THE COMPLETE CHARLES DICKENS

COLLECTION

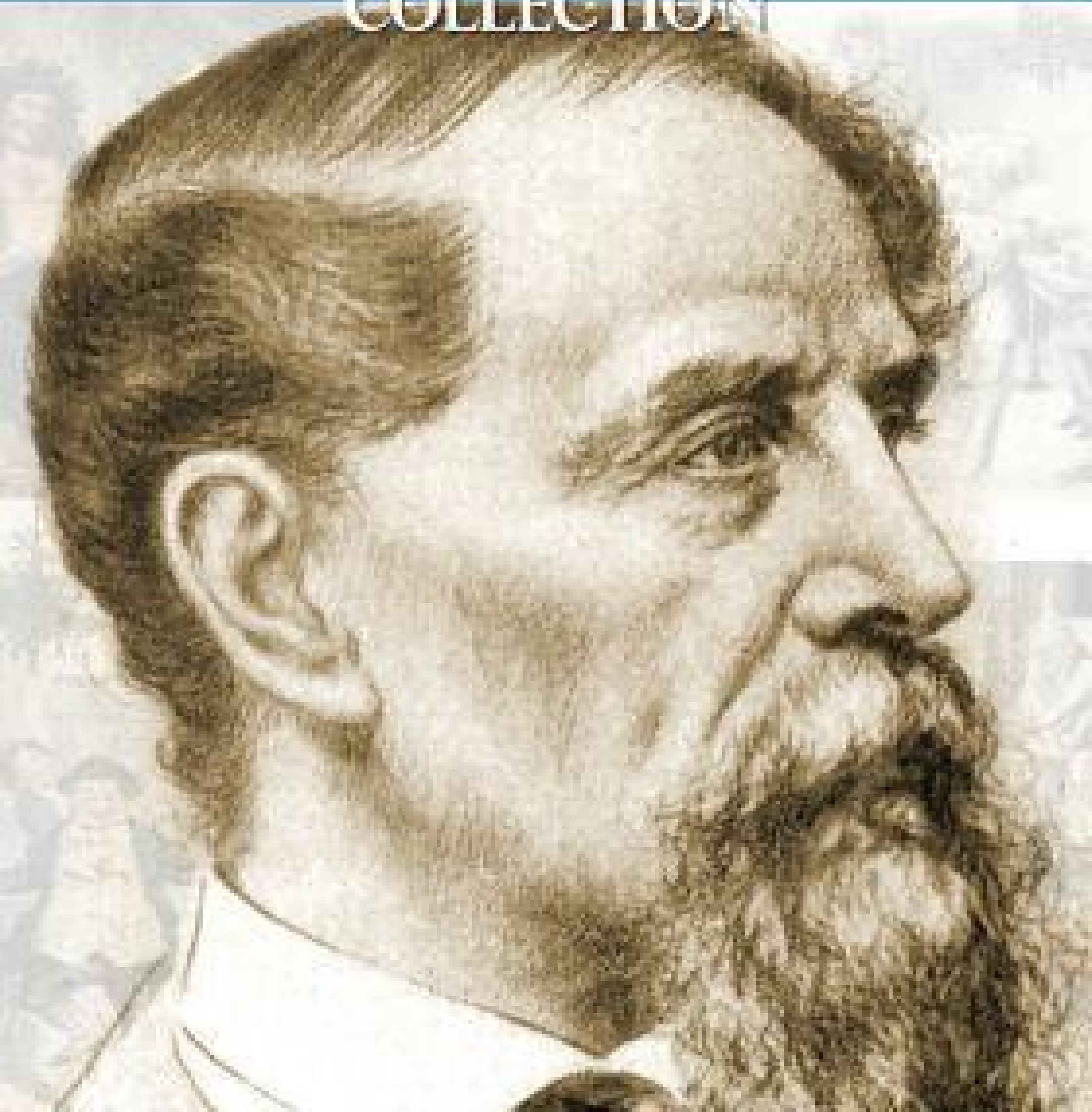

The Complete
Charles Dickens
Collection

60 Complete Works

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American Notes for General Circulation

by Charles Dickens

PREFACE TO THE FIRST CHEAP EDITION OF "AMERICAN NOTES"

IT is nearly eight years since this book was first published. I present it, unaltered, in the Cheap Edition; and such of my opinions as it expresses, are quite unaltered too.

My readers have opportunities of judging for themselves whether the influences and tendencies which I distrust in America, have any existence not in my imagination. They can examine for themselves whether there has been anything in the public career of that country during these past eight years, or whether there is anything in its present position, at home or abroad, which suggests that those influences and tendencies really do exist. As they find the fact, they will judge me. If they discern any evidences of wrong- going in any direction that I have indicated, they will acknowledge that I had reason in what I wrote. If they discern no such thing, they will consider me altogether mistaken.

Prejudiced, I never have been otherwise than in favour of the United States. No visitor can ever have set foot on those shores, with a stronger faith in the Republic than I had, when I landed in America.

I purposely abstain from extending these observations to any length. I have nothing to defend, or to explain away. The truth is the truth; and neither childish absurdities, nor unscrupulous contradictions, can make it otherwise. The earth would still move round the sun, though the whole Catholic Church said No.

I have many friends in America, and feel a grateful interest in the country. To represent me as viewing it with ill-nature, animosity, or partisanship, is merely to do a very foolish thing, which is always a very easy one; and which I have disregarded for eight years, and could disregard for eighty more.

LONDON, JUNE 22, 1850.

PREFACE TO THE "CHARLES DICKENS" EDITION OF "AMERICAN NOTES"

MY readers have opportunities of judging for themselves whether the influences and tendencies which I distrusted in America, had, at that time, any existence but in my imagination. They can examine for themselves whether there has been anything in the public career of that country since, at home or abroad, which suggests that those influences and tendencies really did exist. As they find the fact, they will judge me. If they discern any evidences of wrong-going, in any direction that I have indicated, they will acknowledge that I had reason in what I wrote. If they discern no such indications, they will consider me altogether mistaken - but not wilfully.

Prejudiced, I am not, and never have been, otherwise than in favour of the United States. I have many friends in America, I feel a grateful interest in the country, I hope and believe it will successfully work out a problem of the highest importance to the whole human race. To represent me as viewing AMERICA with ill- nature, coldness, or animosity, is merely to do a very foolish thing: which is always a very easy one.

CHAPTER I - GOING AWAY

I SHALL never forget the one-fourth serious and three-fourths comical astonishment, with which, on the morning of the third of January eighteen-hundred-and-forty-two, I opened the door of, and put my head into, a 'state-room' on board the Britannia steam- packet, twelve hundred tons burthen per register, bound for Halifax and Boston, and carrying Her Majesty's mails.

That this state-room had been specially engaged for 'Charles Dickens, Esquire, and Lady,' was rendered sufficiently clear even to my scared intellect by a very small manuscript, announcing the fact, which was pinned on a very flat quilt, covering a very thin mattress, spread like a surgical plaster on a most inaccessible shelf. But that this was the state-room concerning which Charles Dickens, Esquire, and Lady, had held daily and nightly conferences for at least four months preceding: that this could by any possibility be that small snug chamber of the imagination, which Charles Dickens, Esquire, with the spirit of prophecy strong upon him, had always foretold would contain at least one little sofa, and which his lady, with a modest yet most magnificent sense of its limited dimensions, had from the first opined would not hold more than two enormous portmanteaus in some odd corner out of sight (portmanteaus which could now no more be got in at the door, not to say stowed away, than a giraffe could be persuaded or forced into a flower-pot): that this utterly impracticable, thoroughly hopeless, and profoundly preposterous box, had the remotest reference to, or connection with, those chaste and pretty, not to say gorgeous little bowers, sketched by a masterly hand, in the highly varnished lithographic plan hanging up in the agent's counting-house in the city of London: that this room of state, in short, could be anything but a pleasant fiction and cheerful jest of the captain's, invented and put in practice for the better relish and enjoyment of the real state-room presently to be disclosed:- these were truths which I really could not, for the moment, bring my mind at all to bear upon or comprehend. And I sat down upon a kind of horsehair slab, or perch, of which there were two within; and looked, without any expression of countenance whatever, at some friends who had come on board with us, and who were crushing their faces into all manner of shapes by endeavouring to squeeze them through the small doorway.

We had experienced a pretty smart shock before coming below, which, but that we were the most sanguine people living, might have prepared us for the worst. The imaginative artist to whom I have already made allusion, has depicted in the same great work, a chamber of almost interminable perspective, furnished, as Mr. Robins would say, in a style of more than Eastern splendour, and filled (but not inconveniently so) with groups of ladies and gentlemen, in the very highest state of enjoyment and vivacity. Before descending into the bowels of the ship, we had passed from the deck into a long narrow apartment, not unlike a gigantic hearse with windows in the sides; having at the upper end a melancholy stove, at which three or four chilly stewards were warming their hands; while on either side, extending down its whole dreary length, was a long, long table, over each of which a rack, fixed to the low roof, and stuck full of drinking-glasses and cruet-stands, hinted dismally at rolling seas and heavy weather. I had not at that time seen the ideal presentment of this chamber which has since gratified me so much, but I observed that one of our friends who had made the arrangements for our voyage, turned pale on entering, retreated on the friend behind him, smote his forehead involuntarily, and said below his breath, 'Impossible! it cannot be!' or words to that effect. He recovered himself however by a great effort, and after a preparatory cough or two, cried, with a ghastly smile which is still before me, looking at the same time round the walls, 'Ha! the breakfast-room, steward - eh?' We all foresaw what the answer must be: we knew the agony he suffered. He had often spoken of THE SALOON; had taken in and lived upon the pictorial idea; had usually given us to understand, at home, that to form a just conception of it, it would be necessary to multiply the size and furniture of an ordinary drawing-room by seven, and then fall short of the reality. When the man in reply avowed the truth; the blunt, remorseless, naked truth; 'This is the saloon, sir' - he actually reeled beneath the blow.

In persons who were so soon to part, and interpose between their else daily communication the formidable barrier of many thousand miles of stormy space, and who were for that reason anxious to cast no other cloud, not even the passing shadow of a moment's disappointment or discomfiture, upon the short interval of happy companionship that yet remained to them - in persons so situated, the natural transition from these first surprises was obviously into peals of hearty laughter, and I can report that I, for one, being still seated upon the slab or perch before mentioned, roared outright until the vessel rang again. Thus, in less than two minutes after coming upon it for the first time, we all by common consent agreed that this state-room was the pleasantest and most facetious and capital contrivance possible; and that to have had it one inch larger, would have been quite a disagreeable and deplorable state of things. And with this; and with showing how, - by very nearly closing the door, and twining in and out like serpents, and by counting the little washing slab as standing-room, - we could manage to insinuate four people into it, all at one time; and entreating each other to observe how very airy it was (in dock), and how there was a beautiful port-hole which could be kept open all day (weather permitting), and how there was quite a large bull's-eye just over the looking-glass which would render shaving a perfectly easy and delightful process (when the ship didn't roll too much); we arrived, at last, at the unanimous conclusion that it was rather spacious than otherwise: though I do verily believe that, deducting the two berths, one above the other, than which nothing smaller for sleeping in was ever made except coffins, it was no bigger than one of those hackney cabriolets which have the door behind, and shoot their fares out, like sacks of coals, upon the pavement.

Having settled this point to the perfect satisfaction of all parties, concerned and unconcerned, we sat down round the fire in the ladies' cabin - just to try the effect. It was rather dark, certainly; but somebody said, 'of course it would be light, at sea,' a proposition to which we all assented; echoing 'of course, of course;' though it would be exceedingly difficult to say why we thought so. I remember, too, when we had discovered and exhausted another topic of consolation in the circumstance of this ladies' cabin adjoining our state-room, and the consequently immense feasibility of sitting there at all times and seasons, and had fallen into a momentary silence, leaning our faces on our hands and looking at the fire, one of our party said, with the solemn air of a man who had made a discovery, 'What a relish mulled claret will have down here!' which appeared to strike us all most forcibly; as though there were something spicy and high-flavoured in cabins, which essentially improved that composition, and rendered it quite incapable of perfection anywhere else.

There was a stewardess, too, actively engaged in producing clean sheets and table-cloths from the very entrails of the sofas, and from unexpected lockers, of such artful mechanism, that it made one's head ache to see them opened one after another, and rendered it quite a distracting circumstance to follow her proceedings, and to find that every nook and corner and individual piece of furniture was something else besides what it pretended to be, and was a mere trap and deception and place of secret stowage, whose ostensible purpose was its least useful one.

God bless that stewardess for her piously fraudulent account of January voyages! God bless her for her clear recollection of the companion passage of last year, when nobody was ill, and everybody dancing from morning to night, and it was 'a run' of twelve days, and a piece of the purest frolic, and delight, and jollity! All happiness be with her for her bright face and her pleasant Scotch tongue, which had sounds of old Home in it for my fellow-traveller; and for her predictions of fair winds and fine weather (all wrong, or I shouldn't be half so fond of her); and for the ten thousand small fragments of genuine womanly tact, by which, without piecing them elaborately together, and patching them up into shape and form and case and pointed application, she nevertheless did plainly show that all young mothers on one side of the Atlantic were near and close at hand to their little children left upon the other; and that what seemed to the uninitiated a serious journey, was, to those who were in the secret, a mere frolic, to be sung about and whistled at! Light be her heart, and gay her merry eyes, for years!

The state-room had grown pretty fast; but by this time it had expanded into something quite bulky, and almost boasted a bay- window to view the sea from. So we went upon deck again in high spirits; and there, everything was in such a state of bustle and active preparation, that the blood quickened its pace, and whirled through one's veins on that clear frosty morning with involuntary mirthfulness. For every gallant ship was riding slowly up and down, and every little boat was splashing noisily in the water; and knots of people stood upon the wharf, gazing with a kind of 'dread delight' on the far-famed fast American steamer; and one party of men were 'taking in the milk,' or, in other words, getting the cow on board; and another were filling the icehouses to the very throat with fresh provisions; with butchers'-meat and garden-stuff, pale sucking-pigs, calves' heads in scores, beef, veal, and pork, and poultry out of all proportion; and others were coiling ropes and busy with oakum yarns; and others were lowering heavy packages into the hold; and the purser's head was barely visible as it loomed in a state, of exquisite perplexity from the midst of a vast pile of passengers' luggage; and there seemed to be nothing going on anywhere, or uppermost in the mind of anybody, but preparations for this mighty voyage. This, with the bright cold sun, the bracing air, the crisply-curling water, the thin white crust of morning ice upon the decks which crackled with a sharp and cheerful sound beneath the lightest tread, was irresistible. And when, again upon the shore, we turned and saw from the vessel's mast her name signalled in flags of joyous colours, and fluttering by their side the beautiful American banner with its stars and stripes, - the long three thousand miles and more, and, longer still, the six whole months of absence, so dwindled and faded, that the ship had gone out and come home again, and it was broad spring already in the Coburg Dock at Liverpool.

I have not inquired among my medical acquaintance, whether Turtle, and cold Punch, with Hock, Champagne, and Claret, and all the slight et cetera usually included in an unlimited order for a good dinner - especially when it is left to the liberal construction of my faultless friend, Mr. Radley, of the Adelphi Hotel - are peculiarly calculated to suffer a sea-change; or whether a plain mutton-chop, and a glass or two of sherry, would be less likely of conversion into foreign and disconcerting material. My own opinion is, that whether one is discreet or indiscreet in these particulars, on the eve of a sea-voyage, is a matter of little consequence; and that, to use a common phrase, 'it comes to very much the same thing in the end.' Be this as it may, I know that the dinner of that day was undeniably perfect; that it comprehended all these items, and a great many more; and that we all did ample justice to it. And I know too, that, bating a certain tacit avoidance of any allusion to to-morrow; such as may be supposed to prevail between delicate-minded turnkeys, and a sensitive prisoner who is to be hanged next morning; we got on very well, and, all things considered, were merry enough.

When the morning - THE morning - came, and we met at breakfast, it was curious to see how eager we all were to prevent a moment's pause in the conversation, and how astoundingly gay everybody was: the forced spirits of each member of the little party having as much likeness to his natural mirth, as hot-house peas at five guineas the quart, resemble in flavour the growth of the dews, and air, and rain of Heaven. But as one o'clock, the hour for going aboard, drew near, this volubility dwindled away by little and little, despite the most persevering efforts to the contrary, until at last, the matter being now quite desperate, we threw off all disguise; openly speculated upon where we should be this time to- morrow, this time next day, and so forth; and entrusted a vast number of messages to those who intended returning to town that night, which were to be delivered at home and elsewhere without fail, within the very shortest possible space of time after the arrival of the railway train at Euston Square. And commissions and remembrances do so crowd upon one at such a time, that we were still busied with this employment when we found ourselves fused, as it were, into a dense conglomeration of passengers and passengers' friends and passengers' luggage, all jumbled together on the deck of a small steamboat, and panting and snorting off to the packet, which had worked out of dock yesterday afternoon and was now lying at her moorings in the river.

And there she is! all eyes are turned to where she lies, dimly discernible through the gathering fog of the early winter afternoon; every finger is pointed in the same direction; and murmurs of interest and admiration - as 'How beautiful she looks!' 'How trim she is!' - are heard on every side. Even the lazy gentleman with his hat on one side and his hands in his pockets, who has dispensed so much consolation by inquiring with a yawn of another gentleman whether he is 'going across' - as if it were a ferry - even he condescends to look that way, and nod his head, as who should say, 'No mistake about THAT:' and not even the sage Lord Burleigh in his nod, included half so much as this lazy gentleman of might who has made the passage (as everybody on board has found out already; it's impossible to say how) thirteen times without a single accident! There is another passenger very much wrapped-up, who has been frowned down by the rest, and morally trampled upon and crushed, for presuming to inquire with a timid interest how long it is since the poor President went down. He is standing close to the lazy gentleman, and says with a faint smile that he believes She is a very strong Ship; to which the lazy gentleman, looking first in his questioner's eye and then very hard in the wind's, answers unexpectedly and ominously, that She need be. Upon this the lazy gentleman instantly falls very low in the popular estimation, and the passengers, with looks of defiance, whisper to each other that he is an ass, and an impostor, and clearly don't know anything at all about it.

But we are made fast alongside the packet, whose huge red funnel is smoking bravely, giving rich promise of serious intentions. Packing-cases, portmanteaus, carpet-bags, and boxes, are already passed from hand to hand, and hauled on board with breathless rapidity. The officers, smartly dressed, are at the gangway handing the passengers up the side, and hurrying the men. In five minutes' time, the little steamer is utterly deserted, and the packet is beset and over-run by its late freight, who instantly pervade the whole ship, and are to be met with by the dozen in every nook and corner: swarming down below with their own baggage, and stumbling over other people's; disposing themselves comfortably in wrong cabins, and creating a most horrible confusion by having to turn out again; madly bent upon opening locked doors, and on forcing a passage into all kinds of out-of-the-way places where there is no thoroughfare; sending wild stewards, with elfin hair, to and fro upon the breezy decks on unintelligible errands, impossible of execution: and in short, creating the most extraordinary and bewildering tumult. In the midst of all this, the lazy gentleman, who seems to have no luggage of any kind - not so much as a friend, even - lounges up and down the hurricane deck, coolly puffing a cigar; and, as this unconcerned demeanour again exalts him in the opinion of those who have leisure to observe his proceedings, every time he looks up at the masts, or down at the decks, or over the side, they look there too, as wondering whether he sees anything wrong anywhere, and hoping that, in case he should, he will have the goodness to mention it.

What have we here? The captain's boat! and yonder the captain himself. Now, by all our hopes and wishes, the very man he ought to be! A well-made, tight-built, dapper little fellow; with a ruddy face, which is a letter of invitation to shake him by both hands at once; and with a clear, blue honest eye, that it does one good to see one's sparkling image in. 'Ring the bell!' 'Ding, ding, ding!' the very bell is in a hurry. 'Now for the shore - who's for the shore?' - 'These gentlemen, I am sorry to say.' They are away, and never said, Good b'ye. Ah now they wave it from the little boat. 'Good b'ye! Good b'ye!' Three cheers from them; three more from us; three more from them: and they are gone.

To and fro, to and fro, to and fro again a hundred times! This waiting for the latest mail-bags is worse than all. If we could have gone off in the midst of that last burst, we should have started triumphantly: but to lie here, two hours and more in the damp fog, neither staying at home nor going abroad, is letting one gradually down into the very depths of dulness and low spirits. A speck in the mist, at last! That's something. It is the boat we wait for! That's more to the purpose. The captain appears on the paddle-box with his speaking trumpet; the officers take their stations; all hands are on the alert; the flagging hopes of the passengers revive; the cooks pause in their savoury work, and look out with faces full of interest. The boat comes alongside; the bags are dragged in anyhow, and flung down for the moment anywhere. Three cheers more: and as the first one rings upon our ears, the vessel throbs like a strong giant that has just received the breath of life; the two great wheels turn fiercely round for the first time; and the noble ship, with wind and tide astern, breaks proudly through the lashed and roaming water.

CHAPTER II - THE PASSAGE OUT

WE all dined together that day; and a rather formidable party we were: no fewer than eighty-six strong. The vessel being pretty deep in the water, with all her coals on board and so many passengers, and the weather being calm and quiet, there was but little motion; so that before the dinner was half over, even those passengers who were most distrustful of themselves plucked up amazingly; and those who in the morning had returned to the universal question, 'Are you a good sailor?' a very decided negative, now either parried the inquiry with the evasive reply, 'Oh! I suppose I'm no worse than anybody else;' or, reckless of all moral obligations, answered boldly 'Yes:' and with some irritation too, as though they would add, 'I should like to know what you see in ME, sir, particularly, to justify suspicion!'

Notwithstanding this high tone of courage and confidence, I could not but observe that very few remained long over their wine; and that everybody had an unusual love of the open air; and that the favourite and most coveted seats were invariably those nearest to the door. The tea-table, too, was by no means as well attended as the dinner-table; and there was less whist-playing than might have been expected. Still, with the exception of one lady, who had retired with some precipitation at dinner-time, immediately after being assisted to the finest cut of a very yellow boiled leg of mutton with very green capers, there were no invalids as yet; and walking, and smoking, and drinking of brandy-and-water (but always in the open air), went on with unabated spirit, until eleven o'clock or thereabouts, when 'turning in' - no sailor of seven hours' experience talks of going to bed - became the order of the night. The perpetual tramp of boot-heels on the decks gave place to a heavy silence, and the whole human freight was stowed away below, excepting a very few stragglers, like myself, who were probably, like me, afraid to go there.

To one unaccustomed to such scenes, this is a very striking time on shipboard. Afterwards, and when its novelty had long worn off, it never ceased to have a peculiar interest and charm for me. The gloom through which the great black mass holds its direct and certain course; the rushing water, plainly heard, but dimly seen; the broad, white, glistening track, that follows in the vessel's wake; the men on the look-out forward, who would be scarcely visible against the dark sky, but for their blotting out some score of glistening stars; the helmsman at the wheel, with the illuminated card before him, shining, a speck of light amidst the darkness, like something sentient and of Divine intelligence; the melancholy sighing of the wind through block, and rope, and chain; the gleaming forth of light from every crevice, nook, and tiny piece of glass about the decks, as though the ship were filled with fire in hiding, ready to burst through any outlet, wild with its resistless power of death and ruin. At first, too, and even when the hour, and all the objects it exalts, have come to be familiar, it is difficult, alone and thoughtful, to hold them to their proper shapes and forms. They change with the wandering fancy; assume the semblance of things left far away; put on the well-remembered aspect of favourite places dearly loved; and even people them with shadows. Streets, houses, rooms; figures so like their usual occupants, that they have startled me by their reality, which far exceeded, as it seemed to me, all power of mine to conjure up the absent; have, many and many a time, at such an hour, grown suddenly out of objects with whose real look, and use, and purpose, I was as well acquainted as with my own two hands.

My own two hands, and feet likewise, being very cold, however, on this particular occasion, I crept below at midnight. It was not exactly comfortable below. It was decidedly close; and it was impossible to be unconscious of the presence of that extraordinary compound of strange smells, which is to be found nowhere but on board ship, and which is such a subtle perfume that it seems to enter at every pore of the skin, and whisper of the hold. Two passengers' wives (one of them my own) lay already in silent agonies on the sofa; and one lady's maid (MY lady's) was a mere bundle on the floor, execrating her destiny, and pounding her curl- papers among the stray boxes. Everything sloped the wrong way: which in itself was an aggravation scarcely to be borne. I had left the door open, a moment before, in the bosom of a gentle declivity, and, when I turned to shut it, it was on the summit of a lofty eminence. Now every plank and timber creaked, as if the ship were made of wicker-work; and now crackled, like an enormous fire of the driest possible twigs. There was nothing for it but bed; so I went to bed.

It was pretty much the same for the next two days, with a tolerably fair wind and dry weather. I read in bed (but to this hour I don't know what) a good deal; and reeled on deck a little; drank cold brandy-and-water with an unspeakable disgust, and ate hard biscuit perseveringly: not ill, but going to be.

It is the third morning. I am awakened out of my sleep by a dismal shriek from my wife, who demands to know whether there's any danger. I rouse myself, and look out of bed. The water-jug is plunging and leaping like a lively dolphin; all the smaller articles are afloat, except my shoes, which are stranded on a carpet-bag, high and dry, like a couple of coal-barges. Suddenly I see them spring into the air, and behold the looking-glass, which is nailed to the wall, sticking fast upon the ceiling. At the same time the door entirely disappears, and a new one is opened in the floor. Then I begin to comprehend that the state-room is standing on its head.

Before it is possible to make any arrangement at all compatible with this novel state of things, the ship rights. Before one can say 'Thank Heaven!' she wrongs again. Before one can cry she IS wrong, she seems to have started forward, and to be a creature actually running of its own accord, with broken knees and failing legs, through every variety of hole and pitfall, and stumbling constantly. Before one can so much as wonder, she takes a high leap into the air. Before she has well done that, she takes a deep dive into the water. Before she has gained the surface, she throws a summerset. The instant she is on her legs, she rushes backward. And so she goes on staggering, heaving, wrestling, leaping, diving, jumping, pitching, throbbing, rolling, and rocking: and going through all these movements, sometimes by turns, and sometimes altogether: until one feels disposed to roar for mercy.

A steward passes. 'Steward!' 'Sir?' 'What IS the matter? what DO you call this?' 'Rather a heavy sea on, sir, and a head-wind.'

A head-wind! Imagine a human face upon the vessel's prow, with fifteen thousand Samsons in one bent upon driving her back, and hitting her exactly between the eyes whenever she attempts to advance an inch. Imagine the ship herself, with every pulse and artery of her huge body swollen and bursting under this maltreatment, sworn to go on or die. Imagine the wind howling, the sea roaring, the rain beating: all in furious array against her. Picture the sky both dark and wild, and the clouds, in fearful sympathy with the waves, making another ocean in the air. Add to all this, the clattering on deck and down below; the tread of hurried feet; the loud hoarse shouts of seamen; the gurgling in and out of water through the scuppers; with, every now and then, the striking of a heavy sea upon the planks above, with the deep, dead, heavy sound of thunder heard within a vault; - and there is the head-wind of that January morning.

I say nothing of what may be called the domestic noises of the ship: such as the breaking of glass and crockery, the tumbling down of stewards, the gambols, overhead, of loose casks and truant dozens of bottled porter, and the very remarkable and far from exhilarating sounds raised in their various state-rooms by the seventy passengers who were too ill to get up to breakfast. I say nothing of them: for although I lay listening to this concert for three or four days, I don't think I heard it for more than a quarter of a minute, at the expiration of which term, I lay down again, excessively sea-sick.

Not sea-sick, be it understood, in the ordinary acceptation of the term: I wish I had been: but in a form which I have never seen or heard described, though I have no doubt it is very common. I lay there, all the day long, quite coolly and contentedly; with no sense of weariness, with no desire to get up, or get better, or take the air; with no curiosity, or care, or regret, of any sort or degree, saving that I think I can remember, in this universal indifference, having a kind of lazy joy - of fiendish delight, if anything so lethargic can be dignified with the title - in the fact of my wife being too ill to talk to me. If I may be allowed to illustrate my state of mind by such an example, I should say that I was exactly in the condition of the elder Mr. Willet, after the incursion of the rioters into his bar at Chigwell. Nothing would have surprised me. If, in the momentary illumination of any ray of intelligence that may have come upon me in the way of thoughts of Home, a goblin postman, with a scarlet coat and bell, had come into that little kennel before me, broad awake in broad day, and, apologising for being damp through walking in the sea, had handed me a letter directed to myself, in familiar characters, I am certain I should not have felt one atom of astonishment: I should have been perfectly satisfied. If Neptune himself had walked in, with a toasted shark on his trident, I should have looked upon the event as one of the very commonest everyday occurrences.

Once - once - I found myself on deck. I don't know how I got there, or what possessed me to go there, but there I was; and completely dressed too, with a huge pea-coat on, and a pair of boots such as no weak man in his senses could ever have got into. I found myself standing, when a gleam of consciousness came upon me, holding on to something. I don't know what. I think it was the boatswain: or it may have been the pump: or possibly the cow. I can't say how long I had been there; whether a day or a minute. I recollect trying to think about something (about anything in the whole wide world, I was not particular) without the smallest effect. I could not even make out which was the sea, and which the sky, for the horizon seemed drunk, and was flying wildly about in all directions. Even in that incapable state, however, I recognised the lazy gentleman standing before me: nautically clad in a suit of shaggy blue, with an oilskin hat. But I was too imbecile, although I knew it to be he, to separate him from his dress; and tried to call him, I remember, PILOT. After another interval of total unconsciousness, I found he had gone, and recognised another figure in its place. It seemed to wave and fluctuate before me as though I saw it reflected in an unsteady looking-glass; but I knew it for the captain; and such was the cheerful influence of his face, that I tried to smile: yes, even then I tried to smile. I saw by his gestures that he addressed me; but it was a long time before I could make out that he remonstrated against my standing up to my knees in water - as I was; of course I don't know why. I tried to thank him, but couldn't. I could only point to my boots - or wherever I supposed my boots to be - and say in a plaintive voice, 'Cork soles:' at the same time endeavouring, I am told, to sit down in the pool. Finding that I was quite insensible, and for the time a maniac, he humanely conducted me below.

There I remained until I got better: suffering, whenever I was recommended to eat anything, an amount of anguish only second to that which is said to be endured by the apparently drowned, in the process of restoration to life. One gentleman on board had a letter of introduction to me from a mutual friend in London. He sent it below with his card, on the morning of the head-wind; and I was long troubled with the idea that he might be up, and well, and a hundred times a day expecting me to call upon him in the saloon. I imagined him one of those cast-iron images - I will not call them men - who ask, with red faces, and lusty voices, what sea-sickness means, and whether it really is as bad as it is represented to be. This was very torturing indeed; and I don't think I ever felt such perfect gratification and gratitude of heart, as I did when I heard from the ship's doctor that he had been obliged to put a large mustard poultice on this very gentleman's stomach. I date my recovery from the receipt of that intelligence.

It was materially assisted though, I have no doubt, by a heavy gale of wind, which came slowly up at sunset, when we were about ten days out, and raged with gradually increasing fury until morning, saving that it lulled for an hour a little before midnight. There was something in the unnatural repose of that hour, and in the after gathering of the storm, so inconceivably awful and tremendous, that its bursting into full violence was almost a relief.

The labouring of the ship in the troubled sea on this night I shall never forget. 'Will it ever be worse than this?' was a question I had often heard asked, when everything was sliding and bumping about, and when it certainly did seem difficult to comprehend the possibility of anything afloat being more disturbed, without toppling over and going down. But what the agitation of a steam- vessel is, on a bad winter's night in the wild Atlantic, it is impossible for the most vivid imagination to conceive. To say that she is flung down on her side in the waves, with her masts dipping into them, and that, springing up again, she rolls over on the other side, until a heavy sea strikes her with the noise of a hundred great guns, and hurls her back - that she stops, and staggers, and shivers, as though stunned, and then, with a violent throbbing at her heart, darts onward like a monster goaded into madness, to be beaten down, and battered, and crushed, and leaped on by the angry sea - that thunder, lightning, hail, and rain, and wind, are all in fierce contention for the mastery - that every plank has its groan, every nail its shriek, and every drop of water in the great ocean its howling voice - is nothing. To say that all is grand, and all appalling and horrible in the last degree, is nothing. Words cannot express it. Thoughts cannot convey it. Only a dream can call it up again, in all its fury, rage, and passion.

And yet, in the very midst of these terrors, I was placed in a situation so exquisitely ridiculous, that even then I had as strong a sense of its absurdity as I have now, and could no more help laughing than I can at any other comical incident, happening under circumstances the most favourable to its enjoyment. About midnight we shipped a sea, which forced its way through the skylights, burst open the doors above, and came raging and roaring down into the ladies' cabin, to the unspeakable consternation of my wife and a little Scotch lady - who, by the way, had previously sent a message to the captain by the stewardess, requesting him, with her compliments, to have a steel conductor immediately attached to the top of every mast, and to the chimney, in order that the ship might not be struck by lightning. They and the handmaid before mentioned, being in such ecstasies of fear that I scarcely knew what to do with them, I naturally bethought myself of some restorative or comfortable cordial; and nothing better occurring to me, at the moment, than hot brandy-and-water, I procured a tumbler full without delay. It being impossible to stand or sit without holding on, they were all heaped together in one corner of a long sofa - a fixture extending entirely across the cabin - where they clung to each other in momentary expectation of being drowned. When I approached this place with my specific, and was about to administer it with many consolatory expressions to the nearest sufferer, what was my dismay to see them all roll slowly down to the other end! And when I staggered to that end, and held out the glass once more, how immensely baffled were my good intentions by the ship giving another lurch, and their all rolling back again! I suppose I dodged them up and down this sofa for at least a quarter of an hour, without reaching them once; and by the time I did catch them, the brandy-and-water was diminished, by constant spilling, to a teaspoonful. To complete the group, it is necessary to recognise in this disconcerted dodger, an individual very pale from sea-sickness, who had shaved his beard and brushed his hair, last, at Liverpool: and whose only article of dress (linen not included) were a pair of dreadnought trousers; a blue jacket, formerly admired upon the Thames at Richmond; no stockings; and one slipper.

Of the outrageous antics performed by that ship next morning; which made bed a practical joke, and getting up, by any process short of falling out, an impossibility; I say nothing. But anything like the utter dreariness and desolation that met my eyes when I literally 'tumbled up' on deck at noon, I never saw. Ocean and sky were all of one dull, heavy, uniform, lead colour. There was no extent of prospect even over the dreary waste that lay around us, for the sea ran high, and the horizon encompassed us like a large black hoop. Viewed from the air, or some tall bluff on shore, it would have been imposing and stupendous, no doubt; but seen from the wet and rolling decks, it only impressed one giddily and painfully. In the gale of last night the life-boat had been crushed by one blow of the sea like a walnut-shell; and there it hung dangling in the air: a mere faggot of crazy boards. The planking of the paddle-boxes had been torn sheer away. The wheels were exposed and bare; and they whirled and dashed their spray about the decks at random. Chimney, white with crusted salt; topmasts struck; storm-sails set; rigging all knotted, tangled, wet, and drooping: a gloomier picture it would be hard to look upon.

I was now comfortably established by courtesy in the ladies' cabin, where, besides ourselves, there were only four other passengers. First, the little Scotch lady before mentioned, on her way to join her husband at New York, who had settled there three years before. Secondly and thirdly, an honest young Yorkshireman, connected with some American house; domiciled in that same city, and carrying thither his beautiful young wife to whom he had been married but a fortnight, and who was the fairest specimen of a comely English country girl I have ever seen. Fourthly, fifthly, and lastly, another couple: newly married too, if one might judge from the endearments they frequently interchanged: of whom I know no more than that they were rather a mysterious, run-away kind of couple; that the lady had great personal attractions also; and that the gentleman carried more guns with him than Robinson Crusoe, wore a shooting-coat, and had two great dogs on board. On further consideration, I remember that he tried hot roast pig and bottled ale as a cure for sea-sickness; and that he took these remedies (usually in bed) day after day, with astonishing perseverance. I may add, for the information of the curious, that they decidedly failed.

The weather continuing obstinately and almost unprecedentedly bad, we usually straggled into this cabin, more or less faint and miserable, about an hour before noon, and lay down on the sofas to recover; during which interval, the captain would look in to communicate the state of the wind, the moral certainty of its changing to-morrow (the weather is always going to improve to- morrow, at sea), the vessel's rate of sailing, and so forth. Observations there were none to tell us of, for there was no sun to take them by. But a description of one day will serve for all the rest. Here it is.

The captain being gone, we compose ourselves to read, if the place be light enough; and if not, we doze and talk alternately. At one, a bell rings, and the stewardess comes down with a steaming dish of baked potatoes, and another of roasted apples; and plates of pig's face, cold ham, salt beef; or perhaps a smoking mess of rare hot collops. We fall to upon these dainties; eat as much as we can (we have great appetites now); and are as long as possible about it. If the fire will burn (it WILL sometimes) we are pretty cheerful. If it won't, we all remark to each other that it's very cold, rub our hands, cover ourselves with coats and cloaks, and lie down again to doze, talk, and read (provided as aforesaid), until dinner-time. At five, another bell rings, and the stewardess reappears with another dish of potatoes - boiled this time - and store of hot meat of various kinds: not forgetting the roast pig, to be taken medicinally. We sit down at table again (rather more cheerfully than before); prolong the meal with a rather mouldy dessert of apples, grapes, and oranges; and drink our wine and brandy-and-water. The bottles and glasses are still upon the table, and the oranges and so forth are rolling about according to their fancy and the ship's way, when the doctor comes down, by special nightly invitation, to join our evening rubber: immediately on whose arrival we make a party at whist, and as it is a rough night and the cards will not lie on the cloth, we put the tricks in our pockets as we take them. At whist we remain with exemplary gravity (deducting a short time for tea and toast) until eleven o'clock, or thereabouts; when the captain comes down again, in a sou'-wester hat tied under his chin, and a pilot-coat: making the ground wet where he stands. By this time the card-playing is over, and the bottles and glasses are again upon the table; and after an hour's pleasant conversation about the ship, the passengers, and things in general, the captain (who never goes to bed, and is never out of humour) turns up his coat collar for the deck again; shakes hands all round; and goes laughing out into the weather as merrily as to a birthday party.

As to daily news, there is no dearth of that commodity. This passenger is reported to have lost fourteen pounds at Vingt-et-un in the saloon yesterday; and that passenger drinks his bottle of champagne every day, and how he does it (being only a clerk), nobody knows. The head engineer has distinctly said that there never was such times - meaning weather - and four good hands are ill, and have given in, dead beat. Several berths are full of water, and all the cabins are leaky. The ship's cook, secretly swigging damaged whiskey, has been found drunk; and has been played upon by the fire-engine until quite sober. All the stewards have fallen down-stairs at various dinner-times, and go about with plasters in various places. The baker is ill, and so is the pastry-cook. A new man, horribly indisposed, has been required to fill the place of the latter officer; and has been propped and jammed up with empty casks in a little house upon deck, and commanded to roll out pie-crust, which he protests (being highly bilious) it is death to him to look at. News! A dozen murders on shore would lack the interest of these slight incidents at sea.

Divided between our rubber and such topics as these, we were running (as we thought) into Halifax Harbour, on the fifteenth night, with little wind and a bright moon - indeed, we had made the Light at its outer entrance, and put the pilot in charge - when suddenly the ship struck upon a bank of mud. An immediate rush on deck took place of course; the sides were crowded in an instant; and for a few minutes we were in as lively a state of confusion as the greatest lover of disorder would desire to see. The passengers, and guns, and water-casks, and other heavy matters, being all huddled together aft, however, to lighten her in the head, she was soon got off; and after some driving on towards an uncomfortable line of objects (whose vicinity had been announced very early in the disaster by a loud cry of 'Breakers a-head!') and much backing of paddles, and heaving of the lead into a constantly decreasing depth of water, we dropped anchor in a strange outlandish-looking nook which nobody on board could recognise, although there was land all about us, and so close that we could plainly see the waving branches of the trees.

It was strange enough, in the silence of midnight, and the dead stillness that seemed to be created by the sudden and unexpected stoppage of the engine which had been clanking and blasting in our ears incessantly for so many days, to watch the look of blank astonishment expressed in every face: beginning with the officers, tracing it through all the passengers, and descending to the very stokers and furnacemen, who emerged from below, one by one, and clustered together in a smoky group about the hatchway of the engine-room, comparing notes in whispers. After throwing up a few rockets and firing signal guns in the hope of being hailed from the land, or at least of seeing a light - but without any other sight or sound presenting itself - it was determined to send a boat on shore. It was amusing to observe how very kind some of the passengers were, in volunteering to go ashore in this same boat: for the general good, of course: not by any means because they thought the ship in an unsafe position, or contemplated the possibility of her heeling over in case the tide were running out. Nor was it less amusing to remark how desperately unpopular the poor pilot became in one short minute. He had had his passage out from Liverpool, and during the whole voyage had been quite a notorious character, as a teller of anecdotes and cracker of jokes. Yet here were the very men who had laughed the loudest at his jests, now flourishing their fists in his face, loading him with imprecations, and defying him to his teeth as a villain!

The boat soon shoved off, with a lantern and sundry blue lights on board; and in less than an hour returned; the officer in command bringing with him a tolerably tall young tree, which he had plucked up by the roots, to satisfy certain distrustful passengers whose minds misgave them that they were to be imposed upon and shipwrecked, and who would on no other terms believe that he had been ashore, or had done anything but fraudulently row a little way into the mist, specially to deceive them and compass their deaths. Our captain had foreseen from the first that we must be in a place called the Eastern passage; and so we were. It was about the last place in the world in which we had any business or reason to be, but a sudden fog, and some error on the pilot's part, were the cause. We were surrounded by banks, and rocks, and shoals of all kinds, but had happily drifted, it seemed, upon the only safe speck that was to be found thereabouts. Eased by this report, and by the assurance that the tide was past the ebb, we turned in at three o'clock in the morning.

I was dressing about half-past nine next day, when the noise above hurried me on deck. When I had left it overnight, it was dark, foggy, and damp, and there were bleak hills all round us. Now, we were gliding down a smooth, broad stream, at the rate of eleven miles an hour: our colours flying gaily; our crew rigged out in their smartest clothes; our officers in uniform again; the sun shining as on a brilliant April day in England; the land stretched out on either side, streaked with light patches of snow; white wooden houses; people at their doors; telegraphs working; flags hoisted; wharfs appearing; ships; quays crowded with people; distant noises; shouts; men and boys running down steep places towards the pier: all more bright and gay and fresh to our unused eyes than words can paint them. We came to a wharf, paved with uplifted faces; got alongside, and were made fast, after some shouting and straining of cables; darted, a score of us along the gangway, almost as soon as it was thrust out to meet us, and before it had reached the ship - and leaped upon the firm glad earth again!

I suppose this Halifax would have appeared an Elysium, though it had been a curiosity of ugly dulness. But I carried away with me a most pleasant impression of the town and its inhabitants, and have preserved it to this hour. Nor was it without regret that I came home, without having found an opportunity of returning thither, and once more shaking hands with the friends I made that day.

It happened to be the opening of the Legislative Council and General Assembly, at which ceremonial the forms observed on the commencement of a new Session of Parliament in England were so closely copied, and so gravely presented on a small scale, that it was like looking at Westminster through the wrong end of a telescope. The governor, as her Majesty's representative, delivered what may be called the Speech from the Throne. He said what he had to say manfully and well. The military band outside the building struck up "God save the Queen" with great vigour before his Excellency had quite finished; the people shouted; the in's rubbed their hands; the out's shook their heads; the Government party said there never was such a good speech; the Opposition declared there never was such a bad one; the Speaker and members of the House of Assembly withdrew from the bar to say a great deal among themselves and do a little: and, in short, everything went on, and promised to go on, just as it does at home upon the like occasions.

The town is built on the side of a hill, the highest point being commanded by a strong fortress, not yet quite finished. Several streets of good breadth and appearance extend from its summit to the water-side, and are intersected by cross streets running parallel with the river. The houses are chiefly of wood. The market is abundantly supplied; and provisions are exceedingly cheap. The weather being unusually mild at that time for the season of the year, there was no sleighing: but there were plenty of those vehicles in yards and by-places, and some of them, from the gorgeous quality of their decorations, might have 'gone on' without alteration as triumphal cars in a melodrama at Astley's. The day was uncommonly fine; the air bracing and healthful; the whole aspect of the town cheerful, thriving, and industrious.

We lay there seven hours, to deliver and exchange the mails. At length, having collected all our bags and all our passengers (including two or three choice spirits, who, having indulged too freely in oysters and champagne, were found lying insensible on their backs in unfrequented streets), the engines were again put in motion, and we stood off for Boston.

Encountering squally weather again in the Bay of Fundy, we tumbled and rolled about as usual all that night and all next day. On the next afternoon, that is to say, on Saturday, the twenty-second of January, an American pilot-boat came alongside, and soon afterwards the Britannia steam-packet, from Liverpool, eighteen days out, was telegraphed at Boston.

The indescribable interest with which I strained my eyes, as the first patches of American soil peeped like molehills from the green sea, and followed them, as they swelled, by slow and almost imperceptible degrees, into a continuous line of coast, can hardly be exaggerated. A sharp keen wind blew dead against us; a hard frost prevailed on shore; and the cold was most severe. Yet the air was so intensely clear, and dry, and bright, that the temperature was not only endurable, but delicious.

How I remained on deck, staring about me, until we came alongside the dock, and how, though I had had as many eyes as Argus, I should have had them all wide open, and all employed on new objects - are topics which I will not prolong this chapter to discuss. Neither will I more than hint at my foreigner-like mistake in supposing that a party of most active persons, who scrambled on board at the peril of their lives as we approached the wharf, were newsmen, answering to that industrious class at home; whereas, despite the leathern wallets of news slung about the necks of some, and the broad sheets in the hands of all, they were Editors, who boarded ships in person (as one gentleman in a worsted comforter informed me), 'because they liked the excitement of it.' Suffice it in this place to say, that one of these invaders, with a ready courtesy for which I thank him here most gratefully, went on before to order rooms at the hotel; and that when I followed, as I soon did, I found myself rolling through the long passages with an involuntary imitation of the gait of Mr. T. P. Cooke, in a new nautical melodrama.

'Dinner, if you please,' said I to the waiter.

'When?' said the waiter.

'As quick as possible,' said I.

'Right away?' said the waiter.

After a moment's hesitation, I answered 'No,' at hazard.

'NOT right away?' cried the waiter, with an amount of surprise that made me start.

I looked at him doubtfully, and returned, 'No; I would rather have it in this private room. I like it very much.'

At this, I really thought the waiter must have gone out of his mind: as I believe he would have done, but for the interposition of another man, who whispered in his ear, 'Directly.'

'Well! and that's a fact!' said the waiter, looking helplessly at me: 'Right away.'

I saw now that 'Right away' and 'Directly' were one and the same thing. So I reversed my previous answer, and sat down to dinner in ten minutes afterwards; and a capital dinner it was.

The hotel (a very excellent one) is called the Tremont House. It has more galleries, colonnades, piazzas, and passages than I can remember, or the reader would believe.

CHAPTER III - BOSTON

IN all the public establishments of America, the utmost courtesy prevails. Most of our Departments are susceptible of considerable improvement in this respect, but the Custom-house above all others would do well to take example from the United States and render itself somewhat less odious and offensive to foreigners. The servile rapacity of the French officials is sufficiently contemptible; but there is a surly boorish incivility about our men, alike disgusting to all persons who fall into their hands, and discreditable to the nation that keeps such ill-conditioned curs snarling about its gates.

When I landed in America, I could not help being strongly impressed with the contrast their Custom-house presented, and the attention, politeness and good humour with which its officers discharged their duty.

As we did not land at Boston, in consequence of some detention at the wharf, until after dark, I received my first impressions of the city in walking down to the Custom-house on the morning after our arrival, which was Sunday. I am afraid to say, by the way, how many offers of pews and seats in church for that morning were made to us, by formal note of invitation, before we had half finished our first dinner in America, but if I may be allowed to make a moderate guess, without going into nicer calculation, I should say that at least as many sittings were proffered us, as would have accommodated a score or two of grown-up families. The number of creeds and forms of religion to which the pleasure of our company was requested, was in very fair proportion.

Not being able, in the absence of any change of clothes, to go to church that day, we were compelled to decline these kindnesses, one and all; and I was reluctantly obliged to forego the delight of hearing Dr. Channing, who happened to preach that morning for the first time in a very long interval. I mention the name of this distinguished and accomplished man (with whom I soon afterwards had the pleasure of becoming personally acquainted), that I may have the gratification of recording my humble tribute of admiration and respect for his high abilities and character; and for the bold philanthropy with which he has ever opposed himself to that most hideous blot and foul disgrace - Slavery.

To return to Boston. When I got into the streets upon this Sunday morning, the air was so clear, the houses were so bright and gay: the signboards were painted in such gaudy colours; the gilded letters were so very golden; the bricks were so very red, the stone was so very white, the blinds and area railings were so very green, the knobs and plates upon the street doors so marvellously bright and twinkling; and all so slight and unsubstantial in appearance - that every thoroughfare in the city looked exactly like a scene in a pantomime. It rarely happens in the business streets that a tradesman, if I may venture to call anybody a tradesman, where everybody is a merchant, resides above his store; so that many occupations are often carried on in one house, and the whole front is covered with boards and inscriptions. As I walked along, I kept glancing up at these boards, confidently expecting to see a few of them change into something; and I never turned a corner suddenly without looking out for the clown and pantaloon, who, I had no doubt, were hiding in a doorway or behind some pillar close at hand. As to Harlequin and Columbine, I discovered immediately that they lodged (they are always looking after lodgings in a pantomime) at a very small clockmaker's one story high, near the hotel;

which, in addition to various symbols and devices, almost covering the whole front, had a great dial hanging out - to be jumped through, of course.

The suburbs are, if possible, even more unsubstantial-looking than the city. The white wooden houses (so white that it makes one wink to look at them), with their green jalousie blinds, are so sprinkled and dropped about in all directions, without seeming to have any root at all in the ground; and the small churches and chapels are so prim, and bright, and highly varnished; that I almost believed the whole affair could be taken up piecemeal like a child's toy, and crammed into a little box.

The city is a beautiful one, and cannot fail, I should imagine, to impress all strangers very favourably. The private dwelling-houses are, for the most part, large and elegant; the shops extremely good; and the public buildings handsome. The State House is built upon the summit of a hill, which rises gradually at first, and afterwards by a steep ascent, almost from the water's edge. In front is a green enclosure, called the Common. The site is beautiful: and from the top there is a charming panoramic view of the whole town and neighbourhood. In addition to a variety of commodious offices, it contains two handsome chambers; in one the House of Representatives of the State hold their meetings: in the other, the Senate. Such proceedings as I saw here, were conducted with perfect gravity and decorum; and were certainly calculated to inspire attention and respect.

There is no doubt that much of the intellectual refinement and superiority of Boston, is referable to the quiet influence of the University of Cambridge, which is within three or four miles of the city. The resident professors at that university are gentlemen of learning and varied attainments; and are, without one exception that I can call to mind, men who would shed a grace upon, and do honour to, any society in the civilised world. Many of the resident gentry in Boston and its neighbourhood, and I think I am not mistaken in adding, a large majority of those who are attached to the liberal professions there, have been educated at this same school. Whatever the defects of American universities may be, they disseminate no prejudices; rear no bigots; dig up the buried ashes of no old superstitions; never interpose between the people and their improvement; exclude no man because of his religious opinions; above all, in their whole course of study and instruction, recognise a world, and a broad one too, lying beyond the college walls.

It was a source of inexpressible pleasure to me to observe the almost imperceptible, but not less certain effect, wrought by this institution among the small community of Boston; and to note at every turn the humanising tastes and desires it has engendered; the affectionate friendships to which it has given rise; the amount of vanity and prejudice it has dispelled. The golden calf they worship at Boston is a pigmy compared with the giant effigies set up in other parts of that vast counting-house which lies beyond the Atlantic; and the almighty dollar sinks into something comparatively insignificant, amidst a whole Pantheon of better gods.

Above all, I sincerely believe that the public institutions and charities of this capital of Massachusetts are as nearly perfect, as the most considerate wisdom, benevolence, and humanity, can make them. I never in my life was more affected by the contemplation of happiness, under circumstances of privation and bereavement, than in my visits to these establishments.

It is a great and pleasant feature of all such institutions in America, that they are either supported by the State or assisted by the State; or (in the event of their not needing its helping hand) that they act in concert with it, and are emphatically the people's. I cannot but think, with a view to the principle and its tendency to elevate or depress the character of the industrious classes, that a Public Charity is immeasurably better than a Private Foundation, no matter how munificently the latter may be endowed. In our own country, where it has not, until within these later days, been a very popular fashion with governments to display any extraordinary regard for the great mass of the people or to recognise their existence as improvable creatures, private charities, unexampled in the history of the earth, have arisen, to do an incalculable amount of good among the destitute and afflicted. But the government of the country, having neither act nor part in them, is not in the receipt of any portion of the gratitude they inspire; and, offering very little shelter or relief beyond that which is to be found in the workhouse and the jail, has come, not unnaturally, to be looked upon by the poor rather as a stern master, quick to correct and punish, than a kind protector, merciful and vigilant in their hour of need.

The maxim that out of evil cometh good, is strongly illustrated by these establishments at home; as the records of the Prerogative Office in Doctors' Commons can abundantly prove. Some immensely rich old gentleman or lady, surrounded by needy relatives, makes, upon a low average, a will a-week. The old gentleman or lady, never very remarkable in the best of times for good temper, is full of aches and pains from head to foot; full of fancies and caprices; full of spleen, distrust, suspicion, and dislike. To cancel old wills, and invent new ones, is at last the sole business of such a testator's existence; and relations and friends (some of whom have been bred up distinctly to inherit a large share of the property, and have been, from their cradles, specially disqualified from devoting themselves to any useful pursuit, on that account) are so often and so unexpectedly and summarily cut off, and reinstated, and cut off again, that the whole family, down to the remotest cousin, is kept in a perpetual fever. At length it becomes plain that the old lady or gentleman has not long to live; and the plainer this becomes, the more clearly the old lady or gentleman perceives that everybody is in a conspiracy against their poor old dying relative; wherefore the old lady or gentleman makes another last will - positively the last this time - conceals the same in a china teapot, and expires next day. Then it turns out, that the whole of the real and personal estate is divided between half-a- dozen charities; and that the dead and gone testator has in pure spite helped to do a great deal of good, at the cost of an immense amount of evil passion and misery.

The Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, at Boston, is superintended by a body of trustees who make an annual report to the corporation. The indigent blind of that state are admitted gratuitously. Those from the adjoining state of Connecticut, or from the states of Maine, Vermont, or New Hampshire, are admitted by a warrant from the state to which they respectively belong; or, failing that, must find security among their friends, for the payment of about twenty pounds English for their first year's board and instruction, and ten for the second. 'After the first year,' say the trustees, 'an account current will be opened with each pupil; he will be charged with the actual cost of his board, which will not exceed two dollars per week;' a trifle more than eight shillings English; 'and he will be credited with the amount paid for him by the state, or by his friends; also with his earnings over and above the cost of the stock which he uses; so that all his earnings over one dollar per week will be his own. By the third year it will be known whether his earnings will more than pay the actual cost of his board; if they should, he will have it at his option to remain and receive his earnings, or not. Those who prove unable to earn their own livelihood will not be retained; as it is not desirable to convert the establishment into an alms- house, or to retain any but working bees in the hive. Those who by physical or mental imbecility are disqualified from work, are thereby disqualified from being members of an industrious community; and they can be better provided for in establishments fitted for the infirm.'

I went to see this place one very fine winter morning: an Italian sky above, and the air so clear and bright on every side, that even my eyes, which are none of the best, could follow the minute lines and scraps of tracery in distant buildings. Like most other public institutions in America, of the same class, it stands a mile or two without the town, in a cheerful healthy spot; and is an airy, spacious, handsome edifice. It is built upon a height, commanding the harbour. When I paused for a moment at the door, and marked how fresh and free the whole scene was - what sparkling bubbles glanced upon the waves, and welled up every moment to the surface, as though the world below, like that above, were radiant with the bright day, and gushing over in its fulness of light: when I gazed from sail to sail away upon a ship at sea, a tiny speck of shining white, the only cloud upon the still, deep, distant blue - and, turning, saw a blind boy with his sightless face addressed that way, as though he too had some sense within him of the glorious distance: I felt a kind of sorrow that the place should be so very light, and a strange wish that for his sake it were darker. It was but momentary, of course, and a mere fancy, but I felt it keenly for all that.

The children were at their daily tasks in different rooms, except a few who were already dismissed, and were at play. Here, as in many institutions, no uniform is worn; and I was very glad of it, for two reasons. Firstly, because I am sure that nothing but senseless custom and want of thought would reconcile us to the liveries and badges we are so fond of at home. Secondly, because the absence of these things presents each child to the visitor in his or her own proper character, with its individuality unimpaired; not lost in a dull, ugly, monotonous repetition of the same unmeaning garb: which is really an important consideration. The wisdom of encouraging a little harmless pride in personal appearance even among the blind, or the whimsical absurdity of considering charity and leather breeches inseparable companions, as we do, requires no comment.

Good order, cleanliness, and comfort, pervaded every corner of the building. The various classes, who were gathered round their teachers, answered the questions put to them with readiness and intelligence, and in a spirit of cheerful contest for precedence which pleased me very much. Those who were at play, were gleesome and noisy as other children. More spiritual and affectionate friendships appeared to exist among them, than would be found among other young persons suffering under no deprivation; but this I expected and was prepared to find. It is a part of the great scheme of Heaven's merciful consideration for the afflicted.

In a portion of the building, set apart for that purpose, are work- shops for blind persons whose education is finished, and who have acquired a trade, but who cannot pursue it in an ordinary manufactory because of their deprivation. Several people were at work here; making brushes, mattresses, and so forth; and the cheerfulness, industry, and good order discernible in every other part of the building, extended to this department also.

On the ringing of a bell, the pupils all repaired, without any guide or leader, to a spacious music-hall, where they took their seats in an orchestra erected for that purpose, and listened with manifest delight to a voluntary on the organ, played by one of themselves. At its conclusion, the performer, a boy of nineteen or twenty, gave place to a girl; and to her accompaniment they all sang a hymn, and afterwards a sort of chorus. It was very sad to look upon and hear them, happy though their condition unquestionably was; and I saw that one blind girl, who (being for the time deprived of the use of her limbs, by illness) sat close beside me with her face towards them, wept silently the while she listened.

It is strange to watch the faces of the blind, and see how free they are from all concealment of what is passing in their thoughts; observing which, a man with eyes may blush to contemplate the mask he wears. Allowing for one shade of anxious expression which is never absent from their countenances, and the like of which we may readily detect in our own faces if we try to feel our way in the dark, every idea, as it rises within them, is expressed with the lightning's speed and nature's truth. If the company at a rout, or drawing-room at court, could only for one time be as unconscious of the eyes upon them as blind men and women are, what secrets would come out, and what a worker of hypocrisy this sight, the loss of which we so much pity, would appear to be!

The thought occurred to me as I sat down in another room, before a girl, blind, deaf, and dumb; destitute of smell; and nearly so of taste: before a fair young creature with every human faculty, and hope, and power of goodness and affection, inclosed within her delicate frame, and but one outward sense - the sense of touch. There she was, before me; built up, as it were, in a marble cell, impervious to any ray of light, or particle of sound;

with her poor white hand peeping through a chink in the wall, beckoning to some good man for help, that an Immortal soul might be awakened.

Long before I looked upon her, the help had come. Her face was radiant with intelligence and pleasure. Her hair, braided by her own hands, was bound about a head, whose intellectual capacity and development were beautifully expressed in its graceful outline, and its broad open brow; her dress, arranged by herself, was a pattern of neatness and simplicity; the work she had knitted, lay beside her; her writing-book was on the desk she leaned upon. - From the mournful ruin of such bereavement, there had slowly risen up this gentle, tender, guileless, grateful-hearted being.

Like other inmates of that house, she had a green ribbon bound round her eyelids. A doll she had dressed lay near upon the ground. I took it up, and saw that she had made a green fillet such as she wore herself, and fastened it about its mimic eyes.

She was seated in a little enclosure, made by school-desks and forms, writing her daily journal. But soon finishing this pursuit, she engaged in an animated conversation with a teacher who sat beside her. This was a favourite mistress with the poor pupil. If she could see the face of her fair instructress, she would not love her less, I am sure.

I have extracted a few disjointed fragments of her history, from an account, written by that one man who has made her what she is. It is a very beautiful and touching narrative; and I wish I could present it entire.

Her name is Laura Bridgman. 'She was born in Hanover, New Hampshire, on the twenty-first of December, 1829. She is described as having been a very sprightly and pretty infant, with bright blue eyes. She was, however, so puny and feeble until she was a year and a half old, that her parents hardly hoped to rear her. She was subject to severe fits, which seemed to rack her frame almost beyond her power of endurance: and life was held by the feeblest tenure: but when a year and a half old, she seemed to rally; the dangerous symptoms subsided; and at twenty months old, she was perfectly well.

'Then her mental powers, hitherto stinted in their growth, rapidly developed themselves; and during the four months of health which she enjoyed, she appears (making due allowance for a fond mother's account) to have displayed a considerable degree of intelligence.

'But suddenly she sickened again; her disease raged with great violence during five weeks, when her eyes and ears were inflamed, suppurated, and their contents were discharged. But though sight and hearing were gone for ever, the poor child's sufferings were not ended. The fever raged during seven weeks; for five months she was kept in bed in a darkened room; it was a year before she could walk unsupported, and two years before she could sit up all day. It was now observed that her sense of smell was almost entirely destroyed; and, consequently, that her taste was much blunted.

'It was not until four years of age that the poor child's bodily health seemed restored, and she was able to enter upon her apprenticeship of life and the world.

'But what a situation was hers! The darkness and the silence of the tomb were around her: no mother's smile called forth her answering smile, no father's voice taught her to imitate his sounds:- they, brothers and sisters, were but forms of matter which resisted her touch, but which differed not from the furniture of the house, save in warmth, and in the power of locomotion; and not even in these respects from the dog and the cat.

'But the immortal spirit which had been implanted within her could not die, nor be maimed nor mutilated; and though most of its avenues of communication with the world were cut off, it began to manifest itself through the others. As soon as she could walk, she began to explore the room, and then the house; she became familiar with the form, density, weight, and heat, of every article she could lay her hands upon. She followed her mother, and felt her hands and arms, as she was occupied about the house; and her disposition to imitate, led her to repeat everything herself. She even learned to sew a little, and to knit.'

The reader will scarcely need to be told, however, that the opportunities of communicating with her, were very, very limited; and that the moral effects of her wretched state soon began to appear. Those who cannot be enlightened by reason, can only be controlled by force; and this, coupled with her great privations, must soon have reduced her to a worse condition than that of the beasts that perish, but for timely and unhoped-for aid.

'At this time, I was so fortunate as to hear of the child, and immediately hastened to Hanover to see her. I found her with a well-formed figure; a strongly-marked, nervous-sanguine temperament; a large and beautifully-shaped head; and the whole system in healthy action. The parents were easily induced to consent to her coming to Boston, and on the 4th of October, 1837, they brought her to the Institution.

'For a while, she was much bewildered; and after waiting about two weeks, until she became acquainted with her new locality, and somewhat familiar with the inmates, the attempt was made to give her knowledge of arbitrary signs, by which she could interchange thoughts with others.

'There was one of two ways to be adopted: either to go on to build up a language of signs on the basis of the natural language which she had already commenced herself, or to teach her the purely arbitrary language in common use: that is, to give her a sign for every individual thing, or to give her a knowledge of letters by combination of which she might express her idea of the existence, and the mode and condition of existence, of any thing. The former would have been easy, but very ineffectual; the latter seemed very difficult, but, if accomplished, very effectual. I determined therefore to try the latter.

'The first experiments were made by taking articles in common use, such as knives, forks, spoons, keys, &c., and pasting upon them labels with their names printed in raised letters. These she felt very carefully, and soon, of course, distinguished that the crooked lines SPOON, differed as much from the crooked lines KEY, as the spoon differed from the key in form.

'Then small detached labels, with the same words printed upon them, were put into her hands; and she soon observed that they were similar to the ones pasted on the articles.' She showed her perception of this similarity by laying the label KEY upon the key, and the label SPOON upon the spoon. She was encouraged here by the natural sign of approbation, patting on the head.

'The same process was then repeated with all the articles which she could handle; and she very easily learned to place the proper labels upon them. It was evident, however, that the only intellectual exercise was that of imitation and memory. She recollected that the label BOOK was placed upon a book, and she repeated the process first from imitation, next from memory, with only the motive of love of approbation, but apparently without the intellectual perception of any relation between the things.

'After a while, instead of labels, the individual letters were given to her on detached bits of paper: they were arranged side by side so as to spell BOOK, KEY, &c.; then they were mixed up in a heap and a sign was made for her to arrange them herself so as to express the words BOOK, KEY, &c.; and she did so.

'Hitherto, the process had been mechanical, and the success about as great as teaching a very knowing dog a variety of tricks. The poor child had sat in mute amazement, and patiently imitated everything her teacher did; but now the truth began to flash upon her: her intellect began to work: she perceived that here was a way by which she could herself make up a sign of anything that was in her own mind, and show it to another mind; and at once her countenance lighted up with a human expression: it was no longer a dog, or parrot: it was an immortal spirit, eagerly seizing upon a new link of union with other spirits! I could almost fix upon the moment when this truth dawned upon her mind, and spread its light to her countenance; I saw that the great obstacle was overcome; and that henceforward nothing but patient and persevering, but plain and straightforward, efforts were to be used.

'The result thus far, is quickly related, and easily conceived; but not so was the process; for many weeks of apparently unprofitable labour were passed before it was effected.

'When it was said above that a sign was made, it was intended to say, that the action was performed by her teacher, she feeling his hands, and then imitating the motion.

'The next step was to procure a set of metal types, with the different letters of the alphabet cast upon their ends; also a board, in which were square holes, into which holes she could set the types; so that the letters on their ends could alone be felt above the surface.

'Then, on any article being handed to her, for instance, a pencil, or a watch, she would select the component letters, and arrange them on her board, and read them with apparent pleasure.

'She was exercised for several weeks in this way, until her vocabulary became extensive; and then the important step was taken of teaching her how to represent the different letters by the position of her fingers, instead of the cumbrous apparatus of the board and types. She accomplished this speedily and easily, for her intellect had begun to work in aid of her teacher, and her progress was rapid.

'This was the period, about three months after she had commenced, that the first report of her case was made, in which it was stated that "she has just learned the manual alphabet, as used by the deaf mutes, and it is a subject of delight and wonder to see how rapidly, correctly, and eagerly, she goes on with her labours. Her teacher gives her a new object, for instance, a pencil, first lets her examine it, and get an idea of its use, then teaches her how to spell it by making the signs for the letters with her own fingers: the child grasps her hand, and feels her fingers, as the different letters are formed; she turns her head a little on one side like a person listening closely; her lips are apart; she seems scarcely to breathe; and her countenance, at first anxious, gradually changes to a smile, as she comprehends the lesson. She then holds up her tiny fingers, and spells the word in the manual alphabet; next, she takes her types and arranges her letters; and last, to make sure that she is right, she takes the whole of the types composing the word, and places them upon or in contact with the pencil, or whatever the object may be."

'The whole of the succeeding year was passed in gratifying her eager inquiries for the names of every object which she could possibly handle; in exercising her in the use of the manual alphabet; in extending in every possible way her knowledge of the physical relations of things; and in proper care of her health.

'At the end of the year a report of her case was made, from which the following is an extract.

'"It has been ascertained beyond the possibility of doubt, that she cannot see a ray of light, cannot hear the least sound, and never exercises her sense of smell, if she have any. Thus her mind dwells in darkness and stillness, as profound as that of a closed tomb at midnight. Of beautiful sights, and sweet sounds, and pleasant odours, she has no conception; nevertheless, she seems as happy and playful as a bird or a lamb; and the employment of her intellectual faculties, or the acquirement of a new idea, gives her a vivid pleasure, which is plainly marked in her expressive features. She never seems to repine, but has all the buoyancy and gaiety of childhood. She is fond of fun and frolic, and when playing with the rest of the children, her shrill laugh sounds loudest of the group.

'"When left alone, she seems very happy if she have her knitting or sewing, and will busy herself for hours; if she have no occupation, she evidently amuses herself by imaginary dialogues, or by recalling past impressions; she counts with her fingers, or spells out names of things which she has recently learned, in the manual alphabet of the deaf mutes. In this lonely self-communion she seems to reason, reflect, and argue; if she spell a word wrong with the fingers of her right hand, she instantly strikes it with her left, as her teacher does, in sign of disapprobation; if right, then she pats herself upon the head, and looks pleased. She sometimes purposely spells a word wrong with the left hand, looks roguish for a moment and laughs, and then with the right hand strikes the left, as if to correct it.

'"During the year she has attained great dexterity in the use of the manual alphabet of the deaf mutes; and she spells out the words and sentences which she knows, so fast and so deftly, that only those accustomed to this language can follow with the eye the rapid motions of her fingers.

'"But wonderful as is the rapidity with which she writes her thoughts upon the air, still more so is the ease and accuracy with which she reads the words thus written by another; grasping their hands in hers, and following every movement of their fingers, as letter after letter conveys their meaning to her mind. It is in this way that she converses with her blind playmates, and nothing can more forcibly show the power of mind in forcing matter to its purpose than a meeting between them. For if great talent and skill are necessary for two pantomimes to paint their thoughts and feelings by the movements of the body, and the expression of the countenance, how much greater the difficulty when darkness shrouds them both, and the one can hear no sound.

'"When Laura is walking through a passage-way, with her hands spread before her, she knows instantly every one she meets, and passes them with a sign of recognition: but if it be a girl of her own age, and especially if it be one of her favourites, there is instantly a bright smile of recognition, a twining of arms, a grasping of hands, and a swift telegraphing upon the tiny fingers; whose rapid evolutions convey the thoughts and feelings from the outposts of one mind to those of the other. There are questions and answers, exchanges of joy or sorrow, there are kissings and partings, just as between little children with all their senses."

'During this year, and six months after she had left home, her mother came to visit her, and the scene of their meeting was an interesting one.

'The mother stood some time, gazing with overflowing eyes upon her unfortunate child, who, all unconscious of her presence, was playing about the room. Presently Laura ran against her, and at once began feeling her hands, examining her dress, and trying to find out if she knew her; but not succeeding in this, she turned away as from a stranger, and the poor woman could not conceal the pang she felt, at finding that her beloved child did not know her.

'She then gave Laura a string of beads which she used to wear at home, which were recognised by the child at once, who, with much joy, put them around her neck, and sought me eagerly to say she understood the string was from her home.

'The mother now sought to caress her, but poor Laura repelled her, preferring to be with her acquaintances.

'Another article from home was now given her, and she began to look much interested; she examined the stranger much closer, and gave me to understand that she knew she came from Hanover; she even endured her caresses, but would leave her with indifference at the slightest signal. The distress of the mother was now painful to behold; for, although she had feared that she should not be recognised, the painful reality of being treated with cold indifference by a darling child, was too much for woman's nature to bear.

'After a while, on the mother taking hold of her again, a vague idea seemed to flit across Laura's mind, that this could not be a stranger; she therefore felt her hands very eagerly, while her countenance assumed an expression of intense interest; she became very pale; and then suddenly red; hope seemed struggling with doubt and anxiety, and never were contending emotions more strongly painted upon the human face: at this moment of painful uncertainty, the mother drew her close to her side, and kissed her fondly, when at once the truth flashed upon the child, and all mistrust and anxiety disappeared from her face, as with an expression of exceeding joy she eagerly nestled to the bosom of her parent, and yielded herself to her fond embraces.

'After this, the beads were all unheeded; the playthings which were offered to her were utterly disregarded; her playmates, for whom but a moment before she gladly left the stranger, now vainly strove to pull her from her mother; and though she yielded her usual instantaneous obedience to my signal to follow me, it was evidently with painful reluctance. She clung close to me, as if bewildered and fearful; and when, after a moment, I took her to her mother, she sprang to her arms, and clung to her with eager joy.

'The subsequent parting between them, showed alike the affection, the intelligence, and the resolution of the child.

'Laura accompanied her mother to the door, clinging close to her all the way, until they arrived at the threshold, where she paused, and felt around, to ascertain who was near her. Perceiving the matron, of whom she is very fond, she grasped her with one hand, holding on convulsively to her mother with the other; and thus she stood for a moment: then she dropped her mother's hand; put her handkerchief to her eyes; and turning round, clung sobbing to the matron; while her mother departed, with emotions as deep as those of her child.

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'It has been remarked in former reports, that she can distinguish different degrees of intellect in others, and that she soon regarded, almost with contempt, a new-comer, when, after a few days, she discovered her weakness of mind. This unamiable part of her character has been more strongly developed during the past year.

'She chooses for her friends and companions, those children who are intelligent, and can talk best with her; and she evidently dislikes to be with those who are deficient in intellect, unless, indeed, she can make them serve her purposes, which she is evidently inclined to do. She takes advantage of them, and makes them wait upon her, in a manner that she knows she could not exact of others; and in various ways shows her Saxon blood.

'She is fond of having other children noticed and caressed by the teachers, and those whom she respects; but this must not be carried too far, or she becomes jealous. She wants to have her share, which, if not the lion's, is the greater part; and if she does not get it, she says, "MY MOTHER WILL LOVE ME."

'Her tendency to imitation is so strong, that it leads her to actions which must be entirely incomprehensible to her, and which can give her no other pleasure than the gratification of an internal faculty. She has been known to sit for half an hour, holding a book before her sightless eyes, and moving her lips, as she has observed seeing people do when reading.

'She one day pretended that her doll was sick; and went through all the motions of tending it, and giving it medicine; she then put it carefully to bed, and placed a bottle of hot water to its feet, laughing all the time most heartily. When I came home, she insisted upon my going to see it, and feel its pulse; and when I told her to put a blister on its back, she seemed to enjoy it amazingly, and almost screamed with delight.

'Her social feelings, and her affections, are very strong; and when she is sitting at work, or at her studies, by the side of one of her little friends, she will break off from her task every few moments, to hug and kiss them with an earnestness and warmth that is touching to behold.

'When left alone, she occupies and apparently amuses herself, and seems quite contented; and so strong seems to be the natural tendency of thought to put on the garb of language, that she often soliloquizes in the FINGER LANGUAGE, slow and tedious as it is. But it is only when alone, that she is quiet: for if she becomes sensible of the presence of any one near her, she is restless until she can sit close beside them, hold their hand, and converse with them by signs.

'In her intellectual character it is pleasing to observe an insatiable thirst for knowledge, and a quick perception of the relations of things. In her moral character, it is beautiful to behold her continual gladness, her keen enjoyment of existence, her expansive love, her unhesitating confidence, her sympathy with suffering, her conscientiousness, truthfulness, and hopefulness.'

Such are a few fragments from the simple but most interesting and instructive history of Laura Bridgman. The name of her great benefactor and friend, who writes it, is Dr. Howe. There are not many persons, I hope and believe, who, after reading these passages, can ever hear that name with indifference.

A further account has been published by Dr. Howe, since the report from which I have just quoted. It describes her rapid mental growth and improvement during twelve months more, and brings her little history down to the end of last year. It is very remarkable, that as we dream in words, and carry on imaginary conversations, in which we speak both for ourselves and for the shadows who appear to us in those visions of the night, so she, having no words, uses her finger alphabet in her sleep. And it has been ascertained that when her slumber is broken, and is much disturbed by dreams, she expresses her thoughts in an irregular and confused manner on her fingers: just as we should murmur and mutter them indistinctly, in the like circumstances.

I turned over the leaves of her Diary, and found it written in a fair legible square hand, and expressed in terms which were quite intelligible without any explanation. On my saying that I should like to see her write again, the teacher who sat beside her, bade her, in their language, sign her name upon a slip of paper, twice or thrice. In doing so, I observed that she kept her left hand always touching, and following up, her right, in which, of course, she held the pen. No line was indicated by any contrivance, but she wrote straight and freely.

She had, until now, been quite unconscious of the presence of visitors; but, having her hand placed in that of the gentleman who accompanied me, she immediately expressed his name upon her teacher's palm. Indeed her sense of touch is now so exquisite, that having been acquainted with a person once, she can recognise him or her after almost any interval. This gentleman had been in her company, I believe, but very seldom, and certainly had not seen her for many months. My hand she rejected at once, as she does that of any man who is a stranger to her. But she retained my wife's with evident pleasure, kissed her, and examined her dress with a girl's curiosity and interest.

She was merry and cheerful, and showed much innocent playfulness in her intercourse with her teacher. Her delight on recognising a favourite playfellow and companion - herself a blind girl - who silently, and with an equal enjoyment of the coming surprise, took a seat beside her, was beautiful to witness. It elicited from her at first, as other slight circumstances did twice or thrice during my visit, an uncouth noise which was rather painful to hear. But of her teacher touching her lips, she immediately desisted, and embraced her laughingly and affectionately.

I had previously been into another chamber, where a number of blind boys were swinging, and climbing, and engaged in various sports. They all clamoured, as we entered, to the assistant-master, who accompanied us, 'Look at me, Mr. Hart! Please, Mr. Hart, look at me!' evincing, I thought, even in this, an anxiety peculiar to their condition, that their little feats of agility should be SEEN. Among them was a small laughing fellow, who stood aloof, entertaining himself with a gymnastic exercise for bringing the arms and chest into play; which he enjoyed mightily; especially when, in thrusting out his right arm, he brought it into contact with another boy. Like Laura Bridgman, this young child was deaf, and dumb, and blind.

Dr. Howe's account of this pupil's first instruction is so very striking, and so intimately connected with Laura herself, that I cannot refrain from a short extract. I may premise that the poor boy's name is Oliver Caswell; that he is thirteen years of age; and that he was in full possession of all his faculties, until three years and four months old. He was then attacked by scarlet fever; in four weeks became deaf; in a few weeks more, blind; in six months, dumb. He showed his anxious sense of this last deprivation, by often feeling the lips of other persons when they were talking, and then putting his hand upon his own, as if to assure himself that he had them in the right position.

'His thirst for knowledge,' says Dr. Howe, 'proclaimed itself as soon as he entered the house, by his eager examination of everything he could feel or smell in his new location. For instance, treading upon the register of a furnace, he instantly stooped down, and began to feel it, and soon discovered the way in which the upper plate moved upon the lower one; but this was not enough for him, so lying down upon his face, he applied his tongue first to one, then to the other, and seemed to discover that they were of different kinds of metal.

'His signs were expressive: and the strictly natural language, laughing, crying, sighing, kissing, embracing, &c., was perfect.

'Some of the analogical signs which (guided by his faculty of imitation) he had contrived, were comprehensible; such as the waving motion of his hand for the motion of a boat, the circular one for a wheel, &c.

'The first object was to break up the use of these signs and to substitute for them the use of purely arbitrary ones.

'Profiting by the experience I had gained in the other cases, I omitted several steps of the process before employed, and commenced at once with the finger language. Taking, therefore, several articles having short names, such as key, cup, mug, &c., and with Laura for an auxiliary, I sat down, and taking his hand, placed it upon one of them, and then with my own, made the letters KEY. He felt my hands eagerly with both of his, and on my repeating the process, he evidently tried to imitate the motions of my fingers. In a few minutes he contrived to feel the motions of my fingers with one hand, and holding out the other he tried to imitate them, laughing most heartily when he succeeded. Laura was by, interested even to agitation; and the two presented a singular sight: her face was flushed and anxious, and her fingers twining in among ours so closely as to follow every motion, but so slightly as not to embarrass them; while Oliver stood attentive, his head a little aside, his face turned up, his left hand grasping mine, and his right held out: at every motion of my fingers his countenance betokened keen attention; there was an expression of anxiety as he tried to imitate the motions; then a smile came stealing out as he thought he could do so, and spread into a joyous laugh the moment he succeeded, and felt me pat his head, and Laura clap him heartily upon the back, and jump up and down in her joy.

'He learned more than a half-dozen letters in half an hour, and seemed delighted with his success, at least in gaining approbation. His attention then began to flag, and I commenced playing with him. It was evident that in all this he had merely been imitating the motions of my fingers, and placing his hand upon the key, cup, &c., as part of the process, without any perception of the relation between the sign and the object.

'When he was tired with play I took him back to the table, and he was quite ready to begin again his process of imitation. He soon learned to make the letters for KEY, PEN, PIN; and by having the object repeatedly placed in his hand, he at last perceived the relation I wished to establish between them. This was evident, because, when I made the letters PIN, or PEN, or CUP, he would select the article.

'The perception of this relation was not accompanied by that radiant flash of intelligence, and that glow of joy, which marked the delightful moment when Laura first perceived it. I then placed all the articles on the table, and going away a little distance with the children, placed Oliver's fingers in the positions to spell KEY, on which Laura went and brought the article: the little fellow seemed much amused by this, and looked very attentive and smiling. I then caused him to make the letters BREAD, and in an instant Laura went and brought him a piece: he smelled at it; put it to his lips; cocked up his head with a most knowing look; seemed to reflect a moment; and then laughed outright, as much as to say, "Aha! I understand now how something may be made out of this."

'It was now clear that he had the capacity and inclination to learn, that he was a proper subject for instruction, and needed only persevering attention. I therefore put him in the hands of an intelligent teacher, nothing doubting of his rapid progress.'

Well may this gentleman call that a delightful moment, in which some distant promise of her present state first gleamed upon the darkened mind of Laura Bridgman. Throughout his life, the recollection of that moment will be to him a source of pure, unfading happiness; nor will it shine less brightly on the evening of his days of Noble Usefulness.

The affection which exists between these two - the master and the pupil - is as far removed from all ordinary care and regard, as the circumstances in which it has had its growth, are apart from the common occurrences of life. He is occupied now, in devising means of imparting to her, higher knowledge; and of conveying to her some adequate idea of the Great Creator of that universe in which, dark and silent and scentless though it be to her, she has such deep delight and glad enjoyment.

Ye who have eyes and see not, and have ears and hear not; ye who are as the hypocrites of sad countenances, and disfigure your faces that ye may seem unto men to fast; learn healthy cheerfulness, and mild contentment, from the deaf, and dumb, and blind! Self-elected saints with gloomy brows, this sightless, earless, voiceless child may teach you lessons you will do well to follow. Let that poor hand of hers lie gently on your hearts; for there may be something in its healing touch akin to that of the Great Master whose precepts you misconstrue, whose lessons you pervert, of whose charity and sympathy with all the world, not one among you in his daily practice knows as much as many of the worst among those fallen sinners, to whom you are liberal in nothing but the preachment of perdition!

As I rose to quit the room, a pretty little child of one of the attendants came running in to greet its father. For the moment, a child with eyes, among the sightless crowd, impressed me almost as painfully as the blind boy in the porch had done, two hours ago. Ah! how much brighter and more deeply blue, glowing and rich though it had been before, was the scene without, contrasting with the darkness of so many youthful lives within!

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At SOUTH BOSTON, as it is called, in a situation excellently adapted for the purpose, several charitable institutions are clustered together. One of these, is the State Hospital for the insane; admirably conducted on those enlightened principles of conciliation and kindness, which twenty years ago would have been worse than heretical, and which have been acted upon with so much success in our own pauper Asylum at Hanwell. 'Evince a desire to show some confidence, and repose some trust, even in mad people,' said the resident physician, as we walked along the galleries, his patients flocking round us unrestrained. Of those who deny or doubt the wisdom of this maxim after witnessing its effects, if there be such people still alive, I can only say that I hope I may never be summoned as a Juryman on a Commission of Lunacy whereof they are the subjects; for I should certainly find them out of their senses, on such evidence alone.

Each ward in this institution is shaped like a long gallery or hall, with the dormitories of the patients opening from it on either hand. Here they work, read, play at skittles, and other games; and when the weather does not admit of their taking exercise out of doors, pass the day together. In one of these rooms, seated, calmly, and quite as a matter of course, among a throng of mad-women, black and white, were the physician's wife and another lady, with a couple of children. These ladies were graceful and handsome; and it was not difficult to perceive at a glance that even their presence there, had a highly beneficial influence on the patients who were grouped about them.

Leaning her head against the chimney-piece, with a great assumption of dignity and refinement of manner, sat an elderly female, in as many scraps of finery as Madge Wildfire herself. Her head in particular was so strewn with scraps of gauze and cotton and bits of paper, and had so many queer odds and ends stuck all about it, that it looked like a bird's-nest. She was radiant with imaginary jewels; wore a rich pair of undoubted gold spectacles; and gracefully dropped upon her lap, as we approached, a very old greasy newspaper, in which I dare say she had been reading an account of her own presentation at some Foreign Court.

I have been thus particular in describing her, because she will serve to exemplify the physician's manner of acquiring and retaining the confidence of his patients.

'This,' he said aloud, taking me by the hand, and advancing to the fantastic figure with great politeness - not raising her suspicions by the slightest look or whisper, or any kind of aside, to me: 'This lady is the hostess of this mansion, sir. It belongs to her. Nobody else has anything whatever to do with it. It is a large establishment, as you see, and requires a great number of attendants. She lives, you observe, in the very first style. She is kind enough to receive my visits, and to permit my wife and family to reside here; for which it is hardly necessary to say, we are much indebted to her. She is exceedingly courteous, you perceive,' on this hint she bowed condescendingly, 'and will permit me to have the pleasure of introducing you: a gentleman from England, Ma'am: newly arrived from England, after a very tempestuous passage: Mr. Dickens, - the lady of the house!'

We exchanged the most dignified salutations with profound gravity and respect, and so went on. The rest of the madwomen seemed to understand the joke perfectly (not only in this case, but in all the others, except their own), and be highly amused by it. The nature of their several kinds of insanity was made known to me in the same way, and we left each of them in high good humour. Not only is a thorough confidence established, by those means, between the physician and patient, in respect of the nature and extent of their hallucinations, but it is easy to understand that opportunities are afforded for seizing any moment of reason, to startle them by placing their own delusion before them in its most incongruous and ridiculous light.

Every patient in this asylum sits down to dinner every day with a knife and fork; and in the midst of them sits the gentleman, whose manner of dealing with his charges, I have just described. At every meal, moral influence alone restrains the more violent among them from cutting the throats of the rest; but the effect of that influence is reduced to an absolute certainty, and is found, even as a means of restraint, to say nothing of it as a means of cure, a hundred times more efficacious than all the strait-waistcoats, fetters, and handcuffs, that ignorance, prejudice, and cruelty have manufactured since the creation of the world.

In the labour department, every patient is as freely trusted with the tools of his trade as if he were a sane man. In the garden, and on the farm, they work with spades, rakes, and hoes. For amusement, they walk, run, fish, paint, read, and ride out to take the air in carriages provided for the purpose. They have among themselves a sewing society to make clothes for the poor, which holds meetings, passes resolutions, never comes to fisty-cuffs or bowie-knives as sane assemblies have been known to do elsewhere; and conducts all its proceedings with the greatest decorum. The irritability, which would otherwise be expended on their own flesh, clothes, and furniture, is dissipated in these pursuits. They are cheerful, tranquil, and healthy.

Once a week they have a ball, in which the Doctor and his family, with all the nurses and attendants, take an active part. Dances and marches are performed alternately, to the enlivening strains of a piano; and now and then some gentleman or lady (whose proficiency has been previously ascertained) obliges the company with a song: nor does it ever degenerate, at a tender crisis, into a screech or howl; wherein, I must confess, I should have thought the danger lay. At an early hour they all meet together for these festive purposes; at eight o'clock refreshments are served; and at nine they separate.

Immense politeness and good breeding are observed throughout. They all take their tone from the Doctor; and he moves a very Chesterfield among the company. Like other assemblies, these entertainments afford a fruitful topic of conversation among the ladies for some days; and the gentlemen are so anxious to shine on these occasions, that they have been sometimes found 'practising their steps' in private, to cut a more distinguished figure in the dance.

It is obvious that one great feature of this system, is the inculcation and encouragement, even among such unhappy persons, of a decent self-respect. Something of the same spirit pervades all the Institutions at South Boston.

There is the House of Industry. In that branch of it, which is devoted to the reception of old or otherwise helpless paupers, these words are painted on the walls: 'WORTHY OF NOTICE. SELF- GOVERNMENT, QUIETUDE, AND PEACE, ARE BLESSINGS.' It is not assumed and taken for granted that being there they must be evil-disposed and wicked people, before whose vicious eyes it is necessary to flourish threats and harsh restraints. They are met at the very threshold with this mild appeal. All within-doors is very plain and simple, as it ought to be, but arranged with a view to peace and comfort. It costs no more than any other plan of arrangement, but it speaks an amount of consideration for those who are reduced to seek a shelter there, which puts them at once upon their gratitude and good behaviour. Instead of being parcelled out in great, long, rambling wards, where a certain amount of weazen life may mope, and pine, and shiver, all day long, the building is divided into separate rooms, each with its share of light and air. In these, the better kind of paupers live. They have a motive for exertion and becoming pride, in the desire to make these little chambers comfortable and decent.

I do not remember one but it was clean and neat, and had its plant or two upon the window-sill, or row of crockery upon the shelf, or small display of coloured prints upon the whitewashed wall, or, perhaps, its wooden clock behind the door.

The orphans and young children are in an adjoining building separate from this, but a part of the same Institution. Some are such little creatures, that the stairs are of Lilliputian measurement, fitted to their tiny strides. The same consideration for their years and weakness is expressed in their very seats, which are perfect curiosities, and look like articles of furniture for a pauper doll's-house. I can imagine the glee of our Poor Law Commissioners at the notion of these seats having arms and backs; but small spines being of older date than their occupation of the Board-room at Somerset House, I thought even this provision very merciful and kind.

Here again, I was greatly pleased with the inscriptions on the wall, which were scraps of plain morality, easily remembered and understood: such as 'Love one another' - 'God remembers the smallest creature in his creation:' and straightforward advice of that nature. The books and tasks of these smallest of scholars, were adapted, in the same judicious manner, to their childish powers. When we had examined these lessons, four morsels of girls (of whom one was blind) sang a little song, about the merry month of May, which I thought (being extremely dismal) would have suited an English November better. That done, we went to see their sleeping-rooms on the floor above, in which the arrangements were no less excellent and gentle than those we had seen below. And after observing that the teachers were of a class and character well suited to the spirit of the place, I took leave of the infants with a lighter heart than ever I have taken leave of pauper infants yet.

Connected with the House of Industry, there is also an Hospital, which was in the best order, and had, I am glad to say, many beds unoccupied. It had one fault, however, which is common to all American interiors: the presence of the eternal, accursed, suffocating, red-hot demon of a stove, whose breath would blight the purest air under Heaven.

There are two establishments for boys in this same neighbourhood. One is called the Boylston school, and is an asylum for neglected and indigent boys who have committed no crime, but who in the ordinary course of things would very soon be purged of that distinction if they were not taken from the hungry streets and sent here. The other is a House of Reformation for Juvenile Offenders. They are both under the same roof, but the two classes of boys never come in contact.

The Boylston boys, as may be readily supposed, have very much the advantage of the others in point of personal appearance. They were in their school-room when I came upon them, and answered correctly, without book, such questions as where was England; how far was it; what was its population; its capital city; its form of government; and so forth. They sang a song too, about a farmer sowing his seed: with corresponding action at such parts as "tis thus he sows,' 'he turns him round,' 'he claps his hands;' which gave it greater interest for them, and accustomed them to act together, in an orderly manner. They appeared exceedingly well-taught, and not better taught than fed; for a more chubby-looking full-waistcoated set of boys, I never saw.

The juvenile offenders had not such pleasant faces by a great deal, and in this establishment there were many boys of colour. I saw them first at their work (basket-making, and the manufacture of palm-leaf hats), afterwards in their school, where they sang a chorus in praise of Liberty: an odd, and, one would think, rather aggravating, theme for prisoners. These boys are divided into four classes, each denoted by a numeral, worn on a badge upon the arm. On the arrival of a new-comer, he is put into the fourth or lowest class, and left, by good behaviour, to work his way up into the first. The design and object of this Institution is to reclaim the youthful criminal by firm but kind and judicious treatment; to make his prison a place of purification and improvement, not of demoralisation and corruption; to impress upon him that there is but one path, and that one sober industry, which can ever lead him to happiness; to teach him how it may be trodden, if his footsteps have never yet been led that way; and to lure him back to it if they have strayed: in a word, to snatch him from destruction, and restore him to society a penitent and useful member. The importance of such an establishment, in every point of view, and with reference to every consideration of humanity and social policy, requires no comment.

One other establishment closes the catalogue. It is the House of Correction for the State, in which silence is strictly maintained, but where the prisoners have the comfort and mental relief of seeing each other, and of working together. This is the improved system of Prison Discipline which we have imported into England, and which has been in successful operation among us for some years past.

America, as a new and not over-populated country, has in all her prisons, the one great advantage, of being enabled to find useful and profitable work for the inmates; whereas, with us, the prejudice against prison labour is naturally very strong, and almost insurmountable, when honest men who have not offended against the laws are frequently doomed to seek employment in vain. Even in the United States, the principle of bringing convict labour and free labour into a competition which must obviously be to the disadvantage of the latter, has already found many opponents, whose number is not likely to diminish with access of years.

For this very reason though, our best prisons would seem at the first glance to be better conducted than those of America. The treadmill is conducted with little or no noise; five hundred men may pick oakum in the same room, without a sound; and both kinds of labour admit of such keen and vigilant superintendence, as will render even a word of personal communication amongst the prisoners almost impossible. On the other hand, the noise of the loom, the forge, the carpenter's hammer, or the stonemason's saw, greatly favour those opportunities of intercourse - hurried and brief no doubt, but opportunities still - which these several kinds of work, by rendering it necessary for men to be employed very near to each other, and often side by side, without any barrier or partition between them, in their very nature present. A visitor, too, requires to reason and reflect a little, before the sight of a number of men engaged in ordinary labour, such as he is accustomed to out of doors, will impress him half as strongly as the contemplation of the same persons in the same place and garb would, if they were occupied in some task, marked and degraded everywhere as belonging only to felons in jails. In an American state prison or house of correction, I found it difficult at first to persuade myself that I was really in a jail: a place of ignominious punishment and endurance. And to this hour I very much question whether the humane boast that it is not like one, has its root in the true wisdom or philosophy of the matter.

I hope I may not be misunderstood on this subject, for it is one in which I take a strong and deep interest. I incline as little to the sickly feeling which makes every canting lie or maudlin speech of a notorious criminal a subject of newspaper report and general sympathy, as I do to those good old customs of the good old times which made England, even so recently as in the reign of the Third King George, in respect of her criminal code and her prison regulations, one of the most bloody-minded and barbarous countries on the earth. If I thought it would do any good to the rising generation, I would cheerfully give my consent to the disinterment of the bones of any genteel highwayman (the more genteel, the more cheerfully), and to their exposure, piecemeal, on any sign-post, gate, or gibbet, that might be deemed a good elevation for the purpose. My reason is as well convinced that these gentry were as utterly worthless and debauched villains, as it is that the laws and jails hardened them in their evil courses, or that their wonderful escapes were effected by the prison-turnkeys who, in those admirable days, had always been felons themselves, and were, to the last, their bosom-friends and pot-companions. At the same time I know, as all men do or should, that the subject of Prison Discipline is one of the highest importance to any community; and that in her sweeping reform and bright example to other countries on this head, America has shown great wisdom, great benevolence, and exalted policy. In contrasting her system with that which we have modelled upon it, I merely seek to show that with all its drawbacks, ours has some advantages of its own.

The House of Correction which has led to these remarks, is not walled, like other prisons, but is palisaded round about with tall rough stakes, something after the manner of an enclosure for keeping elephants in, as we see it represented in Eastern prints and pictures. The prisoners wear a parti-coloured dress; and those who are sentenced to hard labour, work at nail-making, or stone- cutting. When I was there, the latter class of labourers were employed upon the stone for a new custom-house in course of erection at Boston. They appeared to shape it skilfully and with expedition, though there were very few among them (if any) who had not acquired the art within the prison gates.

The women, all in one large room, were employed in making light clothing, for New Orleans and the Southern States. They did their work in silence like the men; and like them were over-looked by the person contracting for their labour, or by some agent of his appointment. In addition to this, they are every moment liable to be visited by the prison officers appointed for that purpose.

The arrangements for cooking, washing of clothes, and so forth, are much upon the plan of those I have seen at home. Their mode of bestowing the prisoners at night (which is of general adoption) differs from ours, and is both simple and effective. In the centre of a lofty area, lighted by windows in the four walls, are five tiers of cells, one above the other; each tier having before it a light iron gallery, attainable by stairs of the same construction and material: excepting the lower one, which is on the ground. Behind these, back to back with them and facing the opposite wall, are five corresponding rows of cells, accessible by similar means: so that supposing the prisoners locked up in their cells, an officer stationed on the ground, with his back to the wall, has half their number under his eye at once; the remaining half being equally under the observation of another officer on the opposite side; and all in one great apartment. Unless this watch be corrupted or sleeping on his post, it is impossible for a man to escape; for even in the event of his forcing the iron door of his cell without noise (which is exceedingly improbable), the moment he appears outside, and steps into that one of the five galleries on which it is situated, he must be plainly and fully visible to the officer below. Each of these cells holds a small truckle bed, in which one prisoner sleeps; never more. It is small, of course; and the door being not solid, but grated, and without blind or curtain, the prisoner within is at all times exposed to the observation and inspection of any guard who may pass along that tier at any hour or minute of the night. Every day, the prisoners receive their dinner, singly, through a trap in the kitchen wall; and each man carries his to his sleeping cell to eat it, where he is locked up, alone, for that purpose, one hour. The whole of this arrangement struck me as being admirable; and I hope that the next new prison we erect in England may be built on this plan.

I was given to understand that in this prison no swords or fire- arms, or even cudgels, are kept; nor is it probable that, so long as its present excellent management continues, any weapon, offensive or defensive, will ever be required within its bounds.

Such are the Institutions at South Boston! In all of them, the unfortunate or degenerate citizens of the State are carefully instructed in their duties both to God and man; are surrounded by all reasonable means of comfort and happiness that their condition will admit of; are appealed to, as members of the great human family, however afflicted, indigent, or fallen; are ruled by the strong Heart, and not by the strong (though immeasurably weaker) Hand. I have described them at some length; firstly, because their worth demanded it; and secondly, because I mean to take them for a model, and to content myself with saying of others we may come to, whose design and purpose are the same, that in this or that respect they practically fail, or differ.

I wish by this account of them, imperfect in its execution, but in its just intention, honest, I could hope to convey to my readers one-hundredth part of the gratification, the sights I have described, afforded me.

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To an Englishman, accustomed to the paraphernalia of Westminster Hall, an American Court of Law is as odd a sight as, I suppose, an English Court of Law would be to an American. Except in the Supreme Court at Washington (where the judges wear a plain black robe), there is no such thing as a wig or gown connected with the administration of justice. The gentlemen of the bar being barristers and attorneys too (for there is no division of those functions as in England) are no more removed from their clients than attorneys in our Court for the Relief of Insolvent Debtors are, from theirs. The jury are quite at home, and make themselves as comfortable as circumstances will permit. The witness is so little elevated above, or put aloof from, the crowd in the court, that a stranger entering during a pause in the proceedings would find it difficult to pick him out from the rest. And if it chanced to be a criminal trial, his eyes, in nine cases out of ten, would wander to the dock in search of the prisoner, in vain; for that gentleman would most likely be lounging among the most distinguished ornaments of the legal profession, whispering suggestions in his counsel's ear, or making a toothpick out of an old quill with his penknife.

I could not but notice these differences, when I visited the courts at Boston. I was much surprised at first, too, to observe that the counsel who interrogated the witness under examination at the time, did so SITTING. But seeing that he was also occupied in writing down the answers, and remembering that he was alone and had no 'junior,' I quickly consoled myself with the reflection that law was not quite so expensive an article here, as at home; and that the absence of sundry formalities which we regard as indispensable, had doubtless a very favourable influence upon the bill of costs.

In every Court, ample and commodious provision is made for the accommodation of the citizens. This is the case all through America. In every Public Institution, the right of the people to attend, and to have an interest in the proceedings, is most fully and distinctly recognised. There are no grim door-keepers to dole out their tardy civility by the sixpenny-worth; nor is there, I sincerely believe, any insolence of office of any kind. Nothing national is exhibited for money; and no public officer is a showman. We have begun of late years to imitate this good example. I hope we shall continue to do so; and that in the fulness of time, even deans and chapters may be converted.

In the civil court an action was trying, for damages sustained in some accident upon a railway. The witnesses had been examined, and counsel was addressing the jury. The learned gentleman (like a few of his English brethren) was desperately long-winded, and had a remarkable capacity of saying the same thing over and over again. His great theme was 'Warren the

ENGINE driver,' whom he pressed into the service of every sentence he uttered. I listened to him for about a quarter of an hour; and, coming out of court at the expiration of that time, without the faintest ray of enlightenment as to the merits of the case, felt as if I were at home again.

In the prisoner's cell, waiting to be examined by the magistrate on a charge of theft, was a boy. This lad, instead of being committed to a common jail, would be sent to the asylum at South Boston, and there taught a trade; and in the course of time he would be bound apprentice to some respectable master. Thus, his detection in this offence, instead of being the prelude to a life of infamy and a miserable death, would lead, there was a reasonable hope, to his being reclaimed from vice, and becoming a worthy member of society.

I am by no means a wholesale admirer of our legal solemnities, many of which impress me as being exceedingly ludicrous. Strange as it may seem too, there is undoubtedly a degree of protection in the wig and gown - a dismissal of individual responsibility in dressing for the part - which encourages that insolent bearing and language, and that gross perversion of the office of a pleader for The Truth, so frequent in our courts of law. Still, I cannot help doubting whether America, in her desire to shake off the absurdities and abuses of the old system, may not have gone too far into the opposite extreme; and whether it is not desirable, especially in the small community of a city like this, where each man knows the other, to surround the administration of justice with some artificial barriers against the 'Hail fellow, well met' deportment of everyday life. All the aid it can have in the very high character and ability of the Bench, not only here but elsewhere, it has, and well deserves to have; but it may need something more: not to impress the thoughtful and the well-informed, but the ignorant and heedless; a class which includes some prisoners and many witnesses. These institutions were established, no doubt, upon the principle that those who had so large a share in making the laws, would certainly respect them. But experience has proved this hope to be fallacious; for no men know better than the judges of America, that on the occasion of any great popular excitement the law is powerless, and cannot, for the time, assert its own supremacy.

The tone of society in Boston is one of perfect politeness, courtesy, and good breeding. The ladies are unquestionably very beautiful - in face: but there I am compelled to stop. Their education is much as with us; neither better nor worse. I had heard some very marvellous stories in this respect; but not believing them, was not disappointed. Blue ladies there are, in Boston; but like philosophers of that colour and sex in most other latitudes, they rather desire to be thought superior than to be so. Evangelical ladies there are, likewise, whose attachment to the forms of religion, and horror of theatrical entertainments, are most exemplary. Ladies who have a passion for attending lectures are to be found among all classes and all conditions. In the kind of provincial life which prevails in cities such as this, the Pulpit has great influence. The peculiar province of the Pulpit in New England (always excepting the Unitarian Ministry) would appear to be the denouncement of all innocent and rational amusements. The church, the chapel, and the lecture-room, are the only means of excitement excepted; and to the church, the chapel, and the lecture-room, the ladies resort in crowds.

Wherever religion is resorted to, as a strong drink, and as an escape from the dull monotonous round of home, those of its ministers who pepper the highest will be the surest to please. They who strew the Eternal Path with the greatest amount of brimstone, and who most ruthlessly tread down the flowers and leaves that grow by the wayside, will be voted the most righteous; and they who enlarge with the greatest pertinacity on the difficulty of getting into heaven, will be considered by all true believers certain of going there: though it would be hard to say by what process of reasoning this conclusion is arrived at. It is so at home, and it is so abroad. With regard to the other means of excitement, the Lecture, it has at least the merit of being always new. One lecture treads so quickly on the heels of another, that none are remembered; and the course of this month may be safely repeated next, with its charm of novelty unbroken, and its interest unabated.

The fruits of the earth have their growth in corruption. Out of the rottenness of these things, there has sprung up in Boston a sect of philosophers known as Transcendentalists. On inquiring what this appellation might be supposed to signify, I was given to understand that whatever was unintelligible would be certainly transcendental. Not deriving much comfort from this elucidation, I pursued the inquiry still further, and found that the Transcendentalists are followers of my friend Mr. Carlyle, or I should rather say, of a follower of his, Mr. Ralph Waldo Emerson. This gentleman has written a volume of Essays, in which, among much that is dreamy and fanciful (if he will pardon me for saying so), there is much more that is true and manly, honest and bold. Transcendentalism has its occasional vagaries (what school has not?), but it has good healthful qualities in spite of them; not least among the number a hearty disgust of Cant, and an aptitude to detect her in all the million varieties of her everlasting wardrobe. And therefore if I were a Bostonian, I think I would be a Transcendentalist.

The only preacher I heard in Boston was Mr. Taylor, who addresses himself peculiarly to seamen, and who was once a mariner himself. I found his chapel down among the shipping, in one of the narrow, old, water-side streets, with a gay blue flag waving freely from its roof. In the gallery opposite to the pulpit were a little choir of male and female singers, a violoncello, and a violin. The preacher already sat in the pulpit, which was raised on pillars, and ornamented behind him with painted drapery of a lively and somewhat theatrical appearance. He looked a weather-beaten hard- featured man, of about six or eight and fifty; with deep lines graven as it were into his face, dark hair, and a stern, keen eye. Yet the general character of his countenance was pleasant and agreeable. The service commenced with a hymn, to which succeeded an extemporary prayer. It had the fault of frequent repetition, incidental to all such prayers; but it was plain and comprehensive in its doctrines, and breathed a tone of general sympathy and charity, which is not so commonly a characteristic of this form of address to the Deity as it might be. That done he opened his discourse, taking for his text a passage from the Song of Solomon, laid upon the desk before the commencement of the service by some unknown member of the congregation: 'Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning on the arm of her beloved!'

He handled his text in all kinds of ways, and twisted it into all manner of shapes; but always ingeniously, and with a rude eloquence, well adapted to the comprehension of his hearers. Indeed if I be not mistaken, he studied their sympathies and understandings much more than the display of his own powers. His imagery was all drawn from the sea, and from the incidents of a seaman's life; and was often remarkably good. He spoke to them of 'that glorious man, Lord Nelson,' and of Collingwood; and drew nothing in, as the saying is, by the head and shoulders, but brought it to bear upon his purpose, naturally, and with a sharp mind to its effect. Sometimes, when much excited with his subject, he had an odd way - compounded of John

Bunyan, and Balfour of Burley - of taking his great quarto Bible under his arm and pacing up and down the pulpit with it; looking steadily down, meantime, into the midst of the congregation. Thus, when he applied his text to the first assemblage of his hearers, and pictured the wonder of the church at their presumption in forming a congregation among themselves, he stopped short with his Bible under his arm in the manner I have described, and pursued his discourse after this manner:

'Who are these - who are they - who are these fellows? where do they come from? Where are they going to? - Come from! What's the answer?' - leaning out of the pulpit, and pointing downward with his right hand: 'From below!' - starting back again, and looking at the sailors before him: 'From below, my brethren. From under the hatches of sin, battened down above you by the evil one. That's where you came from!' - a walk up and down the pulpit: 'and where are you going' - stopping abruptly: 'where are you going? Aloft!' - very softly, and pointing upward: 'Aloft!' - louder: 'aloft!' - louder still: 'That's where you are going - with a fair wind, - all taut and trim, steering direct for Heaven in its glory, where there are no storms or foul weather, and where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.' - Another walk: 'That's where you're going to, my friends. That's it. That's the place. That's the port. That's the haven. It's a blessed harbour - still water there, in all changes of the winds and tides; no driving ashore upon the rocks, or slipping your cables and running out to sea, there: Peace - Peace - Peace - all peace!' - Another walk, and patting the Bible under his left arm: 'What! These fellows are coming from the wilderness, are they? Yes. From the dreary, blighted wilderness of Iniquity, whose only crop is Death. But do they lean upon anything - do they lean upon nothing, these poor seamen?' - Three raps upon the Bible: 'Oh yes. - Yes. - They lean upon the arm of their Beloved' - three more raps: 'upon the arm of their Beloved' - three more, and a walk: 'Pilot, guiding- star, and compass, all in one, to all hands - here it is' - three more: 'Here it is. They can do their seaman's duty manfully, and be easy in their minds in the utmost peril and danger, with this' - two more: 'They can come, even these poor fellows can come, from the wilderness leaning on the arm of their Beloved, and go up - up - up!' - raising his hand higher, and higher, at every repetition of the word, so that he stood with it at last stretched above his head, regarding them in a strange, rapt manner, and pressing the book triumphantly to his breast, until he gradually subsided into some other portion of his discourse.

I have cited this, rather as an instance of the preacher's eccentricities than his merits, though taken in connection with his look and manner, and the character of his audience, even this was striking. It is possible, however, that my favourable impression of him may have been greatly influenced and strengthened, firstly, by his impressing upon his hearers that the true observance of religion was not inconsistent with a cheerful deportment and an exact discharge of the duties of their station, which, indeed, it scrupulously required of them; and secondly, by his cautioning them not to set up any monopoly in Paradise and its mercies. I never heard these two points so wisely touched (if indeed I have ever heard them touched at all), by any preacher of that kind before.

Having passed the time I spent in Boston, in making myself acquainted with these things, in settling the course I should take in my future travels, and in mixing constantly with its society, I am not aware that I have any occasion to prolong this chapter. Such of its social customs as I have not mentioned, however, may be told in a very few words.

The usual dinner-hour is two o'clock. A dinner party takes place at five; and at an evening party, they seldom sup later than eleven; so that it goes hard but one gets home, even from a rout, by midnight. I never could find out any difference between a party at Boston and a party in London, saving that at the former place all assemblies are held at more rational hours; that the conversation may possibly be a little louder and more cheerful; and a guest is usually expected to ascend to the very top of the house to take his cloak off; that he is certain to see, at every dinner, an unusual amount of poultry on the table; and at every supper, at least two mighty bowls of hot stewed oysters, in any one of which a half-grown Duke of Clarence might be smothered easily.

There are two theatres in Boston, of good size and construction, but sadly in want of patronage. The few ladies who resort to them, sit, as of right, in the front rows of the boxes.

The bar is a large room with a stone floor, and there people stand and smoke, and lounge about, all the evening: dropping in and out as the humour takes them. There too the stranger is initiated into the mysteries of Gin-sling, Cock-tail, Sangaree, Mint Julep, Sherry-cobbler, Timber Doodle, and other rare drinks. The house is full of boarders, both married and single, many of whom sleep upon the premises, and contract by the week for their board and lodging: the charge for which diminishes as they go nearer the sky to roost. A public table is laid in a very handsome hall for breakfast, and for dinner, and for supper. The party sitting down together to these meals will vary in number from one to two hundred: sometimes more. The advent of each of these epochs in the day is proclaimed by an awful gong, which shakes the very window-frames as it reverberates through the house, and horribly disturbs nervous foreigners. There is an ordinary for ladies, and an ordinary for gentlemen.

In our private room the cloth could not, for any earthly consideration, have been laid for dinner without a huge glass dish of cranberries in the middle of the table; and breakfast would have been no breakfast unless the principal dish were a deformed beef- steak with a great flat bone in the centre, swimming in hot butter, and sprinkled with the very blackest of all possible pepper. Our bedroom was spacious and airy, but (like every bedroom on this side of the Atlantic) very bare of furniture, having no curtains to the French bedstead or to the window. It had one unusual luxury, however, in the shape of a wardrobe of painted wood, something smaller than an English watch-box; or if this comparison should be insufficient to convey a just idea of its dimensions, they may be estimated from the fact of my having lived for fourteen days and nights in the firm belief that it was a shower-bath.

CHAPTER IV - AN AMERICAN RAILROAD. LOWELL AND ITS FACTORY SYSTEM

BEFORE leaving Boston, I devoted one day to an excursion to Lowell. I assign a separate chapter to this visit; not because I am about to describe it at any great length, but because I remember it as a thing by itself, and am desirous that my readers should do the same.

I made acquaintance with an American railroad, on this occasion, for the first time. As these works are pretty much alike all through the States, their general characteristics are easily described.

There are no first and second class carriages as with us; but there is a gentleman's car and a ladies' car: the main distinction between which is that in the first, everybody smokes; and in the second, nobody does. As a black man never travels with a white one, there is also a negro car; which is a great, blundering, clumsy chest, such as Gulliver put to sea in, from the kingdom of Brobdingnag. There is a great deal of jolting, a great deal of noise, a great deal of wall, not much window, a locomotive engine, a shriek, and a bell.

The cars are like shabby omnibuses, but larger: holding thirty, forty, fifty, people. The seats, instead of stretching from end to end, are placed crosswise. Each seat holds two persons. There is a long row of them on each side of the caravan, a narrow passage up the middle, and a door at both ends. In the centre of the carriage there is usually a stove, fed with charcoal or anthracite coal; which is for the most part red-hot. It is insufferably close; and you see the hot air fluttering between yourself and any other object you may happen to look at, like the ghost of smoke.

In the ladies' car, there are a great many gentlemen who have ladies with them. There are also a great many ladies who have nobody with them: for any lady may travel alone, from one end of the United States to the other, and be certain of the most courteous and considerate treatment everywhere. The conductor or check-taker, or guard, or whatever he may be, wears no uniform. He walks up and down the car, and in and out of it, as his fancy dictates; leans against the door with his hands in his pockets and stares at you, if you chance to be a stranger; or enters into conversation with the passengers about him. A great many newspapers are pulled out, and a few of them are read. Everybody talks to you, or to anybody else who hits his fancy. If you are an Englishman, he expects that that railroad is pretty much like an English railroad. If you say 'No,' he says 'Yes?' (interrogatively), and asks in what respect they differ. You enumerate the heads of difference, one by one, and he says 'Yes?' (still interrogatively) to each. Then he guesses that you don't travel faster in England; and on your replying that you do, says 'Yes?' again (still interrogatively), and it is quite evident, don't believe it. After a long pause he remarks, partly to you, and partly to the knob on the top of his stick, that 'Yankees are reckoned to be considerable of a go-ahead people too;' upon which YOU say 'Yes,' and then HE says 'Yes' again (affirmatively this time); and upon your looking out of window, tells you that behind that hill, and some three miles from the next station, there is a clever town in a smart lo-ca-tion, where he expects you have concluded to stop. Your answer in the negative naturally leads to more questions in reference to your intended route (always pronounced rout); and wherever you are going, you invariably learn that you can't get there without immense difficulty and danger, and that all the great sights are somewhere else.

If a lady take a fancy to any male passenger's seat, the gentleman who accompanies her gives him notice of the fact, and he immediately vacates it with great politeness. Politics are much discussed, so are banks, so is cotton. Quiet people avoid the question of the Presidency, for there will be a new election in three years and a half, and party feeling runs very high: the great constitutional feature of this institution being, that directly the acrimony of the last election is over, the acrimony of the next one begins; which is an unspeakable comfort to all strong politicians and true lovers of their country: that is to say, to ninety-nine men and boys out of every ninety-nine and a quarter.

Except when a branch road joins the main one, there is seldom more than one track of rails; so that the road is very narrow, and the view, where there is a deep cutting, by no means extensive. When there is not, the character of the scenery is always the same. Mile after mile of stunted trees: some hewn down by the axe, some blown down by the wind, some half fallen and resting on their neighbours, many mere logs half hidden in the swamp, others mouldered away to spongy chips. The very soil of the earth is made up of minute fragments such as these; each pool of stagnant water has its crust of vegetable rottenness; on every side there are the boughs, and trunks, and stumps of trees, in every possible stage of decay, decomposition, and neglect. Now you emerge for a few brief minutes on an open country, glittering with some bright lake or pool, broad as many an English river, but so small here that it scarcely has a name; now catch hasty glimpses of a distant town, with its clean white houses and their cool piazzas, its prim New England church and school-house; when whir-r-r-r! almost before you have seen them, comes the same dark screen: the stunted trees, the stumps, the logs, the stagnant water - all so like the last that you seem to have been transported back again by magic.

The train calls at stations in the woods, where the wild impossibility of anybody having the smallest reason to get out, is only to be equalled by the apparently desperate hopelessness of there being anybody to get in. It rushes across the turnpike road, where there is no gate, no policeman, no signal: nothing but a rough wooden arch, on which is painted 'WHEN THE BELL RINGS, LOOK OUT FOR THE LOCOMOTIVE.' On it whirls headlong, dives through the woods again, emerges in the light, clatters over frail arches, rumbles upon the heavy ground, shoots beneath a wooden bridge which intercepts the light for a second like a wink, suddenly awakens all the slumbering echoes in the main street of a large town, and dashes on haphazard, pell-mell, neck-or-nothing, down the middle of the road. There - with mechanics working at their trades, and people leaning from their doors and windows, and boys flying kites and playing marbles, and men smoking, and women talking, and children crawling, and pigs burrowing, and unaccustomed horses plunging and rearing, close to the very rails - there - on, on, on - tears the mad dragon of an engine with its train of cars; scattering in all directions a shower of burning sparks from its wood fire; screeching, hissing, yelling, panting; until at last the thirsty monster stops beneath a covered way to drink, the people cluster round, and you have time to breathe again.

I was met at the station at Lowell by a gentleman intimately connected with the management of the factories there; and gladly putting myself under his guidance, drove off at once to that quarter of the town in which the works, the object of my visit, were situated. Although only just of age - for if my recollection serve me, it has been a manufacturing town barely one-and-twenty years - Lowell is a large, populous, thriving place. Those indications of its youth which first attract the eye, give it a quaintness and oddity of character which, to a visitor from the old country, is amusing enough. It was a very dirty winter's day, and nothing in the whole town looked old to me, except the mud, which in some parts was almost knee-deep, and might have been deposited there, on the subsiding of the waters after the Deluge. In one place, there was a new wooden church, which, having no steeple, and being yet unpainted, looked like an enormous packing-case without any direction upon it. In another there was a large hotel, whose walls and colonnades were so crisp, and thin, and slight, that it had exactly the appearance of being built with cards. I was careful not to draw my breath as we passed, and trembled when I saw a workman come out upon the roof, lest with one thoughtless stamp of his foot he should crush the structure beneath him, and bring it rattling down. The very river that moves the machinery in the mills (for they are all worked by water power), seems to acquire a new character from the fresh buildings of bright red brick and painted wood among which it takes its course; and to be as light- headed, thoughtless, and brisk a young river, in its murmurings and tumblings, as one would desire to see. One would swear that every 'Bakery,' 'Grocery,' and 'Bookbindery,' and other kind of store, took its shutters down for the first time, and started in business yesterday. The golden pestles and mortars fixed as signs upon the sun-blind frames outside the Druggists', appear to have been just turned out of the United States' Mint; and when I saw a baby of some week or ten days old in a woman's arms at a street corner, I found myself unconsciously wondering where it came from: never supposing for an instant that it could have been born in such a young town as that.

There are several factories in Lowell, each of which belongs to what we should term a Company of Proprietors, but what they call in America a Corporation. I went over several of these; such as a woollen factory, a carpet factory, and a cotton factory: examined them in every part; and saw them in their ordinary working aspect, with no preparation of any kind, or departure from their ordinary everyday proceedings. I may add that I am well acquainted with our manufacturing towns in England, and have visited many mills in Manchester and elsewhere in the same manner.

I happened to arrive at the first factory just as the dinner hour was over, and the girls were returning to their work; indeed the stairs of the mill were thronged with them as I ascended. They were all well dressed, but not to my thinking above their condition; for I like to see the humbler classes of society careful of their dress and appearance, and even, if they please, decorated with such little trinkets as come within the compass of their means. Supposing it confined within reasonable limits, I would always encourage this kind of pride, as a worthy element of self- respect, in any person I employed; and should no more be deterred from doing so, because some wretched female referred her fall to a love of dress, than I would allow my construction of the real intent and meaning of the Sabbath to be influenced by any warning to the well-disposed, founded on his backslidings on that particular day, which might emanate from the rather doubtful authority of a murderer in Newgate.

These girls, as I have said, were all well dressed: and that phrase necessarily includes extreme cleanliness. They had serviceable bonnets, good warm cloaks, and shawls; and were not above clogs and pattens. Moreover, there were places in the mill in which they could deposit these things without injury; and there were conveniences for washing. They were healthy in appearance, many of them remarkably so, and had the manners and deportment of young women: not of degraded brutes of burden. If I had seen in one of those mills (but I did not, though I looked for something of this kind with a sharp eye), the most lisping, mincing, affected, and ridiculous young creature that my imagination could suggest, I should have thought of the careless, moping, slatternly, degraded, dull reverse (I HAVE seen that), and should have been still well pleased to look upon her.

The rooms in which they worked, were as well ordered as themselves. In the windows of some, there were green plants, which were trained to shade the glass; in all, there was as much fresh air, cleanliness, and comfort, as the nature of the occupation would possibly admit of. Out of so large a number of females, many of whom were only then just verging upon womanhood, it may be reasonably supposed that some were delicate and fragile in appearance: no doubt there were. But I solemnly declare, that from all the crowd I saw in the different factories that day, I cannot recall or separate one young face that gave me a painful impression; not one young girl whom, assuming it to be a matter of necessity that she should gain her daily bread by the labour of her hands, I would have removed from those works if I had had the power.

They reside in various boarding-houses near at hand. The owners of the mills are particularly careful to allow no persons to enter upon the possession of these houses, whose characters have not undergone the most searching and thorough inquiry. Any complaint that is made against them, by the boarders, or by any one else, is fully investigated; and if good ground of complaint be shown to exist against them, they are removed, and their occupation is handed over to some more deserving person. There are a few children employed in these factories, but not many. The laws of the State forbid their working more than nine months in the year, and require that they be educated during the other three. For this purpose there are schools in Lowell; and there are churches and chapels of various persuasions, in which the young women may observe that form of worship in which they have been educated.

At some distance from the factories, and on the highest and pleasantest ground in the neighbourhood, stands their hospital, or boarding-house for the sick: it is the best house in those parts, and was built by an eminent merchant for his own residence. Like that institution at Boston, which I have before described, it is not parcelled out into wards, but is divided into convenient chambers, each of which has all the comforts of a very comfortable home. The principal medical attendant resides under the same roof; and were the patients members of his own family, they could not be better cared for, or attended with greater gentleness and consideration. The weekly charge in this establishment for each female patient is three dollars, or twelve shillings English; but no girl employed by any of the corporations is ever excluded for want of the means of payment. That they do not very often want the means, may be gathered from the fact, that in July, 1841, no fewer than nine hundred and seventy-eight of these girls were depositors in the Lowell Savings Bank: the amount of whose joint savings was estimated at one hundred thousand dollars, or twenty thousand English pounds.

I am now going to state three facts, which will startle a large class of readers on this side of the Atlantic, very much.

Firstly, there is a joint-stock piano in a great many of the boarding-houses. Secondly, nearly all these young ladies subscribe to circulating libraries. Thirdly, they have got up among themselves a periodical called THE LOWELL OFFERING, 'A repository of original articles, written exclusively by females actively employed in the mills,' - which is duly printed, published, and sold; and whereof I brought away from Lowell four hundred good solid pages, which I have read from beginning to end.

The large class of readers, startled by these facts, will exclaim, with one voice, 'How very preposterous!' On my deferentially inquiring why, they will answer, 'These things are above their station.' In reply to that objection, I would beg to ask what their station is.

It is their station to work. And they DO work. They labour in these mills, upon an average, twelve hours a day, which is unquestionably work, and pretty tight work too. Perhaps it is above their station to indulge in such amusements, on any terms. Are we quite sure that we in England have not formed our ideas of the 'station' of working people, from accustoming ourselves to the contemplation of that class as they are, and not as they might be? I think that if we examine our own feelings, we shall find that the pianos, and the circulating libraries, and even the Lowell Offering, startle us by their novelty, and not by their bearing upon any abstract question of right or wrong.

For myself, I know no station in which, the occupation of to-day cheerfully done and the occupation of to-morrow cheerfully looked to, any one of these pursuits is not most humanising and laudable. I know no station which is rendered more endurable to the person in it, or more safe to the person out of it, by having ignorance for its associate. I know no station which has a right to monopolise the means of mutual instruction, improvement, and rational entertainment; or which has ever continued to be a station very long, after seeking to do so.

Of the merits of the Lowell Offering as a literary production, I will only observe, putting entirely out of sight the fact of the articles having been written by these girls after the arduous labours of the day, that it will compare advantageously with a great many English Annuals. It is pleasant to find that many of its Tales are of the Mills and of those who work in them; that they inculcate habits of self-denial and contentment, and teach good doctrines of enlarged benevolence. A strong feeling for the beauties of nature, as displayed in the solitudes the writers have left at home, breathes through its pages like wholesome village air; and though a circulating library is a favourable school for the study of such topics, it has very scant allusion to fine clothes, fine marriages, fine houses, or fine life. Some persons might object to the papers being signed occasionally with rather fine names, but this is an American fashion. One of the provinces of the state legislature of Massachusetts is to alter ugly names into pretty ones, as the children improve upon the tastes of their parents. These changes costing little or nothing, scores of Mary Annes are solemnly converted into Bevelinas every session.

It is said that on the occasion of a visit from General Jackson or General Harrison to this town (I forget which, but it is not to the purpose), he walked through three miles and a half of these young ladies all dressed out with parasols and silk stockings. But as I am not aware that any worse consequence ensued, than a sudden looking-up of all the parasols and silk stockings in the market; and perhaps the bankruptcy of some speculative New Englander who bought them all up at any price, in expectation of a demand that never came; I set no great store by the circumstance.

In this brief account of Lowell, and inadequate expression of the gratification it yielded me, and cannot fail to afford to any foreigner to whom the condition of such people at home is a subject of interest and anxious speculation, I have carefully abstained from drawing a comparison between these factories and those of our own land. Many of the circumstances whose strong influence has been at work for years in our manufacturing towns have not arisen here; and there is no manufacturing population in Lowell, so to speak: for these girls (often the daughters of small farmers) come from other States, remain a few years in the mills, and then go home for good.

The contrast would be a strong one, for it would be between the Good and Evil, the living light and deepest shadow. I abstain from it, because I deem it just to do so. But I only the more earnestly adjure all those whose eyes may rest on these pages, to pause and reflect upon the difference between this town and those great haunts of desperate misery: to call to mind, if they can in the midst of party strife and squabble, the efforts that must be made to purge them of their suffering and danger: and last, and foremost, to remember how the precious Time is rushing by.

I returned at night by the same railroad and in the same kind of car. One of the passengers being exceedingly anxious to expound at great length to my companion (not to me, of course) the true principles on which books of travel in America should be written by Englishmen, I feigned to fall asleep. But glancing all the way out at window from the corners of my eyes, I found abundance of entertainment for the rest of the ride in watching the effects of the wood fire, which had been invisible in the morning but were now brought out in full relief by the darkness: for we were travelling in a whirlwind of bright sparks, which showered about us like a storm of fiery snow.

CHAPTER V - WORCESTER. THE CONNECTICUT RIVER. HARTFORD. NEW HAVEN. TO NEW YORK

LEAVING Boston on the afternoon of Saturday the fifth of February, we proceeded by another railroad to Worcester: a pretty New England town, where we had arranged to remain under the hospitable roof of the Governor of the State, until Monday morning.

These towns and cities of New England (many of which would be villages in Old England), are as favourable specimens of rural America, as their people are of rural Americans. The well-trimmed lawns and green meadows of home are not there; and the grass, compared with our ornamental plots and pastures, is rank, and rough, and wild: but delicate slopes of land, gently-swelling hills, wooded valleys, and slender streams, abound. Every little colony of houses has its church and school-house peeping from among the white roofs and shady trees; every house is the whitest of the white; every Venetian blind the greenest of the green; every fine day's sky the bluest of the blue. A sharp dry wind and a slight frost had so hardened the roads when we alighted at Worcester, that their furrowed tracks were like ridges of granite. There was the usual aspect of newness on every object, of course. All the buildings looked as if they had been built and painted that morning, and could be taken down on Monday with very little trouble. In the keen evening air, every sharp outline looked a hundred times sharper than ever. The clean cardboard colonnades had no more perspective than a Chinese bridge on a tea-cup, and appeared equally well calculated for use. The razor-like edges of the detached cottages seemed to cut the very wind as it whistled against them, and to send it smarting on its way with a shriller cry than before. Those slightly-built wooden dwellings behind which the sun was setting with a brilliant lustre, could be so looked through and through, that the idea of any inhabitant being able to hide himself from the public gaze, or to have any secrets from the public eye, was not entertainable for a moment. Even where a blazing fire shone through the uncurtained windows of some distant house, it had the air of being newly lighted, and of lacking warmth; and instead of awakening thoughts of a snug chamber, bright with faces that first saw the light round that same hearth, and ruddy with warm hangings, it came upon one suggestive of the smell of new mortar and damp walls.

So I thought, at least, that evening. Next morning when the sun was shining brightly, and the clear church bells were ringing, and sedate people in their best clothes enlivened the pathway near at hand and dotted the distant thread of road, there was a pleasant Sabbath peacefulness on everything, which it was good to feel. It would have been the better for an old church; better still for some old graves; but as it was, a wholesome repose and tranquillity pervaded the scene, which after the restless ocean and the hurried city, had a doubly grateful influence on the spirits.

We went on next morning, still by railroad, to Springfield. From that place to Hartford, whither we were bound, is a distance of only five-and-twenty miles, but at that time of the year the roads were so bad that the journey would probably have occupied ten or twelve hours. Fortunately, however, the winter having been unusually mild, the Connecticut River was 'open,' or, in other words, not frozen. The captain of a small steamboat was going to make his first trip for the season that day (the second February trip, I believe, within the memory of man), and only waited for us to go on board. Accordingly, we went on board, with as little delay as might be. He was as good as his word, and started directly.

It certainly was not called a small steamboat without reason. I omitted to ask the question, but I should think it must have been of about half a pony power. Mr. Paap, the celebrated Dwarf, might have lived and died happily in the cabin, which was fitted with common sash-windows like an ordinary dwelling-house. These windows had bright-red curtains, too, hung on slack strings across the lower panes; so that it looked like the parlour of a Lilliputian public-house, which had got afloat in a flood or some other water accident, and was drifting nobody knew where. But even in this chamber there was a rocking-chair. It would be impossible to get on anywhere, in America, without a rocking-chair. I am afraid to tell how many feet short this vessel was, or how many feet narrow: to apply the words length and width to such measurement would be a contradiction in terms. But I may state that we all kept the middle of the deck, lest the boat should unexpectedly tip over; and that the machinery, by some surprising process of condensation, worked between it and the keel: the whole forming a warm sandwich, about three feet thick.

It rained all day as I once thought it never did rain anywhere, but in the Highlands of Scotland. The river was full of floating blocks of ice, which were constantly crunching and cracking under us; and the depth of water, in the course we took to avoid the larger masses, carried down the middle of the river by the current, did not exceed a few inches. Nevertheless, we moved onward, dexterously; and being well wrapped up, bade defiance to the weather, and enjoyed the journey. The Connecticut River is a fine stream; and the banks in summer-time are, I have no doubt, beautiful; at all events, I was told so by a young lady in the cabin; and she should be a judge of beauty, if the possession of a quality include the appreciation of it, for a more beautiful creature I never looked upon.

After two hours and a half of this odd travelling (including a stoppage at a small town, where we were saluted by a gun considerably bigger than our own chimney), we reached Hartford, and straightway repaired to an extremely comfortable hotel: except, as usual, in the article of bedrooms, which, in almost every place we visited, were very conducive to early rising.

We tarried here, four days. The town is beautifully situated in a basin of green hills; the soil is rich, well-wooded, and carefully improved. It is the seat of the local legislature of Connecticut, which sage body enacted, in bygone times, the renowned code of 'Blue Laws,' in virtue whereof, among other enlightened provisions, any citizen who could be proved to have kissed his wife on Sunday, was punishable, I believe, with the stocks. Too much of the old Puritan spirit exists in these parts to the present hour; but its influence has not tended, that I know, to make the people less hard in their bargains, or more equal in their dealings. As I never heard of its working that effect anywhere else, I infer that it never will, here. Indeed, I am accustomed, with reference to great professions and severe faces, to judge of the goods of the other world pretty much as I judge of the goods of this; and whenever I see a dealer in such commodities with too great a display of them in his window, I doubt the quality of the article within.

In Hartford stands the famous oak in which the charter of King Charles was hidden. It is now inclosed in a gentleman's garden. In the State House is the charter itself. I found the courts of law here, just the same as at Boston; the public institutions almost as good. The Insane Asylum is admirably conducted, and so is the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb.

I very much questioned within myself, as I walked through the Insane Asylum, whether I should have known the attendants from the patients, but for the few words which passed between the former, and the Doctor, in reference to the persons under their charge. Of course I limit this remark merely to their looks; for the conversation of the mad people was mad enough.

There was one little, prim old lady, of very smiling and good- humoured appearance, who came sidling up to me from the end of a long passage, and with a curtsey of inexpressible condescension, propounded this unaccountable inquiry:

'Does Pontefract still flourish, sir, upon the soil of England?'

'He does, ma'am,' I rejoined.

'When you last saw him, sir, he was - '

'Well, ma'am,' said I, 'extremely well. He begged me to present his compliments. I never saw him looking better.'

At this, the old lady was very much delighted. After glancing at me for a moment, as if to be quite sure that I was serious in my respectful air, she sidled back some paces; sidled forward again; made a sudden skip (at which I precipitately retreated a step or two); and said:

'I am an antediluvian, sir.'

I thought the best thing to say was, that I had suspected as much from the first. Therefore I said so.

'It is an extremely proud and pleasant thing, sir, to be an antediluvian,' said the old lady.

'I should think it was, ma'am,' I rejoined.

The old lady kissed her hand, gave another skip, smirked and sidled down the gallery in a most extraordinary manner, and ambled gracefully into her own bed-chamber.

In another part of the building, there was a male patient in bed; very much flushed and heated.

'Well,' said he, starting up, and pulling off his night-cap: 'It's all settled at last. I have arranged it with Queen Victoria.'

'Arranged what?' asked the Doctor.

'Why, that business,' passing his hand wearily across his forehead, 'about the siege of New York.'

'Oh!' said I, like a man suddenly enlightened. For he looked at me for an answer.

'Yes. Every house without a signal will be fired upon by the British troops. No harm will be done to the others. No harm at all. Those that want to be safe, must hoist flags. That's all they'll have to do. They must hoist flags.'

Even while he was speaking he seemed, I thought, to have some faint idea that his talk was incoherent. Directly he had said these words, he lay down again; gave a kind of a groan; and covered his hot head with the blankets.

There was another: a young man, whose madness was love and music. After playing on the accordion a march he had composed, he was very anxious that I should walk into his chamber, which I immediately did.

By way of being very knowing, and humouring him to the top of his bent, I went to the window, which commanded a beautiful prospect, and remarked, with an address upon which I greatly plumed myself:

'What a delicious country you have about these lodgings of yours!'

'Poh!' said he, moving his fingers carelessly over the notes of his instrument: 'WELL ENOUGH FOR SUCH AN INSTITUTION AS THIS!'

I don't think I was ever so taken aback in all my life.

'I come here just for a whim,' he said coolly. 'That's all.'

'Oh! That's all!' said I.

'Yes. That's all. The Doctor's a smart man. He quite enters into it. It's a joke of mine. I like it for a time. You needn't mention it, but I think I shall go out next Tuesday!'

I assured him that I would consider our interview perfectly confidential; and rejoined the Doctor. As we were passing through a gallery on our way out, a well-dressed lady, of quiet and composed manners, came up, and proffering a slip of paper and a pen, begged that I would oblige her with an autograph, I complied, and we parted.

'I think I remember having had a few interviews like that, with ladies out of doors. I hope SHE is not mad?'

'Yes.'

'On what subject? Autographs?'

'No. She hears voices in the air.'

'Well!' thought I, 'it would be well if we could shut up a few false prophets of these later times, who have professed to do the same; and I should like to try the experiment on a Mormonist or two to begin with.'

In this place, there is the best jail for untried offenders in the world. There is also a very well-ordered State prison, arranged upon the same plan as that at Boston, except that here, there is always a sentry on the wall with a loaded gun. It contained at that time about two hundred prisoners. A spot was shown me in the sleeping ward, where a watchman was murdered some years since in the dead of night, in a desperate attempt to escape, made by a prisoner who had broken from his cell. A woman, too, was pointed out to me, who, for the murder of her husband, had been a close prisoner for sixteen years.

'Do you think,' I asked of my conductor, 'that after so very long an imprisonment, she has any thought or hope of ever regaining her liberty?'

'Oh dear yes,' he answered. 'To be sure she has.'

'She has no chance of obtaining it, I suppose?'

'Well, I don't know:' which, by-the-bye, is a national answer. 'Her friends mistrust her.'

'What have THEY to do with it?' I naturally inquired.

'Well, they won't petition.'

'But if they did, they couldn't get her out, I suppose?'

'Well, not the first time, perhaps, nor yet the second, but tiring and wearying for a few years might do it.'

'Does that ever do it?'

'Why yes, that'll do it sometimes. Political friends'll do it sometimes. It's pretty often done, one way or another.'

I shall always entertain a very pleasant and grateful recollection of Hartford. It is a lovely place, and I had many friends there, whom I can never remember with indifference. We left it with no little regret on the evening of Friday the 11th, and travelled that night by railroad to New Haven. Upon the way, the guard and I were formally introduced to each other (as we usually were on such occasions), and exchanged a variety of small-talk. We reached New Haven at about eight o'clock, after a journey of three hours, and put up for the night at the best inn.

New Haven, known also as the City of Elms, is a fine town. Many of its streets (as its ALIAS sufficiently imports) are planted with rows of grand old elm-trees; and the same natural ornaments surround Yale College, an establishment of considerable eminence and reputation. The various departments of this Institution are erected in a kind of park or common in the middle of the town, where they are dimly visible among the shadowing trees. The effect is very like that of an old cathedral yard in England; and when their branches are in full leaf, must be extremely picturesque. Even in the winter time, these groups of well-grown trees, clustering among the busy streets and houses of a thriving city, have a very quaint appearance: seeming to bring about a kind of compromise between town and country; as if each had met the other half-way, and shaken hands upon it; which is at once novel and pleasant.

After a night's rest, we rose early, and in good time went down to the wharf, and on board the packet New York FOR New York. This was the first American steamboat of any size that I had seen; and certainly to an English eye it was infinitely less like a steamboat than a huge floating bath. I could hardly persuade myself, indeed, but that the bathing establishment off Westminster Bridge, which I left a baby, had suddenly grown to an enormous size; run away from home; and set up in foreign parts as a steamer. Being in America, too, which our vagabonds do so particularly favour, it seemed the more probable.

The great difference in appearance between these packets and ours, is, that there is so much of them out of the water: the main-deck being enclosed on all sides, and filled with casks and goods, like any second or third floor in a stack of warehouses; and the promenade or hurricane-deck being a-top of that again. A part of the machinery is always above this deck; where the connecting-rod, in a strong and lofty frame, is seen working away like an iron top- sawyer. There is seldom any mast or tackle: nothing aloft but two tall black chimneys. The man at the helm is shut up in a little house in the fore part of the boat (the wheel being connected with the rudder by iron chains, working the whole length of the deck); and the passengers, unless the weather be very fine indeed, usually congregate below. Directly you have left the wharf, all the life, and stir, and bustle of a packet cease. You wonder for a long time how she goes on, for there seems to be nobody in charge of her; and when another of these dull machines comes splashing by, you feel quite indignant with it, as a sullen cumbrous, ungraceful, unshiplike leviathan: quite forgetting that the vessel you are on board of, is its very counterpart.

There is always a clerk's office on the lower deck, where you pay your fare; a ladies' cabin; baggage and stowage rooms; engineer's room; and in short a great variety of perplexities which render the discovery of the gentlemen's cabin, a matter of some difficulty. It often occupies the whole length of the boat (as it did in this case), and has three or four tiers of berths on each side. When I first descended into the cabin of the New York, it looked, in my unaccustomed eyes, about as long as the Burlington Arcade.

The Sound which has to be crossed on this passage, is not always a very safe or pleasant navigation, and has been the scene of some unfortunate accidents. It was a wet morning, and very misty, and we soon lost sight of land. The day was calm, however, and brightened towards noon. After exhausting (with good help from a friend) the larder, and the stock of bottled beer, I lay down to sleep; being very much tired with the fatigues of yesterday. But I woke from my nap in time to hurry up, and see Hell Gate, the Hog's Back, the Frying Pan, and other notorious localities, attractive to all readers of famous Diedrich Knickerbocker's History. We were now in a narrow channel, with sloping banks on either side, besprinkled with pleasant villas, and made refreshing to the sight by turf and trees. Soon we shot in quick succession, past a light- house; a madhouse (how the lunatics flung up their caps and roared in sympathy with the headlong engine and the driving tide!); a jail; and other buildings: and so emerged into a noble bay, whose waters sparkled in the now cloudless sunshine like Nature's eyes turned up to Heaven.

Then there lay stretched out before us, to the right, confused heaps of buildings, with here and there a spire or steeple, looking down upon the herd below; and here and there, again, a cloud of lazy smoke; and in the foreground a forest of ships' masts, cheery with flapping sails and waving flags. Crossing from among them to the opposite shore, were steam ferry-boats laden with people, coaches, horses, waggons, baskets, boxes: crossed and recrossed by other ferry-boats: all travelling to and fro: and never idle. Stately among these restless Insects, were two or three large ships, moving with slow majestic pace, as creatures of a prouder kind, disdainful of their puny journeys, and making for the broad sea. Beyond, were shining heights, and islands in the glancing river, and a distance scarcely less blue and bright than the sky it seemed to meet. The city's hum and buzz, the clinking of capstans, the ringing of bells, the barking of dogs, the clattering of wheels, tingled in the listening ear. All of which life and stir, coming across the stirring water, caught new life and animation from its free companionship; and, sympathising with its buoyant spirits, glistened as it seemed in sport upon its surface, and hemmed the vessel round, and plashed the water high about her sides, and, floating her gallantly into the dock, flew off again to welcome other comers, and speed before them to the busy port.

CHAPTER VI - NEW YORK

THE beautiful metropolis of America is by no means so clean a city as Boston, but many of its streets have the same characteristics; except that the houses are not quite so fresh-coloured, the sign- boards are not quite so gaudy, the gilded letters not quite so golden, the bricks not quite so red, the stone not quite so white, the blinds and area railings not quite so green, the knobs and plates upon the street doors not quite so bright and twinkling. There are many by-streets, almost as neutral in clean colours, and positive in dirty ones, as by-streets in London; and there is one quarter, commonly called the Five Points, which, in respect of filth and wretchedness, may be safely backed against Seven Dials, or any other part of famed St. Giles's.

The great promenade and thoroughfare, as most people know, is Broadway; a wide and bustling street, which, from the Battery Gardens to its opposite termination in a country road, may be four miles long. Shall we sit down in an upper floor of the Carlton House Hotel (situated in the best part of this main artery of New York), and when we are tired of looking down upon the life below, sally forth arm-in-arm, and mingle with the stream?

Warm weather! The sun strikes upon our heads at this open window, as though its rays were concentrated through a burning-glass; but the day is in its zenith, and the season an unusual one. Was there ever such a sunny street as this Broadway! The pavement stones are polished with the tread of feet until they shine again; the red bricks of the houses might be yet in the dry, hot kilns; and the roofs of those omnibuses look as though, if water were poured on them, they would hiss and smoke, and smell like half-quenched fires. No stint of omnibuses here! Half-a-dozen have gone by within as many minutes. Plenty of hackney cabs and coaches too; gigs, phaetons, large-wheeled tilburies, and private carriages - rather of a clumsy make, and not very different from the public vehicles, but built for the heavy roads beyond the city pavement. Negro coachmen and white; in straw hats, black hats, white hats, glazed caps, fur caps; in coats of drab, black, brown, green, blue, nankeen, striped jean and linen; and there, in that one instance (look while it passes, or it will be too late), in suits of livery. Some southern republican that, who puts his blacks in uniform, and swells with Sultan pomp and power. Yonder, where that phaeton with the well-clipped pair of grays has stopped - standing at their heads now - is a Yorkshire groom, who has not been very long in these parts, and looks sorrowfully round for a companion pair of top-boots, which he may traverse the city half a year without meeting. Heaven save the ladies, how they dress! We have seen more colours in these ten minutes, than we should have seen elsewhere, in as many days. What various parasols! what rainbow silks and satins! what pinking of thin stockings, and pinching of thin shoes, and fluttering of ribbons and silk tassels, and display of rich cloaks with gaudy hoods and linings! The young gentlemen are fond, you see, of turning down their shirt-collars and cultivating their whiskers, especially under the chin; but they cannot approach the ladies in their dress or bearing, being, to say the truth, humanity of quite another sort. Byrons of the desk and counter, pass on, and let us see what kind of men those are behind ye: those two labourers in holiday clothes, of whom one carries in his hand a crumpled scrap of paper from which he tries to spell out a hard name, while the other looks about for it on all the doors and windows.

Irishmen both! You might know them, if they were masked, by their long-tailed blue coats and bright buttons, and their drab trousers, which they wear like men well used to working dresses, who are easy in no others. It would be hard to keep your model republics going, without the countrymen and countrywomen of those two labourers. For who else would dig, and delve, and drudge, and do domestic work, and make canals and roads, and execute great lines of Internal Improvement! Irishmen both, and sorely puzzled too, to find out what they seek. Let us go down, and help them, for the love of home, and that spirit of liberty which admits of honest service to honest men, and honest work for honest bread, no matter what it be.

That's well! We have got at the right address at last, though it is written in strange characters truly, and might have been scrawled with the blunt handle of the spade the writer better knows the use of, than a pen. Their way lies yonder, but what business takes them there? They carry savings: to hoard up? No. They are brothers, those men. One crossed the sea alone, and working very hard for one half year, and living harder, saved funds enough to bring the other out. That done, they worked together side by side, contentedly sharing hard labour and hard living for another term, and then their sisters came, and then another brother, and lastly, their old mother. And what now? Why, the poor old crone is restless in a strange land, and yearns to lay her bones, she says, among her people in the old graveyard at home: and so they go to pay her passage back: and God help her and them, and every simple heart, and all who turn to the Jerusalem of their younger days, and have an altar-fire upon the cold hearth of their fathers.

This narrow thoroughfare, baking and blistering in the sun, is Wall Street: the Stock Exchange and Lombard Street of New York. Many a rapid fortune has been made in this street, and many a no less rapid ruin. Some of these very merchants whom you see hanging about here now, have locked up money in their strong-boxes, like the man in the Arabian Nights, and opening them again, have found but withered leaves. Below, here by the water-side, where the bowsprits of ships stretch across the footway, and almost thrust themselves into the windows, lie the noble American vessels which have made their Packet Service the finest in the world. They have brought hither the foreigners who abound in all the streets: not, perhaps, that there are more here, than in other commercial cities; but elsewhere, they have particular haunts, and you must find them out; here, they pervade the town.

We must cross Broadway again; gaining some refreshment from the heat, in the sight of the great blocks of clean ice which are being carried into shops and bar-rooms; and the pine-apples and water- melons profusely displayed for sale. Fine streets of spacious houses here, you see! - Wall Street has furnished and dismantled many of them very often - and here a deep green leafy square. Be sure that is a hospitable house with inmates to be affectionately remembered always, where they have the open door and pretty show of plants within, and where the child with laughing eyes is peeping out of window at the little dog below. You wonder what may be the use of this tall flagstaff in the by-street, with something like Liberty's head-dress on its top: so do I. But there is a passion for tall flagstaffs hereabout, and you may see its twin brother in five minutes, if you have a mind.

Again across Broadway, and so - passing from the many-coloured crowd and glittering shops - into another long main street, the Bowery. A railroad yonder, see, where two stout horses trot along, drawing a score or two of people and a great wooden ark, with ease. The stores are poorer here; the passengers less gay. Clothes ready-made, and meat ready-cooked, are to be bought in these parts; and the lively whirl of carriages is exchanged for the deep rumble of carts and waggons. These signs which are so plentiful, in shape like river buoys, or small balloons, hoisted by cords to poles, and dangling there, announce, as you may see by looking up, 'OYSTERS IN EVERY STYLE.' They tempt the hungry most at night, for then dull candles glimmering inside, illuminate these dainty words, and make the mouths of idlers water, as they read and linger.

What is this dismal-fronted pile of bastard Egyptian, like an enchanter's palace in a melodrama! - a famous prison, called The Tombs. Shall we go in?

So. A long, narrow, lofty building, stove-heated as usual, with four galleries, one above the other, going round it, and communicating by stairs. Between the two sides of each gallery, and in its centre, a bridge, for the greater convenience of crossing. On each of these bridges sits a man: dozing or reading, or talking to an idle companion. On each tier, are two opposite rows of small iron doors. They look like furnace-doors, but are cold and black, as though the fires within had all gone out. Some two or three are open, and women, with drooping heads bent down, are talking to the inmates. The whole is lighted by a skylight, but it is fast closed; and from the roof there dangle, limp and drooping, two useless windsails.

A man with keys appears, to show us round. A good-looking fellow, and, in his way, civil and obliging.

'Are those black doors the cells?'

'Yes.'

'Are they all full?'

'Well, they're pretty nigh full, and that's a fact, and no two ways about it.'

'Those at the bottom are unwholesome, surely?'

'Why, we DO only put coloured people in 'em. That's the truth.'

'When do the prisoners take exercise?'

'Well, they do without it pretty much.'

'Do they never walk in the yard?'

'Considerable seldom.'

'Sometimes, I suppose?'

'Well, it's rare they do. They keep pretty bright without it.'

'But suppose a man were here for a twelvemonth. I know this is only a prison for criminals who are charged with grave offences, while they are awaiting their trial, or under remand, but the law here affords criminals many means of delay. What with motions for new trials, and in arrest of judgment, and what not, a prisoner might be here for twelve months, I take it, might he not?'

'Well, I guess he might.'

'Do you mean to say that in all that time he would never come out at that little iron door, for exercise?'

'He might walk some, perhaps - not much.'

'Will you open one of the doors?'

'All, if you like.'

The fastenings jar and rattle, and one of the doors turns slowly on its hinges. Let us look in. A small bare cell, into which the light enters through a high chink in the wall. There is a rude means of washing, a table, and a bedstead. Upon the latter, sits a man of sixty; reading. He looks up for a moment; gives an impatient dogged shake; and fixes his eyes upon his book again. As we withdraw our heads, the door closes on him, and is fastened as before. This man has murdered his wife, and will probably be hanged.

'How long has he been here?'

'A month.'

'When will he be tried?'

'Next term.'

'When is that?'

'Next month.'

'In England, if a man be under sentence of death, even he has air and exercise at certain periods of the day.'

'Possible?'

With what stupendous and untranslatable coolness he says this, and how loungingly he leads on to the women's side: making, as he goes, a kind of iron castanet of the key and the stair-rail!

Each cell door on this side has a square aperture in it. Some of the women peep anxiously through it at the sound of footsteps; others shrink away in shame. - For what offence can that lonely child, of ten or twelve years old, be shut up here? Oh! that boy? He is the son of the prisoner we saw just now; is a witness against his father; and is detained here for safe keeping, until the trial; that's all.

But it is a dreadful place for the child to pass the long days and nights in. This is rather hard treatment for a young witness, is it not? - What says our conductor?

'Well, it an't a very rowdy life, and THAT'S a fact!'

Again he clinks his metal castanet, and leads us leisurely away. I have a question to ask him as we go.

'Pray, why do they call this place The Tombs?'

'Well, it's the cant name.'

'I know it is. Why?'

'Some suicides happened here, when it was first built. I expect it come about from that.'

'I saw just now, that that man's clothes were scattered about the floor of his cell. Don't you oblige the prisoners to be orderly, and put such things away?'

'Where should they put 'em?'

'Not on the ground surely. What do you say to hanging them up?'

He stops and looks round to emphasise his answer:

'Why, I say that's just it. When they had hooks they WOULD hang themselves, so they're taken out of every cell, and there's only the marks left where they used to be!'

The prison-yard in which he pauses now, has been the scene of terrible performances. Into this narrow, grave-like place, men are brought out to die. The wretched creature stands beneath the gibbet on the ground; the rope about his neck; and when the sign is given, a weight at its other end comes running down, and swings him up into the air - a corpse.

The law requires that there be present at this dismal spectacle, the judge, the jury, and citizens to the amount of twenty-five. From the community it is hidden. To the dissolute and bad, the thing remains a frightful mystery. Between the criminal and them, the prison-wall is interposed as a thick gloomy veil. It is the curtain to his bed of death, his winding-sheet, and grave. From him it shuts out life, and all the motives to unrepenting hardihood in that last hour, which its mere sight and presence is often all-sufficient to sustain. There are no bold eyes to make him bold; no ruffians to uphold a ruffian's name before. All beyond the pitiless stone wall, is unknown space.

Let us go forth again into the cheerful streets.

Once more in Broadway! Here are the same ladies in bright colours, walking to and fro, in pairs and singly; yonder the very same light blue parasol which passed and repassed the hotel-window twenty times while we were sitting there. We are going to cross here. Take care of the pigs. Two portly sows are trotting up behind this carriage, and a select party of half-a-dozen gentlemen hogs have just now turned the corner.

Here is a solitary swine lounging homeward by himself. He has only one ear; having parted with the other to vagrant-dogs in the course of his city rambles. But he gets on very well without it; and leads a roving, gentlemanly, vagabond kind of life, somewhat answering to that of our club-men at home. He leaves his lodgings every morning at a certain hour, throws himself upon the town, gets through his day in some manner quite satisfactory to himself, and regularly appears at the door of his own house again at night, like the mysterious master of Gil Blas. He is a free-and-easy, careless, indifferent kind of pig, having a very large acquaintance among other pigs of the same character, whom he rather knows by sight than conversation, as he seldom troubles himself to stop and exchange civilities, but goes grunting down the kennel, turning up the news and small-talk of the city in the shape of cabbage-stalks and offal, and bearing no tails but his own: which is a very short one, for his old enemies, the dogs, have been at that too, and have left him hardly enough to swear by. He is in every respect a republican pig, going wherever he pleases, and mingling with the best society, on an equal, if not superior footing, for every one makes way when he appears, and the haughtiest give him the wall, if he prefer it. He is a great philosopher, and seldom moved, unless by the dogs before mentioned. Sometimes, indeed, you may see his small eye twinkling on a slaughtered friend, whose carcase garnishes a butcher's door-post, but he grunts out 'Such is life: all flesh is pork!' buries his nose in the mire again, and waddles down the gutter: comforting himself with the reflection that there is one snout the less to anticipate stray cabbage-stalks, at any rate.

They are the city scavengers, these pigs. Ugly brutes they are; having, for the most part, scanty brown backs, like the lids of old horsehair trunks: spotted with unwholesome black blotches. They have long, gaunt legs, too, and such peaked snouts, that if one of them could be persuaded to sit for his profile, nobody would recognise it for a pig's likeness. They are never attended upon, or fed, or driven, or caught, but are thrown upon their own resources in early life, and become preternaturally knowing in consequence. Every pig knows where he lives, much better than anybody could tell him. At this hour, just as evening is closing in, you will see them roaming towards bed by scores, eating their way to the last. Occasionally, some youth among them who has over- eaten himself, or has been worried by dogs, trots shrinkingly homeward, like a prodigal son: but this is a rare case: perfect self-possession and self-reliance, and immovable composure, being their foremost attributes.

The streets and shops are lighted now; and as the eye travels down the long thoroughfare, dotted with bright jets of gas, it is reminded of Oxford Street, or Piccadilly. Here and there a flight of broad stone cellar-steps appears, and a painted lamp directs you to the Bowling Saloon, or Ten-Pin alley; Ten-Pins being a game of mingled chance and skill, invented when the legislature passed an act forbidding Nine-Pins. At other downward flights of steps, are other lamps, marking the whereabouts of oyster-cellars - pleasant retreats, say I: not only by reason of their wonderful cookery of oysters, pretty nigh as large as cheese-plates (or for thy dear sake, heartiest of Greek Professors!), but because of all kinds of caters of fish, or flesh, or fowl, in these latitudes, the swallowers of oysters alone are not gregarious; but subduing themselves, as it were, to the nature of what they work in, and copying the coyness of the thing they eat, do sit apart in curtained boxes, and consort by twos, not by two hundreds.

But how quiet the streets are! Are there no itinerant bands; no wind or stringed instruments? No, not one. By day, are there no Punches, Fantoccini, Dancing-dogs, Jugglers, Conjurers, Orchestrinas, or even Barrel-organs? No, not one. Yes, I remember one. One barrel-organ and a dancing-monkey - sportive by nature, but fast fading into a dull, lumpish monkey, of the Utilitarian school. Beyond that, nothing lively; no, not so much as a white mouse in a twirling cage.

Are there no amusements? Yes. There is a lecture-room across the way, from which that glare of light proceeds, and there may be evening service for the ladies thrice a week, or oftener. For the young gentlemen, there is the counting-house, the store, the bar- room: the latter, as you may see through these windows, pretty full. Hark! to the clinking sound of hammers breaking lumps of ice, and to the cool gurgling of the pounded bits, as, in the process of mixing, they are poured from glass to glass! No amusements? What are these suckers of cigars and swallowers of strong drinks, whose hats and legs we see in every possible variety of twist, doing, but amusing themselves? What are the fifty newspapers, which those precocious urchins are bawling down the street, and which are kept filed within, what are they but amusements? Not vapid, waterish amusements, but good strong stuff; dealing in round abuse and blackguard names; pulling off the roofs of private houses, as the Halting Devil did in Spain; pimping and pandering for all degrees of vicious taste, and gorging with coined lies the most voracious maw; imputing to every man in public life the coarsest and the vilest motives; scaring away from the stabbed and prostrate body-politic, every Samaritan of clear conscience and good deeds; and setting on, with yell and whistle and the clapping of foul hands, the vilest vermin and worst birds of prey. - No amusements!

Let us go on again; and passing this wilderness of an hotel with stores about its base, like some Continental theatre, or the London Opera House shorn of its colonnade, plunge into the Five Points. But it is needful, first, that we take as our escort these two heads of the police, whom you would know for sharp and well-trained officers if you met them in the Great Desert. So true it is, that certain pursuits, wherever carried on, will stamp men with the same character. These two might have been begotten, born, and bred, in Bow Street.

We have seen no beggars in the streets by night or day; but of other kinds of strollers, plenty. Poverty, wretchedness, and vice, are rife enough where we are going now.

This is the place: these narrow ways, diverging to the right and left, and reeking everywhere with dirt and filth. Such lives as are led here, bear the same fruits here as elsewhere. The coarse and bloated faces at the doors, have counterparts at home, and all the wide world over. Debauchery has made the very houses prematurely old. See how the rotten beams are tumbling down, and how the patched and broken windows seem to scowl dimly, like eyes that have been hurt in drunken frays. Many of those pigs live here. Do they ever wonder why their masters walk upright in lieu of going on all-fours? and why they talk instead of grunting?

So far, nearly every house is a low tavern; and on the bar-room walls, are coloured prints of Washington, and Queen Victoria of England, and the American Eagle. Among the pigeon-holes that hold the bottles, are pieces of plate-glass and coloured paper, for there is, in some sort, a taste for decoration, even here. And as seamen frequent these haunts, there are maritime pictures by the dozen: of partings between sailors and their lady-loves, portraits of William, of the ballad, and his Black-Eyed Susan; of Will Watch, the Bold Smuggler; of Paul Jones the Pirate, and the like: on which the painted eyes of Queen Victoria, and of Washington to boot, rest in as strange companionship, as on most of the scenes that are enacted in their wondering presence.

What place is this, to which the squalid street conducts us? A kind of square of leprous houses, some of which are attainable only by crazy wooden stairs without. What lies beyond this tottering flight of steps, that creak beneath our tread? - a miserable room, lighted by one dim candle, and destitute of all comfort, save that which may be hidden in a wretched bed. Beside it, sits a man: his elbows on his knees: his forehead hidden in his hands. 'What ails that man?' asks the foremost officer. 'Fever,' he sullenly replies, without looking up. Conceive the fancies of a feverish brain, in such a place as this!

Ascend these pitch-dark stairs, heedful of a false footing on the trembling boards, and grope your way with me into this wolfish den, where neither ray of light nor breath of air, appears to come. A negro lad, startled from his sleep by the officer's voice - he knows it well - but comforted by his assurance that he has not come on business, officiously bestirs himself to light a candle. The match flickers for a moment, and shows great mounds of dusty rags upon the ground; then dies away and leaves a denser darkness than before, if there can be degrees in such extremes. He stumbles down the stairs and presently comes back, shading a flaring taper with his hand. Then the mounds of rags are seen to be astir, and rise slowly up, and the floor is covered with heaps of negro women, waking from their sleep: their white teeth chattering, and their bright eyes glistening and winking on all sides with surprise and fear, like the countless repetition of one astonished African face in some strange mirror.

Mount up these other stairs with no less caution (there are traps and pitfalls here, for those who are not so well escorted as ourselves) into the housetop; where the bare beams and rafters meet overhead, and calm night looks down through the crevices in the roof. Open the door of one of these cramped hutches full of sleeping negroes. Pah! They have a charcoal fire within; there is a smell of singeing clothes, or flesh, so close they gather round the brazier; and vapours issue forth that blind and suffocate. From every corner, as you glance about you in these dark retreats, some figure crawls half-awakened, as if the judgment-hour were near at hand, and every obscene grave were giving up its dead. Where dogs would howl to lie, women, and men, and boys slink off to sleep, forcing the dislodged rats to move away in quest of better lodgings.

Here too are lanes and alleys, paved with mud knee-deep, underground chambers, where they dance and game; the walls bedecked with rough designs of ships, and forts, and flags, and American eagles out of number: ruined houses, open to the street, whence, through wide gaps in the walls, other ruins loom upon the eye, as though the world of vice and misery had nothing else to show: hideous tenements which take their name from robbery and murder: all that is loathsome, drooping, and decayed is here.

Our leader has his hand upon the latch of 'Almack's,' and calls to us from the bottom of the steps; for the assembly-room of the Five Point fashionables is approached by a descent. Shall we go in? It is but a moment.

Heyday! the landlady of Almack's thrives! A buxom fat mulatto woman, with sparkling eyes, whose head is daintily ornamented with a handkerchief of many colours. Nor is the landlord much behind her in his finery, being attired in a smart blue jacket, like a ship's steward, with a thick gold ring upon his little finger, and round his neck a gleaming golden watch-guard. How glad he is to see us! What will we please to call for? A dance? It shall be done directly, sir: 'a regular break-down.'

The corpulent black fiddler, and his friend who plays the tambourine, stamp upon the boarding of the small raised orchestra in which they sit, and play a lively measure. Five or six couple come upon the floor, marshalled by a lively young negro, who is the wit of the assembly, and the greatest dancer known. He never leaves off making queer faces, and is the delight of all the rest, who grin from ear to ear incessantly. Among the dancers are two young mulatto girls, with large, black, drooping eyes, and head- gear after the fashion of the hostess, who are as shy, or feign to be, as though they never danced before, and so look down before the visitors, that their partners can see nothing but the long fringed lashes.

But the dance commences. Every gentleman sets as long as he likes to the opposite lady, and the opposite lady to him, and all are so long about it that the sport begins to languish, when suddenly the lively hero dashes in to the rescue. Instantly the fiddler grins, and goes at it tooth and nail; there is new energy in the tambourine; new laughter in the dancers; new smiles in the landlady; new confidence in the landlord; new brightness in the very candles.

Single shuffle, double shuffle, cut and cross-cut; snapping his fingers, rolling his eyes, turning in his knees, presenting the backs of his legs in front, spinning about on his toes and heels like nothing but the man's fingers on the tambourine; dancing with two left legs, two right legs, two wooden legs, two wire legs, two spring legs - all sorts of legs and no legs - what is this to him? And in what walk of life, or dance of life, does man ever get such stimulating applause as thunders about him, when, having danced his partner off her feet, and himself too, he finishes by leaping gloriously on the bar-counter, and calling for something to drink, with the chuckle of a million of counterfeit Jim Crows, in one inimitable sound!

The air, even in these distempered parts, is fresh after the stifling atmosphere of the houses; and now, as we emerge into a broader street, it blows upon us with a purer breath, and the stars look bright again. Here are The Tombs once more. The city watch- house is a part of the building. It follows naturally on the sights we have just left. Let us see that, and then to bed.

What! do you thrust your common offenders against the police discipline of the town, into such holes as these? Do men and women, against whom no crime is proved, lie here all night in perfect darkness, surrounded by the noisome vapours which encircle that flagging lamp you light us with, and breathing this filthy and offensive stench! Why, such indecent and disgusting dungeons as these cells, would bring disgrace upon the most despotic empire in the world! Look at them, man - you, who see them every night, and keep the keys. Do you see what they are? Do you know how drains are made below the streets, and wherein these human sewers differ, except in being always stagnant?

Well, he don't know. He has had five-and-twenty young women locked up in this very cell at one time, and you'd hardly realise what handsome faces there were among 'em.

In God's name! shut the door upon the wretched creature who is in it now, and put its screen before a place, quite unsurpassed in all the vice, neglect, and devilry, of the worst old town in Europe.

Are people really left all night, untried, in those black sties? - Every night. The watch is set at seven in the evening. The magistrate opens his court at five in the morning. That is the earliest hour at which the first prisoner can be released; and if an officer appear against him, he is not taken out till nine o'clock or ten. - But if any one among them die in the interval, as one man did, not long ago? Then he is half-eaten by the rats in an hour's time; as that man was; and there an end.

What is this intolerable tolling of great bells, and crashing of wheels, and shouting in the distance? A fire. And what that deep red light in the opposite direction? Another fire. And what these charred and blackened walls we stand before? A dwelling where a fire has been. It was more than hinted, in an official report, not long ago, that some of these conflagrations were not wholly accidental, and that speculation and enterprise found a field of exertion, even in flames: but be this as it may, there was a fire last night, there are two to-night, and you may lay an even wager there will be at least one, to-morrow. So, carrying that with us for our comfort, let us say, Good night, and climb up-stairs to bed.

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One day, during my stay in New York, I paid a visit to the different public institutions on Long Island, or Rhode Island: I forget which. One of them is a Lunatic Asylum. The building is handsome; and is remarkable for a spacious and elegant staircase. The whole structure is not yet finished, but it is already one of considerable size and extent, and is capable of accommodating a very large number of patients.

I cannot say that I derived much comfort from the inspection of this charity. The different wards might have been cleaner and better ordered; I saw nothing of that salutary system which had impressed me so favourably elsewhere; and everything had a lounging, listless, madhouse air, which was very painful. The moping idiot, cowering down with long dishevelled hair; the gibbering maniac, with his hideous laugh and pointed finger; the vacant eye, the fierce wild face, the gloomy picking of the hands and lips, and munching of the nails: there they were all, without disguise, in naked ugliness and horror. In the dining-room, a bare, dull, dreary place, with nothing for the eye to rest on but the empty walls, a woman was locked up alone. She was bent, they told me, on committing suicide. If anything could have strengthened her in her resolution, it would certainly have been the insupportable monotony of such an existence.

The terrible crowd with which these halls and galleries were filled, so shocked me, that I abridged my stay within the shortest limits, and declined to see that portion of the building in which the refractory and violent were under closer restraint. I have no doubt that the gentleman who presided over this establishment at the time I write of, was competent to manage it, and had done all in his power to promote its usefulness: but will it be believed that the miserable strife of Party feeling is carried even into this sad refuge of afflicted and degraded humanity? Will it be believed that the eyes which are to watch over and control the wanderings of minds on which the most dreadful visitation to which our nature is exposed has fallen, must wear the glasses of some wretched side in Politics? Will it be believed that the governor of such a house as this, is appointed, and deposed, and changed perpetually, as Parties fluctuate and vary, and as their despicable weathercocks are blown this way or that? A hundred times in every week, some new most paltry exhibition of that narrow-minded and injurious Party Spirit, which is the Simoom of America, sickening and blighting everything of wholesome life within its reach, was forced upon my notice; but I never turned my back upon it with feelings of such deep disgust and measureless contempt, as when I crossed the threshold of this madhouse.

At a short distance from this building is another called the Alms House, that is to say, the workhouse of New York. This is a large Institution also: lodging, I believe, when I was there, nearly a thousand poor. It was badly ventilated, and badly lighted; was not too clean; - and impressed me, on the whole, very uncomfortably. But it must be remembered that New York, as a great emporium of commerce, and as a place of general resort, not only from all parts of the States, but from most parts of the world, has always a large pauper population to provide for; and labours, therefore, under peculiar difficulties in this respect. Nor must it be forgotten that New York is a large town, and that in all large towns a vast amount of good and evil is intermixed and jumbled up together.

In the same neighbourhood is the Farm, where young orphans are nursed and bred. I did not see it, but I believe it is well conducted; and I can the more easily credit it, from knowing how mindful they usually are, in America, of that beautiful passage in the Litany which remembers all sick persons and young children.

I was taken to these Institutions by water, in a boat belonging to the Island jail, and rowed by a crew of prisoners, who were dressed in a striped uniform of black and buff, in which they looked like faded tigers. They took me, by the same conveyance, to the jail itself.

It is an old prison, and quite a pioneer establishment, on the plan I have already described. I was glad to hear this, for it is unquestionably a very indifferent one. The most is made, however, of the means it possesses, and it is as well regulated as such a place can be.

The women work in covered sheds, erected for that purpose. If I remember right, there are no shops for the men, but be that as it may, the greater part of them labour in certain stone-quarries near at hand. The day being very wet indeed, this labour was suspended, and the prisoners were in their cells. Imagine these cells, some two or three hundred in number, and in every one a man locked up; this one at his door for air, with his hands thrust through the grate; this one in bed (in the middle of the day, remember); and this one flung down in a heap upon the ground, with his head against the bars, like a wild beast. Make the rain pour down, outside, in torrents. Put the everlasting stove in the midst; hot, and suffocating, and vaporous, as a witch's cauldron. Add a collection of gentle odours, such as would arise from a thousand mildewed umbrellas, wet through, and a thousand buck-baskets, full of half-washed linen - and there is the prison, as it was that day.

The prison for the State at Sing Sing is, on the other hand, a model jail. That, and Auburn, are, I believe, the largest and best examples of the silent system.

In another part of the city, is the Refuge for the Destitute: an Institution whose object is to reclaim youthful offenders, male and female, black and white, without distinction; to teach them useful trades, apprentice them to respectable masters, and make them worthy members of society. Its design, it will be seen, is similar to that at Boston; and it is a no less meritorious and admirable establishment. A suspicion crossed my mind during my inspection of this noble charity, whether the superintendent had quite sufficient knowledge of the world and worldly characters; and whether he did not commit a great mistake in treating some young girls, who were to all intents and purposes, by their years and their past lives, women, as though they were little children; which certainly had a ludicrous effect in my eyes, and, or I am much mistaken, in theirs also. As the Institution, however, is always under a vigilant examination of a body of gentlemen of great intelligence and experience, it cannot fail to be well conducted; and whether I am right or wrong in this slight particular, is unimportant to its deserts and character, which it would be difficult to estimate too highly.

In addition to these establishments, there are in New York, excellent hospitals and schools, literary institutions and libraries; an admirable fire department (as indeed it should be, having constant practice), and charities of every sort and kind. In the suburbs there is a spacious cemetery: unfinished yet, but every day improving. The saddest tomb I saw there was 'The Strangers' Grave. Dedicated to the different hotels in this city.'

There are three principal theatres. Two of them, the Park and the Bowery, are large, elegant, and handsome buildings, and are, I grieve to write it, generally deserted. The third, the Olympic, is a tiny show-box for vaudevilles and burlesques. It is singularly well conducted by Mr. Mitchell, a comic actor of great quiet humour and originality, who is well remembered and esteemed by London playgoers. I am happy to report of this deserving gentleman, that his benches are usually well filled, and that his theatre rings with merriment every night. I had almost forgotten a small summer theatre, called Niblo's, with gardens and open air amusements attached; but I believe it is not exempt from the general depression under which Theatrical Property, or what is humorously called by that name, unfortunately labours.

The country round New York is surpassingly and exquisitely picturesque. The climate, as I have already intimated, is somewhat of the warmest. What it would be, without the sea breezes which come from its beautiful Bay in the evening time, I will not throw myself or my readers into a fever by inquiring.

The tone of the best society in this city, is like that of Boston; here and there, it may be, with a greater infusion of the mercantile spirit, but generally polished and refined, and always most hospitable. The houses and tables are elegant; the hours later and more rakish; and there is, perhaps, a greater spirit of contention in reference to appearances, and the display of wealth and costly living. The ladies are singularly beautiful.

Before I left New York I made arrangements for securing a passage home in the George Washington packet ship, which was advertised to sail in June: that being the month in which I had determined, if prevented by no accident in the course of my ramblings, to leave America.

I never thought that going back to England, returning to all who are dear to me, and to pursuits that have insensibly grown to be a part of my nature, I could have felt so much sorrow as I endured, when I parted at last, on board this ship, with the friends who had accompanied me from this city. I never thought the name of any place, so far away and so lately known, could ever associate itself in my mind with the crowd of affectionate remembrances that now cluster about it. There are those in this city who would brighten, to me, the darkest winter-day that ever glimmered and went out in Lapland; and before whose presence even Home grew dim, when they and I exchanged that painful word which mingles with our every thought and deed; which haunts our cradle-heads in infancy, and closes up the vista of our lives in age.

CHAPTER VII - PHILADELPHIA, AND ITS SOLITARY PRISON

THE journey from New York to Philadelphia, is made by railroad, and two ferries; and usually occupies between five and six hours. It was a fine evening when we were passengers in the train: and watching the bright sunset from a little window near the door by which we sat, my attention was attracted to a remarkable appearance issuing from the windows of the gentleman's car immediately in front of us, which I supposed for some time was occasioned by a number of industrious persons inside, ripping open feather-beds, and giving the feathers to the wind. At length it occurred to me that they were only spitting, which was indeed the case; though how any number of passengers which it was possible for that car to contain, could have maintained such a playful and incessant shower of expectoration, I am still at a loss to understand: notwithstanding the experience in all salivatory phenomena which I afterwards acquired.

I made acquaintance, on this journey, with a mild and modest young quaker, who opened the discourse by informing me, in a grave whisper, that his grandfather was the inventor of cold-drawn castor oil. I mention the circumstance here, thinking it probable that this is the first occasion on which the valuable medicine in question was ever used as a conversational aperient.

We reached the city, late that night. Looking out of my chamber-window, before going to bed, I saw, on the opposite side of the way, a handsome building of white marble, which had a mournful ghost-like aspect, dreary to behold. I attributed this to the sombre influence of the night, and on rising in the morning looked out again, expecting to see its steps and portico thronged with groups of people passing in and out. The door was still tight shut, however; the same cold cheerless air prevailed: and the building looked as if the marble statue of Don Guzman could alone have any business to transact within its gloomy walls. I hastened to inquire its name and purpose, and then my surprise vanished. It was the Tomb of many fortunes; the Great Catacomb of investment; the memorable United States Bank.

The stoppage of this bank, with all its ruinous consequences, had cast (as I was told on every side) a gloom on Philadelphia, under the depressing effect of which it yet laboured. It certainly did seem rather dull and out of spirits.

It is a handsome city, but distractingly regular. After walking about it for an hour or two, I felt that I would have given the world for a crooked street. The collar of my coat appeared to stiffen, and the brim of my hat to expand, beneath its quakery influence. My hair shrunk into a sleek short crop, my hands folded themselves upon my breast of their own calm accord, and thoughts of taking lodgings in Mark Lane over against the Market Place, and of making a large fortune by speculations in corn, came over me involuntarily.

Philadelphia is most bountifully provided with fresh water, which is showered and jerked about, and turned on, and poured off, everywhere. The Waterworks, which are on a height near the city, are no less ornamental than useful, being tastefully laid out as a public garden, and kept in the best and neatest order. The river is dammed at this point, and forced by its own power into certain high tanks or reservoirs, whence the whole city, to the top stories of the houses, is supplied at a very trifling expense.

There are various public institutions. Among them a most excellent Hospital - a quaker establishment, but not sectarian in the great benefits it confers; a quiet, quaint old Library, named after Franklin; a handsome Exchange and Post Office; and so forth. In connection with the quaker Hospital, there is a picture by West, which is exhibited for the benefit of the funds of the institution. The subject is, our Saviour healing the sick, and it is, perhaps, as favourable a specimen of the master as can be seen anywhere. Whether this be high or low praise, depends upon the reader's taste.

In the same room, there is a very characteristic and life-like portrait by Mr. Sully, a distinguished American artist.

My stay in Philadelphia was very short, but what I saw of its society, I greatly liked. Treating of its general characteristics, I should be disposed to say that it is more provincial than Boston or New York, and that there is afloat in the fair city, an assumption of taste and criticism, savouring rather of those genteel discussions upon the same themes, in connection with Shakspeare and the Musical Glasses, of which we read in the Vicar of Wakefield. Near the city, is a most splendid unfinished marble structure for the Girard College, founded by a deceased gentleman of that name and of enormous wealth, which, if completed according to the original design, will be perhaps the richest edifice of modern times. But the bequest is involved in legal disputes, and pending them the work has stopped; so that like many other great undertakings in America, even this is rather going to be done one of these days, than doing now.

In the outskirts, stands a great prison, called the Eastern Penitentiary: conducted on a plan peculiar to the state of Pennsylvania. The system here, is rigid, strict, and hopeless solitary confinement. I believe it, in its effects, to be cruel and wrong.

In its intention, I am well convinced that it is kind, humane, and meant for reformation; but I am persuaded that those who devised this system of Prison Discipline, and those benevolent gentlemen who carry it into execution, do not know what it is that they are doing. I believe that very few men are capable of estimating the immense amount of torture and agony which this dreadful punishment, prolonged for years, inflicts upon the sufferers; and in guessing at it myself, and in reasoning from what I have seen written upon their faces, and what to my certain knowledge they feel within, I am only the more convinced that there is a depth of terrible endurance in it which none but the sufferers themselves can fathom, and which no man has a right to inflict upon his fellow-creature. I hold this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain, to be immeasurably worse than any torture of the body: and because its ghastly signs and tokens are not so palpable to the eye and sense of touch as scars upon the flesh; because its wounds are not upon the surface, and it extorts few cries that human ears can hear; therefore I the more denounce it, as a secret punishment which slumbering humanity is not roused up to stay. I hesitated once, debating with myself, whether, if I had the power of saying 'Yes' or 'No,' I would allow it to be tried in certain cases, where the terms of imprisonment were short; but now, I solemnly declare, that with no rewards or honours could I walk a happy man beneath the open sky by day, or lie me down upon my bed at night, with the consciousness that one human creature, for any length of time, no matter what, lay suffering this unknown punishment in his silent cell, and I the cause, or I consenting to it in the least degree.

I was accompanied to this prison by two gentlemen officially connected with its management, and passed the day in going from cell to cell, and talking with the inmates. Every facility was afforded me, that the utmost courtesy could suggest. Nothing was concealed or hidden from my view, and every piece of information that I sought, was openly and frankly given. The perfect order of the building cannot be praised too highly, and of the excellent motives of all who are immediately concerned in the administration of the system, there can be no kind of question.

Between the body of the prison and the outer wall, there is a spacious garden. Entering it, by a wicket in the massive gate, we pursued the path before us to its other termination, and passed into a large chamber, from which seven long passages radiate. On either side of each, is a long, long row of low cell doors, with a certain number over every one. Above, a gallery of cells like those below, except that they have no narrow yard attached (as those in the ground tier have), and are somewhat smaller. The possession of two of these, is supposed to compensate for the absence of so much air and exercise as can be had in the dull strip attached to each of the others, in an hour's time every day; and therefore every prisoner in this upper story has two cells, adjoining and communicating with, each other.

Standing at the central point, and looking down these dreary passages, the dull repose and quiet that prevails, is awful. Occasionally, there is a drowsy sound from some lone weaver's shuttle, or shoemaker's last, but it is stifled by the thick walls and heavy dungeon-door, and only serves to make the general stillness more profound. Over the head and face of every prisoner who comes into this melancholy house, a black hood is drawn; and in this dark shroud, an emblem of the curtain dropped between him and the living world, he is led to the cell from which he never again comes forth, until his whole term of imprisonment has expired. He never hears of wife and children; home or friends; the life or death of any single creature. He sees the prison-officers, but with that exception he never looks upon a human countenance, or hears a human voice. He is a man buried alive; to be dug out in the slow round of years; and in the mean time dead to everything but torturing anxieties and horrible despair.

His name, and crime, and term of suffering, are unknown, even to the officer who delivers him his daily food. There is a number over his cell-door, and in a book of which the governor of the prison has one copy, and the moral instructor another: this is the index of his history. Beyond these pages the prison has no record of his existence: and though he live to be in the same cell ten weary years, he has no means of knowing, down to the very last hour, in which part of the building it is situated; what kind of men there are about him; whether in the long winter nights there are living people near, or he is in some lonely corner of the great jail, with walls, and passages, and iron doors between him and the nearest sharer in its solitary horrors.

Every cell has double doors: the outer one of sturdy oak, the other of grated iron, wherein there is a trap through which his food is handed. He has a Bible, and a slate and pencil, and, under certain restrictions, has sometimes other books, provided for the purpose, and pen and ink and paper. His razor, plate, and can, and basin, hang upon the wall, or shine upon the little shelf. Fresh water is laid on in every cell, and he can draw it at his pleasure. During the day, his bedstead turns up against the wall, and leaves more space for him to work in. His loom, or bench, or wheel, is there; and there he labours, sleeps and wakes, and counts the seasons as they change, and grows old.

The first man I saw, was seated at his loom, at work. He had been there six years, and was to remain, I think, three more. He had been convicted as a receiver of stolen goods, but even after his long imprisonment, denied his guilt, and said he had been hardly dealt by. It was his second offence.

He stopped his work when we went in, took off his spectacles, and answered freely to everything that was said to him, but always with a strange kind of pause first, and in a low, thoughtful voice. He wore a paper hat of his own making, and was pleased to have it noticed and commanded. He had very ingeniously manufactured a sort of Dutch clock from some disregarded odds and ends; and his vinegar-bottle served for the pendulum. Seeing me interested in this contrivance, he looked up at it with a great deal of pride, and said that he had been thinking of improving it, and that he hoped the hammer and a little piece of broken glass beside it 'would play music before long.' He had extracted some colours from the yarn with which he worked, and painted a few poor figures on the wall. One, of a female, over the door, he called 'The Lady of the Lake.'

He smiled as I looked at these contrivances to while away the time; but when I looked from them to him, I saw that his lip trembled, and could have counted the beating of his heart. I forget how it came about, but some allusion was made to his having a wife. He shook his head at the word, turned aside, and covered his face with his hands.

'But you are resigned now!' said one of the gentlemen after a short pause, during which he had resumed his former manner. He answered with a sigh that seemed quite reckless in its hopelessness, 'Oh yes, oh yes! I am resigned to it.' 'And are a better man, you think?' 'Well, I hope so: I'm sure I hope I may be.' 'And time goes pretty quickly?' 'Time is very long gentlemen, within these four walls!'

He gazed about him - Heaven only knows how wearily! - as he said these words; and in the act of doing so, fell into a strange stare as if he had forgotten something. A moment afterwards he sighed heavily, put on his spectacles, and went about his work again.

In another cell, there was a German, sentenced to five years' imprisonment for larceny, two of which had just expired. With colours procured in the same manner, he had painted every inch of the walls and ceiling quite beautifully. He had laid out the few feet of ground, behind, with exquisite neatness, and had made a little bed in the centre, that looked, by-the-bye, like a grave. The taste and ingenuity he had displayed in everything were most extraordinary; and yet a more dejected, heart-broken, wretched creature, it would be difficult to imagine. I never saw such a picture of forlorn affliction and distress of mind. My heart bled for him; and when the tears ran down his cheeks, and he took one of the visitors aside, to ask, with his trembling hands nervously clutching at his coat to detain him, whether there was no hope of his dismal sentence being commuted, the spectacle was really too painful to witness. I never saw or heard of any kind of misery that impressed me more than the wretchedness of this man.

In a third cell, was a tall, strong black, a burglar, working at his proper trade of making screws and the like. His time was nearly out. He was not only a very dexterous thief, but was notorious for his boldness and hardihood, and for the number of his previous convictions. He entertained us with a long account of his achievements, which he narrated with such infinite relish, that he actually seemed to lick his lips as he told us racy anecdotes of stolen plate, and of old ladies whom he had watched as they sat at windows in silver spectacles (he had plainly had an eye to their metal even from the other side of the street) and had afterwards robbed. This fellow, upon the slightest encouragement, would have mingled with his professional recollections the most detestable cant; but I am very much mistaken if he could have surpassed the unmitigated hypocrisy with which he declared that he blessed the day on which he came into that prison, and that he never would commit another robbery as long as he lived.

There was one man who was allowed, as an indulgence, to keep rabbits. His room having rather a close smell in consequence, they called to him at the door to come out into the passage. He complied of course, and stood shading his haggard face in the unwonted sunlight of the great window, looking as wan and unearthly as if he had been summoned from the grave. He had a white rabbit in his breast; and when the little creature, getting down upon the ground, stole back into the cell, and he, being dismissed, crept timidly after it, I thought it would have been very hard to say in what respect the man was the nobler animal of the two.

There was an English thief, who had been there but a few days out of seven years: a villainous, low-browed, thin-lipped fellow, with a white face; who had as yet no relish for visitors, and who, but for the additional penalty, would have gladly stabbed me with his shoemaker's knife. There was another German who had entered the jail but yesterday, and who started from his bed when we looked in, and pleaded, in his broken English, very hard for work. There was a poet, who after doing two days' work in every four-and-twenty hours, one for himself and one for the prison, wrote verses about ships (he was by trade a mariner), and 'the maddening wine-cup,' and his friends at home. There were very many of them. Some reddened at the sight of visitors, and some turned very pale. Some two or three had prisoner nurses with them, for they were very sick; and one, a fat old negro whose leg had been taken off within the jail, had for his attendant a classical scholar and an accomplished surgeon, himself a prisoner likewise. Sitting upon the stairs, engaged in some slight work, was a pretty coloured boy. 'Is there no refuge for young criminals in Philadelphia, then?' said I. 'Yes, but only for white children.' Noble aristocracy in crime!

There was a sailor who had been there upwards of eleven years, and who in a few months' time would be free. Eleven years of solitary confinement!

'I am very glad to hear your time is nearly out.' What does he say? Nothing. Why does he stare at his hands, and pick the flesh upon his fingers, and raise his eyes for an instant, every now and then, to those bare walls which have seen his head turn grey? It is a way he has sometimes.

Does he never look men in the face, and does he always pluck at those hands of his, as though he were bent on parting skin and bone? It is his humour: nothing more.

It is his humour too, to say that he does not look forward to going out; that he is not glad the time is drawing near; that he did look forward to it once, but that was very long ago; that he has lost all care for everything. It is his humour to be a helpless, crushed, and broken man. And, Heaven be his witness that he has his humour thoroughly gratified!

There were three young women in adjoining cells, all convicted at the same time of a conspiracy to rob their prosecutor. In the silence and solitude of their lives they had grown to be quite beautiful. Their looks were very sad, and might have moved the sternest visitor to tears, but not to that kind of sorrow which the contemplation of the men awakens. One was a young girl; not twenty, as I recollect; whose snow-white room was hung with the work of some former prisoner, and upon whose downcast face the sun in all its splendour shone down through the high chink in the wall, where one narrow strip of bright blue sky was visible. She was very penitent and quiet; had come to be resigned, she said (and I believe her); and had a mind at peace. 'In a word, you are happy here?' said one of my companions. She struggled - she did struggle very hard - to answer, Yes; but raising her eyes, and meeting that glimpse of freedom overhead, she burst into tears, and said, 'She tried to be; she uttered no complaint; but it was natural that she should sometimes long to go out of that one cell: she could not help THAT,' she sobbed, poor thing!

I went from cell to cell that day; and every face I saw, or word I heard, or incident I noted, is present to my mind in all its painfulness. But let me pass them by, for one, more pleasant, glance of a prison on the same plan which I afterwards saw at Pittsburg.

When I had gone over that, in the same manner, I asked the governor if he had any person in his charge who was shortly going out. He had one, he said, whose time was up next day; but he had only been a prisoner two years.

Two years! I looked back through two years of my own life - out of jail, prosperous, happy, surrounded by blessings, comforts, good fortune - and thought how wide a gap it was, and how long those two years passed in solitary captivity would have been. I have the face of this man, who was going to be released next day, before me now. It is almost more memorable in its happiness than the other faces in their misery. How easy and how natural it was for him to say that the system was a good one; and that the time went 'pretty quick - considering;' and that when a man once felt that he had offended the law, and must satisfy it, 'he got along, somehow:' and so forth!

'What did he call you back to say to you, in that strange flutter?' I asked of my conductor, when he had locked the door and joined me in the passage.

'Oh! That he was afraid the soles of his boots were not fit for walking, as they were a good deal worn when he came in; and that he would thank me very much to have them mended, ready.'

Those boots had been taken off his feet, and put away with the rest of his clothes, two years before!

I took that opportunity of inquiring how they conducted themselves immediately before going out; adding that I presumed they trembled very much.

'Well, it's not so much a trembling,' was the answer - 'though they do quiver - as a complete derangement of the nervous system. They can't sign their names to the book; sometimes can't even hold the pen; look about 'em without appearing to know why, or where they are; and sometimes get up and sit down again, twenty times in a minute. This is when they're in the office, where they are taken with the hood on, as they were brought in. When they get outside the gate, they stop, and look first one way and then the other; not knowing which to take. Sometimes they stagger as if they were drunk, and sometimes are forced to lean against the fence, they're so bad:- but they clear off in course of time.'

As I walked among these solitary cells, and looked at the faces of the men within them, I tried to picture to myself the thoughts and feelings natural to their condition. I imagined the hood just taken off, and the scene of their captivity disclosed to them in all its dismal monotony.

At first, the man is stunned. His confinement is a hideous vision; and his old life a reality. He throws himself upon his bed, and lies there abandoned to despair. By degrees the insupportable solitude and barrenness of the place rouses him from this stupor, and when the trap in his grated door is opened, he humbly begs and prays for work. 'Give me some work to do, or I shall go raving mad!'

He has it; and by fits and starts applies himself to labour; but every now and then there comes upon him a burning sense of the years that must be wasted in that stone coffin, and an agony so piercing in the recollection of those who are hidden from his view and knowledge, that he starts from his seat, and striding up and down the narrow room with both hands clasped on his uplifted head, hears spirits tempting him to beat his brains out on the wall.

Again he falls upon his bed, and lies there, moaning. Suddenly he starts up, wondering whether any other man is near; whether there is another cell like that on either side of him: and listens keenly.

There is no sound, but other prisoners may be near for all that. He remembers to have heard once, when he little thought of coming here himself, that the cells were so constructed that the prisoners could not hear each other, though the officers could hear them.

Where is the nearest man - upon the right, or on the left? or is there one in both directions? Where is he sitting now - with his face to the light? or is he walking to and fro? How is he dressed? Has he been here long? Is he much worn away? Is he very white and spectre-like? Does HE think of his neighbour too?

Scarcely venturing to breathe, and listening while he thinks, he conjures up a figure with his back towards him, and imagines it moving about in this next cell. He has no idea of the face, but he is certain of the dark form of a stooping man. In the cell upon the other side, he puts another figure, whose face is hidden from him also. Day after day, and often when he wakes up in the middle of the night, he thinks of these two men until he is almost distracted. He never changes them. There they are always as he first imagined them - an old man on the right; a younger man upon the left - whose hidden features torture him to death, and have a mystery that makes him tremble.

The weary days pass on with solemn pace, like mourners at a funeral; and slowly he begins to feel that the white walls of the cell have something dreadful in them: that their colour is horrible: that their smooth surface chills his blood: that there is one hateful corner which torments him. Every morning when he wakes, he hides his head beneath the coverlet, and shudders to see the ghastly ceiling looking down upon him. The blessed light of day itself peeps in, an ugly phantom face, through the unchangeable crevice which is his prison window.

By slow but sure degrees, the terrors of that hateful corner swell until they beset him at all times; invade his rest, make his dreams hideous, and his nights dreadful. At first, he took a strange dislike to it; feeling as though it gave birth in his brain to something of corresponding shape, which ought not to be there, and racked his head with pains. Then he began to fear it, then to dream of it, and of men whispering its name and pointing to it. Then he could not bear to look at it, nor yet to turn his back upon it. Now, it is every night the lurking-place of a ghost: a shadow:- a silent something, horrible to see, but whether bird, or beast, or muffled human shape, he cannot tell.

When he is in his cell by day, he fears the little yard without. When he is in the yard, he dreads to re-enter the cell. When night comes, there stands the phantom in the corner. If he have the courage to stand in its place, and drive it out (he had once: being desperate), it broods upon his bed. In the twilight, and always at the same hour, a voice calls to him by name; as the darkness thickens, his Loom begins to live; and even that, his comfort, is a hideous figure, watching him till daybreak.

Again, by slow degrees, these horrible fancies depart from him one by one: returning sometimes, unexpectedly, but at longer intervals, and in less alarming shapes. He has talked upon religious matters with the gentleman who visits him, and has read his Bible, and has written a prayer upon his slate, and hung it up as a kind of protection, and an assurance of Heavenly companionship. He dreams now, sometimes, of his children or his wife, but is sure that they are dead, or have deserted him. He is easily moved to tears; is gentle, submissive, and broken-spirited. Occasionally, the old agony comes back: a very little thing will revive it; even a familiar sound, or the scent of summer flowers in the air; but it does not last long, now: for the world without, has come to be the vision, and this solitary life, the sad reality.

If his term of imprisonment be short - I mean comparatively, for short it cannot be - the last half year is almost worse than all; for then he thinks the prison will take fire and he be burnt in the ruins, or that he is doomed to die within the walls, or that he will be detained on some false charge and sentenced for another term: or that something, no matter what, must happen to prevent his going at large. And this is natural, and impossible to be reasoned against, because, after his long separation from human life, and his great suffering, any event will appear to him more probable in the contemplation, than the being restored to liberty and his fellow-creatures.

If his period of confinement have been very long, the prospect of release bewilders and confuses him. His broken heart may flutter for a moment, when he thinks of the world outside, and what it might have been to him in all those lonely years, but that is all. The cell-door has been closed too long on all its hopes and cares. Better to have hanged him in the beginning than bring him to this pass, and send him forth to mingle with his kind, who are his kind no more.

On the haggard face of every man among these prisoners, the same expression sat. I know not what to liken it to. It had something of that strained attention which we see upon the faces of the blind and deaf, mingled with a kind of horror, as though they had all been secretly terrified. In every little chamber that I entered, and at every grate through which I looked, I seemed to see the same appalling countenance. It lives in my memory, with the fascination of a remarkable picture. Parade before my eyes, a hundred men, with one among them newly released from this solitary suffering, and I would point him out.

The faces of the women, as I have said, it humanises and refines. Whether this be because of their better nature, which is elicited in solitude, or because of their being gentler creatures, of greater patience and longer suffering, I do not know; but so it is. That the punishment is nevertheless, to my thinking, fully as cruel and as wrong in their case, as in that of the men, I need scarcely add.

My firm conviction is that, independent of the mental anguish it occasions - an anguish so acute and so tremendous, that all imagination of it must fall far short of the reality - it wears the mind into a morbid state, which renders it unfit for the rough contact and busy action of the world. It is my fixed opinion that those who have undergone this punishment, MUST pass into society again morally unhealthy and diseased. There are many instances on record, of men who have chosen, or have been condemned, to lives of perfect solitude, but I scarcely remember one, even among sages of strong and vigorous intellect, where its effect has not become apparent, in some disordered train of thought, or some gloomy hallucination. What monstrous phantoms, bred of despondency and doubt, and born and reared in solitude, have stalked upon the earth, making creation ugly, and darkening the face of Heaven!

Suicides are rare among these prisoners: are almost, indeed, unknown. But no argument in favour of the system, can reasonably be deduced from this circumstance, although it is very often urged. All men who have made diseases of the mind their study, know perfectly well that such extreme depression and despair as will change the whole character, and beat down all its powers of elasticity and self-resistance, may be at work within a man, and yet stop short of self-destruction. This is a common case.

That it makes the senses dull, and by degrees impairs the bodily faculties, I am quite sure. I remarked to those who were with me in this very establishment at Philadelphia, that the criminals who had been there long, were deaf. They, who were in the habit of seeing these men constantly, were perfectly amazed at the idea, which they regarded as groundless and fanciful. And yet the very first prisoner to whom they appealed - one of their own selection confirmed my impression (which was unknown to him) instantly, and said, with a genuine air it was impossible to doubt, that he couldn't think how it happened, but he WAS growing very dull of hearing.

That it is a singularly unequal punishment, and affects the worst man least, there is no doubt. In its superior efficiency as a means of reformation, compared with that other code of regulations which allows the prisoners to work in company without communicating together, I have not the smallest faith. All the instances of reformation that were mentioned to me, were of a kind that might have been - and I have no doubt whatever, in my own mind, would have been - equally well brought about by the Silent System. With regard to such men as the negro burglar and the English thief, even the most enthusiastic have scarcely any hope of their conversion.

It seems to me that the objection that nothing wholesome or good has ever had its growth in such unnatural solitude, and that even a dog or any of the more intelligent among beasts, would pine, and mope, and rust away, beneath its influence, would be in itself a sufficient argument against this system. But when we recollect, in addition, how very cruel and severe it is, and that a solitary life is always liable to peculiar and distinct objections of a most deplorable nature, which have arisen here, and call to mind, moreover, that the choice is not between this system, and a bad or ill-considered one, but between it and another which has worked well, and is, in its whole design and practice, excellent; there is surely more than sufficient reason for abandoning a mode of punishment attended by so little hope or promise, and fraught, beyond dispute, with such a host of evils.

As a relief to its contemplation, I will close this chapter with a curious story arising out of the same theme, which was related to me, on the occasion of this visit, by some of the gentlemen concerned.

At one of the periodical meetings of the inspectors of this prison, a working man of Philadelphia presented himself before the Board, and earnestly requested to be placed in solitary confinement. On being asked what motive could possibly prompt him to make this strange demand, he answered that he had an irresistible propensity to get drunk; that he was constantly indulging it, to his great misery and ruin; that he had no power of resistance; that he wished to be put beyond the reach of temptation; and that he could think of no better way than this. It was pointed out to him, in reply, that the prison was for criminals who had been tried and sentenced by the law, and could not be made available for any such fanciful purposes; he was exhorted to abstain from intoxicating drinks, as he surely might if he would; and received other very good advice, with which he retired, exceedingly dissatisfied with the result of his application.

He came again, and again, and again, and was so very earnest and importunate, that at last they took counsel together, and said, 'He will certainly qualify himself for admission, if we reject him any more. Let us shut him up. He will soon be glad to go away, and then we shall get rid of him.' So they made him sign a statement which would prevent his ever sustaining an action for false imprisonment, to the effect that his incarceration was voluntary, and of his own seeking; they requested him to take notice that the officer in attendance had orders to release him at any hour of the day or night, when he might knock upon his door for that purpose; but desired him to understand, that once going out, he would not be admitted any more. These conditions agreed upon, and he still remaining in the same mind, he was conducted to the prison, and shut up in one of the cells.

In this cell, the man, who had not the firmness to leave a glass of liquor standing untasted on a table before him - in this cell, in solitary confinement, and working every day at his trade of shoemaking, this man remained nearly two years. His health beginning to fail at the expiration of that time, the surgeon recommended that he should work occasionally in the garden; and as he liked the notion very much, he went about this new occupation with great cheerfulness.

He was digging here, one summer day, very industriously, when the wicket in the outer gate chanced to be left open: showing, beyond, the well-remembered dusty road and sunburnt fields. The way was as free to him as to any man living, but he no sooner raised his head and caught sight of it, all shining in the light, than, with the involuntary instinct of a prisoner, he cast away his spade, scampered off as fast as his legs would carry him, and never once looked back.

CHAPTER VIII - WASHINGTON. THE LEGISLATURE. AND THE PRESIDENT'S HOUSE

WE left Philadelphia by steamboat, at six o'clock one very cold morning, and turned our faces towards Washington.

In the course of this day's journey, as on subsequent occasions, we encountered some Englishmen (small farmers, perhaps, or country publicans at home) who were settled in America, and were travelling on their own affairs. Of all grades and kinds of men that jostle one in the public conveyances of the States, these are often the most intolerable and the most insufferable companions. United to every disagreeable characteristic that the worst kind of American travellers possess, these countrymen of ours display an amount of insolent conceit and cool assumption of superiority, quite monstrous to behold. In the coarse familiarity of their approach, and the effrontery of their inquisitiveness (which they are in great haste to assert, as if they panted to revenge themselves upon the decent old restraints of home), they surpass any native specimens that came within my range of observation: and I often grew so patriotic when I saw and heard them, that I would cheerfully have submitted to a reasonable fine, if I could have given any other country in the whole world, the honour of claiming them for its children.

As Washington may be called the head-quarters of tobacco-tinctured saliva, the time is come when I must confess, without any disguise, that the prevalence of those two odious practices of chewing and expectorating began about this time to be anything but agreeable, and soon became most offensive and sickening. In all the public places of America, this filthy custom is recognised. In the courts of law, the judge has his spittoon, the crier his, the witness his, and the prisoner his; while the jurymen and spectators are provided for, as so many men who in the course of nature must desire to spit incessantly. In the hospitals, the students of medicine are requested, by notices upon the wall, to eject their tobacco juice into the boxes provided for that purpose, and not to discolour the stairs. In public buildings, visitors are implored, through the same agency, to squirt the essence of their quids, or 'plugs,' as I have heard them called by gentlemen learned in this kind of sweetmeat, into the national spittoons, and not about the bases of the marble columns. But in some parts, this custom is inseparably mixed up with every meal and morning call, and with all the transactions of social life. The stranger, who follows in the track I took myself, will find it in its full bloom and glory, luxuriant in all its alarming recklessness, at Washington. And let him not persuade himself (as I once did, to my shame) that previous tourists have exaggerated its extent. The thing itself is an exaggeration of nastiness, which cannot be outdone.

On board this steamboat, there were two young gentlemen, with shirt-collars reversed as usual, and armed with very big walking- sticks; who planted two seats in the middle of the deck, at a distance of some four paces apart; took out their tobacco-boxes; and sat down opposite each other, to chew. In less than a quarter of an hour's time, these hopeful youths had shed about them on the clean boards, a copious shower of yellow rain; clearing, by that means, a kind of magic circle, within whose limits no intruders dared to come, and which they never failed to refresh and re- refresh before a spot was dry. This being before breakfast, rather disposed me, I confess, to nausea; but looking attentively at one of the expectorators, I plainly saw that he was young in chewing, and felt inwardly uneasy, himself. A glow of delight came over me at this discovery; and as I marked his face turn paler and paler, and saw the ball of tobacco in his left cheek, quiver with his suppressed agony, while yet he spat, and chewed, and spat again, in emulation of his older friend, I could have fallen on his neck and implored him to go on for hours.

We all sat down to a comfortable breakfast in the cabin below, where there was no more hurry or confusion than at such a meal in England, and where there was certainly greater politeness exhibited than at most of our stage-coach banquets. At about nine o'clock we arrived at the railroad station, and went on by the cars. At noon we turned out again, to cross a wide river in another steamboat; landed at a continuation of the railroad on the opposite shore; and went on by other cars; in which, in the course of the next hour or so, we crossed by wooden bridges, each a mile in length, two creeks, called respectively Great and Little Gunpowder. The water in both was blackened with flights of canvas-backed ducks, which are most delicious eating, and abound hereabouts at that season of the year.

These bridges are of wood, have no parapet, and are only just wide enough for the passage of the trains; which, in the event of the smallest accident, wound inevitably be plunged into the river. They are startling contrivances, and are most agreeable when passed.

We stopped to dine at Baltimore, and being now in Maryland, were waited on, for the first time, by slaves. The sensation of exacting any service from human creatures who are bought and sold, and being, for the time, a party as it were to their condition, is not an enviable one. The institution exists, perhaps, in its least repulsive and most mitigated form in such a town as this; but it IS slavery; and though I was, with respect to it, an innocent man, its presence filled me with a sense of shame and self-reproach.

After dinner, we went down to the railroad again, and took our seats in the cars for Washington. Being rather early, those men and boys who happened to have nothing particular to do, and were curious in foreigners, came (according to custom) round the carriage in which I sat; let down all the windows; thrust in their heads and shoulders; hooked themselves on conveniently, by their elbows; and fell to comparing notes on the subject of my personal appearance, with as much indifference as if I were a stuffed figure. I never gained so much uncompromising information with reference to my own nose and eyes, and various impressions wrought by my mouth and chin on different minds, and how my head looks when it is viewed from behind, as on these occasions. Some gentlemen were only satisfied by exercising their sense of touch; and the boys (who are surprisingly precocious in America) were seldom satisfied, even by that, but would return to the charge over and over again. Many a budding president has walked into my room with his cap on his head and his hands in his pockets, and stared at me for two whole hours: occasionally refreshing himself with a tweak of his nose, or a draught from the water-jug; or by walking to the windows and inviting other boys in the street below, to come up and do likewise: crying, 'Here he is!' 'Come on!' 'Bring all your brothers!' with other hospitable entreaties of that nature.

We reached Washington at about half-past six that evening, and had upon the way a beautiful view of the Capitol, which is a fine building of the Corinthian order, placed upon a noble and commanding eminence. Arrived at the hotel; I saw no more of the place that night; being very tired, and glad to get to bed.

Breakfast over next morning, I walk about the streets for an hour or two, and, coming home, throw up the window in the front and back, and look out. Here is Washington, fresh in my mind and under my eye.

Take the worst parts of the City Road and Pentonville, or the straggling outskirts of Paris, where the houses are smallest, preserving all their oddities, but especially the small shops and dwellings, occupied in Pentonville (but not in Washington) by furniture-brokers, keepers of poor eating-houses, and fanciers of birds. Burn the whole down; build it up again in wood and plaster; widen it a little; throw in part of St. John's Wood; put green blinds outside all the private houses, with a red curtain and a white one in every window; plough up all the roads; plant a great deal of coarse turf in every place where it ought NOT to be; erect three handsome buildings in stone and marble, anywhere, but the more entirely out of everybody's way the better; call one the Post Office; one the Patent Office, and one the Treasury; make it scorching hot in the morning, and freezing cold in the afternoon, with an occasional tornado of wind and dust; leave a brick-field without the bricks, in all central places where a street may naturally be expected: and that's Washington.

The hotel in which we live, is a long row of small houses fronting on the street, and opening at the back upon a common yard, in which hangs a great triangle. Whenever a servant is wanted, somebody beats on this triangle from one stroke up to seven, according to the number of the house in which his presence is required; and as all the servants are always being wanted, and none of them ever come, this enlivening engine is in full performance the whole day through. Clothes are drying in the same yard; female slaves, with cotton handkerchiefs twisted round their heads are running to and fro on the hotel business; black waiters cross and recross with dishes in their hands; two great dogs are playing upon a mound of loose bricks in the centre of the little square; a pig is turning up his stomach to the sun, and grunting 'that's comfortable!'; and neither the men, nor the women, nor the dogs, nor the pig, nor any created creature, takes the smallest notice of the triangle, which is tingling madly all the time.

I walk to the front window, and look across the road upon a long, straggling row of houses, one story high, terminating, nearly opposite, but a little to the left, in a melancholy piece of waste ground with frowzy grass, which looks like a small piece of country that has taken to drinking, and has quite lost itself. Standing anyhow and all wrong, upon this open space, like something meteoric that has fallen down from the moon, is an odd, lop-sided, one-eyed kind of wooden building, that looks like a church, with a flag- staff as long as itself sticking out of a steeple something larger than a tea-chest. Under the window is a small stand of coaches, whose slave-drivers are sunning themselves on the steps of our door, and talking idly together. The three most obtrusive houses near at hand are the three meanest. On one - a shop, which never has anything in the window, and never has the door open - is painted in large characters, 'THE CITY LUNCH.' At another, which looks like a backway to somewhere else, but is an independent building in itself, oysters are procurable in every style. At the third, which is a very, very little tailor's shop, pants are fixed to order; or in other words, pantaloons are made to measure. And that is our street in Washington.

It is sometimes called the City of Magnificent Distances, but it might with greater propriety be termed the City of Magnificent Intentions; for it is only on taking a bird's-eye view of it from the top of the Capitol, that one can at all comprehend the vast designs of its projector, an aspiring Frenchman. Spacious avenues, that begin in nothing, and lead nowhere; streets, mile-long, that only want houses, roads and inhabitants; public buildings that need but a public to be complete; and ornaments of great thoroughfares, which only lack great thoroughfares to ornament - are its leading features. One might fancy the season over, and most of the houses gone out of town for ever with their masters. To the admirers of cities it is a Barmecide Feast: a pleasant field for the imagination to rove in; a monument raised to a deceased project, with not even a legible inscription to record its departed greatness.

Such as it is, it is likely to remain. It was originally chosen for the seat of Government, as a means of averting the conflicting jealousies and interests of the different States; and very probably, too, as being remote from mobs: a consideration not to be slighted, even in America. It has no trade or commerce of its own: having little or no population beyond the President and his establishment; the members of the legislature who reside there during the session; the Government clerks and officers employed in the various departments; the keepers of the hotels and boarding- houses; and the tradesmen who supply their tables. It is very unhealthy. Few people would live in Washington, I take it, who were not obliged to reside there; and the tides of emigration and speculation, those rapid and regardless currents, are little likely to flow at any time towards such dull and sluggish water.

The principal features of the Capitol, are, of course, the two houses of Assembly. But there is, besides, in the centre of the building, a fine rotunda, ninety-six feet in diameter, and ninety- six high, whose circular wall is divided into compartments, ornamented by historical pictures. Four of these have for their subjects prominent events in the revolutionary struggle. They were painted by Colonel Trumbull, himself a member of Washington's staff at the time of their occurrence; from which circumstance they derive a peculiar interest of their own. In this same hall Mr. Greenough's large statue of Washington has been lately placed. It has great merits of course, but it struck me as being rather strained and violent for its subject. I could wish, however, to have seen it in a better light than it can ever be viewed in, where it stands.

There is a very pleasant and commodious library in the Capitol; and from a balcony in front, the bird's-eye view, of which I have just spoken, may be had, together with a beautiful prospect of the adjacent country. In one of the ornamented portions of the building, there is a figure of Justice; whereunto the Guide Book says, 'the artist at first contemplated giving more of nudity, but he was warned that the public sentiment in this country would not admit of it, and in his caution he has gone, perhaps, into the opposite extreme.' Poor Justice! she has been made to wear much stranger garments in America than those she pines in, in the Capitol. Let us hope that she has changed her dress-maker since they were fashioned, and that the public sentiment of the country did not cut out the clothes she hides her lovely figure in, just now.

The House of Representatives is a beautiful and spacious hall, of semicircular shape, supported by handsome pillars. One part of the gallery is appropriated to the ladies, and there they sit in front rows, and come in, and go out, as at a play or concert. The chair is canopied, and raised considerably above the floor of the House; and every member has an easy chair and a writing desk to himself: which is denounced by some people out of doors as a most unfortunate and injudicious arrangement, tending to long sittings and prosaic speeches. It is an elegant chamber to look at, but a singularly bad one for all purposes of hearing. The Senate, which is smaller, is free from this objection, and is exceedingly well adapted to the uses for which it is designed. The sittings, I need hardly add, take place in the day; and the parliamentary forms are modelled on those of the old country.

I was sometimes asked, in my progress through other places, whether I had not been very much impressed by the HEADS of the lawmakers at Washington; meaning not their chiefs and leaders, but literally their individual and personal heads, whereon their hair grew, and whereby the phrenological character of each legislator was expressed: and I almost as often struck my questioner dumb with indignant consternation by answering 'No, that I didn't remember being at all overcome.' As I must, at whatever hazard, repeat the avowal here, I will follow it up by relating my impressions on this subject in as few words as possible.

In the first place - it may be from some imperfect development of my organ of veneration - I do not remember having ever fainted away, or having even been moved to tears of joyful pride, at sight of any legislative body. I have borne the House of Commons like a man, and have yielded to no weakness, but slumber, in the House of Lords. I have seen elections for borough and county, and have never been impelled (no matter which party won) to damage my hat by throwing it up into the air in triumph, or to crack my voice by shouting forth any reference to our Glorious Constitution, to the noble purity of our independent voters, or, the unimpeachable integrity of our independent members. Having withstood such strong attacks upon my fortitude, it is possible that I may be of a cold and insensible temperament, amounting to iciness, in such matters; and therefore my impressions of the live pillars of the Capitol at Washington must be received with such grains of allowance as this free confession may seem to demand.

Did I see in this public body an assemblage of men, bound together in the sacred names of Liberty and Freedom, and so asserting the chaste dignity of those twin goddesses, in all their discussions, as to exalt at once the Eternal Principles to which their names are given, and their own character and the character of their countrymen, in the admiring eyes of the whole world?

It was but a week, since an aged, grey-haired man, a lasting honour to the land that gave him birth, who has done good service to his country, as his forefathers did, and who will be remembered scores upon scores of years after the worms bred in its corruption, are but so many grains of dust - it was but a week, since this old man had stood for days upon his trial before this very body, charged with having dared to assert the infamy of that traffic, which has for its accursed merchandise men and women, and their unborn children. Yes. And publicly exhibited in the same city all the while; gilded, framed and glazed hung up for general admiration; shown to strangers not with shame, but pride; its face not turned towards the wall, itself not taken down and burned; is the Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America, which solemnly declares that All Men are created Equal; and are endowed by their Creator with the Inalienable Rights of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness!

It was not a month, since this same body had sat calmly by, and heard a man, one of themselves, with oaths which beggars in their drink reject, threaten to cut another's throat from ear to ear. There he sat, among them; not crushed by the general feeling of the assembly, but as good a man as any.

There was but a week to come, and another of that body, for doing his duty to those who sent him there; for claiming in a Republic the Liberty and Freedom of expressing their sentiments, and making known their prayer; would be tried, found guilty, and have strong censure passed upon him by the rest. His was a grave offence indeed; for years before, he had risen up and said, 'A gang of male and female slaves for sale, warranted to breed like cattle, linked to each other by iron fetters, are passing now along the open street beneath the windows of your Temple of Equality! Look!' But there are many kinds of hunters engaged in the Pursuit of Happiness, and they go variously armed. It is the Inalienable Right of some among them, to take the field after THEIR Happiness equipped with cat and cartwhip, stocks, and iron collar, and to shout their view halloa! (always in praise of Liberty) to the music of clanking chains and bloody stripes.

Where sat the many legislators of coarse threats; of words and blows such as coalheavers deal upon each other, when they forget their breeding? On every side. Every session had its anecdotes of that kind, and the actors were all there.

Did I recognise in this assembly, a body of men, who, applying themselves in a new world to correct some of the falsehoods and vices of the old, purified the avenues to Public Life, paved the dirty ways to Place and Power, debated and made laws for the Common Good, and had no party but their Country?

I saw in them, the wheels that move the meanest perversion of virtuous Political Machinery that the worst tools ever wrought. Despicable trickery at elections; under-handed tamperings with public officers; cowardly attacks upon opponents, with scurrilous newspapers for shields, and hired pens for daggers; shameful trucklings to mercenary knaves, whose claim to be considered, is, that every day and week they sow new crops of ruin with their venal types, which are the dragon's teeth of yore, in everything but sharpness; aidings and abettings of every bad inclination in the popular mind, and artful suppressions of all its good influences: such things as these, and in a word, Dishonest Faction in its most depraved and most unblushing form, stared out from every corner of the crowded hall.

Did I see among them, the intelligence and refinement: the true, honest, patriotic heart of America? Here and there, were drops of its blood and life, but they scarcely coloured the stream of desperate adventurers which sets that way for profit and for pay. It is the game of these men, and of their profligate organs, to make the strife of politics so fierce and brutal, and so destructive of all self-respect in worthy men, that sensitive and delicate-minded persons shall be kept aloof, and they, and such as they, be left to battle out their selfish views unchecked. And thus this lowest of all scrambling fights goes on, and they who in other countries would, from their intelligence and station, most aspire to make the laws, do here recoil the farthest from that degradation.

That there are, among the representatives of the people in both Houses, and among all parties, some men of high character and great abilities, I need not say. The foremost among those politicians who are known in Europe, have been already described, and I see no reason to depart from the rule I have laid down for my guidance, of abstaining from all mention of individuals. It will be sufficient to add, that to the most favourable accounts that have been written of them, I more than fully and most heartily subscribe; and that personal intercourse and free communication have bred within me, not the result predicted in the very doubtful proverb, but increased admiration and respect. They are striking men to look at, hard to deceive, prompt to act, lions in energy, Crichtons in varied accomplishments, Indians in fire of eye and gesture, Americans in strong and generous impulse; and they as well represent the honour and wisdom of their country at home, as the distinguished gentleman who is now its Minister at the British Court sustains its highest character abroad.

I visited both houses nearly every day, during my stay in Washington. On my initiatory visit to the House of Representatives, they divided against a decision of the chair; but the chair won. The second time I went, the member who was speaking, being interrupted by a laugh, mimicked it, as one child would in quarrelling with another, and added, 'that he would make honourable gentlemen opposite, sing out a little more on the other side of their mouths presently.' But interruptions are rare; the speaker being usually heard in silence. There are more quarrels than with us, and more threatenings than gentlemen are accustomed to exchange in any civilised society of which we have record: but farm-yard imitations have not as yet been imported from the Parliament of the United Kingdom. The feature in oratory which appears to be the most practised, and most relished, is the constant repetition of the same idea or shadow of an idea in fresh words; and the inquiry out of doors is not, 'What did he say?' but, 'How long did he speak?' These, however, are but enlargements of a principle which prevails elsewhere.

The Senate is a dignified and decorous body, and its proceedings are conducted with much gravity and order. Both houses are handsomely carpeted; but the state to which these carpets are reduced by the universal disregard of the spittoon with which every honourable member is accommodated, and the extraordinary improvements on the pattern which are squirted and dabbled upon it in every direction, do not admit of being described. I will merely observe, that I strongly recommend all strangers not to look at the floor; and if they happen to drop anything, though it be their purse, not to pick it up with an ungloved hand on any account.

It is somewhat remarkable too, at first, to say the least, to see so many honourable members with swelled faces; and it is scarcely less remarkable to discover that this appearance is caused by the quantity of tobacco they contrive to stow within the hollow of the cheek. It is strange enough too, to see an honourable gentleman leaning back in his tilted chair with his legs on the desk before him, shaping a convenient 'plug' with his penknife, and when it is quite ready for use, shooting the old one from his mouth, as from a pop-gun, and clapping the new one in its place.

I was surprised to observe that even steady old chewers of great experience, are not always good marksmen, which has rather inclined me to doubt that general proficiency with the rifle, of which we have heard so much in England. Several gentlemen called upon me who, in the course of conversation, frequently missed the spittoon at five paces; and one (but he was certainly short-sighted) mistook the closed sash for the open window, at three. On another occasion, when I dined out, and was sitting with two ladies and some gentlemen round a fire before dinner, one of the company fell short of the fireplace, six distinct times. I am disposed to think, however, that this was occasioned by his not aiming at that object; as there was a white marble hearth before the fender, which was more convenient, and may have suited his purpose better.

The Patent Office at Washington, furnishes an extraordinary example of American enterprise and ingenuity; for the immense number of models it contains are the accumulated inventions of only five years; the whole of the previous collection having been destroyed by fire. The elegant structure in which they are arranged is one of design rather than execution, for there is but one side erected out of four, though the works are stopped. The Post Office is a very compact and very beautiful building. In one of the departments, among a collection of rare and curious articles, are deposited the presents which have been made from time to time to the American ambassadors at foreign courts by the various potentates to whom they were the accredited agents of the Republic; gifts which by the law they are not permitted to retain. I confess that I looked upon this as a very painful exhibition, and one by no means flattering to the national standard of honesty and honour. That can scarcely be a high state of moral feeling which imagines a gentleman of repute and station, likely to be corrupted, in the discharge of his duty, by the present of a snuff-box, or a richly- mounted sword, or an Eastern shawl; and surely the Nation who reposes confidence in her appointed servants, is likely to be better served, than she who makes them the subject of such very mean and paltry suspicions.

At George Town, in the suburbs, there is a Jesuit College; delightfully situated, and, so far as I had an opportunity of seeing, well managed. Many persons who are not members of the Romish Church, avail themselves, I believe, of these institutions, and of the advantageous opportunities they afford for the education of their children. The heights of this neighbourhood, above the Potomac River, are very picturesque: and are free, I should conceive, from some of the insalubrities of Washington. The air, at that elevation, was quite cool and refreshing, when in the city it was burning hot.

The President's mansion is more like an English club-house, both within and without, than any other kind of establishment with which I can compare it. The ornamental ground about it has been laid out in garden walks; they are pretty, and agreeable to the eye; though they have that uncomfortable air of having been made yesterday, which is far from favourable to the display of such beauties.

My first visit to this house was on the morning after my arrival, when I was carried thither by an official gentleman, who was so kind as to charge himself with my presentation to the President.

We entered a large hall, and having twice or thrice rung a bell which nobody answered, walked without further ceremony through the rooms on the ground floor, as divers other gentlemen (mostly with their hats on, and their hands in their pockets) were doing very leisurely. Some of these had ladies with them, to whom they were showing the premises; others were lounging on the chairs and sofas; others, in a perfect state of exhaustion from listlessness, were yawning drearily. The greater portion of this assemblage were rather asserting their supremacy than doing anything else, as they had no particular business there, that anybody knew of. A few were closely eyeing the movables, as if to make quite sure that the President (who was far from popular) had not made away with any of the furniture, or sold the fixtures for his private benefit.

After glancing at these loungers; who were scattered over a pretty drawing-room, opening upon a terrace which commanded a beautiful prospect of the river and the adjacent country; and who were sauntering, too, about a larger state-room called the Eastern Drawing-room; we went up-stairs into another chamber, where were certain visitors, waiting for audiences. At sight of my conductor, a black in plain clothes and yellow slippers who was gliding noiselessly about, and whispering messages in the ears of the more impatient, made a sign of recognition, and glided off to announce him.

We had previously looked into another chamber fitted all round with a great, bare, wooden desk or counter, whereon lay files of newspapers, to which sundry gentlemen were referring. But there were no such means of beguiling the time in this apartment, which was as unpromising and tiresome as any waiting-room in one of our public establishments, or any physician's dining-room during his hours of consultation at home.

There were some fifteen or twenty persons in the room. One, a tall, wiry, muscular old man, from the west; sunburnt and swarthy; with a brown white hat on his knees, and a giant umbrella resting between his legs; who sat bolt upright in his chair, frowning steadily at the carpet, and twitching the hard lines about his mouth, as if he had made up his mind 'to fix' the President on what he had to say, and wouldn't bate him a grain. Another, a Kentucky farmer, six-feet-six in height, with his hat on, and his hands under his coat-tails, who leaned against the wall and kicked the floor with his heel, as though he had Time's head under his shoe, and were literally 'killing' him. A third, an oval-faced, bilious- looking man, with sleek black hair cropped close, and whiskers and beard shaved down to blue dots, who sucked the head of a thick stick, and from time to time took it out of his mouth, to see how it was getting on. A fourth did nothing but whistle. A fifth did nothing but spit. And indeed all these gentlemen were so very persevering and energetic in this latter particular, and bestowed their favours so abundantly upon the carpet, that I take it for granted the Presidential housemaids have high wages, or, to speak more genteelly, an ample amount of 'compensation:' which is the American word for salary, in the case of all public servants.

We had not waited in this room many minutes, before the black messenger returned, and conducted us into another of smaller dimensions, where, at a business-like table covered with papers, sat the President himself. He looked somewhat worn and anxious, and well he might; being at war with everybody - but the expression of his face was mild and pleasant, and his manner was remarkably unaffected, gentlemanly, and agreeable. I thought that in his whole carriage and demeanour, he became his station singularly well.

Being advised that the sensible etiquette of the republican court admitted of a traveller, like myself, declining, without any impropriety, an invitation to dinner, which did not reach me until I had concluded my arrangements for leaving Washington some days before that to which it referred, I only returned to this house once. It was on the occasion of one of those general assemblies which are held on certain nights, between the hours of nine and twelve o'clock, and are called, rather oddly, Levees.

I went, with my wife, at about ten. There was a pretty dense crowd of carriages and people in the court-yard, and so far as I could make out, there were no very clear regulations for the taking up or setting down of company. There were certainly no policemen to soothe startled horses, either by sawing at their bridles or flourishing truncheons in their eyes; and I am ready to make oath that no inoffensive persons were knocked violently on the head, or poked acutely in their backs or stomachs; or brought to a standstill by any such gentle means, and then taken into custody for not moving on. But there was no confusion or disorder. Our carriage reached the porch in its turn, without any blustering, swearing, shouting, backing, or other disturbance: and we dismounted with as much ease and comfort as though we had been escorted by the whole Metropolitan Force from A to Z inclusive.

The suite of rooms on the ground-floor were lighted up, and a military band was playing in the hall. In the smaller drawing- room, the centre of a circle of company, were the President and his daughter-in-law, who acted as the lady of the mansion; and a very interesting, graceful, and accomplished lady too. One gentleman who stood among this group, appeared to take upon himself the functions of a master of the ceremonies. I saw no other officers or attendants, and none were needed.

The great drawing-room, which I have already mentioned, and the other chambers on the ground-floor, were crowded to excess. The company was not, in our sense of the term, select, for it comprehended persons of very many grades and classes; nor was there any great display of costly attire: indeed, some of the costumes may have been, for aught I know, grotesque enough. But the decorum and propriety of behaviour which prevailed, were unbroken by any rude or disagreeable incident; and every man, even among the miscellaneous crowd in the hall who were admitted without any orders or tickets to look on, appeared to feel that he was a part of the Institution, and was responsible for its preserving a becoming character, and appearing to the best advantage.

That these visitors, too, whatever their station, were not without some refinement of taste and appreciation of intellectual gifts, and gratitude to those men who, by the peaceful exercise of great abilities, shed new charms and associations upon the homes of their countrymen, and elevate their character in other lands, was most earnestly testified by their reception of Washington Irving, my dear friend, who had recently been appointed Minister at the court of Spain, and who was among them that night, in his new character, for the first and last time before going abroad. I sincerely believe that in all the madness of American politics, few public men would have been so earnestly, devotedly, and affectionately caressed, as this most charming writer: and I have seldom respected a public assembly more, than I did this eager throng, when I saw them turning with one mind from noisy orators and officers of state, and flocking with a generous and honest impulse round the man of quiet pursuits: proud in his promotion as reflecting back upon their country: and grateful to him with their whole hearts for the store of graceful fancies he had poured out among them. Long may he dispense such treasures with unsparing hand; and long may they remember him as worthily!

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The term we had assigned for the duration of our stay in Washington was now at an end, and we were to begin to travel; for the railroad distances we had traversed yet, in journeying among these older towns, are on that great continent looked upon as nothing.

I had at first intended going South - to Charleston. But when I came to consider the length of time which this journey would occupy, and the premature heat of the season, which even at Washington had been often very trying; and weighed moreover, in my own mind, the pain of living in the constant contemplation of slavery, against the more than doubtful chances of my ever seeing it, in the time I had to spare, stripped of the disguises in which it would certainly be dressed, and so adding any item to the host of facts already heaped together on the subject; I began to listen to old whisperings which had often been present to me at home in England, when I little thought of ever being here; and to dream again of cities growing up, like palaces in fairy tales, among the wilds and forests of the west.

The advice I received in most quarters when I began to yield to my desire of travelling towards that point of the compass was, according to custom, sufficiently cheerless: my companion being threatened with more perils, dangers, and discomforts, than I can remember or would catalogue if I could; but of which it will be sufficient to remark that blowings-up in steamboats and breakings- down in coaches were among the least. But, having a western route sketched out for me by the best and kindest authority to which I could have resorted, and putting no great faith in these discouragements, I soon determined on my plan of action.

This was to travel south, only to Richmond in Virginia; and then to turn, and shape our course for the Far West; whither I beseech the reader's company, in a new chapter.

CHAPTER IX - A NIGHT STEAMER ON THE POTOMAC RIVER. VIRGINIA ROAD, AND A BLACK DRIVER. RICHMOND. BALTIMORE. THE HARRISBURG MAIL, AND A GLIMPSE OF THE CITY. A CANAL BOAT

WE were to proceed in the first instance by steamboat; and as it is usual to sleep on board, in consequence of the starting-hour being four o'clock in the morning, we went down to where she lay, at that very uncomfortable time for such expeditions when slippers are most valuable, and a familiar bed, in the perspective of an hour or two, looks uncommonly pleasant.

It is ten o'clock at night: say half-past ten: moonlight, warm, and dull enough. The steamer (not unlike a child's Noah's ark in form, with the machinery on the top of the roof) is riding lazily up and down, and bumping clumsily against the wooden pier, as the ripple of the river trifles with its unwieldy carcase. The wharf is some distance from the city. There is nobody down here; and one or two dull lamps upon the steamer's decks are the only signs of life remaining, when our coach has driven away. As soon as our footsteps are heard upon the planks, a fat negress, particularly favoured by nature in respect of bustle, emerges from some dark stairs, and marshals my wife towards the ladies' cabin, to which retreat she goes, followed by a mighty bale of cloaks and great- coats. I valiantly resolve not to go to bed at all, but to walk up and down the pier till morning.

I begin my promenade - thinking of all kinds of distant things and persons, and of nothing near - and pace up and down for half-an- hour. Then I go on board again; and getting into the light of one of the lamps, look at my watch and think it must have stopped; and wonder what has become of the faithful secretary whom I brought along with me from Boston. He is supping with our late landlord (a Field Marshal, at least, no doubt) in honour of our departure, and may be two hours longer. I walk again, but it gets duller and duller: the moon goes down: next June seems farther off in the dark, and the echoes of my footsteps make me nervous. It has turned cold too; and walking up and down without my companion in such lonely circumstances, is but poor amusement. So I break my staunch resolution, and think it may be, perhaps, as well to go to bed.

I go on board again; open the door of the gentlemen's cabin and walk in. Somehow or other - from its being so quiet, I suppose - I have taken it into my head that there is nobody there. To my horror and amazement it is full of sleepers in every stage, shape, attitude, and variety of slumber: in the berths, on the chairs, on the floors, on the tables, and particularly round the stove, my detested enemy. I take another step forward, and slip on the shining face of a black steward, who lies rolled in a blanket on the floor. He jumps up, grins, half in pain and half in hospitality; whispers my own name in my ear; and groping among the sleepers, leads me to my berth. Standing beside it, I count these slumbering passengers, and get past forty. There is no use in going further, so I begin to undress. As the chairs are all occupied, and there is nothing else to put my clothes on, I deposit them upon the ground: not without soiling my hands, for it is in the same condition as the carpets in the Capitol, and from the same cause. Having but partially undressed, I clamber on my shelf, and hold the curtain open for a few minutes while I look round on all my fellow-travellers again. That done, I let it fall on them, and on the world: turn round: and go to sleep.

I wake, of course, when we get under weigh, for there is a good deal of noise. The day is then just breaking. Everybody wakes at the same time. Some are self-possessed directly, and some are much perplexed to make out where they are until they have rubbed their eyes, and leaning on one elbow, looked about them. Some yawn, some groan, nearly all spit, and a few get up. I am among the risers: for it is easy to feel, without going into the fresh air, that the atmosphere of the cabin is vile in the last degree. I huddle on my clothes, go down into the fore-cabin, get shaved by the barber, and wash myself. The washing and dressing apparatus for the passengers generally, consists of two jack-towels, three small wooden basins, a keg of water and a ladle to serve it out with, six square inches of looking-glass, two ditto ditto of yellow soap, a comb and brush for the head, and nothing for the teeth. Everybody uses the comb and brush, except myself. Everybody stares to see me using my own; and two or three gentlemen are strongly disposed to banter me on my prejudices, but don't. When I have made my toilet, I go upon the hurricane-deck, and set in for two hours of hard walking up and down. The sun is rising brilliantly; we are passing Mount Vernon, where Washington lies buried; the river is wide and rapid; and its banks are beautiful. All the glory and splendour of the day are coming on, and growing brighter every minute.

At eight o'clock, we breakfast in the cabin where I passed the night, but the windows and doors are all thrown open, and now it is fresh enough. There is no hurry or greediness apparent in the despatch of the meal. It is longer than a travelling breakfast with us; more orderly, and more polite.

Soon after nine o'clock we come to Potomac Creek, where we are to land; and then comes the oddest part of the journey. Seven stage- coaches are preparing to carry us on. Some of them are ready, some of them are not ready. Some of the drivers are blacks, some whites. There are four horses to each coach, and all the horses, harnessed or unharnessed, are there. The passengers are getting out of the steamboat, and into the coaches; the luggage is being transferred in noisy wheelbarrows; the horses are frightened, and impatient to start; the black drivers are chattering to them like so many monkeys; and the white ones whooping like so many drovers: for the main thing to be done in all kinds of hostlering here, is to make as much noise as possible. The coaches are something like the French coaches, but not nearly so good. In lieu of springs, they are hung on bands of the strongest leather. There is very little choice or difference between them; and they may be likened to the car portion of the swings at an English fair, roofed, put upon axle-trees and wheels, and curtained with painted canvas.

They are covered with mud from the roof to the wheel-tire, and have never been cleaned since they were first built.

The tickets we have received on board the steamboat are marked No. 1, so we belong to coach No. 1. I throw my coat on the box, and hoist my wife and her maid into the inside. It has only one step, and that being about a yard from the ground, is usually approached by a chair: when there is no chair, ladies trust in Providence. The coach holds nine inside, having a seat across from door to door, where we in England put our legs: so that there is only one feat more difficult in the performance than getting in, and that is, getting out again. There is only one outside passenger, and he sits upon the box. As I am that one, I climb up; and while they are strapping the luggage on the roof, and heaping it into a kind of tray behind, have a good opportunity of looking at the driver.

He is a negro - very black indeed. He is dressed in a coarse pepper-and-salt suit excessively patched and darned (particularly at the knees), grey stockings, enormous unblacked high-low shoes, and very short trousers. He has two odd gloves: one of parti- coloured worsted, and one of leather. He has a very short whip, broken in the middle and bandaged up with string. And yet he wears a low-crowned, broad-brimmed, black hat: faintly shadowing forth a kind of insane imitation of an English coachman! But somebody in authority cries 'Go ahead!' as I am making these observations. The mail takes the lead in a four-horse waggon, and all the coaches follow in procession: headed by No. 1.

By the way, whenever an Englishman would cry 'All right!' an American cries 'Go ahead!' which is somewhat expressive of the national character of the two countries.

The first half-mile of the road is over bridges made of loose planks laid across two parallel poles, which tilt up as the wheels roll over them; and IN the river. The river has a clayey bottom and is full of holes, so that half a horse is constantly disappearing unexpectedly, and can't be found again for some time.

But we get past even this, and come to the road itself, which is a series of alternate swamps and gravel-pits. A tremendous place is close before us, the black driver rolls his eyes, screws his mouth up very round, and looks straight between the two leaders, as if he were saying to himself, 'We have done this often before, but NOW I think we shall have a crash.' He takes a rein in each hand; jerks and pulls at both; and dances on the splashboard with both feet (keeping his seat, of course) like the late lamented Ducrow on two of his fiery coursers. We come to the spot, sink down in the mire nearly to the coach windows, tilt on one side at an angle of forty- five degrees, and stick there. The insides scream dismally; the coach stops; the horses flounder; all the other six coaches stop; and their four-and-twenty horses flounder likewise: but merely for company, and in sympathy with ours. Then the following circumstances occur.

BLACK DRIVER (to the horses). 'Hi!'

Nothing happens. Insides scream again.

BLACK DRIVER (to the horses). 'Ho!'

Horses plunge, and splash the black driver.

GENTLEMAN INSIDE (looking out). 'Why, what on airth -

Gentleman receives a variety of splashes and draws his head in again, without finishing his question or waiting for an answer.

BLACK DRIVER (still to the horses). 'Jiddy! Jiddy!'

Horses pull violently, drag the coach out of the hole, and draw it up a bank; so steep, that the black driver's legs fly up into the air, and he goes back among the luggage on the roof. But he immediately recovers himself, and cries (still to the horses),

'Pill!'

No effect. On the contrary, the coach begins to roll back upon No. 2, which rolls back upon No. 3, which rolls back upon No. 4, and so on, until No. 7 is heard to curse and swear, nearly a quarter of a mile behind.

BLACK DRIVER (louder than before). 'Pill!'

Horses make another struggle to get up the bank, and again the coach rolls backward.

BLACK DRIVER (louder than before). 'Pe-e-e-ill!'

Horses make a desperate struggle.

BLACK DRIVER (recovering spirits). 'Hi, Jiddy, Jiddy, Pill!'

Horses make another effort.

BLACK DRIVER (with great vigour). 'Ally Loo! Hi. Jiddy, Jiddy.
Pill. Ally Loo!'

Horses almost do it.

BLACK DRIVER (with his eyes starting out of his head). 'Lee, den.
Lee, dere. Hi. Jiddy, Jiddy. Pill. Ally Loo. Lee-e-e-e-e!'

They run up the bank, and go down again on the other side at a fearful pace. It is impossible to stop them, and at the bottom there is a deep hollow, full of water. The coach rolls frightfully. The insides scream. The mud and water fly about us. The black driver dances like a madman. Suddenly we are all right by some extraordinary means, and stop to breathe.

A black friend of the black driver is sitting on a fence. The black driver recognises him by twirling his head round and round like a harlequin, rolling his eyes, shrugging his shoulders, and grinning from ear to ear. He stops short, turns to me, and says:

'We shall get you through sa, like a fiddle, and hope a please you when we get you through sa. Old 'ooman at home sa:' chuckling very much. 'Outside gentleman sa, he often remember old 'ooman at home sa,' grinning again.

'Ay ay, we'll take care of the old woman. Don't be afraid.'

The black driver grins again, but there is another hole, and beyond that, another bank, close before us. So he stops short: cries (to the horses again) 'Easy. Easy den. Ease. Steady. Hi. Jiddy. Pill. Ally. Loo,' but never 'Lee!' until we are reduced to the very last extremity, and are in the midst of difficulties, extrication from which appears to be all but impossible.

And so we do the ten miles or thereabouts in two hours and a half; breaking no bones, though bruising a great many; and in short getting through the distance, 'like a fiddle.'

This singular kind of coaching terminates at Fredericksburgh, whence there is a railway to Richmond. The tract of country through which it takes its course was once productive; but the soil has been exhausted by the system of employing a great amount of slave labour in forcing crops, without strengthening the land: and it is now little better than a sandy desert overgrown with trees. Dreary and uninteresting as its aspect is, I was glad to the heart to find anything on which one of the curses of this horrible institution has fallen; and had greater pleasure in contemplating the withered ground, than the richest and most thriving cultivation in the same place could possibly have afforded me.

In this district, as in all others where slavery sits brooding, (I have frequently heard this admitted, even by those who are its warmest advocates:) there is an air of ruin and decay abroad, which is inseparable from the system. The barns and outhouses are mouldering away; the sheds are patched and half roofless; the log cabins (built in Virginia with external chimneys made of clay or wood) are squalid in the last degree. There is no look of decent comfort anywhere. The miserable stations by the railway side, the great wild wood-yards, whence the engine is supplied with fuel; the negro children rolling on the ground before the cabin doors, with dogs and pigs; the biped beasts of burden slinking past: gloom and dejection are upon them all.

In the negro car belonging to the train in which we made this journey, were a mother and her children who had just been purchased; the husband and father being left behind with their old owner. The children cried the whole way, and the mother was misery's picture. The champion of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness, who had bought them, rode in the same train; and, every time we stopped, got down to see that they were safe. The black in Sinbad's Travels with one eye in the middle of his forehead which shone like a burning coal, was nature's aristocrat compared with this white gentleman.

It was between six and seven o'clock in the evening, when we drove to the hotel: in front of which, and on the top of the broad flight of steps leading to the door, two or three citizens were balancing themselves on rocking-chairs, and smoking cigars. We found it a very large and elegant establishment, and were as well entertained as travellers need desire to be. The climate being a thirsty one, there was never, at any hour of the day, a scarcity of loungers in the spacious bar, or a cessation of the mixing of cool liquors: but they were a merrier people here, and had musical instruments playing to them o' nights, which it was a treat to hear again.

The next day, and the next, we rode and walked about the town, which is delightfully situated on eight hills, overhanging James River; a sparkling stream, studded here and there with bright islands, or brawling over broken rocks. Although it was yet but the middle of March, the weather in this southern temperature was extremely warm; the peech-trees and magnolias were in full bloom; and the trees were green. In a low ground among the hills, is a valley known as 'Bloody Run,' from a terrible conflict with the Indians which once occurred there. It is a good place for such a struggle, and, like every other spot I saw associated with any legend of that wild people now so rapidly fading from the earth, interested me very much.

The city is the seat of the local parliament of Virginia; and in its shady legislative halls, some orators were drowsily holding forth to the hot noon day. By dint of constant repetition, however, these constitutional sights had very little more interest for me than so many parochial vestries; and I was glad to exchange this one for a lounge in a well-arranged public library of some ten thousand volumes, and a visit to a tobacco manufactory, where the workmen are all slaves.

I saw in this place the whole process of picking, rolling, pressing, drying, packing in casks, and branding. All the tobacco thus dealt with, was in course of manufacture for chewing; and one would have supposed there was enough in that one storehouse to have filled even the comprehensive jaws of America. In this form, the weed looks like the oil-cake on which we fatten cattle; and even without reference to its consequences, is sufficiently uninviting.

Many of the workmen appeared to be strong men, and it is hardly necessary to add that they were all labouring quietly, then. After two o'clock in the day, they are allowed to sing, a certain number at a time. The hour striking while I was there, some twenty sang a hymn in parts, and sang it by no means ill; pursuing their work meanwhile. A bell rang as I was about to leave, and they all poured forth into a building on the opposite side of the street to dinner. I said several times that I should like to see them at their meal; but as the gentleman to whom I mentioned this desire appeared to be suddenly taken rather deaf, I did not pursue the request. Of their appearance I shall have something to say, presently.

On the following day, I visited a plantation or farm, of about twelve hundred acres, on the opposite bank of the river. Here again, although I went down with the owner of the estate, to 'the quarter,' as that part of it in which the slaves live is called, I was not invited to enter into any of their huts. All I saw of them, was, that they were very crazy, wretched cabins, near to which groups of half-naked children basked in the sun, or wallowed on the dusty ground. But I believe that this gentleman is a considerate and excellent master, who inherited his fifty slaves, and is neither a buyer nor a seller of human stock; and I am sure, from my own observation and conviction, that he is a kind-hearted, worthy man.

The planter's house was an airy, rustic dwelling, that brought Defoe's description of such places strongly to my recollection. The day was very warm, but the blinds being all closed, and the windows and doors set wide open, a shady coolness rustled through the rooms, which was exquisitely refreshing after the glare and heat without. Before the windows was an open piazza, where, in what they call the hot weather - whatever that may be - they sling hammocks, and drink and doze luxuriously. I do not know how their cool rejections may taste within the hammocks, but, having experience, I can report that, out of them, the mounds of ices and the bowls of mint-julep and sherry-cobbler they make in these latitudes, are refreshments never to be thought of afterwards, in summer, by those who would preserve contented minds.

There are two bridges across the river: one belongs to the railroad, and the other, which is a very crazy affair, is the private property of some old lady in the neighbourhood, who levies tolls upon the townspeople. Crossing this bridge, on my way back, I saw a notice painted on the gate, cautioning all persons to drive slowly: under a penalty, if the offender were a white man, of five dollars; if a negro, fifteen stripes.

The same decay and gloom that overhang the way by which it is approached, hover above the town of Richmond. There are pretty villas and cheerful houses in its streets, and Nature smiles upon the country round; but jostling its handsome residences, like slavery itself going hand in hand with many lofty virtues, are deplorable tenements, fences unrepaired, walls crumbling into ruinous heaps. Hinting gloomily at things below the surface, these, and many other tokens of the same description, force themselves upon the notice, and are remembered with depressing influence, when livelier features are forgotten.

To those who are happily unaccustomed to them, the countenances in the streets and labouring-places, too, are shocking. All men who know that there are laws against instructing slaves, of which the pains and penalties greatly exceed in their amount the fines imposed on those who maim and torture them, must be prepared to find their faces very low in the scale of intellectual expression. But the darkness - not of skin, but mind - which meets the stranger's eye at every turn; the brutalizing and blotting out of all fairer characters traced by Nature's hand; immeasurably outdo his worst belief. That travelled creation of the great satirist's brain, who fresh from living among horses, peered from a high casement down upon his own kind with trembling horror, was scarcely more repelled and daunted by the sight, than those who look upon some of these faces for the first time must surely be.

I left the last of them behind me in the person of a wretched drudge, who, after running to and fro all day till midnight, and moping in his stealthy winks of sleep upon the stairs betweenwhiles, was washing the dark passages at four o'clock in the morning; and went upon my way with a grateful heart that I was not doomed to live where slavery was, and had never had my senses blunted to its wrongs and horrors in a slave-rocked cradle.

It had been my intention to proceed by James River and Chesapeake Bay to Baltimore; but one of the steamboats being absent from her station through some accident, and the means of conveyance being consequently rendered uncertain, we returned to Washington by the way we had come (there were two constables on board the steamboat, in pursuit of runaway slaves), and halting there again for one night, went on to Baltimore next afternoon.

The most comfortable of all the hotels of which I had any experience in the United States, and they were not a few, is Barnum's, in that city: where the English traveller will find curtains to his bed, for the first and probably the last time in America (this is a disinterested remark, for I never use them); and where he will be likely to have enough water for washing himself, which is not at all a common case.

This capital of the state of Maryland is a bustling, busy town, with a great deal of traffic of various kinds, and in particular of water commerce. That portion of the town which it most favours is none of the cleanest, it is true; but the upper part is of a very different character, and has many agreeable streets and public buildings. The Washington Monument, which is a handsome pillar with a statue on its summit; the Medical College; and the Battle Monument in memory of an engagement with the British at North Point; are the most conspicuous among them.

There is a very good prison in this city, and the State Penitentiary is also among its institutions. In this latter establishment there were two curious cases.

One was that of a young man, who had been tried for the murder of his father. The evidence was entirely circumstantial, and was very conflicting and doubtful; nor was it possible to assign any motive which could have tempted him to the commission of so tremendous a crime. He had been tried twice; and on the second occasion the jury felt so much hesitation in convicting him, that they found a verdict of manslaughter, or murder in the second degree; which it could not possibly be, as there had, beyond all doubt, been no quarrel or provocation, and if he were guilty at all, he was unquestionably guilty of murder in its broadest and worst signification.

The remarkable feature in the case was, that if the unfortunate deceased were not really murdered by this own son of his, he must have been murdered by his own brother. The evidence lay in a most remarkable manner, between those two. On all the suspicious points, the dead man's brother was the witness: all the explanations for the prisoner (some of them extremely plausible) went, by construction and inference, to inculcate him as plotting to fix the guilt upon his nephew. It must have been one of them: and the jury had to decide between two sets of suspicions, almost equally unnatural, unaccountable, and strange.

The other case, was that of a man who once went to a certain distiller's and stole a copper measure containing a quantity of liquor. He was pursued and taken with the property in his possession, and was sentenced to two years' imprisonment. On coming out of the jail, at the expiration of that term, he went back to the same distiller's, and stole the same copper measure containing the same quantity of liquor. There was not the slightest reason to suppose that the man wished to return to prison: indeed everything, but the commission of the offence, made directly against that assumption. There are only two ways of accounting for this extraordinary proceeding. One is, that after undergoing so much for this copper measure he conceived he had established a sort of claim and right to it. The other that, by dint of long thinking about, it had become a monomania with him, and had acquired a fascination which he found it impossible to resist; swelling from an Earthly Copper Gallon into an Ethereal Golden Vat.

After remaining here a couple of days I bound myself to a rigid adherence to the plan I had laid down so recently, and resolved to set forward on our western journey without any more delay. Accordingly, having reduced the luggage within the smallest possible compass (by sending back to New York, to be afterwards forwarded to us in Canada, so much of it as was not absolutely wanted); and having procured the necessary credentials to banking- houses on the way; and having moreover looked for two evenings at the setting sun, with as well-defined an idea of the country before us as if we had been going to travel into the very centre of that planet; we left Baltimore by another railway at half-past eight in the morning, and reached the town of York, some sixty miles off, by the early dinner-time of the Hotel which was the starting-place of the four-horse coach, wherein we were to proceed to Harrisburg.

This conveyance, the box of which I was fortunate enough to secure, had come down to meet us at the railroad station, and was as muddy and cumbersome as usual. As more passengers were waiting for us at the inn-door, the coachman observed under his breath, in the usual self-communicative voice, looking the while at his mouldy harness as if it were to that he was addressing himself,

'I expect we shall want THE BIG coach.'

I could not help wondering within myself what the size of this big coach might be, and how many persons it might be designed to hold; for the vehicle which was too small for our purpose was something larger than two English heavy night coaches, and might have been the twin-brother of a French Diligence. My speculations were speedily set at rest, however, for as soon as we had dined, there came rumbling up the street, shaking its sides like a corpulent giant, a kind of barge on wheels. After much blundering and backing, it stopped at the door: rolling heavily from side to side when its other motion had ceased, as if it had taken cold in its damp stable, and between that, and the having been required in its dropsical old age to move at any faster pace than a walk, were distressed by shortness of wind.

'If here ain't the Harrisburg mail at last, and dreadful bright and smart to look at too,' cried an elderly gentleman in some excitement, 'darn my mother!'

I don't know what the sensation of being darned may be, or whether a man's mother has a keener relish or disrelish of the process than anybody else; but if the endurance of this mysterious ceremony by the old lady in question had depended on the accuracy of her son's vision in respect to the abstract brightness and smartness of the Harrisburg mail, she would certainly have undergone its infliction. However, they booked twelve people inside; and the luggage (including such trifles as a large rocking-chair, and a good-sized dining-table) being at length made fast upon the roof, we started off in great state.

At the door of another hotel, there was another passenger to be taken up.

'Any room, sir?' cries the new passenger to the coachman.

'Well, there's room enough,' replies the coachman, without getting down, or even looking at him.

'There an't no room at all, sir,' bawls a gentleman inside. Which another gentleman (also inside) confirms, by predicting that the attempt to introduce any more passengers 'won't fit nohow.'

The new passenger, without any expression of anxiety, looks into the coach, and then looks up at the coachman: 'Now, how do you mean to fix it?' says he, after a pause: 'for I MUST go.'

The coachman employs himself in twisting the lash of his whip into a knot, and takes no more notice of the question: clearly signifying that it is anybody's business but his, and that the passengers would do well to fix it, among themselves. In this state of things, matters seem to be approximating to a fix of another kind, when another inside passenger in a corner, who is nearly suffocated, cries faintly, 'I'll get out.'

This is no matter of relief or self-congratulation to the driver, for his immovable philosophy is perfectly undisturbed by anything that happens in the coach. Of all things in the world, the coach would seem to be the very last upon his mind. The exchange is made, however, and then the passenger who has given up his seat makes a third upon the box, seating himself in what he calls the middle; that is, with half his person on my legs, and the other half on the driver's.

'Go a-head, cap'en,' cries the colonel, who directs.

'Go-lang!' cries the cap'en to his company, the horses, and away we go.

We took up at a rural bar-room, after we had gone a few miles, an intoxicated gentleman who climbed upon the roof among the luggage, and subsequently slipping off without hurting himself, was seen in the distant perspective reeling back to the grog-shop where we had found him. We also parted with more of our freight at different times, so that when we came to change horses, I was again alone outside.

The coachmen always change with the horses, and are usually as dirty as the coach. The first was dressed like a very shabby English baker; the second like a Russian peasant: for he wore a loose purple camlet robe, with a fur collar, tied round his waist with a parti-coloured worsted sash; grey trousers; light blue gloves: and a cap of bearskin. It had by this time come on to rain very heavily, and there was a cold damp mist besides, which penetrated to the skin. I was glad to take advantage of a stoppage and get down to stretch my legs, shake the water off my great-coat, and swallow the usual anti-temperance recipe for keeping out the cold.

When I mounted to my seat again, I observed a new parcel lying on the coach roof, which I took to be a rather large fiddle in a brown bag. In the course of a few miles, however, I discovered that it had a glazed cap at one end and a pair of muddy shoes at the other and further observation demonstrated it to be a small boy in a snuff-coloured coat, with his arms quite pinioned to his sides, by deep forcing into his pockets. He was, I presume, a relative or friend of the coachman's, as he lay a-top of the luggage with his face towards the rain; and except when a change of position brought his shoes in contact with my hat, he appeared to be asleep. At last, on some occasion of our stopping, this thing slowly upreared itself to the height of three feet six, and fixing its eyes on me, observed in piping accents, with a complaisant yawn, half quenched in an obliging air of friendly patronage, 'Well now, stranger, I guess you find this a'most like an English arternoon, hey?'

The scenery, which had been tame enough at first, was, for the last ten or twelve miles, beautiful. Our road wound through the pleasant valley of the Susquehanna; the river, dotted with innumerable green islands, lay upon our right; and on the left, a steep ascent, craggy with broken rock, and dark with pine trees. The mist, wreathing itself into a hundred fantastic shapes, moved solemnly upon the water; and the gloom of evening gave to all an air of mystery and silence which greatly enhanced its natural interest.

We crossed this river by a wooden bridge, roofed and covered in on all sides, and nearly a mile in length. It was profoundly dark; perplexed, with great beams, crossing and recrossing it at every possible angle; and through the broad chinks and crevices in the floor, the rapid river gleamed, far down below, like a legion of eyes. We had no lamps; and as the horses stumbled and floundered through this place, towards the distant speck of dying light, it seemed interminable. I really could not at first persuade myself as we rumbled heavily on, filling the bridge with hollow noises, and I held down my head to save it from the rafters above, but that I was in a painful dream; for I have often dreamed of toiling through such places, and as often argued, even at the time, 'this cannot be reality.'

At length, however, we emerged upon the streets of Harrisburg, whose feeble lights, reflected dismally from the wet ground, did not shine out upon a very cheerful city. We were soon established in a snug hotel, which though smaller and far less splendid than many we put up at, it raised above them all in my remembrance, by having for its landlord the most obliging, considerate, and gentlemanly person I ever had to deal with.

As we were not to proceed upon our journey until the afternoon, I walked out, after breakfast the next morning, to look about me; and was duly shown a model prison on the solitary system, just erected, and as yet without an inmate; the trunk of an old tree to which Harris, the first settler here (afterwards buried under it), was tied by hostile Indians, with his funeral pile about him, when he was saved by the timely appearance of a friendly party on the opposite shore of the river; the local legislature (for there was another of those bodies here again, in full debate); and the other curiosities of the town.

I was very much interested in looking over a number of treaties made from time to time with the poor Indians, signed by the different chiefs at the period of their ratification, and preserved in the office of the Secretary to the Commonwealth. These signatures, traced of course by their own hands, are rough drawings of the creatures or weapons they were called after. Thus, the Great Turtle makes a crooked pen-and-ink outline of a great turtle; the Buffalo sketches a buffalo; the War Hatchet sets a rough image of that weapon for his mark. So with the Arrow, the Fish, the Scalp, the Big Canoe, and all of them.

I could not but think - as I looked at these feeble and tremulous productions of hands which could draw the longest arrow to the head in a stout elk-horn bow, or split a bead or feather with a rifle- ball - of Crabbe's musings over the Parish Register, and the irregular scratches made with a pen, by men who would plough a lengthy furrow straight from end to end. Nor could I help bestowing many sorrowful thoughts upon the simple warriors whose hands and hearts were set there, in all truth and honesty; and who only learned in course of time from white men how to break their faith, and quibble out of forms and bonds. I wonder, too, how many times the credulous Big Turtle, or trusting Little Hatchet, had put his mark to treaties which were falsely read to him; and had signed away, he knew not what, until it went and cast him loose upon the new possessors of the land, a savage indeed.

Our host announced, before our early dinner, that some members of the legislative body proposed to do us the honour of calling. He had kindly yielded up to us his wife's own little parlour, and when I begged that he would show them in, I saw him look with painful apprehension at its pretty carpet; though, being otherwise occupied at the time, the cause of his uneasiness did not occur to me.

It certainly would have been more pleasant to all parties concerned, and would not, I think, have compromised their independence in any material degree, if some of these gentlemen had not only yielded to the prejudice in favour of spittoons, but had abandoned themselves, for the moment, even to the conventional absurdity of pocket-handkerchiefs.

It still continued to rain heavily, and when we went down to the Canal Boat (for that was the mode of conveyance by which we were to proceed) after dinner, the weather was as unpromising and obstinately wet as one would desire to see. Nor was the sight of this canal boat, in which we were to spend three or four days, by any means a cheerful one; as it involved some uneasy speculations concerning the disposal of the passengers at night, and opened a wide field of inquiry touching the other domestic arrangements of the establishment, which was sufficiently disconcerting.

However, there it was - a barge with a little house in it, viewed from the outside; and a caravan at a fair, viewed from within: the gentlemen being accommodated, as the spectators usually are, in one of those locomotive museums of penny wonders; and the ladies being partitioned off by a red curtain, after the manner of the dwarfs and giants in the same establishments, whose private lives are passed in rather close exclusiveness.

We sat here, looking silently at the row of little tables, which extended down both sides of the cabin, and listening to the rain as it dripped and pattered on the boat, and plashed with a dismal merriment in the water, until the arrival of the railway train, for whose final contribution to our stock of passengers, our departure was alone deferred. It brought a great many boxes, which were bumped and tossed upon the roof, almost as painfully as if they had been deposited on one's own head, without the intervention of a porter's knot; and several damp gentlemen, whose clothes, on their drawing round the stove, began to steam again. No doubt it would have been a thought more comfortable if the driving rain, which now poured down more soakingly than ever, had admitted of a window being opened, or if our number had been something less than thirty; but there was scarcely time to think as much, when a train of three horses was attached to the tow-rope, the boy upon the leader smacked his whip, the rudder creaked and groaned complainingly, and we had begun our journey.

CHAPTER X - SOME FURTHER ACCOUNT OF THE CANAL BOAT, ITS DOMESTIC ECONOMY, AND ITS PASSENGERS.

JOURNEY TO PITTSBURG ACROSS THE ALLEGHANY MOUNTAINS. PITTSBURG

AS it continued to rain most perseveringly, we all remained below: the damp gentlemen round the stove, gradually becoming mildewed by the action of the fire; and the dry gentlemen lying at full length upon the seats, or slumbering uneasily with their faces on the tables, or walking up and down the cabin, which it was barely possible for a man of the middle height to do, without making bald places on his head by scraping it against the roof. At about six o'clock, all the small tables were put together to form one long table, and everybody sat down to tea, coffee, bread, butter, salmon, shad, liver, steaks, potatoes, pickles, ham, chops, black- puddings, and sausages.

'Will you try,' said my opposite neighbour, handing me a dish of potatoes, broken up in milk and butter, 'will you try some of these fixings?'

There are few words which perform such various duties as this word 'fix.' It is the Caleb Quotem of the American vocabulary. You call upon a gentleman in a country town, and his help informs you that he is 'fixing himself' just now, but will be down directly: by which you are to understand that he is dressing. You inquire, on board a steamboat, of a fellow-passenger, whether breakfast will be ready soon, and he tells you he should think so, for when he was last below, they were 'fixing the tables:' in other words, laying the cloth. You beg a porter to collect your luggage, and he entreats you not to be uneasy, for he'll 'fix it presently:' and if you complain of indisposition, you are advised to have recourse to Doctor So-and-so, who will 'fix you' in no time.

One night, I ordered a bottle of mulled wine at an hotel where I was staying, and waited a long time for it; at length it was put upon the table with an apology from the landlord that he feared it wasn't 'fixed properly.' And I recollect once, at a stage-coach dinner, overhearing a very stern gentleman demand of a waiter who presented him with a plate of underdone roast-beef, 'whether he called THAT, fixing God A'mighty's vittles?'

There is no doubt that the meal, at which the invitation was tendered to me which has occasioned this digression, was disposed of somewhat ravenously; and that the gentlemen thrust the broad- bladed knives and the two-pronged forks further down their throats than I ever saw the same weapons go before, except in the hands of a skilful juggler: but no man sat down until the ladies were seated; or omitted any little act of politeness which could contribute to their comfort. Nor did I ever once, on any occasion, anywhere, during my rambles in America, see a woman exposed to the slightest act of rudeness, incivility, or even inattention.

By the time the meal was over, the rain, which seemed to have worn itself out by coming down so fast, was nearly over too; and it became feasible to go on deck: which was a great relief, notwithstanding its being a very small deck, and being rendered still smaller by the luggage, which was heaped together in the middle under a tarpaulin covering; leaving, on either side, a path so narrow, that it became a science to walk to and fro without tumbling overboard into the canal. It was somewhat embarrassing at first, too, to have to duck nimbly every five minutes whenever the man at the helm cried 'Bridge!' and sometimes, when the cry was 'Low Bridge,' to lie down nearly flat. But custom familiarises one to anything, and there were so many bridges that it took a very short time to get used to this.

As night came on, and we drew in sight of the first range of hills, which are the outposts of the Alleghany Mountains, the scenery, which had been uninteresting hitherto, became more bold and striking. The wet ground reeked and smoked, after the heavy fall of rain, and the croaking of the frogs (whose noise in these parts is almost incredible) sounded as though a million of fairy teams with bells were travelling through the air, and keeping pace with us. The night was cloudy yet, but moonlight too: and when we crossed the Susquehanna river - over which there is an extraordinary wooden bridge with two galleries, one above the other, so that even there, two boat teams meeting, may pass without confusion - it was wild and grand.

I have mentioned my having been in some uncertainty and doubt, at first, relative to the sleeping arrangements on board this boat. I remained in the same vague state of mind until ten o'clock or thereabouts, when going below, I found suspended on either side of the cabin, three long tiers of hanging bookshelves, designed apparently for volumes of the small octavo size. Looking with greater attention at these contrivances (wondering to find such literary preparations in such a place), I descried on each shelf a sort of microscopic sheet and blanket; then I began dimly to comprehend that the passengers were the library, and that they were to be arranged, edge-wise, on these shelves, till morning.

I was assisted to this conclusion by seeing some of them gathered round the master of the boat, at one of the tables, drawing lots with all the anxieties and passions of gamesters depicted in their countenances; while others, with small pieces of cardboard in their hands, were groping among the shelves in search of numbers corresponding with those they had drawn. As soon as any gentleman found his number, he took possession of it by immediately undressing himself and crawling into bed. The rapidity with which an agitated gambler subsided into a snoring slumberer, was one of the most singular effects I have ever witnessed. As to the ladies, they were already abed, behind the red curtain, which was carefully drawn and pinned up the centre; though as every cough, or sneeze, or whisper, behind this curtain, was perfectly audible before it, we had still a lively consciousness of their society.

The politeness of the person in authority had secured to me a shelf in a nook near this red curtain, in some degree removed from the great body of sleepers: to which place I retired, with many acknowledgments to him for his attention. I found it, on after- measurement, just the width of an ordinary sheet of Bath post letter-paper; and I was at first in some uncertainty as to the best means of getting into it. But the shelf being a bottom one, I finally determined on lying upon the floor, rolling gently in, stopping immediately I touched the mattress, and remaining for the night with that side uppermost, whatever it might be. Luckily, I came upon my back at exactly the right moment. I was much alarmed on looking upward, to see, by the shape of his half-yard of sacking (which his weight had bent into an exceedingly tight bag), that there was a very heavy gentleman above me, whom the slender cords seemed quite incapable of holding; and I could not help reflecting upon the grief of my wife and family in the event of his coming down in the night. But as I could not have got up again without a severe bodily struggle, which might have alarmed the ladies; and as I had nowhere to go to, even if I had; I shut my eyes upon the danger, and remained there.

One of two remarkable circumstances is indisputably a fact, with reference to that class of society who travel in these boats. Either they carry their restlessness to such a pitch that they never sleep at all; or they expectorate in dreams, which would be a remarkable mingling of the real and ideal. All night long, and every night, on this canal, there was a perfect storm and tempest of spitting; and once my coat, being in the very centre of the hurricane sustained by five gentlemen (which moved vertically, strictly carrying out Reid's Theory of the Law of Storms), I was fain the next morning to lay it on the deck, and rub it down with fair water before it was in a condition to be worn again.

Between five and six o'clock in the morning we got up, and some of us went on deck, to give them an opportunity of taking the shelves down; while others, the morning being very cold, crowded round the rusty stove, cherishing the newly kindled fire, and filling the grate with those voluntary contributions of which they had been so liberal all night. The washing accommodations were primitive. There was a tin ladle chained to the deck, with which every gentleman who thought it necessary to cleanse himself (many were superior to this weakness), fished the dirty water out of the canal, and poured it into a tin basin, secured in like manner. There was also a jack-towel. And, hanging up before a little looking-glass in the bar, in the immediate vicinity of the bread and cheese and biscuits, were a public comb and hair-brush.

At eight o'clock, the shelves being taken down and put away and the tables joined together, everybody sat down to the tea, coffee, bread, butter, salmon, shad, liver, steak, potatoes, pickles, ham, chops, black-puddings, and sausages, all over again. Some were fond of compounding this variety, and having it all on their plates at once. As each gentleman got through his own personal amount of tea, coffee, bread, butter, salmon, shad, liver, steak, potatoes, pickles, ham, chops, black-puddings, and sausages, he rose up and walked off. When everybody had done with everything, the fragments were cleared away: and one of the waiters appearing anew in the character of a barber, shaved such of the company as desired to be shaved; while the remainder looked on, or yawned over their newspapers. Dinner was breakfast again, without the tea and coffee; and supper and breakfast were identical.

There was a man on board this boat, with a light fresh-coloured face, and a pepper-and-salt suit of clothes, who was the most inquisitive fellow that can possibly be imagined. He never spoke otherwise than interrogatively. He was an embodied inquiry. Sitting down or standing up, still or moving, walking the deck or taking his meals, there he was, with a great note of interrogation in each eye, two in his cocked ears, two more in his turned-up nose and chin, at least half a dozen more about the corners of his mouth, and the largest one of all in his hair, which was brushed pertly off his forehead in a flaxen clump. Every button in his clothes said, 'Eh? What's that? Did you speak? Say that again, will you?' He was always wide awake, like the enchanted bride who drove her husband frantic; always restless; always thirsting for answers; perpetually seeking and never finding. There never was such a curious man.

I wore a fur great-coat at that time, and before we were well clear of the wharf, he questioned me concerning it, and its price, and where I bought it, and when, and what fur it was, and what it weighed, and what it cost. Then he took notice of my watch, and asked me what THAT cost, and whether it was a French watch, and where I got it, and how I got it, and whether I bought it or had it given me, and how it went, and where the key-hole was, and when I wound it, every night or every morning, and whether I ever forgot to wind it at all, and if I did, what then? Where had I been to last, and where was I going next, and where was I going after that, and had I seen the President, and what did he say, and what did I say, and what did he say when I had said that? Eh? Lor now! do tell!

Finding that nothing would satisfy him, I evaded his questions after the first score or two, and in particular pleaded ignorance respecting the name of the fur whereof the coat was made. I am unable to say whether this was the reason, but that coat fascinated him afterwards; he usually kept close behind me as I walked, and moved as I moved, that he might look at it the better; and he frequently dived into narrow places after me at the risk of his life, that he might have the satisfaction of passing his hand up the back, and rubbing it the wrong way.

We had another odd specimen on board, of a different kind. This was a thin-faced, spare-figured man of middle age and stature, dressed in a dusty drabbish-coloured suit, such as I never saw before. He was perfectly quiet during the first part of the journey: indeed I don't remember having so much as seen him until he was brought out by circumstances, as great men often are. The conjunction of events which made him famous, happened, briefly, thus.

The canal extends to the foot of the mountain, and there, of course, it stops; the passengers being conveyed across it by land carriage, and taken on afterwards by another canal boat, the counterpart of the first, which awaits them on the other side. There are two canal lines of passage-boats;

one is called The Express, and one (a cheaper one) The Pioneer. The Pioneer gets first to the mountain, and waits for the Express people to come up; both sets of passengers being conveyed across it at the same time. We were the Express company; but when we had crossed the mountain, and had come to the second boat, the proprietors took it into their beads to draft all the Pioneers into it likewise, so that we were five-and-forty at least, and the accession of passengers was not at all of that kind which improved the prospect of sleeping at night. Our people grumbled at this, as people do in such cases; but suffered the boat to be towed off with the whole freight aboard nevertheless; and away we went down the canal. At home, I should have protested lustily, but being a foreigner here, I held my peace. Not so this passenger. He cleft a path among the people on deck (we were nearly all on deck), and without addressing anybody whomsoever, soliloquised as follows:

'This may suit YOU, this may, but it don't suit ME. This may be all very well with Down Easters, and men of Boston raising, but it won't suit my figure nohow; and no two ways about THAT; and so I tell you. Now! I'm from the brown forests of Mississippi, I am, and when the sun shines on me, it does shine - a little. It don't glimmer where I live, the sun don't. No. I'm a brown forester, I am. I an't a Johnny Cake. There are no smooth skins where I live. We're rough men there. Rather. If Down Easters and men of Boston raising like this, I'm glad of it, but I'm none of that raising nor of that breed. No. This company wants a little fixing, IT does. I'm the wrong sort of man for 'em, I am. They won't like me, THEY won't. This is piling of it up, a little too mountainous, this is.' At the end of every one of these short sentences he turned upon his heel, and walked the other way; checking himself abruptly when he had finished another short sentence, and turning back again.

It is impossible for me to say what terrific meaning was hidden in the words of this brown forester, but I know that the other passengers looked on in a sort of admiring horror, and that presently the boat was put back to the wharf, and as many of the Pioneers as could be coaxed or bullied into going away, were got rid of.

When we started again, some of the boldest spirits on board, made bold to say to the obvious occasion of this improvement in our prospects, 'Much obliged to you, sir;' whereunto the brown forester (waving his hand, and still walking up and down as before), replied, 'No you an't. You're none o' my raising. You may act for yourselves, YOU may. I have pinted out the way. Down Easters and Johnny Cakes can follow if they please. I an't a Johnny Cake, I an't. I am from the brown forests of the Mississippi, I am' - and so on, as before. He was unanimously voted one of the tables for his bed at night - there is a great contest for the tables - in consideration for his public services: and he had the warmest corner by the stove throughout the rest of the journey. But I never could find out that he did anything except sit there; nor did I hear him speak again until, in the midst of the bustle and turmoil of getting the luggage ashore in the dark at Pittsburg, I stumbled over him as he sat smoking a cigar on the cabin steps, and heard him muttering to himself, with a short laugh of defiance, 'I an't a Johnny Cake, - I an't. I'm from the brown forests of the Mississippi, I am, damme!' I am inclined to argue from this, that he had never left off saying so; but I could not make an affidavit of that part of the story, if required to do so by my Queen and Country.

As we have not reached Pittsburg yet, however, in the order of our narrative, I may go on to remark that breakfast was perhaps the least desirable meal of the day, as in addition to the many savoury odours arising from the eatables already mentioned, there were whiffs of gin, whiskey, brandy, and rum, from the little bar hard by, and a decided seasoning of stale tobacco. Many of the gentlemen passengers were far from particular in respect of their linen, which was in some cases as yellow as the little rivulets that had trickled from the corners of their mouths in chewing, and dried there. Nor was the atmosphere quite free from zephyr whisperings of the thirty beds which had just been cleared away, and of which we were further and more pressingly reminded by the occasional appearance on the table-cloth of a kind of Game, not mentioned in the Bill of Fare.

And yet despite these oddities - and even they had, for me at least, a humour of their own - there was much in this mode of travelling which I heartily enjoyed at the time, and look back upon with great pleasure. Even the running up, bare-necked, at five o'clock in the morning, from the tainted cabin to the dirty deck; scooping up the icy water, plunging one's head into it, and drawing it out, all fresh and glowing with the cold; was a good thing. The fast, brisk walk upon the towing-path, between that time and breakfast, when every vein and artery seemed to tingle with health; the exquisite beauty of the opening day, when light came gleaming off from everything; the lazy motion of the boat, when one lay idly on the deck, looking through, rather than at, the deep blue sky; the gliding on at night, so noiselessly, past frowning hills, sullen with dark trees, and sometimes angry in one red, burning spot high up, where unseen men lay crouching round a fire; the shining out of the bright stars undisturbed by noise of wheels or steam, or any other sound than the limpid rippling of the water as the boat went on: all these were pure delights.

Then there were new settlements and detached log-cabins and frame-houses, full of interest for strangers from an old country: cabins with simple ovens, outside, made of clay; and lodgings for the pigs nearly as good as many of the human quarters; broken windows, patched with worn-out hats, old clothes, old boards, fragments of blankets and paper; and home-made dressers standing in the open air without the door, whereon was ranged the household store, not hard to count, of earthen jars and pots. The eye was pained to see the stumps of great trees thickly strewn in every field of wheat, and seldom to lose the eternal swamp and dull morass, with hundreds of rotten trunks and twisted branches steeped in its unwholesome water. It was quite sad and oppressive, to come upon great tracts where settlers had been burning down the trees, and where their wounded bodies lay about, like those of murdered creatures, while here and there some charred and blackened giant reared aloft two withered arms, and seemed to call down curses on his foes. Sometimes, at night, the way wound through some lonely gorge, like a mountain pass in Scotland, shining and coldly glittering in the light of the moon, and so closed in by high steep hills all round, that there seemed to be no egress save through the narrower path by which we had come, until one rugged hill-side seemed to open, and shutting out the moonlight as we passed into its gloomy throat, wrapped our new course in shade and darkness.

We had left Harrisburg on Friday. On Sunday morning we arrived at the foot of the mountain, which is crossed by railroad. There are ten inclined planes; five ascending, and five descending; the carriages are dragged up the former, and let slowly down the latter, by means of stationary engines; the comparatively level spaces between, being traversed, sometimes by horse, and sometimes by engine power, as the case demands. Occasionally the rails are laid upon the extreme verge of a giddy precipice; and looking from the carriage window, the traveller gazes sheer down, without a stone or scrap of fence between, into the mountain depths below. The journey is very carefully made, however; only two carriages travelling together; and while proper precautions are taken, is not to be dreaded for its dangers.

It was very pretty travelling thus, at a rapid pace along the heights of the mountain in a keen wind, to look down into a valley full of light and softness; catching glimpses, through the tree- tops, of scattered cabins; children running to the doors; dogs bursting out to bark, whom we could see without hearing: terrified pigs scampering homewards; families sitting out in their rude gardens; cows gazing upward with a stupid indifference; men in their shirt-sleeves looking on at their unfinished houses, planning out to-morrow's work; and we riding onward, high above them, like a whirlwind. It was amusing, too, when we had dined, and rattled down a steep pass, having no other moving power than the weight of the carriages themselves, to see the engine released, long after us, come buzzing down alone, like a great insect, its back of green and gold so shining in the sun, that if it had spread a pair of wings and soared away, no one would have had occasion, as I fancied, for the least surprise. But it stopped short of us in a very business-like manner when we reached the canal: and, before we left the wharf, went panting up this hill again, with the passengers who had waited our arrival for the means of traversing the road by which we had come.

On the Monday evening, furnace fires and clanking hammers on the banks of the canal, warned us that we approached the termination of this part of our journey. After going through another dreamy place - a long aqueduct across the Alleghany River, which was stranger than the bridge at Harrisburg, being a vast, low, wooden chamber full of water - we emerged upon that ugly confusion of backs of buildings and crazy galleries and stairs, which always abuts on water, whether it be river, sea, canal, or ditch: and were at Pittsburg.

Pittsburg is like Birmingham in England; at least its townspeople say so. Setting aside the streets, the shops, the houses, waggons, factories, public buildings, and population, perhaps it may be. It certainly has a great quantity of smoke hanging about it, and is famous for its iron-works. Besides the prison to which I have already referred, this town contains a pretty arsenal and other institutions. It is very beautifully situated on the Alleghany River, over which there are two bridges; and the villas of the wealthier citizens sprinkled about the high grounds in the neighbourhood, are pretty enough. We lodged at a most excellent hotel, and were admirably served. As usual it was full of boarders, was very large, and had a broad colonnade to every story of the house.

We tarried here three days. Our next point was Cincinnati: and as this was a steamboat journey, and western steamboats usually blow up one or two a week in the season, it was advisable to collect opinions in reference to the comparative safety of the vessels bound that way, then lying in the river. One called the Messenger was the best recommended. She had been advertised to start positively, every day for a fortnight or so, and had not gone yet, nor did her captain seem to have any very fixed intention on the subject. But this is the custom: for if the law were to bind down a free and independent citizen to keep his word with the public, what would become of the liberty of the subject? Besides, it is in the way of trade. And if passengers be decoyed in the way of trade, and people be inconvenienced in the way of trade, what man, who is a sharp tradesman himself, shall say, 'We must put a stop to this?'

Impressed by the deep solemnity of the public announcement, I (being then ignorant of these usages) was for hurrying on board in a breathless state, immediately; but receiving private and confidential information that the boat would certainly not start until Friday, April the First, we made ourselves very comfortable in the mean while, and went on board at noon that day.

CHAPTER XI - FROM PITTSBURG TO CINCINNATI IN A WESTERN STEAMBOAT. CINCINNATI

THE Messenger was one among a crowd of high-pressure steamboats, clustered together by a wharf-side, which, looked down upon from the rising ground that forms the landing-place, and backed by the lofty bank on the opposite side of the river, appeared no larger than so many floating models. She had some forty passengers on board, exclusive of the poorer persons on the lower deck; and in half an hour, or less, proceeded on her way.

We had, for ourselves, a tiny state-room with two berths in it, opening out of the ladies' cabin. There was, undoubtedly, something satisfactory in this 'location,' inasmuch as it was in the stern, and we had been a great many times very gravely recommended to keep as far aft as possible, 'because the steamboats generally blew up forward.' Nor was this an unnecessary caution, as the occurrence and circumstances of more than one such fatality during our stay sufficiently testified. Apart from this source of self-congratulation, it was an unspeakable relief to have any place, no matter how confined, where one could be alone: and as the row of little chambers of which this was one, had each a second glass-door besides that in the ladies' cabin, which opened on a narrow gallery outside the vessel, where the other passengers seldom came, and where one could sit in peace and gaze upon the shifting prospect, we took possession of our new quarters with much pleasure.

If the native packets I have already described be unlike anything we are in the habit of seeing on water, these western vessels are still more foreign to all the ideas we are accustomed to entertain of boats. I hardly know what to liken them to, or how to describe them.

In the first place, they have no mast, cordage, tackle, rigging, or other such boat-like gear; nor have they anything in their shape at all calculated to remind one of a boat's head, stem, sides, or keel. Except that they are in the water, and display a couple of paddle-boxes, they might be intended, for anything that appears to the contrary, to perform some unknown service, high and dry, upon a mountain top. There is no visible deck, even: nothing but a long, black, ugly roof covered with burnt-out feathery sparks; above which tower two iron chimneys, and a hoarse escape valve, and a glass steerage-house. Then, in order as the eye descends towards the water, are the sides, and doors, and windows of the state- rooms, jumbled as oddly together as though they formed a small street, built by the varying tastes of a dozen men: the whole is supported on beams and pillars resting on a dirty barge, but a few inches above the water's edge: and in the narrow space between this upper structure and this barge's deck, are the furnace fires and machinery, open at the sides to every wind that blows, and every storm of rain it drives along its path.

Passing one of these boats at night, and seeing the great body of fire, exposed as I have just described, that rages and roars beneath the frail pile of painted wood: the machinery, not warded off or guarded in any way, but doing its work in the midst of the crowd of idlers and emigrants and children, who throng the lower deck: under the management, too, of reckless men whose acquaintance with its mysteries may have been of six months' standing: one feels directly that the wonder is, not that there should be so many fatal accidents, but that any journey should be safely made.

Within, there is one long narrow cabin, the whole length of the boat; from which the state-rooms open, on both sides. A small portion of it at the stern is partitioned off for the ladies; and the bar is at the opposite extreme. There is a long table down the centre, and at either end a stove. The washing apparatus is forward, on the deck. It is a little better than on board the canal boat, but not much. In all modes of travelling, the American customs, with reference to the means of personal cleanliness and wholesome ablution, are extremely negligent and filthy; and I strongly incline to the belief that a considerable amount of illness is referable to this cause.

We are to be on board the Messenger three days: arriving at Cincinnati (barring accidents) on Monday morning. There are three meals a day. Breakfast at seven, dinner at half-past twelve, supper about six. At each, there are a great many small dishes and plates upon the table, with very little in them; so that although there is every appearance of a mighty 'spread,' there is seldom really more than a joint: except for those who fancy slices of beet-root, shreds of dried beef, complicated entanglements of yellow pickle; maize, Indian corn, apple-sauce, and pumpkin.

Some people fancy all these little dainties together (and sweet preserves beside), by way of relish to their roast pig. They are generally those dyspeptic ladies and gentlemen who eat unheard-of quantities of hot corn bread (almost as good for the digestion as a kneaded pin-cushion), for breakfast, and for supper. Those who do not observe this custom, and who help themselves several times instead, usually suck their knives and forks meditatively, until they have decided what to take next: then pull them out of their mouths: put them in the dish; help themselves; and fall to work again. At dinner, there is nothing to drink upon the table, but great jugs full of cold water. Nobody says anything, at any meal, to anybody. All the passengers are very dismal, and seem to have tremendous secrets weighing on their minds. There is no conversation, no laughter, no cheerfulness, no sociality, except in spitting; and that is done in silent fellowship round the stove, when the meal is over. Every man sits down, dull and languid; swallows his fare as if breakfasts, dinners, and suppers, were necessities of nature never to be coupled with recreation or enjoyment; and having bolted his food in a gloomy silence, bolts himself, in the same state. But for these animal observances, you might suppose the whole male portion of the company to be the melancholy ghosts of departed book-keepers, who had fallen dead at the desk: such is their weary air of business and calculation. Undertakers on duty would be sprightly beside them; and a collation of funeral-baked meats, in comparison with these meals, would be a sparkling festivity.

The people are all alike, too. There is no diversity of character. They travel about on the same errands, say and do the same things in exactly the same manner, and follow in the same dull cheerless round. All down the long table, there is scarcely a man who is in anything different from his neighbour. It is quite a relief to have, sitting opposite, that little girl of fifteen with the loquacious chin: who, to do her justice, acts up to it, and fully identifies nature's handwriting, for of all the small chatterboxes that ever invaded the repose of drowsy ladies' cabin, she is the first and foremost. The beautiful girl, who sits a little beyond her - farther down the table there - married the young man with the dark whiskers, who sits beyond HER, only last month. They are going to settle in the very Far West, where he has lived four years, but where she has never been. They were both overturned in a stage-coach the other day (a bad omen anywhere else, where overturns are not so common), and his head, which bears the marks of a recent wound, is bound up still. She was hurt too, at the same time, and lay insensible for some days; bright as her eyes are, now.

Further down still, sits a man who is going some miles beyond their place of destination, to 'improve' a newly-discovered copper mine. He carries the village - that is to be - with him: a few frame cottages, and an apparatus for smelting the copper. He carries its people too. They are partly American and partly Irish, and herd together on the lower deck; where they amused themselves last evening till the night was pretty far advanced, by alternately firing off pistols and singing hymns.

They, and the very few who have been left at table twenty minutes, rise, and go away. We do so too; and passing through our little state-room, resume our seats in the quiet gallery without.

A fine broad river always, but in some parts much wider than in others: and then there is usually a green island, covered with trees, dividing it into two streams. Occasionally, we stop for a few minutes, maybe to take in wood, maybe for passengers, at some small town or village (I ought to say city, every place is a city here); but the banks are for the most part deep solitudes, overgrown with trees, which, hereabouts, are already in leaf and very green. For miles, and miles, and miles, these solitudes are unbroken by any sign of human life or trace of human footstep; nor is anything seen to move about them but the blue jay, whose colour is so bright, and yet so delicate, that it looks like a flying flower. At lengthened intervals a log cabin, with its little space of cleared land about it, nestles under a rising ground, and sends its thread of blue smoke curling up into the sky. It stands in the corner of the poor field of wheat, which is full of great unsightly stumps, like earthy butchers'-blocks. Sometimes the ground is only just now cleared: the felled trees lying yet upon the soil: and the log-house only this morning begun. As we pass this clearing, the settler leans upon his axe or hammer, and looks wistfully at the people from the world. The children creep out of the temporary hut, which is like a gipsy tent upon the ground, and clap their hands and shout. The dog only glances round at us, and then looks up into his master's face again, as if he were rendered uneasy by any suspension of the common business, and had nothing more to do with pleasurers. And still there is the same, eternal foreground. The river has washed away its banks, and stately trees have fallen down into the stream. Some have been there so long, that they are mere dry, grizzly skeletons. Some have just toppled over, and having earth yet about their roots, are bathing their green heads in the river, and putting forth new shoots and branches. Some are almost sliding down, as you look at them. And some were drowned so long ago, that their bleached arms start out from the middle of the current, and seem to try to grasp the boat, and drag it under water.

Through such a scene as this, the unwieldy machine takes its hoarse, sullen way: venting, at every revolution of the paddles, a loud high-pressure blast; enough, one would think, to waken up the host of Indians who lie buried in a great mound yonder: so old, that mighty oaks and other forest trees have struck their roots into its earth; and so high, that it is a hill, even among the hills that Nature planted round it. The very river, as though it shared one's feelings of compassion for the extinct tribes who lived so pleasantly here, in their blessed ignorance of white existence, hundreds of years ago, steals out of its way to ripple near this mound: and there are few places where the Ohio sparkles more brightly than in the Big Grave Creek.

All this I see as I sit in the little stern-gallery mentioned just now. Evening slowly steals upon the landscape and changes it before me, when we stop to set some emigrants ashore.

Five men, as many women, and a little girl. All their worldly goods are a bag, a large chest and an old chair: one, old, high- backed, rush-bottomed chair: a solitary settler in itself. They are rowed ashore in the boat, while the vessel stands a little off awaiting its return, the water being shallow. They are landed at the foot of a high bank, on the summit of which are a few log cabins, attainable only by a long winding path. It is growing dusk; but the sun is very red, and shines in the water and on some of the tree-tops, like fire.

The men get out of the boat first; help out the women; take out the bag, the chest, the chair; bid the rowers 'good-bye;' and shove the boat off for them. At the first plash of the oars in the water, the oldest woman of the party sits down in the old chair, close to the water's edge, without speaking a word. None of the others sit down, though the chest is large enough for many seats. They all stand where they landed, as if stricken into stone; and look after the boat. So they remain, quite still and silent: the old woman and her old chair, in the centre the bag and chest upon the shore, without anybody heeding them all eyes fixed upon the boat. It comes alongside, is made fast, the men jump on board, the engine is put in motion, and we go hoarsely on again. There they stand yet, without the motion of a hand. I can see them through my glass, when, in the distance and increasing darkness, they are mere specks to the eye: lingering there still: the old woman in the old chair, and all the rest about her: not stirring in the least degree. And thus I slowly lose them.

The night is dark, and we proceed within the shadow of the wooded bank, which makes it darker. After gliding past the sombre maze of boughs for a long time, we come upon an open space where the tall trees are burning. The shape of every branch and twig is expressed in a deep red glow, and as the light wind stirs and ruffles it, they seem to vegetate in fire. It is such a sight as we read of in legends of enchanted forests: saving that it is sad to see these noble works wasting away so awfully, alone; and to think how many years must come and go before the magic that created them will rear their like upon this ground again. But the time will come; and when, in their changed ashes, the growth of centuries unborn has struck its roots, the restless men of distant ages will repair to these again unpeopled solitudes; and their fellows, in cities far away, that slumber now, perhaps, beneath the rolling sea, will read in language strange to any ears in being now, but very old to them, of primeval forests where the axe was never heard, and where the jungled ground was never trodden by a human foot.

Midnight and sleep blot out these scenes and thoughts: and when the morning shines again, it gilds the house-tops of a lively city, before whose broad paved wharf the boat is moored; with other boats, and flags, and moving wheels, and hum of men around it; as though there were not a solitary or silent rood of ground within the compass of a thousand miles.

Cincinnati is a beautiful city; cheerful, thriving, and animated. I have not often seen a place that commends itself so favourably and pleasantly to a stranger at the first glance as this does: with its clean houses of red and white, its well-paved roads, and foot-ways of bright tile. Nor does it become less prepossessing on a closer acquaintance. The streets are broad and airy, the shops extremely good, the private residences remarkable for their elegance and neatness. There is something of invention and fancy in the varying styles of these latter erections, which, after the dull company of the steamboat, is perfectly delightful, as conveying an assurance that there are such qualities still in existence. The disposition to ornament these pretty villas and render them attractive, leads to the culture of trees and flowers, and the laying out of well-kept gardens, the sight of which, to those who walk along the streets, is inexpressibly refreshing and agreeable. I was quite charmed with the appearance of the town, and its adjoining suburb of Mount Auburn: from which the city, lying in an amphitheatre of hills, forms a picture of remarkable beauty, and is seen to great advantage.

There happened to be a great Temperance Convention held here on the day after our arrival; and as the order of march brought the procession under the windows of the hotel in which we lodged, when they started in the morning, I had a good opportunity of seeing it. It comprised several thousand men; the members of various 'Washington Auxiliary Temperance Societies;' and was marshalled by officers on horseback, who cantered briskly up and down the line, with scarves and ribbons of bright colours fluttering out behind them gaily. There were bands of music too, and banners out of number: and it was a fresh, holiday-looking concourse altogether.

I was particularly pleased to see the Irishmen, who formed a distinct society among themselves, and mustered very strong with their green scarves; carrying their national Harp and their Portrait of Father Mathew, high above the people's heads. They looked as jolly and good-humoured as ever; and, working (here) the hardest for their living and doing any kind of sturdy labour that came in their way, were the most independent fellows there, I thought.

The banners were very well painted, and flaunted down the street famously. There was the smiting of the rock, and the gushing forth of the waters; and there was a temperate man with 'considerable of a hatchet' (as the standard-bearer would probably have said), aiming a deadly blow at a serpent which was apparently about to spring upon him from the top of a barrel of spirits. But the chief feature of this part of the show was a huge allegorical device, borne among the ship-carpenters, on one side whereof the steamboat Alcohol was represented bursting her boiler and exploding with a great crash, while upon the other, the good ship Temperance sailed away with a fair wind, to the heart's content of the captain, crew, and passengers.

After going round the town, the procession repaired to a certain appointed place, where, as the printed programme set forth, it would be received by the children of the different free schools, 'singing Temperance Songs.' I was prevented from getting there, in time to hear these Little Warblers, or to report upon this novel kind of vocal entertainment: novel, at least, to me: but I found in a large open space, each society gathered round its own banners, and listening in silent attention to its own orator. The speeches, judging from the little I could hear of them, were certainly adapted to the occasion, as having that degree of relationship to cold water which wet blankets may claim: but the main thing was the conduct and appearance of the audience throughout the day; and that was admirable and full of promise.

Cincinnati is honourably famous for its free schools, of which it has so many that no person's child among its population can, by possibility, want the means of education, which are extended, upon an average, to four thousand pupils, annually. I was only present in one of these establishments during the hours of instruction. In the boys' department, which was full of little urchins (varying in their ages, I should say, from six years old to ten or twelve), the master offered to institute an extemporary examination of the pupils in algebra; a proposal, which, as I was by no means confident of my ability to detect mistakes in that science, I declined with some alarm. In the girls' school, reading was proposed; and as I felt tolerably equal to that art, I expressed my willingness to hear a class. Books were distributed accordingly, and some half-dozen girls relieved each other in reading paragraphs from English History. But it seemed to be a dry compilation, infinitely above their powers; and when they had blundered through three or four dreary passages concerning the Treaty of Amiens, and other thrilling topics of the same nature (obviously without comprehending ten words), I expressed myself quite satisfied. It is very possible that they only mounted to this exalted stave in the Ladder of Learning for the astonishment of a visitor; and that at other times they keep upon its lower rounds; but I should have been much better pleased and satisfied if I had heard them exercised in simpler lessons, which they understood.

As in every other place I visited, the judges here were gentlemen of high character and attainments. I was in one of the courts for a few minutes, and found it like those to which I have already referred. A nuisance cause was trying; there were not many spectators; and the witnesses, counsel, and jury, formed a sort of family circle, sufficiently jocose and snug.

The society with which I mingled, was intelligent, courteous, and agreeable. The inhabitants of Cincinnati are proud of their city as one of the most interesting in America: and with good reason: for beautiful and thriving as it is now, and containing, as it does, a population of fifty thousand souls, but two-and-fifty years have passed away since the ground on which it stands (bought at that time for a few dollars) was a wild wood, and its citizens were but a handful of dwellers in scattered log huts upon the river's shore.

CHAPTER XII - FROM CINCINNATI TO LOUISVILLE IN ANOTHER WESTERN

STEAMBOAT; AND FROM LOUISVILLE TO ST. LOUIS IN ANOTHER. ST. LOUIS

LEAVING Cincinnati at eleven o'clock in the forenoon, we embarked for Louisville in the Pike steamboat, which, carrying the mails, was a packet of a much better class than that in which we had come from Pittsburg. As this passage does not occupy more than twelve or thirteen hours, we arranged to go ashore that night: not coveting the distinction of sleeping in a state-room, when it was possible to sleep anywhere else.

There chanced to be on board this boat, in addition to the usual dreary crowd of passengers, one Pitchlynn, a chief of the Choctaw tribe of Indians, who SENT IN HIS CARD to me, and with whom I had the pleasure of a long conversation.

He spoke English perfectly well, though he had not begun to learn the language, he told me, until he was a young man grown. He had read many books; and Scott's poetry appeared to have left a strong impression on his mind: especially the opening of The Lady of the Lake, and the great battle scene in Marmion, in which, no doubt from the congeniality of the subjects to his own pursuits and tastes, he had great interest and delight. He appeared to understand correctly all he had read; and whatever fiction had enlisted his sympathy in its belief, had done so keenly and earnestly. I might almost say fiercely. He was dressed in our ordinary everyday costume, which hung about his fine figure loosely, and with indifferent grace. On my telling him that I regretted not to see him in his own attire, he threw up his right arm, for a moment, as though he were brandishing some heavy weapon, and answered, as he let it fall again, that his race were losing many things besides their dress, and would soon be seen upon the earth no more: but he wore it at home, he added proudly.

He told me that he had been away from his home, west of the Mississippi, seventeen months: and was now returning. He had been chiefly at Washington on some negotiations pending between his Tribe and the Government: which were not settled yet (he said in a melancholy way), and he feared never would be: for what could a few poor Indians do, against such well-skilled men of business as the whites? He had no love for

Washington; tired of towns and cities very soon; and longed for the Forest and the Prairie.

I asked him what he thought of Congress? He answered, with a smile, that it wanted dignity, in an Indian's eyes.

He would very much like, he said, to see England before he died; and spoke with much interest about the great things to be seen there. When I told him of that chamber in the British Museum wherein are preserved household memorials of a race that ceased to be, thousands of years ago, he was very attentive, and it was not hard to see that he had a reference in his mind to the gradual fading away of his own people.

This led us to speak of Mr. Catlin's gallery, which he praised highly: observing that his own portrait was among the collection, and that all the likenesses were 'elegant.' Mr. Cooper, he said, had painted the Red Man well; and so would I, he knew, if I would go home with him and hunt buffaloes, which he was quite anxious I should do. When I told him that supposing I went, I should not be very likely to damage the buffaloes much, he took it as a great joke and laughed heartily.

He was a remarkably handsome man; some years past forty, I should judge; with long black hair, an aquiline nose, broad cheek-bones, a sunburnt complexion, and a very bright, keen, dark, and piercing eye. There were but twenty thousand of the Choctaws left, he said, and their number was decreasing every day. A few of his brother chiefs had been obliged to become civilised, and to make themselves acquainted with what the whites knew, for it was their only chance of existence. But they were not many; and the rest were as they always had been. He dwelt on this: and said several times that unless they tried to assimilate themselves to their conquerors, they must be swept away before the strides of civilised society.

When we shook hands at parting, I told him he must come to England, as he longed to see the land so much: that I should hope to see him there, one day: and that I could promise him he would be well received and kindly treated. He was evidently pleased by this assurance, though he rejoined with a good-humoured smile and an arch shake of his head, that the English used to be very fond of the Red Men when they wanted their help, but had not cared much for them, since.

He took his leave; as stately and complete a gentleman of Nature's making, as ever I beheld; and moved among the people in the boat, another kind of being. He sent me a lithographed portrait of himself soon afterwards; very like, though scarcely handsome enough; which I have carefully preserved in memory of our brief acquaintance.

There was nothing very interesting in the scenery of this day's journey, which brought us at midnight to Louisville. We slept at the Galt House; a splendid hotel; and were as handsomely lodged as though we had been in Paris, rather than hundreds of miles beyond the Alleghanies.

The city presenting no objects of sufficient interest to detain us on our way, we resolved to proceed next day by another steamboat, the Fulton, and to join it, about noon, at a suburb called Portland, where it would be delayed some time in passing through a canal.

The interval, after breakfast, we devoted to riding through the town, which is regular and cheerful: the streets being laid out at right angles, and planted with young trees. The buildings are smoky and blackened, from the use of bituminous coal, but an Englishman is well used to that appearance, and indisposed to quarrel with it. There did not appear to be much business stirring; and some unfinished buildings and improvements seemed to intimate that the city had been overbuilt in the ardour of 'going- a-head,' and was suffering under the re-action consequent upon such feverish forcing of its powers.

On our way to Portland, we passed a 'Magistrate's office,' which amused me, as looking far more like a dame school than any police establishment: for this awful Institution was nothing but a little lazy, good-for-nothing front parlour, open to the street; wherein two or three figures (I presume the magistrate and his myrmidons) were basking in the sunshine, the very effigies of languor and repose. It was a perfect picture of justice retired from business for want of customers; her sword and scales sold off; napping comfortably with her legs upon the table.

Here, as elsewhere in these parts, the road was perfectly alive with pigs of all ages; lying about in every direction, fast asleep.; or grunting along in quest of hidden dainties. I had always a sneaking kindness for these odd animals, and found a constant source of amusement, when all others failed, in watching their proceedings. As we were riding along this morning, I observed a little incident between two youthful pigs, which was so very human as to be inexpressibly comical and grotesque at the time, though I dare say, in telling, it is tame enough.

One young gentleman (a very delicate porker with several straws sticking about his nose, betokening recent investigations in a dung-hill) was walking deliberately on, profoundly thinking, when suddenly his brother, who was lying in a miry hole unseen by him, rose up immediately before his startled eyes, ghostly with damp mud. Never was pig's whole mass of blood so turned. He started back at least three feet, gazed for a moment, and then shot off as hard as he could go: his excessively little tail vibrating with speed and terror like a distracted pendulum. But before he had gone very far, he began to reason with himself as to the nature of this frightful appearance; and as he reasoned, he relaxed his speed by gradual degrees; until at last he stopped, and faced about. There was his brother, with the mud upon him glazing in the sun, yet staring out of the very same hole, perfectly amazed at his proceedings! He was no sooner assured of this; and he assured himself so carefully that one may almost say he shaded his eyes with his hand to see the better; than he came back at a round trot, pounced upon him, and summarily took off a piece of his tail; as a caution to him to be careful what he was about for the future, and never to play tricks with his family any more.

We found the steamboat in the canal, waiting for the slow process of getting through the lock, and went on board, where we shortly afterwards had a new kind of visitor in the person of a certain Kentucky Giant whose name is Porter, and who is of the moderate height of seven feet eight inches, in his stockings.

There never was a race of people who so completely gave the lie to history as these giants, or whom all the chroniclers have so cruelly libelled. Instead of roaring and ravaging about the world, constantly catering for their cannibal larders, and perpetually going to market in an unlawful manner, they are the meekest people in any man's acquaintance: rather inclining to milk and vegetable diet, and bearing anything for a quiet life. So decidedly are amiability and mildness their characteristics, that I confess I look upon that youth who distinguished himself by the slaughter of these inoffensive persons, as a false-hearted brigand, who, pretending to philanthropic motives, was secretly influenced only by the wealth stored up within their castles, and the hope of plunder. And I lean the more to this opinion from finding that even the historian of those exploits, with all his partiality for his hero, is fain to admit that the slaughtered monsters in question were of a very innocent and simple turn; extremely guileless and ready of belief; lending a credulous ear to the most improbable tales; suffering themselves to be easily entrapped into pits; and even (as in the case of the Welsh Giant) with an excess of the hospitable politeness of a landlord, ripping themselves open, rather than hint at the possibility of their guests being versed in the vagabond arts of sleight-of-hand and hocus-pocus.

The Kentucky Giant was but another illustration of the truth of this position. He had a weakness in the region of the knees, and a trustfulness in his long face, which appealed even to five-feet nine for encouragement and support. He was only twenty-five years old, he said, and had grown recently, for it had been found necessary to make an addition to the legs of his inexpressibles. At fifteen he was a short boy, and in those days his English father and his Irish mother had rather snubbed him, as being too small of stature to sustain the credit of the family. He added that his health had not been good, though it was better now; but short people are not wanting who whisper that he drinks too hard.

I understand he drives a hackney-coach, though how he does it, unless he stands on the footboard behind, and lies along the roof upon his chest, with his chin in the box, it would be difficult to comprehend. He brought his gun with him, as a curiosity.

Christened 'The Little Rifle,' and displayed outside a shop-window, it would make the fortune of any retail business in Holborn. When he had shown himself and talked a little while, he withdrew with his pocket-instrument, and went bobbing down the cabin, among men of six feet high and upwards, like a light-house walking among lamp-posts.

Within a few minutes afterwards, we were out of the canal, and in the Ohio river again.

The arrangements of the boat were like those of the Messenger, and the passengers were of the same order of people. We fed at the same times, on the same kind of viands, in the same dull manner, and with the same observances. The company appeared to be oppressed by the same tremendous concealments, and had as little capacity of enjoyment or light-heartedness. I never in my life did see such listless, heavy dulness as brooded over these meals: the very recollection of it weighs me down, and makes me, for the moment, wretched. Reading and writing on my knee, in our little cabin, I really dreaded the coming of the hour that summoned us to table; and was as glad to escape from it again, as if it had been a penance or a punishment. Healthy cheerfulness and good spirits forming a part of the banquet, I could soak my crusts in the fountain with Le Sage's strolling player, and revel in their glad enjoyment: but sitting down with so many fellow-animals to ward off thirst and hunger as a business; to empty, each creature, his Yahoo's trough as quickly as he can, and then slink sullenly away; to have these social sacraments stripped of everything but the mere greedy satisfaction of the natural cravings; goes so against the grain with me, that I seriously believe the recollection of these funeral feasts will be a waking nightmare to me all my life.

There was some relief in this boat, too, which there had not been in the other, for the captain (a blunt, good-natured fellow) had his handsome wife with him, who was disposed to be lively and agreeable, as were a few other lady-passengers who had their seats about us at the same end of the table. But nothing could have made head against the depressing influence of the general body. There was a magnetism of dulness in them which would have beaten down the most facetious companion that the earth ever knew. A jest would have been a crime, and a smile would have faded into a grinning horror. Such deadly, leaden people; such systematic plodding, weary, insupportable heaviness; such a mass of animated indigestion in respect of all that was genial, jovial, frank, social, or hearty; never, sure, was brought together elsewhere since the world began.

Nor was the scenery, as we approached the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, at all inspiriting in its influence. The trees were stunted in their growth; the banks were low and flat; the settlements and log cabins fewer in number: their inhabitants more wan and wretched than any we had encountered yet. No songs of birds were in the air, no pleasant scents, no moving lights and shadows from swift passing clouds. Hour after hour, the changeless glare of the hot, unwinking sky, shone upon the same monotonous objects. Hour after hour, the river rolled along, as wearily and slowly as the time itself.

At length, upon the morning of the third day, we arrived at a spot so much more desolate than any we had yet beheld, that the forlornest places we had passed, were, in comparison with it, full of interest. At the junction of the two rivers, on ground so flat and low and marshy, that at certain seasons of the year it is inundated to the house-tops, lies a breeding-place of fever, ague, and death; vaunted in England as a mine of Golden Hope, and speculated in, on the faith of monstrous representations, to many people's ruin. A dismal swamp, on which the half-built houses rot away: cleared here and there for the space of a few yards; and teeming, then, with rank unwholesome vegetation, in whose baleful shade the wretched wanderers who are tempted hither, droop, and die, and lay their bones; the hateful Mississippi circling and eddying before it, and turning off upon its southern course a slimy monster hideous to behold; a hotbed of disease, an ugly sepulchre, a grave uncheered by any gleam of promise: a place without one single quality, in earth or air or water, to commend it: such is this dismal Cairo.

But what words shall describe the Mississippi, great father of rivers, who (praise be to Heaven) has no young children like him! An enormous ditch, sometimes two or three miles wide, running liquid mud, six miles an hour: its strong and frothy current choked and obstructed everywhere by huge logs and whole forest trees: now twining themselves together in great rafts, from the interstices of which a sedgy, lazy foam works up, to float upon the water's top; now rolling past like monstrous bodies, their tangled roots showing like matted hair; now glancing singly by like giant leeches; and now writhing round and round in the vortex of some small whirlpool, like wounded snakes. The banks low, the trees dwarfish, the marshes swarming with frogs, the wretched cabins few and far apart, their inmates hollow-cheeked and pale, the weather very hot, mosquitoes penetrating into every crack and crevice of the boat, mud and slime on everything: nothing pleasant in its aspect, but the harmless lightning which flickers every night upon the dark horizon.

For two days we toiled up this foul stream, striking constantly against the floating timber, or stopping to avoid those more dangerous obstacles, the snags, or sawyers, which are the hidden trunks of trees that have their roots below the tide. When the nights are very dark, the look-out stationed in the head of the boat, knows by the ripple of the water if any great impediment be near at hand, and rings a bell beside him, which is the signal for the engine to be stopped: but always in the night this bell has work to do, and after every ring, there comes a blow which renders it no easy matter to remain in bed.

The decline of day here was very gorgeous; tingeing the firmament deeply with red and gold, up to the very keystone of the arch above us. As the sun went down behind the bank, the slightest blades of grass upon it seemed to become as distinctly visible as the arteries in the skeleton of a leaf; and when, as it slowly sank, the red and golden bars upon the water grew dimmer, and dimmer yet, as if they were sinking too; and all the glowing colours of departing day paled, inch by inch, before the sombre night; the scene became a thousand times more lonesome and more dreary than before, and all its influences darkened with the sky.

We drank the muddy water of this river while we were upon it. It is considered wholesome by the natives, and is something more opaque than gruel. I have seen water like it at the Filter-shops, but nowhere else.

On the fourth night after leaving Louisville, we reached St. Louis, and here I witnessed the conclusion of an incident, trifling enough in itself, but very pleasant to see, which had interested me during the whole journey.

There was a little woman on board, with a little baby; and both little woman and little child were cheerful, good-looking, bright- eyed, and fair to see. The little woman had been passing a long time with her sick mother in New York, and had left her home in St. Louis, in that condition in which ladies who truly love their lords desire to be. The baby was born in her mother's house; and she had not seen her husband (to whom she was now returning), for twelve months: having left him a month or two after their marriage.

Well, to be sure, there never was a little woman so full of hope, and tenderness, and love, and anxiety, as this little woman was: and all day long she wondered whether 'He' would be at the wharf; and whether 'He' had got her letter; and whether, if she sent the baby ashore by somebody else, 'He' would know it, meeting it in the street: which, seeing that he had never set eyes upon it in his life, was not very likely in the abstract, but was probable enough, to the young mother. She was such an artless little creature; and was in such a sunny, beaming, hopeful state; and let out all this matter clinging close about her heart, so freely; that all the other lady passengers entered into the spirit of it as much as she; and the captain (who heard all about it from his wife) was wondrous sly, I promise you: inquiring, every time we met at table, as in forgetfulness, whether she expected anybody to meet her at St. Louis, and whether she would want to go ashore the night we reached it (but he supposed she wouldn't), and cutting many other dry jokes of that nature. There was one little weazen, dried-apple-faced old woman, who took occasion to doubt the constancy of husbands in such circumstances of bereavement; and there was another lady (with a lap-dog) old enough to moralize on the lightness of human affections, and yet not so old that she could help nursing the baby, now and then, or laughing with the rest, when the little woman called it by its father's name, and asked it all manner of fantastic questions concerning him in the joy of her heart.

It was something of a blow to the little woman, that when we were within twenty miles of our destination, it became clearly necessary to put this baby to bed. But she got over it with the same good humour; tied a handkerchief round her head; and came out into the little gallery with the rest. Then, such an oracle as she became in reference to the localities! and such facetiousness as was displayed by the married ladies! and such sympathy as was shown by the single ones! and such peals of laughter as the little woman herself (who would just as soon have cried) greeted every jest with!

At last, there were the lights of St. Louis, and here was the wharf, and those were the steps: and the little woman covering her face with her hands, and laughing (or seeming to laugh) more than ever, ran into her own cabin, and shut herself up. I have no doubt that in the charming inconsistency of such excitement, she stopped her ears, lest she should hear 'Him' asking for her: but I did not see her do it.

Then, a great crowd of people rushed on board, though the boat was not yet made fast, but was wandering about, among the other boats, to find a landing-place: and everybody looked for the husband: and nobody saw him: when, in the midst of us all - Heaven knows how she ever got there - there was the little woman clinging with both arms tight round the neck of a fine, good-looking, sturdy young fellow! and in a moment afterwards, there she was again, actually clapping her little hands for joy, as she dragged him through the small door of her small cabin, to look at the baby as he lay asleep!

We went to a large hotel, called the Planter's House: built like an English hospital, with long passages and bare walls, and sky- lights above the room-doors for the free circulation of air. There were a great many boarders in it; and as many lights sparkled and glistened from the windows down into the street below, when we drove up, as if it had been illuminated on some occasion of rejoicing. It is an excellent house, and the proprietors have most bountiful notions of providing the creature comforts. Dining alone with my wife in our own room, one day, I counted fourteen dishes on the table at once.

In the old French portion of the town, the thoroughfares are narrow and crooked, and some of the houses are very quaint and picturesque: being built of wood, with tumble-down galleries before the windows, approachable by stairs or rather ladders from the street. There are queer little barbers' shops and drinking- houses too, in this quarter; and abundance of crazy old tenements with blinking casements, such as may be seen in Flanders. Some of these ancient habitations, with high garret gable-windows perking into the roofs, have a kind of French shrug about them; and being lop-sided with age, appear to hold their heads askew, besides, as if they were grimacing in astonishment at the American Improvements.

It is hardly necessary to say, that these consist of wharfs and warehouses, and new buildings in all directions; and of a great many vast plans which are still 'progressing.' Already, however, some very good houses, broad streets, and marble-fronted shops, have gone so far ahead as to be in a state of completion; and the town bids fair in a few years to improve considerably: though it is not likely ever to vie, in point of elegance or beauty, with Cincinnati.

The Roman Catholic religion, introduced here by the early French settlers, prevails extensively. Among the public institutions are a Jesuit college; a convent for 'the Ladies of the Sacred Heart;' and a large chapel attached to the college, which was in course of erection at the time of my visit, and was intended to be consecrated on the second of December in the next year. The architect of this building, is one of the reverend fathers of the school, and the works proceed under his sole direction. The organ will be sent from Belgium.

In addition to these establishments, there is a Roman Catholic cathedral, dedicated to Saint Francis Xavier; and a hospital, founded by the munificence of a deceased resident, who was a member of that church. It also sends missionaries from hence among the Indian tribes.

The Unitarian church is represented, in this remote place, as in most other parts of America, by a gentleman of great worth and excellence. The poor have good reason to remember and bless it; for it befriends them, and aids the cause of rational education, without any sectarian or selfish views. It is liberal in all its actions; of kind construction; and of wide benevolence.

There are three free-schools already erected, and in full operation in this city. A fourth is building, and will soon be opened.

No man ever admits the unhealthiness of the place he dwells in (unless he is going away from it), and I shall therefore, I have no doubt, be at issue with the inhabitants of St. Louis, in questioning the perfect salubrity of its climate, and in hinting that I think it must rather dispose to fever, in the summer and autumnal seasons. Just adding, that it is very hot, lies among great rivers, and has vast tracts of undrained swampy land around it, I leave the reader to form his own opinion.

As I had a great desire to see a Prairie before turning back from the furthest point of my wanderings; and as some gentlemen of the town had, in their hospitable consideration, an equal desire to gratify me; a day was fixed, before my departure, for an expedition to the Looking-Glass Prairie, which is within thirty miles of the town. Deeming it possible that my readers may not object to know what kind of thing such a gipsy party may be at that distance from home, and among what sort of objects it moves, I will describe the jaunt in another chapter.

CHAPTER XIII - A JAUNT TO THE LOOKING-GLASS PRAIRIE AND BACK

I MAY premise that the word Prairie is variously pronounced PARAAER, PAREARER, PAROARER. The latter mode of pronunciation is perhaps the most in favour.

We were fourteen in all, and all young men: indeed it is a singular though very natural feature in the society of these distant settlements, that it is mainly composed of adventurous persons in the prime of life, and has very few grey heads among it. There were no ladies: the trip being a fatiguing one: and we were to start at five o'clock in the morning punctually.

I was called at four, that I might be certain of keeping nobody waiting; and having got some bread and milk for breakfast, threw up the window and looked down into the street, expecting to see the whole party busily astir, and great preparations going on below. But as everything was very quiet, and the street presented that hopeless aspect with which five o'clock in the morning is familiar elsewhere, I deemed it as well to go to bed again, and went accordingly.

I woke again at seven o'clock, and by that time the party had assembled, and were gathered round, one light carriage, with a very stout axletree; one something on wheels like an amateur carrier's cart; one double phaeton of great antiquity and unearthly construction; one gig with a great hole in its back and a broken head; and one rider on horseback who was to go on before. I got into the first coach with three companions; the rest bestowed themselves in the other vehicles; two large baskets were made fast to the lightest; two large stone jars in wicker cases, technically known as demi-johns, were consigned to the 'least rowdy' of the party for safe-keeping; and the procession moved off to the ferryboat, in which it was to cross the river bodily, men, horses, carriages, and all, as the manner in these parts is.

We got over the river in due course, and mustered again before a little wooden box on wheels, hove down all aslant in a morass, with 'MERCHANT TAILOR' painted in very large letters over the door. Having settled the order of proceeding, and the road to be taken, we started off once more and began to make our way through an ill- favoured Black Hollow, called, less expressively, the American Bottom.

The previous day had been - not to say hot, for the term is weak and lukewarm in its power of conveying an idea of the temperature. The town had been on fire; in a blaze. But at night it had come on to rain in torrents, and all night long it had rained without cessation. We had a pair of very strong horses, but travelled at the rate of little more than a couple of miles an hour, through one unbroken slough of black mud and water. It had no variety but in depth. Now it was only half over the wheels, now it hid the axletree, and now the coach sank down in it almost to the windows. The air resounded in all directions with the loud chirping of the frogs, who, with the pigs (a coarse, ugly breed, as unwholesome- looking as though they were the spontaneous growth of the country), had the whole scene to themselves. Here and there we passed a log hut: but the wretched cabins were wide apart and thinly scattered, for though the soil is very rich in this place, few people can exist in such a deadly atmosphere. On either side of the track, if it deserve the name, was the thick 'bush;' and everywhere was stagnant, slimy, rotten, filthy water.

As it is the custom in these parts to give a horse a gallon or so of cold water whenever he is in a foam with heat, we halted for that purpose, at a log inn in the wood, far removed from any other residence. It consisted of one room, bare-roofed and bare-walled of course, with a loft above. The ministering priest was a swarthy young savage, in a shirt of cotton print like bed-furniture, and a pair of ragged trousers. There were a couple of young boys, too, nearly naked, lying idle by the well; and they, and he, and THE traveller at the inn, turned out to look at us.

The traveller was an old man with a grey gristly beard two inches long, a shaggy moustache of the same hue, and enormous eyebrows; which almost obscured his lazy, semi-drunken glance, as he stood regarding us with folded arms: poising himself alternately upon his toes and heels. On being addressed by one of the party, he drew nearer, and said, rubbing his chin (which scraped under his horny hand like fresh gravel beneath a nailed shoe), that he was from Delaware, and had lately bought a farm 'down there,' pointing into one of the marshes where the stunted trees were thickest. He was 'going,' he added, to St. Louis, to fetch his family, whom he had left behind; but he seemed in no great hurry to bring on these incumbrances, for when we moved away, he loitered back into the cabin, and was plainly bent on stopping there so long as his money lasted. He was a great politician of course, and explained his opinions at some length to one of our company; but I only remember that he concluded with two sentiments, one of which was, Somebody for ever; and the other, Blast everybody else! which is by no means a bad abstract of the general creed in these matters.

When the horses were swollen out to about twice their natural dimensions (there seems to be an idea here, that this kind of inflation improves their going), we went forward again, through mud and mire, and damp, and festering heat, and brake and bush, attended always by the music of the frogs and pigs, until nearly noon, when we halted at a place called Belleville.

Belleville was a small collection of wooden houses, huddled together in the very heart of the bush and swamp. Many of them had singularly bright doors of red and yellow; for the place had been lately visited by a travelling painter, 'who got along,' as I was told, 'by eating his way.' The criminal court was sitting, and was at that moment trying some criminals for horse-stealing: with whom it would most likely go hard: for live stock of all kinds being necessarily very much exposed in the woods, is held by the community in rather higher value than human life; and for this reason, juries generally make a point of finding all men indicted for cattle-stealing, guilty, whether or no.

The horses belonging to the bar, the judge, and witnesses, were tied to temporary racks set up roughly in the road; by which is to be understood, a forest path, nearly knee-deep in mud and slime.

There was an hotel in this place, which, like all hotels in America, had its large dining-room for the public table. It was an odd, shambling, low-roofed out-house, half-cowshed and half- kitchen, with a coarse brown canvas table-cloth, and tin sconces stuck against the walls, to hold candles at supper-time. The horseman had gone forward to have coffee and some eatables prepared, and they were by this time nearly ready. He had ordered 'wheat-bread and chicken fixings,' in preference to 'corn-bread and common doings.' The latter kind of rejection includes only pork and bacon. The former comprehends broiled ham, sausages, veal cutlets, steaks, and such other viands of that nature as may be supposed, by a tolerably wide poetical construction, 'to fix' a chicken comfortably in the digestive organs of any lady or gentleman.

On one of the door-posts at this inn, was a tin plate, whereon was inscribed in characters of gold, 'Doctor Crocus;' and on a sheet of paper, pasted up by the side of this plate, was a written announcement that Dr. Crocus would that evening deliver a lecture on Phrenology for the benefit of the Belleville public; at a charge, for admission, of so much a head.

Straying up-stairs, during the preparation of the chicken fixings, I happened to pass the doctor's chamber; and as the door stood wide open, and the room was empty, I made bold to peep in.

It was a bare, unfurnished, comfortless room, with an unframed portrait hanging up at the head of the bed; a likeness, I take it, of the Doctor, for the forehead was fully displayed, and great stress was laid by the artist upon its phrenological developments. The bed itself was covered with an old patchwork counterpane. The room was destitute of carpet or of curtain. There was a damp fireplace without any stove, full of wood ashes; a chair, and a very small table; and on the last-named piece of furniture was displayed, in grand array, the doctor's library, consisting of some half-dozen greasy old books.

Now, it certainly looked about the last apartment on the whole earth out of which any man would be likely to get anything to do him good. But the door, as I have said, stood coaxingly open, and plainly said in conjunction with the chair, the portrait, the table, and the books, 'Walk in, gentlemen, walk in! Don't be ill, gentlemen, when you may be well in no time. Doctor

Crocus is here, gentlemen, the celebrated Dr. Crocus! Dr. Crocus has come all this way to cure you, gentlemen. If you haven't heard of Dr. Crocus, it's your fault, gentlemen, who live a little way out of the world here: not Dr. Crocus's. Walk in, gentlemen, walk in!'

In the passage below, when I went down-stairs again, was Dr. Crocus himself. A crowd had flocked in from the Court House, and a voice from among them called out to the landlord, 'Colonel! introduce Doctor Crocus.'

'Mr. Dickens,' says the colonel, 'Doctor Crocus.'

Upon which Doctor Crocus, who is a tall, fine-looking Scotchman, but rather fierce and warlike in appearance for a professor of the peaceful art of healing, bursts out of the concourse with his right arm extended, and his chest thrown out as far as it will possibly come, and says:

'Your countryman, sir!'

Whereupon Doctor Crocus and I shake hands; and Doctor Crocus looks as if I didn't by any means realise his expectations, which, in a linen blouse, and a great straw hat, with a green ribbon, and no gloves, and my face and nose profusely ornamented with the stings of mosquitoes and the bites of bugs, it is very likely I did not.

'Long in these parts, sir?' says I.

'Three or four months, sir,' says the Doctor.

'Do you think of soon returning to the old country?' says I.

Doctor Crocus makes no verbal answer, but gives me an imploring look, which says so plainly 'Will you ask me that again, a little louder, if you please?' that I repeat the question.

'Think of soon returning to the old country, sir!' repeats the Doctor.

'To the old country, sir,' I rejoin.

Doctor Crocus looks round upon the crowd to observe the effect he produces, rubs his hands, and says, in a very loud voice:

'Not yet awhile, sir, not yet. You won't catch me at that just yet, sir. I am a little too fond of freedom for THAT, sir. Ha, ha! It's not so easy for a man to tear himself from a free country such as this is, sir. Ha, ha! No, no! Ha, ha! None of that till one's obliged to do it, sir. No, no!'

As Doctor Crocus says these latter words, he shakes his head, knowingly, and laughs again. Many of the bystanders shake their heads in concert with the doctor, and laugh too, and look at each other as much as to say, 'A pretty bright and first-rate sort of chap is Crocus!' and unless I am very much mistaken, a good many people went to the lecture that night, who never thought about phrenology, or about Doctor Crocus either, in all their lives before.

From Belleville, we went on, through the same desolate kind of waste, and constantly attended, without the interval of a moment, by the same music; until, at three o'clock in the afternoon, we halted once more at a village called Lebanon to inflate the horses again, and give them some corn besides: of which they stood much in need. Pending this ceremony, I walked into the village, where I met a full-sized dwelling-house coming down-hill at a round trot, drawn by a score or more of oxen.

The public-house was so very clean and good a one, that the managers of the jaunt resolved to return to it and put up there for the night, if possible. This course decided on, and the horses being well refreshed, we again pushed forward, and came upon the Prairie at sunset.

It would be difficult to say why, or how - though it was possibly from having heard and read so much about it - but the effect on me was disappointment. Looking towards the setting sun, there lay, stretched out before my view, a vast expanse of level ground; unbroken, save by one thin line of trees, which scarcely amounted to a scratch upon the great blank; until it met the glowing sky, wherein it seemed to dip: mingling with its rich colours, and mellowing in its distant blue. There it lay, a tranquil sea or lake without water, if such a simile be admissible, with the day going down upon it: a few birds wheeling here and there: and solitude and silence reigning paramount around. But the grass was not yet high; there were bare black patches on the ground; and the few wild flowers that the eye could see, were poor and scanty. Great as the picture was, its very flatness and extent, which left nothing to the imagination, tamed it down and cramped its interest. I felt little of that sense of freedom and exhilaration which a Scottish heath inspires, or even our English downs awaken. It was lonely and wild, but oppressive in its barren monotony. I felt that in traversing the Prairies, I could never abandon myself to the scene, forgetful of all else; as I should do instinctively, were the heather underneath my feet, or an iron-bound coast beyond; but should often glance towards the distant and frequently-receding line of the horizon, and wish it gained and passed. It is not a scene to be forgotten, but it is scarcely one, I think (at all events, as I saw it), to remember with much pleasure, or to covet the looking-on again, in after-life.

We encamped near a solitary log-house, for the sake of its water, and dined upon the plain. The baskets contained roast fowls, buffalo's tongue (an exquisite dainty, by the way), ham, bread, cheese, and butter; biscuits, champagne, sherry; lemons and sugar for punch; and abundance of rough ice. The meal was delicious, and the entertainers were the soul of kindness and good humour. I have often recalled that cheerful party to my pleasant recollection since, and shall not easily forget, in junketings nearer home with friends of older date, my boon companions on the Prairie.

Returning to Lebanon that night, we lay at the little inn at which we had halted in the afternoon. In point of cleanliness and comfort it would have suffered by no comparison with any English alehouse, of a homely kind, in England.

Rising at five o'clock next morning, I took a walk about the village: none of the houses were strolling about to-day, but it was early for them yet, perhaps: and then amused myself by lounging in a kind of farm-yard behind the tavern, of which the leading features were, a strange jumble of rough sheds for stables; a rude colonnade, built as a cool place of summer resort; a deep well; a great earthen mound for keeping vegetables in, in winter time; and a pigeon-house, whose little apertures looked, as they do in all pigeon-houses, very much too small for the admission of the plump and swelling-breasted birds who were strutting about it, though they tried to get in never so hard. That interest exhausted, I took a survey of the inn's two parlours, which were decorated with coloured prints of Washington, and President Madison, and of a white-faced young lady (much speckled by the flies), who held up her gold neck-chain for the admiration of the spectator, and informed all admiring comers that she was 'Just Seventeen:' although I should have thought her older. In the best room were two oil portraits of the kit-cat size, representing the landlord and his infant son; both looking as bold as lions, and staring out of the canvas with an intensity that would have been cheap at any price. They were painted, I think, by the artist who had touched up the Belleville doors with red and gold; for I seemed to recognise his style immediately.

After breakfast, we started to return by a different way from that which we had taken yesterday, and coming up at ten o'clock with an encampment of German emigrants carrying their goods in carts, who had made a rousing fire which they were just quitting, stopped there to refresh. And very pleasant the fire was; for, hot though it had been yesterday, it was quite cold to-day, and the wind blew keenly. Looming in the distance, as we rode along, was another of the ancient Indian burial-places, called The Monks' Mound; in memory of a body of fanatics of the order of La Trappe, who founded a desolate convent there, many years ago, when there were no settlers within a thousand miles, and were all swept off by the pernicious climate: in which lamentable fatality, few rational people will suppose, perhaps, that society experienced any very severe deprivation.

The track of to-day had the same features as the track of yesterday. There was the swamp, the bush, and the perpetual chorus of frogs, the rank unseemly growth, the unwholesome steaming earth. Here and there, and frequently too, we encountered a solitary broken-down waggon, full of some new settler's goods. It was a pitiful sight to see one of these vehicles deep in the mire; the axle-tree broken; the wheel lying idly by its side; the man gone miles away, to look for assistance; the woman seated among their wandering household gods with a baby at her breast, a picture of forlorn, dejected patience; the team of oxen crouching down mournfully in the mud, and breathing forth such clouds of vapour from their mouths and nostrils, that all the damp mist and fog around seemed to have come direct from them.

In due time we mustered once again before the merchant tailor's, and having done so, crossed over to the city in the ferry-boat: passing, on the way, a spot called Bloody Island, the duelling- ground of St. Louis, and so designated in honour of the last fatal combat fought there, which was with pistols, breast to breast. Both combatants fell dead upon the ground; and possibly some rational people may think of them, as of the gloomy madmen on the Monks' Mound, that they were no great loss to the community.

CHAPTER XIV - RETURN TO CINCINNATI. A STAGE-COACH RIDE FROM THAT CITY TO COLUMBUS, AND THENCE TO SANDUSKY. SO, BY LAKE ERIE, TO THE FALLS OF NIAGARA

AS I had a desire to travel through the interior of the state of Ohio, and to 'strike the lakes,' as the phrase is, at a small town called Sandusky, to which that route would conduct us on our way to Niagara, we had to return from St. Louis by the way we had come, and to retrace our former track as far as Cincinnati.

The day on which we were to take leave of St. Louis being very fine; and the steamboat, which was to have started I don't know how early in the morning, postponing, for the third or fourth time, her departure until the afternoon; we rode forward to an old French village on the river, called properly Carondelet, and nicknamed Vide Poche, and arranged that the packet should call for us there.

The place consisted of a few poor cottages, and two or three public-houses; the state of whose larders certainly seemed to justify the second designation of the village, for there was nothing to eat in any of them. At length, however, by going back some half a mile or so, we found a solitary house where ham and coffee were procurable; and there we tarried to wait the advent of the boat, which would come in sight from the green before the door, a long way off.

It was a neat, unpretending village tavern, and we took our repast in a quaint little room with a bed in it, decorated with some old oil paintings, which in their time had probably done duty in a Catholic chapel or monastery. The fare was very good, and served with great cleanliness. The house was kept by a characteristic old couple, with whom we had a long talk, and who were perhaps a very good sample of that kind of people in the West.

The landlord was a dry, tough, hard-faced old fellow (not so very old either, for he was but just turned sixty, I should think), who had been out with the militia in the last war with England, and had seen all kinds of service, - except a battle; and he had been very near seeing that, he added: very near. He had all his life been restless and locomotive, with an irresistible desire for change; and was still the son of his old self: for if he had nothing to keep him at home, he said (slightly jerking his hat and his thumb towards the window of the room in which the old lady sat, as we stood talking in front of the house), he would clean up his musket, and be off to Texas to-morrow morning. He was one of the very many descendants of Cain proper to this continent, who seem destined from their birth to serve as pioneers in the great human army: who gladly go on from year to year extending its outposts, and leaving home after home behind them; and die at last, utterly regardless of their graves being left thousands of miles behind, by the wandering generation who succeed.

His wife was a domesticated, kind-hearted old soul, who had come with him, 'from the queen city of the world,' which, it seemed, was Philadelphia; but had no love for this Western country, and indeed had little reason to bear it any; having seen her children, one by one, die here of fever, in the full prime and beauty of their youth. Her heart was sore, she said, to think of them; and to talk on this theme, even to strangers, in that blighted place, so far from her old home, eased it somewhat, and became a melancholy pleasure.

The boat appearing towards evening, we bade adieu to the poor old lady and her vagrant spouse, and making for the nearest landing- place, were soon on board The Messenger again, in our old cabin, and steaming down the Mississippi.

If the coming up this river, slowly making head against the stream, be an irksome journey, the shooting down it with the turbid current is almost worse; for then the boat, proceeding at the rate of twelve or fifteen miles an hour, has to force its passage through a labyrinth of floating logs, which, in the dark, it is often impossible to see beforehand or avoid. All that night, the bell was never silent for five minutes at a time; and after every ring the vessel reeled again, sometimes beneath a single blow, sometimes beneath a dozen dealt in quick succession, the lightest of which seemed more than enough to beat in her frail keel, as though it had been pie-crust. Looking down upon the filthy river after dark, it seemed to be alive with monsters, as these black masses rolled upon the surface, or came starting up again, head first, when the boat, in ploughing her way among a shoal of such obstructions, drove a few among them for the moment under water. Sometimes the engine stopped during a long interval, and then before her and behind, and gathering close about her on all sides, were so many of these ill- favoured obstacles that she was fairly hemmed in; the centre of a floating island; and was constrained to pause until they parted, somewhere, as dark clouds will do before the wind, and opened by degrees a channel out.

In good time next morning, however, we came again in sight of the detestable morass called Cairo; and stopping there to take in wood, lay alongside a barge, whose starting timbers scarcely held together. It was moored to the bank, and on its side was painted 'Coffee House;' that being, I suppose, the floating paradise to which the people fly for shelter when they lose their houses for a month or two beneath the hideous waters of the Mississippi. But looking southward from this point, we had the satisfaction of seeing that intolerable river dragging its slimy length and ugly freight abruptly off towards New Orleans; and passing a yellow line which stretched across the current, were again upon the clear Ohio, never, I trust, to see the Mississippi more, saving in troubled dreams and nightmares. Leaving it for the company of its sparkling neighbour, was like the transition from pain to ease, or the awakening from a horrible vision to cheerful realities.

We arrived at Louisville on the fourth night, and gladly availed ourselves of its excellent hotel. Next day we went on in the Ben Franklin, a beautiful mail steamboat, and reached Cincinnati shortly after midnight. Being by this time nearly tired of sleeping upon shelves, we had remained awake to go ashore straightway; and groping a passage across the dark decks of other boats, and among labyrinths of engine-machinery and leaking casks of molasses, we reached the streets, knocked up the porter at the hotel where we had stayed before, and were, to our great joy, safely housed soon afterwards.

We rested but one day at Cincinnati, and then resumed our journey to Sandusky. As it comprised two varieties of stage-coach travelling, which, with those I have already glanced at, comprehend the main characteristics of this mode of transit in America, I will take the reader as our fellow-passenger, and pledge myself to perform the distance with all possible despatch.

Our place of destination in the first instance is Columbus. It is distant about a hundred and twenty miles from Cincinnati, but there is a macadamised road (rare blessing!) the whole way, and the rate of travelling upon it is six miles an hour.

We start at eight o'clock in the morning, in a great mail-coach, whose huge cheeks are so very ruddy and plethoric, that it appears to be troubled with a tendency of blood to the head. Dropsical it certainly is, for it will hold a dozen passengers inside. But, wonderful to add, it is very clean and bright, being nearly new; and rattles through the streets of Cincinnati gaily.

Our way lies through a beautiful country, richly cultivated, and luxuriant in its promise of an abundant harvest. Sometimes we pass a field where the strong bristling stalks of Indian corn look like a crop of walking-sticks, and sometimes an enclosure where the green wheat is springing up among a labyrinth of stumps; the primitive worm-fence is universal, and an ugly thing it is; but the farms are neatly kept, and, save for these differences, one might be travelling just now in Kent.

We often stop to water at a roadside inn, which is always dull and silent. The coachman dismounts and fills his bucket, and holds it to the horses' heads. There is scarcely ever any one to help him; there are seldom any loungers standing round; and never any stable- company with jokes to crack. Sometimes, when we have changed our team, there is a difficulty in starting again, arising out of the prevalent mode of breaking a young horse: which is to catch him, harness him against his will, and put him in a stage-coach without further notice: but we get on somehow or other, after a great many kicks and a violent struggle; and jog on as before again.

Occasionally, when we stop to change, some two or three half- drunken loafers will come loitering out with their hands in their pockets, or will be seen kicking their heels in rocking-chairs, or lounging on the window-sill, or sitting on a rail within the colonnade: they have not often anything to say though, either to us or to each other, but sit there idly staring at the coach and horses. The landlord of the inn is usually among them, and seems, of all the party, to be the least connected with the business of the house. Indeed he is with reference to the tavern, what the driver is in relation to the coach and passengers: whatever happens in his sphere of action, he is quite indifferent, and perfectly easy in his mind.

The frequent change of coachmen works no change or variety in the coachman's character. He is always dirty, sullen, and taciturn. If he be capable of smartness of any kind, moral or physical, he has a faculty of concealing it which is truly marvellous. He never speaks to you as you sit beside him on the box, and if you speak to him, he answers (if at all) in monosyllables. He points out nothing on the road, and seldom looks at anything: being, to all appearance, thoroughly weary of it and of existence generally. As to doing the honours of his coach, his business, as I have said, is with the horses. The coach follows because it is attached to them and goes on wheels: not because you are in it. Sometimes, towards the end of a long stage, he suddenly breaks out into a discordant fragment of an election song, but his face never sings along with him: it is only his voice, and not often that.

He always chews and always spits, and never encumbers himself with a pocket-handkerchief. The consequences to the box passenger, especially when the wind blows towards him, are not agreeable.

Whenever the coach stops, and you can hear the voices of the inside passengers; or whenever any bystander addresses them, or any one among them; or they address each other; you will hear one phrase repeated over and over and over again to the most extraordinary extent. It is an ordinary and unpromising phrase enough, being neither more nor less than 'Yes, sir;' but it is adapted to every variety of circumstance, and fills up every pause in the conversation. Thus:-

The time is one o'clock at noon. The scene, a place where we are to stay and dine, on this journey. The coach drives up to the door of an inn. The day is warm, and there are several idlers lingering about the tavern, and waiting for the public dinner. Among them, is a stout gentleman in a brown hat, swinging himself to and fro in a rocking-chair on the pavement.

As the coach stops, a gentleman in a straw hat looks out of the window:

STRAW HAT. (To the stout gentleman in the rocking-chair.) I reckon that's Judge Jefferson, an't it?

BROWN HAT. (Still swinging; speaking very slowly; and without any emotion whatever.) Yes, sir.

STRAW HAT. Warm weather, Judge.

BROWN HAT. Yes, sir.

STRAW HAT. There was a snap of cold, last week.

BROWN HAT. Yes, sir.

STRAW HAT. Yes, sir.

A pause. They look at each other, very seriously.

STRAW HAT. I calculate you'll have got through that case of the corporation, Judge, by this time, now?

BROWN HAT. Yes, sir.

STRAW HAT. How did the verdict go, sir?

BROWN HAT. For the defendant, sir.

STRAW HAT. (Interrogatively.) Yes, sir?

BROWN HAT. (Affirmatively.) Yes, sir.

BOTH. (Musingly, as each gazes down the street.) Yes, sir.

Another pause. They look at each other again, still more seriously than before.

BROWN HAT. This coach is rather behind its time to-day, I guess.

STRAW HAT. (Doubtingly.) Yes, sir.

BROWN HAT. (Looking at his watch.) Yes, sir; nigh upon two hours.

STRAW HAT. (Raising his eyebrows in very great surprise.) Yes, sir!

BROWN HAT. (Decisively, as he puts up his watch.) Yes, sir.

ALL THE OTHER INSIDE PASSENGERS. (Among themselves.) Yes, sir.

COACHMAN. (In a very surly tone.) No it an't.

STRAW HAT. (To the coachman.) Well, I don't know, sir. We were a pretty tall time coming that last fifteen mile. That's a fact.

The coachman making no reply, and plainly declining to enter into any controversy on a subject so far removed from his sympathies and feelings, another passenger says, 'Yes, sir;' and the gentleman in the straw hat in acknowledgment of his courtesy, says 'Yes, sir,' to him, in return. The straw hat then inquires of the brown hat, whether that coach in which he (the straw hat) then sits, is not a new one? To which the brown hat again makes answer, 'Yes, sir.'

STRAW HAT. I thought so. Pretty loud smell of varnish, sir?

BROWN HAT. Yes, sir.

ALL THE OTHER INSIDE PASSENGERS. Yes, sir.

BROWN HAT. (To the company in general.) Yes, sir.

The conversational powers of the company having been by this time pretty heavily taxed, the straw hat opens the door and gets out; and all the rest alight also. We dine soon afterwards with the boarders in the house, and have nothing to drink but tea and coffee. As they are both very bad and the water is worse, I ask for brandy; but it is a Temperance Hotel, and spirits are not to be had for love or money. This preposterous forcing of unpleasant drinks down the reluctant throats of travellers is not at all uncommon in America, but I never discovered that the scruples of such wincing landlords induced them to preserve any unusually nice balance between the quality of their fare, and their scale of charges: on the contrary, I rather suspected them of diminishing the one and exalting the other, by way of recompense for the loss of their profit on the sale of spirituous liquors. After all, perhaps, the plainest course for persons of such tender consciences, would be, a total abstinence from tavern-keeping.

Dinner over, we get into another vehicle which is ready at the door (for the coach has been changed in the interval), and resume our journey; which continues through the same kind of country until evening, when we come to the town where we are to stop for tea and supper; and having delivered the mail bags at the Post-office, ride through the usual wide street, lined with the usual stores and houses (the drapers always having hung up at their door, by way of sign, a piece of bright red cloth), to the hotel where this meal is prepared. There being many boarders here, we sit down, a large party, and a very melancholy one as usual. But there is a buxom hostess at the head of the table, and opposite, a simple Welsh schoolmaster with his wife and child; who came here, on a speculation of greater promise than performance, to teach the classics: and they are sufficient subjects of interest until the meal is over, and another coach is ready. In it we go on once more, lighted by a bright moon, until midnight; when we stop to change the coach again, and remain for half an hour or so in a miserable room, with a blurred lithograph of Washington over the smoky fire-place, and a mighty jug of cold water on the table: to which refreshment the moody passengers do so apply themselves that they would seem to be, one and all, keen patients of Dr. Sangrado. Among them is a very little boy, who chews tobacco like a very big one; and a droning gentleman, who talks arithmetically and statistically on all subjects, from poetry downwards; and who always speaks in the same key, with exactly the same emphasis, and with very grave deliberation. He came outside just now, and told me how that the uncle of a certain young lady who had been spirited away and married by a certain captain, lived in these parts; and how this uncle was so valiant and ferocious that he shouldn't wonder if he were to follow the said captain to England, 'and shoot him down in the street wherever he found him;' in the feasibility of which strong measure I, being for the moment rather prone to contradiction, from feeling half asleep and very tired, declined to acquiesce: assuring him that if the uncle did resort to it, or gratified any other little whim of the like nature, he would find himself one morning prematurely throttled at the Old Bailey: and that he would do well to make his will before he went, as he would certainly want it before he had been in Britain very long.

On we go, all night, and by-and-by the day begins to break, and presently the first cheerful rays of the warm sun come slanting on us brightly. It sheds its light upon a miserable waste of sodden grass, and dull trees, and squalid huts, whose aspect is forlorn and grievous in the last degree. A very desert in the wood, whose growth of green is dank and noxious like that upon the top of standing water: where poisonous fungus grows in the rare footprint on the oozy ground, and sprouts like witches' coral, from the crevices in the cabin wall and floor; it is a hideous thing to lie upon the very threshold of a city. But it was purchased years ago, and as the owner cannot be discovered, the State has been unable to reclaim it. So there it remains, in the midst of cultivation and improvement, like ground accursed, and made obscene and rank by some great crime.

We reached Columbus shortly before seven o'clock, and stayed there, to refresh, that day and night: having excellent apartments in a very large unfinished hotel called the Neill House, which were richly fitted with the polished wood of the black walnut, and opened on a handsome portico and stone verandah, like rooms in some Italian mansion. The town is clean and pretty, and of course is 'going to be' much larger. It is the seat of the State legislature of Ohio, and lays claim, in consequence, to some consideration and importance.

There being no stage-coach next day, upon the road we wished to take, I hired 'an extra,' at a reasonable charge to carry us to Tiffin; a small town from whence there is a railroad to Sandusky. This extra was an ordinary four-horse stage-coach, such as I have described, changing horses and drivers, as the stage-coach would, but was exclusively our own for the journey. To ensure our having horses at the proper stations, and being incommoded by no strangers, the proprietors sent an agent on the box, who was to accompany us the whole way through; and thus attended, and bearing with us, besides, a hamper full of savoury cold meats, and fruit, and wine, we started off again in high spirits, at half-past six o'clock next morning, very much delighted to be by ourselves, and disposed to enjoy even the roughest journey.

It was well for us, that we were in this humour, for the road we went over that day, was certainly enough to have shaken tempers that were not resolutely at Set Fair, down to some inches below Stormy. At one time we were all flung together in a heap at the bottom of the coach, and at another we were crushing our heads against the roof. Now, one side was down deep in the mire, and we were holding on to the other. Now, the coach was lying on the tails of the two wheelers; and now it was rearing up in the air, in a frantic state, with all four horses standing on the top of an insurmountable eminence, looking coolly back at it, as though they would say 'Unharness us. It can't be done.' The drivers on these roads, who certainly get over the ground in a manner which is quite miraculous, so twist and turn the team about in forcing a passage, corkscrew fashion, through the bogs and swamps, that it was quite a common circumstance on looking out of the window, to see the coachman with the ends of a pair of reins in his hands, apparently driving nothing, or playing at horses, and the leaders staring at one unexpectedly from the back of the coach, as if they had some idea of getting up behind. A great portion of the way was over what is called a corduroy road, which is made by throwing trunks of trees into a marsh, and leaving them to settle there. The very slightest of the jolts with which the ponderous carriage fell from log to log, was enough, it seemed, to have dislocated all the bones in the human body. It would be impossible to experience a similar set of sensations, in any other circumstances, unless perhaps in attempting to go up to the top of St. Paul's in an omnibus. Never, never once, that day, was the coach in any position, attitude, or kind of motion to which we are accustomed in coaches. Never did it make the smallest approach to one's experience of the proceedings of any sort of vehicle that goes on wheels.

Still, it was a fine day, and the temperature was delicious, and though we had left Summer behind us in the west, and were fast leaving Spring, we were moving towards Niagara and home. We alighted in a pleasant wood towards the middle of the day, dined on a fallen tree, and leaving our best fragments with a cottager, and our worst with the pigs (who swarm in this part of the country like grains of sand on the sea-shore, to the great comfort of our commissariat in Canada), we went forward again, gaily.

As night came on, the track grew narrower and narrower, until at last it so lost itself among the trees, that the driver seemed to find his way by instinct. We had the comfort of knowing, at least, that there was no danger of his falling asleep, for every now and then a wheel would strike against an unseen stump with such a jerk, that he was fain to hold on pretty tight and pretty quick, to keep himself upon the box. Nor was there any reason to dread the least danger from furious driving, inasmuch as over that broken ground the horses had enough to do to walk; as to shying, there was no room for that; and a herd of wild elephants could not have run away in such a wood, with such a coach at their heels. So we stumbled along, quite satisfied.

These stumps of trees are a curious feature in American travelling. The varying illusions they present to the unaccustomed eye as it grows dark, are quite astonishing in their number and reality. Now, there is a Grecian urn erected in the centre of a lonely field; now there is a woman weeping at a tomb; now a very commonplace old gentleman in a white waistcoat, with a thumb thrust into each arm-hole of his coat; now a student poring on a book; now a crouching negro; now, a horse, a dog, a cannon, an armed man; a hunch-back throwing off his cloak and stepping forth into the light. They were often as entertaining to me as so many glasses in a magic lantern, and never took their shapes at my bidding, but seemed to force themselves upon me, whether I would or no; and strange to say, I sometimes recognised in them counterparts of figures once familiar to me in pictures attached to childish books, forgotten long ago.

It soon became too dark, however, even for this amusement, and the trees were so close together that their dry branches rattled against the coach on either side, and obliged us all to keep our heads within. It lightened too, for three whole hours; each flash being very bright, and blue, and long; and as the vivid streaks came darting in among the crowded branches, and the thunder rolled gloomily above the tree tops, one could scarcely help thinking that there were better neighbourhoods at such a time than thick woods afforded.

At length, between ten and eleven o'clock at night, a few feeble lights appeared in the distance, and Upper Sandusky, an Indian village, where we were to stay till morning, lay before us.

They were gone to bed at the log Inn, which was the only house of entertainment in the place, but soon answered to our knocking, and got some tea for us in a sort of kitchen or common room, tapestried with old newspapers, pasted against the wall. The bed-chamber to which my wife and I were shown, was a large, low, ghostly room; with a quantity of withered branches on the hearth, and two doors without any fastening, opposite to each other, both opening on the black night and wild country, and so contrived, that one of them always blew the other open: a novelty in domestic architecture, which I do not remember to have seen before, and which I was somewhat disconcerted to have forced on my attention after getting into bed, as I had a considerable sum in gold for our travelling expenses, in my dressing-case. Some of the luggage, however, piled against the panels, soon settled this difficulty, and my sleep would not have been very much affected that night, I believe, though it had failed to do so.

My Boston friend climbed up to bed, somewhere in the roof, where another guest was already snoring hugely. But being bitten beyond his power of endurance, he turned out again, and fled for shelter to the coach, which was airing itself in front of the house. This was not a very politic step, as it turned out; for the pigs scenting him, and looking upon the coach as a kind of pie with some manner of meat inside, grunted round it so hideously, that he was afraid to come out again, and lay there shivering, till morning. Nor was it possible to warm him, when he did come out, by means of a glass of brandy: for in Indian villages, the legislature, with a very good and wise intention, forbids the sale of spirits by tavern keepers. The precaution, however, is quite inefficacious, for the Indians never fail to procure liquor of a worse kind, at a dearer price, from travelling pedlars.

It is a settlement of the Wyandot Indians who inhabit this place. Among the company at breakfast was a mild old gentleman, who had been for many years employed by the United States Government in conducting negotiations with the Indians, and who had just concluded a treaty with these people by which they bound themselves, in consideration of a certain annual sum, to remove next year to some land provided for them, west of the Mississippi, and a little way beyond St. Louis. He gave me a moving account of their strong attachment to the familiar scenes of their infancy, and in particular to the burial-places of their kindred; and of their great reluctance to leave them. He had witnessed many such removals, and always with pain, though he knew that they departed for their own good.

The question whether this tribe should go or stay, had been discussed among them a day or two before, in a hut erected for the purpose, the logs of which still lay upon the ground before the inn. When the speaking was done, the ayes and noes were ranged on opposite sides, and every male adult voted in his turn. The moment the result was known, the minority (a large one) cheerfully yielded to the rest, and withdrew all kind of opposition.

We met some of these poor Indians afterwards, riding on shaggy ponies. They were so like the meaner sort of gipsies, that if I could have seen any of them in England, I should have concluded, as a matter of course, that they belonged to that wandering and restless people.

Leaving this town directly after breakfast, we pushed forward again, over a rather worse road than yesterday, if possible, and arrived about noon at Tiffin, where we parted with the extra. At two o'clock we took the railroad; the travelling on which was very slow, its construction being indifferent, and the ground wet and marshy; and arrived at Sandusky in time to dine that evening. We put up at a comfortable little hotel on the brink of Lake Erie, lay there that night, and had no choice but to wait there next day, until a steamboat bound for Buffalo appeared. The town, which was sluggish and uninteresting enough, was something like the back of an English watering-place, out of the season.

Our host, who was very attentive and anxious to make us comfortable, was a handsome middle-aged man, who had come to this town from New England, in which part of the country he was 'raised.' When I say that he constantly walked in and out of the room with his hat on; and stopped to converse in the same free-and- easy state; and lay down on our sofa, and pulled his newspaper out of his pocket, and read it at his ease; I merely mention these traits as characteristic of the country: not at all as being matter of complaint, or as having been disagreeable to me. I should undoubtedly be offended by such proceedings at home, because there they are not the custom, and where they are not, they would be impertinencies; but in America, the only desire of a good- natured fellow of this kind, is to treat his guests hospitably and well; and I had no more right, and I can truly say no more disposition, to measure his conduct by our English rule and standard, than I had to quarrel with him for not being of the exact stature which would qualify him for admission into the Queen's grenadier guards. As little inclination had I to find fault with a funny old lady who was an upper domestic in this establishment, and who, when she came to wait upon us at any meal, sat herself down comfortably in the most convenient chair, and producing a large pin to pick her teeth with, remained performing that ceremony, and steadfastly regarding us meanwhile with much gravity and composure (now and then pressing us to eat a little more), until it was time to clear away. It was enough for us, that whatever we wished done was done with great civility and readiness, and a desire to oblige, not only here, but everywhere else; and that all our wants were, in general, zealously anticipated.

We were taking an early dinner at this house, on the day after our arrival, which was Sunday, when a steamboat came in sight, and presently touched at the wharf. As she proved to be on her way to Buffalo, we hurried on board with all speed, and soon left Sandusky far behind us.

She was a large vessel of five hundred tons, and handsomely fitted up, though with high-pressure engines; which always conveyed that kind of feeling to me, which I should be likely to experience, I think, if I had lodgings on the first-floor of a powder-mill. She was laden with flour, some casks of which commodity were stored upon the deck. The captain coming up to have a little conversation, and to introduce a friend, seated himself astride of one of these barrels, like a Bacchus of private life; and pulling a great clasp-knife out of his pocket, began to 'whittle' it as he talked, by paring thin slices off the edges. And he whittled with such industry and hearty good will, that but for his being called away very soon, it must have disappeared bodily, and left nothing in its place but grist and shavings.

After calling at one or two flat places, with low dams stretching out into the lake, whereon were stumpy lighthouses, like windmills without sails, the whole looking like a Dutch vignette, we came at midnight to Cleveland, where we lay all night, and until nine o'clock next morning.

I entertained quite a curiosity in reference to this place, from having seen at Sandusky a specimen of its literature in the shape of a newspaper, which was very strong indeed upon the subject of Lord Ashburton's recent arrival at Washington, to adjust the points in dispute between the United States Government and Great Britain: informing its readers that as America had 'whipped' England in her infancy, and whipped her again in her youth, so it was clearly necessary that she must whip her once again in her maturity; and pledging its credit to all True Americans, that if Mr. Webster did his duty in the approaching negotiations, and sent the English Lord home again in double quick time, they should, within two years, sing 'Yankee Doodle in Hyde Park, and Hail Columbia in the scarlet courts of Westminster!' I found it a pretty town, and had the satisfaction of beholding the outside of the office of the journal from which I have just quoted. I did not enjoy the delight of seeing the wit who indited the paragraph in question, but I have no doubt he is a prodigious man in his way, and held in high repute by a select circle.

There was a gentleman on board, to whom, as I unintentionally learned through the thin partition which divided our state-room from the cabin in which he and his wife conversed together, I was unwittingly the occasion of very great uneasiness. I don't know why or wherefore, but I appeared to run in his mind perpetually, and to dissatisfy him very much. First of all I heard him say: and the most ludicrous part of the business was, that he said it in my very ear, and could not have communicated more directly with me, if he had leaned upon my shoulder, and whispered me: 'Boz is on board still, my dear.' After a considerable pause, he added, complainingly, 'Boz keeps himself very close;' which was true enough, for I was not very well, and was lying down, with a book. I thought he had done with me after this, but I was deceived; for a long interval having elapsed, during which I imagine him to have been turning restlessly from side to side, and trying to go to sleep; he broke out again, with 'I suppose THAT Boz will be writing a book by-and-by, and putting all our names in it!' at which imaginary consequence of being on board a boat with Boz, he groaned, and became silent.

We called at the town of Erie, at eight o'clock that night, and lay there an hour. Between five and six next morning, we arrived at Buffalo, where we breakfasted; and being too near the Great Falls to wait patiently anywhere else, we set off by the train, the same morning at nine o'clock, to Niagara.

It was a miserable day; chilly and raw; a damp mist falling; and the trees in that northern region quite bare and wintry. Whenever the train halted, I listened for the roar; and was constantly straining my eyes in the direction where I knew the Falls must be, from seeing the river rolling on towards them; every moment expecting to behold the spray. Within a few minutes of our stopping, not before, I saw two great white clouds rising up slowly and majestically from the depths of the earth. That was all. At length we alighted: and then for the first time, I heard the mighty rush of water, and felt the ground tremble underneath my feet.

The bank is very steep, and was slippery with rain, and half-melted ice. I hardly know how I got down, but I was soon at the bottom, and climbing, with two English officers who were crossing and had joined me, over some broken rocks, deafened by the noise, half- blinded by the spray, and wet to the skin. We were at the foot of the American Fall. I could see an immense torrent of water tearing headlong down from some great height, but had no idea of shape, or situation, or anything but vague immensity.

When we were seated in the little ferry-boat, and were crossing the swollen river immediately before both cataracts, I began to feel what it was: but I was in a manner stunned, and unable to comprehend the vastness of the scene. It was not until I came on Table Rock, and looked - Great Heaven, on what a fall of bright- green water! - that it came upon me in its full might and majesty.

Then, when I felt how near to my Creator I was standing, the first effect, and the enduring one - instant and lasting - of the tremendous spectacle, was Peace. Peace of Mind, tranquillity, calm recollections of the Dead, great thoughts of Eternal Rest and Happiness: nothing of gloom or terror. Niagara was at once stamped upon my heart, an Image of Beauty; to remain there, changeless and indelible, until its pulses cease to beat, for ever.

Oh, how the strife and trouble of daily life receded from my view, and lessened in the distance, during the ten memorable days we passed on that Enchanted Ground! What voices spoke from out the thundering water; what faces, faded from the earth, looked out upon me from its gleaming depths; what Heavenly promise glistened in those angels' tears, the drops of many hues, that showered around, and twined themselves about the gorgeous arches which the changing rainbows made!

I never stirred in all that time from the Canadian side, whither I had gone at first. I never crossed the river again; for I knew there were people on the other shore, and in such a place it is natural to shun strange company. To wander to and fro all day, and see the cataracts from all points of view; to stand upon the edge of the great Horse-Shoe Fall, marking the hurried water gathering strength as it approached the verge, yet seeming, too, to pause before it shot into the gulf below; to gaze from the river's level up at the torrent as it came streaming down; to climb the neighbouring heights and watch it through the trees, and see the wreathing water in the rapids hurrying on to take its fearful plunge; to linger in the shadow of the solemn rocks three miles below; watching the river as, stirred by no visible cause, it heaved and eddied and awoke the echoes, being troubled yet, far down beneath the surface, by its giant leap; to have Niagara before me, lighted by the sun and by the moon, red in the day's decline, and grey as evening slowly fell upon it; to look upon it every day, and wake up in the night and hear its ceaseless voice: this was enough.

I think in every quiet season now, still do those waters roll and leap, and roar and tumble, all day long; still are the rainbows spanning them, a hundred feet below. Still, when the sun is on them, do they shine and glow like molten gold. Still, when the day is gloomy, do they fall like snow, or seem to crumble away like the front of a great chalk cliff, or roll down the rock like dense white smoke. But always does the mighty stream appear to die as it comes down, and always from its unfathomable grave arises that tremendous ghost of spray and mist which is never laid: which has haunted this place with the same dread solemnity since Darkness brooded on the deep, and that first flood before the Deluge - Light - came rushing on Creation at the word of God.

CHAPTER XV - IN CANADA; TORONTO; KINGSTON; MONTREAL; QUEBEC; ST. JOHN'S. IN THE UNITED STATES AGAIN; LEBANON; THE SHAKER VILLAGE; WEST POINT

I wish to abstain from instituting any comparison, or drawing any parallel whatever, between the social features of the United States and those of the British Possessions in Canada. For this reason, I shall confine myself to a very brief account of our journeyings in the latter territory.

But before I leave Niagara, I must advert to one disgusting circumstance which can hardly have escaped the observation of any decent traveller who has visited the Falls.

On Table Rock, there is a cottage belonging to a Guide, where little relics of the place are sold, and where visitors register their names in a book kept for the purpose. On the wall of the room in which a great many of these volumes are preserved, the following request is posted: 'Visitors will please not copy nor extract the remarks and poetical effusions from the registers and albums kept here.'

But for this intimation, I should have let them lie upon the tables on which they were strewn with careful negligence, like books in a drawing-room: being quite satisfied with the stupendous silliness of certain stanzas with an anti-climax at the end of each, which were framed and hung up on the wall. Curious, however, after reading this announcement, to see what kind of morsels were so carefully preserved, I turned a few leaves, and found them scrawled all over with the vilest and the filthiest ribaldry that ever human hogs delighted in.

It is humiliating enough to know that there are among men brutes so obscene and worthless, that they can delight in laying their miserable profanations upon the very steps of Nature's greatest altar. But that these should be hoarded up for the delight of their fellow-swine, and kept in a public place where any eyes may see them, is a disgrace to the English language in which they are written (though I hope few of these entries have been made by Englishmen), and a reproach to the English side, on which they are preserved.

The quarters of our soldiers at Niagara, are finely and airily situated. Some of them are large detached houses on the plain above the Falls, which were originally designed for hotels; and in the evening time, when the women and children were leaning over the balconies watching the men as they played at ball and other games upon the grass before the door, they often presented a little picture of cheerfulness and animation which made it quite a pleasure to pass that way.

At any garrisoned point where the line of demarcation between one country and another is so very narrow as at Niagara, desertion from the ranks can scarcely fail to be of frequent occurrence: and it may be reasonably supposed that when the soldiers entertain the wildest and maddest hopes of the fortune and independence that await them on the other side, the impulse to play traitor, which such a place suggests to dishonest minds, is not weakened. But it very rarely happens that the men who do desert, are happy or contented afterwards; and many instances have been known in which they have confessed their grievous disappointment, and their earnest desire to return to their old service if they could but be assured of pardon, or lenient treatment. Many of their comrades, notwithstanding, do the like, from time to time; and instances of loss of life in the effort to cross the river with this object, are far from being uncommon. Several men were drowned in the attempt to swim across, not long ago; and one, who had the madness to trust himself upon a table as a raft, was swept down to the whirlpool, where his mangled body eddied round and round some days.

I am inclined to think that the noise of the Falls is very much exaggerated; and this will appear the more probable when the depth of the great basin in which the water is received, is taken into account. At no time during our stay there, was the wind at all high or boisterous, but we never heard them, three miles off, even at the very quiet time of sunset, though we often tried.

Queenston, at which place the steamboats start for Toronto (or I should rather say at which place they call, for their wharf is at Lewiston, on the opposite shore), is situated in a delicious valley, through which the Niagara river, in colour a very deep green, pursues its course. It is approached by a road that takes its winding way among the heights by which the town is sheltered; and seen from this point is extremely beautiful and picturesque. On the most conspicuous of these heights stood a monument erected by the Provincial Legislature in memory of General Brock, who was slain in a battle with the American forces, after having won the victory. Some vagabond, supposed to be a fellow of the name of Lett, who is now, or who lately was, in prison as a felon, blew up this monument two years ago, and it is now a melancholy ruin, with a long fragment of iron railing hanging dejectedly from its top, and waving to and fro like a wild ivy branch or broken vine stem. It is of much higher importance than it may seem, that this statue should be repaired at the public cost, as it ought to have been long ago. Firstly, because it is beneath the dignity of England to allow a memorial raised in honour of one of her defenders, to remain in this condition, on the very spot where he died. Secondly, because the sight of it in its present state, and the recollection of the unpunished outrage which brought it to this pass, is not very likely to soothe down border feelings among English subjects here, or compose their border quarrels and dislikes.

I was standing on the wharf at this place, watching the passengers embarking in a steamboat which preceded that whose coming we awaited, and participating in the anxiety with which a sergeant's wife was collecting her few goods together - keeping one distracted eye hard upon the porters, who were hurrying them on board, and the other on a hoopless washing-tub for which, as being the most utterly worthless of all her movables, she seemed to entertain particular affection - when three or four soldiers with a recruit came up and went on board.

The recruit was a likely young fellow enough, strongly built and well made, but by no means sober: indeed he had all the air of a man who had been more or less drunk for some days. He carried a small bundle over his shoulder, slung at the end of a walking- stick, and had a short pipe in his mouth. He was as dusty and dirty as recruits usually are, and his shoes betokened that he had travelled on foot some distance, but he was in a very jocose state, and shook hands with this soldier, and clapped that one on the back, and talked and laughed continually, like a roaring idle dog as he was.

The soldiers rather laughed at this blade than with him: seeming to say, as they stood straightening their canes in their hands, and looking coolly at him over their glazed stocks, 'Go on, my boy, while you may! you'll know better by-and-by:' when suddenly the novice, who had been backing towards the gangway in his noisy merriment, fell overboard before their eyes, and splashed heavily down into the river between the vessel and the dock.

I never saw such a good thing as the change that came over these soldiers in an instant. Almost before the man was down, their professional manner, their stiffness and constraint, were gone, and they were filled with the most violent energy. In less time than is required to tell it, they had him out again, feet first, with the tails of his coat flapping over his eyes, everything about him hanging the wrong way, and the water streaming off at every thread in his threadbare dress. But the moment they set him upright and found that he was none the worse, they were soldiers again, looking over their glazed stocks more composedly than ever.

The half-sobered recruit glanced round for a moment, as if his first impulse were to express some gratitude for his preservation, but seeing them with this air of total unconcern, and having his wet pipe presented to him with an oath by the soldier who had been by far the most anxious of the party, he stuck it in his mouth, thrust his hands into his moist pockets, and without even shaking the water off his clothes, walked on board whistling;

not to say as if nothing had happened, but as if he had meant to do it, and it had been a perfect success.

Our steamboat came up directly this had left the wharf, and soon bore us to the mouth of the Niagara; where the stars and stripes of America flutter on one side and the Union Jack of England on the other: and so narrow is the space between them that the sentinels in either fort can often hear the watchword of the other country given. Thence we emerged on Lake Ontario, an inland sea; and by half-past six o'clock were at Toronto.

The country round this town being very flat, is bare of scenic interest; but the town itself is full of life and motion, bustle, business, and improvement. The streets are well paved, and lighted with gas; the houses are large and good; the shops excellent. Many of them have a display of goods in their windows, such as may be seen in thriving county towns in England; and there are some which would do no discredit to the metropolis itself. There is a good stone prison here; and there are, besides, a handsome church, a court-house, public offices, many commodious private residences, and a government observatory for noting and recording the magnetic variations. In the College of Upper Canada, which is one of the public establishments of the city, a sound education in every department of polite learning can be had, at a very moderate expense: the annual charge for the instruction of each pupil, not exceeding nine pounds sterling. It has pretty good endowments in the way of land, and is a valuable and useful institution.

The first stone of a new college had been laid but a few days before, by the Governor General. It will be a handsome, spacious edifice, approached by a long avenue, which is already planted and made available as a public walk. The town is well adapted for wholesome exercise at all seasons, for the footways in the thoroughfares which lie beyond the principal street, are planked like floors, and kept in very good and clean repair.

It is a matter of deep regret that political differences should have run high in this place, and led to most discreditable and disgraceful results. It is not long since guns were discharged from a window in this town at the successful candidates in an election, and the coachman of one of them was actually shot in the body, though not dangerously wounded. But one man was killed on the same occasion; and from the very window whence he received his death, the very flag which shielded his murderer (not only in the commission of his crime, but from its consequences), was displayed again on the occasion of the public ceremony performed by the Governor General, to which I have just adverted. Of all the colours in the rainbow, there is but one which could be so employed: I need not say that flag was orange.

The time of leaving Toronto for Kingston is noon. By eight o'clock next morning, the traveller is at the end of his journey, which is performed by steamboat upon Lake Ontario, calling at Port Hope and Coburg, the latter a cheerful, thriving little town. Vast quantities of flour form the chief item in the freight of these vessels. We had no fewer than one thousand and eighty barrels on board, between Coburg and Kingston.

The latter place, which is now the seat of government in Canada, is a very poor town, rendered still poorer in the appearance of its market-place by the ravages of a recent fire. Indeed, it may be said of Kingston, that one half of it appears to be burnt down, and the other half not to be built up. The Government House is neither elegant nor commodious, yet it is almost the only house of any importance in the neighbourhood.

There is an admirable jail here, well and wisely governed, and excellently regulated, in every respect. The men were employed as shoemakers, ropemakers, blacksmiths, tailors, carpenters, and stonecutters; and in building a new prison, which was pretty far advanced towards completion. The female prisoners were occupied in needlework. Among them was a beautiful girl of twenty, who had been there nearly three years. She acted as bearer of secret despatches for the self-styled Patriots on Navy Island, during the Canadian Insurrection: sometimes dressing as a girl, and carrying them in her stays; sometimes attiring herself as a boy, and secreting them in the lining of her hat. In the latter character she always rode as a boy would, which was nothing to her, for she could govern any horse that any man could ride, and could drive four-in-hand with the best whip in those parts. Setting forth on one of her patriotic missions, she appropriated to herself the first horse she could lay her hands on; and this offence had brought her where I saw her. She had quite a lovely face, though, as the reader may suppose from this sketch of her history, there was a lurking devil in her bright eye, which looked out pretty sharply from between her prison bars.

There is a bomb-proof fort here of great strength, which occupies a bold position, and is capable, doubtless, of doing good service; though the town is much too close upon the frontier to be long held, I should imagine, for its present purpose in troubled times. There is also a small navy-yard, where a couple of Government steamboats were building, and getting on vigorously.

We left Kingston for Montreal on the tenth of May, at half-past nine in the morning, and proceeded in a steamboat down the St. Lawrence river. The beauty of this noble stream at almost any point, but especially in the commencement of this journey when it winds its way among the thousand Islands, can hardly be imagined. The number and constant successions of these islands, all green and richly wooded; their fluctuating sizes, some so large that for half an hour together one among them will appear as the opposite bank of the river, and some so small that they are mere dimples on its broad bosom; their infinite variety of shapes; and the numberless combinations of beautiful forms which the trees growing on them present: all form a picture fraught with uncommon interest and pleasure.

In the afternoon we shot down some rapids where the river boiled and bubbled strangely, and where the force and headlong violence of the current were tremendous. At seven o'clock we reached Dickenson's Landing, whence travellers proceed for two or three hours by stage-coach: the navigation of the river being rendered so dangerous and difficult in the interval, by rapids, that steamboats do not make the passage. The number and length of those PORTAGES, over which the roads are bad, and the travelling slow, render the way between the towns of Montreal and Kingston, somewhat tedious.

Our course lay over a wide, uninclosed tract of country at a little distance from the river-side, whence the bright warning lights on the dangerous parts of the St. Lawrence shone vividly. The night was dark and raw, and the way dreary enough. It was nearly ten o'clock when we reached the wharf where the next steamboat lay; and went on board, and to bed.

She lay there all night, and started as soon as it was day. The morning was ushered in by a violent thunderstorm, and was very wet, but gradually improved and brightened up. Going on deck after breakfast, I was amazed to see floating down with the stream, a most gigantic raft, with some thirty or forty wooden houses upon it, and at least as many flag-masts, so that it looked like a nautical street. I saw many of these rafts afterwards, but never one so large. All the timber, or 'lumber,' as it is called in America, which is brought down the St. Lawrence, is floated down in this manner. When the raft reaches its place of destination, it is broken up; the materials are sold; and the boatmen return for more.

At eight we landed again, and travelled by a stage-coach for four hours through a pleasant and well-cultivated country, perfectly French in every respect: in the appearance of the cottages; the air, language, and dress of the peasantry; the sign-boards on the shops and taverns: and the Virgin's shrines, and crosses, by the wayside. Nearly every common labourer and boy, though he had no shoes to his feet, wore round his waist a sash of some bright colour: generally red: and the women, who were working in the fields and gardens, and doing all kinds of husbandry, wore, one and all, great flat straw hats with most capacious brims. There were Catholic Priests and Sisters of Charity in the village streets; and images of the Saviour at the corners of cross-roads, and in other public places.

At noon we went on board another steamboat, and reached the village of Lachine, nine miles from Montreal, by three o'clock. There, we left the river, and went on by land.

Montreal is pleasantly situated on the margin of the St. Lawrence, and is backed by some bold heights, about which there are charming rides and drives. The streets are generally narrow and irregular, as in most French towns of any age; but in the more modern parts of the city, they are wide and airy. They display a great variety of very good shops; and both in the town and suburbs there are many excellent private dwellings. The granite quays are remarkable for their beauty, solidity, and extent.

There is a very large Catholic cathedral here, recently erected with two tall spires, of which one is yet unfinished. In the open space in front of this edifice, stands a solitary, grim-looking, square brick tower, which has a quaint and remarkable appearance, and which the wiseacres of the place have consequently determined to pull down immediately. The Government House is very superior to that at Kingston, and the town is full of life and bustle. In one of the suburbs is a plank road - not footpath - five or six miles long, and a famous road it is too. All the rides in the vicinity were made doubly interesting by the bursting out of spring, which is here so rapid, that it is but a day's leap from barren winter, to the blooming youth of summer.

The steamboats to Quebec perform the journey in the night; that is to say, they leave Montreal at six in the evening, and arrive at Quebec at six next morning. We made this excursion during our stay in Montreal (which exceeded a fortnight), and were charmed by its interest and beauty.

The impression made upon the visitor by this Gibraltar of America: its giddy heights; its citadel suspended, as it were, in the air; its picturesque steep streets and frowning gateways; and the splendid views which burst upon the eye at every turn: is at once unique and lasting.

It is a place not to be forgotten or mixed up in the mind with other places, or altered for a moment in the crowd of scenes a traveller can recall. Apart from the realities of this most picturesque city, there are associations clustering about it which would make a desert rich in interest. The dangerous precipice along whose rocky front, Wolfe and his brave companions climbed to glory; the Plains of Abraham, where he received his mortal wound; the fortress so chivalrously defended by Montcalm; and his soldier's grave, dug for him while yet alive, by the bursting of a shell; are not the least among them, or among the gallant incidents of history. That is a noble Monument too, and worthy of two great nations, which perpetuates the memory of both brave generals, and on which their names are jointly written.

The city is rich in public institutions and in Catholic churches and charities, but it is mainly in the prospect from the site of the Old Government House, and from the Citadel, that its surpassing beauty lies. The exquisite expanse of country, rich in field and forest, mountain-height and water, which lies stretched out before the view, with miles of Canadian villages, glancing in long white streaks, like veins along the landscape; the motley crowd of gables, roofs, and chimney tops in the old hilly town immediately at hand; the beautiful St. Lawrence sparkling and flashing in the sunlight; and the tiny ships below the rock from which you gaze, whose distant rigging looks like spiders' webs against the light, while casks and barrels on their decks dwindle into toys, and busy mariners become so many puppets; all this, framed by a sunken window in the fortress and looked at from the shadowed room within, forms one of the brightest and most enchanting pictures that the eye can rest upon.

In the spring of the year, vast numbers of emigrants who have newly arrived from England or from Ireland, pass between Quebec and Montreal on their way to the backwoods and new settlements of Canada. If it be an entertaining lounge (as I very often found it) to take a morning stroll upon the quay at Montreal, and see them grouped in hundreds on the public wharfs about their chests and boxes, it is matter of deep interest to be their fellow-passenger on one of these steamboats, and mingling with the concourse, see and hear them unobserved.

The vessel in which we returned from Quebec to Montreal was crowded with them, and at night they spread their beds between decks (those who had beds, at least), and slept so close and thick about our cabin door, that the passage to and fro was quite blocked up. They were nearly all English; from Gloucestershire the greater part; and had had a long winter-passage out; but it was wonderful to see how clean the children had been kept, and how untiring in their love and self-denial all the poor parents were.

Cant as we may, and as we shall to the end of all things, it is very much harder for the poor to be virtuous than it is for the rich; and the good that is in them, shines the brighter for it. In many a noble mansion lives a man, the best of husbands and of fathers, whose private worth in both capacities is justly lauded to the skies. But bring him here, upon this crowded deck. Strip from his fair young wife her silken dress and jewels, unbind her braided hair, stamp early wrinkles on her brow, pinch her pale cheek with care and much privation, array her faded form in coarsely patched attire, let there be nothing but his love to set her forth or deck her out, and you shall put it to the proof indeed. So change his station in the world, that he shall see in those young things who climb about his knee: not records of his wealth and name: but little wrestlers with him for his daily bread; so many poachers on his scanty meal; so many units to divide his every sum of comfort, and farther to reduce its small amount. In lieu of the endearments of childhood in its sweetest aspect, heap upon him all its pains and wants, its sicknesses and ills, its fretfulness, caprice, and querulous endurance: let its prattle be, not of engaging infant fancies, but of cold, and thirst, and hunger: and if his fatherly affection outlive all this, and he be patient, watchful, tender; careful of his children's lives, and mindful always of their joys and sorrows; then send him back to Parliament, and Pulpit, and to Quarter Sessions, and when he hears fine talk of the depravity of those who live from hand to mouth, and labour hard to do it, let him speak up, as one who knows, and tell those holders forth that they, by parallel with such a class, should be High Angels in their daily lives, and lay but humble siege to Heaven at last.

Which of us shall say what he would be, if such realities, with small relief or change all through his days, were his! Looking round upon these people: far from home, houseless, indigent, wandering, weary with travel and hard living: and seeing how patiently they nursed and tended their young children: how they consulted ever their wants first, then half supplied their own; what gentle ministers of hope and faith the women were; how the men profited by their example; and how very, very seldom even a moment's petulance or harsh complaint broke out among them: I felt a stronger love and honour of my kind come glowing on my heart, and wished to God there had been many Atheists in the better part of human nature there, to read this simple lesson in the book of Life.

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We left Montreal for New York again, on the thirtieth of May, crossing to La Prairie, on the opposite shore of the St. Lawrence, in a steamboat; we then took the railroad to St. John's, which is on the brink of Lake Champlain. Our last greeting in Canada was from the English officers in the pleasant barracks at that place (a class of gentlemen who had made every hour of our visit memorable by their hospitality and friendship); and with 'Rule Britannia' sounding in our ears, soon left it far behind.

But Canada has held, and always will retain, a foremost place in my remembrance. Few Englishmen are prepared to find it what it is. Advancing quietly; old differences settling down, and being fast forgotten; public feeling and private enterprise alike in a sound and wholesome state; nothing of flush or fever in its system, but health and vigour throbbing in its steady pulse: it is full of hope and promise. To me - who had been accustomed to think of it as something left behind in the strides of advancing society, as something neglected and forgotten, slumbering and wasting in its sleep - the demand for labour and the rates of wages; the busy quays of Montreal; the vessels taking in their cargoes, and discharging them; the amount of shipping in the different ports; the commerce, roads, and public works, all made TO LAST; the respectability and character of the public journals; and the amount of rational comfort and happiness which honest industry may earn: were very great surprises. The steamboats on the lakes, in their conveniences, cleanliness, and safety; in the gentlemanly character and bearing of their captains; and in the politeness and perfect comfort of their social regulations; are unsurpassed even by the famous Scotch vessels, deservedly so much esteemed at home. The inns are usually bad; because the custom of boarding at hotels is not so general here as in the States, and the British officers, who form a large portion of the society of every town, live chiefly at the regimental messes: but in every other respect, the traveller in Canada will find as good provision for his comfort as in any place I know.

There is one American boat - the vessel which carried us on Lake Champlain, from St. John's to Whitehall - which I praise very highly, but no more than it deserves, when I say that it is superior even to that in which we went from Queenston to Toronto, or to that in which we travelled from the latter place to Kingston, or I have no doubt I may add to any other in the world. This steamboat, which is called the Burlington, is a perfectly exquisite achievement of neatness, elegance, and order. The decks are drawing-rooms; the cabins are boudoirs, choicely furnished and adorned with prints, pictures, and musical instruments; every nook and corner in the vessel is a perfect curiosity of graceful comfort and beautiful contrivance. Captain Sherman, her commander, to whose ingenuity and excellent taste these results are solely attributable, has bravely and worthily distinguished himself on more than one trying occasion: not least among them, in having the moral courage to carry British troops, at a time (during the Canadian rebellion) when no other conveyance was open to them. He and his vessel are held in universal respect, both by his own countrymen and ours; and no man ever enjoyed the popular esteem, who, in his sphere of action, won and wore it better than this gentleman.

By means of this floating palace we were soon in the United States again, and called that evening at Burlington; a pretty town, where we lay an hour or so. We reached Whitehall, where we were to disembark, at six next morning; and might have done so earlier, but that these steamboats lie by for some hours in the night, in consequence of the lake becoming very narrow at that part of the journey, and difficult of navigation in the dark. Its width is so contracted at one point, indeed, that they are obliged to warp round by means of a rope.

After breakfasting at Whitehall, we took the stage-coach for Albany: a large and busy town, where we arrived between five and six o'clock that afternoon; after a very hot day's journey, for we were now in the height of summer again. At seven we started for New York on board a great North River steamboat, which was so crowded with passengers that the upper deck was like the box lobby of a theatre between the pieces, and the lower one like Tottenham Court Road on a Saturday night. But we slept soundly, notwithstanding, and soon after five o'clock next morning reached New York.

Tarrying here, only that day and night, to recruit after our late fatigues, we started off once more upon our last journey in America. We had yet five days to spare before embarking for England, and I had a great desire to see 'the Shaker Village,' which is peopled by a religious sect from whom it takes its name.

To this end, we went up the North River again, as far as the town of Hudson, and there hired an extra to carry us to Lebanon, thirty miles distant: and of course another and a different Lebanon from that village where I slept on the night of the Prairie trip.

The country through which the road meandered, was rich and beautiful; the weather very fine; and for many miles the Kaatskill mountains, where Rip Van Winkle and the ghostly Dutchmen played at ninepins one memorable gusty afternoon, towered in the blue distance, like stately clouds. At one point, as we ascended a steep hill, athwart whose base a railroad, yet constructing, took its course, we came upon an Irish colony. With means at hand of building decent cabins, it was wonderful to see how clumsy, rough, and wretched, its hovels were. The best were poor protection from the weather the worst let in the wind and rain through wide breaches in the roofs of sodden grass, and in the walls of mud; some had neither door nor window; some had nearly fallen down, and were imperfectly propped up by stakes and poles; all were ruinous and filthy. Hideously ugly old women and very buxom young ones, pigs, dogs, men, children, babies, pots, kettles, dung-hills, vile refuse, rank straw, and standing water, all wallowing together in an inseparable heap, composed the furniture of every dark and dirty hut.

Between nine and ten o'clock at night, we arrived at Lebanon which is renowned for its warm baths, and for a great hotel, well adapted, I have no doubt, to the gregarious taste of those seekers after health or pleasure who repair here, but inexpressibly comfortless to me. We were shown into an immense apartment, lighted by two dim candles, called the drawing-room: from which there was a descent by a flight of steps, to another vast desert, called the dining-room: our bed-chambers were among certain long rows of little white-washed cells, which opened from either side of a dreary passage; and were so like rooms in a prison that I half expected to be locked up when I went to bed, and listened involuntarily for the turning of the key on the outside. There need be baths somewhere in the neighbourhood, for the other washing arrangements were on as limited a scale as I ever saw, even in America: indeed, these bedrooms were so very bare of even such common luxuries as chairs, that I should say they were not provided with enough of anything, but that I bethink myself of our having been most bountifully bitten all night.

The house is very pleasantly situated, however, and we had a good breakfast. That done, we went to visit our place of destination, which was some two miles off, and the way to which was soon indicated by a finger-post, whereon was painted, 'To the Shaker Village.'

As we rode along, we passed a party of Shakers, who were at work upon the road; who wore the broadest of all broad-brimmed hats; and were in all visible respects such very wooden men, that I felt about as much sympathy for them, and as much interest in them, as if they had been so many figure-heads of ships. Presently we came to the beginning of the village, and alighting at the door of a house where the Shaker manufactures are sold, and which is the headquarters of the elders, requested permission to see the Shaker worship.

Pending the conveyance of this request to some person in authority, we walked into a grim room, where several grim hats were hanging on grim pegs, and the time was grimly told by a grim clock which uttered every tick with a kind of struggle, as if it broke the grim silence reluctantly, and under protest. Ranged against the wall were six or eight stiff, high-backed chairs, and they partook so strongly of the general grimness that one would much rather have sat on the floor than incurred the smallest obligation to any of them.

Presently, there stalked into this apartment, a grim old Shaker, with eyes as hard, and dull, and cold, as the great round metal buttons on his coat and waistcoat; a sort of calm goblin. Being informed of our desire, he produced a newspaper wherein the body of elders, whereof he was a member, had advertised but a few days before, that in consequence of certain unseemly interruptions which their worship had received from strangers, their chapel was closed to the public for the space of one year.

As nothing was to be urged in opposition to this reasonable arrangement, we requested leave to make some trifling purchases of Shaker goods; which was grimly conceded. We accordingly repaired to a store in the same house and on the opposite side of the passage, where the stock was presided over by something alive in a russet case, which the elder said was a woman; and which I suppose WAS a woman, though I should not have suspected it.

On the opposite side of the road was their place of worship: a cool, clean edifice of wood, with large windows and green blinds: like a spacious summer-house. As there was no getting into this place, and nothing was to be done but walk up and down, and look at it and the other buildings in the village (which were chiefly of wood, painted a dark red like English barns, and composed of many stories like English factories), I have nothing to communicate to the reader, beyond the scanty results I gleaned the while our purchases were making.

These people are called Shakers from their peculiar form of adoration, which consists of a dance, performed by the men and women of all ages, who arrange themselves for that purpose in opposite parties: the men first divesting themselves of their hats and coats, which they gravely hang against the wall before they begin; and tying a ribbon round their shirt-sleeves, as though they were going to be bled. They accompany themselves with a droning, humming noise, and dance until they are quite exhausted, alternately advancing and retiring in a preposterous sort of trot. The effect is said to be unspeakably absurd: and if I may judge from a print of this ceremony which I have in my possession; and which I am informed by those who have visited the chapel, is perfectly accurate; it must be infinitely grotesque.

They are governed by a woman, and her rule is understood to be absolute, though she has the assistance of a council of elders. She lives, it is said, in strict seclusion, in certain rooms above the chapel, and is never shown to profane eyes. If she at all resemble the lady who presided over the store, it is a great charity to keep her as close as possible, and I cannot too strongly express my perfect concurrence in this benevolent proceeding.

All the possessions and revenues of the settlement are thrown into a common stock, which is managed by the elders. As they have made converts among people who were well to do in the world, and are frugal and thrifty, it is understood that this fund prospers: the more especially as they have made large purchases of land. Nor is this at Lebanon the only Shaker settlement: there are, I think, at least, three others.

They are good farmers, and all their produce is eagerly purchased and highly esteemed. 'Shaker seeds,' 'Shaker herbs,' and 'Shaker distilled waters,' are commonly announced for sale in the shops of towns and cities. They are good breeders of cattle, and are kind and merciful to the brute creation. Consequently, Shaker beasts seldom fail to find a ready market.

They eat and drink together, after the Spartan model, at a great public table. There is no union of the sexes, and every Shaker, male and female, is devoted to a life of celibacy. Rumour has been busy upon this theme, but here again I must refer to the lady of the store, and say, that if many of the sister Shakers resemble her, I treat all such slander as bearing on its face the strongest marks of wild improbability. But that they take as proselytes, persons so young that they cannot know their own minds, and cannot possess much strength of resolution in this or any other respect, I can assert from my own observation of the extreme juvenility of certain youthful Shakers whom I saw at work among the party on the road.

They are said to be good drivers of bargains, but to be honest and just in their transactions, and even in horse-dealing to resist those thievish tendencies which would seem, for some undiscovered reason, to be almost inseparable from that branch of traffic. In all matters they hold their own course quietly, live in their gloomy, silent commonwealth, and show little desire to interfere with other people.

This is well enough, but nevertheless I cannot, I confess, incline towards the Shakers; view them with much favour, or extend towards them any very lenient construction. I so abhor, and from my soul detest that bad spirit, no matter by what class or sect it may be entertained, which would strip life of its healthful graces, rob youth of its innocent pleasures, pluck from maturity and age their pleasant ornaments, and make existence but a narrow path towards the grave: that odious spirit which, if it could have had full scope and sway upon the earth, must have blasted and made barren the imaginations of the greatest men, and left them, in their power of raising up enduring images before their fellow-creatures yet unborn, no better than the beasts: that, in these very broad- brimmed hats and very sombre coats - in stiff-necked, solemn- visaged piety, in short, no matter what its garb, whether it have cropped hair as in a Shaker village, or long nails as in a Hindoo temple - I recognise the worst among the enemies of Heaven and Earth, who turn the water at the marriage feasts of this poor world, not into wine, but gall. And if there must be people vowed to crush the harmless fancies and the love of innocent delights and gaieties, which are a part of human nature: as much a part of it as any other love or hope that is our common portion: let them, for me, stand openly revealed among the ribald and licentious; the very idiots know that THEY are not on the Immortal road, and will despise them, and avoid them readily.

Leaving the Shaker village with a hearty dislike of the old Shakers, and a hearty pity for the young ones: tempered by the strong probability of their running away as they grow older and wiser, which they not uncommonly do: we returned to Lebanon, and so to Hudson, by the way we had come upon the previous day. There, we took the steamboat down the North River towards New York, but stopped, some four hours' journey short of it, at West Point, where we remained that night, and all next day, and next night too.

In this beautiful place: the fairest among the fair and lovely Highlands of the North River: shut in by deep green heights and ruined forts, and looking down upon the distant town of Newburgh, along a glittering path of sunlit water, with here and there a skiff, whose white sail often bends on some new tack as sudden flaws of wind come down upon her from the gullies in the hills: hemmed in, besides, all round with memories of Washington, and events of the revolutionary war: is the Military School of America.

It could not stand on more appropriate ground, and any ground more beautiful can hardly be. The course of education is severe, but well devised, and manly. Through June, July, and August, the young men encamp upon the spacious plain whereon the college stands; and all the year their military exercises are performed there, daily. The term of study at this institution, which the State requires from all cadets, is four years; but, whether it be from the rigid nature of the discipline, or the national impatience of restraint, or both causes combined, not more than half the number who begin their studies here, ever remain to finish them.

The number of cadets being about equal to that of the members of Congress, one is sent here from every Congressional district: its member influencing the selection. Commissions in the service are distributed on the same principle. The dwellings of the various Professors are beautifully situated; and there is a most excellent hotel for strangers, though it has the two drawbacks of being a total abstinence house (wines and spirits being forbidden to the students), and of serving the public meals at rather uncomfortable hours: to wit, breakfast at seven, dinner at one, and supper at sunset.

The beauty and freshness of this calm retreat, in the very dawn and greenness of summer - it was then the beginning of June - were exquisite indeed. Leaving it upon the sixth, and returning to New York, to embark for

England on the succeeding day, I was glad to think that among the last memorable beauties which had glided past us, and softened in the bright perspective, were those whose pictures, traced by no common hand, are fresh in most men's minds; not easily to grow old, or fade beneath the dust of Time: the Kaatskill Mountains, Sleepy Hollow, and the Tappaan Zee.

CHAPTER XVI - THE PASSAGE HOME

I NEVER had so much interest before, and very likely I shall never have so much interest again, in the state of the wind, as on the long-looked-for morning of Tuesday the Seventh of June. Some nautical authority had told me a day or two previous, 'anything with west in it, will do;' so when I darted out of bed at daylight, and throwing up the window, was saluted by a lively breeze from the north-west which had sprung up in the night, it came upon me so freshly, rustling with so many happy associations, that I conceived upon the spot a special regard for all airs blowing from that quarter of the compass, which I shall cherish, I dare say, until my own wind has breathed its last frail puff, and withdrawn itself for ever from the mortal calendar.

The pilot had not been slow to take advantage of this favourable weather, and the ship which yesterday had been in such a crowded dock that she might have retired from trade for good and all, for any chance she seemed to have of going to sea, was now full sixteen miles away. A gallant sight she was, when we, fast gaining on her in a steamboat, saw her in the distance riding at anchor: her tall masts pointing up in graceful lines against the sky, and every rope and spar expressed in delicate and thread-like outline: gallant, too, when, we being all aboard, the anchor came up to the sturdy chorus 'Cheerily men, oh cheerily!' and she followed proudly in the towing steamboat's wake: but bravest and most gallant of all, when the tow-rope being cast adrift, the canvas fluttered from her masts, and spreading her white wings she soared away upon her free and solitary course.

In the after cabin we were only fifteen passengers in all, and the greater part were from Canada, where some of us had known each other. The night was rough and squally, so were the next two days, but they flew by quickly, and we were soon as cheerful and snug a party, with an honest, manly-hearted captain at our head, as ever came to the resolution of being mutually agreeable, on land or water.

We breakfasted at eight, lunched at twelve, dined at three, and took our tea at half-past seven. We had abundance of amusements, and dinner was not the least among them: firstly, for its own sake; secondly, because of its extraordinary length: its duration, inclusive of all the long pauses between the courses, being seldom less than two hours and a half; which was a subject of never- failing entertainment. By way of beguiling the tediousness of these banquets, a select association was formed at the lower end of the table, below the mast, to whose distinguished president modesty forbids me to make any further allusion, which, being a very hilarious and jovial institution, was (prejudice apart) in high favour with the rest of the community, and particularly with a black steward, who lived for three weeks in a broad grin at the marvellous humour of these incorporated worthies.

Then, we had chess for those who played it, whist, cribbage, books, backgammon, and shovelboard. In all weathers, fair or foul, calm or windy, we were every one on deck, walking up and down in pairs, lying in the boats, leaning over the side, or chatting in a lazy group together. We had no lack of music, for one played the accordion, another the violin, and another (who usually began at six o'clock A.M.) the key-bugle: the combined effect of which instruments, when they all played different tunes in different parts of the ship, at the same time, and within hearing of each other, as they sometimes did (everybody being intensely satisfied with his own performance), was sublimely hideous.

When all these means of entertainment failed, a sail would heave in sight: looming, perhaps, the very spirit of a ship, in the misty distance, or passing us so close that through our glasses we could see the people on her decks, and easily make out her name, and whither she was bound. For hours together we could watch the dolphins and porpoises as they rolled and leaped and dived around the vessel; or those small creatures ever on the wing, the Mother Carey's chickens, which had borne us company from New York bay, and for a whole fortnight fluttered about the vessel's stern. For some days we had a dead calm, or very light winds, during which the crew amused themselves with fishing, and hooked an unlucky dolphin, who expired, in all his rainbow colours, on the deck: an event of such importance in our barren calendar, that afterwards we dated from the dolphin, and made the day on which he died, an era.

Besides all this, when we were five or six days out, there began to be much talk of icebergs, of which wandering islands an unusual number had been seen by the vessels that had come into New York a day or two before we left that port, and of whose dangerous neighbourhood we were warned by the sudden coldness of the weather, and the sinking of the mercury in the barometer. While these tokens lasted, a double look-out was kept, and many dismal tales were whispered after dark, of ships that had struck upon the ice and gone down in the night; but the wind obliging us to hold a southward course, we saw none of them, and the weather soon grew bright and warm again.

The observation every day at noon, and the subsequent working of the vessel's course, was, as may be supposed, a feature in our lives of paramount importance; nor were there wanting (as there never are) sagacious doubters of the captain's calculations, who, so soon as his back was turned, would, in the absence of compasses, measure the chart with bits of string, and ends of pocket- handkerchiefs, and points of snuffers, and clearly prove him to be wrong by an odd thousand miles or so. It was very edifying to see these unbelievers shake their heads and frown, and hear them hold forth strongly upon navigation: not that they knew anything about it, but that they always mistrusted the captain in calm weather, or when the wind was adverse. Indeed, the mercury itself is not so variable as this class of passengers, whom you will see, when the ship is going nobly through the water, quite pale with admiration, swearing that the captain beats all captains ever known, and even hinting at subscriptions for a piece of plate; and who, next morning, when the breeze has lulled, and all the sails hang useless in the idle air, shake their despondent heads again, and say, with screwed-up lips, they hope that captain is a sailor - but they shrewdly doubt him.

It even became an occupation in the calm, to wonder when the wind WOULD spring up in the favourable quarter, where, it was clearly shown by all the rules and precedents, it ought to have sprung up long ago. The first mate, who whistled for it zealously, was much respected for his perseverance, and was regarded even by the unbelievers as a first-rate sailor. Many gloomy looks would be cast upward through the cabin skylights at the flapping sails while dinner was in progress; and some, growing bold in ruefulness, predicted that we should land about the middle of July. There are always on board ship, a Sanguine One, and a Despondent One. The latter character carried it hollow at this period of the voyage, and triumphed over the Sanguine One at every meal, by inquiring where he supposed the Great Western (which left New York a week after us) was NOW: and where he supposed the 'Cunard' steam-packet was NOW: and what he thought of sailing vessels, as compared with steamships NOW: and so beset his life with pestilent attacks of that kind, that he too was obliged to affect despondency, for very peace and quietude.

These were additions to the list of entertaining incidents, but there was still another source of interest. We carried in the steerage nearly a hundred passengers: a little world of poverty: and as we came to know individuals among them by sight, from looking down upon the deck where they took the air in the daytime, and cooked their food, and very often ate it too, we became curious to know their histories, and with what expectations they had gone out to America, and on what errands they were going home, and what their circumstances were. The information we got on these heads from the carpenter, who had charge of these people, was often of the strangest kind. Some of them had been in America but three days, some but three months, and some had gone out in the last voyage of that very ship in which they were now returning home. Others had sold their clothes to raise the passage-money, and had hardly rags to cover them; others had no food, and lived upon the charity of the rest: and one man, it was discovered nearly at the end of the voyage, not before - for he kept his secret close, and did not court compassion - had had no sustenance whatever but the bones and scraps of fat he took from the plates used in the after- cabin dinner, when they were put out to be washed.

The whole system of shipping and conveying these unfortunate persons, is one that stands in need of thorough revision. If any class deserve to be protected and assisted by the Government, it is that class who are banished from their native land in search of the bare means of subsistence. All that could be done for these poor people by the great compassion and humanity of the captain and officers was done, but they require much more. The law is bound, at least upon the English side, to see that too many of them are not put on board one ship: and that their accommodations are decent: not demoralising, and profligate. It is bound, too, in common humanity, to declare that no man shall be taken on board without his stock of provisions being previously inspected by some proper officer, and pronounced moderately sufficient for his support upon the voyage. It is bound to provide, or to require that there be provided, a medical attendant; whereas in these ships there are none, though sickness of adults, and deaths of children, on the passage, are matters of the very commonest occurrence. Above all it is the duty of any Government, be it monarchy or republic, to interpose and put an end to that system by which a firm of traders in emigrants purchase of the owners the whole 'tween-decks of a ship, and send on board as many wretched people as they can lay hold of, on any terms they can get, without the smallest reference to the conveniences of the steerage, the number of berths, the slightest separation of the sexes, or anything but their own immediate profit. Nor is even this the worst of the vicious system: for, certain crimping agents of these houses, who have a percentage on all the passengers they inveigle, are constantly travelling about those districts where poverty and discontent are rife, and tempting the credulous into more misery, by holding out monstrous inducements to emigration which can never be realised.

The history of every family we had on board was pretty much the same. After hoarding up, and borrowing, and begging, and selling everything to pay the passage, they had gone out to New York, expecting to find its streets paved with gold; and had found them paved with very hard and very real stones. Enterprise was dull; labourers were not wanted; jobs of work were to be got, but the payment was not. They were coming back, even poorer than they went. One of them was carrying an open letter from a young English artisan, who had been in New York a fortnight, to a friend near Manchester, whom he strongly urged to follow him. One of the officers brought it to me as a curiosity. 'This is the country, Jem,' said the writer. 'I like America. There is no despotism here; that's the great thing. Employment of all sorts is going a- begging, and wages are capital. You have only to choose a trade, Jem, and be it. I haven't made choice of one yet, but I shall soon. AT PRESENT I HAVEN'T QUITE MADE UP MY MIND WHETHER TO BE A CARPENTER - OR A TAILOR.'

There was yet another kind of passenger, and but one more, who, in the calm and the light winds, was a constant theme of conversation and observation among us. This was an English sailor, a smart, thorough-built, English man-of-war's-man from his hat to his shoes, who was serving in the American navy, and having got leave of absence was on his way home to see his friends. When he presented himself to take and pay for his passage, it had been suggested to him that being an able seaman he might as well work it and save the money, but this piece of advice he very indignantly rejected: saying, 'He'd be damned but for once he'd go aboard ship, as a gentleman.' Accordingly, they took his money, but he no sooner came aboard, than he stowed his kit in the forecastle, arranged to mess with the crew, and the very first time the hands were turned up, went aloft like a cat, before anybody. And all through the passage there he was, first at the braces, outermost on the yards, perpetually lending a hand everywhere, but always with a sober dignity in his manner, and a sober grin on his face, which plainly said, 'I do it as a gentleman. For my own pleasure, mind you!'

At length and at last, the promised wind came up in right good earnest, and away we went before it, with every stitch of canvas set, slashing through the water nobly. There was a grandeur in the motion of the splendid ship, as overshadowed by her mass of sails, she rode at a furious pace upon the waves, which filled one with an indescribable sense of pride and exultation. As she plunged into a foaming valley, how I loved to see the green waves, bordered deep with white, come rushing on astern, to buoy her upward at their pleasure, and curl about her as she stooped again, but always own her for their haughty mistress still! On, on we flew, with changing lights upon the water, being now in the blessed region of fleecy skies; a bright sun lighting us by day, and a bright moon by night; the vane pointing directly homeward, alike the truthful index to the favouring wind and to our cheerful hearts; until at sunrise, one fair Monday morning - the twenty-seventh of June, I shall not easily forget the day - there lay before us, old Cape Clear, God bless it, showing, in the mist of early morning, like a cloud: the brightest and most welcome cloud, to us, that ever hid the face of Heaven's fallen sister - Home.

Dim speck as it was in the wide prospect, it made the sunrise a more cheerful sight, and gave to it that sort of human interest which it seems to want at sea. There, as elsewhere, the return of day is inseparable from some sense of renewed hope and gladness; but the light shining on the dreary waste of water, and showing it in all its vast extent of loneliness, presents a solemn spectacle, which even night, veiling it in darkness and uncertainty, does not surpass. The rising of the moon is more in keeping with the solitary ocean; and has an air of melancholy grandeur, which in its soft and gentle influence, seems to comfort while it saddens. I recollect when I was a very young child having a fancy that the reflection of the moon in water was a path to Heaven, trodden by the spirits of good people on their way to God; and this old feeling often came over me again, when I watched it on a tranquil night at sea.

The wind was very light on this same Monday morning, but it was still in the right quarter, and so, by slow degrees, we left Cape Clear behind, and sailed along within sight of the coast of Ireland. And how merry we all were, and how loyal to the George Washington, and how full of mutual congratulations, and how venturesome in predicting the exact hour at which we should arrive at Liverpool, may be easily imagined and readily understood. Also, how heartily we drank the captain's health that day at dinner; and how restless we became about packing up: and how two or three of the most sanguine spirits rejected the idea of going to bed at all that night as something it was not worth while to do, so near the shore, but went nevertheless, and slept soundly; and how to be so near our journey's end, was like a pleasant dream, from which one feared to wake.

The friendly breeze freshened again next day, and on we went once more before it gallantly: descrying now and then an English ship going homeward under shortened sail, while we, with every inch of canvas crowded on, dashed gaily past, and left her far behind. Towards evening, the weather turned hazy, with a drizzling rain; and soon became so thick, that we sailed, as it were, in a cloud. Still we swept onward like a phantom ship, and many an eager eye glanced up to where the Look-out on the mast kept watch for Holyhead.

At length his long-expected cry was heard, and at the same moment there shone out from the haze and mist ahead, a gleaming light, which presently was gone, and soon returned, and soon was gone again. Whenever it came back, the eyes of all on board, brightened and sparkled like itself: and there we all stood, watching this revolving light upon the rock at Holyhead, and praising it for its brightness and its friendly warning, and lauding it, in short, above all other signal lights that ever were displayed, until it once more glimmered faintly in the distance, far behind us.

Then, it was time to fire a gun, for a pilot; and almost before its smoke had cleared away, a little boat with a light at her masthead came bearing down upon us, through the darkness, swiftly. And presently, our sails being backed, she ran alongside; and the hoarse pilot, wrapped and muffled in pea-coats and shawls to the very bridge of his weather-ploughed-up nose, stood bodily among us on the deck. And I think if that pilot had wanted to borrow fifty pounds for an indefinite period on no security, we should have engaged to lend it to him, among us, before his boat had dropped astern, or (which is the same thing) before every scrap of news in the paper he brought with him had become the common property of all on board.

We turned in pretty late that night, and turned out pretty early next morning. By six o'clock we clustered on the deck, prepared to go ashore; and looked upon the spires, and roofs, and smoke, of Liverpool. By eight we all sat down in one of its Hotels, to eat and drink together for the last time. And by nine we had shaken hands all round, and broken up our social company for ever.

The country, by the railroad, seemed, as we rattled through it, like a luxuriant garden. The beauty of the fields (so small they looked!), the hedge-rows, and the trees; the pretty cottages, the beds of flowers, the old churchyards, the antique houses, and every well-known object; the exquisite delights of that one journey, crowding in the short compass of a summer's day, the joy of many years, with the winding up with Home and all that makes it dear; no tongue can tell, or pen of mine describe.

CHAPTER XVII - SLAVERY

THE upholders of slavery in America - of the atrocities of which system, I shall not write one word for which I have not had ample proof and warrant - may be divided into three great classes.

The first, are those more moderate and rational owners of human cattle, who have come into the possession of them as so many coins in their trading capital, but who admit the frightful nature of the Institution in the abstract, and perceive the dangers to society with which it is fraught: dangers which however distant they may be, or howsoever tardy in their coming on, are as certain to fall upon its guilty head, as is the Day of Judgment.

The second, consists of all those owners, breeders, users, buyers and sellers of slaves, who will, until the bloody chapter has a bloody end, own, breed, use, buy, and sell them at all hazards: who doggedly deny the horrors of the system in the teeth of such a mass of evidence as never was brought to bear on any other subject, and to which the experience of every day contributes its immense amount; who would at this or any other moment, gladly involve America in a war, civil or foreign, provided that it had for its sole end and object the assertion of their right to perpetuate slavery, and to whip and work and torture slaves, unquestioned by any human authority, and unassailed by any human power; who, when they speak of Freedom, mean the Freedom to oppress their kind, and to be savage, merciless, and cruel; and of whom every man on his own ground, in republican America, is a more exacting, and a sterner, and a less responsible despot than the Caliph Haroun Alraschid in his angry robe of scarlet.

The third, and not the least numerous or influential, is composed of all that delicate gentility which cannot bear a superior, and cannot brook an equal; of that class whose Republicanism means, 'I will not tolerate a man above me: and of those below, none must approach too near;' whose pride, in a land where voluntary servitude is shunned as a disgrace, must be ministered to by slaves; and whose inalienable rights can only have their growth in negro wrongs.

It has been sometimes urged that, in the unavailing efforts which have been made to advance the cause of Human Freedom in the republic of America (strange cause for history to treat of!), sufficient regard has not been had to the existence of the first class of persons; and it has been contended that they are hardly used, in being confounded with the second. This is, no doubt, the case; noble instances of pecuniary and personal sacrifice have already had their growth among them; and it is much to be regretted that the gulf between them and the advocates of emancipation should have been widened and deepened by any means: the rather, as there are, beyond dispute, among these slave-owners, many kind masters who are tender in the exercise of their unnatural power. Still, it is to be feared that this injustice is inseparable from the state of things with which humanity and truth are called upon to deal. Slavery is not a whit the more endurable because some hearts are to be found which can partially resist its hardening influences; nor can the indignant tide of honest wrath stand still, because in its onward course it overwhelms a few who are comparatively innocent, among a host of guilty.

The ground most commonly taken by these better men among the advocates of slavery, is this: 'It is a bad system; and for myself I would willingly get rid of it, if I could; most willingly. But it is not so bad, as you in England take it to be. You are deceived by the representations of the emancipationists. The greater part of my slaves are much attached to me. You will say that I do not allow them to be severely treated; but I will put it to you whether you believe that it can be a general practice to treat them inhumanly, when it would impair their value, and would be obviously against the interests of their masters.'

Is it the interest of any man to steal, to game, to waste his health and mental faculties by drunkenness, to lie, forswear himself, indulge hatred, seek desperate revenge, or do murder? No. All these are roads to ruin. And why, then, do men tread them? Because such inclinations are among the vicious qualities of mankind. Blot out, ye friends of slavery, from the catalogue of human passions, brutal lust, cruelty, and the abuse of irresponsible power (of all earthly temptations the most difficult to be resisted), and when ye have done so, and not before, we will inquire whether it be the interest of a master to lash and maim the slaves, over whose lives and limbs he has an absolute control!

But again: this class, together with that last one I have named, the miserable aristocracy spawned of a false republic, lift up their voices and exclaim 'Public opinion is all-sufficient to prevent such cruelty as you denounce.' Public opinion! Why, public opinion in the slave States IS slavery, is it not? Public opinion, in the slave States, has delivered the slaves over, to the gentle mercies of their masters. Public opinion has made the laws, and denied the slaves legislative protection. Public opinion has knotted the lash, heated the branding-iron, loaded the rifle, and shielded the murderer. Public opinion threatens the abolitionist with death, if he venture to the South; and drags him with a rope about his middle, in broad unblushing noon, through the first city in the East. Public opinion has, within a few years, burned a slave alive at a slow fire in the city of St. Louis; and public opinion has to this day maintained upon the bench that estimable judge who charged the jury, impanelled there to try his murderers, that their most horrid deed was an act of public opinion, and being so, must not be punished by the laws the public sentiment had made. Public opinion hailed this doctrine with a howl of wild applause, and set the prisoners free, to walk the city, men of mark, and influence, and station, as they had been before.

Public opinion! what class of men have an immense preponderance over the rest of the community, in their power of representing public opinion in the legislature? the slave-owners. They send from their twelve States one hundred members, while the fourteen free States, with a free population nearly double, return but a hundred and forty-two. Before whom do the presidential candidates bow down the most humbly, on whom do they fawn the most fondly, and for whose tastes do they cater the most assiduously in their servile protestations? The slave-owners always.

Public opinion! hear the public opinion of the free South, as expressed by its own members in the House of Representatives at Washington. 'I have a great respect for the chair,' quoth North Carolina, 'I have a great respect for the chair as an officer of the house, and a great respect for him personally; nothing but that respect prevents me from rushing to the table and tearing that petition which has just been presented for the abolition of slavery in the district of Columbia, to pieces.' - 'I warn the abolitionists,' says South Carolina, 'ignorant, infuriated barbarians as they are, that if chance shall throw any of them into our hands, he may expect a felon's death.' - 'Let an abolitionist come within the borders of South Carolina,' cries a third; mild Carolina's colleague; 'and if we can catch him, we will try him, and notwithstanding the interference of all the governments on earth, including the Federal government, we will HANG him.'

Public opinion has made this law. - It has declared that in Washington, in that city which takes its name from the father of American liberty, any justice of the peace may bind with fetters any negro passing down the street and thrust him into jail: no offence on the black man's part is necessary. The justice says, 'I choose to think this man a runaway:' and locks him up. Public opinion impowers the man of law when this is done, to advertise the negro in the newspapers, warning his owner to come and claim him, or he will be sold to pay the jail fees. But supposing he is a free black, and has no owner, it may naturally be presumed that he is set at liberty. No: HE IS SOLD TO RECOMPENSE HIS JAILER. This has been done again, and again, and again. He has no means of proving his freedom; has no adviser, messenger, or assistance of any sort or kind; no investigation into his case is made, or inquiry instituted. He, a free man, who may have served for years, and bought his liberty, is thrown into jail on no process, for no crime, and on no pretence of crime: and is sold to pay the jail fees. This seems incredible, even of America, but it is the law.

Public opinion is deferred to, in such cases as the following: which is headed in the newspapers:-

'INTERESTING LAW-CASE.

'An interesting case is now on trial in the Supreme Court, arising out of the following facts. A gentleman residing in Maryland had allowed an aged pair of his slaves, substantial though not legal freedom for several years. While thus living, a daughter was born to them, who grew up in the same liberty, until she married a free negro, and went with him to reside in Pennsylvania. They had several children, and lived unmolested until the original owner died, when his heir attempted to regain them; but the magistrate before whom they were brought, decided that he had no jurisdiction in the case. THE OWNER SEIZED THE WOMAN AND HER CHILDREN IN THE NIGHT, AND CARRIED THEM TO MARYLAND.'

'Cash for negroes,' 'cash for negroes,' 'cash for negroes,' is the heading of advertisements in great capitals down the long columns of the crowded journals. Woodcuts of a runaway negro with manacled hands, crouching beneath a bluff pursuer in top boots, who, having caught him, grasps him by the throat, agreeably diversify the pleasant text. The leading article protests against 'that abominable and hellish doctrine of abolition, which is repugnant alike to every law of God and nature.' The delicate mamma, who smiles her acquiescence in this sprightly writing as she reads the paper in her cool piazza, quiets her youngest child who clings about her skirts, by promising the boy 'a whip to beat the little niggers with.' - But the negroes, little and big, are protected by public opinion.

Let us try this public opinion by another test, which is important in three points of view: first, as showing how desperately timid of the public opinion slave-owners are, in their delicate descriptions of fugitive slaves in widely circulated newspapers; secondly, as showing how perfectly contented the slaves are, and how very seldom they run away; thirdly, as exhibiting their entire freedom from scar, or blemish, or any mark of cruel infliction, as their pictures are drawn, not by lying abolitionists, but by their own truthful masters.

The following are a few specimens of the advertisements in the public papers. It is only four years since the oldest among them appeared; and others of the same nature continue to be published every day, in shoals.

'Ran away, Negress Caroline. Had on a collar with one prong turned down.'

'Ran away, a black woman, Betsy. Had an iron bar on her right leg.'

'Ran away, the negro Manuel. Much marked with irons.'

'Ran away, the negress Fanny. Had on an iron band about her neck.'

'Ran away, a negro boy about twelve years old. Had round his neck a chain dog-collar with "De Lampert" engraved on it.'

'Ran away, the negro Hown. Has a ring of iron on his left foot.
Also, Grise, HIS WIFE, having a ring and chain on the left leg.'

'Ran away, a negro boy named James. Said boy was ironed when he left me.'

'Committed to jail, a man who calls his name John. He has a clog of iron on his right foot which will weigh four or five pounds.'

'Detained at the police jail, the negro wench, Myra. Has several marks of LASHING, and has irons on her feet.'

'Ran away, a negro woman and two children. A few days before she went off, I burnt her with a hot iron, on the left side of her face. I tried to make the letter M.'

'Ran away, a negro man named Henry; his left eye out, some scars from a dirk on and under his left arm, and much scarred with the whip.'

'One hundred dollars reward, for a negro fellow, Pompey, 40 years old. He is branded on the left jaw.'

'Committed to jail, a negro man. Has no toes on the left foot.'

'Ran away, a negro woman named Rachel. Has lost all her toes except the large one.'

'Ran away, Sam. He was shot a short time since through the hand, and has several shots in his left arm and side.'

'Ran away, my negro man Dennis. Said negro has been shot in the left arm between the shoulder and elbow, which has paralysed the left hand.'

'Ran away, my negro man named Simon. He has been shot badly, in his back and right arm.'

'Ran away, a negro named Arthur. Has a considerable scar across his breast and each arm, made by a knife; loves to talk much of the goodness of God.'

'Twenty-five dollars reward for my man Isaac. He has a scar on his forehead, caused by a blow; and one on his back, made by a shot from a pistol.'

'Ran away, a negro girl called Mary. Has a small scar over her eye, a good many teeth missing, the letter A is branded on her cheek and forehead.'

'Ran away, negro Ben. Has a scar on his right hand; his thumb and forefinger being injured by being shot last fall. A part of the bone came out. He has also one or two large scars on his back and hips.'

'Detained at the jail, a mulatto, named Tom. Has a scar on the right cheek, and appears to have been burned with powder on the face.'

'Ran away, a negro man named Ned. Three of his fingers are drawn into the palm of his hand by a cut. Has a scar on the back of his neck, nearly half round, done by a knife.'

'Was committed to jail, a negro man. Says his name is Josiah. His back very much scarred by the whip; and branded on the thigh and hips in three or four places, thus (J M). The rim of his right ear has been bit or cut off.'

'Fifty dollars reward, for my fellow Edward. He has a scar on the corner of his mouth, two cuts on and under his arm, and the letter E on his arm.'

'Ran away, negro boy Ellie. Has a scar on one of his arms from the bite of a dog.'

'Ran away, from the plantation of James Surgette, the following negroes: Randal, has one ear cropped; Bob, has lost one eye; Kentucky Tom, has one jaw broken.'

'Ran away, Anthony. One of his ears cut off, and his left hand cut with an axe.'

'Fifty dollars reward for the negro Jim Blake. Has a piece cut out of each ear, and the middle finger of the left hand cut off to the second joint.'

'Ran away, a negro woman named Maria. Has a scar on one side of her cheek, by a cut. Some scars on her back.'

'Ran away, the Mulatto wench Mary. Has a cut on the left arm, a scar on the left shoulder, and two upper teeth missing.'

I should say, perhaps, in explanation of this latter piece of description, that among the other blessings which public opinion secures to the negroes, is the common practice of violently punching out their teeth. To make them wear iron collars by day and night, and to worry them with dogs, are practices almost too ordinary to deserve mention.

'Ran away, my man Fountain. Has holes in his ears, a scar on the right side of his forehead, has been shot in the hind part of his legs, and is marked on the back with the whip.'

'Two hundred and fifty dollars reward for my negro man Jim. He is much marked with shot in his right thigh. The shot entered on the outside, halfway between the hip and knee joints.'

'Brought to jail, John. Left ear cropt.'

'Taken up, a negro man. Is very much scarred about the face and body, and has the left ear bit off.'

'Ran away, a black girl, named Mary. Has a scar on her cheek, and the end of one of her toes cut off.'

'Ran away, my Mulatto woman, Judy. She has had her right arm broke.'

'Ran away, my negro man, Levi. His left hand has been burnt, and I think the end of his forefinger is off.'

'Ran away, a negro man, NAMED WASHINGTON. Has lost a part of his middle finger, and the end of his little finger.'

'Twenty-five dollars reward for my man John. The tip of his nose is bit off.'

'Twenty-five dollars reward for the negro slave, Sally. Walks AS THOUGH crippled in the back.'

'Ran away, Joe Dennis. Has a small notch in one of his ears.'

'Ran away, negro boy, Jack. Has a small crop out of his left ear.'

'Ran away, a negro man, named Ivory. Has a small piece cut out of the top of each ear.'

While upon the subject of ears, I may observe that a distinguished abolitionist in New York once received a negro's ear, which had been cut off close to the head, in a general post letter. It was forwarded by the free and independent gentleman who had caused it to be amputated, with a polite request that he would place the specimen in his 'collection.'

I could enlarge this catalogue with broken arms, and broken legs, and gashed flesh, and missing teeth, and lacerated backs, and bites of dogs, and brands of red-hot irons innumerable: but as my readers will be sufficiently sickened and repelled already, I will turn to another branch of the subject.

These advertisements, of which a similar collection might be made for every year, and month, and week, and day; and which are coolly read in families as things of course, and as a part of the current news and small-talk; will serve to show how very much the slaves profit by public opinion, and how tender it is in their behalf. But it may be worth while to inquire how the slave-owners, and the class of society to which great numbers of them belong, defer to public opinion in their conduct, not to their slaves but to each other; how they are accustomed to restrain their passions; what their bearing is among themselves; whether they are fierce or gentle; whether their social customs be brutal, sanguinary, and violent, or bear the impress of civilisation and refinement.

That we may have no partial evidence from abolitionists in this inquiry, either, I will once more turn to their own newspapers, and I will confine myself, this time, to a selection from paragraphs which appeared from day to day, during my visit to America, and which refer to occurrences happening while I was there. The italics in these extracts, as in the foregoing, are my own.

These cases did not ALL occur, it will be seen, in territory actually belonging to legalised Slave States, though most, and those the very worst among them did, as their counterparts constantly do; but the position of the scenes of action in reference to places immediately at hand, where slavery is the law; and the strong resemblance between that class of outrages and the rest; lead to the just presumption that the character of the parties concerned was formed in slave districts, and brutalised by slave customs.

'HORRIBLE TRAGEDY.

'By a slip from THE SOUTHPORT TELEGRAPH, Wisconsin, we learn that the Hon. Charles C. P. Arndt, Member of the Council for Brown county, was shot dead ON THE FLOOR OF THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, by James R. Vinyard, Member from Grant county. THE AFFAIR grew out of a nomination for Sheriff of Grant county. Mr. E. S. Baker was nominated and supported by Mr. Arndt. This nomination was opposed by Vinyard, who wanted the appointment to vest in his own brother. In the course of debate, the deceased made some statements which Vinyard pronounced false, and made use of violent and insulting language, dealing largely in personalities, to which Mr. A. made no reply. After the adjournment, Mr. A. stepped up to Vinyard, and requested him to retract, which he refused to do, repeating the offensive words. Mr. Arndt then made a blow at Vinyard, who stepped back a pace, drew a pistol, and shot him dead.

'The issue appears to have been provoked on the part of Vinyard, who was determined at all hazards to defeat the appointment of Baker, and who, himself defeated, turned his ire and revenge upon the unfortunate Arndt.'

'THE WISCONSIN TRAGEDY.

Public indignation runs high in the territory of Wisconsin, in relation to the murder of C. C. P. Arndt, in the Legislative Hall of the Territory. Meetings have been held in different counties of Wisconsin, denouncing THE PRACTICE OF SECRETLY BEARING ARMS IN THE LEGISLATIVE CHAMBERS OF THE COUNTRY. We have seen the account of the expulsion of James R. Vinyard, the perpetrator of the bloody deed, and are amazed to hear, that, after this expulsion by those who saw Vinyard kill Mr. Arndt in the presence of his aged father, who was on a visit to see his son, little dreaming that he was to witness his murder, JUDGE DUNN HAS DISCHARGED VINYARD ON BAIL. The Miners' Free Press speaks IN TERMS OF MERITED REBUKE at the outrage upon the feelings of the people of Wisconsin. Vinyard was within arm's length of Mr. Arndt, when he took such deadly aim at him, that he never spoke. Vinyard might at pleasure, being so near, have only wounded him, but he chose to kill him.'

'MURDER.

By a letter in a St. Louis paper of the '4th, we notice a terrible outrage at Burlington, Iowa. A Mr. Bridgman having had a difficulty with a citizen of the place, Mr. Ross; a brother-in-law of the latter provided himself with one of Colt's revolving pistols, met Mr. B. in the street, AND DISCHARGED

THE CONTENTS OF FIVE OF THE BARRELS AT HIM: EACH SHOT TAKING EFFECT. Mr. B., though horribly wounded, and dying, returned the fire, and killed Ross on the spot.'

'TERRIBLE DEATH OF ROBERT POTTER.

'From the "Caddo Gazette," of the 12th inst., we learn the frightful death of Colonel Robert Potter. . . . He was beset in his house by an enemy, named Rose. He sprang from his couch, seized his gun, and, in his night-clothes, rushed from the house. For about two hundred yards his speed seemed to defy his pursuers; but, getting entangled in a thicket, he was captured. Rose told him THAT HE INTENDED TO ACT A GENEROUS PART, and give him a chance for his life. He then told Potter he might run, and he should not be interrupted till he reached a certain distance. Potter started at the word of command, and before a gun was fired he had reached the lake. His first impulse was to jump in the water and dive for it, which he did. Rose was close behind him, and formed his men on the bank ready to shoot him as he rose. In a few seconds he came up to breathe; and scarce had his head reached the surface of the water when it was completely riddled with the shot of their guns, and he sunk, to rise no more!'

'MURDER IN ARKANSAS.

'We understand THAT A SEVERE RENCONTRE CAME OFF a few days since in the Seneca Nation, between Mr. Loose, the sub-agent of the mixed band of the Senecas, Quapaw, and Shawnees, and Mr. James Gillespie, of the mercantile firm of Thomas G. Allison and Co., of Maysville, Benton, County Ark, in which the latter was slain with a bowie-knife. Some difficulty had for some time existed between the parties. It is said that Major Gillespie brought on the attack with a cane. A severe conflict ensued, during which two pistols were fired by Gillespie and one by Loose. Loose then stabbed Gillespie with one of those never-failing weapons, a bowie-knife. The death of Major G. is much regretted, as he was a liberal-minded and energetic man. Since the above was in type, we have learned that Major Allison has stated to some of our citizens in town that Mr. Loose gave the first blow. We forbear to give any particulars, as THE MATTER WILL BE THE SUBJECT OF JUDICIAL INVESTIGATION.'

'FOUL DEED.

The steamer Thames, just from Missouri river, brought us a handbill, offering a reward of 500 dollars, for the person who assassinated Lilburn W. Baggs, late Governor of this State, at Independence, on the night of the 6th inst. Governor Baggs, it is stated in a written memorandum, was not dead, but mortally wounded.

'Since the above was written, we received a note from the clerk of the Thames, giving the following particulars. Gov. Baggs was shot by some villain on Friday, 6th inst., in the evening, while sitting in a room in his own house in Independence. His son, a boy, hearing a report, ran into the room, and found the Governor sitting in his chair, with his jaw fallen down, and his head leaning back; on discovering the injury done to his father, he gave the alarm. Foot tracks were found in the garden below the window, and a pistol picked up supposed to have been overloaded, and thrown from the hand of the scoundrel who fired it. Three buck shots of a heavy load, took effect; one going through his mouth, one into the brain, and another probably in or near the brain; all going into the back part of the neck and head. The Governor was still alive on the morning of the 7th; but no hopes for his recovery by his friends, and but slight hopes from his physicians.

'A man was suspected, and the Sheriff most probably has possession of him by this time.

'The pistol was one of a pair stolen some days previous from a baker in Independence, and the legal authorities have the description of the other.'

'RENCONTRE.

'An unfortunate AFFAIR took place on Friday evening in Chatres Street, in which one of our most respectable citizens received a dangerous wound, from a poignard, in the abdomen. From the Bee (New Orleans) of yesterday, we learn the following particulars. It appears that an article was published in the French side of the paper on Monday last, containing some strictures on the Artillery Battalion for firing their guns on Sunday morning, in answer to those from the Ontario and Woodbury, and thereby much alarm was caused to the families of those persons who were out all night preserving the peace of the city. Major C. Gally, Commander of the battalion, resenting this, called at the office and demanded the author's name; that of Mr. P. Arpin was given to him, who was absent at the time. Some angry words then passed with one of the proprietors, and a challenge followed; the friends of both parties tried to arrange the affair, but failed to do so. On Friday evening, about seven o'clock, Major Gally met Mr. P. Arpin in Chatres Street, and accosted him. "Are you Mr. Arpin?"

'"Yes, sir."

'"Then I have to tell you that you are a - " (applying an appropriate epithet).

'"I shall remind you of your words, sir."

'"But I have said I would break my cane on your shoulders."

'"I know it, but I have not yet received the blow."

'At these words, Major Gally, having a cane in his hands, struck Mr. Arpin across the face, and the latter drew a poignard from his pocket and stabbed Major Gally in the abdomen.

'Fears are entertained that the wound will be mortal. WE UNDERSTAND THAT MR. ARPIN HAS GIVEN SECURITY FOR HIS APPEARANCE AT THE CRIMINAL COURT TO ANSWER THE CHARGE.'

'AFFRAY IN MISSISSIPPI.

'On the 27th ult., in an affray near Carthage, Leake county, Mississippi, between James Cottingham and John Wilburn, the latter was shot by the former, and so horribly wounded, that there was no hope of his recovery. On the 2nd instant, there was an affray at Carthage between A. C. Sharkey and George Goff, in which the latter was shot, and thought mortally wounded. Sharkey delivered himself up to the authorities, BUT CHANGED HIS MIND AND ESCAPED!'

'PERSONAL ENCOUNTER.

'An encounter took place in Sparta, a few days since, between the barkeeper of an hotel, and a man named Bury. It appears that Bury had become somewhat noisy, AND THAT THE BARKEEPER, DETERMINED TO PRESERVE ORDER, HAD THREATENED TO SHOOT BURY, whereupon Bury drew a pistol and shot the barkeeper down. He was not dead at the last accounts, but slight hopes were entertained of his recovery.'

'DUEL.

'The clerk of the steamboat TRIBUNE informs us that another duel was fought on Tuesday last, by Mr. Robbins, a bank officer in Vicksburg, and Mr. Fall, the editor of the Vicksburg Sentinel. According to the arrangement, the parties had six pistols each, which, after the word "Fire!" THEY WERE TO DISCHARGE AS FAST AS THEY PLEASED. Fall fired two pistols without effect. Mr. Robbins' first shot took effect in Fall's thigh, who fell, and was unable to continue the combat.'

'AFFRAY IN CLARKE COUNTY.

'An UNFORTUNATE AFFRAY occurred in Clarke county (MO.), near Waterloo, on Tuesday the 19th ult., which originated in settling the partnership concerns of Messrs. M'Kane and M'Allister, who had been engaged in the business of distilling, and resulted in the death of the latter, who was shot down by Mr. M'Kane, because of his attempting to take possession of seven barrels of whiskey, the property of M'Kane, which had been knocked off to M'Allister at a sheriff's sale at one dollar per barrel. M'Kane immediately fled AND AT THE LATEST DATES HAD NOT BEEN TAKEN.

'THIS UNFORTUNATE AFFRAY caused considerable excitement in the neighbourhood, as both the parties were men with large families depending upon them and stood well in the community.'

I will quote but one more paragraph, which, by reason of its monstrous absurdity, may be a relief to these atrocious deeds.

'AFFAIR OF HONOUR.

'We have just heard the particulars of a meeting which took place on Six Mile Island, on Tuesday, between two young bloods of our city: Samuel Thurston, AGED FIFTEEN, and William Hine, AGED THIRTEEN years. They were attended by young gentlemen of the same age. The weapons used on the occasion, were a couple of Dickson's best rifles; the distance, thirty yards. They took one fire, without any damage being sustained by either party, except the ball of Thurston's gun passing through the crown of Hine's hat. THROUGH THE INTERCESSION OF THE BOARD OF HONOUR, the challenge was withdrawn, and the difference amicably adjusted.'

If the reader will picture to himself the kind of Board of Honour which amicably adjusted the difference between these two little boys, who in any other part of the world would have been amicably adjusted on two porters' backs and soundly flogged with birchen rods, he will be possessed, no doubt, with as strong a sense of its ludicrous character, as that which sets me laughing whenever its image rises up before me.

Now, I appeal to every human mind, imbued with the commonest of common sense, and the commonest of common humanity; to all dispassionate, reasoning creatures, of any shade of opinion; and ask, with these revolting evidences of the state of society which exists in and about the slave districts of America before them, can they have a doubt of the real condition of the slave, or can they for a moment make a compromise between the institution or any of its flagrant, fearful features, and their own just consciences? Will they say of any tale of cruelty and horror, however aggravated in degree, that it is improbable, when they can turn to the public prints, and, running, read such signs as these, laid before them by the men who rule the slaves: in their own acts and under their own hands?

Do we not know that the worst deformity and ugliness of slavery are at once the cause and the effect of the reckless license taken by these freeborn outlaws? Do we not know that the man who has been born and bred among its wrongs; who has seen in his childhood husbands obliged at the word of command to flog their wives; women, indecently compelled to hold up their own garments that men might lay the heavier stripes upon their legs, driven and harried by brutal overseers in their time of travail, and becoming mothers on the field of toil, under the very lash itself; who has read in youth, and seen his virgin sisters read, descriptions of runaway men and women, and their disfigured persons, which could not be published elsewhere, of so much stock upon a farm, or at a show of beasts:- do we not know that that man, whenever his wrath is kindled up, will be a brutal savage? Do we not know that as he is a coward in his domestic life, stalking among his shrinking men and women slaves armed with his heavy whip, so he will be a coward out of doors, and carrying cowards' weapons hidden in his breast, will shoot men down and stab them when he quarrels? And if our reason did not teach us this and much beyond; if we were such idiots as to close our eyes to that fine mode of training which rears up such men; should we not know that they who among their equals stab and pistol in the legislative halls, and in the counting-house, and on the marketplace, and in all the elsewhere peaceful pursuits of life, must be to their dependants, even though they were free servants, so many merciless and unrelenting tyrants?

What! shall we declaim against the ignorant peasantry of Ireland, and mince the matter when these American taskmasters are in question? Shall we cry shame on the brutality of those who hamstring cattle: and spare the lights of Freedom upon earth who notch the ears of men and women, cut pleasant posies in the shrinking flesh, learn to write with pens of red-hot iron on the human face, rack their poetic fancies for liveries of mutilation which their slaves shall wear for life and carry to the grave, breaking living limbs as did the soldiery who mocked and slew the Saviour of the world, and set defenceless creatures up for targets! Shall we whimper over legends of the tortures practised on each other by the Pagan Indians, and smile upon the cruelties of Christian men! Shall we, so long as these things last, exult above the scattered remnants of that race, and triumph in the white enjoyment of their possessions? Rather, for me, restore the forest and the Indian village; in lieu of stars and stripes, let some poor feather flutter in the breeze; replace the streets and squares by wigwams; and though the death-song of a hundred haughty warriors fill the air, it will be music to the shriek of one unhappy slave.

On one theme, which is commonly before our eyes, and in respect of which our national character is changing fast, let the plain Truth be spoken, and let us not, like dastards, beat about the bush by hinting at the Spaniard and the fierce Italian. When knives are drawn by Englishmen in conflict let it be said and known: 'We owe this change to Republican Slavery. These are the weapons of Freedom. With sharp points and edges such as these, Liberty in America hews and hacks her slaves; or, failing that pursuit, her sons devote them to a better use, and turn them on each other.'

CHAPTER XVIII - CONCLUDING REMARKS

THERE are many passages in this book, where I have been at some pains to resist the temptation of troubling my readers with my own deductions and conclusions: preferring that they should judge for themselves, from such premises as I have laid before them. My only object in the outset, was, to carry them with me faithfully wheresoever I went: and that task I have discharged.

But I may be pardoned, if on such a theme as the general character of the American people, and the general character of their social system, as presented to a stranger's eyes, I desire to express my own opinions in a few words, before I bring these volumes to a close.

They are, by nature, frank, brave, cordial, hospitable, and affectionate. Cultivation and refinement seem but to enhance their warmth of heart and ardent enthusiasm; and it is the possession of these latter qualities in a most remarkable degree, which renders an educated American one of the most endearing and most generous of friends. I never was so won upon, as by this class; never yielded up my full confidence and esteem so readily and pleasurably, as to them; never can make again, in half a year, so many friends for whom I seem to entertain the regard of half a life.

These qualities are natural, I implicitly believe, to the whole people. That they are, however, sadly sapped and blighted in their growth among the mass; and that there are influences at work which endanger them still more, and give but little present promise of their healthy restoration; is a truth that ought to be told.

It is an essential part of every national character to pique itself mightily upon its faults, and to deduce tokens of its virtue or its wisdom from their very exaggeration. One great blemish in the popular mind of America, and the prolific parent of an innumerable brood of evils, is Universal Distrust. Yet the American citizen plumes himself upon this spirit, even when he is sufficiently dispassionate to perceive the ruin it works; and will often adduce it, in spite of his own reason, as an instance of the great sagacity and acuteness of the people, and their superior shrewdness and independence.

'You carry,' says the stranger, 'this jealousy and distrust into every transaction of public life. By repelling worthy men from your legislative assemblies, it has bred up a class of candidates for the suffrage, who, in their very act, disgrace your Institutions and your people's choice. It has rendered you so fickle, and so given to change, that your inconstancy has passed into a proverb; for you no sooner set up an idol firmly, than you are sure to pull it down and dash it into fragments: and this, because directly you reward a benefactor, or a public servant, you distrust him, merely because he is rewarded; and immediately apply yourselves to find out, either that you have been too bountiful in your acknowledgments, or he remiss in his deserts. Any man who attains a high place among you, from the President downwards, may date his downfall from that moment; for any printed lie that any notorious villain pens, although it militate directly against the character and conduct of a life, appeals at once to your distrust, and is believed. You will strain at a gnat in the way of trustfulness and confidence, however fairly won and well deserved; but you will swallow a whole caravan of camels, if they be laden with unworthy doubts and mean suspicions. Is this well, think you, or likely to elevate the character of the governors or the governed, among you?'

The answer is invariably the same: 'There's freedom of opinion here, you know. Every man thinks for himself, and we are not to be easily overreached. That's how our people come to be suspicious.'

Another prominent feature is the love of 'smart' dealing: which gilds over many a swindle and gross breach of trust; many a defalcation, public and private; and enables many a knave to hold his head up with the best, who well deserves a halter; though it has not been without its retributive operation, for this smartness has done more in a few years to impair the public credit, and to cripple the public resources, than dull honesty, however rash, could have effected in a century. The merits of a broken speculation, or a bankruptcy, or of a successful scoundrel, are not gauged by its or his observance of the golden rule, 'Do as you would be done by,' but are considered with reference to their smartness. I recollect, on both occasions of our passing that ill- fated Cairo on the Mississippi, remarking on the bad effects such gross deceits must have when they exploded, in generating a want of confidence abroad, and discouraging foreign investment: but I was given to understand that this was a very smart scheme by which a deal of money had been made: and that its smartest feature was, that they forgot these things abroad, in a very short time, and speculated again, as freely as ever. The following dialogue I have held a hundred times: 'Is it not a very disgraceful circumstance that such a man as So-and-so should be acquiring a large property by the most infamous and odious means, and notwithstanding all the crimes of which he has been guilty, should be tolerated and abetted by your Citizens? He is a public nuisance, is he not?' 'Yes, sir.' 'A convicted liar?' 'Yes, sir.' 'He has been kicked, and cuffed, and caned?' 'Yes, sir.' 'And he is utterly dishonourable, debased, and profligate?' 'Yes, sir.' 'In the name of wonder, then, what is his merit?' 'Well, sir, he is a smart man.'

In like manner, all kinds of deficient and impolitic usages are referred to the national love of trade; though, oddly enough, it would be a weighty charge against a foreigner that he regarded the Americans as a trading people. The love of trade is assigned as a reason for that comfortless custom, so very prevalent in country towns, of married persons living in hotels, having no fireside of their own, and seldom meeting from early morning until late at night, but at the hasty public meals. The love of trade is a reason why the literature of America is to remain for ever unprotected 'For we are a trading people, and don't care for poetry:' though we DO, by the way, profess to be very proud of our poets: while healthful amusements, cheerful means of recreation, and wholesome fancies, must fade before the stern utilitarian joys of trade.

These three characteristics are strongly presented at every turn, full in the stranger's view. But, the foul growth of America has a more tangled root than this; and it strikes its fibres, deep in its licentious Press.

Schools may be erected, East, West, North, and South; pupils be taught, and masters reared, by scores upon scores of thousands; colleges may thrive, churches may be crammed, temperance may be diffused, and advancing knowledge in all other forms walk through the land with giant strides: but while the newspaper press of America is in, or near, its present abject state, high moral improvement in that country is hopeless. Year by year, it must and will go back; year by year, the tone of public feeling must sink lower down; year by year, the Congress and the Senate must become of less account before all decent men; and year by year, the memory of the Great Fathers of the Revolution must be outraged more and more, in the bad life of their degenerate child.

Among the herd of journals which are published in the States, there are some, the reader scarcely need be told, of character and credit. From personal intercourse with accomplished gentlemen connected with publications of this class, I have derived both pleasure and profit. But the name of these is Few, and of the others Legion; and the influence of the good, is powerless to counteract the moral poison of the bad.

Among the gentry of America; among the well-informed and moderate: in the learned professions; at the bar and on the bench: there is, as there can be, but one opinion, in reference to the vicious character of these infamous journals. It is sometimes contended - I will not say strangely, for it is natural to seek excuses for such a disgrace - that their influence is not so great as a visitor would suppose. I must be pardoned for saying that there is no warrant for this plea, and that every fact and circumstance tends directly to the opposite conclusion.

When any man, of any grade of desert in intellect or character, can climb to any public distinction, no matter what, in America, without first grovelling down upon the earth, and bending the knee before this monster of depravity; when any private excellence is safe from its attacks; when any social confidence is left unbroken by it, or any tie of social decency and honour is held in the least regard; when any man in that free country has freedom of opinion, and presumes to think for himself, and speak for himself, without humble reference to a censorship which, for its rampant ignorance and base dishonesty, he utterly loathes and despises in his heart; when those who most acutely feel its infamy and the reproach it casts upon the nation, and who most denounce it to each other, dare to set their heels upon, and crush it openly, in the sight of all men: then, I will believe that its influence is lessening, and men are returning to their manly senses. But while that Press has its evil eye in every house, and its black hand in every appointment in the state, from a president to a postman; while, with ribald slander for its only stock in trade, it is the standard literature of an enormous class, who must find their reading in a newspaper, or they will not read at all; so long must its odium be upon the country's head, and so long must the evil it works, be plainly visible in the Republic.

To those who are accustomed to the leading English journals, or to the respectable journals of the Continent of Europe; to those who are accustomed to anything else in print and paper; it would be impossible, without an amount of extract for which I have neither space nor inclination, to convey an adequate idea of this frightful engine in America. But if any man desire confirmation of my statement on this head, let him repair to any place in this city of London, where scattered numbers of these publications are to be found; and there, let him form his own opinion. (1)

It would be well, there can be no doubt, for the American people as a whole, if they loved the Real less, and the Ideal somewhat more. It would be well, if there were greater encouragement to lightness of heart and gaiety, and a wider cultivation of what is beautiful, without being eminently and directly useful. But here, I think the general remonstrance, 'we are a new country,' which is so often advanced as an excuse for defects which are quite unjustifiable, as being, of right, only the slow growth of an old one, may be very reasonably urged: and I yet hope to hear of there being some other national amusement in the United States, besides newspaper politics.

They certainly are not a humorous people, and their temperament always impressed me is being of a dull and gloomy character. In shrewdness of remark, and a certain cast-iron quaintness, the Yankees, or people of New England, unquestionably take the lead; as they do in most other evidences of intelligence. But in travelling about, out of the large cities - as I have remarked in former parts of these volumes - I was quite oppressed by the prevailing seriousness and melancholy air of business: which was so general and unvarying, that at every new town I came to, I seemed to meet the very same people whom I had left behind me, at the last. Such defects as are perceptible in the national manners, seem, to me, to be referable, in a great degree, to this cause: which has generated a dull, sullen persistence in coarse usages, and rejected the graces of life as undeserving of attention. There is no doubt that Washington, who was always most scrupulous and exact on points of ceremony, perceived the tendency towards this mistake, even in his time, and did his utmost to correct it.

I cannot hold with other writers on these subjects that the prevalence of various forms of dissent in America, is in any way attributable to the non-existence there of an established church: indeed, I think the temper of the people, if it admitted of such an Institution being founded amongst them, would lead them to desert it, as a matter of course, merely because it WAS established. But, supposing it to exist, I doubt its probable efficacy in summoning the wandering sheep to one great fold, simply because of the immense amount of dissent which prevails at home; and because I do not find in America any one form of religion with which we in Europe, or even in England, are unacquainted. Dissenters resort thither in great numbers, as other people do, simply because it is a land of resort; and great settlements of them are founded, because ground can be purchased, and towns and villages reared, where there were none of the human creation before. But even the Shakers emigrated from England; our country is not unknown to Mr. Joseph Smith, the apostle of Mormonism, or to his benighted disciples; I have beheld religious scenes myself in some of our populous towns which can hardly be surpassed by an American camp- meeting; and I am not aware that any instance of superstitious imposture on the one hand, and superstitious credulity on the other, has had its origin in the United States, which we cannot more than parallel by the precedents of Mrs. Southcote, Mary Tofts the rabbit-breeder, or even Mr. Thorn of Canterbury: which latter case arose, some time after the dark ages had passed away.

The Republican Institutions of America undoubtedly lead the people to assert their self-respect and their equality; but a traveller is bound to bear those Institutions in his mind, and not hastily to resent the near approach of a class of strangers, who, at home, would keep aloof. This characteristic, when it was tinctured with no foolish pride, and stopped short of no honest service, never offended me; and I very seldom, if ever, experienced its rude or unbecoming display. Once or twice it was comically developed, as in the following case; but this was an amusing incident, and not the rule, or near it.

I wanted a pair of boots at a certain town, for I had none to travel in, but those with the memorable cork soles, which were much too hot for the fiery decks of a steamboat. I therefore sent a message to an artist in boots, importing, with my compliments, that I should be happy to see him, if he would do me the polite favour to call. He very kindly returned for answer, that he would 'look round' at six o'clock that evening.

I was lying on the sofa, with a book and a wine-glass, at about that time, when the door opened, and a gentleman in a stiff cravat, within a year or two on either side of thirty, entered, in his hat and gloves; walked up to the looking-glass; arranged his hair; took off his gloves; slowly produced a measure from the uttermost depths of his coat-pocket; and requested me, in a languid tone, to 'unfix' my straps. I complied, but looked with some curiosity at his hat, which was still upon his head. It might have been that, or it might have been the heat - but he took it off. Then, he sat himself down on a chair opposite to me; rested an arm on each knee; and, leaning forward very much, took from the ground, by a great effort, the specimen of metropolitan workmanship which I had just pulled off: whistling, pleasantly, as he did so. He turned it over and over; surveyed it with a contempt no language can express; and inquired if I wished him to fix me a boot like THAT? I courteously replied, that provided the boots were large enough, I would leave the rest to him; that if convenient and practicable, I should not object to their bearing some resemblance to the model then before him; but that I would be entirely guided by, and would beg to leave the whole subject to, his judgment and discretion. 'You an't partickler, about this scoop in the heel, I suppose then?' says he: 'we don't foller that, here.' I repeated my last observation. He looked at himself in the glass again; went closer to it to dash a grain or two of dust out of the corner of his eye; and settled his cravat. All this time, my leg and foot were in the air. 'Nearly ready, sir?' I inquired. 'Well, pretty nigh,' he said; 'keep steady.' I kept as steady as I could, both in foot and face; and having by this time got the dust out, and found his pencil-case, he measured me, and made the necessary notes. When he had finished, he fell into his old attitude, and taking up the boot again, mused for some time. 'And this,' he said, at last, 'is an English boot, is it? This is a London boot, eh?' 'That, sir,' I replied, 'is a London boot.' He mused over it again, after the manner of Hamlet with Yorick's skull; nodded his head, as who should say, 'I pity the Institutions that led to the production of this boot!'; rose; put up his pencil, notes, and paper - glancing at himself in the glass, all the time - put on his hat - drew on his gloves very slowly; and finally walked out. When he had been gone about a minute, the door reopened, and his hat and his head reappeared. He looked round the room, and at the boot again, which was still lying on the floor; appeared thoughtful for a minute; and then said 'Well, good arternoon.' 'Good afternoon, sir,' said I: and that was the end of the interview.

There is but one other head on which I wish to offer a remark; and that has reference to the public health. In so vast a country, where there are thousands of millions of acres of land yet unsettled and uncleared, and on every rood of which, vegetable decomposition is annually taking place; where there are so many great rivers, and such opposite varieties of climate; there cannot fail to be a great amount of sickness at certain seasons. But I may venture to say, after conversing with many members of the medical profession in America, that I am not singular in the opinion that much of the disease which does prevail, might be avoided, if a few common precautions were observed. Greater means of personal cleanliness, are indispensable to this end; the custom of hastily swallowing large quantities of animal food, three times a-day, and rushing back to sedentary pursuits after each meal, must be changed; the gentler sex must go more wisely clad, and take more healthful exercise; and in the latter clause, the males must be included also. Above all, in public institutions, and throughout the whole of every town and city, the system of ventilation, and drainage, and removal of impurities requires to be thoroughly revised. There is no local Legislature in America which may not study Mr. Chadwick's excellent Report upon the Sanitary Condition of our Labouring Classes, with immense advantage.

* * * * * *

I HAVE now arrived at the close of this book. I have little reason to believe, from certain warnings I have had since I returned to England, that it will be tenderly or favourably received by the American people; and as I have written the Truth in relation to the mass of those who form their judgments and express their opinions, it will be seen that I have no desire to court, by any adventitious means, the popular applause.

It is enough for me, to know, that what I have set down in these pages, cannot cost me a single friend on the other side of the Atlantic, who is, in anything, deserving of the name. For the rest, I put my trust, implicitly, in the spirit in which they have been conceived and penned; and I can bide my time.

I have made no reference to my reception, nor have I suffered it to influence me in what I have written; for, in either case, I should have offered but a sorry acknowledgment, compared with that I bear within my breast, towards those partial readers of my former books, across the Water, who met me with an open hand, and not with one that closed upon an iron muzzle.

THE END

POSTSCRIPT

AT a Public Dinner given to me on Saturday the 18th of April, 1868, in the City of New York, by two hundred representatives of the Press of the United States of America, I made the following observations among others:

'So much of my voice has lately been heard in the land, that I might have been contented with troubling you no further from my present standing-point, were it not a duty with which I henceforth charge myself, not only here but on every suitable occasion, whatsoever and wheresoever, to express my high and grateful sense of my second reception in America, and to bear my honest testimony to the national generosity and magnanimity. Also, to declare how astounded I have been by the amazing changes I have seen around me on every side, - changes moral, changes physical, changes in the amount of land subdued and peopled, changes in the rise of vast new cities, changes in the growth of older cities almost out of recognition, changes in the graces and amenities of life, changes in the Press, without whose advancement no advancement can take place anywhere. Nor am I, believe me, so arrogant as to suppose that in five and twenty years there have been no changes in me, and that I had nothing to learn and no extreme impressions to correct when I was here first. And this brings me to a point on which I have, ever since I landed in the United States last November, observed a strict silence, though sometimes tempted to break it, but in reference to which I will, with your good leave, take you into my confidence now. Even the Press, being human, may be sometimes mistaken or misinformed, and I rather think that I have in one or two rare instances observed its information to be not strictly accurate with reference to myself. Indeed, I have, now and again, been more surprised by printed news that I have read of myself, than by any printed news that I have ever read in my present state of existence. Thus, the vigour and perseverance with which I have for some months past been collecting materials for, and hammering away at, a new book on America has much astonished me; seeing that all that time my declaration has been perfectly well known to my publishers on both sides of the Atlantic, that no consideration on earth would induce me to write one. But what I have intended, what I have resolved upon (and this is the confidence I seek to place in you) is, on my return to England, in my own person, in my own journal, to bear, for the behoof of my countrymen, such testimony to the gigantic changes in this country as I have hinted at to-night. Also, to record that wherever I have been, in the smallest places equally with the largest, I have been received with unsurpassable politeness, delicacy, sweet temper, hospitality, consideration, and with unsurpassable respect for the privacy daily enforced upon me by the nature of my avocation here and the state of my health. This testimony, so long as I live, and so long as my descendants have any legal right in my books, I shall cause to be republished, as an appendix to every copy of those two books of mine in which I have referred to America. And this I will do and cause to be done, not in mere love and thankfulness, but because I regard it as an act of plain justice and honour.'

I said these words with the greatest earnestness that I could lay upon them, and I repeat them in print here with equal earnestness. So long as this book shall last, I hope that they will form a part of it, and will be fairly read as inseparable from my experiences and impressions of America.

CHARLES DICKENS.

MAY, 1868.

Footnotes:

(1) NOTE TO THE ORIGINAL EDITION. - Or let him refer to an able, and perfectly truthful article, in THE FOREIGN QUARTERLY REVIEW, published in the present month of October; to which my attention has been attracted, since these sheets have been passing through the press. He will find some specimens there, by no means remarkable to any man who has been in America, but sufficiently striking to one who has not.

THE END OF
American Notes

Bardell v. Pickwick

Written by Charles Dickens
Edited by Percy Fitzgerald

The Trial for Breach of Promise of Marriage held at the Guildhall Sittings, on April 1, 1828, before Mr. Justice Stareleigh and a Special Jury of the City of London.

Edited with Notes and Commentaries
by
PERCY FITZGERALD, M.A., F.S.A.
Barrister-at-Law;
and sometime Crown Prosecutor on the North-East Circuit (*Ireland*).

LONDON
ELLIOT STOCK 62 PATERNOSTER ROW E.C.
1902

INTRODUCTION.

There are few things more familiar or more interesting to the public than this *cause célèbre*. It is better known than many a real case: for every one knows the Judge, his name and remarks—also the Counsel—(notably Sergeant Buzfuz)—the witnessess, and what they said—and of course all about the Plaintiff and the famous Defendant. It was tried over seventy years ago at "the Guildhall Settens," and was described by Boz some sixty-three years ago. Yet every detail seems fresh—and as fresh as ever. It is astonishing that a purely technical sketch like this, whose humours might be relished only by such specialists as Barristers and Attorneys, who would understand the jokes levelled at the Profession, should be so well understanded of the people. All see the point of the legal satire. It is a quite a prodigy. Boz had the art, in an extraordinary degree, of thus vividly commending trade processes, professional allusions, and methods to outsiders, and making them humourous and intelligible. Witness Jackson, when he came to "serve" Mr. Pickwick and friends with the *subpœnas*. It is a dry, business-like process, but how racy Boz made it. A joke sparkles in every line.

This trial for Breach has been debated over and over again among lawyers and barristers, some contending that "there was no evidence at all to go to the Jury" as to a promise; others insisting on mis-direction, and that there was evidence that ought not to have been admitted. The law has since been changed, and by later Acts both Mrs. Bardell and Mr. Pickwick would have been allowed to tell their stories and to have been cross-examined. Mrs. Bardell was almost justified in supposing that Mr. Pickwick was offering his hand when he was merely speaking of engaging a man-servant. But then the whole would have been spoiled. Under the present systems, this would all have come out. Mr. Pickwick, when it came to his turn, would have explained what his proceedings meant. It is a most perfect and vivid satire on the hackneyed methods of the lawyers when dealing with the witnesses. Nothing can be more natural or more graphic. It is maintained to something between the level of comedy and farce: nor is there the least exaggeration. It applies now as it did then, though not to the same topics. A hectoring, bullying Counsel, threatening and cruel, would interfere with the pleasant tone of the play; but it is all the same conveyed. There is a likeness to Bardell *v.* Pickwick in another Burlesque case, tried in our day, the well-known "Trial by Jury," the joint work of Mr. Gilbert and the late Sir Arthur Sullivan. The general tone of both is the same and in the modern work there is a general Pickwickian flavour. Sir Arthur's music, too, is highly "Pickwickian," and the joint effort of the two humorists is infinitely diverting. The Judge is something of a Stareleigh.

The truth is that Boz, the engenderer of these facetiæ, apart from his literary gift, was one of the most brilliant, capable young fellows of his generation. Whatever he did, he did in the best way, and in the brightest way. But his power of observation and of seeing what might be termed the humorous *quiddity* of anything, was extraordinary.

To put absurdity in a proper view for satirical purposes, it has to be generalised from a number of instances, familiar to all. Those legal oddities, the public had seen over and over again, but they had passed unnoticed till this clever observer set to work and noted them. As I say, it required a deep knowledge of the law to set these things in a grotesque light.

Boz had been a sort of general reporter on the *Chronicle*: he "took" everything. He had reported at police courts as well as at the law courts. His quick and bright intelligence seized the humours here, as it did those of the street. He later reported in the Gallery, and was dispatched across country in post-chaises to "take" eminent political speakers—always winning the hearty commendation of his employers for his zeal and energy.

THE CAUSE OF ACTION.

Mr. Pickwick was a well-to-do bachelor, who lived by himself near the city, where he had been in trade. His age was about fifty, as can be accurately calculated by his remark on the sliding at Manor Farm. “I used to do so on the gutters when I was a boy . . . but I hav’nt done such a thing these thirty years.” This was said in 1828. He resided in Goswell Street—now Goswell Road—with a widow lady, whose husband had been in the Excise. He cannot have paid more than a pound a week, if so much, for two rooms on the first floor. There was no servant, and the hardworking landlady, Mrs. Martha Bardell, performed all the duties of her household single-handed. As her Counsel later described it,—and see all she did for him!—“She waited on him, attended to his comforts, cooked his meals, looked out his linen for the washer-woman when it went abroad, darned, aired, and prepared it for his wear when it came home, and, in short, enjoyed his fullest trust and confidence.” Thus Sergeant Buzfuz, duly “instructed.” Not only was there Mr. Pickwick, but there was another lodger, and her little boy Tommy. The worthy woman took care of and looked after all three. This might incline us to take a favorable view of her. She regarded her lodger with feelings of veneration and attachment, of which proof is found in her later talk with Sam. To him she said that “he had always behaved himself like a perfect gentlemen,” and then added this significant speech: “It’s a terrible thing to be dragged in this way before the public, but *I now see* that it’s the only thing that I ought to do.” That is, she seems to have held out as long as possible, believing that her amiable lodger would act as a perfect gentlemen and like himself. But when she found that even an action had no terrors for him, she saw that there was nothing else to do but to let the action go on.

And what was Mrs. Bardell like? One would imagine her a plump, buxom widow, “fat, fair, and forty,” with her dear little boy, “the only pledge of her deceased exciseman,” or say something between thirty and forty years old. Fortunately, two portraits have come down to us of the lady—one somewhat of this pattern, and depicting her, as she flung herself on Mr. Pickwick on that disastrous morning: the other—a swollen, dreadful thing, which must be a caricature of the literal presentment. Here we see a woman of gross, enormous proportions seated on the front bench and apparently weighing some thirteen or fourteen stone, with a vast coarse face. This is surely an unfair presentment of the worthy landlady; besides, Dodson and Fogg were too astute practitioners to imperil their chances by exhibiting to his Lordship and the Jury so ill-favoured a plaintiff. Indeed, we are told that they arranged a rather theatrical exhibition in this scene, with a view of creating an impression in their favour.

Many find pleasure in reading the Bookseller's Catalogues, and a vast number are showered on me in the course of the year. But on one of these I always gaze with a special interest, and even tenderness. For it comes from one Herbert, who lives in Goswell Road. Only think, *Goswell* Road—erst Goswell Street, where just seventy years ago Mrs. Bardell was letting lodgings and Mr. Pickwick himself was lodging: and on the cover I read, furthur attraction, "Goswell Road, near the 'Angel,'" whence the "stage" which took the party to the "Spaniard" at Hampstead started! Sometimes I am drawn to the shop, crowded with books; but one's thoughts stray away from the books into speculations as to *which* house it was. But the indications are most vague, though the eye settles on a decent range of shabby-looking faded tenements—two storeys high only—and which *look* like lodging houses. Some ingenious commentators have indeed ventured to identify the house itself, arguing from the very general description in the text.

We should note, however, Mr. Pickwick's lack of caution. He came in the very next day, having apparently made no enquiries as to the landlady. Had he done so, he would have learned of the drunken exciseman who met his death by being knocked on the head with a quart pot. He might have heard of the friends, Cluppins, Raddle, etc., who seemed to have been charwomen or something of the sort; also that there was a sort of working man as a fellow lodger. Above all, that there was no servant in the house. All which boded ill, and made it likely that Mr. Pickwick would be the easy victim of some crafty scheme.

All went well until the unluckly morning in July, 1827, when Mr. Pickwick's friends, coming to pay a morning call, and entering unexpectedly, surprised Mr. Pickwick with his landlady fainting in his arms in an hysterical condition. This was a very awkward business. The delinquent, however, did not at once grasp the situation, and could not “make head or tail of it, or what the lady meant.” His friends, however, had their doubts:

> ‘What *is* the matter?’ said the three tongue-tied Pickwickians.
>
> ‘I don’t know,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, pettishly. ‘Now, help me, lead this woman down stairs.’
>
> ‘Oh, I am better now,’ said Mrs. Bardell, faintly.
>
> ‘Let me lead you downstairs,’ said the ever gallant Mr. Tupman.
>
> ‘Thank you, sir—thank you?’ exclaimed Mrs. Bardell hysterically. And downstairs she was led accordingly, accompanied by her affectionate son.
>
> ‘I cannot conceive—’ said Mr. Pickwick, when his friend returned—‘I cannot conceive what has been the matter with that woman. I had merely announced to her my intention of keeping a man servant, when she fell into the extraordinary paroxysm in which you found her. Very extraordinary thing.’
>
> ‘Very,’ said his three friends.
>
> ‘Placed me in such an extremely awkward situation,’ continued Mr. Pickwick.
>
> ‘Very,’ was the reply of his followers, as they coughed slightly, and looked dubiously at each other.
>
> This behaviour was not lost upon Mr. Pickwick. He remarked their incredulity. They evidently suspected him.

It may be reasonably supposed that Mr. Pickwick had not been very discreet, or sufficiently cautious in his general behaviour to his landlady. As we know, he was rather too effusive in his relations with the fair sex. One of his weaknesses was *kissing*. He would kiss everybody who was young or good-looking. His maxim was “Kiss early and kiss often.” Who can forget his *systematic* method of greeting the engaging Arabella? “He (1) took off his spectacles, (2) in great haste, and (3) taking both the young lady’s hands in his (4) kissed her (5) a great many times (6) perhaps a greater number of times than was absolutely necessary.” Old rogue! I have little doubt that on his return home from his tours he encircled the buxom figure of Mrs. Bardell—all of course in his own paternal and privileged way.

It should be borne in mind also that Mr. Pickwick was almost invariably drawn into his more serious scrapes and embarrassments by this devotion to the sex. The night in the boarding school garden—the affair with the spinster lady—his interview with Arabella from the top of the wall—his devotion to Mrs. Pott and Mrs. Dowler—and much more that we do not hear of, show that he was a gallant elderly gentleman. Oh, he was a "sly dog, he was."

There is a curious burst of Mr. Pickwick's which seems to hint at a sort of tender appreciation on his side. When the notice of trial was sent to him, in his first vehemence, he broke out that Mrs. Bardell had nothing to do with the business, "*She hadn't the heart to do it*." Mr. Pickwick could not speak with this certainty, unless he knew the lady's feelings pretty well. *Why* hadn't she the heart to do it? Because she was sincerely attached to him and his interests and was "a dear creature." This, however, was a fond delusion of the worthy gentleman's. Persons of her class are not quite so disinterested as they appear to be, especially if they have to interpret the various paternal and comforting advances made to them by their well to do lodgers.

There is another factor which can hardly be left out, when considering Mr. Pickwick's responsibility—that is, his too frequent indulgence in liquor, and the insufficiency of his head to stand its influence. Now this was a very important day for him, the first time he was to set up a man servant. He had to break it to his landlady, who would naturally resent the change. He may have been *priming* himself with some of those perpetual glasses of brandy and water to which he was addicted, and who knows but that, in his ardour to propitiate, he may have gone a *little* too far? This fact too, of the introducing a man servant into her establishment, Mrs. Bardell may have indistinctly associated with a general change in his life. If she were to become Mrs. Pickwick her duties might be naturally expected to devolve on a male assistant.

Next morning he and his friends quitted London on their travels to Eatanswill in pursuit of adventure. He airily dismissed the matter. We may wonder whether he made any remonstrance to his landlady before his departure. Probably he did not, fancying that she had been merely in a slight fit of the "tantrums."

At Bury, however, after the boarding-school adventure, he was to be painfully awakened. He was sitting with his friends after dinner at the "Angel," in his happiest mood. Winkle had related his quarrel with Pott *in re* Mrs. Pott, in a humorous fashion when one of the most delightful of humorous scenes followed.

Mr. Pickwick was proceeding with his scathing rebuke, when Sam enters with a letter.

> 'I don't know this hand,' said Mr. Pickwick, opening the letter. 'Mercy on us! what's this? It must be a jest; it—it—can't be true.'
>
> 'What's the matter?' was the general inquiry.
>
> 'Nobody dead, is there?' said Wardle, alarmed at the horror in Mr. Pickwick's countenance.
>
> Mr. Pickwick made no reply, but, pushing the letter across the table, and desiring Mr. Tupman to read it aloud, fell back in his chair with a look of vacant astonishment quite alarming to behold.
>
> Mr. Tupman, with a trembling voice, read the letter, of which the following is a copy:—
>
> '*Freeman's Court, Cornhill, August* 28*th*, 1827.
> *Bardell against Pickwick*.
>
> *Sir*,
>
> *Having been instructed by Mrs. Martha Bardell to commence an action against you for a breach of promise of marriage, for which the plaintiff lays her damages at fifteen hundred pounds, we beg to inform you that a writ has been issued against you in this suit in the Court of Common Pleas; and request to know, by return of post, the name of your attorney in London, who will accept service thereof.*
>
> *We are, Sir,*
> *Your obedient servants,*
> *DODSON & FOGG*.
>
> Mr. Samuel Pickwick.'

So Mr. Pickwick, the general mentor, the philosopher and friend—the man of high moral tone, "born to set the world aright"—the general lecturer of his "followers," was now in for an action at law of the most awkward and unpleasant kind. To be philandering with one's landlady! rather low form this. But what would they say down at Manor Farm? How Isabella Wardle and her sister—and all the girls—would laugh! And the spinster aunt—*she* would enjoy it! But there was no help for it. It must be faced.

Naturally Mr. Pickwick felt uncomfortable, and his first idea was to arrange the matter. This was a sensible course, and he ought at once to have put the matter into the hands of his friend Perker, with full powers to treat. But no. Mr. Pickwick's vanity and indiscretion made him meddle in the business behind his solicitor's back, as it where, and with damaging results to himself—a warning to all such amateurs. It must be said that Dodson and Fogg's behaviour at the extraordinary visit which he paid them was marked by a certain propriety. Mr. Pickwick insisted on knowing what were the grounds of action—that is, the details of the evidence against him—in short, their case. They, very correctly, refused to tell him. "The case may be false or it may be true—it may be credible it may be incredible." But all the same it was a strong case. This was as much as they could tell. Mr. Pickwick could only urge that if "it were so, he was a most unfortunate man," on which Dodson promptly—"I hope you are, sir, I trust you may be, sir. If you are really innocent, you are more unfortunate than I had believed any man could possibly be."

Mr. Pickwick then rather foolishly asked did he understand they meant to go on with the action—as if they could have been affected by his declaration. "Understand?" was the reply, "that you certainly may"—a very natural speech.

With some want of professional delicacy and etiquette, Dodson seized the opportunity to "serve" Mr. Pickwick; but they were not a high-class firm and their methods were not high-class. Then an extraordinarily incredible display followed. His passion broke forth. *"Of all the disgraceful and rascally proceedings he ever, etc.*!" Dodson summoned his clerks to listen to this gross language, and said, "Perhaps you would like to call us swindlers." *"You are*," said Mr. Pickwick. Fogg even wished him to assault them—and perhaps he would have done so, but for Sam, who at last got him away. This was certainly not correct, but how aggravating was Mr. Pickwick! One is rather astonished at the forbearance of this sharp firm.

Now, had Mr. Pickwick gone straight to his lodgings in Goswell Street and seen Mrs. Bardell, heard her views and claims, had he been told by her that she had been professionally urged to go to law as she had such a strong case—there might have been some excuse for this violence to Dodson and Fogg. But he knew nothing whatever of the matter—knew nothing of the attornies—and in his blind fury gratuitously assumed that they had "conspired" to harass him in this way. True, he had overheard how they had treated poor Ramsey.

This very *malapropos* visit of Mr. Pickwick to the firm was, as I said, a mistake and damaged his case. It showed that he was nervous and anxious, and *insecure*. He took nothing by it. There was in truth much short-sighted cunning in his ways, which came of his overweening vanity. But this was only one of several attempts he made to worm out something to his own advantage.

Another of Mr. Pickwick's foolish manœuvres was his sending his man to his old lodgings to his landlady—ostensibly to fetch away his "things," when this dialogue passed:

> 'Tell Mrs. Bardell she may put a bill up, as soon as she likes.'
>
> 'Wery good, sir,' replied Mr. Weller; 'anythin' more, sir.'
>
> 'Nothing more, Sam.'
>
> Mr. Weller stepped slowly to the door, as if he expected something more; slowly opened it, slowly stepped out, and had slowly closed it within a couple of inches, when Mr. Pickwick called out.
>
> 'Sam.'
>
> 'Sir,' said Mr. Weller, stepping quickly back, and closing the door behind him.
>
> 'I have no objection, Sam, to your endeavouring to ascertain how Mrs. Bardell herself seems disposed towards me, and whether it is really probable that this vile and groundless action is to be carried to extremity. *I say, I do not object to your doing this, if you wish it, Sam,*' said Mr. Pickwick. Sam gave a short nod of intelligence and left the room.

Now this was very artful on the part of Mr. Pickwick, but it was a very shallow sort of artfulness, and it was later to recoil on himself. Sam of course saw through it at once. It never dawned on this simple-minded man what use the Plaintiff's solicitors would make of his *demarche*.

When the subpœnas were served he rushed off to Perker:

> 'They have subpœna'd my servant too,' said Mr. Pickwick.
>
> 'Sam?' said Perker.
>
> Mr. Pickwick replied in the affirmative.
>
> 'Of course, my dear sir; of course. I knew they would. I could have told *you* that a month ago. You know, my dear sir, if you *will* take the management of your affairs into your own hands after intrusting them to your solicitor, you must also take the consequences.' Here Mr. Perker drew himself up with conscious dignity, and brushed some stray grains of snuff from his shirt frill.
>
> 'And what do they want him to prove?' asked Mr. Pickwick, after two or three minutes' silence.

‘That you sent him up to the plaintiff’s to make some offer of a compromise, I suppose,’ replied Perker. ‘It don’t matter much, though; I don’t think many counsel could get a great deal out of *him*.’

‘I don’t think they could,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

The minutiæ of legal process are prosaic and uninteresting, and it might seem impossible to invest them with any dramatic interest; but how admirably has Boz lightened up and coloured the simple incident of an attorney’s clerk—a common, vulgar fellow of the lowest type, arriving to serve his subpœnas on the witnesses—all assumed to be hostile. The scene is full of touches of light comedy.

‘How de do, sir?’ said Mr. Jackson, nodding to Mr. Pickwick.

That gentlemen bowed, and looked somewhat surprised for the physiognomy of Mr. Jackson dwelt not in his recollection.

‘I have called from Dodson and Fogg’s,’ said Mr. Jackson, in an explanatory tone.

Mr. Pickwick roused at the name. ‘I refer you to my attorney, sir: Mr. Perker, of Gray’s Inn,’ said he. ‘Waiter, show this gentleman out.’

‘Beg your pardon, Mr. Pickwick,’ said Jackson, deliberately depositing his hat on the floor, and drawing from his pocket the strip of parchment. ‘But personal service, by clerk or agent, in these cases, you know, Mr. Pickwick—nothing like caution, sir, in all legal forms?’

Here Mr. Jackson cast his eye on the parchment; and, resting his hands on the table, and looking round with a winning and persuasive, smile, said: ‘Now, come; don’t let’s have no words about such a little matter as this. Which of you gentlemen’s name’s Snodgrass?’

At this inquiry Mr. Snodgrass gave such a very undisguised and palpable start, that no further reply was needed.

‘Ah! I thought so,’ said Mr. Jackson, more affably than before. ‘I’ve got a little something to trouble you with, sir.’

‘Me!’ exclaimed Mr. Snodgrass.

‘It’s only a *subpœna* in Bardell and Pickwick on behalf of the plaintiff,’ replied Jackson, singling out one of the slips of paper, and producing a shilling from his waistcoat pocket. ‘It’ll come on, in the settens after Term; fourteenth of Febooary, we expect; we’ve marked it a special jury cause, and it’s only ten down the paper. That’s yours, Mr. Snodgrass.’ As Jackson said this he presented the parchment before the eyes of Mr. Snodgrass, and slipped the paper and the shilling into his hand.

Mr. Tupman had witnessed this process in silent astonishment, when Jackson, turning sharply upon him, said:

‘I think I ain’t mistaken when I say your name’s Tupman, am I?’

Mr. Tupman looked at Mr. Pickwick; but, perceiving no encouragement in that gentleman’s widely-opened eyes to deny his name, said:

‘Yes, my name *is* Tupman, sir.’

‘And that other gentleman’s Mr. Winkle, I think?’ said Jackson.

Mr. Winkle faltered out a reply in the affirmative; and both gentlemen were forthwith invested with a slip of paper, and a shilling each, by the dexterous Mr. Jackson.

‘Now,’ said Jackson, ‘I’m affraid you’ll think me rather troublesome, but I want somebody else, if it ain’t inconvenient. I *have* Samuel Weller’s name here, Mr. Pickwick.’

‘Send my servant here, waiter,’ said Mr. Pickwick. The waiter retired, considerably astonished, and Mr. Pickwick motioned Jackson to a seat.

There was a painful pause, which was at length broken by the innocent defendant.

‘I suppose, sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, his indignation rising while he spoke; ‘I suppose, sir, that it is the intention of your employers to seek to criminate me upon the testimony of my own friends?’

Mr. Jackson struck his forefinger several times against the left side of his nose, to intimate that he was not there to disclose the secrets of the prison-house, and playfully rejoined:

‘Not knowin’, can’t say.’

‘For what other reason, sir,’ pursued Mr. Pickwick, ‘are these subpœnas served upon them, if not for this?’

‘Very good plant, Mr. Pickwick,’ replied Jackson, slowly shaking his head. ‘But it won’t do. No harm in trying, but there’s little to be got out of me.’

Here Mr. Jackson smiled once more upon the company, and, applying his left thumb to the tip of his nose, worked a visionary coffee-mill with his right hand: thereby performing a very graceful piece of pantomime (then much in vogue, but now, unhappily, almost obsolete) which was familiarly denominated ‘taking a grinder.’ (Imagine a modern solicitor’s clerk “Taking a grinder!”)

‘No, no, Mr. Pickwick,’ said Jackson, in conclusion; ‘Perker’s people must guess what we served these subpœnas for. If they can’t, they must wait till the action comes on, and then they’ll find out.’

Mr. Pickwick bestowed a look of excessive disgust on his unwelcome visitor, and would probably have hurled some tremendous anathema at the heads of Messrs. Dodson and Fogg, had not Sam’s entrance at the instant interrupted him.

‘Samuel Weller?’ said Mr. Jackson, inquiringly.

‘Vun o’ the truest things as you’ve said for many a long year,’ replied Sam, in a most composed manner.

‘Here’s a subpœna for you, Mr. Weller,’ said Jackson.

‘What’s that in English?’ inquired Sam.

‘Here’s the original,’ said Jackson, declining the required explanation.

‘Which?’ said Sam.

‘This,’ replied Jackson, shaking the parchment.

‘Oh, that’s the ’rig’nal, is it?’ said Sam. ‘Well, I’m wery glad I’ve seen the ’rig’nal, ’cos it’s a gratifyin’ sort o’ thing, and eases vun’s mind so much.’

‘And here’s the shilling,’ said Jackson. ‘It’s from Dodson and Fogg’s.’

‘And it’s uncommon handsome o’ Dodson and Fogg, as knows so little of me, to come down vith a present,’ said Sam. ‘I feel it as a wery high compliment, sir; it’s a wery hon’rable thing to them, as they knows how to reward merit werever they meets it. Besides wich, it’s affectin to one’s feelin’s.’

As Mr. Weller said this, he inflicted a little friction on his right eye-lid, with the sleeve of his coat, after the most approved manner of actors when they are in domestic pathetics.

Mr. Jackson seemed rather puzzled by Sam’s proceedings; but, as he had served the subpœnas, and had nothing more to say, he made a feint of putting on the one glove which he usually carried in his hand, for the sake of appearances; and returned to the office to report progress.

Another of Mr. Pickwick's foolish and self-willed proceedings was the interview with Serjeant Snubbin, which he so positively insisted upon. We may wonder now-a-days would any K.C. of position have condescended to allow such a proceeding? I fancy it would be thought "irregular:" though perhaps *ex gratia*, and from the oddity of the proposal, it might be conceded.

When Mr. Pickwick called upon him, it turned out that the Serjeant knew nothing whatever of his case; probably cared nothing about it. It was not in his line. He perhaps wondered why the old-fashioned lawyer had "retained" him. We learn Parker's reason:

> 'Well, we've done everything that's necessary. I have engaged Serjeant Snubbin.'
>
> 'Is he a good man?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.
>
> 'Good man!' replied Perker; 'bless your heart and soul, my dear sir, Serjeant Snubbin is at the very top of his profession. Gets treble the business of any man in court—engaged in every case. You needn't mention it abroad; but we say—we of the profession—that Serjeant Snubbin leads the court by the nose.'

How foolish was this reasoning can be seen on an instant's reflection. To "lead the court by the nose" is well enough in an argument before a judge: but here it was more important to lead *a jury* by the nose, which Buzfuz knew how to do. Moreover when a counsel has this power, it usually operates on a special judge and his colleagues; but who could guarantee that Snubbin's special judge would try the case. As it turned out, the Chief Justice fell sick before the day, and Mr. Justice Stareleigh unexpectedly took the case. He as it proved was anything but "led by the nose." Perker indeed, summed up the whole weakness of the case in a single sentence:

> 'They have subpœna'd my three friends,' said Mr. Pickwick.
>
> 'Ah! of course they would,' replied Perker. 'Important witnesses; saw you in a delicate situation.'
>
> 'But she fainted of her own accord,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'She threw herself into my arms.'
>
> 'Very likely, my dear sir,' replied Perker; 'very likely and very natural. Nothing more so, my dear sir, nothing. *But who's to prove it*?'

A suggestion, we are told, that rather "staggered" Mr. Pickwick.

Within ten minutes after he had received the assurance that the thing was impossible, he was conducted by his solicitors into the outer office of the great Serjeant Snubbin himself.

It was an uncarpeted room of tolerable dimensions, with a large writing table drawn up near the fire, the baize top of which had long since lost all claim to its original hue of green, and had gradually grown grey with dust and age, except where all traces of its natural colour were obliterated by ink-stains. Upon the table were numerous little bundles of papers tied with red tape; and behind it, sat an elderly clerk, whose sleek appearance and heavy gold watch-chain presented imposing indications of the extensive and lucrative practice of Mr. Serjeant Snubbin.

‘Is the Serjeant in his room, Mr. Mallard?’ inquired Perker, offering his box with all imaginable courtesy.

‘Yes, he is,’ was the reply, ‘but he’s very busy. Look here; not an opinion given yet, on any one of these cases; and an expedition fee paid with all of them.’ The clerk smiled as he said this, and inhaled the pinch of snuff with a zest which seemed to be compounded of a fondness for snuff and a relish for fees.

‘Something like practice that,’ said Perker.

‘Yes,’ said the barrister’s clerk, producing his own box, and offering it with the greatest cordiality; ‘and the best of it is, that as nobody alive except myself can read the Serjeant’s writing, they are obliged to wait for the opinions, when he has given them, till I have copied ’em, ha—ha—ha!’

‘Which makes good for we know who, besides the Serjeant, and draws a little more out of his clients, eh?’ said Perker; ‘Ha, ha, ha!’ At this the Serjeant’s clerk laughed again—not a noisy boisterous laugh, but a silent, internal chuckle, which Mr. Pickwick disliked to hear. When a man bleeds inwardly, it is a dangerous thing for himself; but when he laughs inwardly, it bodes no good to other people.

‘You haven’t made me out that little list of the fees that I’m in your debt, have you?’ said Perker.

‘No, I have not,’ replied the clerk.

‘I wish you would,’ said Perker. ‘Let me have them, and I’ll send you a cheque. But I suppose you’re too busy pocketing the ready money, to think of the debtors, eh? ha, ha, ha!’ This sally seemed to tickle the clerk, amazingly, and he once more enjoyed a little quiet laugh to himself.

‘But, Mr. Mallard, my dear friend,’ said Perker, suddenly recovering his gravity, and drawing the great man’s great man into a corner, by the lappel of his coat, ‘you must persuade the Serjeant to see me, and my client here.’

‘Come, come,’ said the clerk, ‘that’s not bad either. See the Serjeant! come, that’s too absurd.’ Notwithstanding the absurdity of the proposal, however, the clerk allowed himself to be gently drawn beyond the hearing of Mr. Pickwick; and after a short conversation conducted in whispers, walked softly down a little dark passage and disappeared into the legal luminary’s sanctum, from whence he shortly returned on tiptoe, and informed Mr. Perker and Mr. Pickwick that the Serjeant had been prevailed upon, in violation of all his established rules and customs, to admit them at once.

The Serjeant was writing when his clients entered; he bowed abstractedly when Mr. Pickwick was introduced by his solicitor; and then, motioning them to a seat, put his pen carefully in the inkstand, nursed his left leg, and waited to be spoken to.

‘Mr. Pickwick is the defendant in Bardell and Pickwick, Serjeant Snubbin,’ said Perker.

‘I am retained in that, am I?’ said the Serjeant.

‘You are, Sir,’ replied Perker.

The Serjeant nodded his head, and waited for something else.

‘Mr. Pickwick was anxious to call upon you, Serjeant Snubbin,’ said Perker, ‘to state to you, before you entered upon the case, that he denies there being any ground or pretence whatever for the action against him; and that unless he came into court with clean hands, and without the most conscientious conviction that he was right in resisting the plaintiff’s demand, he would not be there at all. I believe I state your views correctly; do I not, my dear Sir?’ said the little man, turning to Mr. Pickwick.

‘Quite so,’ replied that gentleman.

Mr. Serjeant Snubbin unfolded his glasses, raised them to his eyes; and, after looking at Mr. Pickwick for a few seconds with great curiosity, turned to Mr. Perker, and said, smiling slightly as he spoke—

‘Has Mr. Pickwick a strong case?’

The attorney shrugged his shoulders.

‘Do you purpose calling witnesses?’

‘No.’

The smile on the Serjeant’s countenance became more defined; he rocked his leg with increased violence, and, throwing himself back in his easy-chair, coughed dubiously.

These tokens of the Serjeant’s presentiments on the subject, slight as they were, were not lost on Mr. Pickwick. He settled the spectacles, through which he had attentively regarded such demonstrations of the barrister’s feeling as he had permitted himself to exhibit, more firmly on his nose; and said with great energy, and in utter disregard of all Mr. Perker’s admonitory winkings and frownings—

‘My wishing to wait upon you for such a purpose as this, Sir, appears, I have no doubt, to a gentleman who sees so much of these matters as you must necessarily do, a very extraordinary circumstance.’

The Serjeant tried to look gravely at the fire, but the smile came back again.

‘Gentlemen of your profession, Sir,’ continued Mr. Pickwick, ‘see the worst side of human nature—all its disputes, all its ill-will and bad blood, rise up before you. You know from your experience of juries (I mean no disparagement to you or them) how much depends upon *effect*; and you are apt to attribute to others, a desire to use, for purposes of deception and self-interest, the very instruments which you, in pure honesty and honour of purpose, and with a laudable desire to do your utmost for your client, know the temper and worth of so well, from constantly employing them yourselves. I really believe that to this circumstance may be attributed the vulgar but very general notion of your being, as a body, suspicious, distrustful, and over-cautious. Conscious as I am, Sir, of the disadvantage of making such a declaration to you, under such circumstances, I have come here, because I wish you distinctly to understand, as my friend Mr. Perker has said, that I am innocent of the falsehood laid to my charge; and although I am very well aware of the inestimable value of your assistance, Sir, I must beg to add, that unless you sincerely believe this, I would rather be deprived of the aid of your talents than have the advantage of them.’

> Long before the close of this address, which we are bound to say was of a very prosy character for Mr. Pickwick, the Serjeant had relapsed into a state of abstraction.

Now the Serjeant might at once have replied to all this, that the innocence or guilt of a client had nothing to do with him, that his use was merely to secure a client such benefit and advantage as the law entitled him to: that a judge and jury would decide the point of innocence. Boz himself evidently shared this popular delusion, and seems to be speaking by Mr. Pickwick's mouth. The sagacious Serjeant, however, took no notice whatever of the appeal, but simply asked "who was with him" in the case. Mr. Phunky was sent for, and asked by his leader "to take Mr. Pickwick away" and "hear anything he may wish to communicate." The party was then bowed out.

The truth was, Mr. Pickwick's attorney was too much of a social character and of the "old family solicitor" pattern for so critical a case. The counsel he "instructed" were unsuitable. Serjeant Snubbin was an overworked "Chamber lawyer," whose whole time and experience was given to furnishing "opinions" on tangled cases; so pressed was he that he took "expedition fees" to give certain cases priority: an illegitimate practice that now the Bar Committee would scarcely tolerate. What could such a man know of nisi prius trials, of cross-examining or handling witnesses? It is enough to give his portrait, as supplied by the author:

> Mr. Serjeant Snubbin was a lantern-faced, sallow-complexioned man, of about five-and-forty, or—as the novels say—he might be fifty. He had that *dull-looking boiled eye* which is often to be seen in the heads of people who have applied themselves during many years to a weary and laborious course of study; and which would have been sufficient, without the additional eye-glass which dangled from a broad black riband round his neck, to warn a stranger that he was very near-sighted. His hair was thin and weak, which was partly attributable to his having never devoted much time to its arrangement, and partly to his having worn for five-and-twenty years the forsenic wig which hung on a block beside him. The marks of hair powder on his coat collar, and the ill-washed and worse tied white neckerchief round his throat, showed that he had not found leisure since he left the court to make any alteration in his dress: while the slovenly style of the remainder of his costume warranted the inference that his personal appearance

> would not have been very much improved if he had. Books of practice, heaps of papers, and opened letters, were scattered over the table, without any attempt at order or arrangement; the furniture of the room was old and ricketty; the doors of the bookcase were rotting in their hinges; the dust flew out from the carpet in little clouds at every step; the blinds were yellow with age and dirt; the state of everything in the room showed, with a clearness not to be mistaken, that Mr. Serjeant Snubbin was far too much occupied with his professional pursuits to take any great heed or regard of his personal comforts.

It was a characteristic feature of the slowness of legal process in those days that though the notice of action was sent on August the 28th, 1827, the case was not ripe for trial until February 14th of the next year—nearly six months having elapsed. It is difficult to speculate as to what this long delay was owing. There were only two witnesses whose evidence had to be briefed—Mrs. Cluppins and Mrs. Sanders—and they were at hand. It is odd, by the way, that they did not think of examining little Tommy Bardell, the only one who actually witnessed the proceeding. True, he was of tender years—about eight or ten—and the son of the Plaintiff, but he must have “known the nature of an oath.”

THE TRIAL.

At last the momentous morning came round. It was the fourteenth of February, Valentine's Day, 1828—one not of good omen for the Plaintiff. [26] The Defendant's party was rather gloomy at breakfast, when Perker, by wave of encouraging his client, uttered some *dicta* as to the chances of the Jury having had a good breakfast "Discontented or hungry jurymen, my dear Sir, always find for the Plaintiff." "Bless my heart," said Mr. Pickwick, looking very blank, "What do they do that for!"

The party then got into hackney coaches and was driven to the Guildhall, where the case was to be tried at ten o'clock precisely.

How dramatic Boz has made the "calling of the Jury," which might be thought an uninteresting and prosaic operation enough. It was a special jury, which entailed one guinea per head extra expense on Mr. Pickwick. He had, of course, asked for it: but Dodson and Fogg would have been well content with and perhaps even have preferred a common jury. Now-a-days, special jurors, though summoned largely, have to be almost coerced into attending. A fine of ten pounds is imposed, but this is almost invariably remitted on affidavit. The common jurors, moreover, do not show the reluctance to "serve" of Groffin, the chemist. A guinea is not to be despised. There are, as it were, professional common jurors who hang about the Courts in the hope of being thus called as "understudies." On this occasion what was called a *Tales* was prayed for, and two common jurors were pressed into the service: and "a greengrocer and a chemist were caught directly."

It is impossible to say too much of the completeness with which the legal scene is put forward. Everything is dealt with. We have perfect sketches of the judge, the ushers, the jury, the counsel on the case, the witnesses, the barristers, the attorneys; we have the speeches, the methods of examination and cross-examination.

There is nothing better or more life-like than the sketch of the court in the chill morning, and before the actors came on the scene—the inimitable description of the idle barristers hanging about "the Bar of England," which is accurate to this hour.

Few could describe effectively the peculiar appearance of a crowd of barristers assembled in a Court of Law. They are a type apart, and their odd headgear accentuates all the peculiarities of their faces. No one has, however, succeeded so well as Boz in touching off their peculiarities. This sort of histrionic guise and bearing is assumed with a view to impose on his friends and the public, to suggest an idea that they have much or at least something to do.

> ‘And that,’ said Mr. Pickwick, pointing to a couple of enclosed seats on his right, ‘that’s where the jurymen sit, is it not?’
>
> ‘The identical place, my dear Sir,’ replied Perker, tapping the lid of his snuff-box.
>
> Mr. Pickwick stood up in a state of great agitation and took a glance at the court. There were already a pretty large sprinkling of spectators in the gallery, and a numerous muster of gentlemen in wigs in the barristers’ seats, who presented, as a body, all that pleasing and extensive variety of nose and whisker for which the bar of England is so justly celebrated. Such of the gentlemen as had got a brief to carry, carried it in as conspicuous a manner as possible, and occasionally scratched their noses therewith, to impress the fact more strongly on the observation of the spectators.

One of the happiest descriptions is surely that of the binding of law books. A law library is the most repulsive and uninteresting thing in the world. The colour of the leather is unhealthy and disagreeable, and the necessary shading is secured at the expense of grace. Boz characterises it as ‘that under-done pie crust.’

> Other gentlemen, who had no briefs to show, carried under their arms goodly octavos, with a red label behind, and that under-done-pie-crust-coloured cover, which is technically known as “law calf.” Others, who had neither briefs nor books, thrust their hands into their pockets, and looked as wise as they conveniently could; while others, again, moved here and there with great restlessness and earnestness of manner, content to awaken thereby the admiration and astonishment of the uninitiated stranger. The whole, to the great wonderment of Mr. Pickwick, were divided into little groups, who were chatting and discussing the news of the day in the most unfeeling manner possible—just as if no trial at all were coming on.

> A bow from Mr. Phunky, as he entered, and took his seat behind the row appropriated to the King's Counsel, attracted Mr. Pickwick's attention; and he had scarcely returned it, when Mr. Serjeant Snubbin appeared, followed by Mr. Mallard, who half hid the Serjeant behind a large crimson bag, which he placed on his table, and after shaking hands with Perker, withdrew. Then there entered two or three more Serjeants, and among them, one with a fat body and a red face, who nodded in a friendly manner to Mr. Serjeant Snubbin, and said it was a fine morning.
>
> 'Who's that red-faced man, who said it was a fine morning and nodded to our counsel?' whispered Mr. Pickwick.
>
> 'Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz,' replied Perker. 'He's opposed to us; he leads on the other side. That gentleman behind him is Mr. Skimpin, his junior.'
>
> Mr. Pickwick was just on the point of inquiring, with great abhorrence of the man's cold-blooded villainy, how Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz, who was counsel for the opposite party, dared to presume to tell Mr. Serjeant Snubbin, who was counsel for him, that it was a fine morning,—when he was interrupted by a general rising of the barristers, and a loud cry of 'Silence!' from the officers of the court. Looking round, he found that this was caused by the entrance of the Judge.

On reaching the Court, Perker said, "put Mr. Pickwick's friends in the students' box. Mr. Pickwick had better sit by me." This useful provision for the instruction of legal probationers has fallen into desuetude—no place is reserved for the students now-a-days. Lord Campbell describes the custom and recalls an incident that occurred when he was sitting in the students' box, close to the Bench.

There were some matters of procedure which have since been changed—such as Mr. Skimpin "calling for" Winkle, and the latter answering. This is now done by an Officer of the Court. Skimpin also asks Winkle his name, as a first question, though he had been sworn and had given it. And the *mal-entendu* as to "Daniel Nathaniel" could not then have occurred, as the Officer would have obtained the name correctly. Another unusual thing was that Buzfuz, after his long and rather exhausting speech, should have examined the first witness. Now-a-days the junior would do this. We may note that at this time it was always "my Lord," and "your Lordship," with the full natural sound—we had not yet got to the clipped “M’lud,’” and “your Ludship.” Perhaps this form *was* actually used by the Counsel but was not noticed by Boz, or seemed to him the right thing. The King’s Counsel were behind and could stoop down to consult their solicitors.

This minute observation and particularity of Boz is further shown in his noting the very places where the Attorneys sat, and which he describes. They had the seats next the table:

“You are quite right,” said Buzfuz later on, answering the whisper of Dodson and Fogg, after Sam’s awkward revelation. How often have we seen these hasty communications, which are not without their dramatic effect.

THE JUDGE.

Mr. Pickwick, unfortunate in his Counsel, his Solicitor, his Jury—one of prejudiced tradesmen—was also to be unlucky in the Judge who tried his case. No doubt Perker had comforted him: “no matter how it goes, however unfair Buzfuz may be, we have a judge to hold the scales fair and keep the jury straight. The Lord Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, the Right Hon. Sir Nicholas Conyngham Tindal is a man of immense reputation at the Bar. We are most fortunate in having him.” Judge then of the disappointment when on coming to court it was found that Sir Stephen Gaselee was to take the case “owing to the absence of the Chief Justice, occasioned by indisposition.” (I protest that at times one does not know whether we are following out a course of real events, or tracing the incidents of a fiction, so wonderfully does Boz make his fiction blend with reality.) This was a serious blow. Tindal was an admirable judge. Did not his chroniclers write of him: “His sagacity, impartiality and plain sense, his industry and clear sightedness made him an admiration of non-professional spectators: while among lawyers he was very highly esteemed *for his invariable kindness to all who appeared before him*. He retained to the last their respect and affection.” With such a man presiding Sergeant Buzfuz’s eccentric violence and abuse of the defendant would have been restrained (“having the outward appearance of a man and not of a monster.”) Mr. Skimpin’s gross insinuations, to wit, that Winkle was “telegraphing” to his friend, would have been summarily put down, and all “bullying” checked; more, he would have calmly kept Counsel’s attention to the issue. This perfect impartiality would have made him show to the Jury how little evidence there was to support the plaintiff’s case. Instead came this unlucky indisposition: and his place was taken by “my Brother Gaselee:” with what results Mr. Pickwick was to learn disastrously.

It is curious, however, that the Chief Justice, in spite of his indisposition, should still be associated with the case; for he had tried the momentous case of Norton *v.* Melbourne, and had heard there letters read, which were parodied in the “chops and tomato sauce” correspondence, so Boz had him well before him. The case had to be tried at the Guildhall Sessions; so a fair and rational judge would have spoilt all sport. Further, as

Boz had seen the fairness and dignity of the Chief Justice he was naturally reluctant to exhibit him unfavorably. The only thing was to make the Chief Justice become suddenly "indisposed," and have his place taken by a grotesque judge.

The Judge who was to try the case, Mr. Justice Stareleigh, as is well known, was drawn from Sir Stephen Gaselee, of whose name Stareleigh is a sort of synonym. Serjeant Gaselee was once well known in the prosecutions directed against Radicals and so-called Reformers, but *Pickwick* has given him a greater reputation. The baiting he received from patriotic advocates may have inflamed his temper and made him irritable. He is described by one author, in a most humorous, if personal fashion. He was "a most particularly short man, and so fat that he seemed all face and waistcoat. He rolled in upon two little turned legs, and having bobbed gravely to the bar who bobbed gravely to him, put his little legs under the table, when all you could see of him was two queer little eyes, one broad, pink face, and somewhere about half of a big and very comical-looking wig." All through he is shown as arrogant and incapable, and also as making some absurd mistakes.

It will be a surprise to most people to learn that this picture is no more than an amusing caricature, and that the judge was really a person of high character. He is described as "a very painstaking, upright judge, and, in his private capacity, a worthy and benevolent man." Thus, Mr. Croker, who, however, supplies a sound reason for his being the subject of such satire. "With many admirable qualities both of head and heart, he had made himself a legitimate object of ridicule by his explosions on the Bench." Under such conditions, the Bar, the suitors and the public had neither the wish nor the opportunity to search for extenuating excuses in his private life. They suffered enough from the "explosions" and that was all that concerned them. He had been fourteen years on the Bench, and, like Stareleigh, belonged to the Common Pleas. He was suffering too from infirmities, particularly from deafness, and appears to have misapprehended statements in the same grotesque fashion that he mistook Winkle's name.

Boz's fashion of burlesque, by the way, is happily shown in his treatment of this topic. Another would have been content with "Daniel," the simple misapprehension. "Nathaniel, sir," says Winkle. "Daniel—any other name?" "Nathaniel, sir—my lord, I mean." "*Nathaniel Daniel—or Daniel Nathaniel*?" "No, my lord, only Nathaniel, not Daniel at all."

“What did you tell me it was Daniel for, then, sir?”

“I didn’t, my lord.”

“You did, sir. *How could I have got Nathaniel in my notes, unless you told me so, sir*?”

How admirable is this. The sly satire goes deeper, as Judges, under less gross conditions, have often made this illogical appeal to “my notes.”

Though not gifted with oratorical powers which were likely to gain him employment as a leader, Gaselee’s reputation for legal knowledge soon recommended him to a judge’s place. He was accordingly selected on July 1st, 1824, to fill a vacancy in the Court of Common Pleas. In that Court he sat for nearly fourteen years “with the character of a painstaking judge, and in his private capacity as a worthy and benevolent man.” Thus Mr. Foss, F.S.A.

The reader will have noted the Judge’s severity to poor Groffin, the chemist, who had pleaded the danger of his boy mistaking oxalic acid for Epsom salts. Could it be that the Judge’s experience as the son of a provincial doctor, had shown what class of man was before him? Later, unexpectedly, we learn that the Judge was a steady member for fourteen years of the Royal Humane Society, of which institution he was also a Vice-President.

But we now come to a most extraordinary thing—the result of the young author’s telling and most sarcastic portrait of the irascible little judge. It is curious that Forster, while enumerating various instances of Boz’s severe treatment of living persons, as a sort of chastisement for their defects of manner or character, seems not to have thought of this treatment of the judge—and passes it by. Nor did he notice the prompt result that followed on the sketch. The report of the trial appeared in the March number, 1837—and we are told, the luckless judge retired from the Bench, shortly after the end of Hilary Term, that is in April or the beginning of May. We may assume that the poor gentleman could not endure the jests of his *confrères* or the scarcely concealed tittering of the Barristers, all of whom had of course devoured and enjoyed the number. We may say that the learned Sergeant Buzfuz was not likely to be affected in any way by *his* picture; it may indeed have added to his reputation. I confess to some sympathy for the poor old judge who was thus driven from the Bench. Sam Foote was much given to this sort of personal attack, and made the lives of some of his victims wretched. Boz, however, seems to have felt himself called upon to act thus as public executioner on two occasions only. After the fall of the judge in June, 1837, he wanted a model for a tyrannical magistrate in *Oliver Twist*—and Mr. Laing, the Hatton Garden Magistrate—a harsh, ferocious personage, at once occurred to him. He wrote accordingly to one of his friends that he wished to be *smuggled* into his office some morning to study him. This "smuggling" of course meant the placing him where he would not be observed—as a magistrate knowing his "sketches" might recognise him. "I know the man perfectly well" he added. So he did, for he forgot that he had introduced him already in *Pickwick* as Nupkins—whose talk is exactly alike, in places almost word for word to that of "Mr. Fang."

These palliations, Boz, a young fellow of three and twenty or so, did not pause to weigh. He only saw a testy, red-faced old fellow with goggle eyes, and seventy-four years old, and past his work. His infirmities already made him incapable of carrying through the business of the Court as the mistake, "Is it Daniel Nathaniel or Nathaniel Daniel?" shows. It is curious, however, that this weakness of misapprehending names is described of another judge, Arabin—a strange grotesque. Theodore Hook gives an amusing specimen in his Gilbert Gurney.

From the general description in the text, it is evident Stareleigh was the prey of gouty affections—which swelled him into grotesque shape, and he found himself unequal to the office. He died two years after his retirement at No. 13, Montagu Place, Russell Square; so that the Judge in Bardell *v.* Pickwick was living close to Perker the Attorney in the same case. Here we seem to mix up the fictional and the living characters, but this is the law of *Pickwick*—the confines between the two worlds being quite confused or broken down. The late commander of our forces in China, Sir A. Gaselee, is of this family. It should be remembered, however, when we think of this judge's frowardness, that judges in those times were dictatorial and carried matters with a high hand. There were often angry conflicts between them, and members of the Bar, and Stareleigh was really not so very tyrannical. He did what so many judges do—took a side from the first, and had decided in his own mind that Mr. Pickwick could not possibly have a case. That curious form of address from the Bench is now no longer heard—"who is with you, *Brother Buzfuz*?" Judges and sergeants were then common members of the Guild—both wore the "coif."

THE COURT.

When the swearing of the jury is going on, how good, and how natural is the scene with the unfortunate chemist.

> ‘Answer to your names, gentlemen that you may be sworn,’ said the gentleman in black. ‘Richard Upwitch.’
>
> ‘Here,’ said the greengrocer.
>
> ‘Thomas Groffin.’
>
> ‘Here,’ said the chemist.
>
> ‘Take the book, gentlemen. You shall well and truly try—’
>
> ‘I beg this court’s pardon,’ said the chemist, who was a tall, thin, yellow-visaged man, ‘but I hope this court will excuse my attendance.’
>
> ‘On what grounds, sir?’ replied Mr. Justice Stareleigh.
>
> ‘I have no assistant, my Lord,’ said the chemist.
>
> ‘I can’t help that, sir,’ replied Mr. Justice Stareleigh. ‘You should hire one.’
>
> ‘I can’t afford it, my Lord,’ rejoined the chemist.
>
> ‘Then you ought to be able to afford it, sir,’ said the judge, reddening; for Mr. Justice Stareleigh’s temper bordered on the irritable, and brooked not contradiction.
>
> ‘I know I *ought* to do, if I got on as well as I deserved, but I don’t, my Lord,’ answered the chemist.
>
> ‘Swear the gentleman,’ said the judge, peremptorily.
>
> The officer had got no farther than the ‘You shall well and truly try,’ when he was again interrupted by the chemist.
>
> ‘I am to be sworn, my Lord, am I?’ said the chemist.
>
> ‘Certainly, sir,’ replied the testy little judge.
>
> ‘Very well, my Lord,’ replied the chemist in a resigned manner. ‘There’ll be murder before this trial’s over; that’s all. Swear me, if you please, sir;’ and sworn the chemist was, before the judge could find words to utter.
>
> ‘I merely wanted to observe, my Lord,’ said the chemist, taking his seat with great deliberation, ‘that I’ve left nobody but an errand boy in my shop. He is a very nice boy, my Lord, but he is not acquainted with drugs; and I know that the prevailing impression on his mind is,

> that Epsom salts means oxalic acid; and syrup of senna, laudanum. That's all, my Lord.' With this, the tall chemist composed himself into a comfortable attitude, and, assuming a pleasant expression of countenance, appeared to have prepared himself for the worst.

One who was born in the same year as Boz, but who was to live for thirty years after him, Henry Russell—composer and singer of "The Ivy Green"—was, when a youth, apprenticed to a chemist, and when about ten years old, that is five years before Bardell *v.* Pickwick, was left in charge of the shop. He discovered just in time that he had served a customer who had asked for Epsom salts with poison sufficient to kill fifty people. On this he gave up the profession. I have little doubt that he told this story to his friend a dozen years later, and that it was on Boz's mind when he wrote. Epsom salts was the drug mentioned in both instances.

It must be said that even in our day a defendant for Breach, with Mr. Pickwick's story and surroundings, would have had small chance with a city jury. They saw before them a benevolent-looking Lothario, of a Quaker-like air, while all the witnesses against him were his three most intimate friends and his own man.

We have, of course, testy judges now, who may be "short" in manner, but I think it can be affirmed that no judge of our day could behave to counsel or witnesses as Mr. Justice Stareleigh did. It is, in fact, now the tone for a judge to affect a sort of polished courtesy, and to impart a sort of light gaiety to the business he is transacting. All asperity and tyrannous rudeness is held to be out of place. Hectoring and bullying of witnesses will not be tolerated. The last exhibition was perhaps that of the late Dr. Kenealy in the Tichborne case.

All the swearing of jurymen before the court, with the intervention of the judge, has been got rid of. The Master of the Court, or Chief Clerk, has a number of interviews—at his public desk—with important individuals, bringing him signed papers. These are excuses of some sort—medical certificates, etc.—with a view to be "let off" serving. Some—most, perhaps—are accepted, some refused. A man of wealth and importance can have little difficulty. Of course this would be denied by the jurists: but, somehow, the great guns contrive not to attend. At ten o'clock this officer proceeds to swear the jury, which is happily accomplished by the time the judge enters.

SERJEANT BUZFUZ.

Mr. Pickwick, considering the critical nature of his case, was certainly unfortunate in his solicitor, as well as in the Counsel selected by his solicitors. The other side were particularly favoured in this matter. They had a pushful bustling “wide-awake” firm of solicitors, who let not a point escape. Sergeant Buzfuz was exactly the sort of advocate for the case—masterful, unscrupulous, eloquent, and with a singularly ingenious faculty for putting everything on his client’s side in the best light, and his adversary’s in the worst. He could “tear a witness to pieces,” and turn him inside out. His junior, Skimpin, was glib, ready-armed at all points, and singularly adroit in “making a hare” of any witness who fell into his hands, *teste* Winkle. He had all the professional devices for dealing with a witness’s answers, and twisting them to his purpose, at his fingers’ ends. He was the Wontner or Ballantyne of his day. Mr. Pickwick’s “bar” was quite outmatched. They were rather a feeble lot, too respectable altogether, and really not familiar with this line of business. Even the judge was against them from the very start, so Mr. Pickwick had very poor chances indeed. All this was due to that old-fashioned and rather incapable “Family Solicitor” Perker.

Serjeant Buzfuz is known the world all over, at least wherever English is known. I myself was once startled in a fashionable West End church to hear a preacher, when emphasizing the value and necessity of Prayer, and the certainty with which it is responded to, use this illustration: “As Serjeant Buzfuz said to Sam Weller, ‘*There is little to do and plenty to get*.’” Needless to say, an amused smile, if not a titter, passed round the congregation. But it is the Barrister who most appreciates the learned Serjeant. For the topics he argued and his fashion of arguing them, bating a not excessive exaggeration, comes home to them all. Nay, they must have a secret admiration, and fondly think how excellently well such and such topics are put, and how they must have told with a jury.

Buzfuz, it is now well known, was drawn from a leading serjeant of his day, Serjeant Bompas, K.C. Not so long since I was sitting by Bompas’s son, the present Judge Bompas, at dinner, and a most agreeable causeur he was. Not only did Boz sketch the style and fashion of the serjeant, but it is clear that Phiz drew the figure and features.

"I am the youngest son of Serjeant Bompas," Judge Bompas writes to me, "and have never heard it doubted that the name Buzfuz was taken from my father who was at that time considered a most successful advocate. I think he may have been chosen for the successful advocate because he was so successful: but I have never been able to ascertain that there was any other special resemblance. I do not remember my father myself: he died when I was eight years old. But I am told I am like him in face. He was tall (five feet ten inches) and a large man, very popular, and very excitable in his cases, so that I am told that Counsel against him used to urge him, out of friendship, not to get so agitated. A connection of mine who knew him well, went over to hear Charles Dickens read the Trial Scene, to see if he at all imitated him in voice or manner, but told me that he did not do so at all. I think, therefore, that having chosen his name, as a writer might now that of Sir Charles Russell, he then drew a general type of barrister, as he thought it might be satirised. My father, like myself, was on the Western Circuit and leader of it at the time of his death."

"I had a curious episode happen to me once. A client wrote to apply to the court to excuse a juror on the ground that he was a chemist and had no assistant who understood the drugs. It was not till I made the application and the Court began to laugh that I remembered the Pickwick Trial. I believe the application was quite bonâ fide, and not at all an imitation of it." An interesting communication from one who might be styled "Buzfuz's son;" and, as Judge Bompas alludes to his own likeness to his sire, I may add that the likeness to the portrait in the court scene, is very striking indeed. There is the same fullness of face, the large features. Buzfuz was certainly a counsel of power and ability, and I think lawyers will admit he managed Mrs. Bardell's case with much adroitness. His speech, besides being a sort of satirical abstract of the unamiable thundering boisterousness addressed to juries in such cases, is one of much ability. He makes the most of every topic that he thought likely to "tell" on a city jury. We laugh heartily at his would-be solemn and pathetic passages, but these are little exaggerated. Buzfuz's statement is meant to show how counsel, quite legitimately, can bring quite innocent acts to the support of their case by marshalling them in suspicious order, and suggesting that they had a connection with the charge made. Many a client thus becomes as bewildered as Mr. Pickwick was, on seeing his own harmless proceedings assuming quite a guilty complexion.

Serjeant Buzfuz-Bompas died at the age of fifty-three, at his house in Park Road, Regents Park, on February 29th, 1844. He was then, comparatively, a young man, and must have had ability to have attained his position so early. He was called to the Bar in 1815, and began as Serjeant in 1827, in Trinity Term, only a year or so before the famous case was tried.

So dramatic is the whole "Trial" in its action and characters, that it is almost fit for the stage as it stands. There have been a great number of versions, one by the author's son, Charles "the Younger," one by Mr. Hollingshead, and so on. It is a favorite piece for charitable benefits, and a number of well-known performers often volunteer to figure as "Gentlemen of the Jury." Buzfuz has been often played by Mr. Toole, but his too farcical methods scarcely enhanced the part. The easiness of comedy is essential. That sound player Mr. James Fernander is the best Buzfuz that I have seen.

There is a French translation of *Pickwick*, in which the general spirit of the "Trial" is happily conveyed. Thus Mr. Phunky's name is given as "M. Finge," which the little judge mistakes for "M. Singe." Buzfuz's speech too is excellent, especially his denouncing the Defendant's coming with his chops "*et son ignoble bassinoire*" i.e., warming pan.

THE OPENING SPEECH.

Buzfuz's great speech is one of the happiest parodies in the language. Never was the forensic jargon and treatment so humorously set forth—and this because of the perfect *sincerity* and earnestness with which it was done. There is none of the far-fetched, impossible exaggeration—the form of burlesque which Theodore Hook or Albert Smith might have attempted. It is, in fact, a real speech, which might have been delivered to a dull-headed audience without much impairing credibility. Apart from this it is a most effective harangue and most plausible statement of the Plaintiff's case.

A little professional touch, which is highly significant as part of the pantomine, and which Boz made very effective at the reading, was the Serjeant's dramatic preparation for his speech. "Having whispered to Dodson and conferred briefly with Fogg, *he pulled his gown over his shoulders, settled his wig,* and addressed the Jury." Who has not seen this bit of business?

Again, Juries may have noted that the Junior as he rises to speak, mumbles something that is quite inaudible, and which nobody attends to. This is known as "opening the pleadings."

> The ushers again called silence, and Mr. Skimpin proceeded to 'open the case;' and the case appeared to have very little inside it when he had opened it, for he kept such particulars as he knew, completely to himself, and sat down, after a lapse of three minutes, leaving the jury in precisely the same advanced stage of wisdom as they were in before.
>
> Serjeant Buzfuz then rose with all the majesty and dignity which the grave nature of the proceedings demanded, and having whispered to Dodson, and conferred briefly with Fogg, pulled his gown over his shoulders, settled his wig, and addressed the jury.

A most delightful legal platitude, as one might call it, is to be found in the opening of the learned Sergeant's speech. It is a familiar, transparent thing, often used to impose on the Jury. As Boz says of another topic, "Counsel often begins in this way because it makes the jury think what sharp fellows they must be." "You have heard from my learned friend, gentlemen," continued the Serjeant, well knowing that from the learned friend alluded to they had heard just nothing at all, “you have heard from my learned friend, that this is an action for Breach of Promise of Marriage, in which the damages are laid at £1,500. But you have *not heard from my learned friend, inasmuch as it did not lie within my learned friend’s province to tell you*, what are the facts and circumstances of the case.” This rich bit of circumlocution is simple nonsense, in rotund phrase, and meant to suggest the imposing majesty of legal process. The Jury knew perfectly beforehand what they were going to try: but were to be impressed by the magnifying agency of legal processes, and would be awe stricken accordingly. The passage, “inasmuch as it did not lie within my learned friend’s province to tell you,” is a delightful bit of cant. In short, the Jury was thus admitted to the secret legal arena, and into community with the learned friends themselves, and were persuaded that they were very sharp fellows indeed. What pleasant satire is here, on the mellifluous “openings” of Counsel, the putting a romantic gloss on the most prosaic incidents.

A sucking Barrister might well study this speech of Buzfuz as a guide to the conducting of a case, and above all of rather a “shaky” one. Not less excellent is his smooth and plausible account of Mrs. Bardell’s setting up in lodging letting. He really makes it “interesting.” One thinks of some fluttering, helpless young widow, setting out in the battle of life.

He describes the poor innocent lady putting a bill in her window, “and let me entreat the attention of the Jury to the wording of this document—‘Apartments furnished for a single gentleman!’ Mrs. Bardell’s opinions of the opposite sex, gentlemen, were derived from a long contemplation of the inestimable qualities of her lost husband. She had no fear—she had no distrust—she had no suspicion—all was confidence and reliance. ‘Mr. Bardell,’ said the widow: ‘Mr. Bardell was a man of honour—Mr. Bardell was a man of his word—Mr. Bardell was no deceiver—Mr. Bardell was once a single gentleman himself; to single gentlemen I look for protection, for assistance, for comfort, and for consolation—in single gentlemen I shall perpetually see something to remind me of what Mr. Bardell was, when he first won my young and untried affections; to a single gentleman, then, shall my lodgings be let.’ Actuated by this beautiful and touching impulse (among the best impulses of our imperfect nature, gentlemen), the lonely and desolate widow dried her tears, furnished her first floor, caught her innocent boy to her maternal bosom, and put the bill up in her parlour window. Did it remain there long? No. The serpent was on the watch, the train was laid, the mine was preparing, the sapper and miner was at work. Before the bill had been in the parlour window three days—three days, gentlemen—a being, erect upon two legs, and bearing all the outward semblance of a man, and not of a monster, knocked at the door of Mrs. Bardell's house. He enquired within."

Those who attended the Reading will recall the admirable briskness, and more admirable spirit with which Boz delivered the passage "by the evidence of the unimpeachable female whom I shall place in that"—here he brought down his palm with a mighty slap on the desk, and added, after a moment's pause, "*Box* before you." It was that *preceding* of the stroke that told. So real was it, one fancied oneself listening to some obstreperous counsel. In all true acting—notably on the French boards—the gesture should a little precede the utterance. So the serjeant knew something of art.

When Mr. Pickwick gave an indignant start on hearing himself described as a heartless villain how cleverly does the capable Buzfuz turn the incident to profit.

> 'I say systematic villany, gentlemen,' said Serjeant Buzfuz, looking through Mr. Pickwick, and talking *at* him; 'and when I say systematic villiany, let me tell the defendant, Pickwick, if he be in court, as I am informed he is, that it would have been more decent in him, more becoming, in better judgment and in better taste, if he had stopped away. Let me tell him, gentlemen, that any gestures of dissent or disapprobation in which he may indulge in this court will not go down with you; that you will know how to value, and to appreciate them; and let me tell him further, as my lord will tell you, gentlemen, that a counsel, in the discharge of his duty to his client, is neither to be intimidated nor bullied, nor put down; and that any attempt to do either the one or the other, or the first or the last, will recoil on the head of the attempter, be he plaintiff or be he defendant, be his name Pickwick, or Noakes, or Stoakes, or Stiles, or Brown, or Thompson.'
>
> This little divergence from the subject in hand, had of course the intended effect of turning all eyes to Mr. Pickwick.

We relish, too, another "common form." When the Serjeant found that his jest as to "greasing the wheels of Mr. Pickwick's slow-coach" had somewhat missed fire—a thing that often unaccountably happens, in the case of the "twelve intelligent men," the Serjeant knew how to adroitly recover himself.

He paused in this place to see whether the jury smiled at his joke; but as nobody took it but the greengrocer, whose sensitiveness on the subject was very probably occasioned by his having subjected a chaise-cart to the process in question on that identical morning, the learned Serjeant considered it advisable to undergo a slight relapse into the dismals before he concluded.

'But enough of this, gentlemen,' said Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz, 'it is difficult to smile with an aching heart; it is ill jesting when our deepest sympathies are awakened. My client's hopes and prospects are ruined, and it is no figure of speech to say that her occupation is gone indeed. The bill is down—but there is no tenant. Eligible single gentlemen pass and repass—but there is no invitation for them to enquire within or without. All is gloom and silence in the house; even the voice of the child is hushed; his infant sports are disregarded when his mother weeps; his "alley tors" and his "commoneys" are alike neglected; he forgets the long familiar cry of "knuckle down," and at tip-cheese, or odd and even, his hand is out. But Pickwick, gentlemen, Pickwick, the ruthless destroyer of this domestic oasis in the desert of Goswell Street—Pickwick, who has choked up the well, and thrown ashes on the sward—Pickwick, who comes before you to-day with his heartless tomato sauce and warming-pans—Pickwick still rears his head with unblushing effrontery, and gazes without a sigh on the ruin he has made. Damages, gentlemen—heavy damages is the only punishment with which you can visit him.'

THE INCRIMINATING LETTERS.

"I shall prove to you, gentlemen, that *about a year ago Pickwick suddenly began to absent himself from home*, during long intervals, ('on Pickwick Tours,') *as if with the intention of breaking off from my client*: but I shall show you also that his resolutions were not at that time sufficiently strong, or that his better feelings conquered, *if better feelings he has*: or that the charms and accomplishments of my client prevailed against his unmanly intentions." We may note the reserve which suggested a struggle going on in Mr. Pickwick. And how persuasive is Buzfuz's *exegesis*! Then, on the letters:

"These letters bespeak the character of the man. They are not open, fervid, eloquent epistles breathing nothing but the language of affectionate attachment. They are *covert*, *sly*, under-hand communications, but, fortunately, far more conclusive than if couched in the most glowing language. *Letters that must be viewed with a cautious and supicious eye*: *letters that were evidently intended at the time, by Pickwick, to mislead and delude any third parties into whose hands they might fall*." The gravity and persuasiveness of all this is really *impayable*. "Let me read the first: 'Garraway's, twelve o'clock. Dear Mrs. B., Chops and tomato sauce. Yours, Pickwick.' Gentlemen, what does this mean? Chops and tomato sauce. Yours, Pickwick. Chops! Gracious Heavens!—and tomato sauce! Gentlemen, is the happiness of a sensitive and confiding female *to be trifled* away by such artifices as these? *The next has no date whatever which is in itself suspicious*: 'Dear Mrs. B., I shall not be at home until to-morrow. Slow coach.' And then follows the very remarkable expression, 'Don't trouble yourself about the warming pan.'"

There is a little bit of serious history connected with these letters which I was the first I think to discover. They were intended to satirise the trivial scraps brought forward in Mrs. Norton's matrimonial case—Norton *v.* Lord Melbourne. My late friend, "Charles Dickens the younger," as he used to call himself, in his notes on *Pickwick*, puts aside this theory altogether as a mere unfounded fancy; but it will be seen there cannot be a doubt in the matter. Sir W. Follett laid just as much stress on these scraps as Serjeant Buzfuz did on his: he even used the phrase, "it seems there may be latent love like latent heat, in these productions.” We have also, “Yours Melbourne,” like “Yours Pickwick,” the latter signing as though he were a Peer. “There is another of these notes,” went on Sir William, “How are you?” “Again there is no beginning you see.” “The next has no date, which is in itself suspicious,” Buzfuz would have added. Another ran—“I will call about half past four, Yours.” “*These* are the only notes that have been found,” added the counsel, with due gravity, “*they seem to import much more than mere words convey*.” After this can there be a doubt?

This case was tried in June, 1836, and, it must be borne in mind, caused a prodigious sensation all over the Kingdom. The Pickwick part, containing the description, appeared about December, six months afterwards. Only old people may recall Norton *v.* Melbourne, the fair Caroline’s wrongs have long been forgotten; but it is curious that the memory of it should have been kept alive in some sort by this farcical parody. Equally curious is it that the public should always have insisted that she was the heroine of yet another story, George Meredith’s *Diana*, though the author has disclaimed it over and over again.

The Serjeant’s dealing with the warming pan topic is a truly admirable satiric touch, and not one bit far-fetched or exaggerated. Any one familiar with suspicious actions has again and again heard comments as plausible and as forced. “Don’t trouble yourself about the warming pan! The warming pan! Why, gentlemen, who *does* trouble himself about a warming pen?” A delicious *non sequitur*, sheer nonsense, and yet with an air of conviction that is irresistable. “When was the peace of mind of man or woman broken or disturbed by a warming pan which is in itself a harmless, a useful *and I will add, gentlemen*, a comforting article of domestic furniture?” He then goes on ingeniously to suggest that it may be “a cover for hidden fire, a mere substitute for some endearing word or promise, *agreeably to a preconcerted system* of correspondence, artfully contrived by Pickwick *with a view* to his contemplated desertion and which I am not in a position to explain?” Admirable indeed! One could imagine a city jury in their wisdom thinking that there must be *something* in this warming pan!

Not less amusing and plausible is his dealing with the famous topic of the “chops and tomato sauce,” not “tomata” as Boz has it. I suppose there is no popular allusion better understood than this. The very man in the street knows all about it and what it means. Absurd as it may seem, it is hardly an exaggeration. Counsel every day give weight to points just as trivial and expound them elaborately to the jury. The Serjeant's burst of horror is admirable, "Gentlemen, *what does this mean*? 'Chops and tomata sauce! Yours Pickwick!' Chops! Gracious Heavens! What does this mean? Is the happiness of a sensitive and confiding female to be trifled away *by such shallow artifices as these*?'"

I recall that admirable judge and pleasant man, the late Lord FitzGerald, who was fond of talking of this trial, saying to me that Buzfuz lost a good point here, as he might have dwelt on the mystic meaning of tomato which is the "love apple," that here was the "secret correspondence," the real "cover for hidden fire."

He concluded by demanding exemplary damages as "the recompense you can award my client. And for these damages she now appeals to an enlightened, a high-minded, a right feeling, a conscientious, a dispassionate, a sympathising, a contemplative jury of her civilized countrymen!"

THE PLAINTIFF’S CASE.

It was really of a very flimsy kind but “bolstered-up” and carried through by the bluster of the serjeant and the smartness of his junior. It rested first on a dialogue between Mr. Pickwick and his landlady which was overheard, in fact by several persons; second, on a striking situation witnessed by his three friends who entered unexpectedly and surprised him with Mrs. Bardell in his arms; third, on some documentary evidence, and lastly, on a damaging incident disclosed by Winkle.

The first witness “put in the box,” was Mrs. Martha Cluppins—an intimate friend of the plaintiffs.

We know that she was sister to Mrs. Raddle, who lived far away in Southwark, and was the landlady of Mr. Sawyer. She might have been cross-examined with effect as to her story that she had been “out buying kidney pertaties,” etc. Why buy these articles in Goswell Street and come all the way from Southwark? What was she doing there at all? This question could have been answered only in one way—which was that the genial author fancied at the moment she was living near Mrs. Bardell.

Besides this, there was another point which Snubbin, in cross-examination, ought to have driven home. Mrs. Cluppins was of an inferior type, of the common washerwoman or “charing” sort; her language was of Mrs. Gamp’s kind; “which her name was” so and so. Yet, this creature, in another room, or on the stairs, the door being “on the jar,” can repeat with her limited appreciation, those dubious and imperfect utterances of Mr. Pickwick! How could she remember all? Or could she understand them? Impossible! She, however, may have caught up something.

Winkle, too, said he heard something as he came up the stairs —“Compose yourself my dear creature, for consider if any one were to come,” etc. But what could be the value of evidence heard in this way? Would a jury believe it? “Not only,” as Sam said, “is ‘wision limited,’” but hearing also.

In short, the delicate subtleties of the conversation between Mr. Pickwick and Mrs. Bardell would be wholly lost in her hands. Persons of her class know nothing of suggestion or double meanings or reserved intention, everything for them must be in black and white. How unlikely, therefore, that through the panels of a door or through the half opened door, (“she said on the jar,”) could she catch the phrases and their meanings, and, above all, retain them in her memory? No doubt, as the counsel put it bluntly, she listened, and with all her ears.

However this may be, here is what Mrs. Cluppins deposed to:

> ‘Mrs. Cluppins,’ said Serjeant Buzfuz, ‘pray compose yoursel, ma’am;’ and, of course, directly Mrs. Cluppins was desired to compose herself she sobbed with increased violence, and gave divers alarming manifestations of an approaching fainting fit, or, as she afterwards said, of her feelings being too many for her.
>
> ‘Do you recollect, Mrs. Cluppins?’ said Serjeant Buzfuz, after a few unimportant questions—‘do you recollect being in Mrs. Bardell’s back one pair of stairs, on one particular morning in July last, when she was dusting Mr. Pickwick’s apartment?’
>
> ‘Yes, my Lord and jury, I do,’ replied Mrs. Cluppins.
>
> ‘Mr. Pickwick’s sitting-room was the first floor front, I believe?’
>
> ‘Yes it were, sir,’ replied Mrs. Cluppins.
>
> ‘What were you doing in the back room, ma’am?’ inquired the little judge.
>
> ‘My Lord and jury,’ said Mrs. Cluppins, with interesting agitation, ‘I will not deceive you.’
>
> ‘You had better not, ma’am,’ said the little judge.
>
> ‘I was there,’ resumed Mrs. Cluppins, ‘unbeknown to Mrs. Bardell; I had been out with a little basket, gentlemen, to buy three pounds of red kidney pertaties, which was three pound, tuppense ha’penny, when I see Mrs. Bardell’s street door on the jar.’
>
> ‘On the what?’ exclaimed the little judge.
>
> ‘Partly open, my Lord,’ said Serjeant Snubbin.
>
> ‘She *said* on the jar,’ said the little judge with a cunning look.
>
> ‘It’s all the same, my lord,’ said Serjeant Snubbin. The little judge looked doubtful, and said he’d make a note of it. Mrs. Cluppins then resumed—
>
> ‘I walked in, gentlemen, just to say good mornin’, and went in a permiscuous manner up-stairs, and into the back room. Gentlemen, there was the sound of voices in the front room, and—’
>
> ‘And you listened, I believe, Mrs. Cluppins,’ said Serjeant Buzfuz.

> ‘Beggin’ your pardon, sir,’ replied Mrs. Cluppins, in a majestic manner, ‘I would scorn the haction. The voices was very loud, sir, and forced themselves upon my ear.’
>
> ‘Well, Mrs. Cluppins, you were not listening, but you heard the voices. Was one of those voices Mr. Pickwick’s?’
>
> ‘Yes, it were, sir.’
>
> And Mrs. Cluppins, after distinctly stating that Mr. Pickwick addressed himself to Mrs. Bardell, repeated by slow degrees, and by dint of many questions the conversation with which our readers are already acquainted.

Now we have to turn back to one of the earlier passages in the story for the conversation between the pair, “with which the reader is already acquainted.” Thus we shall know what Mrs. Cluppin’s might have heard.

> Mr. Pickwick paced the room to and fro with hurried steps, popped his head out of the window at intervals of about three minutes each, constantly referred to his watch, and exhibited many other manifestations of impatience, very unusual with him. It was evident that something of great importance was in contemplation, but what that something was not even Mrs. Bardell herself had been enabled to discover.
>
> ‘Mrs. Bardell,’ said Mr. Pickwick at last, as that amiable female approached the termination of a prolonged dusting of the apartment.
>
> ‘Sir,’ said Mrs. Bardell.
>
> ‘Your little boy is a very long time gone.’
>
> ‘Why, it’s a good long way to the Borough, sir,’ remonstrated Mrs. Bardell.
>
> ‘Ah,’ said Pickwick, ‘very true; so it is.’
>
> Mr. Pickwick relapsed into silence, and Mrs. Bardell resumed her dusting.
>
> ‘Mrs. Bardell,’ said Mr. Pickwick, at the expiration of a few minutes.
>
> ‘Sir,’ said Mrs. Bardell again.
>
> ‘Do you think it’s a much greater expense to keep two people, than to keep one?’
>
> ‘La, Mr. Pickwick,’ said Mrs. Bardell, colouring up to the very border of her cap, as she fancied she observed a species of matrimonial twinkle in the eyes of her lodger, ‘La, Mr. Pickwick, what a question!’

‘Well, but *do* you?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘That depends—’ said Mrs. Bardell, approaching the duster very near to Mr. Pickwick’s elbow, which was planted on the table; ‘that depends a good deal upon the person, you know, Mr. Pickwick; and whether it’s a saving and careful person, sir.’

‘That’s very true,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘but the person I have in my eye (here he looked very hard at Mrs. Bardell) I think possesses these qualities; and has, moreover, a considerable knowledge of the world, and a great deal of sharpness, Mrs. Bardell; which may be of material use to me.’

‘La, Mr. Pickwick,’ said Mrs. Bardell; the crimson rising to her cap-border again.

‘I do,’ said Mr. Pickwick, growing energetic, as was his wont in speaking of a subject which interested him, ‘I do, indeed; and to tell you the truth, Mrs. Bardell, I have made up my mind.’

‘Dear me, sir,’ exclaimed Mrs. Bardell.

‘You’ll think it very strange, now,’ said the amiable Mr. Pickwick, with a good humoured glance at his companion, ‘that I never consulted you about this matter, and never even mentioned it, till I sent your little boy out this morning, eh?’

Mrs. Bardell could only reply by a look. She had long worshipped Mr. Pickwick at a distance, but here she was, all at once, raised to a pinnacle to which her wildest and most extravagant hopes and never dared to aspire. Mr. Pickwick was going to propose—a deliberate plan, too—sent her little boy to the Borough, to get him out of the way—how thoughtful—how considerate!’

‘Well,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘what do you think?’

‘Oh, Mr. Pickwick,’ said Mrs. Bardell, trembling with agitation, ‘you’re very kind, sir.’

‘It’ll save you a good deal of trouble, won’t it?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Oh, I never thought anything of the trouble, sir,’ replied Mrs. Bardell; ‘and, of course, I should take more trouble to please you then, than ever; but it is so kind of you, Mr. Pickwick, to have so much consideration for my loneliness.’

‘Ah, to be sure,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘I never thought of that. When I am in town, you’ll always have somebody to sit with you. To be sure, so you will.’

> ‘I’m sure I ought to be a very happy woman,’ said Mrs. Bardell.
>
> ‘And your little boy—’ said Mr. Pickwick.
>
> ‘Bless his heart,’ interposed Mrs. Bardell, with a maternal sob.
>
> ‘He, too, will have a companion,’ resumed Mr. Pickwick, ‘a lively one, who’ll teach him, I’ll be bound, more tricks in a week than he would ever learn in a year.’ And Mr. Pickwick smiled placidly.
>
> ‘Oh, you dear—’ said Mrs. Bardell.
>
> Mr. Pickwick started.
>
> ‘Oh, you kind, good, playful dear,’ said Mrs. Bardell; and without more ado, she rose from her chair, and flung her arms round Mr. Pickwick’s neck, with a cataract of tears, and a chorus of sobs.
>
> ‘Bless my soul,’ cried the astonished Mr. Pickwick;—‘Mrs. Bardell, my good woman—dear me, what a situation—pray—consider, Mrs. Bardell, if anybody should come.’
>
> ‘O, let them come,’ exclaimed Mrs. Bardell, frantically.
>
> ‘I’ll never leave you, dear, kind, good soul.’ And with these words Mrs. Bardell clung the tighter.

Every utterance of the little Judge is in character, from his first directions “go on.” His suspicious question, “what were you doing in the back room, ma’am?”—and on Serjeant Buzfuz’s sudden pause for breath, when “the *silence* awoke Mr. Justice Stareleigh, who immediately wrote down something, with a pen without any ink in it, and looked unusually profound, to impress his jury with the belief that he always thought most deeply with his eyes shut.” Also when at the “on the jar” incident—he “looked doubtful, but said he’d make a note of it.” So when Sam made one of his free and easy speeches, the Judge looked sternly at Sam for fully two minutes, but Sam’s features were so perfectly calm that he said nothing. When Sam, too, made his witty *reposte* to Buzfuz as to his “wision being limited,” we are told that there was a great laugh—that even “the little Judge smiled:” a good touch, for he enjoyed, like other judges, seeing his learned brother get a fall—’tis human nature.

It must be said the impression of a listener, who had heard all this could have been anything but favourable to Mr. Pickwick. No doubt there was his paternally benevolent character to correct it: but even this might go against him as it would suggest a sort of hypocrisy. Even the firmest friends, in their surprise, do not pause to debate or reason; they are astonished and wonder exceedingly.

WINKLE’S EVIDENCE.

Skimpin may have been intended for Wilkin, a later Serjeant and well-known in the ’fifties, and whose style and manner is reproduced. We could not ask a better junior in a “touch and go” case. He was as ready to take advantage of any opening as was the late Lord Bowen, when he was junior in the Tichborne case.

On entering the Box, Mr. Winkle “bowed to the Judge,” with considerable deference, a politeness quite thrown away. “Don’t look at me sir,” said the Judge sharply, “look at the Jury.” This was ungracious, but judges generally don’t relish any advances from witnesses or others.

When poor Winkle was accused by the Judge of giving his name as Daniel, he was told that “he had better be careful:” on which the ready Skimpin: “Now, Mr. Winkle attend to me if you please: and let me recommend you, for your own sake, to bear in mind his lordship’s injunction to be careful.” Thus by the agency of Judge and counsel witness was discredited at starting and of course flurried.

> ‘I believe you are a particular friend of Pickwick, the defendant, are you not?

Winkle, eager to retrieve himself by being “careful” began—

> ‘I have known Mr. Pickwick now as well as I recollect at this moment, nearly—’
>
> ‘Pray, Mr. Winkle, don’t evade the question. Are you, or are you not a particular friend of the defendant?’
>
> ‘I was just about to say that—’
>
> ‘Will you, or will you not answer my question, sir?’
>
> ‘If you don’t you’ll be committed, sir,’ interposed the little Judge.
>
> ‘Come, sir,’ said Mr. Skimpin, ‘*yes or no, if you please*.’
>
> ‘Yes, I am,’ replied Mr. Winkle.
>
> ‘*Yes, you are. And why couldn’t you say that at once, sir*?’

I think there is no more happy touch of legal satire in the books than that about “What the soldier said.” It is perfect, so complete, that it is always understood by unprofessional readers. The lawyer feels at once that it is as true as it is happy.

> ‘Little to do and plenty to get,’ said Serjeant Buzfuz to Sam.

> ‘O, quite enough to get, sir, as the soldier said ven they ordered him three hundred and fifty lashes.’
>
> ‘*You must not tell us what the soldier or any other man said, sir; it’s not evidence,’* interposed the Judge.

Who will forget the roar that always greeted this sally when Boz read it, or the low and slow solemnity which he imparted to the Judge’s dictum. As an illustration it is simply admirable.

Boz himself would have been pleased to find himself quoted in two impressive legal tomes of some 1800 pages. The great and laborious John Pitt Taylor could not have been wholly a legal dry-as-dust: for the man who could have gravely entered Bardell *v.* Pickwick in his notes and have quoted a passage must have had a share of humour.

Most people know that it is a strict principle that “hearsay evidence” of an utterance will not be accepted in lieu of that of the person to whom the remark was made. Neither can we think it out of probability that such an objection may have been made by some over punctilious judge wishing to restrain Sam’s exuberance. A Scotch judge once quoted in court a passage from *The Antiquary* in which he said the true view of an intricate point was given; but then Scott was a lawyer.

It is requisite, says Mr. John Pitt Taylor (p. 500) speaking of “hearsay evidence” that whatever facts a witness speaks, he should be confined to those lying within his own knowledge. For every witness should give his testimony on oath, and should be subject to cross examination. But testimony from the relation of third persons cannot be subject to these tests. This rule of exclusion has been recognised as a fundamental principle of the law of evidence ever since the time of Charles II. To this he adds a note, with all due gravity: “The rule excluding heresay evidence, or rather the mode in which that rule is frequently misunderstood in Courts of Justice, is amusingly caricatured by Mr. Dickens *in his report* of the case of Bardell *v.* Pickwick, p. 367.”

Bardell *v.* Pickwick! He thus puts it with the many thousand or tens of thousand cases quoted, and he has even found a place for it in his index of places. He then goes on to quote the passage, just as he would quote from Barnwall and Adolphus.

How sagacious—full of legal point—is Boz’s comment on Winkle’s incoherent evidence. Phunky asked him whether he had any reason to suppose that Pickwick was about to be married. “‘Oh no; certainly not,’ replied Mr. Winkle with so much eagerness, that Mr. Phunky ought to have got him out of the box with all possible dispatch. Lawyers hold out that there are two kinds of particularly bad witnesses: a reluctant witness, and a too willing witness;" and most true it is. Both commit themselves in each case, but in different ways. The matter of the former, and the manner of the latter do the mischief. The ideal witness affects indifference, and is as impartial as the record of a phonograph. It is wonderful where Boz learned all this. No doubt from his friend Talfourd, K.C., who carefully revised "The Trial."

Skimpin's interpretation of Mr. Pickwick's consolatory phrase, which he evidently devised on the spur of the moment, shows him to be a very ready, smart fellow.

> 'Now, Mr. Winkle, I have only one more question to ask you, and I beg you to bear in mind his Lordship's caution. Will you undertake to swear that Pickwick, the Defendant, did not say on the occasion in question—"My dear Mrs. Bardell, you're a good creature; compose yourself to this situation, for to this situation you must come," or words to that effect?'
>
> 'I—I didn't understand him so, certainly,' said Mr. Winkle, astounded at this ingenious dove-tailing of the few words he had heard. 'I was on the staircase, and couldn't hear distinctly; the impression on my mind is—'
>
> 'The gentlemen of the jury want none of the impressions on your mind, Mr. Winkle, which I fear would be of little service to honest, straightforward men,' interposed Mr. Skimpin. 'You were on the staircase, and didn't distinctly hear; but you will swear that Pickwick *did not make use* of the expressions I have quoted? Do I understand that?'
>
> 'No, I will not,' replied Mr. Winkle; and down sat Mr. Skimpin, with a triumphant countenance.

This "Will you swear he did *not*," etc., is a device familiar to cross examiners, and is used when the witness cannot be got to accept the words or admit that they were used. It of course means little or nothing: but its effect on the jury is that they come to fancy that the words *may* have been used, and that the witness is not very clear as to his recollection.

How well described, too, and satirised, is yet another "common form" of the cross examiner, to wit the "How often, Sir?" question. Winkle, when asked as to his knowledge of Mrs. Bardell, replied that “he did not know her, but that he had seen her.” (I recall making this very answer to Boz when we were both driving through Sackville Street, Dublin. He had asked “Did I know so-and-so?” when I promptly replied, “I don’t know him, but I have seen him.” This rather arrided him, as Elia would say.)

Skimpin went on:

> ‘Oh, you don’t know her, but you have seen her.’
>
> ‘Now have the goodness to tell the gentlemen of the jury what you mean by *that*, Mr. Winkle.’
>
> ‘I mean that I am not intimate with her, but that I have seen her when I went to call on Mr. Pickwick, in Goswell Street.’
>
> ‘How often have you seen her, Sir?’
>
> ‘How often?’
>
> ‘*Yes, Mr. Winkle, how often*? I’ll repeat the question for you a dozen times, if you require it, Sir.’ And the learned gentlemen, with a firm and steady frown, placed his hands on his hips, and smiled suspiciously to the jury.
>
> *On this question there arose the edifying brow-beating, customary on such points*. First of all, Mr. Winkle said it was quite impossible for him to say how many times he had seen Mrs. Bardell. Then he was asked if he had seen her twenty times, to which he replied, ‘Certainly,—more than that.’ And then he was asked whether he hadn’t seen her a hundred times—whether he couldn’t swear that he had seen her more than fifty times—whether he didn’t know that he had seen her at least seventy-five times, and so forth; the satisfactory conclusion which was arrived at, at last, being—that he had better take care of himself, and mind what he was about. The witness having been, by these means, reduced to the requisite ebb of nervous perplexity, the examination was concluded.

How excellent is this. Who has not heard the process repeated over and over again from the young fledgeling Counsel to the old “hardbitten” and experienced K.C.?

A young legal tyro might find profit as well as entertainment in carefully studying others of Mr. Skimpin’s adroit methods in cross examination. They are in a manner typical of those in favour with the more experienced members of the profession, allowing, of course, for a little humorous exaggeration. He will note also that Boz shows clearly how effective was the result of the processes. Here are a few useful recipes.

How to make a witness appear as though he wished to withhold the truth. How to highly discredit a witness by an opening question. How to insinuate inaccuracy. How to suggest that the witness is evading. How to deal with a statement of a particular number of instances. How to take advantage of a witness' glances. How to suggest another imputed meaning to a witness' statement and confuse him into accepting it.

Another happy and familiar form is Skimpin's interrogation of Winkle as to his "friends"—

> 'Are they here?'
>
> 'Yes they are,' said Mr. Winkle, *looking very earnestly towards the spot where his friends were stationed.*

As every one attending courts knows, this is an almost intuitive movement in a witness; he thinks it corroborates him somehow.

But how good Skimpin and how ready—

"'Pray attend to me, Mr. Winkle, and *never mind your friends,*' with another expressive look at the jury; '*they must tell their stories without any previous consultation with you,* if none has yet taken place,' another expressive look. 'Now Sir, tell what you saw,' etc. '*Come, out with it, sir, we must* have it sooner or later.'" The assumption here that the witness would keep back what he knew is adroit and very convincing.

A REVELATION.

But now we come to a very critical passage in Mr. Pickwick's case: one that really destroyed any chance that he had. It really settled the matter with the jury; and the worst was, the point was brought out through the inefficiency of his own counsel.

But let us hear the episode, and see how the foolish Phunky muddled it.

> Mr. Phunky rose for the purpose of getting something important out of Mr. Winkle in cross-examination. Whether he did get anything important out of him, will immediately appear.
>
> 'I believe, Mr. Winkle,' said Mr. Phunky, 'that Mr. Pickwick is not a young man?'
>
> 'Oh no,' replied Mr. Winkle, 'old enough to be my father.'
>
> 'You have told my learned friend that you have known Mr. Pickwick a long time. Had you ever any reason to suppose or believe that he was about to be married?'
>
> 'Oh no; certainly not;' replied Mr. Winkle with so much eagerness, that Mr. Phunky ought to have got him out of the box with all possible dispatch. Lawyers hold out that there are two kinds of particularly bad witnesses, a reluctant witness, and a too willing witness; it was Mr. Winkle's fate to figure in both characters.
>
> 'I will even go further than this, Mr. Winkle,' continued Mr. Phunky, in a most smooth and complacent manner. 'Did you ever see any thing in Mr. Pickwick's manner and conduct towards the opposite sex to induce you to believe that he ever contemplated matrimony of late years, in any case?'
>
> 'Oh no; certainly not,' replied Mr. Winkle.
>
> 'Has his behaviour, when females have been in the case, always been that of a man, who having attained a pretty advanced period of life, content with his own occupations and amusements, treats them only as a father might his daughters?'
>
> 'Not the least doubt of it,' replied Mr. Winkle, in the fulness of his heart. 'That is—yes—oh yes—certainly.'
>
> 'You have never known anything in his behaviour towards Mrs. Bardell, or any other female, in the least degree suspicious?' said Mr.

> Phunky, preparing to sit down, for Serjeant Snubbin was winking at him.
>
> ‘N—n—no,’ replied Mr. Winkle, ‘except on one trifling occasion, which, I have no doubt, might be easily explained.’
>
> Now, if the unfortunate Mr. Phunky had sat down when Serjeant Snubbin winked at him, or if Serjeant Buzfuz had stopped this irregular cross-examination at the outset (which he knew better than to do, for observing Mr. Winkle’s anxiety, and well knowing it would in all probability, lead to something serviceable to him), this unfortunate admission would not have been elicited. The moment the words fell from Mr. Winkle’s lips, Mr. Phunky sat down, and Serjeant Snubbin rather hastily told him he might leave the box, which Mr. Winkle prepared to do with great readiness, when Serjeant Buzfuz stopped him.
>
> ‘Stay, Mr. Winkle—stay,’ said Serjeant Buzfuz, ‘will your lordship have the goodness to ask him, what this one instance of suspicious behaviour towards females on the part of this gentlemen, who is old enough to be his father, was?’
>
> ‘You hear what the learned counsel says, Sir,’ observed the Judge, turning to the miserable and agonized Mr. Winkle. ‘Describe the occasion to which you refer.’
>
> ‘My lord,’ said Mr. Winkle, trembling with anxiety, ‘I—I’d rather not.’

And Winkle had to relate the whole Ipswich adventure of the doublebedded room and the spinster lady.

It is surprising that Dodson and Fogg did not ferret out all about Mr. Pickwick’s adventure at the Great White Horse. Peter Magnus lived in town and must have heard of the coming case; these things *do* somehow leak out, and he would have gladly volunteered the story, were it only to spite the man. But further, Dodson and Fogg must have made all sorts of enquiries into Mr. Pickwick’s doings. Mrs. Bardell herself might have heard something. The story was certainly in the Ipswich papers, for there was the riot in the street, the appearance before the mayor, the exposure of “Captain FitzMarshall”—a notable business altogether. What a revelation in open court! Conceive Miss Witherfield called to depose to Mr. Pickwick’s midnight invasion. Mr. Pickwick himself might have been called and put on the rack, this incident not concerning his breach of promise. And supposing that the ubiquitous Jingle had heard of this business and had gone to the solicitor's office to volunteer evidence, and most useful evidence it would have been—to wit that Mr. Pickwick had been caught in the garden of a young ladies' school and had alarmed the house by his attempts to gain admission in the small hours! Jingle of course, could not be permitted to testify to this, but he could put the firm on the track. Mr. Pickwick's reputation could hardly have survived these two revelations, and sweeping damages to the full amount would have been the certain result.

This extraordinary adventure of Mr. Pickwick's at the Great White Horse Inn, Ipswich, verifies Dodson's casual remark to him, that "he was either a very designing or a most unfortunate man," circumstances being so strong against him. As the story was brought out, in open court, owing to the joint indiscretion of Phunky and Winkle, it will be best, in justice to Mr. Pickwick, to give practically his account of the affair.

> 'Nobody sleeps in the other bed, of course,' said Mr. Pickwick.
>
> 'Oh no, sir.'
>
> 'Very good. Tell my servant to bring me up some hot water at half-past eight in the morning, and that I shall not want him any more to-night.'
>
> 'Yes, sir.'
>
> And bidding Mr. Pickwick good-night, the chambermaid retired, and left him alone.
>
> Mr. Pickwick sat himself down in a chair before the fire, and fell into a train of rambling meditations. First he thought of his friends, and wondered when they would join him; *then his mind reverted to Mrs. Martha Bardell*; and from that lady it wandered, by a natural process, to the dingy counting-house of Dodson and Fogg. From Dodson and Fogg's it flew off at tangent, to the very centre of the history of the queer client; and then it came back to the Great White Horse at Ipswich, with sufficient clearness to convince Mr. Pickwick that he was falling asleep: so he aroused himself, and began to undress, when he recollected he had left his watch on the table down stairs. So as it was pretty late now, and he was unwilling to ring his bell at that hour of the night, he slipped on his coat, of which he had just divested himself, and taking the japanned candlestick in his hand, walked quietly down stairs.

The more stairs Mr. Pickwick went down, the more stairs there seemed to be to descend, and again and again, when Mr. Pickwick got into some narrow passage, and began to congratulate himself on having gained the ground-floor, did another flight of stairs appear before his astonished eyes. At last he reached a stone hall, which he remembered to have seen when he entered the house. Passage after passage did he explore; room after room did he peep into; at length, just as he was on the point of giving up the search in despair, he opened the door of the identical room in which he had spent the evening, and beheld his missing property on the table.

Mr. Pickwick seized the watch in triumph, and proceeded to retrace his steps to his bed-chamber. If his progress downwards had been attended with difficulties and uncertainty, his journey back, was infinitely more perplexing. Rows of doors, garnished with boots of every shape, make, and size, branched off in every possible direction. A dozen times did he softly turn the handle of some bedroom door, which resembled his own, when a gruff cry from within of “Who the devil’s that?” or “What do want here?” caused him to steal away on tiptoe, with a perfectly marvellous celerity. He was reduced to the verge of despair, when an open door attracted his attention. He peeped in—right at last. There were the two beds, whose situation he perfectly remembered, and the fire still burning. His candle, not a long one when he first received it, had flickered away in the drafts of air through which he had passed, and sunk into the socket, just as he had closed the door after him. ‘No matter,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘I can undress myself just as well by the light of the fire.’

The bedsteads stood, one each side of the door; and on the inner side of each, was a little path, terminating in a rush-bottomed chair, just wide enough to admit of a person’s getting into, or out of bed, on that side if he or she thought proper. Having carefully drawn the curtains of his bed on the outside, Mr. Pickwick sat down on the rush-bottomed chair, and leisurely divested himself of his shoes and gaiters. He then took off and folded up, his coat, waistcoat, and neck-cloth, and slowly drawing on his tasseled night-cap, secured it firmly on his head, by tying beneath his chin, the strings which he always had attached to that article of dress. It was at this moment that the absurdity of his recent bewilderment struck upon his mind; and throwing himself back in the rush-bottomed chair, Mr. Pickwick laughed to himself so heartily, that it would have been quite delightful to any man of well-constituted mind to have watched the smiles which expanded his amiable features, as they shone forth, from beneath the night-cap.

‘It is the best idea,’ said Mr. Pickwick to himself, smiling till he almost cracked the night-cap strings—‘It is the best idea, my losing myself in this place, and wandering about those staircases, that I ever heard of. Droll, droll, very droll.’ Here Mr. Pickwick smiled again, a broader smile than before, and was about to continue the process of undressing, in the best possible humour, when he was suddenly stopped by a most unexpected interruption; to wit, the entrance into the room of some person with a candle, who, after locking the door, advanced to the dressing table, and set down the light upon it.

The smile that played upon Mr. Pickwick’s features, was instantaneously lost in a look of the most unbounded and wonder-stricken surprise. The person, whoever it was, had come so suddenly and with so little noise, that Mr. Pickwick had had no time to call out, or oppose their entrance. Who could it be? A robber? Some evil-minded person who had seen him come upstairs with a handsome watch in his hand, perhaps. What was he to do!

The only way in which Mr. Pickwick could catch a glimpse of his mysterious visitor with the least danger of being seen himself, was by creeping on to the bed, and peeping out from between the curtains on the opposite side. Keeping the curtains carefully closed with his hand, so that nothing more of him could be seen than his face and nightcap, and putting on his spectacles, he mustered up courage, and looked out.

Mr. Pickwick almost fainted with horror and dismay. Standing before the dressing glass, was a middle-aged lady in yellow curl-papers, busily engaged in brushing what ladies call their “back hair.” However the unconscious middle-aged lady came into that room, it was quite clear that she contemplated remaining there for the night; for she had brought a rushlight and shade with her, which with praiseworthy precaution against fire, she had stationed in a basin on the floor, where it was glimmering away, like a gigantic lighthouse, in a particularly small piece of water.

‘Bless my soul,’ thought Mr. Pickwick, ‘what a dreadful thing!’

‘Hem!’ said the lady; and in went Mr. Pickwick’s head with automaton-like rapidity.

‘I never met with anything so awful as this,’—thought poor Mr. Pickwick, the cold perspiration starting in drops upon his nightcap. ‘Never. This is fearful.’

It was quite impossible to resist the urgent desire to see what was going forward. So out went Mr. Pickwick’s head again. The prospect was worse than before. The middle-aged lady had finished arranging her hair; had carefully enveloped it, in a muslin nightcap with a small plaited border, and was gazing pensively on the fire.

‘This matter is growing alarming’—reasoned Mr. Pickwick with himself. ‘I can’t allow things to go on in this way. By the self-possession of that lady, it’s clear to me that I must have come into the wrong room. If I call out, she’ll alarm the house, but if I remain here, the consequences will be still more frightful.’

Mr. Pickwick, it is quite unnecessary to say, was one of the most modest and delicate-minded of mortals. The very idea of exhibiting his nightcap to a lady, overpowered him, but he had tied those confounded strings in a knot, and do what he would, he couldn’t get it off. The disclosure must be made. There was only one other way of doing it. He shrunk behind the curtains, and called out very loudly—

‘Ha—hum.’

That the lady started at this unexpected sound was evident, by her falling up against the rushlight shade; that she persuaded herself it must have been the effect of imagination was equally clear, for when Mr. Pickwick, under the impression that she had fainted away, stone-dead from fright, ventured to peep out again, she was gazing pensively on the fire as before.

‘Most extraordinary female this,’ thought Mr. Pickwick, popping in again. ‘Ha—hum.’

These last sounds, so like those in which, as legends inform us, the ferocious giant Blunderbore was in the habit of expressing his opinion that it was time to lay the cloth, were too distinctly audible, to be again mistaken for the workings of fancy.

‘Gracious Heaven!’ said the middle-aged lady, ‘what’s that!’

‘It’s—it’s—only a gentleman, Ma’am,’ said Mr. Pickwick from behind the curtains.

‘A gentleman!’ said the lady with a terrific scream.

‘It’s all over,’ thought Mr. Pickwick.

‘A strange man,’ shrieked the lady. Another instant and the house would be alarmed. Her garments rustled as she rushed towards the door.

‘Ma’am,’—said Mr. Pickwick, thrusting out his head, in the extremity of desperation, ‘Ma’am.’

Now although Mr. Pickwick was not actuated by any definite object in putting out his head, it was instantaneously productive of a good effect. The lady, as we have alreaded stated, was near the door. She must pass it, to reach the staircase, and she would most undoubtedly have done so by this time, had not the sudden apparition of Mr. Pickwick’s nightcap driven her back, into the remotest corner of the apartment, where she stood, staring wildly at Mr. Pickwick, while Mr. Pickwick, in his turn, stared wildly at her.

‘Wretch,’—said the lady, covering her eyes with her hands, ‘what do you want here.’

‘Nothing, Ma’am—nothing whatever, Ma’am,’ said Mr. Pickwick, earnestly.

‘Nothing!’ said the lady, looking up.

‘Nothing, Ma’am, upon my honour,’ said Mr. Pickwick, nodding his head so energetically, that the tassel of his nightcap danced again. ‘I am almost ready to sink, Ma’am, beneath the confusion of addressing a lady in my nightcap (here the lady hastily snatched off her’s), but I can’t get it off, Ma’am (here Mr. Pickwick gave it a tremendous tug in proof of the statment). It is evident to me, Ma’am, now, that I have mistaken this bedroom for my own. I had not been here five minutes, Ma’am, when you suddenly entered it.’

‘If this improbable story be really true, Sir,’—said the lady, sobbing violently, ‘you will leave it instantly.’

‘I will, Ma’am, with the greatest pleasure,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘Instantly, Sir,’ said the lady.

‘Certainly, Ma’am,’ interposed Mr. Pickwick very quickly. ‘Certainly, Ma’am. I—I—am very sorry, Ma’am,’ said Mr. Pickwick, making his appearance at the bottom of the bed, ‘to have been the innocent occasion of this alarm and emotion; deeply sorry Ma’am.’

The lady pointed to the door. One excellent quality of Mr. Pickwick’s character was beautifully displayed at this moment, under the most trying circumstances. Although he had hastily put on his hat over his night cap, after the manner of the old patrol; although he carried his shoes and gaiters in his hand, and his coat and waistcoat over his arm, nothing could subdue his native politeness.

‘I am exceedingly sorry, Ma’am,’ said Mr. Pickwick, bowing very low.

‘If you are, Sir, you will at once leave the room,’ said the lady.

‘Immediately, Ma’am; this instant, Ma’am,’ said Mr. Pickwick, opening the door, and dropping both his shoes with a loud crash in so doing.

‘I trust Ma’am,’ resumed Mr. Pickwick, gathering up his shoes, and turning round to bow again, ‘I trust, Ma’am, that my unblemished character, and the devoted respect I entertain for your sex, will plead as some slight excuse for this’—But before Mr. Pickwick could conclude the sentence, the lady had thrust him into the passage, and locked and bolted the door behind him.

Whatever grounds of self-congratulation Mr. Pickwick might have, for having escaped so quietly from his late awkward situation, his present position was by no means enviable. He was alone, in an open passage, in a strange house, in the middle of the night, half dressed; it was not to be supposed that he could find his way in perfect darkness to a room which he had been wholly unable to discover with a light, and if he made the slightest noise in his fruitless attempts to do so, he stood every chance of being shot at, and perhaps killed, by some wakeful traveller. He had no resource but to remain where he was, until daylight appeared. So after groping his way a few paces down the passage, and to his infinite alarm, stumbling over several pairs of boots in so doing, Mr. Pickwick crouched into a little recess in the wall, to wait for morning, as philosophically as he might.

He was not destined, however, to undergo this additional trial of patience: for he had not been long ensconced in his present concealment when, to his unspeakable horror, a man, bearing a light, appeared at the end of the passage. His horror was suddenly converted into joy, however, when he recognized the form of his faithful attendant. It was indeed Mr. Samuel Weller, who after sitting up thus

> late, in conversation with the Boots, who was sitting up for the mail, was now about to retire to rest.

Imagine this story told by Miss Witherfield in open court, with all its details, the lady's narrative being coloured by the recollection that she had lost a suitable husband owing to her adventure. Mr. Peter Magnus would have deposed to Mr. Pickwick's extraordinary interest in the matter of the proposal, and have added his suspicions on recalling Mr. Pickwick's ambiguous declaration that he had come down to expose a certain person—even one of his own sympathetic friends, who had witnessed the scene with Mrs. Bardell, and recalled the Boarding House incident, might murmur, "How odd that he is ever thus in pursuit of the fair under suspicious circumstances? *could* it be that after all?—What if he had some previous knowledge of the lady, and secretly admired her, and stung to fury at the notion of Mr. Peter Magnus marrying, had taken this strange mode of declaring his passion?" Even the sagacious Sam, devoted as he was to his master, was taken aback on meeting him in his midnight wanderings.

> 'Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, suddenly appearing before him, 'Where's my bedroom?'
>
> Mr. Weller stared at his master with the most emphatic surprise; and it was not until the question had been repeated three several times, that he turned round, and led the way to the long-sought apartment.
>
> 'Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, as he got into bed, 'I have made one of the most extraordinary mistakes to-night, that ever were heard of.'
>
> 'Werry likely, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller, drily.
>
> 'But of this I am determined, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'that if I were to stop in this house for six months, I would never trust myself about it alone, again.'
>
> 'That's the wery prudentest resolution as you could come to, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller. 'You raythe want somebody to look arter you, Sir, ven your judgment goes out a wisitin'.'
>
> 'What do you mean by that, Sam?' said Mr. Pickwick. He raised himself in bed, and extended his hand, as if he were about to say something more; but suddenly checking himself, turned round, and bade his valet 'Good night.'
>
> 'Good night, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller. He paused when he got outside the door—shook his head—walked on—stopped—snuffed the

> candle—shook his head again—and finally proceeded slowly to his chamber, apparently buried in the profoundest meditation.

It will be seen that Sam went near to being disrespectful in his sceptical view of his master's story.

When Mrs. Sanders was examined, "the Court" put a few questions to her, as to the customs of love-making among persons of her position. She had "received love letters, like other ladies. In the course of their correspondence Mr. Sanders had often called her a 'duck' but never 'chops' or 'tomato sauce.' He was particularly fond of ducks. Perhaps if he had been as fond of chops and tomato sauce, he might have called her that, as a term of affection."

Mrs. Sanders was clearly one of the same class as Mrs. Cluppins, and chiefly deposed to the general impression in the neighbourhood that Mr. Pickwick had "offered" for Mrs. Bardell. Tupman, Snodgrass and Sam were also examined. Being friends of the defendant, they were from the outset assumed to be "hostile" and treated accordingly. It may be doubted, however, whether it is permissible to treat "your own witnesses" in this rough fashion, until at least they have shown some overt signs of their hostility, either by reserve, or an obvious determination to let as little as possible be extracted from them. In such case, it is usual to apply to the court for its sanction to deal with them by the severity of cross examination.

When Sam entered the witness box, the Serjeant addressed him: "I believe you are in the service of Mr. Pickwick, the Defendant in this case. *Speak up, if you please, Mr. Weller*." Sam had not had time to say anything, so the admonition might seem superfluous. But this is a well-known device. Sam had been "briefed" to the Serjeant as a rather dangerous witness—somewhat too wide awake. It was necessary therefore to be short and summary with him. He thus conveyed to the jury that this Sam was one whom he could address in this curt way, and who by his low, uncertain accents might try to hide the truth. Sam, however, disconcerted the plan by his prompt, ready answer, "I *mean* to speak up, sir." Sam, as we know, clearly brought out the Dodson and Fogg's damaging assurance to Mrs. Bardell, that no costs should be charged to her personally.

When the Plaintiff's case was closed, things did not look particularly bright for Mr. Pickwick. It had been shown on the evidence of his own friends that he had been surprised with his landlady in his arms; (2) That he had been corresponding with her on most familiar terms—at least Serjeant

Buzfuz had made it appear so; (3) Language that *almost* amounted to a proposal had been overheard; (4) And finally, it had been revealed that the Defendant had been “caught” in a lady’s bedroom, at an Inn, at midnight! To answer which a “strong” case was absolutely essential. This, we grieve to say, was not forthcoming.

THE DEFENDANT’S CASE.

When we listen to the defence set up for Mr. Pickwick we have to lament that that worthy gentleman was not better served by his legal advisers.

On the other side the shrewd Dodson and Fogg had done admirably for their client. They were sharp clever attornies, having a thundering, overpowering leader, and a smart, exceedingly smart junior, one of those “wide-awake” brisk fellows who really conduct the case, and will “take silk” in a few years. This gentleman could cross-examine in capital style and address the jury in a language of his own, by glances, shrugs, and remarks addressed to a witness, but intended for the jury, as they knew perfectly well. His style, bearing, and speeches form an admirable epitome of the arts and devices of a smart counsel. There are “common” forms and Skimpin had them at his fingers’ ends. As we listen, we feel how admirably directed they were to work on the jury.

Perker’s plan of campaign as announced to Mr. Pickwick, was a poor one enough, and showed how desperate he thought the case was. “We have only one (course) to adopt, my dear sir,” he said, “cross-examine the witnesses: trust to Snubbin’s eloquence, throw dust in the eyes of the judge, and ourselves on the jury.” Brave words, but nothing of the programme was carried out. The cross-examination of the witnesses was but tamely attempted. Snubbin’s eloquence was not displayed beyond mildly praising his client’s good character. As for “throwing dust in the eyes of judge,” we have seen Mr. Justice Stareleigh was much too wide awake for that; while the throwing themselves on the jury was disastrous. There were several other lines of defence which a more up-to-date solicitor would not have overlooked. A less scrupulous man would have made searching enquiries into Mrs. Bardell’s history and character; but his client, perhaps, would not have sanctioned this course.

Perker is even absurd enough to talk of a *casa*, as though it were some Italian word.

A *ca sa* was short for a writ of *Capias ad Satisfaciendum*, which gave a warrant to the officers to seize the goods. There were various kinds of this machinery, but what affected Mr. Pickwick was a *Capias ad*

Satisfaciendum, to enforce attendance at the Court. The *ca sa* also came after judgment, giving authority to imprison the defendant till the claim was satisfied.

The appearance of such great guns as the two Serjeants is accounted for by a curious rule that Serjeants only were permitted to lead in cases read in the Court of Common Pleas. [84] This strange monopoly recalls that other one, in the Court of Arches, where the advocates and judges used to exchange places and decide on cases in which perhaps they had been advocates. These illiberal and unaccountable restrictions have been swept away, with the Courts themselves.

Very unusual indeed at this time was the appearance of a lawyer of Serjeant Snubbin's class in court, and there is a well-known story how, when Charles Butler made his appearance on a special occasion, all the Bar crowded in to hear him, and he had, I think, to get a gown for the occasion.

One is sorry to think that there are no Serjeants now, though at the Irish Bar there is one solitary survivor—Serjeant Hemphill. Gone too, are their "coifs" and other paraphernalia. With the abolition of the separate courts they were found superfluous. We like to hear of Serjeant Parry, Serjeant Ballantine, Serjeants Warren and Talford, all four literary men. [85]

Having made this initial blunder, Perker did not even instruct a good, smart and ready junior, but chose instead the incapable Phunky who really brought out that fatal piece of evidence from Winkle, which "did for" his case altogether. He had no business, as Boz tells us.

This junior, we are told, had been just called, that is to say, he had been only eight years at the Bar. Snubbin had never heard of him. The little judge, in court, also said "that he never had the pleasure of hearing the gentleman's name before," a sneer he would not have ventured on to a counsel in good practice. Snubbin's remark is amusing and sarcastic; but now-a-days any barrister who had been at the Bar eight years would not be considered as just called, for if he has been passed over for that time, he is likely never to make a figure. The rude and unbecoming sneers, both of Snubbin and the little Judge, seem amazing in our present code of legal manners. Everything at that time, however, was much more "in the rough" and coarser. This was his first case; and the poor creature is thus described:

> Although an infant barrister, he was a full-grown man. He had a very nervous manner, and a painful hesitation in his speech; it did not appear to be a natural defect, but seemed rather the result of timidity,

arising from the consciousness of being “kept down” by want of means, or interest, or connection, or impudence, as the case might be. He was overawed by the Serjeant, and profoundly courteous to the attorney.

‘I have not had the pleasure of seeing you before, Mr. Phunky,’ said Serjeant Snubbin, with haughty condescension.

Mr. Phunky bowed. He *had* had the pleasure of seeing the Serjeant, and of envying him too, with all a poor man’s envy, for eight years and a quarter.

‘You are with me in this case, I understand?’ said the Serjeant.

If Mr. Phunky had been a rich man, he would have instantly sent for his clerk to remind him; if he had been a wise one, he would have applied his fore-finger to his forehead, and endeavoured to recollect, whether, in the multiplicity of his engagements he had undertaken this one, or not; but as he was neither rich nor wise (in this sense at all events) he turned red, and bowed.

‘Have you read the papers, Mr. Phunky?’ inquired the Serjeant.

Here again, Mr. Phunky should have professed to have forgotten all about the merits of the case; but as he had read such papers as had been laid before him in the course of the action, and had thought of nothing else, waking or sleeping, throughout the two months during which he had been retained as Mr. Serjeant Snubbin’s junior, he turned a deeper red, and bowed again.

‘This is Mr. Pickwick,’ said the Serjeant, waving his pen in the direction in which that gentleman was standing.

Mr. Phunky bowed to Mr. Pickwick with a reverence which a first client must ever awaken; and again inclined his head towards his leader.

‘Perhaps you will take Mr. Pickwick away,’ said the Serjeant, ‘and—and—and—hear anything Mr. Pickwick may wish to communicate. We shall have a consultation, of course.’ With this hint that he had been interrupted quite long enough, Mr. Serjeant Snubbin, who had been gradually growing more and more abstracted, applied his glass to his eyes for an instant, bowed slightly round, and was once more deeply immersed in the case before him: which arose out of an interminable law suit, originating in the act of an individual, deceased a century or so ago, who had stopped up a pathway leading from some

> place which nobody ever came from, to some other place which nobody ever went to.

With such a pair the case was literally given away. Perker should have secured a man like the present Mr. Gill or Mr. Charles Matthews—they might have "broken down" the witnesses, or laughed the case out of court.

We may speculate—why did Perker make this foolish selection? As to Snubbin there was some excuse, as it was the custom that Serjeants only should lead in the Court of Common Pleas. But for the choice of Phunky, Perker's stupidity alone was responsible.

Under these conditions Serjeant Snubbin's conduct of the case and his "handling" of the witnesses was truly inefficient. He lost every opportunity for helping his client. He "led" in a quiet, gentlemanly and almost indifferent way. His first opportunity came in examining Mrs. Cluppins. As we have seen, she had deposed to hearing, when the door was "on the jar," Mr. Pickwick make those speeches which Mrs. Bardell had taken to be a proposal. Now here was the moment to show the ambiguity and that Mr. Pickwick was speaking of his servant. It might have been brought out that Sam was actually engaged that day, and that she had met him on the stairs, etc. But Snubbin declined to ask her a single question, saying that Mr. Pickwick admitted the accuracy of her statement. But this was beside the matter, and the Serjeant need not have impeached her accuracy.

When Phunky came to Winkle, the inexperience of the tyro was shown at once. Again, here was the moment to have extracted from the witness a full explanation of Mr. Pickwick's ambiguous speeches to Mrs. Bardell. He could have "brought out" as "clear as the light of day" that Mr. Pickwick was speaking of his engagement of a valet and have shown that the valet was to be engaged that very morning. It would have been impossible to resist such an explanation. But the thing was not thought of. From him also could have been drawn a vast deal favourable to Mr. Pickwick such as his disgust and annoyance at Mrs. Bardell's behaviour, his wish to be rid of her, his complaints of her conduct. But no, there was only the foolish question as to Mr. Pickwick's being an elderly man and of fatherly ways, a topic that would by no means negative the presumption of matrimony. But nothing could excuse the rashness of putting a general question as to "Mr. Pickwick's behaviour towards females." No adroit counsel would run the risk of encountering a too conscientious witness, such as Winkle proved to be and who would "let the cat out of the bag."

As we have seen, this awkward question settled Mr. Pickwick's business. Snubbin had held him out as an elderly but benevolent being, treating every female he met as a daughter, never dreaming of matrimony: when lo! the whole fabric is overthrown in an instant by the luckless Winkle's admission!

> Amid the profound silence of the whole court Mr. Winkle faltered out that the trifling circumstance of suspicion was Mr. Pickwick's being found in a lady's sleeping apartment at midnight, which had terminated, *he believed*, in breaking off the projected marriage of the lady, and had led, *he knew*, to the whole party being forcibly carried before a magistrate.

Thus was the defendant suddenly revealed as a Pecksniffian Lothario, and his pretence of philanthrophy after was shewn in its true colours. It was impossible not to associate this with the scene with Mrs. Bardell.

But there was an important legal "point" which one might have expected would have occurred to so eminent a Chamber Counsel as Serjeant Snubbin. To prove a breach of the promise, it must always be shown that the defendant had been given an opportunity of officially refusing to fulfil it. It should have been put to him "in black and white," "Will you marry me?" and he must have answered "No, I will not," or something to that effect. In default of this the defendant might plead "True I gave the promise and it stands unbroken, for you never required me to act upon it." Now in Mr. Pickwick's case this actually occurred. As we have seen he left town the morning after the imputed proposal and while he was away, within a month, the notice of action was sent to him. Up to that time he had not heard a word of Dodson and Fogg, or of legal proceedings. But it may be urged that Mrs. Bardell herself may have written, formulating her demands. That this was not the case is evident from Mr. Pickwick's behaviour; he did not dream of such a thing, or he would have been disturbed by it, or have consulted his friends about it. Had it been so, his high opinion of Mrs. Bardell would have been shattered. For did he not say on seeing Dodson and Fogg's letter, "She couldn't do it, she hasn't the heart to do it." The only thing that makes against this theory is his reply to Peter Magnus who asked him "had he ever proposed?" when he answered vehemently "Never," possibly recalling Mrs. Bardell. She may however have written to him a pleading letter reminding him of what he had said to her, declaring her deep-seated affection for him and inviting him to carry out what he had offered. Mr. Pickwick would have replied in one of his amiable letters, couched in rather general terms, perhaps calling her "my dear creature," but putting aside the whole business: and there the matter probably dropped for a time. I have little doubt the good woman up to the last really believed that her elderly lodger intended to make her an offer of his hand, and that on his return from his travels he would resume the business. Much elated by this prospect, and most naturally too, she had told all her friends and neighbours of her approaching advancement. This Mrs. Sanders specially deposed to: "had always said and believed that Pickwick would marry Mrs. Bardell; knew that Mrs. Bardell being engaged to Pickwick was the current topic of conversation in the neighbourhood, after the fainting in July; had been told it herself by Mrs. Mudberry which kept a mangle, and Mrs. Bunkin which clear-starched, but did not see either Mrs. Mudberry or Mrs. Bunkin in court."

Notwithstanding these speculations, it still does not appear that Pickwick made such a legal and official refusal to execute his promise as would be sufficient to support the statement of what is now called "the summons and plaint," to wit, that the plaintiff being able and willing "to marry the defendant the defendant refused, etc."

There is another matter on which hands of skilful counsel might have affected Mrs. Bardell and which my friend Mr. Burnand ("F. C. B.") was the first to push home. At the trial, Mrs. Saunders cross-examined by Serjeant Snubbin, had to admit that her friend had an admirer—a certain Baker in the neighbourhood—who was supposed to have matrimonial designs. Pressed on this matter she thus deposed: "Had heard Pickwick ask the little boy how he should like to have another father. Did not know that Mrs. Bardell was at that time keeping company with the baker, but did know that the baker was then a single man, and is now married. Couldn't swear that Mrs. Bardell was not very fond of the baker, but should think that the baker was not very fond of Mrs. Bardell, or he wouldn't have married somebody else. Thought Mrs. Bardell fainted away on the morning in July, because Pickwick asked her to name the day; knew that she (witness) fainted away stone dead when Mr. Saunders asked *her* to name the day, and believed that everybody as called herself a lady would do the same, under similar circumstances. Heard Pickwick ask the boy the question about the marbles, but upon her oath did not know the difference between an alley tor and a commoney.

By the Court.—During the period of her keeping company with Mr. Sanders, had received love letters, like other ladies. In course of their correspondence Mr. Sanders had often called her a ‘duck,’ but never ‘chops,’ nor yet ‘tomata sauce.’ He was particularly fond of ducks. Perhaps if he had been as fond of chops and tomata sauce, he might have called her that, as a term of affection.

What a point, too, Serjeant Snubbin missed here! Could he not have quoted the old verses. How he would have convulsed the court as he poured out the apropos “for Tommy and Me!”

Pat-a-cake, Pat-a-cake, baker’s man,
Bake me a cake as quick as you can;
Knead it and bake it as fast as can be,
And put in the oven for Tommy and me.

Now we do not find that the Serjeant made any use of this topic in his speech. He might have surely urged that this “wily and experienced widow” was eager for a husband, that having been “thrown over” by her baker and stung by the mortification, she resolved, as it were, to rehabilitate herself and prepare this “plant” for her unsuspecting lodger. As Sir Henry Irving says in the play, “I don’t like widows; *they know too much*.” F. C. B., as I have said, has treated this baker theme and developed it regularly in his amusing operetta “Pickwick.”

The little epitome given of Snubbin’s speech shows how weak were his topics, and that he, in fact, considered that there was no defence.

> Serjeant Snubbin then addressed the jury on behalf of the defendant; and a very long and a very emphatic address he delivered, in which he bestowed the highest possible eulogiums on the conduct and character of Mr. Pickwick. He attempted to show that the letters which had been exhibited, merely related to Mr. Pickwick’s dinner, or to the preparations for receiving him in his apartments on his return from some country excursion. It is sufficient to add in general terms, that he did the best he could for Mr. Pickwick; and the best, as everybody knows on the infallible authority of the old adage, could do no more.

This was no more than speaking “in mitigation of damages.”

Mr. Phunky made no speech, which was just as well, as he might have but damaged the case, as no witnesses had been called on his side. For the same reason, the Court had not the pleasure of hearing Skimpin, who would no doubt have “torn the Defendant’s case to tatters.”

CHARGE AND VERDICT.

The regular formula is this. The judge begins to read his notes, and makes “running comments” as he goes along. “We have first, gentlemen, the statement of Mrs. Cluppins, she tells you, &c. Of course she comes as the friend of the Plaintiff, and naturally takes a favourable view of her case. If you are satisfied with her statement, it is for you, gentlemen, to consider what value you will attach to it. Then we come to the question of damages. This is entirely a matter for you. You must take into account the position in life of the Defendant, and what the Plaintiff has lost by his default. On the other hand they must be reasonable in amount. If you believe the promise has been clearly established, you should give substantial though not excessive damages, on a scale sufficient to repay the Plaintiff for the wrong. On the other hand—should it seem to you doubtful whether the promise had been made—you will give the Defendant the benefit of the doubt. These are questions entirely for you—not for me. On the whole case, you will ask yourselves, whether a promise such as would satisfy reasonable men, has been supported by sufficient evidence. If so, Plaintiff is entitled to damages—on the other hand, if this is not proved to your satisfaction, you will find for the Defendant.”

Mr. Justice Stareleigh, however, as we are told, then “summed up in his old established and most approved form. He read as much of his notes as he could decypher on so short a notice, and made running comments on the evidence as he went along. If Mrs. Bardell were right, it was perfectly clear that Mr. Pickwick was wrong, and if they thought the evidence of Mrs. Cluppins worthy of credence, they would believe it, and if they didn’t, why they would’nt. If they were satisfied that a breach of promise had been committed, they would find for the Plaintiff, with such damages as they thought proper; and if, on the other hand, it appeared to them that no promise of marriage had ever been given, they would find for the Defendant, with no damages at all.” Such was this lucid direction—which is really, not in the least, an exaggeration.

But I could fancy some acute judge of our time—such as Mr. Justice Day or Mr. Justice Bigham—after trying this case, turning round in his seat to “charge” the jury. “Here, gentlemen,” he would tell them, “we have it claimed on one side that a promise of marriage was made—and broken; on the other hand the Defendant denies having ever given such a promise. The question you will have to deal with is: What was this promise, and when was it given? In other words, *when* did the Defendant propose to the lady. On the part of the Plaintiff, this was said to have been done at the interview in Goswell Street, and two friends of the Plaintiff—Mrs. Cluppins, I think"—turning over his notes—"yes, Cluppins, and Sanders both declare positively that they overheard the language of the proposal. Further, Mr. Pickwick's friends are called, to prove that the lady was in his arms, fainting. It is extraordinary that not one of these three gentlemen should have deposed to any statements or have offered explanations of the situation. One witness indeed says that he heard the Defendant remonstrate with the Plaintiff, on her hysterical behaviour, and ask her to consider that if any one should come in, what would be said. Now, this is not the language of an ardent suitor, who would rather wish than otherwise, that such endearing familiarities should continue: though I don't think you need seriously accept the reading the learned Counsel, Mr. Skimpin, put on the phrase used; on the other hand, the words 'my dear creature,' were distinctly heard.

"There is one little incident," the Judge might go on, "which I must not pass by, and which is not without its significance. A witness deposed that the defendant was noted for his kindness to the Plaintiff's little boy—that he was constantly giving him presents, and once was heard to say to him, patting him on the head, '*how would you like to have another father*?' Now, this addressed to a child of tender years does seem an odd sort of speech. Of course, it will be contended that the reference was to the probability of his Mother marrying some one other than the Defendant: if that be the case, it seems to me rather an indelicate and reckless speech. And then it must be said, it seems inconsistent with the amiable and benevolent character given to the Defendant to-day. On the other hand, if he were referring to *himself* it will appear natural and proper enough. And there is this to be added, that when the child had reported the remark to his mother, which of course he did, she would most reasonably begin to found hopes upon it. And then what follows, Gentlemen?—the Defendant is found holding this lady in his arms, and becomes so demonstrative in his attentions that this very child comes to her rescue. I am inexperienced in these things—they may be innocent and done with the purest intentions, or may not; but you, Gentlemen of the Jury, are men of the world: and it is for you to put the proper construction on them."

"You will have noted, Gentlemen, this curious feature of the case. None of the witnesses were in the room when the imputed proposal was made, yet all, Cluppins, Weller, and the Defendant's three friends, *heard* what the Defendant said. This suggests that he must have been very pressing, if not agitated. One of the witnesses, Winkle, I think, yes, Winkle, actually deposes to hearing the words, 'My dear creature! Compose yourself' and the like. He added he was afraid someone might come in; a very reasonable fear, Gentlemen, and well grounded: for several persons *did* come in and it would seem with awkward results for the Defendant. But, Gentlemen, I confess that what most of all weighs with me in this case is the remarkable avowal wrung from a reluctant witness, of the Defendant's being surprised at midnight in a lady's bed-chamber, and being taken, after a serious riot, before the Magistrates. This came on me, as I saw it did on you all, as a surprise. True, it does not bear on the question of a promise or of the breach. But still it seems a matter which you cannot wholly shut out from your consideration. It startled me as it did you, to find a sort of travelling philanthropist, as the Defendant Pickwick holds himself out to be, on whose mildly benevolent features nature seems to have stamped rectitude and high principle, living a life of hypocrisy, taking part in midnight invasions and daylight riots. It is one of his own friends who tells us this sad story: and it is for you to consider whether the Plaintiff was here also in pursuit of yet another disreputable game, holding out marriage as the bait: I seem to speak strongly, but I feel it would be impossible to withdraw this from your consideration.

"You may reasonably ask yourselves of what Pickwick was afraid—or why did he dread the presence of witnesses? Was he simply beguiling the lady, as he attempted to beguile that lady at Ipswich, without 'meaning business,' as the phrase runs. I must say the Plaintiff had rather reasonable grounds for assuming that the Defendant *did* mean business. But all this is for you, Gentlemen, not for me.

"Then we have the man Weller's statement—a sort of humorous stage servant, not unamusing—and of course entirely devoted to his master's interest. I don't think you need attach any importance to what he said of the solicitors for the Plaintiff. When I was at the Bar, Gentlemen, attornies did much worse things than this."

The jury consulted for only a few minutes. Perhaps, however, they were only discussing the amount of damages. They were certainly moderate—laid at £1500—though had Dodson and Fogg's advice prevailed, it should have been double. This only, by the way, is further proof of the amiable Mrs. Bardell's moderation and secret *tendre* for her genial lodger. Considering that Mr. Pickwick was 'a gentleman,' and further a gentleman of means, and that Mrs. Bardell was but an humble lodging-house keeper, the sum seems hardly commensurate. Dodson and Fogg no doubt expected £1,000.

> An anxious quarter of an hour elapsed; the jury came back; the judge was fetched in. Mr. Pickwick put on his spectacles, and gazed at the foreman with an agitated countenance and a quickly beating heart.
>
> 'Gentlemen,' said the individual in black, 'are you all agreed upon your verdict?'
>
> 'We are,' replied the foreman.
>
> 'Do you find for the plaintiff, gentlemen, or for the defendant?'
>
> 'For the plaintiff.'
>
> 'With what damages, gentlemen?'
>
> 'Seven hundred and fifty pounds.'
>
> Mr. Pickwick took off his spectacles, carefully wiped the glasses, folded them into their case, and put them in his pocket; then having drawn on his gloves with great nicety, and stared at the foreman all the while, he mechanically followed Mr. Perker and the blue bag out of court.
>
> They stopped in a side room while Perker paid the court fees; and here, Mr. Pickwick was joined by his friends. Here, too, he encountered Messrs. Dodson and Fogg, rubbing their hands with every token of outward satisfaction.
>
> 'Well, gentlemen,' said Mr. Pickwick.
>
> 'Well, sir,' said Dodson: for self and partner.
>
> 'You imagine you'll get your costs, don't you, gentlemen?' said Mr. Pickwick.
>
> Fogg said they thought it rather probable. Dodson smiled, and said they'd try.
>
> 'You may try, and try, and try again, Messrs. Dodson and Fogg,' said Mr. Pickwick vehemently, 'but not one farthing of costs or

> damages do you ever get from me, if I spend the rest of my existence in a debtor's prison.'
>
> 'Ha, ha!' laughed Dodson. 'You will think better of that, before next term, Mr. Pickwick.'
>
> 'He, he, he! We'll soon see about that Mr. Pickwick,' grinned Mr. Fogg.
>
> Speechless with indignation, Mr. Pickwick allowed himself to be led by his solicitor and friends to the door, and there assisted into a hackney-coach, which had been fetched for the purpose, by the ever watchful Sam Weller.
>
> Sam had put up the steps; and was preparing to jump upon the box, when he felt himself gently touched on the shoulder; and looking round, his father stood before him. The old gentleman's countenance wore a mournful expression, as he shook his head gravely, and said, in warning accents:
>
> 'I know'd what 'ud come 'o this here mode 'o doin' bisness. Oh Sammy, Sammy, vy worn't there a alleybi!'

We may wonder that the laborious Chamber Counsel Serjeant Snubbin did not advise "moving for a new trial." The verdict was clearly a wrong one—no sufficient evidence had been furnished either of a promise, or a breach. The full court would no doubt have granted the motion, and this would have led to Mr. Pickwick's release, for the astute Dodson and Fogg must have recognised their poor chances, and perhaps have required "security for costs," which their client could not have given. However, the idea did not occur to anybody.

Since the law was changed both plaintiff and defendant may be examined in such cases as these. What a different complexion this would have put on the suit. The whole case would have tumbled to pieces like a pack of cards. For Mr. Pickwick "put into the box" would have clearly shown that all that had been thus misconstrued, was his proposal for engaging a valet, which was to have been that very morning. He would have related the words of the dialogue, and the Jury would have seen at once how the mistake arose. On the other hand, he would have been exposed to a severe rating cross examination by the learned Serjeant—fortified by Winkle's most damaging slip about the White Horse incident—who would have forced out of him all the incidents. We can almost hear the Serjeant subject the Defendant to the torture.

“This fellow of yours, Sir, was he recommended to you by a friend?”

“No—not at all.”

“By a Registry Office?”

“Certainly not—nothing of the kind.”

“Nothing of the kind? I suppose too low a class of place for you, eh? Come Sir!”

“I never said such a thing.”

“Nor thought it, I suppose? Come, Sir, no beating about the bush. In plain terms, did you get him from a low Public House in the Boro’?”

Mr. Pickwick started up.

“Never!”

“Do you deny it?”

“I never knew that the White Hart was a low Public-House,” said the witness indignantly.

“Never mind what you know, Sir. Did you or did you not get him from there?” thundered the Serjeant.

“Of course I did.”

“Of course you did. Then what’s the use of all this juggling. It does you no good with My Lord and the Jury. I tell you plainly, Mr. Pickwick, we mean to have all out of you. Now Sir, was this man of yours an experienced valet?”

“Certainly not.”

“He had, of course, some training in his profession in other families?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Not that you know of. Do you dare to persist in that, Sir?”

“Why not?”

“Don’t ask *me* questions, Sir, I’m asking *you*. Do you deny, Sir, that the man was neither more nor less than a common Boots in the yard of a Public House, wearing an old tattered hat and jacket—very different from the suit in which you have rigged him up here to-day?”

Mr. Pickwick was astonished and silent. He was suffering. He had never dreamed of this view.

“Why,” he said, “I suppose—”

“We want none of your supposes, Sir, answer yes or no.”

“Well he certainly was such as you describe.”

A flutter ran round the court.

“And this creature of yours, you would impose on the Jury as a trained man servant. You may go down Sir.”

PLEA FOR “DODSON AND FOGG.”

This famous firm of city attornies has become a bye-word in legal history—being considered the most notorious of practitioners for sharp, underhand, scheming practices. Boz was always vehement against the abuses of the law, but his generous ardour sometimes led him to exaggerated and wholesale statements that were scarcely well founded. This is found in some degree even in the sweeping attacks in *Bleak House*. But he was so vivid, so persuasive, in his pictures, that there was no appeal.

The unreasoning fury of Mr. Pickwick is specially shown in the case of Jingle, whom he pursued with an animosity that was almost frantic. One would think it was some public enemy he was hunting down for the public good. Poor Jingle had really done nothing so monstrous, after all. He had “chaffed” Dr. Slammer, “run off” with the spinster aunt—nothing so uncommon in those days—had been consigned to the Fleet for non-payment of his debts, and there showed penitence and other signs of a good heart. His one serious offence was passing himself off as a naval officer, and under an assumed name. But he had *crossed* Mr. Pickwick—had ridiculed him—had contemptuously sent a message to “Tuppy.” When he dared to play a practical joke on his persecutor, his infamy passed beyond bounds. Here was the key to Mr. Pickwick’s nature—any lack of homage or respect was an offence against morality. So with Dodson and Fogg. He had settled in his mind that a condescending visit to these gentlemen, with a little explanation and remonstrance would completely disarm them. His fury on his advances being rejected was extraordinary.

Here Boz shows, as he ever does, his profound and most logical treatment of human character. He never goes astray, being guided by a happy and true instinct. Mr. Pickwick had grown to be the most inflated of men. Flattered and followed—submitted to with the greatest deference—ordering people about—doing what he pleased—he could not stand the slightest opposition. No one was to contradict—no one to question even his stockings—speckled or others. Even when he was clearly wrong, it was an affront to hint at it. He had much in common with that great man, Mr. Gladstone, who was the political Pickwick of his time. He was overbearing and arrogant and unrestrained, and I am afraid vindictive. Dodson and

Fogg were associated with the great mortification of his life. He could not forgive them—the very sight of them roused his hatred, and the having to pay them ransom stung him to fury. All which is most natural and yet unexpected.

The popular and genial Sir Frank Lockwood was almost the first to put forward a plea in abatement of prejudice for the firm. He showed that they were not much below the usual type of middle-class solicitors. What they did was in the ordinary course. With Mr. Pickwick they were most forbearing, and even indulgent. There was one rather doubtful passage, but even here he offers extenuation. This was their treatment of poor Ramsey, which, at first sight, seems very bad indeed.

> ‘There was such a game with Fogg here, this mornin’,’ said the man in the brown coat, ‘while Jack was upstairs sorting the papers, and you two were gone to the stamp-office. Fogg was down here opening the letters, when that chap we issued the writ against at Camberwell, you know, came in—what’s his name again?’
>
> ‘Ramsey,’ said the clerk who had spoken to Mr. Pickwick.
>
> ‘Ah, Ramsey—a precious seedy-looking customer. ‘Well, sir,’ says old Fogg, looking at him very fierce—you know his way—‘well, Sir, have you come to settle?’ ‘Yes, I have, Sir,’ said Ramsey, putting his hand in his pocket, and bringing out the money, ‘the debt two-pound ten, and the costs three pound five, and here it is, sir;’ and he sighed like bricks, as he lugged out the money, done up in a bit of blotting paper. Old Fogg looked first at the money, and then at him, and then he coughed in his rum way, so that I knew something was coming. ‘You don’t know there’s a declaration filed, which increases the costs materially, I suppose?’ said Fogg. ‘You don’t say that Sir,’ said Ramsey, starting back; ‘the time was only out last night, Sir.’ ‘I do say it, though,’ said Fogg, ‘my clerk’s just gone to file it. Hasn’t Mr. Jackson gone to file that declaration in Bullman and Ramsey, Mr. Wicks?’ Of course I said yes, and then Fogg coughed again, and looked at Ramsey. ‘My God!’ said Ramsey; ‘and here have I nearly driven myself mad, scraping this money together, and all to no purpose.’ ‘None at all,’ said Fogg, coolly; ‘so you had better go back and scrape some more together, and bring it here in time.’ ‘I can’t get it, by God,’ said Ramsey, striking the desk with his fist. ‘Don’t bully me, Sir,’ said Fogg, getting into a passion on purpose. ‘I am not

> bullying you, Sir,' said Ramsey. 'You are,' said Fogg; 'get out, Sir, get out of this office, Sir, and come back, Sir, when you know how to behave yourself.' Well, Ramsey tried to speak, but Fogg wouldn't let him, so he put the money in his pocket, and sneaked out. The door was scarcely shut, when old Fogg turned round to me, with a sweet smile on his face, and drew the declaration out of his coat pocket. 'Here, Wicks,' says Fogg, 'take a cab, and go down to the Temple as quick as you can, and file that. The costs are quite safe, for he's a steady man with a large family, at a salary of five-and-twenty shillings a week, and if he gives us a warrant of attorney, as he must in the end, I know his employers will see it paid; so we may as well get all we can out of him, Mr. Wicks; it's a Christian act to do it, Mr. Wicks, for with his large family and small income, he'll be all the better for a good lesson against getting into debt,—won't he, Mr. Wicks, won't he?'—and he smiled so goodnaturedly as he went away, that it was delightful to see him. 'He is a capital man of business,' said Wicks, in a tone of the deepest admiration, 'capital, isn't he?'
>
> The other three cordially subscribed to this opinion, and the anecdote afforded the most unlimited satisfaction.
>
> 'Nice men these here, Sir,' whispered Mr. Weller to his master; 'wery nice notion of fun they has, Sir.'

Sir F. Lockwood, by the way, offers one of the most amusing proofs conceivable, of the convincing power of "Pickwick," which is constantly taking us out of the world of fiction, into that of the daily living life. He speaks of the cruel trick played upon the unfortunate Ramsey, who came to pay his bill of costs, and was told that these were out of date, had been swelled by subsequent proceedings. An affidavit had been sworn—which, after he left the house, Wicks, the clerk, was sent off to swear—Then, Sir Frank, adds: "After all, this is merely given *as the statement of Wicks—on whose testimony not much reliance can be placed*." As though Wicks were some living witness, "erect upon two legs," whom he had been examining in Court!

It must, however, be recollected that this was an *exparte* story. Wicks, as Sir F. Lockwood hints, may have coloured it up, to amuse his brethren. The truth is these poor helpless debtors, who fall into the hands of legal "sharks" and money-lenders, have *their* tricks also. They will often "do" those they employ if they can. And further, let this be considered. Before

Ramsey paid his visit the affidavit *had* been prepared, and was actually in Fogg's pocket. Such affidavit would not be allowed for in the costs unless necessary to the case, so that Fogg's statement that it had been filed was very near the truth. Perker himself was playing the same game of hide and seek with another unfortunate—one Watty—who was trying to see him, and learn something about his case, but was always put off with the excuse or falsehood, that Perker was out, though he was within. But then, "Perker was an honourable man."

Boz lets us know, through Sam, how the case reached Dodson and Fogg. He speaks of "the kind generous people o' the perfession 'as sets their clerks to work to find out little disputes among their neighbours and acquaintances as wants settlin' by means of law suits." This system, however, cannot be checked, and "the speculative attorney" even in our time still flourishes.

It was really not a question whether Mr. Pickwick would "indict them for a conspiracy," because they acted as solicitors against him, but whether they would bring an action against *him* on their own account. All through, Mr. Pickwick's behaviour to them had been outrageous. He chose to assume, quite gratuitously that it was they—not Mrs. Bardell—who got up the case; that they had worked on her for their own nefarious ends. Nothing could be more absurd. The landlady was eager enough to protect her own interests—her female friends worked on her, and the loss of so valuable a lodger, which the incident must have entailed, inflamed her more. We can see from Sam's interview with her that she was at last, though at first reluctant, determined to have her rights. But Mr. Pickwick acting on this assumption addressed the firm, from the first to the last in the most scurrilous language. He called them "robbers, swindlers,—a brace of pettifogging scoundrels!" Shocking and ungentlemanly terms, and what is worse, actionable. Yet the pair received this abuse with infinite good temper and restraint, merely securing a witness who should listen, and threatening the speaker with legal penalties.

And why did they not take this course? Well, they had to suspend proceedings until Mrs. Bardell's action was settled, when on receiving their costs they were desirous to part in good humour. But Mr. Pickwick was so furious at being invited to shake hands with them, that he again broke out with coarse abuse, "Robbers!" "Robbers!" calling it after them down the stairs. Why did they not take action on this? Perhaps they were afraid; as

Mr. Pickwick had shewn himself such a doughty and unyielding fighter—going to prison rather than pay. Perhaps they thought he might get the better of them again.

We have very little evidence as to what was the scale of fees in use in these days. They were of course far lower than they are now, after allowances even for the lower cost of living. To-day, the fees to Counsel alone would have absorbed considerably more than Dodson and Fogg's whole bill of costs. A nice point is, could Mr. Pickwick's irregular interview with Serjeant Snubbin be considered something in the way of a consultation? Here were Counsel, Solicitor and Client: the Serjeant gave up a portion of his valuable time and, further, the junior counsel was summoned specially from his chambers to supply his "advice and opinion." Mr. Pickwick ought surely to have to pay for his whim. And the bill of costs that these "sharks" of attornies sent in! It was astonishingly moderate. For writ, service of subpœnas, hunting up evidence, consultation, fees to counsel, fees for the day, retainers, etc.,—the sum of £120 was all that was asked.

Imagine Messrs. Lewis and Lewis sending in such a demand at the end of a trial which it had taken them nearly a year to get ready. In our time it could hardly be done under £1,000. Perker, by the way, told his client that on payment of the costs both of Plaintiff and Defendent, into the hands of "these sharks" he would get his release. With much indulgence—the attornies—allowed him to leave the prison on his bare undertaking to pay. And it is not clear why he should pay his own costs to them, and not to Perker. And they were *not* paid for sometime. Mr. Pickwick's own costs must have been small. He had no witnesses. Perker would not have made a hand of him, and I fancy he would have got off for ninety pounds, or a hundred pounds. There was, however, the fees of the Special Jury, so he would have to pay, say, £220.

THE COGNOVIT.

Perker, it has been shown, was not a very brilliant solicitor, and his views on the trial were somewhat cloudy. When he was urging his client to leave the Fleet he threw out some equally shadowy and ill-informed notions as to what might be done in the way of punishing the nefarious solicitors, Dodson and Fogg, “those Freeman’s Court Sharks.”

His great charge was that they had got a *cognovit*, or undertaking to pay their costs out of Mrs. Bardell—their own client! Mr. Pickwick refused to pay them—why should not she? The poor woman had “blabbed” to Sam, a careless and natural assurance of theirs, that they would be content to get them from Mr. Pickwick—a thing many a firm would do. But Perker here sees a regular conspiracy. “I cannot undertake to say whether the wording of the cognovit, the nature of the ostensible consideration and the proof we can get together about the whole conduct of the suit, *will be sufficient to justify an indictment for conspiracy*.”

It is impossible to understand this bit of legal jargon. “The wording of the cognovit”—one could speculate on *that* without seeing it. (2) “The nature of the ostensible consideration” was not far to seek—it being work and labour done for the Plaintiff. And again, supposing they had promised her to get them solely from Mr. Pickwick—Sam’s revelation of this, in open court, and its reception with laughter, showed what was thought of it. So which of the two courses were they to adopt? (3) And “the proof we may get together about the whole conduct of the suit.” This “whole conduct” was perfectly regular. So the Judge thought—so did the jury. The case was proved by Pickwick’s own friends. As we know, however, the firm took no steps to obtain satisfaction, but there cannot be the slightest doubt that they would have “recovered damages.” We doubt if Mr. Pickwick would have gone to the Fleet for the second time rather than pay.

Perker’s suspicions as to the *Cognovit* obtained by Dodson and Fogg were shrewd, and certain enough, though he could not have seen the document. The suspicions were well warranted by the state of the Law, which became an instrument in the hands of grasping attorneys. By it the client was made to sign an acknowledgment, and offering no defence to a supposed action,—say for costs—brought against him, Judgment was then marked.

This offered a great temptation to the unscrupulous. Mrs. Bardell, no doubt, signed with light heart, not knowing what she was doing, and being told that it was merely a matter of form. Various enactments attempted to protect the client—one being passed some four or five years before the trial Bardell v. Pickwick, requiring the *Cognovit* to be regularly filed within twenty-one days; more than ten years later it was required, that the client's signing such a thing should have no force in Law, unless he was represented by another solicitor.

The matter, as we know, was compromised with Dodson and Fogg, so there was no need to scrutinize the *Cognovit*. No doubt Perker was enabled to put pressure on the firm by hinting at such proceedings.

The damages, £750, were certainly moderate, and would not have been reduced by the Court on an application to set them aside as "excessive." The good woman was quite at her ease, being no doubt certain that Mr. Pickwick, at last, must give in. She could even enjoy the society of her friends and make the celebrated junketting to the "Spaniards." The firm took another view and grew tired of waiting; or they were sagacious enough to see that the arrest of their client was about the best method of putting pressure on Mr. Pickwick. In this connection, it may be noted that Jackson's over zeal in the transaction might have led to an action against his employers; for he arrested not only Mrs. Bardell, but her friends, Mrs. Sanders and Mrs. Cluppins. The prison gates were actually shut on them. "Safe and sound," said the Bailiff. "Here we are at last," said Jackson, "all right and tight."

True, Mrs. Bardell put under her hand in her appealing letter to Mr. Pickwick, that "this business was from the very first fomented and encouraged and brought about by these men," but this is not much; for the view only occurs to her when her operations had completely failed and recoiled on her own head with such disastrous result. The firm's business was to persuade her that she had a good case, and the Jury's verdict proved that she had. Had Mr. Pickwick given in and paid, she would have had no scruples. One cannot, at the same time, but admire the ingenuity of the author, in bringing such a Nemesis on her. Dodson and Fogg, we are told, "continue in business from which they realise a large income, and in which they are universally considered among the sharpest of the sharp."

At the last interview, at Perker's, when the costs were paid, one might have expected Mr. Pickwick to behave with a certain disdainful dignity. He was beaten and had paid over the stakes, and could afford to treat his enemy with contempt. Not so. The partners held out the olive branch by alluding to the way they had passed by his unmannerly attacks on them. "I beg to assure you, sir, I bear you no ill will or vindictive feeling for sentiments you thought proper to express of us in our office," and the other partner said, "I hope you don't think quite so ill of us, etc." This was rather gentlemanly and becoming. One offered his hand. But Mr. Pickwick broke out in a perfect fury. They had assumed a tone of forgiveness which was "an excess of impudence." He had been "the victim of their plots and conspiracies." They had imprisoned and robbed him. It was "insolent familiarity." At last he said, "*You are a well-matched pair of mean, rascally, pettifogging robbers*." This sentence he repeated three times, and the words "Robbers" he shouted after them many times over the stairs.

Sharping attornies! Why, a real sharping firm would have forced from their client advances of fee, "cash out of pocket," have made her give a Bill of Sale on her lease and goods, and have fairly stripped her of everything before the case began. Of the damages—had they got them—she would have seen but little.

The *Cognovit* that was extracted from Mrs. Bardell was an acknowledgement, as we have seen, which entitled them to enter up judgment just as if a trial had taken place. In the Oxford great Dictionary, it reads quaintly to find Mrs. Bardell's cognovit quoted as an illustration of the legal meaning.

The Turnkey, on her arrest, had told Sam that she had been brought to the Fleet, "on a Cognovit for costs," Sam imparted this news to Job Trotter, and sent him off, hot foot, to Perker in Montague Place. This outcast, was able to tell him, "it seems they got a *Cognovit* out of her for the amount of the costs, directly after the trial!"

Boz, on this occasion, gives us a happy glimpse of Solicitor life.

> Mr. Perker had a dinner party that day, which was certified by the lights in the drawing-room windows, the sound of an improved grand piano, and an improveable cabinet voice issuing therefrom; and a rather overpowering smell of meat which prevaded the steps and entry. In fact, a couple of very good country agencies happening to come up to town at the same time, an agreeable little party had been

> got together to meet them, comprising Mr. Snicks the Life Office Secretary, Mr. Prosee the eminent counsel, three solicitors, one commissioner of bankrupts, a special pleader from the Temple, a small-eyed peremptory young gentleman, his pupil, who had written a lively book about the law of demises, with a vast quantity of marginal notes and references; and several other eminent and distinguished personages. From this society little Mr. Perker detached himself on his clerk being announced in a whisper; and repairing to the dining-room, there found Mr. Lowten and Job Trotter looking very dim and shadowy by the light of a kitchen candle, which the gentleman who condescended to appear in plush shorts and cottons for a quarterly stipend, had, with a becoming contempt for the clerk and all things appertaining to 'the office,' placed upon the table.
>
> 'Now Lowten,' said little Mr. Perker, shutting the door, 'what's the matter? No important letter come in a parcel, is there?'

Do we not seem to be present? We can never pass by Russell Square without calling up the scene. Note, too, the components of that legal dinner. Poor Sir F. Lockwood used to declare that he relished "Mr. Prosee, the eminent counsel," more than any one of Boz's legal circle. Yet these five words are all we know of him. But Sir Frank had imagination, and like some of us could read between the lines, or rather, between the words. Here was a prominent member of the Bar—was he K.C.? a triton among the minnows—therefore heading the table, listened to with reverence as he told of the judges, possibly of "old Stareleigh's" last exhibition of petulance—"with it's high time for him to go, etc." But if he had not silk, why did not Perker retain him instead of the incapable Phunky, whom he did *not* ask on this occasion. "I gave the chap a good chance, but he destroyed my whole case!" "Catch me letting him put his legs under my mahogany." Among the guests was that "small-eyed, peremptory young gentleman"—the special pleader's pupil. What a capital sketch has Boz given of him. "He had written a *lively* book about the law of demises, with a vast quantity of marginal notes and references." He had come with his teacher, who was no doubt highly deferental to Mr. Prosee, but enough, the peremptory young gentleman may have partly "tackled" the great man on some point of practice. The good country agencies must have gone home delighted with their evening.

But Mr. Prosee may be brought into somewhat closer communication with the case. At Perker's dinner the gentlemen had gone up to the drawing room, when Perker was called down to hear the news of Mrs. Bardell's arrest. Mr. Prosee was left expatiating to the circle on some beautiful "point," and when Perker returned how likely that he should tell of his extraordinary client who had preferred to go to prison rather than pay the costs of a suit, "and here," he would go on, "is the drollest sequel you ever heard, &c."

"An odd unusual thing," Mr. Prosee would say. "Plaintiff and Defendant, both in jail together! I never heard the like." There would be much laughter at the novel situation. Thus the *cognovit* would come up and Mr. Prosee gravely say, "nothing will be done till an Act of Parliament is passed. The client should be protected by a fresh solicitor." On which the young author of the treatise on Demises would have something to say in his best fashion; for the *cognovit* might be taken to be a sort of demise. "I doubt Mr. Prosee, if your suggestion would work. As I take it, sir, etc."

RELEASE FROM THE FLEET.

But the circumstances connected with Mr. Pickwick's release from the Fleet, show the adroitness and ability of Dodson in a high degree. It will be recollected that when Job rushed with the news to Perker, that gentleman and his clerk broke out into raptuous admiration.

> 'Now, Lowten,' said little Mr. Perker, shutting the door, 'what's the matter? No important letter come in a parcel, is there?'
>
> 'No, sir,' replied Lowten. 'This is a messenger from Mr. Pickwick, sir.'
>
> 'From Pickwick, eh?' said the little man, turning quickly to Job. 'Well; what is it?'
>
> 'Dodson and Fogg have taken Mrs. Bardell in execution for her costs, sir,' said Job.
>
> 'No!' exclaimed Perker, putting his hands in his pockets, and reclining against the sideboard.
>
> 'Yes,' said Job. 'It seems they got a cognovit out of her for the amount of 'em, directly after the trial.'
>
> 'By Jove!' said Perker, taking both hands out of his pockets and striking the knuckles of his right against the palm of his left, emphatically, 'those are the cleverest scamps I ever had anything to do with!'
>
> 'The sharpest practitioners *I* ever knew, sir,' observed Lowten.
>
> 'Sharp!' echoed Perker. 'There's no knowing where to have them.'
>
> 'Very true, sir, there is not,' replied Lowten; and then both master and man pondered for a few seconds, with animated countenances, as if they were reflecting upon one of the most beautiful and ingenious discoveries that the intellect of man had ever made. When they had in some measure recovered from their trance of admiration, Job Trotter discharged himself of the rest of his commission. Perker nodded his head thoughtfully, and pulled out his watch.

Now to the superficial this seemed to be evaded by the art of the firm in "getting the cognovit out of her." But this was an ordinary, vulgar stroke—which anyone could have done. Their policy went far deeper, and this

Perker was acute enough to recognize. There was no object in putting Mrs. Bardell into the Fleet.

They could no more get their costs out of her, than they could get them out of Mr. Pickwick. She had nothing but her few "sticks" of furniture, worth say £50. But the astute fellows saw what pressure could be put on the benevolent nature of Mr. Pickwick, who could not endure that a respectable woman should be exposed to the contamination of a debtor's prison. And their sagacity was to be justified, and on the very next day, too.

It is curious, however, that no mention is made of Mrs. Bardell's release. It, of course, took place before Mr. Pickwick's. Here again Dodson and Fogg behaved very fairly, for they allowed both her and Mr. Pickwick to be released, without receiving payment, but simply on "an understanding" by Perker. As it turned out, indeed, they were not paid for some weeks.

The processes by which Mr. Pickwick was got into the Fleet were complicated enough, *Habeas Corpus*, appearing before functionaries, etc. But it is odd that in cases of persons of lower degree these seemed not to be necessary. We do not hear of them in Sam's instance. While Mrs. Bardell, was taken straight from "the Spaniards," to the prison door, she was not even formally arrested by the Bailiff, though he was in attendance. He sat afar off at Hampstead, taking his drink—and on the box during the drive. She might be said to have been arbitrarily taken to the prison by Jackson—without a legal warrant. Had not the business been compromised, some other astute firm of attorneys might have found subject for an action against Dodson and Fogg.

Another of the humorous incidents connected with the case is old Weller's firm persuasion that Mr. Pickwick was to "stand his trial," as though he were indicted for some criminal offence. We find him always astray as to when he was to be "tried," etc. This is a most natural impression among the lower classes, who are not very clear as to the distinction between civil and criminal process, being most familiar with the latter. In the same spirit is his humorous suggestion of securing an *alibi*, as the best method of getting Mr. Pickwick off. "O Sammy, Sammy, vy worn't there a alleybi!"

* * * * *

Such is "The Trial in Pickwick."

Is there any writer, now living, I may be asked, who could furnish such a picture as this, one so full of reality and true humour, of one of our modern Courts of Justice? The answer must be that it would be idle to look for such a person. There are thousands who could supply minute drawings in which not a single detail would be omitted. But the piercing to the essence, the happy generalization, the knowledge of the true points of character, these would be sought in vain.

Footnotes:

[26] So confused is the chronology of *Pickwick*, that it is difficult to fix the exact date of the Trial. Boz, writing some ten years after the event, seems to have got a little confused and uncertain as to the exact year of the Trial. He first fixed the opening of the story in 1817: but on coming to the compromising incident in Goswell Street, which occurred only a few weeks later, he changed the year to 1827. Then Jingle's anachronism of the French Revolution of July suggested that the new date would not do. So 1830 was next adopted. But this did not end the matter, for in the "errata" we are directed to change this date back again to 1827. And so it now stands. The Trial therefore really took place on April 1, 1828.

[84] Seven years after the Trial this monopoly was taken away from the Serjeants—namely in 1834: then capriciously given back to them, and finally abolished in 1840.

[85] I have heard from the daughter of Mr. Chapman, the original publisher of *Pickwick*, that Talfourd revised and directed the "Trial." On one occasion Boz was dining with him when the proof was brought in, with some legal mistakes noted by Talfourd. Boz left the table and put it right.

THE END OF BARDELL v. PICKWICK

BARNABY RUDGE

A TALE OF THE RIOTS OF 'EIGHTY

by Charles Dickens

note:
Many archaic forms such as 'to-morrow' or 'to-day' are left untouched in this edition.
Also please be aware if spell-checking, many 'mispelled' words exist, i.e. 'wery' for 'very', however, these are intentional and as intended by the author.

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PREFACE

The late Mr Waterton having, some time ago, expressed his opinion that ravens are gradually becoming extinct in England, I offered the few following words about my experience of these birds.

The raven in this story is a compound of two great originals, of whom I was, at different times, the proud possessor. The first was in the bloom of his youth, when he was discovered in a modest retirement in London, by a friend of mine, and given to me. He had from the first, as Sir Hugh Evans says of Anne Page, 'good gifts', which he improved by study and attention in a most exemplary manner. He slept in a stable—generally on horseback—and so terrified a Newfoundland dog by his preternatural sagacity, that he has been known, by the mere superiority of his genius, to walk off unmolested with the dog's dinner, from before his face. He was rapidly rising in acquirements and virtues, when, in an evil hour, his stable was newly painted. He observed the workmen closely, saw that they were careful of the paint, and immediately burned to possess it. On their going to dinner, he ate up all they had left behind, consisting of a pound or two of white lead; and this youthful indiscretion terminated in death.

While I was yet inconsolable for his loss, another friend of mine in Yorkshire discovered an older and more gifted raven at a village public-house, which he prevailed upon the landlord to part with for a consideration, and sent up to me. The first act of this Sage, was, to administer to the effects of his predecessor, by disinterring all the cheese and halfpence he had buried in the garden—a work of immense labour and research, to which he devoted all the energies of his mind. When he had achieved this task, he applied himself to the acquisition of stable language, in which he soon became such an adept, that he would perch outside my window and drive imaginary horses with great skill, all day. Perhaps even I never saw him at his best, for his former master sent his duty with him, 'and if I wished the bird to come out very strong, would I be so good as to show him a drunken man'—which I never did, having (unfortunately) none but sober people at hand.

But I could hardly have respected him more, whatever the stimulating influences of this sight might have been. He had not the least respect, I am sorry to say, for me in return, or for anybody but the cook; to whom he was attached—but only, I fear, as a Policeman might have been. Once, I met him unexpectedly, about half-a-mile from my house, walking down the middle of a public street, attended by a pretty large crowd, and spontaneously exhibiting the whole of his accomplishments. His gravity under those trying circumstances, I can never forget, nor the extraordinary gallantry with which, refusing to be brought home, he defended himself behind a pump, until overpowered by numbers. It may have been that he was too bright a genius to live long, or it may have been that he took some pernicious substance into his bill, and thence into his maw—which is not improbable, seeing that he new-pointed the greater part of the garden-wall by digging out the mortar, broke countless squares of glass by scraping away the putty all round the frames, and tore up and swallowed, in splinters, the greater part of a wooden staircase of six steps and a landing—but after some three years he too was taken ill, and died before the kitchen fire. He kept his eye to the last upon the meat as it roasted, and suddenly turned over on his back with a sepulchral cry of 'Cuckoo!' Since then I have been ravenless.

No account of the Gordon Riots having been to my knowledge introduced into any Work of Fiction, and the subject presenting very extraordinary and remarkable features, I was led to project this Tale.

It is unnecessary to say, that those shameful tumults, while they reflect indelible disgrace upon the time in which they occurred, and all who had act or part in them, teach a good lesson. That what we falsely call a religious cry is easily raised by men who have no religion, and who in their daily practice set at nought the commonest principles of right and wrong; that it is begotten of intolerance and persecution; that it is senseless, besotted, inveterate and unmerciful; all History teaches us. But perhaps we do not know it in our hearts too well, to profit by even so humble an example as the 'No Popery' riots of Seventeen Hundred and Eighty.

However imperfectly those disturbances are set forth in the following pages, they are impartially painted by one who has no sympathy with the Romish Church, though he acknowledges, as most men do, some esteemed friends among the followers of its creed.

In the description of the principal outrages, reference has been had to the best authorities of that time, such as they are; the account given in this Tale, of all the main features of the Riots, is substantially correct.

Mr Dennis's allusions to the flourishing condition of his trade in those days, have their foundation in Truth, and not in the Author's fancy. Any file of old Newspapers, or odd volume of the Annual Register, will prove this with terrible ease.

Even the case of Mary Jones, dwelt upon with so much pleasure by the same character, is no effort of invention. The facts were stated, exactly as they are stated here, in the House of Commons. Whether they afforded as much entertainment to the merry gentlemen assembled there, as some other most affecting circumstances of a similar nature mentioned by Sir Samuel Romilly, is not recorded.

That the case of Mary Jones may speak the more emphatically for itself, I subjoin it, as related by SIR WILLIAM MEREDITH in a speech in Parliament, 'on Frequent Executions', made in 1777.

'Under this act,' the Shop-lifting Act, 'one Mary Jones was executed, whose case I shall just mention; it was at the time when press warrants were issued, on the alarm about Falkland Islands. The woman's husband was pressed, their goods seized for some debts of his, and she, with two small children, turned into the streets a-begging. It is a circumstance not to be forgotten, that she was very young (under nineteen), and most remarkably handsome. She went to a linen-draper's shop, took some coarse linen off the counter, and slipped it under her cloak; the shopman saw her, and she laid it down: for this she was hanged. Her defence was (I have the trial in my pocket), "that she had lived in credit, and wanted for nothing, till a press-gang came and stole her husband from her; but since then, she had no bed to lie on; nothing to give her children to eat; and they were almost naked; and perhaps she might have done something wrong, for she hardly knew what she did." The parish officers testified the truth of this story; but it seems, there had been a good deal of shop-lifting about Ludgate; an example was thought necessary; and this woman was hanged for the comfort and satisfaction of shopkeepers in Ludgate Street. When brought to receive sentence, she behaved in such a frantic manner, as proved her mind to be in a distracted and desponding state; and the child was sucking at her breast when she set out for Tyburn.'

Chapter 1

In the year 1775, there stood upon the borders of Epping Forest, at a distance of about twelve miles from London—measuring from the Standard in Cornhill,' or rather from the spot on or near to which the Standard used to be in days of yore—a house of public entertainment called the Maypole; which fact was demonstrated to all such travellers as could neither read nor write (and at that time a vast number both of travellers and stay-at-homes were in this condition) by the emblem reared on the roadside over against the house, which, if not of those goodly proportions that Maypoles were wont to present in olden times, was a fair young ash, thirty feet in height, and straight as any arrow that ever English yeoman drew.

The Maypole—by which term from henceforth is meant the house, and not its sign—the Maypole was an old building, with more gable ends than a lazy man would care to count on a sunny day; huge zig-zag chimneys, out of which it seemed as though even smoke could not choose but come in more than naturally fantastic shapes, imparted to it in its tortuous progress; and vast stables, gloomy, ruinous, and empty. The place was said to have been built in the days of King Henry the Eighth; and there was a legend, not only that Queen Elizabeth had slept there one night while upon a hunting excursion, to wit, in a certain oak-panelled room with a deep bay window, but that next morning, while standing on a mounting block before the door with one foot in the stirrup, the virgin monarch had then and there boxed and cuffed an unlucky page for some neglect of duty. The matter-of-fact and doubtful folks, of whom there were a few among the Maypole customers, as unluckily there always are in every little community, were inclined to look upon this tradition as rather apocryphal; but, whenever the landlord of that ancient hostelry appealed to the mounting block itself as evidence, and triumphantly pointed out that there it stood in the same place to that very day, the doubters never failed to be put down by a large majority, and all true believers exulted as in a victory.

Whether these, and many other stories of the like nature, were true or untrue, the Maypole was really an old house, a very old house, perhaps as old as it claimed to be, and perhaps older, which will sometimes happen with houses of an uncertain, as with ladies of a certain, age. Its windows were old diamond-pane lattices, its floors were sunken and uneven, its ceilings blackened by the hand of time, and heavy with massive beams. Over the doorway was an ancient porch, quaintly and grotesquely carved; and here on summer evenings the more favoured customers smoked and drank—ay, and sang many a good song too, sometimes—reposing on two grim-looking high-backed settles, which, like the twin dragons of some fairy tale, guarded the entrance to the mansion.

In the chimneys of the disused rooms, swallows had built their nests for many a long year, and from earliest spring to latest autumn whole colonies of sparrows chirped and twittered in the eaves. There were more pigeons about the dreary stable-yard and out-buildings than anybody but the landlord could reckon up. The wheeling and circling flights of runts, fantails, tumblers, and pouters, were perhaps not quite consistent with the grave and sober character of the building, but the monotonous cooing, which never ceased to be raised by some among them all day long, suited it exactly, and seemed to lull it to rest. With its overhanging stories, drowsy little panes of glass, and front bulging out and projecting over the pathway, the old house looked as if it were nodding in its sleep. Indeed, it needed no very great stretch of fancy to detect in it other resemblances to humanity. The bricks of which it was built had originally been a deep dark red, but had grown yellow and discoloured like an old man's skin; the sturdy timbers had decayed like teeth; and here and there the ivy, like a warm garment to comfort it in its age, wrapt its green leaves closely round the time-worn walls.

It was a hale and hearty age though, still: and in the summer or autumn evenings, when the glow of the setting sun fell upon the oak and chestnut trees of the adjacent forest, the old house, partaking of its lustre, seemed their fit companion, and to have many good years of life in him yet.

The evening with which we have to do, was neither a summer nor an autumn one, but the twilight of a day in March, when the wind howled dismally among the bare branches of the trees, and rumbling in the wide chimneys and driving the rain against the windows of the Maypole Inn, gave such of its frequenters as chanced to be there at the moment an undeniable reason for prolonging their stay, and caused the landlord to prophesy that the night would certainly clear at eleven o'clock precisely,—which by a remarkable coincidence was the hour at which he always closed his house.

The name of him upon whom the spirit of prophecy thus descended was John Willet, a burly, large-headed man with a fat face, which betokened profound obstinacy and slowness of apprehension, combined with a very strong reliance upon his own merits. It was John Willet's ordinary boast in his more placid moods that if he were slow he was sure; which assertion could, in one sense at least, be by no means gainsaid, seeing that he was in everything unquestionably the reverse of fast, and withal one of the most dogged and positive fellows in existence—always sure that what he thought or said or did was right, and holding it as a thing quite settled and ordained by the laws of nature and Providence, that anybody who said or did or thought otherwise must be inevitably and of necessity wrong.

Mr Willet walked slowly up to the window, flattened his fat nose against the cold glass, and shading his eyes that his sight might not be affected by the ruddy glow of the fire, looked abroad. Then he walked slowly back to his old seat in the chimney-corner, and, composing himself in it with a slight shiver, such as a man might give way to and so acquire an additional relish for the warm blaze, said, looking round upon his guests:

'It'll clear at eleven o'clock. No sooner and no later. Not before and not arterwards.'

'How do you make out that?' said a little man in the opposite corner. 'The moon is past the full, and she rises at nine.'

John looked sedately and solemnly at his questioner until he had brought his mind to bear upon the whole of his observation, and then made answer, in a tone which seemed to imply that the moon was peculiarly his business and nobody else's:

'Never you mind about the moon. Don't you trouble yourself about her. You let the moon alone, and I'll let you alone.'

'No offence I hope?' said the little man.

Again John waited leisurely until the observation had thoroughly penetrated to his brain, and then replying, 'No offence as YET,' applied a light to his pipe and smoked in placid silence; now and then casting a sidelong look at a man wrapped in a loose riding-coat with huge cuffs ornamented with tarnished silver lace and large metal buttons, who sat apart from the regular frequenters of the house, and wearing a hat flapped over his face, which was still further shaded by the hand on which his forehead rested, looked unsociable enough.

There was another guest, who sat, booted and spurred, at some distance from the fire also, and whose thoughts—to judge from his folded arms and knitted brows, and from the untasted liquor before him—were occupied with other matters than the topics under discussion or the persons who discussed them. This was a young man of about eight-and-twenty, rather above the middle height, and though of somewhat slight figure, gracefully and strongly made. He wore his own dark hair, and was accoutred in a riding dress, which together with his large boots (resembling in shape and fashion those worn by our Life Guardsmen at the present day), showed indisputable traces of the bad condition of the roads. But travel-stained though he was, he was well and even richly attired, and without being overdressed looked a gallant gentleman.

Lying upon the table beside him, as he had carelessly thrown them down, were a heavy riding-whip and a slouched hat, the latter worn no doubt as being best suited to the inclemency of the weather. There, too, were a pair of pistols in a holster-case, and a short riding-cloak. Little of his face was visible, except the long dark lashes which concealed his downcast eyes, but an air of careless ease and natural gracefulness of demeanour pervaded the figure, and seemed to comprehend even those slight accessories, which were all handsome, and in good keeping.

Towards this young gentleman the eyes of Mr Willet wandered but once, and then as if in mute inquiry whether he had observed his silent neighbour. It was plain that John and the young gentleman had often met before. Finding that his look was not returned, or indeed observed by the person to whom it was addressed, John gradually concentrated the whole power of his eyes into one focus, and brought it to bear upon the man in the flapped hat, at whom he came to stare in course of time with an intensity so remarkable, that it affected his fireside cronies, who all, as with one accord, took their pipes from their lips, and stared with open mouths at the stranger likewise.

The sturdy landlord had a large pair of dull fish-like eyes, and the little man who had hazarded the remark about the moon (and who was the parish-clerk and bell-ringer of Chigwell, a village hard by) had little round black shiny eyes like beads; moreover this little man wore at the knees of his rusty black breeches, and on his rusty black coat, and all down his long flapped waistcoat, little queer buttons like nothing except his eyes; but so like them, that as they twinkled and glistened in the light of the fire, which shone too in his bright shoe-buckles, he seemed all eyes from head to foot, and to be gazing with every one of them at the unknown customer. No wonder that a man should grow restless under such an inspection as this, to say nothing of the eyes belonging to short Tom Cobb the general chandler and post-office keeper, and long Phil Parkes the ranger, both of whom, infected by the example of their companions, regarded him of the flapped hat no less attentively.

The stranger became restless; perhaps from being exposed to this raking fire of eyes, perhaps from the nature of his previous meditations—most probably from the latter cause, for as he changed his position and looked hastily round, he started to find himself the object of such keen regard, and darted an angry and suspicious glance at the fireside group. It had the effect of immediately diverting all eyes to the chimney, except those of John Willet, who finding himself as it were, caught in the fact, and not being (as has been already observed) of a very ready nature, remained staring at his guest in a particularly awkward and disconcerted manner.

'Well?' said the stranger.

Well. There was not much in well. It was not a long speech. 'I thought you gave an order,' said the landlord, after a pause of two or three minutes for consideration.

The stranger took off his hat, and disclosed the hard features of a man of sixty or thereabouts, much weatherbeaten and worn by time, and the naturally harsh expression of which was not improved by a dark handkerchief which was bound tightly round his head, and, while it served the purpose of a wig, shaded his forehead, and almost hid his eyebrows. If it were intended to conceal or divert attention from a deep gash, now healed into an ugly seam, which when it was first inflicted must have laid bare his cheekbone, the object was but indifferently attained, for it could scarcely fail to be noted at a glance. His complexion was of a cadaverous hue, and he had a grizzly jagged beard of some three weeks' date. Such was the figure (very meanly and poorly clad) that now rose from the seat, and stalking across the room sat down in a corner of the chimney, which the politeness or fears of the little clerk very readily assigned to him.

'A highwayman!' whispered Tom Cobb to Parkes the ranger.

'Do you suppose highwaymen don't dress handsomer than that?' replied Parkes. 'It's a better business than you think for, Tom, and highwaymen don't need or use to be shabby, take my word for it.'

Meanwhile the subject of their speculations had done due honour to the house by calling for some drink, which was promptly supplied by the landlord's son Joe, a broad-shouldered strapping young fellow of twenty, whom it pleased his father still to consider a little boy, and to treat accordingly. Stretching out his hands to warm them by the blazing fire, the man turned his head towards the company, and after running his eye sharply over them, said in a voice well suited to his appearance:

'What house is that which stands a mile or so from here?'

'Public-house?' said the landlord, with his usual deliberation.

'Public-house, father!' exclaimed Joe, 'where's the public-house within a mile or so of the Maypole? He means the great house—the Warren—naturally and of course. The old red brick house, sir, that stands in its own grounds—?'

'Aye,' said the stranger.

'And that fifteen or twenty years ago stood in a park five times as broad, which with other and richer property has bit by bit changed hands and dwindled away—more's the pity!' pursued the young man.

'Maybe,' was the reply. 'But my question related to the owner. What it has been I don't care to know, and what it is I can see for myself.'

The heir-apparent to the Maypole pressed his finger on his lips, and glancing at the young gentleman already noticed, who had changed his attitude when the house was first mentioned, replied in a lower tone:

'The owner's name is Haredale, Mr Geoffrey Haredale, and'—again he glanced in the same direction as before—'and a worthy gentleman too—hem!'

Paying as little regard to this admonitory cough, as to the significant gesture that had preceded it, the stranger pursued his questioning.

'I turned out of my way coming here, and took the footpath that crosses the grounds. Who was the young lady that I saw entering a carriage? His daughter?'

'Why, how should I know, honest man?' replied Joe, contriving in the course of some arrangements about the hearth, to advance close to his questioner and pluck him by the sleeve, 'I didn't see the young lady, you know. Whew! There's the wind again—AND rain—well it IS a night!'

Rough weather indeed!' observed the strange man.

'You're used to it?' said Joe, catching at anything which seemed to promise a diversion of the subject.

'Pretty well,' returned the other. 'About the young lady—has Mr Haredale a daughter?'

'No, no,' said the young fellow fretfully, 'he's a single gentleman—he's—be quiet, can't you, man? Don't you see this talk is not relished yonder?'

Regardless of this whispered remonstrance, and affecting not to hear it, his tormentor provokingly continued:

'Single men have had daughters before now. Perhaps she may be his daughter, though he is not married.'

'What do you mean?' said Joe, adding in an undertone as he approached him again, 'You'll come in for it presently, I know you will!'

'I mean no harm'—returned the traveller boldly, 'and have said none that I know of. I ask a few questions—as any stranger may, and not unnaturally—about the inmates of a remarkable house in a neighbourhood which is new to me, and you are as aghast and disturbed as if I were talking treason against King George. Perhaps you can tell me why, sir, for (as I say) I am a stranger, and this is Greek to me?'

The latter observation was addressed to the obvious cause of Joe Willet's discomposure, who had risen and was adjusting his riding-cloak preparatory to sallying abroad. Briefly replying that he could give him no information, the young man beckoned to Joe, and handing him a piece of money in payment of his reckoning, hurried out attended by young Willet himself, who taking up a candle followed to light him to the house-door.

While Joe was absent on this errand, the elder Willet and his three companions continued to smoke with profound gravity, and in a deep silence, each having his eyes fixed on a huge copper boiler that was suspended over the fire. After some time John Willet slowly shook his head, and thereupon his friends slowly shook theirs; but no man withdrew his eyes from the boiler, or altered the solemn expression of his countenance in the slightest degree.

At length Joe returned—very talkative and conciliatory, as though with a strong presentiment that he was going to be found fault with.

'Such a thing as love is!' he said, drawing a chair near the fire, and looking round for sympathy. 'He has set off to walk to London,—all the way to London. His nag gone lame in riding out here this blessed afternoon, and comfortably littered down in our stable at this minute; and he giving up a good hot supper and our best bed, because Miss Haredale has gone to a masquerade up in town, and he has set his heart upon seeing her! I don't think I could persuade myself to do that, beautiful as she is,—but then I'm not in love (at least I don't think I am) and that's the whole difference.'

'He is in love then?' said the stranger.

'Rather,' replied Joe. 'He'll never be more in love, and may very easily be less.'

'Silence, sir!' cried his father.

'What a chap you are, Joe!' said Long Parkes.

'Such a inconsiderate lad!' murmured Tom Cobb.

'Putting himself forward and wringing the very nose off his own father's face!' exclaimed the parish-clerk, metaphorically.

'What HAVE I done?' reasoned poor Joe.

'Silence, sir!' returned his father, 'what do you mean by talking, when you see people that are more than two or three times your age, sitting still and silent and not dreaming of saying a word?'

'Why that's the proper time for me to talk, isn't it?' said Joe rebelliously.

'The proper time, sir!' retorted his father, 'the proper time's no time.'

'Ah to be sure!' muttered Parkes, nodding gravely to the other two who nodded likewise, observing under their breaths that that was the point.

'The proper time's no time, sir,' repeated John Willet; 'when I was your age I never talked, I never wanted to talk. I listened and improved myself that's what I did.'

'And you'd find your father rather a tough customer in argeyment, Joe, if anybody was to try and tackle him,' said Parkes.

'For the matter o' that, Phil!' observed Mr Willet, blowing a long, thin, spiral cloud of smoke out of the corner of his mouth, and staring at it abstractedly as it floated away; 'For the matter o' that, Phil, argeyment is a gift of Natur. If Natur has gifted a man with powers of argeyment, a man has a right to make the best of 'em, and has not a right to stand on false delicacy, and deny that he is so gifted; for that is a turning of his back on Natur, a flouting of her, a slighting of her precious caskets, and a proving of one's self to be a swine that isn't worth her scattering pearls before.'

The landlord pausing here for a very long time, Mr Parkes naturally concluded that he had brought his discourse to an end; and therefore, turning to the young man with some austerity, exclaimed:

'You hear what your father says, Joe? You wouldn't much like to tackle him in argeyment, I'm thinking, sir.'

'IF,' said John Willet, turning his eyes from the ceiling to the face of his interrupter, and uttering the monosyllable in capitals, to apprise him that he had put in his oar, as the vulgar say, with unbecoming and irreverent haste; 'IF, sir, Natur has fixed upon me the gift of argeyment, why should I not own to it, and rather glory in the same? Yes, sir, I AM a tough customer that way. You are right, sir. My toughness has been proved, sir, in this room many and many a time, as I think you know; and if you don't know,' added John, putting his pipe in his mouth again, 'so much the better, for I an't proud and am not going to tell you.'

A general murmur from his three cronies, and a general shaking of heads at the copper boiler, assured John Willet that they had had good experience of his powers and needed no further evidence to assure them of his superiority. John smoked with a little more dignity and surveyed them in silence.

'It's all very fine talking,' muttered Joe, who had been fidgeting in his chair with divers uneasy gestures. 'But if you mean to tell me that I'm never to open my lips—'

'Silence, sir!' roared his father. 'No, you never are. When your opinion's wanted, you give it. When you're spoke to, you speak. When your opinion's not wanted and you're not spoke to, don't you give an opinion and don't you speak. The world's undergone a nice alteration since my time, certainly. My belief is that there an't any boys left—that there isn't such a thing as a boy—that there's nothing now between a male baby and a man—and that all the boys went out with his blessed Majesty King George the Second.'

'That's a very true observation, always excepting the young princes,' said the parish-clerk, who, as the representative of church and state in that company, held himself bound to the nicest loyalty. 'If it's godly and righteous for boys, being of the ages of boys, to behave themselves like boys, then the young princes must be boys and cannot be otherwise.'

'Did you ever hear tell of mermaids, sir?' said Mr Willet.

'Certainly I have,' replied the clerk.

'Very good,' said Mr Willet. 'According to the constitution of mermaids, so much of a mermaid as is not a woman must be a fish. According to the constitution of young princes, so much of a young prince (if anything) as is not actually an angel, must be godly and righteous. Therefore if it's becoming and godly and righteous in the young princes (as it is at their ages) that they should be boys, they are and must be boys, and cannot by possibility be anything else.'

This elucidation of a knotty point being received with such marks of approval as to put John Willet into a good humour, he contented himself with repeating to his son his command of silence, and addressing the stranger, said:

'If you had asked your questions of a grown-up person—of me or any of these gentlemen—you'd have had some satisfaction, and wouldn't have wasted breath. Miss Haredale is Mr Geoffrey Haredale's niece.'

'Is her father alive?' said the man, carelessly.

'No,' rejoined the landlord, 'he is not alive, and he is not dead—'

'Not dead!' cried the other.

'Not dead in a common sort of way,' said the landlord.

The cronies nodded to each other, and Mr Parkes remarked in an undertone, shaking his head meanwhile as who should say, 'let no man contradict me, for I won't believe him,' that John Willet was in amazing force to-night, and fit to tackle a Chief Justice.

The stranger suffered a short pause to elapse, and then asked abruptly, 'What do you mean?'

'More than you think for, friend,' returned John Willet. 'Perhaps there's more meaning in them words than you suspect.'

'Perhaps there is,' said the strange man, gruffly; 'but what the devil do you speak in such mysteries for? You tell me, first, that a man is not alive, nor yet dead—then, that he's not dead in a common sort of way—then, that you mean a great deal more than I think for. To tell you the truth, you may do that easily; for so far as I can make out, you mean nothing. What DO you mean, I ask again?'

'That,' returned the landlord, a little brought down from his dignity by the stranger's surliness, 'is a Maypole story, and has been any time these four-and-twenty years. That story is Solomon Daisy's story. It belongs to the house; and nobody but Solomon Daisy has ever told it under this roof, or ever shall—that's more.'

The man glanced at the parish-clerk, whose air of consciousness and importance plainly betokened him to be the person referred to, and, observing that he had taken his pipe from his lips, after a very long whiff to keep it alight, and was evidently about to tell his story without further solicitation, gathered his large coat about him, and shrinking further back was almost lost in the gloom of the spacious chimney-corner, except when the flame, struggling from under a great faggot, whose weight almost crushed it for the time, shot upward with a strong and sudden glare, and illumining his figure for a moment, seemed afterwards to cast it into deeper obscurity than before.

By this flickering light, which made the old room, with its heavy timbers and panelled walls, look as if it were built of polished ebony—the wind roaring and howling without, now rattling the latch and creaking the hinges of the stout oaken door, and now driving at the casement as though it would beat it in—by this light, and under circumstances so auspicious, Solomon Daisy began his tale:

'It was Mr Reuben Haredale, Mr Geoffrey's elder brother—'

Here he came to a dead stop, and made so long a pause that even John Willet grew impatient and asked why he did not proceed.

'Cobb,' said Solomon Daisy, dropping his voice and appealing to the post-office keeper; 'what day of the month is this?'

'The nineteenth.'

'Of March,' said the clerk, bending forward, 'the nineteenth of March; that's very strange.'

In a low voice they all acquiesced, and Solomon went on:

'It was Mr Reuben Haredale, Mr Geoffrey's elder brother, that twenty-two years ago was the owner of the Warren, which, as Joe has said—not that you remember it, Joe, for a boy like you can't do that, but because you have often heard me say so—was then a much larger and better place, and a much more valuable property than it is now. His lady was lately dead, and he was left with one child—the Miss Haredale you have been inquiring about—who was then scarcely a year old.'

Although the speaker addressed himself to the man who had shown so much curiosity about this same family, and made a pause here as if expecting some exclamation of surprise or encouragement, the latter made no remark, nor gave any indication that he heard or was interested in what was said. Solomon therefore turned to his old companions, whose noses were brightly illuminated by the deep red glow from the bowls of their pipes; assured, by long experience, of their attention, and resolved to show his sense of such indecent behaviour.

'Mr Haredale,' said Solomon, turning his back upon the strange man, 'left this place when his lady died, feeling it lonely like, and went up to

London, where he stopped some months; but finding that place as lonely as this—as I suppose and have always heard say—he suddenly came back again with his little girl to the Warren, bringing with him besides, that day, only two women servants, and his steward, and a gardener.'

Mr Daisy stopped to take a whiff at his pipe, which was going out, and then proceeded—at first in a snuffling tone, occasioned by keen enjoyment of the tobacco and strong pulling at the pipe, and afterwards with increasing distinctness:

'—Bringing with him two women servants, and his steward, and a gardener. The rest stopped behind up in London, and were to follow next day. It happened that that night, an old gentleman who lived at Chigwell Row, and had long been poorly, deceased, and an order came to me at half after twelve o'clock at night to go and toll the passing-bell.'

There was a movement in the little group of listeners, sufficiently indicative of the strong repugnance any one of them would have felt to have turned out at such a time upon such an errand. The clerk felt and understood it, and pursued his theme accordingly.

'It WAS a dreary thing, especially as the grave-digger was laid up in his bed, from long working in a damp soil and sitting down to take his dinner on cold tombstones, and I was consequently under obligation to go alone, for it was too late to hope to get any other companion. However, I wasn't unprepared for it; as the old gentleman had often made it a request that the bell should be tolled as soon as possible after the breath was out of his body, and he had been expected to go for some days. I put as good a face upon it as I could, and muffling myself up (for it was mortal cold), started out with a lighted lantern in one hand and the key of the church in the other.'

At this point of the narrative, the dress of the strange man rustled as if he had turned himself to hear more distinctly. Slightly pointing over his shoulder, Solomon elevated his eyebrows and nodded a silent inquiry to Joe whether this was the case. Joe shaded his eyes with his hand and peered into the corner, but could make out nothing, and so shook his head.

'It was just such a night as this; blowing a hurricane, raining heavily, and very dark—I often think now, darker than I ever saw it before or since; that may be my fancy, but the houses were all close shut and the folks in doors, and perhaps there is only one other man who knows how dark it really was. I got into the church, chained the door back so that it should keep ajar—for, to tell the truth, I didn't like to be shut in there alone—and putting my lantern on the stone seat in the little corner where the bell-rope is, sat down beside it to trim the candle.

'I sat down to trim the candle, and when I had done so I could not persuade myself to get up again, and go about my work. I don't know how it was, but I thought of all the ghost stories I had ever heard, even those that I had heard when I was a boy at school, and had forgotten long ago; and they didn't come into my mind one after another, but all crowding at once, like. I recollected one story there was in the village, how that on a certain night in the year (it might be that very night for anything I knew), all the dead people came out of the ground and sat at the heads of their own graves till morning. This made me think how many people I had known, were buried between the church-door and the churchyard gate, and what a dreadful thing it would be to have to pass among them and know them again, so earthy and unlike themselves. I had known all the niches and arches in the church from a child; still, I couldn't persuade myself that those were their natural shadows which I saw on the pavement, but felt sure there were some ugly figures hiding among 'em and peeping out. Thinking on in this way, I began to think of the old gentleman who was just dead, and I could have sworn, as I looked up the dark chancel, that I saw him in his usual place, wrapping his shroud about him and shivering as if he felt it cold. All this time I sat listening and listening, and hardly dared to breathe. At length I started up and took the bell-rope in my hands. At that minute there rang—not that bell, for I had hardly touched the rope—but another!

'I heard the ringing of another bell, and a deep bell too, plainly. It was only for an instant, and even then the wind carried the sound away, but I heard it. I listened for a long time, but it rang no more. I had heard of corpse candles, and at last I persuaded myself that this must be a corpse bell tolling of itself at midnight for the dead. I tolled my bell—how, or how long, I don't know—and ran home to bed as fast as I could touch the ground.

'I was up early next morning after a restless night, and told the story to my neighbours. Some were serious and some made light of it; I don't think anybody believed it real. But, that morning, Mr Reuben Haredale was found murdered in his bedchamber; and in his hand was a piece of the cord attached to an alarm-bell outside the roof, which hung in his room and had been cut asunder, no doubt by the murderer, when he seized it.

'That was the bell I heard.

'A bureau was found opened, and a cash-box, which Mr Haredale had brought down that day, and was supposed to contain a large sum of money, was gone. The steward and gardener were both missing and both suspected for a long time, but they were never found, though hunted far and wide. And far enough they might have looked for poor Mr Rudge the steward, whose body—scarcely to be recognised by his clothes and the watch and ring he wore—was found, months afterwards, at the bottom of a piece of water in the grounds, with a deep gash in the breast where he had been stabbed with a knife. He was only partly dressed; and people all agreed that he had been sitting up reading in his own room, where there were many traces of blood, and was suddenly fallen upon and killed before his master.

Everybody now knew that the gardener must be the murderer, and though he has never been heard of from that day to this, he will be, mark my words. The crime was committed this day two-and-twenty years—on the nineteenth of March, one thousand seven hundred and fifty-three. On the nineteenth of March in some year—no matter when—I know it, I am sure of it, for we have always, in some strange way or other, been brought back to the subject on that day ever since—on the nineteenth of March in some year, sooner or later, that man will be discovered.'

Chapter 2

'A strange story!' said the man who had been the cause of the narration.—'Stranger still if it comes about as you predict. Is that all?'

A question so unexpected, nettled Solomon Daisy not a little. By dint of relating the story very often, and ornamenting it (according to village report) with a few flourishes suggested by the various hearers from time to time, he had come by degrees to tell it with great effect; and 'Is that all?' after the climax, was not what he was accustomed to.

'Is that all?' he repeated, 'yes, that's all, sir. And enough too, I think.'

'I think so too. My horse, young man! He is but a hack hired from a roadside posting house, but he must carry me to London to-night.'

'To-night!' said Joe.

'To-night,' returned the other. 'What do you stare at? This tavern would seem to be a house of call for all the gaping idlers of the neighbourhood!'

At this remark, which evidently had reference to the scrutiny he had undergone, as mentioned in the foregoing chapter, the eyes of John Willet and his friends were diverted with marvellous rapidity to the copper boiler again. Not so with Joe, who, being a mettlesome fellow, returned the stranger's angry glance with a steady look, and rejoined:

'It is not a very bold thing to wonder at your going on to-night. Surely you have been asked such a harmless question in an inn before, and in better weather than this. I thought you mightn't know the way, as you seem strange to this part.'

'The way—' repeated the other, irritably.

'Yes. DO you know it?'

'I'll—humph!—I'll find it,' replied the man, waving his hand and turning on his heel. 'Landlord, take the reckoning here.'

John Willet did as he was desired; for on that point he was seldom slow, except in the particulars of giving change, and testing the goodness of any piece of coin that was proffered to him, by the application of his teeth or his tongue, or some other test, or in doubtful cases, by a long series of tests terminating in its rejection. The guest then wrapped his garments about him so as to shelter himself as effectually as he could from the rough weather, and without any word or sign of farewell betook himself to the stableyard.

Here Joe (who had left the room on the conclusion of their short dialogue) was protecting himself and the horse from the rain under the shelter of an old penthouse roof.

'He's pretty much of my opinion,' said Joe, patting the horse upon the neck. 'I'll wager that your stopping here to-night would please him better than it would please me.'

'He and I are of different opinions, as we have been more than once on our way here,' was the short reply.

'So I was thinking before you came out, for he has felt your spurs, poor beast.'

The stranger adjusted his coat-collar about his face, and made no answer.

'You'll know me again, I see,' he said, marking the young fellow's earnest gaze, when he had sprung into the saddle.

'The man's worth knowing, master, who travels a road he don't know, mounted on a jaded horse, and leaves good quarters to do it on such a night as this.'

'You have sharp eyes and a sharp tongue, I find.'

'Both I hope by nature, but the last grows rusty sometimes for want of using.'

'Use the first less too, and keep their sharpness for your sweethearts, boy,' said the man.

So saying he shook his hand from the bridle, struck him roughly on the head with the butt end of his whip, and galloped away; dashing through the mud and darkness with a headlong speed, which few badly mounted horsemen would have cared to venture, even had they been thoroughly acquainted with the country; and which, to one who knew nothing of the way he rode, was attended at every step with great hazard and danger.

The roads, even within twelve miles of London, were at that time ill paved, seldom repaired, and very badly made. The way this rider traversed had been ploughed up by the wheels of heavy waggons, and rendered rotten by the frosts and thaws of the preceding winter, or possibly of many winters. Great holes and gaps had been worn into the soil, which, being now filled with water from the late rains, were not easily distinguishable even by day; and a plunge into any one of them might have brought down a surer-footed horse than the poor beast now urged forward to the utmost extent of his powers. Sharp flints and stones rolled from under his hoofs continually; the rider could scarcely see beyond the animal's head, or farther on either side than his own arm would have extended. At that time, too, all the roads in the neighbourhood of the metropolis were infested by footpads or highwaymen, and it was a night, of all others, in which any evil-disposed person of this class might have pursued his unlawful calling with little fear of detection.

Still, the traveller dashed forward at the same reckless pace, regardless alike of the dirt and wet which flew about his head, the profound darkness of the night, and the probability of encountering some desperate characters abroad. At every turn and angle, even where a deviation from the direct course might have been least expected, and could not possibly be seen until he was close upon it, he guided the bridle with an unerring hand, and kept the middle of the road. Thus he sped onward, raising himself in the stirrups, leaning his body forward until it almost touched the horse's neck, and flourishing his heavy whip above his head with the fervour of a madman.

There are times when, the elements being in unusual commotion, those who are bent on daring enterprises, or agitated by great thoughts, whether of good or evil, feel a mysterious sympathy with the tumult of nature, and are roused into corresponding violence. In the midst of thunder, lightning, and storm, many tremendous deeds have been committed; men, self-possessed before, have given a sudden loose to passions they could no longer control. The demons of wrath and despair have striven to emulate those who ride the whirlwind and direct the storm; and man, lashed into madness with the roaring winds and boiling waters, has become for the time as wild and merciless as the elements themselves.

Whether the traveller was possessed by thoughts which the fury of the night had heated and stimulated into a quicker current, or was merely impelled by some strong motive to reach his journey's end, on he swept more like a hunted phantom than a man, nor checked his pace until, arriving at some cross roads, one of which led by a longer route to the place whence he had lately started, he bore down so suddenly upon a vehicle which was coming towards him, that in the effort to avoid it he well-nigh pulled his horse upon his haunches, and narrowly escaped being thrown.

'Yoho!' cried the voice of a man. 'What's that? Who goes there?'

'A friend!' replied the traveller.

'A friend!' repeated the voice. 'Who calls himself a friend and rides like that, abusing Heaven's gifts in the shape of horseflesh, and endangering, not only his own neck (which might be no great matter) but the necks of other people?'

'You have a lantern there, I see,' said the traveller dismounting, 'lend it me for a moment. You have wounded my horse, I think, with your shaft or wheel.'

'Wounded him!' cried the other, 'if I haven't killed him, it's no fault of yours. What do you mean by galloping along the king's highway like that, eh?'

'Give me the light,' returned the traveller, snatching it from his hand, 'and don't ask idle questions of a man who is in no mood for talking.'

'If you had said you were in no mood for talking before, I should perhaps have been in no mood for lighting,' said the voice. 'Hows'ever as it's the poor horse that's damaged and not you, one of you is welcome to the light at all events—but it's not the crusty one.'

The traveller returned no answer to this speech, but holding the light near to his panting and reeking beast, examined him in limb and carcass. Meanwhile, the other man sat very composedly in his vehicle, which was a kind of chaise with a depository for a large bag of tools, and watched his proceedings with a careful eye.

The looker-on was a round, red-faced, sturdy yeoman, with a double chin, and a voice husky with good living, good sleeping, good humour, and good health. He was past the prime of life, but Father Time is not always a hard parent, and, though he tarries for none of his children, often lays his hand lightly upon those who have used him well; making them old men and women inexorably enough, but leaving their hearts and spirits young and in full vigour. With such people the grey head is but the impression of the old fellow's hand in giving them his blessing, and every wrinkle but a notch in the quiet calendar of a well-spent life.

The person whom the traveller had so abruptly encountered was of this kind: bluff, hale, hearty, and in a green old age: at peace with himself, and evidently disposed to be so with all the world. Although muffled up in divers coats and handkerchiefs—one of which, passed over his crown, and tied in a convenient crease of his double chin, secured his three-cornered hat and bob-wig from blowing off his head—there was no disguising his plump and comfortable figure; neither did certain dirty finger-marks upon his face give it any other than an odd and comical expression, through which its natural good humour shone with undiminished lustre.

'He is not hurt,' said the traveller at length, raising his head and the lantern together.

'You have found that out at last, have you?' rejoined the old man. 'My eyes have seen more light than yours, but I wouldn't change with you.'

'What do you mean?'

'Mean! I could have told you he wasn't hurt, five minutes ago. Give me the light, friend; ride forward at a gentler pace; and good night.'

In handing up the lantern, the man necessarily cast its rays full on the speaker's face. Their eyes met at the instant. He suddenly dropped it and crushed it with his foot.

'Did you never see a locksmith before, that you start as if you had come upon a ghost?' cried the old man in the chaise, 'or is this,' he added hastily, thrusting his hand into the tool basket and drawing out a hammer, 'a scheme for robbing me? I know these roads, friend. When I travel them, I carry nothing but a few shillings, and not a crown's worth of them. I tell you plainly, to save us both trouble, that there's nothing to be got from me but a pretty stout arm considering my years, and this tool, which, mayhap from long acquaintance with, I can use pretty briskly. You shall not have it all your own way, I promise you, if you play at that game. With these words he stood upon the defensive.

'I am not what you take me for, Gabriel Varden,' replied the other.

'Then what and who are you?' returned the locksmith. 'You know my name, it seems. Let me know yours.'

'I have not gained the information from any confidence of yours, but from the inscription on your cart which tells it to all the town,' replied the traveller.

'You have better eyes for that than you had for your horse, then,' said Varden, descending nimbly from his chaise; 'who are you? Let me see your face.'

While the locksmith alighted, the traveller had regained his saddle, from which he now confronted the old man, who, moving as the horse moved in chafing under the tightened rein, kept close beside him.

'Let me see your face, I say.'

'Stand off!'

'No masquerading tricks,' said the locksmith, 'and tales at the club to-morrow, how Gabriel Varden was frightened by a surly voice and a dark night. Stand—let me see your face.'

Finding that further resistance would only involve him in a personal struggle with an antagonist by no means to be despised, the traveller threw back his coat, and stooping down looked steadily at the locksmith.

Perhaps two men more powerfully contrasted, never opposed each other face to face. The ruddy features of the locksmith so set off and heightened the excessive paleness of the man on horseback, that he looked like a bloodless ghost, while the moisture, which hard riding had brought out upon his skin, hung there in dark and heavy drops, like dews of agony and death. The countenance of the old locksmith lighted up with the smile of one expecting to detect in this unpromising stranger some latent roguery of eye or lip, which should reveal a familiar person in that arch disguise, and spoil his jest. The face of the other, sullen and fierce, but shrinking too, was that of a man who stood at bay; while his firmly closed jaws, his puckered mouth, and more than all a certain stealthy motion of the hand within his breast, seemed to announce a desperate purpose very foreign to acting, or child's play.

Thus they regarded each other for some time, in silence.

'Humph!' he said when he had scanned his features; 'I don't know you.'

'Don't desire to?'—returned the other, muffling himself as before.

'I don't,' said Gabriel; 'to be plain with you, friend, you don't carry in your countenance a letter of recommendation.'

'It's not my wish,' said the traveller. 'My humour is to be avoided.'

'Well,' said the locksmith bluntly, 'I think you'll have your humour.'

'I will, at any cost,' rejoined the traveller. 'In proof of it, lay this to heart—that you were never in such peril of your life as you have been within these few moments; when you are within five minutes of breathing your last, you will not be nearer death than you have been to-night!'

'Aye!' said the sturdy locksmith.

'Aye! and a violent death.'

'From whose hand?'

'From mine,' replied the traveller.

With that he put spurs to his horse, and rode away; at first plashing heavily through the mire at a smart trot, but gradually increasing in speed until the last sound of his horse's hoofs died away upon the wind; when he was again hurrying on at the same furious gallop, which had been his pace when the locksmith first encountered him.

Gabriel Varden remained standing in the road with the broken lantern in his hand, listening in stupefied silence until no sound reached his ear but the moaning of the wind, and the fast-falling rain; when he struck himself one or two smart blows in the breast by way of rousing himself, and broke into an exclamation of surprise.

'What in the name of wonder can this fellow be! a madman? a highwayman? a cut-throat? If he had not scoured off so fast, we'd have seen who was in most danger, he or I. I never nearer death than I have been to-night! I hope I may be no nearer to it for a score of years to come—if so, I'll be content to be no farther from it. My stars!—a pretty brag this to a stout man—pooh, pooh!'

Gabriel resumed his seat, and looked wistfully up the road by which the traveller had come; murmuring in a half whisper:

'The Maypole—two miles to the Maypole. I came the other road from the Warren after a long day's work at locks and bells, on purpose that I should not come by the Maypole and break my promise to Martha by looking in—there's resolution! It would be dangerous to go on to London without a light; and it's four miles, and a good half mile besides, to the Halfway-House; and between this and that is the very place where one needs a light most. Two miles to the Maypole! I told Martha I wouldn't; I said I wouldn't, and I didn't—there's resolution!'

Repeating these two last words very often, as if to compensate for the little resolution he was going to show by piquing himself on the great resolution he had shown, Gabriel Varden quietly turned back, determining to get a light at the Maypole, and to take nothing but a light.

When he got to the Maypole, however, and Joe, responding to his well-known hail, came running out to the horse's head, leaving the door open behind him, and disclosing a delicious perspective of warmth and brightness—when the ruddy gleam of the fire, streaming through the old red curtains of the common room, seemed to bring with it, as part of itself, a pleasant hum of voices, and a fragrant odour of steaming grog and rare tobacco, all steeped as it were in the cheerful glow—when the shadows, flitting across the curtain, showed that those inside had risen from their snug seats, and were making room in the snuggest corner (how well he knew that corner!) for the honest locksmith, and a broad glare, suddenly streaming up, bespoke the goodness of the crackling log from which a brilliant train of sparks was doubtless at that moment whirling up the chimney in honour of his coming—when, superadded to these enticements, there stole upon him from the distant kitchen a gentle sound of frying, with a musical clatter of plates and dishes, and a savoury smell that made even the boisterous wind a perfume—Gabriel felt his firmness oozing rapidly away. He tried to look stoically at the tavern, but his features would relax into a look of fondness. He turned his head the other way, and the cold black country seemed to frown him off, and drive him for a refuge into its hospitable arms.

'The merciful man, Joe,' said the locksmith, 'is merciful to his beast. I'll get out for a little while.'

And how natural it was to get out! And how unnatural it seemed for a sober man to be plodding wearily along through miry roads, encountering the rude buffets of the wind and pelting of the rain, when there was a clean floor covered with crisp white sand, a well swept hearth, a blazing fire, a table decorated with white cloth, bright pewter flagons, and other tempting preparations for a well-cooked meal—when there were these things, and company disposed to make the most of them, all ready to his hand, and entreating him to enjoyment!

Chapter 3

Such were the locksmith's thoughts when first seated in the snug corner, and slowly recovering from a pleasant defect of vision—pleasant, because occasioned by the wind blowing in his eyes—which made it a matter of sound policy and duty to himself, that he should take refuge from the weather, and tempted him, for the same reason, to aggravate a slight cough, and declare he felt but poorly. Such were still his thoughts more than a full hour afterwards, when, supper over, he still sat with shining jovial face in the same warm nook, listening to the cricket-like chirrup of little Solomon Daisy, and bearing no unimportant or slightly respected part in the social gossip round the Maypole fire.

'I wish he may be an honest man, that's all,' said Solomon, winding up a variety of speculations relative to the stranger, concerning whom Gabriel had compared notes with the company, and so raised a grave discussion; 'I wish he may be an honest man.'

'So we all do, I suppose, don't we?' observed the locksmith.

'I don't,' said Joe.

'No!' cried Gabriel.

'No. He struck me with his whip, the coward, when he was mounted and I afoot, and I should be better pleased that he turned out what I think him.'

'And what may that be, Joe?'

'No good, Mr Varden. You may shake your head, father, but I say no good, and will say no good, and I would say no good a hundred times over, if that would bring him back to have the drubbing he deserves.'

'Hold your tongue, sir,' said John Willet.

'I won't, father. It's all along of you that he ventured to do what he did. Seeing me treated like a child, and put down like a fool, HE plucks up a heart and has a fling at a fellow that he thinks—and may well think too—hasn't a grain of spirit. But he's mistaken, as I'll show him, and as I'll show all of you before long.'

'Does the boy know what he's a saying of!' cried the astonished John Willet.

'Father,' returned Joe, 'I know what I say and mean, well—better than you do when you hear me. I can bear with you, but I cannot bear the contempt that your treating me in the way you do, brings upon me from others every day. Look at other young men of my age. Have they no liberty, no will, no right to speak? Are they obliged to sit mumchance, and to be ordered about till they are the laughing-stock of young and old? I am a bye-word all over Chigwell, and I say—and it's fairer my saying so now, than waiting till you are dead, and I have got your money—I say, that before long I shall be driven to break such bounds, and that when I do, it won't be me that you'll have to blame, but your own self, and no other.'

John Willet was so amazed by the exasperation and boldness of his hopeful son, that he sat as one bewildered, staring in a ludicrous manner at the boiler, and endeavouring, but quite ineffectually, to collect his tardy thoughts, and invent an answer. The guests, scarcely less disturbed, were equally at a loss; and at length, with a variety of muttered, half-expressed condolences, and pieces of advice, rose to depart; being at the same time slightly muddled with liquor.

The honest locksmith alone addressed a few words of coherent and sensible advice to both parties, urging John Willet to remember that Joe was nearly arrived at man's estate, and should not be ruled with too tight a hand, and exhorting Joe himself to bear with his father's caprices, and rather endeavour to turn them aside by temperate remonstrance than by ill-timed rebellion. This advice was received as such advice usually is. On John Willet it made almost as much impression as on the sign outside the door, while Joe, who took it in the best part, avowed himself more obliged than he could well express, but politely intimated his intention nevertheless of taking his own course uninfluenced by anybody.

'You have always been a very good friend to me, Mr Varden,' he said, as they stood without, in the porch, and the locksmith was equipping himself for his journey home; 'I take it very kind of you to say all this, but the time's nearly come when the Maypole and I must part company.'

'Roving stones gather no moss, Joe,' said Gabriel.

'Nor milestones much,' replied Joe. 'I'm little better than one here, and see as much of the world.'

'Then, what would you do, Joe?' pursued the locksmith, stroking his chin reflectively. 'What could you be? Where could you go, you see?'

'I must trust to chance, Mr Varden.'

'A bad thing to trust to, Joe. I don't like it. I always tell my girl when we talk about a husband for her, never to trust to chance, but to make sure beforehand that she has a good man and true, and then chance will neither make her nor break her. What are you fidgeting about there, Joe? Nothing gone in the harness, I hope?'

'No no,' said Joe—finding, however, something very engrossing to do in the way of strapping and buckling—'Miss Dolly quite well?'

'Hearty, thankye. She looks pretty enough to be well, and good too.'

'She's always both, sir'—

'So she is, thank God!'

'I hope,' said Joe after some hesitation, 'that you won't tell this story against me—this of my having been beat like the boy they'd make of me—at all events, till I have met this man again and settled the account. It'll be a better story then.'

'Why who should I tell it to?' returned Gabriel. 'They know it here, and I'm not likely to come across anybody else who would care about it.'

'That's true enough,' said the young fellow with a sigh. 'I quite forgot that. Yes, that's true!'

So saying, he raised his face, which was very red,—no doubt from the exertion of strapping and buckling as aforesaid,—and giving the reins to the old man, who had by this time taken his seat, sighed again and bade him good night.

'Good night!' cried Gabriel. 'Now think better of what we have just been speaking of; and don't be rash, there's a good fellow! I have an interest in you, and wouldn't have you cast yourself away. Good night!'

Returning his cheery farewell with cordial goodwill, Joe Willet lingered until the sound of wheels ceased to vibrate in his ears, and then, shaking his head mournfully, re-entered the house.

Gabriel Varden went his way towards London, thinking of a great many things, and most of all of flaming terms in which to relate his adventure, and so account satisfactorily to Mrs Varden for visiting the Maypole, despite certain solemn covenants between himself and that lady. Thinking begets, not only thought, but drowsiness occasionally, and the more the locksmith thought, the more sleepy he became.

A man may be very sober—or at least firmly set upon his legs on that neutral ground which lies between the confines of perfect sobriety and slight tipsiness—and yet feel a strong tendency to mingle up present circumstances with others which have no manner of connection with them; to confound all consideration of persons, things, times, and places; and to jumble his disjointed thoughts together in a kind of mental kaleidoscope, producing combinations as unexpected as they are transitory. This was Gabriel Varden's state, as, nodding in his dog sleep, and leaving his horse to pursue a road with which he was well acquainted, he got over the ground unconsciously, and drew nearer and nearer home. He had roused himself once, when the horse stopped until the turnpike gate was opened, and had cried a lusty 'good night!' to the toll-keeper; but then he awoke out of a dream about picking a lock in the stomach of the Great Mogul, and even when he did wake, mixed up the turnpike man with his mother-in-law who had been dead twenty years. It is not surprising, therefore, that he soon relapsed, and jogged heavily along, quite insensible to his progress.

And, now, he approached the great city, which lay outstretched before him like a dark shadow on the ground, reddening the sluggish air with a deep dull light, that told of labyrinths of public ways and shops, and swarms of busy people. Approaching nearer and nearer yet, this halo began to fade, and the causes which produced it slowly to develop themselves. Long lines of poorly lighted streets might be faintly traced, with here and there a lighter spot, where lamps were clustered round a square or market, or round some great building; after a time these grew more distinct, and the lamps themselves were visible; slight yellow specks, that seemed to be rapidly snuffed out, one by one, as intervening obstacles hid them from the sight. Then, sounds arose—the striking of church clocks, the distant bark of dogs, the hum of traffic in the streets; then outlines might be traced—tall steeples looming in the air, and piles of unequal roofs oppressed by chimneys; then, the noise swelled into a louder sound, and forms grew more distinct and numerous still, and London—visible in the darkness by its own faint light, and not by that of Heaven—was at hand.

The locksmith, however, all unconscious of its near vicinity, still jogged on, half sleeping and half waking, when a loud cry at no great distance ahead, roused him with a start.

For a moment or two he looked about him like a man who had been transported to some strange country in his sleep, but soon recognising familiar objects, rubbed his eyes lazily and might have relapsed again, but that the cry was repeated—not once or twice or thrice, but many times, and each time, if possible, with increased vehemence. Thoroughly aroused, Gabriel, who was a bold man and not easily daunted, made straight to the spot, urging on his stout little horse as if for life or death.

The matter indeed looked sufficiently serious, for, coming to the place whence the cries had proceeded, he descried the figure of a man extended in an apparently lifeless state upon the pathway, and, hovering round him, another person with a torch in his hand, which he waved in the air with a wild impatience, redoubling meanwhile those cries for help which had brought the locksmith to the spot.

'What's here to do?' said the old man, alighting. 'How's this—what—Barnaby?'

The bearer of the torch shook his long loose hair back from his eyes, and thrusting his face eagerly into that of the locksmith, fixed upon him a look which told his history at once.

'You know me, Barnaby?' said Varden.

He nodded—not once or twice, but a score of times, and that with a fantastic exaggeration which would have kept his head in motion for an hour, but that the locksmith held up his finger, and fixing his eye sternly upon him caused him to desist; then pointed to the body with an inquiring look.

'There's blood upon him,' said Barnaby with a shudder. 'It makes me sick!'

'How came it there?' demanded Varden.

'Steel, steel, steel!' he replied fiercely, imitating with his hand the thrust of a sword.

'Is he robbed?' said the locksmith.

Barnaby caught him by the arm, and nodded 'Yes;' then pointed towards the city.

'Oh!' said the old man, bending over the body and looking round as he spoke into Barnaby's pale face, strangely lighted up by something that was NOT intellect. 'The robber made off that way, did he? Well, well, never mind that just now. Hold your torch this way—a little farther off—so. Now stand quiet, while I try to see what harm is done.'

With these words, he applied himself to a closer examination of the prostrate form, while Barnaby, holding the torch as he had been directed, looked on in silence, fascinated by interest or curiosity, but repelled nevertheless by some strong and secret horror which convulsed him in every nerve.

As he stood, at that moment, half shrinking back and half bending forward, both his face and figure were full in the strong glare of the link, and as distinctly revealed as though it had been broad day. He was about three-and-twenty years old, and though rather spare, of a fair height and strong make. His hair, of which he had a great profusion, was red, and hanging in disorder about his face and shoulders, gave to his restless looks an expression quite unearthly—enhanced by the paleness of his complexion, and the glassy lustre of his large protruding eyes. Startling as his aspect was, the features were good, and there was something even plaintive in his wan and haggard aspect. But, the absence of the soul is far more terrible in a living man than in a dead one; and in this unfortunate being its noblest powers were wanting.

His dress was of green, clumsily trimmed here and there—apparently by his own hands—with gaudy lace; brightest where the cloth was most worn and soiled, and poorest where it was at the best. A pair of tawdry ruffles dangled at his wrists, while his throat was nearly bare. He had ornamented his hat with a cluster of peacock's feathers, but they were limp and broken, and now trailed negligently down his back. Girt to his side was the steel hilt of an old sword without blade or scabbard; and some particoloured ends of ribands and poor glass toys completed the ornamental portion of his attire. The fluttered and confused disposition of all the motley scraps that formed his dress, bespoke, in a scarcely less degree than his eager and unsettled manner, the disorder of his mind, and by a grotesque contrast set off and heightened the more impressive wildness of his face.

'Barnaby,' said the locksmith, after a hasty but careful inspection, 'this man is not dead, but he has a wound in his side, and is in a fainting-fit.'

'I know him, I know him!' cried Barnaby, clapping his hands.

'Know him?' repeated the locksmith.

'Hush!' said Barnaby, laying his fingers upon his lips. 'He went out to-day a wooing. I wouldn't for a light guinea that he should never go a wooing again, for, if he did, some eyes would grow dim that are now as bright as—see, when I talk of eyes, the stars come out! Whose eyes are they? If they are angels' eyes, why do they look down here and see good men hurt, and only wink and sparkle all the night?'

'Now Heaven help this silly fellow,' murmured the perplexed locksmith; 'can he know this gentleman? His mother's house is not far off; I had better see if she can tell me who he is. Barnaby, my man, help me to put him in the chaise, and we'll ride home together.'

'I can't touch him!' cried the idiot falling back, and shuddering as with a strong spasm; he's bloody!'

'It's in his nature, I know,' muttered the locksmith, 'it's cruel to ask him, but I must have help. Barnaby—good Barnaby—dear Barnaby—if you know this gentleman, for the sake of his life and everybody's life that loves him, help me to raise him and lay him down.'

'Cover him then, wrap him close—don't let me see it—smell it—hear the word. Don't speak the word—don't!'

'No, no, I'll not. There, you see he's covered now. Gently. Well done, well done!'

They placed him in the carriage with great ease, for Barnaby was strong and active, but all the time they were so occupied he shivered from head to foot, and evidently experienced an ecstasy of terror.

This accomplished, and the wounded man being covered with Varden's own greatcoat which he took off for the purpose, they proceeded onward at a brisk pace: Barnaby gaily counting the stars upon his fingers, and Gabriel inwardly congratulating himself upon having an adventure now, which would silence Mrs Varden on the subject of the Maypole, for that night, or there was no faith in woman.

Chapter 4

In the venerable suburb—it was a suburb once—of Clerkenwell, towards that part of its confines which is nearest to the Charter House, and in one of those cool, shady Streets, of which a few, widely scattered and dispersed, yet remain in such old parts of the metropolis,—each tenement quietly vegetating like an ancient citizen who long ago retired from business, and dozing on in its infirmity until in course of time it tumbles down, and is replaced by some extravagant young heir, flaunting in stucco and ornamental work, and all the vanities of modern days,—in this quarter, and in a street of this description, the business of the present chapter lies.

At the time of which it treats, though only six-and-sixty years ago, a very large part of what is London now had no existence. Even in the brains of the wildest speculators, there had sprung up no long rows of streets connecting Highgate with Whitechapel, no assemblages of palaces in the swampy levels, nor little cities in the open fields. Although this part of town was then, as now, parcelled out in streets, and plentifully peopled, it wore a different aspect. There were gardens to many of the houses, and trees by the pavement side; with an air of freshness breathing up and down, which in these days would be sought in vain. Fields were nigh at hand, through which the New River took its winding course, and where there was merry haymaking in the summer time. Nature was not so far removed, or hard to get at, as in these days; and although there were busy trades in Clerkenwell, and working jewellers by scores, it was a purer place, with farm-houses nearer to it than many modern Londoners would readily believe, and lovers' walks at no great distance, which turned into squalid courts, long before the lovers of this age were born, or, as the phrase goes, thought of.

In one of these streets, the cleanest of them all, and on the shady side of the way—for good housewives know that sunlight damages their cherished furniture, and so choose the shade rather than its intrusive glare—there stood the house with which we have to deal. It was a modest building, not very straight, not large, not tall; not bold-faced, with great staring windows, but a shy, blinking house, with a conical roof going up into a peak over its garret window of four small panes of glass, like a cocked hat on the head of an elderly gentleman with one eye. It was not built of brick or lofty stone, but of wood and plaster; it was not planned with a dull and wearisome regard to regularity, for no one window matched the other, or seemed to have the slightest reference to anything besides itself.

The shop—for it had a shop—was, with reference to the first floor, where shops usually are; and there all resemblance between it and any other shop stopped short and ceased. People who went in and out didn't go up a flight of steps to it, or walk easily in upon a level with the street, but dived down three steep stairs, as into a cellar. Its floor was paved with stone and brick, as that of any other cellar might be; and in lieu of window framed and glazed it had a great black wooden flap or shutter, nearly breast high from the ground, which turned back in the day-time, admitting as much cold air as light, and very often more. Behind this shop was a wainscoted parlour, looking first into a paved yard, and beyond that again into a little terrace garden, raised some feet above it. Any stranger would have supposed that this wainscoted parlour, saving for the door of communication by which he had entered, was cut off and detached from all the world; and indeed most strangers on their first entrance were observed to grow extremely thoughtful, as weighing and pondering in their minds whether the upper rooms were only approachable by ladders from without; never suspecting that two of the most unassuming and unlikely doors in existence, which the most ingenious mechanician on earth must of necessity have supposed to be the doors of closets, opened out of this room—each without the smallest preparation, or so much as a quarter of an inch of passage—upon two dark winding flights of stairs, the one upward, the other downward, which were the sole means of communication between that chamber and the other portions of the house.

With all these oddities, there was not a neater, more scrupulously tidy, or more punctiliously ordered house, in Clerkenwell, in London, in all England. There were not cleaner windows, or whiter floors, or brighter Stoves, or more highly shining articles of furniture in old mahogany; there was not more rubbing, scrubbing, burnishing and polishing, in the whole street put together. Nor was this excellence attained without some cost and trouble and great expenditure of voice, as the neighbours were frequently reminded when the good lady of the house overlooked and assisted in its being put to rights on cleaning days—which were usually from Monday morning till Saturday night, both days inclusive.

Leaning against the door-post of this, his dwelling, the locksmith stood early on the morning after he had met with the wounded man, gazing disconsolately at a great wooden emblem of a key, painted in vivid yellow to resemble gold, which dangled from the house-front, and swung to and fro with a mournful creaking noise, as if complaining that it had nothing to unlock. Sometimes, he looked over his shoulder into the shop, which was so dark and dingy with numerous tokens of his trade, and so blackened by the smoke of a little forge, near which his 'prentice was at work, that it would have been difficult for one unused to such espials to have distinguished anything but various tools of uncouth make and shape, great bunches of rusty keys, fragments of iron, half-finished locks, and such like things, which garnished the walls and hung in clusters from the ceiling.

After a long and patient contemplation of the golden key, and many such backward glances, Gabriel stepped into the road, and stole a look at the upper windows. One of them chanced to be thrown open at the moment, and a roguish face met his; a face lighted up by the loveliest pair of sparkling eyes that ever locksmith looked upon; the face of a pretty, laughing, girl; dimpled and fresh, and healthful—the very impersonation of good-humour and blooming beauty.

'Hush!' she whispered, bending forward and pointing archly to the window underneath. 'Mother is still asleep.'

'Still, my dear,' returned the locksmith in the same tone. 'You talk as if she had been asleep all night, instead of little more than half an hour. But I'm very thankful. Sleep's a blessing—no doubt about it.' The last few words he muttered to himself.

'How cruel of you to keep us up so late this morning, and never tell us where you were, or send us word!' said the girl.

'Ah Dolly, Dolly!' returned the locksmith, shaking his head, and smiling, 'how cruel of you to run upstairs to bed! Come down to breakfast, madcap, and come down lightly, or you'll wake your mother. She must be tired, I am sure—I am.'

Keeping these latter words to himself, and returning his daughter's nod, he was passing into the workshop, with the smile she had awakened still beaming on his face, when he just caught sight of his 'prentice's brown paper cap ducking down to avoid observation, and shrinking from the window back to its former place, which the wearer no sooner reached than he began to hammer lustily.

'Listening again, Simon!' said Gabriel to himself. 'That's bad. What in the name of wonder does he expect the girl to say, that I always catch him listening when SHE speaks, and never at any other time! A bad habit, Sim, a sneaking, underhanded way. Ah! you may hammer, but you won't beat that out of me, if you work at it till your time's up!'

So saying, and shaking his head gravely, he re-entered the workshop, and confronted the subject of these remarks.

'There's enough of that just now,' said the locksmith. 'You needn't make any more of that confounded clatter. Breakfast's ready.'

'Sir,' said Sim, looking up with amazing politeness, and a peculiar little bow cut short off at the neck, 'I shall attend you immediately.'

'I suppose,' muttered Gabriel, 'that's out of the 'Prentice's Garland or the 'Prentice's Delight, or the 'Prentice's Warbler, or the Prentice's Guide to the Gallows, or some such improving textbook. Now he's going to beautify himself—here's a precious locksmith!'

Quite unconscious that his master was looking on from the dark corner by the parlour door, Sim threw off the paper cap, sprang from his seat, and in two extraordinary steps, something between skating and minuet dancing, bounded to a washing place at the other end of the shop, and there removed from his face and hands all traces of his previous work—practising the same step all the time with the utmost gravity. This done, he drew from some concealed place a little scrap of looking-glass, and with its assistance arranged his hair, and ascertained the exact state of a little carbuncle on his nose. Having now completed his toilet, he placed the fragment of mirror on a low bench, and looked over his shoulder at so much of his legs as could be reflected in that small compass, with the greatest possible complacency and satisfaction.

Sim, as he was called in the locksmith's family, or Mr Simon Tappertit, as he called himself, and required all men to style him out of doors, on holidays, and Sundays out,—was an old-fashioned, thin-faced, sleek-haired, sharp-nosed, small-eyed little fellow, very little more than five feet high, and thoroughly convinced in his own mind that he was above the middle size; rather tall, in fact, than otherwise. Of his figure, which was well enough formed, though somewhat of the leanest, he entertained the highest admiration; and with his legs, which, in knee-breeches, were perfect curiosities of littleness, he was enraptured to a degree amounting to enthusiasm. He also had some majestic, shadowy ideas, which had never been quite fathomed by his intimate friends, concerning the power of his eye. Indeed he had been known to go so far as to boast that he could utterly quell and subdue the haughtiest beauty by a simple process, which he termed 'eyeing her over;' but it must be added, that neither of this faculty, nor of the power he claimed to have, through the same gift, of vanquishing and heaving down dumb animals, even in a rabid state, had he ever furnished evidence which could be deemed quite satisfactory and conclusive.

It may be inferred from these premises, that in the small body of Mr Tappertit there was locked up an ambitious and aspiring soul. As certain liquors, confined in casks too cramped in their dimensions, will ferment, and fret, and chafe in their imprisonment, so the spiritual essence or soul of Mr Tappertit would sometimes fume within that precious cask, his body, until, with great foam and froth and splutter, it would force a vent, and carry all before it. It was his custom to remark, in reference to any one of these occasions, that his soul had got into his head; and in this novel kind of intoxication many scrapes and mishaps befell him, which he had frequently concealed with no small difficulty from his worthy master.

Sim Tappertit, among the other fancies upon which his before-mentioned soul was for ever feasting and regaling itself (and which fancies, like the liver of Prometheus, grew as they were fed upon), had a mighty notion of his order; and had been heard by the servant-maid openly expressing his regret that the 'prentices no longer carried clubs wherewith to mace the citizens: that was his strong expression. He was likewise reported to have said that in former times a stigma had been cast upon the body by the execution of George Barnwell, to which they should not have basely submitted, but should have demanded him of the legislature—temperately at first; then by an appeal to arms, if necessary—to be dealt with as they in their wisdom might think fit. These thoughts always led him to consider what a glorious engine the 'prentices might yet become if they had but a master spirit at their head; and then he would darkly, and to the terror of his hearers, hint at certain reckless fellows that he knew of, and at a certain Lion Heart ready to become their captain, who, once afoot, would make the Lord Mayor tremble on his throne.

In respect of dress and personal decoration, Sim Tappertit was no less of an adventurous and enterprising character. He had been seen, beyond dispute, to pull off ruffles of the finest quality at the corner of the street on

Sunday nights, and to put them carefully in his pocket before returning home; and it was quite notorious that on all great holiday occasions it was his habit to exchange his plain steel knee-buckles for a pair of glittering paste, under cover of a friendly post, planted most conveniently in that same spot. Add to this that he was in years just twenty, in his looks much older, and in conceit at least two hundred; that he had no objection to be jested with, touching his admiration of his master's daughter; and had even, when called upon at a certain obscure tavern to pledge the lady whom he honoured with his love, toasted, with many winks and leers, a fair creature whose Christian name, he said, began with a D—;—and as much is known of Sim Tappertit, who has by this time followed the locksmith in to breakfast, as is necessary to be known in making his acquaintance.

It was a substantial meal; for, over and above the ordinary tea equipage, the board creaked beneath the weight of a jolly round of beef, a ham of the first magnitude, and sundry towers of buttered Yorkshire cake, piled slice upon slice in most alluring order. There was also a goodly jug of well-browned clay, fashioned into the form of an old gentleman, not by any means unlike the locksmith, atop of whose bald head was a fine white froth answering to his wig, indicative, beyond dispute, of sparkling home-brewed ale. But, better far than fair home-brewed, or Yorkshire cake, or ham, or beef, or anything to eat or drink that earth or air or water can supply, there sat, presiding over all, the locksmith's rosy daughter, before whose dark eyes even beef grew insignificant, and malt became as nothing.

Fathers should never kiss their daughters when young men are by. It's too much. There are bounds to human endurance. So thought Sim Tappertit when Gabriel drew those rosy lips to his—those lips within Sim's reach from day to day, and yet so far off. He had a respect for his master, but he wished the Yorkshire cake might choke him.

'Father,' said the locksmith's daughter, when this salute was over, and they took their seats at table, 'what is this I hear about last night?'

'All true, my dear; true as the Gospel, Doll.'

'Young Mr Chester robbed, and lying wounded in the road, when you came up!'

'Ay—Mr Edward. And beside him, Barnaby, calling for help with all his might. It was well it happened as it did; for the road's a lonely one, the hour was late, and, the night being cold, and poor Barnaby even less sensible than usual from surprise and fright, the young gentleman might have met his death in a very short time.'

'I dread to think of it!' cried his daughter with a shudder. 'How did you know him?'

'Know him!' returned the locksmith. 'I didn't know him—how could I? I had never seen him, often as I had heard and spoken of him. I took him to Mrs Rudge's; and she no sooner saw him than the truth came out.'

'Miss Emma, father—If this news should reach her, enlarged upon as it is sure to be, she will go distracted.'

'Why, lookye there again, how a man suffers for being good-natured,' said the locksmith. 'Miss Emma was with her uncle at the masquerade at Carlisle House, where she had gone, as the people at the Warren told me, sorely against her will. What does your blockhead father when he and Mrs Rudge have laid their heads together, but goes there when he ought to be abed, makes interest with his friend the doorkeeper, slips him on a mask and domino, and mixes with the masquers.'

'And like himself to do so!' cried the girl, putting her fair arm round his neck, and giving him a most enthusiastic kiss.

'Like himself!' repeated Gabriel, affecting to grumble, but evidently delighted with the part he had taken, and with her praise. 'Very like himself—so your mother said. However, he mingled with the crowd, and prettily worried and badgered he was, I warrant you, with people squeaking, "Don't you know me?" and "I've found you out," and all that kind of nonsense in his ears. He might have wandered on till now, but in a little room there was a young lady who had taken off her mask, on account of the place being very warm, and was sitting there alone.'

'And that was she?' said his daughter hastily.

'And that was she,' replied the locksmith; 'and I no sooner whispered to her what the matter was—as softly, Doll, and with nearly as much art as you could have used yourself—than she gives a kind of scream and faints away.'

'What did you do—what happened next?' asked his daughter. 'Why, the masks came flocking round, with a general noise and hubbub, and I thought myself in luck to get clear off, that's all,' rejoined the locksmith. 'What happened when I reached home you may guess, if you didn't hear it. Ah! Well, it's a poor heart that never rejoices.—Put Toby this way, my dear.'

This Toby was the brown jug of which previous mention has been made. Applying his lips to the worthy old gentleman's benevolent forehead, the locksmith, who had all this time been ravaging among the eatables, kept them there so long, at the same time raising the vessel slowly in the air, that at length Toby stood on his head upon his nose, when he smacked his lips, and set him on the table again with fond reluctance.

Although Sim Tappertit had taken no share in this conversation, no part of it being addressed to him, he had not been wanting in such silent manifestations of astonishment, as he deemed most compatible with the favourable display of his eyes. Regarding the pause which now ensued, as a particularly advantageous opportunity for doing great execution with them upon the locksmith's daughter (who he had no doubt was looking at him in mute admiration), he began to screw and twist his face, and especially those features, into such extraordinary, hideous, and unparalleled contortions, that Gabriel, who happened to look towards him, was stricken with amazement.

'Why, what the devil's the matter with the lad?' cried the locksmith. 'Is he choking?'

'Who?' demanded Sim, with some disdain.

'Who? Why, you,' returned his master. 'What do you mean by making those horrible faces over your breakfast?'

'Faces are matters of taste, sir,' said Mr Tappertit, rather discomfited; not the less so because he saw the locksmith's daughter smiling.

'Sim,' rejoined Gabriel, laughing heartily. 'Don't be a fool, for I'd rather see you in your senses. These young fellows,' he added, turning to his daughter, 'are always committing some folly or another. There was a quarrel between Joe Willet and old John last night though I can't say Joe was much in fault either. He'll be missing one of these mornings, and will have gone away upon some wild-goose errand, seeking his fortune.—Why, what's the matter, Doll? YOU are making faces now. The girls are as bad as the boys every bit!'

'It's the tea,' said Dolly, turning alternately very red and very white, which is no doubt the effect of a slight scald—'so very hot.'

Mr Tappertit looked immensely big at a quartern loaf on the table, and breathed hard.

'Is that all?' returned the locksmith. 'Put some more milk in it.—Yes, I am sorry for Joe, because he is a likely young fellow, and gains upon one every time one sees him. But he'll start off, you'll find. Indeed he told me as much himself!'

'Indeed!' cried Dolly in a faint voice. 'In-deed!'

'Is the tea tickling your throat still, my dear?' said the locksmith.

But, before his daughter could make him any answer, she was taken with a troublesome cough, and it was such a very unpleasant cough, that, when she left off, the tears were starting in her bright eyes. The good-natured locksmith was still patting her on the back and applying such gentle restoratives, when a message arrived from Mrs Varden, making known to all whom it might concern, that she felt too much indisposed to rise after her great agitation and anxiety of the previous night; and therefore desired to be immediately accommodated with the little black teapot of strong mixed tea, a couple of rounds of buttered toast, a middling-sized dish of beef and ham cut thin, and the Protestant Manual in two volumes post octavo. Like some other ladies who in remote ages flourished upon this globe, Mrs Varden was most devout when most ill-tempered. Whenever she and her husband were at unusual variance, then the Protestant Manual was in high feather.

Knowing from experience what these requests portended, the triumvirate broke up; Dolly, to see the orders executed with all despatch; Gabriel, to some out-of-door work in his little chaise; and Sim, to his daily duty in the workshop, to which retreat he carried the big look, although the loaf remained behind.

Indeed the big look increased immensely, and when he had tied his apron on, became quite gigantic. It was not until he had several times walked up and down with folded arms, and the longest strides he could take, and had kicked a great many small articles out of his way, that his lip began to curl. At length, a gloomy derision came upon his features, and he smiled; uttering meanwhile with supreme contempt the monosyllable 'Joe!'

'I eyed her over, while he talked about the fellow,' he said, 'and that was of course the reason of her being confused. Joe!'

He walked up and down again much quicker than before, and if possible with longer strides; sometimes stopping to take a glance at his legs, and sometimes to jerk out, and cast from him, another 'Joe!' In the course of a quarter of an hour or so he again assumed the paper cap and tried to work. No. It could not be done.

'I'll do nothing to-day,' said Mr Tappertit, dashing it down again, 'but grind. I'll grind up all the tools. Grinding will suit my present humour well. Joe!'

Whirr-r-r-r. The grindstone was soon in motion; the sparks were flying off in showers. This was the occupation for his heated spirit.

Whirr-r-r-r-r-r-r.

'Something will come of this!' said Mr Tappertit, pausing as if in triumph, and wiping his heated face upon his sleeve. 'Something will come of this. I hope it mayn't be human gore!'

Whirr-r-r-r-r-r-r-r.

Chapter 5

As soon as the business of the day was over, the locksmith sallied forth, alone, to visit the wounded gentleman and ascertain the progress of his recovery. The house where he had left him was in a by-street in Southwark, not far from London Bridge; and thither he hied with all speed, bent upon returning with as little delay as might be, and getting to bed betimes.

The evening was boisterous—scarcely better than the previous night had been. It was not easy for a stout man like Gabriel to keep his legs at the street corners, or to make head against the high wind, which often fairly got the better of him, and drove him back some paces, or, in defiance of all his energy, forced him to take shelter in an arch or doorway until the fury of the gust was spent. Occasionally a hat or wig, or both, came spinning and trundling past him, like a mad thing; while the more serious spectacle of falling tiles and slates, or of masses of brick and mortar or fragments of stone-coping rattling upon the pavement near at hand, and splitting into fragments, did not increase the pleasure of the journey, or make the way less dreary.

'A trying night for a man like me to walk in!' said the locksmith, as he knocked softly at the widow's door. 'I'd rather be in old John's chimney-corner, faith!'

'Who's there?' demanded a woman's voice from within. Being answered, it added a hasty word of welcome, and the door was quickly opened.

She was about forty—perhaps two or three years older—with a cheerful aspect, and a face that had once been pretty. It bore traces of affliction and care, but they were of an old date, and Time had smoothed them. Any one who had bestowed but a casual glance on Barnaby might have known that this was his mother, from the strong resemblance between them; but where in his face there was wildness and vacancy, in hers there was the patient composure of long effort and quiet resignation.

One thing about this face was very strange and startling. You could not look upon it in its most cheerful mood without feeling that it had some extraordinary capacity of expressing terror. It was not on the surface. It was in no one feature that it lingered. You could not take the eyes or mouth, or lines upon the cheek, and say, if this or that were otherwise, it would not be so. Yet there it always lurked—something for ever dimly seen, but ever there, and never absent for a moment. It was the faintest, palest shadow of some look, to which an instant of intense and most unutterable horror only could have given birth; but indistinct and feeble as it was, it did suggest what that look must have been, and fixed it in the mind as if it had had existence in a dream.

More faintly imaged, and wanting force and purpose, as it were, because of his darkened intellect, there was this same stamp upon the son. Seen in a picture, it must have had some legend with it, and would have haunted those who looked upon the canvas. They who knew the Maypole story, and could remember what the widow was, before her husband's and his master's murder, understood it well. They recollected how the change had come, and could call to mind that when her son was born, upon the very day the deed was known, he bore upon his wrist what seemed a smear of blood but half washed out.

'God save you, neighbour!' said the locksmith, as he followed her, with the air of an old friend, into a little parlour where a cheerful fire was burning.

'And you,' she answered smiling. 'Your kind heart has brought you here again. Nothing will keep you at home, I know of old, if there are friends to serve or comfort, out of doors.'

'Tut, tut,' returned the locksmith, rubbing his hands and warming them. 'You women are such talkers. What of the patient, neighbour?'

'He is sleeping now. He was very restless towards daylight, and for some hours tossed and tumbled sadly. But the fever has left him, and the doctor says he will soon mend. He must not be removed until to-morrow.'

'He has had visitors to-day—humph?' said Gabriel, slyly.

'Yes. Old Mr Chester has been here ever since we sent for him, and had not been gone many minutes when you knocked.'

'No ladies?' said Gabriel, elevating his eyebrows and looking disappointed.

'A letter,' replied the widow.

'Come. That's better than nothing!' replied the locksmith. 'Who was the bearer?'

'Barnaby, of course.'

'Barnaby's a jewel!' said Varden; 'and comes and goes with ease where we who think ourselves much wiser would make but a poor hand of it. He is not out wandering, again, I hope?'

'Thank Heaven he is in his bed; having been up all night, as you know, and on his feet all day. He was quite tired out. Ah, neighbour, if I could but see him oftener so—if I could but tame down that terrible restlessness—'

'In good time,' said the locksmith, kindly, 'in good time—don't be down-hearted. To my mind he grows wiser every day.'

The widow shook her head. And yet, though she knew the locksmith sought to cheer her, and spoke from no conviction of his own, she was glad to hear even this praise of her poor benighted son.

'He will be a 'cute man yet,' resumed the locksmith. 'Take care, when we are growing old and foolish, Barnaby doesn't put us to the blush, that's all. But our other friend,' he added, looking under the table and about the floor—'sharpest and cunningest of all the sharp and cunning ones—where's he?'

'In Barnaby's room,' rejoined the widow, with a faint smile.

'Ah! He's a knowing blade!' said Varden, shaking his head. 'I should be sorry to talk secrets before him. Oh! He's a deep customer. I've no doubt he can read, and write, and cast accounts if he chooses. What was that? Him tapping at the door?'

'No,' returned the widow. 'It was in the street, I think. Hark! Yes. There again! 'Tis some one knocking softly at the shutter. Who can it be!'

They had been speaking in a low tone, for the invalid lay overhead, and the walls and ceilings being thin and poorly built, the sound of their voices might otherwise have disturbed his slumber. The party without, whoever it was, could have stood close to the shutter without hearing anything spoken; and, seeing the light through the chinks and finding all so quiet, might have been persuaded that only one person was there.

'Some thief or ruffian maybe,' said the locksmith. 'Give me the light.'

'No, no,' she returned hastily. 'Such visitors have never come to this poor dwelling. Do you stay here. You're within call, at the worst. I would rather go myself—alone.'

'Why?' said the locksmith, unwillingly relinquishing the candle he had caught up from the table.

'Because—I don't know why—because the wish is so strong upon me,' she rejoined. 'There again—do not detain me, I beg of you!'

Gabriel looked at her, in great surprise to see one who was usually so mild and quiet thus agitated, and with so little cause. She left the room and closed the door behind her. She stood for a moment as if hesitating, with her hand upon the lock. In this short interval the knocking came again, and a voice close to the window—a voice the locksmith seemed to recollect, and to have some disagreeable association with—whispered 'Make haste.'

The words were uttered in that low distinct voice which finds its way so readily to sleepers' ears, and wakes them in a fright. For a moment it startled even the locksmith; who involuntarily drew back from the window, and listened.

The wind rumbling in the chimney made it difficult to hear what passed, but he could tell that the door was opened, that there was the tread of a man upon the creaking boards, and then a moment's silence—broken by a suppressed something which was not a shriek, or groan, or cry for help, and yet might have been either or all three; and the words 'My God!' uttered in a voice it chilled him to hear.

He rushed out upon the instant. There, at last, was that dreadful look—the very one he seemed to know so well and yet had never seen before—upon her face. There she stood, frozen to the ground, gazing with starting eyes, and livid cheeks, and every feature fixed and ghastly, upon the man he had encountered in the dark last night. His eyes met those of the locksmith. It was but a flash, an instant, a breath upon a polished glass, and he was gone.

The locksmith was upon him—had the skirts of his streaming garment almost in his grasp—when his arms were tightly clutched, and the widow flung herself upon the ground before him.

'The other way—the other way,' she cried. 'He went the other way. Turn—turn!'

'The other way! I see him now,' rejoined the locksmith, pointing—'yonder—there—there is his shadow passing by that light. What—who is this? Let me go.'

'Come back, come back!' exclaimed the woman, clasping him; 'Do not touch him on your life. I charge you, come back. He carries other lives besides his own. Come back!'

'What does this mean?' cried the locksmith.

'No matter what it means, don't ask, don't speak, don't think about it. He is not to be followed, checked, or stopped. Come back!'

The old man looked at her in wonder, as she writhed and clung about him; and, borne down by her passion, suffered her to drag him into the house. It was not until she had chained and double-locked the door, fastened every bolt and bar with the heat and fury of a maniac, and drawn him back into the room, that she turned upon him, once again, that stony look of horror, and, sinking down into a chair, covered her face, and shuddered, as though the hand of death were on her.

Chapter 6

Beyond all measure astonished by the strange occurrences which had passed with so much violence and rapidity, the locksmith gazed upon the shuddering figure in the chair like one half stupefied, and would have gazed much longer, had not his tongue been loosened by compassion and humanity.

'You are ill,' said Gabriel. 'Let me call some neighbour in.'

'Not for the world,' she rejoined, motioning to him with her trembling hand, and holding her face averted. 'It is enough that you have been by, to see this.'

'Nay, more than enough—or less,' said Gabriel.

'Be it so,' she returned. 'As you like. Ask me no questions, I entreat you.'

'Neighbour,' said the locksmith, after a pause. 'Is this fair, or reasonable, or just to yourself? Is it like you, who have known me so long and sought my advice in all matters—like you, who from a girl have had a strong mind and a staunch heart?'

'I have need of them,' she replied. 'I am growing old, both in years and care. Perhaps that, and too much trial, have made them weaker than they used to be. Do not speak to me.'

'How can I see what I have seen, and hold my peace!' returned the locksmith. 'Who was that man, and why has his coming made this change in you?'

She was silent, but held to the chair as though to save herself from falling on the ground.

'I take the licence of an old acquaintance, Mary,' said the locksmith, 'who has ever had a warm regard for you, and maybe has tried to prove it when he could. Who is this ill-favoured man, and what has he to do with you? Who is this ghost, that is only seen in the black nights and bad weather? How does he know, and why does he haunt, this house, whispering through chinks and crevices, as if there was that between him and you, which neither durst so much as speak aloud of? Who is he?'

'You do well to say he haunts this house,' returned the widow, faintly. 'His shadow has been upon it and me, in light and darkness, at noonday and midnight. And now, at last, he has come in the body!'

'But he wouldn't have gone in the body,' returned the locksmith with some irritation, 'if you had left my arms and legs at liberty. What riddle is this?'

'It is one,' she answered, rising as she spoke, 'that must remain for ever as it is. I dare not say more than that.'

'Dare not!' repeated the wondering locksmith.

'Do not press me,' she replied. 'I am sick and faint, and every faculty of life seems dead within me.—No!—Do not touch me, either.'

Gabriel, who had stepped forward to render her assistance, fell back as she made this hasty exclamation, and regarded her in silent wonder.

'Let me go my way alone,' she said in a low voice, 'and let the hands of no honest man touch mine to-night.' When she had tottered to the door, she turned, and added with a stronger effort, 'This is a secret, which, of necessity, I trust to you. You are a true man. As you have ever been good and kind to me,—keep it. If any noise was heard above, make some excuse—say anything but what you really saw, and never let a word or look between us, recall this circumstance. I trust to you. Mind, I trust to you. How much I trust, you never can conceive.'

Casting her eyes upon him for an instant, she withdrew, and left him there alone.

Gabriel, not knowing what to think, stood staring at the door with a countenance full of surprise and dismay. The more he pondered on what had passed, the less able he was to give it any favourable interpretation. To find this widow woman, whose life for so many years had been supposed to be one of solitude and retirement, and who, in her quiet suffering character, had gained the good opinion and respect of all who knew her—to find her linked mysteriously with an ill-omened man, alarmed at his appearance, and yet favouring his escape, was a discovery that pained as much as startled him. Her reliance on his secrecy, and his tacit acquiescence, increased his distress of mind. If he had spoken boldly, persisted in questioning her, detained her when she rose to leave the room, made any kind of protest, instead of silently compromising himself, as he felt he had done, he would have been more at ease.

'Why did I let her say it was a secret, and she trusted it to me!' said Gabriel, putting his wig on one side to scratch his head with greater ease, and looking ruefully at the fire. 'I have no more readiness than old John himself. Why didn't I say firmly, "You have no right to such secrets, and I demand of you to tell me what this means," instead of standing gaping at her, like an old moon-calf as I am! But there's my weakness. I can be obstinate enough with men if need be, but women may twist me round their fingers at their pleasure.'

He took his wig off outright as he made this reflection, and, warming his handkerchief at the fire began to rub and polish his bald head with it, until it glistened again.

'And yet,' said the locksmith, softening under this soothing process, and stopping to smile, 'it MAY be nothing. Any drunken brawler trying to make his way into the house, would have alarmed a quiet soul like her. But then'—and here was the vexation—'how came it to be that man; how comes he to have this influence over her; how came she to favour his getting away from me; and, more than all, how came she not to say it was a sudden fright, and nothing more? It's a sad thing to have, in one minute, reason to mistrust a person I have known so long, and an old sweetheart into the bargain; but what else can I do, with all this upon my mind!—Is that Barnaby outside there?'

'Ay!' he cried, looking in and nodding. 'Sure enough it's Barnaby—how did you guess?'

'By your shadow,' said the locksmith.

'Oho!' cried Barnaby, glancing over his shoulder, 'He's a merry fellow, that shadow, and keeps close to me, though I AM silly. We have such pranks, such walks, such runs, such gambols on the grass! Sometimes he'll be half as tall as a church steeple, and sometimes no bigger than a dwarf. Now, he goes on before, and now behind, and anon he'll be stealing on, on this side, or on that, stopping whenever I stop, and thinking I can't see him, though I have my eye on him sharp enough. Oh! he's a merry fellow. Tell me—is he silly too? I think he is.'

'Why?' asked Gabriel.

'Because he never tires of mocking me, but does it all day long.—Why don't you come?'

'Where?'

'Upstairs. He wants you. Stay—where's HIS shadow? Come. You're a wise man; tell me that.'

'Beside him, Barnaby; beside him, I suppose,' returned the locksmith.

'No!' he replied, shaking his head. 'Guess again.'

'Gone out a walking, maybe?'

'He has changed shadows with a woman,' the idiot whispered in his ear, and then fell back with a look of triumph. 'Her shadow's always with him, and his with her. That's sport I think, eh?'

'Barnaby,' said the locksmith, with a grave look; 'come hither, lad.'

'I know what you want to say. I know!' he replied, keeping away from him. 'But I'm cunning, I'm silent. I only say so much to you—are you ready?' As he spoke, he caught up the light, and waved it with a wild laugh above his head.

'Softly—gently,' said the locksmith, exerting all his influence to keep him calm and quiet. 'I thought you had been asleep.'

'So I HAVE been asleep,' he rejoined, with widely-opened eyes. 'There have been great faces coming and going—close to my face, and then a mile away—low places to creep through, whether I would or no—high churches to fall down from—strange creatures crowded up together neck and heels, to sit upon the bed—that's sleep, eh?'

'Dreams, Barnaby, dreams,' said the locksmith.

'Dreams!' he echoed softly, drawing closer to him. 'Those are not dreams.'

'What are,' replied the locksmith, 'if they are not?'

'I dreamed,' said Barnaby, passing his arm through Varden's, and peering close into his face as he answered in a whisper, 'I dreamed just now that something—it was in the shape of a man—followed me—came softly after me—wouldn't let me be—but was always hiding and crouching, like a cat in dark corners, waiting till I should pass; when it crept out and came softly after me.—Did you ever see me run?'

'Many a time, you know.'

'You never saw me run as I did in this dream. Still it came creeping on to worry me. Nearer, nearer, nearer—I ran faster—leaped—sprung out of bed, and to the window—and there, in the street below—but he is waiting for us. Are you coming?'

'What in the street below, Barnaby?' said Varden, imagining that he traced some connection between this vision and what had actually occurred.

Barnaby looked into his face, muttered incoherently, waved the light above his head again, laughed, and drawing the locksmith's arm more tightly through his own, led him up the stairs in silence.

They entered a homely bedchamber, garnished in a scanty way with chairs, whose spindle-shanks bespoke their age, and other furniture of very little worth; but clean and neatly kept. Reclining in an easy-chair before the fire, pale and weak from waste of blood, was Edward Chester, the young gentleman who had been the first to quit the Maypole on the previous night, and who, extending his hand to the locksmith, welcomed him as his preserver and friend.

'Say no more, sir, say no more,' said Gabriel. 'I hope I would have done at least as much for any man in such a strait, and most of all for you, sir. A certain young lady,' he added, with some hesitation, 'has done us many a kind turn, and we naturally feel—I hope I give you no offence in saying this, sir?'

The young man smiled and shook his head; at the same time moving in his chair as if in pain.

'It's no great matter,' he said, in answer to the locksmith's sympathising look, 'a mere uneasiness arising at least as much from being cooped up here, as from the slight wound I have, or from the loss of blood. Be seated, Mr Varden.'

'If I may make so bold, Mr Edward, as to lean upon your chair,' returned the locksmith, accommodating his action to his speech, and bending over him, 'I'll stand here for the convenience of speaking low. Barnaby is not in his quietest humour to-night, and at such times talking never does him good.'

They both glanced at the subject of this remark, who had taken a seat on the other side of the fire, and, smiling vacantly, was making puzzles on his fingers with a skein of string.

'Pray, tell me, sir,' said Varden, dropping his voice still lower, 'exactly what happened last night. I have my reason for inquiring. You left the Maypole, alone?'

'And walked homeward alone, until I had nearly reached the place where you found me, when I heard the gallop of a horse.'

'Behind you?' said the locksmith.

'Indeed, yes—behind me. It was a single rider, who soon overtook me, and checking his horse, inquired the way to London.'

'You were on the alert, sir, knowing how many highwaymen there are, scouring the roads in all directions?' said Varden.

'I was, but I had only a stick, having imprudently left my pistols in their holster-case with the landlord's son. I directed him as he desired. Before the words had passed my lips, he rode upon me furiously, as if bent on trampling me down beneath his horse's hoofs. In starting aside, I slipped and fell. You found me with this stab and an ugly bruise or two, and without my purse—in which he found little enough for his pains. And now, Mr Varden,' he added, shaking the locksmith by the hand, 'saving the extent of my gratitude to you, you know as much as I.'

'Except,' said Gabriel, bending down yet more, and looking cautiously towards their silent neighhour, 'except in respect of the robber himself. What like was he, sir? Speak low, if you please. Barnaby means no harm, but I have watched him oftener than you, and I know, little as you would think it, that he's listening now.'

It required a strong confidence in the locksmith's veracity to lead any one to this belief, for every sense and faculty that Barnahy possessed, seemed to be fixed upon his game, to the exclusion of all other things. Something in the young man's face expressed this opinion, for Gabriel repeated what he had just said, more earnestly than before, and with another glance towards Barnaby, again asked what like the man was.

'The night was so dark,' said Edward, 'the attack so sudden, and he so wrapped and muffled up, that I can hardly say. It seems that—'

'Don't mention his name, sir,' returned the locksmith, following his look towards Barnaby; 'I know HE saw him. I want to know what YOU saw.'

'All I remember is,' said Edward, 'that as he checked his horse his hat was blown off. He caught it, and replaced it on his head, which I observed was bound with a dark handkerchief. A stranger entered the Maypole while I was there, whom I had not seen—for I had sat apart for reasons of my own—and when I rose to leave the room and glanced round, he was in the shadow of the chimney and hidden from my sight. But, if he and the robber were two different persons, their voices were strangely and most remarkably alike; for directly the man addressed me in the road, I recognised his speech again.'

'It is as I feared. The very man was here to-night,' thought the locksmith, changing colour. 'What dark history is this!'

'Halloa!' cried a hoarse voice in his ear. 'Halloa, halloa, halloa! Bow wow wow. What's the matter here! Hal-loa!'

The speaker—who made the locksmith start as if he had been some supernatural agent—was a large raven, who had perched upon the top of the easy-chair, unseen by him and Edward, and listened with a polite attention and a most extraordinary appearance of comprehending every word, to all they had said up to this point; turning his head from one to the other, as if his office were to judge between them, and it were of the very last importance that he should not lose a word.

'Look at him!' said Varden, divided between admiration of the bird and a kind of fear of him. 'Was there ever such a knowing imp as that! Oh he's a dreadful fellow!'

The raven, with his head very much on one side, and his bright eye shining like a diamond, preserved a thoughtful silence for a few seconds, and then replied in a voice so hoarse and distant, that it seemed to come through his thick feathers rather than out of his mouth.

'Halloa, halloa, halloa! What's the matter here! Keep up your spirits. Never say die. Bow wow wow. I'm a devil, I'm a devil, I'm a devil. Hurrah!'—And then, as if exulting in his infernal character, he began to whistle.

'I more than half believe he speaks the truth. Upon my word I do,' said Varden. 'Do you see how he looks at me, as if he knew what I was saying?'

To which the bird, balancing himself on tiptoe, as it were, and moving his body up and down in a sort of grave dance, rejoined, 'I'm a devil, I'm a devil, I'm a devil,' and flapped his wings against his sides as if he were bursting with laughter. Barnaby clapped his hands, and fairly rolled upon the ground in an ecstasy of delight.

'Strange companions, sir,' said the locksmith, shaking his head, and looking from one to the other. 'The bird has all the wit.'

'Strange indeed!' said Edward, holding out his forefinger to the raven, who, in acknowledgment of the attention, made a dive at it immediately with his iron bill. 'Is he old?'

'A mere boy, sir,' replied the locksmith. 'A hundred and twenty, or thereabouts. Call him down, Barnaby, my man.'

'Call him!' echoed Barnaby, sitting upright upon the floor, and staring vacantly at Gabriel, as he thrust his hair back from his face. 'But who can make him come! He calls me, and makes me go where he will. He goes on before, and I follow. He's the master, and I'm the man. Is that the truth, Grip?'

The raven gave a short, comfortable, confidential kind of croak;—a most expressive croak, which seemed to say, 'You needn't let these fellows into our secrets. We understand each other. It's all right.'

'I make HIM come?' cried Barnaby, pointing to the bird. 'Him, who never goes to sleep, or so much as winks!—Why, any time of night, you may see his eyes in my dark room, shining like two sparks. And every night, and all night too, he's broad awake, talking to himself, thinking what he shall do to-morrow, where we shall go, and what he shall steal, and hide, and bury. I make HIM come! Ha ha ha!'

On second thoughts, the bird appeared disposed to come of himself. After a short survey of the ground, and a few sidelong looks at the ceiling and at everybody present in turn, he fluttered to the floor, and went to Barnaby—not in a hop, or walk, or run, but in a pace like that of a very particular gentleman with exceedingly tight boots on, trying to walk fast over loose pebbles. Then, stepping into his extended hand, and condescending to be held out at arm's length, he gave vent to a succession of sounds, not unlike the drawing of some eight or ten dozen of long corks, and again asserted his brimstone birth and parentage with great distinctness.

The locksmith shook his head—perhaps in some doubt of the creature's being really nothing but a bird—perhaps in pity for Barnaby, who by this time had him in his arms, and was rolling about, with him, on the ground. As he raised his eyes from the poor fellow he encountered those of his mother, who had entered the room, and was looking on in silence.

She was quite white in the face, even to her lips, but had wholly subdued her emotion, and wore her usual quiet look. Varden fancied as he glanced at her that she shrunk from his eye; and that she busied herself about the wounded gentleman to avoid him the better.

It was time he went to bed, she said. He was to be removed to his own home on the morrow, and he had already exceeded his time for sitting up, by a full hour. Acting on this hint, the locksmith prepared to take his leave.

'By the bye,' said Edward, as he shook him by the hand, and looked from him to Mrs Rudge and back again, 'what noise was that below? I heard your voice in the midst of it, and should have inquired before, but our other conversation drove it from my memory. What was it?'

The locksmith looked towards her, and bit his lip. She leant against the chair, and bent her eyes upon the ground. Barnaby too—he was listening.

—'Some mad or drunken fellow, sir,' Varden at length made answer, looking steadily at the widow as he spoke. 'He mistook the house, and tried to force an entrance.'

She breathed more freely, but stood quite motionless. As the locksmith said 'Good night,' and Barnaby caught up the candle to light him down the stairs, she took it from him, and charged him—with more haste and earnestness than so slight an occasion appeared to warrant—not to stir. The raven followed them to satisfy himself that all was right below, and when they reached the street-door, stood on the bottom stair drawing corks out of number.

With a trembling hand she unfastened the chain and bolts, and turned the key. As she had her hand upon the latch, the locksmith said in a low voice,

'I have told a lie to-night, for your sake, Mary, and for the sake of bygone times and old acquaintance, when I would scorn to do so for my own. I hope I may have done no harm, or led to none. I can't help the suspicions you have forced upon me, and I am loth, I tell you plainly, to leave Mr Edward here. Take care he comes to no hurt. I doubt the safety of this roof, and am glad he leaves it so soon. Now, let me go.'

For a moment she hid her face in her hands and wept; but resisting the strong impulse which evidently moved her to reply, opened the door—no wider than was sufficient for the passage of his body—and motioned him away. As the locksmith stood upon the step, it was chained and locked behind him, and the raven, in furtherance of these precautions, barked like a lusty house-dog.

'In league with that ill-looking figure that might have fallen from a gibbet—he listening and hiding here—Barnaby first upon the spot last night—can she who has always borne so fair a name be guilty of such crimes in secret!' said the locksmith, musing. 'Heaven forgive me if I am wrong, and send me just thoughts; but she is poor, the temptation may be great, and we daily hear of things as strange.—Ay, bark away, my friend. If there's any wickedness going on, that raven's in it, I'll be sworn.'

Chapter 7

Mrs Varden was a lady of what is commonly called an uncertain temper—a phrase which being interpreted signifies a temper tolerably certain to make everybody more or less uncomfortable. Thus it generally happened, that when other people were merry, Mrs Varden was dull; and that when other people were dull, Mrs Varden was disposed to be amazingly cheerful. Indeed the worthy housewife was of such a capricious nature, that she not only attained a higher pitch of genius than Macbeth, in respect of her ability to be wise, amazed, temperate and furious, loyal and neutral in an instant, but would sometimes ring the changes backwards and forwards on all possible moods and flights in one short quarter of an hour; performing, as it were, a kind of triple bob major on the peal of instruments in the female belfry, with a skilfulness and rapidity of execution that astonished all who heard her.

It had been observed in this good lady (who did not want for personal attractions, being plump and buxom to look at, though like her fair daughter, somewhat short in stature) that this uncertainty of disposition strengthened and increased with her temporal prosperity; and divers wise men and matrons, on friendly terms with the locksmith and his family, even went so far as to assert, that a tumble down some half-dozen rounds in the world's ladder—such as the breaking of the bank in which her husband kept his money, or some little fall of that kind—would be the making of her, and could hardly fail to render her one of the most agreeable companions in existence. Whether they were right or wrong in this conjecture, certain it is that minds, like bodies, will often fall into a pimpled ill-conditioned state from mere excess of comfort, and like them, are often successfully cured by remedies in themselves very nauseous and unpalatable.

Mrs Varden's chief aider and abettor, and at the same time her principal victim and object of wrath, was her single domestic servant, one Miss Miggs; or as she was called, in conformity with those prejudices of society which lop and top from poor hand-maidens all such genteel excrescences—Miggs. This Miggs was a tall young lady, very much addicted to pattens in private life; slender and shrewish, of a rather uncomfortable figure, and though not absolutely ill-looking, of a sharp and acid visage. As a general principle and abstract proposition, Miggs held the male sex to be utterly contemptible and unworthy of notice; to be fickle, false, base, sottish, inclined to perjury, and wholly undeserving. When particularly exasperated against them (which, scandal said, was when Sim Tappertit slighted her most) she was accustomed to wish with great emphasis that the whole race of women could but die off, in order that the men might be brought to know the real value of the blessings by which they set so little store; nay, her feeling for her order ran so high, that she sometimes declared, if she could only have good security for a fair, round number—say ten thousand—of young virgins following her example, she would, to spite mankind, hang, drown, stab, or poison herself, with a joy past all expression.

It was the voice of Miggs that greeted the locksmith, when he knocked at his own house, with a shrill cry of 'Who's there?'

'Me, girl, me,' returned Gabriel.

What, already, sir!' said Miggs, opening the door with a look of surprise. 'We were just getting on our nightcaps to sit up,—me and mistress. Oh, she has been SO bad!'

Miggs said this with an air of uncommon candour and concern; but the parlour-door was standing open, and as Gabriel very well knew for whose ears it was designed, he regarded her with anything but an approving look as he passed in.

'Master's come home, mim,' cried Miggs, running before him into the parlour. 'You was wrong, mim, and I was right. I thought he wouldn't keep us up so late, two nights running, mim. Master's always considerate so far. I'm so glad, mim, on your account. I'm a little'—here Miggs simpered—'a little sleepy myself; I'll own it now, mim, though I said I wasn't when you asked me. It ain't of no consequence, mim, of course.'

'You had better,' said the locksmith, who most devoutly wished that Barnaby's raven was at Miggs's ankles, 'you had better get to bed at once then.'

'Thanking you kindly, sir,' returned Miggs, 'I couldn't take my rest in peace, nor fix my thoughts upon my prayers, otherways than that I knew mistress was comfortable in her bed this night; by rights she ought to have been there, hours ago.'

'You're talkative, mistress,' said Varden, pulling off his greatcoat, and looking at her askew.

'Taking the hint, sir,' cried Miggs, with a flushed face, 'and thanking you for it most kindly, I will make bold to say, that if I give offence by having consideration for my mistress, I do not ask your pardon, but am content to get myself into trouble and to be in suffering.'

Here Mrs Varden, who, with her countenance shrouded in a large nightcap, had been all this time intent upon the Protestant Manual, looked round, and acknowledged Miggs's championship by commanding her to hold her tongue.

Every little bone in Miggs's throat and neck developed itself with a spitefulness quite alarming, as she replied, 'Yes, mim, I will.'

'How do you find yourself now, my dear?' said the locksmith, taking a chair near his wife (who had resumed her book), and rubbing his knees hard as he made the inquiry.

'You're very anxious to know, an't you?' returned Mrs Varden, with her eyes upon the print. 'You, that have not been near me all day, and wouldn't have been if I was dying!'

'My dear Martha—' said Gabriel.

Mrs Varden turned over to the next page; then went back again to the bottom line over leaf to be quite sure of the last words; and then went on reading with an appearance of the deepest interest and study.

'My dear Martha,' said the locksmith, 'how can you say such things, when you know you don't mean them? If you were dying! Why, if there was anything serious the matter with you, Martha, shouldn't I be in constant attendance upon you?'

'Yes!' cried Mrs Varden, bursting into tears, 'yes, you would. I don't doubt it, Varden. Certainly you would. That's as much as to tell me that you would be hovering round me like a vulture, waiting till the breath was out of my body, that you might go and marry somebody else.'

Miggs groaned in sympathy—a little short groan, checked in its birth, and changed into a cough. It seemed to say, 'I can't help it. It's wrung from me by the dreadful brutality of that monster master.'

'But you'll break my heart one of these days,' added Mrs Varden, with more resignation, 'and then we shall both be happy. My only desire is to see Dolly comfortably settled, and when she is, you may settle ME as soon as you like.'

'Ah!' cried Miggs—and coughed again.

Poor Gabriel twisted his wig about in silence for a long time, and then said mildly, 'Has Dolly gone to bed?'

'Your master speaks to you,' said Mrs Varden, looking sternly over her shoulder at Miss Miggs in waiting.

'No, my dear, I spoke to you,' suggested the locksmith.

'Did you hear me, Miggs?' cried the obdurate lady, stamping her foot upon the ground. 'YOU are beginning to despise me now, are you? But this is example!'

At this cruel rebuke, Miggs, whose tears were always ready, for large or small parties, on the shortest notice and the most reasonable terms, fell a crying violently; holding both her hands tight upon her heart meanwhile, as if nothing less would prevent its splitting into small fragments. Mrs Varden, who likewise possessed that faculty in high perfection, wept too, against Miggs; and with such effect that Miggs gave in after a time, and, except for an occasional sob, which seemed to threaten some remote intention of breaking out again, left her mistress in possession of the field. Her superiority being thoroughly asserted, that lady soon desisted likewise, and fell into a quiet melancholy.

The relief was so great, and the fatiguing occurrences of last night so completely overpowered the locksmith, that he nodded in his chair, and would doubtless have slept there all night, but for the voice of Mrs Varden, which, after a pause of some five minutes, awoke him with a start.

'If I am ever,' said Mrs V.—not scolding, but in a sort of monotonous remonstrance—'in spirits, if I am ever cheerful, if I am ever more than usually disposed to be talkative and comfortable, this is the way I am treated.'

'Such spirits as you was in too, mim, but half an hour ago!' cried Miggs. 'I never see such company!'

'Because,' said Mrs Varden, 'because I never interfere or interrupt; because I never question where anybody comes or goes; because my whole mind and soul is bent on saving where I can save, and labouring in this house;—therefore, they try me as they do.'

'Martha,' urged the locksmith, endeavouring to look as wakeful as possible, 'what is it you complain of? I really came home with every wish and desire to be happy. I did, indeed.'

'What do I complain of!' retorted his wife. 'Is it a chilling thing to have one's husband sulking and falling asleep directly he comes home—to have him freezing all one's warm-heartedness, and throwing cold water over the fireside? Is it natural, when I know he went out upon a matter in which I am as much interested as anybody can be, that I should wish to know all that has happened, or that he should tell me without my begging and praying him to do it? Is that natural, or is it not?'

'I am very sorry, Martha,' said the good-natured locksmith. 'I was really afraid you were not disposed to talk pleasantly; I'll tell you everything; I shall only be too glad, my dear.'

'No, Varden,' returned his wife, rising with dignity. 'I dare say—thank you! I'm not a child to be corrected one minute and petted the next—I'm a little too old for that, Varden. Miggs, carry the light.—YOU can be cheerful, Miggs, at least.'

Miggs, who, to this moment, had been in the very depths of compassionate despondency, passed instantly into the liveliest state conceivable, and tossing her head as she glanced towards the locksmith, bore off her mistress and the light together.

'Now, who would think,' thought Varden, shrugging his shoulders and drawing his chair nearer to the fire, 'that that woman could ever be pleasant and agreeable? And yet she can be. Well, well, all of us have our faults. I'll not be hard upon hers. We have been man and wife too long for that.'

He dozed again—not the less pleasantly, perhaps, for his hearty temper. While his eyes were closed, the door leading to the upper stairs was partially opened; and a head appeared, which, at sight of him, hastily drew back again.

'I wish,' murmured Gabriel, waking at the noise, and looking round the room, 'I wish somebody would marry Miggs. But that's impossible! I wonder whether there's any madman alive, who would marry Miggs!'

This was such a vast speculation that he fell into a doze again, and slept until the fire was quite burnt out. At last he roused himself; and having double-locked the street-door according to custom, and put the key in his pocket, went off to bed.

He had not left the room in darkness many minutes, when the head again appeared, and Sim Tappertit entered, bearing in his hand a little lamp.

'What the devil business has he to stop up so late!' muttered Sim, passing into the workshop, and setting it down upon the forge. 'Here's half the night gone already. There's only one good that has ever come to me, out of this cursed old rusty mechanical trade, and that's this piece of ironmongery, upon my soul!'

As he spoke, he drew from the right hand, or rather right leg pocket of his smalls, a clumsy large-sized key, which he inserted cautiously in the lock his master had secured, and softly opened the door. That done, he replaced his piece of secret workmanship in his pocket; and leaving the lamp burning, and closing the door carefully and without noise, stole out into the street—as little suspected by the locksmith in his sound deep sleep, as by Barnaby himself in his phantom-haunted dreams.

Chapter 8

Clear of the locksmith's house, Sim Tappertit laid aside his cautious manner, and assuming in its stead that of a ruffling, swaggering, roving blade, who would rather kill a man than otherwise, and eat him too if needful, made the best of his way along the darkened streets.

Half pausing for an instant now and then to smite his pocket and assure himself of the safety of his master key, he hurried on to Barbican, and turning into one of the narrowest of the narrow streets which diverged from that centre, slackened his pace and wiped his heated brow, as if the termination of his walk were near at hand.

It was not a very choice spot for midnight expeditions, being in truth one of more than questionable character, and of an appearance by no means inviting. From the main street he had entered, itself little better than an alley, a low-browed doorway led into a blind court, or yard, profoundly dark, unpaved, and reeking with stagnant odours. Into this ill-favoured pit, the locksmith's vagrant 'prentice groped his way; and stopping at a house from whose defaced and rotten front the rude effigy of a bottle swung to and fro like some gibbeted malefactor, struck thrice upon an iron grating with his foot. After listening in vain for some response to his signal, Mr Tappertit became impatient, and struck the grating thrice again.

A further delay ensued, but it was not of long duration. The ground seemed to open at his feet, and a ragged head appeared.

'Is that the captain?' said a voice as ragged as the head.

'Yes,' replied Mr Tappertit haughtily, descending as he spoke, 'who should it be?'

'It's so late, we gave you up,' returned the voice, as its owner stopped to shut and fasten the grating. 'You're late, sir.'

'Lead on,' said Mr Tappertit, with a gloomy majesty, 'and make remarks when I require you. Forward!'

This latter word of command was perhaps somewhat theatrical and unnecessary, inasmuch as the descent was by a very narrow, steep, and slippery flight of steps, and any rashness or departure from the beaten track must have ended in a yawning water-butt. But Mr Tappertit being, like some other great commanders, favourable to strong effects, and personal display, cried 'Forward!' again, in the hoarsest voice he could assume; and led the way, with folded arms and knitted brows, to the cellar down below, where there was a small copper fixed in one corner, a chair or two, a form and table, a glimmering fire, and a truckle-bed, covered with a ragged patchwork rug.

'Welcome, noble captain!' cried a lanky figure, rising as from a nap.

The captain nodded. Then, throwing off his outer coat, he stood composed in all his dignity, and eyed his follower over.

'What news to-night?' he asked, when he had looked into his very soul.

'Nothing particular,' replied the other, stretching himself—and he was so long already that it was quite alarming to see him do it—'how come you to be so late?'

'No matter,' was all the captain deigned to say in answer. 'Is the room prepared?'

'It is,' replied the follower.

'The comrade—is he here?'

'Yes. And a sprinkling of the others—you hear 'em?'

'Playing skittles!' said the captain moodily. 'Light-hearted revellers!'

There was no doubt respecting the particular amusement in which these heedless spirits were indulging, for even in the close and stifling atmosphere of the vault, the noise sounded like distant thunder. It certainly appeared, at first sight, a singular spot to choose, for that or any other purpose of relaxation, if the other cellars answered to the one in which this brief colloquy took place; for the floors were of sodden earth, the walls and roof of damp bare brick tapestried with the tracks of snails and slugs; the air was sickening, tainted, and offensive. It seemed, from one strong flavour which was uppermost among the various odours of the place, that it had, at no very distant period, been used as a storehouse for cheeses; a circumstance which, while it accounted for the greasy moisture that hung about it, was agreeably suggestive of rats. It was naturally damp besides, and little trees of fungus sprung from every mouldering corner.

The proprietor of this charming retreat, and owner of the ragged head before mentioned—for he wore an old tie-wig as bare and frowzy as a stunted hearth-broom—had by this time joined them; and stood a little apart, rubbing his hands, wagging his hoary bristled chin, and smiling in silence. His eyes were closed; but had they been wide open, it would have been easy to tell, from the attentive expression of the face he turned towards them—pale and unwholesome as might be expected in one of his underground existence—and from a certain anxious raising and quivering of the lids, that he was blind.

'Even Stagg hath been asleep,' said the long comrade, nodding towards this person.

'Sound, captain, sound!' cried the blind man; 'what does my noble captain drink—is it brandy, rum, usquebaugh? Is it soaked gunpowder, or blazing oil? Give it a name, heart of oak, and we'd get it for you, if it was wine from a bishop's cellar, or melted gold from King George's mint.'

'See,' said Mr Tappertit haughtily, 'that it's something strong, and comes quick; and so long as you take care of that, you may bring it from the devil's cellar, if you like.'

'Boldly said, noble captain!' rejoined the blind man. 'Spoken like the 'Prentices' Glory. Ha, ha! From the devil's cellar! A brave joke! The captain joketh. Ha, ha, ha!'

'I'll tell you what, my fine feller,' said Mr Tappertit, eyeing the host over as he walked to a closet, and took out a bottle and glass as carelessly as if he had been in full possession of his sight, 'if you make that row, you'll find that the captain's very far from joking, and so I tell you.'

'He's got his eyes on me!' cried Stagg, stopping short on his way back, and affecting to screen his face with the bottle. 'I feel 'em though I can't see 'em. Take 'em off, noble captain. Remove 'em, for they pierce like gimlets.'

Mr Tappertit smiled grimly at his comrade; and twisting out one more look—a kind of ocular screw—under the influence of which the blind man feigned to undergo great anguish and torture, bade him, in a softened tone, approach, and hold his peace.

'I obey you, captain,' cried Stagg, drawing close to him and filling out a bumper without spilling a drop, by reason that he held his little finger at the brim of the glass, and stopped at the instant the liquor touched it, 'drink, noble governor. Death to all masters, life to all 'prentices, and love to all fair damsels. Drink, brave general, and warm your gallant heart!'

Mr Tappertit condescended to take the glass from his outstretched hand. Stagg then dropped on one knee, and gently smoothed the calves of his legs, with an air of humble admiration.

'That I had but eyes!' he cried, 'to behold my captain's symmetrical proportions! That I had but eyes, to look upon these twin invaders of domestic peace!'

'Get out!' said Mr Tappertit, glancing downward at his favourite limbs. 'Go along, will you, Stagg!'

'When I touch my own afterwards,' cried the host, smiting them reproachfully, 'I hate 'em. Comparatively speaking, they've no more shape than wooden legs, beside these models of my noble captain's.'

'Yours!' exclaimed Mr Tappertit. 'No, I should think not. Don't talk about those precious old toothpicks in the same breath with mine; that's rather too much. Here. Take the glass. Benjamin. Lead on. To business!'

With these words, he folded his arms again; and frowning with a sullen majesty, passed with his companion through a little door at the upper end of the cellar, and disappeared; leaving Stagg to his private meditations.

The vault they entered, strewn with sawdust and dimly lighted, was between the outer one from which they had just come, and that in which the skittle-players were diverting themselves; as was manifested by the increased noise and clamour of tongues, which was suddenly stopped, however, and replaced by a dead silence, at a signal from the long comrade. Then, this young gentleman, going to a little cupboard, returned with a thigh-bone, which in former times must have been part and parcel of some individual at least as long as himself, and placed the same in the hands of Mr Tappertit; who, receiving it as a sceptre and staff of authority, cocked his three-cornered hat fiercely on the top of his head, and mounted a large table, whereon a chair of state, cheerfully ornamented with a couple of skulls, was placed ready for his reception.

He had no sooner assumed this position, than another young gentleman appeared, bearing in his arms a huge clasped book, who made him a profound obeisance, and delivering it to the long comrade, advanced to the table, and turning his back upon it, stood there Atlas-wise. Then, the long comrade got upon the table too; and seating himself in a lower chair than Mr Tappertit's, with much state and ceremony, placed the large book on the shoulders of their mute companion as deliberately as if he had been a wooden desk, and prepared to make entries therein with a pen of corresponding size.

When the long comrade had made these preparations, he looked towards Mr Tappertit; and Mr Tappertit, flourishing the bone, knocked nine times therewith upon one of the skulls. At the ninth stroke, a third young gentleman emerged from the door leading to the skittle ground, and bowing low, awaited his commands.

'Prentice!' said the mighty captain, 'who waits without?'

The 'prentice made answer that a stranger was in attendance, who claimed admission into that secret society of 'Prentice Knights, and a free participation in their rights, privileges, and immunities. Thereupon Mr Tappertit flourished the bone again, and giving the other skull a prodigious rap on the nose, exclaimed 'Admit him!' At these dread words the 'prentice bowed once more, and so withdrew as he had come.

There soon appeared at the same door, two other 'prentices, having between them a third, whose eyes were bandaged, and who was attired in a bag-wig, and a broad-skirted coat, trimmed with tarnished lace; and who was girded with a sword, in compliance with the laws of the Institution regulating the introduction of candidates, which required them to assume this courtly dress, and kept it constantly in lavender, for their convenience. One of the conductors of this novice held a rusty blunderbuss pointed towards his ear, and the other a very ancient sabre, with which he carved imaginary offenders as he came along in a sanguinary and anatomical manner.

As this silent group advanced, Mr Tappertit fixed his hat upon his head. The novice then laid his hand upon his breast and bent before him. When he had humbled himself sufficiently, the captain ordered the bandage to be removed, and proceeded to eye him over.

'Ha!' said the captain, thoughtfully, when he had concluded this ordeal. 'Proceed.'

The long comrade read aloud as follows:—'Mark Gilbert. Age, nineteen. Bound to Thomas Curzon, hosier, Golden Fleece, Aldgate. Loves Curzon's daughter. Cannot say that Curzon's daughter loves him. Should think it probable. Curzon pulled his ears last Tuesday week.'

'How!' cried the captain, starting.

'For looking at his daughter, please you,' said the novice.

'Write Curzon down, Denounced,' said the captain. 'Put a black cross against the name of Curzon.'

'So please you,' said the novice, 'that's not the worst—he calls his 'prentice idle dog, and stops his beer unless he works to his liking. He gives Dutch cheese, too, eating Cheshire, sir, himself; and Sundays out, are only once a month.'

'This,' said Mr Tappert gravely, 'is a flagrant case. Put two black crosses to the name of Curzon.'

'If the society,' said the novice, who was an ill-looking, one-sided, shambling lad, with sunken eyes set close together in his head—'if the society would burn his house down—for he's not insured—or beat him as he comes home from his club at night, or help me to carry off his daughter, and marry her at the Fleet, whether she gave consent or no—'

Mr Tappertit waved his grizzly truncheon as an admonition to him not to interrupt, and ordered three black crosses to the name of Curzon.

'Which means,' he said in gracious explanation, 'vengeance, complete and terrible. 'Prentice, do you love the Constitution?'

To which the novice (being to that end instructed by his attendant sponsors) replied 'I do!'

'The Church, the State, and everything established—but the masters?' quoth the captain.

Again the novice said 'I do.'

Having said it, he listened meekly to the captain, who in an address prepared for such occasions, told him how that under that same Constitution (which was kept in a strong box somewhere, but where exactly he could not find out, or he would have endeavoured to procure a copy of it), the 'prentices had, in times gone by, had frequent holidays of right, broken people's heads by scores, defied their masters, nay, even achieved some glorious murders in the streets, which privileges had gradually been wrested from them, and in all which noble aspirations they were now restrained; how the degrading checks imposed upon them were unquestionably attributable to the innovating spirit of the times, and how they united therefore to resist all change, except such change as would restore those good old English customs, by which they would stand or fall. After illustrating the wisdom of going backward, by reference to that sagacious fish, the crab, and the not unfrequent practice of the mule and donkey, he described their general objects; which were briefly vengeance on their Tyrant Masters (of whose grievous and insupportable oppression no 'prentice could entertain a moment's doubt) and the restoration, as aforesaid, of their ancient rights and holidays; for neither of which objects were they now quite ripe, being barely twenty strong, but which they pledged themselves to pursue with fire and sword when needful. Then he described the oath which every member of that small remnant of a noble body took, and which was of a dreadful and impressive kind; binding him, at the bidding of his chief, to resist and obstruct the Lord Mayor, sword-bearer, and chaplain; to despise the authority of the sheriffs; and to hold the court of aldermen as nought; but not on any account, in case the fulness of time should bring a general rising of 'prentices, to damage or in any way disfigure Temple Bar, which was strictly constitutional and always to be approached with reverence. Having gone over these several heads with great eloquence and force, and having further informed the novice that this society had its origin in his own teeming brain, stimulated by a swelling sense of wrong and outrage, Mr Tappertit demanded whether he had strength of heart to take the mighty pledge required, or whether he would withdraw while retreat was yet in his power.

To this the novice made rejoinder, that he would take the vow, though it should choke him; and it was accordingly administered with many impressive circumstances, among which the lighting up of the two skulls with a candle-end inside of each, and a great many flourishes with the bone, were chiefly conspicuous; not to mention a variety of grave exercises with the blunderbuss and sabre, and some dismal groaning by unseen 'prentices without. All these dark and direful ceremonies being at length completed, the table was put aside, the chair of state removed, the sceptre locked up in its usual cupboard, the doors of communication between the three cellars thrown freely open, and the 'Prentice Knights resigned themselves to merriment.

But Mr Tappertit, who had a soul above the vulgar herd, and who, on account of his greatness, could only afford to be merry now and then, threw himself on a bench with the air of a man who was faint with dignity. He looked with an indifferent eye, alike on skittles, cards, and dice, thinking only of the locksmith's daughter, and the base degenerate days on which he had fallen.

'My noble captain neither games, nor sings, nor dances,' said his host, taking a seat beside him. 'Drink, gallant general!'

Mr Tappertit drained the proffered goblet to the dregs; then thrust his hands into his pockets, and with a lowering visage walked among the skittles, while his followers (such is the influence of superior genius) restrained the ardent ball, and held his little shins in dumb respect.

'If I had been born a corsair or a pirate, a brigand, genteel highwayman or patriot—and they're the same thing,' thought Mr Tappertit, musing among the nine-pins, 'I should have been all right. But to drag out a ignoble existence unbeknown to mankind in general—patience! I will be famous yet. A voice within me keeps on whispering Greatness. I shall burst out one of these days, and when I do, what power can keep me down? I feel my soul getting into my head at the idea. More drink there!'

'The novice,' pursued Mr Tappertit, not exactly in a voice of thunder, for his tones, to say the truth were rather cracked and shrill—but very impressively, notwithstanding—'where is he?'

'Here, noble captain!' cried Stagg. 'One stands beside me who I feel is a stranger.'

'Have you,' said Mr Tappertit, letting his gaze fall on the party indicated, who was indeed the new knight, by this time restored to his own apparel; 'Have you the impression of your street-door key in wax?'

The long comrade anticipated the reply, by producing it from the shelf on which it had been deposited.

'Good,' said Mr Tappertit, scrutinising it attentively, while a breathless silence reigned around; for he had constructed secret door-keys for the whole society, and perhaps owed something of his influence to that mean and trivial circumstance—on such slight accidents do even men of mind depend!—'This is easily made. Come hither, friend.'

With that, he beckoned the new knight apart, and putting the pattern in his pocket, motioned to him to walk by his side.

'And so,' he said, when they had taken a few turns up and down, you—you love your master's daughter?'

'I do,' said the 'prentice. 'Honour bright. No chaff, you know.'

'Have you,' rejoined Mr Tappertit, catching him by the wrist, and giving him a look which would have been expressive of the most deadly malevolence, but for an accidental hiccup that rather interfered with it; 'have you a—a rival?'

'Not as I know on,' replied the 'prentice.

'If you had now—' said Mr Tappertit—'what would you—eh?—'

The 'prentice looked fierce and clenched his fists.

'It is enough,' cried Mr Tappertit hastily, 'we understand each other. We are observed. I thank you.'

So saying, he cast him off again; and calling the long comrade aside after taking a few hasty turns by himself, bade him immediately write and post against the wall, a notice, proscribing one Joseph Willet (commonly known as Joe) of Chigwell; forbidding all 'Prentice Knights to succour, comfort, or hold communion with him; and requiring them, on pain of excommunication, to molest, hurt, wrong, annoy, and pick quarrels with the said Joseph, whensoever and wheresoever they, or any of them, should happen to encounter him.

Having relieved his mind by this energetic proceeding, he condescended to approach the festive board, and warming by degrees, at length deigned to preside, and even to enchant the company with a song. After this, he rose to such a pitch as to consent to regale the society with a hornpipe, which he actually performed to the music of a fiddle (played by an ingenious member) with such surpassing agility and brilliancy of execution, that the spectators could not be sufficiently enthusiastic in their admiration; and their host protested, with tears in his eyes, that he had never truly felt his blindness until that moment.

But the host withdrawing—probably to weep in secret—soon returned with the information that it wanted little more than an hour of day, and that all the cocks in Barbican had already begun to crow, as if their lives depended on it. At this intelligence, the 'Prentice Knights arose in haste, and marshalling into a line, filed off one by one and dispersed with all speed to their several homes, leaving their leader to pass the grating last.

'Good night, noble captain,' whispered the blind man as he held it open for his passage out; 'Farewell, brave general. Bye, bye, illustrious commander. Good luck go with you for a—conceited, bragging, empty-headed, duck-legged idiot.'

With which parting words, coolly added as he listened to his receding footsteps and locked the grate upon himself, he descended the steps, and lighting the fire below the little copper, prepared, without any assistance, for his daily occupation; which was to retail at the area-head above pennyworths of broth and soup, and savoury puddings, compounded of such scraps as were to be bought in the heap for the least money at Fleet Market in the evening time; and for the sale of which he had need to have depended chiefly on his private connection, for the court had no thoroughfare, and was not that kind of place in which many people were likely to take the air, or to frequent as an agreeable promenade.

Chapter 9

Chronicler's are privileged to enter where they list, to come and go through keyholes, to ride upon the wind, to overcome, in their soarings up and down, all obstacles of distance, time, and place. Thrice blessed be this last consideration, since it enables us to follow the disdainful Miggs even into the sanctity of her chamber, and to hold her in sweet companionship through the dreary watches of the night!

Miss Miggs, having undone her mistress, as she phrased it (which means, assisted to undress her), and having seen her comfortably to bed in the back room on the first floor, withdrew to her own apartment, in the attic story. Notwithstanding her declaration in the locksmith's presence, she was in no mood for sleep; so, putting her light upon the table and withdrawing the little window curtain, she gazed out pensively at the wild night sky.

Perhaps she wondered what star was destined for her habitation when she had run her little course below; perhaps speculated which of those glimmering spheres might be the natal orb of Mr Tappertit; perhaps marvelled how they could gaze down on that perfidious creature, man, and not sicken and turn green as chemists' lamps; perhaps thought of nothing in particular. Whatever she thought about, there she sat, until her attention, alive to anything connected with the insinuating 'prentice, was attracted by a noise in the next room to her own—his room; the room in which he slept, and dreamed—it might be, sometimes dreamed of her.

That he was not dreaming now, unless he was taking a walk in his sleep, was clear, for every now and then there came a shuffling noise, as though he were engaged in polishing the whitewashed wall; then a gentle creaking of his door; then the faintest indication of his stealthy footsteps on the landing-place outside. Noting this latter circumstance, Miss Miggs turned pale and shuddered, as mistrusting his intentions; and more than once exclaimed, below her breath, 'Oh! what a Providence it is, as I am bolted in!'—which, owing doubtless to her alarm, was a confusion of ideas on her part between a bolt and its use; for though there was one on the door, it was not fastened.

Miss Miggs's sense of hearing, however, having as sharp an edge as her temper, and being of the same snappish and suspicious kind, very soon informed her that the footsteps passed her door, and appeared to have some object quite separate and disconnected from herself. At this discovery she became more alarmed than ever, and was about to give utterance to those cries of 'Thieves!' and 'Murder!' which she had hitherto restrained, when it occurred to her to look softly out, and see that her fears had some good palpable foundation.

Looking out accordingly, and stretching her neck over the handrail, she descried, to her great amazement, Mr Tappertit completely dressed, stealing downstairs, one step at a time, with his shoes in one hand and a lamp in the other. Following him with her eyes, and going down a little way herself to get the better of an intervening angle, she beheld him thrust his head in at the parlour-door, draw it back again with great swiftness, and immediately begin a retreat upstairs with all possible expedition.

'Here's mysteries!' said the damsel, when she was safe in her own room again, quite out of breath. 'Oh, gracious, here's mysteries!'

The prospect of finding anybody out in anything, would have kept Miss Miggs awake under the influence of henbane. Presently, she heard the step again, as she would have done if it had been that of a feather endowed with motion and walking down on tiptoe. Then gliding out as before, she again beheld the retreating figure of the 'prentice; again he looked cautiously in at the parlour-door, but this time instead of retreating, he passed in and disappeared.

Miggs was back in her room, and had her head out of the window, before an elderly gentleman could have winked and recovered from it. Out he came at the street-door, shut it carefully behind him, tried it with his knee, and swaggered off, putting something in his pocket as he went along. At this spectacle Miggs cried 'Gracious!' again, and then 'Goodness gracious!' and then 'Goodness gracious me!' and then, candle in hand, went downstairs as he had done. Coming to the workshop, she saw the lamp burning on the forge, and everything as Sim had left it.

'Why I wish I may only have a walking funeral, and never be buried decent with a mourning-coach and feathers, if the boy hasn't been and made a key for his own self!' cried Miggs. 'Oh the little villain!'

This conclusion was not arrived at without consideration, and much peeping and peering about; nor was it unassisted by the recollection that she had on several occasions come upon the 'prentice suddenly, and found him busy at some mysterious occupation. Lest the fact of Miss Miggs calling him, on whom she stooped to cast a favourable eye, a boy, should create surprise in any breast, it may be observed that she invariably affected to regard all male bipeds under thirty as mere chits and infants; which phenomenon is not unusual in ladies of Miss Miggs's temper, and is indeed generally found to be the associate of such indomitable and savage virtue.

Miss Miggs deliberated within herself for some little time, looking hard at the shop-door while she did so, as though her eyes and thoughts were both upon it; and then, taking a sheet of paper from a drawer, twisted it into a long thin spiral tube. Having filled this instrument with a quantity of small coal-dust from the forge, she approached the door, and dropping on one knee before it, dexterously blew into the keyhole as much of these fine ashes as the lock would hold. When she had filled it to the brim in a very workmanlike and skilful manner, she crept upstairs again, and chuckled as she went.

'There!' cried Miggs, rubbing her hands, 'now let's see whether you won't be glad to take some notice of me, mister. He, he, he! You'll have eyes for somebody besides Miss Dolly now, I think. A fat-faced puss she is, as ever I come across!'

As she uttered this criticism, she glanced approvingly at her small mirror, as who should say, I thank my stars that can't be said of me!—as it certainly could not; for Miss Miggs's style of beauty was of that kind which Mr Tappertit himself had not inaptly termed, in private, 'scraggy.'

'I don't go to bed this night!' said Miggs, wrapping herself in a shawl, and drawing a couple of chairs near the window, flouncing down upon one, and putting her feet upon the other, 'till you come home, my lad. I wouldn't,' said Miggs viciously, 'no, not for five-and-forty pound!'

With that, and with an expression of face in which a great number of opposite ingredients, such as mischief, cunning, malice, triumph, and patient expectation, were all mixed up together in a kind of physiognomical punch, Miss Miggs composed herself to wait and listen, like some fair ogress who had set a trap and was watching for a nibble from a plump young traveller.

She sat there, with perfect composure, all night. At length, just upon break of day, there was a footstep in the street, and presently she could hear Mr Tappertit stop at the door. Then she could make out that he tried his key—that he was blowing into it—that he knocked it on the nearest post to beat the dust out—that he took it under a lamp to look at it—that he poked bits of stick into the lock to clear it—that he peeped into the keyhole, first with one eye, and then with the other—that he tried the key again—that he couldn't turn it, and what was worse, couldn't get it out—that he bent it—that then it was much less disposed to come out than before—that he gave it a mighty twist and a great pull, and then it came out so suddenly that he staggered backwards—that he kicked the door—that he shook it—finally, that he smote his forehead, and sat down on the step in despair.

When this crisis had arrived, Miss Miggs, affecting to be exhausted with terror, and to cling to the window-sill for support, put out her nightcap, and demanded in a faint voice who was there.

Mr Tappertit cried 'Hush!' and, backing to the road, exhorted her in frenzied pantomime to secrecy and silence.

'Tell me one thing,' said Miggs. 'Is it thieves?'

'No—no—no!' cried Mr Tappertit.

'Then,' said Miggs, more faintly than before, 'it's fire. Where is it, sir? It's near this room, I know. I've a good conscience, sir, and would much rather die than go down a ladder. All I wish is, respecting my love to my married sister, Golden Lion Court, number twenty-sivin, second bell-handle on the right-hand door-post.'

'Miggs!' cried Mr Tappertit, 'don't you know me? Sim, you know—Sim—'

'Oh! what about him!' cried Miggs, clasping her hands. 'Is he in any danger? Is he in the midst of flames and blazes! Oh gracious, gracious!'

'Why I'm here, an't I?' rejoined Mr Tappertit, knocking himself on the breast. 'Don't you see me? What a fool you are, Miggs!'

'There!' cried Miggs, unmindful of this compliment. 'Why—so it—Goodness, what is the meaning of—If you please, mim, here's—'

'No, no!' cried Mr Tappertit, standing on tiptoe, as if by that means he, in the street, were any nearer being able to stop the mouth of Miggs in the garret. 'Don't!—I've been out without leave, and something or another's the matter with the lock. Come down, and undo the shop window, that I may get in that way.'

'I dursn't do it, Simmun,' cried Miggs—for that was her pronunciation of his Christian name. 'I dursn't do it, indeed. You know as well as anybody, how particular I am. And to come down in the dead of night, when the house is wrapped in slumbers and weiled in obscurity.' And there she stopped and shivered, for her modesty caught cold at the very thought.

'But Miggs,' cried Mr Tappertit, getting under the lamp, that she might see his eyes. 'My darling Miggs—'

Miggs screamed slightly.

'—That I love so much, and never can help thinking of,' and it is impossible to describe the use he made of his eyes when he said this—'do—for my sake, do.'

'Oh Simmun,' cried Miggs, 'this is worse than all. I know if I come down, you'll go, and—'

'And what, my precious?' said Mr Tappertit.

'And try,' said Miggs, hysterically, 'to kiss me, or some such dreadfulness; I know you will!'

'I swear I won't,' said Mr Tappertit, with remarkable earnestness. 'Upon my soul I won't. It's getting broad day, and the watchman's waking up. Angelic Miggs! If you'll only come and let me in, I promise you faithfully and truly I won't.'

Miss Miggs, whose gentle heart was touched, did not wait for the oath (knowing how strong the temptation was, and fearing he might forswear himself), but tripped lightly down the stairs, and with her own fair hands drew back the rough fastenings of the workshop window. Having helped the wayward 'prentice in, she faintly articulated the words 'Simmun is safe!' and yielding to her woman's nature, immediately became insensible.

'I knew I should quench her,' said Sim, rather embarrassed by this circumstance. 'Of course I was certain it would come to this, but there was nothing else to be done—if I hadn't eyed her over, she wouldn't have come down. Here. Keep up a minute, Miggs. What a slippery figure she is! There's no holding her, comfortably. Do keep up a minute, Miggs, will you?'

As Miggs, however, was deaf to all entreaties, Mr Tappertit leant her against the wall as one might dispose of a walking-stick or umbrella, until he had secured the window, when he took her in his arms again, and, in short stages and with great difficulty—arising from her being tall and his being short, and perhaps in some degree from that peculiar physical conformation on which he had already remarked—carried her upstairs, and planting her, in the same umbrella and walking-stick fashion, just inside her own door, left her to her repose.

'He may be as cool as he likes,' said Miss Miggs, recovering as soon as she was left alone; 'but I'm in his confidence and he can't help himself, nor couldn't if he was twenty Simmunses!'

Chapter 10

It was on one of those mornings, common in early spring, when the year, fickle and changeable in its youth like all other created things, is undecided whether to step backward into winter or forward into summer, and in its uncertainty inclines now to the one and now to the other, and now to both at once—wooing summer in the sunshine, and lingering still with winter in the shade—it was, in short, on one of those mornings, when it is hot and cold, wet and dry, bright and lowering, sad and cheerful, withering and genial, in the compass of one short hour, that old John Willet, who was dropping asleep over the copper boiler, was roused by the sound of a horse's feet, and glancing out at window, beheld a traveller of goodly promise, checking his bridle at the Maypole door.

He was none of your flippant young fellows, who would call for a tankard of mulled ale, and make themselves as much at home as if they had ordered a hogshead of wine; none of your audacious young swaggerers, who would even penetrate into the bar—that solemn sanctuary—and, smiting old John upon the back, inquire if there was never a pretty girl in the house, and where he hid his little chambermaids, with a hundred other impertinences of that nature; none of your free-and-easy companions, who would scrape their boots upon the firedogs in the common room, and be not at all particular on the subject of spittoons; none of your unconscionable blades, requiring impossible chops, and taking unheard-of pickles for granted. He was a staid, grave, placid gentleman, something past the prime of life, yet upright in his carriage, for all that, and slim as a greyhound. He was well-mounted upon a sturdy chestnut cob, and had the graceful seat of an experienced horseman; while his riding gear, though free from such fopperies as were then in vogue, was handsome and well chosen. He wore a riding-coat of a somewhat brighter green than might have been expected to suit the taste of a gentleman of his years, with a short, black velvet cape, and laced pocket-holes and cuffs, all of a jaunty fashion; his linen, too, was of the finest kind, worked in a rich pattern at the wrists and throat, and scrupulously white. Although he seemed, judging from the mud he had picked up on the way, to have come from London, his horse was as smooth and cool as his own iron-grey periwig and pigtail. Neither man nor beast had turned a single hair; and saving for his soiled skirts and spatter-dashes, this gentleman, with his blooming face, white teeth, exactly-ordered dress, and perfect calmness, might have come from making an elaborate and leisurely toilet, to sit for an equestrian portrait at old John Willet's gate.

It must not be supposed that John observed these several characteristics by other than very slow degrees, or that he took in more than half a one at a time, or that he even made up his mind upon that, without a great deal of very serious consideration. Indeed, if he had been distracted in the first instance by questionings and orders, it would have taken him at the least a fortnight to have noted what is here set down; but it happened that the gentleman, being struck with the old house, or with the plump pigeons which were skimming and curtseying about it, or with the tall maypole, on the top of which a weathercock, which had been out of order for fifteen years, performed a perpetual walk to the music of its own creaking, sat for some little time looking round in silence. Hence John, standing with his hand upon the horse's bridle, and his great eyes on the rider, and with nothing passing to divert his thoughts, had really got some of these little circumstances into his brain by the time he was called upon to speak.

'A quaint place this,' said the gentleman—and his voice was as rich as his dress. 'Are you the landlord?'

'At your service, sir,' replied John Willet.

'You can give my horse good stabling, can you, and me an early dinner (I am not particular what, so that it be cleanly served), and a decent room of which there seems to be no lack in this great mansion,' said the stranger, again running his eyes over the exterior.

'You can have, sir,' returned John with a readiness quite surprising, 'anything you please.'

'It's well I am easily satisfied,' returned the other with a smile, 'or that might prove a hardy pledge, my friend.' And saying so, he dismounted, with the aid of the block before the door, in a twinkling.

'Halloa there! Hugh!' roared John. 'I ask your pardon, sir, for keeping you standing in the porch; but my son has gone to town on business, and the boy being, as I may say, of a kind of use to me, I'm rather put out when he's away. Hugh!—a dreadful idle vagrant fellow, sir, half a gipsy, as I think—always sleeping in the sun in summer, and in the straw in winter time, sir—Hugh! Dear Lord, to keep a gentleman a waiting here through him!—Hugh! I wish that chap was dead, I do indeed.'

'Possibly he is,' returned the other. 'I should think if he were living, he would have heard you by this time.'

'In his fits of laziness, he sleeps so desperate hard,' said the distracted host, 'that if you were to fire off cannon-balls into his ears, it wouldn't wake him, sir.'

The guest made no remark upon this novel cure for drowsiness, and recipe for making people lively, but, with his hands clasped behind him, stood in the porch, very much amused to see old John, with the bridle in his hand, wavering between a strong impulse to abandon the animal to his fate, and a half disposition to lead him into the house, and shut him up in the parlour, while he waited on his master.

'Pillory the fellow, here he is at last!' cried John, in the very height and zenith of his distress. 'Did you hear me a calling, villain?'

The figure he addressed made no answer, but putting his hand upon the saddle, sprung into it at a bound, turned the horse's head towards the stable, and was gone in an instant.

'Brisk enough when he is awake,' said the guest.

'Brisk enough, sir!' replied John, looking at the place where the horse had been, as if not yet understanding quite, what had become of him. 'He melts, I think. He goes like a drop of froth. You look at him, and there he is. You look at him again, and—there he isn't.'

Having, in the absence of any more words, put this sudden climax to what he had faintly intended should be a long explanation of the whole life and character of his man, the oracular John Willet led the gentleman up his wide dismantled staircase into the Maypole's best apartment.

It was spacious enough in all conscience, occupying the whole depth of the house, and having at either end a great bay window, as large as many modern rooms; in which some few panes of stained glass, emblazoned with fragments of armorial bearings, though cracked, and patched, and shattered, yet remained; attesting, by their presence, that the former owner had made the very light subservient to his state, and pressed the sun itself into his list of flatterers; bidding it, when it shone into his chamber, reflect the badges of his ancient family, and take new hues and colours from their pride.

But those were old days, and now every little ray came and went as it would; telling the plain, bare, searching truth. Although the best room of the inn, it had the melancholy aspect of grandeur in decay, and was much too vast for comfort. Rich rustling hangings, waving on the walls; and, better far, the rustling of youth and beauty's dress; the light of women's eyes, outshining the tapers and their own rich jewels; the sound of gentle tongues, and music, and the tread of maiden feet, had once been there, and filled it with delight. But they were gone, and with them all its gladness. It was no longer a home; children were never born and bred there; the fireside had become mercenary—a something to be bought and sold—a very courtezan: let who would die, or sit beside, or leave it, it was still the same—it missed nobody, cared for nobody, had equal warmth and smiles for all. God help the man whose heart ever changes with the world, as an old mansion when it becomes an inn!

No effort had been made to furnish this chilly waste, but before the broad chimney a colony of chairs and tables had been planted on a square of carpet, flanked by a ghostly screen, enriched with figures, grinning and grotesque. After lighting with his own hands the faggots which were heaped upon the hearth, old John withdrew to hold grave council with his cook, touching the stranger's entertainment; while the guest himself, seeing small comfort in the yet unkindled wood, opened a lattice in the distant window, and basked in a sickly gleam of cold March sun.

Leaving the window now and then, to rake the crackling logs together, or pace the echoing room from end to end, he closed it when the fire was quite burnt up, and having wheeled the easiest chair into the warmest corner, summoned John Willet.

'Sir,' said John.

He wanted pen, ink, and paper. There was an old standish on the mantelshelf containing a dusty apology for all three. Having set this before him, the landlord was retiring, when he motioned him to stay.

'There's a house not far from here,' said the guest when he had written a few lines, 'which you call the Warren, I believe?'

As this was said in the tone of one who knew the fact, and asked the question as a thing of course, John contented himself with nodding his head in the affirmative; at the same time taking one hand out of his pockets to cough behind, and then putting it in again.

'I want this note'—said the guest, glancing on what he had written, and folding it, 'conveyed there without loss of time, and an answer brought back here. Have you a messenger at hand?'

John was thoughtful for a minute or thereabouts, and then said Yes.

'Let me see him,' said the guest.

This was disconcerting; for Joe being out, and Hugh engaged in rubbing down the chestnut cob, he designed sending on the errand, Barnaby, who had just then arrived in one of his rambles, and who, so that he thought himself employed on a grave and serious business, would go anywhere.

'Why the truth is,' said John after a long pause, 'that the person who'd go quickest, is a sort of natural, as one may say, sir; and though quick of foot, and as much to be trusted as the post itself, he's not good at talking, being touched and flighty, sir.'

'You don't,' said the guest, raising his eyes to John's fat face, 'you don't mean—what's the fellow's name—you don't mean Barnaby?'

'Yes, I do,' returned the landlord, his features turning quite expressive with surprise.

'How comes he to be here?' inquired the guest, leaning back in his chair; speaking in the bland, even tone, from which he never varied; and with the same soft, courteous, never-changing smile upon his face. 'I saw him in London last night.'

'He's, for ever, here one hour, and there the next,' returned old John, after the usual pause to get the question in his mind. 'Sometimes he walks, and sometimes runs. He's known along the road by everybody, and sometimes comes here in a cart or chaise, and sometimes riding double. He comes and goes, through wind, rain, snow, and hail, and on the darkest nights. Nothing hurts HIM.'

'He goes often to the Warren, does he not?' said the guest carelessly. 'I seem to remember his mother telling me something to that effect yesterday. But I was not attending to the good woman much.'

'You're right, sir,' John made answer, 'he does. His father, sir, was murdered in that house.'

'So I have heard,' returned the guest, taking a gold toothpick from his pocket with the same sweet smile. 'A very disagreeable circumstance for the family.'

'Very,' said John with a puzzled look, as if it occurred to him, dimly and afar off, that this might by possibility be a cool way of treating the subject.

'All the circumstances after a murder,' said the guest soliloquising, 'must be dreadfully unpleasant—so much bustle and disturbance—no repose—a constant dwelling upon one subject—and the running in and out, and up and down stairs, intolerable. I wouldn't have such a thing happen to anybody I was nearly interested in, on any account. 'Twould be enough to wear one's life out.—You were going to say, friend—' he added, turning to John again.

'Only that Mrs Rudge lives on a little pension from the family, and that Barnaby's as free of the house as any cat or dog about it,' answered John. 'Shall he do your errand, sir?'

'Oh yes,' replied the guest. 'Oh certainly. Let him do it by all means. Please to bring him here that I may charge him to be quick. If he objects to come you may tell him it's Mr Chester. He will remember my name, I dare say.'

John was so very much astonished to find who his visitor was, that he could express no astonishment at all, by looks or otherwise, but left the room as if he were in the most placid and imperturbable of all possible conditions. It has been reported that when he got downstairs, he looked steadily at the boiler for ten minutes by the clock, and all that time never once left off shaking his head; for which statement there would seem to be some ground of truth and feasibility, inasmuch as that interval of time did certainly elapse, before he returned with Barnaby to the guest's apartment.

'Come hither, lad,' said Mr Chester. 'You know Mr Geoffrey Haredale?'

Barnaby laughed, and looked at the landlord as though he would say, 'You hear him?' John, who was greatly shocked at this breach of decorum, clapped his finger to his nose, and shook his head in mute remonstrance.

'He knows him, sir,' said John, frowning aside at Barnaby, 'as well as you or I do.'

'I haven't the pleasure of much acquaintance with the gentleman,' returned his guest. 'YOU may have. Limit the comparison to yourself, my friend.'

Although this was said with the same easy affability, and the same smile, John felt himself put down, and laying the indignity at Barnaby's door, determined to kick his raven, on the very first opportunity.

'Give that,' said the guest, who had by this time sealed the note, and who beckoned his messenger towards him as he spoke, 'into Mr Haredale's own hands. Wait for an answer, and bring it back to me here. If you should find that Mr Haredale is engaged just now, tell him—can he remember a message, landlord?'

'When he chooses, sir,' replied John. 'He won't forget this one.'

'How are you sure of that?'

John merely pointed to him as he stood with his head bent forward, and his earnest gaze fixed closely on his questioner's face; and nodded sagely.

'Tell him then, Barnaby, should he be engaged,' said Mr Chester, 'that I shall be glad to wait his convenience here, and to see him (if he will call) at any time this evening.—At the worst I can have a bed here, Willet, I suppose?'

Old John, immensely flattered by the personal notoriety implied in this familiar form of address, answered, with something like a knowing look, 'I should believe you could, sir,' and was turning over in his mind various forms of eulogium, with the view of selecting one appropriate to the qualities of his best bed, when his ideas were put to flight by Mr Chester giving Barnaby the letter, and bidding him make all speed away.

'Speed!' said Barnaby, folding the little packet in his breast, 'Speed! If you want to see hurry and mystery, come here. Here!'

With that, he put his hand, very much to John Willet's horror, on the guest's fine broadcloth sleeve, and led him stealthily to the back window.

'Look down there,' he said softly; 'do you mark how they whisper in each other's ears; then dance and leap, to make believe they are in sport? Do you see how they stop for a moment, when they think there is no one looking, and mutter among themselves again; and then how they roll and gambol, delighted with the mischief they've been plotting? Look at 'em now. See how they whirl and plunge. And now they stop again, and whisper, cautiously together—little thinking, mind, how often I have lain upon the grass and watched them. I say what is it that they plot and hatch? Do you know?'

'They are only clothes,' returned the guest, 'such as we wear; hanging on those lines to dry, and fluttering in the wind.'

'Clothes!' echoed Barnaby, looking close into his face, and falling quickly back. 'Ha ha! Why, how much better to be silly, than as wise as you! You don't see shadowy people there, like those that live in sleep—not you. Nor eyes in the knotted panes of glass, nor swift ghosts when it blows hard, nor do you hear voices in the air, nor see men stalking in the sky—not you! I lead a merrier life than you, with all your cleverness. You're the dull men. We're the bright ones. Ha! ha! I'll not change with you, clever as you are,—not I!'

With that, he waved his hat above his head, and darted off.

'A strange creature, upon my word!' said the guest, pulling out a handsome box, and taking a pinch of snuff.

'He wants imagination,' said Mr Willet, very slowly, and after a long silence; 'that's what he wants. I've tried to instil it into him, many and many's the time; but'—John added this in confidence—'he an't made for it; that's the fact.'

To record that Mr Chester smiled at John's remark would be little to the purpose, for he preserved the same conciliatory and pleasant look at all times. He drew his chair nearer to the fire though, as a kind of hint that he would prefer to be alone, and John, having no reasonable excuse for remaining, left him to himself.

Very thoughtful old John Willet was, while the dinner was preparing; and if his brain were ever less clear at one time than another, it is but reasonable to suppose that he addled it in no slight degree by shaking his head so much that day. That Mr Chester, between whom and Mr Haredale, it was notorious to all the neighbourhood, a deep and bitter animosity existed, should come down there for the sole purpose, as it seemed, of seeing him, and should choose the Maypole for their place of meeting, and should send to him express, were stumbling blocks John could not overcome. The only resource he had, was to consult the boiler, and wait impatiently for Barnaby's return.

But Barnaby delayed beyond all precedent. The visitor's dinner was served, removed, his wine was set, the fire replenished, the hearth clean swept; the light waned without, it grew dusk, became quite dark, and still no Barnaby appeared. Yet, though John Willet was full of wonder and misgiving, his guest sat cross-legged in the easy-chair, to all appearance as little ruffled in his thoughts as in his dress—the same calm, easy, cool gentleman, without a care or thought beyond his golden toothpick.

'Barnaby's late,' John ventured to observe, as he placed a pair of tarnished candlesticks, some three feet high, upon the table, and snuffed the lights they held.

'He is rather so,' replied the guest, sipping his wine. 'He will not be much longer, I dare say.'

John coughed and raked the fire together.

'As your roads bear no very good character, if I may judge from my son's mishap, though,' said Mr Chester, 'and as I have no fancy to be knocked on the head—which is not only disconcerting at the moment, but places one, besides, in a ridiculous position with respect to the people who chance to pick one up—I shall stop here to-night. I think you said you had a bed to spare.'

'Such a bed, sir,' returned John Willet; 'ay, such a bed as few, even of the gentry's houses, own. A fixter here, sir. I've heard say that bedstead is nigh two hundred years of age. Your noble son—a fine young gentleman—slept in it last, sir, half a year ago.'

'Upon my life, a recommendation!' said the guest, shrugging his shoulders and wheeling his chair nearer to the fire. 'See that it be well aired, Mr Willet, and let a blazing fire be lighted there at once. This house is something damp and chilly.'

John raked the faggots up again, more from habit than presence of mind, or any reference to this remark, and was about to withdraw, when a bounding step was heard upon the stair, and Barnaby came panting in.

'He'll have his foot in the stirrup in an hour's time,' he cried, advancing. 'He has been riding hard all day—has just come home—but will be in the saddle again as soon as he has eat and drank, to meet his loving friend.'

'Was that his message?' asked the visitor, looking up, but without the smallest discomposure—or at least without the show of any.

'All but the last words,' Barnaby rejoined. 'He meant those. I saw that, in his face.'

'This for your pains,' said the other, putting money in his hand, and glancing at him steadfastly.' This for your pains, sharp Barnaby.'

'For Grip, and me, and Hugh, to share among us,' he rejoined, putting it up, and nodding, as he counted it on his fingers. 'Grip one, me two, Hugh three; the dog, the goat, the cats—well, we shall spend it pretty soon, I warn you. Stay.—Look. Do you wise men see nothing there, now?'

He bent eagerly down on one knee, and gazed intently at the smoke, which was rolling up the chimney in a thick black cloud. John Willet, who appeared to consider himself particularly and chiefly referred to under the term wise men, looked that way likewise, and with great solidity of feature.

'Now, where do they go to, when they spring so fast up there,' asked Barnaby; 'eh? Why do they tread so closely on each other's heels, and why are they always in a hurry—which is what you blame me for, when I only take pattern by these busy folk about me? More of 'em! catching to each other's skirts; and as fast as they go, others come! What a merry dance it is! I would that Grip and I could frisk like that!'

'What has he in that basket at his back?' asked the guest after a few moments, during which Barnaby was still bending down to look higher up the chimney, and earnestly watching the smoke.

'In this?' he answered, jumping up, before John Willet could reply—shaking it as he spoke, and stooping his head to listen. 'In this! What is there here? Tell him!'

'A devil, a devil, a devil!' cried a hoarse voice.

'Here's money!' said Barnaby, chinking it in his hand, 'money for a treat, Grip!'

'Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!' replied the raven, 'keep up your spirits. Never say die. Bow, wow, wow!'

Mr Willet, who appeared to entertain strong doubts whether a customer in a laced coat and fine linen could be supposed to have any acquaintance even with the existence of such unpolite gentry as the bird claimed to belong to, took Barnaby off at this juncture, with the view of preventing any other improper declarations, and quitted the room with his very best bow.

Chapter 11

There was great news that night for the regular Maypole customers, to each of whom, as he straggled in to occupy his allotted seat in the chimney-corner, John, with a most impressive slowness of delivery, and in an apoplectic whisper, communicated the fact that Mr Chester was alone in the large room upstairs, and was waiting the arrival of Mr Geoffrey Haredale, to whom he had sent a letter (doubtless of a threatening nature) by the hands of Barnaby, then and there present.

For a little knot of smokers and solemn gossips, who had seldom any new topics of discussion, this was a perfect Godsend. Here was a good, dark-looking mystery progressing under that very roof—brought home to the fireside, as it were, and enjoyable without the smallest pains or trouble. It is extraordinary what a zest and relish it gave to the drink, and how it heightened the flavour of the tobacco. Every man smoked his pipe with a face of grave and serious delight, and looked at his neighbour with a sort of quiet congratulation. Nay, it was felt to be such a holiday and special night, that, on the motion of little Solomon Daisy, every man (including John himself) put down his sixpence for a can of flip, which grateful beverage was brewed with all despatch, and set down in the midst of them on the brick floor; both that it might simmer and stew before the fire, and that its fragrant steam, rising up among them, and mixing with the wreaths of vapour from their pipes, might shroud them in a delicious atmosphere of their own, and shut out all the world. The very furniture of the room seemed to mellow and deepen in its tone; the ceiling and walls looked blacker and more highly polished, the curtains of a ruddier red; the fire burnt clear and high, and the crickets in the hearthstone chirped with a more than wonted satisfaction.

There were present two, however, who showed but little interest in the general contentment. Of these, one was Barnaby himself, who slept, or, to avoid being beset with questions, feigned to sleep, in the chimney-corner; the other, Hugh, who, sleeping too, lay stretched upon the bench on the opposite side, in the full glare of the blazing fire.

The light that fell upon this slumbering form, showed it in all its muscular and handsome proportions. It was that of a young man, of a hale athletic figure, and a giant's strength, whose sunburnt face and swarthy throat, overgrown with jet black hair, might have served a painter for a model. Loosely attired, in the coarsest and roughest garb, with scraps of straw and hay—his usual bed—clinging here and there, and mingling with his uncombed locks, he had fallen asleep in a posture as careless as his dress. The negligence and disorder of the whole man, with something fierce and sullen in his features, gave him a picturesque appearance, that attracted the regards even of the Maypole customers who knew him well, and caused Long Parkes to say that Hugh looked more like a poaching rascal to-night than ever he had seen him yet.

'He's waiting here, I suppose,' said Solomon, 'to take Mr Haredale's horse.'

'That's it, sir,' replied John Willet. 'He's not often in the house, you know. He's more at his ease among horses than men. I look upon him as a animal himself.'

Following up this opinion with a shrug that seemed meant to say, 'we can't expect everybody to be like us,' John put his pipe into his mouth again, and smoked like one who felt his superiority over the general run of mankind.

'That chap, sir,' said John, taking it out again after a time, and pointing at him with the stem, 'though he's got all his faculties about him—bottled up and corked down, if I may say so, somewheres or another—'

'Very good!' said Parkes, nodding his head. 'A very good expression, Johnny. You'll be a tackling somebody presently. You're in twig to-night, I see.'

'Take care,' said Mr Willet, not at all grateful for the compliment, 'that I don't tackle you, sir, which I shall certainly endeavour to do, if you interrupt me when I'm making observations.—That chap, I was a saying, though he has all his faculties about him, somewheres or another, bottled up and corked down, has no more imagination than Barnaby has. And why hasn't he?'

The three friends shook their heads at each other; saying by that action, without the trouble of opening their lips, 'Do you observe what a philosophical mind our friend has?'

'Why hasn't he?' said John, gently striking the table with his open hand. 'Because they was never drawed out of him when he was a boy. That's why. What would any of us have been, if our fathers hadn't drawed our faculties out of us? What would my boy Joe have been, if I hadn't drawed his faculties out of him?—Do you mind what I'm a saying of, gentlemen?'

'Ah! we mind you,' cried Parkes. 'Go on improving of us, Johnny.'

'Consequently, then,' said Mr Willet, 'that chap, whose mother was hung when he was a little boy, along with six others, for passing bad notes—and it's a blessed thing to think how many people are hung in batches every six weeks for that, and such like offences, as showing how wide awake our government is—that chap that was then turned loose, and had to mind cows, and frighten birds away, and what not, for a few pence to live on, and so got on by degrees to mind horses, and to sleep in course of time in lofts and litter, instead of under haystacks and hedges, till at last he come to be hostler at the Maypole for his board and lodging and a annual trifle—that chap that can't read nor write, and has never had much to do with anything but animals, and has never lived in any way but like the animals he has lived among, IS a animal. And,' said Mr Willet, arriving at his logical conclusion, 'is to be treated accordingly.'

'Willet,' said Solomon Daisy, who had exhibited some impatience at the intrusion of so unworthy a subject on their more interesting theme, 'when Mr Chester come this morning, did he order the large room?'

'He signified, sir,' said John, 'that he wanted a large apartment. Yes. Certainly.'

'Why then, I'll tell you what,' said Solomon, speaking softly and with an earnest look. 'He and Mr Haredale are going to fight a duel in it.'

Everybody looked at Mr Willet, after this alarming suggestion. Mr Willet looked at the fire, weighing in his own mind the effect which such an occurrence would be likely to have on the establishment.

'Well,' said John, 'I don't know—I am sure—I remember that when I went up last, he HAD put the lights upon the mantel-shelf.'

'It's as plain,' returned Solomon, 'as the nose on Parkes's face'—Mr Parkes, who had a large nose, rubbed it, and looked as if he considered this a personal allusion—'they'll fight in that room. You know by the newspapers what a common thing it is for gentlemen to fight in coffee-houses without seconds. One of 'em will be wounded or perhaps killed in this house.'

'That was a challenge that Barnaby took then, eh?' said John.

'—Inclosing a slip of paper with the measure of his sword upon it, I'll bet a guinea,' answered the little man. 'We know what sort of gentleman Mr

Haredale is. You have told us what Barnaby said about his looks, when he came back. Depend upon it, I'm right. Now, mind.'

The flip had had no flavour till now. The tobacco had been of mere English growth, compared with its present taste. A duel in that great old rambling room upstairs, and the best bed ordered already for the wounded man!

'Would it be swords or pistols, now?' said John.

'Heaven knows. Perhaps both,' returned Solomon. 'The gentlemen wear swords, and may easily have pistols in their pockets—most likely have, indeed. If they fire at each other without effect, then they'll draw, and go to work in earnest.'

A shade passed over Mr Willet's face as he thought of broken windows and disabled furniture, but bethinking himself that one of the parties would probably be left alive to pay the damage, he brightened up again.

'And then,' said Solomon, looking from face to face, 'then we shall have one of those stains upon the floor that never come out. If Mr Haredale wins, depend upon it, it'll be a deep one; or if he loses, it will perhaps be deeper still, for he'll never give in unless he's beaten down. We know him better, eh?'

'Better indeed!' they whispered all together.

'As to its ever being got out again,' said Solomon, 'I tell you it never will, or can be. Why, do you know that it has been tried, at a certain house we are acquainted with?'

'The Warren!' cried John. 'No, sure!'

'Yes, sure—yes. It's only known by very few. It has been whispered about though, for all that. They planed the board away, but there it was. They went deep, but it went deeper. They put new boards down, but there was one great spot that came through still, and showed itself in the old place. And—harkye—draw nearer—Mr Geoffrey made that room his study, and sits there, always, with his foot (as I have heard) upon it; and he believes, through thinking of it long and very much, that it will never fade until he finds the man who did the deed.'

As this recital ended, and they all drew closer round the fire, the tramp of a horse was heard without.

'The very man!' cried John, starting up. 'Hugh! Hugh!'

The sleeper staggered to his feet, and hurried after him. John quickly returned, ushering in with great attention and deference (for Mr Haredale was his landlord) the long-expected visitor, who strode into the room clanking his heavy boots upon the floor; and looking keenly round upon the bowing group, raised his hat in acknowledgment of their profound respect.

'You have a stranger here, Willet, who sent to me,' he said, in a voice which sounded naturally stern and deep. 'Where is he?'

'In the great room upstairs, sir,' answered John.

'Show the way. Your staircase is dark, I know. Gentlemen, good night.'

With that, he signed to the landlord to go on before; and went clanking out, and up the stairs; old John, in his agitation, ingeniously lighting everything but the way, and making a stumble at every second step.

'Stop!' he said, when they reached the landing. 'I can announce myself. Don't wait.'

He laid his hand upon the door, entered, and shut it heavily. Mr Willet was by no means disposed to stand there listening by himself, especially as the walls were very thick; so descended, with much greater alacrity than he had come up, and joined his friends below.

Chapter 12

There was a brief pause in the state-room of the Maypole, as Mr Haredale tried the lock to satisfy himself that he had shut the door securely, and, striding up the dark chamber to where the screen inclosed a little patch of light and warmth, presented himself, abruptly and in silence, before the smiling guest.

If the two had no greater sympathy in their inward thoughts than in their outward bearing and appearance, the meeting did not seem likely to prove a very calm or pleasant one. With no great disparity between them in point of years, they were, in every other respect, as unlike and far removed from each other as two men could well be. The one was soft-spoken, delicately made, precise, and elegant; the other, a burly square-built man, negligently dressed, rough and abrupt in manner, stern, and, in his present mood, forbidding both in look and speech. The one preserved a calm and placid smile; the other, a distrustful frown. The new-comer, indeed, appeared bent on showing by his every tone and gesture his determined opposition and hostility to the man he had come to meet. The guest who received him, on the other hand, seemed to feel that the contrast between them was all in his favour, and to derive a quiet exultation from it which put him more at his ease than ever.

'Haredale,' said this gentleman, without the least appearance of embarrassment or reserve, 'I am very glad to see you.'

'Let us dispense with compliments. They are misplaced between us,' returned the other, waving his hand, 'and say plainly what we have to say. You have asked me to meet you. I am here. Why do we stand face to face again?'

'Still the same frank and sturdy character, I see!'

'Good or bad, sir, I am,' returned the other, leaning his arm upon the chimney-piece, and turning a haughty look upon the occupant of the easy-chair, 'the man I used to be. I have lost no old likings or dislikings; my memory has not failed me by a hair's-breadth. You ask me to give you a meeting. I say, I am here.'

'Our meeting, Haredale,' said Mr Chester, tapping his snuff-box, and following with a smile the impatient gesture he had made—perhaps unconsciously—towards his sword, 'is one of conference and peace, I hope?'

'I have come here,' returned the other, 'at your desire, holding myself bound to meet you, when and where you would. I have not come to bandy pleasant speeches, or hollow professions. You are a smooth man of the world, sir, and at such play have me at a disadvantage. The very last man on this earth with whom I would enter the lists to combat with gentle compliments and masked faces, is Mr Chester, I do assure you. I am not his match at such weapons, and have reason to believe that few men are.'

'You do me a great deal of honour Haredale,' returned the other, most composedly, 'and I thank you. I will be frank with you—'

'I beg your pardon—will be what?'

'Frank—open—perfectly candid.'

'Hab!' cried Mr Haredale, drawing his breath. 'But don't let me interrupt you.'

'So resolved am I to hold this course,' returned the other, tasting his wine with great deliberation; 'that I have determined not to quarrel with you, and not to be betrayed into a warm expression or a hasty word.'

'There again,' said Mr Haredale, 'you have me at a great advantage. Your self-command—'

'Is not to be disturbed, when it will serve my purpose, you would say'—rejoined the other, interrupting him with the same complacency. 'Granted. I allow it. And I have a purpose to serve now. So have you. I am sure our object is the same. Let us attain it like sensible men, who have ceased to be boys some time.—Do you drink?'

'With my friends,' returned the other.

'At least,' said Mr Chester, 'you will be seated?'

'I will stand,' returned Mr Haredale impatiently, 'on this dismantled, beggared hearth, and not pollute it, fallen as it is, with mockeries. Go on.'

'You are wrong, Haredale,' said the other, crossing his legs, and smiling as he held his glass up in the bright glow of the fire. 'You are really very wrong. The world is a lively place enough, in which we must accommodate ourselves to circumstances, sail with the stream as glibly as we can, be content to take froth for substance, the surface for the depth, the counterfeit for the real coin. I wonder no philosopher has ever established that our globe itself is hollow. It should be, if Nature is consistent in her works.'

'YOU think it is, perhaps?'

'I should say,' he returned, sipping his wine, 'there could be no doubt about it. Well; we, in trifling with this jingling toy, have had the ill-luck to jostle and fall out. We are not what the world calls friends; but we are as good and true and loving friends for all that, as nine out of every ten of those on whom it bestows the title. You have a niece, and I a son—a fine lad, Haredale, but foolish. They fall in love with each other, and form what this same world calls an attachment; meaning a something fanciful and false like the rest, which, if it took its own free time, would break like any other bubble. But it may not have its own free time—will not, if they are left alone—and the question is, shall we two, because society calls us enemies, stand aloof, and let them rush into each other's arms, when, by approaching each other sensibly, as we do now, we can prevent it, and part them?'

'I love my niece,' said Mr Haredale, after a short silence. 'It may sound strangely in your ears; but I love her.'

'Strangely, my good fellow!' cried Mr Chester, lazily filling his glass again, and pulling out his toothpick. 'Not at all. I like Ned too—or, as you say, love him—that's the word among such near relations. I'm very fond of Ned. He's an amazingly good fellow, and a handsome fellow—foolish and weak as yet; that's all. But the thing is, Haredale—for I'll be very frank, as I told you I would at first—independently of any dislike that you and I might have to being related to each other, and independently of the religious differences between us—and damn it, that's important—I couldn't afford a match of this description. Ned and I couldn't do it. It's impossible.'

'Curb your tongue, in God's name, if this conversation is to last,' retorted Mr Haredale fiercely. 'I have said I love my niece. Do you think that, loving her, I would have her fling her heart away on any man who had your blood in his veins?'

'You see,' said the other, not at all disturbed, 'the advantage of being so frank and open. Just what I was about to add, upon my honour! I am amazingly attached to Ned—quite doat upon him, indeed—and even if we could afford to throw ourselves away, that very objection would be quite insuperable.—I wish you'd take some wine?'

'Mark me,' said Mr Haredale, striding to the table, and laying his hand upon it heavily. 'If any man believes—presumes to think—that I, in word or deed, or in the wildest dream, ever entertained remotely the idea of Emma Haredale's favouring the suit of any one who was akin to you—in any way

—I care not what—he lies. He lies, and does me grievous wrong, in the mere thought.'

'Haredale,' returned the other, rocking himself to and fro as in assent, and nodding at the fire, 'it's extremely manly, and really very generous in you, to meet me in this unreserved and handsome way. Upon my word, those are exactly my sentiments, only expressed with much more force and power than I could use—you know my sluggish nature, and will forgive me, I am sure.'

'While I would restrain her from all correspondence with your son, and sever their intercourse here, though it should cause her death,' said Mr Haredale, who had been pacing to and fro, 'I would do it kindly and tenderly if I can. I have a trust to discharge, which my nature is not formed to understand, and, for this reason, the bare fact of there being any love between them comes upon me to-night, almost for the first time.'

'I am more delighted than I can possibly tell you,' rejoined Mr Chester with the utmost blandness, 'to find my own impression so confirmed. You see the advantage of our having met. We understand each other. We quite agree. We have a most complete and thorough explanation, and we know what course to take.—Why don't you taste your tenant's wine? It's really very good.'

'Pray who,' said Mr Haredale, 'have aided Emma, or your son? Who are their go-betweens, and agents—do you know?'

'All the good people hereabouts—the neighbourhood in general, I think,' returned the other, with his most affable smile. 'The messenger I sent to you to-day, foremost among them all.'

'The idiot? Barnaby?'

'You are surprised? I am glad of that, for I was rather so myself. Yes. I wrung that from his mother—a very decent sort of woman—from whom, indeed, I chiefly learnt how serious the matter had become, and so determined to ride out here to-day, and hold a parley with you on this neutral ground.—You're stouter than you used to be, Haredale, but you look extremely well.'

'Our business, I presume, is nearly at an end,' said Mr Haredale, with an expression of impatience he was at no pains to conceal. 'Trust me, Mr Chester, my niece shall change from this time. I will appeal,' he added in a lower tone, 'to her woman's heart, her dignity, her pride, her duty—'

'I shall do the same by Ned,' said Mr Chester, restoring some errant faggots to their places in the grate with the toe of his boot. 'If there is anything real in this world, it is those amazingly fine feelings and those natural obligations which must subsist between father and son. I shall put it to him on every ground of moral and religious feeling. I shall represent to him that we cannot possibly afford it—that I have always looked forward to his marrying well, for a genteel provision for myself in the autumn of life—that there are a great many clamorous dogs to pay, whose claims are perfectly just and right, and who must be paid out of his wife's fortune. In short, that the very highest and most honourable feelings of our nature, with every consideration of filial duty and affection, and all that sort of thing, imperatively demand that he should run away with an heiress.'

'And break her heart as speedily as possible?' said Mr Haredale, drawing on his glove.

'There Ned will act exactly as he pleases,' returned the other, sipping his wine; 'that's entirely his affair. I wouldn't for the world interfere with my son, Haredale, beyond a certain point. The relationship between father and son, you know, is positively quite a holy kind of bond.—WON'T you let me persuade you to take one glass of wine? Well! as you please, as you please,' he added, helping himself again.

'Chester,' said Mr Haredale, after a short silence, during which he had eyed his smiling face from time to time intently, 'you have the head and heart of an evil spirit in all matters of deception.'

'Your health!' said the other, with a nod. 'But I have interrupted you—'

'If now,' pursued Mr Haredale, 'we should find it difficult to separate these young people, and break off their intercourse—if, for instance, you find it difficult on your side, what course do you intend to take?'

'Nothing plainer, my good fellow, nothing easier,' returned the other, shrugging his shoulders and stretching himself more comfortably before the fire. 'I shall then exert those powers on which you flatter me so highly—though, upon my word, I don't deserve your compliments to their full extent—and resort to a few little trivial subterfuges for rousing jealousy and resentment. You see?'

'In short, justifying the means by the end, we are, as a last resource for tearing them asunder, to resort to treachery and—and lying,' said Mr Haredale.

'Oh dear no. Fie, fie!' returned the other, relishing a pinch of snuff extremely. 'Not lying. Only a little management, a little diplomacy, a little—intriguing, that's the word.'

'I wish,' said Mr Haredale, moving to and fro, and stopping, and moving on again, like one who was ill at ease, 'that this could have been foreseen or prevented. But as it has gone so far, and it is necessary for us to act, it is of no use shrinking or regretting. Well! I shall second your endeavours to the utmost of my power. There is one topic in the whole wide range of human thoughts on which we both agree. We shall act in concert, but apart. There will be no need, I hope, for us to meet again.'

'Are you going?' said Mr Chester, rising with a graceful indolence. 'Let me light you down the stairs.'

'Pray keep your seat,' returned the other drily, 'I know the way. So, waving his hand slightly, and putting on his hat as he turned upon his heel, he went clanking out as he had come, shut the door behind him, and tramped down the echoing stairs.

'Pah! A very coarse animal, indeed!' said Mr Chester, composing himself in the easy-chair again. 'A rough brute. Quite a human badger!'

John Willet and his friends, who had been listening intently for the clash of swords, or firing of pistols in the great room, and had indeed settled the order in which they should rush in when summoned—in which procession old John had carefully arranged that he should bring up the rear—were very much astonished to see Mr Haredale come down without a scratch, call for his horse, and ride away thoughtfully at a footpace. After some consideration, it was decided that he had left the gentleman above, for dead, and had adopted this stratagem to divert suspicion or pursuit.

As this conclusion involved the necessity of their going upstairs forthwith, they were about to ascend in the order they had agreed upon, when a smart ringing at the guest's bell, as if he had pulled it vigorously, overthrew all their speculations, and involved them in great uncertainty and doubt. At length Mr Willet agreed to go upstairs himself, escorted by Hugh and Barnaby, as the strongest and stoutest fellows on the premises, who were to make their appearance under pretence of clearing away the glasses.

Under this protection, the brave and broad-faced John boldly entered the room, half a foot in advance, and received an order for a boot-jack without trembling. But when it was brought, and he leant his sturdy shoulder to the guest, Mr Willet was observed to look very hard into his boots as he pulled them off, and, by opening his eyes much wider than usual, to appear to express some surprise and disappointment at not finding them full of blood. He took occasion, too, to examine the gentleman as closely as he could, expecting to discover sundry loopholes in his person, pierced by his adversary's sword. Finding none, however, and observing in course of time that his guest was as cool and unruffled, both in his dress and temper, as he had been all day, old John at last heaved a deep sigh, and began to think no duel had been fought that night.

'And now, Willet,' said Mr Chester, 'if the room's well aired, I'll try the merits of that famous bed.'

'The room, sir,' returned John, taking up a candle, and nudging Barnaby and Hugh to accompany them, in case the gentleman should unexpectedly drop down faint or dead from some internal wound, 'the room's as warm as any toast in a tankard. Barnaby, take you that other candle, and go on before. Hugh! Follow up, sir, with the easy-chair.'

In this order—and still, in his earnest inspection, holding his candle very close to the guest; now making him feel extremely warm about the legs, now threatening to set his wig on fire, and constantly begging his pardon with great awkwardness and embarrassment—John led the party to the best bedroom, which was nearly as large as the chamber from which they had come, and held, drawn out near the fire for warmth, a great old spectral bedstead, hung with faded brocade, and ornamented, at the top of each carved post, with a plume of feathers that had once been white, but with dust and age had now grown hearse-like and funereal.

'Good night, my friends,' said Mr Chester with a sweet smile, seating himself, when he had surveyed the room from end to end, in the easy-chair which his attendants wheeled before the fire. 'Good night! Barnaby, my good fellow, you say some prayers before you go to bed, I hope?'

Barnaby nodded. 'He has some nonsense that he calls his prayers, sir,' returned old John, officiously. 'I'm afraid there an't much good in em.'

'And Hugh?' said Mr Chester, turning to him.

'Not I,' he answered. 'I know his'—pointing to Barnaby—'they're well enough. He sings 'em sometimes in the straw. I listen.'

'He's quite a animal, sir,' John whispered in his ear with dignity. 'You'll excuse him, I'm sure. If he has any soul at all, sir, it must be such a very small one, that it don't signify what he does or doesn't in that way. Good night, sir!'

The guest rejoined 'God bless you!' with a fervour that was quite affecting; and John, beckoning his guards to go before, bowed himself out of the room, and left him to his rest in the Maypole's ancient bed.

Chapter 13

If Joseph Willet, the denounced and proscribed of 'prentices, had happened to be at home when his father's courtly guest presented himself before the Maypole door—that is, if it had not perversely chanced to be one of the half-dozen days in the whole year on which he was at liberty to absent himself for as many hours without question or reproach—he would have contrived, by hook or crook, to dive to the very bottom of Mr Chester's mystery, and to come at his purpose with as much certainty as though he had been his confidential adviser. In that fortunate case, the lovers would have had quick warning of the ills that threatened them, and the aid of various timely and wise suggestions to boot; for all Joe's readiness of thought and action, and all his sympathies and good wishes, were enlisted in favour of the young people, and were staunch in devotion to their cause. Whether this disposition arose out of his old prepossessions in favour of the young lady, whose history had surrounded her in his mind, almost from his cradle, with circumstances of unusual interest; or from his attachment towards the young gentleman, into whose confidence he had, through his shrewdness and alacrity, and the rendering of sundry important services as a spy and messenger, almost imperceptibly glided; whether they had their origin in either of these sources, or in the habit natural to youth, or in the constant badgering and worrying of his venerable parent, or in any hidden little love affair of his own which gave him something of a fellow-feeling in the matter, it is needless to inquire—especially as Joe was out of the way, and had no opportunity on that particular occasion of testifying to his sentiments either on one side or the other.

It was, in fact, the twenty-fifth of March, which, as most people know to their cost, is, and has been time out of mind, one of those unpleasant epochs termed quarter-days. On this twenty-fifth of March, it was John Willet's pride annually to settle, in hard cash, his account with a certain vintner and distiller in the city of London; to give into whose hands a canvas bag containing its exact amount, and not a penny more or less, was the end and object of a journey for Joe, so surely as the year and day came round.

This journey was performed upon an old grey mare, concerning whom John had an indistinct set of ideas hovering about him, to the effect that she could win a plate or cup if she tried. She never had tried, and probably never would now, being some fourteen or fifteen years of age, short in wind, long in body, and rather the worse for wear in respect of her mane and tail. Notwithstanding these slight defects, John perfectly gloried in the animal; and when she was brought round to the door by Hugh, actually retired into the bar, and there, in a secret grove of lemons, laughed with pride.

'There's a bit of horseflesh, Hugh!' said John, when he had recovered enough self-command to appear at the door again. 'There's a comely creature! There's high mettle! There's bone!'

There was bone enough beyond all doubt; and so Hugh seemed to think, as he sat sideways in the saddle, lazily doubled up with his chin nearly touching his knees; and heedless of the dangling stirrups and loose bridle-rein, sauntered up and down on the little green before the door.

'Mind you take good care of her, sir,' said John, appealing from this insensible person to his son and heir, who now appeared, fully equipped and ready. 'Don't you ride hard.'

'I should be puzzled to do that, I think, father,' Joe replied, casting a disconsolate look at the animal.

'None of your impudence, sir, if you please,' retorted old John. 'What would you ride, sir? A wild ass or zebra would be too tame for you, wouldn't he, eh sir? You'd like to ride a roaring lion, wouldn't you, sir, eh sir? Hold your tongue, sir.' When Mr Willet, in his differences with his son, had exhausted all the questions that occurred to him, and Joe had said nothing at all in answer, he generally wound up by bidding him hold his tongue.

'And what does the boy mean,' added Mr Willet, after he had stared at him for a little time, in a species of stupefaction, 'by cocking his hat, to such an extent! Are you going to kill the wintner, sir?'

'No,' said Joe, tartly; 'I'm not. Now your mind's at ease, father.'

'With a milintary air, too!' said Mr Willet, surveying him from top to toe; 'with a swaggering, fire-eating, biling-water drinking sort of way with him! And what do you mean by pulling up the crocuses and snowdrops, eh sir?'

'It's only a little nosegay,' said Joe, reddening. 'There's no harm in that, I hope?'

'You're a boy of business, you are, sir!' said Mr Willet, disdainfully, 'to go supposing that wintners care for nosegays.'

'I don't suppose anything of the kind,' returned Joe. 'Let them keep their red noses for bottles and tankards. These are going to Mr Varden's house.'

'And do you suppose HE minds such things as crocuses?' demanded John.

'I don't know, and to say the truth, I don't care,' said Joe. 'Come, father, give me the money, and in the name of patience let me go.'

'There it is, sir,' replied John; 'and take care of it; and mind you don't make too much haste back, but give the mare a long rest.—Do you mind?'

'Ay, I mind,' returned Joe. 'She'll need it, Heaven knows.'

'And don't you score up too much at the Black Lion,' said John. 'Mind that too.'

'Then why don't you let me have some money of my own?' retorted Joe, sorrowfully; 'why don't you, father? What do you send me into London for, giving me only the right to call for my dinner at the Black Lion, which you're to pay for next time you go, as if I was not to be trusted with a few shillings? Why do you use me like this? It's not right of you. You can't expect me to be quiet under it.'

'Let him have money!' cried John, in a drowsy reverie. 'What does he call money—guineas? Hasn't he got money? Over and above the tolls, hasn't he one and sixpence?'

'One and sixpence!' repeated his son contemptuously.

'Yes, sir,' returned John, 'one and sixpence. When I was your age, I had never seen so much money, in a heap. A shilling of it is in case of accidents—the mare casting a shoe, or the like of that. The other sixpence is to spend in the diversions of London; and the diversion I recommend is going to the top of the Monument, and sitting there. There's no temptation there, sir—no drink—no young women—no bad characters of any sort—nothing but imagination. That's the way I enjoyed myself when I was your age, sir.'

To this, Joe made no answer, but beckoning Hugh, leaped into the saddle and rode away; and a very stalwart, manly horseman he looked, deserving a better charger than it was his fortune to bestride. John stood staring after him, or rather after the grey mare (for he had no eyes for her rider), until man and beast had been out of sight some twenty minutes, when he began to think they were gone, and slowly re-entering the house, fell into a gentle doze.

The unfortunate grey mare, who was the agony of Joe's life, floundered along at her own will and pleasure until the Maypole was no longer visible, and then, contracting her legs into what in a puppet would have been looked upon as a clumsy and awkward imitation of a canter, mended her pace all at once, and did it of her own accord. The acquaintance with her rider's usual mode of proceeding, which suggested this improvement in hers, impelled her likewise to turn up a bye-way, leading—not to London, but through lanes running parallel with the road they had come, and passing within a few hundred yards of the Maypole, which led finally to an inclosure surrounding a large, old, red-brick mansion—the same of which mention was made as the Warren in the first chapter of this history. Coming to a dead stop in a little copse thereabout, she suffered her rider to dismount with right goodwill, and to tie her to the trunk of a tree.

'Stay there, old girl,' said Joe, 'and let us see whether there's any little commission for me to-day.' So saying, he left her to browze upon such stunted grass and weeds as happened to grow within the length of her tether, and passing through a wicket gate, entered the grounds on foot.

The pathway, after a very few minutes' walking, brought him close to the house, towards which, and especially towards one particular window, he directed many covert glances. It was a dreary, silent building, with echoing courtyards, desolated turret-chambers, and whole suites of rooms shut up and mouldering to ruin.

The terrace-garden, dark with the shade of overhanging trees, had an air of melancholy that was quite oppressive. Great iron gates, disused for many years, and red with rust, drooping on their hinges and overgrown with long rank grass, seemed as though they tried to sink into the ground, and hide their fallen state among the friendly weeds. The fantastic monsters on the walls, green with age and damp, and covered here and there with moss, looked grim and desolate. There was a sombre aspect even on that part of the mansion which was inhabited and kept in good repair, that struck the beholder with a sense of sadness; of something forlorn and failing, whence cheerfulness was banished. It would have been difficult to imagine a bright fire blazing in the dull and darkened rooms, or to picture any gaiety of heart or revelry that the frowning walls shut in. It seemed a place where such things had been, but could be no more—the very ghost of a house, haunting the old spot in its old outward form, and that was all.

Much of this decayed and sombre look was attributable, no doubt, to the death of its former master, and the temper of its present occupant; but remembering the tale connected with the mansion, it seemed the very place for such a deed, and one that might have been its predestined theatre years upon years ago. Viewed with reference to this legend, the sheet of water where the steward's body had been found appeared to wear a black and sullen character, such as no other pool might own; the bell upon the roof that had told the tale of murder to the midnight wind, became a very phantom whose voice would raise the listener's hair on end; and every leafless bough that nodded to another, had its stealthy whispering of the crime.

Joe paced up and down the path, sometimes stopping in affected contemplation of the building or the prospect, sometimes leaning against a tree with an assumed air of idleness and indifference, but always keeping an eye upon the window he had singled out at first. After some quarter of an hour's delay, a small white hand was waved to him for an instant from this casement, and the young man, with a respectful bow, departed; saying under his breath as he crossed his horse again, 'No errand for me to-day!'

But the air of smartness, the cock of the hat to which John Willet had objected, and the spring nosegay, all betokened some little errand of his own, having a more interesting object than a vintner or even a locksmith. So, indeed, it turned out; for when he had settled with the vintner—whose place of business was down in some deep cellars hard by Thames Street, and who was as purple-faced an old gentleman as if he had all his life supported their arched roof on his head—when he had settled the account, and taken the receipt, and declined tasting more than three glasses of old sherry, to the unbounded astonishment of the purple-faced vintner, who, gimlet in hand, had projected an attack upon at least a score of dusty casks, and who stood transfixed, or morally gimleted as it were, to his own wall—when he had done all this, and disposed besides of a frugal dinner at the Black Lion in Whitechapel; spurning the Monument and John's advice, he turned his steps towards the locksmith's house, attracted by the eyes of blooming Dolly Varden.

Joe was by no means a sheepish fellow, but, for all that, when he got to the corner of the street in which the locksmith lived, he could by no means make up his mind to walk straight to the house. First, he resolved to stroll up another street for five minutes, then up another street for five minutes more, and so on until he had lost full half an hour, when he made a bold plunge and found himself with a red face and a beating heart in the smoky workshop.

'Joe Willet, or his ghost?' said Varden, rising from the desk at which he was busy with his books, and looking at him under his spectacles. 'Which is it? Joe in the flesh, eh? That's hearty. And how are all the Chigwell company, Joe?'

'Much as usual, sir—they and I agree as well as ever.'

'Well, well!' said the locksmith. 'We must be patient, Joe, and bear with old folks' foibles. How's the mare, Joe? Does she do the four miles an hour as easily as ever? Ha, ha, ha! Does she, Joe? Eh!—What have we there, Joe—a nosegay!'

'A very poor one, sir—I thought Miss Dolly—'

'No, no,' said Gabriel, dropping his voice, and shaking his head, 'not Dolly. Give 'em to her mother, Joe. A great deal better give 'em to her mother. Would you mind giving 'em to Mrs Varden, Joe?'

'Oh no, sir,' Joe replied, and endeavouring, but not with the greatest possible success, to hide his disappointment. 'I shall be very glad, I'm sure.'

'That's right,' said the locksmith, patting him on the back. 'It don't matter who has 'em, Joe?'

'Not a bit, sir.'—Dear heart, how the words stuck in his throat!

'Come in,' said Gabriel. 'I have just been called to tea. She's in the parlour.'

'She,' thought Joe. 'Which of 'em I wonder—Mrs or Miss?' The locksmith settled the doubt as neatly as if it had been expressed aloud, by leading him to the door, and saying, 'Martha, my dear, here's young Mr Willet.'

Now, Mrs Varden, regarding the Maypole as a sort of human mantrap, or decoy for husbands; viewing its proprietor, and all who aided and abetted him, in the light of so many poachers among Christian men; and believing, moreover, that the publicans coupled with sinners in Holy Writ were veritable licensed victuallers; was far from being favourably disposed towards her visitor. Wherefore she was taken faint directly; and being duly presented with the crocuses and snowdrops, divined on further consideration that they were the occasion of the languor which had seized upon her spirits. 'I'm afraid I couldn't bear the room another minute,' said the good lady, 'if they remained here. WOULD you excuse my putting them out of window?'

Joe begged she wouldn't mention it on any account, and smiled feebly as he saw them deposited on the sill outside. If anybody could have known the pains he had taken to make up that despised and misused bunch of flowers!—

'I feel it quite a relief to get rid of them, I assure you,' said Mrs Varden. 'I'm better already.' And indeed she did appear to have plucked up her spirits.

Joe expressed his gratitude to Providence for this favourable dispensation, and tried to look as if he didn't wonder where Dolly was.

'You're sad people at Chigwell, Mr Joseph,' said Mrs V.

'I hope not, ma'am,' returned Joe.

'You're the cruellest and most inconsiderate people in the world,' said Mrs Varden, bridling. 'I wonder old Mr Willet, having been a married man himself, doesn't know better than to conduct himself as he does. His doing it for profit is no excuse. I would rather pay the money twenty times over, and have Varden come home like a respectable and sober tradesman. If there is one character,' said Mrs Varden with great emphasis, 'that offends and disgusts me more than another, it is a sot.'

'Come, Martha, my dear,' said the locksmith cheerily, 'let us have tea, and don't let us talk about sots. There are none here, and Joe don't want to hear about them, I dare say.'

At this crisis, Miggs appeared with toast.

'I dare say he does not,' said Mrs Varden; 'and I dare say you do not, Varden. It's a very unpleasant subject, I have no doubt, though I won't say it's personal'—Miggs coughed—'whatever I may be forced to think'—Miggs sneezed expressively. 'You never will know, Varden, and nobody at young Mr Willet's age—you'll excuse me, sir—can be expected to know, what a woman suffers when she is waiting at home under such circumstances. If you don't believe me, as I know you don't, here's Miggs, who is only too often a witness of it—ask her.'

'Oh! she were very bad the other night, sir, indeed she were, said Miggs. 'If you hadn't the sweetness of an angel in you, mim, I don't think you could abear it, I raly don't.'

'Miggs,' said Mrs Varden, 'you're profane.'

'Begging your pardon, mim,' returned Miggs, with shrill rapidity, 'such was not my intentions, and such I hope is not my character, though I am but a servant.'

'Answering me, Miggs, and providing yourself,' retorted her mistress, looking round with dignity, 'is one and the same thing. How dare you speak of angels in connection with your sinful fellow-beings—mere'—said Mrs Varden, glancing at herself in a neighbouring mirror, and arranging the ribbon of her cap in a more becoming fashion—'mere worms and grovellers as we are!'

'I did not intend, mim, if you please, to give offence,' said Miggs, confident in the strength of her compliment, and developing strongly in the throat as usual, 'and I did not expect it would be took as such. I hope I know my own unworthiness, and that I hate and despise myself and all my fellow-creatures as every practicable Christian should.'

'You'll have the goodness, if you please,' said Mrs Varden, loftily, 'to step upstairs and see if Dolly has finished dressing, and to tell her that the chair that was ordered for her will be here in a minute, and that if she keeps it waiting, I shall send it away that instant.—I'm sorry to see that you don't take your tea, Varden, and that you don't take yours, Mr Joseph; though of course it would be foolish of me to expect that anything that can be had at home, and in the company of females, would please YOU.'

This pronoun was understood in the plural sense, and included both gentlemen, upon both of whom it was rather hard and undeserved, for Gabriel had applied himself to the meal with a very promising appetite, until it was spoilt by Mrs Varden herself, and Joe had as great a liking for the female society of the locksmith's house—or for a part of it at all events—as man could well entertain.

But he had no opportunity to say anything in his own defence, for at that moment Dolly herself appeared, and struck him quite dumb with her beauty. Never had Dolly looked so handsome as she did then, in all the glow and grace of youth, with all her charms increased a hundredfold by a most becoming dress, by a thousand little coquettish ways which nobody could assume with a better grace, and all the sparkling expectation of that accursed party. It is impossible to tell how Joe hated that party wherever it was, and all the other people who were going to it, whoever they were.

And she hardly looked at him—no, hardly looked at him. And when the chair was seen through the open door coming blundering into the workshop, she actually clapped her hands and seemed glad to go. But Joe gave her his arm—there was some comfort in that—and handed her into it. To see her seat herself inside, with her laughing eyes brighter than diamonds, and her hand—surely she had the prettiest hand in the world—on the ledge of the open window, and her little finger provokingly and pertly tilted up, as if it wondered why Joe didn't squeeze or kiss it! To think how well one or two of the modest snowdrops would have become that delicate bodice, and how they were lying neglected outside the parlour window! To see how Miggs looked on with a face expressive of knowing how all this loveliness was got up, and of being in the secret of every string and pin and hook and eye, and of saying it ain't half as real as you think, and I could look quite as well myself if I took the pains! To hear that provoking precious little scream when the chair was hoisted on its poles, and to catch that transient but not-to-be-forgotten vision of the happy face within—what torments and aggravations, and yet what delights were these! The very chairmen seemed favoured rivals as they bore her down the street.

There never was such an alteration in a small room in a small time as in that parlour when they went back to finish tea. So dark, so deserted, so perfectly disenchanted. It seemed such sheer nonsense to be sitting tamely there, when she was at a dance with more lovers than man could calculate fluttering about her—with the whole party doting on and adoring her, and wanting to marry her. Miggs was hovering about too; and the fact of her existence, the mere circumstance of her ever having been born, appeared, after Dolly, such an unaccountable practical joke. It was impossible to talk. It couldn't be done. He had nothing left for it but to stir his tea round, and round, and round, and ruminate on all the fascinations of the locksmith's lovely daughter.

Gabriel was dull too. It was a part of the certain uncertainty of Mrs Varden's temper, that when they were in this condition, she should be gay and sprightly.

'I need have a cheerful disposition, I am sure,' said the smiling housewife, 'to preserve any spirits at all; and how I do it I can scarcely tell.'

'Ah, mim,' sighed Miggs, 'begging your pardon for the interruption, there an't a many like you.'

'Take away, Miggs,' said Mrs Varden, rising, 'take away, pray. I know I'm a restraint here, and as I wish everybody to enjoy themselves as they best can, I feel I had better go.'

'No, no, Martha,' cried the locksmith. 'Stop here. I'm sure we shall be very sorry to lose you, eh Joe!' Joe started, and said 'Certainly.'

'Thank you, Varden, my dear,' returned his wife; 'but I know your wishes better. Tobacco and beer, or spirits, have much greater attractions than any I can boast of, and therefore I shall go and sit upstairs and look out of window, my love. Good night, Mr Joseph. I'm very glad to have seen you, and I only wish I could have provided something more suitable to your taste. Remember me very kindly if you please to old Mr Willet, and tell him that whenever he comes here I have a crow to pluck with him. Good night!'

Having uttered these words with great sweetness of manner, the good lady dropped a curtsey remarkable for its condescension, and serenely withdrew.

And it was for this Joe had looked forward to the twenty-fifth of March for weeks and weeks, and had gathered the flowers with so much care, and had cocked his hat, and made himself so smart! This was the end of all his bold determination, resolved upon for the hundredth time, to speak out to Dolly and tell her how he loved her! To see her for a minute—for but a minute—to find her going out to a party and glad to go; to be looked upon as a common pipe-smoker, beer-bibber, spirit-guzzler, and tosspot! He bade farewell to his friend the locksmith, and hastened to take horse at the Black Lion, thinking as he turned towards home, as many another Joe has thought before and since, that here was an end to all his hopes—that the thing was impossible and never could be—that she didn't care for him—that he was wretched for life—and that the only congenial prospect left him, was to go for a soldier or a sailor, and get some obliging enemy to knock his brains out as soon as possible.

Chapter 14

Joe Willet rode leisurely along in his desponding mood, picturing the locksmith's daughter going down long country-dances, and poussetting dreadfully with bold strangers—which was almost too much to bear—when he heard the tramp of a horse's feet behind him, and looking back, saw a well-mounted gentleman advancing at a smart canter. As this rider passed, he checked his steed, and called him of the Maypole by his name. Joe set spurs to the grey mare, and was at his side directly.

'I thought it was you, sir,' he said, touching his hat. 'A fair evening, sir. Glad to see you out of doors again.'

The gentleman smiled and nodded. 'What gay doings have been going on to-day, Joe? Is she as pretty as ever? Nay, don't blush, man.'

'If I coloured at all, Mr Edward,' said Joe, 'which I didn't know I did, it was to think I should have been such a fool as ever to have any hope of her. She's as far out of my reach as—as Heaven is.'

'Well, Joe, I hope that's not altogether beyond it,' said Edward, good-humouredly. 'Eh?'

'Ah!' sighed Joe. 'It's all very fine talking, sir. Proverbs are easily made in cold blood. But it can't be helped. Are you bound for our house, sir?'

'Yes. As I am not quite strong yet, I shall stay there to-night, and ride home coolly in the morning.'

'If you're in no particular hurry,' said Joe after a short silence, 'and will bear with the pace of this poor jade, I shall be glad to ride on with you to the Warren, sir, and hold your horse when you dismount. It'll save you having to walk from the Maypole, there and back again. I can spare the time well, sir, for I am too soon.'

'And so am I,' returned Edward, 'though I was unconsciously riding fast just now, in compliment I suppose to the pace of my thoughts, which were travelling post. We will keep together, Joe, willingly, and be as good company as may be. And cheer up, cheer up, think of the locksmith's daughter with a stout heart, and you shall win her yet.'

Joe shook his head; but there was something so cheery in the buoyant hopeful manner of this speech, that his spirits rose under its influence, and communicated as it would seem some new impulse even to the grey mare, who, breaking from her sober amble into a gentle trot, emulated the pace of Edward Chester's horse, and appeared to flatter herself that he was doing his very best.

It was a fine dry night, and the light of a young moon, which was then just rising, shed around that peace and tranquillity which gives to evening time its most delicious charm. The lengthened shadows of the trees, softened as if reflected in still water, threw their carpet on the path the travellers pursued, and the light wind stirred yet more softly than before, as though it were soothing Nature in her sleep. By little and little they ceased talking, and rode on side by side in a pleasant silence.

'The Maypole lights are brilliant to-night,' said Edward, as they rode along the lane from which, while the intervening trees were bare of leaves, that hostelry was visible.

'Brilliant indeed, sir,' returned Joe, rising in his stirrups to get a better view. 'Lights in the large room, and a fire glimmering in the best bedchamber? Why, what company can this be for, I wonder!'

'Some benighted horseman wending towards London, and deterred from going on to-night by the marvellous tales of my friend the highwayman, I suppose,' said Edward.

'He must be a horseman of good quality to have such accommodations. Your bed too, sir—!'

'No matter, Joe. Any other room will do for me. But come—there's nine striking. We may push on.'

They cantered forward at as brisk a pace as Joe's charger could attain, and presently stopped in the little copse where he had left her in the morning. Edward dismounted, gave his bridle to his companion, and walked with a light step towards the house.

A female servant was waiting at a side gate in the garden-wall, and admitted him without delay. He hurried along the terrace-walk, and darted up a flight of broad steps leading into an old and gloomy hall, whose walls were ornamented with rusty suits of armour, antlers, weapons of the chase, and suchlike garniture. Here he paused, but not long; for as he looked round, as if expecting the attendant to have followed, and wondering she had not done so, a lovely girl appeared, whose dark hair next moment rested on his breast. Almost at the same instant a heavy hand was laid upon her arm, Edward felt himself thrust away, and Mr Haredale stood between them.

He regarded the young man sternly without removing his hat; with one hand clasped his niece, and with the other, in which he held his riding-whip, motioned him towards the door. The young man drew himself up, and returned his gaze.

'This is well done of you, sir, to corrupt my servants, and enter my house unbidden and in secret, like a thief!' said Mr Haredale. 'Leave it, sir, and return no more.'

'Miss Haredale's presence,' returned the young man, 'and your relationship to her, give you a licence which, if you are a brave man, you will not abuse. You have compelled me to this course, and the fault is yours—not mine.'

'It is neither generous, nor honourable, nor the act of a true man, sir,' retorted the other, 'to tamper with the affections of a weak, trusting girl, while you shrink, in your unworthiness, from her guardian and protector, and dare not meet the light of day. More than this I will not say to you, save that I forbid you this house, and require you to be gone.'

'It is neither generous, nor honourable, nor the act of a true man to play the spy,' said Edward. 'Your words imply dishonour, and I reject them with the scorn they merit.'

'You will find,' said Mr Haredale, calmly, 'your trusty go-between in waiting at the gate by which you entered. I have played no spy's part, sir. I chanced to see you pass the gate, and followed. You might have heard me knocking for admission, had you been less swift of foot, or lingered in the garden. Please to withdraw. Your presence here is offensive to me and distressful to my niece.' As he said these words, he passed his arm about the waist of the terrified and weeping girl, and drew her closer to him; and though the habitual severity of his manner was scarcely changed, there was yet apparent in the action an air of kindness and sympathy for her distress.

'Mr Haredale,' said Edward, 'your arm encircles her on whom I have set my every hope and thought, and to purchase one minute's happiness for whom I would gladly lay down my life; this house is the casket that holds the precious jewel of my existence. Your niece has plighted her faith to me, and I have plighted mine to her. What have I done that you should hold me in this light esteem, and give me these discourteous words?'

'You have done that, sir,' answered Mr Haredale, 'which must be undone. You have tied a lover'-knot here which must be cut asunder. Take good heed of what I say. Must. I cancel the bond between ye. I reject you, and all of your kith and kin—all the false, hollow, heartless stock.'

'High words, sir,' said Edward, scornfully.

'Words of purpose and meaning, as you will find,' replied the other. 'Lay them to heart.'

'Lay you then, these,' said Edward. 'Your cold and sullen temper, which chills every breast about you, which turns affection into fear, and changes duty into dread, has forced us on this secret course, repugnant to our nature and our wish, and far more foreign, sir, to us than you. I am not a false, a hollow, or a heartless man; the character is yours, who poorly venture on these injurious terms, against the truth, and under the shelter whereof I reminded you just now. You shall not cancel the bond between us. I will not abandon this pursuit. I rely upon your niece's truth and honour, and set your influence at nought. I leave her with a confidence in her pure faith, which you will never weaken, and with no concern but that I do not leave her in some gentler care.'

With that, he pressed her cold hand to his lips, and once more encountering and returning Mr Haredale's steady look, withdrew.

A few words to Joe as he mounted his horse sufficiently explained what had passed, and renewed all that young gentleman's despondency with tenfold aggravation. They rode back to the Maypole without exchanging a syllable, and arrived at the door with heavy hearts.

Old John, who had peeped from behind the red curtain as they rode up shouting for Hugh, was out directly, and said with great importance as he held the young man's stirrup,

'He's comfortable in bed—the best bed. A thorough gentleman; the smilingest, affablest gentleman I ever had to do with.'

'Who, Willet?' said Edward carelessly, as he dismounted.

'Your worthy father, sir,' replied John. 'Your honourable, venerable father.'

'What does he mean?' said Edward, looking with a mixture of alarm and doubt, at Joe.

'What DO you mean?' said Joe. 'Don't you see Mr Edward doesn't understand, father?'

'Why, didn't you know of it, sir?' said John, opening his eyes wide. 'How very singular! Bless you, he's been here ever since noon to-day, and Mr

Haredale has been having a long talk with him, and hasn't been gone an hour.'

'My father, Willet!'

'Yes, sir, he told me so—a handsome, slim, upright gentleman, in green-and-gold. In your old room up yonder, sir. No doubt you can go in, sir,' said John, walking backwards into the road and looking up at the window. 'He hasn't put out his candles yet, I see.'

Edward glanced at the window also, and hastily murmuring that he had changed his mind—forgotten something—and must return to London, mounted his horse again and rode away; leaving the Willets, father and son, looking at each other in mute astonishment.

Chapter 15

At noon next day, John Willet's guest sat lingering over his breakfast in his own home, surrounded by a variety of comforts, which left the Maypole's highest flight and utmost stretch of accommodation at an infinite distance behind, and suggested comparisons very much to the disadvantage and disfavour of that venerable tavern.

In the broad old-fashioned window-seat—as capacious as many modern sofas, and cushioned to serve the purpose of a luxurious settee—in the broad old-fashioned window-seat of a roomy chamber, Mr Chester lounged, very much at his ease, over a well-furnished breakfast-table. He had exchanged his riding-coat for a handsome morning-gown, his boots for slippers; had been at great pains to atone for the having been obliged to make his toilet when he rose without the aid of dressing-case and tiring equipage; and, having gradually forgotten through these means the discomforts of an indifferent night and an early ride, was in a state of perfect complacency, indolence, and satisfaction.

The situation in which he found himself, indeed, was particularly favourable to the growth of these feelings; for, not to mention the lazy influence of a late and lonely breakfast, with the additional sedative of a newspaper, there was an air of repose about his place of residence peculiar to itself, and which hangs about it, even in these times, when it is more bustling and busy than it was in days of yore.

There are, still, worse places than the Temple, on a sultry day, for basking in the sun, or resting idly in the shade. There is yet a drowsiness in its courts, and a dreamy dulness in its trees and gardens; those who pace its lanes and squares may yet hear the echoes of their footsteps on the sounding stones, and read upon its gates, in passing from the tumult of the Strand or Fleet Street, 'Who enters here leaves noise behind.' There is still the plash of falling water in fair Fountain Court, and there are yet nooks and corners where dun-haunted students may look down from their dusty garrets, on a vagrant ray of sunlight patching the shade of the tall houses, and seldom troubled to reflect a passing stranger's form. There is yet, in the Temple, something of a clerkly monkish atmosphere, which public offices of law have not disturbed, and even legal firms have failed to scare away. In summer time, its pumps suggest to thirsty idlers, springs cooler, and more sparkling, and deeper than other wells; and as they trace the spillings of full pitchers on the heated ground, they snuff the freshness, and, sighing, cast sad looks towards the Thames, and think of baths and boats, and saunter on, despondent.

It was in a room in Paper Buildings—a row of goodly tenements, shaded in front by ancient trees, and looking, at the back, upon the Temple Gardens—that this, our idler, lounged; now taking up again the paper he had laid down a hundred times; now trifling with the fragments of his meal; now pulling forth his golden toothpick, and glancing leisurely about the room, or out at window into the trim garden walks, where a few early loiterers were already pacing to and fro. Here a pair of lovers met to quarrel and make up; there a dark-eyed nursery-maid had better eyes for Templars than her charge; on this hand an ancient spinster, with her lapdog in a string, regarded both enormities with scornful sidelong looks; on that a weazen old gentleman, ogling the nursery-maid, looked with like scorn upon the spinster, and wondered she didn't know she was no longer young. Apart from all these, on the river's margin two or three couple of business-talkers walked slowly up and down in earnest conversation; and one young man sat thoughtfully on a bench, alone.

'Ned is amazingly patient!' said Mr Chester, glancing at this last-named person as he set down his teacup and plied the golden toothpick, 'immensely patient! He was sitting yonder when I began to dress, and has scarcely changed his posture since. A most eccentric dog!'

As he spoke, the figure rose, and came towards him with a rapid pace.

'Really, as if he had heard me,' said the father, resuming his newspaper with a yawn. 'Dear Ned!'

Presently the room-door opened, and the young man entered; to whom his father gently waved his hand, and smiled.

'Are you at leisure for a little conversation, sir?' said Edward.

'Surely, Ned. I am always at leisure. You know my constitution.—Have you breakfasted?'

'Three hours ago.'

'What a very early dog!' cried his father, contemplating him from behind the toothpick, with a languid smile.

'The truth is,' said Edward, bringing a chair forward, and seating himself near the table, 'that I slept but ill last night, and was glad to rise. The cause of my uneasiness cannot but be known to you, sir; and it is upon that I wish to speak.'

'My dear boy,' returned his father, 'confide in me, I beg. But you know my constitution—don't be prosy, Ned.'

'I will be plain, and brief,' said Edward.

'Don't say you will, my good fellow,' returned his father, crossing his legs, 'or you certainly will not. You are going to tell me'—

'Plainly this, then,' said the son, with an air of great concern, 'that I know where you were last night—from being on the spot, indeed—and whom you saw, and what your purpose was.'

'You don't say so!' cried his father. 'I am delighted to hear it. It saves us the worry, and terrible wear and tear of a long explanation, and is a great relief for both. At the very house! Why didn't you come up? I should have been charmed to see you.'

'I knew that what I had to say would be better said after a night's reflection, when both of us were cool,' returned the son.

''Fore Gad, Ned,' rejoined the father, 'I was cool enough last night. That detestable Maypole! By some infernal contrivance of the builder, it holds the wind, and keeps it fresh. You remember the sharp east wind that blew so hard five weeks ago? I give you my honour it was rampant in that old house last night, though out of doors there was a dead calm. But you were saying'—

'I was about to say, Heaven knows how seriously and earnestly, that you have made me wretched, sir. Will you hear me gravely for a moment?'

'My dear Ned,' said his father, 'I will hear you with the patience of an anchorite. Oblige me with the milk.'

'I saw Miss Haredale last night,' Edward resumed, when he had complied with this request; 'her uncle, in her presence, immediately after your interview, and, as of course I know, in consequence of it, forbade me the house, and, with circumstances of indignity which are of your creation I am sure, commanded me to leave it on the instant.'

'For his manner of doing so, I give you my honour, Ned, I am not accountable,' said his father. 'That you must excuse. He is a mere boor, a log, a brute, with no address in life.—Positively a fly in the jug. The first I have seen this year.'

Edward rose, and paced the room. His imperturbable parent sipped his tea.

'Father,' said the young man, stopping at length before him, 'we must not trifle in this matter. We must not deceive each other, or ourselves. Let me pursue the manly open part I wish to take, and do not repel me by this unkind indifference.'

'Whether I am indifferent or no,' returned the other, 'I leave you, my dear boy, to judge. A ride of twenty-five or thirty miles, through miry roads—a Maypole dinner—a tete-a-tete with Haredale, which, vanity apart, was quite a Valentine and Orson business—a Maypole bed—a Maypole landlord, and a Maypole retinue of idiots and centaurs;—whether the voluntary endurance of these things looks like indifference, dear Ned, or like the excessive anxiety, and devotion, and all that sort of thing, of a parent, you shall determine for yourself.'

'I wish you to consider, sir,' said Edward, 'in what a cruel situation I am placed. Loving Miss Haredale as I do'—

'My dear fellow,' interrupted his father with a compassionate smile, 'you do nothing of the kind. You don't know anything about it. There's no such thing, I assure you. Now, do take my word for it. You have good sense, Ned,—great good sense. I wonder you should be guilty of such amazing absurdities. You really surprise me.'

'I repeat,' said his son firmly, 'that I love her. You have interposed to part us, and have, to the extent I have just now told you of, succeeded. May I induce you, sir, in time, to think more favourably of our attachment, or is it your intention and your fixed design to hold us asunder if you can?'

'My dear Ned,' returned his father, taking a pinch of snuff and pushing his box towards him, 'that is my purpose most undoubtedly.'

'The time that has elapsed,' rejoined his son, 'since I began to know her worth, has flown in such a dream that until now I have hardly once paused to reflect upon my true position. What is it? From my childhood I have been accustomed to luxury and idleness, and have been bred as though my fortune were large, and my expectations almost without a limit. The idea of wealth has been familiarised to me from my cradle. I have been taught to look upon those means, by which men raise themselves to riches and distinction, as being beyond my heeding, and beneath my care. I have been, as the phrase is, liberally educated, and am fit for nothing. I find myself at last wholly dependent upon you, with no resource but in your favour. In this momentous question of my life we do not, and it would seem we never can, agree. I have shrunk instinctively alike from those to whom you have urged me to pay court, and from the motives of interest and gain which have rendered them in your eyes visible objects for my suit. If there never has been thus much plain-speaking between us before, sir, the fault has not been mine, indeed. If I seem to speak too plainly now, it is, believe me father, in the hope that there may be a franker spirit, a worthier reliance, and a kinder confidence between us in time to come.'

'My good fellow,' said his smiling father, 'you quite affect me. Go on, my dear Edward, I beg. But remember your promise. There is great earnestness, vast candour, a manifest sincerity in all you say, but I fear I observe the faintest indications of a tendency to prose.'

'I am very sorry, sir.'

'I am very sorry, too, Ned, but you know that I cannot fix my mind for any long period upon one subject. If you'll come to the point at once, I'll imagine all that ought to go before, and conclude it said. Oblige me with the milk again. Listening, invariably makes me feverish.'

'What I would say then, tends to this,' said Edward. 'I cannot bear this absolute dependence, sir, even upon you. Time has been lost and opportunity thrown away, but I am yet a young man, and may retrieve it. Will you give me the means of devoting such abilities and energies as I possess, to some worthy pursuit? Will you let me try to make for myself an honourable path in life? For any term you please to name—say for five years if you will—I will pledge myself to move no further in the matter of our difference without your fall concurrence. During that period, I will endeavour earnestly and patiently, if ever man did, to open some prospect for myself, and free you from the burden you fear I should become if I married one whose worth and beauty are her chief endowments. Will you do this, sir? At the expiration of the term we agree upon, let us discuss this subject again. Till then, unless it is revived by you, let it never be renewed between us.'

'My dear Ned,' returned his father, laying down the newspaper at which he had been glancing carelessly, and throwing himself back in the window-seat, 'I believe you know how very much I dislike what are called family affairs, which are only fit for plebeian Christmas days, and have no manner of business with people of our condition. But as you are proceeding upon a mistake, Ned—altogether upon a mistake—I will conquer my repugnance to entering on such matters, and give you a perfectly plain and candid answer, if you will do me the favour to shut the door.'

Edward having obeyed him, he took an elegant little knife from his pocket, and paring his nails, continued:

'You have to thank me, Ned, for being of good family; for your mother, charming person as she was, and almost broken-hearted, and so forth, as she left me, when she was prematurely compelled to become immortal—had nothing to boast of in that respect.'

'Her father was at least an eminent lawyer, sir,' said Edward.

'Quite right, Ned; perfectly so. He stood high at the bar, had a great name and great wealth, but having risen from nothing—I have always closed my eyes to the circumstance and steadily resisted its contemplation, but I fear his father dealt in pork, and that his business did once involve cow-heel and sausages—he wished to marry his daughter into a good family. He had his heart's desire, Ned. I was a younger son's younger son, and I married her. We each had our object, and gained it. She stepped at once into the politest and best circles, and I stepped into a fortune which I assure you was very necessary to my comfort—quite indispensable. Now, my good fellow, that fortune is among the things that have been. It is gone, Ned, and has been gone—how old are you? I always forget.'

'Seven-and-twenty, sir.'

'Are you indeed?' cried his father, raising his eyelids in a languishing surprise. 'So much! Then I should say, Ned, that as nearly as I remember, its skirts vanished from human knowledge, about eighteen or nineteen years ago. It was about that time when I came to live in these chambers (once your grandfather's, and bequeathed by that extremely respectable person to me), and commenced to live upon an inconsiderable annuity and my past reputation.'

'You are jesting with me, sir,' said Edward.

'Not in the slightest degree, I assure you,' returned his father with great composure. 'These family topics are so extremely dry, that I am sorry to say they don't admit of any such relief. It is for that reason, and because they have an appearance of business, that I dislike them so very much. Well! You know the rest. A son, Ned, unless he is old enough to be a companion—that is to say, unless he is some two or three and twenty—is not the kind of thing to have about one. He is a restraint upon his father, his father is a restraint upon him, and they make each other mutually uncomfortable. Therefore, until within the last four years or so—I have a poor memory for dates, and if I mistake, you will correct me in your own mind—you pursued your studies at a distance, and picked up a great variety of accomplishments. Occasionally we passed a week or two together here, and disconcerted each other as only such near relations can. At last you came home. I candidly tell you, my dear boy, that if you had been awkward and overgrown, I should have exported you to some distant part of the world.'

'I wish with all my soul you had, sir,' said Edward.

'No you don't, Ned,' said his father coolly; 'you are mistaken, I assure you. I found you a handsome, prepossessing, elegant fellow, and I threw you into the society I can still command. Having done that, my dear fellow, I consider that I have provided for you in life, and rely upon your doing something to provide for me in return.'

'I do not understand your meaning, sir.'

'My meaning, Ned, is obvious—I observe another fly in the cream-jug, but have the goodness not to take it out as you did the first, for their walk when their legs are milky, is extremely ungraceful and disagreeable—my meaning is, that you must do as I did; that you must marry well and make the most of yourself.'

'A mere fortune-hunter!' cried the son, indignantly.

'What in the devil's name, Ned, would you be!' returned the father. 'All men are fortune-hunters, are they not? The law, the church, the court, the camp—see how they are all crowded with fortune-hunters, jostling each other in the pursuit. The stock-exchange, the pulpit, the counting-house, the royal drawing-room, the senate,—what but fortune-hunters are they filled with? A fortune-hunter! Yes. You ARE one; and you would be nothing else, my dear Ned, if you were the greatest courtier, lawyer, legislator, prelate, or merchant, in existence. If you are squeamish and moral, Ned, console yourself with the reflection that at the very worst your fortune-hunting can make but one person miserable or unhappy. How many people do you suppose these other kinds of huntsmen crush in following their sport—hundreds at a step? Or thousands?'

The young man leant his head upon his hand, and made no answer.

'I am quite charmed,' said the father rising, and walking slowly to and fro—stopping now and then to glance at himself in the mirror, or survey a picture through his glass, with the air of a connoisseur, 'that we have had this conversation, Ned, unpromising as it was. It establishes a confidence between us which is quite delightful, and was certainly necessary, though how you can ever have mistaken our positions and designs, I confess I cannot understand. I conceived, until I found your fancy for this girl, that all these points were tacitly agreed upon between us.'

'I knew you were embarrassed, sir,' returned the son, raising his head for a moment, and then falling into his former attitude, 'but I had no idea we were the beggared wretches you describe. How could I suppose it, bred as I have been; witnessing the life you have always led; and the appearance you have always made?'

'My dear child,' said the father—'for you really talk so like a child that I must call you one—you were bred upon a careful principle; the very manner of your education, I assure you, maintained my credit surprisingly. As to the life I lead, I must lead it, Ned. I must have these little refinements about me. I have always been used to them, and I cannot exist without them. They must surround me, you observe, and therefore they are here. With regard to our circumstances, Ned, you may set your mind at rest upon that score. They are desperate. Your own appearance is by no means despicable, and our joint pocket-money alone devours our income. That's the truth.'

'Why have I never known this before? Why have you encouraged me, sir, to an expenditure and mode of life to which we have no right or title?'

'My good fellow,' returned his father more compassionately than ever, 'if you made no appearance, how could you possibly succeed in the pursuit for which I destined you? As to our mode of life, every man has a right to live in the best way he can; and to make himself as comfortable as he can, or he is an unnatural scoundrel. Our debts, I grant, are very great, and therefore it the more behoves you, as a young man of principle and honour, to pay them off as speedily as possible.'

'The villain's part,' muttered Edward, 'that I have unconsciously played! I to win the heart of Emma Haredale! I would, for her sake, I had died first!'

'I am glad you see, Ned,' returned his father, 'how perfectly self-evident it is, that nothing can be done in that quarter. But apart from this, and the necessity of your speedily bestowing yourself on another (as you know you could to-morrow, if you chose), I wish you'd look upon it pleasantly. In a religious point of view alone, how could you ever think of uniting yourself to a Catholic, unless she was amazingly rich? You ought to be so very Protestant, coming of such a Protestant family as you do. Let us be moral, Ned, or we are nothing. Even if one could set that objection aside, which is impossible, we come to another which is quite conclusive. The very idea of marrying a girl whose father was killed, like meat! Good God, Ned, how disagreeable! Consider the impossibility of having any respect for your father-in-law under such unpleasant circumstances—think of his having been "viewed" by jurors, and "sat upon" by coroners, and of his very doubtful position in the family ever afterwards. It seems to me such an indelicate sort of thing that I really think the girl ought to have been put to death by the state to prevent its happening. But I tease you perhaps. You would rather be alone? My dear Ned, most willingly. God bless you. I shall be going out presently, but we shall meet to-night, or if not to-night, certainly to-morrow. Take care of yourself in the mean time, for both our sakes. You are a person of great consequence to me, Ned—of vast consequence indeed. God bless you!'

With these words, the father, who had been arranging his cravat in the glass, while he uttered them in a disconnected careless manner, withdrew, humming a tune as he went. The son, who had appeared so lost in thought as not to hear or understand them, remained quite still and silent. After the lapse of half an hour or so, the elder Chester, gaily dressed, went out. The younger still sat with his head resting on his hands, in what appeared to be a kind of stupor.

Chapter 16

A series of pictures representing the streets of London in the night, even at the comparatively recent date of this tale, would present to the eye something so very different in character from the reality which is witnessed in these times, that it would be difficult for the beholder to recognise his most familiar walks in the altered aspect of little more than half a century ago.

They were, one and all, from the broadest and best to the narrowest and least frequented, very dark. The oil and cotton lamps, though regularly trimmed twice or thrice in the long winter nights, burnt feebly at the best; and at a late hour, when they were unassisted by the lamps and candles in the shops, cast but a narrow track of doubtful light upon the footway, leaving the projecting doors and house-fronts in the deepest gloom. Many of the courts and lanes were left in total darkness; those of the meaner sort, where one glimmering light twinkled for a score of houses, being favoured in no slight degree. Even in these places, the inhabitants had often good reason for extinguishing their lamp as soon as it was lighted; and the watch being utterly inefficient and powerless to prevent them, they did so at their pleasure. Thus, in the lightest thoroughfares, there was at every turn some obscure and dangerous spot whither a thief might fly or shelter, and few would care to follow; and the city being belted round by fields, green lanes, waste grounds, and lonely roads, dividing it at that time from the suburbs that have joined it since, escape, even where the pursuit was hot, was rendered easy.

It is no wonder that with these favouring circumstances in full and constant operation, street robberies, often accompanied by cruel wounds, and not unfrequently by loss of life, should have been of nightly occurrence in the very heart of London, or that quiet folks should have had great dread of traversing its streets after the shops were closed. It was not unusual for those who wended home alone at midnight, to keep the middle of the road, the better to guard against surprise from lurking footpads; few would venture to repair at a late hour to Kentish Town or Hampstead, or even to Kensington or Chelsea, unarmed and unattended; while he who had been loudest and most valiant at the supper-table or the tavern, and had but a mile or so to go, was glad to fee a link-boy to escort him home.

There were many other characteristics—not quite so disagreeable—about the thoroughfares of London then, with which they had been long familiar. Some of the shops, especially those to the eastward of Temple Bar, still adhered to the old practice of hanging out a sign; and the creaking and swinging of these boards in their iron frames on windy nights, formed a strange and mournful concert for the ears of those who lay awake in bed or hurried through the streets. Long stands of hackney-chairs and groups of chairmen, compared with whom the coachmen of our day are gentle and polite, obstructed the way and filled the air with clamour; night-cellars, indicated by a little stream of light crossing the pavement, and stretching out half-way into the road, and by the stifled roar of voices from below, yawned for the reception and entertainment of the most abandoned of both sexes; under every shed and bulk small groups of link-boys gamed away the earnings of the day; or one more weary than the rest, gave way to sleep, and let the fragment of his torch fall hissing on the puddled ground.

Then there was the watch with staff and lantern crying the hour, and the kind of weather; and those who woke up at his voice and turned them round in bed, were glad to hear it rained, or snowed, or blew, or froze, for very comfort's sake. The solitary passenger was startled by the chairmen's cry of 'By your leave there!' as two came trotting past him with their empty vehicle—carried backwards to show its being disengaged—and hurried to the nearest stand. Many a private chair, too, inclosing some fine lady, monstrously hooped and furbelowed, and preceded by running-footmen bearing flambeaux—for which extinguishers are yet suspended before the doors of a few houses of the better sort—made the way gay and light as it danced along, and darker and more dismal when it had passed. It was not unusual for these running gentry, who carried it with a very high hand, to quarrel in the servants' hall while waiting for their masters and mistresses; and, falling to blows either there or in the street without, to strew the place of skirmish with hair-powder, fragments of bag-wigs, and scattered nosegays. Gaming, the vice which ran so high among all classes (the fashion being of course set by the upper), was generally the cause of these disputes; for cards and dice were as openly used, and worked as much mischief, and yielded as much excitement below stairs, as above. While incidents like these, arising out of drums and masquerades and parties at quadrille, were passing at the west end of the town, heavy stagecoaches and scarce heavier waggons were lumbering slowly towards the city, the coachmen, guard, and passengers, armed to the teeth, and the coach—a day or so perhaps behind its time, but that was nothing—despoiled by highwaymen; who made no scruple to attack, alone and single-handed, a whole caravan of goods and men, and sometimes shot a passenger or two, and were sometimes shot themselves, as the case might be. On the morrow, rumours of this new act of daring on the road yielded matter for a few hours' conversation through the town, and a Public Progress of some fine gentleman (half-drunk) to Tyburn, dressed in the newest fashion, and damning the ordinary with unspeakable gallantry and grace, furnished to the populace, at once a pleasant excitement and a wholesome and profound example.

Among all the dangerous characters who, in such a state of society, prowled and skulked in the metropolis at night, there was one man from whom many as uncouth and fierce as he, shrunk with an involuntary dread. Who he was, or whence he came, was a question often asked, but which none could answer. His name was unknown, he had never been seen until within about eight days or thereabouts, and was equally a stranger to the old ruffians, upon whose haunts he ventured fearlessly, as to the young. He could be no spy, for he never removed his slouched hat to look about him, entered into conversation with no man, heeded nothing that passed, listened to no discourse, regarded nobody that came or went. But so surely as the dead of night set in, so surely this man was in the midst of the loose concourse in the night-cellar where outcasts of every grade resorted; and there he sat till morning.

He was not only a spectre at their licentious feasts; a something in the midst of their revelry and riot that chilled and haunted them; but out of doors he was the same. Directly it was dark, he was abroad—never in company with any one, but always alone; never lingering or loitering, but always walking swiftly; and looking (so they said who had seen him) over his shoulder from time to time, and as he did so quickening his pace. In the fields, the lanes, the roads, in all quarters of the town—east, west, north, and south—that man was seen gliding on like a shadow. He was always hurrying away. Those who encountered him, saw him steal past, caught sight of the backward glance, and so lost him in the darkness.

This constant restlessness, and flitting to and fro, gave rise to strange stories. He was seen in such distant and remote places, at times so nearly tallying with each other, that some doubted whether there were not two of them, or more—some, whether he had not unearthly means of travelling from spot to spot. The footpad hiding in a ditch had marked him passing like a ghost along its brink; the vagrant had met him on the dark high-road; the beggar had seen him pause upon the bridge to look down at the water, and then sweep on again; they who dealt in bodies with the surgeons could swear he slept in churchyards, and that they had beheld him glide away among the tombs on their approach. And as they told these stories to each other, one who had looked about him would pull his neighbour by the sleeve, and there he would be among them.

At last, one man—he was one of those whose commerce lay among the graves—resolved to question this strange companion. Next night, when he had eat his poor meal voraciously (he was accustomed to do that, they had observed, as though he had no other in the day), this fellow sat down at his elbow.

'A black night, master!'

'It is a black night.'

'Blacker than last, though that was pitchy too. Didn't I pass you near the turnpike in the Oxford Road?'

'It's like you may. I don't know.'

'Come, come, master,' cried the fellow, urged on by the looks of his comrades, and slapping him on the shoulder; 'be more companionable and communicative. Be more the gentleman in this good company. There are tales among us that you have sold yourself to the devil, and I know not what.'

'We all have, have we not?' returned the stranger, looking up. 'If we were fewer in number, perhaps he would give better wages.'

'It goes rather hard with you, indeed,' said the fellow, as the stranger disclosed his haggard unwashed face, and torn clothes. 'What of that? Be merry, master. A stave of a roaring song now'—

'Sing you, if you desire to hear one,' replied the other, shaking him roughly off; 'and don't touch me if you're a prudent man; I carry arms which go off easily—they have done so, before now—and make it dangerous for strangers who don't know the trick of them, to lay hands upon me.'

'Do you threaten?' said the fellow.

'Yes,' returned the other, rising and turning upon him, and looking fiercely round as if in apprehension of a general attack.

His voice, and look, and bearing—all expressive of the wildest recklessness and desperation—daunted while they repelled the bystanders. Although in a very different sphere of action now, they were not without much of the effect they had wrought at the Maypole Inn.

'I am what you all are, and live as you all do,' said the man sternly, after a short silence. 'I am in hiding here like the rest, and if we were surprised would perhaps do my part with the best of ye. If it's my humour to be left to myself, let me have it. Otherwise,'—and here he swore a tremendous oath—'there'll be mischief done in this place, though there ARE odds of a score against me.'

A low murmur, having its origin perhaps in a dread of the man and the mystery that surrounded him, or perhaps in a sincere opinion on the part of some of those present, that it would be an inconvenient precedent to meddle too curiously with a gentleman's private affairs if he saw reason to conceal them, warned the fellow who had occasioned this discussion that he had best pursue it no further. After a short time the strange man lay down upon a bench to sleep, and when they thought of him again, they found he was gone.

Next night, as soon as it was dark, he was abroad again and traversing the streets; he was before the locksmith's house more than once, but the family were out, and it was close shut. This night he crossed London Bridge and passed into Southwark. As he glided down a bye street, a woman with a little basket on her arm, turned into it at the other end. Directly he observed her, he sought the shelter of an archway, and stood aside until she had passed. Then he emerged cautiously from his hiding-place, and followed.

She went into several shops to purchase various kinds of household necessaries, and round every place at which she stopped he hovered like her evil spirit; following her when she reappeared. It was nigh eleven o'clock, and the passengers in the streets were thinning fast, when she turned, doubtless to go home. The phantom still followed her.

She turned into the same bye street in which he had seen her first, which, being free from shops, and narrow, was extremely dark. She quickened her pace here, as though distrustful of being stopped, and robbed of such trifling property as she carried with her. He crept along on the other side of the road. Had she been gifted with the speed of wind, it seemed as if his terrible shadow would have tracked her down.

At length the widow—for she it was—reached her own door, and, panting for breath, paused to take the key from her basket. In a flush and glow, with the haste she had made, and the pleasure of being safe at home, she stooped to draw it out, when, raising her head, she saw him standing silently beside her: the apparition of a dream.

His hand was on her mouth, but that was needless, for her tongue clove to its roof, and her power of utterance was gone. 'I have been looking for you many nights. Is the house empty? Answer me. Is any one inside?'

She could only answer by a rattle in her throat.

'Make me a sign.'

She seemed to indicate that there was no one there. He took the key, unlocked the door, carried her in, and secured it carefully behind them.

Chapter 17

It was a chilly night, and the fire in the widow's parlour had burnt low. Her strange companion placed her in a chair, and stooping down before the half-extinguished ashes, raked them together and fanned them with his hat. From time to time he glanced at her over his shoulder, as though to assure himself of her remaining quiet and making no effort to depart; and that done, busied himself about the fire again.

It was not without reason that he took these pains, for his dress was dank and drenched with wet, his jaws rattled with cold, and he shivered from head to foot. It had rained hard during the previous night and for some hours in the morning, but since noon it had been fine. Wheresoever he had passed the hours of darkness, his condition sufficiently betokened that many of them had been spent beneath the open sky. Besmeared with mire; his saturated clothes clinging with a damp embrace about his limbs; his beard unshaven, his face unwashed, his meagre cheeks worn into deep hollows,—a more miserable wretch could hardly be, than this man who now cowered down upon the widow's hearth, and watched the struggling flame with bloodshot eyes.

She had covered her face with her hands, fearing, as it seemed, to look towards him. So they remained for some short time in silence. Glancing round again, he asked at length:

'Is this your house?'

'It is. Why, in the name of Heaven, do you darken it?'

'Give me meat and drink,' he answered sullenly, 'or I dare do more than that. The very marrow in my bones is cold, with wet and hunger. I must have warmth and food, and I will have them here.'

'You were the robber on the Chigwell road.'

'I was.'

'And nearly a murderer then.'

'The will was not wanting. There was one came upon me and raised the hue-and-cry', that it would have gone hard with, but for his nimbleness. I made a thrust at him.'

'You thrust your sword at HIM!' cried the widow, looking upwards. 'You hear this man! you hear and saw!'

He looked at her, as, with her head thrown back, and her hands tight clenched together, she uttered these words in an agony of appeal. Then, starting to his feet as she had done, he advanced towards her.

'Beware!' she cried in a suppressed voice, whose firmness stopped him midway. 'Do not so much as touch me with a finger, or you are lost; body and soul, you are lost.'

'Hear me,' he replied, menacing her with his hand. 'I, that in the form of a man live the life of a hunted beast; that in the body am a spirit, a ghost upon the earth, a thing from which all creatures shrink, save those curst beings of another world, who will not leave me;—I am, in my desperation of this night, past all fear but that of the hell in which I exist from day to day. Give the alarm, cry out, refuse to shelter me. I will not hurt you. But I will not be taken alive; and so surely as you threaten me above your breath, I fall a dead man on this floor. The blood with which I sprinkle it, be on you and yours, in the name of the Evil Spirit that tempts men to their ruin!'

As he spoke, he took a pistol from his breast, and firmly clutched it in his hand.

'Remove this man from me, good Heaven!' cried the widow. 'In thy grace and mercy, give him one minute's penitence, and strike him dead!'

'It has no such purpose,' he said, confronting her. 'It is deaf. Give me to eat and drink, lest I do that it cannot help my doing, and will not do for you.'

'Will you leave me, if I do thus much? Will you leave me and return no more?'

'I will promise nothing,' he rejoined, seating himself at the table, 'nothing but this—I will execute my threat if you betray me.'

She rose at length, and going to a closet or pantry in the room, brought out some fragments of cold meat and bread and put them on the table. He asked for brandy, and for water. These she produced likewise; and he ate and drank with the voracity of a famished hound. All the time he was so engaged she kept at the uttermost distance of the chamber, and sat there shuddering, but with her face towards him. She never turned her back upon him once; and although when she passed him (as she was obliged to do in going to and from the cupboard) she gathered the skirts of her garment about her, as if even its touching his by chance were horrible to think of, still, in the midst of all this dread and terror, she kept her face towards his own, and watched his every movement.

His repast ended—if that can be called one, which was a mere ravenous satisfying of the calls of hunger—he moved his chair towards the fire again, and warming himself before the blaze which had now sprung brightly up, accosted her once more.

'I am an outcast, to whom a roof above his head is often an uncommon luxury, and the food a beggar would reject is delicate fare. You live here at your ease. Do you live alone?'

'I do not,' she made answer with an effort.

'Who dwells here besides?'

'One—it is no matter who. You had best begone, or he may find you here. Why do you linger?'

'For warmth,' he replied, spreading out his hands before the fire. 'For warmth. You are rich, perhaps?'

'Very,' she said faintly. 'Very rich. No doubt I am very rich.'

'At least you are not penniless. You have some money. You were making purchases to-night.'

'I have a little left. It is but a few shillings.'

'Give me your purse. You had it in your hand at the door. Give it to me.'

She stepped to the table and laid it down. He reached across, took it up, and told the contents into his hand. As he was counting them, she listened for a moment, and sprung towards him.

'Take what there is, take all, take more if more were there, but go before it is too late. I have heard a wayward step without, I know full well. It will return directly. Begone.'

'What do you mean?'

'Do not stop to ask. I will not answer. Much as I dread to touch you, I would drag you to the door if I possessed the strength, rather than you should lose an instant. Miserable wretch! fly from this place.'

'If there are spies without, I am safer here,' replied the man, standing aghast. 'I will remain here, and will not fly till the danger is past.'

'It is too late!' cried the widow, who had listened for the step, and not to him. 'Hark to that foot upon the ground. Do you tremble to hear it! It is my son, my idiot son!'

As she said this wildly, there came a heavy knocking at the door. He looked at her, and she at him.

'Let him come in,' said the man, hoarsely. 'I fear him less than the dark, houseless night. He knocks again. Let him come in!'

'The dread of this hour,' returned the widow, 'has been upon me all my life, and I will not. Evil will fall upon him, if you stand eye to eye. My blighted boy! Oh! all good angels who know the truth—hear a poor mother's prayer, and spare my boy from knowledge of this man!'

'He rattles at the shutters!' cried the man. 'He calls you. That voice and cry! It was he who grappled with me in the road. Was it he?'

She had sunk upon her knees, and so knelt down, moving her lips, but uttering no sound. As he gazed upon her, uncertain what to do or where to turn, the shutters flew open. He had barely time to catch a knife from the table, sheathe it in the loose sleeve of his coat, hide in the closet, and do all with the lightning's speed, when Barnaby tapped at the bare glass, and raised the sash exultingly.

'Why, who can keep out Grip and me!' he cried, thrusting in his head, and staring round the room. 'Are you there, mother? How long you keep us from the fire and light.'

She stammered some excuse and tendered him her hand. But Barnaby sprung lightly in without assistance, and putting his arms about her neck, kissed her a hundred times.

'We have been afield, mother—leaping ditches, scrambling through hedges, running down steep banks, up and away, and hurrying on. The wind has been blowing, and the rushes and young plants bowing and bending to it, lest it should do them harm, the cowards—and Grip—ha ha ha!—brave Grip, who cares for nothing, and when the wind rolls him over in the dust, turns manfully to bite it—Grip, bold Grip, has quarrelled with every little bowing twig—thinking, he told me, that it mocked him—and has worried it like a bulldog. Ha ha ha!'

The raven, in his little basket at his master's back, hearing this frequent mention of his name in a tone of exultation, expressed his sympathy by crowing like a cock, and afterwards running over his various phrases of speech with such rapidity, and in so many varieties of hoarseness, that they sounded like the murmurs of a crowd of people.

'He takes such care of me besides!' said Barnaby. 'Such care, mother! He watches all the time I sleep, and when I shut my eyes and make-believe to slumber, he practises new learning softly; but he keeps his eye on me the while, and if he sees me laugh, though never so little, stops directly. He won't surprise me till he's perfect.'

The raven crowed again in a rapturous manner which plainly said, 'Those are certainly some of my characteristics, and I glory in them.' In the meantime, Barnaby closed the window and secured it, and coming to the fireplace, prepared to sit down with his face to the closet. But his mother prevented this, by hastily taking that side herself, and motioning him towards the other.

'How pale you are to-night!' said Barnaby, leaning on his stick. 'We have been cruel, Grip, and made her anxious!'

Anxious in good truth, and sick at heart! The listener held the door of his hiding-place open with his hand, and closely watched her son. Grip—alive to everything his master was unconscious of—had his head out of the basket, and in return was watching him intently with his glistening eye.

'He flaps his wings,' said Barnaby, turning almost quickly enough to catch the retreating form and closing door, 'as if there were strangers here, but Grip is wiser than to fancy that. Jump then!'

Accepting this invitation with a dignity peculiar to himself, the bird hopped up on his master's shoulder, from that to his extended hand, and so to the ground. Barnaby unstrapping the basket and putting it down in a corner with the lid open, Grip's first care was to shut it down with all possible despatch, and then to stand upon it. Believing, no doubt, that he had now rendered it utterly impossible, and beyond the power of mortal man, to shut him up in it any more, he drew a great many corks in triumph, and uttered a corresponding number of hurrahs.

'Mother!' said Barnaby, laying aside his hat and stick, and returning to the chair from which he had risen, 'I'll tell you where we have been to-day, and what we have been doing,—shall I?'

She took his hand in hers, and holding it, nodded the word she could not speak.

'You mustn't tell,' said Barnaby, holding up his finger, 'for it's a secret, mind, and only known to me, and Grip, and Hugh. We had the dog with us, but he's not like Grip, clever as he is, and doesn't guess it yet, I'll wager.—Why do you look behind me so?'

'Did I?' she answered faintly. 'I didn't know I did. Come nearer me.'

'You are frightened!' said Barnaby, changing colour. 'Mother—you don't see'—

'See what?'

'There's—there's none of this about, is there?' he answered in a whisper, drawing closer to her and clasping the mark upon his wrist. 'I am afraid there is, somewhere. You make my hair stand on end, and my flesh creep. Why do you look like that? Is it in the room as I have seen it in my dreams, dashing the ceiling and the walls with red? Tell me. Is it?'

He fell into a shivering fit as he put the question, and shutting out the light with his hands, sat shaking in every limb until it had passed away. After a time, he raised his head and looked about him.

'Is it gone?'

'There has been nothing here,' rejoined his mother, soothing him. 'Nothing indeed, dear Barnaby. Look! You see there are but you and me.'

He gazed at her vacantly, and, becoming reassured by degrees, burst into a wild laugh.

'But let us see,' he said, thoughtfully. 'Were we talking? Was it you and me? Where have we been?'

'Nowhere but here.'

'Aye, but Hugh, and I,' said Barnaby,—'that's it. Maypole Hugh, and I, you know, and Grip—we have been lying in the forest, and among the trees by the road side, with a dark lantern after night came on, and the dog in a noose ready to slip him when the man came by.'

'What man?'

'The robber; him that the stars winked at. We have waited for him after dark these many nights, and we shall have him. I'd know him in a thousand. Mother, see here! This is the man. Look!'

He twisted his handkerchief round his head, pulled his hat upon his brow, wrapped his coat about him, and stood up before her: so like the original he counterfeited, that the dark figure peering out behind him might have passed for his own shadow.

'Ha ha ha! We shall have him,' he cried, ridding himself of the semblance as hastily as he had assumed it. 'You shall see him, mother, bound hand and foot, and brought to London at a saddle-girth; and you shall hear of him at Tyburn Tree if we have luck. So Hugh says. You're pale again, and trembling. And why DO you look behind me so?'

'It is nothing,' she answered. 'I am not quite well. Go you to bed, dear, and leave me here.'

'To bed!' he answered. 'I don't like bed. I like to lie before the fire, watching the prospects in the burning coals—the rivers, hills, and dells, in the deep, red sunset, and the wild faces. I am hungry too, and Grip has eaten nothing since broad noon. Let us to supper. Grip! To supper, lad!'

The raven flapped his wings, and, croaking his satisfaction, hopped to the feet of his master, and there held his bill open, ready for snapping up such lumps of meat as he should throw him. Of these he received about a score in rapid succession, without the smallest discomposure.

'That's all,' said Barnaby.

'More!' cried Grip. 'More!'

But it appearing for a certainty that no more was to be had, he retreated with his store; and disgorging the morsels one by one from his pouch, hid them in various corners—taking particular care, however, to avoid the closet, as being doubtful of the hidden man's propensities and power of resisting temptation. When he had concluded these arrangements, he took a turn or two across the room with an elaborate assumption of having nothing on his mind (but with one eye hard upon his treasure all the time), and then, and not till then, began to drag it out, piece by piece, and eat it with the utmost relish.

Barnaby, for his part, having pressed his mother to eat in vain, made a hearty supper too. Once during the progress of his meal, he wanted more bread from the closet and rose to get it. She hurriedly interposed to prevent him, and summoning her utmost fortitude, passed into the recess, and brought it out herself.

'Mother,' said Barnaby, looking at her steadfastly as she sat down beside him after doing so; 'is to-day my birthday?'

'To-day!' she answered. 'Don't you recollect it was but a week or so ago, and that summer, autumn, and winter have to pass before it comes again?'

'I remember that it has been so till now,' said Barnaby. 'But I think to-day must be my birthday too, for all that.'

She asked him why? 'I'll tell you why,' he said. 'I have always seen you—I didn't let you know it, but I have—on the evening of that day grow very sad. I have seen you cry when Grip and I were most glad; and look frightened with no reason; and I have touched your hand, and felt that it was cold—as it is now. Once, mother (on a birthday that was, also), Grip and I thought of this after we went upstairs to bed, and when it was midnight, striking one o'clock, we came down to your door to see if you were well. You were on your knees. I forget what it was you said. Grip, what was it we heard her say that night?'

'I'm a devil!' rejoined the raven promptly.

'No, no,' said Barnaby. 'But you said something in a prayer; and when you rose and walked about, you looked (as you have done ever since, mother, towards night on my birthday) just as you do now. I have found that out, you see, though I am silly. So I say you're wrong; and this must be my birthday—my birthday, Grip!'

The bird received this information with a crow of such duration as a cock, gifted with intelligence beyond all others of his kind, might usher in the longest day with. Then, as if he had well considered the sentiment, and regarded it as apposite to birthdays, he cried, 'Never say die!' a great many times, and flapped his wings for emphasis.

The widow tried to make light of Barnaby's remark, and endeavoured to divert his attention to some new subject; too easy a task at all times, as she knew. His supper done, Barnaby, regardless of her entreaties, stretched himself on the mat before the fire; Grip perched upon his leg, and divided his time between dozing in the grateful warmth, and endeavouring (as it presently appeared) to recall a new accomplishment he had been studying all day.

A long and profound silence ensued, broken only by some change of position on the part of Barnaby, whose eyes were still wide open and intently fixed upon the fire; or by an effort of recollection on the part of Grip, who would cry in a low voice from time to time, 'Polly put the ket—' and there stop short, forgetting the remainder, and go off in a doze again.

After a long interval, Barnaby's breathing grew more deep and regular, and his eyes were closed. But even then the unquiet spirit of the raven interposed. 'Polly put the ket—' cried Grip, and his master was broad awake again.

At length Barnaby slept soundly, and the bird with his bill sunk upon his breast, his breast itself puffed out into a comfortable alderman-like form, and his bright eye growing smaller and smaller, really seemed to be subsiding into a state of repose. Now and then he muttered in a sepulchral voice, 'Polly put the ket—' but very drowsily, and more like a drunken man than a reflecting raven.

The widow, scarcely venturing to breathe, rose from her seat. The man glided from the closet, and extinguished the candle.

'—tle on,' cried Grip, suddenly struck with an idea and very much excited. '—tle on. Hurrah! Polly put the ket-tle on, we'll all have tea; Polly put the ket-tle on, we'll all have tea. Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah! I'm a devil, I'm a devil, I'm a ket-tle on, Keep up your spirits, Never say die, Bow, wow, wow, I'm a devil, I'm a ket-tle, I'm a—Polly put the ket-tle on, we'll all have tea.'

They stood rooted to the ground, as though it had been a voice from the grave.

But even this failed to awaken the sleeper. He turned over towards the fire, his arm fell to the ground, and his head drooped heavily upon it. The widow and her unwelcome visitor gazed at him and at each other for a moment, and then she motioned him towards the door.

'Stay,' he whispered. 'You teach your son well.'

'I have taught him nothing that you heard to-night. Depart instantly, or I will rouse him.'

'You are free to do so. Shall I rouse him?'

'You dare not do that.'

'I dare do anything, I have told you. He knows me well, it seems. At least I will know him.'

'Would you kill him in his sleep?' cried the widow, throwing herself between them.

'Woman,' he returned between his teeth, as he motioned her aside, 'I would see him nearer, and I will. If you want one of us to kill the other, wake him.'

With that he advanced, and bending down over the prostrate form, softly turned back the head and looked into the face. The light of the fire was upon it, and its every lineament was revealed distinctly. He contemplated it for a brief space, and hastily uprose.

'Observe,' he whispered in the widow's ear: 'In him, of whose existence I was ignorant until to-night, I have you in my power. Be careful how you use me. Be careful how you use me. I am destitute and starving, and a wanderer upon the earth. I may take a sure and slow revenge.'

'There is some dreadful meaning in your words. I do not fathom it.'

'There is a meaning in them, and I see you fathom it to its very depth. You have anticipated it for years; you have told me as much. I leave you to digest it. Do not forget my warning.'

He pointed, as he left her, to the slumbering form, and stealthily withdrawing, made his way into the street. She fell on her knees beside the sleeper, and remained like one stricken into stone, until the tears which fear had frozen so long, came tenderly to her relief.

'Oh Thou,' she cried, 'who hast taught me such deep love for this one remnant of the promise of a happy life, out of whose affliction, even, perhaps the comfort springs that he is ever a relying, loving child to me—never growing old or cold at heart, but needing my care and duty in his manly strength as in his cradle-time—help him, in his darkened walk through this sad world, or he is doomed, and my poor heart is broken!'

Chapter 18

Gliding along the silent streets, and holding his course where they were darkest and most gloomy, the man who had left the widow's house crossed London Bridge, and arriving in the City, plunged into the backways, lanes, and courts, between Cornhill and Smithfield; with no more fixedness of purpose than to lose himself among their windings, and baffle pursuit, if any one were dogging his steps.

It was the dead time of the night, and all was quiet. Now and then a drowsy watchman's footsteps sounded on the pavement, or the lamplighter on his rounds went flashing past, leaving behind a little track of smoke mingled with glowing morsels of his hot red link. He hid himself even from these partakers of his lonely walk, and, shrinking in some arch or doorway while they passed, issued forth again when they were gone and so pursued his solitary way.

To be shelterless and alone in the open country, hearing the wind moan and watching for day through the whole long weary night; to listen to the falling rain, and crouch for warmth beneath the lee of some old barn or rick, or in the hollow of a tree; are dismal things—but not so dismal as the wandering up and down where shelter is, and beds and sleepers are by thousands; a houseless rejected creature. To pace the echoing stones from hour to hour, counting the dull chimes of the clocks; to watch the lights twinkling in chamber windows, to think what happy forgetfulness each house shuts in; that here are children coiled together in their beds, here youth, here age, here poverty, here wealth, all equal in their sleep, and all at rest; to have nothing in common with the slumbering world around, not even sleep, Heaven's gift to all its creatures, and be akin to nothing but despair; to feel, by the wretched contrast with everything on every hand, more utterly alone and cast away than in a trackless desert; this is a kind of suffering, on which the rivers of great cities close full many a time, and which the solitude in crowds alone awakens.

The miserable man paced up and down the streets—so long, so wearisome, so like each other—and often cast a wistful look towards the east, hoping to see the first faint streaks of day. But obdurate night had yet possession of the sky, and his disturbed and restless walk found no relief.

One house in a back street was bright with the cheerful glare of lights; there was the sound of music in it too, and the tread of dancers, and there were cheerful voices, and many a burst of laughter. To this place—to be near something that was awake and glad—he returned again and again; and more than one of those who left it when the merriment was at its height, felt it a check upon their mirthful mood to see him flitting to and fro like an uneasy ghost. At last the guests departed, one and all; and then the house was close shut up, and became as dull and silent as the rest.

His wanderings brought him at one time to the city jail. Instead of hastening from it as a place of ill omen, and one he had cause to shun, he sat down on some steps hard by, and resting his chin upon his hand, gazed upon its rough and frowning walls as though even they became a refuge in his jaded eyes. He paced it round and round, came back to the same spot, and sat down again. He did this often, and once, with a hasty movement, crossed to where some men were watching in the prison lodge, and had his foot upon the steps as though determined to accost them. But looking round, he saw that the day began to break, and failing in his purpose, turned and fled.

He was soon in the quarter he had lately traversed, and pacing to and fro again as he had done before. He was passing down a mean street, when from an alley close at hand some shouts of revelry arose, and there came straggling forth a dozen madcaps, whooping and calling to each other, who, parting noisily, took different ways and dispersed in smaller groups.

Hoping that some low place of entertainment which would afford him a safe refuge might be near at hand, he turned into this court when they were all gone, and looked about for a half-opened door, or lighted window, or other indication of the place whence they had come. It was so profoundly dark, however, and so ill-favoured, that he concluded they had but turned up there, missing their way, and were pouring out again when he observed them. With this impression, and finding there was no outlet but that by which he had entered, he was about to turn, when from a grating near his feet a sudden stream of light appeared, and the sound of talking came. He retreated into a doorway to see who these talkers were, and to listen to them.

The light came to the level of the pavement as he did this, and a man ascended, bearing in his hand a torch. This figure unlocked and held open the grating as for the passage of another, who presently appeared, in the form of a young man of small stature and uncommon self-importance, dressed in an obsolete and very gaudy fashion.

'Good night, noble captain,' said he with the torch. 'Farewell, commander. Good luck, illustrious general!'

In return to these compliments the other bade him hold his tongue, and keep his noise to himself, and laid upon him many similar injunctions, with great fluency of speech and sternness of manner.

'Commend me, captain, to the stricken Miggs,' returned the torch-bearer in a lower voice. 'My captain flies at higher game than Miggses. Ha, ha, ha! My captain is an eagle, both as respects his eye and soaring wings. My captain breaketh hearts as other bachelors break eggs at breakfast.'

'What a fool you are, Stagg!' said Mr Tappertit, stepping on the pavement of the court, and brushing from his legs the dust he had contracted in his passage upward.

'His precious limbs!' cried Stagg, clasping one of his ankles. 'Shall a Miggs aspire to these proportions! No, no, my captain. We will inveigle ladies fair, and wed them in our secret cavern. We will unite ourselves with blooming beauties, captain.'

'I'll tell you what, my buck,' said Mr Tappertit, releasing his leg; 'I'll trouble you not to take liberties, and not to broach certain questions unless certain questions are broached to you. Speak when you're spoke to on particular subjects, and not otherways. Hold the torch up till I've got to the end of the court, and then kennel yourself, do you hear?'

'I hear you, noble captain.'

'Obey then,' said Mr Tappertit haughtily. 'Gentlemen, lead on!' With which word of command (addressed to an imaginary staff or retinue) he folded his arms, and walked with surpassing dignity down the court.

His obsequious follower stood holding the torch above his head, and then the observer saw for the first time, from his place of concealment, that he was blind. Some involuntary motion on his part caught the quick ear of the blind man, before he was conscious of having moved an inch towards him, for he turned suddenly and cried, 'Who's there?'

'A man,' said the other, advancing. 'A friend.'

'A stranger!' rejoined the blind man. 'Strangers are not my friends. What do you do there?'

'I saw your company come out, and waited here till they were gone. I want a lodging.'

'A lodging at this time!' returned Stagg, pointing towards the dawn as though he saw it. 'Do you know the day is breaking?'

'I know it,' rejoined the other, 'to my cost. I have been traversing this iron-hearted town all night.'

'You had better traverse it again,' said the blind man, preparing to descend, 'till you find some lodgings suitable to your taste. I don't let any.'

'Stay!' cried the other, holding him by the arm.

'I'll beat this light about that hangdog face of yours (for hangdog it is, if it answers to your voice), and rouse the neighbourhood besides, if you detain me,' said the blind man. 'Let me go. Do you hear?'

'Do YOU hear!' returned the other, chinking a few shillings together, and hurriedly pressing them into his hand. 'I beg nothing of you. I will pay for the shelter you give me. Death! Is it much to ask of such as you! I have come from the country, and desire to rest where there are none to question me. I am faint, exhausted, worn out, almost dead. Let me lie down, like a dog, before your fire. I ask no more than that. If you would be rid of me, I will depart to-morrow.'

'If a gentleman has been unfortunate on the road,' muttered Stagg, yielding to the other, who, pressing on him, had already gained a footing on the steps—'and can pay for his accommodation—'

'I will pay you with all I have. I am just now past the want of food, God knows, and wish but to purchase shelter. What companion have you below?'

'None.'

'Then fasten your grate there, and show me the way. Quick!'

The blind man complied after a moment's hesitation, and they descended together. The dialogue had passed as hurriedly as the words could be spoken, and they stood in his wretched room before he had had time to recover from his first surprise.

'May I see where that door leads to, and what is beyond?' said the man, glancing keenly round. 'You will not mind that?'

'I will show you myself. Follow me, or go before. Take your choice.'

He bade him lead the way, and, by the light of the torch which his conductor held up for the purpose, inspected all three cellars narrowly. Assured that the blind man had spoken truth, and that he lived there alone, the visitor returned with him to the first, in which a fire was burning, and flung himself with a deep groan upon the ground before it.

His host pursued his usual occupation without seeming to heed him any further. But directly he fell asleep—and he noted his falling into a slumber, as readily as the keenest-sighted man could have done—he knelt down beside him, and passed his hand lightly but carefully over his face and person.

His sleep was checkered with starts and moans, and sometimes with a muttered word or two. His hands were clenched, his brow bent, and his mouth firmly set. All this, the blind man accurately marked; and as if his curiosity were strongly awakened, and he had already some inkling of his mystery, he sat watching him, if the expression may be used, and listening, until it was broad day.

Chapter 19

Dolly Varden's pretty little head was yet bewildered by various recollections of the party, and her bright eyes were yet dazzled by a crowd of images, dancing before them like motes in the sunbeams, among which the effigy of one partner in particular did especially figure, the same being a young coachmaker (a master in his own right) who had given her to understand, when he handed her into the chair at parting, that it was his fixed resolve to neglect his business from that time, and die slowly for the love of her—Dolly's head, and eyes, and thoughts, and seven senses, were all in a state of flutter and confusion for which the party was accountable, although it was now three days old, when, as she was sitting listlessly at breakfast, reading all manner of fortunes (that is to say, of married and flourishing fortunes) in the grounds of her teacup, a step was heard in the workshop, and Mr Edward Chester was descried through the glass door, standing among the rusty locks and keys, like love among the roses—for which apt comparison the historian may by no means take any credit to himself, the same being the invention, in a sentimental mood, of the chaste and modest Miggs, who, beholding him from the doorsteps she was then cleaning, did, in her maiden meditation, give utterance to the simile.

The locksmith, who happened at the moment to have his eyes thrown upward and his head backward, in an intense communing with Toby, did not see his visitor, until Mrs Varden, more watchful than the rest, had desired Sim Tappertit to open the glass door and give him admission—from which untoward circumstance the good lady argued (for she could deduce a precious moral from the most trifling event) that to take a draught of small ale in the morning was to observe a pernicious, irreligious, and Pagan custom, the relish whereof should be left to swine, and Satan, or at least to Popish persons, and should be shunned by the righteous as a work of sin and evil. She would no doubt have pursued her admonition much further, and would have founded on it a long list of precious precepts of inestimable value, but that the young gentleman standing by in a somewhat uncomfortable and discomfited manner while she read her spouse this lecture, occasioned her to bring it to a premature conclusion.

'I'm sure you'll excuse me, sir,' said Mrs Varden, rising and curtseying. 'Varden is so very thoughtless, and needs so much reminding—Sim, bring a chair here.'

Mr Tappertit obeyed, with a flourish implying that he did so, under protest.

'And you can go, Sim,' said the locksmith.

Mr Tappertit obeyed again, still under protest; and betaking himself to the workshop, began seriously to fear that he might find it necessary to poison his master, before his time was out.

In the meantime, Edward returned suitable replies to Mrs Varden's courtesies, and that lady brightened up very much; so that when he accepted a dish of tea from the fair hands of Dolly, she was perfectly agreeable.

'I am sure if there's anything we can do,—Varden, or I, or Dolly either,—to serve you, sir, at any time, you have only to say it, and it shall be done,' said Mrs V.

'I am much obliged to you, I am sure,' returned Edward. 'You encourage me to say that I have come here now, to beg your good offices.'

Mrs Varden was delighted beyond measure.

'It occurred to me that probably your fair daughter might be going to the Warren, either to-day or to-morrow,' said Edward, glancing at Dolly; 'and if so, and you will allow her to take charge of this letter, ma'am, you will oblige me more than I can tell you. The truth is, that while I am very anxious it should reach its destination, I have particular reasons for not trusting it to any other conveyance; so that without your help, I am wholly at a loss.'

'She was not going that way, sir, either to-day, or to-morrow, nor indeed all next week,' the lady graciously rejoined, 'but we shall be very glad to put ourselves out of the way on your account, and if you wish it, you may depend upon its going to-day. You might suppose,' said Mrs Varden, frowning at her husband, 'from Varden's sitting there so glum and silent, that he objected to this arrangement; but you must not mind that, sir, if you please. It's his way at home. Out of doors, he can be cheerful and talkative enough.'

Now, the fact was, that the unfortunate locksmith, blessing his stars to find his helpmate in such good humour, had been sitting with a beaming face, hearing this discourse with a joy past all expression. Wherefore this sudden attack quite took him by surprise.

'My dear Martha—' he said.

'Oh yes, I dare say,' interrupted Mrs Varden, with a smile of mingled scorn and pleasantry. 'Very dear! We all know that.'

'No, but my good soul,' said Gabriel, 'you are quite mistaken. You are indeed. I was delighted to find you so kind and ready. I waited, my dear, anxiously, I assure you, to hear what you would say.'

'You waited anxiously,' repeated Mrs V. 'Yes! Thank you, Varden. You waited, as you always do, that I might bear the blame, if any came of it. But I am used to it,' said the lady with a kind of solemn titter, 'and that's my comfort!'

'I give you my word, Martha—' said Gabriel.

'Let me give you MY word, my dear,' interposed his wife with a Christian smile, 'that such discussions as these between married people, are much better left alone. Therefore, if you please, Varden, we'll drop the subject. I have no wish to pursue it. I could. I might say a great deal. But I would rather not. Pray don't say any more.'

'I don't want to say any more,' rejoined the goaded locksmith.

'Well then, don't,' said Mrs Varden.

'Nor did I begin it, Martha,' added the locksmith, good-humouredly, 'I must say that.'

'You did not begin it, Varden!' exclaimed his wife, opening her eyes very wide and looking round upon the company, as though she would say, You hear this man! 'You did not begin it, Varden! But you shall not say I was out of temper. No, you did not begin it, oh dear no, not you, my dear!'

'Well, well,' said the locksmith. 'That's settled then.'

'Oh yes,' rejoined his wife, 'quite. If you like to say Dolly began it, my dear, I shall not contradict you. I know my duty. I need know it, I am sure. I am often obliged to bear it in mind, when my inclination perhaps would be for the moment to forget it. Thank you, Varden.' And so, with a mighty show of humility and forgiveness, she folded her hands, and looked round again, with a smile which plainly said, 'If you desire to see the first and foremost among female martyrs, here she is, on view!'

This little incident, illustrative though it was of Mrs Varden's extraordinary sweetness and amiability, had so strong a tendency to check the conversation and to disconcert all parties but that excellent lady, that only a few monosyllables were uttered until Edward withdrew; which he presently did, thanking the lady of the house a great many times for her condescension, and whispering in Dolly's ear that he would call on the morrow, in case there should happen to be an answer to the note—which, indeed, she knew without his telling, as Barnaby and his friend Grip had dropped in on the previous night to prepare her for the visit which was then terminating.

Gabriel, who had attended Edward to the door, came back with his hands in his pockets; and, after fidgeting about the room in a very uneasy manner, and casting a great many sidelong looks at Mrs Varden (who with the calmest countenance in the world was five fathoms deep in the Protestant Manual), inquired of Dolly how she meant to go. Dolly supposed by the stage-coach, and looked at her lady mother, who finding herself silently appealed to, dived down at least another fathom into the Manual, and became unconscious of all earthly things.

'Martha—' said the locksmith.

'I hear you, Varden,' said his wife, without rising to the surface.

'I am sorry, my dear, you have such an objection to the Maypole and old John, for otherways as it's a very fine morning, and Saturday's not a busy day with us, we might have all three gone to Chigwell in the chaise, and had quite a happy day of it.'

Mrs Varden immediately closed the Manual, and bursting into tears, requested to be led upstairs.

'What is the matter now, Martha?' inquired the locksmith.

To which Martha rejoined, 'Oh! don't speak to me,' and protested in agony that if anybody had told her so, she wouldn't have believed it.

'But, Martha,' said Gabriel, putting himself in the way as she was moving off with the aid of Dolly's shoulder, 'wouldn't have believed what? Tell me what's wrong now. Do tell me. Upon my soul I don't know. Do you know, child? Damme!' cried the locksmith, plucking at his wig in a kind of frenzy, 'nobody does know, I verily believe, but Miggs!'

'Miggs,' said Mrs Varden faintly, and with symptoms of approaching incoherence, 'is attached to me, and that is sufficient to draw down hatred upon her in this house. She is a comfort to me, whatever she may be to others.'

'She's no comfort to me,' cried Gabriel, made bold by despair. 'She's the misery of my life. She's all the plagues of Egypt in one.'

'She's considered so, I have no doubt,' said Mrs Varden. 'I was prepared for that; it's natural; it's of a piece with the rest. When you taunt me as you do to my face, how can I wonder that you taunt her behind her back!' And here the incoherence coming on very strong, Mrs Varden wept, and laughed, and sobbed, and shivered, and hiccoughed, and choked; and said she knew it was very foolish but she couldn't help it; and that when she was dead and gone, perhaps they would be sorry for it—which really under the circumstances did not appear quite so probable as she seemed to think—with a great deal more to the same effect. In a word, she passed with great decency through all the ceremonies incidental to such occasions; and being supported upstairs, was deposited in a highly spasmodic state on her own bed, where Miss Miggs shortly afterwards flung herself upon the body.

The philosophy of all this was, that Mrs Varden wanted to go to Chigwell; that she did not want to make any concession or explanation; that she would only go on being implored and entreated so to do; and that she would accept no other terms. Accordingly, after a vast amount of moaning and crying upstairs, and much damping of foreheads, and vinegaring of temples, and hartshorning of noses, and so forth; and after most pathetic adjurations from Miggs, assisted by warm brandy-and-water not over-weak, and divers other cordials, also of a stimulating quality, administered at first in teaspoonfuls and afterwards in increasing doses, and of which Miss Miggs herself partook as a preventive measure (for fainting is infectious); after all these remedies, and many more too numerous to mention, but not to take, had been applied; and many verbal consolations, moral, religious, and miscellaneous, had been super-added thereto; the locksmith humbled himself, and the end was gained.

'If it's only for the sake of peace and quietness, father,' said Dolly, urging him to go upstairs.

'Oh, Doll, Doll,' said her good-natured father. 'If you ever have a husband of your own—'

Dolly glanced at the glass.

'—Well, WHEN you have,' said the locksmith, 'never faint, my darling. More domestic unhappiness has come of easy fainting, Doll, than from all the greater passions put together. Remember that, my dear, if you would be really happy, which you never can be, if your husband isn't. And a word in your ear, my precious. Never have a Miggs about you!'

With this advice he kissed his blooming daughter on the cheek, and slowly repaired to Mrs Varden's room; where that lady, lying all pale and languid on her couch, was refreshing herself with a sight of her last new bonnet, which Miggs, as a means of calming her scattered spirits, displayed to the best advantage at her bedside.

'Here's master, mim,' said Miggs. 'Oh, what a happiness it is when man and wife come round again! Oh gracious, to think that him and her should ever have a word together!' In the energy of these sentiments, which were uttered as an apostrophe to the Heavens in general, Miss Miggs perched the bonnet on the top of her own head, and folding her hands, turned on her tears.

'I can't help it,' cried Miggs. 'I couldn't, if I was to be drownded in 'em. She has such a forgiving spirit! She'll forget all that has passed, and go along with you, sir—Oh, if it was to the world's end, she'd go along with you.'

Mrs Varden with a faint smile gently reproved her attendant for this enthusiasm, and reminded her at the same time that she was far too unwell to venture out that day.

'Oh no, you're not, mim, indeed you're not,' said Miggs; 'I repeal to master; master knows you're not, mim. The hair, and motion of the shay, will do you good, mim, and you must not give way, you must not raly. She must keep up, mustn't she, sir, for all out sakes? I was a telling her that, just now. She must remember us, even if she forgets herself. Master will persuade you, mim, I'm sure. There's Miss Dolly's a-going you know, and master, and you, and all so happy and so comfortable. Oh!' cried Miggs, turning on the tears again, previous to quitting the room in great emotion, 'I never see such a blessed one as she is for the forgiveness of her spirit, I never, never, never did. Not more did master neither; no, nor no one—never!'

For five minutes or thereabouts, Mrs Varden remained mildly opposed to all her husband's prayers that she would oblige him by taking a day's pleasure, but relenting at length, she suffered herself to be persuaded, and granting him her free forgiveness (the merit whereof, she meekly said, rested with the Manual and not with her), desired that Miggs might come and help her dress. The handmaid attended promptly, and it is but justice to their joint exertions to record that, when the good lady came downstairs in course of time, completely decked out for the journey, she really looked as if nothing had happened, and appeared in the very best health imaginable.

As to Dolly, there she was again, the very pink and pattern of good looks, in a smart little cherry-coloured mantle, with a hood of the same drawn over her head, and upon the top of that hood, a little straw hat trimmed with cherry-coloured ribbons, and worn the merest trifle on one side—just enough in short to make it the wickedest and most provoking head-dress that ever malicious milliner devised. And not to speak of the manner in which these cherry-coloured decorations brightened her eyes, or vied with her lips, or shed a new bloom on her face, she wore such a cruel little muff, and such a heart-rending pair of shoes, and was so surrounded and hemmed in, as it were, by aggravations of all kinds, that when Mr Tappettit, holding the horse's head, saw her come out of the house alone, such impulses came over him to decoy her into the chaise and drive off like mad, that he would unquestionably have done it, but for certain uneasy doubts besetting him as to the shortest way to Gretna Green; whether it was up the street or down, or up the right-hand turning or the left; and whether, supposing all the turnpikes to be carried by storm, the blacksmith in the end would marry them on credit; which by reason of his clerical office appeared, even to his excited imagination, so unlikely, that he hesitated. And while he stood hesitating, and looking post-chaises-and-six at Dolly, out came his master and his mistress, and the constant Miggs, and the opportunity was gone for ever. For now the chaise creaked upon its springs, and Mrs Varden was inside; and now it creaked again, and more than ever, and the locksmith was inside; and now it bounded once, as if its heart beat lightly, and Dolly was inside; and now it was gone and its place was empty, and he and that dreary Miggs were standing in the street together.

The hearty locksmith was in as good a humour as if nothing had occurred for the last twelve months to put him out of his way, Dolly was all smiles and graces, and Mrs Varden was agreeable beyond all precedent. As they jogged through the streets talking of this thing and of that, who should be descried upon the pavement but that very coachmaker, looking so genteel that nobody would have believed he had ever had anything to do with a coach but riding in it, and bowing like any nobleman. To be sure Dolly was confused when she bowed again, and to be sure the cherry-coloured ribbons trembled a little when she met his mournful eye, which seemed to say, 'I have kept my word, I have begun, the business is going to the devil, and you're the cause of it.' There he stood, rooted to the ground: as Dolly said, like a statue; and as Mrs Varden said, like a pump; till they turned the corner: and when her father thought it was like his impudence, and her mother wondered what he meant by it, Dolly blushed again till her very hood was pale.

But on they went, not the less merrily for this, and there was the locksmith in the incautious fulness of his heart 'pulling-up' at all manner of places, and evincing a most intimate acquaintance with all the taverns on the road, and all the landlords and all the landladies, with whom, indeed, the little horse was on equally friendly terms, for he kept on stopping of his own accord. Never were people so glad to see other people as these landlords and landladies were to behold Mr Varden and Mrs Varden and Miss Varden; and wouldn't they get out, said one; and they really must walk upstairs, said another; and she would take it ill and be quite certain they were proud if they wouldn't have a little taste of something, said a third; and so on, that it was really quite a Progress rather than a ride, and one continued scene of hospitality from beginning to end. It was pleasant enough to be held in such esteem, not to mention the refreshments; so Mrs Varden said nothing at the time, and was all affability and delight—but such a body of evidence as she collected against the unfortunate locksmith that day, to be used thereafter as occasion might require, never was got together for matrimonial purposes.

In course of time—and in course of a pretty long time too, for these agreeable interruptions delayed them not a little,—they arrived upon the skirts of the Forest, and riding pleasantly on among the trees, came at last to the Maypole, where the locksmith's cheerful 'Yoho!' speedily brought to the porch old John, and after him young Joe, both of whom were so transfixed at sight of the ladies, that for a moment they were perfectly unable to give them any welcome, and could do nothing but stare.

It was only for a moment, however, that Joe forgot himself, for speedily reviving he thrust his drowsy father aside—to Mr Willet's mighty and inexpressible indignation—and darting out, stood ready to help them to alight. It was necessary for Dolly to get out first. Joe had her in his arms;—yes, though for a space of time no longer than you could count one in, Joe had her in his arms. Here was a glimpse of happiness!

It would be difficult to describe what a flat and commonplace affair the helping Mrs Varden out afterwards was, but Joe did it, and did it too with the best grace in the world. Then old John, who, entertaining a dull and foggy sort of idea that Mrs Varden wasn't fond of him, had been in some doubt whether she might not have come for purposes of assault and battery, took courage, hoped she was well, and offered to conduct her into the house. This tender being amicably received, they marched in together; Joe and Dolly followed, arm-in-arm, (happiness again!) and Varden brought up the rear.

Old John would have it that they must sit in the bar, and nobody objecting, into the bar they went. All bars are snug places, but the Maypole's was the very snuggest, cosiest, and completest bar, that ever the wit of man devised. Such amazing bottles in old oaken pigeon-holes; such gleaming tankards dangling from pegs at about the same inclination as thirsty men would hold them to their lips; such sturdy little Dutch kegs ranged in rows on shelves; so many lemons hanging in separate nets, and forming the fragrant grove already mentioned in this chronicle, suggestive, with goodly loaves of snowy sugar stowed away hard by, of punch, idealised beyond all mortal knowledge; such closets, such presses, such drawers full of pipes, such places for putting things away in hollow window-seats, all crammed to the throat with eatables, drinkables, or savoury condiments; lastly, and to crown all, as typical of the immense resources of the establishment, and its defiances to all visitors to cut and come again, such a stupendous cheese!

It is a poor heart that never rejoices—it must have been the poorest, weakest, and most watery heart that ever beat, which would not have warmed towards the Maypole bar. Mrs Varden's did directly. She could no more have reproached John Willet among those household gods, the kegs and bottles, lemons, pipes, and cheese, than she could have stabbed him with his own bright carving-knife. The order for dinner too—it might have soothed a savage. 'A bit of fish,' said John to the cook, 'and some lamb chops (breaded, with plenty of ketchup), and a good salad, and a roast spring chicken, with a dish of sausages and mashed potatoes, or something of that sort.' Something of that sort! The resources of these inns! To talk carelessly about dishes, which in themselves were a first-rate holiday kind of dinner, suitable to one's wedding-day, as something of that sort: meaning, if you can't get a spring chicken, any other trifle in the way of poultry will do—such as a peacock, perhaps! The kitchen too, with its great broad cavernous chimney; the kitchen, where nothing in the way of cookery seemed impossible; where you could believe in anything to eat, they chose to tell you of. Mrs Varden returned from the contemplation of these wonders to the bar again, with a head quite dizzy and bewildered. Her housekeeping capacity was not large enough to comprehend them. She was obliged to go to sleep. Waking was pain, in the midst of such immensity.

Dolly in the meanwhile, whose gay heart and head ran upon other matters, passed out at the garden door, and glancing back now and then (but of course not wondering whether Joe saw her), tripped away by a path across the fields with which she was well acquainted, to discharge her mission at the Warren; and this deponent hath been informed and verily believes, that you might have seen many less pleasant objects than the cherry-coloured mantle and ribbons, as they went fluttering along the green meadows in the bright light of the day, like giddy things as they were.

Chapter 20

The proud consciousness of her trust, and the great importance she derived from it, might have advertised it to all the house if she had had to run the gauntlet of its inhabitants; but as Dolly had played in every dull room and passage many and many a time, when a child, and had ever since been the humble friend of Miss Haredale, whose foster-sister she was, she was as free of the building as the young lady herself. So, using no greater precaution than holding her breath and walking on tiptoe as she passed the library door, she went straight to Emma's room as a privileged visitor.

It was the liveliest room in the building. The chamber was sombre like the rest for the matter of that, but the presence of youth and beauty would make a prison cheerful (saving alas! that confinement withers them), and lend some charms of their own to the gloomiest scene. Birds, flowers, books, drawing, music, and a hundred such graceful tokens of feminine loves and cares, filled it with more of life and human sympathy than the whole house besides seemed made to hold. There was heart in the room; and who that has a heart, ever fails to recognise the silent presence of another!

Dolly had one undoubtedly, and it was not a tough one either, though there was a little mist of coquettishness about it, such as sometimes surrounds that sun of life in its morning, and slightly dims its lustre. Thus, when Emma rose to greet her, and kissing her affectionately on the cheek, told her, in her quiet way, that she had been very unhappy, the tears stood in Dolly's eyes, and she felt more sorry than she could tell; but next moment she happened to raise them to the glass, and really there was something there so exceedingly agreeable, that as she sighed, she smiled, and felt surprisingly consoled.

'I have heard about it, miss,' said Dolly, 'and it's very sad indeed, but when things are at the worst they are sure to mend.'

'But are you sure they are at the worst?' asked Emma with a smile.

'Why, I don't see how they can very well be more unpromising than they are; I really don't,' said Dolly. 'And I bring something to begin with.'

'Not from Edward?'

Dolly nodded and smiled, and feeling in her pockets (there were pockets in those days) with an affectation of not being able to find what she wanted, which greatly enhanced her importance, at length produced the letter. As Emma hastily broke the seal and became absorbed in its contents, Dolly's eyes, by one of those strange accidents for which there is no accounting, wandered to the glass again. She could not help wondering whether the coach-maker suffered very much, and quite pitied the poor man.

It was a long letter—a very long letter, written close on all four sides of the sheet of paper, and crossed afterwards; but it was not a consolatory letter, for as Emma read it she stopped from time to time to put her handkerchief to her eyes. To be sure Dolly marvelled greatly to see her in so much distress, for to her thinking a love affair ought to be one of the best jokes, and the slyest, merriest kind of thing in life. But she set it down in her own mind that all this came from Miss Haredale's being so constant, and that if she would only take on with some other young gentleman—just in the most innocent way possible, to keep her first lover up to the mark—she would find herself inexpressibly comforted.

'I am sure that's what I should do if it was me,' thought Dolly. 'To make one's sweetheart miserable is well enough and quite right, but to be made miserable one's self is a little too much!'

However it wouldn't do to say so, and therefore she sat looking on in silence. She needed a pretty considerable stretch of patience, for when the long letter had been read once all through it was read again, and when it had been read twice all through it was read again. During this tedious process, Dolly beguiled the time in the most improving manner that occurred to her, by curling her hair on her fingers, with the aid of the looking-glass before mentioned, and giving it some killing twists.

Everything has an end. Even young ladies in love cannot read their letters for ever. In course of time the packet was folded up, and it only remained to write the answer.

But as this promised to be a work of time likewise, Emma said she would put it off until after dinner, and that Dolly must dine with her. As Dolly had made up her mind to do so beforehand, she required very little pressing; and when they had settled this point, they went to walk in the garden.

They strolled up and down the terrace walks, talking incessantly—at least, Dolly never left off once—and making that quarter of the sad and mournful house quite gay. Not that they talked loudly or laughed much, but they were both so very handsome, and it was such a breezy day, and their light dresses and dark curls appeared so free and joyous in their abandonment, and Emma was so fair, and Dolly so rosy, and Emma so delicately shaped, and Dolly so plump, and—in short, there are no flowers for any garden like such flowers, let horticulturists say what they may, and both house and garden seemed to know it, and to brighten up sensibly.

After this, came the dinner and the letter writing, and some more talking, in the course of which Miss Haredale took occasion to charge upon Dolly certain flirtish and inconstant propensities, which accusations Dolly seemed to think very complimentary indeed, and to be mightily amused with. Finding her quite incorrigible in this respect, Emma suffered her to depart; but not before she had confided to her that important and never-sufficiently-to-be-taken-care-of answer, and endowed her moreover with a pretty little bracelet as a keepsake. Having clasped it on her arm, and again advised her half in jest and half in earnest to amend her roguish ways, for she knew she was fond of Joe at heart (which Dolly stoutly denied, with a great many haughty protestations that she hoped she could do better than that indeed! and so forth), she bade her farewell; and after calling her back to give her more supplementary messages for Edward, than anybody with tenfold the gravity of Dolly Varden could be reasonably expected to remember, at length dismissed her.

Dolly bade her good bye, and tripping lightly down the stairs arrived at the dreaded library door, and was about to pass it again on tiptoe, when it opened, and behold! there stood Mr Haredale. Now, Dolly had from her childhood associated with this gentleman the idea of something grim and ghostly, and being at the moment conscience-stricken besides, the sight of him threw her into such a flurry that she could neither acknowledge his presence nor run away, so she gave a great start, and then with downcast eyes stood still and trembled.

'Come here, girl,' said Mr Haredale, taking her by the hand. 'I want to speak to you.'

'If you please, sir, I'm in a hurry,' faltered Dolly, 'and—you have frightened me by coming so suddenly upon me, sir—I would rather go, sir, if you'll be so good as to let me.'

'Immediately,' said Mr Haredale, who had by this time led her into the room and closed the door. You shall go directly. You have just left Emma?'

'Yes, sir, just this minute.—Father's waiting for me, sir, if you'll please to have the goodness—'

I know. I know,' said Mr Haredale. 'Answer me a question. What did you bring here to-day?'

'Bring here, sir?' faltered Dolly.

'You will tell me the truth, I am sure. Yes.'

Dolly hesitated for a little while, and somewhat emboldened by his manner, said at last, 'Well then, sir. It was a letter.'

'From Mr Edward Chester, of course. And you are the bearer of the answer?'

Dolly hesitated again, and not being able to decide upon any other course of action, burst into tears.

'You alarm yourself without cause,' said Mr Haredale. 'Why are you so foolish? Surely you can answer me. You know that I have but to put the question to Emma and learn the truth directly. Have you the answer with you?'

Dolly had what is popularly called a spirit of her own, and being now fairly at bay, made the best of it.

'Yes, sir,' she rejoined, trembling and frightened as she was. 'Yes, sir, I have. You may kill me if you please, sir, but I won't give it up. I'm very sorry,—but I won't. There, sir.'

'I commend your firmness and your plain-speaking,' said Mr Haredale. 'Rest assured that I have as little desire to take your letter as your life. You are a very discreet messenger and a good girl.'

Not feeling quite certain, as she afterwards said, whether he might not be 'coming over her' with these compliments, Dolly kept as far from him as she could, cried again, and resolved to defend her pocket (for the letter was there) to the last extremity.

'I have some design,' said Mr Haredale after a short silence, during which a smile, as he regarded her, had struggled through the gloom and melancholy that was natural to his face, 'of providing a companion for my niece; for her life is a very lonely one. Would you like the office? You are the oldest friend she has, and the best entitled to it.'

'I don't know, sir,' answered Dolly, not sure but he was bantering her; 'I can't say. I don't know what they might wish at home. I couldn't give an opinion, sir.'

'If your friends had no objection, would you have any?' said Mr Haredale. 'Come. There's a plain question; and easy to answer.'

'None at all that I know of sir,' replied Dolly. 'I should be very glad to be near Miss Emma of course, and always am.'

'That's well,' said Mr Haredale. 'That is all I had to say. You are anxious to go. Don't let me detain you.'

Dolly didn't let him, nor did she wait for him to try, for the words had no sooner passed his lips than she was out of the room, out of the house, and in the fields again.

The first thing to be done, of course, when she came to herself and considered what a flurry she had been in, was to cry afresh; and the next thing, when she reflected how well she had got over it, was to laugh heartily. The tears once banished gave place to the smiles, and at last Dolly laughed so much that she was fain to lean against a tree, and give vent to her exultation. When she could laugh no longer, and was quite tired, she put her head-dress to rights, dried her eyes, looked back very merrily and triumphantly at the Warren chimneys, which were just visible, and resumed her walk.

The twilight had come on, and it was quickly growing dusk, but the path was so familiar to her from frequent traversing that she hardly thought of this, and certainly felt no uneasiness at being left alone. Moreover, there was the bracelet to admire; and when she had given it a good rub, and held it out at arm's length, it sparkled and glittered so beautifully on her wrist, that to look at it in every point of view and with every possible turn of the arm, was quite an absorbing business. There was the letter too, and it looked so mysterious and knowing, when she took it out of her pocket, and it held, as she knew, so much inside, that to turn it over and over, and think about it, and wonder how it began, and how it ended, and what it said all through, was another matter of constant occupation. Between the bracelet and the letter, there was quite enough to do without thinking of anything else; and admiring each by turns, Dolly went on gaily.

As she passed through a wicket-gate to where the path was narrow, and lay between two hedges garnished here and there with trees, she heard a rustling close at hand, which brought her to a sudden stop. She listened. All was very quiet, and she went on again—not absolutely frightened, but a little quicker than before perhaps, and possibly not quite so much at her ease, for a check of that kind is startling.

She had no sooner moved on again, than she was conscious of the same sound, which was like that of a person tramping stealthily among bushes and brushwood. Looking towards the spot whence it appeared to come, she almost fancied she could make out a crouching figure. She stopped again. All was quiet as before. On she went once more—decidedly faster now—and tried to sing softly to herself. It must be the wind.

But how came the wind to blow only when she walked, and cease when she stood still? She stopped involuntarily as she made the reflection, and the rustling noise stopped likewise. She was really frightened now, and was yet hesitating what to do, when the bushes crackled and snapped, and a man came plunging through them, close before her.

Chapter 21

It was for the moment an inexpressible relief to Dolly, to recognise in the person who forced himself into the path so abruptly, and now stood directly in her way, Hugh of the Maypole, whose name she uttered in a tone of delighted surprise that came from her heart.

'Was it you?' she said, 'how glad I am to see you! and how could you terrify me so!'

In answer to which, he said nothing at all, but stood quite still, looking at her.

'Did you come to meet me?' asked Dolly.

Hugh nodded, and muttered something to the effect that he had been waiting for her, and had expected her sooner.

'I thought it likely they would send,' said Dolly, greatly reassured by this.

'Nobody sent me,' was his sullen answer. 'I came of my own accord.'

The rough bearing of this fellow, and his wild, uncouth appearance, had often filled the girl with a vague apprehension even when other people were by, and had occasioned her to shrink from him involuntarily. The having him for an unbidden companion in so solitary a place, with the darkness fast gathering about them, renewed and even increased the alarm she had felt at first.

If his manner had been merely dogged and passively fierce, as usual, she would have had no greater dislike to his company than she always felt—perhaps, indeed, would have been rather glad to have had him at hand. But there was something of coarse bold admiration in his look, which terrified her very much. She glanced timidly towards him, uncertain whether to go forward or retreat, and he stood gazing at her like a handsome satyr; and so they remained for some short time without stirring or breaking silence. At length Dolly took courage, shot past him, and hurried on.

'Why do you spend so much breath in avoiding me?' said Hugh, accommodating his pace to hers, and keeping close at her side.

'I wish to get back as quickly as I can, and you walk too near me, answered Dolly.'

'Too near!' said Hugh, stooping over her so that she could feel his breath upon her forehead. 'Why too near? You're always proud to ME, mistress.'

'I am proud to no one. You mistake me,' answered Dolly. 'Fall back, if you please, or go on.'

'Nay, mistress,' he rejoined, endeavouring to draw her arm through his, 'I'll walk with you.'

She released herself and clenching her little hand, struck him with right good will. At this, Maypole Hugh burst into a roar of laughter, and passing his arm about her waist, held her in his strong grasp as easily as if she had been a bird.

'Ha ha ha! Well done, mistress! Strike again. You shall beat my face, and tear my hair, and pluck my beard up by the roots, and welcome, for the sake of your bright eyes. Strike again, mistress. Do. Ha ha ha! I like it.'

'Let me go,' she cried, endeavouring with both her hands to push him off. 'Let me go this moment.'

'You had as good be kinder to me, Sweetlips,' said Hugh. 'You had, indeed. Come. Tell me now. Why are you always so proud? I don't quarrel with you for it. I love you when you're proud. Ha ha ha! You can't hide your beauty from a poor fellow; that's a comfort!'

She gave him no answer, but as he had not yet checked her progress, continued to press forward as rapidly as she could. At length, between the hurry she had made, her terror, and the tightness of his embrace, her strength failed her, and she could go no further.

'Hugh,' cried the panting girl, 'good Hugh; if you will leave me I will give you anything—everything I have—and never tell one word of this to any living creature.'

'You had best not,' he answered. 'Harkye, little dove, you had best not. All about here know me, and what I dare do if I have a mind. If ever you are going to tell, stop when the words are on your lips, and think of the mischief you'll bring, if you do, upon some innocent heads that you wouldn't wish to hurt a hair of. Bring trouble on me, and I'll bring trouble and something more on them in return. I care no more for them than for so many dogs; not so much—why should I? I'd sooner kill a man than a dog any day. I've never been sorry for a man's death in all my life, and I have for a dog's.'

There was something so thoroughly savage in the manner of these expressions, and the looks and gestures by which they were accompanied, that her great fear of him gave her new strength, and enabled her by a sudden effort to extricate herself and run fleetly from him. But Hugh was as nimble, strong, and swift of foot, as any man in broad England, and it was but a fruitless expenditure of energy, for he had her in his encircling arms again before she had gone a hundred yards.

'Softly, darling—gently—would you fly from rough Hugh, that loves you as well as any drawing-room gallant?'

'I would,' she answered, struggling to free herself again. 'I will. Help!'

'A fine for crying out,' said Hugh. 'Ha ha ha! A fine, pretty one, from your lips. I pay myself! Ha ha ha!'

'Help! help! help!' As she shrieked with the utmost violence she could exert, a shout was heard in answer, and another, and another.

'Thank Heaven!' cried the girl in an ecstasy. 'Joe, dear Joe, this way. Help!'

Her assailant paused, and stood irresolute for a moment, but the shouts drawing nearer and coming quick upon them, forced him to a speedy decision. He released her, whispered with a menacing look, 'Tell HIM: and see what follows!' and leaping the hedge, was gone in an instant. Dolly darted off, and fairly ran into Joe Willet's open arms.

'What is the matter? are you hurt? what was it? who was it? where is he? what was he like?' with a great many encouraging expressions and assurances of safety, were the first words Joe poured forth. But poor little Dolly was so breathless and terrified that for some time she was quite unable to answer him, and hung upon his shoulder, sobbing and crying as if her heart would break.

Joe had not the smallest objection to have her hanging on his shoulder; no, not the least, though it crushed the cherry-coloured ribbons sadly, and put the smart little hat out of all shape. But he couldn't bear to see her cry; it went to his very heart. He tried to console her, bent over her, whispered to her—some say kissed her, but that's a fable. At any rate he said all the kind and tender things he could think of and Dolly let him go on and didn't interrupt him once, and it was a good ten minutes before she was able to raise her head and thank him.

'What was it that frightened you?' said Joe.

A man whose person was unknown to her had followed her, she answered; he began by begging, and went on to threats of robbery, which he was on the point of carrying into execution, and would have executed, but for Joe's timely aid. The hesitation and confusion with which she said this, Joe attributed to the fright she had sustained, and no suspicion of the truth occurred to him for a moment.

'Stop when the words are on your lips.' A hundred times that night, and very often afterwards, when the disclosure was rising to her tongue, Dolly thought of that, and repressed it. A deeply rooted dread of the man; the conviction that his ferocious nature, once roused, would stop at nothing; and the strong assurance that if she impeached him, the full measure of his wrath and vengeance would be wreaked on Joe, who had preserved her; these were considerations she had not the courage to overcome, and inducements to secrecy too powerful for her to surmount.

Joe, for his part, was a great deal too happy to inquire very curiously into the matter; and Dolly being yet too tremulous to walk without assistance, they went forward very slowly, and in his mind very pleasantly, until the Maypole lights were near at hand, twinkling their cheerful welcome, when Dolly stopped suddenly and with a half scream exclaimed,

'The letter!'

'What letter?' cried Joe.

'That I was carrying—I had it in my hand. My bracelet too,' she said, clasping her wrist. 'I have lost them both.'

'Do you mean just now?' said Joe.

'Either I dropped them then, or they were taken from me,' answered Dolly, vainly searching her pocket and rustling her dress. 'They are gone, both gone. What an unhappy girl I am!' With these words poor Dolly, who to do her justice was quite as sorry for the loss of the letter as for her bracelet, fell a-crying again, and bemoaned her fate most movingly.

Joe tried to comfort her with the assurance that directly he had housed her in the Maypole, he would return to the spot with a lantern (for it was now quite dark) and make strict search for the missing articles, which there was great probability of his finding, as it was not likely that anybody had passed that way since, and she was not conscious that they had been forcibly taken from her. Dolly thanked him very heartily for this offer, though with no great hope of his quest being successful; and so with many lamentations on her side, and many hopeful words on his, and much weakness on the part of Dolly and much tender supporting on the part of Joe, they reached the Maypole bar at last, where the locksmith and his wife and old John were yet keeping high festival.

Mr Willet received the intelligence of Dolly's trouble with that surprising presence of mind and readiness of speech for which he was so eminently distinguished above all other men. Mrs Varden expressed her sympathy for her daughter's distress by scolding her roundly for being so late; and the honest locksmith divided himself between condoling with and kissing Dolly, and shaking hands heartily with Joe, whom he could not sufficiently praise or thank.

In reference to this latter point, old John was far from agreeing with his friend; for besides that he by no means approved of an adventurous spirit in the abstract, it occurred to him that if his son and heir had been seriously damaged in a scuffle, the consequences would assuredly have been expensive and inconvenient, and might perhaps have proved detrimental to the Maypole business. Wherefore, and because he looked with no favourable eye upon young girls, but rather considered that they and the whole female sex were a kind of nonsensical mistake on the part of Nature, he took occasion to retire and shake his head in private at the boiler; inspired by which silent oracle, he was moved to give Joe various stealthy nudges with his elbow, as a parental reproof and gentle admonition to mind his own business and not make a fool of himself.

Joe, however, took down the lantern and lighted it; and arming himself with a stout stick, asked whether Hugh was in the stable.

'He's lying asleep before the kitchen fire, sir,' said Mr Willet. 'What do you want him for?'

'I want him to come with me to look after this bracelet and letter,' answered Joe. 'Halloa there! Hugh!'

Dolly turned pale as death, and felt as if she must faint forthwith. After a few moments, Hugh came staggering in, stretching himself and yawning according to custom, and presenting every appearance of having been roused from a sound nap.

'Here, sleepy-head,' said Joe, giving him the lantern. 'Carry this, and bring the dog, and that small cudgel of yours. And woe betide the fellow if we come upon him.'

'What fellow?' growled Hugh, rubbing his eyes and shaking himself.

'What fellow?' returned Joe, who was in a state of great valour and bustle; 'a fellow you ought to know of and be more alive about. It's well for the like of you, lazy giant that you are, to be snoring your time away in chimney-corners, when honest men's daughters can't cross even our quiet meadows at nightfall without being set upon by footpads, and frightened out of their precious lives.'

'They never rob me,' cried Hugh with a laugh. 'I have got nothing to lose. But I'd as lief knock them at head as any other men. How many are there?'

'Only one,' said Dolly faintly, for everybody looked at her.

'And what was he like, mistress?' said Hugh with a glance at young Willet, so slight and momentary that the scowl it conveyed was lost on all but her. 'About my height?'

'Not—not so tall,' Dolly replied, scarce knowing what she said.

'His dress,' said Hugh, looking at her keenly, 'like—like any of ours now? I know all the people hereabouts, and maybe could give a guess at the man, if I had anything to guide me.'

Dolly faltered and turned paler yet; then answered that he was wrapped in a loose coat and had his face hidden by a handkerchief and that she could give no other description of him.

'You wouldn't know him if you saw him then, belike?' said Hugh with a malicious grin.

'I should not,' answered Dolly, bursting into tears again. 'I don't wish to see him. I can't bear to think of him. I can't talk about him any more. Don't go to look for these things, Mr Joe, pray don't. I entreat you not to go with that man.'

'Not to go with me!' cried Hugh. 'I'm too rough for them all. They're all afraid of me. Why, bless you mistress, I've the tenderest heart alive. I love all the ladies, ma'am,' said Hugh, turning to the locksmith's wife.

Mrs Varden opined that if he did, he ought to be ashamed of himself; such sentiments being more consistent (so she argued) with a benighted Mussulman or wild Islander than with a stanch Protestant. Arguing from this imperfect state of his morals, Mrs Varden further opined that he had never studied the Manual. Hugh admitting that he never had, and moreover that he couldn't read, Mrs Varden declared with much severity, that he ought to be even more ashamed of himself than before, and strongly recommended him to save up his pocket-money for the purchase of one, and further to teach himself the contents with all convenient diligence. She was still pursuing this train of discourse, when Hugh, somewhat unceremoniously and irreverently, followed his young master out, and left her to edify the rest of the company. This she proceeded to do, and finding that Mr Willet's eyes were fixed upon her with an appearance of deep attention, gradually addressed the whole of her discourse to him, whom she entertained with a moral and theological lecture of considerable length, in the conviction that great workings were taking place in his spirit. The simple truth was, however, that Mr Willet, although his eyes were wide open and he saw a woman before him whose head by long and steady looking at seemed to grow bigger and bigger until it filled the whole bar, was to all other intents and purposes fast asleep; and so sat leaning back in his chair with his hands in his pockets until his son's return caused him to wake up with a deep sigh, and a faint impression that he had been dreaming about pickled pork and greens—a vision of his slumbers which was no doubt referable to the circumstance of Mrs Varden's having frequently pronounced the word 'Grace' with much emphasis; which word, entering the portals of Mr Willet's brain as they stood ajar, and coupling itself with the words 'before meat,' which were there ranging about, did in time suggest a particular kind of meat together with that description of vegetable which is usually its companion.

The search was wholly unsuccessful. Joe had groped along the path a dozen times, and among the grass, and in the dry ditch, and in the hedge, but all in vain. Dolly, who was quite inconsolable for her loss, wrote a note to Miss Haredale giving her the same account of it that she had given at the Maypole, which Joe undertook to deliver as soon as the family were stirring next day. That done, they sat down to tea in the bar, where there was an uncommon display of buttered toast, and—in order that they might not grow faint for want of sustenance, and might have a decent halting-place or halfway house between dinner and supper—a few savoury trifles in the shape of great rashers of broiled ham, which being well cured, done to a turn, and smoking hot, sent forth a tempting and delicious fragrance.

Mrs Varden was seldom very Protestant at meals, unless it happened that they were underdone, or overdone, or indeed that anything occurred to put her out of humour. Her spirits rose considerably on beholding these goodly preparations, and from the nothingness of good works, she passed to the somethingness of ham and toast with great cheerfulness. Nay, under the influence of these wholesome stimulants, she sharply reproved her daughter for being low and despondent (which she considered an unacceptable frame of mind), and remarked, as she held her own plate for a fresh supply, that it would be well for Dolly, who pined over the loss of a toy and a sheet of paper, if she would reflect upon the voluntary sacrifices of the missionaries in foreign parts who lived chiefly on salads.

The proceedings of such a day occasion various fluctuations in the human thermometer, and especially in instruments so sensitively and delicately constructed as Mrs Varden. Thus, at dinner Mrs V. stood at summer heat; genial, smiling, and delightful. After dinner, in the sunshine of the wine, she went up at least half-a-dozen degrees, and was perfectly enchanting. As its effect subsided, she fell rapidly, went to sleep for an hour or so at temperate, and woke at something below freezing. Now she was at summer heat again, in the shade; and when tea was over, and old John, producing a bottle of cordial from one of the oaken cases, insisted on her sipping two glasses thereof in slow succession, she stood steadily at ninety for one hour and a quarter. Profiting by experience, the locksmith took advantage of this genial weather to smoke his pipe in the porch, and in consequence of this prudent management, he was fully prepared, when the glass went down again, to start homewards directly.

The horse was accordingly put in, and the chaise brought round to the door. Joe, who would on no account be dissuaded from escorting them until they had passed the most dreary and solitary part of the road, led out the grey mare at the same time; and having helped Dolly into her seat (more happiness!) sprung gaily into the saddle. Then, after many good nights, and admonitions to wrap up, and glancing of lights, and handing in of cloaks and shawls, the chaise rolled away, and Joe trotted beside it—on Dolly's side, no doubt, and pretty close to the wheel too.

Chapter 22

It was a fine bright night, and for all her lowness of spirits Dolly kept looking up at the stars in a manner so bewitching (and SHE knew it!) that Joe was clean out of his senses, and plainly showed that if ever a man were—not to say over head and ears, but over the Monument and the top of Saint Paul's in love, that man was himself. The road was a very good one; not at all a jolting road, or an uneven one; and yet Dolly held the side of the chaise with one little hand, all the way. If there had been an executioner behind him with an uplifted axe ready to chop off his head if he touched that hand, Joe couldn't have helped doing it. From putting his own hand upon it as if by chance, and taking it away again after a minute or so, he got to riding along without taking it off at all; as if he, the escort, were bound to do that as an important part of his duty, and had come out for the purpose. The most curious circumstance about this little incident was, that Dolly didn't seem to know of it. She looked so innocent and unconscious when she turned her eyes on Joe, that it was quite provoking.

She talked though; talked about her fright, and about Joe's coming up to rescue her, and about her gratitude, and about her fear that she might not have thanked him enough, and about their always being friends from that time forth—and about all that sort of thing. And when Joe said, not friends he hoped, Dolly was quite surprised, and said not enemies she hoped; and when Joe said, couldn't they be something much better than either, Dolly all of a sudden found out a star which was brighter than all the other stars, and begged to call his attention to the same, and was ten thousand times more innocent and unconscious than ever.

In this manner they travelled along, talking very little above a whisper, and wishing the road could be stretched out to some dozen times its natural length—at least that was Joe's desire—when, as they were getting clear of the forest and emerging on the more frequented road, they heard behind them the sound of a horse's feet at a round trot, which growing rapidly louder as it drew nearer, elicited a scream from Mrs Varden, and the cry 'a friend!' from the rider, who now came panting up, and checked his horse beside them.

'This man again!' cried Dolly, shuddering.

'Hugh!' said Joe. 'What errand are you upon?'

'I come to ride back with you,' he answered, glancing covertly at the locksmith's daughter. 'HE sent me.

'My father!' said poor Joe; adding under his breath, with a very unfilial apostrophe, 'Will he never think me man enough to take care of myself!'

'Aye!' returned Hugh to the first part of the inquiry. 'The roads are not safe just now, he says, and you'd better have a companion.'

'Ride on then,' said Joe. 'I'm not going to turn yet.'

Hugh complied, and they went on again. It was his whim or humour to ride immediately before the chaise, and from this position he constantly turned his head, and looked back. Dolly felt that he looked at her, but she averted her eyes and feared to raise them once, so great was the dread with which he had inspired her.

This interruption, and the consequent wakefulness of Mrs Varden, who had been nodding in her sleep up to this point, except for a minute or two at a time, when she roused herself to scold the locksmith for audaciously taking hold of her to prevent her nodding herself out of the chaise, put a restraint upon the whispered conversation, and made it difficult of resumption. Indeed, before they had gone another mile, Gabriel stopped at his wife's desire, and that good lady protested she would not hear of Joe's going a step further on any account whatever. It was in vain for Joe to protest on the other hand that he was by no means tired, and would turn back presently, and would see them safely past such a point, and so forth. Mrs Varden was obdurate, and being so was not to be overcome by mortal agency.

'Good night—if I must say it,' said Joe, sorrowfully.

'Good night,' said Dolly. She would have added, 'Take care of that man, and pray don't trust him,' but he had turned his horse's head, and was standing close to them. She had therefore nothing for it but to suffer Joe to give her hand a gentle squeeze, and when the chaise had gone on for some distance, to look back and wave it, as he still lingered on the spot where they had parted, with the tall dark figure of Hugh beside him.

What she thought about, going home; and whether the coach-maker held as favourable a place in her meditations as he had occupied in the morning, is unknown. They reached home at last—at last, for it was a long way, made none the shorter by Mrs Varden's grumbling. Miggs hearing the sound of wheels was at the door immediately.

'Here they are, Simmun! Here they are!' cried Miggs, clapping her hands, and issuing forth to help her mistress to alight. 'Bring a chair, Simmun. Now, an't you the better for it, mim? Don't you feel more yourself than you would have done if you'd have stopped at home? Oh, gracious! how cold you are! Goodness me, sir, she's a perfect heap of ice.'

'I can't help it, my good girl. You had better take her in to the fire,' said the locksmith.

'Master sounds unfeeling, mim,' said Miggs, in a tone of commiseration, 'but such is not his intentions, I'm sure. After what he has seen of you this day, I never will believe but that he has a deal more affection in his heart than to speak unkind. Come in and sit yourself down by the fire; there's a good dear—do.'

Mrs Varden complied. The locksmith followed with his hands in his pockets, and Mr Tappertit trundled off with the chaise to a neighbouring stable.

'Martha, my dear,' said the locksmith, when they reached the parlour, 'if you'll look to Dolly yourself or let somebody else do it, perhaps it will be only kind and reasonable. She has been frightened, you know, and is not at all well to-night.'

In fact, Dolly had thrown herself upon the sofa, quite regardless of all the little finery of which she had been so proud in the morning, and with her face buried in her hands was crying very much.

At first sight of this phenomenon (for Dolly was by no means accustomed to displays of this sort, rather learning from her mother's example to avoid them as much as possible) Mrs Varden expressed her belief that never was any woman so beset as she; that her life was a continued scene of trial; that whenever she was disposed to be well and cheerful, so sure were the people around her to throw, by some means or other, a damp upon her spirits; and that, as she had enjoyed herself that day, and Heaven knew it was very seldom she did enjoy herself so she was now to pay the penalty. To all such propositions Miggs assented freely. Poor Dolly, however, grew none the better for these restoratives, but rather worse, indeed; and seeing that she was really ill, both Mrs Varden and Miggs were moved to compassion, and tended her in earnest.

But even then, their very kindness shaped itself into their usual course of policy, and though Dolly was in a swoon, it was rendered clear to the meanest capacity, that Mrs Varden was the sufferer. Thus when Dolly began to get a little better, and passed into that stage in which matrons hold that remonstrance and argument may be successfully applied, her mother represented to her, with tears in her eyes, that if she had been flurried and worried that day, she must remember it was the common lot of humanity, and in especial of womankind, who through the whole of their existence must expect no less, and were bound to make up their minds to meek endurance and patient resignation. Mrs Varden entreated her to remember that one of these days she would, in all probability, have to do violence to her feelings so far as to be married; and that marriage, as she might see every day of her life (and truly she did) was a state requiring great fortitude and forbearance. She represented to her in lively colours, that if she (Mrs V.) had not, in steering her course through this vale of tears, been supported by a strong principle of duty which alone upheld and prevented her from drooping, she must have been in her grave many years ago; in which case she desired to know what would have become of that errant spirit (meaning the locksmith), of whose eye she was the very apple, and in whose path she was, as it were, a shining light and guiding star?

Miss Miggs also put in her word to the same effect. She said that indeed and indeed Miss Dolly might take pattern by her blessed mother, who, she always had said, and always would say, though she were to be hanged, drawn, and quartered for it next minute, was the mildest, amiablest, forgivingest-spirited, longest-sufferingest female as ever she could have believed; the mere narration of whose excellencies had worked such a wholesome change in the mind of her own sister-in-law, that, whereas, before, she and her husband lived like cat and dog, and were in the habit of exchanging brass candlesticks, pot-lids, flat-irons, and other such strong resentments, they were now the happiest and affectionatest couple upon earth; as could be proved any day on application at Golden Lion Court, number twenty-sivin, second bell-handle on the right-hand doorpost. After glancing at herself as a comparatively worthless vessel, but still as one of some desert, she besought her to bear in mind that her aforesaid dear and only mother was of a weakly constitution and excitable temperament, who had constantly to sustain afflictions in domestic life, compared with which thieves and robbers were as nothing, and yet never sunk down or gave way to despair or wrath, but, in prize-fighting phraseology, always came up to time with a cheerful countenance, and went in to win as if nothing had happened. When Miggs finished her solo, her mistress struck in again, and the two together performed a duet to the same purpose; the burden being, that Mrs Varden was persecuted perfection, and Mr Varden, as the representative of mankind in that apartment, a creature of vicious and brutal habits, utterly insensible to the blessings he enjoyed. Of so refined a character, indeed, was their talent of assault under the mask of sympathy, that when Dolly, recovering, embraced her father tenderly, as in vindication of his goodness, Mrs Varden expressed her solemn hope that this would be a lesson to him for the remainder of his life, and that he would do some little justice to a woman's nature ever afterwards—in which aspiration Miss Miggs, by divers sniffs and coughs, more significant than the longest oration, expressed her entire concurrence.

But the great joy of Miggs's heart was, that she not only picked up a full account of what had happened, but had the exquisite delight of conveying it to Mr Tappertit for his jealousy and torture. For that gentleman, on account of Dolly's indisposition, had been requested to take his supper in the workshop, and it was conveyed thither by Miss Miggs's own fair hands.

'Oh Simmun!' said the young lady, 'such goings on to-day! Oh, gracious me, Simmun!'

Mr Tappertit, who was not in the best of humours, and who disliked Miss Miggs more when she laid her hand on her heart and panted for breath than at any other time, as her deficiency of outline was most apparent under such circumstances, eyed her over in his loftiest style, and deigned to express no curiosity whatever.

'I never heard the like, nor nobody else,' pursued Miggs. 'The idea of interfering with HER. What people can see in her to make it worth their while to do so, that's the joke—he he he!'

Finding there was a lady in the case, Mr Tappertit haughtily requested his fair friend to be more explicit, and demanded to know what she meant by 'her.'

'Why, that Dolly,' said Miggs, with an extremely sharp emphasis on the name. 'But, oh upon my word and honour, young Joseph Willet is a brave one; and he do deserve her, that he do.'

'Woman!' said Mr Tappertit, jumping off the counter on which he was seated; 'beware!'

'My stars, Simmun!' cried Miggs, in affected astonishment. 'You frighten me to death! What's the matter?'

'There are strings,' said Mr Tappertit, flourishing his bread-and-cheese knife in the air, 'in the human heart that had better not be wibrated. That's what's the matter.'

'Oh, very well—if you're in a huff,' cried Miggs, turning away.

'Huff or no huff,' said Mr Tappertit, detaining her by the wrist. 'What do you mean, Jezebel? What were you going to say? Answer me!'

Notwithstanding this uncivil exhortation, Miggs gladly did as she was required; and told him how that their young mistress, being alone in the meadows after dark, had been attacked by three or four tall men, who would have certainly borne her away and perhaps murdered her, but for the timely arrival of Joseph Willet, who with his own single hand put them all to flight, and rescued her; to the lasting admiration of his fellow-creatures generally, and to the eternal love and gratitude of Dolly Varden.

'Very good,' said Mr Tappertit, fetching a long breath when the tale was told, and rubbing his hair up till it stood stiff and straight on end all over his head. 'His days are numbered.'

'Oh, Simmun!'

'I tell you,' said the 'prentice, 'his days are numbered. Leave me. Get along with you.'

Miggs departed at his bidding, but less because of his bidding than because she desired to chuckle in secret. When she had given vent to her satisfaction, she returned to the parlour; where the locksmith, stimulated by quietness and Toby, had become talkative, and was disposed to take a cheerful review of the occurrences of the day. But Mrs Varden, whose practical religion (as is not uncommon) was usually of the retrospective order, cut him short by declaiming on the sinfulness of such junketings, and holding that it was high time to go to bed. To bed therefore she withdrew, with an aspect as grim and gloomy as that of the Maypole's own state couch; and to bed the rest of the establishment soon afterwards repaired.

Chapter 23

Twilight had given place to night some hours, and it was high noon in those quarters of the town in which 'the world' condescended to dwell—the world being then, as now, of very limited dimensions and easily lodged—when Mr Chester reclined upon a sofa in his dressing-room in the Temple, entertaining himself with a book.

He was dressing, as it seemed, by easy stages, and having performed half the journey was taking a long rest. Completely attired as to his legs and feet in the trimmest fashion of the day, he had yet the remainder of his toilet to perform. The coat was stretched, like a refined scarecrow, on its separate horse; the waistcoat was displayed to the best advantage; the various ornamental articles of dress were severally set out in most alluring order; and yet he lay dangling his legs between the sofa and the ground, as intent upon his book as if there were nothing but bed before him.

'Upon my honour,' he said, at length raising his eyes to the ceiling with the air of a man who was reflecting seriously on what he had read; 'upon my honour, the most masterly composition, the most delicate thoughts, the finest code of morality, and the most gentlemanly sentiments in the universe! Ah Ned, Ned, if you would but form your mind by such precepts, we should have but one common feeling on every subject that could possibly arise between us!'

This apostrophe was addressed, like the rest of his remarks, to empty air: for Edward was not present, and the father was quite alone.

'My Lord Chesterfield,' he said, pressing his hand tenderly upon the book as he laid it down, 'if I could but have profited by your genius soon enough to have formed my son on the model you have left to all wise fathers, both he and I would have been rich men. Shakespeare was undoubtedly very fine in his way; Milton good, though prosy; Lord Bacon deep, and decidedly knowing; but the writer who should be his country's pride, is my Lord Chesterfield.'

He became thoughtful again, and the toothpick was in requisition.

'I thought I was tolerably accomplished as a man of the world,' he continued, 'I flattered myself that I was pretty well versed in all those little arts and graces which distinguish men of the world from boors and peasants, and separate their character from those intensely vulgar sentiments which are called the national character. Apart from any natural prepossession in my own favour, I believed I was. Still, in every page of this enlightened writer, I find some captivating hypocrisy which has never occurred to me before, or some superlative piece of selfishness to which I was utterly a stranger. I should quite blush for myself before this stupendous creature, if remembering his precepts, one might blush at anything. An amazing man! a nobleman indeed! any King or Queen may make a Lord, but only the Devil himself—and the Graces—can make a Chesterfield.'

Men who are thoroughly false and hollow, seldom try to hide those vices from themselves; and yet in the very act of avowing them, they lay claim to the virtues they feign most to despise. 'For,' say they, 'this is honesty, this is truth. All mankind are like us, but they have not the candour to avow it.' The more they affect to deny the existence of any sincerity in the world, the more they would be thought to possess it in its boldest shape; and this is an unconscious compliment to Truth on the part of these philosophers, which will turn the laugh against them to the Day of Judgment.

Mr Chester, having extolled his favourite author, as above recited, took up the book again in the excess of his admiration and was composing himself for a further perusal of its sublime morality, when he was disturbed by a noise at the outer door; occasioned as it seemed by the endeavours of his servant to obstruct the entrance of some unwelcome visitor.

'A late hour for an importunate creditor,' he said, raising his eyebrows with as indolent an expression of wonder as if the noise were in the street, and one with which he had not the smallest possible concern. 'Much after their accustomed time. The usual pretence I suppose. No doubt a heavy payment to make up tomorrow. Poor fellow, he loses time, and time is money as the good proverb says—I never found it out though. Well. What now? You know I am not at home.'

'A man, sir,' replied the servant, who was to the full as cool and negligent in his way as his master, 'has brought home the riding-whip you lost the other day. I told him you were out, but he said he was to wait while I brought it in, and wouldn't go till I did.'

'He was quite right,' returned his master, 'and you're a blockhead, possessing no judgment or discretion whatever. Tell him to come in, and see that he rubs his shoes for exactly five minutes first.'

The man laid the whip on a chair, and withdrew. The master, who had only heard his foot upon the ground and had not taken the trouble to turn round and look at him, shut his book, and pursued the train of ideas his entrance had disturbed.

'If time were money,' he said, handling his snuff-box, 'I would compound with my creditors, and give them—let me see—how much a day? There's my nap after dinner—an hour—they're extremely welcome to that, and to make the most of it. In the morning, between my breakfast and the paper, I could spare them another hour; in the evening before dinner say another. Three hours a day. They might pay themselves in calls, with interest, in twelve months. I think I shall propose it to them. Ah, my centaur, are you there?'

'Here I am,' replied Hugh, striding in, followed by a dog, as rough and sullen as himself; 'and trouble enough I've had to get here. What do you ask me to come for, and keep me out when I DO come?'

'My good fellow,' returned the other, raising his head a little from the cushion and carelessly surveying him from top to toe, 'I am delighted to see you, and to have, in your being here, the very best proof that you are not kept out. How are you?'

'I'm well enough,' said Hugh impatiently.

'You look a perfect marvel of health. Sit down.'

'I'd rather stand,' said Hugh.

'Please yourself my good fellow,' returned Mr Chester rising, slowly pulling off the loose robe he wore, and sitting down before the dressing-glass. 'Please yourself by all means.'

Having said this in the politest and blandest tone possible, he went on dressing, and took no further notice of his guest, who stood in the same spot as uncertain what to do next, eyeing him sulkily from time to time.

'Are you going to speak to me, master?' he said, after a long silence.

'My worthy creature,' returned Mr Chester, 'you are a little ruffled and out of humour. I'll wait till you're quite yourself again. I am in no hurry.'

This behaviour had its intended effect. It humbled and abashed the man, and made him still more irresolute and uncertain. Hard words he could have returned, violence he would have repaid with interest; but this cool, complacent, contemptuous, self-possessed reception, caused him to feel his inferiority more completely than the most elaborate arguments. Everything contributed to this effect. His own rough speech, contrasted with the soft persuasive accents of the other; his rude bearing, and Mr Chester's polished manner; the disorder and negligence of his ragged dress, and the elegant attire he saw before him; with all the unaccustomed luxuries and comforts of the room, and the silence that gave him leisure to observe these things, and feel how ill at ease they made him; all these influences, which have too often some effect on tutored minds and become of almost resistless power when brought to bear on such a mind as his, quelled Hugh completely. He moved by little and little nearer to Mr Chester's chair, and glancing over his shoulder at the reflection of his face in the glass, as if seeking for some encouragement in its expression, said at length, with a rough attempt at conciliation,

'ARE you going to speak to me, master, or am I to go away?'

'Speak you,' said Mr Chester, 'speak you, good fellow. I have spoken, have I not? I am waiting for you.'

'Why, look'ee, sir,' returned Hugh with increased embarrassment, 'am I the man that you privately left your whip with before you rode away from the Maypole, and told to bring it back whenever he might want to see you on a certain subject?'

'No doubt the same, or you have a twin brother,' said Mr Chester, glancing at the reflection of his anxious face; 'which is not probable, I should say.'

'Then I have come, sir,' said Hugh, 'and I have brought it back, and something else along with it. A letter, sir, it is, that I took from the person who had charge of it.' As he spoke, he laid upon the dressing-table, Dolly's lost epistle. The very letter that had cost her so much trouble.

'Did you obtain this by force, my good fellow?' said Mr Chester, casting his eye upon it without the least perceptible surprise or pleasure.

'Not quite,' said Hugh. 'Partly.'

'Who was the messenger from whom you took it?'

'A woman. One Varden's daughter.'

'Oh indeed!' said Mr Chester gaily. 'What else did you take from her?'

'What else?'

'Yes,' said the other, in a drawling manner, for he was fixing a very small patch of sticking plaster on a very small pimple near the corner of his mouth. 'What else?'

'Well a kiss,' replied Hugh, after some hesitation.

'And what else?'

'Nothing.'

'I think,' said Mr Chester, in the same easy tone, and smiling twice or thrice to try if the patch adhered—'I think there was something else. I have heard a trifle of jewellery spoken of—a mere trifle—a thing of such little value, indeed, that you may have forgotten it. Do you remember anything of the kind—such as a bracelet now, for instance?'

Hugh with a muttered oath thrust his hand into his breast, and drawing the bracelet forth, wrapped in a scrap of hay, was about to lay it on the table likewise, when his patron stopped his hand and bade him put it up again.

'You took that for yourself my excellent friend,' he said, 'and may keep it. I am neither a thief nor a receiver. Don't show it to me. You had better hide it again, and lose no time. Don't let me see where you put it either,' he added, turning away his head.

'You're not a receiver!' said Hugh bluntly, despite the increasing awe in which he held him. 'What do you call THAT, master?' striking the letter with his heavy hand.

'I call that quite another thing,' said Mr Chester coolly. 'I shall prove it presently, as you will see. You are thirsty, I suppose?'

Hugh drew his sleeve across his lips, and gruffly answered yes.

'Step to that closet and bring me a bottle you will see there, and a glass.'

He obeyed. His patron followed him with his eyes, and when his back was turned, smiled as he had never done when he stood beside the mirror. On his return he filled the glass, and bade him drink. That dram despatched, he poured him out another, and another.

'How many can you bear?' he said, filling the glass again.

'As many as you like to give me. Pour on. Fill high. A bumper with a bead in the middle! Give me enough of this,' he added, as he tossed it down his hairy throat, 'and I'll do murder if you ask me!'

'As I don't mean to ask you, and you might possibly do it without being invited if you went on much further,' said Mr Chester with great composure, we will stop, if agreeable to you, my good friend, at the next glass. You were drinking before you came here.'

'I always am when I can get it,' cried Hugh boisterously, waving the empty glass above his head, and throwing himself into a rude dancing attitude. 'I always am. Why not? Ha ha ha! What's so good to me as this? What ever has been? What else has kept away the cold on bitter nights, and driven hunger off in starving times? What else has given me the strength and courage of a man, when men would have left me to die, a puny child? I should never have had a man's heart but for this. I should have died in a ditch. Where's he who when I was a weak and sickly wretch, with trembling legs and fading sight, bade me cheer up, as this did? I never knew him; not I. I drink to the drink, master. Ha ha ha!'

'You are an exceedingly cheerful young man,' said Mr Chester, putting on his cravat with great deliberation, and slightly moving his head from side to side to settle his chin in its proper place. 'Quite a boon companion.'

'Do you see this hand, master,' said Hugh, 'and this arm?' baring the brawny limb to the elbow. 'It was once mere skin and bone, and would have been dust in some poor churchyard by this time, but for the drink.'

'You may cover it,' said Mr Chester, 'it's sufficiently real in your sleeve.'

'I should never have been spirited up to take a kiss from the proud little beauty, master, but for the drink,' cried Hugh. 'Ha ha ha! It was a good one. As sweet as honeysuckle, I warrant you. I thank the drink for it. I'll drink to the drink again, master. Fill me one more. Come. One more!'

'You are such a promising fellow,' said his patron, putting on his waistcoat with great nicety, and taking no heed of this request, 'that I must caution you against having too many impulses from the drink, and getting hung before your time. What's your age?'

'I don't know.'

'At any rate,' said Mr Chester, 'you are young enough to escape what I may call a natural death for some years to come. How can you trust yourself in my hands on so short an acquaintance, with a halter round your neck? What a confiding nature yours must be!'

Hugh fell back a pace or two and surveyed him with a look of mingled terror, indignation, and surprise. Regarding himself in the glass with the same complacency as before, and speaking as smoothly as if he were discussing some pleasant chit-chat of the town, his patron went on:

'Robbery on the king's highway, my young friend, is a very dangerous and ticklish occupation. It is pleasant, I have no doubt, while it lasts; but like many other pleasures in this transitory world, it seldom lasts long. And really if in the ingenuousness of youth, you open your heart so readily on the subject, I am afraid your career will be an extremely short one.'

'How's this?' said Hugh. 'What do you talk of master? Who was it set me on?'

'Who?' said Mr Chester, wheeling sharply round, and looking full at him for the first time. 'I didn't hear you. Who was it?'

Hugh faltered, and muttered something which was not audible.

'Who was it? I am curious to know,' said Mr Chester, with surpassing affability. 'Some rustic beauty perhaps? But be cautious, my good friend. They are not always to be trusted. Do take my advice now, and be careful of yourself.' With these words he turned to the glass again, and went on with his toilet.

Hugh would have answered him that he, the questioner himself had set him on, but the words stuck in his throat. The consummate art with which his patron had led him to this point, and managed the whole conversation, perfectly baffled him. He did not doubt that if he had made the retort which was on his lips when Mr Chester turned round and questioned him so keenly, he would straightway have given him into custody and had him dragged before a justice with the stolen property upon him; in which case it was as certain he would have been hung as it was that he had been born. The ascendency which it was the purpose of the man of the world to establish over this savage instrument, was gained from that time. Hugh's submission was complete. He dreaded him beyond description; and felt that accident and artifice had spun a web about him, which at a touch from such a master-hand as his, would bind him to the gallows.

With these thoughts passing through his mind, and yet wondering at the very same time how he who came there rioting in the confidence of this man (as he thought), should be so soon and so thoroughly subdued, Hugh stood cowering before him, regarding him uneasily from time to time, while he finished dressing. When he had done so, he took up the letter, broke the seal, and throwing himself back in his chair, read it leisurely through.

'Very neatly worded upon my life! Quite a woman's letter, full of what people call tenderness, and disinterestedness, and heart, and all that sort of thing!'

As he spoke, he twisted it up, and glancing lazily round at Hugh as though he would say 'You see this?' held it in the flame of the candle. When it was in a full blaze, he tossed it into the grate, and there it smouldered away.

'It was directed to my son,' he said, turning to Hugh, 'and you did quite right to bring it here. I opened it on my own responsibility, and you see what I have done with it. Take this, for your trouble.'

Hugh stepped forward to receive the piece of money he held out to him. As he put it in his hand, he added:

'If you should happen to find anything else of this sort, or to pick up any kind of information you may think I would like to have, bring it here, will you, my good fellow?'

This was said with a smile which implied—or Hugh thought it did—'fail to do so at your peril!' He answered that he would.

'And don't,' said his patron, with an air of the very kindest patronage, 'don't be at all downcast or uneasy respecting that little rashness we have been speaking of. Your neck is as safe in my hands, my good fellow, as though a baby's fingers clasped it, I assure you.—Take another glass. You are quieter now.'

Hugh accepted it from his hand, and looking stealthily at his smiling face, drank the contents in silence.

'Don't you—ha, ha!—don't you drink to the drink any more?' said Mr Chester, in his most winning manner.

'To you, sir,' was the sullen answer, with something approaching to a bow. 'I drink to you.'

'Thank you. God bless you. By the bye, what is your name, my good soul? You are called Hugh, I know, of course—your other name?'

'I have no other name.'

'A very strange fellow! Do you mean that you never knew one, or that you don't choose to tell it? Which?'

'I'd tell it if I could,' said Hugh, quickly. 'I can't. I have been always called Hugh; nothing more. I never knew, nor saw, nor thought about a father; and I was a boy of six—that's not very old—when they hung my mother up at Tyburn for a couple of thousand men to stare at. They might have let her live. She was poor enough.'

'How very sad!' exclaimed his patron, with a condescending smile. 'I have no doubt she was an exceedingly fine woman.'

'You see that dog of mine?' said Hugh, abruptly.

'Faithful, I dare say?' rejoined his patron, looking at him through his glass; 'and immensely clever? Virtuous and gifted animals, whether man or beast, always are so very hideous.'

'Such a dog as that, and one of the same breed, was the only living thing except me that howled that day,' said Hugh. 'Out of the two thousand odd—there was a larger crowd for its being a woman—the dog and I alone had any pity. If he'd have been a man, he'd have been glad to be quit of her, for she had been forced to keep him lean and half-starved; but being a dog, and not having a man's sense, he was sorry.'

'It was dull of the brute, certainly,' said Mr Chester, 'and very like a brute.'

Hugh made no rejoinder, but whistling to his dog, who sprung up at the sound and came jumping and sporting about him, bade his sympathising friend good night.

'Good night; he returned. 'Remember; you're safe with me—quite safe. So long as you deserve it, my good fellow, as I hope you always will, you have a friend in me, on whose silence you may rely. Now do be careful of yourself, pray do, and consider what jeopardy you might have stood in. Good night! bless you!'

Hugh truckled before the hidden meaning of these words as much as such a being could, and crept out of the door so submissively and subserviently—with an air, in short, so different from that with which he had entered—that his patron on being left alone, smiled more than ever.

'And yet,' he said, as he took a pinch of snuff, 'I do not like their having hanged his mother. The fellow has a fine eye, and I am sure she was handsome. But very probably she was coarse—red-nosed perhaps, and had clumsy feet. Aye, it was all for the best, no doubt.'

With this comforting reflection, he put on his coat, took a farewell glance at the glass, and summoned his man, who promptly attended, followed by a chair and its two bearers.

'Foh!' said Mr Chester. 'The very atmosphere that centaur has breathed, seems tainted with the cart and ladder. Here, Peak. Bring some scent and sprinkle the floor; and take away the chair he sat upon, and air it; and dash a little of that mixture upon me. I am stifled!'

The man obeyed; and the room and its master being both purified, nothing remained for Mr Chester but to demand his hat, to fold it jauntily under his arm, to take his seat in the chair and be carried off; humming a fashionable tune.

Chapter 24

How the accomplished gentleman spent the evening in the midst of a dazzling and brilliant circle; how he enchanted all those with whom he mingled by the grace of his deportment, the politeness of his manner, the vivacity of his conversation, and the sweetness of his voice; how it was observed in every corner, that Chester was a man of that happy disposition that nothing ruffled him, that he was one on whom the world's cares and errors sat lightly as his dress, and in whose smiling face a calm and tranquil mind was constantly reflected; how honest men, who by instinct knew him better, bowed down before him nevertheless, deferred to his every word, and courted his favourable notice; how people, who really had good in them, went with the stream, and fawned and flattered, and approved, and despised themselves while they did so, and yet had not the courage to resist; how, in short, he was one of those who are received and cherished in society (as the phrase is) by scores who individually would shrink from and be repelled by the object of their lavish regard; are things of course, which will suggest themselves. Matter so commonplace needs but a passing glance, and there an end.

The despisers of mankind—apart from the mere fools and mimics, of that creed—are of two sorts. They who believe their merit neglected and unappreciated, make up one class; they who receive adulation and flattery, knowing their own worthlessness, compose the other. Be sure that the coldest-hearted misanthropes are ever of this last order.

Mr Chester sat up in bed next morning, sipping his coffee, and remembering with a kind of contemptuous satisfaction how he had shone last night, and how he had been caressed and courted, when his servant brought in a very small scrap of dirty paper, tightly sealed in two places, on the inside whereof was inscribed in pretty large text these words: 'A friend. Desiring of a conference. Immediate. Private. Burn it when you've read it.'

'Where in the name of the Gunpowder Plot did you pick up this?' said his master.

It was given him by a person then waiting at the door, the man replied.

'With a cloak and dagger?' said Mr Chester.

With nothing more threatening about him, it appeared, than a leather apron and a dirty face. 'Let him come in.' In he came—Mr Tappertit; with his hair still on end, and a great lock in his hand, which he put down on the floor in the middle of the chamber as if he were about to go through some performances in which it was a necessary agent.

'Sir,' said Mr Tappertit with a low bow, 'I thank you for this condescension, and am glad to see you. Pardon the menial office in which I am engaged, sir, and extend your sympathies to one, who, humble as his appearance is, has inn'ard workings far above his station.'

Mr Chester held the bed-curtain farther back, and looked at him with a vague impression that he was some maniac, who had not only broken open the door of his place of confinement, but had brought away the lock. Mr Tappertit bowed again, and displayed his legs to the best advantage.

'You have heard, sir,' said Mr Tappertit, laying his hand upon his breast, 'of G. Varden Locksmith and bell-hanger and repairs neatly executed in town and country, Clerkenwell, London?'

'What then?' asked Mr Chester.

'I'm his 'prentice, sir.'

'What THEN?'

'Ahem!' said Mr Tappertit. 'Would you permit me to shut the door, sir, and will you further, sir, give me your honour bright, that what passes between us is in the strictest confidence?'

Mr Chester laid himself calmly down in bed again, and turning a perfectly undisturbed face towards the strange apparition, which had by this time closed the door, begged him to speak out, and to be as rational as he could, without putting himself to any very great personal inconvenience.

'In the first place, sir,' said Mr Tappertit, producing a small pocket-handkerchief and shaking it out of the folds, 'as I have not a card about me (for the envy of masters debases us below that level) allow me to offer the best substitute that circumstances will admit of. If you will take that in your own hand, sir, and cast your eye on the right-hand corner,' said Mr Tappertit, offering it with a graceful air, 'you will meet with my credentials.'

'Thank you,' answered Mr Chester, politely accepting it, and turning to some blood-red characters at one end. '"Four. Simon Tappertit. One." Is that the—'

'Without the numbers, sir, that is my name,' replied the 'prentice. 'They are merely intended as directions to the washerwoman, and have no connection with myself or family. YOUR name, sir,' said Mr Tappertit, looking very hard at his nightcap, 'is Chester, I suppose? You needn't pull it off, sir, thank you. I observe E. C. from here. We will take the rest for granted.'

'Pray, Mr Tappertit,' said Mr Chester, 'has that complicated piece of ironmongery which you have done me the favour to bring with you, any immediate connection with the business we are to discuss?'

'It has not, sir,' rejoined the 'prentice. 'It's going to be fitted on a ware'us-door in Thames Street.'

'Perhaps, as that is the case,' said Mr Chester, 'and as it has a stronger flavour of oil than I usually refresh my bedroom with, you will oblige me so far as to put it outside the door?'

'By all means, sir,' said Mr Tappertit, suiting the action to the word.

'You'll excuse my mentioning it, I hope?'

'Don't apologise, sir, I beg. And now, if you please, to business.'

During the whole of this dialogue, Mr Chester had suffered nothing but his smile of unvarying serenity and politeness to appear upon his face. Sim Tappertit, who had far too good an opinion of himself to suspect that anybody could be playing upon him, thought within himself that this was something like the respect to which he was entitled, and drew a comparison from this courteous demeanour of a stranger, by no means favourable to the worthy locksmith.

'From what passes in our house,' said Mr Tappertit, 'I am aware, sir, that your son keeps company with a young lady against your inclinations. Sir, your son has not used me well.'

'Mr Tappertit,' said the other, 'you grieve me beyond description.'

'Thank you, sir,' replied the 'prentice. 'I'm glad to hear you say so. He's very proud, sir, is your son; very haughty.'

'I am afraid he IS haughty,' said Mr Chester. 'Do you know I was really afraid of that before; and you confirm me?'

'To recount the menial offices I've had to do for your son, sir,' said Mr Tappertit; 'the chairs I've had to hand him, the coaches I've had to call for him, the numerous degrading duties, wholly unconnected with my indenters, that I've had to do for him, would fill a family Bible. Besides which, sir, he is but a young man himself and I do not consider "thank'ee Sim," a proper form of address on those occasions.'

'Mr Tappertit, your wisdom is beyond your years. Pray go on.'

'I thank you for your good opinion, sir,' said Sim, much gratified, 'and will endeavour so to do. Now sir, on this account (and perhaps for another reason or two which I needn't go into) I am on your side. And what I tell you is this—that as long as our people go backwards and forwards, to and fro, up and down, to that there jolly old Maypole, lettering, and messaging, and fetching and carrying, you couldn't help your son keeping company with that young lady by deputy,—not if he was minded night and day by all the Horse Guards, and every man of 'em in the very fullest uniform.'

Mr Tappertit stopped to take breath after this, and then started fresh again.

'Now, sir, I am a coming to the point. You will inquire of me, "how is this to be prevented?" I'll tell you how. If an honest, civil, smiling gentleman like you—'

'Mr Tappertit—really—'

'No, no, I'm serious,' rejoined the 'prentice, 'I am, upon my soul. If an honest, civil, smiling gentleman like you, was to talk but ten minutes to our old woman—that's Mrs Varden—and flatter her up a bit, you'd gain her over for ever. Then there's this point got—that her daughter Dolly,'—here a flush came over Mr Tappertit's face—'wouldn't be allowed to be a go-between from that time forward; and till that point's got, there's nothing ever will prevent her. Mind that.'

'Mr Tappertit, your knowledge of human nature—'

'Wait a minute,' said Sim, folding his arms with a dreadful calmness. 'Now I come to THE point. Sir, there is a villain at that Maypole, a monster in human shape, a vagabond of the deepest dye, that unless you get rid of and have kidnapped and carried off at the very least—nothing less will do—will marry your son to that young woman, as certainly and as surely as if he was the Archbishop of Canterbury himself. He will, sir, for the hatred and malice that he bears to you; let alone the pleasure of doing a bad action, which to him is its own reward. If you knew how this chap, this Joseph Willet—that's his name—comes backwards and forwards to our house, libelling, and denouncing, and threatening you, and how I shudder when I hear him, you'd hate him worse than I do,—worse than I do, sir,' said Mr Tappertit wildly, putting his hair up straighter, and making a crunching noise with his teeth; 'if sich a thing is possible.'

'A little private vengeance in this, Mr Tappertit?'

'Private vengeance, sir, or public sentiment, or both combined—destroy him,' said Mr Tappertit. 'Miggs says so too. Miggs and me both say so. We can't bear the plotting and undermining that takes place. Our souls recoil from it. Barnaby Rudge and Mrs Rudge are in it likewise; but the villain, Joseph Willet, is the ringleader. Their plottings and schemes are known to me and Miggs. If you want information of 'em, apply to us. Put Joseph Willet down, sir. Destroy him. Crush him. And be happy.'

With these words, Mr Tappertit, who seemed to expect no reply, and to hold it as a necessary consequence of his eloquence that his hearer should be utterly stunned, dumbfoundered, and overwhelmed, folded his arms so that the palm of each hand rested on the opposite shoulder, and disappeared after the manner of those mysterious warners of whom he had read in cheap story-books.

'That fellow,' said Mr Chester, relaxing his face when he was fairly gone, 'is good practice. I HAVE some command of my features, beyond all doubt. He fully confirms what I suspected, though; and blunt tools are sometimes found of use, where sharper instruments would fail. I fear I may be obliged to make great havoc among these worthy people. A troublesome necessity! I quite feel for them.'

With that he fell into a quiet slumber:—subsided into such a gentle, pleasant sleep, that it was quite infantine.

Chapter 25

Leaving the favoured, and well-received, and flattered of the world; him of the world most worldly, who never compromised himself by an ungentlemanly action, and never was guilty of a manly one; to lie smilingly asleep—for even sleep, working but little change in his dissembling face, became with him a piece of cold, conventional hypocrisy—we follow in the steps of two slow travellers on foot, making towards Chigwell.

Barnaby and his mother. Grip in their company, of course.

The widow, to whom each painful mile seemed longer than the last, toiled wearily along; while Barnaby, yielding to every inconstant impulse, fluttered here and there, now leaving her far behind, now lingering far behind himself, now darting into some by-lane or path and leaving her to pursue her way alone, until he stealthily emerged again and came upon her with a wild shout of merriment, as his wayward and capricious nature prompted. Now he would call to her from the topmost branch of some high tree by the roadside; now using his tall staff as a leaping-pole, come flying over ditch or hedge or five-barred gate; now run with surprising swiftness for a mile or more on the straight road, and halting, sport upon a patch of grass with Grip till she came up. These were his delights; and when his patient mother heard his merry voice, or looked into his flushed and healthy face, she would not have abated them by one sad word or murmur, though each had been to her a source of suffering in the same degree as it was to him of pleasure.

It is something to look upon enjoyment, so that it be free and wild and in the face of nature, though it is but the enjoyment of an idiot. It is something to know that Heaven has left the capacity of gladness in such a creature's breast; it is something to be assured that, however lightly men may crush that faculty in their fellows, the Great Creator of mankind imparts it even to his despised and slighted work. Who would not rather see a poor idiot happy in the sunlight, than a wise man pining in a darkened jail!

Ye men of gloom and austerity, who paint the face of Infinite Benevolence with an eternal frown; read in the Everlasting Book, wide open to your view, the lesson it would teach. Its pictures are not in black and sombre hues, but bright and glowing tints; its music—save when ye drown it—is not in sighs and groans, but songs and cheerful sounds. Listen to the million voices in the summer air, and find one dismal as your own. Remember, if ye can, the sense of hope and pleasure which every glad return of day awakens in the breast of all your kind who have not changed their nature; and learn some wisdom even from the witless, when their hearts are lifted up they know not why, by all the mirth and happiness it brings.

The widow's breast was full of care, was laden heavily with secret dread and sorrow; but her boy's gaiety of heart gladdened her, and beguiled the long journey. Sometimes he would bid her lean upon his arm, and would keep beside her steadily for a short distance; but it was more his nature to be rambling to and fro, and she better liked to see him free and happy, even than to have him near her, because she loved him better than herself.

She had quitted the place to which they were travelling, directly after the event which had changed her whole existence; and for two-and-twenty years had never had courage to revisit it. It was her native village. How many recollections crowded on her mind when it appeared in sight!

Two-and-twenty years. Her boy's whole life and history. The last time she looked back upon those roofs among the trees, she carried him in her arms, an infant. How often since that time had she sat beside him night and day, watching for the dawn of mind that never came; how had she feared, and doubted, and yet hoped, long after conviction forced itself upon her! The little stratagems she had devised to try him, the little tokens he had given in his childish way—not of dulness but of something infinitely worse, so ghastly and unchildlike in its cunning—came back as vividly as if but yesterday had intervened. The room in which they used to be; the spot in which his cradle stood; he, old and elfin-like in face, but ever dear to her, gazing at her with a wild and vacant eye, and crooning some uncouth song as she sat by and rocked him; every circumstance of his infancy came thronging back, and the most trivial, perhaps, the most distinctly.

His older childhood, too; the strange imaginings he had; his terror of certain senseless things—familiar objects he endowed with life; the slow and gradual breaking out of that one horror, in which, before his birth, his darkened intellect began; how, in the midst of all, she had found some hope and comfort in his being unlike another child, and had gone on almost believing in the slow development of his mind until he grew a man, and then his childhood was complete and lasting; one after another, all these old thoughts sprung up within her, strong after their long slumber and bitterer than ever.

She took his arm and they hurried through the village street. It was the same as it was wont to be in old times, yet different too, and wore another air. The change was in herself, not it; but she never thought of that, and wondered at its alteration, and where it lay, and what it was.

The people all knew Barnaby, and the children of the place came flocking round him—as she remembered to have done with their fathers and mothers round some silly beggarman, when a child herself. None of them knew her; they passed each well-remembered house, and yard, and homestead; and striking into the fields, were soon alone again.

The Warren was the end of their journey. Mr Haredale was walking in the garden, and seeing them as they passed the iron gate, unlocked it, and bade them enter that way.

'At length you have mustered heart to visit the old place,' he said to the widow. 'I am glad you have.'

'For the first time, and the last, sir,' she replied.

'The first for many years, but not the last?'

'The very last.'

'You mean,' said Mr Haredale, regarding her with some surprise, 'that having made this effort, you are resolved not to persevere and are determined to relapse? This is unworthy of you. I have often told you, you should return here. You would be happier here than elsewhere, I know. As to Barnaby, it's quite his home.'

'And Grip's,' said Barnaby, holding the basket open. The raven hopped gravely out, and perching on his shoulder and addressing himself to Mr Haredale, cried—as a hint, perhaps, that some temperate refreshment would be acceptable—'Polly put the ket-tle on, we'll all have tea!'

'Hear me, Mary,' said Mr Haredale kindly, as he motioned her to walk with him towards the house. 'Your life has been an example of patience and fortitude, except in this one particular which has often given me great pain. It is enough to know that you were cruelly involved in the calamity which deprived me of an only brother, and Emma of her father, without being obliged to suppose (as I sometimes am) that you associate us with the author of our joint misfortunes.'

'Associate you with him, sir!' she cried.

'Indeed,' said Mr Haredale, 'I think you do. I almost believe that because your husband was bound by so many ties to our relation, and died in his service and defence, you have come in some sort to connect us with his murder.'

'Alas!' she answered. 'You little know my heart, sir. You little know the truth!'

'It is natural you should do so; it is very probable you may, without being conscious of it,' said Mr Haredale, speaking more to himself than her. 'We are a fallen house. Money, dispensed with the most lavish hand, would be a poor recompense for sufferings like yours; and thinly scattered by hands so pinched and tied as ours, it becomes a miserable mockery. I feel it so, God knows,' he added, hastily. 'Why should I wonder if she does!'

'You do me wrong, dear sir, indeed,' she rejoined with great earnestness; 'and yet when you come to hear what I desire your leave to say—'

'I shall find my doubts confirmed?' he said, observing that she faltered and became confused. 'Well!'

He quickened his pace for a few steps, but fell back again to her side, and said:

'And have you come all this way at last, solely to speak to me?'

She answered, 'Yes.'

'A curse,' he muttered, 'upon the wretched state of us proud beggars, from whom the poor and rich are equally at a distance; the one being forced to treat us with a show of cold respect; the other condescending to us in their every deed and word, and keeping more aloof, the nearer they approach us.—Why, if it were pain to you (as it must have been) to break for this slight purpose the chain of habit forged through two-and-twenty years, could you not let me know your wish, and beg me to come to you?'

'There was not time, sir,' she rejoined. 'I took my resolution but last night, and taking it, felt that I must not lose a day—a day! an hour—in having speech with you.'

They had by this time reached the house. Mr Haredale paused for a moment, and looked at her as if surprised by the energy of her manner. Observing, however, that she took no heed of him, but glanced up, shuddering, at the old walls with which such horrors were connected in her mind, he led her by a private stair into his library, where Emma was seated in a window, reading.

The young lady, seeing who approached, hastily rose and laid aside her book, and with many kind words, and not without tears, gave her a warm and earnest welcome. But the widow shrunk from her embrace as though she feared her, and sunk down trembling on a chair.

'It is the return to this place after so long an absence,' said Emma gently. 'Pray ring, dear uncle—or stay—Barnaby will run himself and ask for wine—'

'Not for the world,' she cried. 'It would have another taste—I could not touch it. I want but a minute's rest. Nothing but that.'

Miss Haredale stood beside her chair, regarding her with silent pity. She remained for a little time quite still; then rose and turned to Mr Haredale, who had sat down in his easy chair, and was contemplating her with fixed attention.

The tale connected with the mansion borne in mind, it seemed, as has been already said, the chosen theatre for such a deed as it had known. The room in which this group were now assembled—hard by the very chamber where the act was done—dull, dark, and sombre; heavy with worm-eaten books; deadened and shut in by faded hangings, muffling every sound; shadowed mournfully by trees whose rustling boughs gave ever and anon a spectral knocking at the glass; wore, beyond all others in the house, a ghostly, gloomy air. Nor were the group assembled there, unfitting tenants of the spot. The widow, with her marked and startling face and downcast eyes; Mr Haredale stern and despondent ever; his niece beside him, like, yet most unlike, the picture of her father, which gazed reproachfully down upon them from the blackened wall; Barnaby, with his vacant look and restless eye; were all in keeping with the place, and actors in the legend. Nay, the very raven, who had hopped upon the table and with the air of some old necromancer appeared to be profoundly studying a great folio volume that lay open on a desk, was strictly in unison with the rest, and looked like the embodied spirit of evil biding his time of mischief.

'I scarcely know,' said the widow, breaking silence, 'how to begin. You will think my mind disordered.'

'The whole tenor of your quiet and reproachless life since you were last here,' returned Mr Haredale, mildly, 'shall bear witness for you. Why do you fear to awaken such a suspicion? You do not speak to strangers. You have not to claim our interest or consideration for the first time. Be more yourself. Take heart. Any advice or assistance that I can give you, you know is yours of right, and freely yours.'

'What if I came, sir,' she rejoined, 'I who have but one other friend on earth, to reject your aid from this moment, and to say that henceforth I launch myself upon the world, alone and unassisted, to sink or swim as Heaven may decree!'

'You would have, if you came to me for such a purpose,' said Mr Haredale calmly, 'some reason to assign for conduct so extraordinary, which—if one may entertain the possibility of anything so wild and strange—would have its weight, of course.'

'That, sir,' she answered, 'is the misery of my distress. I can give no reason whatever. My own bare word is all that I can offer. It is my duty, my imperative and bounden duty. If I did not discharge it, I should be a base and guilty wretch. Having said that, my lips are sealed, and I can say no more.'

As though she felt relieved at having said so much, and had nerved herself to the remainder of her task, she spoke from this time with a firmer voice and heightened courage.

'Heaven is my witness, as my own heart is—and yours, dear young lady, will speak for me, I know—that I have lived, since that time we all have bitter reason to remember, in unchanging devotion, and gratitude to this family. Heaven is my witness that go where I may, I shall preserve those feelings unimpaired. And it is my witness, too, that they alone impel me to the course I must take, and from which nothing now shall turn me, as I hope for mercy.'

'These are strange riddles,' said Mr Haredale.

'In this world, sir,' she replied, 'they may, perhaps, never be explained. In another, the Truth will be discovered in its own good time. And may that time,' she added in a low voice, 'be far distant!'

'Let me be sure,' said Mr Haredale, 'that I understand you, for I am doubtful of my own senses. Do you mean that you are resolved voluntarily to deprive yourself of those means of support you have received from us so long—that you are determined to resign the annuity we settled on you twenty years ago—to leave house, and home, and goods, and begin life anew—and this, for some secret reason or monstrous fancy which is incapable of explanation, which only now exists, and has been dormant all this time? In the name of God, under what delusion are you labouring?'

'As I am deeply thankful,' she made answer, 'for the kindness of those, alive and dead, who have owned this house; and as I would not have its roof fall down and crush me, or its very walls drip blood, my name being spoken in their hearing; I never will again subsist upon their bounty, or let it help me to subsistence. You do not know,' she added, suddenly, 'to what uses it may be applied; into what hands it may pass. I do, and I renounce it.'

'Surely,' said Mr Haredale, 'its uses rest with you.'

'They did. They rest with me no longer. It may be—it IS—devoted to purposes that mock the dead in their graves. It never can prosper with me. It will bring some other heavy judgement on the head of my dear son, whose innocence will suffer for his mother's guilt.'

'What words are these!' cried Mr Haredale, regarding her with wonder. 'Among what associates have you fallen? Into what guilt have you ever been betrayed?'

'I am guilty, and yet innocent; wrong, yet right; good in intention, though constrained to shield and aid the bad. Ask me no more questions, sir; but believe that I am rather to be pitied than condemned. I must leave my house to-morrow, for while I stay there, it is haunted. My future dwelling, if I am to live in peace, must be a secret. If my poor boy should ever stray this way, do not tempt him to disclose it or have him watched when he returns; for if we are hunted, we must fly again. And now this load is off my mind, I beseech you—and you, dear Miss Haredale, too—to trust me if you can, and think of me kindly as you have been used to do. If I die and cannot tell my secret even then (for that may come to pass), it will sit the lighter on my breast in that hour for this day's work; and on that day, and every day until it comes, I will pray for and thank you both, and trouble you no more.

With that, she would have left them, but they detained her, and with many soothing words and kind entreaties, besought her to consider what she did, and above all to repose more freely upon them, and say what weighed so sorely on her mind. Finding her deaf to their persuasions, Mr Haredale suggested, as a last resource, that she should confide in Emma, of whom, as a young person and one of her own sex, she might stand in less dread than of himself. From this proposal, however, she recoiled with the same indescribable repugnance she had manifested when they met. The utmost that could be wrung from her was, a promise that she would receive Mr Haredale at her own house next evening, and in the mean time reconsider her determination and their dissuasions—though any change on her part, as she told them, was quite hopeless. This condition made at last, they reluctantly suffered her to depart, since she would neither eat nor drink within the house; and she, and Barnaby, and Grip, accordingly went out as they had come, by the private stair and garden-gate; seeing and being seen of no one by the way.

It was remarkable in the raven that during the whole interview he had kept his eye on his book with exactly the air of a very sly human rascal, who, under the mask of pretending to read hard, was listening to everything. He still appeared to have the conversation very strongly in his mind, for although, when they were alone again, he issued orders for the instant preparation of innumerable kettles for purposes of tea, he was thoughtful, and rather seemed to do so from an abstract sense of duty, than with any regard to making himself agreeable, or being what is commonly called good company.

They were to return by the coach. As there was an interval of full two hours before it started, and they needed rest and some refreshment, Barnaby begged hard for a visit to the Maypole. But his mother, who had no wish to be recognised by any of those who had known her long ago, and who feared besides that Mr Haredale might, on second thoughts, despatch some messenger to that place of entertainment in quest of her, proposed to wait in the churchyard instead. As it was easy for Barnaby to buy and carry thither such humble viands as they required, he cheerfully assented, and in the churchyard they sat down to take their frugal dinner.

Here again, the raven was in a highly reflective state; walking up and down when he had dined, with an air of elderly complacency which was strongly suggestive of his having his hands under his coat-tails; and appearing to read the tombstones with a very critical taste. Sometimes, after a long inspection of an epitaph, he would strop his beak upon the grave to which it referred, and cry in his hoarse tones, 'I'm a devil, I'm a devil, I'm a devil!' but whether he addressed his observations to any supposed person below, or merely threw them off as a general remark, is matter of uncertainty.

It was a quiet pretty spot, but a sad one for Barnaby's mother; for Mr Reuben Haredale lay there, and near the vault in which his ashes rested, was a stone to the memory of her own husband, with a brief inscription recording how and when he had lost his life. She sat here, thoughtful and apart, until their time was out, and the distant horn told that the coach was coming.

Barnaby, who had been sleeping on the grass, sprung up quickly at the sound; and Grip, who appeared to understand it equally well, walked into his basket straightway, entreating society in general (as though he intended a kind of satire upon them in connection with churchyards) never to say die on any terms. They were soon on the coach-top and rolling along the road.

It went round by the Maypole, and stopped at the door. Joe was from home, and Hugh came sluggishly out to hand up the parcel that it called for. There was no fear of old John coming out. They could see him from the coach-roof fast asleep in his cosy bar. It was a part of John's character. He made a point of going to sleep at the coach's time. He despised gadding about; he looked upon coaches as things that ought to be indicted; as disturbers of the peace of mankind; as restless, bustling, busy, horn-blowing contrivances, quite beneath the dignity of men, and only suited to giddy girls that did nothing but chatter and go a-shopping. 'We know nothing about coaches here, sir,' John would say, if any unlucky stranger made inquiry touching the offensive vehicles; 'we don't book for 'em; we'd rather not; they're more trouble than they're worth, with their noise and rattle. If you like to wait for 'em you can; but we don't know anything about 'em; they may call and they may not—there's a carrier—he was looked upon as quite good enough for us, when I was a boy.'

She dropped her veil as Hugh climbed up, and while he hung behind, and talked to Barnaby in whispers. But neither he nor any other person spoke to her, or noticed her, or had any curiosity about her; and so, an alien, she visited and left the village where she had been born, and had lived a merry child, a comely girl, a happy wife—where she had known all her enjoyment of life, and had entered on its hardest sorrows.

Chapter 26

'And you're not surprised to hear this, Varden?' said Mr Haredale. 'Well! You and she have always been the best friends, and you should understand her if anybody does.'

'I ask your pardon, sir,' rejoined the locksmith. 'I didn't say I understood her. I wouldn't have the presumption to say that of any woman. It's not so easily done. But I am not so much surprised, sir, as you expected me to be, certainly.'

'May I ask why not, my good friend?'

'I have seen, sir,' returned the locksmith with evident reluctance, 'I have seen in connection with her, something that has filled me with distrust and uneasiness. She has made bad friends, how, or when, I don't know; but that her house is a refuge for one robber and cut-throat at least, I am certain. There, sir! Now it's out.'

'Varden!'

'My own eyes, sir, are my witnesses, and for her sake I would be willingly half-blind, if I could but have the pleasure of mistrusting 'em. I have kept the secret till now, and it will go no further than yourself, I know; but I tell you that with my own eyes—broad awake—I saw, in the passage of her house one evening after dark, the highwayman who robbed and wounded Mr Edward Chester, and on the same night threatened me.'

'And you made no effort to detain him?' said Mr Haredale quickly.

'Sir,' returned the locksmith, 'she herself prevented me—held me, with all her strength, and hung about me until he had got clear off.' And having gone so far, he related circumstantially all that had passed upon the night in question.

This dialogue was held in a low tone in the locksmith's little parlour, into which honest Gabriel had shown his visitor on his arrival. Mr Haredale had called upon him to entreat his company to the widow's, that he might have the assistance of his persuasion and influence; and out of this circumstance the conversation had arisen.

'I forbore,' said Gabriel, 'from repeating one word of this to anybody, as it could do her no good and might do her great harm. I thought and hoped, to say the truth, that she would come to me, and talk to me about it, and tell me how it was; but though I have purposely put myself in her way more than once or twice, she has never touched upon the subject—except by a look. And indeed,' said the good-natured locksmith, 'there was a good deal in the look, more than could have been put into a great many words. It said among other matters "Don't ask me anything" so imploringly, that I didn't ask her anything. You'll think me an old fool, I know, sir. If it's any relief to call me one, pray do.'

'I am greatly disturbed by what you tell me,' said Mr Haredale, after a silence. 'What meaning do you attach to it?'

The locksmith shook his head, and looked doubtfully out of window at the failing light.

'She cannot have married again,' said Mr Haredale.

'Not without our knowledge surely, sir.'

'She may have done so, in the fear that it would lead, if known, to some objection or estrangement. Suppose she married incautiously—it is not improbable, for her existence has been a lonely and monotonous one for many years—and the man turned out a ruffian, she would be anxious to screen him, and yet would revolt from his crimes. This might be. It bears strongly on the whole drift of her discourse yesterday, and would quite explain her conduct. Do you suppose Barnaby is privy to these circumstances?'

'Quite impossible to say, sir,' returned the locksmith, shaking his head again: 'and next to impossible to find out from him. If what you suppose is really the case, I tremble for the lad—a notable person, sir, to put to bad uses—'

'It is not possible, Varden,' said Mr Haredale, in a still lower tone of voice than he had spoken yet, 'that we have been blinded and deceived by this woman from the beginning? It is not possible that this connection was formed in her husband's lifetime, and led to his and my brother's—'

'Good God, sir,' cried Gabriel, interrupting him, 'don't entertain such dark thoughts for a moment. Five-and-twenty years ago, where was there a girl like her? A gay, handsome, laughing, bright-eyed damsel! Think what she was, sir. It makes my heart ache now, even now, though I'm an old man, with a woman for a daughter, to think what she was and what she is. We all change, but that's with Time; Time does his work honestly, and I don't mind him. A fig for Time, sir. Use him well, and he's a hearty fellow, and scorns to have you at a disadvantage. But care and suffering (and those have changed her) are devils, sir—secret, stealthy, undermining devils—who tread down the brightest flowers in Eden, and do more havoc in a month than Time does in a year. Picture to yourself for one minute what Mary was before they went to work with her fresh heart and face—do her that justice—and say whether such a thing is possible.'

'You're a good fellow, Varden,' said Mr Haredale, 'and are quite right. I have brooded on that subject so long, that every breath of suspicion carries me back to it. You are quite right.'

'It isn't, sir,' cried the locksmith with brightened eyes, and sturdy, honest voice; 'it isn't because I courted her before Rudge, and failed, that I say she was too good for him. She would have been as much too good for me. But she WAS too good for him; he wasn't free and frank enough for her. I don't reproach his memory with it, poor fellow; I only want to put her before you as she really was. For myself, I'll keep her old picture in my mind; and thinking of that, and what has altered her, I'll stand her friend, and try to win her back to peace. And damme, sir,' cried Gabriel, 'with your pardon for the word, I'd do the same if she had married fifty highwaymen in a twelvemonth; and think it in the Protestant Manual too, though Martha said it wasn't, tooth and nail, till doomsday!'

If the dark little parlour had been filled with a dense fog, which, clearing away in an instant, left it all radiance and brightness, it could not have been more suddenly cheered than by this outbreak on the part of the hearty locksmith. In a voice nearly as full and round as his own, Mr Haredale cried 'Well said!' and bade him come away without more parley. The locksmith complied right willingly; and both getting into a hackney coach which was waiting at the door, drove off straightway.

They alighted at the street corner, and dismissing their conveyance, walked to the house. To their first knock at the door there was no response. A second met with the like result. But in answer to the third, which was of a more vigorous kind, the parlour window-sash was gently raised, and a musical voice cried:

'Haredale, my dear fellow, I am extremely glad to see you. How very much you have improved in your appearance since our last meeting! I never saw you looking better. HOW do you do?'

Mr Haredale turned his eyes towards the casement whence the voice proceeded, though there was no need to do so, to recognise the speaker, and Mr Chester waved his hand, and smiled a courteous welcome.

'The door will be opened immediately,' he said. 'There is nobody but a very dilapidated female to perform such offices. You will excuse her infirmities? If she were in a more elevated station of society, she would be gouty. Being but a hewer of wood and drawer of water, she is rheumatic. My dear Haredale, these are natural class distinctions, depend upon it.'

Mr Haredale, whose face resumed its lowering and distrustful look the moment he heard the voice, inclined his head stiffly, and turned his back upon the speaker.

'Not opened yet,' said Mr Chester. 'Dear me! I hope the aged soul has not caught her foot in some unlucky cobweb by the way. She is there at last! Come in, I beg!'

Mr Haredale entered, followed by the locksmith. Turning with a look of great astonishment to the old woman who had opened the door, he inquired for Mrs Rudge—for Barnaby. They were both gone, she replied, wagging her ancient head, for good. There was a gentleman in the parlour, who perhaps could tell them more. That was all SHE knew.

'Pray, sir,' said Mr Haredale, presenting himself before this new tenant, 'where is the person whom I came here to see?'

'My dear friend,' he returned, 'I have not the least idea.'

'Your trifling is ill-timed,' retorted the other in a suppressed tone and voice, 'and its subject ill-chosen. Reserve it for those who are your friends, and do not expend it on me. I lay no claim to the distinction, and have the self-denial to reject it.'

'My dear, good sir,' said Mr Chester, 'you are heated with walking. Sit down, I beg. Our friend is—'

'Is but a plain honest man,' returned Mr Haredale, 'and quite unworthy of your notice.'

'Gabriel Varden by name, sir,' said the locksmith bluntly.

'A worthy English yeoman!' said Mr Chester. 'A most worthy yeoman, of whom I have frequently heard my son Ned—darling fellow—speak, and have often wished to see. Varden, my good friend, I am glad to know you. You wonder now,' he said, turning languidly to Mr Haredale, 'to see me here. Now, I am sure you do.'

Mr Haredale glanced at him—not fondly or admiringly—smiled, and held his peace.

'The mystery is solved in a moment,' said Mr Chester; 'in a moment. Will you step aside with me one instant. You remember our little compact in reference to Ned, and your dear niece, Haredale? You remember the list of assistants in their innocent intrigue? You remember these two people being among them? My dear fellow, congratulate yourself, and me. I have bought them off.'

'You have done what?' said Mr Haredale.

'Bought them off,' returned his smiling friend. 'I have found it necessary to take some active steps towards setting this boy and girl attachment quite at rest, and have begun by removing these two agents. You are surprised? Who CAN withstand the influence of a little money! They wanted it, and have been bought off. We have nothing more to fear from them. They are gone.'

'Gone!' echoed Mr Haredale. 'Where?'

'My dear fellow—and you must permit me to say again, that you never looked so young; so positively boyish as you do to-night—the Lord knows where; I believe Columbus himself wouldn't find them. Between you and me they have their hidden reasons, but upon that point I have pledged myself to secrecy. She appointed to see you here to-night, I know, but found it inconvenient, and couldn't wait. Here is the key of the door. I am afraid you'll find it inconveniently large; but as the tenement is yours, your good-nature will excuse that, Haredale, I am certain!'

Chapter 27

Mr Haredale stood in the widow's parlour with the door-key in his hand, gazing by turns at Mr Chester and at Gabriel Varden, and occasionally glancing downward at the key as in the hope that of its own accord it would unlock the mystery; until Mr Chester, putting on his hat and gloves, and sweetly inquiring whether they were walking in the same direction, recalled him to himself.

'No,' he said. 'Our roads diverge—widely, as you know. For the present, I shall remain here.'

'You will be hipped, Haredale; you will be miserable, melancholy, utterly wretched,' returned the other. 'It's a place of the very last description for a man of your temper. I know it will make you very miserable.'

'Let it,' said Mr Haredale, sitting down; 'and thrive upon the thought. Good night!'

Feigning to be wholly unconscious of the abrupt wave of the hand which rendered this farewell tantamount to a dismissal, Mr Chester retorted with a bland and heartfelt benediction, and inquired of Gabriel in what direction HE was going.

'Yours, sir, would be too much honour for the like of me,' replied the locksmith, hesitating.

'I wish you to remain here a little while, Varden,' said Mr Haredale, without looking towards them. 'I have a word or two to say to you.'

'I will not intrude upon your conference another moment,' said Mr Chester with inconceivable politeness. 'May it be satisfactory to you both! God bless you!' So saying, and bestowing upon the locksmith a most refulgent smile, he left them.

'A deplorably constituted creature, that rugged person,' he said, as he walked along the street; 'he is an atrocity that carries its own punishment along with it—a bear that gnaws himself. And here is one of the inestimable advantages of having a perfect command over one's inclinations. I have been tempted in these two short interviews, to draw upon that fellow, fifty times. Five men in six would have yielded to the impulse. By suppressing mine, I wound him deeper and more keenly than if I were the best swordsman in all Europe, and he the worst. You are the wise man's very last resource,' he said, tapping the hilt of his weapon; 'we can but appeal to you when all else is said and done. To come to you before, and thereby spare our adversaries so much, is a barbarian mode of warfare, quite unworthy of any man with the remotest pretensions to delicacy of feeling, or refinement.'

He smiled so very pleasantly as he communed with himself after this manner, that a beggar was emboldened to follow for alms, and to dog his footsteps for some distance. He was gratified by the circumstance, feeling it complimentary to his power of feature, and as a reward suffered the man to follow him until he called a chair, when he graciously dismissed him with a fervent blessing.

'Which is as easy as cursing,' he wisely added, as he took his seat, 'and more becoming to the face.—To Clerkenwell, my good creatures, if you please!' The chairmen were rendered quite vivacious by having such a courteous burden, and to Clerkenwell they went at a fair round trot.

Alighting at a certain point he had indicated to them upon the road, and paying them something less than they expected from a fare of such gentle speech, he turned into the street in which the locksmith dwelt, and presently stood beneath the shadow of the Golden Key. Mr Tappertit, who was hard at work by lamplight, in a corner of the workshop, remained unconscious of his presence until a hand upon his shoulder made him start and turn his head.

'Industry,' said Mr Chester, 'is the soul of business, and the keystone of prosperity. Mr Tappertit, I shall expect you to invite me to dinner when you are Lord Mayor of London.'

'Sir,' returned the 'prentice, laying down his hammer, and rubbing his nose on the back of a very sooty hand, 'I scorn the Lord Mayor and everything that belongs to him. We must have another state of society, sir, before you catch me being Lord Mayor. How de do, sir?'

'The better, Mr Tappertit, for looking into your ingenuous face once more. I hope you are well.'

'I am as well, sir,' said Sim, standing up to get nearer to his ear, and whispering hoarsely, 'as any man can be under the aggrawations to which I am exposed. My life's a burden to me. If it wasn't for wengeance, I'd play at pitch and toss with it on the losing hazard.'

'Is Mrs Varden at home?' said Mr Chester.

'Sir,' returned Sim, eyeing him over with a look of concentrated expression,—'she is. Did you wish to see her?'

Mr Chester nodded.

'Then come this way, sir,' said Sim, wiping his face upon his apron. 'Follow me, sir.—Would you permit me to whisper in your ear, one half a second?'

'By all means.'

Mr Tappertit raised himself on tiptoe, applied his lips to Mr Chester's ear, drew back his head without saying anything, looked hard at him, applied them to his ear again, again drew back, and finally whispered—'The name is Joseph Willet. Hush! I say no more.'

Having said that much, he beckoned the visitor with a mysterious aspect to follow him to the parlour-door, where he announced him in the voice of a gentleman-usher. 'Mr Chester.'

'And not Mr Ed'dard, mind,' said Sim, looking into the door again, and adding this by way of postscript in his own person; 'it's his father.'

'But do not let his father,' said Mr Chester, advancing hat in hand, as he observed the effect of this last explanatory announcement, 'do not let his father be any check or restraint on your domestic occupations, Miss Varden.'

'Oh! Now! There! An't I always a-saying it!' exclaimed Miggs, clapping her hands. 'If he an't been and took Missis for her own daughter. Well, she DO look like it, that she do. Only think of that, mim!'

'Is it possible,' said Mr Chester in his softest tones, 'that this is Mrs Varden! I am amazed. That is not your daughter, Mrs Varden? No, no. Your sister.'

'My daughter, indeed, sir,' returned Mrs V., blushing with great juvenility.

'Ah, Mrs Varden!' cried the visitor. 'Ah, ma'am—humanity is indeed a happy lot, when we can repeat ourselves in others, and still be young as they. You must allow me to salute you—the custom of the country, my dear madam—your daughter too.'

Dolly showed some reluctance to perform this ceremony, but was sharply reproved by Mrs Varden, who insisted on her undergoing it that minute. For pride, she said with great severity, was one of the seven deadly sins, and humility and lowliness of heart were virtues. Wherefore she desired that Dolly would be kissed immediately, on pain of her just displeasure; at the same time giving her to understand that whatever she saw her mother do, she might safely do herself, without being at the trouble of any reasoning or reflection on the subject—which, indeed, was offensive and undutiful, and in direct contravention of the church catechism.

Thus admonished, Dolly complied, though by no means willingly; for there was a broad, bold look of admiration in Mr Chester's face, refined and polished though it sought to be, which distressed her very much. As she stood with downcast eyes, not liking to look up and meet his, he gazed upon her with an approving air, and then turned to her mother.

'My friend Gabriel (whose acquaintance I only made this very evening) should be a happy man, Mrs Varden.'

'Ah!' sighed Mrs V., shaking her head.

'Ah!' echoed Miggs.

'Is that the case?' said Mr Chester, compassionately. 'Dear me!'

'Master has no intentions, sir,' murmured Miggs as she sidled up to him, 'but to be as grateful as his natur will let him, for everythink he owns which it is in his powers to appreciate. But we never, sir'—said Miggs, looking sideways at Mrs Varden, and interlarding her discourse with a sigh—'we never know the full value of SOME wines and fig-trees till we lose 'em. So much the worse, sir, for them as has the slighting of 'em on their consciences when they're gone to be in full blow elsewhere.' And Miss Miggs cast up her eyes to signify where that might be.

As Mrs Varden distinctly heard, and was intended to hear, all that Miggs said, and as these words appeared to convey in metaphorical terms a presage or foreboding that she would at some early period droop beneath her trials and take an easy flight towards the stars, she immediately began to languish, and taking a volume of the Manual from a neighbouring table, leant her arm upon it as though she were Hope and that her Anchor. Mr Chester perceiving this, and seeing how the volume was lettered on the back, took it gently from her hand, and turned the fluttering leaves.

'My favourite book, dear madam. How often, how very often in his early life—before he can remember'—(this clause was strictly true) 'have I deduced little easy moral lessons from its pages, for my dear son Ned! You know Ned?'

Mrs Varden had that honour, and a fine affable young gentleman he was.

'You're a mother, Mrs Varden,' said Mr Chester, taking a pinch of snuff, 'and you know what I, as a father, feel, when he is praised. He gives me some uneasiness—much uneasiness—he's of a roving nature, ma'am—from flower to flower—from sweet to sweet—but his is the butterfly time of life, and we must not be hard upon such trifling.'

He glanced at Dolly. She was attending evidently to what he said. Just what he desired!

'The only thing I object to in this little trait of Ned's, is,' said Mr Chester, '—and the mention of his name reminds me, by the way, that I am about to beg the favour of a minute's talk with you alone—the only thing I object to in it, is, that it DOES partake of insincerity. Now, however I may attempt to disguise the fact from myself in my affection for Ned, still I always revert to this—that if we are not sincere, we are nothing. Nothing upon earth. Let us be sincere, my dear madam—'

'—and Protestant,' murmured Mrs Varden.

'—and Protestant above all things. Let us be sincere and Protestant, strictly moral, strictly just (though always with a leaning towards mercy), strictly honest, and strictly true, and we gain—it is a slight point, certainly, but still it is something tangible; we throw up a groundwork and foundation, so to speak, of goodness, on which we may afterwards erect some worthy superstructure.'

Now, to be sure, Mrs Varden thought, here is a perfect character. Here is a meek, righteous, thoroughgoing Christian, who, having mastered all these qualities, so difficult of attainment; who, having dropped a pinch of salt on the tails of all the cardinal virtues, and caught them every one; makes light of their possession, and pants for more morality. For the good woman never doubted (as many good men and women never do), that this slighting kind of profession, this setting so little store by great matters, this seeming to say, 'I am not proud, I am what you hear, but I consider myself no better than other people; let us change the subject, pray'—was perfectly genuine and true. He so contrived it, and said it in that way that it appeared to have been forced from him, and its effect was marvellous.

Aware of the impression he had made—few men were quicker than he at such discoveries—Mr Chester followed up the blow by propounding certain virtuous maxims, somewhat vague and general in their nature, doubtless, and occasionally partaking of the character of truisms, worn a little out at elbow, but delivered in so charming a voice and with such uncommon serenity and peace of mind, that they answered as well as the best. Nor is this to be wondered at; for as hollow vessels produce a far more musical sound in falling than those which are substantial, so it will oftentimes be found that sentiments which have nothing in them make the loudest ringing in the world, and are the most relished.

Mr Chester, with the volume gently extended in one hand, and with the other planted lightly on his breast, talked to them in the most delicious manner possible; and quite enchanted all his hearers, notwithstanding their conflicting interests and thoughts. Even Dolly, who, between his keen regards and her eyeing over by Mr Tappertit, was put quite out of countenance, could not help owning within herself that he was the sweetest-spoken gentleman she had ever seen. Even Miss Miggs, who was divided between admiration of Mr Chester and a mortal jealousy of her young mistress, had sufficient leisure to be propitiated. Even Mr Tappertit, though occupied as we have seen in gazing at his heart's delight, could not wholly divert his thoughts from the voice of the other charmer. Mrs Varden, to her own private thinking, had never been so improved in all her life; and when Mr Chester, rising and craving permission to speak with her apart, took her by the hand and led her at arm's length upstairs to the best sitting-room, she almost deemed him something more than human.

'Dear madam,' he said, pressing her hand delicately to his lips; 'be seated.'

Mrs Varden called up quite a courtly air, and became seated.

'You guess my object?' said Mr Chester, drawing a chair towards her. 'You divine my purpose? I am an affectionate parent, my dear Mrs Varden.'

'That I am sure you are, sir,' said Mrs V.

'Thank you,' returned Mr Chester, tapping his snuff-box lid. 'Heavy moral responsibilities rest with parents, Mrs Varden.'

Mrs Varden slightly raised her hands, shook her head, and looked at the ground as though she saw straight through the globe, out at the other end, and into the immensity of space beyond.

'I may confide in you,' said Mr Chester, 'without reserve. I love my son, ma'am, dearly; and loving him as I do, I would save him from working certain misery. You know of his attachment to Miss Haredale. You have abetted him in it, and very kind of you it was to do so. I am deeply obliged to you—most deeply obliged to you—for your interest in his behalf; but my dear ma'am, it is a mistaken one, I do assure you.'

Mrs Varden stammered that she was sorry—'

'Sorry, my dear ma'am,' he interposed. 'Never be sorry for what is so very amiable, so very good in intention, so perfectly like yourself. But there are grave and weighty reasons, pressing family considerations, and apart even from these, points of religious difference, which interpose themselves, and render their union impossible; utterly im-possible. I should have mentioned these circumstances to your husband; but he has—you will excuse my saying this so freely—he has NOT your quickness of apprehension or depth of moral sense. What an extremely airy house this is, and how beautifully kept! For one like myself—a widower so long—these tokens of female care and superintendence have inexpressible charms.'

Mrs Varden began to think (she scarcely knew why) that the young Mr Chester must be in the wrong and the old Mr Chester must be in the right.

'My son Ned,' resumed her tempter with his most winning air, 'has had, I am told, your lovely daughter's aid, and your open-hearted husband's.'

'—Much more than mine, sir,' said Mrs Varden; 'a great deal more. I have often had my doubts. It's a—'

'A bad example,' suggested Mr Chester. 'It is. No doubt it is. Your daughter is at that age when to set before her an encouragement for young persons to rebel against their parents on this most important point, is particularly injudicious. You are quite right. I ought to have thought of that myself, but it escaped me, I confess—so far superior are your sex to ours, dear madam, in point of penetration and sagacity.'

Mrs Varden looked as wise as if she had really said something to deserve this compliment—firmly believed she had, in short—and her faith in her own shrewdness increased considerably.

'My dear ma'am,' said Mr Chester, 'you embolden me to be plain with you. My son and I are at variance on this point. The young lady and her natural guardian differ upon it, also. And the closing point is, that my son is bound by his duty to me, by his honour, by every solemn tie and obligation, to marry some one else.'

'Engaged to marry another lady!' quoth Mrs Varden, holding up her hands.

'My dear madam, brought up, educated, and trained, expressly for that purpose. Expressly for that purpose.—Miss Haredale, I am told, is a very charming creature.'

'I am her foster-mother, and should know—the best young lady in the world,' said Mrs Varden.

'I have not the smallest doubt of it. I am sure she is. And you, who have stood in that tender relation towards her, are bound to consult her happiness.

Now, can I—as I have said to Haredale, who quite agrees—can I possibly stand by, and suffer her to throw herself away (although she IS of a Catholic family), upon a young fellow who, as yet, has no heart at all? It is no imputation upon him to say he has not, because young men who have plunged deeply into the frivolities and conventionalities of society, very seldom have. Their hearts never grow, my dear ma'am, till after thirty. I don't believe, no, I do NOT believe, that I had any heart myself when I was Ned's age.'

'Oh sir,' said Mrs Varden, 'I think you must have had. It's impossible that you, who have so much now, can ever have been without any.'

'I hope,' he answered, shrugging his shoulders meekly, 'I have a little; I hope, a very little—Heaven knows! But to return to Ned; I have no doubt you thought, and therefore interfered benevolently in his behalf, that I objected to Miss Haredale. How very natural! My dear madam, I object to him—to him—emphatically to Ned himself.'

Mrs Varden was perfectly aghast at the disclosure.

'He has, if he honourably fulfils this solemn obligation of which I have told you—and he must be honourable, dear Mrs Varden, or he is no son of mine—a fortune within his reach. He is of most expensive, ruinously expensive habits; and if, in a moment of caprice and wilfulness, he were to marry this young lady, and so deprive himself of the means of gratifying the tastes to which he has been so long accustomed, he would—my dear madam, he would break the gentle creature's heart. Mrs Varden, my good lady, my dear soul, I put it to you—is such a sacrifice to be endured? Is the female heart a thing to be trifled with in this way? Ask your own, my dear madam. Ask your own, I beseech you.'

'Truly,' thought Mrs Varden, 'this gentleman is a saint. But,' she added aloud, and not unnaturally, 'if you take Miss Emma's lover away, sir, what becomes of the poor thing's heart then?'

'The very point,' said Mr Chester, not at all abashed, 'to which I wished to lead you. A marriage with my son, whom I should be compelled to disown, would be followed by years of misery; they would be separated, my dear madam, in a twelvemonth. To break off this attachment, which is more fancied than real, as you and I know very well, will cost the dear girl but a few tears, and she is happy again. Take the case of your own daughter, the young lady downstairs, who is your breathing image'—Mrs Varden coughed and simpered—'there is a young man (I am sorry to say, a dissolute fellow, of very indifferent character) of whom I have heard Ned speak—Bullet was it—Pullet—Mullet—'

'There is a young man of the name of Joseph Willet, sir,' said Mrs Varden, folding her hands loftily.

'That's he,' cried Mr Chester. 'Suppose this Joseph Willet now, were to aspire to the affections of your charming daughter, and were to engage them.'

'It would be like his impudence,' interposed Mrs Varden, bridling, 'to dare to think of such a thing!'

'My dear madam, that's the whole case. I know it would be like his impudence. It is like Ned's impudence to do as he has done; but you would not on that account, or because of a few tears from your beautiful daughter, refrain from checking their inclinations in their birth. I meant to have reasoned thus with your husband when I saw him at Mrs Rudge's this evening—'

'My husband,' said Mrs Varden, interposing with emotion, 'would be a great deal better at home than going to Mrs Rudge's so often. I don't know what he does there. I don't see what occasion he has to busy himself in her affairs at all, sir.'

'If I don't appear to express my concurrence in those last sentiments of yours,' returned Mr Chester, 'quite so strongly as you might desire, it is because his being there, my dear madam, and not proving conversational, led me hither, and procured me the happiness of this interview with one, in whom the whole management, conduct, and prosperity of her family are centred, I perceive.'

With that he took Mrs Varden's hand again, and having pressed it to his lips with the highflown gallantry of the day—a little burlesqued to render it the more striking in the good lady's unaccustomed eyes—proceeded in the same strain of mingled sophistry, cajolery, and flattery, to entreat that her utmost influence might be exerted to restrain her husband and daughter from any further promotion of Edward's suit to Miss Haredale, and from aiding or abetting either party in any way. Mrs Varden was but a woman, and had her share of vanity, obstinacy, and love of power. She entered into a secret treaty of alliance, offensive and defensive, with her insinuating visitor; and really did believe, as many others would have done who saw and heard him, that in so doing she furthered the ends of truth, justice, and morality, in a very uncommon degree.

Overjoyed by the success of his negotiation, and mightily amused within himself, Mr Chester conducted her downstairs in the same state as before; and having repeated the previous ceremony of salutation, which also as before comprehended Dolly, took his leave; first completing the conquest of Miss Miggs's heart, by inquiring if 'this young lady' would light him to the door.

'Oh, mim,' said Miggs, returning with the candle. 'Oh gracious me, mim, there's a gentleman! Was there ever such an angel to talk as he is—and such a sweet-looking man! So upright and noble, that he seems to despise the very ground he walks on; and yet so mild and condescending, that he seems to say "but I will take notice on it too." And to think of his taking you for Miss Dolly, and Miss Dolly for your sister—Oh, my goodness me, if I was master wouldn't I be jealous of him!'

Mrs Varden reproved her handmaid for this vain-speaking; but very gently and mildly—quite smilingly indeed—remarking that she was a foolish, giddy, light-headed girl, whose spirits carried her beyond all bounds, and who didn't mean half she said, or she would be quite angry with her.

'For my part,' said Dolly, in a thoughtful manner, 'I half believe Mr Chester is something like Miggs in that respect. For all his politeness and pleasant speaking, I am pretty sure he was making game of us, more than once.'

'If you venture to say such a thing again, and to speak ill of people behind their backs in my presence, miss,' said Mrs Varden, 'I shall insist upon your taking a candle and going to bed directly. How dare you, Dolly? I'm astonished at you. The rudeness of your whole behaviour this evening has been disgraceful. Did anybody ever hear,' cried the enraged matron, bursting into tears, 'of a daughter telling her own mother she has been made game of!'

What a very uncertain temper Mrs Varden's was!

Chapter 28

Repairing to a noted coffee-house in Covent Garden when he left the locksmith's, Mr Chester sat long over a late dinner, entertaining himself exceedingly with the whimsical recollection of his recent proceedings, and congratulating himself very much on his great cleverness. Influenced by these thoughts, his face wore an expression so benign and tranquil, that the waiter in immediate attendance upon him felt he could almost have died in his defence, and settled in his own mind (until the receipt of the bill, and a very small fee for very great trouble disabused it of the idea) that such an apostolic customer was worth half-a-dozen of the ordinary run of visitors, at least.

A visit to the gaming-table—not as a heated, anxious venturer, but one whom it was quite a treat to see staking his two or three pieces in deference to the follies of society, and smiling with equal benevolence on winners and losers—made it late before he reached home. It was his custom to bid his servant go to bed at his own time unless he had orders to the contrary, and to leave a candle on the common stair. There was a lamp on the landing by which he could always light it when he came home late, and having a key of the door about him he could enter and go to bed at his pleasure.

He opened the glass of the dull lamp, whose wick, burnt up and swollen like a drunkard's nose, came flying off in little carbuncles at the candle's touch, and scattering hot sparks about, rendered it matter of some difficulty to kindle the lazy taper; when a noise, as of a man snoring deeply some steps higher up, caused him to pause and listen. It was the heavy breathing of a sleeper, close at hand. Some fellow had lain down on the open staircase, and was slumbering soundly. Having lighted the candle at length and opened his own door, he softly ascended, holding the taper high above his head, and peering cautiously about; curious to see what kind of man had chosen so comfortless a shelter for his lodging.

With his head upon the landing and his great limbs flung over half-a-dozen stairs, as carelessly as though he were a dead man whom drunken bearers had thrown down by chance, there lay Hugh, face uppermost, his long hair drooping like some wild weed upon his wooden pillow, and his huge chest heaving with the sounds which so unwontedly disturbed the place and hour.

He who came upon him so unexpectedly was about to break his rest by thrusting him with his foot, when, glancing at his upturned face, he arrested himself in the very action, and stooping down and shading the candle with his hand, examined his features closely. Close as his first inspection was, it did not suffice, for he passed the light, still carefully shaded as before, across and across his face, and yet observed him with a searching eye.

While he was thus engaged, the sleeper, without any starting or turning round, awoke. There was a kind of fascination in meeting his steady gaze so suddenly, which took from the other the presence of mind to withdraw his eyes, and forced him, as it were, to meet his look. So they remained staring at each other, until Mr Chester at last broke silence, and asked him in a low voice, why he lay sleeping there.

'I thought,' said Hugh, struggling into a sitting posture and gazing at him intently, still, 'that you were a part of my dream. It was a curious one. I hope it may never come true, master.'

'What makes you shiver?'

'The—the cold, I suppose,' he growled, as he shook himself and rose. 'I hardly know where I am yet.'

'Do you know me?' said Mr Chester.

'Ay, I know you,' he answered. 'I was dreaming of you—we're not where I thought we were. That's a comfort.'

He looked round him as he spoke, and in particular looked above his head, as though he half expected to be standing under some object which had had existence in his dream. Then he rubbed his eyes and shook himself again, and followed his conductor into his own rooms.

Mr Chester lighted the candles which stood upon his dressing-table, and wheeling an easy-chair towards the fire, which was yet burning, stirred up a cheerful blaze, sat down before it, and bade his uncouth visitor 'Come here,' and draw his boots off.

'You have been drinking again, my fine fellow,' he said, as Hugh went down on one knee, and did as he was told.

'As I'm alive, master, I've walked the twelve long miles, and waited here I don't know how long, and had no drink between my lips since dinner-time at noon.'

'And can you do nothing better, my pleasant friend, than fall asleep, and shake the very building with your snores?' said Mr Chester. 'Can't you dream in your straw at home, dull dog as you are, that you need come here to do it?—Reach me those slippers, and tread softly.'

Hugh obeyed in silence.

'And harkee, my dear young gentleman,' said Mr Chester, as he put them on, 'the next time you dream, don't let it be of me, but of some dog or horse with whom you are better acquainted. Fill the glass once—you'll find it and the bottle in the same place—and empty it to keep yourself awake.'

Hugh obeyed again even more zealously—and having done so, presented himself before his patron.

'Now,' said Mr Chester, 'what do you want with me?'

'There was news to-day,' returned Hugh. 'Your son was at our house—came down on horseback. He tried to see the young woman, but couldn't get sight of her. He left some letter or some message which our Joe had charge of, but he and the old one quarrelled about it when your son had gone, and the old one wouldn't let it be delivered. He says (that's the old one does) that none of his people shall interfere and get him into trouble. He's a landlord, he says, and lives on everybody's custom.'

'He's a jewel,' smiled Mr Chester, 'and the better for being a dull one.—Well?'

'Varden's daughter—that's the girl I kissed—'

'—and stole the bracelet from upon the king's highway,' said Mr Chester, composedly. 'Yes; what of her?'

'She wrote a note at our house to the young woman, saying she lost the letter I brought to you, and you burnt. Our Joe was to carry it, but the old one kept him at home all next day, on purpose that he shouldn't. Next morning he gave it to me to take; and here it is.'

'You didn't deliver it then, my good friend?' said Mr Chester, twirling Dolly's note between his finger and thumb, and feigning to be surprised.

'I supposed you'd want to have it,' retorted Hugh. 'Burn one, burn all, I thought.'

'My devil-may-care acquaintance,' said Mr Chester—'really if you do not draw some nicer distinctions, your career will be cut short with most surprising suddenness. Don't you know that the letter you brought to me, was directed to my son who resides in this very place? And can you descry no difference between his letters and those addressed to other people?'

'If you don't want it,' said Hugh, disconcerted by this reproof, for he had expected high praise, 'give it me back, and I'll deliver it. I don't know how to please you, master.'

'I shall deliver it,' returned his patron, putting it away after a moment's consideration, 'myself. Does the young lady walk out, on fine mornings?'

'Mostly—about noon is her usual time.'

'Alone?'

'Yes, alone.'

'Where?'

'In the grounds before the house.—Them that the footpath crosses.'

'If the weather should be fine, I may throw myself in her way to-morrow, perhaps,' said Mr Chester, as coolly as if she were one of his ordinary acquaintance. 'Mr Hugh, if I should ride up to the Maypole door, you will do me the favour only to have seen me once. You must suppress your gratitude, and endeavour to forget my forbearance in the matter of the bracelet. It is natural it should break out, and it does you honour; but when other folks are by, you must, for your own sake and safety, be as like your usual self as though you owed me no obligation whatever, and had never stood within these walls. You comprehend me?'

Hugh understood him perfectly. After a pause he muttered that he hoped his patron would involve him in no trouble about this last letter; for he had kept it back solely with the view of pleasing him. He was continuing in this strain, when Mr Chester with a most beneficent and patronising air cut him short by saying:

'My good fellow, you have my promise, my word, my sealed bond (for a verbal pledge with me is quite as good), that I will always protect you so long as you deserve it. Now, do set your mind at rest. Keep it at ease, I beg of you. When a man puts himself in my power so thoroughly as you have done, I really feel as though he had a kind of claim upon me. I am more disposed to mercy and forbearance under such circumstances than I can tell you, Hugh. Do look upon me as your protector, and rest assured, I entreat you, that on the subject of that indiscretion, you may preserve, as long as you and I are friends, the lightest heart that ever beat within a human breast. Fill that glass once more to cheer you on your road homewards—I am really quite ashamed to think how far you have to go—and then God bless you for the night.'

'They think,' said Hugh, when he had tossed the liquor down, 'that I am sleeping soundly in the stable. Ha ha ha! The stable door is shut, but the steed's gone, master.'

'You are a most convivial fellow,' returned his friend, 'and I love your humour of all things. Good night! Take the greatest possible care of yourself, for my sake!'

It was remarkable that during the whole interview, each had endeavoured to catch stolen glances of the other's face, and had never looked full at it. They interchanged one brief and hasty glance as Hugh went out, averted their eyes directly, and so separated. Hugh closed the double doors behind him, carefully and without noise; and Mr Chester remained in his easy-chair, with his gaze intently fixed upon the fire.

'Well!' he said, after meditating for a long time—and said with a deep sigh and an uneasy shifting of his attitude, as though he dismissed some other subject from his thoughts, and returned to that which had held possession of them all the day—the plot thickens; I have thrown the shell; it will explode, I think, in eight-and-forty hours, and should scatter these good folks amazingly. We shall see!'

He went to bed and fell asleep, but had not slept long when he started up and thought that Hugh was at the outer door, calling in a strange voice, very different from his own, to be admitted. The delusion was so strong upon him, and was so full of that vague terror of the night in which such visions have their being, that he rose, and taking his sheathed sword in his hand, opened the door, and looked out upon the staircase, and towards the spot where Hugh had lain asleep; and even spoke to him by name. But all was dark and quiet, and creeping back to bed again, he fell, after an hour's uneasy watching, into a second sleep, and woke no more till morning.

Chapter 29

The thoughts of worldly men are for ever regulated by a moral law of gravitation, which, like the physical one, holds them down to earth. The bright glory of day, and the silent wonders of a starlit night, appeal to their minds in vain. There are no signs in the sun, or in the moon, or in the stars, for their reading. They are like some wise men, who, learning to know each planet by its Latin name, have quite forgotten such small heavenly constellations as Charity, Forbearance, Universal Love, and Mercy, although they shine by night and day so brightly that the blind may see them; and who, looking upward at the spangled sky, see nothing there but the reflection of their own great wisdom and book-learning.

It is curious to imagine these people of the world, busy in thought, turning their eyes towards the countless spheres that shine above us, and making them reflect the only images their minds contain. The man who lives but in the breath of princes, has nothing his sight but stars for courtiers' breasts. The envious man beholds his neighbours' honours even in the sky; to the money-hoarder, and the mass of worldly folk, the whole great universe above glitters with sterling coin—fresh from the mint—stamped with the sovereign's head—coming always between them and heaven, turn where they may. So do the shadows of our own desires stand between us and our better angels, and thus their brightness is eclipsed.

Everything was fresh and gay, as though the world were but that morning made, when Mr Chester rode at a tranquil pace along the Forest road. Though early in the season, it was warm and genial weather; the trees were budding into leaf, the hedges and the grass were green, the air was musical with songs of birds, and high above them all the lark poured out her richest melody. In shady spots, the morning dew sparkled on each young leaf and blade of grass; and where the sun was shining, some diamond drops yet glistened brightly, as in unwillingness to leave so fair a world, and have such brief existence. Even the light wind, whose rustling was as gentle to the ear as softly-falling water, had its hope and promise; and, leaving a pleasant fragrance in its track as it went fluttering by, whispered of its intercourse with Summer, and of his happy coming.

The solitary rider went glancing on among the trees, from sunlight into shade and back again, at the same even pace—looking about him, certainly, from time to time, but with no greater thought of the day or the scene through which he moved, than that he was fortunate (being choicely dressed) to have such favourable weather. He smiled very complacently at such times, but rather as if he were satisfied with himself than with anything else: and so went riding on, upon his chestnut cob, as pleasant to look upon as his own horse, and probably far less sensitive to the many cheerful influences by which he was surrounded.

In the course of time, the Maypole's massive chimneys rose upon his view: but he quickened not his pace one jot, and with the same cool gravity rode up to the tavern porch. John Willet, who was toasting his red face before a great fire in the bar, and who, with surpassing foresight and quickness of apprehension, had been thinking, as he looked at the blue sky, that if that state of things lasted much longer, it might ultimately become necessary to leave off fires and throw the windows open, issued forth to hold his stirrup; calling lustily for Hugh.

'Oh, you're here, are you, sir?' said John, rather surprised by the quickness with which he appeared. 'Take this here valuable animal into the stable, and have more than particular care of him if you want to keep your place. A mortal lazy fellow, sir; he needs a deal of looking after.'

'But you have a son,' returned Mr Chester, giving his bridle to Hugh as he dismounted, and acknowledging his salute by a careless motion of his hand towards his hat. 'Why don't you make HIM useful?'

'Why, the truth is, sir,' replied John with great importance, 'that my son—what, you're a-listening are you, villain?'

'Who's listening?' returned Hugh angrily. 'A treat, indeed, to hear YOU speak! Would you have me take him in till he's cool?'

'Walk him up and down further off then, sir,' cried old John, 'and when you see me and a noble gentleman entertaining ourselves with talk, keep your distance. If you don't know your distance, sir,' added Mr Willet, after an enormously long pause, during which he fixed his great dull eyes on Hugh, and waited with exemplary patience for any little property in the way of ideas that might come to him, 'we'll find a way to teach you, pretty soon.'

Hugh shrugged his shoulders scornfully, and in his reckless swaggering way, crossed to the other side of the little green, and there, with the bridle slung loosely over his shoulder, led the horse to and fro, glancing at his master every now and then from under his bushy eyebrows, with as sinister an aspect as one would desire to see.

Mr Chester, who, without appearing to do so, had eyed him attentively during this brief dispute, stepped into the porch, and turning abruptly to Mr Willet, said,

'You keep strange servants, John.'

'Strange enough to look at, sir, certainly,' answered the host; 'but out of doors; for horses, dogs, and the likes of that; there an't a better man in England than is that Maypole Hugh yonder. He an't fit for indoors,' added Mr Willet, with the confidential air of a man who felt his own superior nature. 'I do that; but if that chap had only a little imagination, sir—'

'He's an active fellow now, I dare swear,' said Mr Chester, in a musing tone, which seemed to suggest that he would have said the same had there been nobody to hear him.

'Active, sir!' retorted John, with quite an expression in his face; 'that chap! Hallo there! You, sir! Bring that horse here, and go and hang my wig on the weathercock, to show this gentleman whether you're one of the lively sort or not.'

Hugh made no answer, but throwing the bridle to his master, and snatching his wig from his head, in a manner so unceremonious and hasty that the action discomposed Mr Willet not a little, though performed at his own special desire, climbed nimbly to the very summit of the maypole before the house, and hanging the wig upon the weathercock, sent it twirling round like a roasting jack. Having achieved this performance, he cast it on the ground, and sliding down the pole with inconceivable rapidity, alighted on his feet almost as soon as it had touched the earth.

'There, sir,' said John, relapsing into his usual stolid state, 'you won't see that at many houses, besides the Maypole, where there's good accommodation for man and beast—nor that neither, though that with him is nothing.'

This last remark bore reference to his vaulting on horseback, as upon Mr Chester's first visit, and quickly disappearing by the stable gate.

'That with him is nothing,' repeated Mr Willet, brushing his wig with his wrist, and inwardly resolving to distribute a small charge for dust and damage to that article of dress, through the various items of his guest's bill; 'he'll get out of a'most any winder in the house. There never was such a chap for flinging himself about and never hurting his bones. It's my opinion, sir, that it's pretty nearly allowing to his not having any imagination; and that if imagination could be (which it can't) knocked into him, he'd never be able to do it any more. But we was a-talking, sir, about my son.'

'True, Willet, true,' said his visitor, turning again towards the landlord with his accustomed serenity of face. 'My good friend, what about him?'

It has been reported that Mr Willet, previously to making answer, winked. But as he was never known to be guilty of such lightness of conduct either before or afterwards, this may be looked upon as a malicious invention of his enemies—founded, perhaps, upon the undisputed circumstance of his taking his guest by the third breast button of his coat, counting downwards from the chin, and pouring his reply into his ear:

'Sir,' whispered John, with dignity, 'I know my duty. We want no love-making here, sir, unbeknown to parents. I respect a certain young gentleman, taking him in the light of a young gentleman; I respect a certain young lady, taking her in the light of a young lady; but of the two as a couple, I have no knowledge, sir, none whatever. My son, sir, is upon his patrole.'

'I thought I saw him looking through the corner window but this moment,' said Mr Chester, who naturally thought that being on patrole, implied walking about somewhere.

'No doubt you did, sir,' returned John. 'He is upon his patrole of honour, sir, not to leave the premises. Me and some friends of mine that use the Maypole of an evening, sir, considered what was best to be done with him, to prevent his doing anything unpleasant in opposing your desires; and we've put him on his patrole. And what's more, sir, he won't be off his patrole for a pretty long time to come, I can tell you that.'

When he had communicated this bright idea, which had its origin in the perusal by the village cronies of a newspaper, containing, among other matters, an account of how some officer pending the sentence of some court-martial had been enlarged on parole, Mr Willet drew back from his guest's ear, and without any visible alteration of feature, chuckled thrice audibly. This nearest approach to a laugh in which he ever indulged (and that but seldom and only on extreme occasions), never even curled his lip or effected the smallest change in—no, not so much as a slight wagging of—his great, fat, double chin, which at these times, as at all others, remained a perfect desert in the broad map of his face; one changeless, dull, tremendous blank.

Lest it should be matter of surprise to any, that Mr Willet adopted this bold course in opposition to one whom he had often entertained, and who had always paid his way at the Maypole gallantly, it may be remarked that it was his very penetration and sagacity in this respect, which occasioned him to indulge in those unusual demonstrations of jocularity, just now recorded. For Mr Willet, after carefully balancing father and son in his mental scales, had arrived at the distinct conclusion that the old gentleman was a better sort of a customer than the young one. Throwing his landlord into the same scale, which was already turned by this consideration, and heaping upon him, again, his strong desires to run counter to the unfortunate Joe, and his opposition as a general principle to all matters of love and matrimony, it went down to the very ground straightway, and sent the light cause of the younger gentleman flying upwards to the ceiling. Mr Chester was not the kind of man to be by any means dim-sighted to Mr Willet's motives, but he thanked him as graciously as if he had been one of the most disinterested martyrs that ever shone on earth; and leaving him, with many complimentary reliances on his great taste and judgment, to prepare whatever dinner he might deem most fitting the occasion, bent his steps towards the Warren.

Dressed with more than his usual elegance; assuming a gracefulness of manner, which, though it was the result of long study, sat easily upon him and became him well; composing his features into their most serene and prepossessing expression; and setting in short that guard upon himself, at every point, which denoted that he attached no slight importance to the impression he was about to make; he entered the bounds of Miss Haredale's usual walk. He had not gone far, or looked about him long, when he descried coming towards him, a female figure. A glimpse of the form and dress as she crossed a little wooden bridge which lay between them, satisfied him that he had found her whom he desired to see. He threw himself in her way, and a very few paces brought them close together.

He raised his hat from his head, and yielding the path, suffered her to pass him. Then, as if the idea had but that moment occurred to him, he turned hastily back and said in an agitated voice:

'I beg pardon—do I address Miss Haredale?'

She stopped in some confusion at being so unexpectedly accosted by a stranger; and answered 'Yes.'

'Something told me,' he said, LOOKING a compliment to her beauty, 'that it could be no other. Miss Haredale, I bear a name which is not unknown to you—which it is a pride, and yet a pain to me to know, sounds pleasantly in your ears. I am a man advanced in life, as you see. I am the father of him whom you honour and distinguish above all other men. May I for weighty reasons which fill me with distress, beg but a minute's conversation with you here?'

Who that was inexperienced in deceit, and had a frank and youthful heart, could doubt the speaker's truth—could doubt it too, when the voice that spoke, was like the faint echo of one she knew so well, and so much loved to hear? She inclined her head, and stopping, cast her eyes upon the ground.

'A little more apart—among these trees. It is an old man's hand, Miss Haredale; an honest one, believe me.'

She put hers in it as he said these words, and suffered him to lead her to a neighbouring seat.

'You alarm me, sir,' she said in a low voice. 'You are not the bearer of any ill news, I hope?'

'Of none that you anticipate,' he answered, sitting down beside her. 'Edward is well—quite well. It is of him I wish to speak, certainly; but I have no misfortune to communicate.'

She bowed her head again, and made as though she would have begged him to proceed; but said nothing.

'I am sensible that I speak to you at a disadvantage, dear Miss Haredale. Believe me that I am not so forgetful of the feelings of my younger days as not to know that you are little disposed to view me with favour. You have heard me described as cold-hearted, calculating, selfish—'

'I have never, sir,'—she interposed with an altered manner and a firmer voice; 'I have never heard you spoken of in harsh or disrespectful terms. You do a great wrong to Edward's nature if you believe him capable of any mean or base proceeding.'

'Pardon me, my sweet young lady, but your uncle—'

'Nor is it my uncle's nature either,' she replied, with a heightened colour in her cheek. 'It is not his nature to stab in the dark, nor is it mine to love such deeds.'

She rose as she spoke, and would have left him; but he detained her with a gentle hand, and besought her in such persuasive accents to hear him but another minute, that she was easily prevailed upon to comply, and so sat down again.

'And it is,' said Mr Chester, looking upward, and apostrophising the air; 'it is this frank, ingenuous, noble nature, Ned, that you can wound so lightly. Shame—shame upon you, boy!'

She turned towards him quickly, and with a scornful look and flashing eyes. There were tears in Mr Chester's eyes, but he dashed them hurriedly away, as though unwilling that his weakness should be known, and regarded her with mingled admiration and compassion.

'I never until now,' he said, 'believed, that the frivolous actions of a young man could move me like these of my own son. I never knew till now, the worth of a woman's heart, which boys so lightly win, and lightly fling away. Trust me, dear young lady, that I never until now did know your worth; and though an abhorrence of deceit and falsehood has impelled me to seek you out, and would have done so had you been the poorest and least gifted of your sex, I should have lacked the fortitude to sustain this interview could I have pictured you to my imagination as you really are.'

Oh! If Mrs Varden could have seen the virtuous gentleman as he said these words, with indignation sparkling from his eyes—if she could have heard his broken, quavering voice—if she could have beheld him as he stood bareheaded in the sunlight, and with unwonted energy poured forth his eloquence!

With a haughty face, but pale and trembling too, Emma regarded him in silence. She neither spoke nor moved, but gazed upon him as though she would look into his heart.

'I throw off,' said Mr Chester, 'the restraint which natural affection would impose on some men, and reject all bonds but those of truth and duty. Miss Haredale, you are deceived; you are deceived by your unworthy lover, and my unworthy son.'

Still she looked at him steadily, and still said not one word.

'I have ever opposed his professions of love for you; you will do me the justice, dear Miss Haredale, to remember that. Your uncle and myself were enemies in early life, and if I had sought retaliation, I might have found it here. But as we grow older, we grow wiser—bitter, I would fain hope—and from the first, I have opposed him in this attempt. I foresaw the end, and would have spared you, if I could.'

'Speak plainly, sir,' she faltered. 'You deceive me, or are deceived yourself. I do not believe you—I cannot—I should not.'

'First,' said Mr Chester, soothingly, 'for there may be in your mind some latent angry feeling to which I would not appeal, pray take this letter. It reached my hands by chance, and by mistake, and should have accounted to you (as I am told) for my son's not answering some other note of yours. God forbid, Miss Haredale,' said the good gentleman, with great emotion, 'that there should be in your gentle breast one causeless ground of quarrel with him. You should know, and you will see, that he was in no fault here.'

There appeared something so very candid, so scrupulously honourable, so very truthful and just in this course something which rendered the upright person who resorted to it, so worthy of belief—that Emma's heart, for the first time, sunk within her. She turned away and burst into tears.

'I would,' said Mr Chester, leaning over her, and speaking in mild and quite venerable accents; 'I would, dear girl, it were my task to banish, not increase, those tokens of your grief. My son, my erring son,—I will not call him deliberately criminal in this, for men so young, who have been inconstant twice or thrice before, act without reflection, almost without a knowledge of the wrong they do,—will break his plighted faith to you; has broken it even now. Shall I stop here, and having given you this warning, leave it to be fulfilled; or shall I go on?'

'You will go on, sir,' she answered, 'and speak more plainly yet, in justice both to him and me.'

'My dear girl,' said Mr Chester, bending over her more affectionately still; 'whom I would call my daughter, but the Fates forbid, Edward seeks to break with you upon a false and most unwarrantable pretence. I have it on his own showing; in his own hand. Forgive me, if I have had a watch upon his conduct; I am his father; I had a regard for your peace and his honour, and no better resource was left me. There lies on his desk at this present moment, ready for transmission to you, a letter, in which he tells you that our poverty—our poverty; his and mine, Miss Haredale—forbids him to pursue his claim upon your hand; in which he offers, voluntarily proposes, to free you from your pledge; and talks magnanimously (men do so, very commonly, in such cases) of being in time more worthy of your regard—and so forth. A letter, to be plain, in which he not only jilts you—pardon the word; I would summon to your aid your pride and dignity—not only jilts you, I fear, in favour of the object whose slighting treatment first inspired his brief passion for yourself and gave it birth in wounded vanity, but affects to make a merit and a virtue of the act.'

She glanced proudly at him once more, as by an involuntary impulse, and with a swelling breast rejoined, 'If what you say be true, he takes much needless trouble, sir, to compass his design. He's very tender of my peace of mind. I quite thank him.'

'The truth of what I tell you, dear young lady,' he replied, 'you will test by the receipt or non-receipt of the letter of which I speak. Haredale, my dear fellow, I am delighted to see you, although we meet under singular circumstances, and upon a melancholy occasion. I hope you are very well.'

At these words the young lady raised her eyes, which were filled with tears; and seeing that her uncle indeed stood before them, and being quite unequal to the trial of hearing or of speaking one word more, hurriedly withdrew, and left them. They stood looking at each other, and at her retreating figure, and for a long time neither of them spoke.

'What does this mean? Explain it,' said Mr Haredale at length. 'Why are you here, and why with her?'

'My dear friend,' rejoined the other, resuming his accustomed manner with infinite readiness, and throwing himself upon the bench with a weary air, 'you told me not very long ago, at that delightful old tavern of which you are the esteemed proprietor (and a most charming establishment it is for persons of rural pursuits and in robust health, who are not liable to take cold), that I had the head and heart of an evil spirit in all matters of deception. I thought at the time; I really did think; you flattered me. But now I begin to wonder at your discernment, and vanity apart, do honestly believe you spoke the truth. Did you ever counterfeit extreme ingenuousness and honest indignation? My dear fellow, you have no conception, if you never did, how faint the effort makes one.'

Mr Haredale surveyed him with a look of cold contempt. 'You may evade an explanation, I know,' he said, folding his arms. 'But I must have it. I can wait.'

'Not at all. Not at all, my good fellow. You shall not wait a moment,' returned his friend, as he lazily crossed his legs. 'The simplest thing in the world. It lies in a nutshell. Ned has written her a letter—a boyish, honest, sentimental composition, which remains as yet in his desk, because he hasn't had the heart to send it. I have taken a liberty, for which my parental affection and anxiety are a sufficient excuse, and possessed myself of the contents. I have described them to your niece (a most enchanting person, Haredale; quite an angelic creature), with a little colouring and description adapted to our purpose. It's done. You may be quite easy. It's all over. Deprived of their adherents and mediators; her pride and jealousy roused to the utmost; with nobody to undeceive her, and you to confirm me; you will find that their intercourse will close with her answer. If she receives Ned's letter by to-morrow noon, you may date their parting from to-morrow night. No thanks, I beg; you owe me none. I have acted for myself; and if I have forwarded our compact with all the ardour even you could have desired, I have done so selfishly, indeed.'

'I curse the compact, as you call it, with my whole heart and soul,' returned the other. 'It was made in an evil hour. I have bound myself to a lie; I have leagued myself with you; and though I did so with a righteous motive, and though it cost me such an effort as haply few men know, I hate and despise myself for the deed.'

'You are very warm,' said Mr Chester with a languid smile.

'I AM warm. I am maddened by your coldness. 'Death, Chester, if your blood ran warmer in your veins, and there were no restraints upon me, such as those that hold and drag me back—well; it is done; you tell me so, and on such a point I may believe you. When I am most remorseful for this treachery, I will think of you and your marriage, and try to justify myself in such remembrances, for having torn asunder Emma and your son, at any cost. Our bond is cancelled now, and we may part.'

Mr Chester kissed his hand gracefully; and with the same tranquil face he had preserved throughout—even when he had seen his companion so tortured and transported by his passion that his whole frame was shaken—lay in his lounging posture on the seat and watched him as he walked away.

'My scapegoat and my drudge at school,' he said, raising his head to look after him; 'my friend of later days, who could not keep his mistress when he had won her, and threw me in her way to carry off the prize; I triumph in the present and the past. Bark on, ill-favoured, ill-conditioned cur; fortune has ever been with me—I like to hear you.'

The spot where they had met, was in an avenue of trees. Mr Haredale not passing out on either hand, had walked straight on. He chanced to turn his head when at some considerable distance, and seeing that his late companion had by that time risen and was looking after him, stood still as though he half expected him to follow and waited for his coming up.

'It MAY come to that one day, but not yet,' said Mr Chester, waving his hand, as though they were the best of friends, and turning away. 'Not yet, Haredale. Life is pleasant enough to me; dull and full of heaviness to you. No. To cross swords with such a man—to indulge his humour unless upon extremity—would be weak indeed.'

For all that, he drew his sword as he walked along, and in an absent humour ran his eye from hilt to point full twenty times. But thoughtfulness begets wrinkles; remembering this, he soon put it up, smoothed his contracted brow, hummed a gay tune with greater gaiety of manner, and was his unruffled self again.

Chapter 30

A homely proverb recognises the existence of a troublesome class of persons who, having an inch conceded them, will take an ell. Not to quote the illustrious examples of those heroic scourges of mankind, whose amiable path in life has been from birth to death through blood, and fire, and ruin, and who would seem to have existed for no better purpose than to teach mankind that as the absence of pain is pleasure, so the earth, purged of their presence, may be deemed a blessed place—not to quote such mighty instances, it will be sufficient to refer to old John Willet.

Old John having long encroached a good standard inch, full measure, on the liberty of Joe, and having snipped off a Flemish ell in the matter of the parole, grew so despotic and so great, that his thirst for conquest knew no bounds. The more young Joe submitted, the more absolute old John became. The ell soon faded into nothing. Yards, furlongs, miles arose; and on went old John in the pleasantest manner possible, trimming off an exuberance in this place, shearing away some liberty of speech or action in that, and conducting himself in his small way with as much high mightiness and majesty, as the most glorious tyrant that ever had his statue reared in the public ways, of ancient or of modern times.

As great men are urged on to the abuse of power (when they need urging, which is not often), by their flatterers and dependents, so old John was impelled to these exercises of authority by the applause and admiration of his Maypole cronies, who, in the intervals of their nightly pipes and pots, would shake their heads and say that Mr Willet was a father of the good old English sort; that there were no new-fangled notions or modern ways in him; that he put them in mind of what their fathers were when they were boys; that there was no mistake about him; that it would be well for the country if there were more like him, and more was the pity that there were not; with many other original remarks of that nature. Then they would condescendingly give Joe to understand that it was all for his good, and he would be thankful for it one day; and in particular, Mr Cobb would acquaint him, that when he was his age, his father thought no more of giving him a parental kick, or a box on the ears, or a cuff on the head, or some little admonition of that sort, than he did of any other ordinary duty of life; and he would further remark, with looks of great significance, that but for this judicious bringing up, he might have never been the man he was at that present speaking; which was probable enough, as he was, beyond all question, the dullest dog of the party. In short, between old John and old John's friends, there never was an unfortunate young fellow so bullied, badgered, worried, fretted, and brow-beaten; so constantly beset, or made so tired of his life, as poor Joe Willet.

This had come to be the recognised and established state of things; but as John was very anxious to flourish his supremacy before the eyes of Mr Chester, he did that day exceed himself, and did so goad and chafe his son and heir, that but for Joe's having made a solemn vow to keep his hands in his pockets when they were not otherwise engaged, it is impossible to say what he might have done with them. But the longest day has an end, and at length Mr Chester came downstairs to mount his horse, which was ready at the door.

As old John was not in the way at the moment, Joe, who was sitting in the bar ruminating on his dismal fate and the manifold perfections of Dolly Varden, ran out to hold the guest's stirrup and assist him to mount. Mr Chester was scarcely in the saddle, and Joe was in the very act of making him a graceful bow, when old John came diving out of the porch, and collared him.

'None of that, sir,' said John, 'none of that, sir. No breaking of patroles. How dare you come out of the door, sir, without leave? You're trying to get away, sir, are you, and to make a traitor of yourself again? What do you mean, sir?'

'Let me go, father,' said Joe, imploringly, as he marked the smile upon their visitor's face, and observed the pleasure his disgrace afforded him. 'This is too bad. Who wants to get away?'

'Who wants to get away!' cried John, shaking him. 'Why you do, sir, you do. You're the boy, sir,' added John, collaring with one band, and aiding the effect of a farewell bow to the visitor with the other, 'that wants to sneak into houses, and stir up differences between noble gentlemen and their sons, are you, eh? Hold your tongue, sir.'

Joe made no effort to reply. It was the crowning circumstance of his degradation. He extricated himself from his father's grasp, darted an angry look at the departing guest, and returned into the house.

'But for her,' thought Joe, as he threw his arms upon a table in the common room, and laid his head upon them, 'but for Dolly, who I couldn't bear should think me the rascal they would make me out to be if I ran away, this house and I should part to-night.'

It being evening by this time, Solomon Daisy, Tom Cobb, and Long Parkes, were all in the common room too, and had from the window been witnesses of what had just occurred. Mr Willet joining them soon afterwards, received the compliments of the company with great composure, and lighting his pipe, sat down among them.

'We'll see, gentlemen,' said John, after a long pause, 'who's the master of this house, and who isn't. We'll see whether boys are to govern men, or men are to govern boys.'

'And quite right too,' assented Solomon Daisy with some approving nods; 'quite right, Johnny. Very good, Johnny. Well said, Mr Willet. Brayvo, sir.'

John slowly brought his eyes to bear upon him, looked at him for a long time, and finally made answer, to the unspeakable consternation of his hearers, 'When I want encouragement from you, sir, I'll ask you for it. You let me alone, sir. I can get on without you, I hope. Don't you tackle me, sir, if you please.'

'Don't take it ill, Johnny; I didn't mean any harm,' pleaded the little man.

'Very good, sir,' said John, more than usually obstinate after his late success. 'Never mind, sir. I can stand pretty firm of myself, sir, I believe, without being shored up by you.' And having given utterance to this retort, Mr Willet fixed his eyes upon the boiler, and fell into a kind of tobacco-trance.

The spirits of the company being somewhat damped by this embarrassing line of conduct on the part of their host, nothing more was said for a long time; but at length Mr Cobb took upon himself to remark, as he rose to knock the ashes out of his pipe, that he hoped Joe would thenceforth learn to obey his father in all things; that he had found, that day, he was not one of the sort of men who were to be trifled with; and that he would recommend him, poetically speaking, to mind his eye for the future.

'I'd recommend you, in return,' said Joe, looking up with a flushed face, 'not to talk to me.'

'Hold your tongue, sir,' cried Mr Willet, suddenly rousing himself, and turning round.

'I won't, father,' cried Joe, smiting the table with his fist, so that the jugs and glasses rung again; 'these things are hard enough to bear from you; from anybody else I never will endure them any more. Therefore I say, Mr Cobb, don't talk to me.'

'Why, who are you,' said Mr Cobb, sneeringly, 'that you're not to be talked to, eh, Joe?'

To which Joe returned no answer, but with a very ominous shake of the head, resumed his old position, which he would have peacefully preserved until the house shut up at night, but that Mr Cobb, stimulated by the wonder of the company at the young man's presumption, retorted with sundry taunts, which proved too much for flesh and blood to bear. Crowding into one moment the vexation and the wrath of years, Joe started up, overturned the table, fell upon his long enemy, pummelled him with all his might and main, and finished by driving him with surprising swiftness against a heap of spittoons in one corner; plunging into which, head foremost, with a tremendous crash, he lay at full length among the ruins, stunned and motionless. Then, without waiting to receive the compliments of the bystanders on the victory he had won, he retreated to his own bedchamber, and considering himself in a state of siege, piled all the portable furniture against the door by way of barricade.

'I have done it now,' said Joe, as he sat down upon his bedstead and wiped his heated face. 'I knew it would come at last. The Maypole and I must part company. I'm a roving vagabond—she hates me for evermore—it's all over!'

Chapter 31

Pondering on his unhappy lot, Joe sat and listened for a long time, expecting every moment to hear their creaking footsteps on the stairs, or to be greeted by his worthy father with a summons to capitulate unconditionally, and deliver himself up straightway. But neither voice nor footstep came; and though some distant echoes, as of closing doors and people hurrying in and out of rooms, resounding from time to time through the great passages, and penetrating to his remote seclusion, gave note of unusual commotion downstairs, no nearer sound disturbed his place of retreat, which seemed the quieter for these far-off noises, and was as dull and full of gloom as any hermit's cell.

It came on darker and darker. The old-fashioned furniture of the chamber, which was a kind of hospital for all the invalided movables in the house, grew indistinct and shadowy in its many shapes; chairs and tables, which by day were as honest cripples as need be, assumed a doubtful and mysterious character; and one old leprous screen of faded India leather and gold binding, which had kept out many a cold breath of air in days of yore and shut in many a jolly face, frowned on him with a spectral aspect, and stood at full height in its allotted corner, like some gaunt ghost who waited to be questioned. A portrait opposite the window—a queer, old grey-eyed general, in an oval frame—seemed to wink and doze as the light decayed, and at length, when the last faint glimmering speck of day went out, to shut its eyes in good earnest, and fall sound asleep. There was such a hush and mystery about everything, that Joe could not help following its example; and so went off into a slumber likewise, and dreamed of Dolly, till the clock of Chigwell church struck two.

Still nobody came. The distant noises in the house had ceased, and out of doors all was quiet; save for the occasional barking of some deep-mouthed dog, and the shaking of the branches by the night wind. He gazed mournfully out of window at each well-known object as it lay sleeping in the dim light of the moon; and creeping back to his former seat, thought about the late uproar, until, with long thinking of, it seemed to have occurred a month ago. Thus, between dozing, and thinking, and walking to the window and looking out, the night wore away; the grim old screen, and the kindred chairs and tables, began slowly to reveal themselves in their accustomed forms; the grey-eyed general seemed to wink and yawn and rouse himself; and at last he was broad awake again, and very uncomfortable and cold and haggard he looked, in the dull grey light of morning.

The sun had begun to peep above the forest trees, and already flung across the curling mist bright bars of gold, when Joe dropped from his window on the ground below, a little bundle and his trusty stick, and prepared to descend himself.

It was not a very difficult task; for there were so many projections and gable ends in the way, that they formed a series of clumsy steps, with no greater obstacle than a jump of some few feet at last. Joe, with his stick and bundle on his shoulder, quickly stood on the firm earth, and looked up at the old Maypole, it might be for the last time.

He didn't apostrophise it, for he was no great scholar. He didn't curse it, for he had little ill-will to give to anything on earth. He felt more affectionate and kind to it than ever he had done in all his life before, so said with all his heart, 'God bless you!' as a parting wish, and turned away.

He walked along at a brisk pace, big with great thoughts of going for a soldier and dying in some foreign country where it was very hot and sandy, and leaving God knows what unheard-of wealth in prize-money to Dolly, who would be very much affected when she came to know of it; and full of such youthful visions, which were sometimes sanguine and sometimes melancholy, but always had her for their main point and centre, pushed on vigorously until the noise of London sounded in his ears, and the Black Lion hove in sight.

It was only eight o'clock then, and very much astonished the Black Lion was, to see him come walking in with dust upon his feet at that early hour, with no grey mare to bear him company. But as he ordered breakfast to be got ready with all speed, and on its being set before him gave indisputable tokens of a hearty appetite, the Lion received him, as usual, with a hospitable welcome; and treated him with those marks of distinction, which, as a regular customer, and one within the freemasonry of the trade, he had a right to claim.

This Lion or landlord,—for he was called both man and beast, by reason of his having instructed the artist who painted his sign, to convey into the features of the lordly brute whose effigy it bore, as near a counterpart of his own face as his skill could compass and devise,—was a gentleman almost as quick of apprehension, and of almost as subtle a wit, as the mighty John himself. But the difference between them lay in this: that whereas Mr Willet's extreme sagacity and acuteness were the efforts of unassisted nature, the Lion stood indebted, in no small amount, to beer; of which he swigged such copious draughts, that most of his faculties were utterly drowned and washed away, except the one great faculty of sleep, which he retained in surprising perfection. The creaking Lion over the house-door was, therefore, to say the truth, rather a drowsy, tame, and feeble lion; and as these social representatives of a savage class are usually of a conventional character (being depicted, for the most part, in impossible attitudes and of unearthly colours), he was frequently supposed by the more ignorant and uninformed among the neighbours, to be the veritable portrait of the host as he appeared on the occasion of some great funeral ceremony or public mourning.

'What noisy fellow is that in the next room?' said Joe, when he had disposed of his breakfast, and had washed and brushed himself.

'A recruiting serjeant,' replied the Lion.

Joe started involuntarily. Here was the very thing he had been dreaming of, all the way along.

'And I wish,' said the Lion, 'he was anywhere else but here. The party make noise enough, but don't call for much. There's great cry there, Mr Willet, but very little wool. Your father wouldn't like 'em, I know.'

Perhaps not much under any circumstances. Perhaps if he could have known what was passing at that moment in Joe's mind, he would have liked them still less.

'Is he recruiting for a—for a fine regiment?' said Joe, glancing at a little round mirror that hung in the bar.

'I believe he is,' replied the host. 'It's much the same thing, whatever regiment he's recruiting for. I'm told there an't a deal of difference between a fine man and another one, when they're shot through and through.'

'They're not all shot,' said Joe.

'No,' the Lion answered, 'not all. Those that are—supposing it's done easy—are the best off in my opinion.'

'Ah!' retorted Joe, 'but you don't care for glory.'

'For what?' said the Lion.

'Glory.'

'No,' returned the Lion, with supreme indifference. 'I don't. You're right in that, Mr Willet. When Glory comes here, and calls for anything to drink and changes a guinea to pay for it, I'll give it him for nothing. It's my belief, sir, that the Glory's arms wouldn't do a very strong business.'

These remarks were not at all comforting. Joe walked out, stopped at the door of the next room, and listened. The serjeant was describing a military life. It was all drinking, he said, except that there were frequent intervals of eating and love-making. A battle was the finest thing in the world—when your side won it—and Englishmen always did that. 'Supposing you should be killed, sir?' said a timid voice in one corner. 'Well, sir, supposing you should be,' said the serjeant, 'what then? Your country loves you, sir; his Majesty King George the Third loves you; your memory is honoured, revered, respected; everybody's fond of you, and grateful to you; your name's wrote down at full length in a book in the War Office. Damme, gentlemen, we must all die some time, or another, eh?'

The voice coughed, and said no more.

Joe walked into the room. A group of half-a-dozen fellows had gathered together in the taproom, and were listening with greedy ears. One of them, a carter in a smockfrock, seemed wavering and disposed to enlist. The rest, who were by no means disposed, strongly urged him to do so (according to the custom of mankind), backed the serjeant's arguments, and grinned among themselves. 'I say nothing, boys,' said the serjeant, who sat a little apart, drinking his liquor. 'For lads of spirit'—here he cast an eye on Joe—'this is the time. I don't want to inveigle you. The king's not come to that, I hope. Brisk young blood is what we want; not milk and water. We won't take five men out of six. We want top-sawyers, we do. I'm not a-going to tell tales out of school, but, damme, if every gentleman's son that carries arms in our corps, through being under a cloud and having little differences with his relations, was counted up'—here his eye fell on Joe again, and so good-naturedly, that Joe beckoned him out. He came directly.

'You're a gentleman, by G—!' was his first remark, as he slapped him on the back. 'You're a gentleman in disguise. So am I. Let's swear a friendship.'

Joe didn't exactly do that, but he shook hands with him, and thanked him for his good opinion.

'You want to serve,' said his new friend. 'You shall. You were made for it. You're one of us by nature. What'll you take to drink?'

'Nothing just now,' replied Joe, smiling faintly. 'I haven't quite made up my mind.'

'A mettlesome fellow like you, and not made up his mind!' cried the serjeant. 'Here—let me give the bell a pull, and you'll make up your mind in half a minute, I know.'

'You're right so far'—answered Joe, 'for if you pull the bell here, where I'm known, there'll be an end of my soldiering inclinations in no time. Look in my face. You see me, do you?'

'I do,' replied the serjeant with an oath, 'and a finer young fellow or one better qualified to serve his king and country, I never set my—' he used an adjective in this place—'eyes on.

'Thank you,' said Joe, 'I didn't ask you for want of a compliment, but thank you all the same. Do I look like a sneaking fellow or a liar?'

The serjeant rejoined with many choice asseverations that he didn't; and that if his (the serjeant's) own father were to say he did, he would run the old gentleman through the body cheerfully, and consider it a meritorious action.

Joe expressed his obligations, and continued, 'You can trust me then, and credit what I say. I believe I shall enlist in your regiment to-night. The reason I don't do so now is, because I don't want until to-night, to do what I can't recall. Where shall I find you, this evening?'

His friend replied with some unwillingness, and after much ineffectual entreaty having for its object the immediate settlement of the business, that his quarters would be at the Crooked Billet in Tower Street; where he would be found waking until midnight, and sleeping until breakfast time to-morrow.

'And if I do come—which it's a million to one, I shall—when will you take me out of London?' demanded Joe.

'To-morrow morning, at half after eight o'clock,' replied the serjeant. 'You'll go abroad—a country where it's all sunshine and plunder—the finest climate in the world.'

'To go abroad,' said Joe, shaking hands with him, 'is the very thing I want. You may expect me.'

'You're the kind of lad for us,' cried the serjeant, holding Joe's hand in his, in the excess of his admiration. 'You're the boy to push your fortune. I don't say it because I bear you any envy, or would take away from the credit of the rise you'll make, but if I had been bred and taught like you, I'd have been a colonel by this time.'

'Tush, man!' said Joe, 'I'm not so young as that. Needs must when the devil drives; and the devil that drives me is an empty pocket and an unhappy home. For the present, good-bye.'

'For king and country!' cried the serjeant, flourishing his cap.

'For bread and meat!' cried Joe, snapping his fingers. And so they parted.

He had very little money in his pocket; so little indeed, that after paying for his breakfast (which he was too honest and perhaps too proud to score up to his father's charge) he had but a penny left. He had courage, notwithstanding, to resist all the affectionate importunities of the serjeant, who waylaid him at the door with many protestations of eternal friendship, and did in particular request that he would do him the favour to accept of only one shilling as a temporary accommodation. Rejecting his offers both of cash and credit, Joe walked away with stick and bundle as before, bent upon getting through the day as he best could, and going down to the locksmith's in the dusk of the evening; for it should go hard, he had resolved, but he would have a parting word with charming Dolly Varden.

He went out by Islington and so on to Highgate, and sat on many stones and gates, but there were no voices in the bells to bid him turn. Since the time of noble Whittington, fair flower of merchants, bells have come to have less sympathy with humankind. They only ring for money and on state occasions. Wanderers have increased in number; ships leave the Thames for distant regions, carrying from stem to stern no other cargo; the bells are silent; they ring out no entreaties or regrets; they are used to it and have grown worldly.

Joe bought a roll, and reduced his purse to the condition (with a difference) of that celebrated purse of Fortunatus, which, whatever were its favoured owner's necessities, had one unvarying amount in it. In these real times, when all the Fairies are dead and buried, there are still a great many purses which possess that quality. The sum-total they contain is expressed in arithmetic by a circle, and whether it be added to or multiplied by its own amount, the result of the problem is more easily stated than any known in figures.

Evening drew on at last. With the desolate and solitary feeling of one who had no home or shelter, and was alone utterly in the world for the first time, he bent his steps towards the locksmith's house. He had delayed till now, knowing that Mrs Varden sometimes went out alone, or with Miggs for her sole attendant, to lectures in the evening; and devoutly hoping that this might be one of her nights of moral culture.

He had walked up and down before the house, on the opposite side of the way, two or three times, when as he returned to it again, he caught a glimpse of a fluttering skirt at the door. It was Dolly's—to whom else could it belong? no dress but hers had such a flow as that. He plucked up his spirits, and followed it into the workshop of the Golden Key.

His darkening the door caused her to look round. Oh that face! 'If it hadn't been for that,' thought Joe, 'I should never have walked into poor Tom Cobb. She's twenty times handsomer than ever. She might marry a Lord!'

He didn't say this. He only thought it—perhaps looked it also. Dolly was glad to see him, and was SO sorry her father and mother were away from home. Joe begged she wouldn't mention it on any account.

Dolly hesitated to lead the way into the parlour, for there it was nearly dark; at the same time she hesitated to stand talking in the workshop, which was yet light and open to the street. They had got by some means, too, before the little forge; and Joe having her hand in his (which he had no right to have, for Dolly only gave it him to shake), it was so like standing before some homely altar being married, that it was the most embarrassing state of things in the world.

'I have come,' said Joe, 'to say good-bye—to say good-bye for I don't know how many years; perhaps for ever. I am going abroad.'

Now this was exactly what he should not have said. Here he was, talking like a gentleman at large who was free to come and go and roam about the world at pleasure, when that gallant coachmaker had vowed but the night before that Miss Varden held him bound in adamantine chains; and had positively stated in so many words that she was killing him by inches, and that in a fortnight more or thereabouts he expected to make a decent end and leave the business to his mother.

Dolly released her hand and said 'Indeed!' She remarked in the same breath that it was a fine night, and in short, betrayed no more emotion than the forge itself.

'I couldn't go,' said Joe, 'without coming to see you. I hadn't the heart to.'

Dolly was more sorry than she could tell, that he should have taken so much trouble. It was such a long way, and he must have such a deal to do. And how WAS Mr Willet—that dear old gentleman—

'Is this all you say!' cried Joe.

All! Good gracious, what did the man expect! She was obliged to take her apron in her hand and run her eyes along the hem from corner to corner, to keep herself from laughing in his face;—not because his gaze confused her—not at all.

Joe had small experience in love affairs, and had no notion how different young ladies are at different times; he had expected to take Dolly up again at the very point where he had left her after that delicious evening ride, and was no more prepared for such an alteration than to see the sun and moon change places. He had buoyed himself up all day with an indistinct idea that she would certainly say 'Don't go,' or 'Don't leave us,' or 'Why do you go?' or 'Why do you leave us?' or would give him some little encouragement of that sort; he had even entertained the possibility of her bursting into tears, of her throwing herself into his arms, of her falling down in a fainting fit without previous word or sign; but any approach to such a line of conduct as this, had been so far from his thoughts that he could only look at her in silent wonder.

Dolly in the meanwhile, turned to the corners of her apron, and measured the sides, and smoothed out the wrinkles, and was as silent as he. At last after a long pause, Joe said good-bye. 'Good-bye'—said Dolly—with as pleasant a smile as if he were going into the next street, and were coming back to supper; 'good-bye.'

'Come,' said Joe, putting out both hands, 'Dolly, dear Dolly, don't let us part like this. I love you dearly, with all my heart and soul; with as much truth and earnestness as ever man loved woman in this world, I do believe. I am a poor fellow, as you know—poorer now than ever, for I have fled from home, not being able to bear it any longer, and must fight my own way without help. You are beautiful, admired, are loved by everybody, are well off and happy; and may you ever be so! Heaven forbid I should ever make you otherwise; but give me a word of comfort. Say something kind to me. I have no right to expect it of you, I know, but I ask it because I love you, and shall treasure the slightest word from you all through my life. Dolly, dearest, have you nothing to say to me?'

No. Nothing. Dolly was a coquette by nature, and a spoilt child. She had no notion of being carried by storm in this way. The coachmaker would have been dissolved in tears, and would have knelt down, and called himself names, and clasped his hands, and beat his breast, and tugged wildly at his cravat, and done all kinds of poetry. Joe had no business to be going abroad. He had no right to be able to do it. If he was in adamantine chains, he couldn't.

'I have said good-bye,' said Dolly, 'twice. Take your arm away directly, Mr Joseph, or I'll call Miggs.'

'I'll not reproach you,' answered Joe, 'it's my fault, no doubt. I have thought sometimes that you didn't quite despise me, but I was a fool to think so. Every one must, who has seen the life I have led—you most of all. God bless you!'

He was gone, actually gone. Dolly waited a little while, thinking he would return, peeped out at the door, looked up the street and down as well as the increasing darkness would allow, came in again, waited a little longer, went upstairs humming a tune, bolted herself in, laid her head down on her bed, and cried as if her heart would break. And yet such natures are made up of so many contradictions, that if Joe Willet had come back that night, next day, next week, next month, the odds are a hundred to one she would have treated him in the very same manner, and have wept for it afterwards with the very same distress.

She had no sooner left the workshop than there cautiously peered out from behind the chimney of the forge, a face which had already emerged from the same concealment twice or thrice, unseen, and which, after satisfying itself that it was now alone, was followed by a leg, a shoulder, and so on by degrees, until the form of Mr Tappertit stood confessed, with a brown-paper cap stuck negligently on one side of its head, and its arms very much a-kimbo.

'Have my ears deceived me,' said the 'prentice, 'or do I dream! am I to thank thee, Fortun', or to cus thee—which?'

He gravely descended from his elevation, took down his piece of looking-glass, planted it against the wall upon the usual bench, twisted his head round, and looked closely at his legs.

'If they're a dream,' said Sim, 'let sculptures have such wisions, and chisel 'em out when they wake. This is reality. Sleep has no such limbs as them. Tremble, Willet, and despair. She's mine! She's mine!'

With these triumphant expressions, he seized a hammer and dealt a heavy blow at a vice, which in his mind's eye represented the sconce or head of Joseph Willet. That done, he burst into a peal of laughter which startled Miss Miggs even in her distant kitchen, and dipping his head into a bowl of water, had recourse to a jack-towel inside the closet door, which served the double purpose of smothering his feelings and drying his face.

Joe, disconsolate and down-hearted, but full of courage too, on leaving the locksmith's house made the best of his way to the Crooked Billet, and there inquired for his friend the serjeant, who, expecting no man less, received him with open arms. In the course of five minutes after his arrival at that house of entertainment, he was enrolled among the gallant defenders of his native land; and within half an hour, was regaled with a steaming supper of boiled tripe and onions, prepared, as his friend assured him more than once, at the express command of his most Sacred Majesty the King. To this meal, which tasted very savoury after his long fasting, he did ample justice; and when he had followed it up, or down, with a variety of loyal and patriotic toasts, he was conducted to a straw mattress in a loft over the stable, and locked in there for the night.

The next morning, he found that the obliging care of his martial friend had decorated his hat with sundry particoloured streamers, which made a very lively appearance; and in company with that officer, and three other military gentlemen newly enrolled, who were under a cloud so dense that it only left three shoes, a boot, and a coat and a half visible among them, repaired to the riverside. Here they were joined by a corporal and four more heroes, of whom two were drunk and daring, and two sober and penitent, but each of whom, like Joe, had his dusty stick and bundle. The party embarked in a passage-boat bound for Gravesend, whence they were to proceed on foot to Chatham; the wind was in their favour, and they soon left London behind them, a mere dark mist—a giant phantom in the air.

Chapter 32

Misfortunes, saith the adage, never come singly. There is little doubt that troubles are exceedingly gregarious in their nature, and flying in flocks, are apt to perch capriciously; crowding on the heads of some poor wights until there is not an inch of room left on their unlucky crowns, and taking no more notice of others who offer as good resting-places for the soles of their feet, than if they had no existence. It may have happened that a flight of troubles brooding over London, and looking out for Joseph Willet, whom they couldn't find, darted down haphazard on the first young man that caught their fancy, and settled on him instead. However this may be, certain it is that on the very day of Joe's departure they swarmed about the ears of Edward Chester, and did so buzz and flap their wings, and persecute him, that he was most profoundly wretched.

It was evening, and just eight o'clock, when he and his father, having wine and dessert set before them, were left to themselves for the first time that day. They had dined together, but a third person had been present during the meal, and until they met at table they had not seen each other since the previous night.

Edward was reserved and silent. Mr Chester was more than usually gay; but not caring, as it seemed, to open a conversation with one whose humour was so different, he vented the lightness of his spirit in smiles and sparkling looks, and made no effort to awaken his attention. So they remained for some time: the father lying on a sofa with his accustomed air of graceful negligence; the son seated opposite to him with downcast eyes, busied, it was plain, with painful and uneasy thoughts.

'My dear Edward,' said Mr Chester at length, with a most engaging laugh, 'do not extend your drowsy influence to the decanter. Suffer THAT to circulate, let your spirits be never so stagnant.'

Edward begged his pardon, passed it, and relapsed into his former state.

'You do wrong not to fill your glass,' said Mr Chester, holding up his own before the light. 'Wine in moderation—not in excess, for that makes men ugly—has a thousand pleasant influences. It brightens the eye, improves the voice, imparts a new vivacity to one's thoughts and conversation: you should try it, Ned.'

'Ah father!' cried his son, 'if—'

'My good fellow,' interposed the parent hastily, as he set down his glass, and raised his eyebrows with a startled and horrified expression, 'for Heaven's sake don't call me by that obsolete and ancient name. Have some regard for delicacy. Am I grey, or wrinkled, do I go on crutches, have I lost my teeth, that you adopt such a mode of address? Good God, how very coarse!'

'I was about to speak to you from my heart, sir,' returned Edward, 'in the confidence which should subsist between us; and you check me in the outset.'

'Now DO, Ned, DO not,' said Mr Chester, raising his delicate hand imploringly, 'talk in that monstrous manner. About to speak from your heart. Don't you know that the heart is an ingenious part of our formation—the centre of the blood-vessels and all that sort of thing—which has no more to do with what you say or think, than your knees have? How can you be so very vulgar and absurd? These anatomical allusions should be left to gentlemen of the medical profession. They are really not agreeable in society. You quite surprise me, Ned.'

'Well! there are no such things to wound, or heal, or have regard for. I know your creed, sir, and will say no more,' returned his son.

'There again,' said Mr Chester, sipping his wine, 'you are wrong. I distinctly say there are such things. We know there are. The hearts of animals—of bullocks, sheep, and so forth—are cooked and devoured, as I am told, by the lower classes, with a vast deal of relish. Men are sometimes stabbed to the heart, shot to the heart; but as to speaking from the heart, or to the heart, or being warm-hearted, or cold-hearted, or broken-hearted, or being all heart, or having no heart—pah! these things are nonsense, Ned.'

'No doubt, sir,' returned his son, seeing that he paused for him to speak. 'No doubt.'

'There's Haredale's niece, your late flame,' said Mr Chester, as a careless illustration of his meaning. 'No doubt in your mind she was all heart once. Now she has none at all. Yet she is the same person, Ned, exactly.'

'She is a changed person, sir,' cried Edward, reddening; 'and changed by vile means, I believe.'

'You have had a cool dismissal, have you?' said his father. 'Poor Ned! I told you last night what would happen.—May I ask you for the nutcrackers?'

'She has been tampered with, and most treacherously deceived,' cried Edward, rising from his seat. 'I never will believe that the knowledge of my real position, given her by myself, has worked this change. I know she is beset and tortured. But though our contract is at an end, and broken past all redemption; though I charge upon her want of firmness and want of truth, both to herself and me; I do not now, and never will believe, that any sordid motive, or her own unbiassed will, has led her to this course—never!'

'You make me blush,' returned his father gaily, 'for the folly of your nature, in which—but we never know ourselves—I devoutly hope there is no reflection of my own. With regard to the young lady herself, she has done what is very natural and proper, my dear fellow; what you yourself proposed, as I learn from Haredale; and what I predicted—with no great exercise of sagacity—she would do. She supposed you to be rich, or at least quite rich enough; and found you poor. Marriage is a civil contract; people marry to better their worldly condition and improve appearances; it is an affair of house and furniture, of liveries, servants, equipage, and so forth. The lady being poor and you poor also, there is an end of the matter. You cannot enter upon these considerations, and have no manner of business with the ceremony. I drink her health in this glass, and respect and honour her for her extreme good sense. It is a lesson to you. Fill yours, Ned.'

'It is a lesson,' returned his son, 'by which I hope I may never profit, and if years and experience impress it on—'

'Don't say on the heart,' interposed his father.

'On men whom the world and its hypocrisy have spoiled,' said Edward warmly, 'Heaven keep me from its knowledge.'

'Come, sir,' returned his father, raising himself a little on the sofa, and looking straight towards him; 'we have had enough of this. Remember, if you please, your interest, your duty, your moral obligations, your filial affections, and all that sort of thing, which it is so very delightful and charming to reflect upon; or you will repent it.'

'I shall never repent the preservation of my self-respect, sir,' said Edward. 'Forgive me if I say that I will not sacrifice it at your bidding, and that I will not pursue the track which you would have me take, and to which the secret share you have had in this late separation tends.'

His father rose a little higher still, and looking at him as though curious to know if he were quite resolved and earnest, dropped gently down again, and said in the calmest voice—eating his nuts meanwhile, 'Edward, my father had a son, who being a fool like you, and, like you, entertaining low and disobedient sentiments, he disinherited and cursed one morning after breakfast. The circumstance occurs to me with a singular clearness of recollection this evening. I remember eating muffins at the time, with marmalade. He led a miserable life (the son, I mean) and died early; it was a happy release on all accounts; he degraded the family very much. It is a sad circumstance, Edward, when a father finds it necessary to resort to such strong measures.

'It is,' replied Edward, 'and it is sad when a son, proffering him his love and duty in their best and truest sense, finds himself repelled at every turn, and forced to disobey. Dear father,' he added, more earnestly though in a gentler tone, 'I have reflected many times on what occurred between us when we first discussed this subject. Let there be a confidence between us; not in terms, but truth. Hear what I have to say.'

'As I anticipate what it is, and cannot fail to do so, Edward,' returned his father coldly, 'I decline. I couldn't possibly. I am sure it would put me out of temper, which is a state of mind I can't endure. If you intend to mar my plans for your establishment in life, and the preservation of that gentility and becoming pride, which our family have so long sustained—if, in short, you are resolved to take your own course, you must take it, and my curse with it. I am very sorry, but there's really no alternative.'

'The curse may pass your lips,' said Edward, 'but it will be but empty breath. I do not believe that any man on earth has greater power to call one down upon his fellow—least of all, upon his own child—than he has to make one drop of rain or flake of snow fall from the clouds above us at his impious bidding. Beware, sir, what you do.'

'You are so very irreligious, so exceedingly undutiful, so horribly profane,' rejoined his father, turning his face lazily towards him, and cracking another nut, 'that I positively must interrupt you here. It is quite impossible we can continue to go on, upon such terms as these. If you will do me the favour to ring the bell, the servant will show you to the door. Return to this roof no more, I beg you. Go, sir, since you have no moral sense remaining; and go to the Devil, at my express desire. Good day.'

Edward left the room without another word or look, and turned his back upon the house for ever.

The father's face was slightly flushed and heated, but his manner was quite unchanged, as he rang the bell again, and addressed the servant on his entrance.

'Peak—if that gentleman who has just gone out—'

'I beg your pardon, sir, Mr Edward?'

'Were there more than one, dolt, that you ask the question?—If that gentleman should send here for his wardrobe, let him have it, do you hear? If he should call himself at any time, I'm not at home. You'll tell him so, and shut the door.'

So, it soon got whispered about, that Mr Chester was very unfortunate in his son, who had occasioned him great grief and sorrow. And the good people who heard this and told it again, marvelled the more at his equanimity and even temper, and said what an amiable nature that man must have, who, having undergone so much, could be so placid and so calm. And when Edward's name was spoken, Society shook its head, and laid its finger on its lip, and sighed, and looked very grave; and those who had sons about his age, waxed wrathful and indignant, and hoped, for Virtue's sake, that he was dead. And the world went on turning round, as usual, for five years, concerning which this Narrative is silent.

Chapter 33

One wintry evening, early in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty, a keen north wind arose as it grew dark, and night came on with black and dismal looks. A bitter storm of sleet, sharp, dense, and icy-cold, swept the wet streets, and rattled on the trembling windows. Signboards, shaken past endurance in their creaking frames, fell crashing on the pavement; old tottering chimneys reeled and staggered in the blast; and many a steeple rocked again that night, as though the earth were troubled.

It was not a time for those who could by any means get light and warmth, to brave the fury of the weather. In coffee-houses of the better sort, guests crowded round the fire, forgot to be political, and told each other with a secret gladness that the blast grew fiercer every minute. Each humble tavern by the water-side, had its group of uncouth figures round the hearth, who talked of vessels foundering at sea, and all hands lost; related many a dismal tale of shipwreck and drowned men, and hoped that some they knew were safe, and shook their heads in doubt. In private dwellings, children clustered near the blaze; listening with timid pleasure to tales of ghosts and goblins, and tall figures clad in white standing by bed-sides, and people who had gone to sleep in old churches and being overlooked had found themselves alone there at the dead hour of the night: until they shuddered at the thought of the dark rooms upstairs, yet loved to hear the wind moan too, and hoped it would continue bravely. From time to time these happy indoor people stopped to listen, or one held up his finger and cried 'Hark!' and then, above the rumbling in the chimney, and the fast pattering on the glass, was heard a wailing, rushing sound, which shook the walls as though a giant's hand were on them; then a hoarse roar as if the sea had risen; then such a whirl and tumult that the air seemed mad; and then, with a lengthened howl, the waves of wind swept on, and left a moment's interval of rest.

Cheerily, though there were none abroad to see it, shone the Maypole light that evening. Blessings on the red—deep, ruby, glowing red—old curtain of the window; blending into one rich stream of brightness, fire and candle, meat, drink, and company, and gleaming like a jovial eye upon the bleak waste out of doors! Within, what carpet like its crunching sand, what music merry as its crackling logs, what perfume like its kitchen's dainty breath, what weather genial as its hearty warmth! Blessings on the old house, how sturdily it stood! How did the vexed wind chafe and roar about its stalwart roof; how did it pant and strive with its wide chimneys, which still poured forth from their hospitable throats, great clouds of smoke, and puffed defiance in its face; how, above all, did it drive and rattle at the casement, emulous to extinguish that cheerful glow, which would not be put down and seemed the brighter for the conflict!

The profusion too, the rich and lavish bounty, of that goodly tavern! It was not enough that one fire roared and sparkled on its spacious hearth; in the tiles which paved and compassed it, five hundred flickering fires burnt brightly also. It was not enough that one red curtain shut the wild night out, and shed its cheerful influence on the room. In every saucepan lid, and candlestick, and vessel of copper, brass, or tin that hung upon the walls, were countless ruddy hangings, flashing and gleaming with every motion of the blaze, and offering, let the eye wander where it might, interminable vistas of the same rich colour. The old oak wainscoting, the beams, the chairs, the seats, reflected it in a deep, dull glimmer. There were fires and red curtains in the very eyes of the drinkers, in their buttons, in their liquor, in the pipes they smoked.

Mr Willet sat in what had been his accustomed place five years before, with his eyes on the eternal boiler; and had sat there since the clock struck eight, giving no other signs of life than breathing with a loud and constant snore (though he was wide awake), and from time to time putting his glass to his lips, or knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and filling it anew. It was now half-past ten. Mr Cobb and long Phil Parkes were his companions, as of old, and for two mortal hours and a half, none of the company had pronounced one word.

Whether people, by dint of sitting together in the same place and the same relative positions, and doing exactly the same things for a great many years, acquire a sixth sense, or some unknown power of influencing each other which serves them in its stead, is a question for philosophy to settle. But certain it is that old John Willet, Mr Parkes, and Mr Cobb, were one and all firmly of opinion that they were very jolly companions—rather choice spirits than otherwise; that they looked at each other every now and then as if there were a perpetual interchange of ideas going on among them; that no man considered himself or his neighbour by any means silent; and that each of them nodded occasionally when he caught the eye of another, as if he would say, 'You have expressed yourself extremely well, sir, in relation to that sentiment, and I quite agree with you.'

The room was so very warm, the tobacco so very good, and the fire so very soothing, that Mr Willet by degrees began to doze; but as he had perfectly acquired, by dint of long habit, the art of smoking in his sleep, and as his breathing was pretty much the same, awake or asleep, saving that in the latter case he sometimes experienced a slight difficulty in respiration (such as a carpenter meets with when he is planing and comes to a knot), neither of his companions was aware of the circumstance, until he met with one of these impediments and was obliged to try again.

'Johnny's dropped off,' said Mr Parkes in a whisper.

'Fast as a top,' said Mr Cobb.

Neither of them said any more until Mr Willet came to another knot—one of surpassing obduracy—which bade fair to throw him into convulsions, but which he got over at last without waking, by an effort quite superhuman.

'He sleeps uncommon hard,' said Mr Cobb.

Mr Parkes, who was possibly a hard-sleeper himself, replied with some disdain, 'Not a bit on it;' and directed his eyes towards a handbill pasted over the chimney-piece, which was decorated at the top with a woodcut representing a youth of tender years running away very fast, with a bundle over his shoulder at the end of a stick, and—to carry out the idea—a finger-post and a milestone beside him. Mr Cobb likewise turned his eyes in the same direction, and surveyed the placard as if that were the first time he had ever beheld it. Now, this was a document which Mr Willet had himself indited on the disappearance of his son Joseph, acquainting the nobility and gentry and the public in general with the circumstances of his having left his home; describing his dress and appearance; and offering a reward of five pounds to any person or persons who would pack him up and return him safely to the Maypole at Chigwell, or lodge him in any of his Majesty's jails until such time as his father should come and claim him. In this advertisement Mr Willet had obstinately persisted, despite the advice and entreaties of his friends, in describing his son as a 'young boy;' and furthermore as being from eighteen inches to a couple of feet shorter than he really was; two circumstances which perhaps accounted, in some degree, for its never having been productive of any other effect than the transmission to Chigwell at various times and at a vast expense, of some five-and-forty runaways varying from six years old to twelve.

Mr Cobb and Mr Parkes looked mysteriously at this composition, at each other, and at old John. From the time he had pasted it up with his own hands, Mr Willet had never by word or sign alluded to the subject, or encouraged any one else to do so. Nobody had the least notion what his thoughts or opinions were, connected with it; whether he remembered it or forgot it; whether he had any idea that such an event had ever taken place. Therefore, even while he slept, no one ventured to refer to it in his presence; and for such sufficient reasons, these his chosen friends were silent now.

Mr Willet had got by this time into such a complication of knots, that it was perfectly clear he must wake or die. He chose the former alternative, and opened his eyes.

'If he don't come in five minutes,' said John, 'I shall have supper without him.'

The antecedent of this pronoun had been mentioned for the last time at eight o'clock. Messrs Parkes and Cobb being used to this style of conversation, replied without difficulty that to be sure Solomon was very late, and they wondered what had happened to detain him.

'He an't blown away, I suppose,' said Parkes. 'It's enough to carry a man of his figure off his legs, and easy too. Do you hear it? It blows great guns, indeed. There'll be many a crash in the Forest to-night, I reckon, and many a broken branch upon the ground to-morrow.'

'It won't break anything in the Maypole, I take it, sir,' returned old John. 'Let it try. I give it leave—what's that?'

'The wind,' cried Parkes. 'It's howling like a Christian, and has been all night long.'

'Did you ever, sir,' asked John, after a minute's contemplation, 'hear the wind say "Maypole"?'

'Why, what man ever did?' said Parkes.

'Nor "ahoy," perhaps?' added John.

'No. Nor that neither.'

'Very good, sir,' said Mr Willet, perfectly unmoved; 'then if that was the wind just now, and you'll wait a little time without speaking, you'll hear it say both words very plain.'

Mr Willet was right. After listening for a few moments, they could clearly hear, above the roar and tumult out of doors, this shout repeated; and that with a shrillness and energy, which denoted that it came from some person in great distress or terror. They looked at each other, turned pale, and held their breath. No man stirred.

It was in this emergency that Mr Willet displayed something of that strength of mind and plenitude of mental resource, which rendered him the admiration of all his friends and neighbours. After looking at Messrs Parkes and Cobb for some time in silence, he clapped his two hands to his cheeks, and sent forth a roar which made the glasses dance and rafters ring—a long-sustained, discordant bellow, that rolled onward with the wind, and startling every echo, made the night a hundred times more boisterous—a deep, loud, dismal bray, that sounded like a human gong. Then, with every vein in his head and face swollen with the great exertion, and his countenance suffused with a lively purple, he drew a little nearer to the fire, and turning his back upon it, said with dignity:

'If that's any comfort to anybody, they're welcome to it. If it an't, I'm sorry for 'em. If either of you two gentlemen likes to go out and see what's the matter, you can. I'm not curious, myself.'

While he spoke the cry drew nearer and nearer, footsteps passed the window, the latch of the door was raised, it opened, was violently shut again, and Solomon Daisy, with a lighted lantern in his hand, and the rain streaming from his disordered dress, dashed into the room.

A more complete picture of terror than the little man presented, it would be difficult to imagine. The perspiration stood in beads upon his face, his knees knocked together, his every limb trembled, the power of articulation was quite gone; and there he stood, panting for breath, gazing on them with such livid ashy looks, that they were infected with his fear, though ignorant of its occasion, and, reflecting his dismayed and horror-stricken visage, stared back again without venturing to question him; until old John Willet, in a fit of temporary insanity, made a dive at his cravat, and, seizing him by that portion of his dress, shook him to and fro until his very teeth appeared to rattle in his head.

'Tell us what's the matter, sir,' said John, 'or I'll kill you. Tell us what's the matter, sir, or in another second I'll have your head under the biler. How dare you look like that? Is anybody a-following of you? What do you mean? Say something, or I'll be the death of you, I will.'

Mr Willet, in his frenzy, was so near keeping his word to the very letter (Solomon Daisy's eyes already beginning to roll in an alarming manner, and certain guttural sounds, as of a choking man, to issue from his throat), that the two bystanders, recovering in some degree, plucked him off his victim by main force, and placed the little clerk of Chigwell in a chair. Directing a fearful gaze all round the room, he implored them in a faint voice to give him some drink; and above all to lock the house-door and close and bar the shutters of the room, without a moment's loss of time. The latter request did not tend to reassure his hearers, or to fill them with the most comfortable sensations; they complied with it, however, with the greatest expedition; and having handed him a bumper of brandy-and-water, nearly boiling hot, waited to hear what he might have to tell them.

'Oh, Johnny,' said Solomon, shaking him by the hand. 'Oh, Parkes. Oh, Tommy Cobb. Why did I leave this house to-night! On the nineteenth of March—of all nights in the year, on the nineteenth of March!'

They all drew closer to the fire. Parkes, who was nearest to the door, started and looked over his shoulder. Mr Willet, with great indignation, inquired what the devil he meant by that—and then said, 'God forgive me,' and glanced over his own shoulder, and came a little nearer.

'When I left here to-night,' said Solomon Daisy, 'I little thought what day of the month it was. I have never gone alone into the church after dark on this day, for seven-and-twenty years. I have heard it said that as we keep our birthdays when we are alive, so the ghosts of dead people, who are not easy in their graves, keep the day they died upon.—How the wind roars!'

Nobody spoke. All eyes were fastened on Solomon.

'I might have known,' he said, 'what night it was, by the foul weather. There's no such night in the whole year round as this is, always. I never sleep quietly in my bed on the nineteenth of March.'

'Go on,' said Tom Cobb, in a low voice. 'Nor I neither.'

Solomon Daisy raised his glass to his lips; put it down upon the floor with such a trembling hand that the spoon tinkled in it like a little bell; and continued thus:

'Have I ever said that we are always brought back to this subject in some strange way, when the nineteenth of this month comes round? Do you suppose it was by accident, I forgot to wind up the church-clock? I never forgot it at any other time, though it's such a clumsy thing that it has to be wound up every day. Why should it escape my memory on this day of all others?

'I made as much haste down there as I could when I went from here, but I had to go home first for the keys; and the wind and rain being dead against me all the way, it was pretty well as much as I could do at times to keep my legs. I got there at last, opened the church-door, and went in. I had not met a soul all the way, and you may judge whether it was dull or not. Neither of you would bear me company. If you could have known what was to come, you'd have been in the right.

'The wind was so strong, that it was as much as I could do to shut the church-door by putting my whole weight against it; and even as it was, it burst wide open twice, with such strength that any of you would have sworn, if you had been leaning against it, as I was, that somebody was pushing on the other side. However, I got the key turned, went into the belfry, and wound up the clock—which was very near run down, and would have stood stock-still in half an hour.

'As I took up my lantern again to leave the church, it came upon me all at once that this was the nineteenth of March. It came upon me with a kind of shock, as if a hand had struck the thought upon my forehead; at the very same moment, I heard a voice outside the tower—rising from among the graves.'

Here old John precipitately interrupted the speaker, and begged that if Mr Parkes (who was seated opposite to him and was staring directly over his head) saw anything, he would have the goodness to mention it. Mr Parkes apologised, and remarked that he was only listening; to which Mr Willet angrily retorted, that his listening with that kind of expression in his face was not agreeable, and that if he couldn't look like other people, he had better put his pocket-handkerchief over his head. Mr Parkes with great submission pledged himself to do so, if again required, and John Willet turning to Solomon desired him to proceed. After waiting until a violent gust of wind and rain, which seemed to shake even that sturdy house to its foundation, had passed away, the little man complied:

'Never tell me that it was my fancy, or that it was any other sound which I mistook for that I tell you of. I heard the wind whistle through the arches of the church. I heard the steeple strain and creak. I heard the rain as it came driving against the walls. I felt the bells shake. I saw the ropes sway to and fro. And I heard that voice.'

'What did it say?' asked Tom Cobb.

'I don't know what; I don't know that it spoke. It gave a kind of cry, as any one of us might do, if something dreadful followed us in a dream, and came upon us unawares; and then it died off: seeming to pass quite round the church.'

'I don't see much in that,' said John, drawing a long breath, and looking round him like a man who felt relieved.

'Perhaps not,' returned his friend, 'but that's not all.'

'What more do you mean to say, sir, is to come?' asked John, pausing in the act of wiping his face upon his apron. 'What are you a-going to tell us of next?'

'What I saw.'

'Saw!' echoed all three, bending forward.

'When I opened the church-door to come out,' said the little man, with an expression of face which bore ample testimony to the sincerity of his conviction, 'when I opened the church-door to come out, which I did suddenly, for I wanted to get it shut again before another gust of wind came up, there crossed me—so close, that by stretching out my finger I could have touched it—something in the likeness of a man. It was bare-headed to the storm. It turned its face without stopping, and fixed its eyes on mine. It was a ghost—a spirit.'

'Whose?' they all three cried together.

In the excess of his emotion (for he fell back trembling in his chair, and waved his hand as if entreating them to question him no further), his answer was lost on all but old John Willet, who happened to be seated close beside him.

'Who!' cried Parkes and Tom Cobb, looking eagerly by turns at Solomon Daisy and at Mr Willet. 'Who was it?'

'Gentlemen,' said Mr Willet after a long pause, 'you needn't ask. The likeness of a murdered man. This is the nineteenth of March.'

A profound silence ensued.

'If you'll take my advice,' said John, 'we had better, one and all, keep this a secret. Such tales would not be liked at the Warren. Let us keep it to ourselves for the present time at all events, or we may get into trouble, and Solomon may lose his place. Whether it was really as he says, or whether it wasn't, is no matter. Right or wrong, nobody would believe him. As to the probabilities, I don't myself think,' said Mr Willet, eyeing the corners of the room in a manner which showed that, like some other philosophers, he was not quite easy in his theory, 'that a ghost as had been a man of sense in his lifetime, would be out a-walking in such weather—I only know that I wouldn't, if I was one.'

But this heretical doctrine was strongly opposed by the other three, who quoted a great many precedents to show that bad weather was the very time for such appearances; and Mr Parkes (who had had a ghost in his family, by the mother's side) argued the matter with so much ingenuity and force of illustration, that John was only saved from having to retract his opinion by the opportune appearance of supper, to which they applied themselves with a dreadful relish. Even Solomon Daisy himself, by dint of the elevating influences of fire, lights, brandy, and good company, so far recovered as to handle his knife and fork in a highly creditable manner, and to display a capacity both of eating and drinking, such as banished all fear of his having sustained any lasting injury from his fright.

Supper done, they crowded round the fire again, and, as is common on such occasions, propounded all manner of leading questions calculated to surround the story with new horrors and surprises. But Solomon Daisy, notwithstanding these temptations, adhered so steadily to his original account, and repeated it so often, with such slight variations, and with such solemn asseverations of its truth and reality, that his hearers were (with good reason) more astonished than at first. As he took John Willet's view of the matter in regard to the propriety of not bruiting the tale abroad, unless the spirit should appear to him again, in which case it would be necessary to take immediate counsel with the clergyman, it was solemnly resolved that it should be hushed up and kept quiet. And as most men like to have a secret to tell which may exalt their own importance, they arrived at this conclusion with perfect unanimity.

As it was by this time growing late, and was long past their usual hour of separating, the cronies parted for the night. Solomon Daisy, with a fresh candle in his lantern, repaired homewards under the escort of long Phil Parkes and Mr Cobb, who were rather more nervous than himself. Mr Willet, after seeing them to the door, returned to collect his thoughts with the assistance of the boiler, and to listen to the storm of wind and rain, which had not yet abated one jot of its fury.

Chapter 34

Before old John had looked at the boiler quite twenty minutes, he got his ideas into a focus, and brought them to bear upon Solomon Daisy's story. The more he thought of it, the more impressed he became with a sense of his own wisdom, and a desire that Mr Haredale should be impressed with it likewise. At length, to the end that he might sustain a principal and important character in the affair; and might have the start of Solomon and his two friends, through whose means he knew the adventure, with a variety of exaggerations, would be known to at least a score of people, and most likely to Mr Haredale himself, by breakfast-time to-morrow; he determined to repair to the Warren before going to bed.

'He's my landlord,' thought John, as he took a candle in his hand, and setting it down in a corner out of the wind's way, opened a casement in the rear of the house, looking towards the stables. 'We haven't met of late years so often as we used to do—changes are taking place in the family—it's desirable that I should stand as well with them, in point of dignity, as possible—the whispering about of this here tale will anger him—it's good to have confidences with a gentleman of his natur', and set one's-self right besides. Halloa there! Hugh—Hugh. Hal-loa!'

When he had repeated this shout a dozen times, and startled every pigeon from its slumbers, a door in one of the ruinous old buildings opened, and a rough voice demanded what was amiss now, that a man couldn't even have his sleep in quiet.

'What! Haven't you sleep enough, growler, that you're not to be knocked up for once?' said John.

'No,' replied the voice, as the speaker yawned and shook himself. 'Not half enough.'

'I don't know how you CAN sleep, with the wind a bellowsing and roaring about you, making the tiles fly like a pack of cards,' said John; 'but no matter for that. Wrap yourself up in something or another, and come here, for you must go as far as the Warren with me. And look sharp about it.'

Hugh, with much low growling and muttering, went back into his lair; and presently reappeared, carrying a lantern and a cudgel, and enveloped from head to foot in an old, frowzy, slouching horse-cloth. Mr Willet received this figure at the back-door, and ushered him into the bar, while he wrapped himself in sundry greatcoats and capes, and so tied and knotted his face in shawls and handkerchiefs, that how he breathed was a mystery.

'You don't take a man out of doors at near midnight in such weather, without putting some heart into him, do you, master?' said Hugh.

'Yes I do, sir,' returned Mr Willet. 'I put the heart (as you call it) into him when he has brought me safe home again, and his standing steady on his legs an't of so much consequence. So hold that light up, if you please, and go on a step or two before, to show the way.'

Hugh obeyed with a very indifferent grace, and a longing glance at the bottles. Old John, laying strict injunctions on his cook to keep the doors locked in his absence, and to open to nobody but himself on pain of dismissal, followed him into the blustering darkness out of doors.

The way was wet and dismal, and the night so black, that if Mr Willet had been his own pilot, he would have walked into a deep horsepond within a few hundred yards of his own house, and would certainly have terminated his career in that ignoble sphere of action. But Hugh, who had a sight as keen as any hawk's, and, apart from that endowment, could have found his way blindfold to any place within a dozen miles, dragged old John along, quite deaf to his remonstrances, and took his own course without the slightest reference to, or notice of, his master. So they made head against the wind as they best could; Hugh crushing the wet grass beneath his heavy tread, and stalking on after his ordinary savage fashion; John Willet following at arm's length, picking his steps, and looking about him, now for bogs and ditches, and now for such stray ghosts as might be wandering abroad, with looks of as much dismay and uneasiness as his immovable face was capable of expressing.

At length they stood upon the broad gravel-walk before the Warren-house. The building was profoundly dark, and none were moving near it save themselves. From one solitary turret-chamber, however, there shone a ray of light; and towards this speck of comfort in the cold, cheerless, silent scene, Mr Willet bade his pilot lead him.

'The old room,' said John, looking timidly upward; 'Mr Reuben's own apartment, God be with us! I wonder his brother likes to sit there, so late at night—on this night too.'

'Why, where else should he sit?' asked Hugh, holding the lantern to his breast, to keep the candle from the wind, while he trimmed it with his fingers. 'It's snug enough, an't it?'

'Snug!' said John indignantly. 'You have a comfortable idea of snugness, you have, sir. Do you know what was done in that room, you ruffian?'

'Why, what is it the worse for that!' cried Hugh, looking into John's fat face. 'Does it keep out the rain, and snow, and wind, the less for that? Is it less warm or dry, because a man was killed there? Ha, ha, ha! Never believe it, master. One man's no such matter as that comes to.'

Mr Willet fixed his dull eyes on his follower, and began—by a species of inspiration—to think it just barely possible that he was something of a dangerous character, and that it might be advisable to get rid of him one of these days. He was too prudent to say anything, with the journey home before him; and therefore turned to the iron gate before which this brief dialogue had passed, and pulled the handle of the bell that hung beside it. The turret in which the light appeared being at one corner of the building, and only divided from the path by one of the garden-walks, upon which this gate opened, Mr Haredale threw up the window directly, and demanded who was there.

'Begging pardon, sir,' said John, 'I knew you sat up late, and made bold to come round, having a word to say to you.'

'Willet—is it not?'

'Of the Maypole—at your service, sir.'

Mr Haredale closed the window, and withdrew. He presently appeared at a door in the bottom of the turret, and coming across the garden-walk, unlocked the gate and let them in.

'You are a late visitor, Willet. What is the matter?'

'Nothing to speak of, sir,' said John; 'an idle tale, I thought you ought to know of; nothing more.'

'Let your man go forward with the lantern, and give me your hand. The stairs are crooked and narrow. Gently with your light, friend. You swing it like a censer.'

Hugh, who had already reached the turret, held it more steadily, and ascended first, turning round from time to time to shed his light downward on the steps. Mr Haredale following next, eyed his lowering face with no great favour; and Hugh, looking down on him, returned his glances with interest, as they climbed the winding stairs.

It terminated in a little ante-room adjoining that from which they had seen the light. Mr Haredale entered first, and led the way through it into the latter chamber, where he seated himself at a writing-table from which he had risen when they had rung the bell.

'Come in,' he said, beckoning to old John, who remained bowing at the door. 'Not you, friend,' he added hastily to Hugh, who entered also. 'Willet, why do you bring that fellow here?'

'Why, sir,' returned John, elevating his eyebrows, and lowering his voice to the tone in which the question had been asked him, 'he's a good guard, you see.'

'Don't be too sure of that,' said Mr Haredale, looking towards him as he spoke. 'I doubt it. He has an evil eye.'

'There's no imagination in his eye,' returned Mr Willet, glancing over his shoulder at the organ in question, 'certainly.'

'There is no good there, be assured,' said Mr Haredale. 'Wait in that little room, friend, and close the door between us.'

Hugh shrugged his shoulders, and with a disdainful look, which showed, either that he had overheard, or that he guessed the purport of their whispering, did as he was told. When he was shut out, Mr Haredale turned to John, and bade him go on with what he had to say, but not to speak too loud, for there were quick ears yonder.

Thus cautioned, Mr Willet, in an oily whisper, recited all that he had heard and said that night; laying particular stress upon his own sagacity, upon his great regard for the family, and upon his solicitude for their peace of mind and happiness. The story moved his auditor much more than he had expected. Mr Haredale often changed his attitude, rose and paced the room, returned again, desired him to repeat, as nearly as he could, the very words that Solomon had used, and gave so many other signs of being disturbed and ill at ease, that even Mr Willet was surprised.

'You did quite right,' he said, at the end of a long conversation, 'to bid them keep this story secret. It is a foolish fancy on the part of this weak-brained man, bred in his fears and superstition. But Miss Haredale, though she would know it to be so, would be disturbed by it if it reached her ears; it is too nearly connected with a subject very painful to us all, to be heard with indifference. You were most prudent, and have laid me under a great obligation. I thank you very much.'

This was equal to John's most sanguine expectations; but he would have preferred Mr Haredale's looking at him when he spoke, as if he really did thank him, to his walking up and down, speaking by fits and starts, often stopping with his eyes fixed on the ground, moving hurriedly on again, like one distracted, and seeming almost unconscious of what he said or did.

This, however, was his manner; and it was so embarrassing to John that he sat quite passive for a long time, not knowing what to do. At length he rose. Mr Haredale stared at him for a moment as though he had quite forgotten his being present, then shook hands with him, and opened the door. Hugh, who was, or feigned to be, fast asleep on the ante-chamber floor, sprang up on their entrance, and throwing his cloak about him, grasped his stick and lantern, and prepared to descend the stairs.

'Stay,' said Mr Haredale. 'Will this man drink?'

'Drink! He'd drink the Thames up, if it was strong enough, sir, replied John Willet. 'He'll have something when he gets home. He's better without it, now, sir.'

'Nay. Half the distance is done,' said Hugh. 'What a hard master you are! I shall go home the better for one glassful, halfway. Come!'

As John made no reply, Mr Haredale brought out a glass of liquor, and gave it to Hugh, who, as he took it in his hand, threw part of it upon the floor.

'What do you mean by splashing your drink about a gentleman's house, sir?' said John.

'I'm drinking a toast,' Hugh rejoined, holding the glass above his head, and fixing his eyes on Mr Haredale's face; 'a toast to this house and its master.' With that he muttered something to himself, and drank the rest, and setting down the glass, preceded them without another word.

John was a good deal scandalised by this observance, but seeing that Mr Haredale took little heed of what Hugh said or did, and that his thoughts were otherwise employed, he offered no apology, and went in silence down the stairs, across the walk, and through the garden-gate. They stopped upon the outer side for Hugh to hold the light while Mr Haredale locked it on the inner; and then John saw with wonder (as he often afterwards related), that he was very pale, and that his face had changed so much and grown so haggard since their entrance, that he almost seemed another man.

They were in the open road again, and John Willet was walking on behind his escort, as he had come, thinking very steadily of what he had just now seen, when Hugh drew him suddenly aside, and almost at the same instant three horsemen swept past—the nearest brushed his shoulder even then—who, checking their steeds as suddenly as they could, stood still, and waited for their coming up.

Chapter 35

When John Willet saw that the horsemen wheeled smartly round, and drew up three abreast in the narrow road, waiting for him and his man to join them, it occurred to him with unusual precipitation that they must be highwaymen; and had Hugh been armed with a blunderbuss, in place of his stout cudgel, he would certainly have ordered him to fire it off at a venture, and would, while the word of command was obeyed, have consulted his own personal safety in immediate flight. Under the circumstances of disadvantage, however, in which he and his guard were placed, he deemed it prudent to adopt a different style of generalship, and therefore whispered his attendant to address them in the most peaceable and courteous terms. By way of acting up to the spirit and letter of this instruction, Hugh stepped forward, and flourishing his staff before the very eyes of the rider nearest to him, demanded roughly what he and his fellows meant by so nearly galloping over them, and why they scoured the king's highway at that late hour of night.

The man whom he addressed was beginning an angry reply in the same strain, when he was checked by the horseman in the centre, who, interposing with an air of authority, inquired in a somewhat loud but not harsh or unpleasant voice:

'Pray, is this the London road?'

'If you follow it right, it is,' replied Hugh roughly.

'Nay, brother,' said the same person, 'you're but a churlish Englishman, if Englishman you be—which I should much doubt but for your tongue. Your companion, I am sure, will answer me more civilly. How say you, friend?'

'I say it IS the London road, sir,' answered John. 'And I wish,' he added in a subdued voice, as he turned to Hugh, 'that you was in any other road, you vagabond. Are you tired of your life, sir, that you go a-trying to provoke three great neck-or-nothing chaps, that could keep on running over us, back'ards and for'ards, till we was dead, and then take our bodies up behind 'em, and drown us ten miles off?'

'How far is it to London?' inquired the same speaker.

'Why, from here, sir,' answered John, persuasively, 'it's thirteen very easy mile.'

The adjective was thrown in, as an inducement to the travellers to ride away with all speed; but instead of having the desired effect, it elicited from the same person, the remark, 'Thirteen miles! That's a long distance!' which was followed by a short pause of indecision.

'Pray,' said the gentleman, 'are there any inns hereabouts?' At the word 'inns,' John plucked up his spirit in a surprising manner; his fears rolled off like smoke; all the landlord stirred within him.

'There are no inns,' rejoined Mr Willet, with a strong emphasis on the plural number; 'but there's a Inn—one Inn—the Maypole Inn. That's a Inn indeed. You won't see the like of that Inn often.'

'You keep it, perhaps?' said the horseman, smiling.

'I do, sir,' replied John, greatly wondering how he had found this out.

'And how far is the Maypole from here?'

'About a mile'—John was going to add that it was the easiest mile in all the world, when the third rider, who had hitherto kept a little in the rear, suddenly interposed:

'And have you one excellent bed, landlord? Hem! A bed that you can recommend—a bed that you are sure is well aired—a bed that has been slept in by some perfectly respectable and unexceptionable person?'

'We don't take in no tagrag and bobtail at our house, sir,' answered John. 'And as to the bed itself—'

'Say, as to three beds,' interposed the gentleman who had spoken before; 'for we shall want three if we stay, though my friend only speaks of one.'

'No, no, my lord; you are too good, you are too kind; but your life is of far too much importance to the nation in these portentous times, to be placed upon a level with one so useless and so poor as mine. A great cause, my lord, a mighty cause, depends on you. You are its leader and its champion, its advanced guard and its van. It is the cause of our altars and our homes, our country and our faith. Let ME sleep on a chair—the carpet—anywhere. No one will repine if I take cold or fever. Let John Grueby pass the night beneath the open sky—no one will repine for HIM. But forty thousand men of this our island in the wave (exclusive of women and children) rivet their eyes and thoughts on Lord George Gordon; and every day, from the rising up of the sun to the going down of the same, pray for his health and vigour. My lord,' said the speaker, rising in his stirrups, 'it is a glorious cause, and must not be forgotten. My lord, it is a mighty cause, and must not be endangered. My lord, it is a holy cause, and must not be deserted.'

'It IS a holy cause,' exclaimed his lordship, lifting up his hat with great solemnity. 'Amen.'

'John Grueby,' said the long-winded gentleman, in a tone of mild reproof, 'his lordship said Amen.'

'I heard my lord, sir,' said the man, sitting like a statue on his horse.

'And do not YOU say Amen, likewise?'

To which John Grueby made no reply at all, but sat looking straight before him.

'You surprise me, Grueby,' said the gentleman. 'At a crisis like the present, when Queen Elizabeth, that maiden monarch, weeps within her tomb, and Bloody Mary, with a brow of gloom and shadow, stalks triumphant—'

'Oh, sir,' cied the man, gruffly, 'where's the use of talking of Bloody Mary, under such circumstances as the present, when my lord's wet through, and tired with hard riding? Let's either go on to London, sir, or put up at once; or that unfort'nate Bloody Mary will have more to answer for—and she's done a deal more harm in her grave than she ever did in her lifetime, I believe.'

By this time Mr Willet, who had never beard so many words spoken together at one time, or delivered with such volubility and emphasis as by the long-winded gentleman; and whose brain, being wholly unable to sustain or compass them, had quite given itself up for lost; recovered so far as to observe that there was ample accommodation at the Maypole for all the party: good beds; neat wines; excellent entertainment for man and beast; private rooms for large and small parties; dinners dressed upon the shortest notice; choice stabling, and a lock-up coach-house; and, in short, to run over such recommendatory scraps of language as were painted up on various portions of the building, and which in the course of some forty years he had learnt to repeat with tolerable correctness. He was considering whether it was at all possible to insert any novel sentences to the same purpose, when the gentleman who had spoken first, turning to him of the long wind, exclaimed, 'What say you, Gashford? Shall we tarry at this house he speaks of, or press forward? You shall decide.'

'I would submit, my lord, then,' returned the person he appealed to, in a silky tone, 'that your health and spirits—so important, under Providence, to our great cause, our pure and truthful cause'—here his lordship pulled off his hat again, though it was raining hard—'require refreshment and repose.'

'Go on before, landlord, and show the way,' said Lord George Gordon; 'we will follow at a footpace.'

'If you'll give me leave, my lord,' said John Grueby, in a low voice, 'I'll change my proper place, and ride before you. The looks of the landlord's friend are not over honest, and it may be as well to be cautious with him.'

'John Grueby is quite right,' interposed Mr Gashford, falling back hastily. 'My lord, a life so precious as yours must not be put in peril. Go forward, John, by all means. If you have any reason to suspect the fellow, blow his brains out.'

John made no answer, but looking straight before him, as his custom seemed to be when the secretary spoke, bade Hugh push on, and followed close behind him. Then came his lordship, with Mr Willet at his bridle rein; and, last of all, his lordship's secretary—for that, it seemed, was Gashford's office.

Hugh strode briskly on, often looking back at the servant, whose horse was close upon his heels, and glancing with a leer at his bolster case of pistols, by which he seemed to set great store. He was a square-built, strong-made, bull-necked fellow, of the true English breed; and as Hugh measured him with his eye, he measured Hugh, regarding him meanwhile with a look of bluff disdain. He was much older than the Maypole man, being to all appearance five-and-forty; but was one of those self-possessed, hard-headed, imperturbable fellows, who, if they are ever beaten at fisticuffs, or other kind of warfare, never know it, and go on coolly till they win.

'If I led you wrong now,' said Hugh, tauntingly, 'you'd—ha ha ha!—you'd shoot me through the head, I suppose.'

John Grueby took no more notice of this remark than if he had been deaf and Hugh dumb; but kept riding on quite comfortably, with his eyes fixed on the horizon.

'Did you ever try a fall with a man when you were young, master?' said Hugh. 'Can you make any play at single-stick?'

John Grueby looked at him sideways with the same contented air, but deigned not a word in answer.

'—Like this?' said Hugh, giving his cudgel one of those skilful flourishes, in which the rustic of that time delighted. 'Whoop!'

'—Or that,' returned John Grueby, beating down his guard with his whip, and striking him on the head with its butt end. 'Yes, I played a little once. You wear your hair too long; I should have cracked your crown if it had been a little shorter.'

It was a pretty smart, loud-sounding rap, as it was, and evidently astonished Hugh; who, for the moment, seemed disposed to drag his new acquaintance from his saddle. But his face betokening neither malice, triumph, rage, nor any lingering idea that he had given him offence; his eyes gazing steadily in the old direction, and his manner being as careless and composed as if he had merely brushed away a fly; Hugh was so puzzled, and so disposed to look upon him as a customer of almost supernatural toughness, that he merely laughed, and cried 'Well done!' then, sheering off a little, led the way in silence.

Before the lapse of many minutes the party halted at the Maypole door. Lord George and his secretary quickly dismounting, gave their horses to their servant, who, under the guidance of Hugh, repaired to the stables. Right glad to escape from the inclemency of the night, they followed Mr Willet into the common room, and stood warming themselves and drying their clothes before the cheerful fire, while he busied himself with such orders and preparations as his guest's high quality required.

As he bustled in and out of the room, intent on these arrangements, he had an opportunity of observing the two travellers, of whom, as yet, he knew nothing but the voice. The lord, the great personage who did the Maypole so much honour, was about the middle height, of a slender make, and sallow complexion, with an aquiline nose, and long hair of a reddish brown, combed perfectly straight and smooth about his ears, and slightly powdered, but without the faintest vestige of a curl. He was attired, under his greatcoat, in a full suit of black, quite free from any ornament, and of the most precise and sober cut. The gravity of his dress, together with a certain lankness of cheek and stiffness of deportment, added nearly ten years to his age, but his figure was that of one not yet past thirty. As he stood musing in the red glow of the fire, it was striking to observe his very bright large eye, which betrayed a restlessness of thought and purpose, singularly at variance with the studied composure and sobriety of his mien, and with his quaint and sad apparel. It had nothing harsh or cruel in its expression; neither had his face, which was thin and mild, and wore an air of melancholy; but it was suggestive of an indefinable uneasiness; which infected those who looked upon him, and filled them with a kind of pity for the man: though why it did so, they would have had some trouble to explain.

Gashford, the secretary, was taller, angularly made, high-shouldered, bony, and ungraceful. His dress, in imitation of his superior, was demure and staid in the extreme; his manner, formal and constrained. This gentleman had an overhanging brow, great hands and feet and ears, and a pair of eyes that seemed to have made an unnatural retreat into his head, and to have dug themselves a cave to hide in. His manner was smooth and humble, but very sly and slinking. He wore the aspect of a man who was always lying in wait for something that WOULDN'T come to pass; but he looked patient—very patient—and fawned like a spaniel dog. Even now, while he warmed and rubbed his hands before the blaze, he had the air of one who only presumed to enjoy it in his degree as a commoner; and though he knew his lord was not regarding him, he looked into his face from time to time, and with a meek and deferential manner, smiled as if for practice.

Such were the guests whom old John Willet, with a fixed and leaden eye, surveyed a hundred times, and to whom he now advanced with a state candlestick in each hand, beseeching them to follow him into a worthier chamber. 'For my lord,' said John—it is odd enough, but certain people seem to have as great a pleasure in pronouncing titles as their owners have in wearing them—'this room, my lord, isn't at all the sort of place for your lordship, and I have to beg your lordship's pardon for keeping you here, my lord, one minute.'

With this address, John ushered them upstairs into the state apartment, which, like many other things of state, was cold and comfortless. Their own footsteps, reverberating through the spacious room, struck upon their hearing with a hollow sound; and its damp and chilly atmosphere was rendered doubly cheerless by contrast with the homely warmth they had deserted.

It was of no use, however, to propose a return to the place they had quitted, for the preparations went on so briskly that there was no time to stop them. John, with the tall candlesticks in his hands, bowed them up to the fireplace; Hugh, striding in with a lighted brand and pile of firewood, cast it down upon the hearth, and set it in a blaze; John Grueby (who had a great blue cockade in his hat, which he appeared to despise mightily) brought in the portmanteau he had carried on his horse, and placed it on the floor; and presently all three were busily engaged in drawing out the screen, laying the cloth, inspecting the beds, lighting fires in the bedrooms, expediting the supper, and making everything as cosy and as snug as might be, on so short a notice. In less than an hour's time, supper had been served, and ate, and cleared away; and Lord George and his secretary, with slippered feet, and legs stretched out before the fire, sat over some hot mulled wine together.

'So ends, my lord,' said Gashford, filling his glass with great complacency, 'the blessed work of a most blessed day.'

'And of a blessed yesterday,' said his lordship, raising his head.

'Ah!'—and here the secretary clasped his hands—'a blessed yesterday indeed! The Protestants of Suffolk are godly men and true. Though others of our countrymen have lost their way in darkness, even as we, my lord, did lose our road to-night, theirs is the light and glory.'

'Did I move them, Gashford?' said Lord George.

'Move them, my lord! Move them! They cried to be led on against the Papists, they vowed a dreadful vengeance on their heads, they roared like men possessed—'

'But not by devils,' said his lord.

'By devils! my lord! By angels.'

'Yes—oh surely—by angels, no doubt,' said Lord George, thrusting his hands into his pockets, taking them out again to bite his nails, and looking uncomfortably at the fire. 'Of course by angels—eh Gashford?'

'You do not doubt it, my lord?' said the secretary.

'No—No,' returned his lord. 'No. Why should I? I suppose it would be decidedly irreligious to doubt it—wouldn't it, Gashford? Though there certainly were,' he added, without waiting for an answer, 'some plaguy ill-looking characters among them.'

'When you warmed,' said the secretary, looking sharply at the other's downcast eyes, which brightened slowly as he spoke; 'when you warmed into that noble outbreak; when you told them that you were never of the lukewarm or the timid tribe, and bade them take heed that they were prepared to follow one who would lead them on, though to the very death; when you spoke of a hundred and twenty thousand men across the Scottish border who would take their own redress at any time, if it were not conceded; when you cried "Perish the Pope and all his base adherents; the penal laws against them shall never be repealed while Englishmen have hearts and hands"—and waved your own and touched your sword; and when they cried "No Popery!" and you cried "No; not even if we wade in blood," and they threw up their hats and cried "Hurrah! not even if we wade in blood; No Popery! Lord George! Down with the Papists—Vengeance on their heads:" when this was said and done, and a word from you, my lord, could raise or still the tumult—ah! then I felt what greatness was indeed, and thought, When was there ever power like this of Lord George Gordon's!'

'It's a great power. You're right. It is a great power!' he cried with sparkling eyes. 'But—dear Gashford—did I really say all that?'

'And how much more!' cried the secretary, looking upwards. 'Ah! how much more!'

'And I told them what you say, about the one hundred and forty thousand men in Scotland, did I!' he asked with evident delight. 'That was bold.'

'Our cause is boldness. Truth is always bold.'

'Certainly. So is religion. She's bold, Gashford?'

'The true religion is, my lord.'

'And that's ours,' he rejoined, moving uneasily in his seat, and biting his nails as though he would pare them to the quick. 'There can be no doubt of ours being the true one. You feel as certain of that as I do, Gashford, don't you?'

'Does my lord ask ME,' whined Gashford, drawing his chair nearer with an injured air, and laying his broad flat hand upon the table; 'ME,' he repeated, bending the dark hollows of his eyes upon him with an unwholesome smile, 'who, stricken by the magic of his eloquence in Scotland but a year ago, abjured the errors of the Romish church, and clung to him as one whose timely hand had plucked me from a pit?'

'True. No—No. I—I didn't mean it,' replied the other, shaking him by the hand, rising from his seat, and pacing restlessly about the room. 'It's a proud thing to lead the people, Gashford,' he added as he made a sudden halt.

'By force of reason too,' returned the pliant secretary.

'Ay, to be sure. They may cough and jeer, and groan in Parliament, and call me fool and madman, but which of them can raise this human sea and make it swell and roar at pleasure? Not one.'

'Not one,' repeated Gashford.

'Which of them can say for his honesty, what I can say for mine; which of them has refused a minister's bribe of one thousand pounds a year, to resign his seat in favour of another? Not one.'

'Not one,' repeated Gashford again—taking the lion's share of the mulled wine between whiles.

'And as we are honest, true, and in a sacred cause, Gashford,' said Lord George with a heightened colour and in a louder voice, as he laid his fevered hand upon his shoulder, 'and are the only men who regard the mass of people out of doors, or are regarded by them, we will uphold them to the last; and will raise a cry against these un-English Papists which shall re-echo through the country, and roll with a noise like thunder. I will be worthy of the motto on my coat of arms, "Called and chosen and faithful."

'Called,' said the secretary, 'by Heaven.'

'I am.'

'Chosen by the people.'

'Yes.'

'Faithful to both.'

'To the block!'

It would be difficult to convey an adequate idea of the excited manner in which he gave these answers to the secretary's promptings; of the rapidity of his utterance, or the violence of his tone and gesture; in which, struggling through his Puritan's demeanour, was something wild and ungovernable which broke through all restraint. For some minutes he walked rapidly up and down the room, then stopping suddenly, exclaimed,

'Gashford—YOU moved them yesterday too. Oh yes! You did.'

'I shone with a reflected light, my lord,' replied the humble secretary, laying his hand upon his heart. 'I did my best.'

'You did well,' said his master, 'and are a great and worthy instrument. If you will ring for John Grueby to carry the portmanteau into my room, and will wait here while I undress, we will dispose of business as usual, if you're not too tired.'

'Too tired, my lord!—But this is his consideration! Christian from head to foot.' With which soliloquy, the secretary tilted the jug, and looked very hard into the mulled wine, to see how much remained.

John Willet and John Grueby appeared together. The one bearing the great candlesticks, and the other the portmanteau, showed the deluded lord into his chamber; and left the secretary alone, to yawn and shake himself, and finally to fall asleep before the fire.

'Now, Mr Gashford sir,' said John Grueby in his ear, after what appeared to him a moment of unconsciousness; 'my lord's abed.'

'Oh. Very good, John,' was his mild reply. 'Thank you, John. Nobody need sit up. I know my room.'

'I hope you're not a-going to trouble your head to-night, or my lord's head neither, with anything more about Bloody Mary,' said John. 'I wish the blessed old creetur had never been born.'

'I said you might go to bed, John,' returned the secretary. 'You didn't hear me, I think.'

'Between Bloody Marys, and blue cockades, and glorious Queen Besses, and no Poperys, and Protestant associations, and making of speeches,' pursued John Grueby, looking, as usual, a long way off, and taking no notice of this hint, 'my lord's half off his head. When we go out o' doors, such a set of ragamuffins comes a-shouting after us, "Gordon forever!" that I'm ashamed of myself and don't know where to look. When we're indoors, they come a-roaring and screaming about the house like so many devils; and my lord instead of ordering them to be drove away, goes out into the balcony and demeans himself by making speeches to 'em, and calls 'em "Men of England," and "Fellow-countrymen," as if he was fond of 'em and thanked 'em for coming. I can't make it out, but they're all mixed up somehow or another with that unfort'nate Bloody Mary, and call her name out till they're hoarse. They're all Protestants too—every man and boy among 'em: and Protestants are very fond of spoons, I find, and silver-plate in general, whenever area-gates is left open accidentally. I wish that was the worst of it, and that no more harm might be to come; but if you don't stop these ugly customers in time, Mr Gashford (and I know you; you're the man that blows the fire), you'll find 'em grow a little bit too strong for you. One of these evenings, when the weather gets warmer and Protestants are thirsty, they'll be pulling London down,—and I never heard that Bloody Mary went as far as THAT.'

Gashford had vanished long ago, and these remarks had been bestowed on empty air. Not at all discomposed by the discovery, John Grueby fixed his hat on, wrongside foremost that he might be unconscious of the shadow of the obnoxious cockade, and withdrew to bed; shaking his head in a very gloomy and prophetic manner until he reached his chamber.

Chapter 36

Gashford, with a smiling face, but still with looks of profound deference and humility, betook himself towards his master's room, smoothing his hair down as he went, and humming a psalm tune. As he approached Lord George's door, he cleared his throat and hummed more vigorously.

There was a remarkable contrast between this man's occupation at the moment, and the expression of his countenance, which was singularly repulsive and malicious. His beetling brow almost obscured his eyes; his lip was curled contemptuously; his very shoulders seemed to sneer in stealthy whisperings with his great flapped ears.

'Hush!' he muttered softly, as he peeped in at the chamber-door. 'He seems to be asleep. Pray Heaven he is! Too much watching, too much care, too much thought—ah! Lord preserve him for a martyr! He is a saint, if ever saint drew breath on this bad earth.'

Placing his light upon a table, he walked on tiptoe to the fire, and sitting in a chair before it with his back towards the bed, went on communing with himself like one who thought aloud:

'The saviour of his country and his country's religion, the friend of his poor countrymen, the enemy of the proud and harsh; beloved of the rejected and oppressed, adored by forty thousand bold and loyal English hearts—what happy slumbers his should be!' And here he sighed, and warmed his hands, and shook his head as men do when their hearts are full, and heaved another sigh, and warmed his hands again.

'Why, Gashford?' said Lord George, who was lying broad awake, upon his side, and had been staring at him from his entrance.

'My—my lord,' said Gashford, starting and looking round as though in great surprise. 'I have disturbed you!'

'I have not been sleeping.'

'Not sleeping!' he repeated, with assumed confusion. 'What can I say for having in your presence given utterance to thoughts—but they were sincere—they were sincere!' exclaimed the secretary, drawing his sleeve in a hasty way across his eyes; 'and why should I regret your having heard them?'

'Gashford,' said the poor lord, stretching out his hand with manifest emotion. 'Do not regret it. You love me well, I know—too well. I don't deserve such homage.'

Gashford made no reply, but grasped the hand and pressed it to his lips. Then rising, and taking from the trunk a little desk, he placed it on a table near the fire, unlocked it with a key he carried in his pocket, sat down before it, took out a pen, and, before dipping it in the inkstand, sucked it—to compose the fashion of his mouth perhaps, on which a smile was hovering yet.

'How do our numbers stand since last enrolling-night?' inquired Lord George. 'Are we really forty thousand strong, or do we still speak in round numbers when we take the Association at that amount?'

'Our total now exceeds that number by a score and three,' Gashford replied, casting his eyes upon his papers.

'The funds?'

'Not VERY improving; but there is some manna in the wilderness, my lord. Hem! On Friday night the widows' mites dropped in. "Forty scavengers, three and fourpence. An aged pew-opener of St Martin's parish, sixpence. A bell-ringer of the established church, sixpence. A Protestant infant, newly born, one halfpenny. The United Link Boys, three shillings—one bad. The anti-popish prisoners in Newgate, five and fourpence. A friend in Bedlam, half-a-crown. Dennis the hangman, one shilling."'

'That Dennis,' said his lordship, 'is an earnest man. I marked him in the crowd in Welbeck Street, last Friday.'

'A good man,' rejoined the secretary, 'a staunch, sincere, and truly zealous man.'

'He should be encouraged,' said Lord George. 'Make a note of Dennis. I'll talk with him.'

Gashford obeyed, and went on reading from his list:

'"The Friends of Reason, half-a-guinea. The Friends of Liberty, half-a-guinea. The Friends of Peace, half-a-guinea. The Friends of Charity, half-a-guinea. The Friends of Mercy, half-a-guinea. The Associated Rememberers of Bloody Mary, half-a-guinea. The United Bulldogs, half-a-guinea."'

'The United Bulldogs,' said Lord George, biting his nails most horribly, 'are a new society, are they not?'

'Formerly the 'Prentice Knights, my lord. The indentures of the old members expiring by degrees, they changed their name, it seems, though they still have 'prentices among them, as well as workmen.'

'What is their president's name?' inquired Lord George.

'President,' said Gashford, reading, 'Mr Simon Tappertit.'

'I remember him. The little man, who sometimes brings an elderly sister to our meetings, and sometimes another female too, who is conscientious, I have no doubt, but not well-favoured?'

'The very same, my lord.'

'Tappertit is an earnest man,' said Lord George, thoughtfully. 'Eh, Gashford?'

'One of the foremost among them all, my lord. He snuffs the battle from afar, like the war-horse. He throws his hat up in the street as if he were inspired, and makes most stirring speeches from the shoulders of his friends.'

'Make a note of Tappertit,' said Lord George Gordon. 'We may advance him to a place of trust.'

'That,' rejoined the secretary, doing as he was told, 'is all—except Mrs Varden's box (fourteenth time of opening), seven shillings and sixpence in silver and copper, and half-a-guinea in gold; and Miggs (being the saving of a quarter's wages), one-and-threepence.'

'Miggs,' said Lord George. 'Is that a man?'

'The name is entered on the list as a woman,' replied the secretary. 'I think she is the tall spare female of whom you spoke just now, my lord, as not being well-favoured, who sometimes comes to hear the speeches—along with Tappertit and Mrs Varden.'

'Mrs Varden is the elderly lady then, is she?'

The secretary nodded, and rubbed the bridge of his nose with the feather of his pen.

'She is a zealous sister,' said Lord George. 'Her collection goes on prosperously, and is pursued with fervour. Has her husband joined?'

'A malignant,' returned the secretary, folding up his papers. 'Unworthy such a wife. He remains in outer darkness and steadily refuses.'

'The consequences be upon his own head!—Gashford!'

'My lord!'

'You don't think,' he turned restlessly in his bed as he spoke, 'these people will desert me, when the hour arrives? I have spoken boldly for them, ventured much, suppressed nothing. They'll not fall off, will they?'

'No fear of that, my lord,' said Gashford, with a meaning look, which was rather the involuntary expression of his own thoughts than intended as any confirmation of his words, for the other's face was turned away. 'Be sure there is no fear of that.'

'Nor,' he said with a more restless motion than before, 'of their—but they CAN sustain no harm from leaguing for this purpose. Right is on our side, though Might may be against us. You feel as sure of that as I—honestly, you do?'

The secretary was beginning with 'You do not doubt,' when the other interrupted him, and impatiently rejoined:

'Doubt. No. Who says I doubt? If I doubted, should I cast away relatives, friends, everything, for this unhappy country's sake; this unhappy country,' he cried, springing up in bed, after repeating the phrase 'unhappy country's sake' to himself, at least a dozen times, 'forsaken of God and man, delivered over to a dangerous confederacy of Popish powers; the prey of corruption, idolatry, and despotism! Who says I doubt? Am I called, and chosen, and faithful? Tell me. Am I, or am I not?'

'To God, the country, and yourself,' cried Gashford.

'I am. I will be. I say again, I will be: to the block. Who says as much! Do you? Does any man alive?'

The secretary drooped his head with an expression of perfect acquiescence in anything that had been said or might be; and Lord George gradually sinking down upon his pillow, fell asleep.

Although there was something very ludicrous in his vehement manner, taken in conjunction with his meagre aspect and ungraceful presence, it would scarcely have provoked a smile in any man of kindly feeling; or even if it had, he would have felt sorry and almost angry with himself next moment, for yielding to the impulse. This lord was sincere in his violence and in his wavering. A nature prone to false enthusiasm, and the vanity of being a leader, were the worst qualities apparent in his composition. All the rest was weakness—sheer weakness; and it is the unhappy lot of thoroughly weak men, that their very sympathies, affections, confidences—all the qualities which in better constituted minds are virtues—dwindle into foibles, or turn into downright vices.

Gashford, with many a sly look towards the bed, sat chuckling at his master's folly, until his deep and heavy breathing warned him that he might retire. Locking his desk, and replacing it within the trunk (but not before he had taken from a secret lining two printed handbills), he cautiously withdrew; looking back, as he went, at the pale face of the slumbering man, above whose head the dusty plumes that crowned the Maypole couch, waved drearily and sadly as though it were a bier.

Stopping on the staircase to listen that all was quiet, and to take off his shoes lest his footsteps should alarm any light sleeper who might be near at hand, he descended to the ground floor, and thrust one of his bills beneath the great door of the house. That done, he crept softly back to his own chamber, and from the window let another fall—carefully wrapt round a stone to save it from the wind—into the yard below.

They were addressed on the back 'To every Protestant into whose hands this shall come,' and bore within what follows:

'Men and Brethren. Whoever shall find this letter, will take it as a warning to join, without delay, the friends of Lord George Gordon. There are great events at hand; and the times are dangerous and troubled. Read this carefully, keep it clean, and drop it somewhere else. For King and Country. Union.'

'More seed, more seed,' said Gashford as he closed the window. 'When will the harvest come!'

Chapter 37

To surround anything, however monstrous or ridiculous, with an air of mystery, is to invest it with a secret charm, and power of attraction which to the crowd is irresistible. False priests, false prophets, false doctors, false patriots, false prodigies of every kind, veiling their proceedings in mystery, have always addressed themselves at an immense advantage to the popular credulity, and have been, perhaps, more indebted to that resource in gaining and keeping for a time the upper hand of Truth and Common Sense, than to any half-dozen items in the whole catalogue of imposture. Curiosity is, and has been from the creation of the world, a master-passion. To awaken it, to gratify it by slight degrees, and yet leave something always in suspense, is to establish the surest hold that can be had, in wrong, on the unthinking portion of mankind.

If a man had stood on London Bridge, calling till he was hoarse, upon the passers-by, to join with Lord George Gordon, although for an object which no man understood, and which in that very incident had a charm of its own,—the probability is, that he might have influenced a score of people in a month. If all zealous Protestants had been publicly urged to join an association for the avowed purpose of singing a hymn or two occasionally, and hearing some indifferent speeches made, and ultimately of petitioning Parliament not to pass an act for abolishing the penal laws against Roman Catholic priests, the penalty of perpetual imprisonment denounced against those who educated children in that persuasion, and the disqualification of all members of the Romish church to inherit real property in the United Kingdom by right of purchase or descent,—matters so far removed from the business and bosoms of the mass, might perhaps have called together a hundred people. But when vague rumours got abroad, that in this Protestant association a secret power was mustering against the government for undefined and mighty purposes; when the air was filled with whispers of a confederacy among the Popish powers to degrade and enslave England, establish an inquisition in London, and turn the pens of Smithfield market into stakes and cauldrons; when terrors and alarms which no man understood were perpetually broached, both in and out of Parliament, by one enthusiast who did not understand himself, and bygone bugbears which had lain quietly in their graves for centuries, were raised again to haunt the ignorant and credulous; when all this was done, as it were, in the dark, and secret invitations to join the Great Protestant Association in defence of religion, life, and liberty, were dropped in the public ways, thrust under the house-doors, tossed in at windows, and pressed into the hands of those who trod the streets by night; when they glared from every wall, and shone on every post and pillar, so that stocks and stones appeared infected with the common fear, urging all men to join together blindfold in resistance of they knew not what, they knew not why;—then the mania spread indeed, and the body, still increasing every day, grew forty thousand strong.

So said, at least, in this month of March, 1780, Lord George Gordon, the Association's president. Whether it was the fact or otherwise, few men knew or cared to ascertain. It had never made any public demonstration; had scarcely ever been heard of, save through him; had never been seen; and was supposed by many to be the mere creature of his disordered brain. He was accustomed to talk largely about numbers of men—stimulated, as it was inferred, by certain successful disturbances, arising out of the same subject, which had occurred in Scotland in the previous year; was looked upon as a cracked-brained member of the lower house, who attacked all parties and sided with none, and was very little regarded. It was known that there was discontent abroad—there always is; he had been accustomed to address the people by placard, speech, and pamphlet, upon other questions; nothing had come, in England, of his past exertions, and nothing was apprehended from his present. Just as he has come upon the reader, he had come, from time to time, upon the public, and been forgotten in a day; as suddenly as he appears in these pages, after a blank of five long years, did he and his proceedings begin to force themselves, about this period, upon the notice of thousands of people, who had mingled in active life during the whole interval, and who, without being deaf or blind to passing events, had scarcely ever thought of him before.

'My lord,' said Gashford in his ear, as he drew the curtains of his bed betimes; 'my lord!'

'Yes—who's that? What is it?'

'The clock has struck nine,' returned the secretary, with meekly folded hands. 'You have slept well? I hope you have slept well? If my prayers are heard, you are refreshed indeed.'

'To say the truth, I have slept so soundly,' said Lord George, rubbing his eyes and looking round the room, 'that I don't remember quite—what place is this?'

'My lord!' cried Gashford, with a smile.

'Oh!' returned his superior. 'Yes. You're not a Jew then?'

'A Jew!' exclaimed the pious secretary, recoiling.

'I dreamed that we were Jews, Gashford. You and I—both of us—Jews with long beards.'

'Heaven forbid, my lord! We might as well be Papists.'

'I suppose we might,' returned the other, very quickly. 'Eh? You really think so, Gashford?'

'Surely I do,' the secretary cried, with looks of great surprise.

'Humph!' he muttered. 'Yes, that seems reasonable.'

'I hope my lord—' the secretary began.

'Hope!' he echoed, interrupting him. 'Why do you say, you hope? There's no harm in thinking of such things.'

'Not in dreams,' returned the Secretary.

'In dreams! No, nor waking either.'

—'"Called, and chosen, and faithful,"' said Gashford, taking up Lord George's watch which lay upon a chair, and seeming to read the inscription on the seal, abstractedly.

It was the slightest action possible, not obtruded on his notice, and apparently the result of a moment's absence of mind, not worth remark. But as the words were uttered, Lord George, who had been going on impetuously, stopped short, reddened, and was silent. Apparently quite unconscious of this change in his demeanour, the wily Secretary stepped a little apart, under pretence of pulling up the window-blind, and returning when the other had had time to recover, said:

'The holy cause goes bravely on, my lord. I was not idle, even last night. I dropped two of the handbills before I went to bed, and both are gone this morning. Nobody in the house has mentioned the circumstance of finding them, though I have been downstairs full half-an-hour. One or two recruits will be their first fruit, I predict; and who shall say how many more, with Heaven's blessing on your inspired exertions!'

'It was a famous device in the beginning,' replied Lord George; 'an excellent device, and did good service in Scotland. It was quite worthy of you. You remind me not to be a sluggard, Gashford, when the vineyard is menaced with destruction, and may be trodden down by Papist feet. Let the horses be saddled in half-an-hour. We must be up and doing!'

He said this with a heightened colour, and in a tone of such enthusiasm, that the secretary deemed all further prompting needless, and withdrew.

—'Dreamed he was a Jew,' he said thoughtfully, as he closed the bedroom door. 'He may come to that before he dies. It's like enough. Well! After a time, and provided I lost nothing by it, I don't see why that religion shouldn't suit me as well as any other. There are rich men among the Jews; shaving is very troublesome;—yes, it would suit me well enough. For the present, though, we must be Christian to the core. Our prophetic motto will suit all creeds in their turn, that's a comfort.' Reflecting on this source of consolation, he reached the sitting-room, and rang the bell for breakfast.

Lord George was quickly dressed (for his plain toilet was easily made), and as he was no less frugal in his repasts than in his Puritan attire, his share of the meal was soon dispatched. The secretary, however, more devoted to the good things of this world, or more intent on sustaining his strength and spirits for the sake of the Protestant cause, ate and drank to the last minute, and required indeed some three or four reminders from John Grueby, before he could resolve to tear himself away from Mr Willet's plentiful providing.

At length he came downstairs, wiping his greasy mouth, and having paid John Willet's bill, climbed into his saddle. Lord George, who had been walking up and down before the house talking to himself with earnest gestures, mounted his horse; and returning old John Willet's stately bow, as well as the parting salutation of a dozen idlers whom the rumour of a live lord being about to leave the Maypole had gathered round the porch, they rode away, with stout John Grueby in the rear.

If Lord George Gordon had appeared in the eyes of Mr Willet, overnight, a nobleman of somewhat quaint and odd exterior, the impression was confirmed this morning, and increased a hundredfold. Sitting bolt upright upon his bony steed, with his long, straight hair, dangling about his face and fluttering in the wind; his limbs all angular and rigid, his elbows stuck out on either side ungracefully, and his whole frame jogged and shaken at every motion of his horse's feet; a more grotesque or more ungainly figure can hardly be conceived. In lieu of whip, he carried in his hand a great gold-headed cane, as large as any footman carries in these days, and his various modes of holding this unwieldy weapon—now upright before his face like the sabre of a horse-soldier, now over his shoulder like a musket, now between his finger and thumb, but always in some uncouth and awkward fashion—contributed in no small degree to the absurdity of his appearance. Stiff, lank, and solemn, dressed in an unusual manner, and ostentatiously exhibiting—whether by design or accident—all his peculiarities of carriage, gesture, and conduct, all the qualities, natural and artificial, in which he differed from other men; he might have moved the sternest looker-on to laughter, and fully provoked the smiles and whispered jests which greeted his departure from the Maypole inn.

Quite unconscious, however, of the effect he produced, he trotted on beside his secretary, talking to himself nearly all the way, until they came within a mile or two of London, when now and then some passenger went by who knew him by sight, and pointed him out to some one else, and perhaps stood looking after him, or cried in jest or earnest as it might be, 'Hurrah Geordie! No Popery!' At which he would gravely pull off his hat, and bow. When they reached the town and rode along the streets, these notices became more frequent; some laughed, some hissed, some turned their heads and smiled, some wondered who he was, some ran along the pavement by his side and cheered. When this happened in a crush of carts and chairs and coaches, he would make a dead stop, and pulling off his hat, cry, 'Gentlemen, No Popery!' to which the gentlemen would respond with lusty voices, and with three times three; and then, on he would go again with a score or so of the raggedest, following at his horse's heels, and shouting till their throats were parched.

The old ladies too—there were a great many old ladies in the streets, and these all knew him. Some of them—not those of the highest rank, but such as sold fruit from baskets and carried burdens—clapped their shrivelled hands, and raised a weazen, piping, shrill 'Hurrah, my lord.' Others waved their hands or handkerchiefs, or shook their fans or parasols, or threw up windows and called in haste to those within, to come and see. All these marks of popular esteem, he received with profound gravity and respect; bowing very low, and so frequently that his hat was more off his head than on; and looking up at the houses as he passed along, with the air of one who was making a public entry, and yet was not puffed up or proud.

So they rode (to the deep and unspeakable disgust of John Grueby) the whole length of Whitechapel, Leadenhall Street, and Cheapside, and into St Paul's Churchyard. Arriving close to the cathedral, he halted; spoke to Gashford; and looking upward at its lofty dome, shook his head, as though he said, 'The Church in Danger!' Then to be sure, the bystanders stretched their throats indeed; and he went on again with mighty acclamations from the mob, and lower bows than ever.

So along the Strand, up Swallow Street, into the Oxford Road, and thence to his house in Welbeck Street, near Cavendish Square, whither he was attended by a few dozen idlers; of whom he took leave on the steps with this brief parting, 'Gentlemen, No Popery. Good day. God bless you.' This being rather a shorter address than they expected, was received with some displeasure, and cries of 'A speech! a speech!' which might have been complied with, but that John Grueby, making a mad charge upon them with all three horses, on his way to the stables, caused them to disperse into the adjoining fields, where they presently fell to pitch and toss, chuck-farthing, odd or even, dog-fighting, and other Protestant recreations.

In the afternoon Lord George came forth again, dressed in a black velvet coat, and trousers and waistcoat of the Gordon plaid, all of the same Quaker cut; and in this costume, which made him look a dozen times more strange and singular than before, went down on foot to Westminster. Gashford, meanwhile, bestirred himself in business matters; with which he was still engaged when, shortly after dusk, John Grueby entered and announced a visitor.

'Let him come in,' said Gashford.

'Here! come in!' growled John to somebody without; 'You're a Protestant, an't you?'

'I should think so,' replied a deep, gruff voice.

'You've the looks of it,' said John Grueby. 'I'd have known you for one, anywhere.' With which remark he gave the visitor admission, retired, and shut the door.

The man who now confronted Gashford, was a squat, thickset personage, with a low, retreating forehead, a coarse shock head of hair, and eyes so small and near together, that his broken nose alone seemed to prevent their meeting and fusing into one of the usual size. A dingy handkerchief twisted like a cord about his neck, left its great veins exposed to view, and they were swollen and starting, as though with gulping down strong passions, malice, and ill-will. His dress was of threadbare velveteen—a faded, rusty, whitened black, like the ashes of a pipe or a coal fire after a day's extinction; discoloured with the soils of many a stale debauch, and reeking yet with pot-house odours. In lieu of buckles at his knees, he wore unequal loops of packthread; and in his grimy hands he held a knotted stick, the knob of which was carved into a rough likeness of his own vile face. Such was the visitor who doffed his three-cornered hat in Gashford's presence, and waited, leering, for his notice.

'Ah! Dennis!' cried the secretary. 'Sit down.'

'I see my lord down yonder—' cried the man, with a jerk of his thumb towards the quarter that he spoke of, 'and he says to me, says my lord, "If you've nothing to do, Dennis, go up to my house and talk with Muster Gashford." Of course I'd nothing to do, you know. These an't my working hours. Ha ha! I was a-taking the air when I see my lord, that's what I was doing. I takes the air by night, as the howls does, Muster Gashford.'

And sometimes in the day-time, eh?' said the secretary—'when you go out in state, you know.'

'Ha ha!' roared the fellow, smiting his leg; 'for a gentleman as 'ull say a pleasant thing in a pleasant way, give me Muster Gashford agin' all London and Westminster! My lord an't a bad 'un at that, but he's a fool to you. Ah to be sure,—when I go out in state.'

'And have your carriage,' said the secretary; 'and your chaplain, eh? and all the rest of it?'

'You'll be the death of me,' cried Dennis, with another roar, 'you will. But what's in the wind now, Muster Gashford,' he asked hoarsely, 'Eh? Are we to be under orders to pull down one of them Popish chapels—or what?'

'Hush!' said the secretary, suffering the faintest smile to play upon his face. 'Hush! God bless me, Dennis! We associate, you know, for strictly peaceable and lawful purposes.'

'I know, bless you,' returned the man, thrusting his tongue into his cheek; 'I entered a' purpose, didn't I!'

'No doubt,' said Gashford, smiling as before. And when he said so, Dennis roared again, and smote his leg still harder, and falling into fits of laughter, wiped his eyes with the corner of his neckerchief, and cried, 'Muster Gashford agin' all England hollow!'

'Lord George and I were talking of you last night,' said Gashford, after a pause. 'He says you are a very earnest fellow.'

'So I am,' returned the hangman.

'And that you truly hate the Papists.'

'So I do,' and he confirmed it with a good round oath. 'Lookye here, Muster Gashford,' said the fellow, laying his hat and stick upon the floor, and slowly beating the palm of one hand with the fingers of the other; 'Observe. I'm a constitutional officer that works for my living, and does my work creditable. Do I, or do I not?'

'Unquestionably.'

'Very good. Stop a minute. My work, is sound, Protestant, constitutional, English work. Is it, or is it not?'

'No man alive can doubt it.'

'Nor dead neither. Parliament says this here—says Parliament, "If any man, woman, or child, does anything which goes again a certain number of our acts"—how many hanging laws may there be at this present time, Muster Gashford? Fifty?'

'I don't exactly know how many,' replied Gashford, leaning back in his chair and yawning; 'a great number though.'

'Well, say fifty. Parliament says, "If any man, woman, or child, does anything again any one of them fifty acts, that man, woman, or child, shall be worked off by Dennis." George the Third steps in when they number very strong at the end of a sessions, and says, "These are too many for Dennis. I'll have half for myself and Dennis shall have half for himself;" and sometimes he throws me in one over that I don't expect, as he did three year ago, when I got Mary Jones, a young woman of nineteen who come up to Tyburn with a infant at her breast, and was worked off for taking a piece of cloth off the counter of a shop in Ludgate Hill, and putting it down again when the shopman see her; and who had never done any harm before, and only tried to do that, in consequence of her husband having been pressed three weeks previous, and she being left to beg, with two young children—as was proved upon the trial. Ha ha!—Well! That being the law and the practice of England, is the glory of England, an't it, Muster Gashford?'

'Certainly,' said the secretary.

'And in times to come,' pursued the hangman, 'if our grandsons should think of their grandfathers' times, and find these things altered, they'll say, "Those were days indeed, and we've been going down hill ever since." Won't they, Muster Gashford?'

'I have no doubt they will,' said the secretary.

'Well then, look here,' said the hangman. 'If these Papists gets into power, and begins to boil and roast instead of hang, what becomes of my work! If they touch my work that's a part of so many laws, what becomes of the laws in general, what becomes of the religion, what becomes of the country!—Did you ever go to church, Muster Gashford?'

'Ever!' repeated the secretary with some indignation; 'of course.'

'Well,' said the ruffian, 'I've been once—twice, counting the time I was christened—and when I heard the Parliament prayed for, and thought how many new hanging laws they made every sessions, I considered that I was prayed for. Now mind, Muster Gashford,' said the fellow, taking up his stick and shaking it with a ferocious air, 'I mustn't have my Protestant work touched, nor this here Protestant state of things altered in no degree, if I can help it; I mustn't have no Papists interfering with me, unless they come to be worked off in course of law; I mustn't have no biling, no roasting, no frying—nothing but hanging. My lord may well call me an earnest fellow. In support of the great Protestant principle of having plenty of that, I'll,' and here he beat his club upon the ground, 'burn, fight, kill—do anything you bid me, so that it's bold and devilish—though the end of it was, that I got hung myself.—There, Muster Gashford!'

He appropriately followed up this frequent prostitution of a noble word to the vilest purposes, by pouring out in a kind of ecstasy at least a score of most tremendous oaths; then wiped his heated face upon his neckerchief, and cried, 'No Popery! I'm a religious man, by G—!'

Gashford had leant back in his chair, regarding him with eyes so sunken, and so shadowed by his heavy brows, that for aught the hangman saw of them, he might have been stone blind. He remained smiling in silence for a short time longer, and then said, slowly and distinctly:

'You are indeed an earnest fellow, Dennis—a most valuable fellow—the staunchest man I know of in our ranks. But you must calm yourself; you must be peaceful, lawful, mild as any lamb. I am sure you will be though.'

'Ay, ay, we shall see, Muster Gashford, we shall see. You won't have to complain of me,' returned the other, shaking his head.

'I am sure I shall not,' said the secretary in the same mild tone, and with the same emphasis. 'We shall have, we think, about next month, or May, when this Papist relief bill comes before the house, to convene our whole body for the first time. My lord has thoughts of our walking in procession through the streets—just as an innocent display of strength—and accompanying our petition down to the door of the House of Commons.'

'The sooner the better,' said Dennis, with another oath.

'We shall have to draw up in divisions, our numbers being so large; and, I believe I may venture to say,' resumed Gashford, affecting not to hear the interruption, 'though I have no direct instructions to that effect—that Lord George has thought of you as an excellent leader for one of these parties. I have no doubt you would be an admirable one.'

'Try me,' said the fellow, with an ugly wink.

'You would be cool, I know,' pursued the secretary, still smiling, and still managing his eyes so that he could watch him closely, and really not be seen in turn, 'obedient to orders, and perfectly temperate. You would lead your party into no danger, I am certain.'

'I'd lead them, Muster Gashford,'—the hangman was beginning in a reckless way, when Gashford started forward, laid his finger on his lips, and feigned to write, just as the door was opened by John Grueby.

'Oh!' said John, looking in; 'here's another Protestant.'

'Some other room, John,' cried Gashford in his blandest voice. 'I am engaged just now.'

But John had brought this new visitor to the door, and he walked in unbidden, as the words were uttered; giving to view the form and features, rough attire, and reckless air, of Hugh.

Chapter 38

The secretary put his hand before his eyes to shade them from the glare of the lamp, and for some moments looked at Hugh with a frowning brow, as if he remembered to have seen him lately, but could not call to mind where, or on what occasion. His uncertainty was very brief, for before Hugh had spoken a word, he said, as his countenance cleared up:

'Ay, ay, I recollect. It's quite right, John, you needn't wait. Don't go, Dennis.'

'Your servant, master,' said Hugh, as Grueby disappeared.

'Yours, friend,' returned the secretary in his smoothest manner. 'What brings YOU here? We left nothing behind us, I hope?'

Hugh gave a short laugh, and thrusting his hand into his breast, produced one of the handbills, soiled and dirty from lying out of doors all night, which he laid upon the secretary's desk after flattening it upon his knee, and smoothing out the wrinkles with his heavy palm.

'Nothing but that, master. It fell into good hands, you see.'

'What is this!' said Gashford, turning it over with an air of perfectly natural surprise. 'Where did you get it from, my good fellow; what does it mean? I don't understand this at all.'

A little disconcerted by this reception, Hugh looked from the secretary to Dennis, who had risen and was standing at the table too, observing the stranger by stealth, and seeming to derive the utmost satisfaction from his manners and appearance. Considering himself silently appealed to by this action, Mr Dennis shook his head thrice, as if to say of Gashford, 'No. He don't know anything at all about it. I know he don't. I'll take my oath he don't;' and hiding his profile from Hugh with one long end of his frowzy neckerchief, nodded and chuckled behind this screen in extreme approval of the secretary's proceedings.

'It tells the man that finds it, to come here, don't it?' asked Hugh. 'I'm no scholar, myself, but I showed it to a friend, and he said it did.'

'It certainly does,' said Gashford, opening his eyes to their utmost width; 'really this is the most remarkable circumstance I have ever known. How did you come by this piece of paper, my good friend?'

'Muster Gashford,' wheezed the hangman under his breath, 'agin' all Newgate!'

Whether Hugh heard him, or saw by his manner that he was being played upon, or perceived the secretary's drift of himself, he came in his blunt way to the point at once.

'Here!' he said, stretching out his hand and taking it back; 'never mind the bill, or what it says, or what it don't say. You don't know anything about it, master,—no more do I,—no more does he,' glancing at Dennis. 'None of us know what it means, or where it comes from: there's an end of that. Now I want to make one against the Catholics, I'm a No-Popery man, and ready to be sworn in. That's what I've come here for.'

'Put him down on the roll, Muster Gashford,' said Dennis approvingly. 'That's the way to go to work—right to the end at once, and no palaver.'

'What's the use of shooting wide of the mark, eh, old boy!' cried Hugh.

'My sentiments all over!' rejoined the hangman. 'This is the sort of chap for my division, Muster Gashford. Down with him, sir. Put him on the roll. I'd stand godfather to him, if he was to be christened in a bonfire, made of the ruins of the Bank of England.'

With these and other expressions of confidence of the like flattering kind, Mr Dennis gave him a hearty slap on the back, which Hugh was not slow to return.

'No Popery, brother!' cried the hangman.

'No Property, brother!' responded Hugh.

'Popery, Popery,' said the secretary with his usual mildness.

'It's all the same!' cried Dennis. 'It's all right. Down with him, Muster Gashford. Down with everybody, down with everything! Hurrah for the Protestant religion! That's the time of day, Muster Gashford!'

The secretary regarded them both with a very favourable expression of countenance, while they gave loose to these and other demonstrations of their patriotic purpose; and was about to make some remark aloud, when Dennis, stepping up to him, and shading his mouth with his hand, said, in a hoarse whisper, as he nudged him with his elbow:

'Don't split upon a constitutional officer's profession, Muster Gashford. There are popular prejudices, you know, and he mightn't like it. Wait till he comes to be more intimate with me. He's a fine-built chap, an't he?'

'A powerful fellow indeed!'

'Did you ever, Muster Gashford,' whispered Dennis, with a horrible kind of admiration, such as that with which a cannibal might regard his intimate friend, when hungry,—'did you ever—and here he drew still closer to his ear, and fenced his mouth with both his open bands—'see such a throat as his? Do but cast your eye upon it. There's a neck for stretching, Muster Gashford!'

The secretary assented to this proposition with the best grace he could assume—it is difficult to feign a true professional relish: which is eccentric sometimes—and after asking the candidate a few unimportant questions, proceeded to enrol him a member of the Great Protestant Association of England. If anything could have exceeded Mr Dennis's joy on the happy conclusion of this ceremony, it would have been the rapture with which he received the announcement that the new member could neither read nor write: those two arts being (as Mr Dennis swore) the greatest possible curse a civilised community could know, and militating more against the professional emoluments and usefulness of the great constitutional office he had the honour to hold, than any adverse circumstances that could present themselves to his imagination.

The enrolment being completed, and Hugh having been informed by Gashford, in his peculiar manner, of the peaceful and strictly lawful objects contemplated by the body to which he now belonged—during which recital Mr Dennis nudged him very much with his elbow, and made divers remarkable faces—the secretary gave them both to understand that he desired to be alone. Therefore they took their leaves without delay, and came out of the house together.

'Are you walking, brother?' said Dennis.

'Ay!' returned Hugh. 'Where you will.'

'That's social,' said his new friend. 'Which way shall we take? Shall we go and have a look at doors that we shall make a pretty good clattering at, before long—eh, brother?'

Hugh answering in the affirmative, they went slowly down to Westminster, where both houses of Parliament were then sitting. Mingling in the crowd of carriages, horses, servants, chairmen, link-boys, porters, and idlers of all kinds, they lounged about; while Hugh's new friend pointed out to him significantly the weak parts of the building, how easy it was to get into the lobby, and so to the very door of the House of Commons; and how plainly, when they marched down there in grand array, their roars and shouts would be heard by the members inside; with a great deal more to the same purpose, all of which Hugh received with manifest delight.

He told him, too, who some of the Lords and Commons were, by name, as they came in and out; whether they were friendly to the Papists or otherwise; and bade him take notice of their liveries and equipages, that he might be sure of them, in case of need. Sometimes he drew him close to the windows of a passing carriage, that he might see its master's face by the light of the lamps; and, both in respect of people and localities, he showed so much acquaintance with everything around, that it was plain he had often studied there before; as indeed, when they grew a little more confidential, he confessed he had.

Perhaps the most striking part of all this was, the number of people—never in groups of more than two or three together—who seemed to be skulking about the crowd for the same purpose. To the greater part of these, a slight nod or a look from Hugh's companion was sufficient greeting; but, now and then, some man would come and stand beside him in the throng, and, without turning his head or appearing to communicate with him, would say a word or two in a low voice, which he would answer in the same cautious manner. Then they would part, like strangers. Some of these men often reappeared again unexpectedly in the crowd close to Hugh, and, as they passed by, pressed his hand, or looked him sternly in the face; but they never spoke to him, nor he to them; no, not a word.

It was remarkable, too, that whenever they happened to stand where there was any press of people, and Hugh chanced to be looking downward, he was sure to see an arm stretched out—under his own perhaps, or perhaps across him—which thrust some paper into the hand or pocket of a bystander, and was so suddenly withdrawn that it was impossible to tell from whom it came; nor could he see in any face, on glancing quickly round, the least confusion or surprise. They often trod upon a paper like the one he carried in his breast, but his companion whispered him not to touch it or to take it up,—not even to look towards it,—so there they let them lie, and passed on.

When they had paraded the street and all the avenues of the building in this manner for near two hours, they turned away, and his friend asked him what he thought of what he had seen, and whether he was prepared for a good hot piece of work if it should come to that. The hotter the better,' said Hugh, 'I'm prepared for anything.'—'So am I,' said his friend, 'and so are many of us; and they shook hands upon it with a great oath, and with many terrible imprecations on the Papists.

As they were thirsty by this time, Dennis proposed that they should repair together to The Boot, where there was good company and strong liquor. Hugh yielding a ready assent, they bent their steps that way with no loss of time.

This Boot was a lone house of public entertainment, situated in the fields at the back of the Foundling Hospital; a very solitary spot at that period, and quite deserted after dark. The tavern stood at some distance from any high road, and was approachable only by a dark and narrow lane; so that Hugh was much surprised to find several people drinking there, and great merriment going on. He was still more surprised to find among them almost every face that had caught his attention in the crowd; but his companion having whispered him outside the door, that it was not considered good manners at The Boot to appear at all curious about the company, he kept his own counsel, and made no show of recognition.

Before putting his lips to the liquor which was brought for them, Dennis drank in a loud voice the health of Lord George Gordon, President of the Great Protestant Association; which toast Hugh pledged likewise, with corresponding enthusiasm. A fiddler who was present, and who appeared to act as the appointed minstrel of the company, forthwith struck up a Scotch reel; and that in tones so invigorating, that Hugh and his friend (who had both been drinking before) rose from their seats as by previous concert, and, to the great admiration of the assembled guests, performed an extemporaneous No-Popery Dance.

Chapter 39

The applause which the performance of Hugh and his new friend elicited from the company at The Boot, had not yet subsided, and the two dancers were still panting from their exertions, which had been of a rather extreme and violent character, when the party was reinforced by the arrival of some more guests, who, being a detachment of United Bulldogs, were received with very flattering marks of distinction and respect.

The leader of this small party—for, including himself, they were but three in number—was our old acquaintance, Mr Tappertit, who seemed, physically speaking, to have grown smaller with years (particularly as to his legs, which were stupendously little), but who, in a moral point of view, in personal dignity and self-esteem, had swelled into a giant. Nor was it by any means difficult for the most unobservant person to detect this state of feeling in the quondam 'prentice, for it not only proclaimed itself impressively and beyond mistake in his majestic walk and kindling eye, but found a striking means of revelation in his turned-up nose, which scouted all things of earth with deep disdain, and sought communion with its kindred skies.

Mr Tappertit, as chief or captain of the Bulldogs, was attended by his two lieutenants; one, the tall comrade of his younger life; the other, a 'Prentice Knight in days of yore—Mark Gilbert, bound in the olden time to Thomas Curzon of the Golden Fleece. These gentlemen, like himself, were now emancipated from their 'prentice thraldom, and served as journeymen; but they were, in humble emulation of his great example, bold and daring spirits, and aspired to a distinguished state in great political events. Hence their connection with the Protestant Association of England, sanctioned by the name of Lord George Gordon; and hence their present visit to The Boot.

'Gentlemen!' said Mr Tappertit, taking off his hat as a great general might in addressing his troops. 'Well met. My lord does me and you the honour to send his compliments per self.'

'You've seen my lord too, have you?' said Dennis. 'I see him this afternoon.'

'My duty called me to the Lobby when our shop shut up; and I saw him there, sir,' Mr Tappertit replied, as he and his lieutenants took their seats.

'How do YOU do?'

'Lively, master, lively,' said the fellow. 'Here's a new brother, regularly put down in black and white by Muster Gashford; a credit to the cause; one of the stick-at-nothing sort; one arter my own heart. D'ye see him? Has he got the looks of a man that'll do, do you think?' he cried, as he slapped Hugh on the back.

'Looks or no looks,' said Hugh, with a drunken flourish of his arm, 'I'm the man you want. I hate the Papists, every one of 'em. They hate me and I hate them. They do me all the harm they can, and I'll do them all the harm I can. Hurrah!'

'Was there ever,' said Dennis, looking round the room, when the echo of his boisterous voice bad died away; 'was there ever such a game boy! Why, I mean to say, brothers, that if Muster Gashford had gone a hundred mile and got together fifty men of the common run, they wouldn't have been worth this one.'

The greater part of the company implicitly subscribed to this opinion, and testified their faith in Hugh by nods and looks of great significance. Mr Tappertit sat and contemplated him for a long time in silence, as if he suspended his judgment; then drew a little nearer to him, and eyed him over more carefully; then went close up to him, and took him apart into a dark corner.

'I say,' he began, with a thoughtful brow, 'haven't I seen you before?'

'It's like you may,' said Hugh, in his careless way. 'I don't know; shouldn't wonder.'

'No, but it's very easily settled,' returned Sim. 'Look at me. Did you ever see ME before? You wouldn't be likely to forget it, you know, if you ever did. Look at me. Don't be afraid; I won't do you any harm. Take a good look—steady now.'

The encouraging way in which Mr Tappertit made this request, and coupled it with an assurance that he needn't be frightened, amused Hugh mightily—so much indeed, that he saw nothing at all of the small man before him, through closing his eyes in a fit of hearty laughter, which shook his great broad sides until they ached again.

'Come!' said Mr Tappertit, growing a little impatient under this disrespectful treatment. 'Do you know me, feller?'

'Not I,' cried Hugh. 'Ha ha ha! Not I! But I should like to.'

'And yet I'd have wagered a seven-shilling piece,' said Mr Tappertit, folding his arms, and confronting him with his legs wide apart and firmly planted on the ground, 'that you once were hostler at the Maypole.'

Hugh opened his eyes on hearing this, and looked at him in great surprise.

'—And so you were, too,' said Mr Tappertit, pushing him away with a condescending playfulness. 'When did MY eyes ever deceive—unless it was a young woman! Don't you know me now?'

'Why it an't—' Hugh faltered.

'An't it?' said Mr Tappertit. 'Are you sure of that? You remember G. Varden, don't you?'

Certainly Hugh did, and he remembered D. Varden too; but that he didn't tell him.

'You remember coming down there, before I was out of my time, to ask after a vagabond that had bolted off, and left his disconsolate father a prey to the bitterest emotions, and all the rest of it—don't you?' said Mr Tappertit.

'Of course I do!' cried Hugh. 'And I saw you there.'

'Saw me there!' said Mr Tappertit. 'Yes, I should think you did see me there. The place would be troubled to go on without me. Don't you remember my thinking you liked the vagabond, and on that account going to quarrel with you; and then finding you detested him worse than poison, going to drink with you? Don't you remember that?'

'To be sure!' cried Hugh.

'Well! and are you in the same mind now?' said Mr Tappertit.

'Yes!' roared Hugh.

'You speak like a man,' said Mr Tappertit, 'and I'll shake hands with you.' With these conciliatory expressions he suited the action to the word; and Hugh meeting his advances readily, they performed the ceremony with a show of great heartiness.

'I find,' said Mr Tappertit, looking round on the assembled guests, 'that brother What's-his-name and I are old acquaintance.—You never heard anything more of that rascal, I suppose, eh?'

'Not a syllable,' replied Hugh. 'I never want to. I don't believe I ever shall. He's dead long ago, I hope.'

'It's to be hoped, for the sake of mankind in general and the happiness of society, that he is,' said Mr Tappertit, rubbing his palm upon his legs, and looking at it between whiles. 'Is your other hand at all cleaner? Much the same. Well, I'll owe you another shake. We'll suppose it done, if you've no objection.'

Hugh laughed again, and with such thorough abandonment to his mad humour, that his limbs seemed dislocated, and his whole frame in danger of tumbling to pieces; but Mr Tappertit, so far from receiving this extreme merriment with any irritation, was pleased to regard it with the utmost favour, and even to join in it, so far as one of his gravity and station could, with any regard to that decency and decorum which men in high places are expected to maintain.

Mr Tappertit did not stop here, as many public characters might have done, but calling up his brace of lieutenants, introduced Hugh to them with high commendation; declaring him to be a man who, at such times as those in which they lived, could not be too much cherished. Further, he did him the honour to remark, that he would be an acquisition of which even the United Bulldogs might be proud; and finding, upon sounding him, that he was quite ready and willing to enter the society (for he was not at all particular, and would have leagued himself that night with anything, or anybody, for any purpose whatsoever), caused the necessary preliminaries to be gone into upon the spot. This tribute to his great merit delighted no man more than Mr Dennis, as he himself proclaimed with several rare and surprising oaths; and indeed it gave unmingled satisfaction to the whole assembly.

'Make anything you like of me!' cried Hugh, flourishing the can he had emptied more than once. 'Put me on any duty you please. I'm your man. I'll do it. Here's my captain—here's my leader. Ha ha ha! Let him give me the word of command, and I'll fight the whole Parliament House single-handed, or set a lighted torch to the King's Throne itself!' With that, he smote Mr Tappertit on the back, with such violence that his little body seemed to shrink into a mere nothing; and roared again until the very foundlings near at hand were startled in their beds.

In fact, a sense of something whimsical in their companionship seemed to have taken entire possession of his rude brain. The bare fact of being patronised by a great man whom he could have crushed with one hand, appeared in his eyes so eccentric and humorous, that a kind of ferocious merriment gained the mastery over him, and quite subdued his brutal nature. He roared and roared again; toasted Mr Tappertit a hundred times;

declared himself a Bulldog to the core; and vowed to be faithful to him to the last drop of blood in his veins.

All these compliments Mr Tappertit received as matters of course—flattering enough in their way, but entirely attributable to his vast superiority. His dignified self-possession only delighted Hugh the more; and in a word, this giant and dwarf struck up a friendship which bade fair to be of long continuance, as the one held it to be his right to command, and the other considered it an exquisite pleasantry to obey. Nor was Hugh by any means a passive follower, who scrupled to act without precise and definite orders; for when Mr Tappertit mounted on an empty cask which stood by way of rostrum in the room, and volunteered a speech upon the alarming crisis then at hand, he placed himself beside the orator, and though he grinned from ear to ear at every word he said, threw out such expressive hints to scoffers in the management of his cudgel, that those who were at first the most disposed to interrupt, became remarkably attentive, and were the loudest in their approbation.

It was not all noise and jest, however, at The Boot, nor were the whole party listeners to the speech. There were some men at the other end of the room (which was a long, low-roofed chamber) in earnest conversation all the time; and when any of this group went out, fresh people were sure to come in soon afterwards and sit down in their places, as though the others had relieved them on some watch or duty; which it was pretty clear they did, for these changes took place by the clock, at intervals of half an hour. These persons whispered very much among themselves, and kept aloof, and often looked round, as jealous of their speech being overheard; some two or three among them entered in books what seemed to be reports from the others; when they were not thus employed one of them would turn to the newspapers which were strewn upon the table, and from the St James's Chronicle, the Herald, Chronicle, or Public Advertiser, would read to the rest in a low voice some passage having reference to the topic in which they were all so deeply interested. But the great attraction was a pamphlet called The Thunderer, which espoused their own opinions, and was supposed at that time to emanate directly from the Association. This was always in request; and whether read aloud, to an eager knot of listeners, or by some solitary man, was certain to be followed by stormy talking and excited looks.

In the midst of all his merriment, and admiration of his captain, Hugh was made sensible by these and other tokens, of the presence of an air of mystery, akin to that which had so much impressed him out of doors. It was impossible to discard a sense that something serious was going on, and that under the noisy revel of the public-house, there lurked unseen and dangerous matter. Little affected by this, however, he was perfectly satisfied with his quarters and would have remained there till morning, but that his conductor rose soon after midnight, to go home; Mr Tappertit following his example, left him no excuse to stay. So they all three left the house together: roaring a No-Popery song until the fields resounded with the dismal noise.

Cheer up, captain!' cried Hugh, when they had roared themselves out of breath. 'Another stave!'

Mr Tappertit, nothing loath, began again; and so the three went staggering on, arm-in-arm, shouting like madmen, and defying the watch with great valour. Indeed this did not require any unusual bravery or boldness, as the watchmen of that time, being selected for the office on account of excessive age and extraordinary infirmity, had a custom of shutting themselves up tight in their boxes on the first symptoms of disturbance, and remaining there until they disappeared. In these proceedings, Mr Dennis, who had a gruff voice and lungs of considerable power, distinguished himself very much, and acquired great credit with his two companions.

'What a queer fellow you are!' said Mr Tappertit. 'You're so precious sly and close. Why don't you ever tell what trade you're of?'

'Answer the captain instantly,' cried Hugh, beating his hat down on his head; 'why don't you ever tell what trade you're of?'

'I'm of as gen-teel a calling, brother, as any man in England—as light a business as any gentleman could desire.'

'Was you 'prenticed to it?' asked Mr Tappertit.

'No. Natural genius,' said Mr Dennis. 'No 'prenticing. It come by natur'. Muster Gashford knows my calling. Look at that hand of mine—many and many a job that hand has done, with a neatness and dexterity, never known afore. When I look at that hand,' said Mr Dennis, shaking it in the air, 'and remember the helegant bits of work it has turned off, I feel quite molloncholy to think it should ever grow old and feeble. But sich is life!'

He heaved a deep sigh as he indulged in these reflections, and putting his fingers with an absent air on Hugh's throat, and particularly under his left ear, as if he were studying the anatomical development of that part of his frame, shook his head in a despondent manner and actually shed tears.

'You're a kind of artist, I suppose—eh!' said Mr Tappertit.

'Yes,' rejoined Dennis; 'yes—I may call myself a artist—a fancy workman—art improves natur'—that's my motto.'

'And what do you call this?' said Mr Tappertit taking his stick out of his hand.

'That's my portrait atop,' Dennis replied; 'd'ye think it's like?'

'Why—it's a little too handsome,' said Mr Tappertit. 'Who did it? You?'

'I!' repeated Dennis, gazing fondly on his image. 'I wish I had the talent. That was carved by a friend of mine, as is now no more. The very day afore he died, he cut that with his pocket-knife from memory! "I'll die game," says my friend, "and my last moments shall be dewoted to making Dennis's picter." That's it.'

'That was a queer fancy, wasn't it?' said Mr Tappertit.

'It WAS a queer fancy,' rejoined the other, breathing on his fictitious nose, and polishing it with the cuff of his coat, 'but he was a queer subject altogether—a kind of gipsy—one of the finest, stand-up men, you ever see. Ah! He told me some things that would startle you a bit, did that friend of mine, on the morning when he died.'

'You were with him at the time, were you?' said Mr Tappertit.

'Yes,' he answered with a curious look, 'I was there. Oh! yes certainly, I was there. He wouldn't have gone off half as comfortable without me. I had been with three or four of his family under the same circumstances. They were all fine fellows.'

'They must have been fond of you,' remarked Mr Tappertit, looking at him sideways.

'I don't know that they was exactly fond of me,' said Dennis, with a little hesitation, 'but they all had me near 'em when they departed. I come in for their wardrobes too. This very handkecher that you see round my neck, belonged to him that I've been speaking of—him as did that likeness.'

Mr Tappertit glanced at the article referred to, and appeared to think that the deceased's ideas of dress were of a peculiar and by no means an expensive kind. He made no remark upon the point, however, and suffered his mysterious companion to proceed without interruption.

'These smalls,' said Dennis, rubbing his legs; 'these very smalls—they belonged to a friend of mine that's left off sich incumbrances for ever: this coat too—I've often walked behind this coat, in the street, and wondered whether it would ever come to me: this pair of shoes have danced a hornpipe for another man, afore my eyes, full half-a-dozen times at least: and as to my hat,' he said, taking it off, and whirling it round upon his fist—'Lord! I've seen this hat go up Holborn on the box of a hackney-coach—ah, many and many a day!'

'You don't mean to say their old wearers are ALL dead, I hope?' said Mr Tappertit, falling a little distance from him as he spoke.

'Every one of 'em,' replied Dennis. 'Every man Jack!'

There was something so very ghastly in this circumstance, and it appeared to account, in such a very strange and dismal manner, for his faded dress—which, in this new aspect, seemed discoloured by the earth from graves—that Mr Tappertit abruptly found he was going another way, and, stopping short, bade him good night with the utmost heartiness. As they happened to be near the Old Bailey, and Mr Dennis knew there were turnkeys in the lodge with whom he could pass the night, and discuss professional subjects of common interest among them before a rousing fire, and over a social glass, he separated from his companions without any great regret, and warmly shaking hands with Hugh, and making an early appointment for their meeting at The Boot, left them to pursue their road.

'That's a strange sort of man,' said Mr Tappertit, watching the hackney-coachman's hat as it went bobbing down the street. 'I don't know what to make of him. Why can't he have his smalls made to order, or wear live clothes at any rate?'

'He's a lucky man, captain,' cried Hugh. 'I should like to have such friends as his.'

'I hope he don't get 'em to make their wills, and then knock 'em on the head,' said Mr Tappertit, musing. 'But come. The United B.'s expect me. On!—What's the matter?'

'I quite forgot,' said Hugh, who had started at the striking of a neighbouring clock. 'I have somebody to see to-night—I must turn back directly. The drinking and singing put it out of my head. It's well I remembered it!'

Mr Tappertit looked at him as though he were about to give utterance to some very majestic sentiments in reference to this act of desertion, but as it was clear, from Hugh's hasty manner, that the engagement was one of a pressing nature, he graciously forbore, and gave him his permission to depart immediately, which Hugh acknowledged with a roar of laughter.

'Good night, captain!' he cried. 'I am yours to the death, remember!'

'Farewell!' said Mr Tappertit, waving his hand. 'Be bold and vigilant!'

'No Popery, captain!' roared Hugh.

'England in blood first!' cried his desperate leader. Whereat Hugh cheered and laughed, and ran off like a greyhound.

'That man will prove a credit to my corps,' said Simon, turning thoughtfully upon his heel. 'And let me see. In an altered state of society—which must ensue if we break out and are victorious—when the locksmith's child is mine, Miggs must be got rid of somehow, or she'll poison the tea-kettle one evening when I'm out. He might marry Miggs, if he was drunk enough. It shall be done. I'll make a note of it.'

Chapter 40

Little thinking of the plan for his happy settlement in life which had suggested itself to the teeming brain of his provident commander, Hugh made no pause until Saint Dunstan's giants struck the hour above him, when he worked the handle of a pump which stood hard by, with great vigour, and thrusting his head under the spout, let the water gush upon him until a little stream ran down from every uncombed hair, and he was wet to the waist. Considerably refreshed by this ablution, both in mind and body, and almost sobered for the time, he dried himself as he best could; then crossed the road, and plied the knocker of the Middle Temple gate.

The night-porter looked through a small grating in the portal with a surly eye, and cried 'Halloa!' which greeting Hugh returned in kind, and bade him open quickly.

'We don't sell beer here,' cried the man; 'what else do you want?'

'To come in,' Hugh replied, with a kick at the door.

'Where to go?'

'Paper Buildings.'

'Whose chambers?'

'Sir John Chester's.' Each of which answers, he emphasised with another kick.

After a little growling on the other side, the gate was opened, and he passed in: undergoing a close inspection from the porter as he did so.

'YOU wanting Sir John, at this time of night!' said the man.

'Ay!' said Hugh. 'I! What of that?'

'Why, I must go with you and see that you do, for I don't believe it.'

'Come along then.'

Eyeing him with suspicious looks, the man, with key and lantern, walked on at his side, and attended him to Sir John Chester's door, at which Hugh gave one knock, that echoed through the dark staircase like a ghostly summons, and made the dull light tremble in the drowsy lamp.

'Do you think he wants me now?' said Hugh.

Before the man had time to answer, a footstep was heard within, a light appeared, and Sir John, in his dressing-gown and slippers, opened the door.

'I ask your pardon, Sir John,' said the porter, pulling off his hat. 'Here's a young man says he wants to speak to you. It's late for strangers. I thought it best to see that all was right.'

'Aha!' cried Sir John, raising his eyebrows. 'It's you, messenger, is it? Go in. Quite right, friend. I commend your prudence highly. Thank you. God bless you. Good night.'

To be commended, thanked, God-blessed, and bade good night by one who carried 'Sir' before his name, and wrote himself M.P. to boot, was something for a porter. He withdrew with much humility and reverence. Sir John followed his late visitor into the dressing-room, and sitting in his easy-chair before the fire, and moving it so that he could see him as he stood, hat in hand, beside the door, looked at him from head to foot.

The old face, calm and pleasant as ever; the complexion, quite juvenile in its bloom and clearness; the same smile; the wonted precision and elegance of dress; the white, well-ordered teeth; the delicate hands; the composed and quiet manner; everything as it used to be: no mark of age or passion, envy, hate, or discontent: all unruffled and serene, and quite delightful to behold.

He wrote himself M.P.—but how? Why, thus. It was a proud family—more proud, indeed, than wealthy. He had stood in danger of arrest; of bailiffs, and a jail—a vulgar jail, to which the common people with small incomes went. Gentlemen of ancient houses have no privilege of exemption from such cruel laws—unless they are of one great house, and then they have. A proud man of his stock and kindred had the means of sending him there. He offered—not indeed to pay his debts, but to let him sit for a close borough until his own son came of age, which, if he lived, would come to pass in twenty years. It was quite as good as an Insolvent Act, and infinitely more genteel. So Sir John Chester was a member of Parliament.

But how Sir John? Nothing so simple, or so easy. One touch with a sword of state, and the transformation was effected. John Chester, Esquire, M.P., attended court—went up with an address—headed a deputation. Such elegance of manner, so many graces of deportment, such powers of conversation, could never pass unnoticed. Mr was too common for such merit. A man so gentlemanly should have been—but Fortune is capricious—born a Duke: just as some dukes should have been born labourers. He caught the fancy of the king, knelt down a grub, and rose a butterfly. John Chester, Esquire, was knighted and became Sir John.

'I thought when you left me this evening, my esteemed acquaintance,' said Sir John after a pretty long silence, 'that you intended to return with all despatch?'

'So I did, master.'

'And so you have?' he retorted, glancing at his watch. 'Is that what you would say?'

Instead of replying, Hugh changed the leg on which he leant, shuffled his cap from one hand to the other, looked at the ground, the wall, the ceiling, and finally at Sir John himself; before whose pleasant face he lowered his eyes again, and fixed them on the floor.

'And how have you been employing yourself in the meanwhile?' quoth Sir John, lazily crossing his legs. 'Where have you been? what harm have you been doing?'

'No harm at all, master,' growled Hugh, with humility. 'I have only done as you ordered.'

'As I WHAT?' returned Sir John.

'Well then,' said Hugh uneasily, 'as you advised, or said I ought, or said I might, or said that you would do, if you was me. Don't be so hard upon me, master.'

Something like an expression of triumph in the perfect control he had established over this rough instrument appeared in the knight's face for an instant; but it vanished directly, as he said—paring his nails while speaking:

'When you say I ordered you, my good fellow, you imply that I directed you to do something for me—something I wanted done—something for my own ends and purposes—you see? Now I am sure I needn't enlarge upon the extreme absurdity of such an idea, however unintentional; so please—' and here he turned his eyes upon him—'to be more guarded. Will you?'

'I meant to give you no offence,' said Hugh. 'I don't know what to say. You catch me up so very short.'

'You will be caught up much shorter, my good friend—infinitely shorter—one of these days, depend upon it,' replied his patron calmly. 'By-the-bye, instead of wondering why you have been so long, my wonder should be why you came at all. Why did you?'

'You know, master,' said Hugh, 'that I couldn't read the bill I found, and that supposing it to be something particular from the way it was wrapped up, I brought it here.'

'And could you ask no one else to read it, Bruin?' said Sir John.

'No one that I could trust with secrets, master. Since Barnaby Rudge was lost sight of for good and all—and that's five years ago—I haven't talked with any one but you.'

'You have done me honour, I am sure.'

'I have come to and fro, master, all through that time, when there was anything to tell, because I knew that you'd be angry with me if I stayed away,' said Hugh, blurting the words out, after an embarrassed silence; 'and because I wished to please you if I could, and not to have you go against me. There. That's the true reason why I came to-night. You know that, master, I am sure.'

'You are a specious fellow,' returned Sir John, fixing his eyes upon him, 'and carry two faces under your hood, as well as the best. Didn't you give me in this room, this evening, any other reason; no dislike of anybody who has slighted you lately, on all occasions, abused you, treated you with rudeness; acted towards you, more as if you were a mongrel dog than a man like himself?'

'To be sure I did!' cried Hugh, his passion rising, as the other meant it should; 'and I say it all over now, again. I'd do anything to have some revenge on him—anything. And when you told me that he and all the Catholics would suffer from those who joined together under that handbill, I said I'd make one of 'em, if their master was the devil himself. I AM one of 'em. See whether I am as good as my word and turn out to be among the foremost, or no. I mayn't have much head, master, but I've head enough to remember those that use me ill. You shall see, and so shall he, and so shall hundreds more, how my spirit backs me when the time comes. My bark is nothing to my bite. Some that I know had better have a wild lion among 'em than me, when I am fairly loose—they had!'

The knight looked at him with a smile of far deeper meaning than ordinary; and pointing to the old cupboard, followed him with his eyes while he filled and drank a glass of liquor; and smiled when his back was turned, with deeper meaning yet.

'You are in a blustering mood, my friend,' he said, when Hugh confronted him again.

'Not I, master!' cried Hugh. 'I don't say half I mean. I can't. I haven't got the gift. There are talkers enough among us; I'll be one of the doers.'

'Oh! you have joined those fellows then?' said Sir John, with an air of most profound indifference.

'Yes. I went up to the house you told me of; and got put down upon the muster. There was another man there, named Dennis—'

'Dennis, eh!' cried Sir John, laughing. 'Ay, ay! a pleasant fellow, I believe?'

'A roaring dog, master—one after my own heart—hot upon the matter too—red hot.'

'So I have heard,' replied Sir John, carelessly. 'You don't happen to know his trade, do you?'

'He wouldn't say,' cried Hugh. 'He keeps it secret.'

'Ha ha!' laughed Sir John. 'A strange fancy—a weakness with some persons—you'll know it one day, I dare swear.'

'We're intimate already,' said Hugh.

'Quite natural! And have been drinking together, eh?' pursued Sir John. 'Did you say what place you went to in company, when you left Lord George's?'

Hugh had not said or thought of saying, but he told him; and this inquiry being followed by a long train of questions, he related all that had passed both in and out of doors, the kind of people he had seen, their numbers, state of feeling, mode of conversation, apparent expectations and intentions. His questioning was so artfully contrived, that he seemed even in his own eyes to volunteer all this information rather than to have it wrested from him; and he was brought to this state of feeling so naturally, that when Mr Chester yawned at length and declared himself quite wearied out, he made a rough kind of excuse for having talked so much.

'There—get you gone,' said Sir John, holding the door open in his hand. 'You have made a pretty evening's work. I told you not to do this. You may get into trouble. You'll have an opportunity of revenging yourself on your proud friend Haredale, though, and for that, you'd hazard anything, I suppose?'

'I would,' retorted Hugh, stopping in his passage out and looking back; 'but what do I risk! What do I stand a chance of losing, master? Friends, home? A fig for 'em all; I have none; they are nothing to me. Give me a good scuffle; let me pay off old scores in a bold riot where there are men to stand by me; and then use me as you like—it don't matter much to me what the end is!'

'What have you done with that paper?' said Sir John.

'I have it here, master.'

'Drop it again as you go along; it's as well not to keep such things about you.'

Hugh nodded, and touching his cap with an air of as much respect as he could summon up, departed.

Sir John, fastening the doors behind him, went back to his dressing-room, and sat down once again before the fire, at which he gazed for a long time, in earnest meditation.

'This happens fortunately,' he said, breaking into a smile, 'and promises well. Let me see. My relative and I, who are the most Protestant fellows in the world, give our worst wishes to the Roman Catholic cause; and to Saville, who introduces their bill, I have a personal objection besides; but as each of us has himself for the first article in his creed, we cannot commit ourselves by joining with a very extravagant madman, such as this Gordon most undoubtedly is. Now really, to foment his disturbances in secret, through the medium of such a very apt instrument as my savage friend here, may further our real ends; and to express at all becoming seasons, in moderate and polite terms, a disapprobation of his proceedings, though we agree with him in principle, will certainly be to gain a character for honesty and uprightness of purpose, which cannot fail to do us infinite service, and to raise us into some importance. Good! So much for public grounds. As to private considerations, I confess that if these vagabonds WOULD make some riotous demonstration (which does not appear impossible), and WOULD inflict some little chastisement on Haredale as a not inactive man among his sect, it would be extremely agreeable to my feelings, and would amuse me beyond measure. Good again! Perhaps better!'

When he came to this point, he took a pinch of snuff; then beginning slowly to undress, he resumed his meditations, by saying with a smile:

'I fear, I DO fear exceedingly, that my friend is following fast in the footsteps of his mother. His intimacy with Mr Dennis is very ominous. But I have no doubt he must have come to that end any way. If I lend him a helping hand, the only difference is, that he may, upon the whole, possibly drink a few gallons, or puncheons, or hogsheads, less in this life than he otherwise would. It's no business of mine. It's a matter of very small importance!'

So he took another pinch of snuff, and went to bed.

Chapter 41

From the workshop of the Golden Key, there issued forth a tinkling sound, so merry and good-humoured, that it suggested the idea of some one working blithely, and made quite pleasant music. No man who hammered on at a dull monotonous duty, could have brought such cheerful notes from steel and iron; none but a chirping, healthy, honest-hearted fellow, who made the best of everything, and felt kindly towards everybody, could have done it for an instant. He might have been a coppersmith, and still been musical. If he had sat in a jolting waggon, full of rods of iron, it seemed as if he would have brought some harmony out of it.

Tink, tink, tink—clear as a silver bell, and audible at every pause of the streets' harsher noises, as though it said, 'I don't care; nothing puts me out; I am resolved to be happy.' Women scolded, children squalled, heavy carts went rumbling by, horrible cries proceeded from the lungs of hawkers; still it struck in again, no higher, no lower, no louder, no softer; not thrusting itself on people's notice a bit the more for having been outdone by louder sounds—tink, tink, tink, tink, tink.

It was a perfect embodiment of the still small voice, free from all cold, hoarseness, huskiness, or unhealthiness of any kind; foot-passengers slackened their pace, and were disposed to linger near it; neighbours who had got up splenetic that morning, felt good-humour stealing on them as they heard it, and by degrees became quite sprightly; mothers danced their babies to its ringing; still the same magical tink, tink, tink, came gaily from the workshop of the Golden Key.

Who but the locksmith could have made such music! A gleam of sun shining through the unsashed window, and chequering the dark workshop with a broad patch of light, fell full upon him, as though attracted by his sunny heart. There he stood working at his anvil, his face all radiant with exercise and gladness, his sleeves turned up, his wig pushed off his shining forehead—the easiest, freest, happiest man in all the world. Beside him sat a sleek cat, purring and winking in the light, and falling every now and then into an idle doze, as from excess of comfort. Toby looked on from a tall bench hard by; one beaming smile, from his broad nut-brown face down to the slack-baked buckles in his shoes. The very locks that hung around had something jovial in their rust, and seemed like gouty gentlemen of hearty natures, disposed to joke on their infirmities. There was nothing surly or severe in the whole scene. It seemed impossible that any one of the innumerable keys could fit a churlish strong-box or a prison-door. Cellars of beer and wine, rooms where there were fires, books, gossip, and cheering laughter—these were their proper sphere of action. Places of distrust and cruelty, and restraint, they would have left quadruple-locked for ever.

Tink, tink, tink. The locksmith paused at last, and wiped his brow. The silence roused the cat, who, jumping softly down, crept to the door, and watched with tiger eyes a bird-cage in an opposite window. Gabriel lifted Toby to his mouth, and took a hearty draught.

Then, as he stood upright, with his head flung back, and his portly chest thrown out, you would have seen that Gabriel's lower man was clothed in military gear. Glancing at the wall beyond, there might have been espied, hanging on their several pegs, a cap and feather, broadsword, sash, and coat of scarlet; which any man learned in such matters would have known from their make and pattern to be the uniform of a serjeant in the Royal East London Volunteers.

As the locksmith put his mug down, empty, on the bench whence it had smiled on him before, he glanced at these articles with a laughing eye, and looking at them with his head a little on one side, as though he would get them all into a focus, said, leaning on his hammer:

'Time was, now, I remember, when I was like to run mad with the desire to wear a coat of that colour. If any one (except my father) had called me a fool for my pains, how I should have fired and fumed! But what a fool I must have been, sure-ly!'

'Ah!' sighed Mrs Varden, who had entered unobserved. 'A fool indeed. A man at your time of life, Varden, should know better now.'

'Why, what a ridiculous woman you are, Martha,' said the locksmith, turning round with a smile.

'Certainly,' replied Mrs V. with great demureness. 'Of course I am. I know that, Varden. Thank you.'

'I mean—' began the locksmith.

'Yes,' said his wife, 'I know what you mean. You speak quite plain enough to be understood, Varden. It's very kind of you to adapt yourself to my capacity, I am sure.'

'Tut, tut, Martha,' rejoined the locksmith; 'don't take offence at nothing. I mean, how strange it is of you to run down volunteering, when it's done to defend you and all the other women, and our own fireside and everybody else's, in case of need.'

'It's unchristian,' cried Mrs Varden, shaking her head.

'Unchristian!' said the locksmith. 'Why, what the devil—'

Mrs Varden looked at the ceiling, as in expectation that the consequence of this profanity would be the immediate descent of the four-post bedstead on the second floor, together with the best sitting-room on the first; but no visible judgment occurring, she heaved a deep sigh, and begged her husband, in a tone of resignation, to go on, and by all means to blaspheme as much as possible, because he knew she liked it.

The locksmith did for a moment seem disposed to gratify her, but he gave a great gulp, and mildly rejoined:

'I was going to say, what on earth do you call it unchristian for? Which would be most unchristian, Martha—to sit quietly down and let our houses be sacked by a foreign army, or to turn out like men and drive 'em off? Shouldn't I be a nice sort of a Christian, if I crept into a corner of my own chimney and looked on while a parcel of whiskered savages bore off Dolly—or you?'

When he said 'or you,' Mrs Varden, despite herself, relaxed into a smile. There was something complimentary in the idea. 'In such a state of things as that, indeed—' she simpered.

'As that!' repeated the locksmith. 'Well, that would be the state of things directly. Even Miggs would go. Some black tambourine-player, with a great turban on, would be bearing HER off, and, unless the tambourine-player was proof against kicking and scratching, it's my belief he'd have the worst of it. Ha ha ha! I'd forgive the tambourine-player. I wouldn't have him interfered with on any account, poor fellow.' And here the locksmith laughed again so heartily, that tears came into his eyes—much to Mrs Varden's indignation, who thought the capture of so sound a Protestant and estimable a private character as Miggs by a pagan negro, a circumstance too shocking and awful for contemplation.

The picture Gabriel had drawn, indeed, threatened serious consequences, and would indubitably have led to them, but luckily at that moment a light footstep crossed the threshold, and Dolly, running in, threw her arms round her old father's neck and hugged him tight.

'Here she is at last!' cried Gabriel. 'And how well you look, Doll, and how late you are, my darling!'

How well she looked? Well? Why, if he had exhausted every laudatory adjective in the dictionary, it wouldn't have been praise enough. When and where was there ever such a plump, roguish, comely, bright-eyed, enticing, bewitching, captivating, maddening little puss in all this world, as Dolly! What was the Dolly of five years ago, to the Dolly of that day! How many coachmakers, saddlers, cabinet-makers, and professors of other useful arts, had deserted their fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, and, most of all, their cousins, for the love of her! How many unknown gentlemen—supposed to be of mighty fortunes, if not titles—had waited round the corner after dark, and tempted Miggs the incorruptible, with golden guineas, to deliver offers of marriage folded up in love-letters! How many disconsolate fathers and substantial tradesmen had waited on the locksmith for the same purpose, with dismal tales of how their sons had lost their appetites, and taken to shut themselves up in dark bedrooms, and wandering in desolate suburbs with pale faces, and all because of Dolly Varden's loveliness and cruelty! How many young men, in all previous times of unprecedented steadiness, had turned suddenly wild and wicked for the same reason, and, in an ecstasy of unrequited love, taken to wrench off door-knockers, and invert the boxes of rheumatic watchmen! How had she recruited the king's service, both by sea and land, through rendering desperate his loving subjects between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five! How many young ladies had publicly professed, with tears in their eyes, that for their tastes she was much too short, too tall, too bold, too cold, too stout, too thin, too fair, too dark—too everything but handsome! How many old ladies, taking counsel together, had thanked Heaven their daughters were not like her, and had hoped she might come to no harm, and had thought she would come to no good, and had wondered what people saw in her, and had arrived at the conclusion that she was 'going off' in her looks, or had never come on in them, and that she was a thorough imposition and a popular mistake!

And yet here was this same Dolly Varden, so whimsical and hard to please that she was Dolly Varden still, all smiles and dimples and pleasant looks, and caring no more for the fifty or sixty young fellows who at that very moment were breaking their hearts to marry her, than if so many oysters had been crossed in love and opened afterwards.

Dolly hugged her father as has been already stated, and having hugged her mother also, accompanied both into the little parlour where the cloth was already laid for dinner, and where Miss Miggs—a trifle more rigid and bony than of yore—received her with a sort of hysterical gasp, intended for a smile. Into the hands of that young virgin, she delivered her bonnet and walking dress (all of a dreadful, artful, and designing kind), and then said with a laugh, which rivalled the locksmith's music, 'How glad I always am to be at home again!'

'And how glad we always are, Doll,' said her father, putting back the dark hair from her sparkling eyes, 'to have you at home. Give me a kiss.'

If there had been anybody of the male kind there to see her do it—but there was not—it was a mercy.

'I don't like your being at the Warren,' said the locksmith, 'I can't bear to have you out of my sight. And what is the news over yonder, Doll?'

'What news there is, I think you know already,' replied his daughter. 'I am sure you do though.'

'Ay?' cried the locksmith. 'What's that?'

'Come, come,' said Dolly, 'you know very well. I want you to tell me why Mr Haredale—oh, how gruff he is again, to be sure!—has been away from home for some days past, and why he is travelling about (we know he IS travelling, because of his letters) without telling his own niece why or wherefore.'

'Miss Emma doesn't want to know, I'll swear,' returned the locksmith.

'I don't know that,' said Dolly; 'but I do, at any rate. Do tell me. Why is he so secret, and what is this ghost story, which nobody is to tell Miss Emma, and which seems to be mixed up with his going away? Now I see you know by your colouring so.'

'What the story means, or is, or has to do with it, I know no more than you, my dear,' returned the locksmith, 'except that it's some foolish fear of little Solomon's—which has, indeed, no meaning in it, I suppose. As to Mr Haredale's journey, he goes, as I believe—'

'Yes,' said Dolly.

'As I believe,' resumed the locksmith, pinching her cheek, 'on business, Doll. What it may be, is quite another matter. Read Blue Beard, and don't be too curious, pet; it's no business of yours or mine, depend upon that; and here's dinner, which is much more to the purpose.'

Dolly might have remonstrated against this summary dismissal of the subject, notwithstanding the appearance of dinner, but at the mention of Blue Beard Mrs Varden interposed, protesting she could not find it in her conscience to sit tamely by, and hear her child recommended to peruse the adventures of a Turk and Mussulman—far less of a fabulous Turk, which she considered that potentate to be. She held that, in such stirring and tremendous times as those in which they lived, it would be much more to the purpose if Dolly became a regular subscriber to the Thunderer, where she would have an opportunity of reading Lord George Gordon's speeches word for word, which would be a greater comfort and solace to her, than a hundred and fifty Blue Beards ever could impart. She appealed in support of this proposition to Miss Miggs, then in waiting, who said that indeed the peace of mind she had derived from the perusal of that paper generally, but especially of one article of the very last week as ever was, entitled 'Great Britain drenched in gore,' exceeded all belief; the same composition, she added, had also wrought such a comforting effect on the mind of a married sister of hers, then resident at Golden Lion Court, number twenty-sivin, second bell-handle on the right-hand door-post, that, being in a delicate state of health, and in fact expecting an addition to her family, she had been seized with fits directly after its perusal, and had raved of the Inquisition ever since; to the great improvement of her husband and friends. Miss Miggs went on to say that she would recommend all those whose hearts were hardened to hear Lord George themselves, whom she commended first, in respect of his steady Protestantism, then of his oratory, then of his eyes, then of his nose, then of his legs, and lastly of his figure generally, which she looked upon as fit for any statue, prince, or angel, to which sentiment Mrs Varden fully subscribed.

Mrs Varden having cut in, looked at a box upon the mantelshelf, painted in imitation of a very red-brick dwelling-house, with a yellow roof; having at top a real chimney, down which voluntary subscribers dropped their silver, gold, or pence, into the parlour; and on the door the counterfeit presentment of a brass plate, whereon was legibly inscribed 'Protestant Association:'—and looking at it, said, that it was to her a source of poignant misery to think that Varden never had, of all his substance, dropped anything into that temple, save once in secret—as she afterwards discovered—two fragments of tobacco-pipe, which she hoped would not be put down to his last account. That Dolly, she was grieved to say, was no less backward in her contributions, better loving, as it seemed, to purchase ribbons and such gauds, than to encourage the great cause, then in such heavy tribulation; and that she did entreat her (her father she much feared could not be moved) not to despise, but imitate, the bright example of Miss Miggs, who flung her wages, as it were, into the very countenance of the Pope, and bruised his features with her quarter's money.

'Oh, mim,' said Miggs, 'don't relude to that. I had no intentions, mim, that nobody should know. Such sacrifices as I can make, are quite a widder's mite. It's all I have,' cried Miggs with a great burst of tears—for with her they never came on by degrees—'but it's made up to me in other ways; it's well made up.'

This was quite true, though not perhaps in the sense that Miggs intended. As she never failed to keep her self-denial full in Mrs Varden's view, it drew forth so many gifts of caps and gowns and other articles of dress, that upon the whole the red-brick house was perhaps the best investment for her small capital she could possibly have hit upon; returning her interest, at the rate of seven or eight per cent in money, and fifty at least in personal repute and credit.

'You needn't cry, Miggs,' said Mrs Varden, herself in tears; 'you needn't be ashamed of it, though your poor mistress IS on the same side.'

Miggs howled at this remark, in a peculiarly dismal way, and said she knowed that master hated her. That it was a dreadful thing to live in families and have dislikes, and not give satisfactions. That to make divisions was a thing she could not abear to think of, neither could her feelings let her do it. That if it was master's wishes as she and him should part, it was best they should part, and she hoped he might be the happier for it, and always wished him well, and that he might find somebody as would meet his dispositions. It would be a hard trial, she said, to part from such a missis, but she could meet any suffering when her conscience told her she was in the rights, and therefore she was willing even to go that lengths. She did not think, she added, that she could long survive the separations, but, as she was hated and looked upon unpleasant, perhaps her dying as soon as possible would be the best endings for all parties. With this affecting conclusion, Miss Miggs shed more tears, and sobbed abundantly.

'Can you bear this, Varden?' said his wife in a solemn voice, laying down her knife and fork.

'Why, not very well, my dear,' rejoined the locksmith, 'but I try to keep my temper.'

'Don't let there be words on my account, mim,' sobbed Miggs. 'It's much the best that we should part. I wouldn't stay—oh, gracious me!—and make dissensions, not for a annual gold mine, and found in tea and sugar.'

Lest the reader should be at any loss to discover the cause of Miss Miggs's deep emotion, it may be whispered apart that, happening to be listening, as her custom sometimes was, when Gabriel and his wife conversed together, she had heard the locksmith's joke relative to the foreign black who played the tambourine, and bursting with the spiteful feelings which the taunt awoke in her fair breast, exploded in the manner we have witnessed. Matters having now arrived at a crisis, the locksmith, as usual, and for the sake of peace and quietness, gave in.

'What are you crying for, girl?' he said. 'What's the matter with you? What are you talking about hatred for? I don't hate you; I don't hate anybody. Dry your eyes and make yourself agreeable, in Heaven's name, and let us all be happy while we can.'

The allied powers deeming it good generalship to consider this a sufficient apology on the part of the enemy, and confession of having been in the wrong, did dry their eyes and take it in good part. Miss Miggs observed that she bore no malice, no not to her greatest foe, whom she rather loved the more indeed, the greater persecution she sustained. Mrs Varden approved of this meek and forgiving spirit in high terms, and incidentally declared as a closing article of agreement, that Dolly should accompany her to the Clerkenwell branch of the association, that very night. This was an extraordinary instance of her great prudence and policy; having had this end in view from the first, and entertaining a secret misgiving that the locksmith (who was bold when Dolly was in question) would object, she had backed Miss Miggs up to this point, in order that she might have him at a disadvantage. The manoeuvre succeeded so well that Gabriel only made a wry face, and with the warning he had just had, fresh in his mind, did not dare to say one word.

The difference ended, therefore, in Miggs being presented with a gown by Mrs Varden and half-a-crown by Dolly, as if she had eminently distinguished herself in the paths of morality and goodness. Mrs V., according to custom, expressed her hope that Varden would take a lesson from what had passed and learn more generous conduct for the time to come; and the dinner being now cold and nobody's appetite very much improved by what had passed, they went on with it, as Mrs Varden said, 'like Christians.'

As there was to be a grand parade of the Royal East London Volunteers that afternoon, the locksmith did no more work; but sat down comfortably with his pipe in his mouth, and his arm round his pretty daughter's waist, looking lovingly on Mrs V., from time to time, and exhibiting from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, one smiling surface of good humour. And to be sure, when it was time to dress him in his regimentals, and Dolly, hanging about him in all kinds of graceful winning ways, helped to button and buckle and brush him up and get him into one of the tightest coats that ever was made by mortal tailor, he was the proudest father in all England.

'What a handy jade it is!' said the locksmith to Mrs Varden, who stood by with folded hands—rather proud of her husband too—while Miggs held his cap and sword at arm's length, as if mistrusting that the latter might run some one through the body of its own accord; 'but never marry a soldier, Doll, my dear.'

Dolly didn't ask why not, or say a word, indeed, but stooped her head down very low to tie his sash.

'I never wear this dress,' said honest Gabriel, 'but I think of poor Joe Willet. I loved Joe; he was always a favourite of mine. Poor Joe!—Dear heart, my girl, don't tie me in so tight.'

Dolly laughed—not like herself at all—the strangest little laugh that could be—and held her head down lower still.

'Poor Joe!' resumed the locksmith, muttering to himself; 'I always wish he had come to me. I might have made it up between them, if he had. Ah! old John made a great mistake in his way of acting by that lad—a great mistake.—Have you nearly tied that sash, my dear?'

What an ill-made sash it was! There it was, loose again and trailing on the ground. Dolly was obliged to kneel down, and recommence at the beginning.

'Never mind young Willet, Varden,' said his wife frowning; 'you might find some one more deserving to talk about, I think.'

Miss Miggs gave a great sniff to the same effect.

'Nay, Martha,' cried the locksmith, 'don't let us bear too hard upon him. If the lad is dead indeed, we'll deal kindly by his memory.'

'A runaway and a vagabond!' said Mrs Varden.

Miss Miggs expressed her concurrence as before.

'A runaway, my dear, but not a vagabond,' returned the locksmith in a gentle tone. 'He behaved himself well, did Joe—always—and was a handsome, manly fellow. Don't call him a vagabond, Martha.'

Mrs Varden coughed—and so did Miggs.

'He tried hard to gain your good opinion, Martha, I can tell you,' said the locksmith smiling, and stroking his chin. 'Ah! that he did. It seems but yesterday that he followed me out to the Maypole door one night, and begged me not to say how like a boy they used him—say here, at home, he meant, though at the time, I recollect, I didn't understand. "And how's Miss Dolly, sir?" says Joe,' pursued the locksmith, musing sorrowfully, 'Ah! Poor Joe!'

'Well, I declare,' cried Miggs. 'Oh! Goodness gracious me!'

'What's the matter now?' said Gabriel, turning sharply to her, 'Why, if here an't Miss Dolly,' said the handmaid, stooping down to look into her face, 'a-giving way to floods of tears. Oh mim! oh sir. Raly it's give me such a turn,' cried the susceptible damsel, pressing her hand upon her side to quell the palpitation of her heart, 'that you might knock me down with a feather.'

The locksmith, after glancing at Miss Miggs as if he could have wished to have a feather brought straightway, looked on with a broad stare while Dolly hurried away, followed by that sympathising young woman: then turning to his wife, stammered out, 'Is Dolly ill? Have I done anything? Is it my fault?'

'Your fault!' cried Mrs V. reproachfully. 'There—you had better make haste out.'

'What have I done?' said poor Gabriel. 'It was agreed that Mr Edward's name was never to be mentioned, and I have not spoken of him, have I?'

Mrs Varden merely replied that she had no patience with him, and bounced off after the other two. The unfortunate locksmith wound his sash about him, girded on his sword, put on his cap, and walked out.

'I am not much of a dab at my exercise,' he said under his breath, 'but I shall get into fewer scrapes at that work than at this. Every man came into the world for something; my department seems to be to make every woman cry without meaning it. It's rather hard!'

But he forgot it before he reached the end of the street, and went on with a shining face, nodding to the neighbours, and showering about his friendly greetings like mild spring rain.

Chapter 42

The Royal East London Volunteers made a brilliant sight that day: formed into lines, squares, circles, triangles, and what not, to the beating of drums, and the streaming of flags; and performed a vast number of complex evolutions, in all of which Serjeant Varden bore a conspicuous share. Having displayed their military prowess to the utmost in these warlike shows, they marched in glittering order to the Chelsea Bun House, and regaled in the adjacent taverns until dark. Then at sound of drum they fell in again, and returned amidst the shouting of His Majesty's lieges to the place from whence they came.

The homeward march being somewhat tardy,—owing to the unsoldierlike behaviour of certain corporals, who, being gentlemen of sedentary pursuits in private life and excitable out of doors, broke several windows with their bayonets, and rendered it imperative on the commanding officer to deliver them over to a strong guard, with whom they fought at intervals as they came along,—it was nine o'clock when the locksmith reached home. A hackney-coach was waiting near his door; and as he passed it, Mr Haredale looked from the window and called him by his name.

'The sight of you is good for sore eyes, sir,' said the locksmith, stepping up to him. 'I wish you had walked in though, rather than waited here.'

'There is nobody at home, I find,' Mr Haredale answered; 'besides, I desired to be as private as I could.'

'Humph!' muttered the locksmith, looking round at his house. 'Gone with Simon Tappertit to that precious Branch, no doubt.'

Mr Haredale invited him to come into the coach, and, if he were not tired or anxious to go home, to ride with him a little way that they might have some talk together. Gabriel cheerfully complied, and the coachman mounting his box drove off.

'Varden,' said Mr Haredale, after a minute's pause, 'you will be amazed to hear what errand I am on; it will seem a very strange one.'

'I have no doubt it's a reasonable one, sir, and has a meaning in it,' replied the locksmith; 'or it would not be yours at all. Have you just come back to town, sir?'

'But half an hour ago.'

'Bringing no news of Barnaby, or his mother?' said the locksmith dubiously. 'Ah! you needn't shake your head, sir. It was a wild-goose chase. I feared that, from the first. You exhausted all reasonable means of discovery when they went away. To begin again after so long a time has passed is hopeless, sir—quite hopeless.'

'Why, where are they?' he returned impatiently. 'Where can they be? Above ground?'

'God knows,' rejoined the locksmith, 'many that I knew above it five years ago, have their beds under the grass now. And the world is a wide place. It's a hopeless attempt, sir, believe me. We must leave the discovery of this mystery, like all others, to time, and accident, and Heaven's pleasure.'

'Varden, my good fellow,' said Mr Haredale, 'I have a deeper meaning in my present anxiety to find them out, than you can fathom. It is not a mere whim; it is not the casual revival of my old wishes and desires; but an earnest, solemn purpose. My thoughts and dreams all tend to it, and fix it in my mind. I have no rest by day or night; I have no peace or quiet; I am haunted.'

His voice was so altered from its usual tones, and his manner bespoke so much emotion, that Gabriel, in his wonder, could only sit and look towards him in the darkness, and fancy the expression of his face.

'Do not ask me,' continued Mr Haredale, 'to explain myself. If I were to do so, you would think me the victim of some hideous fancy. It is enough that this is so, and that I cannot—no, I can not—lie quietly in my bed, without doing what will seem to you incomprehensible.'

'Since when, sir,' said the locksmith after a pause, 'has this uneasy feeling been upon you?'

Mr Haredale hesitated for some moments, and then replied: 'Since the night of the storm. In short, since the last nineteenth of March.'

As though he feared that Varden might express surprise, or reason with him, he hastily went on:

'You will think, I know, I labour under some delusion. Perhaps I do. But it is not a morbid one; it is a wholesome action of the mind, reasoning on actual occurrences. You know the furniture remains in Mrs Rudge's house, and that it has been shut up, by my orders, since she went away, save once a-week or so, when an old neighbour visits it to scare away the rats. I am on my way there now.'

'For what purpose?' asked the locksmith.

'To pass the night there,' he replied; 'and not to-night alone, but many nights. This is a secret which I trust to you in case of any unexpected emergency. You will not come, unless in case of strong necessity, to me; from dusk to broad day I shall be there. Emma, your daughter, and the rest, suppose me out of London, as I have been until within this hour. Do not undeceive them. This is the errand I am bound upon. I know I may confide it to you, and I rely upon your questioning me no more at this time.'

With that, as if to change the theme, he led the astounded locksmith back to the night of the Maypole highwayman, to the robbery of Edward Chester, to the reappearance of the man at Mrs Rudge's house, and to all the strange circumstances which afterwards occurred. He even asked him carelessly about the man's height, his face, his figure, whether he was like any one he had ever seen—like Hugh, for instance, or any man he had known at any time—and put many questions of that sort, which the locksmith, considering them as mere devices to engage his attention and prevent his expressing the astonishment he felt, answered pretty much at random.

At length, they arrived at the corner of the street in which the house stood, where Mr Haredale, alighting, dismissed the coach. 'If you desire to see me safely lodged,' he said, turning to the locksmith with a gloomy smile, 'you can.'

Gabriel, to whom all former marvels had been nothing in comparison with this, followed him along the narrow pavement in silence. When they reached the door, Mr Haredale softly opened it with a key he had about him, and closing it when Varden entered, they were left in thorough darkness.

They groped their way into the ground-floor room. Here Mr Haredale struck a light, and kindled a pocket taper he had brought with him for the purpose. It was then, when the flame was full upon him, that the locksmith saw for the first time how haggard, pale, and changed he looked; how worn and thin he was; how perfectly his whole appearance coincided with all that he had said so strangely as they rode along. It was not an unnatural impulse in Gabriel, after what he had heard, to note curiously the expression of his eyes. It was perfectly collected and rational;—so much so, indeed, that he felt ashamed of his momentary suspicion, and drooped his own when Mr

Haredale looked towards him, as if he feared they would betray his thoughts.

'Will you walk through the house?' said Mr Haredale, with a glance towards the window, the crazy shutters of which were closed and fastened. 'Speak low.'

There was a kind of awe about the place, which would have rendered it difficult to speak in any other manner. Gabriel whispered 'Yes,' and followed him upstairs.

Everything was just as they had seen it last. There was a sense of closeness from the exclusion of fresh air, and a gloom and heaviness around, as though long imprisonment had made the very silence sad. The homely hangings of the beds and windows had begun to droop; the dust lay thick upon their dwindling folds; and damps had made their way through ceiling, wall, and floor. The boards creaked beneath their tread, as if resenting the unaccustomed intrusion; nimble spiders, paralysed by the taper's glare, checked the motion of their hundred legs upon the wall, or dropped like lifeless things upon the ground; the death-watch ticked; and the scampering feet of rats and mice rattled behind the wainscot.

As they looked about them on the decaying furniture, it was strange to find how vividly it presented those to whom it had belonged, and with whom it was once familiar. Grip seemed to perch again upon his high-backed chair; Barnaby to crouch in his old favourite corner by the fire; the mother to resume her usual seat, and watch him as of old. Even when they could separate these objects from the phantoms of the mind which they invoked, the latter only glided out of sight, but lingered near them still; for then they seemed to lurk in closets and behind the doors, ready to start out and suddenly accost them in well-remembered tones.

They went downstairs, and again into the room they had just now left. Mr Haredale unbuckled his sword and laid it on the table, with a pair of pocket pistols; then told the locksmith he would light him to the door.

'But this is a dull place, sir,' said Gabriel lingering; 'may no one share your watch?'

He shook his head, and so plainly evinced his wish to be alone, that Gabriel could say no more. In another moment the locksmith was standing in the street, whence he could see that the light once more travelled upstairs, and soon returning to the room below, shone brightly through the chinks of the shutters.

If ever man were sorely puzzled and perplexed, the locksmith was, that night. Even when snugly seated by his own fireside, with Mrs Varden opposite in a nightcap and night-jacket, and Dolly beside him (in a most distracting dishabille) curling her hair, and smiling as if she had never cried in all her life and never could—even then, with Toby at his elbow and his pipe in his mouth, and Miggs (but that perhaps was not much) falling asleep in the background, he could not quite discard his wonder and uneasiness. So in his dreams—still there was Mr Haredale, haggard and careworn, listening in the solitary house to every sound that stirred, with the taper shining through the chinks until the day should turn it pale and end his lonely watching.

Chapter 43

Next morning brought no satisfaction to the locksmith's thoughts, nor next day, nor the next, nor many others. Often after nightfall he entered the street, and turned his eyes towards the well-known house; and as surely as he did so, there was the solitary light, still gleaming through the crevices of the window-shutter, while all within was motionless, noiseless, cheerless, as a grave. Unwilling to hazard Mr Haredale's favour by disobeying his strict injunction, he never ventured to knock at the door or to make his presence known in any way. But whenever strong interest and curiosity attracted him to the spot—which was not seldom—the light was always there.

If he could have known what passed within, the knowledge would have yielded him no clue to this mysterious vigil. At twilight, Mr Haredale shut himself up, and at daybreak he came forth. He never missed a night, always came and went alone, and never varied his proceedings in the least degree.

The manner of his watch was this. At dusk, he entered the house in the same way as when the locksmith bore him company, kindled a light, went through the rooms, and narrowly examined them. That done, he returned to the chamber on the ground-floor, and laying his sword and pistols on the table, sat by it until morning.

He usually had a book with him, and often tried to read, but never fixed his eyes or thoughts upon it for five minutes together. The slightest noise without doors, caught his ear; a step upon the pavement seemed to make his heart leap.

He was not without some refreshment during the long lonely hours; generally carrying in his pocket a sandwich of bread and meat, and a small flask of wine. The latter diluted with large quantities of water, he drank in a heated, feverish way, as though his throat were dried; but he scarcely ever broke his fast, by so much as a crumb of bread.

If this voluntary sacrifice of sleep and comfort had its origin, as the locksmith on consideration was disposed to think, in any superstitious expectation of the fulfilment of a dream or vision connected with the event on which he had brooded for so many years, and if he waited for some ghostly visitor who walked abroad when men lay sleeping in their beds, he showed no trace of fear or wavering. His stern features expressed inflexible resolution; his brows were puckered, and his lips compressed, with deep and settled purpose; and when he started at a noise and listened, it was not with the start of fear but hope, and catching up his sword as though the hour had come at last, he would clutch it in his tight-clenched hand, and listen with sparkling eyes and eager looks, until it died away.

These disappointments were numerous, for they ensued on almost every sound, but his constancy was not shaken. Still, every night he was at his post, the same stern, sleepless, sentinel; and still night passed, and morning dawned, and he must watch again.

This went on for weeks; he had taken a lodging at Vauxhall in which to pass the day and rest himself; and from this place, when the tide served, he usually came to London Bridge from Westminster by water, in order that he might avoid the busy streets.

One evening, shortly before twilight, he came his accustomed road upon the river's bank, intending to pass through Westminster Hall into Palace Yard, and there take boat to London Bridge as usual. There was a pretty large concourse of people assembled round the Houses of Parliament, looking at the members as they entered and departed, and giving vent to rather noisy demonstrations of approval or dislike, according to their known opinions. As he made his way among the throng, he heard once or twice the No-Popery cry, which was then becoming pretty familiar to the ears of most men; but holding it in very slight regard, and observing that the idlers were of the lowest grade, he neither thought nor cared about it, but made his way along, with perfect indifference.

There were many little knots and groups of persons in Westminster Hall: some few looking upward at its noble ceiling, and at the rays of evening light, tinted by the setting sun, which streamed in aslant through its small windows, and growing dimmer by degrees, were quenched in the gathering gloom below; some, noisy passengers, mechanics going home from work, and otherwise, who hurried quickly through, waking the echoes with their voices, and soon darkening the small door in the distance, as they passed into the street beyond; some, in busy conference together on political or private matters, pacing slowly up and down with eyes that sought the ground, and seeming, by their attitudes, to listen earnestly from head to foot. Here, a dozen squabbling urchins made a very Babel in the air; there, a solitary man, half clerk, half mendicant, paced up and down with hungry dejection in his look and gait; at his elbow passed an errand-lad, swinging his basket round and round, and with his shrill whistle riving the very timbers of the roof; while a more observant schoolboy, half-way through, pocketed his ball, and eyed the distant beadle as he came looming on. It was that time of evening when, if you shut your eyes and open them again, the darkness of an hour appears to have gathered in a second. The smooth-worn pavement, dusty with footsteps, still called upon the lofty walls to reiterate the shuffle and the tread of feet unceasingly, save when the closing of some heavy door resounded through the building like a clap of thunder, and drowned all other noises in its rolling sound.

Mr Haredale, glancing only at such of these groups as he passed nearest to, and then in a manner betokening that his thoughts were elsewhere, had nearly traversed the Hall, when two persons before him caught his attention. One of these, a gentleman in elegant attire, carried in his hand a cane, which he twirled in a jaunty manner as he loitered on; the other, an obsequious, crouching, fawning figure, listened to what he said—at times throwing in a humble word himself—and, with his shoulders shrugged up to his ears, rubbed his hands submissively, or answered at intervals by an inclination of the head, half-way between a nod of acquiescence, and a bow of most profound respect.

In the abstract there was nothing very remarkable in this pair, for servility waiting on a handsome suit of clothes and a cane—not to speak of gold and silver sticks, or wands of office—is common enough. But there was that about the well-dressed man, yes, and about the other likewise, which struck Mr Haredale with no pleasant feeling. He hesitated, stopped, and would have stepped aside and turned out of his path, but at the moment, the other two faced about quickly, and stumbled upon him before he could avoid them.

The gentleman with the cane lifted his hat and had begun to tender an apology, which Mr Haredale had begun as hastily to acknowledge and walk away, when he stopped short and cried, 'Haredale! Gad bless me, this is strange indeed!'

'It is,' he returned impatiently; 'yes—a—'

'My dear friend,' cried the other, detaining him, 'why such great speed? One minute, Haredale, for the sake of old acquaintance.'

'I am in haste,' he said. 'Neither of us has sought this meeting. Let it be a brief one. Good night!'

'Fie, fie!' replied Sir John (for it was he), 'how very churlish! We were speaking of you. Your name was on my lips—perhaps you heard me mention it? No? I am sorry for that. I am really sorry.—You know our friend here, Haredale? This is really a most remarkable meeting!'

The friend, plainly very ill at ease, had made bold to press Sir John's arm, and to give him other significant hints that he was desirous of avoiding this introduction. As it did not suit Sir John's purpose, however, that it should be evaded, he appeared quite unconscious of these silent remonstrances, and inclined his hand towards him, as he spoke, to call attention to him more particularly.

The friend, therefore, had nothing for it, but to muster up the pleasantest smile he could, and to make a conciliatory bow, as Mr Haredale turned his eyes upon him. Seeing that he was recognised, he put out his hand in an awkward and embarrassed manner, which was not mended by its contemptuous rejection.

'Mr Gashford!' said Haredale, coldly. 'It is as I have heard then. You have left the darkness for the light, sir, and hate those whose opinions you formerly held, with all the bitterness of a renegade. You are an honour, sir, to any cause. I wish the one you espouse at present, much joy of the acquisition it has made.'

The secretary rubbed his hands and bowed, as though he would disarm his adversary by humbling himself before him. Sir John Chester again exclaimed, with an air of great gaiety, 'Now, really, this is a most remarkable meeting!' and took a pinch of snuff with his usual self-possession.

'Mr Haredale,' said Gashford, stealthily raising his eyes, and letting them drop again when they met the other's steady gaze, is too conscientious, too honourable, too manly, I am sure, to attach unworthy motives to an honest change of opinions, even though it implies a doubt of those he holds himself. Mr Haredale is too just, too generous, too clear-sighted in his moral vision, to—'

'Yes, sir?' he rejoined with a sarcastic smile, finding the secretary stopped. 'You were saying'—

Gashford meekly shrugged his shoulders, and looking on the ground again, was silent.

'No, but let us really,' interposed Sir John at this juncture, 'let us really, for a moment, contemplate the very remarkable character of this meeting.

Haredale, my dear friend, pardon me if I think you are not sufficiently impressed with its singularity. Here we stand, by no previous appointment or arrangement, three old schoolfellows, in Westminster Hall; three old boarders in a remarkably dull and shady seminary at Saint Omer's, where you, being Catholics and of necessity educated out of England, were brought up; and where I, being a promising young Protestant at that time, was sent to learn the French tongue from a native of Paris!'

'Add to the singularity, Sir John,' said Mr Haredale, 'that some of you Protestants of promise are at this moment leagued in yonder building, to prevent our having the surpassing and unheard-of privilege of teaching our children to read and write—here—in this land, where thousands of us enter your service every year, and to preserve the freedom of which, we die in bloody battles abroad, in heaps: and that others of you, to the number of some thousands as I learn, are led on to look on all men of my creed as wolves and beasts of prey, by this man Gashford. Add to it besides the bare fact that this man lives in society, walks the streets in broad day—I was about to say, holds up his head, but that he does not—and it will be strange, and very strange, I grant you.'

'Oh! you are hard upon our friend,' replied Sir John, with an engaging smile. 'You are really very hard upon our friend!'

'Let him go on, Sir John,' said Gashford, fumbling with his gloves. 'Let him go on. I can make allowances, Sir John. I am honoured with your good opinion, and I can dispense with Mr Haredale's. Mr Haredale is a sufferer from the penal laws, and I can't expect his favour.'

'You have so much of my favour, sir,' retorted Mr Haredale, with a bitter glance at the third party in their conversation, 'that I am glad to see you in such good company. You are the essence of your great Association, in yourselves.'

'Now, there you mistake,' said Sir John, in his most benignant way. 'There—which is a most remarkable circumstance for a man of your punctuality and exactness, Haredale—you fall into error. I don't belong to the body; I have an immense respect for its members, but I don't belong to it; although I am, it is certainly true, the conscientious opponent of your being relieved. I feel it my duty to be so; it is a most unfortunate necessity; and cost me a bitter struggle.—Will you try this box? If you don't object to a trifling infusion of a very chaste scent, you'll find its flavour exquisite.'

'I ask your pardon, Sir John,' said Mr Haredale, declining the proffer with a motion of his hand, 'for having ranked you among the humble instruments who are obvious and in all men's sight. I should have done more justice to your genius. Men of your capacity plot in secrecy and safety, and leave exposed posts to the duller wits.'

'Don't apologise, for the world,' replied Sir John sweetly; 'old friends like you and I, may be allowed some freedoms, or the deuce is in it.'

Gashford, who had been very restless all this time, but had not once looked up, now turned to Sir John, and ventured to mutter something to the effect that he must go, or my lord would perhaps be waiting.

'Don't distress yourself, good sir,' said Mr Haredale, 'I'll take my leave, and put you at your ease—' which he was about to do without ceremony, when he was stayed by a buzz and murmur at the upper end of the hall, and, looking in that direction, saw Lord George Gordon coming in, with a crowd of people round him.

There was a lurking look of triumph, though very differently expressed, in the faces of his two companions, which made it a natural impulse on Mr Haredale's part not to give way before this leader, but to stand there while he passed. He drew himself up and, clasping his hands behind him, looked on with a proud and scornful aspect, while Lord George slowly advanced (for the press was great about him) towards the spot where they were standing.

He had left the House of Commons but that moment, and had come straight down into the Hall, bringing with him, as his custom was, intelligence of what had been said that night in reference to the Papists, and what petitions had been presented in their favour, and who had supported them, and when the bill was to be brought in, and when it would be advisable to present their own Great Protestant petition. All this he told the persons about him in a loud voice, and with great abundance of ungainly gesture. Those who were nearest him made comments to each other, and vented threats and murmurings; those who were outside the crowd cried, 'Silence,' and Stand back,' or closed in upon the rest, endeavouring to make a forcible exchange of places: and so they came driving on in a very disorderly and irregular way, as it is the manner of a crowd to do.

When they were very near to where the secretary, Sir John, and Mr Haredale stood, Lord George turned round and, making a few remarks of a sufficiently violent and incoherent kind, concluded with the usual sentiment, and called for three cheers to back it. While these were in the act of being given with great energy, he extricated himself from the press, and stepped up to Gashford's side. Both he and Sir John being well known to the populace, they fell back a little, and left the four standing together.

'Mr Haredale, Lord George,' said Sir John Chester, seeing that the nobleman regarded him with an inquisitive look. 'A Catholic gentleman unfortunately—most unhappily a Catholic—but an esteemed acquaintance of mine, and once of Mr Gashford's. My dear Haredale, this is Lord George Gordon.'

'I should have known that, had I been ignorant of his lordship's person,' said Mr Haredale. 'I hope there is but one gentleman in England who, addressing an ignorant and excited throng, would speak of a large body of his fellow-subjects in such injurious language as I heard this moment. For shame, my lord, for shame!'

'I cannot talk to you, sir,' replied Lord George in a loud voice, and waving his hand in a disturbed and agitated manner; 'we have nothing in common.'

'We have much in common—many things—all that the Almighty gave us,' said Mr Haredale; 'and common charity, not to say common sense and common decency, should teach you to refrain from these proceedings. If every one of those men had arms in their hands at this moment, as they have them in their heads, I would not leave this place without telling you that you disgrace your station.'

'I don't hear you, sir,' he replied in the same manner as before; 'I can't hear you. It is indifferent to me what you say. Don't retort, Gashford,' for the secretary had made a show of wishing to do so; 'I can hold no communion with the worshippers of idols.'

As he said this, he glanced at Sir John, who lifted his hands and eyebrows, as if deploring the intemperate conduct of Mr Haredale, and smiled in admiration of the crowd and of their leader.

'HE retort!' cried Haredale. 'Look you here, my lord. Do you know this man?'

Lord George replied by laying his hand upon the shoulder of his cringing secretary, and viewing him with a smile of confidence.

'This man,' said Mr Haredale, eyeing him from top to toe, 'who in his boyhood was a thief, and has been from that time to this, a servile, false, and truckling knave: this man, who has crawled and crept through life, wounding the hands he licked, and biting those he fawned upon: this sycophant, who never knew what honour, truth, or courage meant; who robbed his benefactor's daughter of her virtue, and married her to break her heart, and did it, with stripes and cruelty: this creature, who has whined at kitchen windows for the broken food, and begged for halfpence at our chapel doors: this apostle of the faith, whose tender conscience cannot bear the altars where his vicious life was publicly denounced—Do you know this man?'

'Oh, really—you are very, very hard upon our friend!' exclaimed Sir John.

'Let Mr Haredale go on,' said Gashford, upon whose unwholesome face the perspiration had broken out during this speech, in blotches of wet; 'I don't mind him, Sir John; it's quite as indifferent to me what he says, as it is to my lord. If he reviles my lord, as you have heard, Sir John, how can I hope to escape?'

'Is it not enough, my lord,' Mr Haredale continued, 'that I, as good a gentleman as you, must hold my property, such as it is, by a trick at which the state connives because of these hard laws; and that we may not teach our youth in schools the common principles of right and wrong; but must we be denounced and ridden by such men as this! Here is a man to head your No-Popery cry! For shame. For shame!'

The infatuated nobleman had glanced more than once at Sir John Chester, as if to inquire whether there was any truth in these statements concerning Gashford, and Sir John had as often plainly answered by a shrug or look, 'Oh dear me! no.' He now said, in the same loud key, and in the same strange manner as before:

'I have nothing to say, sir, in reply, and no desire to hear anything more. I beg you won't obtrude your conversation, or these personal attacks, upon me. I shall not be deterred from doing my duty to my country and my countrymen, by any such attempts, whether they proceed from emissaries of the Pope or not, I assure you. Come, Gashford!'

They had walked on a few paces while speaking, and were now at the Hall-door, through which they passed together. Mr Haredale, without any leave-taking, turned away to the river stairs, which were close at hand, and hailed the only boatman who remained there.

But the throng of people—the foremost of whom had heard every word that Lord George Gordon said, and among all of whom the rumour had been rapidly dispersed that the stranger was a Papist who was bearding him for his advocacy of the popular cause—came pouring out pell-mell, and, forcing the nobleman, his secretary, and Sir John Chester on before them, so that they appeared to be at their head, crowded to the top of the stairs where Mr Haredale waited until the boat was ready, and there stood still, leaving him on a little clear space by himself.

They were not silent, however, though inactive. At first some indistinct mutterings arose among them, which were followed by a hiss or two, and these swelled by degrees into a perfect storm. Then one voice said, 'Down with the Papists!' and there was a pretty general cheer, but nothing more. After a lull of a few moments, one man cried out, 'Stone him;' another, 'Duck him;' another, in a stentorian voice, 'No Popery!' This favourite cry the rest re-echoed, and the mob, which might have been two hundred strong, joined in a general shout.

Mr Haredale had stood calmly on the brink of the steps, until they made this demonstration, when he looked round contemptuously, and walked at a slow pace down the stairs. He was pretty near the boat, when Gashford, as if without intention, turned about, and directly afterwards a great stone was thrown by some hand, in the crowd, which struck him on the head, and made him stagger like a drunken man.

The blood sprung freely from the wound, and trickled down his coat. He turned directly, and rushing up the steps with a boldness and passion which made them all fall back, demanded:

'Who did that? Show me the man who hit me.'

Not a soul moved; except some in the rear who slunk off, and, escaping to the other side of the way, looked on like indifferent spectators.

'Who did that?' he repeated. 'Show me the man who did it. Dog, was it you? It was your deed, if not your hand—I know you.'

He threw himself on Gashford as he said the words, and hurled him to the ground. There was a sudden motion in the crowd, and some laid hands upon him, but his sword was out, and they fell off again.

'My lord—Sir John,'—he cried, 'draw, one of you—you are responsible for this outrage, and I look to you. Draw, if you are gentlemen.' With that he struck Sir John upon the breast with the flat of his weapon, and with a burning face and flashing eyes stood upon his guard; alone, before them all.

For an instant, for the briefest space of time the mind can readily conceive, there was a change in Sir John's smooth face, such as no man ever saw there. The next moment, he stepped forward, and laid one hand on Mr Haredale's arm, while with the other he endeavoured to appease the crowd.

'My dear friend, my good Haredale, you are blinded with passion—it's very natural, extremely natural—but you don't know friends from foes.'

'I know them all, sir, I can distinguish well—' he retorted, almost mad with rage. 'Sir John, Lord George—do you hear me? Are you cowards?'

'Never mind, sir,' said a man, forcing his way between and pushing him towards the stairs with friendly violence, 'never mind asking that. For God's sake, get away. What CAN you do against this number? And there are as many more in the next street, who'll be round directly,'—indeed they began to pour in as he said the words—'you'd be giddy from that cut, in the first heat of a scuffle. Now do retire, sir, or take my word for it you'll be worse used than you would be if every man in the crowd was a woman, and that woman Bloody Mary. Come, sir, make haste—as quick as you can.'

Mr Haredale, who began to turn faint and sick, felt how sensible this advice was, and descended the steps with his unknown friend's assistance. John Grueby (for John it was) helped him into the boat, and giving her a shove off, which sent her thirty feet into the tide, bade the waterman pull away like a Briton; and walked up again as composedly as if he had just landed.

There was at first a slight disposition on the part of the mob to resent this interference; but John looking particularly strong and cool, and wearing besides Lord George's livery, they thought better of it, and contented themselves with sending a shower of small missiles after the boat, which plashed harmlessly in the water; for she had by this time cleared the bridge, and was darting swiftly down the centre of the stream.

From this amusement, they proceeded to giving Protestant knocks at the doors of private houses, breaking a few lamps, and assaulting some stray constables. But, it being whispered that a detachment of Life Guards had been sent for, they took to their heels with great expedition, and left the street quite clear.

Chapter 44

When the concourse separated, and, dividing into chance clusters, drew off in various directions, there still remained upon the scene of the late disturbance, one man. This man was Gashford, who, bruised by his late fall, and hurt in a much greater degree by the indignity he had undergone, and the exposure of which he had been the victim, limped up and down, breathing curses and threats of vengeance.

It was not the secretary's nature to waste his wrath in words. While he vented the froth of his malevolence in those effusions, he kept a steady eye on two men, who, having disappeared with the rest when the alarm was spread, had since returned, and were now visible in the moonlight, at no great distance, as they walked to and fro, and talked together.

He made no move towards them, but waited patiently on the dark side of the street, until they were tired of strolling backwards and forwards and walked away in company. Then he followed, but at some distance: keeping them in view, without appearing to have that object, or being seen by them.

They went up Parliament Street, past Saint Martin's church, and away by Saint Giles's to Tottenham Court Road, at the back of which, upon the western side, was then a place called the Green Lanes. This was a retired spot, not of the choicest kind, leading into the fields. Great heaps of ashes; stagnant pools, overgrown with rank grass and duckweed; broken turnstiles; and the upright posts of palings long since carried off for firewood, which menaced all heedless walkers with their jagged and rusty nails; were the leading features of the landscape: while here and there a donkey, or a ragged horse, tethered to a stake, and cropping off a wretched meal from the coarse stunted turf, were quite in keeping with the scene, and would have suggested (if the houses had not done so, sufficiently, of themselves) how very poor the people were who lived in the crazy huts adjacent, and how foolhardy it might prove for one who carried money, or wore decent clothes, to walk that way alone, unless by daylight.

Poverty has its whims and shows of taste, as wealth has. Some of these cabins were turreted, some had false windows painted on their rotten walls; one had a mimic clock, upon a crazy tower of four feet high, which screened the chimney; each in its little patch of ground had a rude seat or arbour. The population dealt in bones, in rags, in broken glass, in old wheels, in birds, and dogs. These, in their several ways of stowage, filled the gardens; and shedding a perfume, not of the most delicious nature, in the air, filled it besides with yelps, and screams, and howling.

Into this retreat, the secretary followed the two men whom he had held in sight; and here he saw them safely lodged, in one of the meanest houses, which was but a room, and that of small dimensions. He waited without, until the sound of their voices, joined in a discordant song, assured him they were making merry; and then approaching the door, by means of a tottering plank which crossed the ditch in front, knocked at it with his hand.

'Muster Gashfordl' said the man who opened it, taking his pipe from his mouth, in evident surprise. 'Why, who'd have thought of this here honour! Walk in, Muster Gashford—walk in, sir.'

Gashford required no second invitation, and entered with a gracious air. There was a fire in the rusty grate (for though the spring was pretty far advanced, the nights were cold), and on a stool beside it Hugh sat smoking. Dennis placed a chair, his only one, for the secretary, in front of the hearth; and took his seat again upon the stool he had left when he rose to give the visitor admission.

'What's in the wind now, Muster Gashford?' he said, as he resumed his pipe, and looked at him askew. 'Any orders from head-quarters? Are we going to begin? What is it, Muster Gashford?'

'Oh, nothing, nothing,' rejoined the secretary, with a friendly nod to Hugh. 'We have broken the ice, though. We had a little spurt to-day—eh, Dennis?'

'A very little one,' growled the hangman. 'Not half enough for me.'

'Nor me neither!' cried Hugh. 'Give us something to do with life in it—with life in it, master. Ha, ha!'

'Why, you wouldn't,' said the secretary, with his worst expression of face, and in his mildest tones, 'have anything to do, with—with death in it?'

'I don't know that,' replied Hugh. 'I'm open to orders. I don't care; not I.'

'Nor I!' vociferated Dennis.

'Brave fellows!' said the secretary, in as pastor-like a voice as if he were commending them for some uncommon act of valour and generosity. 'By the bye'—and here he stopped and warmed his hands: then suddenly looked up—'who threw that stone to-day?'

Mr Dennis coughed and shook his head, as who should say, 'A mystery indeed!' Hugh sat and smoked in silence.

'It was well done!' said the secretary, warming his hands again. 'I should like to know that man.'

'Would you?' said Dennis, after looking at his face to assure himself that he was serious. 'Would you like to know that man, Muster Gashford?'

'I should indeed,' replied the secretary.

'Why then, Lord love you,' said the hangman, in his hoarest chuckle, as he pointed with his pipe to Hugh, 'there he sits. That's the man. My stars and halters, Muster Gashford,' he added in a whisper, as he drew his stool close to him and jogged him with his elbow, 'what a interesting blade he is! He wants as much holding in as a thorough-bred bulldog. If it hadn't been for me to-day, he'd have had that 'ere Roman down, and made a riot of it, in another minute.'

'And why not?' cried Hugh in a surly voice, as he overheard this last remark. 'Where's the good of putting things off? Strike while the iron's hot; that's what I say.'

'Ah!' retorted Dennis, shaking his head, with a kind of pity for his friend's ingenuous youth; 'but suppose the iron an't hot, brother! You must get people's blood up afore you strike, and have 'em in the humour. There wasn't quite enough to provoke 'em to-day, I tell you. If you'd had your way, you'd have spoilt the fun to come, and ruined us.'

'Dennis is quite right,' said Gashford, smoothly. 'He is perfectly correct. Dennis has great knowledge of the world.'

'I ought to have, Muster Gashford, seeing what a many people I've helped out of it, eh?' grinned the hangman, whispering the words behind his hand.

The secretary laughed at this jest as much as Dennis could desire, and when he had done, said, turning to Hugh:

'Dennis's policy was mine, as you may have observed. You saw, for instance, how I fell when I was set upon. I made no resistance. I did nothing to provoke an outbreak. Oh dear no!'

'No, by the Lord Harry!' cried Dennis with a noisy laugh, 'you went down very quiet, Muster Gashford—and very flat besides. I thinks to myself at the time "it's all up with Muster Gashford!" I never see a man lay flatter nor more still—with the life in him—than you did to-day. He's a rough 'un to play with, is that 'ere Papist, and that's the fact.'

The secretary's face, as Dennis roared with laughter, and turned his wrinkled eyes on Hugh who did the like, might have furnished a study for the devil's picture. He sat quite silent until they were serious again, and then said, looking round:

'We are very pleasant here; so very pleasant, Dennis, that but for my lord's particular desire that I should sup with him, and the time being very near at hand, I should be inclined to stay, until it would be hardly safe to go homeward. I come upon a little business—yes, I do—as you supposed. It's very flattering to you; being this. If we ever should be obliged—and we can't tell, you know—this is a very uncertain world'—

'I believe you, Muster Gashford,' interposed the hangman with a grave nod. 'The uncertainties as I've seen in reference to this here state of existence, the unexpected contingencies as have come about!—Oh my eye!' Feeling the subject much too vast for expression, he puffed at his pipe again, and looked the rest.

'I say,' resumed the secretary, in a slow, impressive way; 'we can't tell what may come to pass; and if we should be obliged, against our wills, to have recourse to violence, my lord (who has suffered terribly to-day, as far as words can go) consigns to you two—bearing in mind my recommendation of you both, as good staunch men, beyond all doubt and suspicion—the pleasant task of punishing this Haredale. You may do as you please with him, or his, provided that you show no mercy, and no quarter, and leave no two beams of his house standing where the builder placed them. You may sack it, burn it, do with it as you like, but it must come down; it must be razed to the ground; and he, and all belonging to him, left as shelterless as new-born infants whom their mothers have exposed. Do you understand me?' said Gashford, pausing, and pressing his hands together gently.

'Understand you, master!' cried Hugh. 'You speak plain now. Why, this is hearty!'

'I knew you would like it,' said Gashford, shaking him by the hand; 'I thought you would. Good night! Don't rise, Dennis: I would rather find my way alone. I may have to make other visits here, and it's pleasant to come and go without disturbing you. I can find my way perfectly well. Good night!'

He was gone, and had shut the door behind him. They looked at each other, and nodded approvingly: Dennis stirred up the fire.

'This looks a little more like business!' he said.

'Ay, indeed!' cried Hugh; 'this suits me!'

'I've heerd it said of Muster Gashford,' said the hangman, 'that he'd a surprising memory and wonderful firmness—that he never forgot, and never forgave.—Let's drink his health!'

Hugh readily complied—pouring no liquor on the floor when he drank this toast—and they pledged the secretary as a man after their own hearts, in a bumper.

Chapter 45

While the worst passions of the worst men were thus working in the dark, and the mantle of religion, assumed to cover the ugliest deformities, threatened to become the shroud of all that was good and peaceful in society, a circumstance occurred which once more altered the position of two persons from whom this history has long been separated, and to whom it must now return.

In a small English country town, the inhabitants of which supported themselves by the labour of their hands in plaiting and preparing straw for those who made bonnets and other articles of dress and ornament from that material,—concealed under an assumed name, and living in a quiet poverty which knew no change, no pleasures, and few cares but that of struggling on from day to day in one great toil for bread,—dwelt Barnaby and his mother. Their poor cottage had known no stranger's foot since they sought the shelter of its roof five years before; nor had they in all that time held any commerce or communication with the old world from which they had fled. To labour in peace, and devote her labour and her life to her poor son, was all the widow sought. If happiness can be said at any time to be the lot of one on whom a secret sorrow preys, she was happy now. Tranquillity, resignation, and her strong love of him who needed it so much, formed the small circle of her quiet joys; and while that remained unbroken, she was contented.

For Barnaby himself, the time which had flown by, had passed him like the wind. The daily suns of years had shed no brighter gleam of reason on his mind; no dawn had broken on his long, dark night. He would sit sometimes—often for days together on a low seat by the fire or by the cottage door, busy at work (for he had learnt the art his mother plied), and listening, God help him, to the tales she would repeat, as a lure to keep him in her sight. He had no recollection of these little narratives; the tale of yesterday was new to him upon the morrow; but he liked them at the moment; and when the humour held him, would remain patiently within doors, hearing her stories like a little child, and working cheerfully from sunrise until it was too dark to see.

At other times,—and then their scanty earnings were barely sufficient to furnish them with food, though of the coarsest sort,—he would wander abroad from dawn of day until the twilight deepened into night. Few in that place, even of the children, could be idle, and he had no companions of his own kind. Indeed there were not many who could have kept up with him in his rambles, had there been a legion. But there were a score of vagabond dogs belonging to the neighbours, who served his purpose quite as well. With two or three of these, or sometimes with a full half-dozen barking at his heels, he would sally forth on some long expedition that consumed the day; and though, on their return at nightfall, the dogs would come home limping and sore-footed, and almost spent with their fatigue, Barnaby was up and off again at sunrise with some new attendants of the same class, with whom he would return in like manner. On all these travels, Grip, in his little basket at his master's back, was a constant member of the party, and when they set off in fine weather and in high spirits, no dog barked louder than the raven.

Their pleasures on these excursions were simple enough. A crust of bread and scrap of meat, with water from the brook or spring, sufficed for their repast. Barnaby's enjoyments were, to walk, and run, and leap, till he was tired; then to lie down in the long grass, or by the growing corn, or in the shade of some tall tree, looking upward at the light clouds as they floated over the blue surface of the sky, and listening to the lark as she poured out her brilliant song. There were wild-flowers to pluck—the bright red poppy, the gentle harebell, the cowslip, and the rose. There were birds to watch; fish; ants; worms; hares or rabbits, as they darted across the distant pathway in the wood and so were gone: millions of living things to have an interest in, and lie in wait for, and clap hands and shout in memory of, when they had disappeared. In default of these, or when they wearied, there was the merry sunlight to hunt out, as it crept in aslant through leaves and boughs of trees, and hid far down—deep, deep, in hollow places—like a silver pool, where nodding branches seemed to bathe and sport; sweet scents of summer air breathing over fields of beans or clover; the perfume of wet leaves or moss; the life of waving trees, and shadows always changing. When these or any of them tired, or in excess of pleasing tempted him to shut his eyes, there was slumber in the midst of all these soft delights, with the gentle wind murmuring like music in his ears, and everything around melting into one delicious dream.

Their hut—for it was little more—stood on the outskirts of the town, at a short distance from the high road, but in a secluded place, where few chance passengers strayed at any season of the year. It had a plot of garden-ground attached, which Barnaby, in fits and starts of working, trimmed, and kept in order. Within doors and without, his mother laboured for their common good; and hail, rain, snow, or sunshine, found no difference in her.

Though so far removed from the scenes of her past life, and with so little thought or hope of ever visiting them again, she seemed to have a strange desire to know what happened in the busy world. Any old newspaper, or scrap of intelligence from London, she caught at with avidity. The excitement it produced was not of a pleasurable kind, for her manner at such times expressed the keenest anxiety and dread; but it never faded in the least degree. Then, and in stormy winter nights, when the wind blew loud and strong, the old expression came into her face, and she would be seized with a fit of trembling, like one who had an ague. But Barnaby noted little of this; and putting a great constraint upon herself, she usually recovered her accustomed manner before the change had caught his observation.

Grip was by no means an idle or unprofitable member of the humble household. Partly by dint of Barnaby's tuition, and partly by pursuing a species of self-instruction common to his tribe, and exerting his powers of observation to the utmost, he had acquired a degree of sagacity which rendered him famous for miles round. His conversational powers and surprising performances were the universal theme: and as many persons came to see the wonderful raven, and none left his exertions unrewarded—when he condescended to exhibit, which was not always, for genius is capricious—his earnings formed an important item in the common stock. Indeed, the bird himself appeared to know his value well; for though he was perfectly free and unrestrained in the presence of Barnaby and his mother, he maintained in public an amazing gravity, and never stooped to any other gratuitous performances than biting the ankles of vagabond boys (an exercise in which he much delighted), killing a fowl or two occasionally, and swallowing the dinners of various neighbouring dogs, of whom the boldest held him in great awe and dread.

Time had glided on in this way, and nothing had happened to disturb or change their mode of life, when, one summer's night in June, they were in their little garden, resting from the labours of the day. The widow's work was yet upon her knee, and strewn upon the ground about her; and Barnaby stood leaning on his spade, gazing at the brightness in the west, and singing softly to himself.

'A brave evening, mother! If we had, chinking in our pockets, but a few specks of that gold which is piled up yonder in the sky, we should be rich for life.'

'We are better as we are,' returned the widow with a quiet smile. 'Let us be contented, and we do not want and need not care to have it, though it lay shining at our feet.'

'Ay!' said Barnaby, resting with crossed arms on his spade, and looking wistfully at the sunset, that's well enough, mother; but gold's a good thing to have. I wish that I knew where to find it. Grip and I could do much with gold, be sure of that.'

'What would you do?' she asked.

'What! A world of things. We'd dress finely—you and I, I mean; not Grip—keep horses, dogs, wear bright colours and feathers, do no more work, live delicately and at our ease. Oh, we'd find uses for it, mother, and uses that would do us good. I would I knew where gold was buried. How hard I'd work to dig it up!'

'You do not know,' said his mother, rising from her seat and laying her hand upon his shoulder, 'what men have done to win it, and how they have found, too late, that it glitters brightest at a distance, and turns quite dim and dull when handled.'

'Ay, ay; so you say; so you think,' he answered, still looking eagerly in the same direction. 'For all that, mother, I should like to try.'

'Do you not see,' she said, 'how red it is? Nothing bears so many stains of blood, as gold. Avoid it. None have such cause to hate its name as we have. Do not so much as think of it, dear love. It has brought such misery and suffering on your head and mine as few have known, and God grant few may have to undergo. I would rather we were dead and laid down in our graves, than you should ever come to love it.'

For a moment Barnaby withdrew his eyes and looked at her with wonder. Then, glancing from the redness in the sky to the mark upon his wrist as if he would compare the two, he seemed about to question her with earnestness, when a new object caught his wandering attention, and made him quite forgetful of his purpose.

This was a man with dusty feet and garments, who stood, bare-headed, behind the hedge that divided their patch of garden from the pathway, and leant meekly forward as if he sought to mingle with their conversation, and waited for his time to speak. His face was turned towards the brightness, too, but the light that fell upon it showed that he was blind, and saw it not.

'A blessing on those voices!' said the wayfarer. 'I feel the beauty of the night more keenly, when I hear them. They are like eyes to me. Will they speak again, and cheer the heart of a poor traveller?'

'Have you no guide?' asked the widow, after a moment's pause.

'None but that,' he answered, pointing with his staff towards the sun; 'and sometimes a milder one at night, but she is idle now.'

'Have you travelled far?'

'A weary way and long,' rejoined the traveller as he shook his head. 'A weary, weary, way. I struck my stick just now upon the bucket of your well—be pleased to let me have a draught of water, lady.'

'Why do you call me lady?' she returned. 'I am as poor as you.'

'Your speech is soft and gentle, and I judge by that,' replied the man. 'The coarsest stuffs and finest silks, are—apart from the sense of touch—alike to me. I cannot judge you by your dress.'

'Come round this way,' said Barnaby, who had passed out at the garden-gate and now stood close beside him. 'Put your hand in mine. You're blind and always in the dark, eh? Are you frightened in the dark? Do you see great crowds of faces, now? Do they grin and chatter?'

'Alas!' returned the other, 'I see nothing. Waking or sleeping, nothing.'

Barnaby looked curiously at his eyes, and touching them with his fingers, as an inquisitive child might, led him towards the house.

'You have come a long distance, 'said the widow, meeting him at the door. 'How have you found your way so far?'

'Use and necessity are good teachers, as I have heard—the best of any,' said the blind man, sitting down upon the chair to which Barnaby had led him, and putting his hat and stick upon the red-tiled floor. 'May neither you nor your son ever learn under them. They are rough masters.'

'You have wandered from the road, too,' said the widow, in a tone of pity.

'Maybe, maybe,' returned the blind man with a sigh, and yet with something of a smile upon his face, 'that's likely. Handposts and milestones are dumb, indeed, to me. Thank you the more for this rest, and this refreshing drink!'

As he spoke, he raised the mug of water to his mouth. It was clear, and cold, and sparkling, but not to his taste nevertheless, or his thirst was not very great, for he only wetted his lips and put it down again.

He wore, hanging with a long strap round his neck, a kind of scrip or wallet, in which to carry food. The widow set some bread and cheese before him, but he thanked her, and said that through the kindness of the charitable he had broken his fast once since morning, and was not hungry. When he had made her this reply, he opened his wallet, and took out a few pence, which was all it appeared to contain.

'Might I make bold to ask,' he said, turning towards where Barnaby stood looking on, 'that one who has the gift of sight, would lay this out for me in bread to keep me on my way? Heaven's blessing on the young feet that will bestir themselves in aid of one so helpless as a sightless man!'

Barnaby looked at his mother, who nodded assent; in another moment he was gone upon his charitable errand. The blind man sat listening with an attentive face, until long after the sound of his retreating footsteps was inaudible to the widow, and then said, suddenly, and in a very altered tone:

'There are various degrees and kinds of blindness, widow. There is the connubial blindness, ma'am, which perhaps you may have observed in the course of your own experience, and which is a kind of wilful and self-bandaging blindness. There is the blindness of party, ma'am, and public men, which is the blindness of a mad bull in the midst of a regiment of soldiers clothed in red. There is the blind confidence of youth, which is the blindness of young kittens, whose eyes have not yet opened on the world; and there is that physical blindness, ma'am, of which I am, contrairy to my own desire, a most illustrious example. Added to these, ma'am, is that blindness of the intellect, of which we have a specimen in your interesting son, and which, having sometimes glimmerings and dawnings of the light, is scarcely to be trusted as a total darkness. Therefore, ma'am, I have taken the liberty to get him out of the way for a short time, while you and I confer together, and this precaution arising out of the delicacy of my sentiments towards yourself, you will excuse me, ma'am, I know.'

Having delivered himself of this speech with many flourishes of manner, he drew from beneath his coat a flat stone bottle, and holding the cork between his teeth, qualified his mug of water with a plentiful infusion of the liquor it contained. He politely drained the bumper to her health, and the ladies, and setting it down empty, smacked his lips with infinite relish.

'I am a citizen of the world, ma'am,' said the blind man, corking his bottle, 'and if I seem to conduct myself with freedom, it is therefore. You wonder who I am, ma'am, and what has brought me here. Such experience of human nature as I have, leads me to that conclusion, without the aid of eyes by which to read the movements of your soul as depicted in your feminine features. I will satisfy your curiosity immediately, ma'am; immediately.' With that he slapped his bottle on its broad back, and having put it under his garment as before, crossed his legs and folded his hands, and settled himself in his chair, previous to proceeding any further.

The change in his manner was so unexpected, the craft and wickedness of his deportment were so much aggravated by his condition—for we are accustomed to see in those who have lost a human sense, something in its place almost divine—and this alteration bred so many fears in her whom he addressed, that she could not pronounce one word. After waiting, as it seemed, for some remark or answer, and waiting in vain, the visitor resumed:

'Madam, my name is Stagg. A friend of mine who has desired the honour of meeting with you any time these five years past, has commissioned me to call upon you. I should be glad to whisper that gentleman's name in your ear.—Zounds, ma'am, are you deaf? Do you hear me say that I should be glad to whisper my friend's name in your ear?'

'You need not repeat it,' said the widow, with a stifled groan; 'I see too well from whom you come.'

'But as a man of honour, ma'am,' said the blind man, striking himself on the breast, 'whose credentials must not be disputed, I take leave to say that I WILL mention that gentleman's name. Ay, ay,' he added, seeming to catch with his quick ear the very motion of her hand, 'but not aloud. With your leave, ma'am, I desire the favour of a whisper.'

She moved towards him, and stooped down. He muttered a word in her ear; and, wringing her hands, she paced up and down the room like one distracted. The blind man, with perfect composure, produced his bottle again, mixed another glassful; put it up as before; and, drinking from time to time, followed her with his face in silence.

'You are slow in conversation, widow,' he said after a time, pausing in his draught. 'We shall have to talk before your son.'

'What would you have me do?' she answered. 'What do you want?'

'We are poor, widow, we are poor,' he retorted, stretching out his right hand, and rubbing his thumb upon its palm.

'Poor!' she cried. 'And what am I?'

'Comparisons are odious,' said the blind man. 'I don't know, I don't care. I say that we are poor. My friend's circumstances are indifferent, and so are mine. We must have our rights, widow, or we must be bought off. But you know that, as well as I, so where is the use of talking?'

She still walked wildly to and fro. At length, stopping abruptly before him, she said:

'Is he near here?'

'He is. Close at hand.'

'Then I am lost!'

'Not lost, widow,' said the blind man, calmly; 'only found. Shall I call him?'

'Not for the world,' she answered, with a shudder.

'Very good,' he replied, crossing his legs again, for he had made as though he would rise and walk to the door. 'As you please, widow. His presence is not necessary that I know of. But both he and I must live; to live, we must eat and drink; to eat and drink, we must have money:—I say no more.'

'Do you know how pinched and destitute I am?' she retorted. 'I do not think you do, or can. If you had eyes, and could look around you on this poor place, you would have pity on me. Oh! let your heart be softened by your own affliction, friend, and have some sympathy with mine.'

The blind man snapped his fingers as he answered:

'—Beside the question, ma'am, beside the question. I have the softest heart in the world, but I can't live upon it. Many a gentleman lives well upon a soft head, who would find a heart of the same quality a very great drawback. Listen to me. This is a matter of business, with which sympathies and sentiments have nothing to do. As a mutual friend, I wish to arrange it in a satisfactory manner, if possible; and thus the case stands.—If you are very poor now, it's your own choice. You have friends who, in case of need, are always ready to help you. My friend is in a more destitute and desolate situation than most men, and, you and he being linked together in a common cause, he naturally looks to you to assist him. He has boarded and lodged with me a long time (for as I said just now, I am very soft-hearted), and I quite approve of his entertaining this opinion. You have always had a roof over your head; he has always been an outcast. You have your son to comfort and assist you; he has nobody at all. The advantages must not be all one side. You are in the same boat, and we must divide the ballast a little more equally.'

She was about to speak, but he checked her, and went on.

'The only way of doing this, is by making up a little purse now and then for my friend; and that's what I advise. He bears you no malice that I know of, ma'am: so little, that although you have treated him harshly more than once, and driven him, I may say, out of doors, he has that regard for you that I believe even if you disappointed him now, he would consent to take charge of your son, and to make a man of him.'

He laid a great stress on these latter words, and paused as if to find out what effect they had produced. She only answered by her tears.

'He is a likely lad,' said the blind man, thoughtfully, 'for many purposes, and not ill-disposed to try his fortune in a little change and bustle, if I may judge from what I heard of his talk with you to-night.—Come. In a word, my friend has pressing necessity for twenty pounds. You, who can give up an annuity, can get that sum for him. It's a pity you should be troubled. You seem very comfortable here, and it's worth that much to remain so. Twenty pounds, widow, is a moderate demand. You know where to apply for it; a post will bring it you.—Twenty pounds!'

She was about to answer him again, but again he stopped her.

'Don't say anything hastily; you might be sorry for it. Think of it a little while. Twenty pounds—of other people's money—how easy! Turn it over in your mind. I'm in no hurry. Night's coming on, and if I don't sleep here, I shall not go far. Twenty pounds! Consider of it, ma'am, for twenty minutes; give each pound a minute; that's a fair allowance. I'll enjoy the air the while, which is very mild and pleasant in these parts.'

With these words he groped his way to the door, carrying his chair with him. Then seating himself, under a spreading honeysuckle, and stretching his legs across the threshold so that no person could pass in or out without his knowledge, he took from his pocket a pipe, flint, steel and tinder-box, and began to smoke. It was a lovely evening, of that gentle kind, and at that time of year, when the twilight is most beautiful. Pausing now and then to let his smoke curl slowly off, and to sniff the grateful fragrance of the flowers, he sat there at his ease—as though the cottage were his proper dwelling, and he had held undisputed possession of it all his life—waiting for the widow's answer and for Barnaby's return.

Chapter 46

When Barnaby returned with the bread, the sight of the pious old pilgrim smoking his pipe and making himself so thoroughly at home, appeared to surprise even him; the more so, as that worthy person, instead of putting up the loaf in his wallet as a scarce and precious article, tossed it carelessly on the table, and producing his bottle, bade him sit down and drink.

'For I carry some comfort, you see,' he said. 'Taste that. Is it good?'

The water stood in Barnaby's eyes as he coughed from the strength of the draught, and answered in the affirmative.

'Drink some more,' said the blind man; 'don't be afraid of it. You don't taste anything like that, often, eh?'

'Often!' cried Barnaby. 'Never!'

'Too poor?' returned the blind man with a sigh. 'Ay. That's bad. Your mother, poor soul, would be happier if she was richer, Barnaby.'

'Why, so I tell her—the very thing I told her just before you came to-night, when all that gold was in the sky,' said Barnaby, drawing his chair nearer to him, and looking eagerly in his face. 'Tell me. Is there any way of being rich, that I could find out?'

'Any way! A hundred ways.'

'Ay, ay?' he returned. 'Do you say so? What are they?—Nay, mother, it's for your sake I ask; not mine;—for yours, indeed. What are they?'

The blind man turned his face, on which there was a smile of triumph, to where the widow stood in great distress; and answered,

'Why, they are not to be found out by stay-at-homes, my good friend.'

'By stay-at-homes!' cried Barnaby, plucking at his sleeve. 'But I am not one. Now, there you mistake. I am often out before the sun, and travel home when he has gone to rest. I am away in the woods before the day has reached the shady places, and am often there when the bright moon is peeping through the boughs, and looking down upon the other moon that lives in the water. As I walk along, I try to find, among the grass and moss, some of that small money for which she works so hard and used to shed so many tears. As I lie asleep in the shade, I dream of it—dream of digging it up in heaps; and spying it out, hidden under bushes; and seeing it sparkle, as the dew-drops do, among the leaves. But I never find it. Tell me where it is. I'd go there, if the journey were a whole year long, because I know she would be happier when I came home and brought some with me. Speak again. I'll listen to you if you talk all night.'

The blind man passed his hand lightly over the poor fellow's face, and finding that his elbows were planted on the table, that his chin rested on his two hands, that he leaned eagerly forward, and that his whole manner expressed the utmost interest and anxiety, paused for a minute as though he desired the widow to observe this fully, and then made answer:

'It's in the world, bold Barnaby, the merry world; not in solitary places like those you pass your time in, but in crowds, and where there's noise and rattle.'

'Good! good!' cried Barnaby, rubbing his hands. 'Yes! I love that. Grip loves it too. It suits us both. That's brave!'

'—The kind of places,' said the blind man, 'that a young fellow likes, and in which a good son may do more for his mother, and himself to boot, in a month, than he could here in all his life—that is, if he had a friend, you know, and some one to advise with.'

'You hear this, mother?' cried Barnaby, turning to her with delight. 'Never tell me we shouldn't heed it, if it lay shining at out feet. Why do we heed it so much now? Why do you toil from morning until night?'

'Surely,' said the blind man, 'surely. Have you no answer, widow? Is your mind,' he slowly added, 'not made up yet?'

'Let me speak with you,' she answered, 'apart.'

'Lay your hand upon my sleeve,' said Stagg, arising from the table; 'and lead me where you will. Courage, bold Barnaby. We'll talk more of this: I've a fancy for you. Wait there till I come back. Now, widow.'

She led him out at the door, and into the little garden, where they stopped.

'You are a fit agent,' she said, in a half breathless manner, 'and well represent the man who sent you here.'

'I'll tell him that you said so,' Stagg retorted. 'He has a regard for you, and will respect me the more (if possible) for your praise. We must have our rights, widow.'

'Rights! Do you know,' she said, 'that a word from me—'

'Why do you stop?' returned the blind man calmly, after a long pause. 'Do I know that a word from you would place my friend in the last position of the dance of life? Yes, I do. What of that? It will never be spoken, widow.'

'You are sure of that?'

'Quite—so sure, that I don't come here to discuss the question. I say we must have our rights, or we must be bought off. Keep to that point, or let me return to my young friend, for I have an interest in the lad, and desire to put him in the way of making his fortune. Bah! you needn't speak,' he added hastily; 'I know what you would say: you have hinted at it once already. Have I no feeling for you, because I am blind? No, I have not. Why do you expect me, being in darkness, to be better than men who have their sight—why should you? Is the hand of Heaven more manifest in my having no eyes, than in your having two? It's the cant of you folks to be horrified if a blind man robs, or lies, or steals; oh yes, it's far worse in him, who can barely live on the few halfpence that are thrown to him in streets, than in you, who can see, and work, and are not dependent on the mercies of the world. A curse on you! You who have five senses may be wicked at your pleasure; we who have four, and want the most important, are to live and be moral on our affliction. The true charity and justice of rich to poor, all the world over!'

He paused a moment when he had said these words, and caught the sound of money, jingling in her hand.

'Well?' he cried, quickly resuming his former manner. 'That should lead to something. The point, widow?'

'First answer me one question,' she replied. 'You say he is close at hand. Has he left London?'

'Being close at hand, widow, it would seem he has,' returned the blind man.

'I mean, for good? You know that.'

'Yes, for good. The truth is, widow, that his making a longer stay there might have had disagreeable consequences. He has come away for that reason.'

'Listen,' said the widow, telling some money out, upon a bench beside them. 'Count.'

'Six,' said the blind man, listening attentively. 'Any more?'

'They are the savings,' she answered, 'of five years. Six guineas.'

He put out his hand for one of the coins; felt it carefully, put it between his teeth, rung it on the bench; and nodded to her to proceed.

'These have been scraped together and laid by, lest sickness or death should separate my son and me. They have been purchased at the price of much hunger, hard labour, and want of rest. If you CAN take them—do—on condition that you leave this place upon the instant, and enter no more into that room, where he sits now, expecting your return.'

'Six guineas,' said the blind man, shaking his head, 'though of the fullest weight that were ever coined, fall very far short of twenty pounds, widow.'

'For such a sum, as you know, I must write to a distant part of the country. To do that, and receive an answer, I must have time.'

'Two days?' said Stagg.

'More.'

'Four days?'

'A week. Return on this day week, at the same hour, but not to the house. Wait at the corner of the lane.'

'Of course,' said the blind man, with a crafty look, 'I shall find you there?'

'Where else can I take refuge? Is it not enough that you have made a beggar of me, and that I have sacrificed my whole store, so hardly earned, to preserve this home?'

'Humph!' said the blind man, after some consideration. 'Set me with my face towards the point you speak of, and in the middle of the road. Is this the spot?'

'It is.'

'On this day week at sunset. And think of him within doors.—For the present, good night.'

She made him no answer, nor did he stop for any. He went slowly away, turning his head from time to time, and stopping to listen, as if he were curious to know whether he was watched by any one. The shadows of night were closing fast around, and he was soon lost in the gloom. It was not, however, until she had traversed the lane from end to end, and made sure that he was gone, that she re-entered the cottage, and hurriedly barred the door and window.

'Mother!' said Barnaby. 'What is the matter? Where is the blind man?'

'He is gone.'

'Gone!' he cried, starting up. 'I must have more talk with him. Which way did he take?'

'I don't know,' she answered, folding her arms about him. 'You must not go out to-night. There are ghosts and dreams abroad.'

'Ay?' said Barnaby, in a frightened whisper.

'It is not safe to stir. We must leave this place to-morrow.'

'This place! This cottage—and the little garden, mother!'

'Yes! To-morrow morning at sunrise. We must travel to London; lose ourselves in that wide place—there would be some trace of us in any other town—then travel on again, and find some new abode.'

Little persuasion was required to reconcile Barnaby to anything that promised change. In another minute, he was wild with delight; in another, full of grief at the prospect of parting with his friends the dogs; in another, wild again; then he was fearful of what she had said to prevent his wandering abroad that night, and full of terrors and strange questions. His light-heartedness in the end surmounted all his other feelings, and lying down in his clothes to the end that he might be ready on the morrow, he soon fell fast asleep before the poor turf fire.

His mother did not close her eyes, but sat beside him, watching. Every breath of wind sounded in her ears like that dreaded footstep at the door, or like that hand upon the latch, and made the calm summer night, a night of horror. At length the welcome day appeared. When she had made the little preparations which were needful for their journey, and had prayed upon her knees with many tears, she roused Barnaby, who jumped up gaily at her summons.

His clothes were few enough, and to carry Grip was a labour of love. As the sun shed his earliest beams upon the earth, they closed the door of their deserted home, and turned away. The sky was blue and bright. The air was fresh and filled with a thousand perfumes. Barnaby looked upward, and laughed with all his heart.

But it was a day he usually devoted to a long ramble, and one of the dogs—the ugliest of them all—came bounding up, and jumping round him in the fulness of his joy. He had to bid him go back in a surly tone, and his heart smote him while he did so. The dog retreated; turned with a half-incredulous, half-imploring look; came a little back; and stopped.

It was the last appeal of an old companion and a faithful friend—cast off. Barnaby could bear no more, and as he shook his head and waved his playmate home, he burst into tears.

'Oh mother, mother, how mournful he will be when he scratches at the door, and finds it always shut!'

There was such a sense of home in the thought, that though her own eyes overflowed she would not have obliterated the recollection of it, either from her own mind or from his, for the wealth of the whole wide world.

Chapter 47

In the exhaustless catalogue of Heaven's mercies to mankind, the power we have of finding some germs of comfort in the hardest trials must ever occupy the foremost place; not only because it supports and upholds us when we most require to be sustained, but because in this source of consolation there is something, we have reason to believe, of the divine spirit; something of that goodness which detects amidst our own evil doings, a redeeming quality; something which, even in our fallen nature, we possess in common with the angels; which had its being in the old time when they trod the earth, and lingers on it yet, in pity.

How often, on their journey, did the widow remember with a grateful heart, that out of his deprivation Barnaby's cheerfulness and affection sprung! How often did she call to mind that but for that, he might have been sullen, morose, unkind, far removed from her—vicious, perhaps, and cruel! How often had she cause for comfort, in his strength, and hope, and in his simple nature! Those feeble powers of mind which rendered him so soon forgetful of the past, save in brief gleams and flashes,—even they were a comfort now. The world to him was full of happiness; in every tree, and plant, and flower, in every bird, and beast, and tiny insect whom a breath of summer wind laid low upon the ground, he had delight. His delight was hers; and where many a wise son would have made her sorrowful, this poor light-hearted idiot filled her breast with thankfulness and love.

Their stock of money was low, but from the hoard she had told into the blind man's hand, the widow had withheld one guinea. This, with the few pence she possessed besides, was to two persons of their frugal habits, a goodly sum in bank. Moreover they had Grip in company; and when they must otherwise have changed the guinea, it was but to make him exhibit outside an alehouse door, or in a village street, or in the grounds or gardens of a mansion of the better sort, and scores who would have given nothing in charity, were ready to bargain for more amusement from the talking bird.

One day—for they moved slowly, and although they had many rides in carts and waggons, were on the road a week—Barnaby, with Grip upon his shoulder and his mother following, begged permission at a trim lodge to go up to the great house, at the other end of the avenue, and show his raven.

The man within was inclined to give them admittance, and was indeed about to do so, when a stout gentleman with a long whip in his hand, and a flushed face which seemed to indicate that he had had his morning's draught, rode up to the gate, and called in a loud voice and with more oaths than the occasion seemed to warrant to have it opened directly.

'Who hast thou got here?' said the gentleman angrily, as the man threw the gate wide open, and pulled off his hat, 'who are these? Eh? art a beggar, woman?'

The widow answered with a curtsey, that they were poor travellers.

'Vagrants,' said the gentleman, 'vagrants and vagabonds. Thee wish to be made acquainted with the cage, dost thee—the cage, the stocks, and the whipping-post? Where dost come from?'

She told him in a timid manner,—for he was very loud, hoarse, and red-faced,—and besought him not to be angry, for they meant no harm, and would go upon their way that moment.

'Don't be too sure of that,' replied the gentleman, 'we don't allow vagrants to roam about this place. I know what thou want'st—-stray linen drying on hedges, and stray poultry, eh? What hast got in that basket, lazy hound?'

'Grip, Grip, Grip—Grip the clever, Grip the wicked, Grip the knowing—Grip, Grip, Grip,' cried the raven, whom Barnaby had shut up on the approach of this stern personage. 'I'm a devil I'm a devil I'm a devil, Never say die Hurrah Bow wow wow, Polly put the kettle on we'll all have tea.'

'Take the vermin out, scoundrel,' said the gentleman, 'and let me see him.'

Barnaby, thus condescendingly addressed, produced his bird, but not without much fear and trembling, and set him down upon the ground; which he had no sooner done than Grip drew fifty corks at least, and then began to dance; at the same time eyeing the gentleman with surprising insolence of manner, and screwing his head so much on one side that he appeared desirous of screwing it off upon the spot.

The cork-drawing seemed to make a greater impression on the gentleman's mind, than the raven's power of speech, and was indeed particularly adapted to his habits and capacity. He desired to have that done again, but despite his being very peremptory, and notwithstanding that Barnaby coaxed to the utmost, Grip turned a deaf ear to the request, and preserved a dead silence.

'Bring him along,' said the gentleman, pointing to the house. But Grip, who had watched the action, anticipated his master, by hopping on before them;—constantly flapping his wings, and screaming 'cook!' meanwhile, as a hint perhaps that there was company coming, and a small collation would be acceptable.

Barnaby and his mother walked on, on either side of the gentleman on horseback, who surveyed each of them from time to time in a proud and coarse manner, and occasionally thundered out some question, the tone of which alarmed Barnaby so much that he could find no answer, and, as a matter of course, could make him no reply. On one of these occasions, when the gentleman appeared disposed to exercise his horsewhip, the widow ventured to inform him in a low voice and with tears in her eyes, that her son was of weak mind.

'An idiot, eh?' said the gentleman, looking at Barnaby as he spoke. 'And how long hast thou been an idiot?'

'She knows,' was Barnaby's timid answer, pointing to his mother—'I—always, I believe.'

'From his birth,' said the widow.

'I don't believe it,' cried the gentleman, 'not a bit of it. It's an excuse not to work. There's nothing like flogging to cure that disorder. I'd make a difference in him in ten minutes, I'll be bound.'

'Heaven has made none in more than twice ten years, sir,' said the widow mildly.

'Then why don't you shut him up? we pay enough for county institutions, damn 'em. But thou'd rather drag him about to excite charity—of course. Ay, I know thee.'

Now, this gentleman had various endearing appellations among his intimate friends. By some he was called 'a country gentleman of the true school,' by some 'a fine old country gentleman,' by some 'a sporting gentleman,' by some 'a thorough-bred Englishman,' by some 'a genuine John Bull;' but they all agreed in one respect, and that was, that it was a pity there were not more like him, and that because there were not, the country was going to rack and ruin every day. He was in the commission of the peace, and could write his name almost legibly; but his greatest qualifications were, that he was more severe with poachers, was a better shot, a harder rider, had better horses, kept better dogs, could eat more solid food, drink more strong wine, go to bed every night more drunk and get up every morning more sober, than any man in the county. In knowledge of horseflesh he was almost equal to a farrier, in stable learning he surpassed his own head groom, and in gluttony not a pig on his estate was a match for him. He had no seat in Parliament himself, but he was extremely patriotic, and usually drove his voters up to the poll with his own hands. He was warmly attached to church and state, and never appointed to the living in his gift any but a three-bottle man and a first-rate fox-hunter. He mistrusted the honesty of all poor people who could read and write, and had a secret jealousy of his own wife (a young lady whom he had married for what his friends called 'the good old English reason,' that her father's property adjoined his own) for possessing those accomplishments in a greater degree than himself. In short, Barnaby being an idiot, and Grip a creature of mere brute instinct, it would be very hard to say what this gentleman was.

He rode up to the door of a handsome house approached by a great flight of steps, where a man was waiting to take his horse, and led the way into a large hall, which, spacious as it was, was tainted with the fumes of last night's stale debauch. Greatcoats, riding-whips, bridles, top-boots, spurs, and such gear, were strewn about on all sides, and formed, with some huge stags' antlers, and a few portraits of dogs and horses, its principal embellishments.

Throwing himself into a great chair (in which, by the bye, he often snored away the night, when he had been, according to his admirers, a finer country gentleman than usual) he bade the man to tell his mistress to come down: and presently there appeared, a little flurried, as it seemed, by the unwonted summons, a lady much younger than himself, who had the appearance of being in delicate health, and not too happy.

'Here! Thou'st no delight in following the hounds as an Englishwoman should have,' said the gentleman. 'See to this here. That'll please thee perhaps.'

The lady smiled, sat down at a little distance from him, and glanced at Barnaby with a look of pity.

'He's an idiot, the woman says,' observed the gentleman, shaking his head; 'I don't believe it.'

'Are you his mother?' asked the lady.

She answered yes.

'What's the use of asking HER?' said the gentleman, thrusting his hands into his breeches pockets. 'She'll tell thee so, of course. Most likely he's hired, at so much a day. There. Get on. Make him do something.'

Grip having by this time recovered his urbanity, condescended, at Barnaby's solicitation, to repeat his various phrases of speech, and to go through the whole of his performances with the utmost success. The corks, and the never say die, afforded the gentleman so much delight that he demanded the repetition of this part of the entertainment, until Grip got into his basket, and positively refused to say another word, good or bad. The lady too, was much amused with him; and the closing point of his obstinacy so delighted her husband that he burst into a roar of laughter, and demanded his price.

Barnaby looked as though he didn't understand his meaning. Probably he did not.

'His price,' said the gentleman, rattling the money in his pockets, 'what dost want for him? How much?'

'He's not to be sold,' replied Barnaby, shutting up the basket in a great hurry, and throwing the strap over his shoulder. 'Mother, come away.'

'Thou seest how much of an idiot he is, book-learner,' said the gentleman, looking scornfully at his wife. 'He can make a bargain. What dost want for him, old woman?'

'He is my son's constant companion,' said the widow. 'He is not to be sold, sir, indeed.'

'Not to be sold!' cried the gentleman, growing ten times redder, hoarser, and louder than before. 'Not to be sold!'

'Indeed no,' she answered. 'We have never thought of parting with him, sir, I do assure you.'

He was evidently about to make a very passionate retort, when a few murmured words from his wife happening to catch his ear, he turned sharply round, and said, 'Eh? What?'

'We can hardly expect them to sell the bird, against their own desire,' she faltered. 'If they prefer to keep him—'

'Prefer to keep him!' he echoed. 'These people, who go tramping about the country a-pilfering and vagabondising on all hands, prefer to keep a bird, when a landed proprietor and a justice asks his price! That old woman's been to school. I know she has. Don't tell me no,' he roared to the widow, 'I say, yes.'

Barnaby's mother pleaded guilty to the accusation, and hoped there was no harm in it.

'No harm!' said the gentleman. 'No. No harm. No harm, ye old rebel, not a bit of harm. If my clerk was here, I'd set ye in the stocks, I would, or lay ye in jail for prowling up and down, on the look-out for petty larcenies, ye limb of a gipsy. Here, Simon, put these pilferers out, shove 'em into the road, out with 'em! Ye don't want to sell the bird, ye that come here to beg, don't ye? If they an't out in double-quick, set the dogs upon 'em!'

They waited for no further dismissal, but fled precipitately, leaving the gentleman to storm away by himself (for the poor lady had already retreated), and making a great many vain attempts to silence Grip, who, excited by the noise, drew corks enough for a city feast as they hurried down the avenue, and appeared to congratulate himself beyond measure on having been the cause of the disturbance. When they had nearly reached the lodge, another servant, emerging from the shrubbery, feigned to be very active in ordering them off, but this man put a crown into the widow's hand, and whispering that his lady sent it, thrust them gently from the gate.

This incident only suggested to the widow's mind, when they halted at an alehouse some miles further on, and heard the justice's character as given by his friends, that perhaps something more than capacity of stomach and tastes for the kennel and the stable, were required to form either a perfect country gentleman, a thoroughbred Englishman, or a genuine John Bull; and that possibly the terms were sometimes misappropriated, not to say disgraced. She little thought then, that a circumstance so slight would ever influence their future fortunes; but time and experience enlightened her in this respect.

'Mother,' said Barnaby, as they were sitting next day in a waggon which was to take them within ten miles of the capital, 'we're going to London first, you said. Shall we see that blind man there?'

She was about to answer 'Heaven forbid!' but checked herself, and told him No, she thought not; why did he ask?

'He's a wise man,' said Barnaby, with a thoughtful countenance. 'I wish that we may meet with him again. What was it that he said of crowds? That gold was to be found where people crowded, and not among the trees and in such quiet places? He spoke as if he loved it; London is a crowded place; I think we shall meet him there.'

'But why do you desire to see him, love?' she asked.

'Because,' said Barnaby, looking wistfully at her, 'he talked to me about gold, which is a rare thing, and say what you will, a thing you would like to have, I know. And because he came and went away so strangely—just as white-headed old men come sometimes to my bed's foot in the night, and say what I can't remember when the bright day returns. He told me he'd come back. I wonder why he broke his word!'

'But you never thought of being rich or gay, before, dear Barnaby. You have always been contented.'

He laughed and bade her say that again, then cried, 'Ay ay—oh yes,' and laughed once more. Then something passed that caught his fancy, and the topic wandered from his mind, and was succeeded by another just as fleeting.

But it was plain from what he had said, and from his returning to the point more than once that day, and on the next, that the blind man's visit, and indeed his words, had taken strong possession of his mind. Whether the idea of wealth had occurred to him for the first time on looking at the golden clouds that evening—and images were often presented to his thoughts by outward objects quite as remote and distant; or whether their poor and humble way of life had suggested it, by contrast, long ago; or whether the accident (as he would deem it) of the blind man's pursuing the current of his own remarks, had done so at the moment; or he had been impressed by the mere circumstance of the man being blind, and, therefore, unlike any one with whom he had talked before; it was impossible to tell. She tried every means to discover, but in vain; and the probability is that Barnaby himself was equally in the dark.

It filled her with uneasiness to find him harping on this string, but all that she could do, was to lead him quickly to some other subject, and to dismiss it from his brain. To caution him against their visitor, to show any fear or suspicion in reference to him, would only be, she feared, to increase that interest with which Barnaby regarded him, and to strengthen his desire to meet him once again. She hoped, by plunging into the crowd, to rid herself of her terrible pursuer, and then, by journeying to a distance and observing increased caution, if that were possible, to live again unknown, in secrecy and peace.

They reached, in course of time, their halting-place within ten miles of London, and lay there for the night, after bargaining to be carried on for a trifle next day, in a light van which was returning empty, and was to start at five o'clock in the morning. The driver was punctual, the road good—save for the dust, the weather being very hot and dry—and at seven in the forenoon of Friday the second of June, one thousand seven hundred and eighty, they alighted at the foot of Westminster Bridge, bade their conductor farewell, and stood alone, together, on the scorching pavement. For the freshness which night sheds upon such busy thoroughfares had already departed, and the sun was shining with uncommon lustre.

Chapter 48

Uncertain where to go next, and bewildered by the crowd of people who were already astir, they sat down in one of the recesses on the bridge, to rest. They soon became aware that the stream of life was all pouring one way, and that a vast throng of persons were crossing the river from the Middlesex to the Surrey shore, in unusual haste and evident excitement. They were, for the most part, in knots of two or three, or sometimes half-a-dozen; they spoke little together—many of them were quite silent; and hurried on as if they had one absorbing object in view, which was common to them all.

They were surprised to see that nearly every man in this great concourse, which still came pouring past, without slackening in the least, wore in his hat a blue cockade; and that the chance passengers who were not so decorated, appeared timidly anxious to escape observation or attack, and gave them the wall as if they would conciliate them. This, however, was natural enough, considering their inferiority in point of numbers; for the proportion of those who wore blue cockades, to those who were dressed as usual, was at least forty or fifty to one. There was no quarrelling, however: the blue cockades went swarming on, passing each other when they could, and making all the speed that was possible in such a multitude; and exchanged nothing more than looks, and very often not even those, with such of the passers-by as were not of their number.

At first, the current of people had been confined to the two pathways, and but a few more eager stragglers kept the road. But after half an hour or so, the passage was completely blocked up by the great press, which, being now closely wedged together, and impeded by the carts and coaches it encountered, moved but slowly, and was sometimes at a stand for five or ten minutes together.

After the lapse of nearly two hours, the numbers began to diminish visibly, and gradually dwindling away, by little and little, left the bridge quite clear, save that, now and then, some hot and dusty man, with the cockade in his hat, and his coat thrown over his shoulder, went panting by, fearful of being too late, or stopped to ask which way his friends had taken, and being directed, hastened on again like one refreshed. In this comparative solitude, which seemed quite strange and novel after the late crowd, the widow had for the first time an opportunity of inquiring of an old man who came and sat beside them, what was the meaning of that great assemblage.

'Why, where have you come from,' he returned, 'that you haven't heard of Lord George Gordon's great association? This is the day that he presents the petition against the Catholics, God bless him!'

'What have all these men to do with that?' she said.

'What have they to do with it!' the old man replied. 'Why, how you talk! Don't you know his lordship has declared he won't present it to the house at all, unless it is attended to the door by forty thousand good and true men at least? There's a crowd for you!'

'A crowd indeed!' said Barnaby. 'Do you hear that, mother!'

'And they're mustering yonder, as I am told,' resumed the old man, 'nigh upon a hundred thousand strong. Ah! Let Lord George alone. He knows his power. There'll be a good many faces inside them three windows over there,' and he pointed to where the House of Commons overlooked the river, 'that'll turn pale when good Lord George gets up this afternoon, and with reason too! Ay, ay. Let his lordship alone. Let him alone. HE knows!' And so, with much mumbling and chuckling and shaking of his forefinger, he rose, with the assistance of his stick, and tottered off.

'Mother!' said Barnaby, 'that's a brave crowd he talks of. Come!'

'Not to join it!' cried his mother.

'Yes, yes,' he answered, plucking at her sleeve. 'Why not? Come!'

'You don't know,' she urged, 'what mischief they may do, where they may lead you, what their meaning is. Dear Barnaby, for my sake—'

'For your sake!' he cried, patting her hand. 'Well! It IS for your sake, mother. You remember what the blind man said, about the gold. Here's a brave crowd! Come! Or wait till I come back—yes, yes, wait here.'

She tried with all the earnestness her fears engendered, to turn him from his purpose, but in vain. He was stooping down to buckle on his shoe, when a hackney-coach passed them rather quickly, and a voice inside called to the driver to stop.

'Young man,' said a voice within.

'Who's that?' cried Barnaby, looking up.

'Do you wear this ornament?' returned the stranger, holding out a blue cockade.

'In Heaven's name, no. Pray do not give it him!' exclaimed the widow.

'Speak for yourself, woman,' said the man within the coach, coldly. 'Leave the young man to his choice; he's old enough to make it, and to snap your apron-strings. He knows, without your telling, whether he wears the sign of a loyal Englishman or not.'

Barnaby, trembling with impatience, cried, 'Yes! yes, yes, I do,' as he had cried a dozen times already. The man threw him a cockade, and crying, 'Make haste to St George's Fields,' ordered the coachman to drive on fast; and left them.

With hands that trembled with his eagerness to fix the bauble in his hat, Barnaby was adjusting it as he best could, and hurriedly replying to the tears and entreaties of his mother, when two gentlemen passed on the opposite side of the way. Observing them, and seeing how Barnaby was occupied, they stopped, whispered together for an instant, turned back, and came over to them.

'Why are you sitting here?' said one of them, who was dressed in a plain suit of black, wore long lank hair, and carried a great cane. 'Why have you not gone with the rest?'

'I am going, sir,' replied Barnaby, finishing his task, and putting his hat on with an air of pride. 'I shall be there directly.'

'Say "my lord," young man, when his lordship does you the honour of speaking to you,' said the second gentleman mildly. 'If you don't know Lord George Gordon when you see him, it's high time you should.'

'Nay, Gashford,' said Lord George, as Barnaby pulled off his hat again and made him a low bow, 'it's no great matter on a day like this, which every Englishman will remember with delight and pride. Put on your hat, friend, and follow us, for you lag behind and are late. It's past ten now. Didn't you know that the hour for assembling was ten o'clock?'

Barnaby shook his head and looked vacantly from one to the other.

'You might have known it, friend,' said Gashford, 'it was perfectly understood. How came you to be so ill informed?'

'He cannot tell you, sir,' the widow interposed. 'It's of no use to ask him. We are but this morning come from a long distance in the country, and know nothing of these matters.'

'The cause has taken a deep root, and has spread its branches far and wide,' said Lord George to his secretary. 'This is a pleasant hearing. I thank Heaven for it!'

'Amen!' cried Gashford with a solemn face.

'You do not understand me, my lord,' said the widow. 'Pardon me, but you cruelly mistake my meaning. We know nothing of these matters. We have no desire or right to join in what you are about to do. This is my son, my poor afflicted son, dearer to me than my own life. In mercy's name, my lord, go your way alone, and do not tempt him into danger!'

'My good woman,' said Gashford, 'how can you!—Dear me!—What do you mean by tempting, and by danger? Do you think his lordship is a roaring lion, going about and seeking whom he may devour? God bless me!'

'No, no, my lord, forgive me,' implored the widow, laying both her hands upon his breast, and scarcely knowing what she did, or said, in the earnestness of her supplication, 'but there are reasons why you should hear my earnest, mother's prayer, and leave my son with me. Oh do! He is not in his right senses, he is not, indeed!'

'It is a bad sign of the wickedness of these times,' said Lord George, evading her touch, and colouring deeply, 'that those who cling to the truth and support the right cause, are set down as mad. Have you the heart to say this of your own son, unnatural mother!'

'I am astonished at you!' said Gashford, with a kind of meek severity. 'This is a very sad picture of female depravity.'

'He has surely no appearance,' said Lord George, glancing at Barnaby, and whispering in his secretary's ear, 'of being deranged? And even if he had, we must not construe any trifling peculiarity into madness. Which of us'—and here he turned red again—'would be safe, if that were made the law!'

'Not one,' replied the secretary; 'in that case, the greater the zeal, the truth, and talent; the more direct the call from above; the clearer would be the madness. With regard to this young man, my lord,' he added, with a lip that slightly curled as he looked at Barnaby, who stood twirling his hat, and stealthily beckoning them to come away, 'he is as sensible and self-possessed as any one I ever saw.'

'And you desire to make one of this great body?' said Lord George, addressing him; 'and intended to make one, did you?'

'Yes—yes,' said Barnaby, with sparkling eyes. 'To be sure I did! I told her so myself.'

'I see,' replied Lord George, with a reproachful glance at the unhappy mother. 'I thought so. Follow me and this gentleman, and you shall have your wish.'

Barnaby kissed his mother tenderly on the cheek, and bidding her be of good cheer, for their fortunes were both made now, did as he was desired. She, poor woman, followed too—with how much fear and grief it would be hard to tell.

They passed quickly through the Bridge Road, where the shops were all shut up (for the passage of the great crowd and the expectation of their return had alarmed the tradesmen for their goods and windows), and where, in the upper stories, all the inhabitants were congregated, looking down into the street below, with faces variously expressive of alarm, of interest, expectancy, and indignation. Some of these applauded, and some hissed; but regardless of these interruptions—for the noise of a vast congregation of people at a little distance, sounded in his ears like the roaring of the sea—Lord George Gordon quickened his pace, and presently arrived before St George's Fields.

They were really fields at that time, and of considerable extent. Here an immense multitude was collected, bearing flags of various kinds and sizes, but all of the same colour—blue, like the cockades—some sections marching to and fro in military array, and others drawn up in circles, squares, and lines. A large portion, both of the bodies which paraded the ground, and of those which remained stationary, were occupied in singing hymns or psalms. With whomsoever this originated, it was well done; for the sound of so many thousand voices in the air must have stirred the heart of any man within him, and could not fail to have a wonderful effect upon enthusiasts, however mistaken.

Scouts had been posted in advance of the great body, to give notice of their leader's coming. These falling back, the word was quickly passed through the whole host, and for a short interval there ensued a profound and deathlike silence, during which the mass was so still and quiet, that the fluttering of a banner caught the eye, and became a circumstance of note. Then they burst into a tremendous shout, into another, and another; and the air seemed rent and shaken, as if by the discharge of cannon.

'Gashford!' cried Lord George, pressing his secretary's arm tight within his own, and speaking with as much emotion in his voice, as in his altered face, 'I am called indeed, now. I feel and know it. I am the leader of a host. If they summoned me at this moment with one voice to lead them on to death, I'd do it—Yes, and fall first myself!'

'It is a proud sight,' said the secretary. 'It is a noble day for England, and for the great cause throughout the world. Such homage, my lord, as I, an humble but devoted man, can render—'

'What are you doing?' cried his master, catching him by both hands; for he had made a show of kneeling at his feet. 'Do not unfit me, dear Gashford, for the solemn duty of this glorious day—' the tears stood in the eyes of the poor gentleman as he said the words.—'Let us go among them; we have to find a place in some division for this new recruit—give me your hand.'

Gashford slid his cold insidious palm into his master's grasp, and so, hand in hand, and followed still by Barnaby and by his mother too, they mingled with the concourse.

They had by this time taken to their singing again, and as their leader passed between their ranks, they raised their voices to their utmost. Many of those who were banded together to support the religion of their country, even unto death, had never heard a hymn or psalm in all their lives. But these fellows having for the most part strong lungs, and being naturally fond of singing, chanted any ribaldry or nonsense that occurred to them, feeling pretty certain that it would not be detected in the general chorus, and not caring much if it were. Many of these voluntaries were sung under the very nose of Lord George Gordon, who, quite unconscious of their burden, passed on with his usual stiff and solemn deportment, very much edified and delighted by the pious conduct of his followers.

So they went on and on, up this line, down that, round the exterior of this circle, and on every side of that hollow square; and still there were lines, and squares, and circles out of number to review. The day being now intensely hot, and the sun striking down his fiercest rays upon the field, those who carried heavy banners began to grow faint and weary; most of the number assembled were fain to pull off their neckcloths, and throw their coats and waistcoats open; and some, towards the centre, quite overpowered by the excessive heat, which was of course rendered more unendurable by the multitude around them, lay down upon the grass, and offered all they had about them for a drink of water. Still, no man left the ground, not even of those who were so distressed; still Lord George, streaming from every pore, went on with Gashford; and still Barnaby and his mother followed close behind them.

They had arrived at the top of a long line of some eight hundred men in single file, and Lord George had turned his head to look back, when a loud cry of recognition—in that peculiar and half-stifled tone which a voice has, when it is raised in the open air and in the midst of a great concourse of persons—was heard, and a man stepped with a shout of laughter from the rank, and smote Barnaby on the shoulders with his heavy hand.

'How now!' he cried. 'Barnaby Rudge! Why, where have you been hiding for these hundred years?'

Barnaby had been thinking within himself that the smell of the trodden grass brought back his old days at cricket, when he was a young boy and played on Chigwell Green. Confused by this sudden and boisterous address, he stared in a bewildered manner at the man, and could scarcely say 'What! Hugh!'

'Hugh!' echoed the other; 'ay, Hugh—Maypole Hugh! You remember my dog? He's alive now, and will know you, I warrant. What, you wear the colour, do you? Well done! Ha ha ha!'

'You know this young man, I see,' said Lord George.

'Know him, my lord! as well as I know my own right hand. My captain knows him. We all know him.'

'Will you take him into your division?'

'It hasn't in it a better, nor a nimbler, nor a more active man, than Barnaby Rudge,' said Hugh. 'Show me the man who says it has! Fall in, Barnaby. He shall march, my lord, between me and Dennis; and he shall carry,' he added, taking a flag from the hand of a tired man who tendered it, 'the gayest silken streamer in this valiant army.'

'In the name of God, no!' shrieked the widow, darting forward. 'Barnaby—my lord—see—he'll come back—Barnaby—Barnaby!'

'Women in the field!' cried Hugh, stepping between them, and holding her off. 'Holloa! My captain there!'

'What's the matter here?' cried Simon Tappertit, bustling up in a great heat. 'Do you call this order?'

'Nothing like it, captain,' answered Hugh, still holding her back with his outstretched hand. 'It's against all orders. Ladies are carrying off our gallant soldiers from their duty. The word of command, captain! They're filing off the ground. Quick!'

'Close!' cried Simon, with the whole power of his lungs. 'Form! March!'

She was thrown to the ground; the whole field was in motion; Barnaby was whirled away into the heart of a dense mass of men, and she saw him no more.

Chapter 49

The mob had been divided from its first assemblage into four divisions; the London, the Westminster, the Southwark, and the Scotch. Each of these divisions being subdivided into various bodies, and these bodies being drawn up in various forms and figures, the general arrangement was, except to the few chiefs and leaders, as unintelligible as the plan of a great battle to the meanest soldier in the field. It was not without its method, however; for, in a very short space of time after being put in motion, the crowd had resolved itself into three great parties, and were prepared, as had been arranged, to cross the river by different bridges, and make for the House of Commons in separate detachments.

At the head of that division which had Westminster Bridge for its approach to the scene of action, Lord George Gordon took his post; with Gashford at his right hand, and sundry ruffians, of most unpromising appearance, forming a kind of staff about him. The conduct of a second party, whose route lay by Blackfriars, was entrusted to a committee of management, including perhaps a dozen men: while the third, which was to go by London Bridge, and through the main streets, in order that their numbers and their serious intentions might be the better known and appreciated by the citizens, were led by Simon Tappertit (assisted by a few subalterns, selected from the Brotherhood of United Bulldogs), Dennis the hangman, Hugh, and some others.

The word of command being given, each of these great bodies took the road assigned to it, and departed on its way, in perfect order and profound silence. That which went through the City greatly exceeded the others in number, and was of such prodigious extent that when the rear began to move, the front was nearly four miles in advance, notwithstanding that the men marched three abreast and followed very close upon each other.

At the head of this party, in the place where Hugh, in the madness of his humour, had stationed him, and walking between that dangerous companion and the hangman, went Barnaby; as many a man among the thousands who looked on that day afterwards remembered well. Forgetful of all other things in the ecstasy of the moment, his face flushed and his eyes sparkling with delight, heedless of the weight of the great banner he carried, and mindful only of its flashing in the sun and rustling in the summer breeze, on he went, proud, happy, elated past all telling:—the only light-hearted, undesigning creature, in the whole assembly.

'What do you think of this?' asked Hugh, as they passed through the crowded streets, and looked up at the windows which were thronged with spectators. 'They have all turned out to see our flags and streamers? Eh, Barnaby? Why, Barnaby's the greatest man of all the pack! His flag's the largest of the lot, the brightest too. There's nothing in the show, like Barnaby. All eyes are turned on him. Ha ha ha!'

'Don't make that din, brother,' growled the hangman, glancing with no very approving eyes at Barnaby as he spoke: 'I hope he don't think there's nothing to be done, but carrying that there piece of blue rag, like a boy at a breaking up. You're ready for action I hope, eh? You, I mean,' he added, nudging Barnaby roughly with his elbow. 'What are you staring at? Why don't you speak?'

Barnaby had been gazing at his flag, and looked vacantly from his questioner to Hugh.

'He don't understand your way,' said the latter. 'Here, I'll explain it to him. Barnaby old boy, attend to me.'

'I'll attend,' said Barnaby, looking anxiously round; 'but I wish I could see her somewhere.'

'See who?' demanded Dennis in a gruff tone. 'You an't in love I hope, brother? That an't the sort of thing for us, you know. We mustn't have no love here.'

'She would be proud indeed to see me now, eh Hugh?' said Barnaby. 'Wouldn't it make her glad to see me at the head of this large show? She'd cry for joy, I know she would. Where CAN she be? She never sees me at my best, and what do I care to be gay and fine if SHE'S not by?'

'Why, what palaver's this?' asked Mr Dennis with supreme disdain. 'We an't got no sentimental members among us, I hope.'

'Don't be uneasy, brother,' cried Hugh, 'he's only talking of his mother.'

'Of his what?' said Mr Dennis with a strong oath.

'His mother.'

'And have I combined myself with this here section, and turned out on this here memorable day, to hear men talk about their mothers!' growled Mr Dennis with extreme disgust. 'The notion of a man's sweetheart's bad enough, but a man's mother!'—and here his disgust was so extreme that he spat upon the ground, and could say no more.

'Barnaby's right,' cried Hugh with a grin, 'and I say it. Lookee, bold lad. If she's not here to see, it's because I've provided for her, and sent half-a-dozen gentlemen, every one of 'em with a blue flag (but not half as fine as yours), to take her, in state, to a grand house all hung round with gold and silver banners, and everything else you please, where she'll wait till you come, and want for nothing.'

'Ay!' said Barnaby, his face beaming with delight: 'have you indeed? That's a good hearing. That's fine! Kind Hugh!'

'But nothing to what will come, bless you,' retorted Hugh, with a wink at Dennis, who regarded his new companion in arms with great astonishment.

'No, indeed?' cried Barnaby.

'Nothing at all,' said Hugh. 'Money, cocked hats and feathers, red coats and gold lace; all the fine things there are, ever were, or will be; will belong to us if we are true to that noble gentleman—the best man in the world—carry our flags for a few days, and keep 'em safe. That's all we've got to do.'

'Is that all?' cried Barnaby with glistening eyes, as he clutched his pole the tighter; 'I warrant you I keep this one safe, then. You have put it in good hands. You know me, Hugh. Nobody shall wrest this flag away.'

'Well said!' cried Hugh. 'Ha ha! Nobly said! That's the old stout Barnaby, that I have climbed and leaped with, many and many a day—I knew I was not mistaken in Barnaby.—Don't you see, man,' he added in a whisper, as he slipped to the other side of Dennis, 'that the lad's a natural, and can be got to do anything, if you take him the right way? Letting alone the fun he is, he's worth a dozen men, in earnest, as you'd find if you tried a fall with him. Leave him to me. You shall soon see whether he's of use or not.'

Mr Dennis received these explanatory remarks with many nods and winks, and softened his behaviour towards Barnaby from that moment. Hugh, laying his finger on his nose, stepped back into his former place, and they proceeded in silence.

It was between two and three o'clock in the afternoon when the three great parties met at Westminster, and, uniting into one huge mass, raised a tremendous shout. This was not only done in token of their presence, but as a signal to those on whom the task devolved, that it was time to take possession of the lobbies of both Houses, and of the various avenues of approach, and of the gallery stairs. To the last-named place, Hugh and Dennis, still with their pupil between them, rushed straightway; Barnaby having given his flag into the hands of one of their own party, who kept them at the outer door. Their followers pressing on behind, they were borne as on a great wave to the very doors of the gallery, whence it was impossible to retreat, even if they had been so inclined, by reason of the throng which choked up the passages. It is a familiar expression in describing a great crowd, that a person might have walked upon the people's heads. In this case it was actually done; for a boy who had by some means got among the concourse, and was in imminent danger of suffocation, climbed to the shoulders of a man beside him and walked upon the people's hats and heads into the open street; traversing in his passage the whole length of two staircases and a long gallery. Nor was the swarm without less dense; for a basket which had been tossed into the crowd, was jerked from head to head, and shoulder to shoulder, and went spinning and whirling on above them, until it was lost to view, without ever once falling in among them or coming near the ground.

Through this vast throng, sprinkled doubtless here and there with honest zealots, but composed for the most part of the very scum and refuse of London, whose growth was fostered by bad criminal laws, bad prison regulations, and the worst conceivable police, such of the members of both Houses of Parliament as had not taken the precaution to be already at their posts, were compelled to fight and force their way. Their carriages were stopped and broken; the wheels wrenched off; the glasses shivered to atoms; the panels beaten in; drivers, footmen, and masters, pulled from their seats and rolled in the mud. Lords, commoners, and reverend bishops, with little distinction of person or party, were kicked and pinched and hustled; passed from hand to hand through various stages of ill-usage; and sent to their fellow-senators at last with their clothes hanging in ribands about them, their bagwigs torn off, themselves speechless and breathless, and their persons covered with the powder which had been cuffed and beaten out of their hair. One lord was so long in the hands of the populace, that the Peers as a body resolved to sally forth and rescue him, and were in the act of doing so, when he happily appeared among them covered with dirt and bruises, and hardly to be recognised by those who knew him best. The noise and uproar were on the increase every moment. The air was filled with execrations, hoots, and howlings. The mob raged and roared, like a mad monster as it was, unceasingly, and each new outrage served to swell its fury.

Within doors, matters were even yet more threatening. Lord George—preceded by a man who carried the immense petition on a porter's knot through the lobby to the door of the House of Commons, where it was received by two officers of the house who rolled it up to the table ready for presentation—had taken his seat at an early hour, before the Speaker went to prayers. His followers pouring in at the same time, the lobby and all the avenues were immediately filled, as we have seen. Thus the members were not only attacked in their passage through the streets, but were set upon within the very walls of Parliament; while the tumult, both within and without, was so great, that those who attempted to speak could scarcely hear their own voices: far less, consult upon the course it would be wise to take in such extremity, or animate each other to dignified and firm resistance. So sure as any member, just arrived, with dress disordered and dishevelled hair, came struggling through the crowd in the lobby, it yelled and screamed in triumph; and when the door of the House, partially and cautiously opened by those within for his admission, gave them a momentary glimpse of the interior, they grew more wild and savage, like beasts at the sight of prey, and made a rush against the portal which strained its locks and bolts in their staples, and shook the very beams.

The strangers' gallery, which was immediately above the door of the House, had been ordered to be closed on the first rumour of disturbance, and was empty; save that now and then Lord George took his seat there, for the convenience of coming to the head of the stairs which led to it, and repeating to the people what had passed within. It was on these stairs that Barnaby, Hugh, and Dennis were posted. There were two flights, short, steep, and narrow, running parallel to each other, and leading to two little doors communicating with a low passage which opened on the gallery. Between them was a kind of well, or unglazed skylight, for the admission of light and air into the lobby, which might be some eighteen or twenty feet below.

Upon one of these little staircases—not that at the head of which Lord George appeared from time to time, but the other—Gashford stood with his elbow on the bannister, and his cheek resting on his hand, with his usual crafty aspect. Whenever he varied this attitude in the slightest degree—so much as by the gentlest motion of his arm—the uproar was certain to increase, not merely there, but in the lobby below; from which place no doubt, some man who acted as fugleman to the rest, was constantly looking up and watching him.

'Order!' cried Hugh, in a voice which made itself heard even above the roar and tumult, as Lord George appeared at the top of the staircase. 'News! News from my lord!'

The noise continued, notwithstanding his appearance, until Gashford looked round. There was silence immediately—even among the people in the passages without, and on the other staircases, who could neither see nor hear, but to whom, notwithstanding, the signal was conveyed with marvellous rapidity.

'Gentlemen,' said Lord George, who was very pale and agitated, we must be firm. They talk of delays, but we must have no delays. They talk of taking your petition into consideration next Tuesday, but we must have it considered now. Present appearances look bad for our success, but we must succeed and will!'

'We must succeed and will!' echoed the crowd. And so among their shouts and cheers and other cries, he bowed to them and retired, and presently came back again. There was another gesture from Gashford, and a dead silence directly.

'I am afraid,' he said, this time, 'that we have little reason, gentlemen, to hope for any redress from the proceedings of Parliament. But we must redress our own grievances, we must meet again, we must put our trust in Providence, and it will bless our endeavours.'

This speech being a little more temperate than the last, was not so favourably received. When the noise and exasperation were at their height, he came back once more, and told them that the alarm had gone forth for many miles round; that when the King heard of their assembling together in that great body, he had no doubt, His Majesty would send down private orders to have their wishes complied with; and—with the manner of his speech as childish, irresolute, and uncertain as his matter—was proceeding in this strain, when two gentlemen suddenly appeared at the door where he stood, and pressing past him and coming a step or two lower down upon the stairs, confronted the people.

The boldness of this action quite took them by surprise. They were not the less disconcerted, when one of the gentlemen, turning to Lord George, spoke thus—in a loud voice that they might hear him well, but quite coolly and collectedly:

'You may tell these people, if you please, my lord, that I am General Conway of whom they have heard; and that I oppose this petition, and all their proceedings, and yours. I am a soldier, you may tell them, and I will protect the freedom of this place with my sword. You see, my lord, that the members of this House are all in arms to-day; you know that the entrance to it is a narrow one; you cannot be ignorant that there are men within these walls who are determined to defend that pass to the last, and before whom many lives must fall if your adherents persevere. Have a care what you do.'

'And my Lord George,' said the other gentleman, addressing him in like manner, 'I desire them to hear this, from me—Colonel Gordon—your near relation. If a man among this crowd, whose uproar strikes us deaf, crosses the threshold of the House of Commons, I swear to run my sword that moment—not into his, but into your body!'

With that, they stepped back again, keeping their faces towards the crowd; took each an arm of the misguided nobleman; drew him into the passage, and shut the door; which they directly locked and fastened on the inside.

This was so quickly done, and the demeanour of both gentlemen—who were not young men either—was so gallant and resolute, that the crowd faltered and stared at each other with irresolute and timid looks. Many tried to turn towards the door; some of the faintest-hearted cried they had best go back, and called to those behind to give way; and the panic and confusion were increasing rapidly, when Gashford whispered Hugh.

'What now!' Hugh roared aloud, turning towards them. 'Why go back? Where can you do better than here, boys! One good rush against these doors and one below at the same time, will do the business. Rush on, then! As to the door below, let those stand back who are afraid. Let those who are not afraid, try who shall be the first to pass it. Here goes! Look out down there!'

Without the delay of an instant, he threw himself headlong over the bannisters into the lobby below. He had hardly touched the ground when Barnaby was at his side. The chaplain's assistant, and some members who were imploring the people to retire, immediately withdrew; and then, with a great shout, both crowds threw themselves against the doors pell-mell, and besieged the House in earnest.

At that moment, when a second onset must have brought them into collision with those who stood on the defensive within, in which case great loss of life and bloodshed would inevitably have ensued,—the hindmost portion of the crowd gave way, and the rumour spread from mouth to mouth that a messenger had been despatched by water for the military, who were forming in the street. Fearful of sustaining a charge in the narrow passages in which they were so closely wedged together, the throng poured out as impetuously as they had flocked in. As the whole stream turned at once, Barnaby and Hugh went with it: and so, fighting and struggling and trampling on fallen men and being trampled on in turn themselves, they and the whole mass floated by degrees into the open street, where a large detachment of the Guards, both horse and foot, came hurrying up; clearing the ground before them so rapidly that the people seemed to melt away as they advanced.

The word of command to halt being given, the soldiers formed across the street; the rioters, breathless and exhausted with their late exertions, formed likewise, though in a very irregular and disorderly manner. The commanding officer rode hastily into the open space between the two bodies, accompanied by a magistrate and an officer of the House of Commons, for whose accommodation a couple of troopers had hastily dismounted. The Riot Act was read, but not a man stirred.

In the first rank of the insurgents, Barnaby and Hugh stood side by side. Somebody had thrust into Barnaby's hands when he came out into the street, his precious flag; which, being now rolled up and tied round the pole, looked like a giant quarter-staff as he grasped it firmly and stood upon his guard. If ever man believed with his whole heart and soul that he was engaged in a just cause, and that he was bound to stand by his leader to the last, poor Barnaby believed it of himself and Lord George Gordon.

After an ineffectual attempt to make himself heard, the magistrate gave the word and the Horse Guards came riding in among the crowd. But, even then, he galloped here and there, exhorting the people to disperse; and, although heavy stones were thrown at the men, and some were desperately cut and bruised, they had no orders but to make prisoners of such of the rioters as were the most active, and to drive the people back with the flat of their sabres. As the horses came in among them, the throng gave way at many points, and the Guards, following up their advantage, were rapidly clearing the ground, when two or three of the foremost, who were in a manner cut off from the rest by the people closing round them, made straight towards Barnaby and Hugh, who had no doubt been pointed out as the two men who dropped into the lobby: laying about them now with some effect, and inflicting on the more turbulent of their opponents, a few slight flesh wounds, under the influence of which a man dropped, here and there, into the arms of his fellows, amid much groaning and confusion.

At the sight of gashed and bloody faces, seen for a moment in the crowd, then hidden by the press around them, Barnaby turned pale and sick. But he stood his ground, and grasping his pole more firmly yet, kept his eye fixed upon the nearest soldier—nodding his head meanwhile, as Hugh, with a scowling visage, whispered in his ear.

The soldier came spurring on, making his horse rear as the people pressed about him, cutting at the hands of those who would have grasped his rein and forced his charger back, and waving to his comrades to follow—and still Barnaby, without retreating an inch, waited for his coming. Some called to him to fly, and some were in the very act of closing round him, to prevent his being taken, when the pole swept into the air above the people's heads, and the man's saddle was empty in an instant.

Then, he and Hugh turned and fled, the crowd opening to let them pass, and closing up again so quickly that there was no clue to the course they had taken. Panting for breath, hot, dusty, and exhausted with fatigue, they reached the riverside in safety, and getting into a boat with all despatch were soon out of any immediate danger.

As they glided down the river, they plainly heard the people cheering; and supposing they might have forced the soldiers to retreat, lay upon their oars for a few minutes, uncertain whether to return or not. But the crowd passing along Westminster Bridge, soon assured them that the populace were dispersing; and Hugh rightly guessed from this, that they had cheered the magistrate for offering to dismiss the military on condition of their immediate departure to their several homes, and that he and Barnaby were better where they were. He advised, therefore, that they should proceed to Blackfriars, and, going ashore at the bridge, make the best of their way to The Boot; where there was not only good entertainment and safe lodging, but where they would certainly be joined by many of their late companions. Barnaby assenting, they decided on this course of action, and pulled for Blackfriars accordingly.

They landed at a critical time, and fortunately for themselves at the right moment. For, coming into Fleet Street, they found it in an unusual stir; and inquiring the cause, were told that a body of Horse Guards had just galloped past, and that they were escorting some rioters whom they had made prisoners, to Newgate for safety. Not at all ill-pleased to have so narrowly escaped the cavalcade, they lost no more time in asking questions, but hurried to The Boot with as much speed as Hugh considered it prudent to make, without appearing singular or attracting an inconvenient share of public notice.

Chapter 50

They were among the first to reach the tavern, but they had not been there many minutes, when several groups of men who had formed part of the crowd, came straggling in. Among them were Simon Tappertit and Mr Dennis; both of whom, but especially the latter, greeted Barnaby with the utmost warmth, and paid him many compliments on the prowess he had shown.

'Which,' said Dennis, with an oath, as he rested his bludgeon in a corner with his hat upon it, and took his seat at the same table with them, 'it does me good to think of. There was a opportunity! But it led to nothing. For my part, I don't know what would. There's no spirit among the people in these here times. Bring something to eat and drink here. I'm disgusted with humanity.'

'On what account?' asked Mr Tappertit, who had been quenching his fiery face in a half-gallon can. 'Don't you consider this a good beginning, mister?'

'Give me security that it an't a ending,' rejoined the hangman. 'When that soldier went down, we might have made London ours; but no;—we stand, and gape, and look on—the justice (I wish he had had a bullet in each eye, as he would have had, if we'd gone to work my way) says, "My lads, if you'll give me your word to disperse, I'll order off the military," our people sets up a hurrah, throws up the game with the winning cards in their hands, and skulks away like a pack of tame curs as they are. Ah,' said the hangman, in a tone of deep disgust, 'it makes me blush for my feller creeturs. I wish I had been born a ox, I do!'

'You'd have been quite as agreeable a character if you had been, I think,' returned Simon Tappertit, going out in a lofty manner.

'Don't be too sure of that,' rejoined the hangman, calling after him; 'if I was a horned animal at the present moment, with the smallest grain of sense, I'd toss every man in this company, excepting them two,' meaning Hugh and Barnaby, 'for his manner of conducting himself this day.'

With which mournful review of their proceedings, Mr Dennis sought consolation in cold boiled beef and beer; but without at all relaxing the grim and dissatisfied expression of his face, the gloom of which was rather deepened than dissipated by their grateful influence.

The company who were thus libelled might have retaliated by strong words, if not by blows, but they were dispirited and worn out. The greater part of them had fasted since morning; all had suffered extremely from the excessive heat; and between the day's shouting, exertion, and excitement, many had quite lost their voices, and so much of their strength that they could hardly stand. Then they were uncertain what to do next, fearful of the consequences of what they had done already, and sensible that after all they had carried no point, but had indeed left matters worse than they had found them. Of those who had come to The Boot, many dropped off within an hour; such of them as were really honest and sincere, never, after the morning's experience, to return, or to hold any communication with their late companions. Others remained but to refresh themselves, and then went home desponding; others who had theretofore been regular in their attendance, avoided the place altogether. The half-dozen prisoners whom the Guards had taken, were magnified by report into half-a-hundred at least; and their friends, being faint and sober, so slackened in their energy, and so drooped beneath these dispiriting influences, that by eight o'clock in the evening, Dennis, Hugh, and Barnaby, were left alone. Even they were fast asleep upon the benches, when Gashford's entrance roused them.

'Oh! you ARE here then?' said the Secretary. 'Dear me!'

'Why, where should we be, Muster Gashford!' Dennis rejoined as he rose into a sitting posture.

'Oh nowhere, nowhere,' he returned with excessive mildness. 'The streets are filled with blue cockades. I rather thought you might have been among them. I am glad you are not.'

'You have orders for us, master, then?' said Hugh.

'Oh dear, no. Not I. No orders, my good fellow. What orders should I have? You are not in my service.'

'Muster Gashford,' remonstrated Dennis, 'we belong to the cause, don't we?'

'The cause!' repeated the secretary, looking at him in a sort of abstraction. 'There is no cause. The cause is lost.'

'Lost!'

'Oh yes. You have heard, I suppose? The petition is rejected by a hundred and ninety-two, to six. It's quite final. We might have spared ourselves some trouble. That, and my lord's vexation, are the only circumstances I regret. I am quite satisfied in all other respects.'

As he said this, he took a penknife from his pocket, and putting his hat upon his knee, began to busy himself in ripping off the blue cockade which he had worn all day; at the same time humming a psalm tune which had been very popular in the morning, and dwelling on it with a gentle regret.

His two adherents looked at each other, and at him, as if they were at a loss how to pursue the subject. At length Hugh, after some elbowing and winking between himself and Mr Dennis, ventured to stay his hand, and to ask him why he meddled with that riband in his hat.

'Because,' said the secretary, looking up with something between a snarl and a smile; 'because to sit still and wear it, or to fall asleep and wear it, is a mockery. That's all, friend.'

'What would you have us do, master!' cried Hugh.

'Nothing,' returned Gashford, shrugging his shoulders, 'nothing. When my lord was reproached and threatened for standing by you, I, as a prudent man, would have had you do nothing. When the soldiers were trampling you under their horses' feet, I would have had you do nothing. When one of them was struck down by a daring hand, and I saw confusion and dismay in all their faces, I would have had you do nothing—just what you did, in short. This is the young man who had so little prudence and so much boldness. Ah! I am sorry for him.'

'Sorry, master!' cried Hugh.

'Sorry, Muster Gashford!' echoed Dennis.

'In case there should be a proclamation out to-morrow, offering five hundred pounds, or some such trifle, for his apprehension; and in case it should include another man who dropped into the lobby from the stairs above,' said Gashford, coldly; 'still, do nothing.'

'Fire and fury, master!' cried Hugh, starting up. 'What have we done, that you should talk to us like this!'

'Nothing,' returned Gashford with a sneer. 'If you are cast into prison; if the young man—' here he looked hard at Barnaby's attentive face—'is dragged from us and from his friends; perhaps from people whom he loves, and whom his death would kill; is thrown into jail, brought out and hanged before their eyes; still, do nothing. You'll find it your best policy, I have no doubt.'

'Come on!' cried Hugh, striding towards the door. 'Dennis—Barnaby—come on!'

'Where? To do what?' said Gashford, slipping past him, and standing with his back against it.

'Anywhere! Anything!' cried Hugh. 'Stand aside, master, or the window will serve our turn as well. Let us out!'

'Ha ha ha! You are of such—of such an impetuous nature,' said Gashford, changing his manner for one of the utmost good fellowship and the pleasantest raillery; 'you are such an excitable creature—but you'll drink with me before you go?'

'Oh, yes—certainly,' growled Dennis, drawing his sleeve across his thirsty lips. 'No malice, brother. Drink with Muster Gashford!'

Hugh wiped his heated brow, and relaxed into a smile. The artful secretary laughed outright.

'Some liquor here! Be quick, or he'll not stop, even for that. He is a man of such desperate ardour!' said the smooth secretary, whom Mr Dennis corroborated with sundry nods and muttered oaths—'Once roused, he is a fellow of such fierce determination!'

Hugh poised his sturdy arm aloft, and clapping Barnaby on the back, bade him fear nothing. They shook hands together—poor Barnaby evidently possessed with the idea that he was among the most virtuous and disinterested heroes in the world—and Gashford laughed again.

'I hear,' he said smoothly, as he stood among them with a great measure of liquor in his hand, and filled their glasses as quickly and as often as they chose, 'I hear—but I cannot say whether it be true or false—that the men who are loitering in the streets to-night are half disposed to pull down a Romish chapel or two, and that they only want leaders. I even heard mention of those in Duke Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, and in Warwick Street, Golden Square; but common report, you know—You are not going?'

—'To do nothing, master, eh?' cried Hugh. 'No jails and halter for Barnaby and me. They must be frightened out of that. Leaders are wanted, are they? Now boys!'

'A most impetuous fellow!' cried the secretary. 'Ha ha! A courageous, boisterous, most vehement fellow! A man who—'

There was no need to finish the sentence, for they had rushed out of the house, and were far beyond hearing. He stopped in the middle of a laugh, listened, drew on his gloves, and, clasping his hands behind him, paced the deserted room for a long time, then bent his steps towards the busy town, and walked into the streets.

They were filled with people, for the rumour of that day's proceedings had made a great noise. Those persons who did not care to leave home, were at their doors or windows, and one topic of discourse prevailed on every side. Some reported that the riots were effectually put down; others that they had broken out again: some said that Lord George Gordon had been sent under a strong guard to the Tower; others that an attempt had been made upon the King's life, that the soldiers had been again called out, and that the noise of musketry in a distant part of the town had been plainly heard within an hour. As it grew darker, these stories became more direful and mysterious; and often, when some frightened passenger ran past with tidings that the rioters were not far off, and were coming up, the doors were shut and barred, lower windows made secure, and as much consternation engendered, as if the city were invaded by a foreign army.

Gashford walked stealthily about, listening to all he heard, and diffusing or confirming, whenever he had an opportunity, such false intelligence as suited his own purpose; and, busily occupied in this way, turned into Holborn for the twentieth time, when a great many women and children came flying along the street—often panting and looking back—and the confused murmur of numerous voices struck upon his ear. Assured by these tokens, and by the red light which began to flash upon the houses on either side, that some of his friends were indeed approaching, he begged a moment's shelter at a door which opened as he passed, and running with some other persons to an upper window, looked out upon the crowd.

They had torches among them, and the chief faces were distinctly visible. That they had been engaged in the destruction of some building was sufficiently apparent, and that it was a Catholic place of worship was evident from the spoils they bore as trophies, which were easily recognisable for the vestments of priests, and rich fragments of altar furniture. Covered with soot, and dirt, and dust, and lime; their garments torn to rags; their hair hanging wildly about them; their hands and faces jagged and bleeding with the wounds of rusty nails; Barnaby, Hugh, and Dennis hurried on before them all, like hideous madmen. After them, the dense throng came fighting on: some singing; some shouting in triumph; some quarrelling among themselves; some menacing the spectators as they passed; some with great wooden fragments, on which they spent their rage as if they had been alive, rending them limb from limb, and hurling the scattered morsels high into the air; some in a drunken state, unconscious of the hurts they had received from falling bricks, and stones, and beams; one borne upon a shutter, in the very midst, covered with a dingy cloth, a senseless, ghastly heap. Thus—a vision of coarse faces, with here and there a blot of flaring, smoky light; a dream of demon heads and savage eyes, and sticks and iron bars uplifted in the air, and whirled about; a bewildering horror, in which so much was seen, and yet so little, which seemed so long, and yet so short, in which there were so many phantoms, not to be forgotten all through life, and yet so many things that could not be observed in one distracting glimpse—it flitted onward, and was gone.

As it passed away upon its work of wrath and ruin, a piercing scream was heard. A knot of persons ran towards the spot; Gashford, who just then emerged into the street, among them. He was on the outskirts of the little concourse, and could not see or hear what passed within; but one who had a better place, informed him that a widow woman had descried her son among the rioters.

'Is that all?' said the secretary, turning his face homewards. 'Well! I think this looks a little more like business!'

Chapter 51

Promising as these outrages were to Gashford's view, and much like business as they looked, they extended that night no farther. The soldiers were again called out, again they took half-a-dozen prisoners, and again the crowd dispersed after a short and bloodless scuffle. Hot and drunken though they were, they had not yet broken all bounds and set all law and government at defiance. Something of their habitual deference to the authority erected by society for its own preservation yet remained among them, and had its majesty been vindicated in time, the secretary would have had to digest a bitter disappointment.

By midnight, the streets were clear and quiet, and, save that there stood in two parts of the town a heap of nodding walls and pile of rubbish, where there had been at sunset a rich and handsome building, everything wore its usual aspect. Even the Catholic gentry and tradesmen, of whom there were many resident in different parts of the City and its suburbs, had no fear for their lives or property, and but little indignation for the wrong they had already sustained in the plunder and destruction of their temples of worship. An honest confidence in the government under whose protection they had lived for many years, and a well-founded reliance on the good feeling and right thinking of the great mass of the community, with whom, notwithstanding their religious differences, they were every day in habits of confidential, affectionate, and friendly intercourse, reassured them, even under the excesses that had been committed; and convinced them that they who were Protestants in anything but the name, were no more to be considered as abettors of these disgraceful occurrences, than they themselves were chargeable with the uses of the block, the rack, the gibbet, and the stake in cruel Mary's reign.

The clock was on the stroke of one, when Gabriel Varden, with his lady and Miss Miggs, sat waiting in the little parlour. This fact; the toppling wicks of the dull, wasted candles; the silence that prevailed; and, above all, the nightcaps of both maid and matron, were sufficient evidence that they had been prepared for bed some time ago, and had some reason for sitting up so far beyond their usual hour.

If any other corroborative testimony had been required, it would have been abundantly furnished in the actions of Miss Miggs, who, having arrived at that restless state and sensitive condition of the nervous system which are the result of long watching, did, by a constant rubbing and tweaking of her nose, a perpetual change of position (arising from the sudden growth of imaginary knots and knobs in her chair), a frequent friction of her eyebrows, the incessant recurrence of a small cough, a small groan, a gasp, a sigh, a sniff, a spasmodic start, and by other demonstrations of that nature, so file down and rasp, as it were, the patience of the locksmith, that after looking at her in silence for some time, he at last broke out into this apostrophe:—

'Miggs, my good girl, go to bed—do go to bed. You're really worse than the dripping of a hundred water-butts outside the window, or the scratching of as many mice behind the wainscot. I can't bear it. Do go to bed, Miggs. To oblige me—do.'

'You haven't got nothing to untie, sir,' returned Miss Miggs, 'and therefore your requests does not surprise me. But missis has—and while you sit up, mim'—she added, turning to the locksmith's wife, 'I couldn't, no, not if twenty times the quantity of cold water was aperiently running down my back at this moment, go to bed with a quiet spirit.'

Having spoken these words, Miss Miggs made divers efforts to rub her shoulders in an impossible place, and shivered from head to foot; thereby giving the beholders to understand that the imaginary cascade was still in full flow, but that a sense of duty upheld her under that and all other sufferings, and nerved her to endurance.

Mrs Varden being too sleepy to speak, and Miss Miggs having, as the phrase is, said her say, the locksmith had nothing for it but to sigh and be as quiet as he could.

But to be quiet with such a basilisk before him was impossible. If he looked another way, it was worse to feel that she was rubbing her cheek, or twitching her ear, or winking her eye, or making all kinds of extraordinary shapes with her nose, than to see her do it. If she was for a moment free from any of these complaints, it was only because of her foot being asleep, or of her arm having got the fidgets, or of her leg being doubled up with the cramp, or of some other horrible disorder which racked her whole frame. If she did enjoy a moment's ease, then with her eyes shut and her mouth wide open, she would be seen to sit very stiff and upright in her chair; then to nod a little way forward, and stop with a jerk; then to nod a little farther forward, and stop with another jerk; then to recover herself; then to come forward again—lower—lower—lower—by very slow degrees, until, just as it seemed impossible that she could preserve her balance for another instant, and the locksmith was about to call out in an agony, to save her from dashing down upon her forehead and fracturing her skull, then all of a sudden and without the smallest notice, she would come upright and rigid again with her eyes open, and in her countenance an expression of defiance, sleepy but yet most obstinate, which plainly said, 'I've never once closed 'em since I looked at you last, and I'll take my oath of it!'

At length, after the clock had struck two, there was a sound at the street door, as if somebody had fallen against the knocker by accident. Miss Miggs immediately jumping up and clapping her hands, cried with a drowsy mingling of the sacred and profane, 'Ally Looyer, mim! there's Simmuns's knock!'

'Who's there?' said Gabriel.

'Me!' cried the well-known voice of Mr Tappertit. Gabriel opened the door, and gave him admission.

He did not cut a very insinuating figure, for a man of his stature suffers in a crowd; and having been active in yesterday morning's work, his dress was literally crushed from head to foot: his hat being beaten out of all shape, and his shoes trodden down at heel like slippers. His coat fluttered in strips about him, the buckles were torn away both from his knees and feet, half his neckerchief was gone, and the bosom of his shirt was rent to tatters. Yet notwithstanding all these personal disadvantages; despite his being very weak from heat and fatigue; and so begrimed with mud and dust that he might have been in a case, for anything of the real texture (either of his skin or apparel) that the eye could discern; he stalked haughtily into the parlour, and throwing himself into a chair, and endeavouring to thrust his hands into the pockets of his small-clothes, which were turned inside out and displayed upon his legs, like tassels, surveyed the household with a gloomy dignity.

'Simon,' said the locksmith gravely, 'how comes it that you return home at this time of night, and in this condition? Give me an assurance that you have not been among the rioters, and I am satisfied.'

'Sir,' replied Mr Tappertit, with a contemptuous look, 'I wonder at YOUR assurance in making such demands.'

'You have been drinking,' said the locksmith.

'As a general principle, and in the most offensive sense of the words, sir,' returned his journeyman with great self-possession, 'I consider you a liar. In that last observation you have unintentionally—unintentionally, sir,—struck upon the truth.'

'Martha,' said the locksmith, turning to his wife, and shaking his head sorrowfully, while a smile at the absurd figure beside him still played upon his open face, 'I trust it may turn out that this poor lad is not the victim of the knaves and fools we have so often had words about, and who have done so much harm to-day. If he has been at Warwick Street or Duke Street to-night—'

'He has been at neither, sir,' cried Mr Tappertit in a loud voice, which he suddenly dropped into a whisper as he repeated, with eyes fixed upon the locksmith, 'he has been at neither.'

'I am glad of it, with all my heart,' said the locksmith in a serious tone; 'for if he had been, and it could be proved against him, Martha, your Great Association would have been to him the cart that draws men to the gallows and leaves them hanging in the air. It would, as sure as we're alive!'

Mrs Varden was too much scared by Simon's altered manner and appearance, and by the accounts of the rioters which had reached her ears that night, to offer any retort, or to have recourse to her usual matrimonial policy. Miss Miggs wrung her hands, and wept.

'He was not at Duke Street, or at Warwick Street, G. Varden,' said Simon, sternly; 'but he WAS at Westminster. Perhaps, sir, he kicked a county member, perhaps, sir, he tapped a lord—you may stare, sir, I repeat it—blood flowed from noses, and perhaps he tapped a lord. Who knows? This,' he added, putting his hand into his waistcoat-pocket, and taking out a large tooth, at the sight of which both Miggs and Mrs Varden screamed, 'this was a bishop's. Beware, G. Varden!'

'Now, I would rather,' said the locksmith hastily, 'have paid five hundred pounds, than had this come to pass. You idiot, do you know what peril you stand in?'

'I know it, sir,' replied his journeyman, 'and it is my glory. I was there, everybody saw me there. I was conspicuous, and prominent. I will abide the consequences.'

The locksmith, really disturbed and agitated, paced to and fro in silence—glancing at his former 'prentice every now and then—and at length stopping before him, said:

'Get to bed, and sleep for a couple of hours that you may wake penitent, and with some of your senses about you. Be sorry for what you have done, and we will try to save you. If I call him by five o'clock,' said Varden, turning hurriedly to his wife, and he washes himself clean and changes his dress, he may get to the Tower Stairs, and away by the Gravesend tide-boat, before any search is made for him. From there he can easily get on to Canterbury, where your cousin will give him work till this storm has blown over. I am not sure that I do right in screening him from the punishment he deserves, but he has lived in this house, man and boy, for a dozen years, and I should be sorry if for this one day's work he made a miserable end. Lock the front-door, Miggs, and show no light towards the street when you go upstairs. Quick, Simon! Get to bed!'

'And do you suppose, sir,' retorted Mr Tappertit, with a thickness and slowness of speech which contrasted forcibly with the rapidity and earnestness of his kind-hearted master—'and do you suppose, sir, that I am base and mean enough to accept your servile proposition?—Miscreant!'

'Whatever you please, Sim, but get to bed. Every minute is of consequence. The light here, Miggs!'

'Yes yes, oh do! Go to bed directly,' cried the two women together.

Mr Tappertit stood upon his feet, and pushing his chair away to show that he needed no assistance, answered, swaying himself to and fro, and managing his head as if it had no connection whatever with his body:

'You spoke of Miggs, sir—Miggs may be smothered!'

'Oh Simmun!' ejaculated that young lady in a faint voice. 'Oh mim! Oh sir! Oh goodness gracious, what a turn he has give me!'

'This family may ALL be smothered, sir,' returned Mr Tappertit, after glancing at her with a smile of ineffable disdain, 'excepting Mrs V. I have come here, sir, for her sake, this night. Mrs Varden, take this piece of paper. It's a protection, ma'am. You may need it.'

With these words he held out at arm's length, a dirty, crumpled scrap of writing. The locksmith took it from him, opened it, and read as follows:

'All good friends to our cause, I hope will be particular, and do no injury to the property of any true Protestant. I am well assured that the proprietor of this house is a staunch and worthy friend to the cause.

GEORGE GORDON.'

'What's this!' said the locksmith, with an altered face.

'Something that'll do you good service, young feller,' replied his journeyman, 'as you'll find. Keep that safe, and where you can lay your hand upon it in an instant. And chalk "No Popery" on your door to-morrow night, and for a week to come—that's all.'

'This is a genuine document,' said the locksmith, 'I know, for I have seen the hand before. What threat does it imply? What devil is abroad?'

'A fiery devil,' retorted Sim; 'a flaming, furious devil. Don't you put yourself in its way, or you're done for, my buck. Be warned in time, G. Varden. Farewell!'

But here the two women threw themselves in his way—especially Miss Miggs, who fell upon him with such fervour that she pinned him against the wall—and conjured him in moving words not to go forth till he was sober; to listen to reason; to think of it; to take some rest, and then determine.

'I tell you,' said Mr Tappertit, 'that my mind is made up. My bleeding country calls me and I go! Miggs, if you don't get out of the way, I'll pinch you.'

Miss Miggs, still clinging to the rebel, screamed once vociferously—but whether in the distraction of her mind, or because of his having executed his threat, is uncertain.

'Release me,' said Simon, struggling to free himself from her chaste, but spider-like embrace. 'Let me go! I have made arrangements for you in an altered state of society, and mean to provide for you comfortably in life—there! Will that satisfy you?'

'Oh Simmun!' cried Miss Miggs. 'Oh my blessed Simmun! Oh mim! what are my feelings at this conflicting moment!'

Of a rather turbulent description, it would seem; for her nightcap had been knocked off in the scuffle, and she was on her knees upon the floor, making a strange revelation of blue and yellow curl-papers, straggling locks of hair, tags of staylaces, and strings of it's impossible to say what; panting for breath, clasping her hands, turning her eyes upwards, shedding abundance of tears, and exhibiting various other symptoms of the acutest mental suffering.

'I leave,' said Simon, turning to his master, with an utter disregard of Miggs's maidenly affliction, 'a box of things upstairs. Do what you like with 'em. I don't want 'em. I'm never coming back here, any more. Provide yourself, sir, with a journeyman; I'm my country's journeyman; henceforward that's MY line of business.'

'Be what you like in two hours' time, but now go up to bed,' returned the locksmith, planting himself in the doorway. 'Do you hear me? Go to bed!'

'I hear you, and defy you, Varden,' rejoined Simon Tappertit. 'This night, sir, I have been in the country, planning an expedition which shall fill your bell-hanging soul with wonder and dismay. The plot demands my utmost energy. Let me pass!'

'I'll knock you down if you come near the door,' replied the locksmith. 'You had better go to bed!'

Simon made no answer, but gathering himself up as straight as he could, plunged head foremost at his old master, and the two went driving out into the workshop together, plying their hands and feet so briskly that they looked like half-a-dozen, while Miggs and Mrs Varden screamed for twelve.

It would have been easy for Varden to knock his old 'prentice down, and bind him hand and foot; but as he was loth to hurt him in his then defenceless state, he contented himself with parrying his blows when he could, taking them in perfect good part when he could not, and keeping between him and the door, until a favourable opportunity should present itself for forcing him to retreat up-stairs, and shutting him up in his own room. But, in the goodness of his heart, he calculated too much upon his adversary's weakness, and forgot that drunken men who have lost the power of walking steadily, can often run. Watching his time, Simon Tappertit made a cunning show of falling back, staggered unexpectedly forward, brushed past him, opened the door (he knew the trick of that lock well), and darted down the street like a mad dog. The locksmith paused for a moment in the excess of his astonishment, and then gave chase.

It was an excellent season for a run, for at that silent hour the streets were deserted, the air was cool, and the flying figure before him distinctly visible at a great distance, as it sped away, with a long gaunt shadow following at its heels. But the short-winded locksmith had no chance against a man of Sim's youth and spare figure, though the day had been when he could have run him down in no time. The space between them rapidly increased, and as the rays of the rising sun streamed upon Simon in the act of turning a distant corner, Gabriel Varden was fain to give up, and sit down on a doorstep to fetch his breath. Simon meanwhile, without once stopping, fled at the same degree of swiftness to The Boot, where, as he well knew, some of his company were lying, and at which respectable hostelry—for he had already acquired the distinction of being in great peril of the law—a friendly watch had been expecting him all night, and was even now on the look-out for his coming.

'Go thy ways, Sim, go thy ways,' said the locksmith, as soon as he could speak. 'I have done my best for thee, poor lad, and would have saved thee, but the rope is round thy neck, I fear.'

So saying, and shaking his head in a very sorrowful and disconsolate manner, he turned back, and soon re-entered his own house, where Mrs Varden and the faithful Miggs had been anxiously expecting his return.

Now Mrs Varden (and by consequence Miss Miggs likewise) was impressed with a secret misgiving that she had done wrong; that she had, to the utmost of her small means, aided and abetted the growth of disturbances, the end of which it was impossible to foresee; that she had led remotely to the scene which had just passed; and that the locksmith's time for triumph and reproach had now arrived indeed. And so strongly did Mrs Varden feel this, and so crestfallen was she in consequence, that while her husband was pursuing their lost journeyman, she secreted under her chair the little red-brick dwelling-house with the yellow roof, lest it should furnish new occasion for reference to the painful theme; and now hid the same still more, with the skirts of her dress.

But it happened that the locksmith had been thinking of this very article on his way home, and that, coming into the room and not seeing it, he at once demanded where it was.

Mrs Varden had no resource but to produce it, which she did with many tears, and broken protestations that if she could have known—

'Yes, yes,' said Varden, 'of course—I know that. I don't mean to reproach you, my dear. But recollect from this time that all good things perverted to evil purposes, are worse than those which are naturally bad. A thoroughly wicked woman, is wicked indeed. When religion goes wrong, she is very wrong, for the same reason. Let us say no more about it, my dear.'

So he dropped the red-brick dwelling-house on the floor, and setting his heel upon it, crushed it into pieces. The halfpence, and sixpences, and other voluntary contributions, rolled about in all directions, but nobody offered to touch them, or to take them up.

'That,' said the locksmith, 'is easily disposed of, and I would to Heaven that everything growing out of the same society could be settled as easily.'

'It happens very fortunately, Varden,' said his wife, with her handkerchief to her eyes, 'that in case any more disturbances should happen—which I hope not; I sincerely hope not—'

'I hope so too, my dear.'

'—That in case any should occur, we have the piece of paper which that poor misguided young man brought.'

'Ay, to be sure,' said the locksmith, turning quickly round. 'Where is that piece of paper?'

Mrs Varden stood aghast as he took it from her outstretched band, tore it into fragments, and threw them under the grate.

'Not use it?' she said.

'Use it!' cried the locksmith. No! Let them come and pull the roof about our ears; let them burn us out of house and home; I'd neither have the protection of their leader, nor chalk their howl upon my door, though, for not doing it, they shot me on my own threshold. Use it! Let them come and do their worst. The first man who crosses my doorstep on such an errand as theirs, had better be a hundred miles away. Let him look to it. The others may have their will. I wouldn't beg or buy them off, if, instead of every pound of iron in the place, there was a hundred weight of gold. Get you to bed, Martha. I shall take down the shutters and go to work.'

'So early!' said his wife.

'Ay,' replied the locksmith cheerily, 'so early. Come when they may, they shall not find us skulking and hiding, as if we feared to take our portion of the light of day, and left it all to them. So pleasant dreams to you, my dear, and cheerful sleep!'

With that he gave his wife a hearty kiss, and bade her delay no longer, or it would be time to rise before she lay down to rest. Mrs Varden quite amiably and meekly walked upstairs, followed by Miggs, who, although a good deal subdued, could not refrain from sundry stimulative coughs and sniffs by the way, or from holding up her hands in astonishment at the daring conduct of master.

Chapter 52

A mob is usually a creature of very mysterious existence, particularly in a large city. Where it comes from or whither it goes, few men can tell. Assembling and dispersing with equal suddenness, it is as difficult to follow to its various sources as the sea itself; nor does the parallel stop here, for the ocean is not more fickle and uncertain, more terrible when roused, more unreasonable, or more cruel.

The people who were boisterous at Westminster upon the Friday morning, and were eagerly bent upon the work of devastation in Duke Street and Warwick Street at night, were, in the mass, the same. Allowing for the chance accessions of which any crowd is morally sure in a town where there must always be a large number of idle and profligate persons, one and the same mob was at both places. Yet they spread themselves in various directions when they dispersed in the afternoon, made no appointment for reassembling, had no definite purpose or design, and indeed, for anything they knew, were scattered beyond the hope of future union.

At The Boot, which, as has been shown, was in a manner the head-quarters of the rioters, there were not, upon this Friday night, a dozen people. Some slept in the stable and outhouses, some in the common room, some two or three in beds. The rest were in their usual homes or haunts. Perhaps not a score in all lay in the adjacent fields and lanes, and under haystacks, or near the warmth of brick-kilns, who had not their accustomed place of rest beneath the open sky. As to the public ways within the town, they had their ordinary nightly occupants, and no others; the usual amount of vice and wretchedness, but no more.

The experience of one evening, however, had taught the reckless leaders of disturbance, that they had but to show themselves in the streets, to be immediately surrounded by materials which they could only have kept together when their aid was not required, at great risk, expense, and trouble. Once possessed of this secret, they were as confident as if twenty thousand men, devoted to their will, had been encamped about them, and assumed a confidence which could not have been surpassed, though that had really been the case. All day, Saturday, they remained quiet. On Sunday, they rather studied how to keep their men within call, and in full hope, than to follow out, by any fierce measure, their first day's proceedings.

'I hope,' said Dennis, as, with a loud yawn, he raised his body from a heap of straw on which he had been sleeping, and supporting his head upon his hand, appealed to Hugh on Sunday morning, 'that Muster Gashford allows some rest? Perhaps he'd have us at work again already, eh?'

'It's not his way to let matters drop, you may be sure of that,' growled Hugh in answer. 'I'm in no humour to stir yet, though. I'm as stiff as a dead body, and as full of ugly scratches as if I had been fighting all day yesterday with wild cats.'

'You've so much enthusiasm, that's it,' said Dennis, looking with great admiration at the uncombed head, matted beard, and torn hands and face of the wild figure before him; 'you're such a devil of a fellow. You hurt yourself a hundred times more than you need, because you will be foremost in everything, and will do more than the rest.'

'For the matter of that,' returned Hugh, shaking back his ragged hair and glancing towards the door of the stable in which they lay; 'there's one yonder as good as me. What did I tell you about him? Did I say he was worth a dozen, when you doubted him?'

Mr Dennis rolled lazily over upon his breast, and resting his chin upon his hand in imitation of the attitude in which Hugh lay, said, as he too looked towards the door:

'Ay, ay, you knew him, brother, you knew him. But who'd suppose to look at that chap now, that he could be the man he is! Isn't it a thousand cruel pities, brother, that instead of taking his nat'ral rest and qualifying himself for further exertions in this here honourable cause, he should be playing at soldiers like a boy? And his cleanliness too!' said Mr Dennis, who certainly had no reason to entertain a fellow feeling with anybody who was particular on that score; 'what weaknesses he's guilty of; with respect to his cleanliness! At five o'clock this morning, there he was at the pump, though any one would think he had gone through enough, the day before yesterday, to be pretty fast asleep at that time. But no—when I woke for a minute or two, there he was at the pump, and if you'd seen him sticking them peacock's feathers into his hat when he'd done washing—ah! I'm sorry he's such a imperfect character, but the best on us is incomplete in some pint of view or another.'

The subject of this dialogue and of these concluding remarks, which were uttered in a tone of philosophical meditation, was, as the reader will have divined, no other than Barnaby, who, with his flag in hand, stood sentry in the little patch of sunlight at the distant door, or walked to and fro outside, singing softly to himself; and keeping time to the music of some clear church bells. Whether he stood still, leaning with both hands on the flagstaff, or, bearing it upon his shoulder, paced slowly up and down, the careful arrangement of his poor dress, and his erect and lofty bearing, showed how high a sense he had of the great importance of his trust, and how happy and how proud it made him. To Hugh and his companion, who lay in a dark corner of the gloomy shed, he, and the sunlight, and the peaceful Sabbath sound to which he made response, seemed like a bright picture framed by the door, and set off by the stable's blackness. The whole formed such a contrast to themselves, as they lay wallowing, like some obscene animals, in their squalor and wickedness on the two heaps of straw, that for a few moments they looked on without speaking, and felt almost ashamed.

'Ah!'said Hugh at length, carrying it off with a laugh: 'He's a rare fellow is Barnaby, and can do more, with less rest, or meat, or drink, than any of us. As to his soldiering, I put him on duty there.'

'Then there was a object in it, and a proper good one too, I'll be sworn,' retorted Dennis with a broad grin, and an oath of the same quality. 'What was it, brother?'

'Why, you see,' said Hugh, crawling a little nearer to him, 'that our noble captain yonder, came in yesterday morning rather the worse for liquor, and was—like you and me—ditto last night.'

Dennis looked to where Simon Tappertit lay coiled upon a truss of hay, snoring profoundly, and nodded.

'And our noble captain,' continued Hugh with another laugh, 'our noble captain and I, have planned for to-morrow a roaring expedition, with good profit in it.'

'Again the Papists?' asked Dennis, rubbing his hands.

'Ay, against the Papists—against one of 'em at least, that some of us, and I for one, owe a good heavy grudge to.'

'Not Muster Gashford's friend that he spoke to us about in my house, eh?' said Dennis, brimfull of pleasant expectation.

'The same man,' said Hugh.

'That's your sort,' cried Mr Dennis, gaily shaking hands with him, 'that's the kind of game. Let's have revenges and injuries, and all that, and we shall get on twice as fast. Now you talk, indeed!'

'Ha ha ha! The captain,' added Hugh, 'has thoughts of carrying off a woman in the bustle, and—ha ha ha!—and so have I!'

Mr Dennis received this part of the scheme with a wry face, observing that as a general principle he objected to women altogether, as being unsafe and slippery persons on whom there was no calculating with any certainty, and who were never in the same mind for four-and-twenty hours at a stretch. He might have expatiated on this suggestive theme at much greater length, but that it occurred to him to ask what connection existed between the proposed expedition and Barnaby's being posted at the stable-door as sentry; to which Hugh cautiously replied in these words:

'Why, the people we mean to visit, were friends of his, once upon a time, and I know that much of him to feel pretty sure that if he thought we were going to do them any harm, he'd be no friend to our side, but would lend a ready hand to the other. So I've persuaded him (for I know him of old) that Lord George has picked him out to guard this place to-morrow while we're away, and that it's a great honour—and so he's on duty now, and as proud of it as if he was a general. Ha ha! What do you say to me for a careful man as well as a devil of a one?'

Mr Dennis exhausted himself in compliments, and then added,

'But about the expedition itself—'

'About that,' said Hugh, 'you shall hear all particulars from me and the great captain conjointly and both together—for see, he's waking up. Rouse yourself, lion-heart. Ha ha! Put a good face upon it, and drink again. Another hair of the dog that bit you, captain! Call for drink! There's enough of gold and silver cups and candlesticks buried underneath my bed,' he added, rolling back the straw, and pointing to where the ground was newly turned, 'to pay for it, if it was a score of casks full. Drink, captain!'

Mr Tappertit received these jovial promptings with a very bad grace, being much the worse, both in mind and body, for his two nights of debauch, and but indifferently able to stand upon his legs. With Hugh's assistance, however, he contrived to stagger to the pump; and having refreshed himself with an abundant draught of cold water, and a copious shower of the same refreshing liquid on his head and face, he ordered some rum and milk to be served; and upon that innocent beverage and some biscuits and cheese made a pretty hearty meal. That done, he disposed himself in an easy attitude on the ground beside his two companions (who were carousing after their own tastes), and proceeded to enlighten Mr Dennis in reference to to-morrow's project.

That their conversation was an interesting one, was rendered manifest by its length, and by the close attention of all three. That it was not of an oppressively grave character, but was enlivened by various pleasantries arising out of the subject, was clear from their loud and frequent roars of laughter, which startled Barnaby on his post, and made him wonder at their levity. But he was not summoned to join them, until they had eaten, and drunk, and slept, and talked together for some hours; not, indeed, until the twilight; when they informed him that they were about to make a slight demonstration in the streets—just to keep the people's hands in, as it was Sunday night, and the public might otherwise be disappointed—and that he was free to accompany them if he would.

Without the slightest preparation, saving that they carried clubs and wore the blue cockade, they sallied out into the streets; and, with no more settled design than that of doing as much mischief as they could, paraded them at random. Their numbers rapidly increasing, they soon divided into parties; and agreeing to meet by-and-by, in the fields near Welbeck Street, scoured the town in various directions. The largest body, and that which augmented with the greatest rapidity, was the one to which Hugh and Barnaby belonged. This took its way towards Moorfields, where there was a rich chapel, and in which neighbourhood several Catholic families were known to reside.

Beginning with the private houses so occupied, they broke open the doors and windows; and while they destroyed the furniture and left but the bare walls, made a sharp search for tools and engines of destruction, such as hammers, pokers, axes, saws, and such like instruments. Many of the rioters made belts of cord, of handkerchiefs, or any material they found at hand, and wore these weapons as openly as pioneers upon a field-day. There was not the least disguise or concealment—indeed, on this night, very little excitement or hurry. From the chapels, they tore down and took away the very altars, benches, pulpits, pews, and flooring; from the dwelling-houses, the very wainscoting and stairs. This Sunday evening's recreation they pursued like mere workmen who had a certain task to do, and did it. Fifty resolute men might have turned them at any moment; a single company of soldiers could have scattered them like dust; but no man interposed, no authority restrained them, and, except by the terrified persons who fled from their approach, they were as little heeded as if they were pursuing their lawful occupations with the utmost sobriety and good conduct.

In the same manner, they marched to the place of rendezvous agreed upon, made great fires in the fields, and reserving the most valuable of their spoils, burnt the rest. Priestly garments, images of saints, rich stuffs and ornaments, altar-furniture and household goods, were cast into the flames, and shed a glare on the whole country round; but they danced and howled, and roared about these fires till they were tired, and were never for an instant checked.

As the main body filed off from this scene of action, and passed down Welbeck Street, they came upon Gashford, who had been a witness of their proceedings, and was walking stealthily along the pavement. Keeping up with him, and yet not seeming to speak, Hugh muttered in his ear:

'Is this better, master?'

'No,' said Gashford. 'It is not.'

'What would you have?' said Hugh. 'Fevers are never at their height at once. They must get on by degrees.'

'I would have you,' said Gashford, pinching his arm with such malevolence that his nails seemed to meet in the skin; 'I would have you put some meaning into your work. Fools! Can you make no better bonfires than of rags and scraps? Can you burn nothing whole?'

'A little patience, master,' said Hugh. 'Wait but a few hours, and you shall see. Look for a redness in the sky, to-morrow night.'

With that, he fell back into his place beside Barnaby; and when the secretary looked after him, both were lost in the crowd.

Chapter 53

The next day was ushered in by merry peals of bells, and by the firing of the Tower guns; flags were hoisted on many of the church-steeples; the usual demonstrations were made in honour of the anniversary of the King's birthday; and every man went about his pleasure or business as if the city were in perfect order, and there were no half-smouldering embers in its secret places, which, on the approach of night, would kindle up again and scatter ruin and dismay abroad. The leaders of the riot, rendered still more daring by the success of last night and by the booty they had acquired, kept steadily together, and only thought of implicating the mass of their followers so deeply that no hope of pardon or reward might tempt them to betray their more notorious confederates into the hands of justice.

Indeed, the sense of having gone too far to be forgiven, held the timid together no less than the bold. Many who would readily have pointed out the foremost rioters and given evidence against them, felt that escape by that means was hopeless, when their every act had been observed by scores of people who had taken no part in the disturbances; who had suffered in their persons, peace, or property, by the outrages of the mob; who would be most willing witnesses; and whom the government would, no doubt, prefer to any King's evidence that might be offered. Many of this class had deserted their usual occupations on the Saturday morning; some had been seen by their employers active in the tumult; others knew they must be suspected, and that they would be discharged if they returned; others had been desperate from the beginning, and comforted themselves with the homely proverb, that, being hanged at all, they might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb. They all hoped and believed, in a greater or less degree, that the government they seemed to have paralysed, would, in its terror, come to terms with them in the end, and suffer them to make their own conditions. The least sanguine among them reasoned with himself that, at the worst, they were too many to be all punished, and that he had as good a chance of escape as any other man. The great mass never reasoned or thought at all, but were stimulated by their own headlong passions, by poverty, by ignorance, by the love of mischief, and the hope of plunder.

One other circumstance is worthy of remark; and that is, that from the moment of their first outbreak at Westminster, every symptom of order or preconcerted arrangement among them vanished. When they divided into parties and ran to different quarters of the town, it was on the spontaneous suggestion of the moment. Each party swelled as it went along, like rivers as they roll towards the sea; new leaders sprang up as they were wanted, disappeared when the necessity was over, and reappeared at the next crisis. Each tumult took shape and form from the circumstances of the moment; sober workmen, going home from their day's labour, were seen to cast down their baskets of tools and become rioters in an instant; mere boys on errands did the like. In a word, a moral plague ran through the city. The noise, and hurry, and excitement, had for hundreds and hundreds an attraction they had no firmness to resist. The contagion spread like a dread fever: an infectious madness, as yet not near its height, seized on new victims every hour, and society began to tremble at their ravings.

It was between two and three o'clock in the afternoon when Gashford looked into the lair described in the last chapter, and seeing only Barnaby and Dennis there, inquired for Hugh.

He was out, Barnaby told him; had gone out more than an hour ago; and had not yet returned.

'Dennis!' said the smiling secretary, in his smoothest voice, as he sat down cross-legged on a barrel, 'Dennis!'

The hangman struggled into a sitting posture directly, and with his eyes wide open, looked towards him.

'How do you do, Dennis?' said Gashford, nodding. 'I hope you have suffered no inconvenience from your late exertions, Dennis?'

'I always will say of you, Muster Gashford,' returned the hangman, staring at him, 'that that 'ere quiet way of yours might almost wake a dead man. It is,' he added, with a muttered oath—still staring at him in a thoughtful manner—'so awful sly!'

'So distinct, eh Dennis?'

'Distinct!' he answered, scratching his head, and keeping his eyes upon the secretary's face; 'I seem to hear it, Muster Gashford, in my wery bones.'

'I am very glad your sense of hearing is so sharp, and that I succeed in making myself so intelligible,' said Gashford, in his unvarying, even tone. 'Where is your friend?'

Mr Dennis looked round as in expectation of beholding him asleep upon his bed of straw; then remembering he had seen him go out, replied:

'I can't say where he is, Muster Gashford, I expected him back afore now. I hope it isn't time that we was busy, Muster Gashford?'

'Nay,' said the secretary, 'who should know that as well as you? How can I tell you, Dennis? You are perfect master of your own actions, you know, and accountable to nobody—except sometimes to the law, eh?'

Dennis, who was very much baffled by the cool matter-of-course manner of this reply, recovered his self-possession on his professional pursuits being referred to, and pointing towards Barnaby, shook his head and frowned.

'Hush!' cried Barnaby.

'Ah! Do hush about that, Muster Gashford,' said the hangman in a low voice, 'pop'lar prejudices—you always forget—well, Barnaby, my lad, what's the matter?'

'I hear him coming,' he answered: 'Hark! Do you mark that? That's his foot! Bless you, I know his step, and his dog's too. Tramp, tramp, pit-pat, on they come together, and, ha ha ha!—and here they are!' he cried, joyfully welcoming Hugh with both hands, and then patting him fondly on the back, as if instead of being the rough companion he was, he had been one of the most prepossessing of men. 'Here he is, and safe too! I am glad to see him back again, old Hugh!'

'I'm a Turk if he don't give me a warmer welcome always than any man of sense,' said Hugh, shaking hands with him with a kind of ferocious friendship, strange enough to see. 'How are you, boy?'

'Hearty!' cried Barnaby, waving his hat. 'Ha ha ha! And merry too, Hugh! And ready to do anything for the good cause, and the right, and to help the kind, mild, pale-faced gentleman—the lord they used so ill—eh, Hugh?'

'Ay!' returned his friend, dropping his hand, and looking at Gashford for an instant with a changed expression before he spoke to him. 'Good day, master!'

'And good day to you,' replied the secretary, nursing his leg.

'And many good days—whole years of them, I hope. You are heated.'

'So would you have been, master,' said Hugh, wiping his face, 'if you'd been running here as fast as I have.'

'You know the news, then? Yes, I supposed you would have heard it.'

'News! what news?'

'You don't?' cried Gashford, raising his eyebrows with an exclamation of surprise. 'Dear me! Come; then I AM the first to make you acquainted with your distinguished position, after all. Do you see the King's Arms a-top?' he smilingly asked, as he took a large paper from his pocket, unfolded it, and held it out for Hugh's inspection.

'Well!' said Hugh. 'What's that to me?'

'Much. A great deal,' replied the secretary. 'Read it.'

'I told you, the first time I saw you, that I couldn't read,' said Hugh, impatiently. 'What in the Devil's name's inside of it?'

'It is a proclamation from the King in Council,' said Gashford, 'dated to-day, and offering a reward of five hundred pounds—five hundred pounds is a great deal of money, and a large temptation to some people—to any one who will discover the person or persons most active in demolishing those chapels on Saturday night.'

'Is that all?' cried Hugh, with an indifferent air. 'I knew of that.'

'Truly I might have known you did,' said Gashford, smiling, and folding up the document again. 'Your friend, I might have guessed—indeed I did guess—was sure to tell you.'

'My friend!' stammered Hugh, with an unsuccessful effort to appear surprised. 'What friend?'

'Tut tut—do you suppose I don't know where you have been?' retorted Gashford, rubbing his hands, and beating the back of one on the palm of the other, and looking at him with a cunning eye. 'How dull you think me! Shall I say his name?'

'No,' said Hugh, with a hasty glance towards Dennis.

'You have also heard from him, no doubt,' resumed the secretary, after a moment's pause, 'that the rioters who have been taken (poor fellows) are committed for trial, and that some very active witnesses have had the temerity to appear against them. Among others—' and here he clenched his teeth, as if he would suppress by force some violent words that rose upon his tongue; and spoke very slowly. 'Among others, a gentleman who saw the work going on in Warwick Street; a Catholic gentleman; one Haredale.'

Hugh would have prevented his uttering the word, but it was out already. Hearing the name, Barnaby turned swiftly round.

'Duty, duty, bold Barnaby!' cried Hugh, assuming his wildest and most rapid manner, and thrusting into his hand his staff and flag which leant against the wall. 'Mount guard without loss of time, for we are off upon our expedition. Up, Dennis, and get ready! Take care that no one turns the straw upon my bed, brave Barnaby; we know what's underneath it—eh? Now, master, quick! What you have to say, say speedily, for the little captain and a cluster of 'em are in the fields, and only waiting for us. Sharp's the word, and strike's the action. Quick!'

Barnaby was not proof against this bustle and despatch. The look of mingled astonishtnent and anger which had appeared in his face when he turned towards them, faded from it as the words passed from his memory, like breath from a polished mirror; and grasping the weapon which Hugh forced upon him, he proudly took his station at the door, beyond their hearing.

'You might have spoiled our plans, master,' said Hugh. 'YOU, too, of all men!'

'Who would have supposed that HE would be so quick?' urged Gashford.

'He's as quick sometimes—I don't mean with his hands, for that you know, but with his head—as you or any man,' said Hugh. 'Dennis, it's time we were going; they're waiting for us; I came to tell you. Reach me my stick and belt. Here! Lend a hand, master. Fling this over my shoulder, and buckle it behind, will you?'

'Brisk as ever!' said the secretary, adjusting it for him as he desired.

'A man need be brisk to-day; there's brisk work a-foot.'

'There is, is there?' said Gashford. He said it with such a provoking assumption of ignorance, that Hugh, looking over his shoulder and angrily down upon him, replied:

'Is there! You know there is! Who knows better than you, master, that the first great step to be taken is to make examples of these witnesses, and frighten all men from appearing against us or any of our body, any more?'

'There's one we know of,' returned Gashford, with an expressive smile, 'who is at least as well informed upon that subject as you or I.'

'If we mean the same gentleman, as I suppose we do,' Hugh rejoined softly, 'I tell you this—he's as good and quick information about everything as—' here he paused and looked round, as if to make sure that the person in question was not within hearing, 'as Old Nick himself. Have you done that, master? How slow you are!'

'It's quite fast now,' said Gashford, rising. 'I say—you didn't find that your friend disapproved of to-day's little expedition? Ha ha ha! It is fortunate it jumps so well with the witness policy; for, once planned, it must have been carried out. And now you are going, eh?'

'Now we are going, master!' Hugh replied. 'Any parting words?'

'Oh dear, no,' said Gashford sweetly. 'None!'

'You're sure?' cried Hugh, nudging the grinning Dennis.

'Quite sure, eh, Muster Gashford?' chuckled the hangman.

Gashford paused a moment, struggling with his caution and his malice; then putting himself between the two men, and laying a hand upon the arm of each, said, in a cramped whisper:

'Do not, my good friends—I am sure you will not—forget our talk one night—in your house, Dennis—about this person. No mercy, no quarter, no two beams of his house to be left standing where the builder placed them! Fire, the saying goes, is a good servant, but a bad master. Makes it HIS master; he deserves no better. But I am sure you will be firm, I am sure you will be very resolute, I am sure you will remember that he thirsts for your lives, and those of all your brave companions. If you ever acted like staunch fellows, you will do so to-day. Won't you, Dennis—won't you, Hugh?'

The two looked at him, and at each other; then bursting into a roar of laughter, brandished their staves above their heads, shook hands, and hurried out.

When they had been gone a little time, Gashford followed. They were yet in sight, and hastening to that part of the adjacent fields in which their fellows had already mustered; Hugh was looking back, and flourishing his hat to Barnaby, who, delighted with his trust, replied in the same way, and then resumed his pacing up and down before the stable-door, where his feet had worn a path already. And when Gashford himself was far distant, and looked back for the last time, he was still walking to and fro, with the same measured tread; the most devoted and the blithest champion that ever maintained a post, and felt his heart lifted up with a brave sense of duty, and determination to defend it to the last.

Smiling at the simplicity of the poor idiot, Gashford betook himself to Welbeck Street by a different path from that which he knew the rioters would take, and sitting down behind a curtain in one of the upper windows of Lord George Gordon's house, waited impatiently for their coming. They were so long, that although he knew it had been settled they should come that way, he had a misgiving they must have changed their plans and taken some other route. But at length the roar of voices was heard in the neighbouring fields, and soon afterwards they came thronging past, in a great body.

However, they were not all, nor nearly all, in one body, but were, as he soon found, divided into four parties, each of which stopped before the house to give three cheers, and then went on; the leaders crying out in what direction they were going, and calling on the spectators to join them. The first detachment, carrying, by way of banners, some relics of the havoc they had made in Moorfields, proclaimed that they were on their way to Chelsea, whence they would return in the same order, to make of the spoil they bore, a great bonfire, near at hand. The second gave out that they were bound for Wapping, to destroy a chapel; the third, that their place of destination was East Smithfield, and their object the same. All this was done in broad, bright, summer day. Gay carriages and chairs stopped to let them pass, or turned back to avoid them; people on foot stood aside in doorways, or perhaps knocked and begged permission to stand at a window, or in the hall, until the rioters had passed: but nobody interfered with them; and when they had gone by, everything went on as usual.

There still remained the fourth body, and for that the secretary looked with a most intense eagerness. At last it came up. It was numerous, and composed of picked men; for as he gazed down among them, he recognised many upturned faces which he knew well—those of Simon Tappertit, Hugh, and Dennis in the front, of course. They halted and cheered, as the others had done; but when they moved again, they did not, like them, proclaim what design they had. Hugh merely raised his hat upon the bludgeon he carried, and glancing at a spectator on the opposite side of the way, was gone.

Gashford followed the direction of his glance instinctively, and saw, standing on the pavement, and wearing the blue cockade, Sir John Chester. He held his hat an inch or two above his head, to propitiate the mob; and, resting gracefully on his cane, smiling pleasantly, and displaying his dress and person to the very best advantage, looked on in the most tranquil state imaginable. For all that, and quick and dexterous as he was, Gashford had seen him recognise Hugh with the air of a patron. He had no longer any eyes for the crowd, but fixed his keen regards upon Sir John.

He stood in the same place and posture until the last man in the concourse had turned the corner of the street; then very deliberately took the blue cockade out of his hat; put it carefully in his pocket, ready for the next emergency; refreshed himself with a pinch of snuff; put up his box; and was walking slowly off, when a passing carriage stopped, and a lady's hand let down the glass. Sir John's hat was off again immediately. After a minute's conversation at the carriage-window, in which it was apparent that he was vastly entertaining on the subject of the mob, he stepped lightly in, and was driven away.

The secretary smiled, but he had other thoughts to dwell upon, and soon dismissed the topic. Dinner was brought him, but he sent it down untasted; and, in restless pacings up and down the room, and constant glances at the clock, and many futile efforts to sit down and read, or go to sleep, or look out of the window, consumed four weary hours. When the dial told him thus much time had crept away, he stole upstairs to the top of the house, and coming out upon the roof sat down, with his face towards the east.

Heedless of the fresh air that blew upon his heated brow, of the pleasant meadows from which he turned, of the piles of roofs and chimneys upon which he looked, of the smoke and rising mist he vainly sought to pierce, of the shrill cries of children at their evening sports, the distant hum and turmoil of the town, the cheerful country breath that rustled past to meet it, and to droop, and die; he watched, and watched, till it was dark save for the specks of light that twinkled in the streets below and far away—and, as the darkness deepened, strained his gaze and grew more eager yet.

'Nothing but gloom in that direction, still!' he muttered restlessly. 'Dog! where is the redness in the sky, you promised me!'

Chapter 54

Rumours of the prevailing disturbances had, by this time, begun to be pretty generally circulated through the towns and villages round London, and the tidings were everywhere received with that appetite for the marvellous and love of the terrible which have probably been among the natural characteristics of mankind since the creation of the world. These accounts, however, appeared, to many persons at that day—as they would to us at the present, but that we know them to be matter of history—so monstrous and improbable, that a great number of those who were resident at a distance, and who were credulous enough on other points, were really unable to bring their minds to believe that such things could be; and rejected the intelligence they received on all hands, as wholly fabulous and absurd.

Mr Willet—not so much, perhaps, on account of his having argued and settled the matter with himself, as by reason of his constitutional obstinacy—was one of those who positively refused to entertain the current topic for a moment. On this very evening, and perhaps at the very time when Gashford kept his solitary watch, old John was so red in the face with perpetually shaking his head in contradiction of his three ancient cronies and pot companions, that he was quite a phenomenon to behold, and lighted up the Maypole Porch wherein they sat together, like a monstrous carbuncle in a fairy tale.

'Do you think, sir,' said Mr Willet, looking hard at Solomon Daisy—for it was his custom in cases of personal altercation to fasten upon the smallest man in the party—'do you think, sir, that I'm a born fool?'

'No, no, Johnny,' returned Solomon, looking round upon the little circle of which he formed a part: 'We all know better than that. You're no fool, Johnny. No, no!'

Mr Cobb and Mr Parkes shook their heads in unison, muttering, 'No, no, Johnny, not you!' But as such compliments had usually the effect of making Mr Willet rather more dogged than before, he surveyed them with a look of deep disdain, and returned for answer:

'Then what do you mean by coming here, and telling me that this evening you're a-going to walk up to London together—you three—you—

and have the evidence of your own senses? An't,' said Mr Willet, putting his pipe in his mouth with an air of solemn disgust, 'an't the evidence of MY senses enough for you?'

'But we haven't got it, Johnny,' pleaded Parkes, humbly.

'You haven't got it, sir?' repeated Mr Willet, eyeing him from top to toe. 'You haven't got it, sir? You HAVE got it, sir. Don't I tell you that His blessed Majesty King George the Third would no more stand a rioting and rollicking in his streets, than he'd stand being crowed over by his own Parliament?'

'Yes, Johnny, but that's your sense—not your senses,' said the adventurous Mr Parkes.

'How do you know? 'retorted John with great dignity. 'You're a contradicting pretty free, you are, sir. How do YOU know which it is? I'm not aware I ever told you, sir.'

Mr Parkes, finding himself in the position of having got into metaphysics without exactly seeing his way out of them, stammered forth an apology and retreated from the argument. There then ensued a silence of some ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, at the expiration of which period Mr Willet was observed to rumble and shake with laughter, and presently remarked, in reference to his late adversary, 'that he hoped he had tackled him enough.' Thereupon Messrs Cobb and Daisy laughed, and nodded, and Parkes was looked upon as thoroughly and effectually put down.

'Do you suppose if all this was true, that Mr Haredale would be constantly away from home, as he is?' said John, after another silence. 'Do you think he wouldn't be afraid to leave his house with them two young women in it, and only a couple of men, or so?'

'Ay, but then you know,' returned Solomon Daisy, 'his house is a goodish way out of London, and they do say that the rioters won't go more than two miles, or three at the farthest, off the stones. Besides, you know, some of the Catholic gentlefolks have actually sent trinkets and suchlike down here for safety—at least, so the story goes.'

'The story goes!' said Mr Willet testily. 'Yes, sir. The story goes that you saw a ghost last March. But nobody believes it.'

'Well!' said Solomon, rising, to divert the attention of his two friends, who tittered at this retort: 'believed or disbelieved, it's true; and true or not, if we mean to go to London, we must be going at once. So shake hands, Johnny, and good night.'

'I shall shake hands,' returned the landlord, putting his into his pockets, 'with no man as goes to London on such nonsensical errands.'

The three cronies were therefore reduced to the necessity of shaking his elbows; having performed that ceremony, and brought from the house their hats, and sticks, and greatcoats, they bade him good night and departed; promising to bring him on the morrow full and true accounts of the real state of the city, and if it were quiet, to give him the full merit of his victory.

John Willet looked after them, as they plodded along the road in the rich glow of a summer evening; and knocking the ashes out of his pipe, laughed inwardly at their folly, until his sides were sore. When he had quite exhausted himself—which took some time, for he laughed as slowly as he thought and spoke—he sat himself comfortably with his back to the house, put his legs upon the bench, then his apron over his face, and fell sound asleep.

How long he slept, matters not; but it was for no brief space, for when he awoke, the rich light had faded, the sombre hues of night were falling fast upon the landscape, and a few bright stars were already twinkling overhead. The birds were all at roost, the daisies on the green had closed their fairy hoods, the honeysuckle twining round the porch exhaled its perfume in a twofold degree, as though it lost its coyness at that silent time and loved to shed its fragrance on the night; the ivy scarcely stirred its deep green leaves. How tranquil, and how beautiful it was!

Was there no sound in the air, besides the gentle rustling of the trees and the grasshopper's merry chirp? Hark! Something very faint and distant, not unlike the murmuring in a sea-shell. Now it grew louder, fainter now, and now it altogether died away. Presently, it came again, subsided, came once more, grew louder, fainter—swelled into a roar. It was on the road, and varied with its windings. All at once it burst into a distinct sound—the voices, and the tramping feet of many men.

It is questionable whether old John Willet, even then, would have thought of the rioters but for the cries of his cook and housemaid, who ran screaming upstairs and locked themselves into one of the old garrets,—shrieking dismally when they had done so, by way of rendering their place of refuge perfectly secret and secure. These two females did afterwards depone that Mr Willet in his consternation uttered but one word, and called that up the stairs in a stentorian voice, six distinct times. But as this word was a monosyllable, which, however inoffensive when applied to the quadruped it denotes, is highly reprehensible when used in connection with females of unimpeachable character, many persons were inclined to believe that the young women laboured under some hallucination caused by excessive fear; and that their ears deceived them.

Be this as it may, John Willet, in whom the very uttermost extent of dull-headed perplexity supplied the place of courage, stationed himself in the porch, and waited for their coming up. Once, it dimly occurred to him that there was a kind of door to the house, which had a lock and bolts; and at the same time some shadowy ideas of shutters to the lower windows, flitted through his brain. But he stood stock still, looking down the road in the direction in which the noise was rapidly advancing, and did not so much as take his hands out of his pockets.

He had not to wait long. A dark mass, looming through a cloud of dust, soon became visible; the mob quickened their pace; shouting and whooping like savages, they came rushing on pell mell; and in a few seconds he was bandied from hand to hand, in the heart of a crowd of men.

'Halloa!' cried a voice he knew, as the man who spoke came cleaving through the throng. 'Where is he? Give him to me. Don't hurt him. How now, old Jack! Ha ha ha!'

Mr Willet looked at him, and saw it was Hugh; but he said nothing, and thought nothing.

'These lads are thirsty and must drink!' cried Hugh, thrusting him back towards the house. 'Bustle, Jack, bustle. Show us the best—the very best—the over-proof that you keep for your own drinking, Jack!'

John faintly articulated the words, 'Who's to pay?'

'He says "Who's to pay?"' cried Hugh, with a roar of laughter which was loudly echoed by the crowd. Then turning to John, he added, 'Pay! Why, nobody.'

John stared round at the mass of faces—some grinning, some fierce, some lighted up by torches, some indistinct, some dusky and shadowy: some looking at him, some at his house, some at each other—and while he was, as he thought, in the very act of doing so, found himself, without any consciousness of having moved, in the bar; sitting down in an arm-chair, and watching the destruction of his property, as if it were some queer play or entertainment, of an astonishing and stupefying nature, but having no reference to himself—that he could make out—at all.

Yes. Here was the bar—the bar that the boldest never entered without special invitation—the sanctuary, the mystery, the hallowed ground: here it was, crammed with men, clubs, sticks, torches, pistols; filled with a deafening noise, oaths, shouts, screams, hootings; changed all at once into a bear-garden, a madhouse, an infernal temple: men darting in and out, by door and window, smashing the glass, turning the taps, drinking liquor out of China punchbowls, sitting astride of casks, smoking private and personal pipes, cutting down the sacred grove of lemons, hacking and hewing at the celebrated cheese, breaking open inviolable drawers, putting things in their pockets which didn't belong to them, dividing his own money before his own eyes, wantonly wasting, breaking, pulling down and tearing up: nothing quiet, nothing private: men everywhere—above, below, overhead, in the bedrooms, in the kitchen, in the yard, in the stables—clambering in at windows when there were doors wide open; dropping out of windows when the stairs were handy; leaping over the bannisters into chasms of passages: new faces and figures presenting themselves every instant—some yelling, some singing, some fighting, some breaking glass and crockery, some laying the dust with the liquor they couldn't drink, some ringing the bells till they pulled them down, others beating them with pokers till they beat them into fragments: more men still—more, more, more—swarming on like insects: noise, smoke, light, darkness, frolic, anger, laughter, groans, plunder, fear, and ruin!

Nearly all the time while John looked on at this bewildering scene, Hugh kept near him; and though he was the loudest, wildest, most destructive villain there, he saved his old master's bones a score of times. Nay, even when Mr Tappertit, excited by liquor, came up, and in assertion of his prerogative politely kicked John Willet on the shins, Hugh bade him return the compliment; and if old John had had sufficient presence of mind to understand this whispered direction, and to profit by it, he might no doubt, under Hugh's protection, have done so with impunity.

At length the band began to reassemble outside the house, and to call to those within, to join them, for they were losing time. These murmurs increasing, and attaining a high pitch, Hugh, and some of those who yet lingered in the bar, and who plainly were the leaders of the troop, took counsel together, apart, as to what was to be done with John, to keep him quiet until their Chigwell work was over. Some proposed to set the house on fire and leave him in it; others, that he should be reduced to a state of temporary insensibility, by knocking on the head; others, that he should be sworn to sit where he was until to-morrow at the same hour; others again, that he should be gagged and taken off with them, under a sufficient guard. All these propositions being overruled, it was concluded, at last, to bind him in his chair, and the word was passed for Dennis.

'Look'ee here, Jack!' said Hugh, striding up to him: 'We are going to tie you, hand and foot, but otherwise you won't be hurt. D'ye hear?'

John Willet looked at another man, as if he didn't know which was the speaker, and muttered something about an ordinary every Sunday at two o'clock.

'You won't be hurt I tell you, Jack—do you hear me?' roared Hugh, impressing the assurance upon him by means of a heavy blow on the back. 'He's so dead scared, he's woolgathering, I think. Give him a drop of something to drink here. Hand over, one of you.'

A glass of liquor being passed forward, Hugh poured the contents down old John's throat. Mr Willet feebly smacked his lips, thrust his hand into his pocket, and inquired what was to pay; adding, as he looked vacantly round, that he believed there was a trifle of broken glass—

'He's out of his senses for the time, it's my belief,' said Hugh, after shaking him, without any visible effect upon his system, until his keys rattled in his pocket. 'Where's that Dennis?'

The word was again passed, and presently Mr Dennis, with a long cord bound about his middle, something after the manner of a friar, came hurrying in, attended by a body-guard of half-a-dozen of his men.

'Come! Be alive here!' cried Hugh, stamping his foot upon the ground. 'Make haste!'

Dennis, with a wink and a nod, unwound the cord from about his person, and raising his eyes to the ceiling, looked all over it, and round the walls and cornice, with a curious eye; then shook his head.

'Move, man, can't you!' cried Hugh, with another impatient stamp of his foot. 'Are we to wait here, till the cry has gone for ten miles round, and our work's interrupted?'

'It's all very fine talking, brother,' answered Dennis, stepping towards him; 'but unless—' and here he whispered in his ear—'unless we do it over the door, it can't be done at all in this here room.'

'What can't?' Hugh demanded.

'What can't!' retorted Dennis. 'Why, the old man can't.'

'Why, you weren't going to hang him!' cried Hugh.

'No, brother?' returned the hangman with a stare. 'What else?'

Hugh made no answer, but snatching the rope from his companion's hand, proceeded to bind old John himself; but his very first move was so bungling and unskilful, that Mr Dennis entreated, almost with tears in his eyes, that he might be permitted to perform the duty. Hugh consenting, he achieved it in a twinkling.

'There,' he said, looking mournfully at John Willet, who displayed no more emotion in his bonds than he had shown out of them. 'That's what I call pretty and workmanlike. He's quite a picter now. But, brother, just a word with you—now that he's ready trussed, as one may say, wouldn't it be better for all parties if we was to work him off? It would read uncommon well in the newspapers, it would indeed. The public would think a great deal more on us!'

Hugh, inferring what his companion meant, rather from his gestures than his technical mode of expressing himself (to which, as he was ignorant of his calling, he wanted the clue), rejected this proposition for the second time, and gave the word 'Forward!' which was echoed by a hundred voices from without.

'To the Warren!' shouted Dennis as he ran out, followed by the rest. 'A witness's house, my lads!'

A loud yell followed, and the whole throng hurried off, mad for pillage and destruction. Hugh lingered behind for a few moments to stimulate himself with more drink, and to set all the taps running, a few of which had accidentally been spared; then, glancing round the despoiled and plundered room, through whose shattered window the rioters had thrust the Maypole itself,—for even that had been sawn down,—lighted a torch, clapped the mute and motionless John Willet on the back, and waving his light above his head, and uttering a fierce shout, hastened after his companions.

Chapter 55

John Willet, left alone in his dismantled bar, continued to sit staring about him; awake as to his eyes, certainly, but with all his powers of reason and reflection in a sound and dreamless sleep. He looked round upon the room which had been for years, and was within an hour ago, the pride of his heart; and not a muscle of his face was moved. The night, without, looked black and cold through the dreary gaps in the casement; the precious liquids, now nearly leaked away, dripped with a hollow sound upon the floor; the Maypole peered ruefully in through the broken window, like the bowsprit of a wrecked ship; the ground might have been the bottom of the sea, it was so strewn with precious fragments. Currents of air rushed in, as the old doors jarred and creaked upon their hinges; the candles flickered and guttered down, and made long winding-sheets; the cheery deep-red curtains flapped and fluttered idly in the wind; even the stout Dutch kegs, overthrown and lying empty in dark corners, seemed the mere husks of good fellows whose jollity had departed, and who could kindle with a friendly glow no more. John saw this desolation, and yet saw it not. He was perfectly contented to sit there, staring at it, and felt no more indignation or discomfort in his bonds than if they had been robes of honour. So far as he was personally concerned, old Time lay snoring, and the world stood still.

Save for the dripping from the barrels, the rustling of such light fragments of destruction as the wind affected, and the dull creaking of the open doors, all was profoundly quiet: indeed, these sounds, like the ticking of the death-watch in the night, only made the silence they invaded deeper and more apparent. But quiet or noisy, it was all one to John. If a train of heavy artillery could have come up and commenced ball practice outside the window, it would have been all the same to him. He was a long way beyond surprise. A ghost couldn't have overtaken him.

By and by he heard a footstep—a hurried, and yet cautious footstep—coming on towards the house. It stopped, advanced again, then seemed to go quite round it. Having done that, it came beneath the window, and a head looked in.

It was strongly relieved against the darkness outside by the glare of the guttering candles. A pale, worn, withered face; the eyes—but that was owing to its gaunt condition—unnaturally large and bright; the hair, a grizzled black. It gave a searching glance all round the room, and a deep voice said:

'Are you alone in this house?'

John made no sign, though the question was repeated twice, and he heard it distinctly. After a moment's pause, the man got in at the window. John was not at all surprised at this, either. There had been so much getting in and out of window in the course of the last hour or so, that he had quite forgotten the door, and seemed to have lived among such exercises from infancy.

The man wore a large, dark, faded cloak, and a slouched hat; he walked up close to John, and looked at him. John returned the compliment with interest.

'How long have you been sitting thus?' said the man.

John considered, but nothing came of it.

'Which way have the party gone?'

Some wandering speculations relative to the fashion of the stranger's boots, got into Mr Willet's mind by some accident or other, but they got out again in a hurry, and left him in his former state.

'You would do well to speak,' said the man; 'you may keep a whole skin, though you have nothing else left that can be hurt. Which way have the party gone?'

'That!' said John, finding his voice all at once, and nodding with perfect good faith—he couldn't point; he was so tightly bound—in exactly the opposite direction to the right one.

'You lie!' said the man angrily, and with a threatening gesture. 'I came that way. You would betray me.'

It was so evident that John's imperturbability was not assumed, but was the result of the late proceedings under his roof, that the man stayed his hand in the very act of striking him, and turned away.

John looked after him without so much as a twitch in a single nerve of his face. He seized a glass, and holding it under one of the little casks until a few drops were collected, drank them greedily off; then throwing it down upon the floor impatiently, he took the vessel in his hands and drained it into his throat. Some scraps of bread and meat were scattered about, and on these he fell next; eating them with voracity, and pausing every now and then to listen for some fancied noise outside. When he had refreshed himself in this manner with violent haste, and raised another barrel to his lips, he pulled his hat upon his brow as though he were about to leave the house, and turned to John.

'Where are your servants?'

Mr Willet indistinctly remembered to have heard the rioters calling to them to throw the key of the room in which they were, out of window, for their keeping. He therefore replied, 'Locked up.'

'Well for them if they remain quiet, and well for you if you do the like,' said the man. 'Now show me the way the party went.'

This time Mr Willet indicated it correctly. The man was hurrying to the door, when suddenly there came towards them on the wind, the loud and rapid tolling of an alarm-bell, and then a bright and vivid glare streamed up, which illumined, not only the whole chamber, but all the country.

It was not the sudden change from darkness to this dreadful light, it was not the sound of distant shrieks and shouts of triumph, it was not this dread invasion of the serenity and peace of night, that drove the man back as though a thunderbolt had struck him. It was the Bell. If the ghastliest shape the human mind has ever pictured in its wildest dreams had risen up before him, he could not have staggered backward from its touch, as he did from the first sound of that loud iron voice. With eyes that started from his head, his limbs convulsed, his face most horrible to see, he raised one arm high up into the air, and holding something visionary back and down, with his other hand, drove at it as though he held a knife and stabbed it to the heart. He clutched his hair, and stopped his ears, and travelled madly round and round; then gave a frightful cry, and with it rushed away: still, still, the Bell tolled on and seemed to follow him—louder and louder, hotter and hotter yet. The glare grew brighter, the roar of voices deeper; the crash of heavy bodies falling, shook the air; bright streams of sparks rose up into the sky; but louder than them all—rising faster far, to Heaven—a million times more fierce and furious—pouring forth dreadful secrets after its long silence—speaking the language of the dead—the Bell—the Bell!

What hunt of spectres could surpass that dread pursuit and flight! Had there been a legion of them on his track, he could have better borne it. They would have had a beginning and an end, but here all space was full. The one pursuing voice was everywhere: it sounded in the earth, the air; shook the long grass, and howled among the trembling trees. The echoes caught it up, the owls hooted as it flew upon the breeze, the nightingale was silent and hid herself among the thickest boughs: it seemed to goad and urge the angry fire, and lash it into madness; everything was steeped in one prevailing red; the glow was everywhere; nature was drenched in blood: still the remorseless crying of that awful voice—the Bell, the Bell!

It ceased; but not in his ears. The knell was at his heart. No work of man had ever voice like that which sounded there, and warned him that it cried unceasingly to Heaven. Who could hear that hell, and not know what it said! There was murder in its every note—cruel, relentless, savage murder—the murder of a confiding man, by one who held his every trust. Its ringing summoned phantoms from their graves. What face was that, in which a friendly smile changed to a look of half incredulous horror, which stiffened for a moment into one of pain, then changed again into an imploring glance at Heaven, and so fell idly down with upturned eyes, like the dead stags' he had often peeped at when a little child: shrinking and shuddering—there was a dreadful thing to think of now!—and clinging to an apron as he looked! He sank upon the ground, and grovelling down as if he would dig himself a place to hide in, covered his face and ears: but no, no, no,—a hundred walls and roofs of brass would not shut out that bell, for in it spoke the wrathful voice of God, and from that voice, the whole wide universe could not afford a refuge!

While he rushed up and down, not knowing where to turn, and while he lay crouching there, the work went briskly on indeed. When they left the Maypole, the rioters formed into a solid body, and advanced at a quick pace towards the Warren. Rumour of their approach having gone before, they found the garden-doors fast closed, the windows made secure, and the house profoundly dark: not a light being visible in any portion of the building. After some fruitless ringing at the bells, and beating at the iron gates, they drew off a few paces to reconnoitre, and confer upon the course it would be best to take.

Very little conference was needed, when all were bent upon one desperate purpose, infuriated with liquor, and flushed with successful riot. The word being given to surround the house, some climbed the gates, or dropped into the shallow trench and scaled the garden wall, while others pulled down the solid iron fence, and while they made a breach to enter by, made deadly weapons of the bars. The house being completely encircled, a small number of men were despatched to break open a tool-shed in the garden; and during their absence on this errand, the remainder contented themselves with knocking violently at the doors, and calling to those within, to come down and open them on peril of their lives.

No answer being returned to this repeated summons, and the detachment who had been sent away, coming back with an accession of pickaxes, spades, and hoes, they,—together with those who had such arms already, or carried (as many did) axes, poles, and crowbars,—struggled into the foremost rank, ready to beset the doors and windows. They had not at this time more than a dozen lighted torches among them; but when these preparations were completed, flaming links were distributed and passed from hand to hand with such rapidity, that, in a minute's time, at least two-thirds of the whole roaring mass bore, each man in his hand, a blazing brand. Whirling these about their heads they raised a loud shout, and fell to work upon the doors and windows.

Amidst the clattering of heavy blows, the rattling of broken glass, the cries and execrations of the mob, and all the din and turmoil of the scene, Hugh and his friends kept together at the turret-door where Mr Haredale had last admitted him and old John Willet; and spent their united force on that. It was a strong old oaken door, guarded by good bolts and a heavy bar, but it soon went crashing in upon the narrow stairs behind, and made, as it were, a platform to facilitate their tearing up into the rooms above. Almost at the same moment, a dozen other points were forced, and at every one the crowd poured in like water.

A few armed servant-men were posted in the hall, and when the rioters forced an entrance there, they fired some half-a-dozen shots. But these taking no effect, and the concourse coming on like an army of devils, they only thought of consulting their own safety, and retreated, echoing their assailants' cries, and hoping in the confusion to be taken for rioters themselves; in which stratagem they succeeded, with the exception of one old man who was never heard of again, and was said to have had his brains beaten out with an iron bar (one of his fellows reported that he had seen the old man fall), and to have been afterwards burnt in the flames.

The besiegers being now in complete possession of the house, spread themselves over it from garret to cellar, and plied their demon labours fiercely. While some small parties kindled bonfires underneath the windows, others broke up the furniture and cast the fragments down to feed the flames below; where the apertures in the wall (windows no longer) were large enough, they threw out tables, chests of drawers, beds, mirrors, pictures, and flung them whole into the fire; while every fresh addition to the blazing masses was received with shouts, and howls, and yells, which added new and dismal terrors to the conflagration. Those who had axes and had spent their fury on the movables, chopped and tore down the doors and window frames, broke up the flooring, hewed away the rafters, and buried men who lingered in the upper rooms, in heaps of ruins. Some searched the drawers, the chests, the boxes, writing-desks, and closets, for jewels, plate, and money; while others, less mindful of gain and more mad for destruction, cast their whole contents into the courtyard without examination, and called to those below, to heap them on the blaze. Men who had been into the cellars, and had staved the casks, rushed to and fro stark mad, setting fire to all they saw—often to the dresses of their own friends—and kindling the building in so many parts that some had no time for escape, and were seen, with drooping hands and blackened faces, hanging senseless on the window-sills to which they had crawled, until they were sucked and drawn into the burning gulf. The more the fire crackled and raged, the wilder and more cruel the men grew; as though moving in that element they became fiends, and changed their earthly nature for the qualities that give delight in hell.

The burning pile, revealing rooms and passages red hot, through gaps made in the crumbling walls; the tributary fires that licked the outer bricks and stones, with their long forked tongues, and ran up to meet the glowing mass within; the shining of the flames upon the villains who looked on and fed them; the roaring of the angry blaze, so bright and high that it seemed in its rapacity to have swallowed up the very smoke; the living flakes the wind bore rapidly away and hurried on with, like a storm of fiery snow; the noiseless breaking of great beams of wood, which fell like feathers on the heap of ashes, and crumbled in the very act to sparks and powder; the lurid tinge that overspread the sky, and the darkness, very deep by contrast, which prevailed around; the exposure to the coarse, common gaze, of every little nook which usages of home had made a sacred place, and the destruction by rude hands of every little household favourite which old associations made a dear and precious thing: all this taking place—not among pitying looks and friendly murmurs of compassion, but brutal shouts and exultations, which seemed to make the very rats who stood by the old house too long, creatures with some claim upon the pity and regard of those its roof had sheltered:—combined to form a scene never to be forgotten by those who saw it and were not actors in the work, so long as life endured.

And who were they? The alarm-bell rang—and it was pulled by no faint or hesitating hands—for a long time; but not a soul was seen. Some of the insurgents said that when it ceased, they heard the shrieks of women, and saw some garments fluttering in the air, as a party of men bore away no unresisting burdens. No one could say that this was true or false, in such an uproar; but where was Hugh? Who among them had seen him, since the forcing of the doors? The cry spread through the body. Where was Hugh!

'Here!' he hoarsely cried, appearing from the darkness; out of breath, and blackened with the smoke. 'We have done all we can; the fire is burning itself out; and even the corners where it hasn't spread, are nothing but heaps of ruins. Disperse, my lads, while the coast's clear; get back by different ways; and meet as usual!' With that, he disappeared again,—contrary to his wont, for he was always first to advance, and last to go away,—leaving them to follow homewards as they would.

It was not an easy task to draw off such a throng. If Bedlam gates had been flung wide open, there would not have issued forth such maniacs as the frenzy of that night had made. There were men there, who danced and trampled on the beds of flowers as though they trod down human enemies, and wrenched them from the stalks, like savages who twisted human necks. There were men who cast their lighted torches in the air, and suffered them to fall upon their heads and faces, blistering the skin with deep unseemly burns. There were men who rushed up to the fire, and paddled in it with their hands as if in water; and others who were restrained by force from plunging in, to gratify their deadly longing. On the skull of one drunken lad—not twenty, by his looks—who lay upon the ground with a bottle to his mouth, the lead from the roof came streaming down in a shower of liquid fire, white hot; melting his head like wax. When the scattered parties were collected, men—living yet, but singed as with hot irons—were plucked out of the cellars, and carried off upon the shoulders of others, who strove to wake them as they went along, with ribald jokes, and left them, dead, in the passages of hospitals. But of all the howling throng not one learnt mercy from, or sickened at, these sights; nor was the fierce, besotted, senseless rage of one man glutted.

Slowly, and in small clusters, with hoarse hurrahs and repetitions of their usual cry, the assembly dropped away. The last few red-eyed stragglers reeled after those who had gone before; the distant noise of men calling to each other, and whistling for others whom they missed, grew fainter and fainter; at length even these sounds died away, and silence reigned alone.

Silence indeed! The glare of the flames had sunk into a fitful, flashing light; and the gentle stars, invisible till now, looked down upon the blackening heap. A dull smoke hung upon the ruin, as though to hide it from those eyes of Heaven; and the wind forbore to move it. Bare walls, roof open to the sky—chambers, where the beloved dead had, many and many a fair day, risen to new life and energy; where so many dear ones had been sad and merry; which were connected with so many thoughts and hopes, regrets and changes—all gone. Nothing left but a dull and dreary blank—a smouldering heap of dust and ashes—the silence and solitude of utter desolation.

Chapter 56

The Maypole cronies, little dreaming of the change so soon to come upon their favourite haunt, struck through the Forest path upon their way to London; and avoiding the main road, which was hot and dusty, kept to the by-paths and the fields. As they drew nearer to their destination, they began to make inquiries of the people whom they passed, concerning the riots, and the truth or falsehood of the stories they had heard. The answers went far beyond any intelligence that had spread to quiet Chigwell. One man told them that that afternoon the Guards, conveying to Newgate some rioters who had been re-examined, had been set upon by the mob and compelled to retreat; another, that the houses of two witnesses near Clare Market were about to be pulled down when he came away; another, that Sir George Saville's house in Leicester Fields was to be burned that night, and that it would go hard with Sir George if he fell into the people's hands, as it was he who had brought in the Catholic bill. All accounts agreed that the mob were out, in stronger numbers and more numerous parties than had yet appeared; that the streets were unsafe; that no man's house or life was worth an hour's purchase; that the public consternation was increasing every moment; and that many families had already fled the city. One fellow who wore the popular colour, damned them for not having cockades in their hats, and bade them set a good watch to-morrow night upon their prison doors, for the locks would have a straining; another asked if they were fire-proof, that they walked abroad without the distinguishing mark of all good and true men;—and a third who rode on horseback, and was quite alone, ordered them to throw each man a shilling, in his hat, towards the support of the rioters. Although they were afraid to refuse compliance with this demand, and were much alarmed by these reports, they agreed, having come so far, to go forward, and see the real state of things with their own eyes. So they pushed on quicker, as men do who are excited by portentous news; and ruminating on what they had heard, spoke little to each other.

It was now night, and as they came nearer to the city they had dismal confirmation of this intelligence in three great fires, all close together, which burnt fiercely and were gloomily reflected in the sky. Arriving in the immediate suburbs, they found that almost every house had chalked upon its door in large characters 'No Popery,' that the shops were shut, and that alarm and anxiety were depicted in every face they passed.

Noting these things with a degree of apprehension which neither of the three cared to impart, in its full extent, to his companions, they came to a turnpike-gate, which was shut. They were passing through the turnstile on the path, when a horseman rode up from London at a hard gallop, and called to the toll-keeper in a voice of great agitation, to open quickly in the name of God.

The adjuration was so earnest and vehement, that the man, with a lantern in his hand, came running out—toll-keeper though he was—and was about to throw the gate open, when happening to look behind him, he exclaimed, 'Good Heaven, what's that! Another fire!'

At this, the three turned their heads, and saw in the distance—straight in the direction whence they had come—a broad sheet of flame, casting a threatening light upon the clouds, which glimmered as though the conflagration were behind them, and showed like a wrathful sunset.

'My mind misgives me,' said the horseman, 'or I know from what far building those flames come. Don't stand aghast, my good fellow. Open the gate!'

'Sir,' cried the man, laying his hand upon his horse's bridle as he let him through: 'I know you now, sir; be advised by me; do not go on. I saw them pass, and know what kind of men they are. You will be murdered.'

'So be it!' said the horseman, looking intently towards the fire, and not at him who spoke.

'But sir—sir,' cried the man, grasping at his rein more tightly yet, 'if you do go on, wear the blue riband. Here, sir,' he added, taking one from his own hat, 'it's necessity, not choice, that makes me wear it; it's love of life and home, sir. Wear it for this one night, sir; only for this one night.'

'Do!' cried the three friends, pressing round his horse. 'Mr Haredale—worthy sir—good gentleman—pray be persuaded.'

'Who's that?' cried Mr Haredale, stooping down to look. 'Did I hear Daisy's voice?'

'You did, sir,' cried the little man. 'Do be persuaded, sir. This gentleman says very true. Your life may hang upon it.'

'Are you,' said Mr Haredale abruptly, 'afraid to come with me?'

'I, sir?—N-n-no.'

'Put that riband in your hat. If we meet the rioters, swear that I took you prisoner for wearing it. I will tell them so with my own lips; for as I hope for mercy when I die, I will take no quarter from them, nor shall they have quarter from me, if we come hand to hand to-night. Up here—behind me—quick! Clasp me tight round the body, and fear nothing.'

In an instant they were riding away, at full gallop, in a dense cloud of dust, and speeding on, like hunters in a dream.

It was well the good horse knew the road he traversed, for never once—no, never once in all the journey—did Mr Haredale cast his eyes upon the ground, or turn them, for an instant, from the light towards which they sped so madly. Once he said in a low voice, 'It is my house,' but that was the only time he spoke. When they came to dark and doubtful places, he never forgot to put his hand upon the little man to hold him more securely in his seat, but he kept his head erect and his eyes fixed on the fire, then, and always.

The road was dangerous enough, for they went the nearest way—headlong—far from the highway—by lonely lanes and paths, where waggon-wheels had worn deep ruts; where hedge and ditch hemmed in the narrow strip of ground; and tall trees, arching overhead, made it profoundly dark. But on, on, on, with neither stop nor stumble, till they reached the Maypole door, and could plainly see that the fire began to fade, as if for want of fuel.

'Down—for one moment—for but one moment,' said Mr Haredale, helping Daisy to the ground, and following himself. 'Willet—Willet—where are my niece and servants—Willet!'

Crying to him distractedly, he rushed into the bar.—The landlord bound and fastened to his chair; the place dismantled, stripped, and pulled about his ears;—nobody could have taken shelter here.

He was a strong man, accustomed to restrain himself, and suppress his strong emotions; but this preparation for what was to follow—though he had seen that fire burning, and knew that his house must be razed to the ground—was more than he could bear. He covered his face with his hands for a moment, and turned away his head.

'Johnny, Johnny,' said Solomon—and the simple-hearted fellow cried outright, and wrung his hands—'Oh dear old Johnny, here's a change! That the Maypole bar should come to this, and we should live to see it! The old Warren too, Johnny—Mr Haredale—oh, Johnny, what a piteous sight this is!'

Pointing to Mr Haredale as he said these words, little Solomon Daisy put his elbows on the back of Mr Willet's chair, and fairly blubbered on his shoulder.

While Solomon was speaking, old John sat, mute as a stock-fish, staring at him with an unearthly glare, and displaying, by every possible symptom, entire and complete unconsciousness. But when Solomon was silent again, John followed with his great round eyes the direction of his looks, and did appear to have some dawning distant notion that somebody had come to see him.

'You know us, don't you, Johnny?' said the little clerk, rapping himself on the breast. 'Daisy, you know—Chigwell Church—bell-ringer—little desk on Sundays—eh, Johnny?'

Mr Willet reflected for a few moments, and then muttered, as it were mechanically: 'Let us sing to the praise and glory of—'

'Yes, to be sure,' cried the little man, hastily; 'that's it—that's me, Johnny. You're all right now, an't you? Say you're all right, Johnny.'

'All right?' pondered Mr Willet, as if that were a matter entirely between himself and his conscience. 'All right? Ah!'

'They haven't been misusing you with sticks, or pokers, or any other blunt instruments—have they, Johnny?' asked Solomon, with a very anxious glance at Mr Willet's head. 'They didn't beat you, did they?'

John knitted his brow; looked downwards, as if he were mentally engaged in some arithmetical calculation; then upwards, as if the total would not come at his call; then at Solomon Daisy, from his eyebrow to his shoe-buckle; then very slowly round the bar. And then a great, round, leaden-looking, and not at all transparent tear, came rolling out of each eye, and he said, as he shook his head:

'If they'd only had the goodness to murder me, I'd have thanked 'em kindly.'

'No, no, no, don't say that, Johnny,' whimpered his little friend. 'It's very, very bad, but not quite so bad as that. No, no!'

'Look'ee here, sir!' cried John, turning his rueful eyes on Mr Haredale, who had dropped on one knee, and was hastily beginning to untie his bonds. 'Look'ee here, sir! The very Maypole—the old dumb Maypole—stares in at the winder, as if it said, "John Willet, John Willet, let's go and pitch ourselves in the nighest pool of water as is deep enough to hold us; for our day is over!"'

'Don't, Johnny, don't,' cried his friend: no less affected with this mournful effort of Mr Willet's imagination, than by the sepulchral tone in which he had spoken of the Maypole. 'Please don't, Johnny!'

'Your loss is great, and your misfortune a heavy one,' said Mr Haredale, looking restlessly towards the door: 'and this is not a time to comfort you. If it were, I am in no condition to do so. Before I leave you, tell me one thing, and try to tell me plainly, I implore you. Have you seen, or heard of Emma?'

'No!' said Mr Willet.

'Nor any one but these bloodhounds?'

'No!'

'They rode away, I trust in Heaven, before these dreadful scenes began,' said Mr Haredale, who, between his agitation, his eagerness to mount his horse again, and the dexterity with which the cords were tied, had scarcely yet undone one knot. 'A knife, Daisy!'

'You didn't,' said John, looking about, as though he had lost his pocket-handkerchief, or some such slight article—'either of you gentlemen—see a—a coffin anywheres, did you?'

'Willet!' cried Mr Haredale. Solomon dropped the knife, and instantly becoming limp from head to foot, exclaimed 'Good gracious!'

'—Because,' said John, not at all regarding them, 'a dead man called a little time ago, on his way yonder. I could have told you what name was on the plate, if he had brought his coffin with him, and left it behind. If he didn't, it don't signify.'

His landlord, who had listened to these words with breathless attention, started that moment to his feet; and, without a word, drew Solomon Daisy to the door, mounted his horse, took him up behind again, and flew rather than galloped towards the pile of ruins, which that day's sun had shone upon, a stately house. Mr Willet stared after them, listened, looked down upon himself to make quite sure that he was still unbound, and, without any manifestation of impatience, disappointment, or surprise, gently relapsed into the condition from which he had so imperfectly recovered.

Mr Haredale tied his horse to the trunk of a tree, and grasping his companion's arm, stole softly along the footpath, and into what had been the garden of his house. He stopped for an instant to look upon its smoking walls, and at the stars that shone through roof and floor upon the heap of crumbling ashes. Solomon glanced timidly in his face, but his lips were tightly pressed together, a resolute and stern expression sat upon his brow, and not a tear, a look, or gesture indicating grief, escaped him.

He drew his sword; felt for a moment in his breast, as though he carried other arms about him; then grasping Solomon by the wrist again, went with a cautious step all round the house. He looked into every doorway and gap in the wall; retraced his steps at every rustling of the air among the leaves; and searched in every shadowed nook with outstretched hands. Thus they made the circuit of the building: but they returned to the spot from which they had set out, without encountering any human being, or finding the least trace of any concealed straggler.

After a short pause, Mr Haredale shouted twice or thrice. Then cried aloud, 'Is there any one in hiding here, who knows my voice! There is nothing to fear now. If any of my people are near, I entreat them to answer!' He called them all by name; his voice was echoed in many mournful tones; then all was silent as before.

They were standing near the foot of the turret, where the alarm-bell hung. The fire had raged there, and the floors had been sawn, and hewn, and beaten down, besides. It was open to the night; but a part of the staircase still remained, winding upward from a great mound of dust and cinders. Fragments of the jagged and broken steps offered an insecure and giddy footing here and there, and then were lost again, behind protruding angles of the wall, or in the deep shadows cast upon it by other portions of the ruin; for by this time the moon had risen, and shone brightly.

As they stood here, listening to the echoes as they died away, and hoping in vain to hear a voice they knew, some of the ashes in this turret slipped and rolled down. Startled by the least noise in that melancholy place, Solomon looked up in his companion's face, and saw that he had turned towards the spot, and that he watched and listened keenly.

He covered the little man's mouth with his hand, and looked again. Instantly, with kindling eyes, he bade him on his life keep still, and neither speak nor move. Then holding his breath, and stooping down, he stole into the turret, with his drawn sword in his hand, and disappeared.

Terrified to be left there by himself, under such desolate circumstances, and after all he had seen and heard that night, Solomon would have followed, but there had been something in Mr Haredale's manner and his look, the recollection of which held him spellbound. He stood rooted to the spot; and scarcely venturing to breathe, looked up with mingled fear and wonder.

Again the ashes slipped and rolled—very, very softly—again—and then again, as though they crumbled underneath the tread of a stealthy foot. And now a figure was dimly visible; climbing very softly; and often stopping to look down; now it pursued its difficult way; and now it was hidden from the view again.

It emerged once more, into the shadowy and uncertain light—higher now, but not much, for the way was steep and toilsome, and its progress very slow. What phantom of the brain did he pursue; and why did he look down so constantly? He knew he was alone. Surely his mind was not affected by that night's loss and agony. He was not about to throw himself headlong from the summit of the tottering wall. Solomon turned sick, and clasped his hands. His limbs trembled beneath him, and a cold sweat broke out upon his pallid face.

If he complied with Mr Haredale's last injunction now, it was because he had not the power to speak or move. He strained his gaze, and fixed it on a patch of moonlight, into which, if he continued to ascend, he must soon emerge. When he appeared there, he would try to call to him.

Again the ashes slipped and crumbled; some stones rolled down, and fell with a dull, heavy sound upon the ground below. He kept his eyes upon the piece of moonlight. The figure was coming on, for its shadow was already thrown upon the wall. Now it appeared—and now looked round at him—and now—

The horror-stricken clerk uttered a scream that pierced the air, and cried, 'The ghost! The ghost!'

Long before the echo of his cry had died away, another form rushed out into the light, flung itself upon the foremost one, knelt down upon its breast, and clutched its throat with both hands.

'Villain!' cried Mr Haredale, in a terrible voice—for it was he. 'Dead and buried, as all men supposed through your infernal arts, but reserved by Heaven for this—at last—at last I have you. You, whose hands are red with my brother's blood, and that of his faithful servant, shed to conceal your own atrocious guilt—You, Rudge, double murderer and monster, I arrest you in the name of God, who has delivered you into my hands. No. Though you had the strength of twenty men,' he added, as the murderer writhed and struggled, you could not escape me or loosen my grasp to-night!'

Chapter 57

Barnaby, armed as we have seen, continued to pace up and down before the stable-door; glad to be alone again, and heartily rejoicing in the unaccustomed silence and tranquillity. After the whirl of noise and riot in which the last two days had been passed, the pleasures of solitude and peace were enhanced a thousandfold. He felt quite happy; and as he leaned upon his staff and mused, a bright smile overspread his face, and none but cheerful visions floated into his brain.

Had he no thoughts of her, whose sole delight he was, and whom he had unconsciously plunged in such bitter sorrow and such deep affliction? Oh, yes. She was at the heart of all his cheerful hopes and proud reflections. It was she whom all this honour and distinction were to gladden; the joy and profit were for her. What delight it gave her to hear of the bravery of her poor boy! Ah! He would have known that, without Hugh's telling him. And what a precious thing it was to know she lived so happily, and heard with so much pride (he pictured to himself her look when they told her) that he was in such high esteem: bold among the boldest, and trusted before them all! And when these frays were over, and the good lord had conquered his enemies, and they were all at peace again, and he and she were rich, what happiness they would have in talking of these troubled times when he was a great soldier: and when they sat alone together in the tranquil twilight, and she had no longer reason to be anxious for the morrow, what pleasure would he have in the reflection that this was his doing—his—poor foolish Barnaby's; and in patting her on the cheek, and saying with a merry laugh, 'Am I silly now, mother—am I silly now?'

With a lighter heart and step, and eyes the brighter for the happy tear that dimmed them for a moment, Barnaby resumed his walk; and singing gaily to himself, kept guard upon his quiet post.

His comrade Grip, the partner of his watch, though fond of basking in the sunshine, preferred to-day to walk about the stable; having a great deal to do in the way of scattering the straw, hiding under it such small articles as had been casually left about, and haunting Hugh's bed, to which he seemed to have taken a particular attachment. Sometimes Barnaby looked in and called him, and then he came hopping out; but he merely did this as a concession to his master's weakness, and soon returned again to his own grave pursuits: peering into the straw with his bill, and rapidly covering up the place, as if, Midas-like, he were whispering secrets to the earth and burying them; constantly busying himself upon the sly; and affecting, whenever Barnaby came past, to look up in the clouds and have nothing whatever on his mind: in short, conducting himself, in many respects, in a more than usually thoughtful, deep, and mysterious manner.

As the day crept on, Barnaby, who had no directions forbidding him to eat and drink upon his post, but had been, on the contrary, supplied with a bottle of beer and a basket of provisions, determined to break his fast, which he had not done since morning. To this end, he sat down on the ground before the door, and putting his staff across his knees in case of alarm or surprise, summoned Grip to dinner.

This call, the bird obeyed with great alacrity; crying, as he sidled up to his master, 'I'm a devil, I'm a Polly, I'm a kettle, I'm a Protestant, No Popery!' Having learnt this latter sentiment from the gentry among whom he had lived of late, he delivered it with uncommon emphasis.

'Well said, Grip!' cried his master, as he fed him with the daintiest bits. 'Well said, old boy!'

'Never say die, bow wow wow, keep up your spirits, Grip Grip Grip, Holloa! We'll all have tea, I'm a Protestant kettle, No Popery!' cried the raven.

'Gordon for ever, Grip!' cried Barnaby.

The raven, placing his head upon the ground, looked at his master sideways, as though he would have said, 'Say that again!' Perfectly understanding his desire, Barnaby repeated the phrase a great many times. The bird listened with profound attention; sometimes repeating the popular cry in a low voice, as if to compare the two, and try if it would at all help him to this new accomplishment; sometimes flapping his wings, or barking; and sometimes in a kind of desperation drawing a multitude of corks, with extraordinary viciousness.

Barnaby was so intent upon his favourite, that he was not at first aware of the approach of two persons on horseback, who were riding at a foot-pace, and coming straight towards his post. When he perceived them, however, which he did when they were within some fifty yards of him, he jumped hastily up, and ordering Grip within doors, stood with both hands on his staff, waiting until he should know whether they were friends or foes.

He had hardly done so, when he observed that those who advanced were a gentleman and his servant; almost at the same moment he recognised Lord George Gordon, before whom he stood uncovered, with his eyes turned towards the ground.

'Good day!' said Lord George, not reining in his horse until he was close beside him. 'Well!'

'All quiet, sir, all safe!' cried Barnaby. 'The rest are away—they went by that path—that one. A grand party!'

'Ay?' said Lord George, looking thoughtfully at him. 'And you?'

'Oh! They left me here to watch—to mount guard—to keep everything secure till they come back. I'll do it, sir, for your sake. You're a good gentleman; a kind gentleman—ay, you are. There are many against you, but we'll be a match for them, never fear!'

'What's that?' said Lord George—pointing to the raven who was peeping out of the stable-door—but still looking thoughtfully, and in some perplexity, it seemed, at Barnaby.

'Why, don't you know!' retorted Barnaby, with a wondering laugh. 'Not know what HE is! A bird, to be sure. My bird—my friend—Grip.'

'A devil, a kettle, a Grip, a Polly, a Protestant, no Popery!' cried the raven.

'Though, indeed,' added Barnaby, laying his hand upon the neck of Lord George's horse, and speaking softly: 'you had good reason to ask me what he is, for sometimes it puzzles me—and I am used to him—to think he's only a bird. He's my brother, Grip is—always with me—always talking—always merry—eh, Grip?'

The raven answered by an affectionate croak, and hopping on his master's arm, which he held downward for that purpose, submitted with an air of perfect indifference to be fondled, and turned his restless, curious eye, now upon Lord George, and now upon his man.

Lord George, biting his nails in a discomfited manner, regarded Barnaby for some time in silence; then beckoning to his servant, said:

'Come hither, John.'

John Grueby touched his hat, and came.

'Have you ever seen this young man before?' his master asked in a low voice.

'Twice, my lord,' said John. 'I saw him in the crowd last night and Saturday.'

'Did—did it seem to you that his manner was at all wild or strange?' Lord George demanded, faltering.

'Mad,' said John, with emphatic brevity.

'And why do you think him mad, sir?' said his master, speaking in a peevish tone. 'Don't use that word too freely. Why do you think him mad?'

'My lord,' John Grueby answered, 'look at his dress, look at his eyes, look at his restless way, hear him cry "No Popery!" Mad, my lord.'

'So because one man dresses unlike another,' returned his angry master, glancing at himself; 'and happens to differ from other men in his carriage and manner, and to advocate a great cause which the corrupt and irreligious desert, he is to be accounted mad, is he?'

'Stark, staring, raving, roaring mad, my lord,' returned the unmoved John.

'Do you say this to my face?' cried his master, turning sharply upon him.

'To any man, my lord, who asks me,' answered John.

'Mr Gashford, I find, was right,' said Lord George; 'I thought him prejudiced, though I ought to have known a man like him better than to have supposed it possible!'

'I shall never have Mr Gashford's good word, my lord,' replied John, touching his hat respectfully, 'and I don't covet it.'

'You are an ill-conditioned, most ungrateful fellow,' said Lord George: 'a spy, for anything I know. Mr Gashford is perfectly correct, as I might have felt convinced he was. I have done wrong to retain you in my service. It is a tacit insult to him as my choice and confidential friend to do so, remembering the cause you sided with, on the day he was maligned at Westminster. You will leave me to-night—nay, as soon as we reach home. The sooner the better.'

'If it comes to that, I say so too, my lord. Let Mr Gashford have his will. As to my being a spy, my lord, you know me better than to believe it, I am sure. I don't know much about causes. My cause is the cause of one man against two hundred; and I hope it always will be.'

'You have said quite enough,' returned Lord George, motioning him to go back. 'I desire to hear no more.'

'If you'll let me have another word, my lord,' returned John Grueby, 'I'd give this silly fellow a caution not to stay here by himself. The proclamation is in a good many hands already, and it's well known that he was concerned in the business it relates to. He had better get to a place of safety if he can, poor creature.'

'You hear what this man says?' cried Lord George, addressing Barnaby, who had looked on and wondered while this dialogue passed. 'He thinks you may be afraid to remain upon your post, and are kept here perhaps against your will. What do you say?'

'I think, young man,' said John, in explanation, 'that the soldiers may turn out and take you; and that if they do, you will certainly be hung by the neck till you're dead—dead—dead. And I think you had better go from here, as fast as you can. That's what I think.'

'He's a coward, Grip, a coward!' cried Barnaby, putting the raven on the ground, and shouldering his staff. 'Let them come! Gordon for ever! Let them come!'

'Ay!' said Lord George, 'let them! Let us see who will venture to attack a power like ours; the solemn league of a whole people. THIS a madman! You have said well, very well. I am proud to be the leader of such men as you.'

Barnaby's heart swelled within his bosom as he heard these words. He took Lord George's hand and carried it to his lips; patted his horse's crest, as if the affection and admiration he had conceived for the man extended to the animal he rode; then unfurling his flag, and proudly waving it, resumed his pacing up and down.

Lord George, with a kindling eye and glowing cheek, took off his hat, and flourishing it above his head, bade him exultingly Farewell!—then cantered off at a brisk pace; after glancing angrily round to see that his servant followed. Honest John set spurs to his horse and rode after his master, but not before he had again warned Barnaby to retreat, with many significant gestures, which indeed he continued to make, and Barnaby to resist, until the windings of the road concealed them from each other's view.

Left to himself again with a still higher sense of the importance of his post, and stimulated to enthusiasm by the special notice and encouragement of his leader, Barnaby walked to and fro in a delicious trance rather than as a waking man. The sunshine which prevailed around was in his mind. He had but one desire ungratified. If she could only see him now!

The day wore on; its heat was gently giving place to the cool of evening; a light wind sprung up, fanning his long hair, and making the banner rustle pleasantly above his head. There was a freedom and freshness in the sound and in the time, which chimed exactly with his mood. He was happier than ever.

He was leaning on his staff looking towards the declining sun, and reflecting with a smile that he stood sentinel at that moment over buried gold, when two or three figures appeared in the distance, making towards the house at a rapid pace, and motioning with their hands as though they urged its inmates to retreat from some approaching danger. As they drew nearer, they became more earnest in their gestures; and they were no sooner within hearing, than the foremost among them cried that the soldiers were coming up.

At these words, Barnaby furled his flag, and tied it round the pole. His heart beat high while he did so, but he had no more fear or thought of retreating than the pole itself. The friendly stragglers hurried past him, after giving him notice of his danger, and quickly passed into the house, where the utmost confusion immediately prevailed. As those within hastily closed the windows and the doors, they urged him by looks and signs to fly without loss of time, and called to him many times to do so; but he only shook his head indignantly in answer, and stood the firmer on his post. Finding that he was not to be persuaded, they took care of themselves; and leaving the place with only one old woman in it, speedily withdrew.

As yet there had been no symptom of the news having any better foundation than in the fears of those who brought it, but The Boot had not been deserted five minutes, when there appeared, coming across the fields, a body of men who, it was easy to see, by the glitter of their arms and ornaments in the sun, and by their orderly and regular mode of advancing—for they came on as one man—were soldiers. In a very little time, Barnaby knew that they were a strong detachment of the Foot Guards, having along with them two gentlemen in private clothes, and a small party of Horse; the latter brought up the rear, and were not in number more than six or eight.

They advanced steadily; neither quickening their pace as they came nearer, nor raising any cry, nor showing the least emotion or anxiety. Though this was a matter of course in the case of regular troops, even to Barnaby, there was something particularly impressive and disconcerting in it to one accustomed to the noise and tumult of an undisciplined mob. For all that, he stood his ground not a whit the less resolutely, and looked on undismayed.

Presently, they marched into the yard, and halted. The commanding-officer despatched a messenger to the horsemen, one of whom came riding back. Some words passed between them, and they glanced at Barnaby; who well remembered the man he had unhorsed at Westminster, and saw him now before his eyes. The man being speedily dismissed, saluted, and rode back to his comrades, who were drawn up apart at a short distance.

The officer then gave the word to prime and load. The heavy ringing of the musket-stocks upon the ground, and the sharp and rapid rattling of the ramrods in their barrels, were a kind of relief to Barnaby, deadly though he knew the purport of such sounds to be. When this was done, other commands were given, and the soldiers instantaneously formed in single file all round the house and stables; completely encircling them in every part, at a distance, perhaps, of some half-dozen yards; at least that seemed in Barnaby's eyes to be about the space left between himself and those who confronted him. The horsemen remained drawn up by themselves as before.

The two gentlemen in private clothes who had kept aloof, now rode forward, one on either side the officer. The proclamation having been produced and read by one of them, the officer called on Barnaby to surrender.

He made no answer, but stepping within the door, before which he had kept guard, held his pole crosswise to protect it. In the midst of a profound silence, he was again called upon to yield.

Still he offered no reply. Indeed he had enough to do, to run his eye backward and forward along the half-dozen men who immediately fronted him, and settle hurriedly within himself at which of them he would strike first, when they pressed on him. He caught the eye of one in the centre, and resolved to hew that fellow down, though he died for it.

Again there was a dead silence, and again the same voice called upon him to deliver himself up.

Next moment he was back in the stable, dealing blows about him like a madman. Two of the men lay stretched at his feet: the one he had marked, dropped first—he had a thought for that, even in the hot blood and hurry of the struggle. Another blow—another! Down, mastered, wounded in the breast by a heavy blow from the butt-end of a gun (he saw the weapon in the act of falling)—breathless—and a prisoner.

An exclamation of surprise from the officer recalled him, in some degree, to himself. He looked round. Grip, after working in secret all the afternoon, and with redoubled vigour while everybody's attention was distracted, had plucked away the straw from Hugh's bed, and turned up the loose ground with his iron bill. The hole had been recklessly filled to the brim, and was merely sprinkled with earth. Golden cups, spoons, candlesticks, coined guineas—all the riches were revealed.

They brought spades and a sack; dug up everything that was hidden there; and carried away more than two men could lift. They handcuffed him and bound his arms, searched him, and took away all he had. Nobody questioned or reproached him, or seemed to have much curiosity about him. The two men he had stunned, were carried off by their companions in the same business-like way in which everything else was done. Finally, he was left under a guard of four soldiers with fixed bayonets, while the officer directed in person the search of the house and the other buildings connected with it.

This was soon completed. The soldiers formed again in the yard; he was marched out, with his guard about him; and ordered to fall in, where a space was left. The others closed up all round, and so they moved away, with the prisoner in the centre.

When they came into the streets, he felt he was a sight; and looking up as they passed quickly along, could see people running to the windows a little too late, and throwing up the sashes to look after him. Sometimes he met a staring face beyond the heads about him, or under the arms of his conductors, or peering down upon him from a waggon-top or coach-box; but this was all he saw, being surrounded by so many men. The very noises of the streets seemed muffled and subdued; and the air came stale and hot upon him, like the sickly breath of an oven.

Tramp, tramp. Tramp, tramp. Heads erect, shoulders square, every man stepping in exact time—all so orderly and regular—nobody looking at him—nobody seeming conscious of his presence,—he could hardly believe he was a Prisoner. But at the word, though only thought, not spoken, he felt the handcuffs galling his wrists, the cord pressing his arms to his sides: the loaded guns levelled at his head; and those cold, bright, sharp, shining points turned towards him: the mere looking down at which, now that he was bound and helpless, made the warm current of his life run cold.

Chapter 58

They were not long in reaching the barracks, for the officer who commanded the party was desirous to avoid rousing the people by the display of military force in the streets, and was humanely anxious to give as little opportunity as possible for any attempt at rescue; knowing that it must lead to bloodshed and loss of life, and that if the civil authorities by whom he was accompanied, empowered him to order his men to fire, many innocent persons would probably fall, whom curiosity or idleness had attracted to the spot. He therefore led the party briskly on, avoiding with a merciful prudence the more public and crowded thoroughfares, and pursuing those which he deemed least likely to be infested by disorderly persons. This wise proceeding not only enabled them to gain their quarters without any interruption, but completely baffled a body of rioters who had assembled in one of the main streets, through which it was considered certain they would pass, and who remained gathered together for the purpose of releasing the prisoner from their hands, long after they had deposited him in a place of security, closed the barrack-gates, and set a double guard at every entrance for its better protection.

Arrived at this place, poor Barnaby was marched into a stone-floored room, where there was a very powerful smell of tobacco, a strong thorough draught of air, and a great wooden bedstead, large enough for a score of men. Several soldiers in undress were lounging about, or eating from tin cans; military accoutrements dangled on rows of pegs along the whitewashed wall; and some half-dozen men lay fast asleep upon their backs, snoring in concert. After remaining here just long enough to note these things, he was marched out again, and conveyed across the parade-ground to another portion of the building.

Perhaps a man never sees so much at a glance as when he is in a situation of extremity. The chances are a hundred to one, that if Barnaby had lounged in at the gate to look about him, he would have lounged out again with a very imperfect idea of the place, and would have remembered very little about it. But as he was taken handcuffed across the gravelled area, nothing escaped his notice. The dry, arid look of the dusty square, and of the bare brick building; the clothes hanging at some of the windows; and the men in their shirt-sleeves and braces, lolling with half their bodies out of the others; the green sun-blinds at the officers' quarters, and the little scanty trees in front; the drummer-boys practising in a distant courtyard; the men at drill on the parade; the two soldiers carrying a basket between them, who winked to each other as he went by, and slily pointed to their throats; the spruce serjeant who hurried past with a cane in his hand, and under his arm a clasped book with a vellum cover; the fellows in the ground-floor rooms, furbishing and brushing up their different articles of dress, who stopped to look at him, and whose voices as they spoke together echoed loudly through the empty galleries and passages;—everything, down to the stand of muskets before the guard-house, and the drum with a pipe-clayed belt attached, in one corner, impressed itself upon his observation, as though he had noticed them in the same place a hundred times, or had been a whole day among them, in place of one brief hurried minute.

He was taken into a small paved back yard, and there they opened a great door, plated with iron, and pierced some five feet above the ground with a few holes to let in air and light. Into this dungeon he was walked straightway; and having locked him up there, and placed a sentry over him, they left him to his meditations.

The cell, or black hole, for it had those words painted on the door, was very dark, and having recently accommodated a drunken deserter, by no means clean. Barnaby felt his way to some straw at the farther end, and looking towards the door, tried to accustom himself to the gloom, which, coming from the bright sunshine out of doors, was not an easy task.

There was a kind of portico or colonnade outside, and this obstructed even the little light that at the best could have found its way through the small apertures in the door. The footsteps of the sentinel echoed monotonously as he paced its stone pavement to and fro (reminding Barnaby of the watch he had so lately kept himself); and as he passed and repassed the door, he made the cell for an instant so black by the interposition of his body, that his going away again seemed like the appearance of a new ray of light, and was quite a circumstance to look for.

When the prisoner had sat sometime upon the ground, gazing at the chinks, and listening to the advancing and receding footsteps of his guard, the man stood still upon his post. Barnaby, quite unable to think, or to speculate on what would be done with him, had been lulled into a kind of doze by his regular pace; but his stopping roused him; and then he became aware that two men were in conversation under the colonnade, and very near the door of his cell.

How long they had been talking there, he could not tell, for he had fallen into an unconsciousness of his real position, and when the footsteps ceased, was answering aloud some question which seemed to have been put to him by Hugh in the stable, though of the fancied purport, either of question or reply, notwithstanding that he awoke with the latter on his lips, he had no recollection whatever. The first words that reached his ears, were these:

'Why is he brought here then, if he has to be taken away again so soon?'

'Why where would you have him go! Damme, he's not as safe anywhere as among the king's troops, is he? What WOULD you do with him? Would you hand him over to a pack of cowardly civilians, that shake in their shoes till they wear the soles out, with trembling at the threats of the ragamuffins he belongs to?'

'That's true enough.'

'True enough!—I'll tell you what. I wish, Tom Green, that I was a commissioned instead of a non-commissioned officer, and that I had the command of two companies—only two companies—of my own regiment. Call me out to stop these riots—give me the needful authority, and half-a-dozen rounds of ball cartridge—'

'Ay!' said the other voice. 'That's all very well, but they won't give the needful authority. If the magistrate won't give the word, what's the officer to do?'

Not very well knowing, as it seemed, how to overcome this difficulty, the other man contented himself with damning the magistrates.

'With all my heart,' said his friend.

'Where's the use of a magistrate?' returned the other voice. 'What's a magistrate in this case, but an impertinent, unnecessary, unconstitutional sort of interference? Here's a proclamation. Here's a man referred to in that proclamation. Here's proof against him, and a witness on the spot. Damme! Take him out and shoot him, sir. Who wants a magistrate?'

'When does he go before Sir John Fielding?' asked the man who had spoken first.

'To-night at eight o'clock,' returned the other. 'Mark what follows. The magistrate commits him to Newgate. Our people take him to Newgate. The rioters pelt our people. Our people retire before the rioters. Stones are thrown, insults are offered, not a shot's fired. Why? Because of the magistrates. Damn the magistrates!'

When he had in some degree relieved his mind by cursing the magistrates in various other forms of speech, the man was silent, save for a low growling, still having reference to those authorities, which from time to time escaped him.

Barnaby, who had wit enough to know that this conversation concerned, and very nearly concerned, himself, remained perfectly quiet until they ceased to speak, when he groped his way to the door, and peeping through the air-holes, tried to make out what kind of men they were, to whom he had been listening.

The one who condemned the civil power in such strong terms, was a serjeant—engaged just then, as the streaming ribands in his cap announced, on the recruiting service. He stood leaning sideways against a pillar nearly opposite the door, and as he growled to himself, drew figures on the pavement with his cane. The other man had his back towards the dungeon, and Barnaby could only see his form. To judge from that, he was a gallant, manly, handsome fellow, but he had lost his left arm. It had been taken off between the elbow and the shoulder, and his empty coat-sleeve hung across his breast.

It was probably this circumstance which gave him an interest beyond any that his companion could boast of, and attracted Barnaby's attention. There was something soldierly in his bearing, and he wore a jaunty cap and jacket. Perhaps he had been in the service at one time or other. If he had, it could not have been very long ago, for he was but a young fellow now.

'Well, well,' he said thoughtfully; 'let the fault be where it may, it makes a man sorrowful to come back to old England, and see her in this condition.'

'I suppose the pigs will join 'em next,' said the serjeant, with an imprecation on the rioters, 'now that the birds have set 'em the example.'

'The birds!' repeated Tom Green.

'Ah—birds,' said the serjeant testily; 'that's English, an't it?'

'I don't know what you mean.'

'Go to the guard-house, and see. You'll find a bird there, that's got their cry as pat as any of 'em, and bawls "No Popery," like a man—or like a devil, as he says he is. I shouldn't wonder. The devil's loose in London somewhere. Damme if I wouldn't twist his neck round, on the chance, if I had MY way.'

The young man had taken two or three steps away, as if to go and see this creature, when he was arrested by the voice of Barnaby.

'It's mine,' he called out, half laughing and half weeping—'my pet, my friend Grip. Ha ha ha! Don't hurt him, he has done no harm. I taught him; it's my fault. Let me have him, if you please. He's the only friend I have left now. He'll not dance, or talk, or whistle for you, I know; but he will for me, because he knows me and loves me—though you wouldn't think it—very well. You wouldn't hurt a bird, I'm sure. You're a brave soldier, sir, and wouldn't harm a woman or a child—no, no, nor a poor bird, I'm certain.'

This latter adjuration was addressed to the serjeant, whom Barnaby judged from his red coat to be high in office, and able to seal Grip's destiny by a word. But that gentleman, in reply, surlily damned him for a thief and rebel as he was, and with many disinterested imprecations on his own eyes, liver, blood, and body, assured him that if it rested with him to decide, he would put a final stopper on the bird, and his master too.

'You talk boldly to a caged man,' said Barnaby, in anger. 'If I was on the other side of the door and there were none to part us, you'd change your note—ay, you may toss your head—you would! Kill the bird—do. Kill anything you can, and so revenge yourself on those who with their bare hands untied could do as much to you!'

Having vented his defiance, he flung himself into the furthest corner of his prison, and muttering, 'Good bye, Grip—good bye, dear old Grip!' shed tears for the first time since he had been taken captive; and hid his face in the straw.

He had had some fancy at first, that the one-armed man would help him, or would give him a kind word in answer. He hardly knew why, but he hoped and thought so. The young fellow had stopped when he called out, and checking himself in the very act of turning round, stood listening to every word he said. Perhaps he built his feeble trust on this; perhaps on his being young, and having a frank and honest manner. However that might be, he built on sand. The other went away directly he had finished speaking, and neither answered him, nor returned. No matter. They were all against him here: he might have known as much. Good bye, old Grip, good bye!

After some time, they came and unlocked the door, and called to him to come out. He rose directly, and complied, for he would not have THEM think he was subdued or frightened. He walked out like a man, and looked from face to face.

None of them returned his gaze or seemed to notice it. They marched him back to the parade by the way they had brought him, and there they halted, among a body of soldiers, at least twice as numerous as that which had taken him prisoner in the afternoon. The officer he had seen before, bade him in a few brief words take notice that if he attempted to escape, no matter how favourable a chance he might suppose he had, certain of the men had orders to fire upon him, that moment. They then closed round him as before, and marched him off again.

In the same unbroken order they arrived at Bow Street, followed and beset on all sides by a crowd which was continually increasing. Here he was placed before a blind gentleman, and asked if he wished to say anything. Not he. What had he got to tell them? After a very little talking, which he was careless of and quite indifferent to, they told him he was to go to Newgate, and took him away.

He went out into the street, so surrounded and hemmed in on every side by soldiers, that he could see nothing; but he knew there was a great crowd of people, by the murmur; and that they were not friendly to the soldiers, was soon rendered evident by their yells and hisses. How often and how eagerly he listened for the voice of Hugh! There was not a voice he knew among them all. Was Hugh a prisoner too? Was there no hope!

As they came nearer and nearer to the prison, the hootings of the people grew more violent; stones were thrown; and every now and then, a rush was made against the soldiers, which they staggered under. One of them, close before him, smarting under a blow upon the temple, levelled his musket, but the officer struck it upwards with his sword, and ordered him on peril of his life to desist. This was the last thing he saw with any distinctness, for directly afterwards he was tossed about, and beaten to and fro, as though in a tempestuous sea. But go where he would, there were the same guards about him. Twice or thrice he was thrown down, and so were they; but even then, he could not elude their vigilance for a moment. They were up again, and had closed about him, before he, with his wrists so tightly bound, could scramble to his feet. Fenced in, thus, he felt himself hoisted to the top of a low flight of steps, and then for a moment he caught a glimpse of the fighting in the crowd, and of a few red coats sprinkled together, here and there, struggling to rejoin their fellows. Next moment, everything was dark and gloomy, and he was standing in the prison lobby; the centre of a group of men.

A smith was speedily in attendance, who riveted upon him a set of heavy irons. Stumbling on as well as he could, beneath the unusual burden of these fetters, he was conducted to a strong stone cell, where, fastening the door with locks, and bolts, and chains, they left him, well secured; having first, unseen by him, thrust in Grip, who, with his head drooping and his deep black plumes rough and rumpled, appeared to comprehend and to partake, his master's fallen fortunes.

Chapter 59

It is necessary at this juncture to return to Hugh, who, having, as we have seen, called to the rioters to disperse from about the Warren, and meet again as usual, glided back into the darkness from which he had emerged, and reappeared no more that night.

He paused in the copse which sheltered him from the observation of his mad companions, and waited to ascertain whether they drew off at his bidding, or still lingered and called to him to join them. Some few, he saw, were indisposed to go away without him, and made towards the spot where he stood concealed as though they were about to follow in his footsteps, and urge him to come back; but these men, being in their turn called to by their friends, and in truth not greatly caring to venture into the dark parts of the grounds, where they might be easily surprised and taken, if any of the neighbours or retainers of the family were watching them from among the trees, soon abandoned the idea, and hastily assembling such men as they found of their mind at the moment, straggled off.

When he was satisfied that the great mass of the insurgents were imitating this example, and that the ground was rapidly clearing, he plunged into the thickest portion of the little wood; and, crashing the branches as he went, made straight towards a distant light: guided by that, and by the sullen glow of the fire behind him.

As he drew nearer and nearer to the twinkling beacon towards which he bent his course, the red glare of a few torches began to reveal itself, and the voices of men speaking together in a subdued tone broke the silence which, save for a distant shouting now and then, already prevailed. At length he cleared the wood, and, springing across a ditch, stood in a dark lane, where a small body of ill-looking vagabonds, whom he had left there some twenty minutes before, waited his coming with impatience.

They were gathered round an old post-chaise or chariot, driven by one of themselves, who sat postilion-wise upon the near horse. The blinds were drawn up, and Mr Tappertit and Dennis kept guard at the two windows. The former assumed the command of the party, for he challenged Hugh as he advanced towards them; and when he did so, those who were resting on the ground about the carriage rose to their feet and clustered round him.

'Well!' said Simon, in a low voice; 'is all right?'

'Right enough,' replied Hugh, in the same tone. 'They're dispersing now—had begun before I came away.'

'And is the coast clear?'

'Clear enough before our men, I take it,' said Hugh. 'There are not many who, knowing of their work over yonder, will want to meddle with 'em to-night.—Who's got some drink here?'

Everybody had some plunder from the cellar; half-a-dozen flasks and bottles were offered directly. He selected the largest, and putting it to his mouth, sent the wine gurgling down his throat. Having emptied it, he threw it down, and stretched out his hand for another, which he emptied likewise, at a draught. Another was given him, and this he half emptied too. Reserving what remained to finish with, he asked:

'Have you got anything to eat, any of you? I'm as ravenous as a hungry wolf. Which of you was in the larder—come?'

'I was, brother,' said Dennis, pulling off his hat, and fumbling in the crown. 'There's a matter of cold venison pasty somewhere or another here, if that'll do.'

'Do!' cried Hugh, seating himself on the pathway. 'Bring it out! Quick! Show a light here, and gather round! Let me sup in state, my lads! Ha ha ha!'

Entering into his boisterous humour, for they all had drunk deeply, and were as wild as he, they crowded about him, while two of their number who had torches, held them up, one on either side of him, that his banquet might not be despatched in the dark. Mr Dennis, having by this time succeeded in extricating from his hat a great mass of pasty, which had been wedged in so tightly that it was not easily got out, put it before him; and Hugh, having borrowed a notched and jagged knife from one of the company, fell to work upon it vigorously.

'I should recommend you to swallow a little fire every day, about an hour afore dinner, brother,' said Dennis, after a pause. 'It seems to agree with you, and to stimulate your appetite.'

Hugh looked at him, and at the blackened faces by which he was surrounded, and, stopping for a moment to flourish his knife above his head, answered with a roar of laughter.

'Keep order, there, will you?' said Simon Tappertit.

'Why, isn't a man allowed to regale himself, noble captain,' retorted his lieutenant, parting the men who stood between them, with his knife, that he might see him,—'to regale himself a little bit after such work as mine? What a hard captain! What a strict captain! What a tyrannical captain! Ha ha ha!'

'I wish one of you fellers would hold a bottle to his mouth to keep him quiet,' said Simon, 'unless you want the military to be down upon us.'

'And what if they are down upon us!' retorted Hugh. 'Who cares? Who's afraid? Let 'em come, I say, let 'em come. The more, the merrier. Give me bold Barnaby at my side, and we two will settle the military, without troubling any of you. Barnaby's the man for the military. Barnaby's health!'

But as the majority of those present were by no means anxious for a second engagement that night, being already weary and exhausted, they sided with Mr Tappertit, and pressed him to make haste with his supper, for they had already delayed too long. Knowing, even in the height of his frenzy, that they incurred great danger by lingering so near the scene of the late outrages, Hugh made an end of his meal without more remonstrance, and rising, stepped up to Mr Tappertit, and smote him on the back.

'Now then,' he cried, 'I'm ready. There are brave birds inside this cage, eh? Delicate birds,—tender, loving, little doves. I caged 'em—I caged 'em—one more peep!'

He thrust the little man aside as he spoke, and mounting on the steps, which were half let down, pulled down the blind by force, and stared into the chaise like an ogre into his larder.

'Ha ha ha! and did you scratch, and pinch, and struggle, pretty mistress?' he cried, as he grasped a little hand that sought in vain to free itself from his grip: 'you, so bright-eyed, and cherry-lipped, and daintily made? But I love you better for it, mistress. Ay, I do. You should stab me and welcome, so that it pleased you, and you had to cure me afterwards. I love to see you proud and scornful. It makes you handsomer than ever; and who so handsome as you at any time, my pretty one!'

'Come!' said Mr Tappertit, who had waited during this speech with considerable impatience. 'There's enough of that. Come down.'

The little hand seconded this admonition by thrusting Hugh's great head away with all its force, and drawing up the blind, amidst his noisy laughter, and vows that he must have another look, for the last glimpse of that sweet face had provoked him past all bearing. However, as the suppressed impatience of the party now broke out into open murmurs, he abandoned this design, and taking his seat upon the bar, contented himself with tapping at the front windows of the carriage, and trying to steal a glance inside; Mr Tappertit, mounting the steps and hanging on by the door, issued his directions to the driver with a commanding voice and attitude; the rest got up behind, or ran by the side of the carriage, as they could; some, in imitation of Hugh, endeavoured to see the face he had praised so highly, and were reminded of their impertinence by hints from the cudgel of Mr Tappertit. Thus they pursued their journey by circuitous and winding roads; preserving, except when they halted to take breath, or to quarrel about the best way of reaching London, pretty good order and tolerable silence.

In the mean time, Dolly—beautiful, bewitching, captivating little Dolly—her hair dishevelled, her dress torn, her dark eyelashes wet with tears, her bosom heaving—her face, now pale with fear, now crimsoned with indignation—her whole self a hundred times more beautiful in this heightened aspect than ever she had been before—vainly strove to comfort Emma Haredale, and to impart to her the consolation of which she stood in so much need herself. The soldiers were sure to come; they must be rescued; it would be impossible to convey them through the streets of London when they set the threats of their guards at defiance, and shrieked to the passengers for help. If they did this when they came into the more frequented ways, she was certain—she was quite certain—they must be released. So poor Dolly said, and so poor Dolly tried to think; but the invariable conclusion of all such arguments was, that Dolly burst into tears; cried, as she wrung her hands, what would they do or think, or who would comfort them, at home, at the Golden Key; and sobbed most piteously.

Miss Haredale, whose feelings were usually of a quieter kind than Dolly's, and not so much upon the surface, was dreadfully alarmed, and indeed had only just recovered from a swoon. She was very pale, and the hand which Dolly held was quite cold; but she bade her, nevertheless, remember that, under Providence, much must depend upon their own discretion; that if they remained quiet and lulled the vigilance of the ruffians into whose hands they had fallen, the chances of their being able to procure assistance when they reached the town, were very much increased; that unless society were quite unhinged, a hot pursuit must be immediately commenced; and that her uncle, she might be sure, would never rest until he had found them out and rescued them. But as she said these latter words, the idea that he had fallen in a general massacre of the Catholics that night—no very wild or improbable supposition after what they had seen and undergone—struck her dumb; and, lost in the horrors they had witnessed, and those they might be yet reserved for, she sat incapable of thought, or speech, or outward show of grief: as rigid, and almost as white and cold, as marble.

Oh, how many, many times, in that long ride, did Dolly think of her old lover,—poor, fond, slighted Joe! How many, many times, did she recall that night when she ran into his arms from the very man now projecting his hateful gaze into the darkness where she sat, and leering through the glass in monstrous admiration! And when she thought of Joe, and what a brave fellow he was, and how he would have rode boldly up, and dashed in among these villains now, yes, though they were double the number—and here she clenched her little hand, and pressed her foot upon the ground—the pride she felt for a moment in having won his heart, faded in a burst of tears, and she sobbed more bitterly than ever.

As the night wore on, and they proceeded by ways which were quite unknown to them—for they could recognise none of the objects of which they sometimes caught a hurried glimpse—their fears increased; nor were they without good foundation; it was not difficult for two beautiful young women to find, in their being borne they knew not whither by a band of daring villains who eyed them as some among these fellows did, reasons for the worst alarm. When they at last entered London, by a suburb with which they were wholly unacquainted, it was past midnight, and the streets were dark and empty. Nor was this the worst, for the carriage stopping in a lonely spot, Hugh suddenly opened the door, jumped in, and took his seat between them.

It was in vain they cried for help. He put his arm about the neck of each, and swore to stifle them with kisses if they were not as silent as the grave.

'I come here to keep you quiet,' he said, 'and that's the means I shall take. So don't be quiet, pretty mistresses—make a noise—do—and I shall like it all the better.'

They were proceeding at a rapid pace, and apparently with fewer attendants than before, though it was so dark (the torches being extinguished) that this was mere conjecture. They shrunk from his touch, each into the farthest corner of the carriage; but shrink as Dolly would, his arm encircled her waist, and held her fast. She neither cried nor spoke, for terror and disgust deprived her of the power; but she plucked at his hand as though she would die in the effort to disengage herself; and crouching on the ground, with her head averted and held down, repelled him with a strength she wondered at as much as he. The carriage stopped again.

'Lift this one out,' said Hugh to the man who opened the door, as he took Miss Haredale's hand, and felt how heavily it fell. 'She's fainted.'

'So much the better,' growled Dennis—it was that amiable gentleman. 'She's quiet. I always like 'em to faint, unless they're very tender and composed.'

'Can you take her by yourself?' asked Hugh.

'I don't know till I try. I ought to be able to; I've lifted up a good many in my time,' said the hangman. 'Up then! She's no small weight, brother; none of these here fine gals are. Up again! Now we have her.'

Having by this time hoisted the young lady into his arms, he staggered off with his burden.

'Look ye, pretty bird,' said Hugh, drawing Dolly towards him. 'Remember what I told you—a kiss for every cry. Scream, if you love me, darling. Scream once, mistress. Pretty mistress, only once, if you love me.'

Thrusting his face away with all her force, and holding down her head, Dolly submitted to be carried out of the chaise, and borne after Miss Haredale into a miserable cottage, where Hugh, after hugging her to his breast, set her gently down upon the floor.

Poor Dolly! Do what she would, she only looked the better for it, and tempted them the more. When her eyes flashed angrily, and her ripe lips slightly parted, to give her rapid breathing vent, who could resist it? When she wept and sobbed as though her heart would break, and bemoaned her miseries in the sweetest voice that ever fell upon a listener's ear, who could be insensible to the little winning pettishness which now and then displayed itself, even in the sincerity and earnestness of her grief? When, forgetful for a moment of herself, as she was now, she fell on her knees beside her friend, and bent over her, and laid her cheek to hers, and put her arms about her, what mortal eyes could have avoided wandering to the delicate bodice, the streaming hair, the neglected dress, the perfect abandonment and unconsciousness of the blooming little beauty? Who could look on and see her lavish caresses and endearments, and not desire to be in Emma Haredale's place; to be either her or Dolly; either the hugging or the hugged? Not Hugh. Not Dennis.

'I tell you what it is, young women,' said Mr Dennis, 'I an't much of a lady's man myself, nor am I a party in the present business further than lending a willing hand to my friends: but if I see much more of this here sort of thing, I shall become a principal instead of a accessory. I tell you candid.'

'Why have you brought us here?' said Emma. 'Are we to be murdered?'

'Murdered!' cried Dennis, sitting down upon a stool, and regarding her with great favour. 'Why, my dear, who'd murder sich chickabiddies as you? If you was to ask me, now, whether you was brought here to be married, there might be something in it.'

And here he exchanged a grin with Hugh, who removed his eyes from Dolly for the purpose.

'No, no,' said Dennis, 'there'll be no murdering, my pets. Nothing of that sort. Quite the contrairy.'

'You are an older man than your companion, sir,' said Emma, trembling. 'Have you no pity for us? Do you not consider that we are women?'

'I do indeed, my dear,' retorted Dennis. 'It would be very hard not to, with two such specimens afore my eyes. Ha ha! Oh yes, I consider that. We all consider that, miss.'

He shook his head waggishly, leered at Hugh again, and laughed very much, as if he had said a noble thing, and rather thought he was coming out.

'There'll be no murdering, my dear. Not a bit on it. I tell you what though, brother,' said Dennis, cocking his hat for the convenience of scratching his head, and looking gravely at Hugh, 'it's worthy of notice, as a proof of the amazing equalness and dignity of our law, that it don't make no distinction between men and women. I've heerd the judge say, sometimes, to a highwayman or housebreaker as had tied the ladies neck and heels—you'll excuse me making mention of it, my darlings—and put 'em in a cellar, that he showed no consideration to women. Now, I say that there judge didn't know his business, brother; and that if I had been that there highwayman or housebreaker, I should have made answer: "What are you a talking of, my lord? I showed the women as much consideration as the law does, and what more would you have me do?" If you was to count up in the newspapers the number of females as have been worked off in this here city alone, in the last ten year,' said Mr Dennis thoughtfully, 'you'd be surprised at the total—quite amazed, you would. There's a dignified and equal thing; a beautiful thing! But we've no security for its lasting. Now that they've begun to favour these here Papists, I shouldn't wonder if they went and altered even THAT, one of these days. Upon my soul, I shouldn't.'

The subject, perhaps from being of too exclusive and professional a nature, failed to interest Hugh as much as his friend had anticipated. But he had no time to pursue it, for at this crisis Mr Tappertit entered precipitately; at sight of whom Dolly uttered a scream of joy, and fairly threw herself into his arms.

'I knew it, I was sure of it!' cried Dolly. 'My dear father's at the door. Thank God, thank God! Bless you, Sim. Heaven bless you for this!'

Simon Tappertit, who had at first implicitly believed that the locksmith's daughter, unable any longer to suppress her secret passion for himself, was about to give it full vent in its intensity, and to declare that she was his for ever, looked extremely foolish when she said these words;—the more so, as they were received by Hugh and Dennis with a loud laugh, which made her draw back, and regard him with a fixed and earnest look.

'Miss Haredale,' said Sim, after a very awkward silence, 'I hope you're as comfortable as circumstances will permit of. Dolly Varden, my darling—my own, my lovely one—I hope YOU'RE pretty comfortable likewise.'

Poor little Dolly! She saw how it was; hid her face in her hands; and sobbed more bitterly than ever.

'You meet in me, Miss V.,' said Simon, laying his hand upon his breast, 'not a 'prentice, not a workman, not a slave, not the wictim of your father's tyrannical behaviour, but the leader of a great people, the captain of a noble band, in which these gentlemen are, as I may say, corporals and serjeants. You behold in me, not a private individual, but a public character; not a mender of locks, but a healer of the wounds of his unhappy country. Dolly V., sweet Dolly V., for how many years have I looked forward to this present meeting! For how many years has it been my intention to exalt and ennoble you! I redeem it. Behold in me, your husband. Yes, beautiful Dolly—charmer—enslaver—S. Tappertit is all your own!'

As he said these words he advanced towards her. Dolly retreated till she could go no farther, and then sank down upon the floor. Thinking it very possible that this might be maiden modesty, Simon essayed to raise her; on which Dolly, goaded to desperation, wound her hands in his hair, and crying out amidst her tears that he was a dreadful little wretch, and always had been, shook, and pulled, and beat him, until he was fain to call for help, most lustily. Hugh had never admired her half so much as at that moment.

'She's in an excited state to-night,' said Simon, as he smoothed his rumpled feathers, 'and don't know when she's well off. Let her be by herself till to-morrow, and that'll bring her down a little. Carry her into the next house!'

Hugh had her in his arms directly. It might be that Mr Tappertit's heart was really softened by her distress, or it might be that he felt it in some degree indecorous that his intended bride should be struggling in the grasp of another man. He commanded him, on second thoughts, to put her down again, and looked moodily on as she flew to Miss Haredale's side, and clinging to her dress, hid her flushed face in its folds.

'They shall remain here together till to-morrow,' said Simon, who had now quite recovered his dignity—'till to-morrow. Come away!'

'Ay!' cried Hugh. 'Come away, captain. Ha ha ha!'

'What are you laughing at?' demanded Simon sternly.

'Nothing, captain, nothing,' Hugh rejoined; and as he spoke, and clapped his hand upon the shoulder of the little man, he laughed again, for some unknown reason, with tenfold violence.

Mr Tappertit surveyed him from head to foot with lofty scorn (this only made him laugh the more), and turning to the prisoners, said:

'You'll take notice, ladies, that this place is well watched on every side, and that the least noise is certain to be attended with unpleasant consequences. You'll hear—both of you—more of our intentions to-morrow. In the mean time, don't show yourselves at the window, or appeal to any of the people you may see pass it; for if you do, it'll be known directly that you come from a Catholic house, and all the exertions our men can make, may not be able to save your lives.'

With this last caution, which was true enough, he turned to the door, followed by Hugh and Dennis. They paused for a moment, going out, to look at them clasped in each other's arms, and then left the cottage; fastening the door, and setting a good watch upon it, and indeed all round the house.

'I say,' growled Dennis, as they walked away in company, 'that's a dainty pair. Muster Gashford's one is as handsome as the other, eh?'

'Hush!' said Hugh, hastily. 'Don't you mention names. It's a bad habit.'

'I wouldn't like to be HIM, then (as you don't like names), when he breaks it out to her; that's all,' said Dennis. 'She's one of them fine, black-eyed, proud gals, as I wouldn't trust at such times with a knife too near 'em.

I've seen some of that sort, afore now. I recollect one that was worked off, many year ago—and there was a gentleman in that case too—that says to me, with her lip a trembling, but her hand as steady as ever I see one: "Dennis, I'm near my end, but if I had a dagger in these fingers, and he was within my reach, I'd strike him dead afore me;"—ah, she did—and she'd have done it too!'

Strike who dead?' demanded Hugh.

'How should I know, brother?' answered Dennis. 'SHE never said; not she.'

Hugh looked, for a moment, as though he would have made some further inquiry into this incoherent recollection; but Simon Tappertit, who had been meditating deeply, gave his thoughts a new direction.

'Hugh!' said Sim. 'You have done well to-day. You shall be rewarded. So have you, Dennis.—There's no young woman YOU want to carry off, is there?'

'N—no,' returned that gentleman, stroking his grizzly beard, which was some two inches long. 'None in partickler, I think.'

'Very good,' said Sim; 'then we'll find some other way of making it up to you. As to you, old boy'—he turned to Hugh—'you shall have Miggs (her that I promised you, you know) within three days. Mind. I pass my word for it.'

Hugh thanked him heartily; and as he did so, his laughing fit returned with such violence that he was obliged to hold his side with one hand, and to lean with the other on the shoulder of his small captain, without whose support he would certainly have rolled upon the ground.

Chapter 60

The three worthies turned their faces towards The Boot, with the intention of passing the night in that place of rendezvous, and of seeking the repose they so much needed in the shelter of their old den; for now that the mischief and destruction they had purposed were achieved, and their prisoners were safely bestowed for the night, they began to be conscious of exhaustion, and to feel the wasting effects of the madness which had led to such deplorable results.

Notwithstanding the lassitude and fatigue which oppressed him now, in common with his two companions, and indeed with all who had taken an active share in that night's work, Hugh's boisterous merriment broke out afresh whenever he looked at Simon Tappertit, and vented itself—much to that gentleman's indignation—in such shouts of laughter as bade fair to bring the watch upon them, and involve them in a skirmish, to which in their present worn-out condition they might prove by no means equal. Even Mr Dennis, who was not at all particular on the score of gravity or dignity, and who had a great relish for his young friend's eccentric humours, took occasion to remonstrate with him on this imprudent behaviour, which he held to be a species of suicide, tantamount to a man's working himself off without being overtaken by the law, than which he could imagine nothing more ridiculous or impertinent.

Not abating one jot of his noisy mirth for these remonstrances, Hugh reeled along between them, having an arm of each, until they hove in sight of The Boot, and were within a field or two of that convenient tavern. He happened by great good luck to have roared and shouted himself into silence by this time. They were proceeding onward without noise, when a scout who had been creeping about the ditches all night, to warn any stragglers from encroaching further on what was now such dangerous ground, peeped cautiously from his hiding-place, and called to them to stop.

'Stop! and why?' said Hugh.

Because (the scout replied) the house was filled with constables and soldiers; having been surprised that afternoon. The inmates had fled or been taken into custody, he could not say which. He had prevented a great many people from approaching nearer, and he believed they had gone to the markets and such places to pass the night. He had seen the distant fires, but they were all out now. He had heard the people who passed and repassed, speaking of them too, and could report that the prevailing opinion was one of apprehension and dismay. He had not heard a word of Barnaby—didn't even know his name—but it had been said in his hearing that some man had been taken and carried off to Newgate. Whether this was true or false, he could not affirm.

The three took counsel together, on hearing this, and debated what it might be best to do. Hugh, deeming it possible that Barnaby was in the hands of the soldiers, and at that moment under detention at The Boot, was for advancing stealthily, and firing the house; but his companions, who objected to such rash measures unless they had a crowd at their backs, represented that if Barnaby were taken he had assuredly been removed to a stronger prison; they would never have dreamed of keeping him all night in a place so weak and open to attack. Yielding to this reasoning, and to their persuasions, Hugh consented to turn back and to repair to Fleet Market; for which place, it seemed, a few of their boldest associates had shaped their course, on receiving the same intelligence.

Feeling their strength recruited and their spirits roused, now that there was a new necessity for action, they hurried away, quite forgetful of the fatigue under which they had been sinking but a few minutes before; and soon arrived at their new place of destination.

Fleet Market, at that time, was a long irregular row of wooden sheds and penthouses, occupying the centre of what is now called Farringdon Street. They were jumbled together in a most unsightly fashion, in the middle of the road; to the great obstruction of the thoroughfare and the annoyance of passengers, who were fain to make their way, as they best could, among carts, baskets, barrows, trucks, casks, bulks, and benches, and to jostle with porters, hucksters, waggoners, and a motley crowd of buyers, sellers, pick-pockets, vagrants, and idlers. The air was perfumed with the stench of rotten leaves and faded fruit; the refuse of the butchers' stalls, and offal and garbage of a hundred kinds. It was indispensable to most public conveniences in those days, that they should be public nuisances likewise; and Fleet Market maintained the principle to admiration.

To this place, perhaps because its sheds and baskets were a tolerable substitute for beds, or perhaps because it afforded the means of a hasty barricade in case of need, many of the rioters had straggled, not only that night, but for two or three nights before. It was now broad day, but the morning being cold, a group of them were gathered round a fire in a public-house, drinking hot purl, and smoking pipes, and planning new schemes for to-morrow.

Hugh and his two friends being known to most of these men, were received with signal marks of approbation, and inducted into the most honourable seats. The room-door was closed and fastened to keep intruders at a distance, and then they proceeded to exchange news.

'The soldiers have taken possession of The Boot, I hear,' said Hugh. 'Who knows anything about it?'

Several cried that they did; but the majority of the company having been engaged in the assault upon the Warren, and all present having been concerned in one or other of the night's expeditions, it proved that they knew no more than Hugh himself; having been merely warned by each other, or by the scout, and knowing nothing of their own knowledge.

'We left a man on guard there to-day,' said Hugh, looking round him, 'who is not here. You know who it is—Barnaby, who brought the soldier down, at Westminster. Has any man seen or heard of him?'

They shook their heads, and murmured an answer in the negative, as each man looked round and appealed to his fellow; when a noise was heard without, and a man was heard to say that he wanted Hugh—that he must see Hugh.

'He is but one man,' cried Hugh to those who kept the door; 'let him come in.'

'Ay, ay!' muttered the others. 'Let him come in. Let him come in.'

The door was accordingly unlocked and opened. A one-armed man, with his head and face tied up with a bloody cloth, as though he had been severely beaten, his clothes torn, and his remaining hand grasping a thick stick, rushed in among them, and panting for breath, demanded which was Hugh.

'Here he is,' replied the person he inquired for. 'I am Hugh. What do you want with me?'

'I have a message for you,' said the man. 'You know one Barnaby.'

'What of him? Did he send the message?'

'Yes. He's taken. He's in one of the strong cells in Newgate. He defended himself as well as he could, but was overpowered by numbers. That's his message.'

'When did you see him?' asked Hugh, hastily.

'On his way to prison, where he was taken by a party of soldiers. They took a by-road, and not the one we expected. I was one of the few who tried to rescue him, and he called to me, and told me to tell Hugh where he was. We made a good struggle, though it failed. Look here!'

He pointed to his dress and to his bandaged head, and still panting for breath, glanced round the room; then faced towards Hugh again.

'I know you by sight,' he said, 'for I was in the crowd on Friday, and on Saturday, and yesterday, but I didn't know your name. You're a bold fellow, I know. So is he. He fought like a lion tonight, but it was of no use. I did my best, considering that I want this limb.'

Again he glanced inquisitively round the room or seemed to do so, for his face was nearly hidden by the bandage—and again facing sharply towards Hugh, grasped his stick as if he half expected to be set upon, and stood on the defensive.

If he had any such apprehension, however, he was speedily reassured by the demeanour of all present. None thought of the bearer of the tidings. He was lost in the news he brought. Oaths, threats, and execrations, were vented on all sides. Some cried that if they bore this tamely, another day would see them all in jail; some, that they should have rescued the other prisoners, and this would not have happened. One man cried in a loud voice, 'Who'll follow me to Newgate!' and there was a loud shout and general rush towards the door.

But Hugh and Dennis stood with their backs against it, and kept them back, until the clamour had so far subsided that their voices could be heard, when they called to them together that to go now, in broad day, would be madness; and that if they waited until night and arranged a plan of attack, they might release, not only their own companions, but all the prisoners, and burn down the jail.

'Not that jail alone,' cried Hugh, 'but every jail in London. They shall have no place to put their prisoners in. We'll burn them all down; make bonfires of them every one! Here!' he cried, catching at the hangman's hand. 'Let all who're men here, join with us. Shake hands upon it. Barnaby out of jail, and not a jail left standing! Who joins?'

Every man there. And they swore a great oath to release their friends from Newgate next night; to force the doors and burn the jail; or perish in the fire themselves.

Chapter 61

On that same night—events so crowd upon each other in convulsed and distracted times, that more than the stirring incidents of a whole life often become compressed into the compass of four-and-twenty hours—on that same night, Mr Haredale, having strongly bound his prisoner, with the assistance of the sexton, and forced him to mount his horse, conducted him to Chigwell; bent upon procuring a conveyance to London from that place, and carrying him at once before a justice. The disturbed state of the town would be, he knew, a sufficient reason for demanding the murderer's committal to prison before daybreak, as no man could answer for the security of any of the watch-houses or ordinary places of detention; and to convey a prisoner through the streets when the mob were again abroad, would not only be a task of great danger and hazard, but would be to challenge an attempt at rescue. Directing the sexton to lead the horse, he walked close by the murderer's side, and in this order they reached the village about the middle of the night.

The people were all awake and up, for they were fearful of being burnt in their beds, and sought to comfort and assure each other by watching in company. A few of the stoutest-hearted were armed and gathered in a body on the green. To these, who knew him well, Mr Haredale addressed himself, briefly narrating what had happened, and beseeching them to aid in conveying the criminal to London before the dawn of day.

But not a man among them dared to help him by so much as the motion of a finger. The rioters, in their passage through the village, had menaced with their fiercest vengeance, any person who should aid in extinguishing the fire, or render the least assistance to him, or any Catholic whomsoever. Their threats extended to their lives and all they possessed. They were assembled for their own protection, and could not endanger themselves by lending any aid to him. This they told him, not without hesitation and regret, as they kept aloof in the moonlight and glanced fearfully at the ghostly rider, who, with his head drooping on his breast and his hat slouched down upon his brow, neither moved nor spoke.

Finding it impossible to persuade them, and indeed hardly knowing how to do so after what they had seen of the fury of the crowd, Mr Haredale besought them that at least they would leave him free to act for himself, and would suffer him to take the only chaise and pair of horses that the place afforded. This was not acceded to without some difficulty, but in the end they told him to do what he would, and go away from them in heaven's name.

Leaving the sexton at the horse's bridle, he drew out the chaise with his own hands, and would have harnessed the horses, but that the post-boy of the village—a soft-hearted, good-for-nothing, vagabond kind of fellow—was moved by his earnestness and passion, and, throwing down a pitchfork with which he was armed, swore that the rioters might cut him into mincemeat if they liked, but he would not stand by and see an honest gentleman who had done no wrong, reduced to such extremity, without doing what he could to help him. Mr Haredale shook him warmly by the hand, and thanked him from his heart. In five minutes' time the chaise was ready, and this good scapegrace in his saddle. The murderer was put inside, the blinds were drawn up, the sexton took his seat upon the bar, Mr Haredale mounted his horse and rode close beside the door; and so they started in the dead of night, and in profound silence, for London.

The consternation was so extreme that even the horses which had escaped the flames at the Warren, could find no friends to shelter them. They passed them on the road, browsing on the stunted grass; and the driver told them, that the poor beasts had wandered to the village first, but had been driven away, lest they should bring the vengeance of the crowd on any of the inhabitants.

Nor was this feeling confined to such small places, where the people were timid, ignorant, and unprotected. When they came near London they met, in the grey light of morning, more than one poor Catholic family who, terrified by the threats and warnings of their neighbours, were quitting the city on foot, and who told them they could hire no cart or horse for the removal of their goods, and had been compelled to leave them behind, at the mercy of the crowd. Near Mile End they passed a house, the master of which, a Catholic gentleman of small means, having hired a waggon to remove his furniture by midnight, had had it all brought down into the street, to wait the vehicle's arrival, and save time in the packing. But the man with whom he made the bargain, alarmed by the fires that night, and by the sight of the rioters passing his door, had refused to keep it: and the poor gentleman, with his wife and servant and their little children, were sitting trembling among their goods in the open street, dreading the arrival of day and not knowing where to turn or what to do.

It was the same, they heard, with the public conveyances. The panic was so great that the mails and stage-coaches were afraid to carry passengers who professed the obnoxious religion. If the drivers knew them, or they admitted that they held that creed, they would not take them, no, though they offered large sums; and yesterday, people had been afraid to recognise Catholic acquaintance in the streets, lest they should be marked by spies, and burnt out, as it was called, in consequence. One mild old man—a priest, whose chapel was destroyed; a very feeble, patient, inoffensive creature—who was trudging away, alone, designing to walk some distance from town, and then try his fortune with the coaches, told Mr Haredale that he feared he might not find a magistrate who would have the hardihood to commit a prisoner to jail, on his complaint. But notwithstanding these discouraging accounts they went on, and reached the Mansion House soon after sunrise.

Mr Haredale threw himself from his horse, but he had no need to knock at the door, for it was already open, and there stood upon the step a portly old man, with a very red, or rather purple face, who with an anxious expression of countenance, was remonstrating with some unseen personage upstairs, while the porter essayed to close the door by degrees and get rid of him. With the intense impatience and excitement natural to one in his condition, Mr Haredale thrust himself forward and was about to speak, when the fat old gentleman interposed:

'My good sir,' said he, 'pray let me get an answer. This is the sixth time I have been here. I was here five times yesterday. My house is threatened with destruction. It is to be burned down to-night, and was to have been last night, but they had other business on their hands. Pray let me get an answer.'

'My good sir,' returned Mr Haredale, shaking his head, 'my house is burned to the ground. But heaven forbid that yours should be. Get your answer. Be brief, in mercy to me.'

'Now, you hear this, my lord?'—said the old gentleman, calling up the stairs, to where the skirt of a dressing-gown fluttered on the landing-place. 'Here is a gentleman here, whose house was actually burnt down last night.'

'Dear me, dear me,' replied a testy voice, 'I am very sorry for it, but what am I to do? I can't build it up again. The chief magistrate of the city can't go and be a rebuilding of people's houses, my good sir. Stuff and nonsense!'

'But the chief magistrate of the city can prevent people's houses from having any need to be rebuilt, if the chief magistrate's a man, and not a dummy—can't he, my lord?' cried the old gentleman in a choleric manner.

'You are disrespectable, sir,' said the Lord Mayor—'leastways, disrespectful I mean.'

'Disrespectful, my lord!' returned the old gentleman. 'I was respectful five times yesterday. I can't be respectful for ever. Men can't stand on being respectful when their houses are going to be burnt over their heads, with them in 'em. What am I to do, my lord? AM I to have any protection!'

'I told you yesterday, sir,' said the Lord Mayor, 'that you might have an alderman in your house, if you could get one to come.'

'What the devil's the good of an alderman?' returned the choleric old gentleman.

'—To awe the crowd, sir,' said the Lord Mayor.

'Oh Lord ha' mercy!' whimpered the old gentleman, as he wiped his forehead in a state of ludicrous distress, 'to think of sending an alderman to awe a crowd! Why, my lord, if they were even so many babies, fed on mother's milk, what do you think they'd care for an alderman! Will YOU come?'

'I!' said the Lord Mayor, most emphatically: 'Certainly not.'

'Then what,' returned the old gentleman, 'what am I to do? Am I a citizen of England? Am I to have the benefit of the laws? Am I to have any return for the King's taxes?'

'I don't know, I am sure,' said the Lord Mayor; 'what a pity it is you're a Catholic! Why couldn't you be a Protestant, and then you wouldn't have got yourself into such a mess? I'm sure I don't know what's to be done.—There are great people at the bottom of these riots.—Oh dear me, what a thing it is to be a public character!—You must look in again in the course of the day.—Would a javelin-man do?—Or there's Philips the constable,—HE'S disengaged,—he's not very old for a man at his time of life, except in his legs, and if you put him up at a window he'd look quite young by candle-light, and might frighten 'em very much.—Oh dear!—well!—we'll see about it.'

'Stop!' cried Mr Haredale, pressing the door open as the porter strove to shut it, and speaking rapidly, 'My Lord Mayor, I beg you not to go away. I have a man here, who committed a murder eight-and-twenty years ago. Half-a-dozen words from me, on oath, will justify you in committing him to prison for re-examination. I only seek, just now, to have him consigned to a place of safety. The least delay may involve his being rescued by the rioters.'

'Oh dear me!' cried the Lord Mayor. 'God bless my soul—and body—oh Lor!—well I!—there are great people at the bottom of these riots, you know.—You really mustn't.'

'My lord,' said Mr Haredale, 'the murdered gentleman was my brother; I succeeded to his inheritance; there were not wanting slanderous tongues at that time, to whisper that the guilt of this most foul and cruel deed was mine—mine, who loved him, as he knows, in Heaven, dearly. The time has come, after all these years of gloom and misery, for avenging him, and bringing to light a crime so artful and so devilish that it has no parallel. Every second's delay on your part loosens this man's bloody hands again, and leads to his escape. My lord, I charge you hear me, and despatch this matter on the instant.'

'Oh dear me!' cried the chief magistrate; 'these an't business hours, you know—I wonder at you—how ungentlemanly it is of you—you mustn't—you really mustn't.—And I suppose you are a Catholic too?'

'I am,' said Mr Haredale.

'God bless my soul, I believe people turn Catholics a'purpose to vex and worrit me,' cried the Lord Mayor. 'I wish you wouldn't come here; they'll be setting the Mansion House afire next, and we shall have you to thank for it. You must lock your prisoner up, sir—give him to a watchman—and—call again at a proper time. Then we'll see about it!'

Before Mr Haredale could answer, the sharp closing of a door and drawing of its bolts, gave notice that the Lord Mayor had retreated to his bedroom, and that further remonstrance would be unavailing. The two clients retreated likewise, and the porter shut them out into the street.

'That's the way he puts me off,' said the old gentleman, 'I can get no redress and no help. What are you going to do, sir?'

'To try elsewhere,' answered Mr Haredale, who was by this time on horseback.

'I feel for you, I assure you—and well I may, for we are in a common cause,' said the old gentleman. 'I may not have a house to offer you to-night; let me tender it while I can. On second thoughts though,' he added, putting up a pocket-book he had produced while speaking, 'I'll not give you a card, for if it was found upon you, it might get you into trouble. Langdale—that's my name—vintner and distiller—Holborn Hill—you're heartily welcome, if you'll come.'

Mr Haredale bowed, and rode off, close beside the chaise as before; determining to repair to the house of Sir John Fielding, who had the reputation of being a bold and active magistrate, and fully resolved, in case the rioters should come upon them, to do execution on the murderer with his own hands, rather than suffer him to be released.

They arrived at the magistrate's dwelling, however, without molestation (for the mob, as we have seen, were then intent on deeper schemes), and knocked at the door. As it had been pretty generally rumoured that Sir John was proscribed by the rioters, a body of thief-takers had been keeping watch in the house all night. To one of them Mr Haredale stated his business, which appearing to the man of sufficient moment to warrant his arousing the justice, procured him an immediate audience.

No time was lost in committing the murderer to Newgate; then a new building, recently completed at a vast expense, and considered to be of enormous strength. The warrant being made out, three of the thief-takers bound him afresh (he had been struggling, it seemed, in the chaise, and had loosened his manacles); gagged him lest they should meet with any of the mob, and he should call to them for help; and seated themselves, along with him, in the carriage. These men being all well armed, made a formidable escort; but they drew up the blinds again, as though the carriage were empty, and directed Mr Haredale to ride forward, that he might not attract attention by seeming to belong to it.

The wisdom of this proceeding was sufficiently obvious, for as they hurried through the city they passed among several groups of men, who, if they had not supposed the chaise to be quite empty, would certainly have stopped it. But those within keeping quite close, and the driver tarrying to be asked no questions, they reached the prison without interruption, and, once there, had him out, and safe within its gloomy walls, in a twinkling.

With eager eyes and strained attention, Mr Haredale saw him chained, and locked and barred up in his cell. Nay, when he had left the jail, and stood in the free street, without, he felt the iron plates upon the doors, with his hands, and drew them over the stone wall, to assure himself that it was real; and to exult in its being so strong, and rough, and cold. It was not until he turned his back upon the jail, and glanced along the empty streets, so lifeless and quiet in the bright morning, that he felt the weight upon his heart; that he knew he was tortured by anxiety for those he had left at home; and that home itself was but another bead in the long rosary of his regrets.

Chapter 62

The prisoner, left to himself, sat down upon his bedstead: and resting his elbows on his knees, and his chin upon his hands, remained in that attitude for hours. It would be hard to say, of what nature his reflections were. They had no distinctness, and, saving for some flashes now and then, no reference to his condition or the train of circumstances by which it had been brought about. The cracks in the pavement of his cell, the chinks in the wall where stone was joined to stone, the bars in the window, the iron ring upon the floor,—such things as these, subsiding strangely into one another, and awakening an indescribable kind of interest and amusement, engrossed his whole mind; and although at the bottom of his every thought there was an uneasy sense of guilt, and dread of death, he felt no more than that vague consciousness of it, which a sleeper has of pain. It pursues him through his dreams, gnaws at the heart of all his fancied pleasures, robs the banquet of its taste, music of its sweetness, makes happiness itself unhappy, and yet is no bodily sensation, but a phantom without shape, or form, or visible presence; pervading everything, but having no existence; recognisable everywhere, but nowhere seen, or touched, or met with face to face, until the sleep is past, and waking agony returns.

After a long time the door of his cell opened. He looked up; saw the blind man enter; and relapsed into his former position.

Guided by his breathing, the visitor advanced to where he sat; and stopping beside him, and stretching out his hand to assure himself that he was right, remained, for a good space, silent.

'This is bad, Rudge. This is bad,' he said at length.

The prisoner shuffled with his feet upon the ground in turning his body from him, but made no other answer.

'How were you taken?' he asked. 'And where? You never told me more than half your secret. No matter; I know it now. How was it, and where, eh?' he asked again, coming still nearer to him.

'At Chigwell,' said the other.

'At Chigwell! How came you there?'

'Because I went there to avoid the man I stumbled on,' he answered. 'Because I was chased and driven there, by him and Fate. Because I was urged to go there, by something stronger than my own will. When I found him watching in the house she used to live in, night after night, I knew I never could escape him—never! and when I heard the Bell—'

He shivered; muttered that it was very cold; paced quickly up and down the narrow cell; and sitting down again, fell into his old posture.

'You were saying,' said the blind man, after another pause, 'that when you heard the Bell—'

'Let it be, will you?' he retorted in a hurried voice. 'It hangs there yet.'

The blind man turned a wistful and inquisitive face towards him, but he continued to speak, without noticing him.

'I went to Chigwell, in search of the mob. I have been so hunted and beset by this man, that I knew my only hope of safety lay in joining them. They had gone on before; I followed them when it left off.'

'When what left off?'

'The Bell. They had quitted the place. I hoped that some of them might be still lingering among the ruins, and was searching for them when I heard—' he drew a long breath, and wiped his forehead with his sleeve—'his voice.'

'Saying what?'

'No matter what. I don't know. I was then at the foot of the turret, where I did the—'

'Ay,' said the blind man, nodding his head with perfect composure, 'I understand.'

'I climbed the stair, or so much of it as was left; meaning to hide till he had gone. But he heard me; and followed almost as soon as I set foot upon the ashes.'

'You might have hidden in the wall, and thrown him down, or stabbed him,' said the blind man.

'Might I? Between that man and me, was one who led him on—I saw it, though he did not—and raised above his head a bloody hand. It was in the room above that HE and I stood glaring at each other on the night of the murder, and before he fell he raised his hand like that, and fixed his eyes on me. I knew the chase would end there.'

'You have a strong fancy,' said the blind man, with a smile.

'Strengthen yours with blood, and see what it will come to.'

He groaned, and rocked himself, and looking up for the first time, said, in a low, hollow voice:

'Eight-and-twenty years! Eight-and-twenty years! He has never changed in all that time, never grown older, nor altered in the least degree. He has been before me in the dark night, and the broad sunny day; in the twilight, the moonlight, the sunlight, the light of fire, and lamp, and candle; and in the deepest gloom. Always the same! In company, in solitude, on land, on shipboard; sometimes leaving me alone for months, and sometimes always with me. I have seen him, at sea, come gliding in the dead of night along the bright reflection of the moon in the calm water; and I have seen him, on quays and market-places, with his hand uplifted, towering, the centre of a busy crowd, unconscious of the terrible form that had its silent stand among them. Fancy! Are you real? Am I? Are these iron fetters, riveted on me by the smith's hammer, or are they fancies I can shatter at a blow?'

The blind man listened in silence.

'Fancy! Do I fancy that I killed him? Do I fancy that as I left the chamber where he lay, I saw the face of a man peeping from a dark door, who plainly showed me by his fearful looks that he suspected what I had done? Do I remember that I spoke fairly to him—that I drew nearer—nearer yet—with the hot knife in my sleeve? Do I fancy how HE died? Did he stagger back into the angle of the wall into which I had hemmed him, and, bleeding inwardly, stand, not fail, a corpse before me? Did I see him, for an instant, as I see you now, erect and on his feet—but dead!'

The blind man, who knew that he had risen, motioned him to sit down again upon his bedstead; but he took no notice of the gesture.

'It was then I thought, for the first time, of fastening the murder upon him. It was then I dressed him in my clothes, and dragged him down the back-stairs to the piece of water. Do I remember listening to the bubbles that came rising up when I had rolled him in? Do I remember wiping the water from my face, and because the body splashed it there, in its descent, feeling as if it MUST be blood?

'Did I go home when I had done? And oh, my God! how long it took to do! Did I stand before my wife, and tell her? Did I see her fall upon the ground; and, when I stooped to raise her, did she thrust me back with a force that cast me off as if I had been a child, staining the hand with which she clasped my wrist? Is THAT fancy?

'Did she go down upon her knees, and call on Heaven to witness that she and her unborn child renounced me from that hour; and did she, in words so solemn that they turned me cold—me, fresh from the horrors my own hands had made—warn me to fly while there was time; for though she would be silent, being my wretched wife, she would not shelter me? Did I go forth that night, abjured of God and man, and anchored deep in hell, to wander at my cable's length about the earth, and surely be drawn down at last?'

'Why did you return? said the blind man.

'Why is blood red? I could no more help it, than I could live without breath. I struggled against the impulse, but I was drawn back, through every difficult and adverse circumstance, as by a mighty engine. Nothing could stop me. The day and hour were none of my choice. Sleeping and waking, I had been among the old haunts for years—had visited my own grave. Why did I come back? Because this jail was gaping for me, and he stood beckoning at the door.'

'You were not known?' said the blind man.

'I was a man who had been twenty-two years dead. No. I was not known.'

'You should have kept your secret better.'

'MY secret? MINE? It was a secret, any breath of air could whisper at its will. The stars had it in their twinkling, the water in its flowing, the leaves in their rustling, the seasons in their return. It lurked in strangers' faces, and their voices. Everything had lips on which it always trembled.—MY secret!'

'It was revealed by your own act at any rate,' said the blind man.

'The act was not mine. I did it, but it was not mine. I was forced at times to wander round, and round, and round that spot. If you had chained me up when the fit was on me, I should have broken away, and gone there. As truly as the loadstone draws iron towards it, so he, lying at the bottom of his grave, could draw me near him when he would. Was that fancy? Did I like to go there, or did I strive and wrestle with the power that forced me?'

The blind man shrugged his shoulders, and smiled incredulously. The prisoner again resumed his old attitude, and for a long time both were mute.

'I suppose then,' said his visitor, at length breaking silence, 'that you are penitent and resigned; that you desire to make peace with everybody (in particular, with your wife who has brought you to this); and that you ask no greater favour than to be carried to Tyburn as soon as possible? That being the case, I had better take my leave. I am not good enough to be company for you.'

'Have I not told you,' said the other fiercely, 'that I have striven and wrestled with the power that brought me here? Has my whole life, for eight-and-twenty years, been one perpetual struggle and resistance, and do you think I want to lie down and die? Do all men shrink from death—I most of all!'

'That's better said. That's better spoken, Rudge—but I'll not call you that again—than anything you have said yet,' returned the blind man, speaking more familiarly, and laying his hands upon his arm. 'Lookye,—I never killed a man myself, for I have never been placed in a position that made it worth my while. Farther, I am not an advocate for killing men, and I don't think I should recommend it or like it—for it's very hazardous—under any circumstances. But as you had the misfortune to get into this trouble before I made your acquaintance, and as you have been my companion, and have been of use to me for a long time now, I overlook that part of the matter, and am only anxious that you shouldn't die unnecessarily. Now, I do not consider that, at present, it is at all necessary.'

'What else is left me?' returned the prisoner. 'To eat my way through these walls with my teeth?'

'Something easier than that,' returned his friend. 'Promise me that you will talk no more of these fancies of yours—idle, foolish things, quite beneath a man—and I'll tell you what I mean.'

'Tell me,' said the other.

'Your worthy lady with the tender conscience; your scrupulous, virtuous, punctilious, but not blindly affectionate wife—'

'What of her?'

'Is now in London.'

'A curse upon her, be she where she may!'

'That's natural enough. If she had taken her annuity as usual, you would not have been here, and we should have been better off. But that's apart from the business. She's in London. Scared, as I suppose, and have no doubt, by my representation when I waited upon her, that you were close at hand (which I, of course, urged only as an inducement to compliance, knowing that she was not pining to see you), she left that place, and travelled up to London.'

'How do you know?'

'From my friend the noble captain—the illustrious general—the bladder, Mr Tappertit. I learnt from him the last time I saw him, which was yesterday, that your son who is called Barnaby—not after his father, I suppose—'

'Death! does that matter now!'

'—You are impatient,' said the blind man, calmly; 'it's a good sign, and looks like life—that your son Barnaby had been lured away from her by one of his companions who knew him of old, at Chigwell; and that he is now among the rioters.'

'And what is that to me? If father and son be hanged together, what comfort shall I find in that?'

'Stay—stay, my friend,' returned the blind man, with a cunning look, 'you travel fast to journeys' ends. Suppose I track my lady out, and say thus much: "You want your son, ma'am—good. I, knowing those who tempt him to remain among them, can restore him to you, ma'am—good. You must pay a price, ma'am, for his restoration—good again. The price is small, and easy to be paid—dear ma'am, that's best of all."'

'What mockery is this?'

'Very likely, she may reply in those words. "No mockery at all," I answer: "Madam, a person said to be your husband (identity is difficult of proof after the lapse of many years) is in prison, his life in peril—the charge against him, murder. Now, ma'am, your husband has been dead a long, long time. The gentleman never can be confounded with him, if you will have the goodness to say a few words, on oath, as to when he died, and how; and that this person (who I am told resembles him in some degree) is no more he than I am. Such testimony will set the question quite at rest. Pledge yourself to me to give it, ma' am, and I will undertake to keep your son (a fine lad) out of harm's way until you have done this trifling service, when he shall be delivered up to you, safe and sound. On the other hand, if you decline to do so, I fear he will be betrayed, and handed over to the law, which will assuredly sentence him to suffer death. It is, in fact, a choice between his life and death. If you refuse, he swings. If you comply, the timber is not grown, nor the hemp sown, that shall do him any harm."'

'There is a gleam of hope in this!' cried the prisoner.

'A gleam!' returned his friend, 'a noon-blaze; a full and glorious daylight. Hush! I hear the tread of distant feet. Rely on me.'

'When shall I hear more?'

'As soon as I do. I should hope, to-morrow. They are coming to say that our time for talk is over. I hear the jingling of the keys. Not another word of this just now, or they may overhear us.'

As he said these words, the lock was turned, and one of the prison turnkeys appearing at the door, announced that it was time for visitors to leave the jail.

'So soon!' said Stagg, meekly. 'But it can't be helped. Cheer up, friend. This mistake will soon be set at rest, and then you are a man again! If this charitable gentleman will lead a blind man (who has nothing in return but prayers) to the prison-porch, and set him with his face towards the west, he will do a worthy deed. Thank you, good sir. I thank you very kindly.'

So saying, and pausing for an instant at the door to turn his grinning face towards his friend, he departed.

When the officer had seen him to the porch, he returned, and again unlocking and unbarring the door of the cell, set it wide open, informing its inmate that he was at liberty to walk in the adjacent yard, if he thought proper, for an hour.

The prisoner answered with a sullen nod; and being left alone again, sat brooding over what he had heard, and pondering upon the hopes the recent conversation had awakened; gazing abstractedly, the while he did so, on the light without, and watching the shadows thrown by one wall on another, and on the stone-paved ground.

It was a dull, square yard, made cold and gloomy by high walls, and seeming to chill the very sunlight. The stone, so bare, and rough, and obdurate, filled even him with longing thoughts of meadow-land and trees; and with a burning wish to be at liberty. As he looked, he rose, and leaning against the door-post, gazed up at the bright blue sky, smiling even on that dreary home of crime. He seemed, for a moment, to remember lying on his back in some sweet-scented place, and gazing at it through moving branches, long ago.

His attention was suddenly attracted by a clanking sound—he knew what it was, for he had startled himself by making the same noise in walking to the door. Presently a voice began to sing, and he saw the shadow of a figure on the pavement. It stopped—was silent all at once, as though the person for a moment had forgotten where he was, but soon remembered—and so, with the same clanking noise, the shadow disappeared.

He walked out into the court and paced it to and fro; startling the echoes, as he went, with the harsh jangling of his fetters. There was a door near his, which, like his, stood ajar.

He had not taken half-a-dozen turns up and down the yard, when, standing still to observe this door, he heard the clanking sound again. A face looked out of the grated window—he saw it very dimly, for the cell was dark and the bars were heavy—and directly afterwards, a man appeared, and came towards him.

For the sense of loneliness he had, he might have been in jail a year. Made eager by the hope of companionship, he quickened his pace, and hastened to meet the man half way—

What was this! His son!

They stood face to face, staring at each other. He shrinking and cowed, despite himself; Barnahy struggling with his imperfect memory, and wondering where he had seen that face before. He was not uncertain long, for suddenly he laid hands upon him, and striving to bear him to the ground, cried:

'Ah! I know! You are the robber!'

He said nothing in reply at first, but held down his head, and struggled with him silently. Finding the younger man too strong for him, he raised his face, looked close into his eyes, and said,

'I am your father.'

God knows what magic the name had for his ears; but Barnaby released his hold, fell back, and looked at him aghast. Suddenly he sprung towards him, put his arms about his neck, and pressed his head against his cheek.

Yes, yes, he was; he was sure he was. But where had he been so long, and why had he left his mother by herself, or worse than by herself, with her poor foolish boy? And had she really been as happy as they said? And where was she? Was she near there? She was not happy now, and he in jail? Ah, no.

Not a word was said in answer; but Grip croaked loudly, and hopped about them, round and round, as if enclosing them in a magic circle, and invoking all the powers of mischief.

Chapter 63

During the whole of this day, every regiment in or near the metropolis was on duty in one or other part of the town; and the regulars and militia, in obedience to the orders which were sent to every barrack and station within twenty-four hours' journey, began to pour in by all the roads. But the disturbance had attained to such a formidable height, and the rioters had grown, with impunity, to be so audacious, that the sight of this great force, continually augmented by new arrivals, instead of operating as a check, stimulated them to outrages of greater hardihood than any they had yet committed; and helped to kindle a flame in London, the like of which had never been beheld, even in its ancient and rebellious times.

All yesterday, and on this day likewise, the commander-in-chief endeavoured to arouse the magistrates to a sense of their duty, and in particular the Lord Mayor, who was the faintest-hearted and most timid of them all. With this object, large bodies of the soldiery were several times despatched to the Mansion House to await his orders: but as he could, by no threats or persuasions, be induced to give any, and as the men remained in the open street, fruitlessly for any good purpose, and thrivingly for a very bad one; these laudable attempts did harm rather than good. For the crowd, becoming speedily acquainted with the Lord Mayor's temper, did not fail to take advantage of it by boasting that even the civil authorities were opposed to the Papists, and could not find it in their hearts to molest those who were guilty of no other offence. These vaunts they took care to make within the hearing of the soldiers; and they, being naturally loth to quarrel with the people, received their advances kindly enough: answering, when they were asked if they desired to fire upon their countrymen, 'No, they would be damned if they did;' and showing much honest simplicity and good nature. The feeling that the military were No-Popery men, and were ripe for disobeying orders and joining the mob, soon became very prevalent in consequence. Rumours of their disaffection, and of their leaning towards the popular cause, spread from mouth to mouth with astonishing rapidity; and whenever they were drawn up idly in the streets or squares, there was sure to be a crowd about them, cheering and shaking hands, and treating them with a great show of confidence and affection.

By this time, the crowd was everywhere; all concealment and disguise were laid aside, and they pervaded the whole town. If any man among them wanted money, he had but to knock at the door of a dwelling-house, or walk into a shop, and demand it in the rioters name; and his demand was instantly complied with. The peaceable citizens being afraid to lay hands upon them, singly and alone, it may be easily supposed that when gathered together in bodies, they were perfectly secure from interruption. They assembled in the streets, traversed them at their will and pleasure, and publicly concerted their plans. Business was quite suspended; the greater part of the shops were closed; most of the houses displayed a blue flag in token of their adherence to the popular side; and even the Jews in Houndsditch, Whitechapel, and those quarters, wrote upon their doors or window-shutters, 'This House is a True Protestant.' The crowd was the law, and never was the law held in greater dread, or more implicitly obeyed.

It was about six o'clock in the evening, when a vast mob poured into Lincoln's Inn Fields by every avenue, and divided—evidently in pursuance of a previous design—into several parties. It must not be understood that this arrangement was known to the whole crowd, but that it was the work of a few leaders; who, mingling with the men as they came upon the ground, and calling to them to fall into this or that parry, effected it as rapidly as if it had been determined on by a council of the whole number, and every man had known his place.

It was perfectly notorious to the assemblage that the largest body, which comprehended about two-thirds of the whole, was designed for the attack on Newgate. It comprehended all the rioters who had been conspicuous in any of their former proceedings; all those whom they recommended as daring hands and fit for the work; all those whose companions had been taken in the riots; and a great number of people who were relatives or friends of felons in the jail. This last class included, not only the most desperate and utterly abandoned villains in London, but some who were comparatively innocent. There was more than one woman there, disguised in man's attire, and bent upon the rescue of a child or brother. There were the two sons of a man who lay under sentence of death, and who was to be executed along with three others, on the next day but one. There was a great parry of boys whose fellow-pickpockets were in the prison; and at the skirts of all, a score of miserable women, outcasts from the world, seeking to release some other fallen creature as miserable as themselves, or moved by a general sympathy perhaps—God knows—with all who were without hope, and wretched.

Old swords, and pistols without ball or powder; sledge-hammers, knives, axes, saws, and weapons pillaged from the butchers' shops; a forest of iron bars and wooden clubs; long ladders for scaling the walls, each carried on the shoulders of a dozen men; lighted torches; tow smeared with pitch, and tar, and brimstone; staves roughly plucked from fence and paling; and even crutches taken from crippled beggars in the streets; composed their arms. When all was ready, Hugh and Dennis, with Simon Tappertit between them, led the way. Roaring and chafing like an angry sea, the crowd pressed after them.

Instead of going straight down Holborn to the jail, as all expected, their leaders took the way to Clerkenwell, and pouring down a quiet street, halted before a locksmith's house—the Golden Key.

'Beat at the door,' cried Hugh to the men about him. 'We want one of his craft to-night. Beat it in, if no one answers.'

The shop was shut. Both door and shutters were of a strong and sturdy kind, and they knocked without effect. But the impatient crowd raising a cry of 'Set fire to the house!' and torches being passed to the front, an upper window was thrown open, and the stout old locksmith stood before them.

'What now, you villains!' he demanded. 'Where is my daughter?'

'Ask no questions of us, old man,' retorted Hugh, waving his comrades to be silent, 'but come down, and bring the tools of your trade. We want you.'

'Want me!' cried the locksmith, glancing at the regimental dress he wore: 'Ay, and if some that I could name possessed the hearts of mice, ye should have had me long ago. Mark me, my lad—and you about him do the same. There are a score among ye whom I see now and know, who are dead men from this hour. Begone! and rob an undertaker's while you can! You'll want some coffins before long.'

'Will you come down?' cried Hugh.

'Will you give me my daughter, ruffian?' cried the locksmith.

'I know nothing of her,' Hugh rejoined. 'Burn the door!'

'Stop!' cried the locksmith, in a voice that made them falter—presenting, as he spoke, a gun. 'Let an old man do that. You can spare him better.'

The young fellow who held the light, and who was stooping down before the door, rose hastily at these words, and fell back. The locksmith ran his eye along the upturned faces, and kept the weapon levelled at the threshold of his house. It had no other rest than his shoulder, but was as steady as the house itself.

'Let the man who does it, take heed to his prayers,' he said firmly; 'I warn him.'

Snatching a torch from one who stood near him, Hugh was stepping forward with an oath, when he was arrested by a shrill and piercing shriek, and, looking upward, saw a fluttering garment on the house-top.

There was another shriek, and another, and then a shrill voice cried, 'Is Simmun below!' At the same moment a lean neck was stretched over the parapet, and Miss Miggs, indistinctly seen in the gathering gloom of evening, screeched in a frenzied manner, 'Oh! dear gentlemen, let me hear Simmuns's answer from his own lips. Speak to me, Simmun. Speak to me!'

Mr Tappertit, who was not at all flattered by this compliment, looked up, and bidding her hold her peace, ordered her to come down and open the door, for they wanted her master, and would take no denial.

'Oh good gentlemen!' cried Miss Miggs. 'Oh my own precious, precious Simmun—'

'Hold your nonsense, will you!' retorted Mr Tappertit; 'and come down and open the door.—G. Varden, drop that gun, or it will be worse for you.'

'Don't mind his gun,' screamed Miggs. 'Simmun and gentlemen, I poured a mug of table-beer right down the barrel.'

The crowd gave a loud shout, which was followed by a roar of laughter.

'It wouldn't go off, not if you was to load it up to the muzzle,' screamed Miggs. 'Simmun and gentlemen, I'm locked up in the front attic, through the little door on the right hand when you think you've got to the very top of the stairs—and up the flight of corner steps, being careful not to knock your heads against the rafters, and not to tread on one side in case you should fall into the two-pair bedroom through the lath and plasture, which do not bear, but the contrairy. Simmun and gentlemen, I've been locked up here for safety, but my endeavours has always been, and always will be, to be on the right side—the blessed side and to prenounce the Pope of Babylon, and all her inward and her outward workings, which is Pagin. My sentiments is of little consequences, I know,' cried Miggs, with additional shrillness, 'for my positions is but a servant, and as sich, of humilities, still I gives expressions to my feelings, and places my reliances on them which entertains my own opinions!'

Without taking much notice of these outpourings of Miss Miggs after she had made her first announcement in relation to the gun, the crowd raised a ladder against the window where the locksmith stood, and notwithstanding that he closed, and fastened, and defended it manfully, soon forced an entrance by shivering the glass and breaking in the frames. After dealing a few stout blows about him, he found himself defenceless, in the midst of a furious crowd, which overflowed the room and softened off in a confused heap of faces at the door and window.

They were very wrathful with him (for he had wounded two men), and even called out to those in front, to bring him forth and hang him on a lamp-post. But Gabriel was quite undaunted, and looked from Hugh and Dennis, who held him by either arm, to Simon Tappertit, who confronted him.

'You have robbed me of my daughter,' said the locksmith, 'who is far dearer to me than my life; and you may take my life, if you will. I bless God that I have been enabled to keep my wife free of this scene; and that He has made me a man who will not ask mercy at such hands as yours.'

'And a wery game old gentleman you are,' said Mr Dennis, approvingly; 'and you express yourself like a man. What's the odds, brother, whether it's a lamp-post to-night, or a feather-bed ten year to come, eh?'

The locksmith glanced at him disdainfully, but returned no other answer.

'For my part,' said the hangman, who particularly favoured the lamp-post suggestion, 'I honour your principles. They're mine exactly. In such sentiments as them,' and here he emphasised his discourse with an oath, 'I'm ready to meet you or any man halfway.—Have you got a bit of cord anywheres handy? Don't put yourself out of the way, if you haven't. A handkecher will do.'

'Don't be a fool, master,' whispered Hugh, seizing Varden roughly by the shoulder; 'but do as you're bid. You'll soon hear what you're wanted for. Do it!'

'I'll do nothing at your request, or that of any scoundrel here,' returned the locksmith. 'If you want any service from me, you may spare yourselves the pains of telling me what it is. I tell you, beforehand, I'll do nothing for you.'

Mr Dennis was so affected by this constancy on the part of the staunch old man, that he protested—almost with tears in his eyes—that to baulk his inclinations would be an act of cruelty and hard dealing to which he, for one, never could reconcile his conscience. The gentleman, he said, had avowed in so many words that he was ready for working off; such being the case, he considered it their duty, as a civilised and enlightened crowd, to work him off. It was not often, he observed, that they had it in their power to accommodate themselves to the wishes of those from whom they had the misfortune to differ. Having now found an individual who expressed a desire which they could reasonably indulge (and for himself he was free to confess that in his opinion that desire did honour to his feelings), he hoped they would decide to accede to his proposition before going any further. It was an experiment which, skilfully and dexterously performed, would be over in five minutes, with great comfort and satisfaction to all parties; and though it did not become him (Mr Dennis) to speak well of himself he trusted he might be allowed to say that he had practical knowledge of the subject, and, being naturally of an obliging and friendly disposition, would work the gentleman off with a deal of pleasure.

These remarks, which were addressed in the midst of a frightful din and turmoil to those immediately about him, were received with great favour; not so much, perhaps, because of the hangman's eloquence, as on account of the locksmith's obstinacy. Gabriel was in imminent peril, and he knew it; but he preserved a steady silence; and would have done so, if they had been debating whether they should roast him at a slow fire.

As the hangman spoke, there was some stir and confusion on the ladder; and directly he was silent—so immediately upon his holding his peace, that the crowd below had no time to learn what he had been saying, or to shout in response—some one at the window cried:

'He has a grey head. He is an old man: Don't hurt him!'

The locksmith turned, with a start, towards the place from which the words had come, and looked hurriedly at the people who were hanging on the ladder and clinging to each other.

'Pay no respect to my grey hair, young man,' he said, answering the voice and not any one he saw. 'I don't ask it. My heart is green enough to scorn and despise every man among you, band of robbers that you are!'

This incautious speech by no means tended to appease the ferocity of the crowd. They cried again to have him brought out; and it would have gone hard with the honest locksmith, but that Hugh reminded them, in answer, that they wanted his services, and must have them.

'So, tell him what we want,' he said to Simon Tappertit, 'and quickly. And open your ears, master, if you would ever use them after to-night.'

Gabriel folded his arms, which were now at liberty, and eyed his old 'prentice in silence.

'Lookye, Varden,' said Sim, 'we're bound for Newgate.'

'I know you are,' returned the locksmith. 'You never said a truer word than that.'

'To burn it down, I mean,' said Simon, 'and force the gates, and set the prisoners at liberty. You helped to make the lock of the great door.'

'I did,' said the locksmith. 'You owe me no thanks for that—as you'll find before long.'

'Maybe,' returned his journeyman, 'but you must show us how to force it.'

'Must I!'

'Yes; for you know, and I don't. You must come along with us, and pick it with your own hands.'

'When I do,' said the locksmith quietly, 'my hands shall drop off at the wrists, and you shall wear them, Simon Tappertit, on your shoulders for epaulettes.'

'We'll see that,' cried Hugh, interposing, as the indignation of the crowd again burst forth. 'You fill a basket with the tools he'll want, while I bring him downstairs. Open the doors below, some of you. And light the great captain, others! Is there no business afoot, my lads, that you can do nothing but stand and grumble?'

They looked at one another, and quickly dispersing, swarmed over the house, plundering and breaking, according to their custom, and carrying off such articles of value as happened to please their fancy. They had no great length of time for these proceedings, for the basket of tools was soon prepared and slung over a man's shoulders. The preparations being now completed, and everything ready for the attack, those who were pillaging and destroying in the other rooms were called down to the workshop. They were about to issue forth, when the man who had been last upstairs, stepped forward, and asked if the young woman in the garret (who was making a terrible noise, he said, and kept on screaming without the least cessation) was to be released?

For his own part, Simon Tappertit would certainly have replied in the negative, but the mass of his companions, mindful of the good service she had done in the matter of the gun, being of a different opinion, he had nothing for it but to answer, Yes. The man, accordingly, went back again to the rescue, and presently returned with Miss Miggs, limp and doubled up, and very damp from much weeping.

As the young lady had given no tokens of consciousness on their way downstairs, the bearer reported her either dead or dying; and being at some loss what to do with her, was looking round for a convenient bench or heap of ashes on which to place her senseless form, when she suddenly came upon her feet by some mysterious means, thrust back her hair, stared wildly at Mr Tappertit, cried, 'My Simmuns's life is not a wictim!' and dropped into his arms with such promptitude that he staggered and reeled some paces back, beneath his lovely burden.

'Oh bother!' said Mr Tappertit. 'Here. Catch hold of her, somebody. Lock her up again; she never ought to have been let out.'

'My Simmun!' cried Miss Miggs, in tears, and faintly. 'My for ever, ever blessed Simmun!'

'Hold up, will you,' said Mr Tappertit, in a very unresponsive tone, 'I'll let you fall if you don't. What are you sliding your feet off the ground for?'

'My angel Simmuns!' murmured Miggs—'he promised—'

'Promised! Well, and I'll keep my promise,' answered Simon, testily. 'I mean to provide for you, don't I? Stand up!'

'Where am I to go? What is to become of me after my actions of this night!' cried Miggs. 'What resting-places now remains but in the silent tombses!'

'I wish you was in the silent tombses, I do,' cried Mr Tappertit, 'and boxed up tight, in a good strong one. Here,' he cried to one of the bystanders, in whose ear he whispered for a moment: 'Take her off, will you. You understand where?'

The fellow nodded; and taking her in his arms, notwithstanding her broken protestations, and her struggles (which latter species of opposition, involving scratches, was much more difficult of resistance), carried her away. They who were in the house poured out into the street; the locksmith was taken to the head of the crowd, and required to walk between his two conductors; the whole body was put in rapid motion; and without any shouts or noise they bore down straight on Newgate, and halted in a dense mass before the prison-gate.

Chapter 64

Breaking the silence they had hitherto preserved, they raised a great cry as soon as they were ranged before the jail, and demanded to speak to the governor. This visit was not wholly unexpected, for his house, which fronted the street, was strongly barricaded, the wicket-gate of the prison was closed up, and at no loophole or grating was any person to be seen. Before they had repeated their summons many times, a man appeared upon the roof of the governor's house, and asked what it was they wanted.

Some said one thing, some another, and some only groaned and hissed. It being now nearly dark, and the house high, many persons in the throng were not aware that any one had come to answer them, and continued their clamour until the intelligence was gradually diffused through the whole concourse. Ten minutes or more elapsed before any one voice could be heard with tolerable distinctness; during which interval the figure remained perched alone, against the summer-evening sky, looking down into the troubled street.

'Are you,' said Hugh at length, 'Mr Akerman, the head jailer here?'

'Of course he is, brother,' whispered Dennis. But Hugh, without minding him, took his answer from the man himself.

'Yes,' he said. 'I am.'

'You have got some friends of ours in your custody, master.'

'I have a good many people in my custody.' He glanced downward, as he spoke, into the jail: and the feeling that he could see into the different yards, and that he overlooked everything which was hidden from their view by the rugged walls, so lashed and goaded the mob, that they howled like wolves.

'Deliver up our friends,' said Hugh, 'and you may keep the rest.'

'It's my duty to keep them all. I shall do my duty.'

'If you don't throw the doors open, we shall break 'em down,' said Hugh; 'for we will have the rioters out.'

'All I can do, good people,' Akerman replied, 'is to exhort you to disperse; and to remind you that the consequences of any disturbance in this place, will be very severe, and bitterly repented by most of you, when it is too late.'

He made as though he would retire when he said these words, but he was checked by the voice of the locksmith.

'Mr Akerman,' cried Gabriel, 'Mr Akerman.'

'I will hear no more from any of you,' replied the governor, turning towards the speaker, and waving his hand.

'But I am not one of them,' said Gabriel. 'I am an honest man, Mr Akerman; a respectable tradesman—Gabriel Varden, the locksmith. You know me?'

'You among the crowd!' cried the governor in an altered voice.

'Brought here by force—brought here to pick the lock of the great door for them,' rejoined the locksmith. 'Bear witness for me, Mr Akerman, that I refuse to do it; and that I will not do it, come what may of my refusal. If any violence is done to me, please to remember this.'

'Is there no way of helping you?' said the governor.

'None, Mr Akerman. You'll do your duty, and I'll do mine. Once again, you robbers and cut-throats,' said the locksmith, turning round upon them, 'I refuse. Ah! Howl till you're hoarse. I refuse.'

'Stay—stay!' said the jailer, hastily. 'Mr Varden, I know you for a worthy man, and one who would do no unlawful act except upon compulsion—'

'Upon compulsion, sir,' interposed the locksmith, who felt that the tone in which this was said, conveyed the speaker's impression that he had ample excuse for yielding to the furious multitude who beset and hemmed him in, on every side, and among whom he stood, an old man, quite alone; 'upon compulsion, sir, I'll do nothing.'

'Where is that man,' said the keeper, anxiously, 'who spoke to me just now?'

'Here!' Hugh replied.

'Do you know what the guilt of murder is, and that by keeping that honest tradesman at your side you endanger his life!'

'We know it very well,' he answered, 'for what else did we bring him here? Let's have our friends, master, and you shall have your friend. Is that fair, lads?'

The mob replied to him with a loud Hurrah!

'You see how it is, sir?' cried Varden. 'Keep 'em out, in King George's name. Remember what I have said. Good night!'

There was no more parley. A shower of stones and other missiles compelled the keeper of the jail to retire; and the mob, pressing on, and swarming round the walls, forced Gabriel Varden close up to the door.

In vain the basket of tools was laid upon the ground before him, and he was urged in turn by promises, by blows, by offers of reward, and threats of instant death, to do the office for which they had brought him there. 'No,' cried the sturdy locksmith, 'I will not!'

He had never loved his life so well as then, but nothing could move him. The savage faces that glared upon him, look where he would; the cries of those who thirsted, like wild animals, for his blood; the sight of men pressing forward, and trampling down their fellows, as they strove to reach him, and struck at him above the heads of other men, with axes and with iron bars; all failed to daunt him. He looked from man to man, and face to face, and still, with quickened breath and lessening colour, cried firmly, 'I will not!'

Dennis dealt him a blow upon the face which felled him to the ground. He sprung up again like a man in the prime of life, and with blood upon his forehead, caught him by the throat.

'You cowardly dog!' he said: 'Give me my daughter. Give me my daughter.'

They struggled together. Some cried 'Kill him,' and some (but they were not near enough) strove to trample him to death. Tug as he would at the old man's wrists, the hangman could not force him to unclench his hands.

'Is this all the return you make me, you ungrateful monster?' he articulated with great difficulty, and with many oaths.

'Give me my daughter!' cried the locksmith, who was now as fierce as those who gathered round him: 'Give me my daughter!'

He was down again, and up, and down once more, and buffeting with a score of them, who bandied him from hand to hand, when one tall fellow, fresh from a slaughter-house, whose dress and great thigh-boots smoked hot with grease and blood, raised a pole-axe, and swearing a horrible oath, aimed it at the old man's uncovered head. At that instant, and in the very act, he fell himself, as if struck by lightning, and over his body a one-armed man came darting to the locksmith's side. Another man was with him, and both caught the locksmith roughly in their grasp.

'Leave him to us!' they cried to Hugh—struggling, as they spoke, to force a passage backward through the crowd. 'Leave him to us. Why do you waste your whole strength on such as he, when a couple of men can finish him in as many minutes! You lose time. Remember the prisoners! remember Barnaby!'

The cry ran through the mob. Hammers began to rattle on the walls; and every man strove to reach the prison, and be among the foremost rank. Fighting their way through the press and struggle, as desperately as if they were in the midst of enemies rather than their own friends, the two men retreated with the locksmith between them, and dragged him through the very heart of the concourse.

And now the strokes began to fall like hail upon the gate, and on the strong building; for those who could not reach the door, spent their fierce rage on anything—even on the great blocks of stone, which shivered their weapons into fragments, and made their hands and arms to tingle as if the walls were active in their stout resistance, and dealt them back their blows. The clash of iron ringing upon iron, mingled with the deafening tumult and sounded high above it, as the great sledge-hammers rattled on the nailed and plated door: the sparks flew off in showers; men worked in gangs, and at short intervals relieved each other, that all their strength might be devoted to the work; but there stood the portal still, as grim and dark and strong as ever, and, saving for the dints upon its battered surface, quite unchanged.

While some brought all their energies to bear upon this toilsome task; and some, rearing ladders against the prison, tried to clamber to the summit of the walls they were too short to scale; and some again engaged a body of police a hundred strong, and beat them back and trod them under foot by force of numbers; others besieged the house on which the jailer had appeared, and driving in the door, brought out his furniture, and piled it up against the prison-gate, to make a bonfire which should burn it down. As soon as this device was understood, all those who had laboured hitherto, cast down their tools and helped to swell the heap; which reached half-way across the street, and was so high, that those who threw more fuel on the top, got up by ladders. When all the keeper's goods were flung upon this costly pile, to the last fragment, they smeared it with the pitch, and tar, and rosin they had brought, and sprinkled it with turpentine. To all the woodwork round the prison-doors they did the like, leaving not a joist or beam untouched. This infernal christening performed, they fired the pile with lighted matches and with blazing tow, and then stood by, awaiting the result.

The furniture being very dry, and rendered more combustible by wax and oil, besides the arts they had used, took fire at once. The flames roared high and fiercely, blackening the prison-wall, and twining up its loftly front like burning serpents. At first they crowded round the blaze, and vented their exultation only in their looks: but when it grew hotter and fiercer—when it crackled, leaped, and roared, like a great furnace—when it shone upon the opposite houses, and lighted up not only the pale and wondering faces at the windows, but the inmost corners of each habitation—when through the deep red heat and glow, the fire was seen sporting and toying with the door, now clinging to its obdurate surface, now gliding off with fierce inconstancy and soaring high into the sky, anon returning to fold it in its burning grasp and lure it to its ruin—when it shone and gleamed so brightly that the church clock of St Sepulchre's so often pointing to the hour of death, was legible as in broad day, and the vane upon its steeple-top glittered in the unwonted light like something richly jewelled—when blackened stone and sombre brick grew ruddy in the deep reflection, and windows shone like burnished gold, dotting the longest distance in the fiery vista with their specks of brightness—when wall and tower, and roof and chimney-stack, seemed drunk, and in the flickering glare appeared to reel and stagger—when scores of objects, never seen before, burst out upon the view, and things the most familiar put on some new aspect—then the mob began to join the whirl, and with loud yells, and shouts, and clamour, such as happily is seldom heard, bestirred themselves to feed the fire, and keep it at its height.

Although the heat was so intense that the paint on the houses over against the prison, parched and crackled up, and swelling into boils, as it were from excess of torture, broke and crumbled away; although the glass fell from the window-sashes, and the lead and iron on the roofs blistered the incautious hand that touched them, and the sparrows in the eaves took wing, and rendered giddy by the smoke, fell fluttering down upon the blazing pile; still the fire was tended unceasingly by busy hands, and round it, men were going always. They never slackened in their zeal, or kept aloof, but pressed upon the flames so hard, that those in front had much ado to save themselves from being thrust in; if one man swooned or dropped, a dozen struggled for his place, and that although they knew the pain, and thirst, and pressure to be unendurable. Those who fell down in fainting-fits, and were not crushed or burnt, were carried to an inn-yard close at hand, and dashed with water from a pump; of which buckets full were passed from man to man among the crowd; but such was the strong desire of all to drink, and such the fighting to be first, that, for the most part, the whole contents were spilled upon the ground, without the lips of one man being moistened.

Meanwhile, and in the midst of all the roar and outcry, those who were nearest to the pile, heaped up again the burning fragments that came toppling down, and raked the fire about the door, which, although a sheet of flame, was still a door fast locked and barred, and kept them out. Great pieces of blazing wood were passed, besides, above the people's heads to such as stood about the ladders, and some of these, climbing up to the topmost stave, and holding on with one hand by the prison wall, exerted all their skill and force to cast these fire-brands on the roof, or down into the yards within. In many instances their efforts were successful; which occasioned a new and appalling addition to the horrors of the scene: for the prisoners within, seeing from between their bars that the fire caught in many places and thrived fiercely, and being all locked up in strong cells for the night, began to know that they were in danger of being burnt alive. This terrible fear, spreading from cell to cell and from yard to yard, vented itself in such dismal cries and wailings, and in such dreadful shrieks for help, that the whole jail resounded with the noise; which was loudly heard even above the shouting of the mob and roaring of the flames, and was so full of agony and despair, that it made the boldest tremble.

It was remarkable that these cries began in that quarter of the jail which fronted Newgate Street, where, it was well known, the men who were to suffer death on Thursday were confined. And not only were these four who had so short a time to live, the first to whom the dread of being burnt occurred, but they were, throughout, the most importunate of all: for they could be plainly heard, notwithstanding the great thickness of the walls, crying that the wind set that way, and that the flames would shortly reach them; and calling to the officers of the jail to come and quench the fire from a cistern which was in their yard, and full of water. Judging from what the crowd outside the walls could hear from time to time, these four doomed wretches never ceased to call for help; and that with as much distraction, and in as great a frenzy of attachment to existence, as though each had an honoured, happy life before him, instead of eight-and-forty hours of miserable imprisonment, and then a violent and shameful death.

But the anguish and suffering of the two sons of one of these men, when they heard, or fancied that they heard, their father's voice, is past description. After wringing their hands and rushing to and fro as if they were stark mad, one mounted on the shoulders of his brother, and tried to clamber up the face of the high wall, guarded at the top with spikes and points of iron. And when he fell among the crowd, he was not deterred by his bruises, but mounted up again, and fell again, and, when he found the feat impossible, began to beat the stones and tear them with his hands, as if he could that way make a breach in the strong building, and force a passage in. At last, they cleft their way among the mob about the door, though many men, a dozen times their match, had tried in vain to do so, and were seen, in—yes, in—the fire, striving to prize it down, with crowbars.

Nor were they alone affected by the outcry from within the prison. The women who were looking on, shrieked loudly, beat their hands together, stopped their ears; and many fainted: the men who were not near the walls and active in the siege, rather than do nothing, tore up the pavement of the street, and did so with a haste and fury they could not have surpassed if that had been the jail, and they were near their object. Not one living creature in the throng was for an instant still. The whole great mass were mad.

A shout! Another! Another yet, though few knew why, or what it meant. But those around the gate had seen it slowly yield, and drop from its topmost hinge. It hung on that side by but one, but it was upright still, because of the bar, and its having sunk, of its own weight, into the heap of ashes at its foot. There was now a gap at the top of the doorway, through which could be descried a gloomy passage, cavernous and dark. Pile up the fire!

It burnt fiercely. The door was red-hot, and the gap wider. They vainly tried to shield their faces with their hands, and standing as if in readiness for a spring, watched the place. Dark figures, some crawling on their hands and knees, some carried in the arms of others, were seen to pass along the roof. It was plain the jail could hold out no longer. The keeper, and his officers, and their wives and children, were escaping. Pile up the fire!

The door sank down again: it settled deeper in the cinders—tottered—yielded—was down!

As they shouted again, they fell back, for a moment, and left a clear space about the fire that lay between them and the jail entry. Hugh leapt upon the blazing heap, and scattering a train of sparks into the air, and making the dark lobby glitter with those that hung upon his dress, dashed into the jail.

The hangman followed. And then so many rushed upon their track, that the fire got trodden down and thinly strewn about the street; but there was no need of it now, for, inside and out, the prison was in flames.

Chapter 65

During the whole course of the terrible scene which was now at its height, one man in the jail suffered a degree of fear and mental torment which had no parallel in the endurance, even of those who lay under sentence of death.

When the rioters first assembled before the building, the murderer was roused from sleep—if such slumbers as his may have that blessed name—by the roar of voices, and the struggling of a great crowd. He started up as these sounds met his ear, and, sitting on his bedstead, listened.

After a short interval of silence the noise burst out again. Still listening attentively, he made out, in course of time, that the jail was besieged by a furious multitude. His guilty conscience instantly arrayed these men against himself, and brought the fear upon him that he would be singled out, and torn to pieces.

Once impressed with the terror of this conceit, everything tended to confirm and strengthen it. His double crime, the circumstances under which it had been committed, the length of time that had elapsed, and its discovery in spite of all, made him, as it were, the visible object of the Almighty's wrath. In all the crime and vice and moral gloom of the great pest-house of the capital, he stood alone, marked and singled out by his great guilt, a Lucifer among the devils. The other prisoners were a host, hiding and sheltering each other—a crowd like that without the walls. He was one man against the whole united concourse; a single, solitary, lonely man, from whom the very captives in the jail fell off and shrunk appalled.

It might be that the intelligence of his capture having been bruited abroad, they had come there purposely to drag him out and kill him in the street; or it might be that they were the rioters, and, in pursuance of an old design, had come to sack the prison. But in either case he had no belief or hope that they would spare him. Every shout they raised, and every sound they made, was a blow upon his heart. As the attack went on, he grew more wild and frantic in his terror: tried to pull away the bars that guarded the chimney and prevented him from climbing up: called loudly on the turnkeys to cluster round the cell and save him from the fury of the rabble; or put him in some dungeon underground, no matter of what depth, how dark it was, or loathsome, or beset with rats and creeping things, so that it hid him and was hard to find.

But no one came, or answered him. Fearful, even while he cried to them, of attracting attention, he was silent. By and bye, he saw, as he looked from his grated window, a strange glimmering on the stone walls and pavement of the yard. It was feeble at first, and came and went, as though some officers with torches were passing to and fro upon the roof of the prison. Soon it reddened, and lighted brands came whirling down, spattering the ground with fire, and burning sullenly in corners. One rolled beneath a wooden bench, and set it in a blaze; another caught a water-spout, and so went climbing up the wall, leaving a long straight track of fire behind it. After a time, a slow thick shower of burning fragments, from some upper portion of the prison which was blazing nigh, began to fall before his door. Remembering that it opened outwards, he knew that every spark which fell upon the heap, and in the act lost its bright life, and died an ugly speck of dust and rubbish, helped to entomb him in a living grave. Still, though the jail resounded with shrieks and cries for help,—though the fire bounded up as if each separate flame had had a tiger's life, and roared as though, in every one, there were a hungry voice—though the heat began to grow intense, and the air suffocating, and the clamour without increased, and the danger of his situation even from one merciless element was every moment more extreme,—still he was afraid to raise his voice again, lest the crowd should break in, and should, of their own ears or from the information given them by the other prisoners, get the clue to his place of confinement. Thus fearful alike, of those within the prison and of those without; of noise and silence; light and darkness; of being released, and being left there to die; he was so tortured and tormented, that nothing man has ever done to man in the horrible caprice of power and cruelty, exceeds his self-inflicted punishment.

Now, now, the door was down. Now they came rushing through the jail, calling to each other in the vaulted passages; clashing the iron gates dividing yard from yard; beating at the doors of cells and wards; wrenching off bolts and locks and bars; tearing down the door-posts to get men out; endeavouring to drag them by main force through gaps and windows where a child could scarcely pass; whooping and yelling without a moment's rest; and running through the heat and flames as if they were cased in metal. By their legs, their arms, the hair upon their heads, they dragged the prisoners out. Some threw themselves upon the captives as they got towards the door, and tried to file away their irons; some danced about them with a frenzied joy, and rent their clothes, and were ready, as it seemed, to tear them limb from limb. Now a party of a dozen men came darting through the yard into which the murderer cast fearful glances from his darkened window; dragging a prisoner along the ground whose dress they had nearly torn from his body in their mad eagerness to set him free, and who was bleeding and senseless in their hands. Now a score of prisoners ran to and fro, who had lost themselves in the intricacies of the prison, and were so bewildered with the noise and glare that they knew not where to turn or what to do, and still cried out for help, as loudly as before. Anon some famished wretch whose theft had been a loaf of bread, or scrap of butcher's meat, came skulking past, barefooted—going slowly away because that jail, his house, was burning; not because he had any other, or had friends to meet, or old haunts to revisit, or any liberty to gain, but liberty to starve and die. And then a knot of highwaymen went trooping by, conducted by the friends they had among the crowd, who muffled their fetters as they went along, with handkerchiefs and bands of hay, and wrapped them in coats and cloaks, and gave them drink from bottles, and held it to their lips, because of their handcuffs which there was no time to remove. All this, and Heaven knows how much more, was done amidst a noise, a hurry, and distraction, like nothing that we know of, even in our dreams; which seemed for ever on the rise, and never to decrease for the space of a single instant.

He was still looking down from his window upon these things, when a band of men with torches, ladders, axes, and many kinds of weapons, poured into the yard, and hammering at his door, inquired if there were any prisoner within. He left the window when he saw them coming, and drew back into the remotest corner of the cell; but although he returned them no answer, they had a fancy that some one was inside, for they presently set ladders against it, and began to tear away the bars at the casement; not only that, indeed, but with pickaxes to hew down the very stones in the wall.

As soon as they had made a breach at the window, large enough for the admission of a man's head, one of them thrust in a torch and looked all round the room. He followed this man's gaze until it rested on himself, and heard him demand why he had not answered, but made him no reply.

In the general surprise and wonder, they were used to this; without saying anything more, they enlarged the breach until it was large enough to admit the body of a man, and then came dropping down upon the floor, one after another, until the cell was full. They caught him up among them, handed him to the window, and those who stood upon the ladders passed him down upon the pavement of the yard. Then the rest came out, one after another, and, bidding him fly, and lose no time, or the way would be choked up, hurried away to rescue others.

It seemed not a minute's work from first to last. He staggered to his feet, incredulous of what had happened, when the yard was filled again, and a crowd rushed on, hurrying Barnaby among them. In another minute—not so much: another minute! the same instant, with no lapse or interval between!—he and his son were being passed from hand to hand, through the dense crowd in the street, and were glancing backward at a burning pile which some one said was Newgate.

From the moment of their first entrance into the prison, the crowd dispersed themselves about it, and swarmed into every chink and crevice, as if they had a perfect acquaintance with its innermost parts, and bore in their minds an exact plan of the whole. For this immediate knowledge of the place, they were, no doubt, in a great degree, indebted to the hangman, who stood in the lobby, directing some to go this way, some that, and some the other; and who materially assisted in bringing about the wonderful rapidity with which the release of the prisoners was effected.

But this functionary of the law reserved one important piece of intelligence, and kept it snugly to himself. When he had issued his instructions relative to every other part of the building, and the mob were dispersed from end to end, and busy at their work, he took a bundle of keys from a kind of cupboard in the wall, and going by a kind of passage near the chapel (it joined the governors house, and was then on fire), betook himself to the condemned cells, which were a series of small, strong, dismal rooms, opening on a low gallery, guarded, at the end at which he entered, by a strong iron wicket, and at its opposite extremity by two doors and a thick grate. Having double locked the wicket, and assured himself that the other entrances were well secured, he sat down on a bench in the gallery, and sucked the head of his stick with the utmost complacency, tranquillity, and contentment.

It would have been strange enough, a man's enjoying himself in this quiet manner, while the prison was burning, and such a tumult was cleaving the air, though he had been outside the walls. But here, in the very heart of the building, and moreover with the prayers and cries of the four men under sentence sounding in his ears, and their hands, stretched our through the gratings in their cell-doors, clasped in frantic entreaty before his very eyes, it was particularly remarkable. Indeed, Mr Dennis appeared to think it an uncommon circumstance, and to banter himself upon it; for he thrust his hat on one side as some men do when they are in a waggish humour, sucked the head of his stick with a higher relish, and smiled as though he would say, 'Dennis, you're a rum dog; you're a queer fellow; you're capital company, Dennis, and quite a character!'

He sat in this way for some minutes, while the four men in the cells, who were certain that somebody had entered the gallery, but could not see who, gave vent to such piteous entreaties as wretches in their miserable condition may be supposed to have been inspired with: urging, whoever it was, to set them at liberty, for the love of Heaven; and protesting, with great fervour, and truly enough, perhaps, for the time, that if they escaped, they would amend their ways, and would never, never, never again do wrong before God or man, but would lead penitent and sober lives, and sorrowfully repent the crimes they had committed. The terrible energy with which they spoke, would have moved any person, no matter how good or just (if any good or just person could have strayed into that sad place that night), to have set them at liberty: and, while he would have left any other punishment to its free course, to have saved them from this last dreadful and repulsive penalty; which never turned a man inclined to evil, and has hardened thousands who were half inclined to good.

Mr Dennis, who had been bred and nurtured in the good old school, and had administered the good old laws on the good old plan, always once and sometimes twice every six weeks, for a long time, bore these appeals with a deal of philosophy. Being at last, however, rather disturbed in his pleasant reflection by their repetition, he rapped at one of the doors with his stick, and cried:

'Hold your noise there, will you?'

At this they all cried together that they were to be hanged on the next day but one; and again implored his aid.

'Aid! For what!' said Mr Dennis, playfully rapping the knuckles of the hand nearest him.

'To save us!' they cried.

'Oh, certainly,' said Mr Dennis, winking at the wall in the absence of any friend with whom he could humour the joke. 'And so you're to be worked off, are you, brothers?'

'Unless we are released to-night,' one of them cried, 'we are dead men!'

'I tell you what it is,' said the hangman, gravely; 'I'm afraid, my friend, that you're not in that 'ere state of mind that's suitable to your condition, then; you're not a-going to be released: don't think it—Will you leave off that 'ere indecent row? I wonder you an't ashamed of yourselves, I do.'

He followed up this reproof by rapping every set of knuckles one after the other, and having done so, resumed his seat again with a cheerful countenance.

'You've had law,' he said, crossing his legs and elevating his eyebrows: 'laws have been made a' purpose for you; a wery handsome prison's been made a' purpose for you; a parson's kept a purpose for you; a constitootional officer's appointed a' purpose for you; carts is maintained a' purpose for you—and yet you're not contented!—WILL you hold that noise, you sir in the furthest?'

A groan was the only answer.

'So well as I can make out,' said Mr Dennis, in a tone of mingled badinage and remonstrance, 'there's not a man among you. I begin to think I'm on the opposite side, and among the ladies; though for the matter of that, I've seen a many ladies face it out, in a manner that did honour to the sex.—You in number two, don't grind them teeth of yours. Worse manners,' said the hangman, rapping at the door with his stick, 'I never see in this place afore. I'm ashamed of you. You're a disgrace to the Bailey.'

After pausing for a moment to hear if anything could be pleaded in justification, Mr Dennis resumed in a sort of coaxing tone:

'Now look'ee here, you four. I'm come here to take care of you, and see that you an't burnt, instead of the other thing. It's no use your making any noise, for you won't be found out by them as has broken in, and you'll only be hoarse when you come to the speeches,—which is a pity. What I say in respect to the speeches always is, "Give it mouth." That's my maxim. Give it mouth. I've heerd,' said the hangman, pulling off his hat to take his handkerchief from the crown and wipe his face, and then putting it on again a little more on one side than before, 'I've heerd a eloquence on them boards—you know what boards I mean—and have heerd a degree of mouth given to them speeches, that they was as clear as a bell, and as good as a play.

There's a pattern! And always, when a thing of this natur's to come off, what I stand up for, is, a proper frame of mind. Let's have a proper frame of mind, and we can go through with it, creditable—pleasant—sociable. Whatever you do (and I address myself in particular, to you in the furthest), never snivel. I'd sooner by half, though I lose by it, see a man tear his clothes a' purpose to spile 'em before they come to me, than find him snivelling. It's ten to one a better frame of mind, every way!'

While the hangman addressed them to this effect, in the tone and with the air of a pastor in familiar conversation with his flock, the noise had been in some degree subdued; for the rioters were busy in conveying the prisoners to the Sessions House, which was beyond the main walls of the prison, though connected with it, and the crowd were busy too, in passing them from thence along the street. But when he had got thus far in his discourse, the sound of voices in the yard showed plainly that the mob had returned and were coming that way; and directly afterwards a violent crashing at the grate below, gave note of their attack upon the cells (as they were called) at last.

It was in vain the hangman ran from door to door, and covered the grates, one after another, with his hat, in futile efforts to stifle the cries of the four men within; it was in vain he dogged their outstretched hands, and beat them with his stick, or menaced them with new and lingering pains in the execution of his office; the place resounded with their cries. These, together with the feeling that they were now the last men in the jail, so worked upon and stimulated the besiegers, that in an incredibly short space of time they forced the strong grate down below, which was formed of iron rods two inches square, drove in the two other doors, as if they had been but deal partitions, and stood at the end of the gallery with only a bar or two between them and the cells.

'Halloa!' cried Hugh, who was the first to look into the dusky passage: 'Dennis before us! Well done, old boy. Be quick, and open here, for we shall be suffocated in the smoke, going out.'

'Go out at once, then,' said Dennis. 'What do you want here?'

'Want!' echoed Hugh. 'The four men.'

'Four devils!' cried the hangman. 'Don't you know they're left for death on Thursday? Don't you respect the law—the constitootion—nothing? Let the four men be.'

'Is this a time for joking?' cried Hugh. 'Do you hear 'em? Pull away these bars that have got fixed between the door and the ground; and let us in.'

'Brother,' said the hangman, in a low voice, as he stooped under pretence of doing what Hugh desired, but only looked up in his face, 'can't you leave these here four men to me, if I've the whim! You do what you like, and have what you like of everything for your share,—give me my share. I want these four men left alone, I tell you!'

'Pull the bars down, or stand out of the way,' was Hugh's reply.

'You can turn the crowd if you like, you know that well enough, brother,' said the hangman, slowly. 'What! You WILL come in, will you?'

'Yes.'

'You won't let these men alone, and leave 'em to me? You've no respect for nothing—haven't you?' said the hangman, retreating to the door by which he had entered, and regarding his companion with a scowl. 'You WILL come in, will you, brother!'

'I tell you, yes. What the devil ails you? Where are you going?'

'No matter where I'm going,' rejoined the hangman, looking in again at the iron wicket, which he had nearly shut upon himself, and held ajar. 'Remember where you're coming. That's all!'

With that, he shook his likeness at Hugh, and giving him a grin, compared with which his usual smile was amiable, disappeared, and shut the door.

Hugh paused no longer, but goaded alike by the cries of the convicts, and by the impatience of the crowd, warned the man immediately behind him—the way was only wide enough for one abreast—to stand back, and wielded a sledge-hammer with such strength, that after a few blows the iron bent and broke, and gave them free admittance.

It the two sons of one of these men, of whom mention has been made, were furious in their zeal before, they had now the wrath and vigour of lions. Calling to the man within each cell, to keep as far back as he could, lest the axes crashing through the door should wound him, a party went to work upon each one, to beat it in by sheer strength, and force the bolts and staples from their hold. But although these two lads had the weakest party, and the worst armed, and did not begin until after the others, having stopped to whisper to him through the grate, that door was the first open, and that man was the first out. As they dragged him into the gallery to knock off his irons, he fell down among them, a mere heap of chains, and was carried out in that state on men's shoulders, with no sign of life.

The release of these four wretched creatures, and conveying them, astounded and bewildered, into the streets so full of life—a spectacle they had never thought to see again, until they emerged from solitude and silence upon that last journey, when the air should be heavy with the pent-up breath of thousands, and the streets and houses should be built and roofed with human faces, not with bricks and tiles and stones—was the crowning horror of the scene. Their pale and haggard looks and hollow eyes; their staggering feet, and hands stretched out as if to save themselves from falling; their wandering and uncertain air; the way they heaved and gasped for breath, as though in water, when they were first plunged into the crowd; all marked them for the men. No need to say 'this one was doomed to die;' for there were the words broadly stamped and branded on his face. The crowd fell off, as if they had been laid out for burial, and had risen in their shrouds; and many were seen to shudder, as though they had been actually dead men, when they chanced to touch or brush against their garments.

At the bidding of the mob, the houses were all illuminated that night—lighted up from top to bottom as at a time of public gaiety and joy. Many years afterwards, old people who lived in their youth near this part of the city, remembered being in a great glare of light, within doors and without, and as they looked, timid and frightened children, from the windows, seeing a FACE go by. Though the whole great crowd and all its other terrors had faded from their recollection, this one object remained; alone, distinct, and well remembered. Even in the unpractised minds of infants, one of these doomed men darting past, and but an instant seen, was an image of force enough to dim the whole concourse; to find itself an all-absorbing place, and hold it ever after.

When this last task had been achieved, the shouts and cries grew fainter; the clank of fetters, which had resounded on all sides as the prisoners escaped, was heard no more; all the noises of the crowd subsided into a hoarse and sullen murmur as it passed into the distance; and when the human tide had rolled away, a melancholy heap of smoking ruins marked the spot where it had lately chafed and roared.

Chapter 66

Although he had had no rest upon the previous night, and had watched with little intermission for some weeks past, sleeping only in the day by starts and snatches, Mr Haredale, from the dawn of morning until sunset, sought his niece in every place where he deemed it possible she could have taken refuge. All day long, nothing, save a draught of water, passed his lips; though he prosecuted his inquiries far and wide, and never so much as sat down, once.

In every quarter he could think of; at Chigwell and in London; at the houses of the tradespeople with whom he dealt, and of the friends he knew; he pursued his search. A prey to the most harrowing anxieties and apprehensions, he went from magistrate to magistrate, and finally to the Secretary of State. The only comfort he received was from this minister, who assured him that the Government, being now driven to the exercise of the extreme prerogatives of the Crown, were determined to exert them; that a proclamation would probably be out upon the morrow, giving to the military, discretionary and unlimited power in the suppression of the riots; that the sympathies of the King, the Administration, and both Houses of Parliament, and indeed of all good men of every religious persuasion, were strongly with the injured Catholics; and that justice should be done them at any cost or hazard. He told him, moreover, that other persons whose houses had been burnt, had for a time lost sight of their children or their relatives, but had, in every case, within his knowledge, succeeded in discovering them; that his complaint should be remembered, and fully stated in the instructions given to the officers in command, and to all the inferior myrmidons of justice; and that everything that could be done to help him, should be done, with a goodwill and in good faith.

Grateful for this consolation, feeble as it was in its reference to the past, and little hope as it afforded him in connection with the subject of distress which lay nearest to his heart; and really thankful for the interest the minister expressed, and seemed to feel, in his condition; Mr Haredale withdrew. He found himself, with the night coming on, alone in the streets; and destitute of any place in which to lay his head.

He entered an hotel near Charing Cross, and ordered some refreshment and a bed. He saw that his faint and worn appearance attracted the attention of the landlord and his waiters; and thinking that they might suppose him to be penniless, took out his purse, and laid it on the table. It was not that, the landlord said, in a faltering voice. If he were one of those who had suffered by the rioters, he durst not give him entertainment. He had a family of children, and had been twice warned to be careful in receiving guests. He heartily prayed his forgiveness, but what could he do?

Nothing. No man felt that more sincerely than Mr Haredale. He told the man as much, and left the house.

Feeling that he might have anticipated this occurrence, after what he had seen at Chigwell in the morning, where no man dared to touch a spade, though he offered a large reward to all who would come and dig among the ruins of his house, he walked along the Strand; too proud to expose himself to another refusal, and of too generous a spirit to involve in distress or ruin any honest tradesman who might be weak enough to give him shelter. He wandered into one of the streets by the side of the river, and was pacing in a thoughtful manner up and down, thinking of things that had happened long ago, when he heard a servant-man at an upper window call to another on the opposite side of the street, that the mob were setting fire to Newgate.

To Newgate! where that man was! His failing strength returned, his energies came back with tenfold vigour, on the instant. If it were possible—if they should set the murderer free—was he, after all he had undergone, to die with the suspicion of having slain his own brother, dimly gathering about him—

He had no consciousness of going to the jail; but there he stood, before it. There was the crowd wedged and pressed together in a dense, dark, moving mass; and there were the flames soaring up into the air. His head turned round and round, lights flashed before his eyes, and he struggled hard with two men.

'Nay, nay,' said one. 'Be more yourself, my good sir. We attract attention here. Come away. What can you do among so many men?'

'The gentleman's always for doing something,' said the other, forcing him along as he spoke. 'I like him for that. I do like him for that.'

They had by this time got him into a court, hard by the prison. He looked from one to the other, and as he tried to release himself, felt that he tottered on his feet. He who had spoken first, was the old gentleman whom he had seen at the Lord Mayor's. The other was John Grueby, who had stood by him so manfully at Westminster.

'What does this mean?' he asked them faintly. 'How came we together?'

'On the skirts of the crowd,' returned the distiller; 'but come with us. Pray come with us. You seem to know my friend here?'

'Surely,' said Mr Haredale, looking in a kind of stupor at John.

'He'll tell you then,' returned the old gentleman, 'that I am a man to be trusted. He's my servant. He was lately (as you know, I have no doubt) in Lord George Gordon's service; but he left it, and brought, in pure goodwill to me and others, who are marked by the rioters, such intelligence as he had picked up, of their designs.'

—'On one condition, please, sir,' said John, touching his hat. No evidence against my lord—a misled man—a kind-hearted man, sir. My lord never intended this.'

'The condition will be observed, of course,' rejoined the old distiller. 'It's a point of honour. But come with us, sir; pray come with us.'

John Grueby added no entreaties, but he adopted a different kind of persuasion, by putting his arm through one of Mr Haredale's, while his master took the other, and leading him away with all speed.

Sensible, from a strange lightness in his head, and a difficulty in fixing his thoughts on anything, even to the extent of bearing his companions in his mind for a minute together without looking at them, that his brain was affected by the agitation and suffering through which he had passed, and to which he was still a prey, Mr Haredale let them lead him where they would. As they went along, he was conscious of having no command over what he said or thought, and that he had a fear of going mad.

The distiller lived, as he had told him when they first met, on Holborn Hill, where he had great storehouses and drove a large trade. They approached his house by a back entrance, lest they should attract the notice of the crowd, and went into an upper room which faced towards the street; the windows, however, in common with those of every other room in the house, were boarded up inside, in order that, out of doors, all might appear quite dark.

They laid him on a sofa in this chamber, perfectly insensible; but John immediately fetching a surgeon, who took from him a large quantity of blood, he gradually came to himself. As he was, for the time, too weak to walk, they had no difficulty in persuading him to remain there all night, and got him to bed without loss of a minute. That done, they gave him cordial and some toast, and presently a pretty strong composing-draught, under the influence of which he soon fell into a lethargy, and, for a time, forgot his troubles.

The vintner, who was a very hearty old fellow and a worthy man, had no thoughts of going to bed himself, for he had received several threatening warnings from the rioters, and had indeed gone out that evening to try and gather from the conversation of the mob whether his house was to be the next attacked. He sat all night in an easy-chair in the same room—dozing a little now and then—and received from time to time the reports of John Grueby and two or three other trustworthy persons in his employ, who went out into the streets as scouts; and for whose entertainment an ample allowance of good cheer (which the old vintner, despite his anxiety, now and then attacked himself) was set forth in an adjoining chamber.

These accounts were of a sufficiently alarming nature from the first; but as the night wore on, they grew so much worse, and involved such a fearful amount of riot and destruction, that in comparison with these new tidings all the previous disturbances sunk to nothing.

The first intelligence that came, was of the taking of Newgate, and the escape of all the prisoners, whose track, as they made up Holborn and into the adjacent streets, was proclaimed to those citizens who were shut up in their houses, by the rattling of their chains, which formed a dismal concert, and was heard in every direction, as though so many forges were at work. The flames too, shone so brightly through the vintner's skylights, that the rooms and staircases below were nearly as light as in broad day; while the distant shouting of the mob seemed to shake the very walls and ceilings.

At length they were heard approaching the house, and some minutes of terrible anxiety ensued. They came close up, and stopped before it; but after giving three loud yells, went on. And although they returned several times that night, creating new alarms each time, they did nothing there; having their hands full. Shortly after they had gone away for the first time, one of the scouts came running in with the news that they had stopped before Lord Mansfield's house in Bloomsbury Square.

Soon afterwards there came another, and another, and then the first returned again, and so, by little and little, their tale was this:—That the mob gathering round Lord Mansfield's house, had called on those within to open the door, and receiving no reply (for Lord and Lady Mansfield were at that moment escaping by the backway), forced an entrance according to their usual custom. That they then began to demolish the house with great fury, and setting fire to it in several parts, involved in a common ruin the whole of the costly furniture, the plate and jewels, a beautiful gallery of pictures, the rarest collection of manuscripts ever possessed by any one private person in the world, and worse than all, because nothing could replace this loss, the great Law Library, on almost every page of which were notes in the Judge's own hand, of inestimable value,—being the results of the study and experience of his whole life. That while they were howling and exulting round the fire, a troop of soldiers, with a magistrate among them, came up, and being too late (for the mischief was by that time done), began to disperse the crowd. That the Riot Act being read, and the crowd still resisting, the soldiers received orders to fire, and levelling their muskets shot dead at the first discharge six men and a woman, and wounded many persons; and loading again directly, fired another volley, but over the people's heads it was supposed, as none were seen to fall. That thereupon, and daunted by the shrieks and tumult, the crowd began to disperse, and the soldiers went away, leaving the killed and wounded on the ground: which they had no sooner done than the rioters came back again, and taking up the dead bodies, and the wounded people, formed into a rude procession, having the bodies in the front. That in this order they paraded off with a horrible merriment; fixing weapons in the dead men's hands to make them look as if alive; and preceded by a fellow ringing Lord Mansfield's dinner-bell with all his might.

The scouts reported further, that this party meeting with some others who had been at similar work elsewhere, they all united into one, and drafting off a few men with the killed and wounded, marched away to Lord Mansfield's country seat at Caen Wood, between Hampstead and Highgate; bent upon destroying that house likewise, and lighting up a great fire there, which from that height should be seen all over London. But in this, they were disappointed, for a party of horse having arrived before them, they retreated faster than they went, and came straight back to town.

There being now a great many parties in the streets, each went to work according to its humour, and a dozen houses were quickly blazing, including those of Sir John Fielding and two other justices, and four in Holborn—one of the greatest thoroughfares in London—which were all burning at the same time, and burned until they went out of themselves, for the people cut the engine hose, and would not suffer the firemen to play upon the flames. At one house near Moorfields, they found in one of the rooms some canary birds in cages, and these they cast into the fire alive. The poor little creatures screamed, it was said, like infants, when they were flung upon the blaze; and one man was so touched that he tried in vain to save them, which roused the indignation of the crowd, and nearly cost him his life.

At this same house, one of the fellows who went through the rooms, breaking the furniture and helping to destroy the building, found a child's doll—a poor toy—which he exhibited at the window to the mob below, as the image of some unholy saint which the late occupants had worshipped. While he was doing this, another man with an equally tender conscience (they had both been foremost in throwing down the canary birds for roasting alive), took his seat on the parapet of the house, and harangued the crowd from a pamphlet circulated by the Association, relative to the true principles of Christianity! Meanwhile the Lord Mayor, with his hands in his pockets, looked on as an idle man might look at any other show, and seemed mightily satisfied to have got a good place.

Such were the accounts brought to the old vintner by his servants as he sat at the side of Mr Haredale's bed, having been unable even to doze, after the first part of the night; too much disturbed by his own fears; by the cries of the mob, the light of the fires, and the firing of the soldiers. Such, with the addition of the release of all the prisoners in the New Jail at Clerkenwell, and as many robberies of passengers in the streets, as the crowd had leisure to indulge in, were the scenes of which Mr Haredale was happily unconscious, and which were all enacted before midnight.

Chapter 67

When darkness broke away and morning began to dawn, the town wore a strange aspect indeed.

Sleep had hardly been thought of all night. The general alarm was so apparent in the faces of the inhabitants, and its expression was so aggravated by want of rest (few persons, with any property to lose, having dared go to bed since Monday), that a stranger coming into the streets would have supposed some mortal pest or plague to have been raging. In place of the usual cheerfulness and animation of morning, everything was dead and silent. The shops remained closed, offices and warehouses were shut, the coach and chair stands were deserted, no carts or waggons rumbled through the slowly waking streets, the early cries were all hushed; a universal gloom prevailed. Great numbers of people were out, even at daybreak, but they flitted to and fro as though they shrank from the sound of their own footsteps; the public ways were haunted rather than frequented; and round the smoking ruins people stood apart from one another and in silence, not venturing to condemn the rioters, or to be supposed to do so, even in whispers.

At the Lord President's in Piccadilly, at Lambeth Palace, at the Lord Chancellor's in Great Ormond Street, in the Royal Exchange, the Bank, the Guildhall, the Inns of Court, the Courts of Law, and every chamber fronting the streets near Westminster Hall and the Houses of Parliament, parties of soldiers were posted before daylight. A body of Horse Guards paraded Palace Yard; an encampment was formed in the Park, where fifteen hundred men and five battalions of Militia were under arms; the Tower was fortified, the drawbridges were raised, the cannon loaded and pointed, and two regiments of artillery busied in strengthening the fortress and preparing it for defence. A numerous detachment of soldiers were stationed to keep guard at the New River Head, which the people had threatened to attack, and where, it was said, they meant to cut off the main-pipes, so that there might be no water for the extinction of the flames. In the Poultry, and on Cornhill, and at several other leading points, iron chains were drawn across the street; parties of soldiers were distributed in some of the old city churches while it was yet dark; and in several private houses (among them, Lord Rockingham's in Grosvenor Square); which were blockaded as though to sustain a siege, and had guns pointed from the windows. When the sun rose, it shone into handsome apartments filled with armed men; the furniture hastily heaped away in corners, and made of little or no account, in the terror of the time—on arms glittering in city chambers, among desks and stools, and dusty books—into little smoky churchyards in odd lanes and by-ways, with soldiers lying down among the tombs, or lounging under the shade of the one old tree, and their pile of muskets sparkling in the light—on solitary sentries pacing up and down in courtyards, silent now, but yesterday resounding with the din and hum of business—everywhere on guard-rooms, garrisons, and threatening preparations.

As the day crept on, still more unusual sights were witnessed in the streets. The gates of the King's Bench and Fleet Prisons being opened at the usual hour, were found to have notices affixed to them, announcing that the rioters would come that night to burn them down. The wardens, too well knowing the likelihood there was of this promise being fulfilled, were fain to set their prisoners at liberty, and give them leave to move their goods; so, all day, such of them as had any furniture were occupied in conveying it, some to this place, some to that, and not a few to the brokers' shops, where they gladly sold it, for any wretched price those gentry chose to give. There were some broken men among these debtors who had been in jail so long, and were so miserable and destitute of friends, so dead to the world, and utterly forgotten and uncared for, that they implored their jailers not to set them free, and to send them, if need were, to some other place of custody. But they, refusing to comply, lest they should incur the anger of the mob, turned them into the streets, where they wandered up and down hardly remembering the ways untrodden by their feet so long, and crying—such abject things those rotten-hearted jails had made them—as they slunk off in their rags, and dragged their slipshod feet along the pavement.

Even of the three hundred prisoners who had escaped from Newgate, there were some—a few, but there were some—who sought their jailers out and delivered themselves up: preferring imprisonment and punishment to the horrors of such another night as the last. Many of the convicts, drawn back to their old place of captivity by some indescribable attraction, or by a desire to exult over it in its downfall and glut their revenge by seeing it in ashes, actually went back in broad noon, and loitered about the cells. Fifty were retaken at one time on this next day, within the prison walls; but their fate did not deter others, for there they went in spite of everything, and there they were taken in twos and threes, twice or thrice a day, all through the week. Of the fifty just mentioned, some were occupied in endeavouring to rekindle the fire; but in general they seemed to have no object in view but to prowl and lounge about the old place: being often found asleep in the ruins, or sitting talking there, or even eating and drinking, as in a choice retreat.

Besides the notices on the gates of the Fleet and the King's Bench, many similar announcements were left, before one o'clock at noon, at the houses of private individuals; and further, the mob proclaimed their intention of seizing on the Bank, the Mint, the Arsenal at Woolwich, and the Royal Palaces. The notices were seldom delivered by more than one man, who, if it were at a shop, went in, and laid it, with a bloody threat perhaps, upon the counter; or if it were at a private house, knocked at the door, and thrust it in the servant's hand. Notwithstanding the presence of the military in every quarter of the town, and the great force in the Park, these messengers did their errands with impunity all through the day. So did two boys who went down Holborn alone, armed with bars taken from the railings of Lord Mansfield's house, and demanded money for the rioters. So did a tall man on horseback who made a collection for the same purpose in Fleet Street, and refused to take anything but gold.

A rumour had now got into circulation, too, which diffused a greater dread all through London, even than these publicly announced intentions of the rioters, though all men knew that if they were successfully effected, there must ensue a national bankruptcy and general ruin. It was said that they meant to throw the gates of Bedlam open, and let all the madmen loose. This suggested such dreadful images to the people's minds, and was indeed an act so fraught with new and unimaginable horrors in the contemplation, that it beset them more than any loss or cruelty of which they could foresee the worst, and drove many sane men nearly mad themselves.

So the day passed on: the prisoners moving their goods; people running to and fro in the streets, carrying away their property; groups standing in silence round the ruins; all business suspended; and the soldiers disposed as has been already mentioned, remaining quite inactive. So the day passed on, and dreaded night drew near again.

At last, at seven o'clock in the evening, the Privy Council issued a solemn proclamation that it was now necessary to employ the military, and that the officers had most direct and effectual orders, by an immediate exertion of their utmost force, to repress the disturbances; and warning all good subjects of the King to keep themselves, their servants, and apprentices, within doors that night. There was then delivered out to every soldier on duty, thirty-six rounds of powder and ball; the drums beat; and the whole force was under arms at sunset.

The City authorities, stimulated by these vigorous measures, held a Common Council; passed a vote thanking the military associations who had tendered their aid to the civil authorities; accepted it; and placed them under the direction of the two sheriffs. At the Queen's palace, a double guard, the yeomen on duty, the groom-porters, and all other attendants, were stationed in the passages and on the staircases at seven o'clock, with strict instructions to be watchful on their posts all night; and all the doors were locked. The gentlemen of the Temple, and the other Inns, mounted guard within their gates, and strengthened them with the great stones of the pavement, which they took up for the purpose. In Lincoln's Inn, they gave up the hall and commons to the Northumberland Militia, under the command of Lord Algernon Percy; in some few of the city wards, the burgesses turned out, and without making a very fierce show, looked brave enough. Some hundreds of stout gentlemen threw themselves, armed to the teeth, into the halls of the different companies, double-locked and bolted all the gates, and dared the rioters (among themselves) to come on at their peril. These arrangements being all made simultaneously, or nearly so, were completed by the time it got dark; and then the streets were comparatively clear, and were guarded at all the great corners and chief avenues by the troops: while parties of the officers rode up and down in all directions, ordering chance stragglers home, and admonishing the residents to keep within their houses, and, if any firing ensued, not to approach the windows. More chains were drawn across such of the thoroughfares as were of a nature to favour the approach of a great crowd, and at each of these points a considerable force was stationed. All these precautions having been taken, and it being now quite dark, those in command awaited the result in some anxiety: and not without a hope that such vigilant demonstrations might of themselves dishearten the populace, and prevent any new outrages.

But in this reckoning they were cruelly mistaken, for in half an hour, or less, as though the setting in of night had been their preconcerted signal, the rioters having previously, in small parties, prevented the lighting of the street lamps, rose like a great sea; and that in so many places at once, and with such inconceivable fury, that those who had the direction of the troops knew not, at first, where to turn or what to do. One after another, new fires blazed up in every quarter of the town, as though it were the intention of the insurgents to wrap the city in a circle of flames, which, contracting by degrees, should burn the whole to ashes; the crowd swarmed and roared in every street; and none but rioters and soldiers being out of doors, it seemed to the latter as if all London were arrayed against them, and they stood alone against the town.

In two hours, six-and-thirty fires were raging—six-and-thirty great conflagrations: among them the Borough Clink in Tooley Street, the King's Bench, the Fleet, and the New Bridewell. In almost every street, there was a battle; and in every quarter the muskets of the troops were heard above the shouts and tumult of the mob. The firing began in the Poultry, where the chain was drawn across the road, where nearly a score of people were killed on the first discharge. Their bodies having been hastily carried into St Mildred's Church by the soldiers, the latter fired again, and following fast upon the crowd, who began to give way when they saw the execution that was done, formed across Cheapside, and charged them at the point of the bayonet.

The streets were now a dreadful spectacle. The shouts of the rabble, the shrieks of women, the cries of the wounded, and the constant firing, formed a deafening and an awful accompaniment to the sights which every corner presented. Wherever the road was obstructed by the chains, there the fighting and the loss of life were greatest; but there was hot work and bloodshed in almost every leading thoroughfare.

At Holborn Bridge, and on Holborn Hill, the confusion was greater than in any other part; for the crowd that poured out of the city in two great streams, one by Ludgate Hill, and one by Newgate Street, united at that spot, and formed a mass so dense, that at every volley the people seemed to fall in heaps. At this place a large detachment of soldiery were posted, who fired, now up Fleet Market, now up Holborn, now up Snow Hill—constantly raking the streets in each direction. At this place too, several large fires were burning, so that all the terrors of that terrible night seemed to be concentrated in one spot.

Full twenty times, the rioters, headed by one man who wielded an axe in his right hand, and bestrode a brewer's horse of great size and strength, caparisoned with fetters taken out of Newgate, which clanked and jingled as he went, made an attempt to force a passage at this point, and fire the vintner's house. Full twenty times they were repulsed with loss of life, and still came back again; and though the fellow at their head was marked and singled out by all, and was a conspicuous object as the only rioter on horseback, not a man could hit him. So surely as the smoke cleared away, so surely there was he; calling hoarsely to his companions, brandishing his axe above his head, and dashing on as though he bore a charmed life, and was proof against ball and powder.

This man was Hugh; and in every part of the riot, he was seen. He headed two attacks upon the Bank, helped to break open the Toll-houses on Blackfriars Bridge, and cast the money into the street: fired two of the prisons with his own hand: was here, and there, and everywhere—always foremost—always active—striking at the soldiers, cheering on the crowd, making his horse's iron music heard through all the yell and uproar: but never hurt or stopped. Turn him at one place, and he made a new struggle in another; force him to retreat at this point, and he advanced on that, directly. Driven from Holborn for the twentieth time, he rode at the head of a great crowd straight upon Saint Paul's, attacked a guard of soldiers who kept watch over a body of prisoners within the iron railings, forced them to retreat, rescued the men they had in custody, and with this accession to his party, came back again, mad with liquor and excitement, and hallooing them on like a demon.

It would have been no easy task for the most careful rider to sit a horse in the midst of such a throng and tumult; but though this madman rolled upon his back (he had no saddle) like a boat upon the sea, he never for an instant lost his seat, or failed to guide him where he would. Through the very thickest of the press, over dead bodies and burning fragments, now on the pavement, now in the road, now riding up a flight of steps to make himself the more conspicuous to his party, and now forcing a passage through a mass of human beings, so closely squeezed together that it seemed as if the edge of a knife would scarcely part them,—on he went, as though he could surmount all obstacles by the mere exercise of his will.

And perhaps his not being shot was in some degree attributable to this very circumstance; for his extreme audacity, and the conviction that he must be one of those to whom the proclamation referred, inspired the soldiers with a desire to take him alive, and diverted many an aim which otherwise might have been more near the mark.

The vintner and Mr Haredale, unable to sit quietly listening to the noise without seeing what went on, had climbed to the roof of the house, and hiding behind a stack of chimneys, were looking cautiously down into the street, almost hoping that after so many repulses the rioters would be foiled, when a great shout proclaimed that a parry were coming round the other way; and the dismal jingling of those accursed fetters warned them next moment that they too were led by Hugh. The soldiers had advanced into Fleet Market and were dispersing the people there; so that they came on with hardly any check, and were soon before the house.

'All's over now,' said the vintner. 'Fifty thousand pounds will be scattered in a minute. We must save ourselves. We can do no more, and shall have reason to be thankful if we do as much.'

Their first impulse was, to clamber along the roofs of the houses, and, knocking at some garret window for admission, pass down that way into the street, and so escape. But another fierce cry from below, and a general upturning of the faces of the crowd, apprised them that they were discovered, and even that Mr Haredale was recognised; for Hugh, seeing him plainly in the bright glare of the fire, which in that part made it as light as day, called to him by his name, and swore to have his life.

'Leave me here,' said Mr Haredale, 'and in Heaven's name, my good friend, save yourself! Come on!' he muttered, as he turned towards Hugh and faced him without any further effort at concealment: 'This roof is high, and if we close, we will die together!'

'Madness,' said the honest vintner, pulling him back, 'sheer madness. Hear reason, sir. My good sir, hear reason. I could never make myself heard by knocking at a window now; and even if I could, no one would be bold enough to connive at my escape. Through the cellars, there's a kind of passage into the back street by which we roll casks in and out. We shall have time to get down there before they can force an entry. Do not delay an instant, but come with me—for both our sakes—for mine—my dear good sir!'

As he spoke, and drew Mr Haredale back, they had both a glimpse of the street. It was but a glimpse, but it showed them the crowd, gathering and clustering round the house: some of the armed men pressing to the front to break down the doors and windows, some bringing brands from the nearest fire, some with lifted faces following their course upon the roof and pointing them out to their companions: all raging and roaring like the flames they lighted up. They saw some men thirsting for the treasures of strong liquor which they knew were stored within; they saw others, who had been wounded, sinking down into the opposite doorways and dying, solitary wretches, in the midst of all the vast assemblage; here a frightened woman trying to escape; and there a lost child; and there a drunken ruffian, unconscious of the death-wound on his head, raving and fighting to the last. All these things, and even such trivial incidents as a man with his hat off, or turning round, or stooping down, or shaking hands with another, they marked distinctly; yet in a glance so brief, that, in the act of stepping back, they lost the whole, and saw but the pale faces of each other, and the red sky above them.

Mr Haredale yielded to the entreaties of his companion—more because he was resolved to defend him, than for any thought he had of his own life, or any care he entertained for his own safety—and quickly re-entering the house, they descended the stairs together. Loud blows were thundering on the shutters, crowbars were already thrust beneath the door, the glass fell from the sashes, a deep light shone through every crevice, and they heard the voices of the foremost in the crowd so close to every chink and keyhole, that they seemed to be hoarsely whispering their threats into their very ears. They had but a moment reached the bottom of the cellar-steps and shut the door behind them, when the mob broke in.

The vaults were profoundly dark, and having no torch or candle—for they had been afraid to carry one, lest it should betray their place of refuge—they were obliged to grope with their hands. But they were not long without light, for they had not gone far when they heard the crowd forcing the door; and, looking back among the low-arched passages, could see them in the distance, hurrying to and fro with flashing links, broaching the casks, staving the great vats, turning off upon the right hand and the left, into the different cellars, and lying down to drink at the channels of strong spirits which were already flowing on the ground.

They hurried on, not the less quickly for this; and had reached the only vault which lay between them and the passage out, when suddenly, from the direction in which they were going, a strong light gleamed upon their faces; and before they could slip aside, or turn back, or hide themselves, two men (one bearing a torch) came upon them, and cried in an astonished whisper, 'Here they are!'

At the same instant they pulled off what they wore upon their heads. Mr Haredale saw before him Edward Chester, and then saw, when the vintner gasped his name, Joe Willet.

Ay, the same Joe, though with an arm the less, who used to make the quarterly journey on the grey mare to pay the bill to the purple-faced vintner; and that very same purple-faced vintner, formerly of Thames Street, now looked him in the face, and challenged him by name.

'Give me your hand,' said Joe softly, taking it whether the astonished vintner would or no. 'Don't fear to shake it; it's a friendly one and a hearty one, though it has no fellow. Why, how well you look and how bluff you are! And you—God bless you, sir. Take heart, take heart. We'll find them. Be of good cheer; we have not been idle.'

There was something so honest and frank in Joe's speech, that Mr Haredale put his hand in his involuntarily, though their meeting was suspicious enough. But his glance at Edward Chester, and that gentleman's keeping aloof, were not lost upon Joe, who said bluntly, glancing at Edward while he spoke:

'Times are changed, Mr Haredale, and times have come when we ought to know friends from enemies, and make no confusion of names. Let me tell you that but for this gentleman, you would most likely have been dead by this time, or badly wounded at the best.'

'What do you say?' cried Mr Haredale.

'I say,' said Joe, 'first, that it was a bold thing to be in the crowd at all disguised as one of them; though I won't say much about that, on second thoughts, for that's my case too. Secondly, that it was a brave and glorious action—that's what I call it—to strike that fellow off his horse before their eyes!'

'What fellow! Whose eyes!'

'What fellow, sir!' cried Joe: 'a fellow who has no goodwill to you, and who has the daring and devilry in him of twenty fellows. I know him of old. Once in the house, HE would have found you, here or anywhere. The rest owe you no particular grudge, and, unless they see you, will only think of drinking themselves dead. But we lose time. Are you ready?'

'Quite,' said Edward. 'Put out the torch, Joe, and go on. And be silent, there's a good fellow.'

'Silent or not silent,' murmured Joe, as he dropped the flaring link upon the ground, crushed it with his foot, and gave his hand to Mr Haredale, 'it was a brave and glorious action;—no man can alter that.'

Both Mr Haredale and the worthy vintner were too amazed and too much hurried to ask any further questions, so followed their conductors in silence. It seemed, from a short whispering which presently ensued between them and the vintner relative to the best way of escape, that they had entered by the back-door, with the connivance of John Grueby, who watched outside with the key in his pocket, and whom they had taken into their confidence. A party of the crowd coming up that way, just as they entered, John had double-locked the door again, and made off for the soldiers, so that means of retreat was cut off from under them.

However, as the front-door had been forced, and this minor crowd, being anxious to get at the liquor, had no fancy for losing time in breaking down another, but had gone round and got in from Holborn with the rest, the narrow lane in the rear was quite free of people. So, when they had crawled through the passage indicated by the vintner (which was a mere shelving-trap for the admission of casks), and had managed with some difficulty to unchain and raise the door at the upper end, they emerged into the street without being observed or interrupted. Joe still holding Mr Haredale tight, and Edward taking the same care of the vintner, they hurried through the streets at a rapid pace; occasionally standing aside to let some fugitives go by, or to keep out of the way of the soldiers who followed them, and whose questions, when they halted to put any, were speedily stopped by one whispered word from Joe.

Chapter 68

While Newgate was burning on the previous night, Barnaby and his father, having been passed among the crowd from hand to hand, stood in Smithfield, on the outskirts of the mob, gazing at the flames like men who had been suddenly roused from sleep. Some moments elapsed before they could distinctly remember where they were, or how they got there; or recollected that while they were standing idle and listless spectators of the fire, they had tools in their hands which had been hurriedly given them that they might free themselves from their fetters.

Barnaby, heavily ironed as he was, if he had obeyed his first impulse, or if he had been alone, would have made his way back to the side of Hugh, who to his clouded intellect now shone forth with the new lustre of being his preserver and truest friend. But his father's terror of remaining in the streets, communicated itself to him when he comprehended the full extent of his fears, and impressed him with the same eagerness to fly to a place of safety.

In a corner of the market among the pens for cattle, Barnaby knelt down, and pausing every now and then to pass his hand over his father's face, or look up to him with a smile, knocked off his irons. When he had seen him spring, a free man, to his feet, and had given vent to the transport of delight which the sight awakened, he went to work upon his own, which soon fell rattling down upon the ground, and left his limbs unfettered.

Gliding away together when this task was accomplished, and passing several groups of men, each gathered round a stooping figure to hide him from those who passed, but unable to repress the clanking sound of hammers, which told that they too were busy at the same work,—the two fugitives made towards Clerkenwell, and passing thence to Islington, as the nearest point of egress, were quickly in the fields. After wandering about for a long time, they found in a pasture near Finchley a poor shed, with walls of mud, and roof of grass and brambles, built for some cowherd, but now deserted. Here, they lay down for the rest of the night.

They wandered to and fro when it was day, and once Barnaby went off alone to a cluster of little cottages two or three miles away, to purchase some bread and milk. But finding no better shelter, they returned to the same place, and lay down again to wait for night.

Heaven alone can tell, with what vague hopes of duty, and affection; with what strange promptings of nature, intelligible to him as to a man of radiant mind and most enlarged capacity; with what dim memories of children he had played with when a child himself, who had prattled of their fathers, and of loving them, and being loved; with how many half-remembered, dreamy associations of his mother's grief and tears and widowhood; he watched and tended this man. But that a vague and shadowy crowd of such ideas came slowly on him; that they taught him to be sorry when he looked upon his haggard face, that they overflowed his eyes when he stooped to kiss him, that they kept him waking in a tearful gladness, shading him from the sun, fanning him with leaves, soothing him when he started in his sleep—ah! what a troubled sleep it was—and wondering when SHE would come to join them and be happy, is the truth. He sat beside him all that day; listening for her footsteps in every breath of air, looking for her shadow on the gently-waving grass, twining the hedge flowers for her pleasure when she came, and his when he awoke; and stooping down from time to time to listen to his mutterings, and wonder why he was so restless in that quiet place. The sun went down, and night came on, and he was still quite tranquil; busied with these thoughts, as if there were no other people in the world, and the dull cloud of smoke hanging on the immense city in the distance, hid no vices, no crimes, no life or death, or cause of disquiet—nothing but clear air.

But the hour had now come when he must go alone to find out the blind man (a task that filled him with delight) and bring him to that place; taking especial care that he was not watched or followed on his way back. He listened to the directions he must observe, repeated them again and again, and after twice or thrice returning to surprise his father with a light-hearted laugh, went forth, at last, upon his errand: leaving Grip, whom he had carried from the jail in his arms, to his care.

Fleet of foot, and anxious to return, he sped swiftly on towards the city, but could not reach it before the fires began, and made the night angry with their dismal lustre. When he entered the town—it might be that he was changed by going there without his late companions, and on no violent errand; or by the beautiful solitude in which he had passed the day, or by the thoughts that had come upon him,—but it seemed peopled by a legion of devils. This flight and pursuit, this cruel burning and destroying, these dreadful cries and stunning noises, were THEY the good lord's noble cause!

Though almost stupefied by the bewildering scene, still be found the blind man's house. It was shut up and tenantless.

He waited for a long while, but no one came. At last he withdrew; and as he knew by this time that the soldiers were firing, and many people must have been killed, he went down into Holborn, where he heard the great crowd was, to try if he could find Hugh, and persuade him to avoid the danger, and return with him.

If he had been stunned and shocked before, his horror was increased a thousandfold when he got into this vortex of the riot, and not being an actor in the terrible spectacle, had it all before his eyes. But there, in the midst, towering above them all, close before the house they were attacking now, was Hugh on horseback, calling to the rest!

Sickened by the sights surrounding him on every side, and by the heat and roar, and crash, he forced his way among the crowd (where many recognised him, and with shouts pressed back to let him pass), and in time was nearly up with Hugh, who was savagely threatening some one, but whom or what he said, he could not, in the great confusion, understand. At that moment the crowd forced their way into the house, and Hugh—it was impossible to see by what means, in such a concourse—fell headlong down.

Barnaby was beside him when he staggered to his feet. It was well he made him hear his voice, or Hugh, with his uplifted axe, would have cleft his skull in twain.

'Barnaby—you! Whose hand was that, that struck me down?'

'Not mine.'

'Whose!—I say, whose!' he cried, reeling back, and looking wildly round. 'What are you doing? Where is he? Show me!'

'You are hurt,' said Barnaby—as indeed he was, in the head, both by the blow he had received, and by his horse's hoof. 'Come away with me.'

As he spoke, he took the horse's bridle in his hand, turned him, and dragged Hugh several paces. This brought them out of the crowd, which was pouring from the street into the vintner's cellars.

'Where's—where's Dennis?' said Hugh, coming to a stop, and checking Barnaby with his strong arm. 'Where has he been all day? What did he mean by leaving me as he did, in the jail, last night? Tell me, you—d'ye hear!'

With a flourish of his dangerous weapon, he fell down upon the ground like a log. After a minute, though already frantic with drinking and with the wound in his head, he crawled to a stream of burning spirit which was pouring down the kennel, and began to drink at it as if it were a brook of water.

Barnaby drew him away, and forced him to rise. Though he could neither stand nor walk, he involuntarily staggered to his horse, climbed upon his back, and clung there. After vainly attempting to divest the animal of his clanking trappings, Barnaby sprung up behind him, snatched the bridle, turned into Leather Lane, which was close at hand, and urged the frightened horse into a heavy trot.

He looked back, once, before he left the street; and looked upon a sight not easily to be erased, even from his remembrance, so long as he had life.

The vintner's house with a half-a-dozen others near at hand, was one great, glowing blaze. All night, no one had essayed to quench the flames, or stop their progress; but now a body of soldiers were actively engaged in pulling down two old wooden houses, which were every moment in danger of taking fire, and which could scarcely fail, if they were left to burn, to extend the conflagration immensely. The tumbling down of nodding walls and heavy blocks of wood, the hooting and the execrations of the crowd, the distant firing of other military detachments, the distracted looks and cries of those whose habitations were in danger, the hurrying to and fro of frightened people with their goods; the reflections in every quarter of the sky, of deep, red, soaring flames, as though the last day had come and the whole universe were burning; the dust, and smoke, and drift of fiery particles, scorching and kindling all it fell upon; the hot unwholesome vapour, the blight on everything; the stars, and moon, and very sky, obliterated;—made up such a sum of dreariness and ruin, that it seemed as if the face of Heaven were blotted out, and night, in its rest and quiet, and softened light, never could look upon the earth again.

But there was a worse spectacle than this—worse by far than fire and smoke, or even the rabble's unappeasable and maniac rage. The gutters of the street, and every crack and fissure in the stones, ran with scorching spirit, which being dammed up by busy hands, overflowed the road and pavement, and formed a great pool, into which the people dropped down dead by dozens. They lay in heaps all round this fearful pond, husbands and wives, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, women with children in their arms and babies at their breasts, and drank until they died. While some stooped with their lips to the brink and never raised their heads again, others sprang up from their fiery draught, and danced, half in a mad triumph, and half in the agony of suffocation, until they fell, and steeped their corpses in the liquor that had killed them. Nor was even this the worst or most appalling kind of death that happened on this fatal night. From the burning cellars, where they drank out of hats, pails, buckets, tubs, and shoes, some men were drawn, alive, but all alight from head to foot; who, in their unendurable anguish and suffering, making for anything that had the look of water, rolled, hissing, in this hideous lake, and splashed up liquid fire which lapped in all it met with as it ran along the surface, and neither spared the living nor the dead. On this last night of the great riots—for the last night it was—the wretched victims of a senseless outcry, became themselves the dust and ashes of the flames they had kindled, and strewed the public streets of London.

With all he saw in this last glance fixed indelibly upon his mind, Barnaby hurried from the city which enclosed such horrors; and holding down his head that he might not even see the glare of the fires upon the quiet landscape, was soon in the still country roads.

He stopped at about half-a-mile from the shed where his father lay, and with some difficulty making Hugh sensible that he must dismount, sunk the horse's furniture in a pool of stagnant water, and turned the animal loose. That done, he supported his companion as well as he could, and led him slowly forward.

Chapter 69

It was the dead of night, and very dark, when Barnaby, with his stumbling comrade, approached the place where he had left his father; but he could see him stealing away into the gloom, distrustful even of him, and rapidly retreating. After calling to him twice or thrice that there was nothing to fear, but without effect, he suffered Hugh to sink upon the ground, and followed to bring him back.

He continued to creep away, until Barnaby was close upon him; then turned, and said in a terrible, though suppressed voice:

'Let me go. Do not lay hands upon me. You have told her; and you and she together have betrayed me!'

Barnaby looked at him, in silence.

'You have seen your mother!'

'No,' cried Barnaby, eagerly. 'Not for a long time—longer than I can tell. A whole year, I think. Is she here?'

His father looked upon him steadfastly for a few moments, and then said—drawing nearer to him as he spoke, for, seeing his face, and hearing his words, it was impossible to doubt his truth:

'What man is that?'

'Hugh—Hugh. Only Hugh. You know him. HE will not harm you. Why, you're afraid of Hugh! Ha ha ha! Afraid of gruff, old, noisy Hugh!'

'What man is he, I ask you,' he rejoined so fiercely, that Barnaby stopped in his laugh, and shrinking back, surveyed him with a look of terrified amazement.

'Why, how stern you are! You make me fear you, though you are my father. Why do you speak to me so?'

—'I want,' he answered, putting away the hand which his son, with a timid desire to propitiate him, laid upon his sleeve,—'I want an answer, and you give me only jeers and questions. Who have you brought with you to this hiding-place, poor fool; and where is the blind man?'

'I don't know where. His house was close shut. I waited, but no person came; that was no fault of mine. This is Hugh—brave Hugh, who broke into that ugly jail, and set us free. Aha! You like him now, do you? You like him now!'

'Why does he lie upon the ground?'

'He has had a fall, and has been drinking. The fields and trees go round, and round, and round with him, and the ground heaves under his feet. You know him? You remember? See!'

They had by this time returned to where he lay, and both stooped over him to look into his face.

'I recollect the man,' his father murmured. 'Why did you bring him here?'

'Because he would have been killed if I had left him over yonder. They were firing guns and shedding blood. Does the sight of blood turn you sick, father? I see it does, by your face. That's like me—What are you looking at?'

'At nothing!' said the murderer softly, as he started back a pace or two, and gazed with sunken jaw and staring eyes above his son's head. 'At nothing!'

He remained in the same attitude and with the same expression on his face for a minute or more; then glanced slowly round as if he had lost something; and went shivering back, towards the shed.

'Shall I bring him in, father?' asked Barnaby, who had looked on, wondering.

He only answered with a suppressed groan, and lying down upon the ground, wrapped his cloak about his head, and shrunk into the darkest corner.

Finding that nothing would rouse Hugh now, or make him sensible for a moment, Barnaby dragged him along the grass, and laid him on a little heap of refuse hay and straw which had been his own bed; first having brought some water from a running stream hard by, and washed his wound, and laved his hands and face. Then he lay down himself, between the two, to pass the night; and looking at the stars, fell fast asleep.

Awakened early in the morning, by the sunshine and the songs of birds, and hum of insects, he left them sleeping in the hut, and walked into the sweet and pleasant air. But he felt that on his jaded senses, oppressed and burdened with the dreadful scenes of last night, and many nights before, all the beauties of opening day, which he had so often tasted, and in which he had had such deep delight, fell heavily. He thought of the blithe mornings when he and the dogs went bounding on together through the woods and fields; and the recollection filled his eyes with tears. He had no consciousness, God help him, of having done wrong, nor had he any new perception of the merits of the cause in which he had been engaged, or those of the men who advocated it; but he was full of cares now, and regrets, and dismal recollections, and wishes (quite unknown to him before) that this or that event had never happened, and that the sorrow and suffering of so many people had been spared. And now he began to think how happy they would be—his father, mother, he, and Hugh—if they rambled away together, and lived in some lonely place, where there were none of these troubles; and that perhaps the blind man, who had talked so wisely about gold, and told him of the great secrets he knew, could teach them how to live without being pinched by want. As this occurred to him, he was the more sorry that he had not seen him last night; and he was still brooding over this regret, when his father came, and touched him on the shoulder.

'Ah!' cried Barnaby, starting from his fit of thoughtfulness. 'Is it only you?'

'Who should it be?'

'I almost thought,' he answered, 'it was the blind man. I must have some talk with him, father.'

'And so must I, for without seeing him, I don't know where to fly or what to do, and lingering here, is death. You must go to him again, and bring him here.'

'Must I!' cried Barnaby, delighted; 'that's brave, father. That's what I want to do.'

'But you must bring only him, and none other. And though you wait at his door a whole day and night, still you must wait, and not come back without him.'

'Don't you fear that,' he cried gaily. 'He shall come, he shall come.'

'Trim off these gewgaws,' said his father, plucking the scraps of ribbon and the feathers from his hat, 'and over your own dress wear my cloak. Take heed how you go, and they will be too busy in the streets to notice you. Of your coming back you need take no account, for he'll manage that, safely.'

'To be sure!' said Barnaby. 'To be sure he will! A wise man, father, and one who can teach us to be rich. Oh! I know him, I know him.'

He was speedily dressed, and as well disguised as he could be. With a lighter heart he then set off upon his second journey, leaving Hugh, who was still in a drunken stupor, stretched upon the ground within the shed, and his father walking to and fro before it.

The murderer, full of anxious thoughts, looked after him, and paced up and down, disquieted by every breath of air that whispered among the boughs, and by every light shadow thrown by the passing clouds upon the daisied ground. He was anxious for his safe return, and yet, though his own life and safety hung upon it, felt a relief while he was gone. In the intense selfishness which the constant presence before him of his great crimes, and their consequences here and hereafter, engendered, every thought of Barnaby, as his son, was swallowed up and lost. Still, his presence was a torture and reproach; in his wild eyes, there were terrible images of that guilty night; with his unearthly aspect, and his half-formed mind, he seemed to the murderer a creature who had sprung into existence from his victim's blood. He could not bear his look, his voice, his touch; and yet he was forced, by his own desperate condition and his only hope of cheating the gibbet, to have him by his side, and to know that he was inseparable from his single chance of escape.

He walked to and fro, with little rest, all day, revolving these things in his mind; and still Hugh lay, unconscious, in the shed. At length, when the sun was setting, Barnaby returned, leading the blind man, and talking earnestly to him as they came along together.

The murderer advanced to meet them, and bidding his son go on and speak to Hugh, who had just then staggered to his feet, took his place at the blind man's elbow, and slowly followed, towards the shed.

'Why did you send HIM?' said Stagg. 'Don't you know it was the way to have him lost, as soon as found?'

'Would you have had me come myself?' returned the other.

'Humph! Perhaps not. I was before the jail on Tuesday night, but missed you in the crowd. I was out last night, too. There was good work last night—gay work—profitable work'—he added, rattling the money in his pockets.

'Have you—'

—'Seen your good lady? Yes.'

'Do you mean to tell me more, or not?'

'I'll tell you all,' returned the blind man, with a laugh. 'Excuse me—but I love to see you so impatient. There's energy in it.'

'Does she consent to say the word that may save me?'

'No,' returned the blind man emphatically, as he turned his face towards him. 'No. Thus it is. She has been at death's door since she lost her darling—has been insensible, and I know not what. I tracked her to a hospital, and presented myself (with your leave) at her bedside. Our talk was not a long one, for she was weak, and there being people near I was not quite easy. But I told her all that you and I agreed upon, and pointed out the young gentleman's position, in strong terms. She tried to soften me, but that, of course (as I told her), was lost time. She cried and moaned, you may be sure; all women do. Then, of a sudden, she found her voice and strength, and said that Heaven would help her and her innocent son; and that to Heaven she appealed against us—which she did; in really very pretty language, I assure you. I advised her, as a friend, not to count too much on assistance from any such distant quarter—recommended her to think of it—told her where I lived—said I knew she would send to me before noon, next day—and left her, either in a faint or shamming.'

When he had concluded this narration, during which he had made several pauses, for the convenience of cracking and eating nuts, of which he seemed to have a pocketful, the blind man pulled a flask from his pocket, took a draught himself, and offered it to his companion.

'You won't, won't you?' he said, feeling that he pushed it from him. 'Well! Then the gallant gentleman who's lodging with you, will. Hallo, bully!'

'Death!' said the other, holding him back. 'Will you tell me what I am to do!'

'Do! Nothing easier. Make a moonlight flitting in two hours' time with the young gentleman (he's quite ready to go; I have been giving him good advice as we came along), and get as far from London as you can. Let me know where you are, and leave the rest to me. She MUST come round; she can't hold out long; and as to the chances of your being retaken in the meanwhile, why it wasn't one man who got out of Newgate, but three hundred. Think of that, for your comfort.'

'We must support life. How?'

'How!' repeated the blind man. 'By eating and drinking. And how get meat and drink, but by paying for it! Money!' he cried, slapping his pocket. 'Is money the word? Why, the streets have been running money. Devil send that the sport's not over yet, for these are jolly times; golden, rare, roaring, scrambling times. Hallo, bully! Hallo! Hallo! Drink, bully, drink. Where are ye there! Hallo!'

With such vociferations, and with a boisterous manner which bespoke his perfect abandonment to the general licence and disorder, he groped his way towards the shed, where Hugh and Barnaby were sitting on the ground.

'Put it about!' he cried, handing his flask to Hugh. 'The kennels run with wine and gold. Guineas and strong water flow from the very pumps. About with it, don't spare it!'

Exhausted, unwashed, unshorn, begrimed with smoke and dust, his hair clotted with blood, his voice quite gone, so that he spoke in whispers; his skin parched up by fever, his whole body bruised and cut, and beaten about, Hugh still took the flask, and raised it to his lips. He was in the act of drinking, when the front of the shed was suddenly darkened, and Dennis stood before them.

'No offence, no offence,' said that personage in a conciliatory tone, as Hugh stopped in his draught, and eyed him, with no pleasant look, from head to foot. 'No offence, brother. Barnaby here too, eh? How are you, Barnaby? And two other gentlemen! Your humble servant, gentlemen. No offence to YOU either, I hope. Eh, brothers?'

Notwithstanding that he spoke in this very friendly and confident manner, he seemed to have considerable hesitation about entering, and remained outside the roof. He was rather better dressed than usual: wearing the same suit of threadbare black, it is true, but having round his neck an unwholesome-looking cravat of a yellowish white; and, on his hands, great leather gloves, such as a gardener might wear in following his trade. His shoes were newly greased, and ornamented with a pair of rusty iron buckles; the packthread at his knees had been renewed; and where he wanted buttons, he wore pins. Altogether, he had something the look of a tipstaff, or a bailiff's follower, desperately faded, but who had a notion of keeping up the appearance of a professional character, and making the best of the worst means.

'You're very snug here,' said Mr Dennis, pulling out a mouldy pocket-handkerchief, which looked like a decomposed halter, and wiping his forehead in a nervous manner.

'Not snug enough to prevent your finding us, it seems,' Hugh answered, sulkily.

'Why I'll tell you what, brother,' said Dennis, with a friendly smile, 'when you don't want me to know which way you're riding, you must wear another sort of bells on your horse. Ah! I know the sound of them you wore last night, and have got quick ears for 'em; that's the truth. Well, but how are you, brother?'

He had by this time approached, and now ventured to sit down by him.

'How am I?' answered Hugh. 'Where were you yesterday? Where did you go when you left me in the jail? Why did you leave me? And what did you mean by rolling your eyes and shaking your fist at me, eh?'

'I shake my fist!—at you, brother!' said Dennis, gently checking Hugh's uplifted hand, which looked threatening.

'Your stick, then; it's all one.'

'Lord love you, brother, I meant nothing. You don't understand me by half. I shouldn't wonder now,' he added, in the tone of a desponding and an injured man, 'but you thought, because I wanted them chaps left in the prison, that I was a going to desert the banners?'

Hugh told him, with an oath, that he had thought so.

'Well!' said Mr Dennis, mournfully, 'if you an't enough to make a man mistrust his feller-creeturs, I don't know what is. Desert the banners! Me! Ned Dennis, as was so christened by his own father!—Is this axe your'n, brother?'

Yes, it's mine,' said Hugh, in the same sullen manner as before; 'it might have hurt you, if you had come in its way once or twice last night. Put it down.'

'Might have hurt me!' said Mr Dennis, still keeping it in his hand, and feeling the edge with an air of abstraction. 'Might have hurt me! and me exerting myself all the time to the wery best advantage. Here's a world! And you're not a-going to ask me to take a sup out of that 'ere bottle, eh?'

Hugh passed it towards him. As he raised it to his lips, Barnaby jumped up, and motioning them to be silent, looked eagerly out.

'What's the matter, Barnaby?' said Dennis, glancing at Hugh and dropping the flask, but still holding the axe in his hand.

'Hush!' he answered softly. 'What do I see glittering behind the hedge?'

'What!' cried the hangman, raising his voice to its highest pitch, and laying hold of him and Hugh. 'Not SOLDIERS, surely!'

That moment, the shed was filled with armed men; and a body of horse, galloping into the field, drew up before it.

'There!' said Dennis, who remained untouched among them when they had seized their prisoners; 'it's them two young ones, gentlemen, that the proclamation puts a price on. This other's an escaped felon.—I'm sorry for it, brother,' he added, in a tone of resignation, addressing himself to Hugh; 'but you've brought it on yourself; you forced me to do it; you wouldn't respect the soundest constitootional principles, you know; you went and wiolated the wery framework of society. I had sooner have given away a trifle in charity than done this, I would upon my soul.—If you'll keep fast hold on 'em, gentlemen, I think I can make a shift to tie 'em better than you can.'

But this operation was postponed for a few moments by a new occurrence. The blind man, whose ears were quicker than most people's sight, had been alarmed, before Barnaby, by a rustling in the bushes, under cover of which the soldiers had advanced. He retreated instantly—had hidden somewhere for a minute—and probably in his confusion mistaking the point at which he had emerged, was now seen running across the open meadow.

An officer cried directly that he had helped to plunder a house last night. He was loudly called on, to surrender. He ran the harder, and in a few seconds would have been out of gunshot. The word was given, and the men fired.

There was a breathless pause and a profound silence, during which all eyes were fixed upon him. He had been seen to start at the discharge, as if the report had frightened him. But he neither stopped nor slackened his pace in the least, and ran on full forty yards further. Then, without one reel or stagger, or sign of faintness, or quivering of any limb, he dropped.

Some of them hurried up to where he lay;—the hangman with them. Everything had passed so quickly, that the smoke had not yet scattered, but curled slowly off in a little cloud, which seemed like the dead man's spirit moving solemnly away. There were a few drops of blood upon the grass—more, when they turned him over—that was all.

'Look here! Look here!' said the hangman, stooping one knee beside the body, and gazing up with a disconsolate face at the officer and men. 'Here's a pretty sight!'

'Stand out of the way,' replied the officer. 'Serjeant! see what he had about him.'

The man turned his pockets out upon the grass, and counted, besides some foreign coins and two rings, five-and-forty guineas in gold. These were bundled up in a handkerchief and carried away; the body remained there for the present, but six men and the serjeant were left to take it to the nearest public-house.

'Now then, if you're going,' said the serjeant, clapping Dennis on the back, and pointing after the officer who was walking towards the shed.

To which Mr Dennis only replied, 'Don't talk to me!' and then repeated what he had said before, namely, 'Here's a pretty sight!'

'It's not one that you care for much, I should think,' observed the serjeant coolly.

'Why, who,' said Mr Dennis rising, 'should care for it, if I don't?'

'Oh! I didn't know you was so tender-hearted,' said the serjeant. 'That's all!'

'Tender-hearted!' echoed Dennis. 'Tender-hearted! Look at this man. Do you call THIS constitootional? Do you see him shot through and through instead of being worked off like a Briton? Damme, if I know which party to side with. You're as bad as the other. What's to become of the country if the military power's to go a superseding the ciwilians in this way? Where's this poor feller-creetur's rights as a citizen, that he didn't have ME in his last moments! I was here. I was willing. I was ready. These are nice times, brother, to have the dead crying out against us in this way, and sleep comfortably in our beds arterwards; wery nice!'

Whether he derived any material consolation from binding the prisoners, is uncertain; most probably he did. At all events his being summoned to that work, diverted him, for the time, from these painful reflections, and gave his thoughts a more congenial occupation.

They were not all three carried off together, but in two parties; Barnaby and his father, going by one road in the centre of a body of foot; and Hugh, fast bound upon a horse, and strongly guarded by a troop of cavalry, being taken by another.

They had no opportunity for the least communication, in the short interval which preceded their departure; being kept strictly apart. Hugh only observed that Barnaby walked with a drooping head among his guard, and, without raising his eyes, that he tried to wave his fettered hand when he passed. For himself, he buoyed up his courage as he rode along, with the assurance that the mob would force his jail wherever it might be, and set him at liberty. But when they got into London, and more especially into Fleet Market, lately the stronghold of the rioters, where the military were rooting out the last remnant of the crowd, he saw that this hope was gone, and felt that he was riding to his death.

Chapter 70

Mr Dennis having despatched this piece of business without any personal hurt or inconvenience, and having now retired into the tranquil respectability of private life, resolved to solace himself with half an hour or so of female society. With this amiable purpose in his mind, he bent his steps towards the house where Dolly and Miss Haredale were still confined, and whither Miss Miggs had also been removed by order of Mr Simon Tappertit.

As he walked along the streets with his leather gloves clasped behind him, and his face indicative of cheerful thought and pleasant calculation, Mr Dennis might have been likened unto a farmer ruminating among his crops, and enjoying by anticipation the bountiful gifts of Providence. Look where he would, some heap of ruins afforded him rich promise of a working off; the whole town appeared to have been ploughed and sown, and nurtured by most genial weather; and a goodly harvest was at hand.

Having taken up arms and resorted to deeds of violence, with the great main object of preserving the Old Bailey in all its purity, and the gallows in all its pristine usefulness and moral grandeur, it would perhaps be going too far to assert that Mr Dennis had ever distinctly contemplated and foreseen this happy state of things. He rather looked upon it as one of those beautiful dispensations which are inscrutably brought about for the behoof and advantage of good men. He felt, as it were, personally referred to, in this prosperous ripening for the gibbet; and had never considered himself so much the pet and favourite child of Destiny, or loved that lady so well or with such a calm and virtuous reliance, in all his life.

As to being taken up, himself, for a rioter, and punished with the rest, Mr Dennis dismissed that possibility from his thoughts as an idle chimera; arguing that the line of conduct he had adopted at Newgate, and the service he had rendered that day, would be more than a set-off against any evidence which might identify him as a member of the crowd. That any charge of companionship which might be made against him by those who were themselves in danger, would certainly go for nought. And that if any trivial indiscretion on his part should unluckily come out, the uncommon usefulness of his office, at present, and the great demand for the exercise of its functions, would certainly cause it to be winked at, and passed over. In a word, he had played his cards throughout, with great care; had changed sides at the very nick of time; had delivered up two of the most notorious rioters, and a distinguished felon to boot; and was quite at his ease.

Saving—for there is a reservation; and even Mr Dennis was not perfectly happy—saving for one circumstance; to wit, the forcible detention of Dolly and Miss Haredale, in a house almost adjoining his own. This was a stumbling-block; for if they were discovered and released, they could, by the testimony they had it in their power to give, place him in a situation of great jeopardy; and to set them at liberty, first extorting from them an oath of secrecy and silence, was a thing not to be thought of. It was more, perhaps, with an eye to the danger which lurked in this quarter, than from his abstract love of conversation with the sex, that the hangman, quickening his steps, now hastened into their society, cursing the amorous natures of Hugh and Mr Tappertit with great heartiness, at every step he took.

When he entered the miserable room in which they were confined, Dolly and Miss Haredale withdrew in silence to the remotest corner. But Miss Miggs, who was particularly tender of her reputation, immediately fell upon her knees and began to scream very loud, crying, 'What will become of me!'—'Where is my Simmuns!'—'Have mercy, good gentlemen, on my sex's weaknesses!'—with other doleful lamentations of that nature, which she delivered with great propriety and decorum.

'Miss, miss,' whispered Dennis, beckoning to her with his forefinger, 'come here—I won't hurt you. Come here, my lamb, will you?'

On hearing this tender epithet, Miss Miggs, who had left off screaming when he opened his lips, and had listened to him attentively, began again, crying: 'Oh I'm his lamb! He says I'm his lamb! Oh gracious, why wasn't I born old and ugly! Why was I ever made to be the youngest of six, and all of 'em dead and in their blessed graves, excepting one married sister, which is settled in Golden Lion Court, number twenty-sivin, second bell-handle on the—!'

'Don't I say I an't a-going to hurt you?' said Dennis, pointing to a chair. 'Why miss, what's the matter?'

'I don't know what mayn't be the matter!' cried Miss Miggs, clasping her hands distractedly. 'Anything may be the matter!'

'But nothing is, I tell you,' said the hangman. 'First stop that noise and come and sit down here, will you, chuckey?'

The coaxing tone in which he said these latter words might have failed in its object, if he had not accompanied them with sundry sharp jerks of his thumb over one shoulder, and with divers winks and thrustings of his tongue into his cheek, from which signals the damsel gathered that he sought to speak to her apart, concerning Miss Haredale and Dolly. Her curiosity being very powerful, and her jealousy by no means inactive, she arose, and with a great deal of shivering and starting back, and much muscular action among all the small bones in her throat, gradually approached him.

'Sit down,' said the hangman.

Suiting the action to the word, he thrust her rather suddenly and prematurely into a chair, and designing to reassure her by a little harmless jocularity, such as is adapted to please and fascinate the sex, converted his right forefinger into an ideal bradawl or gimlet, and made as though he would screw the same into her side—whereat Miss Miggs shrieked again, and evinced symptoms of faintness.

'Lovey, my dear,' whispered Dennis, drawing his chair close to hers. 'When was your young man here last, eh?'

'MY young man, good gentleman!' answered Miggs in a tone of exquisite distress.

'Ah! Simmuns, you know—him?' said Dennis.

'Mine indeed!' cried Miggs, with a burst of bitterness—and as she said it, she glanced towards Dolly. 'MINE, good gentleman!'

This was just what Mr Dennis wanted, and expected.

'Ah!' he said, looking so soothingly, not to say amorously on Miggs, that she sat, as she afterwards remarked, on pins and needles of the sharpest Whitechapel kind, not knowing what intentions might be suggesting that expression to his features: 'I was afraid of that. I saw as much myself. It's her fault. She WILL entice 'em.'

'I wouldn't,' cried Miggs, folding her hands and looking upwards with a kind of devout blankness, 'I wouldn't lay myself out as she does; I wouldn't be as bold as her; I wouldn't seem to say to all male creeturs "Come and kiss me"'—and here a shudder quite convulsed her frame—'for any earthly crowns as might be offered. Worlds,' Miggs added solemnly, 'should not reduce me. No. Not if I was Wenis.'

'Well, but you ARE Wenus, you know,' said Mr Dennis, confidentially.

'No, I am not, good gentleman,' answered Miggs, shaking her head with an air of self-denial which seemed to imply that she might be if she chose, but she hoped she knew better. 'No, I am not, good gentleman. Don't charge me with it.'

Up to this time she had turned round, every now and then, to where Dolly and Miss Haredale had retired and uttered a scream, or groan, or laid her hand upon her heart and trembled excessively, with a view of keeping up appearances, and giving them to understand that she conversed with the visitor, under protest and on compulsion, and at a great personal sacrifice, for their common good. But at this point, Mr Dennis looked so very full of meaning, and gave such a singularly expressive twitch to his face as a request to her to come still nearer to him, that she abandoned these little arts, and gave him her whole and undivided attention.

'When was Simmuns here, I say?' quoth Dennis, in her ear.

'Not since yesterday morning; and then only for a few minutes. Not all day, the day before.'

'You know he meant all along to carry off that one!' said Dennis, indicating Dolly by the slightest possible jerk of his head:—'And to hand you over to somebody else.'

Miss Miggs, who had fallen into a terrible state of grief when the first part of this sentence was spoken, recovered a little at the second, and seemed by the sudden check she put upon her tears, to intimate that possibly this arrangement might meet her views; and that it might, perhaps, remain an open question.

'—But unfort'nately,' pursued Dennis, who observed this: 'somebody else was fond of her too, you see; and even if he wasn't, somebody else is took for a rioter, and it's all over with him.'

Miss Miggs relapsed.

'Now I want,' said Dennis, 'to clear this house, and to see you righted. What if I was to get her off, out of the way, eh?'

Miss Miggs, brightening again, rejoined, with many breaks and pauses from excess of feeling, that temptations had been Simmuns's bane. That it was not his faults, but hers (meaning Dolly's). That men did not see through these dreadful arts as women did, and therefore was caged and trapped, as Simmun had been. That she had no personal motives to serve—far from it—on the contrary, her intentions was good towards all parties. But forasmuch as she knowed that Simmun, if united to any designing and artful minxes (she would name no names, for that was not her dispositions)—to ANY designing and artful minxes—must be made miserable and unhappy for life, she DID incline towards prewentions. Such, she added, was her free confessions. But as this was private feelings, and might perhaps be looked upon as wengeance, she begged the gentleman would say no more. Whatever he said, wishing to do her duty by all mankind, even by them as had ever been her bitterest enemies, she would not listen to him. With that she stopped her ears, and shook her head from side to side, to intimate to Mr Dennis that though he talked until he had no breath left, she was as deaf as any adder.

'Lookee here, my sugar-stick,' said Mr Dennis, 'if your view's the same as mine, and you'll only be quiet and slip away at the right time, I can have the house clear to-morrow, and be out of this trouble.—Stop though! there's the other.'

'Which other, sir?' asked Miggs—still with her fingers in her ears and her head shaking obstinately.

'Why, the tallest one, yonder,' said Dennis, as he stroked his chin, and added, in an undertone to himself, something about not crossing Muster Gashford.

Miss Miggs replied (still being profoundly deaf) that if Miss Haredale stood in the way at all, he might make himself quite easy on that score; as she had gathered, from what passed between Hugh and Mr Tappertit when they were last there, that she was to be removed alone (not by them, but by somebody else), to-morrow night.

Mr Dennis opened his eyes very wide at this piece of information, whistled once, considered once, and finally slapped his head once and nodded once, as if he had got the clue to this mysterious removal, and so dismissed it. Then he imparted his design concerning Dolly to Miss Miggs, who was taken more deaf than before, when he began; and so remained, all through.

The notable scheme was this. Mr Dennis was immediately to seek out from among the rioters, some daring young fellow (and he had one in his eye, he said), who, terrified by the threats he could hold out to him, and alarmed by the capture of so many who were no better and no worse than he, would gladly avail himself of any help to get abroad, and out of harm's way, with his plunder, even though his journey were incumbered by an unwilling companion; indeed, the unwilling companion being a beautiful girl, would probably be an additional inducement and temptation. Such a person found, he proposed to bring him there on the ensuing night, when the tall one was taken off, and Miss Miggs had purposely retired; and then that Dolly should be gagged, muffled in a cloak, and carried in any handy conveyance down to the river's side; where there were abundant means of getting her smuggled snugly off in any small craft of doubtful character, and no questions asked. With regard to the expense of this removal, he would say, at a rough calculation, that two or three silver tea or coffee-pots, with something additional for drink (such as a muffineer, or toast-rack), would more than cover it. Articles of plate of every kind having been buried by the rioters in several lonely parts of London, and particularly, as he knew, in St James's Square, which, though easy of access, was little frequented after dark, and had a convenient piece of water in the midst, the needful funds were close at hand, and could be had upon the shortest notice. With regard to Dolly, the gentleman would exercise his own discretion. He would be bound to do nothing but to take her away, and keep her away. All other arrangements and dispositions would rest entirely with himself.

If Miss Miggs had had her hearing, no doubt she would have been greatly shocked by the indelicacy of a young female's going away with a stranger by night (for her moral feelings, as we have said, were of the tenderest kind); but directly Mr Dennis ceased to speak, she reminded him that he had only wasted breath. She then went on to say (still with her fingers in her ears) that nothing less than a severe practical lesson would save the locksmith's daughter from utter ruin; and that she felt it, as it were, a moral obligation and a sacred duty to the family, to wish that some one would devise one for her reformation. Miss Miggs remarked, and very justly, as an abstract sentiment which happened to occur to her at the moment, that she dared to say the locksmith and his wife would murmur, and repine, if they were ever, by forcible abduction, or otherwise, to lose their child; but that we seldom knew, in this world, what was best for us: such being our sinful and imperfect natures, that very few arrived at that clear understanding.

Having brought their conversation to this satisfactory end, they parted: Dennis, to pursue his design, and take another walk about his farm; Miss Miggs, to launch, when he left her, into such a burst of mental anguish (which she gave them to understand was occasioned by certain tender things he had had the presumption and audacity to say), that little Dolly's heart was quite melted. Indeed, she said and did so much to soothe the outraged feelings of Miss Miggs, and looked so beautiful while doing so, that if that young maid had not had ample vent for her surpassing spite, in a knowledge of the mischief that was brewing, she must have scratched her features, on the spot.

Chapter 71

All next day, Emma Haredale, Dolly, and Miggs, remained cooped up together in what had now been their prison for so many days, without seeing any person, or hearing any sound but the murmured conversation, in an outer room, of the men who kept watch over them. There appeared to be more of these fellows than there had been hitherto; and they could no longer hear the voices of women, which they had before plainly distinguished. Some new excitement, too, seemed to prevail among them; for there was much stealthy going in and out, and a constant questioning of those who were newly arrived. They had previously been quite reckless in their behaviour; often making a great uproar; quarrelling among themselves, fighting, dancing, and singing. They were now very subdued and silent, conversing almost in whispers, and stealing in and out with a soft and stealthy tread, very different from the boisterous trampling in which their arrivals and departures had hitherto been announced to the trembling captives.

Whether this change was occasioned by the presence among them of some person of authority in their ranks, or by any other cause, they were unable to decide. Sometimes they thought it was in part attributable to there being a sick man in the chamber, for last night there had been a shuffling of feet, as though a burden were brought in, and afterwards a moaning noise. But they had no means of ascertaining the truth: for any question or entreaty on their parts only provoked a storm of execrations, or something worse; and they were too happy to be left alone, unassailed by threats or admiration, to risk even that comfort, by any voluntary communication with those who held them in durance.

It was sufficiently evident, both to Emma and to the locksmith's poor little daughter herself, that she, Dolly, was the great object of attraction; and that so soon as they should have leisure to indulge in the softer passion, Hugh and Mr Tappertit would certainly fall to blows for her sake; in which latter case, it was not very difficult to see whose prize she would become. With all her old horror of that man revived, and deepened into a degree of aversion and abhorrence which no language can describe; with a thousand old recollections and regrets, and causes of distress, anxiety, and fear, besetting her on all sides; poor Dolly Varden—sweet, blooming, buxom Dolly—began to hang her head, and fade, and droop, like a beautiful flower. The colour fled from her cheeks, her courage forsook her, her gentle heart failed. Unmindful of all her provoking caprices, forgetful of all her conquests and inconstancy, with all her winning little vanities quite gone, she nestled all the livelong day in Emma Haredale's bosom; and, sometimes calling on her dear old grey-haired father, sometimes on her mother, and sometimes even on her old home, pined slowly away, like a poor bird in its cage.

Light hearts, light hearts, that float so gaily on a smooth stream, that are so sparkling and buoyant in the sunshine—down upon fruit, bloom upon flowers, blush in summer air, life of the winged insect, whose whole existence is a day—how soon ye sink in troubled water! Poor Dolly's heart—a little, gentle, idle, fickle thing; giddy, restless, fluttering; constant to nothing but bright looks, and smiles and laughter—Dolly's heart was breaking.

Emma had known grief, and could bear it better. She had little comfort to impart, but she could soothe and tend her, and she did so; and Dolly clung to her like a child to its nurse. In endeavouring to inspire her with some fortitude, she increased her own; and though the nights were long, and the days dismal, and she felt the wasting influence of watching and fatigue, and had perhaps a more defined and clear perception of their destitute condition and its worst dangers, she uttered no complaint. Before the ruffians, in whose power they were, she bore herself so calmly, and with such an appearance, in the midst of all her terror, of a secret conviction that they dared not harm her, that there was not a man among them but held her in some degree of dread; and more than one believed she had a weapon hidden in her dress, and was prepared to use it.

Such was their condition when they were joined by Miss Miggs, who gave them to understand that she too had been taken prisoner because of her charms, and detailed such feats of resistance she had performed (her virtue having given her supernatural strength), that they felt it quite a happiness to have her for a champion. Nor was this the only comfort they derived at first from Miggs's presence and society: for that young lady displayed such resignation and long-suffering, and so much meek endurance, under her trials, and breathed in all her chaste discourse a spirit of such holy confidence and resignation, and devout belief that all would happen for the best, that Emma felt her courage strengthened by the bright example; never doubting but that everything she said was true, and that she, like them, was torn from all she loved, and agonised by doubt and apprehension. As to poor Dolly, she was roused, at first, by seeing one who came from home; but when she heard under what circumstances she had left it, and into whose hands her father had fallen, she wept more bitterly than ever, and refused all comfort.

Miss Miggs was at some trouble to reprove her for this state of mind, and to entreat her to take example by herself, who, she said, was now receiving back, with interest, tenfold the amount of her subscriptions to the red-brick dwelling-house, in the articles of peace of mind and a quiet conscience. And, while on serious topics, Miss Miggs considered it her duty to try her hand at the conversion of Miss Haredale; for whose improvement she launched into a polemical address of some length, in the course whereof, she likened herself unto a chosen missionary, and that young lady to a cannibal in darkness. Indeed, she returned so often to these subjects, and so frequently called upon them to take a lesson from her,—at the same time vaunting and, as it were, rioting in, her huge unworthiness, and abundant excess of sin,—that, in the course of a short time, she became, in that small chamber, rather a nuisance than a comfort, and rendered them, if possible, even more unhappy than they had been before.

The night had now come; and for the first time (for their jailers had been regular in bringing food and candles), they were left in darkness. Any change in their condition in such a place inspired new fears; and when some hours had passed, and the gloom was still unbroken, Emma could no longer repress her alarm.

They listened attentively. There was the same murmuring in the outer room, and now and then a moan which seemed to be wrung from a person in great pain, who made an effort to subdue it, but could not. Even these men seemed to be in darkness too; for no light shone through the chinks in the door, nor were they moving, as their custom was, but quite still: the silence being unbroken by so much as the creaking of a board.

At first, Miss Miggs wondered greatly in her own mind who this sick person might be; but arriving, on second thoughts, at the conclusion that he was a part of the schemes on foot, and an artful device soon to be employed with great success, she opined, for Miss Haredale's comfort, that it must be some misguided Papist who had been wounded: and this happy supposition encouraged her to say, under her breath, 'Ally Looyer!' several times.

'Is it possible,' said Emma, with some indignation, 'that you who have seen these men committing the outrages you have told us of, and who have fallen into their hands, like us, can exult in their cruelties!'

'Personal considerations, miss,' rejoined Miggs, 'sinks into nothing, afore a noble cause. Ally Looyer! Ally Looyer! Ally Looyer, good gentlemen!'

It seemed from the shrill pertinacity with which Miss Miggs repeated this form of acclamation, that she was calling the same through the keyhole of the door; but in the profound darkness she could not be seen.

'If the time has come—Heaven knows it may come at any moment—when they are bent on prosecuting the designs, whatever they may be, with which they have brought us here, can you still encourage, and take part with them?' demanded Emma.

'I thank my goodness-gracious-blessed-stars I can, miss,' returned Miggs, with increased energy.—'Ally Looyer, good gentlemen!'

Even Dolly, cast down and disappointed as she was, revived at this, and bade Miggs hold her tongue directly.

'WHICH, was you pleased to observe, Miss Varden?' said Miggs, with a strong emphasis on the irrelative pronoun.

Dolly repeated her request.

'Ho, gracious me!' cried Miggs, with hysterical derision. 'Ho, gracious me! Yes, to be sure I will. Ho yes! I am a abject slave, and a toiling, moiling, constant-working, always-being-found-fault-with, never-giving-satisfactions, nor-having-no-time-to-clean-oneself, potter's wessel—an't I, miss! Ho yes! My situations is lowly, and my capacities is limited, and my duties is to humble myself afore the base degenerating daughters of their blessed mothers as is—fit to keep companies with holy saints but is born to persecutions from wicked relations—and to demean myself before them as is no better than Infidels—an't it, miss! Ho yes! My only becoming occupations is to help young flaunting pagins to brush and comb and titiwate theirselves into whitening and suppulchres, and leave the young men to think that there an't a bit of padding in it nor no pinching ins nor fillings out nor pomatums nor deceits nor earthly wanities—an't it, miss! Yes, to be sure it is—ho yes!'

Having delivered these ironical passages with a most wonderful volubility, and with a shrillness perfectly deafening (especially when she jerked out the interjections), Miss Miggs, from mere habit, and not because weeping was at all appropriate to the occasion, which was one of triumph, concluded by bursting into a flood of tears, and calling in an impassioned manner on the name of Simmuns.

What Emma Haredale and Dolly would have done, or how long Miss Miggs, now that she had hoisted her true colours, would have gone on waving them before their astonished senses, it is impossible to tell. Nor is it necessary to speculate on these matters, for a startling interruption occurred at that moment, which took their whole attention by storm.

This was a violent knocking at the door of the house, and then its sudden bursting open; which was immediately succeeded by a scuffle in the room without, and the clash of weapons. Transported with the hope that rescue had at length arrived, Emma and Dolly shrieked aloud for help; nor were their shrieks unanswered; for after a hurried interval, a man, bearing in one hand a drawn sword, and in the other a taper, rushed into the chamber where they were confined.

It was some check upon their transport to find in this person an entire stranger, but they appealed to him, nevertheless, and besought him, in impassioned language, to restore them to their friends.

'For what other purpose am I here?' he answered, closing the door, and standing with his back against it. 'With what object have I made my way to this place, through difficulty and danger, but to preserve you?'

With a joy for which it was impossible to find adequate expression, they embraced each other, and thanked Heaven for this most timely aid. Their deliverer stepped forward for a moment to put the light upon the table, and immediately returning to his former position against the door, bared his head, and looked on smilingly.

'You have news of my uncle, sir?' said Emma, turning hastily towards him.

'And of my father and mother?' added Dolly.

'Yes,' he said. 'Good news.'

'They are alive and unhurt?' they both cried at once.

'Yes, and unhurt,' he rejoined.

'And close at hand?'

'I did not say close at hand,' he answered smoothly; 'they are at no great distance. YOUR friends, sweet one,' he added, addressing Dolly, 'are within a few hours' journey. You will be restored to them, I hope, to-night.'

'My uncle, sir—' faltered Emma.

'Your uncle, dear Miss Haredale, happily—I say happily, because he has succeeded where many of our creed have failed, and is safe—has crossed the sea, and is out of Britain.'

'I thank God for it,' said Emma, faintly.

'You say well. You have reason to be thankful: greater reason than it is possible for you, who have seen but one night of these cruel outrages, to imagine.'

'Does he desire,' said Emma, 'that I should follow him?'

'Do you ask if he desires it?' cried the stranger in surprise. 'IF he desires it! But you do not know the danger of remaining in England, the difficulty of escape, or the price hundreds would pay to secure the means, when you make that inquiry. Pardon me. I had forgotten that you could not, being prisoner here.'

'I gather, sir,' said Emma, after a moment's pause, 'from what you hint at, but fear to tell me, that I have witnessed but the beginning, and the least, of the violence to which we are exposed, and that it has not yet slackened in its fury?'

He shrugged his shoulders, shook his head, lifted up his hands; and with the same smooth smile, which was not a pleasant one to see, cast his eyes upon the ground, and remained silent.

'You may venture, sir, to speak plain,' said Emma, 'and to tell me the worst. We have undergone some preparation for it.'

But here Dolly interposed, and entreated her not to hear the worst, but the best; and besought the gentleman to tell them the best, and to keep the remainder of his news until they were safe among their friends again.

'It is told in three words,' he said, glancing at the locksmith's daughter with a look of some displeasure. 'The people have risen, to a man, against us; the streets are filled with soldiers, who support them and do their bidding. We have no protection but from above, and no safety but in flight; and that is a poor resource; for we are watched on every hand, and detained here, both by force and fraud. Miss Haredale, I cannot bear—believe me, that I cannot bear—by speaking of myself, or what I have done, or am prepared to do, to seem to vaunt my services before you. But, having powerful Protestant connections, and having my whole wealth embarked with theirs in shipping and commerce, I happily possessed the means of saving your uncle. I have the means of saving you; and in redemption of my sacred promise, made to him, I am here; pledged not to leave you until I have placed you in his arms. The treachery or penitence of one of the men about you, led to the discovery of your place of confinement; and that I have forced my way here, sword in hand, you see.'

'You bring,' said Emma, faltering, 'some note or token from my uncle?'

'No, he doesn't,' cried Dolly, pointing at him earnestly; 'now I am sure he doesn't. Don't go with him for the world!'

'Hush, pretty fool—be silent,' he replied, frowning angrily upon her. 'No, Miss Haredale, I have no letter, nor any token of any kind; for while I sympathise with you, and such as you, on whom misfortune so heavy and so undeserved has fallen, I value my life. I carry, therefore, no writing which, found upon me, would lead to its certain loss. I never thought of bringing any other token, nor did Mr Haredale think of entrusting me with one—possibly because he had good experience of my faith and honesty, and owed his life to me.'

There was a reproof conveyed in these words, which to a nature like Emma Haredale's, was well addressed. But Dolly, who was differently constituted, was by no means touched by it, and still conjured her, in all the terms of affection and attachment she could think of, not to be lured away.

'Time presses,' said their visitor, who, although he sought to express the deepest interest, had something cold and even in his speech, that grated on the ear; 'and danger surrounds us. If I have exposed myself to it, in vain, let it be so; but if you and he should ever meet again, do me justice. If you decide to remain (as I think you do), remember, Miss Haredale, that I left you with a solemn caution, and acquitting myself of all the consequences to which you expose yourself.'

'Stay, sir!' cried Emma—one moment, I beg you. Cannot we—and she drew Dolly closer to her—'cannot we go together?'

'The task of conveying one female in safety through such scenes as we must encounter, to say nothing of attracting the attention of those who crowd the streets,' he answered, 'is enough. I have said that she will be restored to her friends to-night. If you accept the service I tender, Miss Haredale, she shall be instantly placed in safe conduct, and that promise redeemed. Do you decide to remain? People of all ranks and creeds are flying from the town, which is sacked from end to end. Let me be of use in some quarter. Do you stay, or go?'

'Dolly,' said Emma, in a hurried manner, 'my dear girl, this is our last hope. If we part now, it is only that we may meet again in happiness and honour. I will trust to this gentleman.'

'No no-no!' cried Dolly, clinging to her. 'Pray, pray, do not!'

'You hear,' said Emma, 'that to-night—only to-night—within a few hours—think of that!—you will be among those who would die of grief to lose you, and who are now plunged in the deepest misery for your sake. Pray for me, dear girl, as I will for you; and never forget the many quiet hours we have passed together. Say one "God bless you!" Say that at parting!'

But Dolly could say nothing; no, not when Emma kissed her cheek a hundred times, and covered it with tears, could she do more than hang upon her neck, and sob, and clasp, and hold her tight.

'We have time for no more of this,' cried the man, unclenching her hands, and pushing her roughly off, as he drew Emma Haredale towards the door: 'Now! Quick, outside there! are you ready?'

'Ay!' cried a loud voice, which made him start. 'Quite ready! Stand back here, for your lives!'

And in an instant he was felled like an ox in the butcher's shambles—struck down as though a block of marble had fallen from the roof and crushed him—and cheerful light, and beaming faces came pouring in—and Emma was clasped in her uncle's embrace, and Dolly, with a shriek that pierced the air, fell into the arms of her father and mother.

What fainting there was, what laughing, what crying, what sobbing, what smiling, how much questioning, no answering, all talking together, all beside themselves with joy; what kissing, congratulating, embracing, shaking of hands, and falling into all these raptures, over and over and over again; no language can describe.

At length, and after a long time, the old locksmith went up and fairly hugged two strangers, who had stood apart and left them to themselves; and then they saw—whom? Yes, Edward Chester and Joseph Willet.

'See here!' cried the locksmith. 'See here! where would any of us have been without these two? Oh, Mr Edward, Mr Edward—oh, Joe, Joe, how light, and yet how full, you have made my old heart to-night!'

'It was Mr Edward that knocked him down, sir,' said Joe: 'I longed to do it, but I gave it up to him. Come, you brave and honest gentleman! Get your senses together, for you haven't long to lie here.'

He had his foot upon the breast of their sham deliverer, in the absence of a spare arm; and gave him a gentle roll as he spoke. Gashford, for it was no other, crouching yet malignant, raised his scowling face, like sin subdued, and pleaded to be gently used.

'I have access to all my lord's papers, Mr Haredale,' he said, in a submissive voice: Mr Haredale keeping his back towards him, and not once looking round: 'there are very important documents among them. There are a great many in secret drawers, and distributed in various places, known only to my lord and me. I can give some very valuable information, and render important assistance to any inquiry. You will have to answer it, if I receive ill usage.

'Pah!' cried Joe, in deep disgust. 'Get up, man; you're waited for, outside. Get up, do you hear?'

Gashford slowly rose; and picking up his hat, and looking with a baffled malevolence, yet with an air of despicable humility, all round the room, crawled out.

'And now, gentlemen,' said Joe, who seemed to be the spokesman of the party, for all the rest were silent; 'the sooner we get back to the Black Lion, the better, perhaps.'

Mr Haredale nodded assent, and drawing his niece's arm through his, and taking one of her hands between his own, passed out straightway; followed by the locksmith, Mrs Varden, and Dolly—who would scarcely have presented a sufficient surface for all the hugs and caresses they bestowed upon her though she had been a dozen Dollys. Edward Chester and Joe followed.

And did Dolly never once look behind—not once? Was there not one little fleeting glimpse of the dark eyelash, almost resting on her flushed cheek, and of the downcast sparkling eye it shaded? Joe thought there was—and he is not likely to have been mistaken; for there were not many eyes like Dolly's, that's the truth.

The outer room through which they had to pass, was full of men; among them, Mr Dennis in safe keeping; and there, had been since yesterday, lying in hiding behind a wooden screen which was now thrown down, Simon Tappertit, the recreant 'prentice, burnt and bruised, and with a gun-shot wound in his body; and his legs—his perfect legs, the pride and glory of his life, the comfort of his existence—crushed into shapeless ugliness. Wondering no longer at the moans they had heard, Dolly kept closer to her father, and shuddered at the sight; but neither bruises, burns, nor gun-shot wound, nor all the torture of his shattered limbs, sent half so keen a pang to Simon's breast, as Dolly passing out, with Joe for her preserver.

A coach was ready at the door, and Dolly found herself safe and whole inside, between her father and mother, with Emma Haredale and her uncle, quite real, sitting opposite. But there was no Joe, no Edward; and they had said nothing. They had only bowed once, and kept at a distance. Dear heart! what a long way it was to the Black Lion!

Chapter 72

The Black Lion was so far off, and occupied such a length of time in the getting at, that notwithstanding the strong presumptive evidence she had about her of the late events being real and of actual occurrence, Dolly could not divest herself of the belief that she must be in a dream which was lasting all night. Nor was she quite certain that she saw and heard with her own proper senses, even when the coach, in the fulness of time, stopped at the Black Lion, and the host of that tavern approached in a gush of cheerful light to help them to dismount, and give them hearty welcome.

There too, at the coach door, one on one side, one upon the other, were already Edward Chester and Joe Willet, who must have followed in another coach: and this was such a strange and unaccountable proceeding, that Dolly was the more inclined to favour the idea of her being fast asleep. But when Mr Willet appeared—old John himself—so heavy-headed and obstinate, and with such a double chin as the liveliest imagination could never in its boldest flights have conjured up in all its vast proportions—then she stood corrected, and unwillingly admitted to herself that she was broad awake.

And Joe had lost an arm—he—that well-made, handsome, gallant fellow! As Dolly glanced towards him, and thought of the pain he must have suffered, and the far-off places in which he had been wandering, and wondered who had been his nurse, and hoped that whoever it was, she had been as kind and gentle and considerate as she would have been, the tears came rising to her bright eyes, one by one, little by little, until she could keep them back no longer, and so before them all, wept bitterly.

'We are all safe now, Dolly,' said her father, kindly. 'We shall not be separated any more. Cheer up, my love, cheer up!'

The locksmith's wife knew better perhaps, than he, what ailed her daughter. But Mrs Varden being quite an altered woman—for the riots had done that good—added her word to his, and comforted her with similar representations.

'Mayhap,' said Mr Willet, senior, looking round upon the company, 'she's hungry. That's what it is, depend upon it—I am, myself.'

The Black Lion, who, like old John, had been waiting supper past all reasonable and conscionable hours, hailed this as a philosophical discovery of the profoundest and most penetrating kind; and the table being already spread, they sat down to supper straightway.

The conversation was not of the liveliest nature, nor were the appetites of some among them very keen. But, in both these respects, old John more than atoned for any deficiency on the part of the rest, and very much distinguished himself.

It was not in point of actual conversation that Mr Willet shone so brilliantly, for he had none of his old cronies to 'tackle,' and was rather timorous of venturing on Joe; having certain vague misgivings within him, that he was ready on the shortest notice, and on receipt of the slightest offence, to fell the Black Lion to the floor of his own parlour, and immediately to withdraw to China or some other remote and unknown region, there to dwell for evermore, or at least until he had got rid of his remaining arm and both legs, and perhaps an eye or so, into the bargain. It was with a peculiar kind of pantomime that Mr Willet filled up every pause; and in this he was considered by the Black Lion, who had been his familiar for some years, quite to surpass and go beyond himself, and outrun the expectations of his most admiring friends.

The subject that worked in Mr Willet's mind, and occasioned these demonstrations, was no other than his son's bodily disfigurement, which he had never yet got himself thoroughly to believe, or comprehend. Shortly after their first meeting, he had been observed to wander, in a state of great perplexity, to the kitchen, and to direct his gaze towards the fire, as if in search of his usual adviser in all matters of doubt and difficulty. But there being no boiler at the Black Lion, and the rioters having so beaten and battered his own that it was quite unfit for further service, he wandered out again, in a perfect bog of uncertainty and mental confusion, and in that state took the strangest means of resolving his doubts: such as feeling the sleeve of his son's greatcoat as deeming it possible that his arm might be there; looking at his own arms and those of everybody else, as if to assure himself that two and not one was the usual allowance; sitting by the hour together in a brown study, as if he were endeavouring to recall Joe's image in his younger days, and to remember whether he really had in those times one arm or a pair; and employing himself in many other speculations of the same kind.

Finding himself at this supper, surrounded by faces with which he had been so well acquainted in old times, Mr Willet recurred to the subject with uncommon vigour; apparently resolved to understand it now or never. Sometimes, after every two or three mouthfuls, he laid down his knife and fork, and stared at his son with all his might—particularly at his maimed side; then, he looked slowly round the table until he caught some person's eye, when he shook his head with great solemnity, patted his shoulder, winked, or as one may say—for winking was a very slow process with him—went to sleep with one eye for a minute or two; and so, with another solemn shaking of his head, took up his knife and fork again, and went on eating. Sometimes, he put his food into his mouth abstractedly, and, with all his faculties concentrated on Joe, gazed at him in a fit of stupefaction as he cut his meat with one hand, until he was recalled to himself by symptoms of choking on his own part, and was by that means restored to consciousness. At other times he resorted to such small devices as asking him for the salt, the pepper, the vinegar, the mustard—anything that was on his maimed side—and watching him as he handed it. By dint of these experiments, he did at last so satisfy and convince himself, that, after a longer silence than he had yet maintained, he laid down his knife and fork on either side his plate, drank a long draught from a tankard beside him (still keeping his eyes on Joe), and leaning backward in his chair and fetching a long breath, said, as he looked all round the board:

'It's been took off!'

'By George!' said the Black Lion, striking the table with his hand, 'he's got it!'

'Yes, sir,' said Mr Willet, with the look of a man who felt that he had earned a compliment, and deserved it. 'That's where it is. It's been took off.'

'Tell him where it was done,' said the Black Lion to Joe.

'At the defence of the Savannah, father.'

'At the defence of the Salwanners,' repeated Mr Willet, softly; again looking round the table.

'In America, where the war is,' said Joe.

'In America, where the war is,' repeated Mr Willet. 'It was took off in the defence of the Salwanners in America where the war is.' Continuing to repeat these words to himself in a low tone of voice (the same information had been conveyed to him in the same terms, at least fifty times before), Mr Willet arose from table, walked round to Joe, felt his empty sleeve all the way up, from the cuff, to where the stump of his arm remained; shook his hand; lighted his pipe at the fire, took a long whiff, walked to the door, turned round once when he had reached it, wiped his left eye with the back of his forefinger, and said, in a faltering voice: 'My son's arm—was took off—at the defence of the—Salwanners—in America—where the war is'—with which words he withdrew, and returned no more that night.

Indeed, on various pretences, they all withdrew one after another, save Dolly, who was left sitting there alone. It was a great relief to be alone, and she was crying to her heart's content, when she heard Joe's voice at the end of the passage, bidding somebody good night.

Good night! Then he was going elsewhere—to some distance, perhaps. To what kind of home COULD he be going, now that it was so late!

She heard him walk along the passage, and pass the door. But there was a hesitation in his footsteps. He turned back—Dolly's heart beat high—he looked in.

'Good night!'—he didn't say Dolly, but there was comfort in his not saying Miss Varden.

'Good night!' sobbed Dolly.

'I am sorry you take on so much, for what is past and gone,' said Joe kindly. 'Don't. I can't bear to see you do it. Think of it no longer. You are safe and happy now.'

Dolly cried the more.

'You must have suffered very much within these few days—and yet you're not changed, unless it's for the better. They said you were, but I don't see it. You were—you were always very beautiful,' said Joe, 'but you are more beautiful than ever, now. You are indeed. There can be no harm in my saying so, for you must know it. You are told so very often, I am sure.'

As a general principle, Dolly DID know it, and WAS told so, very often. But the coachmaker had turned out, years ago, to be a special donkey; and whether she had been afraid of making similar discoveries in others, or had grown by dint of long custom to be careless of compliments generally, certain it is that although she cried so much, she was better pleased to be told so now, than ever she had been in all her life.

'I shall bless your name,' sobbed the locksmith's little daughter, 'as long as I live. I shall never hear it spoken without feeling as if my heart would burst. I shall remember it in my prayers, every night and morning till I die!'

'Will you?' said Joe, eagerly. 'Will you indeed? It makes me—well, it makes me very glad and proud to hear you say so.'

Dolly still sobbed, and held her handkerchief to her eyes. Joe still stood, looking at her.

'Your voice,' said Joe, 'brings up old times so pleasantly, that, for the moment, I feel as if that night—there can be no harm in talking of that night now—had come back, and nothing had happened in the mean time. I feel as if I hadn't suffered any hardships, but had knocked down poor Tom Cobb only yesterday, and had come to see you with my bundle on my shoulder before running away.—You remember?'

Remember! But she said nothing. She raised her eyes for an instant. It was but a glance; a little, tearful, timid glance. It kept Joe silent though, for a long time.

'Well!' he said stoutly, 'it was to be otherwise, and was. I have been abroad, fighting all the summer and frozen up all the winter, ever since. I have come back as poor in purse as I went, and crippled for life besides. But, Dolly, I would rather have lost this other arm—ay, I would rather have lost my head—than have come back to find you dead, or anything but what I always pictured you to myself, and what I always hoped and wished to find you. Thank God for all!'

Oh how much, and how keenly, the little coquette of five years ago, felt now! She had found her heart at last. Never having known its worth till now, she had never known the worth of his. How priceless it appeared!

'I did hope once,' said Joe, in his homely way, 'that I might come back a rich man, and marry you. But I was a boy then, and have long known better than that. I am a poor, maimed, discharged soldier, and must be content to rub through life as I can. I can't say, even now, that I shall be glad to see you married, Dolly; but I AM glad—yes, I am, and glad to think I can say so—to know that you are admired and courted, and can pick and choose for a happy life. It's a comfort to me to know that you'll talk to your husband about me; and I hope the time will come when I may be able to like him, and to shake hands with him, and to come and see you as a poor friend who knew you when you were a girl. God bless you!'

His hand DID tremble; but for all that, he took it away again, and left her.

Chapter 73

By this Friday night—for it was on Friday in the riot week, that Emma and Dolly were rescued, by the timely aid of Joe and Edward Chester—the disturbances were entirely quelled, and peace and order were restored to the affrighted city. True, after what had happened, it was impossible for any man to say how long this better state of things might last, or how suddenly new outrages, exceeding even those so lately witnessed, might burst forth and fill its streets with ruin and bloodshed; for this reason, those who had fled from the recent tumults still kept at a distance, and many families, hitherto unable to procure the means of flight, now availed themselves of the calm, and withdrew into the country. The shops, too, from Tyburn to Whitechapel, were still shut; and very little business was transacted in any of the places of great commercial resort. But, notwithstanding, and in spite of the melancholy forebodings of that numerous class of society who see with the greatest clearness into the darkest perspectives, the town remained profoundly quiet. The strong military force disposed in every advantageous quarter, and stationed at every commanding point, held the scattered fragments of the mob in check; the search after rioters was prosecuted with unrelenting vigour; and if there were any among them so desperate and reckless as to be inclined, after the terrible scenes they had beheld, to venture forth again, they were so daunted by these resolute measures, that they quickly shrunk into their hiding-places, and had no thought but for their safety.

In a word, the crowd was utterly routed. Upwards of two hundred had been shot dead in the streets. Two hundred and fifty more were lying, badly wounded, in the hospitals; of whom seventy or eighty died within a short time afterwards. A hundred were already in custody, and more were taken every hour. How many perished in the conflagrations, or by their own excesses, is unknown; but that numbers found a terrible grave in the hot ashes of the flames they had kindled, or crept into vaults and cellars to drink in secret or to nurse their sores, and never saw the light again, is certain. When the embers of the fires had been black and cold for many weeks, the labourers' spades proved this, beyond a doubt.

Seventy-two private houses and four strong jails were destroyed in the four great days of these riots. The total loss of property, as estimated by the sufferers, was one hundred and fifty-five thousand pounds; at the lowest and least partial estimate of disinterested persons, it exceeded one hundred and twenty-five thousand pounds. For this immense loss, compensation was soon afterwards made out of the public purse, in pursuance of a vote of the House of Commons; the sum being levied on the various wards in the city, on the county, and the borough of Southwark. Both Lord Mansfield and Lord Saville, however, who had been great sufferers, refused to accept of any compensation whatever.

The House of Commons, sitting on Tuesday with locked and guarded doors, had passed a resolution to the effect that, as soon as the tumults subsided, it would immediately proceed to consider the petitions presented from many of his Majesty's Protestant subjects, and would take the same into its serious consideration. While this question was under debate, Mr Herbert, one of the members present, indignantly rose and called upon the House to observe that Lord George Gordon was then sitting under the gallery with the blue cockade, the signal of rebellion, in his hat. He was not only obliged, by those who sat near, to take it out; but offering to go into the street to pacify the mob with the somewhat indefinite assurance that the House was prepared to give them 'the satisfaction they sought,' was actually held down in his seat by the combined force of several members. In short, the disorder and violence which reigned triumphant out of doors, penetrated into the senate, and there, as elsewhere, terror and alarm prevailed, and ordinary forms were for the time forgotten.

On the Thursday, both Houses had adjourned until the following Monday se'nnight, declaring it impossible to pursue their deliberations with the necessary gravity and freedom, while they were surrounded by armed troops. And now that the rioters were dispersed, the citizens were beset with a new fear; for, finding the public thoroughfares and all their usual places of resort filled with soldiers entrusted with the free use of fire and sword, they began to lend a greedy ear to the rumours which were afloat of martial law being declared, and to dismal stories of prisoners having been seen hanging on lamp-posts in Cheapside and Fleet Street. These terrors being promptly dispelled by a Proclamation declaring that all the rioters in custody would be tried by a special commission in due course of law, a fresh alarm was engendered by its being whispered abroad that French money had been found on some of the rioters, and that the disturbances had been fomented by foreign powers who sought to compass the overthrow and ruin of England. This report, which was strengthened by the diffusion of anonymous handbills, but which, if it had any foundation at all, probably owed its origin to the circumstance of some few coins which were not English money having been swept into the pockets of the insurgents with other miscellaneous booty, and afterwards discovered on the prisoners or the dead bodies,—caused a great sensation; and men's minds being in that excited state when they are most apt to catch at any shadow of apprehension, was bruited about with much industry.

All remaining quiet, however, during the whole of this Friday, and on this Friday night, and no new discoveries being made, confidence began to be restored, and the most timid and desponding breathed again. In Southwark, no fewer than three thousand of the inhabitants formed themselves into a watch, and patrolled the streets every hour. Nor were the citizens slow to follow so good an example: and it being the manner of peaceful men to be very bold when the danger is over, they were abundantly fierce and daring; not scrupling to question the stoutest passenger with great severity, and carrying it with a very high hand over all errand-boys, servant-girls, and 'prentices.

As day deepened into evening, and darkness crept into the nooks and corners of the town as if it were mustering in secret and gathering strength to venture into the open ways, Barnaby sat in his dungeon, wondering at the silence, and listening in vain for the noise and outcry which had ushered in the night of late. Beside him, with his hand in hers, sat one in whose companionship he felt at peace. She was worn, and altered, full of grief, and heavy-hearted; but the same to him.

'Mother,' he said, after a long silence: 'how long,—how many days and nights,—shall I be kept here?'

'Not many, dear. I hope not many.'

'You hope! Ay, but your hoping will not undo these chains. I hope, but they don't mind that. Grip hopes, but who cares for Grip?'

The raven gave a short, dull, melancholy croak. It said 'Nobody,' as plainly as a croak could speak.

'Who cares for Grip, except you and me?' said Barnaby, smoothing the bird's rumpled feathers with his hand. 'He never speaks in this place; he never says a word in jail; he sits and mopes all day in his dark corner, dozing sometimes, and sometimes looking at the light that creeps in through the bars, and shines in his bright eye as if a spark from those great fires had fallen into the room and was burning yet. But who cares for Grip?'

The raven croaked again—Nobody.

'And by the way,' said Barnaby, withdrawing his hand from the bird, and laying it upon his mother's arm, as he looked eagerly in her face; 'if they kill me—they may: I heard it said they would—what will become of Grip when I am dead?'

The sound of the word, or the current of his own thoughts, suggested to Grip his old phrase 'Never say die!' But he stopped short in the middle of it, drew a dismal cork, and subsided into a faint croak, as if he lacked the heart to get through the shortest sentence.

'Will they take HIS life as well as mine?' said Barnaby. 'I wish they would. If you and I and he could die together, there would be none to feel sorry, or to grieve for us. But do what they will, I don't fear them, mother!'

'They will not harm you,' she said, her tears choking her utterance. 'They never will harm you, when they know all. I am sure they never will.'

'Oh! Don't be too sure of that,' cried Barnaby, with a strange pleasure in the belief that she was self-deceived, and in his own sagacity. 'They have marked me from the first. I heard them say so to each other when they brought me to this place last night; and I believe them. Don't you cry for me. They said that I was bold, and so I am, and so I will be. You may think that I am silly, but I can die as well as another.—I have done no harm, have I?' he added quickly.

'None before Heaven,' she answered.

'Why then,' said Barnaby, 'let them do their worst. You told me once—you—when I asked you what death meant, that it was nothing to be feared, if we did no harm—Aha! mother, you thought I had forgotten that!'

His merry laugh and playful manner smote her to the heart. She drew him closer to her, and besought him to talk to her in whispers and to be very quiet, for it was getting dark, and their time was short, and she would soon have to leave him for the night.

'You will come to-morrow?' said Barnaby.

Yes. And every day. And they would never part again.

He joyfully replied that this was well, and what he wished, and what he had felt quite certain she would tell him; and then he asked her where she had been so long, and why she had not come to see him when he had been a great soldier, and ran through the wild schemes he had had for their being rich and living prosperously, and with some faint notion in his mind that she was sad and he had made her so, tried to console and comfort her, and talked of their former life and his old sports and freedom: little dreaming that every word he uttered only increased her sorrow, and that her tears fell faster at the freshened recollection of their lost tranquillity.

'Mother,' said Barnaby, as they heard the man approaching to close the cells for the night,' when I spoke to you just now about my father you cried "Hush!" and turned away your head. Why did you do so? Tell me why, in a word. You thought HE was dead. You are not sorry that he is alive and has come back to us. Where is he? Here?'

'Do not ask any one where he is, or speak about him,' she made answer.

'Why not?' said Barnaby. 'Because he is a stern man, and talks roughly? Well! I don't like him, or want to be with him by myself; but why not speak about him?'

'Because I am sorry that he is alive; sorry that he has come back; and sorry that he and you have ever met. Because, dear Barnaby, the endeavour of my life has been to keep you two asunder.'

'Father and son asunder! Why?'

'He has,' she whispered in his ear, 'he has shed blood. The time has come when you must know it. He has shed the blood of one who loved him well, and trusted him, and never did him wrong in word or deed.'

Barnaby recoiled in horror, and glancing at his stained wrist for an instant, wrapped it, shuddering, in his dress.

'But,' she added hastily as the key turned in the lock, 'although we shun him, he is your father, dearest, and I am his wretched wife. They seek his life, and he will lose it. It must not be by our means; nay, if we could win him back to penitence, we should be bound to love him yet. Do not seem to know him, except as one who fled with you from the jail, and if they question you about him, do not answer them. God be with you through the night, dear boy! God be with you!'

She tore herself away, and in a few seconds Barnaby was alone. He stood for a long time rooted to the spot, with his face hidden in his hands; then flung himself, sobbing, on his miserable bed.

But the moon came slowly up in all her gentle glory, and the stars looked out, and through the small compass of the grated window, as through the narrow crevice of one good deed in a murky life of guilt, the face of Heaven shone bright and merciful. He raised his head; gazed upward at the quiet sky, which seemed to smile upon the earth in sadness, as if the night, more thoughtful than the day, looked down in sorrow on the sufferings and evil deeds of men; and felt its peace sink deep into his heart. He, a poor idiot, caged in his narrow cell, was as much lifted up to God, while gazing on the mild light, as the freest and most favoured man in all the spacious city; and in his ill-remembered prayer, and in the fragment of the childish hymn, with which he sung and crooned himself asleep, there breathed as true a spirit as ever studied homily expressed, or old cathedral arches echoed.

As his mother crossed a yard on her way out, she saw, through a grated door which separated it from another court, her husband, walking round and round, with his hands folded on his breast, and his head hung down. She asked the man who conducted her, if she might speak a word with this prisoner. Yes, but she must be quick for he was locking up for the night, and there was but a minute or so to spare. Saying this, he unlocked the door, and bade her go in.

It grated harshly as it turned upon its hinges, but he was deaf to the noise, and still walked round and round the little court, without raising his head or changing his attitude in the least. She spoke to him, but her voice was weak, and failed her. At length she put herself in his track, and when he came near, stretched out her hand and touched him.

He started backward, trembling from head to foot; but seeing who it was, demanded why she came there. Before she could reply, he spoke again.

'Am I to live or die? Do you murder too, or spare?'

'My son—our son,' she answered, 'is in this prison.'

'What is that to me?' he cried, stamping impatiently on the stone pavement. 'I know it. He can no more aid me than I can aid him. If you are come to talk of him, begone!'

As he spoke he resumed his walk, and hurried round the court as before. When he came again to where she stood, he stopped, and said,

'Am I to live or die? Do you repent?'

'Oh!—do YOU?' she answered. 'Will you, while time remains? Do not believe that I could save you, if I dared.'

'Say if you would,' he answered with an oath, as he tried to disengage himself and pass on. 'Say if you would.'

'Listen to me for one moment,' she returned; 'for but a moment. I am but newly risen from a sick-bed, from which I never hoped to rise again. The best among us think, at such a time, of good intentions half-performed and duties left undone. If I have ever, since that fatal night, omitted to pray for your repentance before death—if I omitted, even then, anything which might tend to urge it on you when the horror of your crime was fresh—if, in our later meeting, I yielded to the dread that was upon me, and forgot to fall upon my knees and solemnly adjure you, in the name of him you sent to his account with Heaven, to prepare for the retribution which must come, and which is stealing on you now—I humbly before you, and in the agony of supplication in which you see me, beseech that you will let me make atonement.'

'What is the meaning of your canting words?' he answered roughly. 'Speak so that I may understand you.'

'I will,' she answered, 'I desire to. Bear with me for a moment more. The hand of Him who set His curse on murder, is heavy on us now. You cannot doubt it. Our son, our innocent boy, on whom His anger fell before his birth, is in this place in peril of his life—brought here by your guilt; yes, by that alone, as Heaven sees and knows, for he has been led astray in the darkness of his intellect, and that is the terrible consequence of your crime.'

'If you come, woman-like, to load me with reproaches—' he muttered, again endeavouring to break away.

'I do not. I have a different purpose. You must hear it. If not to-night, to-morrow; if not to-morrow, at another time. You MUST hear it. Husband, escape is hopeless—impossible.'

'You tell me so, do you?' he said, raising his manacled hand, and shaking it. 'You!'

'Yes,' she said, with indescribable earnestness. 'But why?'

'To make me easy in this jail. To make the time 'twixt this and death, pass pleasantly. For my good—yes, for my good, of course,' he said, grinding his teeth, and smiling at her with a livid face.

'Not to load you with reproaches,' she replied; 'not to aggravate the tortures and miseries of your condition, not to give you one hard word, but to restore you to peace and hope. Husband, dear husband, if you will but confess this dreadful crime; if you will but implore forgiveness of Heaven and of those whom you have wronged on earth; if you will dismiss these vain uneasy thoughts, which never can be realised, and will rely on

Penitence and on the Truth, I promise you, in the great name of the Creator, whose image you have defaced, that He will comfort and console you. And for myself,' she cried, clasping her hands, and looking upward, 'I swear before Him, as He knows my heart and reads it now, that from that hour I will love and cherish you as I did of old, and watch you night and day in the short interval that will remain to us, and soothe you with my truest love and duty, and pray with you, that one threatening judgment may be arrested, and that our boy may be spared to bless God, in his poor way, in the free air and light!'

He fell back and gazed at her while she poured out these words, as though he were for a moment awed by her manner, and knew not what to do. But anger and fear soon got the mastery of him, and he spurned her from him.

'Begone!' he cried. 'Leave me! You plot, do you! You plot to get speech with me, and let them know I am the man they say I am. A curse on you and on your boy.'

'On him the curse has already fallen,' she replied, wringing her hands.

'Let it fall heavier. Let it fall on one and all. I hate you both. The worst has come to me. The only comfort that I seek or I can have, will be the knowledge that it comes to you. Now go!'

She would have urged him gently, even then, but he menaced her with his chain.

'I say go—I say it for the last time. The gallows has me in its grasp, and it is a black phantom that may urge me on to something more. Begone! I curse the hour that I was born, the man I slew, and all the living world!'

In a paroxysm of wrath, and terror, and the fear of death, he broke from her, and rushed into the darkness of his cell, where he cast himself jangling down upon the stone floor, and smote it with his ironed hands. The man returned to lock the dungeon door, and having done so, carried her away.

On that warm, balmy night in June, there were glad faces and light hearts in all quarters of the town, and sleep, banished by the late horrors, was doubly welcomed. On that night, families made merry in their houses, and greeted each other on the common danger they had escaped; and those who had been denounced, ventured into the streets; and they who had been plundered, got good shelter. Even the timorous Lord Mayor, who was summoned that night before the Privy Council to answer for his conduct, came back contented; observing to all his friends that he had got off very well with a reprimand, and repeating with huge satisfaction his memorable defence before the Council, 'that such was his temerity, he thought death would have been his portion.'

On that night, too, more of the scattered remnants of the mob were traced to their lurking-places, and taken; and in the hospitals, and deep among the ruins they had made, and in the ditches, and fields, many unshrouded wretches lay dead: envied by those who had been active in the disturbances, and who pillowed their doomed heads in the temporary jails.

And in the Tower, in a dreary room whose thick stone walls shut out the hum of life, and made a stillness which the records left by former prisoners with those silent witnesses seemed to deepen and intensify; remorseful for every act that had been done by every man among the cruel crowd; feeling for the time their guilt his own, and their lives put in peril by himself; and finding, amidst such reflections, little comfort in fanaticism, or in his fancied call; sat the unhappy author of all—Lord George Gordon.

He had been made prisoner that evening. 'If you are sure it's me you want,' he said to the officers, who waited outside with the warrant for his arrest on a charge of High Treason, 'I am ready to accompany you—' which he did without resistance. He was conducted first before the Privy Council, and afterwards to the Horse Guards, and then was taken by way of Westminster Bridge, and back over London Bridge (for the purpose of avoiding the main streets), to the Tower, under the strongest guard ever known to enter its gates with a single prisoner.

Of all his forty thousand men, not one remained to bear him company. Friends, dependents, followers,—none were there. His fawning secretary had played the traitor; and he whose weakness had been goaded and urged on by so many for their own purposes, was desolate and alone.

Chapter 74

Me Dennis, having been made prisoner late in the evening, was removed to a neighbouring round-house for that night, and carried before a justice for examination on the next day, Saturday. The charges against him being numerous and weighty, and it being in particular proved, by the testimony of Gabriel Varden, that he had shown a special desire to take his life, he was committed for trial. Moreover he was honoured with the distinction of being considered a chief among the insurgents, and received from the magistrate's lips the complimentary assurance that he was in a position of imminent danger, and would do well to prepare himself for the worst.

To say that Mr Dennis's modesty was not somewhat startled by these honours, or that he was altogether prepared for so flattering a reception, would be to claim for him a greater amount of stoical philosophy than even he possessed. Indeed this gentleman's stoicism was of that not uncommon kind, which enables a man to bear with exemplary fortitude the afflictions of his friends, but renders him, by way of counterpoise, rather selfish and sensitive in respect of any that happen to befall himself. It is therefore no disparagement to the great officer in question to state, without disguise or concealment, that he was at first very much alarmed, and that he betrayed divers emotions of fear, until his reasoning powers came to his relief, and set before him a more hopeful prospect.

In proportion as Mr Dennis exercised these intellectual qualities with which he was gifted, in reviewing his best chances of coming off handsomely and with small personal inconvenience, his spirits rose, and his confidence increased. When he remembered the great estimation in which his office was held, and the constant demand for his services; when he bethought himself, how the Statute Book regarded him as a kind of Universal Medicine applicable to men, women, and children, of every age and variety of criminal constitution; and how high he stood, in his official capacity, in the favour of the Crown, and both Houses of Parliament, the Mint, the Bank of England, and the Judges of the land; when he recollected that whatever Ministry was in or out, he remained their peculiar pet and panacea, and that for his sake England stood single and conspicuous among the civilised nations of the earth: when he called these things to mind and dwelt upon them, he felt certain that the national gratitude MUST relieve him from the consequences of his late proceedings, and would certainly restore him to his old place in the happy social system.

With these crumbs, or as one may say, with these whole loaves of comfort to regale upon, Mr Dennis took his place among the escort that awaited him, and repaired to jail with a manly indifference. Arriving at Newgate, where some of the ruined cells had been hastily fitted up for the safe keeping of rioters, he was warmly received by the turnkeys, as an unusual and interesting case, which agreeably relieved their monotonous duties. In this spirit, he was fettered with great care, and conveyed into the interior of the prison.

'Brother,' cried the hangman, as, following an officer, he traversed under these novel circumstances the remains of passages with which he was well acquainted, 'am I going to be along with anybody?'

'If you'd have left more walls standing, you'd have been alone,' was the reply. 'As it is, we're cramped for room, and you'll have company.'

'Well,' returned Dennis, 'I don't object to company, brother. I rather like company. I was formed for society, I was.'

'That's rather a pity, an't it?' said the man.

'No,' answered Dennis, 'I'm not aware that it is. Why should it be a pity, brother?'

'Oh! I don't know,' said the man carelessly. 'I thought that was what you meant. Being formed for society, and being cut off in your flower, you know—'

'I say,' interposed the other quickly, 'what are you talking of? Don't. Who's a-going to be cut off in their flowers?'

'Oh, nobody particular. I thought you was, perhaps,' said the man.

Mr Dennis wiped his face, which had suddenly grown very hot, and remarking in a tremulous voice to his conductor that he had always been fond of his joke, followed him in silence until he stopped at a door.

'This is my quarters, is it?' he asked facetiously.

'This is the shop, sir,' replied his friend.

He was walking in, but not with the best possible grace, when he suddenly stopped, and started back.

'Halloa!' said the officer. 'You're nervous.'

'Nervous!' whispered Dennis in great alarm. 'Well I may be. Shut the door.'

'I will, when you're in,' returned the man.

'But I can't go in there,' whispered Dennis. 'I can't be shut up with that man. Do you want me to be throttled, brother?'

The officer seemed to entertain no particular desire on the subject one way or other, but briefly remarking that he had his orders, and intended to obey them, pushed him in, turned the key, and retired.

Dennis stood trembling with his back against the door, and involuntarily raising his arm to defend himself, stared at a man, the only other tenant of the cell, who lay, stretched at his fall length, upon a stone bench, and who paused in his deep breathing as if he were about to wake. But he rolled over on one side, let his arm fall negligently down, drew a long sigh, and murmuring indistinctly, fell fast asleep again.

Relieved in some degree by this, the hangman took his eyes for an instant from the slumbering figure, and glanced round the cell in search of some 'vantage-ground or weapon of defence. There was nothing moveable within it, but a clumsy table which could not be displaced without noise, and a heavy chair. Stealing on tiptoe towards this latter piece of furniture, he retired with it into the remotest corner, and intrenching himself behind it, watched the enemy with the utmost vigilance and caution.

The sleeping man was Hugh; and perhaps it was not unnatural for Dennis to feel in a state of very uncomfortable suspense, and to wish with his whole soul that he might never wake again. Tired of standing, he crouched down in his corner after some time, and rested on the cold pavement; but although Hugh's breathing still proclaimed that he was sleeping soundly, he could not trust him out of his sight for an instant. He was so afraid of him, and of some sudden onslaught, that he was not content to see his closed eyes through the chair-back, but every now and then, rose stealthily to his feet, and peered at him with outstretched neck, to assure himself that he really was still asleep, and was not about to spring upon him when he was off his guard.

He slept so long and so soundly, that Mr Dennis began to think he might sleep on until the turnkey visited them. He was congratulating himself upon these promising appearances, and blessing his stars with much fervour, when one or two unpleasant symptoms manifested themselves: such as another motion of the arm, another sigh, a restless tossing of the head.

Then, just as it seemed that he was about to fall heavily to the ground from his narrow bed, Hugh's eyes opened.

It happened that his face was turned directly towards his unexpected visitor. He looked lazily at him for some half-dozen seconds without any aspect of surprise or recognition; then suddenly jumped up, and with a great oath pronounced his name.

'Keep off, brother, keep off!' cried Dennis, dodging behind the chair. 'Don't do me a mischief. I'm a prisoner like you. I haven't the free use of my limbs. I'm quite an old man. Don't hurt me!'

He whined out the last three words in such piteous accents, that Hugh, who had dragged away the chair, and aimed a blow at him with it, checked himself, and bade him get up.

'I'll get up certainly, brother,' cried Dennis, anxious to propitiate him by any means in his power. 'I'll comply with any request of yours, I'm sure. There—I'm up now. What can I do for you? Only say the word, and I'll do it.'

'What can you do for me!' cried Hugh, clutching him by the collar with both hands, and shaking him as though he were bent on stopping his breath by that means. 'What have you done for me?'

'The best. The best that could be done,' returned the hangman.

Hugh made him no answer, but shaking him in his strong grip until his teeth chattered in his head, cast him down upon the floor, and flung himself on the bench again.

'If it wasn't for the comfort it is to me, to see you here,' he muttered, 'I'd have crushed your head against it; I would.'

It was some time before Dennis had breath enough to speak, but as soon as he could resume his propitiatory strain, he did so.

'I did the best that could be done, brother,' he whined; 'I did indeed. I was forced with two bayonets and I don't know how many bullets on each side of me, to point you out. If you hadn't been taken, you'd have been shot; and what a sight that would have been—a fine young man like you!'

'Will it be a better sight now?' asked Hugh, raising his head, with such a fierce expression, that the other durst not answer him just then.

'A deal better,' said Dennis meekly, after a pause. 'First, there's all the chances of the law, and they're five hundred strong. We may get off scot-free. Unlikelier things than that have come to pass. Even if we shouldn't, and the chances fail, we can but be worked off once: and when it's well done, it's so neat, so skilful, so captiwating, if that don't seem too strong a word, that you'd hardly believe it could be brought to sich perfection. Kill one's fellow-creeturs off, with muskets!—Pah!' and his nature so revolted at the bare idea, that he spat upon the dungeon pavement.

His warming on this topic, which to one unacquainted with his pursuits and tastes appeared like courage; together with his artful suppression of his own secret hopes, and mention of himself as being in the same condition with Hugh; did more to soothe that ruffian than the most elaborate arguments could have done, or the most abject submission. He rested his arms upon his knees, and stooping forward, looked from beneath his shaggy hair at Dennis, with something of a smile upon his face.

'The fact is, brother,' said the hangman, in a tone of greater confidence, 'that you got into bad company. The man that was with you was looked after more than you, and it was him I wanted. As to me, what have I got by it? Here we are, in one and the same plight.'

'Lookee, rascal,' said Hugh, contracting his brows, 'I'm not altogether such a shallow blade but I know you expected to get something by it, or you wouldn't have done it. But it's done, and you're here, and it will soon be all over with you and me; and I'd as soon die as live, or live as die. Why should I trouble myself to have revenge on you? To eat, and drink, and go to sleep, as long as I stay here, is all I care for. If there was but a little more sun to bask in, than can find its way into this cursed place, I'd lie in it all day, and not trouble myself to sit or stand up once. That's all the care I have for myself. Why should I care for YOU?'

Finishing this speech with a growl like the yawn of a wild beast, he stretched himself upon the bench again, and closed his eyes once more.

After looking at him in silence for some moments, Dennis, who was greatly relieved to find him in this mood, drew the chair towards his rough couch and sat down near him—taking the precaution, however, to keep out of the range of his brawny arm.

'Well said, brother; nothing could be better said,' he ventured to observe. 'We'll eat and drink of the best, and sleep our best, and make the best of it every way. Anything can be got for money. Let's spend it merrily.'

'Ay,' said Hugh, coiling himself into a new position.—'Where is it?'

'Why, they took mine from me at the lodge,' said Mr Dennis; 'but mine's a peculiar case.'

'Is it? They took mine too.'

'Why then, I tell you what, brother,' Dennis began. 'You must look up your friends—'

'My friends!' cried Hugh, starting up and resting on his hands. 'Where are my friends?'

'Your relations then,' said Dennis.

'Ha ha ha!' laughed Hugh, waving one arm above his head. 'He talks of friends to me—talks of relations to a man whose mother died the death in store for her son, and left him, a hungry brat, without a face he knew in all the world! He talks of this to me!'

'Brother,' cried the hangman, whose features underwent a sudden change, 'you don't mean to say—'

'I mean to say,' Hugh interposed, 'that they hung her up at Tyburn. What was good enough for her, is good enough for me. Let them do the like by me as soon as they please—the sooner the better. Say no more to me. I'm going to sleep.'

'But I want to speak to you; I want to hear more about that,' said Dennis, changing colour.

'If you're a wise man,' growled Hugh, raising his head to look at him with a frown, 'you'll hold your tongue. I tell you I'm going to sleep.'

Dennis venturing to say something more in spite of this caution, the desperate fellow struck at him with all his force, and missing him, lay down again with many muttered oaths and imprecations, and turned his face towards the wall. After two or three ineffectual twitches at his dress, which he was hardy enough to venture upon, notwithstanding his dangerous humour, Mr Dennis, who burnt, for reasons of his own, to pursue the conversation, had no alternative but to sit as patiently as he could: waiting his further pleasure.

Chapter 75

A month has elapsed,—and we stand in the bedchamber of Sir John Chester. Through the half-opened window, the Temple Garden looks green and pleasant; the placid river, gay with boat and barge, and dimpled with the plash of many an oar, sparkles in the distance; the sky is blue and clear; and the summer air steals gently in, filling the room with perfume. The very town, the smoky town, is radiant. High roofs and steeple-tops, wont to look black and sullen, smile a cheerful grey; every old gilded vane, and ball, and cross, glitters anew in the bright morning sun; and, high among them all, St Paul's towers up, showing its lofty crest in burnished gold.

Sir John was breakfasting in bed. His chocolate and toast stood upon a little table at his elbow; books and newspapers lay ready to his hand, upon the coverlet; and, sometimes pausing to glance with an air of tranquil satisfaction round the well-ordered room, and sometimes to gaze indolently at the summer sky, he ate, and drank, and read the news luxuriously.

The cheerful influence of the morning seemed to have some effect, even upon his equable temper. His manner was unusually gay; his smile more placid and agreeable than usual; his voice more clear and pleasant. He laid down the newspaper he had been reading; leaned back upon his pillow with the air of one who resigned himself to a train of charming recollections; and after a pause, soliloquised as follows:

'And my friend the centaur, goes the way of his mamma! I am not surprised. And his mysterious friend Mr Dennis, likewise! I am not surprised. And my old postman, the exceedingly free-and-easy young madman of Chigwell! I am quite rejoiced. It's the very best thing that could possibly happen to him.'

After delivering himself of these remarks, he fell again into his smiling train of reflection; from which he roused himself at length to finish his chocolate, which was getting cold, and ring the bell for more.

The new supply arriving, he took the cup from his servant's hand; and saying, with a charming affability, 'I am obliged to you, Peak,' dismissed him.

'It is a remarkable circumstance,' he mused, dallying lazily with the teaspoon, 'that my friend the madman should have been within an ace of escaping, on his trial; and it was a good stroke of chance (or, as the world would say, a providential occurrence) that the brother of my Lord Mayor should have been in court, with other country justices, into whose very dense heads curiosity had penetrated. For though the brother of my Lord Mayor was decidedly wrong; and established his near relationship to that amusing person beyond all doubt, in stating that my friend was sane, and had, to his knowledge, wandered about the country with a vagabond parent, avowing revolutionary and rebellious sentiments; I am not the less obliged to him for volunteering that evidence. These insane creatures make such very odd and embarrassing remarks, that they really ought to be hanged for the comfort of society.'

The country justice had indeed turned the wavering scale against poor Barnaby, and solved the doubt that trembled in his favour. Grip little thought how much he had to answer for.

'They will be a singular party,' said Sir John, leaning his head upon his hand, and sipping his chocolate; 'a very curious party. The hangman himself; the centaur; and the madman. The centaur would make a very handsome preparation in Surgeons' Hall, and would benefit science extremely. I hope they have taken care to bespeak him.—Peak, I am not at home, of course, to anybody but the hairdresser.'

This reminder to his servant was called forth by a knock at the door, which the man hastened to open. After a prolonged murmur of question and answer, he returned; and as he cautiously closed the room-door behind him, a man was heard to cough in the passage.

'Now, it is of no use, Peak,' said Sir John, raising his hand in deprecation of his delivering any message; 'I am not at home. I cannot possibly hear you. I told you I was not at home, and my word is sacred. Will you never do as you are desired?'

Having nothing to oppose to this reproof, the man was about to withdraw, when the visitor who had given occasion to it, probably rendered impatient by delay, knocked with his knuckles at the chamber-door, and called out that he had urgent business with Sir John Chester, which admitted of no delay.

'Let him in,' said Sir John. 'My good fellow,' he added, when the door was opened, 'how come you to intrude yourself in this extraordinary manner upon the privacy of a gentleman? How can you be so wholly destitute of self-respect as to be guilty of such remarkable ill-breeding?'

'My business, Sir John, is not of a common kind, I do assure you,' returned the person he addressed. 'If I have taken any uncommon course to get admission to you, I hope I shall be pardoned on that account.'

'Well! we shall see; we shall see,' returned Sir John, whose face cleared up when he saw who it was, and whose prepossessing smile was now restored. 'I am sure we have met before,' he added in his winning tone, 'but really I forget your name?'

'My name is Gabriel Varden, sir.'

'Varden, of course, Varden,' returned Sir John, tapping his forehead. 'Dear me, how very defective my memory becomes! Varden to be sure—Mr Varden the locksmith. You have a charming wife, Mr Varden, and a most beautiful daughter. They are well?'

Gabriel thanked him, and said they were.

'I rejoice to hear it,' said Sir John. 'Commend me to them when you return, and say that I wished I were fortunate enough to convey, myself, the salute which I entrust you to deliver. And what,' he asked very sweetly, after a moment's pause, 'can I do for you? You may command me freely.'

'I thank you, Sir John,' said Gabriel, with some pride in his manner, 'but I have come to ask no favour of you, though I come on business.—Private,' he added, with a glance at the man who stood looking on, 'and very pressing business.'

'I cannot say you are the more welcome for being independent, and having nothing to ask of me,' returned Sir John, graciously, 'for I should have been happy to render you a service; still, you are welcome on any terms. Oblige me with some more chocolate, Peak, and don't wait.'

The man retired, and left them alone.

'Sir John,' said Gabriel, 'I am a working-man, and have been so, all my life. If I don't prepare you enough for what I have to tell; if I come to the point too abruptly; and give you a shock, which a gentleman could have spared you, or at all events lessened very much; I hope you will give me credit for meaning well. I wish to be careful and considerate, and I trust that in a straightforward person like me, you'll take the will for the deed.'

'Mr Varden,' returned the other, perfectly composed under this exordium; 'I beg you'll take a chair. Chocolate, perhaps, you don't relish? Well! it IS an acquired taste, no doubt.'

'Sir John,' said Gabriel, who had acknowledged with a bow the invitation to be seated, but had not availed himself of it. 'Sir John'—he dropped his voice and drew nearer to the bed—'I am just now come from Newgate—'

'Good Gad!' cried Sir John, hastily sitting up in bed; 'from Newgate, Mr Varden! How could you be so very imprudent as to come from Newgate! Newgate, where there are jail-fevers, and ragged people, and bare-footed men and women, and a thousand horrors! Peak, bring the camphor, quick! Heaven and earth, Mr Varden, my dear, good soul, how COULD you come from Newgate?'

Gabriel returned no answer, but looked on in silence while Peak (who had entered with the hot chocolate) ran to a drawer, and returning with a bottle, sprinkled his master's dressing-gown and the bedding; and besides moistening the locksmith himself, plentifully, described a circle round about him on the carpet. When he had done this, he again retired; and Sir John, reclining in an easy attitude upon his pillow, once more turned a smiling face towards his visitor.

'You will forgive me, Mr Varden, I am sure, for being at first a little sensitive both on your account and my own. I confess I was startled, notwithstanding your delicate exordium. Might I ask you to do me the favour not to approach any nearer?—You have really come from Newgate!'

The locksmith inclined his head.

'In-deed! And now, Mr Varden, all exaggeration and embellishment apart,' said Sir John Chester, confidentially, as he sipped his chocolate, 'what kind of place IS Newgate?'

'A strange place, Sir John,' returned the locksmith, 'of a sad and doleful kind. A strange place, where many strange things are heard and seen; but few more strange than that I come to tell you of. The case is urgent. I am sent here.'

'Not—no, no—not from the jail?'

'Yes, Sir John; from the jail.'

'And my good, credulous, open-hearted friend,' said Sir John, setting down his cup, and laughing,—'by whom?'

'By a man called Dennis—for many years the hangman, and to-morrow morning the hanged,' returned the locksmith.

Sir John had expected—had been quite certain from the first—that he would say he had come from Hugh, and was prepared to meet him on that point. But this answer occasioned him a degree of astonishment, which, for the moment, he could not, with all his command of feature, prevent his face from expressing. He quickly subdued it, however, and said in the same light tone:

'And what does the gentleman require of me? My memory may be at fault again, but I don't recollect that I ever had the pleasure of an introduction to him, or that I ever numbered him among my personal friends, I do assure you, Mr Varden.'

'Sir John,' returned the locksmith, gravely, 'I will tell you, as nearly as I can, in the words he used to me, what he desires that you should know, and what you ought to know without a moment's loss of time.'

Sir John Chester settled himself in a position of greater repose, and looked at his visitor with an expression of face which seemed to say, 'This is an amusing fellow! I'll hear him out.'

'You may have seen in the newspapers, sir,' said Gabriel, pointing to the one which lay by his side, 'that I was a witness against this man upon his trial some days since; and that it was not his fault I was alive, and able to speak to what I knew.'

'MAY have seen!' cried Sir John. 'My dear Mr Varden, you are quite a public character, and live in all men's thoughts most deservedly. Nothing can exceed the interest with which I read your testimony, and remembered that I had the pleasure of a slight acquaintance with you.—-I hope we shall have your portrait published?'

'This morning, sir,' said the locksmith, taking no notice of these compliments, 'early this morning, a message was brought to me from Newgate, at this man's request, desiring that I would go and see him, for he had something particular to communicate. I needn't tell you that he is no friend of mine, and that I had never seen him, until the rioters beset my house.'

Sir John fanned himself gently with the newspaper, and nodded.

'I knew, however, from the general report,' resumed Gabriel, 'that the order for his execution to-morrow, went down to the prison last night; and looking upon him as a dying man, I complied with his request.'

'You are quite a Christian, Mr Varden,' said Sir John; 'and in that amiable capacity, you increase my desire that you should take a chair.'

'He said,' continued Gabriel, looking steadily at the knight, 'that he had sent to me, because he had no friend or companion in the whole world (being the common hangman), and because he believed, from the way in which I had given my evidence, that I was an honest man, and would act truly by him. He said that, being shunned by every one who knew his calling, even by people of the lowest and most wretched grade, and finding, when he joined the rioters, that the men he acted with had no suspicion of it (which I believe is true enough, for a poor fool of an old 'prentice of mine was one of them), he had kept his own counsel, up to the time of his being taken and put in jail.'

'Very discreet of Mr Dennis,' observed Sir John with a slight yawn, though still with the utmost affability, 'but—except for your admirable and lucid manner of telling it, which is perfect—not very interesting to me.'

'When,' pursued the locksmith, quite unabashed and wholly regardless of these interruptions, 'when he was taken to the jail, he found that his fellow-prisoner, in the same room, was a young man, Hugh by name, a leader in the riots, who had been betrayed and given up by himself. From something which fell from this unhappy creature in the course of the angry words they had at meeting, he discovered that his mother had suffered the death to which they both are now condemned.—The time is very short, Sir John.'

The knight laid down his paper fan, replaced his cup upon the table at his side, and, saving for the smile that lurked about his mouth, looked at the locksmith with as much steadiness as the locksmith looked at him.

'They have been in prison now, a month. One conversation led to many more; and the hangman soon found, from a comparison of time, and place, and dates, that he had executed the sentence of the law upon this woman, himself. She had been tempted by want—as so many people are—into the easy crime of passing forged notes. She was young and handsome; and the traders who employ men, women, and children in this traffic, looked upon her as one who was well adapted for their business, and who would probably go on without suspicion for a long time. But they were mistaken; for she was stopped in the commission of her very first offence, and died for it. She was of gipsy blood, Sir John—'

It might have been the effect of a passing cloud which obscured the sun, and cast a shadow on his face; but the knight turned deadly pale. Still he met the locksmith's eye, as before.

'She was of gipsy blood, Sir John,' repeated Gabriel, 'and had a high, free spirit. This, and her good looks, and her lofty manner, interested some gentlemen who were easily moved by dark eyes; and efforts were made to save her. They might have been successful, if she would have given them any clue to her history. But she never would, or did. There was reason to suspect that she would make an attempt upon her life. A watch was set upon her night and day; and from that time she never spoke again—'

Sir John stretched out his hand towards his cup. The locksmith going on, arrested it half-way.

—'Until she had but a minute to live. Then she broke silence, and said, in a low firm voice which no one heard but this executioner, for all other living creatures had retired and left her to her fate, "If I had a dagger within these fingers and he was within my reach, I would strike him dead before me, even now!" The man asked "Who?" She said, "The father of her boy."'

Sir John drew back his outstretched hand, and seeing that the locksmith paused, signed to him with easy politeness and without any new appearance of emotion, to proceed.

'It was the first word she had ever spoken, from which it could be understood that she had any relative on earth. "Was the child alive?" he asked. "Yes." He asked her where it was, its name, and whether she had any wish respecting it. She had but one, she said. It was that the boy might live and grow, in utter ignorance of his father, so that no arts might teach him to be gentle and forgiving. When he became a man, she trusted to the God of their tribe to bring the father and the son together, and revenge her through her child. He asked her other questions, but she spoke no more. Indeed, he says, she scarcely said this much, to him, but stood with her face turned upwards to the sky, and never looked towards him once.'

Sir John took a pinch of snuff; glanced approvingly at an elegant little sketch, entitled 'Nature,' on the wall; and raising his eyes to the locksmith's face again, said, with an air of courtesy and patronage, 'You were observing, Mr Varden—'

'That she never,' returned the locksmith, who was not to be diverted by any artifice from his firm manner, and his steady gaze, 'that she never looked towards him once, Sir John; and so she died, and he forgot her. But, some years afterwards, a man was sentenced to die the same death, who was a gipsy too; a sunburnt, swarthy fellow, almost a wild man; and while he lay in prison, under sentence, he, who had seen the hangman more than once while he was free, cut an image of him on his stick, by way of braving death, and showing those who attended on him, how little he cared or thought about it. He gave this stick into his hands at Tyburn, and told him then, that the woman I have spoken of had left her own people to join a fine gentleman, and that, being deserted by him, and cast off by her old friends, she had sworn within her own proud breast, that whatever her misery might be, she would ask no help of any human being. He told him that she had kept her word to the last; and that, meeting even him in the streets—he had been fond of her once, it seems—she had slipped from him by a trick, and he never saw her again, until, being in one of the frequent crowds at Tyburn, with some of his rough companions, he had been driven almost mad by seeing, in the criminal under another name, whose death he had come to witness, herself. Standing in the same place in which she had stood, he told the hangman this, and told him, too, her real name, which only her own people and the gentleman for whose sake she had left them, knew. That name he will tell again, Sir John, to none but you.'

'To none but me!' exclaimed the knight, pausing in the act of raising his cup to his lips with a perfectly steady hand, and curling up his little finger for the better display of a brilliant ring with which it was ornamented: 'but me!—My dear Mr Varden, how very preposterous, to select me for his confidence! With you at his elbow, too, who are so perfectly trustworthy!'

'Sir John, Sir John,' returned the locksmith, 'at twelve tomorrow, these men die. Hear the few words I have to add, and do not hope to deceive me; for though I am a plain man of humble station, and you are a gentleman of rank and learning, the truth raises me to your level, and I KNOW that you anticipate the disclosure with which I am about to end, and that you believe this doomed man, Hugh, to be your son.'

'Nay,' said Sir John, bantering him with a gay air; 'the wild gentleman, who died so suddenly, scarcely went as far as that, I think?'

'He did not,' returned the locksmith, 'for she had bound him by some pledge, known only to these people, and which the worst among them respect, not to tell your name: but, in a fantastic pattern on the stick, he had carved some letters, and when the hangman asked it, he bade him, especially if he should ever meet with her son in after life, remember that place well.'

'What place?'

'Chester.'

The knight finished his cup of chocolate with an appearance of infinite relish, and carefully wiped his lips upon his handkerchief.

'Sir John,' said the locksmith, 'this is all that has been told to me; but since these two men have been left for death, they have conferred together closely. See them, and hear what they can add. See this Dennis, and learn from him what he has not trusted to me. If you, who hold the clue to all, want corroboration (which you do not), the means are easy.'

'And to what,' said Sir John Chester, rising on his elbow, after smoothing the pillow for its reception; 'my dear, good-natured, estimable Mr Varden—with whom I cannot be angry if I would—to what does all this tend?'

'I take you for a man, Sir John, and I suppose it tends to some pleading of natural affection in your breast,' returned the locksmith. 'I suppose to the straining of every nerve, and the exertion of all the influence you have, or can make, in behalf of your miserable son, and the man who has disclosed his existence to you. At the worst, I suppose to your seeing your son, and awakening him to a sense of his crime and danger. He has no such sense now. Think what his life must have been, when he said in my hearing, that if I moved you to anything, it would be to hastening his death, and ensuring his silence, if you had it in your power!'

'And have you, my good Mr Varden,' said Sir John in a tone of mild reproof, 'have you really lived to your present age, and remained so very simple and credulous, as to approach a gentleman of established character with such credentials as these, from desperate men in their last extremity, catching at any straw? Oh dear! Oh fie, fie!'

The locksmith was going to interpose, but he stopped him:

'On any other subject, Mr Varden, I shall be delighted—I shall be charmed—to converse with you, but I owe it to my own character not to pursue this topic for another moment.'

'Think better of it, sir, when I am gone,' returned the locksmith; 'think better of it, sir. Although you have, thrice within as many weeks, turned your lawful son, Mr Edward, from your door, you may have time, you may have years to make your peace with HIM, Sir John: but that twelve o'clock will soon be here, and soon be past for ever.'

'I thank you very much,' returned the knight, kissing his delicate hand to the locksmith, 'for your guileless advice; and I only wish, my good soul, although your simplicity is quite captivating, that you had a little more worldly wisdom. I never so much regretted the arrival of my hairdresser as I do at this moment. God bless you! Good morning! You'll not forget my message to the ladies, Mr Varden? Peak, show Mr Varden to the door.'

Gabriel said no more, but gave the knight a parting look, and left him. As he quitted the room, Sir John's face changed; and the smile gave place to a haggard and anxious expression, like that of a weary actor jaded by the performance of a difficult part. He rose from his bed with a heavy sigh, and wrapped himself in his morning-gown.

'So she kept her word,' he said, 'and was constant to her threat! I would I had never seen that dark face of hers,—I might have read these consequences in it, from the first. This affair would make a noise abroad, if it rested on better evidence; but, as it is, and by not joining the scattered links of the chain, I can afford to slight it.—Extremely distressing to be the parent of such an uncouth creature! Still, I gave him very good advice. I told him he would certainly be hanged. I could have done no more if I had known of our relationship; and there are a great many fathers who have never done as much for THEIR natural children.—The hairdresser may come in, Peak!'

The hairdresser came in; and saw in Sir John Chester (whose accommodating conscience was soon quieted by the numerous precedents that occurred to him in support of his last observation), the same imperturbable, fascinating, elegant gentleman he had seen yesterday, and many yesterdays before.

Chapter 76

As the locksmith walked slowly away from Sir John Chester's chambers, he lingered under the trees which shaded the path, almost hoping that he might be summoned to return. He had turned back thrice, and still loitered at the corner, when the clock struck twelve.

It was a solemn sound, and not merely for its reference to to-morrow; for he knew that in that chime the murderer's knell was rung. He had seen him pass along the crowded street, amidst the execration of the throng; and marked his quivering lip, and trembling limbs; the ashy hue upon his face, his clammy brow, the wild distraction of his eye—the fear of death that swallowed up all other thoughts, and gnawed without cessation at his heart and brain. He had marked the wandering look, seeking for hope, and finding, turn where it would, despair. He had seen the remorseful, pitiful, desolate creature, riding, with his coffin by his side, to the gibbet. He knew that, to the last, he had been an unyielding, obdurate man; that in the savage terror of his condition he had hardened, rather than relented, to his wife and child; and that the last words which had passed his white lips were curses on them as his enemies.

Mr Haredale had determined to be there, and see it done. Nothing but the evidence of his own senses could satisfy that gloomy thirst for retribution which had been gathering upon him for so many years. The locksmith knew this, and when the chimes had ceased to vibrate, hurried away to meet him.

'For these two men,' he said, as he went, 'I can do no more. Heaven have mercy on them!—Alas! I say I can do no more for them, but whom can I help? Mary Rudge will have a home, and a firm friend when she most wants one; but Barnaby—poor Barnaby—willing Barnaby—what aid can I render him? There are many, many men of sense, God forgive me,' cried the honest locksmith, stopping in a narrow count to pass his hand across his eyes, 'I could better afford to lose than Barnaby. We have always been good friends, but I never knew, till now, how much I loved the lad.'

There were not many in the great city who thought of Barnaby that day, otherwise than as an actor in a show which was to take place to-morrow. But if the whole population had had him in their minds, and had wished his life to be spared, not one among them could have done so with a purer zeal or greater singleness of heart than the good locksmith.

Barnaby was to die. There was no hope. It is not the least evil attendant upon the frequent exhibition of this last dread punishment, of Death, that it hardens the minds of those who deal it out, and makes them, though they be amiable men in other respects, indifferent to, or unconscious of, their great responsibility. The word had gone forth that Barnaby was to die. It went forth, every month, for lighter crimes. It was a thing so common, that very few were startled by the awful sentence, or cared to question its propriety. Just then, too, when the law had been so flagrantly outraged, its dignity must be asserted. The symbol of its dignity,—stamped upon every page of the criminal statute-book,—was the gallows; and Barnaby was to die.

They had tried to save him. The locksmith had carried petitions and memorials to the fountain-head, with his own hands. But the well was not one of mercy, and Barnaby was to die.

From the first his mother had never left him, save at night; and with her beside him, he was as usual contented. On this last day, he was more elated and more proud than he had been yet; and when she dropped the book she had been reading to him aloud, and fell upon his neck, he stopped in his busy task of folding a piece of crape about his hat, and wondered at her anguish. Grip uttered a feeble croak, half in encouragement, it seemed, and half in remonstrance, but he wanted heart to sustain it, and lapsed abruptly into silence.

With them who stood upon the brink of the great gulf which none can see beyond, Time, so soon to lose itself in vast Eternity, rolled on like a mighty river, swollen and rapid as it nears the sea. It was morning but now; they had sat and talked together in a dream; and here was evening. The dreadful hour of separation, which even yesterday had seemed so distant, was at hand.

They walked out into the courtyard, clinging to each other, but not speaking. Barnaby knew that the jail was a dull, sad, miserable place, and looked forward to to-morrow, as to a passage from it to something bright and beautiful. He had a vague impression too, that he was expected to be brave—that he was a man of great consequence, and that the prison people would be glad to make him weep. He trod the ground more firmly as he thought of this, and bade her take heart and cry no more, and feel how steady his hand was. 'They call me silly, mother. They shall see to-morrow!'

Dennis and Hugh were in the courtyard. Hugh came forth from his cell as they did, stretching himself as though he had been sleeping. Dennis sat upon a bench in a corner, with his knees and chin huddled together, and rocked himself to and fro like a person in severe pain.

The mother and son remained on one side of the court, and these two men upon the other. Hugh strode up and down, glancing fiercely every now and then at the bright summer sky, and looking round, when he had done so, at the walls.

'No reprieve, no reprieve! Nobody comes near us. There's only the night left now!' moaned Dennis faintly, as he wrung his hands. 'Do you think they'll reprieve me in the night, brother? I've known reprieves come in the night, afore now. I've known 'em come as late as five, six, and seven o'clock in the morning. Don't you think there's a good chance yet,—don't you? Say you do. Say you do, young man,' whined the miserable creature, with an imploring gesture towards Barnaby, 'or I shall go mad!'

'Better be mad than sane, here,' said Hugh. 'GO mad.'

'But tell me what you think. Somebody tell me what he thinks!' cried the wretched object,—so mean, and wretched, and despicable, that even Pity's self might have turned away, at sight of such a being in the likeness of a man—'isn't there a chance for me,—isn't there a good chance for me? Isn't it likely they may be doing this to frighten me? Don't you think it is? Oh!' he almost shrieked, as he wrung his hands, 'won't anybody give me comfort!'

'You ought to be the best, instead of the worst,' said Hugh, stopping before him. 'Ha, ha, ha! See the hangman, when it comes home to him!'

'You don't know what it is,' cried Dennis, actually writhing as he spoke: 'I do. That I should come to be worked off! I! I! That I should come!'

'And why not?' said Hugh, as he thrust back his matted hair to get a better view of his late associate. 'How often, before I knew your trade, did I hear you talking of this as if it was a treat?'

'I an't unconsistent,' screamed the miserable creature; 'I'd talk so again, if I was hangman. Some other man has got my old opinions at this minute. That makes it worse. Somebody's longing to work me off. I know by myself that somebody must be!'

'He'll soon have his longing,' said Hugh, resuming his walk. 'Think of that, and be quiet.'

Although one of these men displayed, in his speech and bearing, the most reckless hardihood; and the other, in his every word and action, testified such an extreme of abject cowardice that it was humiliating to see him; it would be difficult to say which of them would most have repelled and shocked an observer. Hugh's was the dogged desperation of a savage at the stake; the hangman was reduced to a condition little better, if any, than that of a hound with the halter round his neck. Yet, as Mr Dennis knew and could have told them, these were the two commonest states of mind in persons brought to their pass. Such was the wholesome growth of the seed sown by the law, that this kind of harvest was usually looked for, as a matter of course.

In one respect they all agreed. The wandering and uncontrollable train of thought, suggesting sudden recollections of things distant and long forgotten and remote from each other—the vague restless craving for something undefined, which nothing could satisfy—the swift flight of the minutes, fusing themselves into hours, as if by enchantment—the rapid coming of the solemn night—the shadow of death always upon them, and yet so dim and faint, that objects the meanest and most trivial started from the gloom beyond, and forced themselves upon the view—the impossibility of holding the mind, even if they had been so disposed, to penitence and preparation, or of keeping it to any point while one hideous fascination tempted it away—these things were common to them all, and varied only in their outward tokens.

'Fetch me the book I left within—upon your bed,' she said to Barnaby, as the clock struck. 'Kiss me first.'

He looked in her face, and saw there, that the time was come. After a long embrace, he tore himself away, and ran to bring it to her; bidding her not stir till he came back. He soon returned, for a shriek recalled him,—but she was gone.

He ran to the yard-gate, and looked through. They were carrying her away. She had said her heart would break. It was better so.

'Don't you think,' whimpered Dennis, creeping up to him, as he stood with his feet rooted to the ground, gazing at the blank walls—'don't you think there's still a chance? It's a dreadful end; it's a terrible end for a man like me. Don't you think there's a chance? I don't mean for you, I mean for me. Don't let HIM hear us (meaning Hugh); 'he's so desperate.'

Now then,' said the officer, who had been lounging in and out with his hands in his pockets, and yawning as if he were in the last extremity for some subject of interest: 'it's time to turn in, boys.'

'Not yet,' cried Dennis, 'not yet. Not for an hour yet.'

'I say,—your watch goes different from what it used to,' returned the man. 'Once upon a time it was always too fast. It's got the other fault now.'

'My friend,' cried the wretched creature, falling on his knees, 'my dear friend—you always were my dear friend—there's some mistake. Some letter has been mislaid, or some messenger has been stopped upon the way. He may have fallen dead. I saw a man once, fall down dead in the street, myself, and he had papers in his pocket. Send to inquire. Let somebody go to inquire. They never will hang me. They never can.—Yes, they will,' he cried, starting to his feet with a terrible scream. 'They'll hang me by a trick, and keep the pardon back. It's a plot against me. I shall lose my life!' And uttering another yell, he fell in a fit upon the ground.

'See the hangman when it comes home to him!' cried Hugh again, as they bore him away—'Ha ha ha! Courage, bold Barnaby, what care we? Your hand! They do well to put us out of the world, for if we got loose a second time, we wouldn't let them off so easy, eh? Another shake! A man can die but once. If you wake in the night, sing that out lustily, and fall asleep again. Ha ha ha!'

Barnaby glanced once more through the grate into the empty yard; and then watched Hugh as he strode to the steps leading to his sleeping-cell. He heard him shout, and burst into a roar of laughter, and saw him flourish his hat. Then he turned away himself, like one who walked in his sleep; and, without any sense of fear or sorrow, lay down on his pallet, listening for the clock to strike again.

Chapter 77

The time wore on. The noises in the streets became less frequent by degrees, until silence was scarcely broken save by the bells in church towers, marking the progress—softer and more stealthy while the city slumbered—of that Great Watcher with the hoary head, who never sleeps or rests. In the brief interval of darkness and repose which feverish towns enjoy, all busy sounds were hushed; and those who awoke from dreams lay listening in their beds, and longed for dawn, and wished the dead of the night were past.

Into the street outside the jail's main wall, workmen came straggling at this solemn hour, in groups of two or three, and meeting in the centre, cast their tools upon the ground and spoke in whispers. Others soon issued from the jail itself, bearing on their shoulders planks and beams: these materials being all brought forth, the rest bestirred themselves, and the dull sound of hammers began to echo through the stillness.

Here and there among this knot of labourers, one, with a lantern or a smoky link, stood by to light his fellows at their work; and by its doubtful aid, some might be dimly seen taking up the pavement of the road, while others held great upright posts, or fixed them in the holes thus made for their reception. Some dragged slowly on, towards the rest, an empty cart, which they brought rumbling from the prison-yard; while others erected strong barriers across the street. All were busily engaged. Their dusky figures moving to and fro, at that unusual hour, so active and so silent, might have been taken for those of shadowy creatures toiling at midnight on some ghostly unsubstantial work, which, like themselves, would vanish with the first gleam of day, and leave but morning mist and vapour.

While it was yet dark, a few lookers-on collected, who had plainly come there for the purpose and intended to remain: even those who had to pass the spot on their way to some other place, lingered, and lingered yet, as though the attraction of that were irresistible. Meanwhile the noise of saw and mallet went on briskly, mingled with the clattering of boards on the stone pavement of the road, and sometimes with the workmen's voices as they called to one another. Whenever the chimes of the neighbouring church were heard—and that was every quarter of an hour—a strange sensation, instantaneous and indescribable, but perfectly obvious, seemed to pervade them all.

Gradually, a faint brightness appeared in the east, and the air, which had been very warm all through the night, felt cool and chilly. Though there was no daylight yet, the darkness was diminished, and the stars looked pale. The prison, which had been a mere black mass with little shape or form, put on its usual aspect; and ever and anon a solitary watchman could be seen upon its roof, stopping to look down upon the preparations in the street. This man, from forming, as it were, a part of the jail, and knowing or being supposed to know all that was passing within, became an object of as much interest, and was as eagerly looked for, and as awfully pointed out, as if he had been a spirit.

By and by, the feeble light grew stronger, and the houses with their signboards and inscriptions, stood plainly out, in the dull grey morning. Heavy stage waggons crawled from the inn-yard opposite; and travellers peeped out; and as they rolled sluggishly away, cast many a backward look towards the jail. And now, the sun's first beams came glancing into the street; and the night's work, which, in its various stages and in the varied fancies of the lookers-on had taken a hundred shapes, wore its own proper form—a scaffold, and a gibbet.

As the warmth of the cheerful day began to shed itself upon the scanty crowd, the murmur of tongues was heard, shutters were thrown open, and blinds drawn up, and those who had slept in rooms over against the prison, where places to see the execution were let at high prices, rose hastily from their beds. In some of the houses, people were busy taking out the window-sashes for the better accommodation of spectators; in others, the spectators were already seated, and beguiling the time with cards, or drink, or jokes among themselves. Some had purchased seats upon the house-tops, and were already crawling to their stations from parapet and garret-window. Some were yet bargaining for good places, and stood in them in a state of indecision: gazing at the slowly-swelling crowd, and at the workmen as they rested listlessly against the scaffold—affecting to listen with indifference to the proprietor's eulogy of the commanding view his house afforded, and the surpassing cheapness of his terms.

A fairer morning never shone. From the roofs and upper stories of these buildings, the spires of city churches and the great cathedral dome were visible, rising up beyond the prison, into the blue sky, and clad in the colour of light summer clouds, and showing in the clear atmosphere their every scrap of tracery and fretwork, and every niche and loophole. All was brightness and promise, excepting in the street below, into which (for it yet lay in shadow) the eye looked down as into a dark trench, where, in the midst of so much life, and hope, and renewal of existence, stood the terrible instrument of death. It seemed as if the very sun forbore to look upon it.

But it was better, grim and sombre in the shade, than when, the day being more advanced, it stood confessed in the full glare and glory of the sun, with its black paint blistering, and its nooses dangling in the light like loathsome garlands. It was better in the solitude and gloom of midnight with a few forms clustering about it, than in the freshness and the stir of morning: the centre of an eager crowd. It was better haunting the street like a spectre, when men were in their beds, and influencing perchance the city's dreams, than braving the broad day, and thrusting its obscene presence upon their waking senses.

Five o'clock had struck—six—seven—and eight. Along the two main streets at either end of the cross-way, a living stream had now set in, rolling towards the marts of gain and business. Carts, coaches, waggons, trucks, and barrows, forced a passage through the outskirts of the throng, and clattered onward in the same direction. Some of these which were public conveyances and had come from a short distance in the country, stopped; and the driver pointed to the gibbet with his whip, though he might have spared himself the pains, for the heads of all the passengers were turned that way without his help, and the coach-windows were stuck full of staring eyes. In some of the carts and waggons, women might be seen, glancing fearfully at the same unsightly thing; and even little children were held up above the people's heads to see what kind of a toy a gallows was, and learn how men were hanged.

Two rioters were to die before the prison, who had been concerned in the attack upon it; and one directly afterwards in Bloomsbury Square. At nine o'clock, a strong body of military marched into the street, and formed and lined a narrow passage into Holborn, which had been indifferently kept all night by constables. Through this, another cart was brought (the one already mentioned had been employed in the construction of the scaffold), and wheeled up to the prison-gate. These preparations made, the soldiers stood at ease; the officers lounged to and fro, in the alley they had made, or talked together at the scaffold's foot; and the concourse, which had been rapidly augmenting for some hours, and still received additions every minute, waited with an impatience which increased with every chime of St Sepulchre's clock, for twelve at noon.

Up to this time they had been very quiet, comparatively silent, save when the arrival of some new party at a window, hitherto unoccupied, gave them something new to look at or to talk of. But, as the hour approached, a buzz and hum arose, which, deepening every moment, soon swelled into a roar, and seemed to fill the air. No words or even voices could be distinguished in this clamour, nor did they speak much to each other; though such as were better informed upon the topic than the rest, would tell their neighbours, perhaps, that they might know the hangman when he came out, by his being the shorter one: and that the man who was to suffer with him was named Hugh: and that it was Barnaby Rudge who would be hanged in Bloomsbury Square.

The hum grew, as the time drew near, so loud, that those who were at the windows could not hear the church-clock strike, though it was close at hand. Nor had they any need to hear it, either, for they could see it in the people's faces. So surely as another quarter chimed, there was a movement in the crowd—as if something had passed over it—as if the light upon them had been changed—in which the fact was readable as on a brazen dial, figured by a giant's hand.

Three quarters past eleven! The murmur now was deafening, yet every man seemed mute. Look where you would among the crowd, you saw strained eyes and lips compressed; it would have been difficult for the most vigilant observer to point this way or that, and say that yonder man had cried out. It were as easy to detect the motion of lips in a sea-shell.

Three quarters past eleven! Many spectators who had retired from the windows, came back refreshed, as though their watch had just begun. Those who had fallen asleep, roused themselves; and every person in the crowd made one last effort to better his position—which caused a press against the sturdy barriers that made them bend and yield like twigs. The officers, who until now had kept together, fell into their several positions, and gave the words of command. Swords were drawn, muskets shouldered, and the bright steel winding its way among the crowd, gleamed and glittered in the sun like a river. Along this shining path, two men came hurrying on, leading a horse, which was speedily harnessed to the cart at the prison-door. Then, a profound silence replaced the tumult that had so long been gathering, and a breathless pause ensued. Every window was now choked up with heads; the house-tops teemed with people—clinging to chimneys, peering over gable-ends, and holding on where the sudden loosening of any brick or stone would dash them down into the street. The church tower, the church roof, the church yard, the prison leads, the very water-spouts and lampposts—every inch of room—swarmed with human life.

At the first stroke of twelve the prison-bell began to toll. Then the roar—mingled now with cries of 'Hats off!' and 'Poor fellows!' and, from some specks in the great concourse, with a shriek or groan—burst forth again. It was terrible to see—if any one in that distraction of excitement could have seen—the world of eager eyes, all strained upon the scaffold and the beam.

The hollow murmuring was heard within the jail as plainly as without. The three were brought forth into the yard, together, as it resounded through the air. They knew its import well.

'D'ye hear?' cried Hugh, undaunted by the sound. 'They expect us! I heard them gathering when I woke in the night, and turned over on t'other side and fell asleep again. We shall see how they welcome the hangman, now that it comes home to him. Ha, ha, ha!'

The Ordinary coming up at this moment, reproved him for his indecent mirth, and advised him to alter his demeanour.

'And why, master?' said Hugh. 'Can I do better than bear it easily? YOU bear it easily enough. Oh! never tell me,' he cried, as the other would have spoken, 'for all your sad look and your solemn air, you think little enough of it! They say you're the best maker of lobster salads in London. Ha, ha! I've heard that, you see, before now. Is it a good one, this morning—is your hand in? How does the breakfast look? I hope there's enough, and to spare, for all this hungry company that'll sit down to it, when the sight's over.'

'I fear,' observed the clergyman, shaking his head, 'that you are incorrigible.'

'You're right. I am,' rejoined Hugh sternly. 'Be no hypocrite, master! You make a merry-making of this, every month; let me be merry, too. If you want a frightened fellow there's one that'll suit you. Try your hand upon him.'

He pointed, as he spoke, to Dennis, who, with his legs trailing on the ground, was held between two men; and who trembled so, that all his joints and limbs seemed racked by spasms. Turning from this wretched spectacle, he called to Barnaby, who stood apart.

'What cheer, Barnaby? Don't be downcast, lad. Leave that to HIM.'

'Bless you,' cried Barnaby, stepping lightly towards him, 'I'm not frightened, Hugh. I'm quite happy. I wouldn't desire to live now, if they'd let me. Look at me! Am I afraid to die? Will they see ME tremble?'

Hugh gazed for a moment at his face, on which there was a strange, unearthly smile; and at his eye, which sparkled brightly; and interposing between him and the Ordinary, gruffly whispered to the latter:

'I wouldn't say much to him, master, if I was you. He may spoil your appetite for breakfast, though you ARE used to it.'

He was the only one of the three who had washed or trimmed himself that morning. Neither of the others had done so, since their doom was pronounced. He still wore the broken peacock's feathers in his hat; and all his usual scraps of finery were carefully disposed about his person. His kindling eye, his firm step, his proud and resolute bearing, might have graced some lofty act of heroism; some voluntary sacrifice, born of a noble cause and pure enthusiasm; rather than that felon's death.

But all these things increased his guilt. They were mere assumptions. The law had declared it so, and so it must be. The good minister had been greatly shocked, not a quarter of an hour before, at his parting with Grip. For one in his condition, to fondle a bird!—The yard was filled with people; bluff civic functionaries, officers of justice, soldiers, the curious in such matters, and guests who had been bidden as to a wedding. Hugh looked about him, nodded gloomily to some person in authority, who indicated with his hand in what direction he was to proceed; and clapping Barnaby on the shoulder, passed out with the gait of a lion.

They entered a large room, so near to the scaffold that the voices of those who stood about it, could be plainly heard: some beseeching the javelin-men to take them out of the crowd: others crying to those behind, to stand back, for they were pressed to death, and suffocating for want of air.

In the middle of this chamber, two smiths, with hammers, stood beside an anvil. Hugh walked straight up to them, and set his foot upon it with a sound as though it had been struck by a heavy weapon. Then, with folded arms, he stood to have his irons knocked off: scowling haughtily round, as those who were present eyed him narrowly and whispered to each other.

It took so much time to drag Dennis in, that this ceremony was over with Hugh, and nearly over with Barnaby, before he appeared. He no sooner came into the place he knew so well, however, and among faces with which he was so familiar, than he recovered strength and sense enough to clasp his hands and make a last appeal.

'Gentlemen, good gentlemen,' cried the abject creature, grovelling down upon his knees, and actually prostrating himself upon the stone floor: 'Governor, dear governor—honourable sheriffs—worthy gentlemen—have mercy upon a wretched man that has served His Majesty, and the Law, and Parliament, for so many years, and don't—don't let me die—because of a mistake.'

'Dennis,' said the governor of the jail, 'you know what the course is, and that the order came with the rest. You know that we could do nothing, even if we would.'

'All I ask, sir,—all I want and beg, is time, to make it sure,' cried the trembling wretch, looking wildly round for sympathy. 'The King and Government can't know it's me; I'm sure they can't know it's me; or they never would bring me to this dreadful slaughterhouse. They know my name, but they don't know it's the same man. Stop my execution—for charity's sake stop my execution, gentlemen—till they can be told that I've been hangman here, nigh thirty year. Will no one go and tell them?' he implored, clenching his hands and glaring round, and round, and round again—'will no charitable person go and tell them!'

'Mr Akerman,' said a gentleman who stood by, after a moment's pause, 'since it may possibly produce in this unhappy man a better frame of mind, even at this last minute, let me assure him that he was well known to have been the hangman, when his sentence was considered.'

'—But perhaps they think on that account that the punishment's not so great,' cried the criminal, shuffling towards this speaker on his knees, and holding up his folded hands; 'whereas it's worse, it's worse a hundred times, to me than any man. Let them know that, sir. Let them know that. They've made it worse to me by giving me so much to do. Stop my execution till they know that!'

The governor beckoned with his hand, and the two men, who had supported him before, approached. He uttered a piercing cry:

'Wait! Wait. Only a moment—only one moment more! Give me a last chance of reprieve. One of us three is to go to Bloomsbury Square. Let me be the one. It may come in that time; it's sure to come. In the Lord's name let me be sent to Bloomsbury Square. Don't hang me here. It's murder.'

They took him to the anvil: but even then he could be heard above the clinking of the smiths' hammers, and the hoarse raging of the crowd, crying that he knew of Hugh's birth—that his father was living, and was a gentleman of influence and rank—that he had family secrets in his possession—that he could tell nothing unless they gave him time, but must die with them on his mind; and he continued to rave in this sort until his voice failed him, and he sank down a mere heap of clothes between the two attendants.

It was at this moment that the clock struck the first stroke of twelve, and the bell began to toll. The various officers, with the two sheriffs at their head, moved towards the door. All was ready when the last chime came upon the ear.

They told Hugh this, and asked if he had anything to say.

'To say!' he cried. 'Not I. I'm ready.—Yes,' he added, as his eye fell upon Barnaby, 'I have a word to say, too. Come hither, lad.'

There was, for the moment, something kind, and even tender, struggling in his fierce aspect, as he wrung his poor companion by the hand.

'I'll say this,' he cried, looking firmly round, 'that if I had ten lives to lose, and the loss of each would give me ten times the agony of the hardest death, I'd lay them all down—ay, I would, though you gentlemen may not believe it—to save this one. This one,' he added, wringing his hand again, 'that will be lost through me.'

'Not through you,' said the idiot, mildly. 'Don't say that. You were not to blame. You have always been very good to me.—Hugh, we shall know what makes the stars shine, NOW!'

'I took him from her in a reckless mood, and didn't think what harm would come of it,' said Hugh, laying his hand upon his head, and speaking in a lower voice. 'I ask her pardon; and his.—Look here,' he added roughly, in his former tone. 'You see this lad?'

They murmured 'Yes,' and seemed to wonder why he asked.

'That gentleman yonder—' pointing to the clergyman—'has often in the last few days spoken to me of faith, and strong belief. You see what I am—more brute than man, as I have been often told—but I had faith enough to believe, and did believe as strongly as any of you gentlemen can believe anything, that this one life would be spared. See what he is!—Look at him!'

Barnaby had moved towards the door, and stood beckoning him to follow.

'If this was not faith, and strong belief!' cried Hugh, raising his right arm aloft, and looking upward like a savage prophet whom the near approach of Death had filled with inspiration, 'where are they! What else should teach me—me, born as I was born, and reared as I have been reared—to hope for any mercy in this hardened, cruel, unrelenting place! Upon these human shambles, I, who never raised this hand in prayer till now, call down the wrath of God! On that black tree, of which I am the ripened fruit, I do invoke the curse of all its victims, past, and present, and to come. On the head of that man, who, in his conscience, owns me for his son, I leave the wish that he may never sicken on his bed of down, but die a violent death as I do now, and have the night-wind for his only mourner. To this I say, Amen, amen!'

His arm fell downward by his side; he turned; and moved towards them with a steady step, the man he had been before.

'There is nothing more?' said the governor.

Hugh motioned Barnaby not to come near him (though without looking in the direction where he stood) and answered, 'There is nothing more.'

'Move forward!'

'—Unless,' said Hugh, glancing hurriedly back,—'unless any person here has a fancy for a dog; and not then, unless he means to use him well. There's one, belongs to me, at the house I came from, and it wouldn't be easy to find a better. He'll whine at first, but he'll soon get over that.—You wonder that I think about a dog just now, he added, with a kind of laugh. 'If any man deserved it of me half as well, I'd think of HIM.'

He spoke no more, but moved onward in his place, with a careless air, though listening at the same time to the Service for the Dead, with something between sullen attention, and quickened curiosity. As soon as he had passed the door, his miserable associate was carried out; and the crowd beheld the rest.

Barnaby would have mounted the steps at the same time—indeed he would have gone before them, but in both attempts he was restrained, as he was to undergo the sentence elsewhere. In a few minutes the sheriffs reappeared, the same procession was again formed, and they passed through various rooms and passages to another door—that at which the cart was waiting. He held down his head to avoid seeing what he knew his eyes must otherwise encounter, and took his seat sorrowfully,—and yet with something of a childish pride and pleasure,—in the vehicle. The officers fell into their places at the sides, in front and in the rear; the sheriffs' carriages rolled on; a guard of soldiers surrounded the whole; and they moved slowly forward through the throng and pressure toward Lord Mansfield's ruined house.

It was a sad sight—all the show, and strength, and glitter, assembled round one helpless creature—and sadder yet to note, as he rode along, how his wandering thoughts found strange encouragement in the crowded windows and the concourse in the streets; and how, even then, he felt the influence of the bright sky, and looked up, smiling, into its deep unfathomable blue. But there had been many such sights since the riots were over—some so moving in their nature, and so repulsive too, that they were far more calculated to awaken pity for the sufferers, than respect for that law whose strong arm seemed in more than one case to be as wantonly stretched forth now that all was safe, as it had been basely paralysed in time of danger.

Two cripples—both mere boys—one with a leg of wood, one who dragged his twisted limbs along by the help of a crutch, were hanged in this same Bloomsbury Square. As the cart was about to glide from under them, it was observed that they stood with their faces from, not to, the house they had assisted to despoil; and their misery was protracted that this omission might be remedied. Another boy was hanged in Bow Street; other young lads in various quarters of the town. Four wretched women, too, were put to death. In a word, those who suffered as rioters were, for the most part, the weakest, meanest, and most miserable among them. It was a most exquisite satire upon the false religious cry which had led to so much misery, that some of these people owned themselves to be Catholics, and begged to be attended by their own priests.

One young man was hanged in Bishopsgate Street, whose aged grey-headed father waited for him at the gallows, kissed him at its foot when he arrived, and sat there, on the ground, till they took him down. They would have given him the body of his child; but he had no hearse, no coffin, nothing to remove it in, being too poor—and walked meekly away beside the cart that took it back to prison, trying, as he went, to touch its lifeless hand.

But the crowd had forgotten these matters, or cared little about them if they lived in their memory: and while one great multitude fought and hustled to get near the gibbet before Newgate, for a parting look, another followed in the train of poor lost Barnaby, to swell the throng that waited for him on the spot.

Chapter 78

On this same day, and about this very hour, Mr Willet the elder sat smoking his pipe in a chamber at the Black Lion. Although it was hot summer weather, Mr Willet sat close to the fire. He was in a state of profound cogitation, with his own thoughts, and it was his custom at such times to stew himself slowly, under the impression that that process of cookery was favourable to the melting out of his ideas, which, when he began to simmer, sometimes oozed forth so copiously as to astonish even himself.

Mr Willet had been several thousand times comforted by his friends and acquaintance, with the assurance that for the loss he had sustained in the damage done to the Maypole, he could 'come upon the county.' But as this phrase happened to bear an unfortunate resemblance to the popular expression of 'coming on the parish,' it suggested to Mr Willet's mind no more consolatory visions than pauperism on an extensive scale, and ruin in a capacious aspect. Consequently, he had never failed to receive the intelligence with a rueful shake of the head, or a dreary stare, and had been always observed to appear much more melancholy after a visit of condolence than at any other time in the whole four-and-twenty hours.

It chanced, however, that sitting over the fire on this particular occasion—perhaps because he was, as it were, done to a turn; perhaps because he was in an unusually bright state of mind; perhaps because he had considered the subject so long; perhaps because of all these favouring circumstances, taken together—it chanced that, sitting over the fire on this particular occasion, Mr Willet did, afar off and in the remotest depths of his intellect, perceive a kind of lurking hint or faint suggestion, that out of the public purse there might issue funds for the restoration of the Maypole to its former high place among the taverns of the earth. And this dim ray of light did so diffuse itself within him, and did so kindle up and shine, that at last he had it as plainly and visibly before him as the blaze by which he sat; and, fully persuaded that he was the first to make the discovery, and that he had started, hunted down, fallen upon, and knocked on the head, a perfectly original idea which had never presented itself to any other man, alive or dead, he laid down his pipe, rubbed his hands, and chuckled audibly.

'Why, father!' cried Joe, entering at the moment, 'you're in spirits to-day!'

'It's nothing partickler,' said Mr Willet, chuckling again. 'It's nothing at all partickler, Joseph. Tell me something about the Salwanners.' Having preferred this request, Mr Willet chuckled a third time, and after these unusual demonstrations of levity, he put his pipe in his mouth again.

'What shall I tell you, father?' asked Joe, laying his hand upon his sire's shoulder, and looking down into his face. 'That I have come back, poorer than a church mouse? You know that. That I have come back, maimed and crippled? You know that.'

'It was took off,' muttered Mr Willet, with his eyes upon the fire, 'at the defence of the Salwanners, in America, where the war is.'

'Quite right,' returned Joe, smiling, and leaning with his remaining elbow on the back of his father's chair; 'the very subject I came to speak to you about. A man with one arm, father, is not of much use in the busy world.'

This was one of those vast propositions which Mr Willet had never considered for an instant, and required time to 'tackle.' Wherefore he made no answer.

'At all events,' said Joe, 'he can't pick and choose his means of earning a livelihood, as another man may. He can't say "I will turn my hand to this," or "I won't turn my hand to that," but must take what he can do, and be thankful it's no worse.—What did you say?'

Mr Willet had been softly repeating to himself, in a musing tone, the words 'defence of the Salwanners:' but he seemed embarrassed at having been overheard, and answered 'Nothing.'

'Now look here, father.—Mr Edward has come to England from the West Indies. When he was lost sight of (I ran away on the same day, father), he made a voyage to one of the islands, where a school-friend of his had settled; and, finding him, wasn't too proud to be employed on his estate, and—and in short, got on well, and is prospering, and has come over here on business of his own, and is going back again speedily. Our returning nearly at the same time, and meeting in the course of the late troubles, has been a good thing every way; for it has not only enabled us to do old friends some service, but has opened a path in life for me which I may tread without being a burden upon you. To be plain, father, he can employ me; I have satisfied myself that I can be of real use to him; and I am going to carry my one arm away with him, and to make the most of it.

In the mind's eye of Mr Willet, the West Indies, and indeed all foreign countries, were inhabited by savage nations, who were perpetually burying pipes of peace, flourishing tomahawks, and puncturing strange patterns in their bodies. He no sooner heard this announcement, therefore, than he leaned back in his chair, took his pipe from his lips, and stared at his son with as much dismay as if he already beheld him tied to a stake, and tortured for the entertainment of a lively population. In what form of expression his feelings would have found a vent, it is impossible to say. Nor is it necessary: for, before a syllable occurred to him, Dolly Varden came running into the room, in tears, threw herself on Joe's breast without a word of explanation, and clasped her white arms round his neck.

'Dolly!' cried Joe. 'Dolly!'

'Ay, call me that; call me that always,' exclaimed the locksmith's little daughter; 'never speak coldly to me, never be distant, never again reprove me for the follies I have long repented, or I shall die, Joe.'

'I reprove you!' said Joe.

'Yes—for every kind and honest word you uttered, went to my heart. For you, who have borne so much from me—for you, who owe your sufferings and pain to my caprice—for you to be so kind—so noble to me, Joe—'

He could say nothing to her. Not a syllable. There was an odd sort of eloquence in his one arm, which had crept round her waist: but his lips were mute.

'If you had reminded me by a word—only by one short word,' sobbed Dolly, clinging yet closer to him, 'how little I deserved that you should treat me with so much forbearance; if you had exulted only for one moment in your triumph, I could have borne it better.'

'Triumph!' repeated Joe, with a smile which seemed to say, 'I am a pretty figure for that.'

'Yes, triumph,' she cried, with her whole heart and soul in her earnest voice, and gushing tears; 'for it is one. I am glad to think and know it is. I wouldn't be less humbled, dear—I wouldn't be without the recollection of that last time we spoke together in this place—no, not if I could recall the past, and make our parting, yesterday.'

Did ever lover look as Joe looked now!

'Dear Joe,' said Dolly, 'I always loved you—in my own heart I always did, although I was so vain and giddy. I hoped you would come back that night. I made quite sure you would. I prayed for it on my knees. Through all these long, long years, I have never once forgotten you, or left off hoping that this happy time might come.'

The eloquence of Joe's arm surpassed the most impassioned language; and so did that of his lips—yet he said nothing, either.

'And now, at last,' cried Dolly, trembling with the fervour of her speech, 'if you were sick, and shattered in your every limb; if you were ailing, weak, and sorrowful; if, instead of being what you are, you were in everybody's eyes but mine the wreck and ruin of a man; I would be your wife, dear love, with greater pride and joy, than if you were the stateliest lord in England!'

'What have I done,' cried Joe, 'what have I done to meet with this reward?'

'You have taught me,' said Dolly, raising her pretty face to his, 'to know myself, and your worth; to be something better than I was; to be more deserving of your true and manly nature. In years to come, dear Joe, you shall find that you have done so; for I will be, not only now, when we are young and full of hope, but when we have grown old and weary, your patient, gentle, never-tiring wife. I will never know a wish or care beyond our home and you, and I will always study how to please you with my best affection and my most devoted love. I will: indeed I will!'

Joe could only repeat his former eloquence—but it was very much to the purpose.

'They know of this, at home,' said Dolly. 'For your sake, I would leave even them; but they know it, and are glad of it, and are as proud of you as I am, and as full of gratitude.—You'll not come and see me as a poor friend who knew me when I was a girl, will you, dear Joe?'

Well, well! It don't matter what Joe said in answer, but he said a great deal; and Dolly said a great deal too: and he folded Dolly in his one arm pretty tight, considering that it was but one; and Dolly made no resistance: and if ever two people were happy in this world—which is not an utterly miserable one, with all its faults—we may, with some appearance of certainty, conclude that they were.

To say that during these proceedings Mr Willet the elder underwent the greatest emotions of astonishment of which our common nature is susceptible—to say that he was in a perfect paralysis of surprise, and that he wandered into the most stupendous and theretofore unattainable heights of complicated amazement—would be to shadow forth his state of mind in the feeblest and lamest terms. If a roc, an eagle, a griffin, a flying elephant, a winged sea-horse, had suddenly appeared, and, taking him on its back, carried him bodily into the heart of the 'Salwanners,' it would have been to him as an everyday occurrence, in comparison with what he now beheld. To be sitting quietly by, seeing and hearing these things; to be completely overlooked, unnoticed, and disregarded, while his son and a young lady were talking to each other in the most impassioned manner, kissing each other, and making themselves in all respects perfectly at home; was a position so tremendous, so inexplicable, so utterly beyond the widest range of his capacity of comprehension, that he fell into a lethargy of wonder, and could no more rouse himself than an enchanted sleeper in the first year of his fairy lease, a century long.

'Father,' said Joe, presenting Dolly. 'You know who this is?'

Mr Willet looked first at her, then at his son, then back again at Dolly, and then made an ineffectual effort to extract a whiff from his pipe, which had gone out long ago.

'Say a word, father, if it's only "how d'ye do,"' urged Joe.

'Certainly, Joseph,' answered Mr Willet. 'Oh yes! Why not?'

'To be sure,' said Joe. 'Why not?'

'Ah!' replied his father. 'Why not?' and with this remark, which he uttered in a low voice as though he were discussing some grave question with himself, he used the little finger—if any of his fingers can be said to have come under that denomination—of his right hand as a tobacco-stopper, and was silent again.

And so he sat for half an hour at least, although Dolly, in the most endearing of manners, hoped, a dozen times, that he was not angry with her. So he sat for half an hour, quite motionless, and looking all the while like nothing so much as a great Dutch Pin or Skittle. At the expiration of that period, he suddenly, and without the least notice, burst (to the great consternation of the young people) into a very loud and very short laugh; and repeating, 'Certainly, Joseph. Oh yes! Why not?' went out for a walk.

Chapter 79

Old John did not walk near the Golden Key, for between the Golden Key and the Black Lion there lay a wilderness of streets—as everybody knows who is acquainted with the relative bearings of Clerkenwell and Whitechapel—and he was by no means famous for pedestrian exercises. But the Golden Key lies in our way, though it was out of his; so to the Golden Key this chapter goes.

The Golden Key itself, fair emblem of the locksmith's trade, had been pulled down by the rioters, and roughly trampled under foot. But, now, it was hoisted up again in all the glory of a new coat of paint, and shewed more bravely even than in days of yore. Indeed the whole house-front was spruce and trim, and so freshened up throughout, that if there yet remained at large any of the rioters who had been concerned in the attack upon it, the sight of the old, goodly, prosperous dwelling, so revived, must have been to them as gall and wormwood.

The shutters of the shop were closed, however, and the window-blinds above were all pulled down, and in place of its usual cheerful appearance, the house had a look of sadness and an air of mourning; which the neighbours, who in old days had often seen poor Barnaby go in and out, were at no loss to understand. The door stood partly open; but the locksmith's hammer was unheard; the cat sat moping on the ashy forge; all was deserted, dark, and silent.

On the threshold of this door, Mr Haredale and Edward Chester met. The younger man gave place; and both passing in with a familiar air, which seemed to denote that they were tarrying there, or were well-accustomed to go to and fro unquestioned, shut it behind them.

Entering the old back-parlour, and ascending the flight of stairs, abrupt and steep, and quaintly fashioned as of old, they turned into the best room; the pride of Mrs Varden's heart, and erst the scene of Miggs's household labours.

'Varden brought the mother here last evening, he told me?' said Mr Haredale.

'She is above-stairs now—in the room over here,' Edward rejoined. 'Her grief, they say, is past all telling. I needn't add—for that you know beforehand, sir—that the care, humanity, and sympathy of these good people have no bounds.'

'I am sure of that. Heaven repay them for it, and for much more! Varden is out?'

'He returned with your messenger, who arrived almost at the moment of his coming home himself. He was out the whole night—but that of course you know. He was with you the greater part of it?'

'He was. Without him, I should have lacked my right hand. He is an older man than I; but nothing can conquer him.'

'The cheeriest, stoutest-hearted fellow in the world.'

'He has a right to be. He has a right to he. A better creature never lived. He reaps what he has sown—no more.'

'It is not all men,' said Edward, after a moment's hesitation, 'who have the happiness to do that.'

'More than you imagine,' returned Mr Haredale. 'We note the harvest more than the seed-time. You do so in me.'

In truth his pale and haggard face, and gloomy bearing, had so far influenced the remark, that Edward was, for the moment, at a loss to answer him.

'Tut, tut,' said Mr Haredale, ''twas not very difficult to read a thought so natural. But you are mistaken nevertheless. I have had my share of sorrows—more than the common lot, perhaps, but I have borne them ill. I have broken where I should have bent; and have mused and brooded, when my spirit should have mixed with all God's great creation. The men who learn endurance, are they who call the whole world, brother. I have turned FROM the world, and I pay the penalty.'

Edward would have interposed, but he went on without giving him time.

'It is too late to evade it now. I sometimes think, that if I had to live my life once more, I might amend this fault—not so much, I discover when I search my mind, for the love of what is right, as for my own sake. But even when I make these better resolutions, I instinctively recoil from the idea of suffering again what I have undergone; and in this circumstance I find the unwelcome assurance that I should still be the same man, though I could cancel the past, and begin anew, with its experience to guide me.'

'Nay, you make too sure of that,' said Edward.

'You think so,' Mr Haredale answered, 'and I am glad you do. I know myself better, and therefore distrust myself more. Let us leave this subject for another—not so far removed from it as it might, at first sight, seem to be. Sir, you still love my niece, and she is still attached to you.'

'I have that assurance from her own lips,' said Edward, 'and you know—I am sure you know—that I would not exchange it for any blessing life could yield me.'

'You are frank, honourable, and disinterested,' said Mr Haredale; 'you have forced the conviction that you are so, even on my once-jaundiced mind, and I believe you. Wait here till I come back.'

He left the room as he spoke; but soon returned with his niece. 'On that first and only time,' he said, looking from the one to the other, 'when we three stood together under her father's roof, I told you to quit it, and charged you never to return.'

'It is the only circumstance arising out of our love,' observed Edward, 'that I have forgotten.'

'You own a name,' said Mr Haredale, 'I had deep reason to remember. I was moved and goaded by recollections of personal wrong and injury, I know, but, even now I cannot charge myself with having, then, or ever, lost sight of a heartfelt desire for her true happiness; or with having acted—however much I was mistaken—with any other impulse than the one pure, single, earnest wish to be to her, as far as in my inferior nature lay, the father she had lost.'

'Dear uncle,' cried Emma, 'I have known no parent but you. I have loved the memory of others, but I have loved you all my life. Never was father kinder to his child than you have been to me, without the interval of one harsh hour, since I can first remember.'

'You speak too fondly,' he answered, 'and yet I cannot wish you were less partial; for I have a pleasure in hearing those words, and shall have in calling them to mind when we are far asunder, which nothing else could give me. Bear with me for a moment longer, Edward, for she and I have been together many years; and although I believe that in resigning her to you I put the seal upon her future happiness, I find it needs an effort.'

He pressed her tenderly to his bosom, and after a minute's pause, resumed:

'I have done you wrong, sir, and I ask your forgiveness—in no common phrase, or show of sorrow; but with earnestness and sincerity. In the same spirit, I acknowledge to you both that the time has been when I connived at treachery and falsehood—which if I did not perpetrate myself, I still permitted—to rend you two asunder.'

'You judge yourself too harshly,' said Edward. 'Let these things rest.'

'They rise in judgment against me when I look back, and not now for the first time,' he answered. 'I cannot part from you without your full forgiveness; for busy life and I have little left in common now, and I have regrets enough to carry into solitude, without addition to the stock.'

'You bear a blessing from us both,' said Emma. 'Never mingle thoughts of me—of me who owe you so much love and duty—with anything but undying affection and gratitude for the past, and bright hopes for the future.'

'The future,' returned her uncle, with a melancholy smile, 'is a bright word for you, and its image should be wreathed with cheerful hopes. Mine is of another kind, but it will be one of peace, and free, I trust, from care or passion. When you quit England I shall leave it too. There are cloisters abroad; and now that the two great objects of my life are set at rest, I know no better home. You droop at that, forgetting that I am growing old, and that my course is nearly run. Well, we will speak of it again—not once or twice, but many times; and you shall give me cheerful counsel, Emma.'

'And you will take it?' asked his niece.

'I'll listen to it,' he answered, with a kiss, 'and it will have its weight, be certain. What have I left to say? You have, of late, been much together. It is better and more fitting that the circumstances attendant on the past, which wrought your separation, and sowed between you suspicion and distrust, should not be entered on by me.'

'Much, much better,' whispered Emma.

'I avow my share in them,' said Mr Haredale, 'though I held it, at the time, in detestation. Let no man turn aside, ever so slightly, from the broad path of honour, on the plausible pretence that he is justified by the goodness of his end. All good ends can be worked out by good means. Those that cannot, are bad; and may be counted so at once, and left alone.'

He looked from her to Edward, and said in a gentler tone:

'In goods and fortune you are now nearly equal. I have been her faithful steward, and to that remnant of a richer property which my brother left her, I desire to add, in token of my love, a poor pittance, scarcely worth the mention, for which I have no longer any need. I am glad you go abroad. Let our ill-fated house remain the ruin it is. When you return, after a few thriving years, you will command a better, and a more fortunate one. We are friends?'

Edward took his extended hand, and grasped it heartily.

'You are neither slow nor cold in your response,' said Mr Haredale, doing the like by him, 'and when I look upon you now, and know you, I feel that I would choose you for her husband. Her father had a generous nature, and you would have pleased him well. I give her to you in his name, and with his blessing. If the world and I part in this act, we part on happier terms than we have lived for many a day.'

He placed her in his arms, and would have left the room, but that he was stopped in his passage to the door by a great noise at a distance, which made them start and pause.

It was a loud shouting, mingled with boisterous acclamations, that rent the very air. It drew nearer and nearer every moment, and approached so rapidly, that, even while they listened, it burst into a deafening confusion of sounds at the street corner.

'This must be stopped—quieted,' said Mr Haredale, hastily. 'We should have foreseen this, and provided against it. I will go out to them at once.'

But, before he could reach the door, and before Edward could catch up his hat and follow him, they were again arrested by a loud shriek from above-stairs: and the locksmith's wife, bursting in, and fairly running into Mr Haredale's arms, cried out:

'She knows it all, dear sir!—she knows it all! We broke it out to her by degrees, and she is quite prepared.' Having made this communication, and furthermore thanked Heaven with great fervour and heartiness, the good lady, according to the custom of matrons, on all occasions of excitement, fainted away directly.

They ran to the window, drew up the sash, and looked into the crowded street. Among a dense mob of persons, of whom not one was for an instant still, the locksmith's ruddy face and burly form could be descried, beating about as though he was struggling with a rough sea. Now, he was carried back a score of yards, now onward nearly to the door, now back again, now forced against the opposite houses, now against those adjoining his own: now carried up a flight of steps, and greeted by the outstretched hands of half a hundred men, while the whole tumultuous concourse stretched their throats, and cheered with all their might. Though he was really in a fair way to be torn to pieces in the general enthusiasm, the locksmith, nothing discomposed, echoed their shouts till he was as hoarse as they, and in a glow of joy and right good-humour, waved his hat until the daylight shone between its brim and crown.

But in all the bandyings from hand to hand, and strivings to and fro, and sweepings here and there, which—saving that he looked more jolly and more radiant after every struggle—troubled his peace of mind no more than if he had been a straw upon the water's surface, he never once released his firm grasp of an arm, drawn tight through his. He sometimes turned to clap this friend upon the back, or whisper in his ear a word of staunch encouragement, or cheer him with a smile; but his great care was to shield him from the pressure, and force a passage for him to the Golden Key. Passive and timid, scared, pale, and wondering, and gazing at the throng as if he were newly risen from the dead, and felt himself a ghost among the living, Barnaby—not Barnaby in the spirit, but in flesh and blood, with pulses, sinews, nerves, and beating heart, and strong affections—clung to his stout old friend, and followed where he led.

And thus, in course of time, they reached the door, held ready for their entrance by no unwilling hands. Then slipping in, and shutting out the crowd by main force, Gabriel stood between Mr Haredale and Edward Chester, and Barnaby, rushing up the stairs, fell upon his knees beside his mother's bed.

'Such is the blessed end, sir,' cried the panting locksmith, to Mr Haredale, 'of the best day's work we ever did. The rogues! it's been hard fighting to get away from 'em. I almost thought, once or twice, they'd have been too much for us with their kindness!'

They had striven, all the previous day, to rescue Barnaby from his impending fate. Failing in their attempts, in the first quarter to which they addressed themselves, they renewed them in another. Failing there, likewise, they began afresh at midnight; and made their way, not only to the judge and jury who had tried him, but to men of influence at court, to the young Prince of Wales, and even to the ante-chamber of the King himself. Successful, at last, in awakening an interest in his favour, and an inclination to inquire more dispassionately into his case, they had had an interview with the minister, in his bed, so late as eight o'clock that morning. The result of a searching inquiry (in which they, who had known the poor fellow from his childhood, did other good service, besides bringing it about) was, that between eleven and twelve o'clock, a free pardon to Barnaby Rudge was made out and signed, and entrusted to a horse-soldier for instant conveyance to the place of execution. This courier reached the spot just as the cart appeared in sight; and Barnaby being carried back to jail, Mr Haredale, assured that all was safe, had gone straight from Bloomsbury Square to the Golden Key, leaving to Gabriel the grateful task of bringing him home in triumph.

'I needn't say,' observed the locksmith, when he had shaken hands with all the males in the house, and hugged all the females, five-and-forty times, at least, 'that, except among ourselves, I didn't want to make a triumph of it. But, directly we got into the street we were known, and this hubbub began. Of the two,' he added, as he wiped his crimson face, 'and after experience of both, I think I'd rather be taken out of my house by a crowd of enemies, than escorted home by a mob of friends!'

It was plain enough, however, that this was mere talk on Gabriel's part, and that the whole proceeding afforded him the keenest delight; for the people continuing to make a great noise without, and to cheer as if their voices were in the freshest order, and good for a fortnight, he sent upstairs for Grip (who had come home at his master's back, and had acknowledged the favours of the multitude by drawing blood from every finger that came within his reach), and with the bird upon his arm presented himself at the first-floor window, and waved his hat again until it dangled by a shred, between his finger and thumb. This demonstration having been received with appropriate shouts, and silence being in some degree restored, he thanked them for their sympathy; and taking the liberty to inform them that there was a sick person in the house, proposed that they should give three cheers for King George, three more for Old England, and three more for nothing particular, as a closing ceremony. The crowd assenting, substituted Gabriel Varden for the nothing particular; and giving him one over, for good measure, dispersed in high good-humour.

What congratulations were exchanged among the inmates at the Golden Key, when they were left alone; what an overflowing of joy and happiness there was among them; how incapable it was of expression in Barnaby's own person; and how he went wildly from one to another, until he became so far tranquillised, as to stretch himself on the ground beside his mother's couch and fall into a deep sleep; are matters that need not be told. And it is well they happened to be of this class, for they would be very hard to tell, were their narration ever so indispensable.

Before leaving this bright picture, it may be well to glance at a dark and very different one which was presented to only a few eyes, that same night.

The scene was a churchyard; the time, midnight; the persons, Edward Chester, a clergyman, a grave-digger, and the four bearers of a homely coffin. They stood about a grave which had been newly dug, and one of the bearers held up a dim lantern,—the only light there—which shed its feeble ray upon the book of prayer. He placed it for a moment on the coffin, when he and his companions were about to lower it down. There was no inscription on the lid.

The mould fell solemnly upon the last house of this nameless man; and the rattling dust left a dismal echo even in the accustomed ears of those who had borne it to its resting-place. The grave was filled in to the top, and trodden down. They all left the spot together.

'You never saw him, living?' asked the clergyman, of Edward.

'Often, years ago; not knowing him for my brother.'

'Never since?'

'Never. Yesterday, he steadily refused to see me. It was urged upon him, many times, at my desire.'

'Still he refused? That was hardened and unnatural.'

'Do you think so?'

'I infer that you do not?'

'You are right. We hear the world wonder, every day, at monsters of ingratitude. Did it never occur to you that it often looks for monsters of affection, as though they were things of course?'

They had reached the gate by this time, and bidding each other good night, departed on their separate ways.

Chapter 80

That afternoon, when he had slept off his fatigue; had shaved, and washed, and dressed, and freshened himself from top to toe; when he had dined, comforted himself with a pipe, an extra Toby, a nap in the great arm-chair, and a quiet chat with Mrs Varden on everything that had happened, was happening, or about to happen, within the sphere of their domestic concern; the locksmith sat himself down at the tea-table in the little back-parlour: the rosiest, cosiest, merriest, heartiest, best-contented old buck, in Great Britain or out of it.

There he sat, with his beaming eye on Mrs V., and his shining face suffused with gladness, and his capacious waistcoat smiling in every wrinkle, and his jovial humour peeping from under the table in the very plumpness of his legs; a sight to turn the vinegar of misanthropy into purest milk of human kindness. There he sat, watching his wife as she decorated the room with flowers for the greater honour of Dolly and Joseph Willet, who had gone out walking, and for whom the tea-kettle had been singing gaily on the hob full twenty minutes, chirping as never kettle chirped before; for whom the best service of real undoubted china, patterned with divers round-faced mandarins holding up broad umbrellas, was now displayed in all its glory; to tempt whose appetites a clear, transparent, juicy ham, garnished with cool green lettuce-leaves and fragrant cucumber, reposed upon a shady table, covered with a snow-white cloth; for whose delight, preserves and jams, crisp cakes and other pastry, short to eat, with cunning twists, and cottage loaves, and rolls of bread both white and brown, were all set forth in rich profusion; in whose youth Mrs V. herself had grown quite young, and stood there in a gown of red and white: symmetrical in figure, buxom in bodice, ruddy in cheek and lip, faultless in ankle, laughing in face and mood, in all respects delicious to behold—there sat the locksmith among all and every these delights, the sun that shone upon them all: the centre of the system: the source of light, heat, life, and frank enjoyment in the bright household world.

And when had Dolly ever been the Dolly of that afternoon? To see how she came in, arm-in-arm with Joe; and how she made an effort not to blush or seem at all confused; and how she made believe she didn't care to sit on his side of the table; and how she coaxed the locksmith in a whisper not to joke; and how her colour came and went in a little restless flutter of happiness, which made her do everything wrong, and yet so charmingly wrong that it was better than right!—why, the locksmith could have looked on at this (as he mentioned to Mrs Varden when they retired for the night) for four-and-twenty hours at a stretch, and never wished it done.

The recollections, too, with which they made merry over that long protracted tea! The glee with which the locksmith asked Joe if he remembered that stormy night at the Maypole when he first asked after Dolly—the laugh they all had, about that night when she was going out to the party in the sedan-chair—the unmerciful manner in which they rallied Mrs Varden about putting those flowers outside that very window—the difficulty Mrs Varden found in joining the laugh against herself, at first, and the extraordinary perception she had of the joke when she overcame it—the confidential statements of Joe concerning the precise day and hour when he was first conscious of being fond of Dolly, and Dolly's blushing admissions, half volunteered and half extorted, as to the time from which she dated the discovery that she 'didn't mind' Joe—here was an exhaustless fund of mirth and conversation.

Then, there was a great deal to be said regarding Mrs Varden's doubts, and motherly alarms, and shrewd suspicions; and it appeared that from Mrs Varden's penetration and extreme sagacity nothing had ever been hidden. She had known it all along. She had seen it from the first. She had always predicted it. She had been aware of it before the principals. She had said within herself (for she remembered the exact words) 'that young Willet is certainly looking after our Dolly, and I must look after HIM.' Accordingly, she had looked after him, and had observed many little circumstances (all of which she named) so exceedingly minute that nobody else could make anything out of them even now; and had, it seemed from first to last, displayed the most unbounded tact and most consummate generalship.

Of course the night when Joe WOULD ride homeward by the side of the chaise, and when Mrs Varden WOULD insist upon his going back again, was not forgotten—nor the night when Dolly fainted on his name being mentioned—nor the times upon times when Mrs Varden, ever watchful and prudent, had found her pining in her own chamber. In short, nothing was forgotten; and everything by some means or other brought them back to the conclusion, that that was the happiest hour in all their lives; consequently, that everything must have occurred for the best, and nothing could be suggested which would have made it better.

While they were in the full glow of such discourse as this, there came a startling knock at the door, opening from the street into the workshop, which had been kept closed all day that the house might be more quiet. Joe, as in duty bound, would hear of nobody but himself going to open it; and accordingly left the room for that purpose.

It would have been odd enough, certainly, if Joe had forgotten the way to this door; and even if he had, as it was a pretty large one and stood straight before him, he could not easily have missed it. But Dolly, perhaps because she was in the flutter of spirits before mentioned, or perhaps because she thought he would not be able to open it with his one arm—she could have had no other reason—hurried out after him; and they stopped so long in the passage—no doubt owing to Joe's entreaties that she would not expose herself to the draught of July air which must infallibly come rushing in on this same door being opened—that the knock was repeated, in a yet more startling manner than before.

'Is anybody going to open that door?' cried the locksmith. 'Or shall I come?'

Upon that, Dolly went running back into the parlour, all dimples and blushes; and Joe opened it with a mighty noise, and other superfluous demonstrations of being in a violent hurry.

'Well,' said the locksmith, when he reappeared: 'what is it? eh Joe? what are you laughing at?'

'Nothing, sir. It's coming in.'

'Who's coming in? what's coming in?' Mrs Varden, as much at a loss as her husband, could only shake her head in answer to his inquiring look: so, the locksmith wheeled his chair round to command a better view of the room-door, and stared at it with his eyes wide open, and a mingled expression of curiosity and wonder shining in his jolly face.

Instead of some person or persons straightway appearing, divers remarkable sounds were heard, first in the workshop and afterwards in the little dark passage between it and the parlour, as though some unwieldy chest or heavy piece of furniture were being brought in, by an amount of human strength inadequate to the task. At length after much struggling and humping, and bruising of the wall on both sides, the door was forced open as by a battering-ram; and the locksmith, steadily regarding what appeared beyond, smote his thigh, elevated his eyebrows, opened his mouth, and cried in a loud voice expressive of the utmost consternation:

'Damme, if it an't Miggs come back!'

The young damsel whom he named no sooner heard these words, than deserting a small boy and a very large box by which she was accompanied, and advancing with such precipitation that her bonnet flew off her head, burst into the room, clasped her hands (in which she held a pair of pattens, one in each), raised her eyes devotedly to the ceiling, and shed a flood of tears.

'The old story!' cried the locksmith, looking at her in inexpressible desperation. 'She was born to be a damper, this young woman! nothing can prevent it!'

'Ho master, ho mim!' cried Miggs, 'can I constrain my feelings in these here once agin united moments! Ho Mr Warsen, here's blessedness among relations, sir! Here's forgivenesses of injuries, here's amicablenesses!'

The locksmith looked from his wife to Dolly, and from Dolly to Joe, and from Joe to Miggs, with his eyebrows still elevated and his mouth still open. When his eyes got back to Miggs, they rested on her; fascinated.

'To think,' cried Miggs with hysterical joy, 'that Mr Joe, and dear Miss Dolly, has raly come together after all as has been said and done contrairy! To see them two a-settin' along with him and her, so pleasant and in all respects so affable and mild; and me not knowing of it, and not being in the ways to make no preparations for their teas. Ho what a cutting thing it is, and yet what sweet sensations is awoke within me!'

Either in clasping her hands again, or in an ecstasy of pious joy, Miss Miggs clinked her pattens after the manner of a pair of cymbals, at this juncture; and then resumed, in the softest accents:

'And did my missis think—ho goodness, did she think—as her own Miggs, which supported her under so many trials, and understood her natur' when them as intended well but acted rough, went so deep into her feelings—did she think as her own Miggs would ever leave her? Did she think as Miggs, though she was but a servant, and knowed that servitudes was no inheritances, would forgit that she was the humble instruments as always made it comfortable between them two when they fell out, and always told master of the meekness and forgiveness of her blessed dispositions! Did she think as Miggs had no attachments! Did she think that wages was her only object!'

To none of these interrogatories, whereof every one was more pathetically delivered than the last, did Mrs Varden answer one word: but Miggs, not at all abashed by this circumstance, turned to the small boy in attendance—her eldest nephew—son of her own married sister—born in Golden Lion Court, number twenty-sivin, and bred in the very shadow of the second bell-handle on the right-hand door-post—and with a plentiful use of her pocket-handkerchief, addressed herself to him: requesting that on his return home he would console his parents for the loss of her, his aunt, by delivering to them a faithful statement of his having left her in the bosom of that family, with which, as his aforesaid parents well knew, her best affections were incorporated; that he would remind them that nothing less than her imperious sense of duty, and devoted attachment to her old master and missis, likewise Miss Dolly and young Mr Joe, should ever have induced her to decline that pressing invitation which they, his parents, had, as he could testify, given her, to lodge and board with them, free of all cost and charge, for evermore; lastly, that he would help her with her box upstairs, and then repair straight home, bearing her blessing and her strong injunctions to mingle in his prayers a supplication that he might in course of time grow up a locksmith, or a Mr Joe, and have Mrs Vardens and Miss Dollys for his relations and friends.

Having brought this admonition to an end—upon which, to say the truth, the young gentleman for whose benefit it was designed, bestowed little or no heed, having to all appearance his faculties absorbed in the contemplation of the sweetmeats,—Miss Miggs signified to the company in general that they were not to be uneasy, for she would soon return; and, with her nephew's aid, prepared to bear her wardrobe up the staircase.

'My dear,' said the locksmith to his wife. 'Do you desire this?'

'I desire it!' she answered. 'I am astonished—I am amazed—at her audacity. Let her leave the house this moment.'

Miggs, hearing this, let her end of the box fall heavily to the floor, gave a very loud sniff, crossed her arms, screwed down the corners of her mouth, and cried, in an ascending scale, 'Ho, good gracious!' three distinct times.

'You hear what your mistress says, my love,' remarked the locksmith. 'You had better go, I think. Stay; take this with you, for the sake of old service.'

Miss Miggs clutched the bank-note he took from his pocket-book and held out to her; deposited it in a small, red leather purse; put the purse in her pocket (displaying, as she did so, a considerable portion of some under-garment, made of flannel, and more black cotton stocking than is commonly seen in public); and, tossing her head, as she looked at Mrs Varden, repeated—

'Ho, good gracious!'

'I think you said that once before, my dear,' observed the locksmith.

'Times is changed, is they, mim!' cried Miggs, bridling; 'you can spare me now, can you? You can keep 'em down without me? You're not in wants of any one to scold, or throw the blame upon, no longer, an't you, mim? I'm glad to find you've grown so independent. I wish you joy, I'm sure!'

With that she dropped a curtsey, and keeping her head erect, her ear towards Mrs Varden, and her eye on the rest of the company, as she alluded to them in her remarks, proceeded:

'I'm quite delighted, I'm sure, to find sich independency, feeling sorry though, at the same time, mim, that you should have been forced into submissions when you couldn't help yourself—he he he! It must be great vexations, 'specially considering how ill you always spoke of Mr Joe—to have him for a son-in-law at last; and I wonder Miss Dolly can put up with him, either, after being off and on for so many years with a coachmaker. But I HAVE heerd say, that the coachmaker thought twice about it—he he he!—and that he told a young man as was a frind of his, that he hoped he knowed better than to be drawed into that; though she and all the family DID pull uncommon strong!'

Here she paused for a reply, and receiving none, went on as before.

'I HAVE heerd say, mim, that the illnesses of some ladies was all pretensions, and that they could faint away, stone dead, whenever they had the inclinations so to do. Of course I never see sich cases with my own eyes—ho no! He he he! Nor master neither—ho no! He he he! I HAVE heerd the neighbours make remark as some one as they was acquainted with, was a poor good-natur'd mean-spirited creetur, as went out fishing for a wife one day, and caught a Tartar. Of course I never to my knowledge see the poor person himself. Nor did you neither, mim—ho no. I wonder who it can be—don't you, mim? No doubt you do, mim. Ho yes. He he he!'

Again Miggs paused for a reply; and none being offered, was so oppressed with teeming spite and spleen, that she seemed like to burst.

'I'm glad Miss Dolly can laugh,' cried Miggs with a feeble titter. 'I like to see folks a-laughing—so do you, mim, don't you? You was always glad to see people in spirits, wasn't you, mim? And you always did your best to keep 'em cheerful, didn't you, mim? Though there an't such a great deal to laugh at now either; is there, mim? It an't so much of a catch, after looking out so sharp ever since she was a little chit, and costing such a deal in dress and show, to get a poor, common soldier, with one arm, is it, mim? He he! I wouldn't have a husband with one arm, anyways. I would have two arms. I would have two arms, if it was me, though instead of hands they'd only got hooks at the end, like our dustman!'

Miss Miggs was about to add, and had, indeed, begun to add, that, taking them in the abstract, dustmen were far more eligible matches than soldiers, though, to be sure, when people were past choosing they must take the best they could get, and think themselves well off too; but her vexation and chagrin being of that internally bitter sort which finds no relief in words, and is aggravated to madness by want of contradiction, she could hold out no longer, and burst into a storm of sobs and tears.

In this extremity she fell on the unlucky nephew, tooth and nail, and plucking a handful of hair from his head, demanded to know how long she was to stand there to be insulted, and whether or no he meant to help her to carry out the box again, and if he took a pleasure in hearing his family reviled: with other inquiries of that nature; at which disgrace and provocation, the small boy, who had been all this time gradually lashed into rebellion by the sight of unattainable pastry, walked off indignant, leaving his aunt and the box to follow at their leisure. Somehow or other, by dint of pushing and pulling, they did attain the street at last; where Miss Miggs, all blowzed with the exertion of getting there, and with her sobs and tears, sat down upon her property to rest and grieve, until she could ensnare some other youth to help her home.

'It's a thing to laugh at, Martha, not to care for,' whispered the locksmith, as he followed his wife to the window, and good-humouredly dried her eyes. 'What does it matter? You had seen your fault before. Come! Bring up Toby again, my dear; Dolly shall sing us a song; and we'll be all the merrier for this interruption!'

Chapter 81

Another month had passed, and the end of August had nearly come, when Mr Haredale stood alone in the mail-coach office at Bristol. Although but a few weeks had intervened since his conversation with Edward Chester and his niece, in the locksmith's house, and he had made no change, in the mean time, in his accustomed style of dress, his appearance was greatly altered. He looked much older, and more care-worn. Agitation and anxiety of mind scatter wrinkles and grey hairs with no unsparing hand; but deeper traces follow on the silent uprooting of old habits, and severing of dear, familiar ties. The affections may not be so easily wounded as the passions, but their hurts are deeper, and more lasting. He was now a solitary man, and the heart within him was dreary and lonesome.

He was not the less alone for having spent so many years in seclusion and retirement. This was no better preparation than a round of social cheerfulness: perhaps it even increased the keenness of his sensibility. He had been so dependent upon her for companionship and love; she had come to be so much a part and parcel of his existence; they had had so many cares and thoughts in common, which no one else had shared; that losing her was beginning life anew, and being required to summon up the hope and elasticity of youth, amid the doubts, distrusts, and weakened energies of age.

The effort he had made to part from her with seeming cheerfulness and hope—and they had parted only yesterday—left him the more depressed. With these feelings, he was about to revisit London for the last time, and look once more upon the walls of their old home, before turning his back upon it, for ever.

The journey was a very different one, in those days, from what the present generation find it; but it came to an end, as the longest journey will, and he stood again in the streets of the metropolis. He lay at the inn where the coach stopped, and resolved, before he went to bed, that he would make his arrival known to no one; would spend but another night in London; and would spare himself the pang of parting, even with the honest locksmith.

Such conditions of the mind as that to which he was a prey when he lay down to rest, are favourable to the growth of disordered fancies, and uneasy visions. He knew this, even in the horror with which he started from his first sleep, and threw up the window to dispel it by the presence of some object, beyond the room, which had not been, as it were, the witness of his dream. But it was not a new terror of the night; it had been present to him before, in many shapes; it had haunted him in bygone times, and visited his pillow again and again. If it had been but an ugly object, a childish spectre, haunting his sleep, its return, in its old form, might have awakened a momentary sensation of fear, which, almost in the act of waking, would have passed away. This disquiet, however, lingered about him, and would yield to nothing. When he closed his eyes again, he felt it hovering near; as he slowly sunk into a slumber, he was conscious of its gathering strength and purpose, and gradually assuming its recent shape; when he sprang up from his bed, the same phantom vanished from his heated brain, and left him filled with a dread against which reason and waking thought were powerless.

The sun was up, before he could shake it off. He rose late, but not refreshed, and remained within doors all that day. He had a fancy for paying his last visit to the old spot in the evening, for he had been accustomed to walk there at that season, and desired to see it under the aspect that was most familiar to him. At such an hour as would afford him time to reach it a little before sunset, he left the inn, and turned into the busy street.

He had not gone far, and was thoughtfully making his way among the noisy crowd, when he felt a hand upon his shoulder, and, turning, recognised one of the waiters from the inn, who begged his pardon, but he had left his sword behind him.

'Why have you brought it to me?' he asked, stretching out his hand, and yet not taking it from the man, but looking at him in a disturbed and agitated manner.

The man was sorry to have disobliged him, and would carry it back again. The gentleman had said that he was going a little way into the country, and that he might not return until late. The roads were not very safe for single travellers after dark; and, since the riots, gentlemen had been more careful than ever, not to trust themselves unarmed in lonely places. 'We thought you were a stranger, sir,' he added, 'and that you might believe our roads to be better than they are; but perhaps you know them well, and carry fire-arms—'

He took the sword, and putting it up at his side, thanked the man, and resumed his walk.

It was long remembered that he did this in a manner so strange, and with such a trembling hand, that the messenger stood looking after his retreating figure, doubtful whether he ought not to follow, and watch him. It was long remembered that he had been heard pacing his bedroom in the dead of the night; that the attendants had mentioned to each other in the morning, how fevered and how pale he looked; and that when this man went back to the inn, he told a fellow-servant that what he had observed in this short interview lay very heavy on his mind, and that he feared the gentleman intended to destroy himself, and would never come back alive.

With a half-consciousness that his manner had attracted the man's attention (remembering the expression of his face when they parted), Mr Haredale quickened his steps; and arriving at a stand of coaches, bargained with the driver of the best to carry him so far on his road as the point where the footway struck across the fields, and to await his return at a house of entertainment which was within a stone's-throw of that place. Arriving there in due course, he alighted and pursued his way on foot.

He passed so near the Maypole, that he could see its smoke rising from among the trees, while a flock of pigeons—some of its old inhabitants, doubtless—sailed gaily home to roost, between him and the unclouded sky. 'The old house will brighten up now,' he said, as he looked towards it, 'and there will be a merry fireside beneath its ivied roof. It is some comfort to know that everything will not be blighted hereabouts. I shall be glad to have one picture of life and cheerfulness to turn to, in my mind!'

He resumed his walk, and bent his steps towards the Warren. It was a clear, calm, silent evening, with hardly a breath of wind to stir the leaves, or any sound to break the stillness of the time, but drowsy sheep-bells tinkling in the distance, and, at intervals, the far-off lowing of cattle, or bark of village dogs. The sky was radiant with the softened glory of sunset; and on the earth, and in the air, a deep repose prevailed. At such an hour, he arrived at the deserted mansion which had been his home so long, and looked for the last time upon its blackened walls.

The ashes of the commonest fire are melancholy things, for in them there is an image of death and ruin,—of something that has been bright, and is but dull, cold, dreary dust,—with which our nature forces us to sympathise. How much more sad the crumbled embers of a home: the casting down of that great altar, where the worst among us sometimes perform the worship of the heart; and where the best have offered up such sacrifices, and done such deeds of heroism, as, chronicled, would put the proudest temples of old Time, with all their vaunting annals, to the blush!

He roused himself from a long train of meditation, and walked slowly round the house. It was by this time almost dark.

He had nearly made the circuit of the building, when he uttered a half-suppressed exclamation, started, and stood still. Reclining, in an easy attitude, with his back against a tree, and contemplating the ruin with an expression of pleasure,—a pleasure so keen that it overcame his habitual indolence and command of feature, and displayed itself utterly free from all restraint or reserve,—before him, on his own ground, and triumphing then, as he had triumphed in every misfortune and disappointment of his life, stood the man whose presence, of all mankind, in any place, and least of all in that, he could the least endure.

Although his blood so rose against this man, and his wrath so stirred within him, that he could have struck him dead, he put such fierce constraint upon himself that he passed him without a word or look. Yes, and he would have gone on, and not turned, though to resist the Devil who poured such hot temptation in his brain, required an effort scarcely to be achieved, if this man had not himself summoned him to stop: and that, with an assumed compassion in his voice which drove him well-nigh mad, and in an instant routed all the self-command it had been anguish—acute, poignant anguish—to sustain.

All consideration, reflection, mercy, forbearance; everything by which a goaded man can curb his rage and passion; fled from him as he turned back. And yet he said, slowly and quite calmly—far more calmly than he had ever spoken to him before:

'Why have you called to me?'

'To remark,' said Sir John Chester with his wonted composure, 'what an odd chance it is, that we should meet here!'

'It IS a strange chance.'

'Strange? The most remarkable and singular thing in the world. I never ride in the evening; I have not done so for years. The whim seized me, quite unaccountably, in the middle of last night.—How very picturesque this is!'—He pointed, as he spoke, to the dismantled house, and raised his glass to his eye.

'You praise your own work very freely.'

Sir John let fall his glass; inclined his face towards him with an air of the most courteous inquiry; and slightly shook his head as though he were remarking to himself, 'I fear this animal is going mad!'

'I say you praise your own work very freely,' repeated Mr Haredale.

'Work!' echoed Sir John, looking smilingly round. 'Mine!—I beg your pardon, I really beg your pardon—'

'Why, you see,' said Mr Haredale, 'those walls. You see those tottering gables. You see on every side where fire and smoke have raged. You see the destruction that has been wanton here. Do you not?'

'My good friend,' returned the knight, gently checking his impatience with his hand, 'of course I do. I see everything you speak of, when you stand aside, and do not interpose yourself between the view and me. I am very sorry for you. If I had not had the pleasure to meet you here, I think I should have written to tell you so. But you don't bear it as well as I had expected—excuse me—no, you don't indeed.'

He pulled out his snuff-box, and addressing him with the superior air of a man who, by reason of his higher nature, has a right to read a moral lesson to another, continued:

'For you are a philosopher, you know—one of that stern and rigid school who are far above the weaknesses of mankind in general. You are removed, a long way, from the frailties of the crowd. You contemplate them from a height, and rail at them with a most impressive bitterness. I have heard you.'

—'And shall again,' said Mr Haredale.

'Thank you,' returned the other. 'Shall we walk as we talk? The damp falls rather heavily. Well,—as you please. But I grieve to say that I can spare you only a very few moments.'

'I would,' said Mr Haredale, 'you had spared me none. I would, with all my soul, you had been in Paradise (if such a monstrous lie could be enacted), rather than here to-night.'

'Nay,' returned the other—'really—you do yourself injustice. You are a rough companion, but I would not go so far to avoid you.'

'Listen to me,' said Mr Haredale. 'Listen to me.'

'While you rail?' inquired Sir John.

'While I deliver your infamy. You urged and stimulated to do your work a fit agent, but one who in his nature—in the very essence of his being—is a traitor, and who has been false to you (despite the sympathy you two should have together) as he has been to all others. With hints, and looks, and crafty words, which told again are nothing, you set on Gashford to this work—this work before us now. With these same hints, and looks, and crafty words, which told again are nothing, you urged him on to gratify the deadly hate he owes me—I have earned it, I thank Heaven—by the abduction and dishonour of my niece. You did. I see denial in your looks,' he cried, abruptly pointing in his face, and stepping back, 'and denial is a lie!'

He had his hand upon his sword; but the knight, with a contemptuous smile, replied to him as coldly as before.

'You will take notice, sir—if you can discriminate sufficiently—that I have taken the trouble to deny nothing. Your discernment is hardly fine enough for the perusal of faces, not of a kind as coarse as your speech; nor has it ever been, that I remember; or, in one face that I could name, you would have read indifference, not to say disgust, somewhat sooner than you did. I speak of a long time ago,—but you understand me.'

'Disguise it as you will, you mean denial. Denial explicit or reserved, expressed or left to be inferred, is still a lie. You say you don't deny. Do you admit?'

'You yourself,' returned Sir John, suffering the current of his speech to flow as smoothly as if it had been stemmed by no one word of interruption, 'publicly proclaimed the character of the gentleman in question (I think it was in Westminster Hall) in terms which relieve me from the necessity of making any further allusion to him. You may have been warranted; you may not have been; I can't say. Assuming the gentleman to be what you described, and to have made to you or any other person any statements that may have happened to suggest themselves to him, for the sake of his own security, or for the sake of money, or for his own amusement, or for any other consideration,—I have nothing to say of him, except that his extremely degrading situation appears to me to be shared with his employers. You are so very plain yourself, that you will excuse a little freedom in me, I am sure.'

'Attend to me again, Sir John but once,' cried Mr Haredale; 'in your every look, and word, and gesture, you tell me this was not your act. I tell you that it was, and that you tampered with the man I speak of, and with your wretched son (whom God forgive!) to do this deed. You talk of degradation and character. You told me once that you had purchased the absence of the poor idiot and his mother, when (as I have discovered since, and then suspected) you had gone to tempt them, and had found them flown. To you I traced the insinuation that I alone reaped any harvest from my brother's death; and all the foul attacks and whispered calumnies that followed in its train. In every action of my life, from that first hope which you converted into grief and desolation, you have stood, like an adverse fate, between me and peace. In all, you have ever been the same cold-blooded, hollow, false, unworthy villain. For the second time, and for the last, I cast these charges in your teeth, and spurn you from me as I would a faithless dog!'

With that he raised his arm, and struck him on the breast so that he staggered. Sir John, the instant he recovered, drew his sword, threw away the scabbard and his hat, and running on his adversary made a desperate lunge at his heart, which, but that his guard was quick and true, would have stretched him dead upon the grass.

In the act of striking him, the torrent of his opponent's rage had reached a stop. He parried his rapid thrusts, without returning them, and called to him, with a frantic kind of terror in his face, to keep back.

'Not to-night! not to-night!' he cried. 'In God's name, not tonight!'

Seeing that he lowered his weapon, and that he would not thrust in turn, Sir John lowered his.

'Not to-night!' his adversary cried. 'Be warned in time!'

'You told me—it must have been in a sort of inspiration—' said Sir John, quite deliberately, though now he dropped his mask, and showed his hatred in his face, 'that this was the last time. Be assured it is! Did you believe our last meeting was forgotten? Did you believe that your every word and look was not to be accounted for, and was not well remembered? Do you believe that I have waited your time, or you mine? What kind of man is he who entered, with all his sickening cant of honesty and truth, into a bond with me to prevent a marriage he affected to dislike, and when I had redeemed my part to the spirit and the letter, skulked from his, and brought the match about in his own time, to rid himself of a burden he had grown tired of, and cast a spurious lustre on his house?'

'I have acted,' cried Mr Haredale, 'with honour and in good faith. I do so now. Do not force me to renew this duel to-night!'

'You said my "wretched" son, I think?' said Sir John, with a smile. 'Poor fool! The dupe of such a shallow knave—trapped into marriage by such an uncle and by such a niece—he well deserves your pity. But he is no longer a son of mine: you are welcome to the prize your craft has made, sir.'

'Once more,' cried his opponent, wildly stamping on the ground, 'although you tear me from my better angel, I implore you not to come within the reach of my sword to-night. Oh! why were you here at all! Why have we met! To-morrow would have cast us far apart for ever!'

'That being the case,' returned Sir John, without the least emotion, 'it is very fortunate we have met to-night. Haredale, I have always despised you, as you know, but I have given you credit for a species of brute courage. For the honour of my judgment, which I had thought a good one, I am sorry to find you a coward.'

Not another word was spoken on either side. They crossed swords, though it was now quite dusk, and attacked each other fiercely. They were well matched, and each was thoroughly skilled in the management of his weapon.

After a few seconds they grew hotter and more furious, and pressing on each other inflicted and received several slight wounds. It was directly after receiving one of these in his arm, that Mr Haredale, making a keener thrust as he felt the warm blood spirting out, plunged his sword through his opponent's body to the hilt.

Their eyes met, and were on each other as he drew it out. He put his arm about the dying man, who repulsed him, feebly, and dropped upon the turf. Raising himself upon his hands, he gazed at him for an instant, with scorn and hatred in his look; but, seeming to remember, even then, that this expression would distort his features after death, he tried to smile, and, faintly moving his right hand, as if to hide his bloody linen in his vest, fell back dead—the phantom of last night.

Chapter the Last

A parting glance at such of the actors in this little history as it has not, in the course of its events, dismissed, will bring it to an end.

Mr Haredale fled that night. Before pursuit could be begun, indeed before Sir John was traced or missed, he had left the kingdom. Repairing straight to a religious establishment, known throughout Europe for the rigour and severity of its discipline, and for the merciless penitence it exacted from those who sought its shelter as a refuge from the world, he took the vows which thenceforth shut him out from nature and his kind, and after a few remorseful years was buried in its gloomy cloisters.

Two days elapsed before the body of Sir John was found. As soon as it was recognised and carried home, the faithful valet, true to his master's creed, eloped with all the cash and movables he could lay his hands on, and started as a finished gentleman upon his own account. In this career he met with great success, and would certainly have married an heiress in the end, but for an unlucky check which led to his premature decease. He sank under a contagious disorder, very prevalent at that time, and vulgarly termed the jail fever.

Lord George Gordon, remaining in his prison in the Tower until Monday the fifth of February in the following year, was on that day solemnly tried at Westminster for High Treason. Of this crime he was, after a patient investigation, declared Not Guilty; upon the ground that there was no proof of his having called the multitude together with any traitorous or unlawful intentions. Yet so many people were there, still, to whom those riots taught no lesson of reproof or moderation, that a public subscription was set on foot in Scotland to defray the cost of his defence.

For seven years afterwards he remained, at the strong intercession of his friends, comparatively quiet; saving that he, every now and then, took occasion to display his zeal for the Protestant faith in some extravagant proceeding which was the delight of its enemies; and saving, besides, that he was formally excommunicated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, for refusing to appear as a witness in the Ecclesiastical Court when cited for that purpose. In the year 1788 he was stimulated by some new insanity to write and publish an injurious pamphlet, reflecting on the Queen of France, in very violent terms. Being indicted for the libel, and (after various strange demonstrations in court) found guilty, he fled into Holland in place of appearing to receive sentence: from whence, as the quiet burgomasters of Amsterdam had no relish for his company, he was sent home again with all speed. Arriving in the month of July at Harwich, and going thence to Birmingham, he made in the latter place, in August, a public profession of the Jewish religion; and figured there as a Jew until he was arrested, and brought back to London to receive the sentence he had evaded. By virtue of this sentence he was, in the month of December, cast into Newgate for five years and ten months, and required besides to pay a large fine, and to furnish heavy securities for his future good behaviour.

After addressing, in the midsummer of the following year, an appeal to the commiseration of the National Assembly of France, which the English minister refused to sanction, he composed himself to undergo his full term of punishment; and suffering his beard to grow nearly to his waist, and conforming in all respects to the ceremonies of his new religion, he applied himself to the study of history, and occasionally to the art of painting, in which, in his younger days, he had shown some skill. Deserted by his former friends, and treated in all respects like the worst criminal in the jail, he lingered on, quite cheerful and resigned, until the 1st of November 1793, when he died in his cell, being then only three-and-forty years of age.

Many men with fewer sympathies for the distressed and needy, with less abilities and harder hearts, have made a shining figure and left a brilliant fame. He had his mourners. The prisoners bemoaned his loss, and missed him; for though his means were not large, his charity was great, and in bestowing alms among them he considered the necessities of all alike, and knew no distinction of sect or creed. There are wise men in the highways of the world who may learn something, even from this poor crazy lord who died in Newgate.

To the last, he was truly served by bluff John Grueby. John was at his side before he had been four-and-twenty hours in the Tower, and never left him until he died. He had one other constant attendant, in the person of a beautiful Jewish girl; who attached herself to him from feelings half religious, half romantic, but whose virtuous and disinterested character appears to have been beyond the censure even of the most censorious.

Gashford deserted him, of course. He subsisted for a time upon his traffic in his master's secrets; and, this trade failing when the stock was quite exhausted, procured an appointment in the honourable corps of spies and eavesdroppers employed by the government. As one of these wretched underlings, he did his drudgery, sometimes abroad, sometimes at home, and long endured the various miseries of such a station. Ten or a dozen years ago—not more—a meagre, wan old man, diseased and miserably poor, was found dead in his bed at an obscure inn in the Borough, where he was quite unknown. He had taken poison. There was no clue to his name; but it was discovered from certain entries in a pocket-book he carried, that he had been secretary to Lord George Gordon in the time of the famous riots.

Many months after the re-establishment of peace and order, and even when it had ceased to be the town-talk, that every military officer, kept at free quarters by the City during the late alarms, had cost for his board and lodging four pounds four per day, and every private soldier two and twopence halfpenny; many months after even this engrossing topic was forgotten, and the United Bulldogs were to a man all killed, imprisoned, or transported, Mr Simon Tappertit, being removed from a hospital to prison, and thence to his place of trial, was discharged by proclamation, on two wooden legs. Shorn of his graceful limbs, and brought down from his high estate to circumstances of utter destitution, and the deepest misery, he made shift to stump back to his old master, and beg for some relief. By the locksmith's advice and aid, he was established in business as a shoeblack, and opened shop under an archway near the Horse Guards. This being a central quarter, he quickly made a very large connection; and on levee days, was sometimes known to have as many as twenty half-pay officers waiting their turn for polishing. Indeed his trade increased to that extent, that in course of time he entertained no less than two apprentices, besides taking for his wife the widow of an eminent bone and rag collector, formerly of Millbank. With this lady (who assisted in the business) he lived in great domestic happiness, only chequered by those little storms which serve to clear the atmosphere of wedlock, and brighten its horizon. In some of these gusts of bad weather, Mr Tappertit would, in the assertion of his prerogative, so far forget himself, as to correct his lady with a brush, or boot, or shoe; while she (but only in extreme cases) would retaliate by taking off his legs, and leaving him exposed to the derision of those urchins who delight in mischief.

Miss Miggs, baffled in all her schemes, matrimonial and otherwise, and cast upon a thankless, undeserving world, turned very sharp and sour; and did at length become so acid, and did so pinch and slap and tweak the hair and noses of the youth of Golden Lion Court, that she was by one consent expelled that sanctuary, and desired to bless some other spot of earth, in preference. It chanced at that moment, that the justices of the peace for Middlesex proclaimed by public placard that they stood in need of a female turnkey for the County Bridewell, and appointed a day and hour for the inspection of candidates. Miss Miggs attending at the time appointed, was instantly chosen and selected from one hundred and twenty-four competitors, and at once promoted to the office; which she held until her decease, more than thirty years afterwards, remaining single all that time. It was observed of this lady that while she was inflexible and grim to all her female flock, she was particularly so to those who could establish any claim to beauty: and it was often remarked as a proof of her indomitable virtue and severe chastity, that to such as had been frail she showed no mercy; always falling upon them on the slightest occasion, or on no occasion at all, with the fullest measure of her wrath. Among other useful inventions which she practised upon this class of offenders and bequeathed to posterity, was the art of inflicting an exquisitely vicious poke or dig with the wards of a key in the small of the back, near the spine. She likewise originated a mode of treading by accident (in pattens) on such as had small feet; also very remarkable for its ingenuity, and previously quite unknown.

It was not very long, you may be sure, before Joe Willet and Dolly Varden were made husband and wife, and with a handsome sum in bank (for the locksmith could afford to give his daughter a good dowry), reopened the Maypole. It was not very long, you may be sure, before a red-faced little boy was seen staggering about the Maypole passage, and kicking up his heels on the green before the door. It was not very long, counting by years, before there was a red-faced little girl, another red-faced little boy, and a whole troop of girls and boys: so that, go to Chigwell when you would, there would surely be seen, either in the village street, or on the green, or frolicking in the farm-yard—for it was a farm now, as well as a tavern—more small Joes and small Dollys than could be easily counted. It was not a very long time before these appearances ensued; but it WAS a VERY long time before Joe looked five years older, or Dolly either, or the locksmith either, or his wife either: for cheerfulness and content are great beautifiers, and are famous preservers of youthful looks, depend upon it.

It was a long time, too, before there was such a country inn as the Maypole, in all England: indeed it is a great question whether there has ever been such another to this hour, or ever will be. It was a long time too—for Never, as the proverb says, is a long day—before they forgot to have an interest in wounded soldiers at the Maypole, or before Joe omitted to refresh them, for the sake of his old campaign; or before the serjeant left off looking in there, now and then; or before they fatigued themselves, or each other, by talking on these occasions of battles and sieges, and hard weather and hard service, and a thousand things belonging to a soldier's life. As to the great silver snuff-box which the King sent Joe with his own hand, because of his conduct in the Riots, what guest ever went to the Maypole without putting finger and thumb into that box, and taking a great pinch, though he had never taken a pinch of snuff before, and almost sneezed himself into convulsions even then? As to the purple-faced vintner, where is the man who lived in those times and never saw HIM at the Maypole: to all appearance as much at home in the best room, as if he lived there? And as to the feastings and christenings, and revellings at Christmas, and celebrations of birthdays, wedding-days, and all manner of days, both at the Maypole and the Golden Key,—if they are not notorious, what facts are?

Mr Willet the elder, having been by some extraordinary means possessed with the idea that Joe wanted to be married, and that it would be well for him, his father, to retire into private life, and enable him to live in comfort, took up his abode in a small cottage at Chigwell; where they widened and enlarged the fireplace for him, hung up the boiler, and furthermore planted in the little garden outside the front-door, a fictitious Maypole; so that he was quite at home directly. To this, his new habitation, Tom Cobb, Phil Parkes, and Solomon Daisy went regularly every night: and in the chimney-corner, they all four quaffed, and smoked, and prosed, and dozed, as they had done of old. It being accidentally discovered after a short time that Mr Willet still appeared to consider himself a landlord by profession, Joe provided him with a slate, upon which the old man regularly scored up vast accounts for meat, drink, and tobacco. As he grew older this passion increased upon him; and it became his delight to chalk against the name of each of his cronies a sum of enormous magnitude, and impossible to be paid: and such was his secret joy in these entries, that he would be perpetually seen going behind the door to look at them, and coming forth again, suffused with the liveliest satisfaction.

He never recovered the surprise the Rioters had given him, and remained in the same mental condition down to the last moment of his life. It was like to have been brought to a speedy termination by the first sight of his first grandchild, which appeared to fill him with the belief that some alarming miracle had happened to Joe. Being promptly blooded, however, by a skilful surgeon, he rallied; and although the doctors all agreed, on his being attacked with symptoms of apoplexy six months afterwards, that he ought to die, and took it very ill that he did not, he remained alive—possibly on account of his constitutional slowness—for nearly seven years more, when he was one morning found speechless in his bed. He lay in this state, free from all tokens of uneasiness, for a whole week, when he was suddenly restored to consciousness by hearing the nurse whisper in his son's ear that he was going. 'I'm a-going, Joseph,' said Mr Willet, turning round upon the instant, 'to the Salwanners'—and immediately gave up the ghost.

He left a large sum of money behind him; even more than he was supposed to have been worth, although the neighbours, according to the custom of mankind in calculating the wealth that other people ought to have saved, had estimated his property in good round numbers. Joe inherited the whole; so that he became a man of great consequence in those parts, and was perfectly independent.

Some time elapsed before Barnaby got the better of the shock he had sustained, or regained his old health and gaiety. But he recovered by degrees: and although he could never separate his condemnation and escape from the idea of a terrific dream, he became, in other respects, more rational. Dating from the time of his recovery, he had a better memory and greater steadiness of purpose; but a dark cloud overhung his whole previous existence, and never cleared away.

He was not the less happy for this, for his love of freedom and interest in all that moved or grew, or had its being in the elements, remained to him unimpaired. He lived with his mother on the Maypole farm, tending the poultry and the cattle, working in a garden of his own, and helping everywhere. He was known to every bird and beast about the place, and had a name for every one. Never was there a lighter-hearted husbandman, a creature more popular with young and old, a blither or more happy soul than Barnaby; and though he was free to ramble where he would, he never quitted Her, but was for evermore her stay and comfort.

It was remarkable that although he had that dim sense of the past, he sought out Hugh's dog, and took him under his care; and that he never could be tempted into London. When the Riots were many years old, and Edward and his wife came back to England with a family almost as numerous as Dolly's, and one day appeared at the Maypole porch, he knew them instantly, and wept and leaped for joy. But neither to visit them, nor on any other pretence, no matter how full of promise and enjoyment, could he be persuaded to set foot in the streets: nor did he ever conquer this repugnance or look upon the town again.

Grip soon recovered his looks, and became as glossy and sleek as ever. But he was profoundly silent. Whether he had forgotten the art of Polite Conversation in Newgate, or had made a vow in those troubled times to forego, for a period, the display of his accomplishments, is matter of uncertainty; but certain it is that for a whole year he never indulged in any other sound than a grave, decorous croak. At the expiration of that term, the morning being very bright and sunny, he was heard to address himself to the horses in the stable, upon the subject of the Kettle, so often mentioned in these pages; and before the witness who overheard him could run into the house with the intelligence, and add to it upon his solemn affirmation the statement that he had heard him laugh, the bird himself advanced with fantastic steps to the very door of the bar, and there cried, 'I'm a devil, I'm a devil, I'm a devil!' with extraordinary rapture.

From that period (although he was supposed to be much affected by the death of Mr Willet senior), he constantly practised and improved himself in the vulgar tongue; and, as he was a mere infant for a raven when Barnaby was grey, he has very probably gone on talking to the present time.

THE END OF
Barnaby Rudge

The Battle of Life

by Charles Dickens

CHAPTER I - Part The First

Once upon a time, it matters little when, and in stalwart England, it matters little where, a fierce battle was fought. It was fought upon a long summer day when the waving grass was green. Many a wild flower formed by the Almighty Hand to be a perfumed goblet for the dew, felt its enamelled cup filled high with blood that day, and shrinking dropped. Many an insect deriving its delicate colour from harmless leaves and herbs, was stained anew that day by dying men, and marked its frightened way with an unnatural track. The painted butterfly took blood into the air upon the edges of its wings. The stream ran red. The trodden ground became a quagmire, whence, from sullen pools collected in the prints of human feet and horses' hoofs, the one prevailing hue still lowered and glimmered at the sun.

Heaven keep us from a knowledge of the sights the moon beheld upon that field, when, coming up above the black line of distant rising- ground, softened and blurred at the edge by trees, she rose into the sky and looked upon the plain, strewn with upturned faces that had once at mothers' breasts sought mothers' eyes, or slumbered happily. Heaven keep us from a knowledge of the secrets whispered afterwards upon the tainted wind that blew across the scene of that day's work and that night's death and suffering! Many a lonely moon was bright upon the battle-ground, and many a star kept mournful watch upon it, and many a wind from every quarter of the earth blew over it, before the traces of the fight were worn away.

They lurked and lingered for a long time, but survived in little things; for, Nature, far above the evil passions of men, soon recovered Her serenity, and smiled upon the guilty battle-ground as she had done before, when it was innocent. The larks sang high above it; the swallows skimmed and dipped and flitted to and fro; the shadows of the flying clouds pursued each other swiftly, over grass and corn and turnip-field and wood, and over roof and church- spire in the nestling town among the trees, away into the bright distance on the borders of the sky and earth, where the red sunsets faded. Crops were sown, and grew up, and were gathered in; the stream that had been crimsoned, turned a watermill; men whistled at the plough; gleaners and haymakers were seen in quiet groups at work; sheep and oxen pastured; boys whooped and called, in fields, to scare away the birds; smoke rose from cottage chimneys; sabbath bells rang peacefully; old people lived and died; the timid creatures of the field, the simple flowers of the bush and garden, grew and withered in their destined terms: and all upon the fierce and bloody battle-ground, where thousands upon thousands had been killed in the great fight. But, there were deep green patches in the growing corn at first, that people looked at awfully. Year after year they re-appeared; and it was known that underneath those fertile spots, heaps of men and horses lay buried, indiscriminately, enriching the ground. The husbandmen who ploughed those places, shrunk from the great worms abounding there; and the sheaves they yielded, were, for many a long year, called the Battle Sheaves, and set apart; and no one ever knew a Battle Sheaf to be among the last load at a Harvest Home. For a long time, every furrow that was turned, revealed some fragments of the fight. For a long time, there were wounded trees upon the battle- ground; and scraps of hacked and broken fence and wall, where deadly struggles had been made; and trampled parts where not a leaf or blade would grow. For a long time, no village girl would dress her hair or bosom with the sweetest flower from that field of death: and after many a year had come and gone, the berries growing there, were still believed to leave too deep a stain upon the hand that plucked them.

The Seasons in their course, however, though they passed as lightly as the summer clouds themselves, obliterated, in the lapse of time, even these remains of the old conflict; and wore away such legendary traces of it as the neighbouring people carried in their minds, until they dwindled into old wives' tales, dimly remembered round the winter fire, and waning every year. Where the wild flowers and berries had so long remained upon the stem untouched, gardens arose, and houses were built, and children played at battles on the turf. The wounded trees had long ago made Christmas logs, and blazed and roared away. The deep green patches were no greener now than the memory of those who lay in dust below. The ploughshare still turned up from time to time some rusty bits of metal, but it was hard to say what use they had ever served, and those who found them wondered and disputed. An old dinted corselet, and a helmet, had been hanging in the church so long, that the same weak half-blind old man who tried in vain to make them out above the whitewashed arch, had marvelled at them as a baby. If the host slain upon the field, could have been for a moment reanimated in the forms in which they fell, each upon the spot that was the bed of his untimely death, gashed and ghastly soldiers would have stared in, hundreds deep, at household door and window; and would have risen on the hearths of quiet homes; and would have been the garnered store of barns and granaries; and would have started up between the cradled infant and its nurse; and would have floated with the stream, and whirled round on the mill, and crowded the orchard, and burdened the meadow, and piled the rickyard high with dying men. So altered was the battle-ground, where thousands upon thousands had been killed in the great fight.

Nowhere more altered, perhaps, about a hundred years ago, than in one little orchard attached to an old stone house with a honeysuckle porch; where, on a bright autumn morning, there were sounds of music and laughter, and where two girls danced merrily together on the grass, while some half-dozen peasant women standing on ladders, gathering the apples from the trees, stopped in their work to look down, and share their enjoyment. It was a pleasant, lively, natural scene; a beautiful day, a retired spot; and the two girls, quite unconstrained and careless, danced in the freedom and gaiety of their hearts.

If there were no such thing as display in the world, my private opinion is, and I hope you agree with me, that we might get on a great deal better than we do, and might be infinitely more agreeable company than we are. It was charming to see how these girls danced. They had no spectators but the apple-pickers on the ladders. They were very glad to please them, but they danced to please themselves (or at least you would have supposed so); and you could no more help admiring, than they could help dancing. How they did dance!

Not like opera-dancers. Not at all. And not like Madame Anybody's finished pupils. Not the least. It was not quadrille dancing, nor minuet dancing, nor even country-dance dancing. It was neither in the old style, nor the new style, nor the French style, nor the English style: though it may have been, by accident, a trifle in the Spanish style, which is a free and joyous one, I am told, deriving a delightful air of off-hand inspiration, from the chirping little castanets. As they danced among the orchard trees, and down the groves of stems and back again, and twirled each other lightly round and round, the influence of their airy motion seemed to spread and spread, in the sun-lighted scene, like an expanding circle in the water. Their streaming hair and fluttering skirts, the elastic grass beneath their feet, the boughs that rustled in the morning air - the flashing leaves, the speckled shadows on the soft green ground - the balmy wind that swept along the landscape, glad to turn the distant windmill, cheerily - everything between the two girls, and the man and team at plough upon the ridge of land, where they showed against the sky as if they were the last things in the world - seemed dancing too.

At last, the younger of the dancing sisters, out of breath, and laughing gaily, threw herself upon a bench to rest. The other leaned against a tree hard by. The music, a wandering harp and fiddle, left off with a flourish, as if it boasted of its freshness; though the truth is, it had gone at such a pace, and worked itself to such a pitch of competition with the dancing, that it never could have held on, half a minute longer. The apple- pickers on the ladders raised a hum and murmur of applause, and then, in keeping with the sound, bestirred themselves to work again like bees.

The more actively, perhaps, because an elderly gentleman, who was no other than Doctor Jeddler himself - it was Doctor Jeddler's house and orchard, you should know, and these were Doctor Jeddler's daughters - came bustling out to see what was the matter, and who the deuce played music on his property, before breakfast. For he was a great philosopher, Doctor Jeddler, and not very musical.

'Music and dancing TO-DAY!' said the Doctor, stopping short, and speaking to himself. 'I thought they dreaded to-day. But it's a world of contradictions. Why, Grace, why, Marion!' he added, aloud, 'is the world more mad than usual this morning?'

'Make some allowance for it, father, if it be,' replied his younger daughter, Marion, going close to him, and looking into his face, 'for it's somebody's birth-day.'

'Somebody's birth-day, Puss!' replied the Doctor. 'Don't you know it's always somebody's birth-day? Did you never hear how many new performers enter on this - ha! ha! ha! - it's impossible to speak gravely of it - on this preposterous and ridiculous business called Life, every minute?'

'No, father!'

'No, not you, of course; you're a woman - almost,' said the Doctor. 'By-the-by,' and he looked into the pretty face, still close to his, 'I suppose it's YOUR birth-day.'

'No! Do you really, father?' cried his pet daughter, pursing up her red lips to be kissed.

'There! Take my love with it,' said the Doctor, imprinting his upon them; 'and many happy returns of the - the idea! - of the day. The notion of wishing happy returns in such a farce as this,' said the Doctor to himself, 'is good! Ha! ha! ha!'

Doctor Jeddler was, as I have said, a great philosopher, and the heart and mystery of his philosophy was, to look upon the world as a gigantic practical joke; as something too absurd to be considered seriously, by any rational man. His system of belief had been, in the beginning, part and parcel of the battle-ground on which he lived, as you shall presently understand.

'Well! But how did you get the music?' asked the Doctor.
'Poultry-stealers, of course! Where did the minstrels come from?'

'Alfred sent the music,' said his daughter Grace, adjusting a few simple flowers in her sister's hair, with which, in her admiration of that youthful beauty, she had herself adorned it half-an-hour before, and which the dancing had disarranged.

'Oh! Alfred sent the music, did he?' returned the Doctor.

'Yes. He met it coming out of the town as he was entering early. The men are travelling on foot, and rested there last night; and as it was Marion's birth-day, and he thought it would please her, he sent them on, with a pencilled note to me, saying that if I thought so too, they had come to serenade her.'

'Ay, ay,' said the Doctor, carelessly, 'he always takes your opinion.'

'And my opinion being favourable,' said Grace, good-humouredly; and pausing for a moment to admire the pretty head she decorated, with her own thrown back; 'and Marion being in high spirits, and beginning to dance, I joined her. And so we danced to Alfred's music till we were out of breath. And we thought the music all the gayer for being sent by Alfred. Didn't we, dear Marion?'

'Oh, I don't know, Grace. How you tease me about Alfred.'

'Tease you by mentioning your lover?' said her sister.

'I am sure I don't much care to have him mentioned,' said the wilful beauty, stripping the petals from some flowers she held, and scattering them on the ground. 'I am almost tired of hearing of him; and as to his being my lover - '

'Hush! Don't speak lightly of a true heart, which is all your own, Marion,' cried her sister, 'even in jest. There is not a truer heart than Alfred's in the world!'

'No-no,' said Marion, raising her eyebrows with a pleasant air of careless consideration, 'perhaps not. But I don't know that there's any great merit in that. I - I don't want him to be so very true. I never asked him. If he expects that I - But, dear Grace, why need we talk of him at all, just now!'

It was agreeable to see the graceful figures of the blooming sisters, twined together, lingering among the trees, conversing thus, with earnestness opposed to lightness, yet, with love responding tenderly to love. And it was very curious indeed to see the younger sister's eyes suffused with tears, and something fervently and deeply felt, breaking through the wilfulness of what she said, and striving with it painfully.

The difference between them, in respect of age, could not exceed four years at most; but Grace, as often happens in such cases, when no mother watches over both (the Doctor's wife was dead), seemed, in her gentle care of her young sister, and in the steadiness of her devotion to her, older than she was; and more removed, in course of nature, from all competition with her, or participation, otherwise than through her sympathy and true affection, in her wayward fancies, than their ages seemed to warrant. Great character of mother, that, even in this shadow and faint reflection of it, purifies the heart, and raises the exalted nature nearer to the angels!

The Doctor's reflections, as he looked after them, and heard the purport of their discourse, were limited at first to certain merry meditations on the folly of all loves and likings, and the idle imposition practised on themselves by young people, who believed for a moment, that there could be anything serious in such bubbles, and were always undeceived - always!

But, the home-adorning, self-denying qualities of Grace, and her sweet temper, so gentle and retiring, yet including so much constancy and bravery of spirit, seemed all expressed to him in the contrast between her quiet household figure and that of his younger and more beautiful child; and he was sorry for her sake - sorry for them both - that life should be such a very ridiculous business as it was.

The Doctor never dreamed of inquiring whether his children, or either of them, helped in any way to make the scheme a serious one. But then he was a Philosopher.

A kind and generous man by nature, he had stumbled, by chance, over that common Philosopher's stone (much more easily discovered than the object of the alchemist's researches), which sometimes trips up kind and generous men, and has the fatal property of turning gold to dross and every precious thing to poor account.

'Britain!' cried the Doctor. 'Britain! Holloa!'

A small man, with an uncommonly sour and discontented face, emerged from the house, and returned to this call the unceremonious acknowledgment of 'Now then!'

'Where's the breakfast table?' said the Doctor.

'In the house,' returned Britain.

'Are you going to spread it out here, as you were told last night?' said the Doctor. 'Don't you know that there are gentlemen coming? That there's business to be done this morning, before the coach comes by? That this is a very particular occasion?'

'I couldn't do anything, Dr. Jeddler, till the women had done getting in the apples, could I?' said Britain, his voice rising with his reasoning, so that it was very loud at last.

'Well, have they done now?' replied the Doctor, looking at his watch, and clapping his hands. 'Come! make haste! where's Clemency?'

'Here am I, Mister,' said a voice from one of the ladders, which a pair of clumsy feet descended briskly. 'It's all done now. Clear away, gals. Everything shall be ready for you in half a minute, Mister.'

With that she began to bustle about most vigorously; presenting, as she did so, an appearance sufficiently peculiar to justify a word of introduction.

She was about thirty years old, and had a sufficiently plump and cheerful face, though it was twisted up into an odd expression of tightness that made it comical. But, the extraordinary homeliness of her gait and manner, would have superseded any face in the world. To say that she had two left legs, and somebody else's arms, and that all four limbs seemed to be out of joint, and to start from perfectly wrong places when they were set in motion, is to offer the mildest outline of the reality. To say that she was perfectly content and satisfied with these arrangements, and regarded them as being no business of hers, and that she took her arms and legs as they came, and allowed them to dispose of themselves just as it happened, is to render faint justice to her equanimity. Her dress was a prodigious pair of self-willed shoes, that never wanted to go where her feet went; blue stockings; a printed gown of many colours, and the most hideous pattern procurable for money; and a white apron. She always wore short sleeves, and always had, by some accident, grazed elbows, in which she took so lively an interest, that she was continually trying to turn them round and get impossible views of them. In general, a little cap placed somewhere on her head; though it was rarely to be met with in the place usually occupied in other subjects, by that article of dress; but, from head to foot she was scrupulously clean, and maintained a kind of dislocated tidiness. Indeed, her laudable anxiety to be tidy and compact in her own conscience as well as in the public eye, gave rise to one of her most startling evolutions, which was to grasp herself sometimes by a sort of wooden handle (part of her clothing, and familiarly called a busk), and wrestle as it were with her garments, until they fell into a symmetrical arrangement.

Such, in outward form and garb, was Clemency Newcome; who was supposed to have unconsciously originated a corruption of her own Christian name, from Clementina (but nobody knew, for the deaf old mother, a very phenomenon of age, whom she had supported almost from a child, was dead, and she had no other relation); who now busied herself in preparing the table, and who stood, at intervals, with her bare red arms crossed, rubbing her grazed elbows with opposite hands, and staring at it very composedly, until she suddenly remembered something else she wanted, and jogged off to fetch it.

'Here are them two lawyers a-coming, Mister!' said Clemency, in a tone of no very great good-will.

'Ah!' cried the Doctor, advancing to the gate to meet them. 'Good morning, good morning! Grace, my dear! Marion! Here are Messrs. Snitchey and Craggs. Where's Alfred!'

'He'll be back directly, father, no doubt,' said Grace. 'He had so much to do this morning in his preparations for departure, that he was up and out by daybreak. Good morning, gentlemen.'

'Ladies!' said Mr. Snitchey, 'for Self and Craggs,' who bowed, 'good morning! Miss,' to Marion, 'I kiss your hand.' Which he did. 'And I wish you' - which he might or might not, for he didn't look, at first sight, like a gentleman troubled with many warm outpourings of soul, in behalf of other people, 'a hundred happy returns of this auspicious day.'

'Ha ha ha!' laughed the Doctor thoughtfully, with his hands in his pockets. 'The great farce in a hundred acts!'

'You wouldn't, I am sure,' said Mr. Snitchey, standing a small professional blue bag against one leg of the table, 'cut the great farce short for this actress, at all events, Doctor Jeddler.'

'No,' returned the Doctor. 'God forbid! May she live to laugh at it, as long as she CAN laugh, and then say, with the French wit, "The farce is ended; draw the curtain."'

'The French wit,' said Mr. Snitchey, peeping sharply into his blue bag, 'was wrong, Doctor Jeddler, and your philosophy is altogether wrong, depend upon it, as I have often told you. Nothing serious in life! What do you call law?'

'A joke,' replied the Doctor.

'Did you ever go to law?' asked Mr. Snitchey, looking out of the blue bag.

'Never,' returned the Doctor.

'If you ever do,' said Mr. Snitchey, 'perhaps you'll alter that opinion.'

Craggs, who seemed to be represented by Snitchey, and to be conscious of little or no separate existence or personal individuality, offered a remark of his own in this place. It involved the only idea of which he did not stand seized and possessed in equal moieties with Snitchey; but, he had some partners in it among the wise men of the world.

'It's made a great deal too easy,' said Mr. Craggs.

'Law is?' asked the Doctor.

'Yes,' said Mr. Craggs, 'everything is. Everything appears to me to be made too easy, now-a-days. It's the vice of these times. If the world is a joke (I am not prepared to say it isn't), it ought to be made a very difficult joke to crack. It ought to be as hard a struggle, sir, as possible. That's the intention. But, it's being made far too easy. We are oiling the gates of life. They ought to be rusty. We shall have them beginning to turn, soon, with a smooth sound. Whereas they ought to grate upon their hinges, sir.'

Mr. Craggs seemed positively to grate upon his own hinges, as he delivered this opinion; to which he communicated immense effect - being a cold, hard, dry, man, dressed in grey and white, like a flint; with small twinkles in his eyes, as if something struck sparks out of them. The three natural kingdoms, indeed, had each a fanciful representative among this brotherhood of disputants; for Snitchey was like a magpie or raven (only not so sleek), and the Doctor had a streaked face like a winter-pippin, with here and there a dimple to express the peckings of the birds, and a very little bit of pigtail behind that stood for the stalk.

As the active figure of a handsome young man, dressed for a journey, and followed by a porter bearing several packages and baskets, entered the orchard at a brisk pace, and with an air of gaiety and hope that accorded well with the morning, these three drew together, like the brothers of the sister Fates, or like the Graces most effectually disguised, or like the three weird prophets on the heath, and greeted him.

'Happy returns, Alf!' said the Doctor, lightly.

'A hundred happy returns of this auspicious day, Mr. Heathfield!' said Snitchey, bowing low.

'Returns!' Craggs murmured in a deep voice, all alone.

'Why, what a battery!' exclaimed Alfred, stopping short, 'and one - two - three - all foreboders of no good, in the great sea before me. I am glad you are not the first I have met this morning: I should have taken it for a bad omen. But, Grace was the first - sweet, pleasant Grace - so I defy you all!'

'If you please, Mister, I was the first you know,' said Clemency Newcome. 'She was walking out here, before sunrise, you remember. I was in the house.'

'That's true! Clemency was the first,' said Alfred. 'So I defy you with Clemency.'

'Ha, ha, ha, - for Self and Craggs,' said Snitchey. 'What a defiance!'

'Not so bad a one as it appears, may be,' said Alfred, shaking hands heartily with the Doctor, and also with Snitchey and Craggs, and then looking round. 'Where are the - Good Heavens!'

With a start, productive for the moment of a closer partnership between Jonathan Snitchey and Thomas Craggs than the subsisting articles of agreement in that wise contemplated, he hastily betook himself to where the sisters stood together, and - however, I needn't more particularly explain his manner of saluting Marion first, and Grace afterwards, than by hinting that Mr. Craggs may possibly have considered it 'too easy.'

Perhaps to change the subject, Dr. Jeddler made a hasty move towards the breakfast, and they all sat down at table. Grace presided; but so discreetly stationed herself, as to cut off her sister and Alfred from the rest of the company. Snitchey and Craggs sat at opposite corners, with the blue bag between them for safety; the Doctor took his usual position, opposite to Grace. Clemency hovered galvanically about the table, as waitress; and the melancholy Britain, at another and a smaller board, acted as Grand Carver of a round of beef and a ham.

'Meat?' said Britain, approaching Mr. Snitchey, with the carving knife and fork in his hands, and throwing the question at him like a missile.

'Certainly,' returned the lawyer.

'Do YOU want any?' to Craggs.

'Lean and well done,' replied that gentleman.

Having executed these orders, and moderately supplied the Doctor (he seemed to know that nobody else wanted anything to eat), he lingered as near the Firm as he decently could, watching with an austere eye their disposition of the viands, and but once relaxing the severe expression of his face. This was on the occasion of Mr. Craggs, whose teeth were not of the best, partially choking, when he cried out with great animation, 'I thought he was gone!'

'Now, Alfred,' said the Doctor, 'for a word or two of business, while we are yet at breakfast.'

'While we are yet at breakfast,' said Snitchey and Craggs, who seemed to have no present idea of leaving off.

Although Alfred had not been breakfasting, and seemed to have quite enough business on his hands as it was, he respectfully answered:

'If you please, sir.'

'If anything could be serious,' the Doctor began, 'in such a - '

'Farce as this, sir,' hinted Alfred.

'In such a farce as this,' observed the Doctor, 'it might be this recurrence, on the eve of separation, of a double birthday, which is connected with many associations pleasant to us four, and with the recollection of a long and amicable intercourse. That's not to the purpose.'

'Ah! yes, yes, Dr. Jeddler,' said the young man. 'It is to the purpose. Much to the purpose, as my heart bears witness this morning; and as yours does too, I know, if you would let it speak. I leave your house to-day; I cease to be your ward to-day; we part with tender relations stretching far behind us, that never can be exactly renewed, and with others dawning - yet before us,' he looked down at Marion beside him, 'fraught with such considerations as I must not trust myself to speak of now. Come, come!' he added, rallying his spirits and the Doctor at once, 'there's a serious grain in this large foolish dust-heap, Doctor. Let us allow to- day, that there is One.'

'To-day!' cried the Doctor. 'Hear him! Ha, ha, ha! Of all days in the foolish year. Why, on this day, the great battle was fought on this ground. On this ground where we now sit, where I saw my two girls dance this morning, where the fruit has just been gathered for our eating from these trees, the roots of which are struck in Men, not earth, - so many lives were lost, that within my recollection, generations afterwards, a churchyard full of bones, and dust of bones, and chips of cloven skulls, has been dug up from underneath our feet here. Yet not a hundred people in that battle knew for what they fought, or why; not a hundred of the inconsiderate rejoicers in the victory, why they rejoiced. Not half a hundred people were the better for the gain or loss. Not half-a-dozen men agree to this hour on the cause or merits; and nobody, in short, ever knew anything distinct about it, but the mourners of the slain. Serious, too!' said the Doctor, laughing. 'Such a system!'

'But, all this seems to me,' said Alfred, 'to be very serious.'

'Serious!' cried the Doctor. 'If you allowed such things to be serious, you must go mad, or die, or climb up to the top of a mountain, and turn hermit.'

'Besides - so long ago,' said Alfred.

'Long ago!' returned the Doctor. 'Do you know what the world has been doing, ever since? Do you know what else it has been doing? I don't!'

'It has gone to law a little,' observed Mr. Snitchey, stirring his tea.

'Although the way out has been always made too easy,' said his partner.

'And you'll excuse my saying, Doctor,' pursued Mr. Snitchey, 'having been already put a thousand times in possession of my opinion, in the course of our discussions, that, in its having gone to law, and in its legal system altogether, I do observe a serious side - now, really, a something tangible, and with a purpose and intention in it - '

Clemency Newcome made an angular tumble against the table, occasioning a sounding clatter among the cups and saucers.

'Heyday! what's the matter there?' exclaimed the Doctor.

'It's this evil-inclined blue bag,' said Clemency, 'always tripping up somebody!'

'With a purpose and intention in it, I was saying,' resumed Snitchey, 'that commands respect. Life a farce, Dr. Jeddler? With law in it?'

The Doctor laughed, and looked at Alfred.

'Granted, if you please, that war is foolish,' said Snitchey. 'There we agree. For example. Here's a smiling country,' pointing it out with his fork, 'once overrun by soldiers - trespassers every man of 'em - and laid waste by fire and sword. He, he, he! The idea of any man exposing himself, voluntarily, to fire and sword! Stupid, wasteful, positively ridiculous; you laugh at your fellow- creatures, you know, when you think of it! But take this smiling country as it stands. Think of the laws appertaining to real property; to the bequest and devise of real property; to the mortgage and redemption of real property; to leasehold, freehold, and copyhold estate; think,' said Mr. Snitchey, with such great emotion that he actually smacked his lips, 'of the complicated laws relating to title and proof of title, with all the contradictory precedents and numerous acts of parliament connected with them; think of the infinite number of ingenious and interminable chancery suits, to which this pleasant prospect may give rise; and acknowledge, Dr. Jeddler, that there is a green spot in the scheme about us! I believe,' said Mr. Snitchey, looking at his partner, 'that I speak for Self and Craggs?'

Mr. Craggs having signified assent, Mr. Snitchey, somewhat freshened by his recent eloquence, observed that he would take a little more beef and another cup of tea.

'I don't stand up for life in general,' he added, rubbing his hands and chuckling, 'it's full of folly; full of something worse. Professions of trust, and confidence, and unselfishness, and all that! Bah, bah, bah! We see what they're worth. But, you mustn't laugh at life; you've got a game to play; a very serious game indeed! Everybody's playing against you, you know, and you're playing against them. Oh! it's a very interesting thing. There are deep moves upon the board. You must only laugh, Dr. Jeddler, when you win - and then not much. He, he, he! And then not much,' repeated Snitchey, rolling his head and winking his eye, as if he would have added, 'you may do this instead!'

'Well, Alfred!' cried the Doctor, 'what do you say now?'

'I say, sir,' replied Alfred, 'that the greatest favour you could do me, and yourself too, I am inclined to think, would be to try sometimes to forget this battle-field and others like it in that broader battle-field of Life, on which the sun looks every day.'

'Really, I'm afraid that wouldn't soften his opinions, Mr. Alfred,' said Snitchey. 'The combatants are very eager and very bitter in that same battle of Life. There's a great deal of cutting and slashing, and firing into people's heads from behind. There is terrible treading down, and trampling on. It is rather a bad business.'

'I believe, Mr. Snitchey,' said Alfred, 'there are quiet victories and struggles, great sacrifices of self, and noble acts of heroism, in it - even in many of its apparent lightnesses and contradictions - not the less difficult to achieve, because they have no earthly chronicle or audience - done every day in nooks and corners, and in little households, and in men's and women's hearts - any one of which might reconcile the sternest man to such a world, and fill him with belief and hope in it, though two-fourths of its people were at war, and another fourth at law; and that's a bold word.'

Both the sisters listened keenly.

'Well, well!' said the Doctor, 'I am too old to be converted, even by my friend Snitchey here, or my good spinster sister, Martha Jeddler; who had what she calls her domestic trials ages ago, and has led a sympathising life with all sorts of people ever since; and who is so much of your opinion (only she's less reasonable and more obstinate, being a woman), that we can't agree, and seldom meet. I was born upon this battle-field. I began, as a boy, to have my thoughts directed to the real history of a battle-field. Sixty years have gone over my head, and I have never seen the Christian world, including Heaven knows how many loving mothers and good enough girls like mine here, anything but mad for a battle- field. The same contradictions prevail in everything. One must either laugh or cry at such stupendous inconsistencies; and I prefer to laugh.'

Britain, who had been paying the profoundest and most melancholy attention to each speaker in his turn, seemed suddenly to decide in favour of the same preference, if a deep sepulchral sound that escaped him might be construed into a demonstration of risibility. His face, however, was so perfectly unaffected by it, both before and afterwards, that although one or two of the breakfast party looked round as being startled by a mysterious noise, nobody connected the offender with it.

Except his partner in attendance, Clemency Newcome; who rousing him with one of those favourite joints, her elbows, inquired, in a reproachful whisper, what he laughed at.

'Not you!' said Britain.

'Who then?'

'Humanity,' said Britain. 'That's the joke!'

'What between master and them lawyers, he's getting more and more addle-headed every day!' cried Clemency, giving him a lunge with the other elbow, as a mental stimulant. 'Do you know where you are? Do you want to get warning?'

'I don't know anything,' said Britain, with a leaden eye and an immovable visage. 'I don't care for anything. I don't make out anything. I don't believe anything. And I don't want anything.'

Although this forlorn summary of his general condition may have been overcharged in an access of despondency, Benjamin Britain - sometimes called Little Britain, to distinguish him from Great; as we might say Young England, to express Old England with a decided difference - had defined his real state more accurately than might be supposed. For, serving as a sort of man Miles to the Doctor's Friar Bacon, and listening day after day to innumerable orations addressed by the Doctor to various people, all tending to show that his very existence was at best a mistake and an absurdity, this unfortunate servitor had fallen, by degrees, into such an abyss of confused and contradictory suggestions from within and without, that Truth at the bottom of her well, was on the level surface as compared with Britain in the depths of his mystification. The only point he clearly comprehended, was, that the new element usually brought into these discussions by Snitchey and Craggs, never served to make them clearer, and always seemed to give the Doctor a species of advantage and confirmation. Therefore, he looked upon the Firm as one of the proximate causes of his state of mind, and held them in abhorrence accordingly.

'But, this is not our business, Alfred,' said the Doctor. 'Ceasing to be my ward (as you have said) to-day; and leaving us full to the brim of such learning as the Grammar School down here was able to give you, and your studies in London could add to that, and such practical knowledge as a dull old country Doctor like myself could graft upon both; you are away, now, into the world. The first term of probation appointed by your poor father, being over, away you go now, your own master, to fulfil his second desire. And long before your three years' tour among the foreign schools of medicine is finished, you'll have forgotten us. Lord, you'll forget us easily in six months!'

'If I do - But you know better; why should I speak to you!' said Alfred, laughing.

'I don't know anything of the sort,' returned the Doctor. 'What do you say, Marion?'

Marion, trifling with her teacup, seemed to say - but she didn't say it - that he was welcome to forget, if he could. Grace pressed the blooming face against her cheek, and smiled.

'I haven't been, I hope, a very unjust steward in the execution of my trust,' pursued the Doctor; 'but I am to be, at any rate, formally discharged, and released, and what not this morning; and here are our good friends Snitchey and Craggs, with a bagful of papers, and accounts, and documents, for the transfer of the balance of the trust fund to you (I wish it was a more difficult one to dispose of, Alfred, but you must get to be a great man and make it so), and other drolleries of that sort, which are to be signed, sealed, and delivered.'

'And duly witnessed as by law required,' said Snitchey, pushing away his plate, and taking out the papers, which his partner proceeded to spread upon the table; 'and Self and Crags having been co-trustees with you, Doctor, in so far as the fund was concerned, we shall want your two servants to attest the signatures - can you read, Mrs. Newcome?'

'I an't married, Mister,' said Clemency.

'Oh! I beg your pardon. I should think not,' chuckled Snitchey, casting his eyes over her extraordinary figure. 'You CAN read?'

'A little,' answered Clemency.

'The marriage service, night and morning, eh?' observed the lawyer, jocosely.

'No,' said Clemency. 'Too hard. I only reads a thimble.'

'Read a thimble!' echoed Snitchey. 'What are you talking about, young woman?'

Clemency nodded. 'And a nutmeg-grater.'

'Why, this is a lunatic! a subject for the Lord High Chancellor!' said Snitchey, staring at her.

- 'If possessed of any property,' stipulated Craggs.

Grace, however, interposing, explained that each of the articles in question bore an engraved motto, and so formed the pocket library of Clemency Newcome, who was not much given to the study of books.

'Oh, that's it, is it, Miss Grace!' said Snitchey.

'Yes, yes. Ha, ha, ha! I thought our friend was an idiot. She looks uncommonly like it,' he muttered, with a supercilious glance. 'And what does the thimble say, Mrs. Newcome?'

'I an't married, Mister,' observed Clemency.

'Well, Newcome. Will that do?' said the lawyer. 'What does the thimble say, Newcome?'

How Clemency, before replying to this question, held one pocket open, and looked down into its yawning depths for the thimble which wasn't there, - and how she then held an opposite pocket open, and seeming to descry it, like a pearl of great price, at the bottom, cleared away such intervening obstacles as a handkerchief, an end of wax candle, a flushed apple, an orange, a lucky penny, a cramp bone, a padlock, a pair of scissors in a sheath more expressively describable as promising young shears, a handful or so of loose beads, several balls of cotton, a needle-case, a cabinet collection of curl-papers, and a biscuit, all of which articles she entrusted individually and separately to Britain to hold, - is of no consequence.

Nor how, in her determination to grasp this pocket by the throat and keep it prisoner (for it had a tendency to swing, and twist itself round the nearest corner), she assumed and calmly maintained, an attitude apparently inconsistent with the human anatomy and the laws of gravity. It is enough that at last she triumphantly produced the thimble on her finger, and rattled the nutmeg-grater: the literature of both those trinkets being obviously in course of wearing out and wasting away, through excessive friction.

'That's the thimble, is it, young woman?' said Mr. Snitchey, diverting himself at her expense. 'And what does the thimble say?'

'It says,' replied Clemency, reading slowly round as if it were a tower, 'For-get and For-give.'

Snitchey and Craggs laughed heartily. 'So new!' said Snitchey. 'So easy!' said Craggs. 'Such a knowledge of human nature in it!' said Snitchey. 'So applicable to the affairs of life!' said Craggs.

'And the nutmeg-grater?' inquired the head of the Firm.

'The grater says,' returned Clemency, 'Do as you - wold - be - done by.'

'Do, or you'll be done brown, you mean,' said Mr. Snitchey.

'I don't understand,' retorted Clemency, shaking her head vaguely. 'I an't no lawyer.'

'I am afraid that if she was, Doctor,' said Mr. Snitchey, turning to him suddenly, as if to anticipate any effect that might otherwise be consequent on this retort, 'she'd find it to be the golden rule of half her clients. They are serious enough in that - whimsical as your world is - and lay the blame on us afterwards. We, in our profession, are little else than mirrors after all, Mr. Alfred; but, we are generally consulted by angry and quarrelsome people who are not in their best looks, and it's rather hard to quarrel with us if we reflect unpleasant aspects. I think,' said Mr. Snitchey, 'that I speak for Self and Craggs?'

'Decidedly,' said Craggs.

'And so, if Mr. Britain will oblige us with a mouthful of ink,' said Mr. Snitchey, returning to the papers, 'we'll sign, seal, and deliver as soon as possible, or the coach will be coming past before we know where we are.'

If one might judge from his appearance, there was every probability of the coach coming past before Mr. Britain knew where HE was; for he stood in a state of abstraction, mentally balancing the Doctor against the lawyers, and the lawyers against the Doctor, and their clients against both, and engaged in feeble attempts to make the thimble and nutmeg-grater (a new idea to him) square with anybody's system of philosophy; and, in short, bewildering himself as much as ever his great namesake has done with theories and schools. But, Clemency, who was his good Genius - though he had the meanest possible opinion of her understanding, by reason of her seldom troubling herself with abstract speculations, and being always at hand to do the right thing at the right time - having produced the ink in a twinkling, tendered him the further service of recalling him to himself by the application of her elbows; with which gentle flappers she so jogged his memory, in a more literal construction of that phrase than usual, that he soon became quite fresh and brisk.

How he laboured under an apprehension not uncommon to persons in his degree, to whom the use of pen and ink is an event, that he couldn't append his name to a document, not of his own writing, without committing himself in some shadowy manner, or somehow signing away vague and enormous sums of money; and how he approached the deeds under protest, and by dint of the Doctor's coercion, and insisted on pausing to look at them before writing (the cramped hand, to say nothing of the phraseology, being so much Chinese to him), and also on turning them round to see whether there was anything fraudulent underneath; and how, having signed his name, he became desolate as one who had parted with his property and rights; I want the time to tell. Also, how the blue bag containing his signature, afterwards had a mysterious interest for him, and he couldn't leave it; also, how Clemency Newcome, in an ecstasy of laughter at the idea of her own importance and dignity, brooded over the whole table with her two elbows, like a spread eagle, and reposed her head upon her left arm as a preliminary to the formation of certain cabalistic characters, which required a deal of ink, and imaginary counterparts whereof she executed at the same time with her tongue. Also, how, having once tasted ink, she became thirsty in that regard, as tame tigers are said to be after tasting another sort of fluid, and wanted to sign everything, and put her name in all kinds of places. In brief, the Doctor was discharged of his trust and all its responsibilities; and Alfred, taking it on himself, was fairly started on the journey of life.

'Britain!' said the Doctor. 'Run to the gate, and watch for the coach. Time flies, Alfred.'

'Yes, sir, yes,' returned the young man, hurriedly. 'Dear Grace! a moment! Marion - so young and beautiful, so winning and so much admired, dear to my heart as nothing else in life is - remember! I leave Marion to you!'

'She has always been a sacred charge to me, Alfred. She is doubly so, now. I will be faithful to my trust, believe me.'

'I do believe it, Grace. I know it well. Who could look upon your face, and hear your voice, and not know it! Ah, Grace! If I had your well-governed heart, and tranquil mind, how bravely I would leave this place to-day!'

'Would you?' she answered with a quiet smile.

'And yet, Grace - Sister, seems the natural word.'

'Use it!' she said quickly. 'I am glad to hear it. Call me nothing else.'

'And yet, sister, then,' said Alfred, 'Marion and I had better have your true and steadfast qualities serving us here, and making us both happier and better. I wouldn't carry them away, to sustain myself, if I could!'

'Coach upon the hill-top!' exclaimed Britain.

'Time flies, Alfred,' said the Doctor.

Marion had stood apart, with her eyes fixed upon the ground; but, this warning being given, her young lover brought her tenderly to where her sister stood, and gave her into her embrace.

'I have been telling Grace, dear Marion,' he said, 'that you are her charge; my precious trust at parting. And when I come back and reclaim you, dearest, and the bright prospect of our married life lies stretched before us, it shall be one of our chief pleasures to consult how we can make Grace happy; how we can anticipate her wishes; how we can show our gratitude and love to her; how we can return her something of the debt she will have heaped upon us.'

The younger sister had one hand in his; the other rested on her sister's neck. She looked into that sister's eyes, so calm, serene, and cheerful, with a gaze in which affection, admiration, sorrow, wonder, almost veneration, were blended. She looked into that sister's face, as if it were the face of some bright angel. Calm, serene, and cheerful, the face looked back on her and on her lover.

'And when the time comes, as it must one day,' said Alfred, - 'I wonder it has never come yet, but Grace knows best, for Grace is always right - when SHE will want a friend to open her whole heart to, and to be to her something of what she has been to us - then, Marion, how faithful we will prove, and what delight to us to know that she, our dear good sister, loves and is loved again, as we would have her!'

Still the younger sister looked into her eyes, and turned not - even towards him. And still those honest eyes looked back, so calm, serene, and cheerful, on herself and on her lover.

'And when all that is past, and we are old, and living (as we must!) together - close together - talking often of old times,' said Alfred - 'these shall be our favourite times among them - this day most of all; and, telling each other what we thought and felt, and hoped and feared at parting; and how we couldn't bear to say good bye - '

'Coach coming through the wood!' cried Britain.

'Yes! I am ready - and how we met again, so happily in spite of all; we'll make this day the happiest in all the year, and keep it as a treble birth-day. Shall we, dear?'

'Yes!' interposed the elder sister, eagerly, and with a radiant smile. 'Yes! Alfred, don't linger. There's no time. Say good bye to Marion. And Heaven be with you!'

He pressed the younger sister to his heart. Released from his embrace, she again clung to her sister; and her eyes, with the same blended look, again sought those so calm, serene, and cheerful.

'Farewell, my boy!' said the Doctor. 'To talk about any serious correspondence or serious affections, and engagements and so forth, in such a - ha ha ha! - you know what I mean - why that, of course, would be sheer nonsense. All I can say is, that if you and Marion should continue in the same foolish minds, I shall not object to have you for a son-in-law one of these days.'

'Over the bridge!' cried Britain.

'Let it come!' said Alfred, wringing the Doctor's hand stoutly. 'Think of me sometimes, my old friend and guardian, as seriously as you can! Adieu, Mr. Snitchey! Farewell, Mr. Craggs!'

'Coming down the road!' cried Britain.

'A kiss of Clemency Newcome for long acquaintance' sake! Shake hands, Britain! Marion, dearest heart, good bye! Sister Grace! remember!'

The quiet household figure, and the face so beautiful in its serenity, were turned towards him in reply; but Marion's look and attitude remained unchanged.

The coach was at the gate. There was a bustle with the luggage.
The coach drove away. Marion never moved.

'He waves his hat to you, my love,' said Grace. 'Your chosen husband, darling. Look!'

The younger sister raised her head, and, for a moment, turned it. Then, turning back again, and fully meeting, for the first time, those calm eyes, fell sobbing on her neck.

'Oh, Grace. God bless you! But I cannot bear to see it, Grace!
It breaks my heart.'

CHAPTER II - Part The Second

SNITCHEY AND CRAGGS had a snug little office on the old Battle Ground, where they drove a snug little business, and fought a great many small pitched battles for a great many contending parties. Though it could hardly be said of these conflicts that they were running fights - for in truth they generally proceeded at a snail's pace - the part the Firm had in them came so far within the general denomination, that now they took a shot at this Plaintiff, and now aimed a chop at that Defendant, now made a heavy charge at an estate in Chancery, and now had some light skirmishing among an irregular body of small debtors, just as the occasion served, and the enemy happened to present himself. The Gazette was an important and profitable feature in some of their fields, as in fields of greater renown; and in most of the Actions wherein they showed their generalship, it was afterwards observed by the combatants that they had had great difficulty in making each other out, or in knowing with any degree of distinctness what they were about, in consequence of the vast amount of smoke by which they were surrounded.

The offices of Messrs. Snitchey and Craggs stood convenient, with an open door down two smooth steps, in the market-place; so that any angry farmer inclining towards hot water, might tumble into it at once. Their special council-chamber and hall of conference was an old back-room up-stairs, with a low dark ceiling, which seemed to be knitting its brows gloomily in the consideration of tangled points of law. It was furnished with some high-backed leathern chairs, garnished with great goggle-eyed brass nails, of which, every here and there, two or three had fallen out - or had been picked out, perhaps, by the wandering thumbs and forefingers of bewildered clients. There was a framed print of a great judge in it, every curl in whose dreadful wig had made a man's hair stand on end. Bales of papers filled the dusty closets, shelves, and tables; and round the wainscot there were tiers of boxes, padlocked and fireproof, with people's names painted outside, which anxious visitors felt themselves, by a cruel enchantment, obliged to spell backwards and forwards, and to make anagrams of, while they sat, seeming to listen to Snitchey and Craggs, without comprehending one word of what they said.

Snitchey and Craggs had each, in private life as in professional existence, a partner of his own. Snitchey and Craggs were the best friends in the world, and had a real confidence in one another; but Mrs. Snitchey, by a dispensation not uncommon in the affairs of life, was on principle suspicious of Mr. Craggs; and Mrs. Craggs was on principle suspicious of Mr. Snitchey. 'Your Snitcheys indeed,' the latter lady would observe, sometimes, to Mr. Craggs; using that imaginative plural as if in disparagement of an objectionable pair of pantaloons, or other articles not possessed of a singular number; 'I don't see what you want with your Snitcheys, for my part. You trust a great deal too much to your Snitcheys, I think, and I hope you may never find my words come true.' While Mrs. Snitchey would observe to Mr. Snitchey, of Craggs, 'that if ever he was led away by man he was led away by that man, and that if ever she read a double purpose in a mortal eye, she read that purpose in Craggs's eye.' Notwithstanding this, however, they were all very good friends in general: and Mrs. Snitchey and Mrs. Craggs maintained a close bond of alliance against 'the office,' which they both considered the Blue chamber, and common enemy, full of dangerous (because unknown) machinations.

In this office, nevertheless, Snitchey and Craggs made honey for their several hives. Here, sometimes, they would linger, of a fine evening, at the window of their council-chamber overlooking the old battle-ground, and wonder (but that was generally at assize time, when much business had made them sentimental) at the folly of mankind, who couldn't always be at peace with one another and go to law comfortably. Here, days, and weeks, and months, and years, passed over them: their calendar, the gradually diminishing number of brass nails in the leathern chairs, and the increasing bulk of papers on the tables. Here, nearly three years' flight had thinned the one and swelled the other, since the breakfast in the orchard; when they sat together in consultation at night.

Not alone; but, with a man of about thirty, or that time of life, negligently dressed, and somewhat haggard in the face, but well- made, well-attired, and well-looking, who sat in the armchair of state, with one hand in his breast, and the other in his dishevelled hair, pondering moodily. Messrs. Snitchey and Craggs sat opposite each other at a neighbouring desk. One of the fireproof boxes, unpadlocked and opened, was upon it; a part of its contents lay strewn upon the table, and the rest was then in course of passing through the hands of Mr. Snitchey; who brought it to the candle, document by document; looked at every paper singly, as he produced it; shook his head, and handed it to Mr. Craggs; who looked it over also, shook his head, and laid it down. Sometimes, they would stop, and shaking their heads in concert, look towards the abstracted client. And the name on the box being Michael Warden, Esquire, we may conclude from these premises that the name and the box were both his, and that the affairs of Michael Warden, Esquire, were in a bad way.

'That's all,' said Mr. Snitchey, turning up the last paper.
'Really there's no other resource. No other resource.'

'All lost, spent, wasted, pawned, borrowed, and sold, eh?' said the client, looking up.

'All,' returned Mr. Snitchey.

'Nothing else to be done, you say?'

'Nothing at all.'

The client bit his nails, and pondered again.

'And I am not even personally safe in England? You hold to that, do you?'

'In no part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland,' replied Mr. Snitchey.

'A mere prodigal son with no father to go back to, no swine to keep, and no husks to share with them? Eh?' pursued the client, rocking one leg over the other, and searching the ground with his eyes.

Mr. Snitchey coughed, as if to deprecate the being supposed to participate in any figurative illustration of a legal position. Mr. Craggs, as if to express that it was a partnership view of the subject, also coughed.

'Ruined at thirty!' said the client. 'Humph!'

'Not ruined, Mr. Warden,' returned Snitchey. 'Not so bad as that. You have done a good deal towards it, I must say, but you are not ruined. A little nursing - '

'A little Devil,' said the client.

'Mr. Craggs,' said Snitchey, 'will you oblige me with a pinch of snuff? Thank you, sir.'

As the imperturbable lawyer applied it to his nose with great apparent relish and a perfect absorption of his attention in the proceeding, the client gradually broke into a smile, and, looking up, said:

'You talk of nursing. How long nursing?'

'How long nursing?' repeated Snitchey, dusting the snuff from his fingers, and making a slow calculation in his mind. 'For your involved estate, sir? In good hands? S. and C.'s, say? Six or seven years.'

'To starve for six or seven years!' said the client with a fretful laugh, and an impatient change of his position.

'To starve for six or seven years, Mr. Warden,' said Snitchey, 'would be very uncommon indeed. You might get another estate by showing yourself, the while. But, we don't think you could do it - speaking for Self and Craggs - and consequently don't advise it.'

'What DO you advise?'

'Nursing, I say,' repeated Snitchey. 'Some few years of nursing by Self and Craggs would bring it round. But to enable us to make terms, and hold terms, and you to keep terms, you must go away; you must live abroad. As to starvation, we could ensure you some hundreds a-year to starve upon, even in the beginning - I dare say, Mr. Warden.'

'Hundreds,' said the client. 'And I have spent thousands!'

'That,' retorted Mr. Snitchey, putting the papers slowly back into the cast-iron box, 'there is no doubt about. No doubt about,' he repeated to himself, as he thoughtfully pursued his occupation.

The lawyer very likely knew HIS man; at any rate his dry, shrewd, whimsical manner, had a favourable influence on the client's moody state, and disposed him to be more free and unreserved. Or, perhaps the client knew HIS man, and had elicited such encouragement as he had received, to render some purpose he was about to disclose the more defensible in appearance. Gradually raising his head, he sat looking at his immovable adviser with a smile, which presently broke into a laugh.

'After all,' he said, 'my iron-headed friend - '

Mr. Snitchey pointed out his partner. 'Self and - excuse me - Craggs.'

'I beg Mr. Craggs's pardon,' said the client. 'After all, my iron- headed friends,' he leaned forward in his chair, and dropped his voice a little, 'you don't know half my ruin yet.'

Mr. Snitchey stopped and stared at him. Mr. Craggs also stared.

'I am not only deep in debt,' said the client, 'but I am deep in - '

'Not in love!' cried Snitchey.

'Yes!' said the client, falling back in his chair, and surveying the Firm with his hands in his pockets. 'Deep in love.'

'And not with an heiress, sir?' said Snitchey.

'Not with an heiress.'

'Nor a rich lady?'

'Nor a rich lady that I know of - except in beauty and merit.'

'A single lady, I trust?' said Mr. Snitchey, with great expression.

'Certainly.'

'It's not one of Dr. Jeddler's daughters?' said Snitchey, suddenly squaring his elbows on his knees, and advancing his face at least a yard.

'Yes!' returned the client.

'Not his younger daughter?' said Snitchey.

'Yes!' returned the client.

'Mr. Craggs,' said Snitchey, much relieved, 'will you oblige me with another pinch of snuff? Thank you! I am happy to say it don't signify, Mr. Warden; she's engaged, sir, she's bespoke. My partner can corroborate me. We know the fact.'

'We know the fact,' repeated Craggs.

'Why, so do I perhaps,' returned the client quietly. 'What of that! Are you men of the world, and did you never hear of a woman changing her mind?'

'There certainly have been actions for breach,' said Mr. Snitchey, 'brought against both spinsters and widows, but, in the majority of cases - '

'Cases!' interposed the client, impatiently. 'Don't talk to me of cases. The general precedent is in a much larger volume than any of your law books. Besides, do you think I have lived six weeks in the Doctor's house for nothing?'

'I think, sir,' observed Mr. Snitchey, gravely addressing himself to his partner, 'that of all the scrapes Mr. Warden's horses have brought him into at one time and another - and they have been pretty numerous, and pretty expensive, as none know better than himself, and you, and I - the worst scrape may turn out to be, if he talks in this way, this having ever been left by one of them at the Doctor's garden wall, with three broken ribs, a snapped collar- bone, and the Lord knows how many bruises. We didn't think so much of it, at the time when we knew he was going on well under the Doctor's hands and roof; but it looks bad now, sir. Bad? It looks very bad. Doctor Jeddler too - our client, Mr. Craggs.'

'Mr. Alfred Heathfield too - a sort of client, Mr. Snitchey,' said Craggs.

'Mr. Michael Warden too, a kind of client,' said the careless visitor, 'and no bad one either: having played the fool for ten or twelve years. However, Mr. Michael Warden has sown his wild oats now - there's their crop, in that box; and he means to repent and be wise. And in proof of it, Mr. Michael Warden means, if he can, to marry Marion, the Doctor's lovely daughter, and to carry her away with him.'

'Really, Mr. Craggs,' Snitchey began.

'Really, Mr. Snitchey, and Mr. Craggs, partners both,' said the client, interrupting him; 'you know your duty to your clients, and you know well enough, I am sure, that it is no part of it to interfere in a mere love affair, which I am obliged to confide to you. I am not going to carry the young lady off, without her own consent. There's nothing illegal in it. I never was Mr. Heathfield's bosom friend. I violate no confidence of his. I love where he loves, and I mean to win where he would win, if I can.'

'He can't, Mr. Craggs,' said Snitchey, evidently anxious and discomfited. 'He can't do it, sir. She dotes on Mr. Alfred.'

'Does she?' returned the client.

'Mr. Craggs, she dotes on him, sir,' persisted Snitchey.

'I didn't live six weeks, some few months ago, in the Doctor's house for nothing; and I doubted that soon,' observed the client. 'She would have doted on him, if her sister could have brought it about; but I watched them. Marion avoided his name, avoided the subject: shrunk from the least allusion to it, with evident distress.'

'Why should she, Mr. Craggs, you know? Why should she, sir?' inquired Snitchey.

'I don't know why she should, though there are many likely reasons,' said the client, smiling at the attention and perplexity expressed in Mr. Snitchey's shining eye, and at his cautious way of carrying on the conversation, and making himself informed upon the subject; 'but I know she does. She was very young when she made the engagement - if it may be called one, I am not even sure of that - and has repented of it, perhaps. Perhaps - it seems a foppish thing to say, but upon my soul I don't mean it in that light - she may have fallen in love with me, as I have fallen in love with her.'

'He, he! Mr. Alfred, her old playfellow too, you remember, Mr. Craggs,' said Snitchey, with a disconcerted laugh; 'knew her almost from a baby!'

'Which makes it the more probable that she may be tired of his idea,' calmly pursued the client, 'and not indisposed to exchange it for the newer one of another lover, who presents himself (or is presented by his horse) under romantic circumstances; has the not unfavourable reputation - with a country girl - of having lived thoughtlessly and gaily, without doing much harm to anybody; and who, for his youth and figure, and so forth - this may seem foppish again, but upon my soul I don't mean it in that light - might perhaps pass muster in a crowd with Mr. Alfred himself.'

There was no gainsaying the last clause, certainly; and Mr. Snitchey, glancing at him, thought so. There was something naturally graceful and pleasant in the very carelessness of his air. It seemed to suggest, of his comely face and well-knit figure, that they might be greatly better if he chose: and that, once roused and made earnest (but he never had been earnest yet), he could be full of fire and purpose. 'A dangerous sort of libertine,' thought the shrewd lawyer, 'to seem to catch the spark he wants, from a young lady's eyes.'

'Now, observe, Snitchey,' he continued, rising and taking him by the button, 'and Craggs,' taking him by the button also, and placing one partner on either side of him, so that neither might evade him. 'I don't ask you for any advice. You are right to keep quite aloof from all parties in such a matter, which is not one in which grave men like you could interfere, on any side. I am briefly going to review in half-a-dozen words, my position and intention, and then I shall leave it to you to do the best for me, in money matters, that you can: seeing, that, if I run away with the Doctor's beautiful daughter (as I hope to do, and to become another man under her bright influence), it will be, for the moment, more chargeable than running away alone. But I shall soon make all that up in an altered life.'

'I think it will be better not to hear this, Mr. Craggs?' said Snitchey, looking at him across the client.

'I think not,' said Craggs. - Both listened attentively.

'Well! You needn't hear it,' replied their client. 'I'll mention it, however. I don't mean to ask the Doctor's consent, because he wouldn't give it me. But I mean to do the Doctor no wrong or harm, because (besides there being nothing serious in such trifles, as he says) I hope to rescue his child, my Marion, from what I see - I KNOW - she dreads, and contemplates with misery: that is, the return of this old lover. If anything in the world is true, it is true that she dreads his return. Nobody is injured so far. I am so harried and worried here just now, that I lead the life of a flying-fish. I skulk about in the dark, I am shut out of my own house, and warned off my own grounds; but, that house, and those grounds, and many an acre besides, will come back to me one day, as you know and say; and Marion will probably be richer - on your showing, who are never sanguine - ten years hence as my wife, than as the wife of Alfred Heathfield, whose return she dreads (remember that), and in whom or in any man, my passion is not surpassed. Who is injured yet? It is a fair case throughout. My right is as good as his, if she decide in my favour; and I will try my right by her alone. You will like to know no more after this, and I will tell you no more. Now you know my purpose, and wants. When must I leave here?'

'In a week,' said Snitchey. 'Mr. Craggs?'

'In something less, I should say,' responded Craggs.

'In a month,' said the client, after attentively watching the two faces. 'This day month. To-day is Thursday. Succeed or fail, on this day month I go.'

'It's too long a delay,' said Snitchey; 'much too long. But let it be so. I thought he'd have stipulated for three,' he murmured to himself. 'Are you going? Good night, sir!'

'Good night!' returned the client, shaking hands with the Firm.

'You'll live to see me making a good use of riches yet. Henceforth the star of my destiny is, Marion!'

'Take care of the stairs, sir,' replied Snitchey; 'for she don't shine there. Good night!'

'Good night!'

So they both stood at the stair-head with a pair of office-candles, watching him down. When he had gone away, they stood looking at each other.

'What do you think of all this, Mr. Craggs?' said Snitchey.

Mr. Craggs shook his head.

'It was our opinion, on the day when that release was executed, that there was something curious in the parting of that pair; I recollect,' said Snitchey.

'It was,' said Mr. Craggs.

'Perhaps he deceives himself altogether,' pursued Mr. Snitchey, locking up the fireproof box, and putting it away; 'or, if he don't, a little bit of fickleness and perfidy is not a miracle, Mr. Craggs. And yet I thought that pretty face was very true. I thought,' said Mr. Snitchey, putting on his great-coat (for the weather was very cold), drawing on his gloves, and snuffing out one candle, 'that I had even seen her character becoming stronger and more resolved of late. More like her sister's.'

'Mrs. Craggs was of the same opinion,' returned Craggs.

'I'd really give a trifle to-night,' observed Mr. Snitchey, who was a good-natured man, 'if I could believe that Mr. Warden was reckoning without his host; but, light-headed, capricious, and unballasted as he is, he knows something of the world and its people (he ought to, for he has bought what he does know, dear enough); and I can't quite think that. We had better not interfere: we can do nothing, Mr. Craggs, but keep quiet.'

'Nothing,' returned Craggs.

'Our friend the Doctor makes light of such things,' said Mr. Snitchey, shaking his head. 'I hope he mayn't stand in need of his philosophy. Our friend Alfred talks of the battle of life,' he shook his head again, 'I hope he mayn't be cut down early in the day. Have you got your hat, Mr. Craggs? I am going to put the other candle out.' Mr. Craggs replying in the affirmative, Mr. Snitchey suited the action to the word, and they groped their way out of the council-chamber, now dark as the subject, or the law in general.

My story passes to a quiet little study, where, on that same night, the sisters and the hale old Doctor sat by a cheerful fireside. Grace was working at her needle. Marion read aloud from a book before her. The Doctor, in his dressing-gown and slippers, with his feet spread out upon the warm rug, leaned back in his easy- chair, and listened to the book, and looked upon his daughters.

They were very beautiful to look upon. Two better faces for a fireside, never made a fireside bright and sacred. Something of the difference between them had been softened down in three years' time; and enthroned upon the clear brow of the younger sister, looking through her eyes, and thrilling in her voice, was the same earnest nature that her own motherless youth had ripened in the elder sister long ago. But she still appeared at once the lovelier and weaker of the two; still seemed to rest her head upon her sister's breast, and put her trust in her, and look into her eyes for counsel and reliance. Those loving eyes, so calm, serene, and cheerful, as of old.

'"And being in her own home,"' read Marion, from the book; '"her home made exquisitely dear by these remembrances, she now began to know that the great trial of her heart must soon come on, and could not be delayed. O Home, our comforter and friend when others fall away, to part with whom, at any step between the cradle and the grave"'-

'Marion, my love!' said Grace.

'Why, Puss!' exclaimed her father, 'what's the matter?'

She put her hand upon the hand her sister stretched towards her, and read on; her voice still faltering and trembling, though she made an effort to command it when thus interrupted.

'"To part with whom, at any step between the cradle and the grave, is always sorrowful. O Home, so true to us, so often slighted in return, be lenient to them that turn away from thee, and do not haunt their erring footsteps too reproachfully! Let no kind looks, no well-remembered smiles, be seen upon thy phantom face. Let no ray of affection, welcome, gentleness, forbearance, cordiality, shine from thy white head. Let no old loving word, or tone, rise up in judgment against thy deserter; but if thou canst look harshly and severely, do, in mercy to the Penitent!"'

'Dear Marion, read no more to-night,' said Grace for she was weeping.

'I cannot,' she replied, and closed the book. 'The words seem all on fire!'

The Doctor was amused at this; and laughed as he patted her on the head.

'What! overcome by a story-book!' said Doctor Jeddler. 'Print and paper! Well, well, it's all one. It's as rational to make a serious matter of print and paper as of anything else. But, dry your eyes, love, dry your eyes. I dare say the heroine has got home again long ago, and made it up all round - and if she hasn't, a real home is only four walls; and a fictitious one, mere rags and ink. What's the matter now?'

'It's only me, Mister,' said Clemency, putting in her head at the door.

'And what's the matter with YOU?' said the Doctor.

'Oh, bless you, nothing an't the matter with me,' returned Clemency - and truly too, to judge from her well-soaped face, in which there gleamed as usual the very soul of good-humour, which, ungainly as she was, made her quite engaging. Abrasions on the elbows are not generally understood, it is true, to range within that class of personal charms called beauty-spots. But, it is better, going through the world, to have the arms chafed in that narrow passage, than the temper: and Clemency's was sound and whole as any beauty's in the land.

'Nothing an't the matter with me,' said Clemency, entering, 'but - come a little closer, Mister.'

The Doctor, in some astonishment, complied with this invitation.

'You said I wasn't to give you one before them, you know,' said Clemency.

A novice in the family might have supposed, from her extraordinary ogling as she said it, as well as from a singular rapture or ecstasy which pervaded her elbows, as if she were embracing herself, that 'one,' in its most favourable interpretation, meant a chaste salute. Indeed the Doctor himself seemed alarmed, for the moment; but quickly regained his composure, as Clemency, having had recourse to both her pockets - beginning with the right one, going away to the wrong one, and afterwards coming back to the right one again - produced a letter from the Post-office.

'Britain was riding by on a errand,' she chuckled, handing it to the Doctor, 'and see the mail come in, and waited for it. There's A. H. in the corner. Mr. Alfred's on his journey home, I bet. We shall have a wedding in the house - there was two spoons in my saucer this morning. Oh Luck, how slow he opens it!'

All this she delivered, by way of soliloquy, gradually rising higher and higher on tiptoe, in her impatience to hear the news, and making a corkscrew of her apron, and a bottle of her mouth. At last, arriving at a climax of suspense, and seeing the Doctor still engaged in the perusal of the letter, she came down flat upon the soles of her feet again, and cast her apron, as a veil, over her head, in a mute despair, and inability to bear it any longer.

'Here! Girls!' cried the Doctor. 'I can't help it: I never could keep a secret in my life. There are not many secrets, indeed, worth being kept in such a - well! never mind that. Alfred's coming home, my dears, directly.'

'Directly!' exclaimed Marion.

'What! The story-book is soon forgotten!' said the Doctor, pinching her cheek. 'I thought the news would dry those tears. Yes. "Let it be a surprise," he says, here. But I can't let it be a surprise. He must have a welcome.'

'Directly!' repeated Marion.

'Why, perhaps not what your impatience calls "directly,"' returned the doctor; 'but pretty soon too. Let us see. Let us see. To-day is Thursday, is it not? Then he promises to be here, this day month.'

'This day month!' repeated Marion, softly.

'A gay day and a holiday for us,' said the cheerful voice of her sister Grace, kissing her in congratulation. 'Long looked forward to, dearest, and come at last.'

She answered with a smile; a mournful smile, but full of sisterly affection. As she looked in her sister's face, and listened to the quiet music of her voice, picturing the happiness of this return, her own face glowed with hope and joy.

And with a something else; a something shining more and more through all the rest of its expression; for which I have no name. It was not exultation, triumph, proud enthusiasm. They are not so calmly shown. It was not love and gratitude alone, though love and gratitude were part of it. It emanated from no sordid thought, for sordid thoughts do not light up the brow, and hover on the lips, and move the spirit like a fluttered light, until the sympathetic figure trembles.

Dr. Jeddler, in spite of his system of philosophy - which he was continually contradicting and denying in practice, but more famous philosophers have done that - could not help having as much interest in the return of his old ward and pupil as if it had been a serious event. So he sat himself down in his easy-chair again, stretched out his slippered feet once more upon the rug, read the letter over and over a great many times, and talked it over more times still.

'Ah! The day was,' said the Doctor, looking at the fire, 'when you and he, Grace, used to trot about arm-in-arm, in his holiday time, like a couple of walking dolls. You remember?'

'I remember,' she answered, with her pleasant laugh, and plying her needle busily.

'This day month, indeed!' mused the Doctor. 'That hardly seems a twelve month ago. And where was my little Marion then!'

'Never far from her sister,' said Marion, cheerily, 'however little. Grace was everything to me, even when she was a young child herself.'

'True, Puss, true,' returned the Doctor. 'She was a staid little woman, was Grace, and a wise housekeeper, and a busy, quiet, pleasant body; bearing with our humours and anticipating our wishes, and always ready to forget her own, even in those times. I never knew you positive or obstinate, Grace, my darling, even then, on any subject but one.'

'I am afraid I have changed sadly for the worse, since,' laughed Grace, still busy at her work. 'What was that one, father?'

'Alfred, of course,' said the Doctor. 'Nothing would serve you but you must be called Alfred's wife; so we called you Alfred's wife; and you liked it better, I believe (odd as it seems now), than being called a Duchess, if we could have made you one.'

'Indeed?' said Grace, placidly.

'Why, don't you remember?' inquired the Doctor.

'I think I remember something of it,' she returned, 'but not much. It's so long ago.' And as she sat at work, she hummed the burden of an old song, which the Doctor liked.

'Alfred will find a real wife soon,' she said, breaking off; 'and that will be a happy time indeed for all of us. My three years' trust is nearly at an end, Marion. It has been a very easy one. I shall tell Alfred, when I give you back to him, that you have loved him dearly all the time, and that he has never once needed my good services. May I tell him so, love?'

'Tell him, dear Grace,' replied Marion, 'that there never was a trust so generously, nobly, steadfastly discharged; and that I have loved YOU, all the time, dearer and dearer every day; and O! how dearly now!'

'Nay,' said her cheerful sister, returning her embrace, 'I can scarcely tell him that; we will leave my deserts to Alfred's imagination. It will be liberal enough, dear Marion; like your own.'

With that, she resumed the work she had for a moment laid down, when her sister spoke so fervently: and with it the old song the Doctor liked to hear. And the Doctor, still reposing in his easy- chair, with his slippered feet stretched out before him on the rug, listened to the tune, and beat time on his knee with Alfred's letter, and looked at his two daughters, and thought that among the many trifles of the trifling world, these trifles were agreeable enough.

Clemency Newcome, in the meantime, having accomplished her mission and lingered in the room until she had made herself a party to the news, descended to the kitchen, where her coadjutor, Mr. Britain, was regaling after supper, surrounded by such a plentiful collection of bright pot-lids, well-scoured saucepans, burnished dinner-covers, gleaming kettles, and other tokens of her industrious habits, arranged upon the walls and shelves, that he sat as in the centre of a hall of mirrors. The majority did not give forth very flattering portraits of him, certainly; nor were they by any means unanimous in their reflections; as some made him very long-faced, others very broad-faced, some tolerably well- looking, others vastly ill-looking, according to their several manners of reflecting: which were as various, in respect of one fact, as those of so many kinds of men. But they all agreed that in the midst of them sat, quite at his ease, an individual with a pipe in his mouth, and a jug of beer at his elbow, who nodded condescendingly to Clemency, when she stationed herself at the same table.

'Well, Clemmy,' said Britain, 'how are you by this time, and what's the news?'

Clemency told him the news, which he received very graciously. A gracious change had come over Benjamin from head to foot. He was much broader, much redder, much more cheerful, and much jollier in all respects. It seemed as if his face had been tied up in a knot before, and was now untwisted and smoothed out.

'There'll be another job for Snitchey and Craggs, I suppose,' he observed, puffing slowly at his pipe. 'More witnessing for you and me, perhaps, Clemmy!'

'Lor!' replied his fair companion, with her favourite twist of her favourite joints. 'I wish it was me, Britain!'

'Wish what was you?'

'A-going to be married,' said Clemency.

Benjamin took his pipe out of his mouth and laughed heartily. 'Yes! you're a likely subject for that!' he said. 'Poor Clem!' Clemency for her part laughed as heartily as he, and seemed as much amused by the idea. 'Yes,' she assented, 'I'm a likely subject for that; an't I?'

'YOU'LL never be married, you know,' said Mr. Britain, resuming his pipe.

'Don't you think I ever shall though?' said Clemency, in perfect good faith.

Mr. Britain shook his head. 'Not a chance of it!'

'Only think!' said Clemency. 'Well! - I suppose you mean to,
Britain, one of these days; don't you?'

A question so abrupt, upon a subject so momentous, required consideration. After blowing out a great cloud of smoke, and looking at it with his head now on this side and now on that, as if it were actually the question, and he were surveying it in various aspects, Mr. Britain replied that he wasn't altogether clear about it, but - ye-es - he thought he might come to that at last.

'I wish her joy, whoever she may be!' cried Clemency.

'Oh she'll have that,' said Benjamin, 'safe enough.'

'But she wouldn't have led quite such a joyful life as she will lead, and wouldn't have had quite such a sociable sort of husband as she will have,' said Clemency, spreading herself half over the table, and staring retrospectively at the candle, 'if it hadn't been for - not that I went to do it, for it was accidental, I am sure - if it hadn't been for me; now would she, Britain?'

'Certainly not,' returned Mr. Britain, by this time in that high state of appreciation of his pipe, when a man can open his mouth but a very little way for speaking purposes; and sitting luxuriously immovable in his chair, can afford to turn only his eyes towards a companion, and that very passively and gravely. 'Oh! I'm greatly beholden to you, you know, Clem.'

'Lor, how nice that is to think of!' said Clemency.

At the same time, bringing her thoughts as well as her sight to bear upon the candle-grease, and becoming abruptly reminiscent of its healing qualities as a balsam, she anointed her left elbow with a plentiful application of that remedy.

'You see I've made a good many investigations of one sort and another in my time,' pursued Mr. Britain, with the profundity of a sage, 'having been always of an inquiring turn of mind; and I've read a good many books about the general Rights of things and Wrongs of things, for I went into the literary line myself, when I began life.'

'Did you though!' cried the admiring Clemency.

'Yes,' said Mr. Britain: 'I was hid for the best part of two years behind a bookstall, ready to fly out if anybody pocketed a volume; and after that, I was light porter to a stay and mantua maker, in which capacity I was employed to carry about, in oilskin baskets, nothing but deceptions - which soured my spirits and disturbed my confidence in human nature; and after that, I heard a world of discussions in this house, which soured my spirits fresh; and my opinion after all is, that, as a safe and comfortable sweetener of the same, and as a pleasant guide through life, there's nothing like a nutmeg-grater.'

Clemency was about to offer a suggestion, but he stopped her by anticipating it.

'Com-bined,' he added gravely, 'with a thimble.'

'Do as you wold, you know, and cetrer, eh!' observed Clemency, folding her arms comfortably in her delight at this avowal, and patting her elbows. 'Such a short cut, an't it?'

'I'm not sure,' said Mr. Britain, 'that it's what would be considered good philosophy. I've my doubts about that; but it wears well, and saves a quantity of snarling, which the genuine article don't always.'

'See how you used to go on once, yourself, you know!' said Clemency.

'Ah!' said Mr. Britain. 'But the most extraordinary thing, Clemmy, is that I should live to be brought round, through you. That's the strange part of it. Through you! Why, I suppose you haven't so much as half an idea in your head.'

Clemency, without taking the least offence, shook it, and laughed and hugged herself, and said, 'No, she didn't suppose she had.'

'I'm pretty sure of it,' said Mr. Britain.

'Oh! I dare say you're right,' said Clemency. 'I don't pretend to none. I don't want any.'

Benjamin took his pipe from his lips, and laughed till the tears ran down his face. 'What a natural you are, Clemmy!' he said, shaking his head, with an infinite relish of the joke, and wiping his eyes. Clemency, without the smallest inclination to dispute it, did the like, and laughed as heartily as he.

'I can't help liking you,' said Mr. Britain; 'you're a regular good creature in your way, so shake hands, Clem. Whatever happens, I'll always take notice of you, and be a friend to you.'

'Will you?' returned Clemency. 'Well! that's very good of you.'

'Yes, yes,' said Mr. Britain, giving her his pipe to knock the ashes out of it; 'I'll stand by you. Hark! That's a curious noise!'

'Noise!' repeated Clemency.

'A footstep outside. Somebody dropping from the wall, it sounded like,' said Britain. 'Are they all abed up-stairs?'

'Yes, all abed by this time,' she replied.

'Didn't you hear anything?'

'No.'

They both listened, but heard nothing.

'I tell you what,' said Benjamin, taking down a lantern. 'I'll have a look round, before I go to bed myself, for satisfaction's sake. Undo the door while I light this, Clemmy.'

Clemency complied briskly; but observed as she did so, that he would only have his walk for his pains, that it was all his fancy, and so forth. Mr.

Britain said 'very likely;' but sallied out, nevertheless, armed with the poker, and casting the light of the lantern far and near in all directions.

'It's as quiet as a churchyard,' said Clemency, looking after him; 'and almost as ghostly too!'

Glancing back into the kitchen, she cried fearfully, as a light figure stole into her view, 'What's that!'

'Hush!' said Marion in an agitated whisper. 'You have always loved me, have you not!'

'Loved you, child! You may be sure I have.'

'I am sure. And I may trust you, may I not? There is no one else just now, in whom I CAN trust.'

'Yes,' said Clemency, with all her heart.

'There is some one out there,' pointing to the door, 'whom I must see, and speak with, to-night. Michael Warden, for God's sake retire! Not now!'

Clemency started with surprise and trouble as, following the direction of the speaker's eyes, she saw a dark figure standing in the doorway.

'In another moment you may be discovered,' said Marion. 'Not now! Wait, if you can, in some concealment. I will come presently.'

He waved his hand to her, and was gone. 'Don't go to bed. Wait here for me!' said Marion, hurriedly. 'I have been seeking to speak to you for an hour past. Oh, be true to me!'

Eagerly seizing her bewildered hand, and pressing it with both her own to her breast - an action more expressive, in its passion of entreaty, than the most eloquent appeal in words, - Marion withdrew; as the light of the returning lantern flashed into the room.

'All still and peaceable. Nobody there. Fancy, I suppose,' said Mr. Britain, as he locked and barred the door. 'One of the effects of having a lively imagination. Halloa! Why, what's the matter?'

Clemency, who could not conceal the effects of her surprise and concern, was sitting in a chair: pale, and trembling from head to foot.

'Matter!' she repeated, chafing her hands and elbows, nervously, and looking anywhere but at him. 'That's good in you, Britain, that is! After going and frightening one out of one's life with noises and lanterns, and I don't know what all. Matter! Oh, yes!'

'If you're frightened out of your life by a lantern, Clemmy,' said Mr. Britain, composedly blowing it out and hanging it up again, 'that apparition's very soon got rid of. But you're as bold as brass in general,' he said, stopping to observe her; 'and were, after the noise and the lantern too. What have you taken into your head? Not an idea, eh?'

But, as Clemency bade him good night very much after her usual fashion, and began to bustle about with a show of going to bed herself immediately, Little Britain, after giving utterance to the original remark that it was impossible to account for a woman's whims, bade her good night in return, and taking up his candle strolled drowsily away to bed.

When all was quiet, Marion returned.

'Open the door,' she said; 'and stand there close beside me, while I speak to him, outside.'

Timid as her manner was, it still evinced a resolute and settled purpose, such as Clemency could not resist. She softly unbarred the door: but before turning the key, looked round on the young creature waiting to issue forth when she should open it.

The face was not averted or cast down, but looking full upon her, in its pride of youth and beauty. Some simple sense of the slightness of the barrier that interposed itself between the happy home and honoured love of the fair girl, and what might be the desolation of that home, and shipwreck of its dearest treasure, smote so keenly on the tender heart of Clemency, and so filled it to overflowing with sorrow and compassion, that, bursting into tears, she threw her arms round Marion's neck.

'It's little that I know, my dear,' cried Clemency, 'very little; but I know that this should not be. Think of what you do!'

'I have thought of it many times,' said Marion, gently.

'Once more,' urged Clemency. 'Till to-morrow.' Marion shook her head.

'For Mr. Alfred's sake,' said Clemency, with homely earnestness. 'Him that you used to love so dearly, once!'

She hid her face, upon the instant, in her hands, repeating 'Once!' as if it rent her heart.

'Let me go out,' said Clemency, soothing her. 'I'll tell him what you like. Don't cross the door-step to-night. I'm sure no good will come of it. Oh, it was an unhappy day when Mr. Warden was ever brought here! Think of your good father, darling - of your sister.'

'I have,' said Marion, hastily raising her head. 'You don't know what I do. I MUST speak to him. You are the best and truest friend in all the world for what you have said to me, but I must take this step. Will you go with me, Clemency,' she kissed her on her friendly face, 'or shall I go alone?'

Sorrowing and wondering, Clemency turned the key, and opened the door. Into the dark and doubtful night that lay beyond the threshold, Marion passed quickly, holding by her hand.

In the dark night he joined her, and they spoke together earnestly and long; and the hand that held so fast by Clemeney's, now trembled, now turned deadly cold, now clasped and closed on hers, in the strong feeling of the speech it emphasised unconsciously. When they returned, he followed to the door, and pausing there a moment, seized the other hand, and pressed it to his lips. Then, stealthily withdrew.

The door was barred and locked again, and once again she stood beneath her father's roof. Not bowed down by the secret that she brought there, though so young; but, with that same expression on her face for which I had no name before, and shining through her tears.

Again she thanked and thanked her humble friend, and trusted to her, as she said, with confidence, implicitly. Her chamber safely reached, she fell upon her knees; and with her secret weighing on her heart, could pray!

Could rise up from her prayers, so tranquil and serene, and bending over her fond sister in her slumber, look upon her face and smile - though sadly: murmuring as she kissed her forehead, how that Grace had been a mother to her, ever, and she loved her as a child!

Could draw the passive arm about her neck when lying down to rest - it seemed to cling there, of its own will, protectingly and tenderly even in sleep - and breathe upon the parted lips, God bless her!

Could sink into a peaceful sleep, herself; but for one dream, in which she cried out, in her innocent and touching voice, that she was quite alone, and they had all forgotten her.

A month soon passes, even at its tardiest pace. The month appointed to elapse between that night and the return, was quick of foot, and went by, like a vapour.

The day arrived. A raging winter day, that shook the old house, sometimes, as if it shivered in the blast. A day to make home doubly home. To give the chimney-corner new delights. To shed a ruddier glow upon the faces gathered round the hearth, and draw each fireside group into a closer and more social league, against the roaring elements without. Such a wild winter day as best prepares the way for shut-out night; for curtained rooms, and cheerful looks; for music, laughter, dancing, light, and jovial entertainment!

All these the Doctor had in store to welcome Alfred back. They knew that he could not arrive till night; and they would make the night air ring, he said, as he approached. All his old friends should congregate about him. He should not miss a face that he had known and liked. No! They should every one be there!

So, guests were bidden, and musicians were engaged, and tables spread, and floors prepared for active feet, and bountiful provision made, of every hospitable kind. Because it was the Christmas season, and his eyes were all unused to English holly and its sturdy green, the dancing-room was garlanded and hung with it; and the red berries gleamed an English welcome to him, peeping from among the leaves.

It was a busy day for all of them: a busier day for none of them than Grace, who noiselessly presided everywhere, and was the cheerful mind of all the preparations. Many a time that day (as well as many a time within the fleeting month preceding it), did Clemency glance anxiously, and almost fearfully, at Marion. She saw her paler, perhaps, than usual; but there was a sweet composure on her face that made it lovelier than ever.

At night when she was dressed, and wore upon her head a wreath that Grace had proudly twined about it - its mimic flowers were Alfred's favourites, as Grace remembered when she chose them - that old expression, pensive, almost sorrowful, and yet so spiritual, high, and stirring, sat again upon her brow, enhanced a hundred-fold.

'The next wreath I adjust on this fair head, will be a marriage wreath,' said Grace; 'or I am no true prophet, dear.'

Her sister smiled, and held her in her arms.

'A moment, Grace. Don't leave me yet. Are you sure that I want nothing more?'

Her care was not for that. It was her sister's face she thought of, and her eyes were fixed upon it, tenderly.

'My art,' said Grace, 'can go no farther, dear girl; nor your beauty. I never saw you look so beautiful as now.'

'I never was so happy,' she returned.

'Ay, but there is a greater happiness in store. In such another home, as cheerful and as bright as this looks now,' said Grace, 'Alfred and his young wife will soon be living.'

She smiled again. 'It is a happy home, Grace, in your fancy. I can see it in your eyes. I know it WILL be happy, dear. How glad I am to know it.'

'Well,' cried the Doctor, bustling in. 'Here we are, all ready for Alfred, eh? He can't be here until pretty late - an hour or so before midnight - so there'll be plenty of time for making merry before he comes. He'll not find us with the ice unbroken. Pile up the fire here, Britain! Let it shine upon the holly till it winks again. It's a world of nonsense, Puss; true lovers and all the rest of it - all nonsense; but we'll be nonsensical with the rest of 'em, and give our true lover a mad welcome. Upon my word!' said the old Doctor, looking at his daughters proudly, 'I'm not clear to-night, among other absurdities, but that I'm the father of two handsome girls.'

'All that one of them has ever done, or may do - may do, dearest father - to cause you pain or grief, forgive her,' said Marion, 'forgive her now, when her heart is full. Say that you forgive her. That you will forgive her. That she shall always share your love, and -,' and the rest was not said, for her face was hidden on the old man's shoulder.

'Tut, tut, tut,' said the Doctor gently. 'Forgive! What have I to forgive? Heyday, if our true lovers come back to flurry us like this, we must hold 'em at a distance; we must send expresses out to stop 'em short upon the road, and bring 'em on a mile or two a day, until we're properly prepared to meet 'em. Kiss me, Puss. Forgive! Why, what a silly child you are! If you had vexed and crossed me fifty times a day, instead of not at all, I'd forgive you everything, but such a supplication. Kiss me again, Puss. There! Prospective and retrospective - a clear score between us. Pile up the fire here! Would you freeze the people on this bleak December night! Let us be light, and warm, and merry, or I'll not forgive some of you!'

So gaily the old Doctor carried it! And the fire was piled up, and the lights were bright, and company arrived, and a murmuring of lively tongues began, and already there was a pleasant air of cheerful excitement stirring through all the house.

More and more company came flocking in. Bright eyes sparkled upon Marion; smiling lips gave her joy of his return; sage mothers fanned themselves, and hoped she mightn't be too youthful and inconstant for the quiet round of home; impetuous fathers fell into disgrace for too much exaltation of her beauty; daughters envied her; sons envied him; innumerable pairs of lovers profited by the occasion; all were interested, animated, and expectant.

Mr. and Mrs. Craggs came arm in arm, but Mrs. Snitchey came alone.

'Why, what's become of HIM?' inquired the Doctor.

The feather of a Bird of Paradise in Mrs. Snitchey's turban, trembled as if the Bird of Paradise were alive again, when she said that doubtless Mr. Craggs knew. SHE was never told.

'That nasty office,' said Mrs. Craggs.

'I wish it was burnt down,' said Mrs. Snitchey.

'He's - he's - there's a little matter of business that keeps my partner rather late,' said Mr. Craggs, looking uneasily about him.

'Oh-h! Business. Don't tell me!' said Mrs. Snitchey.

'WE know what business means,' said Mrs. Craggs.

But their not knowing what it meant, was perhaps the reason why Mrs. Snitchey's Bird of Paradise feather quivered so portentously, and why all the pendant bits on Mrs. Craggs's ear-rings shook like little bells.

'I wonder YOU could come away, Mr. Craggs,' said his wife.

'Mr. Craggs is fortunate, I'm sure!' said Mrs. Snitchey.

'That office so engrosses 'em,' said Mrs. Craggs.

'A person with an office has no business to be married at all,' said Mrs. Snitchey.

Then, Mrs. Snitchey said, within herself, that that look of hers had pierced to Craggs's soul, and he knew it; and Mrs. Craggs observed to Craggs, that 'his Snitcheys' were deceiving him behind his back, and he would find it out when it was too late.

Still, Mr. Craggs, without much heeding these remarks, looked uneasily about until his eye rested on Grace, to whom he immediately presented himself.

'Good evening, ma'am,' said Craggs. 'You look charmingly. Your -
Miss - your sister, Miss Marion, is she - '

'Oh, she's quite well, Mr. Craggs.'

'Yes - I - is she here?' asked Craggs.

'Here! Don't you see her yonder? Going to dance?' said Grace.

Mr. Craggs put on his spectacles to see the better; looked at her through them, for some time; coughed; and put them, with an air of satisfaction, in their sheath again, and in his pocket.

Now the music struck up, and the dance commenced. The bright fire crackled and sparkled, rose and fell, as though it joined the dance itself, in right good fellowship. Sometimes, it roared as if it would make music too. Sometimes, it flashed and beamed as if it were the eye of the old room: it winked too, sometimes, like a knowing patriarch, upon the youthful whisperers in corners. Sometimes, it sported with the holly-boughs; and, shining on the leaves by fits and starts, made them look as if they were in the cold winter night again, and fluttering in the wind. Sometimes its genial humour grew obstreperous, and passed all bounds; and then it cast into the room, among the twinkling feet, with a loud burst, a shower of harmless little sparks, and in its exultation leaped and bounded, like a mad thing, up the broad old chimney.

Another dance was near its close, when Mr. Snitchey touched his partner, who was looking on, upon the arm.

Mr. Craggs started, as if his familiar had been a spectre.

'Is he gone?' he asked.

'Hush! He has been with me,' said Snitchey, 'for three hours and more. He went over everything. He looked into all our arrangements for him, and was very particular indeed. He - Humph!'

The dance was finished. Marion passed close before him, as he spoke. She did not observe him, or his partner; but, looked over her shoulder towards her sister in the distance, as she slowly made her way into the crowd, and passed out of their view.

'You see! All safe and well,' said Mr. Craggs. 'He didn't recur to that subject, I suppose?'

'Not a word.'

'And is he really gone? Is he safe away?'

'He keeps to his word. He drops down the river with the tide in that shell of a boat of his, and so goes out to sea on this dark night! - a dare-devil he is - before the wind. There's no such lonely road anywhere else. That's one thing. The tide flows, he says, an hour before midnight - about this time. I'm glad it's over.' Mr. Snitchey wiped his forehead, which looked hot and anxious.

'What do you think,' said Mr. Craggs, 'about - '

'Hush!' replied his cautious partner, looking straight before him. 'I understand you. Don't mention names, and don't let us, seem to be talking secrets. I don't know what to think; and to tell you the truth, I don't care now. It's a great relief. His self-love deceived him, I suppose. Perhaps the young lady coquetted a little. The evidence would seem to point that way. Alfred not arrived?'

'Not yet,' said Mr. Craggs. 'Expected every minute.'

'Good.' Mr. Snitchey wiped his forehead again. 'It's a great relief. I haven't been so nervous since we've been in partnership. I intend to spend the evening now, Mr. Craggs.'

Mrs. Craggs and Mrs. Snitchey joined them as he announced this intention. The Bird of Paradise was in a state of extreme vibration, and the little bells were ringing quite audibly.

'It has been the theme of general comment, Mr. Snitchey,' said Mrs. Snitchey. 'I hope the office is satisfied.'

'Satisfied with what, my dear?' asked Mr. Snitchey.

'With the exposure of a defenceless woman to ridicule and remark,' returned his wife. 'That is quite in the way of the office, THAT is.'

'I really, myself,' said Mrs. Craggs, 'have been so long accustomed to connect the office with everything opposed to domesticity, that I am glad to know it as the avowed enemy of my peace. There is something honest in that, at all events.'

'My dear,' urged Mr. Craggs, 'your good opinion is invaluable, but I never avowed that the office was the enemy of your peace.'

'No,' said Mrs. Craggs, ringing a perfect peal upon the little bells. 'Not you, indeed. You wouldn't be worthy of the office, if you had the candour to.'

'As to my having been away to-night, my dear,' said Mr. Snitchey, giving her his arm, 'the deprivation has been mine, I'm sure; but, as Mr. Craggs knows - '

Mrs. Snitchey cut this reference very short by hitching her husband to a distance, and asking him to look at that man. To do her the favour to look at him!

'At which man, my dear?' said Mr. Snitchey.

'Your chosen companion; I'M no companion to you, Mr. Snitchey.'

'Yes, yes, you are, my dear,' he interposed.

'No, no, I'm not,' said Mrs. Snitchey with a majestic smile. 'I know my station. Will you look at your chosen companion, Mr. Snitchey; at your referee, at the keeper of your secrets, at the man you trust; at your other self, in short?'

The habitual association of Self with Craggs, occasioned Mr. Snitchey to look in that direction.

'If you can look that man in the eye this night,' said Mrs. Snitchey, 'and not know that you are deluded, practised upon, made the victim of his arts, and bent down prostrate to his will by some unaccountable fascination which it is impossible to explain and against which no warning of mine is of the least avail, all I can say is - I pity you!'

At the very same moment Mrs. Craggs was oracular on the cross subject. Was it possible, she said, that Craggs could so blind himself to his Snitcheys, as not to feel his true position? Did he mean to say that he had seen his Snitcheys come into that room, and didn't plainly see that there was reservation, cunning, treachery, in the man? Would he tell her that his very action, when he wiped his forehead and looked so stealthily about him, didn't show that there was something weighing on the conscience of his precious Snitcheys (if he had a conscience), that wouldn't bear the light? Did anybody but his Snitcheys come to festive entertainments like a burglar? - which, by the way, was hardly a clear illustration of the case, as he had walked in very mildly at the door. And would he still assert to her at noon-day (it being nearly midnight), that his Snitcheys were to be justified through thick and thin, against all facts, and reason, and experience?

Neither Snitchey nor Craggs openly attempted to stem the current which had thus set in, but, both were content to be carried gently along it, until its force abated. This happened at about the same time as a general movement for a country dance; when Mr. Snitchey proposed himself as a partner to Mrs. Craggs, and Mr. Craggs gallantly offered himself to Mrs. Snitchey; and after some such slight evasions as 'why don't you ask somebody else?' and 'you'll be glad, I know, if I decline,' and 'I wonder you can dance out of the office' (but this jocosely now), each lady graciously accepted, and took her place.

It was an old custom among them, indeed, to do so, and to pair off, in like manner, at dinners and suppers; for they were excellent friends, and on a footing of easy familiarity. Perhaps the false Craggs and the wicked Snitchey were a recognised fiction with the two wives, as Doe and Roe, incessantly running up and down bailiwicks, were with the two husbands: or, perhaps the ladies had instituted, and taken upon themselves, these two shares in the business, rather than be left out of it altogether. But, certain it is, that each wife went as gravely and steadily to work in her vocation as her husband did in his, and would have considered it almost impossible for the Firm to maintain a successful and respectable existence, without her laudable exertions.

But, now, the Bird of Paradise was seen to flutter down the middle; and the little bells began to bounce and jingle in poussette; and the Doctor's rosy face spun round and round, like an expressive pegtop highly varnished; and breathless Mr. Craggs began to doubt already, whether country dancing had been made 'too easy,' like the rest of life; and Mr. Snitchey, with his nimble cuts and capers, footed it for Self and Craggs, and half-a-dozen more.

Now, too, the fire took fresh courage, favoured by the lively wind the dance awakened, and burnt clear and high. It was the Genius of the room, and present everywhere. It shone in people's eyes, it sparkled in the jewels on the snowy necks of girls, it twinkled at their ears as if it whispered to them slyly, it flashed about their waists, it flickered on the ground and made it rosy for their feet, it bloomed upon the ceiling that its glow might set off their bright faces, and it kindled up a general illumination in Mrs. Craggs's little belfry.

Now, too, the lively air that fanned it, grew less gentle as the music quickened and the dance proceeded with new spirit; and a breeze arose that made the leaves and berries dance upon the wall, as they had often done upon the trees; and the breeze rustled in the room as if an invisible company of fairies, treading in the foot-steps of the good substantial revellers, were whirling after them. Now, too, no feature of the Doctor's face could be distinguished as he spun and spun; and now there seemed a dozen Birds of Paradise in fitful flight; and now there were a thousand little bells at work; and now a fleet of flying skirts was ruffled by a little tempest, when the music gave in, and the dance was over.

Hot and breathless as the Doctor was, it only made him the more impatient for Alfred's coming.

'Anything been seen, Britain? Anything been heard?'

'Too dark to see far, sir. Too much noise inside the house to hear.'

'That's right! The gayer welcome for him. How goes the time?'

'Just twelve, sir. He can't be long, sir.'

'Stir up the fire, and throw another log upon it,' said the Doctor. 'Let him see his welcome blazing out upon the night - good boy! - as he comes along!'

He saw it - Yes! From the chaise he caught the light, as he turned the corner by the old church. He knew the room from which it shone. He saw the wintry branches of the old trees between the light and him. He knew that one of those trees rustled musically in the summer time at the window of Marion's chamber.

The tears were in his eyes. His heart throbbed so violently that he could hardly bear his happiness. How often he had thought of this time - pictured it under all circumstances - feared that it might never come - yearned, and wearied for it - far away!

Again the light! Distinct and ruddy; kindled, he knew, to give him welcome, and to speed him home. He beckoned with his hand, and waved his hat, and cheered out, loud, as if the light were they, and they could see and hear him, as he dashed towards them through the mud and mire, triumphantly.

Stop! He knew the Doctor, and understood what he had done. He would not let it be a surprise to them. But he could make it one, yet, by going forward on foot. If the orchard-gate were open, he could enter there; if not, the wall was easily climbed, as he knew of old; and he would be among them in an instant.

He dismounted from the chaise, and telling the driver - even that was not easy in his agitation - to remain behind for a few minutes, and then to follow slowly, ran on with exceeding swiftness, tried the gate, scaled the wall, jumped down on the other side, and stood panting in the old orchard.

There was a frosty rime upon the trees, which, in the faint light of the clouded moon, hung upon the smaller branches like dead garlands. Withered leaves crackled and snapped beneath his feet, as he crept softly on towards the house. The desolation of a winter night sat brooding on the earth, and in the sky. But, the red light came cheerily towards him from the windows; figures passed and repassed there; and the hum and murmur of voices greeted his ear sweetly.

Listening for hers: attempting, as he crept on, to detach it from the rest, and half believing that he heard it: he had nearly reached the door, when it was abruptly opened, and a figure coming out encountered his. It instantly recoiled with a half-suppressed cry.

'Clemency,' he said, 'don't you know me?'

'Don't come in!' she answered, pushing him back. 'Go away. Don't ask me why. Don't come in.'

'What is the matter?' he exclaimed.

'I don't know. I - I am afraid to think. Go back. Hark!'

There was a sudden tumult in the house. She put her hands upon her ears. A wild scream, such as no hands could shut out, was heard; and Grace - distraction in her looks and manner - rushed out at the door.

'Grace!' He caught her in his arms. 'What is it! Is she dead!'

She disengaged herself, as if to recognise his face, and fell down at his feet.

A crowd of figures came about them from the house. Among them was her father, with a paper in his hand.

'What is it!' cried Alfred, grasping his hair with his hands, and looking in an agony from face to face, as he bent upon his knee beside the insensible girl. 'Will no one look at me? Will no one speak to me? Does no one know me? Is there no voice among you all, to tell me what it is!'

There was a murmur among them. 'She is gone.'

'Gone!' he echoed.

'Fled, my dear Alfred!' said the Doctor, in a broken voice, and with his hands before his face. 'Gone from her home and us. To- night! She writes that she has made her innocent and blameless choice - entreats that we will forgive her - prays that we will not forget her - and is gone.'

'With whom? Where?'

He started up, as if to follow in pursuit; but, when they gave way to let him pass, looked wildly round upon them, staggered back, and sunk down in his former attitude, clasping one of Grace's cold hands in his own.

There was a hurried running to and fro, confusion, noise, disorder, and no purpose. Some proceeded to disperse themselves about the roads, and some took horse, and some got lights, and some conversed together, urging that there was no trace or track to follow. Some approached him kindly, with the view of offering consolation; some admonished him that Grace must be removed into the house, and that he prevented it. He never heard them, and he never moved.

The snow fell fast and thick. He looked up for a moment in the air, and thought that those white ashes strewn upon his hopes and misery, were suited to them well. He looked round on the whitening ground, and thought how Marion's foot-prints would be hushed and covered up, as soon as made, and even that remembrance of her blotted out. But he never felt the weather and he never stirred.

CHAPTER III - Part The Third

THE world had grown six years older since that night of the return. It was a warm autumn afternoon, and there had been heavy rain. The sun burst suddenly from among the clouds; and the old battle- ground, sparkling brilliantly and cheerfully at sight of it in one green place, flashed a responsive welcome there, which spread along the country side as if a joyful beacon had been lighted up, and answered from a thousand stations.

How beautiful the landscape kindling in the light, and that luxuriant influence passing on like a celestial presence, brightening everything! The wood, a sombre mass before, revealed its varied tints of yellow, green, brown, red: its different forms of trees, with raindrops glittering on their leaves and twinkling as they fell. The verdant meadow-land, bright and glowing, seemed as if it had been blind, a minute since, and now had found a sense of sight where-with to look up at the shining sky. Corn-fields, hedge-rows, fences, homesteads, and clustered roofs, the steeple of the church, the stream, the water-mill, all sprang out of the gloomy darkness smiling. Birds sang sweetly, flowers raised their drooping heads, fresh scents arose from the invigorated ground; the blue expanse above extended and diffused itself; already the sun's slanting rays pierced mortally the sullen bank of cloud that lingered in its flight; and a rainbow, spirit of all the colours that adorned the earth and sky, spanned the whole arch with its triumphant glory.

At such a time, one little roadside Inn, snugly sheltered behind a great elm-tree with a rare seat for idlers encircling its capacious bole, addressed a cheerful front towards the traveller, as a house of entertainment ought, and tempted him with many mute but significant assurances of a comfortable welcome. The ruddy sign- board perched up in the tree, with its golden letters winking in the sun, ogled the passer-by, from among the green leaves, like a jolly face, and promised good cheer. The horse-trough, full of clear fresh water, and the ground below it sprinkled with droppings of fragrant hay, made every horse that passed, prick up his ears. The crimson curtains in the lower rooms, and the pure white hangings in the little bed-chambers above, beckoned, Come in! with every breath of air. Upon the bright green shutters, there were golden legends about beer and ale, and neat wines, and good beds; and an affecting picture of a brown jug frothing over at the top. Upon the window-sills were flowering plants in bright red pots, which made a lively show against the white front of the house; and in the darkness of the doorway there were streaks of light, which glanced off from the surfaces of bottles and tankards.

On the door-step, appeared a proper figure of a landlord, too; for, though he was a short man, he was round and broad, and stood with his hands in his pockets, and his legs just wide enough apart to express a mind at rest upon the subject of the cellar, and an easy confidence - too calm and virtuous to become a swagger - in the general resources of the Inn. The superabundant moisture, trickling from everything after the late rain, set him off well. Nothing near him was thirsty. Certain top-heavy dahlias, looking over the palings of his neat well-ordered garden, had swilled as much as they could carry - perhaps a trifle more - and may have been the worse for liquor; but the sweet-briar, roses, wall- flowers, the plants at the windows, and the leaves on the old tree, were in the beaming state of moderate company that had taken no more than was wholesome for them, and had served to develop their best qualities. Sprinkling dewy drops about them on the ground, they seemed profuse of innocent and sparkling mirth, that did good where it lighted, softening neglected corners which the steady rain could seldom reach, and hurting nothing.

This village Inn had assumed, on being established, an uncommon sign. It was called The Nutmeg-Grater. And underneath that household word, was inscribed, up in the tree, on the same flaming board, and in the like golden characters, By Benjamin Britain.

At a second glance, and on a more minute examination of his face, you might have known that it was no other than Benjamin Britain himself who stood in the doorway - reasonably changed by time, but for the better; a very comfortable host indeed.

'Mrs. B.,' said Mr. Britain, looking down the road, 'is rather late. It's tea-time.'

As there was no Mrs. Britain coming, he strolled leisurely out into the road and looked up at the house, very much to his satisfaction. 'It's just the sort of house,' said Benjamin, 'I should wish to stop at, if I didn't keep it.'

Then, he strolled towards the garden-paling, and took a look at the dahlias. They looked over at him, with a helpless drowsy hanging of their heads: which bobbed again, as the heavy drops of wet dripped off them.

'You must be looked after,' said Benjamin. 'Memorandum, not to forget to tell her so. She's a long time coming!'

Mr. Britain's better half seemed to be by so very much his better half, that his own moiety of himself was utterly cast away and helpless without her.

'She hadn't much to do, I think,' said Ben. 'There were a few little matters of business after market, but not many. Oh! here we are at last!'

A chaise-cart, driven by a boy, came clattering along the road: and seated in it, in a chair, with a large well-saturated umbrella spread out to dry behind her, was the plump figure of a matronly woman, with her bare arms folded across a basket which she carried on her knee, several other baskets and parcels lying crowded around her, and a certain bright good nature in her face and contented awkwardness in her manner, as she jogged to and fro with the motion of her carriage, which smacked of old times, even in the distance. Upon her nearer approach, this relish of by-gone days was not diminished; and when the cart stopped at the Nutmeg-Grater door, a pair of shoes, alighting from it, slipped nimbly through Mr. Britain's open arms, and came down with a substantial weight upon the pathway, which shoes could hardly have belonged to any one but Clemency Newcome.

In fact they did belong to her, and she stood in them, and a rosy comfortable-looking soul she was: with as much soap on her glossy face as in times of yore, but with whole elbows now, that had grown quite dimpled in her improved condition.

'You're late, Clemmy!' said Mr. Britain.

'Why, you see, Ben, I've had a deal to do!' she replied, looking busily after the safe removal into the house of all the packages and baskets: 'eight, nine, ten - where's eleven? Oh! my basket's eleven! It's all right. Put the horse up, Harry, and if he coughs again give him a warm mash to-night. Eight, nine, ten. Why, where's eleven? Oh! forgot, it's all right. How's the children, Ben?'

'Hearty, Clemmy, hearty.'

'Bless their precious faces!' said Mrs. Britain, unbonneting her own round countenance (for she and her husband were by this time in the bar), and smoothing her hair with her open hands. 'Give us a kiss, old man!'

Mr. Britain promptly complied.

'I think,' said Mrs. Britain, applying herself to her pockets and drawing forth an immense bulk of thin books and crumpled papers: a very kennel of dogs'-ears: 'I've done everything. Bills all settled - turnips sold - brewer's account looked into and paid - 'bacco pipes ordered - seventeen pound four, paid into the Bank - Doctor Heathfield's charge for little Clem - you'll guess what that is - Doctor Heathfield won't take nothing again, Ben.'

'I thought he wouldn't,' returned Ben.

'No. He says whatever family you was to have, Ben, he'd never put you to the cost of a halfpenny. Not if you was to have twenty.'

Mr. Britain's face assumed a serious expression, and he looked hard at the wall.

'An't it kind of him?' said Clemency.

'Very,' returned Mr. Britain. 'It's the sort of kindness that I wouldn't presume upon, on any account.'

'No,' retorted Clemency. 'Of course not. Then there's the pony - he fetched eight pound two; and that an't bad, is it?'

'It's very good,' said Ben.

'I'm glad you're pleased!' exclaimed his wife. 'I thought you would be; and I think that's all, and so no more at present from yours and cetrer, C. Britain. Ha ha ha! There! Take all the papers, and lock 'em up. Oh! Wait a minute. Here's a printed bill to stick on the wall. Wet from the printer's. How nice it smells!'

'What's this?' said Ben, looking over the document.

'I don't know,' replied his wife. 'I haven't read a word of it.'

'"To be sold by Auction,"' read the host of the Nutmeg-Grater, '"unless previously disposed of by private contract."'

'They always put that,' said Clemency.

'Yes, but they don't always put this,' he returned. 'Look here, "Mansion," &c. - "offices," &c., "shrubberies," &c., "ring fence," &c. "Messrs. Snitchey and Craggs," &c., "ornamental portion of the unencumbered freehold property of Michael Warden, Esquire, intending to continue to reside abroad"!'

'Intending to continue to reside abroad!' repeated Clemency.

'Here it is,' said Britain. 'Look!'

'And it was only this very day that I heard it whispered at the old house, that better and plainer news had been half promised of her, soon!' said Clemency, shaking her head sorrowfully, and patting her elbows as if the recollection of old times unconsciously awakened her old habits. 'Dear, dear, dear! There'll be heavy hearts, Ben, yonder.'

Mr. Britain heaved a sigh, and shook his head, and said he couldn't make it out: he had left off trying long ago. With that remark, he applied himself to putting up the bill just inside the bar window. Clemency, after meditating in silence for a few moments, roused herself, cleared her thoughtful brow, and bustled off to look after the children.

Though the host of the Nutmeg-Grater had a lively regard for his good-wife, it was of the old patronising kind, and she amused him mightily. Nothing would have astonished him so much, as to have known for certain from any third party, that it was she who managed the whole house, and made him, by her plain straightforward thrift, good-humour, honesty, and industry, a thriving man. So easy it is, in any degree of life (as the world very often finds it), to take those cheerful natures that never assert their merit, at their own modest valuation; and to conceive a flippant liking of people for their outward oddities and eccentricities, whose innate worth, if we would look so far, might make us blush in the comparison!

It was comfortable to Mr. Britain, to think of his own condescension in having married Clemency. She was a perpetual testimony to him of the goodness of his heart, and the kindness of his disposition; and he felt that her being an excellent wife was an illustration of the old precept that virtue is its own reward.

He had finished wafering up the bill, and had locked the vouchers for her day's proceedings in the cupboard - chuckling all the time, over her capacity for business - when, returning with the news that the two Master Britains were playing in the coach-house under the superintendence of one Betsey, and that little Clem was sleeping 'like a picture,' she sat down to tea, which had awaited her arrival, on a little table. It was a very neat little bar, with the usual display of bottles and glasses; a sedate clock, right to the minute (it was half-past five); everything in its place, and everything furbished and polished up to the very utmost.

'It's the first time I've sat down quietly to-day, I declare,' said Mrs. Britain, taking a long breath, as if she had sat down for the night; but getting up again immediately to hand her husband his tea, and cut him his bread-and-butter; 'how that bill does set me thinking of old times!'

'Ah!' said Mr. Britain, handling his saucer like an oyster, and disposing of its contents on the same principle.

'That same Mr. Michael Warden,' said Clemency, shaking her head at the notice of sale, 'lost me my old place.'

'And got you your husband,' said Mr. Britain.

'Well! So he did,' retorted Clemency, 'and many thanks to him.'

'Man's the creature of habit,' said Mr. Britain, surveying her, over his saucer. 'I had somehow got used to you, Clem; and I found I shouldn't be able to get on without you. So we went and got made man and wife. Ha! ha! We! Who'd have thought it!'

'Who indeed!' cried Clemency. 'It was very good of you, Ben.'

'No, no, no,' replied Mr. Britain, with an air of self-denial. 'Nothing worth mentioning.'

'Oh yes it was, Ben,' said his wife, with great simplicity; 'I'm sure I think so, and am very much obliged to you. Ah!' looking again at the bill; 'when she was known to be gone, and out of reach, dear girl, I couldn't help telling - for her sake quite as much as theirs - what I knew, could I?'

'You told it, anyhow,' observed her husband.

'And Dr. Jeddler,' pursued Clemency, putting down her tea-cup, and looking thoughtfully at the bill, 'in his grief and passion turned me out of house and home! I never have been so glad of anything in all my life, as that I didn't say an angry word to him, and hadn't any angry feeling towards him, even then; for he repented that truly, afterwards. How often he has sat in this room, and told me over and over again he was sorry for it! - the last time, only yesterday, when you were out. How often he has sat in this room, and talked to me, hour after hour, about one thing and another, in which he made believe to be interested! - but only for the sake of the days that are gone by, and because he knows she used to like me, Ben!'

'Why, how did you ever come to catch a glimpse of that, Clem?' asked her husband: astonished that she should have a distinct perception of a truth which had only dimly suggested itself to his inquiring mind.

'I don't know, I'm sure,' said Clemency, blowing her tea, to cool it. 'Bless you, I couldn't tell you, if you was to offer me a reward of a hundred pound.'

He might have pursued this metaphysical subject but for her catching a glimpse of a substantial fact behind him, in the shape of a gentleman attired in mourning, and cloaked and booted like a rider on horseback, who stood at the bar-door. He seemed attentive to their conversation, and not at all impatient to interrupt it.

Clemency hastily rose at this sight. Mr. Britain also rose and saluted the guest. 'Will you please to walk up-stairs, sir? There's a very nice room upstairs, sir.'

'Thank you,' said the stranger, looking earnestly at Mr. Britain's wife. 'May I come in here?'

'Oh, surely, if you like, sir,' returned Clemency, admitting him.

'What would you please to want, sir?'

The bill had caught his eye, and he was reading it.

'Excellent property that, sir,' observed Mr. Britain.

He made no answer; but, turning round, when he had finished reading, looked at Clemency with the same observant curiosity as before. 'You were asking me,' - he said, still looking at her, - 'What you would please to take, sir,' answered Clemency, stealing a glance at him in return.

'If you will let me have a draught of ale,' he said, moving to a table by the window, 'and will let me have it here, without being any interruption to your meal, I shall be much obliged to you.' He sat down as he spoke, without any further parley, and looked out at the prospect. He was an easy, well-knit figure of a man in the prime of life. His face, much browned by the sun, was shaded by a quantity of dark hair; and he wore a moustache. His beer being set before him, he filled out a glass, and drank, good-humouredly, to the house; adding, as he put the tumbler down again:

'It's a new house, is it not?'

'Not particularly new, sir,' replied Mr. Britain.

'Between five and six years old,' said Clemency; speaking very distinctly.

'I think I heard you mention Dr. Jeddler's name, as I came in,' inquired the stranger. 'That bill reminds me of him; for I happen to know something of that story, by hearsay, and through certain connexions of mine. - Is the old man living?'

'Yes, he's living, sir,' said Clemency.

'Much changed?'

'Since when, sir?' returned Clemency, with remarkable emphasis and expression.

'Since his daughter - went away.'

'Yes! he's greatly changed since then,' said Clemency. 'He's grey and old, and hasn't the same way with him at all; but, I think he's happy now. He has taken on with his sister since then, and goes to see her very often. That did him good, directly. At first, he was sadly broken down; and it was enough to make one's heart bleed, to see him wandering about, railing at the world; but a great change for the better came over him after a year or two, and then he began to like to talk about his lost daughter, and to praise her, ay and the world too! and was never tired of saying, with the tears in his poor eyes, how beautiful and good she was. He had forgiven her then. That was about the same time as Miss Grace's marriage. Britain, you remember?'

Mr. Britain remembered very well.

'The sister is married then,' returned the stranger. He paused for some time before he asked, 'To whom?'

Clemency narrowly escaped oversetting the tea-board, in her emotion at this question.

'Did YOU never hear?' she said.

'I should like to hear,' he replied, as he filled his glass again, and raised it to his lips.

'Ah! It would be a long story, if it was properly told,' said Clemency, resting her chin on the palm of her left hand, and supporting that elbow on her right hand, as she shook her head, and looked back through the intervening years, as if she were looking at a fire. 'It would be a long story, I am sure.'

'But told as a short one,' suggested the stranger.

Told as a short one,' repeated Clemency in the same thoughtful tone, and without any apparent reference to him, or consciousness of having auditors, 'what would there be to tell? That they grieved together, and remembered her together, like a person dead; that they were so tender of her, never would reproach her, called her back to one another as she used to be, and found excuses for her! Every one knows that. I'm sure I do. No one better,' added Clemency, wiping her eyes with her hand.

'And so,' suggested the stranger.

'And so,' said Clemency, taking him up mechanically, and without any change in her attitude or manner, 'they at last were married. They were married on her birth-day - it comes round again to-morrow - very quiet, very humble like, but very happy. Mr. Alfred said, one night when they were walking in the orchard, "Grace, shall our wedding-day be Marion's birth-day?" And it was.'

'And they have lived happily together?' said the stranger.

'Ay,' said Clemency. 'No two people ever more so. They have had no sorrow but this.'

She raised her head as with a sudden attention to the circumstances under which she was recalling these events, and looked quickly at the stranger. Seeing that his face was turned toward the window, and that he seemed intent upon the prospect, she made some eager signs to her husband, and pointed to the bill, and moved her mouth as if she were repeating with great energy, one word or phrase to him over and over again. As she uttered no sound, and as her dumb motions like most of her gestures were of a very extraordinary kind, this unintelligible conduct reduced Mr. Britain to the confines of despair. He stared at the table, at the stranger, at the spoons, at his wife - followed her pantomime with looks of deep amazement and perplexity - asked in the same language, was it property in danger, was it he in danger, was it she - answered her signals with other signals expressive of the deepest distress and confusion - followed the motions of her lips - guessed half aloud 'milk and water,' 'monthly warning,' 'mice and walnuts' - and couldn't approach her meaning.

Clemency gave it up at last, as a hopeless attempt; and moving her chair by very slow degrees a little nearer to the stranger, sat with her eyes apparently cast down but glancing sharply at him now and then, waiting until he should ask some other question. She had not to wait long; for he said, presently:

'And what is the after history of the young lady who went away? They know it, I suppose?'

Clemency shook her head. 'I've heard,' she said, 'that Doctor Jeddler is thought to know more of it than he tells. Miss Grace has had letters from her sister, saying that she was well and happy, and made much happier by her being married to Mr. Alfred: and has written letters back. But there's a mystery about her life and fortunes, altogether, which nothing has cleared up to this hour, and which - '

She faltered here, and stopped.

'And which' - repeated the stranger.

'Which only one other person, I believe, could explain,' said Clemency, drawing her breath quickly.

'Who may that be?' asked the stranger.

'Mr. Michael Warden!' answered Clemency, almost in a shriek: at once conveying to her husband what she would have had him understand before, and letting Michael Warden know that he was recognised.

'You remember me, sir?' said Clemency, trembling with emotion; 'I saw just now you did! You remember me, that night in the garden. I was with her!'

'Yes. You were,' he said.

'Yes, sir,' returned Clemency. 'Yes, to be sure. This is my husband, if you please. Ben, my dear Ben, run to Miss Grace - run to Mr. Alfred - run somewhere, Ben! Bring somebody here, directly!'

'Stay!' said Michael Warden, quietly interposing himself between the door and Britain. 'What would you do?'

'Let them know that you are here, sir,' answered Clemency, clapping her hands in sheer agitation. 'Let them know that they may hear of her, from your own lips; let them know that she is not quite lost to them, but that she will come home again yet, to bless her father and her loving sister - even her old servant, even me,' she struck herself upon the breast with both hands, 'with a sight of her sweet face. Run, Ben, run!' And still she pressed him on towards the door, and still Mr. Warden stood before it, with his hand stretched out, not angrily, but sorrowfully.

'Or perhaps,' said Clemency, running past her husband, and catching in her emotion at Mr. Warden's cloak, 'perhaps she's here now; perhaps she's close by. I think from your manner she is. Let me see her, sir, if you please. I waited on her when she was a little child. I saw her grow to be the pride of all this place. I knew her when she was Mr. Alfred's promised wife. I tried to warn her when you tempted her away. I know what her old home was when she was like the soul of it, and how it changed when she was gone and lost. Let me speak to her, if you please!'

He gazed at her with compassion, not unmixed with wonder: but, he made no gesture of assent.

'I don't think she CAN know,' pursued Clemency, 'how truly they forgive her; how they love her; what joy it would be to them, to see her once more. She may be timorous of going home. Perhaps if she sees me, it may give her new heart. Only tell me truly, Mr. Warden, is she with you?'

'She is not,' he answered, shaking his head.

This answer, and his manner, and his black dress, and his coming back so quietly, and his announced intention of continuing to live abroad, explained it all. Marion was dead.

He didn't contradict her; yes, she was dead! Clemency sat down, hid her face upon the table, and cried.

At that moment, a grey-headed old gentleman came running in: quite out of breath, and panting so much that his voice was scarcely to be recognised as the voice of Mr. Snitchey.

'Good Heaven, Mr. Warden!' said the lawyer, taking him aside, 'what wind has blown - ' He was so blown himself, that he couldn't get on any further until after a pause, when he added, feebly, 'you here?'

'An ill-wind, I am afraid,' he answered. 'If you could have heard what has just passed - how I have been besought and entreated to perform impossibilities - what confusion and affliction I carry with me!'

'I can guess it all. But why did you ever come here, my good sir?' retorted Snitchey.

'Come! How should I know who kept the house? When I sent my servant on to you, I strolled in here because the place was new to me; and I had a natural curiosity in everything new and old, in these old scenes; and it was outside the town. I wanted to communicate with you, first, before appearing there. I wanted to know what people would say to me. I see by your manner that you can tell me. If it were not for your confounded caution, I should have been possessed of everything long ago.'

'Our caution!' returned the lawyer, 'speaking for Self and Craggs - deceased,' here Mr. Snitchey, glancing at his hat-band, shook his head, 'how can you reasonably blame us, Mr. Warden? It was understood between us that the subject was never to be renewed, and that it wasn't a subject on which grave and sober men like us (I made a note of your observations at the time) could interfere. Our caution too! When Mr. Craggs, sir, went down to his respected grave in the full belief - '

'I had given a solemn promise of silence until I should return, whenever that might be,' interrupted Mr. Warden; 'and I have kept it.'

'Well, sir, and I repeat it,' returned Mr. Snitchey, 'we were bound to silence too. We were bound to silence in our duty towards ourselves, and in our duty towards a variety of clients, you among them, who were as close as wax. It was not our place to make inquiries of you on such a delicate subject. I had my suspicions, sir; but, it is not six months since I have known the truth, and been assured that you lost her.'

'By whom?' inquired his client.

'By Doctor Jeddler himself, sir, who at last reposed that confidence in me voluntarily. He, and only he, has known the whole truth, years and years.'

'And you know it?' said his client.

'I do, sir!' replied Snitchey; 'and I have also reason to know that it will be broken to her sister to-morrow evening. They have given her that promise. In the meantime, perhaps you'll give me the honour of your company at my house; being unexpected at your own. But, not to run the chance of any more such difficulties as you have had here, in case you should be recognised - though you're a good deal changed; I think I might have passed you myself, Mr. Warden - we had better dine here, and walk on in the evening. It's a very good place to dine at, Mr. Warden: your own property, by- the-bye. Self and Craggs (deceased) took a chop here sometimes, and had it very comfortably served. Mr. Craggs, sir,' said Snitchey, shutting his eyes tight for an instant, and opening them again, 'was struck off the roll of life too soon.'

'Heaven forgive me for not condoling with you,' returned Michael Warden, passing his hand across his forehead, 'but I'm like a man in a dream at present. I seem to want my wits. Mr. Craggs - yes - I am very sorry we have lost Mr. Craggs.' But he looked at Clemency as he said it, and seemed to sympathise with Ben, consoling her.

'Mr. Craggs, sir,' observed Snitchey, 'didn't find life, I regret to say, as easy to have and to hold as his theory made it out, or he would have been among us now. It's a great loss to me. He was my right arm, my right leg, my right ear, my right eye, was Mr. Craggs. I am paralytic without him. He bequeathed his share of the business to Mrs. Craggs, her executors, administrators, and assigns. His name remains in the Firm to this hour. I try, in a childish sort of a way, to make believe, sometimes, he's alive. You may observe that I speak for Self and Craggs - deceased, sir - deceased,' said the tender-hearted attorney, waving his pocket- handkerchief.

Michael Warden, who had still been observant of Clemency, turned to Mr. Snitchey when he ceased to speak, and whispered in his ear.

'Ah, poor thing!' said Snitchey, shaking his head. 'Yes. She was always very faithful to Marion. She was always very fond of her. Pretty Marion! Poor Marion! Cheer up, Mistress - you are married now, you know, Clemency.'

Clemency only sighed, and shook her head.

'Well, well! Wait till to-morrow,' said the lawyer, kindly.

'To-morrow can't bring back' the dead to life, Mister,' said Clemency, sobbing.

'No. It can't do that, or it would bring back Mr. Craggs, deceased,' returned the lawyer. 'But it may bring some soothing circumstances; it may bring some comfort. Wait till to-morrow!'

So Clemency, shaking his proffered hand, said she would; and Britain, who had been terribly cast down at sight of his despondent wife (which was like the business hanging its head), said that was right; and Mr. Snitchey and Michael Warden went up-stairs; and there they were soon engaged in a conversation so cautiously conducted, that no murmur of it was audible above the clatter of plates and dishes, the hissing of the frying-pan, the bubbling of saucepans, the low monotonous waltzing of the jack - with a dreadful click every now and then as if it had met with some mortal accident to its head, in a fit of giddiness - and all the other preparations in the kitchen for their dinner.

To-morrow was a bright and peaceful day; and nowhere were the autumn tints more beautifully seen, than from the quiet orchard of the Doctor's house. The snows of many winter nights had melted from that ground, the withered leaves of many summer times had rustled there, since she had fled. The honey-suckle porch was green again, the trees cast bountiful and changing shadows on the grass, the landscape was as tranquil and serene as it had ever been; but where was she!

Not there. Not there. She would have been a stranger sight in her old home now, even than that home had been at first, without her. But, a lady sat in the familiar place, from whose heart she had never passed away; in whose true memory she lived, unchanging, youthful, radiant with all promise and all hope; in whose affection - and it was a mother's now, there was a cherished little daughter playing by her side - she had no rival, no successor; upon whose gentle lips her name was trembling then.

The spirit of the lost girl looked out of those eyes. Those eyes of Grace, her sister, sitting with her husband in the orchard, on their wedding-day, and his and Marion's birth-day.

He had not become a great man; he had not grown rich; he had not forgotten the scenes and friends of his youth; he had not fulfilled any one of the Doctor's old predictions. But, in his useful, patient, unknown visiting of poor men's homes; and in his watching of sick beds; and in his daily knowledge of the gentleness and goodness flowering the by-paths of this world, not to be trodden down beneath the heavy foot of poverty, but springing up, elastic, in its track, and making its way beautiful; he had better learned and proved, in each succeeding year, the truth of his old faith. The manner of his life, though quiet and remote, had shown him how often men still entertained angels, unawares, as in the olden time; and how the most unlikely forms - even some that were mean and ugly to the view, and poorly clad - became irradiated by the couch of sorrow, want, and pain, and changed to ministering spirits with a glory round their heads.

He lived to better purpose on the altered battle-ground, perhaps, than if he had contended restlessly in more ambitious lists; and he was happy with his wife, dear Grace.

And Marion. Had HE forgotten her?

'The time has flown, dear Grace,' he said, 'since then;' they had been talking of that night; 'and yet it seems a long long while ago. We count by changes and events within us. Not by years.'

'Yet we have years to count by, too, since Marion was with us,' returned Grace. 'Six times, dear husband, counting to-night as one, we have sat here on her birth-day, and spoken together of that happy return, so eagerly expected and so long deferred. Ah when will it be! When will it be!'

Her husband attentively observed her, as the tears collected in her eyes; and drawing nearer, said:

'But, Marion told you, in that farewell letter which she left for you upon your table, love, and which you read so often, that years must pass away before it COULD be. Did she not?'

She took a letter from her breast, and kissed it, and said 'Yes.'

'That through these intervening years, however happy she might be, she would look forward to the time when you would meet again, and all would be made clear; and that she prayed you, trustfully and hopefully to do the same. The letter runs so, does it not, my dear?'

'Yes, Alfred.'

'And every other letter she has written since?'

'Except the last - some months ago - in which she spoke of you, and what you then knew, and what I was to learn to-night.'

He looked towards the sun, then fast declining, and said that the appointed time was sunset.

'Alfred!' said Grace, laying her hand upon his shoulder earnestly, 'there is something in this letter - this old letter, which you say I read so often -

that I have never told you. But, to-night, dear husband, with that sunset drawing near, and all our life seeming to soften and become hushed with the departing day, I cannot keep it secret.'

'What is it, love?'

'When Marion went away, she wrote me, here, that you had once left her a sacred trust to me, and that now she left you, Alfred, such a trust in my hands: praying and beseeching me, as I loved her, and as I loved you, not to reject the affection she believed (she knew, she said) you would transfer to me when the new wound was healed, but to encourage and return it.'

' - And make me a proud, and happy man again, Grace. Did she say so?'

'She meant, to make myself so blest and honoured in your love,' was his wife's answer, as he held her in his arms.

'Hear me, my dear!' he said. - 'No. Hear me so!' - and as he spoke, he gently laid the head she had raised, again upon his shoulder. 'I know why I have never heard this passage in the letter, until now. I know why no trace of it ever showed itself in any word or look of yours at that time. I know why Grace, although so true a friend to me, was hard to win to be my wife. And knowing it, my own! I know the priceless value of the heart I gird within my arms, and thank GOD for the rich possession!'

She wept, but not for sorrow, as he pressed her to his heart. After a brief space, he looked down at the child, who was sitting at their feet playing with a little basket of flowers, and bade her look how golden and how red the sun was.

'Alfred,' said Grace, raising her head quickly at these words. 'The sun is going down. You have not forgotten what I am to know before it sets.'

'You are to know the truth of Marion's history, my love,' he answered.

'All the truth,' she said, imploringly. 'Nothing veiled from me, any more. That was the promise. Was it not?'

'It was,' he answered.

'Before the sun went down on Marion's birth-day. And you see it, Alfred? It is sinking fast.'

He put his arm about her waist, and, looking steadily into her eyes, rejoined:

'That truth is not reserved so long for me to tell, dear Grace. It is to come from other lips.'

'From other lips!' she faintly echoed.

'Yes. I know your constant heart, I know how brave you are, I know that to you a word of preparation is enough. You have said, truly, that the time is come. It is. Tell me that you have present fortitude to bear a trial - a surprise - a shock: and the messenger is waiting at the gate.'

'What messenger?' she said. 'And what intelligence does he bring?'

'I am pledged,' he answered her, preserving his steady look, 'to say no more. Do you think you understand me?'

'I am afraid to think,' she said.

There was that emotion in his face, despite its steady gaze, which frightened her. Again she hid her own face on his shoulder, trembling, and entreated him to pause - a moment.

'Courage, my wife! When you have firmness to receive the messenger, the messenger is waiting at the gate. The sun is setting on Marion's birthday. Courage, courage, Grace!'

She raised her head, and, looking at him, told him she was ready. As she stood, and looked upon him going away, her face was so like Marion's as it had been in her later days at home, that it was wonderful to see. He took the child with him. She called her back - she bore the lost girl's name - and pressed her to her bosom. The little creature, being released again, sped after him, and Grace was left alone.

She knew not what she dreaded, or what hoped; but remained there, motionless, looking at the porch by which they had disappeared.

Ah! what was that, emerging from its shadow; standing on its threshold! That figure, with its white garments rustling in the evening air; its head laid down upon her father's breast, and pressed against it to his loving heart! O God! was it a vision that came bursting from the old man's arms, and with a cry, and with a waving of its hands, and with a wild precipitation of itself upon her in its boundless love, sank down in her embrace!

'Oh, Marion, Marion! Oh, my sister! Oh, my heart's dear love!
Oh, joy and happiness unutterable, so to meet again!'

It was no dream, no phantom conjured up by hope and fear, but Marion, sweet Marion! So beautiful, so happy, so unalloyed by care and trial, so elevated and exalted in her loveliness, that as the setting sun shone brightly on her upturned face, she might have been a spirit visiting the earth upon some healing mission.

Clinging to her sister, who had dropped upon a seat and bent down over her - and smiling through her tears - and kneeling, close before her, with both arms twining round her, and never turning for an instant from her face - and with the glory of the setting sun upon her brow, and with the soft tranquillity of evening gathering around them - Marion at length broke silence; her voice, so calm, low, clear, and pleasant, well-tuned to the time.

'When this was my dear home, Grace, as it will be now again - '

'Stay, my sweet love! A moment! O Marion, to hear you speak again.'

She could not bear the voice she loved so well, at first.

'When this was my dear home, Grace, as it will be now again, I loved him from my soul. I loved him most devotedly. I would have died for him, though I was so young. I never slighted his affection in my secret breast for one brief instant. It was far beyond all price to me. Although it is so long ago, and past, and gone, and everything is wholly changed, I could not bear to think that you, who love so well, should think I did not truly love him once. I never loved him better, Grace, than when he left this very scene upon this very day. I never loved him better, dear one, than I did that night when I left here.'

Her sister, bending over her, could look into her face, and hold her fast.

'But he had gained, unconsciously,' said Marion, with a gentle smile, 'another heart, before I knew that I had one to give him. That heart - yours, my sister! - was so yielded up, in all its other tenderness, to me; was so devoted, and so noble; that it plucked its love away, and kept its secret from all eyes but mine - Ah! what other eyes were quickened by such tenderness and gratitude! - and was content to sacrifice itself to me. But, I knew something of its depths. I knew the struggle it had made. I knew its high, inestimable worth to him, and his appreciation of it, let him love me as he would. I knew the debt I owed it. I had its great example every day before me. What you had done for me, I knew that I could do, Grace, if I would, for you. I never laid my head down on my pillow, but I prayed with tears to do it. I never laid my head down on my pillow, but I thought of Alfred's own words on the day of his departure, and how truly he had said (for I knew that, knowing you) that there were victories gained every day, in struggling hearts, to which these fields of battle were nothing. Thinking more and more upon the great endurance cheerfully sustained, and never known or cared for, that there must be, every day and hour, in that great strife of which he spoke, my trial seemed to grow light and easy. And He who knows our hearts, my dearest, at this moment, and who knows there is no drop of bitterness or grief - of anything but unmixed happiness - in mine, enabled me to make the resolution that I never would be Alfred's wife. That he should be my brother, and your husband, if the course I took could bring that happy end to pass; but that I never would (Grace, I then loved him dearly, dearly!) be his wife!'

'O Marion! O Marion!'

'I had tried to seem indifferent to him;' and she pressed her sister's face against her own; 'but that was hard, and you were always his true advocate. I had tried to tell you of my resolution, but you would never hear me; you would never understand me. The time was drawing near for his return. I felt that I must act, before the daily intercourse between us was renewed. I knew that one great pang, undergone at that time, would save a lengthened agony to all of us. I knew that if I went away then, that end must follow which HAS followed, and which has made us both so happy, Grace! I wrote to good Aunt Martha, for a refuge in her house: I did not then tell her all, but something of my story, and she freely promised it. While I was contesting that step with myself, and with my love of you, and home, Mr. Warden, brought here by an accident, became, for some time, our companion.'

'I have sometimes feared of late years, that this might have been,' exclaimed her sister; and her countenance was ashy-pale. 'You never loved him - and you married him in your self-sacrifice to me!'

'He was then,' said Marion, drawing her sister closer to her, 'on the eve of going secretly away for a long time. He wrote to me, after leaving here; told me what his condition and prospects really were; and offered me his hand. He told me he had seen I was not happy in the prospect of Alfred's return. I believe he thought my heart had no part in that contract; perhaps thought I might have loved him once, and did not then; perhaps thought that when I tried to seem indifferent, I tried to hide indifference - I cannot tell. But I wished that you should feel me wholly lost to Alfred - hopeless to him - dead. Do you understand me, love?'

Her sister looked into her face, attentively. She seemed in doubt.

'I saw Mr. Warden, and confided in his honour; charged him with my secret, on the eve of his and my departure. He kept it. Do you understand me, dear?'

Grace looked confusedly upon her. She scarcely seemed to hear.

'My love, my sister!' said Marion, 'recall your thoughts a moment; listen to me. Do not look so strangely on me. There are countries, dearest, where those who would abjure a misplaced passion, or would strive, against some cherished feeling of their hearts and conquer it, retire into a hopeless solitude, and close the world against themselves and worldly loves and hopes for ever. When women do so, they assume that name which is so dear to you and me, and call each other Sisters. But, there may be sisters, Grace, who, in the broad world out of doors, and underneath its free sky, and in its crowded places, and among its busy life, and trying to assist and cheer it and to do some good, - learn the same lesson; and who, with hearts still fresh and young, and open to all happiness and means of happiness, can say the battle is long past, the victory long won. And such a one am I! You understand me now?'

Still she looked fixedly upon her, and made no reply.

'Oh Grace, dear Grace,' said Marion, clinging yet more tenderly and fondly to that breast from which she had been so long exiled, 'if you were not a happy wife and mother - if I had no little namesake here - if Alfred, my kind brother, were not your own fond husband - from whence could I derive the ecstasy I feel to-night! But, as I left here, so I have returned. My heart has known no other love, my hand has never been bestowed apart from it. I am still your maiden sister, unmarried, unbetrothed: your own loving old Marion, in whose affection you exist alone and have no partner, Grace!'

She understood her now. Her face relaxed: sobs came to her relief; and falling on her neck, she wept and wept, and fondled her as if she were a child again.

When they were more composed, they found that the Doctor, and his sister good Aunt Martha, were standing near at hand, with Alfred.

'This is a weary day for me,' said good Aunt Martha, smiling through her tears, as she embraced her nieces; 'for I lose my dear companion in making you all happy; and what can you give me, in return for my Marion?'

'A converted brother,' said the Doctor.

'That's something, to be sure,' retorted Aunt Martha, 'in such a farce as -'

'No, pray don't,' said the doctor penitently.

'Well, I won't,' replied Aunt Martha. 'But, I consider myself ill used. I don't know what's to become of me without my Marion, after we have lived together half-a-dozen years.'

'You must come and live here, I suppose,' replied the Doctor. 'We shan't quarrel now, Martha.'

'Or you must get married, Aunt,' said Alfred.

'Indeed,' returned the old lady, 'I think it might be a good speculation if I were to set my cap at Michael Warden, who, I hear, is come home much the better for his absence in all respects. But as I knew him when he was a boy, and I was not a very young woman then, perhaps he mightn't respond. So I'll make up my mind to go and live with Marion, when she marries, and until then (it will not be very long, I dare say) to live alone. What do YOU say, Brother?'

'I've a great mind to say it's a ridiculous world altogether, and there's nothing serious in it,' observed the poor old Doctor.

'You might take twenty affidavits of it if you chose, Anthony,' said his sister; 'but nobody would believe you with such eyes as those.'

'It's a world full of hearts,' said the Doctor, hugging his youngest daughter, and bending across her to hug Grace - for he couldn't separate the sisters; 'and a serious world, with all its folly - even with mine, which was enough to have swamped the whole globe; and it is a world on which the sun never rises, but it looks upon a thousand bloodless battles that are some set-off against the miseries and wickedness of Battle-Fields; and it is a world we need be careful how we libel, Heaven forgive us, for it is a world of sacred mysteries, and its Creator only knows what lies beneath the surface of His lightest image!'

You would not be the better pleased with my rude pen, if it dissected and laid open to your view the transports of this family, long severed and now reunited. Therefore, I will not follow the poor Doctor through his humbled recollection of the sorrow he had had, when Marion was lost to him; nor, will I tell how serious he had found that world to be, in which some love, deep-anchored, is the portion of all human creatures; nor, how such a trifle as the absence of one little unit in the great absurd account, had stricken him to the ground. Nor, how, in compassion for his distress, his sister had, long ago, revealed the truth to him by slow degrees, and brought him to the knowledge of the heart of his self-banished daughter, and to that daughter's side.

Nor, how Alfred Heathfield had been told the truth, too, in the course of that then current year; and Marion had seen him, and had promised him, as her brother, that on her birth-day, in the evening, Grace should know it from her lips at last.

'I beg your pardon, Doctor,' said Mr. Snitchey, looking into the orchard, 'but have I liberty to come in?'

Without waiting for permission, he came straight to Marion, and kissed her hand, quite joyfully.

'If Mr. Craggs had been alive, my dear Miss Marion,' said Mr. Snitchey, 'he would have had great interest in this occasion. It might have suggested to him, Mr. Alfred, that our life is not too easy perhaps: that, taken altogether, it will bear any little smoothing we can give it; but Mr. Craggs was a man who could endure to be convinced, sir. He was always open to conviction. If he were open to conviction, now, I - this is weakness. Mrs. Snitchey, my dear,' - at his summons that lady appeared from behind the door, 'you are among old friends.'

Mrs. Snitchey having delivered her congratulations, took her husband aside.

'One moment, Mr. Snitchey,' said that lady. 'It is not in my nature to rake up the ashes of the departed.'

'No, my dear,' returned her husband.

'Mr. Craggs is - '

'Yes, my dear, he is deceased,' said Snitchey.

'But I ask you if you recollect,' pursued his wife, 'that evening of the ball? I only ask you that. If you do; and if your memory has not entirely failed you, Mr. Snitchey; and if you are not absolutely in your dotage; I ask you to connect this time with that - to remember how I begged and prayed you, on my knees - '

'Upon your knees, my dear?' said Mr. Snitchey.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Snitchey, confidently, 'and you know it - to beware of that man - to observe his eye - and now to tell me whether I was right, and whether at that moment he knew secrets which he didn't choose to tell.'

'Mrs. Snitchey,' returned her husband, in her ear, 'Madam. Did you ever observe anything in MY eye?'

'No,' said Mrs. Snitchey, sharply. 'Don't flatter yourself.'

'Because, Madam, that night,' he continued, twitching her by the sleeve, 'it happens that we both knew secrets which we didn't choose to tell, and both knew just the same professionally. And so the less you say about such things the better, Mrs. Snitchey; and take this as a warning to have wiser and more charitable eyes another time. Miss Marion, I brought a friend of yours along with me. Here! Mistress!'

Poor Clemency, with her apron to her eyes, came slowly in, escorted by her husband; the latter doleful with the presentiment, that if she abandoned herself to grief, the Nutmeg-Grater was done for.

'Now, Mistress,' said the lawyer, checking Marion as she ran towards her, and interposing himself between them, 'what's the matter with YOU?'

'The matter!' cried poor Clemency. - When, looking up in wonder, and in indignant remonstrance, and in the added emotion of a great roar from Mr. Britain, and seeing that sweet face so well remembered close before her, she stared, sobbed, laughed, cried, screamed, embraced her, held her fast, released her, fell on Mr. Snitchey and embraced him (much to Mrs. Snitchey's indignation), fell on the Doctor and embraced him, fell on Mr. Britain and embraced him, and concluded by embracing herself, throwing her apron over her head, and going into hysterics behind it.

A stranger had come into the orchard, after Mr. Snitchey, and had remained apart, near the gate, without being observed by any of the group; for they had little spare attention to bestow, and that had been monopolised by the ecstasies of Clemency. He did not appear to wish to be observed, but stood alone, with downcast eyes; and there was an air of dejection about him (though he was a gentleman of a gallant appearance) which the general happiness rendered more remarkable.

None but the quick eyes of Aunt Martha, however, remarked him at all; but, almost as soon as she espied him, she was in conversation with him. Presently, going to where Marion stood with Grace and her little namesake, she whispered something in Marion's ear, at which she started, and appeared surprised; but soon recovering from her confusion, she timidly approached the stranger, in Aunt Martha's company, and engaged in conversation with him too.

'Mr. Britain,' said the lawyer, putting his hand in his pocket, and bringing out a legal-looking document, while this was going on, 'I congratulate you. You are now the whole and sole proprietor of that freehold tenement, at present occupied and held by yourself as a licensed tavern, or house of public entertainment, and commonly called or known by the sign of the Nutmeg-Grater. Your wife lost one house, through my client

Mr. Michael Warden; and now gains another. I shall have the pleasure of canvassing you for the county, one of these fine mornings.'

'Would it make any difference in the vote if the sign was altered, sir?' asked Britain.

'Not in the least,' replied the lawyer.

'Then,' said Mr. Britain, handing him back the conveyance, 'just clap in the words, "and Thimble," will you be so good; and I'll have the two mottoes painted up in the parlour instead of my wife's portrait.'

'And let me,' said a voice behind them; it was the stranger's - Michael Warden's; 'let me claim the benefit of those inscriptions. Mr. Heathfield and Dr. Jeddler, I might have deeply wronged you both. That I did not, is no virtue of my own. I will not say that I am six years wiser than I was, or better. But I have known, at any rate, that term of self-reproach. I can urge no reason why you should deal gently with me. I abused the hospitality of this house; and learnt by my own demerits, with a shame I never have forgotten, yet with some profit too, I would fain hope, from one,' he glanced at Marion, 'to whom I made my humble supplication for forgiveness, when I knew her merit and my deep unworthiness. In a few days I shall quit this place for ever. I entreat your pardon. Do as you would be done by! Forget and Forgive!'

TIME - from whom I had the latter portion of this story, and with whom I have the pleasure of a personal acquaintance of some five- and-thirty years' duration - informed me, leaning easily upon his scythe, that Michael Warden never went away again, and never sold his house, but opened it afresh, maintained a golden means of hospitality, and had a wife, the pride and honour of that countryside, whose name was Marion. But, as I have observed that Time confuses facts occasionally, I hardly know what weight to give to his authority.

THE END OF
The Battle of Life

BLEAK HOUSE

by Charles Dickens

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PREFACE

A Chancery judge once had the kindness to inform me, as one of a company of some hundred and fifty men and women not labouring under any suspicions of lunacy, that the Court of Chancery, though the shining subject of much popular prejudice (at which point I thought the judge's eye had a cast in my direction), was almost immaculate. There had been, he admitted, a trivial blemish or so in its rate of progress, but this was exaggerated and had been entirely owing to the "parsimony of the public," which guilty public, it appeared, had been until lately bent in the most determined manner on by no means enlarging the number of Chancery judges appointed—I believe by Richard the Second, but any other king will do as well.

This seemed to me too profound a joke to be inserted in the body of this book or I should have restored it to Conversation Kenge or to Mr. Vholes, with one or other of whom I think it must have originated. In such mouths I might have coupled it with an apt quotation from one of Shakespeare's sonnets:

"My nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand:
Pity me, then, and wish I were renewed!"

But as it is wholesome that the parsimonious public should know what has been doing, and still is doing, in this connexion, I mention here that everything set forth in these pages concerning the Court of Chancery is substantially true, and within the truth. The case of Gridley is in no essential altered from one of actual occurrence, made public by a disinterested person who was professionally acquainted with the whole of the monstrous wrong from beginning to end. At the present moment

(August, 1853) there is a suit before the court which was commenced nearly twenty years ago, in which from thirty to forty counsel have been known to appear at one time, in which costs have been incurred to the amount of seventy thousand pounds, which is A FRIENDLY SUIT, and which is (I am assured) no nearer to its termination now than when it was begun. There is another well-known suit in Chancery, not yet decided, which was commenced before the close of the last century and in which more than double the amount of seventy thousand pounds has been swallowed up in costs. If I wanted other authorities for Jarndyce and Jarndyce, I could rain them on these pages, to the shame of—a parsimonious public.

There is only one other point on which I offer a word of remark. The possibility of what is called spontaneous combustion has been denied since the death of Mr. Krook; and my good friend Mr. Lewes (quite mistaken, as he soon found, in supposing the thing to have been abandoned by all authorities) published some ingenious letters to me at the time when that event was chronicled, arguing that spontaneous combustion could not possibly be. I have no need to observe that I do not wilfully or negligently mislead my readers and that before I wrote that description I took pains to investigate the subject. There are about thirty cases on record, of which the most famous, that of the Countess Cornelia de Baudi Cesenate, was minutely investigated and described by Giuseppe Bianchini, a prebendary of Verona, otherwise distinguished in letters, who published an account of it at Verona in 1731, which he afterwards republished at Rome. The appearances, beyond all rational doubt, observed in that case are the appearances observed in Mr. Krook's case. The next most famous instance happened at Rheims six years earlier, and the historian in that case is Le Cat, one of the most renowned surgeons produced by France. The subject was a woman, whose husband was ignorantly convicted of having murdered her; but on solemn appeal to a higher court, he was acquitted because it was shown upon the evidence that she had died the death of which this name of spontaneous combustion is given. I do not think it necessary to add to these notable facts, and that general reference to the authorities which will be found at page 30, vol. ii., [1] the recorded opinions and experiences of distinguished medical professors, French, English, and Scotch, in more modern days, contenting myself with observing that I shall not abandon the facts until there shall have been a considerable spontaneous combustion of the testimony on which human occurrences are usually received.[2]

In Bleak House I have purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things.

1853

[1] Publisher's note. This referred to a specific page in the printed book. In this edition the pertinent information is in Chapter XXX, paragraph 90.

[2] Another case, very clearly described by a dentist, occurred at the town of Columbus, in the United States of America, quite recently. The subject was a German who kept a liquor-shop and was an inveterate drunkard.

CHAPTER I. In Chancery

London. Michaelmas term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes—gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas in a general infection of ill temper, and losing their foot-hold at street-corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if this day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest.

Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon and hanging in the misty clouds.

Gas looming through the fog in divers places in the streets, much as the sun may, from the spongey fields, be seen to loom by husbandman and ploughboy. Most of the shops lighted two hours before their time—as the gas seems to know, for it has a haggard and unwilling look.

The raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest near that leaden-headed old obstruction, appropriate ornament for the threshold of a leaden-headed old corporation, Temple Bar. And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln's Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery.

Never can there come fog too thick, never can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering condition which this High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds this day in the sight of heaven and earth.

On such an afternoon, if ever, the Lord High Chancellor ought to be sitting here—as here he is—with a foggy glory round his head, softly fenced in with crimson cloth and curtains, addressed by a large advocate with great whiskers, a little voice, and an interminable brief, and outwardly directing his contemplation to the lantern in the roof, where he can see nothing but fog. On such an afternoon some score of members of the High Court of Chancery bar ought to be—as here they are—mistily engaged in one of the ten thousand stages of an endless cause, tripping one another up on slippery precedents, groping knee-deep in technicalities, running their goat-hair and horsehair warded heads against walls of words and making a pretence of equity with serious faces, as players might. On such an afternoon the various solicitors in the cause, some two or three of whom have inherited it from their fathers, who made a fortune by it, ought to be—as are they not?—ranged in a line, in a long matted well (but you might look in vain for truth at the bottom of it) between the registrar's red table and the silk gowns, with bills, cross-bills, answers, rejoinders, injunctions, affidavits, issues, references to masters, masters' reports, mountains of costly nonsense, piled before them. Well may the court be dim, with wasting candles here and there; well may the fog hang heavy in it, as if it would never get out; well may the stained-glass windows lose their colour and admit no light of day into the place; well may the uninitiated from the streets, who peep in through the glass panes in the door, be deterred from entrance by its owlish aspect and by the drawl, languidly echoing to the roof from the padded dais where the Lord High Chancellor looks into the lantern that has no light in it and where the attendant wigs are all stuck in a fog-bank! This is the Court of Chancery, which has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire, which has its worn-out lunatic in every madhouse and its dead in every churchyard, which has its ruined suitor with his slipshod heels and threadbare dress borrowing and begging through the round of every man's acquaintance, which gives to monied might the means abundantly of wearying out the right, which so exhausts finances, patience, courage, hope, so overthrows the brain and breaks the heart, that there is not an honourable man among its practitioners who would not give—who does not often give—the warning, "Suffer any wrong that can be done you rather than come here!"

Who happen to be in the Lord Chancellor's court this murky afternoon besides the Lord Chancellor, the counsel in the cause, two or three counsel who are never in any cause, and the well of solicitors before mentioned? There is the registrar below the judge, in wig and gown; and there are two or three maces, or petty-bags, or privy purses, or whatever they may be, in legal court suits. These are all yawning, for no crumb of amusement ever falls from Jarndyce and Jarndyce (the cause in hand), which was squeezed dry years upon years ago. The short-hand writers, the reporters of the court, and the reporters of the newspapers invariably decamp with the rest of the regulars when Jarndyce and Jarndyce comes on. Their places are a blank. Standing on a seat at the side of the hall, the better to peer into the curtained sanctuary, is a little mad old woman in a squeezed bonnet who is always in court, from its sitting to its rising, and always expecting some incomprehensible judgment to be given in her favour. Some say she really is, or was, a party to a suit, but no one knows for certain because no one cares. She carries some small litter in a reticule which she calls her documents, principally consisting of paper matches and dry lavender. A sallow prisoner has come up, in custody, for the half-dozenth time to make a personal application "to purge himself of his contempt," which, being a solitary surviving executor who has fallen into a state of conglomeration about accounts of which it is not pretended that he had ever any knowledge, he is not at all likely ever to do. In the meantime his prospects in life are ended. Another ruined suitor, who periodically appears from Shropshire and breaks out into efforts to address the Chancellor at the close of the day's business and who can by no means be made to understand that the Chancellor is legally ignorant of his existence after making it desolate for a quarter of a century, plants himself in a good place and keeps an eye on the judge, ready to call out "My Lord!" in a voice of sonorous complaint on the instant of his rising. A few lawyers' clerks and others who know this suitor by sight linger on the chance of his furnishing some fun and enlivening the dismal weather a little.

Jarndyce and Jarndyce drones on. This scarecrow of a suit has, in course of time, become so complicated that no man alive knows what it means. The parties to it understand it least, but it has been observed that no two Chancery lawyers can talk about it for five minutes without coming to a total disagreement as to all the premises. Innumerable children have been born into the cause; innumerable young people have married into it; innumerable old people have died out of it. Scores of persons have deliriously found themselves made parties in Jarndyce and Jarndyce without knowing how or why; whole families have inherited legendary hatreds with the suit. The little plaintiff or defendant who was promised a new rocking-horse when Jarndyce and Jarndyce should be settled has grown up, possessed himself of a real horse, and trotted away into the other world. Fair wards of court have faded into mothers and grandmothers; a long procession of Chancellors has come in and gone out; the legion of bills in the suit have been transformed into mere bills of mortality; there are not three Jarndyces left upon the earth perhaps since old Tom Jarndyce in despair blew his brains out at a coffee-house in Chancery Lane; but Jarndyce and Jarndyce still drags its dreary length before the court, perennially hopeless.

Jarndyce and Jarndyce has passed into a joke. That is the only good that has ever come of it. It has been death to many, but it is a joke in the profession. Every master in Chancery has had a reference out of it. Every Chancellor was "in it," for somebody or other, when he was counsel at the bar. Good things have been said about it by blue-nosed, bulbous-shoed old benchers in select port-wine committee after dinner in hall. Articled clerks have been in the habit of fleshing their legal wit upon it. The last Lord Chancellor handled it neatly, when, correcting Mr. Blowers, the eminent silk gown who said that such a thing might happen when the sky rained potatoes, he observed, "or when we get through Jarndyce and Jarndyce, Mr. Blowers"—a pleasantry that particularly tickled the maces, bags, and purses.

How many people out of the suit Jarndyce and Jarndyce has stretched forth its unwholesome hand to spoil and corrupt would be a very wide question. From the master upon whose impaling files reams of dusty warrants in Jarndyce and Jarndyce have grimly writhed into many shapes, down to the copying-clerk in the Six Clerks' Office who has copied his tens of thousands of Chancery folio-pages under that eternal heading, no man's nature has been made better by it. In trickery, evasion, procrastination, spoliation, botheration, under false pretences of all sorts, there are influences that can never come to good. The very solicitors' boys who have kept the wretched suitors at bay, by protesting time out of mind that Mr. Chizzle, Mizzle, or otherwise was particularly engaged and had appointments until dinner, may have got an extra moral twist and shuffle into themselves out of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. The receiver in the cause has acquired a goodly sum of money by it but has acquired too a distrust of his own mother and a contempt for his own kind. Chizzle, Mizzle, and otherwise have lapsed into a habit of vaguely promising themselves that they will look into that outstanding little matter and see what can be done for Drizzle—who was not well used—when Jarndyce and Jarndyce shall be got out of the office. Shirking and sharking in all their many varieties have been sown broadcast by the ill-fated cause; and even those who have contemplated its history from the outermost circle of such evil have been insensibly tempted into a loose way of letting bad things alone to take their own bad course, and a loose belief that if the world go wrong it was in some off-hand manner never meant to go right.

Thus, in the midst of the mud and at the heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery.

"Mr. Tangle," says the Lord High Chancellor, latterly something restless under the eloquence of that learned gentleman.

"Mlud," says Mr. Tangle. Mr. Tangle knows more of Jarndyce and Jarndyce than anybody. He is famous for it—supposed never to have read anything else since he left school.

"Have you nearly concluded your argument?"

"Mlud, no—variety of points—feel it my duty tsubmit—ludship," is the reply that slides out of Mr. Tangle.

"Several members of the bar are still to be heard, I believe?" says the Chancellor with a slight smile.

Eighteen of Mr. Tangle's learned friends, each armed with a little summary of eighteen hundred sheets, bob up like eighteen hammers in a pianoforte, make eighteen bows, and drop into their eighteen places of obscurity.

"We will proceed with the hearing on Wednesday fortnight," says the Chancellor. For the question at issue is only a question of costs, a mere bud on the forest tree of the parent suit, and really will come to a settlement one of these days.

The Chancellor rises; the bar rises; the prisoner is brought forward in a hurry; the man from Shropshire cries, "My lord!" Maces, bags, and purses indignantly proclaim silence and frown at the man from Shropshire.

"In reference," proceeds the Chancellor, still on Jarndyce and Jarndyce, "to the young girl—"

"Begludship's pardon—boy," says Mr. Tangle prematurely. "In reference," proceeds the Chancellor with extra distinctness, "to the young girl and boy, the two young people"—Mr. Tangle crushed—"whom I directed to be in attendance to-day and who are now in my private room, I will see them and satisfy myself as to the expediency of making the order for their residing with their uncle."

Mr. Tangle on his legs again. "Begludship's pardon—dead."

"With their"—Chancellor looking through his double eye-glass at the papers on his desk—"grandfather."

"Begludship's pardon—victim of rash action—brains."

Suddenly a very little counsel with a terrific bass voice arises, fully inflated, in the back settlements of the fog, and says, "Will your lordship allow me? I appear for him. He is a cousin, several times removed. I am not at the moment prepared to inform the court in what exact remove he is a cousin, but he IS a cousin."

Leaving this address (delivered like a sepulchral message) ringing in the rafters of the roof, the very little counsel drops, and the fog knows him no more. Everybody looks for him. Nobody can see him.

"I will speak with both the young people," says the Chancellor anew, "and satisfy myself on the subject of their residing with their cousin. I will mention the matter to-morrow morning when I take my seat."

The Chancellor is about to bow to the bar when the prisoner is presented. Nothing can possibly come of the prisoner's conglomeration but his being sent back to prison, which is soon done. The man from Shropshire ventures another remonstrative "My lord!" but the Chancellor, being aware of him, has dexterously vanished. Everybody else quickly vanishes too. A battery of blue bags is loaded with heavy charges of papers and carried off by clerks; the little mad old woman marches off with her documents; the empty court is locked up. If all the injustice it has committed and all the misery it has caused could only be locked up with it, and the whole burnt away in a great funeral pyre—why so much the better for other parties than the parties in Jarndyce and Jarndyce!

CHAPTER II. In Fashion

It is but a glimpse of the world of fashion that we want on this same miry afternoon. It is not so unlike the Court of Chancery but that we may pass from the one scene to the other, as the crow flies. Both the world of fashion and the Court of Chancery are things of precedent and usage: oversleeping Rip Van Winkles who have played at strange games through a deal of thundery weather; sleeping beauties whom the knight will wake one day, when all the stopped spits in the kitchen shall begin to turn prodigiously!

It is not a large world. Relatively even to this world of ours, which has its limits too (as your Highness shall find when you have made the tour of it and are come to the brink of the void beyond), it is a very little speck. There is much good in it; there are many good and true people in it; it has its appointed place. But the evil of it is that it is a world wrapped up in too much jeweller's cotton and fine wool, and cannot hear the rushing of the larger worlds, and cannot see them as they circle round the sun. It is a deadened world, and its growth is sometimes unhealthy for want of air.

My Lady Dedlock has returned to her house in town for a few days previous to her departure for Paris, where her ladyship intends to stay some weeks, after which her movements are uncertain. The fashionable intelligence says so for the comfort of the Parisians, and it knows all fashionable things. To know things otherwise were to be unfashionable. My Lady Dedlock has been down at what she calls, in familiar conversation, her "place" in Lincolnshire. The waters are out in Lincolnshire. An arch of the bridge in the park has been sapped and sopped away. The adjacent low-lying ground for half a mile in breadth is a stagnant river with melancholy trees for islands in it and a surface punctured all over, all day long, with falling rain. My Lady Dedlock's place has been extremely dreary. The weather for many a day and night has been so wet that the trees seem wet through, and the soft loppings and prunings of the woodman's axe can make no crash or crackle as they fall. The deer, looking soaked, leave quagmires where they pass. The shot of a rifle loses its sharpness in the moist air, and its smoke moves in a tardy little cloud towards the green rise, coppice-topped, that makes a background for the falling rain. The view from my Lady Dedlock's own windows is alternately a lead-coloured view and a view in Indian ink. The vases on the stone terrace in the foreground catch the rain all day; and the heavy drops fall—drip, drip, drip—upon the broad flagged pavement, called from old time the Ghost's Walk, all night. On Sundays the little church in the park is mouldy; the oaken pulpit breaks out into a cold sweat; and there is a general smell and taste as of the ancient Dedlocks in their graves. My Lady Dedlock (who is childless), looking out in the early twilight from her boudoir at a keeper's lodge and seeing the light of a fire upon the latticed panes, and smoke rising from the chimney, and a child, chased by a woman, running out into the rain to meet the shining figure of a wrapped-up man coming through the gate, has been put quite out of temper. My Lady Dedlock says she has been "bored to death."

Therefore my Lady Dedlock has come away from the place in Lincolnshire and has left it to the rain, and the crows, and the rabbits, and the deer, and the partridges and pheasants. The pictures of the Dedlocks past and gone have seemed to vanish into the damp walls in mere lowness of spirits, as the housekeeper has passed along the old rooms shutting up the shutters. And when they will next come forth again, the fashionable intelligence—which, like the fiend, is omniscient of the past and present, but not the future—cannot yet undertake to say.

Sir Leicester Dedlock is only a baronet, but there is no mightier baronet than he. His family is as old as the hills, and infinitely more respectable. He has a general opinion that the world might get on without hills but would be done up without Dedlocks. He would on the whole admit nature to be a good idea (a little low, perhaps, when not enclosed with a park-fence), but an idea dependent for its execution on your great county families. He is a gentleman of strict conscience, disdainful of all littleness and meanness and ready on the shortest notice to die any death you may please to mention rather than give occasion for the least impeachment of his integrity. He is an honourable, obstinate, truthful, high-spirited, intensely prejudiced, perfectly unreasonable man.

Sir Leicester is twenty years, full measure, older than my Lady. He will never see sixty-five again, nor perhaps sixty-six, nor yet sixty-seven. He has a twist of the gout now and then and walks a little stiffly. He is of a worthy presence, with his light-grey hair and whiskers, his fine shirt-frill, his pure-white waistcoat, and his blue coat with bright buttons always buttoned. He is ceremonious, stately, most polite on every occasion to my Lady, and holds her personal attractions in the highest estimation. His gallantry to my Lady, which has never changed since he courted her, is the one little touch of romantic fancy in him.

Indeed, he married her for love. A whisper still goes about that she had not even family; howbeit, Sir Leicester had so much family that perhaps he had enough and could dispense with any more. But she had beauty, pride, ambition, insolent resolve, and sense enough to portion out a legion of fine ladies. Wealth and station, added to these, soon floated her upward, and for years now my Lady Dedlock has been at the centre of the fashionable intelligence and at the top of the fashionable tree.

How Alexander wept when he had no more worlds to conquer, everybody knows—or has some reason to know by this time, the matter having been rather frequently mentioned. My Lady Dedlock, having conquered HER world, fell not into the melting, but rather into the freezing, mood. An exhausted composure, a worn-out placidity, an equanimity of fatigue not to be ruffled by interest or satisfaction, are the trophies of her victory. She is perfectly well-bred. If she could be translated to heaven to-morrow, she might be expected to ascend without any rapture.

She has beauty still, and if it be not in its heyday, it is not yet in its autumn. She has a fine face—originally of a character that would be rather called very pretty than handsome, but improved into classicality by the acquired expression of her fashionable state. Her figure is elegant and has the effect of being tall. Not that she is so, but that "the most is made," as the Honourable Bob Stables has frequently asserted upon oath, "of all her points." The same authority observes that she is perfectly got up and remarks in commendation of her hair especially that she is the best-groomed woman in the whole stud.

With all her perfections on her head, my Lady Dedlock has come up from her place in Lincolnshire (hotly pursued by the fashionable intelligence) to pass a few days at her house in town previous to her departure for Paris, where her ladyship intends to stay some weeks, after which her movements are uncertain. And at her house in town, upon this muddy, murky afternoon, presents himself an old-fashioned old gentleman, attorney-at-law and eke solicitor of the High Court of Chancery, who has the honour of acting as legal adviser of the Dedlocks and has as many cast-iron boxes in his office with that name outside as if the present baronet were the coin of the conjuror's trick and were constantly being juggled through the whole set. Across the hall, and up the stairs, and along the passages, and through the rooms, which are very brilliant in the season and very dismal out of it—fairy-land to visit, but a desert to live in—the old gentleman is conducted by a Mercury in powder to my Lady's presence.

The old gentleman is rusty to look at, but is reputed to have made good thrift out of aristocratic marriage settlements and aristocratic wills, and to be very rich. He is surrounded by a mysterious halo of family confidences, of which he is known to be the silent depository. There are noble mausoleums rooted for centuries in retired glades of parks among the growing timber and the fern, which perhaps hold fewer noble secrets than walk abroad among men, shut up in the breast of Mr. Tulkinghorn. He is of what is called the old school—a phrase generally meaning any school that seems never to have been young—and wears knee-breeches tied with ribbons, and gaiters or stockings. One peculiarity of his black clothes and of his black stockings, be they silk or worsted, is that they never shine. Mute, close, irresponsive to any glancing light, his dress is like himself. He never converses when not professionaly consulted. He is found sometimes, speechless but quite at home, at corners of dinner-tables in great country houses and near doors of drawing-rooms, concerning which the fashionable intelligence is eloquent, where everybody knows him and where half the Peerage stops to say "How do you do, Mr. Tulkinghorn?" He receives these salutations with gravity and buries them along with the rest of his knowledge.

Sir Leicester Dedlock is with my Lady and is happy to see Mr. Tulkinghorn. There is an air of prescription about him which is always agreeable to Sir Leicester; he receives it as a kind of tribute. He likes Mr. Tulkinghorn's dress; there is a kind of tribute in that too. It is eminently respectable, and likewise, in a general way, retainer-like. It expresses, as it were, the steward of the legal mysteries, the butler of the legal cellar, of the Dedlocks.

Has Mr. Tulkinghorn any idea of this himself? It may be so, or it may not, but there is this remarkable circumstance to be noted in everything associated with my Lady Dedlock as one of a class—as one of the leaders and representatives of her little world. She supposes herself to be an inscrutable Being, quite out of the reach and ken of ordinary mortals—seeing herself in her glass, where indeed she looks so. Yet every dim little star revolving about her, from her maid to the manager of the Italian Opera, knows her weaknesses, prejudices, follies, haughtinesses, and caprices and lives upon as accurate a calculation and as nice a measure of her moral nature as her dressmaker takes of her physical proportions. Is a new dress, a new custom, a new singer, a new dancer, a new form of jewellery, a new dwarf or giant, a new chapel, a new anything, to be set up? There are deferential people in a dozen callings whom my Lady Dedlock suspects of nothing but prostration before her, who can tell you how to manage her as if she were a baby, who do nothing but nurse her all their lives, who, humbly affecting to follow with profound subservience, lead her and her whole troop after them; who, in hooking one, hook all and bear them off as Lemuel Gulliver bore away the stately fleet of the majestic Lilliput. "If you want to address our people, sir," say Blaze and Sparkle, the jewellers—meaning by our people Lady Dedlock and the rest—"you must remember that you are not dealing with the general public; you must hit our people in their weakest place, and their weakest place is such a place." "To make this article go down, gentlemen," say Sheen and Gloss, the mercers, to their friends the manufacturers, "you must come to us, because we know where to have the fashionable people, and we can make it fashionable." "If you want to get this print upon the tables of my high connexion, sir," says Mr. Sladdery, the librarian, "or if you want to get this dwarf or giant into the houses of my high connexion, sir, or if you want to secure to this entertainment the patronage of my high connexion, sir, you must leave it, if you please, to me, for I have been accustomed to study the leaders of my high connexion, sir, and I may tell you without vanity that I can turn them round my finger"—in which Mr. Sladdery, who is an honest man, does not exaggerate at all.

Therefore, while Mr. Tulkinghorn may not know what is passing in the Dedlock mind at present, it is very possible that he may.

"My Lady's cause has been again before the Chancellor, has it, Mr. Tulkinghorn?" says Sir Leicester, giving him his hand.

"Yes. It has been on again to-day," Mr. Tulkinghorn replies, making one of his quiet bows to my Lady, who is on a sofa near the fire, shading her face with a hand-screen.

"It would be useless to ask," says my Lady with the dreariness of the place in Lincolnshire still upon her, "whether anything has been done."

"Nothing that YOU would call anything has been done to-day," replies Mr. Tulkinghorn.

"Nor ever will be," says my Lady.

Sir Leicester has no objection to an interminable Chancery suit. It is a slow, expensive, British, constitutional kind of thing. To be sure, he has not a vital interest in the suit in question, her part in which was the only property my Lady brought him; and he has a shadowy impression that for his name—the name of Dedlock—to be in a cause, and not in the title of that cause, is a most ridiculous accident. But he regards the Court of Chancery, even if it should involve an occasional delay of justice and a trifling amount of confusion, as a something devised in conjunction with a variety of other somethings by the perfection of human wisdom for the eternal settlement (humanly speaking) of everything. And he is upon the whole of a fixed opinion that to give the sanction of his countenance to any complaints respecting it would be to encourage some person in the lower classes to rise up somewhere—like Wat Tyler.

"As a few fresh affidavits have been put upon the file," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, "and as they are short, and as I proceed upon the troublesome principle of begging leave to possess my clients with any new proceedings in a cause"—cautious man Mr. Tulkinghorn, taking no more responsibility than necessary—"and further, as I see you are going to Paris, I have brought them in my pocket."

(Sir Leicester was going to Paris too, by the by, but the delight of the fashionable intelligence was in his Lady.)

Mr. Tulkinghorn takes out his papers, asks permission to place them on a golden talisman of a table at my Lady's elbow, puts on his spectacles, and begins to read by the light of a shaded lamp.

"'In Chancery. Between John Jarndyce—'"

My Lady interrupts, requesting him to miss as many of the formal horrors as he can.

Mr. Tulkinghorn glances over his spectacles and begins again lower down. My Lady carelessly and scornfully abstracts her attention. Sir Leicester in a great chair looks at the file and appears to have a stately liking for the legal repetitions and prolixities as ranging among the national bulwarks. It happens that the fire is hot where my Lady sits and that the hand-screen is more beautiful than useful, being priceless but small. My Lady, changing her position, sees the papers on the table—looks at them nearer—looks at them nearer still—asks impulsively, "Who copied that?"

Mr. Tulkinghorn stops short, surprised by my Lady's animation and her unusual tone.

"Is it what you people call law-hand?" she asks, looking full at him in her careless way again and toying with her screen.

"Not quite. Probably"—Mr. Tulkinghorn examines it as he speaks—"the legal character which it has was acquired after the original hand was formed. Why do you ask?"

"Anything to vary this detestable monotony. Oh, go on, do!"

Mr. Tulkinghorn reads again. The heat is greater; my Lady screens her face. Sir Leicester dozes, starts up suddenly, and cries, "Eh? What do you say?"

"I say I am afraid," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, who had risen hastily, "that Lady Dedlock is ill."

"Faint," my Lady murmurs with white lips, "only that; but it is like the faintness of death. Don't speak to me. Ring, and take me to my room!"

Mr. Tulkinghorn retires into another chamber; bells ring, feet shuffle and patter, silence ensues. Mercury at last begs Mr. Tulkinghorn to return.

"Better now," quoth Sir Leicester, motioning the lawyer to sit down and read to him alone. "I have been quite alarmed. I never knew my Lady swoon before. But the weather is extremely trying, and she really has been bored to death down at our place in Lincolnshire."

CHAPTER III. A Progress

I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages, for I know I am not clever. I always knew that. I can remember, when I was a very little girl indeed, I used to say to my doll when we were alone together, "Now, Dolly, I am not clever, you know very well, and you must be patient with me, like a dear!" And so she used to sit propped up in a great arm-chair, with her beautiful complexion and rosy lips, staring at me—or not so much at me, I think, as at nothing—while I busily stitched away and told her every one of my secrets.

My dear old doll! I was such a shy little thing that I seldom dared to open my lips, and never dared to open my heart, to anybody else. It almost makes me cry to think what a relief it used to be to me when I came home from school of a day to run upstairs to my room and say, "Oh, you dear faithful Dolly, I knew you would be expecting me!" and then to sit down on the floor, leaning on the elbow of her great chair, and tell her all I had noticed since we parted. I had always rather a noticing way—not a quick way, oh, no!—a silent way of noticing what passed before me and thinking I should like to understand it better. I have not by any means a quick understanding. When I love a person very tenderly indeed, it seems to brighten. But even that may be my vanity.

I was brought up, from my earliest remembrance—like some of the princesses in the fairy stories, only I was not charming—by my godmother. At least, I only knew her as such. She was a good, good woman! She went to church three times every Sunday, and to morning prayers on Wednesdays and Fridays, and to lectures whenever there were lectures; and never missed. She was handsome; and if she had ever smiled, would have been (I used to think) like an angel—but she never smiled. She was always grave and strict. She was so very good herself, I thought, that the badness of other people made her frown all her life. I felt so different from her, even making every allowance for the differences between a child and a woman; I felt so poor, so trifling, and so far off that I never could be unrestrained with her—no, could never even love her as I wished. It made me very sorry to consider how good she was and how unworthy of her I was, and I used ardently to hope that I might have a better heart; and I talked it over very often with the dear old doll, but I never loved my godmother as I ought to have loved her and as I felt I must have loved her if I had been a better girl.

This made me, I dare say, more timid and retiring than I naturally was and cast me upon Dolly as the only friend with whom I felt at ease. But something happened when I was still quite a little thing that helped it very much.

I had never heard my mama spoken of. I had never heard of my papa either, but I felt more interested about my mama. I had never worn a black frock, that I could recollect. I had never been shown my mama's grave. I had never been told where it was. Yet I had never been taught to pray for any relation but my godmother. I had more than once approached this subject of my thoughts with Mrs. Rachael, our only servant, who took my light away when I was in bed (another very good woman, but austere to me), and she had only said, "Esther, good night!" and gone away and left me.

Although there were seven girls at the neighbouring school where I was a day boarder, and although they called me little Esther Summerson, I knew none of them at home. All of them were older than I, to be sure (I was the youngest there by a good deal), but there seemed to be some other separation between us besides that, and besides their being far more clever than I was and knowing much more than I did. One of them in the first week of my going to the school (I remember it very well) invited me home to a little party, to my great joy. But my godmother wrote a stiff letter declining for me, and I never went. I never went out at all.

It was my birthday. There were holidays at school on other birthdays—none on mine. There were rejoicings at home on other birthdays, as I knew from what I heard the girls relate to one another—there were none on mine. My birthday was the most melancholy day at home in the whole year.

I have mentioned that unless my vanity should deceive me (as I know it may, for I may be very vain without suspecting it, though indeed I don't), my comprehension is quickened when my affection is. My disposition is very affectionate, and perhaps I might still feel such a wound if such a wound could be received more than once with the quickness of that birthday.

Dinner was over, and my godmother and I were sitting at the table before the fire. The clock ticked, the fire clicked; not another sound had been heard in the room or in the house for I don't know how long. I happened to look timidly up from my stitching, across the table at my godmother, and I saw in her face, looking gloomily at me, "It would have been far better, little Esther, that you had had no birthday, that you had never been born!"

I broke out crying and sobbing, and I said, "Oh, dear godmother, tell me, pray do tell me, did Mama die on my birthday?"

"No," she returned. "Ask me no more, child!"

"Oh, do pray tell me something of her. Do now, at last, dear godmother, if you please! What did I do to her? How did I lose her? Why am I so different from other children, and why is it my fault, dear godmother? No, no, no, don't go away. Oh, speak to me!"

I was in a kind of fright beyond my grief, and I caught hold of her dress and was kneeling to her. She had been saying all the while, "Let me go!" But now she stood still.

Her darkened face had such power over me that it stopped me in the midst of my vehemence. I put up my trembling little hand to clasp hers or to beg her pardon with what earnestness I might, but withdrew it as she looked at me, and laid it on my fluttering heart. She raised me, sat in her chair, and standing me before her, said slowly in a cold, low voice—I see her knitted brow and pointed finger—"Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers. The time will come—and soon enough—when you will understand this better and will feel it too, as no one save a woman can. I have forgiven her"—but her face did not relent—"the wrong she did to me, and I say no more of it, though it was greater than you will ever know—than any one will ever know but I, the sufferer. For yourself, unfortunate girl, orphaned and degraded from the first of these evil anniversaries, pray daily that the sins of others be not visited upon your head, according to what is written. Forget your mother and leave all other people to forget her who will do her unhappy child that greatest kindness. Now, go!"

She checked me, however, as I was about to depart from her—so frozen as I was!—and added this, "Submission, self-denial, diligent work, are the preparations for a life begun with such a shadow on it. You are different from other children, Esther, because you were not born, like them, in common sinfulness and wrath. You are set apart."

I went up to my room, and crept to bed, and laid my doll's cheek against mine wet with tears, and holding that solitary friend upon my bosom, cried myself to sleep. Imperfect as my understanding of my sorrow was, I knew that I had brought no joy at any time to anybody's heart and that I was to no one upon earth what Dolly was to me.

Dear, dear, to think how much time we passed alone together afterwards, and how often I repeated to the doll the story of my birthday and confided to her that I would try as hard as ever I could to repair the fault I had been born with (of which I confessedly felt guilty and yet innocent) and would strive as I grew up to be industrious, contented, and kind-hearted and to do some good to some one, and win some love to myself if I could. I hope it is not self-indulgent to shed these tears as I think of it. I am very thankful, I am very cheerful, but I cannot quite help their coming to my eyes.

There! I have wiped them away now and can go on again properly.

I felt the distance between my godmother and myself so much more after the birthday, and felt so sensible of filling a place in her house which ought to have been empty, that I found her more difficult of approach, though I was fervently grateful to her in my heart, than ever. I felt in the same way towards my school companions; I felt in the same way towards Mrs. Rachael, who was a widow; and oh, towards her daughter, of whom she was proud, who came to see her once a fortnight! I was very retired and quiet, and tried to be very diligent.

One sunny afternoon when I had come home from school with my books and portfolio, watching my long shadow at my side, and as I was gliding upstairs to my room as usual, my godmother looked out of the parlour-door and called me back. Sitting with her, I found—which was very unusual indeed—a stranger. A portly, important-looking gentleman, dressed all in black, with a white cravat, large gold watch seals, a pair of gold eye-glasses, and a large seal-ring upon his little finger.

"This," said my godmother in an undertone, "is the child." Then she said in her naturally stern way of speaking, "This is Esther, sir."

The gentleman put up his eye-glasses to look at me and said, "Come here, my dear!" He shook hands with me and asked me to take off my bonnet, looking at me all the while. When I had complied, he said, "Ah!" and afterwards "Yes!" And then, taking off his eye-glasses and folding them in a red case, and leaning back in his arm-chair, turning the case about in his two hands, he gave my godmother a nod. Upon that, my godmother said, "You may go upstairs, Esther!" And I made him my curtsy and left him.

It must have been two years afterwards, and I was almost fourteen, when one dreadful night my godmother and I sat at the fireside. I was reading aloud, and she was listening. I had come down at nine o'clock as I always did to read the Bible to her, and was reading from St. John how our Saviour stooped down, writing with his finger in the dust, when they brought the sinful woman to him.

"So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself and said unto them, 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her!'"

I was stopped by my godmother's rising, putting her hand to her head, and crying out in an awful voice from quite another part of the book, "'Watch ye, therefore, lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch!'"

In an instant, while she stood before me repeating these words, she fell down on the floor. I had no need to cry out; her voice had sounded through the house and been heard in the street.

She was laid upon her bed. For more than a week she lay there, little altered outwardly, with her old handsome resolute frown that I so well knew carved upon her face. Many and many a time, in the day and in the night, with my head upon the pillow by her that my whispers might be plainer to her, I kissed her, thanked her, prayed for her, asked her for her blessing and forgiveness, entreated her to give me the least sign that she knew or heard me. No, no, no. Her face was immovable. To the very last, and even afterwards, her frown remained unsoftened.

On the day after my poor good godmother was buried, the gentleman in black with the white neckcloth reappeared. I was sent for by Mrs. Rachael, and found him in the same place, as if he had never gone away.

"My name is Kenge," he said; "you may remember it, my child; Kenge and Carboy, Lincoln's Inn."

I replied that I remembered to have seen him once before.

"Pray be seated—here near me. Don't distress yourself; it's of no use. Mrs. Rachael, I needn't inform you who were acquainted with the late Miss Barbary's affairs, that her means die with her and that this young lady, now her aunt is dead—"

"My aunt, sir!"

"It is really of no use carrying on a deception when no object is to be gained by it," said Mr. Kenge smoothly, "Aunt in fact, though not in law. Don't distress yourself! Don't weep! Don't tremble! Mrs. Rachael, our young friend has no doubt heard of—the—a—Jarndyce and Jarndyce."

"Never," said Mrs. Rachael.

"Is it possible," pursued Mr. Kenge, putting up his eye-glasses, "that our young friend—I BEG you won't distress yourself!—never heard of Jarndyce and Jarndyce!"

I shook my head, wondering even what it was.

"Not of Jarndyce and Jarndyce?" said Mr. Kenge, looking over his glasses at me and softly turning the case about and about as if he were petting something. "Not of one of the greatest Chancery suits known? Not of Jarndyce and Jarndyce—the—a—in itself a monument of Chancery practice. In which (I would say) every difficulty, every contingency, every masterly fiction, every form of procedure known in that court, is represented over and over again? It is a cause that could not exist out of this free and great country. I should say that the aggregate of costs in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, Mrs. Rachael"—I was afraid he addressed himself to her because I appeared inattentive"—amounts at the present hour to from SIX-ty to SEVEN-ty THOUSAND POUNDS!" said Mr. Kenge, leaning back in his chair.

I felt very ignorant, but what could I do? I was so entirely unacquainted with the subject that I understood nothing about it even then.

"And she really never heard of the cause!" said Mr. Kenge. "Surprising!"

"Miss Barbary, sir," returned Mrs. Rachael, "who is now among the Seraphim—"

"I hope so, I am sure," said Mr. Kenge politely.

"—Wished Esther only to know what would be serviceable to her. And she knows, from any teaching she has had here, nothing more."

"Well!" said Mr. Kenge. "Upon the whole, very proper. Now to the point," addressing me. "Miss Barbary, your sole relation (in fact that is, for

I am bound to observe that in law you had none) being deceased and it naturally not being to be expected that Mrs. Rachael—"

"Oh, dear no!" said Mrs. Rachael quickly.

"Quite so," assented Mr. Kenge; "—that Mrs. Rachael should charge herself with your maintenance and support (I beg you won't distress yourself), you are in a position to receive the renewal of an offer which I was instructed to make to Miss Barbary some two years ago and which, though rejected then, was understood to be renewable under the lamentable circumstances that have since occurred. Now, if I avow that I represent, in Jarndyce and Jarndyce and otherwise, a highly humane, but at the same time singular, man, shall I compromise myself by any stretch of my professional caution?" said Mr. Kenge, leaning back in his chair again and looking calmly at us both.

He appeared to enjoy beyond everything the sound of his own voice. I couldn't wonder at that, for it was mellow and full and gave great importance to every word he uttered. He listened to himself with obvious satisfaction and sometimes gently beat time to his own music with his head or rounded a sentence with his hand. I was very much impressed by him—even then, before I knew that he formed himself on the model of a great lord who was his client and that he was generally called Conversation Kenge.

"Mr. Jarndyce," he pursued, "being aware of the—I would say, desolate—position of our young friend, offers to place her at a first-rate establishment where her education shall be completed, where her comfort shall be secured, where her reasonable wants shall be anticipated, where she shall be eminently qualified to discharge her duty in that station of life unto which it has pleased—shall I say Providence?—to call her."

My heart was filled so full, both by what he said and by his affecting manner of saying it, that I was not able to speak, though I tried.

"Mr. Jarndyce," he went on, "makes no condition beyond expressing his expectation that our young friend will not at any time remove herself from the establishment in question without his knowledge and concurrence. That she will faithfully apply herself to the acquisition of those accomplishments, upon the exercise of which she will be ultimately dependent. That she will tread in the paths of virtue and honour, and—the—a—so forth."

I was still less able to speak than before.

"Now, what does our young friend say?" proceeded Mr. Kenge. "Take time, take time! I pause for her reply. But take time!"

What the destitute subject of such an offer tried to say, I need not repeat. What she did say, I could more easily tell, if it were worth the telling. What she felt, and will feel to her dying hour, I could never relate.

This interview took place at Windsor, where I had passed (as far as I knew) my whole life. On that day week, amply provided with all necessaries, I left it, inside the stagecoach, for Reading.

Mrs. Rachael was too good to feel any emotion at parting, but I was not so good, and wept bitterly. I thought that I ought to have known her better after so many years and ought to have made myself enough of a favourite with her to make her sorry then. When she gave me one cold parting kiss upon my forehead, like a thaw-drop from the stone porch—it was a very frosty day—I felt so miserable and self-reproachful that I clung to her and told her it was my fault, I knew, that she could say good-bye so easily!

"No, Esther!" she returned. "It is your misfortune!"

The coach was at the little lawn-gate—we had not come out until we heard the wheels—and thus I left her, with a sorrowful heart. She went in before my boxes were lifted to the coach-roof and shut the door. As long as I could see the house, I looked back at it from the window through my tears. My godmother had left Mrs. Rachael all the little property she possessed; and there was to be a sale; and an old hearth-rug with roses on it, which always seemed to me the first thing in the world I had ever seen, was hanging outside in the frost and snow. A day or two before, I had wrapped the dear old doll in her own shawl and quietly laid her—I am half ashamed to tell it—in the garden-earth under the tree that shaded my old window. I had no companion left but my bird, and him I carried with me in his cage.

When the house was out of sight, I sat, with my bird-cage in the straw at my feet, forward on the low seat to look out of the high window, watching the frosty trees, that were like beautiful pieces of spar, and the fields all smooth and white with last night's snow, and the sun, so red but yielding so little heat, and the ice, dark like metal where the skaters and sliders had brushed the snow away. There was a gentleman in the coach who sat on the opposite seat and looked very large in a quantity of wrappings, but he sat gazing out of the other window and took no notice of me.

I thought of my dead godmother, of the night when I read to her, of her frowning so fixedly and sternly in her bed, of the strange place I was going to, of the people I should find there, and what they would be like, and what they would say to me, when a voice in the coach gave me a terrible start.

It said, "What the de-vil are you crying for?"

I was so frightened that I lost my voice and could only answer in a whisper, "Me, sir?" For of course I knew it must have been the gentleman in the quantity of wrappings, though he was still looking out of his window.

"Yes, you," he said, turning round.

"I didn't know I was crying, sir," I faltered.

"But you are!" said the gentleman. "Look here!" He came quite opposite to me from the other corner of the coach, brushed one of his large furry cuffs across my eyes (but without hurting me), and showed me that it was wet.

"There! Now you know you are," he said. "Don't you?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"And what are you crying for?" said the gentleman, "Don't you want to go there?"

"Where, sir?"

"Where? Why, wherever you are going," said the gentleman.

"I am very glad to go there, sir," I answered.

"Well, then! Look glad!" said the gentleman.

I thought he was very strange, or at least that what I could see of him was very strange, for he was wrapped up to the chin, and his face was almost hidden in a fur cap with broad fur straps at the side of his head fastened under his chin; but I was composed again, and not afraid of him. So I told him that I thought I must have been crying because of my godmother's death and because of Mrs. Rachael's not being sorry to part with me.

"Confound Mrs. Rachael!" said the gentleman. "Let her fly away in a high wind on a broomstick!"

I began to be really afraid of him now and looked at him with the greatest astonishment. But I thought that he had pleasant eyes, although he kept on muttering to himself in an angry manner and calling Mrs. Rachael names.

After a little while he opened his outer wrapper, which appeared to me large enough to wrap up the whole coach, and put his arm down into a deep pocket in the side.

"Now, look here!" he said. "In this paper," which was nicely folded, "is a piece of the best plum-cake that can be got for money—sugar on the outside an inch thick, like fat on mutton chops. Here's a little pie (a gem this is, both for size and quality), made in France. And what do you suppose it's made of? Livers of fat geese. There's a pie! Now let's see you eat 'em."

"Thank you, sir," I replied; "thank you very much indeed, but I hope you won't be offended—they are too rich for me."

"Floored again!" said the gentleman, which I didn't at all understand, and threw them both out of window.

He did not speak to me any more until he got out of the coach a little way short of Reading, when he advised me to be a good girl and to be studious, and shook hands with me. I must say I was relieved by his departure. We left him at a milestone. I often walked past it afterwards, and never for a long time without thinking of him and half expecting to meet him. But I never did; and so, as time went on, he passed out of my mind.

When the coach stopped, a very neat lady looked up at the window and said, "Miss Donny."

"No, ma'am, Esther Summerson."

"That is quite right," said the lady, "Miss Donny."

I now understood that she introduced herself by that name, and begged Miss Donny's pardon for my mistake, and pointed out my boxes at her request. Under the direction of a very neat maid, they were put outside a very small green carriage; and then Miss Donny, the maid, and I got inside and were driven away.

"Everything is ready for you, Esther," said Miss Donny, "and the scheme of your pursuits has been arranged in exact accordance with the wishes of your guardian, Mr. Jarndyce."

"Of—did you say, ma'am?"

"Of your guardian, Mr. Jarndyce," said Miss Donny.

I was so bewildered that Miss Donny thought the cold had been too severe for me and lent me her smelling-bottle.

"Do you know my—guardian, Mr. Jarndyce, ma'am?" I asked after a good deal of hesitation.

"Not personally, Esther," said Miss Donny; "merely through his solicitors, Messrs. Kenge and Carboy, of London. A very superior gentleman, Mr. Kenge. Truly eloquent indeed. Some of his periods quite majestic!"

I felt this to be very true but was too confused to attend to it. Our speedy arrival at our destination, before I had time to recover myself, increased my confusion, and I never shall forget the uncertain and the unreal air of everything at Greenleaf (Miss Donny's house) that afternoon!

But I soon became used to it. I was so adapted to the routine of Greenleaf before long that I seemed to have been there a great while and almost to have dreamed rather than really lived my old life at my godmother's. Nothing could be more precise, exact, and orderly than Greenleaf. There was a time for everything all round the dial of the clock, and everything was done at its appointed moment.

We were twelve boarders, and there were two Miss Donnys, twins. It was understood that I would have to depend, by and by, on my qualifications as a governess, and I was not only instructed in everything that was taught at Greenleaf, but was very soon engaged in helping to instruct others. Although I was treated in every other respect like the rest of the school, this single difference was made in my case from the first. As I began to know more, I taught more, and so in course of time I had plenty to do, which I was very fond of doing because it made the dear girls fond of me. At last, whenever a new pupil came who was a little downcast and unhappy, she was so sure—indeed I don't know why—to make a friend of me that all new-comers were confided to my care. They said I was so gentle, but I am sure THEY were! I often thought of the resolution I had made on my birthday to try to be industrious, contented, and true-hearted and to do some good to some one and win some love if I could; and indeed, indeed, I felt almost ashamed to have done so little and have won so much.

I passed at Greenleaf six happy, quiet years. I never saw in any face there, thank heaven, on my birthday, that it would have been better if I had never been born. When the day came round, it brought me so many tokens of affectionate remembrance that my room was beautiful with them from New Year's Day to Christmas.

In those six years I had never been away except on visits at holiday time in the neighbourhood. After the first six months or so I had taken Miss Donny's advice in reference to the propriety of writing to Mr. Kenge to say that I was happy and grateful, and with her approval I had written such a letter. I had received a formal answer acknowledging its receipt and saying, "We note the contents thereof, which shall be duly communicated to our client." After that I sometimes heard Miss Donny and her sister mention how regular my accounts were paid, and about twice a year I ventured to write a similar letter. I always received by return of post exactly the same answer in the same round hand, with the signature of Kenge and Carboy in another writing, which I supposed to be Mr. Kenge's.

It seems so curious to me to be obliged to write all this about myself! As if this narrative were the narrative of MY life! But my little body will soon fall into the background now.

Six quiet years (I find I am saying it for the second time) I had passed at Greenleaf, seeing in those around me, as it might be in a looking-glass, every stage of my own growth and change there, when, one November morning, I received this letter. I omit the date.

> *Old Square, Lincoln's Inn*
>
> *Madam,*
>
> *Jarndyce and Jarndyce*
>
> *Our clt Mr. Jarndyce being abt to rece into his house, under an Order of the Ct of Chy, a Ward of the Ct in this cause, for whom he wishes to secure an elgble compn, directs us to inform you that he will be glad of your serces in the afsd capacity.*
>
> *We have arrngd for your being forded, carriage free, pr eight o'clock coach from Reading, on Monday morning next, to White Horse Cellar, Piccadilly, London, where one of our clks will be in waiting to convey you to our offe as above.*
>
> *We are, Madam, Your obedt Servts,*
>
> *Kenge and Carboy*
>
> *Miss Esther Summerson*

Oh, never, never, never shall I forget the emotion this letter caused in the house! It was so tender in them to care so much for me, it was so gracious in that father who had not forgotten me to have made my orphan way so smooth and easy and to have inclined so many youthful natures towards me, that I could hardly bear it. Not that I would have had them less sorry—I am afraid not; but the pleasure of it, and the pain of it, and the pride and joy of it, and the humble regret of it were so blended that my heart seemed almost breaking while it was full of rapture.

The letter gave me only five days' notice of my removal. When every minute added to the proofs of love and kindness that were given me in those five days, and when at last the morning came and when they took me through all the rooms that I might see them for the last time, and when some cried, "Esther, dear, say good-bye to me here at my bedside, where you first spoke so kindly to me!" and when others asked me only to write their names, "With Esther's love," and when they all surrounded me with their parting presents and clung to me weeping and cried, "What shall we do when dear, dear Esther's gone!" and when I tried to tell them how forbearing and how good they had all been to me and how I blessed and thanked them every one, what a heart I had!

And when the two Miss Donnys grieved as much to part with me as the least among them, and when the maids said, "Bless you, miss, wherever you go!" and when the ugly lame old gardener, who I thought had hardly noticed me in all those years, came panting after the coach to give me a little nosegay of geraniums and told me I had been the light of his eyes—indeed the old man said so!—what a heart I had then!

And could I help it if with all this, and the coming to the little school, and the unexpected sight of the poor children outside waving their hats and bonnets to me, and of a grey-haired gentleman and lady whose daughter I had helped to teach and at whose house I had visited (who were said to be the proudest people in all that country), caring for nothing but calling out, "Good-bye, Esther. May you be very happy!"—could I help it if I was quite bowed down in the coach by myself and said "Oh, I am so thankful, I am so thankful!" many times over!

But of course I soon considered that I must not take tears where I was going after all that had been done for me. Therefore, of course, I made myself sob less and persuaded myself to be quiet by saying very often, "Esther, now you really must! This WILL NOT do!" I cheered myself up pretty well at last, though I am afraid I was longer about it than I ought to have been; and when I had cooled my eyes with lavender water, it was time to watch for London.

I was quite persuaded that we were there when we were ten miles off, and when we really were there, that we should never get there. However, when we began to jolt upon a stone pavement, and particularly when every other conveyance seemed to be running into us, and we seemed to be running into every other conveyance, I began to believe that we really were approaching the end of our journey. Very soon afterwards we stopped.

A young gentleman who had inked himself by accident addressed me from the pavement and said, "I am from Kenge and Carboy's, miss, of Lincoln's Inn."

"If you please, sir," said I.

He was very obliging, and as he handed me into a fly after superintending the removal of my boxes, I asked him whether there was a great fire anywhere? For the streets were so full of dense brown smoke that scarcely anything was to be seen.

"Oh, dear no, miss," he said. "This is a London particular."

I had never heard of such a thing.

"A fog, miss," said the young gentleman.

"Oh, indeed!" said I.

We drove slowly through the dirtiest and darkest streets that ever were seen in the world (I thought) and in such a distracting state of confusion that I wondered how the people kept their senses, until we passed into sudden quietude under an old gateway and drove on through a silent square until we came to an odd nook in a corner, where there was an entrance up a steep, broad flight of stairs, like an entrance to a church. And there really was a churchyard outside under some cloisters, for I saw the gravestones from the staircase window.

This was Kenge and Carboy's. The young gentleman showed me through an outer office into Mr. Kenge's room—there was no one in it—and politely put an arm-chair for me by the fire. He then called my attention to a little looking-glass hanging from a nail on one side of the chimney-piece.

"In case you should wish to look at yourself, miss, after the journey, as you're going before the Chancellor. Not that it's requisite, I am sure," said the young gentleman civilly.

"Going before the Chancellor?" I said, startled for a moment.

"Only a matter of form, miss," returned the young gentleman. "Mr. Kenge is in court now. He left his compliments, and would you partake of some refreshment"—there were biscuits and a decanter of wine on a small table—"and look over the paper," which the young gentleman gave me as he spoke. He then stirred the fire and left me.

Everything was so strange—the stranger from its being night in the day-time, the candles burning with a white flame, and looking raw and cold—that I read the words in the newspaper without knowing what they meant and found myself reading the same words repeatedly. As it was of no use going on in that way, I put the paper down, took a peep at my bonnet in the glass to see if it was neat, and looked at the room, which was not half lighted, and at the shabby, dusty tables, and at the piles of writings, and at a bookcase full of the most inexpressive-looking books that ever had anything to say for themselves. Then I went on, thinking, thinking, thinking; and the fire went on, burning, burning, burning; and the candles went on flickering and guttering, and there were no snuffers—until the young gentleman by and by brought a very dirty pair—for two hours.

At last Mr. Kenge came. HE was not altered, but he was surprised to see how altered I was and appeared quite pleased. "As you are going to be the companion of the young lady who is now in the Chancellor's private room, Miss Summerson," he said, "we thought it well that you should be in attendance also. You will not be discomposed by the Lord Chancellor, I dare say?"

"No, sir," I said, "I don't think I shall," really not seeing on consideration why I should be.

So Mr. Kenge gave me his arm and we went round the corner, under a colonnade, and in at a side door. And so we came, along a passage, into a comfortable sort of room where a young lady and a young gentleman were standing near a great, loud-roaring fire. A screen was interposed between them and it, and they were leaning on the screen, talking.

They both looked up when I came in, and I saw in the young lady, with the fire shining upon her, such a beautiful girl! With such rich golden hair, such soft blue eyes, and such a bright, innocent, trusting face!

"Miss Ada," said Mr. Kenge, "this is Miss Summerson."

She came to meet me with a smile of welcome and her hand extended, but seemed to change her mind in a moment and kissed me. In short, she had such a natural, captivating, winning manner that in a few minutes we were sitting in the window-seat, with the light of the fire upon us, talking together as free and happy as could be.

What a load off my mind! It was so delightful to know that she could confide in me and like me! It was so good of her, and so encouraging to me!

The young gentleman was her distant cousin, she told me, and his name Richard Carstone. He was a handsome youth with an ingenuous face and a most engaging laugh; and after she had called him up to where we sat, he stood by us, in the light of the fire, talking gaily, like a light-hearted boy. He was very young, not more than nineteen then, if quite so much, but nearly two years older than she was. They were both orphans and (what was very unexpected and curious to me) had never met before that day. Our all three coming together for the first time in such an unusual place was a thing to talk about, and we talked about it; and the fire, which had left off roaring, winked its red eyes at us—as Richard said—like a drowsy old Chancery lion.

We conversed in a low tone because a full-dressed gentleman in a bag wig frequently came in and out, and when he did so, we could hear a drawling sound in the distance, which he said was one of the counsel in our case addressing the Lord Chancellor. He told Mr. Kenge that the Chancellor would be up in five minutes; and presently we heard a bustle and a tread of feet, and Mr. Kenge said that the Court had risen and his lordship was in the next room.

The gentleman in the bag wig opened the door almost directly and requested Mr. Kenge to come in. Upon that, we all went into the next room, Mr. Kenge first, with my darling—it is so natural to me now that I can't help writing it; and there, plainly dressed in black and sitting in an arm-chair at a table near the fire, was his lordship, whose robe, trimmed with beautiful gold lace, was thrown upon another chair. He gave us a searching look as we entered, but his manner was both courtly and kind.

The gentleman in the bag wig laid bundles of papers on his lordship's table, and his lordship silently selected one and turned over the leaves.

"Miss Clare," said the Lord Chancellor. "Miss Ada Clare?"

Mr. Kenge presented her, and his lordship begged her to sit down near him. That he admired her and was interested by her even I could see in a moment. It touched me that the home of such a beautiful young creature should be represented by that dry, official place. The Lord High

Chancellor, at his best, appeared so poor a substitute for the love and pride of parents.

"The Jarndyce in question," said the Lord Chancellor, still turning over leaves, "is Jarndyce of Bleak House."

"Jarndyce of Bleak House, my lord," said Mr. Kenge.

"A dreary name," said the Lord Chancellor.

"But not a dreary place at present, my lord," said Mr. Kenge.

"And Bleak House," said his lordship, "is in—"

"Hertfordshire, my lord."

"Mr. Jarndyce of Bleak House is not married?" said his lordship.

"He is not, my lord," said Mr. Kenge.

A pause.

"Young Mr. Richard Carstone is present?" said the Lord Chancellor, glancing towards him.

Richard bowed and stepped forward.

"Hum!" said the Lord Chancellor, turning over more leaves.

"Mr. Jarndyce of Bleak House, my lord," Mr. Kenge observed in a low voice, "if I may venture to remind your lordship, provides a suitable companion for—"

"For Mr. Richard Carstone?" I thought (but I am not quite sure) I heard his lordship say in an equally low voice and with a smile.

"For Miss Ada Clare. This is the young lady. Miss Summerson."

His lordship gave me an indulgent look and acknowledged my curtsy very graciously.

"Miss Summerson is not related to any party in the cause, I think?"

"No, my lord."

Mr. Kenge leant over before it was quite said and whispered. His lordship, with his eyes upon his papers, listened, nodded twice or thrice, turned over more leaves, and did not look towards me again until we were going away.

Mr. Kenge now retired, and Richard with him, to where I was, near the door, leaving my pet (it is so natural to me that again I can't help it!) sitting near the Lord Chancellor, with whom his lordship spoke a little part, asking her, as she told me afterwards, whether she had well reflected on the proposed arrangement, and if she thought she would be happy under the roof of Mr. Jarndyce of Bleak House, and why she thought so? Presently he rose courteously and released her, and then he spoke for a minute or two with Richard Carstone, not seated, but standing, and altogether with more ease and less ceremony, as if he still knew, though he WAS Lord Chancellor, how to go straight to the candour of a boy.

"Very well!" said his lordship aloud. "I shall make the order. Mr. Jarndyce of Bleak House has chosen, so far as I may judge," and this was when he looked at me, "a very good companion for the young lady, and the arrangement altogether seems the best of which the circumstances admit."

He dismissed us pleasantly, and we all went out, very much obliged to him for being so affable and polite, by which he had certainly lost no dignity but seemed to us to have gained some.

When we got under the colonnade, Mr. Kenge remembered that he must go back for a moment to ask a question and left us in the fog, with the Lord Chancellor's carriage and servants waiting for him to come out.

"Well!" said Richard Carstone. "THAT'S over! And where do we go next, Miss Summerson?"

"Don't you know?" I said.

"Not in the least," said he.

"And don't YOU know, my love?" I asked Ada.

"No!" said she. "Don't you?"

"Not at all!" said I.

We looked at one another, half laughing at our being like the children in the wood, when a curious little old woman in a squeezed bonnet and carrying a reticule came curtsying and smiling up to us with an air of great ceremony.

"Oh!" said she. "The wards in Jarndyce! Ve-ry happy, I am sure, to have the honour! It is a good omen for youth, and hope, and beauty when they find themselves in this place, and don't know what's to come of it."

"Mad!" whispered Richard, not thinking she could hear him.

"Right! Mad, young gentleman," she returned so quickly that he was quite abashed. "I was a ward myself. I was not mad at that time," curtsying low and smiling between every little sentence. "I had youth and hope. I believe, beauty. It matters very little now. Neither of the three served or saved me. I have the honour to attend court regularly. With my documents. I expect a judgment. Shortly. On the Day of Judgment. I have discovered that the sixth seal mentioned in the Revelations is the Great Seal. It has been open a long time! Pray accept my blessing."

As Ada was a little frightened, I said, to humour the poor old lady, that we were much obliged to her.

"Ye-es!" she said mincingly. "I imagine so. And here is Conversation Kenge. With HIS documents! How does your honourable worship do?"

"Quite well, quite well! Now don't be troublesome, that's a good soul!" said Mr. Kenge, leading the way back.

"By no means," said the poor old lady, keeping up with Ada and me. "Anything but troublesome. I shall confer estates on both—which is not being troublesome, I trust? I expect a judgment. Shortly. On the Day of Judgment. This is a good omen for you. Accept my blessing!"

She stopped at the bottom of the steep, broad flight of stairs; but we looked back as we went up, and she was still there, saying, still with a curtsy and a smile between every little sentence, "Youth. And hope. And beauty. And Chancery. And Conversation Kenge! Ha! Pray accept my blessing!"

CHAPTER IV. Telescopic Philanthropy

We were to pass the night, Mr. Kenge told us when we arrived in his room, at Mrs. Jellyby's; and then he turned to me and said he took it for granted I knew who Mrs. Jellyby was.

"I really don't, sir," I returned. "Perhaps Mr. Carstone—or Miss Clare—"

But no, they knew nothing whatever about Mrs. Jellyby. "In-deed! Mrs. Jellyby," said Mr. Kenge, standing with his back to the fire and casting his eyes over the dusty hearth-rug as if it were Mrs. Jellyby's biography, "is a lady of very remarkable strength of character who devotes herself entirely to the public. She has devoted herself to an extensive variety of public subjects at various times and is at present (until something else attracts her) devoted to the subject of Africa, with a view to the general cultivation of the coffee berry—AND the natives—and the happy settlement, on the banks of the African rivers, of our superabundant home population. Mr. Jarndyce, who is desirous to aid any work that is considered likely to be a good work and who is much sought after by philanthropists, has, I believe, a very high opinion of Mrs. Jellyby."

Mr. Kenge, adjusting his cravat, then looked at us.

"And Mr. Jellyby, sir?" suggested Richard.

"Ah! Mr. Jellyby," said Mr. Kenge, "is—a—I don't know that I can describe him to you better than by saying that he is the husband of Mrs. Jellyby."

"A nonentity, sir?" said Richard with a droll look.

"I don't say that," returned Mr. Kenge gravely. "I can't say that, indeed, for I know nothing whatever OF Mr. Jellyby. I never, to my knowledge, had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Jellyby. He may be a very superior man, but he is, so to speak, merged—merged—in the more shining qualities of his wife." Mr. Kenge proceeded to tell us that as the road to Bleak House would have been very long, dark, and tedious on such an evening, and as we had been travelling already, Mr. Jarndyce had himself proposed this arrangement. A carriage would be at Mrs. Jellyby's to convey us out of town early in the forenoon of to-morrow.

He then rang a little bell, and the young gentleman came in. Addressing him by the name of Guppy, Mr. Kenge inquired whether Miss Summerson's boxes and the rest of the baggage had been "sent round." Mr. Guppy said yes, they had been sent round, and a coach was waiting to take us round too as soon as we pleased.

"Then it only remains," said Mr. Kenge, shaking hands with us, "for me to express my lively satisfaction in (good day, Miss Clare!) the arrangement this day concluded and my (GOOD-bye to you, Miss Summerson!) lively hope that it will conduce to the happiness, the (glad to have had the honour of making your acquaintance, Mr. Carstone!) welfare, the advantage in all points of view, of all concerned! Guppy, see the party safely there."

"Where IS 'there,' Mr. Guppy?" said Richard as we went downstairs.

"No distance," said Mr. Guppy; "round in Thavies Inn, you know."

"I can't say I know where it is, for I come from Winchester and am strange in London."

"Only round the corner," said Mr. Guppy. "We just twist up Chancery Lane, and cut along Holborn, and there we are in four minutes' time, as near as a toucher. This is about a London particular NOW, ain't it, miss?" He seemed quite delighted with it on my account.

"The fog is very dense indeed!" said I.

"Not that it affects you, though, I'm sure," said Mr. Guppy, putting up the steps. "On the contrary, it seems to do you good, miss, judging from your appearance."

I knew he meant well in paying me this compliment, so I laughed at myself for blushing at it when he had shut the door and got upon the box; and we all three laughed and chatted about our inexperience and the strangeness of London until we turned up under an archway to our destination—a narrow street of high houses like an oblong cistern to hold the fog. There was a confused little crowd of people, principally children, gathered about the house at which we stopped, which had a tarnished brass plate on the door with the inscription JELLYBY.

"Don't be frightened!" said Mr. Guppy, looking in at the coach-window. "One of the young Jellybys been and got his head through the area railings!"

"Oh, poor child," said I; "let me out, if you please!"

"Pray be careful of yourself, miss. The young Jellybys are always up to something," said Mr. Guppy.

I made my way to the poor child, who was one of the dirtiest little unfortunates I ever saw, and found him very hot and frightened and crying loudly, fixed by the neck between two iron railings, while a milkman and a beadle, with the kindest intentions possible, were endeavouring to drag him back by the legs, under a general impression that his skull was compressible by those means. As I found (after pacifying him) that he was a little boy with a naturally large head, I thought that perhaps where his head could go, his body could follow, and mentioned that the best mode of extrication might be to push him forward. This was so favourably received by the milkman and beadle that he would immediately have been pushed into the area if I had not held his pinafore while Richard and Mr. Guppy ran down through the kitchen to catch him when he should be released. At last he was happily got down without any accident, and then he began to beat Mr. Guppy with a hoop-stick in quite a frantic manner.

Nobody had appeared belonging to the house except a person in pattens, who had been poking at the child from below with a broom; I don't know with what object, and I don't think she did. I therefore supposed that Mrs.

Jellyby was not at home, and was quite surprised when the person appeared in the passage without the pattens, and going up to the back room on the first floor before Ada and me, announced us as, "Them two young ladies, Missis Jellyby!" We passed several more children on the way up, whom it was difficult to avoid treading on in the dark; and as we came into Mrs. Jellyby's presence, one of the poor little things fell downstairs—down a whole flight (as it sounded to me), with a great noise.

Mrs. Jellyby, whose face reflected none of the uneasiness which we could not help showing in our own faces as the dear child's head recorded its passage with a bump on every stair—Richard afterwards said he counted seven, besides one for the landing—received us with perfect equanimity. She was a pretty, very diminutive, plump woman of from forty to fifty, with handsome eyes, though they had a curious habit of seeming to look a long way off. As if—I am quoting Richard again—they could see nothing nearer than Africa!

"I am very glad indeed," said Mrs. Jellyby in an agreeable voice, "to have the pleasure of receiving you. I have a great respect for Mr. Jarndyce, and no one in whom he is interested can be an object of indifference to me."

We expressed our acknowledgments and sat down behind the door, where there was a lame invalid of a sofa. Mrs. Jellyby had very good hair but was too much occupied with her African duties to brush it. The shawl in which she had been loosely muffled dropped onto her chair when she advanced to us; and as she turned to resume her seat, we could not help noticing that her dress didn't nearly meet up the back and that the open space was railed across with a lattice-work of stay-lace—like a summer-house.

The room, which was strewn with papers and nearly filled by a great writing-table covered with similar litter, was, I must say, not only very untidy but very dirty. We were obliged to take notice of that with our sense of sight, even while, with our sense of hearing, we followed the poor child who had tumbled downstairs: I think into the back kitchen, where somebody seemed to stifle him.

But what principally struck us was a jaded and unhealthy-looking though by no means plain girl at the writing-table, who sat biting the feather of her pen and staring at us. I suppose nobody ever was in such a state of ink. And from her tumbled hair to her pretty feet, which were disfigured with frayed and broken satin slippers trodden down at heel, she really seemed to have no article of dress upon her, from a pin upwards, that was in its proper condition or its right place.

"You find me, my dears," said Mrs. Jellyby, snuffing the two great office candles in tin candlesticks, which made the room taste strongly of hot tallow (the fire had gone out, and there was nothing in the grate but ashes, a bundle of wood, and a poker), "you find me, my dears, as usual, very busy; but that you will excuse. The African project at present employs my whole time. It involves me in correspondence with public bodies and with private individuals anxious for the welfare of their species all over the country. I am happy to say it is advancing. We hope by this time next year to have from a hundred and fifty to two hundred healthy families cultivating coffee and educating the natives of Borrioboola-Gha, on the left bank of the Niger."

As Ada said nothing, but looked at me, I said it must be very gratifying.

"It IS gratifying," said Mrs. Jellyby. "It involves the devotion of all my energies, such as they are; but that is nothing, so that it succeeds; and I am more confident of success every day. Do you know, Miss Summerson, I almost wonder that YOU never turned your thoughts to Africa."

This application of the subject was really so unexpected to me that I was quite at a loss how to receive it. I hinted that the climate—

"The finest climate in the world!" said Mrs. Jellyby.

"Indeed, ma'am?"

"Certainly. With precaution," said Mrs. Jellyby. "You may go into Holborn, without precaution, and be run over. You may go into Holborn, with precaution, and never be run over. Just so with Africa."

I said, "No doubt." I meant as to Holborn.

"If you would like," said Mrs. Jellyby, putting a number of papers towards us, "to look over some remarks on that head, and on the general subject, which have been extensively circulated, while I finish a letter I am now dictating to my eldest daughter, who is my amanuensis—"

The girl at the table left off biting her pen and made a return to our recognition, which was half bashful and half sulky.

"—I shall then have finished for the present," proceeded Mrs. Jellyby with a sweet smile, "though my work is never done. Where are you, Caddy?"

"'Presents her compliments to Mr. Swallow, and begs—'" said Caddy.

"'And begs,'" said Mrs. Jellyby, dictating, "'to inform him, in reference to his letter of inquiry on the African project—' No, Peepy! Not on my account!"

Peepy (so self-named) was the unfortunate child who had fallen downstairs, who now interrupted the correspondence by presenting himself, with a strip of plaster on his forehead, to exhibit his wounded knees, in which Ada and I did not know which to pity most—the bruises or the dirt. Mrs. Jellyby merely added, with the serene composure with which she said everything, "Go along, you naughty Peepy!" and fixed her fine eyes on Africa again.

However, as she at once proceeded with her dictation, and as I interrupted nothing by doing it, I ventured quietly to stop poor Peepy as he was going out and to take him up to nurse. He looked very much astonished at it and at Ada's kissing him, but soon fell fast asleep in my arms, sobbing at longer and longer intervals, until he was quiet. I was so occupied with Peepy that I lost the letter in detail, though I derived such a general impression from it of the momentous importance of Africa, and the utter insignificance of all other places and things, that I felt quite ashamed to have thought so little about it.

"Six o'clock!" said Mrs. Jellyby. "And our dinner hour is nominally (for we dine at all hours) five! Caddy, show Miss Clare and Miss Summerson their rooms. You will like to make some change, perhaps? You will excuse me, I know, being so much occupied. Oh, that very bad child! Pray put him down, Miss Summerson!"

I begged permission to retain him, truly saying that he was not at all troublesome, and carried him upstairs and laid him on my bed. Ada and I had two upper rooms with a door of communication between. They were excessively bare and disorderly, and the curtain to my window was fastened up with a fork.

"You would like some hot water, wouldn't you?" said Miss Jellyby, looking round for a jug with a handle to it, but looking in vain.

"If it is not being troublesome," said we.

"Oh, it's not the trouble," returned Miss Jellyby; "the question is, if there IS any."

The evening was so very cold and the rooms had such a marshy smell that I must confess it was a little miserable, and Ada was half crying. We soon laughed, however, and were busily unpacking when Miss Jellyby came back to say that she was sorry there was no hot water, but they couldn't find the kettle, and the boiler was out of order.

We begged her not to mention it and made all the haste we could to get down to the fire again. But all the little children had come up to the landing outside to look at the phenomenon of Peepy lying on my bed, and our attention was distracted by the constant apparition of noses and fingers in situations of danger between the hinges of the doors. It was impossible to shut the door of either room, for my lock, with no knob to it, looked as if it wanted to be wound up; and though the handle of Ada's went round and round with the greatest smoothness, it was attended with no effect whatever on the door. Therefore I proposed to the children that they should come in and be very good at my table, and I would tell them the story of Little Red Riding Hood while I dressed; which they did, and were as quiet as mice, including Peepy, who awoke opportunely before the appearance of the wolf.

When we went downstairs we found a mug with "A Present from Tunbridge Wells" on it lighted up in the staircase window with a floating wick, and a young woman, with a swelled face bound up in a flannel bandage blowing the fire of the drawing-room (now connected by an open door with Mrs. Jellyby's room) and choking dreadfully. It smoked to that degree, in short, that we all sat coughing and crying with the windows open for half an hour, during which Mrs. Jellyby, with the same sweetness of temper, directed letters about Africa. Her being so employed was, I must say, a great relief to me, for Richard told us that he had washed his hands in a pie-dish and that they had found the kettle on his dressing-table, and he made Ada laugh so that they made me laugh in the most ridiculous manner.

Soon after seven o'clock we went down to dinner, carefully, by Mrs. Jellyby's advice, for the stair-carpets, besides being very deficient in stair-wires, were so torn as to be absolute traps. We had a fine cod-fish, a piece of roast beef, a dish of cutlets, and a pudding; an excellent dinner, if it had had any cooking to speak of, but it was almost raw. The young woman with the flannel bandage waited, and dropped everything on the table wherever it happened to go, and never moved it again until she put it on the stairs. The person I had seen in pattens, who I suppose to have been the cook, frequently came and skirmished with her at the door, and there appeared to be ill will between them.

All through dinner—which was long, in consequence of such accidents as the dish of potatoes being mislaid in the coal skuttle and the handle of the corkscrew coming off and striking the young woman in the chin—Mrs. Jellyby preserved the evenness of her disposition. She told us a great deal that was interesting about Borrioboola-Gha and the natives, and received so many letters that Richard, who sat by her, saw four envelopes in the gravy at once. Some of the letters were proceedings of ladies' committees or resolutions of ladies' meetings, which she read to us; others were applications from people excited in various ways about the cultivation of coffee, and natives; others required answers, and these she sent her eldest daughter from the table three or four times to write. She was full of business and undoubtedly was, as she had told us, devoted to the cause.

I was a little curious to know who a mild bald gentleman in spectacles was, who dropped into a vacant chair (there was no top or bottom in particular) after the fish was taken away and seemed passively to submit himself to Borrioboola-Gha but not to be actively interested in that settlement. As he never spoke a word, he might have been a native but for his complexion. It was not until we left the table and he remained alone with Richard that the possibility of his being Mr. Jellyby ever entered my head. But he WAS Mr. Jellyby; and a loquacious young man called Mr. Quale, with large shining knobs for temples and his hair all brushed to the back of his head, who came in the evening, and told Ada he was a philanthropist, also informed her that he called the matrimonial alliance of Mrs. Jellyby with Mr. Jellyby the union of mind and matter.

This young man, besides having a great deal to say for himself about Africa and a project of his for teaching the coffee colonists to teach the natives to turn piano-forte legs and establish an export trade, delighted in drawing Mrs. Jellyby out by saving, "I believe now, Mrs. Jellyby, you have received as many as from one hundred and fifty to two hundred letters respecting Africa in a single day, have you not?" or, "If my memory does not deceive me, Mrs. Jellyby, you once mentioned that you had sent off five thousand circulars from one post-office at one time?"—always repeating Mrs. Jellyby's answer to us like an interpreter. During the whole evening, Mr. Jellyby sat in a corner with his head against the wall as if he were subject to low spirits. It seemed that he had several times opened his mouth when alone with Richard after dinner, as if he had something on his mind, but had always shut it again, to Richard's extreme confusion, without saying anything.

Mrs. Jellyby, sitting in quite a nest of waste paper, drank coffee all the evening and dictated at intervals to her eldest daughter. She also held a discussion with Mr. Quale, of which the subject seemed to be—if I understood it—the brotherhood of humanity, and gave utterance to some beautiful sentiments. I was not so attentive an auditor as I might have wished to be, however, for Peepy and the other children came flocking about Ada and me in a corner of the drawing-room to ask for another story; so we sat down among them and told them in whispers "Puss in Boots" and I don't know what else until Mrs. Jellyby, accidentally remembering them, sent them to bed. As Peepy cried for me to take him to bed, I carried him upstairs, where the young woman with the flannel bandage charged into the midst of the little family like a dragon and overturned them into cribs.

After that I occupied myself in making our room a little tidy and in coaxing a very cross fire that had been lighted to burn, which at last it did, quite brightly. On my return downstairs, I felt that Mrs. Jellyby looked down upon me rather for being so frivolous, and I was sorry for it, though at the same time I knew that I had no higher pretensions.

It was nearly midnight before we found an opportunity of going to bed, and even then we left Mrs. Jellyby among her papers drinking coffee and Miss Jellyby biting the feather of her pen.

"What a strange house!" said Ada when we got upstairs. "How curious of my cousin Jarndyce to send us here!"

"My love," said I, "it quite confuses me. I want to understand it, and I can't understand it at all."

"What?" asked Ada with her pretty smile.

"All this, my dear," said I. "It MUST be very good of Mrs. Jellyby to take such pains about a scheme for the benefit of natives—and yet—Peepy and the housekeeping!"

Ada laughed and put her arm about my neck as I stood looking at the fire, and told me I was a quiet, dear, good creature and had won her heart. "You are so thoughtful, Esther," she said, "and yet so cheerful! And you do so much, so unpretendingly! You would make a home out of even this house."

My simple darling! She was quite unconscious that she only praised herself and that it was in the goodness of her own heart that she made so much of me!

"May I ask you a question?" said I when we had sat before the fire a little while.

"Five hundred," said Ada.

"Your cousin, Mr. Jarndyce. I owe so much to him. Would you mind describing him to me?"

Shaking her golden hair, Ada turned her eyes upon me with such laughing wonder that I was full of wonder too, partly at her beauty, partly at her surprise.

"Esther!" she cried.

"My dear!"

"You want a description of my cousin Jarndyce?"

"My dear, I never saw him."

"And I never saw him!" returned Ada.

Well, to be sure!

No, she had never seen him. Young as she was when her mama died, she remembered how the tears would come into her eyes when she spoke of him and of the noble generosity of his character, which she had said was to be trusted above all earthly things; and Ada trusted it. Her cousin Jarndyce had written to her a few months ago—"a plain, honest letter," Ada said—proposing the arrangement we were now to enter on and telling her that "in time it might heal some of the wounds made by the miserable Chancery suit." She had replied, gratefully accepting his proposal. Richard had received a similar letter and had made a similar response. He HAD seen Mr. Jarndyce once, but only once, five years ago, at Winchester school. He had told Ada, when they were leaning on the screen before the fire where I found them, that he recollected him as "a bluff, rosy fellow." This was the utmost description Ada could give me.

It set me thinking so that when Ada was asleep, I still remained before the fire, wondering and wondering about Bleak House, and wondering and wondering that yesterday morning should seem so long ago. I don't know where my thoughts had wandered when they were recalled by a tap at the door.

I opened it softly and found Miss Jellyby shivering there with a broken candle in a broken candlestick in one hand and an egg-cup in the other.

"Good night!" she said very sulkily.

"Good night!" said I.

"May I come in?" she shortly and unexpectedly asked me in the same sulky way.

"Certainly," said I. "Don't wake Miss Clare."

She would not sit down, but stood by the fire dipping her inky middle finger in the egg-cup, which contained vinegar, and smearing it over the ink stains on her face, frowning the whole time and looking very gloomy.

"I wish Africa was dead!" she said on a sudden.

I was going to remonstrate.

"I do!" she said "Don't talk to me, Miss Summerson. I hate it and detest it. It's a beast!"

I told her she was tired, and I was sorry. I put my hand upon her head, and touched her forehead, and said it was hot now but would be cool to-morrow. She still stood pouting and frowning at me, but presently put down her egg-cup and turned softly towards the bed where Ada lay.

"She is very pretty!" she said with the same knitted brow and in the same uncivil manner.

I assented with a smile.

"An orphan. Ain't she?"

"Yes."

"But knows a quantity, I suppose? Can dance, and play music, and sing? She can talk French, I suppose, and do geography, and globes, and needlework, and everything?"

"No doubt," said I.

"I can't," she returned. "I can't do anything hardly, except write. I'm always writing for Ma. I wonder you two were not ashamed of yourselves to come in this afternoon and see me able to do nothing else. It was like your ill nature. Yet you think yourselves very fine, I dare say!"

I could see that the poor girl was near crying, and I resumed my chair without speaking and looked at her (I hope) as mildly as I felt towards her.

"It's disgraceful," she said. "You know it is. The whole house is disgraceful. The children are disgraceful. I'M disgraceful. Pa's miserable, and no wonder! Priscilla drinks—she's always drinking. It's a great shame and a great story of you if you say you didn't smell her to-day. It was as bad as a public-house, waiting at dinner; you know it was!"

"My dear, I don't know it," said I.

"You do," she said very shortly. "You shan't say you don't. You do!"

"Oh, my dear!" said I. "If you won't let me speak—"

"You're speaking now. You know you are. Don't tell stories, Miss Summerson."

"My dear," said I, "as long as you won't hear me out—"

"I don't want to hear you out."

"Oh, yes, I think you do," said I, "because that would be so very unreasonable. I did not know what you tell me because the servant did not come near me at dinner; but I don't doubt what you tell me, and I am sorry to hear it."

"You needn't make a merit of that," said she.

"No, my dear," said I. "That would be very foolish."

She was still standing by the bed, and now stooped down (but still with the same discontented face) and kissed Ada. That done, she came softly back and stood by the side of my chair. Her bosom was heaving in a distressful manner that I greatly pitied, but I thought it better not to speak.

"I wish I was dead!" she broke out. "I wish we were all dead. It would be a great deal better for us."

In a moment afterwards, she knelt on the ground at my side, hid her face in my dress, passionately begged my pardon, and wept. I comforted her and would have raised her, but she cried no, no; she wanted to stay there!

"You used to teach girls," she said, "If you could only have taught me, I could have learnt from you! I am so very miserable, and I like you so much!"

I could not persuade her to sit by me or to do anything but move a ragged stool to where she was kneeling, and take that, and still hold my dress in the same manner. By degrees the poor tired girl fell asleep, and then I contrived to raise her head so that it should rest on my lap, and to cover us both with shawls. The fire went out, and all night long she slumbered thus before the ashy grate. At first I was painfully awake and vainly tried to lose myself, with my eyes closed, among the scenes of the day. At length, by slow degrees, they became indistinct and mingled. I began to lose the identity of the sleeper resting on me. Now it was Ada, now one of my old Reading friends from whom I could not believe I had so recently parted. Now it was the little mad woman worn out with curtsying and smiling, now some one in authority at Bleak House. Lastly, it was no one, and I was no one.

The purblind day was feebly struggling with the fog when I opened my eyes to encounter those of a dirty-faced little spectre fixed upon me. Peepy had scaled his crib, and crept down in his bed-gown and cap, and was so cold that his teeth were chattering as if he had cut them all.

CHAPTER V. A Morning Adventure

Although the morning was raw, and although the fog still seemed heavy—I say seemed, for the windows were so encrusted with dirt that they would have made midsummer sunshine dim—I was sufficiently forewarned of the discomfort within doors at that early hour and sufficiently curious about London to think it a good idea on the part of Miss Jellyby when she proposed that we should go out for a walk.

"Ma won't be down for ever so long," she said, "and then it's a chance if breakfast's ready for an hour afterwards, they dawdle so. As to Pa, he gets what he can and goes to the office. He never has what you would call a regular breakfast. Priscilla leaves him out the loaf and some milk, when there is any, overnight. Sometimes there isn't any milk, and sometimes the cat drinks it. But I'm afraid you must be tired, Miss Summerson, and perhaps you would rather go to bed."

"I am not at all tired, my dear," said I, "and would much prefer to go out."

"If you're sure you would," returned Miss Jellyby, "I'll get my things on."

Ada said she would go too, and was soon astir. I made a proposal to Peepy, in default of being able to do anything better for him, that he should let me wash him and afterwards lay him down on my bed again. To this he submitted with the best grace possible, staring at me during the whole operation as if he never had been, and never could again be, so astonished in his life—looking very miserable also, certainly, but making no complaint, and going snugly to sleep as soon as it was over. At first I was in two minds about taking such a liberty, but I soon reflected that nobody in the house was likely to notice it.

What with the bustle of dispatching Peepy and the bustle of getting myself ready and helping Ada, I was soon quite in a glow. We found Miss Jellyby trying to warm herself at the fire in the writing-room, which Priscilla was then lighting with a smutty parlour candlestick, throwing the candle in to make it burn better. Everything was just as we had left it last night and was evidently intended to remain so. Below-stairs the dinner-cloth had not been taken away, but had been left ready for breakfast. Crumbs, dust, and waste-paper were all over the house. Some pewter pots and a milk-can hung on the area railings; the door stood open; and we met the cook round the corner coming out of a public-house, wiping her mouth. She mentioned, as she passed us, that she had been to see what o'clock it was.

But before we met the cook, we met Richard, who was dancing up and down Thavies Inn to warm his feet. He was agreeably surprised to see us stirring so soon and said he would gladly share our walk. So he took care of Ada, and Miss Jellyby and I went first. I may mention that Miss Jellyby had relapsed into her sulky manner and that I really should not have thought she liked me much unless she had told me so.

"Where would you wish to go?" she asked.

"Anywhere, my dear," I replied.

"Anywhere's nowhere," said Miss Jellyby, stopping perversely.

"Let us go somewhere at any rate," said I.

She then walked me on very fast.

"I don't care!" she said. "Now, you are my witness, Miss Summerson, I say I don't care—but if he was to come to our house with his great, shining, lumpy forehead night after night till he was as old as Methuselah, I wouldn't have anything to say to him. Such ASSES as he and Ma make of themselves!"

"My dear!" I remonstrated, in allusion to the epithet and the vigorous emphasis Miss Jellyby set upon it. "Your duty as a child—"

"Oh! Don't talk of duty as a child, Miss Summerson; where's Ma's duty as a parent? All made over to the public and Africa, I suppose! Then let the public and Africa show duty as a child; it's much more their affair than mine. You are shocked, I dare say! Very well, so am I shocked too; so we are both shocked, and there's an end of it!"

She walked me on faster yet.

"But for all that, I say again, he may come, and come, and come, and I won't have anything to say to him. I can't bear him. If there's any stuff in the world that I hate and detest, it's the stuff he and Ma talk. I wonder the very paving-stones opposite our house can have the patience to stay there and be a witness of such inconsistencies and contradictions as all that sounding nonsense, and Ma's management!"

I could not but understand her to refer to Mr. Quale, the young gentleman who had appeared after dinner yesterday. I was saved the disagreeable necessity of pursuing the subject by Richard and Ada coming up at a round pace, laughing and asking us if we meant to run a race. Thus interrupted, Miss Jellyby became silent and walked moodily on at my side while I admired the long successions and varieties of streets, the quantity of people already going to and fro, the number of vehicles passing and repassing, the busy preparations in the setting forth of shop windows and the sweeping out of shops, and the extraordinary creatures in rags secretly groping among the swept-out rubbish for pins and other refuse.

"So, cousin," said the cheerful voice of Richard to Ada behind me. "We are never to get out of Chancery! We have come by another way to our place of meeting yesterday, and—by the Great Seal, here's the old lady again!"

Truly, there she was, immediately in front of us, curtsying, and smiling, and saying with her yesterday's air of patronage, "The wards in Jarndyce! Ve-ry happy, I am sure!"

"You are out early, ma'am," said I as she curtsied to me.

"Ye-es! I usually walk here early. Before the court sits. It's retired. I collect my thoughts here for the business of the day," said the old lady mincingly. "The business of the day requires a great deal of thought. Chancery justice is so ve-ry difficult to follow."

"Who's this, Miss Summerson?" whispered Miss Jellyby, drawing my arm tighter through her own.

The little old lady's hearing was remarkably quick. She answered for herself directly.

"A suitor, my child. At your service. I have the honour to attend court regularly. With my documents. Have I the pleasure of addressing another of the youthful parties in Jarndyce?" said the old lady, recovering herself, with her head on one side, from a very low curtsy.

Richard, anxious to atone for his thoughtlessness of yesterday, good-naturedly explained that Miss Jellyby was not connected with the suit.

"Ha!" said the old lady. "She does not expect a judgment? She will still grow old. But not so old. Oh, dear, no! This is the garden of Lincoln's Inn. I call it my garden. It is quite a bower in the summer-time. Where the birds sing melodiously. I pass the greater part of the long vacation here. In contemplation. You find the long vacation exceedingly long, don't you?"

We said yes, as she seemed to expect us to say so.

"When the leaves are falling from the trees and there are no more flowers in bloom to make up into nosegays for the Lord Chancellor's court," said the old lady, "the vacation is fulfilled and the sixth seal, mentioned in the Revelations, again prevails. Pray come and see my lodging. It will be a good omen for me. Youth, and hope, and beauty are very seldom there. It is a long, long time since I had a visit from either."

She had taken my hand, and leading me and Miss Jellyby away, beckoned Richard and Ada to come too. I did not know how to excuse myself and looked to Richard for aid. As he was half amused and half curious and all in doubt how to get rid of the old lady without offence, she continued to lead us away, and he and Ada continued to follow, our strange conductress informing us all the time, with much smiling condescension, that she lived close by.

It was quite true, as it soon appeared. She lived so close by that we had not time to have done humouring her for a few moments before she was at home. Slipping us out at a little side gate, the old lady stopped most unexpectedly in a narrow back street, part of some courts and lanes immediately outside the wall of the inn, and said, "This is my lodging. Pray walk up!"

She had stopped at a shop over which was written "KROOK, RAG AND BOTTLE WAREHOUSE." Also, in long thin letters, "KROOK, DEALER IN MARINE STORES." In one part of the window was a picture of a red paper mill at which a cart was unloading a quantity of sacks of old rags. In another was the inscription "BONES BOUGHT." In another, "KITCHEN-STUFF BOUGHT." In another, "OLD IRON BOUGHT." In another, "WASTE-PAPER BOUGHT." In another, "LADIES' AND GENTLEMEN'S WARDROBES BOUGHT." Everything seemed to be bought and nothing to be sold there. In all parts of the window were quantities of dirty bottles—blacking bottles, medicine bottles, ginger-beer and soda-water bottles, pickle bottles, wine bottles, ink bottles; I am reminded by mentioning the latter that the shop had in several little particulars the air of being in a legal neighbourhood and of being, as it were, a dirty hanger-on and disowned relation of the law. There were a great many ink bottles. There was a little tottering bench of shabby old volumes outside the door, labelled "Law Books, all at 9d." Some of the inscriptions I have enumerated were written in law-hand, like the papers I had seen in Kenge and Carboy's office and the letters I had so long received from the firm. Among them was one, in the same writing, having nothing to do with the business of the shop, but announcing that a respectable man aged forty-five wanted engrossing or copying to execute with neatness and dispatch: Address to Nemo, care of Mr. Krook, within. There were several second-hand bags, blue and red, hanging up. A little way within the shop-door lay heaps of old crackled parchment scrolls and discoloured and dog's-eared law-papers. I could have fancied that all the rusty keys, of which there must have been hundreds huddled together as old iron, had once belonged to doors of rooms or strong chests in lawyers' offices. The litter of rags tumbled partly into and partly out of a one-legged wooden scale, hanging without any counterpoise from a beam, might have been counsellors' bands and gowns torn up. One had only to fancy, as Richard whispered to Ada and me while we all stood looking in, that yonder bones in a corner, piled together and picked very clean, were the bones of clients, to make the picture complete.

As it was still foggy and dark, and as the shop was blinded besides by the wall of Lincoln's Inn, intercepting the light within a couple of yards, we should not have seen so much but for a lighted lantern that an old man in spectacles and a hairy cap was carrying about in the shop. Turning towards the door, he now caught sight of us. He was short, cadaverous, and withered, with his head sunk sideways between his shoulders and the breath issuing in visible smoke from his mouth as if he were on fire within. His throat, chin, and eyebrows were so frosted with white hairs and so gnarled with veins and puckered skin that he looked from his breast upward like some old root in a fall of snow.

"Hi, hi!" said the old man, coming to the door. "Have you anything to sell?"

We naturally drew back and glanced at our conductress, who had been trying to open the house-door with a key she had taken from her pocket, and to whom Richard now said that as we had had the pleasure of seeing where she lived, we would leave her, being pressed for time. But she was not to be so easily left. She became so fantastically and pressingly earnest in her entreaties that we would walk up and see her apartment for an instant, and was so bent, in her harmless way, on leading me in, as part of the good omen she desired, that I (whatever the others might do) saw nothing for it but to comply. I suppose we were all more or less curious; at any rate, when the old man added his persuasions to hers and said, "Aye, aye! Please her! It won't take a minute! Come in, come in! Come in through the shop if t'other door's out of order!" we all went in, stimulated by Richard's laughing encouragement and relying on his protection.

"My landlord, Krook," said the little old lady, condescending to him from her lofty station as she presented him to us. "He is called among the neighbours the Lord Chancellor. His shop is called the Court of Chancery. He is a very eccentric person. He is very odd. Oh, I assure you he is very odd!"

She shook her head a great many times and tapped her forehead with her finger to express to us that we must have the goodness to excuse him, "For he is a little—you know—M!" said the old lady with great stateliness. The old man overheard, and laughed.

"It's true enough," he said, going before us with the lantern, "that they call me the Lord Chancellor and call my shop Chancery. And why do you think they call me the Lord Chancellor and my shop Chancery?"

"I don't know, I am sure!" said Richard rather carelessly.

"You see," said the old man, stopping and turning round, "they—Hi! Here's lovely hair! I have got three sacks of ladies' hair below, but none so beautiful and fine as this. What colour, and what texture!"

"That'll do, my good friend!" said Richard, strongly disapproving of his having drawn one of Ada's tresses through his yellow hand. "You can admire as the rest of us do without taking that liberty."

The old man darted at him a sudden look which even called my attention from Ada, who, startled and blushing, was so remarkably beautiful that she seemed to fix the wandering attention of the little old lady herself. But as Ada interposed and laughingly said she could only feel proud of such genuine admiration, Mr. Krook shrunk into his former self as suddenly as he had leaped out of it.

"You see, I have so many things here," he resumed, holding up the lantern, "of so many kinds, and all as the neighbours think (but THEY know nothing), wasting away and going to rack and ruin, that that's why they have given me and my place a christening. And I have so many old parchmentses and papers in my stock. And I have a liking for rust and must and cobwebs. And all's fish that comes to my net. And I can't abear to part with anything I once lay hold of (or so my neighbours think, but what do THEY know?) or to alter anything, or to have any sweeping, nor scouring, nor cleaning, nor repairing going on about me. That's the way I've got the ill name of Chancery. I don't mind. I go to see my noble and learned brother pretty well every day, when he sits in the Inn. He don't notice me, but I notice him. There's no great odds betwixt us. We both grub on in a muddle. Hi, Lady Jane!"

A large grey cat leaped from some neighbouring shelf on his shoulder and startled us all.

"Hi! Show 'em how you scratch. Hi! Tear, my lady!" said her master.

The cat leaped down and ripped at a bundle of rags with her tigerish claws, with a sound that it set my teeth on edge to hear.

"She'd do as much for any one I was to set her on," said the old man. "I deal in cat-skins among other general matters, and hers was offered to me. It's a very fine skin, as you may see, but I didn't have it stripped off! THAT warn't like Chancery practice though, says you!"

He had by this time led us across the shop, and now opened a door in the back part of it, leading to the house-entry. As he stood with his hand upon the lock, the little old lady graciously observed to him before passing out, "That will do, Krook. You mean well, but are tiresome. My young friends are pressed for time. I have none to spare myself, having to attend court very soon. My young friends are the wards in Jarndyce."

"Jarndyce!" said the old man with a start.

"Jarndyce and Jarndyce. The great suit, Krook," returned his lodger.

"Hi!" exclaimed the old man in a tone of thoughtful amazement and with a wider stare than before. "Think of it!"

He seemed so rapt all in a moment and looked so curiously at us that Richard said, "Why, you appear to trouble yourself a good deal about the causes before your noble and learned brother, the other Chancellor!"

"Yes," said the old man abstractedly. "Sure! YOUR name now will be —"

"Richard Carstone."

"Carstone," he repeated, slowly checking off that name upon his forefinger; and each of the others he went on to mention upon a separate finger. "Yes. There was the name of Barbary, and the name of Clare, and the name of Dedlock, too, I think."

"He knows as much of the cause as the real salaried Chancellor!" said Richard, quite astonished, to Ada and me.

"Aye!" said the old man, coming slowly out of his abstraction. "Yes! Tom Jarndyce—you'll excuse me, being related; but he was never known about court by any other name, and was as well known there as—she is now," nodding slightly at his lodger. "Tom Jarndyce was often in here. He got into a restless habit of strolling about when the cause was on, or expected, talking to the little shopkeepers and telling 'em to keep out of Chancery, whatever they did. 'For,' says he, 'it's being ground to bits in a slow mill; it's being roasted at a slow fire; it's being stung to death by single bees; it's being drowned by drops; it's going mad by grains.' He was as near making away with himself, just where the young lady stands, as near could be."

We listened with horror.

"He come in at the door," said the old man, slowly pointing an imaginary track along the shop, "on the day he did it—the whole neighbourhood had said for months before that he would do it, of a certainty sooner or later—he come in at the door that day, and walked along there, and sat himself on a bench that stood there, and asked me (you'll judge I was a mortal sight younger then) to fetch him a pint of wine. 'For,' says he, 'Krook, I am much depressed; my cause is on again, and I think I'm nearer judgment than I ever was.' I hadn't a mind to leave him alone; and I persuaded him to go to the tavern over the way there, t'other side my lane (I mean Chancery Lane); and I followed and looked in at the window, and saw him, comfortable as I thought, in the arm-chair by the fire, and company with him. I hadn't hardly got back here when I heard a shot go echoing and rattling right away into the inn. I ran out—neighbours ran out—twenty of us cried at once, 'Tom Jarndyce!'"

The old man stopped, looked hard at us, looked down into the lantern, blew the light out, and shut the lantern up.

"We were right, I needn't tell the present hearers. Hi! To be sure, how the neighbourhood poured into court that afternoon while the cause was on! How my noble and learned brother, and all the rest of 'em, grubbed and muddled away as usual and tried to look as if they hadn't heard a word of the last fact in the case or as if they had—Oh, dear me!—nothing at all to do with it if they had heard of it by any chance!"

Ada's colour had entirely left her, and Richard was scarcely less pale. Nor could I wonder, judging even from my emotions, and I was no party in the suit, that to hearts so untried and fresh it was a shock to come into the inheritance of a protracted misery, attended in the minds of many people with such dreadful recollections. I had another uneasiness, in the application of the painful story to the poor half-witted creature who had brought us there; but, to my surprise, she seemed perfectly unconscious of that and only led the way upstairs again, informing us with the toleration of a superior creature for the infirmities of a common mortal that her landlord was "a little M, you know!"

She lived at the top of the house, in a pretty large room, from which she had a glimpse of Lincoln's Inn Hall. This seemed to have been her principal inducement, originally, for taking up her residence there. She could look at it, she said, in the night, especially in the moonshine. Her room was clean, but very, very bare. I noticed the scantiest necessaries in the way of furniture; a few old prints from books, of Chancellors and barristers, wafered against the wall; and some half-dozen reticles and work-bags, "containing documents," as she informed us. There were neither coals nor ashes in the grate, and I saw no articles of clothing anywhere, nor any kind of food. Upon a shelf in an open cupboard were a plate or two, a cup or two, and so forth, but all dry and empty. There was a more affecting meaning in her pinched appearance, I thought as I looked round, than I had understood before.

"Extremely honoured, I am sure," said our poor hostess with the greatest suavity, "by this visit from the wards in Jarndyce. And very much indebted for the omen. It is a retired situation. Considering. I am limited as to situation. In consequence of the necessity of attending on the Chancellor. I have lived here many years. I pass my days in court, my evenings and my nights here. I find the nights long, for I sleep but little and think much. That is, of course, unavoidable, being in Chancery. I am sorry I cannot offer chocolate. I expect a judgment shortly and shall then place my establishment on a superior footing. At present, I don't mind confessing to the wards in Jarndyce (in strict confidence) that I sometimes find it difficult to keep up a genteel appearance. I have felt the cold here. I have felt something sharper than cold. It matters very little. Pray excuse the introduction of such mean topics."

She partly drew aside the curtain of the long, low garret window and called our attention to a number of bird-cages hanging there, some containing several birds. There were larks, linnets, and goldfinches—I should think at least twenty.

"I began to keep the little creatures," she said, "with an object that the wards will readily comprehend. With the intention of restoring them to liberty. When my judgment should be given. Ye-es! They die in prison, though. Their lives, poor silly things, are so short in comparison with Chancery proceedings that, one by one, the whole collection has died over and over again. I doubt, do you know, whether one of these, though they are all young, will live to be free! Ve-ry mortifying, is it not?"

Although she sometimes asked a question, she never seemed to expect a reply, but rambled on as if she were in the habit of doing so when no one but herself was present.

"Indeed," she pursued, "I positively doubt sometimes, I do assure you, whether while matters are still unsettled, and the sixth or Great Seal still prevails, I may not one day be found lying stark and senseless here, as I have found so many birds!"

Richard, answering what he saw in Ada's compassionate eyes, took the opportunity of laying some money, softly and unobserved, on the chimney-piece. We all drew nearer to the cages, feigning to examine the birds.

"I can't allow them to sing much," said the little old lady, "for (you'll think this curious) I find my mind confused by the idea that they are singing while I am following the arguments in court. And my mind requires to be so very clear, you know! Another time, I'll tell you their names. Not at present. On a day of such good omen, they shall sing as much as they like. In honour of youth," a smile and curtsy, "hope," a smile and curtsy, "and beauty," a smile and curtsy. "There! We'll let in the full light."

The birds began to stir and chirp.

"I cannot admit the air freely," said the little old lady—the room was close, and would have been the better for it—"because the cat you saw downstairs, called Lady Jane, is greedy for their lives. She crouches on the parapet outside for hours and hours. I have discovered," whispering mysteriously, "that her natural cruelty is sharpened by a jealous fear of their regaining their liberty. In consequence of the judgment I expect being shortly given. She is sly and full of malice. I half believe, sometimes, that she is no cat, but the wolf of the old saying. It is so very difficult to keep her from the door."

Some neighbouring bells, reminding the poor soul that it was half-past nine, did more for us in the way of bringing our visit to an end than we could easily have done for ourselves. She hurriedly took up her little bag of documents, which she had laid upon the table on coming in, and asked if we were also going into court. On our answering no, and that we would on no account detain her, she opened the door to attend us downstairs.

"With such an omen, it is even more necessary than usual that I should be there before the Chancellor comes in," said she, "for he might mention my case the first thing. I have a presentiment that he WILL mention it the first thing this morning"

She stopped to tell us in a whisper as we were going down that the whole house was filled with strange lumber which her landlord had bought piecemeal and had no wish to sell, in consequence of being a little M. This was on the first floor. But she had made a previous stoppage on the second floor and had silently pointed at a dark door there.

"The only other lodger," she now whispered in explanation, "a law-writer. The children in the lanes here say he has sold himself to the devil. I don't know what he can have done with the money. Hush!"

She appeared to mistrust that the lodger might hear her even there, and repeating "Hush!" went before us on tiptoe as though even the sound of her footsteps might reveal to him what she had said.

Passing through the shop on our way out, as we had passed through it on our way in, we found the old man storing a quantity of packets of waste-paper in a kind of well in the floor. He seemed to be working hard, with the perspiration standing on his forehead, and had a piece of chalk by him, with which, as he put each separate package or bundle down, he made a crooked mark on the panelling of the wall.

Richard and Ada, and Miss Jellyby, and the little old lady had gone by him, and I was going when he touched me on the arm to stay me, and chalked the letter J upon the wall—in a very curious manner, beginning with the end of the letter and shaping it backward. It was a capital letter, not a printed one, but just such a letter as any clerk in Messrs. Kenge and Carboy's office would have made.

"Can you read it?" he asked me with a keen glance.

"Surely," said I. "It's very plain."

"What is it?"

"J."

With another glance at me, and a glance at the door, he rubbed it out and turned an "a" in its place (not a capital letter this time), and said, "What's that?"

I told him. He then rubbed that out and turned the letter "r," and asked me the same question. He went on quickly until he had formed in the same curious manner, beginning at the ends and bottoms of the letters, the word Jarndyce, without once leaving two letters on the wall together.

"What does that spell?" he asked me.

When I told him, he laughed. In the same odd way, yet with the same rapidity, he then produced singly, and rubbed out singly, the letters forming the words Bleak House. These, in some astonishment, I also read; and he laughed again.

"Hi!" said the old man, laying aside the chalk. "I have a turn for copying from memory, you see, miss, though I can neither read nor write."

He looked so disagreeable and his cat looked so wickedly at me, as if I were a blood-relation of the birds upstairs, that I was quite relieved by Richard's appearing at the door and saying, "Miss Summerson, I hope you are not bargaining for the sale of your hair. Don't be tempted. Three sacks below are quite enough for Mr. Krook!"

I lost no time in wishing Mr. Krook good morning and joining my friends outside, where we parted with the little old lady, who gave us her blessing with great ceremony and renewed her assurance of yesterday in reference to her intention of settling estates on Ada and me. Before we finally turned out of those lanes, we looked back and saw Mr. Krook standing at his shop-door, in his spectacles, looking after us, with his cat upon his shoulder, and her tail sticking up on one side of his hairy cap like a tall feather.

"Quite an adventure for a morning in London!" said Richard with a sigh. "Ah, cousin, cousin, it's a weary word this Chancery!"

"It is to me, and has been ever since I can remember," returned Ada. "I am grieved that I should be the enemy—as I suppose I am—of a great number of relations and others, and that they should be my enemies—as I suppose they are—and that we should all be ruining one another without knowing how or why and be in constant doubt and discord all our lives. It seems very strange, as there must be right somewhere, that an honest judge in real earnest has not been able to find out through all these years where it is."

"Ah, cousin!" said Richard. "Strange, indeed! All this wasteful, wanton chess-playing IS very strange. To see that composed court yesterday jogging on so serenely and to think of the wretchedness of the pieces on the board gave me the headache and the heartache both together. My head ached with wondering how it happened, if men were neither fools nor rascals; and my heart ached to think they could possibly be either. But at all events, Ada—I may call you Ada?"

"Of course you may, cousin Richard."

"At all events, Chancery will work none of its bad influences on US. We have happily been brought together, thanks to our good kinsman, and it can't divide us now!"

"Never, I hope, cousin Richard!" said Ada gently.

Miss Jellyby gave my arm a squeeze and me a very significant look. I smiled in return, and we made the rest of the way back very pleasantly.

In half an hour after our arrival, Mrs. Jellyby appeared; and in the course of an hour the various things necessary for breakfast straggled one by one into the dining-room. I do not doubt that Mrs. Jellyby had gone to bed and got up in the usual manner, but she presented no appearance of having changed her dress. She was greatly occupied during breakfast, for the morning's post brought a heavy correspondence relative to Borrioboola-Gha, which would occasion her (she said) to pass a busy day. The children tumbled about, and notched memoranda of their accidents in their legs, which were perfect little calendars of distress; and Peepy was lost for an hour and a half, and brought home from Newgate market by a policeman. The equable manner in which Mrs. Jellyby sustained both his absence and his restoration to the family circle surprised us all.

She was by that time perseveringly dictating to Caddy, and Caddy was fast relapsing into the inky condition in which we had found her. At one o'clock an open carriage arrived for us, and a cart for our luggage. Mrs. Jellyby charged us with many remembrances to her good friend Mr. Jarndyce; Caddy left her desk to see us depart, kissed me in the passage, and stood biting her pen and sobbing on the steps; Peepy, I am happy to say, was asleep and spared the pain of separation (I was not without misgivings that he had gone to Newgate market in search of me); and all the other children got up behind the barouche and fell off, and we saw them, with great concern, scattered over the surface of Thavies Inn as we rolled out of its precincts.

CHAPTER VI. Quite at Home

The day had brightened very much, and still brightened as we went westward. We went our way through the sunshine and the fresh air, wondering more and more at the extent of the streets, the brilliancy of the shops, the great traffic, and the crowds of people whom the pleasanter weather seemed to have brought out like many-coloured flowers. By and by we began to leave the wonderful city and to proceed through suburbs which, of themselves, would have made a pretty large town in my eyes; and at last we got into a real country road again, with windmills, rick-yards, milestones, farmers' waggons, scents of old hay, swinging signs, and horse troughs: trees, fields, and hedge-rows. It was delightful to see the green landscape before us and the immense metropolis behind; and when a waggon with a train of beautiful horses, furnished with red trappings and clear-sounding bells, came by us with its music, I believe we could all three have sung to the bells, so cheerful were the influences around.

"The whole road has been reminding me of my namesake Whittington," said Richard, "and that waggon is the finishing touch. Halloa! What's the matter?"

We had stopped, and the waggon had stopped too. Its music changed as the horses came to a stand, and subsided to a gentle tinkling, except when a horse tossed his head or shook himself and sprinkled off a little shower of bell-ringing.

"Our postilion is looking after the waggoner," said Richard, "and the waggoner is coming back after us. Good day, friend!" The waggoner was at our coach-door. "Why, here's an extraordinary thing!" added Richard, looking closely at the man. "He has got your name, Ada, in his hat!"

He had all our names in his hat. Tucked within the band were three small notes—one addressed to Ada, one to Richard, one to me. These the waggoner delivered to each of us respectively, reading the name aloud first. In answer to Richard's inquiry from whom they came, he briefly answered, "Master, sir, if you please"; and putting on his hat again (which was like a soft bowl), cracked his whip, re-awakened his music, and went melodiously away.

"Is that Mr. Jarndyce's waggon?" said Richard, calling to our post-boy.

"Yes, sir," he replied. "Going to London."

We opened the notes. Each was a counterpart of the other and contained these words in a solid, plain hand.

> *I look forward, my dear, to our meeting easily and without constraint on either side. I therefore have to propose that we meet as old friends and take the past for granted. It will be a relief to you possibly, and to me certainly, and so my love to you.*
>
> *John Jarndyce*

I had perhaps less reason to be surprised than either of my companions, having never yet enjoyed an opportunity of thanking one who had been my benefactor and sole earthly dependence through so many years. I had not considered how I could thank him, my gratitude lying too deep in my heart for that; but I now began to consider how I could meet him without thanking him, and felt it would be very difficult indeed.

The notes revived in Richard and Ada a general impression that they both had, without quite knowing how they came by it, that their cousin Jarndyce could never bear acknowledgments for any kindness he performed and that sooner than receive any he would resort to the most singular expedients and evasions or would even run away. Ada dimly remembered to have heard her mother tell, when she was a very little child, that he had once done her an act of uncommon generosity and that on her going to his house to thank him, he happened to see her through a window coming to the door, and immediately escaped by the back gate, and was not heard of for three months. This discourse led to a great deal more on the same theme, and indeed it lasted us all day, and we talked of scarcely anything else. If we did by any chance diverge into another subject, we soon returned to this, and wondered what the house would be like, and when we should get there, and whether we should see Mr. Jarndyce as soon as we arrived or after a delay, and what he would say to us, and what we should say to him. All of which we wondered about, over and over again.

The roads were very heavy for the horses, but the pathway was generally good, so we alighted and walked up all the hills, and liked it so well that we prolonged our walk on the level ground when we got to the top. At Barnet there were other horses waiting for us, but as they had only just been fed, we had to wait for them too, and got a long fresh walk over a common and an old battle-field before the carriage came up. These delays so protracted the journey that the short day was spent and the long night had closed in before we came to St. Albans, near to which town Bleak House was, we knew.

By that time we were so anxious and nervous that even Richard confessed, as we rattled over the stones of the old street, to feeling an irrational desire to drive back again. As to Ada and me, whom he had wrapped up with great care, the night being sharp and frosty, we trembled from head to foot. When we turned out of the town, round a corner, and Richard told us that the post-boy, who had for a long time sympathized with our heightened expectation, was looking back and nodding, we both stood up in the carriage (Richard holding Ada lest she should be jolted down) and gazed round upon the open country and the starlight night for our destination. There was a light sparkling on the top of a hill before us, and the driver, pointing to it with his whip and crying, "That's Bleak House!" put his horses into a canter and took us forward at such a rate, uphill though it was, that the wheels sent the road drift flying about our heads like spray from a water-mill. Presently we lost the light, presently saw it, presently lost it, presently saw it, and turned into an avenue of trees and cantered up towards where it was beaming brightly. It was in a window of what seemed to be an old-fashioned house with three peaks in the roof in front and a circular sweep leading to the porch. A bell was rung as we drew up, and amidst the sound of its deep voice in the still air, and the distant barking of some dogs, and a gush of light from the opened door, and the smoking and steaming of the heated horses, and the quickened beating of our own hearts, we alighted in no inconsiderable confusion.

"Ada, my love, Esther, my dear, you are welcome. I rejoice to see you! Rick, if I had a hand to spare at present, I would give it you!"

The gentleman who said these words in a clear, bright, hospitable voice had one of his arms round Ada's waist and the other round mine, and kissed us both in a fatherly way, and bore us across the hall into a ruddy little room, all in a glow with a blazing fire. Here he kissed us again, and opening his arms, made us sit down side by side on a sofa ready drawn out near the hearth. I felt that if we had been at all demonstrative, he would have run away in a moment.

"Now, Rick!" said he. "I have a hand at liberty. A word in earnest is as good as a speech. I am heartily glad to see you. You are at home. Warm yourself!"

Richard shook him by both hands with an intuitive mixture of respect and frankness, and only saying (though with an earnestness that rather alarmed me, I was so afraid of Mr. Jarndyce's suddenly disappearing), "You are very kind, sir! We are very much obliged to you!" laid aside his hat and coat and came up to the fire.

"And how did you like the ride? And how did you like Mrs. Jellyby, my dear?" said Mr. Jarndyce to Ada.

While Ada was speaking to him in reply, I glanced (I need not say with how much interest) at his face. It was a handsome, lively, quick face, full of change and motion; and his hair was a silvered iron-grey. I took him to be nearer sixty than fifty, but he was upright, hearty, and robust. From the moment of his first speaking to us his voice had connected itself with an association in my mind that I could not define; but now, all at once, a something sudden in his manner and a pleasant expression in his eyes recalled the gentleman in the stagecoach six years ago on the memorable day of my journey to Reading. I was certain it was he. I never was so frightened in my life as when I made the discovery, for he caught my glance, and appearing to read my thoughts, gave such a look at the door that I thought we had lost him.

However, I am happy to say he remained where he was, and asked me what I thought of Mrs. Jellyby.

"She exerts herself very much for Africa, sir," I said.

"Nobly!" returned Mr. Jarndyce. "But you answer like Ada." Whom I had not heard. "You all think something else, I see."

"We rather thought," said I, glancing at Richard and Ada, who entreated me with their eyes to speak, "that perhaps she was a little unmindful of her home."

"Floored!" cried Mr. Jarndyce.

I was rather alarmed again.

"Well! I want to know your real thoughts, my dear. I may have sent you there on purpose."

"We thought that, perhaps," said I, hesitating, "it is right to begin with the obligations of home, sir; and that, perhaps, while those are overlooked and neglected, no other duties can possibly be substituted for them."

"The little Jellybys," said Richard, coming to my relief, "are really—I can't help expressing myself strongly, sir—in a devil of a state."

"She means well," said Mr. Jarndyce hastily. "The wind's in the east."

"It was in the north, sir, as we came down," observed Richard.

"My dear Rick," said Mr. Jarndyce, poking the fire, "I'll take an oath it's either in the east or going to be. I am always conscious of an uncomfortable sensation now and then when the wind is blowing in the east."

"Rheumatism, sir?" said Richard.

"I dare say it is, Rick. I believe it is. And so the little Jell—I had my doubts about 'em—are in a—oh, Lord, yes, it's easterly!" said Mr. Jarndyce.

He had taken two or three undecided turns up and down while uttering these broken sentences, retaining the poker in one hand and rubbing his hair with the other, with a good-natured vexation at once so whimsical and so lovable that I am sure we were more delighted with him than we could possibly have expressed in any words. He gave an arm to Ada and an arm to me, and bidding Richard bring a candle, was leading the way out when he suddenly turned us all back again.

"Those little Jellybys. Couldn't you—didn't you—now, if it had rained sugar-plums, or three-cornered raspberry tarts, or anything of that sort!" said Mr. Jarndyce.

"Oh, cousin—" Ada hastily began.

"Good, my pretty pet. I like cousin. Cousin John, perhaps, is better."

"Then, cousin John—" Ada laughingly began again.

"Ha, ha! Very good indeed!" said Mr. Jarndyce with great enjoyment. "Sounds uncommonly natural. Yes, my dear?"

"It did better than that. It rained Esther."

"Aye?" said Mr. Jarndyce. "What did Esther do?"

"Why, cousin John," said Ada, clasping her hands upon his arm and shaking her head at me across him—for I wanted her to be quiet—"Esther was their friend directly. Esther nursed them, coaxed them to sleep, washed and dressed them, told them stories, kept them quiet, bought them keepsakes"—My dear girl! I had only gone out with Peepy after he was found and given him a little, tiny horse!—"and, cousin John, she softened poor Caroline, the eldest one, so much and was so thoughtful for me and so amiable! No, no, I won't be contradicted, Esther dear! You know, you know, it's true!"

The warm-hearted darling leaned across her cousin John and kissed me, and then looking up in his face, boldly said, "At all events, cousin John, I WILL thank you for the companion you have given me." I felt as if she challenged him to run away. But he didn't.

"Where did you say the wind was, Rick?" asked Mr. Jarndyce.

"In the north as we came down, sir."

"You are right. There's no east in it. A mistake of mine. Come, girls, come and see your home!"

It was one of those delightfully irregular houses where you go up and down steps out of one room into another, and where you come upon more rooms when you think you have seen all there are, and where there is a bountiful provision of little halls and passages, and where you find still older cottage-rooms in unexpected places with lattice windows and green growth pressing through them. Mine, which we entered first, was of this kind, with an up-and-down roof that had more corners in it than I ever counted afterwards and a chimney (there was a wood fire on the hearth) paved all around with pure white tiles, in every one of which a bright miniature of the fire was blazing. Out of this room, you went down two steps into a charming little sitting-room looking down upon a flower-garden, which room was henceforth to belong to Ada and me. Out of this you went up three steps into Ada's bedroom, which had a fine broad window commanding a beautiful view (we saw a great expanse of darkness lying underneath the stars), to which there was a hollow window-seat, in which, with a spring-lock, three dear Adas might have been lost at once. Out of this room you passed into a little gallery, with which the other best rooms (only two) communicated, and so, by a little staircase of shallow steps with a number of corner stairs in it, considering its length, down into the hall. But if instead of going out at Ada's door you came back into my room, and went out at the door by which you had entered it, and turned up a few crooked steps that branched off in an unexpected manner from the stairs, you lost yourself in passages, with mangles in them, and three-cornered tables, and a native Hindu chair, which was also a sofa, a box, and a bedstead, and looked in every form something between a bamboo skeleton and a great bird-cage, and had been brought from India nobody knew by whom or when. From these you came on Richard's room, which was part library, part sitting-room, part bedroom, and seemed indeed a comfortable compound of many rooms. Out of that you went straight, with a little interval of passage, to the plain room where Mr. Jarndyce slept, all the year round, with his window open, his bedstead without any furniture standing in the middle of the floor for more air, and his cold bath gaping for him in a smaller room adjoining. Out of that you came into another passage, where there were back-stairs and where you could hear the horses being rubbed down outside the stable and being told to "Hold up" and "Get over," as they slipped about very much on the uneven stones. Or you might, if you came out at another door (every room had at least two doors), go straight down to the hall again by half-a-dozen steps and a low archway, wondering how you got back there or had ever got out of it.

The furniture, old-fashioned rather than old, like the house, was as pleasantly irregular. Ada's sleeping-room was all flowers—in chintz and paper, in velvet, in needlework, in the brocade of two stiff courtly chairs which stood, each attended by a little page of a stool for greater state, on either side of the fire-place. Our sitting-room was green and had framed and glazed upon the walls numbers of surprising and surprised birds, staring out of pictures at a real trout in a case, as brown and shining as if it had been served with gravy; at the death of Captain Cook; and at the whole process of preparing tea in China, as depicted by Chinese artists. In my room there were oval engravings of the months—ladies haymaking in short waists and large hats tied under the chin, for June; smooth-legged noblemen pointing with cocked-hats to village steeples, for October. Half-length portraits in crayons abounded all through the house, but were so dispersed that I found the brother of a youthful officer of mine in the china-closet and the grey old age of my pretty young bride, with a flower in her bodice, in the breakfast-room. As substitutes, I had four angels, of Queen Anne's reign, taking a complacent gentleman to heaven, in festoons, with some difficulty; and a composition in needlework representing fruit, a kettle, and an alphabet. All the movables, from the wardrobes to the chairs and tables, hangings, glasses, even to the pincushions and scent-bottles on the dressing-tables, displayed the same quaint variety. They agreed in nothing but their perfect neatness, their display of the whitest linen, and their storing-up, wheresoever the existence of a drawer, small or large, rendered it possible, of quantities of rose-leaves and sweet lavender. Such, with its illuminated windows, softened here and there by shadows of curtains, shining out upon the starlight night; with its light, and warmth, and comfort; with its hospitable jingle, at a distance, of preparations for dinner; with the face of its generous master brightening everything we saw; and just wind enough without to sound a low accompaniment to everything we heard, were our first impressions of Bleak House.

"I am glad you like it," said Mr. Jarndyce when he had brought us round again to Ada's sitting-room. "It makes no pretensions, but it is a comfortable little place, I hope, and will be more so with such bright young looks in it. You have barely half an hour before dinner. There's no one here but the finest creature upon earth—a child."

"More children, Esther!" said Ada.

"I don't mean literally a child," pursued Mr. Jarndyce; "not a child in years. He is grown up—he is at least as old as I am—but in simplicity, and freshness, and enthusiasm, and a fine guileless inaptitude for all worldly affairs, he is a perfect child."

We felt that he must be very interesting.

"He knows Mrs. Jellyby," said Mr. Jarndyce. "He is a musical man, an amateur, but might have been a professional. He is an artist too, an amateur, but might have been a professional. He is a man of attainments and of captivating manners. He has been unfortunate in his affairs, and unfortunate in his pursuits, and unfortunate in his family; but he don't care—he's a child!"

"Did you imply that he has children of his own, sir?" inquired Richard.

"Yes, Rick! Half-a-dozen. More! Nearer a dozen, I should think. But he has never looked after them. How could he? He wanted somebody to look after HIM. He is a child, you know!" said Mr. Jarndyce.

"And have the children looked after themselves at all, sir?" inquired Richard.

"Why, just as you may suppose," said Mr. Jarndyce, his countenance suddenly falling. "It is said that the children of the very poor are not brought up, but dragged up. Harold Skimpole's children have tumbled up somehow or other. The wind's getting round again, I am afraid. I feel it rather!"

Richard observed that the situation was exposed on a sharp night.

"It IS exposed," said Mr. Jarndyce. "No doubt that's the cause. Bleak House has an exposed sound. But you are coming my way. Come along!"

Our luggage having arrived and being all at hand, I was dressed in a few minutes and engaged in putting my worldly goods away when a maid (not the one in attendance upon Ada, but another, whom I had not seen) brought a basket into my room with two bunches of keys in it, all labelled.

"For you, miss, if you please," said she.

"For me?" said I.

"The housekeeping keys, miss."

I showed my surprise, for she added with some little surprise on her own part, "I was told to bring them as soon as you was alone, miss. Miss Summerson, if I don't deceive myself?"

"Yes," said I. "That is my name."

"The large bunch is the housekeeping, and the little bunch is the cellars, miss. Any time you was pleased to appoint to-morrow morning, I was to show you the presses and things they belong to."

I said I would be ready at half-past six, and after she was gone, stood looking at the basket, quite lost in the magnitude of my trust. Ada found me thus and had such a delightful confidence in me when I showed her the keys and told her about them that it would have been insensibility and ingratitude not to feel encouraged. I knew, to be sure, that it was the dear girl's kindness, but I liked to be so pleasantly cheated.

When we went downstairs, we were presented to Mr. Skimpole, who was standing before the fire telling Richard how fond he used to be, in his school-time, of football. He was a little bright creature with a rather large head, but a delicate face and a sweet voice, and there was a perfect charm in him. All he said was so free from effort and spontaneous and was said with such a captivating gaiety that it was fascinating to hear him talk. Being of a more slender figure than Mr. Jarndyce and having a richer complexion, with browner hair, he looked younger. Indeed, he had more the appearance in all respects of a damaged young man than a well-preserved elderly one. There was an easy negligence in his manner and even in his dress (his hair carelessly disposed, and his neckkerchief loose and flowing, as I have seen artists paint their own portraits) which I could not separate from the idea of a romantic youth who had undergone some unique process of depreciation. It struck me as being not at all like the manner or appearance of a man who had advanced in life by the usual road of years, cares, and experiences.

I gathered from the conversation that Mr. Skimpole had been educated for the medical profession and had once lived, in his professional capacity, in the household of a German prince. He told us, however, that as he had always been a mere child in point of weights and measures and had never known anything about them (except that they disgusted him), he had never been able to prescribe with the requisite accuracy of detail. In fact, he said, he had no head for detail. And he told us, with great humour, that when he was wanted to bleed the prince or physic any of his people, he was generally found lying on his back in bed, reading the newspapers or making fancy-sketches in pencil, and couldn't come. The prince, at last, objecting to this, "in which," said Mr. Skimpole, in the frankest manner, "he was perfectly right," the engagement terminated, and Mr. Skimpole having (as he added with delightful gaiety) "nothing to live upon but love, fell in love, and married, and surrounded himself with rosy cheeks." His good friend Jarndyce and some other of his good friends then helped him, in quicker or slower succession, to several openings in life, but to no purpose, for he must confess to two of the oldest infirmities in the world: one was that he had no idea of time, the other that he had no idea of money. In consequence of which he never kept an appointment, never could transact any business, and never knew the value of anything! Well! So he had got on in life, and here he was! He was very fond of reading the papers, very fond of making fancy-sketches with a pencil, very fond of nature, very fond of art. All he asked of society was to let him live. THAT wasn't much. His wants were few. Give him the papers, conversation, music, mutton, coffee, landscape, fruit in the season, a few sheets of Bristol-board, and a little claret, and he asked no more. He was a mere child in the world, but he didn't cry for the moon. He said to the world, "Go your several ways in peace! Wear red coats, blue coats, lawn sleeves; put pens behind your ears, wear aprons; go after glory, holiness, commerce, trade, any object you prefer; only—let Harold Skimpole live!"

All this and a great deal more he told us, not only with the utmost brilliancy and enjoyment, but with a certain vivacious candour—speaking of himself as if he were not at all his own affair, as if Skimpole were a third person, as if he knew that Skimpole had his singularities but still had his claims too, which were the general business of the community and must not be slighted. He was quite enchanting. If I felt at all confused at that early time in endeavouring to reconcile anything he said with anything I had thought about the duties and accountabilities of life (which I am far from sure of), I was confused by not exactly understanding why he was free of them. That he WAS free of them, I scarcely doubted; he was so very clear about it himself.

"I covet nothing," said Mr. Skimpole in the same light way. "Possession is nothing to me. Here is my friend Jarndyce's excellent house. I feel obliged to him for possessing it. I can sketch it and alter it. I can set it to music. When I am here, I have sufficient possession of it and have neither trouble, cost, nor responsibility. My steward's name, in short, is Jarndyce, and he can't cheat me. We have been mentioning Mrs. Jellyby. There is a bright-eyed woman, of a strong will and immense power of business detail, who throws herself into objects with surprising ardour! I don't regret that I have not a strong will and an immense power of business detail to throw myself into objects with surprising ardour. I can admire her without envy. I can sympathize with the objects. I can dream of them. I can lie down on the grass—in fine weather—and float along an African river, embracing all the natives I meet, as sensible of the deep silence and sketching the dense overhanging tropical growth as accurately as if I were there. I don't know that it's of any direct use my doing so, but it's all I can do, and I do it thoroughly. Then, for heaven's sake, having Harold Skimpole, a confiding child, petitioning you, the world, an agglomeration of practical people of business habits, to let him live and admire the human family, do it somehow or other, like good souls, and suffer him to ride his rocking-horse!"

It was plain enough that Mr. Jarndyce had not been neglectful of the adjuration. Mr. Skimpole's general position there would have rendered it so without the addition of what he presently said.

"It's only you, the generous creatures, whom I envy," said Mr. Skimpole, addressing us, his new friends, in an impersonal manner. "I envy you your power of doing what you do. It is what I should revel in myself. I don't feel any vulgar gratitude to you. I almost feel as if YOU ought to be grateful to ME for giving you the opportunity of enjoying the luxury of generosity. I know you like it. For anything I can tell, I may have come into the world expressly for the purpose of increasing your stock of happiness. I may have been born to be a benefactor to you by sometimes giving you an opportunity of assisting me in my little perplexities. Why should I regret my incapacity for details and worldly affairs when it leads to such pleasant consequences? I don't regret it therefore."

Of all his playful speeches (playful, yet always fully meaning what they expressed) none seemed to be more to the taste of Mr. Jarndyce than this. I had often new temptations, afterwards, to wonder whether it was really singular, or only singular to me, that he, who was probably the most grateful of mankind upon the least occasion, should so desire to escape the gratitude of others.

We were all enchanted. I felt it a merited tribute to the engaging qualities of Ada and Richard that Mr. Skimpole, seeing them for the first time, should he so unreserved and should lay himself out to be so exquisitely agreeable. They (and especially Richard) were naturally pleased, for similar reasons, and considered it no common privilege to be so freely confided in by such an attractive man. The more we listened, the more gaily Mr. Skimpole talked. And what with his fine hilarious manner and his engaging candour and his genial way of lightly tossing his own weaknesses about, as if he had said, "I am a child, you know! You are designing people compared with me" (he really made me consider myself in that light) "but I am gay and innocent; forget your worldly arts and play with me!" the effect was absolutely dazzling.

He was so full of feeling too and had such a delicate sentiment for what was beautiful or tender that he could have won a heart by that alone. In the evening, when I was preparing to make tea and Ada was touching the piano in the adjoining room and softly humming a tune to her cousin Richard, which they had happened to mention, he came and sat down on the sofa near me and so spoke of Ada that I almost loved him.

"She is like the morning," he said. "With that golden hair, those blue eyes, and that fresh bloom on her cheek, she is like the summer morning. The birds here will mistake her for it. We will not call such a lovely young creature as that, who is a joy to all mankind, an orphan. She is the child of the universe."

Mr. Jarndyce, I found, was standing near us with his hands behind him and an attentive smile upon his face.

"The universe," he observed, "makes rather an indifferent parent, I am afraid."

"Oh! I don't know!" cried Mr. Skimpole buoyantly.

"I think I do know," said Mr. Jarndyce.

"Well!" cried Mr. Skimpole. "You know the world (which in your sense is the universe), and I know nothing of it, so you shall have your way. But if I had mine," glancing at the cousins, "there should be no brambles of sordid realities in such a path as that. It should be strewn with roses; it should lie through bowers, where there was no spring, autumn, nor winter, but perpetual summer. Age or change should never wither it. The base word money should never be breathed near it!"

Mr. Jarndyce patted him on the head with a smile, as if he had been really a child, and passing a step or two on, and stopping a moment, glanced at the young cousins. His look was thoughtful, but had a benignant expression in it which I often (how often!) saw again, which has long been engraven on my heart. The room in which they were, communicating with that in which he stood, was only lighted by the fire. Ada sat at the piano; Richard stood beside her, bending down. Upon the wall, their shadows blended together, surrounded by strange forms, not without a ghostly motion caught from the unsteady fire, though reflecting from motionless objects. Ada touched the notes so softly and sang so low that the wind, sighing away to the distant hills, was as audible as the music. The mystery of the future and the little clue afforded to it by the voice of the present seemed expressed in the whole picture.

But it is not to recall this fancy, well as I remember it, that I recall the scene. First, I was not quite unconscious of the contrast in respect of meaning and intention between the silent look directed that way and the flow of words that had preceded it. Secondly, though Mr. Jarndyce's glance as he withdrew it rested for but a moment on me, I felt as if in that moment he confided to me—and knew that he confided to me and that I received the confidence—his hope that Ada and Richard might one day enter on a dearer relationship.

Mr. Skimpole could play on the piano and the violoncello, and he was a composer—had composed half an opera once, but got tired of it—and played what he composed with taste. After tea we had quite a little concert, in which Richard—who was enthralled by Ada's singing and told me that she seemed to know all the songs that ever were written—and Mr. Jarndyce, and I were the audience. After a little while I missed first Mr. Skimpole and afterwards Richard, and while I was thinking how could Richard stay away so long and lose so much, the maid who had given me the keys looked in at the door, saying, "If you please, miss, could you spare a minute?"

When I was shut out with her in the hall, she said, holding up her hands, "Oh, if you please, miss, Mr. Carstone says would you come upstairs to Mr. Skimpole's room. He has been took, miss!"

"Took?" said I.

"Took, miss. Sudden," said the maid.

I was apprehensive that his illness might be of a dangerous kind, but of course I begged her to be quiet and not disturb any one and collected myself, as I followed her quickly upstairs, sufficiently to consider what were the best remedies to be applied if it should prove to be a fit. She threw open a door and I went into a chamber, where, to my unspeakable surprise, instead of finding Mr. Skimpole stretched upon the bed or prostrate on the floor, I found him standing before the fire smiling at Richard, while Richard, with a face of great embarrassment, looked at a person on the sofa, in a white great-coat, with smooth hair upon his head and not much of it, which he was wiping smoother and making less of with a pocket-handkerchief.

"Miss Summerson," said Richard hurriedly, "I am glad you are come. You will be able to advise us. Our friend Mr. Skimpole—don't be alarmed!—is arrested for debt."

"And really, my dear Miss Summerson," said Mr. Skimpole with his agreeable candour, "I never was in a situation in which that excellent sense and quiet habit of method and usefulness, which anybody must observe in you who has the happiness of being a quarter of an hour in your society, was more needed."

The person on the sofa, who appeared to have a cold in his head, gave such a very loud snort that he startled me.

"Are you arrested for much, sir?" I inquired of Mr. Skimpole.

"My dear Miss Summerson," said he, shaking his head pleasantly, "I don't know. Some pounds, odd shillings, and halfpence, I think, were mentioned."

"It's twenty-four pound, sixteen, and sevenpence ha'penny," observed the stranger. "That's wot it is."

"And it sounds—somehow it sounds," said Mr. Skimpole, "like a small sum?"

The strange man said nothing but made another snort. It was such a powerful one that it seemed quite to lift him out of his seat.

"Mr. Skimpole," said Richard to me, "has a delicacy in applying to my cousin Jarndyce because he has lately—I think, sir, I understood you that you had lately—"

"Oh, yes!" returned Mr. Skimpole, smiling. "Though I forgot how much it was and when it was. Jarndyce would readily do it again, but I have the epicure-like feeling that I would prefer a novelty in help, that I would rather," and he looked at Richard and me, "develop generosity in a new soil and in a new form of flower."

"What do you think will be best, Miss Summerson?" said Richard, aside.

I ventured to inquire, generally, before replying, what would happen if the money were not produced.

"Jail," said the strange man, coolly putting his handkerchief into his hat, which was on the floor at his feet. "Or Coavinses."

"May I ask, sir, what is—"

"Coavinses?" said the strange man. "A 'ouse."

Richard and I looked at one another again. It was a most singular thing that the arrest was our embarrassment and not Mr. Skimpole's. He observed us with a genial interest, but there seemed, if I may venture on such a contradiction, nothing selfish in it. He had entirely washed his hands of the difficulty, and it had become ours.

"I thought," he suggested, as if good-naturedly to help us out, "that being parties in a Chancery suit concerning (as people say) a large amount of property, Mr. Richard or his beautiful cousin, or both, could sign something, or make over something, or give some sort of undertaking, or pledge, or bond? I don't know what the business name of it may be, but I suppose there is some instrument within their power that would settle this?"

"Not a bit on it," said the strange man.

"Really?" returned Mr. Skimpole. "That seems odd, now, to one who is no judge of these things!"

"Odd or even," said the stranger gruffly, "I tell you, not a bit on it!"

"Keep your temper, my good fellow, keep your temper!" Mr. Skimpole gently reasoned with him as he made a little drawing of his head on the fly-leaf of a book. "Don't be ruffled by your occupation. We can separate you from your office; we can separate the individual from the pursuit. We are not so prejudiced as to suppose that in private life you are otherwise than a very estimable man, with a great deal of poetry in your nature, of which you may not be conscious."

The stranger only answered with another violent snort, whether in acceptance of the poetry-tribute or in disdainful rejection of it, he did not express to me.

"Now, my dear Miss Summerson, and my dear Mr. Richard," said Mr. Skimpole gaily, innocently, and confidingly as he looked at his drawing with his head on one side, "here you see me utterly incapable of helping myself, and entirely in your hands! I only ask to be free. The butterflies are free. Mankind will surely not deny to Harold Skimpole what it concedes to the butterflies!"

"My dear Miss Summerson," said Richard in a whisper, "I have ten pounds that I received from Mr. Kenge. I must try what that will do."

I possessed fifteen pounds, odd shillings, which I had saved from my quarterly allowance during several years. I had always thought that some accident might happen which would throw me suddenly, without any relation or any property, on the world and had always tried to keep some little money by me that I might not be quite penniless. I told Richard of my having this little store and having no present need of it, and I asked him delicately to inform Mr. Skimpole, while I should be gone to fetch it, that we would have the pleasure of paying his debt.

When I came back, Mr. Skimpole kissed my hand and seemed quite touched. Not on his own account (I was again aware of that perplexing and extraordinary contradiction), but on ours, as if personal considerations were impossible with him and the contemplation of our happiness alone affected him. Richard, begging me, for the greater grace of the transaction, as he said, to settle with Coavinses (as Mr. Skimpole now jocularly called him), I counted out the money and received the necessary acknowledgment. This, too, delighted Mr. Skimpole.

His compliments were so delicately administered that I blushed less than I might have done and settled with the stranger in the white coat without making any mistakes. He put the money in his pocket and shortly said, "Well, then, I'll wish you a good evening, miss.

"My friend," said Mr. Skimpole, standing with his back to the fire after giving up the sketch when it was half finished, "I should like to ask you something, without offence."

I think the reply was, "Cut away, then!"

"Did you know this morning, now, that you were coming out on this errand?" said Mr. Skimpole.

"Know'd it yes'day aft'noon at tea-time," said Coavinses.

"It didn't affect your appetite? Didn't make you at all uneasy?"

"Not a bit," said Coavinses. "I know'd if you wos missed to-day, you wouldn't be missed to-morrow. A day makes no such odds."

"But when you came down here," proceeded Mr. Skimpole, "it was a fine day. The sun was shining, the wind was blowing, the lights and shadows were passing across the fields, the birds were singing."

"Nobody said they warn't, in MY hearing," returned Coavinses.

"No," observed Mr. Skimpole. "But what did you think upon the road?"

"Wot do you mean?" growled Coavinses with an appearance of strong resentment. "Think! I've got enough to do, and little enough to get for it without thinking. Thinking!" (with profound contempt).

"Then you didn't think, at all events," proceeded Mr. Skimpole, "to this effect: 'Harold Skimpole loves to see the sun shine, loves to hear the wind blow, loves to watch the changing lights and shadows, loves to hear the birds, those choristers in Nature's great cathedral. And does it seem to me that I am about to deprive Harold Skimpole of his share in such possessions, which are his only birthright!' You thought nothing to that effect?"

"I—certainly—did—NOT," said Coavinses, whose doggedness in utterly renouncing the idea was of that intense kind that he could only give adequate expression to it by putting a long interval between each word, and accompanying the last with a jerk that might have dislocated his neck.

"Very odd and very curious, the mental process is, in you men of business!" said Mr. Skimpole thoughtfully. "Thank you, my friend. Good night."

As our absence had been long enough already to seem strange downstairs, I returned at once and found Ada sitting at work by the fireside talking to her cousin John. Mr. Skimpole presently appeared, and Richard shortly after him. I was sufficiently engaged during the remainder of the evening in taking my first lesson in backgammon from Mr. Jarndyce, who was very fond of the game and from whom I wished of course to learn it as quickly as I could in order that I might be of the very small use of being able to play when he had no better adversary. But I thought, occasionally, when Mr. Skimpole played some fragments of his own compositions or when, both at the piano and the violoncello, and at our table, he preserved with an absence of all effort his delightful spirits and his easy flow of conversation, that Richard and I seemed to retain the transferred impression of having been arrested since dinner and that it was very curious altogether.

It was late before we separated, for when Ada was going at eleven o'clock, Mr. Skimpole went to the piano and rattled hilariously that the best of all ways to lengthen our days was to steal a few hours from night, my dear! It was past twelve before he took his candle and his radiant face out of the room, and I think he might have kept us there, if he had seen fit, until daybreak. Ada and Richard were lingering for a few moments by the fire, wondering whether Mrs. Jellyby had yet finished her dictation for the day, when Mr. Jarndyce, who had been out of the room, returned.

"Oh, dear me, what's this, what's this!" he said, rubbing his head and walking about with his good-humoured vexation. "What's this they tell me? Rick, my boy, Esther, my dear, what have you been doing? Why did you do it? How could you do it? How much apiece was it? The wind's round again. I feel it all over me!"

We neither of us quite knew what to answer.

"Come, Rick, come! I must settle this before I sleep. How much are you out of pocket? You two made the money up, you know! Why did you? How could you? Oh, Lord, yes, it's due east—must be!"

"Really, sir," said Richard, "I don't think it would be honourable in me to tell you. Mr. Skimpole relied upon us—"

"Lord bless you, my dear boy! He relies upon everybody!" said Mr. Jarndyce, giving his head a great rub and stopping short.

"Indeed, sir?"

"Everybody! And he'll be in the same scrape again next week!" said Mr. Jarndyce, walking again at a great pace, with a candle in his hand that had gone out. "He's always in the same scrape. He was born in the same scrape. I verily believe that the announcement in the newspapers when his mother was confined was 'On Tuesday last, at her residence in Botheration Buildings, Mrs. Skimpole of a son in difficulties.'"

Richard laughed heartily but added, "Still, sir, I don't want to shake his confidence or to break his confidence, and if I submit to your better knowledge again, that I ought to keep his secret, I hope you will consider before you press me any more. Of course, if you do press me, sir, I shall know I am wrong and will tell you."

"Well!" cried Mr. Jarndyce, stopping again, and making several absent endeavours to put his candlestick in his pocket. "I—here! Take it away, my dear. I don't know what I am about with it; it's all the wind—invariably has that effect—I won't press you, Rick; you may be right. But really—to get hold of you and Esther—and to squeeze you like a couple of tender young Saint Michael's oranges! It'll blow a gale in the course of the night!"

He was now alternately putting his hands into his pockets as if he were going to keep them there a long time, and taking them out again and vehemently rubbing them all over his head.

I ventured to take this opportunity of hinting that Mr. Skimpole, being in all such matters quite a child—

"Eh, my dear?" said Mr. Jarndyce, catching at the word.

"Being quite a child, sir," said I, "and so different from other people—"

"You are right!" said Mr. Jarndyce, brightening. "Your woman's wit hits the mark. He is a child—an absolute child. I told you he was a child, you know, when I first mentioned him."

Certainly! Certainly! we said.

"And he IS a child. Now, isn't he?" asked Mr. Jarndyce, brightening more and more.

He was indeed, we said.

"When you come to think of it, it's the height of childishness in you—I mean me—" said Mr. Jarndyce, "to regard him for a moment as a man. You can't make HIM responsible. The idea of Harold Skimpole with designs or plans, or knowledge of consequences! Ha, ha, ha!"

It was so delicious to see the clouds about his bright face clearing, and to see him so heartily pleased, and to know, as it was impossible not to know, that the source of his pleasure was the goodness which was tortured by condemning, or mistrusting, or secretly accusing any one, that I saw the tears in Ada's eyes, while she echoed his laugh, and felt them in my own.

"Why, what a cod's head and shoulders I am," said Mr. Jarndyce, "to require reminding of it! The whole business shows the child from beginning to end. Nobody but a child would have thought of singling YOU two out for parties in the affair! Nobody but a child would have thought of YOUR having the money! If it had been a thousand pounds, it would have been just the same!" said Mr. Jarndyce with his whole face in a glow.

We all confirmed it from our night's experience.

"To be sure, to be sure!" said Mr. Jarndyce. "However, Rick, Esther, and you too, Ada, for I don't know that even your little purse is safe from his inexperience—I must have a promise all round that nothing of this sort shall ever be done any more. No advances! Not even sixpences."

We all promised faithfully, Richard with a merry glance at me touching his pocket as if to remind me that there was no danger of OUR transgressing.

"As to Skimpole," said Mr. Jarndyce, "a habitable doll's house with good board and a few tin people to get into debt with and borrow money of would set the boy up in life. He is in a child's sleep by this time, I suppose; it's time I should take my craftier head to my more worldly pillow. Good night, my dears. God bless you!"

He peeped in again, with a smiling face, before we had lighted our candles, and said, "Oh! I have been looking at the weather-cock. I find it was a false alarm about the wind. It's in the south!" And went away singing to himself.

Ada and I agreed, as we talked together for a little while upstairs, that this caprice about the wind was a fiction and that he used the pretence to account for any disappointment he could not conceal, rather than he would blame the real cause of it or disparage or depreciate any one. We thought this very characteristic of his eccentric gentleness and of the difference between him and those petulant people who make the weather and the winds (particularly that unlucky wind which he had chosen for such a different purpose) the stalking-horses of their splenetic and gloomy humours.

Indeed, so much affection for him had been added in this one evening to my gratitude that I hoped I already began to understand him through that mingled feeling. Any seeming inconsistencies in Mr. Skimpole or in Mrs. Jellyby I could not expect to be able to reconcile, having so little experience or practical knowledge. Neither did I try, for my thoughts were busy when I was alone, with Ada and Richard and with the confidence I had seemed to receive concerning them. My fancy, made a little wild by the wind perhaps, would not consent to be all unselfish, either, though I would have persuaded it to be so if I could. It wandered back to my godmother's house and came along the intervening track, raising up shadowy speculations which had sometimes trembled there in the dark as to what knowledge Mr. Jarndyce had of my earliest history—even as to the possibility of his being my father, though that idle dream was quite gone now.

It was all gone now, I remembered, getting up from the fire. It was not for me to muse over bygones, but to act with a cheerful spirit and a grateful heart. So I said to myself, "Esther, Esther, Esther! Duty, my dear!" and gave my little basket of housekeeping keys such a shake that they sounded like little bells and rang me hopefully to bed.

CHAPTER VII. The Ghost's Walk

While Esther sleeps, and while Esther wakes, it is still wet weather down at the place in Lincolnshire. The rain is ever falling—drip, drip, drip—by day and night upon the broad flagged terrace-pavement, the Ghost's Walk. The weather is so very bad down in Lincolnshire that the liveliest imagination can scarcely apprehend its ever being fine again. Not that there is any superabundant life of imagination on the spot, for Sir Leicester is not here (and, truly, even if he were, would not do much for it in that particular), but is in Paris with my Lady; and solitude, with dusky wings, sits brooding upon Chesney Wold.

There may be some motions of fancy among the lower animals at Chesney Wold. The horses in the stables—the long stables in a barren, red-brick court-yard, where there is a great bell in a turret, and a clock with a large face, which the pigeons who live near it and who love to perch upon its shoulders seem to be always consulting—THEY may contemplate some mental pictures of fine weather on occasions, and may be better artists at them than the grooms. The old roan, so famous for cross-country work, turning his large eyeball to the grated window near his rack, may remember the fresh leaves that glisten there at other times and the scents that stream in, and may have a fine run with the hounds, while the human helper, clearing out the next stall, never stirs beyond his pitchfork and birch-broom. The grey, whose place is opposite the door and who with an impatient rattle of his halter pricks his ears and turns his head so wistfully when it is opened, and to whom the opener says, "Woa grey, then, steady! Noabody wants you to-day!" may know it quite as well as the man. The whole seemingly monotonous and uncompanionable half-dozen, stabled together, may pass the long wet hours when the door is shut in livelier communication than is held in the servants' hall or at the Dedlock Arms, or may even beguile the time by improving (perhaps corrupting) the pony in the loose-box in the corner.

So the mastiff, dozing in his kennel in the court-yard with his large head on his paws, may think of the hot sunshine when the shadows of the stable-buildings tire his patience out by changing and leave him at one time of the day no broader refuge than the shadow of his own house, where he sits on end, panting and growling short, and very much wanting something to worry besides himself and his chain. So now, half-waking and all-winking, he may recall the house full of company, the coach-houses full of vehicles, the stables full of horses, and the out-buildings full of attendants upon horses, until he is undecided about the present and comes forth to see how it is. Then, with that impatient shake of himself, he may growl in the spirit, "Rain, rain, rain! Nothing but rain—and no family here!" as he goes in again and lies down with a gloomy yawn.

So with the dogs in the kennel-buildings across the park, who have their restless fits and whose doleful voices when the wind has been very obstinate have even made it known in the house itself—upstairs, downstairs, and in my Lady's chamber. They may hunt the whole country-side, while the raindrops are pattering round their inactivity. So the rabbits with their self-betraying tails, frisking in and out of holes at roots of trees, may be lively with ideas of the breezy days when their ears are blown about or of those seasons of interest when there are sweet young plants to gnaw. The turkey in the poultry-yard, always troubled with a class-grievance (probably Christmas), may be reminiscent of that summer morning wrongfully taken from him when he got into the lane among the felled trees, where there was a barn and barley. The discontented goose, who stoops to pass under the old gateway, twenty feet high, may gabble out, if we only knew it, a waddling preference for weather when the gateway casts its shadow on the ground.

Be this as it may, there is not much fancy otherwise stirring at Chesney Wold. If there be a little at any odd moment, it goes, like a little noise in that old echoing place, a long way and usually leads off to ghosts and mystery.

It has rained so hard and rained so long down in Lincolnshire that Mrs. Rouncewell, the old housekeeper at Chesney Wold, has several times taken off her spectacles and cleaned them to make certain that the drops were not upon the glasses. Mrs. Rouncewell might have been sufficiently assured by hearing the rain, but that she is rather deaf, which nothing will induce her to believe. She is a fine old lady, handsome, stately, wonderfully neat, and has such a back and such a stomacher that if her stays should turn out when she dies to have been a broad old-fashioned family fire-grate, nobody who knows her would have cause to be surprised. Weather affects Mrs. Rouncewell little. The house is there in all weathers, and the house, as she expresses it, "is what she looks at." She sits in her room (in a side passage on the ground floor, with an arched window commanding a smooth quadrangle, adorned at regular intervals with smooth round trees and smooth round blocks of stone, as if the trees were going to play at bowls with the stones), and the whole house reposes on her mind. She can open it on occasion and be busy and fluttered, but it is shut up now and lies on the breadth of Mrs. Rouncewell's iron-bound bosom in a majestic sleep.

It is the next difficult thing to an impossibility to imagine Chesney Wold without Mrs. Rouncewell, but she has only been here fifty years. Ask her how long, this rainy day, and she shall answer "fifty year, three months, and a fortnight, by the blessing of heaven, if I live till Tuesday." Mr. Rouncewell died some time before the decease of the pretty fashion of pig-tails, and modestly hid his own (if he took it with him) in a corner of the churchyard in the park near the mouldy porch. He was born in the market-town, and so was his young widow. Her progress in the family began in the time of the last Sir Leicester and originated in the still-room.

The present representative of the Dedlocks is an excellent master. He supposes all his dependents to be utterly bereft of individual characters, intentions, or opinions, and is persuaded that he was born to supersede the necessity of their having any. If he were to make a discovery to the contrary, he would be simply stunned—would never recover himself, most likely, except to gasp and die. But he is an excellent master still, holding it a part of his state to be so. He has a great liking for Mrs. Rouncewell; he says she is a most respectable, creditable woman. He always shakes hands with her when he comes down to Chesney Wold and when he goes away; and if he were very ill, or if he were knocked down by accident, or run over, or placed in any situation expressive of a Dedlock at a disadvantage, he would say if he could speak, "Leave me, and send Mrs. Rouncewell here!" feeling his dignity, at such a pass, safer with her than with anybody else.

Mrs. Rouncewell has known trouble. She has had two sons, of whom the younger ran wild, and went for a soldier, and never came back. Even to this hour, Mrs. Rouncewell's calm hands lose their composure when she speaks of him, and unfolding themselves from her stomacher, hover about her in an agitated manner as she says what a likely lad, what a fine lad, what a gay, good-humoured, clever lad he was! Her second son would have been provided for at Chesney Wold and would have been made steward in due season, but he took, when he was a schoolboy, to constructing steam-engines out of saucepans and setting birds to draw their own water with the least possible amount of labour, so assisting them with artful contrivance of hydraulic pressure that a thirsty canary had only, in a literal sense, to put his shoulder to the wheel and the job was done. This propensity gave Mrs. Rouncewell great uneasiness. She felt it with a mother's anguish to be a move in the Wat Tyler direction, well knowing that Sir Leicester had that general impression of an aptitude for any art to which smoke and a tall chimney might be considered essential. But the doomed young rebel (otherwise a mild youth, and very persevering), showing no sign of grace as he got older but, on the contrary, constructing a model of a power-loom, she was fain, with many tears, to mention his backslidings to the baronet. "Mrs. Rouncewell," said Sir Leicester, "I can never consent to argue, as you know, with any one on any subject. You had better get rid of your boy; you had better get him into some Works. The iron country farther north is, I suppose, the congenial direction for a boy with these tendencies." Farther north he went, and farther north he grew up; and if Sir Leicester Dedlock ever saw him when he came to Chesney Wold to visit his mother, or ever thought of him afterwards, it is certain that he only regarded him as one of a body of some odd thousand conspirators, swarthy and grim, who were in the habit of turning out by torchlight two or three nights in the week for unlawful purposes.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Rouncewell's son has, in the course of nature and art, grown up, and established himself, and married, and called unto him Mrs. Rouncewell's grandson, who, being out of his apprenticeship, and home from a journey in far countries, whither he was sent to enlarge his knowledge and complete his preparations for the venture of this life, stands leaning against the chimney-piece this very day in Mrs. Rouncewell's room at Chesney Wold.

"And, again and again, I am glad to see you, Watt! And, once again, I am glad to see you, Watt!" says Mrs. Rouncewell. "You are a fine young fellow. You are like your poor uncle George. Ah!" Mrs. Rouncewell's hands unquiet, as usual, on this reference.

"They say I am like my father, grandmother."

"Like him, also, my dear—but most like your poor uncle George! And your dear father." Mrs. Rouncewell folds her hands again. "He is well?"

"Thriving, grandmother, in every way."

"I am thankful!" Mrs. Rouncewell is fond of her son but has a plaintive feeling towards him, much as if he were a very honourable soldier who had gone over to the enemy.

"He is quite happy?" says she.

"Quite."

"I am thankful! So he has brought you up to follow in his ways and has sent you into foreign countries and the like? Well, he knows best. There may be a world beyond Chesney Wold that I don't understand. Though I am not young, either. And I have seen a quantity of good company too!"

"Grandmother," says the young man, changing the subject, "what a very pretty girl that was I found with you just now. You called her Rosa?"

"Yes, child. She is daughter of a widow in the village. Maids are so hard to teach, now-a-days, that I have put her about me young. She's an apt scholar and will do well. She shows the house already, very pretty. She lives with me at my table here."

"I hope I have not driven her away?"

"She supposes we have family affairs to speak about, I dare say. She is very modest. It is a fine quality in a young woman. And scarcer," says Mrs. Rouncewell, expanding her stomacher to its utmost limits, "than it formerly was!"

The young man inclines his head in acknowledgment of the precepts of experience. Mrs. Rouncewell listens.

"Wheels!" says she. They have long been audible to the younger ears of her companion. "What wheels on such a day as this, for gracious sake?"

After a short interval, a tap at the door. "Come in!" A dark-eyed, dark-haired, shy, village beauty comes in—so fresh in her rosy and yet delicate bloom that the drops of rain which have beaten on her hair look like the dew upon a flower fresh gathered.

"What company is this, Rosa?" says Mrs. Rouncewell.

"It's two young men in a gig, ma'am, who want to see the house—yes, and if you please, I told them so!" in quick reply to a gesture of dissent from the housekeeper. "I went to the hall-door and told them it was the wrong day and the wrong hour, but the young man who was driving took off his hat in the wet and begged me to bring this card to you."

"Read it, my dear Watt," says the housekeeper.

Rosa is so shy as she gives it to him that they drop it between them and almost knock their foreheads together as they pick it up. Rosa is shyer than before.

"Mr. Guppy" is all the information the card yields.

"Guppy!" repeats Mrs. Rouncewell, "MR. Guppy! Nonsense, I never heard of him!"

"If you please, he told ME that!" says Rosa. "But he said that he and the other young gentleman came from London only last night by the mail, on business at the magistrates' meeting, ten miles off, this morning, and that as their business was soon over, and they had heard a great deal said of Chesney Wold, and really didn't know what to do with themselves, they had come through the wet to see it. They are lawyers. He says he is not in Mr. Tulkinghorn's office, but he is sure he may make use of Mr. Tulkinghorn's name if necessary." Finding, now she leaves off, that she has been making quite a long speech, Rosa is shyer than ever.

Now, Mr. Tulkinghorn is, in a manner, part and parcel of the place, and besides, is supposed to have made Mrs. Rouncewell's will. The old lady relaxes, consents to the admission of the visitors as a favour, and dismisses Rosa. The grandson, however, being smitten by a sudden wish to see the house himself, proposes to join the party. The grandmother, who is pleased that he should have that interest, accompanies him—though to do him justice, he is exceedingly unwilling to trouble her.

"Much obliged to you, ma'am!" says Mr. Guppy, divesting himself of his wet dreadnought in the hall. "Us London lawyers don't often get an out, and when we do, we like to make the most of it, you know."

The old housekeeper, with a gracious severity of deportment, waves her hand towards the great staircase. Mr. Guppy and his friend follow Rosa; Mrs. Rouncewell and her grandson follow them; a young gardener goes before to open the shutters.

As is usually the case with people who go over houses, Mr. Guppy and his friend are dead beat before they have well begun. They straggle about in wrong places, look at wrong things, don't care for the right things, gape when more rooms are opened, exhibit profound depression of spirits, and are clearly knocked up. In each successive chamber that they enter, Mrs. Rouncewell, who is as upright as the house itself, rests apart in a window-seat or other such nook and listens with stately approval to Rosa's exposition. Her grandson is so attentive to it that Rosa is shyer than ever—and prettier. Thus they pass on from room to room, raising the pictured Dedlocks for a few brief minutes as the young gardener admits the light, and reconsigning them to their graves as he shuts it out again. It appears to the afflicted Mr. Guppy and his inconsolable friend that there is no end to the Dedlocks, whose family greatness seems to consist in their never having done anything to distinguish themselves for seven hundred years.

Even the long drawing-room of Chesney Wold cannot revive Mr. Guppy's spirits. He is so low that he droops on the threshold and has hardly strength of mind to enter. But a portrait over the chimney-piece, painted by the fashionable artist of the day, acts upon him like a charm. He recovers in a moment. He stares at it with uncommon interest; he seems to be fixed and fascinated by it.

"Dear me!" says Mr. Guppy. "Who's that?"

"The picture over the fire-place," says Rosa, "is the portrait of the present Lady Dedlock. It is considered a perfect likeness, and the best work of the master."

"Blest," says Mr. Guppy, staring in a kind of dismay at his friend, "if I can ever have seen her. Yet I know her! Has the picture been engraved, miss?"

"The picture has never been engraved. Sir Leicester has always refused permission."

"Well!" says Mr. Guppy in a low voice. "I'll be shot if it ain't very curious how well I know that picture! So that's Lady Dedlock, is it!"

"The picture on the right is the present Sir Leicester Dedlock. The picture on the left is his father, the late Sir Leicester."

Mr. Guppy has no eyes for either of these magnates. "It's unaccountable to me," he says, still staring at the portrait, "how well I know that picture! I'm dashed," adds Mr. Guppy, looking round, "if I don't think I must have had a dream of that picture, you know!"

As no one present takes any especial interest in Mr. Guppy's dreams, the probability is not pursued. But he still remains so absorbed by the portrait that he stands immovable before it until the young gardener has closed the shutters, when he comes out of the room in a dazed state that is an odd though a sufficient substitute for interest and follows into the succeeding rooms with a confused stare, as if he were looking everywhere for Lady Dedlock again.

He sees no more of her. He sees her rooms, which are the last shown, as being very elegant, and he looks out of the windows from which she looked out, not long ago, upon the weather that bored her to death. All things have an end, even houses that people take infinite pains to see and are tired of before they begin to see them. He has come to the end of the sight, and the fresh village beauty to the end of her description; which is always this: "The terrace below is much admired. It is called, from an old story in the family, the Ghost's Walk."

"No?" says Mr. Guppy, greedily curious. "What's the story, miss? Is it anything about a picture?"

"Pray tell us the story," says Watt in a half whisper.

"I don't know it, sir." Rosa is shyer than ever.

"It is not related to visitors; it is almost forgotten," says the housekeeper, advancing. "It has never been more than a family anecdote."

"You'll excuse my asking again if it has anything to do with a picture, ma'am," observes Mr. Guppy, "because I do assure you that the more I think of that picture the better I know it, without knowing how I know it!"

The story has nothing to do with a picture; the housekeeper can guarantee that. Mr. Guppy is obliged to her for the information and is, moreover, generally obliged. He retires with his friend, guided down another staircase by the young gardener, and presently is heard to drive away. It is now dusk. Mrs. Rouncewell can trust to the discretion of her two young hearers and may tell THEM how the terrace came to have that ghostly name.

She seats herself in a large chair by the fast-darkening window and tells them: "In the wicked days, my dears, of King Charles the First—I mean, of course, in the wicked days of the rebels who leagued themselves against that excellent king—Sir Morbury Dedlock was the owner of Chesney Wold. Whether there was any account of a ghost in the family before those days, I can't say. I should think it very likely indeed."

Mrs. Rouncewell holds this opinion because she considers that a family of such antiquity and importance has a right to a ghost. She regards a ghost as one of the privileges of the upper classes, a genteel distinction to which the common people have no claim.

"Sir Morbury Dedlock," says Mrs. Rouncewell, "was, I have no occasion to say, on the side of the blessed martyr. But it IS supposed that his Lady, who had none of the family blood in her veins, favoured the bad cause. It is said that she had relations among King Charles's enemies, that she was in correspondence with them, and that she gave them information. When any of the country gentlemen who followed his Majesty's cause met here, it is said that my Lady was always nearer to the door of their council-room than they supposed. Do you hear a sound like a footstep passing along the terrace, Watt?"

Rosa draws nearer to the housekeeper.

"I hear the rain-drip on the stones," replies the young man, "and I hear a curious echo—I suppose an echo—which is very like a halting step."

The housekeeper gravely nods and continues: "Partly on account of this division between them, and partly on other accounts, Sir Morbury and his Lady led a troubled life. She was a lady of a haughty temper. They were not well suited to each other in age or character, and they had no children to moderate between them. After her favourite brother, a young gentleman, was killed in the civil wars (by Sir Morbury's near kinsman), her feeling was so violent that she hated the race into which she had married. When the Dedlocks were about to ride out from Chesney Wold in the king's cause, she is supposed to have more than once stolen down into the stables in the dead of night and lamed their horses; and the story is that once at such an hour, her husband saw her gliding down the stairs and followed her into the stall where his own favourite horse stood. There he seized her by the wrist, and in a struggle or in a fall or through the horse being frightened and lashing out, she was lamed in the hip and from that hour began to pine away."

The housekeeper has dropped her voice to a little more than a whisper.

"She had been a lady of a handsome figure and a noble carriage. She never complained of the change; she never spoke to any one of being crippled or of being in pain, but day by day she tried to walk upon the terrace, and with the help of the stone balustrade, went up and down, up and down, up and down, in sun and shadow, with greater difficulty every day. At last, one afternoon her husband (to whom she had never, on any persuasion, opened her lips since that night), standing at the great south window, saw her drop upon the pavement. He hastened down to raise her, but she repulsed him as he bent over her, and looking at him fixedly and coldly, said, 'I will die here where I have walked. And I will walk here, though I am in my grave. I will walk here until the pride of this house is humbled. And when calamity or when disgrace is coming to it, let the Dedlocks listen for my step!'"

Watt looks at Rosa. Rosa in the deepening gloom looks down upon the ground, half frightened and half shy.

"There and then she died. And from those days," says Mrs. Rouncewell, "the name has come down—the Ghost's Walk. If the tread is an echo, it is an echo that is only heard after dark, and is often unheard for a long while together. But it comes back from time to time; and so sure as there is sickness or death in the family, it will be heard then."

"And disgrace, grandmother—" says Watt.

"Disgrace never comes to Chesney Wold," returns the housekeeper.

Her grandson apologizes with "True. True."

"That is the story. Whatever the sound is, it is a worrying sound," says Mrs. Rouncewell, getting up from her chair; "and what is to be noticed in it is that it MUST BE HEARD. My Lady, who is afraid of nothing, admits that when it is there, it must be heard. You cannot shut it out. Watt, there is a tall French clock behind you (placed there, 'a purpose) that has a loud beat when it is in motion and can play music. You understand how those things are managed?"

"Pretty well, grandmother, I think."

"Set it a-going."

Watt sets it a-going—music and all.

"Now, come hither," says the housekeeper. "Hither, child, towards my Lady's pillow. I am not sure that it is dark enough yet, but listen! Can you hear the sound upon the terrace, through the music, and the beat, and everything?"

"I certainly can!"

"So my Lady says."

CHAPTER VIII. Covering a Multitude of Sins

It was interesting when I dressed before daylight to peep out of window, where my candles were reflected in the black panes like two beacons, and finding all beyond still enshrouded in the indistinctness of last night, to watch how it turned out when the day came on. As the prospect gradually revealed itself and disclosed the scene over which the wind had wandered in the dark, like my memory over my life, I had a pleasure in discovering the unknown objects that had been around me in my sleep. At first they were faintly discernible in the mist, and above them the later stars still glimmered. That pale interval over, the picture began to enlarge and fill up so fast that at every new peep I could have found enough to look at for an hour. Imperceptibly my candles became the only incongruous part of the morning, the dark places in my room all melted away, and the day shone bright upon a cheerful landscape, prominent in which the old Abbey Church, with its massive tower, threw a softer train of shadow on the view than seemed compatible with its rugged character. But so from rough outsides (I hope I have learnt), serene and gentle influences often proceed.

Every part of the house was in such order, and every one was so attentive to me, that I had no trouble with my two bunches of keys, though what with trying to remember the contents of each little store-room drawer and cupboard; and what with making notes on a slate about jams, and pickles, and preserves, and bottles, and glass, and china, and a great many other things; and what with being generally a methodical, old-maidish sort of foolish little person, I was so busy that I could not believe it was breakfast-time when I heard the bell ring. Away I ran, however, and made tea, as I had already been installed into the responsibility of the tea-pot; and then, as they were all rather late and nobody was down yet, I thought I would take a peep at the garden and get some knowledge of that too. I found it quite a delightful place—in front, the pretty avenue and drive by which we had approached (and where, by the by, we had cut up the gravel so terribly with our wheels that I asked the gardener to roll it); at the back, the flower-garden, with my darling at her window up there, throwing it open to smile out at me, as if she would have kissed me from that distance. Beyond the flower-garden was a kitchen-garden, and then a paddock, and then a snug little rick-yard, and then a dear little farm-yard. As to the house itself, with its three peaks in the roof; its various-shaped windows, some so large, some so small, and all so pretty; its trellis-work, against the southfront for roses and honey-suckle, and its homely, comfortable, welcoming look—it was, as Ada said when she came out to meet me with her arm through that of its master, worthy of her cousin John, a bold thing to say, though he only pinched her dear cheek for it.

Mr. Skimpole was as agreeable at breakfast as he had been overnight. There was honey on the table, and it led him into a discourse about bees. He had no objection to honey, he said (and I should think he had not, for he seemed to like it), but he protested against the overweening assumptions of bees. He didn't at all see why the busy bee should be proposed as a model to him; he supposed the bee liked to make honey, or he wouldn't do it—nobody asked him. It was not necessary for the bee to make such a merit of his tastes. If every confectioner went buzzing about the world banging against everything that came in his way and egotistically calling upon everybody to take notice that he was going to his work and must not be interrupted, the world would be quite an unsupportable place. Then, after all, it was a ridiculous position to be smoked out of your fortune with brimstone as soon as you had made it. You would have a very mean opinion of a Manchester man if he spun cotton for no other purpose. He must say he thought a drone the embodiment of a pleasanter and wiser idea. The drone said unaffectedly, "You will excuse me; I really cannot attend to the shop! I find myself in a world in which there is so much to see and so short a time to see it in that I must take the liberty of looking about me and begging to be provided for by somebody who doesn't want to look about him." This appeared to Mr. Skimpole to be the drone philosophy, and he thought it a very good philosophy, always supposing the drone to be willing to be on good terms with the bee, which, so far as he knew, the easy fellow always was, if the consequential creature would only let him, and not be so conceited about his honey!

He pursued this fancy with the lightest foot over a variety of ground and made us all merry, though again he seemed to have as serious a meaning in what he said as he was capable of having. I left them still listening to him when I withdrew to attend to my new duties. They had occupied me for some time, and I was passing through the passages on my return with my basket of keys on my arm when Mr. Jarndyce called me into a small room next his bed-chamber, which I found to be in part a little library of books and papers and in part quite a little museum of his boots and shoes and hat-boxes.

"Sit down, my dear," said Mr. Jarndyce. "This, you must know, is the growlery. When I am out of humour, I come and growl here."

"You must be here very seldom, sir," said I.

"Oh, you don't know me!" he returned. "When I am deceived or disappointed in—the wind, and it's easterly, I take refuge here. The growlery is the best-used room in the house. You are not aware of half my humours yet. My dear, how you are trembling!"

I could not help it; I tried very hard, but being alone with that benevolent presence, and meeting his kind eyes, and feeling so happy and so honoured there, and my heart so full—

I kissed his hand. I don't know what I said, or even that I spoke. He was disconcerted and walked to the window; I almost believed with an intention of jumping out, until he turned and I was reassured by seeing in his eyes what he had gone there to hide. He gently patted me on the head, and I sat down.

"There! There!" he said. "That's over. Pooh! Don't be foolish."

"It shall not happen again, sir," I returned, "but at first it is difficult—"

"Nonsense!" he said. "It's easy, easy. Why not? I hear of a good little orphan girl without a protector, and I take it into my head to be that protector. She grows up, and more than justifies my good opinion, and I remain her guardian and her friend. What is there in all this? So, so! Now, we have cleared off old scores, and I have before me thy pleasant, trusting, trusty face again."

I said to myself, "Esther, my dear, you surprise me! This really is not what I expected of you!" And it had such a good effect that I folded my hands upon my basket and quite recovered myself. Mr. Jarndyce, expressing his approval in his face, began to talk to me as confidentially as if I had been in the habit of conversing with him every morning for I don't know how long. I almost felt as if I had.

"Of course, Esther," he said, "you don't understand this Chancery business?"

And of course I shook my head.

"I don't know who does," he returned. "The lawyers have twisted it into such a state of bedevilment that the original merits of the case have long disappeared from the face of the earth. It's about a will and the trusts under a will—or it was once. It's about nothing but costs now. We are always appearing, and disappearing, and swearing, and interrogating, and filing, and cross-filing, and arguing, and sealing, and motioning, and referring, and reporting, and revolving about the Lord Chancellor and all his satellites, and equitably waltzing ourselves off to dusty death, about costs. That's the great question. All the rest, by some extraordinary means, has melted away."

"But it was, sir," said I, to bring him back, for he began to rub his head, "about a will?"

"Why, yes, it was about a will when it was about anything," he returned. "A certain Jarndyce, in an evil hour, made a great fortune, and made a great will. In the question how the trusts under that will are to be administered, the fortune left by the will is squandered away; the legatees under the will are reduced to such a miserable condition that they would be sufficiently punished if they had committed an enormous crime in having money left them, and the will itself is made a dead letter. All through the deplorable cause, everything that everybody in it, except one man, knows already is referred to that only one man who don't know it, to find out—all through the deplorable cause, everybody must have copies, over and over again, of everything that has accumulated about it in the way of cartloads of papers (or must pay for them without having them, which is the usual course, for nobody wants them) and must go down the middle and up again through such an infernal country-dance of costs and fees and nonsense and corruption as was never dreamed of in the wildest visions of a witch's Sabbath. Equity sends questions to law, law sends questions back to equity; law finds it can't do this, equity finds it can't do that; neither can so much as say it can't do anything, without this solicitor instructing and this counsel appearing for A, and that solicitor instructing and that counsel appearing for B; and so on through the whole alphabet, like the history of the apple pie. And thus, through years and years, and lives and lives, everything goes on, constantly beginning over and over again, and nothing ever ends. And we can't get out of the suit on any terms, for we are made parties to it, and MUST BE parties to it, whether we like it or not. But it won't do to think of it! When my great uncle, poor Tom Jarndyce, began to think of it, it was the beginning of the end!"

"The Mr. Jarndyce, sir, whose story I have heard?"

He nodded gravely. "I was his heir, and this was his house, Esther. When I came here, it was bleak indeed. He had left the signs of his misery upon it."

"How changed it must be now!" I said.

"It had been called, before his time, the Peaks. He gave it its present name and lived here shut up, day and night poring over the wicked heaps of papers in the suit and hoping against hope to disentangle it from its mystification and bring it to a close. In the meantime, the place became dilapidated, the wind whistled through the cracked walls, the rain fell through the broken roof, the weeds choked the passage to the rotting door. When I brought what remained of him home here, the brains seemed to me to have been blown out of the house too, it was so shattered and ruined."

He walked a little to and fro after saying this to himself with a shudder, and then looked at me, and brightened, and came and sat down again with his hands in his pockets.

"I told you this was the growlery, my dear. Where was I?"

I reminded him, at the hopeful change he had made in Bleak House.

"Bleak House; true. There is, in that city of London there, some property of ours which is much at this day what Bleak House was then; I say property of ours, meaning of the suit's, but I ought to call it the property of costs, for costs is the only power on earth that will ever get anything out of it now or will ever know it for anything but an eyesore and a heartsore. It is a street of perishing blind houses, with their eyes stoned out, without a pane of glass, without so much as a window-frame, with the bare blank shutters tumbling from their hinges and falling asunder, the iron rails peeling away in flakes of rust, the chimneys sinking in, the stone steps to every door (and every door might be death's door) turning stagnant green, the very crutches on which the ruins are propped decaying. Although Bleak House was not in Chancery, its master was, and it was stamped with the same seal. These are the Great Seal's impressions, my dear, all over England—the children know them!"

"How changed it is!" I said again.

"Why, so it is," he answered much more cheerfully; "and it is wisdom in you to keep me to the bright side of the picture." (The idea of my wisdom!) "These are things I never talk about or even think about, excepting in the growlery here. If you consider it right to mention them to Rick and Ada," looking seriously at me, "you can. I leave it to your discretion, Esther."

"I hope, sir—" said I.

"I think you had better call me guardian, my dear."

I felt that I was choking again—I taxed myself with it, "Esther, now, you know you are!"—when he feigned to say this slightly, as if it were a whim instead of a thoughtful tenderness. But I gave the housekeeping keys the least shake in the world as a reminder to myself, and folding my hands in a still more determined manner on the basket, looked at him quietly.

"I hope, guardian," said I, "that you may not trust too much to my discretion. I hope you may not mistake me. I am afraid it will be a disappointment to you to know that I am not clever, but it really is the truth, and you would soon find it out if I had not the honesty to confess it."

He did not seem at all disappointed; quite the contrary. He told me, with a smile all over his face, that he knew me very well indeed and that I was quite clever enough for him.

"I hope I may turn out so," said I, "but I am much afraid of it, guardian."

"You are clever enough to be the good little woman of our lives here, my dear," he returned playfully; "the little old woman of the child's (I don't mean Skimpole's) rhyme:

"'Little old woman, and whither so high?'
'To sweep the cobwebs out of the sky.'

"You will sweep them so neatly out of OUR sky in the course of your housekeeping, Esther, that one of these days we shall have to abandon the growlery and nail up the door."

This was the beginning of my being called Old Woman, and Little Old Woman, and Cobweb, and Mrs. Shipton, and Mother Hubbard, and Dame Durden, and so many names of that sort that my own name soon became quite lost among them.

"However," said Mr. Jarndyce, "to return to our gossip. Here's Rick, a fine young fellow full of promise. What's to be done with him?"

Oh, my goodness, the idea of asking my advice on such a point!

"Here he is, Esther," said Mr. Jarndyce, comfortably putting his hands into his pockets and stretching out his legs. "He must have a profession; he must make some choice for himself. There will be a world more wiglomeration about it, I suppose, but it must be done."

"More what, guardian?" said I.

"More wiglomeration," said he. "It's the only name I know for the thing. He is a ward in Chancery, my dear. Kenge and Carboy will have something to say about it; Master Somebody—a sort of ridiculous sexton, digging graves for the merits of causes in a back room at the end of Quality

Court, Chancery Lane—will have something to say about it; counsel will have something to say about it; the Chancellor will have something to say about it; the satellites will have something to say about it; they will all have to be handsomely feed, all round, about it; the whole thing will be vastly ceremonious, wordy, unsatisfactory, and expensive, and I call it, in general, wiglomeration. How mankind ever came to be afflicted with wiglomeration, or for whose sins these young people ever fell into a pit of it, I don't know; so it is."

He began to rub his head again and to hint that he felt the wind. But it was a delightful instance of his kindness towards me that whether he rubbed his head, or walked about, or did both, his face was sure to recover its benignant expression as it looked at mine; and he was sure to turn comfortable again and put his hands in his pockets and stretch out his legs.

"Perhaps it would be best, first of all," said I, "to ask Mr. Richard what he inclines to himself."

"Exactly so," he returned. "That's what I mean! You know, just accustom yourself to talk it over, with your tact and in your quiet way, with him and Ada, and see what you all make of it. We are sure to come at the heart of the matter by your means, little woman."

I really was frightened at the thought of the importance I was attaining and the number of things that were being confided to me. I had not meant this at all; I had meant that he should speak to Richard. But of course I said nothing in reply except that I would do my best, though I feared (I realty felt it necessary to repeat this) that he thought me much more sagacious than I was. At which my guardian only laughed the pleasantest laugh I ever heard.

"Come!" he said, rising and pushing back his chair. "I think we may have done with the growlery for one day! Only a concluding word. Esther, my dear, do you wish to ask me anything?"

He looked so attentively at me that I looked attentively at him and felt sure I understood him.

"About myself, sir?" said I.

"Yes."

"Guardian," said I, venturing to put my hand, which was suddenly colder than I could have wished, in his, "nothing! I am quite sure that if there were anything I ought to know or had any need to know, I should not have to ask you to tell it to me. If my whole reliance and confidence were not placed in you, I must have a hard heart indeed. I have nothing to ask you, nothing in the world."

He drew my hand through his arm and we went away to look for Ada. From that hour I felt quite easy with him, quite unreserved, quite content to know no more, quite happy.

We lived, at first, rather a busy life at Bleak House, for we had to become acquainted with many residents in and out of the neighbourhood who knew Mr. Jarndyce. It seemed to Ada and me that everybody knew him who wanted to do anything with anybody else's money. It amazed us when we began to sort his letters and to answer some of them for him in the growlery of a morning to find how the great object of the lives of nearly all his correspondents appeared to be to form themselves into committees for getting in and laying out money. The ladies were as desperate as the gentlemen; indeed, I think they were even more so. They threw themselves into committees in the most impassioned manner and collected subscriptions with a vehemence quite extraordinary. It appeared to us that some of them must pass their whole lives in dealing out subscription-cards to the whole post-office directory—shilling cards, half-crown cards, half-sovereign cards, penny cards. They wanted everything. They wanted wearing apparel, they wanted linen rags, they wanted money, they wanted coals, they wanted soup, they wanted interest, they wanted autographs, they wanted flannel, they wanted whatever Mr. Jarndyce had—or had not. Their objects were as various as their demands. They were going to raise new buildings, they were going to pay off debts on old buildings, they were going to establish in a picturesque building (engraving of proposed west elevation attached) the Sisterhood of Mediaeval Marys, they were going to give a testimonial to Mrs. Jellyby, they were going to have their secretary's portrait painted and presented to his mother-in-law, whose deep devotion to him was well known, they were going to get up everything, I really believe, from five hundred thousand tracts to an annuity and from a marble monument to a silver tea-pot. They took a multitude of titles. They were the Women of England, the Daughters of Britain, the Sisters of all the cardinal virtues separately, the Females of America, the Ladies of a hundred denominations. They appeared to be always excited about canvassing and electing. They seemed to our poor wits, and according to their own accounts, to be constantly polling people by tens of thousands, yet never bringing their candidates in for anything. It made our heads ache to think, on the whole, what feverish lives they must lead.

Among the ladies who were most distinguished for this rapacious benevolence (if I may use the expression) was a Mrs. Pardiggle, who seemed, as I judged from the number of her letters to Mr. Jarndyce, to be almost as powerful a correspondent as Mrs. Jellyby herself. We observed that the wind always changed when Mrs. Pardiggle became the subject of conversation and that it invariably interrupted Mr. Jarndyce and prevented his going any farther, when he had remarked that there were two classes of charitable people; one, the people who did a little and made a great deal of noise; the other, the people who did a great deal and made no noise at all. We were therefore curious to see Mrs. Pardiggle, suspecting her to be a type of the former class, and were glad when she called one day with her five young sons.

She was a formidable style of lady with spectacles, a prominent nose, and a loud voice, who had the effect of wanting a great deal of room. And she really did, for she knocked down little chairs with her skirts that were quite a great way off. As only Ada and I were at home, we received her timidly, for she seemed to come in like cold weather and to make the little Pardiggles blue as they followed.

"These, young ladies," said Mrs. Pardiggle with great volubility after the first salutations, "are my five boys. You may have seen their names in a printed subscription list (perhaps more than one) in the possession of our esteemed friend Mr. Jarndyce. Egbert, my eldest (twelve), is the boy who sent out his pocket-money, to the amount of five and threepence, to the Tockahoopo Indians. Oswald, my second (ten and a half), is the child who contributed two and nine-pence to the Great National Smithers Testimonial. Francis, my third (nine), one and sixpence halfpenny; Felix, my fourth (seven), eightpence to the Superannuated Widows; Alfred, my youngest (five), has voluntarily enrolled himself in the Infant Bonds of Joy, and is pledged never, through life, to use tobacco in any form."

We had never seen such dissatisfied children. It was not merely that they were weazened and shrivelled—though they were certainly that too—but they looked absolutely ferocious with discontent. At the mention of the Tockahoopo Indians, I could really have supposed Egbert to be one of the most baleful members of that tribe, he gave me such a savage frown. The face of each child, as the amount of his contribution was mentioned, darkened in a peculiarly vindictive manner, but his was by far the worst. I must except, however, the little recruit into the Infant Bonds of Joy, who was stolidly and evenly miserable.

"You have been visiting, I understand," said Mrs. Pardiggle, "at Mrs. Jellyby's?"

We said yes, we had passed one night there.

"Mrs. Jellyby," pursued the lady, always speaking in the same demonstrative, loud, hard tone, so that her voice impressed my fancy as if it had a sort of spectacles on too—and I may take the opportunity of remarking that her spectacles were made the less engaging by her eyes being what Ada called "choking eyes," meaning very prominent—"Mrs. Jellyby is a benefactor to society and deserves a helping hand. My boys have contributed to the African project—Egbert, one and six, being the entire allowance of nine weeks; Oswald, one and a penny halfpenny, being the same; the rest, according to their little means. Nevertheless, I do not go with Mrs. Jellyby in all things. I do not go with Mrs. Jellyby in her treatment of her young family. It has been noticed. It has been observed that her young family are excluded from participation in the objects to which she is devoted. She may be right, she may be wrong; but, right or wrong, this is not my course with MY young family. I take them everywhere."

I was afterwards convinced (and so was Ada) that from the ill-conditioned eldest child, these words extorted a sharp yell. He turned it off into a yawn, but it began as a yell.

"They attend matins with me (very prettily done) at half-past six o'clock in the morning all the year round, including of course the depth of winter," said Mrs. Pardiggle rapidly, "and they are with me during the revolving duties of the day. I am a School lady, I am a Visiting lady, I am a Reading lady, I am a Distributing lady; I am on the local Linen Box Committee and many general committees; and my canvassing alone is very extensive—perhaps no one's more so. But they are my companions everywhere; and by these means they acquire that knowledge of the poor, and that capacity of doing charitable business in general—in short, that taste for the sort of thing—which will render them in after life a service to their neighbours and a satisfaction to themselves. My young family are not frivolous; they expend the entire amount of their allowance in subscriptions, under my direction; and they have attended as many public meetings and listened to as many lectures, orations, and discussions as generally fall to the lot of few grown people. Alfred (five), who, as I mentioned, has of his own election joined the Infant Bonds of Joy, was one of the very few children who manifested consciousness on that occasion after a fervid address of two hours from the chairman of the evening."

Alfred glowered at us as if he never could, or would, forgive the injury of that night.

"You may have observed, Miss Summerson," said Mrs. Pardiggle, "in some of the lists to which I have referred, in the possession of our esteemed friend Mr. Jarndyce, that the names of my young family are concluded with the name of O. A. Pardiggle, F.R.S., one pound. That is their father. We usually observe the same routine. I put down my mite first; then my young family enrol their contributions, according to their ages and their little means; and then Mr. Pardiggle brings up the rear. Mr. Pardiggle is happy to throw in his limited donation, under my direction; and thus things are made not only pleasant to ourselves, but, we trust, improving to others."

Suppose Mr. Pardiggle were to dine with Mr. Jellyby, and suppose Mr. Jellyby were to relieve his mind after dinner to Mr. Pardiggle, would Mr. Pardiggle, in return, make any confidential communication to Mr. Jellyby? I was quite confused to find myself thinking this, but it came into my head.

"You are very pleasantly situated here!" said Mrs. Pardiggle.

We were glad to change the subject, and going to the window, pointed out the beauties of the prospect, on which the spectacles appeared to me to rest with curious indifference.

"You know Mr. Gusher?" said our visitor.

We were obliged to say that we had not the pleasure of Mr. Gusher's acquaintance.

"The loss is yours, I assure you," said Mrs. Pardiggle with her commanding deportment. "He is a very fervid, impassioned speaker—full of fire! Stationed in a waggon on this lawn, now, which, from the shape of the land, is naturally adapted to a public meeting, he would improve almost any occasion you could mention for hours and hours! By this time, young ladies," said Mrs. Pardiggle, moving back to her chair and overturning, as if by invisible agency, a little round table at a considerable distance with my work-basket on it, "by this time you have found me out, I dare say?"

This was really such a confusing question that Ada looked at me in perfect dismay. As to the guilty nature of my own consciousness after what

I had been thinking, it must have been expressed in the colour of my cheeks.

"Found out, I mean," said Mrs. Pardiggle, "the prominent point in my character. I am aware that it is so prominent as to be discoverable immediately. I lay myself open to detection, I know. Well! I freely admit, I am a woman of business. I love hard work; I enjoy hard work. The excitement does me good. I am so accustomed and inured to hard work that I don't know what fatigue is."

We murmured that it was very astonishing and very gratifying, or something to that effect. I don't think we knew what it was either, but this is what our politeness expressed.

"I do not understand what it is to be tired; you cannot tire me if you try!" said Mrs. Pardiggle. "The quantity of exertion (which is no exertion to me), the amount of business (which I regard as nothing), that I go through sometimes astonishes myself. I have seen my young family, and Mr. Pardiggle, quite worn out with witnessing it, when I may truly say I have been as fresh as a lark!"

If that dark-visaged eldest boy could look more malicious than he had already looked, this was the time when he did it. I observed that he doubled his right fist and delivered a secret blow into the crown of his cap, which was under his left arm.

"This gives me a great advantage when I am making my rounds," said Mrs. Pardiggle. "If I find a person unwilling to hear what I have to say, I tell that person directly, 'I am incapable of fatigue, my good friend, I am never tired, and I mean to go on until I have done.' It answers admirably! Miss Summerson, I hope I shall have your assistance in my visiting rounds immediately, and Miss Clare's very soon."

At first I tried to excuse myself for the present on the general ground of having occupations to attend to which I must not neglect. But as this was an ineffectual protest, I then said, more particularly, that I was not sure of my qualifications. That I was inexperienced in the art of adapting my mind to minds very differently situated, and addressing them from suitable points of view. That I had not that delicate knowledge of the heart which must be essential to such a work. That I had much to learn, myself, before I could teach others, and that I could not confide in my good intentions alone. For these reasons I thought it best to be as useful as I could, and to render what kind services I could to those immediately about me, and to try to let that circle of duty gradually and naturally expand itself. All this I said with anything but confidence, because Mrs. Pardiggle was much older than I, and had great experience, and was so very military in her manners.

"You are wrong, Miss Summerson," said she, "but perhaps you are not equal to hard work or the excitement of it, and that makes a vast difference. If you would like to see how I go through my work, I am now about—with my young family—to visit a brickmaker in the neighbourhood (a very bad character) and shall be glad to take you with me. Miss Clare also, if she will do me the favour."

Ada and I interchanged looks, and as we were going out in any case, accepted the offer. When we hastily returned from putting on our bonnets, we found the young family languishing in a corner and Mrs. Pardiggle sweeping about the room, knocking down nearly all the light objects it contained. Mrs. Pardiggle took possession of Ada, and I followed with the family.

Ada told me afterwards that Mrs. Pardiggle talked in the same loud tone (that, indeed, I overheard) all the way to the brickmaker's about an exciting contest which she had for two or three years waged against another lady relative to the bringing in of their rival candidates for a pension somewhere. There had been a quantity of printing, and promising, and proxying, and polling, and it appeared to have imparted great liveliness to all concerned, except the pensioners—who were not elected yet.

I am very fond of being confided in by children and am happy in being usually favoured in that respect, but on this occasion it gave me great uneasiness. As soon as we were out of doors, Egbert, with the manner of a little footpad, demanded a shilling of me on the ground that his pocket-money was "boned" from him. On my pointing out the great impropriety of the word, especially in connexion with his parent (for he added sulkily "By her!"), he pinched me and said, "Oh, then! Now! Who are you! YOU wouldn't like it, I think? What does she make a sham for, and pretend to give me money, and take it away again? Why do you call it my allowance, and never let me spend it?" These exasperating questions so inflamed his mind and the minds of Oswald and Francis that they all pinched me at once, and in a dreadfully expert way—screwing up such little pieces of my arms that I could hardly forbear crying out. Felix, at the same time, stamped upon my toes. And the Bond of Joy, who on account of always having the whole of his little income anticipated stood in fact pledged to abstain from cakes as well as tobacco, so swelled with grief and rage when we passed a pastry-cook's shop that he terrified me by becoming purple. I never underwent so much, both in body and mind, in the course of a walk with young people as from these unnaturally constrained children when they paid me the compliment of being natural.

I was glad when we came to the brickmaker's house, though it was one of a cluster of wretched hovels in a brick-field, with pigsties close to the broken windows and miserable little gardens before the doors growing nothing but stagnant pools. Here and there an old tub was put to catch the droppings of rain-water from a roof, or they were banked up with mud into a little pond like a large dirt-pie. At the doors and windows some men and women lounged or prowled about, and took little notice of us except to laugh to one another or to say something as we passed about gentlefolks minding their own business and not troubling their heads and muddying their shoes with coming to look after other people's.

Mrs. Pardiggle, leading the way with a great show of moral determination and talking with much volubility about the untidy habits of the people (though I doubted if the best of us could have been tidy in such a place), conducted us into a cottage at the farthest corner, the ground-floor room of which we nearly filled. Besides ourselves, there were in this damp, offensive room a woman with a black eye, nursing a poor little gasping baby by the fire; a man, all stained with clay and mud and looking very dissipated, lying at full length on the ground, smoking a pipe; a powerful young man fastening a collar on a dog; and a bold girl doing some kind of washing in very dirty water. They all looked up at us as we came in, and the woman seemed to turn her face towards the fire as if to hide her bruised eye; nobody gave us any welcome.

"Well, my friends," said Mrs. Pardiggle, but her voice had not a friendly sound, I thought; it was much too business-like and systematic. "How do you do, all of you? I am here again. I told you, you couldn't tire me, you know. I am fond of hard work, and am true to my word."

"There an't," growled the man on the floor, whose head rested on his hand as he stared at us, "any more on you to come in, is there?"

"No, my friend," said Mrs. Pardiggle, seating herself on one stool and knocking down another. "We are all here."

"Because I thought there warn't enough of you, perhaps?" said the man, with his pipe between his lips as he looked round upon us.

The young man and the girl both laughed. Two friends of the young man, whom we had attracted to the doorway and who stood there with their hands in their pockets, echoed the laugh noisily.

"You can't tire me, good people," said Mrs. Pardiggle to these latter. "I enjoy hard work, and the harder you make mine, the better I like it."

"Then make it easy for her!" growled the man upon the floor. "I wants it done, and over. I wants a end of these liberties took with my place. I wants an end of being drawed like a badger. Now you're a-going to poll-pry and question according to custom—I know what you're a-going to be up to. Well! You haven't got no occasion to be up to it. I'll save you the trouble. Is my daughter a-washin? Yes, she IS a-washin. Look at the water. Smell it! That's wot we drinks. How do you like it, and what do you think of gin instead! An't my place dirty? Yes, it is dirty—it's nat'rally dirty, and it's nat'rally onwholesome; and we've had five dirty and onwholesome children, as is all dead infants, and so much the better for them, and for us besides. Have I read the little book wot you left? No, I an't read the little book wot you left. There an't nobody here as knows how to read it; and if there wos, it wouldn't be suitable to me. It's a book fit for a babby, and I'm not a babby. If you was to leave me a doll, I shouldn't nuss it. How have I been conducting of myself? Why, I've been drunk for three days; and I'da been drunk four if I'da had the money. Don't I never mean for to go to church? No, I don't never mean for to go to church. I shouldn't be expected there, if I did; the beadle's too gen-teel for me. And how did my wife get that black eye? Why, I give it her; and if she says I didn't, she's a lie!"

He had pulled his pipe out of his mouth to say all this, and he now turned over on his other side and smoked again. Mrs. Pardiggle, who had been regarding him through her spectacles with a forcible composure, calculated, I could not help thinking, to increase his antagonism, pulled out a good book as if it were a constable's staff and took the whole family into custody. I mean into religious custody, of course; but she really did it as if she were an inexorable moral policeman carrying them all off to a station-house.

Ada and I were very uncomfortable. We both felt intrusive and out of place, and we both thought that Mrs. Pardiggle would have got on infinitely better if she had not had such a mechanical way of taking possession of people. The children sulked and stared; the family took no notice of us whatever, except when the young man made the dog bark, which he usually did when Mrs. Pardiggle was most emphatic. We both felt painfully sensible that between us and these people there was an iron barrier which could not be removed by our new friend. By whom or how it could be removed, we did not know, but we knew that. Even what she read and said seemed to us to be ill-chosen for such auditors, if it had been imparted ever so modestly and with ever so much tact. As to the little book to which the man on the floor had referred, we acquired a knowledge of it afterwards, and Mr. Jarndyce said he doubted if Robinson Crusoe could have read it, though he had had no other on his desolate island.

We were much relieved, under these circumstances, when Mrs. Pardiggle left off.

The man on the floor, then turning his head round again, said morosely, "Well! You've done, have you?"

"For to-day, I have, my friend. But I am never fatigued. I shall come to you again in your regular order," returned Mrs. Pardiggle with demonstrative cheerfulness.

"So long as you goes now," said he, folding his arms and shutting his eyes with an oath, "you may do wot you like!"

Mrs. Pardiggle accordingly rose and made a little vortex in the confined room from which the pipe itself very narrowly escaped. Taking one of her young family in each hand, and telling the others to follow closely, and expressing her hope that the brickmaker and all his house would be improved when she saw them next, she then proceeded to another cottage. I hope it is not unkind in me to say that she certainly did make, in this as in everything else, a show that was not conciliatory of doing charity by wholesale and of dealing in it to a large extent.

She supposed that we were following her, but as soon as the space was left clear, we approached the woman sitting by the fire to ask if the baby were ill.

She only looked at it as it lay on her lap. We had observed before that when she looked at it she covered her discoloured eye with her hand, as though she wished to separate any association with noise and violence and ill treatment from the poor little child.

Ada, whose gentle heart was moved by its appearance, bent down to touch its little face. As she did so, I saw what happened and drew her back. The child died.

"Oh, Esther!" cried Ada, sinking on her knees beside it. "Look here! Oh, Esther, my love, the little thing! The suffering, quiet, pretty little thing! I am so sorry for it. I am so sorry for the mother. I never saw a sight so pitiful as this before! Oh, baby, baby!"

Such compassion, such gentleness, as that with which she bent down weeping and put her hand upon the mother's might have softened any mother's heart that ever beat. The woman at first gazed at her in astonishment and then burst into tears.

Presently I took the light burden from her lap, did what I could to make the baby's rest the prettier and gentler, laid it on a shelf, and covered it with my own handkerchief. We tried to comfort the mother, and we whispered to her what Our Saviour said of children. She answered nothing, but sat weeping—weeping very much.

When I turned, I found that the young man had taken out the dog and was standing at the door looking in upon us with dry eyes, but quiet. The girl was quiet too and sat in a corner looking on the ground. The man had risen. He still smoked his pipe with an air of defiance, but he was silent.

An ugly woman, very poorly clothed, hurried in while I was glancing at them, and coming straight up to the mother, said, "Jenny! Jenny!" The mother rose on being so addressed and fell upon the woman's neck.

She also had upon her face and arms the marks of ill usage. She had no kind of grace about her, but the grace of sympathy; but when she condoled with the woman, and her own tears fell, she wanted no beauty. I say condoled, but her only words were "Jenny! Jenny!" All the rest was in the tone in which she said them.

I thought it very touching to see these two women, coarse and shabby and beaten, so united; to see what they could be to one another; to see how they felt for one another, how the heart of each to each was softened by the hard trials of their lives. I think the best side of such people is almost hidden from us. What the poor are to the poor is little known, excepting to themselves and God.

We felt it better to withdraw and leave them uninterrupted. We stole out quietly and without notice from any one except the man. He was leaning against the wall near the door, and finding that there was scarcely room for us to pass, went out before us. He seemed to want to hide that he did this on our account, but we perceived that he did, and thanked him. He made no answer.

Ada was so full of grief all the way home, and Richard, whom we found at home, was so distressed to see her in tears (though he said to me, when she was not present, how beautiful it was too!), that we arranged to return at night with some little comforts and repeat our visit at the brick-maker's house. We said as little as we could to Mr. Jarndyce, but the wind changed directly.

Richard accompanied us at night to the scene of our morning expedition. On our way there, we had to pass a noisy drinking-house, where a number of men were flocking about the door. Among them, and prominent in some dispute, was the father of the little child. At a short distance, we passed the young man and the dog, in congenial company. The sister was standing laughing and talking with some other young women at the corner of the row of cottages, but she seemed ashamed and turned away as we went by.

We left our escort within sight of the brickmaker's dwelling and proceeded by ourselves. When we came to the door, we found the woman who had brought such consolation with her standing there looking anxiously out.

"It's you, young ladies, is it?" she said in a whisper. "I'm a-watching for my master. My heart's in my mouth. If he was to catch me away from home, he'd pretty near murder me."

"Do you mean your husband?" said I.

"Yes, miss, my master. Jenny's asleep, quite worn out. She's scarcely had the child off her lap, poor thing, these seven days and nights, except when I've been able to take it for a minute or two."

As she gave way for us, she went softly in and put what we had brought near the miserable bed on which the mother slept. No effort had been made to clean the room—it seemed in its nature almost hopeless of being clean; but the small waxen form from which so much solemnity diffused itself had been composed afresh, and washed, and neatly dressed in some fragments of white linen; and on my handkerchief, which still covered the poor baby, a little bunch of sweet herbs had been laid by the same rough, scarred hands, so lightly, so tenderly!

"May heaven reward you!" we said to her. "You are a good woman."

"Me, young ladies?" she returned with surprise. "Hush! Jenny, Jenny!"

The mother had moaned in her sleep and moved. The sound of the familiar voice seemed to calm her again. She was quiet once more.

How little I thought, when I raised my handkerchief to look upon the tiny sleeper underneath and seemed to see a halo shine around the child through Ada's drooping hair as her pity bent her head—how little I thought in whose unquiet bosom that handkerchief would come to lie after covering the motionless and peaceful breast! I only thought that perhaps the Angel of the child might not be all unconscious of the woman who replaced it with so compassionate a hand; not all unconscious of her presently, when we had taken leave, and left her at the door, by turns looking, and listening in terror for herself, and saying in her old soothing manner, "Jenny, Jenny!"

CHAPTER IX. Signs and Tokens

I don't know how it is I seem to be always writing about myself. I mean all the time to write about other people, and I try to think about myself as little as possible, and I am sure, when I find myself coming into the story again, I am really vexed and say, "Dear, dear, you tiresome little creature, I wish you wouldn't!" but it is all of no use. I hope any one who may read what I write will understand that if these pages contain a great deal about me, I can only suppose it must be because I have really something to do with them and can't be kept out.

My darling and I read together, and worked, and practised, and found so much employment for our time that the winter days flew by us like bright-winged birds. Generally in the afternoons, and always in the evenings, Richard gave us his company. Although he was one of the most restless creatures in the world, he certainly was very fond of our society.

He was very, very, very fond of Ada. I mean it, and I had better say it at once. I had never seen any young people falling in love before, but I found them out quite soon. I could not say so, of course, or show that I knew anything about it. On the contrary, I was so demure and used to seem so unconscious that sometimes I considered within myself while I was sitting at work whether I was not growing quite deceitful.

But there was no help for it. All I had to do was to be quiet, and I was as quiet as a mouse. They were as quiet as mice too, so far as any words were concerned, but the innocent manner in which they relied more and more upon me as they took more and more to one another was so charming that I had great difficulty in not showing how it interested me.

"Our dear little old woman is such a capital old woman," Richard would say, coming up to meet me in the garden early, with his pleasant laugh and perhaps the least tinge of a blush, "that I can't get on without her. Before I begin my harum-scarum day—grinding away at those books and instruments and then galloping up hill and down dale, all the country round, like a highwayman—it does me so much good to come and have a steady walk with our comfortable friend, that here I am again!"

"You know, Dame Durden, dear," Ada would say at night, with her head upon my shoulder and the firelight shining in her thoughtful eyes, "I don't want to talk when we come upstairs here. Only to sit a little while thinking, with your dear face for company, and to hear the wind and remember the poor sailors at sea—"

Ah! Perhaps Richard was going to be a sailor. We had talked it over very often now, and there was some talk of gratifying the inclination of his childhood for the sea. Mr. Jarndyce had written to a relation of the family, a great Sir Leicester Dedlock, for his interest in Richard's favour, generally; and Sir Leicester had replied in a gracious manner that he would be happy to advance the prospects of the young gentleman if it should ever prove to be within his power, which was not at all probable, and that my Lady sent her compliments to the young gentleman (to whom she perfectly remembered that she was allied by remote consanguinity) and trusted that he would ever do his duty in any honourable profession to which he might devote himself.

"So I apprehend it's pretty clear," said Richard to me, "that I shall have to work my own way. Never mind! Plenty of people have had to do that before now, and have done it. I only wish I had the command of a clipping privateer to begin with and could carry off the Chancellor and keep him on short allowance until he gave judgment in our cause. He'd find himself growing thin, if he didn't look sharp!"

With a buoyancy and hopefulness and a gaiety that hardly ever flagged, Richard had a carelessness in his character that quite perplexed me, principally because he mistook it, in such a very odd way, for prudence. It entered into all his calculations about money in a singular manner which I don't think I can better explain than by reverting for a moment to our loan to Mr. Skimpole.

Mr. Jarndyce had ascertained the amount, either from Mr. Skimpole himself or from Coavinses, and had placed the money in my hands with instructions to me to retain my own part of it and hand the rest to Richard. The number of little acts of thoughtless expenditure which Richard justified by the recovery of his ten pounds, and the number of times he talked to me as if he had saved or realized that amount, would form a sum in simple addition.

"My prudent Mother Hubbard, why not?" he said to me when he wanted, without the least consideration, to bestow five pounds on the brickmaker. "I made ten pounds, clear, out of Coavinses' business."

"How was that?" said I.

"Why, I got rid of ten pounds which I was quite content to get rid of and never expected to see any more. You don't deny that?"

"No," said I.

"Very well! Then I came into possession of ten pounds—"

"The same ten pounds," I hinted.

"That has nothing to do with it!" returned Richard. "I have got ten pounds more than I expected to have, and consequently I can afford to spend it without being particular."

In exactly the same way, when he was persuaded out of the sacrifice of these five pounds by being convinced that it would do no good, he carried that sum to his credit and drew upon it.

"Let me see!" he would say. "I saved five pounds out of the brickmaker's affair, so if I have a good rattle to London and back in a post-chaise and put that down at four pounds, I shall have saved one. And it's a very good thing to save one, let me tell you: a penny saved is a penny got!"

I believe Richard's was as frank and generous a nature as there possibly can be. He was ardent and brave, and in the midst of all his wild restlessness, was so gentle that I knew him like a brother in a few weeks. His gentleness was natural to him and would have shown itself abundantly even without Ada's influence; but with it, he became one of the most winning of companions, always so ready to be interested and always so happy, sanguine, and light-hearted. I am sure that I, sitting with them, and walking with them, and talking with them, and noticing from day to day how they went on, falling deeper and deeper in love, and saying nothing about it, and each shyly thinking that this love was the greatest of secrets, perhaps not yet suspected even by the other—I am sure that I was scarcely less enchanted than they were and scarcely less pleased with the pretty dream.

We were going on in this way, when one morning at breakfast Mr. Jarndyce received a letter, and looking at the superscription, said, "From Boythorn? Aye, aye!" and opened and read it with evident pleasure, announcing to us in a parenthesis when he was about half-way through, that Boythorn was "coming down" on a visit. Now who was Boythorn, we all thought. And I dare say we all thought too—I am sure I did, for one—would Boythorn at all interfere with what was going forward?

"I went to school with this fellow, Lawrence Boythorn," said Mr. Jarndyce, tapping the letter as he laid it on the table, "more than five and forty years ago. He was then the most impetuous boy in the world, and he is now the most impetuous man. He was then the loudest boy in the world, and he is now the loudest man. He was then the heartiest and sturdiest boy in the world, and he is now the heartiest and sturdiest man. He is a tremendous fellow."

"In stature, sir?" asked Richard.

"Pretty well, Rick, in that respect," said Mr. Jarndyce; "being some ten years older than I and a couple of inches taller, with his head thrown back like an old soldier, his stalwart chest squared, his hands like a clean blacksmith's, and his lungs! There's no simile for his lungs. Talking, laughing, or snoring, they make the beams of the house shake."

As Mr. Jarndyce sat enjoying the image of his friend Boythorn, we observed the favourable omen that there was not the least indication of any change in the wind.

"But it's the inside of the man, the warm heart of the man, the passion of the man, the fresh blood of the man, Rick—and Ada, and little Cobweb too, for you are all interested in a visitor—that I speak of," he pursued. "His language is as sounding as his voice. He is always in extremes, perpetually in the superlative degree. In his condemnation he is all ferocity. You might suppose him to be an ogre from what he says, and I believe he has the reputation of one with some people. There! I tell you no more of him beforehand. You must not be surprised to see him take me under his protection, for he has never forgotten that I was a low boy at school and that our friendship began in his knocking two of my head tyrant's teeth out (he says six) before breakfast. Boythorn and his man," to me, "will be here this afternoon, my dear."

I took care that the necessary preparations were made for Mr. Boythorn's reception, and we looked forward to his arrival with some curiosity. The afternoon wore away, however, and he did not appear. The dinner-hour arrived, and still he did not appear. The dinner was put back an hour, and we were sitting round the fire with no light but the blaze when the hall-door suddenly burst open and the hall resounded with these words, uttered with the greatest vehemence and in a stentorian tone: "We have been misdirected, Jarndyce, by a most abandoned ruffian, who told us to take the turning to the right instead of to the left. He is the most intolerable scoundrel on the face of the earth. His father must have been a most consummate villain, ever to have such a son. I would have had that fellow shot without the least remorse!"

"Did he do it on purpose?" Mr. Jarndyce inquired.

"I have not the slightest doubt that the scoundrel has passed his whole existence in misdirecting travellers!" returned the other. "By my soul, I thought him the worst-looking dog I had ever beheld when he was telling me to take the turning to the right. And yet I stood before that fellow face to face and didn't knock his brains out!"

"Teeth, you mean?" said Mr. Jarndyce.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Lawrence Boythorn, really making the whole house vibrate. "What, you have not forgotten it yet! Ha, ha, ha! And that was another most consummate vagabond! By my soul, the countenance of that fellow when he was a boy was the blackest image of perfidy, cowardice, and cruelty ever set up as a scarecrow in a field of scoundrels. If I were to meet that most unparalleled despot in the streets to-morrow, I would fell him like a rotten tree!"

"I have no doubt of it," said Mr. Jarndyce. "Now, will you come upstairs?"

"By my soul, Jarndyce," returned his guest, who seemed to refer to his watch, "if you had been married, I would have turned back at the garden-gate and gone away to the remotest summits of the Himalaya Mountains sooner than I would have presented myself at this unseasonable hour."

"Not quite so far, I hope?" said Mr. Jarndyce.

"By my life and honour, yes!" cried the visitor. "I wouldn't be guilty of the audacious insolence of keeping a lady of the house waiting all this time for any earthly consideration. I would infinitely rather destroy myself—infinitely rather!"

Talking thus, they went upstairs, and presently we heard him in his bedroom thundering "Ha, ha, ha!" and again "Ha, ha, ha!" until the flattest echo in the neighbourhood seemed to catch the contagion and to laugh as enjoyingly as he did or as we did when we heard him laugh.

We all conceived a prepossession in his favour, for there was a sterling quality in this laugh, and in his vigorous, healthy voice, and in the roundness and fullness with which he uttered every word he spoke, and in the very fury of his superlatives, which seemed to go off like blank cannons and hurt nothing. But we were hardly prepared to have it so confirmed by his appearance when Mr. Jarndyce presented him. He was not only a very handsome old gentleman—upright and stalwart as he had been described to us—with a massive grey head, a fine composure of face when silent, a figure that might have become corpulent but for his being so continually in earnest that he gave it no rest, and a chin that might have subsided into a double chin but for the vehement emphasis in which it was constantly required to assist; but he was such a true gentleman in his manner, so chivalrously polite, his face was lighted by a smile of so much sweetness and tenderness, and it seemed so plain that he had nothing to hide, but showed himself exactly as he was—incapable, as Richard said, of anything on a limited scale, and firing away with those blank great guns because he carried no small arms whatever—that really I could not help looking at him with equal pleasure as he sat at dinner, whether he smilingly conversed with Ada and me, or was led by Mr. Jarndyce into some great volley of superlatives, or threw up his head like a bloodhound and gave out that tremendous "Ha, ha, ha!"

"You have brought your bird with you, I suppose?" said Mr. Jarndyce.

"By heaven, he is the most astonishing bird in Europe!" replied the other. "He IS the most wonderful creature! I wouldn't take ten thousand guineas for that bird. I have left an annuity for his sole support in case he should outlive me. He is, in sense and attachment, a phenomenon. And his father before him was one of the most astonishing birds that ever lived!"

The subject of this laudation was a very little canary, who was so tame that he was brought down by Mr. Boythorn's man, on his forefinger, and after taking a gentle flight round the room, alighted on his master's head. To hear Mr. Boythorn presently expressing the most implacable and passionate sentiments, with this fragile mite of a creature quietly perched on his forehead, was to have a good illustration of his character, I thought.

"By my soul, Jarndyce," he said, very gently holding up a bit of bread to the canary to peck at, "if I were in your place I would seize every master in Chancery by the throat to-morrow morning and shake him until his money rolled out of his pockets and his bones rattled in his skin. I would have a settlement out of somebody, by fair means or by foul. If you would empower me to do it, I would do it for you with the greatest satisfaction!" (All this time the very small canary was eating out of his hand.)

"I thank you, Lawrence, but the suit is hardly at such a point at present," returned Mr. Jarndyce, laughing, "that it would be greatly advanced even by the legal process of shaking the bench and the whole bar."

"There never was such an infernal cauldron as that Chancery on the face of the earth!" said Mr. Boythorn. "Nothing but a mine below it on a busy day in term time, with all its records, rules, and precedents collected in it and every functionary belonging to it also, high and low, upward and downward, from its son the Accountant-General to its father the Devil, and the whole blown to atoms with ten thousand hundredweight of gunpowder, would reform it in the least!"

It was impossible not to laugh at the energetic gravity with which he recommended this strong measure of reform. When we laughed, he threw up his head and shook his broad chest, and again the whole country seemed to echo to his "Ha, ha, ha!" It had not the least effect in disturbing the bird, whose sense of security was complete and who hopped about the table with its quick head now on this side and now on that, turning its bright sudden eye on its master as if he were no more than another bird.

"But how do you and your neighbour get on about the disputed right of way?" said Mr. Jarndyce. "You are not free from the toils of the law yourself!"

"The fellow has brought actions against ME for trespass, and I have brought actions against HIM for trespass," returned Mr. Boythorn. "By heaven, he is the proudest fellow breathing. It is morally impossible that his name can be Sir Leicester. It must be Sir Lucifer."

"Complimentary to our distant relation!" said my guardian laughingly to Ada and Richard.

"I would beg Miss Clare's pardon and Mr. Carstone's pardon," resumed our visitor, "if I were not reassured by seeing in the fair face of the lady and the smile of the gentleman that it is quite unnecessary and that they keep their distant relation at a comfortable distance."

"Or he keeps us," suggested Richard.

"By my soul," exclaimed Mr. Boythorn, suddenly firing another volley, "that fellow is, and his father was, and his grandfather was, the most stiff-necked, arrogant imbecile, pig-headed numskull, ever, by some inexplicable mistake of Nature, born in any station of life but a walking-stick's! The whole of that family are the most solemnly conceited and consummate blockheads! But it's no matter; he should not shut up my path if he were fifty baronets melted into one and living in a hundred Chesney Wolds, one within another, like the ivory balls in a Chinese carving. The fellow, by his agent, or secretary, or somebody, writes to me 'Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, presents his compliments to Mr. Lawrence Boythorn, and has to call his attention to the fact that the green pathway by the old parsonage-house, now the property of Mr. Lawrence Boythorn, is Sir Leicester's right of way, being in fact a portion of the park of chesney Wold, and that Sir Leicester finds it convenient to close up the same.' I write to the fellow, 'Mr. Lawrence Boythorn presents his compliments to Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, and has to call HIS attention to the fact that he totally denies the whole of Sir Leicester Dedlock's positions on every possible subject and has to add, in reference to closing up the pathway, that he will be glad to see the man who may undertake to do it.' The fellow sends a most abandoned villain with one eye to construct a gateway. I play upon that execrable scoundrel with a fire-engine until the breath is nearly driven out of his body. The fellow erects a gate in the night. I chop it down and burn it in the morning. He sends his myrmidons to come over the fence and pass and repass. I catch them in humane man traps, fire split peas at their legs, play upon them with the engine—resolve to free mankind from the insupportable burden of the existence of those lurking ruffians. He brings actions for trespass; I bring actions for trespass. He brings actions for assault and battery; I defend them and continue to assault and batter. Ha, ha, ha!"

To hear him say all this with unimaginable energy, one might have thought him the angriest of mankind. To see him at the very same time, looking at the bird now perched upon his thumb and softly smoothing its feathers with his forefinger, one might have thought him the gentlest. To hear him laugh and see the broad good nature of his face then, one might have supposed that he had not a care in the world, or a dispute, or a dislike, but that his whole existence was a summer joke.

"No, no," he said, "no closing up of my paths by any Dedlock! Though I willingly confess," here he softened in a moment, "that Lady Dedlock is the most accomplished lady in the world, to whom I would do any homage that a plain gentleman, and no baronet with a head seven hundred years thick, may. A man who joined his regiment at twenty and within a week challenged the most imperious and presumptuous coxcomb of a commanding officer that ever drew the breath of life through a tight waist—and got broke for it—is not the man to be walked over by all the Sir Lucifers, dead or alive, locked or unlocked. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nor the man to allow his junior to be walked over either?" said my guardian.

"Most assuredly not!" said Mr. Boythorn, clapping him on the shoulder with an air of protection that had something serious in it, though he laughed. "He will stand by the low boy, always. Jarndyce, you may rely upon him! But speaking of this trespass—with apologies to Miss Clare and Miss Summerson for the length at which I have pursued so dry a subject—is there nothing for me from your men Kenge and Carboy?"

"I think not, Esther?" said Mr. Jarndyce.

"Nothing, guardian."

"Much obliged!" said Mr. Boythorn. "Had no need to ask, after even my slight experience of Miss Summerson's forethought for every one about her." (They all encouraged me; they were determined to do it.) "I inquired because, coming from Lincolnshire, I of course have not yet been in town, and I thought some letters might have been sent down here. I dare say they will report progress to-morrow morning."

I saw him so often in the course of the evening, which passed very pleasantly, contemplate Richard and Ada with an interest and a satisfaction that made his fine face remarkably agreeable as he sat at a little distance from the piano listening to the music—and he had small occasion to tell us that he was passionately fond of music, for his face showed it—that I asked my guardian as we sat at the backgammon board whether Mr. Boythorn had ever been married.

"No," said he. "No."

"But he meant to be!" said I.

"How did you find out that?" he returned with a smile. "Why, guardian," I explained, not without reddening a little at hazarding what was in my thoughts, "there is something so tender in his manner, after all, and he is so very courtly and gentle to us, and—"

Mr. Jarndyce directed his eyes to where he was sitting as I have just described him.

I said no more.

"You are right, little woman," he answered. "He was all but married once. Long ago. And once."

"Did the lady die?"

"No—but she died to him. That time has had its influence on all his later life. Would you suppose him to have a head and a heart full of romance yet?"

"I think, guardian, I might have supposed so. But it is easy to say that when you have told me so."

"He has never since been what he might have been," said Mr. Jarndyce, "and now you see him in his age with no one near him but his servant and his little yellow friend. It's your throw, my dear!"

I felt, from my guardian's manner, that beyond this point I could not pursue the subject without changing the wind. I therefore forbore to ask any further questions. I was interested, but not curious. I thought a little while about this old love story in the night, when I was awakened by Mr. Boythorn's lusty snoring; and I tried to do that very difficult thing, imagine old people young again and invested with the graces of youth. But I fell asleep before I had succeeded, and dreamed of the days when I lived in my godmother's house. I am not sufficiently acquainted with such subjects to know whether it is at all remarkable that I almost always dreamed of that period of my life.

With the morning there came a letter from Messrs. Kenge and Carboy to Mr. Boythorn informing him that one of their clerks would wait upon him at noon. As it was the day of the week on which I paid the bills, and added up my books, and made all the household affairs as compact as possible, I remained at home while Mr. Jarndyce, Ada, and Richard took advantage of a very fine day to make a little excursion, Mr. Boythorn was to wait for Kenge and Carboy's clerk and then was to go on foot to meet them on their return.

Well! I was full of business, examining tradesmen's books, adding up columns, paying money, filing receipts, and I dare say making a great bustle about it when Mr. Guppy was announced and shown in. I had had some idea that the clerk who was to be sent down might be the young gentleman who had met me at the coach-office, and I was glad to see him, because he was associated with my present happiness.

I scarcely knew him again, he was so uncommonly smart. He had an entirely new suit of glossy clothes on, a shining hat, lilac-kid gloves, a neckerchief of a variety of colours, a large hot-house flower in his button-hole, and a thick gold ring on his little finger. Besides which, he quite scented the dining-room with bear's-grease and other perfumery. He looked at me with an attention that quite confused me when I begged him to take a seat until the servant should return; and as he sat there crossing and uncrossing his legs in a corner, and I asked him if he had had a pleasant ride, and hoped that Mr. Kenge was well, I never looked at him, but I found him looking at me in the same scrutinizing and curious way.

When the request was brought to him that he would go upstairs to Mr. Boythorn's room, I mentioned that he would find lunch prepared for him when he came down, of which Mr. Jarndyce hoped he would partake. He said with some embarrassment, holding the handle of the door, "Shall I have the honour of finding you here, miss?" I replied yes, I should be there; and he went out with a bow and another look.

I thought him only awkward and shy, for he was evidently much embarrassed; and I fancied that the best thing I could do would be to wait until I saw that he had everything he wanted and then to leave him to himself. The lunch was soon brought, but it remained for some time on the table. The interview with Mr. Boythorn was a long one, and a stormy one too, I should think, for although his room was at some distance I heard his loud voice rising every now and then like a high wind, and evidently blowing perfect broadsides of denunciation.

At last Mr. Guppy came back, looking something the worse for the conference. "My eye, miss," he said in a low voice, "he's a Tartar!"

"Pray take some refreshment, sir," said I.

Mr. Guppy sat down at the table and began nervously sharpening the carving-knife on the carving-fork, still looking at me (as I felt quite sure without looking at him) in the same unusual manner. The sharpening lasted so long that at last I felt a kind of obligation on me to raise my eyes in order that I might break the spell under which he seemed to labour, of not being able to leave off.

He immediately looked at the dish and began to carve.

"What will you take yourself, miss? You'll take a morsel of something?"

"No, thank you," said I.

"Shan't I give you a piece of anything at all, miss?" said Mr. Guppy, hurriedly drinking off a glass of wine.

"Nothing, thank you," said I. "I have only waited to see that you have everything you want. Is there anything I can order for you?"

"No, I am much obliged to you, miss, I'm sure. I've everything that I can require to make me comfortable—at least I—not comfortable—I'm never that." He drank off two more glasses of wine, one after another.

I thought I had better go.

"I beg your pardon, miss!" said Mr. Guppy, rising when he saw me rise. "But would you allow me the favour of a minute's private conversation?"

Not knowing what to say, I sat down again.

"What follows is without prejudice, miss?" said Mr. Guppy, anxiously bringing a chair towards my table.

"I don't understand what you mean," said I, wondering.

"It's one of our law terms, miss. You won't make any use of it to my detriment at Kenge and Carboy's or elsewhere. If our conversation shouldn't lead to anything, I am to be as I was and am not to be prejudiced in my situation or worldly prospects. In short, it's in total confidence."

"I am at a loss, sir," said I, "to imagine what you can have to communicate in total confidence to me, whom you have never seen but once; but I should be very sorry to do you any injury."

"Thank you, miss. I'm sure of it—that's quite sufficient." All this time Mr. Guppy was either planing his forehead with his handkerchief or tightly rubbing the palm of his left hand with the palm of his right. "If you would excuse my taking another glass of wine, miss, I think it might assist me in getting on without a continual choke that cannot fail to be mutually unpleasant."

He did so, and came back again. I took the opportunity of moving well behind my table.

"You wouldn't allow me to offer you one, would you miss?" said Mr. Guppy, apparently refreshed.

"Not any," said I.

"Not half a glass?" said Mr. Guppy. "Quarter? No! Then, to proceed. My present salary, Miss Summerson, at Kenge and Carboy's, is two pound a week. When I first had the happiness of looking upon you, it was one fifteen, and had stood at that figure for a lengthened period. A rise of five has since taken place, and a further rise of five is guaranteed at the expiration of a term not exceeding twelve months from the present date. My mother has a little property, which takes the form of a small life annuity, upon which she lives in an independent though unassuming manner in the Old Street Road. She is eminently calculated for a mother-in-law. She never interferes, is all for peace, and her disposition easy. She has her failings—as who has not?—but I never knew her do it when company was present, at which time you may freely trust her with wines, spirits, or malt liquors. My own abode is lodgings at Penton Place, Pentonville. It is lowly, but airy, open at the back, and considered one of the 'ealthiest outlets. Miss Summerson! In the mildest language, I adore you. Would you be so kind as to allow me (as I may say) to file a declaration—to make an offer!"

Mr. Guppy went down on his knees. I was well behind my table and not much frightened. I said, "Get up from that ridiculous position immediately, sir, or you will oblige me to break my implied promise and ring the bell!"

"Hear me out, miss!" said Mr. Guppy, folding his hands.

"I cannot consent to hear another word, sir," I returned, "Unless you get up from the carpet directly and go and sit down at the table as you ought to do if you have any sense at all."

He looked piteously, but slowly rose and did so.

"Yet what a mockery it is, miss," he said with his hand upon his heart and shaking his head at me in a melancholy manner over the tray, "to be stationed behind food at such a moment. The soul recoils from food at such a moment, miss."

"I beg you to conclude," said I; "you have asked me to hear you out, and I beg you to conclude."

"I will, miss," said Mr. Guppy. "As I love and honour, so likewise I obey. Would that I could make thee the subject of that vow before the shrine!"

"That is quite impossible," said I, "and entirely out of the question."

"I am aware," said Mr. Guppy, leaning forward over the tray and regarding me, as I again strangely felt, though my eyes were not directed to him, with his late intent look, "I am aware that in a worldly point of view, according to all appearances, my offer is a poor one. But, Miss Summerson! Angel! No, don't ring—I have been brought up in a sharp school and am accustomed to a variety of general practice. Though a young man, I have ferreted out evidence, got up cases, and seen lots of life. Blest with your hand, what means might I not find of advancing your interests and pushing your fortunes! What might I not get to know, nearly concerning you? I know nothing now, certainly; but what MIGHT I not if I had your confidence, and you set me on?"

I told him that he addressed my interest or what he supposed to be my interest quite as unsuccessfully as he addressed my inclination, and he would now understand that I requested him, if he pleased, to go away immediately.

"Cruel miss," said Mr. Guppy, "hear but another word! I think you must have seen that I was struck with those charms on the day when I waited at the Whytorseller. I think you must have remarked that I could not forbear a tribute to those charms when I put up the steps of the 'ackney-coach. It was a feeble tribute to thee, but it was well meant. Thy image has ever since been fixed in my breast. I have walked up and down of an evening opposite Jellyby's house only to look upon the bricks that once contained thee. This out of to-day, quite an unnecessary out so far as the attendance, which was its pretended object, went, was planned by me alone for thee alone. If I speak of interest, it is only to recommend myself and my respectful wretchedness. Love was before it, and is before it."

"I should be pained, Mr. Guppy," said I, rising and putting my hand upon the bell-rope, "to do you or any one who was sincere the injustice of slighting any honest feeling, however disagreeably expressed. If you have really meant to give me a proof of your good opinion, though ill-timed and misplaced, I feel that I ought to thank you. I have very little reason to be proud, and I am not proud. I hope," I think I added, without very well knowing what I said, "that you will now go away as if you had never been so exceedingly foolish and attend to Messrs. Kenge and Carboy's business."

"Half a minute, miss!" cried Mr. Guppy, checking me as I was about to ring. "This has been without prejudice?"

"I will never mention it," said I, "unless you should give me future occasion to do so."

"A quarter of a minute, miss! In case you should think better at any time, however distant—THAT'S no consequence, for my feelings can never alter—of anything I have said, particularly what might I not do, Mr. William Guppy, eighty-seven, Penton Place, or if removed, or dead (of blighted hopes or anything of that sort), care of Mrs. Guppy, three hundred and two, Old Street Road, will be sufficient."

I rang the bell, the servant came, and Mr. Guppy, laying his written card upon the table and making a dejected bow, departed. Raising my eyes as he went out, I once more saw him looking at me after he had passed the door.

I sat there for another hour or more, finishing my books and payments and getting through plenty of business. Then I arranged my desk, and put everything away, and was so composed and cheerful that I thought I had quite dismissed this unexpected incident. But, when I went upstairs to my own room, I surprised myself by beginning to laugh about it and then surprised myself still more by beginning to cry about it. In short, I was in a flutter for a little while and felt as if an old chord had been more coarsely touched than it ever had been since the days of the dear old doll, long buried in the garden.

CHAPTER X. The Law-Writer

On the eastern borders of Chancery Lane, that is to say, more particularly in Cook's Court, Cursitor Street, Mr. Snagsby, law-stationer, pursues his lawful calling. In the shade of Cook's Court, at most times a shady place, Mr. Snagsby has dealt in all sorts of blank forms of legal process; in skins and rolls of parchment; in paper—foolscap, brief, draft, brown, white, whitey-brown, and blotting; in stamps; in office-quills, pens, ink, India-rubber, pounce, pins, pencils, sealing-wax, and wafers; in red tape and green ferret; in pocket-books, almanacs, diaries, and law lists; in string boxes, rulers, inkstands—glass and leaden—pen-knives, scissors, bodkins, and other small office-cutlery; in short, in articles too numerous to mention, ever since he was out of his time and went into partnership with Peffer. On that occasion, Cook's Court was in a manner revolutionized by the new inscription in fresh paint, PEFFER AND SNAGSBY, displacing the time-honoured and not easily to be deciphered legend PEFFER only. For smoke, which is the London ivy, had so wreathed itself round Peffer's name and clung to his dwelling-place that the affectionate parasite quite overpowered the parent tree.

Peffer is never seen in Cook's Court now. He is not expected there, for he has been recumbent this quarter of a century in the churchyard of St. Andrews, Holborn, with the waggons and hackney-coaches roaring past him all the day and half the night like one great dragon. If he ever steal forth when the dragon is at rest to air himself again in Cook's Court until admonished to return by the crowing of the sanguine cock in the cellar at the little dairy in Cursitor Street, whose ideas of daylight it would be curious to ascertain, since he knows from his personal observation next to nothing about it—if Peffer ever do revisit the pale glimpses of Cook's Court, which no law-stationer in the trade can positively deny, he comes invisibly, and no one is the worse or wiser.

In his lifetime, and likewise in the period of Snagsby's "time" of seven long years, there dwelt with Peffer in the same law-stationering premises a niece—a short, shrewd niece, something too violently compressed about the waist, and with a sharp nose like a sharp autumn evening, inclining to be frosty towards the end. The Cook's Courtiers had a rumour flying among them that the mother of this niece did, in her daughter's childhood, moved by too jealous a solicitude that her figure should approach perfection, lace her up every morning with her maternal foot against the bed-post for a stronger hold and purchase; and further, that she exhibited internally pints of vinegar and lemon-juice, which acids, they held, had mounted to the nose and temper of the patient. With whichsoever of the many tongues of Rumour this frothy report originated, it either never reached or never influenced the ears of young Snagsby, who, having wooed and won its fair subject on his arrival at man's estate, entered into two partnerships at once. So now, in Cook's Court, Cursitor Street, Mr. Snagsby and the niece are one; and the niece still cherishes her figure, which, however tastes may differ, is unquestionably so far precious that there is mighty little of it.

Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby are not only one bone and one flesh, but, to the neighbours' thinking, one voice too. That voice, appearing to proceed from Mrs. Snagsby alone, is heard in Cook's Court very often. Mr. Snagsby, otherwise than as he finds expression through these dulcet tones, is rarely heard. He is a mild, bald, timid man with a shining head and a scrubby clump of black hair sticking out at the back. He tends to meekness and obesity. As he stands at his door in Cook's Court in his grey shop-coat and black calico sleeves, looking up at the clouds, or stands behind a desk in his dark shop with a heavy flat ruler, snipping and slicing at sheepskin in company with his two 'prentices, he is emphatically a retiring and unassuming man. From beneath his feet, at such times, as from a shrill ghost unquiet in its grave, there frequently arise complainings and lamentations in the voice already mentioned; and haply, on some occasions when these reach a sharper pitch than usual, Mr. Snagsby mentions to the 'prentices, "I think my little woman is a-giving it to Guster!"

This proper name, so used by Mr. Snagsby, has before now sharpened the wit of the Cook's Courtiers to remark that it ought to be the name of Mrs. Snagsby, seeing that she might with great force and expression be termed a Guster, in compliment to her stormy character. It is, however, the possession, and the only possession except fifty shillings per annum and a very small box indifferently filled with clothing, of a lean young woman from a workhouse (by some supposed to have been christened Augusta) who, although she was farmed or contracted for during her growing time by an amiable benefactor of his species resident at Tooting, and cannot fail to have been developed under the most favourable circumstances, "has fits," which the parish can't account for.

Guster, really aged three or four and twenty, but looking a round ten years older, goes cheap with this unaccountable drawback of fits, and is so apprehensive of being returned on the hands of her patron saint that except when she is found with her head in the pail, or the sink, or the copper, or the dinner, or anything else that happens to be near her at the time of her seizure, she is always at work. She is a satisfaction to the parents and guardians of the 'prentices, who feel that there is little danger of her inspiring tender emotions in the breast of youth; she is a satisfaction to Mrs. Snagsby, who can always find fault with her; she is a satisfaction to Mr. Snagsby, who thinks it a charity to keep her. The law-stationer's establishment is, in Guster's eyes, a temple of plenty and splendour. She believes the little drawing-room upstairs, always kept, as one may say, with its hair in papers and its pinafore on, to be the most elegant apartment in Christendom. The view it commands of Cook's Court at one end (not to mention a squint into Cursitor Street) and of Coavinses' the sheriff's officer's backyard at the other she regards as a prospect of unequalled beauty. The portraits it displays in oil—and plenty of it too—of Mr. Snagsby looking at Mrs. Snagsby and of Mrs. Snagsby looking at Mr. Snagsby are in her eyes as achievements of Raphael or Titian. Guster has some recompenses for her many privations.

Mr. Snagsby refers everything not in the practical mysteries of the business to Mrs. Snagsby. She manages the money, reproaches the tax-gatherers, appoints the times and places of devotion on Sundays, licenses Mr. Snagsby's entertainments, and acknowledges no responsibility as to what she thinks fit to provide for dinner, insomuch that she is the high standard of comparison among the neighbouring wives a long way down Chancery Lane on both sides, and even out in Holborn, who in any domestic passages of arms habitually call upon their husbands to look at the difference between their (the wives') position and Mrs. Snagsby's, and their (the husbands') behaviour and Mr. Snagsby's. Rumour, always flying bat-like about Cook's Court and skimming in and out at everybody's windows, does say that Mrs. Snagsby is jealous and inquisitive and that Mr. Snagsby is sometimes worried out of house and home, and that if he had the spirit of a mouse he wouldn't stand it. It is even observed that the wives who quote him to their self-willed husbands as a shining example in reality look down upon him and that nobody does so with greater superciliousness than one particular lady whose lord is more than suspected of laying his umbrella on her as an instrument of correction. But these vague whisperings may arise from Mr. Snagsby's being in his way rather a meditative and poetical man, loving to walk in Staple Inn in the summer-time and to observe how countrified the sparrows and the leaves are, also to lounge about the Rolls Yard of a Sunday afternoon and to remark (if in good spirits) that there were old times once and that you'd find a stone coffin or two now under that chapel, he'll be bound, if you was to dig for it. He solaces his imagination, too, by thinking of the many Chancellors and Vices, and Masters of the Rolls who are deceased; and he gets such a flavour of the country out of telling the two 'prentices how he HAS heard say that a brook "as clear as crystial" once ran right down the middle of Holborn, when Turnstile really was a turnstile, leading slap away into the meadows—gets such a flavour of the country out of this that he never wants to go there.

The day is closing in and the gas is lighted, but is not yet fully effective, for it is not quite dark. Mr. Snagsby standing at his shop-door looking up at the clouds sees a crow who is out late skim westward over the slice of sky belonging to Cook's Court. The crow flies straight across Chancery Lane and Lincoln's Inn Garden into Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Here, in a large house, formerly a house of state, lives Mr. Tulkinghorn. It is let off in sets of chambers now, and in those shrunken fragments of its greatness, lawyers lie like maggots in nuts. But its roomy staircases, passages, and antechambers still remain; and even its painted ceilings, where Allegory, in Roman helmet and celestial linen, sprawls among balustrades and pillars, flowers, clouds, and big-legged boys, and makes the head ache—as would seem to be Allegory's object always, more or less. Here, among his many boxes labelled with transcendent names, lives Mr. Tulkinghorn, when not speechlessly at home in country-houses where the great ones of the earth are bored to death. Here he is to-day, quiet at his table. An oyster of the old school whom nobody can open.

Like as he is to look at, so is his apartment in the dusk of the present afternoon. Rusty, out of date, withdrawing from attention, able to afford it. Heavy, broad-backed, old-fashioned, mahogany-and-horsehair chairs, not easily lifted; obsolete tables with spindle-legs and dusty baize covers; presentation prints of the holders of great titles in the last generation or the last but one, environ him. A thick and dingy Turkey-carpet muffles the floor where he sits, attended by two candles in old-fashioned silver candlesticks that give a very insufficient light to his large room. The titles on the backs of his books have retired into the binding; everything that can have a lock has got one; no key is visible. Very few loose papers are about. He has some manuscript near him, but is not referring to it. With the round top of an inkstand and two broken bits of sealing-wax he is silently and slowly working out whatever train of indecision is in his mind. Now the inkstand top is in the middle, now the red bit of sealing-wax, now the black bit. That's not it. Mr. Tulkinghorn must gather them all up and begin again.

Here, beneath the painted ceiling, with foreshortened Allegory staring down at his intrusion as if it meant to swoop upon him, and he cutting it dead, Mr. Tulkinghorn has at once his house and office. He keeps no staff, only one middle-aged man, usually a little out at elbows, who sits in a high pew in the hall and is rarely overburdened with business. Mr. Tulkinghorn is not in a common way. He wants no clerks. He is a great reservoir of confidences, not to be so tapped. His clients want HIM; he is all in all. Drafts that he requires to be drawn are drawn by special-pleaders in the temple on mysterious instructions; fair copies that he requires to be made are made at the stationers', expense being no consideration. The middle-aged man in the pew knows scarcely more of the affairs of the peerage than any crossing-sweeper in Holborn.

The red bit, the black bit, the inkstand top, the other inkstand top, the little sand-box. So! You to the middle, you to the right, you to the left. This train of indecision must surely be worked out now or never. Now! Mr. Tulkinghorn gets up, adjusts his spectacles, puts on his hat, puts the manuscript in his pocket, goes out, tells the middle-aged man out at elbows, "I shall be back presently." Very rarely tells him anything more explicit.

Mr. Tulkinghorn goes, as the crow came—not quite so straight, but nearly—to Cook's Court, Cursitor Street. To Snagsby's, Law-Stationer's, Deeds engrossed and copied, Law-Writing executed in all its branches, &c., &c., &c.

It is somewhere about five or six o'clock in the afternoon, and a balmy fragrance of warm tea hovers in Cook's Court. It hovers about Snagsby's door. The hours are early there: dinner at half-past one and supper at half-past nine. Mr. Snagsby was about to descend into the subterranean regions to take tea when he looked out of his door just now and saw the crow who was out late.

"Master at home?"

Guster is minding the shop, for the 'prentices take tea in the kitchen with Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby; consequently, the robe-maker's two daughters, combing their curls at the two glasses in the two second-floor windows of the opposite house, are not driving the two 'prentices to distraction as they fondly suppose, but are merely awakening the unprofitable admiration of Guster, whose hair won't grow, and never would, and it is confidently thought, never will.

"Master at home?" says Mr. Tulkinghorn.

Master is at home, and Guster will fetch him. Guster disappears, glad to get out of the shop, which she regards with mingled dread and veneration as a storehouse of awful implements of the great torture of the law—a place not to be entered after the gas is turned off.

Mr. Snagsby appears, greasy, warm, herbaceous, and chewing. Bolts a bit of bread and butter. Says, "Bless my soul, sir! Mr. Tulkinghorn!"

"I want half a word with you, Snagsby."

"Certainly, sir! Dear me, sir, why didn't you send your young man round for me? Pray walk into the back shop, sir." Snagsby has brightened in a moment.

The confined room, strong of parchment-grease, is warehouse, counting-house, and copying-office. Mr. Tulkinghorn sits, facing round, on a stool at the desk.

"Jarndyce and Jarndyce, Snagsby."

"Yes, sir." Mr. Snagsby turns up the gas and coughs behind his hand, modestly anticipating profit. Mr. Snagsby, as a timid man, is accustomed to cough with a variety of expressions, and so to save words.

"You copied some affidavits in that cause for me lately."

"Yes, sir, we did."

"There was one of them," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, carelessly feeling—tight, unopenable oyster of the old school!—in the wrong coat-pocket, "the handwriting of which is peculiar, and I rather like. As I happened to be passing, and thought I had it about me, I looked in to ask you—but I haven't got it. No matter, any other time will do. Ah! here it is! I looked in to ask you who copied this."

"Who copied this, sir?" says Mr. Snagsby, taking it, laying it flat on the desk, and separating all the sheets at once with a twirl and a twist of the left hand peculiar to lawstationers. "We gave this out, sir. We were giving out rather a large quantity of work just at that time. I can tell you in a moment who copied it, sir, by referring to my book."

Mr. Snagsby takes his book down from the safe, makes another bolt of the bit of bread and butter which seemed to have stopped short, eyes the affidavit aside, and brings his right forefinger travelling down a page of the book, "Jewby—Packer—Jarndyce."

"Jarndyce! Here we are, sir," says Mr. Snagsby. "To be sure! I might have remembered it. This was given out, sir, to a writer who lodges just over on the opposite side of the lane."

Mr. Tulkinghorn has seen the entry, found it before the law-stationer, read it while the forefinger was coming down the hill.

"WHAT do you call him? Nemo?" says Mr. Tulkinghorn. "Nemo, sir. Here it is. Forty-two folio. Given out on the Wednesday night at eight o'clock, brought in on the Thursday morning at half after nine."

"Nemo!" repeats Mr. Tulkinghorn. "Nemo is Latin for no one."

"It must be English for some one, sir, I think," Mr. Snagsby submits with his deferential cough. "It is a person's name. Here it is, you see, sir! Forty-two folio. Given out Wednesday night, eight o'clock; brought in Thursday morning, half after nine."

The tail of Mr. Snagsby's eye becomes conscious of the head of Mrs. Snagsby looking in at the shop-door to know what he means by deserting his tea. Mr. Snagsby addresses an explanatory cough to Mrs. Snagsby, as who should say, "My dear, a customer!"

"Half after nine, sir," repeats Mr. Snagsby. "Our law-writers, who live by job-work, are a queer lot; and this may not be his name, but it's the name he goes by. I remember now, sir, that he gives it in a written advertisement he sticks up down at the Rule Office, and the King's Bench Office, and the Judges' Chambers, and so forth. You know the kind of document, sir—wanting employ?"

Mr. Tulkinghorn glances through the little window at the back of Coavinses', the sheriff's officer's, where lights shine in Coavinses' windows. Coavinses' coffee-room is at the back, and the shadows of several gentlemen under a cloud loom cloudily upon the blinds. Mr. Snagsby takes the opportunity of slightly turning his head to glance over his shoulder at his little woman and to make apologetic motions with his mouth to this effect: "Tul-king-horn—rich—in-flu-en-tial!"

"Have you given this man work before?" asks Mr. Tulkinghorn.

"Oh, dear, yes, sir! Work of yours."

"Thinking of more important matters, I forget where you said he lived?"

"Across the lane, sir. In fact, he lodges at a—" Mr. Snagsby makes another bolt, as if the bit of bread and buffer were insurmountable"—at a rag and bottle shop."

"Can you show me the place as I go back?"

"With the greatest pleasure, sir!"

Mr. Snagsby pulls off his sleeves and his grey coat, pulls on his black coat, takes his hat from its peg. "Oh! Here is my little woman!" he says aloud. "My dear, will you be so kind as to tell one of the lads to look after the shop while I step across the lane with Mr. Tulkinghorn? Mrs. Snagsby, sir—I shan't be two minutes, my love!"

Mrs. Snagsby bends to the lawyer, retires behind the counter, peeps at them through the window-blind, goes softly into the back office, refers to the entries in the book still lying open. Is evidently curious.

"You will find that the place is rough, sir," says Mr. Snagsby, walking deferentially in the road and leaving the narrow pavement to the lawyer; "and the party is very rough. But they're a wild lot in general, sir. The advantage of this particular man is that he never wants sleep. He'll go at it right on end if you want him to, as long as ever you like."

It is quite dark now, and the gas-lamps have acquired their full effect. Jostling against clerks going to post the day's letters, and against counsel and attorneys going home to dinner, and against plaintiffs and defendants and suitors of all sorts, and against the general crowd, in whose way the forensic wisdom of ages has interposed a million of obstacles to the transaction of the commonest business of life; diving through law and equity, and through that kindred mystery, the street mud, which is made of nobody knows what and collects about us nobody knows whence or how—we only knowing in general that when there is too much of it we find it necessary to shovel it away—the lawyer and the law-stationer come to a rag and bottle shop and general emporium of much disregarded merchandise, lying and being in the shadow of the wall of Lincoln's Inn, and kept, as is announced in paint, to all whom it may concern, by one Krook.

"This is where he lives, sir," says the law-stationer.

"This is where he lives, is it?" says the lawyer unconcernedly. "Thank you."

"Are you not going in, sir?"

"No, thank you, no; I am going on to the Fields at present. Good evening. Thank you!" Mr. Snagsby lifts his hat and returns to his little woman and his tea.

But Mr. Tulkinghorn does not go on to the Fields at present. He goes a short way, turns back, comes again to the shop of Mr. Krook, and enters it straight. It is dim enough, with a blot-headed candle or so in the windows, and an old man and a cat sitting in the back part by a fire. The old man rises and comes forward, with another blot-headed candle in his hand.

"Pray is your lodger within?"

"Male or female, sir?" says Mr. Krook.

"Male. The person who does copying."

Mr. Krook has eyed his man narrowly. Knows him by sight. Has an indistinct impression of his aristocratic repute.

"Did you wish to see him, sir?"

"Yes."

"It's what I seldom do myself," says Mr. Krook with a grin. "Shall I call him down? But it's a weak chance if he'd come, sir!"

"I'll go up to him, then," says Mr. Tulkinghorn.

"Second floor, sir. Take the candle. Up there!" Mr. Krook, with his cat beside him, stands at the bottom of the staircase, looking after Mr. Tulkinghorn. "Hi-hi!" he says when Mr. Tulkinghorn has nearly disappeared. The lawyer looks down over the hand-rail. The cat expands her wicked mouth and snarls at him.

"Order, Lady Jane! Behave yourself to visitors, my lady! You know what they say of my lodger?" whispers Krook, going up a step or two.

"What do they say of him?"

"They say he has sold himself to the enemy, but you and I know better—he don't buy. I'll tell you what, though; my lodger is so black-humoured and gloomy that I believe he'd as soon make that bargain as any other. Don't put him out, sir. That's my advice!"

Mr. Tulkinghorn with a nod goes on his way. He comes to the dark door on the second floor. He knocks, receives no answer, opens it, and accidentally extinguishes his candle in doing so.

The air of the room is almost bad enough to have extinguished it if he had not. It is a small room, nearly black with soot, and grease, and dirt. In the rusty skeleton of a grate, pinched at the middle as if poverty had gripped it, a red coke fire burns low. In the corner by the chimney stand a deal table and a broken desk, a wilderness marked with a rain of ink. In another corner a ragged old portmanteau on one of the two chairs serves for cabinet or wardrobe; no larger one is needed, for it collapses like the cheeks of a starved man. The floor is bare, except that one old mat, trodden to shreds of rope-yarn, lies perishing upon the hearth. No curtain veils the darkness of the night, but the discoloured shutters are drawn together, and through the two gaunt holes pierced in them, famine might be staring in—the banshee of the man upon the bed.

For, on a low bed opposite the fire, a confusion of dirty patchwork, lean-ribbed ticking, and coarse sacking, the lawyer, hesitating just within the doorway, sees a man. He lies there, dressed in shirt and trousers, with bare feet. He has a yellow look in the spectral darkness of a candle that has guttered down until the whole length of its wick (still burning) has doubled over and left a tower of winding-sheet above it. His hair is ragged, mingling with his whiskers and his beard—the latter, ragged too, and grown, like the scum and mist around him, in neglect. Foul and filthy as the room is, foul and filthy as the air is, it is not easy to perceive what fumes those are which most oppress the senses in it; but through the general sickliness and faintness, and the odour of stale tobacco, there comes into the lawyer's mouth the bitter, vapid taste of opium.

"Hallo, my friend!" he cries, and strikes his iron candlestick against the door.

He thinks he has awakened his friend. He lies a little turned away, but his eyes are surely open.

"Hallo, my friend!" he cries again. "Hallo! Hallo!"

As he rattles on the door, the candle which has drooped so long goes out and leaves him in the dark, with the gaunt eyes in the shutters staring down upon the bed.

CHAPTER XI. Our Dear Brother

A touch on the lawyer's wrinkled hand as he stands in the dark room, irresolute, makes him start and say, "What's that?"

"It's me," returns the old man of the house, whose breath is in his ear. "Can't you wake him?"

"No."

"What have you done with your candle?"

"It's gone out. Here it is."

Krook takes it, goes to the fire, stoops over the red embers, and tries to get a light. The dying ashes have no light to spare, and his endeavours are vain. Muttering, after an ineffectual call to his lodger, that he will go downstairs and bring a lighted candle from the shop, the old man departs. Mr. Tulkinghorn, for some new reason that he has, does not await his return in the room, but on the stairs outside.

The welcome light soon shines upon the wall, as Krook comes slowly up with his green-eyed cat following at his heels. "Does the man generally sleep like this?" inquired the lawyer in a low voice. "Hi! I don't know," says Krook, shaking his head and lifting his eyebrows. "I know next to nothing of his habits except that he keeps himself very close."

Thus whispering, they both go in together. As the light goes in, the great eyes in the shutters, darkening, seem to close. Not so the eyes upon the bed.

"God save us!" exclaims Mr. Tulkinghorn. "He is dead!" Krook drops the heavy hand he has taken up so suddenly that the arm swings over the bedside.

They look at one another for a moment.

"Send for some doctor! Call for Miss Flite up the stairs, sir. Here's poison by the bed! Call out for Flite, will you?" says Krook, with his lean hands spread out above the body like a vampire's wings.

Mr. Tulkinghorn hurries to the landing and calls, "Miss Flite! Flite! Make haste, here, whoever you are! Flite!" Krook follows him with his eyes, and while he is calling, finds opportunity to steal to the old portmanteau and steal back again.

"Run, Flite, run! The nearest doctor! Run!" So Mr. Krook addresses a crazy little woman who is his female lodger, who appears and vanishes in a breath, who soon returns accompanied by a testy medical man brought from his dinner, with a broad, snuffy upper lip and a broad Scotch tongue.

"Ey! Bless the hearts o' ye," says the medical man, looking up at them after a moment's examination. "He's just as dead as Phairy!"

Mr. Tulkinghorn (standing by the old portmanteau) inquires if he has been dead any time.

"Any time, sir?" says the medical gentleman. "It's probable he wull have been dead aboot three hours."

"About that time, I should say," observes a dark young man on the other side of the bed.

"Air you in the maydickle prayfession yourself, sir?" inquires the first.

The dark young man says yes.

"Then I'll just tak' my depairture," replies the other, "for I'm nae gude here!" With which remark he finishes his brief attendance and returns to finish his dinner.

The dark young surgeon passes the candle across and across the face and carefully examines the law-writer, who has established his pretensions to his name by becoming indeed No one.

"I knew this person by sight very well," says he. "He has purchased opium of me for the last year and a half. Was anybody present related to him?" glancing round upon the three bystanders.

"I was his landlord," grimly answers Krook, taking the candle from the surgeon's outstretched hand. "He told me once I was the nearest relation he had."

"He has died," says the surgeon, "of an over-dose of opium, there is no doubt. The room is strongly flavoured with it. There is enough here now," taking an old tea-pot from Mr. Krook, "to kill a dozen people."

"Do you think he did it on purpose?" asks Krook.

"Took the over-dose?"

"Yes!" Krook almost smacks his lips with the unction of a horrible interest.

"I can't say. I should think it unlikely, as he has been in the habit of taking so much. But nobody can tell. He was very poor, I suppose?"

"I suppose he was. His room—don't look rich," says Krook, who might have changed eyes with his cat, as he casts his sharp glance around. "But I have never been in it since he had it, and he was too close to name his circumstances to me."

"Did he owe you any rent?"

"Six weeks."

"He will never pay it!" says the young man, resuming his examination. "It is beyond a doubt that he is indeed as dead as Pharaoh; and to judge from his appearance and condition, I should think it a happy release. Yet he must have been a good figure when a youth, and I dare say, good-looking." He says this, not unfeelingly, while sitting on the bedstead's edge with his face towards that other face and his hand upon the region of the heart. "I recollect once thinking there was something in his manner, uncouth as it was, that denoted a fall in life. Was that so?" he continues, looking round.

Krook replies, "You might as well ask me to describe the ladies whose heads of hair I have got in sacks downstairs. Than that he was my lodger for a year and a half and lived—or didn't live—by law-writing, I know no more of him."

During this dialogue Mr. Tulkinghorn has stood aloof by the old portmanteau, with his hands behind him, equally removed, to all appearance, from all three kinds of interest exhibited near the bed—from the young surgeon's professional interest in death, noticeable as being quite apart from his remarks on the deceased as an individual; from the old man's unction; and the little crazy woman's awe. His imperturbable face has been as inexpressive as his rusty clothes. One could not even say he has been thinking all this while. He has shown neither patience nor impatience, nor attention nor abstraction. He has shown nothing but his shell. As easily might the tone of a delicate musical instrument be inferred from its case, as the tone of Mr. Tulkinghorn from his case.

He now interposes, addressing the young surgeon in his unmoved, professional way.

"I looked in here," he observes, "just before you, with the intention of giving this deceased man, whom I never saw alive, some employment at his trade of copying. I had heard of him from my stationer—Snagsby of Cook's Court. Since no one here knows anything about him, it might be as well to send for Snagsby. Ah!" to the little crazy woman, who has often seen him in court, and whom he has often seen, and who proposes, in frightened dumb-show, to go for the law-stationer. "Suppose you do!"

While she is gone, the surgeon abandons his hopeless investigation and covers its subject with the patchwork counterpane. Mr. Krook and he interchange a word or two. Mr. Tulkinghorn says nothing, but stands, ever, near the old portmanteau.

Mr. Snagsby arrives hastily in his grey coat and his black sleeves. "Dear me, dear me," he says; "and it has come to this, has it! Bless my soul!"

"Can you give the person of the house any information about this unfortunate creature, Snagsby?" inquires Mr. Tulkinghorn. "He was in arrears with his rent, it seems. And he must be buried, you know."

"Well, sir," says Mr. Snagsby, coughing his apologetic cough behind his hand, "I really don't know what advice I could offer, except sending for the beadle."

"I don't speak of advice," returns Mr. Tulkinghorn. "I could advise—"

"No one better, sir, I am sure," says Mr. Snagsby, with his deferential cough.

"I speak of affording some clue to his connexions, or to where he came from, or to anything concerning him."

"I assure you, sir," says Mr. Snagsby after prefacing his reply with his cough of general propitiation, "that I no more know where he came from than I know—"

"Where he has gone to, perhaps," suggests the surgeon to help him out.

A pause. Mr. Tulkinghorn looking at the law-stationer. Mr. Krook, with his mouth open, looking for somebody to speak next.

"As to his connexions, sir," says Mr. Snagsby, "if a person was to say to me, 'Snagsby, here's twenty thousand pound down, ready for you in the Bank of England if you'll only name one of 'em,' I couldn't do it, sir! About a year and a half ago—to the best of my belief, at the time when he first came to lodge at the present rag and bottle shop—"

"That was the time!" says Krook with a nod.

"About a year and a half ago," says Mr. Snagsby, strengthened, "he came into our place one morning after breakfast, and finding my little woman (which I name Mrs. Snagsby when I use that appellation) in our shop, produced a specimen of his handwriting and gave her to understand that he was in want of copying work to do and was, not to put too fine a point upon it," a favourite apology for plain speaking with Mr. Snagsby, which he always offers with a sort of argumentative frankness, "hard up!

My little woman is not in general partial to strangers, particular—not to put too fine a point upon it—when they want anything. But she was rather took by something about this person, whether by his being unshaved, or by his hair being in want of attention, or by what other ladies' reasons, I leave you to judge; and she accepted of the specimen, and likewise of the address. My little woman hasn't a good ear for names," proceeds Mr. Snagsby after consulting his cough of consideration behind his hand, "and she considered Nemo equally the same as Nimrod. In consequence of which, she got into a habit of saying to me at meals, 'Mr. Snagsby, you haven't found Nimrod any work yet!' or 'Mr. Snagsby, why didn't you give that eight and thirty Chancery folio in Jarndyce to Nimrod?' or such like. And that is the way he gradually fell into job-work at our place; and that is the most I know of him except that he was a quick hand, and a hand not sparing of night-work, and that if you gave him out, say, five and forty folio on the Wednesday night, you would have it brought in on the Thursday morning. All of which—" Mr. Snagsby concludes by politely motioning with his hat towards the bed, as much as to add, "I have no doubt my honourable friend would confirm if he were in a condition to do it."

"Hadn't you better see," says Mr. Tulkinghorn to Krook, "whether he had any papers that may enlighten you? There will be an inquest, and you will be asked the question. You can read?"

"No, I can't," returns the old man with a sudden grin.

"Snagsby," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, "look over the room for him. He will get into some trouble or difficulty otherwise. Being here, I'll wait if you make haste, and then I can testify on his behalf, if it should ever be necessary, that all was fair and right. If you will hold the candle for Mr. Snagsby, my friend, he'll soon see whether there is anything to help you."

"In the first place, here's an old portmanteau, sir," says Snagsby.

Ah, to be sure, so there is! Mr. Tulkinghorn does not appear to have seen it before, though he is standing so close to it, and though there is very little else, heaven knows.

The marine-store merchant holds the light, and the law-stationer conducts the search. The surgeon leans against the corner of the chimney-piece; Miss Flite peeps and trembles just within the door. The apt old scholar of the old school, with his dull black breeches tied with ribbons at the knees, his large black waistcoat, his long-sleeved black coat, and his wisp of limp white neckerchief tied in the bow the peerage knows so well, stands in exactly the same place and attitude.

There are some worthless articles of clothing in the old portmanteau; there is a bundle of pawnbrokers' duplicates, those turnpike tickets on the road of poverty; there is a crumpled paper, smelling of opium, on which are scrawled rough memoranda—as, took, such a day, so many grains; took, such another day, so many more—begun some time ago, as if with the intention of being regularly continued, but soon left off. There are a few dirty scraps of newspapers, all referring to coroners' inquests; there is nothing else. They search the cupboard and the drawer of the ink-splashed table. There is not a morsel of an old letter or of any other writing in either. The young surgeon examines the dress on the law-writer. A knife and some odd halfpence are all he finds. Mr. Snagsby's suggestion is the practical suggestion after all, and the beadle must be called in.

So the little crazy lodger goes for the beadle, and the rest come out of the room. "Don't leave the cat there!" says the surgeon; "that won't do!" Mr. Krook therefore drives her out before him, and she goes furtively downstairs, winding her lithe tail and licking her lips.

"Good night!" says Mr. Tulkinghorn, and goes home to Allegory and meditation.

By this time the news has got into the court. Groups of its inhabitants assemble to discuss the thing, and the outposts of the army of observation (principally boys) are pushed forward to Mr. Krook's window, which they closely invest. A policeman has already walked up to the room, and walked down again to the door, where he stands like a tower, only condescending to see the boys at his base occasionally; but whenever he does see them, they quail and fall back. Mrs. Perkins, who has not been for some weeks on speaking terms with Mrs. Piper in consequence for an unpleasantness originating in young Perkins' having "fetched" young Piper "a crack," renews her friendly intercourse on this auspicious occasion. The potboy at the corner, who is a privileged amateur, as possessing official knowledge of life and having to deal with drunken men occasionally, exchanges confidential communications with the policeman and has the appearance of an impregnable youth, unassailable by truncheons and unconfinable in station-houses. People talk across the court out of window, and bare-headed scouts come hurrying in from Chancery Lane to know what's the matter. The general feeling seems to be that it's a blessing Mr. Krook warn't made away with first, mingled with a little natural disappointment that he was not. In the midst of this sensation, the beadle arrives.

The beadle, though generally understood in the neighbourhood to be a ridiculous institution, is not without a certain popularity for the moment, if it were only as a man who is going to see the body. The policeman considers him an imbecile civilian, a remnant of the barbarous watchmen times, but gives him admission as something that must be borne with until government shall abolish him. The sensation is heightened as the tidings spread from mouth to mouth that the beadle is on the ground and has gone in.

By and by the beadle comes out, once more intensifying the sensation, which has rather languished in the interval. He is understood to be in want of witnesses for the inquest to-morrow who can tell the coroner and jury anything whatever respecting the deceased. Is immediately referred to innumerable people who can tell nothing whatever. Is made more imbecile by being constantly informed that Mrs. Green's son "was a law-writer hisself and knowed him better than anybody," which son of Mrs. Green's appears, on inquiry, to be at the present time aboard a vessel bound for China, three months out, but considered accessible by telegraph on application to the Lords of the Admiralty. Beadle goes into various shops and parlours, examining the inhabitants, always shutting the door first, and by exclusion, delay, and general idiotcy exasperating the public. Policeman seen to smile to potboy. Public loses interest and undergoes reaction. Taunts the beadle in shrill youthful voices with having boiled a boy, choruses fragments of a popular song to that effect and importing that the boy was made into soup for the workhouse. Policeman at last finds it necessary to support the law and seize a vocalist, who is released upon the flight of the rest on condition of his getting out of this then, come, and cutting it—a condition he immediately observes. So the sensation dies off for the time; and the unmoved policeman (to whom a little opium, more or less, is nothing), with his shining hat, stiff stock, inflexible great-coat, stout belt and bracelet, and all things fitting, pursues his lounging way with a heavy tread, beating the palms of his white gloves one against the other and stopping now and then at a street-corner to look casually about for anything between a lost child and a murder.

Under cover of the night, the feeble-minded beadle comes flitting about Chancery Lane with his summonses, in which every juror's name is wrongly spelt, and nothing rightly spelt but the beadle's own name, which nobody can read or wants to know. The summonses served and his witnesses forewarned, the beadle goes to Mr. Krook's to keep a small appointment he has made with certain paupers, who, presently arriving, are conducted upstairs, where they leave the great eyes in the shutter something new to stare at, in that last shape which earthly lodgings take for No one—and for Every one.

And all that night the coffin stands ready by the old portmanteau; and the lonely figure on the bed, whose path in life has lain through five and forty years, lies there with no more track behind him that any one can trace than a deserted infant.

Next day the court is all alive—is like a fair, as Mrs. Perkins, more than reconciled to Mrs. Piper, says in amicable conversation with that excellent woman. The coroner is to sit in the first-floor room at the Sol's Arms, where the Harmonic Meetings take place twice a week and where the chair is filled by a gentleman of professional celebrity, faced by Little Swills, the comic vocalist, who hopes (according to the bill in the window) that his friends will rally round him and support first-rate talent. The Sol's Arms does a brisk stroke of business all the morning. Even children so require sustaining under the general excitement that a pieman who has established himself for the occasion at the corner of the court says his brandy-balls go off like smoke. What time the beadle, hovering between the door of Mr. Krook's establishment and the door of the Sol's Arms, shows the curiosity in his keeping to a few discreet spirits and accepts the compliment of a glass of ale or so in return.

At the appointed hour arrives the coroner, for whom the jurymen are waiting and who is received with a salute of skittles from the good dry skittle-ground attached to the Sol's Arms. The coroner frequents more public-houses than any man alive. The smell of sawdust, beer, tobacco-smoke, and spirits is inseparable in his vocation from death in its most awful shapes. He is conducted by the beadle and the landlord to the Harmonic Meeting Room, where he puts his hat on the piano and takes a Windsor-chair at the head of a long table formed of several short tables put together and ornamented with glutinous rings in endless involutions, made by pots and glasses. As many of the jury as can crowd together at the table sit there. The rest get among the spittoons and pipes or lean against the piano. Over the coroner's head is a small iron garland, the pendant handle of a bell, which rather gives the majesty of the court the appearance of going to be hanged presently.

Call over and swear the jury! While the ceremony is in progress, sensation is created by the entrance of a chubby little man in a large shirt-collar, with a moist eye and an inflamed nose, who modestly takes a position near the door as one of the general public, but seems familiar with the room too. A whisper circulates that this is Little Swills. It is considered not unlikely that he will get up an imitation of the coroner and make it the principal feature of the Harmonic Meeting in the evening.

"Well, gentlemen—" the coroner begins.

"Silence there, will you!" says the beadle. Not to the coroner, though it might appear so.

"Well, gentlemen," resumes the coroner. "You are impanelled here to inquire into the death of a certain man. Evidence will be given before you as to the circumstances attending that death, and you will give your verdict according to the—skittles; they must be stopped, you know, beadle!—evidence, and not according to anything else. The first thing to be done is to view the body."

"Make way there!" cries the beadle.

So they go out in a loose procession, something after the manner of a straggling funeral, and make their inspection in Mr. Krook's back second floor, from which a few of the jurymen retire pale and precipitately. The beadle is very careful that two gentlemen not very neat about the cuffs and buttons (for whose accommodation he has provided a special little table near the coroner in the Harmonic Meeting Room) should see all that is to be seen. For they are the public chroniclers of such inquiries by the line; and he is not superior to the universal human infirmity, but hopes to read in print what "Mooney, the active and intelligent beadle of the district," said and did and even aspires to see the name of Mooney as familiarly and patronizingly mentioned as the name of the hangman is, according to the latest examples.

Little Swills is waiting for the coroner and jury on their return. Mr. Tulkinghorn, also. Mr. Tulkinghorn is received with distinction and seated near the coroner between that high judicial officer, a bagatelle-board, and the coal-box. The inquiry proceeds. The jury learn how the subject of their inquiry died, and learn no more about him. "A very eminent solicitor is in attendance, gentlemen," says the coroner, "who, I am informed, was accidentally present when discovery of the death was made, but he could only repeat the evidence you have already heard from the surgeon, the landlord, the lodger, and the law-stationer, and it is not necessary to trouble him. Is anybody in attendance who knows anything more?"

Mrs. Piper pushed forward by Mrs. Perkins. Mrs. Piper sworn.

Anastasia Piper, gentlemen. Married woman. Now, Mrs. Piper, what have you got to say about this?

Why, Mrs. Piper has a good deal to say, chiefly in parentheses and without punctuation, but not much to tell. Mrs. Piper lives in the court (which her husband is a cabinet-maker), and it has long been well beknown among the neighbours (counting from the day next but one before the half-baptizing of Alexander James Piper aged eighteen months and four days old on accounts of not being expected to live such was the sufferings gentlemen of that child in his gums) as the plaintive—so Mrs. Piper insists on calling the deceased—was reported to have sold himself. Thinks it was the plaintive's air in which that report originatinin. See the plaintive often and considered as his air was feariocious and not to be allowed to go about some children being timid (and if doubted hoping Mrs. Perkins may be brought forard for she is here and will do credit to her husband and herself and family). Has seen the plaintive wexed and worrited by the children (for children they will ever be and you cannot expect them specially if of playful dispositions to be Methoozellers which you was not yourself). On accounts of this and his dark looks has often dreamed as she see him take a pick-axe from his pocket and split Johnny's head (which the child knows not fear and has repeatually called after him close at his eels). Never however see the plaintive take a pick-axe or any other wepping far from it. Has seen him hurry away when run and called after as if not partial to children and never see him speak to neither child nor grown person at any time (excepting the boy that sweeps the crossing down the lane over the way round the corner which if he was here would tell you that he has been seen a-speaking to him frequent).

Says the coroner, is that boy here? Says the beadle, no, sir, he is not here. Says the coroner, go and fetch him then. In the absence of the active and intelligent, the coroner converses with Mr. Tulkinghorn.

Oh! Here's the boy, gentlemen!

Here he is, very muddy, very hoarse, very ragged. Now, boy! But stop a minute. Caution. This boy must be put through a few preliminary paces.

Name, Jo. Nothing else that he knows on. Don't know that everybody has two names. Never heerd of sich a think. Don't know that Jo is short for a longer name. Thinks it long enough for HIM. HE don't find no fault with it. Spell it? No. HE can't spell it. No father, no mother, no friends. Never been to school. What's home? Knows a broom's a broom, and knows it's wicked to tell a lie. Don't recollect who told him about the broom or about the lie, but knows both. Can't exactly say what'll be done to him arter he's dead if he tells a lie to the gentlemen here, but believes it'll be something wery bad to punish him, and serve him right—and so he'll tell the truth.

"This won't do, gentlemen!" says the coroner with a melancholy shake of the head.

"Don't you think you can receive his evidence, sir?" asks an attentive juryman.

"Out of the question," says the coroner. "You have heard the boy. 'Can't exactly say' won't do, you know. We can't take THAT in a court of justice, gentlemen. It's terrible depravity. Put the boy aside."

Boy put aside, to the great edification of the audience, especially of Little Swills, the comic vocalist.

Now. Is there any other witness? No other witness.

Very well, gentlemen! Here's a man unknown, proved to have been in the habit of taking opium in large quantities for a year and a half, found dead of too much opium. If you think you have any evidence to lead you to the conclusion that he committed suicide, you will come to that conclusion. If you think it is a case of accidental death, you will find a verdict accordingly.

Verdict accordingly. Accidental death. No doubt. Gentlemen, you are discharged. Good afternoon.

While the coroner buttons his great-coat, Mr. Tulkinghorn and he give private audience to the rejected witness in a corner.

That graceless creature only knows that the dead man (whom he recognized just now by his yellow face and black hair) was sometimes hooted and pursued about the streets. That one cold winter night when he, the boy, was shivering in a doorway near his crossing, the man turned to look at him, and came back, and having questioned him and found that he had not a friend in the world, said, "Neither have I. Not one!" and gave him the price of a supper and a night's lodging. That the man had often spoken to him since and asked him whether he slept sound at night, and how he bore cold and hunger, and whether he ever wished to die, and similar strange questions. That when the man had no money, he would say in passing, "I am as poor as you to-day, Jo," but that when he had any, he had always (as the boy most heartily believes) been glad to give him some.

"He was wery good to me," says the boy, wiping his eyes with his wretched sleeve. "Wen I see him a-layin' so stritched out just now, I wished he could have heerd me tell him so. He wos wery good to me, he wos!"

As he shuffles downstairs, Mr. Snagsby, lying in wait for him, puts a half-crown in his hand. "If you ever see me coming past your crossing with my little woman—I mean a lady—" says Mr. Snagsby with his finger on his nose, "don't allude to it!"

For some little time the jurymen hang about the Sol's Arms colloquially. In the sequel, half-a-dozen are caught up in a cloud of pipe-smoke that pervades the parlour of the Sol's Arms; two stroll to Hampstead; and four engage to go half-price to the play at night, and top up with oysters. Little Swills is treated on several hands. Being asked what he thinks of the proceedings, characterizes them (his strength lying in a slangular direction) as "a rummy start." The landlord of the Sol's Arms, finding Little Swills so popular, commends him highly to the jurymen and public, observing that for a song in character he don't know his equal and that that man's character-wardrobe would fill a cart.

Thus, gradually the Sol's Arms melts into the shadowy night and then flares out of it strong in gas. The Harmonic Meeting hour arriving, the gentleman of professional celebrity takes the chair, is faced (red-faced) by Little Swills; their friends rally round them and support first-rate talent. In the zenith of the evening, Little Swills says, "Gentlemen, if you'll permit me, I'll attempt a short description of a scene of real life that came off here to-day." Is much applauded and encouraged; goes out of the room as Swills; comes in as the coroner (not the least in the world like him); describes the inquest, with recreative intervals of piano-forte accompaniment, to the refrain: With his (the coroner's) tippy tol li doll, tippy tol lo doll, tippy tol li doll, Dee!

The jingling piano at last is silent, and the Harmonic friends rally round their pillows. Then there is rest around the lonely figure, now laid in its last earthly habitation; and it is watched by the gaunt eyes in the shutters through some quiet hours of night. If this forlorn man could have been prophetically seen lying here by the mother at whose breast he nestled, a little child, with eyes upraised to her loving face, and soft hand scarcely knowing how to close upon the neck to which it crept, what an impossibility the vision would have seemed! Oh, if in brighter days the now-extinguished fire within him ever burned for one woman who held him in her heart, where is she, while these ashes are above the ground!

It is anything but a night of rest at Mr. Snagsby's, in Cook's Court, where Guster murders sleep by going, as Mr. Snagsby himself allows—not to put too fine a point upon it—out of one fit into twenty. The occasion of this seizure is that Guster has a tender heart and a susceptible something that possibly might have been imagination, but for Tooting and her patron saint. Be it what it may, now, it was so direfully impressed at tea-time by Mr. Snagsby's account of the inquiry at which he had assisted that at supper-time she projected herself into the kitchen, preceded by a flying Dutch cheese, and fell into a fit of unusual duration, which she only came out of to go into another, and another, and so on through a chain of fits, with short intervals between, of which she has pathetically availed herself by consuming them in entreaties to Mrs. Snagsby not to give her warning "when she quite comes to," and also in appeals to the whole establishment to lay her down on the stones and go to bed. Hence, Mr. Snagsby, at last hearing the cock at the little dairy in Cursitor Street go into that disinterested ecstasy of his on the subject of daylight, says, drawing a long breath, though the most patient of men, "I thought you was dead, I am sure!"

What question this enthusiastic fowl supposes he settles when he strains himself to such an extent, or why he should thus crow (so men crow on various triumphant public occasions, however) about what cannot be of any moment to him, is his affair. It is enough that daylight comes, morning comes, noon comes.

Then the active and intelligent, who has got into the morning papers as such, comes with his pauper company to Mr. Krook's and bears off the body of our dear brother here departed to a hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene, whence malignant diseases are communicated to the bodies of our dear brothers and sisters who have not departed, while our dear brothers and sisters who hang about official back-stairs—would to heaven they HAD departed!—are very complacent and agreeable. Into a beastly scrap of ground which a Turk would reject as a savage abomination and a Caffre would shudder at, they bring our dear brother here departed to receive Christian burial.

With houses looking on, on every side, save where a reeking little tunnel of a court gives access to the iron gate—with every villainy of life in action close on death, and every poisonous element of death in action close on life—here they lower our dear brother down a foot or two, here sow him in corruption, to be raised in corruption: an avenging ghost at many a sick-bedside, a shameful testimony to future ages how civilization and barbarism walked this boastful island together.

Come night, come darkness, for you cannot come too soon or stay too long by such a place as this! Come, straggling lights into the windows of the ugly houses; and you who do iniquity therein, do it at least with this dread scene shut out! Come, flame of gas, burning so sullenly above the iron gate, on which the poisoned air deposits its witch-ointment slimy to the touch! It is well that you should call to every passerby, "Look here!"

With the night comes a slouching figure through the tunnel-court to the outside of the iron gate. It holds the gate with its hands and looks in between the bars, stands looking in for a little while.

It then, with an old broom it carries, softly sweeps the step and makes the archway clean. It does so very busily and trimly, looks in again a little while, and so departs.

Jo, is it thou? Well, well! Though a rejected witness, who "can't exactly say" what will be done to him in greater hands than men's, thou art not quite in outer darkness. There is something like a distant ray of light in thy muttered reason for this: "He wos wery good to me, he wos!"

CHAPTER XII. On the Watch

It has left off raining down in Lincolnshire at last, and Chesney Wold has taken heart. Mrs. Rouncewell is full of hospitable cares, for Sir Leicester and my Lady are coming home from Paris. The fashionable intelligence has found it out and communicates the glad tidings to benighted England. It has also found out that they will entertain a brilliant and distinguished circle of the ELITE of the BEAU MONDE (the fashionable intelligence is weak in English, but a giant refreshed in French) at the ancient and hospitable family seat in Lincolnshire.

For the greater honour of the brilliant and distinguished circle, and of Chesney Wold into the bargain, the broken arch of the bridge in the park is mended; and the water, now retired within its proper limits and again spanned gracefully, makes a figure in the prospect from the house. The clear, cold sunshine glances into the brittle woods and approvingly beholds the sharp wind scattering the leaves and drying the moss. It glides over the park after the moving shadows of the clouds, and chases them, and never catches them, all day. It looks in at the windows and touches the ancestral portraits with bars and patches of brightness never contemplated by the painters. Athwart the picture of my Lady, over the great chimney-piece, it throws a broad bend-sinister of light that strikes down crookedly into the hearth and seems to rend it.

Through the same cold sunshine and the same sharp wind, my Lady and Sir Leicester, in their travelling chariot (my Lady's woman and Sir Leicester's man affectionate in the rumble), start for home. With a considerable amount of jingling and whip-cracking, and many plunging demonstrations on the part of two bare-backed horses and two centaurs with glazed hats, jack-boots, and flowing manes and tails, they rattle out of the yard of the Hotel Bristol in the Place Vendome and canter between the sun-and-shadow-chequered colonnade of the Rue de Rivoli and the garden of the ill-fated palace of a headless king and queen, off by the Place of Concord, and the Elysian Fields, and the Gate of the Star, out of Paris.

Sooth to say, they cannot go away too fast, for even here my Lady Dedlock has been bored to death. Concert, assembly, opera, theatre, drive, nothing is new to my Lady under the worn-out heavens. Only last Sunday, when poor wretches were gay—within the walls playing with children among the clipped trees and the statues in the Palace Garden; walking, a score abreast, in the Elysian Fields, made more Elysian by performing dogs and wooden horses; between whiles filtering (a few) through the gloomy Cathedral of Our Lady to say a word or two at the base of a pillar within flare of a rusty little gridiron-full of gusty little tapers; without the walls encompassing Paris with dancing, love-making, wine-drinking, tobacco-smoking, tomb-visiting, billiard card and domino playing, quack-doctoring, and much murderous refuse, animate and inanimate—only last Sunday, my Lady, in the desolation of Boredom and the clutch of Giant Despair, almost hated her own maid for being in spirits.

She cannot, therefore, go too fast from Paris. Weariness of soul lies before her, as it lies behind—her Ariel has put a girdle of it round the whole earth, and it cannot be unclasped—but the imperfect remedy is always to fly from the last place where it has been experienced. Fling Paris back into the distance, then, exchanging it for endless avenues and cross-avenues of wintry trees! And, when next beheld, let it be some leagues away, with the Gate of the Star a white speck glittering in the sun, and the city a mere mound in a plain—two dark square towers rising out of it, and light and shadow descending on it aslant, like the angels in Jacob's dream!

Sir Leicester is generally in a complacent state, and rarely bored. When he has nothing else to do, he can always contemplate his own greatness. It is a considerable advantage to a man to have so inexhaustible a subject. After reading his letters, he leans back in his corner of the carriage and generally reviews his importance to society.

"You have an unusual amount of correspondence this morning?" says my Lady after a long time. She is fatigued with reading. Has almost read a page in twenty miles.

"Nothing in it, though. Nothing whatever."

"I saw one of Mr. Tulkinghorn's long effusions, I think?"

"You see everything," says Sir Leicester with admiration.

"Ha!" sighs my Lady. "He is the most tiresome of men!"

"He sends—I really beg your pardon—he sends," says Sir Leicester, selecting the letter and unfolding it, "a message to you. Our stopping to change horses as I came to his postscript drove it out of my memory. I beg you'll excuse me. He says—" Sir Leicester is so long in taking out his eye-glass and adjusting it that my Lady looks a little irritated. "He says 'In the matter of the right of way—' I beg your pardon, that's not the place. He says—yes! Here I have it! He says, 'I beg my respectful compliments to my Lady, who, I hope, has benefited by the change. Will you do me the favour to mention (as it may interest her) that I have something to tell her on her return in reference to the person who copied the affidavit in the Chancery suit, which so powerfully stimulated her curiosity. I have seen him.'"

My Lady, leaning forward, looks out of her window.

"That's the message," observes Sir Leicester.

"I should like to walk a little," says my Lady, still looking out of her window.

"Walk?" repeats Sir Leicester in a tone of surprise.

"I should like to walk a little," says my Lady with unmistakable distinctness. "Please to stop the carriage."

The carriage is stopped, the affectionate man alights from the rumble, opens the door, and lets down the steps, obedient to an impatient motion of my Lady's hand. My Lady alights so quickly and walks away so quickly that Sir Leicester, for all his scrupulous politeness, is unable to assist her, and is left behind. A space of a minute or two has elapsed before he comes up with her. She smiles, looks very handsome, takes his arm, lounges with him for a quarter of a mile, is very much bored, and resumes her seat in the carriage.

The rattle and clatter continue through the greater part of three days, with more or less of bell-jingling and whip-cracking, and more or less plunging of centaurs and bare-backed horses. Their courtly politeness to each other at the hotels where they tarry is the theme of general admiration. Though my Lord IS a little aged for my Lady, says Madame, the hostess of the Golden Ape, and though he might be her amiable father, one can see at a glance that they love each other. One observes my Lord with his white hair, standing, hat in hand, to help my Lady to and from the carriage. One observes my Lady, how recognisant of my Lord's politeness, with an inclination of her gracious head and the concession of her so-genteel fingers! It is ravishing!

The sea has no appreciation of great men, but knocks them about like the small fry. It is habitually hard upon Sir Leicester, whose countenance it greenly mottles in the manner of sage-cheese and in whose aristocratic system it effects a dismal revolution. It is the Radical of Nature to him. Nevertheless, his dignity gets over it after stopping to refit, and he goes on with my Lady for Chesney Wold, lying only one night in London on the way to Lincolnshire.

Through the same cold sunlight, colder as the day declines, and through the same sharp wind, sharper as the separate shadows of bare trees gloom together in the woods, and as the Ghost's Walk, touched at the western corner by a pile of fire in the sky, resigns itself to coming night, they drive into the park. The rooks, swinging in their lofty houses in the elm-tree avenue, seem to discuss the question of the occupancy of the carriage as it passes underneath, some agreeing that Sir Leicester and my Lady are come down, some arguing with malcontents who won't admit it, now all consenting to consider the question disposed of, now all breaking out again in violent debate, incited by one obstinate and drowsy bird who will persist in putting in a last contradictory croak. Leaving them to swing and caw, the travelling chariot rolls on to the house, where fires gleam warmly through some of the windows, though not through so many as to give an inhabited expression to the darkening mass of front. But the brilliant and distinguished circle will soon do that.

Mrs. Rouncewell is in attendance and receives Sir Leicester's customary shake of the hand with a profound curtsy.

"How do you do, Mrs. Rouncewell? I am glad to see you."

"I hope I have the honour of welcoming you in good health, Sir Leicester?"

"In excellent health, Mrs. Rouncewell."

"My Lady is looking charmingly well," says Mrs. Rouncewell with another curtsy.

My Lady signifies, without profuse expenditure of words, that she is as wearily well as she can hope to be.

But Rosa is in the distance, behind the housekeeper; and my Lady, who has not subdued the quickness of her observation, whatever else she may have conquered, asks, "Who is that girl?"

"A young scholar of mine, my Lady. Rosa."

"Come here, Rosa!" Lady Dedlock beckons her, with even an appearance of interest. "Why, do you know how pretty you are, child?" she says, touching her shoulder with her two forefingers.

Rosa, very much abashed, says, "No, if you please, my Lady!" and glances up, and glances down, and don't know where to look, but looks all the prettier.

"How old are you?"

"Nineteen, my Lady."

"Nineteen," repeats my Lady thoughtfully. "Take care they don't spoil you by flattery."

"Yes, my Lady."

My Lady taps her dimpled cheek with the same delicate gloved fingers and goes on to the foot of the oak staircase, where Sir Leicester pauses for her as her knightly escort. A staring old Dedlock in a panel, as large as life and as dull, looks as if he didn't know what to make of it, which was probably his general state of mind in the days of Queen Elizabeth.

That evening, in the housekeeper's room, Rosa can do nothing but murmur Lady Dedlock's praises. She is so affable, so graceful, so beautiful, so elegant; has such a sweet voice and such a thrilling touch that Rosa can feel it yet! Mrs. Rouncewell confirms all this, not without personal pride, reserving only the one point of affability. Mrs. Rouncewell is not quite sure as to that. Heaven forbid that she should say a syllable in dispraise of any member of that excellent family, above all, of my Lady, whom the whole world admires; but if my Lady would only be "a little more free," not quite so cold and distant, Mrs. Rouncewell thinks she would be more affable.

"'Tis almost a pity," Mrs. Rouncewell adds—only "almost" because it borders on impiety to suppose that anything could be better than it is, in such an express dispensation as the Dedlock affairs—"that my Lady has no family. If she had had a daughter now, a grown young lady, to interest her, I think she would have had the only kind of excellence she wants."

"Might not that have made her still more proud, grandmother?" says Watt, who has been home and come back again, he is such a good grandson.

"More and most, my dear," returns the housekeeper with dignity, "are words it's not my place to use—nor so much as to hear—applied to any drawback on my Lady."

"I beg your pardon, grandmother. But she is proud, is she not?"

"If she is, she has reason to be. The Dedlock family have always reason to be."

"Well," says Watt, "it's to be hoped they line out of their prayer-books a certain passage for the common people about pride and vainglory. Forgive me, grandmother! Only a joke!"

"Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock, my dear, are not fit subjects for joking."

"Sir Leicester is no joke by any means," says Watt, "and I humbly ask his pardon. I suppose, grandmother, that even with the family and their guests down here, there is no objection to my prolonging my stay at the Dedlock Arms for a day or two, as any other traveller might?"

"Surely, none in the world, child."

"I am glad of that," says Watt, "because I have an inexpressible desire to extend my knowledge of this beautiful neighbourhood."

He happens to glance at Rosa, who looks down and is very shy indeed. But according to the old superstition, it should be Rosa's ears that burn, and not her fresh bright cheeks, for my Lady's maid is holding forth about her at this moment with surpassing energy.

My Lady's maid is a Frenchwoman of two and thirty, from somewhere in the southern country about Avignon and Marseilles, a large-eyed brown woman with black hair who would be handsome but for a certain feline mouth and general uncomfortable tightness of face, rendering the jaws too eager and the skull too prominent. There is something indefinably keen and wan about her anatomy, and she has a watchful way of looking out of the corners of her eyes without turning her head which could be pleasantly dispensed with, especially when she is in an ill humour and near knives. Through all the good taste of her dress and little adornments, these objections so express themselves that she seems to go about like a very neat she-wolf imperfectly tamed. Besides being accomplished in all the knowledge appertaining to her post, she is almost an Englishwoman in her acquaintance with the language; consequently, she is in no want of words to shower upon Rosa for having attracted my Lady's attention, and she pours them out with such grim ridicule as she sits at dinner that her companion, the affectionate man, is rather relieved when she arrives at the spoon stage of that performance.

Ha, ha, ha! She, Hortense, been in my Lady's service since five years and always kept at the distance, and this doll, this puppet, caressed—absolutely caressed—by my Lady on the moment of her arriving at the house! Ha, ha, ha! "And do you know how pretty you are, child?" "No, my Lady." You are right there! "And how old are you, child! And take care they do not spoil you by flattery, child!" Oh, how droll! It is the BEST thing altogether.

In short, it is such an admirable thing that Mademoiselle Hortense can't forget it; but at meals for days afterwards, even among her countrywomen and others attached in like capacity to the troop of visitors, relapses into silent enjoyment of the joke—an enjoyment expressed, in her own convivial manner, by an additional tightness of face, thin elongation of compressed lips, and sidewise look, which intense appreciation of humour is frequently reflected in my Lady's mirrors when my Lady is not among them.

All the mirrors in the house are brought into action now, many of them after a long blank. They reflect handsome faces, simpering faces, youthful faces, faces of threescore and ten that will not submit to be old; the entire collection of faces that have come to pass a January week or two at Chesney Wold, and which the fashionable intelligence, a mighty hunter before the Lord, hunts with a keen scent, from their breaking cover at the Court of St. James's to their being run down to death. The place in Lincolnshire is all alive. By day guns and voices are heard ringing in the woods, horsemen and carriages enliven the park roads, servants and hangers-on pervade the village and the Dedlock Arms. Seen by night from distant openings in the trees, the row of windows in the long drawing-room, where my Lady's picture hangs over the great chimney-piece, is like a row of jewels set in a black frame. On Sunday the chill little church is almost warmed by so much gallant company, and the general flavour of the Dedlock dust is quenched in delicate perfumes.

The brilliant and distinguished circle comprehends within it no contracted amount of education, sense, courage, honour, beauty, and virtue. Yet there is something a little wrong about it in despite of its immense advantages. What can it be?

Dandyism? There is no King George the Fourth now (more the pity) to set the dandy fashion; there are no clear-starched jack-towel neckcloths, no short-waisted coats, no false calves, no stays. There are no caricatures, now, of effeminate exquisites so arrayed, swooning in opera boxes with excess of delight and being revived by other dainty creatures poking long-necked scent-bottles at their noses. There is no beau whom it takes four men at once to shake into his buckskins, or who goes to see all the executions, or who is troubled with the self-reproach of having once consumed a pea. But is there dandyism in the brilliant and distinguished circle notwithstanding, dandyism of a more mischievous sort, that has got below the surface and is doing less harmless things than jack-towelling itself and stopping its own digestion, to which no rational person need particularly object?

Why, yes. It cannot be disguised. There ARE at Chesney Wold this January week some ladies and gentlemen of the newest fashion, who have set up a dandyism—in religion, for instance. Who in mere lackadaisical want of an emotion have agreed upon a little dandy talk about the vulgar wanting faith in things in general, meaning in the things that have been tried and found wanting, as though a low fellow should unaccountably lose faith in a bad shilling after finding it out! Who would make the vulgar very picturesque and faithful by putting back the hands upon the clock of time and cancelling a few hundred years of history.

There are also ladies and gentlemen of another fashion, not so new, but very elegant, who have agreed to put a smooth glaze on the world and to keep down all its realities. For whom everything must be languid and pretty. Who have found out the perpetual stoppage. Who are to rejoice at nothing and be sorry for nothing. Who are not to be disturbed by ideas. On whom even the fine arts, attending in powder and walking backward like the Lord Chamberlain, must array themselves in the milliners' and tailors' patterns of past generations and be particularly careful not to be in earnest or to receive any impress from the moving age.

Then there is my Lord Boodle, of considerable reputation with his party, who has known what office is and who tells Sir Leicester Dedlock with much gravity, after dinner, that he really does not see to what the present age is tending. A debate is not what a debate used to be; the House is not what the House used to be; even a Cabinet is not what it formerly was. He perceives with astonishment that supposing the present government to be overthrown, the limited choice of the Crown, in the formation of a new ministry, would lie between Lord Coodle and Sir Thomas Doodle—supposing it to be impossible for the Duke of Foodle to act with Goodle, which may be assumed to be the case in consequence of the breach arising out of that affair with Hoodle. Then, giving the Home Department and the leadership of the House of Commons to Joodle, the Exchequer to Koodle, the Colonies to Loodle, and the Foreign Office to Moodle, what are you to do with Noodle? You can't offer him the Presidency of the Council; that is reserved for Poodle. You can't put him in the Woods and Forests; that is hardly good enough for Quoodle. What follows? That the country is shipwrecked, lost, and gone to pieces (as is made manifest to the patriotism of Sir Leicester Dedlock) because you can't provide for Noodle!

On the other hand, the Right Honourable William Buffy, M.P., contends across the table with some one else that the shipwreck of the country—about which there is no doubt; it is only the manner of it that is in question—is attributable to Cuffy. If you had done with Cuffy what you ought to have done when he first came into Parliament, and had prevented him from going over to Duffy, you would have got him into alliance with Fuffy, you would have had with you the weight attaching as a smart debater to Guffy, you would have brought to bear upon the elections the wealth of Huffy, you would have got in for three counties Juffy, Kuffy, and Luffy, and you would have strengthened your administration by the official knowledge and the business habits of Muffy. All this, instead of being as you now are, dependent on the mere caprice of Puffy!

As to this point, and as to some minor topics, there are differences of opinion; but it is perfectly clear to the brilliant and distinguished circle, all round, that nobody is in question but Boodle and his retinue, and Buffy and HIS retinue. These are the great actors for whom the stage is reserved. A People there are, no doubt—a certain large number of supernumeraries, who are to be occasionally addressed, and relied upon for shouts and choruses, as on the theatrical stage; but Boodle and Buffy, their followers and families, their heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns, are the born first-actors, managers, and leaders, and no others can appear upon the scene for ever and ever.

In this, too, there is perhaps more dandyism at Chesney Wold than the brilliant and distinguished circle will find good for itself in the long run. For it is, even with the stillest and politest circles, as with the circle the necromancer draws around him—very strange appearances may be seen in active motion outside. With this difference, that being realities and not phantoms, there is the greater danger of their breaking in.

Chesney Wold is quite full anyhow, so full that a burning sense of injury arises in the breasts of ill-lodged ladies'-maids, and is not to he extinguished. Only one room is empty. It is a turret chamber of the third order of merit, plainly but comfortably furnished and having an old-fashioned business air. It is Mr. Tulkinghorn's room, and is never bestowed on anybody else, for he may come at any time. He is not come yet. It is his quiet habit to walk across the park from the village in fine weather, to drop into this room as if he had never been out of it since he was last seen there, to request a servant to inform Sir Leicester that he is arrived in case he should be wanted, and to appear ten minutes before dinner in the shadow of the library-door. He sleeps in his turret with a complaining flag-staff over his head, and has some leads outside on which, any fine morning when he is down here, his black figure may be seen walking before breakfast like a larger species of rook.

Every day before dinner, my Lady looks for him in the dusk of the library, but he is not there. Every day at dinner, my Lady glances down the table for the vacant place that would be waiting to receive him if he had just arrived, but there is no vacant place. Every night my Lady casually asks her maid, "Is Mr. Tulkinghorn come?"

Every night the answer is, "No, my Lady, not yet."

One night, while having her hair undressed, my Lady loses herself in deep thought after this reply until she sees her own brooding face in the opposite glass, and a pair of black eyes curiously observing her.

"Be so good as to attend," says my Lady then, addressing the reflection of Hortense, "to your business. You can contemplate your beauty at another time."

"Pardon! It was your Ladyship's beauty."

"That," says my Lady, "you needn't contemplate at all."

At length, one afternoon a little before sunset, when the bright groups of figures which have for the last hour or two enlivened the Ghost's Walk are all dispersed and only Sir Leicester and my Lady remain upon the terrace, Mr. Tulkinghorn appears. He comes towards them at his usual methodical pace, which is never quickened, never slackened. He wears his usual expressionless mask—if it be a mask—and carries family secrets in every limb of his body and every crease of his dress. Whether his whole soul is devoted to the great or whether he yields them nothing beyond the services he sells is his personal secret. He keeps it, as he keeps the secrets of his clients; he is his own client in that matter, and will never betray himself.

"How do you do, Mr. Tulkinghorn?" says Sir Leicester, giving him his hand.

Mr. Tulkinghorn is quite well. Sir Leicester is quite well. My Lady is quite well. All highly satisfactory. The lawyer, with his hands behind him, walks at Sir Leicester's side along the terrace. My Lady walks upon the other side.

"We expected you before," says Sir Leicester. A gracious observation. As much as to say, "Mr. Tulkinghorn, we remember your existence when you are not here to remind us of it by your presence. We bestow a fragment of our minds upon you, sir, you see!"

Mr. Tulkinghorn, comprehending it, inclines his head and says he is much obliged.

"I should have come down sooner," he explains, "but that I have been much engaged with those matters in the several suits between yourself and Boythorn."

"A man of a very ill-regulated mind," observes Sir Leicester with severity. "An extremely dangerous person in any community. A man of a very low character of mind."

"He is obstinate," says Mr. Tulkinghorn.

"It is natural to such a man to be so," says Sir Leicester, looking most profoundly obstinate himself. "I am not at all surprised to hear it."

"The only question is," pursues the lawyer, "whether you will give up anything."

"No, sir," replies Sir Leicester. "Nothing. I give up?"

"I don't mean anything of importance. That, of course, I know you would not abandon. I mean any minor point."

"Mr. Tulkinghorn," returns Sir Leicester, "there can be no minor point between myself and Mr. Boythorn. If I go farther, and observe that I cannot readily conceive how ANY right of mine can be a minor point, I speak not so much in reference to myself as an individual as in reference to the family position I have it in charge to maintain."

Mr. Tulkinghorn inclines his head again. "I have now my instructions," he says. "Mr. Boythorn will give us a good deal of trouble—"

"It is the character of such a mind, Mr. Tulkinghorn," Sir Leicester interrupts him, "TO give trouble. An exceedingly ill-conditioned, levelling person. A person who, fifty years ago, would probably have been tried at the Old Bailey for some demagogue proceeding, and severely punished—if not," adds Sir Leicester after a moment's pause, "if not hanged, drawn, and quartered."

Sir Leicester appears to discharge his stately breast of a burden in passing this capital sentence, as if it were the next satisfactory thing to having the sentence executed.

"But night is coming on," says he, "and my Lady will take cold. My dear, let us go in."

As they turn towards the hall-door, Lady Dedlock addresses Mr. Tulkinghorn for the first time.

"You sent me a message respecting the person whose writing I happened to inquire about. It was like you to remember the circumstance; I had quite forgotten it. Your message reminded me of it again. I can't imagine what association I had with a hand like that, but I surely had some."

"You had some?" Mr. Tulkinghorn repeats.

"Oh, yes!" returns my Lady carelessly. "I think I must have had some. And did you really take the trouble to find out the writer of that actual thing—what is it!—affidavit?"

"Yes."

"How very odd!"

They pass into a sombre breakfast-room on the ground floor, lighted in the day by two deep windows. It is now twilight. The fire glows brightly on the panelled wall and palely on the window-glass, where, through the cold reflection of the blaze, the colder landscape shudders in the wind and a grey mist creeps along, the only traveller besides the waste of clouds.

My Lady lounges in a great chair in the chimney-corner, and Sir Leicester takes another great chair opposite. The lawyer stands before the fire with his hand out at arm's length, shading his face. He looks across his arm at my Lady.

"Yes," he says, "I inquired about the man, and found him. And, what is very strange, I found him—"

"Not to be any out-of-the-way person, I am afraid!" Lady Dedlock languidly anticipates.

"I found him dead."

"Oh, dear me!" remonstrated Sir Leicester. Not so much shocked by the fact as by the fact of the fact being mentioned.

"I was directed to his lodging—a miserable, poverty-stricken place—and I found him dead."

"You will excuse me, Mr. Tulkinghorn," observes Sir Leicester. "I think the less said—"

"Pray, Sir Leicester, let me hear the story out" (it is my Lady speaking). "It is quite a story for twilight. How very shocking! Dead?"

Mr. Tulkinghorn re-asserts it by another inclination of his head. "Whether by his own hand—"

"Upon my honour!" cries Sir Leicester. "Really!"

"Do let me hear the story!" says my Lady.

"Whatever you desire, my dear. But, I must say—"

"No, you mustn't say! Go on, Mr. Tulkinghorn."

Sir Leicester's gallantry concedes the point, though he still feels that to bring this sort of squalor among the upper classes is really—really—

"I was about to say," resumes the lawyer with undisturbed calmness, "that whether he had died by his own hand or not, it was beyond my power to tell you. I should amend that phrase, however, by saying that he had unquestionably died of his own act, though whether by his own deliberate intention or by mischance can never certainly be known. The coroner's jury found that he took the poison accidentally."

"And what kind of man," my Lady asks, "was this deplorable creature?"

"Very difficult to say," returns the lawyer, shaking his head. "He had lived so wretchedly and was so neglected, with his gipsy colour and his wild black hair and beard, that I should have considered him the commonest of the common. The surgeon had a notion that he had once been something better, both in appearance and condition."

"What did they call the wretched being?"

"They called him what he had called himself, but no one knew his name."

"Not even any one who had attended on him?"

"No one had attended on him. He was found dead. In fact, I found him."

"Without any clue to anything more?"

"Without any; there was," says the lawyer meditatively, "an old portmanteau, but—No, there were no papers."

During the utterance of every word of this short dialogue, Lady Dedlock and Mr. Tulkinghorn, without any other alteration in their customary deportment, have looked very steadily at one another—as was natural, perhaps, in the discussion of so unusual a subject. Sir Leicester has looked at the fire, with the general expression of the Dedlock on the staircase. The story being told, he renews his stately protest, saying that as it is quite clear that no association in my Lady's mind can possibly be traceable to this poor wretch (unless he was a begging-letter writer), he trusts to hear no more about a subject so far removed from my Lady's station.

"Certainly, a collection of horrors," says my Lady, gathering up her mantles and furs, "but they interest one for the moment! Have the kindness, Mr. Tulkinghorn, to open the door for me."

Mr. Tulkinghorn does so with deference and holds it open while she passes out. She passes close to him, with her usual fatigued manner and insolent grace. They meet again at dinner—again, next day—again, for many days in succession. Lady Dedlock is always the same exhausted deity, surrounded by worshippers, and terribly liable to be bored to death, even while presiding at her own shrine. Mr. Tulkinghorn is always the same speechless repository of noble confidences, so oddly but of place and yet so perfectly at home. They appear to take as little note of one another as any two people enclosed within the same walls could. But whether each evermore watches and suspects the other, evermore mistrustful of some great reservation; whether each is evermore prepared at all points for the other, and never to be taken unawares; what each would give to know how much the other knows—all this is hidden, for the time, in their own hearts.

CHAPTER XIII. Esther's Narrative

We held many consultations about what Richard was to be, first without Mr. Jarndyce, as he had requested, and afterwards with him, but it was a long time before we seemed to make progress. Richard said he was ready for anything. When Mr. Jarndyce doubted whether he might not already be too old to enter the Navy, Richard said he had thought of that, and perhaps he was. When Mr. Jarndyce asked him what he thought of the Army, Richard said he had thought of that, too, and it wasn't a bad idea. When Mr. Jarndyce advised him to try and decide within himself whether his old preference for the sea was an ordinary boyish inclination or a strong impulse, Richard answered, Well he really HAD tried very often, and he couldn't make out.

"How much of this indecision of character," Mr. Jarndyce said to me, "is chargeable on that incomprehensible heap of uncertainty and procrastination on which he has been thrown from his birth, I don't pretend to say; but that Chancery, among its other sins, is responsible for some of it, I can plainly see. It has engendered or confirmed in him a habit of putting off—and trusting to this, that, and the other chance, without knowing what chance—and dismissing everything as unsettled, uncertain, and confused. The character of much older and steadier people may be even changed by the circumstances surrounding them. It would be too much to expect that a boy's, in its formation, should be the subject of such influences and escape them."

I felt this to be true; though if I may venture to mention what I thought besides, I thought it much to be regretted that Richard's education had not counteracted those influences or directed his character. He had been eight years at a public school and had learnt, I understood, to make Latin verses of several sorts in the most admirable manner. But I never heard that it had been anybody's business to find out what his natural bent was, or where his failings lay, or to adapt any kind of knowledge to HIM. HE had been adapted to the verses and had learnt the art of making them to such perfection that if he had remained at school until he was of age, I suppose he could only have gone on making them over and over again unless he had enlarged his education by forgetting how to do it. Still, although I had no doubt that they were very beautiful, and very improving, and very sufficient for a great many purposes of life, and always remembered all through life, I did doubt whether Richard would not have profited by some one studying him a little, instead of his studying them quite so much.

To be sure, I knew nothing of the subject and do not even now know whether the young gentlemen of classic Rome or Greece made verses to the same extent—or whether the young gentlemen of any country ever did.

"I haven't the least idea," said Richard, musing, "what I had better be. Except that I am quite sure I don't want to go into the Church, it's a toss-up."

"You have no inclination in Mr. Kenge's way?" suggested Mr. Jarndyce.

"I don't know that, sir!" replied Richard. "I am fond of boating. Articled clerks go a good deal on the water. It's a capital profession!"

"Surgeon—" suggested Mr. Jarndyce.

"That's the thing, sir!" cried Richard.

I doubt if he had ever once thought of it before.

"That's the thing, sir," repeated Richard with the greatest enthusiasm. "We have got it at last. M.R.C.S.!"

He was not to be laughed out of it, though he laughed at it heartily. He said he had chosen his profession, and the more he thought of it, the more he felt that his destiny was clear; the art of healing was the art of all others for him. Mistrusting that he only came to this conclusion because, having never had much chance of finding out for himself what he was fitted for and having never been guided to the discovery, he was taken by the newest idea and was glad to get rid of the trouble of consideration, I wondered whether the Latin verses often ended in this or whether Richard's was a solitary case.

Mr. Jarndyce took great pains to talk with him seriously and to put it to his good sense not to deceive himself in so important a matter. Richard was a little grave after these interviews, but invariably told Ada and me that it was all right, and then began to talk about something else.

"By heaven!" cried Mr. Boythorn, who interested himself strongly in the subject—though I need not say that, for he could do nothing weakly; "I rejoice to find a young gentleman of spirit and gallantry devoting himself to that noble profession! The more spirit there is in it, the better for mankind and the worse for those mercenary task-masters and low tricksters who delight in putting that illustrious art at a disadvantage in the world. By all that is base and despicable," cried Mr. Boythorn, "the treatment of surgeons aboard ship is such that I would submit the legs—both legs—of every member of the Admiralty Board to a compound fracture and render it a transportable offence in any qualified practitioner to set them if the system were not wholly changed in eight and forty hours!"

"Wouldn't you give them a week?" asked Mr. Jarndyce.

"No!" cried Mr. Boythorn firmly. "Not on any consideration! Eight and forty hours! As to corporations, parishes, vestry-boards, and similar gatherings of jolter-headed clods who assemble to exchange such speeches that, by heaven, they ought to be worked in quicksilver mines for the short remainder of their miserable existence, if it were only to prevent their detestable English from contaminating a language spoken in the presence of the sun—as to those fellows, who meanly take advantage of the ardour of gentlemen in the pursuit of knowledge to recompense the inestimable services of the best years of their lives, their long study, and their expensive education with pittances too small for the acceptance of clerks, I would have the necks of every one of them wrung and their skulls arranged in Surgeons' Hall for the contemplation of the whole profession in order that its younger members might understand from actual measurement, in early life, HOW thick skulls may become!"

He wound up this vehement declaration by looking round upon us with a most agreeable smile and suddenly thundering, "Ha, ha, ha!" over and over again, until anybody else might have been expected to be quite subdued by the exertion.

As Richard still continued to say that he was fixed in his choice after repeated periods for consideration had been recommended by Mr. Jarndyce and had expired, and he still continued to assure Ada and me in the same final manner that it was "all right," it became advisable to take Mr. Kenge into council. Mr. Kenge, therefore, came down to dinner one day, and leaned back in his chair, and turned his eye-glasses over and over, and spoke in a sonorous voice, and did exactly what I remembered to have seen him do when I was a little girl.

"Ah!" said Mr. Kenge. "Yes. Well! A very good profession, Mr. Jarndyce, a very good profession."

"The course of study and preparation requires to be diligently pursued," observed my guardian with a glance at Richard.

"Oh, no doubt," said Mr. Kenge. "Diligently."

"But that being the case, more or less, with all pursuits that are worth much," said Mr. Jarndyce, "it is not a special consideration which another choice would be likely to escape."

"Truly," said Mr. Kenge. "And Mr. Richard Carstone, who has so meritoriously acquitted himself in the—shall I say the classic shades?—in which his youth had been passed, will, no doubt, apply the habits, if not the principles and practice, of versification in that tongue in which a poet was said (unless I mistake) to be born, not made, to the more eminently practical field of action on which he enters."

"You may rely upon it," said Richard in his off-hand manner, "that I shall go at it and do my best."

"Very well, Mr. Jarndyce!" said Mr. Kenge, gently nodding his head. "Really, when we are assured by Mr. Richard that he means to go at it and to do his best," nodding feelingly and smoothly over those expressions, "I would submit to you that we have only to inquire into the best mode of carrying out the object of his ambition. Now, with reference to placing Mr. Richard with some sufficiently eminent practitioner. Is there any one in view at present?"

"No one, Rick, I think?" said my guardian.

"No one, sir," said Richard.

"Quite so!" observed Mr. Kenge. "As to situation, now. Is there any particular feeling on that head?"

"N—no," said Richard.

"Quite so!" observed Mr. Kenge again.

"I should like a little variety," said Richard; "I mean a good range of experience."

"Very requisite, no doubt," returned Mr. Kenge. "I think this may be easily arranged, Mr. Jarndyce? We have only, in the first place, to discover a sufficiently eligible practitioner; and as soon as we make our want—and shall I add, our ability to pay a premium?—known, our only difficulty will be in the selection of one from a large number. We have only, in the second place, to observe those little formalities which are rendered necessary by our time of life and our being under the guardianship of the court. We shall soon be—shall I say, in Mr. Richard's own light-hearted manner, 'going at it'—to our heart's content. It is a coincidence," said Mr. Kenge with a tinge of melancholy in his smile, "one of those coincidences which may or may not require an explanation beyond our present limited faculties, that I have a cousin in the medical profession. He might be deemed eligible by you and might be disposed to respond to this proposal. I can answer for him as little as for you, but he MIGHT!"

As this was an opening in the prospect, it was arranged that Mr. Kenge should see his cousin. And as Mr. Jarndyce had before proposed to take us to London for a few weeks, it was settled next day that we should make our visit at once and combine Richard's business with it.

Mr. Boythorn leaving us within a week, we took up our abode at a cheerful lodging near Oxford Street over an upholsterer's shop. London was a great wonder to us, and we were out for hours and hours at a time, seeing the sights, which appeared to be less capable of exhaustion than we were. We made the round of the principal theatres, too, with great delight, and saw all the plays that were worth seeing. I mention this because it was at the theatre that I began to be made uncomfortable again by Mr. Guppy.

I was sitting in front of the box one night with Ada, and Richard was in the place he liked best, behind Ada's chair, when, happening to look down into the pit, I saw Mr. Guppy, with his hair flattened down upon his head and woe depicted in his face, looking up at me. I felt all through the performance that he never looked at the actors but constantly looked at me, and always with a carefully prepared expression of the deepest misery and the profoundest dejection.

It quite spoiled my pleasure for that night because it was so very embarrassing and so very ridiculous. But from that time forth, we never went to the play without my seeing Mr. Guppy in the pit, always with his hair straight and flat, his shirt-collar turned down, and a general feebleness about him. If he were not there when we went in, and I began to hope he would not come and yielded myself for a little while to the interest of the scene, I was certain to encounter his languishing eyes when I least expected it and, from that time, to be quite sure that they were fixed upon me all the evening.

I really cannot express how uneasy this made me. If he would only have brushed up his hair or turned up his collar, it would have been bad enough; but to know that that absurd figure was always gazing at me, and always in that demonstrative state of despondency, put such a constraint upon me that I did not like to laugh at the play, or to cry at it, or to move, or to speak. I seemed able to do nothing naturally. As to escaping Mr. Guppy by going to the back of the box, I could not bear to do that because I knew Richard and Ada relied on having me next them and that they could never have talked together so happily if anybody else had been in my place. So there I sat, not knowing where to look—for wherever I looked, I knew Mr. Guppy's eyes were following me—and thinking of the dreadful expense to which this young man was putting himself on my account.

Sometimes I thought of telling Mr. Jarndyce. Then I feared that the young man would lose his situation and that I might ruin him. Sometimes I thought of confiding in Richard, but was deterred by the possibility of his fighting Mr. Guppy and giving him black eyes. Sometimes I thought, should I frown at him or shake my head. Then I felt I could not do it. Sometimes I considered whether I should write to his mother, but that ended in my being convinced that to open a correspondence would be to make the matter worse. I always came to the conclusion, finally, that I could do nothing. Mr. Guppy's perseverance, all this time, not only produced him regularly at any theatre to which we went, but caused him to appear in the crowd as we were coming out, and even to get up behind our fly—where I am sure I saw him, two or three times, struggling among the most dreadful spikes. After we got home, he haunted a post opposite our house. The upholsterer's where we lodged being at the corner of two streets, and my bedroom window being opposite the post, I was afraid to go near the window when I went upstairs, lest I should see him (as I did one moonlight night) leaning against the post and evidently catching cold. If Mr. Guppy had not been, fortunately for me, engaged in the daytime, I really should have had no rest from him.

While we were making this round of gaieties, in which Mr. Guppy so extraordinarily participated, the business which had helped to bring us to town was not neglected. Mr. Kenge's cousin was a Mr. Bayham Badger, who had a good practice at Chelsea and attended a large public institution besides. He was quite willing to receive Richard into his house and to superintend his studies, and as it seemed that those could be pursued advantageously under Mr. Badger's roof, and Mr. Badger liked Richard, and as Richard said he liked Mr. Badger "well enough," an agreement was made, the Lord Chancellor's consent was obtained, and it was all settled.

On the day when matters were concluded between Richard and Mr. Badger, we were all under engagement to dine at Mr. Badger's house. We were to be "merely a family party," Mrs. Badger's note said; and we found no lady there but Mrs. Badger herself. She was surrounded in the drawing-room by various objects, indicative of her painting a little, playing the piano a little, playing the guitar a little, playing the harp a little, singing a little, working a little, reading a little, writing poetry a little, and botanizing a little. She was a lady of about fifty, I should think, youthfully dressed, and of a very fine complexion. If I add to the little list of her accomplishments that she rouged a little, I do not mean that there was any harm in it.

Mr. Bayham Badger himself was a pink, fresh-faced, crisp-looking gentleman with a weak voice, white teeth, light hair, and surprised eyes, some years younger, I should say, than Mrs. Bayham Badger. He admired her exceedingly, but principally, and to begin with, on the curious ground (as it seemed to us) of her having had three husbands. We had barely taken our seats when he said to Mr. Jarndyce quite triumphantly, "You would hardly suppose that I am Mrs. Bayham Badger's third!"

"Indeed?" said Mr. Jarndyce.

"Her third!" said Mr. Badger. "Mrs. Bayham Badger has not the appearance, Miss Summerson, of a lady who has had two former husbands?"

I said "Not at all!"

"And most remarkable men!" said Mr. Badger in a tone of confidence. "Captain Swosser of the Royal Navy, who was Mrs. Badger's first husband, was a very distinguished officer indeed. The name of Professor Dingo, my immediate predecessor, is one of European reputation."

Mrs. Badger overheard him and smiled.

"Yes, my dear!" Mr. Badger replied to the smile, "I was observing to Mr. Jarndyce and Miss Summerson that you had had two former husbands—both very distinguished men. And they found it, as people generally do, difficult to believe."

"I was barely twenty," said Mrs. Badger, "when I married Captain Swosser of the Royal Navy. I was in the Mediterranean with him; I am quite a sailor. On the twelfth anniversary of my wedding-day, I became the wife of Professor Dingo."

"Of European reputation," added Mr. Badger in an undertone.

"And when Mr. Badger and myself were married," pursued Mrs. Badger, "we were married on the same day of the year. I had become attached to the day."

"So that Mrs. Badger has been married to three husbands—two of them highly distinguished men," said Mr. Badger, summing up the facts, "and each time upon the twenty-first of March at eleven in the forenoon!"

We all expressed our admiration.

"But for Mr. Badger's modesty," said Mr. Jarndyce, "I would take leave to correct him and say three distinguished men."

"Thank you, Mr. Jarndyce! What I always tell him!" observed Mrs. Badger.

"And, my dear," said Mr. Badger, "what do I always tell you? That without any affectation of disparaging such professional distinction as I may have attained (which our friend Mr. Carstone will have many opportunities of estimating), I am not so weak—no, really," said Mr. Badger to us generally, "so unreasonable—as to put my reputation on the same footing with such first-rate men as Captain Swosser and Professor Dingo. Perhaps you may be interested, Mr. Jarndyce," continued Mr. Bayham Badger, leading the way into the next drawing-room, "in this portrait of Captain Swosser. It was taken on his return home from the African station, where he had suffered from the fever of the country. Mrs. Badger considers it too yellow. But it's a very fine head. A very fine head!"

We all echoed, "A very fine head!"

"I feel when I look at it," said Mr. Badger, "'That's a man I should like to have seen!' It strikingly bespeaks the first-class man that Captain Swosser pre-eminently was. On the other side, Professor Dingo. I knew him well—attended him in his last illness—a speaking likeness! Over the piano, Mrs. Bayham Badger when Mrs. Swosser. Over the sofa, Mrs. Bayham Badger when Mrs. Dingo. Of Mrs. Bayham Badger IN ESSE, I possess the original and have no copy."

Dinner was now announced, and we went downstairs. It was a very genteel entertainment, very handsomely served. But the captain and the professor still ran in Mr. Badger's head, and as Ada and I had the honour of being under his particular care, we had the full benefit of them.

"Water, Miss Summerson? Allow me! Not in that tumbler, pray. Bring me the professor's goblet, James!"

Ada very much admired some artificial flowers under a glass.

"Astonishing how they keep!" said Mr. Badger. "They were presented to Mrs. Bayham Badger when she was in the Mediterranean."

He invited Mr. Jarndyce to take a glass of claret.

"Not that claret!" he said. "Excuse me! This is an occasion, and ON an occasion I produce some very special claret I happen to have. (James, Captain Swosser's wine!) Mr. Jarndyce, this is a wine that was imported by the captain, we will not say how many years ago. You will find it very curious. My dear, I shall he happy to take some of this wine with you. (Captain Swosser's claret to your mistress, James!) My love, your health!"

After dinner, when we ladies retired, we took Mrs. Badger's first and second husband with us. Mrs. Badger gave us in the drawing-room a biographical sketch of the life and services of Captain Swosser before his marriage and a more minute account of him dating from the time when he fell in love with her at a ball on board the Crippler, given to the officers of that ship when she lay in Plymouth Harbour.

"The dear old Crippler!" said Mrs. Badger, shaking her head. "She was a noble vessel. Trim, ship-shape, all a taunto, as Captain Swosser used to say. You must excuse me if I occasionally introduce a nautical expression; I was quite a sailor once. Captain Swosser loved that craft for my sake. When she was no longer in commission, he frequently said that if he were rich enough to buy her old hulk, he would have an inscription let into the timbers of the quarter-deck where we stood as partners in the dance to mark the spot where he fell—raked fore and aft (Captain Swosser used to say) by the fire from my tops. It was his naval way of mentioning my eyes."

Mrs. Badger shook her head, sighed, and looked in the glass.

"It was a great change from Captain Swosser to Professor Dingo," she resumed with a plaintive smile. "I felt it a good deal at first. Such an entire revolution in my mode of life! But custom, combined with science—particularly science—inured me to it. Being the professor's sole companion in his botanical excursions, I almost forgot that I had ever been afloat, and became quite learned. It is singular that the professor was the antipodes of Captain Swosser and that Mr. Badger is not in the least like either!"

We then passed into a narrative of the deaths of Captain Swosser and Professor Dingo, both of whom seem to have had very bad complaints. In the course of it, Mrs. Badger signified to us that she had never madly loved but once and that the object of that wild affection, never to be recalled in its fresh enthusiasm, was Captain Swosser. The professor was yet dying by inches in the most dismal manner, and Mrs. Badger was giving us imitations of his way of saying, with great difficulty, "Where is Laura? Let Laura give me my toast and water!" when the entrance of the gentlemen consigned him to the tomb.

Now, I observed that evening, as I had observed for some days past, that Ada and Richard were more than ever attached to each other's society, which was but natural, seeing that they were going to be separated so soon. I was therefore not very much surprised when we got home, and Ada and I retired upstairs, to find Ada more silent than usual, though I was not quite prepared for her coming into my arms and beginning to speak to me, with her face hidden.

"My darling Esther!" murmured Ada. "I have a great secret to tell you!"

A mighty secret, my pretty one, no doubt!

"What is it, Ada?"

"Oh, Esther, you would never guess!"

"Shall I try to guess?" said I.

"Oh, no! Don't! Pray don't!" cried Ada, very much startled by the idea of my doing so.

"Now, I wonder who it can be about?" said I, pretending to consider.

"It's about—" said Ada in a whisper. "It's about—my cousin Richard!"

"Well, my own!" said I, kissing her bright hair, which was all I could see. "And what about him?"

"Oh, Esther, you would never guess!"

It was so pretty to have her clinging to me in that way, hiding her face, and to know that she was not crying in sorrow but in a little glow of joy, and pride, and hope, that I would not help her just yet.

"He says—I know it's very foolish, we are both so young—but he says," with a burst of tears, "that he loves me dearly, Esther."

"Does he indeed?" said I. "I never heard of such a thing! Why, my pet of pets, I could have told you that weeks and weeks ago!"

To see Ada lift up her flushed face in joyful surprise, and hold me round the neck, and laugh, and cry, and blush, was so pleasant!

"Why, my darling," said I, "what a goose you must take me for! Your cousin Richard has been loving you as plainly as he could for I don't know how long!"

"And yet you never said a word about it!" cried Ada, kissing me.

"No, my love," said I. "I waited to be told."

"But now I have told you, you don't think it wrong of me, do you?" returned Ada. She might have coaxed me to say no if I had been the hardest-hearted duenna in the world. Not being that yet, I said no very freely.

"And now," said I, "I know the worst of it."

"Oh, that's not quite the worst of it, Esther dear!" cried Ada, holding me tighter and laying down her face again upon my breast.

"No?" said I. "Not even that?"

"No, not even that!" said Ada, shaking her head.

"Why, you never mean to say—" I was beginning in joke.

But Ada, looking up and smiling through her tear's, cried, "Yes, I do! You know, you know I do!" And then sobbed out, "With all my heart I do! With all my whole heart, Esther!"

I told her, laughing, why I had known that, too, just as well as I had known the other! And we sat before the fire, and I had all the talking to myself for a little while (though there was not much of it); and Ada was soon quiet and happy.

"Do you think my cousin John knows, dear Dame Durden?" she asked.

"Unless my cousin John is blind, my pet," said I, "I should think my cousin John knows pretty well as much as we know."

"We want to speak to him before Richard goes," said Ada timidly, "and we wanted you to advise us, and to tell him so. Perhaps you wouldn't mind Richard's coming in, Dame Durden?"

"Oh! Richard is outside, is he, my dear?" said I.

"I am not quite certain," returned Ada with a bashful simplicity that would have won my heart if she had not won it long before, "but I think he's waiting at the door."

There he was, of course. They brought a chair on either side of me, and put me between them, and really seemed to have fallen in love with me instead of one another, they were so confiding, and so trustful, and so fond of me. They went on in their own wild way for a little while—I never stopped them; I enjoyed it too much myself—and then we gradually fell to considering how young they were, and how there must be a lapse of several years before this early love could come to anything, and how it could come to happiness only if it were real and lasting and inspired them with a steady resolution to do their duty to each other, with constancy, fortitude, and perseverance, each always for the other's sake. Well! Richard said that he would work his fingers to the bone for Ada, and Ada said that she would work her fingers to the bone for Richard, and they called me all sorts of endearing and sensible names, and we sat there, advising and talking, half the night. Finally, before we parted, I gave them my promise to speak to their cousin John to-morrow.

So, when to-morrow came, I went to my guardian after breakfast, in the room that was our town-substitute for the growlery, and told him that I had it in trust to tell him something.

"Well, little woman," said he, shutting up his book, "if you have accepted the trust, there can be no harm in it."

"I hope not, guardian," said I. "I can guarantee that there is no secrecy in it. For it only happened yesterday."

"Aye? And what is it, Esther?"

"Guardian," said I, "you remember the happy night when first we came down to Bleak House? When Ada was singing in the dark room?"

I wished to call to his remembrance the look he had given me then. Unless I am much mistaken, I saw that I did so.

"Because—" said I with a little hesitation.

"Yes, my dear!" said he. "Don't hurry."

"Because," said I, "Ada and Richard have fallen in love. And have told each other so."

"Already!" cried my guardian, quite astonished.

"Yes!" said I. "And to tell you the truth, guardian, I rather expected it."

"The deuce you did!" said he.

He sat considering for a minute or two, with his smile, at once so handsome and so kind, upon his changing face, and then requested me to let them know that he wished to see them. When they came, he encircled Ada with one arm in his fatherly way and addressed himself to Richard with a cheerful gravity.

"Rick," said Mr. Jarndyce, "I am glad to have won your confidence. I hope to preserve it. When I contemplated these relations between us four which have so brightened my life and so invested it with new interests and pleasures, I certainly did contemplate, afar off, the possibility of you and your pretty cousin here (don't be shy, Ada, don't be shy, my dear!) being in a mind to go through life together. I saw, and do see, many reasons to make it desirable. But that was afar off, Rick, afar off!"

"We look afar off, sir," returned Richard.

"Well!" said Mr. Jarndyce. "That's rational. Now, hear me, my dears! I might tell you that you don't know your own minds yet, that a thousand things may happen to divert you from one another, that it is well this chain of flowers you have taken up is very easily broken, or it might become a chain of lead. But I will not do that. Such wisdom will come soon enough, I dare say, if it is to come at all. I will assume that a few years hence you will be in your hearts to one another what you are to-day. All I say before speaking to you according to that assumption is, if you DO change—if you DO come to find that you are more commonplace cousins to each other as man and woman than you were as boy and girl (your manhood will excuse me, Rick!)—don't be ashamed still to confide in me, for there will be nothing monstrous or uncommon in it. I am only your friend and distant kinsman. I have no power over you whatever. But I wish and hope to retain your confidence if I do nothing to forfeit it."

"I am very sure, sir," returned Richard, "that I speak for Ada too when I say that you have the strongest power over us both—rooted in respect, gratitude, and affection—strengthening every day."

"Dear cousin John," said Ada, on his shoulder, "my father's place can never be empty again. All the love and duty I could ever have rendered to him is transferred to you."

"Come!" said Mr. Jarndyce. "Now for our assumption. Now we lift our eyes up and look hopefully at the distance! Rick, the world is before you; and it is most probable that as you enter it, so it will receive you. Trust in nothing but in Providence and your own efforts. Never separate the two, like the heathen waggoner. Constancy in love is a good thing, but it means nothing, and is nothing, without constancy in every kind of effort. If you had the abilities of all the great men, past and present, you could do nothing well without sincerely meaning it and setting about it. If you entertain the supposition that any real success, in great things or in small, ever was or could be, ever will or can be, wrested from Fortune by fits and starts, leave that wrong idea here or leave your cousin Ada here."

"I will leave IT here, sir," replied Richard smiling, "if I brought it here just now (but I hope I did not), and will work my way on to my cousin Ada in the hopeful distance."

"Right!" said Mr. Jarndyce. "If you are not to make her happy, why should you pursue her?"

"I wouldn't make her unhappy—no, not even for her love," retorted Richard proudly.

"Well said!" cried Mr. Jarndyce. "That's well said! She remains here, in her home with me. Love her, Rick, in your active life, no less than in her home when you revisit it, and all will go well. Otherwise, all will go ill. That's the end of my preaching. I think you and Ada had better take a walk."

Ada tenderly embraced him, and Richard heartily shook hands with him, and then the cousins went out of the room, looking back again directly, though, to say that they would wait for me.

The door stood open, and we both followed them with our eyes as they passed down the adjoining room, on which the sun was shining, and out at its farther end. Richard with his head bent, and her hand drawn through his arm, was talking to her very earnestly; and she looked up in his face, listening, and seemed to see nothing else. So young, so beautiful, so full of hope and promise, they went on lightly through the sunlight as their own happy thoughts might then be traversing the years to come and making them all years of brightness. So they passed away into the shadow and were gone. It was only a burst of light that had been so radiant. The room darkened as they went out, and the sun was clouded over.

"Am I right, Esther?" said my guardian when they were gone.

He was so good and wise to ask ME whether he was right!

"Rick may gain, out of this, the quality he wants. Wants, at the core of so much that is good!" said Mr. Jarndyce, shaking his head. "I have said nothing to Ada, Esther. She has her friend and counsellor always near." And he laid his hand lovingly upon my head.

I could not help showing that I was a little moved, though I did all I could to conceal it.

"Tut tut!" said he. "But we must take care, too, that our little woman's life is not all consumed in care for others."

"Care? My dear guardian, I believe I am the happiest creature in the world!"

"I believe so, too," said he. "But some one may find out what Esther never will—that the little woman is to be held in remembrance above all other people!"

I have omitted to mention in its place that there was some one else at the family dinner party. It was not a lady. It was a gentleman. It was a gentleman of a dark complexion—a young surgeon. He was rather reserved, but I thought him very sensible and agreeable. At least, Ada asked me if I did not, and I said yes.

CHAPTER XIV. Deportment

Richard left us on the very next evening to begin his new career, and committed Ada to my charge with great love for her and great trust in me. It touched me then to reflect, and it touches me now, more nearly, to remember (having what I have to tell) how they both thought of me, even at that engrossing time. I was a part of all their plans, for the present and the future. I was to write Richard once a week, making my faithful report of Ada, who was to write to him every alternate day. I was to be informed, under his own hand, of all his labours and successes; I was to observe how resolute and persevering he would be; I was to be Ada's bridesmaid when they were married; I was to live with them afterwards; I was to keep all the keys of their house; I was to be made happy for ever and a day.

"And if the suit SHOULD make us rich, Esther—which it may, you know!" said Richard to crown all.

A shade crossed Ada's face.

"My dearest Ada," asked Richard, "why not?"

"It had better declare us poor at once," said Ada.

"Oh! I don't know about that," returned Richard, "but at all events, it won't declare anything at once. It hasn't declared anything in heaven knows how many years."

"Too true," said Ada.

"Yes, but," urged Richard, answering what her look suggested rather than her words, "the longer it goes on, dear cousin, the nearer it must be to a settlement one way or other. Now, is not that reasonable?"

"You know best, Richard. But I am afraid if we trust to it, it will make us unhappy."

"But, my Ada, we are not going to trust to it!" cried Richard gaily. "We know it better than to trust to it. We only say that if it SHOULD make us rich, we have no constitutional objection to being rich. The court is, by solemn settlement of law, our grim old guardian, and we are to suppose that what it gives us (when it gives us anything) is our right. It is not necessary to quarrel with our right."

"No," Said Ada, "but it may be better to forget all about it."

"Well, well," cried Richard, "then we will forget all about it! We consign the whole thing to oblivion. Dame Durden puts on her approving face, and it's done!"

"Dame Durden's approving face," said I, looking out of the box in which I was packing his books, "was not very visible when you called it by that name; but it does approve, and she thinks you can't do better."

So, Richard said there was an end of it, and immediately began, on no other foundation, to build as many castles in the air as would man the Great Wall of China. He went away in high spirits. Ada and I, prepared to miss him very much, commenced our quieter career.

On our arrival in London, we had called with Mr. Jarndyce at Mrs. Jellyby's but had not been so fortunate as to find her at home. It appeared that she had gone somewhere to a tea-drinking and had taken Miss Jellyby with her. Besides the tea-drinking, there was to be some considerable speech-making and letter-writing on the general merits of the cultivation of coffee, conjointly with natives, at the Settlement of Borrioboola-Gha. All this involved, no doubt, sufficient active exercise of pen and ink to make her daughter's part in the proceedings anything but a holiday.

It being now beyond the time appointed for Mrs. Jellyby's return, we called again. She was in town, but not at home, having gone to Mile End directly after breakfast on some Borrioboolan business, arising out of a society called the East London Branch Aid Ramification. As I had not seen Peepy on the occasion of our last call (when he was not to be found anywhere, and when the cook rather thought he must have strolled away with the dustman's cart), I now inquired for him again. The oyster shells he had been building a house with were still in the passage, but he was nowhere discoverable, and the cook supposed that he had "gone after the sheep." When we repeated, with some surprise, "The sheep?" she said, Oh, yes, on market days he sometimes followed them quite out of town and came back in such a state as never was!

I was sitting at the window with my guardian on the following morning, and Ada was busy writing—of course to Richard—when Miss Jellyby was announced, and entered, leading the identical Peepy, whom she had made some endeavours to render presentable by wiping the dirt into corners of his face and hands and making his hair very wet and then violently frizzling it with her fingers. Everything the dear child wore was either too large for him or too small. Among his other contradictory decorations he had the hat of a bishop and the little gloves of a baby. His boots were, on a small scale, the boots of a ploughman, while his legs, so crossed and recrossed with scratches that they looked like maps, were bare below a very short pair of plaid drawers finished off with two frills of perfectly different patterns. The deficient buttons on his plaid frock had evidently been supplied from one of Mr. Jellyby's coats, they were so extremely brazen and so much too large. Most extraordinary specimens of needlework appeared on several parts of his dress, where it had been hastily mended, and I recognized the same hand on Miss Jellyby's. She was, however, unaccountably improved in her appearance and looked very pretty. She was conscious of poor little Peepy being but a failure after all her trouble, and she showed it as she came in by the way in which she glanced first at him and then at us.

"Oh, dear me!" said my guardian. "Due east!"

Ada and I gave her a cordial welcome and presented her to Mr. Jarndyce, to whom she said as she sat down, "Ma's compliments, and she hopes you'll excuse her, because she's correcting proofs of the plan. She's going to put out five thousand new circulars, and she knows you'll be interested to hear that. I have brought one of them with me. Ma's compliments." With which she presented it sulkily enough.

"Thank you," said my guardian. "I am much obliged to Mrs. Jellyby. Oh, dear me! This is a very trying wind!"

We were busy with Peepy, taking off his clerical hat, asking him if he remembered us, and so on. Peepy retired behind his elbow at first, but relented at the sight of sponge-cake and allowed me to take him on my lap, where he sat munching quietly. Mr. Jarndyce then withdrawing into the temporary growlery, Miss Jellyby opened a conversation with her usual abruptness.

"We are going on just as bad as ever in Thavies Inn," said she. "I have no peace of my life. Talk of Africa! I couldn't be worse off if I was a what's-his-name—man and a brother!"

I tried to say something soothing.

"Oh, it's of no use, Miss Summerson," exclaimed Miss Jellyby, "though I thank you for the kind intention all the same. I know how I am used, and I am not to be talked over. YOU wouldn't be talked over if you were used so. Peepy, go and play at Wild Beasts under the piano!"

"I shan't!" said Peepy.

"Very well, you ungrateful, naughty, hard-hearted boy!" returned Miss Jellyby with tears in her eyes. "I'll never take pains to dress you any more."

"Yes, I will go, Caddy!" cried Peepy, who was really a good child and who was so moved by his sister's vexation that he went at once.

"It seems a little thing to cry about," said poor Miss Jellyby apologetically, "but I am quite worn out. I was directing the new circulars till two this morning. I detest the whole thing so that that alone makes my head ache till I can't see out of my eyes. And look at that poor unfortunate child! Was there ever such a fright as he is!"

Peepy, happily unconscious of the defects in his appearance, sat on the carpet behind one of the legs of the piano, looking calmly out of his den at us while he ate his cake.

"I have sent him to the other end of the room," observed Miss Jellyby, drawing her chair nearer ours, "because I don't want him to hear the conversation. Those little things are so sharp! I was going to say, we really are going on worse than ever. Pa will be a bankrupt before long, and then I hope Ma will be satisfied. There'll he nobody but Ma to thank for it."

We said we hoped Mr. Jellyby's affairs were not in so bad a state as that.

"It's of no use hoping, though it's very kind of you," returned Miss Jellyby, shaking her head. "Pa told me only yesterday morning (and dreadfully unhappy he is) that he couldn't weather the storm. I should be surprised if he could. When all our tradesmen send into our house any stuff they like, and the servants do what they like with it, and I have no time to improve things if I knew how, and Ma don't care about anything, I should like to make out how Pa is to weather the storm. I declare if I was Pa, I'd run away."

"My dear!" said I, smiling. "Your papa, no doubt, considers his family."

"Oh, yes, his family is all very fine, Miss Summerson," replied Miss Jellyby; "but what comfort is his family to him? His family is nothing but bills, dirt, waste, noise, tumbles downstairs, confusion, and wretchedness. His scrambling home, from week's end to week's end, is like one great washing-day—only nothing's washed!"

Miss Jellyby tapped her foot upon the floor and wiped her eyes.

"I am sure I pity Pa to that degree," she said, "and am so angry with Ma that I can't find words to express myself! However, I am not going to bear it, I am determined. I won't be a slave all my life, and I won't submit to be proposed to by Mr. Quale. A pretty thing, indeed, to marry a philanthropist. As if I hadn't had enough of THAT!" said poor Miss Jellyby.

I must confess that I could not help feeling rather angry with Mrs. Jellyby myself, seeing and hearing this neglected girl and knowing how much of bitterly satirical truth there was in what she said.

"If it wasn't that we had been intimate when you stopped at our house," pursued Miss Jellyby, "I should have been ashamed to come here to-day, for I know what a figure I must seem to you two. But as it is, I made up my mind to call, especially as I am not likely to see you again the next time you come to town."

She said this with such great significance that Ada and I glanced at one another, foreseeing something more.

"No!" said Miss Jellyby, shaking her head. "Not at all likely! I know I may trust you two. I am sure you won't betray me. I am engaged."

"Without their knowledge at home?" said I.

"Why, good gracious me, Miss Summerson," she returned, justifying herself in a fretful but not angry manner, "how can it be otherwise? You know what Ma is—and I needn't make poor Pa more miserable by telling HIM."

"But would it not he adding to his unhappiness to marry without his knowledge or consent, my dear?" said I.

"No," said Miss Jellyby, softening. "I hope not. I should try to make him happy and comfortable when he came to see me, and Peepy and the others should take it in turns to come and stay with me, and they should have some care taken of them then."

There was a good deal of affection in poor Caddy. She softened more and more while saying this and cried so much over the unwonted little home-picture she had raised in her mind that Peepy, in his cave under the piano, was touched, and turned himself over on his back with loud lamentations. It was not until I had brought him to kiss his sister, and had restored him to his place on my lap, and had shown him that Caddy was laughing (she laughed expressly for the purpose), that we could recall his peace of mind; even then it was for some time conditional on his taking us in turns by the chin and smoothing our faces all over with his hand. At last, as his spirits were not equal to the piano, we put him on a chair to look out of window; and Miss Jellyby, holding him by one leg, resumed her confidence.

"It began in your coming to our house," she said.

We naturally asked how.

"I felt I was so awkward," she replied, "that I made up my mind to be improved in that respect at all events and to learn to dance. I told Ma I was ashamed of myself, and I must be taught to dance. Ma looked at me in that provoking way of hers as if I wasn't in sight, but I was quite determined to be taught to dance, and so I went to Mr. Turveydrop's Academy in Newman Street."

"And was it there, my dear—" I began.

"Yes, it was there," said Caddy, "and I am engaged to Mr. Turveydrop. There are two Mr. Turveydrops, father and son. My Mr. Turveydrop is the son, of course. I only wish I had been better brought up and was likely to make him a better wife, for I am very fond of him."

"I am sorry to hear this," said I, "I must confess."

"I don't know why you should be sorry," she retorted a little anxiously, "but I am engaged to Mr. Turveydrop, whether or no, and he is very fond of me. It's a secret as yet, even on his side, because old Mr. Turveydrop has a share in the connexion and it might break his heart or give him some other shock if he was told of it abruptly. Old Mr. Turveydrop is a very gentlemanly man indeed—very gentlemanly."

"Does his wife know of it?" asked Ada.

"Old Mr. Turveydrop's wife, Miss Clare?" returned Miss Jellyby, opening her eyes. "There's no such person. He is a widower."

We were here interrupted by Peepy, whose leg had undergone so much on account of his sister's unconsciously jerking it like a bell-rope whenever she was emphatic that the afflicted child now bemoaned his sufferings with a very low-spirited noise. As he appealed to me for compassion, and as I was only a listener, I undertook to hold him. Miss Jellyby proceeded, after begging Peepy's pardon with a kiss and assuring him that she hadn't meant to do it.

"That's the state of the case," said Caddy. "If I ever blame myself, I still think it's Ma's fault. We are to be married whenever we can, and then I shall go to Pa at the office and write to Ma. It won't much agitate Ma; I am only pen and ink to HER. One great comfort is," said Caddy with a sob, "that I shall never hear of Africa after I am married. Young Mr. Turveydrop hates it for my sake, and if old Mr. Turveydrop knows there is such a place, it's as much as he does."

"It was he who was very gentlemanly, I think!" said I.

"Very gentlemanly indeed," said Caddy. "He is celebrated almost everywhere for his deportment."

"Does he teach?" asked Ada.

"No, he don't teach anything in particular," replied Caddy. "But his deportment is beautiful."

Caddy went on to say with considerable hesitation and reluctance that there was one thing more she wished us to know, and felt we ought to know, and which she hoped would not offend us. It was that she had improved her acquaintance with Miss Flite, the little crazy old lady, and that she frequently went there early in the morning and met her lover for a few minutes before breakfast—only for a few minutes. "I go there at other times," said Caddy, "but Prince does not come then. Young Mr. Turveydrop's name is Prince; I wish it wasn't, because it sounds like a dog, but of course he didn't christen himself. Old Mr. Turveydrop had him christened Prince in remembrance of the Prince Regent. Old Mr. Turveydrop adored the Prince Regent on account of his deportment. I hope you won't think the worse of me for having made these little appointments at Miss Flite's, where I first went with you, because I like the poor thing for her own sake and I believe she likes me. If you could see young Mr. Turveydrop, I am sure you would think well of him—at least, I am sure you couldn't possibly think any ill of him. I am going there now for my lesson. I couldn't ask you to go with me, Miss Summerson; but if you would," said Caddy, who had said all this earnestly and tremblingly, "I should be very glad—very glad."

It happened that we had arranged with my guardian to go to Miss Flite's that day. We had told him of our former visit, and our account had interested him; but something had always happened to prevent our going there again. As I trusted that I might have sufficient influence with Miss Jellyby to prevent her taking any very rash step if I fully accepted the confidence she was so willing to place in me, poor girl, I proposed that she and I and Peepy should go to the academy and afterwards meet my guardian and Ada at Miss Flite's, whose name I now learnt for the first time. This was on condition that Miss Jellyby and Peepy should come back with us to dinner. The last article of the agreement being joyfully acceded to by both, we smartened Peepy up a little with the assistance of a few pins, some soap and water, and a hair-brush, and went out, bending our steps towards Newman Street, which was very near.

I found the academy established in a sufficiently dingy house at the corner of an archway, with busts in all the staircase windows. In the same house there were also established, as I gathered from the plates on the door, a drawing-master, a coal-merchant (there was, certainly, no room for his coals), and a lithographic artist. On the plate which, in size and situation, took precedence of all the rest, I read, MR. TURVEYDROP. The door was open, and the hall was blocked up by a grand piano, a harp, and several other musical instruments in cases, all in progress of removal, and all looking rakish in the daylight. Miss Jellyby informed me that the academy had been lent, last night, for a concert.

We went upstairs—it had been quite a fine house once, when it was anybody's business to keep it clean and fresh, and nobody's business to smoke in it all day—and into Mr. Turveydrop's great room, which was built out into a mews at the back and was lighted by a skylight. It was a bare, resounding room smelling of stables, with cane forms along the walls, and the walls ornamented at regular intervals with painted lyres and little cut-glass branches for candles, which seemed to be shedding their old-fashioned drops as other branches might shed autumn leaves. Several young lady pupils, ranging from thirteen or fourteen years of age to two or three and twenty, were assembled; and I was looking among them for their instructor when Caddy, pinching my arm, repeated the ceremony of introduction. "Miss Summerson, Mr. Prince Turveydrop!"

I curtsied to a little blue-eyed fair man of youthful appearance with flaxen hair parted in the middle and curling at the ends all round his head. He had a little fiddle, which we used to call at school a kit, under his left arm, and its little bow in the same hand. His little dancing-shoes were particularly diminutive, and he had a little innocent, feminine manner which not only appealed to me in an amiable way, but made this singular effect upon me, that I received the impression that he was like his mother and that his mother had not been much considered or well used.

"I am very happy to see Miss Jellyby's friend," he said, bowing low to me. "I began to fear," with timid tenderness, "as it was past the usual time, that Miss Jellyby was not coming."

"I beg you will have the goodness to attribute that to me, who have detained her, and to receive my excuses, sir," said I.

"Oh, dear!" said he.

"And pray," I entreated, "do not allow me to be the cause of any more delay."

With that apology I withdrew to a seat between Peepy (who, being well used to it, had already climbed into a corner place) and an old lady of a censorious countenance whose two nieces were in the class and who was very indignant with Peepy's boots. Prince Turveydrop then tinkled the strings of his kit with his fingers, and the young ladies stood up to dance. Just then there appeared from a side-door old Mr. Turveydrop, in the full lustre of his deportment.

He was a fat old gentleman with a false complexion, false teeth, false whiskers, and a wig. He had a fur collar, and he had a padded breast to his coat, which only wanted a star or a broad blue ribbon to be complete. He was pinched in, and swelled out, and got up, and strapped down, as much as he could possibly bear. He had such a neckcloth on (puffing his very eyes out of their natural shape), and his chin and even his ears so sunk into it, that it seemed as though be must inevitably double up if it were cast loose. He had under his arm a hat of great size and weight, shelving downward from the crown to the brim, and in his hand a pair of white gloves with which he flapped it as he stood poised on one leg in a high-shouldered, round-elbowed state of elegance not to be surpassed. He had a cane, he had an eye-glass, he had a snuff-box, he had rings, he had wristbands, he had everything but any touch of nature; he was not like youth, he was not like age, he was not like anything in the world but a model of deportment.

"Father! A visitor. Miss Jellyby's friend, Miss Summerson."

"Distinguished," said Mr. Turveydrop, "by Miss Summerson's presence." As he bowed to me in that tight state, I almost believe I saw creases come into the whites of his eyes.

"My father," said the son, aside, to me with quite an affecting belief in him, "is a celebrated character. My father is greatly admired."

"Go on, Prince! Go on!" said Mr. Turveydrop, standing with his back to the fire and waving his gloves condescendingly. "Go on, my son!"

At this command, or by this gracious permission, the lesson went on. Prince Turveydrop sometimes played the kit, dancing; sometimes played the piano, standing; sometimes hummed the tune with what little breath he could spare, while he set a pupil right; always conscientiously moved with the least proficient through every step and every part of the figure; and never rested for an instant. His distinguished father did nothing whatever but stand before the fire, a model of deportment.

"And he never does anything else," said the old lady of the censorious countenance. "Yet would you believe that it's HIS name on the door-plate?"

"His son's name is the same, you know," said I.

"He wouldn't let his son have any name if he could take it from him," returned the old lady. "Look at the son's dress!" It certainly was plain—threadbare—almost shabby. "Yet the father must be garnished and tricked out," said the old lady, "because of his deportment. I'd deport him! Transport him would be better!"

I felt curious to know more concerning this person. I asked, "Does he give lessons in deportment now?"

"Now!" returned the old lady shortly. "Never did."

After a moment's consideration, I suggested that perhaps fencing had been his accomplishment.

"I don't believe he can fence at all, ma'am," said the old lady.

I looked surprised and inquisitive. The old lady, becoming more and more incensed against the master of deportment as she dwelt upon the subject, gave me some particulars of his career, with strong assurances that they were mildly stated.

He had married a meek little dancing-mistress, with a tolerable connexion (having never in his life before done anything but deport himself), and had worked her to death, or had, at the best, suffered her to work herself to death, to maintain him in those expenses which were indispensable to his position. At once to exhibit his deportment to the best models and to keep the best models constantly before himself, he had found it necessary to frequent all public places of fashionable and lounging resort, to be seen at Brighton and elsewhere at fashionable times, and to lead an idle life in the very best clothes. To enable him to do this, the affectionate little dancing-mistress had toiled and laboured and would have toiled and laboured to that hour if her strength had lasted so long. For the mainspring of the story was that in spite of the man's absorbing selfishness, his wife (overpowered by his deportment) had, to the last, believed in him and had, on her death-bed, in the most moving terms, confided him to their son as one who had an inextinguishable claim upon him and whom he could never regard with too much pride and deference. The son, inheriting his mother's belief, and having the deportment always before him, had lived and grown in the same faith, and now, at thirty years of age, worked for his father twelve hours a day and looked up to him with veneration on the old imaginary pinnacle.

"The airs the fellow gives himself!" said my informant, shaking her head at old Mr. Turveydrop with speechless indignation as he drew on his tight gloves, of course unconscious of the homage she was rendering. "He fully believes he is one of the aristocracy! And he is so condescending to the son he so egregiously deludes that you might suppose him the most virtuous of parents. Oh!" said the old lady, apostrophizing him with infinite vehemence. "I could bite you!"

I could not help being amused, though I heard the old lady out with feelings of real concern. It was difficult to doubt her with the father and son before me. What I might have thought of them without the old lady's account, or what I might have thought of the old lady's account without them, I cannot say. There was a fitness of things in the whole that carried conviction with it.

My eyes were yet wandering, from young Mr. Turveydrop working so hard, to old Mr. Turveydrop deporting himself so beautifully, when the latter came ambling up to me and entered into conversation.

He asked me, first of all, whether I conferred a charm and a distinction on London by residing in it? I did not think it necessary to reply that I was perfectly aware I should not do that, in any case, but merely told him where I did reside.

"A lady so graceful and accomplished," he said, kissing his right glove and afterwards extending it towards the pupils, "will look leniently on the deficiencies here. We do our best to polish—polish—polish!"

He sat down beside me, taking some pains to sit on the form, I thought, in imitation of the print of his illustrious model on the sofa. And really he did look very like it.

"To polish—polish—polish!" he repeated, taking a pinch of snuff and gently fluttering his fingers. "But we are not, if I may say so to one formed to be graceful both by Nature and Art—" with the high-shouldered bow, which it seemed impossible for him to make without lifting up his eyebrows and shutting his eyes "—we are not what we used to be in point of deportment."

"Are we not, sir?" said I.

"We have degenerated," he returned, shaking his head, which he could do to a very limited extent in his cravat. "A levelling age is not favourable to deportment. It develops vulgarity. Perhaps I speak with some little partiality. It may not be for me to say that I have been called, for some years now, Gentleman Turveydrop, or that his Royal Highness the Prince Regent did me the honour to inquire, on my removing my hat as he drove out of the Pavilion at Brighton (that fine building), 'Who is he? Who the devil is he? Why don't I know him? Why hasn't he thirty thousand a year?' But these are little matters of anecdote—the general property, ma'am—still repeated occasionally among the upper classes."

"Indeed?" said I.

He replied with the high-shouldered bow. "Where what is left among us of deportment," he added, "still lingers. England—alas, my country!—has degenerated very much, and is degenerating every day. She has not many gentlemen left. We are few. I see nothing to succeed us but a race of weavers."

"One might hope that the race of gentlemen would be perpetuated here," said I.

"You are very good." He smiled with a high-shouldered bow again. "You flatter me. But, no—no! I have never been able to imbue my poor boy with that part of his art. Heaven forbid that I should disparage my dear child, but he has—no deportment."

"He appears to be an excellent master," I observed.

"Understand me, my dear madam, he IS an excellent master. All that can be acquired, he has acquired. All that can be imparted, he can impart. But there ARE things—" He took another pinch of snuff and made the bow again, as if to add, "This kind of thing, for instance."

I glanced towards the centre of the room, where Miss Jellyby's lover, now engaged with single pupils, was undergoing greater drudgery than ever.

"My amiable child," murmured Mr. Turveydrop, adjusting his cravat.

"Your son is indefatigable," said I.

"It is my reward," said Mr. Turveydrop, "to hear you say so. In some respects, he treads in the footsteps of his sainted mother. She was a devoted creature. But wooman, lovely wooman," said Mr. Turveydrop with very disagreeable gallantry, "what a sex you are!"

I rose and joined Miss Jellyby, who was by this time putting on her bonnet. The time allotted to a lesson having fully elapsed, there was a general putting on of bonnets. When Miss Jellyby and the unfortunate Prince found an opportunity to become betrothed I don't know, but they certainly found none on this occasion to exchange a dozen words.

"My dear," said Mr. Turveydrop benignly to his son, "do you know the hour?"

"No, father." The son had no watch. The father had a handsome gold one, which he pulled out with an air that was an example to mankind.

"My son," said he, "it's two o'clock. Recollect your school at Kensington at three."

"That's time enough for me, father," said Prince. "I can take a morsel of dinner standing and be off."

"My dear boy," returned his father, "you must be very quick. You will find the cold mutton on the table."

"Thank you, father. Are YOU off now, father?"

"Yes, my dear. I suppose," said Mr. Turveydrop, shutting his eyes and lifting up his shoulders with modest consciousness, "that I must show myself, as usual, about town."

"You had better dine out comfortably somewhere," said his son.

"My dear child, I intend to. I shall take my little meal, I think, at the French house, in the Opera Colonnade."

"That's right. Good-bye, father!" said Prince, shaking hands.

"Good-bye, my son. Bless you!"

Mr. Turveydrop said this in quite a pious manner, and it seemed to do his son good, who, in parting from him, was so pleased with him, so dutiful to him, and so proud of him that I almost felt as if it were an unkindness to the younger man not to be able to believe implicitly in the elder. The few moments that were occupied by Prince in taking leave of us (and particularly of one of us, as I saw, being in the secret), enhanced my favourable impression of his almost childish character. I felt a liking for him and a compassion for him as he put his little kit in his pocket—and with it his desire to stay a little while with Caddy—and went away good-humouredly to his cold mutton and his school at Kensington, that made me scarcely less irate with his father than the censorious old lady.

The father opened the room door for us and bowed us out in a manner, I must acknowledge, worthy of his shining original. In the same style he presently passed us on the other side of the street, on his way to the aristocratic part of the town, where he was going to show himself among the few other gentlemen left. For some moments, I was so lost in reconsidering what I had heard and seen in Newman Street that I was quite unable to talk to Caddy or even to fix my attention on what she said to me, especially when I began to inquire in my mind whether there were, or ever had been, any other gentlemen, not in the dancing profession, who lived and founded a reputation entirely on their deportment. This became so bewildering and suggested the possibility of so many Mr. Turveydrops that I said, "Esther, you must make up your mind to abandon this subject altogether and attend to Caddy." I accordingly did so, and we chatted all the rest of the way to Lincoln's Inn.

Caddy told me that her lover's education had been so neglected that it was not always easy to read his notes. She said if he were not so anxious about his spelling and took less pains to make it clear, he would do better; but he put so many unnecessary letters into short words that they sometimes quite lost their English appearance. "He does it with the best intention," observed Caddy, "but it hasn't the effect he means, poor fellow!" Caddy then went on to reason, how could he be expected to be a scholar when he had passed his whole life in the dancing-school and had done nothing but teach and fag, fag and teach, morning, noon, and night! And what did it matter? She could write letters enough for both, as she knew to her cost, and it was far better for him to be amiable than learned. "Besides, it's not as if I was an accomplished girl who had any right to give herself airs," said Caddy. "I know little enough, I am sure, thanks to Ma!

"There's another thing I want to tell you, now we are alone," continued Caddy, "which I should not have liked to mention unless you had seen Prince, Miss Summerson. You know what a house ours is. It's of no use my trying to learn anything that it would be useful for Prince's wife to know in OUR house. We live in such a state of muddle that it's impossible, and I have only been more disheartened whenever I have tried. So I get a little practice with—who do you think? Poor Miss Flite! Early in the morning I help her to tidy her room and clean her birds, and I make her cup of coffee for her (of course she taught me), and I have learnt to make it so well that Prince says it's the very best coffee he ever tasted, and would quite delight old Mr. Turveydrop, who is very particular indeed about his coffee. I can make little puddings too; and I know how to buy neck of mutton, and tea, and sugar, and butter, and a good many housekeeping things. I am not clever at my needle, yet," said Caddy, glancing at the repairs on Peepy's frock, "but perhaps I shall improve, and since I have been engaged to Prince and have been doing all this, I have felt better-tempered, I hope, and more forgiving to Ma. It rather put me out at first this morning to see you and Miss Clare looking so neat and pretty and to feel ashamed of Peepy and myself too, but on the whole I hope I am better-tempered than I was and more forgiving to Ma."

The poor girl, trying so hard, said it from her heart, and touched mine. "Caddy, my love," I replied, "I begin to have a great affection for you, and I hope we shall become friends."

"Oh, do you?" cried Caddy. "How happy that would make me!"

"My dear Caddy," said I, "let us be friends from this time, and let us often have a chat about these matters and try to find the right way through them." Caddy was overjoyed. I said everything I could in my old-fashioned way to comfort and encourage her, and I would not have objected to old Mr. Turveydrop that day for any smaller consideration than a settlement on his daughter-in-law.

By this time we were come to Mr. Krook's, whose private door stood open. There was a bill, pasted on the door-post, announcing a room to let on the second floor. It reminded Caddy to tell me as we proceeded upstairs that there had been a sudden death there and an inquest and that our little friend had been ill of the fright. The door and window of the vacant room being open, we looked in. It was the room with the dark door to which Miss Flite had secretly directed my attention when I was last in the house. A sad and desolate place it was, a gloomy, sorrowful place that gave me a strange sensation of mournfulness and even dread. "You look pale," said Caddy when we came out, "and cold!" I felt as if the room had chilled me.

We had walked slowly while we were talking, and my guardian and Ada were here before us. We found them in Miss Flite's garret. They were looking at the birds, while a medical gentleman who was so good as to attend Miss Flite with much solicitude and compassion spoke with her cheerfully by the fire.

"I have finished my professional visit," he said, coming forward. "Miss Flite is much better and may appear in court (as her mind is set upon it) to-morrow. She has been greatly missed there, I understand."

Miss Flite received the compliment with complacency and dropped a general curtsy to us.

"Honoured, indeed," said she, "by another visit from the wards in Jarndyce! Ve-ry happy to receive Jarndyce of Bleak House beneath my humble roof!" with a special curtsy. "Fitz-Jarndyce, my dear"—she had bestowed that name on Caddy, it appeared, and always called her by it—"a double welcome!"

"Has she been very ill?" asked Mr. Jarndyce of the gentleman whom we had found in attendance on her. She answered for herself directly, though he had put the question in a whisper.

"Oh, decidedly unwell! Oh, very unwell indeed," she said confidentially. "Not pain, you know—trouble. Not bodily so much as nervous, nervous! The truth is," in a subdued voice and trembling, "we have had death here. There was poison in the house. I am very susceptible to such horrid things. It frightened me. Only Mr. Woodcourt knows how much. My physician, Mr. Woodcourt!" with great stateliness. "The wards in Jarndyce—Jarndyce of Bleak House—Fitz-Jarndyce!"

"Miss Flite," said Mr. Woodcourt in a grave kind of voice, as if he were appealing to her while speaking to us, and laying his hand gently on her arm, "Miss Flite describes her illness with her usual accuracy. She was alarmed by an occurrence in the house which might have alarmed a stronger person, and was made ill by the distress and agitation. She brought me here in the first hurry of the discovery, though too late for me to be of any use to the unfortunate man. I have compensated myself for that disappointment by coming here since and being of some small use to her."

"The kindest physician in the college," whispered Miss Flite to me. "I expect a judgment. On the day of judgment. And shall then confer estates."

"She will be as well in a day or two," said Mr. Woodcourt, looking at her with an observant smile, "as she ever will be. In other words, quite well of course. Have you heard of her good fortune?"

"Most extraordinary!" said Miss Flite, smiling brightly. "You never heard of such a thing, my dear! Every Saturday, Conversation Kenge or Guppy (clerk to Conversation K.) places in my hand a paper of shillings. Shillings. I assure you! Always the same number in the paper. Always one for every day in the week. Now you know, really! So well-timed, is it not? Ye-es! From whence do these papers come, you say? That is the great question. Naturally. Shall I tell you what I think? I think," said Miss Flite, drawing herself back with a very shrewd look and shaking her right forefinger in a most significant manner, "that the Lord Chancellor, aware of the length of time during which the Great Seal has been open (for it has been open a long time!), forwards them. Until the judgment I expect is given. Now that's very creditable, you know. To confess in that way that he IS a little slow for human life. So delicate! Attending court the other day—I attend it regularly, with my documents—I taxed him with it, and he almost confessed. That is, I smiled at him from my bench, and HE smiled at me from his bench. But it's great good fortune, is it not? And Fitz-Jarndyce lays the money out for me to great advantage. Oh, I assure you to the greatest advantage!"

I congratulated her (as she addressed herself to me) upon this fortunate addition to her income and wished her a long continuance of it. I did not speculate upon the source from which it came or wonder whose humanity was so considerate. My guardian stood before me, contemplating the birds, and I had no need to look beyond him.

"And what do you call these little fellows, ma'am?" said he in his pleasant voice. "Have they any names?"

"I can answer for Miss Flite that they have," said I, "for she promised to tell us what they were. Ada remembers?"

Ada remembered very well.

"Did I?" said Miss Flite. "Who's that at my door? What are you listening at my door for, Krook?"

The old man of the house, pushing it open before him, appeared there with his fur cap in his hand and his cat at his heels.

"I warn't listening, Miss Flite," he said, "I was going to give a rap with my knuckles, only you're so quick!"

"Make your cat go down. Drive her away!" the old lady angrily exclaimed.

"Bah, bah! There ain't no danger, gentlefolks," said Mr. Krook, looking slowly and sharply from one to another until he had looked at all of us; "she'd never offer at the birds when I was here unless I told her to it."

"You will excuse my landlord," said the old lady with a dignified air. "M, quite M! What do you want, Krook, when I have company?"

"Hi!" said the old man. "You know I am the Chancellor."

"Well?" returned Miss Elite. "What of that?"

"For the Chancellor," said the old man with a chuckle, "not to be acquainted with a Jarndyce is queer, ain't it, Miss Flite? Mightn't I take the liberty? Your servant, sir. I know Jarndyce and Jarndyce a'most as well as you do, sir. I knowed old Squire Tom, sir. I never to my knowledge see you afore though, not even in court. Yet, I go there a mortal sight of times in the course of the year, taking one day with another."

"I never go there," said Mr. Jarndyce (which he never did on any consideration). "I would sooner go—somewhere else."

"Would you though?" returned Krook, grinning. "You're bearing hard upon my noble and learned brother in your meaning, sir, though perhaps it is but nat'ral in a Jarndyce. The burnt child, sir! What, you're looking at my lodger's birds, Mr. Jarndyce?" The old man had come by little and little into the room until he now touched my guardian with his elbow and looked close up into his face with his spectacled eyes. "It's one of her strange ways that she'll never tell the names of these birds if she can help it, though she named 'em all." This was in a whisper. "Shall I run 'em over, Flite?" he asked aloud, winking at us and pointing at her as she turned away, affecting to sweep the grate.

"If you like," she answered hurriedly.

The old man, looking up at the cages after another look at us, went through the list.

"Hope, Joy, Youth, Peace, Rest, Life, Dust, Ashes, Waste, Want, Ruin, Despair, Madness, Death, Cunning, Folly, Words, Wigs, Rags, Sheepskin, Plunder, Precedent, Jargon, Gammon, and Spinach. That's the whole collection," said the old man, "all cooped up together, by my noble and learned brother."

"This is a bitter wind!" muttered my guardian.

"When my noble and learned brother gives his judgment, they're to be let go free," said Krook, winking at us again. "And then," he added, whispering and grinning, "if that ever was to happen—which it won't—the birds that have never been caged would kill 'em."

"If ever the wind was in the east," said my guardian, pretending to look out of the window for a weathercock, "I think it's there to-day!"

We found it very difficult to get away from the house. It was not Miss Flite who detained us; she was as reasonable a little creature in consulting the convenience of others as there possibly could be. It was Mr. Krook. He seemed unable to detach himself from Mr. Jarndyce. If he had been linked to him, he could hardly have attended him more closely. He proposed to show us his Court of Chancery and all the strange medley it contained; during the whole of our inspection (prolonged by himself) he kept close to Mr. Jarndyce and sometimes detained him under one pretence or other until we had passed on, as if he were tormented by an inclination to enter upon some secret subject which he could not make up his mind to approach. I cannot imagine a countenance and manner more singularly expressive of caution and indecision, and a perpetual impulse to do something he could not resolve to venture on, than Mr. Krook's was that day. His watchfulness of my guardian was incessant. He rarely removed his eyes from his face. If he went on beside him, he observed him with the slyness of an old white fox. If he went before, he looked back. When we stood still, he got opposite to him, and drawing his hand across and across his open mouth with a curious expression of a sense of power, and turning up his eyes, and lowering his grey eyebrows until they appeared to be shut, seemed to scan every lineament of his face.

At last, having been (always attended by the cat) all over the house and having seen the whole stock of miscellaneous lumber, which was certainly curious, we came into the back part of the shop. Here on the head of an empty barrel stood on end were an ink-bottle, some old stumps of pens, and some dirty playbills; and against the wall were pasted several large printed alphabets in several plain hands.

"What are you doing here?" asked my guardian.

"Trying to learn myself to read and write," said Krook.

"And how do you get on?"

"Slow. Bad," returned the old man impatiently. "It's hard at my time of life."

"It would be easier to be taught by some one," said my guardian.

"Aye, but they might teach me wrong!" returned the old man with a wonderfully suspicious flash of his eye. "I don't know what I may have lost by not being learned afore. I wouldn't like to lose anything by being learned wrong now."

"Wrong?" said my guardian with his good-humoured smile. "Who do you suppose would teach you wrong?"

"I don't know, Mr. Jarndyce of Bleak House!" replied the old man, turning up his spectacles on his forehead and rubbing his hands. "I don't suppose as anybody would, but I'd rather trust my own self than another!"

These answers and his manner were strange enough to cause my guardian to inquire of Mr. Woodcourt, as we all walked across Lincoln's Inn together, whether Mr. Krook were really, as his lodger represented him, deranged. The young surgeon replied, no, he had seen no reason to think so. He was exceedingly distrustful, as ignorance usually was, and he was always more or less under the influence of raw gin, of which he drank great quantities and of which he and his back-shop, as we might have observed, smelt strongly; but he did not think him mad as yet.

On our way home, I so conciliated Peepy's affections by buying him a windmill and two flour-sacks that he would suffer nobody else to take off his hat and gloves and would sit nowhere at dinner but at my side. Caddy sat upon the other side of me, next to Ada, to whom we imparted the whole history of the engagement as soon as we got back. We made much of Caddy, and Peepy too; and Caddy brightened exceedingly; and my guardian was as merry as we were; and we were all very happy indeed until Caddy went home at night in a hackney-coach, with Peepy fast asleep, but holding tight to the windmill.

I have forgotten to mention—at least I have not mentioned—that Mr. Woodcourt was the same dark young surgeon whom we had met at Mr. Badger's. Or that Mr. Jarndyce invited him to dinner that day. Or that he came. Or that when they were all gone and I said to Ada, "Now, my darling, let us have a little talk about Richard!" Ada laughed and said—

But I don't think it matters what my darling said. She was always merry.

CHAPTER XV. Bell Yard

While we were in London Mr. Jarndyce was constantly beset by the crowd of excitable ladies and gentlemen whose proceedings had so much astonished us. Mr. Quale, who presented himself soon after our arrival, was in all such excitements. He seemed to project those two shining knobs of temples of his into everything that went on and to brush his hair farther and farther back, until the very roots were almost ready to fly out of his head in inappeasable philanthropy. All objects were alike to him, but he was always particularly ready for anything in the way of a testimonial to any one. His great power seemed to be his power of indiscriminate admiration. He would sit for any length of time, with the utmost enjoyment, bathing his temples in the light of any order of luminary. Having first seen him perfectly swallowed up in admiration of Mrs. Jellyby, I had supposed her to be the absorbing object of his devotion. I soon discovered my mistake and found him to be train-bearer and organ-blower to a whole procession of people.

Mrs. Pardiggle came one day for a subscription to something, and with her, Mr. Quale. Whatever Mrs. Pardiggle said, Mr. Quale repeated to us; and just as he had drawn Mrs. Jellyby out, he drew Mrs. Pardiggle out. Mrs. Pardiggle wrote a letter of introduction to my guardian in behalf of her eloquent friend Mr. Gusher. With Mr. Gusher appeared Mr. Quale again. Mr. Gusher, being a flabby gentleman with a moist surface and eyes so much too small for his moon of a face that they seemed to have been originally made for somebody else, was not at first sight prepossessing; yet he was scarcely seated before Mr. Quale asked Ada and me, not inaudibly, whether he was not a great creature—which he certainly was, flabbily speaking, though Mr. Quale meant in intellectual beauty—and whether we were not struck by his massive configuration of brow. In short, we heard of a great many missions of various sorts among this set of people, but nothing respecting them was half so clear to us as that it was Mr. Quale's mission to be in ecstasies with everybody else's mission and that it was the most popular mission of all.

Mr. Jarndyce had fallen into this company in the tenderness of his heart and his earnest desire to do all the good in his power; but that he felt it to be too often an unsatisfactory company, where benevolence took spasmodic forms, where charity was assumed as a regular uniform by loud professors and speculators in cheap notoriety, vehement in profession, restless and vain in action, servile in the last degree of meanness to the great, adulatory of one another, and intolerable to those who were anxious quietly to help the weak from failing rather than with a great deal of bluster and self-laudation to raise them up a little way when they were down, he plainly told us. When a testimonial was originated to Mr. Quale by Mr. Gusher (who had already got one, originated by Mr. Quale), and when Mr. Gusher spoke for an hour and a half on the subject to a meeting, including two charity schools of small boys and girls, who were specially reminded of the widow's mite, and requested to come forward with halfpence and be acceptable sacrifices, I think the wind was in the east for three whole weeks.

I mention this because I am coming to Mr. Skimpole again. It seemed to me that his off-hand professions of childishness and carelessness were a great relief to my guardian, by contrast with such things, and were the more readily believed in since to find one perfectly undesigning and candid man among many opposites could not fail to give him pleasure. I should be sorry to imply that Mr. Skimpole divined this and was politic; I really never understood him well enough to know. What he was to my guardian, he certainly was to the rest of the world.

He had not been very well; and thus, though he lived in London, we had seen nothing of him until now. He appeared one morning in his usual agreeable way and as full of pleasant spirits as ever.

Well, he said, here he was! He had been bilious, but rich men were often bilious, and therefore he had been persuading himself that he was a man of property. So he was, in a certain point of view—in his expansive intentions. He had been enriching his medical attendant in the most lavish manner. He had always doubled, and sometimes quadrupled, his fees. He had said to the doctor, "Now, my dear doctor, it is quite a delusion on your part to suppose that you attend me for nothing. I am overwhelming you with money—in my expansive intentions—if you only knew it!" And really (he said) he meant it to that degree that he thought it much the same as doing it. If he had had those bits of metal or thin paper to which mankind attached so much importance to put in the doctor's hand, he would have put them in the doctor's hand. Not having them, he substituted the will for the deed. Very well! If he really meant it—if his will were genuine and real, which it was—it appeared to him that it was the same as coin, and cancelled the obligation.

"It may be, partly, because I know nothing of the value of money," said Mr. Skimpole, "but I often feel this. It seems so reasonable! My butcher says to me he wants that little bill. It's a part of the pleasant unconscious poetry of the man's nature that he always calls it a 'little' bill—to make the payment appear easy to both of us. I reply to the butcher, 'My good friend, if you knew it, you are paid. You haven't had the trouble of coming to ask for the little bill. You are paid. I mean it.'"

"But, suppose," said my guardian, laughing, "he had meant the meat in the bill, instead of providing it?"

"My dear Jarndyce," he returned, "you surprise me. You take the butcher's position. A butcher I once dealt with occupied that very ground. Says he, 'Sir, why did you eat spring lamb at eighteen pence a pound?' 'Why did I eat spring lamb at eighteen pence a pound, my honest friend?' said I, naturally amazed by the question. 'I like spring lamb!' This was so far convincing. 'Well, sir,' says he, 'I wish I had meant the lamb as you mean the money!' 'My good fellow,' said I, 'pray let us reason like intellectual beings. How could that be? It was impossible. You HAD got the lamb, and I have NOT got the money. You couldn't really mean the lamb without sending it in, whereas I can, and do, really mean the money without paying it!' He had not a word. There was an end of the subject."

"Did he take no legal proceedings?" inquired my guardian.

"Yes, he took legal proceedings," said Mr. Skimpole. "But in that he was influenced by passion, not by reason. Passion reminds me of Boythorn. He writes me that you and the ladies have promised him a short visit at his bachelor-house in Lincolnshire."

"He is a great favourite with my girls," said Mr. Jarndyce, "and I have promised for them."

"Nature forgot to shade him off, I think," observed Mr. Skimpole to Ada and me. "A little too boisterous—like the sea. A little too vehement—like a bull who has made up his mind to consider every colour scarlet. But I grant a sledge-hammering sort of merit in him!"

I should have been surprised if those two could have thought very highly of one another, Mr. Boythorn attaching so much importance to many things and Mr. Skimpole caring so little for anything. Besides which, I had noticed Mr. Boythorn more than once on the point of breaking out into some strong opinion when Mr. Skimpole was referred to. Of course I merely joined Ada in saying that we had been greatly pleased with him.

"He has invited me," said Mr. Skimpole; "and if a child may trust himself in such hands—which the present child is encouraged to do, with the united tenderness of two angels to guard him—I shall go. He proposes to frank me down and back again. I suppose it will cost money? Shillings perhaps? Or pounds? Or something of that sort? By the by, Coavinses. You remember our friend Coavinses, Miss Summerson?"

He asked me as the subject arose in his mind, in his graceful, light-hearted manner and without the least embarrassment.

"Oh, yes!" said I.

"Coavinses has been arrested by the Great Bailiff," said Mr. Skimpole. "He will never do violence to the sunshine any more."

It quite shocked me to hear it, for I had already recalled with anything but a serious association the image of the man sitting on the sofa that night wiping his head.

"His successor informed me of it yesterday," said Mr. Skimpole. "His successor is in my house now—in possession, I think he calls it. He came yesterday, on my blue-eyed daughter's birthday. I put it to him, 'This is unreasonable and inconvenient. If you had a blue-eyed daughter you wouldn't like ME to come, uninvited, on HER birthday?' But he stayed."

Mr. Skimpole laughed at the pleasant absurdity and lightly touched the piano by which he was seated.

"And he told me," he said, playing little chords where I shall put full stops, "The Coavinses had left. Three children. No mother. And that Coavinses' profession. Being unpopular. The rising Coavinses. Were at a considerable disadvantage."

Mr. Jarndyce got up, rubbing his head, and began to walk about. Mr. Skimpole played the melody of one of Ada's favourite songs. Ada and I both looked at Mr. Jarndyce, thinking that we knew what was passing in his mind.

After walking and stopping, and several times leaving off rubbing his head, and beginning again, my guardian put his hand upon the keys and stopped Mr. Skimpole's playing. "I don't like this, Skimpole," he said thoughtfully.

Mr. Skimpole, who had quite forgotten the subject, looked up surprised.

"The man was necessary," pursued my guardian, walking backward and forward in the very short space between the piano and the end of the room and rubbing his hair up from the back of his head as if a high east wind had blown it into that form. "If we make such men necessary by our faults and follies, or by our want of worldly knowledge, or by our misfortunes, we must not revenge ourselves upon them. There was no harm in his trade. He maintained his children. One would like to know more about this."

"Oh! Coavinses?" cried Mr. Skimpole, at length perceiving what he meant. "Nothing easier. A walk to Coavinses' headquarters, and you can know what you will."

Mr. Jarndyce nodded to us, who were only waiting for the signal. "Come! We will walk that way, my dears. Why not that way as soon as another!" We were quickly ready and went out. Mr. Skimpole went with us and quite enjoyed the expedition. It was so new and so refreshing, he said, for him to want Coavinses instead of Coavinses wanting him!

He took us, first, to Cursitor Street, Chancery Lane, where there was a house with barred windows, which he called Coavinses' Castle. On our going into the entry and ringing a bell, a very hideous boy came out of a sort of office and looked at us over a spiked wicket.

"Who did you want?" said the boy, fitting two of the spikes into his chin.

"There was a follower, or an officer, or something, here," said Mr. Jarndyce, "who is dead."

"Yes?" said the boy. "Well?"

"I want to know his name, if you please?"

"Name of Neckett," said the boy.

"And his address?"

"Bell Yard," said the boy. "Chandler's shop, left hand side, name of Blinder."

"Was he—I don't know how to shape the question—" murmured my guardian, "industrious?"

"Was Neckett?" said the boy. "Yes, wery much so. He was never tired of watching. He'd set upon a post at a street corner eight or ten hours at a stretch if he undertook to do it."

"He might have done worse," I heard my guardian soliloquize. "He might have undertaken to do it and not done it. Thank you. That's all I want."

We left the boy, with his head on one side and his arms on the gate, fondling and sucking the spikes, and went back to Lincoln's Inn, where Mr. Skimpole, who had not cared to remain nearer Coavinses, awaited us. Then we all went to Bell Yard, a narrow alley at a very short distance. We soon found the chandler's shop. In it was a good-natured-looking old woman with a dropsy, or an asthma, or perhaps both.

"Neckett's children?" said she in reply to my inquiry. "Yes, Surely, miss. Three pair, if you please. Door right opposite the stairs." And she handed me the key across the counter.

I glanced at the key and glanced at her, but she took it for granted that I knew what to do with it. As it could only be intended for the children's door, I came out without asking any more questions and led the way up the dark stairs. We went as quietly as we could, but four of us made some noise on the aged boards, and when we came to the second story we found we had disturbed a man who was standing there looking out of his room.

"Is it Gridley that's wanted?" he said, fixing his eyes on me with an angry stare.

"No, sir," said I; "I am going higher up."

He looked at Ada, and at Mr. Jarndyce, and at Mr. Skimpole, fixing the same angry stare on each in succession as they passed and followed me. Mr. Jarndyce gave him good day. "Good day!" he said abruptly and fiercely. He was a tall, sallow man with a careworn head on which but little hair remained, a deeply lined face, and prominent eyes. He had a combative look and a chafing, irritable manner which, associated with his figure—still large and powerful, though evidently in its decline—rather alarmed me. He had a pen in his hand, and in the glimpse I caught of his room in passing, I saw that it was covered with a litter of papers.

Leaving him standing there, we went up to the top room. I tapped at the door, and a little shrill voice inside said, "We are locked in. Mrs. Blinder's got the key!"

I applied the key on hearing this and opened the door. In a poor room with a sloping ceiling and containing very little furniture was a mite of a boy, some five or six years old, nursing and hushing a heavy child of eighteen months. There was no fire, though the weather was cold; both children were wrapped in some poor shawls and tippets as a substitute. Their clothing was not so warm, however, but that their noses looked red and pinched and their small figures shrunken as the boy walked up and down nursing and hushing the child with its head on his shoulder.

"Who has locked you up here alone?" we naturally asked.

"Charley," said the boy, standing still to gaze at us.

"Is Charley your brother?"

"No. She's my sister, Charlotte. Father called her Charley."

"Are there any more of you besides Charley?"

"Me," said the boy, "and Emma," patting the limp bonnet of the child he was nursing. "And Charley."

"Where is Charley now?"

"Out a-washing," said the boy, beginning to walk up and down again and taking the nankeen bonnet much too near the bedstead by trying to gaze at us at the same time.

We were looking at one another and at these two children when there came into the room a very little girl, childish in figure but shrewd and older-looking in the face—pretty-faced too—wearing a womanly sort of bonnet much too large for her and drying her bare arms on a womanly sort of apron. Her fingers were white and wrinkled with washing, and the soap-suds were yet smoking which she wiped off her arms. But for this, she might have been a child playing at washing and imitating a poor working-woman with a quick observation of the truth.

She had come running from some place in the neighbourhood and had made all the haste she could. Consequently, though she was very light, she was out of breath and could not speak at first, as she stood panting, and wiping her arms, and looking quietly at us.

"Oh, here's Charley!" said the boy.

The child he was nursing stretched forth its arms and cried out to be taken by Charley. The little girl took it, in a womanly sort of manner belonging to the apron and the bonnet, and stood looking at us over the burden that clung to her most affectionately.

"Is it possible," whispered my guardian as we put a chair for the little creature and got her to sit down with her load, the boy keeping close to her, holding to her apron, "that this child works for the rest? Look at this! For God's sake, look at this!"

It was a thing to look at. The three children close together, and two of them relying solely on the third, and the third so young and yet with an air of age and steadiness that sat so strangely on the childish figure.

"Charley, Charley!" said my guardian. "How old are you?"

"Over thirteen, sir," replied the child.

"Oh! What a great age," said my guardian. "What a great age, Charley!"

I cannot describe the tenderness with which he spoke to her, half playfully yet all the more compassionately and mournfully.

"And do you live alone here with these babies, Charley?" said my guardian.

"Yes, sir," returned the child, looking up into his face with perfect confidence, "since father died."

"And how do you live, Charley? Oh! Charley," said my guardian, turning his face away for a moment, "how do you live?"

"Since father died, sir, I've gone out to work. I'm out washing to-day."

"God help you, Charley!" said my guardian. "You're not tall enough to reach the tub!"

"In pattens I am, sir," she said quickly. "I've got a high pair as belonged to mother."

"And when did mother die? Poor mother!"

"Mother died just after Emma was born," said the child, glancing at the face upon her bosom. "Then father said I was to be as good a mother to her as I could. And so I tried. And so I worked at home and did cleaning and nursing and washing for a long time before I began to go out. And that's how I know how; don't you see, sir?"

"And do you often go out?"

"As often as I can," said Charley, opening her eyes and smiling, "because of earning sixpences and shillings!"

"And do you always lock the babies up when you go out?"

"To keep 'em safe, sir, don't you see?" said Charley. "Mrs. Blinder comes up now and then, and Mr. Gridley comes up sometimes, and perhaps I can run in sometimes, and they can play you know, and Tom an't afraid of being locked up, are you, Tom?"

"No-o!" said Tom stoutly.

"When it comes on dark, the lamps are lighted down in the court, and they show up here quite bright—almost quite bright. Don't they, Tom?"

"Yes, Charley," said Tom, "almost quite bright."

"Then he's as good as gold," said the little creature—Oh, in such a motherly, womanly way! "And when Emma's tired, he puts her to bed. And when he's tired he goes to bed himself. And when I come home and light the candle and has a bit of supper, he sits up again and has it with me. Don't you, Tom?"

"Oh, yes, Charley!" said Tom. "That I do!" And either in this glimpse of the great pleasure of his life or in gratitude and love for Charley, who was all in all to him, he laid his face among the scanty folds of her frock and passed from laughing into crying.

It was the first time since our entry that a tear had been shed among these children. The little orphan girl had spoken of their father and their mother as if all that sorrow were subdued by the necessity of taking courage, and by her childish importance in being able to work, and by her bustling busy way. But now, when Tom cried, although she sat quite tranquil, looking quietly at us, and did not by any movement disturb a hair of the head of either of her little charges, I saw two silent tears fall down her face.

I stood at the window with Ada, pretending to look at the housetops, and the blackened stack of chimneys, and the poor plants, and the birds in little cages belonging to the neighbours, when I found that Mrs. Blinder, from the shop below, had come in (perhaps it had taken her all this time to get upstairs) and was talking to my guardian.

"It's not much to forgive 'em the rent, sir," she said; "who could take it from them!"

"Well, well!" said my guardian to us two. "It is enough that the time will come when this good woman will find that it WAS much, and that forasmuch as she did it unto the least of these—This child," he added after a few moments, "could she possibly continue this?"

"Really, sir, I think she might," said Mrs. Blinder, getting her heavy breath by painful degrees. "She's as handy as it's possible to be. Bless you, sir, the way she tended them two children after the mother died was the talk of the yard! And it was a wonder to see her with him after he was took ill, it really was! 'Mrs. Blinder,' he said to me the very last he spoke—he was lying there—'Mrs. Blinder, whatever my calling may have been, I see a angel sitting in this room last night along with my child, and I trust her to Our Father!'"

"He had no other calling?" said my guardian.

"No, sir," returned Mrs. Blinder, "he was nothing but a follerers. When he first came to lodge here, I didn't know what he was, and I confess that when I found out I gave him notice. It wasn't liked in the yard. It wasn't approved by the other lodgers. It is NOT a genteel calling," said Mrs. Blinder, "and most people do object to it. Mr. Gridley objected to it very strong, and he is a good lodger, though his temper has been hard tried."

"So you gave him notice?" said my guardian.

"So I gave him notice," said Mrs. Blinder. "But really when the time came, and I knew no other ill of him, I was in doubts. He was punctual and diligent; he did what he had to do, sir," said Mrs. Blinder, unconsciously fixing Mr. Skimpole with her eye, "and it's something in this world even to do that."

"So you kept him after all?"

"Why, I said that if he could arrange with Mr. Gridley, I could arrange it with the other lodgers and should not so much mind its being liked or disliked in the yard. Mr. Gridley gave his consent gruff—but gave it. He was always gruff with him, but he has been kind to the children since. A person is never known till a person is proved."

"Have many people been kind to the children?" asked Mr. Jarndyce.

"Upon the whole, not so bad, sir," said Mrs. Blinder; "but certainly not so many as would have been if their father's calling had been different. Mr. Coavins gave a guinea, and the follerers made up a little purse. Some neighbours in the yard that had always joked and tapped their shoulders when he went by came forward with a little subscription, and—in general—not so bad. Similarly with Charlotte. Some people won't employ her because she was a follerer's child; some people that do employ her cast it at her; some make a merit of having her to work for them, with that and all her draw-backs upon her, and perhaps pay her less and put upon her more. But she's patienter than others would be, and is clever too, and always willing, up to the full mark of her strength and over. So I should say, in general, not so bad, sir, but might be better."

Mrs. Blinder sat down to give herself a more favourable opportunity of recovering her breath, exhausted anew by so much talking before it was fully restored. Mr. Jarndyce was turning to speak to us when his attention was attracted by the abrupt entrance into the room of the Mr. Gridley who had been mentioned and whom we had seen on our way up.

"I don't know what you may be doing here, ladies and gentlemen," he said, as if he resented our presence, "but you'll excuse my coming in. I don't come in to stare about me. Well, Charley! Well, Tom! Well, little one! How is it with us all to-day?"

He bent over the group in a caressing way and clearly was regarded as a friend by the children, though his face retained its stern character and his manner to us was as rude as it could be. My guardian noticed it and respected it.

"No one, surely, would come here to stare about him," he said mildly.

"May be so, sir, may be so," returned the other, taking Tom upon his knee and waving him off impatiently. "I don't want to argue with ladies and gentlemen. I have had enough of arguing to last one man his life."

"You have sufficient reason, I dare say," said Mr. Jarndyce, "for being chafed and irritated—"

"There again!" exclaimed the man, becoming violently angry. "I am of a quarrelsome temper. I am irascible. I am not polite!"

"Not very, I think."

"Sir," said Gridley, putting down the child and going up to him as if he meant to strike him, "do you know anything of Courts of Equity?"

"Perhaps I do, to my sorrow."

"To your sorrow?" said the man, pausing in his wrath, "if so, I beg your pardon. I am not polite, I know. I beg your pardon! Sir," with renewed violence, "I have been dragged for five and twenty years over burning iron, and I have lost the habit of treading upon velvet. Go into the Court of Chancery yonder and ask what is one of the standing jokes that brighten up their business sometimes, and they will tell you that the best joke they have is the man from Shropshire. I," he said, beating one hand on the other passionately, "am the man from Shropshire."

"I believe I and my family have also had the honour of furnishing some entertainment in the same grave place," said my guardian composedly. "You may have heard my name—Jarndyce."

"Mr. Jarndyce," said Gridley with a rough sort of salutation, "you bear your wrongs more quietly than I can bear mine. More than that, I tell you—and I tell this gentleman, and these young ladies, if they are friends of yours—that if I took my wrongs in any other way, I should be driven mad! It is only by resenting them, and by revenging them in my mind, and by angrily demanding the justice I never get, that I am able to keep my wits together.

It is only that!" he said, speaking in a homely, rustic way and with great vehemence. "You may tell me that I over-excite myself. I answer that it's in my nature to do it, under wrong, and I must do it. There's nothing between doing it, and sinking into the smiling state of the poor little mad woman that haunts the court. If I was once to sit down under it, I should become imbecile."

The passion and heat in which he was, and the manner in which his face worked, and the violent gestures with which he accompanied what he said, were most painful to see.

"Mr. Jarndyce," he said, "consider my case. As true as there is a heaven above us, this is my case. I am one of two brothers. My father (a farmer) made a will and left his farm and stock and so forth to my mother for her life. After my mother's death, all was to come to me except a legacy of three hundred pounds that I was then to pay my brother. My mother died. My brother some time afterwards claimed his legacy. I and some of my relations said that he had had a part of it already in board and lodging and some other things. Now mind! That was the question, and nothing else. No one disputed the will; no one disputed anything but whether part of that three hundred pounds had been already paid or not. To settle that question, my brother filing a bill, I was obliged to go into this accursed Chancery; I was forced there because the law forced me and would let me go nowhere else. Seventeen people were made defendants to that simple suit! It first came on after two years. It was then stopped for another two years while the master (may his head rot off!) inquired whether I was my father's son, about which there was no dispute at all with any mortal creature. He then found out that there were not defendants enough—remember, there were only seventeen as yet!—but that we must have another who had been left out and must begin all over again. The costs at that time—before the thing was begun!—were three times the legacy. My brother would have given up the legacy, and joyful, to escape more costs. My whole estate, left to me in that will of my father's, has gone in costs. The suit, still undecided, has fallen into rack, and ruin, and despair, with everything else—and here I stand, this day! Now, Mr. Jarndyce, in your suit there are thousands and thousands involved, where in mine there are hundreds. Is mine less hard to bear or is it harder to bear, when my whole living was in it and has been thus shamefully sucked away?"

Mr. Jarndyce said that he condoled with him with all his heart and that he set up no monopoly himself in being unjustly treated by this monstrous system.

"There again!" said Mr. Gridley with no diminution of his rage. "The system! I am told on all hands, it's the system. I mustn't look to individuals. It's the system. I mustn't go into court and say, 'My Lord, I beg to know this from you—is this right or wrong? Have you the face to tell me I have received justice and therefore am dismissed?' My Lord knows nothing of it. He sits there to administer the system. I mustn't go to Mr. Tulkinghorn, the solicitor in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and say to him when he makes me furious by being so cool and satisfied—as they all do, for I know they gain by it while I lose, don't I?—I mustn't say to him, 'I will have something out of some one for my ruin, by fair means or foul!' HE is not responsible. It's the system. But, if I do no violence to any of them, here—I may! I don't know what may happen if I am carried beyond myself at last! I will accuse the individual workers of that system against me, face to face, before the great eternal bar!"

His passion was fearful. I could not have believed in such rage without seeing it.

"I have done!" he said, sitting down and wiping his face. "Mr. Jarndyce, I have done! I am violent, I know. I ought to know it. I have been in prison for contempt of court. I have been in prison for threatening the solicitor. I have been in this trouble, and that trouble, and shall be again. I am the man from Shropshire, and I sometimes go beyond amusing them, though they have found it amusing, too, to see me committed into custody and brought up in custody and all that. It would be better for me, they tell me, if I restrained myself. I tell them that if I did restrain myself I should become imbecile. I was a good-enough-tempered man once, I believe. People in my part of the country say they remember me so, but now I must have this vent under my sense of injury or nothing could hold my wits together. It would be far better for you, Mr. Gridley,' the Lord Chancellor told me last week, 'not to waste your time here, and to stay, usefully employed, down in Shropshire.' 'My Lord, my Lord, I know it would,' said I to him, 'and it would have been far better for me never to have heard the name of your high office, but unhappily for me, I can't undo the past, and the past drives me here!' Besides," he added, breaking fiercely out, "I'll shame them. To the last, I'll show myself in that court to its shame. If I knew when I was going to die, and could be carried there, and had a voice to speak with, I would die there, saying, 'You have brought me here and sent me from here many and many a time. Now send me out feet foremost!'"

His countenance had, perhaps for years, become so set in its contentious expression that it did not soften, even now when he was quiet.

"I came to take these babies down to my room for an hour," he said, going to them again, "and let them play about. I didn't mean to say all this, but it don't much signify. You're not afraid of me, Tom, are you?"

"No!" said Tom. "You ain't angry with ME."

"You are right, my child. You're going back, Charley? Aye? Come then, little one!" He took the youngest child on his arm, where she was willing enough to be carried. "I shouldn't wonder if we found a gingerbread soldier downstairs. Let's go and look for him!"

He made his former rough salutation, which was not deficient in a certain respect, to Mr. Jarndyce, and bowing slightly to us, went downstairs to his room.

Upon that, Mr. Skimpole began to talk, for the first time since our arrival, in his usual gay strain. He said, Well, it was really very pleasant to see how things lazily adapted themselves to purposes. Here was this Mr. Gridley, a man of a robust will and surprising energy—intellectually speaking, a sort of inharmonious blacksmith—and he could easily imagine that there Gridley was, years ago, wandering about in life for something to expend his superfluous combativeness upon—a sort of Young Love among the thorns—when the Court of Chancery came in his way and accommodated him with the exact thing he wanted. There they were, matched, ever afterwards! Otherwise he might have been a great general, blowing up all sorts of towns, or he might have been a great politician, dealing in all sorts of parliamentary rhetoric; but as it was, he and the Court of Chancery had fallen upon each other in the pleasantest way, and nobody was much the worse, and Gridley was, so to speak, from that hour provided for. Then look at Coavinses! How delightfully poor Coavinses (father of these charming children) illustrated the same principle! He, Mr. Skimpole, himself, had sometimes repined at the existence of Coavinses. He had found Coavinses in his way. He could had dispensed with Coavinses. There had been times when, if he had been a sultan, and his grand vizier had said one morning, "What does the Commander of the Faithful require at the hands of his slave?" he might have even gone so far as to reply, "The head of Coavinses!" But what turned out to be the case? That, all that time, he had been giving employment to a most deserving man, that he had been a benefactor to Coavinses, that he had actually been enabling Coavinses to bring up these charming children in this agreeable way, developing these social virtues! Insomuch that his heart had just now swelled and the tears had come into his eyes when he had looked round the room and thought, "I was the great patron of Coavinses, and his little comforts were MY work!"

There was something so captivating in his light way of touching these fantastic strings, and he was such a mirthful child by the side of the graver childhood we had seen, that he made my guardian smile even as he turned towards us from a little private talk with Mrs. Blinder. We kissed Charley, and took her downstairs with us, and stopped outside the house to see her run away to her work. I don't know where she was going, but we saw her run, such a little, little creature in her womanly bonnet and apron, through a covered way at the bottom of the court and melt into the city's strife and sound like a dewdrop in an ocean.

CHAPTER XVI. Tom-all-Alone's

My Lady Dedlock is restless, very restless. The astonished fashionable intelligence hardly knows where to have her. To-day she is at Chesney Wold; yesterday she was at her house in town; to-morrow she may be abroad, for anything the fashionable intelligence can with confidence predict. Even Sir Leicester's gallantry has some trouble to keep pace with her. It would have more but that his other faithful ally, for better and for worse—the gout—darts into the old oak bed-chamber at Chesney Wold and grips him by both legs.

Sir Leicester receives the gout as a troublesome demon, but still a demon of the patrician order. All the Dedlocks, in the direct male line, through a course of time during and beyond which the memory of man goeth not to the contrary, have had the gout. It can be proved, sir. Other men's fathers may have died of the rheumatism or may have taken base contagion from the tainted blood of the sick vulgar, but the Dedlock family have communicated something exclusive even to the levelling process of dying by dying of their own family gout. It has come down through the illustrious line like the plate, or the pictures, or the place in Lincolnshire. It is among their dignities. Sir Leicester is perhaps not wholly without an impression, though he has never resolved it into words, that the angel of death in the discharge of his necessary duties may observe to the shades of the aristocracy, "My lords and gentlemen, I have the honour to present to you another Dedlock certified to have arrived per the family gout."

Hence Sir Leicester yields up his family legs to the family disorder as if he held his name and fortune on that feudal tenure. He feels that for a Dedlock to be laid upon his back and spasmodically twitched and stabbed in his extremities is a liberty taken somewhere, but he thinks, "We have all yielded to this; it belongs to us; it has for some hundreds of years been understood that we are not to make the vaults in the park interesting on more ignoble terms; and I submit myself to the compromise."

And a goodly show he makes, lying in a flush of crimson and gold in the midst of the great drawing-room before his favourite picture of my Lady, with broad strips of sunlight shining in, down the long perspective, through the long line of windows, and alternating with soft reliefs of shadow. Outside, the stately oaks, rooted for ages in the green ground which has never known ploughshare, but was still a chase when kings rode to battle with sword and shield and rode a-hunting with bow and arrow, bear witness to his greatness. Inside, his forefathers, looking on him from the walls, say, "Each of us was a passing reality here and left this coloured shadow of himself and melted into remembrance as dreamy as the distant voices of the rooks now lulling you to rest," and hear their testimony to his greatness too. And he is very great this day. And woe to Boythorn or other daring wight who shall presumptuously contest an inch with him!

My Lady is at present represented, near Sir Leicester, by her portrait. She has flitted away to town, with no intention of remaining there, and will soon flit hither again, to the confusion of the fashionable intelligence. The house in town is not prepared for her reception. It is muffled and dreary. Only one Mercury in powder gapes disconsolate at the hall-window; and he mentioned last night to another Mercury of his acquaintance, also accustomed to good society, that if that sort of thing was to last—which it couldn't, for a man of his spirits couldn't bear it, and a man of his figure couldn't be expected to bear it—there would be no resource for him, upon his honour, but to cut his throat!

What connexion can there be between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabout of Jo the outlaw with the broom, who had that distant ray of light upon him when he swept the churchyard-step? What connexion can there have been between many people in the innumerable histories of this world who from opposite sides of great gulfs have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together!

Jo sweeps his crossing all day long, unconscious of the link, if any link there be. He sums up his mental condition when asked a question by replying that he "don't know nothink." He knows that it's hard to keep the mud off the crossing in dirty weather, and harder still to live by doing it. Nobody taught him even that much; he found it out.

Jo lives—that is to say, Jo has not yet died—in a ruinous place known to the like of him by the name of Tom-all-Alone's. It is a black, dilapidated street, avoided by all decent people, where the crazy houses were seized upon, when their decay was far advanced, by some bold vagrants who after establishing their own possession took to letting them out in lodgings. Now, these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery. As on the ruined human wretch vermin parasites appear, so these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in; and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever and sowing more evil in its every footprint than Lord Coodle, and Sir Thomas Doodle, and the Duke of Foodle, and all the fine gentlemen in office, down to Zoodle, shall set right in five hundred years—though born expressly to do it.

Twice lately there has been a crash and a cloud of dust, like the springing of a mine, in Tom-all-Alone's; and each time a house has fallen. These accidents have made a paragraph in the newspapers and have filled a bed or two in the nearest hospital. The gaps remain, and there are not unpopular lodgings among the rubbish. As several more houses are nearly ready to go, the next crash in Tom-all-Alone's may be expected to be a good one.

This desirable property is in Chancery, of course. It would be an insult to the discernment of any man with half an eye to tell him so. Whether "Tom" is the popular representative of the original plaintiff or defendant in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, or whether Tom lived here when the suit had laid the street waste, all alone, until other settlers came to join him, or whether the traditional title is a comprehensive name for a retreat cut off from honest company and put out of the pale of hope, perhaps nobody knows. Certainly Jo don't know.

"For I don't," says Jo, "I don't know nothink."

It must be a strange state to be like Jo! To shuffle through the streets, unfamiliar with the shapes, and in utter darkness as to the meaning, of those mysterious symbols, so abundant over the shops, and at the corners of streets, and on the doors, and in the windows! To see people read, and to see people write, and to see the postmen deliver letters, and not to have the least idea of all that language—to be, to every scrap of it, stone blind and dumb! It must be very puzzling to see the good company going to the churches on Sundays, with their books in their hands, and to think (for perhaps Jo DOES think at odd times) what does it all mean, and if it means anything to anybody, how comes it that it means nothing to me? To be hustled, and jostled, and moved on; and really to feel that it would appear to be perfectly true that I have no business here, or there, or anywhere; and yet to be perplexed by the consideration that I AM here somehow, too, and everybody overlooked me until I became the creature that I am! It must be a strange state, not merely to be told that I am scarcely human (as in the case of my offering myself for a witness), but to feel it of my own knowledge all my life! To see the horses, dogs, and cattle go by me and to know that in ignorance I belong to them and not to the superior beings in my shape, whose delicacy I offend! Jo's ideas of a criminal trial, or a judge, or a bishop, or a government, or that inestimable jewel to him (if he only knew it) the Constitution, should be strange! His whole material and immaterial life is wonderfully strange; his death, the strangest thing of all.

Jo comes out of Tom-all-Alone's, meeting the tardy morning which is always late in getting down there, and munches his dirty bit of bread as he comes along. His way lying through many streets, and the houses not yet being open, he sits down to breakfast on the door-step of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts and gives it a brush when he has finished as an acknowledgment of the accommodation. He admires the size of the edifice and wonders what it's all about. He has no idea, poor wretch, of the spiritual destitution of a coral reef in the Pacific or what it costs to look up the precious souls among the coco-nuts and bread-fruit.

He goes to his crossing and begins to lay it out for the day. The town awakes; the great tee-totum is set up for its daily spin and whirl; all that unaccountable reading and writing, which has been suspended for a few hours, recommences. Jo and the other lower animals get on in the unintelligible mess as they can. It is market-day. The blinded oxen, over-goaded, over-driven, never guided, run into wrong places and are beaten out, and plunge red-eyed and foaming at stone walls, and often sorely hurt the innocent, and often sorely hurt themselves. Very like Jo and his order; very, very like!

A band of music comes and plays. Jo listens to it. So does a dog—a drover's dog, waiting for his master outside a butcher's shop, and evidently thinking about those sheep he has had upon his mind for some hours and is happily rid of. He seems perplexed respecting three or four, can't remember where he left them, looks up and down the street as half expecting to see them astray, suddenly pricks up his ears and remembers all about it. A thoroughly vagabond dog, accustomed to low company and public-houses; a terrific dog to sheep, ready at a whistle to scamper over their backs and tear out mouthfuls of their wool; but an educated, improved, developed dog who has been taught his duties and knows how to discharge them. He and Jo listen to the music, probably with much the same amount of animal satisfaction; likewise as to awakened association, aspiration, or regret, melancholy or joyful reference to things beyond the senses, they are probably upon a par. But, otherwise, how far above the human listener is the brute!

Turn that dog's descendants wild, like Jo, and in a very few years they will so degenerate that they will lose even their bark—but not their bite.

The day changes as it wears itself away and becomes dark and drizzly. Jo fights it out at his crossing among the mud and wheels, the horses, whips, and umbrellas, and gets but a scanty sum to pay for the unsavoury shelter of Tom-all-Alone's. Twilight comes on; gas begins to start up in the shops; the lamplighter, with his ladder, runs along the margin of the pavement. A wretched evening is beginning to close in.

In his chambers Mr. Tulkinghorn sits meditating an application to the nearest magistrate to-morrow morning for a warrant. Gridley, a disappointed suitor, has been here to-day and has been alarming. We are not to be put in bodily fear, and that ill-conditioned fellow shall be held to bail again. From the ceiling, foreshortened Allegory, in the person of one impossible Roman upside down, points with the arm of Samson (out of joint, and an odd one) obtrusively toward the window. Why should Mr. Tulkinghorn, for such no reason, look out of window? Is the hand not always pointing there? So he does not look out of window.

And if he did, what would it be to see a woman going by? There are women enough in the world, Mr. Tulkinghorn thinks—too many; they are at the bottom of all that goes wrong in it, though, for the matter of that, they create business for lawyers. What would it be to see a woman going by, even though she were going secretly? They are all secret. Mr. Tulkinghorn knows that very well.

But they are not all like the woman who now leaves him and his house behind, between whose plain dress and her refined manner there is something exceedingly inconsistent. She should be an upper servant by her attire, yet in her air and step, though both are hurried and assumed—as far as she can assume in the muddy streets, which she treads with an unaccustomed foot—she is a lady. Her face is veiled, and still she sufficiently betrays herself to make more than one of those who pass her look round sharply.

She never turns her head. Lady or servant, she has a purpose in her and can follow it. She never turns her head until she comes to the crossing where Jo plies with his broom. He crosses with her and begs. Still, she does not turn her head until she has landed on the other side. Then she slightly beckons to him and says, "Come here!"

Jo follows her a pace or two into a quiet court.

"Are you the boy I've read of in the papers?" she asked behind her veil.

"I don't know," says Jo, staring moodily at the veil, "nothink about no papers. I don't know nothink about nothink at all."

"Were you examined at an inquest?"

"I don't know nothink about no—where I was took by the beadle, do you mean?" says Jo. "Was the boy's name at the inkwhich Jo?"

"Yes."

"That's me!" says Jo.

"Come farther up."

"You mean about the man?" says Jo, following. "Him as wos dead?"

"Hush! Speak in a whisper! Yes. Did he look, when he was living, so very ill and poor?"

"Oh, jist!" says Jo.

"Did he look like—not like YOU?" says the woman with abhorrence.

"Oh, not so bad as me," says Jo. "I'm a reg'lar one I am! You didn't know him, did you?"

"How dare you ask me if I knew him?"

"No offence, my lady," says Jo with much humility, for even he has got at the suspicion of her being a lady.

"I am not a lady. I am a servant."

"You are a jolly servant!" says Jo without the least idea of saying anything offensive, merely as a tribute of admiration.

"Listen and be silent. Don't talk to me, and stand farther from me! Can you show me all those places that were spoken of in the account I read? The place he wrote for, the place he died at, the place where you were taken to, and the place where he was buried? Do you know the place where he was buried?"

Jo answers with a nod, having also nodded as each other place was mentioned.

"Go before me and show me all those dreadful places. Stop opposite to each, and don't speak to me unless I speak to you. Don't look back. Do what I want, and I will pay you well."

Jo attends closely while the words are being spoken; tells them off on his broom-handle, finding them rather hard; pauses to consider their meaning; considers it satisfactory; and nods his ragged head.

"I'm fly," says Jo. "But fen larks, you know. Stow hooking it!"

"What does the horrible creature mean?" exclaims the servant, recoiling from him.

"Stow cutting away, you know!" says Jo.

"I don't understand you. Go on before! I will give you more money than you ever had in your life."

Jo screws up his mouth into a whistle, gives his ragged head a rub, takes his broom under his arm, and leads the way, passing deftly with his bare feet over the hard stones and through the mud and mire.

Cook's Court. Jo stops. A pause.

"Who lives here?"

"Him wot give him his writing and give me half a bull," says Jo in a whisper without looking over his shoulder.

"Go on to the next."

Krook's house. Jo stops again. A longer pause.

"Who lives here?"

"HE lived here," Jo answers as before.

After a silence he is asked, "In which room?"

"In the back room up there. You can see the winder from this corner. Up there! That's where I see him stritched out. This is the public-ouse where I was took to."

"Go on to the next!"

It is a longer walk to the next, but Jo, relieved of his first suspicions, sticks to the forms imposed upon him and does not look round. By many devious ways, reeking with offence of many kinds, they come to the little tunnel of a court, and to the gas-lamp (lighted now), and to the iron gate.

"He was put there," says Jo, holding to the bars and looking in.

"Where? Oh, what a scene of horror!"

"There!" says Jo, pointing. "Over yinder. Among them piles of bones, and close to that there kitchin winder! They put him wery nigh the top. They was obliged to stamp upon it to git it in. I could unkiver it for you with my broom if the gate was open. That's why they locks it, I s'pose," giving it a shake. "It's always locked. Look at the rat!" cries Jo, excited. "Hi! Look! There he goes! Ho! Into the ground!"

The servant shrinks into a corner, into a corner of that hideous archway, with its deadly stains contaminating her dress; and putting out her two hands and passionately telling him to keep away from her, for he is loathsome to her, so remains for some moments. Jo stands staring and is still staring when she recovers herself.

"Is this place of abomination consecrated ground?"

"I don't know nothink of consequential ground," says Jo, still staring.

"Is it blessed?"

"Which?" says Jo, in the last degree amazed.

"Is it blessed?"

"I'm blest if I know," says Jo, staring more than ever; "but I shouldn't think it warn't. Blest?" repeats Jo, something troubled in his mind. "It an't done it much good if it is. Blest? I should think it was t'othered myself. But I don't know nothink!"

The servant takes as little heed of what he says as she seems to take of what she has said herself. She draws off her glove to get some money from her purse. Jo silently notices how white and small her hand is and what a jolly servant she must be to wear such sparkling rings.

She drops a piece of money in his hand without touching it, and shuddering as their hands approach. "Now," she adds, "show me the spot again!"

Jo thrusts the handle of his broom between the bars of the gate, and with his utmost power of elaboration, points it out. At length, looking aside to see if he has made himself intelligible, he finds that he is alone.

His first proceeding is to hold the piece of money to the gas-light and to be overpowered at finding that it is yellow—gold. His next is to give it a one-sided bite at the edge as a test of its quality. His next, to put it in his mouth for safety and to sweep the step and passage with great care. His job done, he sets off for Tom-all-Alone's, stopping in the light of innumerable gas-lamps to produce the piece of gold and give it another one-sided bite as a reassurance of its being genuine.

The Mercury in powder is in no want of society to-night, for my Lady goes to a grand dinner and three or four balls. Sir Leicester is fidgety down at Chesney Wold, with no better company than the goat; he complains to Mrs. Rouncewell that the rain makes such a monotonous pattering on the terrace that he can't read the paper even by the fireside in his own snug dressing-room.

"Sir Leicester would have done better to try the other side of the house, my dear," says Mrs. Rouncewell to Rosa. "His dressing-room is on my Lady's side. And in all these years I never heard the step upon the Ghost's Walk more distinct than it is to-night!"

CHAPTER XVII. Esther's Narrative

Richard very often came to see us while we remained in London (though he soon failed in his letter-writing), and with his quick abilities, his good spirits, his good temper, his gaiety and freshness, was always delightful. But though I liked him more and more the better I knew him, I still felt more and more how much it was to be regretted that he had been educated in no habits of application and concentration. The system which had addressed him in exactly the same manner as it had addressed hundreds of other boys, all varying in character and capacity, had enabled him to dash through his tasks, always with fair credit and often with distinction, but in a fitful, dazzling way that had confirmed his reliance on those very qualities in himself which it had been most desirable to direct and train. They were good qualities, without which no high place can be meritoriously won, but like fire and water, though excellent servants, they were very bad masters. If they had been under Richard's direction, they would have been his friends; but Richard being under their direction, they became his enemies.

I write down these opinions not because I believe that this or any other thing was so because I thought so, but only because I did think so and I want to be quite candid about all I thought and did. These were my thoughts about Richard. I thought I often observed besides how right my guardian was in what he had said, and that the uncertainties and delays of the Chancery suit had imparted to his nature something of the careless spirit of a gamester who felt that he was part of a great gaming system.

Mr. and Mrs. Bayham Badger coming one afternoon when my guardian was not at home, in the course of conversation I naturally inquired after Richard.

"Why, Mr. Carstone," said Mrs. Badger, "is very well and is, I assure you, a great acquisition to our society. Captain Swosser used to say of me that I was always better than land a-head and a breeze a-starn to the midshipmen's mess when the purser's junk had become as tough as the fore-topsel weather earings. It was his naval way of mentioning generally that I was an acquisition to any society. I may render the same tribute, I am sure, to Mr. Carstone. But I—you won't think me premature if I mention it?"

I said no, as Mrs. Badger's insinuating tone seemed to require such an answer.

"Nor Miss Clare?" said Mrs. Bayham Badger sweetly.

Ada said no, too, and looked uneasy.

"Why, you see, my dears," said Mrs. Badger, "—you'll excuse me calling you my dears?"

We entreated Mrs. Badger not to mention it.

"Because you really are, if I may take the liberty of saying so," pursued Mrs. Badger, "so perfectly charming. You see, my dears, that although I am still young—or Mr. Bayham Badger pays me the compliment of saying so—"

"No," Mr. Badger called out like some one contradicting at a public meeting. "Not at all!"

"Very well," smiled Mrs. Badger, "we will say still young."

"Undoubtedly," said Mr. Badger.

"My dears, though still young, I have had many opportunities of observing young men. There were many such on board the dear old Crippler, I assure you. After that, when I was with Captain Swosser in the Mediterranean, I embraced every opportunity of knowing and befriending the midshipmen under Captain Swosser's command. YOU never heard them called the young gentlemen, my dears, and probably would not understand allusions to their pipe-claying their weekly accounts, but it is otherwise with me, for blue water has been a second home to me, and I have been quite a sailor. Again, with Professor Dingo."

"A man of European reputation," murmured Mr. Badger.

"When I lost my dear first and became the wife of my dear second," said Mrs. Badger, speaking of her former husbands as if they were parts of a charade, "I still enjoyed opportunities of observing youth. The class attendant on Professor Dingo's lectures was a large one, and it became my pride, as the wife of an eminent scientific man seeking herself in science the utmost consolation it could impart, to throw our house open to the students as a kind of Scientific Exchange. Every Tuesday evening there was lemonade and a mixed biscuit for all who chose to partake of those refreshments. And there was science to an unlimited extent."

"Remarkable assemblies those, Miss Summerson," said Mr. Badger reverentially. "There must have been great intellectual friction going on there under the auspices of such a man!"

"And now," pursued Mrs. Badger, "now that I am the wife of my dear third, Mr. Badger, I still pursue those habits of observation which were formed during the lifetime of Captain Swosser and adapted to new and unexpected purposes during the lifetime of Professor Dingo. I therefore have not come to the consideration of Mr. Carstone as a neophyte. And yet I am very much of the opinion, my dears, that he has not chosen his profession advisedly."

Ada looked so very anxious now that I asked Mrs. Badger on what she founded her supposition.

"My dear Miss Summerson," she replied, "on Mr. Carstone's character and conduct. He is of such a very easy disposition that probably he would never think it worth-while to mention how he really feels, but he feels languid about the profession. He has not that positive interest in it which makes it his vocation. If he has any decided impression in reference to it, I should say it was that it is a tiresome pursuit. Now, this is not promising. Young men like Mr. Allan Woodcourt who take it from a strong interest in all that it can do will find some reward in it through a great deal of work for a very little money and through years of considerable endurance and disappointment. But I am quite convinced that this would never be the case with Mr. Carstone."

"Does Mr. Badger think so too?" asked Ada timidly.

"Why," said Mr. Badger, "to tell the truth, Miss Clare, this view of the matter had not occurred to me until Mrs. Badger mentioned it. But when Mrs. Badger put it in that light, I naturally gave great consideration to it, knowing that Mrs. Badger's mind, in addition to its natural advantages, has had the rare advantage of being formed by two such very distinguished (I will even say illustrious) public men as Captain Swosser of the Royal Navy and Professor Dingo. The conclusion at which I have arrived is—in short, is Mrs. Badger's conclusion."

"It was a maxim of Captain Swosser's," said Mrs. Badger, "speaking in his figurative naval manner, that when you make pitch hot, you cannot make it too hot; and that if you only have to swab a plank, you should swab it as if Davy Jones were after you. It appears to me that this maxim is applicable to the medical as well as to the nautical profession.

"To all professions," observed Mr. Badger. "It was admirably said by Captain Swosser. Beautifully said."

"People objected to Professor Dingo when we were staying in the north of Devon after our marriage," said Mrs. Badger, "that he disfigured some of the houses and other buildings by chipping off fragments of those edifices with his little geological hammer. But the professor replied that he knew of no building save the Temple of Science. The principle is the same, I think?"

"Precisely the same," said Mr. Badger. "Finely expressed! The professor made the same remark, Miss Summerson, in his last illness, when (his mind wandering) he insisted on keeping his little hammer under the pillow and chipping at the countenances of the attendants. The ruling passion!"

Although we could have dispensed with the length at which Mr. and Mrs. Badger pursued the conversation, we both felt that it was disinterested in them to express the opinion they had communicated to us and that there was a great probability of its being sound. We agreed to say nothing to Mr. Jarndyce until we had spoken to Richard; and as he was coming next evening, we resolved to have a very serious talk with him.

So after he had been a little while with Ada, I went in and found my darling (as I knew she would be) prepared to consider him thoroughly right in whatever he said.

"And how do you get on, Richard?" said I. I always sat down on the other side of him. He made quite a sister of me.

"Oh! Well enough!" said Richard.

"He can't say better than that, Esther, can he?" cried my pet triumphantly.

I tried to look at my pet in the wisest manner, but of course I couldn't.

"Well enough?" I repeated.

"Yes," said Richard, "well enough. It's rather jog-trotty and humdrum. But it'll do as well as anything else!"

"Oh! My dear Richard!" I remonstrated.

"What's the matter?" said Richard.

"Do as well as anything else!"

"I don't think there's any harm in that, Dame Durden," said Ada, looking so confidingly at me across him; "because if it will do as well as anything else, it will do very well, I hope."

"Oh, yes, I hope so," returned Richard, carelessly tossing his hair from his forehead. "After all, it may be only a kind of probation till our suit is—I forgot though. I am not to mention the suit. Forbidden ground! Oh, yes, it's all right enough. Let us talk about something else."

Ada would have done so willingly, and with a full persuasion that we had brought the question to a most satisfactory state. But I thought it would be useless to stop there, so I began again.

"No, but Richard," said I, "and my dear Ada! Consider how important it is to you both, and what a point of honour it is towards your cousin, that you, Richard, should be quite in earnest without any reservation. I think we had better talk about this, really, Ada. It will be too late very soon."

"Oh, yes! We must talk about it!" said Ada. "But I think Richard is right."

What was the use of my trying to look wise when she was so pretty, and so engaging, and so fond of him!

"Mr. and Mrs. Badger were here yesterday, Richard," said I, "and they seemed disposed to think that you had no great liking for the profession."

"Did they though?" said Richard. "Oh! Well, that rather alters the case, because I had no idea that they thought so, and I should not have liked to disappoint or inconvenience them. The fact is, I don't care much about it. But, oh, it don't matter! It'll do as well as anything else!"

"You hear him, Ada!" said I.

"The fact is," Richard proceeded, half thoughtfully and half jocosely, "it is not quite in my way. I don't take to it. And I get too much of Mrs. Bayham Badger's first and second."

"I am sure THAT'S very natural!" cried Ada, quite delighted. "The very thing we both said yesterday, Esther!"

"Then," pursued Richard, "it's monotonous, and to-day is too like yesterday, and to-morrow is too like to-day."

"But I am afraid," said I, "this is an objection to all kinds of application—to life itself, except under some very uncommon circumstances."

"Do you think so?" returned Richard, still considering. "Perhaps! Ha! Why, then, you know," he added, suddenly becoming gay again, "we travel outside a circle to what I said just now. It'll do as well as anything else. Oh, it's all right enough! Let us talk about something else."

But even Ada, with her loving face—and if it had seemed innocent and trusting when I first saw it in that memorable November fog, how much more did it seem now when I knew her innocent and trusting heart—even Ada shook her head at this and looked serious. So I thought it a good opportunity to hint to Richard that if he were sometimes a little careless of himself, I was very sure he never meant to be careless of Ada, and that it was a part of his affectionate consideration for her not to slight the importance of a step that might influence both their lives. This made him almost grave.

"My dear Mother Hubbard," he said, "that's the very thing! I have thought of that several times and have been quite angry with myself for meaning to be so much in earnest and—somehow—not exactly being so. I don't know how it is; I seem to want something or other to stand by. Even you have no idea how fond I am of Ada (my darling cousin, I love you, so much!), but I don't settle down to constancy in other things. It's such uphill work, and it takes such a time!" said Richard with an air of vexation.

"That may be," I suggested, "because you don't like what you have chosen."

"Poor fellow!" said Ada. "I am sure I don't wonder at it!"

No. It was not of the least use my trying to look wise. I tried again, but how could I do it, or how could it have any effect if I could, while Ada rested her clasped hands upon his shoulder and while he looked at her tender blue eyes, and while they looked at him!

"You see, my precious girl," said Richard, passing her golden curls through and through his hand, "I was a little hasty perhaps; or I misunderstood my own inclinations perhaps. They don't seem to lie in that direction. I couldn't tell till I tried. Now the question is whether it's worth-while to undo all that has been done. It seems like making a great disturbance about nothing particular."

"My dear Richard," said I, "how CAN you say about nothing particular?"

"I don't mean absolutely that," he returned. "I mean that it MAY be nothing particular because I may never want it."

Both Ada and I urged, in reply, not only that it was decidedly worth-while to undo what had been done, but that it must be undone. I then asked Richard whether he had thought of any more congenial pursuit.

"There, my dear Mrs. Shipton," said Richard, "you touch me home. Yes, I have. I have been thinking that the law is the boy for me."

"The law!" repeated Ada as if she were afraid of the name.

"If I went into Kenge's office," said Richard, "and if I were placed under articles to Kenge, I should have my eye on the—hum!—the forbidden ground—and should be able to study it, and master it, and to satisfy myself that it was not neglected and was being properly conducted. I should be able to look after Ada's interests and my own interests (the same thing!);

and I should peg away at Blackstone and all those fellows with the most tremendous ardour."

I was not by any means so sure of that, and I saw how his hankering after the vague things yet to come of those long-deferred hopes cast a shade on Ada's face. But I thought it best to encourage him in any project of continuous exertion, and only advised him to be quite sure that his mind was made up now.

"My dear Minerva," said Richard, "I am as steady as you are. I made a mistake; we are all liable to mistakes; I won't do so any more, and I'll become such a lawyer as is not often seen. That is, you know," said Richard, relapsing into doubt, "if it really is worth-while, after all, to make such a disturbance about nothing particular!"

This led to our saying again, with a great deal of gravity, all that we had said already and to our coming to much the same conclusion afterwards. But we so strongly advised Richard to be frank and open with Mr. Jarndyce, without a moment's delay, and his disposition was naturally so opposed to concealment that he sought him out at once (taking us with him) and made a full avowal. "Rick," said my guardian, after hearing him attentively, "we can retreat with honour, and we will. But we must be careful—for our cousin's sake, Rick, for our cousin's sake—that we make no more such mistakes. Therefore, in the matter of the law, we will have a good trial before we decide. We will look before we leap, and take plenty of time about it."

Richard's energy was of such an impatient and fitful kind that he would have liked nothing better than to have gone to Mr. Kenge's office in that hour and to have entered into articles with him on the spot. Submitting, however, with a good grace to the caution that we had shown to be so necessary, he contented himself with sitting down among us in his lightest spirits and talking as if his one unvarying purpose in life from childhood had been that one which now held possession of him. My guardian was very kind and cordial with him, but rather grave, enough so to cause Ada, when he had departed and we were going upstairs to bed, to say, "Cousin John, I hope you don't think the worse of Richard?"

"No, my love," said he.

"Because it was very natural that Richard should be mistaken in such a difficult case. It is not uncommon."

"No, no, my love," said he. "Don't look unhappy."

"Oh, I am not unhappy, cousin John!" said Ada, smiling cheerfully, with her hand upon his shoulder, where she had put it in bidding him good night. "But I should be a little so if you thought at all the worse of Richard."

"My dear," said Mr. Jarndyce, "I should think the worse of him only if you were ever in the least unhappy through his means. I should be more disposed to quarrel with myself even then, than with poor Rick, for I brought you together. But, tut, all this is nothing! He has time before him, and the race to run. I think the worse of him? Not I, my loving cousin! And not you, I swear!"

"No, indeed, cousin John," said Ada, "I am sure I could not—I am sure I would not—think any ill of Richard if the whole world did. I could, and I would, think better of him then than at any other time!"

So quietly and honestly she said it, with her hands upon his shoulders—both hands now—and looking up into his face, like the picture of truth!

"I think," said my guardian, thoughtfully regarding her, "I think it must be somewhere written that the virtues of the mothers shall occasionally be visited on the children, as well as the sins of the father. Good night, my rosebud. Good night, little woman. Pleasant slumbers! Happy dreams!"

This was the first time I ever saw him follow Ada with his eyes with something of a shadow on their benevolent expression. I well remembered the look with which he had contemplated her and Richard when she was singing in the firelight; it was but a very little while since he had watched them passing down the room in which the sun was shining, and away into the shade; but his glance was changed, and even the silent look of confidence in me which now followed it once more was not quite so hopeful and untroubled as it had originally been.

Ada praised Richard more to me that night than ever she had praised him yet. She went to sleep with a little bracelet he had given her clasped upon her arm. I fancied she was dreaming of him when I kissed her cheek after she had slept an hour and saw how tranquil and happy she looked.

For I was so little inclined to sleep myself that night that I sat up working. It would not be worth mentioning for its own sake, but I was wakeful and rather low-spirited. I don't know why. At least I don't think I know why. At least, perhaps I do, but I don't think it matters.

At any rate, I made up my mind to be so dreadfully industrious that I would leave myself not a moment's leisure to be low-spirited. For I naturally said, "Esther! You to be low-spirited. YOU!" And it really was time to say so, for I—yes, I really did see myself in the glass, almost crying. "As if you had anything to make you unhappy, instead of everything to make you happy, you ungrateful heart!" said I.

If I could have made myself go to sleep, I would have done it directly, but not being able to do that, I took out of my basket some ornamental work for our house (I mean Bleak House) that I was busy with at that time and sat down to it with great determination. It was necessary to count all the stitches in that work, and I resolved to go on with it until I couldn't keep my eyes open, and then to go to bed.

I soon found myself very busy. But I had left some silk downstairs in a work-table drawer in the temporary growlery, and coming to a stop for want of it, I took my candle and went softly down to get it. To my great surprise, on going in I found my guardian still there, and sitting looking at the ashes. He was lost in thought, his book lay unheeded by his side, his silvered iron-grey hair was scattered confusedly upon his forehead as though his hand had been wandering among it while his thoughts were elsewhere, and his face looked worn. Almost frightened by coming upon him so unexpectedly, I stood still for a moment and should have retired without speaking had he not, in again passing his hand abstractedly through his hair, seen me and started.

"Esther!"

I told him what I had come for.

"At work so late, my dear?"

"I am working late to-night," said I, "because I couldn't sleep and wished to tire myself. But, dear guardian, you are late too, and look weary. You have no trouble, I hope, to keep you waking?"

"None, little woman, that YOU would readily understand," said he.

He spoke in a regretful tone so new to me that I inwardly repeated, as if that would help me to his meaning, "That I could readily understand!"

"Remain a moment, Esther," said he, "You were in my thoughts."

"I hope I was not the trouble, guardian?"

He slightly waved his hand and fell into his usual manner. The change was so remarkable, and he appeared to make it by dint of so much self-command, that I found myself again inwardly repeating, "None that I could understand!"

"Little woman," said my guardian, "I was thinking—that is, I have been thinking since I have been sitting here—that you ought to know of your own history all I know. It is very little. Next to nothing."

"Dear guardian," I replied, "when you spoke to me before on that subject—"

"But since then," he gravely interposed, anticipating what I meant to say, "I have reflected that your having anything to ask me, and my having anything to tell you, are different considerations, Esther. It is perhaps my duty to impart to you the little I know."

"If you think so, guardian, it is right."

"I think so," he returned very gently, and kindly, and very distinctly. "My dear, I think so now. If any real disadvantage can attach to your position in the mind of any man or woman worth a thought, it is right that you at least of all the world should not magnify it to yourself by having vague impressions of its nature."

I sat down and said after a little effort to be as calm as I ought to be, "One of my earliest remembrances, guardian, is of these words: 'Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers. The time will come, and soon enough, when you will understand this better, and will feel it too, as no one save a woman can.'" I had covered my face with my hands in repeating the words, but I took them away now with a better kind of shame, I hope, and told him that to him I owed the blessing that I had from my childhood to that hour never, never, never felt it. He put up his hand as if to stop me. I well knew that he was never to be thanked, and said no more.

"Nine years, my dear," he said after thinking for a little while, "have passed since I received a letter from a lady living in seclusion, written with a stern passion and power that rendered it unlike all other letters I have ever read. It was written to me (as it told me in so many words), perhaps because it was the writer's idiosyncrasy to put that trust in me, perhaps because it was mine to justify it. It told me of a child, an orphan girl then twelve years old, in some such cruel words as those which live in your remembrance. It told me that the writer had bred her in secrecy from her birth, had blotted out all trace of her existence, and that if the writer were to die before the child became a woman, she would be left entirely friendless, nameless, and unknown. It asked me to consider if I would, in that case, finish what the writer had begun."

I listened in silence and looked attentively at him.

"Your early recollection, my dear, will supply the gloomy medium through which all this was seen and expressed by the writer, and the distorted religion which clouded her mind with impressions of the need there was for the child to expiate an offence of which she was quite innocent. I felt concerned for the little creature, in her darkened life, and replied to the letter."

I took his hand and kissed it.

"It laid the injunction on me that I should never propose to see the writer, who had long been estranged from all intercourse with the world, but who would see a confidential agent if I would appoint one. I accredited Mr. Kenge. The lady said, of her own accord and not of his seeking, that her name was an assumed one. That she was, if there were any ties of blood in such a case, the child's aunt. That more than this she would never (and he was well persuaded of the steadfastness of her resolution) for any human consideration disclose. My dear, I have told you all."

I held his hand for a little while in mine.

"I saw my ward oftener than she saw me," he added, cheerily making light of it, "and I always knew she was beloved, useful, and happy. She repays me twenty-thousandfold, and twenty more to that, every hour in every day!"

"And oftener still," said I, "she blesses the guardian who is a father to her!"

At the word father, I saw his former trouble come into his face. He subdued it as before, and it was gone in an instant; but it had been there and it had come so swiftly upon my words that I felt as if they had given him a shock. I again inwardly repeated, wondering, "That I could readily understand. None that I could readily understand!" No, it was true. I did not understand it. Not for many and many a day.

"Take a fatherly good night, my dear," said he, kissing me on the forehead, "and so to rest. These are late hours for working and thinking. You do that for all of us, all day long, little housekeeper!"

I neither worked nor thought any more that night. I opened my grateful heart to heaven in thankfulness for its providence to me and its care of me, and fell asleep.

We had a visitor next day. Mr. Allan Woodcourt came. He came to take leave of us; he had settled to do so beforehand. He was going to China and to India as a surgeon on board ship. He was to be away a long, long time.

I believe—at least I know—that he was not rich. All his widowed mother could spare had been spent in qualifying him for his profession. It was not lucrative to a young practitioner, with very little influence in London; and although he was, night and day, at the service of numbers of poor people and did wonders of gentleness and skill for them, he gained very little by it in money. He was seven years older than I. Not that I need mention it, for it hardly seems to belong to anything.

I think—I mean, he told us—that he had been in practice three or four years and that if he could have hoped to contend through three or four more, he would not have made the voyage on which he was bound. But he had no fortune or private means, and so he was going away. He had been to see us several times altogether. We thought it a pity he should go away. Because he was distinguished in his art among those who knew it best, and some of the greatest men belonging to it had a high opinion of him.

When he came to bid us good-bye, he brought his mother with him for the first time. She was a pretty old lady, with bright black eyes, but she seemed proud. She came from Wales and had had, a long time ago, an eminent person for an ancestor, of the name of Morgan ap-Kerrig—of some place that sounded like Gimlet—who was the most illustrious person that ever was known and all of whose relations were a sort of royal family. He appeared to have passed his life in always getting up into mountains and fighting somebody; and a bard whose name sounded like Crumlinwallinwer had sung his praises in a piece which was called, as nearly as I could catch it, Mewlinnwillinwodd.

Mrs. Woodcourt, after expatiating to us on the fame of her great kinsman, said that no doubt wherever her son Allan went he would remember his pedigree and would on no account form an alliance below it. She told him that there were many handsome English ladies in India who went out on speculation, and that there were some to be picked up with property, but that neither charms nor wealth would suffice for the descendant from such a line without birth, which must ever be the first consideration. She talked so much about birth that for a moment I half fancied, and with pain—But what an idle fancy to suppose that she could think or care what MINE was!

Mr. Woodcourt seemed a little distressed by her prolixity, but he was too considerate to let her see it and contrived delicately to bring the conversation round to making his acknowledgments to my guardian for his hospitality and for the very happy hours—he called them the very happy hours—he had passed with us. The recollection of them, he said, would go with him wherever he went and would be always treasured. And so we gave him our hands, one after another—at least, they did—and I did; and so he put his lips to Ada's hand—and to mine; and so he went away upon his long, long voyage!

I was very busy indeed all day and wrote directions home to the servants, and wrote notes for my guardian, and dusted his books and papers, and jingled my housekeeping keys a good deal, one way and another. I was still busy between the lights, singing and working by the window, when who should come in but Caddy, whom I had no expectation of seeing!

"Why, Caddy, my dear," said I, "what beautiful flowers!"

She had such an exquisite little nosegay in her hand.

"Indeed, I think so, Esther," replied Caddy. "They are the loveliest I ever saw."

"Prince, my dear?" said I in a whisper.

"No," answered Caddy, shaking her head and holding them to me to smell. "Not Prince."

"Well, to be sure, Caddy!" said I. "You must have two lovers!"

"What? Do they look like that sort of thing?" said Caddy.

"Do they look like that sort of thing?" I repeated, pinching her cheek.

Caddy only laughed in return, and telling me that she had come for half an hour, at the expiration of which time Prince would be waiting for her at the corner, sat chatting with me and Ada in the window, every now and then handing me the flowers again or trying how they looked against my hair. At last, when she was going, she took me into my room and put them in my dress.

"For me?" said I, surprised.

"For you," said Caddy with a kiss. "They were left behind by somebody."

"Left behind?"

"At poor Miss Flite's," said Caddy. "Somebody who has been very good to her was hurrying away an hour ago to join a ship and left these flowers behind. No, no! Don't take them out. Let the pretty little things lie here," said Caddy, adjusting them with a careful hand, "because I was present myself, and I shouldn't wonder if somebody left them on purpose!"

"Do they look like that sort of thing?" said Ada, coming laughingly behind me and clasping me merrily round the waist. "Oh, yes, indeed they do, Dame Durden! They look very, very like that sort of thing. Oh, very like it indeed, my dear!"

CHAPTER XVIII. Lady Dedlock

It was not so easy as it had appeared at first to arrange for Richard's making a trial of Mr. Kenge's office. Richard himself was the chief impediment. As soon as he had it in his power to leave Mr. Badger at any moment, he began to doubt whether he wanted to leave him at all. He didn't know, he said, really. It wasn't a bad profession; he couldn't assert that he disliked it; perhaps he liked it as well as he liked any other—suppose he gave it one more chance! Upon that, he shut himself up for a few weeks with some books and some bones and seemed to acquire a considerable fund of information with great rapidity. His fervour, after lasting about a month, began to cool, and when it was quite cooled, began to grow warm again. His vacillations between law and medicine lasted so long that midsummer arrived before he finally separated from Mr. Badger and entered on an experimental course of Messrs. Kenge and Carboy. For all his waywardness, he took great credit to himself as being determined to be in earnest "this time." And he was so good-natured throughout, and in such high spirits, and so fond of Ada, that it was very difficult indeed to be otherwise than pleased with him.

"As to Mr. Jarndyce," who, I may mention, found the wind much given, during this period, to stick in the east; "As to Mr. Jarndyce," Richard would say to me, "he is the finest fellow in the world, Esther! I must be particularly careful, if it were only for his satisfaction, to take myself well to task and have a regular wind-up of this business now."

The idea of his taking himself well to task, with that laughing face and heedless manner and with a fancy that everything could catch and nothing could hold, was ludicrously anomalous. However, he told us betweenwhiles that he was doing it to such an extent that he wondered his hair didn't turn grey. His regular wind-up of the business was (as I have said) that he went to Mr. Kenge's about midsummer to try how he liked it.

All this time he was, in money affairs, what I have described him in a former illustration—generous, profuse, wildly careless, but fully persuaded that he was rather calculating and prudent. I happened to say to Ada, in his presence, half jestingly, half seriously, about the time of his going to Mr. Kenge's, that he needed to have Fortunatus' purse, he made so light of money, which he answered in this way, "My jewel of a dear cousin, you hear this old woman! Why does she say that? Because I gave eight pounds odd (or whatever it was) for a certain neat waistcoat and buttons a few days ago. Now, if I had stayed at Badger's I should have been obliged to spend twelve pounds at a blow for some heart-breaking lecture-fees. So I make four pounds—in a lump—by the transaction!"

It was a question much discussed between him and my guardian what arrangements should be made for his living in London while he experimented on the law, for we had long since gone back to Bleak House, and it was too far off to admit of his coming there oftener than once a week. My guardian told me that if Richard were to settle down at Mr. Kenge's he would take some apartments or chambers where we too could occasionally stay for a few days at a time; "but, little woman," he added, rubbing his head very significantly, "he hasn't settled down there yet!" The discussions ended in our hiring for him, by the month, a neat little furnished lodging in a quiet old house near Queen Square. He immediately began to spend all the money he had in buying the oddest little ornaments and luxuries for this lodging; and so often as Ada and I dissuaded him from making any purchase that he had in contemplation which was particularly unnecessary and expensive, he took credit for what it would have cost and made out that to spend anything less on something else was to save the difference.

While these affairs were in abeyance, our visit to Mr. Boythorn's was postponed. At length, Richard having taken possession of his lodging, there was nothing to prevent our departure. He could have gone with us at that time of the year very well, but he was in the full novelty of his new position and was making most energetic attempts to unravel the mysteries of the fatal suit. Consequently we went without him, and my darling was delighted to praise him for being so busy.

We made a pleasant journey down into Lincolnshire by the coach and had an entertaining companion in Mr. Skimpole. His furniture had been all cleared off, it appeared, by the person who took possession of it on his blue-eyed daughter's birthday, but he seemed quite relieved to think that it was gone. Chairs and table, he said, were wearisome objects; they were monotonous ideas, they had no variety of expression, they looked you out of countenance, and you looked them out of countenance. How pleasant, then, to be bound to no particular chairs and tables, but to sport like a butterfly among all the furniture on hire, and to flit from rosewood to mahogany, and from mahogany to walnut, and from this shape to that, as the humour took one!

"The oddity of the thing is," said Mr. Skimpole with a quickened sense of the ludicrous, "that my chairs and tables were not paid for, and yet my landlord walks off with them as composedly as possible. Now, that seems droll! There is something grotesque in it. The chair and table merchant never engaged to pay my landlord my rent. Why should my landlord quarrel with HIM? If I have a pimple on my nose which is disagreeable to my landlord's peculiar ideas of beauty, my landlord has no business to scratch my chair and table merchant's nose, which has no pimple on it. His reasoning seems defective!"

"Well," said my guardian good-humouredly, "it's pretty clear that whoever became security for those chairs and tables will have to pay for them."

"Exactly!" returned Mr. Skimpole. "That's the crowning point of unreason in the business! I said to my landlord, 'My good man, you are not aware that my excellent friend Jarndyce will have to pay for those things that you are sweeping off in that indelicate manner. Have you no consideration for HIS property?' He hadn't the least."

"And refused all proposals," said my guardian.

"Refused all proposals," returned Mr. Skimpole. "I made him business proposals. I had him into my room. I said, 'You are a man of business, I believe?' He replied, 'I am,' 'Very well,' said I, 'now let us be business-like. Here is an inkstand, here are pens and paper, here are wafers. What do you want? I have occupied your house for a considerable period, I believe to our mutual satisfaction until this unpleasant misunderstanding arose; let us be at once friendly and business-like. What do you want?' In reply to this, he made use of the figurative expression—which has something Eastern about it—that he had never seen the colour of my money. 'My amiable friend,' said I, 'I never have any money. I never know anything about money.' 'Well, sir,' said he, 'what do you offer if I give you time?' 'My good fellow,' said I, 'I have no idea of time; but you say you are a man of business, and whatever you can suggest to be done in a business-like way with pen, and ink, and paper—and wafers—I am ready to do. Don't pay yourself at another man's expense (which is foolish), but be business-like!' However, he wouldn't be, and there was an end of it."

If these were some of the inconveniences of Mr. Skimpole's childhood, it assuredly possessed its advantages too. On the journey he had a very good appetite for such refreshment as came in our way (including a basket of choice hothouse peaches), but never thought of paying for anything. So when the coachman came round for his fee, he pleasantly asked him what he considered a very good fee indeed, now—a liberal one—and on his replying half a crown for a single passenger, said it was little enough too, all things considered, and left Mr. Jarndyce to give it him.

It was delightful weather. The green corn waved so beautifully, the larks sang so joyfully, the hedges were so full of wild flowers, the trees were so thickly out in leaf, the bean-fields, with a light wind blowing over them, filled the air with such a delicious fragrance! Late in the afternoon we came to the market-town where we were to alight from the coach—a dull little town with a church-spire, and a marketplace, and a market-cross, and one intensely sunny street, and a pond with an old horse cooling his legs in it, and a very few men sleepily lying and standing about in narrow little bits of shade. After the rustling of the leaves and the waving of the corn all along the road, it looked as still, as hot, as motionless a little town as England could produce.

At the inn we found Mr. Boythorn on horseback, waiting with an open carriage to take us to his house, which was a few miles off. He was overjoyed to see us and dismounted with great alacrity.

"By heaven!" said he after giving us a courteous greeting. This a most infamous coach. It is the most flagrant example of an abominable public vehicle that ever encumbered the face of the earth. It is twenty-five minutes after its time this afternoon. The coachman ought to be put to death!"

"IS he after his time?" said Mr. Skimpole, to whom he happened to address himself. "You know my infirmity."

"Twenty-five minutes! Twenty-six minutes!" replied Mr. Boythorn, referring to his watch. "With two ladies in the coach, this scoundrel has deliberately delayed his arrival six and twenty minutes. Deliberately! It is impossible that it can be accidental! But his father—and his uncle—were the most profligate coachmen that ever sat upon a box."

While he said this in tones of the greatest indignation, he handed us into the little phaeton with the utmost gentleness and was all smiles and pleasure.

"I am sorry, ladies," he said, standing bare-headed at the carriage-door when all was ready, "that I am obliged to conduct you nearly two miles out of the way. But our direct road lies through Sir Leicester Dedlock's park, and in that fellow's property I have sworn never to set foot of mine, or horse's foot of mine, pending the present relations between us, while I breathe the breath of life!" And here, catching my guardian's eye, he broke into one of his tremendous laughs, which seemed to shake even the motionless little market-town.

"Are the Dedlocks down here, Lawrence?" said my guardian as we drove along and Mr. Boythorn trotted on the green turf by the roadside.

"Sir Arrogant Numskull is here," replied Mr. Boythorn. "Ha ha ha! Sir Arrogant is here, and I am glad to say, has been laid by the heels here. My Lady," in naming whom he always made a courtly gesture as if particularly to exclude her from any part in the quarrel, "is expected, I believe, daily. I am not in the least surprised that she postpones her appearance as long as possible. Whatever can have induced that transcendent woman to marry that effigy and figure-head of a baronet is one of the most impenetrable mysteries that ever baffled human inquiry. Ha ha ha ha!"

"I suppose," said my guardian, laughing, "WE may set foot in the park while we are here? The prohibition does not extend to us, does it?"

"I can lay no prohibition on my guests," he said, bending his head to Ada and me with the smiling politeness which sat so gracefully upon him, "except in the matter of their departure. I am only sorry that I cannot have the happiness of being their escort about Chesney Wold, which is a very fine place! But by the light of this summer day, Jarndyce, if you call upon the owner while you stay with me, you are likely to have but a cool reception. He carries himself like an eight-day clock at all times, like one of a race of eight-day clocks in gorgeous cases that never go and never went—Ha ha ha!—but he will have some extra stiffness, I can promise you, for the friends of his friend and neighbour Boythorn!"

"I shall not put him to the proof," said my guardian. "He is as indifferent to the honour of knowing me, I dare say, as I am to the honour of knowing him. The air of the grounds and perhaps such a view of the house as any other sightseer might get are quite enough for me."

"Well!" said Mr. Boythorn. "I am glad of it on the whole. It's in better keeping. I am looked upon about here as a second Ajax defying the lightning. Ha ha ha ha! When I go into our little church on a Sunday, a considerable part of the inconsiderable congregation expect to see me drop, scorched and withered, on the pavement under the Dedlock displeasure. Ha ha ha ha! I have no doubt he is surprised that I don't. For he is, by heaven, the most self-satisfied, and the shallowest, and the most coxcombical and utterly brainless ass!"

Our coming to the ridge of a hill we had been ascending enabled our friend to point out Chesney Wold itself to us and diverted his attention from its master.

It was a picturesque old house in a fine park richly wooded. Among the trees and not far from the residence he pointed out the spire of the little church of which he had spoken. Oh, the solemn woods over which the light and shadow travelled swiftly, as if heavenly wings were sweeping on benignant errands through the summer air; the smooth green slopes, the glittering water, the garden where the flowers were so symmetrically arranged in clusters of the richest colours, how beautiful they looked! The house, with gable and chimney, and tower, and turret, and dark doorway, and broad terrace-walk, twining among the balustrades of which, and lying heaped upon the vases, there was one great flush of roses, seemed scarcely real in its light solidity and in the serene and peaceful hush that rested on all around it. To Ada and to me, that above all appeared the pervading influence. On everything, house, garden, terrace, green slopes, water, old oaks, fern, moss, woods again, and far away across the openings in the prospect to the distance lying wide before us with a purple bloom upon it, there seemed to be such undisturbed repose.

When we came into the little village and passed a small inn with the sign of the Dedlock Arms swinging over the road in front, Mr. Boythorn interchanged greetings with a young gentleman sitting on a bench outside the inn-door who had some fishing-tackle lying beside him.

"That's the housekeeper's grandson, Mr. Rouncewell by name," said, he, "and he is in love with a pretty girl up at the house. Lady Dedlock has taken a fancy to the pretty girl and is going to keep her about her own fair person—an honour which my young friend himself does not at all appreciate. However, he can't marry just yet, even if his Rosebud were willing; so he is fain to make the best of it. In the meanwhile, he comes here pretty often for a day or two at a time to—fish. Ha ha ha ha!"

"Are he and the pretty girl engaged, Mr. Boythorn?" asked Ada.

"Why, my dear Miss Clare," he returned, "I think they may perhaps understand each other; but you will see them soon, I dare say, and I must learn from you on such a point—not you from me."

Ada blushed, and Mr. Boythorn, trotting forward on his comely grey horse, dismounted at his own door and stood ready with extended arm and uncovered head to welcome us when we arrived.

He lived in a pretty house, formerly the parsonage house, with a lawn in front, a bright flower-garden at the side, and a well-stocked orchard and kitchen-garden in the rear, enclosed with a venerable wall that had of itself a ripened ruddy look. But, indeed, everything about the place wore an aspect of maturity and abundance. The old lime-tree walk was like green cloisters, the very shadows of the cherry-trees and apple-trees were heavy with fruit, the gooseberry-bushes were so laden that their branches arched and rested on the earth, the strawberries and raspberries grew in like profusion, and the peaches basked by the hundred on the wall. Tumbled about among the spread nets and the glass frames sparkling and winking in the sun there were such heaps of drooping pods, and marrows, and cucumbers, that every foot of ground appeared a vegetable treasury, while the smell of sweet herbs and all kinds of wholesome growth (to say nothing of the neighbouring meadows where the hay was carrying) made the whole air a great nosegay. Such stillness and composure reigned within the orderly precincts of the old red wall that even the feathers hung in garlands to scare the birds hardly stirred; and the wall had such a ripening influence that where, here and there high up, a disused nail and scrap of list still clung to it, it was easy to fancy that they had mellowed with the changing seasons and that they had rusted and decayed according to the common fate.

The house, though a little disorderly in comparison with the garden, was a real old house with settles in the chimney of the brick-floored kitchen and great beams across the ceilings. On one side of it was the terrible piece of ground in dispute, where Mr. Boythorn maintained a sentry in a smock-frock day and night, whose duty was supposed to be, in cases of aggression, immediately to ring a large bell hung up there for the purpose, to unchain a great bull-dog established in a kennel as his ally, and generally to deal destruction on the enemy. Not content with these precautions, Mr. Boythorn had himself composed and posted there, on painted boards to which his name was attached in large letters, the following solemn warnings: "Beware of the bull-dog. He is most ferocious. Lawrence Boythorn." "The blunderbus is loaded with slugs. Lawrence Boythorn." "Man-traps and spring-guns are set here at all times of the day and night. Lawrence Boythorn." "Take notice. That any person or persons audaciously presuming to trespass on this property will be punished with the utmost severity of private chastisement and prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the law. Lawrence Boythorn." These he showed us from the drawing-room window, while his bird was hopping about his head, and he laughed, "Ha ha ha ha! Ha ha ha ha!" to that extent as he pointed them out that I really thought he would have hurt himself.

"But this is taking a good deal of trouble," said Mr. Skimpole in his light way, "when you are not in earnest after all."

"Not in earnest!" returned Mr. Boythorn with unspeakable warmth. "Not in earnest! If I could have hoped to train him, I would have bought a lion instead of that dog and would have turned him loose upon the first intolerable robber who should dare to make an encroachment on my rights. Let Sir Leicester Dedlock consent to come out and decide this question by single combat, and I will meet him with any weapon known to mankind in any age or country. I am that much in earnest. Not more!"

We arrived at his house on a Saturday. On the Sunday morning we all set forth to walk to the little church in the park. Entering the park, almost immediately by the disputed ground, we pursued a pleasant footpath winding among the verdant turf and the beautiful trees until it brought us to the church-porch.

The congregation was extremely small and quite a rustic one with the exception of a large muster of servants from the house, some of whom were already in their seats, while others were yet dropping in. There were some stately footmen, and there was a perfect picture of an old coachman, who looked as if he were the official representative of all the pomps and vanities that had ever been put into his coach. There was a very pretty show of young women, and above them, the handsome old face and fine responsible portly figure of the housekeeper towered pre-eminent. The pretty girl of whom Mr. Boythorn had told us was close by her. She was so very pretty that I might have known her by her beauty even if I had not seen how blushingly conscious she was of the eyes of the young fisherman, whom I discovered not far off. One face, and not an agreeable one, though it was handsome, seemed maliciously watchful of this pretty girl, and indeed of every one and everything there. It was a Frenchwoman's.

As the bell was yet ringing and the great people were not yet come, I had leisure to glance over the church, which smelt as earthy as a grave, and to think what a shady, ancient, solemn little church it was. The windows, heavily shaded by trees, admitted a subdued light that made the faces around me pale, and darkened the old brasses in the pavement and the time and damp-worn monuments, and rendered the sunshine in the little porch, where a monotonous ringer was working at the bell, inestimably bright. But a stir in that direction, a gathering of reverential awe in the rustic faces, and a blandly ferocious assumption on the part of Mr. Boythorn of being resolutely unconscious of somebody's existence forewarned me that the great people were come and that the service was going to begin.

"'Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight—'"

Shall I ever forget the rapid beating at my heart, occasioned by the look I met as I stood up! Shall I ever forget the manner in which those handsome proud eyes seemed to spring out of their languor and to hold mine! It was only a moment before I cast mine down—released again, if I may say so—on my book; but I knew the beautiful face quite well in that short space of time.

And, very strangely, there was something quickened within me, associated with the lonely days at my godmother's; yes, away even to the days when I had stood on tiptoe to dress myself at my little glass after dressing my doll. And this, although I had never seen this lady's face before in all my life—I was quite sure of it—absolutely certain.

It was easy to know that the ceremonious, gouty, grey-haired gentleman, the only other occupant of the great pew, was Sir Leicester Dedlock, and that the lady was Lady Dedlock. But why her face should be, in a confused way, like a broken glass to me, in which I saw scraps of old remembrances, and why I should be so fluttered and troubled (for I was still) by having casually met her eyes, I could not think.

I felt it to be an unmeaning weakness in me and tried to overcome it by attending to the words I heard. Then, very strangely, I seemed to hear them, not in the reader's voice, but in the well-remembered voice of my godmother. This made me think, did Lady Dedlock's face accidentally resemble my godmother's? It might be that it did, a little; but the expression was so different, and the stern decision which had worn into my godmother's face, like weather into rocks, was so completely wanting in the face before me that it could not be that resemblance which had struck me. Neither did I know the loftiness and haughtiness of Lady Dedlock's face, at all, in any one. And yet I—I, little Esther Summerson, the child who lived a life apart and on whose birthday there was no rejoicing—seemed to arise before my own eyes, evoked out of the past by some power in this fashionable lady, whom I not only entertained no fancy that I had ever seen, but whom I perfectly well knew I had never seen until that hour.

It made me tremble so to be thrown into this unaccountable agitation that I was conscious of being distressed even by the observation of the French maid, though I knew she had been looking watchfully here, and there, and everywhere, from the moment of her coming into the church. By degrees, though very slowly, I at last overcame my strange emotion. After a long time, I looked towards Lady Dedlock again. It was while they were preparing to sing, before the sermon. She took no heed of me, and the beating at my heart was gone. Neither did it revive for more than a few moments when she once or twice afterwards glanced at Ada or at me through her glass.

The service being concluded, Sir Leicester gave his arm with much taste and gallantry to Lady Dedlock—though he was obliged to walk by the help of a thick stick—and escorted her out of church to the pony carriage in which they had come. The servants then dispersed, and so did the congregation, whom Sir Leicester had contemplated all along (Mr. Skimpole said to Mr. Boythorn's infinite delight) as if he were a considerable landed proprietor in heaven.

"He believes he is!" said Mr. Boythorn. "He firmly believes it. So did his father, and his grandfather, and his great-grandfather!"

"Do you know," pursued Mr. Skimpole very unexpectedly to Mr. Boythorn, "it's agreeable to me to see a man of that sort."

"IS it!" said Mr. Boythorn.

"Say that he wants to patronize me," pursued Mr. Skimpole. "Very well! I don't object."

"I do," said Mr. Boythorn with great vigour.

"Do you really?" returned Mr. Skimpole in his easy light vein. "But that's taking trouble, surely. And why should you take trouble? Here am I, content to receive things childishly as they fall out, and I never take trouble! I come down here, for instance, and I find a mighty potentate exacting homage. Very well! I say 'Mighty potentate, here IS my homage! It's easier to give it than to withhold it. Here it is. If you have anything of an agreeable nature to show me, I shall be happy to see it; if you have anything of an agreeable nature to give me, I shall be happy to accept it.' Mighty potentate replies in effect, 'This is a sensible fellow. I find him accord with my digestion and my bilious system. He doesn't impose upon me the necessity of rolling myself up like a hedgehog with my points outward. I expand, I open, I turn my silver lining outward like Milton's cloud, and it's more agreeable to both of us.' That's my view of such things, speaking as a child!"

"But suppose you went down somewhere else to-morrow," said Mr. Boythorn, "where there was the opposite of that fellow—or of this fellow. How then?"

"How then?" said Mr. Skimpole with an appearance of the utmost simplicity and candour. "Just the same then! I should say, 'My esteemed Boythorn'—to make you the personification of our imaginary friend—'my esteemed Boythorn, you object to the mighty potentate? Very good. So do I. I take it that my business in the social system is to be agreeable; I take it that everybody's business in the social system is to be agreeable. It's a system of harmony, in short. Therefore if you object, I object. Now, excellent Boythorn, let us go to dinner!'"

"But excellent Boythorn might say," returned our host, swelling and growing very red, "I'll be—"

"I understand," said Mr. Skimpole. "Very likely he would."

"—if I WILL go to dinner!" cried Mr. Boythorn in a violent burst and stopping to strike his stick upon the ground. "And he would probably add, 'Is there such a thing as principle, Mr. Harold Skimpole?'"

"To which Harold Skimpole would reply, you know," he returned in his gayest manner and with his most ingenuous smile, "'Upon my life I have not the least idea! I don't know what it is you call by that name, or where it is, or who possesses it. If you possess it and find it comfortable, I am quite delighted and congratulate you heartily. But I know nothing about it, I assure you; for I am a mere child, and I lay no claim to it, and I don't want it!' So, you see, excellent Boythorn and I would go to dinner after all!"

This was one of many little dialogues between them which I always expected to end, and which I dare say would have ended under other circumstances, in some violent explosion on the part of our host. But he had so high a sense of his hospitable and responsible position as our entertainer, and my guardian laughed so sincerely at and with Mr. Skimpole, as a child who blew bubbles and broke them all day long, that matters never went beyond this point. Mr. Skimpole, who always seemed quite unconscious of having been on delicate ground, then betook himself to beginning some sketch in the park which be never finished, or to playing fragments of airs on the piano, or to singing scraps of songs, or to lying down on his back under a tree and looking at the sky—which he couldn't help thinking, he said, was what he was meant for; it suited him so exactly.

"Enterprise and effort," he would say to us (on his back), "are delightful to me. I believe I am truly cosmopolitan. I have the deepest sympathy with them. I lie in a shady place like this and think of adventurous spirits going to the North Pole or penetrating to the heart of the Torrid Zone with admiration. Mercenary creatures ask, 'What is the use of a man's going to the North Pole? What good does it do?' I can't say; but, for anything I CAN say, he may go for the purpose—though he don't know it—of employing my thoughts as I lie here. Take an extreme case. Take the case of the slaves on American plantations. I dare say they are worked hard, I dare say they don't altogether like it. I dare say theirs is an unpleasant experience on the whole; but they people the landscape for me, they give it a poetry for me, and perhaps that is one of the pleasanter objects of their existence. I am very sensible of it, if it be, and I shouldn't wonder if it were!"

I always wondered on these occasions whether he ever thought of Mrs. Skimpole and the children, and in what point of view they presented themselves to his cosmopolitan mind. So far as I could understand, they rarely presented themselves at all.

The week had gone round to the Saturday following that beating of my heart in the church; and every day had been so bright and blue that to ramble in the woods, and to see the light striking down among the transparent leaves and sparkling in the beautiful interlacings of the shadows of the trees, while the birds poured out their songs and the air was drowsy with the hum of insects, had been most delightful. We had one favourite spot, deep in moss and last year's leaves, where there were some felled trees from which the bark was all stripped off. Seated among these, we looked through a green vista supported by thousands of natural columns, the whitened stems of trees, upon a distant prospect made so radiant by its contrast with the shade in which we sat and made so precious by the arched perspective through which we saw it that it was like a glimpse of the better land. Upon the Saturday we sat here, Mr. Jarndyce, Ada, and I, until we heard thunder muttering in the distance and felt the large raindrops rattle through the leaves.

The weather had been all the week extremely sultry, but the storm broke so suddenly—upon us, at least, in that sheltered spot—that before we reached the outskirts of the wood the thunder and lightning were frequent and the rain came plunging through the leaves as if every drop were a great leaden bead. As it was not a time for standing among trees, we ran out of the wood, and up and down the moss-grown steps which crossed the plantation-fence like two broad-staved ladders placed back to back, and made for a keeper's lodge which was close at hand. We had often noticed the dark beauty of this lodge standing in a deep twilight of trees, and how the ivy clustered over it, and how there was a steep hollow near, where we had once seen the keeper's dog dive down into the fern as if it were water.

The lodge was so dark within, now the sky was overcast, that we only clearly saw the man who came to the door when we took shelter there and put two chairs for Ada and me. The lattice-windows were all thrown open, and we sat just within the doorway watching the storm. It was grand to see how the wind awoke, and bent the trees, and drove the rain before it like a cloud of smoke; and to hear the solemn thunder and to see the lightning; and while thinking with awe of the tremendous powers by which our little lives are encompassed, to consider how beneficent they are and how upon the smallest flower and leaf there was already a freshness poured from all this seeming rage which seemed to make creation new again.

"Is it not dangerous to sit in so exposed a place?"

"Oh, no, Esther dear!" said Ada quietly.

Ada said it to me, but I had not spoken.

The beating of my heart came back again. I had never heard the voice, as I had never seen the face, but it affected me in the same strange way. Again, in a moment, there arose before my mind innumerable pictures of myself.

Lady Dedlock had taken shelter in the lodge before our arrival there and had come out of the gloom within. She stood behind my chair with her hand upon it. I saw her with her hand close to my shoulder when I turned my head.

"I have frightened you?" she said.

No. It was not fright. Why should I be frightened!

"I believe," said Lady Dedlock to my guardian, "I have the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Jarndyce."

"Your remembrance does me more honour than I had supposed it would, Lady Dedlock," he returned.

"I recognized you in church on Sunday. I am sorry that any local disputes of Sir Leicester's—they are not of his seeking, however, I believe—should render it a matter of some absurd difficulty to show you any attention here."

"I am aware of the circumstances," returned my guardian with a smile, "and am sufficiently obliged."

She had given him her hand in an indifferent way that seemed habitual to her and spoke in a correspondingly indifferent manner, though in a very pleasant voice. She was as graceful as she was beautiful, perfectly self-possessed, and had the air, I thought, of being able to attract and interest any one if she had thought it worth her while. The keeper had brought her a chair on which she sat in the middle of the porch between us.

"Is the young gentleman disposed of whom you wrote to Sir Leicester about and whose wishes Sir Leicester was sorry not to have it in his power to advance in any way?" she said over her shoulder to my guardian.

"I hope so," said he.

She seemed to respect him and even to wish to conciliate him. There was something very winning in her haughty manner, and it became more familiar—I was going to say more easy, but that could hardly be—as she spoke to him over her shoulder.

"I presume this is your other ward, Miss Clare?"

He presented Ada, in form.

"You will lose the disinterested part of your Don Quixote character," said Lady Dedlock to Mr. Jarndyce over her shoulder again, "if you only redress the wrongs of beauty like this. But present me," and she turned full upon me, "to this young lady too!"

"Miss Summerson really is my ward," said Mr. Jarndyce. "I am responsible to no Lord Chancellor in her case."

"Has Miss Summerson lost both her parents?" said my Lady.

"Yes."

"She is very fortunate in her guardian."

Lady Dedlock looked at me, and I looked at her and said I was indeed. All at once she turned from me with a hasty air, almost expressive of displeasure or dislike, and spoke to him over her shoulder again.

"Ages have passed since we were in the habit of meeting, Mr. Jarndyce."

"A long time. At least I thought it was a long time, until I saw you last Sunday," he returned.

"What! Even you are a courtier, or think it necessary to become one to me!" she said with some disdain. "I have achieved that reputation, I suppose."

"You have achieved so much, Lady Dedlock," said my guardian, "that you pay some little penalty, I dare say. But none to me."

"So much!" she repeated, slightly laughing. "Yes!"

With her air of superiority, and power, and fascination, and I know not what, she seemed to regard Ada and me as little more than children. So, as she slightly laughed and afterwards sat looking at the rain, she was as self-possessed and as free to occupy herself with her own thoughts as if she had been alone.

"I think you knew my sister when we were abroad together better than you know me?" she said, looking at him again.

"Yes, we happened to meet oftener," he returned.

"We went our several ways," said Lady Dedlock, "and had little in common even before we agreed to differ. It is to be regretted, I suppose, but it could not be helped."

Lady Dedlock again sat looking at the rain. The storm soon began to pass upon its way. The shower greatly abated, the lightning ceased, the thunder rolled among the distant hills, and the sun began to glisten on the wet leaves and the falling rain. As we sat there, silently, we saw a little pony phaeton coming towards us at a merry pace.

"The messenger is coming back, my Lady," said the keeper, "with the carriage."

As it drove up, we saw that there were two people inside. There alighted from it, with some cloaks and wrappers, first the Frenchwoman whom I had seen in church, and secondly the pretty girl, the Frenchwoman with a defiant confidence, the pretty girl confused and hesitating.

"What now?" said Lady Dedlock. "Two!"

"I am your maid, my Lady, at the present," said the Frenchwoman. "The message was for the attendant."

"I was afraid you might mean me, my Lady," said the pretty girl.

"I did mean you, child," replied her mistress calmly. "Put that shawl on me."

She slightly stooped her shoulders to receive it, and the pretty girl lightly dropped it in its place. The Frenchwoman stood unnoticed, looking on with her lips very tightly set.

"I am sorry," said Lady Dedlock to Mr. Jarndyce, "that we are not likely to renew our former acquaintance. You will allow me to send the carriage back for your two wards. It shall be here directly."

But as he would on no account accept this offer, she took a graceful leave of Ada—none of me—and put her hand upon his proffered arm, and got into the carriage, which was a little, low, park carriage with a hood.

"Come in, child," she said to the pretty girl; "I shall want you. Go on!"

The carriage rolled away, and the Frenchwoman, with the wrappers she had brought hanging over her arm, remained standing where she had alighted.

I suppose there is nothing pride can so little bear with as pride itself, and that she was punished for her imperious manner. Her retaliation was the most singular I could have imagined. She remained perfectly still until the carriage had turned into the drive, and then, without the least discomposure of countenance, slipped off her shoes, left them on the ground, and walked deliberately in the same direction through the wettest of the wet grass.

"Is that young woman mad?" said my guardian.

"Oh, no, sir!" said the keeper, who, with his wife, was looking after her. "Hortense is not one of that sort. She has as good a head-piece as the best. But she's mortal high and passionate—powerful high and passionate; and what with having notice to leave, and having others put above her, she don't take kindly to it."

"But why should she walk shoeless through all that water?" said my guardian.

"Why, indeed, sir, unless it is to cool her down!" said the man.

"Or unless she fancies it's blood," said the woman. "She'd as soon walk through that as anything else, I think, when her own's up!"

We passed not far from the house a few minutes afterwards. Peaceful as it had looked when we first saw it, it looked even more so now, with a diamond spray glittering all about it, a light wind blowing, the birds no longer hushed but singing strongly, everything refreshed by the late rain, and the little carriage shining at the doorway like a fairy carriage made of silver. Still, very steadfastly and quietly walking towards it, a peaceful figure too in the landscape, went Mademoiselle Hortense, shoeless, through the wet grass.

CHAPTER XIX. Moving On

It is the long vacation in the regions of Chancery Lane. The good ships Law and Equity, those teak-built, copper-bottomed, iron-fastened, brazen-faced, and not by any means fast-sailing clippers are laid up in ordinary. The Flying Dutchman, with a crew of ghostly clients imploring all whom they may encounter to peruse their papers, has drifted, for the time being, heaven knows where. The courts are all shut up; the public offices lie in a hot sleep. Westminster Hall itself is a shady solitude where nightingales might sing, and a tenderer class of suitors than is usually found there, walk.

The Temple, Chancery Lane, Serjeants' Inn, and Lincoln's Inn even unto the Fields are like tidal harbours at low water, where stranded proceedings, offices at anchor, idle clerks lounging on lop-sided stools that will not recover their perpendicular until the current of Term sets in, lie high and dry upon the ooze of the long vacation. Outer doors of chambers are shut up by the score, messages and parcels are to be left at the Porter's Lodge by the bushel. A crop of grass would grow in the chinks of the stone pavement outside Lincoln's Inn Hall, but that the ticket-porters, who have nothing to do beyond sitting in the shade there, with their white aprons over their heads to keep the flies off, grub it up and eat it thoughtfully.

There is only one judge in town. Even he only comes twice a week to sit in chambers. If the country folks of those assize towns on his circuit could see him now! No full-bottomed wig, no red petticoats, no fur, no javelin-men, no white wands. Merely a close-shaved gentleman in white trousers and a white hat, with sea-bronze on the judicial countenance, and a strip of bark peeled by the solar rays from the judicial nose, who calls in at the shell-fish shop as he comes along and drinks iced ginger-beer!

The bar of England is scattered over the face of the earth. How England can get on through four long summer months without its bar—which is its acknowledged refuge in adversity and its only legitimate triumph in prosperity—is beside the question; assuredly that shield and buckler of Britannia are not in present wear. The learned gentleman who is always so tremendously indignant at the unprecedented outrage committed on the feelings of his client by the opposite party that he never seems likely to recover it is doing infinitely better than might be expected in Switzerland. The learned gentleman who does the withering business and who blights all opponents with his gloomy sarcasm is as merry as a grig at a French watering-place. The learned gentleman who weeps by the pint on the smallest provocation has not shed a tear these six weeks. The very learned gentleman who has cooled the natural heat of his gingery complexion in pools and fountains of law until he has become great in knotty arguments for term-time, when he poses the drowsy bench with legal "chaff," inexplicable to the uninitiated and to most of the initiated too, is roaming, with a characteristic delight in aridity and dust, about Constantinople. Other dispersed fragments of the same great palladium are to be found on the canals of Venice, at the second cataract of the Nile, in the baths of Germany, and sprinkled on the sea-sand all over the English coast. Scarcely one is to be encountered in the deserted region of Chancery Lane. If such a lonely member of the bar do flit across the waste and come upon a prowling suitor who is unable to leave off haunting the scenes of his anxiety, they frighten one another and retreat into opposite shades.

It is the hottest long vacation known for many years. All the young clerks are madly in love, and according to their various degrees, pine for bliss with the beloved object, at Margate, Ramsgate, or Gravesend. All the middle-aged clerks think their families too large. All the unowned dogs who stray into the Inns of Court and pant about staircases and other dry places seeking water give short howls of aggravation. All the blind men's dogs in the streets draw their masters against pumps or trip them over buckets. A shop with a sun-blind, and a watered pavement, and a bowl of gold and silver fish in the window, is a sanctuary. Temple Bar gets so hot that it is, to the adjacent Strand and Fleet Street, what a heater is in an urn, and keeps them simmering all night.

There are offices about the Inns of Court in which a man might be cool, if any coolness were worth purchasing at such a price in dullness; but the little thoroughfares immediately outside those retirements seem to blaze. In Mr. Krook's court, it is so hot that the people turn their houses inside out and sit in chairs upon the pavement—Mr. Krook included, who there pursues his studies, with his cat (who never is too hot) by his side. The Sol's Arms has discontinued the Harmonic Meetings for the season, and Little Swills is engaged at the Pastoral Gardens down the river, where he comes out in quite an innocent manner and sings comic ditties of a juvenile complexion calculated (as the bill says) not to wound the feelings of the most fastidious mind.

Over all the legal neighbourhood there hangs, like some great veil of rust or gigantic cobweb, the idleness and pensiveness of the long vacation. Mr. Snagsby, law-stationer of Cook's Court, Cursitor Street, is sensible of the influence not only in his mind as a sympathetic and contemplative man, but also in his business as a law-stationer aforesaid. He has more leisure for musing in Staple Inn and in the Rolls Yard during the long vacation than at other seasons, and he says to the two 'prentices, what a thing it is in such hot weather to think that you live in an island with the sea a-rolling and a-bowling right round you.

Guster is busy in the little drawing-room on this present afternoon in the long vacation, when Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby have it in contemplation to receive company. The expected guests are rather select than numerous, being Mr. and Mrs. Chadband and no more. From Mr. Chadband's being much given to describe himself, both verbally and in writing, as a vessel, he is occasionally mistaken by strangers for a gentleman connected with navigation, but he is, as he expresses it, "in the ministry." Mr. Chadband is attached to no particular denomination and is considered by his persecutors to have nothing so very remarkable to say on the greatest of subjects as to render his volunteering, on his own account, at all incumbent on his conscience; but he has his followers, and Mrs. Snagsby is of the number. Mrs. Snagsby has but recently taken a passage upward by the vessel, Chadband; and her attention was attracted to that Bark A 1, when she was something flushed by the hot weather.

"My little woman," says Mr. Snagsby to the sparrows in Staple Inn, "likes to have her religion rather sharp, you see!"

So Guster, much impressed by regarding herself for the time as the handmaid of Chadband, whom she knows to be endowed with the gift of holding forth for four hours at a stretch, prepares the little drawing-room for tea. All the furniture is shaken and dusted, the portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby are touched up with a wet cloth, the best tea-service is set forth, and there is excellent provision made of dainty new bread, crusty twists, cool fresh butter, thin slices of ham, tongue, and German sausage, and delicate little rows of anchovies nestling in parsley, not to mention new-laid eggs, to be brought up warm in a napkin, and hot buttered toast. For Chadband is rather a consuming vessel—the persecutors say a gorging vessel—and can wield such weapons of the flesh as a knife and fork remarkably well.

Mr. Snagsby in his best coat, looking at all the preparations when they are completed and coughing his cough of deference behind his hand, says to Mrs. Snagsby, "At what time did you expect Mr. and Mrs. Chadband, my love?"

"At six," says Mrs. Snagsby.

Mr. Snagsby observes in a mild and casual way that "it's gone that."

"Perhaps you'd like to begin without them," is Mrs. Snagsby's reproachful remark.

Mr. Snagsby does look as if he would like it very much, but he says, with his cough of mildness, "No, my dear, no. I merely named the time."

"What's time," says Mrs. Snagsby, "to eternity?"

"Very true, my dear," says Mr. Snagsby. "Only when a person lays in victuals for tea, a person does it with a view—perhaps—more to time. And when a time is named for having tea, it's better to come up to it."

"To come up to it!" Mrs. Snagsby repeats with severity. "Up to it! As if Mr. Chadband was a fighter!"

"Not at all, my dear," says Mr. Snagsby.

Here, Guster, who had been looking out of the bedroom window, comes rustling and scratching down the little staircase like a popular ghost, and falling flushed into the drawing-room, announces that Mr. and Mrs. Chadband have appeared in the court. The bell at the inner door in the passage immediately thereafter tinkling, she is admonished by Mrs. Snagsby, on pain of instant reconsignment to her patron saint, not to omit the ceremony of announcement. Much discomposed in her nerves (which were previously in the best order) by this threat, she so fearfully mutilates that point of state as to announce "Mr. and Mrs. Cheeseming, least which, Imeantersay, whatsername!" and retires conscience-stricken from the presence.

Mr. Chadband is a large yellow man with a fat smile and a general appearance of having a good deal of train oil in his system. Mrs. Chadband is a stern, severe-looking, silent woman. Mr. Chadband moves softly and cumbrously, not unlike a bear who has been taught to walk upright. He is very much embarrassed about the arms, as if they were inconvenient to him and he wanted to grovel, is very much in a perspiration about the head, and never speaks without first putting up his great hand, as delivering a token to his hearers that he is going to edify them.

"My friends," says Mr. Chadband, "peace be on this house! On the master thereof, on the mistress thereof, on the young maidens, and on the young men! My friends, why do I wish for peace? What is peace? Is it war? No. Is it strife? No. Is it lovely, and gentle, and beautiful, and pleasant, and serene, and joyful? Oh, yes! Therefore, my friends, I wish for peace, upon you and upon yours."

In consequence of Mrs. Snagsby looking deeply edified, Mr. Snagsby thinks it expedient on the whole to say amen, which is well received.

"Now, my friends," proceeds Mr. Chadband, "since I am upon this theme—"

Guster presents herself. Mrs. Snagsby, in a spectral bass voice and without removing her eyes from Chadband, says with dreadful distinctness, "Go away!"

"Now, my friends," says Chadband, "since I am upon this theme, and in my lowly path improving it—"

Guster is heard unaccountably to murmur "one thousing seven hundred and eighty-two." The spectral voice repeats more solemnly, "Go away!"

"Now, my friends," says Mr. Chadband, "we will inquire in a spirit of love—"

Still Guster reiterates "one thousing seven hundred and eighty-two."

Mr. Chadband, pausing with the resignation of a man accustomed to be persecuted and languidly folding up his chin into his fat smile, says, "Let us hear the maiden! Speak, maiden!"

"One thousing seven hundred and eighty-two, if you please, sir. Which he wish to know what the shilling ware for," says Guster, breathless.

"For?" returns Mrs. Chadband. "For his fare!"

Guster replied that "he insistes on one and eightpence or on summonsizzing the party." Mrs. Snagsby and Mrs. Chadband are proceeding to grow shrill in indignation when Mr. Chadband quiets the tumult by lifting up his hand.

"My friends," says he, "I remember a duty unfulfilled yesterday. It is right that I should be chastened in some penalty. I ought not to murmur. Rachael, pay the eightpence!"

While Mrs. Snagsby, drawing her breath, looks hard at Mr. Snagsby, as who should say, "You hear this apostle!" and while Mr. Chadband glows with humility and train oil, Mrs. Chadband pays the money. It is Mr. Chadband's habit—it is the head and front of his pretensions indeed—to keep this sort of debtor and creditor account in the smallest items and to post it publicly on the most trivial occasions.

"My friends," says Chadband, "eightpence is not much; it might justly have been one and fourpence; it might justly have been half a crown. O let us be joyful, joyful! O let us be joyful!"

With which remark, which appears from its sound to be an extract in verse, Mr. Chadband stalks to the table, and before taking a chair, lifts up his admonitory hand.

"My friends," says he, "what is this which we now behold as being spread before us? Refreshment. Do we need refreshment then, my friends? We do. And why do we need refreshment, my friends? Because we are but mortal, because we are but sinful, because we are but of the earth, because we are not of the air. Can we fly, my friends? We cannot. Why can we not fly, my friends?"

Mr. Snagsby, presuming on the success of his last point, ventures to observe in a cheerful and rather knowing tone, "No wings." But is immediately frowned down by Mrs. Snagsby.

"I say, my friends," pursues Mr. Chadband, utterly rejecting and obliterating Mr. Snagsby's suggestion, "why can we not fly? Is it because we are calculated to walk? It is. Could we walk, my friends, without strength? We could not. What should we do without strength, my friends? Our legs would refuse to bear us, our knees would double up, our ankles would turn over, and we should come to the ground. Then from whence, my friends, in a human point of view, do we derive the strength that is necessary to our limbs? Is it," says Chadband, glancing over the table, "from bread in various forms, from butter which is churned from the milk which is yielded unto us by the cow, from the eggs which are laid by the fowl, from ham, from tongue, from sausage, and from such like? It is. Then let us partake of the good things which are set before us!"

The persecutors denied that there was any particular gift in Mr. Chadband's piling verbose flights of stairs, one upon another, after this fashion. But this can only be received as a proof of their determination to persecute, since it must be within everybody's experience that the Chadband style of oratory is widely received and much admired.

Mr. Chadband, however, having concluded for the present, sits down at Mr. Snagsby's table and lays about him prodigiously. The conversion of nutriment of any sort into oil of the quality already mentioned appears to be a process so inseparable from the constitution of this exemplary vessel that in beginning to eat and drink, he may be described as always becoming a kind of considerable oil mills or other large factory for the production of that article on a wholesale scale. On the present evening of the long vacation, in Cook's Court, Cursitor Street, he does such a powerful stroke of business that the warehouse appears to be quite full when the works cease.

At this period of the entertainment, Guster, who has never recovered her first failure, but has neglected no possible or impossible means of bringing the establishment and herself into contempt—among which may be briefly enumerated her unexpectedly performing clashing military music on Mr. Chadband's head with plates, and afterwards crowning that gentleman with muffins—at which period of the entertainment, Guster whispers Mr. Snagsby that he is wanted.

"And being wanted in the—not to put too fine a point upon it—in the shop," says Mr. Snagsby, rising, "perhaps this good company will excuse me for half a minute."

Mr. Snagsby descends and finds the two 'prentices intently contemplating a police constable, who holds a ragged boy by the arm.

"Why, bless my heart," says Mr. Snagsby, "what's the matter!"

"This boy," says the constable, "although he's repeatedly told to, won't move on—"

"I'm always a-moving on, sar," cries the boy, wiping away his grimy tears with his arm. "I've always been a-moving and a-moving on, ever since I was born. Where can I possibly move to, sir, more nor I do move!"

"He won't move on," says the constable calmly, with a slight professional hitch of his neck involving its better settlement in his stiff stock, "although he has been repeatedly cautioned, and therefore I am obliged to take him into custody. He's as obstinate a young gonoph as I know. He WON'T move on."

"Oh, my eye! Where can I move to!" cries the boy, clutching quite desperately at his hair and beating his bare feet upon the floor of Mr. Snagsby's passage.

"Don't you come none of that or I shall make blessed short work of you!" says the constable, giving him a passionless shake. "My instructions are that you are to move on. I have told you so five hundred times."

"But where?" cries the boy.

"Well! Really, constable, you know," says Mr. Snagsby wistfully, and coughing behind his hand his cough of great perplexity and doubt, "really, that does seem a question. Where, you know?"

"My instructions don't go to that," replies the constable. "My instructions are that this boy is to move on."

Do you hear, Jo? It is nothing to you or to any one else that the great lights of the parliamentary sky have failed for some few years in this business to set you the example of moving on. The one grand recipe remains for you—the profound philosophical prescription—the be-all and the end-all of your strange existence upon earth. Move on! You are by no means to move off, Jo, for the great lights can't at all agree about that. Move on!

Mr. Snagsby says nothing to this effect, says nothing at all indeed, but coughs his forlornest cough, expressive of no thoroughfare in any direction. By this time Mr. and Mrs. Chadband and Mrs. Snagsby, hearing the altercation, have appeared upon the stairs. Guster having never left the end of the passage, the whole household are assembled.

"The simple question is, sir," says the constable, "whether you know this boy. He says you do."

Mrs. Snagsby, from her elevation, instantly cries out, "No he don't!"

"My lit-tle woman!" says Mr. Snagsby, looking up the staircase. "My love, permit me! Pray have a moment's patience, my dear. I do know something of this lad, and in what I know of him, I can't say that there's any harm; perhaps on the contrary, constable." To whom the law-stationer relates his Joful and woeful experience, suppressing the half-crown fact.

"Well!" says the constable, "so far, it seems, he had grounds for what he said. When I took him into custody up in Holborn, he said you knew him. Upon that, a young man who was in the crowd said he was acquainted with you, and you were a respectable housekeeper, and if I'd call and make the inquiry, he'd appear. The young man don't seem inclined to keep his word, but—Oh! Here IS the young man!"

Enter Mr. Guppy, who nods to Mr. Snagsby and touches his hat with the chivalry of clerkship to the ladies on the stairs.

"I was strolling away from the office just now when I found this row going on," says Mr. Guppy to the law-stationer, "and as your name was mentioned, I thought it was right the thing should be looked into."

"It was very good-natured of you, sir," says Mr. Snagsby, "and I am obliged to you." And Mr. Snagsby again relates his experience, again suppressing the half-crown fact.

"Now, I know where you live," says the constable, then, to Jo. "You live down in Tom-all-Alone's. That's a nice innocent place to live in, ain't it?"

"I can't go and live in no nicer place, sir," replies Jo. "They wouldn't have nothink to say to me if I wos to go to a nice innocent place fur to live. Who ud go and let a nice innocent lodging to such a reg'lar one as me!"

"You are very poor, ain't you?" says the constable.

"Yes, I am indeed, sir, wery poor in gin'ral," replies Jo. "I leave you to judge now! I shook these two half-crowns out of him," says the constable, producing them to the company, "in only putting my hand upon him!"

"They're wot's left, Mr. Snagsby," says Jo, "out of a sov-ring as wos give me by a lady in a wale as sed she wos a servant and as come to my crossin one night and asked to be showd this 'ere ouse and the ouse wot him as you giv the writin to died at, and the berrin-ground wot he's berrid in. She ses to me she ses 'are you the boy at the inkwhich?' she ses. I ses 'yes' I ses. She ses to me she ses 'can you show me all them places?' I ses 'yes I can' I ses. And she ses to me 'do it' and I dun it and she giv me a sov'ring and hooked it. And I an't had much of the sov'ring neither," says Jo, with dirty tears, "fur I had to pay five bob, down in Tom-all-Alone's, afore they'd square it fur to give me change, and then a young man he thieved another five while I was asleep and another boy he thieved ninepence and the landlord he stood drains round with a lot more on it."

"You don't expect anybody to believe this, about the lady and the sovereign, do you?" says the constable, eyeing him aside with ineffable disdain.

"I don't know as I do, sir," replies Jo. "I don't expect nothink at all, sir, much, but that's the true hist'ry on it."

"You see what he is!" the constable observes to the audience. "Well, Mr. Snagsby, if I don't lock him up this time, will you engage for his moving on?"

"No!" cries Mrs. Snagsby from the stairs.

"My little woman!" pleads her husband. "Constable, I have no doubt he'll move on. You know you really must do it," says Mr. Snagsby.

"I'm everyways agreeable, sir," says the hapless Jo.

"Do it, then," observes the constable. "You know what you have got to do. Do it! And recollect you won't get off so easy next time. Catch hold of your money. Now, the sooner you're five mile off, the better for all parties."

With this farewell hint and pointing generally to the setting sun as a likely place to move on to, the constable bids his auditors good afternoon and makes the echoes of Cook's Court perform slow music for him as he walks away on the shady side, carrying his iron-bound hat in his hand for a little ventilation.

Now, Jo's improbable story concerning the lady and the sovereign has awakened more or less the curiosity of all the company. Mr. Guppy, who has an inquiring mind in matters of evidence and who has been suffering severely from the lassitude of the long vacation, takes that interest in the case that he enters on a regular cross-examination of the witness, which is found so interesting by the ladies that Mrs. Snagsby politely invites him to step upstairs and drink a cup of tea, if he will excuse the disarranged state of the tea-table, consequent on their previous exertions. Mr. Guppy yielding his assent to this proposal, Jo is requested to follow into the drawing-room doorway, where Mr. Guppy takes him in hand as a witness, patting him into this shape, that shape, and the other shape like a butterman dealing with so much butter, and worrying him according to the best models. Nor is the examination unlike many such model displays, both in respect of its eliciting nothing and of its being lengthy, for Mr. Guppy is sensible of his talent, and Mrs. Snagsby feels not only that it gratifies her inquisitive disposition, but that it lifts her husband's establishment higher up in the law. During the progress of this keen encounter, the vessel Chadband, being merely engaged in the oil trade, gets aground and waits to be floated off.

"Well!" says Mr. Guppy. "Either this boy sticks to it like cobbler's-wax or there is something out of the common here that beats anything that ever came into my way at Kenge and Carboy's."

Mrs. Chadband whispers Mrs. Snagsby, who exclaims, "You don't say so!"

"For years!" replied Mrs. Chadband.

"Has known Kenge and Carboy's office for years," Mrs. Snagsby triumphantly explains to Mr. Guppy. "Mrs. Chadband—this gentleman's wife—Reverend Mr. Chadband."

"Oh, indeed!" says Mr. Guppy.

"Before I married my present husband," says Mrs. Chadband.

"Was you a party in anything, ma'am?" says Mr. Guppy, transferring his cross-examination.

"No."

"NOT a party in anything, ma'am?" says Mr. Guppy.

Mrs. Chadband shakes her head.

"Perhaps you were acquainted with somebody who was a party in something, ma'am?" says Mr. Guppy, who likes nothing better than to model his conversation on forensic principles.

"Not exactly that, either," replies Mrs. Chadband, humouring the joke with a hard-favoured smile.

"Not exactly that, either!" repeats Mr. Guppy. "Very good. Pray, ma'am, was it a lady of your acquaintance who had some transactions (we will not at present say what transactions) with Kenge and Carboy's office, or was it a gentleman of your acquaintance? Take time, ma'am. We shall come to it presently. Man or woman, ma'am?"

"Neither," says Mrs. Chadband as before.

"Oh! A child!" says Mr. Guppy, throwing on the admiring Mrs. Snagsby the regular acute professional eye which is thrown on British jurymen. "Now, ma'am, perhaps you'll have the kindness to tell us WHAT child."

"You have got it at last, sir," says Mrs. Chadband with another hard-favoured smile. "Well, sir, it was before your time, most likely, judging from your appearance. I was left in charge of a child named Esther Summerson, who was put out in life by Messrs. Kenge and Carboy."

"Miss Summerson, ma'am!" cries Mr. Guppy, excited.

"I call her Esther Summerson," says Mrs. Chadband with austerity. "There was no Miss-ing of the girl in my time. It was Esther. 'Esther, do this! Esther, do that!' and she was made to do it."

"My dear ma'am," returns Mr. Guppy, moving across the small apartment, "the humble individual who now addresses you received that young lady in London when she first came here from the establishment to which you have alluded. Allow me to have the pleasure of taking you by the hand."

Mr. Chadband, at last seeing his opportunity, makes his accustomed signal and rises with a smoking head, which he dabs with his pocket-handkerchief. Mrs. Snagsby whispers "Hush!"

"My friends," says Chadband, "we have partaken in moderation" (which was certainly not the case so far as he was concerned) "of the comforts which have been provided for us. May this house live upon the fatness of the land; may corn and wine be plentiful therein; may it grow, may it thrive, may it prosper, may it advance, may it proceed, may it press forward! But, my friends, have we partaken of anything else? We have. My friends, of what else have we partaken? Of spiritual profit? Yes. From whence have we derived that spiritual profit? My young friend, stand forth!"

Jo, thus apostrophized, gives a slouch backward, and another slouch forward, and another slouch to each side, and confronts the eloquent Chadband with evident doubts of his intentions.

"My young friend," says Chadband, "you are to us a pearl, you are to us a diamond, you are to us a gem, you are to us a jewel. And why, my young friend?"

"I don't know," replies Jo. "I don't know nothink."

"My young friend," says Chadband, "it is because you know nothing that you are to us a gem and jewel. For what are you, my young friend? Are you a beast of the field? No. A bird of the air? No. A fish of the sea or river? No. You are a human boy, my young friend. A human boy. O glorious to be a human boy! And why glorious, my young friend? Because you are capable of receiving the lessons of wisdom, because you are capable of profiting by this discourse which I now deliver for your good, because you are not a stick, or a staff, or a stock, or a stone, or a post, or a pillar.

"O running stream of sparkling joy
To be a soaring human boy!

"And do you cool yourself in that stream now, my young friend? No. Why do you not cool yourself in that stream now? Because you are in a state of darkness, because you are in a state of obscurity, because you are in a state of sinfulness, because you are in a state of bondage. My young friend, what is bondage? Let us, in a spirit of love, inquire."

At this threatening stage of the discourse, Jo, who seems to have been gradually going out of his mind, smears his right arm over his face and gives a terrible yawn. Mrs. Snagsby indignantly expresses her belief that he is a limb of the arch-fiend.

"My friends," says Mr. Chadband with his persecuted chin folding itself into its fat smile again as he looks round, "it is right that I should be humbled, it is right that I should be tried, it is right that I should be mortified, it is right that I should be corrected. I stumbled, on Sabbath last, when I thought with pride of my three hours' improving. The account is now favourably balanced: my creditor has accepted a composition. O let us be joyful, joyful! O let us be joyful!"

Great sensation on the part of Mrs. Snagsby.

"My friends," says Chadband, looking round him in conclusion, "I will not proceed with my young friend now. Will you come to-morrow, my young friend, and inquire of this good lady where I am to be found to deliver a discourse unto you, and will you come like the thirsty swallow upon the next day, and upon the day after that, and upon the day after that, and upon many pleasant days, to hear discourses?" (This with a cow-like lightness.)

Jo, whose immediate object seems to be to get away on any terms, gives a shuffling nod. Mr. Guppy then throws him a penny, and Mrs. Snagsby calls to Guster to see him safely out of the house. But before he goes downstairs, Mr. Snagsby loads him with some broken meats from the table, which he carries away, hugging in his arms.

So, Mr. Chadband—of whom the persecutors say that it is no wonder he should go on for any length of time uttering such abominable nonsense, but that the wonder rather is that he should ever leave off, having once the audacity to begin—retires into private life until he invests a little capital of supper in the oil-trade. Jo moves on, through the long vacation, down to Blackfriars Bridge, where he finds a baking stony corner wherein to settle to his repast.

And there he sits, munching and gnawing, and looking up at the great cross on the summit of St. Paul's Cathedral, glittering above a red-and-violet-tinted cloud of smoke. From the boy's face one might suppose that sacred emblem to be, in his eyes, the crowning confusion of the great, confused city—so golden, so high up, so far out of his reach. There he sits, the sun going down, the river running fast, the crowd flowing by him in two streams—everything moving on to some purpose and to one end—until he is stirred up and told to "move on" too.

CHAPTER XX. A New Lodger

The long vacation saunters on towards term-time like an idle river very leisurely strolling down a flat country to the sea. Mr. Guppy saunters along with it congenially. He has blunted the blade of his penknife and broken the point off by sticking that instrument into his desk in every direction. Not that he bears the desk any ill will, but he must do something, and it must be something of an unexciting nature, which will lay neither his physical nor his intellectual energies under too heavy contribution. He finds that nothing agrees with him so well as to make little gyrations on one leg of his stool, and stab his desk, and gape.

Kenge and Carboy are out of town, and the articled clerk has taken out a shooting license and gone down to his father's, and Mr. Guppy's two fellow-stipendiaries are away on leave. Mr. Guppy and Mr. Richard Carstone divide the dignity of the office. But Mr. Carstone is for the time being established in Kenge's room, whereat Mr. Guppy chafes. So exceedingly that he with biting sarcasm informs his mother, in the confidential moments when he sups with her off a lobster and lettuce in the Old Street Road, that he is afraid the office is hardly good enough for swells, and that if he had known there was a swell coming, he would have got it painted.

Mr. Guppy suspects everybody who enters on the occupation of a stool in Kenge and Carboy's office of entertaining, as a matter of course, sinister designs upon him. He is clear that every such person wants to depose him. If he be ever asked how, why, when, or wherefore, he shuts up one eye and shakes his head. On the strength of these profound views, he in the most ingenious manner takes infinite pains to counterplot when there is no plot, and plays the deepest games of chess without any adversary.

It is a source of much gratification to Mr. Guppy, therefore, to find the new-comer constantly poring over the papers in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, for he well knows that nothing but confusion and failure can come of that. His satisfaction communicates itself to a third saunterer through the long vacation in Kenge and Carboy's office, to wit, Young Smallweed.

Whether Young Smallweed (metaphorically called Small and eke Chick Weed, as it were jocularly to express a fledgling) was ever a boy is much doubted in Lincoln's Inn. He is now something under fifteen and an old limb of the law. He is facetiously understood to entertain a passion for a lady at a cigar-shop in the neighbourhood of Chancery Lane and for her sake to have broken off a contract with another lady, to whom he had been engaged some years. He is a town-made article, of small stature and weazen features, but may be perceived from a considerable distance by means of his very tall hat. To become a Guppy is the object of his ambition. He dresses at that gentleman (by whom he is patronized), talks at him, walks at him, founds himself entirely on him. He is honoured with Mr. Guppy's particular confidence and occasionally advises him, from the deep wells of his experience, on difficult points in private life.

Mr. Guppy has been lolling out of window all the morning after trying all the stools in succession and finding none of them easy, and after several times putting his head into the iron safe with a notion of cooling it. Mr. Smallweed has been twice dispatched for effervescent drinks, and has twice mixed them in the two official tumblers and stirred them up with the ruler. Mr. Guppy propounds for Mr. Smallweed's consideration the paradox that the more you drink the thirstier you are and reclines his head upon the window-sill in a state of hopeless languor.

While thus looking out into the shade of Old Square, Lincoln's Inn, surveying the intolerable bricks and mortar, Mr. Guppy becomes conscious of a manly whisker emerging from the cloistered walk below and turning itself up in the direction of his face. At the same time, a low whistle is wafted through the Inn and a suppressed voice cries, "Hip! Gup-py!"

"Why, you don't mean it!" says Mr. Guppy, aroused. "Small! Here's Jobling!" Small's head looks out of window too and nods to Jobling.

"Where have you sprung up from?" inquires Mr. Guppy.

"From the market-gardens down by Deptford. I can't stand it any longer. I must enlist. I say! I wish you'd lend me half a crown. Upon my soul, I'm hungry."

Jobling looks hungry and also has the appearance of having run to seed in the market-gardens down by Deptford.

"I say! Just throw out half a crown if you have got one to spare. I want to get some dinner."

"Will you come and dine with me?" says Mr. Guppy, throwing out the coin, which Mr. Jobling catches neatly.

"How long should I have to hold out?" says Jobling.

"Not half an hour. I am only waiting here till the enemy goes, returns Mr. Guppy, butting inward with his head.

"What enemy?"

"A new one. Going to be articled. Will you wait?"

"Can you give a fellow anything to read in the meantime?" says Mr. Jobling.

Smallweed suggests the law list. But Mr. Jobling declares with much earnestness that he "can't stand it."

"You shall have the paper," says Mr. Guppy. "He shall bring it down. But you had better not be seen about here. Sit on our staircase and read. It's a quiet place."

Jobling nods intelligence and acquiescence. The sagacious Smallweed supplies him with the newspaper and occasionally drops his eye upon him from the landing as a precaution against his becoming disgusted with waiting and making an untimely departure. At last the enemy retreats, and then Smallweed fetches Mr. Jobling up.

"Well, and how are you?" says Mr. Guppy, shaking hands with him.

"So, so. How are you?"

Mr. Guppy replying that he is not much to boast of, Mr. Jobling ventures on the question, "How is SHE?" This Mr. Guppy resents as a liberty, retorting, "Jobling, there ARE chords in the human mind—" Jobling begs pardon.

"Any subject but that!" says Mr. Guppy with a gloomy enjoyment of his injury. "For there ARE chords, Jobling—"

Mr. Jobling begs pardon again.

During this short colloquy, the active Smallweed, who is of the dinner party, has written in legal characters on a slip of paper, "Return immediately." This notification to all whom it may concern, he inserts in the letter-box, and then putting on the tall hat at the angle of inclination at which Mr. Guppy wears his, informs his patron that they may now make themselves scarce.

Accordingly they betake themselves to a neighbouring dining-house, of the class known among its frequenters by the denomination slap-bang, where the waitress, a bouncing young female of forty, is supposed to have made some impression on the susceptible Smallweed, of whom it may be remarked that he is a weird changeling to whom years are nothing. He stands precociously possessed of centuries of owlish wisdom. If he ever lay in a cradle, it seems as if he must have lain there in a tail-coat. He has an old, old eye, has Smallweed; and he drinks and smokes in a monkeyish way; and his neck is stiff in his collar; and he is never to be taken in; and he knows all about it, whatever it is. In short, in his bringing up he has been so nursed by Law and Equity that he has become a kind of fossil imp, to account for whose terrestrial existence it is reported at the public offices that his father was John Doe and his mother the only female member of the Roe family, also that his first long-clothes were made from a blue bag.

Into the dining-house, unaffected by the seductive show in the window of artificially whitened cauliflowers and poultry, verdant baskets of peas, coolly blooming cucumbers, and joints ready for the spit, Mr. Smallweed leads the way. They know him there and defer to him. He has his favourite box, he bespeaks all the papers, he is down upon bald patriarchs, who keep them more than ten minutes afterwards. It is of no use trying him with anything less than a full-sized "bread" or proposing to him any joint in cut unless it is in the very best cut. In the matter of gravy he is adamant.

Conscious of his elfin power and submitting to his dread experience, Mr. Guppy consults him in the choice of that day's banquet, turning an appealing look towards him as the waitress repeats the catalogue of viands and saying "What do YOU take, Chick?" Chick, out of the profundity of his artfulness, preferring "veal and ham and French beans—and don't you forget the stuffing, Polly" (with an unearthly cock of his venerable eye), Mr. Guppy and Mr. Jobling give the like order. Three pint pots of half-and-half are superadded. Quickly the waitress returns bearing what is apparently a model of the Tower of Babel but what is really a pile of plates and flat tin dish-covers. Mr. Smallweed, approving of what is set before him, conveys intelligent benignity into his ancient eye and winks upon her. Then, amid a constant coming in, and going out, and running about, and a clatter of crockery, and a rumbling up and down of the machine which brings the nice cuts from the kitchen, and a shrill crying for more nice cuts down the speaking-pipe, and a shrill reckoning of the cost of nice cuts that have been disposed of, and a general flush and steam of hot joints, cut and uncut, and a considerably heated atmosphere in which the soiled knives and tablecloths seem to break out spontaneously into eruptions of grease and blotches of beer, the legal triumvirate appease their appetites.

Mr. Jobling is buttoned up closer than mere adornment might require. His hat presents at the rims a peculiar appearance of a glistening nature, as if it had been a favourite snail-promenade. The same phenomenon is visible on some parts of his coat, and particularly at the seams. He has the faded appearance of a gentleman in embarrassed circumstances; even his light whiskers droop with something of a shabby air.

His appetite is so vigorous that it suggests spare living for some little time back. He makes such a speedy end of his plate of veal and ham, bringing it to a close while his companions are yet midway in theirs, that Mr. Guppy proposes another. "Thank you, Guppy," says Mr. Jobling, "I really don't know but what I WILL take another."

Another being brought, he falls to with great goodwill.

Mr. Guppy takes silent notice of him at intervals until he is half way through this second plate and stops to take an enjoying pull at his pint pot of half-and-half (also renewed) and stretches out his legs and rubs his hands. Beholding him in which glow of contentment, Mr. Guppy says, "You are a man again, Tony!"

"Well, not quite yet," says Mr. Jobling. "Say, just born."

"Will you take any other vegetables? Grass? Peas? Summer cabbage?"

"Thank you, Guppy," says Mr. Jobling. "I really don't know but what I WILL take summer cabbage."

Order given; with the sarcastic addition (from Mr. Smallweed) of "Without slugs, Polly!" And cabbage produced.

"I am growing up, Guppy," says Mr. Jobling, plying his knife and fork with a relishing steadiness.

"Glad to hear it."

"In fact, I have just turned into my teens," says Mr. Jobling.

He says no more until he has performed his task, which he achieves as Messrs. Guppy and Smallweed finish theirs, thus getting over the ground in excellent style and beating those two gentlemen easily by a veal and ham and a cabbage.

"Now, Small," says Mr. Guppy, "what would you recommend about pastry?"

"Marrow puddings," says Mr. Smallweed instantly.

"Aye, aye!" cries Mr. Jobling with an arch look. "You're there, are you? Thank you, Mr. Guppy, I don't know but what I WILL take a marrow pudding."

Three marrow puddings being produced, Mr. Jobling adds in a pleasant humour that he is coming of age fast. To these succeed, by command of

Mr. Smallweed, "three Cheshires," and to those "three small rums." This apex of the entertainment happily reached, Mr. Jobling puts up his legs on the carpeted seat (having his own side of the box to himself), leans against the wall, and says, "I am grown up now, Guppy. I have arrived at maturity."

"What do you think, now," says Mr. Guppy, "about—you don't mind Smallweed?"

"Not the least in the worid. I have the pleasure of drinking his good health."

"Sir, to you!" says Mr. Smallweed.

"I was saying, what do you think NOW," pursues Mr. Guppy, "of enlisting?"

"Why, what I may think after dinner," returns Mr. Jobling, "is one thing, my dear Guppy, and what I may think before dinner is another thing. Still, even after dinner, I ask myself the question, What am I to do? How am I to live? Ill fo manger, you know," says Mr. Jobling, pronouncing that word as if he meant a necessary fixture in an English stable. "Ill fo manger. That's the French saying, and mangering is as necessary to me as it is to a Frenchman. Or more so."

Mr. Smallweed is decidedly of opinion "much more so."

"If any man had told me," pursues Jobling, "even so lately as when you and I had the frisk down in Lincolnshire, Guppy, and drove over to see that house at Castle Wold—"

Mr. Smallweed corrects him—Chesney Wold.

"Chesney Wold. (I thank my honourable friend for that cheer.) If any man had told me then that I should be as hard up at the present time as I literally find myself, I should have—well, I should have pitched into him," says Mr. Jobling, taking a little rum-and-water with an air of desperate resignation; "I should have let fly at his head."

"Still, Tony, you were on the wrong side of the post then," remonstrates Mr. Guppy. "You were talking about nothing else in the gig."

"Guppy," says Mr. Jobling, "I will not deny it. I was on the wrong side of the post. But I trusted to things coming round."

That very popular trust in flat things coming round! Not in their being beaten round, or worked round, but in their "coming" round! As though a lunatic should trust in the world's "coming" triangular!

"I had confident expectations that things would come round and be all square," says Mr. Jobling with some vagueness of expression and perhaps of meaning too. "But I was disappointed. They never did. And when it came to creditors making rows at the office and to people that the office dealt with making complaints about dirty trifles of borrowed money, why there was an end of that connexion. And of any new professional connexion too, for if I was to give a reference to-morrow, it would be mentioned and would sew me up. Then what's a fellow to do? I have been keeping out of the way and living cheap down about the market-gardens, but what's the use of living cheap when you have got no money? You might as well live dear."

"Better," Mr. Smallweed thinks.

"Certainly. It's the fashionable way; and fashion and whiskers have been my weaknesses, and I don't care who knows it," says Mr. Jobling. "They are great weaknesses—Damme, sir, they are great. Well," proceeds Mr. Jobling after a defiant visit to his rum-and-water, "what can a fellow do, I ask you, BUT enlist?"

Mr. Guppy comes more fully into the conversation to state what, in his opinion, a fellow can do. His manner is the gravely impressive manner of a man who has not committed himself in life otherwise than as he has become the victim of a tender sorrow of the heart.

"Jobling," says Mr. Guppy, "myself and our mutual friend Smallweed—"

Mr. Smallweed modestly observes, "Gentlemen both!" and drinks.

"—Have had a little conversation on this matter more than once since you—"

"Say, got the sack!" cries Mr. Jobling bitterly. "Say it, Guppy. You mean it."

"No-o-o! Left the Inn," Mr. Smallweed delicately suggests.

"Since you left the Inn, Jobling," says Mr. Guppy; "and I have mentioned to our mutual friend Smallweed a plan I have lately thought of proposing. You know Snagsby the stationer?"

"I know there is such a stationer," returns Mr. Jobling. "He was not ours, and I am not acquainted with him."

"He IS ours, Jobling, and I AM acquainted with him," Mr. Guppy retorts. "Well, sir! I have lately become better acquainted with him through some accidental circumstances that have made me a visitor of his in private life. Those circumstances it is not necessary to offer in argument. They may—or they may not—have some reference to a subject which may—or may not—have cast its shadow on my existence."

As it is Mr. Guppy's perplexing way with boastful misery to tempt his particular friends into this subject, and the moment they touch it, to turn on them with that trenchant severity about the chords in the human mind, both Mr. Jobling and Mr. Smallweed decline the pitfall by remaining silent.

"Such things may be," repeats Mr. Guppy, "or they may not be. They are no part of the case. It is enough to mention that both Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby are very willing to oblige me and that Snagsby has, in busy times, a good deal of copying work to give out. He has all Tulkinghorn's, and an excellent business besides. I believe if our mutual friend Smallweed were put into the box, he could prove this?"

Mr. Smallweed nods and appears greedy to be sworn.

"Now, gentlemen of the jury," says Mr. Guppy, "—I mean, now, Jobling—you may say this is a poor prospect of a living. Granted. But it's better than nothing, and better than enlistment. You want time. There must be time for these late affairs to blow over. You might live through it on much worse terms than by writing for Snagsby."

Mr. Jobling is about to interrupt when the sagacious Smallweed checks him with a dry cough and the words, "Hem! Shakspeare!"

"There are two branches to this subject, Jobling," says Mr. Guppy. "That is the first. I come to the second. You know Krook, the Chancellor, across the lane. Come, Jobling," says Mr. Guppy in his encouraging cross-examination-tone, "I think you know Krook, the Chancellor, across the lane?"

"I know him by sight," says Mr. Jobling.

"You know him by sight. Very well. And you know little Flite?"

"Everybody knows her," says Mr. Jobling.

"Everybody knows her. VERY well. Now it has been one of my duties of late to pay Flite a certain weekly allowance, deducting from it the amount of her weekly rent, which I have paid (in consequence of instructions I have received) to Krook himself, regularly in her presence. This has brought me into communication with Krook and into a knowledge of his house and his habits. I know he has a room to let. You may live there at a very low charge under any name you like, as quietly as if you were a hundred miles off. He'll ask no questions and would accept you as a tenant at a word from me—before the clock strikes, if you chose. And I tell you another thing, Jobling," says Mr. Guppy, who has suddenly lowered his voice and become familiar again, "he's an extraordinary old chap—always rummaging among a litter of papers and grubbing away at teaching himself to read and write, without getting on a bit, as it seems to me. He is a most extraordinary old chap, sir. I don't know but what it might be worth a fellow's while to look him up a bit."

"You don't mean—" Mr. Jobling begins.

"I mean," returns Mr. Guppy, shrugging his shoulders with becoming modesty, "that I can't make him out. I appeal to our mutual friend Smallweed whether he has or has not heard me remark that I can't make him out."

Mr. Smallweed bears the concise testimony, "A few!"

"I have seen something of the profession and something of life, Tony," says Mr. Guppy, "and it's seldom I can't make a man out, more or less. But such an old card as this, so deep, so sly, and secret (though I don't believe he is ever sober), I never came across. Now, he must be precious old, you know, and he has not a soul about him, and he is reported to be immensely rich; and whether he is a smuggler, or a receiver, or an unlicensed pawnbroker, or a money-lender—all of which I have thought likely at different times—it might pay you to knock up a sort of knowledge of him. I don't see why you shouldn't go in for it, when everything else suits."

Mr. Jobling, Mr. Guppy, and Mr. Smallweed all lean their elbows on the table and their chins upon their hands, and look at the ceiling. After a time, they all drink, slowly lean back, put their hands in their pockets, and look at one another.

"If I had the energy I once possessed, Tony!" says Mr. Guppy with a sigh. "But there are chords in the human mind—"

Expressing the remainder of the desolate sentiment in rum-and-water, Mr. Guppy concludes by resigning the adventure to Tony Jobling and informing him that during the vacation and while things are slack, his purse, "as far as three or four or even five pound goes," will be at his disposal. "For never shall it be said," Mr. Guppy adds with emphasis, "that William Guppy turned his back upon his friend!"

The latter part of the proposal is so directly to the purpose that Mr. Jobling says with emotion, "Guppy, my trump, your fist!" Mr. Guppy presents it, saying, "Jobling, my boy, there it is!" Mr. Jobling returns, "Guppy, we have been pals now for some years!" Mr. Guppy replies, "Jobling, we have."

They then shake hands, and Mr. Jobling adds in a feeling manner, "Thank you, Guppy, I don't know but what I WILL take another glass for old acquaintance sake."

"Krook's last lodger died there," observes Mr. Guppy in an incidental way.

"Did he though!" says Mr. Jobling.

"There was a verdict. Accidental death. You don't mind that?"

"No," says Mr. Jobling, "I don't mind it; but he might as well have died somewhere else. It's devilish odd that he need go and die at MY place!" Mr. Jobling quite resents this liberty, several times returning to it with such remarks as, "There are places enough to die in, I should think!" or, "He wouldn't have liked my dying at HIS place, I dare say!"

However, the compact being virtually made, Mr. Guppy proposes to dispatch the trusty Smallweed to ascertain if Mr. Krook is at home, as in that case they may complete the negotiation without delay. Mr. Jobling approving, Smallweed puts himself under the tall hat and conveys it out of the dining-rooms in the Guppy manner. He soon returns with the intelligence that Mr. Krook is at home and that he has seen him through the shop-door, sitting in the back premises, sleeping "like one o'clock."

"Then I'll pay," says Mr. Guppy, "and we'll go and see him. Small, what will it be?"

Mr. Smallweed, compelling the attendance of the waitress with one hitch of his eyelash, instantly replies as follows: "Four veals and hams is three, and four potatoes is three and four, and one summer cabbage is three and six, and three marrows is four and six, and six breads is five, and three Cheshires is five and three, and four half-pints of half-and-half is six and three, and four small rums is eight and three, and three Pollys is eight and six. Eight and six in half a sovereign, Polly, and eighteenpence out!"

Not at all excited by these stupendous calculations, Smallweed dismisses his friends with a cool nod and remains behind to take a little admiring notice of Polly, as opportunity may serve, and to read the daily papers, which are so very large in proportion to himself, shorn of his hat, that when he holds up the Times to run his eye over the columns, he seems to have retired for the night and to have disappeared under the bedclothes.

Mr. Guppy and Mr. Jobling repair to the rag and bottle shop, where they find Krook still sleeping like one o'clock, that is to say, breathing stertorously with his chin upon his breast and quite insensible to any external sounds or even to gentle shaking. On the table beside him, among the usual lumber, stand an empty gin-bottle and a glass. The unwholesome air is so stained with this liquor that even the green eyes of the cat upon her shelf, as they open and shut and glimmer on the visitors, look drunk.

"Hold up here!" says Mr. Guppy, giving the relaxed figure of the old man another shake. "Mr. Krook! Halloa, sir!"

But it would seem as easy to wake a bundle of old clothes with a spirituous heat smouldering in it. "Did you ever see such a stupor as he falls into, between drink and sleep?" says Mr. Guppy.

"If this is his regular sleep," returns Jobling, rather alarmed, "it'll last a long time one of these days, I am thinking."

"It's always more like a fit than a nap," says Mr. Guppy, shaking him again. "Halloa, your lordship! Why, he might be robbed fifty times over! Open your eyes!"

After much ado, he opens them, but without appearing to see his visitors or any other objects. Though he crosses one leg on another, and folds his hands, and several times closes and opens his parched lips, he seems to all intents and purposes as insensible as before.

"He is alive, at any rate," says Mr. Guppy. "How are you, my Lord Chancellor. I have brought a friend of mine, sir, on a little matter of business."

The old man still sits, often smacking his dry lips without the least consciousness. After some minutes he makes an attempt to rise. They help him up, and he staggers against the wall and stares at them.

"How do you do, Mr. Krook?" says Mr. Guppy in some discomfiture. "How do you do, sir? You are looking charming, Mr. Krook. I hope you are pretty well?"

The old man, in aiming a purposeless blow at Mr. Guppy, or at nothing, feebly swings himself round and comes with his face against the wall. So he remains for a minute or two, heaped up against it, and then staggers down the shop to the front door. The air, the movement in the court, the lapse of time, or the combination of these things recovers him. He comes back pretty steadily, adjusting his fur cap on his head and looking keenly at them.

"Your servant, gentlemen; I've been dozing. Hi! I am hard to wake, odd times."

"Rather so, indeed, sir," responds Mr. Guppy.

"What? You've been a-trying to do it, have you?" says the suspicious Krook.

"Only a little," Mr. Guppy explains.

The old man's eye resting on the empty bottle, he takes it up, examines it, and slowly tilts it upside down.

"I say!" he cries like the hobgoblin in the story. "Somebody's been making free here!"

"I assure you we found it so," says Mr. Guppy. "Would you allow me to get it filled for you?"

"Yes, certainly I would!" cries Krook in high glee. "Certainly I would! Don't mention it! Get it filled next door—Sol's Arms—the Lord Chancellor's fourteenpenny. Bless you, they know ME!"

He so presses the empty bottle upon Mr. Guppy that that gentleman, with a nod to his friend, accepts the trust and hurries out and hurries in again with the bottle filled. The old man receives it in his arms like a beloved grandchild and pats it tenderly.

"But, I say," he whispers, with his eyes screwed up, after tasting it, "this ain't the Lord Chancellor's fourteenpenny. This is eighteenpenny!"

"I thought you might like that better," says Mr. Guppy.

"You're a nobleman, sir," returns Krook with another taste, and his hot breath seems to come towards them like a flame. "You're a baron of the land."

Taking advantage of this auspicious moment, Mr. Guppy presents his friend under the impromptu name of Mr. Weevle and states the object of their visit. Krook, with his bottle under his arm (he never gets beyond a certain point of either drunkenness or sobriety), takes time to survey his proposed lodger and seems to approve of him. "You'd like to see the room, young man?" he says. "Ah! It's a good room! Been whitewashed. Been cleaned down with soft soap and soda. Hi! It's worth twice the rent, letting alone my company when you want it and such a cat to keep the mice away."

Commending the room after this manner, the old man takes them upstairs, where indeed they do find it cleaner than it used to be and also containing some old articles of furniture which he has dug up from his inexhaustible stores. The terms are easily concluded—for the Lord

Chancellor cannot be hard on Mr. Guppy, associated as he is with Kenge and Carboy, Jarndyce and Jarndyce, and other famous claims on his professional consideration—and it is agreed that Mr. Weevle shall take possession on the morrow. Mr. Weevle and Mr. Guppy then repair to Cook's Court, Cursitor Street, where the personal introduction of the former to Mr. Snagsby is effected and (more important) the vote and interest of Mrs. Snagsby are secured. They then report progress to the eminent Smallweed, waiting at the office in his tall hat for that purpose, and separate, Mr. Guppy explaining that he would terminate his little entertainment by standing treat at the play but that there are chords in the human mind which would render it a hollow mockery.

On the morrow, in the dusk of evening, Mr. Weevle modestly appears at Krook's, by no means incommoded with luggage, and establishes himself in his new lodging, where the two eyes in the shutters stare at him in his sleep, as if they were full of wonder. On the following day Mr. Weevle, who is a handy good-for-nothing kind of young fellow, borrows a needle and thread of Miss Flite and a hammer of his landlord and goes to work devising apologies for window-curtains, and knocking up apologies for shelves, and hanging up his two teacups, milkpot, and crockery sundries on a pennyworth of little hooks, like a shipwrecked sailor making the best of it.

But what Mr. Weevle prizes most of all his few possessions (next after his light whiskers, for which he has an attachment that only whiskers can awaken in the breast of man) is a choice collection of copper-plate impressions from that truly national work The Divinities of Albion, or Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty, representing ladies of title and fashion in every variety of smirk that art, combined with capital, is capable of producing. With these magnificent portraits, unworthily confined in a band-box during his seclusion among the market-gardens, he decorates his apartment; and as the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty wears every variety of fancy dress, plays every variety of musical instrument, fondles every variety of dog, ogles every variety of prospect, and is backed up by every variety of flower-pot and balustrade, the result is very imposing.

But fashion is Mr. Weevle's, as it was Tony Jobling's, weakness. To borrow yesterday's paper from the Sol's Arms of an evening and read about the brilliant and distinguished meteors that are shooting across the fashionable sky in every direction is unspeakable consolation to him. To know what member of what brilliant and distinguished circle accomplished the brilliant and distinguished feat of joining it yesterday or contemplates the no less brilliant and distinguished feat of leaving it to-morrow gives him a thrill of joy. To be informed what the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty is about, and means to be about, and what Galaxy marriages are on the tapis, and what Galaxy rumours are in circulation, is to become acquainted with the most glorious destinies of mankind. Mr. Weevle reverts from this intelligence to the Galaxy portraits implicated, and seems to know the originals, and to be known of them.

For the rest he is a quiet lodger, full of handy shifts and devices as before mentioned, able to cook and clean for himself as well as to carpenter, and developing social inclinations after the shades of evening have fallen on the court. At those times, when he is not visited by Mr. Guppy or by a small light in his likeness quenched in a dark hat, he comes out of his dull room—where he has inherited the deal wilderness of desk bespattered with a rain of ink—and talks to Krook or is "very free," as they call it in the court, commendingly, with any one disposed for conversation. Wherefore, Mrs. Piper, who leads the court, is impelled to offer two remarks to Mrs. Perkins: firstly, that if her Johnny was to have whiskers, she could wish 'em to be identically like that young man's; and secondly, "Mark my words, Mrs. Perkins, ma'am, and don't you be surprised, Lord bless you, if that young man comes in at last for old Krook's money!"

CHAPTER XXI. The Smallweed Family

In a rather ill-favoured and ill-savoured neighbourhood, though one of its rising grounds bears the name of Mount Pleasant, the Elfin Smallweed, christened Bartholomew and known on the domestic hearth as Bart, passes that limited portion of his time on which the office and its contingencies have no claim. He dwells in a little narrow street, always solitary, shady, and sad, closely bricked in on all sides like a tomb, but where there yet lingers the stump of an old forest tree whose flavour is about as fresh and natural as the Smallweed smack of youth.

There has been only one child in the Smallweed family for several generations. Little old men and women there have been, but no child, until Mr. Smallweed's grandmother, now living, became weak in her intellect and fell (for the first time) into a childish state. With such infantine graces as a total want of observation, memory, understanding, and interest, and an eternal disposition to fall asleep over the fire and into it, Mr. Smallweed's grandmother has undoubtedly brightened the family.

Mr. Smallweed's grandfather is likewise of the party. He is in a helpless condition as to his lower, and nearly so as to his upper, limbs, but his mind is unimpaired. It holds, as well as it ever held, the first four rules of arithmetic and a certain small collection of the hardest facts. In respect of ideality, reverence, wonder, and other such phrenological attributes, it is no worse off than it used to be. Everything that Mr. Smallweed's grandfather ever put away in his mind was a grub at first, and is a grub at last. In all his life he has never bred a single butterfly.

The father of this pleasant grandfather, of the neighbourhood of Mount Pleasant, was a horny-skinned, two-legged, money-getting species of spider who spun webs to catch unwary flies and retired into holes until they were entrapped. The name of this old pagan's god was Compound Interest. He lived for it, married it, died of it. Meeting with a heavy loss in an honest little enterprise in which all the loss was intended to have been on the other side, he broke something—something necessary to his existence, therefore it couldn't have been his heart—and made an end of his career. As his character was not good, and he had been bred at a charity school in a complete course, according to question and answer, of those ancient people the Amorites and Hittites, he was frequently quoted as an example of the failure of education.

His spirit shone through his son, to whom he had always preached of "going out" early in life and whom he made a clerk in a sharp scrivener's office at twelve years old. There the young gentleman improved his mind, which was of a lean and anxious character, and developing the family gifts, gradually elevated himself into the discounting profession. Going out early in life and marrying late, as his father had done before him, he too begat a lean and anxious-minded son, who in his turn, going out early in life and marrying late, became the father of Bartholomew and Judith Smallweed, twins. During the whole time consumed in the slow growth of this family tree, the house of Smallweed, always early to go out and late to marry, has strengthened itself in its practical character, has discarded all amusements, discountenanced all story-books, fairy-tales, fictions, and fables, and banished all levities whatsoever. Hence the gratifying fact that it has had no child born to it and that the complete little men and women whom it has produced have been observed to bear a likeness to old monkeys with something depressing on their minds.

At the present time, in the dark little parlour certain feet below the level of the street—a grim, hard, uncouth parlour, only ornamented with the coarsest of baize table-covers, and the hardest of sheet-iron tea-trays, and offering in its decorative character no bad allegorical representation of Grandfather Smallweed's mind—seated in two black horsehair porter's chairs, one on each side of the fire-place, the superannuated Mr. and Mrs. Smallweed while away the rosy hours. On the stove are a couple of trivets for the pots and kettles which it is Grandfather Smallweed's usual occupation to watch, and projecting from the chimney-piece between them is a sort of brass gallows for roasting, which he also superintends when it is in action. Under the venerable Mr. Smallweed's seat and guarded by his spindle legs is a drawer in his chair, reported to contain property to a fabulous amount. Beside him is a spare cushion with which he is always provided in order that he may have something to throw at the venerable partner of his respected age whenever she makes an allusion to money—a subject on which he is particularly sensitive.

"And where's Bart?" Grandfather Smallweed inquires of Judy, Bart's twin sister.

"He an't come in yet," says Judy.

"It's his tea-time, isn't it?"

"No."

"How much do you mean to say it wants then?"

"Ten minutes."

"Hey?"

"Ten minutes." (Loud on the part of Judy.)

"Ho!" says Grandfather Smallweed. "Ten minutes."

Grandmother Smallweed, who has been mumbling and shaking her head at the trivets, hearing figures mentioned, connects them with money and screeches like a horrible old parrot without any plumage, "Ten ten-pound notes!"

Grandfather Smallweed immediately throws the cushion at her.

"Drat you, be quiet!" says the good old man.

The effect of this act of jaculation is twofold. It not only doubles up Mrs. Smallweed's head against the side of her porter's chair and causes her to present, when extricated by her granddaughter, a highly unbecoming state of cap, but the necessary exertion recoils on Mr. Smallweed himself, whom it throws back into HIS porter's chair like a broken puppet. The excellent old gentleman being at these times a mere clothes-bag with a black skull-cap on the top of it, does not present a very animated appearance until he has undergone the two operations at the hands of his granddaughter of being shaken up like a great bottle and poked and punched like a great bolster. Some indication of a neck being developed in him by these means, he and the sharer of his life's evening again fronting one another in their two porter's chairs, like a couple of sentinels long forgotten on their post by the Black Serjeant, Death.

Judy the twin is worthy company for these associates. She is so indubitably sister to Mr. Smallweed the younger that the two kneaded into one would hardly make a young person of average proportions, while she so happily exemplifies the before-mentioned family likeness to the monkey tribe that attired in a spangled robe and cap she might walk about the table-land on the top of a barrel-organ without exciting much remark as an unusual specimen. Under existing circumstances, however, she is dressed in a plain, spare gown of brown stuff.

Judy never owned a doll, never heard of Cinderella, never played at any game. She once or twice fell into children's company when she was about ten years old, but the children couldn't get on with Judy, and Judy couldn't get on with them. She seemed like an animal of another species, and there was instinctive repugnance on both sides. It is very doubtful whether Judy knows how to laugh. She has so rarely seen the thing done that the probabilities are strong the other way. Of anything like a youthful laugh, she certainly can have no conception. If she were to try one, she would find her teeth in her way, modelling that action of her face, as she has unconsciously modelled all its other expressions, on her pattern of sordid age. Such is Judy.

And her twin brother couldn't wind up a top for his life. He knows no more of Jack the Giant Killer or of Sinbad the Sailor than he knows of the people in the stars. He could as soon play at leap-frog or at cricket as change into a cricket or a frog himself. But he is so much the better off than his sister that on his narrow world of fact an opening has dawned into such broader regions as lie within the ken of Mr. Guppy. Hence his admiration and his emulation of that shining enchanter.

Judy, with a gong-like clash and clatter, sets one of the sheet-iron tea-trays on the table and arranges cups and saucers. The bread she puts on in an iron basket, and the butter (and not much of it) in a small pewter plate. Grandfather Smallweed looks hard after the tea as it is served out and asks Judy where the girl is.

"Charley, do you mean?" says Judy.

"Hey?" from Grandfather Smallweed.

"Charley, do you mean?"

This touches a spring in Grandmother Smallweed, who, chuckling as usual at the trivets, cries, "Over the water! Charley over the water, Charley over the water, over the water to Charley, Charley over the water, over the water to Charley!" and becomes quite energetic about it. Grandfather looks at the cushion but has not sufficiently recovered his late exertion.

"Ha!" he says when there is silence. "If that's her name. She eats a deal. It would be better to allow her for her keep."

Judy, with her brother's wink, shakes her head and purses up her mouth into no without saying it.

"No?" returns the old man. "Why not?"

"She'd want sixpence a day, and we can do it for less," says Judy.

"Sure?"

Judy answers with a nod of deepest meaning and calls, as she scrapes the butter on the loaf with every precaution against waste and cuts it into slices, "You, Charley, where are you?" Timidly obedient to the summons, a little girl in a rough apron and a large bonnet, with her hands covered with soap and water and a scrubbing brush in one of them, appears, and curtsys.

"What work are you about now?" says Judy, making an ancient snap at her like a very sharp old beldame.

"I'm a-cleaning the upstairs back room, miss," replies Charley.

"Mind you do it thoroughly, and don't loiter. Shirking won't do for me. Make haste! Go along!" cries Judy with a stamp upon the ground. "You girls are more trouble than you're worth, by half."

On this severe matron, as she returns to her task of scraping the butter and cutting the bread, falls the shadow of her brother, looking in at the window. For whom, knife and loaf in hand, she opens the street-door.

"Aye, aye, Bart!" says Grandfather Smallweed. "Here you are, hey?"

"Here I am," says Bart.

"Been along with your friend again, Bart?"

Small nods.

"Dining at his expense, Bart?"

Small nods again.

"That's right. Live at his expense as much as you can, and take warning by his foolish example. That's the use of such a friend. The only use you can put him to," says the venerable sage.

His grandson, without receiving this good counsel as dutifully as he might, honours it with all such acceptance as may lie in a slight wink and a nod and takes a chair at the tea-table. The four old faces then hover over teacups like a company of ghastly cherubim, Mrs. Smallweed perpetually twitching her head and chattering at the trivets and Mr. Smallweed requiring to be repeatedly shaken up like a large black draught.

"Yes, yes," says the good old gentleman, reverting to his lesson of wisdom. "That's such advice as your father would have given you, Bart. You never saw your father. More's the pity. He was my true son." Whether it is intended to be conveyed that he was particularly pleasant to look at, on that account, does not appear.

"He was my true son," repeats the old gentleman, folding his bread and butter on his knee, "a good accountant, and died fifteen years ago."

Mrs. Smallweed, following her usual instinct, breaks out with "Fifteen hundred pound. Fifteen hundred pound in a black box, fifteen hundred pound locked up, fifteen hundred pound put away and hid!" Her worthy husband, setting aside his bread and butter, immediately discharges the cushion at her, crushes her against the side of her chair, and falls back in his own, overpowered. His appearance, after visiting Mrs. Smallweed with one of these admonitions, is particularly impressive and not wholly prepossessing, firstly because the exertion generally twists his black skull-cap over one eye and gives him an air of goblin rakishness, secondly because he mutters violent imprecations against Mrs. Smallweed, and thirdly because the contrast between those powerful expressions and his powerless figure is suggestive of a baleful old malignant who would be very wicked if he could. All this, however, is so common in the Smallweed family circle that it produces no impression. The old gentleman is merely shaken and has his internal feathers beaten up, the cushion is restored to its usual place beside him, and the old lady, perhaps with her cap adjusted and perhaps not, is planted in her chair again, ready to be bowled down like a ninepin.

Some time elapses in the present instance before the old gentleman is sufficiently cool to resume his discourse, and even then he mixes it up with several edifying expletives addressed to the unconscious partner of his bosom, who holds communication with nothing on earth but the trivets. As thus: "If your father, Bart, had lived longer, he might have been worth a deal of money—you brimstone chatterer!—but just as he was beginning to build up the house that he had been making the foundations for, through many a year—you jade of a magpie, jackdaw, and poll-parrot, what do you mean!—he took ill and died of a low fever, always being a sparing and a spare man, full of business care—I should like to throw a cat at you instead of a cushion, and I will too if you make such a confounded fool of yourself!—and your mother, who was a prudent woman as dry as a chip, just dwindled away like touchwood after you and Judy were born—you are an old pig. You are a brimstone pig. You're a head of swine!"

Judy, not interested in what she has often heard, begins to collect in a basin various tributary streams of tea, from the bottoms of cups and saucers and from the bottom of the tea-pot for the little charwoman's evening meal. In like manner she gets together, in the iron bread-basket, as many outside fragments and worn-down heels of loaves as the rigid economy of the house has left in existence.

"But your father and me were partners, Bart," says the old gentleman, "and when I am gone, you and Judy will have all there is. It's rare for you both that you went out early in life—Judy to the flower business, and you to the law. You won't want to spend it. You'll get your living without it, and put more to it. When I am gone, Judy will go back to the flower business and you'll still stick to the law."

One might infer from Judy's appearance that her business rather lay with the thorns than the flowers, but she has in her time been apprenticed to the art and mystery of artificial flower-making. A close observer might perhaps detect both in her eye and her brother's, when their venerable grandsire anticipates his being gone, some little impatience to know when he may be going, and some resentful opinion that it is time he went.

"Now, if everybody has done," says Judy, completing her preparations, "I'll have that girl in to her tea. She would never leave off if she took it by herself in the kitchen."

Charley is accordingly introduced, and under a heavy fire of eyes, sits down to her basin and a Druidical ruin of bread and butter. In the active superintendence of this young person, Judy Smallweed appears to attain a perfectly geological age and to date from the remotest periods. Her systematic manner of flying at her and pouncing on her, with or without pretence, whether or no, is wonderful, evincing an accomplishment in the art of girl-driving seldom reached by the oldest practitioners.

"Now, don't stare about you all the afternoon," cries Judy, shaking her head and stamping her foot as she happens to catch the glance which has been previously sounding the basin of tea, "but take your victuals and get back to your work."

"Yes, miss," says Charley.

"Don't say yes," returns Miss Smallweed, "for I know what you girls are. Do it without saying it, and then I may begin to believe you."

Charley swallows a great gulp of tea in token of submission and so disperses the Druidical ruins that Miss Smallweed charges her not to gormandize, which "in you girls," she observes, is disgusting. Charley might find some more difficulty in meeting her views on the general subject of girls but for a knock at the door.

"See who it is, and don't chew when you open it!" cries Judy.

The object of her attentions withdrawing for the purpose, Miss Smallweed takes that opportunity of jumbling the remainder of the bread and butter together and launching two or three dirty tea-cups into the ebb-tide of the basin of tea as a hint that she considers the eating and drinking terminated.

"Now! Who is it, and what's wanted?" says the snappish Judy.

It is one Mr. George, it appears. Without other announcement or ceremony, Mr. George walks in.

"Whew!" says Mr. George. "You are hot here. Always a fire, eh? Well! Perhaps you do right to get used to one." Mr. George makes the latter remark to himself as he nods to Grandfather Smallweed.

"Ho! It's you!" cries the old gentleman. "How de do? How de do?"

"Middling," replies Mr. George, taking a chair. "Your granddaughter I have had the honour of seeing before; my service to you, miss."

"This is my grandson," says Grandfather Smallweed. "You ha'n't seen him before. He is in the law and not much at home."

"My service to him, too! He is like his sister. He is very like his sister. He is devilish like his sister," says Mr. George, laying a great and not altogether complimentary stress on his last adjective.

"And how does the world use you, Mr. George?" Grandfather Smallweed inquires, slowly rubbing his legs.

"Pretty much as usual. Like a football."

He is a swarthy brown man of fifty, well made, and good looking, with crisp dark hair, bright eyes, and a broad chest. His sinewy and powerful hands, as sunburnt as his face, have evidently been used to a pretty rough life. What is curious about him is that he sits forward on his chair as if he were, from long habit, allowing space for some dress or accoutrements that he has altogether laid aside. His step too is measured and heavy and would go well with a weighty clash and jingle of spurs. He is close-shaved now, but his mouth is set as if his upper lip had been for years familiar with a great moustache; and his manner of occasionally laying the open palm of his broad brown hand upon it is to the same effect. Altogether one might guess Mr. George to have been a trooper once upon a time.

A special contrast Mr. George makes to the Smallweed family. Trooper was never yet billeted upon a household more unlike him. It is a broadsword to an oyster-knife. His developed figure and their stunted forms, his large manner filling any amount of room and their little narrow pinched ways, his sounding voice and their sharp spare tones, are in the strongest and the strangest opposition. As he sits in the middle of the grim parlour, leaning a little forward, with his hands upon his thighs and his elbows squared, he looks as though, if he remained there long, he would absorb into himself the whole family and the whole four-roomed house, extra little back-kitchen and all.

"Do you rub your legs to rub life into 'em?" he asks of Grandfather Smallweed after looking round the room.

"Why, it's partly a habit, Mr. George, and—yes—it partly helps the circulation," he replies.

"The cir-cu-la-tion!" repeats Mr. George, folding his arms upon his chest and seeming to become two sizes larger. "Not much of that, I should think."

"Truly I'm old, Mr. George," says Grandfather Smallweed. "But I can carry my years. I'm older than HER," nodding at his wife, "and see what she is? You're a brimstone chatterer!" with a sudden revival of his late hostility.

"Unlucky old soul!" says Mr. George, turning his head in that direction. "Don't scold the old lady. Look at her here, with her poor cap half off her head and her poor hair all in a muddle. Hold up, ma'am. That's better. There we are! Think of your mother, Mr. Smallweed," says Mr. George, coming back to his seat from assisting her, "if your wife an't enough."

"I suppose you were an excellent son, Mr. George?" the old man hints with a leer.

The colour of Mr. George's face rather deepens as he replies, "Why no. I wasn't."

"I am astonished at it."

"So am I. I ought to have been a good son, and I think I meant to have been one. But I wasn't. I was a thundering bad son, that's the long and the short of it, and never was a credit to anybody."

"Surprising!" cries the old man.

"However," Mr. George resumes, "the less said about it, the better now. Come! You know the agreement. Always a pipe out of the two months' interest! (Bosh! It's all correct. You needn't be afraid to order the pipe. Here's the new bill, and here's the two months' interest-money, and a devil-and-all of a scrape it is to get it together in my business.)"

Mr. George sits, with his arms folded, consuming the family and the parlour while Grandfather Smallweed is assisted by Judy to two black leathern cases out of a locked bureau, in one of which he secures the document he has just received, and from the other takes another similar document which he hands to Mr. George, who twists it up for a pipelight. As the old man inspects, through his glasses, every up-stroke and down-stroke of both documents before he releases them from their leathern prison, and as he counts the money three times over and requires Judy to say every word she utters at least twice, and is as tremulously slow of speech and action as it is possible to be, this business is a long time in progress. When it is quite concluded, and not before, he disengages his ravenous eyes and fingers from it and answers Mr. George's last remark by saying, "Afraid to order the pipe? We are not so mercenary as that, sir.

Judy, see directly to the pipe and the glass of cold brandy-and-water for Mr. George."

The sportive twins, who have been looking straight before them all this time except when they have been engrossed by the black leathern cases, retire together, generally disdainful of the visitor, but leaving him to the old man as two young cubs might leave a traveller to the parental bear.

"And there you sit, I suppose, all the day long, eh?" says Mr. George with folded arms.

"Just so, just so," the old man nods.

"And don't you occupy yourself at all?"

"I watch the fire—and the boiling and the roasting—"

"When there is any," says Mr. George with great expression.

"Just so. When there is any."

"Don't you read or get read to?"

The old man shakes his head with sharp sly triumph. "No, no. We have never been readers in our family. It don't pay. Stuff. Idleness. Folly. No, no!"

"There's not much to choose between your two states," says the visitor in a key too low for the old man's dull hearing as he looks from him to the old woman and back again. "I say!" in a louder voice.

"I hear you."

"You'll sell me up at last, I suppose, when I am a day in arrear."

"My dear friend!" cries Grandfather Smallweed, stretching out both hands to embrace him. "Never! Never, my dear friend! But my friend in the city that I got to lend you the money—HE might!"

"Oh! You can't answer for him?" says Mr. George, finishing the inquiry in his lower key with the words "You lying old rascal!"

"My dear friend, he is not to be depended on. I wouldn't trust him. He will have his bond, my dear friend."

"Devil doubt him," says Mr. George. Charley appearing with a tray, on which are the pipe, a small paper of tobacco, and the brandy-and-water, he asks her, "How do you come here! You haven't got the family face."

"I goes out to work, sir," returns Charley.

The trooper (if trooper he be or have been) takes her bonnet off, with a light touch for so strong a hand, and pats her on the head. "You give the house almost a wholesome look. It wants a bit of youth as much as it wants fresh air." Then he dismisses her, lights his pipe, and drinks to Mr.

Smallweed's friend in the city—the one solitary flight of that esteemed old gentleman's imagination.

"So you think he might be hard upon me, eh?"

"I think he might—I am afraid he would. I have known him do it," says Grandfather Smallweed incautiously, "twenty times."

Incautiously, because his stricken better-half, who has been dozing over the fire for some time, is instantly aroused and jabbers "Twenty thousand pounds, twenty twenty-pound notes in a money-box, twenty guineas, twenty million twenty per cent, twenty—" and is then cut short by the flying cushion, which the visitor, to whom this singular experiment appears to be a novelty, snatches from her face as it crushes her in the usual manner.

"You're a brimstone idiot. You're a scorpion—a brimstone scorpion! You're a sweltering toad. You're a chattering clattering broomstick witch that ought to be burnt!" gasps the old man, prostrate in his chair. "My dear friend, will you shake me up a little?"

Mr. George, who has been looking first at one of them and then at the other, as if he were demented, takes his venerable acquaintance by the throat on receiving this request, and dragging him upright in his chair as easily as if he were a doll, appears in two minds whether or no to shake all future power of cushioning out of him and shake him into his grave. Resisting the temptation, but agitating him violently enough to make his head roll like a harlequin's, he puts him smartly down in his chair again and adjusts his skull-cap with such a rub that the old man winks with both eyes for a minute afterwards.

"O Lord!" gasps Mr. Smallweed. "That'll do. Thank you, my dear friend, that'll do. Oh, dear me, I'm out of breath. O Lord!" And Mr. Smallweed says it not without evident apprehensions of his dear friend, who still stands over him looming larger than ever.

The alarming presence, however, gradually subsides into its chair and falls to smoking in long puffs, consoling itself with the philosophical reflection, "The name of your friend in the city begins with a D, comrade, and you're about right respecting the bond."

"Did you speak, Mr. George?" inquires the old man.

The trooper shakes his head, and leaning forward with his right elbow on his right knee and his pipe supported in that hand, while his other hand, resting on his left leg, squares his left elbow in a martial manner, continues to smoke. Meanwhile he looks at Mr. Smallweed with grave attention and now and then fans the cloud of smoke away in order that he may see him the more clearly.

"I take it," he says, making just as much and as little change in his position as will enable him to reach the glass to his lips with a round, full action, "that I am the only man alive (or dead either) that gets the value of a pipe out of YOU?"

"Well," returns the old man, "it's true that I don't see company, Mr. George, and that I don't treat. I can't afford to it. But as you, in your pleasant way, made your pipe a condition—"

"Why, it's not for the value of it; that's no great thing. It was a fancy to get it out of you. To have something in for my money."

"Ha! You're prudent, prudent, sir!" cries Grandfather Smallweed, rubbing his legs.

"Very. I always was." Puff. "It's a sure sign of my prudence that I ever found the way here." Puff. "Also, that I am what I am." Puff. "I am well known to be prudent," says Mr. George, composedly smoking. "I rose in life that way."

"Don't he down-hearted, sir. You may rise yet."

Mr. George laughs and drinks.

"Ha'n't you no relations, now," asks Grandfather Smallweed with a twinkle in his eyes, "who would pay off this little principal or who would lend you a good name or two that I could persuade my friend in the city to make you a further advance upon? Two good names would be sufficient for my friend in the city. Ha'n't you no such relations, Mr. George?"

Mr. George, still composedly smoking, replies, "If I had, I shouldn't trouble them. I have been trouble enough to my belongings in my day. It MAY be a very good sort of penitence in a vagabond, who has wasted the best time of his life, to go back then to decent people that he never was a credit to and live upon them, but it's not my sort. The best kind of amends then for having gone away is to keep away, in my opinion."

"But natural affection, Mr. George," hints Grandfather Smallweed.

"For two good names, hey?" says Mr. George, shaking his head and still composedly smoking. "No. That's not my sort either."

Grandfather Smallweed has been gradually sliding down in his chair since his last adjustment and is now a bundle of clothes with a voice in it calling for Judy. That houri, appearing, shakes him up in the usual manner and is charged by the old gentleman to remain near him. For he seems chary of putting his visitor to the trouble of repeating his late attentions.

"Ha!" he observes when he is in trim again. "If you could have traced out the captain, Mr. George, it would have been the making of you. If when you first came here, in consequence of our advertisement in the newspapers—when I say 'our,' I'm alluding to the advertisements of my friend in the city, and one or two others who embark their capital in the same way, and are so friendly towards me as sometimes to give me a lift with my little pittance—if at that time you could have helped us, Mr. George, it would have been the making of you."

"I was willing enough to be 'made,' as you call it," says Mr. George, smoking not quite so placidly as before, for since the entrance of Judy he has been in some measure disturbed by a fascination, not of the admiring kind, which obliges him to look at her as she stands by her grandfather's chair, "but on the whole, I am glad I wasn't now."

"Why, Mr. George? In the name of—of brimstone, why?" says Grandfather Smallweed with a plain appearance of exasperation. (Brimstone apparently suggested by his eye lighting on Mrs. Smallweed in her slumber.)

"For two reasons, comrade."

"And what two reasons, Mr. George? In the name of the—"

"Of our friend in the city?" suggests Mr. George, composedly drinking.

"Aye, if you like. What two reasons?"

"In the first place," returns Mr. George, but still looking at Judy as if she being so old and so like her grandfather it is indifferent which of the two he addresses, "you gentlemen took me in. You advertised that Mr. Hawdon (Captain Hawdon, if you hold to the saying 'Once a captain, always a captain') was to hear of something to his advantage."

"Well?" returns the old man shrilly and sharply.

"Well!" says Mr. George, smoking on. "It wouldn't have been much to his advantage to have been clapped into prison by the whole bill and judgment trade of London."

"How do you know that? Some of his rich relations might have paid his debts or compounded for 'em. Besides, he had taken US in. He owed us immense sums all round. I would sooner have strangled him than had no return. If I sit here thinking of him," snarls the old man, holding up his impotent ten fingers, "I want to strangle him now." And in a sudden access of fury, he throws the cushion at the unoffending Mrs. Smallweed, but it passes harmlessly on one side of her chair.

"I don't need to be told," returns the trooper, taking his pipe from his lips for a moment and carrying his eyes back from following the progress of the cushion to the pipe-bowl which is burning low, "that he carried on heavily and went to ruin. I have been at his right hand many a day when he was charging upon ruin full-gallop. I was with him when he was sick and well, rich and poor. I laid this hand upon him after he had run through everything and broken down everything beneath him—when he held a pistol to his head."

"I wish he had let it off," says the benevolent old man, "and blown his head into as many pieces as he owed pounds!"

"That would have been a smash indeed," returns the trooper coolly; "any way, he had been young, hopeful, and handsome in the days gone by, and I am glad I never found him, when he was neither, to lead to a result so much to his advantage. That's reason number one."

"I hope number two's as good?" snarls the old man.

"Why, no. It's more of a selfish reason. If I had found him, I must have gone to the other world to look. He was there."

"How do you know he was there?"

"He wasn't here."

"How do you know he wasn't here?"

"Don't lose your temper as well as your money," says Mr. George, calmly knocking the ashes out of his pipe. "He was drowned long before. I am convinced of it. He went over a ship's side. Whether intentionally or accidentally, I don't know. Perhaps your friend in the city does. Do you know what that tune is, Mr. Smallweed?" he adds after breaking off to whistle one, accompanied on the table with the empty pipe.

"Tune!" replied the old man. "No. We never have tunes here."

"That's the Dead March in Saul. They bury soldiers to it, so it's the natural end of the subject. Now, if your pretty granddaughter—excuse me, miss—will condescend to take care of this pipe for two months, we shall save the cost of one next time. Good evening, Mr. Smallweed!"

"My dear friend!" the old man gives him both his hands.

"So you think your friend in the city will be hard upon me if I fall in a payment?" says the trooper, looking down upon him like a giant.

"My dear friend, I am afraid he will," returns the old man, looking up at him like a pygmy.

Mr. George laughs, and with a glance at Mr. Smallweed and a parting salutation to the scornful Judy, strides out of the parlour, clashing imaginary sabres and other metallic appurtenances as he goes.

"You're a damned rogue," says the old gentleman, making a hideous grimace at the door as he shuts it. "But I'll lime you, you dog, I'll lime you!"

After this amiable remark, his spirit soars into those enchanting regions of reflection which its education and pursuits have opened to it, and again he and Mrs. Smallweed while away the rosy hours, two unrelieved sentinels forgotten as aforesaid by the Black Serjeant.

While the twain are faithful to their post, Mr. George strides through the streets with a massive kind of swagger and a grave-enough face. It is eight o'clock now, and the day is fast drawing in. He stops hard by Waterloo Bridge and reads a playbill, decides to go to Astley's Theatre. Being there, is much delighted with the horses and the feats of strength; looks at the weapons with a critical eye; disapproves of the combats as giving evidences of unskilful swordsmanship; but is touched home by the sentiments. In the last scene, when the Emperor of Tartary gets up into a cart and condescends to bless the united lovers by hovering over them with the Union Jack, his eyelashes are moistened with emotion.

The theatre over, Mr. George comes across the water again and makes his way to that curious region lying about the Haymarket and Leicester Square which is a centre of attraction to indifferent foreign hotels and indifferent foreigners, racket-courts, fighting-men, swordsmen, footguards, old china, gaming-houses, exhibitions, and a large medley of shabbiness and shrinking out of sight. Penetrating to the heart of this region, he arrives by a court and a long whitewashed passage at a great brick building composed of bare walls, floors, roof-rafters, and skylights, on the front of which, if it can be said to have any front, is painted GEORGE'S SHOOTING GALLERY, &c.

Into George's Shooting Gallery, &c., he goes; and in it there are gaslights (partly turned off now), and two whitened targets for rifle-shooting, and archery accommodation, and fencing appliances, and all necessaries for the British art of boxing. None of these sports or exercises being pursued in George's Shooting Gallery to-night, which is so devoid of company that a little grotesque man with a large head has it all to himself and lies asleep upon the floor.

The little man is dressed something like a gunsmith, in a green-baize apron and cap; and his face and hands are dirty with gunpowder and begrimed with the loading of guns. As he lies in the light before a glaring white target, the black upon him shines again. Not far off is the strong, rough, primitive table with a vice upon it at which he has been working. He is a little man with a face all crushed together, who appears, from a certain blue and speckled appearance that one of his cheeks presents, to have been blown up, in the way of business, at some odd time or times.

"Phil!" says the trooper in a quiet voice.

"All right!" cries Phil, scrambling to his feet.

"Anything been doing?"

"Flat as ever so much swipes," says Phil. "Five dozen rifle and a dozen pistol. As to aim!" Phil gives a howl at the recollection.

"Shut up shop, Phil!"

As Phil moves about to execute this order, it appears that he is lame, though able to move very quickly. On the speckled side of his face he has no eyebrow, and on the other side he has a bushy black one, which want of uniformity gives him a very singular and rather sinister appearance. Everything seems to have happened to his hands that could possibly take place consistently with the retention of all the fingers, for they are notched, and seamed, and crumpled all over. He appears to be very strong and lifts heavy benches about as if he had no idea what weight was. He has a curious way of limping round the gallery with his shoulder against the wall and tacking off at objects he wants to lay hold of instead of going straight to them, which has left a smear all round the four walls, conventionally called "Phil's mark."

This custodian of George's Gallery in George's absence concludes his proceedings, when he has locked the great doors and turned out all the lights but one, which he leaves to glimmer, by dragging out from a wooden cabin in a corner two mattresses and bedding. These being drawn to opposite ends of the gallery, the trooper makes his own bed and Phil makes his.

"Phil!" says the master, walking towards him without his coat and waistcoat, and looking more soldierly than ever in his braces. "You were found in a doorway, weren't you?"

"Gutter," says Phil. "Watchman tumbled over me."

"Then vagabondizing came natural to YOU from the beginning."

"As nat'ral as possible," says Phil.

"Good night!"

"Good night, guv'ner."

Phil cannot even go straight to bed, but finds it necessary to shoulder round two sides of the gallery and then tack off at his mattress. The trooper, after taking a turn or two in the rifle-distance and looking up at the moon now shining through the skylights, strides to his own mattress by a shorter route and goes to bed too.

CHAPTER XXII. Mr. Bucket

Allegory looks pretty cool in Lincoln's Inn Fields, though the evening is hot, for both Mr. Tulkinghorn's windows are wide open, and the room is lofty, gusty, and gloomy. These may not be desirable characteristics when November comes with fog and sleet or January with ice and snow, but they have their merits in the sultry long vacation weather. They enable Allegory, though it has cheeks like peaches, and knees like bunches of blossoms, and rosy swellings for calves to its legs and muscles to its arms, to look tolerably cool to-night.

Plenty of dust comes in at Mr. Tulkinghorn's windows, and plenty more has generated among his furniture and papers. It lies thick everywhere. When a breeze from the country that has lost its way takes fright and makes a blind hurry to rush out again, it flings as much dust in the eyes of Allegory as the law—or Mr. Tulkinghorn, one of its trustiest representatives—may scatter, on occasion, in the eyes of the laity.

In his lowering magazine of dust, the universal article into which his papers and himself, and all his clients, and all things of earth, animate and inanimate, are resolving, Mr. Tulkinghorn sits at one of the open windows enjoying a bottle of old port. Though a hard-grained man, close, dry, and silent, he can enjoy old wine with the best. He has a priceless bin of port in some artful cellar under the Fields, which is one of his many secrets. When he dines alone in chambers, as he has dined to-day, and has his bit of fish and his steak or chicken brought in from the coffee-house, he descends with a candle to the echoing regions below the deserted mansion, and heralded by a remote reverberation of thundering doors, comes gravely back encircled by an earthy atmosphere and carrying a bottle from which he pours a radiant nectar, two score and ten years old, that blushes in the glass to find itself so famous and fills the whole room with the fragrance of southern grapes.

Mr. Tulkinghorn, sitting in the twilight by the open window, enjoys his wine. As if it whispered to him of its fifty years of silence and seclusion, it shuts him up the closer. More impenetrable than ever, he sits, and drinks, and mellows as it were in secrecy, pondering at that twilight hour on all the mysteries he knows, associated with darkening woods in the country, and vast blank shut-up houses in town, and perhaps sparing a thought or two for himself, and his family history, and his money, and his will—all a mystery to every one—and that one bachelor friend of his, a man of the same mould and a lawyer too, who lived the same kind of life until he was seventy-five years old, and then suddenly conceiving (as it is supposed) an impression that it was too monotonous, gave his gold watch to his hair-dresser one summer evening and walked leisurely home to the Temple and hanged himself.

But Mr. Tulkinghorn is not alone to-night to ponder at his usual length. Seated at the same table, though with his chair modestly and uncomfortably drawn a little way from it, sits a bald, mild, shining man who coughs respectfully behind his hand when the lawyer bids him fill his glass.

"Now, Snagsby," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, "to go over this odd story again."

"If you please, sir."

"You told me when you were so good as to step round here last night—"

"For which I must ask you to excuse me if it was a liberty, sir; but I remember that you had taken a sort of an interest in that person, and I thought it possible that you might—just—wish—to—"

Mr. Tulkinghorn is not the man to help him to any conclusion or to admit anything as to any possibility concerning himself. So Mr. Snagsby trails off into saying, with an awkward cough, "I must ask you to excuse the liberty, sir, I am sure."

"Not at all," says Mr. Tulkinghorn. "You told me, Snagsby, that you put on your hat and came round without mentioning your intention to your wife. That was prudent I think, because it's not a matter of such importance that it requires to be mentioned."

"Well, sir," returns Mr. Snagsby, "you see, my little woman is—not to put too fine a point upon it—inquisitive. She's inquisitive. Poor little thing, she's liable to spasms, and it's good for her to have her mind employed. In consequence of which she employs it—I should say upon every individual thing she can lay hold of, whether it concerns her or not—especially not. My little woman has a very active mind, sir."

Mr. Snagsby drinks and murmurs with an admiring cough behind his hand, "Dear me, very fine wine indeed!"

"Therefore you kept your visit to yourself last night?" says Mr. Tulkinghorn. "And to-night too?"

"Yes, sir, and to-night, too. My little woman is at present in—not to put too fine a point on it—in a pious state, or in what she considers such, and attends the Evening Exertions (which is the name they go by) of a reverend party of the name of Chadband. He has a great deal of eloquence at his command, undoubtedly, but I am not quite favourable to his style myself. That's neither here nor there. My little woman being engaged in that way made it easier for me to step round in a quiet manner."

Mr. Tulkinghorn assents. "Fill your glass, Snagsby."

"Thank you, sir, I am sure," returns the stationer with his cough of deference. "This is wonderfully fine wine, sir!"

"It is a rare wine now," says Mr. Tulkinghorn. "It is fifty years old."

"Is it indeed, sir? But I am not surprised to hear it, I am sure. It might be—any age almost." After rendering this general tribute to the port, Mr. Snagsby in his modesty coughs an apology behind his hand for drinking anything so precious.

"Will you run over, once again, what the boy said?" asks Mr. Tulkinghorn, putting his hands into the pockets of his rusty smallclothes and leaning quietly back in his chair.

"With pleasure, sir."

Then, with fidelity, though with some prolixity, the law-stationer repeats Jo's statement made to the assembled guests at his house. On coming to the end of his narrative, he gives a great start and breaks off with, "Dear me, sir, I wasn't aware there was any other gentleman present!"

Mr. Snagsby is dismayed to see, standing with an attentive face between himself and the lawyer at a little distance from the table, a person with a hat and stick in his hand who was not there when he himself came in and has not since entered by the door or by either of the windows. There is a press in the room, but its hinges have not creaked, nor has a step been audible upon the floor. Yet this third person stands there with his attentive face, and his hat and stick in his hands, and his hands behind him, a composed and quiet listener. He is a stoutly built, steady-looking, sharp-eyed man in black, of about the middle-age. Except that he looks at Mr. Snagsby as if he were going to take his portrait, there is nothing remarkable about him at first sight but his ghostly manner of appearing.

"Don't mind this gentleman," says Mr. Tulkinghorn in his quiet way. "This is only Mr. Bucket."

"Oh, indeed, sir?" returns the stationer, expressing by a cough that he is quite in the dark as to who Mr. Bucket may be.

"I wanted him to hear this story," says the lawyer, "because I have half a mind (for a reason) to know more of it, and he is very intelligent in such things. What do you say to this, Bucket?"

"It's very plain, sir. Since our people have moved this boy on, and he's not to be found on his old lay, if Mr. Snagsby don't object to go down with me to Tom-all-Alone's and point him out, we can have him here in less than a couple of hours' time. I can do it without Mr. Snagsby, of course, but this is the shortest way."

"Mr. Bucket is a detective officer, Snagsby," says the lawyer in explanation.

"Is he indeed, sir?" says Mr. Snagsby with a strong tendency in his clump of hair to stand on end.

"And if you have no real objection to accompany Mr. Bucket to the place in question," pursues the lawyer, "I shall feel obliged to you if you will do so."

In a moment's hesitation on the part of Mr. Snagsby, Bucket dips down to the bottom of his mind.

"Don't you be afraid of hurting the boy," he says. "You won't do that. It's all right as far as the boy's concerned. We shall only bring him here to ask him a question or so I want to put to him, and he'll be paid for his trouble and sent away again. It'll be a good job for him. I promise you, as a man, that you shall see the boy sent away all right. Don't you be afraid of hurting him; you an't going to do that."

"Very well, Mr. Tulkinghorn!" cries Mr. Snagsby cheerfully. And reassured, "Since that's the case—"

"Yes! And lookee here, Mr. Snagsby," resumes Bucket, taking him aside by the arm, tapping him familiarly on the breast, and speaking in a confidential tone. "You're a man of the world, you know, and a man of business, and a man of sense. That's what YOU are."

"I am sure I am much obliged to you for your good opinion," returns the stationer with his cough of modesty, "but—"

"That's what YOU are, you know," says Bucket. "Now, it an't necessary to say to a man like you, engaged in your business, which is a business of trust and requires a person to be wide awake and have his senses about him and his head screwed on tight (I had an uncle in your business once)—it an't necessary to say to a man like you that it's the best and wisest way to keep little matters like this quiet. Don't you see? Quiet!"

"Certainly, certainly," returns the other.

"I don't mind telling YOU," says Bucket with an engaging appearance of frankness, "that as far as I can understand it, there seems to be a doubt whether this dead person wasn't entitled to a little property, and whether this female hasn't been up to some games respecting that property, don't you see?"

"Oh!" says Mr. Snagsby, but not appearing to see quite distinctly.

"Now, what YOU want," pursues Bucket, again tapping Mr. Snagsby on the breast in a comfortable and soothing manner, "is that every person should have their rights according to justice. That's what YOU want."

"To be sure," returns Mr. Snagsby with a nod.

"On account of which, and at the same time to oblige a—do you call it, in your business, customer or client? I forget how my uncle used to call it."

"Why, I generally say customer myself," replies Mr. Snagsby.

"You're right!" returns Mr. Bucket, shaking hands with him quite affectionately. "—On account of which, and at the same time to oblige a real good customer, you mean to go down with me, in confidence, to Tom-all-Alone's and to keep the whole thing quiet ever afterwards and never mention it to any one. That's about your intentions, if I understand you?"

"You are right, sir. You are right," says Mr. Snagsby.

"Then here's your hat," returns his new friend, quite as intimate with it as if he had made it; "and if you're ready, I am."

They leave Mr. Tulkinghorn, without a ruffle on the surface of his unfathomable depths, drinking his old wine, and go down into the streets.

"You don't happen to know a very good sort of person of the name of Gridley, do you?" says Bucket in friendly converse as they descend the stairs.

"No," says Mr. Snagsby, considering, "I don't know anybody of that name. Why?"

"Nothing particular," says Bucket; "only having allowed his temper to get a little the better of him and having been threatening some respectable people, he is keeping out of the way of a warrant I have got against him—which it's a pity that a man of sense should do."

As they walk along, Mr. Snagsby observes, as a novelty, that however quick their pace may be, his companion still seems in some undefinable manner to lurk and lounge; also, that whenever he is going to turn to the right or left, he pretends to have a fixed purpose in his mind of going straight ahead, and wheels off, sharply, at the very last moment. Now and then, when they pass a police-constable on his beat, Mr. Snagsby notices that both the constable and his guide fall into a deep abstraction as they come towards each other, and appear entirely to overlook each other, and to gaze into space. In a few instances, Mr. Bucket, coming behind some under-sized young man with a shining hat on, and his sleek hair twisted into one flat curl on each side of his head, almost without glancing at him touches him with his stick, upon which the young man, looking round, instantly evaporates. For the most part Mr. Bucket notices things in general, with a face as unchanging as the great mourning ring on his little finger or the brooch, composed of not much diamond and a good deal of setting, which he wears in his shirt.

When they come at last to Tom-all-Alone's, Mr. Bucket stops for a moment at the corner and takes a lighted bull's-eye from the constable on duty there, who then accompanies him with his own particular bull's-eye at his waist. Between his two conductors, Mr. Snagsby passes along the middle of a villainous street, undrained, unventilated, deep in black mud and corrupt water—though the roads are dry elsewhere—and reeking with such smells and sights that he, who has lived in London all his life, can scarce believe his senses. Branching from this street and its heaps of ruins are other streets and courts so infamous that Mr. Snagsby sickens in body and mind and feels as if he were going every moment deeper down into the infernal gulf.

"Draw off a bit here, Mr. Snagsby," says Bucket as a kind of shabby palanquin is borne towards them, surrounded by a noisy crowd. "Here's the fever coming up the street!"

As the unseen wretch goes by, the crowd, leaving that object of attraction, hovers round the three visitors like a dream of horrible faces and fades away up alleys and into ruins and behind walls, and with occasional cries and shrill whistles of warning, thenceforth flits about them until they leave the place.

"Are those the fever-houses, Darby?" Mr. Bucket coolly asks as he turns his bull's-eye on a line of stinking ruins.

Darby replies that "all them are," and further that in all, for months and months, the people "have been down by dozens" and have been carried out dead and dying "like sheep with the rot." Bucket observing to Mr. Snagsby as they go on again that he looks a little poorly, Mr. Snagsby answers that he feels as if he couldn't breathe the dreadful air.

There is inquiry made at various houses for a boy named Jo. As few people are known in Tom-all-Alone's by any Christian sign, there is much reference to Mr. Snagsby whether he means Carrots, or the Colonel, or Gallows, or Young Chisel, or Terrier Tip, or Lanky, or the Brick. Mr. Snagsby describes over and over again. There are conflicting opinions respecting the original of his picture. Some think it must be Carrots, some say the Brick. The Colonel is produced, but is not at all near the thing. Whenever Mr. Snagsby and his conductors are stationary, the crowd flows round, and from its squalid depths obsequious advice heaves up to Mr. Bucket. Whenever they move, and the angry bull's-eyes glare, it fades away and flits about them up the alleys, and in the ruins, and behind the walls, as before.

At last there is a lair found out where Toughy, or the Tough Subject, lays him down at night; and it is thought that the Tough Subject may be Jo. Comparison of notes between Mr. Snagsby and the proprietress of the house—a drunken face tied up in a black bundle, and flaring out of a heap of rags on the floor of a dog-hutch which is her private apartment—leads to the establishment of this conclusion. Toughy has gone to the doctor's to get a bottle of stuff for a sick woman but will be here anon.

"And who have we got here to-night?" says Mr. Bucket, opening another door and glaring in with his bull's-eye. "Two drunken men, eh? And two women? The men are sound enough," turning back each sleeper's arm from his face to look at him. "Are these your good men, my dears?"

"Yes, sir," returns one of the women. "They are our husbands."

"Brickmakers, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"What are you doing here? You don't belong to London."

"No, sir. We belong to Hertfordshire."

"Whereabouts in Hertfordshire?"

"Saint Albans."

"Come up on the tramp?"

"We walked up yesterday. There's no work down with us at present, but we have done no good by coming here, and shall do none, I expect."

"That's not the way to do much good," says Mr. Bucket, turning his head in the direction of the unconscious figures on the ground.

"It an't indeed," replies the woman with a sigh. "Jenny and me knows it full well."

The room, though two or three feet higher than the door, is so low that the head of the tallest of the visitors would touch the blackened ceiling if he stood upright. It is offensive to every sense; even the gross candle burns pale and sickly in the polluted air. There are a couple of benches and a higher bench by way of a table. The men lie asleep where they stumbled down, but the women sit by the candle. Lying in the arms of the woman who has spoken is a very young child.

"Why, what age do you call that little creature?" says Bucket. "It looks as if it was born yesterday." He is not at all rough about it; and as he turns his light gently on the infant, Mr. Snagsby is strangely reminded of another infant, encircled with light, that he has seen in pictures.

"He is not three weeks old yet, sir," says the woman.

"Is he your child?"

"Mine."

The other woman, who was bending over it when they came in, stoops down again and kisses it as it lies asleep.

"You seem as fond of it as if you were the mother yourself," says Mr. Bucket.

"I was the mother of one like it, master, and it died."

"Ah, Jenny, Jenny!" says the other woman to her. "Better so. Much better to think of dead than alive, Jenny! Much better!"

"Why, you an't such an unnatural woman, I hope," returns Bucket sternly, "as to wish your own child dead?"

"God knows you are right, master," she returns. "I am not. I'd stand between it and death with my own life if I could, as true as any pretty lady."

"Then don't talk in that wrong manner," says Mr. Bucket, mollified again. "Why do you do it?"

"It's brought into my head, master," returns the woman, her eyes filling with tears, "when I look down at the child lying so. If it was never to wake no more, you'd think me mad, I should take on so. I know that very well. I was with Jenny when she lost hers—warn't I, Jenny?—and I know how she grieved. But look around you at this place. Look at them," glancing at the sleepers on the ground. "Look at the boy you're waiting for, who's gone out to do me a good turn. Think of the children that your business lays with often and often, and that YOU see grow up!"

"Well, well," says Mr. Bucket, "you train him respectable, and he'll be a comfort to you, and look after you in your old age, you know."

"I mean to try hard," she answers, wiping her eyes. "But I have been a-thinking, being over-tired to-night and not well with the ague, of all the many things that'll come in his way. My master will be against it, and he'll be beat, and see me beat, and made to fear his home, and perhaps to stray wild. If I work for him ever so much, and ever so hard, there's no one to help me; and if he should be turned bad 'spite of all I could do, and the time should come when I should sit by him in his sleep, made hard and changed, an't it likely I should think of him as he lies in my lap now and wish he had died as Jenny's child died!"

"There, there!" says Jenny. "Liz, you're tired and ill. Let me take him."

In doing so, she displaces the mother's dress, but quickly readjusts it over the wounded and bruised bosom where the baby has been lying.

"It's my dead child," says Jenny, walking up and down as she nurses, "that makes me love this child so dear, and it's my dead child that makes her love it so dear too, as even to think of its being taken away from her now. While she thinks that, I think what fortune would I give to have my darling back. But we mean the same thing, if we knew how to say it, us two mothers does in our poor hearts!"

As Mr. Snagsby blows his nose and coughs his cough of sympathy, a step is heard without. Mr. Bucket throws his light into the doorway and says to Mr. Snagsby, "Now, what do you say to Toughy? Will HE do?"

"That's Jo," says Mr. Snagsby.

Jo stands amazed in the disk of light, like a ragged figure in a magic-lantern, trembling to think that he has offended against the law in not having moved on far enough. Mr. Snagsby, however, giving him the consolatory assurance, "It's only a job you will be paid for, Jo," he recovers; and on being taken outside by Mr. Bucket for a little private confabulation, tells his tale satisfactorily, though out of breath.

"I have squared it with the lad," says Mr. Bucket, returning, "and it's all right. Now, Mr. Snagsby, we're ready for you."

First, Jo has to complete his errand of good nature by handing over the physic he has been to get, which he delivers with the laconic verbal direction that "it's to be all took d'rectly." Secondly, Mr. Snagsby has to lay upon the table half a crown, his usual panacea for an immense variety of afflictions. Thirdly, Mr. Bucket has to take Jo by the arm a little above the elbow and walk him on before him, without which observance neither the Tough Subject nor any other Subject could be professionally conducted to Lincoln's Inn Fields. These arrangements completed, they give the women good night and come out once more into black and foul Tom-all-Alone's.

By the noisome ways through which they descended into that pit, they gradually emerge from it, the crowd flitting, and whistling, and skulking about them until they come to the verge, where restoration of the bull's-eyes is made to Darby. Here the crowd, like a concourse of imprisoned demons, turns back, yelling, and is seen no more. Through the clearer and fresher streets, never so clear and fresh to Mr. Snagsby's mind as now, they walk and ride until they come to Mr. Tulkinghorn's gate.

As they ascend the dim stairs (Mr. Tulkinghorn's chambers being on the first floor), Mr. Bucket mentions that he has the key of the outer door in his pocket and that there is no need to ring. For a man so expert in most things of that kind, Bucket takes time to open the door and makes some noise too. It may be that he sounds a note of preparation.

Howbeit, they come at last into the hall, where a lamp is burning, and so into Mr. Tulkinghorn's usual room—the room where he drank his old wine to-night. He is not there, but his two old-fashioned candlesticks are, and the room is tolerably light.

Mr. Bucket, still having his professional hold of Jo and appearing to Mr. Snagsby to possess an unlimited number of eyes, makes a little way into this room, when Jo starts and stops.

"What's the matter?" says Bucket in a whisper.

"There she is!" cries Jo.

"Who!"

"The lady!"

A female figure, closely veiled, stands in the middle of the room, where the light falls upon it. It is quite still and silent. The front of the figure is towards them, but it takes no notice of their entrance and remains like a statue.

"Now, tell me," says Bucket aloud, "how you know that to be the lady."

"I know the wale," replies Jo, staring, "and the bonnet, and the gownd."

"Be quite sure of what you say, Tough," returns Bucket, narrowly observant of him. "Look again."

"I am a-looking as hard as ever I can look," says Jo with starting eyes, "and that there's the wale, the bonnet, and the gownd."

"What about those rings you told me of?" asks Bucket.

"A-sparkling all over here," says Jo, rubbing the fingers of his left hand on the knuckles of his right without taking his eyes from the figure.

The figure removes the right-hand glove and shows the hand.

"Now, what do you say to that?" asks Bucket.

Jo shakes his head. "Not rings a bit like them. Not a hand like that."

"What are you talking of?" says Bucket, evidently pleased though, and well pleased too.

"Hand was a deal whiter, a deal delicater, and a deal smaller," returns Jo.

"Why, you'll tell me I'm my own mother next," says Mr. Bucket. "Do you recollect the lady's voice?"

"I think I does," says Jo.

The figure speaks. "Was it at all like this? I will speak as long as you like if you are not sure. Was it this voice, or at all like this voice?"

Jo looks aghast at Mr. Bucket. "Not a bit!"

"Then, what," retorts that worthy, pointing to the figure, "did you say it was the lady for?"

"Cos," says Jo with a perplexed stare but without being at all shaken in his certainty, "cos that there's the wale, the bonnet, and the gownd. It is her and it an't her. It an't her hand, nor yet her rings, nor yet her woice. But that there's the wale, the bonnet, and the gownd, and they're wore the same way wot she wore 'em, and it's her height wot she wos, and she giv me a sov'ring and hooked it."

"Well!" says Mr. Bucket slightly, "we haven't got much good out of YOU. But, however, here's five shillings for you. Take care how you spend it, and don't get yourself into trouble." Bucket stealthily tells the coins from one hand into the other like counters—which is a way he has, his principal use of them being in these games of skill—and then puts them, in a little pile, into the boy's hand and takes him out to the door, leaving Mr. Snagsby, not by any means comfortable under these mysterious circumstances, alone with the veiled figure. But on Mr. Tulkinghorn's coming into the room, the veil is raised and a sufficiently good-looking Frenchwoman is revealed, though her expression is something of the intensest.

"Thank you, Mademoiselle Hortense," says Mr. Tulkinghorn with his usual equanimity. "I will give you no further trouble about this little wager."

"You will do me the kindness to remember, sir, that I am not at present placed?" says mademoiselle.

"Certainly, certainly!"

"And to confer upon me the favour of your distinguished recommendation?"

"By all means, Mademoiselle Hortense."

"A word from Mr. Tulkinghorn is so powerful."

"It shall not be wanting, mademoiselle."

"Receive the assurance of my devoted gratitude, dear sir."

"Good night."

Mademoiselle goes out with an air of native gentility; and Mr. Bucket, to whom it is, on an emergency, as natural to be groom of the ceremonies as it is to be anything else, shows her downstairs, not without gallantry.

"Well, Bucket?" quoth Mr. Tulkinghorn on his return.

"It's all squared, you see, as I squared it myself, sir. There an't a doubt that it was the other one with this one's dress on. The boy was exact respecting colours and everything. Mr. Snagsby, I promised you as a man that he should be sent away all right. Don't say it wasn't done!"

"You have kept your word, sir," returns the stationer; "and if I can be of no further use, Mr. Tulkinghorn, I think, as my little woman will be getting anxious—"

"Thank you, Snagsby, no further use," says Mr. Tulkinghorn. "I am quite indebted to you for the trouble you have taken already."

"Not at all, sir. I wish you good night."

"You see, Mr. Snagsby," says Mr. Bucket, accompanying him to the door and shaking hands with him over and over again, "what I like in you is that you're a man it's of no use pumping; that's what YOU are. When you know you have done a right thing, you put it away, and it's done with and gone, and there's an end of it. That's what YOU do."

"That is certainly what I endeavour to do, sir," returns Mr. Snagsby.

"No, you don't do yourself justice. It an't what you endeavour to do," says Mr. Bucket, shaking hands with him and blessing him in the tenderest manner, "it's what you DO. That's what I estimate in a man in your way of business."

Mr. Snagsby makes a suitable response and goes homeward so confused by the events of the evening that he is doubtful of his being awake and out—doubtful of the reality of the streets through which he goes—doubtful of the reality of the moon that shines above him. He is presently reassured on these subjects by the unchallengeable reality of Mrs. Snagsby, sitting up with her head in a perfect beehive of curl-papers and night-cap, who has dispatched Guster to the police-station with official intelligence of her husband's being made away with, and who within the last two hours has passed through every stage of swooning with the greatest decorum. But as the little woman feelingly says, many thanks she gets for it!

CHAPTER XXIII. Esther's Narrative

We came home from Mr. Boythorn's after six pleasant weeks. We were often in the park and in the woods and seldom passed the lodge where we had taken shelter without looking in to speak to the keeper's wife; but we saw no more of Lady Dedlock, except at church on Sundays. There was company at Chesney Wold; and although several beautiful faces surrounded her, her face retained the same influence on me as at first. I do not quite know even now whether it was painful or pleasurable, whether it drew me towards her or made me shrink from her. I think I admired her with a kind of fear, and I know that in her presence my thoughts always wandered back, as they had done at first, to that old time of my life.

I had a fancy, on more than one of these Sundays, that what this lady so curiously was to me, I was to her—I mean that I disturbed her thoughts as she influenced mine, though in some different way. But when I stole a glance at her and saw her so composed and distant and unapproachable, I felt this to be a foolish weakness. Indeed, I felt the whole state of my mind in reference to her to be weak and unreasonable, and I remonstrated with myself about it as much as I could.

One incident that occurred before we quitted Mr. Boythorn's house, I had better mention in this place.

I was walking in the garden with Ada and when I was told that some one wished to see me. Going into the breakfast-room where this person was waiting, I found it to be the French maid who had cast off her shoes and walked through the wet grass on the day when it thundered and lightened.

"Mademoiselle," she began, looking fixedly at me with her too-eager eyes, though otherwise presenting an agreeable appearance and speaking neither with boldness nor servility, "I have taken a great liberty in coming here, but you know how to excuse it, being so amiable, mademoiselle."

"No excuse is necessary," I returned, "if you wish to speak to me."

"That is my desire, mademoiselle. A thousand thanks for the permission. I have your leave to speak. Is it not?" she said in a quick, natural way.

"Certainly," said I.

"Mademoiselle, you are so amiable! Listen then, if you please. I have left my Lady. We could not agree. My Lady is so high, so very high. Pardon! Mademoiselle, you are right!" Her quickness anticipated what I might have said presently but as yet had only thought. "It is not for me to come here to complain of my Lady. But I say she is so high, so very high. I will not say a word more. All the world knows that."

"Go on, if you please," said I.

"Assuredly; mademoiselle, I am thankful for your politeness. Mademoiselle, I have an inexpressible desire to find service with a young lady who is good, accomplished, beautiful. You are good, accomplished, and beautiful as an angel. Ah, could I have the honour of being your domestic!"

"I am sorry—" I began.

"Do not dismiss me so soon, mademoiselle!" she said with an involuntary contraction of her fine black eyebrows. "Let me hope a moment! Mademoiselle, I know this service would be more retired than that which I have quitted. Well! I wish that. I know this service would be less distinguished than that which I have quitted. Well! I wish that, I know that I should win less, as to wages here. Good. I am content."

"I assure you," said I, quite embarrassed by the mere idea of having such an attendant, "that I keep no maid—"

"Ah, mademoiselle, but why not? Why not, when you can have one so devoted to you! Who would be enchanted to serve you; who would be so true, so zealous, and so faithful every day! Mademoiselle, I wish with all my heart to serve you. Do not speak of money at present. Take me as I am. For nothing!"

She was so singularly earnest that I drew back, almost afraid of her. Without appearing to notice it, in her ardour she still pressed herself upon me, speaking in a rapid subdued voice, though always with a certain grace and propriety.

"Mademoiselle, I come from the South country where we are quick and where we like and dislike very strong. My Lady was too high for me; I was too high for her. It is done—past—finished! Receive me as your domestic, and I will serve you well. I will do more for you than you figure to yourself now. Chut! Mademoiselle, I will—no matter, I will do my utmost possible in all things. If you accept my service, you will not repent it. Mademoiselle, you will not repent it, and I will serve you well. You don't know how well!"

There was a lowering energy in her face as she stood looking at me while I explained the impossibility of my engaging her (without thinking it necessary to say how very little I desired to do so), which seemed to bring visibly before me some woman from the streets of Paris in the reign of terror.

She heard me out without interruption and then said with her pretty accent and in her mildest voice, "Hey, mademoiselle, I have received my answer! I am sorry of it. But I must go elsewhere and seek what I have not found here. Will you graciously let me kiss your hand?"

She looked at me more intently as she took it, and seemed to take note, with her momentary touch, of every vein in it. "I fear I surprised you, mademoiselle, on the day of the storm?" she said with a parting curtsy.

I confessed that she had surprised us all.

"I took an oath, mademoiselle," she said, smiling, "and I wanted to stamp it on my mind so that I might keep it faithfully. And I will! Adieu, mademoiselle!"

So ended our conference, which I was very glad to bring to a close. I supposed she went away from the village, for I saw her no more; and nothing else occurred to disturb our tranquil summer pleasures until six weeks were out and we returned home as I began just now by saying.

At that time, and for a good many weeks after that time, Richard was constant in his visits. Besides coming every Saturday or Sunday and remaining with us until Monday morning, he sometimes rode out on horseback unexpectedly and passed the evening with us and rode back again early next day. He was as vivacious as ever and told us he was very industrious, but I was not easy in my mind about him. It appeared to me that his industry was all misdirected. I could not find that it led to anything but the formation of delusive hopes in connexion with the suit already the pernicious cause of so much sorrow and ruin. He had got at the core of that mystery now, he told us, and nothing could be plainer than that the will under which he and Ada were to take I don't know how many thousands of pounds must be finally established if there were any sense or justice in the Court of Chancery—but oh, what a great IF that sounded in my ears—and that this happy conclusion could not be much longer delayed. He proved this to himself by all the weary arguments on that side he had read, and every one of them sunk him deeper in the infatuation. He had even begun to haunt the court. He told us how he saw Miss Flite there daily, how they talked together, and how he did her little kindnesses, and how, while he laughed at her, he pitied her from his heart. But he never thought—never, my poor, dear, sanguine Richard, capable of so much happiness then, and with such better things before him—what a fatal link was riveting between his fresh youth and her faded age, between his free hopes and her caged birds, and her hungry garret, and her wandering mind.

Ada loved him too well to mistrust him much in anything he said or did, and my guardian, though he frequently complained of the east wind and read more than usual in the growlery, preserved a strict silence on the subject. So I thought one day when I went to London to meet Caddy Jellyby, at her solicitation, I would ask Richard to be in waiting for me at the coach-office, that we might have a little talk together. I found him there when I arrived, and we walked away arm in arm.

"Well, Richard," said I as soon as I could begin to be grave with him, "are you beginning to feel more settled now?"

"Oh, yes, my dear!" returned Richard. "I'm all right enough."

"But settled?" said I.

"How do you mean, settled?" returned Richard with his gay laugh.

"Settled in the law," said I.

"Oh, aye," replied Richard, "I'm all right enough."

"You said that before, my dear Richard."

"And you don't think it's an answer, eh? Well! Perhaps it's not. Settled? You mean, do I feel as if I were settling down?"

"Yes."

"Why, no, I can't say I am settling down," said Richard, strongly emphasizing "down," as if that expressed the difficulty, "because one can't settle down while this business remains in such an unsettled state. When I say this business, of course I mean the—forbidden subject."

"Do you think it will ever be in a settled state?" said I.

"Not the least doubt of it," answered Richard.

We walked a little way without speaking, and presently Richard addressed me in his frankest and most feeling manner, thus: "My dear Esther, I understand you, and I wish to heaven I were a more constant sort of fellow. I don't mean constant to Ada, for I love her dearly—better and better every day—but constant to myself. (Somehow, I mean something that I can't very well express, but you'll make it out.) If I were a more constant sort of fellow, I should have held on either to Badger or to Kenge and Carboy like grim death, and should have begun to be steady and systematic by this time, and shouldn't be in debt, and—"

"ARE you in debt, Richard?"

"Yes," said Richard, "I am a little so, my dear. Also, I have taken rather too much to billiards and that sort of thing. Now the murder's out; you despise me, Esther, don't you?"

"You know I don't," said I.

"You are kinder to me than I often am to myself," he returned. "My dear Esther, I am a very unfortunate dog not to be more settled, but how CAN I be more settled? If you lived in an unfinished house, you couldn't settle down in it; if you were condemned to leave everything you undertook unfinished, you would find it hard to apply yourself to anything; and yet that's my unhappy case. I was born into this unfinished contention with all its chances and changes, and it began to unsettle me before I quite knew the difference between a suit at law and a suit of clothes; and it has gone on unsettling me ever since; and here I am now, conscious sometimes that I am but a worthless fellow to love my confiding cousin Ada."

We were in a solitary place, and he put his hands before his eyes and sobbed as he said the words.

"Oh, Richard!" said I. "Do not be so moved. You have a noble nature, and Ada's love may make you worthier every day."

"I know, my dear," he replied, pressing my arm, "I know all that. You mustn't mind my being a little soft now, for I have had all this upon my mind for a long time, and have often meant to speak to you, and have sometimes wanted opportunity and sometimes courage. I know what the thought of Ada ought to do for me, but it doesn't do it. I am too unsettled even for that. I love her most devotedly, and yet I do her wrong, in doing myself wrong, every day and hour. But it can't last for ever. We shall come on for a final hearing and get judgment in our favour, and then you and Ada shall see what I can really be!"

It had given me a pang to hear him sob and see the tears start out between his fingers, but that was infinitely less affecting to me than the hopeful animation with which he said these words.

"I have looked well into the papers, Esther. I have been deep in them for months," he continued, recovering his cheerfulness in a moment, "and you may rely upon it that we shall come out triumphant. As to years of delay, there has been no want of them, heaven knows! And there is the greater probability of our bringing the matter to a speedy close; in fact, it's on the paper now. It will be all right at last, and then you shall see!"

Recalling how he had just now placed Messrs. Kenge and Carboy in the same category with Mr. Badger, I asked him when he intended to be articled in Lincoln's Inn.

"There again! I think not at all, Esther," he returned with an effort. "I fancy I have had enough of it. Having worked at Jarndyce and Jarndyce like a galley slave, I have slaked my thirst for the law and satisfied myself that I shouldn't like it. Besides, I find it unsettles me more and more to be so constantly upon the scene of action. So what," continued Richard, confident again by this time, "do I naturally turn my thoughts to?"

"I can't imagine," said I.

"Don't look so serious," returned Richard, "because it's the best thing I can do, my dear Esther, I am certain. It's not as if I wanted a profession for life. These proceedings will come to a termination, and then I am provided for. No. I look upon it as a pursuit which is in its nature more or less unsettled, and therefore suited to my temporary condition—I may say, precisely suited. What is it that I naturally turn my thoughts to?"

I looked at him and shook my head.

"What," said Richard, in a tone of perfect conviction, "but the army!"

"The army?" said I.

"The army, of course. What I have to do is to get a commission; and—there I am, you know!" said Richard.

And then he showed me, proved by elaborate calculations in his pocket-book, that supposing he had contracted, say, two hundred pounds of debt in six months out of the army; and that he contracted no debt at all within a corresponding period in the army—as to which he had quite made up his mind; this step must involve a saving of four hundred pounds in a year, or two thousand pounds in five years, which was a considerable sum. And then he spoke so ingenuously and sincerely of the sacrifice he made in withdrawing himself for a time from Ada, and of the earnestness with which he aspired—as in thought he always did, I know full well—to repay her love, and to ensure her happiness, and to conquer what was amiss in himself, and to acquire the very soul of decision, that he made my heart ache keenly, sorely. For, I thought, how would this end, how could this end, when so soon and so surely all his manly qualities were touched by the fatal blight that ruined everything it rested on!

I spoke to Richard with all the earnestness I felt, and all the hope I could not quite feel then, and implored him for Ada's sake not to put any trust in

Chancery. To all I said, Richard readily assented, riding over the court and everything else in his easy way and drawing the brightest pictures of the character he was to settle into—alas, when the grievous suit should loose its hold upon him! We had a long talk, but it always came back to that, in substance.

At last we came to Soho Square, where Caddy Jellyby had appointed to wait for me, as a quiet place in the neighbourhood of Newman Street. Caddy was in the garden in the centre and hurried out as soon as I appeared. After a few cheerful words, Richard left us together.

"Prince has a pupil over the way, Esther," said Caddy, "and got the key for us. So if you will walk round and round here with me, we can lock ourselves in and I can tell you comfortably what I wanted to see your dear good face about."

"Very well, my dear," said I. "Nothing could be better." So Caddy, after affectionately squeezing the dear good face as she called it, locked the gate, and took my arm, and we began to walk round the garden very cosily.

"You see, Esther," said Caddy, who thoroughly enjoyed a little confidence, "after you spoke to me about its being wrong to marry without Ma's knowledge, or even to keep Ma long in the dark respecting our engagement—though I don't believe Ma cares much for me, I must say—I thought it right to mention your opinions to Prince. In the first place because I want to profit by everything you tell me, and in the second place because I have no secrets from Prince."

"I hope he approved, Caddy?"

"Oh, my dear! I assure you he would approve of anything you could say. You have no idea what an opinion he has of you!"

"Indeed!"

"Esther, it's enough to make anybody but me jealous," said Caddy, laughing and shaking her head; "but it only makes me joyful, for you are the first friend I ever had, and the best friend I ever can have, and nobody can respect and love you too much to please me."

"Upon my word, Caddy," said I, "you are in the general conspiracy to keep me in a good humour. Well, my dear?"

"Well! I am going to tell you," replied Caddy, crossing her hands confidentially upon my arm. "So we talked a good deal about it, and so I said to Prince, 'Prince, as Miss Summerson—'"

"I hope you didn't say 'Miss Summerson'?"

"No. I didn't!" cried Caddy, greatly pleased and with the brightest of faces. "I said, 'Esther.' I said to Prince, 'As Esther is decidedly of that opinion, Prince, and has expressed it to me, and always hints it when she writes those kind notes, which you are so fond of hearing me read to you, I am prepared to disclose the truth to Ma whenever you think proper. And I think, Prince,' said I, 'that Esther thinks that I should be in a better, and truer, and more honourable position altogether if you did the same to your papa.'"

"Yes, my dear," said I. "Esther certainly does think so."

"So I was right, you see!" exclaimed Caddy. "Well! This troubled Prince a good deal, not because he had the least doubt about it, but because he is so considerate of the feelings of old Mr. Turveydrop; and he had his apprehensions that old Mr. Turveydrop might break his heart, or faint away, or be very much overcome in some affecting manner or other if he made such an announcement. He feared old Mr. Turveydrop might consider it undutiful and might receive too great a shock. For old Mr. Turveydrop's deportment is very beautiful, you know, Esther," said Caddy, "and his feelings are extremely sensitive."

"Are they, my dear?"

"Oh, extremely sensitive. Prince says so. Now, this has caused my darling child—I didn't mean to use the expression to you, Esther," Caddy apologized, her face suffused with blushes, "but I generally call Prince my darling child."

I laughed; and Caddy laughed and blushed, and went on.

"This has caused him, Esther—"

"Caused whom, my dear?"

"Oh, you tiresome thing!" said Caddy, laughing, with her pretty face on fire. "My darling child, if you insist upon it! This has caused him weeks of uneasiness and has made him delay, from day to day, in a very anxious manner. At last he said to me, 'Caddy, if Miss Summerson, who is a great favourite with my father, could be prevailed upon to be present when I broke the subject, I think I could do it.' So I promised I would ask you. And I made up my mind, besides," said Caddy, looking at me hopefully but timidly, "that if you consented, I would ask you afterwards to come with me to Ma. This is what I meant when I said in my note that I had a great favour and a great assistance to beg of you. And if you thought you could grant it, Esther, we should both be very grateful."

"Let me see, Caddy," said I, pretending to consider. "Really, I think I could do a greater thing than that if the need were pressing. I am at your service and the darling child's, my dear, whenever you like."

Caddy was quite transported by this reply of mine, being, I believe, as susceptible to the least kindness or encouragement as any tender heart that ever beat in this world; and after another turn or two round the garden, during which she put on an entirely new pair of gloves and made herself as resplendent as possible that she might do no avoidable discredit to the Master of Deportment, we went to Newman Street direct.

Prince was teaching, of course. We found him engaged with a not very hopeful pupil—a stubborn little girl with a sulky forehead, a deep voice, and an inanimate, dissatisfied mama—whose case was certainly not rendered more hopeful by the confusion into which we threw her preceptor. The lesson at last came to an end, after proceeding as discordantly as possible; and when the little girl had changed her shoes and had had her white muslin extinguished in shawls, she was taken away. After a few words of preparation, we then went in search of Mr. Turveydrop, whom we found, grouped with his hat and gloves, as a model of deportment, on the sofa in his private apartment—the only comfortable room in the house. He appeared to have dressed at his leisure in the intervals of a light collation, and his dressing-case, brushes, and so forth, all of quite an elegant kind, lay about.

"Father, Miss Summerson; Miss Jellyby."

"Charmed! Enchanted!" said Mr. Turveydrop, rising with his high-shouldered bow. "Permit me!" Handing chairs. "Be seated!" Kissing the tips of his left fingers. "Overjoyed!" Shutting his eyes and rolling. "My little retreat is made a paradise." Recomposing himself on the sofa like the second gentleman in Europe.

"Again you find us, Miss Summerson," said he, "using our little arts to polish, polish! Again the sex stimulates us and rewards us by the condescension of its lovely presence. It is much in these times (and we have made an awfully degenerating business of it since the days of his Royal Highness the Prince Regent—my patron, if I may presume to say so) to experience that deportment is not wholly trodden under foot by mechanics. That it can yet bask in the smile of beauty, my dear madam."

I said nothing, which I thought a suitable reply; and he took a pinch of snuff.

"My dear son," said Mr. Turveydrop, "you have four schools this afternoon. I would recommend a hasty sandwich."

"Thank you, father," returned Prince, "I will be sure to be punctual. My dear father, may I beg you to prepare your mind for what I am going to say?"

"Good heaven!" exclaimed the model, pale and aghast as Prince and Caddy, hand in hand, bent down before him. "What is this? Is this lunacy! Or what is this?"

"Father," returned Prince with great submission, "I love this young lady, and we are engaged."

"Engaged!" cried Mr. Turveydrop, reclining on the sofa and shutting out the sight with his hand. "An arrow launched at my brain by my own child!"

"We have been engaged for some time, father," faltered Prince, "and Miss Summerson, hearing of it, advised that we should declare the fact to you and was so very kind as to attend on the present occasion. Miss Jellyby is a young lady who deeply respects you, father."

Mr. Turveydrop uttered a groan.

"No, pray don't! Pray don't, father," urged his son. "Miss Jellyby is a young lady who deeply respects you, and our first desire is to consider your comfort."

Mr. Turveydrop sobbed.

"No, pray don't, father!" cried his son.

"Boy," said Mr. Turveydrop, "it is well that your sainted mother is spared this pang. Strike deep, and spare not. Strike home, sir, strike home!"

"Pray don't say so, father," implored Prince, in tears. "It goes to my heart. I do assure you, father, that our first wish and intention is to consider your comfort. Caroline and I do not forget our duty—what is my duty is Caroline's, as we have often said together—and with your approval and consent, father, we will devote ourselves to making your life agreeable."

"Strike home," murmured Mr. Turveydrop. "Strike home!" But he seemed to listen, I thought, too.

"My dear father," returned Prince, "we well know what little comforts you are accustomed to and have a right to, and it will always be our study and our pride to provide those before anything. If you will bless us with your approval and consent, father, we shall not think of being married until it is quite agreeable to you; and when we ARE married, we shall always make you—of course—our first consideration. You must ever be the head and master here, father; and we feel how truly unnatural it would be in us if we failed to know it or if we failed to exert ourselves in every possible way to please you."

Mr. Turveydrop underwent a severe internal struggle and came upright on the sofa again with his cheeks puffing over his stiff cravat, a perfect model of parental deportment.

"My son!" said Mr. Turveydrop. "My children! I cannot resist your prayer. Be happy!"

His benignity as he raised his future daughter-in-law and stretched out his hand to his son (who kissed it with affectionate respect and gratitude) was the most confusing sight I ever saw.

"My children," said Mr. Turveydrop, paternally encircling Caddy with his left arm as she sat beside him, and putting his right hand gracefully on his hip. "My son and daughter, your happiness shall be my care. I will watch over you. You shall always live with me"—meaning, of course, I will always live with you—"this house is henceforth as much yours as mine; consider it your home. May you long live to share it with me!"

The power of his deportment was such that they really were as much overcome with thankfulness as if, instead of quartering himself upon them for the rest of his life, he were making some munificent sacrifice in their favour.

"For myself, my children," said Mr. Turveydrop, "I am falling into the sear and yellow leaf, and it is impossible to say how long the last feeble traces of gentlemanly deportment may linger in this weaving and spinning age. But, so long, I will do my duty to society and will show myself, as usual, about town. My wants are few and simple. My little apartment here, my few essentials for the toilet, my frugal morning meal, and my little dinner will suffice. I charge your dutiful affection with the supply of these requirements, and I charge myself with all the rest."

They were overpowered afresh by his uncommon generosity.

"My son," said Mr. Turveydrop, "for those little points in which you are deficient—points of deportment, which are born with a man, which may be improved by cultivation, but can never be originated—you may still rely on me. I have been faithful to my post since the days of his Royal Highness the Prince Regent, and I will not desert it now. No, my son. If you have ever contemplated your father's poor position with a feeling of pride, you may rest assured that he will do nothing to tarnish it. For yourself, Prince, whose character is different (we cannot be all alike, nor is it advisable that we should), work, be industrious, earn money, and extend the connexion as much as possible."

"That you may depend I will do, dear father, with all my heart," replied Prince.

"I have no doubt of it," said Mr. Turveydrop. "Your qualities are not shining, my dear child, but they are steady and useful. And to both of you, my children, I would merely observe, in the spirit of a sainted wooman on whose path I had the happiness of casting, I believe, SOME ray of light, take care of the establishment, take care of my simple wants, and bless you both!"

Old Mr. Turveydrop then became so very gallant, in honour of the occasion, that I told Caddy we must really go to Thavies Inn at once if we were to go at all that day. So we took our departure after a very loving farewell between Caddy and her betrothed, and during our walk she was so happy and so full of old Mr. Turveydrop's praises that I would not have said a word in his disparagement for any consideration.

The house in Thavies Inn had bills in the windows annoucing that it was to let, and it looked dirtier and gloomier and ghastlier than ever. The name of poor Mr. Jellyby had appeared in the list of bankrupts but a day or two before, and he was shut up in the dining-room with two gentlemen and a heap of blue bags, account-books, and papers, making the most desperate endeavours to understand his affairs. They appeared to me to be quite beyond his comprehension, for when Caddy took me into the dining-room by mistake and we came upon Mr. Jellyby in his spectacles, forlornly fenced into a corner by the great dining-table and the two gentlemen, he seemed to have given up the whole thing and to be speechless and insensible.

Going upstairs to Mrs. Jellyby's room (the children were all screaming in the kitchen, and there was no servant to be seen), we found that lady in the midst of a voluminous correspondence, opening, reading, and sorting letters, with a great accumulation of torn covers on the floor. She was so preoccupied that at first she did not know me, though she sat looking at me with that curious, bright-eyed, far-off look of hers.

"Ah! Miss Summerson!" she said at last. "I was thinking of something so different! I hope you are well. I am happy to see you. Mr. Jarndyce and

Miss Clare quite well?"

I hoped in return that Mr. Jellyby was quite well.

"Why, not quite, my dear," said Mrs. Jellyby in the calmest manner. "He has been unfortunate in his affairs and is a little out of spirits. Happily for me, I am so much engaged that I have no time to think about it. We have, at the present moment, one hundred and seventy families, Miss Summerson, averaging five persons in each, either gone or going to the left bank of the Niger."

I thought of the one family so near us who were neither gone nor going to the left bank of the Niger, and wondered how she could be so placid.

"You have brought Caddy back, I see," observed Mrs. Jellyby with a glance at her daughter. "It has become quite a novelty to see her here. She has almost deserted her old employment and in fact obliges me to employ a boy."

"I am sure, Ma—" began Caddy.

"Now you know, Caddy," her mother mildly interposed, "that I DO employ a boy, who is now at his dinner. What is the use of your contradicting?"

"I was not going to contradict, Ma," returned Caddy. "I was only going to say that surely you wouldn't have me be a mere drudge all my life."

"I believe, my dear," said Mrs. Jellyby, still opening her letters, casting her bright eyes smilingly over them, and sorting them as she spoke, "that you have a business example before you in your mother. Besides. A mere drudge? If you had any sympathy with the destinies of the human race, it would raise you high above any such idea. But you have none. I have often told you, Caddy, you have no such sympathy."

"Not if it's Africa, Ma, I have not."

"Of course you have not. Now, if I were not happily so much engaged, Miss Summerson," said Mrs. Jellyby, sweetly casting her eyes for a moment on me and considering where to put the particular letter she had just opened, "this would distress and disappoint me. But I have so much to think of, in connexion with Borrioboola-Gha and it is so necessary I should concentrate myself that there is my remedy, you see."

As Caddy gave me a glance of entreaty, and as Mrs. Jellyby was looking far away into Africa straight through my bonnet and head, I thought it a good opportunity to come to the subject of my visit and to attract Mrs. Jellyby's attention.

"Perhaps," I began, "you will wonder what has brought me here to interrupt you."

"I am always delighted to see Miss Summerson," said Mrs. Jellyby, pursuing her employment with a placid smile. "Though I wish," and she shook her head, "she was more interested in the Borrioboolan project."

"I have come with Caddy," said I, "because Caddy justly thinks she ought not to have a secret from her mother and fancies I shall encourage and aid her (though I am sure I don't know how) in imparting one."

"Caddy," said Mrs. Jellyby, pausing for a moment in her occupation and then serenely pursuing it after shaking her head, "you are going to tell me some nonsense."

Caddy untied the strings of her bonnet, took her bonnet off, and letting it dangle on the floor by the strings, and crying heartily, said, "Ma, I am engaged."

"Oh, you ridiculous child!" observed Mrs. Jellyby with an abstracted air as she looked over the dispatch last opened; "what a goose you are!"

"I am engaged, Ma," sobbed Caddy, "to young Mr. Turveydrop, at the academy; and old Mr. Turveydrop (who is a very gentlemanly man indeed) has given his consent, and I beg and pray you'll give us yours, Ma, because I never could be happy without it. I never, never could!" sobbed Caddy, quite forgetful of her general complainings and of everything but her natural affection. "

You see again, Miss Summerson," observed Mrs. Jellyby serenely, "what a happiness it is to be so much occupied as I am and to have this necessity for self-concentration that I have. Here is Caddy engaged to a dancing-master's son—mixed up with people who have no more sympathy with the destinies of the human race than she has herself! This, too, when Mr. Quale, one of the first philanthropists of our time, has mentioned to me that he was really disposed to be interested in her!"

"Ma, I always hated and detested Mr. Quale!" sobbed Caddy.

"Caddy, Caddy!" returned Mrs. Jellyby, opening another letter with the greatest complacency. "I have no doubt you did. How could you do otherwise, being totally destitute of the sympathies with which he overflows! Now, if my public duties were not a favourite child to me, if I were not occupied with large measures on a vast scale, these petty details might grieve me very much, Miss Summerson. But can I permit the film of a silly proceeding on the part of Caddy (from whom I expect nothing else) to interpose between me and the great African continent? No. No," repeated Mrs. Jellyby in a calm clear voice, and with an agreeable smile, as she opened more letters and sorted them. "No, indeed."

I was so unprepared for the perfect coolness of this reception, though I might have expected it, that I did not know what to say. Caddy seemed equally at a loss. Mrs. Jellyby continued to open and sort letters and to repeat occasionally in quite a charming tone of voice and with a smile of perfect composure, "No, indeed."

"I hope, Ma," sobbed poor Caddy at last, "you are not angry?"

"Oh, Caddy, you really are an absurd girl," returned Mrs. Jellyby, "to ask such questions after what I have said of the preoccupation of my mind."

"And I hope, Ma, you give us your consent and wish us well?" said Caddy.

"You are a nonsensical child to have done anything of this kind," said Mrs. Jellyby; "and a degenerate child, when you might have devoted yourself to the great public measure. But the step is taken, and I have engaged a boy, and there is no more to be said. Now, pray, Caddy," said Mrs. Jellyby, for Caddy was kissing her, "don't delay me in my work, but let me clear off this heavy batch of papers before the afternoon post comes in!"

I thought I could not do better than take my leave; I was detained for a moment by Caddy's saying, "You won't object to my bringing him to see you, Ma?"

"Oh, dear me, Caddy," cried Mrs. Jellyby, who had relapsed into that distant contemplation, "have you begun again? Bring whom?"

"Him, Ma."

"Caddy, Caddy!" said Mrs. Jellyby, quite weary of such little matters. "Then you must bring him some evening which is not a Parent Society night, or a Branch night, or a Ramification night. You must accommodate the visit to the demands upon my time. My dear Miss Summerson, it was very kind of you to come here to help out this silly chit. Good-bye! When I tell you that I have fifty-eight new letters from manufacturing families anxious to understand the details of the native and coffee-cultivation question this morning, I need not apologize for having very little leisure."

I was not surprised by Caddy's being in low spirits when we went downstairs, or by her sobbing afresh on my neck, or by her saying she would far rather have been scolded than treated with such indifference, or by her confiding to me that she was so poor in clothes that how she was ever to be married creditably she didn't know. I gradually cheered her up by dwelling on the many things she would do for her unfortunate father and for Peepy when she had a home of her own; and finally we went downstairs into the damp dark kitchen, where Peepy and his little brothers and sisters were grovelling on the stone floor and where we had such a game of play with them that to prevent myself from being quite torn to pieces I was obliged to fall back on my fairy-tales. From time to time I heard loud voices in the parlour overhead, and occasionally a violent tumbling about of the furniture. The last effect I am afraid was caused by poor Mr. Jellyby's breaking away from the dining-table and making rushes at the window with the intention of throwing himself into the area whenever he made any new attempt to understand his affairs.

As I rode quietly home at night after the day's bustle, I thought a good deal of Caddy's engagement and felt confirmed in my hopes (in spite of the elder Mr. Turveydrop) that she would be the happier and better for it. And if there seemed to be but a slender chance of her and her husband ever finding out what the model of deportment really was, why that was all for the best too, and who would wish them to be wiser? I did not wish them to be any wiser and indeed was half ashamed of not entirely believing in him myself. And I looked up at the stars, and thought about travellers in distant countries and the stars THEY saw, and hoped I might always be so blest and happy as to be useful to some one in my small way.

They were so glad to see me when I got home, as they always were, that I could have sat down and cried for joy if that had not been a method of making myself disagreeable. Everybody in the house, from the lowest to the highest, showed me such a bright face of welcome, and spoke so cheerily, and was so happy to do anything for me, that I suppose there never was such a fortunate little creature in the world.

We got into such a chatty state that night, through Ada and my guardian drawing me out to tell them all about Caddy, that I went on prose, prose, prosing for a length of time. At last I got up to my own room, quite red to think how I had been holding forth, and then I heard a soft tap at my door. So I said, "Come in!" and there came in a pretty little girl, neatly dressed in mourning, who dropped a curtsy.

"If you please, miss," said the little girl in a soft voice, "I am Charley."

"Why, so you are," said I, stooping down in astonishment and giving her a kiss. "How glad am I to see you, Charley!"

"If you please, miss," pursued Charley in the same soft voice, "I'm your maid."

"Charley?"

"If you please, miss, I'm a present to you, with Mr. Jarndyce's love."

I sat down with my hand on Charley's neck and looked at Charley.

"And oh, miss," says Charley, clapping her hands, with the tears starting down her dimpled cheeks, "Tom's at school, if you please, and learning so good! And little Emma, she's with Mrs. Blinder, miss, a-being took such care of! And Tom, he would have been at school—and Emma, she would have been left with Mrs. Blinder—and me, I should have been here—all a deal sooner, miss; only Mr. Jarndyce thought that Tom and Emma and me had better get a little used to parting first, we was so small. Don't cry, if you please, miss!"

"I can't help it, Charley."

"No, miss, nor I can't help it," says Charley. "And if you please, miss, Mr. Jarndyce's love, and he thinks you'll like to teach me now and then. And if you please, Tom and Emma and me is to see each other once a month. And I'm so happy and so thankful, miss," cried Charley with a heaving heart, "and I'll try to be such a good maid!"

"Oh, Charley dear, never forget who did all this!"

"No, miss, I never will. Nor Tom won't. Nor yet Emma. It was all you, miss."

"I have known nothing of it. It was Mr. Jarndyce, Charley."

"Yes, miss, but it was all done for the love of you and that you might be my mistress. If you please, miss, I am a little present with his love, and it was all done for the love of you. Me and Tom was to be sure to remember it."

Charley dried her eyes and entered on her functions, going in her matronly little way about and about the room and folding up everything she could lay her hands upon. Presently Charley came creeping back to my side and said, "Oh, don't cry, if you please, miss."

And I said again, "I can't help it, Charley."

And Charley said again, "No, miss, nor I can't help it." And so, after all, I did cry for joy indeed, and so did she.

CHAPTER XXIV. An Appeal Case

As soon as Richard and I had held the conversation of which I have given an account, Richard communicated the state of his mind to Mr. Jarndyce. I doubt if my guardian were altogether taken by surprise when he received the representation, though it caused him much uneasiness and disappointment. He and Richard were often closeted together, late at night and early in the morning, and passed whole days in London, and had innumerable appointments with Mr. Kenge, and laboured through a quantity of disagreeable business. While they were thus employed, my guardian, though he underwent considerable inconvenience from the state of the wind and rubbed his head so constantly that not a single hair upon it ever rested in its right place, was as genial with Ada and me as at any other time, but maintained a steady reserve on these matters. And as our utmost endeavours could only elicit from Richard himself sweeping assurances that everything was going on capitally and that it really was all right at last, our anxiety was not much relieved by him.

We learnt, however, as the time went on, that a new application was made to the Lord Chancellor on Richard's behalf as an infant and a ward, and I don't know what, and that there was a quantity of talking, and that the Lord Chancellor described him in open court as a vexatious and capricious infant, and that the matter was adjourned and readjourned, and referred, and reported on, and petitioned about until Richard began to doubt (as he told us) whether, if he entered the army at all, it would not be as a veteran of seventy or eighty years of age. At last an appointment was made for him to see the Lord Chancellor again in his private room, and there the Lord Chancellor very seriously reproved him for trifling with time and not knowing his mind—"a pretty good joke, I think," said Richard, "from that quarter!"—and at last it was settled that his application should be granted. His name was entered at the Horse Guards as an applicant for an ensign's commission; the purchase-money was deposited at an agent's; and Richard, in his usual characteristic way, plunged into a violent course of military study and got up at five o'clock every morning to practise the broadsword exercise.

Thus, vacation succeeded term, and term succeeded vacation. We sometimes heard of Jarndyce and Jarndyce as being in the paper or out of the paper, or as being to be mentioned, or as being to be spoken to; and it came on, and it went off. Richard, who was now in a professor's house in London, was able to be with us less frequently than before; my guardian still maintained the same reserve; and so time passed until the commission was obtained and Richard received directions with it to join a regiment in Ireland.

He arrived post-haste with the intelligence one evening, and had a long conference with my guardian. Upwards of an hour elapsed before my guardian put his head into the room where Ada and I were sitting and said, "Come in, my dears!" We went in and found Richard, whom we had last seen in high spirits, leaning on the chimney-piece looking mortified and angry.

"Rick and I, Ada," said Mr. Jarndyce, "are not quite of one mind. Come, come, Rick, put a brighter face upon it!"

"You are very hard with me, sir," said Richard. "The harder because you have been so considerate to me in all other respects and have done me kindnesses that I can never acknowledge. I never could have been set right without you, sir."

"Well, well!" said Mr. Jarndyce. "I want to set you more right yet. I want to set you more right with yourself."

"I hope you will excuse my saying, sir," returned Richard in a fiery way, but yet respectfully, "that I think I am the best judge about myself."

"I hope you will excuse my saying, my dear Rick," observed Mr. Jarndyce with the sweetest cheerfulness and good humour, "that it's quite natural in you to think so, but I don't think so. I must do my duty, Rick, or you could never care for me in cool blood; and I hope you will always care for me, cool and hot."

Ada had turned so pale that he made her sit down in his reading-chair and sat beside her.

"It's nothing, my dear," he said, "it's nothing. Rick and I have only had a friendly difference, which we must state to you, for you are the theme. Now you are afraid of what's coming."

"I am not indeed, cousin John," replied Ada with a smile, "if it is to come from you."

"Thank you, my dear. Do you give me a minute's calm attention, without looking at Rick. And, little woman, do you likewise. My dear girl," putting his hand on hers as it lay on the side of the easy-chair, "you recollect the talk we had, we four when the little woman told me of a little love affair?"

"It is not likely that either Richard or I can ever forget your kindness that day, cousin John."

"I can never forget it," said Richard.

"And I can never forget it," said Ada.

"So much the easier what I have to say, and so much the easier for us to agree," returned my guardian, his face irradiated by the gentleness and honour of his heart. "Ada, my bird, you should know that Rick has now chosen his profession for the last time. All that he has of certainty will be expended when he is fully equipped. He has exhausted his resources and is bound henceforward to the tree he has planted."

"Quite true that I have exhausted my present resources, and I am quite content to know it. But what I have of certainty, sir," said Richard, "is not all I have."

"Rick, Rick!" cried my guardian with a sudden terror in his manner, and in an altered voice, and putting up his hands as if he would have stopped his ears. "For the love of God, don't found a hope or expectation on the family curse! Whatever you do on this side the grave, never give one lingering glance towards the horrible phantom that has haunted us so many years. Better to borrow, better to beg, better to die!"

We were all startled by the fervour of this warning. Richard bit his lip and held his breath, and glanced at me as if he felt, and knew that I felt too, how much he needed it.

"Ada, my dear," said Mr. Jarndyce, recovering his cheerfulness, "these are strong words of advice, but I live in Bleak House and have seen a sight here. Enough of that. All Richard had to start him in the race of life is ventured. I recommend to him and you, for his sake and your own, that he should depart from us with the understanding that there is no sort of contract between you. I must go further. I will be plain with you both. You were to confide freely in me, and I will confide freely in you. I ask you wholly to relinquish, for the present, any tie but your relationship."

"Better to say at once, sir," returned Richard, "that you renounce all confidence in me and that you advise Ada to do the same."

"Better to say nothing of the sort, Rick, because I don't mean it."

"You think I have begun ill, sir," retorted Richard. "I HAVE, I know."

"How I hoped you would begin, and how go on, I told you when we spoke of these things last," said Mr. Jarndyce in a cordial and encouraging manner. "You have not made that beginning yet, but there is a time for all things, and yours is not gone by; rather, it is just now fully come. Make a clear beginning altogether. You two (very young, my dears) are cousins. As yet, you are nothing more. What more may come must come of being worked out, Rick, and no sooner."

"You are very hard with me, sir," said Richard. "Harder than I could have supposed you would be."

"My dear boy," said Mr. Jarndyce, "I am harder with myself when I do anything that gives you pain. You have your remedy in your own hands. Ada, it is better for him that he should be free and that there should be no youthful engagement between you. Rick, it is better for her, much better; you owe it to her. Come! Each of you will do what is best for the other, if not what is best for yourselves."

"Why is it best, sir?" returned Richard hastily. "It was not when we opened our hearts to you. You did not say so then."

"I have had experience since. I don't blame you, Rick, but I have had experience since."

"You mean of me, sir."

"Well! Yes, of both of you," said Mr. Jarndyce kindly. "The time is not come for your standing pledged to one another. It is not right, and I must not recognize it. Come, come, my young cousins, begin afresh! Bygones shall be bygones, and a new page turned for you to write your lives in."

Richard gave an anxious glance at Ada but said nothing.

"I have avoided saying one word to either of you or to Esther," said Mr. Jarndyce, "until now, in order that we might be open as the day, and all on equal terms. I now affectionately advise, I now most earnestly entreat, you two to part as you came here. Leave all else to time, truth, and steadfastness. If you do otherwise, you will do wrong, and you will have made me do wrong in ever bringing you together."

A long silence succeeded.

"Cousin Richard," said Ada then, raising her blue eyes tenderly to his face, "after what our cousin John has said, I think no choice is left us. Your mind may he quite at ease about me, for you will leave me here under his care and will be sure that I can have nothing to wish for—quite sure if I guide myself by his advice. I—I don't doubt, cousin Richard," said Ada, a little confused, "that you are very fond of me, and I—I don't think you will fall in love with anybody else. But I should like you to consider well about it too, as I should like you to be in all things very happy. You may trust in me, cousin Richard. I am not at all changeable; but I am not unreasonable, and should never blame you. Even cousins may be sorry to part; and in truth I am very, very sorry, Richard, though I know it's for your welfare. I shall always think of you affectionately, and often talk of you with Esther, and—and perhaps you will sometimes think a little of me, cousin Richard. So now," said Ada, going up to him and giving him her trembling hand, "we are only cousins again, Richard—for the time perhaps—and I pray for a blessing on my dear cousin, wherever he goes!"

It was strange to me that Richard should not be able to forgive my guardian for entertaining the very same opinion of him which he himself had expressed of himself in much stronger terms to me. But it was certainly the case. I observed with great regret that from this hour he never was as free and open with Mr. Jarndyce as he had been before. He had every reason given him to be so, but he was not; and solely on his side, an estrangement began to arise between them.

In the business of preparation and equipment he soon lost himself, and even his grief at parting from Ada, who remained in Hertfordshire while he, Mr. Jarndyce, and I went up to London for a week. He remembered her by fits and starts, even with bursts of tears, and at such times would confide to me the heaviest self-reproaches. But in a few minutes he would recklessly conjure up some undefinable means by which they were both to be made rich and happy for ever, and would become as gay as possible.

It was a busy time, and I trotted about with him all day long, buying a variety of things of which he stood in need. Of the things he would have bought if he had been left to his own ways I say nothing. He was perfectly confidential with me, and often talked so sensibly and feelingly about his faults and his vigorous resolutions, and dwelt so much upon the encouragement he derived from these conversations that I could never have been tired if I had tried.

There used, in that week, to come backward and forward to our lodging to fence with Richard a person who had formerly been a cavalry soldier; he was a fine bluff-looking man, of a frank free bearing, with whom Richard had practised for some months. I heard so much about him, not only from Richard, but from my guardian too, that I was purposely in the room with my work one morning after breakfast when he came.

"Good morning, Mr. George," said my guardian, who happened to be alone with me. "Mr. Carstone will be here directly. Meanwhile, Miss Summerson is very happy to see you, I know. Sit down."

He sat down, a little disconcerted by my presence, I thought, and without looking at me, drew his heavy sunburnt hand across and across his upper lip.

"You are as punctual as the sun," said Mr. Jarndyce.

"Military time, sir," he replied. "Force of habit. A mere habit in me, sir. I am not at all business-like."

"Yet you have a large establishment, too, I am told?" said Mr. Jarndyce.

"Not much of a one, sir. I keep a shooting gallery, but not much of a one."

"And what kind of a shot and what kind of a swordsman do you make of Mr. Carstone?" said my guardian.

"Pretty good, sir," he replied, folding his arms upon his broad chest and looking very large. "If Mr. Carstone was to give his full mind to it, he would come out very good."

"But he don't, I suppose?" said my guardian.

"He did at first, sir, but not afterwards. Not his full mind. Perhaps he has something else upon it—some young lady, perhaps." His bright dark eyes glanced at me for the first time.

"He has not me upon his mind, I assure you, Mr. George," said I, laughing, "though you seem to suspect me."

He reddened a little through his brown and made me a trooper's bow. "No offence, I hope, miss. I am one of the roughs."

"Not at all," said I. "I take it as a compliment."

If he had not looked at me before, he looked at me now in three or four quick successive glances. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said to my guardian with a manly kind of diffidence, "but you did me the honour to mention the young lady's name—"

"Miss Summerson."

"Miss Summerson," he repeated, and looked at me again.

"Do you know the name?" I asked.

"No, miss. To my knowledge I never heard it. I thought I had seen you somewhere."

"I think not," I returned, raising my head from my work to look at him; and there was something so genuine in his speech and manner that I was glad of the opportunity. "I remember faces very well."

"So do I, miss!" he returned, meeting my look with the fullness of his dark eyes and broad forehead. "Humph! What set me off, now, upon that!"

His once more reddening through his brown and being disconcerted by his efforts to remember the association brought my guardian to his relief.

"Have you many pupils, Mr. George?"

"They vary in their number, sir. Mostly they're but a small lot to live by."

"And what classes of chance people come to practise at your gallery?"

"All sorts, sir. Natives and foreigners. From gentlemen to 'prentices. I have had Frenchwomen come, before now, and show themselves dabs at pistol-shooting. Mad people out of number, of course, but THEY go everywhere where the doors stand open."

"People don't come with grudges and schemes of finishing their practice with live targets, I hope?" said my guardian, smiling.

"Not much of that, sir, though that HAS happened. Mostly they come for skill—or idleness. Six of one, and half-a-dozen of the other. I beg your pardon," said Mr. George, sitting stiffly upright and squaring an elbow on each knee, "but I believe you're a Chancery suitor, if I have heard correct?"

"I am sorry to say I am."

"I have had one of YOUR compatriots in my time, sir."

"A Chancery suitor?" returned my guardian. "How was that?"

"Why, the man was so badgered and worried and tortured by being knocked about from post to pillar, and from pillar to post," said Mr. George, "that he got out of sorts. I don't believe he had any idea of taking aim at anybody, but he was in that condition of resentment and violence that he would come and pay for fifty shots and fire away till he was red hot. One day I said to him when there was nobody by and he had been talking to me angrily about his wrongs, 'If this practice is a safety-valve, comrade, well and good; but I don't altogether like your being so bent upon it in your present state of mind; I'd rather you took to something else.' I was on my guard for a blow, he was that passionate; but he received it in very good part and left off directly. We shook hands and struck up a sort of friendship."

"What was that man?" asked my guardian in a new tone of interest.

"Why, he began by being a small Shropshire farmer before they made a baited bull of him," said Mr. George.

"Was his name Gridley?"

"It was, sir."

Mr. George directed another succession of quick bright glances at me as my guardian and I exchanged a word or two of surprise at the coincidence, and I therefore explained to him how we knew the name. He made me another of his soldierly bows in acknowledgment of what he called my condescension.

"I don't know," he said as he looked at me, "what it is that sets me off again—but—bosh! What's my head running against!" He passed one of his heavy hands over his crisp dark hair as if to sweep the broken thoughts out of his mind and sat a little forward, with one arm akimbo and the other resting on his leg, looking in a brown study at the ground.

"I am sorry to learn that the same state of mind has got this Gridley into new troubles and that he is in hiding," said my guardian.

"So I am told, sir," returned Mr. George, still musing and looking on the ground. "So I am told."

"You don't know where?"

"No, sir," returned the trooper, lifting up his eyes and coming out of his reverie. "I can't say anything about him. He will be worn out soon, I expect. You may file a strong man's heart away for a good many years, but it will tell all of a sudden at last."

Richard's entrance stopped the conversation. Mr. George rose, made me another of his soldierly bows, wished my guardian a good day, and strode heavily out of the room.

This was the morning of the day appointed for Richard's departure. We had no more purchases to make now; I had completed all his packing early in the afternoon; and our time was disengaged until night, when he was to go to Liverpool for Holyhead. Jarndyce and Jarndyce being again expected to come on that day, Richard proposed to me that we should go down to the court and hear what passed. As it was his last day, and he was eager to go, and I had never been there, I gave my consent and we walked down to Westminster, where the court was then sitting. We beguiled the way with arrangements concerning the letters that Richard was to write to me and the letters that I was to write to him and with a great many hopeful projects. My guardian knew where we were going and therefore was not with us.

When we came to the court, there was the Lord Chancellor—the same whom I had seen in his private room in Lincoln's Inn—sitting in great state and gravity on the bench, with the mace and seals on a red table below him and an immense flat nosegay, like a little garden, which scented the whole court. Below the table, again, was a long row of solicitors, with bundles of papers on the matting at their feet; and then there were the gentlemen of the bar in wigs and gowns—some awake and some asleep, and one talking, and nobody paying much attention to what he said. The Lord Chancellor leaned back in his very easy chair with his elbow on the cushioned arm and his forehead resting on his hand; some of those who were present dozed; some read the newspapers; some walked about or whispered in groups: all seemed perfectly at their ease, by no means in a hurry, very unconcerned, and extremely comfortable.

To see everything going on so smoothly and to think of the roughness of the suitors' lives and deaths; to see all that full dress and ceremony and to think of the waste, and want, and beggared misery it represented; to consider that while the sickness of hope deferred was raging in so many hearts this polite show went calmly on from day to day, and year to year, in such good order and composure; to behold the Lord Chancellor and the whole array of practitioners under him looking at one another and at the spectators as if nobody had ever heard that all over England the name in which they were assembled was a bitter jest, was held in universal horror, contempt, and indignation, was known for something so flagrant and bad that little short of a miracle could bring any good out of it to any one—this was so curious and self-contradictory to me, who had no experience of it, that it was at first incredible, and I could not comprehend it. I sat where Richard put me, and tried to listen, and looked about me; but there seemed to be no reality in the whole scene except poor little Miss Flite, the madwoman, standing on a bench and nodding at it.

Miss Flite soon espied us and came to where we sat. She gave me a gracious welcome to her domain and indicated, with much gratification and pride, its principal attractions. Mr. Kenge also came to speak to us and did the honours of the place in much the same way, with the bland modesty of a proprietor. It was not a very good day for a visit, he said; he would have preferred the first day of term; but it was imposing, it was imposing.

When we had been there half an hour or so, the case in progress—if I may use a phrase so ridiculous in such a connexion—seemed to die out of its own vapidity, without coming, or being by anybody expected to come, to any result. The Lord Chancellor then threw down a bundle of papers from his desk to the gentlemen below him, and somebody said, "Jarndyce and Jarndyce." Upon this there was a buzz, and a laugh, and a general withdrawal of the bystanders, and a bringing in of great heaps, and piles, and bags and bags full of papers.

I think it came on "for further directions"—about some bill of costs, to the best of my understanding, which was confused enough. But I counted twenty-three gentlemen in wigs who said they were "in it," and none of them appeared to understand it much better than I. They chatted about it with the Lord Chancellor, and contradicted and explained among themselves, and some of them said it was this way, and some of them said it was that way, and some of them jocosely proposed to read huge volumes of affidavits, and there was more buzzing and laughing, and everybody concerned was in a state of idle entertainment, and nothing could be made of it by anybody. After an hour or so of this, and a good many speeches being begun and cut short, it was "referred back for the present," as Mr. Kenge said, and the papers were bundled up again before the clerks had finished bringing them in.

I glanced at Richard on the termination of these hopeless proceedings and was shocked to see the worn look of his handsome young face. "It can't last for ever, Dame Durden. Better luck next time!" was all he said.

I had seen Mr. Guppy bringing in papers and arranging them for Mr. Kenge; and he had seen me and made me a forlorn bow, which rendered me desirous to get out of the court. Richard had given me his arm and was taking me away when Mr. Guppy came up.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Carstone," said he in a whisper, "and Miss Summerson's also, but there's a lady here, a friend of mine, who knows her and wishes to have the pleasure of shaking hands." As he spoke, I saw before me, as if she had started into bodily shape from my remembrance, Mrs. Rachael of my godmother's house.

"How do you do, Esther?" said she. "Do you recollect me?"

I gave her my hand and told her yes and that she was very little altered.

"I wonder you remember those times, Esther," she returned with her old asperity. "They are changed now. Well! I am glad to see you, and glad you are not too proud to know me." But indeed she seemed disappointed that I was not.

"Proud, Mrs. Rachael!" I remonstrated.

"I am married, Esther," she returned, coldly correcting me, "and am Mrs. Chadband. Well! I wish you good day, and I hope you'll do well."

Mr. Guppy, who had been attentive to this short dialogue, heaved a sigh in my ear and elbowed his own and Mrs. Rachael's way through the confused little crowd of people coming in and going out, which we were in the midst of and which the change in the business had brought together. Richard and I were making our way through it, and I was yet in the first chill of the late unexpected recognition when I saw, coming towards us, but not seeing us, no less a person than Mr. George. He made nothing of the people about him as he tramped on, staring over their heads into the body of the court.

"George!" said Richard as I called his attention to him.

"You are well met, sir," he returned. "And you, miss. Could you point a person out for me, I want? I don't understand these places."

Turning as he spoke and making an easy way for us, he stopped when we were out of the press in a corner behind a great red curtain.

"There's a little cracked old woman," he began, "that—"

I put up my finger, for Miss Flite was close by me, having kept beside me all the time and having called the attention of several of her legal acquaintance to me (as I had overheard to my confusion) by whispering in their ears, "Hush! Fitz Jarndyce on my left!"

"Hem!" said Mr. George. "You remember, miss, that we passed some conversation on a certain man this morning? Gridley," in a low whisper behind his hand.

"Yes," said I.

"He is hiding at my place. I couldn't mention it. Hadn't his authority. He is on his last march, miss, and has a whim to see her. He says they can feel for one another, and she has been almost as good as a friend to him here. I came down to look for her, for when I sat by Gridley this afternoon, I seemed to hear the roll of the muffled drums."

"Shall I tell her?" said I.

"Would you be so good?" he returned with a glance of something like apprehension at Miss Flite. "It's a providence I met you, miss; I doubt if I should have known how to get on with that lady." And he put one hand in his breast and stood upright in a martial attitude as I informed little Miss Flite, in her ear, of the purport of his kind errand.

"My angry friend from Shropshire! Almost as celebrated as myself!" she exclaimed. "Now really! My dear, I will wait upon him with the greatest pleasure."

"He is living concealed at Mr. George's," said I. "Hush! This is Mr. George."

"In—deed!" returned Miss Flite. "Very proud to have the honour! A military man, my dear. You know, a perfect general!" she whispered to me.

Poor Miss Flite deemed it necessary to be so courtly and polite, as a mark of her respect for the army, and to curtsy so very often that it was no easy matter to get her out of the court. When this was at last done, and addressing Mr. George as "General," she gave him her arm, to the great entertainment of some idlers who were looking on, he was so discomposed and begged me so respectfully "not to desert him" that I could not make up my mind to do it, especially as Miss Flite was always tractable with me and as she too said, "Fitz Jarndyce, my dear, you will accompany us, of course." As Richard seemed quite willing, and even anxious, that we should see them safely to their destination, we agreed to do so. And as Mr. George informed us that Gridley's mind had run on Mr. Jarndyce all the afternoon after hearing of their interview in the morning, I wrote a hasty note in pencil to my guardian to say where we were gone and why. Mr. George sealed it at a coffee-house, that it might lead to no discovery, and we sent it off by a ticket-porter.

We then took a hackney-coach and drove away to the neighbourhood of Leicester Square. We walked through some narrow courts, for which Mr. George apologized, and soon came to the shooting gallery, the door of which was closed. As he pulled a bell-handle which hung by a chain to the door-post, a very respectable old gentleman with grey hair, wearing spectacles, and dressed in a black spencer and gaiters and a broad-brimmed hat, and carrying a large gold-beaded cane, addressed him.

"I ask your pardon, my good friend," said he, "but is this George's Shooting Gallery?"

"It is, sir," returned Mr. George, glancing up at the great letters in which that inscription was painted on the whitewashed wall.

"Oh! To be sure!" said the old gentleman, following his eyes. "Thank you. Have you rung the bell?"

"My name is George, sir, and I have rung the bell."

"Oh, indeed?" said the old gentleman. "Your name is George? Then I am here as soon as you, you see. You came for me, no doubt?"

"No, sir. You have the advantage of me."

"Oh, indeed?" said the old gentleman. "Then it was your young man who came for me. I am a physician and was requested—five minutes ago—to come and visit a sick man at George's Shooting Gallery."

"The muffled drums," said Mr. George, turning to Richard and me and gravely shaking his head. "It's quite correct, sir. Will you please to walk in."

The door being at that moment opened by a very singular-looking little man in a green-baize cap and apron, whose face and hands and dress were blackened all over, we passed along a dreary passage into a large building with bare brick walls where there were targets, and guns, and swords, and other things of that kind. When we had all arrived here, the physician stopped, and taking off his hat, appeared to vanish by magic and to leave another and quite a different man in his place.

"Now lookee here, George," said the man, turning quickly round upon him and tapping him on the breast with a large forefinger. "You know me, and I know you. You're a man of the world, and I'm a man of the world. My name's Bucket, as you are aware, and I have got a peace-warrant against Gridley. You have kept him out of the way a long time, and you have been artful in it, and it does you credit."

Mr. George, looking hard at him, bit his lip and shook his head.

"Now, George," said the other, keeping close to him, "you're a sensible man and a well-conducted man; that's what YOU are, beyond a doubt. And mind you, I don't talk to you as a common character, because you have served your country and you know that when duty calls we must obey. Consequently you're very far from wanting to give trouble. If I required assistance, you'd assist me; that's what YOU'D do. Phil Squod, don't you go a-sidling round the gallery like that"—the dirty little man was shuffling about with his shoulder against the wall, and his eyes on the intruder, in a manner that looked threatening—"because I know you and won't have it."

"Phil!" said Mr. George.

"Yes, guv'ner."

"Be quiet."

The little man, with a low growl, stood still.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Mr. Bucket, "you'll excuse anything that may appear to be disagreeable in this, for my name's Inspector Bucket of the Detective, and I have a duty to perform. George, I know where my man is because I was on the roof last night and saw him through the skylight, and you along with him. He is in there, you know," pointing; "that's where HE is—on a sofy. Now I must see my man, and I must tell my man to consider himself in custody; but you know me, and you know I don't want to take any uncomfortable measures. You give me your word, as from one man to another (and an old soldier, mind you, likewise), that it's honourable between us two, and I'll accommodate you to the utmost of my power."

"I give it," was the reply. "But it wasn't handsome in you, Mr. Bucket."

"Gammon, George! Not handsome?" said Mr. Bucket, tapping him on his broad breast again and shaking hands with him. "I don't say it wasn't handsome in you to keep my man so close, do I? Be equally good-tempered to me, old boy! Old William Tell, Old Shaw, the Life Guardsman! Why, he's a model of the whole British army in himself, ladies and gentlemen. I'd give a fifty-pun' note to be such a figure of a man!"

The affair being brought to this head, Mr. George, after a little consideration, proposed to go in first to his comrade (as he called him), taking Miss Flite with him. Mr. Bucket agreeing, they went away to the further end of the gallery, leaving us sitting and standing by a table covered with guns. Mr. Bucket took this opportunity of entering into a little light conversation, asking me if I were afraid of fire-arms, as most young ladies were; asking Richard if he were a good shot; asking Phil Squod which he considered the best of those rifles and what it might be worth first-hand, telling him in return that it was a pity he ever gave way to his temper, for he was naturally so amiable that he might have been a young woman, and making himself generally agreeable.

After a time he followed us to the further end of the gallery, and Richard and I were going quietly away when Mr. George came after us. He said that if we had no objection to see his comrade, he would take a visit from us very kindly. The words had hardly passed his lips when the bell was rung and my guardian appeared, "on the chance," he slightly observed, "of being able to do any little thing for a poor fellow involved in the same misfortune as himself." We all four went back together and went into the place where Gridley was.

It was a bare room, partitioned off from the gallery with unpainted wood. As the screening was not more than eight or ten feet high and only enclosed the sides, not the top, the rafters of the high gallery roof were overhead, and the skylight through which Mr. Bucket had looked down. The sun was low—near setting—and its light came redly in above, without descending to the ground. Upon a plain canvas-covered sofa lay the man from Shropshire, dressed much as we had seen him last, but so changed that at first I recognized no likeness in his colourless face to what I recollected.

He had been still writing in his hiding-place, and still dwelling on his grievances, hour after hour. A table and some shelves were covered with manuscript papers and with worn pens and a medley of such tokens. Touchingly and awfully drawn together, he and the little mad woman were side by side and, as it were, alone. She sat on a chair holding his hand, and none of us went close to them.

His voice had faded, with the old expression of his face, with his strength, with his anger, with his resistance to the wrongs that had at last subdued him. The faintest shadow of an object full of form and colour is such a picture of it as he was of the man from Shropshire whom we had spoken with before.

He inclined his head to Richard and me and spoke to my guardian.

"Mr. Jarndyce, it is very kind of you to come to see me. I am not long to be seen, I think. I am very glad to take your hand, sir. You are a good man, superior to injustice, and God knows I honour you."

They shook hands earnestly, and my guardian said some words of comfort to him.

"It may seem strange to you, sir," returned Gridley; "I should not have liked to see you if this had been the first time of our meeting. But you know I made a fight for it, you know I stood up with my single hand against them all, you know I told them the truth to the last, and told them what they were, and what they had done to me; so I don't mind your seeing me, this wreck."

"You have been courageous with them many and many a time," returned my guardian.

"Sir, I have been," with a faint smile. "I told you what would come of it when I ceased to be so, and see here! Look at us—look at us!" He drew the hand Miss Flite held through her arm and brought her something nearer to him.

"This ends it. Of all my old associations, of all my old pursuits and hopes, of all the living and the dead world, this one poor soul alone comes natural to me, and I am fit for. There is a tie of many suffering years between us two, and it is the only tie I ever had on earth that Chancery has not broken."

"Accept my blessing, Gridley," said Miss Flite in tears. "Accept my blessing!"

"I thought, boastfully, that they never could break my heart, Mr. Jarndyce. I was resolved that they should not. I did believe that I could, and would, charge them with being the mockery they were until I died of some bodily disorder. But I am worn out. How long I have been wearing out, I don't know; I seemed to break down in an hour. I hope they may never come to hear of it. I hope everybody here will lead them to believe that I died defying them, consistently and perseveringly, as I did through so many years."

Here Mr. Bucket, who was sitting in a corner by the door, good-naturedly offered such consolation as he could administer.

"Come, come!" he said from his corner. "Don't go on in that way, Mr. Gridley. You are only a little low. We are all of us a little low sometimes. I am. Hold up, hold up! You'll lose your temper with the whole round of 'em, again and again; and I shall take you on a score of warrants yet, if I have luck."

He only shook his head.

"Don't shake your head," said Mr. Bucket. "Nod it; that's what I want to see you do. Why, Lord bless your soul, what times we have had together! Haven't I seen you in the Fleet over and over again for contempt? Haven't I come into court, twenty afternoons for no other purpose than to see you pin the Chancellor like a bull-dog? Don't you remember when you first began to threaten the lawyers, and the peace was sworn against you two or three times a week? Ask the little old lady there; she has been always present. Hold up, Mr. Gridley, hold up, sir!"

"What are you going to do about him?" asked George in a low voice.

"I don't know yet," said Bucket in the same tone. Then resuming his encouragement, he pursued aloud: "Worn out, Mr. Gridley? After dodging me for all these weeks and forcing me to climb the roof here like a tom cat and to come to see you as a doctor? That ain't like being worn out. I should think not! Now I tell you what you want. You want excitement, you know, to keep YOU up; that's what YOU want. You're used to it, and you can't do without it. I couldn't myself. Very well, then; here's this warrant got by Mr. Tulkinghorn of Lincoln's Inn Fields, and backed into half-a-dozen counties since. What do you say to coming along with me, upon this warrant, and having a good angry argument before the magistrates? It'll do you good; it'll freshen you up and get you into training for another turn at the Chancellor. Give in? Why, I am surprised to hear a man of your energy talk of giving in. You mustn't do that. You're half the fun of the fair in the Court of Chancery. George, you lend Mr. Gridley a hand, and let's see now whether he won't be better up than down."

"He is very weak," said the trooper in a low voice.

"Is he?" returned Bucket anxiously. "I only want to rouse him. I don't like to see an old acquaintance giving in like this. It would cheer him up more than anything if I could make him a little waxy with me. He's welcome to drop into me, right and left, if he likes. I shall never take advantage of it."

The roof rang with a scream from Miss Flite, which still rings in my ears.

"Oh, no, Gridley!" she cried as he fell heavily and calmly back from before her. "Not without my blessing. After so many years!"

The sun was down, the light had gradually stolen from the roof, and the shadow had crept upward. But to me the shadow of that pair, one living and one dead, fell heavier on Richard's departure than the darkness of the darkest night. And through Richard's farewell words I heard it echoed: "Of all my old associations, of all my old pursuits and hopes, of all the living and the dead world, this one poor soul alone comes natural to me, and I am fit for. There is a tie of many suffering years between us two, and it is the only tie I ever had on earth that Chancery has not broken!"

CHAPTER XXV. Mrs. Snagsby Sees It All

There is disquietude in Cook's Court, Cursitor Street. Black suspicion hides in that peaceful region. The mass of Cook's Courtiers are in their usual state of mind, no better and no worse; but Mr. Snagsby is changed, and his little woman knows it.

For Tom-all-Alone's and Lincoln's Inn Fields persist in harnessing themselves, a pair of ungovernable coursers, to the chariot of Mr. Snagsby's imagination; and Mr. Bucket drives; and the passengers are Jo and Mr. Tulkinghorn; and the complete equipage whirls though the law-stationery business at wild speed all round the clock. Even in the little front kitchen where the family meals are taken, it rattles away at a smoking pace from the dinner-table, when Mr. Snagsby pauses in carving the first slice of the leg of mutton baked with potatoes and stares at the kitchen wall.

Mr. Snagsby cannot make out what it is that he has had to do with. Something is wrong somewhere, but what something, what may come of it, to whom, when, and from which unthought of and unheard of quarter is the puzzle of his life. His remote impressions of the robes and coronets, the stars and garters, that sparkle through the surface-dust of Mr. Tulkinghorn's chambers; his veneration for the mysteries presided over by that best and closest of his customers, whom all the Inns of Court, all Chancery Lane, and all the legal neighbourhood agree to hold in awe; his remembrance of Detective Mr. Bucket with his forefinger and his confidential manner, impossible to be evaded or declined, persuade him that he is a party to some dangerous secret without knowing what it is. And it is the fearful peculiarity of this condition that, at any hour of his daily life, at any opening of the shop-door, at any pull of the bell, at any entrance of a messenger, or any delivery of a letter, the secret may take air and fire, explode, and blow up—Mr. Bucket only knows whom.

For which reason, whenever a man unknown comes into the shop (as many men unknown do) and says, "Is Mr. Snagsby in?" or words to that innocent effect, Mr. Snagsby's heart knocks hard at his guilty breast. He undergoes so much from such inquiries that when they are made by boys he revenges himself by flipping at their ears over the counter and asking the young dogs what they mean by it and why they can't speak out at once? More impracticable men and boys persist in walking into Mr. Snagsby's sleep and terrifying him with unaccountable questions, so that often when the cock at the little dairy in Cursitor Street breaks out in his usual absurd way about the morning, Mr. Snagsby finds himself in a crisis of nightmare, with his little woman shaking him and saying "What's the matter with the man!"

The little woman herself is not the least item in his difficulty. To know that he is always keeping a secret from her, that he has under all circumstances to conceal and hold fast a tender double tooth, which her sharpness is ever ready to twist out of his head, gives Mr. Snagsby, in her dentistical presence, much of the air of a dog who has a reservation from his master and will look anywhere rather than meet his eye.

These various signs and tokens, marked by the little woman, are not lost upon her. They impel her to say, "Snagsby has something on his mind!" And thus suspicion gets into Cook's Court, Cursitor Street. From suspicion to jealousy, Mrs. Snagsby finds the road as natural and short as from Cook's Court to Chancery Lane. And thus jealousy gets into Cook's Court, Cursitor Street. Once there (and it was always lurking thereabout), it is very active and nimble in Mrs. Snagsby's breast, prompting her to nocturnal examinations of Mr. Snagsby's pockets; to secret perusals of Mr. Snagsby's letters; to private researches in the day book and ledger, till, cash-box, and iron safe; to watchings at windows, listenings behind doors, and a general putting of this and that together by the wrong end.

Mrs. Snagsby is so perpetually on the alert that the house becomes ghostly with creaking boards and rustling garments. The 'prentices think somebody may have been murdered there in bygone times. Guster holds certain loose atoms of an idea (picked up at Tooting, where they were found floating among the orphans) that there is buried money underneath the cellar, guarded by an old man with a white beard, who cannot get out for seven thousand years because he said the Lord's Prayer backwards.

"Who was Nimrod?" Mrs. Snagsby repeatedly inquires of herself. "Who was that lady—that creature? And who is that boy?" Now, Nimrod being as dead as the mighty hunter whose name Mrs. Snagsby has appropriated, and the lady being unproducible, she directs her mental eye, for the present, with redoubled vigilance to the boy. "And who," quoth Mrs. Snagsby for the thousand and first time, "is that boy? Who is that—!" And there Mrs. Snagsby is seized with an inspiration.

He has no respect for Mr. Chadband. No, to be sure, and he wouldn't have, of course. Naturally he wouldn't, under those contagious circumstances. He was invited and appointed by Mr. Chadband—why, Mrs. Snagsby heard it herself with her own ears!—to come back, and be told where he was to go, to be addressed by Mr. Chadband; and he never came! Why did he never come? Because he was told not to come. Who told him not to come? Who? Ha, ha! Mrs. Snagsby sees it all.

But happily (and Mrs. Snagsby tightly shakes her head and tightly smiles) that boy was met by Mr. Chadband yesterday in the streets; and that boy, as affording a subject which Mr. Chadband desires to improve for the spiritual delight of a select congregation, was seized by Mr. Chadband and threatened with being delivered over to the police unless he showed the reverend gentleman where he lived and unless he entered into, and fulfilled, an undertaking to appear in Cook's Court to-morrow night, "to—mor—row—night," Mrs. Snagsby repeats for mere emphasis with another tight smile and another tight shake of her head; and to-morrow night that boy will be here, and to-morrow night Mrs. Snagsby will have her eye upon him and upon some one else; and oh, you may walk a long while in your secret ways (says Mrs. Snagsby with haughtiness and scorn), but you can't blind ME!

Mrs. Snagsby sounds no timbrel in anybody's ears, but holds her purpose quietly, and keeps her counsel. To-morrow comes, the savoury preparations for the Oil Trade come, the evening comes. Comes Mr. Snagsby in his black coat; come the Chadbands; come (when the gorging vessel is replete) the 'prentices and Guster, to be edified; comes at last, with his slouching head, and his shuffle backward, and his shuffle forward, and his shuffle to the right, and his shuffle to the left, and his bit of fur cap in his muddy hand, which he picks as if it were some mangy bird he had caught and was plucking before eating raw, Jo, the very, very tough subject Mr. Chadband is to improve.

Mrs. Snagsby screws a watchful glance on Jo as he is brought into the little drawing-room by Guster. He looks at Mr. Snagsby the moment he comes in. Aha! Why does he look at Mr. Snagsby? Mr. Snagsby looks at him. Why should he do that, but that Mrs. Snagsby sees it all? Why else should that look pass between them, why else should Mr. Snagsby be confused and cough a signal cough behind his hand? It is as clear as crystal that Mr. Snagsby is that boy's father.

"Peace, my friends," says Chadband, rising and wiping the oily exudations from his reverend visage. "Peace be with us! My friends, why with us? Because," with his fat smile, "it cannot be against us, because it must be for us; because it is not hardening, because it is softening; because it does not make war like the hawk, but comes home unto us like the dove. Therefore, my friends, peace be with us! My human boy, come forward!"

Stretching forth his flabby paw, Mr. Chadband lays the same on Jo's arm and considers where to station him. Jo, very doubtful of his reverend friend's intentions and not at all clear but that something practical and painful is going to be done to him, mutters, "You let me alone. I never said nothink to you. You let me alone."

"No, my young friend," says Chadband smoothly, "I will not let you alone. And why? Because I am a harvest-labourer, because I am a toiler and a moiler, because you are delivered over unto me and are become as a precious instrument in my hands. My friends, may I so employ this instrument as to use it to your advantage, to your profit, to your gain, to your welfare, to your enrichment! My young friend, sit upon this stool."

Jo, apparently possessed by an impression that the reverend gentleman wants to cut his hair, shields his head with both arms and is got into the required position with great difficulty and every possible manifestation of reluctance.

When he is at last adjusted like a lay-figure, Mr. Chadband, retiring behind the table, holds up his bear's-paw and says, "My friends!" This is the signal for a general settlement of the audience. The 'prentices giggle internally and nudge each other. Guster falls into a staring and vacant state, compounded of a stunned admiration of Mr. Chadband and pity for the friendless outcast whose condition touches her nearly. Mrs. Snagsby silently lays trains of gunpowder. Mrs. Chadband composes herself grimly by the fire and warms her knees, finding that sensation favourable to the reception of eloquence.

It happens that Mr. Chadband has a pulpit habit of fixing some member of his congregation with his eye and fatly arguing his points with that particular person, who is understood to be expected to be moved to an occasional grunt, groan, gasp, or other audible expression of inward working, which expression of inward working, being echoed by some elderly lady in the next pew and so communicated like a game of forfeits through a circle of the more fermentable sinners present, serves the purpose of parliamentary cheering and gets Mr. Chadband's steam up. From mere force of habit, Mr. Chadband in saying "My friends!" has rested his eye on Mr. Snagsby and proceeds to make that ill-starred stationer, already sufficiently confused, the immediate recipient of his discourse.

"We have here among us, my friends," says Chadband, "a Gentile and a heathen, a dweller in the tents of Tom-all-Alone's and a mover-on upon the surface of the earth. We have here among us, my friends," and Mr. Chadband, untwisting the point with his dirty thumb-nail, bestows an oily smile on Mr. Snagsby, signifying that he will throw him an argumentative back-fall presently if he be not already down, "a brother and a boy. Devoid of parents, devoid of relations, devoid of flocks and herds, devoid of gold and silver and of precious stones. Now, my friends, why do I say he is devoid of these possessions? Why? Why is he?" Mr. Chadband states the question as if he were propounding an entirely new riddle of much ingenuity and merit to Mr. Snagsby and entreating him not to give it up.

Mr. Snagsby, greatly perplexed by the mysterious look he received just now from his little woman—at about the period when Mr. Chadband mentioned the word parents—is tempted into modestly remarking, "I don't know, I'm sure, sir." On which interruption Mrs. Chadband glares and Mrs. Snagsby says, "For shame!"

"I hear a voice," says Chadband; "is it a still small voice, my friends? I fear not, though I fain would hope so—"

"Ah—h!" from Mrs. Snagsby.

"Which says, 'I don't know.' Then I will tell you why. I say this brother present here among us is devoid of parents, devoid of relations, devoid of flocks and herds, devoid of gold, of silver, and of precious stones because he is devoid of the light that shines in upon some of us. What is that light? What is it? I ask you, what is that light?"

Mr. Chadband draws back his head and pauses, but Mr. Snagsby is not to be lured on to his destruction again. Mr. Chadband, leaning forward over the table, pierces what he has got to follow directly into Mr. Snagsby with the thumb-nail already mentioned.

"It is," says Chadband, "the ray of rays, the sun of suns, the moon of moons, the star of stars. It is the light of Terewth."

Mr. Chadband draws himself up again and looks triumphantly at Mr. Snagsby as if he would be glad to know how he feels after that.

"Of Terewth," says Mr. Chadband, hitting him again. "Say not to me that it is NOT the lamp of lamps. I say to you it is. I say to you, a million of times over, it is. It is! I say to you that I will proclaim it to you, whether you like it or not; nay, that the less you like it, the more I will proclaim it to you. With a speaking-trumpet! I say to you that if you rear yourself against it, you shall fall, you shall be bruised, you shall be battered, you shall be flawed, you shall be smashed."

The present effect of this flight of oratory—much admired for its general power by Mr. Chadband's followers—being not only to make Mr. Chadband unpleasantly warm, but to represent the innocent Mr. Snagsby in the light of a determined enemy to virtue, with a forehead of brass and a heart of adamant, that unfortunate tradesman becomes yet more disconcerted and is in a very advanced state of low spirits and false position when Mr. Chadband accidentally finishes him.

"My friends," he resumes after dabbing his fat head for some time—and it smokes to such an extent that he seems to light his pocket-handkerchief at it, which smokes, too, after every dab—"to pursue the subject we are endeavouring with our lowly gifts to improve, let us in a spirit of love inquire what is that Terewth to which I have alluded. For, my young friends," suddenly addressing the 'prentices and Guster, to their consternation, "if I am told by the doctor that calomel or castor-oil is good for me, I may naturally ask what is calomel, and what is castor-oil. I may wish to be informed of that before I dose myself with either or with both. Now, my young friends, what is this Terewth then? Firstly (in a spirit of love), what is the common sort of Terewth—the working clothes—the every-day wear, my young friends? Is it deception?"

"Ah—h!" from Mrs. Snagsby.

"Is it suppression?"

A shiver in the negative from Mrs. Snagsby.

"Is it reservation?"

A shake of the head from Mrs. Snagsby—very long and very tight.

"No, my friends, it is neither of these. Neither of these names belongs to it. When this young heathen now among us—who is now, my friends, asleep, the seal of indifference and perdition being set upon his eyelids; but do not wake him, for it is right that I should have to wrestle, and to combat and to struggle, and to conquer, for his sake—when this young hardened heathen told us a story of a cock, and of a bull, and of a lady, and of a sovereign, was THAT the Terewth? No. Or if it was partly, was it wholly and entirely? No, my friends, no!"

If Mr. Snagsby could withstand his little woman's look as it enters at his eyes, the windows of his soul, and searches the whole tenement, he were other than the man he is. He cowers and droops.

"Or, my juvenile friends," says Chadband, descending to the level of their comprehension with a very obtrusive demonstration in his greasily meek smile of coming a long way downstairs for the purpose, "if the master of this house was to go forth into the city and there see an eel, and was to come back, and was to call unto him the mistress of this house, and was to say, 'Sarah, rejoice with me, for I have seen an elephant!' would THAT be Terewth?"

Mrs. Snagsby in tears.

"Or put it, my juvenile friends, that he saw an elephant, and returning said 'Lo, the city is barren, I have seen but an eel,' would THAT be Terewth?"

Mrs. Snagsby sobbing loudly.

"Or put it, my juvenile friends," said Chadband, stimulated by the sound, "that the unnatural parents of this slumbering heathen—for parents he had, my juvenile friends, beyond a doubt—after casting him forth to the wolves and the vultures, and the wild dogs and the young gazelles, and the serpents, went back to their dwellings and had their pipes, and their pots, and their flutings and their dancings, and their malt liquors, and their butcher's meat and poultry, would THAT be Terewth?"

Mrs. Snagsby replies by delivering herself a prey to spasms, not an unresisting prey, but a crying and a tearing one, so that Cook's Court re-echoes with her shrieks. Finally, becoming cataleptic, she has to be carried up the narrow staircase like a grand piano. After unspeakable suffering, productive of the utmost consternation, she is pronounced, by expresses from the bedroom, free from pain, though much exhausted, in which state of affairs Mr. Snagsby, trampled and crushed in the piano-forte removal, and extremely timid and feeble, ventures to come out from behind the door in the drawing-room.

All this time Jo has been standing on the spot where he woke up, ever picking his cap and putting bits of fur in his mouth. He spits them out with a remorseful air, for he feels that it is in his nature to be an unimprovable reprobate and that it's no good HIS trying to keep awake, for HE won't never know nothink. Though it may be, Jo, that there is a history so interesting and affecting even to minds as near the brutes as thine, recording deeds done on this earth for common men, that if the Chadbands, removing their own persons from the light, would but show it thee in simple reverence, would but leave it unimproved, would but regard it as being eloquent enough without their modest aid—it might hold thee awake, and thou might learn from it yet!

Jo never heard of any such book. Its compilers and the Reverend Chadband are all one to him, except that he knows the Reverend Chadband and would rather run away from him for an hour than hear him talk for five minutes. "It an't no good my waiting here no longer," thinks Jo. "Mr. Snagsby an't a-going to say nothink to me to-night." And downstairs he shuffles.

But downstairs is the charitable Guster, holding by the handrail of the kitchen stairs and warding off a fit, as yet doubtfully, the same having been induced by Mrs. Snagsby's screaming. She has her own supper of bread and cheese to hand to Jo, with whom she ventures to interchange a word or so for the first time.

"Here's something to eat, poor boy," says Guster.

"Thank'ee, mum," says Jo.

"Are you hungry?"

"Jist!" says Jo.

"What's gone of your father and your mother, eh?"

Jo stops in the middle of a bite and looks petrified. For this orphan charge of the Christian saint whose shrine was at Tooting has patted him on the shoulder, and it is the first time in his life that any decent hand has been so laid upon him.

"I never know'd nothink about 'em," says Jo.

"No more didn't I of mine," cries Guster. She is repressing symptoms favourable to the fit when she seems to take alarm at something and vanishes down the stairs.

"Jo," whispers the law-stationer softly as the boy lingers on the step.

"Here I am, Mr. Snagsby!"

"I didn't know you were gone—there's another half-crown, Jo. It was quite right of you to say nothing about the lady the other night when we were out together. It would breed trouble. You can't be too quiet, Jo."

"I am fly, master!"

And so, good night.

A ghostly shade, frilled and night-capped, follows the law-stationer to the room he came from and glides higher up. And henceforth he begins, go where he will, to be attended by another shadow than his own, hardly less constant than his own, hardly less quiet than his own. And into whatsoever atmosphere of secrecy his own shadow may pass, let all concerned in the secrecy beware! For the watchful Mrs. Snagsby is there too—bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, shadow of his shadow.

CHAPTER XXVI. Sharpshooters

Wintry morning, looking with dull eyes and sallow face upon the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, finds its inhabitants unwilling to get out of bed. Many of them are not early risers at the brightest of times, being birds of night who roost when the sun is high and are wide awake and keen for prey when the stars shine out. Behind dingy blind and curtain, in upper story and garret, skulking more or less under false names, false hair, false titles, false jewellery, and false histories, a colony of brigands lie in their first sleep. Gentlemen of the green-baize road who could discourse from personal experience of foreign galleys and home treadmills; spies of strong governments that eternally quake with weakness and miserable fear, broken traitors, cowards, bullies, gamesters, shufflers, swindlers, and false witnesses; some not unmarked by the branding-iron beneath their dirty braid; all with more cruelty in them than was in Nero, and more crime than is in Newgate. For howsoever bad the devil can be in fustian or smock-frock (and he can be very bad in both), he is a more designing, callous, and intolerable devil when he sticks a pin in his shirt-front, calls himself a gentleman, backs a card or colour, plays a game or so of billiards, and knows a little about bills and promissory notes than in any other form he wears. And in such form Mr. Bucket shall find him, when he will, still pervading the tributary channels of Leicester Square.

But the wintry morning wants him not and wakes him not. It wakes Mr. George of the shooting gallery and his familiar. They arise, roll up and stow away their mattresses. Mr. George, having shaved himself before a looking-glass of minute proportions, then marches out, bare-headed and bare-chested, to the pump in the little yard and anon comes back shining with yellow soap, friction, drifting rain, and exceedingly cold water. As he rubs himself upon a large jack-towel, blowing like a military sort of diver just come up, his hair curling tighter and tighter on his sunburnt temples the more he rubs it so that it looks as if it never could be loosened by any less coercive instrument than an iron rake or a curry-comb—as he rubs, and puffs, and polishes, and blows, turning his head from side to side the more conveniently to excoriate his throat, and standing with his body well bent forward to keep the wet from his martial legs, Phil, on his knees lighting a fire, looks round as if it were enough washing for him to see all that done, and sufficient renovation for one day to take in the superfluous health his master throws off.

When Mr. George is dry, he goes to work to brush his head with two hard brushes at once, to that unmerciful degree that Phil, shouldering his way round the gallery in the act of sweeping it, winks with sympathy. This chafing over, the ornamental part of Mr. George's toilet is soon performed. He fills his pipe, lights it, and marches up and down smoking, as his custom is, while Phil, raising a powerful odour of hot rolls and coffee, prepares breakfast. He smokes gravely and marches in slow time. Perhaps this morning's pipe is devoted to the memory of Gridley in his grave.

"And so, Phil," says George of the shooting gallery after several turns in silence, "you were dreaming of the country last night?"

Phil, by the by, said as much in a tone of surprise as he scrambled out of bed.

"Yes, guv'ner."

"What was it like?"

"I hardly know what it was like, guv'ner," said Phil, considering.

"How did you know it was the country?"

"On account of the grass, I think. And the swans upon it," says Phil after further consideration.

"What were the swans doing on the grass?"

"They was a-eating of it, I expect," says Phil.

The master resumes his march, and the man resumes his preparation of breakfast. It is not necessarily a lengthened preparation, being limited to the setting forth of very simple breakfast requisites for two and the broiling of a rasher of bacon at the fire in the rusty grate; but as Phil has to sidle round a considerable part of the gallery for every object he wants, and never brings two objects at once, it takes time under the circumstances. At length the breakfast is ready. Phil announcing it, Mr. George knocks the ashes out of his pipe on the hob, stands his pipe itself in the chimney corner, and sits down to the meal. When he has helped himself, Phil follows suit, sitting at the extreme end of the little oblong table and taking his plate on his knees. Either in humility, or to hide his blackened hands, or because it is his natural manner of eating.

"The country," says Mr. George, plying his knife and fork; "why, I suppose you never clapped your eyes on the country, Phil?"

"I see the marshes once," says Phil, contentedly eating his breakfast.

"What marshes?"

"THE marshes, commander," returns Phil.

"Where are they?"

"I don't know where they are," says Phil; "but I see 'em, guv'ner. They was flat. And miste."

Governor and commander are interchangeable terms with Phil, expressive of the same respect and deference and applicable to nobody but Mr. George.

"I was born in the country, Phil."

"Was you indeed, commander?"

"Yes. And bred there."

Phil elevates his one eyebrow, and after respectfully staring at his master to express interest, swallows a great gulp of coffee, still staring at him.

"There's not a bird's note that I don't know," says Mr. George. "Not many an English leaf or berry that I couldn't name. Not many a tree that I couldn't climb yet if I was put to it. I was a real country boy, once. My good mother lived in the country."

"She must have been a fine old lady, guv'ner," Phil observes.

"Aye! And not so old either, five and thirty years ago," says Mr. George. "But I'll wager that at ninety she would be near as upright as me, and near as broad across the shoulders."

"Did she die at ninety, guv'ner?" inquires Phil.

"No. Bosh! Let her rest in peace, God bless her!" says the trooper. "What set me on about country boys, and runaways, and good-for-nothings? You, to be sure! So you never clapped your eyes upon the country—marshes and dreams excepted. Eh?"

Phil shakes his head.

"Do you want to see it?"

"N-no, I don't know as I do, particular," says Phil.

"The town's enough for you, eh?"

"Why, you see, commander," says Phil, "I ain't acquainted with anythink else, and I doubt if I ain't a-getting too old to take to novelties."

"How old ARE you, Phil?" asks the trooper, pausing as he conveys his smoking saucer to his lips.

"I'm something with a eight in it," says Phil. "It can't be eighty. Nor yet eighteen. It's betwixt 'em, somewheres."

Mr. George, slowly putting down his saucer without tasting its contents, is laughingly beginning, "Why, what the deuce, Phil—" when he stops, seeing that Phil is counting on his dirty fingers.

"I was just eight," says Phil, "agreeable to the parish calculation, when I went with the tinker. I was sent on a errand, and I see him a-sittin under a old buildin with a fire all to himself wery comfortable, and he says, 'Would you like to come along a me, my man?' I says 'Yes,' and him and me and the fire goes home to Clerkenwell together. That was April Fool Day. I was able to count up to ten; and when April Fool Day come round again, I says to myself, 'Now, old chap, you're one and a eight in it.' April Fool Day after that, I says, 'Now, old chap, you're two and a eight in it.' In course of time, I come to ten and a eight in it; two tens and a eight in it. When it got so high, it got the upper hand of me, but this is how I always know there's a eight in it."

"Ah!" says Mr. George, resuming his breakfast. "And where's the tinker?"

"Drink put him in the hospital, guv'ner, and the hospital put him—in a glass-case, I HAVE heerd," Phil replies mysteriously.

"By that means you got promotion? Took the business, Phil?"

"Yes, commander, I took the business. Such as it was. It wasn't much of a beat—round Saffron Hill, Hatton Garden, Clerkenwell, Smiffeld, and there—poor neighbourhood, where they uses up the kettles till they're past mending. Most of the tramping tinkers used to come and lodge at our place; that was the best part of my master's earnings. But they didn't come to me. I warn't like him. He could sing 'em a good song. I couldn't! He could play 'em a tune on any sort of pot you please, so as it was iron or block tin. I never could do nothing with a pot but mend it or bile it—never had a note of music in me. Besides, I was too ill-looking, and their wives complained of me."

"They were mighty particular. You would pass muster in a crowd, Phil!" says the trooper with a pleasant smile.

"No, guv'ner," returns Phil, shaking his head. "No, I shouldn't. I was passable enough when I went with the tinker, though nothing to boast of then; but what with blowing the fire with my mouth when I was young, and spileing my complexion, and singeing my hair off, and swallering the smoke, and what with being nat'rally unfort'nate in the way of running against hot metal and marking myself by sich means, and what with having turn-ups with the tinker as I got older, almost whenever he was too far gone in drink—which was almost always—my beauty was queer, wery queer, even at that time. As to since, what with a dozen years in a dark forge where the men was given to larking, and what with being scorched in a accident at a gas-works, and what with being blowed out of winder case-filling at the firework business, I am ugly enough to be made a show on!"

Resigning himself to which condition with a perfectly satisfied manner, Phil begs the favour of another cup of coffee. While drinking it, he says, "It was after the case-filling blow-up when I first see you, commander. You remember?"

"I remember, Phil. You were walking along in the sun."

"Crawling, guv'ner, again a wall—"

"True, Phil—shouldering your way on—"

"In a night-cap!" exclaims Phil, excited.

"In a night-cap—"

"And hobbling with a couple of sticks!" cries Phil, still more excited.

"With a couple of sticks. When—"

"When you stops, you know," cries Phil, putting down his cup and saucer and hastily removing his plate from his knees, "and says to me, 'What, comrade! You have been in the wars!' I didn't say much to you, commander, then, for I was took by surprise that a person so strong and healthy and bold as you was should stop to speak to such a limping bag of bones as I was. But you says to me, says you, delivering it out of your chest as hearty as possible, so that it was like a glass of something hot, 'What accident have you met with? You have been badly hurt. What's amiss, old boy? Cheer up, and tell us about it!' Cheer up! I was cheered already! I says as much to you, you says more to me, I says more to you, you says more to me, and here I am, commander! Here I am, commander!" cries Phil, who has started from his chair and unaccountably begun to sidle away. "If a mark's wanted, or if it will improve the business, let the customers take aim at me. They can't spoil MY beauty. I'M all right. Come on! If they want a man to box at, let 'em box at me. Let 'em knock me well about the head. I don't mind. If they want a light-weight to be throwed for practice, Cornwall, Devonshire, or Lancashire, let 'em throw me. They won't hurt ME. I have been throwed, all sorts of styles, all my life!"

With this unexpected speech, energetically delivered and accompanied by action illustrative of the various exercises referred to, Phil Squod shoulders his way round three sides of the gallery, and abruptly tacking off at his commander, makes a butt at him with his head, intended to express devotion to his service. He then begins to clear away the breakfast.

Mr. George, after laughing cheerfully and clapping him on the shoulder, assists in these arrangements and helps to get the gallery into business order. That done, he takes a turn at the dumb-bells, and afterwards weighing himself and opining that he is getting "too fleshy," engages with great gravity in solitary broadsword practice. Meanwhile Phil has fallen to work at his usual table, where he screws and unscrews, and cleans, and files, and whistles into small apertures, and blackens himself more and more, and seems to do and undo everything that can be done and undone about a gun.

Master and man are at length disturbed by footsteps in the passage, where they make an unusual sound, denoting the arrival of unusual company. These steps, advancing nearer and nearer to the gallery, bring into it a group at first sight scarcely reconcilable with any day in the year but the fifth of November.

It consists of a limp and ugly figure carried in a chair by two bearers and attended by a lean female with a face like a pinched mask, who might be expected immediately to recite the popular verses commemorative of the time when they did contrive to blow Old England up alive but for her keeping her lips tightly and defiantly closed as the chair is put down. At which point the figure in it gasping, "O Lord! Oh, dear me! I am shaken!" adds, "How de do, my dear friend, how de do?" Mr. George then descries, in the procession, the venerable Mr. Smallweed out for an airing, attended by his granddaughter Judy as body-guard.

"Mr. George, my dear friend," says Grandfather Smallweed, removing his right arm from the neck of one of his bearers, whom he has nearly throttled coming along, "how de do? You're surprised to see me, my dear friend."

"I should hardly have been more surprised to have seen your friend in the city," returns Mr. George.

"I am very seldom out," pants Mr. Smallweed. "I haven't been out for many months. It's inconvenient—and it comes expensive. But I longed so much to see you, my dear Mr. George. How de do, sir?"

"I am well enough," says Mr. George. "I hope you are the same."

"You can't be too well, my dear friend." Mr. Smallweed takes him by both hands. "I have brought my granddaughter Judy. I couldn't keep her away. She longed so much to see you."

"Hum! She bears it calmly!" mutters Mr. George.

"So we got a hackney-cab, and put a chair in it, and just round the corner they lifted me out of the cab and into the chair, and carried me here that I might see my dear friend in his own establishment! This," says Grandfather Smallweed, alluding to the bearer, who has been in danger of strangulation and who withdraws adjusting his windpipe, "is the driver of the cab. He has nothing extra. It is by agreement included in his fare. This person," the other bearer, "we engaged in the street outside for a pint of beer. Which is twopence. Judy, give the person twopence. I was not sure you had a workman of your own here, my dear friend, or we needn't have employed this person."

Grandfather Smallweed refers to Phil with a glance of considerable terror and a half-subdued "O Lord! Oh, dear me!" Nor in his apprehension, on the surface of things, without some reason, for Phil, who has never beheld the apparition in the black-velvet cap before, has stopped short with a gun in his hand with much of the air of a dead shot intent on picking Mr. Smallweed off as an ugly old bird of the crow species.

"Judy, my child," says Grandfather Smallweed, "give the person his twopence. It's a great deal for what he has done."

The person, who is one of those extraordinary specimens of human fungus that spring up spontaneously in the western streets of London, ready dressed in an old red jacket, with a "mission" for holding horses and calling coaches, received his twopence with anything but transport, tosses the money into the air, catches it over-handed, and retires.

"My dear Mr. George," says Grandfather Smallweed, "would you be so kind as help to carry me to the fire? I am accustomed to a fire, and I am an old man, and I soon chill. Oh, dear me!"

His closing exclamation is jerked out of the venerable gentleman by the suddenness with which Mr. Squod, like a genie, catches him up, chair and all, and deposits him on the hearth-stone.

"O Lord!" says Mr. Smallweed, panting. "Oh, dear me! Oh, my stars! My dear friend, your workman is very strong—and very prompt. O Lord, he is very prompt! Judy, draw me back a little. I'm being scorched in the legs," which indeed is testified to the noses of all present by the smell of his worsted stockings.

The gentle Judy, having backed her grandfather a little way from the fire, and having shaken him up as usual, and having released his overshadowed eye from its black-velvet extinguisher, Mr. Smallweed again says, "Oh, dear me! O Lord!" and looking about and meeting Mr. George's glance, again stretches out both hands.

"My dear friend! So happy in this meeting! And this is your establishment? It's a delightful place. It's a picture! You never find that anything goes off here accidentally, do you, my dear friend?" adds Grandfather Smallweed, very ill at ease.

"No, no. No fear of that."

"And your workman. He—Oh, dear me!—he never lets anything off without meaning it, does he, my dear friend?"

"He has never hurt anybody but himself," says Mr. George, smiling.

"But he might, you know. He seems to have hurt himself a good deal, and he might hurt somebody else," the old gentleman returns. "He mightn't mean it—or he even might. Mr. George, will you order him to leave his infernal fire-arms alone and go away?"

Obedient to a nod from the trooper, Phil retires, empty-handed, to the other end of the gallery. Mr. Smallweed, reassured, falls to rubbing his legs.

"And you're doing well, Mr. George?" he says to the trooper, squarely standing faced about towards him with his broadsword in his hand. "You are prospering, please the Powers?"

Mr. George answers with a cool nod, adding, "Go on. You have not come to say that, I know."

"You are so sprightly, Mr. George," returns the venerable grandfather. "You are such good company."

"Ha ha! Go on!" says Mr. George.

"My dear friend! But that sword looks awful gleaming and sharp. It might cut somebody, by accident. It makes me shiver, Mr. George. Curse him!" says the excellent old gentleman apart to Judy as the trooper takes a step or two away to lay it aside. "He owes me money, and might think of paying off old scores in this murdering place. I wish your brimstone grandmother was here, and he'd shave her head off."

Mr. George, returning, folds his arms, and looking down at the old man, sliding every moment lower and lower in his chair, says quietly, "Now for it!"

"Ho!" cries Mr. Smallweed, rubbing his hands with an artful chuckle. "Yes. Now for it. Now for what, my dear friend?"

"For a pipe," says Mr. George, who with great composure sets his chair in the chimney-corner, takes his pipe from the grate, fills it and lights it, and falls to smoking peacefully.

This tends to the discomfiture of Mr. Smallweed, who finds it so difficult to resume his object, whatever it may be, that he becomes exasperated and secretly claws the air with an impotent vindictiveness expressive of an intense desire to tear and rend the visage of Mr. George. As the excellent old gentleman's nails are long and leaden, and his hands lean and veinous, and his eyes green and watery; and, over and above this, as he continues, while he claws, to slide down in his chair and to collapse into a shapeless bundle, he becomes such a ghastly spectacle, even in the accustomed eyes of Judy, that that young virgin pounces at him with something more than the ardour of affection and so shakes him up and pats and pokes him in divers parts of his body, but particularly in that part which the science of self-defence would call his wind, that in his grievous distress he utters enforced sounds like a paviour's rammer.

When Judy has by these means set him up again in his chair, with a white face and a frosty nose (but still clawing), she stretches out her weazen forefinger and gives Mr. George one poke in the back. The trooper raising his head, she makes another poke at her esteemed grandfather, and having thus brought them together, stares rigidly at the fire.

"Aye, aye! Ho, ho! U—u—u—ugh!" chatters Grandfather Smallweed, swallowing his rage. "My dear friend!" (still clawing).

"I tell you what," says Mr. George. "If you want to converse with me, you must speak out. I am one of the roughs, and I can't go about and about. I haven't the art to do it. I am not clever enough. It don't suit me. When you go winding round and round me," says the trooper, putting his pipe between his lips again, "damme, if I don't feel as if I was being smothered!"

And he inflates his broad chest to its utmost extent as if to assure himself that he is not smothered yet.

"If you have come to give me a friendly call," continues Mr. George, "I am obliged to you; how are you? If you have come to see whether there's any property on the premises, look about you; you are welcome. If you want to out with something, out with it!"

The blooming Judy, without removing her gaze from the fire, gives her grandfather one ghostly poke.

"You see! It's her opinion too. And why the devil that young woman won't sit down like a Christian," says Mr. George with his eyes musingly fixed on Judy, "I can't comprehend."

"She keeps at my side to attend to me, sir," says Grandfather Smallweed. "I am an old man, my dear Mr. George, and I need some attention. I can carry my years; I am not a brimstone poll-parrot" (snarling and looking unconsciously for the cushion), "but I need attention, my dear friend."

"Well!" returns the trooper, wheeling his chair to face the old man. "Now then?"

"My friend in the city, Mr. George, has done a little business with a pupil of yours."

"Has he?" says Mr. George. "I am sorry to hear it."

"Yes, sir." Grandfather Smallweed rubs his legs. "He is a fine young soldier now, Mr. George, by the name of Carstone. Friends came forward and paid it all up, honourable."

"Did they?" returns Mr. George. "Do you think your friend in the city would like a piece of advice?"

"I think he would, my dear friend. From you."

"I advise him, then, to do no more business in that quarter. There's no more to be got by it. The young gentleman, to my knowledge, is brought to a dead halt."

"No, no, my dear friend. No, no, Mr. George. No, no, no, sir," remonstrates Grandfather Smallweed, cunningly rubbing his spare legs. "Not quite a dead halt, I think. He has good friends, and he is good for his pay, and he is good for the selling price of his commission, and he is good for his chance in a lawsuit, and he is good for his chance in a wife, and—oh, do you know, Mr. George, I think my friend would consider the young gentleman good for something yet?" says Grandfather Smallweed, turning up his velvet cap and scratching his ear like a monkey.

Mr. George, who has put aside his pipe and sits with an arm on his chair-back, beats a tattoo on the ground with his right foot as if he were not particularly pleased with the turn the conversation has taken.

"But to pass from one subject to another," resumes Mr. Smallweed. "'To promote the conversation,' as a joker might say. To pass, Mr. George, from the ensign to the captain."

"What are you up to, now?" asks Mr. George, pausing with a frown in stroking the recollection of his moustache. "What captain?"

"Our captain. The captain we know of. Captain Hawdon."

"Oh! That's it, is it?" says Mr. George with a low whistle as he sees both grandfather and granddaughter looking hard at him. "You are there! Well? What about it? Come, I won't be smothered any more. Speak!"

"My dear friend," returns the old man, "I was applied—Judy, shake me up a little!—I was applied to yesterday about the captain, and my opinion still is that the captain is not dead."

"Bosh!" observes Mr. George.

"What was your remark, my dear friend?" inquires the old man with his hand to his ear.

"Bosh!"

"Ho!" says Grandfather Smallweed. "Mr. George, of my opinion you can judge for yourself according to the questions asked of me and the reasons given for asking 'em. Now, what do you think the lawyer making the inquiries wants?"

"A job," says Mr. George.

"Nothing of the kind!"

"Can't be a lawyer, then," says Mr. George, folding his arms with an air of confirmed resolution.

"My dear friend, he is a lawyer, and a famous one. He wants to see some fragment in Captain Hawdon's writing. He don't want to keep it. He only wants to see it and compare it with a writing in his possession."

"Well?"

"Well, Mr. George. Happening to remember the advertisement concerning Captain Hawdon and any information that could be given respecting him, he looked it up and came to me—just as you did, my dear friend. WILL you shake hands? So glad you came that day! I should have missed forming such a friendship if you hadn't come!"

"Well, Mr. Smallweed?" says Mr. George again after going through the ceremony with some stiffness.

"I had no such thing. I have nothing but his signature. Plague pestilence and famine, battle murder and sudden death upon him," says the old man, making a curse out of one of his few remembrances of a prayer and squeezing up his velvet cap between his angry hands, "I have half a million of his signatures, I think! But you," breathlessly recovering his mildness of speech as Judy re-adjusts the cap on his skittle-ball of a head, "you, my dear Mr. George, are likely to have some letter or paper that would suit the purpose. Anything would suit the purpose, written in the hand."

"Some writing in that hand," says the trooper, pondering; "may be, I have."

"My dearest friend!"

"May be, I have not."

"Ho!" says Grandfather Smallweed, crest-fallen.

"But if I had bushels of it, I would not show as much as would make a cartridge without knowing why."

"Sir, I have told you why. My dear Mr. George, I have told you why."

"Not enough," says the trooper, shaking his head. "I must know more, and approve it."

"Then, will you come to the lawyer? My dear friend, will you come and see the gentleman?" urges Grandfather Smallweed, pulling out a lean old silver watch with hands like the leg of a skeleton. "I told him it was probable I might call upon him between ten and eleven this forenoon, and it's now half after ten. Will you come and see the gentleman, Mr. George?"

"Hum!" says he gravely. "I don't mind that. Though why this should concern you so much, I don't know."

"Everything concerns me that has a chance in it of bringing anything to light about him. Didn't he take us all in? Didn't he owe us immense sums, all round? Concern me? Who can anything about him concern more than me? Not, my dear friend," says Grandfather Smallweed, lowering his tone, "that I want YOU to betray anything. Far from it. Are you ready to come, my dear friend?"

"Aye! I'll come in a moment. I promise nothing, you know."

"No, my dear Mr. George; no."

"And you mean to say you're going to give me a lift to this place, wherever it is, without charging for it?" Mr. George inquires, getting his hat and thick wash-leather gloves.

This pleasantry so tickles Mr. Smallweed that he laughs, long and low, before the fire. But ever while he laughs, he glances over his paralytic shoulder at Mr. George and eagerly watches him as he unlocks the padlock of a homely cupboard at the distant end of the gallery, looks here and there upon the higher shelves, and ultimately takes something out with a rustling of paper, folds it, and puts it in his breast. Then Judy pokes Mr. Smallweed once, and Mr. Smallweed pokes Judy once.

"I am ready," says the trooper, coming back. "Phil, you can carry this old gentleman to his coach, and make nothing of him."

"Oh, dear me! O Lord! Stop a moment!" says Mr. Smallweed. "He's so very prompt! Are you sure you can do it carefully, my worthy man?"

Phil makes no reply, but seizing the chair and its load, sidles away, tightly hugged by the now speechless Mr. Smallweed, and bolts along the passage as if he had an acceptable commission to carry the old gentleman to the nearest volcano. His shorter trust, however, terminating at the cab, he deposits him there; and the fair Judy takes her place beside him, and the chair embellishes the roof, and Mr. George takes the vacant place upon the box.

Mr. George is quite confounded by the spectacle he beholds from time to time as he peeps into the cab through the window behind him, where the grim Judy is always motionless, and the old gentleman with his cap over one eye is always sliding off the seat into the straw and looking upward at him out of his other eye with a helpless expression of being jolted in the back.

CHAPTER XXVII. More Old Soldiers Than One

Mr. George has not far to ride with folded arms upon the box, for their destination is Lincoln's Inn Fields. When the driver stops his horses, Mr. George alights, and looking in at the window, says, "What, Mr. Tulkinghorn's your man, is he?"

"Yes, my dear friend. Do you know him, Mr. George?"

"Why, I have heard of him—seen him too, I think. But I don't know him, and he don't know me."

There ensues the carrying of Mr. Smallweed upstairs, which is done to perfection with the trooper's help. He is borne into Mr. Tulkinghorn's great room and deposited on the Turkey rug before the fire. Mr. Tulkinghorn is not within at the present moment but will be back directly. The occupant of the pew in the hall, having said thus much, stirs the fire and leaves the triumvirate to warm themselves.

Mr. George is mightily curious in respect of the room. He looks up at the painted ceiling, looks round at the old law-books, contemplates the portraits of the great clients, reads aloud the names on the boxes.

"'Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet,'" Mr. George reads thoughtfully. "Ha! 'Manor of Chesney Wold.' Humph!" Mr. George stands looking at these boxes a long while—as if they were pictures—and comes back to the fire repeating, "Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, and Manor of Chesney Wold, hey?"

"Worth a mint of money, Mr. George!" whispers Grandfather Smallweed, rubbing his legs. "Powerfully rich!"

"Who do you mean? This old gentleman, or the Baronet?"

"This gentleman, this gentleman."

"So I have heard; and knows a thing or two, I'll hold a wager. Not bad quarters, either," says Mr. George, looking round again. "See the strong-box yonder!"

This reply is cut short by Mr. Tulkinghorn's arrival. There is no change in him, of course. Rustily drest, with his spectacles in his hand, and their very case worn threadbare. In manner, close and dry. In voice, husky and low. In face, watchful behind a blind; habitually not uncensorious and contemptuous perhaps. The peerage may have warmer worshippers and faithfuller believers than Mr. Tulkinghorn, after all, if everything were known.

"Good morning, Mr. Smallweed, good morning!" he says as he comes in. "You have brought the sergeant, I see. Sit down, sergeant."

As Mr. Tulkinghorn takes off his gloves and puts them in his hat, he looks with half-closed eyes across the room to where the trooper stands and says within himself perchance, "You'll do, my friend!"

"Sit down, sergeant," he repeats as he comes to his table, which is set on one side of the fire, and takes his easy-chair. "Cold and raw this morning, cold and raw!" Mr. Tulkinghorn warms before the bars, alternately, the palms and knuckles of his hands and looks (from behind that blind which is always down) at the trio sitting in a little semicircle before him.

"Now, I can feel what I am about" (as perhaps he can in two senses), "Mr. Smallweed." The old gentleman is newly shaken up by Judy to bear his part in the conversation. "You have brought our good friend the sergeant, I see."

"Yes, sir," returns Mr. Smallweed, very servile to the lawyer's wealth and influence.

"And what does the sergeant say about this business?"

"Mr. George," says Grandfather Smallweed with a tremulous wave of his shrivelled hand, "this is the gentleman, sir."

Mr. George salutes the gentleman but otherwise sits bolt upright and profoundly silent—very forward in his chair, as if the full complement of regulation appendages for a field-day hung about him.

Mr. Tulkinghorn proceeds, "Well, George—I believe your name is George?"

"It is so, Sir."

"What do you say, George?"

"I ask your pardon, sir," returns the trooper, "but I should wish to know what YOU say?"

"Do you mean in point of reward?"

"I mean in point of everything, sir."

This is so very trying to Mr. Smallweed's temper that he suddenly breaks out with "You're a brimstone beast!" and as suddenly asks pardon of Mr. Tulkinghorn, excusing himself for this slip of the tongue by saying to Judy, "I was thinking of your grandmother, my dear."

"I supposed, sergeant," Mr. Tulkinghorn resumes as he leans on one side of his chair and crosses his legs, "that Mr. Smallweed might have sufficiently explained the matter. It lies in the smallest compass, however. You served under Captain Hawdon at one time, and were his attendant in illness, and rendered him many little services, and were rather in his confidence, I am told. That is so, is it not?"

"Yes, sir, that is so," says Mr. George with military brevity.

"Therefore you may happen to have in your possession something—anything, no matter what; accounts, instructions, orders, a letter, anything—in Captain Hawdon's writing. I wish to compare his writing with some that I have. If you can give me the opportunity, you shall be rewarded for your trouble. Three, four, five, guineas, you would consider handsome, I dare say."

"Noble, my dear friend!" cries Grandfather Smallweed, screwing up his eyes.

"If not, say how much more, in your conscience as a soldier, you can demand. There is no need for you to part with the writing, against your inclination—though I should prefer to have it."

Mr. George sits squared in exactly the same attitude, looks at the painted ceiling, and says never a word. The irascible Mr. Smallweed scratches the air.

"The question is," says Mr. Tulkinghorn in his methodical, subdued, uninterested way, "first, whether you have any of Captain Hawdon's writing?"

"First, whether I have any of Captain Hawdon's writing, sir," repeats Mr. George.

"Secondly, what will satisfy you for the trouble of producing it?"

"Secondly, what will satisfy me for the trouble of producing it, sir," repeats Mr. George.

"Thirdly, you can judge for yourself whether it is at all like that," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, suddenly handing him some sheets of written paper tied together.

"Whether it is at all like that, sir. Just so," repeats Mr. George.

All three repetitions Mr. George pronounces in a mechanical manner, looking straight at Mr. Tulkinghorn; nor does he so much as glance at the affidavit in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, that has been given to him for his inspection (though he still holds it in his hand), but continues to look at the lawyer with an air of troubled meditation.

"Well?" says Mr. Tulkinghorn. "What do you say?"

"Well, sir," replies Mr. George, rising erect and looking immense, "I would rather, if you'll excuse me, have nothing to do with this."

Mr. Tulkinghorn, outwardly quite undisturbed, demands, "Why not?"

"Why, sir," returns the trooper. "Except on military compulsion, I am not a man of business. Among civilians I am what they call in Scotland a ne'er-do-weel. I have no head for papers, sir. I can stand any fire better than a fire of cross questions. I mentioned to Mr. Smallweed, only an hour or so ago, that when I come into things of this kind I feel as if I was being smothered. And that is my sensation," says Mr. George, looking round upon the company, "at the present moment."

With that, he takes three strides forward to replace the papers on the lawyer's table and three strides backward to resume his former station, where he stands perfectly upright, now looking at the ground and now at the painted ceiling, with his hands behind him as if to prevent himself from accepting any other document whatever.

Under this provocation, Mr. Smallweed's favourite adjective of disparagement is so close to his tongue that he begins the words "my dear friend" with the monosyllable "brim," thus converting the possessive pronoun into brimmy and appearing to have an impediment in his speech. Once past this difficulty, however, he exhorts his dear friend in the tenderest manner not to be rash, but to do what so eminent a gentleman requires, and to do it with a good grace, confident that it must be unobjectionable as well as profitable. Mr. Tulkinghorn merely utters an occasional sentence, as, "You are the best judge of your own interest, sergeant." "Take care you do no harm by this." "Please yourself, please yourself." "If you know what you mean, that's quite enough." These he utters with an appearance of perfect indifference as he looks over the papers on his table and prepares to write a letter.

Mr. George looks distrustfully from the painted ceiling to the ground, from the ground to Mr. Smallweed, from Mr. Smallweed to Mr.

Tulkinghorn, and from Mr. Tulkinghorn to the painted ceiling again, often in his perplexity changing the leg on which he rests.

"I do assure you, sir," says Mr. George, "not to say it offensively, that between you and Mr. Smallweed here, I really am being smothered fifty times over. I really am, sir. I am not a match for you gentlemen. Will you allow me to ask why you want to see the captain's hand, in the case that I could find any specimen of it?"

Mr. Tulkinghorn quietly shakes his head. "No. If you were a man of business, sergeant, you would not need to be informed that there are confidential reasons, very harmless in themselves, for many such wants in the profession to which I belong. But if you are afraid of doing any injury to Captain Hawdon, you may set your mind at rest about that."

"Aye! He is dead, sir."

"IS he?" Mr. Tulkinghorn quietly sits down to write.

"Well, sir," says the trooper, looking into his hat after another disconcerted pause, "I am sorry not to have given you more satisfaction. If it would be any satisfaction to any one that I should be confirmed in my judgment that I would rather have nothing to do with this by a friend of mine who has a better head for business than I have, and who is an old soldier, I am willing to consult with him. I—I really am so completely smothered myself at present," says Mr. George, passing his hand hopelessly across his brow, "that I don't know but what it might be a satisfaction to me."

Mr. Smallweed, hearing that this authority is an old soldier, so strongly inculcates the expediency of the trooper's taking counsel with him, and particularly informing him of its being a question of five guineas or more, that Mr. George engages to go and see him. Mr. Tulkinghorn says nothing either way.

"I'll consult my friend, then, by your leave, sir," says the trooper, "and I'll take the liberty of looking in again with the final answer in the course of the day. Mr. Smallweed, if you wish to be carried downstairs—"

"In a moment, my dear friend, in a moment. Will you first let me speak half a word with this gentleman in private?"

"Certainly, sir. Don't hurry yourself on my account." The trooper retires to a distant part of the room and resumes his curious inspection of the boxes, strong and otherwise.

"If I wasn't as weak as a brimstone baby, sir," whispers Grandfather Smallweed, drawing the lawyer down to his level by the lapel of his coat and flashing some half-quenched green fire out of his angry eyes, "I'd tear the writing away from him. He's got it buttoned in his breast. I saw him put it there. Judy saw him put it there. Speak up, you crabbed image for the sign of a walking-stick shop, and say you saw him put it there!"

This vehement conjuration the old gentleman accompanies with such a thrust at his granddaughter that it is too much for his strength, and he slips away out of his chair, drawing Mr. Tulkinghorn with him, until he is arrested by Judy, and well shaken.

"Violence will not do for me, my friend," Mr. Tulkinghorn then remarks coolly.

"No, no, I know, I know, sir. But it's chafing and galling—it's—it's worse than your smattering chattering magpie of a grandmother," to the imperturbable Judy, who only looks at the fire, "to know he has got what's wanted and won't give it up. He, not to give it up! HE! A vagabond! But never mind, sir, never mind. At the most, he has only his own way for a little while. I have him periodically in a vice. I'll twist him, sir. I'll screw him, sir. If he won't do it with a good grace, I'll make him do it with a bad one, sir! Now, my dear Mr. George," says Grandfather Smallweed, winking at the lawyer hideously as he releases him, "I am ready for your kind assistance, my excellent friend!"

Mr. Tulkinghorn, with some shadowy sign of amusement manifesting itself through his self-possession, stands on the hearth-rug with his back to the fire, watching the disappearance of Mr. Smallweed and acknowledging the trooper's parting salute with one slight nod.

It is more difficult to get rid of the old gentleman, Mr. George finds, than to bear a hand in carrying him downstairs, for when he is replaced in his conveyance, he is so loquacious on the subject of the guineas and retains such an affectionate hold of his button—having, in truth, a secret longing to rip his coat open and rob him—that some degree of force is necessary on the trooper's part to effect a separation. It is accomplished at last, and he proceeds alone in quest of his adviser.

By the cloisterly Temple, and by Whitefriars (there, not without a glance at Hanging-Sword Alley, which would seem to be something in his way), and by Blackfriars Bridge, and Blackfriars Road, Mr. George sedately marches to a street of little shops lying somewhere in that ganglion of roads from Kent and Surrey, and of streets from the bridges of London, centring in the far-famed elephant who has lost his castle formed of a thousand four-horse coaches to a stronger iron monster than he, ready to chop him into mince-meat any day he dares. To one of the little shops in this street, which is a musician's shop, having a few fiddles in the window, and some Pan's pipes and a tambourine, and a triangle, and certain elongated scraps of music, Mr. George directs his massive tread. And halting at a few paces from it, as he sees a soldierly looking woman, with her outer skirts tucked up, come forth with a small wooden tub, and in that tub commence a-whisking and a-splashing on the margin of the pavement, Mr. George says to himself, "She's as usual, washing greens. I never saw her, except upon a baggage-waggon, when she wasn't washing greens!"

The subject of this reflection is at all events so occupied in washing greens at present that she remains unsuspicious of Mr. George's approach until, lifting up herself and her tub together when she has poured the water off into the gutter, she finds him standing near her. Her reception of him is not flattering.

"George, I never see you but I wish you was a hundred mile away!"

The trooper, without remarking on this welcome, follows into the musical-instrument shop, where the lady places her tub of greens upon the counter, and having shaken hands with him, rests her arms upon it.

"I never," she says, "George, consider Matthew Bagnet safe a minute when you're near him. You are that restless and that roving—"

"Yes! I know I am, Mrs. Bagnet. I know I am."

"You know you are!" says Mrs. Bagnet. "What's the use of that? WHY are you?"

"The nature of the animal, I suppose," returns the trooper good-humouredly.

"Ah!" cries Mrs. Bagnet, something shrilly. "But what satisfaction will the nature of the animal be to me when the animal shall have tempted my Mat away from the musical business to New Zealand or Australey?"

Mrs. Bagnet is not at all an ill-looking woman. Rather large-boned, a little coarse in the grain, and freckled by the sun and wind which have tanned her hair upon the forehead, but healthy, wholesome, and bright-eyed. A strong, busy, active, honest-faced woman of from forty-five to fifty. Clean, hardy, and so economically dressed (though substantially) that the only article of ornament of which she stands possessed appear's to be her wedding-ring, around which her finger has grown to be so large since it was put on that it will never come off again until it shall mingle with Mrs. Bagnet's dust.

"Mrs. Bagnet," says the trooper, "I am on my parole with you. Mat will get no harm from me. You may trust me so far."

"Well, I think I may. But the very looks of you are unsettling," Mrs. Bagnet rejoins. "Ah, George, George! If you had only settled down and married Joe Pouch's widow when he died in North America, SHE'D have combed your hair for you."

"It was a chance for me, certainly," returns the trooper half laughingly, half seriously, "but I shall never settle down into a respectable man now. Joe Pouch's widow might have done me good—there was something in her, and something of her—but I couldn't make up my mind to it. If I had had the luck to meet with such a wife as Mat found!"

Mrs. Bagnet, who seems in a virtuous way to be under little reserve with a good sort of fellow, but to be another good sort of fellow herself for that matter, receives this compliment by flicking Mr. George in the face with a head of greens and taking her tub into the little room behind the shop.

"Why, Quebec, my poppet," says George, following, on invitation, into that department. "And little Malta, too! Come and kiss your Bluffy!"

These young ladies—not supposed to have been actually christened by the names applied to them, though always so called in the family from the places of their birth in barracks—are respectively employed on three-legged stools, the younger (some five or six years old) in learning her letters out of a penny primer, the elder (eight or nine perhaps) in teaching her and sewing with great assiduity. Both hail Mr. George with acclamations as an old friend and after some kissing and romping plant their stools beside him.

"And how's young Woolwich?" says Mr. George.

"Ah! There now!" cries Mrs. Bagnet, turning about from her saucepans (for she is cooking dinner) with a bright flush on her face. "Would you believe it? Got an engagement at the theayter, with his father, to play the fife in a military piece."

"Well done, my godson!" cries Mr. George, slapping his thigh.

"I believe you!" says Mrs. Bagnet. "He's a Briton. That's what Woolwich is. A Briton!"

"And Mat blows away at his bassoon, and you're respectable civilians one and all," says Mr. George. "Family people. Children growing up.

Mat's old mother in Scotland, and your old father somewhere else, corresponded with, and helped a little, and—well, well! To be sure, I don't know why I shouldn't be wished a hundred mile away, for I have not much to do with all this!"

Mr. George is becoming thoughtful, sitting before the fire in the whitewashed room, which has a sanded floor and a barrack smell and contains nothing superfluous and has not a visible speck of dirt or dust in it, from the faces of Quebec and Malta to the bright tin pots and pannikins upon the dresser shelves—Mr. George is becoming thoughtful, sitting here while Mrs. Bagnet is busy, when Mr. Bagnet and young Woolwich opportunely come home. Mr. Bagnet is an ex-artilleryman, tall and upright, with shaggy eyebrows and whiskers like the fibres of a coco-nut, not a hair upon his head, and a torrid complexion. His voice, short, deep, and resonant, is not at all unlike the tones of the instrument to which he is devoted. Indeed there may be generally observed in him an unbending, unyielding, brass-bound air, as if he were himself the bassoon of the human orchestra. Young Woolwich is the type and model of a young drummer.

Both father and son salute the trooper heartily. He saying, in due season, that he has come to advise with Mr. Bagnet, Mr. Bagnet hospitably declares that he will hear of no business until after dinner and that his friend shall not partake of his counsel without first partaking of boiled pork and greens. The trooper yielding to this invitation, he and Mr. Bagnet, not to embarrass the domestic preparations, go forth to take a turn up and down the little street, which they promenade with measured tread and folded arms, as if it were a rampart.

"George," says Mr. Bagnet. "You know me. It's my old girl that advises. She has the head. But I never own to it before her. Discipline must be maintained. Wait till the greens is off her mind. Then we'll consult. Whatever the old girl says, do—do it!"

"I intend to, Mat," replies the other. "I would sooner take her opinion than that of a college."

"College," returns Mr. Bagnet in short sentences, bassoon-like. "What college could you leave—in another quarter of the world—with nothing but a grey cloak and an umbrella—to make its way home to Europe? The old girl would do it to-morrow. Did it once!"

"You are right," says Mr. George.

"What college," pursues Bagnet, "could you set up in life—with two penn'orth of white lime—a penn'orth of fuller's earth—a ha'porth of sand—and the rest of the change out of sixpence in money? That's what the old girl started on. In the present business."

"I am rejoiced to hear it's thriving, Mat."

"The old girl," says Mr. Bagnet, acquiescing, "saves. Has a stocking somewhere. With money in it. I never saw it. But I know she's got it. Wait till the greens is off her mind. Then she'll set you up."

"She is a treasure!" exclaims Mr. George.

"She's more. But I never own to it before her. Discipline must be maintained. It was the old girl that brought out my musical abilities. I should have been in the artillery now but for the old girl. Six years I hammered at the fiddle. Ten at the flute. The old girl said it wouldn't do; intention good, but want of flexibility; try the bassoon. The old girl borrowed a bassoon from the bandmaster of the Rifle Regiment. I practised in the trenches. Got on, got another, get a living by it!"

George remarks that she looks as fresh as a rose and as sound as an apple.

"The old girl," says Mr. Bagnet in reply, "is a thoroughly fine woman. Consequently she is like a thoroughly fine day. Gets finer as she gets on. I never saw the old girl's equal. But I never own to it before her. Discipline must be maintained!"

Proceeding to converse on indifferent matters, they walk up and down the little street, keeping step and time, until summoned by Quebec and Malta to do justice to the pork and greens, over which Mrs. Bagnet, like a military chaplain, says a short grace. In the distribution of these comestibles, as in every other household duty, Mrs. Bagnet developes an exact system, sitting with every dish before her, allotting to every portion of pork its own portion of pot-liquor, greens, potatoes, and even mustard, and serving it out complete. Having likewise served out the beer from a can and thus supplied the mess with all things necessary, Mrs. Bagnet proceeds to satisfy her own hunger, which is in a healthy state. The kit of the mess, if the table furniture may be so denominated, is chiefly composed of utensils of horn and tin that have done duty in several parts of the world. Young Woolwich's knife, in particular, which is of the oyster kind, with the additional feature of a strong shutting-up movement which frequently balks the appetite of that young musician, is mentioned as having gone in various hands the complete round of foreign service.

The dinner done, Mrs. Bagnet, assisted by the younger branches (who polish their own cups and platters, knives and forks), makes all the dinner garniture shine as brightly as before and puts it all away, first sweeping the hearth, to the end that Mr. Bagnet and the visitor may not be retarded in the smoking of their pipes. These household cares involve much pattening and counter-pattening in the backyard and considerable use of a pail, which is finally so happy as to assist in the ablutions of Mrs. Bagnet herself. That old girl reappearing by and by, quite fresh, and sitting down to her needlework, then and only then—the greens being only then to be considered as entirely off her mind—Mr. Bagnet requests the trooper to state his case.

This Mr. George does with great discretion, appearing to address himself to Mr. Bagnet, but having an eye solely on the old girl all the time, as Bagnet has himself. She, equally discreet, busies herself with her needlework. The case fully stated, Mr. Bagnet resorts to his standard artifice for the maintenance of discipline.

"That's the whole of it, is it, George?" says he.

"That's the whole of it."

"You act according to my opinion?"

"I shall be guided," replies George, "entirely by it."

"Old girl," says Mr. Bagnet, "give him my opinion. You know it. Tell him what it is."

It is that he cannot have too little to do with people who are too deep for him and cannot be too careful of interference with matters he does not understand—that the plain rule is to do nothing in the dark, to be a party to nothing underhanded or mysterious, and never to put his foot where he cannot see the ground. This, in effect, is Mr. Bagnet's opinion, as delivered through the old girl, and it so relieves Mr. George's mind by confirming his own opinion and banishing his doubts that he composes himself to smoke another pipe on that exceptional occasion and to have a talk over old times with the whole Bagnet family, according to their various ranges of experience.

Through these means it comes to pass that Mr. George does not again rise to his full height in that parlour until the time is drawing on when the bassoon and fife are expected by a British public at the theatre; and as it takes time even then for Mr. George, in his domestic character of Bluffy, to take leave of Quebec and Malta and insinuate a sponsorial shilling into the pocket of his godson with felicitations on his success in life, it is dark when Mr. George again turns his face towards Lincoln's Inn Fields.

"A family home," he ruminates as he marches along, "however small it is, makes a man like me look lonely. But it's well I never made that evolution of matrimony. I shouldn't have been fit for it. I am such a vagabond still, even at my present time of life, that I couldn't hold to the gallery a month together if it was a regular pursuit or if I didn't camp there, gipsy fashion. Come! I disgrace nobody and cumber nobody; that's something. I have not done that for many a long year!"

So he whistles it off and marches on.

Arrived in Lincoln's Inn Fields and mounting Mr. Tulkinghorn's stair, he finds the outer door closed and the chambers shut, but the trooper not knowing much about outer doors, and the staircase being dark besides, he is yet fumbling and groping about, hoping to discover a bell-handle or to open the door for himself, when Mr. Tulkinghorn comes up the stairs (quietly, of course) and angrily asks, "Who is that? What are you doing there?"

"I ask your pardon, sir. It's George. The sergeant."

"And couldn't George, the sergeant, see that my door was locked?"

"Why, no, sir, I couldn't. At any rate, I didn't," says the trooper, rather nettled.

"Have you changed your mind? Or are you in the same mind?" Mr. Tulkinghorn demands. But he knows well enough at a glance.

"In the same mind, sir."

"I thought so. That's sufficient. You can go. So you are the man," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, opening his door with the key, "in whose hiding-place Mr. Gridley was found?"

"Yes, I AM the man," says the trooper, stopping two or three stairs down. "What then, sir?"

"What then? I don't like your associates. You should not have seen the inside of my door this morning if I had thought of your being that man. Gridley? A threatening, murderous, dangerous fellow."

With these words, spoken in an unusually high tone for him, the lawyer goes into his rooms and shuts the door with a thundering noise.

Mr. George takes his dismissal in great dudgeon, the greater because a clerk coming up the stairs has heard the last words of all and evidently applies them to him. "A pretty character to bear," the trooper growls with a hasty oath as he strides downstairs. "A threatening, murderous, dangerous fellow!" And looking up, he sees the clerk looking down at him and marking him as he passes a lamp. This so intensifies his dudgeon that for five minutes he is in an ill humour. But he whistles that off like the rest of it and marches home to the shooting gallery.

CHAPTER XXVIII. The Ironmaster

Sir Leicester Dedlock has got the better, for the time being, of the family gout and is once more, in a literal no less than in a figurative point of view, upon his legs. He is at his place in Lincolnshire; but the waters are out again on the low-lying grounds, and the cold and damp steal into Chesney Wold, though well defended, and eke into Sir Leicester's bones. The blazing fires of faggot and coal—Dedlock timber and antediluvian forest—that blaze upon the broad wide hearths and wink in the twilight on the frowning woods, sullen to see how trees are sacrificed, do not exclude the enemy. The hot-water pipes that trail themselves all over the house, the cushioned doors and windows, and the screens and curtains fail to supply the fires' deficiencies and to satisfy Sir Leicester's need. Hence the fashionable intelligence proclaims one morning to the listening earth that Lady Dedlock is expected shortly to return to town for a few weeks.

It is a melancholy truth that even great men have their poor relations. Indeed great men have often more than their fair share of poor relations, inasmuch as very red blood of the superior quality, like inferior blood unlawfully shed, WILL cry aloud and WILL be heard. Sir Leicester's cousins, in the remotest degree, are so many murders in the respect that they "will out." Among whom there are cousins who are so poor that one might almost dare to think it would have been the happier for them never to have been plated links upon the Dedlock chain of gold, but to have been made of common iron at first and done base service.

Service, however (with a few limited reservations, genteel but not profitable), they may not do, being of the Dedlock dignity. So they visit their richer cousins, and get into debt when they can, and live but shabbily when they can't, and find—the women no husbands, and the men no wives—and ride in borrowed carriages, and sit at feasts that are never of their own making, and so go through high life. The rich family sum has been divided by so many figures, and they are the something over that nobody knows what to do with.

Everybody on Sir Leicester Dedlock's side of the question and of his way of thinking would appear to be his cousin more or less. From my Lord Boodle, through the Duke of Foodle, down to Noodle, Sir Leicester, like a glorious spider, stretches his threads of relationship. But while he is stately in the cousinship of the Everybodys, he is a kind and generous man, according to his dignified way, in the cousinship of the Nobodys; and at the present time, in despite of the damp, he stays out the visit of several such cousins at Chesney Wold with the constancy of a martyr.

Of these, foremost in the front rank stands Volumnia Dedlock, a young lady (of sixty) who is doubly highly related, having the honour to be a poor relation, by the mother's side, to another great family. Miss Volumnia, displaying in early life a pretty talent for cutting ornaments out of coloured paper, and also for singing to the guitar in the Spanish tongue, and propounding French conundrums in country houses, passed the twenty years of her existence between twenty and forty in a sufficiently agreeable manner. Lapsing then out of date and being considered to bore mankind by her vocal performances in the Spanish language, she retired to Bath, where she lives slenderly on an annual present from Sir Leicester and whence she makes occasional resurrections in the country houses of her cousins. She has an extensive acquaintance at Bath among appalling old gentlemen with thin legs and nankeen trousers, and is of high standing in that dreary city. But she is a little dreaded elsewhere in consequence of an indiscreet profusion in the article of rouge and persistency in an obsolete pearl necklace like a rosary of little bird's-eggs.

In any country in a wholesome state, Volumnia would be a clear case for the pension list. Efforts have been made to get her on it, and when William Buffy came in, it was fully expected that her name would be put down for a couple of hundred a year. But William Buffy somehow discovered, contrary to all expectation, that these were not the times when it could be done, and this was the first clear indication Sir Leicester Dedlock had conveyed to him that the country was going to pieces.

There is likewise the Honourable Bob Stables, who can make warm mashes with the skill of a veterinary surgeon and is a better shot than most gamekeepers. He has been for some time particularly desirous to serve his country in a post of good emoluments, unaccompanied by any trouble or responsibility. In a well-regulated body politic this natural desire on the part of a spirited young gentleman so highly connected would be speedily recognized, but somehow William Buffy found when he came in that these were not times in which he could manage that little matter either, and this was the second indication Sir Leicester Dedlock had conveyed to him that the country was going to pieces.

The rest of the cousins are ladies and gentlemen of various ages and capacities, the major part amiable and sensible and likely to have done well enough in life if they could have overcome their cousinship; as it is, they are almost all a little worsted by it, and lounge in purposeless and listless paths, and seem to be quite as much at a loss how to dispose of themselves as anybody else can be how to dispose of them.

In this society, and where not, my Lady Dedlock reigns supreme. Beautiful, elegant, accomplished, and powerful in her little world (for the world of fashion does not stretch ALL the way from pole to pole), her influence in Sir Leicester's house, however haughty and indifferent her manner, is greatly to improve it and refine it. The cousins, even those older cousins who were paralysed when Sir Leicester married her, do her feudal homage; and the Honourable Bob Stables daily repeats to some chosen person between breakfast and lunch his favourite original remark, that she is the best-groomed woman in the whole stud.

Such the guests in the long drawing-room at Chesney Wold this dismal night when the step on the Ghost's Walk (inaudible here, however) might be the step of a deceased cousin shut out in the cold. It is near bed-time. Bedroom fires blaze brightly all over the house, raising ghosts of grim furniture on wall and ceiling. Bedroom candlesticks bristle on the distant table by the door, and cousins yawn on ottomans. Cousins at the piano, cousins at the soda-water tray, cousins rising from the card-table, cousins gathered round the fire. Standing on one side of his own peculiar fire (for there are two), Sir Leicester. On the opposite side of the broad hearth, my Lady at her table. Volumnia, as one of the more privileged cousins, in a luxurious chair between them. Sir Leicester glancing, with magnificent displeasure, at the rouge and the pearl necklace.

"I occasionally meet on my staircase here," drawls Volumnia, whose thoughts perhaps are already hopping up it to bed, after a long evening of very desultory talk, "one of the prettiest girls, I think, that I ever saw in my life."

"A PROTEGEE of my Lady's," observes Sir Leicester.

"I thought so. I felt sure that some uncommon eye must have picked that girl out. She really is a marvel. A dolly sort of beauty perhaps," says Miss Volumnia, reserving her own sort, "but in its way, perfect; such bloom I never saw!"

Sir Leicester, with his magnificent glance of displeasure at the rouge, appears to say so too.

"Indeed," remarks my Lady languidly, "if there is any uncommon eye in the case, it is Mrs. Rouncewell's, and not mine. Rosa is her discovery."

"Your maid, I suppose?"

"No. My anything; pet—secretary—messenger—I don't know what."

"You like to have her about you, as you would like to have a flower, or a bird, or a picture, or a poodle—no, not a poodle, though—or anything else that was equally pretty?" says Volumnia, sympathizing. "Yes, how charming now! And how well that delightful old soul Mrs. Rouncewell is looking. She must be an immense age, and yet she is as active and handsome! She is the dearest friend I have, positively!"

Sir Leicester feels it to be right and fitting that the housekeeper of Chesney Wold should be a remarkable person. Apart from that, he has a real regard for Mrs. Rouncewell and likes to hear her praised. So he says, "You are right, Volumnia," which Volumnia is extremely glad to hear.

"She has no daughter of her own, has she?"

"Mrs. Rouncewell? No, Volumnia. She has a son. Indeed, she had two."

My Lady, whose chronic malady of boredom has been sadly aggravated by Volumnia this evening, glances wearily towards the candlesticks and heaves a noiseless sigh.

"And it is a remarkable example of the confusion into which the present age has fallen; of the obliteration of landmarks, the opening of floodgates, and the uprooting of distinctions," says Sir Leicester with stately gloom, "that I have been informed by Mr. Tulkinghorn that Mrs. Rouncewell's son has been invited to go into Parliament."

Miss Volumnia utters a little sharp scream.

"Yes, indeed," repeats Sir Leicester. "Into Parliament."

"I never heard of such a thing! Good gracious, what is the man?" exclaims Volumnia.

"He is called, I believe—an—ironmaster." Sir Leicester says it slowly and with gravity and doubt, as not being sure but that he is called a lead-mistress or that the right word may be some other word expressive of some other relationship to some other metal.

Volumnia utters another little scream.

"He has declined the proposal, if my information from Mr. Tulkinghorn be correct, as I have no doubt it is. Mr. Tulkinghorn being always correct and exact; still that does not," says Sir Leicester, "that does not lessen the anomaly, which is fraught with strange considerations—startling considerations, as it appears to me."

Miss Volumnia rising with a look candlestick-wards, Sir Leicester politely performs the grand tour of the drawing-room, brings one, and lights it at my Lady's shaded lamp.

"I must beg you, my Lady," he says while doing so, "to remain a few moments, for this individual of whom I speak arrived this evening shortly before dinner and requested in a very becoming note"—Sir Leicester, with his habitual regard to truth, dwells upon it—"I am bound to say, in a very becoming and well-expressed note, the favour of a short interview with yourself and MYself on the subject of this young girl. As it appeared that he wished to depart to-night, I replied that we would see him before retiring."

Miss Volumnia with a third little scream takes flight, wishing her hosts—O Lud!—well rid of the—what is it?—ironmaster!

The other cousins soon disperse, to the last cousin there. Sir Leicester rings the bell, "Make my compliments to Mr. Rouncewell, in the housekeeper's apartments, and say I can receive him now."

My Lady, who has heard all this with slight attention outwardly, looks towards Mr. Rouncewell as he comes in. He is a little over fifty perhaps, of a good figure, like his mother, and has a clear voice, a broad forehead from which his dark hair has retired, and a shrewd though open face. He is a responsible-looking gentleman dressed in black, portly enough, but strong and active. Has a perfectly natural and easy air and is not in the least embarrassed by the great presence into which he comes.

"Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock, as I have already apologized for intruding on you, I cannot do better than be very brief. I thank you, Sir Leicester."

The head of the Dedlocks has motioned towards a sofa between himself and my Lady. Mr. Rouncewell quietly takes his seat there.

"In these busy times, when so many great undertakings are in progress, people like myself have so many workmen in so many places that we are always on the flight."

Sir Leicester is content enough that the ironmaster should feel that there is no hurry there; there, in that ancient house, rooted in that quiet park, where the ivy and the moss have had time to mature, and the gnarled and warted elms and the umbrageous oaks stand deep in the fern and leaves of a hundred years; and where the sun-dial on the terrace has dumbly recorded for centuries that time which was as much the property of every Dedlock—while he lasted—as the house and lands. Sir Leicester sits down in an easy-chair, opposing his repose and that of Chesney Wold to the restless flights of ironmasters.

"Lady Dedlock has been so kind," proceeds Mr. Rouncewell with a respectful glance and a bow that way, "as to place near her a young beauty of the name of Rosa. Now, my son has fallen in love with Rosa and has asked my consent to his proposing marriage to her and to their becoming engaged if she will take him—which I suppose she will. I have never seen Rosa until to-day, but I have some confidence in my son's good sense—even in love. I find her what he represents her, to the best of my judgment; and my mother speaks of her with great commendation."

"She in all respects deserves it," says my Lady.

"I am happy, Lady Dedlock, that you say so, and I need not comment on the value to me of your kind opinion of her."

"That," observes Sir Leicester with unspeakable grandeur, for he thinks the ironmaster a little too glib, "must be quite unnecessary."

"Quite unnecessary, Sir Leicester. Now, my son is a very young man, and Rosa is a very young woman. As I made my way, so my son must make his; and his being married at present is out of the question. But supposing I gave my consent to his engaging himself to this pretty girl, if this pretty girl will engage herself to him, I think it a piece of candour to say at once—I am sure, Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock, you will understand and excuse me—I should make it a condition that she did not remain at Chesney Wold. Therefore, before communicating further with my son, I take the liberty of saying that if her removal would be in any way inconvenient or objectionable, I will hold the matter over with him for any reasonable time and leave it precisely where it is."

Not remain at Chesney Wold! Make it a condition! All Sir Leicester's old misgivings relative to Wat Tyler and the people in the iron districts who do nothing but turn out by torchlight come in a shower upon his head, the fine grey hair of which, as well as of his whiskers, actually stirs with indignation.

"Am I to understand, sir," says Sir Leicester, "and is my Lady to understand"—he brings her in thus specially, first as a point of gallantry, and next as a point of prudence, having great reliance on her sense—"am I to understand, Mr. Rouncewell, and is my Lady to understand, sir, that you consider this young woman too good for Chesney Wold or likely to be injured by remaining here?"

"Certainly not, Sir Leicester,"

"I am glad to hear it." Sir Leicester very lofty indeed.

"Pray, Mr. Rouncewell," says my Lady, warning Sir Leicester off with the slightest gesture of her pretty hand, as if he were a fly, "explain to me what you mean."

"Willingly, Lady Dedlock. There is nothing I could desire more."

Addressing her composed face, whose intelligence, however, is too quick and active to be concealed by any studied impassiveness, however habitual, to the strong Saxon face of the visitor, a picture of resolution and perseverance, my Lady listens with attention, occasionally slightly bending her head.

"I am the son of your housekeeper, Lady Dedlock, and passed my childhood about this house. My mother has lived here half a century and will die here I have no doubt. She is one of those examples—perhaps as good a one as there is—of love, and attachment, and fidelity in such a nation, which England may well be proud of, but of which no order can appropriate the whole pride or the whole merit, because such an instance bespeaks high worth on two sides—on the great side assuredly, on the small one no less assuredly."

Sir Leicester snorts a little to hear the law laid down in this way, but in his honour and his love of truth, he freely, though silently, admits the justice of the ironmaster's proposition.

"Pardon me for saying what is so obvious, but I wouldn't have it hastily supposed," with the least turn of his eyes towards Sir Leicester, "that I am ashamed of my mother's position here, or wanting in all just respect for Chesney Wold and the family. I certainly may have desired—I certainly have desired, Lady Dedlock—that my mother should retire after so many years and end her days with me. But as I have found that to sever this strong bond would be to break her heart, I have long abandoned that idea."

Sir Leicester very magnificent again at the notion of Mrs. Rouncewell being spirited off from her natural home to end her days with an ironmaster.

"I have been," proceeds the visitor in a modest, clear way, "an apprentice and a workman. I have lived on workman's wages, years and years, and beyond a certain point have had to educate myself. My wife was a foreman's daughter, and plainly brought up. We have three daughters besides this son of whom I have spoken, and being fortunately able to give them greater advantages than we have had ourselves, we have educated them well, very well. It has been one of our great cares and pleasures to make them worthy of any station."

A little boastfulness in his fatherly tone here, as if he added in his heart, "even of the Chesney Wold station." Not a little more magnificence, therefore, on the part of Sir Leicester.

"All this is so frequent, Lady Dedlock, where I live, and among the class to which I belong, that what would be generally called unequal marriages are not of such rare occurrence with us as elsewhere. A son will sometimes make it known to his father that he has fallen in love, say, with a young woman in the factory. The father, who once worked in a factory himself, will be a little disappointed at first very possibly. It may be that he had other views for his son. However, the chances are that having ascertained the young woman to be of unblemished character, he will say to his son, 'I must be quite sure you are in earnest here. This is a serious matter for both of you. Therefore I shall have this girl educated for two years,' or it may be, 'I shall place this girl at the same school with your sisters for such a time, during which you will give me your word and honour to see her only so often. If at the expiration of that time, when she has so far profited by her advantages as that you may be upon a fair equality, you are both in the same mind, I will do my part to make you happy.' I know of several cases such as I describe, my Lady, and I think they indicate to me my own course now."

Sir Leicester's magnificence explodes. Calmly, but terribly.

"Mr. Rouncewell," says Sir Leicester with his right hand in the breast of his blue coat, the attitude of state in which he is painted in the gallery, "do you draw a parallel between Chesney Wold and a—" Here he resists a disposition to choke, "a factory?"

"I need not reply, Sir Leicester, that the two places are very different; but for the purposes of this case, I think a parallel may be justly drawn between them."

Sir Leicester directs his majestic glance down one side of the long drawing-room and up the other before he can believe that he is awake.

"Are you aware, sir, that this young woman whom my Lady—my Lady—has placed near her person was brought up at the village school outside the gates?"

"Sir Leicester, I am quite aware of it. A very good school it is, and handsomely supported by this family."

"Then, Mr. Rouncewell," returns Sir Leicester, "the application of what you have said is, to me, incomprehensible."

"Will it be more comprehensible, Sir Leicester, if I say," the ironmaster is reddening a little, "that I do not regard the village school as teaching everything desirable to be known by my son's wife?"

From the village school of Chesney Wold, intact as it is this minute, to the whole framework of society; from the whole framework of society, to the aforesaid framework receiving tremendous cracks in consequence of people (iron-masters, lead-mistresses, and what not) not minding their catechism, and getting out of the station unto which they are called—necessarily and for ever, according to Sir Leicester's rapid logic, the first station in which they happen to find themselves; and from that, to their educating other people out of THEIR stations, and so obliterating the landmarks, and opening the floodgates, and all the rest of it; this is the swift progress of the Dedlock mind.

"My Lady, I beg your pardon. Permit me, for one moment!" She has given a faint indication of intending to speak. "Mr. Rouncewell, our views of duty, and our views of station, and our views of education, and our views of—in short, ALL our views—are so diametrically opposed, that to prolong this discussion must be repellent to your feelings and repellent to my own. This young woman is honoured with my Lady's notice and favour. If she wishes to withdraw herself from that notice and favour or if she chooses to place herself under the influence of any one who may in his peculiar opinions—you will allow me to say, in his peculiar opinions, though I readily admit that he is not accountable for them to me—who may, in his peculiar opinions, withdraw her from that notice and favour, she is at any time at liberty to do so. We are obliged to you for the plainness with which you have spoken. It will have no effect of itself, one way or other, on the young woman's position here. Beyond this, we can make no terms; and here we beg—if you will be so good—to leave the subject."

The visitor pauses a moment to give my Lady an opportunity, but she says nothing. He then rises and replies, "Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock, allow me to thank you for your attention and only to observe that I shall very seriously recommend my son to conquer his present inclinations. Good night!"

"Mr. Rouncewell," says Sir Leicester with all the nature of a gentleman shining in him, "it is late, and the roads are dark. I hope your time is not so precious but that you will allow my Lady and myself to offer you the hospitality of Chesney Wold, for to-night at least."

"I hope so," adds my Lady.

"I am much obliged to you, but I have to travel all night in order to reach a distant part of the country punctually at an appointed time in the morning."

Therewith the ironmaster takes his departure, Sir Leicester ringing the bell and my Lady rising as he leaves the room.

When my Lady goes to her boudoir, she sits down thoughtfully by the fire, and inattentive to the Ghost's Walk, looks at Rosa, writing in an inner room. Presently my Lady calls her.

"Come to me, child. Tell me the truth. Are you in love?"

"Oh! My Lady!"

My Lady, looking at the downcast and blushing face, says smiling, "Who is it? Is it Mrs. Rouncewell's grandson?"

"Yes, if you please, my Lady. But I don't know that I am in love with him—yet."

"Yet, you silly little thing! Do you know that he loves YOU, yet?"

"I think he likes me a little, my Lady." And Rosa bursts into tears.

Is this Lady Dedlock standing beside the village beauty, smoothing her dark hair with that motherly touch, and watching her with eyes so full of musing interest? Aye, indeed it is!

"Listen to me, child. You are young and true, and I believe you are attached to me."

"Indeed I am, my Lady. Indeed there is nothing in the world I wouldn't do to show how much."

"And I don't think you would wish to leave me just yet, Rosa, even for a lover?"

"No, my Lady! Oh, no!" Rosa looks up for the first time, quite frightened at the thought.

"Confide in me, my child. Don't fear me. I wish you to be happy, and will make you so—if I can make anybody happy on this earth."

Rosa, with fresh tears, kneels at her feet and kisses her hand. My Lady takes the hand with which she has caught it, and standing with her eyes fixed on the fire, puts it about and about between her own two hands, and gradually lets it fall. Seeing her so absorbed, Rosa softly withdraws; but still my Lady's eyes are on the fire.

In search of what? Of any hand that is no more, of any hand that never was, of any touch that might have magically changed her life? Or does she listen to the Ghost's Walk and think what step does it most resemble? A man's? A woman's? The pattering of a little child's feet, ever coming on—on—on? Some melancholy influence is upon her, or why should so proud a lady close the doors and sit alone upon the hearth so desolate?

Volumnia is away next day, and all the cousins are scattered before dinner. Not a cousin of the batch but is amazed to hear from Sir Leicester at breakfast-time of the obliteration of landmarks, and opening of floodgates, and cracking of the framework of society, manifested through Mrs. Rouncewell's son. Not a cousin of the batch but is really indignant, and connects it with the feebleness of William Buffy when in office, and really does feel deprived of a stake in the country—or the pension list—or something—by fraud and wrong. As to Volumnia, she is handed down the great staircase by Sir Leicester, as eloquent upon the theme as if there were a general rising in the north of England to obtain her rouge-pot and pearl necklace. And thus, with a clatter of maids and valets—for it is one appurtenance of their cousinship that however difficult they may find it to keep themselves, they MUST keep maids and valets—the cousins disperse to the four winds of heaven; and the one wintry wind that blows to-day shakes a shower from the trees near the deserted house, as if all the cousins had been changed into leaves.

CHAPTER XXIX. The Young Man

Chesney Wold is shut up, carpets are rolled into great scrolls in corners of comfortless rooms, bright damask does penance in brown holland, carving and gilding puts on mortification, and the Dedlock ancestors retire from the light of day again. Around and around the house the leaves fall thick, but never fast, for they come circling down with a dead lightness that is sombre and slow. Let the gardener sweep and sweep the turf as he will, and press the leaves into full barrows, and wheel them off, still they lie ankle-deep. Howls the shrill wind round Chesney Wold; the sharp rain beats, the windows rattle, and the chimneys growl. Mists hide in the avenues, veil the points of view, and move in funeral-wise across the rising grounds. On all the house there is a cold, blank smell like the smell of a little church, though something dryer, suggesting that the dead and buried Dedlocks walk there in the long nights and leave the flavour of their graves behind them.

But the house in town, which is rarely in the same mind as Chesney Wold at the same time, seldom rejoicing when it rejoices or mourning when it mourns, expecting when a Dedlock dies—the house in town shines out awakened. As warm and bright as so much state may be, as delicately redolent of pleasant scents that bear no trace of winter as hothouse flowers can make it, soft and hushed so that the ticking of the clocks and the crisp burning of the fires alone disturb the stillness in the rooms, it seems to wrap those chilled bones of Sir Leicester's in rainbow-coloured wool. And Sir Leicester is glad to repose in dignified contentment before the great fire in the library, condescendingly perusing the backs of his books or honouring the fine arts with a glance of approbation. For he has his pictures, ancient and modern. Some of the Fancy Ball School in which art occasionally condescends to become a master, which would be best catalogued like the miscellaneous articles in a sale. As "Three high-backed chairs, a table and cover, long-necked bottle (containing wine), one flask, one Spanish female's costume, three-quarter face portrait of Miss Jogg the model, and a suit of armour containing Don Quixote." Or "One stone terrace (cracked), one gondola in distance, one Venetian senator's dress complete, richly embroidered white satin costume with profile portrait of Miss Jogg the model, one Scimitar superbly mounted in gold with jewelled handle, elaborate Moorish dress (very rare), and Othello."

Mr. Tulkinghorn comes and goes pretty often, there being estate business to do, leases to be renewed, and so on. He sees my Lady pretty often, too; and he and she are as composed, and as indifferent, and take as little heed of one another, as ever. Yet it may be that my Lady fears this Mr. Tulkinghorn and that he knows it. It may be that he pursues her doggedly and steadily, with no touch of compunction, remorse, or pity. It may be that her beauty and all the state and brilliancy surrounding her only gives him the greater zest for what he is set upon and makes him the more inflexible in it. Whether he be cold and cruel, whether immovable in what he has made his duty, whether absorbed in love of power, whether determined to have nothing hidden from him in ground where he has burrowed among secrets all his life, whether he in his heart despises the splendour of which he is a distant beam, whether he is always treasuring up slights and offences in the affability of his gorgeous clients—whether he be any of this, or all of this, it may be that my Lady had better have five thousand pairs of fashionable eyes upon her, in distrustful vigilance, than the two eyes of this rusty lawyer with his wisp of neckcloth and his dull black breeches tied with ribbons at the knees.

Sir Leicester sits in my Lady's room—that room in which Mr. Tulkinghorn read the affidavit in Jarndyce and Jarndyce—particularly complacent. My Lady, as on that day, sits before the fire with her screen in her hand. Sir Leicester is particularly complacent because he has found in his newspaper some congenial remarks bearing directly on the floodgates and the framework of society. They apply so happily to the late case that Sir Leicester has come from the library to my Lady's room expressly to read them aloud. "The man who wrote this article," he observes by way of preface, nodding at the fire as if he were nodding down at the man from a mount, "has a well-balanced mind."

The man's mind is not so well balanced but that he bores my Lady, who, after a languid effort to listen, or rather a languid resignation of herself to a show of listening, becomes distraught and falls into a contemplation of the fire as if it were her fire at Chesney Wold, and she had never left it. Sir Leicester, quite unconscious, reads on through his double eye-glass, occasionally stopping to remove his glass and express approval, as "Very true indeed," "Very properly put," "I have frequently made the same remark myself," invariably losing his place after each observation, and going up and down the column to find it again.

Sir Leicester is reading with infinite gravity and state when the door opens, and the Mercury in powder makes this strange announcement, "The young man, my Lady, of the name of Guppy."

Sir Leicester pauses, stares, repeats in a killing voice, "The young man of the name of Guppy?"

Looking round, he beholds the young man of the name of Guppy, much discomfited and not presenting a very impressive letter of introduction in his manner and appearance.

"Pray," says Sir Leicester to Mercury, "what do you mean by announcing with this abruptness a young man of the name of Guppy?"

"I beg your pardon, Sir Leicester, but my Lady said she would see the young man whenever he called. I was not aware that you were here, Sir Leicester."

With this apology, Mercury directs a scornful and indignant look at the young man of the name of Guppy which plainly says, "What do you come calling here for and getting ME into a row?"

"It's quite right. I gave him those directions," says my Lady. "Let the young man wait."

"By no means, my Lady. Since he has your orders to come, I will not interrupt you." Sir Leicester in his gallantry retires, rather declining to accept a bow from the young man as he goes out and majestically supposing him to be some shoemaker of intrusive appearance.

Lady Dedlock looks imperiously at her visitor when the servant has left the room, casting her eyes over him from head to foot. She suffers him to stand by the door and asks him what he wants.

"That your ladyship would have the kindness to oblige me with a little conversation," returns Mr. Guppy, embarrassed.

"You are, of course, the person who has written me so many letters?"

"Several, your ladyship. Several before your ladyship condescended to favour me with an answer."

"And could you not take the same means of rendering a Conversation unnecessary? Can you not still?"

Mr. Guppy screws his mouth into a silent "No!" and shakes his head.

"You have been strangely importunate. If it should appear, after all, that what you have to say does not concern me—and I don't know how it can, and don't expect that it will—you will allow me to cut you short with but little ceremony. Say what you have to say, if you please."

My Lady, with a careless toss of her screen, turns herself towards the fire again, sitting almost with her back to the young man of the name of Guppy.

"With your ladyship's permission, then," says the young man, "I will now enter on my business. Hem! I am, as I told your ladyship in my first letter, in the law. Being in the law, I have learnt the habit of not committing myself in writing, and therefore I did not mention to your ladyship the name of the firm with which I am connected and in which my standing—and I may add income—is tolerably good. I may now state to your ladyship, in confidence, that the name of that firm is Kenge and Carboy, of Lincoln's Inn, which may not be altogether unknown to your ladyship in connexion with the case in Chancery of Jarndyce and Jarndyce."

My Lady's figure begins to be expressive of some attention. She has ceased to toss the screen and holds it as if she were listening.

"Now, I may say to your ladyship at once," says Mr. Guppy, a little emboldened, "it is no matter arising out of Jarndyce and Jarndyce that made me so desirous to speak to your ladyship, which conduct I have no doubt did appear, and does appear, obtrusive—in fact, almost blackguardly."

After waiting for a moment to receive some assurance to the contrary, and not receiving any, Mr. Guppy proceeds, "If it had been Jarndyce and Jarndyce, I should have gone at once to your ladyship's solicitor, Mr. Tulkinghorn, of the Fields. I have the pleasure of being acquainted with Mr. Tulkinghorn—at least we move when we meet one another—and if it had been any business of that sort, I should have gone to him."

My Lady turns a little round and says, "You had better sit down."

"Thank your ladyship." Mr. Guppy does so. "Now, your ladyship"—Mr. Guppy refers to a little slip of paper on which he has made small notes of his line of argument and which seems to involve him in the densest obscurity whenever he looks at it—"I—Oh, yes!—I place myself entirely in your ladyship's hands. If your ladyship was to make any complaint to Kenge and Carboy or to Mr. Tulkinghorn of the present visit, I should be placed in a very disagreeable situation. That, I openly admit. Consequently, I rely upon your ladyship's honour."

My Lady, with a disdainful gesture of the hand that holds the screen, assures him of his being worth no complaint from her.

"Thank your ladyship," says Mr. Guppy; "quite satisfactory. Now—I—dash it!—The fact is that I put down a head or two here of the order of the points I thought of touching upon, and they're written short, and I can't quite make out what they mean. If your ladyship will excuse me taking it to the window half a moment, I—"

Mr. Guppy, going to the window, tumbles into a pair of love-birds, to whom he says in his confusion, "I beg your pardon, I am sure." This does not tend to the greater legibility of his notes. He murmurs, growing warm and red and holding the slip of paper now close to his eyes, now a long way off, "C.S. What's C.S. for? Oh! C.S.! Oh, I know! Yes, to be sure!" And comes back enlightened.

"I am not aware," says Mr. Guppy, standing midway between my Lady and his chair, "whether your ladyship ever happened to hear of, or to see, a young lady of the name of Miss Esther Summerson."

My Lady's eyes look at him full. "I saw a young lady of that name not long ago. This past autumn."

"Now, did it strike your ladyship that she was like anybody?" asks Mr. Guppy, crossing his arms, holding his head on one side, and scratching the corner of his mouth with his memoranda.

My Lady removes her eyes from him no more.

"No."

"Not like your ladyship's family?"

"No."

"I think your ladyship," says Mr. Guppy, "can hardly remember Miss Summerson's face?"

"I remember the young lady very well. What has this to do with me?"

"Your ladyship, I do assure you that having Miss Summerson's image imprinted on my 'eart—which I mention in confidence—I found, when I had the honour of going over your ladyship's mansion of Chesney Wold while on a short out in the county of Lincolnshire with a friend, such a resemblance between Miss Esther Summerson and your ladyship's own portrait that it completely knocked me over, so much so that I didn't at the moment even know what it WAS that knocked me over. And now I have the honour of beholding your ladyship near (I have often, since that, taken the liberty of looking at your ladyship in your carriage in the park, when I dare say you was not aware of me, but I never saw your ladyship so near), it's really more surprising than I thought it."

Young man of the name of Guppy! There have been times, when ladies lived in strongholds and had unscrupulous attendants within call, when that poor life of yours would NOT have been worth a minute's purchase, with those beautiful eyes looking at you as they look at this moment.

My Lady, slowly using her little hand-screen as a fan, asks him again what he supposes that his taste for likenesses has to do with her.

"Your ladyship," replies Mr. Guppy, again referring to his paper, "I am coming to that. Dash these notes! Oh! 'Mrs. Chadband.' Yes." Mr. Guppy draws his chair a little forward and seats himself again. My Lady reclines in her chair composedly, though with a trifle less of graceful ease than usual perhaps, and never falters in her steady gaze. "A—stop a minute, though!" Mr. Guppy refers again. "E.S. twice? Oh, yes! Yes, I see my way now, right on."

Rolling up the slip of paper as an instrument to point his speech with, Mr. Guppy proceeds.

"Your ladyship, there is a mystery about Miss Esther Summerson's birth and bringing up. I am informed of that fact because—which I mention in confidence—I know it in the way of my profession at Kenge and Carboy's. Now, as I have already mentioned to your ladyship, Miss Summerson's image is imprinted on my 'eart. If I could clear this mystery for her, or prove her to be well related, or find that having the honour to be a remote branch of your ladyship's family she had a right to be made a party in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, why, I might make a sort of a claim upon Miss Summerson to look with an eye of more dedicated favour on my proposals than she has exactly done as yet. In fact, as yet she hasn't favoured them at all."

A kind of angry smile just dawns upon my Lady's face.

"Now, it's a very singular circumstance, your ladyship," says Mr. Guppy, "though one of those circumstances that do fall in the way of us professional men—which I may call myself, for though not admitted, yet I have had a present of my articles made to me by Kenge and Carboy, on my mother's advancing from the principal of her little income the money for the stamp, which comes heavy—that I have encountered the person who lived as servant with the lady who brought Miss Summerson up before Mr. Jarndyce took charge of her. That lady was a Miss Barbary, your ladyship."

Is the dead colour on my Lady's face reflected from the screen which has a green silk ground and which she holds in her raised hand as if she had forgotten it, or is it a dreadful paleness that has fallen on her?

"Did your ladyship," says Mr. Guppy, "ever happen to hear of Miss Barbary?"

"I don't know. I think so. Yes."

"Was Miss Barbary at all connected with your ladyship's family?"

My Lady's lips move, but they utter nothing. She shakes her head.

"NOT connected?" says Mr. Guppy. "Oh! Not to your ladyship's knowledge, perhaps? Ah! But might be? Yes." After each of these interrogatories, she has inclined her head. "Very good! Now, this Miss Barbary was extremely close—seems to have been extraordinarily close for a female, females being generally (in common life at least) rather given to conversation—and my witness never had an idea whether she possessed a single relative. On one occasion, and only one, she seems to have been confidential to my witness on a single point, and she then told her that the little girl's real name was not Esther Summerson, but Esther Hawdon."

"My God!"

Mr. Guppy stares. Lady Dedlock sits before him looking him through, with the same dark shade upon her face, in the same attitude even to the holding of the screen, with her lips a little apart, her brow a little contracted, but for the moment dead. He sees her consciousness return, sees a tremor pass across her frame like a ripple over water, sees her lips shake, sees her compose them by a great effort, sees her force herself back to the knowledge of his presence and of what he has said. All this, so quickly, that her exclamation and her dead condition seem to have passed away like the features of those long-preserved dead bodies sometimes opened up in tombs, which, struck by the air like lightning, vanish in a breath.

"Your ladyship is acquainted with the name of Hawdon?"

"I have heard it before."

"Name of any collateral or remote branch of your ladyship's family?"

"No."

"Now, your ladyship," says Mr. Guppy, "I come to the last point of the case, so far as I have got it up. It's going on, and I shall gather it up closer and closer as it goes on. Your ladyship must know—if your ladyship don't happen, by any chance, to know already—that there was found dead at the house of a person named Krook, near Chancery Lane, some time ago, a law-writer in great distress. Upon which law-writer there was an inquest, and which law-writer was an anonymous character, his name being unknown. But, your ladyship, I have discovered very lately that that law-writer's name was Hawdon."

"And what is THAT to me?"

"Aye, your ladyship, that's the question! Now, your ladyship, a queer thing happened after that man's death. A lady started up, a disguised lady, your ladyship, who went to look at the scene of action and went to look at his grave. She hired a crossing-sweeping boy to show it her. If your ladyship would wish to have the boy produced in corroboration of this statement, I can lay my hand upon him at any time."

The wretched boy is nothing to my Lady, and she does NOT wish to have him produced.

"Oh, I assure your ladyship it's a very queer start indeed," says Mr. Guppy. "If you was to hear him tell about the rings that sparkled on her fingers when she took her glove off, you'd think it quite romantic."

There are diamonds glittering on the hand that holds the screen. My Lady trifles with the screen and makes them glitter more, again with that expression which in other times might have been so dangerous to the young man of the name of Guppy.

"It was supposed, your ladyship, that he left no rag or scrap behind him by which he could be possibly identified. But he did. He left a bundle of old letters."

The screen still goes, as before. All this time her eyes never once release him.

"They were taken and secreted. And to-morrow night, your ladyship, they will come into my possession."

"Still I ask you, what is this to me?"

"Your ladyship, I conclude with that." Mr. Guppy rises. "If you think there's enough in this chain of circumstances put together—in the undoubted strong likeness of this young lady to your ladyship, which is a positive fact for a jury; in her having been brought up by Miss Barbary; in Miss Barbary stating Miss Summerson's real name to be Hawdon; in your ladyship's knowing both these names VERY WELL; and in Hawdon's dying as he did—to give your ladyship a family interest in going further into the case, I will bring these papers here. I don't know what they are, except that they are old letters: I have never had them in my possession yet. I will bring those papers here as soon as I get them and go over them for the first time with your ladyship. I have told your ladyship my object. I have told your ladyship that I should be placed in a very disagreeable situation if any complaint was made, and all is in strict confidence."

Is this the full purpose of the young man of the name of Guppy, or has he any other? Do his words disclose the length, breadth, depth, of his object and suspicion in coming here; or if not, what do they hide? He is a match for my Lady there. She may look at him, but he can look at the table and keep that witness-box face of his from telling anything.

"You may bring the letters," says my Lady, "if you choose."

"Your ladyship is not very encouraging, upon my word and honour," says Mr. Guppy, a little injured.

"You may bring the letters," she repeats in the same tone, "if you—please."

"It shall he done. I wish your ladyship good day."

On a table near her is a rich bauble of a casket, barred and clasped like an old strong-chest. She, looking at him still, takes it to her and unlocks it.

"Oh! I assure your ladyship I am not actuated by any motives of that sort," says Mr. Guppy, "and I couldn't accept anything of the kind. I wish your ladyship good day, and am much obliged to you all the same."

So the young man makes his bow and goes downstairs, where the supercilious Mercury does not consider himself called upon to leave his Olympus by the hall-fire to let the young man out.

As Sir Leicester basks in his library and dozes over his newspaper, is there no influence in the house to startle him, not to say to make the very trees at Chesney Wold fling up their knotted arms, the very portraits frown, the very armour stir?

No. Words, sobs, and cries are but air, and air is so shut in and shut out throughout the house in town that sounds need be uttered trumpet-tongued indeed by my Lady in her chamber to carry any faint vibration to Sir Leicester's ears; and yet this cry is in the house, going upward from a wild figure on its knees.

"O my child, my child! Not dead in the first hours of her life, as my cruel sister told me, but sternly nurtured by her, after she had renounced me and my name! O my child, O my child!"

CHAPTER XXX. Esther's Narrative

Richard had been gone away some time when a visitor came to pass a few days with us. It was an elderly lady. It was Mrs. Woodcourt, who, having come from Wales to stay with Mrs. Bayham Badger and having written to my guardian, "by her son Allan's desire," to report that she had heard from him and that he was well "and sent his kind remembrances to all of us," had been invited by my guardian to make a visit to Bleak House. She stayed with us nearly three weeks. She took very kindly to me and was extremely confidential, so much so that sometimes she almost made me uncomfortable. I had no right, I knew very well, to be uncomfortable because she confided in me, and I felt it was unreasonable; still, with all I could do, I could not quite help it.

She was such a sharp little lady and used to sit with her hands folded in each other looking so very watchful while she talked to me that perhaps I found that rather irksome. Or perhaps it was her being so upright and trim, though I don't think it was that, because I thought that quaintly pleasant. Nor can it have been the general expression of her face, which was very sparkling and pretty for an old lady. I don't know what it was. Or at least if I do now, I thought I did not then. Or at least—but it don't matter.

Of a night when I was going upstairs to bed, she would invite me into her room, where she sat before the fire in a great chair; and, dear me, she would tell me about Morgan ap-Kerrig until I was quite low-spirited! Sometimes she recited a few verses from Crumlinwallinwer and the Mewlinnwillinwodd (if those are the right names, which I dare say they are not), and would become quite fiery with the sentiments they expressed. Though I never knew what they were (being in Welsh), further than that they were highly eulogistic of the lineage of Morgan ap-Kerrig.

"So, Miss Summerson," she would say to me with stately triumph, "this, you see, is the fortune inherited by my son. Wherever my son goes, he can claim kindred with Ap-Kerrig. He may not have money, but he always has what is much better—family, my dear."

I had my doubts of their caring so very much for Morgan ap-Kerrig in India and China, but of course I never expressed them. I used to say it was a great thing to be so highly connected.

"It IS, my dear, a great thing," Mrs. Woodcourt would reply. "It has its disadvantages; my son's choice of a wife, for instance, is limited by it, but the matrimonial choice of the royal family is limited in much the same manner."

Then she would pat me on the arm and smooth my dress, as much as to assure me that she had a good opinion of me, the distance between us notwithstanding.

"Poor Mr. Woodcourt, my dear," she would say, and always with some emotion, for with her lofty pedigree she had a very affectionate heart, "was descended from a great Highland family, the MacCoorts of MacCoort. He served his king and country as an officer in the Royal Highlanders, and he died on the field. My son is one of the last representatives of two old families. With the blessing of heaven he will set them up again and unite them with another old family."

It was in vain for me to try to change the subject, as I used to try, only for the sake of novelty or perhaps because—but I need not be so particular. Mrs. Woodcourt never would let me change it.

"My dear," she said one night, "you have so much sense and you look at the world in a quiet manner so superior to your time of life that it is a comfort to me to talk to you about these family matters of mine. You don't know much of my son, my dear; but you know enough of him, I dare say, to recollect him?"

"Yes, ma'am. I recollect him."

"Yes, my dear. Now, my dear, I think you are a judge of character, and I should like to have your opinion of him."

"Oh, Mrs. Woodcourt," said I, "that is so difficult!"

"Why is it so difficult, my dear?" she returned. "I don't see it myself."

"To give an opinion—"

"On so slight an acquaintance, my dear. THAT'S true."

I didn't mean that, because Mr. Woodcourt had been at our house a good deal altogether and had become quite intimate with my guardian. I said so, and added that he seemed to be very clever in his profession—we thought—and that his kindness and gentleness to Miss Flite were above all praise.

"You do him justice!" said Mrs. Woodcourt, pressing my hand. "You define him exactly. Allan is a dear fellow, and in his profession faultless. I say it, though I am his mother. Still, I must confess he is not without faults, love."

"None of us are," said I.

"Ah! But his really are faults that he might correct, and ought to correct," returned the sharp old lady, sharply shaking her head. "I am so much attached to you that I may confide in you, my dear, as a third party wholly disinterested, that he is fickleness itself."

I said I should have thought it hardly possible that he could have been otherwise than constant to his profession and zealous in the pursuit of it, judging from the reputation he had earned.

"You are right again, my dear," the old lady retorted, "but I don't refer to his profession, look you."

"Oh!" said I.

"No," said she. "I refer, my dear, to his social conduct. He is always paying trivial attentions to young ladies, and always has been, ever since he was eighteen. Now, my dear, he has never really cared for any one of them and has never meant in doing this to do any harm or to express anything but politeness and good nature. Still, it's not right, you know; is it?"

"No," said I, as she seemed to wait for me.

"And it might lead to mistaken notions, you see, my dear."

I supposed it might.

"Therefore, I have told him many times that he really should be more careful, both in justice to himself and in justice to others. And he has always said, 'Mother, I will be; but you know me better than anybody else does, and you know I mean no harm—in short, mean nothing.' All of which is very true, my dear, but is no justification. However, as he is now gone so far away and for an indefinite time, and as he will have good opportunities and introductions, we may consider this past and gone. And you, my dear," said the old lady, who was now all nods and smiles, "regarding your dear self, my love?"

"Me, Mrs. Woodcourt?"

"Not to be always selfish, talking of my son, who has gone to seek his fortune and to find a wife—when do you mean to seek YOUR fortune and to find a husband, Miss Summerson? Hey, look you! Now you blush!"

I don't think I did blush—at all events, it was not important if I did—and I said my present fortune perfectly contented me and I had no wish to change it.

"Shall I tell you what I always think of you and the fortune yet to come for you, my love?" said Mrs. Woodcourt.

"If you believe you are a good prophet," said I.

"Why, then, it is that you will marry some one very rich and very worthy, much older—five and twenty years, perhaps—than yourself. And you will be an excellent wife, and much beloved, and very happy."

"That is a good fortune," said I. "But why is it to be mine?"

"My dear," she returned, "there's suitability in it—you are so busy, and so neat, and so peculiarly situated altogether that there's suitability in it, and it will come to pass. And nobody, my love, will congratulate you more sincerely on such a marriage than I shall."

It was curious that this should make me uncomfortable, but I think it did. I know it did. It made me for some part of that night uncomfortable. I was so ashamed of my folly that I did not like to confess it even to Ada, and that made me more uncomfortable still. I would have given anything not to have been so much in the bright old lady's confidence if I could have possibly declined it. It gave me the most inconsistent opinions of her. At one time I thought she was a story-teller, and at another time that she was the pink of truth. Now I suspected that she was very cunning, next moment I believed her honest Welsh heart to be perfectly innocent and simple. And after all, what did it matter to me, and why did it matter to me? Why could not I, going up to bed with my basket of keys, stop to sit down by her fire and accommodate myself for a little while to her, at least as well as to anybody else, and not trouble myself about the harmless things she said to me? Impelled towards her, as I certainly was, for I was very anxious that she should like me and was very glad indeed that she did, why should I harp afterwards, with actual distress and pain, on every word she said and weigh it over and over again in twenty scales? Why was it so worrying to me to have her in our house, and confidential to me every night, when I yet felt that it was better and safer somehow that she should be there than anywhere else? These were perplexities and contradictions that I could not account for. At least, if I could—but I shall come to all that by and by, and it is mere idleness to go on about it now.

So when Mrs. Woodcourt went away, I was sorry to lose her but was relieved too. And then Caddy Jellyby came down, and Caddy brought such a packet of domestic news that it gave us abundant occupation.

First Caddy declared (and would at first declare nothing else) that I was the best adviser that ever was known. This, my pet said, was no news at all; and this, I said, of course, was nonsense. Then Caddy told us that she was going to be married in a month and that if Ada and I would be her bridesmaids, she was the happiest girl in the world. To be sure, this was news indeed; and I thought we never should have done talking about it, we had so much to say to Caddy, and Caddy had so much to say to us.

It seemed that Caddy's unfortunate papa had got over his bankruptcy—"gone through the Gazette," was the expression Caddy used, as if it were a tunnel—with the general clemency and commiseration of his creditors, and had got rid of his affairs in some blessed manner without succeeding in understanding them, and had given up everything he possessed (which was not worth much, I should think, to judge from the state of the furniture), and had satisfied every one concerned that he could do no more, poor man. So, he had been honourably dismissed to "the office" to begin the world again. What he did at the office, I never knew; Caddy said he was a "custom-house and general agent," and the only thing I ever understood about that business was that when he wanted money more than usual he went to the docks to look for it, and hardly ever found it.

As soon as her papa had tranquillized his mind by becoming this shorn lamb, and they had removed to a furnished lodging in Hatton Garden (where I found the children, when I afterwards went there, cutting the horse hair out of the seats of the chairs and choking themselves with it), Caddy had brought about a meeting between him and old Mr. Turveydrop; and poor Mr. Jellyby, being very humble and meek, had deferred to Mr. Turveydrop's deportment so submissively that they had become excellent friends. By degrees, old Mr. Turveydrop, thus familiarized with the idea of his son's marriage, had worked up his parental feelings to the height of contemplating that event as being near at hand and had given his gracious consent to the young couple commencing housekeeping at the academy in Newman Street when they would.

"And your papa, Caddy. What did he say?"

"Oh! Poor Pa," said Caddy, "only cried and said he hoped we might get on better than he and Ma had got on. He didn't say so before Prince, he only said so to me. And he said, 'My poor girl, you have not been very well taught how to make a home for your husband, but unless you mean with all your heart to strive to do it, you had better murder him than marry him—if you really love him.'"

"And how did you reassure him, Caddy?"

"Why, it was very distressing, you know, to see poor Pa so low and hear him say such terrible things, and I couldn't help crying myself. But I told him that I DID mean it with all my heart and that I hoped our house would be a place for him to come and find some comfort in of an evening and that I hoped and thought I could be a better daughter to him there than at home. Then I mentioned Peepy's coming to stay with me, and then Pa began to cry again and said the children were Indians."

"Indians, Caddy?"

"Yes," said Caddy, "wild Indians. And Pa said"—here she began to sob, poor girl, not at all like the happiest girl in the world—"that he was sensible the best thing that could happen to them was their being all tomahawked together."

Ada suggested that it was comfortable to know that Mr. Jellyby did not mean these destructive sentiments.

"No, of course I know Pa wouldn't like his family to be weltering in their blood," said Caddy, "but he means that they are very unfortunate in being Ma's children and that he is very unfortunate in being Ma's husband; and I am sure that's true, though it seems unnatural to say so."

I asked Caddy if Mrs. Jellyby knew that her wedding-day was fixed.

"Oh! You know what Ma is, Esther," she returned. "It's impossible to say whether she knows it or not. She has been told it often enough; and when she IS told it, she only gives me a placid look, as if I was I don't know what—a steeple in the distance," said Caddy with a sudden idea; "and then she shakes her head and says 'Oh, Caddy, Caddy, what a tease you are!' and goes on with the Borrioboola letters."

"And about your wardrobe, Caddy?" said I. For she was under no restraint with us.

"Well, my dear Esther," she returned, drying her eyes, "I must do the best I can and trust to my dear Prince never to have an unkind remembrance of my coming so shabbily to him. If the question concerned an outfit for Borrioboola, Ma would know all about it and would be quite excited. Being what it is, she neither knows nor cares."

Caddy was not at all deficient in natural affection for her mother, but mentioned this with tears as an undeniable fact, which I am afraid it was. We were sorry for the poor dear girl and found so much to admire in the good disposition which had survived under such discouragement that we both at once (I mean Ada and I) proposed a little scheme that made her perfectly joyful. This was her staying with us for three weeks, my staying with her for one, and our all three contriving and cutting out, and repairing, and sewing, and saving, and doing the very best we could think of to make the most of her stock. My guardian being as pleased with the idea as Caddy was, we took her home next day to arrange the matter and brought her out again in triumph with her boxes and all the purchases that could be squeezed out of a ten-pound note, which Mr. Jellyby had found in the docks I suppose, but which he at all events gave her. What my guardian would not have given her if we had encouraged him, it would be difficult to say, but we thought it right to compound for no more than her wedding-dress and bonnet. He agreed to this compromise, and if Caddy had ever been happy in her life, she was happy when we sat down to work.

She was clumsy enough with her needle, poor girl, and pricked her fingers as much as she had been used to ink them. She could not help reddening a little now and then, partly with the smart and partly with vexation at being able to do no better, but she soon got over that and began to improve rapidly. So day after day she, and my darling, and my little maid Charley, and a milliner out of the town, and I, sat hard at work, as pleasantly as possible.

Over and above this, Caddy was very anxious "to learn housekeeping," as she said. Now, mercy upon us! The idea of her learning housekeeping of a person of my vast experience was such a joke that I laughed, and coloured up, and fell into a comical confusion when she proposed it. However, I said, "Caddy, I am sure you are very welcome to learn anything that you can learn of ME, my dear," and I showed her all my books and methods and all my fidgety ways. You would have supposed that I was showing her some wonderful inventions, by her study of them; and if you had seen her, whenever I jingled my housekeeping keys, get up and attend me, certainly you might have thought that there never was a greater imposter than I with a blinder follower than Caddy Jellyby.

So what with working and housekeeping, and lessons to Charley, and backgammon in the evening with my guardian, and duets with Ada, the three weeks slipped fast away. Then I went home with Caddy to see what could be done there, and Ada and Charley remained behind to take care of my guardian.

When I say I went home with Caddy, I mean to the furnished lodging in Hatton Garden. We went to Newman Street two or three times, where preparations were in progress too—a good many, I observed, for enhancing the comforts of old Mr. Turveydrop, and a few for putting the newly married couple away cheaply at the top of the house—but our great point was to make the furnished lodging decent for the wedding-breakfast and to imbue Mrs. Jellyby beforehand with some faint sense of the occasion.

The latter was the more difficult thing of the two because Mrs. Jellyby and an unwholesome boy occupied the front sitting-room (the back one was a mere closet), and it was littered down with waste-paper and Borrioboolan documents, as an untidy stable might be littered with straw. Mrs. Jellyby sat there all day drinking strong coffee, dictating, and holding Borrioboolan interviews by appointment. The unwholesome boy, who seemed to me to be going into a decline, took his meals out of the house. When Mr. Jellyby came home, he usually groaned and went down into the kitchen. There he got something to eat if the servant would give him anything, and then, feeling that he was in the way, went out and walked about Hatton Garden in the wet. The poor children scrambled up and tumbled down the house as they had always been accustomed to do.

The production of these devoted little sacrifices in any presentable condition being quite out of the question at a week's notice, I proposed to Caddy that we should make them as happy as we could on her marriage morning in the attic where they all slept, and should confine our greatest efforts to her mama and her mama's room, and a clean breakfast. In truth Mrs. Jellyby required a good deal of attention, the lattice-work up her back having widened considerably since I first knew her and her hair looking like the mane of a dustman's horse.

Thinking that the display of Caddy's wardrobe would be the best means of approaching the subject, I invited Mrs. Jellyby to come and look at it spread out on Caddy's bed in the evening after the unwholesome boy was gone.

"My dear Miss Summerson," said she, rising from her desk with her usual sweetness of temper, "these are really ridiculous preparations, though your assisting them is a proof of your kindness. There is something so inexpressibly absurd to me in the idea of Caddy being married! Oh, Caddy, you silly, silly, silly puss!"

She came upstairs with us notwithstanding and looked at the clothes in her customary far-off manner. They suggested one distinct idea to her, for she said with her placid smile, and shaking her head, "My good Miss Summerson, at half the cost, this weak child might have been equipped for Africa!"

On our going downstairs again, Mrs. Jellyby asked me whether this troublesome business was really to take place next Wednesday. And on my replying yes, she said, "Will my room be required, my dear Miss Summerson? For it's quite impossible that I can put my papers away."

I took the liberty of saying that the room would certainly be wanted and that I thought we must put the papers away somewhere. "Well, my dear Miss Summerson," said Mrs. Jellyby, "you know best, I dare say. But by obliging me to employ a boy, Caddy has embarrassed me to that extent, overwhelmed as I am with public business, that I don't know which way to turn. We have a Ramification meeting, too, on Wednesday afternoon, and the inconvenience is very serious."

"It is not likely to occur again," said I, smiling. "Caddy will be married but once, probably."

"That's true," Mrs. Jellyby replied; "that's true, my dear. I suppose we must make the best of it!"

The next question was how Mrs. Jellyby should be dressed on the occasion. I thought it very curious to see her looking on serenely from her writing-table while Caddy and I discussed it, occasionally shaking her head at us with a half-reproachful smile like a superior spirit who could just bear with our trifling.

The state in which her dresses were, and the extraordinary confusion in which she kept them, added not a little to our difficulty; but at length we devised something not very unlike what a common-place mother might wear on such an occasion. The abstracted manner in which Mrs. Jellyby would deliver herself up to having this attire tried on by the dressmaker, and the sweetness with which she would then observe to me how sorry she was that I had not turned my thoughts to Africa, were consistent with the rest of her behaviour.

The lodging was rather confined as to space, but I fancied that if Mrs. Jellyby's household had been the only lodgers in Saint Paul's or Saint

Peter's, the sole advantage they would have found in the size of the building would have been its affording a great deal of room to be dirty in. I believe that nothing belonging to the family which it had been possible to break was unbroken at the time of those preparations for Caddy's marriage, that nothing which it had been possible to spoil in any way was unspoilt, and that no domestic object which was capable of collecting dirt, from a dear child's knee to the door-plate, was without as much dirt as could well accumulate upon it.

Poor Mr. Jellyby, who very seldom spoke and almost always sat when he was at home with his head against the wall, became interested when he saw that Caddy and I were attempting to establish some order among all this waste and ruin and took off his coat to help. But such wonderful things came tumbling out of the closets when they were opened—bits of mouldy pie, sour bottles, Mrs. Jellyby's caps, letters, tea, forks, odd boots and shoes of children, firewood, wafers, saucepan-lids, damp sugar in odds and ends of paper bags, footstools, blacklead brushes, bread, Mrs. Jellyby's bonnets, books with butter sticking to the binding, guttered candle ends put out by being turned upside down in broken candlesticks, nutshells, heads and tails of shrimps, dinner-mats, gloves, coffee-grounds, umbrellas—that he looked frightened, and left off again. But he came regularly every evening and sat without his coat, with his head against the wall, as though he would have helped us if he had known how.

"Poor Pa!" said Caddy to me on the night before the great day, when we really had got things a little to rights. "It seems unkind to leave him, Esther. But what could I do if I stayed! Since I first knew you, I have tidied and tidied over and over again, but it's useless. Ma and Africa, together, upset the whole house directly. We never have a servant who don't drink. Ma's ruinous to everything."

Mr. Jellyby could not hear what she said, but he seemed very low indeed and shed tears, I thought.

"My heart aches for him; that it does!" sobbed Caddy. "I can't help thinking to-night, Esther, how dearly I hope to be happy with Prince, and how dearly Pa hoped, I dare say, to be happy with Ma. What a disappointed life!"

"My dear Caddy!" said Mr. Jellyby, looking slowly round from the wail. It was the first time, I think, I ever heard him say three words together.

"Yes, Pa!" cried Caddy, going to him and embracing him affectionately.

"My dear Caddy," said Mr. Jellyby. "Never have—"

"Not Prince, Pa?" faltered Caddy. "Not have Prince?"

"Yes, my dear," said Mr. Jellyby. "Have him, certainly. But, never have —"

I mentioned in my account of our first visit in Thavies Inn that Richard described Mr. Jellyby as frequently opening his mouth after dinner without saying anything. It was a habit of his. He opened his mouth now a great many times and shook his head in a melancholy manner.

"What do you wish me not to have? Don't have what, dear Pa?" asked Caddy, coaxing him, with her arms round his neck.

"Never have a mission, my dear child."

Mr. Jellyby groaned and laid his head against the wall again, and this was the only time I ever heard him make any approach to expressing his sentiments on the Borrioboolan question. I suppose he had been more talkative and lively once, but he seemed to have been completely exhausted long before I knew him.

I thought Mrs. Jellyby never would have left off serenely looking over her papers and drinking coffee that night. It was twelve o'clock before we could obtain possession of the room, and the clearance it required then was so discouraging that Caddy, who was almost tired out, sat down in the middle of the dust and cried. But she soon cheered up, and we did wonders with it before we went to bed.

In the morning it looked, by the aid of a few flowers and a quantity of soap and water and a little arrangement, quite gay. The plain breakfast made a cheerful show, and Caddy was perfectly charming. But when my darling came, I thought—and I think now—that I never had seen such a dear face as my beautiful pet's.

We made a little feast for the children upstairs, and we put Peepy at the head of the table, and we showed them Caddy in her bridal dress, and they clapped their hands and hurrahed, and Caddy cried to think that she was going away from them and hugged them over and over again until we brought Prince up to fetch her away—when, I am sorry to say, Peepy bit him. Then there was old Mr. Turveydrop downstairs, in a state of deportment not to be expressed, benignly blessing Caddy and giving my guardian to understand that his son's happiness was his own parental work and that he sacrificed personal considerations to ensure it. "My dear sir," said Mr. Turveydrop, "these young people will live with me; my house is large enough for their accommodation, and they shall not want the shelter of my roof. I could have wished—you will understand the allusion, Mr. Jarndyce, for you remember my illustrious patron the Prince Regent—I could have wished that my son had married into a family where there was more deportment, but the will of heaven be done!"

Mr. and Mrs. Pardiggle were of the party—Mr. Pardiggle, an obstinate-looking man with a large waistcoat and stubbly hair, who was always talking in a loud bass voice about his mite, or Mrs. Pardiggle's mite, or their five boys' mites. Mr. Quale, with his hair brushed back as usual and his knobs of temples shining very much, was also there, not in the character of a disappointed lover, but as the accepted of a young—at least, an unmarried—lady, a Miss Wisk, who was also there. Miss Wisk's mission, my guardian said, was to show the world that woman's mission was man's mission and that the only genuine mission of both man and woman was to be always moving declaratory resolutions about things in general at public meetings. The guests were few, but were, as one might expect at Mrs. Jellyby's, all devoted to public objects only. Besides those I have mentioned, there was an extremely dirty lady with her bonnet all awry and the ticketed price of her dress still sticking on it, whose neglected home, Caddy told me, was like a filthy wilderness, but whose church was like a fancy fair. A very contentious gentleman, who said it was his mission to be everybody's brother but who appeared to be on terms of coolness with the whole of his large family, completed the party.

A party, having less in common with such an occasion, could hardly have been got together by any ingenuity. Such a mean mission as the domestic mission was the very last thing to be endured among them; indeed, Miss Wisk informed us, with great indignation, before we sat down to breakfast, that the idea of woman's mission lying chiefly in the narrow sphere of home was an outrageous slander on the part of her tyrant, man. One other singularity was that nobody with a mission—except Mr. Quale, whose mission, as I think I have formerly said, was to be in ecstasies with everybody's mission—cared at all for anybody's mission. Mrs. Pardiggle being as clear that the only one infallible course was her course of pouncing upon the poor and applying benevolence to them like a strait-waistcoat; as Miss Wisk was that the only practical thing for the world was the emancipation of woman from the thraldom of her tyrant, man. Mrs.

Jellyby, all the while, sat smiling at the limited vision that could see anything but Borrioboola-Gha.

But I am anticipating now the purport of our conversation on the ride home instead of first marrying Caddy. We all went to church, and Mr. Jellyby gave her away. Of the air with which old Mr. Turveydrop, with his hat under his left arm (the inside presented at the clergyman like a cannon) and his eyes creasing themselves up into his wig, stood stiff and high-shouldered behind us bridesmaids during the ceremony, and afterwards saluted us, I could never say enough to do it justice. Miss Wisk, whom I cannot report as prepossessing in appearance, and whose manner was grim, listened to the proceedings, as part of woman's wrongs, with a disdainful face. Mrs. Jellyby, with her calm smile and her bright eyes, looked the least concerned of all the company.

We duly came back to breakfast, and Mrs. Jellyby sat at the head of the table and Mr. Jellyby at the foot. Caddy had previously stolen upstairs to hug the children again and tell them that her name was Turveydrop. But this piece of information, instead of being an agreeable surprise to Peepy, threw him on his back in such transports of kicking grief that I could do nothing on being sent for but accede to the proposal that he should be admitted to the breakfast table. So he came down and sat in my lap; and Mrs. Jellyby, after saying, in reference to the state of his pinafore, "Oh, you naughty Peepy, what a shocking little pig you are!" was not at all discomposed. He was very good except that he brought down Noah with him (out of an ark I had given him before we went to church) and WOULD dip him head first into the wine-glasses and then put him in his mouth.

My guardian, with his sweet temper and his quick perception and his amiable face, made something agreeable even out of the ungenial company. None of them seemed able to talk about anything but his, or her, own one subject, and none of them seemed able to talk about even that as part of a world in which there was anything else; but my guardian turned it all to the merry encouragement of Caddy and the honour of the occasion, and brought us through the breakfast nobly. What we should have done without him, I am afraid to think, for all the company despising the bride and bridegroom and old Mr. Turveydrop—and old Mr. Thurveydrop, in virtue of his deportment, considering himself vastly superior to all the company—it was a very unpromising case.

At last the time came when poor Caddy was to go and when all her property was packed on the hired coach and pair that was to take her and her husband to Gravesend. It affected us to see Caddy clinging, then, to her deplorable home and hanging on her mother's neck with the greatest tenderness.

"I am very sorry I couldn't go on writing from dictation, Ma," sobbed Caddy. "I hope you forgive me now."

"Oh, Caddy, Caddy!" said Mrs. Jellyby. "I have told you over and over again that I have engaged a boy, and there's an end of it."

"You are sure you are not the least angry with me, Ma? Say you are sure before I go away, Ma?"

"You foolish Caddy," returned Mrs. Jellyby, "do I look angry, or have I inclination to be angry, or time to be angry? How CAN you?"

"Take a little care of Pa while I am gone, Mama!"

Mrs. Jellyby positively laughed at the fancy. "You romantic child," said she, lightly patting Caddy's back. "Go along. I am excellent friends with you. Now, good-bye, Caddy, and be very happy!"

Then Caddy hung upon her father and nursed his cheek against hers as if he were some poor dull child in pain. All this took place in the hall. Her father released her, took out his pocket handkerchief, and sat down on the stairs with his head against the wall. I hope he found some consolation in walls. I almost think he did.

And then Prince took her arm in his and turned with great emotion and respect to his father, whose deportment at that moment was overwhelming.

"Thank you over and over again, father!" said Prince, kissing his hand. "I am very grateful for all your kindness and consideration regarding our marriage, and so, I can assure you, is Caddy."

"Very," sobbed Caddy. "Ve-ry!"

"My dear son," said Mr. Turveydrop, "and dear daughter, I have done my duty. If the spirit of a sainted wooman hovers above us and looks down on the occasion, that, and your constant affection, will be my recompense. You will not fail in YOUR duty, my son and daughter, I believe?"

"Dear father, never!" cried Prince.

"Never, never, dear Mr. Turveydrop!" said Caddy.

"This," returned Mr. Turveydrop, "is as it should be. My children, my home is yours, my heart is yours, my all is yours. I will never leave you;

nothing but death shall part us. My dear son, you contemplate an absence of a week, I think?"

"A week, dear father. We shall return home this day week."

"My dear child," said Mr. Turveydrop, "let me, even under the present exceptional circumstances, recommend strict punctuality. It is highly important to keep the connexion together; and schools, if at all neglected, are apt to take offence."

"This day week, father, we shall be sure to be home to dinner."

"Good!" said Mr. Turveydrop. "You will find fires, my dear Caroline, in your own room, and dinner prepared in my apartment. Yes, yes, Prince!" anticipating some self-denying objection on his son's part with a great air. "You and our Caroline will be strange in the upper part of the premises and will, therefore, dine that day in my apartment. Now, bless ye!"

They drove away, and whether I wondered most at Mrs. Jellyby or at Mr. Turveydrop, I did not know. Ada and my guardian were in the same condition when we came to talk it over. But before we drove away too, I received a most unexpected and eloquent compliment from Mr. Jellyby. He came up to me in the hall, took both my hands, pressed them earnestly, and opened his mouth twice. I was so sure of his meaning that I said, quite flurried, "You are very welcome, sir. Pray don't mention it!"

"I hope this marriage is for the best, guardian," said I when we three were on our road home.

"I hope it is, little woman. Patience. We shall see."

"Is the wind in the east to-day?" I ventured to ask him.

He laughed heartily and answered, "No."

"But it must have been this morning, I think," said I.

He answered "No" again, and this time my dear girl confidently answered "No" too and shook the lovely head which, with its blooming flowers against the golden hair, was like the very spring. "Much YOU know of east winds, my ugly darling," said I, kissing her in my admiration—I couldn't help it.

Well! It was only their love for me, I know very well, and it is a long time ago. I must write it even if I rub it out again, because it gives me so much pleasure. They said there could be no east wind where Somebody was; they said that wherever Dame Durden went, there was sunshine and summer air.

CHAPTER XXXI. Nurse and Patient

I had not been at home again many days when one evening I went upstairs into my own room to take a peep over Charley's shoulder and see how she was getting on with her copy-book. Writing was a trying business to Charley, who seemed to have no natural power over a pen, but in whose hand every pen appeared to become perversely animated, and to go wrong and crooked, and to stop, and splash, and sidle into corners like a saddle-donkey. It was very odd to see what old letters Charley's young hand had made, they so wrinkled, and shrivelled, and tottering, it so plump and round. Yet Charley was uncommonly expert at other things and had as nimble little fingers as I ever watched.

"Well, Charley," said I, looking over a copy of the letter O in which it was represented as square, triangular, pear-shaped, and collapsed in all kinds of ways, "we are improving. If we only get to make it round, we shall be perfect, Charley."

Then I made one, and Charley made one, and the pen wouldn't join Charley's neatly, but twisted it up into a knot.

"Never mind, Charley. We shall do it in time."

Charley laid down her pen, the copy being finished, opened and shut her cramped little hand, looked gravely at the page, half in pride and half in doubt, and got up, and dropped me a curtsy.

"Thank you, miss. If you please, miss, did you know a poor person of the name of Jenny?"

"A brickmaker's wife, Charley? Yes."

"She came and spoke to me when I was out a little while ago, and said you knew her, miss. She asked me if I wasn't the young lady's little maid—meaning you for the young lady, miss—and I said yes, miss."

"I thought she had left this neighbourhood altogether, Charley."

"So she had, miss, but she's come back again to where she used to live—she and Liz. Did you know another poor person of the name of Liz, miss?"

"I think I do, Charley, though not by name."

"That's what she said!" returned Charley. "They have both come back, miss, and have been tramping high and low."

"Tramping high and low, have they, Charley?"

"Yes, miss." If Charley could only have made the letters in her copy as round as the eyes with which she looked into my face, they would have been excellent. "And this poor person came about the house three or four days, hoping to get a glimpse of you, miss—all she wanted, she said—but you were away. That was when she saw me. She saw me a-going about, miss," said Charley with a short laugh of the greatest delight and pride, "and she thought I looked like your maid!"

"Did she though, really, Charley?"

"Yes, miss!" said Charley. "Really and truly." And Charley, with another short laugh of the purest glee, made her eyes very round again and looked as serious as became my maid. I was never tired of seeing Charley in the full enjoyment of that great dignity, standing before me with her youthful face and figure, and her steady manner, and her childish exultation breaking through it now and then in the pleasantest way.

"And where did you see her, Charley?" said I.

My little maid's countenance fell as she replied, "By the doctor's shop, miss." For Charley wore her black frock yet.

I asked if the brickmaker's wife were ill, but Charley said no. It was some one else. Some one in her cottage who had tramped down to Saint Albans and was tramping he didn't know where. A poor boy, Charley said. No father, no mother, no any one. "Like as Tom might have been, miss, if Emma and me had died after father," said Charley, her round eyes filling with tears.

"And she was getting medicine for him, Charley?"

"She said, miss," returned Charley, "how that he had once done as much for her."

My little maid's face was so eager and her quiet hands were folded so closely in one another as she stood looking at me that I had no great difficulty in reading her thoughts. "Well, Charley," said I, "it appears to me that you and I can do no better than go round to Jenny's and see what's the matter."

The alacrity with which Charley brought my bonnet and veil, and having dressed me, quaintly pinned herself into her warm shawl and made herself look like a little old woman, sufficiently expressed her readiness. So Charley and I, without saying anything to any one, went out.

It was a cold, wild night, and the trees shuddered in the wind. The rain had been thick and heavy all day, and with little intermission for many days. None was falling just then, however. The sky had partly cleared, but was very gloomy—even above us, where a few stars were shining. In the north and north-west, where the sun had set three hours before, there was a pale dead light both beautiful and awful; and into it long sullen lines of cloud waved up like a sea stricken immovable as it was heaving. Towards London a lurid glare overhung the whole dark waste, and the contrast between these two lights, and the fancy which the redder light engendered of an unearthly fire, gleaming on all the unseen buildings of the city and on all the faces of its many thousands of wondering inhabitants, was as solemn as might be.

I had no thought that night—none, I am quite sure—of what was soon to happen to me. But I have always remembered since that when we had stopped at the garden-gate to look up at the sky, and when we went upon our way, I had for a moment an undefinable impression of myself as being something different from what I then was. I know it was then and there that I had it. I have ever since connected the feeling with that spot and time and with everything associated with that spot and time, to the distant voices in the town, the barking of a dog, and the sound of wheels coming down the miry hill.

It was Saturday night, and most of the people belonging to the place where we were going were drinking elsewhere. We found it quieter than I had previously seen it, though quite as miserable. The kilns were burning, and a stifling vapour set towards us with a pale-blue glare.

We came to the cottage, where there was a feeble candle in the patched window. We tapped at the door and went in. The mother of the little child who had died was sitting in a chair on one side of the poor fire by the bed; and opposite to her, a wretched boy, supported by the chimney-piece, was cowering on the floor. He held under his arm, like a little bundle, a fragment of a fur cap; and as he tried to warm himself, he shook until the crazy door and window shook. The place was closer than before and had an unhealthy and a very peculiar smell.

I had not lifted my veil when I first spoke to the woman, which was at the moment of our going in. The boy staggered up instantly and stared at me with a remarkable expression of surprise and terror.

His action was so quick and my being the cause of it was so evident that I stood still instead of advancing nearer.

"I won't go no more to the berryin ground," muttered the boy; "I ain't a-going there, so I tell you!"

I lifted my veil and spoke to the woman. She said to me in a low voice, "Don't mind him, ma'am. He'll soon come back to his head," and said to him, "Jo, Jo, what's the matter?"

"I know wot she's come for!" cried the boy.

"Who?"

"The lady there. She's come to get me to go along with her to the berryin ground. I won't go to the berryin ground. I don't like the name on it. She might go a-berryin ME." His shivering came on again, and as he leaned against the wall, he shook the hovel.

"He has been talking off and on about such like all day, ma'am," said Jenny softly. "Why, how you stare! This is MY lady, Jo."

"Is it?" returned the boy doubtfully, and surveying me with his arm held out above his burning eyes. "She looks to me the t'other one. It ain't the bonnet, nor yet it ain't the gownd, but she looks to me the t'other one."

My little Charley, with her premature experience of illness and trouble, had pulled off her bonnet and shawl and now went quietly up to him with a chair and sat him down in it like an old sick nurse. Except that no such attendant could have shown him Charley's youthful face, which seemed to engage his confidence.

"I say!" said the boy. "YOU tell me. Ain't the lady the t'other lady?"

Charley shook her head as she methodically drew his rags about him and made him as warm as she could.

"Oh!" the boy muttered. "Then I s'pose she ain't."

"I came to see if I could do you any good," said I. "What is the matter with you?"

"I'm a-being froze," returned the boy hoarsely, with his haggard gaze wandering about me, "and then burnt up, and then froze, and then burnt up, ever so many times in a hour. And my head's all sleepy, and all a-going mad-like—and I'm so dry—and my bones isn't half so much bones as pain.

"When did he come here?" I asked the woman.

"This morning, ma'am, I found him at the corner of the town. I had known him up in London yonder. Hadn't I, Jo?"

"Tom-all-Alone's," the boy replied.

Whenever he fixed his attention or his eyes, it was only for a very little while. He soon began to droop his head again, and roll it heavily, and speak as if he were half awake.

"When did he come from London?" I asked.

"I come from London yes'day," said the boy himself, now flushed and hot. "I'm a-going somewheres."

"Where is he going?" I asked.

"Somewheres," repeated the boy in a louder tone. "I have been moved on, and moved on, more nor ever I was afore, since the t'other one give me the sov'ring. Mrs. Snagsby, she's always a-watching, and a-driving of me—what have I done to her?—and they're all a-watching and a-driving of me. Every one of 'em's doing of it, from the time when I don't get up, to the time when I don't go to bed. And I'm a-going somewheres. That's where I'm a-going. She told me, down in Tom-all-Alone's, as she came from Stolbuns, and so I took the Stolbuns Road. It's as good as another."

He always concluded by addressing Charley.

"What is to be done with him?" said I, taking the woman aside. "He could not travel in this state even if he had a purpose and knew where he was going!"

"I know no more, ma'am, than the dead," she replied, glancing compassionately at him. "Perhaps the dead know better, if they could only tell us. I've kept him here all day for pity's sake, and I've given him broth and physic, and Liz has gone to try if any one will take him in (here's my pretty in the bed—her child, but I call it mine); but I can't keep him long, for if my husband was to come home and find him here, he'd be rough in putting him out and might do him a hurt. Hark! Here comes Liz back!"

The other woman came hurriedly in as she spoke, and the boy got up with a half-obscured sense that he was expected to be going. When the little child awoke, and when and how Charley got at it, took it out of bed, and began to walk about hushing it, I don't know. There she was, doing all this in a quiet motherly manner as if she were living in Mrs. Blinder's attic with Tom and Emma again.

The friend had been here and there, and had been played about from hand to hand, and had come back as she went. At first it was too early for the boy to be received into the proper refuge, and at last it was too late. One official sent her to another, and the other sent her back again to the first, and so backward and forward, until it appeared to me as if both must have been appointed for their skill in evading their duties instead of performing them. And now, after all, she said, breathing quickly, for she had been running and was frightened too, "Jenny, your master's on the road home, and mine's not far behind, and the Lord help the boy, for we can do no more for him!" They put a few halfpence together and hurried them into his hand, and so, in an oblivious, half-thankful, half-insensible way, he shuffled out of the house.

"Give me the child, my dear," said its mother to Charley, "and thank you kindly too! Jenny, woman dear, good night! Young lady, if my master don't fall out with me, I'll look down by the kiln by and by, where the boy will be most like, and again in the morning!" She hurried off, and presently we passed her hushing and singing to her child at her own door and looking anxiously along the road for her drunken husband.

I was afraid of staying then to speak to either woman, lest I should bring her into trouble. But I said to Charley that we must not leave the boy to die. Charley, who knew what to do much better than I did, and whose quickness equalled her presence of mind, glided on before me, and presently we came up with Jo, just short of the brick-kiln.

I think he must have begun his journey with some small bundle under his arm and must have had it stolen or lost it. For he still carried his wretched fragment of fur cap like a bundle, though he went bare-headed through the rain, which now fell fast. He stopped when we called to him and again showed a dread of me when I came up, standing with his lustrous eyes fixed upon me, and even arrested in his shivering fit.

I asked him to come with us, and we would take care that he had some shelter for the night.

"I don't want no shelter," he said; "I can lay amongst the warm bricks."

"But don't you know that people die there?" replied Charley.

"They dies everywheres," said the boy. "They dies in their lodgings—she knows where; I showed her—and they dies down in Tom-all-Alone's in heaps. They dies more than they lives, according to what I see." Then he hoarsely whispered Charley, "If she ain't the t'other one, she ain't the forrenner. Is there THREE of 'em then?"

Charley looked at me a little frightened. I felt half frightened at myself when the boy glared on me so.

But he turned and followed when I beckoned to him, and finding that he acknowledged that influence in me, I led the way straight home. It was not far, only at the summit of the hill. We passed but one man. I doubted if we should have got home without assistance, the boy's steps were so uncertain and tremulous. He made no complaint, however, and was strangely unconcerned about himself, if I may say so strange a thing.

Leaving him in the hall for a moment, shrunk into the corner of the window-seat and staring with an indifference that scarcely could be called wonder at the comfort and brightness about him, I went into the drawing-room to speak to my guardian. There I found Mr. Skimpole, who had come down by the coach, as he frequently did without notice, and never bringing any clothes with him, but always borrowing everything he wanted.

They came out with me directly to look at the boy. The servants had gathered in the hall too, and he shivered in the window-seat with Charley standing by him, like some wounded animal that had been found in a ditch.

"This is a sorrowful case," said my guardian after asking him a question or two and touching him and examining his eyes. "What do you say, Harold?"

"You had better turn him out," said Mr. Skimpole.

"What do you mean?" inquired my guardian, almost sternly.

"My dear Jarndyce," said Mr. Skimpole, "you know what I am: I am a child. Be cross to me if I deserve it. But I have a constitutional objection to this sort of thing. I always had, when I was a medical man. He's not safe, you know. There's a very bad sort of fever about him."

Mr. Skimpole had retreated from the hall to the drawing-room again and said this in his airy way, seated on the music-stool as we stood by.

"You'll say it's childish," observed Mr. Skimpole, looking gaily at us. "Well, I dare say it may be; but I AM a child, and I never pretend to be anything else. If you put him out in the road, you only put him where he was before. He will be no worse off than he was, you know. Even make him better off, if you like. Give him sixpence, or five shillings, or five pound ten—you are arithmeticians, and I am not—and get rid of him!"

"And what is he to do then?" asked my guardian.

"Upon my life," said Mr. Skimpole, shrugging his shoulders with his engaging smile, "I have not the least idea what he is to do then. But I have no doubt he'll do it."

"Now, is it not a horrible reflection," said my guardian, to whom I had hastily explained the unavailing efforts of the two women, "is it not a horrible reflection," walking up and down and rumpling his hair, "that if this wretched creature were a convicted prisoner, his hospital would be wide open to him, and he would be as well taken care of as any sick boy in the kingdom?"

"My dear Jarndyce," returned Mr. Skimpole, "you'll pardon the simplicity of the question, coming as it does from a creature who is perfectly simple in worldly matters, but why ISN'T he a prisoner then?"

My guardian stopped and looked at him with a whimsical mixture of amusement and indignation in his face.

"Our young friend is not to be suspected of any delicacy, I should imagine," said Mr. Skimpole, unabashed and candid. "It seems to me that it would be wiser, as well as in a certain kind of way more respectable, if he showed some misdirected energy that got him into prison. There would be more of an adventurous spirit in it, and consequently more of a certain sort of poetry."

"I believe," returned my guardian, resuming his uneasy walk, "that there is not such another child on earth as yourself."

"Do you really?" said Mr. Skimpole. "I dare say! But I confess I don't see why our young friend, in his degree, should not seek to invest himself with such poetry as is open to him. He is no doubt born with an appetite—probably, when he is in a safer state of health, he has an excellent appetite. Very well. At our young friend's natural dinner hour, most likely about noon, our young friend says in effect to society, 'I am hungry; will you have the goodness to produce your spoon and feed me?' Society, which has taken upon itself the general arrangement of the whole system of spoons and professes to have a spoon for our young friend, does NOT produce that spoon; and our young friend, therefore, says 'You really must excuse me if I seize it.' Now, this appears to me a case of misdirected energy, which has a certain amount of reason in it and a certain amount of romance; and I don't know but what I should be more interested in our young friend, as an illustration of such a case, than merely as a poor vagabond—which any one can be."

"In the meantime," I ventured to observe, "he is getting worse."

"In the meantime," said Mr. Skimpole cheerfully, "as Miss Summerson, with her practical good sense, observes, he is getting worse. Therefore I recommend your turning him out before he gets still worse."

The amiable face with which he said it, I think I shall never forget.

"Of course, little woman," observed my guardian, turning to me, "I can ensure his admission into the proper place by merely going there to enforce it, though it's a bad state of things when, in his condition, that is necessary. But it's growing late, and is a very bad night, and the boy is worn out already. There is a bed in the wholesome loft-room by the stable; we had better keep him there till morning, when he can be wrapped up and removed. We'll do that."

"Oh!" said Mr. Skimpole, with his hands upon the keys of the piano as we moved away. "Are you going back to our young friend?"

"Yes," said my guardian.

"How I envy you your constitution, Jarndyce!" returned Mr. Skimpole with playful admiration. "You don't mind these things; neither does Miss Summerson. You are ready at all times to go anywhere, and do anything. Such is will! I have no will at all—and no won't—simply can't."

"You can't recommend anything for the boy, I suppose?" said my guardian, looking back over his shoulder half angrily; only half angrily, for he never seemed to consider Mr. Skimpole an accountable being.

"My dear Jarndyce, I observed a bottle of cooling medicine in his pocket, and it's impossible for him to do better than take it. You can tell them to sprinkle a little vinegar about the place where he sleeps and to keep it moderately cool and him moderately warm. But it is mere impertinence in me to offer any recommendation. Miss Summerson has such a knowledge of detail and such a capacity for the administration of detail that she knows all about it."

We went back into the hall and explained to Jo what we proposed to do, which Charley explained to him again and which he received with the languid unconcern I had already noticed, wearily looking on at what was done as if it were for somebody else. The servants compassionating his miserable state and being very anxious to help, we soon got the loft-room ready; and some of the men about the house carried him across the wet yard, well wrapped up. It was pleasant to observe how kind they were to him and how there appeared to be a general impression among them that frequently calling him "Old Chap" was likely to revive his spirits. Charley directed the operations and went to and fro between the loft-room and the house with such little stimulants and comforts as we thought it safe to give him. My guardian himself saw him before he was left for the night and reported to me when he returned to the growlery to write a letter on the boy's behalf, which a messenger was charged to deliver at day-light in the morning, that he seemed easier and inclined to sleep. They had fastened his door on the outside, he said, in case of his being delirious, but had so arranged that he could not make any noise without being heard.

Ada being in our room with a cold, Mr. Skimpole was left alone all this time and entertained himself by playing snatches of pathetic airs and sometimes singing to them (as we heard at a distance) with great expression and feeling. When we rejoined him in the drawing-room he said he would give us a little ballad which had come into his head "apropos of our young friend," and he sang one about a peasant boy,

"Thrown on the wide world, doomed to wander and roam,
Bereft of his parents, bereft of a home."

quite exquisitely. It was a song that always made him cry, he told us.

He was extremely gay all the rest of the evening, for he absolutely chirped—those were his delighted words—when he thought by what a happy talent for business he was surrounded. He gave us, in his glass of negus, "Better health to our young friend!" and supposed and gaily pursued the case of his being reserved like Whittington to become Lord Mayor of London. In that event, no doubt, he would establish the Jarndyce Institution and the Summerson Almshouses, and a little annual Corporation Pilgrimage to St. Albans. He had no doubt, he said, that our young friend was an excellent boy in his way, but his way was not the Harold Skimpole way; what Harold Skimpole was, Harold Skimpole had found himself, to his considerable surprise, when he first made his own acquaintance; he had accepted himself with all his failings and had thought it sound philosophy to make the best of the bargain; and he hoped we would do the same.

Charley's last report was that the boy was quiet. I could see, from my window, the lantern they had left him burning quietly; and I went to bed very happy to think that he was sheltered.

There was more movement and more talking than usual a little before daybreak, and it awoke me. As I was dressing, I looked out of my window and asked one of our men who had been among the active sympathizers last night whether there was anything wrong about the house. The lantern was still burning in the loft-window.

"It's the boy, miss," said he.

"Is he worse?" I inquired.

"Gone, miss.

"Dead!"

"Dead, miss? No. Gone clean off."

At what time of the night he had gone, or how, or why, it seemed hopeless ever to divine. The door remaining as it had been left, and the lantern standing in the window, it could only be supposed that he had got out by a trap in the floor which communicated with an empty cart-house below. But he had shut it down again, if that were so; and it looked as if it had not been raised. Nothing of any kind was missing. On this fact being clearly ascertained, we all yielded to the painful belief that delirium had come upon him in the night and that, allured by some imaginary object or pursued by some imaginary horror, he had strayed away in that worse than helpless state; all of us, that is to say, but Mr. Skimpole, who repeatedly suggested, in his usual easy light style, that it had occurred to our young friend that he was not a safe inmate, having a bad kind of fever upon him, and that he had with great natural politeness taken himself off.

Every possible inquiry was made, and every place was searched. The brick-kilns were examined, the cottages were visited, the two women were particularly questioned, but they knew nothing of him, and nobody could doubt that their wonder was genuine. The weather had for some time been too wet and the night itself had been too wet to admit of any tracing by footsteps. Hedge and ditch, and wall, and rick and stack, were examined by our men for a long distance round, lest the boy should be lying in such a place insensible or dead; but nothing was seen to indicate that he had ever been near. From the time when he was left in the loft-room, he vanished.

The search continued for five days. I do not mean that it ceased even then, but that my attention was then diverted into a current very memorable to me.

As Charley was at her writing again in my room in the evening, and as I sat opposite to her at work, I felt the table tremble. Looking up, I saw my little maid shivering from head to foot.

"Charley," said I, "are you so cold?"

"I think I am, miss," she replied. "I don't know what it is. I can't hold myself still. I felt so yesterday at about this same time, miss. Don't be uneasy, I think I'm ill."

I heard Ada's voice outside, and I hurried to the door of communication between my room and our pretty sitting-room, and locked it. Just in time, for she tapped at it while my hand was yet upon the key.

Ada called to me to let her in, but I said, "Not now, my dearest. Go away. There's nothing the matter; I will come to you presently." Ah! It was a long, long time before my darling girl and I were companions again.

Charley fell ill. In twelve hours she was very ill. I moved her to my room, and laid her in my bed, and sat down quietly to nurse her. I told my guardian all about it, and why I felt it was necessary that I should seclude myself, and my reason for not seeing my darling above all. At first she came very often to the door, and called to me, and even reproached me with sobs and tears; but I wrote her a long letter saying that she made me anxious and unhappy and imploring her, as she loved me and wished my mind to be at peace, to come no nearer than the garden. After that she came beneath the window even oftener than she had come to the door, and if I had learnt to love her dear sweet voice before when we were hardly ever apart, how did I learn to love it then, when I stood behind the window-curtain listening and replying, but not so much as looking out! How did I learn to love it afterwards, when the harder time came!

They put a bed for me in our sitting-room; and by keeping the door wide open, I turned the two rooms into one, now that Ada had vacated that part of the house, and kept them always fresh and airy. There was not a servant in or about the house but was so good that they would all most gladly have come to me at any hour of the day or night without the least fear or unwillingness, but I thought it best to choose one worthy woman who was never to see Ada and whom I could trust to come and go with all precaution. Through her means I got out to take the air with my guardian when there was no fear of meeting Ada, and wanted for nothing in the way of attendance, any more than in any other respect.

And thus poor Charley sickened and grew worse, and fell into heavy danger of death, and lay severely ill for many a long round of day and night. So patient she was, so uncomplaining, and inspired by such a gentle fortitude that very often as I sat by Charley holding her head in my arms—repose would come to her, so, when it would come to her in no other attitude—I silently prayed to our Father in heaven that I might not forget the lesson which this little sister taught me.

I was very sorrowful to think that Charley's pretty looks would change and be disfigured, even if she recovered—she was such a child with her dimpled face—but that thought was, for the greater part, lost in her greater peril. When she was at the worst, and her mind rambled again to the cares of her father's sick bed and the little children, she still knew me so far as that she would be quiet in my arms when she could lie quiet nowhere else, and murmur out the wanderings of her mind less restlessly. At those times I used to think, how should I ever tell the two remaining babies that the baby who had learned of her faithful heart to be a mother to them in their need was dead!

There were other times when Charley knew me well and talked to me, telling me that she sent her love to Tom and Emma and that she was sure Tom would grow up to be a good man. At those times Charley would speak to me of what she had read to her father as well as she could to comfort him, of that young man carried out to be buried who was the only son of his mother and she was a widow, of the ruler's daughter raised up by the gracious hand upon her bed of death. And Charley told me that when her father died she had kneeled down and prayed in her first sorrow that he likewise might be raised up and given back to his poor children, and that if she should never get better and should die too, she thought it likely that it might come into Tom's mind to offer the same prayer for her. Then would I show Tom how these people of old days had been brought back to life on earth, only that we might know our hope to be restored to heaven!

But of all the various times there were in Charley's illness, there was not one when she lost the gentle qualities I have spoken of. And there were many, many when I thought in the night of the last high belief in the watching angel, and the last higher trust in God, on the part of her poor despised father.

And Charley did not die. She flutteringly and slowly turned the dangerous point, after long lingering there, and then began to mend. The hope that never had been given, from the first, of Charley being in outward appearance Charley any more soon began to be encouraged; and even that prospered, and I saw her growing into her old childish likeness again.

It was a great morning when I could tell Ada all this as she stood out in the garden; and it was a great evening when Charley and I at last took tea together in the next room. But on that same evening, I felt that I was stricken cold.

Happily for both of us, it was not until Charley was safe in bed again and placidly asleep that I began to think the contagion of her illness was upon me. I had been able easily to hide what I felt at tea-time, but I was past that already now, and I knew that I was rapidly following in Charley's steps.

I was well enough, however, to be up early in the morning, and to return my darling's cheerful blessing from the garden, and to talk with her as long as usual. But I was not free from an impression that I had been walking about the two rooms in the night, a little beside myself, though knowing where I was; and I felt confused at times—with a curious sense of fullness, as if I were becoming too large altogether.

In the evening I was so much worse that I resolved to prepare Charley, with which view I said, "You're getting quite strong, Charley, are you not?'

"Oh, quite!" said Charley.

"Strong enough to be told a secret, I think, Charley?"

"Quite strong enough for that, miss!" cried Charley. But Charley's face fell in the height of her delight, for she saw the secret in MY face; and she came out of the great chair, and fell upon my bosom, and said "Oh, miss, it's my doing! It's my doing!" and a great deal more out of the fullness of her grateful heart.

"Now, Charley," said I after letting her go on for a little while, "if I am to be ill, my great trust, humanly speaking, is in you. And unless you are as quiet and composed for me as you always were for yourself, you can never fulfil it, Charley."

"If you'll let me cry a little longer, miss," said Charley. "Oh, my dear, my dear! If you'll only let me cry a little longer. Oh, my dear!"—how affectionately and devotedly she poured this out as she clung to my neck, I never can remember without tears—"I'll be good."

So I let Charley cry a little longer, and it did us both good.

"Trust in me now, if you please, miss," said Charley quietly. "I am listening to everything you say."

"It's very little at present, Charley. I shall tell your doctor to-night that I don't think I am well and that you are going to nurse me."

For that the poor child thanked me with her whole heart. "And in the morning, when you hear Miss Ada in the garden, if I should not be quite able to go to the window-curtain as usual, do you go, Charley, and say I am asleep—that I have rather tired myself, and am asleep. At all times keep the room as I have kept it, Charley, and let no one come."

Charley promised, and I lay down, for I was very heavy. I saw the doctor that night and asked the favour of him that I wished to ask relative to his saying nothing of my illness in the house as yet. I have a very indistinct remembrance of that night melting into day, and of day melting into night again; but I was just able on the first morning to get to the window and speak to my darling.

On the second morning I heard her dear voice—Oh, how dear now!—outside; and I asked Charley, with some difficulty (speech being painful to me), to go and say I was asleep. I heard her answer softly, "Don't disturb her, Charley, for the world!"

"How does my own Pride look, Charley?" I inquired.

"Disappointed, miss," said Charley, peeping through the curtain.

"But I know she is very beautiful this morning."

"She is indeed, miss," answered Charley, peeping. "Still looking up at the window."

With her blue clear eyes, God bless them, always loveliest when raised like that!

I called Charley to me and gave her her last charge.

"Now, Charley, when she knows I am ill, she will try to make her way into the room. Keep her out, Charley, if you love me truly, to the last! Charley, if you let her in but once, only to look upon me for one moment as I lie here, I shall die."

"I never will! I never will!" she promised me.

"I believe it, my dear Charley. And now come and sit beside me for a little while, and touch me with your hand. For I cannot see you, Charley; I am blind."

CHAPTER XXXII. The Appointed Time

It is night in Lincoln's Inn—perplexed and troublous valley of the shadow of the law, where suitors generally find but little day—and fat candles are snuffed out in offices, and clerks have rattled down the crazy wooden stairs and dispersed. The bell that rings at nine o'clock has ceased its doleful clangour about nothing; the gates are shut; and the night-porter, a solemn warder with a mighty power of sleep, keeps guard in his lodge. From tiers of staircase windows clogged lamps like the eyes of Equity, bleared Argus with a fathomless pocket for every eye and an eye upon it, dimly blink at the stars. In dirty upper casements, here and there, hazy little patches of candlelight reveal where some wise draughtsman and conveyancer yet toils for the entanglement of real estate in meshes of sheep-skin, in the average ratio of about a dozen of sheep to an acre of land. Over which bee-like industry these benefactors of their species linger yet, though office-hours be past, that they may give, for every day, some good account at last.

In the neighbouring court, where the Lord Chancellor of the rag and bottle shop dwells, there is a general tendency towards beer and supper. Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Perkins, whose respective sons, engaged with a circle of acquaintance in the game of hide and seek, have been lying in ambush about the by-ways of Chancery Lane for some hours and scouring the plain of the same thoroughfare to the confusion of passengers—Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Perkins have but now exchanged congratulations on the children being abed, and they still linger on a door-step over a few parting words. Mr. Krook and his lodger, and the fact of Mr. Krook's being "continually in liquor," and the testamentary prospects of the young man are, as usual, the staple of their conversation. But they have something to say, likewise, of the Harmonic Meeting at the Sol's Arms, where the sound of the piano through the partly opened windows jingles out into the court, and where Little Swills, after keeping the lovers of harmony in a roar like a very Yorick, may now be heard taking the gruff line in a concerted piece and sentimentally adjuring his friends and patrons to "Listen, listen, listen, tew the wa-ter fall!" Mrs. Perkins and Mrs. Piper compare opinions on the subject of the young lady of professional celebrity who assists at the Harmonic Meetings and who has a space to herself in the manuscript announcement in the window, Mrs. Perkins possessing information that she has been married a year and a half, though announced as Miss M.

Melvilleson, the noted siren, and that her baby is clandestinely conveyed to the Sol's Arms every night to receive its natural nourishment during the entertainments. "Sooner than which, myself," says Mrs. Perkins, "I would get my living by selling lucifers." Mrs. Piper, as in duty bound, is of the same opinion, holding that a private station is better than public applause, and thanking heaven for her own (and, by implication, Mrs. Perkins') respectability. By this time the pot-boy of the Sol's Arms appearing with her supper-pint well frothed, Mrs. Piper accepts that tankard and retires indoors, first giving a fair good night to Mrs. Perkins, who has had her own pint in her hand ever since it was fetched from the same hostelry by young Perkins before he was sent to bed. Now there is a sound of putting up shop-shutters in the court and a smell as of the smoking of pipes; and shooting stars are seen in upper windows, further indicating retirement to rest. Now, too, the policeman begins to push at doors; to try fastenings; to be suspicious of bundles; and to administer his beat, on the hypothesis that every one is either robbing or being robbed.

It is a close night, though the damp cold is searching too, and there is a laggard mist a little way up in the air. It is a fine steaming night to turn the slaughter-houses, the unwholesome trades, the sewerage, bad water, and burial-grounds to account, and give the registrar of deaths some extra business. It may be something in the air—there is plenty in it—or it may be something in himself that is in fault; but Mr. Weevle, otherwise Jobling, is very ill at ease. He comes and goes between his own room and the open street door twenty times an hour. He has been doing so ever since it fell dark. Since the Chancellor shut up his shop, which he did very early to-night, Mr. Weevle has been down and up, and down and up (with a cheap tight velvet skull-cap on his head, making his whiskers look out of all proportion), oftener than before.

It is no phenomenon that Mr. Snagsby should be ill at ease too, for he always is so, more or less, under the oppressive influence of the secret that is upon him. Impelled by the mystery of which he is a partaker and yet in which he is not a sharer, Mr. Snagsby haunts what seems to be its fountain-head—the rag and bottle shop in the court. It has an irresistible attraction for him. Even now, coming round by the Sol's Arms with the intention of passing down the court, and out at the Chancery Lane end, and so terminating his unpremeditated after-supper stroll of ten minutes' long from his own door and back again, Mr. Snagsby approaches.

"What, Mr. Weevle?" says the stationer, stopping to speak. "Are YOU there?"

"Aye!" says Weevle, "Here I am, Mr. Snagsby."

"Airing yourself, as I am doing, before you go to bed?" the stationer inquires.

"Why, there's not much air to be got here; and what there is, is not very freshening," Weevle answers, glancing up and down the court.

"Very true, sir. Don't you observe," says Mr. Snagsby, pausing to sniff and taste the air a little, "don't you observe, Mr. Weevle, that you're—not to put too fine a point upon it—that you're rather greasy here, sir?"

"Why, I have noticed myself that there is a queer kind of flavour in the place to-night," Mr. Weevle rejoins. "I suppose it's chops at the Sol's Arms."

"Chops, do you think? Oh! Chops, eh?" Mr. Snagsby sniffs and tastes again. "Well, sir, I suppose it is. But I should say their cook at the Sol wanted a little looking after. She has been burning 'em, sir! And I don't think"—Mr. Snagsby sniffs and tastes again and then spits and wipes his mouth—"I don't think—not to put too fine a point upon it—that they were quite fresh when they were shown the gridiron."

"That's very likely. It's a tainting sort of weather."

"It IS a tainting sort of weather," says Mr. Snagsby, "and I find it sinking to the spirits."

"By George! I find it gives me the horrors," returns Mr. Weevle.

"Then, you see, you live in a lonesome way, and in a lonesome room, with a black circumstance hanging over it," says Mr. Snagsby, looking in past the other's shoulder along the dark passage and then falling back a step to look up at the house. "I couldn't live in that room alone, as you do, sir. I should get so fidgety and worried of an evening, sometimes, that I should be driven to come to the door and stand here sooner than sit there. But then it's very true that you didn't see, in your room, what I saw there. That makes a difference."

"I know quite enough about it," returns Tony.

"It's not agreeable, is it?" pursues Mr. Snagsby, coughing his cough of mild persuasion behind his hand. "Mr. Krook ought to consider it in the rent. I hope he does, I am sure."

"I hope he does," says Tony. "But I doubt it."

"You find the rent too high, do you, sir?" returns the stationer. "Rents ARE high about here. I don't know how it is exactly, but the law seems to put things up in price. Not," adds Mr. Snagsby with his apologetic cough, "that I mean to say a word against the profession I get my living by."

Mr. Weevle again glances up and down the court and then looks at the stationer. Mr. Snagsby, blankly catching his eye, looks upward for a star or so and coughs a cough expressive of not exactly seeing his way out of this conversation.

"It's a curious fact, sir," he observes, slowly rubbing his hands, "that he should have been—"

"Who's he?" interrupts Mr. Weevle.

"The deceased, you know," says Mr. Snagsby, twitching his head and right eyebrow towards the staircase and tapping his acquaintance on the button.

"Ah, to be sure!" returns the other as if he were not over-fond of the subject. "I thought we had done with him."

"I was only going to say it's a curious fact, sir, that he should have come and lived here, and been one of my writers, and then that you should come and live here, and be one of my writers too. Which there is nothing derogatory, but far from it in the appellation," says Mr. Snagsby, breaking off with a mistrust that he may have unpolitely asserted a kind of proprietorship in Mr. Weevle, "because I have known writers that have gone into brewers' houses and done really very respectable indeed. Eminently respectable, sir," adds Mr. Snagsby with a misgiving that he has not improved the matter.

"It's a curious coincidence, as you say," answers Weevle, once more glancing up and down the court.

"Seems a fate in it, don't there?" suggests the stationer.

"There does."

"Just so," observes the stationer with his confirmatory cough. "Quite a fate in it. Quite a fate. Well, Mr. Weevle, I am afraid I must bid you good night"—Mr. Snagsby speaks as if it made him desolate to go, though he has been casting about for any means of escape ever since he stopped to speak—"my little woman will be looking for me else. Good night, sir!"

If Mr. Snagsby hastens home to save his little woman the trouble of looking for him, he might set his mind at rest on that score. His little woman has had her eye upon him round the Sol's Arms all this time and now glides after him with a pocket handkerchief wrapped over her head, honouring Mr. Weevle and his doorway with a searching glance as she goes past.

"You'll know me again, ma'am, at all events," says Mr. Weevle to himself; "and I can't compliment you on your appearance, whoever you are, with your head tied up in a bundle. Is this fellow NEVER coming!"

This fellow approaches as he speaks. Mr. Weevle softly holds up his finger, and draws him into the passage, and closes the street door. Then they go upstairs, Mr. Weevle heavily, and Mr. Guppy (for it is he) very lightly indeed. When they are shut into the back room, they speak low.

"I thought you had gone to Jericho at least instead of coming here," says Tony.

"Why, I said about ten."

"You said about ten," Tony repeats. "Yes, so you did say about ten. But according to my count, it's ten times ten—it's a hundred o'clock. I never had such a night in my life!"

"What has been the matter?"

"That's it!" says Tony. "Nothing has been the matter. But here have I been stewing and fuming in this jolly old crib till I have had the horrors falling on me as thick as hail. THERE'S a blessed-looking candle!" says Tony, pointing to the heavily burning taper on his table with a great cabbage head and a long winding-sheet.

"That's easily improved," Mr. Guppy observes as he takes the snuffers in hand.

"IS it?" returns his friend. "Not so easily as you think. It has been smouldering like that ever since it was lighted."

"Why, what's the matter with you, Tony?" inquires Mr. Guppy, looking at him, snuffers in hand, as he sits down with his elbow on the table.

"William Guppy," replies the other, "I am in the downs. It's this unbearably dull, suicidal room—and old Boguey downstairs, I suppose." Mr. Weevle moodily pushes the snuffers-tray from him with his elbow, leans his head on his hand, puts his feet on the fender, and looks at the fire. Mr. Guppy, observing him, slightly tosses his head and sits down on the other side of the table in an easy attitude.

"Wasn't that Snagsby talking to you, Tony?"

"Yes, and he—yes, it was Snagsby," said Mr. Weevle, altering the construction of his sentence.

"On business?"

"No. No business. He was only sauntering by and stopped to prose."

"I thought it was Snagsby," says Mr. Guppy, "and thought it as well that he shouldn't see me, so I waited till he was gone."

"There we go again, William G.!" cried Tony, looking up for an instant. "So mysterious and secret! By George, if we were going to commit a murder, we couldn't have more mystery about it!"

Mr. Guppy affects to smile, and with the view of changing the conversation, looks with an admiration, real or pretended, round the room at the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty, terminating his survey with the portrait of Lady Dedlock over the mantelshelf, in which she is represented on a terrace, with a pedestal upon the terrace, and a vase upon the pedestal, and her shawl upon the vase, and a prodigious piece of fur upon the shawl, and her arm on the prodigious piece of fur, and a bracelet on her arm.

"That's very like Lady Dedlock," says Mr. Guppy. "It's a speaking likeness."

"I wish it was," growls Tony, without changing his position. "I should have some fashionable conversation, here, then."

Finding by this time that his friend is not to be wheedled into a more sociable humour, Mr. Guppy puts about upon the ill-used tack and remonstrates with him.

"Tony," says he, "I can make allowances for lowness of spirits, for no man knows what it is when it does come upon a man better than I do, and no man perhaps has a better right to know it than a man who has an unrequited image imprinted on his 'eart. But there are bounds to these things when an unoffending party is in question, and I will acknowledge to you, Tony, that I don't think your manner on the present occasion is hospitable or quite gentlemanly."

"This is strong language, William Guppy," returns Mr. Weevle.

"Sir, it may be," retorts Mr. William Guppy, "but I feel strongly when I use it."

Mr. Weevle admits that he has been wrong and begs Mr. William Guppy to think no more about it. Mr. William Guppy, however, having got the advantage, cannot quite release it without a little more injured remonstrance.

"No! Dash it, Tony," says that gentleman, "you really ought to be careful how you wound the feelings of a man who has an unrequited image imprinted on his 'eart and who is NOT altogether happy in those chords which vibrate to the tenderest emotions. You, Tony, possess in yourself all that is calculated to charm the eye and allure the taste. It is not—happily for you, perhaps, and I may wish that I could say the same—it is not your character to hover around one flower. The ole garden is open to you, and your airy pinions carry you through it. Still, Tony, far be it from me, I am sure, to wound even your feelings without a cause!"

Tony again entreats that the subject may be no longer pursued, saying emphatically, "William Guppy, drop it!" Mr. Guppy acquiesces, with the reply, "I never should have taken it up, Tony, of my own accord."

"And now," says Tony, stirring the fire, "touching this same bundle of letters. Isn't it an extraordinary thing of Krook to have appointed twelve o'clock to-night to hand 'em over to me?"

"Very. What did he do it for?"

"What does he do anything for? HE don't know. Said to-day was his birthday and he'd hand 'em over to-night at twelve o'clock. He'll have drunk himself blind by that time. He has been at it all day."

"He hasn't forgotten the appointment, I hope?"

"Forgotten? Trust him for that. He never forgets anything. I saw him to-night, about eight—helped him to shut up his shop—and he had got the letters then in his hairy cap. He pulled it off and showed 'em me. When the shop was closed, he took them out of his cap, hung his cap on the chair-back, and stood turning them over before the fire. I heard him a little while afterwards, through the floor here, humming like the wind, the only song he knows—about Bibo, and old Charon, and Bibo being drunk when he died, or something or other. He has been as quiet since as an old rat asleep in his hole."

"And you are to go down at twelve?"

"At twelve. And as I tell you, when you came it seemed to me a hundred."

"Tony," says Mr. Guppy after considering a little with his legs crossed, "he can't read yet, can he?"

"Read! He'll never read. He can make all the letters separately, and he knows most of them separately when he sees them; he has got on that much, under me; but he can't put them together. He's too old to acquire the knack of it now—and too drunk."

"Tony," says Mr. Guppy, uncrossing and recrossing his legs, "how do you suppose he spelt out that name of Hawdon?"

"He never spelt it out. You know what a curious power of eye he has and how he has been used to employ himself in copying things by eye alone. He imitated it, evidently from the direction of a letter, and asked me what it meant."

"Tony," says Mr. Guppy, uncrossing and recrossing his legs again, "should you say that the original was a man's writing or a woman's?"

"A woman's. Fifty to one a lady's—slopes a good deal, and the end of the letter 'n,' long and hasty."

Mr. Guppy has been biting his thumb-nail during this dialogue, generally changing the thumb when he has changed the cross leg. As he is going to do so again, he happens to look at his coat-sleeve. It takes his attention. He stares at it, aghast.

"Why, Tony, what on earth is going on in this house to-night? Is there a chimney on fire?"

"Chimney on fire!"

"Ah!" returns Mr. Guppy. "See how the soot's falling. See here, on my arm! See again, on the table here! Confound the stuff, it won't blow off—smears like black fat!"

They look at one another, and Tony goes listening to the door, and a little way upstairs, and a little way downstairs. Comes back and says it's all right and all quiet, and quotes the remark he lately made to Mr. Snagsby about their cooking chops at the Sol's Arms.

"And it was then," resumes Mr. Guppy, still glancing with remarkable aversion at the coat-sleeve, as they pursue their conversation before the fire, leaning on opposite sides of the table, with their heads very near together, "that he told you of his having taken the bundle of letters from his lodger's portmanteau?"

"That was the time, sir," answers Tony, faintly adjusting his whiskers. "Whereupon I wrote a line to my dear boy, the Honourable William Guppy, informing him of the appointment for to-night and advising him not to call before, Boguey being a slyboots."

The light vivacious tone of fashionable life which is usually assumed by Mr. Weevle sits so ill upon him to-night that he abandons that and his whiskers together, and after looking over his shoulder, appears to yield himself up a prey to the horrors again.

"You are to bring the letters to your room to read and compare, and to get yourself into a position to tell him all about them. That's the arrangement, isn't it, Tony?" asks Mr. Guppy, anxiously biting his thumb-nail.

"You can't speak too low. Yes. That's what he and I agreed."

"I tell you what, Tony—"

"You can't speak too low," says Tony once more. Mr. Guppy nods his sagacious head, advances it yet closer, and drops into a whisper.

"I tell you what. The first thing to be done is to make another packet like the real one so that if he should ask to see the real one while it's in my possession, you can show him the dummy."

"And suppose he detects the dummy as soon as he sees it, which with his biting screw of an eye is about five hundred times more likely than not," suggests Tony.

"Then we'll face it out. They don't belong to him, and they never did. You found that, and you placed them in my hands—a legal friend of yours—for security. If he forces us to it, they'll be producible, won't they?"

"Ye-es," is Mr. Weevle's reluctant admission.

"Why, Tony," remonstrates his friend, "how you look! You don't doubt William Guppy? You don't suspect any harm?"

"I don't suspect anything more than I know, William," returns the other gravely.

"And what do you know?" urges Mr. Guppy, raising his voice a little; but on his friend's once more warning him, "I tell you, you can't speak too low," he repeats his question without any sound at all, forming with his lips only the words, "What do you know?"

"I know three things. First, I know that here we are whispering in secrecy, a pair of conspirators."

"Well!" says Mr. Guppy. "And we had better be that than a pair of noodles, which we should be if we were doing anything else, for it's the only way of doing what we want to do. Secondly?"

"Secondly, it's not made out to me how it's likely to be profitable, after all."

Mr. Guppy casts up his eyes at the portrait of Lady Dedlock over the mantelshelf and replies, "Tony, you are asked to leave that to the honour of your friend. Besides its being calculated to serve that friend in those chords of the human mind which—which need not be called into agonizing vibration on the present occasion—your friend is no fool. What's that?"

"It's eleven o'clock striking by the bell of Saint Paul's. Listen and you'll hear all the bells in the city jangling."

Both sit silent, listening to the metal voices, near and distant, resounding from towers of various heights, in tones more various than their situations. When these at length cease, all seems more mysterious and quiet than before. One disagreeable result of whispering is that it seems to evoke an atmosphere of silence, haunted by the ghosts of sound—strange cracks and tickings, the rustling of garments that have no substance in them, and the tread of dreadful feet that would leave no mark on the sea-sand or the winter snow. So sensitive the two friends happen to be that the air is full of these phantoms, and the two look over their shoulders by one consent to see that the door is shut.

"Yes, Tony?" says Mr. Guppy, drawing nearer to the fire and biting his unsteady thumb-nail. "You were going to say, thirdly?"

"It's far from a pleasant thing to be plotting about a dead man in the room where he died, especially when you happen to live in it."

"But we are plotting nothing against him, Tony."

"May be not, still I don't like it. Live here by yourself and see how YOU like it."

"As to dead men, Tony," proceeds Mr. Guppy, evading this proposal, "there have been dead men in most rooms."

"I know there have, but in most rooms you let them alone, and—and they let you alone," Tony answers.

The two look at each other again. Mr. Guppy makes a hurried remark to the effect that they may be doing the deceased a service, that he hopes so. There is an oppressive blank until Mr. Weevle, by stirring the fire suddenly, makes Mr. Guppy start as if his heart had been stirred instead.

"Fah! Here's more of this hateful soot hanging about," says he. "Let us open the window a bit and get a mouthful of air. It's too close."

He raises the sash, and they both rest on the window-sill, half in and half out of the room. The neighbouring houses are too near to admit of their seeing any sky without craning their necks and looking up, but lights in frowsy windows here and there, and the rolling of distant carriages, and the new expression that there is of the stir of men, they find to be comfortable. Mr. Guppy, noiselessly tapping on the window-sill, resumes his whispering in quite a light-comedy tone.

"By the by, Tony, don't forget old Smallweed," meaning the younger of that name. "I have not let him into this, you know. That grandfather of his is too keen by half. It runs in the family."

"I remember," says Tony. "I am up to all that."

"And as to Krook," resumes Mr. Guppy. "Now, do you suppose he really has got hold of any other papers of importance, as he has boasted to you, since you have been such allies?"

Tony shakes his head. "I don't know. Can't Imagine. If we get through this business without rousing his suspicions, I shall be better informed, no doubt. How can I know without seeing them, when he don't know himself? He is always spelling out words from them, and chalking them over the table and the shop-wall, and asking what this is and what that is; but his whole stock from beginning to end may easily be the waste-paper he bought it as, for anything I can say. It's a monomania with him to think he is possessed of documents. He has been going to learn to read them this last quarter of a century, I should judge, from what he tells me."

"How did he first come by that idea, though? That's the question," Mr. Guppy suggests with one eye shut, after a little forensic meditation. "He may have found papers in something he bought, where papers were not supposed to be, and may have got it into his shrewd head from the manner and place of their concealment that they are worth something."

"Or he may have been taken in, in some pretended bargain. Or he may have been muddled altogether by long staring at whatever he HAS got, and by drink, and by hanging about the Lord Chancellor's Court and hearing of documents for ever," returns Mr. Weevle.

Mr. Guppy sitting on the window-sill, nodding his head and balancing all these possibilities in his mind, continues thoughtfully to tap it, and clasp it, and measure it with his hand, until he hastily draws his hand away.

"What, in the devil's name," he says, "is this! Look at my fingers!"

A thick, yellow liquor defiles them, which is offensive to the touch and sight and more offensive to the smell. A stagnant, sickening oil with some natural repulsion in it that makes them both shudder.

"What have you been doing here? What have you been pouring out of window?"

"I pouring out of window! Nothing, I swear! Never, since I have been here!" cries the lodger.

And yet look here—and look here! When he brings the candle here, from the corner of the window-sill, it slowly drips and creeps away down the bricks, here lies in a little thick nauseous pool.

"This is a horrible house," says Mr. Guppy, shutting down the window. "Give me some water or I shall cut my hand off."

He so washes, and rubs, and scrubs, and smells, and washes, that he has not long restored himself with a glass of brandy and stood silently before the fire when Saint Paul's bell strikes twelve and all those other bells strike twelve from their towers of various heights in the dark air, and in their many tones. When all is quiet again, the lodger says, "It's the appointed time at last. Shall I go?"

Mr. Guppy nods and gives him a "lucky touch" on the back, but not with the washed hand, though it is his right hand.

He goes downstairs, and Mr. Guppy tries to compose himself before the fire for waiting a long time. But in no more than a minute or two the stairs creak and Tony comes swiftly back.

"Have you got them?"

"Got them! No. The old man's not there."

He has been so horribly frightened in the short interval that his terror seizes the other, who makes a rush at him and asks loudly, "What's the matter?"

"I couldn't make him hear, and I softly opened the door and looked in. And the burning smell is there—and the soot is there, and the oil is there—and he is not there!" Tony ends this with a groan.

Mr. Guppy takes the light. They go down, more dead than alive, and holding one another, push open the door of the back shop. The cat has retreated close to it and stands snarling, not at them, at something on the ground before the fire. There is a very little fire left in the grate, but there is a smouldering, suffocating vapour in the room and a dark, greasy coating on the walls and ceiling. The chairs and table, and the bottle so rarely absent from the table, all stand as usual. On one chair-back hang the old man's hairy cap and coat.

"Look!" whispers the lodger, pointing his friend's attention to these objects with a trembling finger. "I told you so. When I saw him last, he took his cap off, took out the little bundle of old letters, hung his cap on the back of the chair—his coat was there already, for he had pulled that off before he went to put the shutters up—and I left him turning the letters over in his hand, standing just where that crumbled black thing is upon the floor."

Is he hanging somewhere? They look up. No.

"See!" whispers Tony. "At the foot of the same chair there lies a dirty bit of thin red cord that they tie up pens with. That went round the letters. He undid it slowly, leering and laughing at me, before he began to turn them over, and threw it there. I saw it fall."

"What's the matter with the cat?" says Mr. Guppy. "Look at her!"

"Mad, I think. And no wonder in this evil place."

They advance slowly, looking at all these things. The cat remains where they found her, still snarling at the something on the ground before the fire and between the two chairs. What is it? Hold up the light.

Here is a small burnt patch of flooring; here is the tinder from a little bundle of burnt paper, but not so light as usual, seeming to be steeped in something; and here is—is it the cinder of a small charred and broken log of wood sprinkled with white ashes, or is it coal? Oh, horror, he IS here! And this from which we run away, striking out the light and overturning one another into the street, is all that represents him.

Help, help, help! Come into this house for heaven's sake! Plenty will come in, but none can help. The Lord Chancellor of that court, true to his title in his last act, has died the death of all lord chancellors in all courts and of all authorities in all places under all names soever, where false pretences are made, and where injustice is done. Call the death by any name your Highness will, attribute it to whom you will, or say it might have been prevented how you will, it is the same death eternally—inborn, inbred, engendered in the corrupted humours of the vicious body itself, and that only—spontaneous combustion, and none other of all the deaths that can be died.

CHAPTER XXXIII. Interlopers

Now do those two gentlemen not very neat about the cuffs and buttons who attended the last coroner's inquest at the Sol's Arms reappear in the precincts with surprising swiftness (being, in fact, breathlessly fetched by the active and intelligent beadle), and institute perquisitions through the court, and dive into the Sol's parlour, and write with ravenous little pens on tissue-paper. Now do they note down, in the watches of the night, how the neighbourhood of Chancery Lane was yesterday, at about midnight, thrown into a state of the most intense agitation and excitement by the following alarming and horrible discovery. Now do they set forth how it will doubtless be remembered that some time back a painful sensation was created in the public mind by a case of mysterious death from opium occurring in the first floor of the house occupied as a rag, bottle, and general marine store shop, by an eccentric individual of intemperate habits, far advanced in life, named Krook; and how, by a remarkable coincidence, Krook was examined at the inquest, which it may be recollected was held on that occasion at the Sol's Arms, a well-conducted tavern immediately adjoining the premises in question on the west side and licensed to a highly respectable landlord, Mr. James George Bogsby. Now do they show (in as many words as possible) how during some hours of yesterday evening a very peculiar smell was observed by the inhabitants of the court, in which the tragical occurrence which forms the subject of that present account transpired; and which odour was at one time so powerful that Mr. Swills, a comic vocalist professionally engaged by Mr. J. G. Bogsby, has himself stated to our reporter that he mentioned to Miss M. Melvilleson, a lady of some pretensions to musical ability, likewise engaged by Mr. J. G. Bogsby to sing at a series of concerts called Harmonic Assemblies, or Meetings, which it would appear are held at the Sol's Arms under Mr. Bogsby's direction pursuant to the Act of George the Second, that he (Mr. Swills) found his voice seriously affected by the impure state of the atmosphere, his jocose expression at the time being that he was like an empty post-office, for he hadn't a single note in him. How this account of Mr. Swills is entirely corroborated by two intelligent married females residing in the same court and known respectively by the names of Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Perkins, both of whom observed the foetid effluvia and regarded them as being emitted from the premises in the occupation of Krook, the unfortunate deceased. All this and a great deal more the two gentlemen who have formed an amicable partnership in the melancholy catastrophe write down on the spot; and the boy population of the court (out of bed in a moment) swarm up the shutters of the Sol's Arms parlour, to behold the tops of their heads while they are about it.

The whole court, adult as well as boy, is sleepless for that night, and can do nothing but wrap up its many heads, and talk of the ill-fated house, and look at it. Miss Flite has been bravely rescued from her chamber, as if it were in flames, and accommodated with a bed at the Sol's Arms. The Sol neither turns off its gas nor shuts its door all night, for any kind of public excitement makes good for the Sol and causes the court to stand in need of comfort. The house has not done so much in the stomachic article of cloves or in brandy-and-water warm since the inquest. The moment the pot-boy heard what had happened, he rolled up his shirt-sleeves tight to his shoulders and said, "There'll be a run upon us!" In the first outcry, young Piper dashed off for the fire-engines and returned in triumph at a jolting gallop perched up aloft on the Phoenix and holding on to that fabulous creature with all his might in the midst of helmets and torches. One helmet remains behind after careful investigation of all chinks and crannies and slowly paces up and down before the house in company with one of the two policemen who have likewise been left in charge thereof. To this trio everybody in the court possessed of sixpence has an insatiate desire to exhibit hospitality in a liquid form.

Mr. Weevle and his friend Mr. Guppy are within the bar at the Sol and are worth anything to the Sol that the bar contains if they will only stay there. "This is not a time," says Mr. Bogsby, "to haggle about money," though he looks something sharply after it, over the counter; "give your orders, you two gentlemen, and you're welcome to whatever you put a name to."

Thus entreated, the two gentlemen (Mr. Weevle especially) put names to so many things that in course of time they find it difficult to put a name to anything quite distinctly, though they still relate to all new-comers some version of the night they have had of it, and of what they said, and what they thought, and what they saw. Meanwhile, one or other of the policemen often flits about the door, and pushing it open a little way at the full length of his arm, looks in from outer gloom. Not that he has any suspicions, but that he may as well know what they are up to in there.

Thus night pursues its leaden course, finding the court still out of bed through the unwonted hours, still treating and being treated, still conducting itself similarly to a court that has had a little money left it unexpectedly. Thus night at length with slow-retreating steps departs, and the lamp-lighter going his rounds, like an executioner to a despotic king, strikes off the little heads of fire that have aspired to lessen the darkness. Thus the day cometh, whether or no.

And the day may discern, even with its dim London eye, that the court has been up all night. Over and above the faces that have fallen drowsily on tables and the heels that lie prone on hard floors instead of beds, the brick and mortar physiognomy of the very court itself looks worn and jaded. And now the neighbourhood, waking up and beginning to hear of what has happened, comes streaming in, half dressed, to ask questions; and the two policemen and the helmet (who are far less impressible externally than the court) have enough to do to keep the door.

"Good gracious, gentlemen!" says Mr. Snagsby, coming up. "What's this I hear!"

"Why, it's true," returns one of the policemen. "That's what it is. Now move on here, come!"

"Why, good gracious, gentlemen," says Mr. Snagsby, somewhat promptly backed away, "I was at this door last night betwixt ten and eleven o'clock in conversation with the young man who lodges here."

"Indeed?" returns the policeman. "You will find the young man next door then. Now move on here, some of you,"

"Not hurt, I hope?" says Mr. Snagsby.

"Hurt? No. What's to hurt him!"

Mr. Snagsby, wholly unable to answer this or any question in his troubled mind, repairs to the Sol's Arms and finds Mr. Weevle languishing over tea and toast with a considerable expression on him of exhausted excitement and exhausted tobacco-smoke.

"And Mr. Guppy likewise!" quoth Mr. Snagsby. "Dear, dear, dear! What a fate there seems in all this! And my lit—"

Mr. Snagsby's power of speech deserts him in the formation of the words "my little woman." For to see that injured female walk into the Sol's

Arms at that hour of the morning and stand before the beer-engine, with her eyes fixed upon him like an accusing spirit, strikes him dumb.

"My dear," says Mr. Snagsby when his tongue is loosened, "will you take anything? A little—not to put too fine a point upon it—drop of shrub?"

"No," says Mrs. Snagsby.

"My love, you know these two gentlemen?"

"Yes!" says Mrs. Snagsby, and in a rigid manner acknowledges their presence, still fixing Mr. Snagsby with her eye.

The devoted Mr. Snagsby cannot bear this treatment. He takes Mrs. Snagsby by the hand and leads her aside to an adjacent cask.

"My little woman, why do you look at me in that way? Pray don't do it."

"I can't help my looks," says Mrs. Snagsby, "and if I could I wouldn't."

Mr. Snagsby, with his cough of meekness, rejoins, "Wouldn't you really, my dear?" and meditates. Then coughs his cough of trouble and says, "This is a dreadful mystery, my love!" still fearfully disconcerted by Mrs. Snagsby's eye.

"It IS," returns Mrs. Snagsby, shaking her head, "a dreadful mystery."

"My little woman," urges Mr. Snagsby in a piteous manner, "don't for goodness' sake speak to me with that bitter expression and look at me in that searching way! I beg and entreat of you not to do it. Good Lord, you don't suppose that I would go spontaneously combusting any person, my dear?"

"I can't say," returns Mrs. Snagsby.

On a hasty review of his unfortunate position, Mr. Snagsby "can't say" either. He is not prepared positively to deny that he may have had something to do with it. He has had something—he don't know what—to do with so much in this connexion that is mysterious that it is possible he may even be implicated, without knowing it, in the present transaction. He faintly wipes his forehead with his handkerchief and gasps.

"My life," says the unhappy stationer, "would you have any objections to mention why, being in general so delicately circumspect in your conduct, you come into a wine-vaults before breakfast?"

"Why do YOU come here?" inquires Mrs. Snagsby.

"My dear, merely to know the rights of the fatal accident which has happened to the venerable party who has been—combusted." Mr. Snagsby has made a pause to suppress a groan. "I should then have related them to you, my love, over your French roll."

"I dare say you would! You relate everything to me, Mr. Snagsby."

"Every—my lit—"

"I should be glad," says Mrs. Snagsby after contemplating his increased confusion with a severe and sinister smile, "if you would come home with me; I think you may be safer there, Mr. Snagsby, than anywhere else."

"My love, I don't know but what I may be, I am sure. I am ready to go."

Mr. Snagsby casts his eye forlornly round the bar, gives Messrs. Weevle and Guppy good morning, assures them of the satisfaction with which he sees them uninjured, and accompanies Mrs. Snagsby from the Sol's Arms. Before night his doubt whether he may not be responsible for some inconceivable part in the catastrophe which is the talk of the whole neighbourhood is almost resolved into certainty by Mrs. Snagsby's pertinacity in that fixed gaze. His mental sufferings are so great that he entertains wandering ideas of delivering himself up to justice and requiring to be cleared if innocent and punished with the utmost rigour of the law if guilty.

Mr. Weevle and Mr. Guppy, having taken their breakfast, step into Lincoln's Inn to take a little walk about the square and clear as many of the dark cobwebs out of their brains as a little walk may.

"There can be no more favourable time than the present, Tony," says Mr. Guppy after they have broodingly made out the four sides of the square, "for a word or two between us upon a point on which we must, with very little delay, come to an understanding."

"Now, I tell you what, William G.!" returns the other, eyeing his companion with a bloodshot eye. "If it's a point of conspiracy, you needn't take the trouble to mention it. I have had enough of that, and I ain't going to have any more. We shall have YOU taking fire next or blowing up with a bang."

This supposititious phenomenon is so very disagreeable to Mr. Guppy that his voice quakes as he says in a moral way, "Tony, I should have thought that what we went through last night would have been a lesson to you never to be personal any more as long as you lived." To which Mr. Weevle returns, "William, I should have thought it would have been a lesson to YOU never to conspire any more as long as you lived." To which Mr. Guppy says, "Who's conspiring?" To which Mr. Jobling replies, "Why, YOU are!" To which Mr. Guppy retorts, "No, I am not." To which Mr. Jobling retorts again, "Yes, you are!" To which Mr. Guppy retorts, "Who says so?" To which Mr. Jobling retorts, "I say so!" To which Mr. Guppy retorts, "Oh, indeed?" To which Mr. Jobling retorts, "Yes, indeed!" And both being now in a heated state, they walk on silently for a while to cool down again.

"Tony," says Mr. Guppy then, "if you heard your friend out instead of flying at him, you wouldn't fall into mistakes. But your temper is hasty and you are not considerate. Possessing in yourself, Tony, all that is calculated to charm the eye—"

"Oh! Blow the eye!" cries Mr. Weevle, cutting him short. "Say what you have got to say!"

Finding his friend in this morose and material condition, Mr. Guppy only expresses the finer feelings of his soul through the tone of injury in which he recommences, "Tony, when I say there is a point on which we must come to an understanding pretty soon, I say so quite apart from any kind of conspiring, however innocent. You know it is professionally arranged beforehand in all cases that are tried what facts the witnesses are to prove. Is it or is it not desirable that we should know what facts we are to prove on the inquiry into the death of this unfortunate old mo—gentleman?" (Mr. Guppy was going to say "mogul," but thinks "gentleman" better suited to the circumstances.)

"What facts? THE facts."

"The facts bearing on that inquiry. Those are"—Mr. Guppy tells them off on his fingers—"what we knew of his habits, when you saw him last, what his condition was then, the discovery that we made, and how we made it."

"Yes," says Mr. Weevle. "Those are about the facts."

"We made the discovery in consequence of his having, in his eccentric way, an appointment with you at twelve o'clock at night, when you were to explain some writing to him as you had often done before on account of his not being able to read. I, spending the evening with you, was called down—and so forth. The inquiry being only into the circumstances touching the death of the deceased, it's not necessary to go beyond these facts, I suppose you'll agree?"

"No!" returns Mr. Weevle. "I suppose not."

"And this is not a conspiracy, perhaps?" says the injured Guppy.

"No," returns his friend; "if it's nothing worse than this, I withdraw the observation."

"Now, Tony," says Mr. Guppy, taking his arm again and walking him slowly on, "I should like to know, in a friendly way, whether you have yet thought over the many advantages of your continuing to live at that place?"

"What do you mean?" says Tony, stopping.

"Whether you have yet thought over the many advantages of your continuing to live at that place?" repeats Mr. Guppy, walking him on again.

"At what place? THAT place?" pointing in the direction of the rag and bottle shop.

Mr. Guppy nods.

"Why, I wouldn't pass another night there for any consideration that you could offer me," says Mr. Weevle, haggardly staring.

"Do you mean it though, Tony?"

"Mean it! Do I look as if I mean it? I feel as if I do; I know that," says Mr. Weevle with a very genuine shudder.

"Then the possibility or probability—for such it must be considered—of your never being disturbed in possession of those effects lately belonging to a lone old man who seemed to have no relation in the world, and the certainty of your being able to find out what he really had got stored up there, don't weigh with you at all against last night, Tony, if I understand you?" says Mr. Guppy, biting his thumb with the appetite of vexation.

"Certainly not. Talk in that cool way of a fellow's living there?" cries Mr. Weevle indignantly. "Go and live there yourself."

"Oh! I, Tony!" says Mr. Guppy, soothing him. "I have never lived there and couldn't get a lodging there now, whereas you have got one."

"You are welcome to it," rejoins his friend, "and—ugh!—you may make yourself at home in it."

"Then you really and truly at this point," says Mr. Guppy, "give up the whole thing, if I understand you, Tony?"

"You never," returns Tony with a most convincing steadfastness, "said a truer word in all your life. I do!"

While they are so conversing, a hackney-coach drives into the square, on the box of which vehicle a very tall hat makes itself manifest to the public. Inside the coach, and consequently not so manifest to the multitude, though sufficiently so to the two friends, for the coach stops almost at their feet, are the venerable Mr. Smallweed and Mrs. Smallweed, accompanied by their granddaughter Judy.

An air of haste and excitement pervades the party, and as the tall hat (surmounting Mr. Smallweed the younger) alights, Mr. Smallweed the elder pokes his head out of window and bawls to Mr. Guppy, "How de do, sir! How de do!"

"What do Chick and his family want here at this time of the morning, I wonder!" says Mr. Guppy, nodding to his familiar.

"My dear sir," cries Grandfather Smallweed, "would you do me a favour? Would you and your friend be so very obleeging as to carry me into the public-house in the court, while Bart and his sister bring their grandmother along? Would you do an old man that good turn, sir?"

Mr. Guppy looks at his friend, repeating inquiringly, "The public-house in the court?" And they prepare to bear the venerable burden to the Sol's Arms.

"There's your fare!" says the patriarch to the coachman with a fierce grin and shaking his incapable fist at him. "Ask me for a penny more, and I'll have my lawful revenge upon you. My dear young men, be easy with me, if you please. Allow me to catch you round the neck. I won't squeeze you tighter than I can help. Oh, Lord! Oh, dear me! Oh, my bones!"

It is well that the Sol is not far off, for Mr. Weevle presents an apoplectic appearance before half the distance is accomplished. With no worse aggravation of his symptoms, however, than the utterance of divers croaking sounds expressive of obstructed respiration, he fulils his share of the porterage and the benevolent old gentleman is deposited by his own desire in the parlour of the Sol's Arms.

"Oh, Lord!" gasps Mr. Smallweed, looking about him, breathless, from an arm-chair. "Oh, dear me! Oh, my bones and back! Oh, my aches and pains! Sit down, you dancing, prancing, shambling, scrambling poll-parrot! Sit down!"

This little apostrophe to Mrs. Smallweed is occasioned by a propensity on the part of that unlucky old lady whenever she finds herself on her feet to amble about and "set" to inanimate objects, accompanying herself with a chattering noise, as in a witch dance. A nervous affection has probably as much to do with these demonstrations as any imbecile intention in the poor old woman, but on the present occasion they are so particularly lively in connexion with the Windsor arm-chair, fellow to that in which Mr.

Smallweed is seated, that she only quite desists when her grandchildren have held her down in it, her lord in the meanwhile bestowing upon her, with great volubility, the endearing epithet of "a pig-headed jackdaw," repeated a surprising number of times.

"My dear sir," Grandfather Smallweed then proceeds, addressing Mr. Guppy, "there has been a calamity here. Have you heard of it, either of you?"

"Heard of it, sir! Why, we discovered it."

"You discovered it. You two discovered it! Bart, THEY discovered it!"

The two discoverers stare at the Smallweeds, who return the compliment.

"My dear friends," whines Grandfather Smallweed, putting out both his hands, "I owe you a thousand thanks for discharging the melancholy office of discovering the ashes of Mrs. Smallweed's brother."

"Eh?" says Mr. Guppy.

"Mrs. Smallweed's brother, my dear friend—her only relation. We were not on terms, which is to be deplored now, but he never WOULD be on terms. He was not fond of us. He was eccentric—he was very eccentric. Unless he has left a will (which is not at all likely) I shall take out letters of administration. I have come down to look after the property; it must be sealed up, it must be protected. I have come down," repeats Grandfather Smallweed, hooking the air towards him with all his ten fingers at once, "to look after the property."

"I think, Small," says the disconsolate Mr. Guppy, "you might have mentioned that the old man was your uncle."

"You two were so close about him that I thought you would like me to be the same," returns that old bird with a secretly glistening eye. "Besides, I wasn't proud of him."

"Besides which, it was nothing to you, you know, whether he was or not," says Judy. Also with a secretly glistening eye.

"He never saw me in his life to know me," observed Small; "I don't know why I should introduce HIM, I am sure!"

"No, he never communicated with us, which is to be deplored," the old gentleman strikes in, "but I have come to look after the property—to look over the papers, and to look after the property. We shall make good our title. It is in the hands of my solicitor. Mr. Tulkinghorn, of Lincoln's Inn Fields, over the way there, is so good as to act as my solicitor; and grass don't grow under HIS feet, I can tell ye. Krook was Mrs. Smallweed's only brother; she had no relation but Krook, and Krook had no relation but Mrs. Smallweed. I am speaking of your brother, you brimstone black-beetle, that was seventy-six years of age."

Mrs. Smallweed instantly begins to shake her head and pipe up, "Seventy-six pound seven and sevenpence! Seventy-six thousand bags of money! Seventy-six hundred thousand million of parcels of bank-notes!"

"Will somebody give me a quart pot?" exclaims her exasperated husband, looking helplessly about him and finding no missile within his reach. "Will somebody obleege me with a spittoon? Will somebody hand me anything hard and bruising to pelt at her? You hag, you cat, you dog, you brimstone barker!" Here Mr. Smallweed, wrought up to the highest pitch by his own eloquence, actually throws Judy at her grandmother in default of anything else, by butting that young virgin at the old lady with such force as he can muster and then dropping into his chair in a heap.

"Shake me up, somebody, if you'll he so good," says the voice from within the faintly struggling bundle into which he has collapsed. "I have come to look after the property. Shake me up, and call in the police on duty at the next house to be explained to about the property. My solicitor will be here presently to protect the property. Transportation or the gallows for anybody who shall touch the property!" As his dutiful grandchildren set him up, panting, and putting him through the usual restorative process of shaking and punching, he still repeats like an echo, "The—the property! The property! Property!"

Mr. Weevle and Mr. Guppy look at each other, the former as having relinquished the whole affair, the latter with a discomfited countenance as having entertained some lingering expectations yet. But there is nothing to be done in opposition to the Smallweed interest. Mr. Tulkinghorn's clerk comes down from his official pew in the chambers to mention to the police that Mr. Tulkinghorn is answerable for its being all correct about the next of kin and that the papers and effects will be formally taken possession of in due time and course. Mr. Smallweed is at once permitted so far to assert his supremacy as to be carried on a visit of sentiment into the next house and upstairs into Miss Flite's deserted room, where he looks like a hideous bird of prey newly added to her aviary.

The arrival of this unexpected heir soon taking wind in the court still makes good for the Sol and keeps the court upon its mettle. Mrs. Piper and

Mrs. Perkins think it hard upon the young man if there really is no will, and consider that a handsome present ought to be made him out of the estate. Young Piper and young Perkins, as members of that restless juvenile circle which is the terror of the foot-passengers in Chancery Lane, crumble into ashes behind the pump and under the archway all day long, where wild yells and hootings take place over their remains. Little Swills and Miss M. Melvilleson enter into affable conversation with their patrons, feeling that these unusual occurrences level the barriers between professionals and non-professionals. Mr. Bogsby puts up "The popular song of King Death, with chorus by the whole strength of the company," as the great Harmonic feature of the week and announces in the bill that "J. G. B. is induced to do so at a considerable extra expense in consequence of a wish which has been very generally expressed at the bar by a large body of respectable individuals and in homage to a late melancholy event which has aroused so much sensation." There is one point connected with the deceased upon which the court is particularly anxious, namely, that the fiction of a full-sized coffin should be preserved, though there is so little to put in it. Upon the undertaker's stating in the Sol's bar in the course of the day that he has received orders to construct "a six-footer," the general solicitude is much relieved, and it is considered that Mr. Smallweed's conduct does him great honour.

Out of the court, and a long way out of it, there is considerable excitement too, for men of science and philosophy come to look, and carriages set down doctors at the corner who arrive with the same intent, and there is more learned talk about inflammable gases and phosphuretted hydrogen than the court has ever imagined. Some of these authorities (of course the wisest) hold with indignation that the deceased had no business to die in the alleged manner; and being reminded by other authorities of a certain inquiry into the evidence for such deaths reprinted in the sixth volume of the Philosophical Transactions; and also of a book not quite unknown on English medical jurisprudence; and likewise of the Italian case of the Countess Cornelia Baudi as set forth in detail by one Bianchini, prebendary of Verona, who wrote a scholarly work or so and was occasionally heard of in his time as having gleams of reason in him; and also of the testimony of Messrs. Fodere and Mere, two pestilent Frenchmen who WOULD investigate the subject; and further, of the corroborative testimony of Monsieur Le Cat, a rather celebrated French surgeon once upon a time, who had the unpoliteness to live in a house where such a case occurred and even to write an account of it—still they regard the late Mr. Krook's obstinacy in going out of the world by any such by-way as wholly unjustifiable and personally offensive. The less the court understands of all this, the more the court likes it, and the greater enjoyment it has in the stock in trade of the Sol's Arms. Then there comes the artist of a picture newspaper, with a foreground and figures ready drawn for anything from a wreck on the Cornish coast to a review in Hyde Park or a meeting in Manchester, and in Mrs. Perkins' own room, memorable evermore, he then and there throws in upon the block Mr. Krook's house, as large as life; in fact, considerably larger, making a very temple of it. Similarly, being permitted to look in at the door of the fatal chamber, he depicts that apartment as three-quarters of a mile long by fifty yards high, at which the court is particularly charmed. All this time the two gentlemen before mentioned pop in and out of every house and assist at the philosophical disputations—go everywhere and listen to everybody—and yet are always diving into the Sol's parlour and writing with the ravenous little pens on the tissue-paper.

At last come the coroner and his inquiry, like as before, except that the coroner cherishes this case as being out of the common way and tells the gentlemen of the jury, in his private capacity, that "that would seem to be an unlucky house next door, gentlemen, a destined house; but so we sometimes find it, and these are mysteries we can't account for!" After which the six-footer comes into action and is much admired.

In all these proceedings Mr. Guppy has so slight a part, except when he gives his evidence, that he is moved on like a private individual and can only haunt the secret house on the outside, where he has the mortification of seeing Mr. Smallweed padlocking the door, and of bitterly knowing himself to be shut out. But before these proceedings draw to a close, that is to say, on the night next after the catastrophe, Mr. Guppy has a thing to say that must be said to Lady Dedlock.

For which reason, with a sinking heart and with that hang-dog sense of guilt upon him which dread and watching enfolded in the Sol's Arms have produced, the young man of the name of Guppy presents himself at the town mansion at about seven o'clock in the evening and requests to see her ladyship. Mercury replies that she is going out to dinner; don't he see the carriage at the door? Yes, he does see the carriage at the door; but he wants to see my Lady too.

Mercury is disposed, as he will presently declare to a fellow-gentleman in waiting, "to pitch into the young man"; but his instructions are positive. Therefore he sulkily supposes that the young man must come up into the library. There he leaves the young man in a large room, not over-light, while he makes report of him.

Mr. Guppy looks into the shade in all directions, discovering everywhere a certain charred and whitened little heap of coal or wood. Presently he hears a rustling. Is it—? No, it's no ghost, but fair flesh and blood, most brilliantly dressed.

"I have to beg your ladyship's pardon," Mr. Guppy stammers, very downcast. "This is an inconvenient time—"

"I told you, you could come at any time." She takes a chair, looking straight at him as on the last occasion.

"Thank your ladyship. Your ladyship is very affable."

"You can sit down." There is not much affability in her tone.

"I don't know, your ladyship, that it's worth while my sitting down and detaining you, for I—I have not got the letters that I mentioned when I had the honour of waiting on your ladyship."

"Have you come merely to say so?"

"Merely to say so, your ladyship." Mr. Guppy besides being depressed, disappointed, and uneasy, is put at a further disadvantage by the splendour and beauty of her appearance.

She knows its influence perfectly, has studied it too well to miss a grain of its effect on any one. As she looks at him so steadily and coldly, he not only feels conscious that he has no guide in the least perception of what is really the complexion of her thoughts, but also that he is being every moment, as it were, removed further and further from her.

She will not speak, it is plain. So he must.

"In short, your ladyship," says Mr. Guppy like a meanly penitent thief, "the person I was to have had the letters of, has come to a sudden end, and —" He stops. Lady Dedlock calmly finishes the sentence.

"And the letters are destroyed with the person?"

Mr. Guppy would say no if he could—as he is unable to hide.

"I believe so, your ladyship."

If he could see the least sparkle of relief in her face now? No, he could see no such thing, even if that brave outside did not utterly put him away, and he were not looking beyond it and about it.

He falters an awkward excuse or two for his failure.

"Is this all you have to say?" inquires Lady Dedlock, having heard him out—or as nearly out as he can stumble.

Mr. Guppy thinks that's all.

"You had better be sure that you wish to say nothing more to me, this being the last time you will have the opportunity."

Mr. Guppy is quite sure. And indeed he has no such wish at present, by any means.

"That is enough. I will dispense with excuses. Good evening to you!" And she rings for Mercury to show the young man of the name of Guppy out.

But in that house, in that same moment, there happens to be an old man of the name of Tulkinghorn. And that old man, coming with his quiet footstep to the library, has his hand at that moment on the handle of the door—comes in—and comes face to face with the young man as he is leaving the room.

One glance between the old man and the lady, and for an instant the blind that is always down flies up. Suspicion, eager and sharp, looks out. Another instant, close again.

"I beg your pardon, Lady Dedlock. I beg your pardon a thousand times. It is so very unusual to find you here at this hour. I supposed the room was empty. I beg your pardon!"

"Stay!" She negligently calls him back. "Remain here, I beg. I am going out to dinner. I have nothing more to say to this young man!"

The disconcerted young man bows, as he goes out, and cringingly hopes that Mr. Tulkinghorn of the Fields is well.

"Aye, aye?" says the lawyer, looking at him from under his bent brows, though he has no need to look again—not he. "From Kenge and Carboy's, surely?"

"Kenge and Carboy's, Mr. Tulkinghorn. Name of Guppy, sir."

"To be sure. Why, thank you, Mr. Guppy, I am very well!"

"Happy to hear it, sir. You can't be too well, sir, for the credit of the profession."

"Thank you, Mr. Guppy!"

Mr. Guppy sneaks away. Mr. Tulkinghorn, such a foil in his old-fashioned rusty black to Lady Dedlock's brightness, hands her down the staircase to her carriage. He returns rubbing his chin, and rubs it a good deal in the course of the evening.

CHAPTER XXXIV. A Turn of the Screw

"Now, what," says Mr. George, "may this be? Is it blank cartridge or ball? A flash in the pan or a shot?"

An open letter is the subject of the trooper's speculations, and it seems to perplex him mightily. He looks at it at arm's length, brings it close to him, holds it in his right hand, holds it in his left hand, reads it with his head on this side, with his head on that side, contracts his eyebrows, elevates them, still cannot satisfy himself. He smooths it out upon the table with his heavy palm, and thoughtfully walking up and down the gallery, makes a halt before it every now and then to come upon it with a fresh eye. Even that won't do. "Is it," Mr. George still muses, "blank cartridge or ball?"

Phil Squod, with the aid of a brush and paint-pot, is employed in the distance whitening the targets, softly whistling in quick-march time and in drum-and-fife manner that he must and will go back again to the girl he left behind him.

"Phil!" The trooper beckons as he calls him.

Phil approaches in his usual way, sidling off at first as if he were going anywhere else and then bearing down upon his commander like a bayonet-charge. Certain splashes of white show in high relief upon his dirty face, and he scrapes his one eyebrow with the handle of the brush.

"Attention, Phil! Listen to this."

"Steady, commander, steady."

"'Sir. Allow me to remind you (though there is no legal necessity for my doing so, as you are aware) that the bill at two months' date drawn on yourself by Mr. Matthew Bagnet, and by you accepted, for the sum of ninety-seven pounds four shillings and ninepence, will become due to-morrow, when you will please be prepared to take up the same on presentation. Yours, Joshua Smallweed.' What do you make of that, Phil?"

"Mischief, guv'ner."

"Why?"

"I think," replies Phil after pensively tracing out a cross-wrinkle in his forehead with the brush-handle, "that mischeevious consequences is always meant when money's asked for."

"Lookye, Phil," says the trooper, sitting on the table. "First and last, I have paid, I may say, half as much again as this principal in interest and one thing and another."

Phil intimates by sidling back a pace or two, with a very unaccountable wrench of his wry face, that he does not regard the transaction as being made more promising by this incident.

"And lookye further, Phil," says the trooper, staying his premature conclusions with a wave of his hand. "There has always been an understanding that this bill was to be what they call renewed. And it has been renewed no end of times. What do you say now?"

"I say that I think the times is come to a end at last."

"You do? Humph! I am much of the same mind myself."

"Joshua Smallweed is him that was brought here in a chair?"

"The same."

"Guv'ner," says Phil with exceeding gravity, "he's a leech in his dispositions, he's a screw and a wice in his actions, a snake in his twistings, and a lobster in his claws."

Having thus expressively uttered his sentiments, Mr. Squod, after waiting a little to ascertain if any further remark be expected of him, gets back by his usual series of movements to the target he has in hand and vigorously signifies through his former musical medium that he must and he will return to that ideal young lady. George, having folded the letter, walks in that direction.

"There IS a way, commander," says Phil, looking cunningly at him, "of settling this."

"Paying the money, I suppose? I wish I could."

Phil shakes his head. "No, guv'ner, no; not so bad as that. There IS a way," says Phil with a highly artistic turn of his brush; "what I'm a-doing at present."

"Whitewashing."

Phil nods.

"A pretty way that would be! Do you know what would become of the Bagnets in that case? Do you know they would be ruined to pay off my old scores? YOU'RE a moral character," says the trooper, eyeing him in his large way with no small indignation; "upon my life you are, Phil!"

Phil, on one knee at the target, is in course of protesting earnestly, though not without many allegorical scoops of his brush and smoothings of the white surface round the rim with his thumb, that he had forgotten the Bagnet responsibility and would not so much as injure a hair of the head of any member of that worthy family when steps are audible in the long passage without, and a cheerful voice is heard to wonder whether George is at home. Phil, with a look at his master, hobbles up, saying, "Here's the guv'ner, Mrs. Bagnet! Here he is!" and the old girl herself, accompanied by Mr. Bagnet, appears.

The old girl never appears in walking trim, in any season of the year, without a grey cloth cloak, coarse and much worn but very clean, which is, undoubtedly, the identical garment rendered so interesting to Mr. Bagnet by having made its way home to Europe from another quarter of the globe in company with Mrs. Bagnet and an umbrella. The latter faithful appendage is also invariably a part of the old girl's presence out of doors. It is of no colour known in this life and has a corrugated wooden crook for a handle, with a metallic object let into its prow, or beak, resembling a little model of a fanlight over a street door or one of the oval glasses out of a pair of spectacles, which ornamental object has not that tenacious capacity of sticking to its post that might be desired in an article long associated with the British army. The old girl's umbrella is of a flabby habit of waist and seems to be in need of stays—an appearance that is possibly referable to its having served through a series of years at home as a cupboard and on journeys as a carpet bag. She never puts it up, having the greatest reliance on her well-proved cloak with its capacious hood, but generally uses the instrument as a wand with which to point out joints of meat or bunches of greens in marketing or to arrest the attention of tradesmen by a friendly poke. Without her market-basket, which is a sort of wicker well with two flapping lids, she never stirs abroad. Attended by these her trusty companions, therefore, her honest sunburnt face looking cheerily out of a rough straw bonnet, Mrs. Bagnet now arrives, fresh-coloured and bright, in George's Shooting Gallery.

"Well, George, old fellow," says she, "and how do YOU do, this sunshiny morning?"

Giving him a friendly shake of the hand, Mrs. Bagnet draws a long breath after her walk and sits down to enjoy a rest. Having a faculty, matured on the tops of baggage-waggons and in other such positions, of resting easily anywhere, she perches on a rough bench, unties her bonnet-strings, pushes back her bonnet, crosses her arms, and looks perfectly comfortable.

Mr. Bagnet in the meantime has shaken hands with his old comrade and with Phil, on whom Mrs. Bagnet likewise bestows a good-humoured nod and smile.

"Now, George," said Mrs. Bagnet briskly, "here we are, Lignum and myself"—she often speaks of her husband by this appellation, on account, as it is supposed, of Lignum Vitae having been his old regimental nickname when they first became acquainted, in compliment to the extreme hardness and toughness of his physiognomy—"just looked in, we have, to make it all correct as usual about that security. Give him the new bill to sign, George, and he'll sign it like a man."

"I was coming to you this morning," observes the trooper reluctantly.

"Yes, we thought you'd come to us this morning, but we turned out early and left Woolwich, the best of boys, to mind his sisters and came to you instead—as you see! For Lignum, he's tied so close now, and gets so little exercise, that a walk does him good. But what's the matter, George?" asks Mrs. Bagnet, stopping in her cheerful talk. "You don't look yourself."

"I am not quite myself," returns the trooper; "I have been a little put out, Mrs. Bagnet."

Her bright quick eye catches the truth directly. "George!" holding up her forefinger. "Don't tell me there's anything wrong about that security of Lignum's! Don't do it, George, on account of the children!"

The trooper looks at her with a troubled visage.

"George," says Mrs. Bagnet, using both her arms for emphasis and occasionally bringing down her open hands upon her knees. "If you have allowed anything wrong to come to that security of Lignum's, and if you have let him in for it, and if you have put us in danger of being sold up—and I see sold up in your face, George, as plain as print—you have done a shameful action and have deceived us cruelly. I tell you, cruelly, George. There!"

Mr. Bagnet, otherwise as immovable as a pump or a lamp-post, puts his large right hand on the top of his bald head as if to defend it from a shower-bath and looks with great uneasiness at Mrs. Bagnet.

"George," says that old girl, "I wonder at you! George, I am ashamed of you! George, I couldn't have believed you would have done it! I always knew you to be a rolling stone that gathered no moss, but I never thought you would have taken away what little moss there was for Bagnet and the children to lie upon. You know what a hard-working, steady-going chap he is. You know what Quebec and Malta and Woolwich are, and I never did think you would, or could, have had the heart to serve us so. Oh, George!" Mrs. Bagnet gathers up her cloak to wipe her eyes on in a very genuine manner, "How could you do it?"

Mrs. Bagnet ceasing, Mr. Bagnet removes his hand from his head as if the shower-bath were over and looks disconsolately at Mr. George, who has turned quite white and looks distressfully at the grey cloak and straw bonnet.

"Mat," says the trooper in a subdued voice, addressing him but still looking at his wife, "I am sorry you take it so much to heart, because I do hope it's not so bad as that comes to. I certainly have, this morning, received this letter"—which he reads aloud—"but I hope it may be set right yet. As to a rolling stone, why, what you say is true. I AM a rolling stone, and I never rolled in anybody's way, I fully believe, that I rolled the least good to. But it's impossible for an old vagabond comrade to like your wife and family better than I like 'em, Mat, and I trust you'll look upon me as forgivingly as you can. Don't think I've kept anything from you. I haven't had the letter more than a quarter of an hour."

"Old girl," murmurs Mr. Bagnet after a short silence, "will you tell him my opinion?"

"Oh! Why didn't he marry," Mrs. Bagnet answers, half laughing and half crying, "Joe Pouch's widder in North America? Then he wouldn't have got himself into these troubles."

"The old girl," says Mr. Bagnet, "puts it correct—why didn't you?"

"Well, she has a better husband by this time, I hope," returns the trooper. "Anyhow, here I stand, this present day, NOT married to Joe Pouch's widder. What shall I do? You see all I have got about me. It's not mine; it's yours. Give the word, and I'll sell off every morsel. If I could have hoped it would have brought in nearly the sum wanted, I'd have sold all long ago. Don't believe that I'll leave you or yours in the lurch, Mat. I'd sell myself first. I only wish," says the trooper, giving himself a disparaging blow in the chest, "that I knew of any one who'd buy such a second-hand piece of old stores."

"Old girl," murmurs Mr. Bagnet, "give him another bit of my mind."

"George," says the old girl, "you are not so much to be blamed, on full consideration, except for ever taking this business without the means."

"And that was like me!" observes the penitent trooper, shaking his head. "Like me, I know."

"Silence! The old girl," says Mr. Bagnet, "is correct—in her way of giving my opinions—hear me out!"

"That was when you never ought to have asked for the security, George, and when you never ought to have got it, all things considered. But what's done can't be undone. You are always an honourable and straightforward fellow, as far as lays in your power, though a little flighty. On the other hand, you can't admit but what it's natural in us to be anxious with such a thing hanging over our heads. So forget and forgive all round, George. Come! Forget and forgive all round!"

Mrs. Bagnet, giving him one of her honest hands and giving her husband the other, Mr. George gives each of them one of his and holds them while he speaks.

"I do assure you both, there's nothing I wouldn't do to discharge this obligation. But whatever I have been able to scrape together has gone every two months in keeping it up. We have lived plainly enough here, Phil and I. But the gallery don't quite do what was expected of it, and it's not—in short, it's not the mint. It was wrong in me to take it? Well, so it was. But I was in a manner drawn into that step, and I thought it might steady me, and set me up, and you'll try to overlook my having such expectations, and upon my soul, I am very much obliged to you, and very much ashamed of myself." With these concluding words, Mr. George gives a shake to each of the hands he holds, and relinquishing them, backs a pace or two in a broad-chested, upright attitude, as if he had made a final confession and were immediately going to be shot with all military honours.

"George, hear me out!" says Mr. Bagnet, glancing at his wife. "Old girl, go on!"

Mr. Bagnet, being in this singular manner heard out, has merely to observe that the letter must be attended to without any delay, that it is advisable that George and he should immediately wait on Mr. Smallweed in person, and that the primary object is to save and hold harmless Mr. Bagnet, who had none of the money. Mr. George, entirely assenting, puts on his hat and prepares to march with Mr. Bagnet to the enemy's camp.

"Don't you mind a woman's hasty word, George," says Mrs. Bagnet, patting him on the shoulder. "I trust my old Lignum to you, and I am sure you'll bring him through it."

The trooper returns that this is kindly said and that he WILL bring Lignum through it somehow. Upon which Mrs. Bagnet, with her cloak, basket, and umbrella, goes home, bright-eyed again, to the rest of her family, and the comrades sally forth on the hopeful errand of mollifying Mr. Smallweed.

Whether there are two people in England less likely to come satisfactorily out of any negotiation with Mr. Smallweed than Mr. George and Mr. Matthew Bagnet may be very reasonably questioned. Also, notwithstanding their martial appearance, broad square shoulders, and heavy tread, whether there are within the same limits two more simple and unaccustomed children in all the Smallweedy affairs of life. As they proceed with great gravity through the streets towards the region of Mount Pleasant, Mr. Bagnet, observing his companion to be thoughtful, considers it a friendly part to refer to Mrs. Bagnet's late sally.

"George, you know the old girl—she's as sweet and as mild as milk. But touch her on the children—or myself—and she's off like gunpowder."

"It does her credit, Mat!"

"George," says Mr. Bagnet, looking straight before him, "the old girl—can't do anything—that don't do her credit. More or less. I never say so. Discipline must he maintained."

"She's worth her weight in gold," says the trooper.

"In gold?" says Mr. Bagnet. "I'll tell you what. The old girl's weight—is twelve stone six. Would I take that weight—in any metal—for the old girl? No. Why not? Because the old girl's metal is far more precious—than the preciousest metal. And she's ALL metal!"

"You are right, Mat!"

"When she took me—and accepted of the ring—she 'listed under me and the children—heart and head, for life. She's that earnest," says Mr.

Bagnet, "and true to her colours—that, touch us with a finger—and she turns out—and stands to her arms. If the old girl fires wide—once in a way—at the call of duty—look over it, George. For she's loyal!"

"Why, bless her, Mat," returns the trooper, "I think the higher of her for it!"

"You are right!" says Mr. Bagnet with the warmest enthusiasm, though without relaxing the rigidity of a single muscle. "Think as high of the old girl—as the rock of Gibraltar—and still you'll be thinking low—of such merits. But I never own to it before her. Discipline must be maintained."

These encomiums bring them to Mount Pleasant and to Grandfather Smallweed's house. The door is opened by the perennial Judy, who, having surveyed them from top to toe with no particular favour, but indeed with a malignant sneer, leaves them standing there while she consults the oracle as to their admission. The oracle may be inferred to give consent from the circumstance of her returning with the words on her honey lips that they can come in if they want to it. Thus privileged, they come in and find Mr. Smallweed with his feet in the drawer of his chair as if it were a paper foot-bath and Mrs. Smallweed obscured with the cushion like a bird that is not to sing.

"My dear friend," says Grandfather Smallweed with those two lean affectionate arms of his stretched forth. "How de do? How de do? Who is our friend, my dear friend?"

"Why this," returns George, not able to be very conciliatory at first, "is Matthew Bagnet, who has obliged me in that matter of ours, you know."

"Oh! Mr. Bagnet? Surely!" The old man looks at him under his hand.

"Hope you're well, Mr. Bagnet? Fine man, Mr. George! Military air, sir!"

No chairs being offered, Mr. George brings one forward for Bagnet and one for himself. They sit down, Mr. Bagnet as if he had no power of bending himself, except at the hips, for that purpose.

"Judy," says Mr. Smallweed, "bring the pipe."

"Why, I don't know," Mr. George interposes, "that the young woman need give herself that trouble, for to tell you the truth, I am not inclined to smoke it to-day."

"Ain't you?" returns the old man. "Judy, bring the pipe."

"The fact is, Mr. Smallweed," proceeds George, "that I find myself in rather an unpleasant state of mind. It appears to me, sir, that your friend in the city has been playing tricks."

"Oh, dear no!" says Grandfather Smallweed. "He never does that!"

"Don't he? Well, I am glad to hear it, because I thought it might be HIS doing. This, you know, I am speaking of. This letter."

Grandfather Smallweed smiles in a very ugly way in recognition of the letter.

"What does it mean?" asks Mr. George.

"Judy," says the old man. "Have you got the pipe? Give it to me. Did you say what does it mean, my good friend?"

"Aye! Now, come, come, you know, Mr. Smallweed," urges the trooper, constraining himself to speak as smoothly and confidentially as he can, holding the open letter in one hand and resting the broad knuckles of the other on his thigh, "a good lot of money has passed between us, and we are face to face at the present moment, and are both well aware of the understanding there has always been. I am prepared to do the usual thing which I have done regularly and to keep this matter going. I never got a letter like this from you before, and I have been a little put about by it this morning, because here's my friend Matthew Bagnet, who, you know, had none of the money—"

"I DON'T know it, you know," says the old man quietly.

"Why, con-found you—it, I mean—I tell you so, don't I?"

"Oh, yes, you tell me so," returns Grandfather Smallweed. "But I don't know it."

"Well!" says the trooper, swallowing his fire. "I know it."

Mr. Smallweed replies with excellent temper, "Ah! That's quite another thing!" And adds, "But it don't matter. Mr. Bagnet's situation is all one, whether or no."

The unfortunate George makes a great effort to arrange the affair comfortably and to propitiate Mr. Smallweed by taking him upon his own terms.

"That's just what I mean. As you say, Mr. Smallweed, here's Matthew Bagnet liable to be fixed whether or no. Now, you see, that makes his good lady very uneasy in her mind, and me too, for whereas I'm a harum-scarum sort of a good-for-nought that more kicks than halfpence come natural to, why he's a steady family man, don't you see? Now, Mr. Smallweed," says the trooper, gaining confidence as he proceeds in his soldierly mode of doing business, "although you and I are good friends enough in a certain sort of a way, I am well aware that I can't ask you to let my friend Bagnet off entirely."

"Oh, dear, you are too modest. You can ASK me anything, Mr. George." (There is an ogreish kind of jocularity in Grandfather Smallweed to-day.)

"And you can refuse, you mean, eh? Or not you so much, perhaps, as your friend in the city? Ha ha ha!"

"Ha ha ha!" echoes Grandfather Smallweed. In such a very hard manner and with eyes so particularly green that Mr. Bagnet's natural gravity is much deepened by the contemplation of that venerable man.

"Come!" says the sanguine George. "I am glad to find we can be pleasant, because I want to arrange this pleasantly. Here's my friend Bagnet, and here am I. We'll settle the matter on the spot, if you please, Mr. Smallweed, in the usual way. And you'll ease my friend Bagnet's mind, and his family's mind, a good deal if you'll just mention to him what our understanding is."

Here some shrill spectre cries out in a mocking manner, "Oh, good gracious! Oh!" Unless, indeed, it be the sportive Judy, who is found to be silent when the startled visitors look round, but whose chin has received a recent toss, expressive of derision and contempt. Mr. Bagnet's gravity becomes yet more profound.

"But I think you asked me, Mr. George"—old Smallweed, who all this time has had the pipe in his hand, is the speaker now—"I think you asked me, what did the letter mean?"

"Why, yes, I did," returns the trooper in his off-hand way, "but I don't care to know particularly, if it's all correct and pleasant."

Mr. Smallweed, purposely balking himself in an aim at the trooper's head, throws the pipe on the ground and breaks it to pieces.

"That's what it means, my dear friend. I'll smash you. I'll crumble you. I'll powder you. Go to the devil!"

The two friends rise and look at one another. Mr. Bagnet's gravity has now attained its profoundest point.

"Go to the devil!" repeats the old man. "I'll have no more of your pipe-smokings and swaggerings. What? You're an independent dragoon, too! Go to my lawyer (you remember where; you have been there before) and show your independence now, will you? Come, my dear friend, there's a chance for you. Open the street door, Judy; put these blusterers out! Call in help if they don't go. Put 'em out!"

He vociferates this so loudly that Mr. Bagnet, laying his hands on the shoulders of his comrade before the latter can recover from his amazement, gets him on the outside of the street door, which is instantly slammed by the triumphant Judy. Utterly confounded, Mr. George awhile stands looking at the knocker. Mr. Bagnet, in a perfect abyss of gravity, walks up and down before the little parlour window like a sentry and looks in every time he passes, apparently revolving something in his mind.

"Come, Mat," says Mr. George when he has recovered himself, "we must try the lawyer. Now, what do you think of this rascal?"

Mr. Bagnet, stopping to take a farewell look into the parlour, replies with one shake of his head directed at the interior, "If my old girl had been here—I'd have told him!" Having so discharged himself of the subject of his cogitations, he falls into step and marches off with the trooper, shoulder to shoulder.

When they present themselves in Lincoln's Inn Fields, Mr. Tulkinghorn is engaged and not to be seen. He is not at all willing to see them, for when they have waited a full hour, and the clerk, on his bell being rung, takes the opportunity of mentioning as much, he brings forth no more encouraging message than that Mr. Tulkinghorn has nothing to say to them and they had better not wait. They do wait, however, with the perseverance of military tactics, and at last the bell rings again and the client in possession comes out of Mr. Tulkinghorn's room.

The client is a handsome old lady, no other than Mrs. Rouncewell, housekeeper at Chesney Wold. She comes out of the sanctuary with a fair old-fashioned curtsy and softly shuts the door. She is treated with some distinction there, for the clerk steps out of his pew to show her through the outer office and to let her out. The old lady is thanking him for his attention when she observes the comrades in waiting.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I think those gentlemen are military?"

The clerk referring the question to them with his eye, and Mr. George not turning round from the almanac over the fire-place. Mr. Bagnet takes upon himself to reply, "Yes, ma'am. Formerly."

"I thought so. I was sure of it. My heart warms, gentlemen, at the sight of you. It always does at the sight of such. God bless you, gentlemen! You'll excuse an old woman, but I had a son once who went for a soldier. A fine handsome youth he was, and good in his bold way, though some people did disparage him to his poor mother. I ask your pardon for troubling you, sir. God bless you, gentlemen!"

"Same to you, ma'am!" returns Mr. Bagnet with right good will.

There is something very touching in the earnestness of the old lady's voice and in the tremble that goes through her quaint old figure. But Mr. George is so occupied with the almanac over the fire-place (calculating the coming months by it perhaps) that he does not look round until she has gone away and the door is closed upon her.

"George," Mr. Bagnet gruffly whispers when he does turn from the almanac at last. "Don't be cast down! 'Why, soldiers, why—should we be melancholy, boys?' Cheer up, my hearty!"

The clerk having now again gone in to say that they are still there and Mr. Tulkinghorn being heard to return with some irascibility, "Let 'em come in then!" they pass into the great room with the painted ceiling and find him standing before the fire.

"Now, you men, what do you want? Sergeant, I told you the last time I saw you that I don't desire your company here."

Sergeant replies—dashed within the last few minutes as to his usual manner of speech, and even as to his usual carriage—that he has received this letter, has been to Mr. Smallweed about it, and has been referred there.

"I have nothing to say to you," rejoins Mr. Tulkinghorn. "If you get into debt, you must pay your debts or take the consequences. You have no occasion to come here to learn that, I suppose?"

Sergeant is sorry to say that he is not prepared with the money.

"Very well! Then the other man—this man, if this is he—must pay it for you."

Sergeant is sorry to add that the other man is not prepared with the money either.

"Very well! Then you must pay it between you or you must both be sued for it and both suffer. You have had the money and must refund it. You are not to pocket other people's pounds, shillings, and pence and escape scot-free."

The lawyer sits down in his easy-chair and stirs the fire. Mr. George hopes he will have the goodness to—

"I tell you, sergeant, I have nothing to say to you. I don't like your associates and don't want you here. This matter is not at all in my course of practice and is not in my office. Mr. Smallweed is good enough to offer these affairs to me, but they are not in my way. You must go to Melchisedech's in Clifford's Inn."

"I must make an apology to you, sir," says Mr. George, "for pressing myself upon you with so little encouragement—which is almost as unpleasant to me as it can be to you—but would you let me say a private word to you?"

Mr. Tulkinghorn rises with his hands in his pockets and walks into one of the window recesses. "Now! I have no time to waste." In the midst of his perfect assumption of indifference, he directs a sharp look at the trooper, taking care to stand with his own back to the light and to have the other with his face towards it.

"Well, sir," says Mr. George, "this man with me is the other party implicated in this unfortunate affair—nominally, only nominally—and my sole object is to prevent his getting into trouble on my account. He is a most respectable man with a wife and family, formerly in the Royal Artillery—"

"My friend, I don't care a pinch of snuff for the whole Royal Artillery establishment—officers, men, tumbrils, waggons, horses, guns, and ammunition."

"'Tis likely, sir. But I care a good deal for Bagnet and his wife and family being injured on my account. And if I could bring them through this matter, I should have no help for it but to give up without any other consideration what you wanted of me the other day."

"Have you got it here?"

"I have got it here, sir."

"Sergeant," the lawyer proceeds in his dry passionless manner, far more hopeless in the dealing with than any amount of vehemence, "make up your mind while I speak to you, for this is final. After I have finished speaking I have closed the subject, and I won't re-open it. Understand that. You can leave here, for a few days, what you say you have brought here if you choose; you can take it away at once if you choose. In case you choose to leave it here, I can do this for you—I can replace this matter on its old footing, and I can go so far besides as to give you a written undertaking that this man Bagnet shall never be troubled in any way until you have been proceeded against to the utmost, that your means shall be exhausted before the creditor looks to his. This is in fact all but freeing him. Have you decided?"

The trooper puts his hand into his breast and answers with a long breath, "I must do it, sir."

So Mr. Tulkinghorn, putting on his spectacles, sits down and writes the undertaking, which he slowly reads and explains to Bagnet, who has all this time been staring at the ceiling and who puts his hand on his bald head again, under this new verbal shower-bath, and seems exceedingly in need of the old girl through whom to express his sentiments. The trooper then takes from his breast-pocket a folded paper, which he lays with an unwilling hand at the lawyer's elbow. "'Tis only a letter of instructions, sir. The last I ever had from him."

Look at a millstone, Mr. George, for some change in its expression, and you will find it quite as soon as in the face of Mr. Tulkinghorn when he opens and reads the letter! He refolds it and lays it in his desk with a countenance as unperturbable as death.

Nor has he anything more to say or do but to nod once in the same frigid and discourteous manner and to say briefly, "You can go. Show these men out, there!" Being shown out, they repair to Mr. Bagnet's residence to dine.

Boiled beef and greens constitute the day's variety on the former repast of boiled pork and greens, and Mrs. Bagnet serves out the meal in the same way and seasons it with the best of temper, being that rare sort of old girl that she receives Good to her arms without a hint that it might be Better and catches light from any little spot of darkness near her. The spot on this occasion is the darkened brow of Mr. George; he is unusually thoughtful and depressed. At first Mrs. Bagnet trusts to the combined endearments of Quebec and Malta to restore him, but finding those young ladies sensible that their existing Bluffy is not the Bluffy of their usual frolicsome acquaintance, she winks off the light infantry and leaves him to deploy at leisure on the open ground of the domestic hearth.

But he does not. He remains in close order, clouded and depressed. During the lengthy cleaning up and pattening process, when he and Mr. Bagnet are supplied with their pipes, he is no better than he was at dinner. He forgets to smoke, looks at the fire and ponders, lets his pipe out, fills the breast of Mr. Bagnet with perturbation and dismay by showing that he has no enjoyment of tobacco.

Therefore when Mrs. Bagnet at last appears, rosy from the invigorating pail, and sits down to her work, Mr. Bagnet growls, "Old girl!" and winks monitions to her to find out what's the matter.

"Why, George!" says Mrs. Bagnet, quietly threading her needle. "How low you are!"

"Am I? Not good company? Well, I am afraid I am not."

"He ain't at all like Bluffy, mother!" cries little Malta.

"Because he ain't well, I think, mother," adds Quebec.

"Sure that's a bad sign not to be like Bluffy, too!" returns the trooper, kissing the young damsels. "But it's true," with a sigh, "true, I am afraid. These little ones are always right!"

"George," says Mrs. Bagnet, working busily, "if I thought you cross enough to think of anything that a shrill old soldier's wife—who could have bitten her tongue off afterwards and ought to have done it almost—said this morning, I don't know what I shouldn't say to you now."

"My kind soul of a darling," returns the trooper. "Not a morsel of it."

"Because really and truly, George, what I said and meant to say was that I trusted Lignum to you and was sure you'd bring him through it. And you HAVE brought him through it, noble!"

"Thankee, my dear!" says George. "I am glad of your good opinion."

In giving Mrs. Bagnet's hand, with her work in it, a friendly shake—for she took her seat beside him—the trooper's attention is attracted to her face. After looking at it for a little while as she plies her needle, he looks to young Woolwich, sitting on his stool in the corner, and beckons that fifer to him.

"See there, my boy," says George, very gently smoothing the mother's hair with his hand, "there's a good loving forehead for you! All bright with love of you, my boy. A little touched by the sun and the weather through following your father about and taking care of you, but as fresh and wholesome as a ripe apple on a tree."

Mr. Bagnet's face expresses, so far as in its wooden material lies, the highest approbation and acquiescence.

"The time will come, my boy," pursues the trooper, "when this hair of your mother's will be grey, and this forehead all crossed and re-crossed with wrinkles, and a fine old lady she'll be then. Take care, while you are young, that you can think in those days, 'I never whitened a hair of her dear head—I never marked a sorrowful line in her face!' For of all the many things that you can think of when you are a man, you had better have THAT by you, Woolwich!"

Mr. George concludes by rising from his chair, seating the boy beside his mother in it, and saying, with something of a hurry about him, that he'll smoke his pipe in the street a bit.

CHAPTER XXXV. Esther's Narrative

I lay ill through several weeks, and the usual tenor of my life became like an old remembrance. But this was not the effect of time so much as of the change in all my habits made by the helplessness and inaction of a sick-room. Before I had been confined to it many days, everything else seemed to have retired into a remote distance where there was little or no separation between the various stages of my life which had been really divided by years. In falling ill, I seemed to have crossed a dark lake and to have left all my experiences, mingled together by the great distance, on the healthy shore.

My housekeeping duties, though at first it caused me great anxiety to think that they were unperformed, were soon as far off as the oldest of the old duties at Greenleaf or the summer afternoons when I went home from school with my portfolio under my arm, and my childish shadow at my side, to my godmother's house. I had never known before how short life really was and into how small a space the mind could put it.

While I was very ill, the way in which these divisions of time became confused with one another distressed my mind exceedingly. At once a child, an elder girl, and the little woman I had been so happy as, I was not only oppressed by cares and difficulties adapted to each station, but by the great perplexity of endlessly trying to reconcile them. I suppose that few who have not been in such a condition can quite understand what I mean or what painful unrest arose from this source.

For the same reason I am almost afraid to hint at that time in my disorder—it seemed one long night, but I believe there were both nights and days in it—when I laboured up colossal staircases, ever striving to reach the top, and ever turned, as I have seen a worm in a garden path, by some obstruction, and labouring again. I knew perfectly at intervals, and I think vaguely at most times, that I was in my bed; and I talked with Charley, and felt her touch, and knew her very well; yet I would find myself complaining, "Oh, more of these never-ending stairs, Charley—more and more—piled up to the sky', I think!" and labouring on again.

Dare I hint at that worse time when, strung together somewhere in great black space, there was a flaming necklace, or ring, or starry circle of some kind, of which I was one of the beads! And when my only prayer was to be taken off from the rest and when it was such inexplicable agony and misery to be a part of the dreadful thing?

Perhaps the less I say of these sick experiences, the less tedious and the more intelligible I shall be. I do not recall them to make others unhappy or because I am now the least unhappy in remembering them. It may be that if we knew more of such strange afflictions we might be the better able to alleviate their intensity.

The repose that succeeded, the long delicious sleep, the blissful rest, when in my weakness I was too calm to have any care for myself and could have heard (or so I think now) that I was dying, with no other emotion than with a pitying love for those I left behind—this state can be perhaps more widely understood. I was in this state when I first shrunk from the light as it twinkled on me once more, and knew with a boundless joy for which no words are rapturous enough that I should see again.

I had heard my Ada crying at the door, day and night; I had heard her calling to me that I was cruel and did not love her; I had heard her praying and imploring to be let in to nurse and comfort me and to leave my bedside no more; but I had only said, when I could speak, "Never, my sweet girl, never!" and I had over and over again reminded Charley that she was to keep my darling from the room whether I lived or died. Charley had been true to me in that time of need, and with her little hand and her great heart had kept the door fast.

But now, my sight strengthening and the glorious light coming every day more fully and brightly on me, I could read the letters that my dear wrote to me every morning and evening and could put them to my lips and lay my cheek upon them with no fear of hurting her. I could see my little maid, so tender and so careful, going about the two rooms setting everything in order and speaking cheerfully to Ada from the open window again. I could understand the stillness in the house and the thoughtfulness it expressed on the part of all those who had always been so good to me. I could weep in the exquisite felicity of my heart and be as happy in my weakness as ever I had been in my strength.

By and by my strength began to be restored. Instead of lying, with so strange a calmness, watching what was done for me, as if it were done for some one else whom I was quietly sorry for, I helped it a little, and so on to a little more and much more, until I became useful to myself, and interested, and attached to life again.

How well I remember the pleasant afternoon when I was raised in bed with pillows for the first time to enjoy a great tea-drinking with Charley! The little creature—sent into the world, surely, to minister to the weak and sick—was so happy, and so busy, and stopped so often in her preparations to lay her head upon my bosom, and fondle me, and cry with joyful tears she was so glad, she was so glad, that I was obliged to say, "Charley, if you go on in this way, I must lie down again, my darling, for I am weaker than I thought I was!" So Charley became as quiet as a mouse and took her bright face here and there across and across the two rooms, out of the shade into the divine sunshine, and out of the sunshine into the shade, while I watched her peacefully. When all her preparations were concluded and the pretty tea-table with its little delicacies to tempt me, and its white cloth, and its flowers, and everything so lovingly and beautifully arranged for me by Ada downstairs, was ready at the bedside, I felt sure I was steady enough to say something to Charley that was not new to my thoughts.

First I complimented Charley on the room, and indeed it was so fresh and airy, so spotless and neat, that I could scarce believe I had been lying there so long. This delighted Charley, and her face was brighter than before.

"Yet, Charley," said I, looking round, "I miss something, surely, that I am accustomed to?"

Poor little Charley looked round too and pretended to shake her head as if there were nothing absent.

"Are the pictures all as they used to be?" I asked her.

"Every one of them, miss," said Charley.

"And the furniture, Charley?"

"Except where I have moved it about to make more room, miss."

"And yet," said I, "I miss some familiar object. Ah, I know what it is, Charley! It's the looking-glass."

Charley got up from the table, making as if she had forgotten something, and went into the next room; and I heard her sob there.

I had thought of this very often. I was now certain of it. I could thank God that it was not a shock to me now. I called Charley back, and when she came—at first pretending to smile, but as she drew nearer to me, looking grieved—I took her in my arms and said, "It matters very little, Charley. I hope I can do without my old face very well."

I was presently so far advanced as to be able to sit up in a great chair and even giddily to walk into the adjoining room, leaning on Charley. The mirror was gone from its usual place in that room too, but what I had to bear was none the harder to bear for that.

My guardian had throughout been earnest to visit me, and there was now no good reason why I should deny myself that happiness. He came one morning, and when he first came in, could only hold me in his embrace and say, "My dear, dear girl!" I had long known—who could know better?—what a deep fountain of affection and generosity his heart was; and was it not worth my trivial suffering and change to fill such a place in it? "Oh, yes!" I thought. "He has seen me, and he loves me better than he did; he has seen me and is even fonder of me than he was before; and what have I to mourn for!"

He sat down by me on the sofa, supporting me with his arm. For a little while he sat with his hand over his face, but when he removed it, fell into his usual manner. There never can have been, there never can be, a pleasanter manner.

"My little woman," said he, "what a sad time this has been. Such an inflexible little woman, too, through all!"

"Only for the best, guardian," said I.

"For the best?" he repeated tenderly. "Of course, for the best. But here have Ada and I been perfectly forlorn and miserable; here has your friend Caddy been coming and going late and early; here has every one about the house been utterly lost and dejected; here has even poor Rick been writing—to ME too—in his anxiety for you!"

I had read of Caddy in Ada's letters, but not of Richard. I told him so.

"Why, no, my dear," he replied. "I have thought it better not to mention it to her."

"And you speak of his writing to YOU," said I, repeating his emphasis. "As if it were not natural for him to do so, guardian; as if he could write to a better friend!"

"He thinks he could, my love," returned my guardian, "and to many a better. The truth is, he wrote to me under a sort of protest while unable to write to you with any hope of an answer—wrote coldly, haughtily, distantly, resentfully. Well, dearest little woman, we must look forbearingly on it. He is not to blame. Jarndyce and Jarndyce has warped him out of himself and perverted me in his eyes. I have known it do as bad deeds, and worse, many a time. If two angels could be concerned in it, I believe it would change their nature."

"It has not changed yours, guardian."

"Oh, yes, it has, my dear," he said laughingly. "It has made the south wind easterly, I don't know how often. Rick mistrusts and suspects me—goes to lawyers, and is taught to mistrust and suspect me. Hears I have conflicting interests, claims clashing against his and what not. Whereas, heaven knows that if I could get out of the mountains of wiglomeration on which my unfortunate name has been so long bestowed (which I can't) or could level them by the extinction of my own original right (which I can't either, and no human power ever can, anyhow, I believe, to such a pass have we got), I would do it this hour. I would rather restore to poor Rick his proper nature than be endowed with all the money that dead suitors, broken, heart and soul, upon the wheel of Chancery, have left unclaimed with the Accountant-General—and that's money enough, my dear, to be cast into a pyramid, in memory of Chancery's transcendent wickedness."

"IS it possible, guardian," I asked, amazed, "that Richard can be suspicious of you?"

"Ah, my love, my love," he said, "it is in the subtle poison of such abuses to breed such diseases. His blood is infected, and objects lose their natural aspects in his sight. It is not HIS fault."

"But it is a terrible misfortune, guardian."

"It is a terrible misfortune, little woman, to be ever drawn within the influences of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. I know none greater. By little and little he has been induced to trust in that rotten reed, and it communicates some portion of its rottenness to everything around him. But again I say with all my soul, we must be patient with poor Rick and not blame him. What a troop of fine fresh hearts like his have I seen in my time turned by the same means!"

I could not help expressing something of my wonder and regret that his benevolent, disinterested intentions had prospered so little.

"We must not say so, Dame Durden," he cheerfully replied; "Ada is the happier, I hope, and that is much. I did think that I and both these young creatures might be friends instead of distrustful foes and that we might so far counter-act the suit and prove too strong for it. But it was too much to expect. Jarndyce and Jarndyce was the curtain of Rick's cradle."

"But, guardian, may we not hope that a little experience will teach him what a false and wretched thing it is?"

"We WILL hope so, my Esther," said Mr. Jarndyce, "and that it may not teach him so too late. In any case we must not be hard on him. There are not many grown and matured men living while we speak, good men too, who if they were thrown into this same court as suitors would not be vitally changed and depreciated within three years—within two—within one. How can we stand amazed at poor Rick? A young man so unfortunate," here he fell into a lower tone, as if he were thinking aloud, "cannot at first believe (who could?) that Chancery is what it is. He looks to it, flushed and fitfully, to do something with his interests and bring them to some settlement. It procrastinates, disappoints, tries, tortures him; wears out his sanguine hopes and patience, thread by thread; but he still looks to it, and hankers after it, and finds his whole world treacherous and hollow. Well, well, well! Enough of this, my dear!"

He had supported me, as at first, all this time, and his tenderness was so precious to me that I leaned my head upon his shoulder and loved him as if he had been my father. I resolved in my own mind in this little pause, by some means, to see Richard when I grew strong and try to set him right.

"There are better subjects than these," said my guardian, "for such a joyful time as the time of our dear girl's recovery. And I had a commission to broach one of them as soon as I should begin to talk. When shall Ada come to see you, my love?"

I had been thinking of that too. A little in connexion with the absent mirrors, but not much, for I knew my loving girl would be changed by no change in my looks.

"Dear guardian," said I, "as I have shut her out so long—though indeed, indeed, she is like the light to me—"

"I know it well, Dame Durden, well."

He was so good, his touch expressed such endearing compassion and affection, and the tone of his voice carried such comfort into my heart that I stopped for a little while, quite unable to go on. "Yes, yes, you are tired," said he. "Rest a little."

"As I have kept Ada out so long," I began afresh after a short while, "I think I should like to have my own way a little longer, guardian. It would be best to be away from here before I see her. If Charley and I were to go to some country lodging as soon as I can move, and if I had a week there in which to grow stronger and to be revived by the sweet air and to look forward to the happiness of having Ada with me again, I think it would be better for us."

I hope it was not a poor thing in me to wish to be a little more used to my altered self before I met the eyes of the dear girl I longed so ardently to see, but it is the truth. I did. He understood me, I was sure; but I was not afraid of that. If it were a poor thing, I knew he would pass it over.

"Our spoilt little woman," said my guardian, "shall have her own way even in her inflexibility, though at the price, I know, of tears downstairs. And see here! Here is Boythorn, heart of chivalry, breathing such ferocious vows as never were breathed on paper before, that if you don't go and occupy his whole house, he having already turned out of it expressly for that purpose, by heaven and by earth he'll pull it down and not leave one brick standing on another!"

And my guardian put a letter in my hand, without any ordinary beginning such as "My dear Jarndyce," but rushing at once into the words, "I swear if Miss Summerson do not come down and take possession of my house, which I vacate for her this day at one o'clock, P.M.," and then with the utmost seriousness, and in the most emphatic terms, going on to make the extraordinary declaration he had quoted. We did not appreciate the writer the less for laughing heartily over it, and we settled that I should send him a letter of thanks on the morrow and accept his offer. It was a most agreeable one to me, for all the places I could have thought of, I should have liked to go to none so well as Chesney Wold.

"Now, little housewife," said my guardian, looking at his watch, "I was strictly timed before I came upstairs, for you must not be tired too soon; and my time has waned away to the last minute. I have one other petition. Little Miss Flite, hearing a rumour that you were ill, made nothing of walking down here—twenty miles, poor soul, in a pair of dancing shoes—to inquire. It was heaven's mercy we were at home, or she would have walked back again."

The old conspiracy to make me happy! Everybody seemed to be in it!

"Now, pet," said my guardian, "if it would not be irksome to you to admit the harmless little creature one afternoon before you save Boythorn's otherwise devoted house from demolition, I believe you would make her prouder and better pleased with herself than I—though my eminent name is Jarndyce—could do in a lifetime."

I have no doubt he knew there would be something in the simple image of the poor afflicted creature that would fall like a gentle lesson on my mind at that time. I felt it as he spoke to me. I could not tell him heartily enough how ready I was to receive her. I had always pitied her, never so much as now. I had always been glad of my little power to soothe her under her calamity, but never, never, half so glad before.

We arranged a time for Miss Flite to come out by the coach and share my early dinner. When my guardian left me, I turned my face away upon my couch and prayed to be forgiven if I, surrounded by such blessings, had magnified to myself the little trial that I had to undergo. The childish prayer of that old birthday when I had aspired to be industrious, contented, and true-hearted and to do good to some one and win some love to myself if I could came back into my mind with a reproachful sense of all the happiness I had since enjoyed and all the affectionate hearts that had been turned towards me. If I were weak now, what had I profited by those mercies? I repeated the old childish prayer in its old childish words and found that its old peace had not departed from it.

My guardian now came every day. In a week or so more I could walk about our rooms and hold long talks with Ada from behind the window-curtain. Yet I never saw her, for I had not as yet the courage to look at the dear face, though I could have done so easily without her seeing me.

On the appointed day Miss Flite arrived. The poor little creature ran into my room quite forgetful of her usual dignity, and crying from her very heart of hearts, "My dear Fitz Jarndyce!" fell upon my neck and kissed me twenty times.

"Dear me!" said she, putting her hand into her reticule, "I have nothing here but documents, my dear Fitz Jarndyce; I must borrow a pocket handkerchief."

Charley gave her one, and the good creature certainly made use of it, for she held it to her eyes with both hands and sat so, shedding tears for the next ten minutes.

"With pleasure, my dear Fitz Jarndyce," she was careful to explain. "Not the least pain. Pleasure to see you well again. Pleasure at having the honour of being admitted to see you. I am so much fonder of you, my love, than of the Chancellor. Though I DO attend court regularly. By the by, my dear, mentioning pocket handkerchiefs—"

Miss Flite here looked at Charley, who had been to meet her at the place where the coach stopped. Charley glanced at me and looked unwilling to pursue the suggestion.

"Ve-ry right!" said Miss Flite, "Ve-ry correct. Truly! Highly indiscreet of me to mention it; but my dear Miss Fitz Jarndyce, I am afraid I am at times (between ourselves, you wouldn't think it) a little—rambling you know," said Miss Flite, touching her forehead. "Nothing more."

"What were you going to tell me?" said I, smiling, for I saw she wanted to go on. "You have roused my curiosity, and now you must gratify it."

Miss Flite looked at Charley for advice in this important crisis, who said, "If you please, ma'am, you had better tell then," and therein gratified Miss Flite beyond measure.

"So sagacious, our young friend," said she to me in her mysterious way. "Diminutive. But ve-ry sagacious! Well, my dear, it's a pretty anecdote. Nothing more. Still I think it charming. Who should follow us down the road from the coach, my dear, but a poor person in a very ungenteel bonnet —"

"Jenny, if you please, miss," said Charley.

"Just so!" Miss Flite acquiesced with the greatest suavity. "Jenny. Ye-es! And what does she tell our young friend but that there has been a lady with a veil inquiring at her cottage after my dear Fitz Jarndyce's health and taking a handkerchief away with her as a little keepsake merely because it was my amiable Fitz Jarndyce's! Now, you know, so very prepossessing in the lady with the veil!"

"If you please, miss," said Charley, to whom I looked in some astonishment, "Jenny says that when her baby died, you left a handkerchief there, and that she put it away and kept it with the baby's little things. I think, if you please, partly because it was yours, miss, and partly because it had covered the baby."

"Diminutive," whispered Miss Flite, making a variety of motions about her own forehead to express intellect in Charley. "But ex-ceedingly sagacious! And so dear! My love, she's clearer than any counsel I ever heard!"

"Yes, Charley," I returned. "I remember it. Well?"

"Well, miss," said Charley, "and that's the handkerchief the lady took. And Jenny wants you to know that she wouldn't have made away with it herself for a heap of money but that the lady took it and left some money instead. Jenny don't know her at all, if you please, miss!"

"Why, who can she be?" said I.

"My love," Miss Flite suggested, advancing her lips to my ear with her most mysterious look, "in MY opinion—don't mention this to our diminutive friend—she's the Lord Chancellor's wife. He's married, you know. And I understand she leads him a terrible life. Throws his lordship's papers into the fire, my dear, if he won't pay the jeweller!"

I did not think very much about this lady then, for I had an impression that it might be Caddy. Besides, my attention was diverted by my visitor, who was cold after her ride and looked hungry and who, our dinner being brought in, required some little assistance in arraying herself with great satisfaction in a pitiable old scarf and a much-worn and often-mended pair of gloves, which she had brought down in a paper parcel. I had to preside, too, over the entertainment, consisting of a dish of fish, a roast fowl, a sweetbread, vegetables, pudding, and Madeira; and it was so pleasant to see how she enjoyed it, and with what state and ceremony she did honour to it, that I was soon thinking of nothing else.

When we had finished and had our little dessert before us, embellished by the hands of my dear, who would yield the superintendence of everything prepared for me to no one, Miss Flite was so very chatty and happy that I thought I would lead her to her own history, as she was always pleased to talk about herself. I began by saying "You have attended on the Lord Chancellor many years, Miss Flite?"

"Oh, many, many, many years, my dear. But I expect a judgment. Shortly."

There was an anxiety even in her hopefulness that made me doubtful if I had done right in approaching the subject. I thought I would say no more about it.

"My father expected a judgment," said Miss Flite. "My brother. My sister. They all expected a judgment. The same that I expect."

"They are all—"

"Ye-es. Dead of course, my dear," said she.

As I saw she would go on, I thought it best to try to be serviceable to her by meeting the theme rather than avoiding it.

"Would it not be wiser," said I, "to expect this judgment no more?"

"Why, my dear," she answered promptly, "of course it would!"

"And to attend the court no more?"

"Equally of course," said she. "Very wearing to be always in expectation of what never comes, my dear Fitz Jarndyce! Wearing, I assure you, to the bone!"

She slightly showed me her arm, and it was fearfully thin indeed.

"But, my dear," she went on in her mysterious way, "there's a dreadful attraction in the place. Hush! Don't mention it to our diminutive friend when she comes in. Or it may frighten her. With good reason. There's a cruel attraction in the place. You CAN'T leave it. And you MUST expect."

I tried to assure her that this was not so. She heard me patiently and smilingly, but was ready with her own answer.

"Aye, aye, aye! You think so because I am a little rambling. Ve-ry absurd, to be a little rambling, is it not? Ve-ry confusing, too. To the head. I find it so. But, my dear, I have been there many years, and I have noticed. It's the mace and seal upon the table."

What could they do, did she think? I mildly asked her.

"Draw," returned Miss Flite. "Draw people on, my dear. Draw peace out of them. Sense out of them. Good looks out of them. Good qualities out of them. I have felt them even drawing my rest away in the night. Cold and glittering devils!"

She tapped me several times upon the arm and nodded good-humouredly as if she were anxious I should understand that I had no cause to fear her, though she spoke so gloomily, and confided these awful secrets to me.

"Let me see," said she. "I'll tell you my own case. Before they ever drew me—before I had ever seen them—what was it I used to do?

Tambourine playing? No. Tambour work. I and my sister worked at tambour work. Our father and our brother had a builder's business. We all lived together. Ve-ry respectably, my dear! First, our father was drawn—slowly. Home was drawn with him. In a few years he was a fierce, sour, angry bankrupt without a kind word or a kind look for any one. He had been so different, Fitz Jarndyce. He was drawn to a debtors' prison. There he died. Then our brother was drawn—swiftly—to drunkenness. And rags. And death. Then my sister was drawn. Hush! Never ask to what! Then I was ill and in misery, and heard, as I had often heard before, that this was all the work of Chancery. When I got better, I went to look at the monster. And then I found out how it was, and I was drawn to stay there."

Having got over her own short narrative, in the delivery of which she had spoken in a low, strained voice, as if the shock were fresh upon her, she gradually resumed her usual air of amiable importance.

"You don't quite credit me, my dear! Well, well! You will, some day. I am a little rambling. But I have noticed. I have seen many new faces come, unsuspicious, within the influence of the mace and seal in these many years. As my father's came there. As my brother's. As my sister's. As my own. I hear Conversation Kenge and the rest of them say to the new faces, 'Here's little Miss Flite. Oh, you are new here; and you must come and be presented to little Miss Flite!' Ve-ry good. Proud I am sure to have the honour! And we all laugh. But, Fitz Jarndyce, I know what will happen. I know, far better than they do, when the attraction has begun. I know the signs, my dear. I saw them begin in Gridley. And I saw them end. Fitz Jarndyce, my love," speaking low again, "I saw them beginning in our friend the ward in Jarndyce. Let some one hold him back. Or he'll be drawn to ruin."

She looked at me in silence for some moments, with her face gradually softening into a smile. Seeming to fear that she had been too gloomy, and seeming also to lose the connexion in her mind, she said politely as she sipped her glass of wine, "Yes, my dear, as I was saying, I expect a judgment shortly. Then I shall release my birds, you know, and confer estates."

I was much impressed by her allusion to Richard and by the sad meaning, so sadly illustrated in her poor pinched form, that made its way through all her incoherence. But happily for her, she was quite complacent again now and beamed with nods and smiles.

"But, my dear," she said, gaily, reaching another hand to put it upon mine. "You have not congratulated me on my physician. Positively not once, yet!"

I was obliged to confess that I did not quite know what she meant.

"My physician, Mr. Woodcourt, my dear, who was so exceedingly attentive to me. Though his services were rendered quite gratuitously. Until the Day of Judgment. I mean THE judgment that will dissolve the spell upon me of the mace and seal."

"Mr. Woodcourt is so far away, now," said I, "that I thought the time for such congratulation was past, Miss Flite."

"But, my child," she returned, "is it possible that you don't know what has happened?"

"No," said I.

"Not what everybody has been talking of, my beloved Fitz Jarndyce!"

"No," said I. "You forget how long I have been here."

"True! My dear, for the moment—true. I blame myself. But my memory has been drawn out of me, with everything else, by what I mentioned. Ve-ry strong influence, is it not? Well, my dear, there has been a terrible shipwreck over in those East Indian seas."

"Mr. Woodcourt shipwrecked!"

"Don't be agitated, my dear. He is safe. An awful scene. Death in all shapes. Hundreds of dead and dying. Fire, storm, and darkness. Numbers of the drowning thrown upon a rock. There, and through it all, my dear physician was a hero. Calm and brave through everything. Saved many lives, never complained in hunger and thirst, wrapped naked people in his spare clothes, took the lead, showed them what to do, governed them, tended the sick, buried the dead, and brought the poor survivors safely off at last! My dear, the poor emaciated creatures all but worshipped him. They fell down at his feet when they got to the land and blessed him. The whole country rings with it. Stay! Where's my bag of documents? I have got it there, and you shall read it, you shall read it!"

And I DID read all the noble history, though very slowly and imperfectly then, for my eyes were so dimmed that I could not see the words, and I cried so much that I was many times obliged to lay down the long account she had cut out of the newspaper. I felt so triumphant ever to have known the man who had done such generous and gallant deeds, I felt such glowing exultation in his renown, I so admired and loved what he had done, that I envied the storm-worn people who had fallen at his feet and blessed him as their preserver. I could myself have kneeled down then, so far away, and blessed him in my rapture that he should be so truly good and brave. I felt that no one—mother, sister, wife—could honour him more than I. I did, indeed!

My poor little visitor made me a present of the account, and when as the evening began to close in she rose to take her leave, lest she should miss the coach by which she was to return, she was still full of the shipwreck, which I had not yet sufficiently composed myself to understand in all its details.

"My dear," said she as she carefully folded up her scarf and gloves, "my brave physician ought to have a title bestowed upon him. And no doubt he will. You are of that opinion?"

That he well deserved one, yes. That he would ever have one, no.

"Why not, Fitz Jarndyce?" she asked rather sharply.

I said it was not the custom in England to confer titles on men distinguished by peaceful services, however good and great, unless occasionally when they consisted of the accumulation of some very large amount of money.

"Why, good gracious," said Miss Flite, "how can you say that? Surely you know, my dear, that all the greatest ornaments of England in knowledge, imagination, active humanity, and improvement of every sort are added to its nobility! Look round you, my dear, and consider. YOU must be rambling a little now, I think, if you don't know that this is the great reason why titles will always last in the land!"

I am afraid she believed what she said, for there were moments when she was very mad indeed.

And now I must part with the little secret I have thus far tried to keep. I had thought, sometimes, that Mr. Woodcourt loved me and that if he had been richer he would perhaps have told me that he loved me before he went away. I had thought, sometimes, that if he had done so, I should have been glad of it. But how much better it was now that this had never happened! What should I have suffered if I had had to write to him and tell him that the poor face he had known as mine was quite gone from me and that I freely released him from his bondage to one whom he had never seen!

Oh, it was so much better as it was! With a great pang mercifully spared me, I could take back to my heart my childish prayer to be all he had so brightly shown himself; and there was nothing to be undone: no chain for me to break or for him to drag; and I could go, please God, my lowly way along the path of duty, and he could go his nobler way upon its broader road; and though we were apart upon the journey, I might aspire to meet him, unselfishly, innocently, better far than he had thought me when I found some favour in his eyes, at the journey's end.

CHAPTER XXXVI. Chesney Wold

Charley and I did not set off alone upon our expedition into Lincolnshire. My guardian had made up his mind not to lose sight of me until I was safe in Mr. Boythorn's house, so he accompanied us, and we were two days upon the road. I found every breath of air, and every scent, and every flower and leaf and blade of grass, and every passing cloud, and everything in nature, more beautiful and wonderful to me than I had ever found it yet. This was my first gain from my illness. How little I had lost, when the wide world was so full of delight for me.

My guardian intending to go back immediately, we appointed, on our way down, a day when my dear girl should come. I wrote her a letter, of which he took charge, and he left us within half an hour of our arrival at our destination, on a delightful evening in the early summer-time.

If a good fairy had built the house for me with a wave of her wand, and I had been a princess and her favoured god-child, I could not have been more considered in it. So many preparations were made for me and such an endearing remembrance was shown of all my little tastes and likings that I could have sat down, overcome, a dozen times before I had revisited half the rooms. I did better than that, however, by showing them all to Charley instead. Charley's delight calmed mine; and after we had had a walk in the garden, and Charley had exhausted her whole vocabulary of admiring expressions, I was as tranquilly happy as I ought to have been. It was a great comfort to be able to say to myself after tea, "Esther, my dear, I think you are quite sensible enough to sit down now and write a note of thanks to your host." He had left a note of welcome for me, as sunny as his own face, and had confided his bird to my care, which I knew to be his highest mark of confidence. Accordingly I wrote a little note to him in London, telling him how all his favourite plants and trees were looking, and how the most astonishing of birds had chirped the honours of the house to me in the most hospitable manner, and how, after singing on my shoulder, to the inconceivable rapture of my little maid, he was then at roost in the usual corner of his cage, but whether dreaming or no I could not report. My note finished and sent off to the post, I made myself very busy in unpacking and arranging; and I sent Charley to bed in good time and told her I should want her no more that night.

For I had not yet looked in the glass and had never asked to have my own restored to me. I knew this to be a weakness which must be overcome, but I had always said to myself that I would begin afresh when I got to where I now was. Therefore I had wanted to be alone, and therefore I said, now alone, in my own room, "Esther, if you are to be happy, if you are to have any right to pray to be true-hearted, you must keep your word, my dear." I was quite resolved to keep it, but I sat down for a little while first to reflect upon all my blessings. And then I said my prayers and thought a little more.

My hair had not been cut off, though it had been in danger more than once. It was long and thick. I let it down, and shook it out, and went up to the glass upon the dressing-table. There was a little muslin curtain drawn across it. I drew it back and stood for a moment looking through such a veil of my own hair that I could see nothing else. Then I put my hair aside and looked at the reflection in the mirror, encouraged by seeing how placidly it looked at me. I was very much changed—oh, very, very much. At first my face was so strange to me that I think I should have put my hands before it and started back but for the encouragement I have mentioned. Very soon it became more familiar, and then I knew the extent of the alteration in it better than I had done at first. It was not like what I had expected, but I had expected nothing definite, and I dare say anything definite would have surprised me.

I had never been a beauty and had never thought myself one, but I had been very different from this. It was all gone now. Heaven was so good to me that I could let it go with a few not bitter tears and could stand there arranging my hair for the night quite thankfully.

One thing troubled me, and I considered it for a long time before I went to sleep. I had kept Mr. Woodcourt's flowers. When they were withered I had dried them and put them in a book that I was fond of. Nobody knew this, not even Ada. I was doubtful whether I had a right to preserve what he had sent to one so different—whether it was generous towards him to do it. I wished to be generous to him, even in the secret depths of my heart, which he would never know, because I could have loved him—could have been devoted to him. At last I came to the conclusion that I might keep them if I treasured them only as a remembrance of what was irrevocably past and gone, never to be looked back on any more, in any other light. I hope this may not seem trivial. I was very much in earnest.

I took care to be up early in the morning and to be before the glass when Charley came in on tiptoe.

"Dear, dear, miss!" cried Charley, starting. "Is that you?"

"Yes, Charley," said I, quietly putting up my hair. "And I am very well indeed, and very happy."

I saw it was a weight off Charley's mind, but it was a greater weight off mine. I knew the worst now and was composed to it. I shall not conceal, as I go on, the weaknesses I could not quite conquer, but they always passed from me soon and the happier frame of mind stayed by me faithfully.

Wishing to be fully re-established in my strength and my good spirits before Ada came, I now laid down a little series of plans with Charley for being in the fresh air all day long. We were to be out before breakfast, and were to dine early, and were to be out again before and after dinner, and were to talk in the garden after tea, and were to go to rest betimes, and were to climb every hill and explore every road, lane, and field in the neighbourhood. As to restoratives and strengthening delicacies, Mr. Boythorn's good housekeeper was for ever trotting about with something to eat or drink in her hand; I could not even be heard of as resting in the park but she would come trotting after me with a basket, her cheerful face shining with a lecture on the importance of frequent nourishment. Then there was a pony expressly for my riding, a chubby pony with a short neck and a mane all over his eyes who could canter—when he would—so easily and quietly that he was a treasure. In a very few days he would come to me in the paddock when I called him, and eat out of my hand, and follow me about. We arrived at such a capital understanding that when he was jogging with me lazily, and rather obstinately, down some shady lane, if I patted his neck and said, "Stubbs, I am surprised you don't canter when you know how much I like it; and I think you might oblige me, for you are only getting stupid and going to sleep," he would give his head a comical shake or two and set off directly, while Charley would stand still and laugh with such enjoyment that her laughter was like music. I don't know who had given Stubbs his name, but it seemed to belong to him as naturally as his rough coat. Once we put him in a little chaise and drove him triumphantly through the green lanes for five miles; but all at once, as we were extolling him to the skies, he seemed to take it ill that he should have been accompanied so far by the circle of tantalizing little gnats that had been hovering round and round his ears the whole way without appearing to advance an inch, and stopped to think about it. I suppose he came to the decision that it was not to be borne, for he steadily refused to move until I gave the reins to Charley and got out and walked, when he followed me with a sturdy sort of good humour, putting his head under my arm and rubbing his ear against my sleeve. It was in vain for me to say, "Now, Stubbs, I feel quite sure from what I know of you that you will go on if I ride a little while," for the moment I left him, he stood stock still again. Consequently I was obliged to lead the way, as before; and in this order we returned home, to the great delight of the village.

Charley and I had reason to call it the most friendly of villages, I am sure, for in a week's time the people were so glad to see us go by, though ever so frequently in the course of a day, that there were faces of greeting in every cottage. I had known many of the grown people before and almost all the children, but now the very steeple began to wear a familiar and affectionate look. Among my new friends was an old old woman who lived in such a little thatched and whitewashed dwelling that when the outside shutter was turned up on its hinges, it shut up the whole house-front. This old lady had a grandson who was a sailor, and I wrote a letter to him for her and drew at the top of it the chimney-corner in which she had brought him up and where his old stool yet occupied its old place. This was considered by the whole village the most wonderful achievement in the world, but when an answer came back all the way from Plymouth, in which he mentioned that he was going to take the picture all the way to America, and from America would write again, I got all the credit that ought to have been given to the post-office and was invested with the merit of the whole system.

Thus, what with being so much in the air, playing with so many children, gossiping with so many people, sitting on invitation in so many cottages, going on with Charley's education, and writing long letters to Ada every day, I had scarcely any time to think about that little loss of mine and was almost always cheerful. If I did think of it at odd moments now and then, I had only to be busy and forget it. I felt it more than I had hoped I should once when a child said, "Mother, why is the lady not a pretty lady now like she used to be?" But when I found the child was not less fond of me, and drew its soft hand over my face with a kind of pitying protection in its touch, that soon set me up again. There were many little occurrences which suggested to me, with great consolation, how natural it is to gentle hearts to be considerate and delicate towards any inferiority. One of these particularly touched me. I happened to stroll into the little church when a marriage was just concluded, and the young couple had to sign the register.

The bridegroom, to whom the pen was handed first, made a rude cross for his mark; the bride, who came next, did the same. Now, I had known the bride when I was last there, not only as the prettiest girl in the place, but as having quite distinguished herself in the school, and I could not help looking at her with some surprise. She came aside and whispered to me, while tears of honest love and admiration stood in her bright eyes, "He's a dear good fellow, miss; but he can't write yet—he's going to learn of me—and I wouldn't shame him for the world!" Why, what had I to fear, I thought, when there was this nobility in the soul of a labouring man's daughter!

The air blew as freshly and revivingly upon me as it had ever blown, and the healthy colour came into my new face as it had come into my old one. Charley was wonderful to see, she was so radiant and so rosy; and we both enjoyed the whole day and slept soundly the whole night.

There was a favourite spot of mine in the park-woods of Chesney Wold where a seat had been erected commanding a lovely view. The wood had been cleared and opened to improve this point of sight, and the bright sunny landscape beyond was so beautiful that I rested there at least once every day. A picturesque part of the Hall, called the Ghost's Walk, was seen to advantage from this higher ground; and the startling name, and the old legend in the Dedlock family which I had heard from Mr. Boythorn accounting for it, mingled with the view and gave it something of a mysterious interest in addition to its real charms. There was a bank here, too, which was a famous one for violets; and as it was a daily delight of Charley's to gather wild flowers, she took as much to the spot as I did.

It would be idle to inquire now why I never went close to the house or never went inside it. The family were not there, I had heard on my arrival, and were not expected. I was far from being incurious or uninterested about the building; on the contrary, I often sat in this place wondering how the rooms ranged and whether any echo like a footstep really did resound at times, as the story said, upon the lonely Ghost's Walk. The indefinable feeling with which Lady Dedlock had impressed me may have had some influence in keeping me from the house even when she was absent. I am not sure. Her face and figure were associated with it, naturally; but I cannot say that they repelled me from it, though something did. For whatever reason or no reason, I had never once gone near it, down to the day at which my story now arrives.

I was resting at my favourite point after a long ramble, and Charley was gathering violets at a little distance from me. I had been looking at the Ghost's Walk lying in a deep shade of masonry afar off and picturing to myself the female shape that was said to haunt it when I became aware of a figure approaching through the wood. The perspective was so long and so darkened by leaves, and the shadows of the branches on the ground made it so much more intricate to the eye, that at first I could not discern what figure it was. By little and little it revealed itself to be a woman's—a lady's—Lady Dedlock's. She was alone and coming to where I sat with a much quicker step, I observed to my surprise, than was usual with her.

I was fluttered by her being unexpectedly so near (she was almost within speaking distance before I knew her) and would have risen to continue my walk. But I could not. I was rendered motionless. Not so much by her hurried gesture of entreaty, not so much by her quick advance and outstretched hands, not so much by the great change in her manner and the absence of her haughty self-restraint, as by a something in her face that I had pined for and dreamed of when I was a little child, something I had never seen in any face, something I had never seen in hers before.

A dread and faintness fell upon me, and I called to Charley. Lady Dedlock stopped upon the instant and changed back almost to what I had known her.

"Miss Summerson, I am afraid I have startled you," she said, now advancing slowly. "You can scarcely be strong yet. You have been very ill, I know. I have been much concerned to hear it."

I could no more have removed my eyes from her pale face than I could have stirred from the bench on which I sat. She gave me her hand, and its deadly coldness, so at variance with the enforced composure of her features, deepened the fascination that overpowered me. I cannot say what was in my whirling thoughts.

"You are recovering again?" she asked kindly.

"I was quite well but a moment ago, Lady Dedlock."

"Is this your young attendant?"

"Yes."

"Will you send her on before and walk towards your house with me?"

"Charley," said I, "take your flowers home, and I will follow you directly."

Charley, with her best curtsy, blushingly tied on her bonnet and went her way. When she was gone, Lady Dedlock sat down on the seat beside me.

I cannot tell in any words what the state of my mind was when I saw in her hand my handkerchief with which I had covered the dead baby.

I looked at her, but I could not see her, I could not hear her, I could not draw my breath. The beating of my heart was so violent and wild that I felt as if my life were breaking from me. But when she caught me to her breast, kissed me, wept over me, compassionated me, and called me back to myself; when she fell down on her knees and cried to me, "Oh, my child, my child, I am your wicked and unhappy mother! Oh, try to forgive me!"—when I saw her at my feet on the bare earth in her great agony of mind, I felt, through all my tumult of emotion, a burst of gratitude to the providence of God that I was so changed as that I never could disgrace her by any trace of likeness, as that nobody could ever now look at me and look at her and remotely think of any near tie between us.

I raised my mother up, praying and beseeching her not to stoop before me in such affliction and humiliation. I did so in broken, incoherent words, for besides the trouble I was in, it frightened me to see her at MY feet. I told her—or I tried to tell her—that if it were for me, her child, under any circumstances to take upon me to forgive her, I did it, and had done it, many, many years. I told her that my heart overflowed with love for her, that it was natural love which nothing in the past had changed or could change. That it was not for me, then resting for the first time on my mother's bosom, to take her to account for having given me life, but that my duty was to bless her and receive her, though the whole world turned from her, and that I only asked her leave to do it. I held my mother in my embrace, and she held me in hers, and among the still woods in the silence of the summer day there seemed to be nothing but our two troubled minds that was not at peace.

"To bless and receive me," groaned my mother, "it is far too late. I must travel my dark road alone, and it will lead me where it will. From day to day, sometimes from hour to hour, I do not see the way before my guilty feet. This is the earthly punishment I have brought upon myself. I bear it, and I hide it."

Even in the thinking of her endurance, she drew her habitual air of proud indifference about her like a veil, though she soon cast it off again.

"I must keep this secret, if by any means it can be kept, not wholly for myself. I have a husband, wretched and dishonouring creature that I am!"

These words she uttered with a suppressed cry of despair, more terrible in its sound than any shriek. Covering her face with her hands, she shrank down in my embrace as if she were unwilling that I should touch her; nor could I, by my utmost persuasions or by any endearments I could use, prevail upon her to rise. She said, no, no, no, she could only speak to me so; she must be proud and disdainful everywhere else; she would be humbled and ashamed there, in the only natural moments of her life.

My unhappy mother told me that in my illness she had been nearly frantic. She had but then known that her child was living. She could not have suspected me to be that child before. She had followed me down here to speak to me but once in all her life. We never could associate, never could communicate, never probably from that time forth could interchange another word on earth. She put into my hands a letter she had written for my reading only and said when I had read it and destroyed it—but not so much for her sake, since she asked nothing, as for her husband's and my own—I must evermore consider her as dead. If I could believe that she loved me, in this agony in which I saw her, with a mother's love, she asked me to do that, for then I might think of her with a greater pity, imagining what she suffered. She had put herself beyond all hope and beyond all help. Whether she preserved her secret until death or it came to be discovered and she brought dishonour and disgrace upon the name she had taken, it was her solitary struggle always; and no affection could come near her, and no human creature could render her any aid.

"But is the secret safe so far?" I asked. "Is it safe now, dearest mother?"

"No," replied my mother. "It has been very near discovery. It was saved by an accident. It may be lost by another accident—to-morrow, any day."

"Do you dread a particular person?"

"Hush! Do not tremble and cry so much for me. I am not worthy of these tears," said my mother, kissing my hands. "I dread one person very much."

"An enemy?"

"Not a friend. One who is too passionless to be either. He is Sir Leicester Dedlock's lawyer, mechanically faithful without attachment, and very jealous of the profit, privilege, and reputation of being master of the mysteries of great houses."

"Has he any suspicions?"

"Many."

"Not of you?" I said alarmed.

"Yes! He is always vigilant and always near me. I may keep him at a standstill, but I can never shake him off."

"Has he so little pity or compunction?"

"He has none, and no anger. He is indifferent to everything but his calling. His calling is the acquisition of secrets and the holding possession of such power as they give him, with no sharer or opponent in it."

"Could you trust in him?"

"I shall never try. The dark road I have trodden for so many years will end where it will. I follow it alone to the end, whatever the end be. It may be near, it may be distant; while the road lasts, nothing turns me."

"Dear mother, are you so resolved?"

"I AM resolved. I have long outbidden folly with folly, pride with pride, scorn with scorn, insolence with insolence, and have outlived many vanities with many more. I will outlive this danger, and outdie it, if I can. It has closed around me almost as awfully as if these woods of Chesney Wold had closed around the house, but my course through it is the same. I have but one; I can have but one."

"Mr. Jarndyce—" I was beginning when my mother hurriedly inquired, "Does HE suspect?"

"No," said I. "No, indeed! Be assured that he does not!" And I told her what he had related to me as his knowledge of my story. "But he is so good and sensible," said I, "that perhaps if he knew—"

My mother, who until this time had made no change in her position, raised her hand up to my lips and stopped me.

"Confide fully in him," she said after a little while. "You have my free consent—a small gift from such a mother to her injured child!—but do not tell me of it. Some pride is left in me even yet."

I explained, as nearly as I could then, or can recall now—for my agitation and distress throughout were so great that I scarcely understood myself, though every word that was uttered in the mother's voice, so unfamiliar and so melancholy to me, which in my childhood I had never learned to love and recognize, had never been sung to sleep with, had never heard a blessing from, had never had a hope inspired by, made an enduring impression on my memory—I say I explained, or tried to do it, how I had only hoped that Mr. Jarndyce, who had been the best of fathers to me, might be able to afford some counsel and support to her. But my mother answered no, it was impossible; no one could help her. Through the desert that lay before her, she must go alone.

"My child, my child!" she said. "For the last time! These kisses for the last time! These arms upon my neck for the last time! We shall meet no more. To hope to do what I seek to do, I must be what I have been so long. Such is my reward and doom. If you hear of Lady Dedlock, brilliant, prosperous, and flattered, think of your wretched mother, conscience-stricken, underneath that mask! Think that the reality is in her suffering, in her useless remorse, in her murdering within her breast the only love and truth of which it is capable! And then forgive her if you can, and cry to heaven to forgive her, which it never can!"

We held one another for a little space yet, but she was so firm that she took my hands away, and put them back against my breast, and with a last kiss as she held them there, released them, and went from me into the wood. I was alone, and calm and quiet below me in the sun and shade lay the old house, with its terraces and turrets, on which there had seemed to me to be such complete repose when I first saw it, but which now looked like the obdurate and unpitying watcher of my mother's misery.

Stunned as I was, as weak and helpless at first as I had ever been in my sick chamber, the necessity of guarding against the danger of discovery, or even of the remotest suspicion, did me service. I took such precautions as I could to hide from Charley that I had been crying, and I constrained myself to think of every sacred obligation that there was upon me to be careful and collected. It was not a little while before I could succeed or could even restrain bursts of grief, but after an hour or so I was better and felt that I might return. I went home very slowly and told Charley, whom I found at the gate looking for me, that I had been tempted to extend my walk after Lady Dedlock had left me and that I was over-tired and would lie down. Safe in my own room, I read the letter. I clearly derived from it—and that was much then—that I had not been abandoned by my mother. Her elder and only sister, the godmother of my childhood, discovering signs of life in me when I had been laid aside as dead, had in her stern sense of duty, with no desire or willingness that I should live, reared me in rigid secrecy and had never again beheld my mother's face from within a few hours of my birth. So strangely did I hold my place in this world that until within a short time back I had never, to my own mother's knowledge, breathed—had been buried—had never been endowed with life—had never borne a name. When she had first seen me in the church she had been startled and had thought of what would have been like me if it had ever lived, and had lived on, but that was all then.

What more the letter told me needs not to be repeated here. It has its own times and places in my story.

My first care was to burn what my mother had written and to consume even its ashes. I hope it may not appear very unnatural or bad in me that I then became heavily sorrowful to think I had ever been reared. That I felt as if I knew it would have been better and happier for many people if indeed I had never breathed. That I had a terror of myself as the danger and the possible disgrace of my own mother and of a proud family name. That I was so confused and shaken as to be possessed by a belief that it was right and had been intended that I should die in my birth, and that it was wrong and not intended that I should be then alive.

These are the real feelings that I had. I fell asleep worn out, and when I awoke I cried afresh to think that I was back in the world with my load of trouble for others. I was more than ever frightened of myself, thinking anew of her against whom I was a witness, of the owner of Chesney Wold, of the new and terrible meaning of the old words now moaning in my ear like a surge upon the shore, "Your mother, Esther, was your disgrace, and you are hers. The time will come—and soon enough—when you will understand this better, and will feel it too, as no one save a woman can."

With them, those other words returned, "Pray daily that the sins of others be not visited upon your head." I could not disentangle all that was about me, and I felt as if the blame and the shame were all in me, and the visitation had come down.

The day waned into a gloomy evening, overcast and sad, and I still contended with the same distress. I went out alone, and after walking a little in the park, watching the dark shades falling on the trees and the fitful flight of the bats, which sometimes almost touched me, was attracted to the house for the first time. Perhaps I might not have gone near it if I had been in a stronger frame of mind. As it was, I took the path that led close by it.

I did not dare to linger or to look up, but I passed before the terrace garden with its fragrant odours, and its broad walks, and its well-kept beds and smooth turf; and I saw how beautiful and grave it was, and how the old stone balustrades and parapets, and wide flights of shallow steps, were seamed by time and weather; and how the trained moss and ivy grew about them, and around the old stone pedestal of the sun-dial; and I heard the fountain falling. Then the way went by long lines of dark windows diversified by turreted towers and porches of eccentric shapes, where old stone lions and grotesque monsters bristled outside dens of shadow and snarled at the evening gloom over the escutcheons they held in their grip. Thence the path wound underneath a gateway, and through a court-yard where the principal entrance was (I hurried quickly on), and by the stables where none but deep voices seemed to be, whether in the murmuring of the wind through the strong mass of ivy holding to a high red wall, or in the low complaining of the weathercock, or in the barking of the dogs, or in the slow striking of a clock. So, encountering presently a sweet smell of limes, whose rustling I could hear, I turned with the turning of the path to the south front, and there above me were the balustrades of the Ghost's Walk and one lighted window that might be my mother's.

The way was paved here, like the terrace overhead, and my footsteps from being noiseless made an echoing sound upon the flags. Stopping to look at nothing, but seeing all I did see as I went, I was passing quickly on, and in a few moments should have passed the lighted window, when my echoing footsteps brought it suddenly into my mind that there was a dreadful truth in the legend of the Ghost's Walk, that it was I who was to bring calamity upon the stately house and that my warning feet were haunting it even then. Seized with an augmented terror of myself which turned me cold, I ran from myself and everything, retraced the way by which I had come, and never paused until I had gained the lodge-gate, and the park lay sullen and black behind me.

Not before I was alone in my own room for the night and had again been dejected and unhappy there did I begin to know how wrong and thankless this state was. But from my darling who was coming on the morrow, I found a joyful letter, full of such loving anticipation that I must have been of marble if it had not moved me; from my guardian, too, I found another letter, asking me to tell Dame Durden, if I should see that little woman anywhere, that they had moped most pitiably without her, that the housekeeping was going to rack and ruin, that nobody else could manage the keys, and that everybody in and about the house declared it was not the same house and was becoming rebellious for her return. Two such letters together made me think how far beyond my deserts I was beloved and how happy I ought to be. That made me think of all my past life; and that brought me, as it ought to have done before, into a better condition.

For I saw very well that I could not have been intended to die, or I should never have lived; not to say should never have been reserved for such a happy life. I saw very well how many things had worked together for my welfare, and that if the sins of the fathers were sometimes visited upon the children, the phrase did not mean what I had in the morning feared it meant. I knew I was as innocent of my birth as a queen of hers and that before my Heavenly Father I should not be punished for birth nor a queen rewarded for it. I had had experience, in the shock of that very day, that I could, even thus soon, find comforting reconcilements to the change that had fallen on me. I renewed my resolutions and prayed to be strengthened in them, pouring out my heart for myself and for my unhappy mother and feeling that the darkness of the morning was passing away. It was not upon my sleep; and when the next day's light awoke me, it was gone.

My dear girl was to arrive at five o'clock in the afternoon. How to help myself through the intermediate time better than by taking a long walk along the road by which she was to come, I did not know; so Charley and I and Stubbs—Stubbs saddled, for we never drove him after the one great occasion—made a long expedition along that road and back. On our return, we held a great review of the house and garden and saw that everything was in its prettiest condition, and had the bird out ready as an important part of the establishment.

There were more than two full hours yet to elapse before she could come, and in that interval, which seemed a long one, I must confess I was nervously anxious about my altered looks. I loved my darling so well that I was more concerned for their effect on her than on any one. I was not in this slight distress because I at all repined—I am quite certain I did not, that day—but, I thought, would she be wholly prepared? When she first saw me, might she not be a little shocked and disappointed? Might it not prove a little worse than she expected? Might she not look for her old Esther and not find her? Might she not have to grow used to me and to begin all over again?

I knew the various expressions of my sweet girl's face so well, and it was such an honest face in its loveliness, that I was sure beforehand she could not hide that first look from me. And I considered whether, if it should signify any one of these meanings, which was so very likely, could I quite answer for myself?

Well, I thought I could. After last night, I thought I could. But to wait and wait, and expect and expect, and think and think, was such bad preparation that I resolved to go along the road again and meet her.

So I said to Charley, "Charley, I will go by myself and walk along the road until she comes." Charley highly approving of anything that pleased me, I went and left her at home.

But before I got to the second milestone, I had been in so many palpitations from seeing dust in the distance (though I knew it was not, and could not, be the coach yet) that I resolved to turn back and go home again. And when I had turned, I was in such fear of the coach coming up behind me (though I still knew that it neither would, nor could, do any such thing) that I ran the greater part of the way to avoid being overtaken.

Then, I considered, when I had got safe back again, this was a nice thing to have done! Now I was hot and had made the worst of it instead of the best.

At last, when I believed there was at least a quarter of an hour more yet, Charley all at once cried out to me as I was trembling in the garden, "Here she comes, miss! Here she is!"

I did not mean to do it, but I ran upstairs into my room and hid myself behind the door. There I stood trembling, even when I heard my darling calling as she came upstairs, "Esther, my dear, my love, where are you? Little woman, dear Dame Durden!"

She ran in, and was running out again when she saw me. Ah, my angel girl! The old dear look, all love, all fondness, all affection. Nothing else in it—no, nothing, nothing!

Oh, how happy I was, down upon the floor, with my sweet beautiful girl down upon the floor too, holding my scarred face to her lovely cheek, bathing it with tears and kisses, rocking me to and fro like a child, calling me by every tender name that she could think of, and pressing me to her faithful heart.

CHAPTER XXXVII. Jarndyce and Jarndyce

If the secret I had to keep had been mine, I must have confided it to Ada before we had been long together. But it was not mine, and I did not feel that I had a right to tell it, even to my guardian, unless some great emergency arose. It was a weight to bear alone; still my present duty appeared to be plain, and blest in the attachment of my dear, I did not want an impulse and encouragement to do it. Though often when she was asleep and all was quiet, the remembrance of my mother kept me waking and made the night sorrowful, I did not yield to it at another time; and Ada found me what I used to be—except, of course, in that particular of which I have said enough and which I have no intention of mentioning any more just now, if I can help it.

The difficulty that I felt in being quite composed that first evening when Ada asked me, over our work, if the family were at the house, and when I was obliged to answer yes, I believed so, for Lady Dedlock had spoken to me in the woods the day before yesterday, was great. Greater still when Ada asked me what she had said, and when I replied that she had been kind and interested, and when Ada, while admitting her beauty and elegance, remarked upon her proud manner and her imperious chilling air. But Charley helped me through, unconsciously, by telling us that Lady Dedlock had only stayed at the house two nights on her way from London to visit at some other great house in the next county and that she had left early on the morning after we had seen her at our view, as we called it. Charley verified the adage about little pitchers, I am sure, for she heard of more sayings and doings in a day than would have come to my ears in a month.

We were to stay a month at Mr. Boythorn's. My pet had scarcely been there a bright week, as I recollect the time, when one evening after we had finished helping the gardener in watering his flowers, and just as the candles were lighted, Charley, appearing with a very important air behind Ada's chair, beckoned me mysteriously out of the room.

"Oh! If you please, miss," said Charley in a whisper, with her eyes at their roundest and largest. "You're wanted at the Dedlock Arms."

"Why, Charley," said I, "who can possibly want me at the public-house?"

"I don't know, miss," returned Charley, putting her head forward and folding her hands tight upon the band of her little apron, which she always did in the enjoyment of anything mysterious or confidential, "but it's a gentleman, miss, and his compliments, and will you please to come without saying anything about it."

"Whose compliments, Charley?"

"His'n, miss," returned Charley, whose grammatical education was advancing, but not very rapidly.

"And how do you come to be the messenger, Charley?"

"I am not the messenger, if you please, miss," returned my little maid. "It was W. Grubble, miss."

"And who is W. Grubble, Charley?"

"Mister Grubble, miss," returned Charley. "Don't you know, miss? The Dedlock Arms, by W. Grubble," which Charley delivered as if she were slowly spelling out the sign.

"Aye? The landlord, Charley?"

"Yes, miss. If you please, miss, his wife is a beautiful woman, but she broke her ankle, and it never joined. And her brother's the sawyer that was put in the cage, miss, and they expect he'll drink himself to death entirely on beer," said Charley.

Not knowing what might be the matter, and being easily apprehensive now, I thought it best to go to this place by myself. I bade Charley be quick with my bonnet and veil and my shawl, and having put them on, went away down the little hilly street, where I was as much at home as in Mr. Boythorn's garden.

Mr. Grubble was standing in his shirt-sleeves at the door of his very clean little tavern waiting for me. He lifted off his hat with both hands when he saw me coming, and carrying it so, as if it were an iron vessel (it looked as heavy), preceded me along the sanded passage to his best parlour, a neat carpeted room with more plants in it than were quite convenient, a coloured print of Queen Caroline, several shells, a good many tea-trays, two stuffed and dried fish in glass cases, and either a curious egg or a curious pumpkin (but I don't know which, and I doubt if many people did) hanging from his ceiling. I knew Mr. Grubble very well by sight, from his often standing at his door. A pleasant-looking, stoutish, middle-aged man who never seemed to consider himself cozily dressed for his own fire-side without his hat and top-boots, but who never wore a coat except at church.

He snuffed the candle, and backing away a little to see how it looked, backed out of the room—unexpectedly to me, for I was going to ask him by whom he had been sent. The door of the opposite parlour being then opened, I heard some voices, familiar in my ears I thought, which stopped. A quick light step approached the room in which I was, and who should stand before me but Richard!

"My dear Esther!" he said. "My best friend!" And he really was so warm-hearted and earnest that in the first surprise and pleasure of his brotherly greeting I could scarcely find breath to tell him that Ada was well.

"Answering my very thoughts—always the same dear girl!" said Richard, leading me to a chair and seating himself beside me.

I put my veil up, but not quite.

"Always the same dear girl!" said Richard just as heartily as before.

I put up my veil altogether, and laying my hand on Richard's sleeve and looking in his face, told him how much I thanked him for his kind welcome and how greatly I rejoiced to see him, the more so because of the determination I had made in my illness, which I now conveyed to him.

"My love," said Richard, "there is no one with whom I have a greater wish to talk than you, for I want you to understand me."

"And I want you, Richard," said I, shaking my head, "to understand some one else."

"Since you refer so immediately to John Jarndyce," said Richard, "—I suppose you mean him?"

"Of course I do."

"Then I may say at once that I am glad of it, because it is on that subject that I am anxious to be understood. By you, mind—you, my dear! I am not accountable to Mr. Jarndyce or Mr. Anybody."

I was pained to find him taking this tone, and he observed it.

"Well, well, my dear," said Richard, "we won't go into that now. I want to appear quietly in your country-house here, with you under my arm, and give my charming cousin a surprise. I suppose your loyalty to John Jarndyce will allow that?"

"My dear Richard," I returned, "you know you would be heartily welcome at his house—your home, if you will but consider it so; and you are as heartily welcome here!"

"Spoken like the best of little women!" cried Richard gaily.

I asked him how he liked his profession.

"Oh, I like it well enough!" said Richard. "It's all right. It does as well as anything else, for a time. I don't know that I shall care about it when I come to be settled, but I can sell out then and—however, never mind all that botheration at present."

So young and handsome, and in all respects so perfectly the opposite of Miss Flite! And yet, in the clouded, eager, seeking look that passed over him, so dreadfully like her!

"I am in town on leave just now," said Richard.

"Indeed?"

"Yes. I have run over to look after my—my Chancery interests before the long vacation," said Richard, forcing a careless laugh. "We are beginning to spin along with that old suit at last, I promise you."

No wonder that I shook my head!

"As you say, it's not a pleasant subject." Richard spoke with the same shade crossing his face as before. "Let it go to the four winds for to-night. Puff! Gone! Who do you suppose is with me?"

"Was it Mr. Skimpole's voice I heard?"

"That's the man! He does me more good than anybody. What a fascinating child it is!"

I asked Richard if any one knew of their coming down together. He answered, no, nobody. He had been to call upon the dear old infant—so he called Mr. Skimpole—and the dear old infant had told him where we were, and he had told the dear old infant he was bent on coming to see us, and the dear old infant had directly wanted to come too; and so he had brought him. "And he is worth—not to say his sordid expenses—but thrice his weight in gold," said Richard. "He is such a cheery fellow. No worldliness about him. Fresh and green-hearted!"

I certainly did not see the proof of Mr. Skimpole's worldliness in his having his expenses paid by Richard, but I made no remark about that. Indeed, he came in and turned our conversation. He was charmed to see me, said he had been shedding delicious tears of joy and sympathy at intervals for six weeks on my account, had never been so happy as in hearing of my progress, began to understand the mixture of good and evil in the world now, felt that he appreciated health the more when somebody else was ill, didn't know but what it might be in the scheme of things that A should squint to make B happier in looking straight or that C should carry a wooden leg to make D better satisfied with his flesh and blood in a silk stocking.

"My dear Miss Summerson, here is our friend Richard," said Mr. Skimpole, "full of the brightest visions of the future, which he evokes out of the darkness of Chancery. Now that's delightful, that's inspiriting, that's full of poetry! In old times the woods and solitudes were made joyous to the shepherd by the imaginary piping and dancing of Pan and the nymphs. This present shepherd, our pastoral Richard, brightens the dull Inns of Court by making Fortune and her train sport through them to the melodious notes of a judgment from the bench. That's very pleasant, you know! Some ill-conditioned growling fellow may say to me, 'What's the use of these legal and equitable abuses? How do you defend them?' I reply, 'My growling friend, I DON'T defend them, but they are very agreeable to me. There is a shepherd—youth, a friend of mine, who transmutes them into something highly fascinating to my simplicity. I don't say it is for this that they exist—for I am a child among you worldly grumblers, and not called upon to account to you or myself for anything—but it may be so.'"

I began seriously to think that Richard could scarcely have found a worse friend than this. It made me uneasy that at such a time when he most required some right principle and purpose he should have this captivating looseness and putting-off of everything, this airy dispensing with all principle and purpose, at his elbow. I thought I could understand how such a nature as my guardian's, experienced in the world and forced to contemplate the miserable evasions and contentions of the family misfortune, found an immense relief in Mr. Skimpole's avowal of his weaknesses and display of guileless candour; but I could not satisfy myself that it was as artless as it seemed or that it did not serve Mr. Skimpole's idle turn quite as well as any other part, and with less trouble.

They both walked back with me, and Mr. Skimpole leaving us at the gate, I walked softly in with Richard and said, "Ada, my love, I have brought a gentleman to visit you." It was not difficult to read the blushing, startled face. She loved him dearly, and he knew it, and I knew it. It was a very transparent business, that meeting as cousins only.

I almost mistrusted myself as growing quite wicked in my suspicions, but I was not so sure that Richard loved her dearly. He admired her very much—any one must have done that—and I dare say would have renewed their youthful engagement with great pride and ardour but that he knew how she would respect her promise to my guardian. Still I had a tormenting idea that the influence upon him extended even here, that he was postponing his best truth and earnestness in this as in all things until Jarndyce and Jarndyce should be off his mind. Ah me! What Richard would have been without that blight, I never shall know now!

He told Ada, in his most ingenuous way, that he had not come to make any secret inroad on the terms she had accepted (rather too implicitly and confidingly, he thought) from Mr. Jarndyce, that he had come openly to see her and to see me and to justify himself for the present terms on which he stood with Mr. Jarndyce. As the dear old infant would be with us directly, he begged that I would make an appointment for the morning, when he might set himself right through the means of an unreserved conversation with me. I proposed to walk with him in the park at seven o'clock, and this was arranged. Mr. Skimpole soon afterwards appeared and made us merry for an hour. He particularly requested to see little Coavinses (meaning Charley) and told her, with a patriarchal air, that he had given her late father all the business in his power and that if one of her little brothers would make haste to get set up in the same profession, he hoped he should still be able to put a good deal of employment in his way.

"For I am constantly being taken in these nets," said Mr. Skimpole, looking beamingly at us over a glass of wine-and-water, "and am constantly being bailed out—like a boat. Or paid off—like a ship's company. Somebody always does it for me. I can't do it, you know, for I never have any money. But somebody does it. I get out by somebody's means; I am not like the starling; I get out. If you were to ask me who somebody is, upon my word I couldn't tell you. Let us drink to somebody. God bless him!"

Richard was a little late in the morning, but I had not to wait for him long, and we turned into the park. The air was bright and dewy and the sky without a cloud. The birds sang delightfully; the sparkles in the fern, the grass, and trees, were exquisite to see; the richness of the woods seemed to have increased twenty-fold since yesterday, as if, in the still night when they had looked so massively hushed in sleep, Nature, through all the minute details of every wonderful leaf, had been more wakeful than usual for the glory of that day.

"This is a lovely place," said Richard, looking round. "None of the jar and discord of law-suits here!"

But there was other trouble.

"I tell you what, my dear girl," said Richard, "when I get affairs in general settled, I shall come down here, I think, and rest."

"Would it not be better to rest now?" I asked.

"Oh, as to resting NOW," said Richard, "or as to doing anything very definite NOW, that's not easy. In short, it can't be done; I can't do it at least."

"Why not?" said I.

"You know why not, Esther. If you were living in an unfinished house, liable to have the roof put on or taken off—to be from top to bottom pulled down or built up—to-morrow, next day, next week, next month, next year—you would find it hard to rest or settle. So do I. Now? There's no now for us suitors."

I could almost have believed in the attraction on which my poor little wandering friend had expatiated when I saw again the darkened look of last night. Terrible to think it had in it also a shade of that unfortunate man who had died.

"My dear Richard," said I, "this is a bad beginning of our conversation."

"I knew you would tell me so, Dame Durden."

"And not I alone, dear Richard. It was not I who cautioned you once never to found a hope or expectation on the family curse."

"There you come back to John Jarndyce!" said Richard impatiently. "Well! We must approach him sooner or later, for he is the staple of what I have to say, and it's as well at once. My dear Esther, how can you be so blind? Don't you see that he is an interested party and that it may be very well for him to wish me to know nothing of the suit, and care nothing about it, but that it may not be quite so well for me?"

"Oh, Richard," I remonstrated, "is it possible that you can ever have seen him and heard him, that you can ever have lived under his roof and known him, and can yet breathe, even to me in this solitary place where there is no one to hear us, such unworthy suspicions?"

He reddened deeply, as if his natural generosity felt a pang of reproach. He was silent for a little while before he replied in a subdued voice, "Esther, I am sure you know that I am not a mean fellow and that I have some sense of suspicion and distrust being poor qualities in one of my years."

"I know it very well," said I. "I am not more sure of anything."

"That's a dear girl," retorted Richard, "and like you, because it gives me comfort. I had need to get some scrap of comfort out of all this business, for it's a bad one at the best, as I have no occasion to tell you."

"I know perfectly," said I. "I know as well, Richard—what shall I say? as well as you do—that such misconstructions are foreign to your nature. And I know, as well as you know, what so changes it."

"Come, sister, come," said Richard a little more gaily, "you will be fair with me at all events. If I have the misfortune to be under that influence, so has he. If it has a little twisted me, it may have a little twisted him too. I don't say that he is not an honourable man, out of all this complication and uncertainty; I am sure he is. But it taints everybody. You know it taints everybody. You have heard him say so fifty times. Then why should HE escape?"

"Because," said I, "his is an uncommon character, and he has resolutely kept himself outside the circle, Richard."

"Oh, because and because!" replied Richard in his vivacious way. "I am not sure, my dear girl, but that it may be wise and specious to preserve that outward indifference. It may cause other parties interested to become lax about their interests; and people may die off, and points may drag themselves out of memory, and many things may smoothly happen that are convenient enough."

I was so touched with pity for Richard that I could not reproach him any more, even by a look. I remembered my guardian's gentleness towards his errors and with what perfect freedom from resentment he had spoken of them.

"Esther," Richard resumed, "you are not to suppose that I have come here to make underhanded charges against John Jarndyce. I have only come to justify myself. What I say is, it was all very well and we got on very well while I was a boy, utterly regardless of this same suit; but as soon as I began to take an interest in it and to look into it, then it was quite another thing. Then John Jarndyce discovers that Ada and I must break off and that if I don't amend that very objectionable course, I am not fit for her. Now, Esther, I don't mean to amend that very objectionable course: I will not hold John Jarndyce's favour on those unfair terms of compromise, which he has no right to dictate. Whether it pleases him or displeases him, I must maintain my rights and Ada's. I have been thinking about it a good deal, and this is the conclusion I have come to."

Poor dear Richard! He had indeed been thinking about it a good deal. His face, his voice, his manner, all showed that too plainly.

"So I tell him honourably (you are to know I have written to him about all this) that we are at issue and that we had better be at issue openly than covertly. I thank him for his goodwill and his protection, and he goes his road, and I go mine. The fact is, our roads are not the same. Under one of the wills in dispute, I should take much more than he. I don't mean to say that it is the one to be established, but there it is, and it has its chance."

"I have not to learn from you, my dear Richard," said I, "of your letter. I had heard of it already without an offended or angry word."

"Indeed?" replied Richard, softening. "I am glad I said he was an honourable man, out of all this wretched affair. But I always say that and have never doubted it. Now, my dear Esther, I know these views of mine appear extremely harsh to you, and will to Ada when you tell her what has passed between us. But if you had gone into the case as I have, if you had only applied yourself to the papers as I did when I was at Kenge's, if you only knew what an accumulation of charges and counter-charges, and suspicions and cross-suspicions, they involve, you would think me moderate in comparison."

"Perhaps so," said I. "But do you think that, among those many papers, there is much truth and justice, Richard?"

"There is truth and justice somewhere in the case, Esther—"

"Or was once, long ago," said I.

"Is—is—must be somewhere," pursued Richard impetuously, "and must be brought out. To allow Ada to be made a bribe and hush-money of is not the way to bring it out. You say the suit is changing me; John Jarndyce says it changes, has changed, and will change everybody who has any share in it. Then the greater right I have on my side when I resolve to do all I can to bring it to an end."

"All you can, Richard! Do you think that in these many years no others have done all they could? Has the difficulty grown easier because of so many failures?"

"It can't last for ever," returned Richard with a fierceness kindling in him which again presented to me that last sad reminder. "I am young and earnest, and energy and determination have done wonders many a time. Others have only half thrown themselves into it. I devote myself to it. I make it the object of my life."

"Oh, Richard, my dear, so much the worse, so much the worse!"

"No, no, no, don't you be afraid for me," he returned affectionately. "You're a dear, good, wise, quiet, blessed girl; but you have your prepossessions. So I come round to John Jarndyce. I tell you, my good Esther, when he and I were on those terms which he found so convenient, we were not on natural terms."

"Are division and animosity your natural terms, Richard?"

"No, I don't say that. I mean that all this business puts us on unnatural terms, with which natural relations are incompatible. See another reason for urging it on! I may find out when it's over that I have been mistaken in John Jarndyce. My head may be clearer when I am free of it, and I may then agree with what you say to-day. Very well. Then I shall acknowledge it and make him reparation."

Everything postponed to that imaginary time! Everything held in confusion and indecision until then!

"Now, my best of confidantes," said Richard, "I want my cousin Ada to understand that I am not captious, fickle, and wilful about John Jarndyce, but that I have this purpose and reason at my back. I wish to represent myself to her through you, because she has a great esteem and respect for her cousin John; and I know you will soften the course I take, even though you disapprove of it; and—and in short," said Richard, who had been hesitating through these words, "I—I don't like to represent myself in this litigious, contentious, doubting character to a confiding girl like Ada,"

I told him that he was more like himself in those latter words than in anything he had said yet.

"Why," acknowledged Richard, "that may be true enough, my love. I rather feel it to be so. But I shall be able to give myself fair-play by and by. I shall come all right again, then, don't you be afraid."

I asked him if this were all he wished me to tell Ada.

"Not quite," said Richard. "I am bound not to withhold from her that John Jarndyce answered my letter in his usual manner, addressing me as 'My dear Rick,' trying to argue me out of my opinions, and telling me that they should make no difference in him. (All very well of course, but not altering the case.) I also want Ada to know that if I see her seldom just now, I am looking after her interests as well as my own—we two being in the same boat exactly—and that I hope she will not suppose from any flying rumours she may hear that I am at all light-headed or imprudent; on the contrary, I am always looking forward to the termination of the suit, and always planning in that direction. Being of age now and having taken the step I have taken, I consider myself free from any accountability to John Jarndyce; but Ada being still a ward of the court, I don't yet ask her to renew our engagement. When she is free to act for herself, I shall be myself once more and we shall both be in very different worldly circumstances, I believe. If you tell her all this with the advantage of your considerate way, you will do me a very great and a very kind service, my dear Esther; and I shall knock Jarndyce and Jarndyce on the head with greater vigour. Of course I ask for no secrecy at Bleak House."

"Richard," said I, "you place great confidence in me, but I fear you will not take advice from me?"

"It's impossible that I can on this subject, my dear girl. On any other, readily."

As if there were any other in his life! As if his whole career and character were not being dyed one colour!

"But I may ask you a question, Richard?"

"I think so," said he, laughing. "I don't know who may not, if you may not."

"You say, yourself, you are not leading a very settled life."

"How can I, my dear Esther, with nothing settled!"

"Are you in debt again?"

"Why, of course I am," said Richard, astonished at my simplicity.

"Is it of course?"

"My dear child, certainly. I can't throw myself into an object so completely without expense. You forget, or perhaps you don't know, that under either of the wills Ada and I take something. It's only a question between the larger sum and the smaller. I shall be within the mark any way. Bless your heart, my excellent girl," said Richard, quite amused with me, "I shall be all right! I shall pull through, my dear!"

I felt so deeply sensible of the danger in which he stood that I tried, in Ada's name, in my guardian's, in my own, by every fervent means that I could think of, to warn him of it and to show him some of his mistakes. He received everything I said with patience and gentleness, but it all rebounded from him without taking the least effect. I could not wonder at this after the reception his preoccupied mind had given to my guardian's letter, but I determined to try Ada's influence yet.

So when our walk brought us round to the village again, and I went home to breakfast, I prepared Ada for the account I was going to give her and told her exactly what reason we had to dread that Richard was losing himself and scattering his whole life to the winds. It made her very unhappy, of course, though she had a far, far greater reliance on his correcting his errors than I could have—which was so natural and loving in my dear!—and she presently wrote him this little letter:

> *My dearest cousin,*
>
> *Esther has told me all you said to her this morning. I write this to repeat most earnestly for myself all that she said to you and to let you know how sure I am that you will sooner or later find our cousin John a pattern of truth, sincerity, and goodness, when you will deeply, deeply grieve to have done him (without intending it) so much wrong.*
>
> *I do not quite know how to write what I wish to say next, but I trust you will understand it as I mean it. I have some fears, my dearest cousin, that it may be partly for my sake you are now laying up so much unhappiness for yourself—and if for yourself, for me. In case this should be so, or in case you should entertain much thought of me in what you are doing, I most earnestly entreat and beg you to desist. You can do nothing for my sake that will make me half so happy as for ever turning your back upon the shadow in which we both were born. Do not be angry with me for saying this. Pray, pray, dear Richard, for*

> *my sake, and for your own, and in a natural repugnance for that source of trouble which had its share in making us both orphans when we were very young, pray, pray, let it go for ever. We have reason to know by this time that there is no good in it and no hope, that there is nothing to be got from it but sorrow.*
>
> *My dearest cousin, it is needless for me to say that you are quite free and that it is very likely you may find some one whom you will love much better than your first fancy. I am quite sure, if you will let me say so, that the object of your choice would greatly prefer to follow your fortunes far and wide, however moderate or poor, and see you happy, doing your duty and pursuing your chosen way, than to have the hope of being, or even to be, very rich with you (if such a thing were possible) at the cost of dragging years of procrastination and anxiety and of your indifference to other aims. You may wonder at my saying this so confidently with so little knowledge or experience, but I know it for a certainty from my own heart.*
>
> *Ever, my dearest cousin, your most affectionate*
>
> *Ada*

This note brought Richard to us very soon, but it made little change in him if any. We would fairly try, he said, who was right and who was wrong—he would show us—we should see! He was animated and glowing, as if Ada's tenderness had gratified him; but I could only hope, with a sigh, that the letter might have some stronger effect upon his mind on re-perusal than it assuredly had then.

As they were to remain with us that day and had taken their places to return by the coach next morning, I sought an opportunity of speaking to Mr. Skimpole. Our out-of-door life easily threw one in my way, and I delicately said that there was a responsibility in encouraging Richard.

"Responsibility, my dear Miss Summerson?" he repeated, catching at the word with the pleasantest smile. "I am the last man in the world for such a thing. I never was responsible in my life—I can't be."

"I am afraid everybody is obliged to be," said I timidly enough, he being so much older and more clever than I.

"No, really?" said Mr. Skimpole, receiving this new light with a most agreeable jocularity of surprise. "But every man's not obliged to be solvent? I am not. I never was. See, my dear Miss Summerson," he took a handful of loose silver and halfpence from his pocket, "there's so much money. I have not an idea how much. I have not the power of counting. Call it four and ninepence—call it four pound nine. They tell me I owe more than that. I dare say I do. I dare say I owe as much as good-natured people will let me owe. If they don't stop, why should I? There you have Harold Skimpole in little. If that's responsibility, I am responsible."

The perfect ease of manner with which he put the money up again and looked at me with a smile on his refined face, as if he had been mentioning a curious little fact about somebody else, almost made me feel as if he really had nothing to do with it.

"Now, when you mention responsibility," he resumed, "I am disposed to say that I never had the happiness of knowing any one whom I should consider so refreshingly responsible as yourself. You appear to me to be the very touchstone of responsibility. When I see you, my dear Miss Summerson, intent upon the perfect working of the whole little orderly system of which you are the centre, I feel inclined to say to myself—in fact I do say to myself very often—THAT'S responsibility!"

It was difficult, after this, to explain what I meant; but I persisted so far as to say that we all hoped he would check and not confirm Richard in the sanguine views he entertained just then.

"Most willingly," he retorted, "if I could. But, my dear Miss Summerson, I have no art, no disguise. If he takes me by the hand and leads me through Westminster Hall in an airy procession after fortune, I must go. If he says, 'Skimpole, join the dance!' I must join it. Common sense wouldn't, I know, but I have NO common sense."

It was very unfortunate for Richard, I said.

"Do you think so!" returned Mr. Skimpole. "Don't say that, don't say that. Let us suppose him keeping company with Common Sense—an excellent man—a good deal wrinkled—dreadfully practical—change for a ten-pound note in every pocket—ruled account-book in his hand—say, upon the whole, resembling a tax-gatherer. Our dear Richard, sanguine, ardent, overleaping obstacles, bursting with poetry like a young bud, says to this highly respectable companion, 'I see a golden prospect before me; it's very bright, it's very beautiful, it's very joyous; here I go, bounding over the landscape to come at it!' The respectable companion instantly knocks him down with the ruled account-book; tells him in a literal, prosaic way that he sees no such thing; shows him it's nothing but fees, fraud, horsehair wigs, and black gowns. Now you know that's a painful change—sensible in the last degree, I have no doubt, but disagreeable. I can't do it. I haven't got the ruled account-book, I have none of the tax-gathering elements in my composition, I am not at all respectable, and I don't want to be. Odd perhaps, but so it is!"

It was idle to say more, so I proposed that we should join Ada and Richard, who were a little in advance, and I gave up Mr. Skimpole in despair. He had been over the Hall in the course of the morning and whimsically described the family pictures as we walked. There were such portentous shepherdesses among the Ladies Dedlock dead and gone, he told us, that peaceful crooks became weapons of assault in their hands. They tended their flocks severely in buckram and powder and put their sticking-plaster patches on to terrify commoners as the chiefs of some other tribes put on their war-paint. There was a Sir Somebody Dedlock, with a battle, a sprung-mine, volumes of smoke, flashes of lightning, a town on fire, and a stormed fort, all in full action between his horse's two hind legs, showing, he supposed, how little a Dedlock made of such trifles. The whole race he represented as having evidently been, in life, what he called "stuffed people"—a large collection, glassy eyed, set up in the most approved manner on their various twigs and perches, very correct, perfectly free from animation, and always in glass cases.

I was not so easy now during any reference to the name but that I felt it a relief when Richard, with an exclamation of surprise, hurried away to meet a stranger whom he first descried coming slowly towards us.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Skimpole. "Vholes!"

We asked if that were a friend of Richard's.

"Friend and legal adviser," said Mr. Skimpole. "Now, my dear Miss Summerson, if you want common sense, responsibility, and respectability, all united—if you want an exemplary man—Vholes is THE man."

We had not known, we said, that Richard was assisted by any gentleman of that name.

"When he emerged from legal infancy," returned Mr. Skimpole, "he parted from our conversational friend Kenge and took up, I believe, with Vholes. Indeed, I know he did, because I introduced him to Vholes."

"Had you known him long?" asked Ada.

"Vholes? My dear Miss Clare, I had had that kind of acquaintance with him which I have had with several gentlemen of his profession. He had done something or other in a very agreeable, civil manner—taken proceedings, I think, is the expression—which ended in the proceeding of his taking ME. Somebody was so good as to step in and pay the money—something and fourpence was the amount; I forget the pounds and shillings, but I know it ended with fourpence, because it struck me at the time as being so odd that I could owe anybody fourpence—and after that I brought them together. Vholes asked me for the introduction, and I gave it. Now I come to think of it," he looked inquiringly at us with his frankest smile as he made the discovery, "Vholes bribed me, perhaps? He gave me something and called it commission. Was it a five-pound note? Do you know, I think it MUST have been a five-pound note!"

His further consideration of the point was prevented by Richard's coming back to us in an excited state and hastily representing Mr. Vholes—a sallow man with pinched lips that looked as if they were cold, a red eruption here and there upon his face, tall and thin, about fifty years of age, high-shouldered, and stooping. Dressed in black, black-gloved, and buttoned to the chin, there was nothing so remarkable in him as a lifeless manner and a slow, fixed way he had of looking at Richard.

"I hope I don't disturb you, ladies," said Mr. Vholes, and now I observed that he was further remarkable for an inward manner of speaking. "I arranged with Mr. Carstone that he should always know when his cause was in the Chancellor's paper, and being informed by one of my clerks last night after post time that it stood, rather unexpectedly, in the paper for to-morrow, I put myself into the coach early this morning and came down to confer with him."

"Yes," said Richard, flushed, and looking triumphantly at Ada and me, "we don't do these things in the old slow way now. We spin along now! Mr. Vholes, we must hire something to get over to the post town in, and catch the mail to-night, and go up by it!"

"Anything you please, sir," returned Mr. Vholes. "I am quite at your service."

"Let me see," said Richard, looking at his watch. "If I run down to the Dedlock, and get my portmanteau fastened up, and order a gig, or a chaise, or whatever's to be got, we shall have an hour then before starting. I'll come back to tea. Cousin Ada, will you and Esther take care of Mr. Vholes when I am gone?"

He was away directly, in his heat and hurry, and was soon lost in the dusk of evening. We who were left walked on towards the house.

"Is Mr. Carstone's presence necessary to-morrow, Sir?" said I. "Can it do any good?"

"No, miss," Mr. Vholes replied. "I am not aware that it can."

Both Ada and I expressed our regret that he should go, then, only to be disappointed.

"Mr. Carstone has laid down the principle of watching his own interests," said Mr. Vholes, "and when a client lays down his own principle, and it is not immoral, it devolves upon me to carry it out. I wish in business to be exact and open. I am a widower with three daughters—Emma, Jane, and Caroline—and my desire is so to discharge the duties of life as to leave them a good name. This appears to be a pleasant spot, miss."

The remark being made to me in consequence of my being next him as we walked, I assented and enumerated its chief attractions.

"Indeed?" said Mr. Vholes. "I have the privilege of supporting an aged father in the Vale of Taunton—his native place—and I admire that country very much. I had no idea there was anything so attractive here."

To keep up the conversation, I asked Mr. Vholes if he would like to live altogether in the country.

"There, miss," said he, "you touch me on a tender string. My health is not good (my digestion being much impaired), and if I had only myself to consider, I should take refuge in rural habits, especially as the cares of business have prevented me from ever coming much into contact with general society, and particularly with ladies' society, which I have most wished to mix in. But with my three daughters, Emma, Jane, and Caroline—and my aged father—I cannot afford to be selfish. It is true I have no longer to maintain a dear grandmother who died in her hundred and second year, but enough remains to render it indispensable that the mill should be always going."

It required some attention to hear him on account of his inward speaking and his lifeless manner.

"You will excuse my having mentioned my daughters," he said. "They are my weak point. I wish to leave the poor girls some little independence, as well as a good name."

We now arrived at Mr. Boythorn's house, where the tea-table, all prepared, was awaiting us. Richard came in restless and hurried shortly afterwards, and leaning over Mr. Vholes's chair, whispered something in his ear. Mr. Vholes replied aloud—or as nearly aloud I suppose as he had ever replied to anything—"You will drive me, will you, sir? It is all the same to me, sir. Anything you please. I am quite at your service."

We understood from what followed that Mr. Skimpole was to be left until the morning to occupy the two places which had been already paid for. As Ada and I were both in low spirits concerning Richard and very sorry so to part with him, we made it as plain as we politely could that we should leave Mr. Skimpole to the Dedlock Arms and retire when the night-travellers were gone.

Richard's high spirits carrying everything before them, we all went out together to the top of the hill above the village, where he had ordered a gig to wait and where we found a man with a lantern standing at the head of the gaunt pale horse that had been harnessed to it.

I never shall forget those two seated side by side in the lantern's light, Richard all flush and fire and laughter, with the reins in his hand; Mr. Vholes quite still, black-gloved, and buttoned up, looking at him as if he were looking at his prey and charming it. I have before me the whole picture of the warm dark night, the summer lightning, the dusty track of road closed in by hedgerows and high trees, the gaunt pale horse with his ears pricked up, and the driving away at speed to Jarndyce and Jarndyce.

My dear girl told me that night how Richard's being thereafter prosperous or ruined, befriended or deserted, could only make this difference to her, that the more he needed love from one unchanging heart, the more love that unchanging heart would have to give him; how he thought of her through his present errors, and she would think of him at all times—never of herself if she could devote herself to him, never of her own delights if she could minister to his.

And she kept her word?

I look along the road before me, where the distance already shortens and the journey's end is growing visible; and true and good above the dead sea of the Chancery suit and all the ashy fruit it cast ashore, I think I see my darling.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. A Struggle

When our time came for returning to Bleak House again, we were punctual to the day and were received with an overpowering welcome. I was perfectly restored to health and strength, and finding my housekeeping keys laid ready for me in my room, rang myself in as if I had been a new year, with a merry little peal. "Once more, duty, duty, Esther," said I; "and if you are not overjoyed to do it, more than cheerfully and contentedly, through anything and everything, you ought to be. That's all I have to say to you, my dear!"

The first few mornings were mornings of so much bustle and business, devoted to such settlements of accounts, such repeated journeys to and fro between the growlery and all other parts of the house, so many rearrangements of drawers and presses, and such a general new beginning altogether, that I had not a moment's leisure. But when these arrangements were completed and everything was in order, I paid a visit of a few hours to London, which something in the letter I had destroyed at Chesney Wold had induced me to decide upon in my own mind.

I made Caddy Jellyby—her maiden name was so natural to me that I always called her by it—the pretext for this visit and wrote her a note previously asking the favour of her company on a little business expedition. Leaving home very early in the morning, I got to London by stage-coach in such good time that I got to Newman Street with the day before me.

Caddy, who had not seen me since her wedding-day, was so glad and so affectionate that I was half inclined to fear I should make her husband jealous. But he was, in his way, just as bad—I mean as good; and in short it was the old story, and nobody would leave me any possibility of doing anything meritorious.

The elder Mr. Turveydrop was in bed, I found, and Caddy was milling his chocolate, which a melancholy little boy who was an apprentice—it seemed such a curious thing to be apprenticed to the trade of dancing—was waiting to carry upstairs. Her father-in-law was extremely kind and considerate, Caddy told me, and they lived most happily together. (When she spoke of their living together, she meant that the old gentleman had all the good things and all the good lodging, while she and her husband had what they could get, and were poked into two corner rooms over the Mews.)

"And how is your mama, Caddy?" said I.

"Why, I hear of her, Esther," replied Caddy, "through Pa, but I see very little of her. We are good friends, I am glad to say, but Ma thinks there is something absurd in my having married a dancing-master, and she is rather afraid of its extending to her."

It struck me that if Mrs. Jellyby had discharged her own natural duties and obligations before she swept the horizon with a telescope in search of others, she would have taken the best precautions against becoming absurd, but I need scarcely observe that I kept this to myself.

"And your papa, Caddy?"

"He comes here every evening," returned Caddy, "and is so fond of sitting in the corner there that it's a treat to see him."

Looking at the corner, I plainly perceived the mark of Mr. Jellyby's head against the wall. It was consolatory to know that he had found such a resting-place for it.

"And you, Caddy," said I, "you are always busy, I'll be bound?"

"Well, my dear," returned Caddy, "I am indeed, for to tell you a grand secret, I am qualifying myself to give lessons. Prince's health is not strong, and I want to be able to assist him. What with schools, and classes here, and private pupils, AND the apprentices, he really has too much to do, poor fellow!"

The notion of the apprentices was still so odd to me that I asked Caddy if there were many of them.

"Four," said Caddy. "One in-door, and three out. They are very good children; only when they get together they WILL play—children-like—instead of attending to their work. So the little boy you saw just now waltzes by himself in the empty kitchen, and we distribute the others over the house as well as we can."

"That is only for their steps, of course?" said I.

"Only for their steps," said Caddy. "In that way they practise, so many hours at a time, whatever steps they happen to be upon. They dance in the academy, and at this time of year we do figures at five every morning."

"Why, what a laborious life!" I exclaimed.

"I assure you, my dear," returned Caddy, smiling, "when the out-door apprentices ring us up in the morning (the bell rings into our room, not to disturb old Mr. Turveydrop), and when I put up the window and see them standing on the door-step with their little pumps under their arms, I am actually reminded of the Sweeps."

All this presented the art to me in a singular light, to be sure. Caddy enjoyed the effect of her communication and cheerfully recounted the particulars of her own studies.

"You see, my dear, to save expense I ought to know something of the piano, and I ought to know something of the kit too, and consequently I have to practise those two instruments as well as the details of our profession. If Ma had been like anybody else, I might have had some little musical knowledge to begin upon. However, I hadn't any; and that part of the work is, at first, a little discouraging, I must allow. But I have a very good ear, and I am used to drudgery—I have to thank Ma for that, at all events—and where there's a will there's a way, you know, Esther, the world over." Saying these words, Caddy laughingly sat down at a little jingling square piano and really rattled off a quadrille with great spirit. Then she good-humouredly and blushingly got up again, and while she still laughed herself, said, "Don't laugh at me, please; that's a dear girl!"

I would sooner have cried, but I did neither. I encouraged her and praised her with all my heart. For I conscientiously believed, dancing-master's wife though she was, and dancing-mistress though in her limited ambition she aspired to be, she had struck out a natural, wholesome, loving course of industry and perseverance that was quite as good as a mission.

"My dear," said Caddy, delighted, "you can't think how you cheer me. I shall owe you, you don't know how much. What changes, Esther, even in my small world! You recollect that first night, when I was so unpolite and inky? Who would have thought, then, of my ever teaching people to dance, of all other possibilities and impossibilities!"

Her husband, who had left us while we had this chat, now coming back, preparatory to exercising the apprentices in the ball-room, Caddy informed me she was quite at my disposal. But it was not my time yet, I was glad to tell her, for I should have been vexed to take her away then. Therefore we three adjourned to the apprentices together, and I made one in the dance.

The apprentices were the queerest little people. Besides the melancholy boy, who, I hoped, had not been made so by waltzing alone in the empty kitchen, there were two other boys and one dirty little limp girl in a gauzy dress. Such a precocious little girl, with such a dowdy bonnet on (that, too, of a gauzy texture), who brought her sandalled shoes in an old threadbare velvet reticule. Such mean little boys, when they were not dancing, with string, and marbles, and cramp-bones in their pockets, and the most untidy legs and feet—and heels particularly.

I asked Caddy what had made their parents choose this profession for them. Caddy said she didn't know; perhaps they were designed for teachers, perhaps for the stage. They were all people in humble circumstances, and the melancholy boy's mother kept a ginger-beer shop.

We danced for an hour with great gravity, the melancholy child doing wonders with his lower extremities, in which there appeared to be some sense of enjoyment though it never rose above his waist. Caddy, while she was observant of her husband and was evidently founded upon him, had acquired a grace and self-possession of her own, which, united to her pretty face and figure, was uncommonly agreeable. She already relieved him of much of the instruction of these young people, and he seldom interfered except to walk his part in the figure if he had anything to do in it. He always played the tune. The affectation of the gauzy child, and her condescension to the boys, was a sight. And thus we danced an hour by the clock.

When the practice was concluded, Caddy's husband made himself ready to go out of town to a school, and Caddy ran away to get ready to go out with me. I sat in the ball-room in the interval, contemplating the apprentices. The two out-door boys went upon the staircase to put on their half-boots and pull the in-door boy's hair, as I judged from the nature of his objections. Returning with their jackets buttoned and their pumps stuck in them, they then produced packets of cold bread and meat and bivouacked under a painted lyre on the wall. The little gauzy child, having whisked her sandals into the reticule and put on a trodden-down pair of shoes, shook her head into the dowdy bonnet at one shake, and answering my inquiry whether she liked dancing by replying, "Not with boys," tied it across her chin, and went home contemptuous.

"Old Mr. Turveydrop is so sorry," said Caddy, "that he has not finished dressing yet and cannot have the pleasure of seeing you before you go. You are such a favourite of his, Esther."

I expressed myself much obliged to him, but did not think it necessary to add that I readily dispensed with this attention.

"It takes him a long time to dress," said Caddy, "because he is very much looked up to in such things, you know, and has a reputation to support. You can't think how kind he is to Pa. He talks to Pa of an evening about the Prince Regent, and I never saw Pa so interested."

There was something in the picture of Mr. Turveydrop bestowing his deportment on Mr. Jellyby that quite took my fancy. I asked Caddy if he brought her papa out much.

"No," said Caddy, "I don't know that he does that, but he talks to Pa, and Pa greatly admires him, and listens, and likes it. Of course I am aware that Pa has hardly any claims to deportment, but they get on together delightfully. You can't think what good companions they make. I never saw Pa take snuff before in my life, but he takes one pinch out of Mr. Turveydrop's box regularly and keeps putting it to his nose and taking it away again all the evening."

That old Mr. Turveydrop should ever, in the chances and changes of life, have come to the rescue of Mr. Jellyby from Borrioboola-Gha appeared to me to be one of the pleasantest of oddities.

"As to Peepy," said Caddy with a little hesitation, "whom I was most afraid of—next to having any family of my own, Esther—as an inconvenience to Mr. Turveydrop, the kindness of the old gentleman to that child is beyond everything. He asks to see him, my dear! He lets him take the newspaper up to him in bed; he gives him the crusts of his toast to eat; he sends him on little errands about the house; he tells him to come to me for sixpences. In short," said Caddy cheerily, "and not to prose, I am a very fortunate girl and ought to be very grateful. Where are we going, Esther?"

"To the Old Street Road," said I, "where I have a few words to say to the solicitor's clerk who was sent to meet me at the coach-office on the very day when I came to London and first saw you, my dear. Now I think of it, the gentleman who brought us to your house."

"Then, indeed, I seem to be naturally the person to go with you," returned Caddy.

To the Old Street Road we went and there inquired at Mrs. Guppy's residence for Mrs. Guppy. Mrs. Guppy, occupying the parlours and having indeed been visibly in danger of cracking herself like a nut in the front-parlour door by peeping out before she was asked for, immediately presented herself and requested us to walk in. She was an old lady in a large cap, with rather a red nose and rather an unsteady eye, but smiling all over. Her close little sitting-room was prepared for a visit, and there was a portrait of her son in it which, I had almost written here, was more like than life: it insisted upon him with such obstinacy, and was so determined not to let him off.

Not only was the portrait there, but we found the original there too. He was dressed in a great many colours and was discovered at a table reading law-papers with his forefinger to his forehead.

"Miss Summerson," said Mr. Guppy, rising, "this is indeed an oasis. Mother, will you be so good as to put a chair for the other lady and get out of the gangway."

Mrs. Guppy, whose incessant smiling gave her quite a waggish appearance, did as her son requested and then sat down in a corner, holding her pocket handkerchief to her chest, like a fomentation, with both hands.

I presented Caddy, and Mr. Guppy said that any friend of mine was more than welcome. I then proceeded to the object of my visit.

"I took the liberty of sending you a note, sir," said I.

Mr. Guppy acknowledged the receipt by taking it out of his breast-pocket, putting it to his lips, and returning it to his pocket with a bow. Mr. Guppy's mother was so diverted that she rolled her head as she smiled and made a silent appeal to Caddy with her elbow.

"Could I speak to you alone for a moment?" said I.

Anything like the jocoseness of Mr. Guppy's mother just now, I think I never saw. She made no sound of laughter, but she rolled her head, and shook it, and put her handkerchief to her mouth, and appealed to Caddy with her elbow, and her hand, and her shoulder, and was so unspeakably entertained altogether that it was with some difficulty she could marshal Caddy through the little folding-door into her bedroom adjoining.

"Miss Summerson," said Mr. Guppy, "you will excuse the waywardness of a parent ever mindful of a son's appiness. My mother, though highly exasperating to the feelings, is actuated by maternal dictates."

I could hardly have believed that anybody could in a moment have turned so red or changed so much as Mr. Guppy did when I now put up my veil.

"I asked the favour of seeing you for a few moments here," said I, "in preference to calling at Mr. Kenge's because, remembering what you said on an occasion when you spoke to me in confidence, I feared I might otherwise cause you some embarrassment, Mr. Guppy."

I caused him embarrassment enough as it was, I am sure. I never saw such faltering, such confusion, such amazement and apprehension.

"Miss Summerson," stammered Mr. Guppy, "I—I—beg your pardon, but in our profession—we—we—find it necessary to be explicit. You have referred to an occasion, miss, when I—when I did myself the honour of making a declaration which—"

Something seemed to rise in his throat that he could not possibly swallow. He put his hand there, coughed, made faces, tried again to swallow it, coughed again, made faces again, looked all round the room, and fluttered his papers.

"A kind of giddy sensation has come upon me, miss," he explained, "which rather knocks me over. I—er—a little subject to this sort of thing—er—by George!"

I gave him a little time to recover. He consumed it in putting his hand to his forehead and taking it away again, and in backing his chair into the corner behind him.

"My intention was to remark, miss," said Mr. Guppy, "dear me—something bronchial, I think—hem!—to remark that you was so good on that occasion as to repel and repudiate that declaration. You—you wouldn't perhaps object to admit that? Though no witnesses are present, it might be a satisfaction to—to your mind—if you was to put in that admission."

"There can be no doubt," said I, "that I declined your proposal without any reservation or qualification whatever, Mr. Guppy."

"Thank you, miss," he returned, measuring the table with his troubled hands. "So far that's satisfactory, and it does you credit. Er—this is certainly bronchial!—must be in the tubes—er—you wouldn't perhaps be offended if I was to mention—not that it's necessary, for your own good sense or any person's sense must show 'em that—if I was to mention that such declaration on my part was final, and there terminated?"

"I quite understand that," said I.

"Perhaps—er—it may not be worth the form, but it might be a satisfaction to your mind—perhaps you wouldn't object to admit that, miss?" said Mr. Guppy.

"I admit it most fully and freely," said I.

"Thank you," returned Mr. Guppy. "Very honourable, I am sure. I regret that my arrangements in life, combined with circumstances over which I have no control, will put it out of my power ever to fall back upon that offer or to renew it in any shape or form whatever, but it will ever be a retrospect entwined—er—with friendship's bowers." Mr. Guppy's bronchitis came to his relief and stopped his measurement of the table.

"I may now perhaps mention what I wished to say to you?" I began.

"I shall be honoured, I am sure," said Mr. Guppy. "I am so persuaded that your own good sense and right feeling, miss, will—will keep you as square as possible—that I can have nothing but pleasure, I am sure, in hearing any observations you may wish to offer."

"You were so good as to imply, on that occasion—"

"Excuse me, miss," said Mr. Guppy, "but we had better not travel out of the record into implication. I cannot admit that I implied anything."

"You said on that occasion," I recommenced, "that you might possibly have the means of advancing my interests and promoting my fortunes by making discoveries of which I should be the subject. I presume that you founded that belief upon your general knowledge of my being an orphan girl, indebted for everything to the benevolence of Mr. Jarndyce. Now, the beginning and the end of what I have come to beg of you is, Mr. Guppy, that you will have the kindness to relinquish all idea of so serving me. I have thought of this sometimes, and I have thought of it most lately—since I have been ill. At length I have decided, in case you should at any time recall that purpose and act upon it in any way, to come to you and assure you that you are altogether mistaken. You could make no discovery in reference to me that would do me the least service or give me the least pleasure. I am acquainted with my personal history, and I have it in my power to assure you that you never can advance my welfare by such means. You may, perhaps, have abandoned this project a long time. If so, excuse my giving you unnecessary trouble. If not, I entreat you, on the assurance I have given you, henceforth to lay it aside. I beg you to do this, for my peace."

"I am bound to confess," said Mr. Guppy, "that you express yourself, miss, with that good sense and right feeling for which I gave you credit. Nothing can be more satisfactory than such right feeling, and if I mistook any intentions on your part just now, I am prepared to tender a full apology. I should wish to be understood, miss, as hereby offering that apology—

limiting it, as your own good sense and right feeling will point out the necessity of, to the present proceedings."

I must say for Mr. Guppy that the snuffling manner he had had upon him improved very much. He seemed truly glad to be able to do something I asked, and he looked ashamed.

"If you will allow me to finish what I have to say at once so that I may have no occasion to resume," I went on, seeing him about to speak, "you will do me a kindness, sir. I come to you as privately as possible because you announced this impression of yours to me in a confidence which I have really wished to respect—and which I always have respected, as you remember. I have mentioned my illness. There really is no reason why I should hesitate to say that I know very well that any little delicacy I might have had in making a request to you is quite removed. Therefore I make the entreaty I have now preferred, and I hope you will have sufficient consideration for me to accede to it."

I must do Mr. Guppy the further justice of saying that he had looked more and more ashamed and that he looked most ashamed and very earnest when he now replied with a burning face, "Upon my word and honour, upon my life, upon my soul, Miss Summerson, as I am a living man, I'll act according to your wish! I'll never go another step in opposition to it. I'll take my oath to it if it will be any satisfaction to you. In what I promise at this present time touching the matters now in question," continued Mr. Guppy rapidly, as if he were repeating a familiar form of words, "I speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so—"

"I am quite satisfied," said I, rising at this point, "and I thank you very much. Caddy, my dear, I am ready!"

Mr. Guppy's mother returned with Caddy (now making me the recipient of her silent laughter and her nudges), and we took our leave. Mr. Guppy saw us to the door with the air of one who was either imperfectly awake or walking in his sleep; and we left him there, staring.

But in a minute he came after us down the street without any hat, and with his long hair all blown about, and stopped us, saying fervently, "Miss Summerson, upon my honour and soul, you may depend upon me!"

"I do," said I, "quite confidently."

"I beg your pardon, miss," said Mr. Guppy, going with one leg and staying with the other, "but this lady being present—your own witness—it might be a satisfaction to your mind (which I should wish to set at rest) if you was to repeat those admissions."

"Well, Caddy," said I, turning to her, "perhaps you will not be surprised when I tell you, my dear, that there never has been any engagement—"

"No proposal or promise of marriage whatsoever," suggested Mr. Guppy.

"No proposal or promise of marriage whatsoever," said I, "between this gentleman—"

"William Guppy, of Penton Place, Pentonville, in the county of Middlesex," he murmured.

"Between this gentleman, Mr. William Guppy, of Penton Place, Pentonville, in the county of Middlesex, and myself."

"Thank you, miss," said Mr. Guppy. "Very full—er—excuse me—lady's name, Christian and surname both?"

I gave them.

"Married woman, I believe?" said Mr. Guppy. "Married woman. Thank you. Formerly Caroline Jellyby, spinster, then of Thavies Inn, within the city of London, but extra-parochial; now of Newman Street, Oxford Street. Much obliged."

He ran home and came running back again.

"Touching that matter, you know, I really and truly am very sorry that my arrangements in life, combined with circumstances over which I have no control, should prevent a renewal of what was wholly terminated some time back," said Mr. Guppy to me forlornly and despondently, "but it couldn't be. Now COULD it, you know! I only put it to you."

I replied it certainly could not. The subject did not admit of a doubt. He thanked me and ran to his mother's again—and back again.

"It's very honourable of you, miss, I am sure," said Mr. Guppy. "If an altar could be erected in the bowers of friendship—but, upon my soul, you may rely upon me in every respect save and except the tender passion only!"

The struggle in Mr. Guppy's breast and the numerous oscillations it occasioned him between his mother's door and us were sufficiently conspicuous in the windy street (particularly as his hair wanted cutting) to make us hurry away. I did so with a lightened heart; but when we last looked back, Mr. Guppy was still oscillating in the same troubled state of mind.

CHAPTER XXXIX. Attorney and Client

The name of Mr. Vholes, preceded by the legend Ground-Floor, is inscribed upon a door-post in Symond's Inn, Chancery Lane—a little, pale, wall-eyed, woebegone inn like a large dust-binn of two compartments and a sifter. It looks as if Symond were a sparing man in his way and constructed his inn of old building materials which took kindly to the dry rot and to dirt and all things decaying and dismal, and perpetuated Symond's memory with congenial shabbiness. Quartered in this dingy hatchment commemorative of Symond are the legal bearings of Mr. Vholes.

Mr. Vholes's office, in disposition retiring and in situation retired, is squeezed up in a corner and blinks at a dead wall. Three feet of knotty-floored dark passage bring the client to Mr. Vholes's jet-black door, in an angle profoundly dark on the brightest midsummer morning and encumbered by a black bulk-head of cellarage staircase against which belated civilians generally strike their brows. Mr. Vholes's chambers are on so small a scale that one clerk can open the door without getting off his stool, while the other who elbows him at the same desk has equal facilities for poking the fire. A smell as of unwholesome sheep blending with the smell of must and dust is referable to the nightly (and often daily) consumption of mutton fat in candles and to the fretting of parchment forms and skins in greasy drawers. The atmosphere is otherwise stale and close. The place was last painted or whitewashed beyond the memory of man, and the two chimneys smoke, and there is a loose outer surface of soot everywhere, and the dull cracked windows in their heavy frames have but one piece of character in them, which is a determination to be always dirty and always shut unless coerced. This accounts for the phenomenon of the weaker of the two usually having a bundle of firewood thrust between its jaws in hot weather.

Mr. Vholes is a very respectable man. He has not a large business, but he is a very respectable man. He is allowed by the greater attorneys who have made good fortunes or are making them to be a most respectable man. He never misses a chance in his practice, which is a mark of respectability. He never takes any pleasure, which is another mark of respectability. He is reserved and serious, which is another mark of respectability. His digestion is impaired, which is highly respectable. And he is making hay of the grass which is flesh, for his three daughters. And his father is dependent on him in the Vale of Taunton.

The one great principle of the English law is to make business for itself. There is no other principle distinctly, certainly, and consistently maintained through all its narrow turnings. Viewed by this light it becomes a coherent scheme and not the monstrous maze the laity are apt to think it. Let them but once clearly perceive that its grand principle is to make business for itself at their expense, and surely they will cease to grumble.

But not perceiving this quite plainly—only seeing it by halves in a confused way—the laity sometimes suffer in peace and pocket, with a bad grace, and DO grumble very much. Then this respectability of Mr. Vholes is brought into powerful play against them. "Repeal this statute, my good sir?" says Mr. Kenge to a smarting client. "Repeal it, my dear sir? Never, with my consent. Alter this law, sir, and what will be the effect of your rash proceeding on a class of practitioners very worthily represented, allow me to say to you, by the opposite attorney in the case, Mr. Vholes? Sir, that class of practitioners would be swept from the face of the earth. Now you cannot afford—I will say, the social system cannot afford—to lose an order of men like Mr. Vholes. Diligent, persevering, steady, acute in business. My dear sir, I understand your present feelings against the existing state of things, which I grant to be a little hard in your case; but I can never raise my voice for the demolition of a class of men like Mr. Vholes." The respectability of Mr. Vholes has even been cited with crushing effect before Parliamentary committees, as in the following blue minutes of a distinguished attorney's evidence. "Question (number five hundred and seventeen thousand eight hundred and sixty-nine): If I understand you, these forms of practice indisputably occasion delay? Answer: Yes, some delay. Question: And great expense? Answer: Most assuredly they cannot be gone through for nothing. Question: And unspeakable vexation? Answer: I am not prepared to say that. They have never given ME any vexation; quite the contrary. Question: But you think that their abolition would damage a class of practitioners? Answer: I have no doubt of it. Question: Can you instance any type of that class? Answer: Yes. I would unhesitatingly mention Mr. Vholes. He would be ruined. Question: Mr. Vholes is considered, in the profession, a respectable man? Answer:"—which proved fatal to the inquiry for ten years—"Mr. Vholes is considered, in the profession, a MOST respectable man."

So in familiar conversation, private authorities no less disinterested will remark that they don't know what this age is coming to, that we are plunging down precipices, that now here is something else gone, that these changes are death to people like Vholes—a man of undoubted respectability, with a father in the Vale of Taunton, and three daughters at home. Take a few steps more in this direction, say they, and what is to become of Vholes's father? Is he to perish? And of Vholes's daughters? Are they to be shirt-makers, or governesses? As though, Mr. Vholes and his relations being minor cannibal chiefs and it being proposed to abolish cannibalism, indignant champions were to put the case thus: Make man-eating unlawful, and you starve the Vholeses!

In a word, Mr. Vholes, with his three daughters and his father in the Vale of Taunton, is continually doing duty, like a piece of timber, to shore up some decayed foundation that has become a pitfall and a nuisance. And with a great many people in a great many instances, the question is never one of a change from wrong to right (which is quite an extraneous consideration), but is always one of injury or advantage to that eminently respectable legion, Vholes.

The Chancellor is, within these ten minutes, "up" for the long vacation. Mr. Vholes, and his young client, and several blue bags hastily stuffed out of all regularity of form, as the larger sort of serpents are in their first gorged state, have returned to the official den. Mr. Vholes, quiet and unmoved, as a man of so much respectability ought to be, takes off his close black gloves as if he were skinning his hands, lifts off his tight hat as if he were scalping himself, and sits down at his desk. The client throws his hat and gloves upon the ground—tosses them anywhere, without looking after them or caring where they go; flings himself into a chair, half sighing and half groaning; rests his aching head upon his hand and looks the portrait of young despair.

"Again nothing done!" says Richard. "Nothing, nothing done!"

"Don't say nothing done, sir," returns the placid Vholes. "That is scarcely fair, sir, scarcely fair!"

"Why, what IS done?" says Richard, turning gloomily upon him.

"That may not be the whole question," returns Vholes, "The question may branch off into what is doing, what is doing?"

"And what is doing?" asks the moody client.

Vholes, sitting with his arms on the desk, quietly bringing the tips of his five right fingers to meet the tips of his five left fingers, and quietly separating them again, and fixedly and slowly looking at his client, replies, "A good deal is doing, sir. We have put our shoulders to the wheel, Mr. Carstone, and the wheel is going round."

"Yes, with Ixion on it. How am I to get through the next four or five accursed months?" exclaims the young man, rising from his chair and walking about the room.

"Mr. C.," returns Vholes, following him close with his eyes wherever he goes, "your spirits are hasty, and I am sorry for it on your account. Excuse me if I recommend you not to chafe so much, not to be so impetuous, not to wear yourself out so. You should have more patience. You should sustain yourself better."

"I ought to imitate you, in fact, Mr. Vholes?" says Richard, sitting down again with an impatient laugh and beating the devil's tattoo with his boot on the patternless carpet.

"Sir," returns Vholes, always looking at the client as if he were making a lingering meal of him with his eyes as well as with his professional appetite. "Sir," returns Vholes with his inward manner of speech and his bloodless quietude, "I should not have had the presumption to propose myself as a model for your imitation or any man's. Let me but leave the good name to my three daughters, and that is enough for me; I am not a self-seeker. But since you mention me so pointedly, I will acknowledge that I should like to impart to you a little of my—come, sir, you are disposed to call it insensibility, and I am sure I have no objection—say insensibility—a little of my insensibility."

"Mr. Vholes," explains the client, somewhat abashed, "I had no intention to accuse you of insensibility."

"I think you had, sir, without knowing it," returns the equable Vholes. "Very naturally. It is my duty to attend to your interests with a cool head, and I can quite understand that to your excited feelings I may appear, at such times as the present, insensible. My daughters may know me better; my aged father may know me better. But they have known me much longer than you have, and the confiding eye of affection is not the distrustful eye of business. Not that I complain, sir, of the eye of business being distrustful; quite the contrary. In attending to your interests, I wish to have all possible checks upon me; it is right that I should have them; I court inquiry. But your interests demand that I should be cool and methodical, Mr. Carstone; and I cannot be otherwise—no, sir, not even to please you."

Mr. Vholes, after glancing at the official cat who is patiently watching a mouse's hole, fixes his charmed gaze again on his young client and proceeds in his buttoned-up, half-audible voice as if there were an unclean spirit in him that will neither come out nor speak out, "What are you to do, sir, you inquire, during the vacation. I should hope you gentlemen of the army may find many means of amusing yourselves if you give your minds to it. If you had asked me what I was to do during the vacation, I could have answered you more readily. I am to attend to your interests. I am to be found here, day by day, attending to your interests. That is my duty, Mr. C., and term-time or vacation makes no difference to me. If you wish to consult me as to your interests, you will find me here at all times alike. Other professional men go out of town. I don't. Not that I blame them for going; I merely say I don't go. This desk is your rock, sir!"

Mr. Vholes gives it a rap, and it sounds as hollow as a coffin. Not to Richard, though. There is encouragement in the sound to him. Perhaps Mr. Vholes knows there is.

"I am perfectly aware, Mr. Vholes," says Richard, more familiarly and good-humouredly, "that you are the most reliable fellow in the world and that to have to do with you is to have to do with a man of business who is not to be hoodwinked. But put yourself in my case, dragging on this dislocated life, sinking deeper and deeper into difficulty every day, continually hoping and continually disappointed, conscious of change upon change for the worse in myself, and of no change for the better in anything else, and you will find it a dark-looking case sometimes, as I do."

"You know," says Mr. Vholes, "that I never give hopes, sir. I told you from the first, Mr. C., that I never give hopes. Particularly in a case like this, where the greater part of the costs comes out of the estate, I should not be considerate of my good name if I gave hopes. It might seem as if costs were my object. Still, when you say there is no change for the better, I must, as a bare matter of fact, deny that."

"Aye?" returns Richard, brightening. "But how do you make it out?"

"Mr. Carstone, you are represented by—"

"You said just now—a rock."

"Yes, sir," says Mr. Vholes, gently shaking his head and rapping the hollow desk, with a sound as if ashes were falling on ashes, and dust on dust, "a rock. That's something. You are separately represented, and no longer hidden and lost in the interests of others. THAT'S something. The suit does not sleep; we wake it up, we air it, we walk it about. THAT'S something. It's not all Jarndyce, in fact as well as in name. THAT'S something. Nobody has it all his own way now, sir. And THAT'S something, surely."

Richard, his face flushing suddenly, strikes the desk with his clenched hand.

"Mr. Vholes! If any man had told me when I first went to John Jarndyce's house that he was anything but the disinterested friend he seemed—that he was what he has gradually turned out to be—I could have found no words strong enough to repel the slander; I could not have defended him too ardently. So little did I know of the world! Whereas now I do declare to you that he becomes to me the embodiment of the suit; that in place of its being an abstraction, it is John Jarndyce; that the more I suffer, the more indignant I am with him; that every new delay and every new disappointment is only a new injury from John Jarndyce's hand."

"No, no," says Vholes. "Don't say so. We ought to have patience, all of us. Besides, I never disparage, sir. I never disparage."

"Mr. Vholes," returns the angry client. "You know as well as I that he would have strangled the suit if he could."

"He was not active in it," Mr. Vholes admits with an appearance of reluctance. "He certainly was not active in it. But however, but however, he might have had amiable intentions. Who can read the heart, Mr. C.!"

"You can," returns Richard.

"I, Mr. C.?"

"Well enough to know what his intentions were. Are or are not our interests conflicting? Tell—me—that!" says Richard, accompanying his last three words with three raps on his rock of trust.

"Mr. C.," returns Vholes, immovable in attitude and never winking his hungry eyes, "I should be wanting in my duty as your professional adviser, I should be departing from my fidelity to your interests, if I represented those interests as identical with the interests of Mr. Jarndyce. They are no such thing, sir. I never impute motives; I both have and am a father, and I never impute motives. But I must not shrink from a professional duty, even if it sows dissensions in families. I understand you to be now consulting me professionally as to your interests? You are so? I reply, then, they are not identical with those of Mr. Jarndyce."

"Of course they are not!" cries Richard. "You found that out long ago."

"Mr. C.," returns Vholes, "I wish to say no more of any third party than is necessary. I wish to leave my good name unsullied, together with any little property of which I may become possessed through industry and perseverance, to my daughters Emma, Jane, and Caroline. I also desire to live in amity with my professional brethren. When Mr. Skimpole did me the honour, sir—I will not say the very high honour, for I never stoop to flattery—of bringing us together in this room, I mentioned to you that I could offer no opinion or advice as to your interests while those interests were entrusted to another member of the profession. And I spoke in such terms as I was bound to speak of Kenge and Carboy's office, which stands high. You, sir, thought fit to withdraw your interests from that keeping nevertheless and to offer them to me. You brought them with clean hands, sir, and I accepted them with clean hands. Those interests are now paramount in this office. My digestive functions, as you may have heard me mention, are not in a good state, and rest might improve them; but I shall not rest, sir, while I am your representative. Whenever you want me, you will find me here. Summon me anywhere, and I will come. During the long vacation, sir, I shall devote my leisure to studying your interests more and more closely and to making arrangements for moving heaven and earth (including, of course, the Chancellor) after Michaelmas term; and when I ultimately congratulate you, sir," says Mr. Vholes with the severity of a determined man, "when I ultimately congratulate you, sir, with all my heart, on your accession to fortune—which, but that I never give hopes, I might say something further about—you will owe me nothing beyond whatever little balance may be then outstanding of the costs as between solicitor and client not included in the taxed costs allowed out of the estate. I pretend to no claim upon you, Mr. C., but for the zealous and active discharge—not the languid and routine discharge, sir: that much credit I stipulate for—of my professional duty. My duty prosperously ended, all between us is ended."

Vholes finally adds, by way of rider to this declaration of his principles, that as Mr. Carstone is about to rejoin his regiment, perhaps Mr. C. will favour him with an order on his agent for twenty pounds on account.

"For there have been many little consultations and attendances of late, sir," observes Vholes, turning over the leaves of his diary, "and these things mount up, and I don't profess to be a man of capital. When we first entered on our present relations I stated to you openly—it is a principle of mine that there never can be too much openness between solicitor and client—that I was not a man of capital and that if capital was your object you had better leave your papers in Kenge's office. No, Mr. C., you will find none of the advantages or disadvantages of capital here, sir. This," Vholes gives the desk one hollow blow again, "is your rock; it pretends to be nothing more."

The client, with his dejection insensibly relieved and his vague hopes rekindled, takes pen and ink and writes the draft, not without perplexed consideration and calculation of the date it may bear, implying scant effects in the agent's hands. All the while, Vholes, buttoned up in body and mind, looks at him attentively. All the while, Vholes's official cat watches the mouse's hole.

Lastly, the client, shaking hands, beseeches Mr. Vholes, for heaven's sake and earth's sake, to do his utmost to "pull him through" the Court of Chancery. Mr. Vholes, who never gives hopes, lays his palm upon the client's shoulder and answers with a smile, "Always here, sir. Personally, or by letter, you will always find me here, sir, with my shoulder to the wheel." Thus they part, and Vholes, left alone, employs himself in carrying sundry little matters out of his diary into his draft bill book for the ultimate behoof of his three daughters. So might an industrious fox or bear make up his account of chickens or stray travellers with an eye to his cubs, not to disparage by that word the three raw-visaged, lank, and buttoned-up maidens who dwell with the parent Vholes in an earthy cottage situated in a damp garden at Kennington.

Richard, emerging from the heavy shade of Symond's Inn into the sunshine of Chancery Lane—for there happens to be sunshine there to-day—walks thoughtfully on, and turns into Lincoln's Inn, and passes under the shadow of the Lincoln's Inn trees. On many such loungers have the speckled shadows of those trees often fallen; on the like bent head, the bitten nail, the lowering eye, the lingering step, the purposeless and dreamy air, the good consuming and consumed, the life turned sour. This lounger is not shabby yet, but that may come. Chancery, which knows no wisdom but in precedent, is very rich in such precedents; and why should one be different from ten thousand?

Yet the time is so short since his depreciation began that as he saunters away, reluctant to leave the spot for some long months together, though he hates it, Richard himself may feel his own case as if it were a startling one. While his heart is heavy with corroding care, suspense, distrust, and doubt, it may have room for some sorrowful wonder when he recalls how different his first visit there, how different he, how different all the colours of his mind. But injustice breeds injustice; the fighting with shadows and being defeated by them necessitates the setting up of substances to combat; from the impalpable suit which no man alive can understand, the time for that being long gone by, it has become a gloomy relief to turn to the palpable figure of the friend who would have saved him from this ruin and make HIM his enemy. Richard has told Vholes the truth. Is he in a hardened or a softened mood, he still lays his injuries equally at that door; he was thwarted, in that quarter, of a set purpose, and that purpose could only originate in the one subject that is resolving his existence into itself; besides, it is a justification to him in his own eyes to have an embodied antagonist and oppressor.

Is Richard a monster in all this, or would Chancery be found rich in such precedents too if they could be got for citation from the Recording Angel?

Two pairs of eyes not unused to such people look after him, as, biting his nails and brooding, he crosses the square and is swallowed up by the shadow of the southern gateway. Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle are the possessors of those eyes, and they have been leaning in conversation against the low stone parapet under the trees. He passes close by them, seeing nothing but the ground.

"William," says Mr. Weevle, adjusting his whiskers, "there's combustion going on there! It's not a case of spontaneous, but it's smouldering combustion it is."

"Ah!" says Mr. Guppy. "He wouldn't keep out of Jarndyce, and I suppose he's over head and ears in debt. I never knew much of him. He was as high as the monument when he was on trial at our place. A good riddance to me, whether as clerk or client! Well, Tony, that as I was mentioning is what they're up to."

Mr. Guppy, refolding his arms, resettles himself against the parapet, as resuming a conversation of interest.

"They are still up to it, sir," says Mr. Guppy, "still taking stock, still examining papers, still going over the heaps and heaps of rubbish. At this rate they'll be at it these seven years."

"And Small is helping?"

"Small left us at a week's notice. Told Kenge his grandfather's business was too much for the old gentleman and he could better himself by undertaking it. There had been a coolness between myself and Small on account of his being so close. But he said you and I began it, and as he had me there—for we did—I put our acquaintance on the old footing. That's how I come to know what they're up to."

"You haven't looked in at all?"

"Tony," says Mr. Guppy, a little disconcerted, "to be unreserved with you, I don't greatly relish the house, except in your company, and therefore I have not; and therefore I proposed this little appointment for our fetching away your things. There goes the hour by the clock! Tony"—Mr. Guppy becomes mysteriously and tenderly eloquent—"it is necessary that I should impress upon your mind once more that circumstances over which I have no control have made a melancholy alteration in my most cherished plans and in that unrequited image which I formerly mentioned to you as a friend. That image is shattered, and that idol is laid low. My only wish now in connexion with the objects which I had an idea of carrying out in the court with your aid as a friend is to let 'em alone and bury 'em in oblivion. Do you think it possible, do you think it at all likely (I put it to you, Tony, as a friend), from your knowledge of that capricious and deep old character who fell a prey to the—spontaneous element, do you, Tony, think it at all likely that on second thoughts he put those letters away anywhere, after you saw him alive, and that they were not destroyed that night?"

Mr. Weevle reflects for some time. Shakes his head. Decidedly thinks not.

"Tony," says Mr. Guppy as they walk towards the court, "once again understand me, as a friend. Without entering into further explanations, I may repeat that the idol is down. I have no purpose to serve now but burial in oblivion. To that I have pledged myself. I owe it to myself, and I owe it to the shattered image, as also to the circumstances over which I have no control. If you was to express to me by a gesture, by a wink, that you saw lying anywhere in your late lodgings any papers that so much as looked like the papers in question, I would pitch them into the fire, sir, on my own responsibility."

Mr. Weevle nods. Mr. Guppy, much elevated in his own opinion by having delivered these observations, with an air in part forensic and in part romantic—this gentleman having a passion for conducting anything in the form of an examination, or delivering anything in the form of a summing up or a speech—accompanies his friend with dignity to the court.

Never since it has been a court has it had such a Fortunatus' purse of gossip as in the proceedings at the rag and bottle shop. Regularly, every morning at eight, is the elder Mr. Smallweed brought down to the corner and carried in, accompanied by Mrs. Smallweed, Judy, and Bart; and regularly, all day, do they all remain there until nine at night, solaced by gipsy dinners, not abundant in quantity, from the cook's shop, rummaging and searching, digging, delving, and diving among the treasures of the late lamented. What those treasures are they keep so secret that the court is maddened. In its delirium it imagines guineas pouring out of tea-pots, crown-pieces overflowing punch-bowls, old chairs and mattresses stuffed with Bank of England notes. It possesses itself of the sixpenny history (with highly coloured folding frontispiece) of Mr. Daniel Dancer and his sister, and also of Mr. Elwes, of Suffolk, and transfers all the facts from those authentic narratives to Mr. Krook. Twice when the dustman is called in to carry off a cartload of old paper, ashes, and broken bottles, the whole court assembles and pries into the baskets as they come forth. Many times the two gentlemen who write with the ravenous little pens on the tissue-paper are seen prowling in the neighbourhood—shy of each other, their late partnership being dissolved. The Sol skilfully carries a vein of the prevailing interest through the Harmonic nights. Little Swills, in what are professionally known as "patter" allusions to the subject, is received with loud applause; and the same vocalist "gags" in the regular business like a man inspired. Even Miss M. Melvilleson, in the revived Caledonian melody of "We're a-Nodding," points the sentiment that "the dogs love broo" (whatever the nature of that refreshment may be) with such archness and such a turn of the head towards next door that she is immediately understood to mean Mr. Smallweed loves to find money, and is nightly honoured with a double encore. For all this, the court discovers nothing; and as Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Perkins now communicate to the late lodger whose appearance is the signal for a general rally, it is in one continual ferment to discover everything, and more.

Mr. Weevle and Mr. Guppy, with every eye in the court's head upon them, knock at the closed door of the late lamented's house, in a high state of popularity. But being contrary to the court's expectation admitted, they immediately become unpopular and are considered to mean no good.

The shutters are more or less closed all over the house, and the ground-floor is sufficiently dark to require candles. Introduced into the back shop by Mr. Smallweed the younger, they, fresh from the sunlight, can at first see nothing save darkness and shadows; but they gradually discern the elder Mr. Smallweed seated in his chair upon the brink of a well or grave of waste-paper, the virtuous Judy groping therein like a female sexton, and Mrs. Smallweed on the level ground in the vicinity snowed up in a heap of paper fragments, print, and manuscript which would appear to be the accumulated compliments that have been sent flying at her in the course of the day. The whole party, Small included, are blackened with dust and dirt and present a fiendish appearance not relieved by the general aspect of the room. There is more litter and lumber in it than of old, and it is dirtier if possible; likewise, it is ghostly with traces of its dead inhabitant and even with his chalked writing on the wall.

On the entrance of visitors, Mr. Smallweed and Judy simultaneously fold their arms and stop in their researches.

"Aha!" croaks the old gentleman. "How de do, gentlemen, how de do! Come to fetch your property, Mr. Weevle? That's well, that's well. Ha! Ha! We should have been forced to sell you up, sir, to pay your warehouse room if you had left it here much longer. You feel quite at home here again, I dare say? Glad to see you, glad to see you!"

Mr. Weevle, thanking him, casts an eye about. Mr. Guppy's eye follows Mr. Weevle's eye. Mr. Weevle's eye comes back without any new intelligence in it. Mr. Guppy's eye comes back and meets Mr. Smallweed's eye. That engaging old gentleman is still murmuring, like some wound-up instrument running down, "How de do, sir—how de—how—" And then having run down, he lapses into grinning silence, as Mr. Guppy starts at seeing Mr. Tulkinghorn standing in the darkness opposite with his hands behind him.

"Gentleman so kind as to act as my solicitor," says Grandfather Smallweed. "I am not the sort of client for a gentleman of such note, but he is so good!"

Mr. Guppy, slightly nudging his friend to take another look, makes a shuffling bow to Mr. Tulkinghorn, who returns it with an easy nod. Mr. Tulkinghorn is looking on as if he had nothing else to do and were rather amused by the novelty.

"A good deal of property here, sir, I should say," Mr. Guppy observes to Mr. Smallweed.

"Principally rags and rubbish, my dear friend! Rags and rubbish! Me and Bart and my granddaughter Judy are endeavouring to make out an inventory of what's worth anything to sell. But we haven't come to much as yet; we—haven't—come—to—hah!"

Mr. Smallweed has run down again, while Mr. Weevle's eye, attended by Mr. Guppy's eye, has again gone round the room and come back.

"Well, sir," says Mr. Weevle. "We won't intrude any longer if you'll allow us to go upstairs."

"Anywhere, my dear sir, anywhere! You're at home. Make yourself so, pray!"

As they go upstairs, Mr. Guppy lifts his eyebrows inquiringly and looks at Tony. Tony shakes his head. They find the old room very dull and dismal, with the ashes of the fire that was burning on that memorable night yet in the discoloured grate. They have a great disinclination to touch any object, and carefully blow the dust from it first. Nor are they desirous to prolong their visit, packing the few movables with all possible speed and never speaking above a whisper.

"Look here," says Tony, recoiling. "Here's that horrible cat coming in!"

Mr. Guppy retreats behind a chair. "Small told me of her. She went leaping and bounding and tearing about that night like a dragon, and got out on the house-top, and roamed about up there for a fortnight, and then came tumbling down the chimney very thin. Did you ever see such a brute? Looks as if she knew all about it, don't she? Almost looks as if she was Krook. Shoohoo! Get out, you goblin!"

Lady Jane, in the doorway, with her tiger snarl from ear to ear and her club of a tail, shows no intention of obeying; but Mr. Tulkinghorn stumbling over her, she spits at his rusty legs, and swearing wrathfully, takes her arched back upstairs. Possibly to roam the house-tops again and return by the chimney.

"Mr. Guppy," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, "could I have a word with you?"

Mr. Guppy is engaged in collecting the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty from the wall and depositing those works of art in their old ignoble band-box. "Sir," he returns, reddening, "I wish to act with courtesy towards every member of the profession, and especially, I am sure, towards a member of it so well known as yourself—I will truly add, sir, so distinguished as yourself. Still, Mr. Tulkinghorn, sir, I must stipulate that if you have any word with me, that word is spoken in the presence of my friend."

"Oh, indeed?" says Mr. Tulkinghorn.

"Yes, sir. My reasons are not of a personal nature at all, but they are amply sufficient for myself."

"No doubt, no doubt." Mr. Tulkinghorn is as imperturbable as the hearthstone to which he has quietly walked. "The matter is not of that consequence that I need put you to the trouble of making any conditions, Mr. Guppy." He pauses here to smile, and his smile is as dull and rusty as his pantaloons. "You are to be congratulated, Mr. Guppy; you are a fortunate young man, sir."

"Pretty well so, Mr. Tulkinghorn; I don't complain."

"Complain? High friends, free admission to great houses, and access to elegant ladies! Why, Mr. Guppy, there are people in London who would give their ears to be you."

Mr. Guppy, looking as if he would give his own reddening and still reddening ears to be one of those people at present instead of himself, replies, "Sir, if I attend to my profession and do what is right by Kenge and Carboy, my friends and acquaintances are of no consequence to them nor to any member of the profession, not excepting Mr. Tulkinghorn of the Fields. I am not under any obligation to explain myself further; and with all respect for you, sir, and without offence—I repeat, without offence—"

"Oh, certainly!"

"—I don't intend to do it."

"Quite so," says Mr. Tulkinghorn with a calm nod. "Very good; I see by these portraits that you take a strong interest in the fashionable great, sir?"

He addresses this to the astounded Tony, who admits the soft impeachment.

"A virtue in which few Englishmen are deficient," observes Mr. Tulkinghorn. He has been standing on the hearthstone with his back to the smoked chimney-piece, and now turns round with his glasses to his eyes. "Who is this? 'Lady Dedlock.' Ha! A very good likeness in its way, but it wants force of character. Good day to you, gentlemen; good day!"

When he has walked out, Mr. Guppy, in a great perspiration, nerves himself to the hasty completion of the taking down of the Galaxy Gallery, concluding with Lady Dedlock.

"Tony," he says hurriedly to his astonished companion, "let us be quick in putting the things together and in getting out of this place. It were in vain longer to conceal from you, Tony, that between myself and one of the members of a swan-like aristocracy whom I now hold in my hand, there has been undivulged communication and association. The time might have been when I might have revealed it to you. It never will be more. It is due alike to the oath I have taken, alike to the shattered idol, and alike to circumstances over which I have no control, that the whole should be buried in oblivion. I charge you as a friend, by the interest you have ever testified in the fashionable intelligence, and by any little advances with which I may have been able to accommodate you, so to bury it without a word of inquiry!"

This charge Mr. Guppy delivers in a state little short of forensic lunacy, while his friend shows a dazed mind in his whole head of hair and even in his cultivated whiskers.

CHAPTER XL. National and Domestic

England has been in a dreadful state for some weeks. Lord Coodle would go out, Sir Thomas Doodle wouldn't come in, and there being nobody in Great Britain (to speak of) except Coodle and Doodle, there has been no government. It is a mercy that the hostile meeting between those two great men, which at one time seemed inevitable, did not come off, because if both pistols had taken effect, and Coodle and Doodle had killed each other, it is to be presumed that England must have waited to be governed until young Coodle and young Doodle, now in frocks and long stockings, were grown up. This stupendous national calamity, however, was averted by Lord Coodle's making the timely discovery that if in the heat of debate he had said that he scorned and despised the whole ignoble career of Sir Thomas Doodle, he had merely meant to say that party differences should never induce him to withhold from it the tribute of his warmest admiration; while it as opportunely turned out, on the other hand, that Sir Thomas Doodle had in his own bosom expressly booked Lord Coodle to go down to posterity as the mirror of virtue and honour. Still England has been some weeks in the dismal strait of having no pilot (as was well observed by Sir Leicester Dedlock) to weather the storm; and the marvellous part of the matter is that England has not appeared to care very much about it, but has gone on eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage as the old world did in the days before the flood. But Coodle knew the danger, and Doodle knew the danger, and all their followers and hangers-on had the clearest possible perception of the danger. At last Sir Thomas Doodle has not only condescended to come in, but has done it handsomely, bringing in with him all his nephews, all his male cousins, and all his brothers-in-law. So there is hope for the old ship yet.

Doodle has found that he must throw himself upon the country, chiefly in the form of sovereigns and beer. In this metamorphosed state he is available in a good many places simultaneously and can throw himself upon a considerable portion of the country at one time. Britannia being much occupied in pocketing Doodle in the form of sovereigns, and swallowing Doodle in the form of beer, and in swearing herself black in the face that she does neither—plainly to the advancement of her glory and morality—the London season comes to a sudden end, through all the Doodleites and Coodleites dispersing to assist Britannia in those religious exercises.

Hence Mrs. Rouncewell, housekeeper at Chesney Wold, foresees, though no instructions have yet come down, that the family may shortly be expected, together with a pretty large accession of cousins and others who can in any way assist the great Constitutional work. And hence the stately old dame, taking Time by the forelock, leads him up and down the staircases, and along the galleries and passages, and through the rooms, to witness before he grows any older that everything is ready, that floors are rubbed bright, carpets spread, curtains shaken out, beds puffed and patted, still-room and kitchen cleared for action—all things prepared as beseems the Dedlock dignity.

This present summer evening, as the sun goes down, the preparations are complete. Dreary and solemn the old house looks, with so many appliances of habitation and with no inhabitants except the pictured forms upon the walls. So did these come and go, a Dedlock in possession might have ruminated passing along; so did they see this gallery hushed and quiet, as I see it now; so think, as I think, of the gap that they would make in this domain when they were gone; so find it, as I find it, difficult to believe that it could be without them; so pass from my world, as I pass from theirs, now closing the reverberating door; so leave no blank to miss them, and so die.

Through some of the fiery windows beautiful from without, and set, at this sunset hour, not in dull-grey stone but in a glorious house of gold, the light excluded at other windows pours in rich, lavish, overflowing like the summer plenty in the land. Then do the frozen Dedlocks thaw. Strange movements come upon their features as the shadows of leaves play there. A dense justice in a corner is beguiled into a wink. A staring baronet, with a truncheon, gets a dimple in his chin. Down into the bosom of a stony shepherdess there steals a fleck of light and warmth that would have done it good a hundred years ago. One ancestress of Volumnia, in high-heeled shoes, very like her—casting the shadow of that virgin event before her full two centuries—shoots out into a halo and becomes a saint. A maid of honour of the court of Charles the Second, with large round eyes (and other charms to correspond), seems to bathe in glowing water, and it ripples as it glows.

But the fire of the sun is dying. Even now the floor is dusky, and shadow slowly mounts the walls, bringing the Dedlocks down like age and death. And now, upon my Lady's picture over the great chimney-piece, a weird shade falls from some old tree, that turns it pale, and flutters it, and looks as if a great arm held a veil or hood, watching an opportunity to draw it over her. Higher and darker rises shadow on the wall—now a red gloom on the ceiling—now the fire is out.

All that prospect, which from the terrace looked so near, has moved solemnly away and changed—not the first nor the last of beautiful things that look so near and will so change—into a distant phantom. Light mists arise, and the dew falls, and all the sweet scents in the garden are heavy in the air. Now the woods settle into great masses as if they were each one profound tree. And now the moon rises to separate them, and to glimmer here and there in horizontal lines behind their stems, and to make the avenue a pavement of light among high cathedral arches fantastically broken.

Now the moon is high; and the great house, needing habitation more than ever, is like a body without life. Now it is even awful, stealing through it, to think of the live people who have slept in the solitary bedrooms, to say nothing of the dead. Now is the time for shadow, when every corner is a cavern and every downward step a pit, when the stained glass is reflected in pale and faded hues upon the floors, when anything and everything can be made of the heavy staircase beams excepting their own proper shapes, when the armour has dull lights upon it not easily to be distinguished from stealthy movement, and when barred helmets are frightfully suggestive of heads inside. But of all the shadows in Chesney Wold, the shadow in the long drawing-room upon my Lady's picture is the first to come, the last to be disturbed. At this hour and by this light it changes into threatening hands raised up and menacing the handsome face with every breath that stirs.

"She is not well, ma'am," says a groom in Mrs. Rouncewell's audience-chamber.

"My Lady not well! What's the matter?"

"Why, my Lady has been but poorly, ma'am, since she was last here—I don't mean with the family, ma'am, but when she was here as a bird of passage like. My Lady has not been out much, for her, and has kept her room a good deal."

"Chesney Wold, Thomas," rejoins the housekeeper with proud complacency, "will set my Lady up! There is no finer air and no healthier soil in the world!"

Thomas may have his own personal opinions on this subject, probably hints them in his manner of smoothing his sleek head from the nape of his neck to his temples, but he forbears to express them further and retires to the servants' hall to regale on cold meat-pie and ale.

This groom is the pilot-fish before the nobler shark. Next evening, down come Sir Leicester and my Lady with their largest retinue, and down come the cousins and others from all the points of the compass. Thenceforth for some weeks backward and forward rush mysterious men with no names, who fly about all those particular parts of the country on which Doodle is at present throwing himself in an auriferous and malty shower, but who are merely persons of a restless disposition and never do anything anywhere.

On these national occasions Sir Leicester finds the cousins useful. A better man than the Honourable Bob Stables to meet the Hunt at dinner, there could not possibly be. Better got up gentlemen than the other cousins to ride over to polling-booths and hustings here and there, and show themselves on the side of England, it would be hard to find. Volumnia is a little dim, but she is of the true descent; and there are many who appreciate her sprightly conversation, her French conundrums so old as to have become in the cycles of time almost new again, the honour of taking the fair Dedlock in to dinner, or even the privilege of her hand in the dance. On these national occasions dancing may be a patriotic service, and Volumnia is constantly seen hopping about for the good of an ungrateful and unpensioning country.

My Lady takes no great pains to entertain the numerous guests, and being still unwell, rarely appears until late in the day. But at all the dismal dinners, leaden lunches, basilisk balls, and other melancholy pageants, her mere appearance is a relief. As to Sir Leicester, he conceives it utterly impossible that anything can be wanting, in any direction, by any one who has the good fortune to be received under that roof; and in a state of sublime satisfaction, he moves among the company, a magnificent refrigerator.

Daily the cousins trot through dust and canter over roadside turf, away to hustings and polling-booths (with leather gloves and hunting-whips for the counties and kid gloves and riding-canes for the boroughs), and daily bring back reports on which Sir Leicester holds forth after dinner. Daily the restless men who have no occupation in life present the appearance of being rather busy. Daily Volumnia has a little cousinly talk with Sir Leicester on the state of the nation, from which Sir Leicester is disposed to conclude that Volumnia is a more reflecting woman than he had thought her.

"How are we getting on?" says Miss Volumnia, clasping her hands. "ARE we safe?"

The mighty business is nearly over by this time, and Doodle will throw himself off the country in a few days more. Sir Leicester has just appeared in the long drawing-room after dinner, a bright particular star surrounded by clouds of cousins.

"Volumnia," replies Sir Leicester, who has a list in his hand, "we are doing tolerably."

"Only tolerably!"

Although it is summer weather, Sir Leicester always has his own particular fire in the evening. He takes his usual screened seat near it and repeats with much firmness and a little displeasure, as who should say, I am not a common man, and when I say tolerably, it must not be understood as a common expression, "Volumnia, we are doing tolerably."

"At least there is no opposition to YOU," Volumnia asserts with confidence.

"No, Volumnia. This distracted country has lost its senses in many respects, I grieve to say, but—"

"It is not so mad as that. I am glad to hear it!"

Volumnia's finishing the sentence restores her to favour. Sir Leicester, with a gracious inclination of his head, seems to say to himself, "A sensible woman this, on the whole, though occasionally precipitate."

In fact, as to this question of opposition, the fair Dedlock's observation was superfluous, Sir Leicester on these occasions always delivering in his own candidateship, as a kind of handsome wholesale order to be promptly executed. Two other little seats that belong to him he treats as retail orders of less importance, merely sending down the men and signifying to the tradespeople, "You will have the goodness to make these materials into two members of Parliament and to send them home when done."

"I regret to say, Volumnia, that in many places the people have shown a bad spirit, and that this opposition to the government has been of a most determined and most implacable description."

"W-r-retches!" says Volumnia.

"Even," proceeds Sir Leicester, glancing at the circumjacent cousins on sofas and ottomans, "even in many—in fact, in most—of those places in which the government has carried it against a faction—"

(Note, by the way, that the Coodleites are always a faction with the Doodleites, and that the Doodleites occupy exactly the same position towards the Coodleites.)

"—Even in them I am shocked, for the credit of Englishmen, to be constrained to inform you that the party has not triumphed without being put to an enormous expense. Hundreds," says Sir Leicester, eyeing the cousins with increasing dignity and swelling indignation, "hundreds of thousands of pounds!"

If Volumnia have a fault, it is the fault of being a trifle too innocent, seeing that the innocence which would go extremely well with a sash and tucker is a little out of keeping with the rouge and pearl necklace. Howbeit, impelled by innocence, she asks, "What for?"

"Volumnia," remonstrates Sir Leicester with his utmost severity. "Volumnia!"

"No, no, I don't mean what for," cries Volumnia with her favourite little scream. "How stupid I am! I mean what a pity!"

"I am glad," returns Sir Leicester, "that you do mean what a pity."

Volumnia hastens to express her opinion that the shocking people ought to be tried as traitors and made to support the party.

"I am glad, Volumnia," repeats Sir Leicester, unmindful of these mollifying sentiments, "that you do mean what a pity. It is disgraceful to the electors. But as you, though inadvertently and without intending so unreasonable a question, asked me 'what for?' let me reply to you. For necessary expenses. And I trust to your good sense, Volumnia, not to pursue the subject, here or elsewhere."

Sir Leicester feels it incumbent on him to observe a crushing aspect towards Volumnia because it is whispered abroad that these necessary expenses will, in some two hundred election petitions, be unpleasantly connected with the word bribery, and because some graceless jokers have consequently suggested the omission from the Church service of the ordinary supplication in behalf of the High Court of Parliament and have recommended instead that the prayers of the congregation be requested for six hundred and fifty-eight gentlemen in a very unhealthy state.

"I suppose," observes Volumnia, having taken a little time to recover her spirits after her late castigation, "I suppose Mr. Tulkinghorn has been worked to death."

"I don't know," says Sir Leicester, opening his eyes, "why Mr. Tulkinghorn should be worked to death. I don't know what Mr. Tulkinghorn's engagements may be. He is not a candidate."

Volumnia had thought he might have been employed. Sir Leicester could desire to know by whom, and what for. Volumnia, abashed again, suggests, by somebody—to advise and make arrangements. Sir Leicester is not aware that any client of Mr. Tulkinghorn has been in need of his assistance.

Lady Dedlock, seated at an open window with her arm upon its cushioned ledge and looking out at the evening shadows falling on the park, has seemed to attend since the lawyer's name was mentioned.

A languid cousin with a moustache in a state of extreme debility now observes from his couch that man told him ya'as'dy that Tulkinghorn had gone down t' that iron place t' give legal 'pinion 'bout something, and that contest being over t' day, 'twould be highly jawlly thing if Tulkinghorn should 'pear with news that Coodle man was floored.

Mercury in attendance with coffee informs Sir Leicester, hereupon, that Mr. Tulkinghorn has arrived and is taking dinner. My Lady turns her head inward for the moment, then looks out again as before.

Volumnia is charmed to hear that her delight is come. He is so original, such a stolid creature, such an immense being for knowing all sorts of things and never telling them! Volumnia is persuaded that he must be a Freemason. Is sure he is at the head of a lodge, and wears short aprons, and is made a perfect idol of with candlesticks and trowels. These lively remarks the fair Dedlock delivers in her youthful manner, while making a purse.

"He has not been here once," she adds, "since I came. I really had some thoughts of breaking my heart for the inconstant creature. I had almost made up my mind that he was dead."

It may be the gathering gloom of evening, or it may be the darker gloom within herself, but a shade is on my Lady's face, as if she thought, "I would he were!"

"Mr. Tulkinghorn," says Sir Leicester, "is always welcome here and always discreet wheresoever he is. A very valuable person, and deservedly respected."

The debilitated cousin supposes he is "'normously rich fler."

"He has a stake in the country," says Sir Leicester, "I have no doubt. He is, of course, handsomely paid, and he associates almost on a footing of equality with the highest society."

Everybody starts. For a gun is fired close by.

"Good gracious, what's that?" cries Volumnia with her little withered scream.

"A rat," says my Lady. "And they have shot him."

Enter Mr. Tulkinghorn, followed by Mercuries with lamps and candles.

"No, no," says Sir Leicester, "I think not. My Lady, do you object to the twilight?"

On the contrary, my Lady prefers it.

"Volumnia?"

Oh! Nothing is so delicious to Volumnia as to sit and talk in the dark.

"Then take them away," says Sir Leicester. "Tulkinghorn, I beg your pardon. How do you do?"

Mr. Tulkinghorn with his usual leisurely ease advances, renders his passing homage to my Lady, shakes Sir Leicester's hand, and subsides into the chair proper to him when he has anything to communicate, on the opposite side of the Baronet's little newspaper-table. Sir Leicester is apprehensive that my Lady, not being very well, will take cold at that open window. My Lady is obliged to him, but would rather sit there for the air. Sir Leicester rises, adjusts her scarf about her, and returns to his seat. Mr. Tulkinghorn in the meanwhile takes a pinch of snuff.

"Now," says Sir Leicester. "How has that contest gone?"

"Oh, hollow from the beginning. Not a chance. They have brought in both their people. You are beaten out of all reason. Three to one."

It is a part of Mr. Tulkinghorn's policy and mastery to have no political opinions; indeed, NO opinions. Therefore he says "you" are beaten, and not "we."

Sir Leicester is majestically wroth. Volumnia never heard of such a thing. 'The debilitated cousin holds that it's sort of thing that's sure tapn slongs votes—giv'n—Mob.

"It's the place, you know," Mr. Tulkinghorn goes on to say in the fast-increasing darkness when there is silence again, "where they wanted to put up Mrs. Rouncewell's son."

"A proposal which, as you correctly informed me at the time, he had the becoming taste and perception," observes Sir Leicester, "to decline. I cannot say that I by any means approve of the sentiments expressed by Mr. Rouncewell when he was here for some half-hour in this room, but there was a sense of propriety in his decision which I am glad to acknowledge."

"Ha!" says Mr. Tulkinghorn. "It did not prevent him from being very active in this election, though."

Sir Leicester is distinctly heard to gasp before speaking. "Did I understand you? Did you say that Mr. Rouncewell had been very active in this election?"

"Uncommonly active."

"Against—"

"Oh, dear yes, against you. He is a very good speaker. Plain and emphatic. He made a damaging effect, and has great influence. In the business part of the proceedings he carried all before him."

It is evident to the whole company, though nobody can see him, that Sir Leicester is staring majestically.

"And he was much assisted," says Mr. Tulkinghorn as a wind-up, "by his son."

"By his son, sir?" repeats Sir Leicester with awful politeness.

"By his son."

"The son who wished to marry the young woman in my Lady's service?"

"That son. He has but one."

"Then upon my honour," says Sir Leicester after a terrific pause during which he has been heard to snort and felt to stare, "then upon my honour, upon my life, upon my reputation and principles, the floodgates of society are burst open, and the waters have—a—obliterated the landmarks of the framework of the cohesion by which things are held together!"

General burst of cousinly indignation. Volumnia thinks it is really high time, you know, for somebody in power to step in and do something strong. Debilitated cousin thinks—country's going—Dayvle—steeple-chase pace.

"I beg," says Sir Leicester in a breathless condition, "that we may not comment further on this circumstance. Comment is superfluous. My Lady, let me suggest in reference to that young woman—"

"I have no intention," observes my Lady from her window in a low but decided tone, "of parting with her."

"That was not my meaning," returns Sir Leicester. "I am glad to hear you say so. I would suggest that as you think her worthy of your patronage, you should exert your influence to keep her from these dangerous hands. You might show her what violence would be done in such association to her duties and principles, and you might preserve her for a better fate. You might point out to her that she probably would, in good time, find a husband at Chesney Wold by whom she would not be—" Sir Leicester adds, after a moment's consideration, "dragged from the altars of her forefathers."

These remarks he offers with his unvarying politeness and deference when he addresses himself to his wife. She merely moves her head in reply. The moon is rising, and where she sits there is a little stream of cold pale light, in which her head is seen.

"It is worthy of remark," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, "however, that these people are, in their way, very proud."

"Proud?" Sir Leicester doubts his hearing.

"I should not be surprised if they all voluntarily abandoned the girl—yes, lover and all—instead of her abandoning them, supposing she remained at Chesney Wold under such circumstances."

"Well!" says Sir Leicester tremulously. "Well! You should know, Mr. Tulkinghorn. You have been among them."

"Really, Sir Leicester," returns the lawyer, "I state the fact. Why, I could tell you a story—with Lady Dedlock's permission."

Her head concedes it, and Volumnia is enchanted. A story! Oh, he is going to tell something at last! A ghost in it, Volumnia hopes?

"No. Real flesh and blood." Mr. Tulkinghorn stops for an instant and repeats with some little emphasis grafted upon his usual monotony, "Real flesh and blood, Miss Dedlock. Sir Leicester, these particulars have only lately become known to me. They are very brief. They exemplify what I have said. I suppress names for the present. Lady Dedlock will not think me ill-bred, I hope?"

By the light of the fire, which is low, he can be seen looking towards the moonlight. By the light of the moon Lady Dedlock can be seen, perfectly still.

"A townsman of this Mrs. Rouncewell, a man in exactly parallel circumstances as I am told, had the good fortune to have a daughter who attracted the notice of a great lady. I speak of really a great lady, not merely great to him, but married to a gentleman of your condition, Sir Leicester."

Sir Leicester condescendingly says, "Yes, Mr. Tulkinghorn," implying that then she must have appeared of very considerable moral dimensions indeed in the eyes of an iron-master.

"The lady was wealthy and beautiful, and had a liking for the girl, and treated her with great kindness, and kept her always near her. Now this lady preserved a secret under all her greatness, which she had preserved for many years. In fact, she had in early life been engaged to marry a young rake—he was a captain in the army—nothing connected with whom came to any good. She never did marry him, but she gave birth to a child of which he was the father."

By the light of the fire he can be seen looking towards the moonlight. By the moonlight, Lady Dedlock can be seen in profile, perfectly still.

"The captain in the army being dead, she believed herself safe; but a train of circumstances with which I need not trouble you led to discovery. As I received the story, they began in an imprudence on her own part one day when she was taken by surprise, which shows how difficult it is for the firmest of us (she was very firm) to be always guarded. There was great domestic trouble and amazement, you may suppose; I leave you to imagine, Sir Leicester, the husband's grief. But that is not the present point. When Mr. Rouncewell's townsman heard of the disclosure, he no more allowed the girl to be patronized and honoured than he would have suffered her to be trodden underfoot before his eyes. Such was his pride, that he indignantly took her away, as if from reproach and disgrace. He had no sense of the honour done him and his daughter by the lady's condescension; not the least. He resented the girl's position, as if the lady had been the commonest of commoners. That is the story. I hope Lady Dedlock will excuse its painful nature."

There are various opinions on the merits, more or less conflicting with Volumnia's. That fair young creature cannot believe there ever was any such lady and rejects the whole history on the threshold. The majority incline to the debilitated cousin's sentiment, which is in few words—"no business—Rouncewell's fernal townsman." Sir Leicester generally refers back in his mind to Wat Tyler and arranges a sequence of events on a plan of his own.

There is not much conversation in all, for late hours have been kept at Chesney Wold since the necessary expenses elsewhere began, and this is the first night in many on which the family have been alone. It is past ten when Sir Leicester begs Mr. Tulkinghorn to ring for candles. Then the stream of moonlight has swelled into a lake, and then Lady Dedlock for the first time moves, and rises, and comes forward to a table for a glass of water. Winking cousins, bat-like in the candle glare, crowd round to give it; Volumnia (always ready for something better if procurable) takes another, a very mild sip of which contents her; Lady Dedlock, graceful, self-possessed, looked after by admiring eyes, passes away slowly down the long perspective by the side of that nymph, not at all improving her as a question of contrast.

CHAPTER XLI. In Mr. Tulkinghorn's Room

Mr. Tulkinghorn arrives in his turret-room a little breathed by the journey up, though leisurely performed. There is an expression on his face as if he had discharged his mind of some grave matter and were, in his close way, satisfied. To say of a man so severely and strictly self-repressed that he is triumphant would be to do him as great an injustice as to suppose him troubled with love or sentiment or any romantic weakness. He is sedately satisfied. Perhaps there is a rather increased sense of power upon him as he loosely grasps one of his veinous wrists with his other hand and holding it behind his back walks noiselessly up and down.

There is a capacious writing-table in the room on which is a pretty large accumulation of papers. The green lamp is lighted, his reading-glasses lie upon the desk, the easy-chair is wheeled up to it, and it would seem as though he had intended to bestow an hour or so upon these claims on his attention before going to bed. But he happens not to be in a business mind. After a glance at the documents awaiting his notice—with his head bent low over the table, the old man's sight for print or writing being defective at night—he opens the French window and steps out upon the leads. There he again walks slowly up and down in the same attitude, subsiding, if a man so cool may have any need to subside, from the story he has related downstairs.

The time was once when men as knowing as Mr. Tulkinghorn would walk on turret-tops in the starlight and look up into the sky to read their fortunes there. Hosts of stars are visible to-night, though their brilliancy is eclipsed by the splendour of the moon. If he be seeking his own star as he methodically turns and turns upon the leads, it should be but a pale one to be so rustily represented below. If he be tracing out his destiny, that may be written in other characters nearer to his hand.

As he paces the leads with his eyes most probably as high above his thoughts as they are high above the earth, he is suddenly stopped in passing the window by two eyes that meet his own. The ceiling of his room is rather low; and the upper part of the door, which is opposite the window, is of glass. There is an inner baize door, too, but the night being warm he did not close it when he came upstairs. These eyes that meet his own are looking in through the glass from the corridor outside. He knows them well. The blood has not flushed into his face so suddenly and redly for many a long year as when he recognizes Lady Dedlock.

He steps into the room, and she comes in too, closing both the doors behind her. There is a wild disturbance—is it fear or anger?—in her eyes. In her carriage and all else she looks as she looked downstairs two hours ago.

Is it fear or is it anger now? He cannot be sure. Both might be as pale, both as intent.

"Lady Dedlock?"

She does not speak at first, nor even when she has slowly dropped into the easy-chair by the table. They look at each other, like two pictures.

"Why have you told my story to so many persons?"

"Lady Dedlock, it was necessary for me to inform you that I knew it."

"How long have you known it?"

"I have suspected it a long while—fully known it a little while."

"Months?"

"Days."

He stands before her with one hand on a chair-back and the other in his old-fashioned waistcoat and shirt-frill, exactly as he has stood before her at any time since her marriage. The same formal politeness, the same composed deference that might as well be defiance; the whole man the same dark, cold object, at the same distance, which nothing has ever diminished.

"Is this true concerning the poor girl?"

He slightly inclines and advances his head as not quite understanding the question.

"You know what you related. Is it true? Do her friends know my story also? Is it the town-talk yet? Is it chalked upon the walls and cried in the streets?"

So! Anger, and fear, and shame. All three contending. What power this woman has to keep these raging passions down! Mr. Tulkinghorn's thoughts take such form as he looks at her, with his ragged grey eyebrows a hair's breadth more contracted than usual under her gaze.

"No, Lady Dedlock. That was a hypothetical case, arising out of Sir Leicester's unconsciously carrying the matter with so high a hand. But it would be a real case if they knew—what we know."

"Then they do not know it yet?"

"No."

"Can I save the poor girl from injury before they know it?"

"Really, Lady Dedlock," Mr. Tulkinghorn replies, "I cannot give a satisfactory opinion on that point."

And he thinks, with the interest of attentive curiosity, as he watches the struggle in her breast, "The power and force of this woman are astonishing!"

"Sir," she says, for the moment obliged to set her lips with all the energy she has, that she may speak distinctly, "I will make it plainer. I do not dispute your hypothetical case. I anticipated it, and felt its truth as strongly as you can do, when I saw Mr. Rouncewell here. I knew very well that if he could have had the power of seeing me as I was, he would consider the poor girl tarnished by having for a moment been, although most innocently, the subject of my great and distinguished patronage. But I have an interest in her, or I should rather say—no longer belonging to this place—I had, and if you can find so much consideration for the woman under your foot as to remember that, she will be very sensible of your mercy."

Mr. Tulkinghorn, profoundly attentive, throws this off with a shrug of self-depreciation and contracts his eyebrows a little more.

"You have prepared me for my exposure, and I thank you for that too. Is there anything that you require of me? Is there any claim that I can release or any charge or trouble that I can spare my husband in obtaining HIS release by certifying to the exactness of your discovery? I will write anything, here and now, that you will dictate. I am ready to do it."

And she would do it, thinks the lawyer, watchful of the firm hand with which she takes the pen!

"I will not trouble you, Lady Dedlock. Pray spare yourself."

"I have long expected this, as you know. I neither wish to spare myself nor to be spared. You can do nothing worse to me than you have done. Do what remains now."

"Lady Dedlock, there is nothing to be done. I will take leave to say a few words when you have finished."

Their need for watching one another should be over now, but they do it all this time, and the stars watch them both through the opened window. Away in the moonlight lie the woodland fields at rest, and the wide house is as quiet as the narrow one. The narrow one! Where are the digger and the spade, this peaceful night, destined to add the last great secret to the many secrets of the Tulkinghorn existence? Is the man born yet, is the spade wrought yet? Curious questions to consider, more curious perhaps not to consider, under the watching stars upon a summer night.

"Of repentance or remorse or any feeling of mine," Lady Dedlock presently proceeds, "I say not a word. If I were not dumb, you would be deaf. Let that go by. It is not for your ears."

He makes a feint of offering a protest, but she sweeps it away with her disdainful hand.

"Of other and very different things I come to speak to you. My jewels are all in their proper places of keeping. They will be found there. So, my dresses. So, all the valuables I have. Some ready money I had with me, please to say, but no large amount. I did not wear my own dress, in order that I might avoid observation. I went to be henceforward lost. Make this known. I leave no other charge with you."

"Excuse me, Lady Dedlock," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, quite unmoved. "I am not sure that I understand you. You want—"

"To be lost to all here. I leave Chesney Wold to-night. I go this hour."

Mr. Tulkinghorn shakes his head. She rises, but he, without moving hand from chair-back or from old-fashioned waistcoat and shirt-frill, shakes his head.

"What? Not go as I have said?"

"No, Lady Dedlock," he very calmly replies.

"Do you know the relief that my disappearance will be? Have you forgotten the stain and blot upon this place, and where it is, and who it is?"

"No, Lady Dedlock, not by any means."

Without deigning to rejoin, she moves to the inner door and has it in her hand when he says to her, without himself stirring hand or foot or raising his voice, "Lady Dedlock, have the goodness to stop and hear me, or before you reach the staircase I shall ring the alarm-bell and rouse the house. And then I must speak out before every guest and servant, every man and woman, in it."

He has conquered her. She falters, trembles, and puts her hand confusedly to her head. Slight tokens these in any one else, but when so practised an eye as Mr. Tulkinghorn's sees indecision for a moment in such a subject, he thoroughly knows its value.

He promptly says again, "Have the goodness to hear me, Lady Dedlock," and motions to the chair from which she has risen. She hesitates, but he motions again, and she sits down.

"The relations between us are of an unfortunate description, Lady Dedlock; but as they are not of my making, I will not apologize for them. The position I hold in reference to Sir Leicester is so well known to you that I can hardly imagine but that I must long have appeared in your eyes the natural person to make this discovery."

"Sir," she returns without looking up from the ground on which her eyes are now fixed, "I had better have gone. It would have been far better not to have detained me. I have no more to say."

"Excuse me, Lady Dedlock, if I add a little more to hear."

"I wish to hear it at the window, then. I can't breathe where I am."

His jealous glance as she walks that way betrays an instant's misgiving that she may have it in her thoughts to leap over, and dashing against ledge and cornice, strike her life out upon the terrace below. But a moment's observation of her figure as she stands in the window without any support, looking out at the stars—not up—gloomily out at those stars which are low in the heavens, reassures him. By facing round as she has moved, he stands a little behind her.

"Lady Dedlock, I have not yet been able to come to a decision satisfactory to myself on the course before me. I am not clear what to do or how to act next. I must request you, in the meantime, to keep your secret as you have kept it so long and not to wonder that I keep it too."

He pauses, but she makes no reply.

"Pardon me, Lady Dedlock. This is an important subject. You are honouring me with your attention?"

"I am."

"Thank you. I might have known it from what I have seen of your strength of character. I ought not to have asked the question, but I have the habit of making sure of my ground, step by step, as I go on. The sole consideration in this unhappy case is Sir Leicester."

"Then why," she asks in a low voice and without removing her gloomy look from those distant stars, "do you detain me in his house?"

"Because he IS the consideration. Lady Dedlock, I have no occasion to tell you that Sir Leicester is a very proud man, that his reliance upon you is implicit, that the fall of that moon out of the sky would not amaze him more than your fall from your high position as his wife."

She breathes quickly and heavily, but she stands as unflinchingly as ever he has seen her in the midst of her grandest company.

"I declare to you, Lady Dedlock, that with anything short of this case that I have, I would as soon have hoped to root up by means of my own strength and my own hands the oldest tree on this estate as to shake your hold upon Sir Leicester and Sir Leicester's trust and confidence in you. And even now, with this case, I hesitate. Not that he could doubt (that, even with him, is impossible), but that nothing can prepare him for the blow."

"Not my flight?" she returned. "Think of it again."

"Your flight, Lady Dedlock, would spread the whole truth, and a hundred times the whole truth, far and wide. It would be impossible to save the family credit for a day. It is not to be thought of."

There is a quiet decision in his reply which admits of no remonstrance.

"When I speak of Sir Leicester being the sole consideration, he and the family credit are one. Sir Leicester and the baronetcy, Sir Leicester and Chesney Wold, Sir Leicester and his ancestors and his patrimony"—Mr. Tulkinghorn very dry here—"are, I need not say to you, Lady Dedlock, inseparable."

"Go on!"

"Therefore," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, pursuing his case in his jog-trot style, "I have much to consider. This is to be hushed up if it can be. How can it be, if Sir Leicester is driven out of his wits or laid upon a death-bed? If I inflicted this shock upon him to-morrow morning, how could the immediate change in him be accounted for? What could have caused it? What could have divided you? Lady Dedlock, the wall-chalking and the street-crying would come on directly, and you are to remember that it would not affect you merely (whom I cannot at all consider in this business) but your husband, Lady Dedlock, your husband."

He gets plainer as he gets on, but not an atom more emphatic or animated.

"There is another point of view," he continues, "in which the case presents itself. Sir Leicester is devoted to you almost to infatuation. He might not be able to overcome that infatuation, even knowing what we know. I am putting an extreme case, but it might be so. If so, it were better that he knew nothing. Better for common sense, better for him, better for me. I must take all this into account, and it combines to render a decision very difficult."

She stands looking out at the same stars without a word. They are beginning to pale, and she looks as if their coldness froze her.

"My experience teaches me," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, who has by this time got his hands in his pockets and is going on in his business consideration of the matter like a machine. "My experience teaches me, Lady Dedlock, that most of the people I know would do far better to leave marriage alone. It is at the bottom of three fourths of their troubles. So I thought when Sir Leicester married, and so I always have thought since. No more about that. I must now be guided by circumstances. In the meanwhile I must beg you to keep your own counsel, and I will keep mine."

"I am to drag my present life on, holding its pains at your pleasure, day by day?" she asks, still looking at the distant sky.

"Yes, I am afraid so, Lady Dedlock."

"It is necessary, you think, that I should be so tied to the stake?"

"I am sure that what I recommend is necessary."

"I am to remain on this gaudy platform on which my miserable deception has been so long acted, and it is to fall beneath me when you give the signal?" she said slowly.

"Not without notice, Lady Dedlock. I shall take no step without forewarning you."

She asks all her questions as if she were repeating them from memory or calling them over in her sleep.

"We are to meet as usual?"

"Precisely as usual, if you please."

"And I am to hide my guilt, as I have done so many years?"

"As you have done so many years. I should not have made that reference myself, Lady Dedlock, but I may now remind you that your secret can be no heavier to you than it was, and is no worse and no better than it was. I know it certainly, but I believe we have never wholly trusted each other."

She stands absorbed in the same frozen way for some little time before asking, "Is there anything more to be sald to-night?"

"Why," Mr. Tulkinghorn returns methodically as he softly rubs his hands, "I should like to be assured of your acquiescence in my arrangements, Lady Dedlock."

"You may be assured of it."

"Good. And I would wish in conclusion to remind you, as a business precaution, in case it should be necessary to recall the fact in any communication with Sir Leicester, that throughout our interview I have expressly stated my sole consideration to be Sir Leicester's feelings and honour and the family reputation. I should have been happy to have made Lady Dedlock a prominent consideration, too, if the case had admitted of it; but unfortunately it does not."

"I can attest your fidelity, sir."

Both before and after saying it she remains absorbed, but at length moves, and turns, unshaken in her natural and acquired presence, towards the door. Mr. Tulkinghorn opens both the doors exactly as he would have done yesterday, or as he would have done ten years ago, and makes his old-fashioned bow as she passes out. It is not an ordinary look that he receives from the handsome face as it goes into the darkness, and it is not an ordinary movement, though a very slight one, that acknowledges his courtesy. But as he reflects when he is left alone, the woman has been putting no common constraint upon herself.

He would know it all the better if he saw the woman pacing her own rooms with her hair wildly thrown from her flung-back face, her hands clasped behind her head, her figure twisted as if by pain. He would think so all the more if he saw the woman thus hurrying up and down for hours, without fatigue, without intermission, followed by the faithful step upon the Ghost's Walk. But he shuts out the now chilled air, draws the window-curtain, goes to bed, and falls asleep. And truly when the stars go out and the wan day peeps into the turret-chamber, finding him at his oldest, he looks as if the digger and the spade were both commissioned and would soon be digging.

The same wan day peeps in at Sir Leicester pardoning the repentant country in a majestically condescending dream; and at the cousins entering on various public employments, principally receipt of salary; and at the chaste Volumnia, bestowing a dower of fifty thousand pounds upon a hideous old general with a mouth of false teeth like a pianoforte too full of keys, long the admiration of Bath and the terror of every other community. Also into rooms high in the roof, and into offices in court-yards, and over stables, where humbler ambition dreams of bliss, in keepers' lodges, and in holy matrimony with Will or Sally. Up comes the bright sun, drawing everything up with it—the Wills and Sallys, the latent vapour in the earth, the drooping leaves and flowers, the birds and beasts and creeping things, the gardeners to sweep the dewy turf and unfold emerald velvet where the roller passes, the smoke of the great kitchen fire wreathing itself straight and high into the lightsome air. Lastly, up comes the flag over Mr. Tulkinghorn's unconscious head cheerfully proclaiming that Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock are in their happy home and that there is hospitality at the place in Lincolnshire.

CHAPTER XLII. In Mr. Tulkinghorn's Chambers

From the verdant undulations and the spreading oaks of the Dedlock property, Mr. Tulkinghorn transfers himself to the stale heat and dust of London. His manner of coming and going between the two places is one of his impenetrabilities. He walks into Chesney Wold as if it were next door to his chambers and returns to his chambers as if he had never been out of Lincoln's Inn Fields. He neither changes his dress before the journey nor talks of it afterwards. He melted out of his turret-room this morning, just as now, in the late twilight, he melts into his own square.

Like a dingy London bird among the birds at roost in these pleasant fields, where the sheep are all made into parchment, the goats into wigs, and the pasture into chaff, the lawyer, smoke-dried and faded, dwelling among mankind but not consorting with them, aged without experience of genial youth, and so long used to make his cramped nest in holes and corners of human nature that he has forgotten its broader and better range, comes sauntering home. In the oven made by the hot pavements and hot buildings, he has baked himself dryer than usual; and he has in his thirsty mind his mellowed port-wine half a century old.

The lamplighter is skipping up and down his ladder on Mr. Tulkinghorn's side of the Fields when that high-priest of noble mysteries arrives at his own dull court-yard. He ascends the door-steps and is gliding into the dusky hall when he encounters, on the top step, a bowing and propitiatory little man.

"Is that Snagsby?"

"Yes, sir. I hope you are well, sir. I was just giving you up, sir, and going home."

"Aye? What is it? What do you want with me?"

"Well, sir," says Mr. Snagsby, holding his hat at the side of his head in his deference towards his best customer, "I was wishful to say a word to you, sir."

"Can you say it here?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"Say it then." The lawyer turns, leans his arms on the iron railing at the top of the steps, and looks at the lamplighter lighting the court-yard.

"It is relating," says Mr. Snagsby in a mysterious low voice, "it is relating—not to put too fine a point upon it—to the foreigner, sir!"

Mr. Tulkinghorn eyes him with some surprise. "What foreigner?"

"The foreign female, sir. French, if I don't mistake? I am not acquainted with that language myself, but I should judge from her manners and appearance that she was French; anyways, certainly foreign. Her that was upstairs, sir, when Mr. Bucket and me had the honour of waiting upon you with the sweeping-boy that night."

"Oh! Yes, yes. Mademoiselle Hortense."

"Indeed, sir?" Mr. Snagsby coughs his cough of submission behind his hat. "I am not acquainted myself with the names of foreigners in general, but I have no doubt it WOULD be that." Mr. Snagsby appears to have set out in this reply with some desperate design of repeating the name, but on reflection coughs again to excuse himself.

"And what can you have to say, Snagsby," demands Mr. Tulkinghorn, "about her?"

"Well, sir," returns the stationer, shading his communication with his hat, "it falls a little hard upon me. My domestic happiness is very great—at least, it's as great as can be expected, I'm sure—but my little woman is rather given to jealousy. Not to put too fine a point upon it, she is very much given to jealousy. And you see, a foreign female of that genteel appearance coming into the shop, and hovering—I should be the last to make use of a strong expression if I could avoid it, but hovering, sir—in the court—you know it is—now ain't it? I only put it to yourself, sir."

Mr. Snagsby, having said this in a very plaintive manner, throws in a cough of general application to fill up all the blanks.

"Why, what do you mean?" asks Mr. Tulkinghorn.

"Just so, sir," returns Mr. Snagsby; "I was sure you would feel it yourself and would excuse the reasonableness of MY feelings when coupled with the known excitableness of my little woman. You see, the foreign female—which you mentioned her name just now, with quite a native sound I am sure—caught up the word Snagsby that night, being uncommon quick, and made inquiry, and got the direction and come at dinner-time. Now Guster, our young woman, is timid and has fits, and she, taking fright at the foreigner's looks—which are fierce—and at a grinding manner that she has of speaking—which is calculated to alarm a weak mind—gave way to it, instead of bearing up against it, and tumbled down the kitchen stairs out of one into another, such fits as I do sometimes think are never gone into, or come out of, in any house but ours. Consequently there was by good fortune ample occupation for my little woman, and only me to answer the shop. When she DID say that Mr. Tulkinghorn, being always denied to her by his employer (which I had no doubt at the time was a foreign mode of viewing a clerk), she would do herself the pleasure of continually calling at my place until she was let in here. Since then she has been, as I began by saying, hovering, hovering, sir"—Mr. Snagsby repeats the word with pathetic emphasis—"in the court. The effects of which movement it is impossible to calculate. I shouldn't wonder if it might have already given rise to the painfullest mistakes even in the neighbours' minds, not mentioning (if such a thing was possible) my little woman. Whereas, goodness knows," says Mr. Snagsby, shaking his head, "I never had an idea of a foreign female, except as being formerly connected with a bunch of brooms and a baby, or at the present time with a tambourine and earrings. I never had, I do assure you, sir!"

Mr. Tulkinghorn had listened gravely to this complaint and inquires when the stationer has finished, "And that's all, is it, Snagsby?"

"Why yes, sir, that's all," says Mr. Snagsby, ending with a cough that plainly adds, "and it's enough too—for me."

"I don't know what Mademoiselle Hortense may want or mean, unless she is mad," says the lawyer.

"Even if she was, you know, sir," Mr. Snagsby pleads, "it wouldn't be a consolation to have some weapon or another in the form of a foreign dagger planted in the family."

"No," says the other. "Well, well! This shall be stopped. I am sorry you have been inconvenienced. If she comes again, send her here."

Mr. Snagsby, with much bowing and short apologetic coughing, takes his leave, lightened in heart. Mr. Tulkinghorn goes upstairs, saying to himself, "These women were created to give trouble the whole earth over. The mistress not being enough to deal with, here's the maid now! But I will be short with THIS jade at least!"

So saying, he unlocks his door, gropes his way into his murky rooms, lights his candles, and looks about him. It is too dark to see much of the Allegory overhead there, but that importunate Roman, who is for ever toppling out of the clouds and pointing, is at his old work pretty distinctly. Not honouring him with much attention, Mr. Tulkinghorn takes a small key from his pocket, unlocks a drawer in which there is another key, which unlocks a chest in which there is another, and so comes to the cellar-key, with which he prepares to descend to the regions of old wine. He is going towards the door with a candle in his hand when a knock comes.

"Who's this? Aye, aye, mistress, it's you, is it? You appear at a good time. I have just been hearing of you. Now! What do you want?"

He stands the candle on the chimney-piece in the clerk's hall and taps his dry cheek with the key as he addresses these words of welcome to Mademoiselle Hortense. That feline personage, with her lips tightly shut and her eyes looking out at him sideways, softly closes the door before replying.

"I have had great deal of trouble to find you, sir."

"HAVE you!"

"I have been here very often, sir. It has always been said to me, he is not at home, he is engage, he is this and that, he is not for you."

"Quite right, and quite true."

"Not true. Lies!"

At times there is a suddenness in the manner of Mademoiselle Hortense so like a bodily spring upon the subject of it that such subject involuntarily starts and fails back. It is Mr. Tulkinghorn's case at present, though Mademoiselle Hortense, with her eyes almost shut up (but still looking out sideways), is only smiling contemptuously and shaking her head.

"Now, mistress," says the lawyer, tapping the key hastily upon the chimney-piece. "If you have anything to say, say it, say it."

"Sir, you have not use me well. You have been mean and shabby."

"Mean and shabby, eh?" returns the lawyer, rubbing his nose with the key.

"Yes. What is it that I tell you? You know you have. You have attrapped me—catched me—to give you information; you have asked me to show you the dress of mine my Lady must have wore that night, you have prayed me to come in it here to meet that boy. Say! Is it not?" Mademoiselle Hortense makes another spring.

"You are a vixen, a vixen!" Mr. Tulkinghorn seems to meditate as he looks distrustfully at her, then he replies, "Well, wench, well. I paid you."

"You paid me!" she repeats with fierce disdain. "Two sovereign! I have not change them, I re-fuse them, I des-pise them, I throw them from me!" Which she literally does, taking them out of her bosom as she speaks and flinging them with such violence on the floor that they jerk up again into the light before they roll away into corners and slowly settle down there after spinning vehemently.

"Now!" says Mademoiselle Hortense, darkening her large eyes again. "You have paid me? Eh, my God, oh yes!"

Mr. Tulkinghorn rubs his head with the key while she entertains herself with a sarcastic laugh.

"You must be rich, my fair friend," he composedly observes, "to throw money about in that way!"

"I AM rich," she returns. "I am very rich in hate. I hate my Lady, of all my heart. You know that."

"Know it? How should I know it?"

"Because you have known it perfectly before you prayed me to give you that information. Because you have known perfectly that I was en-r-r-r-raged!" It appears impossible for mademoiselle to roll the letter "r" sufficiently in this word, notwithstanding that she assists her energetic delivery by clenching both her hands and setting all her teeth.

"Oh! I knew that, did I?" says Mr. Tulkinghorn, examining the wards of the key.

"Yes, without doubt. I am not blind. You have made sure of me because you knew that. You had reason! I det-est her." Mademoiselle folds her arms and throws this last remark at him over one of her shoulders.

"Having said this, have you anything else to say, mademoiselle?"

"I am not yet placed. Place me well. Find me a good condition! If you cannot, or do not choose to do that, employ me to pursue her, to chase her, to disgrace and to dishonour her. I will help you well, and with a good will. It is what YOU do. Do I not know that?"

"You appear to know a good deal," Mr. Tulkinghorn retorts.

"Do I not? Is it that I am so weak as to believe, like a child, that I come here in that dress to rec-eive that boy only to decide a little bet, a wager? Eh, my God, oh yes!" In this reply, down to the word "wager" inclusive, mademoiselle has been ironically polite and tender, then as suddenly dashed into the bitterest and most defiant scorn, with her black eyes in one and the same moment very nearly shut and staringly wide open.

"Now, let us see," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, tapping his chin with the key and looking imperturbably at her, "how this matter stands."

"Ah! Let us see," mademoiselle assents, with many angry and tight nods of her head.

"You come here to make a remarkably modest demand, which you have just stated, and it not being conceded, you will come again."

"And again," says mademoiselle with more tight and angry nods. "And yet again. And yet again. And many times again. In effect, for ever!"

"And not only here, but you will go to Mr. Snagsby's too, perhaps? That visit not succeeding either, you will go again perhaps?"

"And again," repeats mademoiselle, cataleptic with determination. "And yet again. And yet again. And many times again. In effect, for ever!"

"Very well. Now, Mademoiselle Hortense, let me recommend you to take the candle and pick up that money of yours. I think you will find it behind the clerk's partition in the corner yonder."

She merely throws a laugh over her shoulder and stands her ground with folded arms.

"You will not, eh?"

"No, I will not!"

"So much the poorer you; so much the richer I! Look, mistress, this is the key of my wine-cellar. It is a large key, but the keys of prisons are larger. In this city there are houses of correction (where the treadmills are, for women), the gates of which are very strong and heavy, and no doubt the keys too. I am afraid a lady of your spirit and activity would find it an inconvenience to have one of those keys turned upon her for any length of time. What do you think?"

"I think," mademoiselle replies without any action and in a clear, obliging voice, "that you are a miserable wretch."

"Probably," returns Mr. Tulkinghorn, quietly blowing his nose. "But I don't ask what you think of myself; I ask what you think of the prison."

"Nothing. What does it matter to me?"

"Why, it matters this much, mistress," says the lawyer, deliberately putting away his handkerchief and adjusting his frill; "the law is so despotic here that it interferes to prevent any of our good English citizens from being troubled, even by a lady's visits against his desire. And on his complaining that he is so troubled, it takes hold of the troublesome lady and shuts her up in prison under hard discipline. Turns the key upon her, mistress." Illustrating with the cellar-key.

"Truly?" returns mademoiselle in the same pleasant voice. "That is droll! But—my faith!—still what does it matter to me?"

"My fair friend," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, "make another visit here, or at Mr. Snagsby's, and you shall learn."

"In that case you will send me to the prison, perhaps?"

"Perhaps."

It would be contradictory for one in mademoiselle's state of agreeable jocularity to foam at the mouth, otherwise a tigerish expansion thereabouts might look as if a very little more would make her do it.

"In a word, mistress," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, "I am sorry to be unpolite, but if you ever present yourself uninvited here—or there—again, I will give you over to the police. Their gallantry is great, but they carry troublesome people through the streets in an ignominious manner, strapped down on a board, my good wench."

"I will prove you," whispers mademoiselle, stretching out her hand, "I will try if you dare to do it!"

"And if," pursues the lawyer without minding her, "I place you in that good condition of being locked up in jail, it will be some time before you find yourself at liberty again."

"I will prove you," repeats mademoiselle in her former whisper.

"And now," proceeds the lawyer, still without minding her, "you had better go. Think twice before you come here again."

"Think you," she answers, "twice two hundred times!"

"You were dismissed by your lady, you know," Mr. Tulkinghorn observes, following her out upon the staircase, "as the most implacable and unmanageable of women. Now turn over a new leaf and take warning by what I say to you. For what I say, I mean; and what I threaten, I will do, mistress."

She goes down without answering or looking behind her. When she is gone, he goes down too, and returning with his cobweb-covered bottle, devotes himself to a leisurely enjoyment of its contents, now and then, as he throws his head back in his chair, catching sight of the pertinacious Roman pointing from the ceiling.

CHAPTER XLIII. Esther's Narrative

It matters little now how much I thought of my living mother who had told me evermore to consider her dead. I could not venture to approach her or to communicate with her in writing, for my sense of the peril in which her life was passed was only to be equalled by my fears of increasing it. Knowing that my mere existence as a living creature was an unforeseen danger in her way, I could not always conquer that terror of myself which had seized me when I first knew the secret. At no time did I dare to utter her name. I felt as if I did not even dare to hear it. If the conversation anywhere, when I was present, took that direction, as it sometimes naturally did, I tried not to hear: I mentally counted, repeated something that I knew, or went out of the room. I am conscious now that I often did these things when there can have been no danger of her being spoken of, but I did them in the dread I had of hearing anything that might lead to her betrayal, and to her betrayal through me.

It matters little now how often I recalled the tones of my mother's voice, wondered whether I should ever hear it again as I so longed to do, and thought how strange and desolate it was that it should be so new to me. It matters little that I watched for every public mention of my mother's name; that I passed and repassed the door of her house in town, loving it, but afraid to look at it; that I once sat in the theatre when my mother was there and saw me, and when we were so wide asunder before the great company of all degrees that any link or confidence between us seemed a dream. It is all, all over. My lot has been so blest that I can relate little of myself which is not a story of goodness and generosity in others. I may well pass that little and go on.

When we were settled at home again, Ada and I had many conversations with my guardian of which Richard was the theme. My dear girl was deeply grieved that he should do their kind cousin so much wrong, but she was so faithful to Richard that she could not bear to blame him even for that. My guardian was assured of it, and never coupled his name with a word of reproof. "Rick is mistaken, my dear," he would say to her. "Well, well! We have all been mistaken over and over again. We must trust to you and time to set him right."

We knew afterwards what we suspected then, that he did not trust to time until he had often tried to open Richard's eyes. That he had written to him, gone to him, talked with him, tried every gentle and persuasive art his kindness could devise. Our poor devoted Richard was deaf and blind to all. If he were wrong, he would make amends when the Chancery suit was over. If he were groping in the dark, he could not do better than do his utmost to clear away those clouds in which so much was confused and obscured. Suspicion and misunderstanding were the fault of the suit? Then let him work the suit out and come through it to his right mind. This was his unvarying reply. Jarndyce and Jarndyce had obtained such possession of his whole nature that it was impossible to place any consideration before him which he did not, with a distorted kind of reason, make a new argument in favour of his doing what he did. "So that it is even more mischievous," said my guardian once to me, "to remonstrate with the poor dear fellow than to leave him alone."

I took one of these opportunities of mentioning my doubts of Mr. Skimpole as a good adviser for Richard.

"Adviser!" returned my guardian, laughing, "My dear, who would advise with Skimpole?"

"Encourager would perhaps have been a better word," said I.

"Encourager!" returned my guardian again. "Who could be encouraged by Skimpole?"

"Not Richard?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "Such an unworldly, uncalculating, gossamer creature is a relief to him and an amusement. But as to advising or encouraging or occupying a serious station towards anybody or anything, it is simply not to be thought of in such a child as Skimpole."

"Pray, cousin John," said Ada, who had just joined us and now looked over my shoulder, "what made him such a child?"

"What made him such a child?" inquired my guardian, rubbing his head, a little at a loss.

"Yes, cousin John."

"Why," he slowly replied, roughening his head more and more, "he is all sentiment, and—and susceptibility, and—and sensibility, and—and imagination. And these qualities are not regulated in him, somehow. I suppose the people who admired him for them in his youth attached too much importance to them and too little to any training that would have balanced and adjusted them, and so he became what he is. Hey?" said my guardian, stopping short and looking at us hopefully. "What do you think, you two?"

Ada, glancing at me, said she thought it was a pity he should be an expense to Richard.

"So it is, so it is," returned my guardian hurriedly. "That must not be. We must arrange that. I must prevent it. That will never do."

And I said I thought it was to be regretted that he had ever introduced Richard to Mr. Vholes for a present of five pounds.

"Did he?" said my guardian with a passing shade of vexation on his face. "But there you have the man. There you have the man! There is nothing mercenary in that with him. He has no idea of the value of money. He introduces Rick, and then he is good friends with Mr. Vholes and borrows five pounds of him. He means nothing by it and thinks nothing of it. He told you himself, I'll be bound, my dear?"

"Oh, yes!" said I.

"Exactly!" cried my guardian, quite triumphant. "There you have the man! If he had meant any harm by it or was conscious of any harm in it, he wouldn't tell it. He tells it as he does it in mere simplicity. But you shall see him in his own home, and then you'll understand him better. We must pay a visit to Harold Skimpole and caution him on these points. Lord bless you, my dears, an infant, an infant!"

In pursuance of this plan, we went into London on an early day and presented ourselves at Mr. Skimpole's door.

He lived in a place called the Polygon, in Somers Town, where there were at that time a number of poor Spanish refugees walking about in cloaks, smoking little paper cigars. Whether he was a better tenant than one might have supposed, in consequence of his friend Somebody always paying his rent at last, or whether his inaptitude for business rendered it particularly difficult to turn him out, I don't know; but he had occupied the same house some years. It was in a state of dilapidation quite equal to our expectation. Two or three of the area railings were gone, the water-butt was broken, the knocker was loose, the bell-handle had been pulled off a long time to judge from the rusty state of the wire, and dirty footprints on the steps were the only signs of its being inhabited.

A slatternly full-blown girl who seemed to be bursting out at the rents in her gown and the cracks in her shoes like an over-ripe berry answered our knock by opening the door a very little way and stopping up the gap with her figure. As she knew Mr. Jarndyce (indeed Ada and I both thought that she evidently associated him with the receipt of her wages), she immediately relented and allowed us to pass in. The lock of the door being in a disabled condition, she then applied herself to securing it with the chain, which was not in good action either, and said would we go upstairs?

We went upstairs to the first floor, still seeing no other furniture than the dirty footprints. Mr. Jarndyce without further ceremony entered a room there, and we followed. It was dingy enough and not at all clean, but furnished with an odd kind of shabby luxury, with a large footstool, a sofa, and plenty of cushions, an easy-chair, and plenty of pillows, a piano, books, drawing materials, music, newspapers, and a few sketches and pictures. A broken pane of glass in one of the dirty windows was papered and wafered over, but there was a little plate of hothouse nectarines on the table, and there was another of grapes, and another of sponge-cakes, and there was a bottle of light wine. Mr. Skimpole himself reclined upon the sofa in a dressing-gown, drinking some fragrant coffee from an old china cup—it was then about mid-day—and looking at a collection of wallflowers in the balcony.

He was not in the least disconcerted by our appearance, but rose and received us in his usual airy manner.

"Here I am, you see!" he said when we were seated, not without some little difficulty, the greater part of the chairs being broken. "Here I am! This is my frugal breakfast. Some men want legs of beef and mutton for breakfast; I don't. Give me my peach, my cup of coffee, and my claret; I am content. I don't want them for themselves, but they remind me of the sun. There's nothing solar about legs of beef and mutton. Mere animal satisfaction!"

"This is our friend's consulting-room (or would be, if he ever prescribed), his sanctum, his studio," said my guardian to us.

"Yes," said Mr. Skimpole, turning his bright face about, "this is the bird's cage. This is where the bird lives and sings. They pluck his feathers now and then and clip his wings, but he sings, he sings!"

He handed us the grapes, repeating in his radiant way, "He sings! Not an ambitious note, but still he sings."

"These are very fine," said my guardian. "A present?"

"No," he answered. "No! Some amiable gardener sells them. His man wanted to know, when he brought them last evening, whether he should wait for the money. 'Really, my friend,' I said, 'I think not—if your time is of any value to you.' I suppose it was, for he went away."

My guardian looked at us with a smile, as though he asked us, "Is it possible to be worldly with this baby?"

"This is a day," said Mr. Skimpole, gaily taking a little claret in a tumbler, "that will ever be remembered here. We shall call it Saint Clare and Saint Summerson day. You must see my daughters. I have a blue-eyed daughter who is my Beauty daughter, I have a Sentiment daughter, and I have a Comedy daughter. You must see them all. They'll be enchanted."

He was going to summon them when my guardian interposed and asked him to pause a moment, as he wished to say a word to him first. "My dear Jarndyce," he cheerfully replied, going back to his sofa, "as many moments as you please. Time is no object here. We never know what o'clock it is, and we never care. Not the way to get on in life, you'll tell me? Certainly. But we DON'T get on in life. We don't pretend to do it."

My guardian looked at us again, plainly saying, "You hear him?"

"Now, Harold," he began, "the word I have to say relates to Rick."

"The dearest friend I have!" returned Mr. Skimpole cordially. "I suppose he ought not to be my dearest friend, as he is not on terms with you. But he is, I can't help it; he is full of youthful poetry, and I love him. If you don't like it, I can't help it. I love him."

The engaging frankness with which he made this declaration really had a disinterested appearance and captivated my guardian, if not, for the moment, Ada too.

"You are welcome to love him as much as you like," returned Mr. Jarndyce, "but we must save his pocket, Harold."

"Oh!" said Mr. Skimpole. "His pocket? Now you are coming to what I don't understand." Taking a little more claret and dipping one of the cakes in it, he shook his head and smiled at Ada and me with an ingenuous foreboding that he never could be made to understand.

"If you go with him here or there," said my guardian plainly, "you must not let him pay for both."

"My dear Jarndyce," returned Mr. Skimpole, his genial face irradiated by the comicality of this idea, "what am I to do? If he takes me anywhere, I must go. And how can I pay? I never have any money. If I had any money, I don't know anything about it. Suppose I say to a man, how much? Suppose the man says to me seven and sixpence? I know nothing about seven and sixpence. It is impossible for me to pursue the subject with any consideration for the man. I don't go about asking busy people what seven and sixpence is in Moorish—which I don't understand. Why should I go about asking them what seven and sixpence is in Money—which I don't understand?"

"Well," said my guardian, by no means displeased with this artless reply, "if you come to any kind of journeying with Rick, you must borrow the money of me (never breathing the least allusion to that circumstance), and leave the calculation to him."

"My dear Jarndyce," returned Mr. Skimpole, "I will do anything to give you pleasure, but it seems an idle form—a superstition. Besides, I give you my word, Miss Clare and my dear Miss Summerson, I thought Mr. Carstone was immensely rich. I thought he had only to make over something, or to sign a bond, or a draft, or a cheque, or a bill, or to put something on a file somewhere, to bring down a shower of money."

"Indeed it is not so, sir," said Ada. "He is poor."

"No, really?" returned Mr. Skimpole with his bright smile. "You surprise me.

"And not being the richer for trusting in a rotten reed," said my guardian, laying his hand emphatically on the sleeve of Mr. Skimpole's dressing-gown, "be you very careful not to encourage him in that reliance, Harold."

"My dear good friend," returned Mr. Skimpole, "and my dear Miss Simmerson, and my dear Miss Clare, how can I do that? It's business, and I don't know business. It is he who encourages me. He emerges from great feats of business, presents the brightest prospects before me as their result, and calls upon me to admire them. I do admire them—as bright prospects. But I know no more about them, and I tell him so."

The helpless kind of candour with which he presented this before us, the light-hearted manner in which he was amused by his innocence, the fantastic way in which he took himself under his own protection and argued about that curious person, combined with the delightful ease of everything he said exactly to make out my guardian's case. The more I saw of him, the more unlikely it seemed to me, when he was present, that he could design, conceal, or influence anything; and yet the less likely that appeared when he was not present, and the less agreeable it was to think of his having anything to do with any one for whom I cared.

Hearing that his examination (as he called it) was now over, Mr. Skimpole left the room with a radiant face to fetch his daughters (his sons had run away at various times), leaving my guardian quite delighted by the manner in which he had vindicated his childish character. He soon came back, bringing with him the three young ladies and Mrs. Skimpole, who had once been a beauty but was now a delicate high-nosed invalid suffering under a complication of disorders.

"This," said Mr. Skimpole, "is my Beauty daughter, Arethusa—plays and sings odds and ends like her father. This is my Sentiment daughter, Laura—plays a little but don't sing. This is my Comedy daughter, Kitty—sings a little but don't play. We all draw a little and compose a little, and none of us have any idea of time or money."

Mrs. Skimpole sighed, I thought, as if she would have been glad to strike out this item in the family attainments. I also thought that she rather impressed her sigh upon my guardian and that she took every opportunity of throwing in another.

"It is pleasant," said Mr. Skimpole, turning his sprightly eyes from one to the other of us, "and it is whimsically interesting to trace peculiarities in families. In this family we are all children, and I am the youngest."

The daughters, who appeared to be very fond of him, were amused by this droll fact, particularly the Comedy daughter.

"My dears, it is true," said Mr. Skimpole, "is it not? So it is, and so it must be, because like the dogs in the hymn, 'it is our nature to.' Now, here is Miss Summerson with a fine administrative capacity and a knowledge of details perfectly surprising. It will sound very strange in Miss Summerson's ears, I dare say, that we know nothing about chops in this house. But we don't, not the least. We can't cook anything whatever. A needle and thread we don't know how to use. We admire the people who possess the practical wisdom we want, but we don't quarrel with them. Then why should they quarrel with us? Live and let live, we say to them. Live upon your practical wisdom, and let us live upon you!"

He laughed, but as usual seemed quite candid and really to mean what he said.

"We have sympathy, my roses," said Mr. Skimpole, "sympathy for everything. Have we not?"

"Oh, yes, papa!" cried the three daughters.

"In fact, that is our family department," said Mr. Skimpole, "in this hurly-burly of life. We are capable of looking on and of being interested, and we DO look on, and we ARE interested. What more can we do? Here is my Beauty daughter, married these three years. Now I dare say her marrying another child, and having two more, was all wrong in point of political economy, but it was very agreeable. We had our little festivities on those occasions and exchanged social ideas. She brought her young husband home one day, and they and their young fledglings have their nest upstairs. I dare say at some time or other Sentiment and Comedy will bring THEIR husbands home and have THEIR nests upstairs too. So we get on, we don't know how, but somehow."

She looked very young indeed to be the mother of two children, and I could not help pitying both her and them. It was evident that the three daughters had grown up as they could and had had just as little haphazard instruction as qualified them to be their father's playthings in his idlest hours. His pictorial tastes were consulted, I observed, in their respective styles of wearing their hair, the Beauty daughter being in the classic manner, the Sentiment daughter luxuriant and flowing, and the Comedy daughter in the arch style, with a good deal of sprightly forehead, and vivacious little curls dotted about the corners of her eyes. They were dressed to correspond, though in a most untidy and negligent way.

Ada and I conversed with these young ladies and found them wonderfully like their father. In the meanwhile Mr. Jarndyce (who had been rubbing his head to a great extent, and hinted at a change in the wind) talked with Mrs. Skimpole in a corner, where we could not help hearing the chink of money. Mr. Skimpole had previously volunteered to go home with us and had withdrawn to dress himself for the purpose.

"My roses," he said when he came back, "take care of mama. She is poorly to-day. By going home with Mr. Jarndyce for a day or two, I shall hear the larks sing and preserve my amiability. It has been tried, you know, and would be tried again if I remained at home."

"That bad man!" said the Comedy daughter.

"At the very time when he knew papa was lying ill by his wallflowers, looking at the blue sky," Laura complained.

"And when the smell of hay was in the air!" said Arethusa.

"It showed a want of poetry in the man," Mr. Skimpole assented, but with perfect good humour. "It was coarse. There was an absence of the finer touches of humanity in it! My daughters have taken great offence," he explained to us, "at an honest man—"

"Not honest, papa. Impossible!" they all three protested.

"At a rough kind of fellow—a sort of human hedgehog rolled up," said Mr. Skimpole, "who is a baker in this neighbourhood and from whom we borrowed a couple of arm-chairs. We wanted a couple of arm-chairs, and we hadn't got them, and therefore of course we looked to a man who HAD got them, to lend them. Well! This morose person lent them, and we wore them out. When they were worn out, he wanted them back. He had them back. He was contented, you will say. Not at all. He objected to their being worn. I reasoned with him, and pointed out his mistake. I said, 'Can you, at your time of life, be so headstrong, my friend, as to persist that an arm-chair is a thing to put upon a shelf and look at? That it is an object to contemplate, to survey from a distance, to consider from a point of sight? Don't you KNOW that these arm-chairs were borrowed to be sat upon?' He was unreasonable and unpersuadable and used intemperate language. Being as patient as I am at this minute, I addressed another appeal to him. I said, 'Now, my good man, however our business capacities may vary, we are all children of one great mother, Nature. On this blooming summer morning here you see me' (I was on the sofa) 'with flowers before me, fruit upon the table, the cloudless sky above me, the air full of fragrance, contemplating Nature. I entreat you, by our common brotherhood, not to interpose between me and a subject so sublime, the absurd figure of an angry baker!' But he did," said Mr. Skimpole, raising his laughing eyes in playful astonishment; "he did interpose that ridiculous figure, and he does, and he will again. And therefore I am very glad to get out of his way and to go home with my friend Jarndyce."

It seemed to escape his consideration that Mrs. Skimpole and the daughters remained behind to encounter the baker, but this was so old a story to all of them that it had become a matter of course. He took leave of his family with a tenderness as airy and graceful as any other aspect in which he showed himself and rode away with us in perfect harmony of mind. We had an opportunity of seeing through some open doors, as we went downstairs, that his own apartment was a palace to the rest of the house.

I could have no anticipation, and I had none, that something very startling to me at the moment, and ever memorable to me in what ensued from it, was to happen before this day was out. Our guest was in such spirits on the way home that I could do nothing but listen to him and wonder at him; nor was I alone in this, for Ada yielded to the same fascination. As to my guardian, the wind, which had threatened to become fixed in the east when we left Somers Town, veered completely round before we were a couple of miles from it.

Whether of questionable childishness or not in any other matters, Mr. Skimpole had a child's enjoyment of change and bright weather. In no way wearied by his sallies on the road, he was in the drawing-room before any of us; and I heard him at the piano while I was yet looking after my housekeeping, singing refrains of barcaroles and drinking songs, Italian and German, by the score.

We were all assembled shortly before dinner, and he was still at the piano idly picking out in his luxurious way little strains of music, and talking between whiles of finishing some sketches of the ruined old Verulam wall to-morrow, which he had begun a year or two ago and had got tired of, when a card was brought in and my guardian read aloud in a surprised voice, "Sir Leicester Dedlock!"

The visitor was in the room while it was yet turning round with me and before I had the power to stir. If I had had it, I should have hurried away. I had not even the presence of mind, in my giddiness, to retire to Ada in the window, or to see the window, or to know where it was. I heard my name and found that my guardian was presenting me before I could move to a chair.

"Pray be seated, Sir Leicester."

"Mr. Jarndyce," said Sir Leicester in reply as he bowed and seated himself, "I do myself the honour of calling here—"

"You do ME the honour, Sir Leicester."

"Thank you—of calling here on my road from Lincolnshire to express my regret that any cause of complaint, however strong, that I may have against a gentleman who—who is known to you and has been your host, and to whom therefore I will make no farther reference, should have prevented you, still more ladies under your escort and charge, from seeing whatever little there may be to gratify a polite and refined taste at my house, Chesney Wold."

"You are exceedingly obliging, Sir Leicester, and on behalf of those ladies (who are present) and for myself, I thank you very much."

"It is possible, Mr. Jarndyce, that the gentleman to whom, for the reasons I have mentioned, I refrain from making further allusion—it is possible, Mr. Jarndyce, that that gentleman may have done me the honour so far to misapprehend my character as to induce you to believe that you would not have been received by my local establishment in Lincolnshire with that urbanity, that courtesy, which its members are instructed to show to all ladies and gentlemen who present themselves at that house. I merely beg to observe, sir, that the fact is the reverse."

My guardian delicately dismissed this remark without making any verbal answer.

"It has given me pain, Mr. Jarndyce," Sir Leicester weightily proceeded. "I assure you, sir, it has given—me—pain—to learn from the housekeeper at Chesney Wold that a gentleman who was in your company in that part of the county, and who would appear to possess a cultivated taste for the fine arts, was likewise deterred by some such cause from examining the family pictures with that leisure, that attention, that care, which he might have desired to bestow upon them and which some of them might possibly have repaid." Here he produced a card and read, with much gravity and a little trouble, through his eye-glass, "Mr. Hirrold—Herald—Harold—Skampling—Skumpling—I beg your pardon—Skimpole."

"This is Mr. Harold Skimpole," said my guardian, evidently surprised.

"Oh!" exclaimed Sir Leicester, "I am happy to meet Mr. Skimpole and to have the opportunity of tendering my personal regrets. I hope, sir, that when you again find yourself in my part of the county, you will be under no similar sense of restraint."

"You are very obliging, Sir Leicester Dedlock. So encouraged, I shall certainly give myself the pleasure and advantage of another visit to your beautiful house. The owners of such places as Chesney Wold," said Mr. Skimpole with his usual happy and easy air, "are public benefactors. They are good enough to maintain a number of delightful objects for the admiration and pleasure of us poor men; and not to reap all the admiration and pleasure that they yield is to be ungrateful to our benefactors."

Sir Leicester seemed to approve of this sentiment highly. "An artist, sir?"

"No," returned Mr. Skimpole. "A perfectly idle man. A mere amateur."

Sir Leicester seemed to approve of this even more. He hoped he might have the good fortune to be at Chesney Wold when Mr. Skimpole next came down into Lincolnshire. Mr. Skimpole professed himself much flattered and honoured.

"Mr. Skimpole mentioned," pursued Sir Leicester, addressing himself again to my guardian, "mentioned to the housekeeper, who, as he may have observed, is an old and attached retainer of the family—"

("That is, when I walked through the house the other day, on the occasion of my going down to visit Miss Summerson and Miss Clare," Mr. Skimpole airily explained to us.)

"—That the friend with whom he had formerly been staying there was Mr. Jarndyce." Sir Leicester bowed to the bearer of that name. "And hence I became aware of the circumstance for which I have professed my regret. That this should have occurred to any gentleman, Mr. Jarndyce, but especially a gentleman formerly known to Lady Dedlock, and indeed claiming some distant connexion with her, and for whom (as I learn from my Lady herself) she entertains a high respect, does, I assure you, give—me—pain."

"Pray say no more about it, Sir Leicester," returned my guardian. "I am very sensible, as I am sure we all are, of your consideration. Indeed the mistake was mine, and I ought to apologize for it."

I had not once looked up. I had not seen the visitor and had not even appeared to myself to hear the conversation. It surprises me to find that I can recall it, for it seemed to make no impression on me as it passed. I heard them speaking, but my mind was so confused and my instinctive avoidance of this gentleman made his presence so distressing to me that I thought I understood nothing, through the rushing in my head and the beating of my heart.

"I mentioned the subject to Lady Dedlock," said Sir Leicester, rising, "and my Lady informed me that she had had the pleasure of exchanging a few words with Mr. Jarndyce and his wards on the occasion of an accidental meeting during their sojourn in the vicinity. Permit me, Mr. Jarndyce, to repeat to yourself, and to these ladies, the assurance I have already tendered to Mr. Skimpole. Circumstances undoubtedly prevent my saying that it would afford me any gratification to hear that Mr. Boythorn had favoured my house with his presence, but those circumstances are confined to that gentleman himself and do not extend beyond him."

"You know my old opinion of him," said Mr. Skimpole, lightly appealing to us. "An amiable bull who is determined to make every colour scarlet!"

Sir Leicester Dedlock coughed as if he could not possibly hear another word in reference to such an individual and took his leave with great ceremony and politeness. I got to my own room with all possible speed and remained there until I had recovered my self-command. It had been very much disturbed, but I was thankful to find when I went downstairs again that they only rallied me for having been shy and mute before the great Lincolnshire baronet.

By that time I had made up my mind that the period was come when I must tell my guardian what I knew. The possibility of my being brought into contact with my mother, of my being taken to her house, even of Mr. Skimpole's, however distantly associated with me, receiving kindnesses and obligations from her husband, was so painful that I felt I could no longer guide myself without his assistance.

When we had retired for the night, and Ada and I had had our usual talk in our pretty room, I went out at my door again and sought my guardian among his books. I knew he always read at that hour, and as I drew near I saw the light shining out into the passage from his reading-lamp.

"May I come in, guardian?"

"Surely, little woman. What's the matter?"

"Nothing is the matter. I thought I would like to take this quiet time of saying a word to you about myself."

He put a chair for me, shut his book, and put it by, and turned his kind attentive face towards me. I could not help observing that it wore that curious expression I had observed in it once before—on that night when he had said that he was in no trouble which I could readily understand.

"What concerns you, my dear Esther," said he, "concerns us all. You cannot be more ready to speak than I am to hear."

"I know that, guardian. But I have such need of your advice and support. Oh! You don't know how much need I have to-night."

He looked unprepared for my being so earnest, and even a little alarmed.

"Or how anxious I have been to speak to you," said I, "ever since the visitor was here to-day."

"The visitor, my dear! Sir Leicester Dedlock?"

"Yes."

He folded his arms and sat looking at me with an air of the profoundest astonishment, awaiting what I should say next. I did not know how to prepare him.

"Why, Esther," said he, breaking into a smile, "our visitor and you are the two last persons on earth I should have thought of connecting together!"

"Oh, yes, guardian, I know it. And I too, but a little while ago."

The smile passed from his face, and he became graver than before. He crossed to the door to see that it was shut (but I had seen to that) and resumed his seat before me.

"Guardian," said I, "do you remensher, when we were overtaken by the thunder-storm, Lady Dedlock's speaking to you of her sister?"

"Of course. Of course I do."

"And reminding you that she and her sister had differed, had gone their several ways?"

"Of course."

"Why did they separate, guardian?"

His face quite altered as he looked at me. "My child, what questions are these! I never knew. No one but themselves ever did know, I believe. Who could tell what the secrets of those two handsome and proud women were! You have seen Lady Dedlock. If you had ever seen her sister, you would know her to have been as resolute and haughty as she."

"Oh, guardian, I have seen her many and many a time!"

"Seen her?"

He paused a little, biting his lip. "Then, Esther, when you spoke to me long ago of Boythorn, and when I told you that he was all but married once, and that the lady did not die, but died to him, and that that time had had its influence on his later life—did you know it all, and know who the lady was?"

"No, guardian," I returned, fearful of the light that dimly broke upon me. "Nor do I know yet."

"Lady Dedlock's sister."

"And why," I could scarcely ask him, "why, guardian, pray tell me why were THEY parted?"

"It was her act, and she kept its motives in her inflexible heart. He afterwards did conjecture (but it was mere conjecture) that some injury which her haughty spirit had received in her cause of quarrel with her sister had wounded her beyond all reason, but she wrote him that from the date of that letter she died to him—as in literal truth she did—and that the resolution was exacted from her by her knowledge of his proud temper and his strained sense of honour, which were both her nature too. In consideration for those master points in him, and even in consideration for them in herself, she made the sacrifice, she said, and would live in it and die in it. She did both, I fear; certainly he never saw her, never heard of her from that hour. Nor did any one."

"Oh, guardian, what have I done!" I cried, giving way to my grief; "what sorrow have I innocently caused!"

"You caused, Esther?"

"Yes, guardian. Innocently, but most surely. That secluded sister is my first remembrance."

"No, no!" he cried, starting.

"Yes, guardian, yes! And HER sister is my mother!"

I would have told him all my mother's letter, but he would not hear it then. He spoke so tenderly and wisely to me, and he put so plainly before me all I had myself imperfectly thought and hoped in my better state of mind, that, penetrated as I had been with fervent gratitude towards him through so many years, I believed I had never loved him so dearly, never thanked him in my heart so fully, as I did that night. And when he had taken me to my room and kissed me at the door, and when at last I lay down to sleep, my thought was how could I ever be busy enough, how could I ever be good enough, how in my little way could I ever hope to be forgetful enough of myself, devoted enough to him, and useful enough to others, to show him how I blessed and honoured him.

CHAPTER XLIV. The Letter and the Answer

My guardian called me into his room next morning, and then I told him what had been left untold on the previous night. There was nothing to be done, he said, but to keep the secret and to avoid another such encounter as that of yesterday. He understood my feeling and entirely shared it. He charged himself even with restraining Mr. Skimpole from improving his opportunity. One person whom he need not name to me, it was not now possible for him to advise or help. He wished it were, but no such thing could be. If her mistrust of the lawyer whom she had mentioned were well-founded, which he scarcely doubted, he dreaded discovery. He knew something of him, both by sight and by reputation, and it was certain that he was a dangerous man. Whatever happened, he repeatedly impressed upon me with anxious affection and kindness, I was as innocent of as himself and as unable to influence.

"Nor do I understand," said he, "that any doubts tend towards you, my dear. Much suspicion may exist without that connexion."

"With the lawyer," I returned. "But two other persons have come into my mind since I have been anxious. Then I told him all about Mr. Guppy, who I feared might have had his vague surmises when I little understood his meaning, but in whose silence after our last interview I expressed perfect confidence.

"Well," said my guardian. "Then we may dismiss him for the present. Who is the other?"

I called to his recollection the French maid and the eager offer of herself she had made to me.

"Ha!" he returned thoughtfully. "That is a more alarming person than the clerk. But after all, my dear, it was but seeking for a new service. She had seen you and Ada a little while before, and it was natural that you should come into her head. She merely proposed herself for your maid, you know. She did nothing more."

"Her manner was strange," said I.

"Yes, and her manner was strange when she took her shoes off and showed that cool relish for a walk that might have ended in her death-bed," said my guardian. "It would be useless self-distress and torment to reckon up such chances and possibilities. There are very few harmless circumstances that would not seem full of perilous meaning, so considered. Be hopeful, little woman. You can be nothing better than yourself; be that, through this knowledge, as you were before you had it. It is the best you can do for everybody's sake. I, sharing the secret with you—"

"And lightening it, guardian, so much," said I.

"—will be attentive to what passes in that family, so far as I can observe it from my distance. And if the time should come when I can stretch out a hand to render the least service to one whom it is better not to name even here, I will not fail to do it for her dear daughter's sake."

I thanked him with my whole heart. What could I ever do but thank him! I was going out at the door when he asked me to stay a moment. Quickly turning round, I saw that same expression on his face again; and all at once, I don't know how, it flashed upon me as a new and far-off possibility that I understood it.

"My dear Esther," said my guardian, "I have long had something in my thoughts that I have wished to say to you."

"Indeed?"

"I have had some difficulty in approaching it, and I still have. I should wish it to be so deliberately said, and so deliberately considered. Would you object to my writing it?"

"Dear guardian, how could I object to your writing anything for ME to read?"

"Then see, my love," said he with his cheery smile, "am I at this moment quite as plain and easy—do I seem as open, as honest and old-fashioned—as I am at any time?"

I answered in all earnestness, "Quite." With the strictest truth, for his momentary hesitation was gone (it had not lasted a minute), and his fine, sensible, cordial, sterling manner was restored.

"Do I look as if I suppressed anything, meant anything but what I said, had any reservation at all, no matter what?" said he with his bright clear eyes on mine.

I answered, most assuredly he did not.

"Can you fully trust me, and thoroughly rely on what I profess, Esther?"

"Most thoroughly," said I with my whole heart.

"My dear girl," returned my guardian, "give me your hand."

He took it in his, holding me lightly with his arm, and looking down into my face with the same genuine freshness and faithfulness of manner—the old protecting manner which had made that house my home in a moment—said, "You have wrought changes in me, little woman, since the winter day in the stage-coach. First and last you have done me a world of good since that time."

"Ah, guardian, what have you done for me since that time!"

"But," said he, "that is not to be remembered now."

"It never can be forgotten."

"Yes, Esther," said he with a gentle seriousness, "it is to be forgotten now, to be forgotten for a while. You are only to remember now that nothing can change me as you know me. Can you feel quite assured of that, my dear?"

"I can, and I do," I said.

"That's much," he answered. "That's everything. But I must not take that at a word. I will not write this something in my thoughts until you have quite resolved within yourself that nothing can change me as you know me. If you doubt that in the least degree, I will never write it. If you are sure of that, on good consideration, send Charley to me this night week—'for the letter.' But if you are not quite certain, never send. Mind, I trust to your truth, in this thing as in everything. If you are not quite certain on that one point, never send!"

"Guardian," said I, "I am already certain, I can no more be changed in that conviction than you can be changed towards me. I shall send Charley for the letter."

He shook my hand and said no more. Nor was any more said in reference to this conversation, either by him or me, through the whole week. When the appointed night came, I said to Charley as soon as I was alone, "Go and knock at Mr. Jarndyce's door, Charley, and say you have come from me—'for the letter.'" Charley went up the stairs, and down the stairs, and along the passages—the zig-zag way about the old-fashioned house seemed very long in my listening ears that night—and so came back, along the passages, and down the stairs, and up the stairs, and brought the letter. "Lay it on the table, Charley," said I. So Charley laid it on the table and went to bed, and I sat looking at it without taking it up, thinking of many things.

I began with my overshadowed childhood, and passed through those timid days to the heavy time when my aunt lay dead, with her resolute face so cold and set, and when I was more solitary with Mrs. Rachael than if I had had no one in the world to speak to or to look at. I passed to the altered days when I was so blest as to find friends in all around me, and to be beloved. I came to the time when I first saw my dear girl and was received into that sisterly affection which was the grace and beauty of my life. I recalled the first bright gleam of welcome which had shone out of those very windows upon our expectant faces on that cold bright night, and which had never paled. I lived my happy life there over again, I went through my illness and recovery, I thought of myself so altered and of those around me so unchanged; and all this happiness shone like a light from one central figure, represented before me by the letter on the table.

I opened it and read it. It was so impressive in its love for me, and in the unselfish caution it gave me, and the consideration it showed for me in every word, that my eyes were too often blinded to read much at a time. But I read it through three times before I laid it down. I had thought beforehand that I knew its purport, and I did. It asked me, would I be the mistress of Bleak House.

It was not a love letter, though it expressed so much love, but was written just as he would at any time have spoken to me. I saw his face, and heard his voice, and felt the influence of his kind protecting manner in every line. It addressed me as if our places were reversed, as if all the good deeds had been mine and all the feelings they had awakened his. It dwelt on my being young, and he past the prime of life; on his having attained a ripe age, while I was a child; on his writing to me with a silvered head, and knowing all this so well as to set it in full before me for mature deliberation. It told me that I would gain nothing by such a marriage and lose nothing by rejecting it, for no new relation could enhance the tenderness in which he held me, and whatever my decision was, he was certain it would be right. But he had considered this step anew since our late confidence and had decided on taking it, if it only served to show me through one poor instance that the whole world would readily unite to falsify the stern prediction of my childhood. I was the last to know what happiness I could bestow upon him, but of that he said no more, for I was always to remember that I owed him nothing and that he was my debtor, and for very much. He had often thought of our future, and foreseeing that the time must come, and fearing that it might come soon, when Ada (now very nearly of age) would leave us, and when our present mode of life must be broken up, had become accustomed to reflect on this proposal. Thus he made it. If I felt that I could ever give him the best right he could have to be my protector, and if I felt that I could happily and justly become the dear companion of his remaining life, superior to all lighter chances and changes than death, even then he could not have me bind myself irrevocably while this letter was yet so new to me, but even then I must have ample time for reconsideration. In that case, or in the opposite case, let him be unchanged in his old relation, in his old manner, in the old name by which I called him. And as to his bright Dame Durden and little housekeeper, she would ever be the same, he knew.

This was the substance of the letter, written throughout with a justice and a dignity as if he were indeed my responsible guardian impartially representing the proposal of a friend against whom in his integrity he stated the full case.

But he did not hint to me that when I had been better looking he had had this same proceeding in his thoughts and had refrained from it. That when my old face was gone from me, and I had no attractions, he could love me just as well as in my fairer days. That the discovery of my birth gave him no shock. That his generosity rose above my disfigurement and my inheritance of shame. That the more I stood in need of such fidelity, the more firmly I might trust in him to the last.

But I knew it, I knew it well now. It came upon me as the close of the benignant history I had been pursuing, and I felt that I had but one thing to do. To devote my life to his happiness was to thank him poorly, and what had I wished for the other night but some new means of thanking him?

Still I cried very much, not only in the fullness of my heart after reading the letter, not only in the strangeness of the prospect—for it was strange though I had expected the contents—but as if something for which there was no name or distinct idea were indefinitely lost to me. I was very happy, very thankful, very hopeful; but I cried very much.

By and by I went to my old glass. My eyes were red and swollen, and I said, "Oh, Esther, Esther, can that be you!" I am afraid the face in the glass was going to cry again at this reproach, but I held up my finger at it, and it stopped.

"That is more like the composed look you comforted me with, my dear, when you showed me such a change!" said I, beginning to let down my hair. "When you are mistress of Bleak House, you are to be as cheerful as a bird. In fact, you are always to be cheerful; so let us begin for once and for all."

I went on with my hair now, quite comfortably. I sobbed a little still, but that was because I had been crying, not because I was crying then.

"And so Esther, my dear, you are happy for life. Happy with your best friends, happy in your old home, happy in the power of doing a great deal of good, and happy in the undeserved love of the best of men."

I thought, all at once, if my guardian had married some one else, how should I have felt, and what should I have done! That would have been a change indeed. It presented my life in such a new and blank form that I rang my housekeeping keys and gave them a kiss before I laid them down in their basket again.

Then I went on to think, as I dressed my hair before the glass, how often had I considered within myself that the deep traces of my illness and the circumstances of my birth were only new reasons why I should be busy, busy, busy—useful, amiable, serviceable, in all honest, unpretending ways. This was a good time, to be sure, to sit down morbidly and cry! As to its seeming at all strange to me at first (if that were any excuse for crying, which it was not) that I was one day to be the mistress of Bleak House, why should it seem strange? Other people had thought of such things, if I had not. "Don't you remember, my plain dear," I asked myself, looking at the glass, "what Mrs. Woodcourt said before those scars were there about your marrying—"

Perhaps the name brought them to my remembrance. The dried remains of the flowers. It would be better not to keep them now. They had only been preserved in memory of something wholly past and gone, but it would be better not to keep them now.

They were in a book, and it happened to be in the next room—our sitting-room, dividing Ada's chamber from mine. I took a candle and went softly in to fetch it from its shelf. After I had it in my hand, I saw my beautiful darling, through the open door, lying asleep, and I stole in to kiss her.

It was weak in me, I know, and I could have no reason for crying; but I dropped a tear upon her dear face, and another, and another. Weaker than that, I took the withered flowers out and put them for a moment to her lips. I thought about her love for Richard, though, indeed, the flowers had nothing to do with that. Then I took them into my own room and burned them at the candle, and they were dust in an instant.

On entering the breakfast-room next morning, I found my guardian just as usual, quite as frank, as open, and free. There being not the least constraint in his manner, there was none (or I think there was none) in mine. I was with him several times in the course of the morning, in and out, when there was no one there, and I thought it not unlikely that he might speak to me about the letter, but he did not say a word.

So, on the next morning, and the next, and for at least a week, over which time Mr. Skimpole prolonged his stay. I expected, every day, that my guardian might speak to me about the letter, but he never did.

I thought then, growing uneasy, that I ought to write an answer. I tried over and over again in my own room at night, but I could not write an answer that at all began like a good answer, so I thought each night I would wait one more day. And I waited seven more days, and he never said a word.

At last, Mr. Skimpole having departed, we three were one afternoon going out for a ride; and I, being dressed before Ada and going down, came upon my guardian, with his back towards me, standing at the drawing-room window looking out.

He turned on my coming in and said, smiling, "Aye, it's you, little woman, is it?" and looked out again.

I had made up my mind to speak to him now. In short, I had come down on purpose. "Guardian," I said, rather hesitating and trembling, "when would you like to have the answer to the letter Charley came for?"

"When it's ready, my dear," he replied.

"I think it is ready," said I.

"Is Charley to bring it?" he asked pleasantly.

"No. I have brought it myself, guardian," I returned.

I put my two arms round his neck and kissed him, and he said was this the mistress of Bleak House, and I said yes; and it made no difference presently, and we all went out together, and I said nothing to my precious pet about it.

CHAPTER XLV. In Trust

One morning when I had done jingling about with my baskets of keys, as my beauty and I were walking round and round the garden I happened to turn my eyes towards the house and saw a long thin shadow going in which looked like Mr. Vholes. Ada had been telling me only that morning of her hopes that Richard might exhaust his ardour in the Chancery suit by being so very earnest in it; and therefore, not to damp my dear girl's spirits, I said nothing about Mr. Vholes's shadow.

Presently came Charley, lightly winding among the bushes and tripping along the paths, as rosy and pretty as one of Flora's attendants instead of my maid, saying, "Oh, if you please, miss, would you step and speak to Mr. Jarndyce!"

It was one of Charley's peculiarities that whenever she was charged with a message she always began to deliver it as soon as she beheld, at any distance, the person for whom it was intended. Therefore I saw Charley asking me in her usual form of words to "step and speak" to Mr. Jarndyce long before I heard her. And when I did hear her, she had said it so often that she was out of breath.

I told Ada I would make haste back and inquired of Charley as we went in whether there was not a gentleman with Mr. Jarndyce. To which Charley, whose grammar, I confess to my shame, never did any credit to my educational powers, replied, "Yes, miss. Him as come down in the country with Mr. Richard."

A more complete contrast than my guardian and Mr. Vholes I suppose there could not be. I found them looking at one another across a table, the one so open and the other so close, the one so broad and upright and the other so narrow and stooping, the one giving out what he had to say in such a rich ringing voice and the other keeping it in in such a cold-blooded, gasping, fish-like manner that I thought I never had seen two people so unmatched.

"You know Mr. Vholes, my dear," said my guardian. Not with the greatest urbanity, I must say.

Mr. Vholes rose, gloved and buttoned up as usual, and seated himself again, just as he had seated himself beside Richard in the gig. Not having Richard to look at, he looked straight before him.

"Mr. Vholes," said my guardian, eyeing his black figure as if he were a bird of ill omen, "has brought an ugly report of our most unfortunate Rick." Laying a marked emphasis on "most unfortunate" as if the words were rather descriptive of his connexion with Mr. Vholes.

I sat down between them; Mr. Vholes remained immovable, except that he secretly picked at one of the red pimples on his yellow face with his black glove.

"And as Rick and you are happily good friends, I should like to know," said my guardian, "what you think, my dear. Would you be so good as to—as to speak up, Mr. Vholes?"

Doing anything but that, Mr. Vholes observed, "I have been saying that I have reason to know, Miss Summerson, as Mr. C.'s professional adviser, that Mr. C.'s circumstances are at the present moment in an embarrassed state. Not so much in point of amount as owing to the peculiar and pressing nature of liabilities Mr. C. has incurred and the means he has of liquidating or meeting the same. I have staved off many little matters for Mr. C., but there is a limit to staving off, and we have reached it. I have made some advances out of pocket to accommodate these unpleasantnesses, but I necessarily look to being repaid, for I do not pretend to be a man of capital, and I have a father to support in the Vale of Taunton, besides striving to realize some little independence for three dear girls at home. My apprehension is, Mr. C.'s circumstances being such, lest it should end in his obtaining leave to part with his commission, which at all events is desirable to be made known to his connexions."

Mr. Vholes, who had looked at me while speaking, here emerged into the silence he could hardly be said to have broken, so stifled was his tone, and looked before him again.

"Imagine the poor fellow without even his present resource," said my guardian to me. "Yet what can I do? You know him, Esther. He would never accept of help from me now. To offer it or hint at it would be to drive him to an extremity, if nothing else did."

Mr. Vholes hereupon addressed me again.

"What Mr. Jarndyce remarks, miss, is no doubt the case, and is the difficulty. I do not see that anything is to be done, I do not say that anything is to be done. Far from it. I merely come down here under the seal of confidence and mention it in order that everything may be openly carried on and that it may not be said afterwards that everything was not openly carried on. My wish is that everything should be openly carried on. I desire to leave a good name behind me. If I consulted merely my own interests with Mr. C., I should not be here. So insurmountable, as you must well know, would be his objections. This is not a professional attendance. This can he charged to nobody. I have no interest in it except as a member of society and a father—AND a son," said Mr. Vholes, who had nearly forgotten that point.

It appeared to us that Mr. Vholes said neither more nor less than the truth in intimating that he sought to divide the responsibility, such as it was, of knowing Richard's situation. I could only suggest that I should go down to Deal, where Richard was then stationed, and see him, and try if it were possible to avert the worst. Without consulting Mr. Vholes on this point, I took my guardian aside to propose it, while Mr. Vholes gauntly stalked to the fire and warmed his funeral gloves.

The fatigue of the journey formed an immediate objection on my guardian's part, but as I saw he had no other, and as I was only too happy to go, I got his consent. We had then merely to dispose of Mr. Vholes.

"Well, sir," said Mr. Jarndyce, "Miss Summerson will communicate with Mr. Carstone, and you can only hope that his position may be yet retrievable. You will allow me to order you lunch after your journey, sir."

"I thank you, Mr. Jarndyce," said Mr. Vholes, putting out his long black sleeve to check the ringing of the bell, "not any. I thank you, no, not a morsel. My digestion is much impaired, and I am but a poor knife and fork at any time. If I was to partake of solid food at this period of the day, I don't know what the consequences might be. Everything having been openly carried on, sir, I will now with your permission take my leave."

"And I would that you could take your leave, and we could all take our leave, Mr. Vholes," returned my guardian bitterly, "of a cause you know of."

Mr. Vholes, whose black dye was so deep from head to foot that it had quite steamed before the fire, diffusing a very unpleasant perfume, made a short one-sided inclination of his head from the neck and slowly shook it.

"We whose ambition it is to be looked upon in the light of respectable practitioners, sir, can but put our shoulders to the wheel. We do it, sir. At least, I do it myself; and I wish to think well of my professional brethren, one and all. You are sensible of an obligation not to refer to me, miss, in communicating with Mr. C.?"

I said I would be careful not to do it.

"Just so, miss. Good morning. Mr. Jarndyce, good morning, sir." Mr. Vholes put his dead glove, which scarcely seemed to have any hand in it, on my fingers, and then on my guardian's fingers, and took his long thin shadow away. I thought of it on the outside of the coach, passing over all the sunny landscape between us and London, chilling the seed in the ground as it glided along.

Of course it became necessary to tell Ada where I was going and why I was going, and of course she was anxious and distressed. But she was too true to Richard to say anything but words of pity and words of excuse, and in a more loving spirit still—my dear devoted girl!—she wrote him a long letter, of which I took charge.

Charley was to be my travelling companion, though I am sure I wanted none and would willingly have left her at home. We all went to London that afternoon, and finding two places in the mail, secured them. At our usual bed-time, Charley and I were rolling away seaward with the Kentish letters.

It was a night's journey in those coach times, but we had the mail to ourselves and did not find the night very tedious. It passed with me as I suppose it would with most people under such circumstances. At one while my journey looked hopeful, and at another hopeless. Now I thought I should do some good, and now I wondered how I could ever have supposed so. Now it seemed one of the most reasonable things in the world that I should have come, and now one of the most unreasonable. In what state I should find Richard, what I should say to him, and what he would say to me occupied my mind by turns with these two states of feeling; and the wheels seemed to play one tune (to which the burden of my guardian's letter set itself) over and over again all night.

At last we came into the narrow streets of Deal, and very gloomy they were upon a raw misty morning. The long flat beach, with its little irregular houses, wooden and brick, and its litter of capstans, and great boats, and sheds, and bare upright poles with tackle and blocks, and loose gravelly waste places overgrown with grass and weeds, wore as dull an appearance as any place I ever saw. The sea was heaving under a thick white fog; and nothing else was moving but a few early ropemakers, who, with the yarn twisted round their bodies, looked as if, tired of their present state of existence, they were spinning themselves into cordage.

But when we got into a warm room in an excellent hotel and sat down, comfortably washed and dressed, to an early breakfast (for it was too late to think of going to bed), Deal began to look more cheerful. Our little room was like a ship's cabin, and that delighted Charley very much. Then the fog began to rise like a curtain, and numbers of ships that we had had no idea were near appeared. I don't know how many sail the waiter told us were then lying in the downs. Some of these vessels were of grand size—one was a large Indiaman just come home; and when the sun shone through the clouds, making silvery pools in the dark sea, the way in which these ships brightened, and shadowed, and changed, amid a bustle of boats pulling off from the shore to them and from them to the shore, and a general life and motion in themselves and everything around them, was most beautiful.

The large Indiaman was our great attraction because she had come into the downs in the night. She was surrounded by boats, and we said how glad the people on board of her must be to come ashore. Charley was curious, too, about the voyage, and about the heat in India, and the serpents and the tigers; and as she picked up such information much faster than grammar, I told her what I knew on those points. I told her, too, how people in such voyages were sometimes wrecked and cast on rocks, where they were saved by the intrepidity and humanity of one man. And Charley asking how that could be, I told her how we knew at home of such a case.

I had thought of sending Richard a note saying I was there, but it seemed so much better to go to him without preparation. As he lived in barracks I was a little doubtful whether this was feasible, but we went out to reconnoitre. Peeping in at the gate of the barrack-yard, we found everything very quiet at that time in the morning, and I asked a sergeant standing on the guardhouse-steps where he lived. He sent a man before to show me, who went up some bare stairs, and knocked with his knuckles at a door, and left us.

"Now then!" cried Richard from within. So I left Charley in the little passage, and going on to the half-open door, said, "Can I come in, Richard? It's only Dame Durden."

He was writing at a table, with a great confusion of clothes, tin cases, books, boots, brushes, and portmanteaus strewn all about the floor. He was only half dressed—in plain clothes, I observed, not in uniform—and his hair was unbrushed, and he looked as wild as his room. All this I saw after he had heartily welcomed me and I was seated near him, for he started upon hearing my voice and caught me in his arms in a moment. Dear Richard! He was ever the same to me. Down to—ah, poor poor fellow!—to the end, he never received me but with something of his old merry boyish manner.

"Good heaven, my dear little woman," said he, "how do you come here? Who could have thought of seeing you! Nothing the matter? Ada is well?"

"Quite well. Lovelier than ever, Richard!"

"Ah!" he said, leaning back in his chair. "My poor cousin! I was writing to you, Esther."

So worn and haggard as he looked, even in the fullness of his handsome youth, leaning back in his chair and crushing the closely written sheet of paper in his hand!

"Have you been at the trouble of writing all that, and am I not to read it after all?" I asked.

"Oh, my dear," he returned with a hopeless gesture. "You may read it in the whole room. It is all over here."

I mildly entreated him not to be despondent. I told him that I had heard by chance of his being in difficulty and had come to consult with him what could best be done.

"Like you, Esther, but useless, and so NOT like you!" said he with a melancholy smile. "I am away on leave this day—should have been gone in another hour—and that is to smooth it over, for my selling out. Well! Let bygones be bygones. So this calling follows the rest. I only want to have been in the church to have made the round of all the professions."

"Richard," I urged, "it is not so hopeless as that?"

"Esther," he returned, "it is indeed. I am just so near disgrace as that those who are put in authority over me (as the catechism goes) would far rather be without me than with me. And they are right. Apart from debts and duns and all such drawbacks, I am not fit even for this employment. I have no care, no mind, no heart, no soul, but for one thing. Why, if this bubble hadn't broken now," he said, tearing the letter he had written into fragments and moodily casting them away, by driblets, "how could I have gone abroad? I must have been ordered abroad, but how could I have gone? How could I, with my experience of that thing, trust even Vholes unless I was at his back!"

I suppose he knew by my face what I was about to say, but he caught the hand I had laid upon his arm and touched my own lips with it to prevent me from going on.

"No, Dame Durden! Two subjects I forbid—must forbid. The first is John Jarndyce. The second, you know what. Call it madness, and I tell you I can't help it now, and can't be sane. But it is no such thing; it is the one object I have to pursue. It is a pity I ever was prevailed upon to turn out of my road for any other. It would be wisdom to abandon it now, after all the time, anxiety, and pains I have bestowed upon it! Oh, yes, true wisdom. It would be very agreeable, too, to some people; but I never will."

He was in that mood in which I thought it best not to increase his determination (if anything could increase it) by opposing him. I took out Ada's letter and put it in his hand.

"Am I to read it now?" he asked.

As I told him yes, he laid it on the table, and resting his head upon his hand, began. He had not read far when he rested his head upon his two hands—to hide his face from me. In a little while he rose as if the light were bad and went to the window. He finished reading it there, with his back towards me, and after he had finished and had folded it up, stood there for some minutes with the letter in his hand. When he came back to his chair, I saw tears in his eyes.

"Of course, Esther, you know what she says here?" He spoke in a softened voice and kissed the letter as he asked me.

"Yes, Richard."

"Offers me," he went on, tapping his foot upon the floor, "the little inheritance she is certain of so soon—just as little and as much as I have wasted—and begs and prays me to take it, set myself right with it, and remain in the service."

"I know your welfare to be the dearest wish of her heart," said I. "And, oh, my dear Richard, Ada's is a noble heart."

"I am sure it is. I—I wish I was dead!"

He went back to the window, and laying his arm across it, leaned his head down on his arm. It greatly affected me to see him so, but I hoped he might become more yielding, and I remained silent. My experience was very limited; I was not at all prepared for his rousing himself out of this emotion to a new sense of injury.

"And this is the heart that the same John Jarndyce, who is not otherwise to be mentioned between us, stepped in to estrange from me," said he indignantly. "And the dear girl makes me this generous offer from under the same John Jarndyce's roof, and with the same John Jarndyce's gracious consent and connivance, I dare say, as a new means of buying me off."

"Richard!" I cried out, rising hastily. "I will not hear you say such shameful words!" I was very angry with him indeed, for the first time in my life, but it only lasted a moment. When I saw his worn young face looking at me as if he were sorry, I put my hand on his shoulder and said, "If you please, my dear Richard, do not speak in such a tone to me. Consider!"

He blamed himself exceedingly and told me in the most generous manner that he had been very wrong and that he begged my pardon a thousand times. At that I laughed, but trembled a little too, for I was rather fluttered after being so fiery.

"To accept this offer, my dear Esther," said he, sitting down beside me and resuming our conversation, "—once more, pray, pray forgive me; I am deeply grieved—to accept my dearest cousin's offer is, I need not say, impossible. Besides, I have letters and papers that I could show you which would convince you it is all over here. I have done with the red coat, believe me. But it is some satisfaction, in the midst of my troubles and perplexities, to know that I am pressing Ada's interests in pressing my own. Vholes has his shoulder to the wheel, and he cannot help urging it on as much for her as for me, thank God!"

His sanguine hopes were rising within him and lighting up his features, but they made his face more sad to me than it had been before.

"No, no!" cried Richard exultingly. "If every farthing of Ada's little fortune were mine, no part of it should be spent in retaining me in what I am not fit for, can take no interest in, and am weary of. It should be devoted to what promises a better return, and should be used where she has a larger stake. Don't be uneasy for me! I shall now have only one thing on my mind, and Vholes and I will work it. I shall not be without means. Free of my commission, I shall be able to compound with some small usurers who will hear of nothing but their bond now—Vholes says so. I should have a balance in my favour anyway, but that would swell it. Come, come! You shall carry a letter to Ada from me, Esther, and you must both of you be more hopeful of me and not believe that I am quite cast away just yet, my dear."

I will not repeat what I said to Richard. I know it was tiresome, and nobody is to suppose for a moment that it was at all wise. It only came from my heart. He heard it patiently and feelingly, but I saw that on the two subjects he had reserved it was at present hopeless to make any representation to him. I saw too, and had experienced in this very interview, the sense of my guardian's remark that it was even more mischievous to use persuasion with him than to leave him as he was.

Therefore I was driven at last to asking Richard if he would mind convincing me that it really was all over there, as he had said, and that it was not his mere impression. He showed me without hesitation a correspondence making it quite plain that his retirement was arranged. I found, from what he told me, that Mr. Vholes had copies of these papers and had been in consultation with him throughout. Beyond ascertaining this, and having been the bearer of Ada's letter, and being (as I was going to be) Richard's companion back to London, I had done no good by coming down. Admitting this to myself with a reluctant heart, I said I would return to the hotel and wait until he joined me there, so he threw a cloak over his shoulders and saw me to the gate, and Charley and I went back along the beach.

There was a concourse of people in one spot, surrounding some naval officers who were landing from a boat, and pressing about them with unusual interest. I said to Charley this would be one of the great Indiaman's boats now, and we stopped to look.

The gentlemen came slowly up from the waterside, speaking good-humouredly to each other and to the people around and glancing about them as if they were glad to be in England again. "Charley, Charley," said I, "come away!" And I hurried on so swiftly that my little maid was surprised.

It was not until we were shut up in our cabin-room and I had had time to take breath that I began to think why I had made such haste. In one of the sunburnt faces I had recognized Mr. Allan Woodcourt, and I had been afraid of his recognizing me. I had been unwilling that he should see my altered looks. I had been taken by surprise, and my courage had quite failed me.

But I knew this would not do, and I now said to myself, "My dear, there is no reason—there is and there can be no reason at all—why it should be worse for you now than it ever has been. What you were last month, you are to-day; you are no worse, you are no better. This is not your resolution; call it up, Esther, call it up!" I was in a great tremble—with running—and at first was quite unable to calm myself; but I got better, and I was very glad to know it.

The party came to the hotel. I heard them speaking on the staircase. I was sure it was the same gentlemen because I knew their voices again—I mean I knew Mr. Woodcourt's. It would still have been a great relief to me to have gone away without making myself known, but I was determined not to do so. "No, my dear, no. No, no, no!"

I untied my bonnet and put my veil half up—I think I mean half down, but it matters very little—and wrote on one of my cards that I happened to be there with Mr. Richard Carstone, and I sent it in to Mr. Woodcourt. He came immediately. I told him I was rejoiced to be by chance among the first to welcome him home to England. And I saw that he was very sorry for me.

"You have been in shipwreck and peril since you left us, Mr. Woodcourt," said I, "but we can hardly call that a misfortune which enabled you to be so useful and so brave. We read of it with the truest interest. It first came to my knowledge through your old patient, poor Miss Flite, when I was recovering from my severe illness."

"Ah! Little Miss Flite!" he said. "She lives the same life yet?"

"Just the same."

I was so comfortable with myself now as not to mind the veil and to be able to put it aside.

"Her gratitude to you, Mr. Woodcourt, is delightful. She is a most affectionate creature, as I have reason to say."

"You—you have found her so?" he returned. "I—I am glad of that." He was so very sorry for me that he could scarcely speak.

"I assure you," said I, "that I was deeply touched by her sympathy and pleasure at the time I have referred to."

"I was grieved to hear that you had been very ill."

"I was very ill."

"But you have quite recovered?"

"I have quite recovered my health and my cheerfulness," said I. "You know how good my guardian is and what a happy life we lead, and I have everything to be thankful for and nothing in the world to desire."

I felt as if he had greater commiseration for me than I had ever had for myself. It inspired me with new fortitude and new calmness to find that it was I who was under the necessity of reassuring him. I spoke to him of his voyage out and home, and of his future plans, and of his probable return to India. He said that was very doubtful. He had not found himself more favoured by fortune there than here. He had gone out a poor ship's surgeon and had come home nothing better. While we were talking, and when I was glad to believe that I had alleviated (if I may use such a term) the shock he had had in seeing me, Richard came in. He had heard downstairs who was with me, and they met with cordial pleasure.

I saw that after their first greetings were over, and when they spoke of Richard's career, Mr. Woodcourt had a perception that all was not going well with him. He frequently glanced at his face as if there were something in it that gave him pain, and more than once he looked towards me as though he sought to ascertain whether I knew what the truth was. Yet Richard was in one of his sanguine states and in good spirits and was thoroughly pleased to see Mr. Woodcourt again, whom he had always liked.

Richard proposed that we all should go to London together; but Mr. Woodcourt, having to remain by his ship a little longer, could not join us. He dined with us, however, at an early hour, and became so much more like what he used to be that I was still more at peace to think I had been able to soften his regrets. Yet his mind was not relieved of Richard. When the coach was almost ready and Richard ran down to look after his luggage, he spoke to me about him.

I was not sure that I had a right to lay his whole story open, but I referred in a few words to his estrangement from Mr Jarndyce and to his being entangled in the ill-fated Chancery suit. Mr. Woodcourt listened with interest and expressed his regret.

"I saw you observe him rather closely," said I, "Do you think him so changed?"

"He is changed," he returned, shaking his head.

I felt the blood rush into my face for the first time, but it was only an instantaneous emotion. I turned my head aside, and it was gone.

"It is not," said Mr. Woodcourt, "his being so much younger or older, or thinner or fatter, or paler or ruddier, as there being upon his face such a singular expression. I never saw so remarkable a look in a young person. One cannot say that it is all anxiety or all weariness; yet it is both, and like ungrown despair."

"You do not think he is ill?" said I.

No. He looked robust in body.

"That he cannot be at peace in mind, we have too much reason to know," I proceeded. "Mr. Woodcourt, you are going to London?"

"To-morrow or the next day."

"There is nothing Richard wants so much as a friend. He always liked you. Pray see him when you get there. Pray help him sometimes with your companionship if you can. You do not know of what service it might be. You cannot think how Ada, and Mr. Jarndyce, and even I—how we should all thank you, Mr. Woodcourt!"

"Miss Summerson," he said, more moved than he had been from the first, "before heaven, I will be a true friend to him! I will accept him as a trust, and it shall be a sacred one!"

"God bless you!" said I, with my eyes filling fast; but I thought they might, when it was not for myself. "Ada loves him—we all love him, but Ada loves him as we cannot. I will tell her what you say. Thank you, and God bless you, in her name!"

Richard came back as we finished exchanging these hurried words and gave me his arm to take me to the coach.

"Woodcourt," he said, unconscious with what application, "pray let us meet in London!"

"Meet?" returned the other. "I have scarcely a friend there now but you. Where shall I find you?"

"Why, I must get a lodging of some sort," said Richard, pondering. "Say at Vholes's, Symond's Inn."

"Good! Without loss of time."

They shook hands heartily. When I was seated in the coach and Richard was yet standing in the street, Mr. Woodcourt laid his friendly hand on Richard's shoulder and looked at me. I understood him and waved mine in thanks.

And in his last look as we drove away, I saw that he was very sorry for me. I was glad to see it. I felt for my old self as the dead may feel if they ever revisit these scenes. I was glad to be tenderly remembered, to be gently pitied, not to be quite forgotten.

CHAPTER XLVI. Stop Him!

Darkness rests upon Tom-All-Alone's. Dilating and dilating since the sun went down last night, it has gradually swelled until it fills every void in the place. For a time there were some dungeon lights burning, as the lamp of life hums in Tom-all-Alone's, heavily, heavily, in the nauseous air, and winking—as that lamp, too, winks in Tom-all-Alone's—at many horrible things. But they are blotted out. The moon has eyed Tom with a dull cold stare, as admitting some puny emulation of herself in his desert region unfit for life and blasted by volcanic fires; but she has passed on and is gone. The blackest nightmare in the infernal stables grazes on Tom-all-Alone's, and Tom is fast asleep.

Much mighty speech-making there has been, both in and out of Parliament, concerning Tom, and much wrathful disputation how Tom shall be got right. Whether he shall be put into the main road by constables, or by beadles, or by bell-ringing, or by force of figures, or by correct principles of taste, or by high church, or by low church, or by no church; whether he shall be set to splitting trusses of polemical straws with the crooked knife of his mind or whether he shall be put to stone-breaking instead. In the midst of which dust and noise there is but one thing perfectly clear, to wit, that Tom only may and can, or shall and will, be reclaimed according to somebody's theory but nobody's practice. And in the hopeful meantime, Tom goes to perdition head foremost in his old determined spirit.

But he has his revenge. Even the winds are his messengers, and they serve him in these hours of darkness. There is not a drop of Tom's corrupted blood but propagates infection and contagion somewhere. It shall pollute, this very night, the choice stream (in which chemists on analysis would find the genuine nobility) of a Norman house, and his Grace shall not be able to say nay to the infamous alliance. There is not an atom of Tom's slime, not a cubic inch of any pestilential gas in which he lives, not one obscenity or degradation about him, not an ignorance, not a wickedness, not a brutality of his committing, but shall work its retribution through every order of society up to the proudest of the proud and to the highest of the high. Verily, what with tainting, plundering, and spoiling, Tom has his revenge.

It is a moot point whether Tom-all-Alone's be uglier by day or by night, but on the argument that the more that is seen of it the more shocking it must be, and that no part of it left to the imagination is at all likely to be made so bad as the reality, day carries it. The day begins to break now; and in truth it might be better for the national glory even that the sun should sometimes set upon the British dominions than that it should ever rise upon so vile a wonder as Tom.

A brown sunburnt gentleman, who appears in some inaptitude for sleep to be wandering abroad rather than counting the hours on a restless pillow, strolls hitherward at this quiet time. Attracted by curiosity, he often pauses and looks about him, up and down the miserable by-ways. Nor is he merely curious, for in his bright dark eye there is compassionate interest; and as he looks here and there, he seems to understand such wretchedness and to have studied it before.

On the banks of the stagnant channel of mud which is the main street of Tom-all-Alone's, nothing is to be seen but the crazy houses, shut up and silent. No waking creature save himself appears except in one direction, where he sees the solitary figure of a woman sitting on a door-step. He walks that way. Approaching, he observes that she has journeyed a long distance and is footsore and travel-stained. She sits on the door-step in the manner of one who is waiting, with her elbow on her knee and her head upon her hand. Beside her is a canvas bag, or bundle, she has carried. She is dozing probably, for she gives no heed to his steps as he comes toward her.

The broken footway is so narrow that when Allan Woodcourt comes to where the woman sits, he has to turn into the road to pass her. Looking down at her face, his eye meets hers, and he stops.

"What is the matter?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Can't you make them hear? Do you want to be let in?"

"I'm walting till they get up at another house—a lodging-house—not here," the woman patiently returns. "I'm waiting here because there will be sun here presently to warm me."

"I am afraid you are tired. I am sorry to see you sitting in the street."

"Thank you, sir. It don't matter."

A habit in him of speaking to the poor and of avoiding patronage or condescension or childishness (which is the favourite device, many people deeming it quite a subtlety to talk to them like little spelling books) has put him on good terms with the woman easily.

"Let me look at your forehead," he says, bending down. "I am a doctor. Don't be afraid. I wouldn't hurt you for the world."

He knows that by touching her with his skilful and accustomed hand he can soothe her yet more readily. She makes a slight objection, saying, "It's nothing"; but he has scarcely laid his fingers on the wounded place when she lifts it up to the light.

"Aye! A bad bruise, and the skin sadly broken. This must be very sore."

"It do ache a little, sir," returns the woman with a started tear upon her cheek.

"Let me try to make it more comfortable. My handkerchief won't hurt you."

"Oh, dear no, sir, I'm sure of that!"

He cleanses the injured place and dries it, and having carefully examined it and gently pressed it with the palm of his hand, takes a small case from his pocket, dresses it, and binds it up. While he is thus employed, he says, after laughing at his establishing a surgery in the street, "And so your husband is a brickmaker?"

"How do you know that, sir?" asks the woman, astonished.

"Why, I suppose so from the colour of the clay upon your bag and on your dress. And I know brickmakers go about working at piecework in different places. And I am sorry to say I have known them cruel to their wives too."

The woman hastily lifts up her eyes as if she would deny that her injury is referable to such a cause. But feeling the hand upon her forehead, and seeing his busy and composed face, she quietly drops them again.

"Where is he now?" asks the surgeon.

"He got into trouble last night, sir; but he'll look for me at the lodging-house."

"He will get into worse trouble if he often misuses his large and heavy hand as he has misused it here. But you forgive him, brutal as he is, and I say no more of him, except that I wish he deserved it. You have no young child?"

The woman shakes her head. "One as I calls mine, sir, but it's Liz's."

"Your own is dead. I see! Poor little thing!"

By this time he has finished and is putting up his case. "I suppose you have some settled home. Is it far from here?" he asks, good-humouredly making light of what he has done as she gets up and curtsys.

"It's a good two or three and twenty mile from here, sir. At Saint Albans. You know Saint Albans, sir? I thought you gave a start like, as if you did."

"Yes, I know something of it. And now I will ask you a question in return. Have you money for your lodging?"

"Yes, sir," she says, "really and truly." And she shows it. He tells her, in acknowledgment of her many subdued thanks, that she is very welcome, gives her good day, and walks away. Tom-all-Alone's is still asleep, and nothing is astir.

Yes, something is! As he retraces his way to the point from which he descried the woman at a distance sitting on the step, he sees a ragged figure coming very cautiously along, crouching close to the soiled walls—which the wretchedest figure might as well avoid—and furtively thrusting a hand before it. It is the figure of a youth whose face is hollow and whose eyes have an emaciated glare. He is so intent on getting along unseen that even the apparition of a stranger in whole garments does not tempt him to look back. He shades his face with his ragged elbow as he passes on the other side of the way, and goes shrinking and creeping on with his anxious hand before him and his shapeless clothes hanging in shreds. Clothes made for what purpose, or of what material, it would be impossible to say. They look, in colour and in substance, like a bundle of rank leaves of swampy growth that rotted long ago.

Allan Woodcourt pauses to look after him and note all this, with a shadowy belief that he has seen the boy before. He cannot recall how or where, but there is some association in his mind with such a form. He imagines that he must have seen it in some hospital or refuge, still, cannot make out why it comes with any special force on his remembrance.

He is gradually emerging from Tom-all-Alone's in the morning light, thinking about it, when he hears running feet behind him, and looking round, sees the boy scouring towards him at great speed, followed by the woman.

"Stop him, stop him!" cries the woman, almost breathless. "Stop him, sir!"

He darts across the road into the boy's path, but the boy is quicker than he, makes a curve, ducks, dives under his hands, comes up half-a-dozen yards beyond him, and scours away again. Still the woman follows, crying, "Stop him, sir, pray stop him!" Allan, not knowing but that he has just robbed her of her money, follows in chase and runs so hard that he runs the boy down a dozen times, but each time he repeats the curve, the duck, the dive, and scours away again. To strike at him on any of these occasions would be to fell and disable him, but the pursuer cannot resolve to do that, and so the grimly ridiculous pursuit continues. At last the fugitive, hard-pressed, takes to a narrow passage and a court which has no thoroughfare. Here, against a hoarding of decaying timber, he is brought to bay and tumbles down, lying gasping at his pursuer, who stands and gasps at him until the woman comes up.

"Oh, you, Jo!" cries the woman. "What? I have found you at last!"

"Jo," repeats Allan, looking at him with attention, "Jo! Stay. To be sure! I recollect this lad some time ago being brought before the coroner."

"Yes, I see you once afore at the inkwhich," whimpers Jo. "What of that? Can't you never let such an unfortnet as me alone? An't I unfortnet enough for you yet? How unfortnet do you want me fur to be? I've been a-chivied and a-chivied, fust by one on you and nixt by another on you, till I'm worritted to skins and bones. The inkwhich warn't MY fault. I done nothink. He wos wery good to me, he wos; he wos the only one I knowed to speak to, as ever come across my crossing. It ain't wery likely I should want him to be inkwhiched. I only wish I wos, myself. I don't know why I don't go and make a hole in the water, I'm sure I don't."

He says it with such a pitiable air, and his grimy tears appear so real, and he lies in the corner up against the hoarding so like a growth of fungus or any unwholesome excrescence produced there in neglect and impurity, that Allan Woodcourt is softened towards him. He says to the woman, "Miserable creature, what has he done?"

To which she only replies, shaking her head at the prostrate figure more amazedly than angrily, "Oh, you Jo, you Jo. I have found you at last!"

"What has he done?" says Allan. "Has he robbed you?"

"No, sir, no. Robbed me? He did nothing but what was kind-hearted by me, and that's the wonder of it."

Allan looks from Jo to the woman, and from the woman to Jo, waiting for one of them to unravel the riddle.

"But he was along with me, sir," says the woman. "Oh, you Jo! He was along with me, sir, down at Saint Albans, ill, and a young lady, Lord bless her for a good friend to me, took pity on him when I durstn't, and took him home—"

Allan shrinks back from him with a sudden horror.

"Yes, sir, yes. Took him home, and made him comfortable, and like a thankless monster he ran away in the night and never has been seen or heard of since till I set eyes on him just now. And that young lady that was such a pretty dear caught his illness, lost her beautiful looks, and wouldn't hardly be known for the same young lady now if it wasn't for her angel temper, and her pretty shape, and her sweet voice. Do you know it? You ungrateful wretch, do you know that this is all along of you and of her goodness to you?" demands the woman, beginning to rage at him as she recalls it and breaking into passionate tears.

The boy, in rough sort stunned by what he hears, falls to smearing his dirty forehead with his dirty palm, and to staring at the ground, and to shaking from head to foot until the crazy hoarding against which he leans rattles.

Allan restrains the woman, merely by a quiet gesture, but effectually.

"Richard told me—" He falters. "I mean, I have heard of this—don't mind me for a moment, I will speak presently."

He turns away and stands for a while looking out at the covered passage. When he comes back, he has recovered his composure, except that he contends against an avoidance of the boy, which is so very remarkable that it absorbs the woman's attention.

"You hear what she says. But get up, get up!"

Jo, shaking and chattering, slowly rises and stands, after the manner of his tribe in a difficulty, sideways against the hoarding, resting one of his high shoulders against it and covertly rubbing his right hand over his left and his left foot over his right.

"You hear what she says, and I know it's true. Have you been here ever since?"

"Wishermaydie if I seen Tom-all-Alone's till this blessed morning," replies Jo hoarsely.

"Why have you come here now?"

Jo looks all round the confined court, looks at his questioner no higher than the knees, and finally answers, "I don't know how to do nothink, and I can't get nothink to do. I'm wery poor and ill, and I thought I'd come back here when there warn't nobody about, and lay down and hide somewheres as I knows on till arter dark, and then go and beg a trifle of Mr. Snagsby. He wos allus willin fur to give me somethink he wos, though Mrs. Snagsby she was allus a-chivying on me—like everybody everywheres."

"Where have you come from?"

Jo looks all round the court again, looks at his questioner's knees again, and concludes by laying his profile against the hoarding in a sort of resignation.

"Did you hear me ask you where you have come from?"

"Tramp then," says Jo.

"Now tell me," proceeds Allan, making a strong effort to overcome his repugnance, going very near to him, and leaning over him with an expression of confidence, "tell me how it came about that you left that house when the good young lady had been so unfortunate as to pity you and take you home."

Jo suddenly comes out of his resignation and excitedly declares, addressing the woman, that he never known about the young lady, that he never heern about it, that he never went fur to hurt her, that he would sooner have hurt his own self, that he'd sooner have had his unfortnet ed chopped off than ever gone a-nigh her, and that she wos wery good to him, she wos. Conducting himself throughout as if in his poor fashion he really meant it, and winding up with some very miserable sobs.

Allan Woodcourt sees that this is not a sham. He constrains himself to touch him. "Come, Jo. Tell me."

"No. I dustn't," says Jo, relapsing into the profile state. "I dustn't, or I would."

"But I must know," returns the other, "all the same. Come, Jo."

After two or three such adjurations, Jo lifts up his head again, looks round the court again, and says in a low voice, "Well, I'll tell you something. I was took away. There!"

"Took away? In the night?"

"Ah!" Very apprehensive of being overheard, Jo looks about him and even glances up some ten feet at the top of the hoarding and through the cracks in it lest the object of his distrust should be looking over or hidden on the other side.

"Who took you away?"

"I dustn't name him," says Jo. "I dustn't do it, sir.

"But I want, in the young lady's name, to know. You may trust me. No one else shall hear."

"Ah, but I don't know," replies Jo, shaking his head fearfully, "as he DON'T hear."

"Why, he is not in this place."

"Oh, ain't he though?" says Jo. "He's in all manner of places, all at wanst."

Allan looks at him in perplexity, but discovers some real meaning and good faith at the bottom of this bewildering reply. He patiently awaits an explicit answer; and Jo, more baffled by his patience than by anything else, at last desperately whispers a name in his ear.

"Aye!" says Allan. "Why, what had you been doing?"

"Nothink, sir. Never done nothink to get myself into no trouble, 'sept in not moving on and the inkwhich. But I'm a-moving on now. I'm a-moving on to the berryin ground—that's the move as I'm up to."

"No, no, we will try to prevent that. But what did he do with you?"

"Put me in a horsepittle," replied Jo, whispering, "till I was discharged, then giv me a little money—four half-bulls, wot you may call half-crowns—and ses 'Hook it! Nobody wants you here,' he ses. 'You hook it. You go and tramp,' he ses. 'You move on,' he ses. 'Don't let me ever see you nowheres within forty mile of London, or you'll repent it.' So I shall, if ever he doos see me, and he'll see me if I'm above ground," concludes Jo, nervously repeating all his former precautions and investigations.

Allan considers a little, then remarks, turning to the woman but keeping an encouraging eye on Jo, "He is not so ungrateful as you supposed. He had a reason for going away, though it was an insufficient one."

"Thankee, sir, thankee!" exclaims Jo. "There now! See how hard you wos upon me. But ony you tell the young lady wot the genlmn ses, and it's all right. For YOU wos wery good to me too, and I knows it."

"Now, Jo," says Allan, keeping his eye upon him, "come with me and I will find you a better place than this to lie down and hide in. If I take one side of the way and you the other to avoid observation, you will not run away, I know very well, if you make me a promise."

"I won't, not unless I wos to see HIM a-coming, sir."

"Very well. I take your word. Half the town is getting up by this time, and the whole town will be broad awake in another hour. Come along.

Good day again, my good woman."

"Good day again, sir, and I thank you kindly many times again."

She has been sitting on her bag, deeply attentive, and now rises and takes it up. Jo, repeating, "Ony you tell the young lady as I never went fur to hurt her and wot the genlmn ses!" nods and shambles and shivers, and smears and blinks, and half laughs and half cries, a farewell to her, and takes his creeping way along after Allan Woodcourt, close to the houses on the opposite side of the street. In this order, the two come up out of Tom-all-Alone's into the broad rays of the sunlight and the purer air.

CHAPTER XLVII. Jo's Will

As Allan Woodcourt and Jo proceed along the streets where the high church spires and the distances are so near and clear in the morning light that the city itself seems renewed by rest, Allan revolves in his mind how and where he shall bestow his companion. "It surely is a strange fact," he considers, "that in the heart of a civilized world this creature in human form should be more difficult to dispose of than an unowned dog." But it is none the less a fact because of its strangeness, and the difficulty remains.

At first he looks behind him often to assure himself that Jo is still really following. But look where he will, he still beholds him close to the opposite houses, making his way with his wary hand from brick to brick and from door to door, and often, as he creeps along, glancing over at him watchfully. Soon satisfied that the last thing in his thoughts is to give him the slip, Allan goes on, considering with a less divided attention what he shall do.

A breakfast-stall at a street-corner suggests the first thing to be done. He stops there, looks round, and beckons Jo. Jo crosses and comes halting and shuffling up, slowly scooping the knuckles of his right hand round and round in the hollowed palm of his left, kneading dirt with a natural pestle and mortar. What is a dainty repast to Jo is then set before him, and he begins to gulp the coffee and to gnaw the bread and butter, looking anxiously about him in all directions as he eats and drinks, like a scared animal.

But he is so sick and miserable that even hunger has abandoned him. "I thought I was amost a-starvin, sir," says Jo, soon putting down his food, "but I don't know nothink—not even that. I don't care for eating wittles nor yet for drinking on 'em." And Jo stands shivering and looking at the breakfast wonderingly.

Allan Woodcourt lays his hand upon his pulse and on his chest. "Draw breath, Jo!" "It draws," says Jo, "as heavy as a cart." He might add, "And rattles like it," but he only mutters, "I'm a-moving on, sir."

Allan looks about for an apothecary's shop. There is none at hand, but a tavern does as well or better. He obtains a little measure of wine and gives the lad a portion of it very carefully. He begins to revive almost as soon as it passes his lips. "We may repeat that dose, Jo," observes Allan after watching him with his attentive face. "So! Now we will take five minutes' rest, and then go on again."

Leaving the boy sitting on the bench of the breakfast-stall, with his back against an iron railing, Allan Woodcourt paces up and down in the early sunshine, casting an occasional look towards him without appearing to watch him. It requires no discernment to perceive that he is warmed and refreshed. If a face so shaded can brighten, his face brightens somewhat; and by little and little he eats the slice of bread he had so hopelessly laid down. Observant of these signs of improvement, Allan engages him in conversation and elicits to his no small wonder the adventure of the lady in the veil, with all its consequences. Jo slowly munches as he slowly tells it. When he has finished his story and his bread, they go on again.

Intending to refer his difficulty in finding a temporary place of refuge for the boy to his old patient, zealous little Miss Flite, Allan leads the way to the court where he and Jo first foregathered. But all is changed at the rag and bottle shop; Miss Flite no longer lodges there; it is shut up; and a hard-featured female, much obscured by dust, whose age is a problem, but who is indeed no other than the interesting Judy, is tart and spare in her replies. These sufficing, however, to inform the visitor that Miss Flite and her birds are domiciled with a Mrs. Blinder, in Bell Yard, he repairs to that neighbouring place, where Miss Flite (who rises early that she may be punctual at the divan of justice held by her excellent friend the Chancellor) comes running downstairs with tears of welcome and with open arms.

"My dear physician!" cries Miss Flite. "My meritorious, distinguished, honourable officer!" She uses some odd expressions, but is as cordial and full of heart as sanity itself can be—more so than it often is. Allan, very patient with her, waits until she has no more raptures to express, then points out Jo, trembling in a doorway, and tells her how he comes there.

"Where can I lodge him hereabouts for the present? Now, you have a fund of knowledge and good sense and can advise me."

Miss Flite, mighty proud of the compliment, sets herself to consider; but it is long before a bright thought occurs to her. Mrs. Blinder is entirely let, and she herself occupies poor Gridley's room. "Gridley!" exclaims Miss Flite, clapping her hands after a twentieth repetition of this remark. "Gridley! To be sure! Of course! My dear physician! General George will help us out."

It is hopeless to ask for any information about General George, and would be, though Miss Flite had not akeady run upstairs to put on her pinched bonnet and her poor little shawl and to arm herself with her reticule of documents. But as she informs her physician in her disjointed manner on coming down in full array that General George, whom she often calls upon, knows her dear Fitz Jarndyce and takes a great interest in all connected with her, Allan is induced to think that they may be in the right way. So he tells Jo, for his encouragement, that this walking about will soon be over now; and they repair to the general's. Fortunately it is not far.

From the exterior of George's Shooting Gallery, and the long entry, and the bare perspective beyond it, Allan Woodcourt augurs well. He also descries promise in the figure of Mr. George himself, striding towards them in his morning exercise with his pipe in his mouth, no stock on, and his muscular arms, developed by broadsword and dumbbell, weightily asserting themselves through his light shirt-sleeves.

"Your servant, sir," says Mr. George with a military salute. Good-humouredly smiling all over his broad forehead up into his crisp hair, he then defers to Miss Flite, as, with great stateliness, and at some length, she performs the courtly ceremony of presentation. He winds it up with another "Your servant, sir!" and another salute.

"Excuse me, sir. A sailor, I believe?" says Mr. George.

"I am proud to find I have the air of one," returns Allan; "but I am only a sea-going doctor."

"Indeed, sir! I should have thought you was a regular blue-jacket myself."

Allan hopes Mr. George will forgive his intrusion the more readily on that account, and particularly that he will not lay aside his pipe, which, in his politeness, he has testified some intention of doing. "You are very good, sir," returns the trooper. "As I know by experience that it's not disagreeable to Miss Flite, and since it's equally agreeable to yourself—" and finishes the sentence by putting it between his lips again. Allan proceeds to tell him all he knows about Jo, unto which the trooper listens with a grave face.

"And that's the lad, sir, is it?" he inquires, looking along the entry to where Jo stands staring up at the great letters on the whitewashed front, which have no meaning in his eyes.

"That's he," says Allan. "And, Mr. George, I am in this difficulty about him. I am unwilling to place him in a hospital, even if I could procure him immediate admission, because I foresee that he would not stay there many hours if he could be so much as got there. The same objection applies to a workhouse, supposing I had the patience to be evaded and shirked, and handed about from post to pillar in trying to get him into one, which is a system that I don't take kindly to."

"No man does, sir," returns Mr. George.

"I am convinced that he would not remain in either place, because he is possessed by an extraordinary terror of this person who ordered him to keep out of the way; in his ignorance, he believes this person to be everywhere, and cognizant of everything."

"I ask your pardon, sir," says Mr. George. "But you have not mentioned that party's name. Is it a secret, sir?"

"The boy makes it one. But his name is Bucket."

"Bucket the detective, sir?"

"The same man."

"The man is known to me, sir," returns the trooper after blowing out a cloud of smoke and squaring his chest, "and the boy is so far correct that he undoubtedly is a—rum customer." Mr. George smokes with a profound meaning after this and surveys Miss Flite in silence.

"Now, I wish Mr. Jarndyce and Miss Summerson at least to know that this Jo, who tells so strange a story, has reappeared, and to have it in their power to speak with him if they should desire to do so. Therefore I want to get him, for the present moment, into any poor lodging kept by decent people where he would be admitted. Decent people and Jo, Mr. George," says Allan, following the direction of the trooper's eyes along the entry, "have not been much acquainted, as you see. Hence the difficulty. Do you happen to know any one in this neighbourhood who would receive him for a while on my paying for him beforehand?"

As he puts the question, he becomes aware of a dirty-faced little man standing at the trooper's elbow and looking up, with an oddly twisted figure and countenance, into the trooper's face. After a few more puffs at his pipe, the trooper looks down askant at the little man, and the little man winks up at the trooper.

"Well, sir," says Mr. George, "I can assure you that I would willingly be knocked on the head at any time if it would be at all agreeable to Miss Summerson, and consequently I esteem it a privilege to do that young lady any service, however small. We are naturally in the vagabond way here, sir, both myself and Phil. You see what the place is. You are welcome to a quiet corner of it for the boy if the same would meet your views. No charge made, except for rations. We are not in a flourishing state of circumstances here, sir. We are liable to be tumbled out neck and crop at a moment's notice. However, sir, such as the place is, and so long as it lasts, here it is at your service."

With a comprehensive wave of his pipe, Mr. George places the whole building at his visitor's disposal.

"I take it for granted, sir," he adds, "you being one of the medical staff, that there is no present infection about this unfortunate subject?"

Allan is quite sure of it.

"Because, sir," says Mr. George, shaking his head sorrowfully, "we have had enough of that."

His tone is no less sorrowfully echoed by his new acquaintance. "Still I am bound to tell you," observes Allan after repeating his former assurance, "that the boy is deplorably low and reduced and that he may be—I do not say that he is—too far gone to recover."

"Do you consider him in present danger, sir?" inquires the trooper.

"Yes, I fear so."

"Then, sir," returns the trooper in a decisive manner, "it appears to me—being naturally in the vagabond way myself—that the sooner he comes out of the street, the better. You, Phil! Bring him in!"

Mr. Squod tacks out, all on one side, to execute the word of command; and the trooper, having smoked his pipe, lays it by. Jo is brought in. He is not one of Mrs. Pardiggle's Tockahoopo Indians; he is not one of Mrs. Jellyby's lambs, being wholly unconnected with Borrioboola-Gha; he is not softened by distance and unfamiliarity; he is not a genuine foreign-grown savage; he is the ordinary home-made article. Dirty, ugly, disagreeable to all the senses, in body a common creature of the common streets, only in soul a heathen. Homely filth begrimes him, homely parasites devour him, homely sores are in him, homely rags are on him; native ignorance, the growth of English soil and climate, sinks his immortal nature lower than the beasts that perish. Stand forth, Jo, in uncompromising colours! From the sole of thy foot to the crown of thy head, there is nothing interesting about thee.

He shuffles slowly into Mr. George's gallery and stands huddled together in a bundle, looking all about the floor. He seems to know that they have an inclination to shrink from him, partly for what he is and partly for what he has caused. He, too, shrinks from them. He is not of the same order of things, not of the same place in creation. He is of no order and no place, neither of the beasts nor of humanity.

"Look here, Jo!" says Allan. "This is Mr. George."

Jo searches the floor for some time longer, then looks up for a moment, and then down again.

"He is a kind friend to you, for he is going to give you lodging room here."

Jo makes a scoop with one hand, which is supposed to be a bow. After a little more consideration and some backing and changing of the foot on which he rests, he mutters that he is "wery thankful."

"You are quite safe here. All you have to do at present is to be obedient and to get strong. And mind you tell us the truth here, whatever you do, Jo."

"Wishermaydie if I don't, sir," says Jo, reverting to his favourite declaration. "I never done nothink yit, but wot you knows on, to get myself into no trouble. I never was in no other trouble at all, sir, 'sept not knowin' nothink and starwation."

"I believe it, now attend to Mr. George. I see he is going to speak to you."

"My intention merely was, sir," observes Mr. George, amazingly broad and upright, "to point out to him where he can lie down and get a thorough good dose of sleep. Now, look here." As the trooper speaks, he conducts them to the other end of the gallery and opens one of the little cabins. "There you are, you see! Here is a mattress, and here you may rest, on good behaviour, as long as Mr., I ask your pardon, sir"—he refers apologetically to the card Allan has given him—"Mr. Woodcourt pleases. Don't you be alarmed if you hear shots; they'll be aimed at the target, and not you. Now, there's another thing I would recommend, sir," says the trooper, turning to his visitor. "Phil, come here!"

Phil bears down upon them according to his usual tactics. "Here is a man, sir, who was found, when a baby, in the gutter. Consequently, it is to be expected that he takes a natural interest in this poor creature. You do, don't you, Phil?"

"Certainly and surely I do, guv'ner," is Phil's reply.

"Now I was thinking, sir," says Mr. George in a martial sort of confidence, as if he were giving his opinion in a council of war at a drum-head, "that if this man was to take him to a bath and was to lay out a few shillings in getting him one or two coarse articles—"

"Mr. George, my considerate friend," returns Allan, taking out his purse, "it is the very favour I would have asked."

Phil Squod and Jo are sent out immediately on this work of improvement. Miss Flite, quite enraptured by her success, makes the best of her way to court, having great fears that otherwise her friend the Chancellor may be uneasy about her or may give the judgment she has so long expected in her absence, and observing "which you know, my dear physician, and general, after so many years, would be too absurdly unfortunate!" Allan takes the opportunity of going out to procure some restorative medicines, and obtaining them near at hand, soon returns to find the trooper walking up and down the gallery, and to fall into step and walk with him.

"I take it, sir," says Mr. George, "that you know Miss Summerson pretty well?"

Yes, it appears.

"Not related to her, sir?"

No, it appears.

"Excuse the apparent curiosity," says Mr. George. "It seemed to me probable that you might take more than a common interest in this poor creature because Miss Summerson had taken that unfortunate interest in him. 'Tis MY case, sir, I assure you."

"And mine, Mr. George."

The trooper looks sideways at Allan's sunburnt cheek and bright dark eye, rapidly measures his height and build, and seems to approve of him.

"Since you have been out, sir, I have been thinking that I unquestionably know the rooms in Lincoln's Inn Fields, where Bucket took the lad, according to his account. Though he is not acquainted with the name, I can help you to it. It's Tulkinghorn. That's what it is."

Allan looks at him inquiringly, repeating the name.

"Tulkinghorn. That's the name, sir. I know the man, and know him to have been in communication with Bucket before, respecting a deceased person who had given him offence. I know the man, sir. To my sorrow."

Allan naturally asks what kind of man he is.

"What kind of man! Do you mean to look at?"

"I think I know that much of him. I mean to deal with. Generally, what kind of man?"

"Why, then I'll tell you, sir," returns the trooper, stopping short and folding his arms on his square chest so angrily that his face fires and flushes all over; "he is a confoundedly bad kind of man. He is a slow-torturing kind of man. He is no more like flesh and blood than a rusty old carbine is. He is a kind of man—by George!—that has caused me more restlessness, and more uneasiness, and more dissatisfaction with myself than all other men put together. That's the kind of man Mr. Tulkinghorn is!"

"I am sorry," says Allan, "to have touched so sore a place."

"Sore?" The trooper plants his legs wider apart, wets the palm of his broad right hand, and lays it on the imaginary moustache. "It's no fault of yours, sir; but you shall judge. He has got a power over me. He is the man I spoke of just now as being able to tumble me out of this place neck and crop. He keeps me on a constant see-saw. He won't hold off, and he won't come on. If I have a payment to make him, or time to ask him for, or anything to go to him about, he don't see me, don't hear me—passes me on to Melchisedech's in Clifford's Inn, Melchisedech's in Clifford's Inn passes me back again to him—he keeps me prowling and dangling about him as if I was made of the same stone as himself. Why, I spend half my life now, pretty well, loitering and dodging about his door. What does he care? Nothing. Just as much as the rusty old carbine I have compared him to. He chafes and goads me till—Bah! Nonsense! I am forgetting myself. Mr. Woodcourt," the trooper resumes his march, "all I say is, he is an old man; but I am glad I shall never have the chance of setting spurs to my horse and riding at him in a fair field. For if I had that chance, in one of the humours he drives me into—he'd go down, sir!"

Mr. George has been so excited that he finds it necessary to wipe his forehead on his shirt-sleeve. Even while he whistles his impetuosity away with the national anthem, some involuntary shakings of his head and heavings of his chest still linger behind, not to mention an occasional hasty adjustment with both hands of his open shirt-collar, as if it were scarcely open enough to prevent his being troubled by a choking sensation. In short, Allan Woodcourt has not much doubt about the going down of Mr. Tulkinghorn on the field referred to.

Jo and his conductor presently return, and Jo is assisted to his mattress by the careful Phil, to whom, after due administration of medicine by his own hands, Allan confides all needful means and instructions. The morning is by this time getting on apace. He repairs to his lodgings to dress and breakfast, and then, without seeking rest, goes away to Mr. Jarndyce to communicate his discovery.

With him Mr. Jarndyce returns alone, confidentially telling him that there are reasons for keeping this matter very quiet indeed and showing a serious interest in it. To Mr. Jarndyce, Jo repeats in substance what he said in the morning, without any material variation. Only that cart of his is heavier to draw, and draws with a hollower sound.

"Let me lay here quiet and not be chivied no more," falters Jo, "and be so kind any person as is a-passin nigh where I used fur to sleep, as jist to say to Mr. Sangsby that Jo, wot he known once, is a-moving on right forards with his duty, and I'll be wery thankful. I'd be more thankful than I am aready if it wos any ways possible for an unfortnet to be it."

He makes so many of these references to the law-stationer in the course of a day or two that Allan, after conferring with Mr. Jarndyce, good-naturedly resolves to call in Cook's Court, the rather, as the cart seems to be breaking down.

To Cook's Court, therefore, he repairs. Mr. Snagsby is behind his counter in his grey coat and sleeves, inspecting an indenture of several skins which has just come in from the engrosser's, an immense desert of law-hand and parchment, with here and there a resting-place of a few large letters to break the awful monotony and save the traveller from despair. Mr Snagsby puts up at one of these inky wells and greets the stranger with his cough of general preparation for business.

"You don't remember me, Mr. Snagsby?"

The stationer's heart begins to thump heavily, for his old apprehensions have never abated. It is as much as he can do to answer, "No, sir, I can't say I do. I should have considered—not to put too fine a point upon it—that I never saw you before, sir."

"Twice before," says Allan Woodcourt. "Once at a poor bedside, and once—"

"It's come at last!" thinks the afflicted stationer, as recollection breaks upon him. "It's got to a head now and is going to burst!" But he has sufficient presence of mind to conduct his visitor into the little counting-house and to shut the door.

"Are you a married man, sir?"

"No, I am not."

"Would you make the attempt, though single," says Mr. Snagsby in a melancholy whisper, "to speak as low as you can? For my little woman is a-listening somewheres, or I'll forfeit the business and five hundred pound!"

In deep dejection Mr. Snagsby sits down on his stool, with his back against his desk, protesting, "I never had a secret of my own, sir. I can't charge my memory with ever having once attempted to deceive my little woman on my own account since she named the day. I wouldn't have done it, sir. Not to put too fine a point upon it, I couldn't have done it, I dursn't have done it. Whereas, and nevertheless, I find myself wrapped round with secrecy and mystery, till my life is a burden to me."

His visitor professes his regret to hear it and asks him does he remember Jo. Mr. Snagsby answers with a suppressed groan, oh, don't he!

"You couldn't name an individual human being—except myself—that my little woman is more set and determined against than Jo," says Mr. Snagsby.

Allan asks why.

"Why?" repeats Mr. Snagsby, in his desperation clutching at the clump of hair at the back of his bald head. "How should I know why? But you are a single person, sir, and may you long be spared to ask a married person such a question!"

With this beneficent wish, Mr. Snagsby coughs a cough of dismal resignation and submits himself to hear what the visitor has to communicate.

"There again!" says Mr. Snagsby, who, between the earnestness of his feelings and the suppressed tones of his voice is discoloured in the face. "At it again, in a new direction! A certain person charges me, in the solemnest way, not to talk of Jo to any one, even my little woman. Then comes another certain person, in the person of yourself, and charges me, in an equally solemn way, not to mention Jo to that other certain person above all other persons. Why, this is a private asylum! Why, not to put too fine a point upon it, this is Bedlam, sir!" says Mr. Snagsby.

But it is better than he expected after all, being no explosion of the mine below him or deepening of the pit into which he has fallen. And being tender-hearted and affected by the account he hears of Jo's condition, he readily engages to "look round" as early in the evening as he can manage it quietly. He looks round very quietly when the evening comes, but it may turn out that Mrs. Snagsby is as quiet a manager as he.

Jo is very glad to see his old friend and says, when they are left alone, that he takes it uncommon kind as Mr. Sangsby should come so far out of his way on accounts of sich as him. Mr. Snagsby, touched by the spectacle before him, immediately lays upon the table half a crown, that magic balsam of his for all kinds of wounds.

"And how do you find yourself, my poor lad?" inquires the stationer with his cough of sympathy.

"I am in luck, Mr. Sangsby, I am," returns Jo, "and don't want for nothink. I'm more cumfbler nor you can't think. Mr. Sangsby! I'm wery sorry that I done it, but I didn't go fur to do it, sir."

The stationer softly lays down another half-crown and asks him what it is that he is sorry for having done.

"Mr. Sangsby," says Jo, "I went and giv a illness to the lady as wos and yit as warn't the t'other lady, and none of 'em never says nothink to me for having done it, on accounts of their being ser good and my having been s'unfortnet. The lady come herself and see me yesday, and she ses, 'Ah, Jo!' she ses. 'We thought we'd lost you, Jo!' she ses. And she sits down a-smilin so quiet, and don't pass a word nor yit a look upon me for having done it, she don't, and I turns agin the wall, I doos, Mr. Sangsby. And Mr. Jarnders, I see him a-forced to turn away his own self. And Mr. Woodcot, he come fur to giv me somethink fur to ease me, wot he's allus a-doin' on day and night, and wen he come a-bending over me and a-speakin up so bold, I see his tears a-fallin, Mr. Sangsby."

The softened stationer deposits another half-crown on the table. Nothing less than a repetition of that infallible remedy will relieve his feelings.

"Wot I was a-thinkin on, Mr. Sangsby," proceeds Jo, "wos, as you wos able to write wery large, p'raps?"

"Yes, Jo, please God," returns the stationer.

"Uncommon precious large, p'raps?" says Jo with eagerness.

"Yes, my poor boy."

Jo laughs with pleasure. "Wot I wos a-thinking on then, Mr. Sangsby, wos, that when I wos moved on as fur as ever I could go and couldn't he moved no furder, whether you might be so good p'raps as to write out, wery large so that any one could see it anywheres, as that I wos wery truly hearty sorry that I done it and that I never went fur to do it, and that though I didn't know nothink at all, I knowd as Mr. Woodcot once cried over it and wos allus grieved over it, and that I hoped as he'd be able to forgive me in his mind. If the writin could be made to say it wery large, he might."

"It shall say it, Jo. Very large."

Jo laughs again. "Thankee, Mr. Sangsby. It's wery kind of you, sir, and it makes me more cumfbler nor I was afore."

The meek little stationer, with a broken and unfinished cough, slips down his fourth half-crown—he has never been so close to a case requiring so many—and is fain to depart. And Jo and he, upon this little earth, shall meet no more. No more.

For the cart so hard to draw is near its journey's end and drags over stony ground. All round the clock it labours up the broken steps, shattered and worn. Not many times can the sun rise and behold it still upon its weary road.

Phil Squod, with his smoky gunpowder visage, at once acts as nurse and works as armourer at his little table in a corner, often looking round and saying with a nod of his green-baize cap and an encouraging elevation of his one eyebrow, "Hold up, my boy! Hold up!" There, too, is Mr. Jarndyce many a time, and Allan Woodcourt almost always, both thinking, much, how strangely fate has entangled this rough outcast in the web of very different lives. There, too, the trooper is a frequent visitor, filling the doorway with his athletic figure and, from his superfluity of life and strength, seeming to shed down temporary vigour upon Jo, who never fails to speak more robustly in answer to his cheerful words.

Jo is in a sleep or in a stupor to-day, and Allan Woodcourt, newly arrived, stands by him, looking down upon his wasted form. After a while he softly seats himself upon the bedside with his face towards him—just as he sat in the law-writer's room—and touches his chest and heart. The cart had very nearly given up, but labours on a little more.

The trooper stands in the doorway, still and silent. Phil has stopped in a low clinking noise, with his little hammer in his hand. Mr. Woodcourt looks round with that grave professional interest and attention on his face, and glancing significantly at the trooper, signs to Phil to carry his table out. When the little hammer is next used, there will be a speck of rust upon it.

"Well, Jo! What is the matter? Don't be frightened."

"I thought," says Jo, who has started and is looking round, "I thought I was in Tom-all-Alone's agin. Ain't there nobody here but you, Mr. Woodcot?"

"Nobody."

"And I ain't took back to Tom-all-Alone's. Am I, sir?"

"No." Jo closes his eyes, muttering, "I'm wery thankful."

After watching him closely a little while, Allan puts his mouth very near his ear and says to him in a low, distinct voice, "Jo! Did you ever know a prayer?"

"Never knowd nothink, sir."

"Not so much as one short prayer?"

"No, sir. Nothink at all. Mr. Chadbands he wos a-prayin wunst at Mr. Sangsby's and I heerd him, but he sounded as if he wos a-speakin to hisself, and not to me. He prayed a lot, but I couldn't make out nothink on it. Different times there was other genlmen come down Tom-all-Alone's a-prayin, but they all mostly sed as the t'other 'wuns prayed wrong, and all mostly sounded to be a-talking to theirselves, or a-passing blame on the t'others, and not a-talkin to us. WE never knowd nothink. I never knowd what it wos all about."

It takes him a long time to say this, and few but an experienced and attentive listener could hear, or, hearing, understand him. After a short relapse into sleep or stupor, he makes, of a sudden, a strong effort to get out of bed.

"Stay, Jo! What now?"

"It's time for me to go to that there berryin ground, sir," he returns with a wild look.

"Lie down, and tell me. What burying ground, Jo?"

"Where they laid him as wos wery good to me, wery good to me indeed, he wos. It's time fur me to go down to that there berryin ground, sir, and ask to be put along with him. I wants to go there and be berried. He used fur to say to me, 'I am as poor as you to-day, Jo,' he ses. I wants to tell him that I am as poor as him now and have come there to be laid along with him."

"By and by, Jo. By and by."

"Ah! P'raps they wouldn't do it if I wos to go myself. But will you promise to have me took there, sir, and laid along with him?"

"I will, indeed."

"Thankee, sir. Thankee, sir. They'll have to get the key of the gate afore they can take me in, for it's allus locked. And there's a step there, as I used for to clean with my broom. It's turned wery dark, sir. Is there any light a-comin?"

"It is coming fast, Jo."

Fast. The cart is shaken all to pieces, and the rugged road is very near its end.

"Jo, my poor fellow!"

"I hear you, sir, in the dark, but I'm a-gropin—a-gropin—let me catch hold of your hand."

"Jo, can you say what I say?"

"I'll say anythink as you say, sir, for I knows it's good."

"Our Father."

"Our Father! Yes, that's wery good, sir."

"Which art in heaven."

"Art in heaven—is the light a-comin, sir?"

"It is close at hand. Hallowed by thy name!"

"Hallowed be—thy—"

The light is come upon the dark benighted way. Dead!

Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, right reverends and wrong reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day.

CHAPTER XLVIII. Closing in

The place in Lincolnshire has shut its many eyes again, and the house in town is awake. In Lincolnshire the Dedlocks of the past doze in their picture-frames, and the low wind murmurs through the long drawing-room as if they were breathing pretty regularly. In town the Dedlocks of the present rattle in their fire-eyed carriages through the darkness of the night, and the Dedlock Mercuries, with ashes (or hair-powder) on their heads, symptomatic of their great humility, loll away the drowsy mornings in the little windows of the hall. The fashionable world—tremendous orb, nearly five miles round—is in full swing, and the solar system works respectfully at its appointed distances.

Where the throng is thickest, where the lights are brightest, where all the senses are ministered to with the greatest delicacy and refinement, Lady Dedlock is. From the shining heights she has scaled and taken, she is never absent. Though the belief she of old reposed in herself as one able to reserve whatsoever she would under her mantle of pride is beaten down, though she has no assurance that what she is to those around her she will remain another day, it is not in her nature when envious eyes are looking on to yield or to droop. They say of her that she has lately grown more handsome and more haughty. The debilitated cousin says of her that she's beauty nough—tsetup shopofwomen—but rather larming kind—remindingmanfact—inconvenient woman—who WILL getoutofbedandbawthstahlishment—Shakespeare.

Mr. Tulkinghorn says nothing, looks nothing. Now, as heretofore, he is to be found in doorways of rooms, with his limp white cravat loosely twisted into its old-fashioned tie, receiving patronage from the peerage and making no sign. Of all men he is still the last who might be supposed to have any influence upon my Lady. Of all women she is still the last who might be supposed to have any dread of him.

One thing has been much on her mind since their late interview in his turret-room at Chesney Wold. She is now decided, and prepared to throw it off.

It is morning in the great world, afternoon according to the little sun. The Mercuries, exhausted by looking out of window, are reposing in the hall and hang their heavy heads, the gorgeous creatures, like overblown sunflowers. Like them, too, they seem to run to a deal of seed in their tags and trimmings. Sir Leicester, in the library, has fallen asleep for the good of the country over the report of a Parliamentary committee. My Lady sits in the room in which she gave audience to the young man of the name of Guppy. Rosa is with her and has been writing for her and reading to her. Rosa is now at work upon embroidery or some such pretty thing, and as she bends her head over it, my Lady watches her in silence. Not for the first time to-day.

"Rosa."

The pretty village face looks brightly up. Then, seeing how serious my Lady is, looks puzzled and surprised.

"See to the door. Is it shut?"

Yes. She goes to it and returns, and looks yet more surprised.

"I am about to place confidence in you, child, for I know I may trust your attachment, if not your judgment. In what I am going to do, I will not disguise myself to you at least. But I confide in you. Say nothing to any one of what passes between us."

The timid little beauty promises in all earnestness to be trustworthy.

"Do you know," Lady Dedlock asks her, signing to her to bring her chair nearer, "do you know, Rosa, that I am different to you from what I am to any one?"

"Yes, my Lady. Much kinder. But then I often think I know you as you really are."

"You often think you know me as I really am? Poor child, poor child!"

She says it with a kind of scorn—though not of Rosa—and sits brooding, looking dreamily at her.

"Do you think, Rosa, you are any relief or comfort to me? Do you suppose your being young and natural, and fond of me and grateful to me, makes it any pleasure to me to have you near me?"

"I don't know, my Lady; I can scarcely hope so. But with all my heart, I wish it was so."

"It is so, little one."

The pretty face is checked in its flush of pleasure by the dark expression on the handsome face before it. It looks timidly for an explanation.

"And if I were to say to-day, 'Go! Leave me!' I should say what would give me great pain and disquiet, child, and what would leave me very solitary."

"My Lady! Have I offended you?"

"In nothing. Come here."

Rosa bends down on the footstool at my Lady's feet. My Lady, with that motherly touch of the famous ironmaster night, lays her hand upon her dark hair and gently keeps it there.

"I told you, Rosa, that I wished you to be happy and that I would make you so if I could make anybody happy on this earth. I cannot. There are reasons now known to me, reasons in which you have no part, rendering it far better for you that you should not remain here. You must not remain here. I have determined that you shall not. I have written to the father of your lover, and he will be here to-day. All this I have done for your sake."

The weeping girl covers her hand with kisses and says what shall she do, what shall she do, when they are separated! Her mistress kisses her on the cheek and makes no other answer.

"Now, be happy, child, under better circumstances. Be beloved and happy!"

"Ah, my Lady, I have sometimes thought—forgive my being so free—that YOU are not happy."

"I!"

"Will you be more so when you have sent me away? Pray, pray, think again. Let me stay a little while!"

"I have said, my child, that what I do, I do for your sake, not my own. It is done. What I am towards you, Rosa, is what I am now—not what I shall be a little while hence. Remember this, and keep my confidence. Do so much for my sake, and thus all ends between us!"

She detaches herself from her simple-hearted companion and leaves the room. Late in the afternoon, when she next appears upon the staircase, she is in her haughtiest and coldest state. As indifferent as if all passion, feeling, and interest had been worn out in the earlier ages of the world and had perished from its surface with its other departed monsters.

Mercury has announced Mr. Rouncewell, which is the cause of her appearance. Mr. Rouncewell is not in the library, but she repairs to the library. Sir Leicester is there, and she wishes to speak to him first.

"Sir Leicester, I am desirous—but you are engaged."

Oh, dear no! Not at all. Only Mr. Tulkinghorn.

Always at hand. Haunting every place. No relief or security from him for a moment.

"I beg your pardon, Lady Dedlock. Will you allow me to retire?"

With a look that plainly says, "You know you have the power to remain if you will," she tells him it is not necessary and moves towards a chair. Mr. Tulkinghorn brings it a little forward for her with his clumsy bow and retires into a window opposite. Interposed between her and the fading light of day in the now quiet street, his shadow falls upon her, and he darkens all before her. Even so does he darken her life.

It is a dull street under the best conditions, where the two long rows of houses stare at each other with that severity that half-a-dozen of its greatest mansions seem to have been slowly stared into stone rather than originally built in that material. It is a street of such dismal grandeur, so determined not to condescend to liveliness, that the doors and windows hold a gloomy state of their own in black paint and dust, and the echoing mews behind have a dry and massive appearance, as if they were reserved to stable the stone chargers of noble statues. Complicated garnish of iron-work entwines itself over the flights of steps in this awful street, and from these petrified bowers, extinguishers for obsolete flambeaux gasp at the upstart gas. Here and there a weak little iron hoop, through which bold boys aspire to throw their friends' caps (its only present use), retains its place among the rusty foliage, sacred to the memory of departed oil. Nay, even oil itself, yet lingering at long intervals in a little absurd glass pot, with a knob in the bottom like an oyster, blinks and sulks at newer lights every night, like its high and dry master in the House of Lords.

Therefore there is not much that Lady Dedlock, seated in her chair, could wish to see through the window in which Mr. Tulkinghorn stands. And yet—and yet—she sends a look in that direction as if it were her heart's desire to have that figure moved out of the way.

Sir Leicester begs his Lady's pardon. She was about to say?

"Only that Mr. Rouncewell is here (he has called by my appointment) and that we had better make an end of the question of that girl. I am tired to death of the matter."

"What can I do—to—assist?" demands Sir Leicester in some considerable doubt.

"Let us see him here and have done with it. Will you tell them to send him up?"

"Mr. Tulkinghorn, be so good as to ring. Thank you. Request," says Sir Leicester to Mercury, not immediately remembering the business term, "request the iron gentleman to walk this way."

Mercury departs in search of the iron gentleman, finds, and produces him. Sir Leicester receives that ferruginous person graciously.

"I hope you are well, Mr. Rouncewell. Be seated. (My solicitor, Mr. Tulkinghorn.) My Lady was desirous, Mr. Rouncewell," Sir Leicester skilfully transfers him with a solemn wave of his hand, "was desirous to speak with you. Hem!"

"I shall be very happy," returns the iron gentleman, "to give my best attention to anything Lady Dedlock does me the honour to say."

As he turns towards her, he finds that the impression she makes upon him is less agreeable than on the former occasion. A distant supercilious air makes a cold atmosphere about her, and there is nothing in her bearing, as there was before, to encourage openness.

"Pray, sir," says Lady Dedlock listlessly, "may I be allowed to inquire whether anything has passed between you and your son respecting your son's fancy?"

It is almost too troublesome to her languid eyes to bestow a look upon him as she asks this question.

"If my memory serves me, Lady Dedlock, I said, when I had the pleasure of seeing you before, that I should seriously advise my son to conquer that—fancy." The ironmaster repeats her expression with a little emphasis.

"And did you?"

"Oh! Of course I did."

Sir Leicester gives a nod, approving and confirmatory. Very proper. The iron gentleman, having said that he would do it, was bound to do it. No difference in this respect between the base metals and the precious. Highly proper.

"And pray has he done so?"

"Really, Lady Dedlock, I cannot make you a definite reply. I fear not. Probably not yet. In our condition of life, we sometimes couple an intention with our—our fancies which renders them not altogether easy to throw off. I think it is rather our way to be in earnest."

Sir Leicester has a misgiving that there may be a hidden Wat Tylerish meaning in this expression, and fumes a little. Mr. Rouncewell is perfectly good-humoured and polite, but within such limits, evidently adapts his tone to his reception.

"Because," proceeds my Lady, "I have been thinking of the subject, which is tiresome to me."

"I am very sorry, I am sure."

"And also of what Sir Leicester said upon it, in which I quite concur"—Sir Leicester flattered—"and if you cannot give us the assurance that this fancy is at an end, I have come to the conclusion that the girl had better leave me."

"I can give no such assurance, Lady Dedlock. Nothing of the kind."

"Then she had better go."

"Excuse me, my Lady," Sir Leicester considerately interposes, "but perhaps this may be doing an injury to the young woman which she has not merited. Here is a young woman," says Sir Leicester, magnificently laying out the matter with his right hand like a service of plate, "whose good fortune it is to have attracted the notice and favour of an eminent lady and to live, under the protection of that eminent lady, surrounded by the various advantages which such a position confers, and which are unquestionably very great—I believe unquestionably very great, sir—for a young woman in that station of life. The question then arises, should that young woman be deprived of these many advantages and that good fortune simply because she has"—Sir Leicester, with an apologetic but dignified inclination of his head towards the ironmaster, winds up his sentence—"has attracted the notice of Mr Rouncewell's son? Now, has she deserved this punishment? Is this just towards her? Is this our previous understanding?"

"I beg your pardon," interposes Mr. Rouncewell's son's father. "Sir Leicester, will you allow me? I think I may shorten the subject. Pray dismiss that from your consideration. If you remember anything so unimportant—which is not to be expected—you would recollect that my first thought in the affair was directly opposed to her remaining here."

Dismiss the Dedlock patronage from consideration? Oh! Sir Leicester is bound to believe a pair of ears that have been handed down to him through such a family, or he really might have mistrusted their report of the iron gentleman's observations.

"It is not necessary," observes my Lady in her coldest manner before he can do anything but breathe amazedly, "to enter into these matters on either side. The girl is a very good girl; I have nothing whatever to say against her, but she is so far insensible to her many advantages and her good fortune that she is in love—or supposes she is, poor little fool—and unable to appreciate them."

Sir Leicester begs to observe that wholly alters the case. He might have been sure that my Lady had the best grounds and reasons in support of her view. He entirely agrees with my Lady. The young woman had better go.

"As Sir Leicester observed, Mr. Rouncewell, on the last occasion when we were fatigued by this business," Lady Dedlock languidly proceeds, "we cannot make conditions with you. Without conditions, and under present circumstances, the girl is quite misplaced here and had better go. I have told her so. Would you wish to have her sent back to the village, or would you like to take her with you, or what would you prefer?"

"Lady Dedlock, if I may speak plainly—"

"By all means."

"—I should prefer the course which will the soonest relieve you of the incumbrance and remove her from her present position."

"And to speak as plainly," she returns with the same studied carelessness, "so should I. Do I understand that you will take her with you?"

The iron gentleman makes an iron bow.

"Sir Leicester, will you ring?" Mr. Tulkinghorn steps forward from his window and pulls the bell. "I had forgotten you. Thank you." He makes his usual bow and goes quietly back again. Mercury, swift-responsive, appears, receives instructions whom to produce, skims away, produces the aforesaid, and departs.

Rosa has been crying and is yet in distress. On her coming in, the ironmaster leaves his chair, takes her arm in his, and remains with her near the door ready to depart.

"You are taken charge of, you see," says my Lady in her weary manner, "and are going away well protected. I have mentioned that you are a very good girl, and you have nothing to cry for."

"She seems after all," observes Mr. Tulkinghorn, loitering a little forward with his hands behind him, "as if she were crying at going away."

"Why, she is not well-bred, you see," returns Mr. Rouncewell with some quickness in his manner, as if he were glad to have the lawyer to retort upon, "and she is an inexperienced little thing and knows no better. If she had remained here, sir, she would have improved, no doubt."

"No doubt," is Mr. Tulkinghorn's composed reply.

Rosa sobs out that she is very sorry to leave my Lady, and that she was happy at Chesney Wold, and has been happy with my Lady, and that she thanks my Lady over and over again. "Out, you silly little puss!" says the ironmaster, checking her in a low voice, though not angrily. "Have a spirit, if you're fond of Watt!" My Lady merely waves her off with indifference, saying, "There, there, child! You are a good girl. Go away!" Sir Leicester has magnificently disengaged himself from the subject and retired into the sanctuary of his blue coat. Mr. Tulkinghorn, an indistinct form against the dark street now dotted with lamps, looms in my Lady's view, bigger and blacker than before.

"Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock," says Mr. Rouncewell after a pause of a few moments, "I beg to take my leave, with an apology for having again troubled you, though not of my own act, on this tiresome subject. I can very well understand, I assure you, how tiresome so small a matter must have become to Lady Dedlock. If I am doubtful of my dealing with it, it is only because I did not at first quietly exert my influence to take my young friend here away without troubling you at all. But it appeared to me—I dare say magnifying the importance of the thing—that it was respectful to explain to you how the matter stood and candid to consult your wishes and convenience. I hope you will excuse my want of acquaintance with the polite world."

Sir Leicester considers himself evoked out of the sanctuary by these remarks. "Mr. Rouncewell," he returns, "do not mention it. Justifications are unnecessary, I hope, on either side."

"I am glad to hear it, Sir Leicester; and if I may, by way of a last word, revert to what I said before of my mother's long connexion with the family and the worth it bespeaks on both sides, I would point out this little instance here on my arm who shows herself so affectionate and faithful in parting and in whom my mother, I dare say, has done something to awaken such feelings—though of course Lady Dedlock, by her heartfelt interest and her genial condescension, has done much more."

If he mean this ironically, it may be truer than he thinks. He points it, however, by no deviation from his straightforward manner of speech, though in saying it he turns towards that part of the dim room where my Lady sits. Sir Leicester stands to return his parting salutation, Mr. Tulkinghorn again rings, Mercury takes another flight, and Mr. Rouncewell and Rosa leave the house.

Then lights are brought in, discovering Mr. Tulkinghorn still standing in his window with his hands behind him and my Lady still sitting with his figure before her, closing up her view of the night as well as of the day. She is very pale. Mr. Tulkinghorn, observing it as she rises to retire, thinks, "Well she may be! The power of this woman is astonishing. She has been acting a part the whole time." But he can act a part too—his one unchanging character—and as he holds the door open for this woman, fifty pairs of eyes, each fifty times sharper than Sir Leicester's pair, should find no flaw in him.

Lady Dedlock dines alone in her own room to-day. Sir Leicester is whipped in to the rescue of the Doodle Party and the discomfiture of the Coodle Faction. Lady Dedlock asks on sitting down to dinner, still deadly pale (and quite an illustration of the debilitated cousin's text), whether he is gone out? Yes. Whether Mr. Tulkinghorn is gone yet? No. Presently she asks again, is he gone YET? No. What is he doing? Mercury thinks he is writing letters in the library. Would my Lady wish to see him? Anything but that.

But he wishes to see my Lady. Within a few more minutes he is reported as sending his respects, and could my Lady please to receive him for a word or two after her dinner? My Lady will receive him now. He comes now, apologizing for intruding, even by her permission, while she is at table. When they are alone, my Lady waves her hand to dispense with such mockeries.

"What do you want, sir?"

"Why, Lady Dedlock," says the lawyer, taking a chair at a little distance from her and slowly rubbing his rusty legs up and down, up and down, up and down, "I am rather surprised by the course you have taken."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, decidedly. I was not prepared for it. I consider it a departure from our agreement and your promise. It puts us in a new position, Lady Dedlock. I feel myself under the necessity of saying that I don't approve of it."

He stops in his rubbing and looks at her, with his hands on his knees. Imperturbable and unchangeable as he is, there is still an indefinable freedom in his manner which is new and which does not escape this woman's observation.

"I do not quite understand you."

"Oh, yes you do, I think. I think you do. Come, come, Lady Dedlock, we must not fence and parry now. You know you like this girl."

"Well, sir?"

"And you know—and I know—that you have not sent her away for the reasons you have assigned, but for the purpose of separating her as much as possible from—excuse my mentioning it as a matter of business—any reproach and exposure that impend over yourself."

"Well, sir?"

"Well, Lady Dedlock," returns the lawyer, crossing his legs and nursing the uppermost knee. "I object to that. I consider that a dangerous proceeding. I know it to be unnecessary and calculated to awaken speculation, doubt, rumour, I don't know what, in the house. Besides, it is a violation of our agreement. You were to be exactly what you were before. Whereas, it must be evident to yourself, as it is to me, that you have been this evening very different from what you were before. Why, bless my soul, Lady Dedlock, transparently so!"

"If, sir," she begins, "in my knowledge of my secret—" But he interrupts her.

"Now, Lady Dedlock, this is a matter of business, and in a matter of business the ground cannot be kept too clear. It is no longer your secret. Excuse me. That is just the mistake. It is my secret, in trust for Sir Leicester and the family. If it were your secret, Lady Dedlock, we should not be here holding this conversation."

"That is very true. If in my knowledge of THE secret I do what I can to spare an innocent girl (especially, remembering your own reference to her when you told my story to the assembled guests at Chesney Wold) from the taint of my impending shame, I act upon a resolution I have taken. Nothing in the world, and no one in the world, could shake it or could move me."

This she says with great deliberation and distinctness and with no more outward passion than himself. As for him, he methodically discusses his matter of business as if she were any insensible instrument used in business.

"Really? Then you see, Lady Dedlock," he returns, "you are not to be trusted. You have put the case in a perfectly plain way, and according to the literal fact; and that being the case, you are not to be trusted."

"Perhaps you may remember that I expressed some anxiety on this same point when we spoke at night at Chesney Wold?"

"Yes," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, coolly getting up and standing on the hearth. "Yes. I recollect, Lady Dedlock, that you certainly referred to the girl, but that was before we came to our arrangement, and both the letter and the spirit of our arrangement altogether precluded any action on your part founded upon my discovery. There can be no doubt about that. As to sparing the girl, of what importance or value is she? Spare! Lady Dedlock, here is a family name compromised. One might have supposed that the course was straight on—over everything, neither to the right nor to the left, regardless of all considerations in the way, sparing nothing, treading everything under foot."

She has been looking at the table. She lifts up her eyes and looks at him. There is a stern expression on her face and a part of her lower lip is compressed under her teeth. "This woman understands me," Mr. Tulkinghorn thinks as she lets her glance fall again. "SHE cannot be spared. Why should she spare others?"

For a little while they are silent. Lady Dedlock has eaten no dinner, but has twice or thrice poured out water with a steady hand and drunk it. She rises from table, takes a lounging-chair, and reclines in it, shading her face. There is nothing in her manner to express weakness or excite compassion. It is thoughtful, gloomy, concentrated. "This woman," thinks Mr. Tulkinghorn, standing on the hearth, again a dark object closing up her view, "is a study."

He studies her at his leisure, not speaking for a time. She too studies something at her leisure. She is not the first to speak, appearing indeed so unlikely to be so, though he stood there until midnight, that even he is driven upon breaking silence.

"Lady Dedlock, the most disagreeable part of this business interview remains, but it is business. Our agreement is broken. A lady of your sense and strength of character will be prepared for my now declaring it void and taking my own course."

"I am quite prepared."

Mr. Tulkinghorn inclines his head. "That is all I have to trouble you with, Lady Dedlock."

She stops him as he is moving out of the room by asking, "This is the notice I was to receive? I wish not to misapprehend you."

"Not exactly the notice you were to receive, Lady Dedlock, because the contemplated notice supposed the agreement to have been observed. But virtually the same, virtually the same. The difference is merely in a lawyer's mind."

"You intend to give me no other notice?"

"You are right. No."

"Do you contemplate undeceiving Sir Leicester to-night?"

"A home question!" says Mr. Tulkinghorn with a slight smile and cautiously shaking his head at the shaded face. "No, not to-night."

"To-morrow?"

"All things considered, I had better decline answering that question, Lady Dedlock. If I were to say I don't know when, exactly, you would not believe me, and it would answer no purpose. It may be to-morrow. I would rather say no more. You are prepared, and I hold out no expectations which circumstances might fail to justify. I wish you good evening."

She removes her hand, turns her pale face towards him as he walks silently to the door, and stops him once again as he is about to open it.

"Do you intend to remain in the house any time? I heard you were writing in the library. Are you going to return there?"

"Only for my hat. I am going home."

She bows her eyes rather than her head, the movement is so slight and curious, and he withdraws. Clear of the room he looks at his watch but is inclined to doubt it by a minute or thereabouts. There is a splendid clock upon the staircase, famous, as splendid clocks not often are, for its accuracy. "And what do YOU say," Mr. Tulkinghorn inquires, referring to it. "What do you say?"

If it said now, "Don't go home!" What a famous clock, hereafter, if it said to-night of all the nights that it has counted off, to this old man of all the young and old men who have ever stood before it, "Don't go home!" With its sharp clear bell it strikes three quarters after seven and ticks on again. "Why, you are worse than I thought you," says Mr. Tulkinghorn, muttering reproof to his watch. "Two minutes wrong? At this rate you won't last my time." What a watch to return good for evil if it ticked in answer, "Don't go home!"

He passes out into the streets and walks on, with his hands behind him, under the shadow of the lofty houses, many of whose mysteries, difficulties, mortgages, delicate affairs of all kinds, are treasured up within his old black satin waistcoat. He is in the confidence of the very bricks and mortar. The high chimney-stacks telegraph family secrets to him. Yet there is not a voice in a mile of them to whisper, "Don't go home!"

Through the stir and motion of the commoner streets; through the roar and jar of many vehicles, many feet, many voices; with the blazing shop-lights lighting him on, the west wind blowing him on, and the crowd pressing him on, he is pitilessly urged upon his way, and nothing meets him murmuring, "Don't go home!" Arrived at last in his dull room to light his candles, and look round and up, and see the Roman pointing from the ceiling, there is no new significance in the Roman's hand to-night or in the flutter of the attendant groups to give him the late warning, "Don't come here!"

It is a moonlight night, but the moon, being past the full, is only now rising over the great wilderness of London. The stars are shining as they shone above the turret-leads at Chesney Wold. This woman, as he has of late been so accustomed to call her, looks out upon them. Her soul is turbulent within her; she is sick at heart and restless. The large rooms are too cramped and close. She cannot endure their restraint and will walk alone in a neighbouring garden.

Too capricious and imperious in all she does to be the cause of much surprise in those about her as to anything she does, this woman, loosely muffled, goes out into the moonlight. Mercury attends with the key. Having opened the garden-gate, he delivers the key into his Lady's hands at her request and is bidden to go back. She will walk there some time to ease her aching head. She may be an hour, she may be more. She needs no further escort. The gate shuts upon its spring with a clash, and he leaves her passing on into the dark shade of some trees.

A fine night, and a bright large moon, and multitudes of stars. Mr. Tulkinghorn, in repairing to his cellar and in opening and shutting those resounding doors, has to cross a little prison-like yard. He looks up casually, thinking what a fine night, what a bright large moon, what multitudes of stars! A quiet night, too.

A very quiet night. When the moon shines very brilliantly, a solitude and stillness seem to proceed from her that influence even crowded places full of life. Not only is it a still night on dusty high roads and on hill-summits, whence a wide expanse of country may be seen in repose, quieter and quieter as it spreads away into a fringe of trees against the sky with the grey ghost of a bloom upon them; not only is it a still night in gardens and in woods, and on the river where the water-meadows are fresh and green, and the stream sparkles on among pleasant islands, murmuring weirs, and whispering rushes; not only does the stillness attend it as it flows where houses cluster thick, where many bridges are reflected in it, where wharves and shipping make it black and awful, where it winds from these disfigurements through marshes whose grim beacons stand like skeletons washed ashore, where it expands through the bolder region of rising grounds, rich in cornfield wind-mill and steeple, and where it mingles with the ever-heaving sea; not only is it a still night on the deep, and on the shore where the watcher stands to see the ship with her spread wings cross the path of light that appears to be presented to only him; but even on this stranger's wilderness of London there is some rest. Its steeples and towers and its one great dome grow more ethereal; its smoky house-tops lose their grossness in the pale effulgence; the noises that arise from the streets are fewer and are softened, and the footsteps on the pavements pass more tranquilly away. In these fields of Mr. Tulkinghorn's inhabiting, where the shepherds play on Chancery pipes that have no stop, and keep their sheep in the fold by hook and by crook until they have shorn them exceeding close, every noise is merged, this moonlight night, into a distant ringing hum, as if the city were a vast glass, vibrating.

What's that? Who fired a gun or pistol? Where was it?

The few foot-passengers start, stop, and stare about them. Some windows and doors are opened, and people come out to look. It was a loud report and echoed and rattled heavily. It shook one house, or so a man says who was passing. It has aroused all the dogs in the neighbourhood, who bark vehemently. Terrified cats scamper across the road. While the dogs are yet barking and howling—there is one dog howling like a demon—the church-clocks, as if they were startled too, begin to strike. The hum from the streets, likewise, seems to swell into a shout. But it is soon over.

Before the last clock begins to strike ten, there is a lull. When it has ceased, the fine night, the bright large moon, and multitudes of stars, are left at peace again.

Has Mr. Tulkinghorn been disturbed? His windows are dark and quiet, and his door is shut. It must be something unusual indeed to bring him out of his shell. Nothing is heard of him, nothing is seen of him. What power of cannon might it take to shake that rusty old man out of his immovable composure?

For many years the persistent Roman has been pointing, with no particular meaning, from that ceiling. It is not likely that he has any new meaning in him to-night. Once pointing, always pointing—like any Roman, or even Briton, with a single idea. There he is, no doubt, in his impossible attitude, pointing, unavailingly, all night long. Moonlight, darkness, dawn, sunrise, day. There he is still, eagerly pointing, and no one minds him.

But a little after the coming of the day come people to clean the rooms. And either the Roman has some new meaning in him, not expressed before, or the foremost of them goes wild, for looking up at his outstretched hand and looking down at what is below it, that person shrieks and flies. The others, looking in as the first one looked, shriek and fly too, and there is an alarm in the street.

What does it mean? No light is admitted into the darkened chamber, and people unaccustomed to it enter, and treading softly but heavily, carry a weight into the bedroom and lay it down. There is whispering and wondering all day, strict search of every corner, careful tracing of steps, and careful noting of the disposition of every article of furniture. All eyes look up at the Roman, and all voices murmur, "If he could only tell what he saw!"

He is pointing at a table with a bottle (nearly full of wine) and a glass upon it and two candles that were blown out suddenly soon after being lighted. He is pointing at an empty chair and at a stain upon the ground before it that might be almost covered with a hand. These objects lie directly within his range. An excited imagination might suppose that there was something in them so terrific as to drive the rest of the composition, not only the attendant big-legged boys, but the clouds and flowers and pillars too—in short, the very body and soul of Allegory, and all the brains it has—stark mad. It happens surely that every one who comes into the darkened room and looks at these things looks up at the Roman and that he is invested in all eyes with mystery and awe, as if he were a paralysed dumb witness.

So it shall happen surely, through many years to come, that ghostly stories shall be told of the stain upon the floor, so easy to be covered, so hard to be got out, and that the Roman, pointing from the ceiling shall point, so long as dust and damp and spiders spare him, with far greater significance than he ever had in Mr. Tulkinghorn's time, and with a deadly meaning. For Mr. Tulkinghorn's time is over for evermore, and the Roman pointed at the murderous hand uplifted against his life, and pointed helplessly at him, from night to morning, lying face downward on the floor, shot through the heart.

CHAPTER XLIX. Dutiful Friendship

A great annual occasion has come round in the establishment of Mr. Matthew Bagnet, otherwise Lignum Vitae, ex-artilleryman and present bassoon-player. An occasion of feasting and festival. The celebration of a birthday in the family.

It is not Mr. Bagnet's birthday. Mr. Bagnet merely distinguishes that epoch in the musical instrument business by kissing the children with an extra smack before breakfast, smoking an additional pipe after dinner, and wondering towards evening what his poor old mother is thinking about it—a subject of infinite speculation, and rendered so by his mother having departed this life twenty years. Some men rarely revert to their father, but seem, in the bank-books of their remembrance, to have transferred all the stock of filial affection into their mother's name. Mr. Bagnet is one of these. Perhaps his exalted appreciation of the merits of the old girl causes him usually to make the noun-substantive "goodness" of the feminine gender.

It is not the birthday of one of the three children. Those occasions are kept with some marks of distinction, but they rarely overleap the bounds of happy returns and a pudding. On young Woolwich's last birthday, Mr. Bagnet certainly did, after observing on his growth and general advancement, proceed, in a moment of profound reflection on the changes wrought by time, to examine him in the catechism, accomplishing with extreme accuracy the questions number one and two, "What is your name?" and "Who gave you that name?" but there failing in the exact precision of his memory and substituting for number three the question "And how do you like that name?" which he propounded with a sense of its importance, in itself so edifying and improving as to give it quite an orthodox air. This, however, was a speciality on that particular birthday, and not a general solemnity.

It is the old girl's birthday, and that is the greatest holiday and reddest-letter day in Mr. Bagnet's calendar. The auspicious event is always commemorated according to certain forms settled and prescribed by Mr. Bagnet some years since. Mr. Bagnet, being deeply convinced that to have a pair of fowls for dinner is to attain the highest pitch of imperial luxury, invariably goes forth himself very early in the morning of this day to buy a pair; he is, as invariably, taken in by the vendor and installed in the possession of the oldest inhabitants of any coop in Europe. Returning with these triumphs of toughness tied up in a clean blue and white cotton handkerchief (essential to the arrangements), he in a casual manner invites Mrs. Bagnet to declare at breakfast what she would like for dinner. Mrs. Bagnet, by a coincidence never known to fail, replying fowls, Mr. Bagnet instantly produces his bundle from a place of concealment amidst general amazement and rejoicing. He further requires that the old girl shall do nothing all day long but sit in her very best gown and be served by himself and the young people. As he is not illustrious for his cookery, this may be supposed to be a matter of state rather than enjoyment on the old girl's part, but she keeps her state with all imaginable cheerfulness.

On this present birthday, Mr. Bagnet has accomplished the usual preliminaries. He has bought two specimens of poultry, which, if there be any truth in adages, were certainly not caught with chaff, to be prepared for the spit; he has amazed and rejoiced the family by their unlooked-for production; he is himself directing the roasting of the poultry; and Mrs.

Bagnet, with her wholesome brown fingers itching to prevent what she sees going wrong, sits in her gown of ceremony, an honoured guest.

Quebec and Malta lay the cloth for dinner, while Woolwich, serving, as beseems him, under his father, keeps the fowls revolving. To these young scullions Mrs. Bagnet occasionally imparts a wink, or a shake of the head, or a crooked face, as they made mistakes.

"At half after one." Says Mr. Bagnet. "To the minute. They'll be done."

Mrs. Bagnet, with anguish, beholds one of them at a standstill before the fire and beginning to burn.

"You shall have a dinner, old girl," says Mr. Bagnet. "Fit for a queen."

Mrs. Bagnet shows her white teeth cheerfully, but to the perception of her son, betrays so much uneasiness of spirit that he is impelled by the dictates of affection to ask her, with his eyes, what is the matter, thus standing, with his eyes wide open, more oblivious of the fowls than before, and not affording the least hope of a return to consciousness. Fortunately his elder sister perceives the cause of the agitation in Mrs. Bagnet's breast and with an admonitory poke recalls him. The stopped fowls going round again, Mrs. Bagnet closes her eyes in the intensity of her relief.

"George will look us up," says Mr. Bagnet. "At half after four. To the moment. How many years, old girl. Has George looked us up. This afternoon?"

"Ah, Lignum, Lignum, as many as make an old woman of a young one, I begin to think. Just about that, and no less," returns Mrs. Bagnet, laughing and shaking her head.

"Old girl," says Mr. Bagnet, "never mind. You'd be as young as ever you was. If you wasn't younger. Which you are. As everybody knows."

Quebec and Malta here exclaim, with clapping of hands, that Bluffy is sure to bring mother something, and begin to speculate on what it will be.

"Do you know, Lignum," says Mrs. Bagnet, casting a glance on the table-cloth, and winking "salt!" at Malta with her right eye, and shaking the pepper away from Quebec with her head, "I begin to think George is in the roving way again.

"George," returns Mr. Bagnet, "will never desert. And leave his old comrade. In the lurch. Don't be afraid of it."

"No, Lignum. No. I don't say he will. I don't think he will. But if he could get over this money trouble of his, I believe he would be off."

Mr. Bagnet asks why.

"Well," returns his wife, considering, "George seems to me to be getting not a little impatient and restless. I don't say but what he's as free as ever. Of course he must be free or he wouldn't be George, but he smarts and seems put out."

"He's extra-drilled," says Mr. Bagnet. "By a lawyer. Who would put the devil out."

"There's something in that," his wife assents; "but so it is, Lignum."

Further conversation is prevented, for the time, by the necessity under which Mr. Bagnet finds himself of directing the whole force of his mind to the dinner, which is a little endangered by the dry humour of the fowls in not yielding any gravy, and also by the made gravy acquiring no flavour and turning out of a flaxen complexion. With a similar perverseness, the potatoes crumble off forks in the process of peeling, upheaving from their centres in every direction, as if they were subject to earthquakes. The legs of the fowls, too, are longer than could be desired, and extremely scaly. Overcoming these disadvantages to the best of his ability, Mr. Bagnet at last dishes and they sit down at table, Mrs. Bagnet occupying the guest's place at his right hand.

It is well for the old girl that she has but one birthday in a year, for two such indulgences in poultry might be injurious. Every kind of finer tendon and ligament that is in the nature of poultry to possess is developed in these specimens in the singular form of guitar-strings. Their limbs appear to have struck roots into their breasts and bodies, as aged trees strike roots into the earth. Their legs are so hard as to encourage the idea that they must have devoted the greater part of their long and arduous lives to pedestrian exercises and the walking of matches. But Mr. Bagnet, unconscious of these little defects, sets his heart on Mrs. Bagnet eating a most severe quantity of the delicacies before her; and as that good old girl would not cause him a moment's disappointment on any day, least of all on such a day, for any consideration, she imperils her digestion fearfully. How young Woolwich cleans the drum-sticks without being of ostrich descent, his anxious mother is at a loss to understand.

The old girl has another trial to undergo after the conclusion of the repast in sitting in state to see the room cleared, the hearth swept, and the dinner-service washed up and polished in the backyard. The great delight and energy with which the two young ladies apply themselves to these duties, turning up their skirts in imitation of their mother and skating in and out on little scaffolds of pattens, inspire the highest hopes for the future, but some anxiety for the present. The same causes lead to confusion of tongues, a clattering of crockery, a rattling of tin mugs, a whisking of brooms, and an expenditure of water, all in excess, while the saturation of the young ladies themselves is almost too moving a spectacle for Mrs. Bagnet to look upon with the calmness proper to her position. At last the various cleansing processes are triumphantly completed; Quebec and Malta appear in fresh attire, smiling and dry; pipes, tobacco, and something to drink are placed upon the table; and the old girl enjoys the first peace of mind she ever knows on the day of this delightful entertainment.

When Mr. Bagnet takes his usual seat, the hands of the clock are very near to half-past four; as they mark it accurately, Mr. Bagnet announces, "George! Military time."

It is George, and he has hearty congratulations for the old girl (whom he kisses on the great occasion), and for the children, and for Mr. Bagnet. "Happy returns to all!" says Mr. George.

"But, George, old man!" cries Mrs. Bagnet, looking at him curiously. "What's come to you?"

"Come to me?"

"Ah! You are so white, George—for you—and look so shocked. Now don't he, Lignum?"

"George," says Mr. Bagnet, "tell the old girl. What's the matter."

"I didn't know I looked white," says the trooper, passing his hand over his brow, "and I didn't know I looked shocked, and I'm sorry I do. But the truth is, that boy who was taken in at my place died yesterday afternoon, and it has rather knocked me over."

"Poor creetur!" says Mrs. Bagnet with a mother's pity. "Is he gone? Dear, dear!"

"I didn't mean to say anything about it, for it's not birthday talk, but you have got it out of me, you see, before I sit down. I should have roused up in a minute," says the trooper, making himself speak more gaily, "but you're so quick, Mrs. Bagnet."

"You're right. The old girl," says Mr. Bagnet. "Is as quick. As powder."

"And what's more, she's the subject of the day, and we'll stick to her," cries Mr. George. "See here, I have brought a little brooch along with me.

It's a poor thing, you know, but it's a keepsake. That's all the good it is, Mrs. Bagnet."

Mr. George produces his present, which is greeted with admiring leapings and clappings by the young family, and with a species of reverential admiration by Mr. Bagnet. "Old girl," says Mr. Bagnet. "Tell him my opinion of it."

"Why, it's a wonder, George!" Mrs. Bagnet exclaims. "It's the beautifullest thing that ever was seen!"

"Good!" says Mr. Bagnet. "My opinion."

"It's so pretty, George," cries Mrs. Bagnet, turning it on all sides and holding it out at arm's length, "that it seems too choice for me."

"Bad!" says Mr. Bagnet. "Not my opinion."

"But whatever it is, a hundred thousand thanks, old fellow," says Mrs. Bagnet, her eyes sparkling with pleasure and her hand stretched out to him; "and though I have been a crossgrained soldier's wife to you sometimes, George, we are as strong friends, I am sure, in reality, as ever can be. Now you shall fasten it on yourself, for good luck, if you will, George."

The children close up to see it done, and Mr. Bagnet looks over young Woolwich's head to see it done with an interest so maturely wooden, yet pleasantly childish, that Mrs. Bagnet cannot help laughing in her airy way and saying, "Oh, Lignum, Lignum, what a precious old chap you are!" But the trooper fails to fasten the brooch. His hand shakes, he is nervous, and it falls off. "Would any one believe this?" says he, catching it as it drops and looking round. "I am so out of sorts that I bungle at an easy job like this!"

Mrs. Bagnet concludes that for such a case there is no remedy like a pipe, and fastening the brooch herself in a twinkling, causes the trooper to be inducted into his usual snug place and the pipes to be got into action. "If that don't bring you round, George," says she, "just throw your eye across here at your present now and then, and the two together MUST do it."

"You ought to do it of yourself," George answers; "I know that very well, Mrs. Bagnet. I'll tell you how, one way and another, the blues have got to be too many for me. Here was this poor lad. 'Twas dull work to see him dying as he did, and not be able to help him."

"What do you mean, George? You did help him. You took him under your roof."

"I helped him so far, but that's little. I mean, Mrs. Bagnet, there he was, dying without ever having been taught much more than to know his right hand from his left. And he was too far gone to be helped out of that."

"Ah, poor creetur!" says Mrs. Bagnet.

"Then," says the trooper, not yet lighting his pipe, and passing his heavy hand over his hair, "that brought up Gridley in a man's mind. His was a bad case too, in a different way. Then the two got mixed up in a man's mind with a flinty old rascal who had to do with both. And to think of that rusty carbine, stock and barrel, standing up on end in his corner, hard, indifferent, taking everything so evenly—it made flesh and blood tingle, I do assure you."

"My advice to you," returns Mrs. Bagnet, "is to light your pipe and tingle that way. It's wholesomer and comfortabler, and better for the health altogether."

"You're right," says the trooper, "and I'll do it."

So he does it, though still with an indignant gravity that impresses the young Bagnets, and even causes Mr. Bagnet to defer the ceremony of drinking Mrs. Bagnet's health, always given by himself on these occasions in a speech of exemplary terseness. But the young ladies having composed what Mr. Bagnet is in the habit of calling "the mixtur," and George's pipe being now in a glow, Mr. Bagnet considers it his duty to proceed to the toast of the evening. He addresses the assembled company in the following terms.

"George. Woolwich. Quebec. Malta. This is her birthday. Take a day's march. And you won't find such another. Here's towards her!"

The toast having been drunk with enthusiasm, Mrs. Bagnet returns thanks in a neat address of corresponding brevity. This model composition is limited to the three words "And wishing yours!" which the old girl follows up with a nod at everybody in succession and a well-regulated swig of the mixture. This she again follows up, on the present occasion, by the wholly unexpected exclamation, "Here's a man!"

Here IS a man, much to the astonishment of the little company, looking in at the parlour-door. He is a sharp-eyed man—a quick keen man—and he takes in everybody's look at him, all at once, individually and collectively, in a manner that stamps him a remarkable man.

"George," says the man, nodding, "how do you find yourself?"

"Why, it's Bucket!" cries Mr. George.

"Yes," says the man, coming in and closing the door. "I was going down the street here when I happened to stop and look in at the musical instruments in the shop-window—a friend of mine is in want of a second-hand wiolinceller of a good tone—and I saw a party enjoying themselves, and I thought it was you in the corner; I thought I couldn't be mistaken. How goes the world with you, George, at the present moment? Pretty smooth? And with you, ma'am? And with you, governor? And Lord," says Mr. Bucket, opening his arms, "here's children too! You may do anything with me if you only show me children. Give us a kiss, my pets. No occasion to inquire who YOUR father and mother is. Never saw such a likeness in my life!"

Mr. Bucket, not unwelcome, has sat himself down next to Mr. George and taken Quebec and Malta on his knees. "You pretty dears," says Mr. Bucket, "give us another kiss; it's the only thing I'm greedy in. Lord bless you, how healthy you look! And what may be the ages of these two, ma'am? I should put 'em down at the figures of about eight and ten."

"You're very near, sir," says Mrs. Bagnet.

"I generally am near," returns Mr. Bucket, "being so fond of children. A friend of mine has had nineteen of 'em, ma'am, all by one mother, and she's still as fresh and rosy as the morning. Not so much so as yourself, but, upon my soul, she comes near you! And what do you call these, my darling?" pursues Mr. Bucket, pinching Malta's cheeks. "These are peaches, these are. Bless your heart! And what do you think about father? Do you think father could recommend a second-hand wiolinceller of a good tone for Mr. Bucket's friend, my dear? My name's Bucket. Ain't that a funny name?"

These blandishments have entirely won the family heart. Mrs. Bagnet forgets the day to the extent of filling a pipe and a glass for Mr. Bucket and waiting upon him hospitably. She would be glad to receive so pleasant a character under any circumstances, but she tells him that as a friend of George's she is particularly glad to see him this evening, for George has not been in his usual spirits.

"Not in his usual spirits?" exclaims Mr. Bucket. "Why, I never heard of such a thing! What's the matter, George? You don't intend to tell me you've been out of spirits. What should you be out of spirits for? You haven't got anything on your mind, you know."

"Nothing particular," returns the trooper.

"I should think not," rejoins Mr. Bucket. "What could you have on your mind, you know! And have these pets got anything on THEIR minds, eh?

Not they, but they'll be upon the minds of some of the young fellows, some of these days, and make 'em precious low-spirited. I ain't much of a prophet, but I can tell you that, ma'am."

Mrs. Bagnet, quite charmed, hopes Mr. Bucket has a family of his own.

"There, ma'am!" says Mr. Bucket. "Would you believe it? No, I haven't. My wife and a lodger constitute my family. Mrs. Bucket is as fond of children as myself and as wishful to have 'em, but no. So it is. Worldly goods are divided unequally, and man must not repine. What a very nice backyard, ma'am! Any way out of that yard, now?"

There is no way out of that yard.

"Ain't there really?" says Mr. Bucket. "I should have thought there might have been. Well, I don't know as I ever saw a backyard that took my fancy more. Would you allow me to look at it? Thank you. No, I see there's no way out. But what a very good-proportioned yard it is!"

Having cast his sharp eye all about it, Mr. Bucket returns to his chair next his friend Mr. George and pats Mr. George affectionately on the shoulder.

"How are your spirits now, George?"

"All right now," returns the trooper.

"That's your sort!" says Mr. Bucket. "Why should you ever have been otherwise? A man of your fine figure and constitution has no right to be out of spirits. That ain't a chest to be out of spirits, is it, ma'am? And you haven't got anything on your mind, you know, George; what could you have on your mind!"

Somewhat harping on this phrase, considering the extent and variety of his conversational powers, Mr. Bucket twice or thrice repeats it to the pipe he lights, and with a listening face that is particularly his own. But the sun of his sociality soon recovers from this brief eclipse and shines again.

"And this is brother, is it, my dears?" says Mr. Bucket, referring to Quebec and Malta for information on the subject of young Woolwich. "And a nice brother he is—half-brother I mean to say. For he's too old to be your boy, ma'am."

"I can certify at all events that he is not anybody else's," returns Mrs. Bagnet, laughing.

"Well, you do surprise me! Yet he's like you, there's no denying. Lord, he's wonderfully like you! But about what you may call the brow, you know, THERE his father comes out!" Mr. Bucket compares the faces with one eye shut up, while Mr. Bagnet smokes in stolid satisfaction.

This is an opportunity for Mrs. Bagnet to inform him that the boy is George's godson.

"George's godson, is he?" rejoins Mr. Bucket with extreme cordiality. "I must shake hands over again with George's godson. Godfather and godson do credit to one another. And what do you intend to make of him, ma'am? Does he show any turn for any musical instrument?"

Mr. Bagnet suddenly interposes, "Plays the fife. Beautiful."

"Would you believe it, governor," says Mr. Bucket, struck by the coincidence, "that when I was a boy I played the fife myself? Not in a scientific way, as I expect he does, but by ear. Lord bless you! 'British Grenadiers'—there's a tune to warm an Englishman up! COULD you give us 'British Grenadiers,' my fine fellow?"

Nothing could be more acceptable to the little circle than this call upon young Woolwich, who immediately fetches his fife and performs the stirring melody, during which performance Mr. Bucket, much enlivened, beats time and never falls to come in sharp with the burden, "British Gra-a-anadeers!" In short, he shows so much musical taste that Mr. Bagnet actually takes his pipe from his lips to express his conviction that he is a singer. Mr. Bucket receives the harmonious impeachment so modestly, confessing how that he did once chaunt a little, for the expression of the feelings of his own bosom, and with no presumptuous idea of entertaining his friends, that he is asked to sing. Not to be behindhand in the sociality of the evening, he complies and gives them "Believe Me, if All Those Endearing Young Charms." This ballad, he informs Mrs. Bagnet, he considers to have been his most powerful ally in moving the heart of Mrs. Bucket when a maiden, and inducing her to approach the altar—Mr. Bucket's own words are "to come up to the scratch."

This sparkling stranger is such a new and agreeable feature in the evening that Mr. George, who testified no great emotions of pleasure on his entrance, begins, in spite of himself, to be rather proud of him. He is so friendly, is a man of so many resources, and so easy to get on with, that it is something to have made him known there. Mr. Bagnet becomes, after another pipe, so sensible of the value of his acquaintance that he solicits the honour of his company on the old girl's next birthday. If anything can more closely cement and consolidate the esteem which Mr. Bucket has formed for the family, it is the discovery of the nature of the occasion. He drinks to Mrs. Bagnet with a warmth approaching to rapture, engages himself for that day twelvemonth more than thankfully, makes a memorandum of the day in a large black pocket-book with a girdle to it, and breathes a hope that Mrs. Bucket and Mrs. Bagnet may before then become, in a manner, sisters. As he says himself, what is public life without private ties? He is in his humble way a public man, but it is not in that sphere that he finds happiness. No, it must be sought within the confines of domestic bliss.

It is natural, under these circumstances, that he, in his turn, should remember the friend to whom he is indebted for so promising an acquaintance. And he does. He keeps very close to him. Whatever the subject of the conversation, he keeps a tender eye upon him. He waits to walk home with him. He is interested in his very boots and observes even them attentively as Mr. George sits smoking cross-legged in the chimney-corner.

At length Mr. George rises to depart. At the same moment Mr. Bucket, with the secret sympathy of friendship, also rises. He dotes upon the children to the last and remembers the commission he has undertaken for an absent friend.

"Respecting that second-hand wiolinceller, governor—could you recommend me such a thing?"

"Scores," says Mr. Bagnet.

"I am obliged to you," returns Mr. Bucket, squeezing his hand. "You're a friend in need. A good tone, mind you! My friend is a regular dab at it. Ecod, he saws away at Mozart and Handel and the rest of the big-wigs like a thorough workman. And you needn't," says Mr. Bucket in a considerate and private voice, "you needn't commit yourself to too low a figure, governor. I don't want to pay too large a price for my friend, but I want you to have your proper percentage and be remunerated for your loss of time. That is but fair. Every man must live, and ought to it."

Mr. Bagnet shakes his head at the old girl to the effect that they have found a jewel of price.

"Suppose I was to give you a look in, say, at half arter ten to-morrow morning. Perhaps you could name the figures of a few wiolincellers of a good tone?" says Mr. Bucket.

Nothing easier. Mr. and Mrs. Bagnet both engage to have the requisite information ready and even hint to each other at the practicability of having a small stock collected there for approval.

"Thank you," says Mr. Bucket, "thank you. Good night, ma'am. Good night, governor. Good night, darlings. I am much obliged to you for one of the pleasantest evenings I ever spent in my life."

They, on the contrary, are much obliged to him for the pleasure he has given them in his company; and so they part with many expressions of goodwill on both sides. "Now George, old boy," says Mr. Bucket, taking his arm at the shop-door, "come along!" As they go down the little street and the Bagnets pause for a minute looking after them, Mrs. Bagnet remarks to the worthy Lignum that Mr. Bucket "almost clings to George like, and seems to be really fond of him."

The neighbouring streets being narrow and ill-paved, it is a little inconvenient to walk there two abreast and arm in arm. Mr. George therefore soon proposes to walk singly. But Mr. Bucket, who cannot make up his mind to relinquish his friendly hold, replies, "Wait half a minute, George. I should wish to speak to you first." Immediately afterwards, he twists him into a public-house and into a parlour, where he confronts him and claps his own back against the door.

"Now, George," says Mr. Bucket, "duty is duty, and friendship is friendship. I never want the two to clash if I can help it. I have endeavoured to make things pleasant to-night, and I put it to you whether I have done it or not. You must consider yourself in custody, George."

"Custody? What for?" returns the trooper, thunderstruck.

"Now, George," says Mr. Bucket, urging a sensible view of the case upon him with his fat forefinger, "duty, as you know very well, is one thing, and conversation is another. It's my duty to inform you that any observations you may make will be liable to be used against you. Therefore, George, be careful what you say. You don't happen to have heard of a murder?"

"Murder!"

"Now, George," says Mr. Bucket, keeping his forefinger in an impressive state of action, "bear in mind what I've said to you. I ask you nothing. You've been in low spirits this afternoon. I say, you don't happen to have heard of a murder?"

"No. Where has there been a murder?"

"Now, George," says Mr. Bucket, "don't you go and commit yourself. I'm a-going to tell you what I want you for. There has been a murder in

Lincoln's Inn Fields—gentleman of the name of Tulkinghorn. He was shot last night. I want you for that."

The trooper sinks upon a seat behind him, and great drops start out upon his forehead, and a deadly pallor overspreads his face.

"Bucket! It's not possible that Mr. Tulkinghorn has been killed and that you suspect ME?"

"George," returns Mr. Bucket, keeping his forefinger going, "it is certainly possible, because it's the case. This deed was done last night at ten o'clock. Now, you know where you were last night at ten o'clock, and you'll be able to prove it, no doubt."

"Last night! Last night?" repeats the trooper thoughtfully. Then it flashes upon him. "Why, great heaven, I was there last night!"

"So I have understood, George," returns Mr. Bucket with great deliberation. "So I have understood. Likewise you've been very often there. You've been seen hanging about the place, and you've been heard more than once in a wrangle with him, and it's possible—I don't say it's certainly so, mind you, but it's possible—that he may have been heard to call you a threatening, murdering, dangerous fellow."

The trooper gasps as if he would admit it all if he could speak.

"Now, George," continues Mr. Bucket, putting his hat upon the table with an air of business rather in the upholstery way than otherwise, "my wish is, as it has been all the evening, to make things pleasant. I tell you plainly there's a reward out, of a hundred guineas, offered by Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet. You and me have always been pleasant together; but I have got a duty to discharge; and if that hundred guineas is to be made, it may as well be made by me as any other man. On all of which accounts, I should hope it was clear to you that I must have you, and that I'm damned if I don't have you. Am I to call in any assistance, or is the trick done?"

Mr. George has recovered himself and stands up like a soldier. "Come," he says; "I am ready."

"George," continues Mr. Bucket, "wait a bit!" With his upholsterer manner, as if the trooper were a window to be fitted up, he takes from his pocket a pair of handcuffs. "This is a serious charge, George, and such is my duty."

The trooper flushes angrily and hesitates a moment, but holds out his two hands, clasped together, and says, "There! Put them on!"

Mr. Bucket adjusts them in a moment. "How do you find them? Are they comfortable? If not, say so, for I wish to make things as pleasant as is consistent with my duty, and I've got another pair in my pocket." This remark he offers like a most respectable tradesman anxious to execute an order neatly and to the perfect satisfaction of his customer. "They'll do as they are? Very well! Now, you see, George"—he takes a cloak from a corner and begins adjusting it about the trooper's neck—"I was mindful of your feelings when I come out, and brought this on purpose. There! Who's the wiser?"

"Only I," returns the trooper, "but as I know it, do me one more good turn and pull my hat over my eyes."

"Really, though! Do you mean it? Ain't it a pity? It looks so."

"I can't look chance men in the face with these things on," Mr. George hurriedly replies. "Do, for God's sake, pull my hat forward."

So strongly entreated, Mr. Bucket complies, puts his own hat on, and conducts his prize into the streets, the trooper marching on as steadily as usual, though with his head less erect, and Mr. Bucket steering him with his elbow over the crossings and up the turnings.

CHAPTER L. Esther's Narrative

It happened that when I came home from Deal I found a note from Caddy Jellyby (as we always continued to call her), informing me that her health, which had been for some time very delicate, was worse and that she would be more glad than she could tell me if I would go to see her. It was a note of a few lines, written from the couch on which she lay and enclosed to me in another from her husband, in which he seconded her entreaty with much solicitude. Caddy was now the mother, and I the godmother, of such a poor little baby—such a tiny old-faced mite, with a countenance that seemed to be scarcely anything but cap-border, and a little lean, long-fingered hand, always clenched under its chin. It would lie in this attitude all day, with its bright specks of eyes open, wondering (as I used to imagine) how it came to be so small and weak. Whenever it was moved it cried, but at all other times it was so patient that the sole desire of its life appeared to be to lie quiet and think. It had curious little dark veins in its face and curious little dark marks under its eyes like faint remembrances of poor Caddy's inky days, and altogether, to those who were not used to it, it was quite a piteous little sight.

But it was enough for Caddy that SHE was used to it. The projects with which she beguiled her illness, for little Esther's education, and little Esther's marriage, and even for her own old age as the grandmother of little Esther's little Esthers, was so prettily expressive of devotion to this pride of her life that I should be tempted to recall some of them but for the timely remembrance that I am getting on irregularly as it is.

To return to the letter. Caddy had a superstition about me which had been strengthening in her mind ever since that night long ago when she had lain asleep with her head in my lap. She almost—I think I must say quite—believed that I did her good whenever I was near her. Now although this was such a fancy of the affectionate girl's that I am almost ashamed to mention it, still it might have all the force of a fact when she was really ill. Therefore I set off to Caddy, with my guardian's consent, post-haste; and she and Prince made so much of me that there never was anything like it.

Next day I went again to sit with her, and next day I went again. It was a very easy journey, for I had only to rise a little earlier in the morning, and keep my accounts, and attend to housekeeping matters before leaving home.

But when I had made these three visits, my guardian said to me, on my return at night, "Now, little woman, little woman, this will never do. Constant dropping will wear away a stone, and constant coaching will wear out a Dame Durden. We will go to London for a while and take possession of our old lodgings."

"Not for me, dear guardian," said I, "for I never feel tired," which was strictly true. I was only too happy to be in such request.

"For me then," returned my guardian, "or for Ada, or for both of us. It is somebody's birthday to-morrow, I think."

"Truly I think it is," said I, kissing my darling, who would be twenty-one to-morrow.

"Well," observed my guardian, half pleasantly, half seriously, "that's a great occasion and will give my fair cousin some necessary business to transact in assertion of her independence, and will make London a more convenient place for all of us. So to London we will go. That being settled, there is another thing—how have you left Caddy?"

"Very unwell, guardian. I fear it will be some time before she regains her health and strength."

"What do you call some time, now?" asked my guardian thoughtfully.

"Some weeks, I am afraid."

"Ah!" He began to walk about the room with his hands in his pockets, showing that he had been thinking as much. "Now, what do you say about her doctor? Is he a good doctor, my love?"

I felt obliged to confess that I knew nothing to the contrary but that Prince and I had agreed only that evening that we would like his opinion to be confirmed by some one.

"Well, you know," returned my guardian quickly, "there's Woodcourt."

I had not meant that, and was rather taken by surprise. For a moment all that I had had in my mind in connexion with Mr. Woodcourt seemed to come back and confuse me.

"You don't object to him, little woman?"

"Object to him, guardian? Oh no!"

"And you don't think the patient would object to him?"

So far from that, I had no doubt of her being prepared to have a great reliance on him and to like him very much. I said that he was no stranger to her personally, for she had seen him often in his kind attendance on Miss Flite.

"Very good," said my guardian. "He has been here to-day, my dear, and I will see him about it to-morrow."

I felt in this short conversation—though I did not know how, for she was quiet, and we interchanged no look—that my dear girl well remembered how merrily she had clasped me round the waist when no other hands than Caddy's had brought me the little parting token. This caused me to feel that I ought to tell her, and Caddy too, that I was going to be the mistress of Bleak House and that if I avoided that disclosure any longer I might become less worthy in my own eyes of its master's love. Therefore, when we went upstairs and had waited listening until the clock struck twelve in order that only I might be the first to wish my darling all good wishes on her birthday and to take her to my heart, I set before her, just as I had set before myself, the goodness and honour of her cousin John and the happy life that was in store for for me. If ever my darling were fonder of me at one time than another in all our intercourse, she was surely fondest of me that night. And I was so rejoiced to know it and so comforted by the sense of having done right in casting this last idle reservation away that I was ten times happier than I had been before. I had scarcely thought it a reservation a few hours ago, but now that it was gone I felt as if I understood its nature better.

Next day we went to London. We found our old lodging vacant, and in half an hour were quietly established there, as if we had never gone away. Mr. Woodcourt dined with us to celebrate my darling's birthday, and we were as pleasant as we could be with the great blank among us that Richard's absence naturally made on such an occasion. After that day I was for some weeks—eight or nine as I remember—very much with Caddy, and thus it fell out that I saw less of Ada at this time than any other since we had first come together, except the time of my own illness. She often came to Caddy's, but our function there was to amuse and cheer her, and we did not talk in our usual confidential manner. Whenever I went home at night we were together, but Caddy's rest was broken by pain, and I often remained to nurse her.

With her husband and her poor little mite of a baby to love and their home to strive for, what a good creature Caddy was! So self-denying, so uncomplaining, so anxious to get well on their account, so afraid of giving trouble, and so thoughtful of the unassisted labours of her husband and the comforts of old Mr. Turveydrop; I had never known the best of her until now. And it seemed so curious that her pale face and helpless figure should be lying there day after day where dancing was the business of life, where the kit and the apprentices began early every morning in the ball-room, and where the untidy little boy waltzed by himself in the kitchen all the afternoon.

At Caddy's request I took the supreme direction of her apartment, trimmed it up, and pushed her, couch and all, into a lighter and more airy and more cheerful corner than she had yet occupied; then, every day, when we were in our neatest array, I used to lay my small small namesake in her arms and sit down to chat or work or read to her. It was at one of the first of these quiet times that I told Caddy about Bleak House.

We had other visitors besides Ada. First of all we had Prince, who in his hurried intervals of teaching used to come softly in and sit softly down, with a face of loving anxiety for Caddy and the very little child. Whatever Caddy's condition really was, she never failed to declare to Prince that she was all but well—which I, heaven forgive me, never failed to confirm. This would put Prince in such good spirits that he would sometimes take the kit from his pocket and play a chord or two to astonish the baby, which I never knew it to do in the least degree, for my tiny namesake never noticed it at all.

Then there was Mrs. Jellyby. She would come occasionally, with her usual distraught manner, and sit calmly looking miles beyond her grandchild as if her attention were absorbed by a young Borrioboolan on its native shores. As bright-eyed as ever, as serene, and as untidy, she would say, "Well, Caddy, child, and how do you do to-day?" And then would sit amiably smiling and taking no notice of the reply or would sweetly glide off into a calculation of the number of letters she had lately received and answered or of the coffee-bearing power of Borrioboola-Gha. This she would always do with a serene contempt for our limited sphere of action, not to be disguised.

Then there was old Mr. Turveydrop, who was from morning to night and from night to morning the subject of innumerable precautions. If the baby cried, it was nearly stifled lest the noise should make him uncomfortable. If the fire wanted stirring in the night, it was surreptitiously done lest his rest should be broken. If Caddy required any little comfort that the house contained, she first carefully discussed whether he was likely to require it too. In return for this consideration he would come into the room once a day, all but blessing it—showing a condescension, and a patronage, and a grace of manner in dispensing the light of his high-shouldered presence from which I might have supposed him (if I had not known better) to have been the benefactor of Caddy's life.

"My Caroline," he would say, making the nearest approach that he could to bending over her. "Tell me that you are better to-day."

"Oh, much better, thank you, Mr. Turveydrop," Caddy would reply.

"Delighted! Enchanted! And our dear Miss Summerson. She is not quite prostrated by fatigue?" Here he would crease up his eyelids and kiss his fingers to me, though I am happy to say he had ceased to be particular in his attentions since I had been so altered.

"Not at all," I would assure him.

"Charming! We must take care of our dear Caroline, Miss Summerson. We must spare nothing that will restore her. We must nourish her. My dear Caroline"—he would turn to his daughter-in-law with infinite generosity and protection—"want for nothing, my love. Frame a wish and gratify it, my daughter. Everything this house contains, everything my room contains, is at your service, my dear. Do not," he would sometimes add in a burst of deportment, "even allow my simple requirements to be considered if they should at any time interfere with your own, my Caroline. Your necessities are greater than mine."

He had established such a long prescriptive right to this deportment (his son's inheritance from his mother) that I several times knew both Caddy and her husband to be melted to tears by these affectionate self-sacrifices.

"Nay, my dears," he would remonstrate; and when I saw Caddy's thin arm about his fat neck as he said it, I would be melted too, though not by the same process. "Nay, nay! I have promised never to leave ye. Be dutiful and affectionate towards me, and I ask no other return. Now, bless ye! I am going to the Park."

He would take the air there presently and get an appetite for his hotel dinner. I hope I do old Mr. Turveydrop no wrong, but I never saw any better traits in him than these I faithfully record, except that he certainly conceived a liking for Peepy and would take the child out walking with great pomp, always on those occasions sending him home before he went to dinner himself, and occasionally with a halfpenny in his pocket. But even this disinterestedness was attended with no inconsiderable cost, to my knowledge, for before Peepy was sufficiently decorated to walk hand in hand with the professor of deportment, he had to be newly dressed, at the expense of Caddy and her husband, from top to toe.

Last of our visitors, there was Mr. Jellyby. Really when he used to come in of an evening, and ask Caddy in his meek voice how she was, and then sit down with his head against the wall, and make no attempt to say anything more, I liked him very much. If he found me bustling about doing any little thing, he sometimes half took his coat off, as if with an intention of helping by a great exertion; but he never got any further. His sole occupation was to sit with his head against the wall, looking hard at the thoughtful baby; and I could not quite divest my mind of a fancy that they understood one another.

I have not counted Mr. Woodcourt among our visitors because he was now Caddy's regular attendant. She soon began to improve under his care, but he was so gentle, so skilful, so unwearying in the pains he took that it is not to be wondered at, I am sure. I saw a good deal of Mr. Woodcourt during this time, though not so much as might be supposed, for knowing Caddy to be safe in his hands, I often slipped home at about the hours when he was expected. We frequently met, notwithstanding. I was quite reconciled to myself now, but I still felt glad to think that he was sorry for me, and he still WAS sorry for me I believed. He helped Mr. Badger in his professional engagements, which were numerous, and had as yet no settled projects for the future.

It was when Caddy began to recover that I began to notice a change in my dear girl. I cannot say how it first presented itself to me, because I observed it in many slight particulars which were nothing in themselves and only became something when they were pieced together. But I made it out, by putting them together, that Ada was not so frankly cheerful with me as she used to be. Her tenderness for me was as loving and true as ever; I did not for a moment doubt that; but there was a quiet sorrow about her which she did not confide to me, and in which I traced some hidden regret.

Now, I could not understand this, and I was so anxious for the happiness of my own pet that it caused me some uneasiness and set me thinking often. At length, feeling sure that Ada suppressed this something from me lest it should make me unhappy too, it came into my head that she was a little grieved—for me—by what I had told her about Bleak House.

How I persuaded myself that this was likely, I don't know. I had no idea that there was any selfish reference in my doing so. I was not grieved for myself: I was quite contented and quite happy. Still, that Ada might be thinking—for me, though I had abandoned all such thoughts—of what once was, but was now all changed, seemed so easy to believe that I believed it.

What could I do to reassure my darling (I considered then) and show her that I had no such feelings? Well! I could only be as brisk and busy as possible, and that I had tried to be all along. However, as Caddy's illness had certainly interfered, more or less, with my home duties—though I had always been there in the morning to make my guardian's breakfast, and he had a hundred times laughed and said there must be two little women, for his little woman was never missing—I resolved to be doubly diligent and gay. So I went about the house humming all the tunes I knew, and I sat working and working in a desperate manner, and I talked and talked, morning, noon, and night.

And still there was the same shade between me and my darling.

"So, Dame Trot," observed my guardian, shutting up his book one night when we were all three together, "so Woodcourt has restored Caddy Jellyby to the full enjoyment of life again?"

"Yes," I said; "and to be repaid by such gratitude as hers is to be made rich, guardian."

"I wish it was," he returned, "with all my heart."

So did I too, for that matter. I said so.

"Aye! We would make him as rich as a Jew if we knew how. Would we not, little woman?"

I laughed as I worked and replied that I was not sure about that, for it might spoil him, and he might not be so useful, and there might be many who could ill spare him. As Miss Flite, and Caddy herself, and many others.

"True," said my guardian. "I had forgotten that. But we would agree to make him rich enough to live, I suppose? Rich enough to work with tolerable peace of mind? Rich enough to have his own happy home and his own household gods—and household goddess, too, perhaps?"

That was quite another thing, I said. We must all agree in that.

"To be sure," said my guardian. "All of us. I have a great regard for Woodcourt, a high esteem for him; and I have been sounding him delicately about his plans. It is difficult to offer aid to an independent man with that just kind of pride which he possesses. And yet I would be glad to do it if I might or if I knew how. He seems half inclined for another voyage. But that appears like casting such a man away."

"It might open a new world to him," said I.

"So it might, little woman," my guardian assented. "I doubt if he expects much of the old world. Do you know I have fancied that he sometimes feels some particular disappointment or misfortune encountered in it. You never heard of anything of that sort?"

I shook my head.

"Humph," said my guardian. "I am mistaken, I dare say." As there was a little pause here, which I thought, for my dear girl's satisfaction, had better be filled up, I hummed an air as I worked which was a favourite with my guardian.

"And do you think Mr. Woodcourt will make another voyage?" I asked him when I had hummed it quietly all through.

"I don't quite know what to think, my dear, but I should say it was likely at present that he will give a long trip to another country."

"I am sure he will take the best wishes of all our hearts with him wherever he goes," said I; "and though they are not riches, he will never be the poorer for them, guardian, at least."

"Never, little woman," he replied.

I was sitting in my usual place, which was now beside my guardian's chair. That had not been my usual place before the letter, but it was now. I looked up to Ada, who was sitting opposite, and I saw, as she looked at me, that her eyes were filled with tears and that tears were falling down her face. I felt that I had only to be placid and merry once for all to undeceive my dear and set her loving heart at rest. I really was so, and I had nothing to do but to be myself.

So I made my sweet girl lean upon my shoulder—how little thinking what was heavy on her mind!—and I said she was not quite well, and put my arm about her, and took her upstairs. When we were in our own room, and when she might perhaps have told me what I was so unprepared to hear, I gave her no encouragement to confide in me; I never thought she stood in need of it.

"Oh, my dear good Esther," said Ada, "if I could only make up my mind to speak to you and my cousin John when you are together!"

"Why, my love!" I remonstrated. "Ada, why should you not speak to us!"

Ada only dropped her head and pressed me closer to her heart.

"You surely don't forget, my beauty," said I, smiling, "what quiet, old-fashioned people we are and how I have settled down to be the discreetest of dames? You don't forget how happily and peacefully my life is all marked out for me, and by whom? I am certain that you don't forget by what a noble character, Ada. That can never be."

"No, never, Esther."

"Why then, my dear," said I, "there can be nothing amiss—and why should you not speak to us?"

"Nothing amiss, Esther?" returned Ada. "Oh, when I think of all these years, and of his fatherly care and kindness, and of the old relations among us, and of you, what shall I do, what shall I do!"

I looked at my child in some wonder, but I thought it better not to answer otherwise than by cheering her, and so I turned off into many little recollections of our life together and prevented her from saying more. When she lay down to sleep, and not before, I returned to my guardian to say good night, and then I came back to Ada and sat near her for a little while.

She was asleep, and I thought as I looked at her that she was a little changed. I had thought so more than once lately. I could not decide, even looking at her while she was unconscious, how she was changed, but something in the familiar beauty of her face looked different to me. My guardian's old hopes of her and Richard arose sorrowfully in my mind, and I said to myself, "She has been anxious about him," and I wondered how that love would end.

When I had come home from Caddy's while she was ill, I had often found Ada at work, and she had always put her work away, and I had never known what it was. Some of it now lay in a drawer near her, which was not quite closed. I did not open the drawer, but I still rather wondered what the work could he, for it was evidently nothing for herself.

And I noticed as I kissed my dear that she lay with one hand under her pillow so that it was hidden.

How much less amiable I must have been than they thought me, how much less amiable than I thought myself, to be so preoccupied with my own cheerfulness and contentment as to think that it only rested with me to put my dear girl right and set her mind at peace!

But I lay down, self-deceived, in that belief. And I awoke in it next day to find that there was still the same shade between me and my darling.

CHAPTER LI. Enlightened

When Mr. Woodcourt arrived in London, he went, that very same day, to Mr. Vholes's in Symond's Inn. For he never once, from the moment when I entreated him to be a friend to Richard, neglected or forgot his promise. He had told me that he accepted the charge as a sacred trust, and he was ever true to it in that spirit.

He found Mr. Vholes in his office and informed Mr. Vholes of his agreement with Richard that he should call there to learn his address.

"Just so, sir," said Mr. Vholes. "Mr. C.'s address is not a hundred miles from here, sir, Mr. C.'s address is not a hundred miles from here. Would you take a seat, sir?"

Mr. Woodcourt thanked Mr. Vholes, but he had no business with him beyond what he had mentioned.

"Just so, sir. I believe, sir," said Mr. Vholes, still quietly insisting on the seat by not giving the address, "that you have influence with Mr. C. Indeed I am aware that you have."

"I was not aware of it myself," returned Mr. Woodcourt; "but I suppose you know best."

"Sir," rejoined Mr. Vholes, self-contained as usual, voice and all, "it is a part of my professional duty to know best. It is a part of my professional duty to study and to understand a gentleman who confides his interests to me. In my professional duty I shall not be wanting, sir, if I know it. I may, with the best intentions, be wanting in it without knowing it; but not if I know it, sir."

Mr. Woodcourt again mentioned the address.

"Give me leave, sir," said Mr. Vholes. "Bear with me for a moment. Sir, Mr. C. is playing for a considerable stake, and cannot play without—need I say what?"

"Money, I presume?"

"Sir," said Mr. Vholes, "to be honest with you (honesty being my golden rule, whether I gain by it or lose, and I find that I generally lose), money is the word. Now, sir, upon the chances of Mr. C.'s game I express to you no opinion, NO opinion. It might be highly impolitic in Mr. C., after playing so long and so high, to leave off; it might be the reverse; I say nothing. No, sir," said Mr. Vholes, bringing his hand flat down upon his desk in a positive manner, "nothing."

"You seem to forget," returned Mr. Woodcourt, "that I ask you to say nothing and have no interest in anything you say."

"Pardon me, sir!" retorted Mr. Vholes. "You do yourself an injustice. No, sir! Pardon me! You shall not—shall not in my office, if I know it—do yourself an injustice. You are interested in anything, and in everything, that relates to your friend. I know human nature much better, sir, than to admit for an instant that a gentleman of your appearance is not interested in whatever concerns his friend."

"Well," replied Mr. Woodcourt, "that may be. I am particularly interested in his address."

"The number, sir," said Mr. Vholes parenthetically, "I believe I have already mentioned. If Mr. C. is to continue to play for this considerable stake, sir, he must have funds. Understand me! There are funds in hand at present. I ask for nothing; there are funds in hand. But for the onward play, more funds must be provided, unless Mr. C. is to throw away what he has already ventured, which is wholly and solely a point for his consideration. This, sir, I take the opportunity of stating openly to you as the friend of Mr. C. Without funds I shall always be happy to appear and act for Mr. C. to the extent of all such costs as are safe to be allowed out of the estate, not beyond that. I could not go beyond that, sir, without wronging some one. I must either wrong my three dear girls or my venerable father, who is entirely dependent on me, in the Vale of Taunton; or some one. Whereas, sir, my resolution is (call it weakness or folly if you please) to wrong no one."

Mr. Woodcourt rather sternly rejoined that he was glad to hear it.

"I wish, sir," said Mr. Vholes, "to leave a good name behind me. Therefore I take every opportunity of openly stating to a friend of Mr. C. how Mr. C. is situated. As to myself, sir, the labourer is worthy of his hire. If I undertake to put my shoulder to the wheel, I do it, and I earn what I get. I am here for that purpose. My name is painted on the door outside, with that object."

"And Mr. Carstone's address, Mr. Vholes?"

"Sir," returned Mr. Vholes, "as I believe I have already mentioned, it is next door. On the second story you will find Mr. C.'s apartments. Mr. C.

desires to be near his professional adviser, and I am far from objecting, for I court inquiry."

Upon this Mr. Woodcourt wished Mr. Vholes good day and went in search of Richard, the change in whose appearance he began to understand now but too well.

He found him in a dull room, fadedly furnished, much as I had found him in his barrack-room but a little while before, except that he was not writing but was sitting with a book before him, from which his eyes and thoughts were far astray. As the door chanced to be standing open, Mr. Woodcourt was in his presence for some moments without being perceived, and he told me that he never could forget the haggardness of his face and the dejection of his manner before he was aroused from his dream.

"Woodcourt, my dear fellow," cried Richard, starting up with extended hands, "you come upon my vision like a ghost."

"A friendly one," he replied, "and only waiting, as they say ghosts do, to be addressed. How does the mortal world go?" They were seated now, near together.

"Badly enough, and slowly enough," said Richard, "speaking at least for my part of it."

"What part is that?"

"The Chancery part."

"I never heard," returned Mr. Woodcourt, shaking his head, "of its going well yet."

"Nor I," said Richard moodily. "Who ever did?" He brightened again in a moment and said with his natural openness, "Woodcourt, I should be sorry to be misunderstood by you, even if I gained by it in your estimation. You must know that I have done no good this long time. I have not intended to do much harm, but I seem to have been capable of nothing else. It may be that I should have done better by keeping out of the net into which my destiny has worked me, but I think not, though I dare say you will soon hear, if you have not already heard, a very different opinion. To make short of a long story, I am afraid I have wanted an object; but I have an object now—or it has me—and it is too late to discuss it. Take me as I am, and make the best of me."

"A bargain," said Mr. Woodcourt. "Do as much by me in return."

"Oh! You," returned Richard, "you can pursue your art for its own sake, and can put your hand upon the plough and never turn, and can strike a purpose out of anything. You and I are very different creatures."

He spoke regretfully and lapsed for a moment into his weary condition.

"Well, well!" he cried, shaking it off. "Everything has an end. We shall see! So you will take me as I am, and make the best of me?"

"Aye! Indeed I will." They shook hands upon it laughingly, but in deep earnestness. I can answer for one of them with my heart of hearts.

"You come as a godsend," said Richard, "for I have seen nobody here yet but Vholes. Woodcourt, there is one subject I should like to mention, for once and for all, in the beginning of our treaty. You can hardly make the best of me if I don't. You know, I dare say, that I have an attachment to my cousin Ada?"

Mr. Woodcourt replied that I had hinted as much to him. "Now pray," returned Richard, "don't think me a heap of selfishness. Don't suppose that I am splitting my head and half breaking my heart over this miserable Chancery suit for my own rights and interests alone. Ada's are bound up with mine; they can't be separated; Vholes works for both of us. Do think of that!"

He was so very solicitous on this head that Mr. Woodcourt gave him the strongest assurances that he did him no injustice.

"You see," said Richard, with something pathetic in his manner of lingering on the point, though it was off-hand and unstudied, "to an upright fellow like you, bringing a friendly face like yours here, I cannot bear the thought of appearing selfish and mean. I want to see Ada righted, Woodcourt, as well as myself; I want to do my utmost to right her, as well as myself; I venture what I can scrape together to extricate her, as well as myself. Do, I beseech you, think of that!"

Afterwards, when Mr. Woodcourt came to reflect on what had passed, he was so very much impressed by the strength of Richard's anxiety on this point that in telling me generally of his first visit to Symond's Inn he particularly dwelt upon it. It revived a fear I had had before that my dear girl's little property would be absorbed by Mr. Vholes and that Richard's justification to himself would be sincerely this. It was just as I began to take care of Caddy that the interview took place, and I now return to the time when Caddy had recovered and the shade was still between me and my darling.

I proposed to Ada that morning that we should go and see Richard. It a little surprised me to find that she hesitated and was not so radiantly willing as I had expected.

"My dear," said I, "you have not had any difference with Richard since I have been so much away?"

"No, Esther."

"Not heard of him, perhaps?" said I.

"Yes, I have heard of him," said Ada.

Such tears in her eyes, and such love in her face. I could not make my darling out. Should I go to Richard's by myself? I said. No, Ada thought I had better not go by myself. Would she go with me? Yes, Ada thought she had better go with me. Should we go now? Yes, let us go now. Well, I could not understand my darling, with the tears in her eyes and the love in her face!

We were soon equipped and went out. It was a sombre day, and drops of chill rain fell at intervals. It was one of those colourless days when everything looks heavy and harsh. The houses frowned at us, the dust rose at us, the smoke swooped at us, nothing made any compromise about itself or wore a softened aspect. I fancied my beautiful girl quite out of place in the rugged streets, and I thought there were more funerals passing along the dismal pavements than I had ever seen before.

We had first to find out Symond's Inn. We were going to inquire in a shop when Ada said she thought it was near Chancery Lane. "We are not likely to be far out, my love, if we go in that direction," said I. So to Chancery Lane we went, and there, sure enough, we saw it written up. Symond's Inn.

We had next to find out the number. "Or Mr. Vholes's office will do," I recollected, "for Mr. Vholes's office is next door." Upon which Ada said, perhaps that was Mr. Vholes's office in the corner there. And it really was.

Then came the question, which of the two next doors? I was going for the one, and my darling was going for the other; and my darling was right again. So up we went to the second story, when we came to Richard's name in great white letters on a hearse-like panel.

I should have knocked, but Ada said perhaps we had better turn the handle and go in. Thus we came to Richard, poring over a table covered with dusty bundles of papers which seemed to me like dusty mirrors reflecting his own mind. Wherever I looked I saw the ominous words that ran in it repeated. Jarndyce and Jarndyce.

He received us very affectionately, and we sat down. "If you had come a little earlier," he said, "you would have found Woodcourt here. There never was such a good fellow as Woodcourt is. He finds time to look in between-whiles, when anybody else with half his work to do would be thinking about not being able to come. And he is so cheery, so fresh, so sensible, so earnest, so—everything that I am not, that the place brightens whenever he comes, and darkens whenever he goes again."

"God bless him," I thought, "for his truth to me!"

"He is not so sanguine, Ada," continued Richard, casting his dejected look over the bundles of papers, "as Vholes and I are usually, but he is only an outsider and is not in the mysteries. We have gone into them, and he has not. He can't be expected to know much of such a labyrinth."

As his look wandered over the papers again and he passed his two hands over his head, I noticed how sunken and how large his eyes appeared, how dry his lips were, and how his finger-nails were all bitten away.

"Is this a healthy place to live in, Richard, do you think?" said I.

"Why, my dear Minerva," answered Richard with his old gay laugh, "it is neither a rural nor a cheerful place; and when the sun shines here, you may lay a pretty heavy wager that it is shining brightly in an open spot. But it's well enough for the time. It's near the offices and near Vholes."

"Perhaps," I hinted, "a change from both—"

"Might do me good?" said Richard, forcing a laugh as he finished the sentence. "I shouldn't wonder! But it can only come in one way now—in one of two ways, I should rather say. Either the suit must be ended, Esther, or the suitor. But it shall be the suit, my dear girl, the suit, my dear girl!"

These latter words were addressed to Ada, who was sitting nearest to him. Her face being turned away from me and towards him, I could not see it.

"We are doing very well," pursued Richard. "Vholes will tell you so. We are really spinning along. Ask Vholes. We are giving them no rest. Vholes knows all their windings and turnings, and we are upon them everywhere. We have astonished them already. We shall rouse up that nest of sleepers, mark my words!"

His hopefulness had long been more painful to me than his despondency; it was so unlike hopefulness, had something so fierce in its determination to be it, was so hungry and eager, and yet so conscious of being forced and unsustainable that it had long touched me to the heart. But the commentary upon it now indelibly written in his handsome face made it far more distressing than it used to be. I say indelibly, for I felt persuaded that if the fatal cause could have been for ever terminated, according to his brightest visions, in that same hour, the traces of the premature anxiety, self-reproach, and disappointment it had occasioned him would have remained upon his features to the hour of his death.

"The sight of our dear little woman," said Richard, Ada still remaining silent and quiet, "is so natural to me, and her compassionate face is so like the face of old days—"

Ah! No, no. I smiled and shook my head.

"—So exactly like the face of old days," said Richard in his cordial voice, and taking my hand with the brotherly regard which nothing ever changed, "that I can't make pretences with her. I fluctuate a little; that's the truth. Sometimes I hope, my dear, and sometimes I—don't quite despair, but nearly. I get," said Richard, relinquishing my hand gently and walking across the room, "so tired!"

He took a few turns up and down and sunk upon the sofa. "I get," he repeated gloomily, "so tired. It is such weary, weary work!"

He was leaning on his arm saying these words in a meditative voice and looking at the ground when my darling rose, put off her bonnet, kneeled down beside him with her golden hair falling like sunlight on his head, clasped her two arms round his neck, and turned her face to me. Oh, what a loving and devoted face I saw!

"Esther, dear," she said very quietly, "I am not going home again."

A light shone in upon me all at once.

"Never any more. I am going to stay with my dear husband. We have been married above two months. Go home without me, my own Esther; I shall never go home any more!" With those words my darling drew his head down on her breast and held it there. And if ever in my life I saw a love that nothing but death could change, I saw it then before me.

"Speak to Esther, my dearest," said Richard, breaking the silence presently. "Tell her how it was."

I met her before she could come to me and folded her in my arms. We neither of us spoke, but with her cheek against my own I wanted to hear nothing. "My pet," said I. "My love. My poor, poor girl!" I pitied her so much. I was very fond of Richard, but the impulse that I had upon me was to pity her so much.

"Esther, will you forgive me? Will my cousin John forgive me?"

"My dear," said I, "to doubt it for a moment is to do him a great wrong. And as to me!" Why, as to me, what had I to forgive!

I dried my sobbing darling's eyes and sat beside her on the sofa, and Richard sat on my other side; and while I was reminded of that so different night when they had first taken me into their confidence and had gone on in their own wild happy way, they told me between them how it was.

"All I had was Richard's," Ada said; "and Richard would not take it, Esther, and what could I do but be his wife when I loved him dearly!"

"And you were so fully and so kindly occupied, excellent Dame Durden," said Richard, "that how could we speak to you at such a time! And besides, it was not a long-considered step. We went out one morning and were married."

"And when it was done, Esther," said my darling, "I was always thinking how to tell you and what to do for the best. And sometimes I thought you ought to know it directly, and sometimes I thought you ought not to know it and keep it from my cousin John; and I could not tell what to do, and I fretted very much."

How selfish I must have been not to have thought of this before! I don't know what I said now. I was so sorry, and yet I was so fond of them and so glad that they were fond of me; I pitied them so much, and yet I felt a kind of pride in their loving one another. I never had experienced such painful and pleasurable emotion at one time, and in my own heart I did not know which predominated. But I was not there to darken their way; I did not do that.

When I was less foolish and more composed, my darling took her wedding-ring from her bosom, and kissed it, and put it on. Then I remembered last night and told Richard that ever since her marriage she had worn it at night when there was no one to see. Then Ada blushingly asked me how did I know that, my dear. Then I told Ada how I had seen her hand concealed under her pillow and had little thought why, my dear. Then they began telling me how it was all over again, and I began to be sorry and glad again, and foolish again, and to hide my plain old face as much as I could lest I should put them out of heart.

Thus the time went on until it became necessary for me to think of returning. When that time arrived it was the worst of all, for then my darling completely broke down. She clung round my neck, calling me by every dear name she could think of and saying what should she do without me! Nor was Richard much better; and as for me, I should have been the worst of the three if I had not severely said to myself, "Now Esther, if you do, I'll never speak to you again!"

"Why, I declare," said I, "I never saw such a wife. I don't think she loves her husband at all. Here, Richard, take my child, for goodness' sake." But I held her tight all the while, and could have wept over her I don't know how long.

"I give this dear young couple notice," said I, "that I am only going away to come back to-morrow and that I shall be always coming backwards and forwards until Symond's Inn is tired of the sight of me. So I shall not say good-bye, Richard. For what would be the use of that, you know, when I am coming back so soon!"

I had given my darling to him now, and I meant to go; but I lingered for one more look of the precious face which it seemed to rive my heart to turn from.

So I said (in a merry, bustling manner) that unless they gave me some encouragement to come back, I was not sure that I could take that liberty, upon which my dear girl looked up, faintly smiling through her tears, and I folded her lovely face between my hands, and gave it one last kiss, and laughed, and ran away.

And when I got downstairs, oh, how I cried! It almost seemed to me that I had lost my Ada for ever. I was so lonely and so blank without her, and it was so desolate to be going home with no hope of seeing her there, that I could get no comfort for a little while as I walked up and down in a dim corner sobbing and crying.

I came to myself by and by, after a little scolding, and took a coach home. The poor boy whom I had found at St. Albans had reappeared a short time before and was lying at the point of death; indeed, was then dead, though I did not know it. My guardian had gone out to inquire about him and did not return to dinner. Being quite alone, I cried a little again, though on the whole I don't think I behaved so very, very ill.

It was only natural that I should not be quite accustomed to the loss of my darling yet. Three or four hours were not a long time after years. But my mind dwelt so much upon the uncongenial scene in which I had left her, and I pictured it as such an overshadowed stony-hearted one, and I so longed to be near her and taking some sort of care of her, that I determined to go back in the evening only to look up at her windows.

It was foolish, I dare say, but it did not then seem at all so to me, and it does not seem quite so even now. I took Charley into my confidence, and we went out at dusk. It was dark when we came to the new strange home of my dear girl, and there was a light behind the yellow blinds. We walked past cautiously three or four times, looking up, and narrowly missed encountering Mr. Vholes, who came out of his office while we were there and turned his head to look up too before going home. The sight of his lank black figure and the lonesome air of that nook in the dark were favourable to the state of my mind. I thought of the youth and love and beauty of my dear girl, shut up in such an ill-assorted refuge, almost as if it were a cruel place.

It was very solitary and very dull, and I did not doubt that I might safely steal upstairs. I left Charley below and went up with a light foot, not distressed by any glare from the feeble oil lanterns on the way. I listened for a few moments, and in the musty rotting silence of the house believed that I could hear the murmur of their young voices. I put my lips to the hearse-like panel of the door as a kiss for my dear and came quietly down again, thinking that one of these days I would confess to the visit.

And it really did me good, for though nobody but Charley and I knew anything about it, I somehow felt as if it had diminished the separation between Ada and me and had brought us together again for those moments. I went back, not quite accustomed yet to the change, but all the better for that hovering about my darling.

My guardian had come home and was standing thoughtfully by the dark window. When I went in, his face cleared and he came to his seat, but he caught the light upon my face as I took mine.

"Little woman," said he, "You have been crying."

"Why, yes, guardian," said I, "I am afraid I have been, a little. Ada has been in such distress, and is so very sorry, guardian."

I put my arm on the back of his chair, and I saw in his glance that my words and my look at her empty place had prepared him.

"Is she married, my dear?"

I told him all about it and how her first entreaties had referred to his forgiveness.

"She has no need of it," said he. "Heaven bless her and her husband!" But just as my first impulse had been to pity her, so was his. "Poor girl, poor girl! Poor Rick! Poor Ada!"

Neither of us spoke after that, until he said with a sigh, "Well, well, my dear! Bleak House is thinning fast."

"But its mistress remains, guardian." Though I was timid about saying it, I ventured because of the sorrowful tone in which he had spoken. "She will do all she can to make it happy," said I.

"She will succeed, my love!"

The letter had made no difference between us except that the seat by his side had come to be mine; it made none now. He turned his old bright fatherly look upon me, laid his hand on my hand in his old way, and said again, "She will succeed, my dear. Nevertheless, Bleak House is thinning fast, O little woman!"

I was sorry presently that this was all we said about that. I was rather disappointed. I feared I might not quite have been all I had meant to be since the letter and the answer.

CHAPTER LII. Obstinacy

But one other day had intervened when, early in the morning as we were going to breakfast, Mr. Woodcourt came in haste with the astounding news that a terrible murder had been committed for which Mr. George had been apprehended and was in custody. When he told us that a large reward was offered by Sir Leicester Dedlock for the murderer's apprehension, I did not in my first consternation understand why; but a few more words explained to me that the murdered person was Sir Leicester's lawyer, and immediately my mother's dread of him rushed into my remembrance.

This unforeseen and violent removal of one whom she had long watched and distrusted and who had long watched and distrusted her, one for whom she could have had few intervals of kindness, always dreading in him a dangerous and secret enemy, appeared so awful that my first thoughts were of her. How appalling to hear of such a death and be able to feel no pity! How dreadful to remember, perhaps, that she had sometimes even wished the old man away who was so swiftly hurried out of life!

Such crowding reflections, increasing the distress and fear I always felt when the name was mentioned, made me so agitated that I could scarcely hold my place at the table. I was quite unable to follow the conversation until I had had a little time to recover. But when I came to myself and saw how shocked my guardian was and found that they were earnestly speaking of the suspected man and recalling every favourable impression we had formed of him out of the good we had known of him, my interest and my fears were so strongly aroused in his behalf that I was quite set up again.

"Guardian, you don't think it possible that he is justly accused?"

"My dear, I CAN'T think so. This man whom we have seen so open-hearted and compassionate, who with the might of a giant has the gentleness of a child, who looks as brave a fellow as ever lived and is so simple and quiet with it, this man justly accused of such a crime? I can't believe it. It's not that I don't or I won't. I can't!"

"And I can't," said Mr. Woodcourt. "Still, whatever we believe or know of him, we had better not forget that some appearances are against him. He bore an animosity towards the deceased gentleman. He has openly mentioned it in many places. He is said to have expressed himself violently towards him, and he certainly did about him, to my knowledge. He admits that he was alone on the scene of the murder within a few minutes of its commission. I sincerely believe him to be as innocent of any participation in it as I am, but these are all reasons for suspicion falling upon him."

"True," said my guardian. And he added, turning to me, "It would be doing him a very bad service, my dear, to shut our eyes to the truth in any of these respects."

I felt, of course, that we must admit, not only to ourselves but to others, the full force of the circumstances against him. Yet I knew withal (I could not help saying) that their weight would not induce us to desert him in his need.

"Heaven forbid!" returned my guardian. "We will stand by him, as he himself stood by the two poor creatures who are gone." He meant Mr. Gridley and the boy, to both of whom Mr. George had given shelter.

Mr. Woodcourt then told us that the trooper's man had been with him before day, after wandering about the streets all night like a distracted creature. That one of the trooper's first anxieties was that we should not suppose him guilty. That he had charged his messenger to represent his perfect innocence with every solemn assurance be could send us. That Mr. Woodcourt had only quieted the man by undertaking to come to our house very early in the morning with these representations. He added that he was now upon his way to see the prisoner himself.

My guardian said directly he would go too. Now, besides that I liked the retired soldier very much and that he liked me, I had that secret interest in what had happened which was only known to my guardian. I felt as if it came close and near to me. It seemed to become personally important to myself that the truth should be discovered and that no innocent people should be suspected, for suspicion, once run wild, might run wilder.

In a word, I felt as if it were my duty and obligation to go with them. My guardian did not seek to dissuade me, and I went.

It was a large prison with many courts and passages so like one another and so uniformly paved that I seemed to gain a new comprehension, as I passed along, of the fondness that solitary prisoners, shut up among the same staring walls from year to year, have had—as I have read—for a weed or a stray blade of grass. In an arched room by himself, like a cellar upstairs, with walls so glaringly white that they made the massive iron window-bars and iron-bound door even more profoundly black than they were, we found the trooper standing in a corner. He had been sitting on a bench there and had risen when he heard the locks and bolts turn.

When he saw us, he came forward a step with his usual heavy tread, and there stopped and made a slight bow. But as I still advanced, putting out my hand to him, he understood us in a moment.

"This is a load off my mind, I do assure you, miss and gentlemen," said he, saluting us with great heartiness and drawing a long breath. "And now I don't so much care how it ends."

He scarcely seemed to be the prisoner. What with his coolness and his soldierly bearing, he looked far more like the prison guard.

"This is even a rougher place than my gallery to receive a lady in," said Mr. George, "but I know Miss Summerson will make the best of it." As he handed me to the bench on which he had been sitting, I sat down, which seemed to give him great satisfaction.

"I thank you, miss," said he.

"Now, George," observed my guardian, "as we require no new assurances on your part, so I believe we need give you none on ours."

"Not at all, sir. I thank you with all my heart. If I was not innocent of this crime, I couldn't look at you and keep my secret to myself under the condescension of the present visit. I feel the present visit very much. I am not one of the eloquent sort, but I feel it, Miss Summerson and gentlemen, deeply."

He laid his hand for a moment on his broad chest and bent his head to us. Although he squared himself again directly, he expressed a great amount of natural emotion by these simple means.

"First," said my guardian, "can we do anything for your personal comfort, George?"

"For which, sir?" he inquired, clearing his throat.

"For your personal comfort. Is there anything you want that would lessen the hardship of this confinement?"

"Well, sir," replied George, after a little cogitation, "I am equally obliged to you, but tobacco being against the rules, I can't say that there is."

"You will think of many little things perhaps, by and by. Whenever you do, George, let us know."

"Thank you, sir. Howsoever," observed Mr. George with one of his sunburnt smiles, "a man who has been knocking about the world in a vagabond kind of a way as long as I have gets on well enough in a place like the present, so far as that goes."

"Next, as to your case," observed my guardian.

"Exactly so, sir," returned Mr. George, folding his arms upon his breast with perfect self-possession and a little curiosity.

"How does it stand now?"

"Why, sir, it is under remand at present. Bucket gives me to understand that he will probably apply for a series of remands from time to time until the case is more complete. How it is to be made more complete I don't myself see, but I dare say Bucket will manage it somehow."

"Why, heaven save us, man," exclaimed my guardian, surprised into his old oddity and vehemence, "you talk of yourself as if you were somebody else!"

"No offence, sir," said Mr. George. "I am very sensible of your kindness. But I don't see how an innocent man is to make up his mind to this kind of thing without knocking his head against the walls unless he takes it in that point of view.

"That is true enough to a certain extent," returned my guardian, softened. "But my good fellow, even an innocent man must take ordinary precautions to defend himself."

"Certainly, sir. And I have done so. I have stated to the magistrates, 'Gentlemen, I am as innocent of this charge as yourselves; what has been stated against me in the way of facts is perfectly true; I know no more about it.' I intend to continue stating that, sir. What more can I do? It's the truth."

"But the mere truth won't do," rejoined my guardian.

"Won't it indeed, sir? Rather a bad look-out for me!" Mr. George good-humouredly observed.

"You must have a lawyer," pursued my guardian. "We must engage a good one for you."

"I ask your pardon, sir," said Mr. George with a step backward. "I am equally obliged. But I must decidedly beg to be excused from anything of that sort."

"You won't have a lawyer?"

"No, sir." Mr. George shook his head in the most emphatic manner. "I thank you all the same, sir, but—no lawyer!"

"Why not?"

"I don't take kindly to the breed," said Mr. George. "Gridley didn't. And—if you'll excuse my saying so much—I should hardly have thought you did yourself, sir."

"That's equity," my guardian explained, a little at a loss; "that's equity, George."

"Is it, indeed, sir?" returned the trooper in his off-hand manner. "I am not acquainted with those shades of names myself, but in a general way I object to the breed."

Unfolding his arms and changing his position, he stood with one massive hand upon the table and the other on his hip, as complete a picture of a man who was not to be moved from a fixed purpose as ever I saw. It was in vain that we all three talked to him and endeavoured to persuade him; he listened with that gentleness which went so well with his bluff bearing, but was evidently no more shaken by our representations that his place of confinement was.

"Pray think, once more, Mr. George," said I. "Have you no wish in reference to your case?"

"I certainly could wish it to be tried, miss," he returned, "by court-martial; but that is out of the question, as I am well aware. If you will be so good as to favour me with your attention for a couple of minutes, miss, not more, I'll endeavour to explain myself as clearly as I can."

He looked at us all three in turn, shook his head a little as if he were adjusting it in the stock and collar of a tight uniform, and after a moment's reflection went on.

"You see, miss, I have been handcuffed and taken into custody and brought here. I am a marked and disgraced man, and here I am. My shooting gallery is rummaged, high and low, by Bucket; such property as I have—'tis small—is turned this way and that till it don't know itself; and (as aforesaid) here I am! I don't particular complain of that. Though I am in these present quarters through no immediately preceding fault of mine, I can very well understand that if I hadn't gone into the vagabond way in my youth, this wouldn't have happened. It HAS happened. Then comes the question how to meet it"

He rubbed his swarthy forehead for a moment with a good-humoured look and said apologetically, "I am such a short-winded talker that I must think a bit." Having thought a bit, he looked up again and resumed.

"How to meet it. Now, the unfortunate deceased was himself a lawyer and had a pretty tight hold of me. I don't wish to rake up his ashes, but he had, what I should call if he was living, a devil of a tight hold of me. I don't like his trade the better for that. If I had kept clear of his trade, I should have kept outside this place. But that's not what I mean. Now, suppose I had killed him. Suppose I really had discharged into his body any one of those pistols recently fired off that Bucket has found at my place, and dear me, might have found there any day since it has been my place. What should I have done as soon as I was hard and fast here? Got a lawyer."

He stopped on hearing some one at the locks and bolts and did not resume until the door had been opened and was shut again. For what purpose opened, I will mention presently.

"I should have got a lawyer, and he would have said (as I have often read in the newspapers), 'My client says nothing, my client reserves his defence': my client this, that, and t'other. Well, 'tis not the custom of that breed to go straight, according to my opinion, or to think that other men do.

Say I am innocent and I get a lawyer. He would be as likely to believe me guilty as not; perhaps more. What would he do, whether or not? Act as if I was—shut my mouth up, tell me not to commit myself, keep circumstances back, chop the evidence small, quibble, and get me off perhaps! But, Miss Summerson, do I care for getting off in that way; or would I rather be hanged in my own way—if you'll excuse my mentioning anything so disagreeable to a lady?"

He had warmed into his subject now, and was under no further necessity to wait a bit.

"I would rather be hanged in my own way. And I mean to be! I don't intend to say," looking round upon us with his powerful arms akimbo and his dark eyebrows raised, "that I am more partial to being hanged than another man. What I say is, I must come off clear and full or not at all. Therefore, when I hear stated against me what is true, I say it's true; and when they tell me, 'whatever you say will be used,' I tell them I don't mind that; I mean it to be used. If they can't make me innocent out of the whole truth, they are not likely to do it out of anything less, or anything else. And if they are, it's worth nothing to me."

Taking a pace or two over the stone floor, he came back to the table and finished what he had to say.

"I thank you, miss and gentlemen both, many times for your attention, and many times more for your interest. That's the plain state of the matter as it points itself out to a mere trooper with a blunt broadsword kind of a mind. I have never done well in life beyond my duty as a soldier, and if the worst comes after all, I shall reap pretty much as I have sown. When I got over the first crash of being seized as a murderer—it don't take a rover who has knocked about so much as myself so very long to recover from a crash—I worked my way round to what you find me now. As such I shall remain. No relations will be disgraced by me or made unhappy for me, and—and that's all I've got to say."

The door had been opened to admit another soldier-looking man of less prepossessing appearance at first sight and a weather-tanned, bright-eyed wholesome woman with a basket, who, from her entrance, had been exceedingly attentive to all Mr. George had said. Mr. George had received them with a familiar nod and a friendly look, but without any more particular greeting in the midst of his address. He now shook them cordially by the hand and said, "Miss Summerson and gentlemen, this is an old comrade of mine, Matthew Bagnet. And this is his wife, Mrs. Bagnet."

Mr. Bagnet made us a stiff military bow, and Mrs. Bagnet dropped us a curtsy.

"Real good friends of mine, they are," sald Mr. George. "It was at their house I was taken."

"With a second-hand wiolinceller," Mr. Bagnet put in, twitching his head angrily. "Of a good tone. For a friend. That money was no object to."

"Mat," said Mr. George, "you have heard pretty well all I have been saying to this lady and these two gentlemen. I know it meets your approval?"

Mr. Bagnet, after considering, referred the point to his wife. "Old girl," said he. "Tell him. Whether or not. It meets my approval."

"Why, George," exclaimed Mrs. Bagnet, who had been unpacking her basket, in which there was a piece of cold pickled pork, a little tea and sugar, and a brown loaf, "you ought to know it don't. You ought to know it's enough to drive a person wild to hear you. You won't be got off this way, and you won't be got off that way—what do you mean by such picking and choosing? It's stuff and nonsense, George."

"Don't be severe upon me in my misfortunes, Mrs. Bagnet," said the trooper lightly.

"Oh! Bother your misfortunes," cried Mrs. Bagnet, "if they don't make you more reasonable than that comes to. I never was so ashamed in my life to hear a man talk folly as I have been to hear you talk this day to the present company. Lawyers? Why, what but too many cooks should hinder you from having a dozen lawyers if the gentleman recommended them to you"

"This is a very sensible woman," said my guardian. "I hope you will persuade him, Mrs. Bagnet."

"Persuade him, sir?" she returned. "Lord bless you, no. You don't know George. Now, there!" Mrs. Bagnet left her basket to point him out with both her bare brown hands. "There he stands! As self-willed and as determined a man, in the wrong way, as ever put a human creature under heaven out of patience! You could as soon take up and shoulder an eight and forty pounder by your own strength as turn that man when he has got a thing into his head and fixed it there. Why, don't I know him!" cried Mrs.

Bagnet. "Don't I know you, George! You don't mean to set up for a new character with ME after all these years, I hope?"

Her friendly indignation had an exemplary effect upon her husband, who shook his head at the trooper several times as a silent recommendation to him to yield. Between whiles, Mrs. Bagnet looked at me; and I understood from the play of her eyes that she wished me to do something, though I did not comprehend what.

"But I have given up talking to you, old fellow, years and years," said Mrs. Bagnet as she blew a little dust off the pickled pork, looking at me again; "and when ladies and gentlemen know you as well as I do, they'll give up talking to you too. If you are not too headstrong to accept of a bit of dinner, here it is."

"I accept it with many thanks," returned the trooper.

"Do you though, indeed?" said Mrs. Bagnet, continuing to grumble on good-humouredly. "I'm sure I'm surprised at that. I wonder you don't starve in your own way also. It would only be like you. Perhaps you'll set your mind upon THAT next." Here she again looked at me, and I now perceived from her glances at the door and at me, by turns, that she wished us to retire and to await her following us outside the prison. Communicating this by similar means to my guardian and Mr. Woodcourt, I rose.

"We hope you will think better of it, Mr. George," said I, "and we shall come to see you again, trusting to find you more reasonable."

"More grateful, Miss Summerson, you can't find me," he returned.

"But more persuadable we can, I hope," said I. "And let me entreat you to consider that the clearing up of this mystery and the discovery of the real perpetrator of this deed may be of the last importance to others besides yourself."

He heard me respectfully but without much heeding these words, which I spoke a little turned from him, already on my way to the door; he was observing (this they afterwards told me) my height and figure, which seemed to catch his attention all at once.

"'Tis curious," said he. "And yet I thought so at the time!"

My guardian asked him what he meant.

"Why, sir," he answered, "when my ill fortune took me to the dead man's staircase on the night of his murder, I saw a shape so like Miss Summerson's go by me in the dark that I had half a mind to speak to it."

For an instant I felt such a shudder as I never felt before or since and hope I shall never feel again.

"It came downstairs as I went up," said the trooper, "and crossed the moonlighted window with a loose black mantle on; I noticed a deep fringe to it. However, it has nothing to do with the present subject, excepting that Miss Summerson looked so like it at the moment that it came into my head."

I cannot separate and define the feelings that arose in me after this; it is enough that the vague duty and obligation I had felt upon me from the first of following the investigation was, without my distinctly daring to ask myself any question, increased, and that I was indignantly sure of there being no possibility of a reason for my being afraid.

We three went out of the prison and walked up and down at some short distance from the gate, which was in a retired place. We had not waited long when Mr. and Mrs. Bagnet came out too and quickly joined us.

There was a tear in each of Mrs. Bagnet's eyes, and her face was flushed and hurried. "I didn't let George see what I thought about it, you know, miss," was her first remark when she came up, "but he's in a bad way, poor old fellow!"

"Not with care and prudence and good help," said my guardian.

"A gentleman like you ought to know best, sir," returned Mrs. Bagnet, hurriedly drying her eyes on the hem of her grey cloak, "but I am uneasy for him. He has been so careless and said so much that he never meant. The gentlemen of the juries might not understand him as Lignum and me do. And then such a number of circumstances have happened bad for him, and such a number of people will be brought forward to speak against him, and Bucket is so deep."

"With a second-hand wiolinceller. And said he played the fife. When a boy," Mr. Bagnet added with great solemnity.

"Now, I tell you, miss," said Mrs. Bagnet; "and when I say miss, I mean all! Just come into the corner of the wall and I'll tell you!"

Mrs. Bagnet hurried us into a more secluded place and was at first too breathless to proceed, occasioning Mr. Bagnet to say, "Old girl! Tell 'em!"

"Why, then, miss," the old girl proceeded, untying the strings of her bonnet for more air, "you could as soon move Dover Castle as move George on this point unless you had got a new power to move him with. And I have got it!"

"You are a jewel of a woman," said my guardian. "Go on!"

"Now, I tell you, miss," she proceeded, clapping her hands in her hurry and agitation a dozen times in every sentence, "that what he says concerning no relations is all bosh. They don't know of him, but he does know of them. He has said more to me at odd times than to anybody else, and it warn't for nothing that he once spoke to my Woolwich about whitening and wrinkling mothers' heads. For fifty pounds he had seen his mother that day. She's alive and must be brought here straight!"

Instantly Mrs. Bagnet put some pins into her mouth and began pinning up her skirts all round a little higher than the level of her grey cloak, which she accomplished with surpassing dispatch and dexterity.

"Lignum," said Mrs. Bagnet, "you take care of the children, old man, and give me the umbrella! I'm away to Lincolnshire to bring that old lady here."

"But, bless the woman," cried my guardian with his hand in his pocket, "how is she going? What money has she got?"

Mrs. Bagnet made another application to her skirts and brought forth a leathern purse in which she hastily counted over a few shillings and which she then shut up with perfect satisfaction.

"Never you mind for me, miss. I'm a soldier's wife and accustomed to travel my own way. Lignum, old boy," kissing him, "one for yourself, three for the children. Now I'm away into Lincolnshire after George's mother!"

And she actually set off while we three stood looking at one another lost in amazement. She actually trudged away in her grey cloak at a sturdy pace, and turned the corner, and was gone.

"Mr. Bagnet," said my guardian. "Do you mean to let her go in that way?"

"Can't help it," he returned. "Made her way home once from another quarter of the world. With the same grey cloak. And same umbrella. Whatever the old girl says, do. Do it! Whenever the old girl says, I'LL do it. She does it."

"Then she is as honest and genuine as she looks," rejoined my guardian, "and it is impossible to say more for her."

"She's Colour-Sergeant of the Nonpareil battalion," said Mr. Bagnet, looking at us over his shoulder as he went his way also. "And there's not such another. But I never own to it before her. Discipline must be maintained."

CHAPTER LIII. The Track

Mr. Bucket and his fat forefinger are much in consultation together under existing circumstances. When Mr. Bucket has a matter of this pressing interest under his consideration, the fat forefinger seems to rise, to the dignity of a familiar demon. He puts it to his ears, and it whispers information; he puts it to his lips, and it enjoins him to secrecy; he rubs it over his nose, and it sharpens his scent; he shakes it before a guilty man, and it charms him to his destruction. The Augurs of the Detective Temple invariably predict that when Mr. Bucket and that finger are in much conference, a terrible avenger will be heard of before long.

Otherwise mildly studious in his observation of human nature, on the whole a benignant philosopher not disposed to be severe upon the follies of mankind, Mr. Bucket pervades a vast number of houses and strolls about an infinity of streets, to outward appearance rather languishing for want of an object. He is in the friendliest condition towards his species and will drink with most of them. He is free with his money, affable in his manners, innocent in his conversation—but through the placid stream of his life there glides an under-current of forefinger.

Time and place cannot bind Mr. Bucket. Like man in the abstract, he is here to-day and gone to-morrow—but, very unlike man indeed, he is here again the next day. This evening he will be casually looking into the iron extinguishers at the door of Sir Leicester Dedlock's house in town; and to-morrow morning he will be walking on the leads at Chesney Wold, where erst the old man walked whose ghost is propitiated with a hundred guineas. Drawers, desks, pockets, all things belonging to him, Mr. Bucket examines. A few hours afterwards, he and the Roman will be alone together comparing forefingers.

It is likely that these occupations are irreconcilable with home enjoyment, but it is certain that Mr. Bucket at present does not go home.

Though in general he highly appreciates the society of Mrs. Bucket—a lady of a natural detective genius, which if it had been improved by professional exercise, might have done great things, but which has paused at the level of a clever amateur—he holds himself aloof from that dear solace. Mrs. Bucket is dependent on their lodger (fortunately an amiable lady in whom she takes an interest) for companionship and conversation.

A great crowd assembles in Lincoln's Inn Fields on the day of the funeral. Sir Leicester Dedlock attends the ceremony in person; strictly speaking, there are only three other human followers, that is to say, Lord Doodle, William Buffy, and the debilitated cousin (thrown in as a make-weight), but the amount of inconsolable carriages is immense. The peerage contributes more four-wheeled affliction than has ever been seen in that neighbourhood. Such is the assemblage of armorial bearings on coach panels that the Herald's College might be supposed to have lost its father and mother at a blow. The Duke of Foodle sends a splendid pile of dust and ashes, with silver wheel-boxes, patent axles, all the last improvements, and three bereaved worms, six feet high, holding on behind, in a bunch of woe. All the state coachmen in London seem plunged into mourning; and if that dead old man of the rusty garb be not beyond a taste in horseflesh (which appears impossible), it must be highly gratified this day.

Quiet among the undertakers and the equipages and the calves of so many legs all steeped in grief, Mr. Bucket sits concealed in one of the inconsolable carriages and at his ease surveys the crowd through the lattice blinds. He has a keen eye for a crowd—as for what not?—and looking here and there, now from this side of the carriage, now from the other, now up at the house windows, now along the people's heads, nothing escapes him.

"And there you are, my partner, eh?" says Mr. Bucket to himself, apostrophizing Mrs. Bucket, stationed, by his favour, on the steps of the deceased's house. "And so you are. And so you are! And very well indeed you are looking, Mrs. Bucket!"

The procession has not started yet, but is waiting for the cause of its assemblage to be brought out. Mr. Bucket, in the foremost emblazoned carriage, uses his two fat forefingers to hold the lattice a hair's breadth open while he looks.

And it says a great deal for his attachment, as a husband, that he is still occupied with Mrs. B. "There you are, my partner, eh?" he murmuringly repeats. "And our lodger with you. I'm taking notice of you, Mrs. Bucket; I hope you're all right in your health, my dear!"

Not another word does Mr. Bucket say, but sits with most attentive eyes until the sacked depository of noble secrets is brought down—Where are all those secrets now? Does he keep them yet? Did they fly with him on that sudden journey?—and until the procession moves, and Mr. Bucket's view is changed. After which he composes himself for an easy ride and takes note of the fittings of the carriage in case he should ever find such knowledge useful.

Contrast enough between Mr. Tulkinghorn shut up in his dark carriage and Mr. Bucket shut up in HIS. Between the immeasurable track of space beyond the little wound that has thrown the one into the fixed sleep which jolts so heavily over the stones of the streets, and the narrow track of blood which keeps the other in the watchful state expressed in every hair of his head! But it is all one to both; neither is troubled about that.

Mr. Bucket sits out the procession in his own easy manner and glides from the carriage when the opportunity he has settled with himself arrives. He makes for Sir Leicester Dedlock's, which is at present a sort of home to him, where he comes and goes as he likes at all hours, where he is always welcome and made much of, where he knows the whole establishment, and walks in an atmosphere of mysterious greatness.

No knocking or ringing for Mr. Bucket. He has caused himself to be provided with a key and can pass in at his pleasure. As he is crossing the hall, Mercury informs him, "Here's another letter for you, Mr. Bucket, come by post," and gives it him.

"Another one, eh?" says Mr. Bucket.

If Mercury should chance to be possessed by any lingering curiosity as to Mr. Bucket's letters, that wary person is not the man to gratify it. Mr. Bucket looks at him as if his face were a vista of some miles in length and he were leisurely contemplating the same.

"Do you happen to carry a box?" says Mr. Bucket.

Unfortunately Mercury is no snuff-taker.

"Could you fetch me a pinch from anywheres?" says Mr. Bucket. "Thankee. It don't matter what it is; I'm not particular as to the kind. Thankee!"

Having leisurely helped himself from a canister borrowed from somebody downstairs for the purpose, and having made a considerable show of tasting it, first with one side of his nose and then with the other, Mr. Bucket, with much deliberation, pronounces it of the right sort and goes on, letter in hand.

Now although Mr. Bucket walks upstairs to the little library within the larger one with the face of a man who receives some scores of letters every day, it happens that much correspondence is not incidental to his life. He is no great scribe, rather handling his pen like the pocket-staff he carries about with him always convenient to his grasp, and discourages correspondence with himself in others as being too artless and direct a way of doing delicate business. Further, he often sees damaging letters produced in evidence and has occasion to reflect that it was a green thing to write them. For these reasons he has very little to do with letters, either as sender or receiver. And yet he has received a round half-dozen within the last twenty-four hours.

"And this," says Mr. Bucket, spreading it out on the table, "is in the same hand, and consists of the same two words."

What two words?

He turns the key in the door, ungirdles his black pocket-book (book of fate to many), lays another letter by it, and reads, boldly written in each, "Lady Dedlock."

"Yes, yes," says Mr. Bucket. "But I could have made the money without this anonymous information."

Having put the letters in his book of fate and girdled it up again, he unlocks the door just in time to admit his dinner, which is brought upon a goodly tray with a decanter of sherry. Mr. Bucket frequently observes, in friendly circles where there is no restraint, that he likes a toothful of your fine old brown East Inder sherry better than anything you can offer him. Consequently he fills and empties his glass with a smack of his lips and is proceeding with his refreshment when an idea enters his mind.

Mr. Bucket softly opens the door of communication between that room and the next and looks in. The library is deserted, and the fire is sinking low. Mr. Bucket's eye, after taking a pigeon-flight round the room, alights upon a table where letters are usually put as they arrive. Several letters for Sir Leicester are upon it. Mr. Bucket draws near and examines the directions. "No," he says, "there's none in that hand. It's only me as is written to. I can break it to Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, to-morrow."

With that he returns to finish his dinner with a good appetite, and after a light nap, is summoned into the drawing-room. Sir Leicester has received him there these several evenings past to know whether he has anything to report. The debilitated cousin (much exhausted by the funeral) and Volumnia are in attendance.

Mr. Bucket makes three distinctly different bows to these three people. A bow of homage to Sir Leicester, a bow of gallantry to Volumnia, and a bow of recognition to the debilitated Cousin, to whom it airily says, "You are a swell about town, and you know me, and I know you." Having distributed these little specimens of his tact, Mr. Bucket rubs his hands.

"Have you anything new to communicate, officer?" inquires Sir Leicester. "Do you wish to hold any conversation with me in private?"

"Why—not to-night, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet."

"Because my time," pursues Sir Leicester, "is wholly at your disposal with a view to the vindication of the outraged majesty of the law."

Mr. Bucket coughs and glances at Volumnia, rouged and necklaced, as though he would respectfully observe, "I do assure you, you're a pretty creetur. I've seen hundreds worse looking at your time of life, I have indeed."

The fair Volumnia, not quite unconscious perhaps of the humanizing influence of her charms, pauses in the writing of cocked-hat notes and meditatively adjusts the pearl necklace. Mr. Bucket prices that decoration in his mind and thinks it as likely as not that Volumnia is writing poetry.

"If I have not," pursues Sir Leicester, "in the most emphatic manner, adjured you, officer, to exercise your utmost skill in this atrocious case, I particularly desire to take the present opportunity of rectifying any omission I may have made. Let no expense be a consideration. I am prepared to defray all charges. You can incur none in pursuit of the object you have undertaken that I shall hesitate for a moment to bear."

Mr. Bucket made Sir Leicester's bow again as a response to this liberality.

"My mind," Sir Leicester adds with a generous warmth, "has not, as may be easily supposed, recovered its tone since the late diabolical occurrence. It is not likely ever to recover its tone. But it is full of indignation to-night after undergoing the ordeal of consigning to the tomb the remains of a faithful, a zealous, a devoted adherent."

Sir Leicester's voice trembles and his grey hair stirs upon his head. Tears are in his eyes; the best part of his nature is aroused.

"I declare," he says, "I solemnly declare that until this crime is discovered and, in the course of justice, punished, I almost feel as if there were a stain upon my name. A gentleman who has devoted a large portion of his life to me, a gentleman who has devoted the last day of his life to me, a gentleman who has constantly sat at my table and slept under my roof, goes from my house to his own, and is struck down within an hour of his leaving my house. I cannot say but that he may have been followed from my house, watched at my house, even first marked because of his association with my house—which may have suggested his possessing greater wealth and being altogether of greater importance than his own retiring demeanour would have indicated. If I cannot with my means and influence and my position bring all the perpetrators of such a crime to light, I fail in the assertion of my respect for that gentleman's memory and of my fidelity towards one who was ever faithful to me."

While he makes this protestation with great emotion and earnestness, looking round the room as if he were addressing an assembly, Mr. Bucket glances at him with an observant gravity in which there might be, but for the audacity of the thought, a touch of compassion.

"The ceremony of to-day," continues Sir Leicester, "strikingly illustrative of the respect in which my deceased friend"—he lays a stress upon the word, for death levels all distinctions—"was held by the flower of the land, has, I say, aggravated the shock I have received from this most horrible and audacious crime. If it were my brother who had committed it, I would not spare him."

Mr. Bucket looks very grave. Volumnia remarks of the deceased that he was the trustiest and dearest person!

"You must feel it as a deprivation to you, miss," replies Mr. Bucket soothingly, "no doubt. He was calculated to BE a deprivation, I'm sure he was."

Volumnia gives Mr. Bucket to understand, in reply, that her sensitive mind is fully made up never to get the better of it as long as she lives, that her nerves are unstrung for ever, and that she has not the least expectation of ever smiling again. Meanwhile she folds up a cocked hat for that redoubtable old general at Bath, descriptive of her melancholy condition.

"It gives a start to a delicate female," says Mr. Bucket sympathetically, "but it'll wear off."

Volumnia wishes of all things to know what is doing? Whether they are going to convict, or whatever it is, that dreadful soldier? Whether he had any accomplices, or whatever the thing is called in the law? And a great deal more to the like artless purpose.

"Why you see, miss," returns Mr. Bucket, bringing the finger into persuasive action—and such is his natural gallantry that he had almost said "my dear"—"it ain't easy to answer those questions at the present moment. Not at the present moment. I've kept myself on this case, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet," whom Mr. Bucket takes into the conversation in right of his importance, "morning, noon, and night. But for a glass or two of sherry, I don't think I could have had my mind so much upon the stretch as it has been. I COULD answer your questions, miss, but duty forbids it. Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, will very soon be made acquainted with all that has been traced. And I hope that he may find it"—Mr. Bucket again looks grave—"to his satisfaction."

The debilitated cousin only hopes some fler'll be executed—zample. Thinks more interest's wanted—get man hanged presentime—than get man place ten thousand a year. Hasn't a doubt—zample—far better hang wrong fler than no fler.

"YOU know life, you know, sir," says Mr. Bucket with a complimentary twinkle of his eye and crook of his finger, "and you can confirm what I've mentioned to this lady. YOU don't want to be told that from information I have received I have gone to work. You're up to what a lady can't be expected to be up to. Lord! Especially in your elevated station of society, miss," says Mr. Bucket, quite reddening at another narrow escape from "my dear."

"The officer, Volumnia," observes Sir Leicester, "is faithful to his duty, and perfectly right."

Mr. Bucket murmurs, "Glad to have the honour of your approbation, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet."

"In fact, Volumnia," proceeds Sir Leicester, "it is not holding up a good model for imitation to ask the officer any such questions as you have put to him. He is the best judge of his own responsibility; he acts upon his responsibility. And it does not become us, who assist in making the laws, to impede or interfere with those who carry them into execution. Or," says Sir

Leicester somewhat sternly, for Volumnia was going to cut in before he had rounded his sentence, "or who vindicate their outraged majesty."

Volumnia with all humility explains that she had not merely the plea of curiosity to urge (in common with the giddy youth of her sex in general) but that she is perfectly dying with regret and interest for the darling man whose loss they all deplore.

"Very well, Volumnia," returns Sir Leicester. "Then you cannot be too discreet."

Mr. Bucket takes the opportunity of a pause to be heard again.

"Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I have no objections to telling this lady, with your leave and among ourselves, that I look upon the case as pretty well complete. It is a beautiful case—a beautiful case—and what little is wanting to complete it, I expect to be able to supply in a few hours."

"I am very glad indeed to hear it," says Sir Leicester. "Highly creditable to you."

"Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet," returns Mr. Bucket very seriously, "I hope it may at one and the same time do me credit and prove satisfactory to all. When I depict it as a beautiful case, you see, miss," Mr. Bucket goes on, glancing gravely at Sir Leicester, "I mean from my point of view. As considered from other points of view, such cases will always involve more or less unpleasantness. Very strange things comes to our knowledge in families, miss; bless your heart, what you would think to be phenomenons, quite."

Volumnia, with her innocent little scream, supposes so.

"Aye, and even in gen-teel families, in high families, in great families," says Mr. Bucket, again gravely eyeing Sir Leicester aside. "I have had the honour of being employed in high families before, and you have no idea—come, I'll go so far as to say not even YOU have any idea, sir," this to the debilitated cousin, "what games goes on!"

The cousin, who has been casting sofa-pillows on his head, in a prostration of boredom yawns, "Vayli," being the used-up for "very likely."

Sir Leicester, deeming it time to dismiss the officer, here majestically interposes with the words, "Very good. Thank you!" and also with a wave of his hand, implying not only that there is an end of the discourse, but that if high families fall into low habits they must take the consequences. "You will not forget, officer," he adds with condescension, "that I am at your disposal when you please."

Mr. Bucket (still grave) inquires if to-morrow morning, now, would suit, in case he should be as for'ard as he expects to be. Sir Leicester replies, "All times are alike to me." Mr. Bucket makes his three bows and is withdrawing when a forgotten point occurs to him.

"Might I ask, by the by," he says in a low voice, cautiously returning, "who posted the reward-bill on the staircase."

"I ordered it to be put up there," replies Sir Leicester.

"Would it be considered a liberty, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, if I was to ask you why?"

"Not at all. I chose it as a conspicuous part of the house. I think it cannot be too prominently kept before the whole establishment. I wish my people to be impressed with the enormity of the crime, the determination to punish it, and the hopelessness of escape. At the same time, officer, if you in your better knowledge of the subject see any objection—"

Mr. Bucket sees none now; the bill having been put up, had better not be taken down. Repeating his three bows he withdraws, closing the door on Volumnia's little scream, which is a preliminary to her remarking that that charmingly horrible person is a perfect Blue Chamber.

In his fondness for society and his adaptability to all grades, Mr. Bucket is presently standing before the hall-fire—bright and warm on the early winter night—admiring Mercury.

"Why, you're six foot two, I suppose?" says Mr. Bucket.

"Three," says Mercury.

"Are you so much? But then, you see, you're broad in proportion and don't look it. You're not one of the weak-legged ones, you ain't. Was you ever modelled now?" Mr. Bucket asks, conveying the expression of an artist into the turn of his eye and head.

Mercury never was modelled.

"Then you ought to be, you know," says Mr. Bucket; "and a friend of mine that you'll hear of one day as a Royal Academy sculptor would stand something handsome to make a drawing of your proportions for the marble. My Lady's out, ain't she?"

"Out to dinner."

"Goes out pretty well every day, don't she?"

"Yes."

"Not to be wondered at!" says Mr. Bucket. "Such a fine woman as her, so handsome and so graceful and so elegant, is like a fresh lemon on a dinner-table, ornamental wherever she goes. Was your father in the same way of life as yourself?"

Answer in the negative.

"Mine was," says Mr. Bucket. "My father was first a page, then a footman, then a butler, then a steward, then an inn-keeper. Lived universally respected, and died lamented. Said with his last breath that he considered service the most honourable part of his career, and so it was. I've a brother in service, AND a brother-in-law. My Lady a good temper?"

Mercury replies, "As good as you can expect."

"Ah!" says Mr. Bucket. "A little spoilt? A little capricious? Lord! What can you anticipate when they're so handsome as that? And we like 'em all the better for it, don't we?"

Mercury, with his hands in the pockets of his bright peach-blossom small-clothes, stretches his symmetrical silk legs with the air of a man of gallantry and can't deny it. Come the roll of wheels and a violent ringing at the bell. "Talk of the angels," says Mr. Bucket. "Here she is!"

The doors are thrown open, and she passes through the hall. Still very pale, she is dressed in slight mourning and wears two beautiful bracelets. Either their beauty or the beauty of her arms is particularly attractive to Mr. Bucket. He looks at them with an eager eye and rattles something in his pocket—halfpence perhaps.

Noticing him at his distance, she turns an inquiring look on the other Mercury who has brought her home.

"Mr. Bucket, my Lady."

Mr. Bucket makes a leg and comes forward, passing his familiar demon over the region of his mouth.

"Are you waiting to see Sir Leicester?"

"No, my Lady, I've seen him!"

"Have you anything to say to me?"

"Not just at present, my Lady."

"Have you made any new discoveries?"

"A few, my Lady."

This is merely in passing. She scarcely makes a stop, and sweeps upstairs alone. Mr. Bucket, moving towards the staircase-foot, watches her as she goes up the steps the old man came down to his grave, past murderous groups of statuary repeated with their shadowy weapons on the wall, past the printed bill, which she looks at going by, out of view.

"She's a lovely woman, too, she really is," says Mr. Bucket, coming back to Mercury. "Don't look quite healthy though."

Is not quite healthy, Mercury informs him. Suffers much from headaches.

Really? That's a pity! Walking, Mr. Bucket would recommend for that. Well, she tries walking, Mercury rejoins. Walks sometimes for two hours when she has them bad. By night, too.

"Are you sure you're quite so much as six foot three?" asks Mr. Bucket. "Begging your pardon for interrupting you a moment?"

Not a doubt about it.

"You're so well put together that I shouldn't have thought it. But the household troops, though considered fine men, are built so straggling. Walks by night, does she? When it's moonlight, though?"

Oh, yes. When it's moonlight! Of course. Oh, of course! Conversational and acquiescent on both sides.

"I suppose you ain't in the habit of walking yourself?" says Mr. Bucket. "Not much time for it, I should say?"

Besides which, Mercury don't like it. Prefers carriage exercise.

"To be sure," says Mr. Bucket. "That makes a difference. Now I think of it," says Mr. Bucket, warming his hands and looking pleasantly at the blaze, "she went out walking the very night of this business."

"To be sure she did! I let her into the garden over the way."

"And left her there. Certainly you did. I saw you doing it."

"I didn't see YOU," says Mercury.

"I was rather in a hurry," returns Mr. Bucket, "for I was going to visit a aunt of mine that lives at Chelsea—next door but two to the old original Bun House—ninety year old the old lady is, a single woman, and got a little property. Yes, I chanced to be passing at the time. Let's see. What time might it be? It wasn't ten."

"Half-past nine."

"You're right. So it was. And if I don't deceive myself, my Lady was muffled in a loose black mantle, with a deep fringe to it?"

"Of course she was."

Of course she was. Mr. Bucket must return to a little work he has to get on with upstairs, but he must shake hands with Mercury in acknowledgment of his agreeable conversation, and will he—this is all he asks—will he, when he has a leisure half-hour, think of bestowing it on that Royal

Academy sculptor, for the advantage of both parties?

CHAPTER LIV. Springing a Mine

Refreshed by sleep, Mr. Bucket rises betimes in the morning and prepares for a field-day. Smartened up by the aid of a clean shirt and a wet hairbrush, with which instrument, on occasions of ceremony, he lubricates such thin locks as remain to him after his life of severe study, Mr. Bucket lays in a breakfast of two mutton chops as a foundation to work upon, together with tea, eggs, toast, and marmalade on a corresponding scale. Having much enjoyed these strengthening matters and having held subtle conference with his familiar demon, he confidently instructs Mercury "just to mention quietly to Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, that whenever he's ready for me, I'm ready for him." A gracious message being returned that Sir Leicester will expedite his dressing and join Mr. Bucket in the library within ten minutes, Mr. Bucket repairs to that apartment and stands before the fire with his finger on his chin, looking at the blazing coals.

Thoughtful Mr. Bucket is, as a man may be with weighty work to do, but composed, sure, confident. From the expression of his face he might be a famous whist-player for a large stake—say a hundred guineas certain—with the game in his hand, but with a high reputation involved in his playing his hand out to the last card in a masterly way. Not in the least anxious or disturbed is Mr. Bucket when Sir Leicester appears, but he eyes the baronet aside as he comes slowly to his easy-chair with that observant gravity of yesterday in which there might have been yesterday, but for the audacity of the idea, a touch of compassion.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, officer, but I am rather later than my usual hour this morning. I am not well. The agitation and the indignation from which I have recently suffered have been too much for me. I am subject to—gout"—Sir Leicester was going to say indisposition and would have said it to anybody else, but Mr. Bucket palpably knows all about it—"and recent circumstances have brought it on."

As he takes his seat with some difficulty and with an air of pain, Mr. Bucket draws a little nearer, standing with one of his large hands on the library-table.

"I am not aware, officer," Sir Leicester observes; raising his eyes to his face, "whether you wish us to be alone, but that is entirely as you please. If you do, well and good. If not, Miss Dedlock would be interested—"

"Why, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet," returns Mr. Bucket with his head persuasively on one side and his forefinger pendant at one ear like an earring, "we can't be too private just at present. You will presently see that we can't be too private. A lady, under the circumstances, and especially in Miss Dedlock's elevated station of society, can't but be agreeable to me, but speaking without a view to myself, I will take the liberty of assuring you that I know we can't be too private."

"That is enough."

"So much so, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet," Mr. Bucket resumes, "that I was on the point of asking your permission to turn the key in the door."

"By all means." Mr. Bucket skilfully and softly takes that precaution, stooping on his knee for a moment from mere force of habit so to adjust the key in the lock as that no one shall peep in from the outerside.

"Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I mentioned yesterday evening that I wanted but a very little to complete this case. I have now completed it and collected proof against the person who did this crime."

"Against the soldier?"

"No, Sir Leicester Dedlock; not the soldier."

Sir Leicester looks astounded and inquires, "Is the man in custody?"

Mr. Bucket tells him, after a pause, "It was a woman."

Sir Leicester leans back in his chair, and breathlessly ejaculates, "Good heaven!"

"Now, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet," Mr. Bucket begins, standing over him with one hand spread out on the library-table and the forefinger of the other in impressive use, "it's my duty to prepare you for a train of circumstances that may, and I go so far as to say that will, give you a shock. But Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, you are a gentleman, and I know what a gentleman is and what a gentleman is capable of. A gentleman can bear a shock when it must come, boldly and steadily. A gentleman can make up his mind to stand up against almost any blow. Why, take yourself, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet. If there's a blow to be inflicted on you, you naturally think of your family. You ask yourself, how would all them ancestors of yours, away to Julius Caesar—not to go beyond him at present—have borne that blow; you remember scores of them that would have borne it well; and you bear it well on their accounts, and to maintain the family credit. That's the way you argue, and that's the way you act, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet."

Sir Leicester, leaning back in his chair and grasping the elbows, sits looking at him with a stony face.

"Now, Sir Leicester Dedlock," proceeds Mr. Bucket, "thus preparing you, let me beg of you not to trouble your mind for a moment as to anything having come to MY knowledge. I know so much about so many characters, high and low, that a piece of information more or less don't signify a straw. I don't suppose there's a move on the board that would surprise ME, and as to this or that move having taken place, why my knowing it is no odds at all, any possible move whatever (provided it's in a wrong direction) being a probable move according to my experience. Therefore, what I say to you, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, is, don't you go and let yourself be put out of the way because of my knowing anything of your family affairs."

"I thank you for your preparation," returns Sir Leicester after a silence, without moving hand, foot, or feature, "which I hope is not necessary; though I give it credit for being well intended. Be so good as to go on. Also"—Sir Leicester seems to shrink in the shadow of his figure—"also, to take a seat, if you have no objection."

None at all. Mr. Bucket brings a chair and diminishes his shadow. "Now, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, with this short preface I come to the point. Lady Dedlock—"

Sir Leicester raises himself in his seat and stares at him fiercely. Mr. Bucket brings the finger into play as an emollient.

"Lady Dedlock, you see she's universally admired. That's what her ladyship is; she's universally admired," says Mr. Bucket.

"I would greatly prefer, officer," Sir Leicester returns stiffly, "my Lady's name being entirely omitted from this discussion."

"So would I, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, but—it's impossible."

"Impossible?"

Mr. Bucket shakes his relentless head.

"Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, it's altogether impossible. What I have got to say is about her ladyship. She is the pivot it all turns on."

"Officer," retorts Sir Leicester with a fiery eye and a quivering lip, "you know your duty. Do your duty, but be careful not to overstep it. I would not suffer it. I would not endure it. You bring my Lady's name into this communication upon your responsibility—upon your responsibility. My Lady's name is not a name for common persons to trifle with!"

"Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I say what I must say, and no more."

"I hope it may prove so. Very well. Go on. Go on, sir!" Glancing at the angry eyes which now avoid him and at the angry figure trembling from head to foot, yet striving to be still, Mr. Bucket feels his way with his forefinger and in a low voice proceeds.

"Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, it becomes my duty to tell you that the deceased Mr. Tulkinghorn long entertained mistrusts and suspicions of Lady Dedlock."

"If he had dared to breathe them to me, sir—which he never did—I would have killed him myself!" exclaims Sir Leicester, striking his hand upon the table. But in the very heat and fury of the act he stops, fixed by the knowing eyes of Mr. Bucket, whose forefinger is slowly going and who, with mingled confidence and patience, shakes his head.

"Sir Leicester Dedlock, the deceased Mr. Tulkinghorn was deep and close, and what he fully had in his mind in the very beginning I can't quite take upon myself to say. But I know from his lips that he long ago suspected Lady Dedlock of having discovered, through the sight of some handwriting—in this very house, and when you yourself, Sir Leicester Dedlock, were present—the existence, in great poverty, of a certain person who had been her lover before you courted her and who ought to have been her husband." Mr. Bucket stops and deliberately repeats, "Ought to have been her husband, not a doubt about it. I know from his lips that when that person soon afterwards died, he suspected Lady Dedlock of visiting his wretched lodging and his wretched grave, alone and in secret. I know from my own inquiries and through my eyes and ears that Lady Dedlock did make such visit in the dress of her own maid, for the deceased Mr. Tulkinghorn employed me to reckon up her ladyship—if you'll excuse my making use of the term we commonly employ—and I reckoned her up, so far, completely. I confronted the maid in the chambers in Lincoln's Inn

Fields with a witness who had been Lady Dedlock's guide, and there couldn't be the shadow of a doubt that she had worn the young woman's dress, unknown to her. Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I did endeavour to pave the way a little towards these unpleasant disclosures yesterday by saying that very strange things happened even in high families sometimes. All this, and more, has happened in your own family, and to and through your own Lady. It's my belief that the deceased Mr. Tulkinghorn followed up these inquiries to the hour of his death and that he and Lady Dedlock even had bad blood between them upon the matter that very night. Now, only you put that to Lady Dedlock, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, and ask her ladyship whether, even after he had left here, she didn't go down to his chambers with the intention of saying something further to him, dressed in a loose black mantle with a deep fringe to it."

Sir Leicester sits like a statue, gazing at the cruel finger that is probing the life-blood of his heart.

"You put that to her ladyship, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, from me, Inspector Bucket of the Detective. And if her ladyship makes any difficulty about admitting of it, you tell her that it's no use, that Inspector Bucket knows it and knows that she passed the soldier as you called him (though he's not in the army now) and knows that she knows she passed him on the staircase. Now, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, why do I relate all this?"

Sir Leicester, who has covered his face with his hands, uttering a single groan, requests him to pause for a moment. By and by he takes his hands away, and so preserves his dignity and outward calmness, though there is no more colour in his face than in his white hair, that Mr. Bucket is a little awed by him. Something frozen and fixed is upon his manner, over and above its usual shell of haughtiness, and Mr. Bucket soon detects an unusual slowness in his speech, with now and then a curious trouble in beginning, which occasions him to utter inarticulate sounds. With such sounds he now breaks silence, soon, however, controlling himself to say that he does not comprehend why a gentleman so faithful and zealous as the late Mr. Tulkinghorn should have communicated to him nothing of this painful, this distressing, this unlooked-for, this overwhelming, this incredible intelligence.

"Again, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet," returns Mr. Bucket, "put it to her ladyship to clear that up. Put it to her ladyship, if you think it right, from Inspector Bucket of the Detective. You'll find, or I'm much mistaken, that the deceased Mr. Tulkinghorn had the intention of communicating the whole to you as soon as he considered it ripe, and further, that he had given her ladyship so to understand. Why, he might have been going to reveal it the very morning when I examined the body! You don't know what I'm going to say and do five minutes from this present time, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet; and supposing I was to be picked off now, you might wonder why I hadn't done it, don't you see?"

True. Sir Leicester, avoiding, with some trouble those obtrusive sounds, says, "True." At this juncture a considerable noise of voices is heard in the hall. Mr. Bucket, after listening, goes to the library-door, softly unlocks and opens it, and listens again. Then he draws in his head and whispers hurriedly but composedly, "Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, this unfortunate family affair has taken air, as I expected it might, the deceased Mr. Tulkinghorn being cut down so sudden. The chance to hush it is to let in these people now in a wrangle with your footmen. Would you mind sitting quiet—on the family account—while I reckon 'em up? And would you just throw in a nod when I seem to ask you for it?"

Sir Leicester indistinctly answers, "Officer. The best you can, the best you can!" and Mr. Bucket, with a nod and a sagacious crook of the forefinger, slips down into the hall, where the voices quickly die away. He is not long in returning; a few paces ahead of Mercury and a brother deity also powdered and in peach-blossomed smalls, who bear between them a chair in which is an incapable old man. Another man and two women come behind. Directing the pitching of the chair in an affable and easy manner, Mr. Bucket dismisses the Mercuries and locks the door again. Sir Leicester looks on at this invasion of the sacred precincts with an icy stare.

"Now, perhaps you may know me, ladies and gentlemen," says Mr. Bucket in a confidential voice. "I am Inspector Bucket of the Detective, I am; and this," producing the tip of his convenient little staff from his breast-pocket, "is my authority. Now, you wanted to see Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet. Well! You do see him, and mind you, it ain't every one as is admitted to that honour. Your name, old gentleman, is Smallweed; that's what your name is; I know it well."

"Well, and you never heard any harm of it!" cries Mr. Smallweed in a shrill loud voice.

"You don't happen to know why they killed the pig, do you?" retorts Mr. Bucket with a steadfast look, but without loss of temper.

"No!"

"Why, they killed him," says Mr. Bucket, "on account of his having so much cheek. Don't YOU get into the same position, because it isn't worthy of you. You ain't in the habit of conversing with a deaf person, are you?"

"Yes," snarls Mr. Smallweed, "my wife's deaf."

"That accounts for your pitching your voice so high. But as she ain't here; just pitch it an octave or two lower, will you, and I'll not only be obliged to you, but it'll do you more credit," says Mr. Bucket. "This other gentleman is in the preaching line, I think?"

"Name of Chadband," Mr. Smallweed puts in, speaking henceforth in a much lower key.

"Once had a friend and brother serjeant of the same name," says Mr. Bucket, offering his hand, "and consequently feel a liking for it. Mrs. Chadband, no doubt?"

"And Mrs. Snagsby," Mr. Smallweed introduces.

"Husband a law-stationer and a friend of my own," says Mr. Bucket. "Love him like a brother! Now, what's up?"

"Do you mean what business have we come upon?" Mr. Smallweed asks, a little dashed by the suddenness of this turn.

"Ah! You know what I mean. Let us hear what it's all about in presence of Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet. Come."

Mr. Smallweed, beckoning Mr. Chadband, takes a moment's counsel with him in a whisper. Mr. Chadband, expressing a considerable amount of oil from the pores of his forehead and the palms of his hands, says aloud, "Yes. You first!" and retires to his former place.

"I was the client and friend of Mr. Tulkinghorn," pipes Grandfather Smallweed then; "I did business with him. I was useful to him, and he was useful to me. Krook, dead and gone, was my brother-in-law. He was own brother to a brimstone magpie—leastways Mrs. Smallweed. I come into Krook's property. I examined all his papers and all his effects. They was all dug out under my eyes. There was a bundle of letters belonging to a dead and gone lodger as was hid away at the back of a shelf in the side of Lady Jane's bed—his cat's bed. He hid all manner of things away, everywheres. Mr. Tulkinghorn wanted 'em and got 'em, but I looked 'em over first. I'm a man of business, and I took a squint at 'em. They was letters from the lodger's sweetheart, and she signed Honoria. Dear me, that's not a common name, Honoria, is it? There's no lady in this house that signs Honoria is there? Oh, no, I don't think so! Oh, no, I don't think so! And not in the same hand, perhaps? Oh, no, I don't think so!"

Here Mr. Smallweed, seized with a fit of coughing in the midst of his triumph, breaks off to ejaculate, "Oh, dear me! Oh, Lord! I'm shaken all to pieces!"

"Now, when you're ready," says Mr. Bucket after awaiting his recovery, "to come to anything that concerns Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, here the gentleman sits, you know."

"Haven't I come to it, Mr. Bucket?" cries Grandfather Smallweed. "Isn't the gentleman concerned yet? Not with Captain Hawdon, and his ever affectionate Honoria, and their child into the bargain? Come, then, I want to know where those letters are. That concerns me, if it don't concern Sir Leicester Dedlock. I will know where they are. I won't have 'em disappear so quietly. I handed 'em over to my friend and solicitor, Mr. Tulkinghorn, not to anybody else."

"Why, he paid you for them, you know, and handsome too," says Mr. Bucket.

"I don't care for that. I want to know who's got 'em. And I tell you what we want—what we all here want, Mr. Bucket. We want more painstaking and search-making into this murder. We know where the interest and the motive was, and you have not done enough. If George the vagabond dragoon had any hand in it, he was only an accomplice, and was set on. You know what I mean as well as any man."

"Now I tell you what," says Mr. Bucket, instantaneously altering his manner, coming close to him, and communicating an extraordinary fascination to the forefinger, "I am damned if I am a-going to have my case spoilt, or interfered with, or anticipated by so much as half a second of time by any human being in creation. YOU want more painstaking and search-making! YOU do? Do you see this hand, and do you think that I don't know the right time to stretch it out and put it on the arm that fired that shot?"

Such is the dread power of the man, and so terribly evident it is that he makes no idle boast, that Mr. Smallweed begins to apologize. Mr. Bucket, dismissing his sudden anger, checks him.

"The advice I give you is, don't you trouble your head about the murder. That's my affair. You keep half an eye on the newspapers, and I shouldn't wonder if you was to read something about it before long, if you look sharp. I know my business, and that's all I've got to say to you on that subject. Now about those letters. You want to know who's got 'em. I don't mind telling you. I have got 'em. Is that the packet?"

Mr. Smallweed looks, with greedy eyes, at the little bundle Mr. Bucket produces from a mysterious part of his coat, and identifies it as the same.

"What have you got to say next?" asks Mr. Bucket. "Now, don't open your mouth too wide, because you don't look handsome when you do it."

"I want five hundred pound."

"No, you don't; you mean fifty," says Mr. Bucket humorously.

It appears, however, that Mr. Smallweed means five hundred.

"That is, I am deputed by Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, to consider (without admitting or promising anything) this bit of business," says Mr. Bucket—Sir Leicester mechanically bows his head—"and you ask me to consider a proposal of five hundred pounds. Why, it's an unreasonable proposal! Two fifty would be bad enough, but better than that. Hadn't you better say two fifty?"

Mr. Smallweed is quite clear that he had better not.

"Then," says Mr. Bucket, "let's hear Mr. Chadband. Lord! Many a time I've heard my old fellow-serjeant of that name; and a moderate man he was in all respects, as ever I come across!"

Thus invited, Mr. Chadband steps forth, and after a little sleek smiling and a little oil-grinding with the palms of his hands, delivers himself as follows, "My friends, we are now—Rachael, my wife, and I—in the mansions of the rich and great. Why are we now in the mansions of the rich and great, my friends? Is it because we are invited? Because we are bidden to feast with them, because we are bidden to rejoice with them, because we are bidden to play the lute with them, because we are bidden to dance with them? No. Then why are we here, my friends? Air we in possession of a sinful secret, and do we require corn, and wine, and oil, or what is much the same thing, money, for the keeping thereof? Probably so, my friends."

"You're a man of business, you are," returns Mr. Bucket, very attentive, "and consequently you're going on to mention what the nature of your secret is. You are right. You couldn't do better."

"Let us then, my brother, in a spirit of love," says Mr. Chadband with a cunning eye, "proceed unto it. Rachael, my wife, advance!"

Mrs. Chadband, more than ready, so advances as to jostle her husband into the background and confronts Mr. Bucket with a hard, frowning smile.

"Since you want to know what we know," says she, "I'll tell you. I helped to bring up Miss Hawdon, her ladyship's daughter. I was in the service of her ladyship's sister, who was very sensitive to the disgrace her ladyship brought upon her, and gave out, even to her ladyship, that the child was dead—she WAS very nearly so—when she was born. But she's alive, and I know her." With these words, and a laugh, and laying a bitter stress on the word "ladyship," Mrs. Chadband folds her arms and looks implacably at Mr. Bucket.

"I suppose now," returns that officer, "YOU will he expecting a twenty-pound note or a present of about that figure?"

Mrs. Chadband merely laughs and contemptuously tells him he can "offer" twenty pence.

"My friend the law-stationer's good lady, over there," says Mr. Bucket, luring Mrs. Snagsby forward with the finger. "What may YOUR game be, ma'am?"

Mrs. Snagsby is at first prevented, by tears and lamentations, from stating the nature of her game, but by degrees it confusedly comes to light that she is a woman overwhelmed with injuries and wrongs, whom Mr. Snagsby has habitually deceived, abandoned, and sought to keep in darkness, and whose chief comfort, under her afflictions, has been the sympathy of the late Mr. Tulkinghorn, who showed so much commiseration for her on one occasion of his calling in Cook's Court in the absence of her perjured husband that she has of late habitually carried to him all her woes. Everybody it appears, the present company excepted, has plotted against Mrs. Snagsby's peace. There is Mr. Guppy, clerk to Kenge and Carboy, who was at first as open as the sun at noon, but who suddenly shut up as close as midnight, under the influence—no doubt—of Mr. Snagsby's suborning and tampering. There is Mr. Weevle, friend of Mr. Guppy, who lived mysteriously up a court, owing to the like coherent causes. There was Krook, deceased; there was Nimrod, deceased; and there was Jo, deceased; and they were "all in it." In what, Mrs. Snagsby does not with particularity express, but she knows that Jo was Mr. Snagsby's son, "as well as if a trumpet had spoken it," and she followed Mr. Snagsby when he went on his last visit to the boy, and if he was not his son why did he go? The one occupation of her life has been, for some time back, to follow Mr. Snagsby to and fro, and up and down, and to piece suspicious circumstances together—and every circumstance that has happened has been most suspicious; and in this way she has pursued her object of detecting and confounding her false husband, night and day. Thus did it come to pass that she brought the Chadbands and Mr. Tulkinghorn together, and conferred with Mr. Tulkinghorn on the change in Mr. Guppy, and helped to turn up the circumstances in which the present company are interested, casually, by the wayside, being still and ever on the great high road that is to terminate in Mr. Snagsby's full exposure and a matrimonial separation. All this, Mrs. Snagsby, as an injured woman, and the friend of Mrs. Chadband, and the follower of Mr. Chadband, and the mourner of the late Mr. Tulkinghorn, is here to certify under the seal of confidence, with every possible confusion and involvement possible and impossible, having no pecuniary motive whatever, no scheme or project but the one mentioned, and bringing here, and taking everywhere, her own dense atmosphere of dust, arising from the ceaseless working of her mill of jealousy.

While this exordium is in hand—and it takes some time—Mr. Bucket, who has seen through the transparency of Mrs. Snagsby's vinegar at a glance, confers with his familiar demon and bestows his shrewd attention on the Chadbands and Mr. Smallweed. Sir Leicester Dedlock remains immovable, with the same icy surface upon him, except that he once or twice looks towards Mr. Bucket, as relying on that officer alone of all mankind.

"Very good," says Mr. Bucket. "Now I understand you, you know, and being deputed by Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, to look into this little matter," again Sir Leicester mechanically bows in confirmation of the statement, "can give it my fair and full attention. Now I won't allude to conspiring to extort money or anything of that sort, because we are men and women of the world here, and our object is to make things pleasant. But I tell you what I DO wonder at; I am surprised that you should think of making a noise below in the hall. It was so opposed to your interests. That's what I look at."

"We wanted to get in," pleads Mr. Smallweed.

"Why, of course you wanted to get in," Mr. Bucket asserts with cheerfulness; "but for a old gentleman at your time of life—what I call truly venerable, mind you!—with his wits sharpened, as I have no doubt they are, by the loss of the use of his limbs, which occasions all his animation to mount up into his head, not to consider that if he don't keep such a business as the present as close as possible it can't be worth a mag to him, is so curious! You see your temper got the better of you; that's where you lost ground," says Mr. Bucket in an argumentative and friendly way.

"I only said I wouldn't go without one of the servants came up to Sir Leicester Dedlock," returns Mr. Smallweed.

"That's it! That's where your temper got the better of you. Now, you keep it under another time and you'll make money by it. Shall I ring for them to carry you down?"

"When are we to hear more of this?" Mrs. Chadband sternly demands.

"Bless your heart for a true woman! Always curious, your delightful sex is!" replies Mr. Bucket with gallantry. "I shall have the pleasure of giving you a call to-morrow or next day—not forgetting Mr. Smallweed and his proposal of two fifty."

"Five hundred!" exclaims Mr. Smallweed.

"All right! Nominally five hundred." Mr. Bucket has his hand on the bell-rope. "SHALL I wish you good day for the present on the part of myself and the gentleman of the house?" he asks in an insinuating tone.

Nobody having the hardihood to object to his doing so, he does it, and the party retire as they came up. Mr. Bucket follows them to the door, and returning, says with an air of serious business, "Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, it's for you to consider whether or not to buy this up. I should recommend, on the whole, it's being bought up myself; and I think it may be bought pretty cheap. You see, that little pickled cowcumber of a Mrs. Snagsby has been used by all sides of the speculation and has done a deal more harm in bringing odds and ends together than if she had meant it. Mr. Tulkinghorn, deceased, he held all these horses in his hand and could have drove 'em his own way, I haven't a doubt; but he was fetched off the box head-foremost, and now they have got their legs over the traces, and are all dragging and pulling their own ways. So it is, and such is life. The cat's away, and the mice they play; the frost breaks up, and the water runs. Now, with regard to the party to be apprehended."

Sir Leicester seems to wake, though his eyes have been wide open, and he looks intently at Mr. Bucket as Mr. Bucket refers to his watch.

"The party to be apprehended is now in this house," proceeds Mr. Bucket, putting up his watch with a steady hand and with rising spirits, "and I'm about to take her into custody in your presence. Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, don't you say a word nor yet stir. There'll be no noise and no disturbance at all. I'll come back in the course of the evening, if agreeable to you, and endeavour to meet your wishes respecting this unfortunate family matter and the nobbiest way of keeping it quiet. Now, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, don't you be nervous on account of the apprehension at present coming off. You shall see the whole case clear, from first to last."

Mr. Bucket rings, goes to the door, briefly whispers Mercury, shuts the door, and stands behind it with his arms folded. After a suspense of a minute or two the door slowly opens and a Frenchwoman enters. Mademoiselle Hortense.

The moment she is in the room Mr. Bucket claps the door to and puts his back against it. The suddenness of the noise occasions her to turn, and then for the first time she sees Sir Leicester Dedlock in his chair.

"I ask you pardon," she mutters hurriedly. "They tell me there was no one here."

Her step towards the door brings her front to front with Mr. Bucket. Suddenly a spasm shoots across her face and she turns deadly pale.

"This is my lodger, Sir Leicester Dedlock," says Mr. Bucket, nodding at her. "This foreign young woman has been my lodger for some weeks back."

"What do Sir Leicester care for that, you think, my angel?" returns mademoiselle in a jocular strain.

"Why, my angel," returns Mr. Bucket, "we shall see."

Mademoiselle Hortense eyes him with a scowl upon her tight face, which gradually changes into a smile of scorn, "You are very mysterieuse. Are you drunk?"

"Tolerable sober, my angel," returns Mr. Bucket.

"I come from arriving at this so detestable house with your wife. Your wife have left me since some minutes. They tell me downstairs that your wife is here. I come here, and your wife is not here. What is the intention of this fool's play, say then?" mademoiselle demands, with her arms composedly crossed, but with something in her dark cheek beating like a clock.

Mr. Bucket merely shakes the finger at her.

"Ah, my God, you are an unhappy idiot!" cries mademoiselle with a toss of her head and a laugh. "Leave me to pass downstairs, great pig." With a stamp of her foot and a menace.

"Now, mademoiselle," says Mr. Bucket in a cool determined way, "you go and sit down upon that sofy."

"I will not sit down upon nothing," she replies with a shower of nods.

"Now, mademoiselle," repeats Mr. Bucket, making no demonstration except with the finger, "you sit down upon that sofy."

"Why?"

"Because I take you into custody on a charge of murder, and you don't need to be told it. Now, I want to be polite to one of your sex and a foreigner if I can. If I can't, I must be rough, and there's rougher ones outside. What I am to be depends on you. So I recommend you, as a friend, afore another half a blessed moment has passed over your head, to go and sit down upon that sofy."

Mademoiselle complies, saying in a concentrated voice while that something in her cheek beats fast and hard, "You are a devil."

"Now, you see," Mr. Bucket proceeds approvingly, "you're comfortable and conducting yourself as I should expect a foreign young woman of your sense to do. So I'll give you a piece of advice, and it's this, don't you talk too much. You're not expected to say anything here, and you can't keep too quiet a tongue in your head. In short, the less you PARLAY, the better, you know." Mr. Bucket is very complacent over this French explanation.

Mademoiselle, with that tigerish expansion of the mouth and her black eyes darting fire upon him, sits upright on the sofa in a rigid state, with her hands clenched—and her feet too, one might suppose—muttering, "Oh, you Bucket, you are a devil!"

"Now, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet," says Mr. Bucket, and from this time forth the finger never rests, "this young woman, my lodger, was her ladyship's maid at the time I have mentioned to you; and this young woman, besides being extraordinary vehement and passionate against her ladyship after being discharged—"

"Lie!" cries mademoiselle. "I discharge myself."

"Now, why don't you take my advice?" returns Mr. Bucket in an impressive, almost in an imploring, tone. "I'm surprised at the indiscreetness you commit. You'll say something that'll be used against you, you know. You're sure to come to it. Never you mind what I say till it's given in evidence. It is not addressed to you."

"Discharge, too," cries mademoiselle furiously, "by her ladyship! Eh, my faith, a pretty ladyship! Why, I r-r-r-ruin my character by remaining with a ladyship so infame!"

"Upon my soul I wonder at you!" Mr. Bucket remonstrates. "I thought the French were a polite nation, I did, really. Yet to hear a female going on like that before Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet!"

"He is a poor abused!" cries mademoiselle. "I spit upon his house, upon his name, upon his imbecility," all of which she makes the carpet represent. "Oh, that he is a great man! Oh, yes, superb! Oh, heaven! Bah!"

"Well, Sir Leicester Dedlock," proceeds Mr. Bucket, "this intemperate foreigner also angrily took it into her head that she had established a claim upon Mr. Tulkinghorn, deceased, by attending on the occasion I told you of at his chambers, though she was liberally paid for her time and trouble."

"Lie!" cries mademoiselle. "I ref-use his money all togezzer."

"If you WILL PARLAY, you know," says Mr. Bucket parenthetically, "you must take the consequences. Now, whether she became my lodger, Sir Leicester Dedlock, with any deliberate intention then of doing this deed and blinding me, I give no opinion on; but she lived in my house in that capacity at the time that she was hovering about the chambers of the deceased Mr. Tulkinghorn with a view to a wrangle, and likewise persecuting and half frightening the life out of an unfortunate stationer."

"Lie!" cries mademoiselle. "All lie!"

"The murder was committed, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, and you know under what circumstances. Now, I beg of you to follow me close with your attention for a minute or two. I was sent for, and the case was entrusted to me. I examined the place, and the body, and the papers, and everything. From information I received (from a clerk in the same house) I took George into custody as having been seen hanging about there on the night, and at very nigh the time of the murder, also as having been overheard in high words with the deceased on former occasions—even threatening him, as the witness made out. If you ask me, Sir Leicester Dedlock, whether from the first I believed George to be the murderer, I tell you candidly no, but he might be, notwithstanding, and there was enough against him to make it my duty to take him and get him kept under remand. Now, observe!"

As Mr. Bucket bends forward in some excitement—for him—and inaugurates what he is going to say with one ghostly beat of his forefinger in the air, Mademoiselle Hortense fixes her black eyes upon him with a dark frown and sets her dry lips closely and firmly together.

"I went home, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, at night and found this young woman having supper with my wife, Mrs. Bucket. She had made a mighty show of being fond of Mrs. Bucket from her first offering herself as our lodger, but that night she made more than ever—in fact, overdid it. Likewise she overdid her respect, and all that, for the lamented memory of the deceased Mr. Tulkinghorn. By the living Lord it flashed upon me, as I sat opposite to her at the table and saw her with a knife in her hand, that she had done it!"

Mademoiselle is hardly audible in straining through her teeth and lips the words, "You are a devil."

"Now where," pursues Mr. Bucket, "had she been on the night of the murder? She had been to the theayter. (She really was there, I have since found, both before the deed and after it.) I knew I had an artful customer to deal with and that proof would be very difficult; and I laid a trap for her—such a trap as I never laid yet, and such a venture as I never made yet. I worked it out in my mind while I was talking to her at supper. When I went upstairs to bed, our house being small and this young woman's ears sharp, I stuffed the sheet into Mrs. Bucket's mouth that she shouldn't say a word of surprise and told her all about it. My dear, don't you give your mind to that again, or I shall link your feet together at the ankles." Mr. Bucket, breaking off, has made a noiseless descent upon mademoiselle and laid his heavy hand upon her shoulder.

"What is the matter with you now?" she asks him.

"Don't you think any more," returns Mr. Bucket with admonitory finger, "of throwing yourself out of window. That's what's the matter with me. Come! Just take my arm. You needn't get up; I'll sit down by you. Now take my arm, will you? I'm a married man, you know; you're acquainted with my wife. Just take my arm."

Vainly endeavouring to moisten those dry lips, with a painful sound she struggles with herself and complies.

"Now we're all right again. Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, this case could never have been the case it is but for Mrs. Bucket, who is a woman in fifty thousand—in a hundred and fifty thousand! To throw this young woman off her guard, I have never set foot in our house since, though I've communicated with Mrs. Bucket in the baker's loaves and in the milk as often as required. My whispered words to Mrs. Bucket when she had the sheet in her mouth were, 'My dear, can you throw her off continually with natural accounts of my suspicions against George, and this, and that, and t'other? Can you do without rest and keep watch upon her night and day? Can you undertake to say, 'She shall do nothing without my knowledge, she shall be my prisoner without suspecting it, she shall no more escape from me than from death, and her life shall be my life, and her soul my soul, till I have got her, if she did this murder?' Mrs. Bucket says to me, as well as she could speak on account of the sheet, 'Bucket, I can!' And she has acted up to it glorious!"

"Lies!" mademoiselle interposes. "All lies, my friend!"

"Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, how did my calculations come out under these circumstances? When I calculated that this impetuous young woman would overdo it in new directions, was I wrong or right? I was right. What does she try to do? Don't let it give you a turn? To throw the murder on her ladyship."

Sir Leicester rises from his chair and staggers down again.

"And she got encouragement in it from hearing that I was always here, which was done a-purpose. Now, open that pocket-book of mine, Sir Leicester Dedlock, if I may take the liberty of throwing it towards you, and look at the letters sent to me, each with the two words 'Lady Dedlock' in it. Open the one directed to yourself, which I stopped this very morning, and read the three words 'Lady Dedlock, Murderess' in it. These letters have been falling about like a shower of lady-birds. What do you say now to Mrs. Bucket, from her spy-place having seen them all 'written by this young woman? What do you say to Mrs. Bucket having, within this half-hour, secured the corresponding ink and paper, fellow half-sheets and what not? What do you say to Mrs. Bucket having watched the posting of 'em every one by this young woman, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet?" Mr. Bucket asks, triumphant in his admiration of his lady's genius.

Two things are especially observable as Mr. Bucket proceeds to a conclusion. First, that he seems imperceptibly to establish a dreadful right of property in mademoiselle. Secondly, that the very atmosphere she breathes seems to narrow and contract about her as if a close net or a pall were being drawn nearer and yet nearer around her breathless figure.

"There is no doubt that her ladyship was on the spot at the eventful period," says Mr. Bucket, "and my foreign friend here saw her, I believe, from the upper part of the staircase. Her ladyship and George and my foreign friend were all pretty close on one another's heels. But that don't signify any more, so I'll not go into it. I found the wadding of the pistol with which the deceased Mr. Tulkinghorn was shot. It was a bit of the printed description of your house at Chesney Wold. Not much in that, you'll say, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet. No. But when my foreign friend here is so thoroughly off her guard as to think it a safe time to tear up the rest of that leaf, and when Mrs. Bucket puts the pieces together and finds the wadding wanting, it begins to look like Queer Street."

"These are very long lies," mademoiselle interposes. "You prose great deal. Is it that you have almost all finished, or are you speaking always?"

"Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet," proceeds Mr. Bucket, who delights in a full title and does violence to himself when he dispenses with any fragment of it, "the last point in the case which I am now going to mention shows the necessity of patience in our business, and never doing a thing in a hurry. I watched this young woman yesterday without her knowledge when she was looking at the funeral, in company with my wife, who planned to take her there; and I had so much to convict her, and I saw such an expression in her face, and my mind so rose against her malice towards her ladyship, and the time was altogether such a time for bringing down what you may call retribution upon her, that if I had been a younger hand with less experience, I should have taken her, certain. Equally, last night, when her ladyship, as is so universally admired I am sure, come home looking—why, Lord, a man might almost say like Venus rising from the ocean—it was so unpleasant and inconsistent to think of her being charged with a murder of which she was innocent that I felt quite to want to put an end to the job. What should I have lost? Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I should have lost the weapon. My prisoner here proposed to Mrs. Bucket, after the departure of the funeral, that they should go per bus a little ways into the country and take tea at a very decent house of entertainment. Now, near that house of entertainment there's a piece of water. At tea, my prisoner got up to fetch her pocket handkercher from the bedroom where the bonnets was; she was rather a long time gone and came back a little out of wind. As soon as they came home this was reported to me by Mrs. Bucket, along with her observations and suspicions. I had the piece of water dragged by moonlight, in presence of a couple of our men, and the pocket pistol was brought up before it had been there half-a-dozen hours. Now, my dear, put your arm a little further through mine, and hold it steady, and I shan't hurt you!"

In a trice Mr. Bucket snaps a handcuff on her wrist. "That's one," says Mr. Bucket. "Now the other, darling. Two, and all told!"

He rises; she rises too. "Where," she asks him, darkening her large eyes until their drooping lids almost conceal them—and yet they stare, "where is your false, your treacherous, and cursed wife?"

"She's gone forrard to the Police Office," returns Mr. Bucket. "You'll see her there, my dear."

"I would like to kiss her!" exclaims Mademoiselle Hortense, panting tigress-like.

"You'd bite her, I suspect," says Mr. Bucket.

"I would!" making her eyes very large. "I would love to tear her limb from limb."

"Bless you, darling," says Mr. Bucket with the greatest composure, "I'm fully prepared to hear that. Your sex have such a surprising animosity against one another when you do differ. You don't mind me half so much, do you?"

"No. Though you are a devil still."

"Angel and devil by turns, eh?" cries Mr. Bucket. "But I am in my regular employment, you must consider. Let me put your shawl tidy. I've been lady's maid to a good many before now. Anything wanting to the bonnet? There's a cab at the door."

Mademoiselle Hortense, casting an indignant eye at the glass, shakes herself perfectly neat in one shake and looks, to do her justice, uncommonly genteel.

"Listen then, my angel," says she after several sarcastic nods. "You are very spiritual. But can you restore him back to life?"

Mr. Bucket answers, "Not exactly."

"That is droll. Listen yet one time. You are very spiritual. Can you make a honourable lady of her?"

"Don't be so malicious," says Mr. Bucket.

"Or a haughty gentleman of HIM?" cries mademoiselle, referring to Sir Leicester with ineffable disdain. "Eh! Oh, then regard him! The poor infant! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"Come, come, why this is worse PARLAYING than the other," says Mr. Bucket. "Come along!"

"You cannot do these things? Then you can do as you please with me. It is but the death, it is all the same. Let us go, my angel. Adieu, you old man, grey. I pity you, and I despise you!"

With these last words she snaps her teeth together as if her mouth closed with a spring. It is impossible to describe how Mr. Bucket gets her out, but he accomplishes that feat in a manner so peculiar to himself, enfolding and pervading her like a cloud, and hovering away with her as if he were a homely Jupiter and she the object of his affections.

Sir Leicester, left alone, remains in the same attitude, as though he were still listening and his attention were still occupied. At length he gazes round the empty room, and finding it deserted, rises unsteadily to his feet, pushes back his chair, and walks a few steps, supporting himself by the table. Then he stops, and with more of those inarticulate sounds, lifts up his eyes and seems to stare at something.

Heaven knows what he sees. The green, green woods of Chesney Wold, the noble house, the pictures of his forefathers, strangers defacing them, officers of police coarsely handling his most precious heirlooms, thousands of fingers pointing at him, thousands of faces sneering at him. But if such shadows flit before him to his bewilderment, there is one other shadow which he can name with something like distinctness even yet and to which alone he addresses his tearing of his white hair and his extended arms.

It is she in association with whom, saving that she has been for years a main fibre of the root of his dignity and pride, he has never had a selfish thought. It is she whom he has loved, admired, honoured, and set up for the world to respect. It is she who, at the core of all the constrained formalities and conventionalities of his life, has been a stock of living tenderness and love, susceptible as nothing else is of being struck with the agony he feels. He sees her, almost to the exclusion of himself, and cannot bear to look upon her cast down from the high place she has graced so well.

And even to the point of his sinking on the ground, oblivious of his suffering, he can yet pronounce her name with something like distinctness in the midst of those intrusive sounds, and in a tone of mourning and compassion rather than reproach.

CHAPTER LV. Flight

Inspector Bucket of the Detective has not yet struck his great blow, as just now chronicled, but is yet refreshing himself with sleep preparatory to his field-day, when through the night and along the freezing wintry roads a chaise and pair comes out of Lincolnshire, making its way towards London.

Railroads shall soon traverse all this country, and with a rattle and a glare the engine and train shall shoot like a meteor over the wide night-landscape, turning the moon paler; but as yet such things are non-existent in these parts, though not wholly unexpected. Preparations are afoot, measurements are made, ground is staked out. Bridges are begun, and their not yet united piers desolately look at one another over roads and streams like brick and mortar couples with an obstacle to their union; fragments of embankments are thrown up and left as precipices with torrents of rusty carts and barrows tumbling over them; tripods of tall poles appear on hilltops, where there are rumours of tunnels; everything looks chaotic and abandoned in full hopelessness. Along the freezing roads, and through the night, the post-chaise makes its way without a railroad on its mind.

Mrs. Rouncewell, so many years housekeeper at Chesney Wold, sits within the chaise; and by her side sits Mrs. Bagnet with her grey cloak and umbrella. The old girl would prefer the bar in front, as being exposed to the weather and a primitive sort of perch more in accordance with her usual course of travelling, but Mrs. Rouncewell is too thoughtful of her comfort to admit of her proposing it. The old lady cannot make enough of the old girl. She sits, in her stately manner, holding her hand, and regardless of its roughness, puts it often to her lips. "You are a mother, my dear soul," says she many times, "and you found out my George's mother!"

"Why, George," returns Mrs. Bagnet, "was always free with me, ma'am, and when he said at our house to my Woolwich that of all the things my Woolwich could have to think of when he grew to be a man, the comfortablest would be that he had never brought a sorrowful line into his mother's face or turned a hair of her head grey, then I felt sure, from his way, that something fresh had brought his own mother into his mind. I had often known him say to me, in past times, that he had behaved bad to her."

"Never, my dear!" returns Mrs. Rouncewell, bursting into tears. "My blessing on him, never! He was always fond of me, and loving to me, was my George! But he had a bold spirit, and he ran a little wild and went for a soldier. And I know he waited at first, in letting us know about himself, till he should rise to be an officer; and when he didn't rise, I know he considered himself beneath us, and wouldn't be a disgrace to us. For he had a lion heart, had my George, always from a baby!"

The old lady's hands stray about her as of yore, while she recalls, all in a tremble, what a likely lad, what a fine lad, what a gay good-humoured clever lad he was; how they all took to him down at Chesney Wold; how Sir Leicester took to him when he was a young gentleman; how the dogs took to him; how even the people who had been angry with him forgave him the moment he was gone, poor boy. And now to see him after all, and in a prison too! And the broad stomacher heaves, and the quaint upright old-fashioned figure bends under its load of affectionate distress.

Mrs. Bagnet, with the instinctive skill of a good warm heart, leaves the old housekeeper to her emotions for a little while—not without passing the back of her hand across her own motherly eyes—and presently chirps up in her cheery manner, "So I says to George when I goes to call him in to tea (he pretended to be smoking his pipe outside), 'What ails you this afternoon, George, for gracious sake? I have seen all sorts, and I have seen you pretty often in season and out of season, abroad and at home, and I never see you so melancholy penitent.' 'Why, Mrs. Bagnet,' says George, 'it's because I AM melancholy and penitent both, this afternoon, that you see me so.' 'What have you done, old fellow?' I says. 'Why, Mrs. Bagnet,' says George, shaking his head, 'what I have done has been done this many a long year, and is best not tried to be undone now. If I ever get to heaven it won't be for being a good son to a widowed mother; I say no more.' Now, ma'am, when George says to me that it's best not tried to be undone now, I have my thoughts as I have often had before, and I draw it out of George how he comes to have such things on him that afternoon. Then George tells me that he has seen by chance, at the lawyer's office, a fine old lady that has brought his mother plain before him, and he runs on about that old lady till he quite forgets himself and paints her picture to me as she used to be, years upon years back. So I says to George when he has done, who is this old lady he has seen? And George tells me it's Mrs. Rouncewell, housekeeper for more than half a century to the Dedlock family down at Chesney Wold in Lincolnshire. George has frequently told me before that he's a

Lincolnshire man, and I says to my old Lignum that night, 'Lignum, that's his mother for five and for-ty pound!'"

All this Mrs. Bagnet now relates for the twentieth time at least within the last four hours. Trilling it out like a kind of bird, with a pretty high note, that it may be audible to the old lady above the hum of the wheels.

"Bless you, and thank you," says Mrs. Rouncewell. "Bless you, and thank you, my worthy soul!"

"Dear heart!" cries Mrs. Bagnet in the most natural manner. "No thanks to me, I am sure. Thanks to yourself, ma'am, for being so ready to pay 'em! And mind once more, ma'am, what you had best do on finding George to be your own son is to make him—for your sake—have every sort of help to put himself in the right and clear himself of a charge of which he is as innocent as you or me. It won't do to have truth and justice on his side; he must have law and lawyers," exclaims the old girl, apparently persuaded that the latter form a separate establishment and have dissolved partnership with truth and justice for ever and a day.

"He shall have," says Mrs. Rouncewell, "all the help that can be got for him in the world, my dear. I will spend all I have, and thankfully, to procure it. Sir Leicester will do his best, the whole family will do their best. I—I know something, my dear; and will make my own appeal, as his mother parted from him all these years, and finding him in a jail at last."

The extreme disquietude of the old housekeeper's manner in saying this, her broken words, and her wringing of her hands make a powerful impression on Mrs. Bagnet and would astonish her but that she refers them all to her sorrow for her son's condition. And yet Mrs. Bagnet wonders too why Mrs. Rouncewell should murmur so distractedly, "My Lady, my Lady, my Lady!" over and over again.

The frosty night wears away, and the dawn breaks, and the post-chaise comes rolling on through the early mist like the ghost of a chaise departed. It has plenty of spectral company in ghosts of trees and hedges, slowly vanishing and giving place to the realities of day. London reached, the travellers alight, the old housekeeper in great tribulation and confusion, Mrs. Bagnet quite fresh and collected—as she would be if her next point, with no new equipage and outfit, were the Cape of Good Hope, the Island of Ascension, Hong Kong, or any other military station.

But when they set out for the prison where the trooper is confined, the old lady has managed to draw about her, with her lavender-coloured dress, much of the staid calmness which is its usual accompaniment. A wonderfully grave, precise, and handsome piece of old china she looks, though her heart beats fast and her stomacher is ruffled more than even the remembrance of this wayward son has ruffled it these many years.

Approaching the cell, they find the door opening and a warder in the act of coming out. The old girl promptly makes a sign of entreaty to him to say nothing; assenting with a nod, he suffers them to enter as he shuts the door.

So George, who is writing at his table, supposing himself to be alone, does not raise his eyes, but remains absorbed. The old housekeeper looks at him, and those wandering hands of hers are quite enough for Mrs. Bagnet's confirmation, even if she could see the mother and the son together, knowing what she knows, and doubt their relationship.

Not a rustle of the housekeeper's dress, not a gesture, not a word betrays her. She stands looking at him as he writes on, all unconscious, and only her fluttering hands give utterance to her emotions. But they are very eloquent, very, very eloquent. Mrs. Bagnet understands them. They speak of gratitude, of joy, of grief, of hope; of inextinguishable affection, cherished with no return since this stalwart man was a stripling; of a better son loved less, and this son loved so fondly and so proudly; and they speak in such touching language that Mrs. Bagnet's eyes brim up with tears and they run glistening down her sun-brown face.

"George Rouncewell! Oh, my dear child, turn and look at me!"

The trooper starts up, clasps his mother round the neck, and falls down on his knees before her. Whether in a late repentance, whether in the first association that comes back upon him, he puts his hands together as a child does when it says its prayers, and raising them towards her breast, bows down his head, and cries.

"My George, my dearest son! Always my favourite, and my favourite still, where have you been these cruel years and years? Grown such a man too, grown such a fine strong man. Grown so like what I knew he must be, if it pleased God he was alive!"

She can ask, and he can answer, nothing connected for a time. All that time the old girl, turned away, leans one arm against the whitened wall, leans her honest forehead upon it, wipes her eyes with her serviceable grey cloak, and quite enjoys herself like the best of old girls as she is.

"Mother," says the trooper when they are more composed, "forgive me first of all, for I know my need of it."

Forgive him! She does it with all her heart and soul. She always has done it. She tells him how she has had it written in her will, these many years, that he was her beloved son George. She has never believed any ill of him, never. If she had died without this happiness—and she is an old woman now and can't look to live very long—she would have blessed him with her last breath, if she had had her senses, as her beloved son George.

"Mother, I have been an undutiful trouble to you, and I have my reward; but of late years I have had a kind of glimmering of a purpose in me too. When I left home I didn't care much, mother—I am afraid not a great deal—for leaving; and went away and 'listed, harum-scarum, making believe to think that I cared for nobody, no not I, and that nobody cared for me."

The trooper has dried his eyes and put away his handkerchief, but there is an extraordinary contrast between his habitual manner of expressing himself and carrying himself and the softened tone in which he speaks, interrupted occasionally by a half-stifled sob.

"So I wrote a line home, mother, as you too well know, to say I had 'listed under another name, and I went abroad. Abroad, at one time I thought I would write home next year, when I might be better off; and when that year was out, I thought I would write home next year, when I might be better off; and when that year was out again, perhaps I didn't think much about it. So on, from year to year, through a service of ten years, till I began to get older, and to ask myself why should I ever write."

"I don't find any fault, child—but not to ease my mind, George? Not a word to your loving mother, who was growing older too?"

This almost overturns the trooper afresh, but he sets himself up with a great, rough, sounding clearance of his throat.

"Heaven forgive me, mother, but I thought there would be small consolation then in hearing anything about me. There were you, respected and esteemed. There was my brother, as I read in chance North Country papers now and then, rising to be prosperous and famous. There was I a dragoon, roving, unsettled, not self-made like him, but self-unmade—all my earlier advantages thrown away, all my little learning unlearnt, nothing picked up but what unfitted me for most things that I could think of. What business had I to make myself known? After letting all that time go by me, what good could come of it? The worst was past with you, mother. I knew by that time (being a man) how you had mourned for me, and wept for me, and prayed for me; and the pain was over, or was softened down, and I was better in your mind as it was."

The old lady sorrowfully shakes her head, and taking one of his powerful hands, lays it lovingly upon her shoulder.

"No, I don't say that it was so, mother, but that I made it out to be so. I said just now, what good could come of it? Well, my dear mother, some good might have come of it to myself—and there was the meanness of it. You would have sought me out; you would have purchased my discharge; you would have taken me down to Chesney Wold; you would have brought me and my brother and my brother's family together; you would all have considered anxiously how to do something for me and set me up as a respectable civilian. But how could any of you feel sure of me when I couldn't so much as feel sure of myself? How could you help regarding as an incumbrance and a discredit to you an idle dragooning chap who was an incumbrance and a discredit to himself, excepting under discipline? How could I look my brother's children in the face and pretend to set them an example—I, the vagabond boy who had run away from home and been the grief and unhappiness of my mother's life? 'No, George.' Such were my words, mother, when I passed this in review before me: 'You have made your bed. Now, lie upon it.'"

Mrs. Rouncewell, drawing up her stately form, shakes her head at the old girl with a swelling pride upon her, as much as to say, "I told you so!" The old girl relieves her feelings and testifies her interest in the conversation by giving the trooper a great poke between the shoulders with her umbrella; this action she afterwards repeats, at intervals, in a species of affectionate lunacy, never failing, after the administration of each of these remonstrances, to resort to the whitened wall and the grey cloak again.

"This was the way I brought myself to think, mother, that my best amends was to lie upon that bed I had made, and die upon it. And I should have done it (though I have been to see you more than once down at Chesney Wold, when you little thought of me) but for my old comrade's wife here, who I find has been too many for me. But I thank her for it. I thank you for it, Mrs. Bagnet, with all my heart and might."

To which Mrs. Bagnet responds with two pokes.

And now the old lady impresses upon her son George, her own dear recovered boy, her joy and pride, the light of her eyes, the happy close of her life, and every fond name she can think of, that he must be governed by the best advice obtainable by money and influence, that he must yield up his case to the greatest lawyers that can be got, that he must act in this serious plight as he shall be advised to act and must not be self-willed, however right, but must promise to think only of his poor old mother's anxiety and suffering until he is released, or he will break her heart.

"Mother, 'tis little enough to consent to," returns the trooper, stopping her with a kiss; "tell me what I shall do, and I'll make a late beginning and do it. Mrs. Bagnet, you'll take care of my mother, I know?"

A very hard poke from the old girl's umbrella.

"If you'll bring her acquainted with Mr. Jarndyce and Miss Summerson, she will find them of her way of thinking, and they will give her the best advice and assistance."

"And, George," says the old lady, "we must send with all haste for your brother. He is a sensible sound man as they tell me—out in the world beyond Chesney Wold, my dear, though I don't know much of it myself—and will be of great service."

"Mother," returns the trooper, "is it too soon to ask a favour?"

"Surely not, my dear."

"Then grant me this one great favour. Don't let my brother know."

"Not know what, my dear?"

"Not know of me. In fact, mother, I can't bear it; I can't make up my mind to it. He has proved himself so different from me and has done so much to raise himself while I've been soldiering that I haven't brass enough in my composition to see him in this place and under this charge. How could a man like him be expected to have any pleasure in such a discovery? It's impossible. No, keep my secret from him, mother; do me a greater kindness than I deserve and keep my secret from my brother, of all men."

"But not always, dear George?"

"Why, mother, perhaps not for good and all—though I may come to ask that too—but keep it now, I do entreat you. If it's ever broke to him that his rip of a brother has turned up, I could wish," says the trooper, shaking his head very doubtfully, "to break it myself and be governed as to advancing or retreating by the way in which he seems to take it."

As he evidently has a rooted feeling on this point, and as the depth of it is recognized in Mrs. Bagnet's face, his mother yields her implicit assent to what he asks. For this he thanks her kindly.

"In all other respects, my dear mother, I'll be as tractable and obedient as you can wish; on this one alone, I stand out. So now I am ready even for the lawyers. I have been drawing up," he glances at his writing on the table, "an exact account of what I knew of the deceased and how I came to be involved in this unfortunate affair. It's entered, plain and regular, like an orderly-book; not a word in it but what's wanted for the facts. I did intend to read it, straight on end, whensoever I was called upon to say anything in my defence. I hope I may be let to do it still; but I have no longer a will of my own in this case, and whatever is said or done, I give my promise not to have any."

Matters being brought to this so far satisfactory pass, and time being on the wane, Mrs. Bagnet proposes a departure. Again and again the old lady hangs upon her son's neck, and again and again the trooper holds her to his broad chest.

"Where are you going to take my mother, Mrs. Bagnet?"

"I am going to the town house, my dear, the family house. I have some business there that must be looked to directly," Mrs. Rouncewell answers.

"Will you see my mother safe there in a coach, Mrs. Bagnet? But of course I know you will. Why should I ask it!"

Why indeed, Mrs. Bagnet expresses with the umbrella.

"Take her, my old friend, and take my gratitude along with you. Kisses to Quebec and Malta, love to my godson, a hearty shake of the hand to Lignum, and this for yourself, and I wish it was ten thousand pound in gold, my dear!" So saying, the trooper puts his lips to the old girl's tanned forehead, and the door shuts upon him in his cell.

No entreaties on the part of the good old housekeeper will induce Mrs. Bagnet to retain the coach for her own conveyance home. Jumping out cheerfully at the door of the Dedlock mansion and handing Mrs. Rouncewell up the steps, the old girl shakes hands and trudges off, arriving soon afterwards in the bosom of the Bagnet family and falling to washing the greens as if nothing had happened.

My Lady is in that room in which she held her last conference with the murdered man, and is sitting where she sat that night, and is looking at the spot where he stood upon the hearth studying her so leisurely, when a tap comes at the door. Who is it? Mrs. Rouncewell. What has brought Mrs. Rouncewell to town so unexpectedly?

"Trouble, my Lady. Sad trouble. Oh, my Lady, may I beg a word with you?"

What new occurrence is it that makes this tranquil old woman tremble so? Far happier than her Lady, as her Lady has often thought, why does she falter in this manner and look at her with such strange mistrust?

"What is the matter? Sit down and take your breath."

"Oh, my Lady, my Lady. I have found my son—my youngest, who went away for a soldier so long ago. And he is in prison."

"For debt?"

"Oh, no, my Lady; I would have paid any debt, and joyful."

"For what is he in prison then?"

"Charged with a murder, my Lady, of which he is as innocent as—as I am. Accused of the murder of Mr. Tulkinghorn."

What does she mean by this look and this imploring gesture? Why does she come so close? What is the letter that she holds?

"Lady Dedlock, my dear Lady, my good Lady, my kind Lady! You must have a heart to feel for me, you must have a heart to forgive me. I was in this family before you were born. I am devoted to it. But think of my dear son wrongfully accused."

"I do not accuse him."

"No, my Lady, no. But others do, and he is in prison and in danger. Oh, Lady Dedlock, if you can say but a word to help to clear him, say it!"

What delusion can this be? What power does she suppose is in the person she petitions to avert this unjust suspicion, if it be unjust? Her Lady's handsome eyes regard her with astonishment, almost with fear.

"My Lady, I came away last night from Chesney Wold to find my son in my old age, and the step upon the Ghost's Walk was so constant and so solemn that I never heard the like in all these years. Night after night, as it has fallen dark, the sound has echoed through your rooms, but last night it was awfullest. And as it fell dark last night, my Lady, I got this letter."

"What letter is it?"

"Hush! Hush!" The housekeeper looks round and answers in a frightened whisper, "My Lady, I have not breathed a word of it, I don't believe what's written in it, I know it can't be true, I am sure and certain that it is not true. But my son is in danger, and you must have a heart to pity me. If you know of anything that is not known to others, if you have any suspicion, if you have any clue at all, and any reason for keeping it in your own breast, oh, my dear Lady, think of me, and conquer that reason, and let it be known! This is the most I consider possible. I know you are not a hard lady, but you go your own way always without help, and you are not familiar with your friends; and all who admire you—and all do —as a beautiful and elegant lady, know you to be one far away from themselves who can't be approached close. My Lady, you may have some proud or angry reasons for disdaining to utter something that you know; if so, pray, oh, pray, think of a faithful servant whose whole life has been passed in this family which she dearly loves, and relent, and help to clear my son! My Lady, my good Lady," the old housekeeper pleads with genuine simplicity, "I am so humble in my place and you are by nature so high and distant that you may not think what I feel for my child, but I feel so much that I have come here to make so bold as to beg and pray you not to be scornful of us if you can do us any right or justice at this fearful time!"

Lady Dedlock raises her without one word, until she takes the letter from her hand.

"Am I to read this?"

"When I am gone, my Lady, if you please, and then remembering the most that I consider possible."

"I know of nothing I can do. I know of nothing I reserve that can affect your son. I have never accused him."

"My Lady, you may pity him the more under a false accusation after reading the letter."

The old housekeeper leaves her with the letter in her hand. In truth she is not a hard lady naturally, and the time has been when the sight of the venerable figure suing to her with such strong earnestness would have moved her to great compassion. But so long accustomed to suppress emotion and keep down reality, so long schooled for her own purposes in that destructive school which shuts up the natural feelings of the heart like flies in amber and spreads one uniform and dreary gloss over the good and bad, the feeling and the unfeeling, the sensible and the senseless, she had subdued even her wonder until now.

She opens the letter. Spread out upon the paper is a printed account of the discovery of the body as it lay face downward on the floor, shot through the heart; and underneath is written her own name, with the word "murderess" attached.

It falls out of her hand. How long it may have lain upon the ground she knows not, but it lies where it fell when a servant stands before her announcing the young man of the name of Guppy. The words have probably been repeated several times, for they are ringing in her head before she begins to understand them.

"Let him come in!"

He comes in. Holding the letter in her hand, which she has taken from the floor, she tries to collect her thoughts. In the eyes of Mr. Guppy she is the same Lady Dedlock, holding the same prepared, proud, chilling state.

"Your ladyship may not be at first disposed to excuse this visit from one who has never been welcome to your ladyship"—which he don't complain of, for he is bound to confess that there never has been any particular reason on the face of things why he should be—"but I hope when I mention my motives to your ladyship you will not find fault with me," says Mr. Guppy.

"Do so."

"Thank your ladyship. I ought first to explain to your ladyship," Mr. Guppy sits on the edge of a chair and puts his hat on the carpet at his feet, "that Miss Summerson, whose image, as I formerly mentioned to your ladyship, was at one period of my life imprinted on my 'eart until erased by circumstances over which I had no control, communicated to me, after I had the pleasure of waiting on your ladyship last, that she particularly wished me to take no steps whatever in any manner at all relating to her. And Miss Summerson's wishes being to me a law (except as connected with circumstances over which I have no control), I consequently never expected to have the distinguished honour of waiting on your ladyship again."

And yet he is here now, Lady Dedlock moodily reminds him.

"And yet I am here now," Mr. Guppy admits. "My object being to communicate to your ladyship, under the seal of confidence, why I am here."

He cannot do so, she tells him, too plainly or too briefly. "Nor can I," Mr. Guppy returns with a sense of injury upon him, "too particularly request your ladyship to take particular notice that it's no personal affair of mine that brings me here. I have no interested views of my own to serve in coming here. If it was not for my promise to Miss Summerson and my keeping of it sacred—I, in point of fact, shouldn't have darkened these doors again, but should have seen 'em further first."

Mr. Guppy considers this a favourable moment for sticking up his hair with both hands.

"Your ladyship will remember when I mention it that the last time I was here I run against a party very eminent in our profession and whose loss we all deplore. That party certainly did from that time apply himself to cutting in against me in a way that I will call sharp practice, and did make it, at every turn and point, extremely difficult for me to be sure that I hadn't inadvertently led up to something contrary to Miss Summerson's wishes. Self-praise is no recommendation, but I may say for myself that I am not so bad a man of business neither."

Lady Dedlock looks at him in stern inquiry. Mr. Guppy immediately withdraws his eyes from her face and looks anywhere else.

"Indeed, it has been made so hard," he goes on, "to have any idea what that party was up to in combination with others that until the loss which we all deplore I was gravelled—an expression which your ladyship, moving in the higher circles, will be so good as to consider tantamount to knocked over. Small likewise—a name by which I refer to another party, a friend of mine that your ladyship is not acquainted with—got to be so close and double-faced that at times it wasn't easy to keep one's hands off his 'ead. However, what with the exertion of my humble abilities, and what with the help of a mutual friend by the name of Mr. Tony Weevle (who is of a high aristocratic turn and has your ladyship's portrait always hanging up in his room), I have now reasons for an apprehension as to which I come to put your ladyship upon your guard. First, will your ladyship allow me to ask you whether you have had any strange visitors this morning? I don't mean fashionable visitors, but such visitors, for instance, as Miss Barbary's old servant, or as a person without the use of his lower extremities, carried upstairs similarly to a guy?"

"No!"

"Then I assure your ladyship that such visitors have been here and have been received here. Because I saw them at the door, and waited at the corner of the square till they came out, and took half an hour's turn afterwards to avoid them."

"What have I to do with that, or what have you? I do not understand you. What do you mean?"

"Your ladyship, I come to put you on your guard. There may be no occasion for it. Very well. Then I have only done my best to keep my promise to Miss Summerson. I strongly suspect (from what Small has dropped, and from what we have corkscrewed out of him) that those letters I was to have brought to your ladyship were not destroyed when I supposed they were. That if there was anything to be blown upon, it IS blown upon. That the visitors I have alluded to have been here this morning to make money of it. And that the money is made, or making."

Mr. Guppy picks up his hat and rises.

"Your ladyship, you know best whether there's anything in what I say or whether there's nothing. Something or nothing, I have acted up to Miss Summerson's wishes in letting things alone and in undoing what I had begun to do, as far as possible; that's sufficient for me. In case I should be taking a liberty in putting your ladyship on your guard when there's no necessity for it, you will endeavour, I should hope, to outlive my presumption, and I shall endeavour to outlive your disapprobation. I now take my farewell of your ladyship, and assure you that there's no danger of your ever being waited on by me again."

She scarcely acknowledges these parting words by any look, but when he has been gone a little while, she rings her bell.

"Where is Sir Leicester?"

Mercury reports that he is at present shut up in the library alone.

"Has Sir Leicester had any visitors this morning?"

Several, on business. Mercury proceeds to a description of them, which has been anticipated by Mr. Guppy. Enough; he may go.

So! All is broken down. Her name is in these many mouths, her husband knows his wrongs, her shame will be published—may be spreading while she thinks about it—and in addition to the thunderbolt so long foreseen by her, so unforeseen by him, she is denounced by an invisible accuser as the murderess of her enemy.

Her enemy he was, and she has often, often, often wished him dead. Her enemy he is, even in his grave. This dreadful accusation comes upon her like a new torment at his lifeless hand. And when she recalls how she was secretly at his door that night, and how she may be represented to have sent her favourite girl away so soon before merely to release herself from observation, she shudders as if the hangman's hands were at her neck.

She has thrown herself upon the floor and lies with her hair all wildly scattered and her face buried in the cushions of a couch. She rises up, hurries to and fro, flings herself down again, and rocks and moans. The horror that is upon her is unutterable. If she really were the murderess, it could hardly be, for the moment, more intense.

For as her murderous perspective, before the doing of the deed, however subtle the precautions for its commission, would have been closed up by a gigantic dilatation of the hateful figure, preventing her from seeing any consequences beyond it; and as those consequences would have rushed in, in an unimagined flood, the moment the figure was laid low—which always happens when a murder is done; so, now she sees that when he used to be on the watch before her, and she used to think, "if some mortal stroke would but fall on this old man and take him from my way!" it was but wishing that all he held against her in his hand might be flung to the winds and chance-sown in many places. So, too, with the wicked relief she has felt in his death. What was his death but the key-stone of a gloomy arch removed, and now the arch begins to fall in a thousand fragments, each crushing and mangling piecemeal!

Thus, a terrible impression steals upon and overshadows her that from this pursuer, living or dead—obdurate and imperturbable before her in his well-remembered shape, or not more obdurate and imperturbable in his coffin-bed—there is no escape but in death. Hunted, she flies. The complication of her shame, her dread, remorse, and misery, overwhelms her at its height; and even her strength of self-reliance is overturned and whirled away like a leaf before a mighty wind.

She hurriedly addresses these lines to her husband, seals, and leaves them on her table:

> *If I am sought for, or accused of, his murder, believe that I am wholly innocent. Believe no other good of me, for I am innocent of nothing else that you have heard, or will hear, laid to my charge. He prepared me, on that fatal night, for his disclosure of my guilt to you. After he had left me, I went out on pretence of walking in the garden where I sometimes walk, but really to follow him and make one last petition that he would not protract the dreadful suspense on which I have been racked by him, you do not know how long, but would mercifully strike next morning.*
>
> *I found his house dark and silent. I rang twice at his door, but there was no reply, and I came home.*

> *I have no home left. I will encumber you no more. May you, in your just resentment, be able to forget the unworthy woman on whom you have wasted a most generous devotion—who avoids you only with a deeper shame than that with which she hurries from herself—and who writes this last adieu.*

She veils and dresses quickly, leaves all her jewels and her money, listens, goes downstairs at a moment when the hall is empty, opens and shuts the great door, flutters away in the shrill frosty wind.

CHAPTER LVI. Pursuit

Impassive, as behoves its high breeding, the Dedlock town house stares at the other houses in the street of dismal grandeur and gives no outward sign of anything going wrong within. Carriages rattle, doors are battered at, the world exchanges calls; ancient charmers with skeleton throats and peachy cheeks that have a rather ghastly bloom upon them seen by daylight, when indeed these fascinating creatures look like Death and the Lady fused together, dazzle the eyes of men. Forth from the frigid mews come easily swinging carriages guided by short-legged coachmen in flaxen wigs, deep sunk into downy hammercloths, and up behind mount luscious Mercuries bearing sticks of state and wearing cocked hats broadwise, a spectacle for the angels.

The Dedlock town house changes not externally, and hours pass before its exalted dullness is disturbed within. But Volumnia the fair, being subject to the prevalent complaint of boredom and finding that disorder attacking her spirits with some virulence, ventures at length to repair to the library for change of scene. Her gentle tapping at the door producing no response, she opens it and peeps in; seeing no one there, takes possession.

The sprightly Dedlock is reputed, in that grass-grown city of the ancients, Bath, to be stimulated by an urgent curiosity which impels her on all convenient and inconvenient occasions to sidle about with a golden glass at her eye, peering into objects of every description. Certain it is that she avails herself of the present opportunity of hovering over her kinsman's letters and papers like a bird, taking a short peck at this document and a blink with her head on one side at that document, and hopping about from table to table with her glass at her eye in an inquisitive and restless manner. In the course of these researches she stumbles over something, and turning her glass in that direction, sees her kinsman lying on the ground like a felled tree.

Volumnia's pet little scream acquires a considerable augmentation of reality from this surprise, and the house is quickly in commotion. Servants tear up and down stairs, bells are violently rung, doctors are sent for, and Lady Dedlock is sought in all directions, but not found. Nobody has seen or heard her since she last rang her bell. Her letter to Sir Leicester is discovered on her table, but it is doubtful yet whether he has not received another missive from another world requiring to be personally answered, and all the living languages, and all the dead, are as one to him.

They lay him down upon his bed, and chafe, and rub, and fan, and put ice to his head, and try every means of restoration. Howbeit, the day has ebbed away, and it is night in his room before his stertorous breathing lulls or his fixed eyes show any consciousness of the candle that is occasionally passed before them. But when this change begins, it goes on; and by and by he nods or moves his eyes or even his hand in token that he hears and comprehends.

He fell down, this morning, a handsome stately gentleman, somewhat infirm, but of a fine presence, and with a well-filled face. He lies upon his bed, an aged man with sunken cheeks, the decrepit shadow of himself. His voice was rich and mellow and he had so long been thoroughly persuaded of the weight and import to mankind of any word he said that his words really had come to sound as if there were something in them. But now he can only whisper, and what he whispers sounds like what it is—mere jumble and jargon.

His favourite and faithful housekeeper stands at his bedside. It is the first act he notices, and he clearly derives pleasure from it. After vainly trying to make himself understood in speech, he makes signs for a pencil. So inexpressively that they cannot at first understand him; it is his old housekeeper who makes out what he wants and brings in a slate.

After pausing for some time, he slowly scrawls upon it in a hand that is not his, "Chesney Wold?"

No, she tells him; he is in London. He was taken ill in the library this morning. Right thankful she is that she happened to come to London and is able to attend upon him.

"It is not an illness of any serious consequence, Sir Leicester. You will be much better to-morrow, Sir Leicester. All the gentlemen say so." This, with the tears coursing down her fair old face.

After making a survey of the room and looking with particular attention all round the bed where the doctors stand, he writes, "My Lady."

"My Lady went out, Sir Leicester, before you were taken ill, and don't know of your illness yet."

He points again, in great agitation, at the two words. They all try to quiet him, but he points again with increased agitation. On their looking at one another, not knowing what to say, he takes the slate once more and writes "My Lady. For God's sake, where?" And makes an imploring moan.

It is thought better that his old housekeeper should give him Lady Dedlock's letter, the contents of which no one knows or can surmise. She opens it for him and puts it out for his perusal. Having read it twice by a great effort, he turns it down so that it shall not be seen and lies moaning. He passes into a kind of relapse or into a swoon, and it is an hour before he opens his eyes, reclining on his faithful and attached old servant's arm. The doctors know that he is best with her, and when not actively engaged about him, stand aloof.

The slate comes into requisition again, but the word he wants to write he cannot remember. His anxiety, his eagerness, and affliction at this pass are pitiable to behold. It seems as if he must go mad in the necessity he feels for haste and the inability under which he labours of expressing to do what or to fetch whom. He has written the letter B, and there stopped. Of a sudden, in the height of his misery, he puts Mr. before it. The old housekeeper suggests Bucket. Thank heaven! That's his meaning.

Mr. Bucket is found to be downstairs, by appointment. Shall he come up?

There is no possibility of misconstruing Sir Leicester's burning wish to see him or the desire he signifies to have the room cleared of every one but the housekeeper. It is speedily done, and Mr. Bucket appears. Of all men upon earth, Sir Leicester seems fallen from his high estate to place his sole trust and reliance upon this man.

"Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I'm sorry to see you like this. I hope you'll cheer up. I'm sure you will, on account of the family credit."

Sir Leicester puts her letter in his hands and looks intently in his face while he reads it. A new intelligence comes into Mr. Bucket's eye as he reads on; with one hook of his finger, while that eye is still glancing over the words, he indicates, "Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I understand you."

Sir Leicester writes upon the slate. "Full forgiveness. Find—"Mr. Bucket stops his hand.

"Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I'll find her. But my search after her must be begun out of hand. Not a minute must be lost."

With the quickness of thought, he follows Sir Leicester Dedlock's look towards a little box upon a table.

"Bring it here, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet? Certainly. Open it with one of these here keys? Certainly. The littlest key? TO be sure. Take the notes out? So I will. Count 'em? That's soon done. Twenty and thirty's fifty, and twenty's seventy, and fifty's one twenty, and forty's one sixty. Take 'em for expenses? That I'll do, and render an account of course. Don't spare money? No I won't."

The velocity and certainty of Mr. Bucket's interpretation on all these heads is little short of miraculous. Mrs. Rouncewell, who holds the light, is giddy with the swiftness of his eyes and hands as he starts up, furnished for his journey.

"You're George's mother, old lady; that's about what you are, I believe?" says Mr. Bucket aside, with his hat already on and buttoning his coat.

"Yes, sir, I am his distressed mother."

"So I thought, according to what he mentioned to me just now. Well, then, I'll tell you something. You needn't be distressed no more. Your son's all right. Now, don't you begin a-crying, because what you've got to do is to take care of Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, and you won't do that by crying. As to your son, he's all right, I tell you; and he sends his loving duty, and hoping you're the same. He's discharged honourable; that's about what HE is; with no more imputation on his character than there is on yours, and yours is a tidy one, I'LL bet a pound. You may trust me, for I took your son. He conducted himself in a game way, too, on that occasion; and he's a fine-made man, and you're a fine-made old lady, and you're a mother and son, the pair of you, as might be showed for models in a caravan. Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, what you've trusted to me I'll go through with. Don't you be afraid of my turning out of my way, right or left, or taking a sleep, or a wash, or a shave till I have found what I go in search of. Say everything as is kind and forgiving on your part? Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, I will. And I wish you better, and these family affairs smoothed over—as, Lord, many other family affairs equally has been, and equally will be, to the end of time."

With this peroration, Mr. Bucket, buttoned up, goes quietly out, looking steadily before him as if he were already piercing the night in quest of the fugitive.

His first step is to take himself to Lady Dedlock's rooms and look all over them for any trifling indication that may help him. The rooms are in darkness now; and to see Mr. Bucket with a wax-light in his hand, holding it above his head and taking a sharp mental inventory of the many delicate objects so curiously at variance with himself, would be to see a sight—which nobody DOES see, as he is particular to lock himself in.

"A spicy boudoir, this," says Mr. Bucket, who feels in a manner furbished up in his French by the blow of the morning. "Must have cost a sight of money. Rum articles to cut away from, these; she must have been hard put to it!"

Opening and shutting table-drawers and looking into caskets and jewel-cases, he sees the reflection of himself in various mirrors, and moralizes thereon.

"One might suppose I was a-moving in the fashionable circles and getting myself up for almac's," says Mr. Bucket. "I begin to think I must be a swell in the Guards without knowing it."

Ever looking about, he has opened a dainty little chest in an inner drawer. His great hand, turning over some gloves which it can scarcely feel, they are so light and soft within it, comes upon a white handkerchief.

"Hum! Let's have a look at YOU," says Mr. Bucket, putting down the light. "What should YOU be kept by yourself for? What's YOUR motive? Are you her ladyship's property, or somebody else's? You've got a mark upon you somewheres or another, I suppose?"

He finds it as he speaks, "Esther Summerson."

"Oh!" says Mr. Bucket, pausing, with his finger at his ear. "Come, I'll take YOU."

He completes his observations as quietly and carefully as he has carried them on, leaves everything else precisely as he found it, glides away after some five minutes in all, and passes into the street. With a glance upward at the dimly lighted windows of Sir Leicester's room, he sets off, full-swing, to the nearest coach-stand, picks out the horse for his money, and directs to be driven to the shooting gallery. Mr. Bucket does not claim to be a scientific judge of horses, but he lays out a little money on the principal events in that line, and generally sums up his knowledge of the subject in the remark that when he sees a horse as can go, he knows him.

His knowledge is not at fault in the present instance. Clattering over the stones at a dangerous pace, yet thoughtfully bringing his keen eyes to bear on every slinking creature whom he passes in the midnight streets, and even on the lights in upper windows where people are going or gone to bed, and on all the turnings that he rattles by, and alike on the heavy sky, and on the earth where the snow lies thin—for something may present itself to assist him, anywhere—he dashes to his destination at such a speed that when he stops the horse half smothers him in a cloud of steam.

"Unbear him half a moment to freshen him up, and I'll be back."

He runs up the long wooden entry and finds the trooper smoking his pipe.

"I thought I should, George, after what you have gone through, my lad. I haven't a word to spare. Now, honour! All to save a woman. Miss Summerson that was here when Gridley died—that was the name, I know—all right—where does she live?"

The trooper has just come from there and gives him the address, near Oxford Street.

"You won't repent it, George. Good night!"

He is off again, with an impression of having seen Phil sitting by the frosty fire staring at him open-mouthed, and gallops away again, and gets out in a cloud of steam again.

Mr. Jarndyce, the only person up in the house, is just going to bed, rises from his book on hearing the rapid ringing at the bell, and comes down to the door in his dressing-gown.

"Don't be alarmed, sir." In a moment his visitor is confidential with him in the hall, has shut the door, and stands with his hand upon the lock. "I've had the pleasure of seeing you before. Inspector Bucket. Look at that handkerchief, sir, Miss Esther Summerson's. Found it myself put away in a drawer of Lady Dedlock's, quarter of an hour ago. Not a moment to lose. Matter of life or death. You know Lady Dedlock?"

"Yes."

"There has been a discovery there to-day. Family affairs have come out. Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, has had a fit—apoplexy or paralysis—and couldn't be brought to, and precious time has been lost. Lady Dedlock disappeared this afternoon and left a letter for him that looks bad. Run your eye over it. Here it is!"

Mr. Jarndyce, having read it, asks him what he thinks.

"I don't know. It looks like suicide. Anyways, there's more and more danger, every minute, of its drawing to that. I'd give a hundred pound an hour to have got the start of the present time. Now, Mr. Jarndyce, I am employed by Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, to follow her and find her, to save her and take her his forgiveness. I have money and full power, but I want something else. I want Miss Summerson."

Mr. Jarndyce in a troubled voice repeats, "Miss Summerson?"

"Now, Mr. Jarndyce"—Mr. Bucket has read his face with the greatest attention all along—"I speak to you as a gentleman of a humane heart, and under such pressing circumstances as don't often happen. If ever delay was dangerous, it's dangerous now; and if ever you couldn't afterwards forgive yourself for causing it, this is the time. Eight or ten hours, worth, as I tell you, a hundred pound apiece at least, have been lost since Lady Dedlock disappeared. I am charged to find her. I am Inspector Bucket. Besides all the rest that's heavy on her, she has upon her, as she believes, suspicion of murder. If I follow her alone, she, being in ignorance of what Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, has communicated to me, may be driven to desperation. But if I follow her in company with a young lady, answering to the description of a young lady that she has a tenderness for—I ask no question, and I say no more than that—she will give me credit for being friendly. Let me come up with her and be able to have the hold upon her of putting that young lady for'ard, and I'll save her and prevail with her if she is alive. Let me come up with her alone—a hard matter—and I'll do my best, but I don't answer for what the best may be. Time flies; it's getting on for one o'clock. When one strikes, there's another hour gone, and it's worth a thousand pound now instead of a hundred."

This is all true, and the pressing nature of the case cannot be questioned. Mr. Jarndyce begs him to remain there while he speaks to Miss Summerson. Mr. Bucket says he will, but acting on his usual principle, does no such thing, following upstairs instead and keeping his man in sight. So he remains, dodging and lurking about in the gloom of the staircase while they confer. In a very little time Mr. Jarndyce comes down and tells him that Miss Summerson will join him directly and place herself under his protection to accompany him where he pleases. Mr. Bucket, satisfied, expresses high approval and awaits her coming at the door.

There he mounts a high tower in his mind and looks out far and wide. Many solitary figures he perceives creeping through the streets; many solitary figures out on heaths, and roads, and lying under haystacks. But the figure that he seeks is not among them. Other solitaries he perceives, in nooks of bridges, looking over; and in shadowed places down by the river's level; and a dark, dark, shapeless object drifting with the tide, more solitary than all, clings with a drowning hold on his attention.

Where is she? Living or dead, where is she? If, as he folds the handkerchief and carefully puts it up, it were able with an enchanted power to bring before him the place where she found it and the night-landscape near the cottage where it covered the little child, would he descry her there? On the waste where the brick-kilns are burning with a pale blue flare, where the straw-roofs of the wretched huts in which the bricks are made are being scattered by the wind, where the clay and water are hard frozen and the mill in which the gaunt blind horse goes round all day looks like an instrument of human torture—traversing this deserted, blighted spot there is a lonely figure with the sad world to itself, pelted by the snow and driven by the wind, and cast out, it would seem, from all companionship. It is the figure of a woman, too; but it is miserably dressed, and no such clothes ever came through the hall and out at the great door of the Dedlock mansion.

CHAPTER LVII. Esther's Narrative

I had gone to bed and fallen asleep when my guardian knocked at the door of my room and begged me to get up directly. On my hurrying to speak to him and learn what had happened, he told me, after a word or two of preparation, that there had been a discovery at Sir Leicester Dedlock's. That my mother had fled, that a person was now at our door who was empowered to convey to her the fullest assurances of affectionate protection and forgiveness if he could possibly find her, and that I was sought for to accompany him in the hope that my entreaties might prevail upon her if his failed. Something to this general purpose I made out, but I was thrown into such a tumult of alarm, and hurry and distress, that in spite of every effort I could make to subdue my agitation, I did not seem, to myself, fully to recover my right mind until hours had passed.

But I dressed and wrapped up expeditiously without waking Charley or any one and went down to Mr. Bucket, who was the person entrusted with the secret. In taking me to him my guardian told me this, and also explained how it was that he had come to think of me. Mr. Bucket, in a low voice, by the light of my guardian's candle, read to me in the hall a letter that my mother had left upon her table; and I suppose within ten minutes of my having been aroused I was sitting beside him, rolling swiftly through the streets.

His manner was very keen, and yet considerate when he explained to me that a great deal might depend on my being able to answer, without confusion, a few questions that he wished to ask me. These were, chiefly, whether I had had much communication with my mother (to whom he only referred as Lady Dedlock), when and where I had spoken with her last, and how she had become possessed of my handkerchief. When I had satisfied him on these points, he asked me particularly to consider—taking time to think—whether within my knowledge there was any one, no matter where, in whom she might be at all likely to confide under circumstances of the last necessity. I could think of no one but my guardian. But by and by I mentioned Mr. Boythorn. He came into my mind as connected with his old chivalrous manner of mentioning my mother's name and with what my guardian had informed me of his engagement to her sister and his unconscious connexion with her unhappy story.

My companion had stopped the driver while we held this conversation, that we might the better hear each other. He now told him to go on again and said to me, after considering within himself for a few moments, that he had made up his mind how to proceed. He was quite willing to tell me what his plan was, but I did not feel clear enough to understand it.

We had not driven very far from our lodgings when we stopped in a by-street at a public-looking place lighted up with gas. Mr. Bucket took me in and sat me in an arm-chair by a bright fire. It was now past one, as I saw by the clock against the wall. Two police officers, looking in their perfectly neat uniform not at all like people who were up all night, were quietly writing at a desk; and the place seemed very quiet altogether, except for some beating and calling out at distant doors underground, to which nobody paid any attention.

A third man in uniform, whom Mr. Bucket called and to whom he whispered his instructions, went out; and then the two others advised together while one wrote from Mr. Bucket's subdued dictation. It was a description of my mother that they were busy with, for Mr. Bucket brought it to me when it was done and read it in a whisper. It was very accurate indeed.

The second officer, who had attended to it closely, then copied it out and called in another man in uniform (there were several in an outer room), who took it up and went away with it. All this was done with the greatest dispatch and without the waste of a moment; yet nobody was at all hurried. As soon as the paper was sent out upon its travels, the two officers resumed their former quiet work of writing with neatness and care. Mr. Bucket thoughtfully came and warmed the soles of his boots, first one and then the other, at the fire.

"Are you well wrapped up, Miss Summerson?" he asked me as his eyes met mine. "It's a desperate sharp night for a young lady to be out in."

I told him I cared for no weather and was warmly clothed.

"It may be a long job," he observed; "but so that it ends well, never mind, miss."

"I pray to heaven it may end well!" said I.

He nodded comfortingly. "You see, whatever you do, don't you go and fret yourself. You keep yourself cool and equal for anything that may happen, and it'll be the better for you, the better for me, the better for Lady Dedlock, and the better for Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet."

He was really very kind and gentle, and as he stood before the fire warming his boots and rubbing his face with his forefinger, I felt a confidence in his sagacity which reassured me. It was not yet a quarter to two when I heard horses' feet and wheels outside. "Now, Miss Summerson," said he, "we are off, if you please!"

He gave me his arm, and the two officers courteously bowed me out, and we found at the door a phaeton or barouche with a postilion and post horses. Mr. Bucket handed me in and took his own seat on the box. The man in uniform whom he had sent to fetch this equipage then handed him up a dark lantern at his request, and when he had given a few directions to the driver, we rattled away.

I was far from sure that I was not in a dream. We rattled with great rapidity through such a labyrinth of streets that I soon lost all idea where we were, except that we had crossed and re-crossed the river, and still seemed to be traversing a low-lying, waterside, dense neighbourhood of narrow thoroughfares chequered by docks and basins, high piles of warehouses, swing-bridges, and masts of ships. At length we stopped at the corner of a little slimy turning, which the wind from the river, rushing up it, did not purify; and I saw my companion, by the light of his lantern, in conference with several men who looked like a mixture of police and sailors. Against the mouldering wall by which they stood, there was a bill, on which I could discern the words, "Found Drowned"; and this and an inscription about drags possessed me with the awful suspicion shadowed forth in our visit to that place.

I had no need to remind myself that I was not there by the indulgence of any feeling of mine to increase the difficulties of the search, or to lessen its hopes, or enhance its delays. I remained quiet, but what I suffered in that dreadful spot I never can forget. And still it was like the horror of a dream. A man yet dark and muddy, in long swollen sodden boots and a hat like them, was called out of a boat and whispered with Mr. Bucket, who went away with him down some slippery steps—as if to look at something secret that he had to show. They came back, wiping their hands upon their coats, after turning over something wet; but thank God it was not what I feared!

After some further conference, Mr. Bucket (whom everybody seemed to know and defer to) went in with the others at a door and left me in the carriage, while the driver walked up and down by his horses to warm himself. The tide was coming in, as I judged from the sound it made, and I could hear it break at the end of the alley with a little rush towards me. It never did so—and I thought it did so, hundreds of times, in what can have been at the most a quarter of an hour, and probably was less—but the thought shuddered through me that it would cast my mother at the horses' feet.

Mr. Bucket came out again, exhorting the others to be vigilant, darkened his lantern, and once more took his seat. "Don't you be alarmed, Miss Summerson, on account of our coming down here," he said, turning to me. "I only want to have everything in train and to know that it is in train by looking after it myself. Get on, my lad!"

We appeared to retrace the way we had come. Not that I had taken note of any particular objects in my perturbed state of mind, but judging from the general character of the streets. We called at another office or station for a minute and crossed the river again. During the whole of this time, and during the whole search, my companion, wrapped up on the box, never relaxed in his vigilance a single moment; but when we crossed the bridge he seemed, if possible, to be more on the alert than before. He stood up to look over the parapet, he alighted and went back after a shadowy female figure that flitted past us, and he gazed into the profound black pit of water with a face that made my heart die within me. The river had a fearful look, so overcast and secret, creeping away so fast between the low flat lines of shore—so heavy with indistinct and awful shapes, both of substance and shadow; so death-like and mysterious. I have seen it many times since then, by sunlight and by moonlight, but never free from the impressions of that journey. In my memory the lights upon the bridge are always burning dim, the cutting wind is eddying round the homeless woman whom we pass, the monotonous wheels are whirling on, and the light of the carriage-lamps reflected back looks palely in upon me—a face rising out of the dreaded water.

Clattering and clattering through the empty streets, we came at length from the pavement on to dark smooth roads and began to leave the houses behind us. After a while I recognized the familiar way to Saint Albans. At Barnet fresh horses were ready for us, and we changed and went on. It was very cold indeed, and the open country was white with snow, though none was falling then.

"An old acquaintance of yours, this road, Miss Summerson," said Mr. Bucket cheerfully.

"Yes," I returned. "Have you gathered any intelligence?"

"None that can be quite depended on as yet," he answered, "but it's early times as yet."

He had gone into every late or early public-house where there was a light (they were not a few at that time, the road being then much frequented by drovers) and had got down to talk to the turnpike-keepers. I had heard him ordering drink, and chinking money, and making himself agreeable and merry everywhere; but whenever he took his seat upon the box again, his face resumed its watchful steady look, and he always said to the driver in the same business tone, "Get on, my lad!"

With all these stoppages, it was between five and six o'clock and we were yet a few miles short of Saint Albans when he came out of one of these houses and handed me in a cup of tea.

"Drink it, Miss Summerson, it'll do you good. You're beginning to get more yourself now, ain't you?"

I thanked him and said I hoped so.

"You was what you may call stunned at first," he returned; "and Lord, no wonder! Don't speak loud, my dear. It's all right. She's on ahead."

I don't know what joyful exclamation I made or was going to make, but he put up his finger and I stopped myself.

"Passed through here on foot this evening about eight or nine. I heard of her first at the archway toll, over at Highgate, but couldn't make quite sure. Traced her all along, on and off. Picked her up at one place, and dropped her at another; but she's before us now, safe. Take hold of this cup and saucer, ostler. Now, if you wasn't brought up to the butter trade, look out and see if you can catch half a crown in your t'other hand. One, two, three, and there you are! Now, my lad, try a gallop!"

We were soon in Saint Albans and alighted a little before day, when I was just beginning to arrange and comprehend the occurrences of the night and really to believe that they were not a dream. Leaving the carriage at the posting-house and ordering fresh horses to be ready, my companion gave me his arm, and we went towards home.

"As this is your regular abode, Miss Summerson, you see," he observed, "I should like to know whether you've been asked for by any stranger answering the description, or whether Mr. Jarndyce has. I don't much expect it, but it might be."

As we ascended the hill, he looked about him with a sharp eye—the day was now breaking—and reminded me that I had come down it one night, as I had reason for remembering, with my little servant and poor Jo, whom he called Toughey.

I wondered how he knew that.

"When you passed a man upon the road, just yonder, you know," said Mr. Bucket.

Yes, I remembered that too, very well.

"That was me," said Mr. Bucket.

Seeing my surprise, he went on, "I drove down in a gig that afternoon to look after that boy. You might have heard my wheels when you came out to look after him yourself, for I was aware of you and your little maid going up when I was walking the horse down. Making an inquiry or two about him in the town, I soon heard what company he was in and was coming among the brick-fields to look for him when I observed you bringing him home here."

"Had he committed any crime?" I asked.

"None was charged against him," said Mr. Bucket, coolly lifting off his hat, "but I suppose he wasn't over-particular. No. What I wanted him for was in connexion with keeping this very matter of Lady Dedlock quiet. He had been making his tongue more free than welcome as to a small accidental service he had been paid for by the deceased Mr. Tulkinghorn; and it wouldn't do, at any sort of price, to have him playing those games. So having warned him out of London, I made an afternoon of it to warn him to keep out of it now he WAS away, and go farther from it, and maintain a bright look-out that I didn't catch him coming back again."

"Poor creature!" said I.

"Poor enough," assented Mr. Bucket, "and trouble enough, and well enough away from London, or anywhere else. I was regularly turned on my back when I found him taken up by your establishment, I do assure you."

I asked him why. "Why, my dear?" said Mr. Bucket. "Naturally there was no end to his tongue then. He might as well have been born with a yard and a half of it, and a remnant over."

Although I remember this conversation now, my head was in confusion at the time, and my power of attention hardly did more than enable me to understand that he entered into these particulars to divert me. With the same kind intention, manifestly, he often spoke to me of indifferent things, while his face was busy with the one object that we had in view. He still pursued this subject as we turned in at the garden-gate.

"Ah!" said Mr. Bucket. "Here we are, and a nice retired place it is. Puts a man in mind of the country house in the Woodpecker-tapping, that was known by the smoke which so gracefully curled. They're early with the kitchen fire, and that denotes good servants. But what you've always got to be careful of with servants is who comes to see 'em; you never know what they're up to if you don't know that. And another thing, my dear. Whenever you find a young man behind the kitchen-door, you give that young man in charge on suspicion of being secreted in a dwelling-house with an unlawful purpose."

We were now in front of the house; he looked attentively and closely at the gravel for footprints before he raised his eyes to the windows.

"Do you generally put that elderly young gentleman in the same room when he's on a visit here, Miss Summerson?" he inquired, glancing at Mr. Skimpole's usual chamber.

"You know Mr. Skimpole!" said I.

"What do you call him again?" returned Mr. Bucket, bending down his ear. "Skimpole, is it? I've often wondered what his name might be. Skimpole. Not John, I should say, nor yet Jacob?"

"Harold," I told him.

"Harold. Yes. He's a queer bird is Harold," said Mr. Bucket, eyeing me with great expression.

"He is a singular character," said I.

"No idea of money," observed Mr. Bucket. "He takes it, though!"

I involuntarily returned for answer that I perceived Mr. Bucket knew him.

"Why, now I'll tell you, Miss Summerson," he replied. "Your mind will be all the better for not running on one point too continually, and I'll tell you for a change. It was him as pointed out to me where Toughey was. I made up my mind that night to come to the door and ask for Toughey, if that was all; but willing to try a move or so first, if any such was on the board, I just pitched up a morsel of gravel at that window where I saw a shadow. As soon as Harold opens it and I have had a look at him, thinks I, you're the man for me. So I smoothed him down a bit about not wanting to disturb the family after they was gone to bed and about its being a thing to be regretted that charitable young ladies should harbour vagrants; and then, when I pretty well understood his ways, I said I should consider a fypunnote well bestowed if I could relieve the premises of Toughey without causing any noise or trouble. Then says he, lifting up his eyebrows in the gayest way, 'It's no use mentioning a fypunnote to me, my friend, because I'm a mere child in such matters and have no idea of money.' Of course I understood what his taking it so easy meant; and being now quite sure he was the man for me, I wrapped the note round a little stone and threw it up to him. Well! He laughs and beams, and looks as innocent as you like, and says, 'But I don't know the value of these things. What am I to DO with this?' 'Spend it, sir,' says I. 'But I shall be taken in,' he says, 'they won't give me the right change, I shall lose it, it's no use to me.' Lord, you never saw such a face as he carried it with! Of course he told me where to find Toughey, and I found him."

I regarded this as very treacherous on the part of Mr. Skimpole towards my guardian and as passing the usual bounds of his childish innocence.

"Bounds, my dear?" returned Mr. Bucket. "Bounds? Now, Miss Summerson, I'll give you a piece of advice that your husband will find useful when you are happily married and have got a family about you. Whenever a person says to you that they are as innocent as can be in all concerning money, look well after your own money, for they are dead certain to collar it if they can. Whenever a person proclaims to you 'In worldly matters I'm a child,' you consider that that person is only a-crying off from being held accountable and that you have got that person's number, and it's Number One. Now, I am not a poetical man myself, except in a vocal way when it goes round a company, but I'm a practical one, and that's my experience. So's this rule. Fast and loose in one thing, fast and loose in everything. I never knew it fail. No more will you. Nor no one. With which caution to the unwary, my dear, I take the liberty of pulling this here bell, and so go back to our business."

I believe it had not been for a moment out of his mind, any more than it had been out of my mind, or out of his face. The whole household were amazed to see me, without any notice, at that time in the morning, and so accompanied; and their surprise was not diminished by my inquiries. No one, however, had been there. It could not be doubted that this was the truth.

"Then, Miss Summerson," said my companion, "we can't be too soon at the cottage where those brickmakers are to be found. Most inquiries there I leave to you, if you'll be so good as to make 'em. The naturalest way is the best way, and the naturalest way is your own way."

We set off again immediately. On arriving at the cottage, we found it shut up and apparently deserted, but one of the neighbours who knew me and who came out when I was trying to make some one hear informed me that the two women and their husbands now lived together in another house, made of loose rough bricks, which stood on the margin of the piece of ground where the kilns were and where the long rows of bricks were drying. We lost no time in repairing to this place, which was within a few hundred yards; and as the door stood ajar, I pushed it open.

There were only three of them sitting at breakfast, the child lying asleep on a bed in the corner. It was Jenny, the mother of the dead child, who was absent. The other woman rose on seeing me; and the men, though they were, as usual, sulky and silent, each gave me a morose nod of recognition. A look passed between them when Mr. Bucket followed me in, and I was surprised to see that the woman evidently knew him.

I had asked leave to enter of course. Liz (the only name by which I knew her) rose to give me her own chair, but I sat down on a stool near the fire, and Mr. Bucket took a corner of the bedstead. Now that I had to speak and was among people with whom I was not familiar, I became conscious of being hurried and giddy. It was very difficult to begin, and I could not help bursting into tears.

"Liz," said I, "I have come a long way in the night and through the snow to inquire after a lady—"

"Who has been here, you know," Mr. Bucket struck in, addressing the whole group with a composed propitiatory face; "that's the lady the young lady means. The lady that was here last night, you know."

"And who told YOU as there was anybody here?" inquired Jenny's husband, who had made a surly stop in his eating to listen and now measured him with his eye.

"A person of the name of Michael Jackson, with a blue welveteen waistcoat with a double row of mother of pearl buttons," Mr. Bucket immediately answered.

"He had as good mind his own business, whoever he is," growled the man.

"He's out of employment, I believe," said Mr. Bucket apologetically for Michael Jackson, "and so gets talking."

The woman had not resumed her chair, but stood faltering with her hand upon its broken back, looking at me. I thought she would have spoken to me privately if she had dared. She was still in this attitude of uncertainty when her husband, who was eating with a lump of bread and fat in one hand and his clasp-knife in the other, struck the handle of his knife violently on the table and told her with an oath to mind HER own business at any rate and sit down.

"I should like to have seen Jenny very much," said I, "for I am sure she would have told me all she could about this lady, whom I am very anxious indeed—you cannot think how anxious—to overtake. Will Jenny be here soon? Where is she?"

The woman had a great desire to answer, but the man, with another oath, openly kicked at her foot with his heavy boot. He left it to Jenny's husband to say what he chose, and after a dogged silence the latter turned his shaggy head towards me.

"I'm not partial to gentlefolks coming into my place, as you've heerd me say afore now, I think, miss. I let their places be, and it's curious they can't let my place be. There'd be a pretty shine made if I was to go a-wisitin THEM, I think. Howsoever, I don't so much complain of you as of some others, and I'm agreeable to make you a civil answer, though I give notice that I'm not a-going to be drawed like a badger. Will Jenny be here soon? No she won't. Where is she? She's gone up to Lunnun."

"Did she go last night?" I asked.

"Did she go last night? Ah! She went last night," he answered with a sulky jerk of his head.

"But was she here when the lady came? And what did the lady say to her? And where is the lady gone? I beg and pray you to be so kind as to tell me," said I, "for I am in great distress to know."

"If my master would let me speak, and not say a word of harm—" the woman timidly began.

"Your master," said her husband, muttering an imprecation with slow emphasis, "will break your neck if you meddle with wot don't concern you."

After another silence, the husband of the absent woman, turning to me again, answered me with his usual grumbling unwillingness.

"Wos Jenny here when the lady come? Yes, she wos here when the lady come. Wot did the lady say to her? Well, I'll tell you wot the lady said to her. She said, 'You remember me as come one time to talk to you about the young lady as had been a-wisiting of you? You remember me as give you somethink handsome for a handkercher wot she had left?' Ah, she remembered. So we all did. Well, then, wos that young lady up at the house now? No, she warn't up at the house now. Well, then, lookee here. The lady was upon a journey all alone, strange as we might think it, and could she rest herself where you're a setten for a hour or so. Yes she could, and so she did. Then she went—it might be at twenty minutes past eleven, and it might be at twenty minutes past twelve; we ain't got no watches here to know the time by, nor yet clocks. Where did she go? I don't know where she go'd. She went one way, and Jenny went another; one went right to Lunnun, and t'other went right from it. That's all about it. Ask this man. He heerd it all, and see it all. He knows."

The other man repeated, "That's all about it."

"Was the lady crying?" I inquired.

"Devil a bit," returned the first man. "Her shoes was the worse, and her clothes was the worse, but she warn't—not as I see."

The woman sat with her arms crossed and her eyes upon the ground. Her husband had turned his seat a little so as to face her and kept his hammer-like hand upon the table as if it were in readiness to execute his threat if she disobeyed him.

"I hope you will not object to my asking your wife," said I, "how the lady looked."

"Come, then!" he gruffly cried to her. "You hear what she says. Cut it short and tell her."

"Bad," replied the woman. "Pale and exhausted. Very bad."

"Did she speak much?"

"Not much, but her voice was hoarse."

She answered, looking all the while at her husband for leave.

"Was she faint?" said I. "Did she eat or drink here?"

"Go on!" said the husband in answer to her look. "Tell her and cut it short."

"She had a little water, miss, and Jenny fetched her some bread and tea. But she hardly touched it."

"And when she went from here," I was proceeding, when Jenny's husband impatiently took me up.

"When she went from here, she went right away nor'ard by the high road. Ask on the road if you doubt me, and see if it warn't so. Now, there's the end. That's all about it."

I glanced at my companion, and finding that he had already risen and was ready to depart, thanked them for what they had told me, and took my leave. The woman looked full at Mr. Bucket as he went out, and he looked full at her.

"Now, Miss Summerson," he said to me as we walked quickly away. "They've got her ladyship's watch among 'em. That's a positive fact."

"You saw it?" I exclaimed.

"Just as good as saw it," he returned. "Else why should he talk about his 'twenty minutes past' and about his having no watch to tell the time by? Twenty minutes! He don't usually cut his time so fine as that. If he comes to half-hours, it's as much as HE does. Now, you see, either her ladyship gave him that watch or he took it. I think she gave it him. Now, what should she give it him for? What should she give it him for?"

He repeated this question to himself several times as we hurried on, appearing to balance between a variety of answers that arose in his mind.

"If time could be spared," said Mr. Bucket, "which is the only thing that can't be spared in this case, I might get it out of that woman; but it's too doubtful a chance to trust to under present circumstances. They are up to keeping a close eye upon her, and any fool knows that a poor creetur like her, beaten and kicked and scarred and bruised from head to foot, will stand by the husband that ill uses her through thick and thin. There's something kept back. It's a pity but what we had seen the other woman."

I regretted it exceedingly, for she was very grateful, and I felt sure would have resisted no entreaty of mine.

"It's possible, Miss Summerson," said Mr. Bucket, pondering on it, "that her ladyship sent her up to London with some word for you, and it's possible that her husband got the watch to let her go. It don't come out altogether so plain as to please me, but it's on the cards. Now, I don't take kindly to laying out the money of Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, on these roughs, and I don't see my way to the usefulness of it at present. No! So far our road, Miss Summerson, is for'ard—straight ahead—and keeping everything quiet!"

We called at home once more that I might send a hasty note to my guardian, and then we hurried back to where we had left the carriage. The horses were brought out as soon as we were seen coming, and we were on the road again in a few minutes.

It had set in snowing at daybreak, and it now snowed hard. The air was so thick with the darkness of the day and the density of the fall that we could see but a very little way in any direction. Although it was extremely cold, the snow was but partially frozen, and it churned—with a sound as if it were a beach of small shells—under the hoofs of the horses into mire and water. They sometimes slipped and floundered for a mile together, and we were obliged to come to a standstill to rest them. One horse fell three times in this first stage, and trembled so and was so shaken that the driver had to dismount from his saddle and lead him at last.

I could eat nothing and could not sleep, and I grew so nervous under those delays and the slow pace at which we travelled that I had an unreasonable desire upon me to get out and walk. Yielding to my companion's better sense, however, I remained where I was. All this time, kept fresh by a certain enjoyment of the work in which he was engaged, he was up and down at every house we came to, addressing people whom he had never beheld before as old acquaintances, running in to warm himself at every fire he saw, talking and drinking and shaking hands at every bar and tap, friendly with every waggoner, wheelwright, blacksmith, and toll-taker, yet never seeming to lose time, and always mounting to the box again with his watchful, steady face and his business-like "Get on, my lad!"

When we were changing horses the next time, he came from the stable-yard, with the wet snow encrusted upon him and dropping off him—plashing and crashing through it to his wet knees as he had been doing frequently since we left Saint Albans—and spoke to me at the carriage side.

"Keep up your spirits. It's certainly true that she came on here, Miss Summerson. There's not a doubt of the dress by this time, and the dress has been seen here."

"Still on foot?" said I.

"Still on foot. I think the gentleman you mentioned must be the point she's aiming at, and yet I don't like his living down in her own part of the country neither."

"I know so little," said I. "There may be some one else nearer here, of whom I never heard."

"That's true. But whatever you do, don't you fall a-crying, my dear; and don't you worry yourself no more than you can help. Get on, my lad!"

The sleet fell all that day unceasingly, a thick mist came on early, and it never rose or lightened for a moment. Such roads I had never seen. I sometimes feared we had missed the way and got into the ploughed grounds or the marshes. If I ever thought of the time I had been out, it presented itself as an indefinite period of great duration, and I seemed, in a strange way, never to have been free from the anxiety under which I then laboured.

As we advanced, I began to feel misgivings that my companion lost confidence. He was the same as before with all the roadside people, but he looked graver when he sat by himself on the box. I saw his finger uneasily going across and across his mouth during the whole of one long weary stage. I overheard that he began to ask the drivers of coaches and other vehicles coming towards us what passengers they had seen in other coaches and vehicles that were in advance. Their replies did not encourage him. He always gave me a reassuring beck of his finger and lift of his eyelid as he got upon the box again, but he seemed perplexed now when he said, "Get on, my lad!"

At last, when we were changing, he told me that he had lost the track of the dress so long that he began to be surprised. It was nothing, he said, to lose such a track for one while, and to take it up for another while, and so on; but it had disappeared here in an unaccountable manner, and we had not come upon it since. This corroborated the apprehensions I had formed, when he began to look at direction-posts, and to leave the carriage at cross roads for a quarter of an hour at a time while he explored them. But I was not to be down-hearted, he told me, for it was as likely as not that the next stage might set us right again.

The next stage, however, ended as that one ended; we had no new clue. There was a spacious inn here, solitary, but a comfortable substantial building, and as we drove in under a large gateway before I knew it, where a landlady and her pretty daughters came to the carriage-door, entreating me to alight and refresh myself while the horses were making ready, I thought it would be uncharitable to refuse. They took me upstairs to a warm room and left me there.

It was at the corner of the house, I remember, looking two ways. On one side to a stable-yard open to a by-road, where the ostlers were unharnessing the splashed and tired horses from the muddy carriage, and beyond that to the by-road itself, across which the sign was heavily swinging; on the other side to a wood of dark pine-trees. Their branches were encumbered with snow, and it silently dropped off in wet heaps while I stood at the window. Night was setting in, and its bleakness was enhanced by the contrast of the pictured fire glowing and gleaming in the window-pane. As I looked among the stems of the trees and followed the discoloured marks in the snow where the thaw was sinking into it and undermining it, I thought of the motherly face brightly set off by daughters that had just now welcomed me and of MY mother lying down in such a wood to die.

I was frightened when I found them all about me, but I remembered that before I fainted I tried very hard not to do it; and that was some little comfort. They cushioned me up on a large sofa by the fire, and then the comely landlady told me that I must travel no further to-night, but must go to bed. But this put me into such a tremble lest they should detain me there that she soon recalled her words and compromised for a rest of half an hour.

A good endearing creature she was. She and her three fair girls, all so busy about me. I was to take hot soup and broiled fowl, while Mr. Bucket dried himself and dined elsewhere; but I could not do it when a snug round table was presently spread by the fireside, though I was very unwilling to disappoint them. However, I could take some toast and some hot negus, and as I really enjoyed that refreshment, it made some recompense.

Punctual to the time, at the half-hour's end the carriage came rumbling under the gateway, and they took me down, warmed, refreshed, comforted by kindness, and safe (I assured them) not to faint any more. After I had got in and had taken a grateful leave of them all, the youngest daughter—a blooming girl of nineteen, who was to be the first married, they had told me—got upon the carriage step, reached in, and kissed me. I have never seen her, from that hour, but I think of her to this hour as my friend.

The transparent windows with the fire and light, looking so bright and warm from the cold darkness out of doors, were soon gone, and again we were crushing and churning the loose snow. We went on with toil enough, but the dismal roads were not much worse than they had been, and the stage was only nine miles. My companion smoking on the box—I had thought at the last inn of begging him to do so when I saw him standing at a great fire in a comfortable cloud of tobacco—was as vigilant as ever and as quickly down and up again when we came to any human abode or any human creature. He had lighted his little dark lantern, which seemed to be a favourite with him, for we had lamps to the carriage; and every now and then he turned it upon me to see that I was doing well. There was a folding-window to the carriage-head, but I never closed it, for it seemed like shutting out hope.

We came to the end of the stage, and still the lost trace was not recovered. I looked at him anxiously when we stopped to change, but I knew by his yet graver face as he stood watching the ostlers that he had heard nothing. Almost in an instant afterwards, as I leaned back in my seat, he looked in, with his lighted lantern in his hand, an excited and quite different man.

"What is it?" said I, starting. "Is she here?"

"No, no. Don't deceive yourself, my dear. Nobody's here. But I've got it!"

The crystallized snow was in his eyelashes, in his hair, lying in ridges on his dress. He had to shake it from his face and get his breath before he spoke to me.

"Now, Miss Summerson," said he, beating his finger on the apron, "don't you be disappointed at what I'm a-going to do. You know me. I'm Inspector Bucket, and you can trust me. We've come a long way; never mind. Four horses out there for the next stage up! Quick!"

There was a commotion in the yard, and a man came running out of the stables to know if he meant up or down.

"Up, I tell you! Up! Ain't it English? Up!"

"Up?" said I, astonished. "To London! Are we going back?"

"Miss Summerson," he answered, "back. Straight back as a die. You know me. Don't be afraid. I'll follow the other, by G—"

"The other?" I repeated. "Who?"

"You called her Jenny, didn't you? I'll follow her. Bring those two pair out here for a crown a man. Wake up, some of you!"

"You will not desert this lady we are in search of; you will not abandon her on such a night and in such a state of mind as I know her to be in!" said I, in an agony, and grasping his hand.

"You are right, my dear, I won't. But I'll follow the other. Look alive here with them horses. Send a man for'ard in the saddle to the next stage, and let him send another for'ard again, and order four on, up, right through. My darling, don't you be afraid!"

These orders and the way in which he ran about the yard urging them caused a general excitement that was scarcely less bewildering to me than the sudden change. But in the height of the confusion, a mounted man galloped away to order the relays, and our horses were put to with great speed.

"My dear," said Mr. Bucket, jumping to his seat and looking in again, "—you'll excuse me if I'm too familiar—don't you fret and worry yourself no more than you can help. I say nothing else at present; but you know me, my dear; now, don't you?"

I endeavoured to say that I knew he was far more capable than I of deciding what we ought to do, but was he sure that this was right? Could I not go forward by myself in search of—I grasped his hand again in my distress and whispered it to him—of my own mother.

"My dear," he answered, "I know, I know, and would I put you wrong, do you think? Inspector Bucket. Now you know me, don't you?"

What could I say but yes!

"Then you keep up as good a heart as you can, and you rely upon me for standing by you, no less than by Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet. Now, are you right there?"

"All right, sir!"

"Off she goes, then. And get on, my lads!"

We were again upon the melancholy road by which we had come, tearing up the miry sleet and thawing snow as if they were torn up by a waterwheel.

CHAPTER LVIII. A Wintry Day and Night

Still impassive, as behoves its breeding, the Dedlock town house carries itself as usual towards the street of dismal grandeur. There are powdered heads from time to time in the little windows of the hall, looking out at the untaxed powder falling all day from the sky; and in the same conservatory there is peach blossom turning itself exotically to the great hall fire from the nipping weather out of doors. It is given out that my Lady has gone down into Lincolnshire, but is expected to return presently.

Rumour, busy overmuch, however, will not go down into Lincolnshire. It persists in flitting and chattering about town. It knows that that poor unfortunate man, Sir Leicester, has been sadly used. It hears, my dear child, all sorts of shocking things. It makes the world of five miles round quite merry. Not to know that there is something wrong at the Dedlocks' is to augur yourself unknown. One of the peachy-cheeked charmers with the skeleton throats is already apprised of all the principal circumstances that will come out before the Lords on Sir Leicester's application for a bill of divorce.

At Blaze and Sparkle's the jewellers and at Sheen and Gloss's the mercers, it is and will be for several hours the topic of the age, the feature of the century. The patronesses of those establishments, albeit so loftily inscrutable, being as nicely weighed and measured there as any other article of the stock-in-trade, are perfectly understood in this new fashion by the rawest hand behind the counter. "Our people, Mr. Jones," said Blaze and Sparkle to the hand in question on engaging him, "our people, sir, are sheep—mere sheep. Where two or three marked ones go, all the rest follow. Keep those two or three in your eye, Mr. Jones, and you have the flock." So, likewise, Sheen and Gloss to THEIR Jones, in reference to knowing where to have the fashionable people and how to bring what they (Sheen and Gloss) choose into fashion. On similar unerring principles, Mr. Sladdery the librarian, and indeed the great farmer of gorgeous sheep, admits this very day, "Why yes, sir, there certainly ARE reports concerning Lady Dedlock, very current indeed among my high connexion, sir. You see, my high connexion must talk about something, sir; and it's only to get a subject into vogue with one or two ladies I could name to make it go down with the whole. Just what I should have done with those ladies, sir, in the case of any novelty you had left to me to bring in, they have done of themselves in this case through knowing Lady Dedlock and being perhaps a little innocently jealous of her too, sir. You'll find, sir, that this topic will be very popular among my high connexion. If it had been a speculation, sir, it would have brought money. And when I say so, you may trust to my being right, sir, for I have made it my business to study my high connexion and to be able to wind it up like a clock, sir."

Thus rumour thrives in the capital, and will not go down into Lincolnshire. By half-past five, post meridian, Horse Guards' time, it has even elicited a new remark from the Honourable Mr. Stables, which bids fair to outshine the old one, on which he has so long rested his colloquial reputation. This sparkling sally is to the effect that although he always knew she was the best-groomed woman in the stud, he had no idea she was a bolter. It is immensely received in turf-circles.

At feasts and festivals also, in firmaments she has often graced, and among constellations she outshone but yesterday, she is still the prevalent subject. What is it? Who is it? When was it? Where was it? How was it? She is discussed by her dear friends with all the genteelest slang in vogue, with the last new word, the last new manner, the last new drawl, and the perfection of polite indifference. A remarkable feature of the theme is that it is found to be so inspiring that several people come out upon it who never came out before—positively say things! William Buffy carries one of these smartnesses from the place where he dines down to the House, where the

Whip for his party hands it about with his snuff-box to keep men together who want to be off, with such effect that the Speaker (who has had it privately insinuated into his own ear under the corner of his wig) cries, "Order at the bar!" three times without making an impression.

And not the least amazing circumstance connected with her being vaguely the town talk is that people hovering on the confines of Mr. Sladdery's high connexion, people who know nothing and ever did know nothing about her, think it essential to their reputation to pretend that she is their topic too, and to retail her at second-hand with the last new word and the last new manner, and the last new drawl, and the last new polite indifference, and all the rest of it, all at second-hand but considered equal to new in inferior systems and to fainter stars. If there be any man of letters, art, or science among these little dealers, how noble in him to support the feeble sisters on such majestic crutches!

So goes the wintry day outside the Dedlock mansion. How within it?

Sir Leicester, lying in his bed, can speak a little, though with difficulty and indistinctness. He is enjoined to silence and to rest, and they have given him some opiate to lull his pain, for his old enemy is very hard with him. He is never asleep, though sometimes he seems to fall into a dull waking doze. He caused his bedstead to be moved out nearer to the window when he heard it was such inclement weather, and his head to be so adjusted that he could see the driving snow and sleet. He watches it as it falls, throughout the whole wintry day.

Upon the least noise in the house, which is kept hushed, his hand is at the pencil. The old housekeeper, sitting by him, knows what he would write and whispers, "No, he has not come back yet, Sir Leicester. It was late last night when he went. He has been but a little time gone yet."

He withdraws his hand and falls to looking at the sleet and snow again until they seem, by being long looked at, to fall so thick and fast that he is obliged to close his eyes for a minute on the giddy whirl of white flakes and icy blots.

He began to look at them as soon as it was light. The day is not yet far spent when he conceives it to be necessary that her rooms should be prepared for her. It is very cold and wet. Let there be good fires. Let them know that she is expected. Please see to it yourself. He writes to this purpose on his slate, and Mrs. Rouncewell with a heavy heart obeys.

"For I dread, George," the old lady says to her son, who waits below to keep her company when she has a little leisure, "I dread, my dear, that my Lady will never more set foot within these walls."

"That's a bad presentiment, mother."

"Nor yet within the walls of Chesney Wold, my dear."

"That's worse. But why, mother?"

"When I saw my Lady yesterday, George, she looked to me—and I may say at me too—as if the step on the Ghost's Walk had almost walked her down."

"Come, come! You alarm yourself with old-story fears, mother."

"No I don't, my dear. No I don't. It's going on for sixty year that I have been in this family, and I never had any fears for it before. But it's breaking up, my dear; the great old Dedlock family is breaking up."

"I hope not, mother."

"I am thankful I have lived long enough to be with Sir Leicester in this illness and trouble, for I know I am not too old nor too useless to be a welcomer sight to him than anybody else in my place would be. But the step on the Ghost's Walk will walk my Lady down, George; it has been many a day behind her, and now it will pass her and go on."

"Well, mother dear, I say again, I hope not."

"Ah, so do I, George," the old lady returns, shaking her head and parting her folded hands. "But if my fears come true, and he has to know it, who will tell him!"

"Are these her rooms?"

"These are my Lady's rooms, just as she left them."

"Why, now," says the trooper, glancing round him and speaking in a lower voice, "I begin to understand how you come to think as you do think, mother. Rooms get an awful look about them when they are fitted up, like these, for one person you are used to see in them, and that person is away under any shadow, let alone being God knows where."

He is not far out. As all partings foreshadow the great final one, so, empty rooms, bereft of a familiar presence, mournfully whisper what your room and what mine must one day be. My Lady's state has a hollow look, thus gloomy and abandoned; and in the inner apartment, where Mr. Bucket last night made his secret perquisition, the traces of her dresses and her ornaments, even the mirrors accustomed to reflect them when they were a portion of herself, have a desolate and vacant air. Dark and cold as the wintry day is, it is darker and colder in these deserted chambers than in many a hut that will barely exclude the weather; and though the servants heap fires in the grates and set the couches and the chairs within the warm glass screens that let their ruddy light shoot through to the furthest corners, there is a heavy cloud upon the rooms which no light will dispel.

The old housekeeper and her son remain until the preparations are complete, and then she returns upstairs. Volumnia has taken Mrs. Rouncewell's place in the meantime, though pearl necklaces and rouge pots, however calculated to embellish Bath, are but indifferent comforts to the invalid under present circumstances. Volumnia, not being supposed to know (and indeed not knowing) what is the matter, has found it a ticklish task to offer appropriate observations and consequently has supplied their place with distracting smoothings of the bed-linen, elaborate locomotion on tiptoe, vigilant peeping at her kinsman's eyes, and one exasperating whisper to herself of, "He is asleep." In disproof of which superfluous remark Sir Leicester has indignantly written on the slate, "I am not."

Yielding, therefore, the chair at the bedside to the quaint old housekeeper, Volumnia sits at a table a little removed, sympathetically sighing. Sir Leicester watches the sleet and snow and listens for the returning steps that he expects. In the ears of his old servant, looking as if she had stepped out of an old picture-frame to attend a summoned Dedlock to another world, the silence is fraught with echoes of her own words, "Who will tell him!"

He has been under his valet's hands this morning to be made presentable and is as well got up as the circumstances will allow. He is propped with pillows, his grey hair is brushed in its usual manner, his linen is arranged to a nicety, and he is wrapped in a responsible dressing-gown. His eye-glass and his watch are ready to his hand. It is necessary—less to his own dignity now perhaps than for her sake—that he should be seen as little disturbed and as much himself as may be. Women will talk, and Volumnia, though a Dedlock, is no exceptional case. He keeps her here, there is little doubt, to prevent her talking somewhere else. He is very ill, but he makes his present stand against distress of mind and body most courageously.

The fair Volumnia, being one of those sprightly girls who cannot long continue silent without imminent peril of seizure by the dragon Boredom, soon indicates the approach of that monster with a series of undisguisable yawns. Finding it impossible to suppress those yawns by any other process than conversation, she compliments Mrs. Rouncewell on her son, declaring that he positively is one of the finest figures she ever saw and as soldierly a looking person, she should think, as what's his name, her favourite Life Guardsman—the man she dotes on, the dearest of creatures—who was killed at Waterloo.

Sir Leicester hears this tribute with so much surprise and stares about him in such a confused way that Mrs. Rouncewell feels it necessary to explain.

"Miss Dedlock don't speak of my eldest son, Sir Leicester, but my youngest. I have found him. He has come home."

Sir Leicester breaks silence with a harsh cry. "George? Your son George come home, Mrs. Rouncewell?"

The old housekeeper wipes her eyes. "Thank God. Yes, Sir Leicester."

Does this discovery of some one lost, this return of some one so long gone, come upon him as a strong confirmation of his hopes? Does he think, "Shall I not, with the aid I have, recall her safely after this, there being fewer hours in her case than there are years in his?"

It is of no use entreating him; he is determined to speak now, and he does. In a thick crowd of sounds, but still intelligibly enough to be understood.

"Why did you not tell me, Mrs. Rouncewell?"

"It happened only yesterday, Sir Leicester, and I doubted your being well enough to be talked to of such things."

Besides, the giddy Volumnia now remembers with her little scream that nobody was to have known of his being Mrs. Rouncewell's son and that she was not to have told. But Mrs. Rouncewell protests, with warmth enough to swell the stomacher, that of course she would have told Sir Leicester as soon as he got better.

"Where is your son George, Mrs. Rouncewell?" asks Sir Leicester,

Mrs. Rouncewell, not a little alarmed by his disregard of the doctor's injunctions, replies, in London.

"Where in London?"

Mrs. Rouncewell is constrained to admit that he is in the house.

"Bring him here to my room. Bring him directly."

The old lady can do nothing but go in search of him. Sir Leicester, with such power of movement as he has, arranges himself a little to receive him. When he has done so, he looks out again at the falling sleet and snow and listens again for the returning steps. A quantity of straw has been tumbled down in the street to deaden the noises there, and she might be driven to the door perhaps without his hearing wheels.

He is lying thus, apparently forgetful of his newer and minor surprise, when the housekeeper returns, accompanied by her trooper son. Mr. George approaches softly to the bedside, makes his bow, squares his chest, and stands, with his face flushed, very heartily ashamed of himself.

"Good heaven, and it is really George Rouncewell!" exclaims Sir Leicester. "Do you remember me, George?"

The trooper needs to look at him and to separate this sound from that sound before he knows what he has said, but doing this and being a little helped by his mother, he replies, "I must have a very bad memory, indeed, Sir Leicester, if I failed to remember you."

"When I look at you, George Rouncewell," Sir Leicester observes with difficulty, "I see something of a boy at Chesney Wold—I remember well—very well."

He looks at the trooper until tears come into his eyes, and then he looks at the sleet and snow again.

"I ask your pardon, Sir Leicester," says the trooper, "but would you accept of my arms to raise you up? You would lie easier, Sir Leicester, if you would allow me to move you."

"If you please, George Rouncewell; if you will be so good."

The trooper takes him in his arms like a child, lightly raises him, and turns him with his face more towards the window. "Thank you. You have your mother's gentleness," returns Sir Leicester, "and your own strength. Thank you."

He signs to him with his hand not to go away. George quietly remains at the bedside, waiting to be spoken to.

"Why did you wish for secrecy?" It takes Sir Leicester some time to ask this.

"Truly I am not much to boast of, Sir Leicester, and I—I should still, Sir Leicester, if you was not so indisposed—which I hope you will not be long—I should still hope for the favour of being allowed to remain unknown in general. That involves explanations not very hard to be guessed at, not very well timed here, and not very creditable to myself. However opinions may differ on a variety of subjects, I should think it would be universally agreed, Sir Leicester, that I am not much to boast of."

"You have been a soldier," observes Sir Leicester, "and a faithful one."

George makes his military bow. "As far as that goes, Sir Leicester, I have done my duty under discipline, and it was the least I could do."

"You find me," says Sir Leicester, whose eyes are much attracted towards him, "far from well, George Rouncewell."

"I am very sorry both to hear it and to see it, Sir Leicester."

"I am sure you are. No. In addition to my older malady, I have had a sudden and bad attack. Something that deadens," making an endeavour to pass one hand down one side, "and confuses," touching his lips.

George, with a look of assent and sympathy, makes another bow. The different times when they were both young men (the trooper much the younger of the two) and looked at one another down at Chesney Wold arise before them both and soften both.

Sir Leicester, evidently with a great determination to say, in his own manner, something that is on his mind before relapsing into silence, tries to raise himself among his pillows a little more. George, observant of the action, takes him in his arms again and places him as he desires to be. "Thank you, George. You are another self to me. You have often carried my spare gun at Chesney Wold, George. You are familiar to me in these strange circumstances, very familiar." He has put Sir Leicester's sounder arm over his shoulder in lifting him up, and Sir Leicester is slow in drawing it away again as he says these words.

"I was about to add," he presently goes on, "I was about to add, respecting this attack, that it was unfortunately simultaneous with a slight misunderstanding between my Lady and myself. I do not mean that there was any difference between us (for there has been none), but that there was a misunderstanding of certain circumstances important only to ourselves, which deprives me, for a little while, of my Lady's society. She has found it necessary to make a journey—I trust will shortly return. Volumnia, do I make myself intelligible? The words are not quite under my command in the manner of pronouncing them."

Volumnia understands him perfectly, and in truth he delivers himself with far greater plainness than could have been supposed possible a minute ago. The effort by which he does so is written in the anxious and labouring expression of his face. Nothing but the strength of his purpose enables him to make it.

"Therefore, Volumnia, I desire to say in your presence—and in the presence of my old retainer and friend, Mrs. Rouncewell, whose truth and fidelity no one can question, and in the presence of her son George, who comes back like a familiar recollection of my youth in the home of my ancestors at Chesney Wold—in case I should relapse, in case I should not recover, in case I should lose both my speech and the power of writing, though I hope for better things—"

The old housekeeper weeping silently; Volumnia in the greatest agitation, with the freshest bloom on her cheeks; the trooper with his arms folded and his head a little bent, respectfully attentive.

"Therefore I desire to say, and to call you all to witness—beginning, Volumnia, with yourself, most solemnly—that I am on unaltered terms with Lady Dedlock. That I assert no cause whatever of complaint against her. That I have ever had the strongest affection for her, and that I retain it undiminished. Say this to herself, and to every one. If you ever say less than this, you will be guilty of deliberate falsehood to me."

Volumnia tremblingly protests that she will observe his injunctions to the letter.

"My Lady is too high in position, too handsome, too accomplished, too superior in most respects to the best of those by whom she is surrounded, not to have her enemies and traducers, I dare say. Let it be known to them, as I make it known to you, that being of sound mind, memory, and understanding, I revoke no disposition I have made in her favour. I abridge nothing I have ever bestowed upon her. I am on unaltered terms with her, and I recall—having the full power to do it if I were so disposed, as you see—no act I have done for her advantage and happiness."

His formal array of words might have at any other time, as it has often had, something ludicrous in it, but at this time it is serious and affecting. His noble earnestness, his fidelity, his gallant shielding of her, his generous conquest of his own wrong and his own pride for her sake, are simply honourable, manly, and true. Nothing less worthy can be seen through the lustre of such qualities in the commonest mechanic, nothing less worthy can be seen in the best-born gentleman. In such a light both aspire alike, both rise alike, both children of the dust shine equally.

Overpowered by his exertions, he lays his head back on his pillows and closes his eyes for not more than a minute, when he again resumes his watching of the weather and his attention to the muffled sounds. In the rendering of those little services, and in the manner of their acceptance, the trooper has become installed as necessary to him. Nothing has been said, but it is quite understood. He falls a step or two backward to be out of sight and mounts guard a little behind his mother's chair.

The day is now beginning to decline. The mist and the sleet into which the snow has all resolved itself are darker, and the blaze begins to tell more vividly upon the room walls and furniture. The gloom augments; the bright gas springs up in the streets; and the pertinacious oil lamps which yet hold their ground there, with their source of life half frozen and half thawed, twinkle gaspingly like fiery fish out of water—as they are. The world, which has been rumbling over the straw and pulling at the bell, "to inquire," begins to go home, begins to dress, to dine, to discuss its dear friend with all the last new modes, as already mentioned.

Now does Sir Leicester become worse, restless, uneasy, and in great pain. Volumnia, lighting a candle (with a predestined aptitude for doing something objectionable), is bidden to put it out again, for it is not yet dark enough. Yet it is very dark too, as dark as it will be all night. By and by she tries again. No! Put it out. It is not dark enough yet.

His old housekeeper is the first to understand that he is striving to uphold the fiction with himself that it is not growing late.

"Dear Sir Leicester, my honoured master," she softly whispers, "I must, for your own good, and my duty, take the freedom of begging and praying that you will not lie here in the lone darkness watching and waiting and dragging through the time. Let me draw the curtains, and light the candles, and make things more comfortable about you. The church-clocks will strike the hours just the same, Sir Leicester, and the night will pass away just the same. My Lady will come back, just the same."

"I know it, Mrs. Rouncewell, but I am weak—and he has been so long gone."

"Not so very long, Sir Leicester. Not twenty-four hours yet."

"But that is a long time. Oh, it is a long time!"

He says it with a groan that wrings her heart.

She knows that this is not a period for bringing the rough light upon him; she thinks his tears too sacred to be seen, even by her. Therefore she sits in the darkness for a while without a word, then gently begins to move about, now stirring the fire, now standing at the dark window looking out. Finally he tells her, with recovered self-command, "As you say, Mrs.

Rouncewell, it is no worse for being confessed. It is getting late, and they are not come. Light the room!" When it is lighted and the weather shut out, it is only left to him to listen.

But they find that however dejected and ill he is, he brightens when a quiet pretence is made of looking at the fires in her rooms and being sure that everything is ready to receive her. Poor pretence as it is, these allusions to her being expected keep up hope within him.

Midnight comes, and with it the same blank. The carriages in the streets are few, and other late sounds in that neighbourhood there are none, unless a man so very nomadically drunk as to stray into the frigid zone goes brawling and bellowing along the pavement. Upon this wintry night it is so still that listening to the intense silence is like looking at intense darkness. If any distant sound be audible in this case, it departs through the gloom like a feeble light in that, and all is heavier than before.

The corporation of servants are dismissed to bed (not unwilling to go, for they were up all last night), and only Mrs. Rouncewell and George keep watch in Sir Leicester's room. As the night lags tardily on—or rather when it seems to stop altogether, at between two and three o'clock—they find a restless craving on him to know more about the weather, now he cannot see it. Hence George, patrolling regularly every half-hour to the rooms so carefully looked after, extends his march to the hall-door, looks about him, and brings back the best report he can make of the worst of nights, the sleet still falling and even the stone footways lying ankle-deep in icy sludge.

Volumnia, in her room up a retired landing on the staircase—the second turning past the end of the carving and gilding, a cousinly room containing a fearful abortion of a portrait of Sir Leicester banished for its crimes, and commanding in the day a solemn yard planted with dried-up shrubs like antediluvian specimens of black tea—is a prey to horrors of many kinds. Not last nor least among them, possibly, is a horror of what may befall her little income in the event, as she expresses it, "of anything happening" to Sir Leicester. Anything, in this sense, meaning one thing only; and that the last thing that can happen to the consciousness of any baronet in the known world.

An effect of these horrors is that Volumnia finds she cannot go to bed in her own room or sit by the fire in her own room, but must come forth with her fair head tied up in a profusion of shawl, and her fair form enrobed in drapery, and parade the mansion like a ghost, particularly haunting the rooms, warm and luxurious, prepared for one who still does not return. Solitude under such circumstances being not to be thought of, Volumnia is attended by her maid, who, impressed from her own bed for that purpose, extremely cold, very sleepy, and generally an injured maid as condemned by circumstances to take office with a cousin, when she had resolved to be maid to nothing less than ten thousand a year, has not a sweet expression of countenance.

The periodical visits of the trooper to these rooms, however, in the course of his patrolling is an assurance of protection and company both to mistress and maid, which renders them very acceptable in the small hours of the night. Whenever he is heard advancing, they both make some little decorative preparation to receive him; at other times they divide their watches into short scraps of oblivion and dialogues not wholly free from acerbity, as to whether Miss Dedlock, sitting with her feet upon the fender, was or was not falling into the fire when rescued (to her great displeasure) by her guardian genius the maid.

"How is Sir Leicester now, Mr. George?" inquires Volumnia, adjusting her cowl over her head.

"Why, Sir Leicester is much the same, miss. He is very low and ill, and he even wanders a little sometimes."

"Has he asked for me?" inquires Volumnia tenderly.

"Why, no, I can't say he has, miss. Not within my hearing, that is to say."

"This is a truly sad time, Mr. George."

"It is indeed, miss. Hadn't you better go to bed?"

"You had a deal better go to bed, Miss Dedlock," quoth the maid sharply.

But Volumnia answers No! No! She may be asked for, she may be wanted at a moment's notice. She never should forgive herself "if anything was to happen" and she was not on the spot. She declines to enter on the question, mooted by the maid, how the spot comes to be there, and not in her room (which is nearer to Sir Leicester's), but staunchly declares that on the spot she will remain. Volumnia further makes a merit of not having "closed an eye"—as if she had twenty or thirty—though it is hard to reconcile this statement with her having most indisputably opened two within five minutes.

But when it comes to four o'clock, and still the same blank, Volumnia's constancy begins to fail her, or rather it begins to strengthen, for she now considers that it is her duty to be ready for the morrow, when much may be expected of her, that, in fact, howsoever anxious to remain upon the spot, it may be required of her, as an act of self-devotion, to desert the spot. So when the trooper reappears with his, "Hadn't you better go to bed, miss?" and when the maid protests, more sharply than before, "You had a deal better go to bed, Miss Dedlock!" she meekly rises and says, "Do with me what you think best!"

Mr. George undoubtedly thinks it best to escort her on his arm to the door of her cousinly chamber, and the maid as undoubtedly thinks it best to hustle her into bed with mighty little ceremony. Accordingly, these steps are taken; and now the trooper, in his rounds, has the house to himself.

There is no improvement in the weather. From the portico, from the eaves, from the parapet, from every ledge and post and pillar, drips the thawed snow. It has crept, as if for shelter, into the lintels of the great door—under it, into the corners of the windows, into every chink and crevice of retreat, and there wastes and dies. It is falling still; upon the roof, upon the skylight, even through the skylight, and drip, drip, drip, with the regularity of the Ghost's Walk, on the stone floor below.

The trooper, his old recollections awakened by the solitary grandeur of a great house—no novelty to him once at Chesney Wold—goes up the stairs and through the chief rooms, holding up his light at arm's length. Thinking of his varied fortunes within the last few weeks, and of his rustic boyhood, and of the two periods of his life so strangely brought together across the wide intermediate space; thinking of the murdered man whose image is fresh in his mind; thinking of the lady who has disappeared from these very rooms and the tokens of whose recent presence are all here; thinking of the master of the house upstairs and of the foreboding, "Who will tell him!" he looks here and looks there, and reflects how he MIGHT see something now, which it would tax his boldness to walk up to, lay his hand upon, and prove to be a fancy. But it is all blank, blank as the darkness above and below, while he goes up the great staircase again, blank as the oppressive silence.

"All is still in readiness, George Rouncewell?"

"Quite orderly and right, Sir Leicester."

"No word of any kind?"

The trooper shakes his head.

"No letter that can possibly have been overlooked?"

But he knows there is no such hope as that and lays his head down without looking for an answer.

Very familiar to him, as he said himself some hours ago, George Rouncewell lifts him into easier positions through the long remainder of the blank wintry night, and equally familiar with his unexpressed wish, extinguishes the light and undraws the curtains at the first late break of day. The day comes like a phantom. Cold, colourless, and vague, it sends a warning streak before it of a deathlike hue, as if it cried out, "Look what I am bringing you who watch there! Who will tell him!"

CHAPTER LIX. Esther's Narrative

It was three o'clock in the morning when the houses outside London did at last begin to exclude the country and to close us in with streets. We had made our way along roads in a far worse condition than when we had traversed them by daylight, both the fall and the thaw having lasted ever since; but the energy of my companion never slackened. It had only been, as I thought, of less assistance than the horses in getting us on, and it had often aided them. They had stopped exhausted half-way up hills, they had been driven through streams of turbulent water, they had slipped down and become entangled with the harness; but he and his little lantern had been always ready, and when the mishap was set right, I had never heard any variation in his cool, "Get on, my lads!"

The steadiness and confidence with which he had directed our journey back I could not account for. Never wavering, he never even stopped to make an inquiry until we were within a few miles of London. A very few words, here and there, were then enough for him; and thus we came, at between three and four o'clock in the morning, into Islington.

I will not dwell on the suspense and anxiety with which I reflected all this time that we were leaving my mother farther and farther behind every minute. I think I had some strong hope that he must be right and could not fail to have a satisfactory object in following this woman, but I tormented myself with questioning it and discussing it during the whole journey. What was to ensue when we found her and what could compensate us for this loss of time were questions also that I could not possibly dismiss; my mind was quite tortured by long dwelling on such reflections when we stopped.

We stopped in a high-street where there was a coach-stand. My companion paid our two drivers, who were as completely covered with splashes as if they had been dragged along the roads like the carriage itself, and giving them some brief direction where to take it, lifted me out of it and into a hackney-coach he had chosen from the rest.

"Why, my dear!" he said as he did this. "How wet you are!"

I had not been conscious of it. But the melted snow had found its way into the carriage, and I had got out two or three times when a fallen horse was plunging and had to be got up, and the wet had penetrated my dress. I assured him it was no matter, but the driver, who knew him, would not be dissuaded by me from running down the street to his stable, whence he brought an armful of clean dry straw. They shook it out and strewed it well about me, and I found it warm and comfortable.

"Now, my dear," said Mr. Bucket, with his head in at the window after I was shut up. "We're a-going to mark this person down. It may take a little time, but you don't mind that. You're pretty sure that I've got a motive. Ain't you?"

I little thought what it was, little thought in how short a time I should understand it better, but I assured him that I had confidence in him.

"So you may have, my dear," he returned. "And I tell you what! If you only repose half as much confidence in me as I repose in you after what I've experienced of you, that'll do. Lord! You're no trouble at all. I never see a young woman in any station of society—and I've seen many elevated ones too—conduct herself like you have conducted yourself since you was called out of your bed. You're a pattern, you know, that's what you are," said Mr. Bucket warmly; "you're a pattern."

I told him I was very glad, as indeed I was, to have been no hindrance to him, and that I hoped I should be none now.

"My dear," he returned, "when a young lady is as mild as she's game, and as game as she's mild, that's all I ask, and more than I expect. She then becomes a queen, and that's about what you are yourself."

With these encouraging words—they really were encouraging to me under those lonely and anxious circumstances—he got upon the box, and we once more drove away. Where we drove I neither knew then nor have ever known since, but we appeared to seek out the narrowest and worst streets in London. Whenever I saw him directing the driver, I was prepared for our descending into a deeper complication of such streets, and we never failed to do so.

Sometimes we emerged upon a wider thoroughfare or came to a larger building than the generality, well lighted. Then we stopped at offices like those we had visited when we began our journey, and I saw him in consultation with others. Sometimes he would get down by an archway or at a street corner and mysteriously show the light of his little lantern. This would attract similar lights from various dark quarters, like so many insects, and a fresh consultation would be held. By degrees we appeared to contract our search within narrower and easier limits. Single police-officers on duty could now tell Mr. Bucket what he wanted to know and point to him where to go. At last we stopped for a rather long conversation between him and one of these men, which I supposed to be satisfactory from his manner of nodding from time to time. When it was finished he came to me looking very busy and very attentive.

"Now, Miss Summerson," he said to me, "you won't be alarmed whatever comes off, I know. It's not necessary for me to give you any further caution than to tell you that we have marked this person down and that you may be of use to me before I know it myself. I don't like to ask such a thing, my dear, but would you walk a little way?"

Of course I got out directly and took his arm.

"It ain't so easy to keep your feet," said Mr. Bucket, "but take time."

Although I looked about me confusedly and hurriedly as we crossed the street, I thought I knew the place. "Are we in Holborn?" I asked him.

"Yes," said Mr. Bucket. "Do you know this turning?"

"It looks like Chancery Lane."

"And was christened so, my dear," said Mr. Bucket.

We turned down it, and as we went shuffling through the sleet, I heard the clocks strike half-past five. We passed on in silence and as quickly as we could with such a foot-hold, when some one coming towards us on the narrow pavement, wrapped in a cloak, stopped and stood aside to give me room. In the same moment I heard an exclamation of wonder and my own name from Mr. Woodcourt. I knew his voice very well.

It was so unexpected and so—I don't know what to call it, whether pleasant or painful—to come upon it after my feverish wandering journey, and in the midst of the night, that I could not keep back the tears from my eyes. It was like hearing his voice in a strange country.

"My dear Miss Summerson, that you should be out at this hour, and in such weather!"

He had heard from my guardian of my having been called away on some uncommon business and said so to dispense with any explanation. I told him that we had but just left a coach and were going—but then I was obliged to look at my companion.

"Why, you see, Mr. Woodcourt"—he had caught the name from me—"we are a-going at present into the next street. Inspector Bucket."

Mr. Woodcourt, disregarding my remonstrances, had hurriedly taken off his cloak and was putting it about me. "That's a good move, too," said Mr. Bucket, assisting, "a very good move."

"May I go with you?" said Mr. Woodcourt. I don't know whether to me or to my companion.

"Why, Lord!" exclaimed Mr. Bucket, taking the answer on himself. "Of course you may."

It was all said in a moment, and they took me between them, wrapped in the cloak.

"I have just left Richard," said Mr. Woodcourt. "I have been sitting with him since ten o'clock last night."

"Oh, dear me, he is ill!"

"No, no, believe me; not ill, but not quite well. He was depressed and faint—you know he gets so worried and so worn sometimes—and Ada sent to me of course; and when I came home I found her note and came straight here. Well! Richard revived so much after a little while, and Ada was so happy and so convinced of its being my doing, though God knows I had little enough to do with it, that I remained with him until he had been fast asleep some hours. As fast asleep as she is now, I hope!"

His friendly and familiar way of speaking of them, his unaffected devotion to them, the grateful confidence with which I knew he had inspired my darling, and the comfort he was to her; could I separate all this from his promise to me? How thankless I must have been if it had not recalled the words he said to me when he was so moved by the change in my appearance: "I will accept him as a trust, and it shall be a sacred one!"

We now turned into another narrow street. "Mr. Woodcourt," said Mr. Bucket, who had eyed him closely as we came along, "our business takes us to a law-stationer's here, a certain Mr. Snagsby's. What, you know him, do you?" He was so quick that he saw it in an instant.

"Yes, I know a little of him and have called upon him at this place."

"Indeed, sir?" said Mr. Bucket. "Then you will be so good as to let me leave Miss Summerson with you for a moment while I go and have half a word with him?"

The last police-officer with whom he had conferred was standing silently behind us. I was not aware of it until he struck in on my saying I heard some one crying.

"Don't be alarmed, miss," he returned. "It's Snagsby's servant."

"Why, you see," said Mr. Bucket, "the girl's subject to fits, and has 'em bad upon her to-night. A most contrary circumstance it is, for I want certain information out of that girl, and she must be brought to reason somehow."

"At all events, they wouldn't be up yet if it wasn't for her, Mr. Bucket," said the other man. "She's been at it pretty well all night, sir."

"Well, that's true," he returned. "My light's burnt out. Show yours a moment."

All this passed in a whisper a door or two from the house in which I could faintly hear crying and moaning. In the little round of light produced for the purpose, Mr. Bucket went up to the door and knocked. The door was opened after he had knocked twice, and he went in, leaving us standing in the street.

"Miss Summerson," said Mr. Woodcourt, "if without obtruding myself on your confidence I may remain near you, pray let me do so."

"You are truly kind," I answered. "I need wish to keep no secret of my own from you; if I keep any, it is another's."

"I quite understand. Trust me, I will remain near you only so long as I can fully respect it."

"I trust implicitly to you," I said. "I know and deeply feel how sacredly you keep your promise."

After a short time the little round of light shone out again, and Mr. Bucket advanced towards us in it with his earnest face. "Please to come in, Miss Summerson," he said, "and sit down by the fire. Mr. Woodcourt, from information I have received I understand you are a medical man. Would you look to this girl and see if anything can be done to bring her round. She has a letter somewhere that I particularly want. It's not in her box, and I think it must be about her; but she is so twisted and clenched up that she is difficult to handle without hurting."

We all three went into the house together; although it was cold and raw, it smelt close too from being up all night. In the passage behind the door stood a scared, sorrowful-looking little man in a grey coat who seemed to have a naturally polite manner and spoke meekly.

"Downstairs, if you please, Mr. Bucket," said he. "The lady will excuse the front kitchen; we use it as our workaday sitting-room. The back is Guster's bedroom, and in it she's a-carrying on, poor thing, to a frightful extent!"

We went downstairs, followed by Mr. Snagsby, as I soon found the little man to be. In the front kitchen, sitting by the fire, was Mrs. Snagsby, with very red eyes and a very severe expression of face.

"My little woman," said Mr. Snagsby, entering behind us, "to wave—not to put too fine a point upon it, my dear—hostilities for one single moment in the course of this prolonged night, here is Inspector Bucket, Mr. Woodcourt, and a lady."

She looked very much astonished, as she had reason for doing, and looked particularly hard at me.

"My little woman," said Mr. Snagsby, sitting down in the remotest corner by the door, as if he were taking a liberty, "it is not unlikely that you may inquire of me why Inspector Bucket, Mr. Woodcourt, and a lady call upon us in Cook's Court, Cursitor Street, at the present hour. I don't know. I have not the least idea. If I was to be informed, I should despair of understanding, and I'd rather not be told."

He appeared so miserable, sitting with his head upon his hand, and I appeared so unwelcome, that I was going to offer an apology when Mr. Bucket took the matter on himself.

"Now, Mr. Snagsby," said he, "the best thing you can do is to go along with Mr. Woodcourt to look after your Guster—"

"My Guster, Mr. Bucket!" cried Mr. Snagsby. "Go on, sir, go on. I shall be charged with that next."

"And to hold the candle," pursued Mr. Bucket without correcting himself, "or hold her, or make yourself useful in any way you're asked. Which there's not a man alive more ready to do, for you're a man of urbanity and suavity, you know, and you've got the sort of heart that can feel for another. Mr. Woodcourt, would you be so good as see to her, and if you can get that letter from her, to let me have it as soon as ever you can?"

As they went out, Mr. Bucket made me sit down in a corner by the fire and take off my wet shoes, which he turned up to dry upon the fender, talking all the time.

"Don't you be at all put out, miss, by the want of a hospitable look from Mrs. Snagsby there, because she's under a mistake altogether. She'll find that out sooner than will be agreeable to a lady of her generally correct manner of forming her thoughts, because I'm a-going to explain it to her." Here, standing on the hearth with his wet hat and shawls in his hand, himself a pile of wet, he turned to Mrs. Snagsby. "Now, the first thing that I say to you, as a married woman possessing what you may call charms, you know—'Believe Me, if All Those Endearing,' and cetrer—you're well acquainted with the song, because it's in vain for you to tell me that you and good society are strangers—charms—attractions, mind you, that ought to give you confidence in yourself—is, that you've done it."

Mrs. Snagsby looked rather alarmed, relented a little and faltered, what did Mr. Bucket mean.

"What does Mr. Bucket mean?" he repeated, and I saw by his face that all the time he talked he was listening for the discovery of the letter, to my own great agitation, for I knew then how important it must be; "I'll tell you what he means, ma'am. Go and see Othello acted. That's the tragedy for you."

Mrs. Snagsby consciously asked why.

"Why?" said Mr. Bucket. "Because you'll come to that if you don't look out. Why, at the very moment while I speak, I know what your mind's not wholly free from respecting this young lady. But shall I tell you who this young lady is? Now, come, you're what I call an intellectual woman—with your soul too large for your body, if you come to that, and chafing it—and you know me, and you recollect where you saw me last, and what was talked of in that circle. Don't you? Yes! Very well. This young lady is that young lady."

Mrs. Snagsby appeared to understand the reference better than I did at the time.

"And Toughey—him as you call Jo—was mixed up in the same business, and no other; and the law-writer that you know of was mixed up in the same business, and no other; and your husband, with no more knowledge of it than your great grandfather, was mixed up (by Mr. Tulkinghorn, deceased, his best customer) in the same business, and no other; and the whole bileing of people was mixed up in the same business, and no other. And yet a married woman, possessing your attractions, shuts her eyes (and sparklers too), and goes and runs her delicate-formed head against a wall. Why, I am ashamed of you! (I expected Mr. Woodcourt might have got it by this time.)"

Mrs. Snagsby shook her head and put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Is that all?" said Mr. Bucket excitedly. "No. See what happens. Another person mixed up in that business and no other, a person in a wretched state, comes here to-night and is seen a-speaking to your maid-servant; and between her and your maid-servant there passes a paper that I would give a hundred pound for, down. What do you do? You hide and you watch 'em, and you pounce upon that maid-servant—knowing what she's subject to and what a little thing will bring 'em on—in that surprising manner and with that severity that, by the Lord, she goes off and keeps off, when a life may be hanging upon that girl's words!"

He so thoroughly meant what he said now that I involuntarily clasped my hands and felt the room turning away from me. But it stopped. Mr. Woodcourt came in, put a paper into his hand, and went away again.

"Now, Mrs. Snagsby, the only amends you can make," said Mr. Bucket, rapidly glancing at it, "is to let me speak a word to this young lady in private here. And if you know of any help that you can give to that gentleman in the next kitchen there or can think of any one thing that's likelier than another to bring the girl round, do your swiftest and best!" In an instant she was gone, and he had shut the door. "Now my dear, you're steady and quite sure of yourself?"

"Quite," said I.

"Whose writing is that?"

It was my mother's. A pencil-writing, on a crushed and torn piece of paper, blotted with wet. Folded roughly like a letter, and directed to me at my guardian's.

"You know the hand," he said, "and if you are firm enough to read it to me, do! But be particular to a word."

It had been written in portions, at different times. I read what follows:

> *I came to the cottage with two objects. First, to see the dear one, if I could, once more—but only to see her—not to speak to her or let her know that I was near. The other object, to elude pursuit and to be lost. Do not blame the mother for her share. The assistance that she rendered me, she rendered on my strongest assurance that it was for the dear one's good. You remember her dead child. The men's consent I bought, but her help was freely given.*
>
> *I came.*

"That was written," said my companion, "when she rested there. It bears out what I made of it. I was right."

The next was written at another time:

> *I have wandered a long distance, and for many hours, and I know that I must soon die. These streets! I have no purpose but to die. When I left, I had a worse, but I am saved from adding that guilt to the rest. Cold, wet, and fatigue are sufficient causes for my being found dead, but I shall die of others, though I suffer from these. It was right that all that had sustained me should give way at once and that I should die of terror and my conscience.*

"Take courage," said Mr. Bucket. "There's only a few words more."

Those, too, were written at another time. To all appearance, almost in the dark:

> *I have done all I could do to be lost. I shall be soon forgotten so, and shall disgrace him least. I have nothing about me by which I can be recognized. This paper I part with now. The place where I shall lie down, if I can get so far, has been often in my mind. Farewell. Forgive.*

Mr. Bucket, supporting me with his arm, lowered me gently into my chair. "Cheer up! Don't think me hard with you, my dear, but as soon as ever you feel equal to it, get your shoes on and be ready."

I did as he required, but I was left there a long time, praying for my unhappy mother. They were all occupied with the poor girl, and I heard Mr. Woodcourt directing them and speaking to her often. At length he came in with Mr. Bucket and said that as it was important to address her gently, he thought it best that I should ask her for whatever information we desired to obtain. There was no doubt that she could now reply to questions if she were soothed and not alarmed. The questions, Mr. Bucket said, were how she came by the letter, what passed between her and the person who gave her the letter, and where the person went. Holding my mind as steadily as I could to these points, I went into the next room with them. Mr. Woodcourt would have remained outside, but at my solicitation went in with us.

The poor girl was sitting on the floor where they had laid her down. They stood around her, though at a little distance, that she might have air. She was not pretty and looked weak and poor, but she had a plaintive and a good face, though it was still a little wild. I kneeled on the ground beside her and put her poor head upon my shoulder, whereupon she drew her arm round my neck and burst into tears.

"My poor girl," said I, laying my face against her forehead, for indeed I was crying too, and trembling, "it seems cruel to trouble you now, but more depends on our knowing something about this letter than I could tell you in an hour."

She began piteously declaring that she didn't mean any harm, she didn't mean any harm, Mrs. Snagsby!

"We are all sure of that," said I. "But pray tell me how you got it."

"Yes, dear lady, I will, and tell you true. I'll tell true, indeed, Mrs. Snagsby."

"I am sure of that," said I. "And how was it?"

"I had been out on an errand, dear lady—long after it was dark—quite late; and when I came home, I found a common-looking person, all wet and muddy, looking up at our house. When she saw me coming in at the door, she called me back and said did I live here. And I said yes, and she said she knew only one or two places about here, but had lost her way and couldn't find them. Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do! They won't believe me! She didn't say any harm to me, and I didn't say any harm to her, indeed, Mrs. Snagsby!"

It was necessary for her mistress to comfort her—which she did, I must say, with a good deal of contrition—before she could be got beyond this.

"She could not find those places," said I.

"No!" cried the girl, shaking her head. "No! Couldn't find them. And she was so faint, and lame, and miserable, Oh so wretched, that if you had seen her, Mr. Snagsby, you'd have given her half a crown, I know!"

"Well, Guster, my girl," said he, at first not knowing what to say. "I hope I should."

"And yet she was so well spoken," said the girl, looking at me with wide open eyes, "that it made a person's heart bleed. And so she said to me, did I know the way to the burying ground? And I asked her which burying ground. And she said, the poor burying ground. And so I told her I had been a poor child myself, and it was according to parishes. But she said she meant a poor burying ground not very far from here, where there was an archway, and a step, and an iron gate."

As I watched her face and soothed her to go on, I saw that Mr. Bucket received this with a look which I could not separate from one of alarm.

"Oh, dear, dear!" cried the girl, pressing her hair back with her hands. "What shall I do, what shall I do! She meant the burying ground where the man was buried that took the sleeping-stuff—that you came home and told us of, Mr. Snagsby—that frightened me so, Mrs. Snagsby. Oh, I am frightened again. Hold me!"

"You are so much better now," said I. "Pray, pray tell me more."

"Yes I will, yes I will! But don't be angry with me, that's a dear lady, because I have been so ill."

Angry with her, poor soul!

"There! Now I will, now I will. So she said, could I tell her how to find it, and I said yes, and I told her; and she looked at me with eyes like almost as if she was blind, and herself all waving back. And so she took out the letter, and showed it me, and said if she was to put that in the post-office, it would be rubbed out and not minded and never sent; and would I take it from her, and send it, and the messenger would be paid at the house. And so I said yes, if it was no harm, and she said no—no harm. And so I took it from her, and she said she had nothing to give me, and I said I was poor myself and consequently wanted nothing. And so she said God bless you, and went."

"And did she go—"

"Yes," cried the girl, anticipating the inquiry. "Yes! She went the way I had shown her. Then I came in, and Mrs. Snagsby came behind me from somewhere and laid hold of me, and I was frightened."

Mr. Woodcourt took her kindly from me. Mr. Bucket wrapped me up, and immediately we were in the street. Mr. Woodcourt hesitated, but I said, "Don't leave me now!" and Mr. Bucket added, "You'll be better with us, we may want you; don't lose time!"

I have the most confused impressions of that walk. I recollect that it was neither night nor day, that morning was dawning but the street-lamps were not yet put out, that the sleet was still falling and that all the ways were deep with it. I recollect a few chilled people passing in the streets. I recollect the wet house-tops, the clogged and bursting gutters and water-spouts, the mounds of blackened ice and snow over which we passed, the narrowness of the courts by which we went. At the same time I remember that the poor girl seemed to be yet telling her story audibly and plainly in my hearing, that I could feel her resting on my arm, that the stained house-fronts put on human shapes and looked at me, that great water-gates seemed to be opening and closing in my head or in the air, and that the unreal things were more substantial than the real.

At last we stood under a dark and miserable covered way, where one lamp was burning over an iron gate and where the morning faintly struggled in. The gate was closed. Beyond it was a burial ground—a dreadful spot in which the night was very slowly stirring, but where I could dimly see heaps of dishonoured graves and stones, hemmed in by filthy houses with a few dull lights in their windows and on whose walls a thick humidity broke out like a disease. On the step at the gate, drenched in the fearful wet of such a place, which oozed and splashed down everywhere, I saw, with a cry of pity and horror, a woman lying—Jenny, the mother of the dead child.

I ran forward, but they stopped me, and Mr. Woodcourt entreated me with the greatest earnestness, even with tears, before I went up to the figure to listen for an instant to what Mr. Bucket said. I did so, as I thought. I did so, as I am sure.

"Miss Summerson, you'll understand me, if you think a moment. They changed clothes at the cottage."

They changed clothes at the cottage. I could repeat the words in my mind, and I knew what they meant of themselves, but I attached no meaning to them in any other connexion.

"And one returned," said Mr. Bucket, "and one went on. And the one that went on only went on a certain way agreed upon to deceive and then turned across country and went home. Think a moment!"

I could repeat this in my mind too, but I had not the least idea what it meant. I saw before me, lying on the step, the mother of the dead child.

She lay there with one arm creeping round a bar of the iron gate and seeming to embrace it. She lay there, who had so lately spoken to my mother. She lay there, a distressed, unsheltered, senseless creature. She who had brought my mother's letter, who could give me the only clue to where my mother was; she, who was to guide us to rescue and save her whom we had sought so far, who had come to this condition by some means connected with my mother that I could not follow, and might be passing beyond our reach and help at that moment; she lay there, and they stopped me! I saw but did not comprehend the solemn and compassionate look in Mr. Woodcourt's face. I saw but did not comprehend his touching the other on the breast to keep him back. I saw him stand uncovered in the bitter air, with a reverence for something. But my understanding for all this was gone.

I even heard it said between them, "Shall she go?"

"She had better go. Her hands should be the first to touch her. They have a higher right than ours."

I passed on to the gate and stooped down. I lifted the heavy head, put the long dank hair aside, and turned the face. And it was my mother, cold and dead.

CHAPTER LX. Perspective

I proceed to other passages of my narrative. From the goodness of all about me I derived such consolation as I can never think of unmoved. I have already said so much of myself, and so much still remains, that I will not dwell upon my sorrow. I had an illness, but it was not a long one; and I would avoid even this mention of it if I could quite keep down the recollection of their sympathy.

I proceed to other passages of my narrative.

During the time of my illness, we were still in London, where Mrs. Woodcourt had come, on my guardian's invitation, to stay with us. When my guardian thought me well and cheerful enough to talk with him in our old way—though I could have done that sooner if he would have believed me—I resumed my work and my chair beside his. He had appointed the time himself, and we were alone.

"Dame Trot," said he, receiving me with a kiss, "welcome to the growlery again, my dear. I have a scheme to develop, little woman. I propose to remain here, perhaps for six months, perhaps for a longer time—as it may be. Quite to settle here for a while, in short."

"And in the meanwhile leave Bleak House?" said I.

"Aye, my dear? Bleak House," he returned, "must learn to take care of itself."

I thought his tone sounded sorrowful, but looking at him, I saw his kind face lighted up by its pleasantest smile.

"Bleak House," he repeated—and his tone did NOT sound sorrowful, I found—"must learn to take care of itself. It is a long way from Ada, my dear, and Ada stands much in need of you."

"It's like you, guardian," said I, "to have been taking that into consideration for a happy surprise to both of us."

"Not so disinterested either, my dear, if you mean to extol me for that virtue, since if you were generally on the road, you could be seldom with me. And besides, I wish to hear as much and as often of Ada as I can in this condition of estrangement from poor Rick. Not of her alone, but of him too, poor fellow."

"Have you seen Mr. Woodcourt, this morning, guardian?"

"I see Mr. Woodcourt every morning, Dame Durden."

"Does he still say the same of Richard?"

"Just the same. He knows of no direct bodily illness that he has; on the contrary, he believes that he has none. Yet he is not easy about him; who CAN be?"

My dear girl had been to see us lately every day, some times twice in a day. But we had foreseen, all along, that this would only last until I was quite myself. We knew full well that her fervent heart was as full of affection and gratitude towards her cousin John as it had ever been, and we acquitted Richard of laying any injunctions upon her to stay away; but we knew on the other hand that she felt it a part of her duty to him to be sparing of her visits at our house. My guardian's delicacy had soon perceived this and had tried to convey to her that he thought she was right.

"Dear, unfortunate, mistaken Richard," said I. "When will he awake from his delusion!"

"He is not in the way to do so now, my dear," replied my guardian. "The more he suffers, the more averse he will be to me, having made me the principal representative of the great occasion of his suffering."

I could not help adding, "So unreasonably!"

"Ah, Dame Trot, Dame Trot," returned my guardian, "what shall we find reasonable in Jarndyce and Jarndyce! Unreason and injustice at the top, unreason and injustice at the heart and at the bottom, unreason and injustice from beginning to end—if it ever has an end—how should poor Rick, always hovering near it, pluck reason out of it? He no more gathers grapes from thorns or figs from thistles than older men did in old times."

His gentleness and consideration for Richard whenever we spoke of him touched me so that I was always silent on this subject very soon.

"I suppose the Lord Chancellor, and the Vice Chancellors, and the whole Chancery battery of great guns would be infinitely astonished by such unreason and injustice in one of their suitors," pursued my guardian. "When those learned gentlemen begin to raise moss-roses from the powder they sow in their wigs, I shall begin to be astonished too!"

He checked himself in glancing towards the window to look where the wind was and leaned on the back of my chair instead.

"Well, well, little woman! To go on, my dear. This rock we must leave to time, chance, and hopeful circumstance. We must not shipwreck Ada upon it. She cannot afford, and he cannot afford, the remotest chance of another separation from a friend. Therefore I have particularly begged of Woodcourt, and I now particularly beg of you, my dear, not to move this subject with Rick. Let it rest. Next week, next month, next year, sooner or later, he will see me with clearer eyes. I can wait."

But I had already discussed it with him, I confessed; and so, I thought, had Mr. Woodcourt.

"So he tells me," returned my guardian. "Very good. He has made his protest, and Dame Durden has made hers, and there is nothing more to be said about it. Now I come to Mrs. Woodcourt. How do you like her, my dear?"

In answer to this question, which was oddly abrupt, I said I liked her very much and thought she was more agreeable than she used to be.

"I think so too," said my guardian. "Less pedigree? Not so much of Morgan ap—what's his name?"

That was what I meant, I acknowledged, though he was a very harmless person, even when we had had more of him.

"Still, upon the whole, he is as well in his native mountains," said my guardian. "I agree with you. Then, little woman, can I do better for a time than retain Mrs. Woodcourt here?"

No. And yet—

My guardian looked at me, waiting for what I had to say.

I had nothing to say. At least I had nothing in my mind that I could say. I had an undefined impression that it might have been better if we had had some other inmate, but I could hardly have explained why even to myself. Or, if to myself, certainly not to anybody else.

"You see," said my guardian, "our neighbourhood is in Woodcourt's way, and he can come here to see her as often as he likes, which is agreeable to them both; and she is familiar to us and fond of you."

Yes. That was undeniable. I had nothing to say against it. I could not have suggested a better arrangement, but I was not quite easy in my mind. Esther, Esther, why not? Esther, think!

"It is a very good plan indeed, dear guardian, and we could not do better."

"Sure, little woman?"

Quite sure. I had had a moment's time to think, since I had urged that duty on myself, and I was quite sure.

"Good," said my guardian. "It shall be done. Carried unanimously."

"Carried unanimously," I repeated, going on with my work.

It was a cover for his book-table that I happened to be ornamenting. It had been laid by on the night preceding my sad journey and never resumed. I showed it to him now, and he admired it highly. After I had explained the pattern to him and all the great effects that were to come out by and by, I thought I would go back to our last theme.

"You said, dear guardian, when we spoke of Mr. Woodcourt before Ada left us, that you thought he would give a long trial to another country. Have you been advising him since?"

"Yes, little woman, pretty often."

"Has he decided to do so?"

"I rather think not."

"Some other prospect has opened to him, perhaps?" said I.

"Why—yes—perhaps," returned my guardian, beginning his answer in a very deliberate manner. "About half a year hence or so, there is a medical attendant for the poor to be appointed at a certain place in Yorkshire. It is a thriving place, pleasantly situated—streams and streets, town and country, mill and moor—and seems to present an opening for such a man. I mean a man whose hopes and aims may sometimes lie (as most men's sometimes do, I dare say) above the ordinary level, but to whom the ordinary level will be high enough after all if it should prove to be a way of usefulness and good service leading to no other. All generous spirits are ambitious, I suppose, but the ambition that calmly trusts itself to such a road, instead of spasmodically trying to fly over it, is of the kind I care for. It is Woodcourt's kind."

"And will he get this appointment?" I asked.

"Why, little woman," returned my guardian, smiling, "not being an oracle, I cannot confidently say, but I think so. His reputation stands very high; there were people from that part of the country in the shipwreck; and strange to say, I believe the best man has the best chance. You must not suppose it to be a fine endowment. It is a very, very commonplace affair, my dear, an appointment to a great amount of work and a small amount of pay; but better things will gather about it, it may be fairly hoped."

"The poor of that place will have reason to bless the choice if it falls on Mr. Woodcourt, guardian."

"You are right, little woman; that I am sure they will."

We said no more about it, nor did he say a word about the future of Bleak House. But it was the first time I had taken my seat at his side in my mourning dress, and that accounted for it, I considered.

I now began to visit my dear girl every day in the dull dark corner where she lived. The morning was my usual time, but whenever I found I had an hour or so to spare, I put on my bonnet and bustled off to Chancery Lane. They were both so glad to see me at all hours, and used to brighten up so when they heard me opening the door and coming in (being quite at home, I never knocked), that I had no fear of becoming troublesome just yet.

On these occasions I frequently found Richard absent. At other times he would be writing or reading papers in the cause at that table of his, so covered with papers, which was never disturbed. Sometimes I would come upon him lingering at the door of Mr. Vholes's office. Sometimes I would meet him in the neighbourhood lounging about and biting his nails. I often met him wandering in Lincoln's Inn, near the place where I had first seen him, oh how different, how different!

That the money Ada brought him was melting away with the candles I used to see burning after dark in Mr. Vholes's office I knew very well. It was not a large amount in the beginning, he had married in debt, and I could not fail to understand, by this time, what was meant by Mr. Vholes's shoulder being at the wheel—as I still heard it was. My dear made the best of housekeepers and tried hard to save, but I knew that they were getting poorer and poorer every day.

She shone in the miserable corner like a beautiful star. She adorned and graced it so that it became another place. Paler than she had been at home, and a little quieter than I had thought natural when she was yet so cheerful and hopeful, her face was so unshadowed that I half believed she was blinded by her love for Richard to his ruinous career.

I went one day to dine with them while I was under this impression. As I turned into Symond's Inn, I met little Miss Flite coming out. She had been to make a stately call upon the wards in Jarndyce, as she still called them, and had derived the highest gratification from that ceremony. Ada had already told me that she called every Monday at five o'clock, with one little extra white bow in her bonnet, which never appeared there at any other time, and with her largest reticule of documents on her arm.

"My dear!" she began. "So delighted! How do you do! So glad to see you. And you are going to visit our interesting Jarndyce wards? TO be sure! Our beauty is at home, my dear, and will be charmed to see you."

"Then Richard is not come in yet?" said I. "I am glad of that, for I was afraid of being a little late."

"No, he is not come in," returned Miss Flite. "He has had a long day in court. I left him there with Vholes. You don't like Vholes, I hope? DON'T like Vholes. Dan-gerous man!"

"I am afraid you see Richard oftener than ever now," said I.

"My dearest," returned Miss Flite, "daily and hourly. You know what I told you of the attraction on the Chancellor's table? My dear, next to myself he is the most constant suitor in court. He begins quite to amuse our little party. Ve-ry friendly little party, are we not?"

It was miserable to hear this from her poor mad lips, though it was no surprise.

"In short, my valued friend," pursued Miss Flite, advancing her lips to my ear with an air of equal patronage and mystery, "I must tell you a secret. I have made him my executor. Nominated, constituted, and appointed him. In my will. Ye-es."

"Indeed?" said I.

"Ye-es," repeated Miss Flite in her most genteel accents, "my executor, administrator, and assign. (Our Chancery phrases, my love.) I have reflected that if I should wear out, he will be able to watch that judgment. Being so very regular in his attendance."

It made me sigh to think of him.

"I did at one time mean," said Miss Flite, echoing the sigh, "to nominate, constitute, and appoint poor Gridley. Also very regular, my charming girl. I assure you, most exemplary! But he wore out, poor man, so I have appointed his successor. Don't mention it. This is in confidence."

She carefully opened her reticule a little way and showed me a folded piece of paper inside as the appointment of which she spoke.

"Another secret, my dear. I have added to my collection of birds."

"Really, Miss Flite?" said I, knowing how it pleased her to have her confidence received with an appearance of interest.

She nodded several times, and her face became overcast and gloomy. "Two more. I call them the Wards in Jarndyce. They are caged up with all the others. With Hope, Joy, Youth, Peace, Rest, Life, Dust, Ashes, Waste, Want, Ruin, Despair, Madness, Death, Cunning, Folly, Words, Wigs, Rags, Sheepskin, Plunder, Precedent, Jargon, Gammon, and Spinach!"

The poor soul kissed me with the most troubled look I had ever seen in her and went her way. Her manner of running over the names of her birds, as if she were afraid of hearing them even from her own lips, quite chilled me.

This was not a cheering preparation for my visit, and I could have dispensed with the company of Mr. Vholes, when Richard (who arrived within a minute or two after me) brought him to share our dinner. Although it was a very plain one, Ada and Richard were for some minutes both out of the room together helping to get ready what we were to eat and drink. Mr. Vholes took that opportunity of holding a little conversation in a low voice with me. He came to the window where I was sitting and began upon Symond's Inn.

"A dull place, Miss Summerson, for a life that is not an official one," said Mr. Vholes, smearing the glass with his black glove to make it clearer for me.

"There is not much to see here," said I.

"Nor to hear, miss," returned Mr. Vholes. "A little music does occasionally stray in, but we are not musical in the law and soon eject it. I hope Mr. Jarndyce is as well as his friends could wish him?"

I thanked Mr. Vholes and said he was quite well.

"I have not the pleasure to be admitted among the number of his friends myself," said Mr. Vholes, "and I am aware that the gentlemen of our profession are sometimes regarded in such quarters with an unfavourable eye. Our plain course, however, under good report and evil report, and all kinds of prejudice (we are the victims of prejudice), is to have everything openly carried on. How do you find Mr. C. looking, Miss Summerson?"

"He looks very ill. Dreadfully anxious."

"Just so," said Mr. Vholes.

He stood behind me with his long black figure reaching nearly to the ceiling of those low rooms, feeling the pimples on his face as if they were ornaments and speaking inwardly and evenly as though there were not a human passion or emotion in his nature.

"Mr. Woodcourt is in attendance upon Mr. C., I believe?" he resumed.

"Mr. Woodcourt is his disinterested friend," I answered.

"But I mean in professional attendance, medical attendance."

"That can do little for an unhappy mind," said I.

"Just so," said Mr. Vholes.

So slow, so eager, so bloodless and gaunt, I felt as if Richard were wasting away beneath the eyes of this adviser and there were something of the vampire in him.

"Miss Summerson," said Mr. Vholes, very slowly rubbing his gloved hands, as if, to his cold sense of touch, they were much the same in black kid or out of it, "this was an ill-advised marriage of Mr. C.'s."

I begged he would excuse me from discussing it. They had been engaged when they were both very young, I told him (a little indignantly) and when the prospect before them was much fairer and brighter. When Richard had not yielded himself to the unhappy influence which now darkened his life.

"Just so," assented Mr. Vholes again. "Still, with a view to everything being openly carried on, I will, with your permission, Miss Summerson, observe to you that I consider this a very ill-advised marriage indeed. I owe the opinion not only to Mr. C.'s connexions, against whom I should naturally wish to protect myself, but also to my own reputation—dear to myself as a professional man aiming to keep respectable; dear to my three girls at home, for whom I am striving to realize some little independence; dear, I will even say, to my aged father, whom it is my privilege to support."

"It would become a very different marriage, a much happier and better marriage, another marriage altogether, Mr. Vholes," said I, "if Richard were persuaded to turn his back on the fatal pursuit in which you are engaged with him."

Mr. Vholes, with a noiseless cough—or rather gasp—into one of his black gloves, inclined his head as if he did not wholly dispute even that.

"Miss Summerson," he said, "it may be so; and I freely admit that the young lady who has taken Mr. C.'s name upon herself in so ill-advised a manner—you will I am sure not quarrel with me for throwing out that remark again, as a duty I owe to Mr. C.'s connexions—is a highly genteel young lady. Business has prevented me from mixing much with general society in any but a professional character; still I trust I am competent to perceive that she is a highly genteel young lady. As to beauty, I am not a judge of that myself, and I never did give much attention to it from a boy, but I dare say the young lady is equally eligible in that point of view. She is considered so (I have heard) among the clerks in the Inn, and it is a point more in their way than in mine. In reference to Mr. C.'s pursuit of his interests—"

"Oh! His interests, Mr. Vholes!"

"Pardon me," returned Mr. Vholes, going on in exactly the same inward and dispassionate manner. "Mr. C. takes certain interests under certain wills disputed in the suit. It is a term we use. In reference to Mr. C,'s pursuit of his interests, I mentioned to you, Miss Summerson, the first time I had the pleasure of seeing you, in my desire that everything should he openly carried on—I used those words, for I happened afterwards to note them in my diary, which is producible at any time—I mentioned to you that Mr. C. had laid down the principle of watching his own interests, and that when a client of mine laid down a principle which was not of an immoral (that is to say, unlawful) nature, it devolved upon me to carry it out. I HAVE carried it out; I do carry it out. But I will not smooth things over to any connexion of Mr. C.'s on any account. As open as I was to Mr. Jarndyce, I am to you. I regard it in the light of a professional duty to be so, though it can be charged to no one. I openly say, unpalatable as it may be, that I consider Mr. C.'s affairs in a very bad way, that I consider Mr. C. himself in a very bad way, and that I regard this as an exceedingly ill-advised marriage. Am I here, sir? Yes, I thank you; I am here, Mr. C., and enjoying the pleasure of some agreeable conversation with Miss Summerson, for which I have to thank you very much, sir!"

He broke off thus in answer to Richard, who addressed him as he came into the room. By this time I too well understood Mr. Vholes's scrupulous way of saving himself and his respectability not to feel that our worst fears did but keep pace with his client's progress.

We sat down to dinner, and I had an opportunity of observing Richard, anxiously. I was not disturbed by Mr. Vholes (who took off his gloves to dine), though he sat opposite to me at the small table, for I doubt if, looking up at all, he once removed his eyes from his host's face. I found Richard thin and languid, slovenly in his dress, abstracted in his manner, forcing his spirits now and then, and at other intervals relapsing into a dull thoughtfulness. About his large bright eyes that used to be so merry there was a wanness and a restlessness that changed them altogether. I cannot use the expression that he looked old. There is a ruin of youth which is not like age, and into such a ruin Richard's youth and youthful beauty had all fallen away.

He ate little and seemed indifferent what it was, showed himself to be much more impatient than he used to be, and was quick even with Ada. I thought at first that his old light-hearted manner was all gone, but it shone out of him sometimes as I had occasionally known little momentary glimpses of my own old face to look out upon me from the glass. His laugh had not quite left him either, but it was like the echo of a joyful sound, and that is always sorrowful.

Yet he was as glad as ever, in his old affectionate way, to have me there, and we talked of the old times pleasantly. These did not appear to be interesting to Mr. Vholes, though he occasionally made a gasp which I believe was his smile. He rose shortly after dinner and said that with the permission of the ladies he would retire to his office.

"Always devoted to business, Vholes!" cried Richard.

"Yes, Mr. C.," he returned, "the interests of clients are never to be neglected, sir. They are paramount in the thoughts of a professional man like myself, who wishes to preserve a good name among his fellow-practitioners and society at large. My denying myself the pleasure of the present agreeable conversation may not be wholly irrespective of your own interests, Mr. C."

Richard expressed himself quite sure of that and lighted Mr. Vholes out. On his return he told us, more than once, that Vholes was a good fellow, a safe fellow, a man who did what he pretended to do, a very good fellow indeed! He was so defiant about it that it struck me he had begun to doubt Mr. Vholes.

Then he threw himself on the sofa, tired out; and Ada and I put things to rights, for they had no other servant than the woman who attended to the chambers. My dear girl had a cottage piano there and quietly sat down to sing some of Richard's favourites, the lamp being first removed into the next room, as he complained of its hurting his eyes.

I sat between them, at my dear girl's side, and felt very melancholy listening to her sweet voice. I think Richard did too; I think he darkened the room for that reason. She had been singing some time, rising between whiles to bend over him and speak to him, when Mr. Woodcourt came in. Then he sat down by Richard and half playfully, half earnestly, quite naturally and easily, found out how he felt and where he had been all day. Presently he proposed to accompany him in a short walk on one of the bridges, as it was a moonlight airy night; and Richard readily consenting, they went out together.

They left my dear girl still sitting at the piano and me still sitting beside her. When they were gone out, I drew my arm round her waist. She put her left hand in mine (I was sitting on that side), but kept her right upon the keys, going over and over them without striking any note.

"Esther, my dearest," she said, breaking silence, "Richard is never so well and I am never so easy about him as when he is with Allan Woodcourt. We have to thank you for that."

I pointed out to my darling how this could scarcely be, because Mr. Woodcourt had come to her cousin John's house and had known us all there, and because he had always liked Richard, and Richard had always liked him, and—and so forth.

"All true," said Ada, "but that he is such a devoted friend to us we owe to you."

I thought it best to let my dear girl have her way and to say no more about it. So I said as much. I said it lightly, because I felt her trembling.

"Esther, my dearest, I want to be a good wife, a very, very good wife indeed. You shall teach me."

I teach! I said no more, for I noticed the hand that was fluttering over the keys, and I knew that it was not I who ought to speak, that it was she who had something to say to me.

"When I married Richard I was not insensible to what was before him. I had been perfectly happy for a long time with you, and I had never known any trouble or anxiety, so loved and cared for, but I understood the danger he was in, dear Esther."

"I know, I know, my darling."

"When we were married I had some little hope that I might be able to convince him of his mistake, that he might come to regard it in a new way as my husband and not pursue it all the more desperately for my sake—as he does. But if I had not had that hope, I would have married him just the same, Esther. Just the same!"

In the momentary firmness of the hand that was never still—a firmness inspired by the utterance of these last words, and dying away with them—I saw the confirmation of her earnest tones.

"You are not to think, my dearest Esther, that I fail to see what you see and fear what you fear. No one can understand him better than I do. The greatest wisdom that ever lived in the world could scarcely know Richard better than my love does."

She spoke so modestly and softly and her trembling hand expressed such agitation as it moved to and fro upon the silent notes! My dear, dear girl!

"I see him at his worst every day. I watch him in his sleep. I know every change of his face. But when I married Richard I was quite determined, Esther, if heaven would help me, never to show him that I grieved for what he did and so to make him more unhappy. I want him, when he comes home, to find no trouble in my face. I want him, when he looks at me, to see what he loved in me. I married him to do this, and this supports me."

I felt her trembling more. I waited for what was yet to come, and I now thought I began to know what it was.

"And something else supports me, Esther."

She stopped a minute. Stopped speaking only; her hand was still in motion.

"I look forward a little while, and I don't know what great aid may come to me. When Richard turns his eyes upon me then, there may be something lying on my breast more eloquent than I have been, with greater power than mine to show him his true course and win him back."

Her hand stopped now. She clasped me in her arms, and I clasped her in mine.

"If that little creature should fail too, Esther, I still look forward. I look forward a long while, through years and years, and think that then, when I am growing old, or when I am dead perhaps, a beautiful woman, his daughter, happily married, may be proud of him and a blessing to him. Or that a generous brave man, as handsome as he used to be, as hopeful, and far more happy, may walk in the sunshine with him, honouring his grey head and saying to himself, 'I thank God this is my father! Ruined by a fatal inheritance, and restored through me!'"

Oh, my sweet girl, what a heart was that which beat so fast against me!

"These hopes uphold me, my dear Esther, and I know they will. Though sometimes even they depart from me before a dread that arises when I look at Richard."

I tried to cheer my darling, and asked her what it was. Sobbing and weeping, she replied, "That he may not live to see his child."

CHAPTER LXI. A Discovery

The days when I frequented that miserable corner which my dear girl brightened can never fade in my remembrance. I never see it, and I never wish to see it now; I have been there only once since, but in my memory there is a mournful glory shining on the place which will shine for ever.

Not a day passed without my going there, of course. At first I found Mr. Skimpole there, on two or three occasions, idly playing the piano and talking in his usual vivacious strain. Now, besides my very much mistrusting the probability of his being there without making Richard poorer, I felt as if there were something in his careless gaiety too inconsistent with what I knew of the depths of Ada's life. I clearly perceived, too, that Ada shared my feelings. I therefore resolved, after much thinking of it, to make a private visit to Mr. Skimpole and try delicately to explain myself. My dear girl was the great consideration that made me bold.

I set off one morning, accompanied by Charley, for Somers Town. As I approached the house, I was strongly inclined to turn back, for I felt what a desperate attempt it was to make an impression on Mr. Skimpole and how extremely likely it was that he would signally defeat me. However, I thought that being there, I would go through with it. I knocked with a trembling hand at Mr. Skimpole's door—literally with a hand, for the knocker was gone—and after a long parley gained admission from an Irishwoman, who was in the area when I knocked, breaking up the lid of a water-butt with a poker to light the fire with.

Mr. Skimpole, lying on the sofa in his room, playing the flute a little, was enchanted to see me. Now, who should receive me, he asked. Who would I prefer for mistress of the ceremonies? Would I have his Comedy daughter, his Beauty daughter, or his Sentiment daughter? Or would I have all the daughters at once in a perfect nosegay?

I replied, half defeated already, that I wished to speak to himself only if he would give me leave.

"My dear Miss Summerson, most joyfully! Of course," he said, bringing his chair nearer mine and breaking into his fascinating smile, "of course it's not business. Then it's pleasure!"

I said it certainly was not business that I came upon, but it was not quite a pleasant matter.

"Then, my dear Miss Summerson," said he with the frankest gaiety, "don't allude to it. Why should you allude to anything that is NOT a pleasant matter? I never do. And you are a much pleasanter creature, in every point of view, than I. You are perfectly pleasant; I am imperfectly pleasant; then, if I never allude to an unpleasant matter, how much less should you! So that's disposed of, and we will talk of something else."

Although I was embarrassed, I took courage to intimate that I still wished to pursue the subject.

"I should think it a mistake," said Mr. Skimpole with his airy laugh, "if I thought Miss Summerson capable of making one. But I don't!"

"Mr. Skimpole," said I, raising my eyes to his, "I have so often heard you say that you are unacquainted with the common affairs of life—"

"Meaning our three banking-house friends, L, S, and who's the junior partner? D?" said Mr. Skimpole, brightly. "Not an idea of them!"

"—That perhaps," I went on, "you will excuse my boldness on that account. I think you ought most seriously to know that Richard is poorer than he was."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Skimpole. "So am I, they tell me."

"And in very embarrassed circumstances."

"Parallel case, exactly!" said Mr. Skimpole with a delighted countenance.

"This at present naturally causes Ada much secret anxiety, and as I think she is less anxious when no claims are made upon her by visitors, and as Richard has one uneasiness always heavy on his mind, it has occurred to me to take the liberty of saying that—if you would—not—"

I was coming to the point with great difficulty when he took me by both hands and with a radiant face and in the liveliest way anticipated it.

"Not go there? Certainly not, my dear Miss Summerson, most assuredly not. Why SHOULD I go there? When I go anywhere, I go for pleasure. I don't go anywhere for pain, because I was made for pleasure.

Pain comes to ME when it wants me. Now, I have had very little pleasure at our dear Richard's lately, and your practical sagacity demonstrates why. Our young friends, losing the youthful poetry which was once so captivating in them, begin to think, 'This is a man who wants pounds.' So I am; I always want pounds; not for myself, but because tradespeople always want them of me. Next, our young friends begin to think, becoming mercenary, 'This is the man who HAD pounds, who borrowed them,' which I did. I always borrow pounds. So our young friends, reduced to prose (which is much to be regretted), degenerate in their power of imparting pleasure to me. Why should I go to see them, therefore? Absurd!"

Through the beaming smile with which he regarded me as he reasoned thus, there now broke forth a look of disinterested benevolence quite astonishing.

"Besides," he said, pursuing his argument in his tone of light-hearted conviction, "if I don't go anywhere for pain—which would be a perversion of the intention of my being, and a monstrous thing to do—why should I go anywhere to be the cause of pain? If I went to see our young friends in their present ill-regulated state of mind, I should give them pain. The associations with me would be disagreeable. They might say, 'This is the man who had pounds and who can't pay pounds,' which I can't, of course; nothing could be more out of the question! Then kindness requires that I shouldn't go near them—and I won't."

He finished by genially kissing my hand and thanking me. Nothing but Miss Summerson's fine tact, he said, would have found this out for him.

I was much disconcerted, but I reflected that if the main point were gained, it mattered little how strangely he perverted everything leading to it. I had determined to mention something else, however, and I thought I was not to be put off in that.

"Mr. Skimpole," said I, "I must take the liberty of saying before I conclude my visit that I was much surprised to learn, on the best authority, some little time ago, that you knew with whom that poor boy left Bleak House and that you accepted a present on that occasion. I have not mentioned it to my guardian, for I fear it would hurt him unnecessarily; but I may say to you that I was much surprised."

"No? Really surprised, my dear Miss Summerson?" he returned inquiringly, raising his pleasant eyebrows.

"Greatly surprised."

He thought about it for a little while with a highly agreeable and whimsical expression of face, then quite gave it up and said in his most engaging manner, "You know what a child I am. Why surprised?"

I was reluctant to enter minutely into that question, but as he begged I would, for he was really curious to know, I gave him to understand in the gentlest words I could use that his conduct seemed to involve a disregard of several moral obligations. He was much amused and interested when he heard this and said, "No, really?" with ingenuous simplicity.

"You know I don't intend to be responsible. I never could do it. Responsibility is a thing that has always been above me—or below me," said Mr. Skimpole. "I don't even know which; but as I understand the way in which my dear Miss Summerson (always remarkable for her practical good sense and clearness) puts this case, I should imagine it was chiefly a question of money, do you know?"

I incautiously gave a qualified assent to this.

"Ah! Then you see," said Mr. Skimpole, shaking his head, "I am hopeless of understanding it."

I suggested, as I rose to go, that it was not right to betray my guardian's confidence for a bribe.

"My dear Miss Summerson," he returned with a candid hilarity that was all his own, "I can't be bribed."

"Not by Mr. Bucket?" said I.

"No," said he. "Not by anybody. I don't attach any value to money. I don't care about it, I don't know about it, I don't want it, I don't keep it—it goes away from me directly. How can I be bribed?"

I showed that I was of a different opinion, though I had not the capacity for arguing the question.

"On the contrary," said Mr. Skimpole, "I am exactly the man to be placed in a superior position in such a case as that. I am above the rest of mankind in such a case as that. I can act with philosophy in such a case as that. I am not warped by prejudices, as an Italian baby is by bandages. I am as free as the air. I feel myself as far above suspicion as Caesar's wife."

Anything to equal the lightness of his manner and the playful impartiality with which he seemed to convince himself, as he tossed the matter about like a ball of feathers, was surely never seen in anybody else!

"Observe the case, my dear Miss Summerson. Here is a boy received into the house and put to bed in a state that I strongly object to. The boy being in bed, a man arrives—like the house that Jack built. Here is the man who demands the boy who is received into the house and put to bed in a state that I strongly object to. Here is a bank-note produced by the man who demands the boy who is received into the house and put to bed in a state that I strongly object to. Here is the Skimpole who accepts the bank-note produced by the man who demands the boy who is received into the house and put to bed in a state that I strongly object to. Those are the facts. Very well. Should the Skimpole have refused the note? WHY should the Skimpole have refused the note? Skimpole protests to Bucket, 'What's this for? I don't understand it, it is of no use to me, take it away.' Bucket still entreats Skimpole to accept it. Are there reasons why Skimpole, not being warped by prejudices, should accept it? Yes. Skimpole perceives them. What are they? Skimpole reasons with himself, this is a tamed lynx, an active police-officer, an intelligent man, a person of a peculiarly directed energy and great subtlety both of conception and execution, who discovers our friends and enemies for us when they run away, recovers our property for us when we are robbed, avenges us comfortably when we are murdered. This active police-officer and intelligent man has acquired, in the exercise of his art, a strong faith in money; he finds it very useful to him, and he makes it very useful to society. Shall I shake that faith in Bucket because I want it myself; shall I deliberately blunt one of Bucket's weapons; shall I positively paralyse Bucket in his next detective operation? And again. If it is blameable in Skimpole to take the note, it is blameable in Bucket to offer the note—much more blameable in Bucket, because he is the knowing man. Now, Skimpole wishes to think well of Bucket; Skimpole deems it essential, in its little place, to the general cohesion of things, that he SHOULD think well of Bucket. The state expressly asks him to trust to Bucket. And he does. And that's all he does!"

I had nothing to offer in reply to this exposition and therefore took my leave. Mr. Skimpole, however, who was in excellent spirits, would not hear of my returning home attended only by "Little Coavinses," and accompanied me himself. He entertained me on the way with a variety of delightful conversation and assured me, at parting, that he should never forget the fine tact with which I had found that out for him about our young friends.

As it so happened that I never saw Mr. Skimpole again, I may at once finish what I know of his history. A coolness arose between him and my guardian, based principally on the foregoing grounds and on his having heartlessly disregarded my guardian's entreaties (as we afterwards learned from Ada) in reference to Richard. His being heavily in my guardian's debt had nothing to do with their separation. He died some five years afterwards and left a diary behind him, with letters and other materials towards his life, which was published and which showed him to have been the victim of a combination on the part of mankind against an amiable child. It was considered very pleasant reading, but I never read more of it myself than the sentence on which I chanced to light on opening the book. It was this: "Jarndyce, in common with most other men I have known, is the incarnation of selfishness."

And now I come to a part of my story touching myself very nearly indeed, and for which I was quite unprepared when the circumstance occurred. Whatever little lingerings may have now and then revived in my mind associated with my poor old face had only revived as belonging to a part of my life that was gone—gone like my infancy or my childhood. I have suppressed none of my many weaknesses on that subject, but have written them as faithfully as my memory has recalled them. And I hope to do, and mean to do, the same down to the last words of these pages, which I see now not so very far before me.

The months were gliding away, and my dear girl, sustained by the hopes she had confided in me, was the same beautiful star in the miserable corner. Richard, more worn and haggard, haunted the court day after day, listlessly sat there the whole day long when he knew there was no remote chance of the suit being mentioned, and became one of the stock sights of the place. I wonder whether any of the gentlemen remembered him as he was when he first went there.

So completely was he absorbed in his fixed idea that he used to avow in his cheerful moments that he should never have breathed the fresh air now "but for Woodcourt." It was only Mr. Woodcourt who could occasionally divert his attention for a few hours at a time and rouse him, even when he sunk into a lethargy of mind and body that alarmed us greatly, and the returns of which became more frequent as the months went on. My dear girl was right in saying that he only pursued his errors the more desperately for her sake. I have no doubt that his desire to retrieve what he had lost was rendered the more intense by his grief for his young wife, and became like the madness of a gamester.

I was there, as I have mentioned, at all hours. When I was there at night, I generally went home with Charley in a coach; sometimes my guardian would meet me in the neighbourhood, and we would walk home together. One evening he had arranged to meet me at eight o'clock. I could not leave, as I usually did, quite punctually at the time, for I was working for my dear girl and had a few stitches more to do to finish what I was about; but it was within a few minutes of the hour when I bundled up my little work-basket, gave my darling my last kiss for the night, and hurried downstairs. Mr. Woodcourt went with me, as it was dusk.

When we came to the usual place of meeting—it was close by, and Mr. Woodcourt had often accompanied me before—my guardian was not there. We waited half an hour, walking up and down, but there were no signs of him. We agreed that he was either prevented from coming or that he had come and gone away, and Mr. Woodcourt proposed to walk home with me.

It was the first walk we had ever taken together, except that very short one to the usual place of meeting. We spoke of Richard and Ada the whole way. I did not thank him in words for what he had done—my appreciation of it had risen above all words then—but I hoped he might not be without some understanding of what I felt so strongly.

Arriving at home and going upstairs, we found that my guardian was out and that Mrs. Woodcourt was out too. We were in the very same room into which I had brought my blushing girl when her youthful lover, now her so altered husband, was the choice of her young heart, the very same room from which my guardian and I had watched them going away through the sunlight in the fresh bloom of their hope and promise.

We were standing by the opened window looking down into the street when Mr. Woodcourt spoke to me. I learned in a moment that he loved me. I learned in a moment that my scarred face was all unchanged to him. I learned in a moment that what I had thought was pity and compassion was devoted, generous, faithful love. Oh, too late to know it now, too late, too late. That was the first ungrateful thought I had. Too late.

"When I returned," he told me, "when I came back, no richer than when I went away, and found you newly risen from a sick bed, yet so inspired by sweet consideration for others and so free from a selfish thought—"

"Oh, Mr. Woodcourt, forbear, forbear!" I entreated him. "I do not deserve your high praise. I had many selfish thoughts at that time, many!"

"Heaven knows, beloved of my life," said he, "that my praise is not a lover's praise, but the truth. You do not know what all around you see in Esther Summerson, how many hearts she touches and awakens, what sacred admiration and what love she wins."

"Oh, Mr. Woodcourt," cried I, "it is a great thing to win love, it is a great thing to win love! I am proud of it, and honoured by it; and the hearing of it causes me to shed these tears of mingled joy and sorrow—joy that I have won it, sorrow that I have not deserved it better; but I am not free to think of yours."

I said it with a stronger heart, for when he praised me thus and when I heard his voice thrill with his belief that what he said was true, I aspired to be more worthy of it. It was not too late for that. Although I closed this unforeseen page in my life to-night, I could be worthier of it all through my life. And it was a comfort to me, and an impulse to me, and I felt a dignity rise up within me that was derived from him when I thought so.

He broke the silence.

"I should poorly show the trust that I have in the dear one who will evermore be as dear to me as now"—and the deep earnestness with which he said it at once strengthened me and made me weep—"if, after her assurance that she is not free to think of my love, I urged it. Dear Esther, let me only tell you that the fond idea of you which I took abroad was exalted to the heavens when I came home. I have always hoped, in the first hour when I seemed to stand in any ray of good fortune, to tell you this. I have always feared that I should tell it you in vain. My hopes and fears are both fulfilled to-night. I distress you. I have said enough."

Something seemed to pass into my place that was like the angel he thought me, and I felt so sorrowful for the loss he had sustained! I wished to help him in his trouble, as I had wished to do when he showed that first commiseration for me.

"Dear Mr. Woodcourt," said I, "before we part to-night, something is left for me to say. I never could say it as I wish—I never shall—but—"

I had to think again of being more deserving of his love and his affliction before I could go on.

"—I am deeply sensible of your generosity, and I shall treasure its remembrance to my dying hour. I know full well how changed I am, I know you are not unacquainted with my history, and I know what a noble love that is which is so faithful. What you have said to me could have affected me so much from no other lips, for there are none that could give it such a value to me. It shall not be lost. It shall make me better."

He covered his eyes with his hand and turned away his head. How could I ever be worthy of those tears?

"If, in the unchanged intercourse we shall have together—in tending Richard and Ada, and I hope in many happier scenes of life—you ever find anything in me which you can honestly think is better than it used to be, believe that it will have sprung up from to-night and that I shall owe it to you. And never believe, dear dear Mr. Woodcourt, never believe that I forget this night or that while my heart beats it can be insensible to the pride and joy of having been beloved by you."

He took my hand and kissed it. He was like himself again, and I felt still more encouraged.

"I am induced by what you said just now," said I, "to hope that you have succeeded in your endeavour."

"I have," he answered. "With such help from Mr. Jarndyce as you who know him so well can imagine him to have rendered me, I have succeeded."

"Heaven bless him for it," said I, giving him my hand; "and heaven bless you in all you do!"

"I shall do it better for the wish," he answered; "it will make me enter on these new duties as on another sacred trust from you."

"Ah! Richard!" I exclaimed involuntarily, "What will he do when you are gone!"

"I am not required to go yet; I would not desert him, dear Miss Summerson, even if I were."

One other thing I felt it needful to touch upon before he left me. I knew that I should not be worthier of the love I could not take if I reserved it.

"Mr. Woodcourt," said I, "you will be glad to know from my lips before I say good night that in the future, which is clear and bright before me, I am most happy, most fortunate, have nothing to regret or desire."

It was indeed a glad hearing to him, he replied.

"From my childhood I have been," said I, "the object of the untiring goodness of the best of human beings, to whom I am so bound by every tie of attachment, gratitude, and love, that nothing I could do in the compass of a life could express the feelings of a single day."

"I share those feelings," he returned. "You speak of Mr. Jarndyce."

"You know his virtues well," said I, "but few can know the greatness of his character as I know it. All its highest and best qualities have been revealed to me in nothing more brightly than in the shaping out of that future in which I am so happy. And if your highest homage and respect had not been his already—which I know they are—they would have been his, I think, on this assurance and in the feeling it would have awakened in you towards him for my sake."

He fervently replied that indeed indeed they would have been. I gave him my hand again.

"Good night," I said, "Good-bye."

"The first until we meet to-morrow, the second as a farewell to this theme between us for ever."

"Yes."

"Good night; good-bye."

He left me, and I stood at the dark window watching the street. His love, in all its constancy and generosity, had come so suddenly upon me that he had not left me a minute when my fortitude gave way again and the street was blotted out by my rushing tears.

But they were not tears of regret and sorrow. No. He had called me the beloved of his life and had said I would be evermore as dear to him as I was then, and I felt as if my heart would not hold the triumph of having heard those words. My first wild thought had died away. It was not too late to hear them, for it was not too late to be animated by them to be good, true, grateful, and contented. How easy my path, how much easier than his!

CHAPTER LXII. Another Discovery

I had not the courage to see any one that night. I had not even the courage to see myself, for I was afraid that my tears might a little reproach me. I went up to my room in the dark, and prayed in the dark, and lay down in the dark to sleep. I had no need of any light to read my guardian's letter by, for I knew it by heart. I took it from the place where I kept it, and repeated its contents by its own clear light of integrity and love, and went to sleep with it on my pillow.

I was up very early in the morning and called Charley to come for a walk. We bought flowers for the breakfast-table, and came back and arranged them, and were as busy as possible. We were so early that I had a good time still for Charley's lesson before breakfast; Charley (who was not in the least improved in the old defective article of grammar) came through it with great applause; and we were altogether very notable. When my guardian appeared he said, "Why, little woman, you look fresher than your flowers!" And Mrs. Woodcourt repeated and translated a passage from the Mewlinnwillinwodd expressive of my being like a mountain with the sun upon it.

This was all so pleasant that I hope it made me still more like the mountain than I had been before. After breakfast I waited my opportunity and peeped about a little until I saw my guardian in his own room—the room of last night—by himself. Then I made an excuse to go in with my housekeeping keys, shutting the door after me.

"Well, Dame Durden?" said my guardian; the post had brought him several letters, and he was writing. "You want money?"

"No, indeed, I have plenty in hand."

"There never was such a Dame Durden," said my guardian, "for making money last."

He had laid down his pen and leaned back in his chair looking at me. I have often spoken of his bright face, but I thought I had never seen it look so bright and good. There was a high happiness upon it which made me think, "He has been doing some great kindness this morning."

"There never was," said my guardian, musing as he smiled upon me, "such a Dame Durden for making money last."

He had never yet altered his old manner. I loved it and him so much that when I now went up to him and took my usual chair, which was always put at his side—for sometimes I read to him, and sometimes I talked to him, and sometimes I silently worked by him—I hardly liked to disturb it by laying my hand on his breast. But I found I did not disturb it at all.

"Dear guardian," said I, "I want to speak to you. Have I been remiss in anything?"

"Remiss in anything, my dear!"

"Have I not been what I have meant to be since—I brought the answer to your letter, guardian?"

"You have been everything I could desire, my love."

"I am very glad indeed to hear that," I returned. "You know, you said to me, was this the mistress of Bleak House. And I said, yes."

"Yes," said my guardian, nodding his head. He had put his arm about me as if there were something to protect me from and looked in my face, smiling.

"Since then," said I, "we have never spoken on the subject except once."

"And then I said Bleak House was thinning fast; and so it was, my dear."

"And I said," I timidly reminded him, "but its mistress remained."

He still held me in the same protecting manner and with the same bright goodness in his face.

"Dear guardian," said I, "I know how you have felt all that has happened, and how considerate you have been. As so much time has passed, and as you spoke only this morning of my being so well again, perhaps you expect me to renew the subject. Perhaps I ought to do so. I will be the mistress of Bleak House when you please."

"See," he returned gaily, "what a sympathy there must be between us! I have had nothing else, poor Rick excepted—it's a large exception—in my mind. When you came in, I was full of it. When shall we give Bleak House its mistress, little woman?"

"When you please."

"Next month?"

"Next month, dear guardian."

"The day on which I take the happiest and best step of my life—the day on which I shall be a man more exulting and more enviable than any other man in the world—the day on which I give Bleak House its little mistress—shall be next month then," said my guardian.

I put my arms round his neck and kissed him just as I had done on the day when I brought my answer.

A servant came to the door to announce Mr. Bucket, which was quite unnecessary, for Mr. Bucket was already looking in over the servant's shoulder. "Mr. Jarndyce and Miss Summerson," said he, rather out of breath, "with all apologies for intruding, WILL you allow me to order up a person that's on the stairs and that objects to being left there in case of becoming the subject of observations in his absence? Thank you. Be so good as chair that there member in this direction, will you?" said Mr. Bucket, beckoning over the banisters.

This singular request produced an old man in a black skull-cap, unable to walk, who was carried up by a couple of bearers and deposited in the room near the door. Mr. Bucket immediately got rid of the bearers, mysteriously shut the door, and bolted it.

"Now you see, Mr. Jarndyce," he then began, putting down his hat and opening his subject with a flourish of his well-remembered finger, "you know me, and Miss Summerson knows me. This gentleman likewise knows me, and his name is Smallweed. The discounting line is his line principally, and he's what you may call a dealer in bills. That's about what YOU are, you know, ain't you?" said Mr. Bucket, stopping a little to address the gentleman in question, who was exceedingly suspicious of him.

He seemed about to dispute this designation of himself when he was seized with a violent fit of coughing.

"Now, moral, you know!" said Mr. Bucket, improving the accident. "Don't you contradict when there ain't no occasion, and you won't be took in that way. Now, Mr. Jarndyce, I address myself to you. I've been negotiating with this gentleman on behalf of Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, and one way and another I've been in and out and about his premises a deal. His premises are the premises formerly occupied by Krook, marine store dealer—a relation of this gentleman's that you saw in his lifetime if I don't mistake?"

My guardian replied, "Yes."

"Well! You are to understand," said Mr. Bucket, "that this gentleman he come into Krook's property, and a good deal of magpie property there was. Vast lots of waste-paper among the rest. Lord bless you, of no use to nobody!"

The cunning of Mr. Bucket's eye and the masterly manner in which he contrived, without a look or a word against which his watchful auditor could protest, to let us know that he stated the case according to previous agreement and could say much more of Mr. Smallweed if he thought it advisable, deprived us of any merit in quite understanding him. His difficulty was increased by Mr. Smallweed's being deaf as well as suspicious and watching his face with the closest attention.

"Among them odd heaps of old papers, this gentleman, when he comes into the property, naturally begins to rummage, don't you see?" said Mr. Bucket.

"To which? Say that again," cried Mr. Smallweed in a shrill, sharp voice.

"To rummage," repeated Mr. Bucket. "Being a prudent man and accustomed to take care of your own affairs, you begin to rummage among the papers as you have come into; don't you?"

"Of course I do," cried Mr. Smallweed.

"Of course you do," said Mr. Bucket conversationally, "and much to blame you would be if you didn't. And so you chance to find, you know," Mr. Bucket went on, stooping over him with an air of cheerful raillery which Mr. Smallweed by no means reciprocated, "and so you chance to find, you know, a paper with the signature of Jarndyce to it. Don't you?"

Mr. Smallweed glanced with a troubled eye at us and grudgingly nodded assent.

"And coming to look at that paper at your full leisure and convenience—all in good time, for you're not curious to read it, and why should you be?—what do you find it to be but a will, you see. That's the drollery of it," said Mr. Bucket with the same lively air of recalling a joke for the enjoyment of Mr. Smallweed, who still had the same crest-fallen appearance of not enjoying it at all; "what do you find it to be but a will?"

"I don't know that it's good as a will or as anything else," snarled Mr. Smallweed.

Mr. Bucket eyed the old man for a moment—he had slipped and shrunk down in his chair into a mere bundle—as if he were much disposed to pounce upon him; nevertheless, he continued to bend over him with the same agreeable air, keeping the corner of one of his eyes upon us.

"Notwithstanding which," said Mr. Bucket, "you get a little doubtful and uncomfortable in your mind about it, having a very tender mind of your own."

"Eh? What do you say I have got of my own?" asked Mr. Smallweed with his hand to his ear.

"A very tender mind."

"Ho! Well, go on," said Mr. Smallweed.

"And as you've heard a good deal mentioned regarding a celebrated Chancery will case of the same name, and as you know what a card Krook was for buying all manner of old pieces of furniter, and books, and papers, and what not, and never liking to part with 'em, and always a-going to teach himself to read, you begin to think—and you never was more correct in your born days—'Ecod, if I don't look about me, I may get into trouble regarding this will.'"

"Now, mind how you put it, Bucket," cried the old man anxiously with his hand at his ear. "Speak up; none of your brimstone tricks. Pick me up; I want to hear better. Oh, Lord, I am shaken to bits!"

Mr. Bucket had certainly picked him up at a dart. However, as soon as he could be heard through Mr. Smallweed's coughing and his vicious ejaculations of "Oh, my bones! Oh, dear! I've no breath in my body! I'm worse than the chattering, clattering, brimstone pig at home!" Mr. Bucket proceeded in the same convivial manner as before.

"So, as I happen to be in the habit of coming about your premises, you take me into your confidence, don't you?"

I think it would be impossible to make an admission with more ill will and a worse grace than Mr. Smallweed displayed when he admitted this, rendering it perfectly evident that Mr. Bucket was the very last person he would have thought of taking into his confidence if he could by any possibility have kept him out of it.

"And I go into the business with you—very pleasant we are over it; and I confirm you in your well-founded fears that you will get yourself into a most precious line if you don't come out with that there will," said Mr. Bucket emphatically; "and accordingly you arrange with me that it shall be delivered up to this present Mr. Jarndyce, on no conditions. If it should prove to be valuable, you trusting yourself to him for your reward; that's about where it is, ain't it?"

"That's what was agreed," Mr. Smallweed assented with the same bad grace.

"In consequence of which," said Mr. Bucket, dismissing his agreeable manner all at once and becoming strictly business-like, "you've got that will upon your person at the present time, and the only thing that remains for you to do is just to out with it!"

Having given us one glance out of the watching corner of his eye, and having given his nose one triumphant rub with his forefinger, Mr. Bucket stood with his eyes fastened on his confidential friend and his hand stretched forth ready to take the paper and present it to my guardian. It was not produced without much reluctance and many declarations on the part of Mr. Smallweed that he was a poor industrious man and that he left it to Mr. Jarndyce's honour not to let him lose by his honesty. Little by little he very slowly took from a breast-pocket a stained, discoloured paper which was much singed upon the outside and a little burnt at the edges, as if it had long ago been thrown upon a fire and hastily snatched off again. Mr. Bucket lost no time in transferring this paper, with the dexterity of a conjuror, from Mr. Smallweed to Mr. Jarndyce. As he gave it to my guardian, he whispered behind his fingers, "Hadn't settled how to make their market of it. Quarrelled and hinted about it. I laid out twenty pound upon it. First the avaricious grandchildren split upon him on account of their objections to his living so unreasonably long, and then they split on one another. Lord! There ain't one of the family that wouldn't sell the other for a pound or two, except the old lady—and she's only out of it because she's too weak in her mind to drive a bargain."

"Mr Bucket," said my guardian aloud, "whatever the worth of this paper may be to any one, my obligations are great to you; and if it be of any worth, I hold myself bound to see Mr. Smallweed remunerated accordingly."

"Not according to your merits, you know," said Mr. Bucket in friendly explanation to Mr. Smallweed. "Don't you be afraid of that. According to its value."

"That is what I mean," said my guardian. "You may observe, Mr. Bucket, that I abstain from examining this paper myself. The plain truth is, I have forsworn and abjured the whole business these many years, and my soul is sick of it. But Miss Summerson and I will immediately place the paper in the hands of my solicitor in the cause, and its existence shall be made known without delay to all other parties interested."

"Mr. Jarndyce can't say fairer than that, you understand," observed Mr. Bucket to his fellow-visitor. "And it being now made clear to you that nobody's a-going to be wronged—which must be a great relief to YOUR mind—we may proceed with the ceremony of chairing you home again."

He unbolted the door, called in the bearers, wished us good morning, and with a look full of meaning and a crook of his finger at parting went his way.

We went our way too, which was to Lincoln's Inn, as quickly as possible. Mr. Kenge was disengaged, and we found him at his table in his dusty room with the inexpressive-looking books and the piles of papers. Chairs having been placed for us by Mr. Guppy, Mr. Kenge expressed the surprise and gratification he felt at the unusual sight of Mr. Jarndyce in his office. He turned over his double eye-glass as he spoke and was more Conversation Kenge than ever.

"I hope," said Mr. Kenge, "that the genial influence of Miss Summerson," he bowed to me, "may have induced Mr. Jarndyce," he bowed to him, "to forego some little of his animosity towards a cause and towards a court which are—shall I say, which take their place in the stately vista of the pillars of our profession?"

"I am inclined to think," returned my guardian, "that Miss Summerson has seen too much of the effects of the court and the cause to exert any influence in their favour. Nevertheless, they are a part of the occasion of my being here. Mr. Kenge, before I lay this paper on your desk and have done with it, let me tell you how it has come into my hands."

He did so shortly and distinctly.

"It could not, sir," said Mr. Kenge, "have been stated more plainly and to the purpose if it had been a case at law."

"Did you ever know English law, or equity either, plain and to the purpose?" said my guardian.

"Oh, fie!" said Mr. Kenge.

At first he had not seemed to attach much importance to the paper, but when he saw it he appeared more interested, and when he had opened and read a little of it through his eye-glass, he became amazed. "Mr. Jarndyce," he said, looking off it, "you have perused this?"

"Not I!" returned my guardian.

"But, my dear sir," said Mr. Kenge, "it is a will of later date than any in the suit. It appears to be all in the testator's handwriting. It is duly executed and attested. And even if intended to be cancelled, as might possibly be supposed to be denoted by these marks of fire, it is NOT cancelled. Here it is, a perfect instrument!"

"Well!" said my guardian. "What is that to me?"

"Mr. Guppy!" cried Mr. Kenge, raising his voice. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Jarndyce."

"Sir."

"Mr. Vholes of Symond's Inn. My compliments. Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Glad to speak with him."

Mr. Guppy disappeared.

"You ask me what is this to you, Mr. Jarndyce. If you had perused this document, you would have seen that it reduces your interest considerably, though still leaving it a very handsome one, still leaving it a very handsome one," said Mr. Kenge, waving his hand persuasively and blandly. "You would further have seen that the interests of Mr. Richard Carstone and of Miss Ada Clare, now Mrs. Richard Carstone, are very materially advanced by it."

"Kenge," said my guardian, "if all the flourishing wealth that the suit brought into this vile court of Chancery could fall to my two young cousins, I should be well contented. But do you ask ME to believe that any good is to come of Jarndyce and Jarndyce?"

"Oh, really, Mr. Jarndyce! Prejudice, prejudice. My dear sir, this is a very great country, a very great country. Its system of equity is a very great system, a very great system. Really, really!"

My guardian said no more, and Mr. Vholes arrived. He was modestly impressed by Mr. Kenge's professional eminence.

"How do you do, Mr. Vholes? Willl you be so good as to take a chair here by me and look over this paper?"

Mr. Vholes did as he was asked and seemed to read it every word. He was not excited by it, but he was not excited by anything. When he had well examined it, he retired with Mr. Kenge into a window, and shading his mouth with his black glove, spoke to him at some length. I was not surprised to observe Mr. Kenge inclined to dispute what he said before he had said much, for I knew that no two people ever did agree about anything in Jarndyce and Jarndyce. But he seemed to get the better of Mr. Kenge too in a conversation that sounded as if it were almost composed of the words "Receiver-General," "Accountant-General," "report," "estate," and "costs." When they had finished, they came back to Mr. Kenge's table and spoke aloud.

"Well! But this is a very remarkable document, Mr. Vholes," said Mr. Kenge.

Mr. Vholes said, "Very much so."

"And a very important document, Mr. Vholes," said Mr. Kenge.

Again Mr. Vholes said, "Very much so."

"And as you say, Mr. Vholes, when the cause is in the paper next term, this document will be an unexpected and interesting feature in it," said Mr.

Kenge, looking loftily at my guardian.

Mr. Vholes was gratified, as a smaller practitioner striving to keep respectable, to be confirmed in any opinion of his own by such an authority.

"And when," asked my guardian, rising after a pause, during which Mr. Kenge had rattled his money and Mr. Vholes had picked his pimples, "when is next term?"

"Next term, Mr. Jarndyce, will be next month," said Mr. Kenge. "Of course we shall at once proceed to do what is necessary with this document and to collect the necessary evidence concerning it; and of course you will receive our usual notification of the cause being in the paper."

"To which I shall pay, of course, my usual attention."

"Still bent, my dear sir," said Mr. Kenge, showing us through the outer office to the door, "still bent, even with your enlarged mind, on echoing a popular prejudice? We are a prosperous community, Mr. Jarndyce, a very prosperous community. We are a great country, Mr. Jarndyce, we are a very great country. This is a great system, Mr. Jarndyce, and would you wish a great country to have a little system? Now, really, really!"

He said this at the stair-head, gently moving his right hand as if it were a silver trowel with which to spread the cement of his words on the structure of the system and consolidate it for a thousand ages.

CHAPTER LXIII. Steel and Iron

George's Shooting Gallery is to let, and the stock is sold off, and George himself is at Chesney Wold attending on Sir Leicester in his rides and riding very near his bridle-rein because of the uncertain hand with which he guides his horse. But not to-day is George so occupied. He is journeying to-day into the iron country farther north to look about him.

As he comes into the iron country farther north, such fresh green woods as those of Chesney Wold are left behind; and coal pits and ashes, high chimneys and red bricks, blighted verdure, scorching fires, and a heavy never-lightening cloud of smoke become the features of the scenery. Among such objects rides the trooper, looking about him and always looking for something he has come to find.

At last, on the black canal bridge of a busy town, with a clang of iron in it, and more fires and more smoke than he has seen yet, the trooper, swart with the dust of the coal roads, checks his horse and asks a workman does he know the name of Rouncewell thereabouts.

"Why, master," quoth the workman, "do I know my own name?"

"'Tis so well known here, is it, comrade?" asks the trooper.

"Rouncewell's? Ah! You're right."

"And where might it be now?" asks the trooper with a glance before him.

"The bank, the factory, or the house?" the workman wants to know.

"Hum! Rouncewell's is so great apparently," mutters the trooper, stroking his chin, "that I have as good as half a mind to go back again. Why, I don't know which I want. Should I find Mr. Rouncewell at the factory, do you think?"

"Tain't easy to say where you'd find him—at this time of the day you might find either him or his son there, if he's in town; but his contracts take him away."

And which is the factory? Why, he sees those chimneys—the tallest ones! Yes, he sees THEM. Well! Let him keep his eye on those chimneys, going on as straight as ever he can, and presently he'll see 'em down a turning on the left, shut in by a great brick wall which forms one side of the street. That's Rouncewell's.

The trooper thanks his informant and rides slowly on, looking about him. He does not turn back, but puts up his horse (and is much disposed to groom him too) at a public-house where some of Rouncewell's hands are dining, as the ostler tells him. Some of Rouncewell's hands have just knocked off for dinner-time and seem to be invading the whole town. They are very sinewy and strong, are Rouncewell's hands—a little sooty too.

He comes to a gateway in the brick wall, looks in, and sees a great perplexity of iron lying about in every stage and in a vast variety of shapes—in bars, in wedges, in sheets; in tanks, in boilers, in axles, in wheels, in cogs, in cranks, in rails; twisted and wrenched into eccentric and perverse forms as separate parts of machinery; mountains of it broken up, and rusty in its age; distant furnaces of it glowing and bubbling in its youth; bright fireworks of it showering about under the blows of the steam-hammer; red-hot iron, white-hot iron, cold-black iron; an iron taste, an iron smell, and a Babel of iron sounds.

"This is a place to make a man's head ache too!" says the trooper, looking about him for a counting-house. "Who comes here? This is very like me before I was set up. This ought to be my nephew, if likenesses run in families. Your servant, sir."

"Yours, sir. Are you looking for any one?"

"Excuse me. Young Mr. Rouncewell, I believe?"

"Yes."

"I was looking for your father, sir. I wish to have a word with him."

The young man, telling him he is fortunate in his choice of a time, for his father is there, leads the way to the office where he is to be found. "Very like me before I was set up—devilish like me!" thinks the trooper as he follows. They come to a building in the yard with an office on an upper floor. At sight of the gentleman in the office, Mr. George turns very red.

"What name shall I say to my father?" asks the young man.

George, full of the idea of iron, in desperation answers "Steel," and is so presented. He is left alone with the gentleman in the office, who sits at a table with account-books before him and some sheets of paper blotted with hosts of figures and drawings of cunning shapes. It is a bare office, with bare windows, looking on the iron view below. Tumbled together on the table are some pieces of iron, purposely broken to be tested at various periods of their service, in various capacities. There is iron-dust on everything; and the smoke is seen through the windows rolling heavily out of the tall chimneys to mingle with the smoke from a vaporous Babylon of other chimneys.

"I am at your service, Mr. Steel," says the gentleman when his visitor has taken a rusty chair.

"Well, Mr. Rouncewell," George replies, leaning forward with his left arm on his knee and his hat in his hand, and very chary of meeting his brother's eye, "I am not without my expectations that in the present visit I may prove to be more free than welcome. I have served as a dragoon in my day, and a comrade of mine that I was once rather partial to was, if I don't deceive myself, a brother of yours. I believe you had a brother who gave his family some trouble, and ran away, and never did any good but in keeping away?"

"Are you quite sure," returns the ironmaster in an altered voice, "that your name is Steel?"

The trooper falters and looks at him. His brother starts up, calls him by his name, and grasps him by both hands.

"You are too quick for me!" cries the trooper with the tears springing out of his eyes. "How do you do, my dear old fellow? I never could have thought you would have been half so glad to see me as all this. How do you do, my dear old fellow, how do you do!"

They shake hands and embrace each other over and over again, the trooper still coupling his "How do you do, my dear old fellow!" with his protestation that he never thought his brother would have been half so glad to see him as all this!

"So far from it," he declares at the end of a full account of what has preceded his arrival there, "I had very little idea of making myself known. I thought if you took by any means forgivingly to my name I might gradually get myself up to the point of writing a letter. But I should not have been surprised, brother, if you had considered it anything but welcome news to hear of me."

"We will show you at home what kind of news we think it, George," returns his brother. "This is a great day at home, and you could not have arrived, you bronzed old soldier, on a better. I make an agreement with my son Watt to-day that on this day twelvemonth he shall marry as pretty and as good a girl as you have seen in all your travels. She goes to Germany to-morrow with one of your nieces for a little polishing up in her education. We make a feast of the event, and you will be made the hero of it."

Mr. George is so entirely overcome at first by this prospect that he resists the proposed honour with great earnestness. Being overborne, however, by his brother and his nephew—concerning whom he renews his protestations that he never could have thought they would have been half so glad to see him—he is taken home to an elegant house in all the arrangements of which there is to be observed a pleasant mixture of the originally simple habits of the father and mother with such as are suited to their altered station and the higher fortunes of their children. Here Mr. George is much dismayed by the graces and accomplishments of his nieces that are and by the beauty of Rosa, his niece that is to be, and by the affectionate salutations of these young ladies, which he receives in a sort of dream. He is sorely taken aback, too, by the dutiful behaviour of his nephew and has a woeful consciousness upon him of being a scapegrace. However, there is great rejoicing and a very hearty company and infinite enjoyment, and Mr. George comes bluff and martial through it all, and his pledge to be present at the marriage and give away the bride is received with universal favour. A whirling head has Mr. George that night when he lies down in the state-bed of his brother's house to think of all these things and to see the images of his nieces (awful all the evening in their floating muslins) waltzing, after the German manner, over his counterpane.

The brothers are closeted next morning in the ironmaster's room, where the elder is proceeding, in his clear sensible way, to show how he thinks he may best dispose of George in his business, when George squeezes his hand and stops him.

"Brother, I thank you a million times for your more than brotherly welcome, and a million times more to that for your more than brotherly intentions. But my plans are made. Before I say a word as to them, I wish to consult you upon one family point. How," says the trooper, folding his arms and looking with indomitable firmness at his brother, "how is my mother to be got to scratch me?"

"I am not sure that I understand you, George," replies the ironmaster.

"I say, brother, how is my mother to be got to scratch me? She must be got to do it somehow."

"Scratch you out of her will, I think you mean?"

"Of course I do. In short," says the trooper, folding his arms more resolutely yet, "I mean—TO—scratch me!"

"My dear George," returns his brother, "is it so indispensable that you should undergo that process?"

"Quite! Absolutely! I couldn't be guilty of the meanness of coming back without it. I should never be safe not to be off again. I have not sneaked home to rob your children, if not yourself, brother, of your rights. I, who forfeited mine long ago! If I am to remain and hold up my head, I must be scratched. Come. You are a man of celebrated penetration and intelligence, and you can tell me how it's to be brought about."

"I can tell you, George," replies the ironmaster deliberately, "how it is not to be brought about, which I hope may answer the purpose as well. Look at our mother, think of her, recall her emotion when she recovered you. Do you believe there is a consideration in the world that would induce her to take such a step against her favourite son? Do you believe there is any chance of her consent, to balance against the outrage it would be to her (loving dear old lady!) to propose it? If you do, you are wrong. No, George! You must make up your mind to remain UNscratched, I think." There is an amused smile on the ironmaster's face as he watches his brother, who is pondering, deeply disappointed. "I think you may manage almost as well as if the thing were done, though."

"How, brother?"

"Being bent upon it, you can dispose by will of anything you have the misfortune to inherit in any way you like, you know."

"That's true!" says the trooper, pondering again. Then he wistfully asks, with his hand on his brother's, "Would you mind mentioning that, brother, to your wife and family?"

"Not at all."

"Thank you. You wouldn't object to say, perhaps, that although an undoubted vagabond, I am a vagabond of the harum-scarum order, and not of the mean sort?"

The ironmaster, repressing his amused smile, assents.

"Thank you. Thank you. It's a weight off my mind," says the trooper with a heave of his chest as he unfolds his arms and puts a hand on each leg, "though I had set my heart on being scratched, too!"

The brothers are very like each other, sitting face to face; but a certain massive simplicity and absence of usage in the ways of the world is all on the trooper's side.

"Well," he proceeds, throwing off his disappointment, "next and last, those plans of mine. You have been so brotherly as to propose to me to fall in here and take my place among the products of your perseverance and sense. I thank you heartily. It's more than brotherly, as I said before, and I thank you heartily for it," shaking him a long time by the hand. "But the truth is, brother, I am a—I am a kind of a weed, and it's too late to plant me in a regular garden."

"My dear George," returns the elder, concentrating his strong steady brow upon him and smiling confidently, "leave that to me, and let me try."

George shakes his head. "You could do it, I have not a doubt, if anybody could; but it's not to be done. Not to be done, sir! Whereas it so falls out, on the other hand, that I am able to be of some trifle of use to Sir Leicester Dedlock since his illness—brought on by family sorrows—and that he would rather have that help from our mother's son than from anybody else."

"Well, my dear George," returns the other with a very slight shade upon his open face, "if you prefer to serve in Sir Leicester Dedlock's household brigade—"

"There it is, brother," cries the trooper, checking him, with his hand upon his knee again; "there it is! You don't take kindly to that idea; I don't mind it. You are not used to being officered; I am. Everything about you is in perfect order and discipline; everything about me requires to be kept so. We are not accustomed to carry things with the same hand or to look at 'em from the same point. I don't say much about my garrison manners because I found myself pretty well at my ease last night, and they wouldn't be noticed here, I dare say, once and away. But I shall get on best at Chesney Wold, where there's more room for a weed than there is here; and the dear old lady will be made happy besides. Therefore I accept of Sir Leicester Dedlock's proposals. When I come over next year to give away the bride, or whenever I come, I shall have the sense to keep the household brigade in ambuscade and not to manoeuvre it on your ground. I thank you heartily again and am proud to think of the Rouncewells as they'll be founded by you."

"You know yourself, George," says the elder brother, returning the grip of his hand, "and perhaps you know me better than I know myself. Take your way. So that we don't quite lose one another again, take your way."

"No fear of that!" returns the trooper. "Now, before I turn my horse's head homewards, brother, I will ask you—if you'll be so good—to look over a letter for me. I brought it with me to send from these parts, as Chesney Wold might be a painful name just now to the person it's written to. I am not much accustomed to correspondence myself, and I am particular respecting this present letter because I want it to be both straightforward and delicate."

Herewith he hands a letter, closely written in somewhat pale ink but in a neat round hand, to the ironmaster, who reads as follows:

> *Miss Esther Summerson,*
>
> *A communication having been made to me by Inspector Bucket of a letter to myself being found among the papers of a certain person, I take the liberty to make known to you that it was but a few lines of*

instruction from abroad, when, where, and how to deliver an enclosed letter to a young and beautiful lady, then unmarried, in England. I duly observed the same.

I further take the liberty to make known to you that it was got from me as a proof of handwriting only and that otherwise I would not have given it up, as appearing to be the most harmless in my possession, without being previously shot through the heart.

I further take the liberty to mention that if I could have supposed a certain unfortunate gentleman to have been in existence, I never could and never would have rested until I had discovered his retreat and shared my last farthing with him, as my duty and my inclination would have equally been. But he was (officially) reported drowned, and assuredly went over the side of a transport-ship at night in an Irish harbour within a few hours of her arrival from the West Indies, as I have myself heard both from officers and men on board, and know to have been (officially) confirmed.

I further take the liberty to state that in my humble quality as one of the rank and file, I am, and shall ever continue to be, your thoroughly devoted and admiring servant and that I esteem the qualities you possess above all others far beyond the limits of the present dispatch.

I have the honour to be,

GEORGE

"A little formal," observes the elder brother, refolding it with a puzzled face.

"But nothing that might not be sent to a pattern young lady?" asks the younger.

"Nothing at all."

Therefore it is sealed and deposited for posting among the iron correspondence of the day. This done, Mr. George takes a hearty farewell of the family party and prepares to saddle and mount. His brother, however, unwilling to part with him so soon, proposes to ride with him in a light open carriage to the place where he will bait for the night, and there remain with him until morning, a servant riding for so much of the journey on the thoroughbred old grey from Chesney Wold. The offer, being gladly accepted, is followed by a pleasant ride, a pleasant dinner, and a pleasant breakfast, all in brotherly communion. Then they once more shake hands long and heartily and part, the ironmaster turning his face to the smoke and fires, and the trooper to the green country. Early in the afternoon the subdued sound of his heavy military trot is heard on the turf in the avenue as he rides on with imaginary clank and jingle of accoutrements under the old elm-trees.

CHAPTER LXIV. Esther's Narrative

Soon after I had that convertion with my guardian, he put a sealed paper in my hand one morning and said, "This is for next month, my dear." I found in it two hundred pounds.

I now began very quietly to make such preparations as I thought were necessary. Regulating my purchases by my guardian's taste, which I knew very well of course, I arranged my wardrobe to please him and hoped I should be highly successful. I did it all so quietly because I was not quite free from my old apprehension that Ada would be rather sorry and because my guardian was so quiet himself. I had no doubt that under all the circumstances we should be married in the most private and simple manner. Perhaps I should only have to say to Ada, "Would you like to come and see me married to-morrow, my pet?" Perhaps our wedding might even be as unpretending as her own, and I might not find it necessary to say anything about it until it was over. I thought that if I were to choose, I would like this best.

The only exception I made was Mrs. Woodcourt. I told her that I was going to be married to my guardian and that we had been engaged some time. She highly approved. She could never do enough for me and was remarkably softened now in comparison with what she had been when we first knew her. There was no trouble she would not have taken to have been of use to me, but I need hardly say that I only allowed her to take as little as gratified her kindness without tasking it.

Of course this was not a time to neglect my guardian, and of course it was not a time for neglecting my darling. So I had plenty of occupation, which I was glad of; and as to Charley, she was absolutely not to be seen for needlework. To surround herself with great heaps of it—baskets full and tables full—and do a little, and spend a great deal of time in staring with her round eyes at what there was to do, and persuade herself that she was going to do it, were Charley's great dignities and delights.

Meanwhile, I must say, I could not agree with my guardian on the subject of the will, and I had some sanguine hopes of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Which of us was right will soon appear, but I certainly did encourage expectations. In Richard, the discovery gave occasion for a burst of business and agitation that buoyed him up for a little time, but he had lost the elasticity even of hope now and seemed to me to retain only its feverish anxieties. From something my guardian said one day when we were talking about this, I understood that my marriage would not take place until after the term-time we had been told to look forward to; and I thought the more, for that, how rejoiced I should be if I could be married when Richard and Ada were a little more prosperous.

The term was very near indeed when my guardian was called out of town and went down into Yorkshire on Mr. Woodcourt's business. He had told me beforehand that his presence there would be necessary. I had just come in one night from my dear girl's and was sitting in the midst of all my new clothes, looking at them all around me and thinking, when a letter from my guardian was brought to me. It asked me to join him in the country and mentioned by what stage-coach my place was taken and at what time in the morning I should have to leave town. It added in a postscript that I would not be many hours from Ada.

I expected few things less than a journey at that time, but I was ready for it in half an hour and set off as appointed early next morning. I travelled all day, wondering all day what I could be wanted for at such a distance; now I thought it might be for this purpose, and now I thought it might be for that purpose, but I was never, never, never near the truth.

It was night when I came to my journey's end and found my guardian waiting for me. This was a great relief, for towards evening I had begun to fear (the more so as his letter was a very short one) that he might be ill. However, there he was, as well as it was possible to be; and when I saw his genial face again at its brightest and best, I said to myself, he has been doing some other great kindness. Not that it required much penetration to say that, because I knew that his being there at all was an act of kindness.

Supper was ready at the hotel, and when we were alone at table he said, "Full of curiosity, no doubt, little woman, to know why I have brought you here?"

"Well, guardian," said I, "without thinking myself a Fatima or you a Blue Beard, I am a little curious about it."

"Then to ensure your night's rest, my love," he returned gaily, "I won't wait until to-morrow to tell you. I have very much wished to express to Woodcourt, somehow, my sense of his humanity to poor unfortunate Jo, his inestimable services to my young cousins, and his value to us all. When it was decided that he should settle here, it came into my head that I might ask his acceptance of some unpretending and suitable little place to lay his own head in. I therefore caused such a place to be looked out for, and such a place was found on very easy terms, and I have been touching it up for him and making it habitable. However, when I walked over it the day before yesterday and it was reported ready, I found that I was not housekeeper enough to know whether things were all as they ought to be. So I sent off for the best little housekeeper that could possibly be got to come and give me her advice and opinion. And here she is," said my guardian, "laughing and crying both together!"

Because he was so dear, so good, so admirable. I tried to tell him what I thought of him, but I could not articulate a word.

"Tut, tut!" said my guardian. "You make too much of it, little woman. Why, how you sob, Dame Durden, how you sob!"

"It is with exquisite pleasure, guardian—with a heart full of thanks."

"Well, well," said he. "I am delighted that you approve. I thought you would. I meant it as a pleasant surprise for the little mistress of Bleak House."

I kissed him and dried my eyes. "I know now!" said I. "I have seen this in your face a long while."

"No; have you really, my dear?" said he. "What a Dame Durden it is to read a face!"

He was so quaintly cheerful that I could not long be otherwise, and was almost ashamed of having been otherwise at all. When I went to bed, I cried. I am bound to confess that I cried; but I hope it was with pleasure, though I am not quite sure it was with pleasure. I repeated every word of the letter twice over.

A most beautiful summer morning succeeded, and after breakfast we went out arm in arm to see the house of which I was to give my mighty housekeeping opinion. We entered a flower-garden by a gate in a side wall, of which he had the key, and the first thing I saw was that the beds and flowers were all laid out according to the manner of my beds and flowers at home.

"You see, my dear," observed my guardian, standing still with a delighted face to watch my looks, "knowing there could be no better plan, I borrowed yours."

We went on by a pretty little orchard, where the cherries were nestling among the green leaves and the shadows of the apple-trees were sporting on the grass, to the house itself—a cottage, quite a rustic cottage of doll's rooms; but such a lovely place, so tranquil and so beautiful, with such a rich and smiling country spread around it; with water sparkling away into the distance, here all overhung with summer-growth, there turning a humming mill; at its nearest point glancing through a meadow by the cheerful town, where cricket-players were assembling in bright groups and a flag was flying from a white tent that rippled in the sweet west wind. And still, as we went through the pretty rooms, out at the little rustic verandah doors, and underneath the tiny wooden colonnades garlanded with woodbine, jasmine, and honey-suckle, I saw in the papering on the walls, in the colours of the furniture, in the arrangement of all the pretty objects, MY little tastes and fancies, MY little methods and inventions which they used to laugh at while they praised them, my odd ways everywhere.

I could not say enough in admiration of what was all so beautiful, but one secret doubt arose in my mind when I saw this, I thought, oh, would he be the happier for it! Would it not have been better for his peace that I should not have been so brought before him? Because although I was not what he thought me, still he loved me very dearly, and it might remind him mournfully of what be believed he had lost. I did not wish him to forget me—perhaps he might not have done so, without these aids to his memory—

but my way was easier than his, and I could have reconciled myself even to that so that he had been the happier for it.

"And now, little woman," said my guardian, whom I had never seen so proud and joyful as in showing me these things and watching my appreciation of them, "now, last of all, for the name of this house."

"What is it called, dear guardian?"

"My child," said he, "come and see,"

He took me to the porch, which he had hitherto avoided, and said, pausing before we went out, "My dear child, don't you guess the name?"

"No!" said I.

We went out of the porch and he showed me written over it, Bleak House.

He led me to a seat among the leaves close by, and sitting down beside me and taking my hand in his, spoke to me thus, "My darling girl, in what there has been between us, I have, I hope, been really solicitous for your happiness. When I wrote you the letter to which you brought the answer," smiling as he referred to it, "I had my own too much in view; but I had yours too. Whether, under different circumstances, I might ever have renewed the old dream I sometimes dreamed when you were very young, of making you my wife one day, I need not ask myself. I did renew it, and I wrote my letter, and you brought your answer. You are following what I say, my child?"

I was cold, and I trembled violently, but not a word he uttered was lost. As I sat looking fixedly at him and the sun's rays descended, softly shining through the leaves upon his bare head, I felt as if the brightness on him must be like the brightness of the angels.

"Hear me, my love, but do not speak. It is for me to speak now. When it was that I began to doubt whether what I had done would really make you happy is no matter. Woodcourt came home, and I soon had no doubt at all."

I clasped him round the neck and hung my head upon his breast and wept. "Lie lightly, confidently here, my child," said he, pressing me gently to him. "I am your guardian and your father now. Rest confidently here."

Soothingly, like the gentle rustling of the leaves; and genially, like the ripening weather; and radiantly and beneficently, like the sunshine, he went on.

"Understand me, my dear girl. I had no doubt of your being contented and happy with me, being so dutiful and so devoted; but I saw with whom you would be happier. That I penetrated his secret when Dame Durden was blind to it is no wonder, for I knew the good that could never change in her better far than she did. Well! I have long been in Allan Woodcourt's confidence, although he was not, until yesterday, a few hours before you came here, in mine. But I would not have my Esther's bright example lost; I would not have a jot of my dear girl's virtues unobserved and unhonoured; I would not have her admitted on sufferance into the line of Morgan ap-Kerrig, no, not for the weight in gold of all the mountains in Wales!"

He stopped to kiss me on the forehead, and I sobbed and wept afresh. For I felt as if I could not bear the painful delight of his praise.

"Hush, little woman! Don't cry; this is to be a day of joy. I have looked forward to it," he said exultingly, "for months on months! A few words more, Dame Trot, and I have said my say. Determined not to throw away one atom of my Esther's worth, I took Mrs. Woodcourt into a separate confidence. 'Now, madam,' said I, 'I clearly perceive—and indeed I know, to boot—that your son loves my ward. I am further very sure that my ward loves your son, but will sacrifice her love to a sense of duty and affection, and will sacrifice it so completely, so entirely, so religiously, that you should never suspect it though you watched her night and day.' Then I told her all our story—ours—yours and mine. 'Now, madam,' said I, 'come you, knowing this, and live with us. Come you, and see my child from hour to hour; set what you see against her pedigree, which is this, and this'—for I scorned to mince it—'and tell me what is the true legitimacy when you shall have quite made up your mind on that subject.' Why, honour to her old Welsh blood, my dear," cried my guardian with enthusiasm, "I believe the heart it animates beats no less warmly, no less admiringly, no less lovingly, towards Dame Durden than my own!"

He tenderly raised my head, and as I clung to him, kissed me in his old fatherly way again and again. What a light, now, on the protecting manner I had thought about!

"One more last word. When Allan Woodcourt spoke to you, my dear, he spoke with my knowledge and consent—but I gave him no encouragement, not I, for these surprises were my great reward, and I was too miserly to part with a scrap of it. He was to come and tell me all that passed, and he did. I have no more to say. My dearest, Allan Woodcourt stood beside your father when he lay dead—stood beside your mother. This is Bleak House. This day I give this house its little mistress; and before God, it is the brightest day in all my life!"

He rose and raised me with him. We were no longer alone. My husband—I have called him by that name full seven happy years now—stood at my side.

"Allan," said my guardian, "take from me a willing gift, the best wife that ever man had. What more can I say for you than that I know you deserve her! Take with her the little home she brings you. You know what she will make it, Allan; you know what she has made its namesake. Let me share its felicity sometimes, and what do I sacrifice? Nothing, nothing."

He kissed me once again, and now the tears were in his eyes as he said more softly, "Esther, my dearest, after so many years, there is a kind of parting in this too. I know that my mistake has caused you some distress. Forgive your old guardian, in restoring him to his old place in your affections; and blot it out of your memory. Allan, take my dear."

He moved away from under the green roof of leaves, and stopping in the sunlight outside and turning cheerfully towards us, said, "I shall be found about here somewhere. It's a west wind, little woman, due west! Let no one thank me any more, for I am going to revert to my bachelor habits, and if anybody disregards this warning, I'll run away and never come back!"

What happiness was ours that day, what joy, what rest, what hope, what gratitude, what bliss! We were to be married before the month was out, but when we were to come and take possession of our own house was to depend on Richard and Ada.

We all three went home together next day. As soon as we arrived in town, Allan went straight to see Richard and to carry our joyful news to him and my darling. Late as it was, I meant to go to her for a few minutes before lying down to sleep, but I went home with my guardian first to make his tea for him and to occupy the old chair by his side, for I did not like to think of its being empty so soon.

When we came home we found that a young man had called three times in the course of that one day to see me and that having been told on the occasion of his third call that I was not expected to return before ten o'clock at night, he had left word that he would call about then. He had left his card three times. Mr. Guppy.

As I naturally speculated on the object of these visits, and as I always associated something ludicrous with the visitor, it fell out that in laughing about Mr. Guppy I told my guardian of his old proposal and his subsequent retraction. "After that," said my guardian, "we will certainly receive this hero." So instructions were given that Mr. Guppy should be shown in when he came again, and they were scarcely given when he did come again.

He was embarrassed when he found my guardian with me, but recovered himself and said, "How de do, sir?"

"How do you do, sir?" returned my guardian.

"Thank you, sir, I am tolerable," returned Mr. Guppy. "Will you allow me to introduce my mother, Mrs. Guppy of the Old Street Road, and my particular friend, Mr. Weevle. That is to say, my friend has gone by the name of Weevle, but his name is really and truly Jobling."

My guardian begged them to be seated, and they all sat down.

"Tony," said Mr. Guppy to his friend after an awkward silence. "Will you open the case?"

"Do it yourself," returned the friend rather tartly.

"Well, Mr. Jarndyce, sir," Mr. Guppy, after a moment's consideration, began, to the great diversion of his mother, which she displayed by nudging Mr. Jobling with her elbow and winking at me in a most remarkable manner, "I had an idea that I should see Miss Summerson by herself and was not quite prepared for your esteemed presence. But Miss Summerson has mentioned to you, perhaps, that something has passed between us on former occasions?"

"Miss Summerson," returned my guardian, smiling, "has made a communication to that effect to me."

"That," said Mr. Guppy, "makes matters easier. Sir, I have come out of my articles at Kenge and Carboy's, and I believe with satisfaction to all parties. I am now admitted (after undergoing an examination that's enough to badger a man blue, touching a pack of nonsense that he don't want to know) on the roll of attorneys and have taken out my certificate, if it would be any satisfaction to you to see it."

"Thank you, Mr. Guppy," returned my guardian. "I am quite willing—I believe I use a legal phrase—to admit the certificate."

Mr. Guppy therefore desisted from taking something out of his pocket and proceeded without it.

"I have no capital myself, but my mother has a little property which takes the form of an annuity"—here Mr. Guppy's mother rolled her head as if she never could sufficiently enjoy the observation, and put her handkerchief to her mouth, and again winked at me—"and a few pounds for expenses out of pocket in conducting business will never be wanting, free of interest, which is an advantage, you know," said Mr. Guppy feelingly.

"Certainly an advantage," returned my guardian.

"I HAVE some connexion," pursued Mr. Guppy, "and it lays in the direction of Walcot Square, Lambeth. I have therefore taken a 'ouse in that locality, which, in the opinion of my friends, is a hollow bargain (taxes ridiculous, and use of fixtures included in the rent), and intend setting up professionally for myself there forthwith."

Here Mr. Guppy's mother fell into an extraordinary passion of rolling her head and smiling waggishly at anybody who would look at her.

"It's a six-roomer, exclusive of kitchens," said Mr. Guppy, "and in the opinion of my friends, a commodious tenement. When I mention my friends, I refer principally to my friend Jobling, who I believe has known me," Mr. Guppy looked at him with a sentimental air, "from boyhood's hour."

Mr. Jobling confirmed this with a sliding movement of his legs.

"My friend Jobling will render me his assistance in the capacity of clerk and will live in the 'ouse," said Mr. Guppy. "My mother will likewise live in the 'ouse when her present quarter in the Old Street Road shall have ceased and expired; and consequently there will be no want of society. My friend Jobling is naturally aristocratic by taste, and besides being acquainted with the movements of the upper circles, fully backs me in the intentions I am now developing."

Mr. Jobling said "Certainly" and withdrew a little from the elbow of Mr Guppy's mother.

"Now, I have no occasion to mention to you, sir, you being in the confidence of Miss Summerson," said Mr. Guppy, "(mother, I wish you'd be so good as to keep still), that Miss Summerson's image was formerly imprinted on my 'eart and that I made her a proposal of marriage."

"That I have heard," returned my guardian.

"Circumstances," pursued Mr. Guppy, "over which I had no control, but quite the contrary, weakened the impression of that image for a time. At which time Miss Summerson's conduct was highly genteel; I may even add, magnanimous."

My guardian patted me on the shoulder and seemed much amused.

"Now, sir," said Mr. Guppy, "I have got into that state of mind myself that I wish for a reciprocity of magnanimous behaviour. I wish to prove to Miss Summerson that I can rise to a heighth of which perhaps she hardly thought me capable. I find that the image which I did suppose had been eradicated from my 'eart is NOT eradicated. Its influence over me is still tremenjous, and yielding to it, I am willing to overlook the circumstances over which none of us have had any control and to renew those proposals to Miss Summerson which I had the honour to make at a former period. I beg to lay the 'ouse in Walcot Square, the business, and myself before Miss Summerson for her acceptance."

"Very magnanimous indeed, sir," observed my guardian.

"Well, sir," replied Mr. Guppy with candour, "my wish is to BE magnanimous. I do not consider that in making this offer to Miss Summerson I am by any means throwing myself away; neither is that the opinion of my friends. Still, there are circumstances which I submit may be taken into account as a set off against any little drawbacks of mine, and so a fair and equitable balance arrived at."

"I take upon myself, sir," said my guardian, laughing as he rang the bell, "to reply to your proposals on behalf of Miss Summerson. She is very sensible of your handsome intentions, and wishes you good evening, and wishes you well."

"Oh!" said Mr. Guppy with a blank look. "Is that tantamount, sir, to acceptance, or rejection, or consideration?"

"To decided rejection, if you please," returned my guardian.

Mr. Guppy looked incredulously at his friend, and at his mother, who suddenly turned very angry, and at the floor, and at the ceiling.

"Indeed?" said he. "Then, Jobling, if you was the friend you represent yourself, I should think you might hand my mother out of the gangway instead of allowing her to remain where she ain't wanted."

But Mrs. Guppy positively refused to come out of the gangway. She wouldn't hear of it. "Why, get along with you," said she to my guardian, "what do you mean? Ain't my son good enough for you? You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Get out with you!"

"My good lady," returned my guardian, "it is hardly reasonable to ask me to get out of my own room."

"I don't care for that," said Mrs. Guppy. "Get out with you. If we ain't good enough for you, go and procure somebody that is good enough. Go along and find 'em."

I was quite unprepared for the rapid manner in which Mrs. Guppy's power of jocularity merged into a power of taking the profoundest offence.

"Go along and find somebody that's good enough for you," repeated Mrs. Guppy. "Get out!" Nothing seemed to astonish Mr. Guppy's mother so much and to make her so very indignant as our not getting out. "Why don't you get out?" said Mrs. Guppy. "What are you stopping here for?"

"Mother," interposed her son, always getting before her and pushing her back with one shoulder as she sidled at my guardian, "WILL you hold your tongue?"

"No, William," she returned, "I won't! Not unless he gets out, I won't!"

However, Mr. Guppy and Mr. Jobling together closed on Mr. Guppy's mother (who began to be quite abusive) and took her, very much against her will, downstairs, her voice rising a stair higher every time her figure got a stair lower, and insisting that we should immediately go and find somebody who was good enough for us, and above all things that we should get out.

CHAPTER LXV. Beginning the World

The term had commenced, and my guardian found an intimation from Mr. Kenge that the cause would come on in two days. As I had sufficient hopes of the will to be in a flutter about it, Allan and I agreed to go down to the court that morning. Richard was extremely agitated and was so weak and low, though his illness was still of the mind, that my dear girl indeed had sore occasion to be supported. But she looked forward—a very little way now—to the help that was to come to her, and never drooped.

It was at Westminster that the cause was to come on. It had come on there, I dare say, a hundred times before, but I could not divest myself of an idea that it MIGHT lead to some result now. We left home directly after breakfast to be at Westminster Hall in good time and walked down there through the lively streets—so happily and strangely it seemed!—together.

As we were going along, planning what we should do for Richard and Ada, I heard somebody calling "Esther! My dear Esther! Esther!" And there was Caddy Jellyby, with her head out of the window of a little carriage which she hired now to go about in to her pupils (she had so many), as if she wanted to embrace me at a hundred yards' distance. I had written her a note to tell her of all that my guardian had done, but had not had a moment to go and see her. Of course we turned back, and the affectionate girl was in that state of rapture, and was so overjoyed to talk about the night when she brought me the flowers, and was so determined to squeeze my face (bonnet and all) between her hands, and go on in a wild manner altogether, calling me all kinds of precious names, and telling Allan I had done I don't know what for her, that I was just obliged to get into the little carriage and calm her down by letting her say and do exactly what she liked. Allan, standing at the window, was as pleased as Caddy; and I was as pleased as either of them; and I wonder that I got away as I did, rather than that I came off laughing, and red, and anything but tidy, and looking after Caddy, who looked after us out of the coach-window as long as she could see us.

This made us some quarter of an hour late, and when we came to Westminster Hall we found that the day's business was begun. Worse than that, we found such an unusual crowd in the Court of Chancery that it was full to the door, and we could neither see nor hear what was passing within. It appeared to be something droll, for occasionally there was a laugh and a cry of "Silence!" It appeared to be something interesting, for every one was pushing and striving to get nearer. It appeared to be something that made the professional gentlemen very merry, for there were several young counsellors in wigs and whiskers on the outside of the crowd, and when one of them told the others about it, they put their hands in their pockets, and quite doubled themselves up with laughter, and went stamping about the pavement of the Hall.

We asked a gentleman by us if he knew what cause was on. He told us Jarndyce and Jarndyce. We asked him if he knew what was doing in it. He said really, no he did not, nobody ever did, but as well as he could make out, it was over. Over for the day? we asked him. No, he said, over for good.

Over for good!

When we heard this unaccountable answer, we looked at one another quite lost in amazement. Could it be possible that the will had set things right at last and that Richard and Ada were going to be rich? It seemed too good to be true. Alas it was!

Our suspense was short, for a break-up soon took place in the crowd, and the people came streaming out looking flushed and hot and bringing a quantity of bad air with them. Still they were all exceedingly amused and were more like people coming out from a farce or a juggler than from a court of justice. We stood aside, watching for any countenance we knew, and presently great bundles of paper began to be carried out—bundles in bags, bundles too large to be got into any bags, immense masses of papers of all shapes and no shapes, which the bearers staggered under, and threw down for the time being, anyhow, on the Hall pavement, while they went back to bring out more. Even these clerks were laughing. We glanced at the papers, and seeing Jarndyce and Jarndyce everywhere, asked an official-looking person who was standing in the midst of them whether the cause was over. Yes, he said, it was all up with it at last, and burst out laughing too.

At this juncture we perceived Mr. Kenge coming out of court with an affable dignity upon him, listening to Mr. Vholes, who was deferential and carried his own bag. Mr. Vholes was the first to see us. "Here is Miss Summerson, sir," he said. "And Mr. Woodcourt."

"Oh, indeed! Yes. Truly!" said Mr. Kenge, raising his hat to me with polished politeness. "How do you do? Glad to see you. Mr. Jarndyce is not here?"

No. He never came there, I reminded him.

"Really," returned Mr. Kenge, "it is as well that he is NOT here to-day, for his—shall I say, in my good friend's absence, his indomitable singularity of opinion?—might have been strengthened, perhaps; not reasonably, but might have been strengthened."

"Pray what has been done to-day?" asked Allan.

"I beg your pardon?" said Mr. Kenge with excessive urbanity.

"What has been done to-day?"

"What has been done," repeated Mr. Kenge. "Quite so. Yes. Why, not much has been done; not much. We have been checked—brought up suddenly, I would say—upon the—shall I term it threshold?"

"Is this will considered a genuine document, sir?" said Allan. "Will you tell us that?"

"Most certainly, if I could," said Mr. Kenge; "but we have not gone into that, we have not gone into that."

"We have not gone into that," repeated Mr. Vholes as if his low inward voice were an echo.

"You are to reflect, Mr. Woodcourt," observed Mr. Kenge, using his silver trowel persuasively and smoothingly, "that this has been a great cause, that this has been a protracted cause, that this has been a complex cause. Jarndyce and Jarndyce has been termed, not inaptly, a monument of Chancery practice."

"And patience has sat upon it a long time," said Allan.

"Very well indeed, sir," returned Mr. Kenge with a certain condescending laugh he had. "Very well! You are further to reflect, Mr. Woodcourt," becoming dignified almost to severity, "that on the numerous difficulties, contingencies, masterly fictions, and forms of procedure in this great cause, there has been expended study, ability, eloquence, knowledge, intellect, Mr. Woodcourt, high intellect. For many years, the—a—I would say the flower of the bar, and the—a—I would presume to add, the matured autumnal fruits of the woolsack—have been lavished upon Jarndyce and Jarndyce. If the public have the benefit, and if the country have the adornment, of this great grasp, it must be paid for in money or money's worth, sir."

"Mr. Kenge," said Allan, appearing enlightened all in a moment. "Excuse me, our time presses. Do I understand that the whole estate is found to have been absorbed in costs?"

"Hem! I believe so," returned Mr. Kenge. "Mr. Vholes, what do YOU say?"

"I believe so," said Mr. Vholes.

"And that thus the suit lapses and melts away?"

"Probably," returned Mr. Kenge. "Mr. Vholes?"

"Probably," said Mr. Vholes.

"My dearest life," whispered Allan, "this will break Richard's heart!"

There was such a shock of apprehension in his face, and he knew Richard so perfectly, and I too had seen so much of his gradual decay, that what my dear girl had said to me in the fullness of her foreboding love sounded like a knell in my ears.

"In case you should be wanting Mr. C., sir," said Mr. Vholes, coming after us, "you'll find him in court. I left him there resting himself a little. Good day, sir; good day, Miss Summerson." As he gave me that slowly devouring look of his, while twisting up the strings of his bag before he hastened with it after Mr. Kenge, the benignant shadow of whose conversational presence he seemed afraid to leave, he gave one gasp as if he had swallowed the last morsel of his client, and his black buttoned-up unwholesome figure glided away to the low door at the end of the Hall.

"My dear love," said Allan, "leave to me, for a little while, the charge you gave me. Go home with this intelligence and come to Ada's by and by!"

I would not let him take me to a coach, but entreated him to go to Richard without a moment's delay and leave me to do as he wished. Hurrying home, I found my guardian and told him gradually with what news I had returned. "Little woman," said he, quite unmoved for himself, "to have done with the suit on any terms is a greater blessing than I had looked for. But my poor young cousins!"

We talked about them all the morning and discussed what it was possible to do. In the afternoon my guardian walked with me to Symond's Inn and left me at the door. I went upstairs. When my darling heard my footsteps, she came out into the small passage and threw her arms round my neck, but she composed herself directly and said that Richard had asked for me several times. Allan had found him sitting in the corner of the court, she told me, like a stone figure. On being roused, he had broken away and made as if he would have spoken in a fierce voice to the judge. He was stopped by his mouth being full of blood, and Allan had brought him home.

He was lying on a sofa with his eyes closed when I went in. There were restoratives on the table; the room was made as airy as possible, and was darkened, and was very orderly and quiet. Allan stood behind him watching him gravely. His face appeared to me to be quite destitute of colour, and now that I saw him without his seeing me, I fully saw, for the first time, how worn away he was. But he looked handsomer than I had seen him look for many a day.

I sat down by his side in silence. Opening his eyes by and by, he said in a weak voice, but with his old smile, "Dame Durden, kiss me, my dear!"

It was a great comfort and surprise to me to find him in his low state cheerful and looking forward. He was happier, he said, in our intended marriage than he could find words to tell me. My husband had been a guardian angel to him and Ada, and he blessed us both and wished us all the joy that life could yield us. I almost felt as if my own heart would have broken when I saw him take my husband's hand and hold it to his breast.

We spoke of the future as much as possible, and he said several times that he must be present at our marriage if he could stand upon his feet. Ada would contrive to take him, somehow, he said. "Yes, surely, dearest Richard!" But as my darling answered him thus hopefully, so serene and beautiful, with the help that was to come to her so near—I knew—I knew!

It was not good for him to talk too much, and when he was silent, we were silent too. Sitting beside him, I made a pretence of working for my dear, as he had always been used to joke about my being busy. Ada leaned upon his pillow, holding his head upon her arm. He dozed often, and whenever he awoke without seeing him, said first of all, "Where is Woodcourt?"

Evening had come on when I lifted up my eyes and saw my guardian standing in the little hall. "Who is that, Dame Durden?" Richard asked me. The door was behind him, but he had observed in my face that some one was there.

I looked to Allan for advice, and as he nodded "Yes," bent over Richard and told him. My guardian saw what passed, came softly by me in a moment, and laid his hand on Richard's. "Oh, sir," said Richard, "you are a good man, you are a good man!" and burst into tears for the first time.

My guardian, the picture of a good man, sat down in my place, keeping his hand on Richard's.

"My dear Rick," said he, "the clouds have cleared away, and it is bright now. We can see now. We were all bewildered, Rick, more or less. What matters! And how are you, my dear boy?"

"I am very weak, sir, but I hope I shall be stronger. I have to begin the world."

"Aye, truly; well said!" cried my guardian.

"I will not begin it in the old way now," said Richard with a sad smile. "I have learned a lesson now, sir. It was a hard one, but you shall be assured, indeed, that I have learned it."

"Well, well," said my guardian, comforting him; "well, well, well, dear boy!"

"I was thinking, sir," resumed Richard, "that there is nothing on earth I should so much like to see as their house—Dame Durden's and Woodcourt's house. If I could be removed there when I begin to recover my strength, I feel as if I should get well there sooner than anywhere."

"Why, so have I been thinking too, Rick," said my guardian, "and our little woman likewise; she and I have been talking of it this very day. I dare say her husband won't object. What do you think?"

Richard smiled and lifted up his arm to touch him as he stood behind the head of the couch.

"I say nothing of Ada," said Richard, "but I think of her, and have thought of her very much. Look at her! See her here, sir, bending over this pillow when she has so much need to rest upon it herself, my dear love, my poor girl!"

He clasped her in his arms, and none of us spoke. He gradually released her, and she looked upon us, and looked up to heaven, and moved her lips.

"When I get down to Bleak House," said Richard, "I shall have much to tell you, sir, and you will have much to show me. You will go, won't you?"

"Undoubtedly, dear Rick."

"Thank you; like you, like you," said Richard. "But it's all like you. They have been telling me how you planned it and how you remembered all Esther's familiar tastes and ways. It will be like coming to the old Bleak House again."

"And you will come there too, I hope, Rick. I am a solitary man now, you know, and it will be a charity to come to me. A charity to come to me, my love!" he repeated to Ada as he gently passed his hand over her golden hair and put a lock of it to his lips. (I think he vowed within himself to cherish her if she were left alone.)

"It was a troubled dream?" said Richard, clasping both my guardian's hands eagerly.

"Nothing more, Rick; nothing more."

"And you, being a good man, can pass it as such, and forgive and pity the dreamer, and be lenient and encouraging when he wakes?"

"Indeed I can. What am I but another dreamer, Rick?"

"I will begin the world!" said Richard with a light in his eyes.

My husband drew a little nearer towards Ada, and I saw him solemnly lift up his hand to warn my guardian.

"When shall I go from this place to that pleasant country where the old times are, where I shall have strength to tell what Ada has been to me, where I shall be able to recall my many faults and blindnesses, where I shall prepare myself to be a guide to my unborn child?" said Richard. "When shall I go?"

"Dear Rick, when you are strong enough," returned my guardian.

"Ada, my darling!"

He sought to raise himself a little. Allan raised him so that she could hold him on her bosom, which was what he wanted.

"I have done you many wrongs, my own. I have fallen like a poor stray shadow on your way, I have married you to poverty and trouble, I have scattered your means to the winds. You will forgive me all this, my Ada, before I begin the world?"

A smile irradiated his face as she bent to kiss him. He slowly laid his face down upon her bosom, drew his arms closer round her neck, and with one parting sob began the world. Not this world, oh, not this! The world that sets this right.

When all was still, at a late hour, poor crazed Miss Flite came weeping to me and told me she had given her birds their liberty.

CHAPTER LXVI. Down in Lincolnshire

There is a hush upon Chesney Wold in these altered days, as there is upon a portion of the family history. The story goes that Sir Leicester paid some who could have spoken out to hold their peace; but it is a lame story, feebly whispering and creeping about, and any brighter spark of life it shows soon dies away. It is known for certain that the handsome Lady Dedlock lies in the mausoleum in the park, where the trees arch darkly overhead, and the owl is heard at night making the woods ring; but whence she was brought home to be laid among the echoes of that solitary place, or how she died, is all mystery. Some of her old friends, principally to be found among the peachy-cheeked charmers with the skeleton throats, did once occasionally say, as they toyed in a ghastly manner with large fans—like charmers reduced to flirting with grim death, after losing all their other beaux—did once occasionally say, when the world assembled together, that they wondered the ashes of the Dedlocks, entombed in the mausoleum, never rose against the profanation of her company. But the dead-and-gone Dedlocks take it very calmly and have never been known to object.

Up from among the fern in the hollow, and winding by the bridle-road among the trees, comes sometimes to this lonely spot the sound of horses' hoofs. Then may be seen Sir Leicester—invalided, bent, and almost blind, but of worthy presence yet—riding with a stalwart man beside him, constant to his bridle-rein. When they come to a certain spot before the mausoleum-door, Sir Leicester's accustomed horse stops of his own accord, and Sir Leicester, pulling off his hat, is still for a few moments before they ride away.

War rages yet with the audacious Boythorn, though at uncertain intervals, and now hotly, and now coolly, flickering like an unsteady fire. The truth is said to be that when Sir Leicester came down to Lincolnshire for good, Mr. Boythorn showed a manifest desire to abandon his right of way and do whatever Sir Leicester would, which Sir Leicester, conceiving to be a condescension to his illness or misfortune, took in such high dudgeon, and was so magnificently aggrieved by, that Mr. Boythorn found himself under the necessity of committing a flagrant trespass to restore his neighbour to himself. Similarly, Mr. Boythorn continues to post tremendous placards on the disputed thoroughfare and (with his bird upon his head) to hold forth vehemently against Sir Leicester in the sanctuary of his own home; similarly, also, he defies him as of old in the little church by testifying a bland unconsciousness of his existence. But it is whispered that when he is most ferocious towards his old foe, he is really most considerate, and that Sir Leicester, in the dignity of being implacable, little supposes how much he is humoured. As little does he think how near together he and his antagonist have suffered in the fortunes of two sisters, and his antagonist, who knows it now, is not the man to tell him. So the quarrel goes on to the satisfaction of both.

In one of the lodges of the park—that lodge within sight of the house where, once upon a time, when the waters were out down in Lincolnshire, my Lady used to see the keeper's child—the stalwart man, the trooper formerly, is housed. Some relics of his old calling hang upon the walls, and these it is the chosen recreation of a little lame man about the stable-yard to keep gleaming bright. A busy little man he always is, in the polishing at harness-house doors, of stirrup-irons, bits, curb-chains, harness bosses, anything in the way of a stable-yard that will take a polish, leading a life of friction. A shaggy little damaged man, withal, not unlike an old dog of some mongrel breed, who has been considerably knocked about. He answers to the name of Phil.

A goodly sight it is to see the grand old housekeeper (harder of hearing now) going to church on the arm of her son and to observe—which few do, for the house is scant of company in these times—the relations of both towards Sir Leicester, and his towards them. They have visitors in the high summer weather, when a grey cloak and umbrella, unknown to Chesney Wold at other periods, are seen among the leaves; when two young ladies are occasionally found gambolling in sequestered saw-pits and such nooks of the park; and when the smoke of two pipes wreathes away into the fragrant evening air from the trooper's door. Then is a fife heard trolling within the lodge on the inspiring topic of the "British Grenadiers"; and as the evening closes in, a gruff inflexible voice is heard to say, while two men pace together up and down, "But I never own to it before the old girl. Discipline must be maintained."

The greater part of the house is shut up, and it is a show-house no longer; yet Sir Leicester holds his shrunken state in the long drawing-room for all that, and reposes in his old place before my Lady's picture. Closed in by night with broad screens, and illumined only in that part, the light of the drawing-room seems gradually contracting and dwindling until it shall be no more. A little more, in truth, and it will be all extinguished for Sir Leicester; and the damp door in the mausoleum which shuts so tight, and looks so obdurate, will have opened and received him.

Volumnia, growing with the flight of time pinker as to the red in her face, and yellower as to the white, reads to Sir Leicester in the long evenings and is driven to various artifices to conceal her yawns, of which the chief and most efficacious is the insertion of the pearl necklace between her rosy lips. Long-winded treatises on the Buffy and Boodle question, showing how Buffy is immaculate and Boodle villainous, and how the country is lost by being all Boodle and no Buffy, or saved by being all Buffy and no Boodle (it must be one of the two, and cannot be anything else), are the staple of her reading. Sir Leicester is not particular what it is and does not appear to follow it very closely, further than that he always comes broad awake the moment Volumnia ventures to leave off, and sonorously repeating her last words, begs with some displeasure to know if she finds herself fatigued. However, Volumnia, in the course of her bird-like hopping about and pecking at papers, has alighted on a memorandum concerning herself in the event of "anything happening" to her kinsman, which is handsome compensation for an extensive course of reading and holds even the dragon Boredom at bay.

The cousins generally are rather shy of Chesney Wold in its dullness, but take to it a little in the shooting season, when guns are heard in the plantations, and a few scattered beaters and keepers wait at the old places of appointment for low-spirited twos and threes of cousins. The debilitated cousin, more debilitated by the dreariness of the place, gets into a fearful state of depression, groaning under penitential sofa-pillows in his gunless hours and protesting that such fernal old jail's—nough t'sew fler up—frever.

The only great occasions for Volumnia in this changed aspect of the place in Lincolnshire are those occasions, rare and widely separated, when something is to be done for the county or the country in the way of gracing a public ball. Then, indeed, does the tuckered sylph come out in fairy form and proceed with joy under cousinly escort to the exhausted old assembly-room, fourteen heavy miles off, which, during three hundred and sixty-four days and nights of every ordinary year, is a kind of antipodean lumber-room full of old chairs and tables upside down. Then, indeed, does she captivate all hearts by her condescension, by her girlish vivacity, and by her skipping about as in the days when the hideous old general with the mouth too full of teeth had not cut one of them at two guineas each. Then does she twirl and twine, a pastoral nymph of good family, through the mazes of the dance. Then do the swains appear with tea, with lemonade, with sandwiches, with homage. Then is she kind and cruel, stately and unassuming, various, beautifully wilful. Then is there a singular kind of parallel between her and the little glass chandeliers of another age embellishing that assembly-room, which, with their meagre stems, their spare little drops, their disappointing knobs where no drops are, their bare little stalks from which knobs and drops have both departed, and their little feeble prismatic twinkling, all seem Volumnias.

For the rest, Lincolnshire life to Volumnia is a vast blank of overgrown house looking out upon trees, sighing, wringing their hands, bowing their heads, and casting their tears upon the window-panes in monotonous depressions. A labyrinth of grandeur, less the property of an old family of human beings and their ghostly likenesses than of an old family of echoings and thunderings which start out of their hundred graves at every sound and go resounding through the building. A waste of unused passages and staircases in which to drop a comb upon a bedroom floor at night is to send a stealthy footfall on an errand through the house. A place where few people care to go about alone, where a maid screams if an ash drops from the fire, takes to crying at all times and seasons, becomes the victim of a low disorder of the spirits, and gives warning and departs.

Thus Chesney Wold. With so much of itself abandoned to darkness and vacancy; with so little change under the summer shining or the wintry lowering; so sombre and motionless always—no flag flying now by day, no rows of lights sparkling by night; with no family to come and go, no visitors to be the souls of pale cold shapes of rooms, no stir of life about it—passion and pride, even to the stranger's eye, have died away from the place in Lincolnshire and yielded it to dull repose.

CHAPTER LXVII. The Close of Esther's Narrative

Full seven happy years I have been the mistress of Bleak House. The few words that I have to add to what I have written are soon penned; then I and the unknown friend to whom I write will part for ever. Not without much dear remembrance on my side. Not without some, I hope, on his or hers.

They gave my darling into my arms, and through many weeks I never left her. The little child who was to have done so much was born before the turf was planted on its father's grave. It was a boy; and I, my husband, and my guardian gave him his father's name.

The help that my dear counted on did come to her, though it came, in the eternal wisdom, for another purpose. Though to bless and restore his mother, not his father, was the errand of this baby, its power was mighty to do it. When I saw the strength of the weak little hand and how its touch could heal my darling's heart and raised hope within her, I felt a new sense of the goodness and the tenderness of God.

They throve, and by degrees I saw my dear girl pass into my country garden and walk there with her infant in her arms. I was married then. I was the happiest of the happy.

It was at this time that my guardian joined us and asked Ada when she would come home.

"Both houses are your home, my dear," said he, "but the older Bleak House claims priority. When you and my boy are strong enough to do it, come and take possession of your home."

Ada called him "her dearest cousin, John." But he said, no, it must be guardian now. He was her guardian henceforth, and the boy's; and he had an old association with the name. So she called him guardian, and has called him guardian ever since. The children know him by no other name. I say the children; I have two little daughters.

It is difficult to believe that Charley (round-eyed still, and not at all grammatical) is married to a miller in our neighbourhood; yet so it is; and even now, looking up from my desk as I write early in the morning at my summer window, I see the very mill beginning to go round. I hope the miller will not spoil Charley; but he is very fond of her, and Charley is rather vain of such a match, for he is well to do and was in great request. So far as my small maid is concerned, I might suppose time to have stood for seven years as still as the mill did half an hour ago, since little Emma, Charley's sister, is exactly what Charley used to be. As to Tom, Charley's brother, I am really afraid to say what he did at school in ciphering, but I think it was decimals. He is apprenticed to the miller, whatever it was, and is a good bashful fellow, always falling in love with somebody and being ashamed of it.

Caddy Jellyby passed her very last holidays with us and was a dearer creature than ever, perpetually dancing in and out of the house with the children as if she had never given a dancing-lesson in her life. Caddy keeps her own little carriage now instead of hiring one, and lives full two miles further westward than Newman Street. She works very hard, her husband (an excellent one) being lame and able to do very little. Still, she is more than contented and does all she has to do with all her heart. Mr. Jellyby spends his evenings at her new house with his head against the wall as he used to do in her old one. I have heard that Mrs. Jellyby was understood to suffer great mortification from her daughter's ignoble marriage and pursuits, but I hope she got over it in time. She has been disappointed in Borrioboola-Gha, which turned out a failure in consequence of the king of Borrioboola wanting to sell everybody—who survived the climate—for rum, but she has taken up with the rights of women to sit in Parliament, and Caddy tells me it is a mission involving more correspondence than the old one. I had almost forgotten Caddy's poor little girl. She is not such a mite now, but she is deaf and dumb. I believe there never was a better mother than Caddy, who learns, in her scanty intervals of leisure, innumerable deaf and dumb arts to soften the affliction of her child.

As if I were never to have done with Caddy, I am reminded here of Peepy and old Mr. Turveydrop. Peepy is in the Custom House, and doing extremely well. Old Mr. Turveydrop, very apoplectic, still exhibits his deportment about town, still enjoys himself in the old manner, is still believed in in the old way. He is constant in his patronage of Peepy and is understood to have bequeathed him a favourite French clock in his dressing-room—which is not his property.

With the first money we saved at home, we added to our pretty house by throwing out a little growlery expressly for my guardian, which we inaugurated with great splendour the next time he came down to see us. I try to write all this lightly, because my heart is full in drawing to an end, but when I write of him, my tears will have their way.

I never look at him but I hear our poor dear Richard calling him a good man. To Ada and her pretty boy, he is the fondest father; to me he is what he has ever been, and what name can I give to that? He is my husband's best and dearest friend, he is our children's darling, he is the object of our deepest love and veneration. Yet while I feel towards him as if he were a superior being, I am so familiar with him and so easy with him that I almost wonder at myself. I have never lost my old names, nor has he lost his; nor do I ever, when he is with us, sit in any other place than in my old chair at his side, Dame Trot, Dame Durden, Little Woman—all just the same as ever; and I answer, "Yes, dear guardian!" just the same.

I have never known the wind to be in the east for a single moment since the day when he took me to the porch to read the name. I remarked to him once that the wind seemed never in the east now, and he said, no, truly; it had finally departed from that quarter on that very day.

I think my darling girl is more beautiful than ever. The sorrow that has been in her face—for it is not there now—seems to have purified even its innocent expression and to have given it a diviner quality. Sometimes when I raise my eyes and see her in the black dress that she still wears, teaching my Richard, I feel—it is difficult to express—as if it were so good to know that she remembers her dear Esther in her prayers.

I call him my Richard! But he says that he has two mamas, and I am one.

We are not rich in the bank, but we have always prospered, and we have quite enough. I never walk out with my husband but I hear the people bless him. I never go into a house of any degree but I hear his praises or see them in grateful eyes. I never lie down at night but I know that in the course of that day he has alleviated pain and soothed some fellow-creature in the time of need. I know that from the beds of those who were past recovery, thanks have often, often gone up, in the last hour, for his patient ministration. Is not this to be rich?

The people even praise me as the doctor's wife. The people even like me as I go about, and make so much of me that I am quite abashed. I owe it all to him, my love, my pride! They like me for his sake, as I do everything I do in life for his sake.

A night or two ago, after bustling about preparing for my darling and my guardian and little Richard, who are coming to-morrow, I was sitting out in the porch of all places, that dearly memorable porch, when Allan came home. So he said, "My precious little woman, what are you doing here?" And I said, "The moon is shining so brightly, Allan, and the night is so delicious, that I have been sitting here thinking."

"What have you been thinking about, my dear?" said Allan then.

"How curious you are!" said I. "I am almost ashamed to tell you, but I will. I have been thinking about my old looks—such as they were."

"And what have you been thinking about THEM, my busy bee?" said Allan.

"I have been thinking that I thought it was impossible that you COULD have loved me any better, even if I had retained them."

"'Such as they were'?" said Allan, laughing.

"Such as they were, of course."

"My dear Dame Durden," said Allan, drawing my arm through his, "do you ever look in the glass?"

"You know I do; you see me do it."

"And don't you know that you are prettier than you ever were?"

"I did not know that; I am not certain that I know it now. But I know that my dearest little pets are very pretty, and that my darling is very beautiful, and that my husband is very handsome, and that my guardian has the brightest and most benevolent face that ever was seen, and that they can very well do without much beauty in me—even supposing—."

THE END OF
Bleak House

CAPTAIN BOLDHEART

BY

CHARLES DICKENS

CAPTAIN BOLDHEART
& THE LATIN-GRAMMAR MASTER

A HOLIDAY ROMANCE FROM
THE PEN OF LIEUT-COL. ROBIN REDFORTH
AGED 9.

BY CHARLES DICKENS

LONDON: CONSTABLE AND CO. LTD.

FOREWORD

The story contained herein was written by Charles Dickens in 1867. It is the third of four stories entitled "Holiday Romance" and was published originally in a children's magazine in America. It purports to be written by a child aged nine. It was republished in England in "All the Year Round" in 1868. For this and four other Christmas pieces Dickens received £1,000.

"Holiday Romance" was published in book form by Messrs Chapman & Hall in 1874, with "Edwin Drood" and other stories.

CAPTAIN BOLDHEART AND THE LATIN-GRAMMAR MASTER

The subject of our present narrative would appear to have devoted himself to the Pirate profession at a comparatively early age. We find him in command of a splendid schooner of one hundred guns, loaded to the muzzle, 'ere yet he had had a party in honour of his tenth birthday.

It seems that our hero, considering himself spited by a Latin-Grammar-Master, demanded the satisfaction due from one man of honour to another. Not getting it, he privately withdrew his haughty spirit from such low company, bought a second-hand pocket-pistol, folded up some sandwiches in a paper bag, made a bottle of Spanish liquorice-water, and entered on a career of valour.

It were tedious to follow Boldheart (for such was his name) through the commencing stages of his history. Suffice it that we find him bearing the rank of Captain Boldheart, reclining in full uniform on a crimson hearth-rug spread out upon the quarter-deck of his schooner the Beauty, in the China Seas. It was a lovely evening, and as his crew lay grouped about him, he favoured them with the following melody:

O landsmen are folly!
O Pirates are jolly!
O Diddleum Dolly,
Di!
(*Chorus*) Heave yo.

The soothing effect of these animated sounds floating over the waters, as the common sailors united their rough voices to take up the rich tones of Boldheart, may be more easily conceived than described.

It was under these circumstances that the lookout at the masthead gave the word, "Whales!"

All was now activity.

"Where away?" cried Captain Boldheart, starting up.

"On the larboard bow, sir," replied the fellow at the masthead, touching his hat. For such was the height of discipline on board of the Beauty, that even at that height he was obliged to mind it or be shot through the head.

"This adventure belongs to me," said Boldheart. "Boy, my harpoon. Let no man follow;" and leaping alone into his boat, the captain rowed with admirable dexterity in the direction of the monster.

All was now excitement.

"He nears him!" said an elderly seaman, following the captain through his spy-glass.

"He strikes him!" said another seaman, a mere stripling, but also with a spy-glass.

"He tows him towards us!" said another seaman, a man in the full vigour of life, but also with a spy-glass.

In fact the captain was seen approaching, with the huge bulk following. We will not dwell on the deafening cries of "Boldheart! Boldheart!" with which he was received, when, carelessly leaping on the quarter-deck, he presented his prize to his men. They afterwards made two thousand four hundred and seventeen pound ten and sixpence by it.

Ordering the sails to be braced up, the captain now stood W.N.W. The Beauty flew rather than floated over the dark blue waters. Nothing particular occurred for a fortnight, except taking, with considerable slaughter, four Spanish galleons, and a Snow from South America, all richly laden. Inaction began to tell upon the spirits of the men. Captain Boldheart called all hands aft, and said:

"My lads, I hear there are discontented ones among ye. Let any such stand forth."

After some murmuring, in which the expressions, "Aye, aye, sir!" "Union Jack!" "Avast," "Starboard," "Port," "Bowsprit," and similar indications of a mutinous undercurrent, though subdued, were audible, Bill Boozey, captain of the foretop, came out from the rest. His form was that of a giant, but he quailed under the captain's eye.

"What are your wrongs?" said the captain.

"Why, d'ye see, Captain Boldheart," replied the towering mariner, "I've sailed man and boy for many a year, but I never yet know'd the milk served out for the ship's company's teas to be so sour as 'tis aboard this craft."

At this moment the thrilling cry, "Man overboard!" announced to the astonished crew that Boozey, in stepping back, as the captain (in mere thoughtfulness) laid his hand upon the faithful pocket-pistol which he wore in his belt, had lost his balance, and was struggling with the foaming tide.

All was now stupefaction.

But, with Captain Boldheart, to throw off his uniform coat regardless of the various rich orders with which it was decorated, and to plunge into the sea after the drowning giant, was the work of a moment. Maddening was the excitement when boats were lowered; intense the joy when the captain was seen holding up the drowning man with his teeth; deafening the cheering when both were restored to the main deck of the Beauty. And from the instant of his changing his wet clothes for dry ones, Captain Boldheart had no such devoted though humble friend as William Boozey.

Boldheart now pointed to the horizon, and called the attention of his crew to the taper spars of a ship lying snug in harbour under the guns of a fort.

"She shall be ours at sunrise," said he. "Serve out a double allowance of grog, and prepare for action."

All was now preparation.

When morning dawned after a sleepless night, it was seen that the stranger was crowding on all sail to come out of the harbour and offer battle. As the two ships came nearer to each other, the stranger fired a gun and hoisted Roman colours. Boldheart then perceived her to be the Latin-Grammar-Master's bark. Such indeed she was, and had been tacking about the world in unavailing pursuit, from the time of his first taking to a roving life.

Boldheart now addressed his men, promising to blow them up if he should feel convinced that their reputation required it, and giving orders that the Latin-Grammar-Master should be taken alive. He then dismissed them to their quarters, and the fight began with a broadside from The Beauty. She then veered round, and poured in another. The Scorpion (so was the bark of the Latin-Grammar-Master appropriately called) was not slow to return her fire, and a terrific cannonading ensued, in which the guns of The Beauty did tremendous execution.

The Latin-Grammar-Master was seen upon the poop, in the midst of the smoke and fire, encouraging his men. To do him justice, he was no Craven, though his white hat, his short grey trousers, and his long snuff-coloured surtout reaching to his heels—the self-same coat in which he had spited Boldheart—contrasted most unfavourably with the brilliant uniform of the latter. At this moment Boldheart, seizing a pike and putting himself at the head of his men, gave the word to board.

A desperate conflict ensued in the hammock nettings—or somewhere in about that direction—until the Latin-Grammar-Master, having all his masts gone, his hull and rigging shot through and through, and seeing Boldheart slashing a path towards him, hauled down his flag himself, gave up his sword to Boldheart, and asked for quarter. Scarce had he been put into the captain's boat, 'ere The Scorpion went down with all on board.

On Captain Boldheart's now assembling his men, a circumstance occurred. He found it necessary with one blow of his cutlass to kill the Cook, who, having lost his brother in the late action, was making at the Latin-Grammar-Master in an infuriated state, intent on his destruction with a carving-knife.

Captain Boldheart then turned to the Latin-Grammar-Master, severely reproaching him with his perfidy, and put it to his crew what they considered that a master who spited a boy deserved?

They answered with one voice, "Death."

"It may be so," said the Captain; "but it shall never be said that Boldheart stained his hour of triumph with the blood of his enemy. Prepare the cutter."

The cutter was immediately prepared.

"Without taking your life," said the Captain, "I must yet for ever deprive you of the power of spiting other boys. I shall turn you adrift in this boat. You will find in her two oars, a compass, a bottle of rum, a small cask of water, a piece of pork, a bag of biscuit, and my Latin grammar. Go! and spite the natives, if you can find any."

Deeply conscious of this bitter sarcasm, the unhappy wretch was put into the cutter, and was soon left far behind. He made no effort to row, but was seen lying on his back with his legs up, when last made out by the ship's telescopes.

A stiff breeze now beginning to blow, Captain Boldheart gave orders to keep her S.S.W., easing her a little during the night by falling off a point or two W. by W., or even by W.S., if she complained much. He then retired for the night, having in truth much need of repose. In addition to the fatigues he had undergone, this brave officer had received sixteen wounds in the engagement, but had not mentioned it.

In the morning a white squall came on, and was succeeded by other squalls of various colours. It thundered and lightened heavily for six weeks. Hurricanes then set in for two months. Waterspouts and tornadoes followed. The oldest sailor on board—and he was a very old one—had never seen such weather. The Beauty lost all idea where she was, and the carpenter reported six feet two of water in the hold. Everybody fell senseless at the pumps every day.

Provisions now ran very low. Our hero put the crew on short allowance, and put himself on shorter allowance than any man in the ship. But his spirit kept him fat. In this extremity, the gratitude of Boozey, the captain of the foretop whom our readers may remember, was truly affecting. The loving though lowly William repeatedly requested to be killed, and preserved for the captain's table.

We now approach a change in affairs.

One day during a gleam of sunshine and when the weather had moderated, the man at the masthead—too weak now to touch his hat, besides its having been blown away—called out,

"Savages!"

All was now expectation.

Presently fifteen hundred canoes, each paddled by twenty savages, were seen advancing in excellent order. They were a light green colour (the Savages were), and sang, with great energy, the following strain:

Choo a choo a choo tooth.
Muntch, muntch. Nycey!
Choo a choo a choo tooth.
Muntch, muntch. Nyce!

As the shades of night were by this time closing in, these expressions were supposed to embody this simple people's views of the Evening Hymn. But it too soon appeared that the song was a translation of "For what we are going to receive," &c.

The chief, imposingly decorated with feathers of lively colours, and having the majestic appearance of a fighting Parrot, no sooner understood (he understood English perfectly) that the ship was The Beauty, Captain Boldheart, than he fell upon his face on the deck, and could not be persuaded to rise until the captain had lifted him up, & told him he wouldn't hurt him. All the rest of the savages also fell on their faces with marks of terror, and had also to be lifted up one by one. Thus the fame of the great Boldheart had gone before him, even among these children of Nature.

Turtles and oysters were now produced in astonishing numbers, and on these and yams the people made a hearty meal. After dinner the Chief told Captain Boldheart that there was better feeding up at the village, and that he would be glad to take him and his officers there. Apprehensive of treachery, Boldheart ordered his boat's crew to attend him completely armed. And well were it for other commanders if their precautions—but let us not anticipate.

When the canoes arrived at the beach, the darkness of the night was illumined by the light of an immense fire. Ordering his boat's crew (with the intrepid though illiterate William at their head) to keep close and be upon their guard, Boldheart bravely went on, arm-in-arm with the Chief.

But how to depict the captain's surprise when he found a ring of Savages singing in chorus that barbarous translation of "For what we are going to receive, &c.," which has been given above, and dancing hand-in-hand round the Latin-Grammar-Master, in a hamper with his head shaved, while two savages floured him, before putting him to the fire to be cooked!

Boldheart now took counsel with his officers on the course to be adopted. In the mean time, the miserable captive never ceased begging pardon and imploring to be delivered. On the generous Boldheart's proposal, it was at length resolved that he should not be cooked, but should be allowed to remain raw, on two conditions. Namely,

1. That he should never under any circumstances presume to teach any boy any thing any more.

2. That, if taken back to England, he should pass his life in travelling to find out boys who wanted their exercises done, and should do their exercises for those boys for nothing, and never say a word about it.

Drawing his sword from its sheath, Boldheart swore him to these conditions on its shining blade. The prisoner wept bitterly, and appeared acutely to feel the errors of his past career.

The captain then ordered his boat's crew to make ready for a volley, and after firing to re-load quickly. "And expect a score or two on ye to go head over heels," murmured William Boozey; "for I'm a looking at ye." With those words the derisive though deadly William took a good aim.

"Fire!"

The ringing voice of Boldheart was lost in the report of the guns and the screeching of the savages. Volley after volley awakened the numerous echoes. Hundreds of savages were killed, hundreds wounded, and thousands ran howling into the woods. The Latin-Grammar-Master had a spare night-cap lent him, and a longtail coat which he wore hind side before. He presented a ludicrous though pitiable appearance, and serve him right.

We now find Captain Boldheart, with this rescued wretch on board, standing off for other islands. At one of these, not a cannibal island, but a pork and vegetable one, he married (only in fun on his part) the King's daughter. Here he rested some time, receiving from the natives great quantities of precious stones, gold dust, elephants' teeth, and sandal wood, and getting very rich. This, too, though he almost every day made presents of enormous value to his men.

The ship being at length as full as she could hold of all sorts of valuable things, Boldheart gave orders to weigh the anchor, and turn the Beauty's head towards England. These orders were obeyed with three cheers, and ere the sun went down full many a hornpipe had been danced on deck by the uncouth though agile William.

We next find Captain Boldheart about three leagues off Madeira, surveying through his spy-glass a stranger of suspicious appearance making sail towards him. On his firing a gun ahead of her to bring her to, she ran up a flag, which he instantly recognized as the flag from the mast in the back-garden at home.

Inferring from this, that his father had put to sea to seek his long-lost son, the captain sent his own boat on board the stranger, to inquire if this was so, and if so, whether his father's intentions were strictly honourable. The boat came back with a present of greens and fresh meat, and reported that the stranger was The Family of twelve hundred tons, and had not only the captain's father on board, but also his mother, with the majority of his aunts and uncles, and all his cousins. It was further reported to Boldheart that the whole of these relations had expressed themselves in a becoming manner, and were anxious to embrace him and thank him for the glorious credit he had done them. Boldheart at once invited them to breakfast next morning on board the Beauty, and gave orders for a brilliant ball that should last all day.

It was in the course of the night that the captain discovered the hopelessness of reclaiming the Latin-Grammar-Master. That thankless traitor was found out, as the two ships lay near each other, communicating with The Family by signals, and offering to give up Boldheart. He was hanged at the yard-arm the first thing in the morning, after having it impressively pointed out to him by Boldheart that this was what spiters came to.

The meeting between the captain and his parents was attended with tears. His uncles and aunts would have attended their meeting with tears too, but he wasn't going to stand that. His cousins were very much astonished by the size of his ship and the discipline of his men, and were greatly overcome by the splendour of his uniform. He kindly conducted them round the vessel, and pointed out every thing worthy of notice. He also fired his hundred guns, and found it amusing to witness their alarm.

The entertainment surpassed everything ever seen on board ship, and lasted from ten in the morning until seven the next morning. Only one disagreeable incident occurred. Captain Boldheart found himself obliged to put his cousin Tom in irons, for being disrespectful. On the boy's promising amendment, however, he was humanely released after a few hours' close confinement.

Boldheart now took his mother down into the great cabin, and asked after the young lady with whom, it was well known to the world, he was in love. His mother replied that the object of his affections was then at school at Margate, for the benefit of sea-bathing (it was the month of September), but that she feared the young lady's friends were still opposed to the union. Boldheart at once resolved, if necessary, to bombard the town.

Taking the command of his ship with this intention, and putting all but fighting men on board The Family, with orders to that vessel to keep in company, Boldheart soon anchored in Margate Roads. Here he went ashore well-armed, and attended by his boat's crew (at their head the faithful though ferocious William), and demanded to see the Mayor, who came out of his office.

"Dost know the name of yon ship, Mayor?" asked Boldheart fiercely.

"No," said the Mayor, rubbing his eyes, which he could scarce believe when he saw the goodly vessel riding at anchor.

"She is named the Beauty," said the captain.

"Hah!" exclaimed the Mayor, with a start. "And you, then, are Captain Boldheart?"

"The same."

A pause ensued. The Mayor trembled.

"Now, Mayor," said the captain, "choose. Help me to my Bride, or be bombarded."

The Mayor begged for two hours' grace, in which to make inquiries respecting the young lady. Boldheart accorded him but one; and during that one placed William Boozey sentry over him, with a drawn sword and instructions to accompany him wherever he went, and to run him through the body if he showed a sign of playing false.

At the end of the hour, the Mayor re-appeared more dead than alive, closely waited on by Boozey more alive than dead.

"Captain," said the Mayor, "I have ascertained that the young lady is going to bathe. Even now she waits her turn for a machine. The tide is low, though rising. I, in one of our town-boats, shall not be suspected. When she comes forth in her bathing-dress into the shallow water from behind the hood of the machine, my boat shall intercept her and prevent her return. Do you the rest."

"Mayor," returned Capt. Boldheart, "thou hast saved thy town."

The captain then signalled his boat to take him off, and steering her himself ordered her crew to row towards the bathing-ground, and there to rest upon their oars. All happened as had been arranged. His lovely bride came forth, the Mayor glided in behind her, she became confused and had floated out of her depth, when, with one skilful touch of the rudder and one quivering stroke from the boat's crew, her adoring Boldheart held her in his strong arms. There her shrieks of terror were changed to cries of joy.

Before the Beauty could get under weigh, the hoisting of all the flags in the town and harbour, and the ringing of all the bells, announced to the brave Boldheart that he had nothing to fear. He therefore determined to be married on the spot, and signalled for a clergyman and clerk, who came off promptly in a sailing-boat named the Skylark. Another great entertainment was then given on board the Beauty, in the midst of which the Mayor was called out by a messenger. He returned with the news that Government had sent down to know whether Captain Boldheart, in acknowledgment of the great services he had done his country by being a Pirate, would consent to be made a Lieutenant-Colonel. For himself he would have spurned the worthless boon, but his Bride wished it and he consented.

Only one thing further happened before the good ship Family was dismissed, with rich presents to all on board. It is painful to record (but such is human nature in some cousins) that Captain Boldheart's unmannerly cousin Tom was actually tied up to receive three dozen with a rope's end "for cheekyness and making games," when Captain Boldheart's lady begged for him and he was spared. The Beauty then refitted, and the Captain and his Bride departed for the Indian Ocean to enjoy themselves for evermore.

THE END.

THE END OF
Captain Boldheart & the Latin Grammar Master

A CHILD’S HISTORY OF ENGLAND

By CHARLES DICKENS

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CHAPTER I—ANCIENT ENGLAND AND THE ROMANS

If you look at a Map of the World, you will see, in the left-hand upper corner of the Eastern Hemisphere, two Islands lying in the sea. They are England and Scotland, and Ireland. England and Scotland form the greater part of these Islands. Ireland is the next in size. The little neighbouring islands, which are so small upon the Map as to be mere dots, are chiefly little bits of Scotland,—broken off, I dare say, in the course of a great length of time, by the power of the restless water.

In the old days, a long, long while ago, before Our Saviour was born on earth and lay asleep in a manger, these Islands were in the same place, and the stormy sea roared round them, just as it roars now. But the sea was not alive, then, with great ships and brave sailors, sailing to and from all parts of the world. It was very lonely. The Islands lay solitary, in the great expanse of water. The foaming waves dashed against their cliffs, and the bleak winds blew over their forests; but the winds and waves brought no adventurers to land upon the Islands, and the savage Islanders knew nothing of the rest of the world, and the rest of the world knew nothing of them.

It is supposed that the Phœnicians, who were an ancient people, famous for carrying on trade, came in ships to these Islands, and found that they produced tin and lead; both very useful things, as you know, and both produced to this very hour upon the sea-coast. The most celebrated tin mines in Cornwall are, still, close to the sea. One of them, which I have seen, is so close to it that it is hollowed out underneath the ocean; and the miners say, that in stormy weather, when they are at work down in that deep place, they can hear the noise of the waves thundering above their heads. So, the Phœnicians, coasting about the Islands, would come, without much difficulty, to where the tin and lead were.

The Phœnicians traded with the Islanders for these metals, and gave the Islanders some other useful things in exchange. The Islanders were, at first, poor savages, going almost naked, or only dressed in the rough skins of beasts, and staining their bodies, as other savages do, with coloured earths and the juices of plants. But the Phœnicians, sailing over to the opposite coasts of France and Belgium, and saying to the people there, ‘We have been to those white cliffs across the water, which you can see in fine weather, and from that country, which is called Britain, we bring this tin and lead,’ tempted some of the French and Belgians to come over also. These people settled themselves on the south coast of England, which is now called Kent; and, although they were a rough people too, they taught the savage Britons some useful arts, and improved that part of the Islands. It is probable that other people came over from Spain to Ireland, and settled there.

Thus, by little and little, strangers became mixed with the Islanders, and the savage Britons grew into a wild, bold people; almost savage, still, especially in the interior of the country away from the sea where the foreign settlers seldom went; but hardy, brave, and strong.

The whole country was covered with forests, and swamps. The greater part of it was very misty and cold. There were no roads, no bridges, no streets, no houses that you would think deserving of the name. A town was nothing but a collection of straw-covered huts, hidden in a thick wood, with a ditch all round, and a low wall, made of mud, or the trunks of trees placed one upon another. The people planted little or no corn, but lived upon the flesh of their flocks and cattle. They made no coins, but used metal rings for money. They were clever in basket-work, as savage people often are; and they could make a coarse kind of cloth, and some very bad earthenware. But in building fortresses they were much more clever.

They made boats of basket-work, covered with the skins of animals, but seldom, if ever, ventured far from the shore. They made swords, of copper mixed with tin; but, these swords were of an awkward shape, and so soft that a heavy blow would bend one. They made light shields, short pointed daggers, and spears—which they jerked back after they had thrown them at an enemy, by a long strip of leather fastened to the stem. The butt-end was a rattle, to frighten an enemy’s horse. The ancient Britons, being divided into as many as thirty or forty tribes, each commanded by its own little king, were constantly fighting with one another, as savage people usually do; and they always fought with these weapons.

They were very fond of horses. The standard of Kent was the picture of a white horse. They could break them in and manage them wonderfully well. Indeed, the horses (of which they had an abundance, though they were rather small) were so well taught in those days, that they can scarcely be said to have improved since; though the men are so much wiser. They understood, and obeyed, every word of command; and would stand still by themselves, in all the din and noise of battle, while their masters went to fight on foot. The Britons could not have succeeded in their most remarkable art, without the aid of these sensible and trusty animals. The art I mean, is the construction and management of war-chariots or cars, for which they have ever been celebrated in history. Each of the best sort of these chariots, not quite breast high in front, and open at the back, contained one man to drive, and two or three others to fight—all standing up. The horses who drew them were so well trained, that they would tear, at full gallop, over the most stony ways, and even through the woods; dashing down their masters' enemies beneath their hoofs, and cutting them to pieces with the blades of swords, or scythes, which were fastened to the wheels, and stretched out beyond the car on each side, for that cruel purpose. In a moment, while at full speed, the horses would stop, at the driver's command. The men within would leap out, deal blows about them with their swords like hail, leap on the horses, on the pole, spring back into the chariots anyhow; and, as soon as they were safe, the horses tore away again.

The Britons had a strange and terrible religion, called the Religion of the Druids. It seems to have been brought over, in very early times indeed, from the opposite country of France, anciently called Gaul, and to have mixed up the worship of the Serpent, and of the Sun and Moon, with the worship of some of the Heathen Gods and Goddesses. Most of its ceremonies were kept secret by the priests, the Druids, who pretended to be enchanters, and who carried magicians' wands, and wore, each of them, about his neck, what he told the ignorant people was a Serpent's egg in a golden case. But it is certain that the Druidical ceremonies included the sacrifice of human victims, the torture of some suspected criminals, and, on particular occasions, even the burning alive, in immense wicker cages, of a number of men and animals together. The Druid Priests had some kind of veneration for the Oak, and for the mistletoe—the same plant that we hang up in houses at Christmas Time now—when its white berries grew upon the Oak. They met together in dark woods, which they called Sacred Groves; and there they instructed, in their mysterious arts, young men who came to them as pupils, and who sometimes stayed with them as long as twenty years.

These Druids built great Temples and altars, open to the sky, fragments of some of which are yet remaining. Stonehenge, on Salisbury Plain, in Wiltshire, is the most extraordinary of these. Three curious stones, called Kits Coty House, on Bluebell Hill, near Maidstone, in Kent, form another. We know, from examination of the great blocks of which such buildings are made, that they could not have been raised without the aid of some ingenious machines, which are common now, but which the ancient Britons certainly did not use in making their own uncomfortable houses. I should not wonder if the Druids, and their pupils who stayed with them twenty years, knowing more than the rest of the Britons, kept the people out of sight while they made these buildings, and then pretended that they built them by magic. Perhaps they had a hand in the fortresses too; at all events, as they were very powerful, and very much believed in, and as they made and executed the laws, and paid no taxes, I don't wonder that they liked their trade. And, as they persuaded the people the more Druids there were, the better off the people would be, I don't wonder that there were a good many of them. But it is pleasant to think that there are no Druids, *now*, who go on in that way, and pretend to carry Enchanters' Wands and Serpents' Eggs—and of course there is nothing of the kind, anywhere.

Such was the improved condition of the ancient Britons, fifty-five years before the birth of Our Saviour, when the Romans, under their great General, Julius Cæsar, were masters of all the rest of the known world. Julius Cæsar had then just conquered Gaul; and hearing, in Gaul, a good deal about the opposite Island with the white cliffs, and about the bravery of the Britons who inhabited it—some of whom had been fetched over to help the Gauls in the war against him—he resolved, as he was so near, to come and conquer Britain next.

So, Julius Cæsar came sailing over to this Island of ours, with eighty vessels and twelve thousand men. And he came from the French coast between Calais and Boulogne, 'because thence was the shortest passage into Britain;' just for the same reason as our steam-boats now take the same track, every day. He expected to conquer Britain easily: but it was not such easy work as he supposed—for the bold Britons fought most bravely; and, what with not having his horse-soldiers with him (for they had been driven back by a storm), and what with having some of his vessels dashed to pieces by a high tide after they were drawn ashore, he ran great risk of being totally defeated. However, for once that the bold Britons beat him, he beat them twice; though not so soundly but that he was very glad to accept their proposals of peace, and go away.

But, in the spring of the next year, he came back; this time, with eight hundred vessels and thirty thousand men. The British tribes chose, as their general-in-chief, a Briton, whom the Romans in their Latin language called Cassivellaunus, but whose British name is supposed to have been Caswallon. A brave general he was, and well he and his soldiers fought the Roman army! So well, that whenever in that war the Roman soldiers saw a great cloud of dust, and heard the rattle of the rapid British chariots, they trembled in their hearts. Besides a number of smaller battles, there was a battle fought near Canterbury, in Kent; there was a battle fought near Chertsey, in Surrey; there was a battle fought near a marshy little town in a wood, the capital of that part of Britain which belonged to Cassivellaunus, and which was probably near what is now Saint Albans, in Hertfordshire. However, brave Cassivellaunus had the worst of it, on the whole; though he and his men always fought like lions. As the other British chiefs were jealous of him, and were always quarrelling with him, and with one another, he gave up, and proposed peace. Julius Cæsar was very glad to grant peace easily, and to go away again with all his remaining ships and men. He had expected to find pearls in Britain, and he may have found a few for anything I know; but, at all events, he found delicious oysters, and I am sure he found tough Britons—of whom, I dare say, he made the same complaint as Napoleon Bonaparte the great French General did, eighteen hundred years afterwards, when he said they were such unreasonable fellows that they never knew when they were beaten. They never *did* know, I believe, and never will.

Nearly a hundred years passed on, and all that time, there was peace in Britain. The Britons improved their towns and mode of life: became more civilised, travelled, and learnt a great deal from the Gauls and Romans. At last, the Roman Emperor, Claudius, sent Aulus Plautius, a skilful general, with a mighty force, to subdue the Island, and shortly afterwards arrived himself. They did little; and Ostorius Scapula, another general, came. Some of the British Chiefs of Tribes submitted. Others resolved to fight to the death. Of these brave men, the bravest was Caractacus, or Caradoc, who gave battle to the Romans, with his army, among the mountains of North Wales. ‘This day,’ said he to his soldiers, ‘decides the fate of Britain! Your liberty, or your eternal slavery, dates from this hour.

Remember your brave ancestors, who drove the great Cæsar himself across the sea!' On hearing these words, his men, with a great shout, rushed upon the Romans. But the strong Roman swords and armour were too much for the weaker British weapons in close conflict. The Britons lost the day. The wife and daughter of the brave Caractacus were taken prisoners; his brothers delivered themselves up; he himself was betrayed into the hands of the Romans by his false and base stepmother: and they carried him, and all his family, in triumph to Rome.

But a great man will be great in misfortune, great in prison, great in chains. His noble air, and dignified endurance of distress, so touched the Roman people who thronged the streets to see him, that he and his family were restored to freedom. No one knows whether his great heart broke, and he died in Rome, or whether he ever returned to his own dear country. English oaks have grown up from acorns, and withered away, when they were hundreds of years old—and other oaks have sprung up in their places, and died too, very aged—since the rest of the history of the brave Caractacus was forgotten.

Still, the Britons *would not* yield. They rose again and again, and died by thousands, sword in hand. They rose, on every possible occasion. Suetonius, another Roman general, came, and stormed the Island of Anglesey (then called Mona), which was supposed to be sacred, and he burnt the Druids in their own wicker cages, by their own fires. But, even while he was in Britain, with his victorious troops, the Britons rose. Because Boadicea, a British queen, the widow of the King of the Norfolk and Suffolk people, resisted the plundering of her property by the Romans who were settled in England, she was scourged, by order of Catus a Roman officer; and her two daughters were shamefully insulted in her presence, and her husband's relations were made slaves. To avenge this injury, the Britons rose, with all their might and rage. They drove Catus into Gaul; they laid the Roman possessions waste; they forced the Romans out of London, then a poor little town, but a trading place; they hanged, burnt, crucified, and slew by the sword, seventy thousand Romans in a few days. Suetonius strengthened his army, and advanced to give them battle. They strengthened their army, and desperately attacked his, on the field where it was strongly posted. Before the first charge of the Britons was made, Boadicea, in a war-chariot, with her fair hair streaming in the wind, and her injured daughters lying at her feet, drove among the troops, and cried to them for vengeance on their oppressors, the licentious Romans. The Britons fought to the last; but they were vanquished with great slaughter, and the unhappy queen took poison.

Still, the spirit of the Britons was not broken. When Suetonius left the country, they fell upon his troops, and retook the Island of Anglesey. Agricola came, fifteen or twenty years afterwards, and retook it once more, and devoted seven years to subduing the country, especially that part of it which is now called Scotland; but, its people, the Caledonians, resisted him at every inch of ground. They fought the bloodiest battles with him; they killed their very wives and children, to prevent his making prisoners of them; they fell, fighting, in such great numbers that certain hills in Scotland are yet supposed to be vast heaps of stones piled up above their graves. Hadrian came, thirty years afterwards, and still they resisted him. Severus came, nearly a hundred years afterwards, and they worried his great army like dogs, and rejoiced to see them die, by thousands, in the bogs and swamps. Caracalla, the son and successor of Severus, did the most to conquer them, for a time; but not by force of arms. He knew how little that would do. He yielded up a quantity of land to the Caledonians, and gave the Britons the same privileges as the Romans possessed. There was peace, after this, for seventy years.

Then new enemies arose. They were the Saxons, a fierce, sea-faring people from the countries to the North of the Rhine, the great river of Germany on the banks of which the best grapes grow to make the German wine. They began to come, in pirate ships, to the sea-coast of Gaul and Britain, and to plunder them. They were repulsed by Carausius, a native either of Belgium or of Britain, who was appointed by the Romans to the command, and under whom the Britons first began to fight upon the sea. But, after this time, they renewed their ravages. A few years more, and the Scots (which was then the name for the people of Ireland), and the Picts, a northern people, began to make frequent plundering incursions into the South of Britain. All these attacks were repeated, at intervals, during two hundred years, and through a long succession of Roman Emperors and chiefs; during all which length of time, the Britons rose against the Romans, over and over again. At last, in the days of the Roman Honorius, when the Roman power all over the world was fast declining, and when Rome wanted all her soldiers at home, the Romans abandoned all hope of conquering Britain, and went away. And still, at last, as at first, the Britons rose against them, in their old brave manner; for, a very little while before, they had turned away the Roman magistrates, and declared themselves an independent people.

Five hundred years had passed, since Julius Cæsar's first invasion of the Island, when the Romans departed from it for ever. In the course of that time, although they had been the cause of terrible fighting and bloodshed, they had done much to improve the condition of the Britons. They had made great military roads; they had built forts; they had taught them how to dress, and arm themselves, much better than they had ever known how to do before; they had refined the whole British way of living. Agricola had built a great wall of earth, more than seventy miles long, extending from Newcastle to beyond Carlisle, for the purpose of keeping out the Picts and Scots; Hadrian had strengthened it; Severus, finding it much in want of repair, had built it afresh of stone.

Above all, it was in the Roman time, and by means of Roman ships, that the Christian Religion was first brought into Britain, and its people first taught the great lesson that, to be good in the sight of God, they must love their neighbours as themselves, and do unto others as they would be done by. The Druids declared that it was very wicked to believe in any such thing, and cursed all the people who did believe it, very heartily. But, when the people found that they were none the better for the blessings of the Druids, and none the worse for the curses of the Druids, but, that the sun shone and the rain fell without consulting the Druids at all, they just began to think that the Druids were mere men, and that it signified very little whether they cursed or blessed. After which, the pupils of the Druids fell off greatly in numbers, and the Druids took to other trades.

Thus I have come to the end of the Roman time in England. It is but little that is known of those five hundred years; but some remains of them are still found. Often, when labourers are digging up the ground, to make foundations for houses or churches, they light on rusty money that once belonged to the Romans. Fragments of plates from which they ate, of goblets from which they drank, and of pavement on which they trod, are discovered among the earth that is broken by the plough, or the dust that is crumbled by the gardener's spade. Wells that the Romans sunk, still yield water; roads that the Romans made, form part of our highways. In some old battle-fields, British spear-heads and Roman armour have been found, mingled together in decay, as they fell in the thick pressure of the fight.

Traces of Roman camps overgrown with grass, and of mounds that are the burial-places of heaps of Britons, are to be seen in almost all parts of the country. Across the bleak moors of Northumberland, the wall of Severus, overrun with moss and weeds, still stretches, a strong ruin; and the shepherds and their dogs lie sleeping on it in the summer weather. On Salisbury Plain, Stonehenge yet stands: a monument of the earlier time when the Roman name was unknown in Britain, and when the Druids, with their best magic wands, could not have written it in the sands of the wild sea-shore.

CHAPTER II—ANCIENT ENGLAND UNDER THE EARLY SAXONS

The Romans had scarcely gone away from Britain, when the Britons began to wish they had never left it. For, the Romans being gone, and the Britons being much reduced in numbers by their long wars, the Picts and Scots came pouring in, over the broken and unguarded wall of Severus, in swarms. They plundered the richest towns, and killed the people; and came back so often for more booty and more slaughter, that the unfortunate Britons lived a life of terror. As if the Picts and Scots were not bad enough on land, the Saxons attacked the islanders by sea; and, as if something more were still wanting to make them miserable, they quarrelled bitterly among themselves as to what prayers they ought to say, and how they ought to say them. The priests, being very angry with one another on these questions, cursed one another in the heartiest manner; and (uncommonly like the old Druids) cursed all the people whom they could not persuade. So, altogether, the Britons were very badly off, you may believe.

They were in such distress, in short, that they sent a letter to Rome entreating help—which they called the Groans of the Britons; and in which they said, 'The barbarians chase us into the sea, the sea throws us back upon the barbarians, and we have only the hard choice left us of perishing by the sword, or perishing by the waves.' But, the Romans could not help them, even if they were so inclined; for they had enough to do to defend themselves against their own enemies, who were then very fierce and strong. At last, the Britons, unable to bear their hard condition any longer, resolved to make peace with the Saxons, and to invite the Saxons to come into their country, and help them to keep out the Picts and Scots.

It was a British Prince named Vortigern who took this resolution, and who made a treaty of friendship with Hengist and Horsa, two Saxon chiefs. Both of these names, in the old Saxon language, signify Horse; for the Saxons, like many other nations in a rough state, were fond of giving men the names of animals, as Horse, Wolf, Bear, Hound. The Indians of North America,—a very inferior people to the Saxons, though—do the same to this day.

Hengist and Horsa drove out the Picts and Scots; and Vortigern, being grateful to them for that service, made no opposition to their settling themselves in that part of England which is called the Isle of Thanet, or to their inviting over more of their countrymen to join them. But Hengist had a beautiful daughter named Rowena; and when, at a feast, she filled a golden goblet to the brim with wine, and gave it to Vortigern, saying in a sweet voice, ‘Dear King, thy health!’ the King fell in love with her. My opinion is, that the cunning Hengist meant him to do so, in order that the Saxons might have greater influence with him; and that the fair Rowena came to that feast, golden goblet and all, on purpose.

At any rate, they were married; and, long afterwards, whenever the King was angry with the Saxons, or jealous of their encroachments, Rowena would put her beautiful arms round his neck, and softly say, ‘Dear King, they are my people! Be favourable to them, as you loved that Saxon girl who gave you the golden goblet of wine at the feast!’ And, really, I don’t see how the King could help himself.

Ah! We must all die! In the course of years, Vortigern died—he was dethroned, and put in prison, first, I am afraid; and Rowena died; and generations of Saxons and Britons died; and events that happened during a long, long time, would have been quite forgotten but for the tales and songs of the old Bards, who used to go about from feast to feast, with their white beards, recounting the deeds of their forefathers. Among the histories of which they sang and talked, there was a famous one, concerning the bravery and virtues of King Arthur, supposed to have been a British Prince in those old times. But, whether such a person really lived, or whether there were several persons whose histories came to be confused together under that one name, or whether all about him was invention, no one knows.

I will tell you, shortly, what is most interesting in the early Saxon times, as they are described in these songs and stories of the Bards.

In, and long after, the days of Vortigern, fresh bodies of Saxons, under various chiefs, came pouring into Britain. One body, conquering the Britons in the East, and settling there, called their kingdom Essex; another body settled in the West, and called their kingdom Wessex; the Northfolk, or Norfolk people, established themselves in one place; the Southfolk, or Suffolk people, established themselves in another; and gradually seven kingdoms or states arose in England, which were called the Saxon Heptarchy. The poor Britons, falling back before these crowds of fighting men whom they had innocently invited over as friends, retired into Wales and the adjacent country; into Devonshire, and into Cornwall. Those parts of England long remained unconquered. And in Cornwall now—where the sea-coast is very gloomy, steep, and rugged—where, in the dark winter-time, ships have often been wrecked close to the land, and every soul on board has perished—where the winds and waves howl drearily and split the solid rocks into arches and caverns—there are very ancient ruins, which the people call the ruins of King Arthur's Castle.

Kent is the most famous of the seven Saxon kingdoms, because the Christian religion was preached to the Saxons there (who domineered over the Britons too much, to care for what *they* said about their religion, or anything else) by Augustine, a monk from Rome. King Ethelbert, of Kent, was soon converted; and the moment he said he was a Christian, his courtiers all said *they* were Christians; after which, ten thousand of his subjects said they were Christians too. Augustine built a little church, close to this King's palace, on the ground now occupied by the beautiful cathedral of Canterbury. Sebert, the King's nephew, built on a muddy marshy place near London, where there had been a temple to Apollo, a church dedicated to Saint Peter, which is now Westminster Abbey. And, in London itself, on the foundation of a temple to Diana, he built another little church which has risen up, since that old time, to be Saint Paul's.

After the death of Ethelbert, Edwin, King of Northumbria, who was such a good king that it was said a woman or child might openly carry a purse of gold, in his reign, without fear, allowed his child to be baptised, and held a great council to consider whether he and his people should all be Christians or not. It was decided that they should be. Coifi, the chief priest of the old religion, made a great speech on the occasion. In this discourse, he told the people that he had found out the old gods to be impostors. 'I am quite satisfied of it,' he said. 'Look at me! I have been serving them all my life, and they have done nothing for me; whereas, if they had been really powerful, they could not have decently done less, in return for all I have done for them, than make my fortune. As they have never made my fortune, I am quite convinced they are impostors!' When this singular priest had finished speaking, he hastily armed himself with sword and lance, mounted a war-horse, rode at a furious gallop in sight of all the people to the temple, and flung his lance against it as an insult. From that time, the Christian religion spread itself among the Saxons, and became their faith.

The next very famous prince was Egbert. He lived about a hundred and fifty years afterwards, and claimed to have a better right to the throne of Wessex than Beortric, another Saxon prince who was at the head of that kingdom, and who married Edburga, the daughter of Offa, king of another of the seven kingdoms. This Queen Edburga was a handsome murderess, who poisoned people when they offended her. One day, she mixed a cup of poison for a certain noble belonging to the court; but her husband drank of it too, by mistake, and died. Upon this, the people revolted, in great crowds; and running to the palace, and thundering at the gates, cried, 'Down with the wicked queen, who poisons men!' They drove her out of the country, and abolished the title she had disgraced. When years had passed away, some travellers came home from Italy, and said that in the town of Pavia they had seen a ragged beggar-woman, who had once been handsome, but was then shrivelled, bent, and yellow, wandering about the streets, crying for bread; and that this beggar-woman was the poisoning English queen. It was, indeed, Edburga; and so she died, without a shelter for her wretched head.

Egbert, not considering himself safe in England, in consequence of his having claimed the crown of Wessex (for he thought his rival might take him prisoner and put him to death), sought refuge at the court of Charlemagne, King of France. On the death of Beortric, so unhappily poisoned by mistake, Egbert came back to Britain; succeeded to the throne of Wessex; conquered some of the other monarchs of the seven kingdoms; added their territories to his own; and, for the first time, called the country over which he ruled, England.

And now, new enemies arose, who, for a long time, troubled England sorely. These were the Northmen, the people of Denmark and Norway, whom the English called the Danes. They were a warlike people, quite at home upon the sea; not Christians; very daring and cruel. They came over in ships, and plundered and burned wheresoever they landed. Once, they beat Egbert in battle. Once, Egbert beat them. But, they cared no more for being beaten than the English themselves. In the four following short reigns, of Ethelwulf, and his sons, Ethelbald, Ethelbert, and Ethelred, they came back, over and over again, burning and plundering, and laying England waste. In the last-mentioned reign, they seized Edmund, King of

East England, and bound him to a tree. Then, they proposed to him that he should change his religion; but he, being a good Christian, steadily refused. Upon that, they beat him, made cowardly jests upon him, all defenceless as he was, shot arrows at him, and, finally, struck off his head. It is impossible to say whose head they might have struck off next, but for the death of King Ethelred from a wound he had received in fighting against them, and the succession to his throne of the best and wisest king that ever lived in England.

CHAPTER III—ENGLAND UNDER THE GOOD SAXON, ALFRED

Alfred the Great was a young man, three-and-twenty years of age, when he became king. Twice in his childhood, he had been taken to Rome, where the Saxon nobles were in the habit of going on journeys which they supposed to be religious; and, once, he had stayed for some time in Paris. Learning, however, was so little cared for, then, that at twelve years old he had not been taught to read; although, of the sons of King Ethelwulf, he, the youngest, was the favourite. But he had—as most men who grow up to be great and good are generally found to have had—an excellent mother; and, one day, this lady, whose name was Osburga, happened, as she was sitting among her sons, to read a book of Saxon poetry. The art of printing was not known until long and long after that period, and the book, which was written, was what is called 'illuminated,' with beautiful bright letters, richly painted. The brothers admiring it very much, their mother said, 'I will give it to that one of you four princes who first learns to read.' Alfred sought out a tutor that very day, applied himself to learn with great diligence, and soon won the book. He was proud of it, all his life.

This great king, in the first year of his reign, fought nine battles with the Danes. He made some treaties with them too, by which the false Danes swore they would quit the country. They pretended to consider that they had taken a very solemn oath, in swearing this upon the holy bracelets that they wore, and which were always buried with them when they died; but they cared little for it, for they thought nothing of breaking oaths and treaties too, as soon as it suited their purpose, and coming back again to fight, plunder, and burn, as usual. One fatal winter, in the fourth year of King Alfred's reign, they spread themselves in great numbers over the whole of England; and so dispersed and routed the King's soldiers that the King was left alone, and was obliged to disguise himself as a common peasant, and to take refuge in the cottage of one of his cowherds who did not know his face.

Here, King Alfred, while the Danes sought him far and near, was left alone one day, by the cowherd's wife, to watch some cakes which she put to bake upon the hearth. But, being at work upon his bow and arrows, with which he hoped to punish the false Danes when a brighter time should come, and thinking deeply of his poor unhappy subjects whom the Danes chased through the land, his noble mind forgot the cakes, and they were burnt. 'What!' said the cowherd's wife, who scolded him well when she came back, and little thought she was scolding the King, 'you will be ready enough to eat them by-and-by, and yet you cannot watch them, idle dog?'

At length, the Devonshire men made head against a new host of Danes who landed on their coast; killed their chief, and captured their flag; on which was represented the likeness of a Raven—a very fit bird for a thievish army like that, I think. The loss of their standard troubled the Danes greatly, for they believed it to be enchanted—woven by the three daughters of one father in a single afternoon—and they had a story among themselves that when they were victorious in battle, the Raven stretched his wings and seemed to fly; and that when they were defeated, he would droop. He had good reason to droop, now, if he could have done anything half so sensible; for, King Alfred joined the Devonshire men; made a camp with them on a piece of firm ground in the midst of a bog in Somersetshire; and prepared for a great attempt for vengeance on the Danes, and the deliverance of his oppressed people.

But, first, as it was important to know how numerous those pestilent Danes were, and how they were fortified, King Alfred, being a good musician, disguised himself as a glee-man or minstrel, and went, with his harp, to the Danish camp. He played and sang in the very tent of Guthrum the Danish leader, and entertained the Danes as they caroused. While he seemed to think of nothing but his music, he was watchful of their tents, their arms, their discipline, everything that he desired to know. And right soon did this great king entertain them to a different tune; for, summoning all his true followers to meet him at an appointed place, where they received him with joyful shouts and tears, as the monarch whom many of them had given up for lost or dead, he put himself at their head, marched on the Danish camp, defeated the Danes with great slaughter, and besieged them for fourteen days to prevent their escape. But, being as merciful as he was good and brave, he then, instead of killing them, proposed peace: on condition that they should altogether depart from that Western part of England, and settle in the East; and that Guthrum should become a Christian, in remembrance of the Divine religion which now taught his conqueror, the noble Alfred, to forgive the enemy who had so often injured him. This, Guthrum did. At his baptism, King Alfred was his godfather. And Guthrum was an honourable chief who well deserved that clemency; for, ever afterwards he was loyal and faithful to the king. The Danes under him were faithful too. They plundered and burned no more, but worked like honest men. They ploughed, and sowed, and reaped, and led good honest English lives. And I hope the children of those Danes played, many a time, with Saxon children in the sunny fields; and that Danish young men fell in love with Saxon girls, and married them; and that English travellers, benighted at the doors of Danish cottages, often went in for shelter until morning; and that Danes and Saxons sat by the red fire, friends, talking of King Alfred the Great.

All the Danes were not like these under Guthrum; for, after some years, more of them came over, in the old plundering and burning way—among them a fierce pirate of the name of Hastings, who had the boldness to sail up the Thames to Gravesend, with eighty ships. For three years, there was a war with these Danes; and there was a famine in the country, too, and a plague, both upon human creatures and beasts. But King Alfred, whose mighty heart never failed him, built large ships nevertheless, with which to pursue the pirates on the sea; and he encouraged his soldiers, by his brave example, to fight valiantly against them on the shore. At last, he drove them all away; and then there was repose in England.

As great and good in peace, as he was great and good in war, King Alfred never rested from his labours to improve his people. He loved to talk with clever men, and with travellers from foreign countries, and to write down what they told him, for his people to read. He had studied Latin after learning to read English, and now another of his labours was, to translate Latin books into the English-Saxon tongue, that his people might be interested, and improved by their contents. He made just laws, that they might live more happily and freely; he turned away all partial judges, that no wrong might be done them; he was so careful of their property, and punished robbers so severely, that it was a common thing to say that under the great King Alfred, garlands of golden chains and jewels might have hung across the streets, and no man would have touched one. He founded schools; he patiently heard causes himself in his Court of Justice; the great desires of his heart were, to do right to all his subjects, and to leave England better, wiser, happier in all ways, than he found it. His industry in these efforts was quite astonishing. Every day he divided into certain portions, and in each portion devoted himself to a certain pursuit. That he might divide his time exactly, he had wax torches or candles made, which were all of the same size, were notched across at regular distances, and were always kept burning. Thus, as the candles burnt down, he divided the day into notches, almost as accurately as we now divide it into hours upon the clock. But when the candles were first invented, it was found that the wind and draughts of air, blowing into the palace through the doors and windows, and through the chinks in the walls, caused them to gutter and burn unequally. To prevent this, the King had them put into cases formed of wood and white horn. And these were the first lanthorns ever made in England.

All this time, he was afflicted with a terrible unknown disease, which caused him violent and frequent pain that nothing could relieve. He bore it, as he had borne all the troubles of his life, like a brave good man, until he was fifty-three years old; and then, having reigned thirty years, he died. He died in the year nine hundred and one; but, long ago as that is, his fame, and the love and gratitude with which his subjects regarded him, are freshly remembered to the present hour.

In the next reign, which was the reign of Edward, surnamed The Elder, who was chosen in council to succeed, a nephew of King Alfred troubled the country by trying to obtain the throne. The Danes in the East of England took part with this usurper (perhaps because they had honoured his uncle so much, and honoured him for his uncle’s sake), and there was hard fighting; but, the King, with the assistance of his sister, gained the day, and reigned in peace for four and twenty years. He gradually extended his power over the whole of England, and so the Seven Kingdoms were united into one.

When England thus became one kingdom, ruled over by one Saxon king, the Saxons had been settled in the country more than four hundred and fifty years. Great changes had taken place in its customs during that time. The Saxons were still greedy eaters and great drinkers, and their feasts were often of a noisy and drunken kind; but many new comforts and even elegances had become known, and were fast increasing. Hangings for the walls of rooms, where, in these modern days, we paste up paper, are known to have been sometimes made of silk, ornamented with birds and flowers in needlework. Tables and chairs were curiously carved in different woods; were sometimes decorated with gold or silver; sometimes even made of those precious metals. Knives and spoons were used at table; golden ornaments were worn—with silk and cloth, and golden tissues and embroideries; dishes were made of gold and silver, brass and bone. There were varieties of drinking-horns, bedsteads, musical instruments. A harp was passed round, at a feast, like the drinking-bowl, from guest to guest; and each one usually sang or played when his turn came. The weapons of the Saxons were stoutly made, and among them was a terrible iron hammer that gave deadly blows, and was long remembered. The Saxons themselves were a handsome people. The men were proud of their long fair hair, parted on the forehead; their ample beards, their fresh complexions, and clear eyes. The beauty of the Saxon women filled all England with a new delight and grace.

I have more to tell of the Saxons yet, but I stop to say this now, because under the Great Alfred, all the best points of the English-Saxon character were first encouraged, and in him first shown. It has been the greatest character among the nations of the earth. Wherever the descendants of the Saxon race have gone, have sailed, or otherwise made their way, even to the remotest regions of the world, they have been patient, persevering, never to be broken in spirit, never to be turned aside from enterprises on which they have resolved. In Europe, Asia, Africa, America, the whole world over; in the desert, in the forest, on the sea; scorched by a burning sun, or frozen by ice that never melts; the Saxon blood remains unchanged. Wheresoever that race goes, there, law, and industry, and safety for life and property, and all the great results of steady perseverance, are certain to arise.

I pause to think with admiration, of the noble king who, in his single person, possessed all the Saxon virtues. Whom misfortune could not subdue, whom prosperity could not spoil, whose perseverance nothing could shake. Who was hopeful in defeat, and generous in success. Who loved justice, freedom, truth, and knowledge. Who, in his care to instruct his people, probably did more to preserve the beautiful old Saxon language, than I can imagine. Without whom, the English tongue in which I tell this story might have wanted half its meaning. As it is said that his spirit still inspires some of our best English laws, so, let you and I pray that it may animate our English hearts, at least to this—to resolve, when we see any of our fellow-creatures left in ignorance, that we will do our best, while life is in us, to have them taught; and to tell those rulers whose duty it is to teach them, and who neglect their duty, that they have profited very little by all the years that have rolled away since the year nine hundred and one, and that they are far behind the bright example of King Alfred the Great.

CHAPTER IV—ENGLAND UNDER ATHELSTAN AND THE SIX BOY-KINGS

Athelstan, the son of Edward the Elder, succeeded that king. He reigned only fifteen years; but he remembered the glory of his grandfather, the great Alfred, and governed England well. He reduced the turbulent people of Wales, and obliged them to pay him a tribute in money, and in cattle, and to send him their best hawks and hounds. He was victorious over the Cornish men, who were not yet quite under the Saxon government. He restored such of the old laws as were good, and had fallen into disuse; made some wise new laws, and took care of the poor and weak. A strong alliance, made against him by Anlaf a Danish prince, Constantine King of the Scots, and the people of North Wales, he broke and defeated in one great battle, long famous for the vast numbers slain in it. After that, he had a quiet reign; the lords and ladies about him had leisure to become polite and agreeable; and foreign princes were glad (as they have sometimes been since) to come to England on visits to the English court.

When Athelstan died, at forty-seven years old, his brother Edmund, who was only eighteen, became king. He was the first of six boy-kings, as you will presently know.

They called him the Magnificent, because he showed a taste for improvement and refinement. But he was beset by the Danes, and had a short and troubled reign, which came to a troubled end. One night, when he was feasting in his hall, and had eaten much and drunk deep, he saw, among the company, a noted robber named Leof, who had been banished from England. Made very angry by the boldness of this man, the King turned to his cup-bearer, and said, ‘There is a robber sitting at the table yonder, who, for his crimes, is an outlaw in the land—a hunted wolf, whose life any man may take, at any time. Command that robber to depart!’ ‘I will not depart!’ said Leof. ‘No?’ cried the King. ‘No, by the Lord!’ said Leof. Upon that the King rose from his seat, and, making passionately at the robber, and seizing him by his long hair, tried to throw him down. But the robber had a dagger underneath his cloak, and, in the scuffle, stabbed the King to death.

That done, he set his back against the wall, and fought so desperately, that although he was soon cut to pieces by the King's armed men, and the wall and pavement were splashed with his blood, yet it was not before he had killed and wounded many of them. You may imagine what rough lives the kings of those times led, when one of them could struggle, half drunk, with a public robber in his own dining-hall, and be stabbed in presence of the company who ate and drank with him.

Then succeeded the boy-king Edred, who was weak and sickly in body, but of a strong mind. And his armies fought the Northmen, the Danes, and Norwegians, or the Sea-Kings, as they were called, and beat them for the time. And, in nine years, Edred died, and passed away.

Then came the boy-king Edwy, fifteen years of age; but the real king, who had the real power, was a monk named Dunstan—a clever priest, a little mad, and not a little proud and cruel.

Dunstan was then Abbot of Glastonbury Abbey, whither the body of King Edmund the Magnificent was carried, to be buried. While yet a boy, he had got out of his bed one night (being then in a fever), and walked about Glastonbury Church when it was under repair; and, because he did not tumble off some scaffolds that were there, and break his neck, it was reported that he had been shown over the building by an angel. He had also made a harp that was said to play of itself—which it very likely did, as Æolian Harps, which are played by the wind, and are understood now, always do. For these wonders he had been once denounced by his enemies, who were jealous of his favour with the late King Athelstan, as a magician; and he had been waylaid, bound hand and foot, and thrown into a marsh. But he got out again, somehow, to cause a great deal of trouble yet.

The priests of those days were, generally, the only scholars. They were learned in many things. Having to make their own convents and monasteries on uncultivated grounds that were granted to them by the Crown, it was necessary that they should be good farmers and good gardeners, or their lands would have been too poor to support them. For the decoration of the chapels where they prayed, and for the comfort of the refectories where they ate and drank, it was necessary that there should be good carpenters, good smiths, good painters, among them. For their greater safety in sickness and accident, living alone by themselves in solitary places, it was necessary that they should study the virtues of plants and herbs, and should know how to dress cuts, burns, scalds, and bruises, and how to set broken limbs. Accordingly, they taught themselves, and one another, a great variety of useful arts; and became skilful in agriculture, medicine, surgery, and handicraft. And when they wanted the aid of any little piece of machinery, which would be simple enough now, but was marvellous then, to impose a trick upon the poor peasants, they knew very well how to make it; and *did* make it many a time and often, I have no doubt.

Dunstan, Abbot of Glastonbury Abbey, was one of the most sagacious of these monks. He was an ingenious smith, and worked at a forge in a little cell. This cell was made too short to admit of his lying at full length when he went to sleep—as if *that* did any good to anybody!—and he used to tell the most extraordinary lies about demons and spirits, who, he said, came there to persecute him. For instance, he related that one day when he was at work, the devil looked in at the little window, and tried to tempt him to lead a life of idle pleasure; whereupon, having his pincers in the fire, red hot, he seized the devil by the nose, and put him to such pain, that his bellowings were heard for miles and miles. Some people are inclined to think this nonsense a part of Dunstan's madness (for his head never quite recovered the fever), but I think not. I observe that it induced the ignorant people to consider him a holy man, and that it made him very powerful. Which was exactly what he always wanted.

On the day of the coronation of the handsome boy-king Edwy, it was remarked by Odo, Archbishop of Canterbury (who was a Dane by birth), that the King quietly left the coronation feast, while all the company were there. Odo, much displeased, sent his friend Dunstan to seek him. Dunstan finding him in the company of his beautiful young wife Elgiva, and her mother Ethelgiva, a good and virtuous lady, not only grossly abused them, but dragged the young King back into the feasting-hall by force. Some, again, think Dunstan did this because the young King's fair wife was his own cousin, and the monks objected to people marrying their own cousins; but I believe he did it, because he was an imperious, audacious, ill-conditioned priest, who, having loved a young lady himself before he became a sour monk, hated all love now, and everything belonging to it.

The young King was quite old enough to feel this insult. Dunstan had been Treasurer in the last reign, and he soon charged Dunstan with having taken some of the last king's money. The Glastonbury Abbot fled to Belgium (very narrowly escaping some pursuers who were sent to put out his eyes, as you will wish they had, when you read what follows), and his abbey was given to priests who were married; whom he always, both before and afterwards, opposed. But he quickly conspired with his friend, Odo the Dane, to set up the King's young brother, Edgar, as his rival for the throne; and, not content with this revenge, he caused the beautiful queen Elgiva, though a lovely girl of only seventeen or eighteen, to be stolen from one of the Royal Palaces, branded in the cheek with a red-hot iron, and sold into slavery in Ireland. But the Irish people pitied and befriended her; and they said, 'Let us restore the girl-queen to the boy-king, and make the young lovers happy!' and they cured her of her cruel wound, and sent her home as beautiful as before. But the villain Dunstan, and that other villain, Odo, caused her to be waylaid at Gloucester as she was joyfully hurrying to join her husband, and to be hacked and hewn with swords, and to be barbarously maimed and lamed, and left to die. When Edwy the Fair (his people called him so, because he was so young and handsome) heard of her dreadful fate, he died of a broken heart; and so the pitiful story of the poor young wife and husband ends! Ah! Better to be two cottagers in these better times, than king and queen of England in those bad days, though never so fair!

Then came the boy-king, Edgar, called the Peaceful, fifteen years old. Dunstan, being still the real king, drove all married priests out of the monasteries and abbeys, and replaced them by solitary monks like himself, of the rigid order called the Benedictines. He made himself Archbishop of Canterbury, for his greater glory; and exercised such power over the neighbouring British princes, and so collected them about the King, that once, when the King held his court at Chester, and went on the river Dee to visit the monastery of St. John, the eight oars of his boat were pulled (as the people used to delight in relating in stories and songs) by eight crowned kings, and steered by the King of England. As Edgar was very obedient to Dunstan and the monks, they took great pains to represent him as the best of kings. But he was really profligate, debauched, and vicious. He once forcibly carried off a young lady from the convent at Wilton; and Dunstan, pretending to be very much shocked, condemned him not to wear his crown upon his head for seven years—no great punishment, I dare say, as it can hardly have been a more comfortable ornament to wear, than a stewpan without a handle. His marriage with his second wife, Elfrida, is one of the worst events of his reign. Hearing of the beauty of this lady, he despatched his favourite courtier, Athelwold, to her father's castle in Devonshire, to see if she were really as charming as fame reported. Now, she was so exceedingly beautiful that Athelwold fell in love with her himself, and married her; but he told the King that she was only rich—not handsome. The King, suspecting the truth when they came home, resolved to pay the newly-married couple a visit; and, suddenly, told Athelwold to prepare for his immediate coming. Athelwold, terrified, confessed to his young wife what he had said and done, and implored her to disguise her beauty by some ugly dress or silly manner, that he might be safe from the King's anger. She promised that she would; but she was a proud woman, who would far rather have been a queen than the wife of a courtier. She dressed herself in her best dress, and adorned herself with her richest jewels; and when the King came, presently, he discovered the cheat. So, he caused his false friend, Athelwold, to be murdered in a wood, and married his widow, this bad Elfrida. Six or seven years afterwards, he died; and was buried, as if he had been all that the monks said he was, in the abbey of Glastonbury, which he—or Dunstan for him—had much enriched.

England, in one part of this reign, was so troubled by wolves, which, driven out of the open country, hid themselves in the mountains of Wales when they were not attacking travellers and animals, that the tribute payable by the Welsh people was forgiven them, on condition of their producing, every year, three hundred wolves' heads. And the Welshmen were so sharp upon the wolves, to save their money, that in four years there was not a wolf left.

Then came the boy-king, Edward, called the Martyr, from the manner of his death. Elfrida had a son, named Ethelred, for whom she claimed the throne; but Dunstan did not choose to favour him, and he made Edward king. The boy was hunting, one day, down in Dorsetshire, when he rode near to Corfe Castle, where Elfrida and Ethelred lived. Wishing to see them kindly, he rode away from his attendants and galloped to the castle gate, where he arrived at twilight, and blew his hunting-horn. 'You are welcome, dear King,' said Elfrida, coming out, with her brightest smiles. 'Pray you dismount and enter.' 'Not so, dear madam,' said the King. 'My company will miss me, and fear that I have met with some harm. Please you to give me a cup of wine, that I may drink here, in the saddle, to you and to my little brother, and so ride away with the good speed I have made in riding here.' Elfrida, going in to bring the wine, whispered an armed servant, one of her attendants, who stole out of the darkening gateway, and crept round behind the King’s horse. As the King raised the cup to his lips, saying, ‘Health!’ to the wicked woman who was smiling on him, and to his innocent brother whose hand she held in hers, and who was only ten years old, this armed man made a spring and stabbed him in the back. He dropped the cup and spurred his horse away; but, soon fainting with loss of blood, dropped from the saddle, and, in his fall, entangled one of his feet in the stirrup. The frightened horse dashed on; trailing his rider’s curls upon the ground; dragging his smooth young face through ruts, and stones, and briers, and fallen leaves, and mud; until the hunters, tracking the animal’s course by the King’s blood, caught his bridle, and released the disfigured body.

Then came the sixth and last of the boy-kings, Ethelred, whom Elfrida, when he cried out at the sight of his murdered brother riding away from the castle gate, unmercifully beat with a torch which she snatched from one of the attendants. The people so disliked this boy, on account of his cruel mother and the murder she had done to promote him, that Dunstan would not have had him for king, but would have made Edgitha, the daughter of the dead King Edgar, and of the lady whom he stole out of the convent at Wilton, Queen of England, if she would have consented. But she knew the stories of the youthful kings too well, and would not be persuaded from the convent where she lived in peace; so, Dunstan put Ethelred on the throne, having no one else to put there, and gave him the nickname of The Unready—knowing that he wanted resolution and firmness.

At first, Elfrida possessed great influence over the young King, but, as he grew older and came of age, her influence declined. The infamous woman, not having it in her power to do any more evil, then retired from court, and, according, to the fashion of the time, built churches and monasteries, to expiate her guilt. As if a church, with a steeple reaching to the very stars, would have been any sign of true repentance for the blood of the poor boy, whose murdered form was trailed at his horse’s heels! As if she could have buried her wickedness beneath the senseless stones of the whole world, piled up one upon another, for the monks to live in!

About the ninth or tenth year of this reign, Dunstan died. He was growing old then, but was as stern and artful as ever. Two circumstances that happened in connexion with him, in this reign of Ethelred, made a great noise. Once, he was present at a meeting of the Church, when the question was discussed whether priests should have permission to marry; and, as he sat with his head hung down, apparently thinking about it, a voice seemed to come out of a crucifix in the room, and warn the meeting to be of his opinion. This was some juggling of Dunstan's, and was probably his own voice disguised. But he played off a worse juggle than that, soon afterwards; for, another meeting being held on the same subject, and he and his supporters being seated on one side of a great room, and their opponents on the other, he rose and said, 'To Christ himself, as judge, do I commit this cause!' Immediately on these words being spoken, the floor where the opposite party sat gave way, and some were killed and many wounded. You may be pretty sure that it had been weakened under Dunstan's direction, and that it fell at Dunstan's signal. *His* part of the floor did not go down. No, no. He was too good a workman for that.

When he died, the monks settled that he was a Saint, and called him Saint Dunstan ever afterwards. They might just as well have settled that he was a coach-horse, and could just as easily have called him one.

Ethelred the Unready was glad enough, I dare say, to be rid of this holy saint; but, left to himself, he was a poor weak king, and his reign was a reign of defeat and shame. The restless Danes, led by Sweyn, a son of the King of Denmark who had quarrelled with his father and had been banished from home, again came into England, and, year after year, attacked and despoiled large towns. To coax these sea-kings away, the weak Ethelred paid them money; but, the more money he paid, the more money the Danes wanted. At first, he gave them ten thousand pounds; on their next invasion, sixteen thousand pounds; on their next invasion, four and twenty thousand pounds: to pay which large sums, the unfortunate English people were heavily taxed. But, as the Danes still came back and wanted more, he thought it would be a good plan to marry into some powerful foreign family that would help him with soldiers. So, in the year one thousand and two, he courted and married Emma, the sister of Richard Duke of Normandy; a lady who was called the Flower of Normandy.

And now, a terrible deed was done in England, the like of which was never done on English ground before or since. On the thirteenth of November, in pursuance of secret instructions sent by the King over the whole country, the inhabitants of every town and city armed, and murdered all the Danes who were their neighbours.

Young and old, babies and soldiers, men and women, every Dane was killed. No doubt there were among them many ferocious men who had done the English great wrong, and whose pride and insolence, in swaggering in the houses of the English and insulting their wives and daughters, had become unbearable; but no doubt there were also among them many peaceful Christian Danes who had married English women and become like English men. They were all slain, even to Gunhilda, the sister of the King of Denmark, married to an English lord; who was first obliged to see the murder of her husband and her child, and then was killed herself.

When the King of the sea-kings heard of this deed of blood, he swore that he would have a great revenge. He raised an army, and a mightier fleet of ships than ever yet had sailed to England; and in all his army there was not a slave or an old man, but every soldier was a free man, and the son of a free man, and in the prime of life, and sworn to be revenged upon the English nation, for the massacre of that dread thirteenth of November, when his countrymen and countrywomen, and the little children whom they loved, were killed with fire and sword. And so, the sea-kings came to England in many great ships, each bearing the flag of its own commander. Golden eagles, ravens, dragons, dolphins, beasts of prey, threatened England from the prows of those ships, as they came onward through the water; and were reflected in the shining shields that hung upon their sides. The ship that bore the standard of the King of the sea-kings was carved and painted like a mighty serpent; and the King in his anger prayed that the Gods in whom he trusted might all desert him, if his serpent did not strike its fangs into England's heart.

And indeed it did. For, the great army landing from the great fleet, near Exeter, went forward, laying England waste, and striking their lances in the earth as they advanced, or throwing them into rivers, in token of their making all the island theirs. In remembrance of the black November night when the Danes were murdered, wheresoever the invaders came, they made the Saxons prepare and spread for them great feasts; and when they had eaten those feasts, and had drunk a curse to England with wild rejoicings, they drew their swords, and killed their Saxon entertainers, and marched on. For six long years they carried on this war: burning the crops, farmhouses, barns, mills, granaries; killing the labourers in the fields; preventing the seed from being sown in the ground; causing famine and starvation; leaving only heaps of ruin and smoking ashes, where they had found rich towns. To crown this misery, English officers and men deserted, and even the favourites of Ethelred the Unready, becoming traitors, seized many of the English ships, turned pirates against their own country, and aided by a storm occasioned the loss of nearly the whole English navy.

There was but one man of note, at this miserable pass, who was true to his country and the feeble King. He was a priest, and a brave one. For twenty days, the Archbishop of Canterbury defended that city against its Danish besiegers; and when a traitor in the town threw the gates open and admitted them, he said, in chains, ‘I will not buy my life with money that must be extorted from the suffering people. Do with me what you please!’ Again and again, he steadily refused to purchase his release with gold wrung from the poor.

At last, the Danes being tired of this, and being assembled at a drunken merry-making, had him brought into the feasting-hall.

‘Now, bishop,’ they said, ‘we want gold!’

He looked round on the crowd of angry faces; from the shaggy beards close to him, to the shaggy beards against the walls, where men were mounted on tables and forms to see him over the heads of others: and he knew that his time was come.

‘I have no gold,’ he said.

‘Get it, bishop!’ they all thundered.

‘That, I have often told you I will not,’ said he.

They gathered closer round him, threatening, but he stood unmoved. Then, one man struck him; then, another; then a cursing soldier picked up from a heap in a corner of the hall, where fragments had been rudely thrown at dinner, a great ox-bone, and cast it at his face, from which the blood came spurting forth; then, others ran to the same heap, and knocked him down with other bones, and bruised and battered him; until one soldier whom he had baptised (willing, as I hope for the sake of that soldier’s soul, to shorten the sufferings of the good man) struck him dead with his battle-axe.

If Ethelred had had the heart to emulate the courage of this noble archbishop, he might have done something yet. But he paid the Danes forty-eight thousand pounds, instead, and gained so little by the cowardly act, that Sweyn soon afterwards came over to subdue all England. So broken was the attachment of the English people, by this time, to their incapable King and their forlorn country which could not protect them, that they welcomed Sweyn on all sides, as a deliverer. London faithfully stood out, as long as the King was within its walls; but, when he sneaked away, it also welcomed the Dane. Then, all was over; and the King took refuge abroad with the Duke of Normandy, who had already given shelter to the King's wife, once the Flower of that country, and to her children.

Still, the English people, in spite of their sad sufferings, could not quite forget the great King Alfred and the Saxon race. When Sweyn died suddenly, in little more than a month after he had been proclaimed King of England, they generously sent to Ethelred, to say that they would have him for their King again, 'if he would only govern them better than he had governed them before.' The Unready, instead of coming himself, sent Edward, one of his sons, to make promises for him. At last, he followed, and the English declared him King. The Danes declared Canute, the son of Sweyn, King. Thus, direful war began again, and lasted for three years, when the Unready died. And I know of nothing better that he did, in all his reign of eight and thirty years.

Was Canute to be King now? Not over the Saxons, they said; they must have Edmund, one of the sons of the Unready, who was surnamed Ironside, because of his strength and stature. Edmund and Canute thereupon fell to, and fought five battles—O unhappy England, what a fighting-ground it was!—and then Ironside, who was a big man, proposed to Canute, who was a little man, that they two should fight it out in single combat. If Canute had been the big man, he would probably have said yes, but, being the little man, he decidedly said no. However, he declared that he was willing to divide the kingdom—to take all that lay north of Watling Street, as the old Roman military road from Dover to Chester was called, and to give Ironside all that lay south of it. Most men being weary of so much bloodshed, this was done. But Canute soon became sole King of England; for Ironside died suddenly within two months. Some think that he was killed, and killed by Canute's orders. No one knows.

CHAPTER V—ENGLAND UNDER CANUTE THE DANE

Canute reigned eighteen years. He was a merciless King at first. After he had clasped the hands of the Saxon chiefs, in token of the sincerity with which he swore to be just and good to them in return for their acknowledging him, he denounced and slew many of them, as well as many relations of the late King. 'He who brings me the head of one of my enemies,' he used to say, 'shall be dearer to me than a brother.' And he was so severe in hunting down his enemies, that he must have got together a pretty large family of these dear brothers. He was strongly inclined to kill Edmund and Edward, two children, sons of poor Ironside; but, being afraid to do so in England, he sent them over to the King of Sweden, with a request that the King would be so good as 'dispose of them.' If the King of Sweden had been like many, many other men of that day, he would have had their innocent throats cut; but he was a kind man, and brought them up tenderly.

Normandy ran much in Canute's mind. In Normandy were the two children of the late king—Edward and Alfred by name; and their uncle the Duke might one day claim the crown for them. But the Duke showed so little inclination to do so now, that he proposed to Canute to marry his sister, the widow of The Unready; who, being but a showy flower, and caring for nothing so much as becoming a queen again, left her children and was wedded to him.

Successful and triumphant, assisted by the valour of the English in his foreign wars, and with little strife to trouble him at home, Canute had a prosperous reign, and made many improvements. He was a poet and a musician. He grew sorry, as he grew older, for the blood he had shed at first; and went to Rome in a Pilgrim's dress, by way of washing it out. He gave a great deal of money to foreigners on his journey; but he took it from the English before he started. On the whole, however, he certainly became a far better man when he had no opposition to contend with, and was as great a King as England had known for some time.

The old writers of history relate how that Canute was one day disgusted with his courtiers for their flattery, and how he caused his chair to be set on the sea-shore, and feigned to command the tide as it came up not to wet the edge of his robe, for the land was his; how the tide came up, of course, without regarding him; and how he then turned to his flatterers, and rebuked them, saying, what was the might of any earthly king, to the might of the Creator, who could say unto the sea, 'Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther!' We may learn from this, I think, that a little sense will go a long way in a king; and that courtiers are not easily cured of flattery, nor kings of a liking for it. If the courtiers of Canute had not known, long before, that the King was fond of flattery, they would have known better than to offer it in such large doses. And if they had not known that he was vain of this speech (anything but a wonderful speech it seems to me, if a good child had made it), they would not have been at such great pains to repeat it. I fancy I see them all on the sea-shore together; the King's chair sinking in the sand; the King in a mighty good humour with his own wisdom; and the courtiers pretending to be quite stunned by it!

It is not the sea alone that is bidden to go 'thus far, and no farther.' The great command goes forth to all the kings upon the earth, and went to Canute in the year one thousand and thirty-five, and stretched him dead upon his bed. Beside it, stood his Norman wife. Perhaps, as the King looked his last upon her, he, who had so often thought distrustfully of Normandy, long ago, thought once more of the two exiled Princes in their uncle's court, and of the little favour they could feel for either Danes or Saxons, and of a rising cloud in Normandy that slowly moved towards England.

CHAPTER VI—ENGLAND UNDER HAROLD HAREFOOT, HARDICANUTE, AND EDWARD THE CONFESSOR

Canute left three sons, by name Sweyn, Harold, and Hardicanute; but his Queen, Emma, once the Flower of Normandy, was the mother of only Hardicanute. Canute had wished his dominions to be divided between the three, and had wished Harold to have England; but the Saxon people in the South of England, headed by a nobleman with great possessions, called the powerful Earl Godwin (who is said to have been originally a poor cow-boy), opposed this, and desired to have, instead, either Hardicanute, or one of the two exiled Princes who were over in Normandy. It seemed so certain that there would be more bloodshed to settle this dispute, that many people left their homes, and took refuge in the woods and swamps. Happily, however, it was agreed to refer the whole question to a great meeting at Oxford, which decided that Harold should have all the country north of the Thames, with London for his capital city, and that Hardicanute should have all the south. The quarrel was so arranged; and, as Hardicanute was in Denmark troubling himself very little about anything but eating and getting drunk, his mother and Earl Godwin governed the south for him.

They had hardly begun to do so, and the trembling people who had hidden themselves were scarcely at home again, when Edward, the elder of the two exiled Princes, came over from Normandy with a few followers, to claim the English Crown. His mother Emma, however, who only cared for her last son Hardicanute, instead of assisting him, as he expected, opposed him so strongly with all her influence that he was very soon glad to get safely back. His brother Alfred was not so fortunate. Believing in an affectionate letter, written some time afterwards to him and his brother, in his mother’s name (but whether really with or without his mother’s knowledge is now uncertain), he allowed himself to be tempted over to England, with a good force of soldiers, and landing on the Kentish coast, and being met and welcomed by Earl Godwin, proceeded into Surrey, as far as the town of Guildford. Here, he and his men halted in the evening to rest, having still the Earl in their company; who had ordered lodgings and good cheer for them. But, in the dead of the night, when they were off their guard, being divided into small parties sleeping soundly after a long march and a plentiful supper in different houses, they were set upon by the King's troops, and taken prisoners. Next morning they were drawn out in a line, to the number of six hundred men, and were barbarously tortured and killed; with the exception of every tenth man, who was sold into slavery. As to the wretched Prince Alfred, he was stripped naked, tied to a horse and sent away into the Isle of Ely, where his eyes were torn out of his head, and where in a few days he miserably died. I am not sure that the Earl had wilfully entrapped him, but I suspect it strongly.

Harold was now King all over England, though it is doubtful whether the Archbishop of Canterbury (the greater part of the priests were Saxons, and not friendly to the Danes) ever consented to crown him. Crowned or uncrowned, with the Archbishop's leave or without it, he was King for four years: after which short reign he died, and was buried; having never done much in life but go a hunting. He was such a fast runner at this, his favourite sport, that the people called him Harold Harefoot.

Hardicanute was then at Bruges, in Flanders, plotting, with his mother (who had gone over there after the cruel murder of Prince Alfred), for the invasion of England. The Danes and Saxons, finding themselves without a King, and dreading new disputes, made common cause, and joined in inviting him to occupy the Throne. He consented, and soon troubled them enough; for he brought over numbers of Danes, and taxed the people so insupportably to enrich those greedy favourites that there were many insurrections, especially one at Worcester, where the citizens rose and killed his tax-collectors; in revenge for which he burned their city. He was a brutal King, whose first public act was to order the dead body of poor Harold Harefoot to be dug up, beheaded, and thrown into the river. His end was worthy of such a beginning. He fell down drunk, with a goblet of wine in his hand, at a wedding-feast at Lambeth, given in honour of the marriage of his standard-bearer, a Dane named Towed the Proud. And he never spoke again.

Edward, afterwards called by the monks The Confessor, succeeded; and his first act was to oblige his mother Emma, who had favoured him so little, to retire into the country; where she died some ten years afterwards. He was the exiled prince whose brother Alfred had been so foully killed. He had been invited over from Normandy by Hardicanute, in the course of his short reign of two years, and had been handsomely treated at court. His cause was now favoured by the powerful Earl Godwin, and he was soon made King. This Earl had been suspected by the people, ever since Prince Alfred's cruel death; he had even been tried in the last reign for the Prince's murder, but had been pronounced not guilty; chiefly, as it was supposed, because of a present he had made to the swinish King, of a gilded ship with a figure-head of solid gold, and a crew of eighty splendidly armed men. It was his interest to help the new King with his power, if the new King would help him against the popular distrust and hatred. So they made a bargain. Edward the Confessor got the Throne. The Earl got more power and more land, and his daughter Editha was made queen; for it was a part of their compact that the King should take her for his wife.

But, although she was a gentle lady, in all things worthy to be beloved—good, beautiful, sensible, and kind—the King from the first neglected her. Her father and her six proud brothers, resenting this cold treatment, harassed the King greatly by exerting all their power to make him unpopular. Having lived so long in Normandy, he preferred the Normans to the English. He made a Norman Archbishop, and Norman Bishops; his great officers and favourites were all Normans; he introduced the Norman fashions and the Norman language; in imitation of the state custom of Normandy, he attached a great seal to his state documents, instead of merely marking them, as the Saxon Kings had done, with the sign of the cross—just as poor people who have never been taught to write, now make the same mark for their names. All this, the powerful Earl Godwin and his six proud sons represented to the people as disfavour shown towards the English; and thus they daily increased their own power, and daily diminished the power of the King.

They were greatly helped by an event that occurred when he had reigned eight years. Eustace, Earl of Bologne, who had married the King's sister, came to England on a visit. After staying at the court some time, he set forth, with his numerous train of attendants, to return home. They were to embark at Dover. Entering that peaceful town in armour, they took possession of the best houses, and noisily demanded to be lodged and entertained without payment. One of the bold men of Dover, who would not endure to have these domineering strangers jingling their heavy swords and iron corselets up and down his house, eating his meat and drinking his strong liquor, stood in his doorway and refused admission to the first armed man who came there. The armed man drew, and wounded him. The man of Dover struck the armed man dead. Intelligence of what he had done, spreading through the streets to where the Count Eustace and his men were standing by their horses, bridle in hand, they passionately mounted, galloped to the house, surrounded it, forced their way in (the doors and windows being closed when they came up), and killed the man of Dover at his own fireside. They then clattered through the streets, cutting down and riding over men, women, and children. This did not last long, you may believe. The men of Dover set upon them with great fury, killed nineteen of the foreigners, wounded many more, and, blockading the road to the port so that they should not embark, beat them out of the town by the way they had come. Hereupon, Count Eustace rides as hard as man can ride to Gloucester, where Edward is, surrounded by Norman monks and Norman lords. ‘Justice!’ cries the Count, ‘upon the men of Dover, who have set upon and slain my people!’ The King sends immediately for the powerful Earl Godwin, who happens to be near; reminds him that Dover is under his government; and orders him to repair to Dover and do military execution on the inhabitants. ‘It does not become you,’ says the proud Earl in reply, ‘to condemn without a hearing those whom you have sworn to protect. I will not do it.’

The King, therefore, summoned the Earl, on pain of banishment and loss of his titles and property, to appear before the court to answer this disobedience. The Earl refused to appear. He, his eldest son Harold, and his second son Sweyn, hastily raised as many fighting men as their utmost power could collect, and demanded to have Count Eustace and his followers surrendered to the justice of the country. The King, in his turn, refused to give them up, and raised a strong force. After some treaty and delay, the troops of the great Earl and his sons began to fall off. The Earl, with a part of his family and abundance of treasure, sailed to Flanders; Harold escaped to Ireland; and the power of the great family was for that time gone in England. But, the people did not forget them.

Then, Edward the Confessor, with the true meanness of a mean spirit, visited his dislike of the once powerful father and sons upon the helpless daughter and sister, his unoffending wife, whom all who saw her (her husband and his monks excepted) loved. He seized rapaciously upon her fortune and her jewels, and allowing her only one attendant, confined her in a gloomy convent, of which a sister of his—no doubt an unpleasant lady after his own heart—was abbess or jailer.

Having got Earl Godwin and his six sons well out of his way, the King favoured the Normans more than ever. He invited over William, Duke Of Normandy, the son of that Duke who had received him and his murdered brother long ago, and of a peasant girl, a tanner's daughter, with whom that Duke had fallen in love for her beauty as he saw her washing clothes in a brook. William, who was a great warrior, with a passion for fine horses, dogs, and arms, accepted the invitation; and the Normans in England, finding themselves more numerous than ever when he arrived with his retinue, and held in still greater honour at court than before, became more and more haughty towards the people, and were more and more disliked by them.

The old Earl Godwin, though he was abroad, knew well how the people felt; for, with part of the treasure he had carried away with him, he kept spies and agents in his pay all over England.

Accordingly, he thought the time was come for fitting out a great expedition against the Norman-loving King. With it, he sailed to the Isle of Wight, where he was joined by his son Harold, the most gallant and brave of all his family. And so the father and son came sailing up the Thames to Southwark; great numbers of the people declaring for them, and shouting for the English Earl and the English Harold, against the Norman favourites!

The King was at first as blind and stubborn as kings usually have been whensoever they have been in the hands of monks. But the people rallied so thickly round the old Earl and his son, and the old Earl was so steady in demanding without bloodshed the restoration of himself and his family to their rights, that at last the court took the alarm. The Norman Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Norman Bishop of London, surrounded by their retainers, fought their way out of London, and escaped from Essex to France in a fishing-boat. The other Norman favourites dispersed in all directions. The old Earl and his sons (except Sweyn, who had committed crimes against the law) were restored to their possessions and dignities. Editha, the virtuous and lovely Queen of the insensible King, was triumphantly released from her prison, the convent, and once more sat in her chair of state, arrayed in the jewels of which, when she had no champion to support her rights, her cold-blooded husband had deprived her.

The old Earl Godwin did not long enjoy his restored fortune. He fell down in a fit at the King's table, and died upon the third day afterwards. Harold succeeded to his power, and to a far higher place in the attachment of the people than his father had ever held. By his valour he subdued the King's enemies in many bloody fights. He was vigorous against rebels in Scotland—this was the time when Macbeth slew Duncan, upon which event our English Shakespeare, hundreds of years afterwards, wrote his great tragedy; and he killed the restless Welsh King Griffith, and brought his head to England.

What Harold was doing at sea, when he was driven on the French coast by a tempest, is not at all certain; nor does it at all matter. That his ship was forced by a storm on that shore, and that he was taken prisoner, there is no doubt. In those barbarous days, all shipwrecked strangers were taken prisoners, and obliged to pay ransom. So, a certain Count Guy, who was the Lord of Ponthieu where Harold's disaster happened, seized him, instead of relieving him like a hospitable and Christian lord as he ought to have done, and expected to make a very good thing of it.

But Harold sent off immediately to Duke William of Normandy, complaining of this treatment; and the Duke no sooner heard of it than he ordered Harold to be escorted to the ancient town of Rouen, where he then was, and where he received him as an honoured guest. Now, some writers tell us that Edward the Confessor, who was by this time old and had no children, had made a will, appointing Duke William of Normandy his successor, and had informed the Duke of his having done so. There is no doubt that he was anxious about his successor; because he had even invited over, from abroad, Edward the Outlaw, a son of Ironside, who had come to England with his wife and three children, but whom the King had strangely refused to see when he did come, and who had died in London suddenly (princes were terribly liable to sudden death in those days), and had been buried in St. Paul's Cathedral. The King might possibly have made such a will; or, having always been fond of the Normans, he might have encouraged Norman William to aspire to the English crown, by something that he said to him when he was staying at the English court. But, certainly William did now aspire to it; and knowing that Harold would be a powerful rival, he called together a great assembly of his nobles, offered Harold his daughter Adele in marriage, informed him that he meant on King Edward's death to claim the English crown as his own inheritance, and required

Harold then and there to swear to aid him. Harold, being in the Duke's power, took this oath upon the Missal, or Prayer-book. It is a good example of the superstitions of the monks, that this Missal, instead of being placed upon a table, was placed upon a tub; which, when Harold had sworn, was uncovered, and shown to be full of dead men's bones—bones, as the monks pretended, of saints. This was supposed to make Harold's oath a great deal more impressive and binding. As if the great name of the Creator of Heaven and earth could be made more solemn by a knuckle-bone, or a double-tooth, or a finger-nail, of Dunstan!

Within a week or two after Harold's return to England, the dreary old Confessor was found to be dying. After wandering in his mind like a very weak old man, he died. As he had put himself entirely in the hands of the monks when he was alive, they praised him lustily when he was dead. They had gone so far, already, as to persuade him that he could work miracles; and had brought people afflicted with a bad disorder of the skin, to him, to be touched and cured. This was called 'touching for the King's Evil,' which afterwards became a royal custom. You know, however, Who really touched the sick, and healed them; and you know His sacred name is not among the dusty line of human kings.

CHAPTER VII—ENGLAND UNDER HAROLD THE SECOND, AND CONQUERED BY THE NORMANS

Harold was crowned King of England on the very day of the maudlin Confessor’s funeral. He had good need to be quick about it. When the news reached Norman William, hunting in his park at Rouen, he dropped his bow, returned to his palace, called his nobles to council, and presently sent ambassadors to Harold, calling on him to keep his oath and resign the Crown. Harold would do no such thing. The barons of France leagued together round Duke William for the invasion of England. Duke William promised freely to distribute English wealth and English lands among them. The Pope sent to Normandy a consecrated banner, and a ring containing a hair which he warranted to have grown on the head of Saint Peter. He blessed the enterprise; and cursed Harold; and requested that the Normans would pay ‘Peter’s Pence’—or a tax to himself of a penny a year on every house—a little more regularly in future, if they could make it convenient.

King Harold had a rebel brother in Flanders, who was a vassal of Harold Hardrada, King of Norway. This brother, and this Norwegian King, joining their forces against England, with Duke William’s help, won a fight in which the English were commanded by two nobles; and then besieged York. Harold, who was waiting for the Normans on the coast at Hastings, with his army, marched to Stamford Bridge upon the river Derwent to give them instant battle.

He found them drawn up in a hollow circle, marked out by their shining spears. Riding round this circle at a distance, to survey it, he saw a brave figure on horseback, in a blue mantle and a bright helmet, whose horse suddenly stumbled and threw him.

‘Who is that man who has fallen?’ Harold asked of one of his captains.

‘The King of Norway,’ he replied.

‘He is a tall and stately king,’ said Harold, ‘but his end is near.’

He added, in a little while, ‘Go yonder to my brother, and tell him, if he withdraw his troops, he shall be Earl of Northumberland, and rich and powerful in England.’

The captain rode away and gave the message.

‘What will he give to my friend the King of Norway?’ asked the brother.

‘Seven feet of earth for a grave,’ replied the captain.

‘No more?’ returned the brother, with a smile.

‘The King of Norway being a tall man, perhaps a little more,’ replied the captain.

‘Ride back!’ said the brother, ‘and tell King Harold to make ready for the fight!’

He did so, very soon. And such a fight King Harold led against that force, that his brother, and the Norwegian King, and every chief of note in all their host, except the Norwegian King’s son, Olave, to whom he gave honourable dismissal, were left dead upon the field. The victorious army marched to York. As King Harold sat there at the feast, in the midst of all his company, a stir was heard at the doors; and messengers all covered with mire from riding far and fast through broken ground came hurrying in, to report that the Normans had landed in England.

The intelligence was true. They had been tossed about by contrary winds, and some of their ships had been wrecked. A part of their own shore, to which they had been driven back, was strewn with Norman bodies. But they had once more made sail, led by the Duke’s own galley, a present from his wife, upon the prow whereof the figure of a golden boy stood pointing towards England. By day, the banner of the three Lions of Normandy, the diverse coloured sails, the gilded vans, the many decorations of this gorgeous ship, had glittered in the sun and sunny water; by night, a light had sparkled like a star at her mast-head. And now, encamped near Hastings, with their leader lying in the old Roman castle of Pevensey, the English retiring in all directions, the land for miles around scorched and smoking, fired and pillaged, was the whole Norman power, hopeful and strong on English ground.

Harold broke up the feast and hurried to London. Within a week, his army was ready. He sent out spies to ascertain the Norman strength. William took them, caused them to be led through his whole camp, and then dismissed. ‘The Normans,’ said these spies to Harold, ‘are not bearded on the upper lip as we English are, but are shorn. They are priests.’ ‘My men,’ replied Harold, with a laugh, ‘will find those priests good soldiers!’

‘The Saxons,’ reported Duke William’s outposts of Norman soldiers, who were instructed to retire as King Harold’s army advanced, ‘rush on us through their pillaged country with the fury of madmen.’

‘Let them come, and come soon!’ said Duke William.

Some proposals for a reconciliation were made, but were soon abandoned. In the middle of the month of October, in the year one thousand and sixty-six, the Normans and the English came front to front. All night the armies lay encamped before each other, in a part of the country then called Senlac, now called (in remembrance of them) Battle. With the first dawn of day, they arose. There, in the faint light, were the English on a hill; a wood behind them; in their midst, the Royal banner, representing a fighting warrior, woven in gold thread, adorned with precious stones; beneath the banner, as it rustled in the wind, stood King Harold on foot, with two of his remaining brothers by his side; around them, still and silent as the dead, clustered the whole English army—every soldier covered by his shield, and bearing in his hand his dreaded English battle-axe.

On an opposite hill, in three lines, archers, foot-soldiers, horsemen, was the Norman force. Of a sudden, a great battle-cry, ‘God help us!’ burst from the Norman lines. The English answered with their own battle-cry, ‘God’s Rood! Holy Rood!’ The Normans then came sweeping down the hill to attack the English.

There was one tall Norman Knight who rode before the Norman army on a prancing horse, throwing up his heavy sword and catching it, and singing of the bravery of his countrymen. An English Knight, who rode out from the English force to meet him, fell by this Knight’s hand. Another English Knight rode out, and he fell too. But then a third rode out, and killed the Norman. This was in the first beginning of the fight. It soon raged everywhere.

The English, keeping side by side in a great mass, cared no more for the showers of Norman arrows than if they had been showers of Norman rain. When the Norman horsemen rode against them, with their battle-axes they cut men and horses down. The Normans gave way. The English pressed forward. A cry went forth among the Norman troops that Duke William was killed. Duke William took off his helmet, in order that his face might be distinctly seen, and rode along the line before his men. This gave them courage. As they turned again to face the English, some of their Norman horse divided the pursuing body of the English from the rest, and thus all that foremost portion of the English army fell, fighting bravely. The main body still remaining firm, heedless of the Norman arrows, and with their battle-axes cutting down the crowds of horsemen when they rode up, like forests of young trees, Duke William pretended to retreat. The eager English followed. The Norman army closed again, and fell upon them with great slaughter.

'Still,' said Duke William, 'there are thousands of the English, firms as rocks around their King. Shoot upward, Norman archers, that your arrows may fall down upon their faces!'

The sun rose high, and sank, and the battle still raged. Through all the wild October day, the clash and din resounded in the air. In the red sunset, and in the white moonlight, heaps upon heaps of dead men lay strewn, a dreadful spectacle, all over the ground.

King Harold, wounded with an arrow in the eye, was nearly blind. His brothers were already killed. Twenty Norman Knights, whose battered armour had flashed fiery and golden in the sunshine all day long, and now looked silvery in the moonlight, dashed forward to seize the Royal banner from the English Knights and soldiers, still faithfully collected round their blinded King. The King received a mortal wound, and dropped. The English broke and fled. The Normans rallied, and the day was lost.

O what a sight beneath the moon and stars, when lights were shining in the tent of the victorious Duke William, which was pitched near the spot where Harold fell—and he and his knights were carousing, within—and soldiers with torches, going slowly to and fro, without, sought for the corpse of Harold among piles of dead—and the Warrior, worked in golden thread and precious stones, lay low, all torn and soiled with blood—and the three Norman Lions kept watch over the field!

CHAPTER VIII—ENGLAND UNDER WILLIAM THE FIRST, THE NORMAN CONQUEROR

Upon the ground where the brave Harold fell, William the Norman afterwards founded an abbey, which, under the name of Battle Abbey, was a rich and splendid place through many a troubled year, though now it is a grey ruin overgrown with ivy. But the first work he had to do, was to conquer the English thoroughly; and that, as you know by this time, was hard work for any man.

He ravaged several counties; he burned and plundered many towns; he laid waste scores upon scores of miles of pleasant country; he destroyed innumerable lives. At length Stigand, Archbishop of Canterbury, with other representatives of the clergy and the people, went to his camp, and submitted to him. Edgar, the insignificant son of Edmund Ironside, was proclaimed King by others, but nothing came of it. He fled to Scotland afterwards, where his sister, who was young and beautiful, married the Scottish King. Edgar himself was not important enough for anybody to care much about him.

On Christmas Day, William was crowned in Westminster Abbey, under the title of William the First; but he is best known as William the Conqueror. It was a strange coronation. One of the bishops who performed the ceremony asked the Normans, in French, if they would have Duke William for their king? They answered Yes. Another of the bishops put the same question to the Saxons, in English. They too answered Yes, with a loud shout. The noise being heard by a guard of Norman horse-soldiers outside, was mistaken for resistance on the part of the English. The guard instantly set fire to the neighbouring houses, and a tumult ensued; in the midst of which the King, being left alone in the Abbey, with a few priests (and they all being in a terrible fright together), was hurriedly crowned. When the crown was placed upon his head, he swore to govern the English as well as the best of their own monarchs. I dare say you think, as I do, that if we except the Great Alfred, he might pretty easily have done that.

Numbers of the English nobles had been killed in the last disastrous battle. Their estates, and the estates of all the nobles who had fought against him there, King William seized upon, and gave to his own Norman knights and nobles. Many great English families of the present time acquired their English lands in this way, and are very proud of it.

But what is got by force must be maintained by force. These nobles were obliged to build castles all over England, to defend their new property; and, do what he would, the King could neither soothe nor quell the nation as he wished. He gradually introduced the Norman language and the Norman customs; yet, for a long time the great body of the English remained sullen and revengeful. On his going over to Normandy, to visit his subjects there, the oppressions of his half-brother Odo, whom he left in charge of his English kingdom, drove the people mad. The men of Kent even invited over, to take possession of Dover, their old enemy Count Eustace of Boulogne, who had led the fray when the Dover man was slain at his own fireside. The men of Hereford, aided by the Welsh, and commanded by a chief named Edric the Wild, drove the Normans out of their country. Some of those who had been dispossessed of their lands, banded together in the North of England; some, in Scotland; some, in the thick woods and marshes; and whensoever they could fall upon the Normans, or upon the English who had submitted to the Normans, they fought, despoiled, and murdered, like the desperate outlaws that they were. Conspiracies were set on foot for a general massacre of the Normans, like the old massacre of the Danes. In short, the English were in a murderous mood all through the kingdom.

King William, fearing he might lose his conquest, came back, and tried to pacify the London people by soft words. He then set forth to repress the country people by stern deeds. Among the towns which he besieged, and where he killed and maimed the inhabitants without any distinction, sparing none, young or old, armed or unarmed, were Oxford, Warwick, Leicester, Nottingham, Derby, Lincoln, York. In all these places, and in many others, fire and sword worked their utmost horrors, and made the land dreadful to behold. The streams and rivers were discoloured with blood; the sky was blackened with smoke; the fields were wastes of ashes; the waysides were heaped up with dead. Such are the fatal results of conquest and ambition! Although William was a harsh and angry man, I do not suppose that he deliberately meant to work this shocking ruin, when he invaded England.

But what he had got by the strong hand, he could only keep by the strong hand, and in so doing he made England a great grave.

Two sons of Harold, by name Edmund and Godwin, came over from Ireland, with some ships, against the Normans, but were defeated. This was scarcely done, when the outlaws in the woods so harassed York, that the Governor sent to the King for help. The King despatched a general and a large force to occupy the town of Durham. The Bishop of that place met the general outside the town, and warned him not to enter, as he would be in danger there. The general cared nothing for the warning, and went in with all his men. That night, on every hill within sight of Durham, signal fires were seen to blaze. When the morning dawned, the English, who had assembled in great strength, forced the gates, rushed into the town, and slew the Normans every one. The English afterwards besought the Danes to come and help them. The Danes came, with two hundred and forty ships. The outlawed nobles joined them; they captured York, and drove the Normans out of that city. Then, William bribed the Danes to go away; and took such vengeance on the English, that all the former fire and sword, smoke and ashes, death and ruin, were nothing compared with it. In melancholy songs, and doleful stories, it was still sung and told by cottage fires on winter evenings, a hundred years afterwards, how, in those dreadful days of the Normans, there was not, from the River Humber to the River Tyne, one inhabited village left, nor one cultivated field—how there was nothing but a dismal ruin, where the human creatures and the beasts lay dead together.

The outlaws had, at this time, what they called a Camp of Refuge, in the midst of the fens of Cambridgeshire. Protected by those marshy grounds which were difficult of approach, they lay among the reeds and rushes, and were hidden by the mists that rose up from the watery earth. Now, there also was, at that time, over the sea in Flanders, an Englishman named Hereward, whose father had died in his absence, and whose property had been given to a Norman. When he heard of this wrong that had been done him (from such of the exiled English as chanced to wander into that country), he longed for revenge; and joining the outlaws in their camp of refuge, became their commander. He was so good a soldier, that the Normans supposed him to be aided by enchantment. William, even after he had made a road three miles in length across the Cambridgeshire marshes, on purpose to attack this supposed enchanter, thought it necessary to engage an old lady, who pretended to be a sorceress, to come and do a little enchantment in the royal cause. For this purpose she was pushed on before the troops in a wooden tower; but Hereward very soon disposed of this unfortunate sorceress, by burning her, tower and all. The monks of the convent of Ely near at hand, however, who were fond of good living, and who found it very uncomfortable to have the country blockaded and their supplies of meat and drink cut off, showed the King a secret way of surprising the camp. So Hereward was soon defeated. Whether he afterwards died quietly, or whether he was killed after killing sixteen of the men who attacked him (as some old rhymes relate that he did), I cannot say. His defeat put an end to the Camp of Refuge; and, very soon afterwards, the King, victorious both in Scotland and in England, quelled the last rebellious English noble. He then surrounded himself with Norman lords, enriched by the property of English nobles; had a great survey made of all the land in England, which was entered as the property of its new owners, on a roll called Doomsday Book; obliged the people to put out their fires and candles at a certain hour every night, on the ringing of a bell which was called The Curfew; introduced the Norman dresses and manners; made the Normans masters everywhere, and the English, servants; turned out the English bishops, and put Normans in their places; and showed himself to be the Conqueror indeed.

But, even with his own Normans, he had a restless life. They were always hungering and thirsting for the riches of the English; and the more he gave, the more they wanted. His priests were as greedy as his soldiers. We know of only one Norman who plainly told his master, the King, that he had come with him to England to do his duty as a faithful servant, and that property taken by force from other men had no charms for him. His name was Guilbert. We should not forget his name, for it is good to remember and to honour honest men.

Besides all these troubles, William the Conqueror was troubled by quarrels among his sons. He had three living. Robert, called Curthose, because of his short legs; William, called Rufus or the Red, from the colour of his hair; and Henry, fond of learning, and called, in the Norman language, Beauclerc, or Fine-Scholar. When Robert grew up, he asked of his father the government of Normandy, which he had nominally possessed, as a child, under his mother, Matilda. The King refusing to grant it, Robert became jealous and discontented; and happening one day, while in this temper, to be ridiculed by his brothers, who threw water on him from a balcony as he was walking before the door, he drew his sword, rushed up-stairs, and was only prevented by the King himself from putting them to death. That same night, he hotly departed with some followers from his father's court, and endeavoured to take the Castle of Rouen by surprise. Failing in this, he shut himself up in another Castle in Normandy, which the King besieged, and where Robert one day unhorsed and nearly killed him without knowing who he was. His submission when he discovered his father, and the intercession of the queen and others, reconciled them; but not soundly; for Robert soon strayed abroad, and went from court to court with his complaints. He was a gay, careless, thoughtless fellow, spending all he got on musicians and dancers; but his mother loved him, and often, against the King's command, supplied him with money through a messenger named Samson. At length the incensed King swore he would tear out Samson's eyes; and Samson, thinking that his only hope of safety was in becoming a monk, became one, went on such errands no more, and kept his eyes in his head.

All this time, from the turbulent day of his strange coronation, the Conqueror had been struggling, you see, at any cost of cruelty and bloodshed, to maintain what he had seized. All his reign, he struggled still, with the same object ever before him. He was a stern, bold man, and he succeeded in it.

He loved money, and was particular in his eating, but he had only leisure to indulge one other passion, and that was his love of hunting. He carried it to such a height that he ordered whole villages and towns to be swept away to make forests for the deer. Not satisfied with sixty-eight Royal Forests, he laid waste an immense district, to form another in Hampshire, called the New Forest. The many thousands of miserable peasants who saw their little houses pulled down, and themselves and children turned into the open country without a shelter, detested him for his merciless addition to their many sufferings; and when, in the twenty-first year of his reign (which proved to be the last), he went over to Rouen, England was as full of hatred against him, as if every leaf on every tree in all his Royal Forests had been a curse upon his head. In the New Forest, his son Richard (for he had four sons) had been gored to death by a Stag; and the people said that this so cruelly-made Forest would yet be fatal to others of the Conqueror's race.

He was engaged in a dispute with the King of France about some territory. While he stayed at Rouen, negotiating with that King, he kept his bed and took medicines: being advised by his physicians to do so, on account of having grown to an unwieldy size. Word being brought to him that the King of France made light of this, and joked about it, he swore in a great rage that he should rue his jests. He assembled his army, marched into the disputed territory, burnt—his old way!—the vines, the crops, and fruit, and set the town of Mantes on fire. But, in an evil hour; for, as he rode over the hot ruins, his horse, setting his hoofs upon some burning embers, started, threw him forward against the pommel of the saddle, and gave him a mortal hurt. For six weeks he lay dying in a monastery near Rouen, and then made his will, giving England to William, Normandy to Robert, and five thousand pounds to Henry. And now, his violent deeds lay heavy on his mind. He ordered money to be given to many English churches and monasteries, and—which was much better repentance—released his prisoners of state, some of whom had been confined in his dungeons twenty years.

It was a September morning, and the sun was rising, when the King was awakened from slumber by the sound of a church bell. 'What bell is that?' he faintly asked. They told him it was the bell of the chapel of Saint Mary. 'I commend my soul,' said he, 'to Mary!' and died.

Think of his name, The Conqueror, and then consider how he lay in death! The moment he was dead, his physicians, priests, and nobles, not knowing what contest for the throne might now take place, or what might happen in it, hastened away, each man for himself and his own property; the mercenary servants of the court began to rob and plunder; the body of the King, in the indecent strife, was rolled from the bed, and lay alone, for hours, upon the ground. O Conqueror, of whom so many great names are proud now, of whom so many great names thought nothing then, it were better to have conquered one true heart, than England!

By-and-by, the priests came creeping in with prayers and candles; and a good knight, named Herluin, undertook (which no one else would do) to convey the body to Caen, in Normandy, in order that it might be buried in St. Stephen's church there, which the Conqueror had founded. But fire, of which he had made such bad use in his life, seemed to follow him of itself in death. A great conflagration broke out in the town when the body was placed in the church; and those present running out to extinguish the flames, it was once again left alone.

It was not even buried in peace. It was about to be let down, in its Royal robes, into a tomb near the high altar, in presence of a great concourse of people, when a loud voice in the crowd cried out, ‘This ground is mine! Upon it, stood my father’s house. This King despoiled me of both ground and house to build this church. In the great name of God, I here forbid his body to be covered with the earth that is my right!’ The priests and bishops present, knowing the speaker’s right, and knowing that the King had often denied him justice, paid him down sixty shillings for the grave. Even then, the corpse was not at rest. The tomb was too small, and they tried to force it in. It broke, a dreadful smell arose, the people hurried out into the air, and, for the third time, it was left alone.

Where were the Conqueror’s three sons, that they were not at their father’s burial? Robert was lounging among minstrels, dancers, and gamesters, in France or Germany. Henry was carrying his five thousand pounds safely away in a convenient chest he had got made. William the Red was hurrying to England, to lay hands upon the Royal treasure and the crown.

CHAPTER IX—ENGLAND UNDER WILLIAM THE SECOND, CALLED RUFUS

William the Red, in breathless haste, secured the three great forts of Dover, Pevensey, and Hastings, and made with hot speed for Winchester, where the Royal treasure was kept. The treasurer delivering him the keys, he found that it amounted to sixty thousand pounds in silver, besides gold and jewels. Possessed of this wealth, he soon persuaded the Archbishop of Canterbury to crown him, and became William the Second, King of England.

Rufus was no sooner on the throne, than he ordered into prison again the unhappy state captives whom his father had set free, and directed a goldsmith to ornament his father's tomb profusely with gold and silver. It would have been more dutiful in him to have attended the sick Conqueror when he was dying; but England itself, like this Red King, who once governed it, has sometimes made expensive tombs for dead men whom it treated shabbily when they were alive.

The King's brother, Robert of Normandy, seeming quite content to be only Duke of that country; and the King's other brother, Fine-Scholar, being quiet enough with his five thousand pounds in a chest; the King flattered himself, we may suppose, with the hope of an easy reign. But easy reigns were difficult to have in those days. The turbulent Bishop Odo (who had blessed the Norman army at the Battle of Hastings, and who, I dare say, took all the credit of the victory to himself) soon began, in concert with some powerful Norman nobles, to trouble the Red King.

The truth seems to be that this bishop and his friends, who had lands in England and lands in Normandy, wished to hold both under one Sovereign; and greatly preferred a thoughtless good-natured person, such as Robert was, to Rufus; who, though far from being an amiable man in any respect, was keen, and not to be imposed upon. They declared in Robert's favour, and retired to their castles (those castles were very troublesome to kings) in a sullen humour. The Red King, seeing the Normans thus falling from him, revenged himself upon them by appealing to the English; to whom he made a variety of promises, which he never meant to perform—in particular, promises to soften the cruelty of the Forest Laws; and who, in return, so aided him with their valour, that Odo was besieged in the Castle of Rochester, and forced to abandon it, and to depart from England for ever: whereupon the other rebellious Norman nobles were soon reduced and scattered.

Then, the Red King went over to Normandy, where the people suffered greatly under the loose rule of Duke Robert. The King's object was to seize upon the Duke's dominions. This, the Duke, of course, prepared to resist; and miserable war between the two brothers seemed inevitable, when the powerful nobles on both sides, who had seen so much of war, interfered to prevent it. A treaty was made. Each of the two brothers agreed to give up something of his claims, and that the longer-liver of the two should inherit all the dominions of the other. When they had come to this loving understanding, they embraced and joined their forces against Fine-Scholar; who had bought some territory of Robert with a part of his five thousand pounds, and was considered a dangerous individual in consequence.

St. Michael's Mount, in Normandy (there is another St. Michael's Mount, in Cornwall, wonderfully like it), was then, as it is now, a strong place perched upon the top of a high rock, around which, when the tide is in, the sea flows, leaving no road to the mainland. In this place, Fine-Scholar shut himself up with his soldiers, and here he was closely besieged by his two brothers. At one time, when he was reduced to great distress for want of water, the generous Robert not only permitted his men to get water, but sent Fine-Scholar wine from his own table; and, on being remonstrated with by the Red King, said 'What! shall we let our own brother die of thirst? Where shall we get another, when he is gone?' At another time, the Red King riding alone on the shore of the bay, looking up at the Castle, was taken by two of Fine-Scholar's men, one of whom was about to kill him, when he cried out, 'Hold, knave! I am the King of England!' The story says that the soldier raised him from the ground respectfully and humbly, and that the King took him into his service. The story may or may not be true; but at any rate it is true that Fine-Scholar could not hold out against his united brothers, and that he abandoned Mount St. Michael, and wandered about—as poor and forlorn as other scholars have been sometimes known to be.

The Scotch became unquiet in the Red King's time, and were twice defeated—the second time, with the loss of their King, Malcolm, and his son. The Welsh became unquiet too. Against them, Rufus was less successful; for they fought among their native mountains, and did great execution on the King's troops. Robert of Normandy became unquiet too; and, complaining that his brother the King did not faithfully perform his part of their agreement, took up arms, and obtained assistance from the King of France, whom Rufus, in the end, bought off with vast sums of money. England became unquiet too. Lord Mowbray, the powerful Earl of Northumberland, headed a great conspiracy to depose the King, and to place upon the throne, Stephen, the Conqueror's near relative. The plot was discovered; all the chief conspirators were seized; some were fined, some were put in prison, some were put to death. The Earl of Northumberland himself was shut up in a dungeon beneath Windsor Castle, where he died, an old man, thirty long years afterwards. The Priests in England were more unquiet than any other class or power; for the Red King treated them with such small ceremony that he refused to appoint new bishops or archbishops when the old ones died, but kept all the wealth belonging to those offices in his own hands. In return for this, the Priests wrote his life when he was dead, and abused him well. I am inclined to think, myself, that there was little to choose between the Priests and the Red King; that both sides were greedy and designing; and that they were fairly matched.

The Red King was false of heart, selfish, covetous, and mean. He had a worthy minister in his favourite, Ralph, nicknamed—for almost every famous person had a nickname in those rough days—Flambard, or the Firebrand. Once, the King being ill, became penitent, and made Anselm, a foreign priest and a good man, Archbishop of Canterbury. But he no sooner got well again than he repented of his repentance, and persisted in wrongfully keeping to himself some of the wealth belonging to the archbishopric. This led to violent disputes, which were aggravated by there being in Rome at that time two rival Popes; each of whom declared he was the only real original infallible Pope, who couldn't make a mistake. At last, Anselm, knowing the Red King's character, and not feeling himself safe in England, asked leave to return abroad. The Red King gladly gave it; for he knew that as soon as Anselm was gone, he could begin to store up all the Canterbury money again, for his own use.

By such means, and by taxing and oppressing the English people in every possible way, the Red King became very rich. When he wanted money for any purpose, he raised it by some means or other, and cared nothing for the injustice he did, or the misery he caused. Having the opportunity of buying from Robert the whole duchy of Normandy for five years, he taxed the English people more than ever, and made the very convents sell their plate and valuables to supply him with the means to make the purchase. But he was as quick and eager in putting down revolt as he was in raising money; for, a part of the Norman people objecting—very naturally, I think—to being sold in this way, he headed an army against them with all the speed and energy of his father. He was so impatient, that he embarked for Normandy in a great gale of wind. And when the sailors told him it was dangerous to go to sea in such angry weather, he replied, 'Hoist sail and away! Did you ever hear of a king who was drowned?'

You will wonder how it was that even the careless Robert came to sell his dominions. It happened thus. It had long been the custom for many English people to make journeys to Jerusalem, which were called pilgrimages, in order that they might pray beside the tomb of Our Saviour there. Jerusalem belonging to the Turks, and the Turks hating Christianity, these Christian travellers were often insulted and ill used. The Pilgrims bore it patiently for some time, but at length a remarkable man, of great earnestness and eloquence, called Peter the Hermit, began to preach in various places against the Turks, and to declare that it was the duty of good Christians to drive away those unbelievers from the tomb of Our Saviour, and to take possession of it, and protect it. An excitement such as the world had never known before was created. Thousands and thousands of men of all ranks and conditions departed for Jerusalem to make war against the Turks. The war is called in history the first Crusade, and every Crusader wore a cross marked on his right shoulder.

All the Crusaders were not zealous Christians. Among them were vast numbers of the restless, idle, profligate, and adventurous spirit of the time. Some became Crusaders for the love of change; some, in the hope of plunder; some, because they had nothing to do at home; some, because they did what the priests told them; some, because they liked to see foreign countries; some, because they were fond of knocking men about, and would as soon knock a Turk about as a Christian. Robert of Normandy may have been influenced by all these motives; and by a kind desire, besides, to save the Christian Pilgrims from bad treatment in future. He wanted to raise a number of armed men, and to go to the Crusade. He could not do so without money. He had no money; and he sold his dominions to his brother, the Red King, for five years. With the large sum he thus obtained, he fitted out his Crusaders gallantly, and went away to Jerusalem in martial state. The Red King, who made money out of everything, stayed at home, busily squeezing more money out of Normans and English.

After three years of great hardship and suffering—from shipwreck at sea; from travel in strange lands; from hunger, thirst, and fever, upon the burning sands of the desert; and from the fury of the Turks—the valiant Crusaders got possession of Our Saviour’s tomb. The Turks were still resisting and fighting bravely, but this success increased the general desire in Europe to join the Crusade. Another great French Duke was proposing to sell his dominions for a term to the rich Red King, when the Red King’s reign came to a sudden and violent end.

You have not forgotten the New Forest which the Conqueror made, and which the miserable people whose homes he had laid waste, so hated. The cruelty of the Forest Laws, and the torture and death they brought upon the peasantry, increased this hatred. The poor persecuted country people believed that the New Forest was enchanted. They said that in thunder-storms, and on dark nights, demons appeared, moving beneath the branches of the gloomy trees. They said that a terrible spectre had foretold to Norman hunters that the Red King should be punished there. And now, in the pleasant season of May, when the Red King had reigned almost thirteen years; and a second Prince of the Conqueror’s blood—another Richard, the son of Duke Robert—was killed by an arrow in this dreaded Forest; the people said that the second time was not the last, and that there was another death to come.

It was a lonely forest, accursed in the people’s hearts for the wicked deeds that had been done to make it; and no man save the King and his Courtiers and Huntsmen, liked to stray there. But, in reality, it was like any other forest. In the spring, the green leaves broke out of the buds; in the summer, flourished heartily, and made deep shades; in the winter, shrivelled and blew down, and lay in brown heaps on the moss. Some trees were stately, and grew high and strong; some had fallen of themselves; some were felled by the forester’s axe; some were hollow, and the rabbits burrowed at their roots; some few were struck by lightning, and stood white and bare. There were hill-sides covered with rich fern, on which the morning dew so beautifully sparkled; there were brooks, where the deer went down to drink, or over which the whole herd bounded, flying from the arrows of the huntsmen; there were sunny glades, and solemn places where but little light came through the rustling leaves. The songs of the birds in the New Forest were pleasanter to hear than the shouts of fighting men outside; and even when the Red King and his Court came hunting through its solitudes, cursing loud and riding hard, with a jingling of stirrups and bridles and knives and daggers, they did much less harm there than among the English or Normans, and the stags died (as they lived) far easier than the people.

Upon a day in August, the Red King, now reconciled to his brother, Fine-Scholar, came with a great train to hunt in the New Forest. Fine-Scholar was of the party. They were a merry party, and had lain all night at Malwood-Keep, a hunting-lodge in the forest, where they had made good cheer, both at supper and breakfast, and had drunk a deal of wine. The party dispersed in various directions, as the custom of hunters then was. The King took with him only Sir Walter Tyrrel, who was a famous sportsman, and to whom he had given, before they mounted horse that morning, two fine arrows.

The last time the King was ever seen alive, he was riding with Sir Walter Tyrrel, and their dogs were hunting together.

It was almost night, when a poor charcoal-burner, passing through the forest with his cart, came upon the solitary body of a dead man, shot with an arrow in the breast, and still bleeding. He got it into his cart. It was the body of the King. Shaken and tumbled, with its red beard all whitened with lime and clotted with blood, it was driven in the cart by the charcoal-burner next day to Winchester Cathedral, where it was received and buried.

Sir Walter Tyrrel, who escaped to Normandy, and claimed the protection of the King of France, swore in France that the Red King was suddenly shot dead by an arrow from an unseen hand, while they were hunting together; that he was fearful of being suspected as the King's murderer; and that he instantly set spurs to his horse, and fled to the sea-shore. Others declared that the King and Sir Walter Tyrrel were hunting in company, a little before sunset, standing in bushes opposite one another, when a stag came between them. That the King drew his bow and took aim, but the string broke. That the King then cried, 'Shoot, Walter, in the Devil's name!' That Sir Walter shot. That the arrow glanced against a tree, was turned aside from the stag, and struck the King from his horse, dead.

By whose hand the Red King really fell, and whether that hand despatched the arrow to his breast by accident or by design, is only known to God. Some think his brother may have caused him to be killed; but the Red King had made so many enemies, both among priests and people, that suspicion may reasonably rest upon a less unnatural murderer. Men know no more than that he was found dead in the New Forest, which the suffering people had regarded as a doomed ground for his race.

CHAPTER X—ENGLAND UNDER HENRY THE FIRST, CALLED FINE-SCHOLAR

Fine-scholar, on hearing of the Red King's death, hurried to Winchester with as much speed as Rufus himself had made, to seize the Royal treasure. But the keeper of the treasure who had been one of the hunting-party in the Forest, made haste to Winchester too, and, arriving there at about the same time, refused to yield it up. Upon this, Fine-Scholar drew his sword, and threatened to kill the treasurer; who might have paid for his fidelity with his life, but that he knew longer resistance to be useless when he found the Prince supported by a company of powerful barons, who declared they were determined to make him King. The treasurer, therefore, gave up the money and jewels of the Crown: and on the third day after the death of the Red King, being a Sunday, Fine-Scholar stood before the high altar in Westminster Abbey, and made a solemn declaration that he would resign the Church property which his brother had seized; that he would do no wrong to the nobles; and that he would restore to the people the laws of Edward the Confessor, with all the improvements of William the Conqueror. So began the reign of King Henry the First.

The people were attached to their new King, both because he had known distresses, and because he was an Englishman by birth and not a Norman. To strengthen this last hold upon them, the King wished to marry an English lady; and could think of no other wife than Maud the Good, the daughter of the King of Scotland. Although this good Princess did not love the King, she was so affected by the representations the nobles made to her of the great charity it would be in her to unite the Norman and Saxon races, and prevent hatred and bloodshed between them for the future, that she consented to become his wife. After some disputing among the priests, who said that as she had been in a convent in her youth, and had worn the veil of a nun, she could not lawfully be married—against which the Princess stated that her aunt, with whom she had lived in her youth, had indeed sometimes thrown a piece of black stuff over her, but for no other reason than because the nun's veil was the only dress the conquering

Normans respected in girl or woman, and not because she had taken the vows of a nun, which she never had—she was declared free to marry, and was made King Henry's Queen. A good Queen she was; beautiful, kind-hearted, and worthy of a better husband than the King.

For he was a cunning and unscrupulous man, though firm and clever. He cared very little for his word, and took any means to gain his ends. All this is shown in his treatment of his brother Robert—Robert, who had suffered him to be refreshed with water, and who had sent him the wine from his own table, when he was shut up, with the crows flying below him, parched with thirst, in the castle on the top of St. Michael's Mount, where his Red brother would have let him die.

Before the King began to deal with Robert, he removed and disgraced all the favourites of the late King; who were for the most part base characters, much detested by the people. Flambard, or Firebrand, whom the late King had made Bishop of Durham, of all things in the world, Henry imprisoned in the Tower; but Firebrand was a great joker and a jolly companion, and made himself so popular with his guards that they pretended to know nothing about a long rope that was sent into his prison at the bottom of a deep flagon of wine. The guards took the wine, and Firebrand took the rope; with which, when they were fast asleep, he let himself down from a window in the night, and so got cleverly aboard ship and away to Normandy.

Now Robert, when his brother Fine-Scholar came to the throne, was still absent in the Holy Land. Henry pretended that Robert had been made Sovereign of that country; and he had been away so long, that the ignorant people believed it. But, behold, when Henry had been some time King of England, Robert came home to Normandy; having leisurely returned from Jerusalem through Italy, in which beautiful country he had enjoyed himself very much, and had married a lady as beautiful as itself! In Normandy, he found Firebrand waiting to urge him to assert his claim to the English crown, and declare war against King Henry. This, after great loss of time in feasting and dancing with his beautiful Italian wife among his Norman friends, he at last did.

The English in general were on King Henry's side, though many of the Normans were on Robert's. But the English sailors deserted the King, and took a great part of the English fleet over to Normandy; so that Robert came to invade this country in no foreign vessels, but in English ships. The virtuous Anselm, however, whom Henry had invited back from abroad, and made Archbishop of Canterbury, was steadfast in the King's cause; and it was so well supported that the two armies, instead of fighting, made a peace. Poor Robert, who trusted anybody and everybody, readily trusted his brother, the King; and agreed to go home and receive a pension from England, on condition that all his followers were fully pardoned. This the King very faithfully promised, but Robert was no sooner gone than he began to punish them.

Among them was the Earl of Shrewsbury, who, on being summoned by the King to answer to five-and-forty accusations, rode away to one of his strong castles, shut himself up therein, called around him his tenants and vassals, and fought for his liberty, but was defeated and banished. Robert, with all his faults, was so true to his word, that when he first heard of this nobleman having risen against his brother, he laid waste the Earl of Shrewsbury's estates in Normandy, to show the King that he would favour no breach of their treaty. Finding, on better information, afterwards, that the Earl's only crime was having been his friend, he came over to England, in his old thoughtless, warm-hearted way, to intercede with the King, and remind him of the solemn promise to pardon all his followers.

This confidence might have put the false King to the blush, but it did not. Pretending to be very friendly, he so surrounded his brother with spies and traps, that Robert, who was quite in his power, had nothing for it but to renounce his pension and escape while he could. Getting home to Normandy, and understanding the King better now, he naturally allied himself with his old friend the Earl of Shrewsbury, who had still thirty castles in that country. This was exactly what Henry wanted. He immediately declared that Robert had broken the treaty, and next year invaded Normandy.

He pretended that he came to deliver the Normans, at their own request, from his brother's misrule. There is reason to fear that his misrule was bad enough; for his beautiful wife had died, leaving him with an infant son, and his court was again so careless, dissipated, and ill-regulated, that it was said he sometimes lay in bed of a day for want of clothes to put on—his attendants having stolen all his dresses. But he headed his army like a brave prince and a gallant soldier, though he had the misfortune to be taken prisoner by King Henry, with four hundred of his Knights. Among them was poor harmless Edgar Atheling, who loved Robert well. Edgar was not important enough to be severe with. The King afterwards gave him a small pension, which he lived upon and died upon, in peace, among the quiet woods and fields of England.

And Robert—poor, kind, generous, wasteful, heedless Robert, with so many faults, and yet with virtues that might have made a better and a happier man—what was the end of him? If the King had had the magnanimity to say with a kind air, ‘Brother, tell me, before these noblemen, that from this time you will be my faithful follower and friend, and never raise your hand against me or my forces more!’ he might have trusted Robert to the death. But the King was not a magnanimous man. He sentenced his brother to be confined for life in one of the Royal Castles. In the beginning of his imprisonment, he was allowed to ride out, guarded; but he one day broke away from his guard and galloped of. He had the evil fortune to ride into a swamp, where his horse stuck fast and he was taken. When the King heard of it he ordered him to be blinded, which was done by putting a red-hot metal basin on his eyes.

And so, in darkness and in prison, many years, he thought of all his past life, of the time he had wasted, of the treasure he had squandered, of the opportunities he had lost, of the youth he had thrown away, of the talents he had neglected. Sometimes, on fine autumn mornings, he would sit and think of the old hunting parties in the free Forest, where he had been the foremost and the gayest. Sometimes, in the still nights, he would wake, and mourn for the many nights that had stolen past him at the gaming-table; sometimes, would seem to hear, upon the melancholy wind, the old songs of the minstrels; sometimes, would dream, in his blindness, of the light and glitter of the Norman Court. Many and many a time, he groped back, in his fancy, to Jerusalem, where he had fought so well; or, at the head of his brave companions, bowed his feathered helmet to the shouts of welcome greeting him in Italy, and seemed again to walk among the sunny vineyards, or on the shore of the blue sea, with his lovely wife. And then, thinking of her grave, and of his fatherless boy, he would stretch out his solitary arms and weep.

At length, one day, there lay in prison, dead, with cruel and disfiguring scars upon his eyelids, bandaged from his jailer’s sight, but on which the eternal Heavens looked down, a worn old man of eighty. He had once been Robert of Normandy. Pity him!

At the time when Robert of Normandy was taken prisoner by his brother, Robert's little son was only five years old. This child was taken, too, and carried before the King, sobbing and crying; for, young as he was, he knew he had good reason to be afraid of his Royal uncle. The King was not much accustomed to pity those who were in his power, but his cold heart seemed for the moment to soften towards the boy. He was observed to make a great effort, as if to prevent himself from being cruel, and ordered the child to be taken away; whereupon a certain Baron, who had married a daughter of Duke Robert's (by name, Helie of Saint Saen), took charge of him, tenderly. The King's gentleness did not last long. Before two years were over, he sent messengers to this lord's Castle to seize the child and bring him away. The Baron was not there at the time, but his servants were faithful, and carried the boy off in his sleep and hid him. When the Baron came home, and was told what the King had done, he took the child abroad, and, leading him by the hand, went from King to King and from Court to Court, relating how the child had a claim to the throne of England, and how his uncle the King, knowing that he had that claim, would have murdered him, perhaps, but for his escape.

The youth and innocence of the pretty little William Fitz-Robert (for that was his name) made him many friends at that time. When he became a young man, the King of France, uniting with the French Counts of Anjou and Flanders, supported his cause against the King of England, and took many of the King's towns and castles in Normandy. But, King Henry, artful and cunning always, bribed some of William's friends with money, some with promises, some with power. He bought off the Count of Anjou, by promising to marry his eldest son, also named William, to the Count's daughter; and indeed the whole trust of this King's life was in such bargains, and he believed (as many another King has done since, and as one King did in France a very little time ago) that every man's truth and honour can be bought at some price. For all this, he was so afraid of William Fitz-Robert and his friends, that, for a long time, he believed his life to be in danger; and never lay down to sleep, even in his palace surrounded by his guards, without having a sword and buckler at his bedside.

To strengthen his power, the King with great ceremony betrothed his eldest daughter Matilda, then a child only eight years old, to be the wife of Henry the Fifth, the Emperor of Germany. To raise her marriage-portion, he taxed the English people in a most oppressive manner; then treated them to a great procession, to restore their good humour; and sent Matilda away, in fine state, with the German ambassadors, to be educated in the country of her future husband.

And now his Queen, Maud the Good, unhappily died. It was a sad thought for that gentle lady, that the only hope with which she had married a man whom she had never loved—the hope of reconciling the Norman and English races—had failed. At the very time of her death, Normandy and all France was in arms against England; for, so soon as his last danger was over, King Henry had been false to all the French powers he had promised, bribed, and bought, and they had naturally united against him. After some fighting, however, in which few suffered but the unhappy common people (who always suffered, whatsoever was the matter), he began to promise, bribe, and buy again; and by those means, and by the help of the Pope, who exerted himself to save more bloodshed, and by solemnly declaring, over and over again, that he really was in earnest this time, and would keep his word, the King made peace.

One of the first consequences of this peace was, that the King went over to Normandy with his son Prince William and a great retinue, to have the Prince acknowledged as his successor by the Norman Nobles, and to contract the promised marriage (this was one of the many promises the King had broken) between him and the daughter of the Count of Anjou. Both these things were triumphantly done, with great show and rejoicing; and on the twenty-fifth of November, in the year one thousand one hundred and twenty, the whole retinue prepared to embark at the Port of Barfleur, for the voyage home.

On that day, and at that place, there came to the King, Fitz-Stephen, a sea-captain, and said:

‘My liege, my father served your father all his life, upon the sea. He steered the ship with the golden boy upon the prow, in which your father sailed to conquer England. I beseech you to grant me the same office. I have a fair vessel in the harbour here, called The White Ship, manned by fifty sailors of renown. I pray you, Sire, to let your servant have the honour of steering you in The White Ship to England!’

‘I am sorry, friend,’ replied the King, ‘that my vessel is already chosen, and that I cannot (therefore) sail with the son of the man who served my father. But the Prince and all his company shall go along with you, in the fair White Ship, manned by the fifty sailors of renown.’

An hour or two afterwards, the King set sail in the vessel he had chosen, accompanied by other vessels, and, sailing all night with a fair and gentle wind, arrived upon the coast of England in the morning. While it was yet night, the people in some of those ships heard a faint wild cry come over the sea, and wondered what it was.

Now, the Prince was a dissolute, debauched young man of eighteen, who bore no love to the English, and had declared that when he came to the throne he would yoke them to the plough like oxen. He went aboard The White Ship, with one hundred and forty youthful Nobles like himself, among whom were eighteen noble ladies of the highest rank. All this gay company, with their servants and the fifty sailors, made three hundred souls aboard the fair White Ship.

'Give three casks of wine, Fitz-Stephen,' said the Prince, 'to the fifty sailors of renown! My father the King has sailed out of the harbour. What time is there to make merry here, and yet reach England with the rest?'

'Prince!' said Fitz-Stephen, 'before morning, my fifty and The White Ship shall overtake the swiftest vessel in attendance on your father the King, if we sail at midnight!'

Then the Prince commanded to make merry; and the sailors drank out the three casks of wine; and the Prince and all the noble company danced in the moonlight on the deck of The White Ship.

When, at last, she shot out of the harbour of Barfleur, there was not a sober seaman on board. But the sails were all set, and the oars all going merrily. Fitz-Stephen had the helm. The gay young nobles and the beautiful ladies, wrapped in mantles of various bright colours to protect them from the cold, talked, laughed, and sang. The Prince encouraged the fifty sailors to row harder yet, for the honour of The White Ship.

Crash! A terrific cry broke from three hundred hearts. It was the cry the people in the distant vessels of the King heard faintly on the water. The White Ship had struck upon a rock—was filling—going down!

Fitz-Stephen hurried the Prince into a boat, with some few Nobles. 'Push off,' he whispered; 'and row to land. It is not far, and the sea is smooth. The rest of us must die.'

But, as they rowed away, fast, from the sinking ship, the Prince heard the voice of his sister Marie, the Countess of Perche, calling for help. He never in his life had been so good as he was then. He cried in an agony, 'Row back at any risk! I cannot bear to leave her!'

They rowed back. As the Prince held out his arms to catch his sister, such numbers leaped in, that the boat was overset. And in the same instant The White Ship went down.

Only two men floated. They both clung to the main yard of the ship, which had broken from the mast, and now supported them. One asked the other who he was? He said, 'I am a nobleman, Godfrey by name, the son of Gilbert de l'Aigle. And you?' said he. 'I am Berold, a poor butcher of Rouen,' was the answer. Then, they said together, 'Lord be merciful to us both!' and tried to encourage one another, as they drifted in the cold benumbing sea on that unfortunate November night.

By-and-by, another man came swimming towards them, whom they knew, when he pushed aside his long wet hair, to be Fitz-Stephen. 'Where is the Prince?' said he. 'Gone! Gone!' the two cried together. 'Neither he, nor his brother, nor his sister, nor the King's niece, nor her brother, nor any one of all the brave three hundred, noble or commoner, except we three, has risen above the water!' Fitz-Stephen, with a ghastly face, cried, 'Woe! woe, to me!' and sunk to the bottom.

The other two clung to the yard for some hours. At length the young noble said faintly, 'I am exhausted, and chilled with the cold, and can hold no longer. Farewell, good friend! God preserve you!' So, he dropped and sunk; and of all the brilliant crowd, the poor Butcher of Rouen alone was saved. In the morning, some fishermen saw him floating in his sheep-skin coat, and got him into their boat—the sole relater of the dismal tale.

For three days, no one dared to carry the intelligence to the King. At length, they sent into his presence a little boy, who, weeping bitterly, and kneeling at his feet, told him that The White Ship was lost with all on board. The King fell to the ground like a dead man, and never, never afterwards, was seen to smile.

But he plotted again, and promised again, and bribed and bought again, in his old deceitful way. Having no son to succeed him, after all his pains ('The Prince will never yoke us to the plough, now!' said the English people), he took a second wife—Adelais or Alice, a duke's daughter, and the Pope's niece. Having no more children, however, he proposed to the Barons to swear that they would recognise as his successor, his daughter Matilda, whom, as she was now a widow, he married to the eldest son of the Count of Anjou, Geoffrey, surnamed Plantagenet, from a custom he had of wearing a sprig of flowering broom (called Genêt in French) in his cap for a feather. As one false man usually makes many, and as a false King, in particular, is pretty certain to make a false Court, the Barons took the oath about the succession of Matilda (and her children after her), twice over, without in the least intending to keep it. The King was now relieved from any remaining fears of William Fitz-Robert, by his death in the Monastery of St. Omer, in France, at twenty-six years old, of a pike-wound in the hand. And as Matilda gave birth to three sons, he thought the succession to the throne secure.

He spent most of the latter part of his life, which was troubled by family quarrels, in Normandy, to be near Matilda. When he had reigned upward of thirty-five years, and was sixty-seven years old, he died of an indigestion and fever, brought on by eating, when he was far from well, of a fish called Lamprey, against which he had often been cautioned by his physicians. His remains were brought over to Reading Abbey to be buried.

You may perhaps hear the cunning and promise-breaking of King Henry the First, called ‘policy’ by some people, and ‘diplomacy’ by others. Neither of these fine words will in the least mean that it was true; and nothing that is not true can possibly be good.

His greatest merit, that I know of, was his love of learning—I should have given him greater credit even for that, if it had been strong enough to induce him to spare the eyes of a certain poet he once took prisoner, who was a knight besides. But he ordered the poet’s eyes to be torn from his head, because he had laughed at him in his verses; and the poet, in the pain of that torture, dashed out his own brains against his prison wall. King Henry the First was avaricious, revengeful, and so false, that I suppose a man never lived whose word was less to be relied upon.

CHAPTER XI—ENGLAND UNDER MATILDA AND STEPHEN

The King was no sooner dead than all the plans and schemes he had laboured at so long, and lied so much for, crumbled away like a hollow heap of sand. Stephen, whom he had never mistrusted or suspected, started up to claim the throne.

Stephen was the son of Adela, the Conqueror's daughter, married to the Count of Blois. To Stephen, and to his brother Henry, the late King had been liberal; making Henry Bishop of Winchester, and finding a good marriage for Stephen, and much enriching him. This did not prevent Stephen from hastily producing a false witness, a servant of the late King, to swear that the King had named him for his heir upon his death-bed. On this evidence the Archbishop of Canterbury crowned him. The new King, so suddenly made, lost not a moment in seizing the Royal treasure, and hiring foreign soldiers with some of it to protect his throne.

If the dead King had even done as the false witness said, he would have had small right to will away the English people, like so many sheep or oxen, without their consent. But he had, in fact, bequeathed all his territory to Matilda; who, supported by Robert, Earl of Gloucester, soon began to dispute the crown. Some of the powerful barons and priests took her side; some took Stephen's; all fortified their castles; and again the miserable English people were involved in war, from which they could never derive advantage whosoever was victorious, and in which all parties plundered, tortured, starved, and ruined them.

Five years had passed since the death of Henry the First—and during those five years there had been two terrible invasions by the people of Scotland under their King, David, who was at last defeated with all his army—when Matilda, attended by her brother Robert and a large force, appeared in England to maintain her claim. A battle was fought between her troops and King Stephen's at Lincoln; in which the King himself was taken prisoner, after bravely fighting until his battle-axe and sword were broken, and was carried into strict confinement at Gloucester. Matilda then submitted herself to the Priests, and the Priests crowned her Queen of England.

She did not long enjoy this dignity. The people of London had a great affection for Stephen; many of the Barons considered it degrading to be ruled by a woman; and the Queen's temper was so haughty that she made innumerable enemies. The people of London revolted; and, in alliance with the troops of Stephen, besieged her at Winchester, where they took her brother Robert prisoner, whom, as her best soldier and chief general, she was glad to exchange for Stephen himself, who thus regained his liberty. Then, the long war went on afresh. Once, she was pressed so hard in the Castle of Oxford, in the winter weather when the snow lay thick upon the ground, that her only chance of escape was to dress herself all in white, and, accompanied by no more than three faithful Knights, dressed in like manner that their figures might not be seen from Stephen's camp as they passed over the snow, to steal away on foot, cross the frozen Thames, walk a long distance, and at last gallop away on horseback. All this she did, but to no great purpose then; for her brother dying while the struggle was yet going on, she at last withdrew to Normandy.

In two or three years after her withdrawal her cause appeared in England, afresh, in the person of her son Henry, young Plantagenet, who, at only eighteen years of age, was very powerful: not only on account of his mother having resigned all Normandy to him, but also from his having married Eleanor, the divorced wife of the French King, a bad woman, who had great possessions in France. Louis, the French King, not relishing this arrangement, helped Eustace, King Stephen's son, to invade Normandy: but Henry drove their united forces out of that country, and then returned here, to assist his partisans, whom the King was then besieging at Wallingford upon the Thames. Here, for two days, divided only by the river, the two armies lay encamped opposite to one another—on the eve, as it seemed to all men, of another desperate fight, when the Earl of Arundel took heart and said 'that it was not reasonable to prolong the unspeakable miseries of two kingdoms to minister to the ambition of two princes.'

Many other noblemen repeating and supporting this when it was once uttered, Stephen and young Plantagenet went down, each to his own bank of the river, and held a conversation across it, in which they arranged a truce; very much to the dissatisfaction of Eustace, who swaggered away with some followers, and laid violent hands on the Abbey of St. Edmund's-

Bury, where he presently died mad. The truce led to a solemn council at Winchester, in which it was agreed that Stephen should retain the crown, on condition of his declaring Henry his successor; that William, another son of the King's, should inherit his father's rightful possessions; and that all the Crown lands which Stephen had given away should be recalled, and all the Castles he had permitted to be built demolished. Thus terminated the bitter war, which had now lasted fifteen years, and had again laid England waste. In the next year Stephen died, after a troubled reign of nineteen years.

Although King Stephen was, for the time in which he lived, a humane and moderate man, with many excellent qualities; and although nothing worse is known of him than his usurpation of the Crown, which he probably excused to himself by the consideration that King Henry the First was a usurper too—which was no excuse at all; the people of England suffered more in these dread nineteen years, than at any former period even of their suffering history. In the division of the nobility between the two rival claimants of the Crown, and in the growth of what is called the Feudal System (which made the peasants the born vassals and mere slaves of the Barons), every Noble had his strong Castle, where he reigned the cruel king of all the neighbouring people. Accordingly, he perpetrated whatever cruelties he chose. And never were worse cruelties committed upon earth than in wretched England in those nineteen years.

The writers who were living then describe them fearfully. They say that the castles were filled with devils rather than with men; that the peasants, men and women, were put into dungeons for their gold and silver, were tortured with fire and smoke, were hung up by the thumbs, were hung up by the heels with great weights to their heads, were torn with jagged irons, killed with hunger, broken to death in narrow chests filled with sharp-pointed stones, murdered in countless fiendish ways. In England there was no corn, no meat, no cheese, no butter, there were no tilled lands, no harvests. Ashes of burnt towns, and dreary wastes, were all that the traveller, fearful of the robbers who prowled abroad at all hours, would see in a long day's journey; and from sunrise until night, he would not come upon a home.

The clergy sometimes suffered, and heavily too, from pillage, but many of them had castles of their own, and fought in helmet and armour like the barons, and drew lots with other fighting men for their share of booty. The Pope (or Bishop of Rome), on King Stephen's resisting his ambition, laid

England under an Interdict at one period of this reign; which means that he allowed no service to be performed in the churches, no couples to be married, no bells to be rung, no dead bodies to be buried. Any man having the power to refuse these things, no matter whether he were called a Pope or a Poulterer, would, of course, have the power of afflicting numbers of innocent people. That nothing might be wanting to the miseries of King Stephen’s time, the Pope threw in this contribution to the public store—not very like the widow’s contribution, as I think, when Our Saviour sat in Jerusalem over-against the Treasury, ‘and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.’

CHAPTER XII—ENGLAND UNDER HENRY THE SECOND

PART THE FIRST

Henry Plantagenet, when he was but twenty-one years old, quietly succeeded to the throne of England, according to his agreement made with the late King at Winchester. Six weeks after Stephen's death, he and his Queen, Eleanor, were crowned in that city; into which they rode on horseback in great state, side by side, amidst much shouting and rejoicing, and clashing of music, and strewing of flowers.

The reign of King Henry the Second began well. The King had great possessions, and (what with his own rights, and what with those of his wife) was lord of one-third part of France. He was a young man of vigour, ability, and resolution, and immediately applied himself to remove some of the evils which had arisen in the last unhappy reign. He revoked all the grants of land that had been hastily made, on either side, during the late struggles; he obliged numbers of disorderly soldiers to depart from England; he reclaimed all the castles belonging to the Crown; and he forced the wicked nobles to pull down their own castles, to the number of eleven hundred, in which such dismal cruelties had been inflicted on the people. The King's brother, Geoffrey, rose against him in France, while he was so well employed, and rendered it necessary for him to repair to that country; where, after he had subdued and made a friendly arrangement with his brother (who did not live long), his ambition to increase his possessions involved him in a war with the French King, Louis, with whom he had been on such friendly terms just before, that to the French King's infant daughter, then a baby in the cradle, he had promised one of his little sons in marriage, who was a child of five years old. However, the war came to nothing at last, and the Pope made the two Kings friends again.

Now, the clergy, in the troubles of the last reign, had gone on very ill indeed. There were all kinds of criminals among them—murderers, thieves, and vagabonds; and the worst of the matter was, that the good priests would not give up the bad priests to justice, when they committed crimes, but persisted in sheltering and defending them. The King, well knowing that there could be no peace or rest in England while such things lasted, resolved to reduce the power of the clergy; and, when he had reigned seven years, found (as he considered) a good opportunity for doing so, in the death of the Archbishop of Canterbury. ‘I will have for the new Archbishop,’ thought the King, ‘a friend in whom I can trust, who will help me to humble these rebellious priests, and to have them dealt with, when they do wrong, as other men who do wrong are dealt with.’ So, he resolved to make his favourite, the new Archbishop; and this favourite was so extraordinary a man, and his story is so curious, that I must tell you all about him.

Once upon a time, a worthy merchant of London, named Gilbert à Becket, made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and was taken prisoner by a Saracen lord. This lord, who treated him kindly and not like a slave, had one fair daughter, who fell in love with the merchant; and who told him that she wanted to become a Christian, and was willing to marry him if they could fly to a Christian country. The merchant returned her love, until he found an opportunity to escape, when he did not trouble himself about the Saracen lady, but escaped with his servant Richard, who had been taken prisoner along with him, and arrived in England and forgot her. The Saracen lady, who was more loving than the merchant, left her father’s house in disguise to follow him, and made her way, under many hardships, to the sea-shore. The merchant had taught her only two English words (for I suppose he must have learnt the Saracen tongue himself, and made love in that language), of which London was one, and his own name, Gilbert, the other. She went among the ships, saying, ‘London! London!’ over and over again, until the sailors understood that she wanted to find an English vessel that would carry her there; so they showed her such a ship, and she paid for her passage with some of her jewels, and sailed away. Well! The merchant was sitting in his counting-house in London one day, when he heard a great noise in the street; and presently Richard came running in from the warehouse, with his eyes wide open and his breath almost gone, saying, ‘Master, master, here is the Saracen lady!’ The merchant thought Richard was mad; but Richard said, ‘No, master! As I live, the Saracen lady is going up and down the city, calling Gilbert! Gilbert!’ Then, he took the merchant by the sleeve, and pointed out of window; and there they saw her among the gables and water-spouts of the dark, dirty street, in her foreign dress, so forlorn, surrounded by a wondering crowd, and passing slowly along, calling Gilbert, Gilbert! When the merchant saw her, and thought of the tenderness she had shown him in his captivity, and of her constancy, his heart was moved, and he ran down into the street; and she saw him coming, and with a great cry fainted in his arms. They were married without loss of time, and Richard (who was an excellent man) danced with joy the whole day of the wedding; and they all lived happy ever afterwards.

This merchant and this Saracen lady had one son, Thomas à Becket. He it was who became the Favourite of King Henry the Second.

He had become Chancellor, when the King thought of making him Archbishop. He was clever, gay, well educated, brave; had fought in several battles in France; had defeated a French knight in single combat, and brought his horse away as a token of the victory. He lived in a noble palace, he was the tutor of the young Prince Henry, he was served by one hundred and forty knights, his riches were immense. The King once sent him as his ambassador to France; and the French people, beholding in what state he travelled, cried out in the streets, ‘How splendid must the King of England be, when this is only the Chancellor!’ They had good reason to wonder at the magnificence of Thomas à Becket, for, when he entered a French town, his procession was headed by two hundred and fifty singing boys; then, came his hounds in couples; then, eight waggons, each drawn by five horses driven by five drivers: two of the waggons filled with strong ale to be given away to the people; four, with his gold and silver plate and stately clothes; two, with the dresses of his numerous servants. Then, came twelve horses, each with a monkey on his back; then, a train of people bearing shields and leading fine war-horses splendidly equipped; then, falconers with hawks upon their wrists; then, a host of knights, and gentlemen and priests; then, the Chancellor with his brilliant garments flashing in the sun, and all the people capering and shouting with delight.

The King was well pleased with all this, thinking that it only made himself the more magnificent to have so magnificent a favourite; but he sometimes jested with the Chancellor upon his splendour too. Once, when they were riding together through the streets of London in hard winter weather, they saw a shivering old man in rags. ‘Look at the poor object!’ said the King. ‘Would it not be a charitable act to give that aged man a comfortable warm cloak?’ ‘Undoubtedly it would,’ said Thomas à Becket, ‘and you do well, Sir, to think of such Christian duties.’ ‘Come!’ cried the

King, ‘then give him your cloak!’ It was made of rich crimson trimmed with ermine. The King tried to pull it off, the Chancellor tried to keep it on, both were near rolling from their saddles in the mud, when the Chancellor submitted, and the King gave the cloak to the old beggar: much to the beggar’s astonishment, and much to the merriment of all the courtiers in attendance. For, courtiers are not only eager to laugh when the King laughs, but they really do enjoy a laugh against a Favourite.

‘I will make,’ thought King Henry the second, ‘this Chancellor of mine, Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury. He will then be the head of the Church, and, being devoted to me, will help me to correct the Church. He has always upheld my power against the power of the clergy, and once publicly told some bishops (I remember), that men of the Church were equally bound to me, with men of the sword. Thomas à Becket is the man, of all other men in England, to help me in my great design.’ So the King, regardless of all objection, either that he was a fighting man, or a lavish man, or a courtly man, or a man of pleasure, or anything but a likely man for the office, made him Archbishop accordingly.

Now, Thomas à Becket was proud and loved to be famous. He was already famous for the pomp of his life, for his riches, his gold and silver plate, his waggons, horses, and attendants. He could do no more in that way than he had done; and being tired of that kind of fame (which is a very poor one), he longed to have his name celebrated for something else. Nothing, he knew, would render him so famous in the world, as the setting of his utmost power and ability against the utmost power and ability of the King. He resolved with the whole strength of his mind to do it.

He may have had some secret grudge against the King besides. The King may have offended his proud humour at some time or other, for anything I know. I think it likely, because it is a common thing for Kings, Princes, and other great people, to try the tempers of their favourites rather severely. Even the little affair of the crimson cloak must have been anything but a pleasant one to a haughty man. Thomas à Becket knew better than any one in England what the King expected of him. In all his sumptuous life, he had never yet been in a position to disappoint the King. He could take up that proud stand now, as head of the Church; and he determined that it should be written in history, either that he subdued the King, or that the King subdued him.

So, of a sudden, he completely altered the whole manner of his life. He turned off all his brilliant followers, ate coarse food, drank bitter water, wore next his skin sackcloth covered with dirt and vermin (for it was then thought very religious to be very dirty), flogged his back to punish himself, lived chiefly in a little cell, washed the feet of thirteen poor people every day, and looked as miserable as he possibly could. If he had put twelve hundred monkeys on horseback instead of twelve, and had gone in procession with eight thousand waggons instead of eight, he could not have half astonished the people so much as by this great change. It soon caused him to be more talked about as an Archbishop than he had been as a Chancellor.

The King was very angry; and was made still more so, when the new Archbishop, claiming various estates from the nobles as being rightfully Church property, required the King himself, for the same reason, to give up Rochester Castle, and Rochester City too. Not satisfied with this, he declared that no power but himself should appoint a priest to any Church in the part of England over which he was Archbishop; and when a certain gentleman of Kent made such an appointment, as he claimed to have the right to do, Thomas à Becket excommunicated him.

Excommunication was, next to the Interdict I told you of at the close of the last chapter, the great weapon of the clergy. It consisted in declaring the person who was excommunicated, an outcast from the Church and from all religious offices; and in cursing him all over, from the top of his head to the sole of his foot, whether he was standing up, lying down, sitting, kneeling, walking, running, hopping, jumping, gaping, coughing, sneezing, or whatever else he was doing. This unchristian nonsense would of course have made no sort of difference to the person cursed—who could say his prayers at home if he were shut out of church, and whom none but God could judge—but for the fears and superstitions of the people, who avoided excommunicated persons, and made their lives unhappy. So, the King said to the New Archbishop, ‘Take off this Excommunication from this gentleman of Kent.’ To which the Archbishop replied, ‘I shall do no such thing.’

The quarrel went on. A priest in Worcestershire committed a most dreadful murder, that aroused the horror of the whole nation. The King demanded to have this wretch delivered up, to be tried in the same court and in the same way as any other murderer. The Archbishop refused, and kept him in the Bishop’s prison. The King, holding a solemn assembly in Westminster Hall, demanded that in future all priests found guilty before their Bishops of crimes against the law of the land should be considered priests no longer, and should be delivered over to the law of the land for punishment. The Archbishop again refused. The King required to know whether the clergy would obey the ancient customs of the country? Every priest there, but one, said, after Thomas à Becket, ‘Saving my order.’ This really meant that they would only obey those customs when they did not interfere with their own claims; and the King went out of the Hall in great wrath.

Some of the clergy began to be afraid, now, that they were going too far. Though Thomas à Becket was otherwise as unmoved as Westminster Hall, they prevailed upon him, for the sake of their fears, to go to the King at Woodstock, and promise to observe the ancient customs of the country, without saying anything about his order. The King received this submission favourably, and summoned a great council of the clergy to meet at the Castle of Clarendon, by Salisbury. But when the council met, the Archbishop again insisted on the words ‘saying my order;’ and he still insisted, though lords entreated him, and priests wept before him and knelt to him, and an adjoining room was thrown open, filled with armed soldiers of the King, to threaten him. At length he gave way, for that time, and the ancient customs (which included what the King had demanded in vain) were stated in writing, and were signed and sealed by the chief of the clergy, and were called the Constitutions of Clarendon.

The quarrel went on, for all that. The Archbishop tried to see the King. The King would not see him. The Archbishop tried to escape from England. The sailors on the coast would launch no boat to take him away. Then, he again resolved to do his worst in opposition to the King, and began openly to set the ancient customs at defiance.

The King summoned him before a great council at Northampton, where he accused him of high treason, and made a claim against him, which was not a just one, for an enormous sum of money. Thomas à Becket was alone against the whole assembly, and the very Bishops advised him to resign his office and abandon his contest with the King. His great anxiety and agitation stretched him on a sick-bed for two days, but he was still undaunted. He went to the adjourned council, carrying a great cross in his right hand, and sat down holding it erect before him. The King angrily retired into an inner room. The whole assembly angrily retired and left him there. But there he sat. The Bishops came out again in a body, and renounced him as a traitor. He only said, ‘I hear!’ and sat there still. They retired again into the inner room, and his trial proceeded without him. By-and-by, the Earl of Leicester, heading the barons, came out to read his sentence. He refused to hear it, denied the power of the court, and said he would refer his cause to the Pope. As he walked out of the hall, with the cross in his hand, some of those present picked up rushes—rushes were strewn upon the floors in those days by way of carpet—and threw them at him. He proudly turned his head, and said that were he not Archbishop, he would chastise those cowards with the sword he had known how to use in bygone days. He then mounted his horse, and rode away, cheered and surrounded by the common people, to whom he threw open his house that night and gave a supper, supping with them himself. That same night he secretly departed from the town; and so, travelling by night and hiding by day, and calling himself ‘Brother Dearman,’ got away, not without difficulty, to Flanders.

The struggle still went on. The angry King took possession of the revenues of the archbishopric, and banished all the relations and servants of Thomas à Becket, to the number of four hundred. The Pope and the French King both protected him, and an abbey was assigned for his residence. Stimulated by this support, Thomas à Becket, on a great festival day, formally proceeded to a great church crowded with people, and going up into the pulpit publicly cursed and excommunicated all who had supported the Constitutions of Clarendon: mentioning many English noblemen by name, and not distantly hinting at the King of England himself.

When intelligence of this new affront was carried to the King in his chamber, his passion was so furious that he tore his clothes, and rolled like a madman on his bed of straw and rushes. But he was soon up and doing. He ordered all the ports and coasts of England to be narrowly watched, that no letters of Interdict might be brought into the kingdom; and sent messengers and bribes to the Pope’s palace at Rome. Meanwhile, Thomas à Becket, for his part, was not idle at Rome, but constantly employed his utmost arts in his own behalf. Thus the contest stood, until there was peace between France and England (which had been for some time at war), and until the two children of the two Kings were married in celebration of it.

Then, the French King brought about a meeting between Henry and his old favourite, so long his enemy.

Even then, though Thomas à Becket knelt before the King, he was obstinate and immovable as to those words about his order. King Louis of France was weak enough in his veneration for Thomas à Becket and such men, but this was a little too much for him. He said that à Becket 'wanted to be greater than the saints and better than St. Peter,' and rode away from him with the King of England. His poor French Majesty asked à Becket's pardon for so doing, however, soon afterwards, and cut a very pitiful figure.

At last, and after a world of trouble, it came to this. There was another meeting on French ground between King Henry and Thomas à Becket, and it was agreed that Thomas à Becket should be Archbishop of Canterbury, according to the customs of former Archbishops, and that the King should put him in possession of the revenues of that post. And now, indeed, you might suppose the struggle at an end, and Thomas à Becket at rest. No, not even yet. For Thomas à Becket hearing, by some means, that King Henry, when he was in dread of his kingdom being placed under an interdict, had had his eldest son Prince Henry secretly crowned, not only persuaded the Pope to suspend the Archbishop of York who had performed that ceremony, and to excommunicate the Bishops who had assisted at it, but sent a messenger of his own into England, in spite of all the King's precautions along the coast, who delivered the letters of excommunication into the Bishops' own hands. Thomas à Becket then came over to England himself, after an absence of seven years. He was privately warned that it was dangerous to come, and that an ireful knight, named Ranulf de Broc, had threatened that he should not live to eat a loaf of bread in England; but he came.

The common people received him well, and marched about with him in a soldierly way, armed with such rustic weapons as they could get. He tried to see the young prince who had once been his pupil, but was prevented. He hoped for some little support among the nobles and priests, but found none. He made the most of the peasants who attended him, and feasted them, and went from Canterbury to Harrow-on-the-Hill, and from Harrow-on-the-Hill back to Canterbury, and on Christmas Day preached in the Cathedral there, and told the people in his sermon that he had come to die among them, and that it was likely he would be murdered. He had no fear, however—or, if he had any, he had much more obstinacy—for he, then and there, excommunicated three of his enemies, of whom Ranulf de Broc, the ireful knight, was one.

As men in general had no fancy for being cursed, in their sitting and walking, and gaping and sneezing, and all the rest of it, it was very natural in the persons so freely excommunicated to complain to the King. It was equally natural in the King, who had hoped that this troublesome opponent was at last quieted, to fall into a mighty rage when he heard of these new affronts; and, on the Archbishop of York telling him that he never could hope for rest while Thomas à Becket lived, to cry out hastily before his court, ‘Have I no one here who will deliver me from this man?’ There were four knights present, who, hearing the King’s words, looked at one another, and went out.

The names of these knights were Reginald Fitzurse, William Tracy, Hugh de Morville, and Richard Brito; three of whom had been in the train of Thomas à Becket in the old days of his splendour. They rode away on horseback, in a very secret manner, and on the third day after Christmas Day arrived at Saltwood House, not far from Canterbury, which belonged to the family of Ranulf de Broc. They quietly collected some followers here, in case they should need any; and proceeding to Canterbury, suddenly appeared (the four knights and twelve men) before the Archbishop, in his own house, at two o’clock in the afternoon. They neither bowed nor spoke, but sat down on the floor in silence, staring at the Archbishop.

Thomas à Becket said, at length, ‘What do you want?’

‘We want,’ said Reginald Fitzurse, ‘the excommunication taken from the Bishops, and you to answer for your offences to the King.’ Thomas à Becket defiantly replied, that the power of the clergy was above the power of the King. That it was not for such men as they were, to threaten him. That if he were threatened by all the swords in England, he would never yield.

‘Then we will do more than threaten!’ said the knights. And they went out with the twelve men, and put on their armour, and drew their shining swords, and came back.

His servants, in the meantime, had shut up and barred the great gate of the palace. At first, the knights tried to shatter it with their battle-axes; but, being shown a window by which they could enter, they let the gate alone, and climbed in that way. While they were battering at the door, the attendants of Thomas à Becket had implored him to take refuge in the

Cathedral; in which, as a sanctuary or sacred place, they thought the knights would dare to do no violent deed. He told them, again and again, that he would not stir. Hearing the distant voices of the monks singing the evening service, however, he said it was now his duty to attend, and therefore, and for no other reason, he would go.

There was a near way between his Palace and the Cathedral, by some beautiful old cloisters which you may yet see. He went into the Cathedral, without any hurry, and having the Cross carried before him as usual. When he was safely there, his servants would have fastened the door, but he said No! it was the house of God and not a fortress.

As he spoke, the shadow of Reginald Fitzurse appeared in the Cathedral doorway, darkening the little light there was outside, on the dark winter evening. This knight said, in a strong voice, ‘Follow me, loyal servants of the King!’ The rattle of the armour of the other knights echoed through the Cathedral, as they came clashing in.

It was so dark, in the lofty aisles and among the stately pillars of the church, and there were so many hiding-places in the crypt below and in the narrow passages above, that Thomas à Becket might even at that pass have saved himself if he would. But he would not. He told the monks resolutely that he would not. And though they all dispersed and left him there with no other follower than Edward Gryme, his faithful cross-bearer, he was as firm then, as ever he had been in his life.

The knights came on, through the darkness, making a terrible noise with their armed tread upon the stone pavement of the church. ‘Where is the traitor?’ they cried out. He made no answer. But when they cried, ‘Where is the Archbishop?’ he said proudly, ‘I am here!’ and came out of the shade and stood before them.

The knights had no desire to kill him, if they could rid the King and themselves of him by any other means. They told him he must either fly or go with them. He said he would do neither; and he threw William Tracy off with such force when he took hold of his sleeve, that Tracy reeled again. By his reproaches and his steadiness, he so incensed them, and exasperated their fierce humour, that Reginald Fitzurse, whom he called by an ill name, said, ‘Then die!’ and struck at his head. But the faithful Edward Gryme put out his arm, and there received the main force of the blow, so that it only made his master bleed. Another voice from among the knights again called to Thomas à Becket to fly; but, with his blood running down his face, and his hands clasped, and his head bent, he commanded himself to God, and stood firm. Then they cruelly killed him close to the altar of St. Bennet; and his body fell upon the pavement, which was dirtied with his blood and brains.

It is an awful thing to think of the murdered mortal, who had so showered his curses about, lying, all disfigured, in the church, where a few lamps here and there were but red specks on a pall of darkness; and to think of the guilty knights riding away on horseback, looking over their shoulders at the dim Cathedral, and remembering what they had left inside.

PART THE SECOND

When the King heard how Thomas à Becket had lost his life in Canterbury Cathedral, through the ferocity of the four Knights, he was filled with dismay. Some have supposed that when the King spoke those hasty words, 'Have I no one here who will deliver me from this man?' he wished, and meant à Becket to be slain. But few things are more unlikely; for, besides that the King was not naturally cruel (though very passionate), he was wise, and must have known full well what any stupid man in his dominions must have known, namely, that such a murder would rouse the Pope and the whole Church against him.

He sent respectful messengers to the Pope, to represent his innocence (except in having uttered the hasty words); and he swore solemnly and publicly to his innocence, and contrived in time to make his peace. As to the four guilty Knights, who fled into Yorkshire, and never again dared to show themselves at Court, the Pope excommunicated them; and they lived miserably for some time, shunned by all their countrymen. At last, they went humbly to Jerusalem as a penance, and there died and were buried.

It happened, fortunately for the pacifying of the Pope, that an opportunity arose very soon after the murder of à Becket, for the King to declare his power in Ireland—which was an acceptable undertaking to the Pope, as the Irish, who had been converted to Christianity by one Patricius (otherwise Saint Patrick) long ago, before any Pope existed, considered that the Pope had nothing at all to do with them, or they with the Pope, and accordingly refused to pay him Peter's Pence, or that tax of a penny a house which I have elsewhere mentioned. The King's opportunity arose in this way.

The Irish were, at that time, as barbarous a people as you can well imagine. They were continually quarrelling and fighting, cutting one another's throats, slicing one another's noses, burning one another's houses, carrying away one another's wives, and committing all sorts of violence. The country was divided into five kingdoms—Desmond, Thomond, Connaught, Ulster, and Leinster—each governed by a separate King, of whom one claimed to be the chief of the rest. Now, one of these Kings, named Dermond Mac Murrough (a wild kind of name, spelt in more than one wild kind of way), had carried off the wife of a friend of his, and concealed her on an island in a bog. The friend resenting this (though it was quite the custom of the country), complained to the chief King, and, with the chief King's help, drove Dermond Mac Murrough out of his dominions. Dermond came over to England for revenge; and offered to hold his realm as a vassal of King Henry, if King Henry would help him to regain it. The King consented to these terms; but only assisted him, then, with what were called Letters Patent, authorising any English subjects who were so disposed, to enter into his service, and aid his cause.

There was, at Bristol, a certain Earl Richard de Clare, called Strongbow; of no very good character; needy and desperate, and ready for anything that offered him a chance of improving his fortunes. There were, in South Wales, two other broken knights of the same good-for-nothing sort, called Robert Fitz-Stephen, and Maurice Fitz-Gerald. These three, each with a small band of followers, took up Dermond's cause; and it was agreed that if it proved successful, Strongbow should marry Dermond's daughter Eva, and be declared his heir.

The trained English followers of these knights were so superior in all the discipline of battle to the Irish, that they beat them against immense superiority of numbers. In one fight, early in the war, they cut off three hundred heads, and laid them before Mac Murrough; who turned them every one up with his hands, rejoicing, and, coming to one which was the head of a man whom he had much disliked, grasped it by the hair and ears, and tore off the nose and lips with his teeth. You may judge from this, what kind of a gentleman an Irish King in those times was. The captives, all through this war, were horribly treated; the victorious party making nothing of breaking their limbs, and casting them into the sea from the tops of high rocks. It was in the midst of the miseries and cruelties attendant on the taking of Waterford, where the dead lay piled in the streets, and the filthy gutters ran with blood, that Strongbow married Eva. An odious marriage-company those mounds of corpse's must have made, I think, and one quite worthy of the young lady's father.

He died, after Waterford and Dublin had been taken, and various successes achieved; and Strongbow became King of Leinster. Now came King Henry's opportunity. To restrain the growing power of Strongbow, he himself repaired to Dublin, as Strongbow's Royal Master, and deprived him of his kingdom, but confirmed him in the enjoyment of great possessions. The King, then, holding state in Dublin, received the homage of nearly all the Irish Kings and Chiefs, and so came home again with a great addition to his reputation as Lord of Ireland, and with a new claim on the favour of the Pope. And now, their reconciliation was completed—more easily and mildly by the Pope, than the King might have expected, I think.

At this period of his reign, when his troubles seemed so few and his prospects so bright, those domestic miseries began which gradually made the King the most unhappy of men, reduced his great spirit, wore away his health, and broke his heart.

He had four sons. Henry, now aged eighteen—his secret crowning of whom had given such offence to Thomas à Becket. Richard, aged sixteen; Geoffrey, fifteen; and John, his favourite, a young boy whom the courtiers named Lackland, because he had no inheritance, but to whom the King meant to give the Lordship of Ireland. All these misguided boys, in their turn, were unnatural sons to him, and unnatural brothers to each other. Prince Henry, stimulated by the French King, and by his bad mother, Queen Eleanor, began the undutiful history,

First, he demanded that his young wife, Margaret, the French King's daughter, should be crowned as well as he. His father, the King, consented, and it was done. It was no sooner done, than he demanded to have a part of his father's dominions, during his father's life. This being refused, he made off from his father in the night, with his bad heart full of bitterness, and took refuge at the French King's Court. Within a day or two, his brothers Richard and Geoffrey followed. Their mother tried to join them—escaping in man's clothes—but she was seized by King Henry's men, and immured in prison, where she lay, deservedly, for sixteen years. Every day, however, some grasping English noblemen, to whom the King's protection of his people from their avarice and oppression had given offence, deserted him and joined the Princes. Every day he heard some fresh intelligence of the Princes levying armies against him; of Prince Henry’s wearing a crown before his own ambassadors at the French Court, and being called the Junior King of England; of all the Princes swearing never to make peace with him, their father, without the consent and approval of the Barons of France. But, with his fortitude and energy unshaken, King Henry met the shock of these disasters with a resolved and cheerful face. He called upon all Royal fathers who had sons, to help him, for his cause was theirs; he hired, out of his riches, twenty thousand men to fight the false French King, who stirred his own blood against him; and he carried on the war with such vigour, that Louis soon proposed a conference to treat for peace.

The conference was held beneath an old wide-spreading green elm-tree, upon a plain in France. It led to nothing. The war recommenced. Prince Richard began his fighting career, by leading an army against his father; but his father beat him and his army back; and thousands of his men would have rued the day in which they fought in such a wicked cause, had not the King received news of an invasion of England by the Scots, and promptly come home through a great storm to repress it. And whether he really began to fear that he suffered these troubles because à Becket had been murdered; or whether he wished to rise in the favour of the Pope, who had now declared à Becket to be a saint, or in the favour of his own people, of whom many believed that even à Becket’s senseless tomb could work miracles, I don’t know: but the King no sooner landed in England than he went straight to Canterbury; and when he came within sight of the distant Cathedral, he dismounted from his horse, took off his shoes, and walked with bare and bleeding feet to à Becket’s grave. There, he lay down on the ground, lamenting, in the presence of many people; and by-and-by he went into the Chapter House, and, removing his clothes from his back and shoulders, submitted himself to be beaten with knotted cords (not beaten very hard, I dare say though) by eighty Priests, one after another. It chanced that on the very day when the King made this curious exhibition of himself, a complete victory was obtained over the Scots; which very much delighted the Priests, who said that it was won because of his great example of repentance. For the Priests in general had found out, since à Becket’s death, that they admired him of all things—though they had hated him very cordially when he was alive.

The Earl of Flanders, who was at the head of the base conspiracy of the King's undutiful sons and their foreign friends, took the opportunity of the King being thus employed at home, to lay siege to Rouen, the capital of Normandy. But the King, who was extraordinarily quick and active in all his movements, was at Rouen, too, before it was supposed possible that he could have left England; and there he so defeated the said Earl of Flanders, that the conspirators proposed peace, and his bad sons Henry and Geoffrey submitted. Richard resisted for six weeks; but, being beaten out of castle after castle, he at last submitted too, and his father forgave him.

To forgive these unworthy princes was only to afford them breathing-time for new faithlessness. They were so false, disloyal, and dishonourable, that they were no more to be trusted than common thieves. In the very next year, Prince Henry rebelled again, and was again forgiven. In eight years more, Prince Richard rebelled against his elder brother; and Prince Geoffrey infamously said that the brothers could never agree well together, unless they were united against their father. In the very next year after their reconciliation by the King, Prince Henry again rebelled against his father; and again submitted, swearing to be true; and was again forgiven; and again rebelled with Geoffrey.

But the end of this perfidious Prince was come. He fell sick at a French town; and his conscience terribly reproaching him with his baseness, he sent messengers to the King his father, imploring him to come and see him, and to forgive him for the last time on his bed of death. The generous King, who had a royal and forgiving mind towards his children always, would have gone; but this Prince had been so unnatural, that the noblemen about the King suspected treachery, and represented to him that he could not safely trust his life with such a traitor, though his own eldest son. Therefore the King sent him a ring from off his finger as a token of forgiveness; and when the Prince had kissed it, with much grief and many tears, and had confessed to those around him how bad, and wicked, and undutiful a son he had been; he said to the attendant Priests: 'O, tie a rope about my body, and draw me out of bed, and lay me down upon a bed of ashes, that I may die with prayers to God in a repentant manner!' And so he died, at twenty-seven years old.

Three years afterwards, Prince Geoffrey, being unhorsed at a tournament, had his brains trampled out by a crowd of horses passing over him. So, there only remained Prince Richard, and Prince John—who had grown to be a young man now, and had solemnly sworn to be faithful to his father. Richard soon rebelled again, encouraged by his friend the French King, Philip the Second (son of Louis, who was dead); and soon submitted and was again forgiven, swearing on the New Testament never to rebel again; and in another year or so, rebelled again; and, in the presence of his father, knelt down on his knee before the King of France; and did the French King homage: and declared that with his aid he would possess himself, by force, of all his father's French dominions.

And yet this Richard called himself a soldier of Our Saviour! And yet this Richard wore the Cross, which the Kings of France and England had both taken, in the previous year, at a brotherly meeting underneath the old wide-spreading elm-tree on the plain, when they had sworn (like him) to devote themselves to a new Crusade, for the love and honour of the Truth!

Sick at heart, wearied out by the falsehood of his sons, and almost ready to lie down and die, the unhappy King who had so long stood firm, began to fail. But the Pope, to his honour, supported him; and obliged the French King and Richard, though successful in fight, to treat for peace. Richard wanted to be Crowned King of England, and pretended that he wanted to be married (which he really did not) to the French King's sister, his promised wife, whom King Henry detained in England. King Henry wanted, on the other hand, that the French King's sister should be married to his favourite son, John: the only one of his sons (he said) who had never rebelled against him. At last King Henry, deserted by his nobles one by one, distressed, exhausted, broken-hearted, consented to establish peace.

One final heavy sorrow was reserved for him, even yet. When they brought him the proposed treaty of peace, in writing, as he lay very ill in bed, they brought him also the list of the deserters from their allegiance, whom he was required to pardon. The first name upon this list was John, his favourite son, in whom he had trusted to the last.

'O John! child of my heart!' exclaimed the King, in a great agony of mind. 'O John, whom I have loved the best! O John, for whom I have contended through these many troubles! Have you betrayed me too!' And then he lay down with a heavy groan, and said, 'Now let the world go as it will. I care for nothing more!'

After a time, he told his attendants to take him to the French town of Chinon—a town he had been fond of, during many years. But he was fond of no place now; it was too true that he could care for nothing more upon this earth. He wildly cursed the hour when he was born, and cursed the children whom he left behind him; and expired.

As, one hundred years before, the servile followers of the Court had abandoned the Conqueror in the hour of his death, so they now abandoned his descendant. The very body was stripped, in the plunder of the Royal chamber; and it was not easy to find the means of carrying it for burial to the abbey church of Fontevraud.

Richard was said in after years, by way of flattery, to have the heart of a Lion. It would have been far better, I think, to have had the heart of a Man. His heart, whatever it was, had cause to beat remorsefully within his breast, when he came—as he did—into the solemn abbey, and looked on his dead father's uncovered face. His heart, whatever it was, had been a black and perjured heart, in all its dealings with the deceased King, and more deficient in a single touch of tenderness than any wild beast's in the forest.

There is a pretty story told of this Reign, called the story of Fair Rosamond. It relates how the King doted on Fair Rosamond, who was the loveliest girl in all the world; and how he had a beautiful Bower built for her in a Park at Woodstock; and how it was erected in a labyrinth, and could only be found by a clue of silk. How the bad Queen Eleanor, becoming jealous of Fair Rosamond, found out the secret of the clue, and one day, appeared before her, with a dagger and a cup of poison, and left her to the choice between those deaths. How Fair Rosamond, after shedding many piteous tears and offering many useless prayers to the cruel Queen, took the poison, and fell dead in the midst of the beautiful bower, while the unconscious birds sang gaily all around her.

Now, there *was* a fair Rosamond, and she was (I dare say) the loveliest girl in all the world, and the King was certainly very fond of her, and the bad Queen Eleanor was certainly made jealous. But I am afraid—I say afraid, because I like the story so much—that there was no bower, no labyrinth, no silken clue, no dagger, no poison. I am afraid fair Rosamond retired to a nunnery near Oxford, and died there, peaceably; her sister-nuns hanging a silken drapery over her tomb, and often dressing it with flowers, in remembrance of the youth and beauty that had enchanted the King when he too was young, and when his life lay fair before him.

It was dark and ended now; faded and gone. Henry Plantagenet lay quiet in the abbey church of Fontevraud, in the fifty-seventh year of his age

—never to be completed—after governing England well, for nearly thirty-five years.

CHAPTER XIII—ENGLAND UNDER RICHARD THE FIRST, CALLED THE LION-HEART

In the year of our Lord one thousand one hundred and eighty-nine, Richard of the Lion Heart succeeded to the throne of King Henry the Second, whose paternal heart he had done so much to break. He had been, as we have seen, a rebel from his boyhood; but, the moment he became a king against whom others might rebel, he found out that rebellion was a great wickedness. In the heat of this pious discovery, he punished all the leading people who had befriended him against his father. He could scarcely have done anything that would have been a better instance of his real nature, or a better warning to fawners and parasites not to trust in lion-hearted princes.

He likewise put his late father's treasurer in chains, and locked him up in a dungeon from which he was not set free until he had relinquished, not only all the Crown treasure, but all his own money too. So, Richard certainly got the Lion's share of the wealth of this wretched treasurer, whether he had a Lion's heart or not.

He was crowned King of England, with great pomp, at Westminster: walking to the Cathedral under a silken canopy stretched on the tops of four lances, each carried by a great lord. On the day of his coronation, a dreadful murdering of the Jews took place, which seems to have given great delight to numbers of savage persons calling themselves Christians. The King had issued a proclamation forbidding the Jews (who were generally hated, though they were the most useful merchants in England) to appear at the ceremony; but as they had assembled in London from all parts, bringing presents to show their respect for the new Sovereign, some of them ventured down to Westminster Hall with their gifts; which were very readily accepted. It is supposed, now, that some noisy fellow in the crowd, pretending to be a very delicate Christian, set up a howl at this, and struck a Jew who was trying to get in at the Hall door with his present. A riot arose. The Jews who had got into the Hall, were driven forth; and some of the rabble cried out that the new King had commanded the unbelieving race to be put to death. Thereupon the crowd rushed through the narrow streets of the city, slaughtering all the Jews they met; and when they could find no more out of doors (on account of their having fled to their houses, and fastened themselves in), they ran madly about, breaking open all the houses where the Jews lived, rushing in and stabbing or spearing them, sometimes even flinging old people and children out of window into blazing fires they had lighted up below. This great cruelty lasted four-and-twenty hours, and only three men were punished for it. Even they forfeited their lives not for murdering and robbing the Jews, but for burning the houses of some Christians.

King Richard, who was a strong, restless, burly man, with one idea always in his head, and that the very troublesome idea of breaking the heads of other men, was mightily impatient to go on a Crusade to the Holy Land, with a great army. As great armies could not be raised to go, even to the Holy Land, without a great deal of money, he sold the Crown domains, and even the high offices of State; recklessly appointing noblemen to rule over his English subjects, not because they were fit to govern, but because they could pay high for the privilege. In this way, and by selling pardons at a dear rate and by varieties of avarice and oppression, he scraped together a large treasure. He then appointed two Bishops to take care of his kingdom in his absence, and gave great powers and possessions to his brother John, to secure his friendship. John would rather have been made Regent of England; but he was a sly man, and friendly to the expedition; saying to himself, no doubt, ‘The more fighting, the more chance of my brother being killed; and when he *is* killed, then I become King John!’

Before the newly levied army departed from England, the recruits and the general populace distinguished themselves by astonishing cruelties on the unfortunate Jews: whom, in many large towns, they murdered by hundreds in the most horrible manner.

At York, a large body of Jews took refuge in the Castle, in the absence of its Governor, after the wives and children of many of them had been slain before their eyes. Presently came the Governor, and demanded admission. ‘How can we give it thee, O Governor!’ said the Jews upon the walls, ‘when, if we open the gate by so much as the width of a foot, the roaring crowd behind thee will press in and kill us?’

Upon this, the unjust Governor became angry, and told the people that he approved of their killing those Jews; and a mischievous maniac of a friar, dressed all in white, put himself at the head of the assault, and they assaulted the Castle for three days.

Then said Jocen, the head-Jew (who was a Rabbi or Priest), to the rest, ‘Brethren, there is no hope for us with the Christians who are hammering at the gates and walls, and who must soon break in. As we and our wives and children must die, either by Christian hands, or by our own, let it be by our own. Let us destroy by fire what jewels and other treasure we have here, then fire the castle, and then perish!’

A few could not resolve to do this, but the greater part complied. They made a blazing heap of all their valuables, and, when those were consumed, set the castle in flames. While the flames roared and crackled around them, and shooting up into the sky, turned it blood-red, Jocen cut the throat of his beloved wife, and stabbed himself. All the others who had wives or children, did the like dreadful deed. When the populace broke in, they found (except the trembling few, cowering in corners, whom they soon killed) only heaps of greasy cinders, with here and there something like part of the blackened trunk of a burnt tree, but which had lately been a human creature, formed by the beneficent hand of the Creator as they were.

After this bad beginning, Richard and his troops went on, in no very good manner, with the Holy Crusade. It was undertaken jointly by the King of England and his old friend Philip of France. They commenced the business by reviewing their forces, to the number of one hundred thousand men. Afterwards, they severally embarked their troops for Messina, in Sicily, which was appointed as the next place of meeting.

King Richard’s sister had married the King of this place, but he was dead: and his uncle Tancred had usurped the crown, cast the Royal Widow into prison, and possessed himself of her estates. Richard fiercely demanded his sister’s release, the restoration of her lands, and (according to the Royal custom of the Island) that she should have a golden chair, a golden table, four-and-twenty silver cups, and four-and-twenty silver dishes. As he was too powerful to be successfully resisted, Tancred yielded to his demands; and then the French King grew jealous, and complained that the English King wanted to be absolute in the Island of Messina and everywhere else. Richard, however, cared little or nothing for this complaint; and in consideration of a present of twenty thousand pieces of gold, promised his pretty little nephew Arthur, then a child of two years old, in marriage to Tancred's daughter. We shall hear again of pretty little Arthur by-and-by.

This Sicilian affair arranged without anybody's brains being knocked out (which must have rather disappointed him), King Richard took his sister away, and also a fair lady named Berengaria, with whom he had fallen in love in France, and whom his mother, Queen Eleanor (so long in prison, you remember, but released by Richard on his coming to the Throne), had brought out there to be his wife; and sailed with them for Cyprus.

He soon had the pleasure of fighting the King of the Island of Cyprus, for allowing his subjects to pillage some of the English troops who were shipwrecked on the shore; and easily conquering this poor monarch, he seized his only daughter, to be a companion to the lady Berengaria, and put the King himself into silver fetters. He then sailed away again with his mother, sister, wife, and the captive princess; and soon arrived before the town of Acre, which the French King with his fleet was besieging from the sea. But the French King was in no triumphant condition, for his army had been thinned by the swords of the Saracens, and wasted by the plague; and Saladin, the brave Sultan of the Turks, at the head of a numerous army, was at that time gallantly defending the place from the hills that rise above it.

Wherever the united army of Crusaders went, they agreed in few points except in gaming, drinking, and quarrelling, in a most unholy manner; in debauching the people among whom they tarried, whether they were friends or foes; and in carrying disturbance and ruin into quiet places. The French King was jealous of the English King, and the English King was jealous of the French King, and the disorderly and violent soldiers of the two nations were jealous of one another; consequently, the two Kings could not at first agree, even upon a joint assault on Acre; but when they did make up their quarrel for that purpose, the Saracens promised to yield the town, to give up to the Christians the wood of the Holy Cross, to set at liberty all their Christian captives, and to pay two hundred thousand pieces of gold. All this was to be done within forty days; but, not being done, King Richard ordered some three thousand Saracen prisoners to be brought out in the front of his camp, and there, in full view of their own countrymen, to be butchered.

The French King had no part in this crime; for he was by that time travelling homeward with the greater part of his men; being offended by the overbearing conduct of the English King; being anxious to look after his own dominions; and being ill, besides, from the unwholesome air of that hot and sandy country. King Richard carried on the war without him; and remained in the East, meeting with a variety of adventures, nearly a year and a half. Every night when his army was on the march, and came to a halt, the heralds cried out three times, to remind all the soldiers of the cause in which they were engaged, ‘Save the Holy Sepulchre!’ and then all the soldiers knelt and said ‘Amen!’ Marching or encamping, the army had continually to strive with the hot air of the glaring desert, or with the Saracen soldiers animated and directed by the brave Saladin, or with both together. Sickness and death, battle and wounds, were always among them; but through every difficulty King Richard fought like a giant, and worked like a common labourer. Long and long after he was quiet in his grave, his terrible battle-axe, with twenty English pounds of English steel in its mighty head, was a legend among the Saracens; and when all the Saracen and Christian hosts had been dust for many a year, if a Saracen horse started at any object by the wayside, his rider would exclaim, ‘What dost thou fear, Fool? Dost thou think King Richard is behind it?’

No one admired this King’s renown for bravery more than Saladin himself, who was a generous and gallant enemy. When Richard lay ill of a fever, Saladin sent him fresh fruits from Damascus, and snow from the mountain-tops. Courtly messages and compliments were frequently exchanged between them—and then King Richard would mount his horse and kill as many Saracens as he could; and Saladin would mount his, and kill as many Christians as he could. In this way King Richard fought to his heart’s content at Arsoof and at Jaffa; and finding himself with nothing exciting to do at Ascalon, except to rebuild, for his own defence, some fortifications there which the Saracens had destroyed, he kicked his ally the Duke of Austria, for being too proud to work at them.

The army at last came within sight of the Holy City of Jerusalem; but, being then a mere nest of jealousy, and quarrelling and fighting, soon retired, and agreed with the Saracens upon a truce for three years, three months, three days, and three hours. Then, the English Christians, protected by the noble Saladin from Saracen revenge, visited Our Saviour’s tomb; and then King Richard embarked with a small force at Acre to return home.

But he was shipwrecked in the Adriatic Sea, and was fain to pass through Germany, under an assumed name. Now, there were many people in Germany who had served in the Holy Land under that proud Duke of Austria who had been kicked; and some of them, easily recognising a man so remarkable as King Richard, carried their intelligence to the kicked Duke, who straightway took him prisoner at a little inn near Vienna.

The Duke's master the Emperor of Germany, and the King of France, were equally delighted to have so troublesome a monarch in safe keeping. Friendships which are founded on a partnership in doing wrong, are never true; and the King of France was now quite as heartily King Richard's foe, as he had ever been his friend in his unnatural conduct to his father. He monstrously pretended that King Richard had designed to poison him in the East; he charged him with having murdered, there, a man whom he had in truth befriended; he bribed the Emperor of Germany to keep him close prisoner; and, finally, through the plotting of these two princes, Richard was brought before the German legislature, charged with the foregoing crimes, and many others. But he defended himself so well, that many of the assembly were moved to tears by his eloquence and earnestness. It was decided that he should be treated, during the rest of his captivity, in a manner more becoming his dignity than he had been, and that he should be set free on the payment of a heavy ransom. This ransom the English people willingly raised. When Queen Eleanor took it over to Germany, it was at first evaded and refused. But she appealed to the honour of all the princes of the German Empire in behalf of her son, and appealed so well that it was accepted, and the King released. Thereupon, the King of France wrote to Prince John—'Take care of thyself. The devil is unchained!'

Prince John had reason to fear his brother, for he had been a traitor to him in his captivity. He had secretly joined the French King; had vowed to the English nobles and people that his brother was dead; and had vainly tried to seize the crown. He was now in France, at a place called Evreux. Being the meanest and basest of men, he contrived a mean and base expedient for making himself acceptable to his brother. He invited the French officers of the garrison in that town to dinner, murdered them all, and then took the fortress. With this recommendation to the good will of a lion-hearted monarch, he hastened to King Richard, fell on his knees before him, and obtained the intercession of Queen Eleanor. 'I forgive him,' said the King, 'and I hope I may forget the injury he has done me, as easily as I know he will forget my pardon.'

While King Richard was in Sicily, there had been trouble in his dominions at home: one of the bishops whom he had left in charge thereof, arresting the other; and making, in his pride and ambition, as great a show as if he were King himself. But the King hearing of it at Messina, and appointing a new Regency, this Longchamp (for that was his name) had fled to France in a woman's dress, and had there been encouraged and supported by the French King. With all these causes of offence against Philip in his mind, King Richard had no sooner been welcomed home by his enthusiastic subjects with great display and splendour, and had no sooner been crowned afresh at Winchester, than he resolved to show the French King that the Devil was unchained indeed, and made war against him with great fury.

There was fresh trouble at home about this time, arising out of the discontents of the poor people, who complained that they were far more heavily taxed than the rich, and who found a spirited champion in William Fitz-Osbert, called Longbeard. He became the leader of a secret society, comprising fifty thousand men; he was seized by surprise; he stabbed the citizen who first laid hands upon him; and retreated, bravely fighting, to a church, which he maintained four days, until he was dislodged by fire, and run through the body as he came out. He was not killed, though; for he was dragged, half dead, at the tail of a horse to Smithfield, and there hanged. Death was long a favourite remedy for silencing the people's advocates; but as we go on with this history, I fancy we shall find them difficult to make an end of, for all that.

The French war, delayed occasionally by a truce, was still in progress when a certain Lord named Vidomar, Viscount of Limoges, chanced to find in his ground a treasure of ancient coins. As the King's vassal, he sent the King half of it; but the King claimed the whole. The lord refused to yield the whole. The King besieged the lord in his castle, swore that he would take the castle by storm, and hang every man of its defenders on the battlements.

There was a strange old song in that part of the country, to the effect that in Limoges an arrow would be made by which King Richard would die. It may be that Bertrand de Gourdon, a young man who was one of the defenders of the castle, had often sung it or heard it sung of a winter night, and remembered it when he saw, from his post upon the ramparts, the King attended only by his chief officer riding below the walls surveying the place. He drew an arrow to the head, took steady aim, said between his teeth, ‘Now I pray God speed thee well, arrow!’ discharged it, and struck the King in the left shoulder.

Although the wound was not at first considered dangerous, it was severe enough to cause the King to retire to his tent, and direct the assault to be made without him. The castle was taken; and every man of its defenders was hanged, as the King had sworn all should be, except Bertrand de Gourdon, who was reserved until the royal pleasure respecting him should be known.

By that time unskilful treatment had made the wound mortal and the King knew that he was dying. He directed Bertrand to be brought into his tent. The young man was brought there, heavily chained, King Richard looked at him steadily. He looked, as steadily, at the King.

‘Knave!’ said King Richard. ‘What have I done to thee that thou shouldest take my life?’

‘What hast thou done to me?’ replied the young man. ‘With thine own hands thou hast killed my father and my two brothers. Myself thou wouldest have hanged. Let me die now, by any torture that thou wilt. My comfort is, that no torture can save Thee. Thou too must die; and, through me, the world is quit of thee!’

Again the King looked at the young man steadily. Again the young man looked steadily at him. Perhaps some remembrance of his generous enemy Saladin, who was not a Christian, came into the mind of the dying King.

‘Youth!’ he said, ‘I forgive thee. Go unhurt!’ Then, turning to the chief officer who had been riding in his company when he received the wound, King Richard said:

‘Take off his chains, give him a hundred shillings, and let him depart.’

He sunk down on his couch, and a dark mist seemed in his weakened eyes to fill the tent wherein he had so often rested, and he died. His age was forty-two; he had reigned ten years. His last command was not obeyed; for the chief officer flayed Bertrand de Gourdon alive, and hanged him.

There is an old tune yet known—a sorrowful air will sometimes outlive many generations of strong men, and even last longer than battle-axes with twenty pounds of steel in the head—by which this King is said to have been discovered in his captivity. Blondel, a favourite Minstrel of King Richard, as the story relates, faithfully seeking his Royal master, went singing it outside the gloomy walls of many foreign fortresses and prisons; until at last he heard it echoed from within a dungeon, and knew the voice, and cried out in ecstasy, ‘O Richard, O my King!’ You may believe it, if you like; it would be easy to believe worse things. Richard was himself a Minstrel and a Poet. If he had not been a Prince too, he might have been a better man perhaps, and might have gone out of the world with less bloodshed and waste of life to answer for.

CHAPTER XIV—ENGLAND UNDER KING JOHN, CALLED LACKLAND

At two-and-thirty years of age, John became King of England. His pretty little nephew Arthur had the best claim to the throne; but John seized the treasure, and made fine promises to the nobility, and got himself crowned at Westminster within a few weeks after his brother Richard's death. I doubt whether the crown could possibly have been put upon the head of a meaner coward, or a more detestable villain, if England had been searched from end to end to find him out.

The French King, Philip, refused to acknowledge the right of John to his new dignity, and declared in favour of Arthur. You must not suppose that he had any generosity of feeling for the fatherless boy; it merely suited his ambitious schemes to oppose the King of England. So John and the French King went to war about Arthur.

He was a handsome boy, at that time only twelve years old. He was not born when his father, Geoffrey, had his brains trampled out at the tournament; and, besides the misfortune of never having known a father's guidance and protection, he had the additional misfortune to have a foolish mother (Constance by name), lately married to her third husband. She took Arthur, upon John's accession, to the French King, who pretended to be very much his friend, and who made him a Knight, and promised him his daughter in marriage; but, who cared so little about him in reality, that finding it his interest to make peace with King John for a time, he did so without the least consideration for the poor little Prince, and heartlessly sacrificed all his interests.

Young Arthur, for two years afterwards, lived quietly; and in the course of that time his mother died. But, the French King then finding it his interest to quarrel with King John again, again made Arthur his pretence, and invited the orphan boy to court. 'You know your rights, Prince,' said the French King, 'and you would like to be a King. Is it not so?' 'Truly,' said Prince Arthur, 'I should greatly like to be a King!' 'Then,' said Philip, 'you shall have two hundred gentlemen who are Knights of mine, and with them you shall go to win back the provinces belonging to you, of which your uncle, the usurping King of England, has taken possession. I myself, meanwhile, will head a force against him in Normandy.' Poor Arthur was so flattered and so grateful that he signed a treaty with the crafty French King, agreeing to consider him his superior Lord, and that the French King should keep for himself whatever he could take from King John.

Now, King John was so bad in all ways, and King Philip was so perfidious, that Arthur, between the two, might as well have been a lamb between a fox and a wolf. But, being so young, he was ardent and flushed with hope; and, when the people of Brittany (which was his inheritance) sent him five hundred more knights and five thousand foot soldiers, he believed his fortune was made. The people of Brittany had been fond of him from his birth, and had requested that he might be called Arthur, in remembrance of that dimly-famous English Arthur, of whom I told you early in this book, whom they believed to have been the brave friend and companion of an old King of their own. They had tales among them about a prophet called Merlin (of the same old time), who had foretold that their own King should be restored to them after hundreds of years; and they believed that the prophecy would be fulfilled in Arthur; that the time would come when he would rule them with a crown of Brittany upon his head; and when neither King of France nor King of England would have any power over them. When Arthur found himself riding in a glittering suit of armour on a richly caparisoned horse, at the head of his train of knights and soldiers, he began to believe this too, and to consider old Merlin a very superior prophet.

He did not know—how could he, being so innocent and inexperienced?—that his little army was a mere nothing against the power of the King of England. The French King knew it; but the poor boy's fate was little to him, so that the King of England was worried and distressed. Therefore, King Philip went his way into Normandy and Prince Arthur went his way towards Mirebeau, a French town near Poictiers, both very well pleased.

Prince Arthur went to attack the town of Mirebeau, because his grandmother Eleanor, who has so often made her appearance in this history (and who had always been his mother's enemy), was living there, and because his Knights said, 'Prince, if you can take her prisoner, you will be able to bring the King your uncle to terms!' But she was not to be easily taken. She was old enough by this time—eighty—but she was as full of stratagem as she was full of years and wickedness. Receiving intelligence of young Arthur’s approach, she shut herself up in a high tower, and encouraged her soldiers to defend it like men. Prince Arthur with his little army besieged the high tower. King John, hearing how matters stood, came up to the rescue, with *his* army. So here was a strange family-party! The boy-Prince besieging his grandmother, and his uncle besieging him!

This position of affairs did not last long. One summer night King John, by treachery, got his men into the town, surprised Prince Arthur’s force, took two hundred of his knights, and seized the Prince himself in his bed. The Knights were put in heavy irons, and driven away in open carts drawn by bullocks, to various dungeons where they were most inhumanly treated, and where some of them were starved to death. Prince Arthur was sent to the castle of Falaise.

One day, while he was in prison at that castle, mournfully thinking it strange that one so young should be in so much trouble, and looking out of the small window in the deep dark wall, at the summer sky and the birds, the door was softly opened, and he saw his uncle the King standing in the shadow of the archway, looking very grim.

‘Arthur,’ said the King, with his wicked eyes more on the stone floor than on his nephew, ‘will you not trust to the gentleness, the friendship, and the truthfulness of your loving uncle?’

‘I will tell my loving uncle that,’ replied the boy, ‘when he does me right. Let him restore to me my kingdom of England, and then come to me and ask the question.’

The King looked at him and went out. ‘Keep that boy close prisoner,’ said he to the warden of the castle.

Then, the King took secret counsel with the worst of his nobles how the Prince was to be got rid of. Some said, ‘Put out his eyes and keep him in prison, as Robort of Normandy was kept.’ Others said, ‘Have him stabbed.’ Others, ‘Have him hanged.’ Others, ‘Have him poisoned.’

King John, feeling that in any case, whatever was done afterwards, it would be a satisfaction to his mind to have those handsome eyes burnt out that had looked at him so proudly while his own royal eyes were blinking at the stone floor, sent certain ruffians to Falaise to blind the boy with red-hot irons. But Arthur so pathetically entreated them, and shed such piteous tears, and so appealed to Hubert de Bourg (or Burgh), the warden of the castle, who had a love for him, and was an honourable, tender man, that

Hubert could not bear it. To his eternal honour he prevented the torture from being performed, and, at his own risk, sent the savages away.

The chafed and disappointed King bethought himself of the stabbing suggestion next, and, with his shuffling manner and his cruel face, proposed it to one William de Bray. 'I am a gentleman and not an executioner,' said William de Bray, and left the presence with disdain.

But it was not difficult for a King to hire a murderer in those days. King John found one for his money, and sent him down to the castle of Falaise. 'On what errand dost thou come?' said Hubert to this fellow. 'To despatch young Arthur,' he returned. 'Go back to him who sent thee,' answered Hubert, 'and say that I will do it!'

King John very well knowing that Hubert would never do it, but that he courageously sent this reply to save the Prince or gain time, despatched messengers to convey the young prisoner to the castle of Rouen.

Arthur was soon forced from the good Hubert—of whom he had never stood in greater need than then—carried away by night, and lodged in his new prison: where, through his grated window, he could hear the deep waters of the river Seine, rippling against the stone wall below.

One dark night, as he lay sleeping, dreaming perhaps of rescue by those unfortunate gentlemen who were obscurely suffering and dying in his cause, he was roused, and bidden by his jailer to come down the staircase to the foot of the tower. He hurriedly dressed himself and obeyed. When they came to the bottom of the winding stairs, and the night air from the river blew upon their faces, the jailer trod upon his torch and put it out. Then, Arthur, in the darkness, was hurriedly drawn into a solitary boat. And in that boat, he found his uncle and one other man.

He knelt to them, and prayed them not to murder him. Deaf to his entreaties, they stabbed him and sunk his body in the river with heavy stones. When the spring-morning broke, the tower-door was closed, the boat was gone, the river sparkled on its way, and never more was any trace of the poor boy beheld by mortal eyes.

The news of this atrocious murder being spread in England, awakened a hatred of the King (already odious for his many vices, and for his having stolen away and married a noble lady while his own wife was living) that never slept again through his whole reign. In Brittany, the indignation was intense. Arthur's own sister Eleanor was in the power of John and shut up in a convent at Bristol, but his half-sister Alice was in Brittany. The people chose her, and the murdered prince's father-in-law, the last husband of Constance, to represent them; and carried their fiery complaints to King Philip. King Philip summoned King John (as the holder of territory in France) to come before him and defend himself. King John refusing to appear, King Philip declared him false, perjured, and guilty; and again made war. In a little time, by conquering the greater part of his French territory, King Philip deprived him of one-third of his dominions. And, through all the fighting that took place, King John was always found, either to be eating and drinking, like a gluttonous fool, when the danger was at a distance, or to be running away, like a beaten cur, when it was near.

You might suppose that when he was losing his dominions at this rate, and when his own nobles cared so little for him or his cause that they plainly refused to follow his banner out of England, he had enemies enough. But he made another enemy of the Pope, which he did in this way.

The Archbishop of Canterbury dying, and the junior monks of that place wishing to get the start of the senior monks in the appointment of his successor, met together at midnight, secretly elected a certain Reginald, and sent him off to Rome to get the Pope's approval. The senior monks and the King soon finding this out, and being very angry about it, the junior monks gave way, and all the monks together elected the Bishop of Norwich, who was the King's favourite. The Pope, hearing the whole story, declared that neither election would do for him, and that *he* elected Stephen Langton. The monks submitting to the Pope, the King turned them all out bodily, and banished them as traitors. The Pope sent three bishops to the King, to threaten him with an Interdict. The King told the bishops that if any Interdict were laid upon his kingdom, he would tear out the eyes and cut off the noses of all the monks he could lay hold of, and send them over to Rome in that undecorated state as a present for their master. The bishops, nevertheless, soon published the Interdict, and fled.

After it had lasted a year, the Pope proceeded to his next step; which was Excommunication. King John was declared excommunicated, with all the usual ceremonies. The King was so incensed at this, and was made so desperate by the disaffection of his Barons and the hatred of his people, that it is said he even privately sent ambassadors to the Turks in Spain, offering to renounce his religion and hold his kingdom of them if they would help him. It is related that the ambassadors were admitted to the presence of the Turkish Emir through long lines of Moorish guards, and that they found the

Emir with his eyes seriously fixed on the pages of a large book, from which he never once looked up. That they gave him a letter from the King containing his proposals, and were gravely dismissed. That presently the Emir sent for one of them, and conjured him, by his faith in his religion, to say what kind of man the King of England truly was? That the ambassador, thus pressed, replied that the King of England was a false tyrant, against whom his own subjects would soon rise. And that this was quite enough for the Emir.

Money being, in his position, the next best thing to men, King John spared no means of getting it. He set on foot another oppressing and torturing of the unhappy Jews (which was quite in his way), and invented a new punishment for one wealthy Jew of Bristol. Until such time as that Jew should produce a certain large sum of money, the King sentenced him to be imprisoned, and, every day, to have one tooth violently wrenched out of his head—beginning with the double teeth. For seven days, the oppressed man bore the daily pain and lost the daily tooth; but, on the eighth, he paid the money. With the treasure raised in such ways, the King made an expedition into Ireland, where some English nobles had revolted. It was one of the very few places from which he did not run away; because no resistance was shown. He made another expedition into Wales—whence he *did* run away in the end: but not before he had got from the Welsh people, as hostages, twenty-seven young men of the best families; every one of whom he caused to be slain in the following year.

To Interdict and Excommunication, the Pope now added his last sentence; Deposition. He proclaimed John no longer King, absolved all his subjects from their allegiance, and sent Stephen Langton and others to the King of France to tell him that, if he would invade England, he should be forgiven all his sins—at least, should be forgiven them by the Pope, if that would do.

As there was nothing that King Philip desired more than to invade England, he collected a great army at Rouen, and a fleet of seventeen hundred ships to bring them over. But the English people, however bitterly they hated the King, were not a people to suffer invasion quietly. They flocked to Dover, where the English standard was, in such great numbers to enrol themselves as defenders of their native land, that there were not provisions for them, and the King could only select and retain sixty thousand. But, at this crisis, the Pope, who had his own reasons for objecting to either King John or King Philip being too powerful, interfered. He entrusted a legate, whose name was Pandolf, with the easy task of frightening King John. He sent him to the English Camp, from France, to terrify him with exaggerations of King Philip's power, and his own weakness in the discontent of the English Barons and people. Pandolf discharged his commission so well, that King John, in a wretched panic, consented to acknowledge Stephen Langton; to resign his kingdom 'to God, Saint Peter, and Saint Paul'—which meant the Pope; and to hold it, ever afterwards, by the Pope's leave, on payment of an annual sum of money. To this shameful contract he publicly bound himself in the church of the Knights Templars at Dover: where he laid at the legate's feet a part of the tribute, which the legate haughtily trampled upon. But they *do* say, that this was merely a genteel flourish, and that he was afterwards seen to pick it up and pocket it.

There was an unfortunate prophet, the name of Peter, who had greatly increased King John's terrors by predicting that he would be unknighted (which the King supposed to signify that he would die) before the Feast of the Ascension should be past. That was the day after this humiliation. When the next morning came, and the King, who had been trembling all night, found himself alive and safe, he ordered the prophet—and his son too—to be dragged through the streets at the tails of horses, and then hanged, for having frightened him.

As King John had now submitted, the Pope, to King Philip's great astonishment, took him under his protection, and informed King Philip that he found he could not give him leave to invade England. The angry Philip resolved to do it without his leave but he gained nothing and lost much; for, the English, commanded by the Earl of Salisbury, went over, in five hundred ships, to the French coast, before the French fleet had sailed away from it, and utterly defeated the whole.

The Pope then took off his three sentences, one after another, and empowered Stephen Langton publicly to receive King John into the favour of the Church again, and to ask him to dinner. The King, who hated Langton with all his might and main—and with reason too, for he was a great and a good man, with whom such a King could have no sympathy—pretended to cry and to be *very* grateful. There was a little difficulty about settling how much the King should pay as a recompense to the clergy for the losses he had caused them; but, the end of it was, that the superior clergy got a good deal, and the inferior clergy got little or nothing—which has also happened since King John's time, I believe.

When all these matters were arranged, the King in his triumph became more fierce, and false, and insolent to all around him than he had ever been. An alliance of sovereigns against King Philip, gave him an opportunity of landing an army in France; with which he even took a town! But, on the French King's gaining a great victory, he ran away, of course, and made a truce for five years.

And now the time approached when he was to be still further humbled, and made to feel, if he could feel anything, what a wretched creature he was. Of all men in the world, Stephen Langton seemed raised up by Heaven to oppose and subdue him. When he ruthlessly burnt and destroyed the property of his own subjects, because their Lords, the Barons, would not serve him abroad, Stephen Langton fearlessly reproved and threatened him. When he swore to restore the laws of King Edward, or the laws of King Henry the First, Stephen Langton knew his falsehood, and pursued him through all his evasions. When the Barons met at the abbey of Saint Edmund's-Bury, to consider their wrongs and the King's oppressions, Stephen Langton roused them by his fervid words to demand a solemn charter of rights and liberties from their perjured master, and to swear, one by one, on the High Altar, that they would have it, or would wage war against him to the death. When the King hid himself in London from the Barons, and was at last obliged to receive them, they told him roundly they would not believe him unless Stephen Langton became a surety that he would keep his word. When he took the Cross to invest himself with some interest, and belong to something that was received with favour, Stephen Langton was still immovable. When he appealed to the Pope, and the Pope wrote to Stephen Langton in behalf of his new favourite, Stephen Langton was deaf, even to the Pope himself, and saw before him nothing but the welfare of England and the crimes of the English King.

At Easter-time, the Barons assembled at Stamford, in Lincolnshire, in proud array, and, marching near to Oxford where the King was, delivered into the hands of Stephen Langton and two others, a list of grievances. 'And these,' they said, 'he must redress, or we will do it for ourselves!' When Stephen Langton told the King as much, and read the list to him, he went half mad with rage. But that did him no more good than his afterwards trying to pacify the Barons with lies. They called themselves and their followers, 'The army of God and the Holy Church.' Marching through the country, with the people thronging to them everywhere (except at Northampton, where they failed in an attack upon the castle), they at last triumphantly set up their banner in London itself, whither the whole land, tired of the tyrant, seemed to flock to join them. Seven knights alone, of all the knights in England, remained with the King; who, reduced to this strait, at last sent the Earl of Pembroke to the Barons to say that he approved of everything, and would meet them to sign their charter when they would. 'Then,' said the Barons, 'let the day be the fifteenth of June, and the place, Runny-Mead.'

On Monday, the fifteenth of June, one thousand two hundred and fourteen, the King came from Windsor Castle, and the Barons came from the town of Staines, and they met on Runny-Mead, which is still a pleasant meadow by the Thames, where rushes grow in the clear water of the winding river, and its banks are green with grass and trees. On the side of the Barons, came the General of their army, Robert Fitz-Walter, and a great concourse of the nobility of England. With the King, came, in all, some four-and-twenty persons of any note, most of whom despised him, and were merely his advisers in form. On that great day, and in that great company, the King signed Magna Charta—the great charter of England—by which he pledged himself to maintain the Church in its rights; to relieve the Barons of oppressive obligations as vassals of the Crown—of which the Barons, in their turn, pledged themselves to relieve *their* vassals, the people; to respect the liberties of London and all other cities and boroughs; to protect foreign merchants who came to England; to imprison no man without a fair trial; and to sell, delay, or deny justice to none. As the Barons knew his falsehood well, they further required, as their securities, that he should send out of his kingdom all his foreign troops; that for two months they should hold possession of the city of London, and Stephen Langton of the Tower; and that five-and-twenty of their body, chosen by themselves, should be a lawful committee to watch the keeping of the charter, and to make war upon him if he broke it.

All this he was obliged to yield. He signed the charter with a smile, and, if he could have looked agreeable, would have done so, as he departed from the splendid assembly. When he got home to Windsor Castle, he was quite a madman in his helpless fury. And he broke the charter immediately afterwards.

He sent abroad for foreign soldiers, and sent to the Pope for help, and plotted to take London by surprise, while the Barons should be holding a great tournament at Stamford, which they had agreed to hold there as a celebration of the charter. The Barons, however, found him out and put it off. Then, when the Barons desired to see him and tax him with his treachery, he made numbers of appointments with them, and kept none, and shifted from place to place, and was constantly sneaking and skulking about. At last he appeared at Dover, to join his foreign soldiers, of whom numbers came into his pay; and with them he besieged and took Rochester Castle, which was occupied by knights and soldiers of the Barons. He would have hanged them every one; but the leader of the foreign soldiers, fearful of what the English people might afterwards do to him, interfered to save the knights; therefore the King was fain to satisfy his vengeance with the death of all the common men. Then, he sent the Earl of Salisbury, with one portion of his army, to ravage the eastern part of his own dominions, while he carried fire and slaughter into the northern part; torturing, plundering, killing, and inflicting every possible cruelty upon the people; and, every morning, setting a worthy example to his men by setting fire, with his own monster-hands, to the house where he had slept last night. Nor was this all; for the Pope, coming to the aid of his precious friend, laid the kingdom under an Interdict again, because the people took part with the Barons. It did not much matter, for the people had grown so used to it now, that they had begun to think nothing about it. It occurred to them—perhaps to Stephen Langton too—that they could keep their churches open, and ring their bells, without the Pope's permission as well as with it. So, they tried the experiment—and found that it succeeded perfectly.

It being now impossible to bear the country, as a wilderness of cruelty, or longer to hold any terms with such a forsworn outlaw of a King, the Barons sent to Louis, son of the French monarch, to offer him the English crown. Caring as little for the Pope's excommunication of him if he accepted the offer, as it is possible his father may have cared for the Pope's forgiveness of his sins, he landed at Sandwich (King John immediately running away from Dover, where he happened to be), and went on to London. The Scottish King, with whom many of the Northern English Lords had taken refuge; numbers of the foreign soldiers, numbers of the Barons, and numbers of the people went over to him every day;—King John, the while, continually running away in all directions.

The career of Louis was checked however, by the suspicions of the Barons, founded on the dying declaration of a French Lord, that when the kingdom was conquered he was sworn to banish them as traitors, and to give their estates to some of his own Nobles. Rather than suffer this, some of the Barons hesitated: others even went over to King John.

It seemed to be the turning-point of King John's fortunes, for, in his savage and murderous course, he had now taken some towns and met with some successes. But, happily for England and humanity, his death was near. Crossing a dangerous quicksand, called the Wash, not very far from Wisbeach, the tide came up and nearly drowned his army. He and his soldiers escaped; but, looking back from the shore when he was safe, he saw the roaring water sweep down in a torrent, overturn the waggons, horses, and men, that carried his treasure, and engulf them in a raging whirlpool from which nothing could be delivered.

Cursing, and swearing, and gnawing his fingers, he went on to Swinestead Abbey, where the monks set before him quantities of pears, and peaches, and new cider—some say poison too, but there is very little reason to suppose so—of which he ate and drank in an immoderate and beastly way. All night he lay ill of a burning fever, and haunted with horrible fears. Next day, they put him in a horse-litter, and carried him to Sleaford Castle, where he passed another night of pain and horror. Next day, they carried him, with greater difficulty than on the day before, to the castle of Newark upon Trent; and there, on the eighteenth of October, in the forty-ninth year of his age, and the seventeenth of his vile reign, was an end of this miserable brute.

CHAPTER XV—ENGLAND UNDER HENRY THE THIRD, CALLED, OF WINCHESTER

If any of the English Barons remembered the murdered Arthur's sister, Eleanor the fair maid of Brittany, shut up in her convent at Bristol, none among them spoke of her now, or maintained her right to the Crown. The dead Usurper's eldest boy, Henry by name, was taken by the Earl of Pembroke, the Marshal of England, to the city of Gloucester, and there crowned in great haste when he was only ten years old. As the Crown itself had been lost with the King's treasure in the raging water, and as there was no time to make another, they put a circle of plain gold upon his head instead. 'We have been the enemies of this child's father,' said Lord Pembroke, a good and true gentleman, to the few Lords who were present, 'and he merited our ill-will; but the child himself is innocent, and his youth demands our friendship and protection.' Those Lords felt tenderly towards the little boy, remembering their own young children; and they bowed their heads, and said, 'Long live King Henry the Third!'

Next, a great council met at Bristol, revised Magna Charta, and made Lord Pembroke Regent or Protector of England, as the King was too young to reign alone. The next thing to be done, was to get rid of Prince Louis of France, and to win over those English Barons who were still ranged under his banner. He was strong in many parts of England, and in London itself; and he held, among other places, a certain Castle called the Castle of Mount Sorel, in Leicestershire. To this fortress, after some skirmishing and truce-making, Lord Pembroke laid siege. Louis despatched an army of six hundred knights and twenty thousand soldiers to relieve it. Lord Pembroke, who was not strong enough for such a force, retired with all his men. The army of the French Prince, which had marched there with fire and plunder, marched away with fire and plunder, and came, in a boastful swaggering manner, to Lincoln. The town submitted; but the Castle in the town, held by a brave widow lady, named Nichola de Camville (whose property it was), made such a sturdy resistance, that the French Count in command of the army of the French Prince found it necessary to besiege this Castle.

While he was thus engaged, word was brought to him that Lord Pembroke, with four hundred knights, two hundred and fifty men with cross-bows, and a stout force both of horse and foot, was marching towards him. ‘What care I?’ said the French Count. ‘The Englishman is not so mad as to attack me and my great army in a walled town!’ But the Englishman did it for all that, and did it—not so madly but so wisely, that he decoyed the great army into the narrow, ill-paved lanes and byways of Lincoln, where its horse-soldiers could not ride in any strong body; and there he made such havoc with them, that the whole force surrendered themselves prisoners, except the Count; who said that he would never yield to any English traitor alive, and accordingly got killed. The end of this victory, which the English called, for a joke, the Fair of Lincoln, was the usual one in those times—the common men were slain without any mercy, and the knights and gentlemen paid ransom and went home.

The wife of Louis, the fair Blanche of Castile, dutifully equipped a fleet of eighty good ships, and sent it over from France to her husband’s aid. An English fleet of forty ships, some good and some bad, gallantly met them near the mouth of the Thames, and took or sunk sixty-five in one fight. This great loss put an end to the French Prince’s hopes. A treaty was made at Lambeth, in virtue of which the English Barons who had remained attached to his cause returned to their allegiance, and it was engaged on both sides that the Prince and all his troops should retire peacefully to France. It was time to go; for war had made him so poor that he was obliged to borrow money from the citizens of London to pay his expenses home.

Lord Pembroke afterwards applied himself to governing the country justly, and to healing the quarrels and disturbances that had arisen among men in the days of the bad King John. He caused Magna Charta to be still more improved, and so amended the Forest Laws that a Peasant was no longer put to death for killing a stag in a Royal Forest, but was only imprisoned. It would have been well for England if it could have had so good a Protector many years longer, but that was not to be. Within three years after the young King’s Coronation, Lord Pembroke died; and you may see his tomb, at this day, in the old Temple Church in London.

The Protectorship was now divided. Peter de Roches, whom King John had made Bishop of Winchester, was entrusted with the care of the person of the young sovereign; and the exercise of the Royal authority was confided to Earl Hubert de Burgh. These two personages had from the first no liking for each other, and soon became enemies. When the young King was declared of age, Peter de Roches, finding that Hubert increased in power and favour, retired discontentedly, and went abroad. For nearly ten years afterwards Hubert had full sway alone.

But ten years is a long time to hold the favour of a King. This King, too, as he grew up, showed a strong resemblance to his father, in feebleness, inconsistency, and irresolution. The best that can be said of him is that he was not cruel. De Roches coming home again, after ten years, and being a novelty, the King began to favour him and to look coldly on Hubert. Wanting money besides, and having made Hubert rich, he began to dislike Hubert. At last he was made to believe, or pretended to believe, that Hubert had misappropriated some of the Royal treasure; and ordered him to furnish an account of all he had done in his administration. Besides which, the foolish charge was brought against Hubert that he had made himself the King's favourite by magic. Hubert very well knowing that he could never defend himself against such nonsense, and that his old enemy must be determined on his ruin, instead of answering the charges fled to Merton Abbey. Then the King, in a violent passion, sent for the Mayor of London, and said to the Mayor, 'Take twenty thousand citizens, and drag me Hubert de Burgh out of that abbey, and bring him here.' The Mayor posted off to do it, but the Archbishop of Dublin (who was a friend of Hubert's) warning the King that an abbey was a sacred place, and that if he committed any violence there, he must answer for it to the Church, the King changed his mind and called the Mayor back, and declared that Hubert should have four months to prepare his defence, and should be safe and free during that time.

Hubert, who relied upon the King's word, though I think he was old enough to have known better, came out of Merton Abbey upon these conditions, and journeyed away to see his wife: a Scottish Princess who was then at St. Edmund's-Bury.

Almost as soon as he had departed from the Sanctuary, his enemies persuaded the weak King to send out one Sir Godfrey de Crancumb, who commanded three hundred vagabonds called the Black Band, with orders to seize him. They came up with him at a little town in Essex, called Brentwood, when he was in bed. He leaped out of bed, got out of the house, fled to the church, ran up to the altar, and laid his hand upon the cross. Sir Godfrey and the Black Band, caring neither for church, altar, nor cross, dragged him forth to the church door, with their drawn swords flashing round his head, and sent for a Smith to rivet a set of chains upon him. When the Smith (I wish I knew his name!) was brought, all dark and swarthy with the smoke of his forge, and panting with the speed he had made; and the Black Band, falling aside to show him the Prisoner, cried with a loud uproar, ‘Make the fetters heavy! make them strong!’ the Smith dropped upon his knee—but not to the Black Band—and said, ‘This is the brave Earl Hubert de Burgh, who fought at Dover Castle, and destroyed the French fleet, and has done his country much good service. You may kill me, if you like, but I will never make a chain for Earl Hubert de Burgh!’

The Black Band never blushed, or they might have blushed at this. They knocked the Smith about from one to another, and swore at him, and tied the Earl on horseback, undressed as he was, and carried him off to the Tower of London. The Bishops, however, were so indignant at the violation of the Sanctuary of the Church, that the frightened King soon ordered the Black Band to take him back again; at the same time commanding the Sheriff of Essex to prevent his escaping out of Brentwood Church. Well! the Sheriff dug a deep trench all round the church, and erected a high fence, and watched the church night and day; the Black Band and their Captain watched it too, like three hundred and one black wolves. For thirty-nine days, Hubert de Burgh remained within. At length, upon the fortieth day, cold and hunger were too much for him, and he gave himself up to the Black Band, who carried him off, for the second time, to the Tower. When his trial came on, he refused to plead; but at last it was arranged that he should give up all the royal lands which had been bestowed upon him, and should be kept at the Castle of Devizes, in what was called ‘free prison,’ in charge of four knights appointed by four lords. There, he remained almost a year, until, learning that a follower of his old enemy the Bishop was made Keeper of the Castle, and fearing that he might be killed by treachery, he climbed the ramparts one dark night, dropped from the top of the high Castle wall into the moat, and coming safely to the ground, took refuge in another church. From this place he was delivered by a party of horse despatched to his help by some nobles, who were by this time in revolt against the King, and assembled in Wales. He was finally pardoned and restored to his estates, but he lived privately, and never more aspired to a high post in the realm, or to a high place in the King’s favour. And thus end

—more happily than the stories of many favourites of Kings—the adventures of Earl Hubert de Burgh.

The nobles, who had risen in revolt, were stirred up to rebellion by the overbearing conduct of the Bishop of Winchester, who, finding that the King secretly hated the Great Charter which had been forced from his father, did his utmost to confirm him in that dislike, and in the preference he showed to foreigners over the English. Of this, and of his even publicly declaring that the Barons of England were inferior to those of France, the English Lords complained with such bitterness, that the King, finding them well supported by the clergy, became frightened for his throne, and sent away the Bishop and all his foreign associates. On his marriage, however, with Eleanor, a French lady, the daughter of the Count of Provence, he openly favoured the foreigners again; and so many of his wife's relations came over, and made such an immense family-party at court, and got so many good things, and pocketed so much money, and were so high with the English whose money they pocketed, that the bolder English Barons murmured openly about a clause there was in the Great Charter, which provided for the banishment of unreasonable favourites. But, the foreigners only laughed disdainfully, and said, 'What are your English laws to us?'

King Philip of France had died, and had been succeeded by Prince Louis, who had also died after a short reign of three years, and had been succeeded by his son of the same name—so moderate and just a man that he was not the least in the world like a King, as Kings went. Isabella, King Henry's mother, wished very much (for a certain spite she had) that England should make war against this King; and, as King Henry was a mere puppet in anybody's hands who knew how to manage his feebleness, she easily carried her point with him. But, the Parliament were determined to give him no money for such a war. So, to defy the Parliament, he packed up thirty large casks of silver—I don't know how he got so much; I dare say he screwed it out of the miserable Jews—and put them aboard ship, and went away himself to carry war into France: accompanied by his mother and his brother Richard, Earl of Cornwall, who was rich and clever. But he only got well beaten, and came home.

The good-humour of the Parliament was not restored by this. They reproached the King with wasting the public money to make greedy foreigners rich, and were so stern with him, and so determined not to let him have more of it to waste if they could help it, that he was at his wit's end for some, and tried so shamelessly to get all he could from his subjects, by excuses or by force, that the people used to say the King was the sturdiest beggar in England. He took the Cross, thinking to get some money by that means; but, as it was very well known that he never meant to go on a crusade, he got none. In all this contention, the Londoners were particularly keen against the King, and the King hated them warmly in return. Hating or loving, however, made no difference; he continued in the same condition for nine or ten years, when at last the Barons said that if he would solemnly confirm their liberties afresh, the Parliament would vote him a large sum.

As he readily consented, there was a great meeting held in Westminster Hall, one pleasant day in May, when all the clergy, dressed in their robes and holding every one of them a burning candle in his hand, stood up (the Barons being also there) while the Archbishop of Canterbury read the sentence of excommunication against any man, and all men, who should henceforth, in any way, infringe the Great Charter of the Kingdom. When he had done, they all put out their burning candles with a curse upon the soul of any one, and every one, who should merit that sentence. The King concluded with an oath to keep the Charter, 'As I am a man, as I am a Christian, as I am a Knight, as I am a King!'

It was easy to make oaths, and easy to break them; and the King did both, as his father had done before him. He took to his old courses again when he was supplied with money, and soon cured of their weakness the few who had ever really trusted him. When his money was gone, and he was once more borrowing and begging everywhere with a meanness worthy of his nature, he got into a difficulty with the Pope respecting the Crown of Sicily, which the Pope said he had a right to give away, and which he offered to King Henry for his second son, Prince Edmund. But, if you or I give away what we have not got, and what belongs to somebody else, it is likely that the person to whom we give it, will have some trouble in taking it. It was exactly so in this case. It was necessary to conquer the Sicilian Crown before it could be put upon young Edmund's head. It could not be conquered without money. The Pope ordered the clergy to raise money. The clergy, however, were not so obedient to him as usual; they had been disputing with him for some time about his unjust preference of Italian Priests in England; and they had begun to doubt whether the King's chaplain, whom he allowed to be paid for preaching in seven hundred churches, could possibly be, even by the Pope's favour, in seven hundred places at once. 'The Pope and the King together,' said the Bishop of London, 'may take the mitre off my head; but, if they do, they will find that I shall put on a soldier's helmet. I pay nothing.' The Bishop of Worcester was as bold as the Bishop of London, and would pay nothing either. Such sums as the more timid or more helpless of the clergy did raise were squandered away, without doing any good to the King, or bringing the Sicilian Crown an inch nearer to Prince Edmund's head. The end of the business was, that the Pope gave the Crown to the brother of the King of France (who conquered it for himself), and sent the King of England in, a bill of one hundred thousand pounds for the expenses of not having won it.

The King was now so much distressed that we might almost pity him, if it were possible to pity a King so shabby and ridiculous. His clever brother, Richard, had bought the title of King of the Romans from the German people, and was no longer near him, to help him with advice. The clergy, resisting the very Pope, were in alliance with the Barons. The Barons were headed by Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, married to King Henry's sister, and, though a foreigner himself, the most popular man in England against the foreign favourites. When the King next met his Parliament, the Barons, led by this Earl, came before him, armed from head to foot, and cased in armour. When the Parliament again assembled, in a month's time, at Oxford, this Earl was at their head, and the King was obliged to consent, on oath, to what was called a Committee of Government: consisting of twenty-four members: twelve chosen by the Barons, and twelve chosen by himself.

But, at a good time for him, his brother Richard came back. Richard's first act (the Barons would not admit him into England on other terms) was to swear to be faithful to the Committee of Government—which he immediately began to oppose with all his might. Then, the Barons began to quarrel among themselves; especially the proud Earl of Gloucester with the Earl of Leicester, who went abroad in disgust. Then, the people began to be dissatisfied with the Barons, because they did not do enough for them. The King's chances seemed so good again at length, that he took heart enough—or caught it from his brother—to tell the Committee of Government that he abolished them—as to his oath, never mind that, the Pope said!—and to seize all the money in the Mint, and to shut himself up in the Tower of London. Here he was joined by his eldest son, Prince Edward; and, from the Tower, he made public a letter of the Pope's to the world in general, informing all men that he had been an excellent and just King for five-and-forty years.

As everybody knew he had been nothing of the sort, nobody cared much for this document. It so chanced that the proud Earl of Gloucester dying, was succeeded by his son; and that his son, instead of being the enemy of the Earl of Leicester, was (for the time) his friend. It fell out, therefore, that these two Earls joined their forces, took several of the Royal Castles in the country, and advanced as hard as they could on London. The London people, always opposed to the King, declared for them with great joy. The King himself remained shut up, not at all gloriously, in the Tower. Prince Edward made the best of his way to Windsor Castle. His mother, the Queen, attempted to follow him by water; but, the people seeing her barge rowing up the river, and hating her with all their hearts, ran to London Bridge, got together a quantity of stones and mud, and pelted the barge as it came through, crying furiously, 'Drown the Witch! Drown her!' They were so near doing it, that the Mayor took the old lady under his protection, and shut her up in St. Paul's until the danger was past.

It would require a great deal of writing on my part, and a great deal of reading on yours, to follow the King through his disputes with the Barons, and to follow the Barons through their disputes with one another—so I will make short work of it for both of us, and only relate the chief events that arose out of these quarrels. The good King of France was asked to decide between them. He gave it as his opinion that the King must maintain the Great Charter, and that the Barons must give up the Committee of Government, and all the rest that had been done by the Parliament at Oxford: which the Royalists, or King's party, scornfully called the Mad Parliament. The Barons declared that these were not fair terms, and they would not accept them. Then they caused the great bell of St. Paul's to be tolled, for the purpose of rousing up the London people, who armed themselves at the dismal sound and formed quite an army in the streets. I am sorry to say, however, that instead of falling upon the King's party with whom their quarrel was, they fell upon the miserable Jews, and killed at least five hundred of them. They pretended that some of these Jews were on the King's side, and that they kept hidden in their houses, for the destruction of the people, a certain terrible composition called Greek Fire, which could not be put out with water, but only burnt the fiercer for it.

What they really did keep in their houses was money; and this their cruel enemies wanted, and this their cruel enemies took, like robbers and murderers.

The Earl of Leicester put himself at the head of these Londoners and other forces, and followed the King to Lewes in Sussex, where he lay encamped with his army. Before giving the King's forces battle here, the Earl addressed his soldiers, and said that King Henry the Third had broken so many oaths, that he had become the enemy of God, and therefore they would wear white crosses on their breasts, as if they were arrayed, not against a fellow-Christian, but against a Turk. White-crossed accordingly, they rushed into the fight. They would have lost the day—the King having on his side all the foreigners in England: and, from Scotland, John Comyn, John Baliol, and Robert Bruce, with all their men—but for the impatience of Prince Edward, who, in his hot desire to have vengeance on the people of London, threw the whole of his father's army into confusion. He was taken Prisoner; so was the King; so was the King's brother the King of the Romans; and five thousand Englishmen were left dead upon the bloody grass.

For this success, the Pope excommunicated the Earl of Leicester: which neither the Earl nor the people cared at all about. The people loved him and supported him, and he became the real King; having all the power of the government in his own hands, though he was outwardly respectful to King Henry the Third, whom he took with him wherever he went, like a poor old limp court-card. He summoned a Parliament (in the year one thousand two hundred and sixty-five) which was the first Parliament in England that the people had any real share in electing; and he grew more and more in favour with the people every day, and they stood by him in whatever he did.

Many of the other Barons, and particularly the Earl of Gloucester, who had become by this time as proud as his father, grew jealous of this powerful and popular Earl, who was proud too, and began to conspire against him. Since the battle of Lewes, Prince Edward had been kept as a hostage, and, though he was otherwise treated like a Prince, had never been allowed to go out without attendants appointed by the Earl of Leicester, who watched him. The conspiring Lords found means to propose to him, in secret, that they should assist him to escape, and should make him their leader; to which he very heartily consented.

So, on a day that was agreed upon, he said to his attendants after dinner (being then at Hereford), 'I should like to ride on horseback, this fine afternoon, a little way into the country.' As they, too, thought it would be very pleasant to have a canter in the sunshine, they all rode out of the town together in a gay little troop. When they came to a fine level piece of turf, the Prince fell to comparing their horses one with another, and offering bets that one was faster than another; and the attendants, suspecting no harm, rode galloping matches until their horses were quite tired. The Prince rode no matches himself, but looked on from his saddle, and staked his money. Thus they passed the whole merry afternoon. Now, the sun was setting, and they were all going slowly up a hill, the Prince's horse very fresh and all the other horses very weary, when a strange rider mounted on a grey steed appeared at the top of the hill, and waved his hat. 'What does the fellow mean?' said the attendants one to another. The Prince answered on the instant by setting spurs to his horse, dashing away at his utmost speed, joining the man, riding into the midst of a little crowd of horsemen who were then seen waiting under some trees, and who closed around him; and so he departed in a cloud of dust, leaving the road empty of all but the baffled attendants, who sat looking at one another, while their horses drooped their ears and panted.

The Prince joined the Earl of Gloucester at Ludlow. The Earl of Leicester, with a part of the army and the stupid old King, was at Hereford. One of the Earl of Leicester's sons, Simon de Montfort, with another part of the army, was in Sussex. To prevent these two parts from uniting was the Prince's first object. He attacked Simon de Montfort by night, defeated him, seized his banners and treasure, and forced him into Kenilworth Castle in Warwickshire, which belonged to his family.

His father, the Earl of Leicester, in the meanwhile, not knowing what had happened, marched out of Hereford, with his part of the army and the King, to meet him. He came, on a bright morning in August, to Evesham, which is watered by the pleasant river Avon. Looking rather anxiously across the prospect towards Kenilworth, he saw his own banners advancing; and his face brightened with joy. But, it clouded darkly when he presently perceived that the banners were captured, and in the enemy's hands; and he said, 'It is over. The Lord have mercy on our souls, for our bodies are Prince Edward's!'

He fought like a true Knight, nevertheless. When his horse was killed under him, he fought on foot. It was a fierce battle, and the dead lay in heaps everywhere. The old King, stuck up in a suit of armour on a big war-horse, which didn't mind him at all, and which carried him into all sorts of places where he didn't want to go, got into everybody's way, and very nearly got knocked on the head by one of his son's men. But he managed to pipe out, 'I am Harry of Winchester!' and the Prince, who heard him, seized his bridle, and took him out of peril. The Earl of Leicester still fought bravely, until his best son Henry was killed, and the bodies of his best friends choked his path; and then he fell, still fighting, sword in hand. They mangled his body, and sent it as a present to a noble lady—but a very unpleasant lady, I should think—who was the wife of his worst enemy. They could not mangle his memory in the minds of the faithful people, though. Many years afterwards, they loved him more than ever, and regarded him as a Saint, and always spoke of him as 'Sir Simon the Righteous.'

And even though he was dead, the cause for which he had fought still lived, and was strong, and forced itself upon the King in the very hour of victory. Henry found himself obliged to respect the Great Charter, however much he hated it, and to make laws similar to the laws of the Great Earl of Leicester, and to be moderate and forgiving towards the people at last—even towards the people of London, who had so long opposed him. There were more risings before all this was done, but they were set at rest by these means, and Prince Edward did his best in all things to restore peace. One Sir Adam de Gourdon was the last dissatisfied knight in arms; but, the Prince vanquished him in single combat, in a wood, and nobly gave him his life, and became his friend, instead of slaying him. Sir Adam was not ungrateful. He ever afterwards remained devoted to his generous conqueror.

When the troubles of the Kingdom were thus calmed, Prince Edward and his cousin Henry took the Cross, and went away to the Holy Land, with many English Lords and Knights. Four years afterwards the King of the Romans died, and, next year (one thousand two hundred and seventy-two), his brother the weak King of England died. He was sixty-eight years old then, and had reigned fifty-six years. He was as much of a King in death, as he had ever been in life. He was the mere pale shadow of a King at all times.

CHAPTER XVI—ENGLAND UNDER EDWARD THE FIRST, CALLED LONGSHANKS

It was now the year of our Lord one thousand two hundred and seventy-two; and Prince Edward, the heir to the throne, being away in the Holy Land, knew nothing of his father's death. The Barons, however, proclaimed him King, immediately after the Royal funeral; and the people very willingly consented, since most men knew too well by this time what the horrors of a contest for the crown were. So King Edward the First, called, in a not very complimentary manner, Longshanks, because of the slenderness of his legs, was peacefully accepted by the English Nation.

His legs had need to be strong, however long and thin they were; for they had to support him through many difficulties on the fiery sands of Asia, where his small force of soldiers fainted, died, deserted, and seemed to melt away. But his prowess made light of it, and he said, 'I will go on, if I go on with no other follower than my groom!'

A Prince of this spirit gave the Turks a deal of trouble. He stormed Nazareth, at which place, of all places on earth, I am sorry to relate, he made a frightful slaughter of innocent people; and then he went to Acre, where he got a truce of ten years from the Sultan. He had very nearly lost his life in Acre, through the treachery of a Saracen Noble, called the Emir of Jaffa, who, making the pretence that he had some idea of turning Christian and wanted to know all about that religion, sent a trusty messenger to Edward very often—with a dagger in his sleeve. At last, one Friday in Whitsun week, when it was very hot, and all the sandy prospect lay beneath the blazing sun, burnt up like a great overdone biscuit, and Edward was lying on a couch, dressed for coolness in only a loose robe, the messenger, with his chocolate-coloured face and his bright dark eyes and white teeth, came creeping in with a letter, and kneeled down like a tame tiger. But, the moment Edward stretched out his hand to take the letter, the tiger made a spring at his heart. He was quick, but Edward was quick too. He seized the traitor by his chocolate throat, threw him to the ground, and slew him with the very dagger he had drawn. The weapon had struck

Edward in the arm, and although the wound itself was slight, it threatened to be mortal, for the blade of the dagger had been smeared with poison. Thanks, however, to a better surgeon than was often to be found in those times, and to some wholesome herbs, and above all, to his faithful wife, Eleanor, who devotedly nursed him, and is said by some to have sucked the poison from the wound with her own red lips (which I am very willing to believe), Edward soon recovered and was sound again.

As the King his father had sent entreaties to him to return home, he now began the journey. He had got as far as Italy, when he met messengers who brought him intelligence of the King's death. Hearing that all was quiet at home, he made no haste to return to his own dominions, but paid a visit to the Pope, and went in state through various Italian Towns, where he was welcomed with acclamations as a mighty champion of the Cross from the Holy Land, and where he received presents of purple mantles and prancing horses, and went along in great triumph. The shouting people little knew that he was the last English monarch who would ever embark in a crusade, or that within twenty years every conquest which the Christians had made in the Holy Land at the cost of so much blood, would be won back by the Turks. But all this came to pass.

There was, and there is, an old town standing in a plain in France, called Châlons. When the King was coming towards this place on his way to England, a wily French Lord, called the Count of Châlons, sent him a polite challenge to come with his knights and hold a fair tournament with the Count and *his* knights, and make a day of it with sword and lance. It was represented to the King that the Count of Châlons was not to be trusted, and that, instead of a holiday fight for mere show and in good humour, he secretly meant a real battle, in which the English should be defeated by superior force.

The King, however, nothing afraid, went to the appointed place on the appointed day with a thousand followers. When the Count came with two thousand and attacked the English in earnest, the English rushed at them with such valour that the Count's men and the Count's horses soon began to be tumbled down all over the field. The Count himself seized the King round the neck, but the King tumbled *him* out of his saddle in return for the compliment, and, jumping from his own horse, and standing over him, beat away at his iron armour like a blacksmith hammering on his anvil. Even when the Count owned himself defeated and offered his sword, the King would not do him the honour to take it, but made him yield it up to a common soldier. There had been such fury shown in this fight, that it was afterwards called the little Battle of Châlons.

The English were very well disposed to be proud of their King after these adventures; so, when he landed at Dover in the year one thousand two hundred and seventy-four (being then thirty-six years old), and went on to Westminster where he and his good Queen were crowned with great magnificence, splendid rejoicings took place. For the coronation-feast there were provided, among other eatables, four hundred oxen, four hundred sheep, four hundred and fifty pigs, eighteen wild boars, three hundred flitches of bacon, and twenty thousand fowls. The fountains and conduits in the street flowed with red and white wine instead of water; the rich citizens hung silks and cloths of the brightest colours out of their windows to increase the beauty of the show, and threw out gold and silver by whole handfuls to make scrambles for the crowd. In short, there was such eating and drinking, such music and capering, such a ringing of bells and tossing of caps, such a shouting, and singing, and revelling, as the narrow overhanging streets of old London City had not witnessed for many a long day. All the people were merry except the poor Jews, who, trembling within their houses, and scarcely daring to peep out, began to foresee that they would have to find the money for this joviality sooner or later.

To dismiss this sad subject of the Jews for the present, I am sorry to add that in this reign they were most unmercifully pillaged. They were hanged in great numbers, on accusations of having clipped the King's coin—which all kinds of people had done. They were heavily taxed; they were disgracefully badged; they were, on one day, thirteen years after the coronation, taken up with their wives and children and thrown into beastly prisons, until they purchased their release by paying to the King twelve thousand pounds. Finally, every kind of property belonging to them was seized by the King, except so little as would defray the charge of their taking themselves away into foreign countries. Many years elapsed before the hope of gain induced any of their race to return to England, where they had been treated so heartlessly and had suffered so much.

If King Edward the First had been as bad a king to Christians as he was to Jews, he would have been bad indeed. But he was, in general, a wise and great monarch, under whom the country much improved. He had no love for the Great Charter—few Kings had, through many, many years—but he had high qualities. The first bold object which he conceived when he came home, was, to unite under one Sovereign England, Scotland, and Wales; the two last of which countries had each a little king of its own, about whom the people were always quarrelling and fighting, and making a prodigious disturbance—a great deal more than he was worth. In the course of King Edward's reign he was engaged, besides, in a war with France. To make these quarrels clearer, we will separate their histories and take them thus. Wales, first. France, second. Scotland, third.

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Llewellyn was the Prince of Wales. He had been on the side of the Barons in the reign of the stupid old King, but had afterwards sworn allegiance to him. When King Edward came to the throne, Llewellyn was required to swear allegiance to him also; which he refused to do. The King, being crowned and in his own dominions, three times more required Llewellyn to come and do homage; and three times more Llewellyn said he would rather not. He was going to be married to Eleanor de Montfort, a young lady of the family mentioned in the last reign; and it chanced that this young lady, coming from France with her youngest brother, Emeric, was taken by an English ship, and was ordered by the English King to be detained. Upon this, the quarrel came to a head. The King went, with his fleet, to the coast of Wales, where, so encompassing Llewellyn, that he could only take refuge in the bleak mountain region of Snowdon in which no provisions could reach him, he was soon starved into an apology, and into a treaty of peace, and into paying the expenses of the war. The King, however, forgave him some of the hardest conditions of the treaty, and consented to his marriage. And he now thought he had reduced Wales to obedience.

But the Welsh, although they were naturally a gentle, quiet, pleasant people, who liked to receive strangers in their cottages among the mountains, and to set before them with free hospitality whatever they had to eat and drink, and to play to them on their harps, and sing their native ballads to them, were a people of great spirit when their blood was up. Englishmen, after this affair, began to be insolent in Wales, and to assume the air of masters; and the Welsh pride could not bear it. Moreover, they believed in that unlucky old Merlin, some of whose unlucky old prophecies somebody always seemed doomed to remember when there was a chance of its doing harm; and just at this time some blind old gentleman with a harp and a long white beard, who was an excellent person, but had become of an unknown age and tedious, burst out with a declaration that Merlin had predicted that when English money had become round, a Prince of Wales would be crowned in London. Now, King Edward had recently forbidden the English penny to be cut into halves and quarters for halfpence and farthings, and had actually introduced a round coin; therefore, the Welsh people said this was the time Merlin meant, and rose accordingly.

King Edward had bought over Prince David, Llewellyn’s brother, by heaping favours upon him; but he was the first to revolt, being perhaps troubled in his conscience. One stormy night, he surprised the Castle of Hawarden, in possession of which an English nobleman had been left; killed the whole garrison, and carried off the nobleman a prisoner to Snowdon. Upon this, the Welsh people rose like one man. King Edward, with his army, marching from Worcester to the Menai Strait, crossed it—near to where the wonderful tubular iron bridge now, in days so different, makes a passage for railway trains—by a bridge of boats that enabled forty men to march abreast. He subdued the Island of Anglesea, and sent his men forward to observe the enemy. The sudden appearance of the Welsh created a panic among them, and they fell back to the bridge. The tide had in the meantime risen and separated the boats; the Welsh pursuing them, they were driven into the sea, and there they sunk, in their heavy iron armour, by thousands. After this victory Llewellyn, helped by the severe winter-weather of Wales, gained another battle; but the King ordering a portion of his English army to advance through South Wales, and catch him between two foes, and Llewellyn bravely turning to meet this new enemy, he was surprised and killed—very meanly, for he was unarmed and defenceless. His head was struck off and sent to London, where it was fixed upon the Tower, encircled with a wreath, some say of ivy, some say of willow, some say of silver, to make it look like a ghastly coin in ridicule of the prediction.

David, however, still held out for six months, though eagerly sought after by the King, and hunted by his own countrymen. One of them finally betrayed him with his wife and children. He was sentenced to be hanged, drawn, and quartered; and from that time this became the established punishment of Traitors in England—a punishment wholly without excuse, as being revolting, vile, and cruel, after its object is dead; and which has no sense in it, as its only real degradation (and that nothing can blot out) is to the country that permits on any consideration such abominable barbarity.

Wales was now subdued. The Queen giving birth to a young prince in the Castle of Carnarvon, the King showed him to the Welsh people as their countryman, and called him Prince of Wales; a title that has ever since been borne by the heir-apparent to the English throne—which that little Prince soon became, by the death of his elder brother. The King did better things for the Welsh than that, by improving their laws and encouraging their trade. Disturbances still took place, chiefly occasioned by the avarice and pride of the English Lords, on whom Welsh lands and castles had been bestowed; but they were subdued, and the country never rose again. There is a legend that to prevent the people from being incited to rebellion by the songs of their bards and harpers, Edward had them all put to death. Some of them may have fallen among other men who held out against the King; but this general slaughter is, I think, a fancy of the harpers themselves, who, I dare say, made a song about it many years afterwards, and sang it by the Welsh firesides until it came to be believed.

The foreign war of the reign of Edward the First arose in this way. The crews of two vessels, one a Norman ship, and the other an English ship, happened to go to the same place in their boats to fill their casks with fresh water. Being rough angry fellows, they began to quarrel, and then to fight—the English with their fists; the Normans with their knives—and, in the fight, a Norman was killed. The Norman crew, instead of revenging themselves upon those English sailors with whom they had quarrelled (who were too strong for them, I suspect), took to their ship again in a great rage, attacked the first English ship they met, laid hold of an unoffending merchant who happened to be on board, and brutally hanged him in the rigging of their own vessel with a dog at his feet. This so enraged the English sailors that there was no restraining them; and whenever, and wherever, English sailors met Norman sailors, they fell upon each other tooth and nail. The Irish and Dutch sailors took part with the English; the French and Genoese sailors helped the Normans; and thus the greater part of the mariners sailing over the sea became, in their way, as violent and raging as the sea itself when it is disturbed.

King Edward’s fame had been so high abroad that he had been chosen to decide a difference between France and another foreign power, and had lived upon the Continent three years. At first, neither he nor the French King Philip (the good Louis had been dead some time) interfered in these quarrels; but when a fleet of eighty English ships engaged and utterly defeated a Norman fleet of two hundred, in a pitched battle fought round a ship at anchor, in which no quarter was given, the matter became too serious to be passed over. King Edward, as Duke of Guienne, was summoned to present himself before the King of France, at Paris, and answer for the damage done by his sailor subjects. At first, he sent the Bishop of London as his representative, and then his brother Edmund, who was married to the French Queen's mother. I am afraid Edmund was an easy man, and allowed himself to be talked over by his charming relations, the French court ladies; at all events, he was induced to give up his brother's dukedom for forty days—as a mere form, the French King said, to satisfy his honour—and he was so very much astonished, when the time was out, to find that the French King had no idea of giving it up again, that I should not wonder if it hastened his death: which soon took place.

King Edward was a King to win his foreign dukedom back again, if it could be won by energy and valour. He raised a large army, renounced his allegiance as Duke of Guienne, and crossed the sea to carry war into France. Before any important battle was fought, however, a truce was agreed upon for two years; and in the course of that time, the Pope effected a reconciliation. King Edward, who was now a widower, having lost his affectionate and good wife, Eleanor, married the French King's sister, Margaret; and the Prince of Wales was contracted to the French King's daughter Isabella.

Out of bad things, good things sometimes arise. Out of this hanging of the innocent merchant, and the bloodshed and strife it caused, there came to be established one of the greatest powers that the English people now possess. The preparations for the war being very expensive, and King Edward greatly wanting money, and being very arbitrary in his ways of raising it, some of the Barons began firmly to oppose him. Two of them, in particular, Humphrey Bohun, Earl of Hereford, and Roger Bigod, Earl of Norfolk, were so stout against him, that they maintained he had no right to command them to head his forces in Guienne, and flatly refused to go there. 'By Heaven, Sir Earl,' said the King to the Earl of Hereford, in a great passion, 'you shall either go or be hanged!' 'By Heaven, Sir King,' replied the Earl, 'I will neither go nor yet will I be hanged!' and both he and the other Earl sturdily left the court, attended by many Lords. The King tried every means of raising money. He taxed the clergy, in spite of all the Pope said to the contrary; and when they refused to pay, reduced them to submission, by saying Very well, then they had no claim upon the government for protection, and any man might plunder them who would—which a good many men were very ready to do, and very readily did, and which the clergy found too losing a game to be played at long. He seized all the wool and leather in the hands of the merchants, promising to pay for it some fine day; and he set a tax upon the exportation of wool, which was so unpopular among the traders that it was called 'The evil toll.' But all would not do. The Barons, led by those two great Earls, declared any taxes imposed without the consent of Parliament, unlawful; and the Parliament refused to impose taxes, until the King should confirm afresh the two Great Charters, and should solemnly declare in writing, that there was no power in the country to raise money from the people, evermore, but the power of Parliament representing all ranks of the people. The King was very unwilling to diminish his own power by allowing this great privilege in the Parliament; but there was no help for it, and he at last complied. We shall come to another King by-and-by, who might have saved his head from rolling off, if he had profited by this example.

The people gained other benefits in Parliament from the good sense and wisdom of this King. Many of the laws were much improved; provision was made for the greater safety of travellers, and the apprehension of thieves and murderers; the priests were prevented from holding too much land, and so becoming too powerful; and Justices of the Peace were first appointed (though not at first under that name) in various parts of the country.

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And now we come to Scotland, which was the great and lasting trouble of the reign of King Edward the First.

About thirteen years after King Edward's coronation, Alexander the Third, the King of Scotland, died of a fall from his horse. He had been married to Margaret, King Edward's sister. All their children being dead, the Scottish crown became the right of a young Princess only eight years old, the daughter of Eric, King of Norway, who had married a daughter of the deceased sovereign. King Edward proposed, that the Maiden of Norway, as this Princess was called, should be engaged to be married to his eldest son; but, unfortunately, as she was coming over to England she fell sick, and landing on one of the Orkney Islands, died there. A great commotion immediately began in Scotland, where as many as thirteen noisy claimants to the vacant throne started up and made a general confusion.

King Edward being much renowned for his sagacity and justice, it seems to have been agreed to refer the dispute to him. He accepted the trust, and went, with an army, to the Border-land where England and Scotland joined. There, he called upon the Scottish gentlemen to meet him at the Castle of Norham, on the English side of the river Tweed; and to that Castle they came. But, before he would take any step in the business, he required those Scottish gentlemen, one and all, to do homage to him as their superior Lord; and when they hesitated, he said, 'By holy Edward, whose crown I wear, I will have my rights, or I will die in maintaining them!' The Scottish gentlemen, who had not expected this, were disconcerted, and asked for three weeks to think about it.

At the end of the three weeks, another meeting took place, on a green plain on the Scottish side of the river. Of all the competitors for the Scottish throne, there were only two who had any real claim, in right of their near kindred to the Royal Family. These were John Baliol and Robert Bruce: and the right was, I have no doubt, on the side of John Baliol. At this particular meeting John Baliol was not present, but Robert Bruce was; and on Robert Bruce being formally asked whether he acknowledged the King of England for his superior lord, he answered, plainly and distinctly, Yes, he did. Next day, John Baliol appeared, and said the same. This point settled, some arrangements were made for inquiring into their titles.

The inquiry occupied a pretty long time—more than a year. While it was going on, King Edward took the opportunity of making a journey through Scotland, and calling upon the Scottish people of all degrees to acknowledge themselves his vassals, or be imprisoned until they did. In the meanwhile, Commissioners were appointed to conduct the inquiry, a Parliament was held at Berwick about it, the two claimants were heard at full length, and there was a vast amount of talking. At last, in the great hall of the Castle of Berwick, the King gave judgment in favour of John Baliol: who, consenting to receive his crown by the King of England's favour and permission, was crowned at Scone, in an old stone chair which had been used for ages in the abbey there, at the coronations of Scottish Kings. Then, King Edward caused the great seal of Scotland, used since the late King's death, to be broken in four pieces, and placed in the English Treasury; and considered that he now had Scotland (according to the common saying) under his thumb.

Scotland had a strong will of its own yet, however. King Edward, determined that the Scottish King should not forget he was his vassal, summoned him repeatedly to come and defend himself and his judges before the English Parliament when appeals from the decisions of Scottish courts of justice were being heard. At length, John Baliol, who had no great heart of his own, had so much heart put into him by the brave spirit of the Scottish people, who took this as a national insult, that he refused to come any more. Thereupon, the King further required him to help him in his war abroad (which was then in progress), and to give up, as security for his good behaviour in future, the three strong Scottish Castles of Jedburgh, Roxburgh, and Berwick. Nothing of this being done; on the contrary, the Scottish people concealing their King among their mountains in the Highlands and showing a determination to resist; Edward marched to Berwick with an army of thirty thousand foot, and four thousand horse; took the Castle, and slew its whole garrison, and the inhabitants of the town as well—men, women, and children. Lord Warrenne, Earl of Surrey, then went on to the Castle of Dunbar, before which a battle was fought, and the whole Scottish army defeated with great slaughter. The victory being complete, the Earl of Surrey was left as guardian of Scotland; the principal offices in that kingdom were given to Englishmen; the more powerful Scottish Nobles were obliged to come and live in England; the Scottish crown and sceptre were brought away; and even the old stone chair was carried off and placed in Westminster Abbey, where you may see it now. Baliol had the Tower of London lent him for a residence, with permission to range about within a circle of twenty miles. Three years afterwards he was allowed to go to Normandy, where he had estates, and where he passed the remaining six years of his life: far more happily, I dare say, than he had lived for a long while in angry Scotland.

Now, there was, in the West of Scotland, a gentleman of small fortune, named William Wallace, the second son of a Scottish knight. He was a man of great size and great strength; he was very brave and daring; when he spoke to a body of his countrymen, he could rouse them in a wonderful manner by the power of his burning words; he loved Scotland dearly, and he hated England with his utmost might. The domineering conduct of the English who now held the places of trust in Scotland made them as intolerable to the proud Scottish people as they had been, under similar circumstances, to the Welsh; and no man in all Scotland regarded them with so much smothered rage as William Wallace. One day, an Englishman in office, little knowing what he was, affronted *him*. Wallace instantly struck him dead, and taking refuge among the rocks and hills, and there joining with his countryman, Sir William Douglas, who was also in arms against King Edward, became the most resolute and undaunted champion of a people struggling for their independence that ever lived upon the earth.

The English Guardian of the Kingdom fled before him, and, thus encouraged, the Scottish people revolted everywhere, and fell upon the English without mercy. The Earl of Surrey, by the King's commands, raised all the power of the Border-counties, and two English armies poured into Scotland. Only one Chief, in the face of those armies, stood by Wallace, who, with a force of forty thousand men, awaited the invaders at a place on the river Forth, within two miles of Stirling. Across the river there was only one poor wooden bridge, called the bridge of Kildean—so narrow, that but two men could cross it abreast. With his eyes upon this bridge, Wallace posted the greater part of his men among some rising grounds, and waited calmly. When the English army came up on the opposite bank of the river, messengers were sent forward to offer terms. Wallace sent them back with a defiance, in the name of the freedom of Scotland. Some of the officers of the Earl of Surrey in command of the English, with *their* eyes also on the bridge, advised him to be discreet and not hasty. He, however, urged to immediate battle by some other officers, and particularly by Cressingham, King Edward's treasurer, and a rash man, gave the word of command to advance. One thousand English crossed the bridge, two abreast; the Scottish troops were as motionless as stone images. Two thousand English crossed; three thousand, four thousand, five. Not a feather, all this time, had been seen to stir among the Scottish bonnets. Now, they all fluttered. 'Forward, one party, to the foot of the Bridge!' cried Wallace, 'and let no more English cross! The rest, down with me on the five thousand who have come over, and cut them all to pieces!' It was done, in the sight of the whole remainder of the English army, who could give no help. Cressingham himself was killed, and the Scotch made whips for their horses of his skin.

King Edward was abroad at this time, and during the successes on the Scottish side which followed, and which enabled bold Wallace to win the whole country back again, and even to ravage the English borders. But, after a few winter months, the King returned, and took the field with more than his usual energy. One night, when a kick from his horse as they both lay on the ground together broke two of his ribs, and a cry arose that he was killed, he leaped into his saddle, regardless of the pain he suffered, and rode through the camp. Day then appearing, he gave the word (still, of course, in that bruised and aching state) Forward! and led his army on to near Falkirk, where the Scottish forces were seen drawn up on some stony ground, behind a morass. Here, he defeated Wallace, and killed fifteen thousand of his men. With the shattered remainder, Wallace drew back to Stirling; but, being pursued, set fire to the town that it might give no help to the English, and escaped. The inhabitants of Perth afterwards set fire to their houses for the same reason, and the King, unable to find provisions, was forced to withdraw his army.

Another Robert Bruce, the grandson of him who had disputed the Scottish crown with Baliol, was now in arms against the King (that elder Bruce being dead), and also John Comyn, Baliol’s nephew. These two young men might agree in opposing Edward, but could agree in nothing else, as they were rivals for the throne of Scotland. Probably it was because they knew this, and knew what troubles must arise even if they could hope to get the better of the great English King, that the principal Scottish people applied to the Pope for his interference. The Pope, on the principle of losing nothing for want of trying to get it, very coolly claimed that Scotland belonged to him; but this was a little too much, and the Parliament in a friendly manner told him so.

In the spring time of the year one thousand three hundred and three, the King sent Sir John Segrave, whom he made Governor of Scotland, with twenty thousand men, to reduce the rebels. Sir John was not as careful as he should have been, but encamped at Rosslyn, near Edinburgh, with his army divided into three parts. The Scottish forces saw their advantage; fell on each part separately; defeated each; and killed all the prisoners. Then, came the King himself once more, as soon as a great army could be raised; he passed through the whole north of Scotland, laying waste whatsoever came in his way; and he took up his winter quarters at Dunfermline. The Scottish cause now looked so hopeless, that Comyn and the other nobles made submission and received their pardons. Wallace alone stood out. He was invited to surrender, though on no distinct pledge that his life should be spared; but he still defied the ireful King, and lived among the steep crags of the Highland glens, where the eagles made their nests, and where the mountain torrents roared, and the white snow was deep, and the bitter winds blew round his unsheltered head, as he lay through many a pitch-dark night wrapped up in his plaid. Nothing could break his spirit; nothing could lower his courage; nothing could induce him to forget or to forgive his country's wrongs. Even when the Castle of Stirling, which had long held out, was besieged by the King with every kind of military engine then in use; even when the lead upon cathedral roofs was taken down to help to make them; even when the King, though an old man, commanded in the siege as if he were a youth, being so resolved to conquer; even when the brave garrison (then found with amazement to be not two hundred people, including several ladies) were starved and beaten out and were made to submit on their knees, and with every form of disgrace that could aggravate their sufferings; even then, when there was not a ray of hope in Scotland, William Wallace was as proud and firm as if he had beheld the powerful and relentless Edward lying dead at his feet.

Who betrayed William Wallace in the end, is not quite certain. That he was betrayed—probably by an attendant—is too true. He was taken to the Castle of Dumbarton, under Sir John Menteith, and thence to London, where the great fame of his bravery and resolution attracted immense concourses of people to behold him. He was tried in Westminster Hall, with a crown of laurel on his head—it is supposed because he was reported to have said that he ought to wear, or that he would wear, a crown there and was found guilty as a robber, a murderer, and a traitor. What they called a robber (he said to those who tried him) he was, because he had taken spoil from the King's men. What they called a murderer, he was, because he had slain an insolent Englishman. What they called a traitor, he was not, for he had never sworn allegiance to the King, and had ever scorned to do it. He was dragged at the tails of horses to West Smithfield, and there hanged on a high gallows, torn open before he was dead, beheaded, and quartered. His head was set upon a pole on London Bridge, his right arm was sent to Newcastle, his left arm to Berwick, his legs to Perth and Aberdeen. But, if King Edward had had his body cut into inches, and had sent every separate inch into a separate town, he could not have dispersed it half so far and wide as his fame. Wallace will be remembered in songs and stories, while there are songs and stories in the English tongue, and Scotland will hold him dear while her lakes and mountains last.

Released from this dreaded enemy, the King made a fairer plan of Government for Scotland, divided the offices of honour among Scottish gentlemen and English gentlemen, forgave past offences, and thought, in his old age, that his work was done.

But he deceived himself. Comyn and Bruce conspired, and made an appointment to meet at Dumfries, in the church of the Minorites. There is a story that Comyn was false to Bruce, and had informed against him to the King; that Bruce was warned of his danger and the necessity of flight, by receiving, one night as he sat at supper, from his friend the Earl of Gloucester, twelve pennies and a pair of spurs; that as he was riding angrily to keep his appointment (through a snow-storm, with his horse's shoes reversed that he might not be tracked), he met an evil-looking serving man, a messenger of Comyn, whom he killed, and concealed in whose dress he found letters that proved Comyn's treachery. However this may be, they were likely enough to quarrel in any case, being hot-headed rivals; and, whatever they quarrelled about, they certainly did quarrel in the church where they met, and Bruce drew his dagger and stabbed Comyn, who fell upon the pavement. When Bruce came out, pale and disturbed, the friends who were waiting for him asked what was the matter? 'I think I have killed Comyn,' said he. 'You only think so?' returned one of them; 'I will make sure!' and going into the church, and finding him alive, stabbed him again and again. Knowing that the King would never forgive this new deed of violence, the party then declared Bruce King of Scotland: got him crowned at Scone—without the chair; and set up the rebellious standard once again.

When the King heard of it he kindled with fiercer anger than he had ever shown yet. He caused the Prince of Wales and two hundred and seventy of the young nobility to be knighted—the trees in the Temple Gardens were cut down to make room for their tents, and they watched their armour all night, according to the old usage: some in the Temple Church: some in Westminster Abbey—and at the public Feast which then took place, he swore, by Heaven, and by two swans covered with gold network which his minstrels placed upon the table, that he would avenge the death of Comyn, and would punish the false Bruce. And before all the company, he charged the Prince his son, in case that he should die before accomplishing his vow, not to bury him until it was fulfilled. Next morning the Prince and the rest of the young Knights rode away to the Border-country to join the English army; and the King, now weak and sick, followed in a horse-litter.

Bruce, after losing a battle and undergoing many dangers and much misery, fled to Ireland, where he lay concealed through the winter. That winter, Edward passed in hunting down and executing Bruce's relations and adherents, sparing neither youth nor age, and showing no touch of pity or sign of mercy. In the following spring, Bruce reappeared and gained some victories. In these frays, both sides were grievously cruel. For instance—Bruce's two brothers, being taken captives desperately wounded, were ordered by the King to instant execution. Bruce's friend Sir John Douglas, taking his own Castle of Douglas out of the hands of an English Lord, roasted the dead bodies of the slaughtered garrison in a great fire made of every movable within it; which dreadful cookery his men called the Douglas Larder. Bruce, still successful, however, drove the Earl of Pembroke and the Earl of Gloucester into the Castle of Ayr and laid siege to it.

The King, who had been laid up all the winter, but had directed the army from his sick-bed, now advanced to Carlisle, and there, causing the litter in which he had travelled to be placed in the Cathedral as an offering to Heaven, mounted his horse once more, and for the last time. He was now sixty-nine years old, and had reigned thirty-five years. He was so ill, that in four days he could go no more than six miles; still, even at that pace, he went on and resolutely kept his face towards the Border. At length, he lay down at the village of Burgh-upon-Sands; and there, telling those around him to impress upon the Prince that he was to remember his father's vow, and was never to rest until he had thoroughly subdued Scotland, he yielded up his last breath.

CHAPTER XVII—ENGLAND UNDER EDWARD THE SECOND

King Edward the Second, the first Prince of Wales, was twenty-three years old when his father died. There was a certain favourite of his, a young man from Gascony, named Piers Gaveston, of whom his father had so much disapproved that he had ordered him out of England, and had made his son swear by the side of his sick-bed, never to bring him back. But, the Prince no sooner found himself King, than he broke his oath, as so many other Princes and Kings did (they were far too ready to take oaths), and sent for his dear friend immediately.

Now, this same Gaveston was handsome enough, but was a reckless, insolent, audacious fellow. He was detested by the proud English Lords: not only because he had such power over the King, and made the Court such a dissipated place, but, also, because he could ride better than they at tournaments, and was used, in his impudence, to cut very bad jokes on them; calling one, the old hog; another, the stage-player; another, the Jew; another, the black dog of Ardenne. This was as poor wit as need be, but it made those Lords very wroth; and the surly Earl of Warwick, who was the black dog, swore that the time should come when Piers Gaveston should feel the black dog's teeth.

It was not come yet, however, nor did it seem to be coming. The King made him Earl of Cornwall, and gave him vast riches; and, when the King went over to France to marry the French Princess, Isabella, daughter of Philip le Bel: who was said to be the most beautiful woman in the world: he made Gaveston, Regent of the Kingdom. His splendid marriage-ceremony in the Church of Our Lady at Boulogne, where there were four Kings and three Queens present (quite a pack of Court Cards, for I dare say the Knaves were not wanting), being over, he seemed to care little or nothing for his beautiful wife; but was wild with impatience to meet Gaveston again.

When he landed at home, he paid no attention to anybody else, but ran into the favourite's arms before a great concourse of people, and hugged him, and kissed him, and called him his brother. At the coronation which soon followed, Gaveston was the richest and brightest of all the glittering company there, and had the honour of carrying the crown. This made the proud Lords fiercer than ever; the people, too, despised the favourite, and would never call him Earl of Cornwall, however much he complained to the King and asked him to punish them for not doing so, but persisted in styling him plain Piers Gaveston.

The Barons were so unceremonious with the King in giving him to understand that they would not bear this favourite, that the King was obliged to send him out of the country. The favourite himself was made to take an oath (more oaths!) that he would never come back, and the Barons supposed him to be banished in disgrace, until they heard that he was appointed Governor of Ireland. Even this was not enough for the besotted King, who brought him home again in a year’s time, and not only disgusted the Court and the people by his doting folly, but offended his beautiful wife too, who never liked him afterwards.

He had now the old Royal want—of money—and the Barons had the new power of positively refusing to let him raise any. He summoned a Parliament at York; the Barons refused to make one, while the favourite was near him. He summoned another Parliament at Westminster, and sent Gaveston away. Then, the Barons came, completely armed, and appointed a committee of themselves to correct abuses in the state and in the King’s household. He got some money on these conditions, and directly set off with Gaveston to the Border-country, where they spent it in idling away the time, and feasting, while Bruce made ready to drive the English out of Scotland. For, though the old King had even made this poor weak son of his swear (as some say) that he would not bury his bones, but would have them boiled clean in a caldron, and carried before the English army until Scotland was entirely subdued, the second Edward was so unlike the first that Bruce gained strength and power every day.

The committee of Nobles, after some months of deliberation, ordained that the King should henceforth call a Parliament together, once every year, and even twice if necessary, instead of summoning it only when he chose. Further, that Gaveston should once more be banished, and, this time, on pain of death if he ever came back. The King’s tears were of no avail; he was obliged to send his favourite to Flanders. As soon as he had done so, however, he dissolved the Parliament, with the low cunning of a mere fool, and set off to the North of England, thinking to get an army about him to oppose the Nobles. And once again he brought Gaveston home, and heaped upon him all the riches and titles of which the Barons had deprived him.

The Lords saw, now, that there was nothing for it but to put the favourite to death. They could have done so, legally, according to the terms of his banishment; but they did so, I am sorry to say, in a shabby manner. Led by the Earl of Lancaster, the King's cousin, they first of all attacked the King and Gaveston at Newcastle. They had time to escape by sea, and the mean King, having his precious Gaveston with him, was quite content to leave his lovely wife behind. When they were comparatively safe, they separated; the King went to York to collect a force of soldiers; and the favourite shut himself up, in the meantime, in Scarborough Castle overlooking the sea. This was what the Barons wanted. They knew that the Castle could not hold out; they attacked it, and made Gaveston surrender. He delivered himself up to the Earl of Pembroke—that Lord whom he had called the Jew—on the Earl's pledging his faith and knightly word, that no harm should happen to him and no violence be done him.

Now, it was agreed with Gaveston that he should be taken to the Castle of Wallingford, and there kept in honourable custody. They travelled as far as Dedington, near Banbury, where, in the Castle of that place, they stopped for a night to rest. Whether the Earl of Pembroke left his prisoner there, knowing what would happen, or really left him thinking no harm, and only going (as he pretended) to visit his wife, the Countess, who was in the neighbourhood, is no great matter now; in any case, he was bound as an honourable gentleman to protect his prisoner, and he did not do it. In the morning, while the favourite was yet in bed, he was required to dress himself and come down into the court-yard. He did so without any mistrust, but started and turned pale when he found it full of strange armed men. 'I think you know me?' said their leader, also armed from head to foot. 'I am the black dog of Ardenne!' The time was come when Piers Gaveston was to feel the black dog's teeth indeed. They set him on a mule, and carried him, in mock state and with military music, to the black dog's kennel—Warwick Castle—where a hasty council, composed of some great noblemen, considered what should be done with him. Some were for sparing him, but one loud voice—it was the black dog's bark, I dare say—sounded through the Castle Hall, uttering these words: 'You have the fox in your power. Let him go now, and you must hunt him again.'

They sentenced him to death. He threw himself at the feet of the Earl of Lancaster—the old hog—but the old hog was as savage as the dog. He was taken out upon the pleasant road, leading from Warwick to Coventry, where the beautiful river Avon, by which, long afterwards, William Shakespeare was born and now lies buried, sparkled in the bright landscape of the beautiful May-day; and there they struck off his wretched head, and stained the dust with his blood.

When the King heard of this black deed, in his grief and rage he denounced relentless war against his Barons, and both sides were in arms for half a year. But, it then became necessary for them to join their forces against Bruce, who had used the time well while they were divided, and had now a great power in Scotland.

Intelligence was brought that Bruce was then besieging Stirling Castle, and that the Governor had been obliged to pledge himself to surrender it, unless he should be relieved before a certain day. Hereupon, the King ordered the nobles and their fighting-men to meet him at Berwick; but, the nobles cared so little for the King, and so neglected the summons, and lost time, that only on the day before that appointed for the surrender, did the King find himself at Stirling, and even then with a smaller force than he had expected. However, he had, altogether, a hundred thousand men, and Bruce had not more than forty thousand; but, Bruce's army was strongly posted in three square columns, on the ground lying between the Burn or Brook of Bannock and the walls of Stirling Castle.

On the very evening, when the King came up, Bruce did a brave act that encouraged his men. He was seen by a certain Henry de Bohun, an English Knight, riding about before his army on a little horse, with a light battle-axe in his hand, and a crown of gold on his head. This English Knight, who was mounted on a strong war-horse, cased in steel, strongly armed, and able (as he thought) to overthrow Bruce by crushing him with his mere weight, set spurs to his great charger, rode on him, and made a thrust at him with his heavy spear. Bruce parried the thrust, and with one blow of his battle-axe split his skull.

The Scottish men did not forget this, next day when the battle raged. Randolph, Bruce's valiant Nephew, rode, with the small body of men he commanded, into such a host of the English, all shining in polished armour in the sunlight, that they seemed to be swallowed up and lost, as if they had plunged into the sea. But, they fought so well, and did such dreadful execution, that the English staggered. Then came Bruce himself upon them, with all the rest of his army. While they were thus hard pressed and amazed, there appeared upon the hills what they supposed to be a new Scottish army, but what were really only the camp followers, in number fifteen thousand: whom Bruce had taught to show themselves at that place and time. The Earl of Gloucester, commanding the English horse, made a last rush to change the fortune of the day; but Bruce (like Jack the Giant-killer in the story) had had pits dug in the ground, and covered over with turfs and stakes. Into these, as they gave way beneath the weight of the horses, riders and horses rolled by hundreds. The English were completely routed; all their treasure, stores, and engines, were taken by the Scottish men; so many waggons and other wheeled vehicles were seized, that it is related that they would have reached, if they had been drawn out in a line, one hundred and eighty miles. The fortunes of Scotland were, for the time, completely changed; and never was a battle won, more famous upon Scottish ground, than this great battle of Bannockburn.

Plague and famine succeeded in England; and still the powerless King and his disdainful Lords were always in contention. Some of the turbulent chiefs of Ireland made proposals to Bruce, to accept the rule of that country. He sent his brother Edward to them, who was crowned King of Ireland. He afterwards went himself to help his brother in his Irish wars, but his brother was defeated in the end and killed. Robert Bruce, returning to Scotland, still increased his strength there.

As the King's ruin had begun in a favourite, so it seemed likely to end in one. He was too poor a creature to rely at all upon himself; and his new favourite was one Hugh le Despenser, the son of a gentleman of ancient family. Hugh was handsome and brave, but he was the favourite of a weak King, whom no man cared a rush for, and that was a dangerous place to hold. The Nobles leagued against him, because the King liked him; and they lay in wait, both for his ruin and his father's. Now, the King had married him to the daughter of the late Earl of Gloucester, and had given both him and his father great possessions in Wales. In their endeavours to extend these, they gave violent offence to an angry Welsh gentleman, named John de Mowbray, and to divers other angry Welsh gentlemen, who resorted to arms, took their castles, and seized their estates. The Earl of Lancaster had first placed the favourite (who was a poor relation of his own) at Court, and he considered his own dignity offended by the preference he received and the honours he acquired; so he, and the Barons who were his friends, joined the Welshmen, marched on London, and sent a message to the King demanding to have the favourite and his father banished. At first, the King unaccountably took it into his head to be spirited, and to send them a bold reply; but when they quartered themselves around Holborn and Clerkenwell, and went down, armed, to the Parliament at Westminster, he gave way, and complied with their demands.

His turn of triumph came sooner than he expected. It arose out of an accidental circumstance. The beautiful Queen happening to be travelling, came one night to one of the royal castles, and demanded to be lodged and entertained there until morning. The governor of this castle, who was one of the enraged lords, was away, and in his absence, his wife refused admission to the Queen; a scuffle took place among the common men on either side, and some of the royal attendants were killed. The people, who cared nothing for the King, were very angry that their beautiful Queen should be thus rudely treated in her own dominions; and the King, taking advantage of this feeling, besieged the castle, took it, and then called the two Despensers home. Upon this, the confederate lords and the Welshmen went over to Bruce. The King encountered them at Boroughbridge, gained the victory, and took a number of distinguished prisoners; among them, the Earl of Lancaster, now an old man, upon whose destruction he was resolved. This Earl was taken to his own castle of Pontefract, and there tried and found guilty by an unfair court appointed for the purpose; he was not even allowed to speak in his own defence. He was insulted, pelted, mounted on a starved pony without saddle or bridle, carried out, and beheaded. Eight-and-twenty knights were hanged, drawn, and quartered. When the King had despatched this bloody work, and had made a fresh and a long truce with Bruce, he took the Despensers into greater favour than ever, and made the father Earl of Winchester.

One prisoner, and an important one, who was taken at Boroughbridge, made his escape, however, and turned the tide against the King. This was Roger Mortimer, always resolutely opposed to him, who was sentenced to death, and placed for safe custody in the Tower of London. He treated his guards to a quantity of wine into which he had put a sleeping potion; and, when they were insensible, broke out of his dungeon, got into a kitchen, climbed up the chimney, let himself down from the roof of the building with a rope-ladder, passed the sentries, got down to the river, and made away in a boat to where servants and horses were waiting for him. He finally escaped to France, where Charles le Bel, the brother of the beautiful Queen, was King. Charles sought to quarrel with the King of England, on pretence of his not having come to do him homage at his coronation. It was proposed that the beautiful Queen should go over to arrange the dispute; she went, and wrote home to the King, that as he was sick and could not come to France himself, perhaps it would be better to send over the young Prince, their son, who was only twelve years old, who could do homage to her brother in his stead, and in whose company she would immediately return. The King sent him: but, both he and the Queen remained at the French Court, and Roger Mortimer became the Queen's lover.

When the King wrote, again and again, to the Queen to come home, she did not reply that she despised him too much to live with him any more (which was the truth), but said she was afraid of the two Despensers. In short, her design was to overthrow the favourites' power, and the King's power, such as it was, and invade England. Having obtained a French force of two thousand men, and being joined by all the English exiles then in France, she landed, within a year, at Orewell, in Suffolk, where she was immediately joined by the Earls of Kent and Norfolk, the King's two brothers; by other powerful noblemen; and lastly, by the first English general who was despatched to check her: who went over to her with all his men. The people of London, receiving these tidings, would do nothing for the King, but broke open the Tower, let out all his prisoners, and threw up their caps and hurrahed for the beautiful Queen.

The King, with his two favourites, fled to Bristol, where he left old Despenser in charge of the town and castle, while he went on with the son to Wales. The Bristol men being opposed to the King, and it being impossible to hold the town with enemies everywhere within the walls, Despenser yielded it up on the third day, and was instantly brought to trial for having traitorously influenced what was called 'the King's mind'—though I doubt if the King ever had any. He was a venerable old man, upwards of ninety years of age, but his age gained no respect or mercy. He was hanged, torn open while he was yet alive, cut up into pieces, and thrown to the dogs. His son was soon taken, tried at Hereford before the same judge on a long series of foolish charges, found guilty, and hanged upon a gallows fifty feet high, with a chaplet of nettles round his head. His poor old father and he were innocent enough of any worse crimes than the crime of having been friends of a King, on whom, as a mere man, they would never have deigned to cast a favourable look. It is a bad crime, I know, and leads to worse; but, many lords and gentlemen—I even think some ladies, too, if I recollect right—have committed it in England, who have neither been given to the dogs, nor hanged up fifty feet high.

The wretched King was running here and there, all this time, and never getting anywhere in particular, until he gave himself up, and was taken off to Kenilworth Castle. When he was safely lodged there, the Queen went to London and met the Parliament. And the Bishop of Hereford, who was the most skilful of her friends, said, What was to be done now? Here was an imbecile, indolent, miserable King upon the throne; wouldn't it be better to take him off, and put his son there instead? I don't know whether the Queen really pitied him at this pass, but she began to cry; so, the Bishop said, Well, my Lords and Gentlemen, what do you think, upon the whole, of sending down to Kenilworth, and seeing if His Majesty (God bless him, and forbid we should depose him!) won't resign?

My Lords and Gentlemen thought it a good notion, so a deputation of them went down to Kenilworth; and there the King came into the great hall of the Castle, commonly dressed in a poor black gown; and when he saw a certain bishop among them, fell down, poor feeble-headed man, and made a wretched spectacle of himself. Somebody lifted him up, and then Sir William Trussel, the Speaker of the House of Commons, almost frightened him to death by making him a tremendous speech to the effect that he was no longer a King, and that everybody renounced allegiance to him. After which, Sir Thomas Blount, the Steward of the Household, nearly finished him, by coming forward and breaking his white wand—which was a ceremony only performed at a King's death. Being asked in this pressing manner what he thought of resigning, the King said he thought it was the best thing he could do. So, he did it, and they proclaimed his son next day.

I wish I could close his history by saying that he lived a harmless life in the Castle and the Castle gardens at Kenilworth, many years—that he had a favourite, and plenty to eat and drink—and, having that, wanted nothing. But he was shamefully humiliated. He was outraged, and slighted, and had dirty water from ditches given him to shave with, and wept and said he would have clean warm water, and was altogether very miserable. He was moved from this castle to that castle, and from that castle to the other castle, because this lord or that lord, or the other lord, was too kind to him: until at last he came to Berkeley Castle, near the River Severn, where (the Lord Berkeley being then ill and absent) he fell into the hands of two black ruffians, called Thomas Gournay and William Ogle.

One night—it was the night of September the twenty-first, one thousand three hundred and twenty-seven—dreadful screams were heard, by the startled people in the neighbouring town, ringing through the thick walls of the Castle, and the dark, deep night; and they said, as they were thus horribly awakened from their sleep, ‘May Heaven be merciful to the King; for those cries forbode that no good is being done to him in his dismal prison!’ Next morning he was dead—not bruised, or stabbed, or marked upon the body, but much distorted in the face; and it was whispered afterwards, that those two villains, Gournay and Ogle, had burnt up his inside with a red-hot iron.

If you ever come near Gloucester, and see the centre tower of its beautiful Cathedral, with its four rich pinnacles, rising lightly in the air; you may remember that the wretched Edward the Second was buried in the old abbey of that ancient city, at forty-three years old, after being for nineteen years and a half a perfectly incapable King.

CHAPTER XVIII—ENGLAND UNDER EDWARD THE THIRD

Roger Mortimer, the Queen's lover (who escaped to France in the last chapter), was far from profiting by the examples he had had of the fate of favourites. Having, through the Queen's influence, come into possession of the estates of the two Despensers, he became extremely proud and ambitious, and sought to be the real ruler of England. The young King, who was crowned at fourteen years of age with all the usual solemnities, resolved not to bear this, and soon pursued Mortimer to his ruin.

The people themselves were not fond of Mortimer—first, because he was a Royal favourite; secondly, because he was supposed to have helped to make a peace with Scotland which now took place, and in virtue of which the young King's sister Joan, only seven years old, was promised in marriage to David, the son and heir of Robert Bruce, who was only five years old. The nobles hated Mortimer because of his pride, riches, and power. They went so far as to take up arms against him; but were obliged to submit. The Earl of Kent, one of those who did so, but who afterwards went over to Mortimer and the Queen, was made an example of in the following cruel manner:

He seems to have been anything but a wise old earl; and he was persuaded by the agents of the favourite and the Queen, that poor King Edward the Second was not really dead; and thus was betrayed into writing letters favouring his rightful claim to the throne. This was made out to be high treason, and he was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to be executed. They took the poor old lord outside the town of Winchester, and there kept him waiting some three or four hours until they could find somebody to cut off his head. At last, a convict said he would do it, if the government would pardon him in return; and they gave him the pardon; and at one blow he put the Earl of Kent out of his last suspense.

While the Queen was in France, she had found a lovely and good young lady, named Philippa, who she thought would make an excellent wife for her son. The young King married this lady, soon after he came to the throne; and her first child, Edward, Prince of Wales, afterwards became celebrated, as we shall presently see, under the famous title of Edward the Black Prince.

The young King, thinking the time ripe for the downfall of Mortimer, took counsel with Lord Montacute how he should proceed. A Parliament was going to be held at Nottingham, and that lord recommended that the favourite should be seized by night in Nottingham Castle, where he was sure to be. Now, this, like many other things, was more easily said than done; because, to guard against treachery, the great gates of the Castle were locked every night, and the great keys were carried up-stairs to the Queen, who laid them under her own pillow. But the Castle had a governor, and the governor being Lord Montacute's friend, confided to him how he knew of a secret passage underground, hidden from observation by the weeds and brambles with which it was overgrown; and how, through that passage, the conspirators might enter in the dead of the night, and go straight to Mortimer's room. Accordingly, upon a certain dark night, at midnight, they made their way through this dismal place: startling the rats, and frightening the owls and bats: and came safely to the bottom of the main tower of the Castle, where the King met them, and took them up a profoundly-dark staircase in a deep silence. They soon heard the voice of Mortimer in council with some friends; and bursting into the room with a sudden noise, took him prisoner. The Queen cried out from her bed-chamber, 'Oh, my sweet son, my dear son, spare my gentle Mortimer!' They carried him off, however; and, before the next Parliament, accused him of having made differences between the young King and his mother, and of having brought about the death of the Earl of Kent, and even of the late King; for, as you know by this time, when they wanted to get rid of a man in those old days, they were not very particular of what they accused him. Mortimer was found guilty of all this, and was sentenced to be hanged at Tyburn. The King shut his mother up in genteel confinement, where she passed the rest of her life; and now he became King in earnest.

The first effort he made was to conquer Scotland. The English lords who had lands in Scotland, finding that their rights were not respected under the late peace, made war on their own account: choosing for their general, Edward, the son of John Baliol, who made such a vigorous fight, that in less than two months he won the whole Scottish Kingdom. He was joined, when thus triumphant, by the King and Parliament; and he and the King in person besieged the Scottish forces in Berwick. The whole Scottish army coming to the assistance of their countrymen, such a furious battle ensued, that thirty thousand men are said to have been killed in it. Baliol was then crowned King of Scotland, doing homage to the King of England; but little came of his successes after all, for the Scottish men rose against him, within no very long time, and David Bruce came back within ten years and took his kingdom.

France was a far richer country than Scotland, and the King had a much greater mind to conquer it. So, he let Scotland alone, and pretended that he had a claim to the French throne in right of his mother. He had, in reality, no claim at all; but that mattered little in those times. He brought over to his cause many little princes and sovereigns, and even courted the alliance of the people of Flanders—a busy, working community, who had very small respect for kings, and whose head man was a brewer. With such forces as he raised by these means, Edward invaded France; but he did little by that, except run into debt in carrying on the war to the extent of three hundred thousand pounds. The next year he did better; gaining a great sea-fight in the harbour of Sluys. This success, however, was very shortlived, for the Flemings took fright at the siege of Saint Omer and ran away, leaving their weapons and baggage behind them. Philip, the French King, coming up with his army, and Edward being very anxious to decide the war, proposed to settle the difference by single combat with him, or by a fight of one hundred knights on each side. The French King said, he thanked him; but being very well as he was, he would rather not. So, after some skirmishing and talking, a short peace was made.

It was soon broken by King Edward’s favouring the cause of John, Earl of Montford; a French nobleman, who asserted a claim of his own against the French King, and offered to do homage to England for the Crown of France, if he could obtain it through England’s help. This French lord, himself, was soon defeated by the French King’s son, and shut up in a tower in Paris; but his wife, a courageous and beautiful woman, who is said to have had the courage of a man, and the heart of a lion, assembled the people of Brittany, where she then was; and, showing them her infant son, made many pathetic entreaties to them not to desert her and their young Lord. They took fire at this appeal, and rallied round her in the strong castle of Hennebon. Here she was not only besieged without by the French under Charles de Blois, but was endangered within by a dreary old bishop, who was always representing to the people what horrors they must undergo if they were faithful—first from famine, and afterwards from fire and sword. But this noble lady, whose heart never failed her, encouraged her soldiers by her own example; went from post to post like a great general; even mounted on horseback fully armed, and, issuing from the castle by a by-path, fell upon the French camp, set fire to the tents, and threw the whole force into disorder. This done, she got safely back to Hennebon again, and was received with loud shouts of joy by the defenders of the castle, who had given her up for lost. As they were now very short of provisions, however, and as they could not dine off enthusiasm, and as the old bishop was always saying, ‘I told you what it would come to!’ they began to lose heart, and to talk of yielding the castle up. The brave Countess retiring to an upper room and looking with great grief out to sea, where she expected relief from England, saw, at this very time, the English ships in the distance, and was relieved and rescued! Sir Walter Manning, the English commander, so admired her courage, that, being come into the castle with the English knights, and having made a feast there, he assaulted the French by way of dessert, and beat them off triumphantly. Then he and the knights came back to the castle with great joy; and the Countess who had watched them from a high tower, thanked them with all her heart, and kissed them every one.

This noble lady distinguished herself afterwards in a sea-fight with the French off Guernsey, when she was on her way to England to ask for more troops. Her great spirit roused another lady, the wife of another French lord (whom the French King very barbarously murdered), to distinguish herself scarcely less. The time was fast coming, however, when Edward, Prince of Wales, was to be the great star of this French and English war.

It was in the month of July, in the year one thousand three hundred and forty-six, when the King embarked at Southampton for France, with an army of about thirty thousand men in all, attended by the Prince of Wales and by several of the chief nobles. He landed at La Hogue in Normandy; and, burning and destroying as he went, according to custom, advanced up the left bank of the River Seine, and fired the small towns even close to Paris; but, being watched from the right bank of the river by the French King and all his army, it came to this at last, that Edward found himself, on Saturday the twenty-sixth of August, one thousand three hundred and forty-six, on a rising ground behind the little French village of Crecy, face to face with the French King’s force. And, although the French King had an enormous army—in number more than eight times his—he there resolved to beat him or be beaten.

The young Prince, assisted by the Earl of Oxford and the Earl of Warwick, led the first division of the English army; two other great Earls led the second; and the King, the third. When the morning dawned, the King received the sacrament, and heard prayers, and then, mounted on horseback with a white wand in his hand, rode from company to company, and rank to rank, cheering and encouraging both officers and men. Then the whole army breakfasted, each man sitting on the ground where he had stood; and then they remained quietly on the ground with their weapons ready.

Up came the French King with all his great force. It was dark and angry weather; there was an eclipse of the sun; there was a thunder-storm, accompanied with tremendous rain; the frightened birds flew screaming above the soldiers' heads. A certain captain in the French army advised the French King, who was by no means cheerful, not to begin the battle until the morrow. The King, taking this advice, gave the word to halt. But, those behind not understanding it, or desiring to be foremost with the rest, came pressing on. The roads for a great distance were covered with this immense army, and with the common people from the villages, who were flourishing their rude weapons, and making a great noise. Owing to these circumstances, the French army advanced in the greatest confusion; every French lord doing what he liked with his own men, and putting out the men of every other French lord.

Now, their King relied strongly upon a great body of cross-bowmen from Genoa; and these he ordered to the front to begin the battle, on finding that he could not stop it. They shouted once, they shouted twice, they shouted three times, to alarm the English archers; but, the English would have heard them shout three thousand times and would have never moved. At last the cross-bowmen went forward a little, and began to discharge their bolts; upon which, the English let fly such a hail of arrows, that the Genoese speedily made off—for their cross-bows, besides being heavy to carry, required to be wound up with a handle, and consequently took time to re-load; the English, on the other hand, could discharge their arrows almost as fast as the arrows could fly.

When the French King saw the Genoese turning, he cried out to his men to kill those scoundrels, who were doing harm instead of service. This increased the confusion. Meanwhile the English archers, continuing to shoot as fast as ever, shot down great numbers of the French soldiers and knights; whom certain sly Cornish-men and Welshmen, from the English army, creeping along the ground, despatched with great knives.

The Prince and his division were at this time so hard-pressed, that the Earl of Warwick sent a message to the King, who was overlooking the battle from a windmill, beseeching him to send more aid.

‘Is my son killed?’ said the King.

‘No, sire, please God,’ returned the messenger.

‘Is he wounded?’ said the King.

‘No, sire.’

‘Is he thrown to the ground?’ said the King.

‘No, sire, not so; but, he is very hard-pressed.’

‘Then,’ said the King, ‘go back to those who sent you, and tell them I shall send no aid; because I set my heart upon my son proving himself this day a brave knight, and because I am resolved, please God, that the honour of a great victory shall be his!’

These bold words, being reported to the Prince and his division, so raised their spirits, that they fought better than ever. The King of France charged gallantly with his men many times; but it was of no use. Night closing in, his horse was killed under him by an English arrow, and the knights and nobles who had clustered thick about him early in the day, were now completely scattered. At last, some of his few remaining followers led him off the field by force since he would not retire of himself, and they journeyed away to Amiens. The victorious English, lighting their watch-fires, made merry on the field, and the King, riding to meet his gallant son, took him in his arms, kissed him, and told him that he had acted nobly, and proved himself worthy of the day and of the crown. While it was yet night, King Edward was hardly aware of the great victory he had gained; but, next day, it was discovered that eleven princes, twelve hundred knights, and thirty thousand common men lay dead upon the French side. Among these was the King of Bohemia, an old blind man; who, having been told that his son was wounded in the battle, and that no force could stand against the Black Prince, called to him two knights, put himself on horse-back between them, fastened the three bridles together, and dashed in among the English, where he was presently slain. He bore as his crest three white ostrich feathers, with the motto *Ich dien*, signifying in English ‘I serve.’ This crest and motto were taken by the Prince of Wales in remembrance of that famous day, and have been borne by the Prince of Wales ever since.

Five days after this great battle, the King laid siege to Calais. This siege—ever afterwards memorable—lasted nearly a year. In order to starve the inhabitants out, King Edward built so many wooden houses for the lodgings of his troops, that it is said their quarters looked like a second Calais suddenly sprung around the first. Early in the siege, the governor of the town drove out what he called the useless mouths, to the number of seventeen hundred persons, men and women, young and old. King Edward allowed them to pass through his lines, and even fed them, and dismissed them with money; but, later in the siege, he was not so merciful—five hundred more, who were afterwards driven out, dying of starvation and misery. The garrison were so hard-pressed at last, that they sent a letter to King Philip, telling him that they had eaten all the horses, all the dogs, and all the rats and mice that could be found in the place; and, that if he did not relieve them, they must either surrender to the English, or eat one another. Philip made one effort to give them relief; but they were so hemmed in by the English power, that he could not succeed, and was fain to leave the place. Upon this they hoisted the English flag, and surrendered to King Edward. ‘Tell your general,’ said he to the humble messengers who came out of the town, ‘that I require to have sent here, six of the most distinguished citizens, bare-legged, and in their shirts, with ropes about their necks; and let those six men bring with them the keys of the castle and the town.’

When the Governor of Calais related this to the people in the Market-place, there was great weeping and distress; in the midst of which, one worthy citizen, named Eustace de Saint Pierre, rose up and said, that if the six men required were not sacrificed, the whole population would be; therefore, he offered himself as the first. Encouraged by this bright example, five other worthy citizens rose up one after another, and offered themselves to save the rest. The Governor, who was too badly wounded to be able to walk, mounted a poor old horse that had not been eaten, and conducted these good men to the gate, while all the people cried and mourned.

Edward received them wrathfully, and ordered the heads of the whole six to be struck off. However, the good Queen fell upon her knees, and besought the King to give them up to her. The King replied, ‘I wish you had been somewhere else; but I cannot refuse you.' So she had them properly dressed, made a feast for them, and sent them back with a handsome present, to the great rejoicing of the whole camp. I hope the people of Calais loved the daughter to whom she gave birth soon afterwards, for her gentle mother's sake.

Now came that terrible disease, the Plague, into Europe, hurrying from the heart of China; and killed the wretched people—especially the poor—in such enormous numbers, that one-half of the inhabitants of England are related to have died of it. It killed the cattle, in great numbers, too; and so few working men remained alive, that there were not enough left to till the ground.

After eight years of differing and quarrelling, the Prince of Wales again invaded France with an army of sixty thousand men. He went through the south of the country, burning and plundering wheresoever he went; while his father, who had still the Scottish war upon his hands, did the like in Scotland, but was harassed and worried in his retreat from that country by the Scottish men, who repaid his cruelties with interest.

The French King, Philip, was now dead, and was succeeded by his son John. The Black Prince, called by that name from the colour of the armour he wore to set off his fair complexion, continuing to burn and destroy in France, roused John into determined opposition; and so cruel had the Black Prince been in his campaign, and so severely had the French peasants suffered, that he could not find one who, for love, or money, or the fear of death, would tell him what the French King was doing, or where he was. Thus it happened that he came upon the French King's forces, all of a sudden, near the town of Poitiers, and found that the whole neighbouring country was occupied by a vast French army. 'God help us!' said the Black Prince, 'we must make the best of it.'

So, on a Sunday morning, the eighteenth of September, the Prince whose army was now reduced to ten thousand men in all—prepared to give battle to the French King, who had sixty thousand horse alone. While he was so engaged, there came riding from the French camp, a Cardinal, who had persuaded John to let him offer terms, and try to save the shedding of Christian blood. 'Save my honour,' said the Prince to this good priest, 'and save the honour of my army, and I will make any reasonable terms.' He offered to give up all the towns, castles, and prisoners, he had taken, and to swear to make no war in France for seven years; but, as John would hear of nothing but his surrender, with a hundred of his chief knights, the treaty was broken off, and the Prince said quietly—'God defend the right; we shall fight to-morrow.'

Therefore, on the Monday morning, at break of day, the two armies prepared for battle. The English were posted in a strong place, which could only be approached by one narrow lane, skirted by hedges on both sides. The French attacked them by this lane; but were so galled and slain by English arrows from behind the hedges, that they were forced to retreat. Then went six hundred English bowmen round about, and, coming upon the rear of the French army, rained arrows on them thick and fast. The French knights, thrown into confusion, quitted their banners and dispersed in all directions. Said Sir John Chandos to the Prince, 'Ride forward, noble Prince, and the day is yours. The King of France is so valiant a gentleman, that I know he will never fly, and may be taken prisoner.' Said the Prince to this, 'Advance, English banners, in the name of God and St. George!' and on they pressed until they came up with the French King, fighting fiercely with his battle-axe, and, when all his nobles had forsaken him, attended faithfully to the last by his youngest son Philip, only sixteen years of age. Father and son fought well, and the King had already two wounds in his face, and had been beaten down, when he at last delivered himself to a banished French knight, and gave him his right-hand glove in token that he had done so.

The Black Prince was generous as well as brave, and he invited his royal prisoner to supper in his tent, and waited upon him at table, and, when they afterwards rode into London in a gorgeous procession, mounted the French King on a fine cream-coloured horse, and rode at his side on a little pony. This was all very kind, but I think it was, perhaps, a little theatrical too, and has been made more meritorious than it deserved to be; especially as I am inclined to think that the greatest kindness to the King of France would have been not to have shown him to the people at all. However, it must be said, for these acts of politeness, that, in course of time, they did much to soften the horrors of war and the passions of conquerors. It was a long, long time before the common soldiers began to have the benefit of such courtly deeds; but they did at last; and thus it is possible that a poor soldier who asked for quarter at the battle of Waterloo, or any other such great fight, may have owed his life indirectly to Edward the Black Prince.

At this time there stood in the Strand, in London, a palace called the Savoy, which was given up to the captive King of France and his son for their residence. As the King of Scotland had now been King Edward's captive for eleven years too, his success was, at this time, tolerably complete. The Scottish business was settled by the prisoner being released under the title of Sir David, King of Scotland, and by his engaging to pay a large ransom. The state of France encouraged England to propose harder terms to that country, where the people rose against the unspeakable cruelty and barbarity of its nobles; where the nobles rose in turn against the people; where the most frightful outrages were committed on all sides; and where the insurrection of the peasants, called the insurrection of the Jacquerie, from Jacques, a common Christian name among the country people of France, awakened terrors and hatreds that have scarcely yet passed away. A treaty called the Great Peace, was at last signed, under which King Edward agreed to give up the greater part of his conquests, and King John to pay, within six years, a ransom of three million crowns of gold. He was so beset by his own nobles and courtiers for having yielded to these conditions—though they could help him to no better—that he came back of his own will to his old palace-prison of the Savoy, and there died.

There was a Sovereign of Castile at that time, called Pedro the Cruel, who deserved the name remarkably well: having committed, among other cruelties, a variety of murders. This amiable monarch being driven from his throne for his crimes, went to the province of Bordeaux, where the Black Prince—now married to his cousin Joan, a pretty widow—was residing, and besought his help. The Prince, who took to him much more kindly than a prince of such fame ought to have taken to such a ruffian, readily listened to his fair promises, and agreeing to help him, sent secret orders to some troublesome disbanded soldiers of his and his father's, who called themselves the Free Companions, and who had been a pest to the French people, for some time, to aid this Pedro. The Prince, himself, going into Spain to head the army of relief, soon set Pedro on his throne again—where he no sooner found himself, than, of course, he behaved like the villain he was, broke his word without the least shame, and abandoned all the promises he had made to the Black Prince.

Now, it had cost the Prince a good deal of money to pay soldiers to support this murderous King; and finding himself, when he came back disgusted to Bordeaux, not only in bad health, but deeply in debt, he began to tax his French subjects to pay his creditors. They appealed to the French King, Charles; war again broke out; and the French town of Limoges, which the Prince had greatly benefited, went over to the French King. Upon this he ravaged the province of which it was the capital; burnt, and plundered, and killed in the old sickening way; and refused mercy to the prisoners, men, women, and children taken in the offending town, though he was so ill and so much in need of pity himself from Heaven, that he was carried in a litter. He lived to come home and make himself popular with the people and Parliament, and he died on Trinity Sunday, the eighth of June, one thousand three hundred and seventy-six, at forty-six years old.

The whole nation mourned for him as one of the most renowned and beloved princes it had ever had; and he was buried with great lamentations in Canterbury Cathedral. Near to the tomb of Edward the Confessor, his monument, with his figure, carved in stone, and represented in the old black armour, lying on its back, may be seen at this day, with an ancient coat of mail, a helmet, and a pair of gauntlets hanging from a beam above it, which most people like to believe were once worn by the Black Prince.

King Edward did not outlive his renowned son, long. He was old, and one Alice Perrers, a beautiful lady, had contrived to make him so fond of her in his old age, that he could refuse her nothing, and made himself ridiculous. She little deserved his love, or—what I dare say she valued a great deal more—the jewels of the late Queen, which he gave her among other rich presents. She took the very ring from his finger on the morning of the day when he died, and left him to be pillaged by his faithless servants. Only one good priest was true to him, and attended him to the last.

Besides being famous for the great victories I have related, the reign of King Edward the Third was rendered memorable in better ways, by the growth of architecture and the erection of Windsor Castle. In better ways still, by the rising up of Wickliffe, originally a poor parish priest: who devoted himself to exposing, with wonderful power and success, the ambition and corruption of the Pope, and of the whole church of which he was the head.

Some of those Flemings were induced to come to England in this reign too, and to settle in Norfolk, where they made better woollen cloths than the English had ever had before. The Order of the Garter (a very fine thing in its way, but hardly so important as good clothes for the nation) also dates from this period. The King is said to have picked ‘up a lady’s garter at a ball, and to have said, *Honi soit qui mal y pense*—in English, ‘Evil be to him who evil thinks of it.’ The courtiers were usually glad to imitate what the King said or did, and hence from a slight incident the Order of the Garter was instituted, and became a great dignity. So the story goes.

CHAPTER XIX—ENGLAND UNDER RICHARD THE SECOND

Richard, son of the Black Prince, a boy eleven years of age, succeeded to the Crown under the title of King Richard the Second. The whole English nation were ready to admire him for the sake of his brave father. As to the lords and ladies about the Court, they declared him to be the most beautiful, the wisest, and the best—even of princes—whom the lords and ladies about the Court, generally declare to be the most beautiful, the wisest, and the best of mankind. To flatter a poor boy in this base manner was not a very likely way to develop whatever good was in him; and it brought him to anything but a good or happy end.

The Duke of Lancaster, the young King's uncle—commonly called John of Gaunt, from having been born at Ghent, which the common people so pronounced—was supposed to have some thoughts of the throne himself; but, as he was not popular, and the memory of the Black Prince was, he submitted to his nephew.

The war with France being still unsettled, the Government of England wanted money to provide for the expenses that might arise out of it; accordingly a certain tax, called the Poll-tax, which had originated in the last reign, was ordered to be levied on the people. This was a tax on every person in the kingdom, male and female, above the age of fourteen, of three groats (or three four-penny pieces) a year; clergymen were charged more, and only beggars were exempt.

I have no need to repeat that the common people of England had long been suffering under great oppression. They were still the mere slaves of the lords of the land on which they lived, and were on most occasions harshly and unjustly treated. But, they had begun by this time to think very seriously of not bearing quite so much; and, probably, were emboldened by that French insurrection I mentioned in the last chapter.

The people of Essex rose against the Poll-tax, and being severely handled by the government officers, killed some of them. At this very time one of the tax-collectors, going his rounds from house to house, at Dartford in Kent came to the cottage of one Wat, a tiler by trade, and claimed the tax upon his daughter. Her mother, who was at home, declared that she was under the age of fourteen; upon that, the collector (as other collectors had already done in different parts of England) behaved in a savage way, and brutally insulted Wat Tyler's daughter. The daughter screamed, the mother screamed. Wat the Tiler, who was at work not far off, ran to the spot, and did what any honest father under such provocation might have done—struck the collector dead at a blow.

Instantly the people of that town uprose as one man. They made Wat Tyler their leader; they joined with the people of Essex, who were in arms under a priest called Jack Straw; they took out of prison another priest named John Ball; and gathering in numbers as they went along, advanced, in a great confused army of poor men, to Blackheath. It is said that they wanted to abolish all property, and to declare all men equal. I do not think this very likely; because they stopped the travellers on the roads and made them swear to be true to King Richard and the people. Nor were they at all disposed to injure those who had done them no harm, merely because they were of high station; for, the King's mother, who had to pass through their camp at Blackheath, on her way to her young son, lying for safety in the Tower of London, had merely to kiss a few dirty-faced rough-bearded men who were noisily fond of royalty, and so got away in perfect safety. Next day the whole mass marched on to London Bridge.

There was a drawbridge in the middle, which William Walworth the Mayor caused to be raised to prevent their coming into the city; but they soon terrified the citizens into lowering it again, and spread themselves, with great uproar, over the streets. They broke open the prisons; they burned the papers in Lambeth Palace; they destroyed the Duke of Lancaster's Palace, the Savoy, in the Strand, said to be the most beautiful and splendid in England; they set fire to the books and documents in the Temple; and made a great riot. Many of these outrages were committed in drunkenness; since those citizens, who had well-filled cellars, were only too glad to throw them open to save the rest of their property; but even the drunken rioters were very careful to steal nothing. They were so angry with one man, who was seen to take a silver cup at the Savoy Palace, and put it in his breast, that they drowned him in the river, cup and all.

The young King had been taken out to treat with them before they committed these excesses; but, he and the people about him were so frightened by the riotous shouts, that they got back to the Tower in the best way they could. This made the insurgents bolder; so they went on rioting away, striking off the heads of those who did not, at a moment's notice, declare for King Richard and the people; and killing as many of the unpopular persons whom they supposed to be their enemies as they could by any means lay hold of. In this manner they passed one very violent day, and then proclamation was made that the King would meet them at Mile-end, and grant their requests.

The rioters went to Mile-end to the number of sixty thousand, and the King met them there, and to the King the rioters peaceably proposed four conditions. First, that neither they, nor their children, nor any coming after them, should be made slaves any more. Secondly, that the rent of land should be fixed at a certain price in money, instead of being paid in service. Thirdly, that they should have liberty to buy and sell in all markets and public places, like other free men. Fourthly, that they should be pardoned for past offences. Heaven knows, there was nothing very unreasonable in these proposals! The young King deceitfully pretended to think so, and kept thirty clerks up, all night, writing out a charter accordingly.

Now, Wat Tyler himself wanted more than this. He wanted the entire abolition of the forest laws. He was not at Mile-end with the rest, but, while that meeting was being held, broke into the Tower of London and slew the archbishop and the treasurer, for whose heads the people had cried out loudly the day before. He and his men even thrust their swords into the bed of the Princess of Wales while the Princess was in it, to make certain that none of their enemies were concealed there.

So, Wat and his men still continued armed, and rode about the city. Next morning, the King with a small train of some sixty gentlemen—among whom was Walworth the Mayor—rode into Smithfield, and saw Wat and his people at a little distance. Says Wat to his men, 'There is the King. I will go speak with him, and tell him what we want.'

Straightway Wat rode up to him, and began to talk. 'King,' says Wat, 'dost thou see all my men there?'

'Ah,' says the King. 'Why?'

'Because,' says Wat, 'they are all at my command, and have sworn to do whatever I bid them.'

Some declared afterwards that as Wat said this, he laid his hand on the King's bridle. Others declared that he was seen to play with his own dagger. I think, myself, that he just spoke to the King like a rough, angry man as he was, and did nothing more. At any rate he was expecting no attack, and preparing for no resistance, when Walworth the Mayor did the not very valiant deed of drawing a short sword and stabbing him in the throat. He dropped from his horse, and one of the King's people speedily finished him. So fell Wat Tyler. Fawners and flatterers made a mighty triumph of it, and set up a cry which will occasionally find an echo to this day. But Wat was a hard-working man, who had suffered much, and had been foully outraged; and it is probable that he was a man of a much higher nature and a much braver spirit than any of the parasites who exulted then, or have exulted since, over his defeat.

Seeing Wat down, his men immediately bent their bows to avenge his fall. If the young King had not had presence of mind at that dangerous moment, both he and the Mayor to boot, might have followed Tyler pretty fast. But the King riding up to the crowd, cried out that Tyler was a traitor, and that he would be their leader. They were so taken by surprise, that they set up a great shouting, and followed the boy until he was met at Islington by a large body of soldiers.

The end of this rising was the then usual end. As soon as the King found himself safe, he unsaid all he had said, and undid all he had done; some fifteen hundred of the rioters were tried (mostly in Essex) with great rigour, and executed with great cruelty. Many of them were hanged on gibbets, and left there as a terror to the country people; and, because their miserable friends took some of the bodies down to bury, the King ordered the rest to be chained up—which was the beginning of the barbarous custom of hanging in chains. The King's falsehood in this business makes such a pitiful figure, that I think Wat Tyler appears in history as beyond comparison the truer and more respectable man of the two.

Richard was now sixteen years of age, and married Anne of Bohemia, an excellent princess, who was called 'the good Queen Anne.' She deserved a better husband; for the King had been fawned and flattered into a treacherous, wasteful, dissolute, bad young man.

There were two Popes at this time (as if one were not enough!), and their quarrels involved Europe in a great deal of trouble. Scotland was still troublesome too; and at home there was much jealousy and distrust, and plotting and counter-plotting, because the King feared the ambition of his relations, and particularly of his uncle, the Duke of Lancaster, and the duke had his party against the King, and the King had his party against the duke.

Nor were these home troubles lessened when the duke went to Castile to urge his claim to the crown of that kingdom; for then the Duke of Gloucester, another of Richard's uncles, opposed him, and influenced the Parliament to demand the dismissal of the King's favourite ministers. The King said in reply, that he would not for such men dismiss the meanest servant in his kitchen. But, it had begun to signify little what a King said when a Parliament was determined; so Richard was at last obliged to give way, and to agree to another Government of the kingdom, under a commission of fourteen nobles, for a year. His uncle of Gloucester was at the head of this commission, and, in fact, appointed everybody composing it.

Having done all this, the King declared as soon as he saw an opportunity that he had never meant to do it, and that it was all illegal; and he got the judges secretly to sign a declaration to that effect. The secret oozed out directly, and was carried to the Duke of Gloucester. The Duke of Gloucester, at the head of forty thousand men, met the King on his entering into London to enforce his authority; the King was helpless against him; his favourites and ministers were impeached and were mercilessly executed. Among them were two men whom the people regarded with very different feelings; one, Robert Tresilian, Chief Justice, who was hated for having made what was called 'the bloody circuit' to try the rioters; the other, Sir Simon Burley, an honourable knight, who had been the dear friend of the Black Prince, and the governor and guardian of the King. For this gentleman's life the good Queen even begged of Gloucester on her knees; but Gloucester (with or without reason) feared and hated him, and replied, that if she valued her husband's crown, she had better beg no more. All this was done under what was called by some the wonderful—and by others, with better reason, the merciless—Parliament.

But Gloucester's power was not to last for ever. He held it for only a year longer; in which year the famous battle of Otterbourne, sung in the old ballad of Chevy Chase, was fought. When the year was out, the King, turning suddenly to Gloucester, in the midst of a great council said, 'Uncle, how old am I?' 'Your highness,' returned the Duke, 'is in your twenty-second year.' 'Am I so much?' said the King; 'then I will manage my own affairs! I am much obliged to you, my good lords, for your past services, but I need them no more.' He followed this up, by appointing a new Chancellor and a new Treasurer, and announced to the people that he had resumed the Government. He held it for eight years without opposition. Through all that time, he kept his determination to revenge himself some day upon his uncle Gloucester, in his own breast.

At last the good Queen died, and then the King, desiring to take a second wife, proposed to his council that he should marry Isabella, of France, the daughter of Charles the Sixth: who, the French courtiers said (as the English courtiers had said of Richard), was a marvel of beauty and wit, and quite a phenomenon—of seven years old. The council were divided about this marriage, but it took place. It secured peace between England and France for a quarter of a century; but it was strongly opposed to the prejudices of the English people. The Duke of Gloucester, who was anxious to take the occasion of making himself popular, declaimed against it loudly, and this at length decided the King to execute the vengeance he had been nursing so long.

He went with a gay company to the Duke of Gloucester's house, Pleshey Castle, in Essex, where the Duke, suspecting nothing, came out into the court-yard to receive his royal visitor. While the King conversed in a friendly manner with the Duchess, the Duke was quietly seized, hurried away, shipped for Calais, and lodged in the castle there. His friends, the Earls of Arundel and Warwick, were taken in the same treacherous manner, and confined to their castles. A few days after, at Nottingham, they were impeached of high treason. The Earl of Arundel was condemned and beheaded, and the Earl of Warwick was banished. Then, a writ was sent by a messenger to the Governor of Calais, requiring him to send the Duke of Gloucester over to be tried. In three days he returned an answer that he could not do that, because the Duke of Gloucester had died in prison. The Duke was declared a traitor, his property was confiscated to the King, a real or pretended confession he had made in prison to one of the Justices of the Common Pleas was produced against him, and there was an end of the matter. How the unfortunate duke died, very few cared to know. Whether he really died naturally; whether he killed himself; whether, by the King's order, he was strangled, or smothered between two beds (as a serving-man of the Governor's named Hall, did afterwards declare), cannot be discovered. There is not much doubt that he was killed, somehow or other, by his nephew's orders. Among the most active nobles in these proceedings were the King's cousin, Henry Bolingbroke, whom the King had made Duke of Hereford to smooth down the old family quarrels, and some others:

who had in the family-plotting times done just such acts themselves as they now condemned in the duke. They seem to have been a corrupt set of men; but such men were easily found about the court in such days.

The people murmured at all this, and were still very sore about the French marriage. The nobles saw how little the King cared for law, and how crafty he was, and began to be somewhat afraid for themselves. The King's life was a life of continued feasting and excess; his retinue, down to the meanest servants, were dressed in the most costly manner, and caroused at his tables, it is related, to the number of ten thousand persons every day. He himself, surrounded by a body of ten thousand archers, and enriched by a duty on wool which the Commons had granted him for life, saw no danger of ever being otherwise than powerful and absolute, and was as fierce and haughty as a King could be.

He had two of his old enemies left, in the persons of the Dukes of Hereford and Norfolk. Sparing these no more than the others, he tampered with the Duke of Hereford until he got him to declare before the Council that the Duke of Norfolk had lately held some treasonable talk with him, as he was riding near Brentford; and that he had told him, among other things, that he could not believe the King's oath—which nobody could, I should think. For this treachery he obtained a pardon, and the Duke of Norfolk was summoned to appear and defend himself. As he denied the charge and said his accuser was a liar and a traitor, both noblemen, according to the manner of those times, were held in custody, and the truth was ordered to be decided by wager of battle at Coventry. This wager of battle meant that whosoever won the combat was to be considered in the right; which nonsense meant in effect, that no strong man could ever be wrong. A great holiday was made; a great crowd assembled, with much parade and show; and the two combatants were about to rush at each other with their lances, when the King, sitting in a pavilion to see fair, threw down the truncheon he carried in his hand, and forbade the battle. The Duke of Hereford was to be banished for ten years, and the Duke of Norfolk was to be banished for life. So said the King. The Duke of Hereford went to France, and went no farther. The Duke of Norfolk made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and afterwards died at Venice of a broken heart.

Faster and fiercer, after this, the King went on in his career. The Duke of Lancaster, who was the father of the Duke of Hereford, died soon after the departure of his son; and, the King, although he had solemnly granted to that son leave to inherit his father’s property, if it should come to him during his banishment, immediately seized it all, like a robber. The judges were so afraid of him, that they disgraced themselves by declaring this theft to be just and lawful. His avarice knew no bounds. He outlawed seventeen counties at once, on a frivolous pretence, merely to raise money by way of fines for misconduct. In short, he did as many dishonest things as he could; and cared so little for the discontent of his subjects—though even the spaniel favourites began to whisper to him that there was such a thing as discontent afloat—that he took that time, of all others, for leaving England and making an expedition against the Irish.

He was scarcely gone, leaving the Duke of York Regent in his absence, when his cousin, Henry of Hereford, came over from France to claim the rights of which he had been so monstrously deprived. He was immediately joined by the two great Earls of Northumberland and Westmoreland; and his uncle, the Regent, finding the King’s cause unpopular, and the disinclination of the army to act against Henry, very strong, withdrew with the Royal forces towards Bristol. Henry, at the head of an army, came from Yorkshire (where he had landed) to London and followed him. They joined their forces—how they brought that about, is not distinctly understood—and proceeded to Bristol Castle, whither three noblemen had taken the young Queen. The castle surrendering, they presently put those three noblemen to death. The Regent then remained there, and Henry went on to Chester.

All this time, the boisterous weather had prevented the King from receiving intelligence of what had occurred. At length it was conveyed to him in Ireland, and he sent over the Earl of Salisbury, who, landing at Conway, rallied the Welshmen, and waited for the King a whole fortnight; at the end of that time the Welshmen, who were perhaps not very warm for him in the beginning, quite cooled down and went home. When the King did land on the coast at last, he came with a pretty good power, but his men cared nothing for him, and quickly deserted. Supposing the Welshmen to be still at Conway, he disguised himself as a priest, and made for that place in company with his two brothers and some few of their adherents. But, there were no Welshmen left—only Salisbury and a hundred soldiers. In this distress, the King’s two brothers, Exeter and Surrey, offered to go to Henry to learn what his intentions were. Surrey, who was true to Richard, was put into prison. Exeter, who was false, took the royal badge, which was a hart, off his shield, and assumed the rose, the badge of Henry. After this, it was pretty plain to the King what Henry's intentions were, without sending any more messengers to ask.

The fallen King, thus deserted—hemmed in on all sides, and pressed with hunger—rode here and rode there, and went to this castle, and went to that castle, endeavouring to obtain some provisions, but could find none. He rode wretchedly back to Conway, and there surrendered himself to the Earl of Northumberland, who came from Henry, in reality to take him prisoner, but in appearance to offer terms; and whose men were hidden not far off. By this earl he was conducted to the castle of Flint, where his cousin Henry met him, and dropped on his knee as if he were still respectful to his sovereign.

'Fair cousin of Lancaster,' said the King, 'you are very welcome' (very welcome, no doubt; but he would have been more so, in chains or without a head).

'My lord,' replied Henry, 'I am come a little before my time; but, with your good pleasure, I will show you the reason. Your people complain with some bitterness, that you have ruled them rigorously for two-and-twenty years. Now, if it please God, I will help you to govern them better in future.'

'Fair cousin,' replied the abject King, 'since it pleaseth you, it pleaseth me mightily.'

After this, the trumpets sounded, and the King was stuck on a wretched horse, and carried prisoner to Chester, where he was made to issue a proclamation, calling a Parliament. From Chester he was taken on towards London. At Lichfield he tried to escape by getting out of a window and letting himself down into a garden; it was all in vain, however, and he was carried on and shut up in the Tower, where no one pitied him, and where the whole people, whose patience he had quite tired out, reproached him without mercy. Before he got there, it is related, that his very dog left him and departed from his side to lick the hand of Henry.

The day before the Parliament met, a deputation went to this wrecked King, and told him that he had promised the Earl of Northumberland at Conway Castle to resign the crown. He said he was quite ready to do it, and signed a paper in which he renounced his authority and absolved his people from their allegiance to him. He had so little spirit left that he gave his royal ring to his triumphant cousin Henry with his own hand, and said, that if he could have had leave to appoint a successor, that same Henry was the man of all others whom he would have named. Next day, the Parliament assembled in Westminster Hall, where Henry sat at the side of the throne, which was empty and covered with a cloth of gold. The paper just signed by the King was read to the multitude amid shouts of joy, which were echoed through all the streets; when some of the noise had died away, the King was formally deposed. Then Henry arose, and, making the sign of the cross on his forehead and breast, challenged the realm of England as his right; the archbishops of Canterbury and York seated him on the throne.

The multitude shouted again, and the shouts re-echoed throughout all the streets. No one remembered, now, that Richard the Second had ever been the most beautiful, the wisest, and the best of princes; and he now made living (to my thinking) a far more sorry spectacle in the Tower of London, than Wat Tyler had made, lying dead, among the hoofs of the royal horses in Smithfield.

The Poll-tax died with Wat. The Smiths to the King and Royal Family, could make no chains in which the King could hang the people’s recollection of him; so the Poll-tax was never collected.

CHAPTER XX—ENGLAND UNDER HENRY THE FOURTH, CALLED BOLINGBROKE

During the last reign, the preaching of Wickliffe against the pride and cunning of the Pope and all his men, had made a great noise in England. Whether the new King wished to be in favour with the priests, or whether he hoped, by pretending to be very religious, to cheat Heaven itself into the belief that he was not a usurper, I don’t know. Both suppositions are likely enough. It is certain that he began his reign by making a strong show against the followers of Wickliffe, who were called Lollards, or heretics—although his father, John of Gaunt, had been of that way of thinking, as he himself had been more than suspected of being. It is no less certain that he first established in England the detestable and atrocious custom, brought from abroad, of burning those people as a punishment for their opinions. It was the importation into England of one of the practices of what was called the Holy Inquisition: which was the most *un*holy and the most infamous tribunal that ever disgraced mankind, and made men more like demons than followers of Our Saviour.

No real right to the crown, as you know, was in this King. Edward Mortimer, the young Earl of March—who was only eight or nine years old, and who was descended from the Duke of Clarence, the elder brother of Henry’s father—was, by succession, the real heir to the throne. However, the King got his son declared Prince of Wales; and, obtaining possession of the young Earl of March and his little brother, kept them in confinement (but not severely) in Windsor Castle. He then required the Parliament to decide what was to be done with the deposed King, who was quiet enough, and who only said that he hoped his cousin Henry would be ‘a good lord’ to him. The Parliament replied that they would recommend his being kept in some secret place where the people could not resort, and where his friends could not be admitted to see him. Henry accordingly passed this sentence upon him, and it now began to be pretty clear to the nation that Richard the Second would not live very long.

It was a noisy Parliament, as it was an unprincipled one, and the Lords quarrelled so violently among themselves as to which of them had been loyal and which disloyal, and which consistent and which inconsistent, that forty gauntlets are said to have been thrown upon the floor at one time as challenges to as many battles: the truth being that they were all false and base together, and had been, at one time with the old King, and at another time with the new one, and seldom true for any length of time to any one. They soon began to plot again. A conspiracy was formed to invite the King to a tournament at Oxford, and then to take him by surprise and kill him. This murderous enterprise, which was agreed upon at secret meetings in the house of the Abbot of Westminster, was betrayed by the Earl of Rutland—one of the conspirators. The King, instead of going to the tournament or staying at Windsor (where the conspirators suddenly went, on finding themselves discovered, with the hope of seizing him), retired to London, proclaimed them all traitors, and advanced upon them with a great force. They retired into the west of England, proclaiming Richard King; but, the people rose against them, and they were all slain. Their treason hastened the death of the deposed monarch. Whether he was killed by hired assassins, or whether he was starved to death, or whether he refused food on hearing of his brothers being killed (who were in that plot), is very doubtful. He met his death somehow; and his body was publicly shown at St. Paul's Cathedral with only the lower part of the face uncovered. I can scarcely doubt that he was killed by the King's orders.

The French wife of the miserable Richard was now only ten years old; and, when her father, Charles of France, heard of her misfortunes and of her lonely condition in England, he went mad: as he had several times done before, during the last five or six years. The French Dukes of Burgundy and Bourbon took up the poor girl's cause, without caring much about it, but on the chance of getting something out of England. The people of Bordeaux, who had a sort of superstitious attachment to the memory of Richard, because he was born there, swore by the Lord that he had been the best man in all his kingdom—which was going rather far—and promised to do great things against the English. Nevertheless, when they came to consider that they, and the whole people of France, were ruined by their own nobles, and that the English rule was much the better of the two, they cooled down again; and the two dukes, although they were very great men, could do nothing without them. Then, began negotiations between France and England for the sending home to Paris of the poor little Queen with all her jewels and her fortune of two hundred thousand francs in gold. The King was quite willing to restore the young lady, and even the jewels; but he said he really could not part with the money. So, at last she was safely deposited at Paris without her fortune, and then the Duke of Burgundy (who was cousin to the French King) began to quarrel with the Duke of Orleans (who was brother to the French King) about the whole matter; and those two dukes made France even more wretched than ever.

As the idea of conquering Scotland was still popular at home, the King marched to the river Tyne and demanded homage of the King of that country. This being refused, he advanced to Edinburgh, but did little there; for, his army being in want of provisions, and the Scotch being very careful to hold him in check without giving battle, he was obliged to retire. It is to his immortal honour that in this sally he burnt no villages and slaughtered no people, but was particularly careful that his army should be merciful and harmless. It was a great example in those ruthless times.

A war among the border people of England and Scotland went on for twelve months, and then the Earl of Northumberland, the nobleman who had helped Henry to the crown, began to rebel against him—probably because nothing that Henry could do for him would satisfy his extravagant expectations. There was a certain Welsh gentleman, named Owen Glendower, who had been a student in one of the Inns of Court, and had afterwards been in the service of the late King, whose Welsh property was taken from him by a powerful lord related to the present King, who was his neighbour. Appealing for redress, and getting none, he took up arms, was made an outlaw, and declared himself sovereign of Wales. He pretended to be a magician; and not only were the Welsh people stupid enough to believe him, but, even Henry believed him too; for, making three expeditions into Wales, and being three times driven back by the wildness of the country, the bad weather, and the skill of Glendower, he thought he was defeated by the Welshman’s magic arts. However, he took Lord Grey and Sir Edmund Mortimer, prisoners, and allowed the relatives of Lord Grey to ransom him, but would not extend such favour to Sir Edmund Mortimer. Now, Henry Percy, called Hotspur, son of the Earl of Northumberland, who was married to Mortimer’s sister, is supposed to have taken offence at this; and, therefore, in conjunction with his father and some others, to have joined Owen Glendower, and risen against Henry. It is by no means clear that this was the real cause of the conspiracy; but perhaps it was made the pretext. It was formed, and was very powerful; including Scroop, Archbishop of York, and the Earl of Douglas, a powerful and brave Scottish nobleman. The King was prompt and active, and the two armies met at Shrewsbury.

There were about fourteen thousand men in each. The old Earl of Northumberland being sick, the rebel forces were led by his son. The King wore plain armour to deceive the enemy; and four noblemen, with the same object, wore the royal arms. The rebel charge was so furious, that every one of those gentlemen was killed, the royal standard was beaten down, and the young Prince of Wales was severely wounded in the face. But he was one of the bravest and best soldiers that ever lived, and he fought so well, and the King's troops were so encouraged by his bold example, that they rallied immediately, and cut the enemy's forces all to pieces. Hotspur was killed by an arrow in the brain, and the rout was so complete that the whole rebellion was struck down by this one blow. The Earl of Northumberland surrendered himself soon after hearing of the death of his son, and received a pardon for all his offences.

There were some lingerings of rebellion yet: Owen Glendower being retired to Wales, and a preposterous story being spread among the ignorant people that King Richard was still alive. How they could have believed such nonsense it is difficult to imagine; but they certainly did suppose that the Court fool of the late King, who was something like him, was he, himself; so that it seemed as if, after giving so much trouble to the country in his life, he was still to trouble it after his death. This was not the worst. The young Earl of March and his brother were stolen out of Windsor Castle. Being retaken, and being found to have been spirited away by one Lady Spencer, she accused her own brother, that Earl of Rutland who was in the former conspiracy and was now Duke of York, of being in the plot. For this he was ruined in fortune, though not put to death; and then another plot arose among the old Earl of Northumberland, some other lords, and that same Scroop, Archbishop of York, who was with the rebels before. These conspirators caused a writing to be posted on the church doors, accusing the King of a variety of crimes; but, the King being eager and vigilant to oppose them, they were all taken, and the Archbishop was executed. This was the first time that a great churchman had been slain by the law in England; but the King was resolved that it should be done, and done it was.

The next most remarkable event of this time was the seizure, by Henry, of the heir to the Scottish throne—James, a boy of nine years old. He had been put aboard-ship by his father, the Scottish King Robert, to save him from the designs of his uncle, when, on his way to France, he was accidentally taken by some English cruisers. He remained a prisoner in England for nineteen years, and became in his prison a student and a famous poet.

With the exception of occasional troubles with the Welsh and with the French, the rest of King Henry's reign was quiet enough. But, the King was far from happy, and probably was troubled in his conscience by knowing that he had usurped the crown, and had occasioned the death of his miserable cousin. The Prince of Wales, though brave and generous, is said to have been wild and dissipated, and even to have drawn his sword on Gascoigne, the Chief Justice of the King's Bench, because he was firm in dealing impartially with one of his dissolute companions. Upon this the Chief Justice is said to have ordered him immediately to prison; the Prince of Wales is said to have submitted with a good grace; and the King is said to have exclaimed, 'Happy is the monarch who has so just a judge, and a son so willing to obey the laws.' This is all very doubtful, and so is another story (of which Shakespeare has made beautiful use), that the Prince once took the crown out of his father's chamber as he was sleeping, and tried it on his own head.

The King's health sank more and more, and he became subject to violent eruptions on the face and to bad epileptic fits, and his spirits sank every day. At last, as he was praying before the shrine of St. Edward at Westminster Abbey, he was seized with a terrible fit, and was carried into the Abbot's chamber, where he presently died. It had been foretold that he would die at Jerusalem, which certainly is not, and never was, Westminster. But, as the Abbot's room had long been called the Jerusalem chamber, people said it was all the same thing, and were quite satisfied with the prediction.

The King died on the 20th of March, 1413, in the forty-seventh year of his age, and the fourteenth of his reign. He was buried in Canterbury Cathedral. He had been twice married, and had, by his first wife, a family of four sons and two daughters. Considering his duplicity before he came to the throne, his unjust seizure of it, and above all, his making that monstrous law for the burning of what the priests called heretics, he was a reasonably good king, as kings went.

CHAPTER XXI—ENGLAND UNDER HENRY THE FIFTH

FIRST PART

The Prince of Wales began his reign like a generous and honest man. He set the young Earl of March free; he restored their estates and their honours to the Percy family, who had lost them by their rebellion against his father; he ordered the imbecile and unfortunate Richard to be honourably buried among the Kings of England; and he dismissed all his wild companions, with assurances that they should not want, if they would resolve to be steady, faithful, and true.

It is much easier to burn men than to burn their opinions; and those of the Lollards were spreading every day. The Lollards were represented by the priests—probably falsely for the most part—to entertain treasonable designs against the new King; and Henry, suffering himself to be worked upon by these representations, sacrificed his friend Sir John Oldcastle, the Lord Cobham, to them, after trying in vain to convert him by arguments. He was declared guilty, as the head of the sect, and sentenced to the flames; but he escaped from the Tower before the day of execution (postponed for fifty days by the King himself), and summoned the Lollards to meet him near London on a certain day. So the priests told the King, at least. I doubt whether there was any conspiracy beyond such as was got up by their agents. On the day appointed, instead of five-and-twenty thousand men, under the command of Sir John Oldcastle, in the meadows of St. Giles, the King found only eighty men, and no Sir John at all. There was, in another place, an addle-headed brewer, who had gold trappings to his horses, and a pair of gilt spurs in his breast—expecting to be made a knight next day by Sir John, and so to gain the right to wear them—but there was no Sir John, nor did anybody give information respecting him, though the King offered great rewards for such intelligence. Thirty of these unfortunate Lollards were hanged and drawn immediately, and were then burnt, gallows and all; and the various prisons in and around London were crammed full of others. Some of these unfortunate men made various confessions of treasonable designs; but, such confessions were easily got, under torture and the fear of fire, and are very little to be trusted. To finish the sad story of Sir John Oldcastle at once, I may mention that he escaped into Wales, and remained there safely, for four years. When discovered by Lord Powis, it is very doubtful if he would have been taken alive—so great was the old soldier's bravery—if a miserable old woman had not come behind him and broken his legs with a stool. He was carried to London in a horse-litter, was fastened by an iron chain to a gibbet, and so roasted to death.

To make the state of France as plain as I can in a few words, I should tell you that the Duke of Orleans, and the Duke of Burgundy, commonly called 'John without fear,' had had a grand reconciliation of their quarrel in the last reign, and had appeared to be quite in a heavenly state of mind. Immediately after which, on a Sunday, in the public streets of Paris, the Duke of Orleans was murdered by a party of twenty men, set on by the Duke of Burgundy—according to his own deliberate confession. The widow of King Richard had been married in France to the eldest son of the Duke of Orleans. The poor mad King was quite powerless to help her, and the Duke of Burgundy became the real master of France. Isabella dying, her husband (Duke of Orleans since the death of his father) married the daughter of the Count of Armagnac, who, being a much abler man than his young son-in-law, headed his party; thence called after him Armagnacs. Thus, France was now in this terrible condition, that it had in it the party of the King's son, the Dauphin Louis; the party of the Duke of Burgundy, who was the father of the Dauphin's ill-used wife; and the party of the Armagnacs; all hating each other; all fighting together; all composed of the most depraved nobles that the earth has ever known; and all tearing unhappy France to pieces.

The late King had watched these dissensions from England, sensible (like the French people) that no enemy of France could injure her more than her own nobility. The present King now advanced a claim to the French throne. His demand being, of course, refused, he reduced his proposal to a certain large amount of French territory, and to demanding the French princess, Catherine, in marriage, with a fortune of two millions of golden crowns. He was offered less territory and fewer crowns, and no princess; but he called his ambassadors home and prepared for war. Then, he proposed to take the princess with one million of crowns. The French Court replied that he should have the princess with two hundred thousand crowns less; he said this would not do (he had never seen the princess in his life), and assembled his army at Southampton. There was a short plot at home just at that time, for deposing him, and making the Earl of March king; but the conspirators were all speedily condemned and executed, and the King embarked for France.

It is dreadful to observe how long a bad example will be followed; but, it is encouraging to know that a good example is never thrown away. The King's first act on disembarking at the mouth of the river Seine, three miles from Harfleur, was to imitate his father, and to proclaim his solemn orders that the lives and property of the peaceable inhabitants should be respected on pain of death. It is agreed by French writers, to his lasting renown, that even while his soldiers were suffering the greatest distress from want of food, these commands were rigidly obeyed.

With an army in all of thirty thousand men, he besieged the town of Harfleur both by sea and land for five weeks; at the end of which time the town surrendered, and the inhabitants were allowed to depart with only fivepence each, and a part of their clothes. All the rest of their possessions was divided amongst the English army. But, that army suffered so much, in spite of its successes, from disease and privation, that it was already reduced one half. Still, the King was determined not to retire until he had struck a greater blow. Therefore, against the advice of all his counsellors, he moved on with his little force towards Calais. When he came up to the river Somme he was unable to cross, in consequence of the fort being fortified; and, as the English moved up the left bank of the river looking for a crossing, the French, who had broken all the bridges, moved up the right bank, watching them, and waiting to attack them when they should try to pass it. At last the English found a crossing and got safely over. The French held a council of war at Rouen, resolved to give the English battle, and sent heralds to King Henry to know by which road he was going. 'By the road that will take me straight to Calais!' said the King, and sent them away with a present of a hundred crowns.

The English moved on, until they beheld the French, and then the King gave orders to form in line of battle. The French not coming on, the army broke up after remaining in battle array till night, and got good rest and refreshment at a neighbouring village. The French were now all lying in another village, through which they knew the English must pass. They were resolved that the English should begin the battle. The English had no means of retreat, if their King had any such intention; and so the two armies passed the night, close together.

To understand these armies well, you must bear in mind that the immense French army had, among its notable persons, almost the whole of that wicked nobility, whose debauchery had made France a desert; and so besotted were they by pride, and by contempt for the common people, that they had scarcely any bowmen (if indeed they had any at all) in their whole enormous number: which, compared with the English army, was at least as six to one. For these proud fools had said that the bow was not a fit weapon for knightly hands, and that France must be defended by gentlemen only. We shall see, presently, what hand the gentlemen made of it.

Now, on the English side, among the little force, there was a good proportion of men who were not gentlemen by any means, but who were good stout archers for all that. Among them, in the morning—having slept little at night, while the French were carousing and making sure of victory—the King rode, on a grey horse; wearing on his head a helmet of shining steel, surmounted by a crown of gold, sparkling with precious stones; and bearing over his armour, embroidered together, the arms of England and the arms of France. The archers looked at the shining helmet and the crown of gold and the sparkling jewels, and admired them all; but, what they admired most was the King's cheerful face, and his bright blue eye, as he told them that, for himself, he had made up his mind to conquer there or to die there, and that England should never have a ransom to pay for *him*. There was one brave knight who chanced to say that he wished some of the many gallant gentlemen and good soldiers, who were then idle at home in England, were there to increase their numbers. But the King told him that, for his part, he did not wish for one more man. 'The fewer we have,' said he, 'the greater will be the honour we shall win!' His men, being now all in good heart, were refreshed with bread and wine, and heard prayers, and waited quietly for the French. The King waited for the French, because they were drawn up thirty deep (the little English force was only three deep), on very difficult and heavy ground; and he knew that when they moved, there must be confusion among them.

As they did not move, he sent off two parties:—one to lie concealed in a wood on the left of the French: the other, to set fire to some houses behind the French after the battle should be begun. This was scarcely done, when three of the proud French gentlemen, who were to defend their country without any help from the base peasants, came riding out, calling upon the English to surrender. The King warned those gentlemen himself to retire with all speed if they cared for their lives, and ordered the English banners to advance. Upon that, Sir Thomas Erpingham, a great English general, who commanded the archers, threw his truncheon into the air, joyfully, and all the English men, kneeling down upon the ground and biting it as if they took possession of the country, rose up with a great shout and fell upon the French.

Every archer was furnished with a great stake tipped with iron; and his orders were, to thrust this stake into the ground, to discharge his arrow, and then to fall back, when the French horsemen came on. As the haughty French gentlemen, who were to break the English archers and utterly destroy them with their knightly lances, came riding up, they were received with such a blinding storm of arrows, that they broke and turned. Horses and men rolled over one another, and the confusion was terrific. Those who rallied and charged the archers got among the stakes on slippery and boggy ground, and were so bewildered that the English archers—who wore no armour, and even took off their leathern coats to be more active—cut them to pieces, root and branch. Only three French horsemen got within the stakes, and those were instantly despatched. All this time the dense French army, being in armour, were sinking knee-deep into the mire; while the light English archers, half-naked, were as fresh and active as if they were fighting on a marble floor.

But now, the second division of the French coming to the relief of the first, closed up in a firm mass; the English, headed by the King, attacked them; and the deadliest part of the battle began. The King’s brother, the Duke of Clarence, was struck down, and numbers of the French surrounded him; but, King Henry, standing over the body, fought like a lion until they were beaten off.

Presently, came up a band of eighteen French knights, bearing the banner of a certain French lord, who had sworn to kill or take the English King. One of them struck him such a blow with a battle-axe that he reeled and fell upon his knees; but, his faithful men, immediately closing round him, killed every one of those eighteen knights, and so that French lord never kept his oath.

The French Duke of Alençon, seeing this, made a desperate charge, and cut his way close up to the Royal Standard of England. He beat down the

Duke of York, who was standing near it; and, when the King came to his rescue, struck off a piece of the crown he wore. But, he never struck another blow in this world; for, even as he was in the act of saying who he was, and that he surrendered to the King; and even as the King stretched out his hand to give him a safe and honourable acceptance of the offer; he fell dead, pierced by innumerable wounds.

The death of this nobleman decided the battle. The third division of the French army, which had never struck a blow yet, and which was, in itself, more than double the whole English power, broke and fled. At this time of the fight, the English, who as yet had made no prisoners, began to take them in immense numbers, and were still occupied in doing so, or in killing those who would not surrender, when a great noise arose in the rear of the French—their flying banners were seen to stop—and King Henry, supposing a great reinforcement to have arrived, gave orders that all the prisoners should be put to death. As soon, however, as it was found that the noise was only occasioned by a body of plundering peasants, the terrible massacre was stopped.

Then King Henry called to him the French herald, and asked him to whom the victory belonged.

The herald replied, 'To the King of England.'

'*We* have not made this havoc and slaughter,' said the King. 'It is the wrath of Heaven on the sins of France. What is the name of that castle yonder?'

The herald answered him, 'My lord, it is the castle of Azincourt.' Said the King, 'From henceforth this battle shall be known to posterity, by the name of the battle of Azincourt.'

Our English historians have made it Agincourt; but, under that name, it will ever be famous in English annals.

The loss upon the French side was enormous. Three Dukes were killed, two more were taken prisoners, seven Counts were killed, three more were taken prisoners, and ten thousand knights and gentlemen were slain upon the field. The English loss amounted to sixteen hundred men, among whom were the Duke of York and the Earl of Suffolk.

War is a dreadful thing; and it is appalling to know how the English were obliged, next morning, to kill those prisoners mortally wounded, who yet writhed in agony upon the ground; how the dead upon the French side were stripped by their own countrymen and countrywomen, and afterwards buried in great pits; how the dead upon the English side were piled up in a great barn, and how their bodies and the barn were all burned together. It is in such things, and in many more much too horrible to relate, that the real desolation and wickedness of war consist. Nothing can make war otherwise than horrible. But the dark side of it was little thought of and soon forgotten; and it cast no shade of trouble on the English people, except on those who had lost friends or relations in the fight. They welcomed their King home with shouts of rejoicing, and plunged into the water to bear him ashore on their shoulders, and flocked out in crowds to welcome him in every town through which he passed, and hung rich carpets and tapestries out of the windows, and strewed the streets with flowers, and made the fountains run with wine, as the great field of Agincourt had run with blood.

SECOND PART

That proud and wicked French nobility who dragged their country to destruction, and who were every day and every year regarded with deeper hatred and detestation in the hearts of the French people, learnt nothing, even from the defeat of Agincourt. So far from uniting against the common enemy, they became, among themselves, more violent, more bloody, and more false—if that were possible—than they had been before. The Count of Armagnac persuaded the French king to plunder of her treasures Queen Isabella of Bavaria, and to make her a prisoner. She, who had hitherto been the bitter enemy of the Duke of Burgundy, proposed to join him, in revenge. He carried her off to Troyes, where she proclaimed herself Regent of France, and made him her lieutenant. The Armagnac party were at that time possessed of Paris; but, one of the gates of the city being secretly opened on a certain night to a party of the duke's men, they got into Paris, threw into the prisons all the Armagnacs upon whom they could lay their hands, and, a few nights afterwards, with the aid of a furious mob of sixty thousand people, broke the prisons open, and killed them all. The former Dauphin was now dead, and the King's third son bore the title. Him, in the height of this murderous scene, a French knight hurried out of bed, wrapped in a sheet, and bore away to Poitiers. So, when the revengeful Isabella and the Duke of Burgundy entered Paris in triumph after the slaughter of their enemies, the Dauphin was proclaimed at Poitiers as the real Regent.

King Henry had not been idle since his victory of Agincourt, but had repulsed a brave attempt of the French to recover Harfleur; had gradually conquered a great part of Normandy; and, at this crisis of affairs, took the important town of Rouen, after a siege of half a year. This great loss so alarmed the French, that the Duke of Burgundy proposed that a meeting to treat of peace should be held between the French and the English kings in a plain by the river Seine. On the appointed day, King Henry appeared there, with his two brothers, Clarence and Gloucester, and a thousand men. The unfortunate French King, being more mad than usual that day, could not come; but the Queen came, and with her the Princess Catherine: who was a very lovely creature, and who made a real impression on King Henry, now that he saw her for the first time. This was the most important circumstance that arose out of the meeting.

As if it were impossible for a French nobleman of that time to be true to his word of honour in anything, Henry discovered that the Duke of Burgundy was, at that very moment, in secret treaty with the Dauphin; and he therefore abandoned the negotiation.

The Duke of Burgundy and the Dauphin, each of whom with the best reason distrusted the other as a noble ruffian surrounded by a party of noble ruffians, were rather at a loss how to proceed after this; but, at length they agreed to meet, on a bridge over the river Yonne, where it was arranged that there should be two strong gates put up, with an empty space between them; and that the Duke of Burgundy should come into that space by one gate, with ten men only; and that the Dauphin should come into that space by the other gate, also with ten men, and no more.

So far the Dauphin kept his word, but no farther. When the Duke of Burgundy was on his knee before him in the act of speaking, one of the Dauphin’s noble ruffians cut the said duke down with a small axe, and others speedily finished him.

It was in vain for the Dauphin to pretend that this base murder was not done with his consent; it was too bad, even for France, and caused a general horror. The duke’s heir hastened to make a treaty with King Henry, and the French Queen engaged that her husband should consent to it, whatever it was. Henry made peace, on condition of receiving the Princess Catherine in marriage, and being made Regent of France during the rest of the King’s lifetime, and succeeding to the French crown at his death. He was soon married to the beautiful Princess, and took her proudly home to England, where she was crowned with great honour and glory.

This peace was called the Perpetual Peace; we shall soon see how long it lasted. It gave great satisfaction to the French people, although they were so poor and miserable, that, at the time of the celebration of the Royal marriage, numbers of them were dying with starvation, on the dunghills in the streets of Paris. There was some resistance on the part of the Dauphin in some few parts of France, but King Henry beat it all down.

And now, with his great possessions in France secured, and his beautiful wife to cheer him, and a son born to give him greater happiness, all appeared bright before him. But, in the fulness of his triumph and the height of his power, Death came upon him, and his day was done. When he fell ill at Vincennes, and found that he could not recover, he was very calm and quiet, and spoke serenely to those who wept around his bed. His wife and child, he said, he left to the loving care of his brother the Duke of Bedford, and his other faithful nobles. He gave them his advice that England should establish a friendship with the new Duke of Burgundy, and offer him the regency of France; that it should not set free the royal princes who had been taken at Agincourt; and that, whatever quarrel might arise with France, England should never make peace without holding Normandy. Then, he laid down his head, and asked the attendant priests to chant the penitential psalms. Amid which solemn sounds, on the thirty-first of August, one thousand four hundred and twenty-two, in only the thirty-fourth year of his age and the tenth of his reign, King Henry the Fifth passed away.

Slowly and mournfully they carried his embalmed body in a procession of great state to Paris, and thence to Rouen where his Queen was: from whom the sad intelligence of his death was concealed until he had been dead some days. Thence, lying on a bed of crimson and gold, with a golden crown upon the head, and a golden ball and sceptre lying in the nerveless hands, they carried it to Calais, with such a great retinue as seemed to dye the road black. The King of Scotland acted as chief mourner, all the Royal Household followed, the knights wore black armour and black plumes of feathers, crowds of men bore torches, making the night as light as day; and the widowed Princess followed last of all. At Calais there was a fleet of ships to bring the funeral host to Dover. And so, by way of London Bridge, where the service for the dead was chanted as it passed along, they brought the body to Westminster Abbey, and there buried it with great respect.

CHAPTER XXII—ENGLAND UNDER HENRY THE SIXTH

PART THE FIRST

It had been the wish of the late King, that while his infant son King Henry the Sixth, at this time only nine months old, was under age, the Duke of Gloucester should be appointed Regent. The English Parliament, however, preferred to appoint a Council of Regency, with the Duke of Bedford at its head: to be represented, in his absence only, by the Duke of Gloucester. The Parliament would seem to have been wise in this, for Gloucester soon showed himself to be ambitious and troublesome, and, in the gratification of his own personal schemes, gave dangerous offence to the Duke of Burgundy, which was with difficulty adjusted.

As that duke declined the Regency of France, it was bestowed by the poor French King upon the Duke of Bedford. But, the French King dying within two months, the Dauphin instantly asserted his claim to the French throne, and was actually crowned under the title of Charles the Seventh. The Duke of Bedford, to be a match for him, entered into a friendly league with the Dukes of Burgundy and Brittany, and gave them his two sisters in marriage. War with France was immediately renewed, and the Perpetual Peace came to an untimely end.

In the first campaign, the English, aided by this alliance, were speedily successful. As Scotland, however, had sent the French five thousand men, and might send more, or attack the North of England while England was busy with France, it was considered that it would be a good thing to offer the Scottish King, James, who had been so long imprisoned, his liberty, on his paying forty thousand pounds for his board and lodging during nineteen years, and engaging to forbid his subjects from serving under the flag of France. It is pleasant to know, not only that the amiable captive at last regained his freedom upon these terms, but, that he married a noble English lady, with whom he had been long in love, and became an excellent King. I am afraid we have met with some Kings in this history, and shall meet with some more, who would have been very much the better, and would have left the world much happier, if they had been imprisoned nineteen years too.

In the second campaign, the English gained a considerable victory at Verneuil, in a battle which was chiefly remarkable, otherwise, for their resorting to the odd expedient of tying their baggage-horses together by the heads and tails, and jumbling them up with the baggage, so as to convert them into a sort of live fortification—which was found useful to the troops, but which I should think was not agreeable to the horses. For three years afterwards very little was done, owing to both sides being too poor for war, which is a very expensive entertainment; but, a council was then held in Paris, in which it was decided to lay siege to the town of Orleans, which was a place of great importance to the Dauphin's cause. An English army of ten thousand men was despatched on this service, under the command of the Earl of Salisbury, a general of fame. He being unfortunately killed early in the siege, the Earl of Suffolk took his place; under whom (reinforced by Sir John Falstaff, who brought up four hundred waggons laden with salt herrings and other provisions for the troops, and, beating off the French who tried to intercept him, came victorious out of a hot skirmish, which was afterwards called in jest the Battle of the Herrings) the town of Orleans was so completely hemmed in, that the besieged proposed to yield it up to their countryman the Duke of Burgundy. The English general, however, replied that his English men had won it, so far, by their blood and valour, and that his English men must have it. There seemed to be no hope for the town, or for the Dauphin, who was so dismayed that he even thought of flying to Scotland or to Spain—when a peasant girl rose up and changed the whole state of affairs.

The story of this peasant girl I have now to tell.

PART THE SECOND: THE STORY OF JOAN OF ARC

In a remote village among some wild hills in the province of Lorraine, there lived a countryman whose name was Jacques d'Arc. He had a daughter, Joan of Arc, who was at this time in her twentieth year. She had been a solitary girl from her childhood; she had often tended sheep and cattle for whole days where no human figure was seen or human voice heard; and she had often knelt, for hours together, in the gloomy, empty, little village chapel, looking up at the altar and at the dim lamp burning before it, until she fancied that she saw shadowy figures standing there, and even that she heard them speak to her. The people in that part of France were very ignorant and superstitious, and they had many ghostly tales to tell about what they had dreamed, and what they saw among the lonely hills when the clouds and the mists were resting on them. So, they easily believed that Joan saw strange sights, and they whispered among themselves that angels and spirits talked to her.

At last, Joan told her father that she had one day been surprised by a great unearthly light, and had afterwards heard a solemn voice, which said it was Saint Michael's voice, telling her that she was to go and help the Dauphin. Soon after this (she said), Saint Catherine and Saint Margaret had appeared to her with sparkling crowns upon their heads, and had encouraged her to be virtuous and resolute. These visions had returned sometimes; but the Voices very often; and the voices always said, 'Joan, thou art appointed by Heaven to go and help the Dauphin!' She almost always heard them while the chapel bells were ringing.

There is no doubt, now, that Joan believed she saw and heard these things. It is very well known that such delusions are a disease which is not by any means uncommon. It is probable enough that there were figures of Saint Michael, and Saint Catherine, and Saint Margaret, in the little chapel (where they would be very likely to have shining crowns upon their heads), and that they first gave Joan the idea of those three personages. She had long been a moping, fanciful girl, and, though she was a very good girl, I dare say she was a little vain, and wishful for notoriety.

Her father, something wiser than his neighbours, said, 'I tell thee, Joan, it is thy fancy. Thou hadst better have a kind husband to take care of thee, girl, and work to employ thy mind!' But Joan told him in reply, that she had taken a vow never to have a husband, and that she must go as Heaven directed her, to help the Dauphin.

It happened, unfortunately for her father's persuasions, and most unfortunately for the poor girl, too, that a party of the Dauphin's enemies found their way into the village while Joan's disorder was at this point, and burnt the chapel, and drove out the inhabitants. The cruelties she saw committed, touched Joan's heart and made her worse. She said that the voices and the figures were now continually with her; that they told her she was the girl who, according to an old prophecy, was to deliver France; and she must go and help the Dauphin, and must remain with him until he should be crowned at Rheims: and that she must travel a long way to a certain lord named Baudricourt, who could and would, bring her into the Dauphin's presence.

As her father still said, 'I tell thee, Joan, it is thy fancy,' she set off to find out this lord, accompanied by an uncle, a poor village wheelwright and cart-maker, who believed in the reality of her visions. They travelled a long way and went on and on, over a rough country, full of the Duke of Burgundy's men, and of all kinds of robbers and marauders, until they came to where this lord was.

When his servants told him that there was a poor peasant girl named Joan of Arc, accompanied by nobody but an old village wheelwright and cart-maker, who wished to see him because she was commanded to help the Dauphin and save France, Baudricourt burst out a-laughing, and bade them send the girl away. But, he soon heard so much about her lingering in the town, and praying in the churches, and seeing visions, and doing harm to no one, that he sent for her, and questioned her. As she said the same things after she had been well sprinkled with holy water as she had said before the sprinkling, Baudricourt began to think there might be something in it. At all events, he thought it worth while to send her on to the town of Chinon, where the Dauphin was. So, he bought her a horse, and a sword, and gave her two squires to conduct her. As the Voices had told Joan that she was to wear a man's dress, now, she put one on, and girded her sword to her side, and bound spurs to her heels, and mounted her horse and rode away with her two squires. As to her uncle the wheelwright, he stood staring at his niece in wonder until she was out of sight—as well he might—and then went home again. The best place, too.

Joan and her two squires rode on and on, until they came to Chinon, where she was, after some doubt, admitted into the Dauphin's presence. Picking him out immediately from all his court, she told him that she came commanded by Heaven to subdue his enemies and conduct him to his coronation at Rheims. She also told him (or he pretended so afterwards, to make the greater impression upon his soldiers) a number of his secrets known only to himself, and, furthermore, she said there was an old, old sword in the cathedral of Saint Catherine at Fierbois, marked with five old crosses on the blade, which Saint Catherine had ordered her to wear.

Now, nobody knew anything about this old, old sword, but when the cathedral came to be examined—which was immediately done—there, sure enough, the sword was found! The Dauphin then required a number of grave priests and bishops to give him their opinion whether the girl derived her power from good spirits or from evil spirits, which they held prodigiously long debates about, in the course of which several learned men fell fast asleep and snored loudly. At last, when one gruff old gentleman had said to Joan, 'What language do your Voices speak?' and when Joan had replied to the gruff old gentleman, 'A pleasanter language than yours,' they agreed that it was all correct, and that Joan of Arc was inspired from Heaven. This wonderful circumstance put new heart into the Dauphin's soldiers when they heard of it, and dispirited the English army, who took Joan for a witch.

So Joan mounted horse again, and again rode on and on, until she came to Orleans. But she rode now, as never peasant girl had ridden yet. She rode upon a white war-horse, in a suit of glittering armour; with the old, old sword from the cathedral, newly burnished, in her belt; with a white flag carried before her, upon which were a picture of God, and the words Jesus Maria. In this splendid state, at the head of a great body of troops escorting provisions of all kinds for the starving inhabitants of Orleans, she appeared before that beleaguered city.

When the people on the walls beheld her, they cried out 'The Maid is come! The Maid of the Prophecy is come to deliver us!' And this, and the sight of the Maid fighting at the head of their men, made the French so bold, and made the English so fearful, that the English line of forts was soon broken, the troops and provisions were got into the town, and Orleans was saved.

Joan, henceforth called The Maid of Orleans, remained within the walls for a few days, and caused letters to be thrown over, ordering Lord Suffolk and his Englishmen to depart from before the town according to the will of Heaven. As the English general very positively declined to believe that Joan knew anything about the will of Heaven (which did not mend the matter with his soldiers, for they stupidly said if she were not inspired she was a witch, and it was of no use to fight against a witch), she mounted her white war-horse again, and ordered her white banner to advance.

The besiegers held the bridge, and some strong towers upon the bridge; and here the Maid of Orleans attacked them. The fight was fourteen hours long. She planted a scaling ladder with her own hands, and mounted a tower wall, but was struck by an English arrow in the neck, and fell into the trench. She was carried away and the arrow was taken out, during which operation she screamed and cried with the pain, as any other girl might have done; but presently she said that the Voices were speaking to her and soothing her to rest. After a while, she got up, and was again foremost in the fight. When the English who had seen her fall and supposed her dead, saw this, they were troubled with the strangest fears, and some of them cried out that they beheld Saint Michael on a white horse (probably Joan herself) fighting for the French. They lost the bridge, and lost the towers, and next day set their chain of forts on fire, and left the place.

But as Lord Suffolk himself retired no farther than the town of Jargeau, which was only a few miles off, the Maid of Orleans besieged him there, and he was taken prisoner. As the white banner scaled the wall, she was struck upon the head with a stone, and was again tumbled down into the ditch; but, she only cried all the more, as she lay there, ‘On, on, my countrymen! And fear nothing, for the Lord hath delivered them into our hands!’ After this new success of the Maid’s, several other fortresses and places which had previously held out against the Dauphin were delivered up without a battle; and at Patay she defeated the remainder of the English army, and set up her victorious white banner on a field where twelve hundred Englishmen lay dead.

She now urged the Dauphin (who always kept out of the way when there was any fighting) to proceed to Rheims, as the first part of her mission was accomplished; and to complete the whole by being crowned there. The Dauphin was in no particular hurry to do this, as Rheims was a long way off, and the English and the Duke of Burgundy were still strong in the country through which the road lay. However, they set forth, with ten thousand men, and again the Maid of Orleans rode on and on, upon her white war-horse, and in her shining armour. Whenever they came to a town which yielded readily, the soldiers believed in her; but, whenever they came to a town which gave them any trouble, they began to murmur that she was an impostor. The latter was particularly the case at Troyes, which finally yielded, however, through the persuasion of one Richard, a friar of the place. Friar Richard was in the old doubt about the Maid of Orleans, until he had sprinkled her well with holy water, and had also well sprinkled the threshold of the gate by which she came into the city. Finding that it made no change in her or the gate, he said, as the other grave old gentlemen had said, that it was all right, and became her great ally.

So, at last, by dint of riding on and on, the Maid of Orleans, and the Dauphin, and the ten thousand sometimes believing and sometimes unbelieving men, came to Rheims. And in the great cathedral of Rheims, the Dauphin actually was crowned Charles the Seventh in a great assembly of the people. Then, the Maid, who with her white banner stood beside the King in that hour of his triumph, kneeled down upon the pavement at his feet, and said, with tears, that what she had been inspired to do, was done, and that the only recompense she asked for, was, that she should now have leave to go back to her distant home, and her sturdily incredulous father, and her first simple escort the village wheelwright and cart-maker. But the King said 'No!' and made her and her family as noble as a King could, and settled upon her the income of a Count.

Ah! happy had it been for the Maid of Orleans, if she had resumed her rustic dress that day, and had gone home to the little chapel and the wild hills, and had forgotten all these things, and had been a good man's wife, and had heard no stranger voices than the voices of little children!

It was not to be, and she continued helping the King (she did a world for him, in alliance with Friar Richard), and trying to improve the lives of the coarse soldiers, and leading a religious, an unselfish, and a modest life, herself, beyond any doubt. Still, many times she prayed the King to let her go home; and once she even took off her bright armour and hung it up in a church, meaning never to wear it more. But, the King always won her back again—while she was of any use to him—and so she went on and on and on, to her doom.

When the Duke of Bedford, who was a very able man, began to be active for England, and, by bringing the war back into France and by holding the Duke of Burgundy to his faith, to distress and disturb Charles very much, Charles sometimes asked the Maid of Orleans what the Voices said about it? But, the Voices had become (very like ordinary voices in perplexed times) contradictory and confused, so that now they said one thing, and now said another, and the Maid lost credit every day. Charles marched on Paris, which was opposed to him, and attacked the suburb of Saint Honoré. In this fight, being again struck down into the ditch, she was abandoned by the whole army. She lay unaided among a heap of dead, and crawled out how she could. Then, some of her believers went over to an opposition Maid, Catherine of La Rochelle, who said she was inspired to tell where there were treasures of buried money—though she never did—and then Joan accidentally broke the old, old sword, and others said that her power was broken with it. Finally, at the siege of Compiègne, held by the Duke of Burgundy, where she did valiant service, she was basely left alone in a retreat, though facing about and fighting to the last; and an archer pulled her off her horse.

O the uproar that was made, and the thanksgivings that were sung, about the capture of this one poor country-girl! O the way in which she was demanded to be tried for sorcery and heresy, and anything else you like, by the Inquisitor-General of France, and by this great man, and by that great man, until it is wearisome to think of! She was bought at last by the Bishop of Beauvais for ten thousand francs, and was shut up in her narrow prison: plain Joan of Arc again, and Maid of Orleans no more.

I should never have done if I were to tell you how they had Joan out to examine her, and cross-examine her, and re-examine her, and worry her into saying anything and everything; and how all sorts of scholars and doctors bestowed their utmost tediousness upon her. Sixteen times she was brought out and shut up again, and worried, and entrapped, and argued with, until she was heart-sick of the dreary business. On the last occasion of this kind she was brought into a burial-place at Rouen, dismally decorated with a scaffold, and a stake and faggots, and the executioner, and a pulpit with a friar therein, and an awful sermon ready. It is very affecting to know that even at that pass the poor girl honoured the mean vermin of a King, who had so used her for his purposes and so abandoned her; and, that while she had been regardless of reproaches heaped upon herself, she spoke out courageously for him.

It was natural in one so young to hold to life. To save her life, she signed a declaration prepared for her—signed it with a cross, for she couldn’t write—that all her visions and Voices had come from the Devil. Upon her recanting the past, and protesting that she would never wear a man’s dress in future, she was condemned to imprisonment for life, ‘on the bread of sorrow and the water of affliction.’

But, on the bread of sorrow and the water of affliction, the visions and the Voices soon returned. It was quite natural that they should do so, for that kind of disease is much aggravated by fasting, loneliness, and anxiety of mind. It was not only got out of Joan that she considered herself inspired again, but, she was taken in a man’s dress, which had been left—to entrap her—in her prison, and which she put on, in her solitude; perhaps, in remembrance of her past glories, perhaps, because the imaginary Voices told her. For this relapse into the sorcery and heresy and anything else you like, she was sentenced to be burnt to death. And, in the market-place of Rouen, in the hideous dress which the monks had invented for such spectacles; with priests and bishops sitting in a gallery looking on, though some had the Christian grace to go away, unable to endure the infamous scene; this shrieking girl—last seen amidst the smoke and fire, holding a crucifix between her hands; last heard, calling upon Christ—was burnt to ashes. They threw her ashes into the river Seine; but they will rise against her murderers on the last day.

From the moment of her capture, neither the French King nor one single man in all his court raised a finger to save her. It is no defence of them that they may have never really believed in her, or that they may have won her victories by their skill and bravery. The more they pretended to believe in her, the more they had caused her to believe in herself; and she had ever been true to them, ever brave, ever nobly devoted. But, it is no wonder, that they, who were in all things false to themselves, false to one another, false to their country, false to Heaven, false to Earth, should be monsters of ingratitude and treachery to a helpless peasant girl.

In the picturesque old town of Rouen, where weeds and grass grow high on the cathedral towers, and the venerable Norman streets are still warm in the blessed sunlight though the monkish fires that once gleamed horribly upon them have long grown cold, there is a statue of Joan of Arc, in the scene of her last agony, the square to which she has given its present name. I know some statues of modern times—even in the World’s metropolis, I think—which commemorate less constancy, less earnestness, smaller claims upon the world’s attention, and much greater impostors.

PART THE THIRD

Bad deeds seldom prosper, happily for mankind; and the English cause gained no advantage from the cruel death of Joan of Arc. For a long time, the war went heavily on. The Duke of Bedford died; the alliance with the Duke of Burgundy was broken; and Lord Talbot became a great general on the English side in France. But, two of the consequences of wars are, Famine—because the people cannot peacefully cultivate the ground—and Pestilence, which comes of want, misery, and suffering. Both these horrors broke out in both countries, and lasted for two wretched years. Then, the war went on again, and came by slow degrees to be so badly conducted by the English government, that, within twenty years from the execution of the Maid of Orleans, of all the great French conquests, the town of Calais alone remained in English hands.

While these victories and defeats were taking place in the course of time, many strange things happened at home. The young King, as he grew up, proved to be very unlike his great father, and showed himself a miserable puny creature. There was no harm in him—he had a great aversion to shedding blood: which was something—but, he was a weak, silly, helpless young man, and a mere shuttlecock to the great lordly battledores about the Court.

Of these battledores, Cardinal Beaufort, a relation of the King, and the Duke of Gloucester, were at first the most powerful. The Duke of Gloucester had a wife, who was nonsensically accused of practising witchcraft to cause the King's death and lead to her husband's coming to the throne, he being the next heir. She was charged with having, by the help of a ridiculous old woman named Margery (who was called a witch), made a little waxen doll in the King's likeness, and put it before a slow fire that it might gradually melt away. It was supposed, in such cases, that the death of the person whom the doll was made to represent, was sure to happen. Whether the duchess was as ignorant as the rest of them, and really did make such a doll with such an intention, I don't know; but, you and I know very well that she might have made a thousand dolls, if she had been stupid enough, and might have melted them all, without hurting the King or anybody else. However, she was tried for it, and so was old Margery, and so was one of the duke's chaplains, who was charged with having assisted them. Both he and Margery were put to death, and the duchess, after being taken on foot and bearing a lighted candle, three times round the City, as a penance, was imprisoned for life. The duke, himself, took all this pretty quietly, and made as little stir about the matter as if he were rather glad to be rid of the duchess.

But, he was not destined to keep himself out of trouble long. The royal shuttlecock being three-and-twenty, the battledores were very anxious to get him married. The Duke of Gloucester wanted him to marry a daughter of the Count of Armagnac; but, the Cardinal and the Earl of Suffolk were all for Margaret, the daughter of the King of Sicily, who they knew was a resolute, ambitious woman and would govern the King as she chose. To make friends with this lady, the Earl of Suffolk, who went over to arrange the match, consented to accept her for the King's wife without any fortune, and even to give up the two most valuable possessions England then had in France. So, the marriage was arranged, on terms very advantageous to the lady; and Lord Suffolk brought her to England, and she was married at Westminster. On what pretence this queen and her party charged the Duke of Gloucester with high treason within a couple of years, it is impossible to make out, the matter is so confused; but, they pretended that the King's life was in danger, and they took the duke prisoner. A fortnight afterwards, he was found dead in bed (they said), and his body was shown to the people, and Lord Suffolk came in for the best part of his estates. You know by this time how strangely liable state prisoners were to sudden death.

If Cardinal Beaufort had any hand in this matter, it did him no good, for he died within six weeks; thinking it very hard and curious—at eighty years old!—that he could not live to be Pope.

This was the time when England had completed her loss of all her great French conquests. The people charged the loss principally upon the Earl of Suffolk, now a duke, who had made those easy terms about the Royal Marriage, and who, they believed, had even been bought by France. So he was impeached as a traitor, on a great number of charges, but chiefly on accusations of having aided the French King, and of designing to make his own son King of England. The Commons and the people being violent against him, the King was made (by his friends) to interpose to save him, by banishing him for five years, and proroguing the Parliament. The duke had much ado to escape from a London mob, two thousand strong, who lay in wait for him in St. Giles's fields; but, he got down to his own estates in Suffolk, and sailed away from Ipswich. Sailing across the Channel, he sent into Calais to know if he might land there; but, they kept his boat and men in the harbour, until an English ship, carrying a hundred and fifty men and called the Nicholas of the Tower, came alongside his little vessel, and ordered him on board. 'Welcome, traitor, as men say,' was the captain's grim and not very respectful salutation. He was kept on board, a prisoner, for eight-and-forty hours, and then a small boat appeared rowing toward the ship. As this boat came nearer, it was seen to have in it a block, a rusty sword, and an executioner in a black mask. The duke was handed down into it, and there his head was cut off with six strokes of the rusty sword. Then, the little boat rowed away to Dover beach, where the body was cast out, and left until the duchess claimed it. By whom, high in authority, this murder was committed, has never appeared. No one was ever punished for it.

There now arose in Kent an Irishman, who gave himself the name of Mortimer, but whose real name was Jack Cade. Jack, in imitation of Wat Tyler, though he was a very different and inferior sort of man, addressed the Kentish men upon their wrongs, occasioned by the bad government of England, among so many battledores and such a poor shuttlecock; and the Kentish men rose up to the number of twenty thousand. Their place of assembly was Blackheath, where, headed by Jack, they put forth two papers, which they called 'The Complaint of the Commons of Kent,' and 'The Requests of the Captain of the Great Assembly in Kent.' They then retired to Sevenoaks. The royal army coming up with them here, they beat it and killed their general. Then, Jack dressed himself in the dead general's armour, and led his men to London.

Jack passed into the City from Southwark, over the bridge, and entered it in triumph, giving the strictest orders to his men not to plunder. Having made a show of his forces there, while the citizens looked on quietly, he went back into Southwark in good order, and passed the night. Next day, he came back again, having got hold in the meantime of Lord Say, an unpopular nobleman. Says Jack to the Lord Mayor and judges: 'Will you be so good as to make a tribunal in Guildhall, and try me this nobleman?' The court being hastily made, he was found guilty, and Jack and his men cut his head off on Cornhill. They also cut off the head of his son-in-law, and then went back in good order to Southwark again.

But, although the citizens could bear the beheading of an unpopular lord, they could not bear to have their houses pillaged. And it did so happen that Jack, after dinner—perhaps he had drunk a little too much—began to plunder the house where he lodged; upon which, of course, his men began to imitate him. Wherefore, the Londoners took counsel with Lord Scales, who had a thousand soldiers in the Tower; and defended London Bridge, and kept Jack and his people out. This advantage gained, it was resolved by divers great men to divide Jack's army in the old way, by making a great many promises on behalf of the state, that were never intended to be performed. This *did* divide them; some of Jack's men saying that they ought to take the conditions which were offered, and others saying that they ought not, for they were only a snare; some going home at once; others staying where they were; and all doubting and quarrelling among themselves.

Jack, who was in two minds about fighting or accepting a pardon, and who indeed did both, saw at last that there was nothing to expect from his men, and that it was very likely some of them would deliver him up and get a reward of a thousand marks, which was offered for his apprehension. So, after they had travelled and quarrelled all the way from Southwark to Blackheath, and from Blackheath to Rochester, he mounted a good horse and galloped away into Sussex. But, there galloped after him, on a better horse, one Alexander Iden, who came up with him, had a hard fight with him, and killed him. Jack's head was set aloft on London Bridge, with the face looking towards Blackheath, where he had raised his flag; and Alexander Iden got the thousand marks.

It is supposed by some, that the Duke of York, who had been removed from a high post abroad through the Queen's influence, and sent out of the way, to govern Ireland, was at the bottom of this rising of Jack and his men, because he wanted to trouble the government. He claimed (though not yet publicly) to have a better right to the throne than Henry of Lancaster, as one of the family of the Earl of March, whom Henry the Fourth had set aside. Touching this claim, which, being through female relationship, was not according to the usual descent, it is enough to say that Henry the Fourth was the free choice of the people and the Parliament, and that his family had now reigned undisputed for sixty years. The memory of Henry the Fifth was so famous, and the English people loved it so much, that the Duke of York's claim would, perhaps, never have been thought of (it would have been so hopeless) but for the unfortunate circumstance of the present King's being by this time quite an idiot, and the country very ill governed. These two circumstances gave the Duke of York a power he could not otherwise have had.

Whether the Duke knew anything of Jack Cade, or not, he came over from Ireland while Jack's head was on London Bridge; being secretly advised that the Queen was setting up his enemy, the Duke of Somerset, against him. He went to Westminster, at the head of four thousand men, and on his knees before the King, represented to him the bad state of the country, and petitioned him to summon a Parliament to consider it. This the King promised. When the Parliament was summoned, the Duke of York accused the Duke of Somerset, and the Duke of Somerset accused the Duke of York; and, both in and out of Parliament, the followers of each party were full of violence and hatred towards the other. At length the Duke of York put himself at the head of a large force of his tenants, and, in arms, demanded the reformation of the Government. Being shut out of London, he encamped at Dartford, and the royal army encamped at Blackheath. According as either side triumphed, the Duke of York was arrested, or the Duke of Somerset was arrested. The trouble ended, for the moment, in the Duke of York renewing his oath of allegiance, and going in peace to one of his own castles.

Half a year afterwards the Queen gave birth to a son, who was very ill received by the people, and not believed to be the son of the King. It shows the Duke of York to have been a moderate man, unwilling to involve England in new troubles, that he did not take advantage of the general discontent at this time, but really acted for the public good. He was made a member of the cabinet, and the King being now so much worse that he could not be carried about and shown to the people with any decency, the duke was made Lord Protector of the kingdom, until the King should recover, or the Prince should come of age. At the same time the Duke of Somerset was committed to the Tower. So, now the Duke of Somerset was down, and the Duke of York was up. By the end of the year, however, the King recovered his memory and some spark of sense; upon which the Queen used her power—which recovered with him—to get the Protector disgraced, and her favourite released. So now the Duke of York was down, and the Duke of Somerset was up.

These ducal ups and downs gradually separated the whole nation into the two parties of York and Lancaster, and led to those terrible civil wars long known as the Wars of the Red and White Roses, because the red rose was the badge of the House of Lancaster, and the white rose was the badge of the House of York.

The Duke of York, joined by some other powerful noblemen of the White Rose party, and leading a small army, met the King with another small army at St. Alban's, and demanded that the Duke of Somerset should be given up. The poor King, being made to say in answer that he would sooner die, was instantly attacked. The Duke of Somerset was killed, and the King himself was wounded in the neck, and took refuge in the house of a poor tanner. Whereupon, the Duke of York went to him, led him with great submission to the Abbey, and said he was very sorry for what had happened. Having now the King in his possession, he got a Parliament summoned and himself once more made Protector, but, only for a few months; for, on the King getting a little better again, the Queen and her party got him into their possession, and disgraced the Duke once more. So, now the Duke of York was down again.

Some of the best men in power, seeing the danger of these constant changes, tried even then to prevent the Red and the White Rose Wars. They brought about a great council in London between the two parties. The White Roses assembled in Blackfriars, the Red Roses in Whitefriars; and some good priests communicated between them, and made the proceedings known at evening to the King and the judges. They ended in a peaceful agreement that there should be no more quarrelling; and there was a great royal procession to St. Paul’s, in which the Queen walked arm-in-arm with her old enemy, the Duke of York, to show the people how comfortable they all were. This state of peace lasted half a year, when a dispute between the Earl of Warwick (one of the Duke’s powerful friends) and some of the King’s servants at Court, led to an attack upon that Earl—who was a White Rose—and to a sudden breaking out of all old animosities. So, here were greater ups and downs than ever.

There were even greater ups and downs than these, soon after. After various battles, the Duke of York fled to Ireland, and his son the Earl of March to Calais, with their friends the Earls of Salisbury and Warwick; and a Parliament was held declaring them all traitors. Little the worse for this, the Earl of Warwick presently came back, landed in Kent, was joined by the Archbishop of Canterbury and other powerful noblemen and gentlemen, engaged the King’s forces at Northampton, signally defeated them, and took the King himself prisoner, who was found in his tent. Warwick would have been glad, I dare say, to have taken the Queen and Prince too, but they escaped into Wales and thence into Scotland.

The King was carried by the victorious force straight to London, and made to call a new Parliament, which immediately declared that the Duke of York and those other noblemen were not traitors, but excellent subjects. Then, back comes the Duke from Ireland at the head of five hundred horsemen, rides from London to Westminster, and enters the House of Lords. There, he laid his hand upon the cloth of gold which covered the empty throne, as if he had half a mind to sit down in it—but he did not. On the Archbishop of Canterbury, asking him if he would visit the King, who was in his palace close by, he replied, ‘I know no one in this country, my lord, who ought not to visit *me*.’ None of the lords present spoke a single word; so, the duke went out as he had come in, established himself royally in the King’s palace, and, six days afterwards, sent in to the Lords a formal statement of his claim to the throne. The lords went to the King on this momentous subject, and after a great deal of discussion, in which the judges and the other law officers were afraid to give an opinion on either side, the question was compromised. It was agreed that the present King should retain the crown for his life, and that it should then pass to the Duke of York and his heirs.

But, the resolute Queen, determined on asserting her son’s right, would hear of no such thing. She came from Scotland to the north of England, where several powerful lords armed in her cause. The Duke of York, for his part, set off with some five thousand men, a little time before Christmas Day, one thousand four hundred and sixty, to give her battle. He lodged at Sandal Castle, near Wakefield, and the Red Roses defied him to come out on Wakefield Green, and fight them then and there. His generals said, he had best wait until his gallant son, the Earl of March, came up with his power; but, he was determined to accept the challenge. He did so, in an evil hour. He was hotly pressed on all sides, two thousand of his men lay dead on Wakefield Green, and he himself was taken prisoner. They set him down in mock state on an ant-hill, and twisted grass about his head, and pretended to pay court to him on their knees, saying, ‘O King, without a kingdom, and Prince without a people, we hope your gracious Majesty is very well and happy!’ They did worse than this; they cut his head off, and handed it on a pole to the Queen, who laughed with delight when she saw it (you recollect their walking so religiously and comfortably to St. Paul’s!), and had it fixed, with a paper crown upon its head, on the walls of York. The Earl of Salisbury lost his head, too; and the Duke of York’s second son, a handsome boy who was flying with his tutor over Wakefield Bridge, was stabbed in the heart by a murderous, lord—Lord Clifford by name—whose father had been killed by the White Roses in the fight at St. Alban’s. There was awful sacrifice of life in this battle, for no quarter was given, and the

Queen was wild for revenge. When men unnaturally fight against their own countrymen, they are always observed to be more unnaturally cruel and filled with rage than they are against any other enemy.

But, Lord Clifford had stabbed the second son of the Duke of York—not the first. The eldest son, Edward Earl of March, was at Gloucester; and, vowing vengeance for the death of his father, his brother, and their faithful friends, he began to march against the Queen. He had to turn and fight a great body of Welsh and Irish first, who worried his advance. These he defeated in a great fight at Mortimer's Cross, near Hereford, where he beheaded a number of the Red Roses taken in battle, in retaliation for the beheading of the White Roses at Wakefield. The Queen had the next turn of beheading. Having moved towards London, and falling in, between St. Alban's and Barnet, with the Earl of Warwick and the Duke of Norfolk, White Roses both, who were there with an army to oppose her, and had got the King with them; she defeated them with great loss, and struck off the heads of two prisoners of note, who were in the King's tent with him, and to whom the King had promised his protection. Her triumph, however, was very short. She had no treasure, and her army subsisted by plunder. This caused them to be hated and dreaded by the people, and particularly by the London people, who were wealthy. As soon as the Londoners heard that Edward, Earl of March, united with the Earl of Warwick, was advancing towards the city, they refused to send the Queen supplies, and made a great rejoicing.

The Queen and her men retreated with all speed, and Edward and Warwick came on, greeted with loud acclamations on every side. The courage, beauty, and virtues of young Edward could not be sufficiently praised by the whole people. He rode into London like a conqueror, and met with an enthusiastic welcome. A few days afterwards, Lord Falconbridge and the Bishop of Exeter assembled the citizens in St. John's Field, Clerkenwell, and asked them if they would have Henry of Lancaster for their King? To this they all roared, 'No, no, no!' and 'King Edward! King Edward!' Then, said those noblemen, would they love and serve young Edward? To this they all cried, 'Yes, yes!' and threw up their caps and clapped their hands, and cheered tremendously.

Therefore, it was declared that by joining the Queen and not protecting those two prisoners of note, Henry of Lancaster had forfeited the crown; and Edward of York was proclaimed King. He made a great speech to the applauding people at Westminster, and sat down as sovereign of England on that throne, on the golden covering of which his father—worthy of a better fate than the bloody axe which cut the thread of so many lives in England, through so many years—had laid his hand.

CHAPTER XXIII—ENGLAND UNDER EDWARD THE FOURTH

King Edward the Fourth was not quite twenty-one years of age when he took that unquiet seat upon the throne of England. The Lancaster party, the Red Roses, were then assembling in great numbers near York, and it was necessary to give them battle instantly. But, the stout Earl of Warwick leading for the young King, and the young King himself closely following him, and the English people crowding round the Royal standard, the White and the Red Roses met, on a wild March day when the snow was falling heavily, at Towton; and there such a furious battle raged between them, that the total loss amounted to forty thousand men—all Englishmen, fighting, upon English ground, against one another. The young King gained the day, took down the heads of his father and brother from the walls of York, and put up the heads of some of the most famous noblemen engaged in the battle on the other side. Then, he went to London and was crowned with great splendour.

A new Parliament met. No fewer than one hundred and fifty of the principal noblemen and gentlemen on the Lancaster side were declared traitors, and the King—who had very little humanity, though he was handsome in person and agreeable in manners—resolved to do all he could, to pluck up the Red Rose root and branch.

Queen Margaret, however, was still active for her young son. She obtained help from Scotland and from Normandy, and took several important English castles. But, Warwick soon retook them; the Queen lost all her treasure on board ship in a great storm; and both she and her son suffered great misfortunes. Once, in the winter weather, as they were riding through a forest, they were attacked and plundered by a party of robbers; and, when they had escaped from these men and were passing alone and on foot through a thick dark part of the wood, they came, all at once, upon another robber. So the Queen, with a stout heart, took the little Prince by the hand, and going straight up to that robber, said to him, ‘My friend, this is the young son of your lawful King! I confide him to your care.’ The robber was surprised, but took the boy in his arms, and faithfully restored him and his mother to their friends. In the end, the Queen's soldiers being beaten and dispersed, she went abroad again, and kept quiet for the present.

Now, all this time, the deposed King Henry was concealed by a Welsh knight, who kept him close in his castle. But, next year, the Lancaster party recovering their spirits, raised a large body of men, and called him out of his retirement, to put him at their head. They were joined by some powerful noblemen who had sworn fidelity to the new King, but who were ready, as usual, to break their oaths, whenever they thought there was anything to be got by it. One of the worst things in the history of the war of the Red and White Roses, is the ease with which these noblemen, who should have set an example of honour to the people, left either side as they took slight offence, or were disappointed in their greedy expectations, and joined the other. Well! Warwick's brother soon beat the Lancastrians, and the false noblemen, being taken, were beheaded without a moment's loss of time. The deposed King had a narrow escape; three of his servants were taken, and one of them bore his cap of estate, which was set with pearls and embroidered with two golden crowns. However, the head to which the cap belonged, got safely into Lancashire, and lay pretty quietly there (the people in the secret being very true) for more than a year. At length, an old monk gave such intelligence as led to Henry's being taken while he was sitting at dinner in a place called Waddington Hall. He was immediately sent to London, and met at Islington by the Earl of Warwick, by whose directions he was put upon a horse, with his legs tied under it, and paraded three times round the pillory. Then, he was carried off to the Tower, where they treated him well enough.

The White Rose being so triumphant, the young King abandoned himself entirely to pleasure, and led a jovial life. But, thorns were springing up under his bed of roses, as he soon found out. For, having been privately married to Elizabeth Woodville, a young widow lady, very beautiful and very captivating; and at last resolving to make his secret known, and to declare her his Queen; he gave some offence to the Earl of Warwick, who was usually called the King-Maker, because of his power and influence, and because of his having lent such great help to placing Edward on the throne. This offence was not lessened by the jealousy with which the Nevil family (the Earl of Warwick's) regarded the promotion of the Woodville family. For, the young Queen was so bent on providing for her relations, that she made her father an earl and a great officer of state;

married her five sisters to young noblemen of the highest rank; and provided for her younger brother, a young man of twenty, by marrying him to an immensely rich old duchess of eighty. The Earl of Warwick took all this pretty graciously for a man of his proud temper, until the question arose to whom the King's sister, Margaret, should be married. The Earl of Warwick said, 'To one of the French King's sons,' and was allowed to go over to the French King to make friendly proposals for that purpose, and to hold all manner of friendly interviews with him. But, while he was so engaged, the Woodville party married the young lady to the Duke of Burgundy! Upon this he came back in great rage and scorn, and shut himself up discontented, in his Castle of Middleham.

A reconciliation, though not a very sincere one, was patched up between the Earl of Warwick and the King, and lasted until the Earl married his daughter, against the King's wishes, to the Duke of Clarence. While the marriage was being celebrated at Calais, the people in the north of England, where the influence of the Nevil family was strongest, broke out into rebellion; their complaint was, that England was oppressed and plundered by the Woodville family, whom they demanded to have removed from power. As they were joined by great numbers of people, and as they openly declared that they were supported by the Earl of Warwick, the King did not know what to do. At last, as he wrote to the earl beseeching his aid, he and his new son-in-law came over to England, and began to arrange the business by shutting the King up in Middleham Castle in the safe keeping of the Archbishop of York; so England was not only in the strange position of having two kings at once, but they were both prisoners at the same time.

Even as yet, however, the King-Maker was so far true to the King, that he dispersed a new rising of the Lancastrians, took their leader prisoner, and brought him to the King, who ordered him to be immediately executed. He presently allowed the King to return to London, and there innumerable pledges of forgiveness and friendship were exchanged between them, and between the Nevils and the Woodvilles; the King's eldest daughter was promised in marriage to the heir of the Nevil family; and more friendly oaths were sworn, and more friendly promises made, than this book would hold.

They lasted about three months. At the end of that time, the Archbishop of York made a feast for the King, the Earl of Warwick, and the Duke of Clarence, at his house, the Moor, in Hertfordshire. The King was washing his hands before supper, when some one whispered him that a body of a hundred men were lying in ambush outside the house. Whether this were true or untrue, the King took fright, mounted his horse, and rode through the dark night to Windsor Castle. Another reconciliation was patched up between him and the King-Maker, but it was a short one, and it was the last. A new rising took place in Lincolnshire, and the King marched to repress it. Having done so, he proclaimed that both the Earl of Warwick and the Duke of Clarence were traitors, who had secretly assisted it, and who had been prepared publicly to join it on the following day. In these dangerous circumstances they both took ship and sailed away to the French court.

And here a meeting took place between the Earl of Warwick and his old enemy, the Dowager Queen Margaret, through whom his father had had his head struck off, and to whom he had been a bitter foe. But, now, when he said that he had done with the ungrateful and perfidious Edward of York, and that henceforth he devoted himself to the restoration of the House of Lancaster, either in the person of her husband or of her little son, she embraced him as if he had ever been her dearest friend. She did more than that; she married her son to his second daughter, the Lady Anne. However agreeable this marriage was to the new friends, it was very disagreeable to the Duke of Clarence, who perceived that his father-in-law, the King-Maker, would never make *him* King, now. So, being but a weak-minded young traitor, possessed of very little worth or sense, he readily listened to an artful court lady sent over for the purpose, and promised to turn traitor once more, and go over to his brother, King Edward, when a fitting opportunity should come.

The Earl of Warwick, knowing nothing of this, soon redeemed his promise to the Dowager Queen Margaret, by invading England and landing at Plymouth, where he instantly proclaimed King Henry, and summoned all Englishmen between the ages of sixteen and sixty, to join his banner. Then, with his army increasing as he marched along, he went northward, and came so near King Edward, who was in that part of the country, that Edward had to ride hard for it to the coast of Norfolk, and thence to get away in such ships as he could find, to Holland. Thereupon, the triumphant King-Maker and his false son-in-law, the Duke of Clarence, went to London, took the old King out of the Tower, and walked him in a great procession to Saint Paul's Cathedral with the crown upon his head. This did not improve the temper of the Duke of Clarence, who saw himself farther off from being King than ever; but he kept his secret, and said nothing. The Nevil family were restored to all their honours and glories, and the Woodvilles and the rest were disgraced. The King-Maker, less sanguinary than the King, shed no blood except that of the Earl of Worcester, who had been so cruel to the people as to have gained the title of the Butcher. Him they caught hidden in a tree, and him they tried and executed. No other death stained the King-Maker's triumph.

To dispute this triumph, back came King Edward again, next year, landing at Ravenspur, coming on to York, causing all his men to cry 'Long live King Henry!' and swearing on the altar, without a blush, that he came to lay no claim to the crown. Now was the time for the Duke of Clarence, who ordered his men to assume the White Rose, and declare for his brother. The Marquis of Montague, though the Earl of Warwick's brother, also declining to fight against King Edward, he went on successfully to London, where the Archbishop of York let him into the City, and where the people made great demonstrations in his favour. For this they had four reasons. Firstly, there were great numbers of the King's adherents hiding in the City and ready to break out; secondly, the King owed them a great deal of money, which they could never hope to get if he were unsuccessful; thirdly, there was a young prince to inherit the crown; and fourthly, the King was gay and handsome, and more popular than a better man might have been with the City ladies. After a stay of only two days with these worthy supporters, the King marched out to Barnet Common, to give the Earl of Warwick battle. And now it was to be seen, for the last time, whether the King or the King-Maker was to carry the day.

While the battle was yet pending, the fainthearted Duke of Clarence began to repent, and sent over secret messages to his father-in-law, offering his services in mediation with the King. But, the Earl of Warwick disdainfully rejected them, and replied that Clarence was false and perjured, and that he would settle the quarrel by the sword. The battle began at four o'clock in the morning and lasted until ten, and during the greater part of the time it was fought in a thick mist—absurdly supposed to be raised by a magician. The loss of life was very great, for the hatred was strong on both sides. The King-Maker was defeated, and the King triumphed. Both the Earl of Warwick and his brother were slain, and their bodies lay in St. Paul's, for some days, as a spectacle to the people.

Margaret’s spirit was not broken even by this great blow. Within five days she was in arms again, and raised her standard in Bath, whence she set off with her army, to try and join Lord Pembroke, who had a force in Wales. But, the King, coming up with her outside the town of Tewkesbury, and ordering his brother, the Duke of Gloucester, who was a brave soldier, to attack her men, she sustained an entire defeat, and was taken prisoner, together with her son, now only eighteen years of age. The conduct of the King to this poor youth was worthy of his cruel character. He ordered him to be led into his tent. ‘And what,’ said he, ‘brought *you* to England?’ ‘I came to England,’ replied the prisoner, with a spirit which a man of spirit might have admired in a captive, ‘to recover my father’s kingdom, which descended to him as his right, and from him descends to me, as mine.’ The King, drawing off his iron gauntlet, struck him with it in the face; and the Duke of Clarence and some other lords, who were there, drew their noble swords, and killed him.

His mother survived him, a prisoner, for five years; after her ransom by the King of France, she survived for six years more. Within three weeks of this murder, Henry died one of those convenient sudden deaths which were so common in the Tower; in plainer words, he was murdered by the King’s order.

Having no particular excitement on his hands after this great defeat of the Lancaster party, and being perhaps desirous to get rid of some of his fat (for he was now getting too corpulent to be handsome), the King thought of making war on France. As he wanted more money for this purpose than the Parliament could give him, though they were usually ready enough for war, he invented a new way of raising it, by sending for the principal citizens of London, and telling them, with a grave face, that he was very much in want of cash, and would take it very kind in them if they would lend him some. It being impossible for them safely to refuse, they complied, and the moneys thus forced from them were called—no doubt to the great amusement of the King and the Court—as if they were free gifts, ‘Benevolences.’ What with grants from Parliament, and what with Benevolences, the King raised an army and passed over to Calais. As nobody wanted war, however, the French King made proposals of peace, which were accepted, and a truce was concluded for seven long years. The proceedings between the Kings of France and England on this occasion, were very friendly, very splendid, and very distrustful. They finished with a meeting between the two Kings, on a temporary bridge over the river Somme, where they embraced through two holes in a strong wooden grating like a lion's cage, and made several bows and fine speeches to one another.

It was time, now, that the Duke of Clarence should be punished for his treacheries; and Fate had his punishment in store. He was, probably, not trusted by the King—for who could trust him who knew him!—and he had certainly a powerful opponent in his brother Richard, Duke of Gloucester, who, being avaricious and ambitious, wanted to marry that widowed daughter of the Earl of Warwick's who had been espoused to the deceased young Prince, at Calais. Clarence, who wanted all the family wealth for himself, secreted this lady, whom Richard found disguised as a servant in the City of London, and whom he married; arbitrators appointed by the King, then divided the property between the brothers. This led to ill-will and mistrust between them. Clarence's wife dying, and he wishing to make another marriage, which was obnoxious to the King, his ruin was hurried by that means, too. At first, the Court struck at his retainers and dependents, and accused some of them of magic and witchcraft, and similar nonsense. Successful against this small game, it then mounted to the Duke himself, who was impeached by his brother the King, in person, on a variety of such charges. He was found guilty, and sentenced to be publicly executed. He never was publicly executed, but he met his death somehow, in the Tower, and, no doubt, through some agency of the King or his brother Gloucester, or both. It was supposed at the time that he was told to choose the manner of his death, and that he chose to be drowned in a butt of Malmsey wine. I hope the story may be true, for it would have been a becoming death for such a miserable creature.

The King survived him some five years. He died in the forty-second year of his life, and the twenty-third of his reign. He had a very good capacity and some good points, but he was selfish, careless, sensual, and cruel. He was a favourite with the people for his showy manners; and the people were a good example to him in the constancy of their attachment. He was penitent on his death-bed for his 'benevolences,' and other extortions, and ordered restitution to be made to the people who had suffered from them. He also called about his bed the enriched members of the Woodville family, and the proud lords whose honours were of older date, and endeavoured to reconcile them, for the sake of the peaceful succession of his son and the tranquillity of England.

CHAPTER XXIV—ENGLAND UNDER EDWARD THE FIFTH

The late King's eldest son, the Prince of Wales, called Edward after him, was only thirteen years of age at his father's death. He was at Ludlow Castle with his uncle, the Earl of Rivers. The prince's brother, the Duke of York, only eleven years of age, was in London with his mother. The boldest, most crafty, and most dreaded nobleman in England at that time was their uncle Richard, Duke of Gloucester, and everybody wondered how the two poor boys would fare with such an uncle for a friend or a foe.

The Queen, their mother, being exceedingly uneasy about this, was anxious that instructions should be sent to Lord Rivers to raise an army to escort the young King safely to London. But, Lord Hastings, who was of the Court party opposed to the Woodvilles, and who disliked the thought of giving them that power, argued against the proposal, and obliged the Queen to be satisfied with an escort of two thousand horse. The Duke of Gloucester did nothing, at first, to justify suspicion. He came from Scotland (where he was commanding an army) to York, and was there the first to swear allegiance to his nephew. He then wrote a condoling letter to the Queen-Mother, and set off to be present at the coronation in London.

Now, the young King, journeying towards London too, with Lord Rivers and Lord Gray, came to Stony Stratford, as his uncle came to Northampton, about ten miles distant; and when those two lords heard that the Duke of Gloucester was so near, they proposed to the young King that they should go back and greet him in his name. The boy being very willing that they should do so, they rode off and were received with great friendliness, and asked by the Duke of Gloucester to stay and dine with him. In the evening, while they were merry together, up came the Duke of Buckingham with three hundred horsemen; and next morning the two lords and the two dukes, and the three hundred horsemen, rode away together to rejoin the King. Just as they were entering Stony Stratford, the Duke of Gloucester, checking his horse, turned suddenly on the two lords, charged them with alienating from him the affections of his sweet nephew, and caused them to be arrested by the three hundred horsemen and taken back.

Then, he and the Duke of Buckingham went straight to the King (whom they had now in their power), to whom they made a show of kneeling down, and offering great love and submission; and then they ordered his attendants to disperse, and took him, alone with them, to Northampton.

A few days afterwards they conducted him to London, and lodged him in the Bishop's Palace. But, he did not remain there long; for, the Duke of Buckingham with a tender face made a speech expressing how anxious he was for the Royal boy's safety, and how much safer he would be in the Tower until his coronation, than he could be anywhere else. So, to the Tower he was taken, very carefully, and the Duke of Gloucester was named Protector of the State.

Although Gloucester had proceeded thus far with a very smooth countenance—and although he was a clever man, fair of speech, and not ill-looking, in spite of one of his shoulders being something higher than the other—and although he had come into the City riding bare-headed at the King's side, and looking very fond of him—he had made the King's mother more uneasy yet; and when the Royal boy was taken to the Tower, she became so alarmed that she took sanctuary in Westminster with her five daughters.

Nor did she do this without reason, for, the Duke of Gloucester, finding that the lords who were opposed to the Woodville family were faithful to the young King nevertheless, quickly resolved to strike a blow for himself. Accordingly, while those lords met in council at the Tower, he and those who were in his interest met in separate council at his own residence, Crosby Palace, in Bishopsgate Street. Being at last quite prepared, he one day appeared unexpectedly at the council in the Tower, and appeared to be very jocular and merry. He was particularly gay with the Bishop of Ely: praising the strawberries that grew in his garden on Holborn Hill, and asking him to have some gathered that he might eat them at dinner. The Bishop, quite proud of the honour, sent one of his men to fetch some; and the Duke, still very jocular and gay, went out; and the council all said what a very agreeable duke he was! In a little time, however, he came back quite altered—not at all jocular—frowning and fierce—and suddenly said,—

'What do those persons deserve who have compassed my destruction; I being the King's lawful, as well as natural, protector?'

To this strange question, Lord Hastings replied, that they deserved death, whosoever they were.

‘Then,’ said the Duke, ‘I tell you that they are that sorceress my brother’s wife;’ meaning the Queen: ‘and that other sorceress, Jane Shore. Who, by witchcraft, have withered my body, and caused my arm to shrink as I now show you.’

He then pulled up his sleeve and showed them his arm, which was shrunken, it is true, but which had been so, as they all very well knew, from the hour of his birth.

Jane Shore, being then the lover of Lord Hastings, as she had formerly been of the late King, that lord knew that he himself was attacked. So, he said, in some confusion, ‘Certainly, my Lord, if they have done this, they be worthy of punishment.’

‘If?’ said the Duke of Gloucester; ‘do you talk to me of ifs? I tell you that they *have* so done, and I will make it good upon thy body, thou traitor!’

With that, he struck the table a great blow with his fist. This was a signal to some of his people outside to cry ‘Treason!’ They immediately did so, and there was a rush into the chamber of so many armed men that it was filled in a moment.

‘First,’ said the Duke of Gloucester to Lord Hastings, ‘I arrest thee, traitor! And let him,’ he added to the armed men who took him, ‘have a priest at once, for by St. Paul I will not dine until I have seen his head of!’

Lord Hastings was hurried to the green by the Tower chapel, and there beheaded on a log of wood that happened to be lying on the ground. Then, the Duke dined with a good appetite, and after dinner summoning the principal citizens to attend him, told them that Lord Hastings and the rest had designed to murder both himself and the Duke if Buckingham, who stood by his side, if he had not providentially discovered their design. He requested them to be so obliging as to inform their fellow-citizens of the truth of what he said, and issued a proclamation (prepared and neatly copied out beforehand) to the same effect.

On the same day that the Duke did these things in the Tower, Sir Richard Ratcliffe, the boldest and most undaunted of his men, went down to Pontefract; arrested Lord Rivers, Lord Gray, and two other gentlemen; and publicly executed them on the scaffold, without any trial, for having intended the Duke’s death. Three days afterwards the Duke, not to lose time, went down the river to Westminster in his barge, attended by divers bishops, lords, and soldiers, and demanded that the Queen should deliver her second son, the Duke of York, into his safe keeping. The Queen, being obliged to comply, resigned the child after she had wept over him; and Richard of Gloucester placed him with his brother in the Tower. Then, he seized Jane Shore, and, because she had been the lover of the late King, confiscated her property, and got her sentenced to do public penance in the streets by walking in a scanty dress, with bare feet, and carrying a lighted candle, to St. Paul's Cathedral, through the most crowded part of the City.

Having now all things ready for his own advancement, he caused a friar to preach a sermon at the cross which stood in front of St. Paul's Cathedral, in which he dwelt upon the profligate manners of the late King, and upon the late shame of Jane Shore, and hinted that the princes were not his children. 'Whereas, good people,' said the friar, whose name was Shaw, 'my Lord the Protector, the noble Duke of Gloucester, that sweet prince, the pattern of all the noblest virtues, is the perfect image and express likeness of his father.' There had been a little plot between the Duke and the friar, that the Duke should appear in the crowd at this moment, when it was expected that the people would cry 'Long live King Richard!' But, either through the friar saying the words too soon, or through the Duke's coming too late, the Duke and the words did not come together, and the people only laughed, and the friar sneaked off ashamed.

The Duke of Buckingham was a better hand at such business than the friar, so he went to the Guildhall the next day, and addressed the citizens in the Lord Protector's behalf. A few dirty men, who had been hired and stationed there for the purpose, crying when he had done, 'God save King Richard!' he made them a great bow, and thanked them with all his heart. Next day, to make an end of it, he went with the mayor and some lords and citizens to Bayard Castle, by the river, where Richard then was, and read an address, humbly entreating him to accept the Crown of England. Richard, who looked down upon them out of a window and pretended to be in great uneasiness and alarm, assured them there was nothing he desired less, and that his deep affection for his nephews forbade him to think of it. To this the Duke of Buckingham replied, with pretended warmth, that the free people of England would never submit to his nephew's rule, and that if Richard, who was the lawful heir, refused the Crown, why then they must find some one else to wear it. The Duke of Gloucester returned, that since he used that strong language, it became his painful duty to think no more of himself, and to accept the Crown.

Upon that, the people cheered and dispersed; and the Duke of Gloucester and the Duke of Buckingham passed a pleasant evening, talking over the play they had just acted with so much success, and every word of which they had prepared together.

CHAPTER XXV—ENGLAND UNDER RICHARD THE THIRD

King Richard the Third was up betimes in the morning, and went to Westminster Hall. In the Hall was a marble seat, upon which he sat himself down between two great noblemen, and told the people that he began the new reign in that place, because the first duty of a sovereign was to administer the laws equally to all, and to maintain justice. He then mounted his horse and rode back to the City, where he was received by the clergy and the crowd as if he really had a right to the throne, and really were a just man. The clergy and the crowd must have been rather ashamed of themselves in secret, I think, for being such poor-spirited knaves.

The new King and his Queen were soon crowned with a great deal of show and noise, which the people liked very much; and then the King set forth on a royal progress through his dominions. He was crowned a second time at York, in order that the people might have show and noise enough; and wherever he went was received with shouts of rejoicing—from a good many people of strong lungs, who were paid to strain their throats in crying, 'God save King Richard!' The plan was so successful that I am told it has been imitated since, by other usurpers, in other progresses through other dominions.

While he was on this journey, King Richard stayed a week at Warwick. And from Warwick he sent instructions home for one of the wickedest murders that ever was done—the murder of the two young princes, his nephews, who were shut up in the Tower of London.

Sir Robert Brackenbury was at that time Governor of the Tower. To him, by the hands of a messenger named John Green, did King Richard send a letter, ordering him by some means to put the two young princes to death. But Sir Robert—I hope because he had children of his own, and loved them—sent John Green back again, riding and spurring along the dusty roads, with the answer that he could not do so horrible a piece of work. The King, having frowningly considered a little, called to him Sir James Tyrrel, his master of the horse, and to him gave authority to take command of the Tower, whenever he would, for twenty-four hours, and to keep all the keys of the Tower during that space of time. Tyrrel, well knowing what was wanted, looked about him for two hardened ruffians, and chose John Dighton, one of his own grooms, and Miles Forest, who was a murderer by trade. Having secured these two assistants, he went, upon a day in August, to the Tower, showed his authority from the King, took the command for four-and-twenty hours, and obtained possession of the keys. And when the black night came he went creeping, creeping, like a guilty villain as he was, up the dark, stone winding stairs, and along the dark stone passages, until he came to the door of the room where the two young princes, having said their prayers, lay fast asleep, clasped in each other's arms. And while he watched and listened at the door, he sent in those evil demons, John Dighton and Miles Forest, who smothered the two princes with the bed and pillows, and carried their bodies down the stairs, and buried them under a great heap of stones at the staircase foot. And when the day came, he gave up the command of the Tower, and restored the keys, and hurried away without once looking behind him; and Sir Robert Brackenbury went with fear and sadness to the princes' room, and found the princes gone for ever.

You know, through all this history, how true it is that traitors are never true, and you will not be surprised to learn that the Duke of Buckingham soon turned against King Richard, and joined a great conspiracy that was formed to dethrone him, and to place the crown upon its rightful owner's head. Richard had meant to keep the murder secret; but when he heard through his spies that this conspiracy existed, and that many lords and gentlemen drank in secret to the healths of the two young princes in the Tower, he made it known that they were dead. The conspirators, though thwarted for a moment, soon resolved to set up for the crown against the murderous Richard, Henry Earl of Richmond, grandson of Catherine: that widow of Henry the Fifth who married Owen Tudor. And as Henry was of the house of Lancaster, they proposed that he should marry the Princess Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of the late King, now the heiress of the house of York, and thus by uniting the rival families put an end to the fatal wars of the Red and White Roses. All being settled, a time was appointed for Henry to come over from Brittany, and for a great rising against Richard to take place in several parts of England at the same hour. On a certain day, therefore, in October, the revolt took place; but unsuccessfully. Richard was prepared, Henry was driven back at sea by a storm, his followers in

England were dispersed, and the Duke of Buckingham was taken, and at once beheaded in the market-place at Salisbury.

The time of his success was a good time, Richard thought, for summoning a Parliament and getting some money. So, a Parliament was called, and it flattered and fawned upon him as much as he could possibly desire, and declared him to be the rightful King of England, and his only son Edward, then eleven years of age, the next heir to the throne.

Richard knew full well that, let the Parliament say what it would, the Princess Elizabeth was remembered by people as the heiress of the house of York; and having accurate information besides, of its being designed by the conspirators to marry her to Henry of Richmond, he felt that it would much strengthen him and weaken them, to be beforehand with them, and marry her to his son. With this view he went to the Sanctuary at Westminster, where the late King's widow and her daughter still were, and besought them to come to Court: where (he swore by anything and everything) they should be safely and honourably entertained. They came, accordingly, but had scarcely been at Court a month when his son died suddenly—or was poisoned—and his plan was crushed to pieces.

In this extremity, King Richard, always active, thought, 'I must make another plan.' And he made the plan of marrying the Princess Elizabeth himself, although she was his niece. There was one difficulty in the way: his wife, the Queen Anne, was alive. But, he knew (remembering his nephews) how to remove that obstacle, and he made love to the Princess Elizabeth, telling her he felt perfectly confident that the Queen would die in February. The Princess was not a very scrupulous young lady, for, instead of rejecting the murderer of her brothers with scorn and hatred, she openly declared she loved him dearly; and, when February came and the Queen did not die, she expressed her impatient opinion that she was too long about it. However, King Richard was not so far out in his prediction, but, that she died in March—he took good care of that—and then this precious pair hoped to be married. But they were disappointed, for the idea of such a marriage was so unpopular in the country, that the King's chief counsellors, Ratcliffe and Catesby, would by no means undertake to propose it, and the King was even obliged to declare in public that he had never thought of such a thing.

He was, by this time, dreaded and hated by all classes of his subjects. His nobles deserted every day to Henry's side; he dared not call another

Parliament, lest his crimes should be denounced there; and for want of money, he was obliged to get Benevolences from the citizens, which exasperated them all against him. It was said too, that, being stricken by his conscience, he dreamed frightful dreams, and started up in the night-time, wild with terror and remorse. Active to the last, through all this, he issued vigorous proclamations against Henry of Richmond and all his followers, when he heard that they were coming against him with a Fleet from France; and took the field as fierce and savage as a wild boar—the animal represented on his shield.

Henry of Richmond landed with six thousand men at Milford Haven, and came on against King Richard, then encamped at Leicester with an army twice as great, through North Wales. On Bosworth Field the two armies met; and Richard, looking along Henry's ranks, and seeing them crowded with the English nobles who had abandoned him, turned pale when he beheld the powerful Lord Stanley and his son (whom he had tried hard to retain) among them. But, he was as brave as he was wicked, and plunged into the thickest of the fight. He was riding hither and thither, laying about him in all directions, when he observed the Earl of Northumberland—one of his few great allies—to stand inactive, and the main body of his troops to hesitate. At the same moment, his desperate glance caught Henry of Richmond among a little group of his knights. Riding hard at him, and crying 'Treason!' he killed his standard-bearer, fiercely unhorsed another gentleman, and aimed a powerful stroke at Henry himself, to cut him down. But, Sir William Stanley parried it as it fell, and before Richard could raise his arm again, he was borne down in a press of numbers, unhorsed, and killed. Lord Stanley picked up the crown, all bruised and trampled, and stained with blood, and put it upon Richmond's head, amid loud and rejoicing cries of 'Long live King Henry!'

That night, a horse was led up to the church of the Grey Friars at Leicester; across whose back was tied, like some worthless sack, a naked body brought there for burial. It was the body of the last of the Plantagenet line, King Richard the Third, usurper and murderer, slain at the battle of Bosworth Field in the thirty-second year of his age, after a reign of two years.

CHAPTER XXVI—ENGLAND UNDER HENRY THE SEVENTH

King Henry the Seventh did not turn out to be as fine a fellow as the nobility and people hoped, in the first joy of their deliverance from Richard the Third. He was very cold, crafty, and calculating, and would do almost anything for money. He possessed considerable ability, but his chief merit appears to have been that he was not cruel when there was nothing to be got by it.

The new King had promised the nobles who had espoused his cause that he would marry the Princess Elizabeth. The first thing he did, was, to direct her to be removed from the castle of Sheriff Hutton in Yorkshire, where Richard had placed her, and restored to the care of her mother in London. The young Earl of Warwick, Edward Plantagenet, son and heir of the late Duke of Clarence, had been kept a prisoner in the same old Yorkshire Castle with her. This boy, who was now fifteen, the new King placed in the Tower for safety. Then he came to London in great state, and gratified the people with a fine procession; on which kind of show he often very much relied for keeping them in good humour. The sports and feasts which took place were followed by a terrible fever, called the Sweating Sickness; of which great numbers of people died. Lord Mayors and Aldermen are thought to have suffered most from it; whether, because they were in the habit of over-eating themselves, or because they were very jealous of preserving filth and nuisances in the City (as they have been since), I don't know.

The King's coronation was postponed on account of the general ill-health, and he afterwards deferred his marriage, as if he were not very anxious that it should take place: and, even after that, deferred the Queen's coronation so long that he gave offence to the York party. However, he set these things right in the end, by hanging some men and seizing on the rich possessions of others; by granting more popular pardons to the followers of the late King than could, at first, be got from him; and, by employing about his Court, some very scrupulous persons who had been employed in the previous reign.

As this reign was principally remarkable for two very curious impostures which have become famous in history, we will make those two stories its principal feature.

There was a priest at Oxford of the name of Simons, who had for a pupil a handsome boy named Lambert Simnel, the son of a baker. Partly to gratify his own ambitious ends, and partly to carry out the designs of a secret party formed against the King, this priest declared that his pupil, the boy, was no other than the young Earl of Warwick; who (as everybody might have known) was safely locked up in the Tower of London. The priest and the boy went over to Ireland; and, at Dublin, enlisted in their cause all ranks of the people: who seem to have been generous enough, but exceedingly irrational. The Earl of Kildare, the governor of Ireland, declared that he believed the boy to be what the priest represented; and the boy, who had been well tutored by the priest, told them such things of his childhood, and gave them so many descriptions of the Royal Family, that they were perpetually shouting and hurrahing, and drinking his health, and making all kinds of noisy and thirsty demonstrations, to express their belief in him. Nor was this feeling confined to Ireland alone, for the Earl of Lincoln—whom the late usurper had named as his successor—went over to the young Pretender; and, after holding a secret correspondence with the Dowager Duchess of Burgundy—the sister of Edward the Fourth, who detested the present King and all his race—sailed to Dublin with two thousand German soldiers of her providing. In this promising state of the boy's fortunes, he was crowned there, with a crown taken off the head of a statue of the Virgin Mary; and was then, according to the Irish custom of those days, carried home on the shoulders of a big chieftain possessing a great deal more strength than sense. Father Simons, you may be sure, was mighty busy at the coronation.

Ten days afterwards, the Germans, and the Irish, and the priest, and the boy, and the Earl of Lincoln, all landed in Lancashire to invade England. The King, who had good intelligence of their movements, set up his standard at Nottingham, where vast numbers resorted to him every day; while the Earl of Lincoln could gain but very few. With his small force he tried to make for the town of Newark; but the King's army getting between him and that place, he had no choice but to risk a battle at Stoke. It soon ended in the complete destruction of the Pretender's forces, one half of whom were killed; among them, the Earl himself. The priest and the baker's boy were taken prisoners. The priest, after confessing the trick, was shut up in prison, where he afterwards died—suddenly perhaps. The boy was taken into the King's kitchen and made a turnspit. He was afterwards raised to the station of one of the King's falconers; and so ended this strange imposition.

There seems reason to suspect that the Dowager Queen—always a restless and busy woman—had had some share in tutoring the baker's son. The King was very angry with her, whether or no. He seized upon her property, and shut her up in a convent at Bermondsey.

One might suppose that the end of this story would have put the Irish people on their guard; but they were quite ready to receive a second impostor, as they had received the first, and that same troublesome Duchess of Burgundy soon gave them the opportunity. All of a sudden there appeared at Cork, in a vessel arriving from Portugal, a young man of excellent abilities, of very handsome appearance and most winning manners, who declared himself to be Richard, Duke of York, the second son of King Edward the Fourth. 'O,' said some, even of those ready Irish believers, 'but surely that young Prince was murdered by his uncle in the Tower!'—'It *is* supposed so,' said the engaging young man; 'and my brother *was* killed in that gloomy prison; but I escaped—it don't matter how, at present—and have been wandering about the world for seven long years.' This explanation being quite satisfactory to numbers of the Irish people, they began again to shout and to hurrah, and to drink his health, and to make the noisy and thirsty demonstrations all over again. And the big chieftain in Dublin began to look out for another coronation, and another young King to be carried home on his back.

Now, King Henry being then on bad terms with France, the French King, Charles the Eighth, saw that, by pretending to believe in the handsome young man, he could trouble his enemy sorely. So, he invited him over to the French Court, and appointed him a body-guard, and treated him in all respects as if he really were the Duke of York. Peace, however, being soon concluded between the two Kings, the pretended Duke was turned adrift, and wandered for protection to the Duchess of Burgundy. She, after feigning to inquire into the reality of his claims, declared him to be the very picture of her dear departed brother; gave him a body-guard at her Court, of thirty halberdiers; and called him by the sounding name of the White Rose of England.

The leading members of the White Rose party in England sent over an agent, named Sir Robert Clifford, to ascertain whether the White Rose's claims were good: the King also sent over his agents to inquire into the Rose's history. The White Roses declared the young man to be really the Duke of York; the King declared him to be Perkin Warbeck, the son of a merchant of the city of Tournay, who had acquired his knowledge of England, its language and manners, from the English merchants who traded in Flanders; it was also stated by the Royal agents that he had been in the service of Lady Brompton, the wife of an exiled English nobleman, and that the Duchess of Burgundy had caused him to be trained and taught, expressly for this deception. The King then required the Archduke Philip—who was the sovereign of Burgundy—to banish this new Pretender, or to deliver him up; but, as the Archduke replied that he could not control the Duchess in her own land, the King, in revenge, took the market of English cloth away from Antwerp, and prevented all commercial intercourse between the two countries.

He also, by arts and bribes, prevailed on Sir Robert Clifford to betray his employers; and he denouncing several famous English noblemen as being secretly the friends of Perkin Warbeck, the King had three of the foremost executed at once. Whether he pardoned the remainder because they were poor, I do not know; but it is only too probable that he refused to pardon one famous nobleman against whom the same Clifford soon afterwards informed separately, because he was rich. This was no other than Sir William Stanley, who had saved the King's life at the battle of Bosworth Field. It is very doubtful whether his treason amounted to much more than his having said, that if he were sure the young man was the Duke of York, he would not take arms against him. Whatever he had done he admitted, like an honourable spirit; and he lost his head for it, and the covetous King gained all his wealth.

Perkin Warbeck kept quiet for three years; but, as the Flemings began to complain heavily of the loss of their trade by the stoppage of the Antwerp market on his account, and as it was not unlikely that they might even go so far as to take his life, or give him up, he found it necessary to do something. Accordingly he made a desperate sally, and landed, with only a few hundred men, on the coast of Deal. But he was soon glad to get back to the place from whence he came; for the country people rose against his followers, killed a great many, and took a hundred and fifty prisoners: who were all driven to London, tied together with ropes, like a team of cattle. Every one of them was hanged on some part or other of the sea-shore; in order, that if any more men should come over with Perkin Warbeck, they might see the bodies as a warning before they landed.

Then the wary King, by making a treaty of commerce with the Flemings, drove Perkin Warbeck out of that country; and, by completely gaining over the Irish to his side, deprived him of that asylum too. He wandered away to Scotland, and told his story at that Court. King James the Fourth of Scotland, who was no friend to King Henry, and had no reason to be (for King Henry had bribed his Scotch lords to betray him more than once; but had never succeeded in his plots), gave him a great reception, called him his cousin, and gave him in marriage the Lady Catherine Gordon, a beautiful and charming creature related to the royal house of Stuart.

Alarmed by this successful reappearance of the Pretender, the King still undermined, and bought, and bribed, and kept his doings and Perkin Warbeck's story in the dark, when he might, one would imagine, have rendered the matter clear to all England. But, for all this bribing of the Scotch lords at the Scotch King's Court, he could not procure the Pretender to be delivered up to him. James, though not very particular in many respects, would not betray him; and the ever-busy Duchess of Burgundy so provided him with arms, and good soldiers, and with money besides, that he had soon a little army of fifteen hundred men of various nations. With these, and aided by the Scottish King in person, he crossed the border into England, and made a proclamation to the people, in which he called the King 'Henry Tudor;' offered large rewards to any who should take or distress him; and announced himself as King Richard the Fourth come to receive the homage of his faithful subjects. His faithful subjects, however, cared nothing for him, and hated his faithful troops: who, being of different nations, quarrelled also among themselves. Worse than this, if worse were possible, they began to plunder the country; upon which the White Rose said, that he would rather lose his rights, than gain them through the miseries of the English people. The Scottish King made a jest of his scruples; but they and their whole force went back again without fighting a battle.

The worst consequence of this attempt was, that a rising took place among the people of Cornwall, who considered themselves too heavily taxed to meet the charges of the expected war. Stimulated by Flammock, a lawyer, and Joseph, a blacksmith, and joined by Lord Audley and some other country gentlemen, they marched on all the way to Deptford Bridge, where they fought a battle with the King's army. They were defeated—though the Cornish men fought with great bravery—and the lord was beheaded, and the lawyer and the blacksmith were hanged, drawn, and quartered. The rest were pardoned. The King, who believed every man to be as avaricious as himself, and thought that money could settle anything, allowed them to make bargains for their liberty with the soldiers who had taken them.

Perkin Warbeck, doomed to wander up and down, and never to find rest anywhere—a sad fate: almost a sufficient punishment for an imposture, which he seems in time to have half believed himself—lost his Scottish refuge through a truce being made between the two Kings; and found himself, once more, without a country before him in which he could lay his head. But James (always honourable and true to him, alike when he melted down his plate, and even the great gold chain he had been used to wear, to pay soldiers in his cause; and now, when that cause was lost and hopeless) did not conclude the treaty, until he had safely departed out of the Scottish dominions. He, and his beautiful wife, who was faithful to him under all reverses, and left her state and home to follow his poor fortunes, were put aboard ship with everything necessary for their comfort and protection, and sailed for Ireland.

But, the Irish people had had enough of counterfeit Earls of Warwick and Dukes of York, for one while; and would give the White Rose no aid. So, the White Rose—encircled by thorns indeed—resolved to go with his beautiful wife to Cornwall as a forlorn resource, and see what might be made of the Cornish men, who had risen so valiantly a little while before, and who had fought so bravely at Deptford Bridge.

To Whitsand Bay, in Cornwall, accordingly, came Perkin Warbeck and his wife; and the lovely lady he shut up for safety in the Castle of St. Michael's Mount, and then marched into Devonshire at the head of three thousand Cornishmen. These were increased to six thousand by the time of his arrival in Exeter; but, there the people made a stout resistance, and he went on to Taunton, where he came in sight of the King's army. The stout Cornish men, although they were few in number, and badly armed, were so bold, that they never thought of retreating; but bravely looked forward to a battle on the morrow. Unhappily for them, the man who was possessed of so many engaging qualities, and who attracted so many people to his side when he had nothing else with which to tempt them, was not as brave as they. In the night, when the two armies lay opposite to each other, he mounted a swift horse and fled. When morning dawned, the poor confiding Cornish men, discovering that they had no leader, surrendered to the King's power. Some of them were hanged, and the rest were pardoned and went miserably home.

Before the King pursued Perkin Warbeck to the sanctuary of Beaulieu in the New Forest, where it was soon known that he had taken refuge, he sent a body of horsemen to St. Michael's Mount, to seize his wife. She was soon taken and brought as a captive before the King. But she was so beautiful, and so good, and so devoted to the man in whom she believed, that the King regarded her with compassion, treated her with great respect, and placed her at Court, near the Queen's person. And many years after Perkin Warbeck was no more, and when his strange story had become like a nursery tale, *she* was called the White Rose, by the people, in remembrance of her beauty.

The sanctuary at Beaulieu was soon surrounded by the King's men; and the King, pursuing his usual dark, artful ways, sent pretended friends to Perkin Warbeck to persuade him to come out and surrender himself. This he soon did; the King having taken a good look at the man of whom he had heard so much—from behind a screen—directed him to be well mounted, and to ride behind him at a little distance, guarded, but not bound in any way. So they entered London with the King's favourite show—a procession; and some of the people hooted as the Pretender rode slowly through the streets to the Tower; but the greater part were quiet, and very curious to see him. From the Tower, he was taken to the Palace at Westminster, and there lodged like a gentleman, though closely watched. He was examined every now and then as to his imposture; but the King was so secret in all he did, that even then he gave it a consequence, which it cannot be supposed to have in itself deserved.

At last Perkin Warbeck ran away, and took refuge in another sanctuary near Richmond in Surrey. From this he was again persuaded to deliver himself up; and, being conveyed to London, he stood in the stocks for a whole day, outside Westminster Hall, and there read a paper purporting to be his full confession, and relating his history as the King's agents had originally described it. He was then shut up in the Tower again, in the company of the Earl of Warwick, who had now been there for fourteen years: ever since his removal out of Yorkshire, except when the King had had him at Court, and had shown him to the people, to prove the imposture of the Baker’s boy. It is but too probable, when we consider the crafty character of Henry the Seventh, that these two were brought together for a cruel purpose. A plot was soon discovered between them and the keepers, to murder the Governor, get possession of the keys, and proclaim Perkin Warbeck as King Richard the Fourth. That there was some such plot, is likely; that they were tempted into it, is at least as likely; that the unfortunate Earl of Warwick—last male of the Plantagenet line—was too unused to the world, and too ignorant and simple to know much about it, whatever it was, is perfectly certain; and that it was the King’s interest to get rid of him, is no less so. He was beheaded on Tower Hill, and Perkin Warbeck was hanged at Tyburn.

Such was the end of the pretended Duke of York, whose shadowy history was made more shadowy—and ever will be—by the mystery and craft of the King. If he had turned his great natural advantages to a more honest account, he might have lived a happy and respected life, even in those days. But he died upon a gallows at Tyburn, leaving the Scottish lady, who had loved him so well, kindly protected at the Queen’s Court. After some time she forgot her old loves and troubles, as many people do with Time’s merciful assistance, and married a Welsh gentleman. Her second husband, Sir Matthew Cradoc, more honest and more happy than her first, lies beside her in a tomb in the old church of Swansea.

The ill-blood between France and England in this reign, arose out of the continued plotting of the Duchess of Burgundy, and disputes respecting the affairs of Brittany. The King feigned to be very patriotic, indignant, and warlike; but he always contrived so as never to make war in reality, and always to make money. His taxation of the people, on pretence of war with France, involved, at one time, a very dangerous insurrection, headed by Sir John Egremont, and a common man called John à Chambre. But it was subdued by the royal forces, under the command of the Earl of Surrey. The knighted John escaped to the Duchess of Burgundy, who was ever ready to receive any one who gave the King trouble; and the plain John was hanged at York, in the midst of a number of his men, but on a much higher gibbet, as being a greater traitor. Hung high or hung low, however, hanging is much the same to the person hung.

Within a year after her marriage, the Queen had given birth to a son, who was called Prince Arthur, in remembrance of the old British prince of romance and story; and who, when all these events had happened, being then in his fifteenth year, was married to Catherine, the daughter of the Spanish monarch, with great rejoicings and bright prospects; but in a very few months he sickened and died. As soon as the King had recovered from his grief, he thought it a pity that the fortune of the Spanish Princess, amounting to two hundred thousand crowns, should go out of the family; and therefore arranged that the young widow should marry his second son Henry, then twelve years of age, when he too should be fifteen. There were objections to this marriage on the part of the clergy; but, as the infallible Pope was gained over, and, as he *must* be right, that settled the business for the time. The King's eldest daughter was provided for, and a long course of disturbance was considered to be set at rest, by her being married to the Scottish King.

And now the Queen died. When the King had got over that grief too, his mind once more reverted to his darling money for consolation, and he thought of marrying the Dowager Queen of Naples, who was immensely rich: but, as it turned out not to be practicable to gain the money however practicable it might have been to gain the lady, he gave up the idea. He was not so fond of her but that he soon proposed to marry the Dowager Duchess of Savoy; and, soon afterwards, the widow of the King of Castile, who was raving mad. But he made a money-bargain instead, and married neither.

The Duchess of Burgundy, among the other discontented people to whom she had given refuge, had sheltered Edmund de la Pole (younger brother of that Earl of Lincoln who was killed at Stoke), now Earl of Suffolk. The King had prevailed upon him to return to the marriage of Prince Arthur; but, he soon afterwards went away again; and then the King, suspecting a conspiracy, resorted to his favourite plan of sending him some treacherous friends, and buying of those scoundrels the secrets they disclosed or invented. Some arrests and executions took place in consequence. In the end, the King, on a promise of not taking his life, obtained possession of the person of Edmund de la Pole, and shut him up in the Tower.

This was his last enemy. If he had lived much longer he would have made many more among the people, by the grinding exaction to which he constantly exposed them, and by the tyrannical acts of his two prime favourites in all money-raising matters, Edmund Dudley and Richard Empson. But Death—the enemy who is not to be bought off or deceived, and on whom no money, and no treachery has any effect—presented himself at this juncture, and ended the King's reign. He died of the gout, on the twenty-second of April, one thousand five hundred and nine, and in the fifty-third year of his age, after reigning twenty-four years; he was buried in the beautiful Chapel of Westminster Abbey, which he had himself founded, and which still bears his name.

It was in this reign that the great Christopher Columbus, on behalf of Spain, discovered what was then called The New World. Great wonder, interest, and hope of wealth being awakened in England thereby, the King and the merchants of London and Bristol fitted out an English expedition for further discoveries in the New World, and entrusted it to Sebastian Cabot, of Bristol, the son of a Venetian pilot there. He was very successful in his voyage, and gained high reputation, both for himself and England.

CHAPTER XXVII—ENGLAND UNDER HENRY THE EIGHTH, CALLED BLUFF KING HAL AND BURLY KING HARRY

PART THE FIRST

We now come to King Henry the Eighth, whom it has been too much the fashion to call 'Bluff King Hal,' and 'Burly King Harry,' and other fine names; but whom I shall take the liberty to call, plainly, one of the most detestable villains that ever drew breath. You will be able to judge, long before we come to the end of his life, whether he deserves the character.

He was just eighteen years of age when he came to the throne. People said he was handsome then; but I don't believe it. He was a big, burly, noisy, small-eyed, large-faced, double-chinned, swinish-looking fellow in later life (as we know from the likenesses of him, painted by the famous Hans Holbein), and it is not easy to believe that so bad a character can ever have been veiled under a prepossessing appearance.

He was anxious to make himself popular; and the people, who had long disliked the late King, were very willing to believe that he deserved to be so. He was extremely fond of show and display, and so were they. Therefore there was great rejoicing when he married the Princess Catherine, and when they were both crowned. And the King fought at tournaments and always came off victorious—for the courtiers took care of that—and there was a general outcry that he was a wonderful man. Empson, Dudley, and their supporters were accused of a variety of crimes they had never committed, instead of the offences of which they really had been guilty; and they were pilloried, and set upon horses with their faces to the tails, and knocked about and beheaded, to the satisfaction of the people, and the enrichment of the King.

The Pope, so indefatigable in getting the world into trouble, had mixed himself up in a war on the continent of Europe, occasioned by the reigning

Princes of little quarrelling states in Italy having at various times married into other Royal families, and so led to *their* claiming a share in those petty Governments. The King, who discovered that he was very fond of the Pope, sent a herald to the King of France, to say that he must not make war upon that holy personage, because he was the father of all Christians. As the French King did not mind this relationship in the least, and also refused to admit a claim King Henry made to certain lands in France, war was declared between the two countries. Not to perplex this story with an account of the tricks and designs of all the sovereigns who were engaged in it, it is enough to say that England made a blundering alliance with Spain, and got stupidly taken in by that country; which made its own terms with France when it could and left England in the lurch. Sir Edward Howard, a bold admiral, son of the Earl of Surrey, distinguished himself by his bravery against the French in this business; but, unfortunately, he was more brave than wise, for, skimming into the French harbour of Brest with only a few row-boats, he attempted (in revenge for the defeat and death of Sir Thomas Knyvett, another bold English admiral) to take some strong French ships, well defended with batteries of cannon. The upshot was, that he was left on board of one of them (in consequence of its shooting away from his own boat), with not more than about a dozen men, and was thrown into the sea and drowned: though not until he had taken from his breast his gold chain and gold whistle, which were the signs of his office, and had cast them into the sea to prevent their being made a boast of by the enemy. After this defeat—which was a great one, for Sir Edward Howard was a man of valour and fame—the King took it into his head to invade France in person; first executing that dangerous Earl of Suffolk whom his father had left in the Tower, and appointing Queen Catherine to the charge of his kingdom in his absence. He sailed to Calais, where he was joined by Maximilian, Emperor of Germany, who pretended to be his soldier, and who took pay in his service: with a good deal of nonsense of that sort, flattering enough to the vanity of a vain blusterer. The King might be successful enough in sham fights; but his idea of real battles chiefly consisted in pitching silken tents of bright colours that were ignominiously blown down by the wind, and in making a vast display of gaudy flags and golden curtains. Fortune, however, favoured him better than he deserved; for, after much waste of time in tent pitching, flag flying, gold curtaining, and other such masquerading, he gave the French battle at a place called Guinegate: where they took such an unaccountable panic, and fled with such swiftness, that it was ever afterwards called by the English the Battle of Spurs. Instead of following up his advantage, the King, finding that he had had enough of real fighting, came home again.

The Scottish King, though nearly related to Henry by marriage, had taken part against him in this war. The Earl of Surrey, as the English general, advanced to meet him when he came out of his own dominions and crossed the river Tweed. The two armies came up with one another when the Scottish King had also crossed the river Till, and was encamped upon the last of the Cheviot Hills, called the Hill of Flodden. Along the plain below it, the English, when the hour of battle came, advanced. The Scottish army, which had been drawn up in five great bodies, then came steadily down in perfect silence. So they, in their turn, advanced to meet the English army, which came on in one long line; and they attacked it with a body of spearmen, under Lord Home. At first they had the best of it; but the English recovered themselves so bravely, and fought with such valour, that, when the Scottish King had almost made his way up to the Royal Standard, he was slain, and the whole Scottish power routed. Ten thousand Scottish men lay dead that day on Flodden Field; and among them, numbers of the nobility and gentry. For a long time afterwards, the Scottish peasantry used to believe that their King had not been really killed in this battle, because no Englishman had found an iron belt he wore about his body as a penance for having been an unnatural and undutiful son. But, whatever became of his belt, the English had his sword and dagger, and the ring from his finger, and his body too, covered with wounds. There is no doubt of it; for it was seen and recognised by English gentlemen who had known the Scottish King well.

When King Henry was making ready to renew the war in France, the French King was contemplating peace. His queen, dying at this time, he proposed, though he was upwards of fifty years old, to marry King Henry’s sister, the Princess Mary, who, besides being only sixteen, was betrothed to the Duke of Suffolk. As the inclinations of young Princesses were not much considered in such matters, the marriage was concluded, and the poor girl was escorted to France, where she was immediately left as the French King’s bride, with only one of all her English attendants. That one was a pretty young girl named Anne Boleyn, niece of the Earl of Surrey, who had been made Duke of Norfolk, after the victory of Flodden Field. Anne Boleyn's is a name to be remembered, as you will presently find.

And now the French King, who was very proud of his young wife, was preparing for many years of happiness, and she was looking forward, I dare say, to many years of misery, when he died within three months, and left her a young widow. The new French monarch, Francis the First, seeing how important it was to his interests that she should take for her second husband no one but an Englishman, advised her first lover, the Duke of Suffolk, when King Henry sent him over to France to fetch her home, to marry her. The Princess being herself so fond of that Duke, as to tell him that he must either do so then, or for ever lose her, they were wedded; and Henry afterwards forgave them. In making interest with the King, the Duke of Suffolk had addressed his most powerful favourite and adviser, Thomas Wolsey—a name very famous in history for its rise and downfall.

Wolsey was the son of a respectable butcher at Ipswich, in Suffolk and received so excellent an education that he became a tutor to the family of the Marquis of Dorset, who afterwards got him appointed one of the late King's chaplains. On the accession of Henry the Eighth, he was promoted and taken into great favour. He was now Archbishop of York; the Pope had made him a Cardinal besides; and whoever wanted influence in England or favour with the King—whether he were a foreign monarch or an English nobleman—was obliged to make a friend of the great Cardinal Wolsey.

He was a gay man, who could dance and jest, and sing and drink; and those were the roads to so much, or rather so little, of a heart as King Henry had. He was wonderfully fond of pomp and glitter, and so was the King. He knew a good deal of the Church learning of that time; much of which consisted in finding artful excuses and pretences for almost any wrong thing, and in arguing that black was white, or any other colour. This kind of learning pleased the King too. For many such reasons, the Cardinal was high in estimation with the King; and, being a man of far greater ability, knew as well how to manage him, as a clever keeper may know how to manage a wolf or a tiger, or any other cruel and uncertain beast, that may turn upon him and tear him any day. Never had there been seen in England such state as my Lord Cardinal kept. His wealth was enormous; equal, it was reckoned, to the riches of the Crown. His palaces were as splendid as the King's, and his retinue was eight hundred strong. He held his Court, dressed out from top to toe in flaming scarlet; and his very shoes were golden, set with precious stones. His followers rode on blood horses; while he, with a wonderful affectation of humility in the midst of his great splendour, ambled on a mule with a red velvet saddle and bridle and golden stirrups.

Through the influence of this stately priest, a grand meeting was arranged to take place between the French and English Kings in France; but on ground belonging to England. A prodigious show of friendship and rejoicing was to be made on the occasion; and heralds were sent to proclaim with brazen trumpets through all the principal cities of Europe, that, on a certain day, the Kings of France and England, as companions and brothers in arms, each attended by eighteen followers, would hold a tournament against all knights who might choose to come.

Charles, the new Emperor of Germany (the old one being dead), wanted to prevent too cordial an alliance between these sovereigns, and came over to England before the King could repair to the place of meeting; and, besides making an agreeable impression upon him, secured Wolsey's interest by promising that his influence should make him Pope when the next vacancy occurred. On the day when the Emperor left England, the King and all the Court went over to Calais, and thence to the place of meeting, between Ardres and Guisnes, commonly called the Field of the Cloth of Gold. Here, all manner of expense and prodigality was lavished on the decorations of the show; many of the knights and gentlemen being so superbly dressed that it was said they carried their whole estates upon their shoulders.

There were sham castles, temporary chapels, fountains running wine, great cellars full of wine free as water to all comers, silk tents, gold lace and foil, gilt lions, and such things without end; and, in the midst of all, the rich Cardinal out-shone and out-glittered all the noblemen and gentlemen assembled. After a treaty made between the two Kings with as much solemnity as if they had intended to keep it, the lists—nine hundred feet long, and three hundred and twenty broad—were opened for the tournament; the Queens of France and England looking on with great array of lords and ladies. Then, for ten days, the two sovereigns fought five combats every day, and always beat their polite adversaries; though they *do* write that the King of England, being thrown in a wrestle one day by the King of France, lost his kingly temper with his brother-in-arms, and wanted to make a quarrel of it. Then, there is a great story belonging to this Field of the Cloth of Gold, showing how the English were distrustful of the French, and the French of the English, until Francis rode alone one morning to Henry’s tent; and, going in before he was out of bed, told him in joke that he was his prisoner; and how Henry jumped out of bed and embraced Francis; and how Francis helped Henry to dress, and warmed his linen for him; and how Henry gave Francis a splendid jewelled collar, and how Francis gave Henry, in return, a costly bracelet. All this and a great deal more was so written about, and sung about, and talked about at that time (and, indeed, since that time too), that the world has had good cause to be sick of it, for ever.

Of course, nothing came of all these fine doings but a speedy renewal of the war between England and France, in which the two Royal companions and brothers in arms longed very earnestly to damage one another. But, before it broke out again, the Duke of Buckingham was shamefully executed on Tower Hill, on the evidence of a discharged servant—really for nothing, except the folly of having believed in a friar of the name of Hopkins, who had pretended to be a prophet, and who had mumbled and jumbled out some nonsense about the Duke’s son being destined to be very great in the land. It was believed that the unfortunate Duke had given offence to the great Cardinal by expressing his mind freely about the expense and absurdity of the whole business of the Field of the Cloth of Gold. At any rate, he was beheaded, as I have said, for nothing. And the people who saw it done were very angry, and cried out that it was the work of ‘the butcher’s son!’

The new war was a short one, though the Earl of Surrey invaded France again, and did some injury to that country. It ended in another treaty of peace between the two kingdoms, and in the discovery that the Emperor of Germany was not such a good friend to England in reality, as he pretended to be. Neither did he keep his promise to Wolsey to make him Pope, though the King urged him. Two Popes died in pretty quick succession; but the foreign priests were too much for the Cardinal, and kept him out of the post. So the Cardinal and King together found out that the Emperor of Germany was not a man to keep faith with; broke off a projected marriage between the King’s daughter Mary, Princess of Wales, and that sovereign; and began to consider whether it might not be well to marry the young lady, either to Francis himself, or to his eldest son.

There now arose at Wittemberg, in Germany, the great leader of the mighty change in England which is called The Reformation, and which set the people free from their slavery to the priests. This was a learned Doctor, named Martin Luther, who knew all about them, for he had been a priest, and even a monk, himself. The preaching and writing of Wickliffe had set a number of men thinking on this subject; and Luther, finding one day to his great surprise, that there really was a book called the New Testament which the priests did not allow to be read, and which contained truths that they suppressed, began to be very vigorous against the whole body, from the Pope downward. It happened, while he was yet only beginning his vast work of awakening the nation, that an impudent fellow named Tetzel, a friar of very bad character, came into his neighbourhood selling what were called Indulgences, by wholesale, to raise money for beautifying the great Cathedral of St. Peter's, at Rome. Whoever bought an Indulgence of the Pope was supposed to buy himself off from the punishment of Heaven for his offences. Luther told the people that these Indulgences were worthless bits of paper, before God, and that Tetzel and his masters were a crew of impostors in selling them.

The King and the Cardinal were mightily indignant at this presumption; and the King (with the help of Sir Thomas More, a wise man, whom he afterwards repaid by striking off his head) even wrote a book about it, with which the Pope was so well pleased that he gave the King the title of Defender of the Faith. The King and the Cardinal also issued flaming warnings to the people not to read Luther's books, on pain of excommunication. But they did read them for all that; and the rumour of what was in them spread far and wide.

When this great change was thus going on, the King began to show himself in his truest and worst colours. Anne Boleyn, the pretty little girl who had gone abroad to France with his sister, was by this time grown up to be very beautiful, and was one of the ladies in attendance on Queen Catherine. Now, Queen Catherine was no longer young or handsome, and it is likely that she was not particularly good-tempered; having been always rather melancholy, and having been made more so by the deaths of four of her children when they were very young. So, the King fell in love with the fair Anne Boleyn, and said to himself, 'How can I be best rid of my own troublesome wife whom I am tired of, and marry Anne?'

You recollect that Queen Catherine had been the wife of Henry’s brother. What does the King do, after thinking it over, but calls his favourite priests about him, and says, O! his mind is in such a dreadful state, and he is so frightfully uneasy, because he is afraid it was not lawful for him to marry the Queen! Not one of those priests had the courage to hint that it was rather curious he had never thought of that before, and that his mind seemed to have been in a tolerably jolly condition during a great many years, in which he certainly had not fretted himself thin; but, they all said, Ah! that was very true, and it was a serious business; and perhaps the best way to make it right, would be for his Majesty to be divorced! The King replied, Yes, he thought that would be the best way, certainly; so they all went to work.

If I were to relate to you the intrigues and plots that took place in the endeavour to get this divorce, you would think the History of England the most tiresome book in the world. So I shall say no more, than that after a vast deal of negotiation and evasion, the Pope issued a commission to Cardinal Wolsey and Cardinal Campeggio (whom he sent over from Italy for the purpose), to try the whole case in England. It is supposed—and I think with reason—that Wolsey was the Queen’s enemy, because she had reproved him for his proud and gorgeous manner of life. But, he did not at first know that the King wanted to marry Anne Boleyn; and when he did know it, he even went down on his knees, in the endeavour to dissuade him.

The Cardinals opened their court in the Convent of the Black Friars, near to where the bridge of that name in London now stands; and the King and Queen, that they might be near it, took up their lodgings at the adjoining palace of Bridewell, of which nothing now remains but a bad prison. On the opening of the court, when the King and Queen were called on to appear, that poor ill-used lady, with a dignity and firmness and yet with a womanly affection worthy to be always admired, went and kneeled at the King’s feet, and said that she had come, a stranger, to his dominions; that she had been a good and true wife to him for twenty years; and that she could acknowledge no power in those Cardinals to try whether she should be considered his wife after all that time, or should be put away. With that, she got up and left the court, and would never afterwards come back to it.

The King pretended to be very much overcome, and said, O! my lords and gentlemen, what a good woman she was to be sure, and how delighted he would be to live with her unto death, but for that terrible uneasiness in his mind which was quite wearing him away! So, the case went on, and there was nothing but talk for two months. Then Cardinal Campeggio, who, on behalf of the Pope, wanted nothing so much as delay, adjourned it for two more months; and before that time was elapsed, the Pope himself adjourned it indefinitely, by requiring the King and Queen to come to Rome and have it tried there. But by good luck for the King, word was brought to him by some of his people, that they had happened to meet at supper, Thomas Cranmer, a learned Doctor of Cambridge, who had proposed to urge the Pope on, by referring the case to all the learned doctors and bishops, here and there and everywhere, and getting their opinions that the King's marriage was unlawful. The King, who was now in a hurry to marry Anne Boleyn, thought this such a good idea, that he sent for Cranmer, post haste, and said to Lord Rochfort, Anne Boleyn's father, 'Take this learned Doctor down to your country-house, and there let him have a good room for a study, and no end of books out of which to prove that I may marry your daughter.' Lord Rochfort, not at all reluctant, made the learned Doctor as comfortable as he could; and the learned Doctor went to work to prove his case. All this time, the King and Anne Boleyn were writing letters to one another almost daily, full of impatience to have the case settled; and Anne Boleyn was showing herself (as I think) very worthy of the fate which afterwards befel her.

It was bad for Cardinal Wolsey that he had left Cranmer to render this help. It was worse for him that he had tried to dissuade the King from marrying Anne Boleyn. Such a servant as he, to such a master as Henry, would probably have fallen in any case; but, between the hatred of the party of the Queen that was, and the hatred of the party of the Queen that was to be, he fell suddenly and heavily. Going down one day to the Court of Chancery, where he now presided, he was waited upon by the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk, who told him that they brought an order to him to resign that office, and to withdraw quietly to a house he had at Esher, in Surrey. The Cardinal refusing, they rode off to the King; and next day came back with a letter from him, on reading which, the Cardinal submitted. An inventory was made out of all the riches in his palace at York Place (now Whitehall), and he went sorrowfully up the river, in his barge, to Putney. An abject man he was, in spite of his pride; for being overtaken, riding out of that place towards Esher, by one of the King's chamberlains who brought him a kind message and a ring, he alighted from his mule, took off his cap, and kneeled down in the dirt. His poor Fool, whom in his prosperous days he had always kept in his palace to entertain him, cut a far better figure than he; for, when the Cardinal said to the chamberlain that he had nothing to send to his lord the King as a present, but that jester who was a most excellent one, it took six strong yeomen to remove the faithful fool from his master.

The once proud Cardinal was soon further disgraced, and wrote the most abject letters to his vile sovereign; who humbled him one day and encouraged him the next, according to his humour, until he was at last ordered to go and reside in his diocese of York. He said he was too poor; but I don’t know how he made that out, for he took a hundred and sixty servants with him, and seventy-two cart-loads of furniture, food, and wine. He remained in that part of the country for the best part of a year, and showed himself so improved by his misfortunes, and was so mild and so conciliating, that he won all hearts. And indeed, even in his proud days, he had done some magnificent things for learning and education. At last, he was arrested for high treason; and, coming slowly on his journey towards London, got as far as Leicester. Arriving at Leicester Abbey after dark, and very ill, he said—when the monks came out at the gate with lighted torches to receive him—that he had come to lay his bones among them. He had indeed; for he was taken to a bed, from which he never rose again. His last words were, ‘Had I but served God as diligently as I have served the King, He would not have given me over, in my grey hairs. Howbeit, this is my just reward for my pains and diligence, not regarding my service to God, but only my duty to my prince.’ The news of his death was quickly carried to the King, who was amusing himself with archery in the garden of the magnificent Palace at Hampton Court, which that very Wolsey had presented to him. The greatest emotion his royal mind displayed at the loss of a servant so faithful and so ruined, was a particular desire to lay hold of fifteen hundred pounds which the Cardinal was reported to have hidden somewhere.

The opinions concerning the divorce, of the learned doctors and bishops and others, being at last collected, and being generally in the King’s favour, were forwarded to the Pope, with an entreaty that he would now grant it. The unfortunate Pope, who was a timid man, was half distracted between his fear of his authority being set aside in England if he did not do as he was asked, and his dread of offending the Emperor of Germany, who was Queen

Catherine’s nephew. In this state of mind he still evaded and did nothing. Then, Thomas Cromwell, who had been one of Wolsey’s faithful attendants, and had remained so even in his decline, advised the King to take the matter into his own hands, and make himself the head of the whole Church. This, the King by various artful means, began to do; but he recompensed the clergy by allowing them to burn as many people as they pleased, for holding Luther’s opinions. You must understand that Sir Thomas More, the wise man who had helped the King with his book, had been made Chancellor in Wolsey’s place. But, as he was truly attached to the Church as it was even in its abuses, he, in this state of things, resigned.

Being now quite resolved to get rid of Queen Catherine, and to marry Anne Boleyn without more ado, the King made Cranmer Archbishop of Canterbury, and directed Queen Catherine to leave the Court. She obeyed; but replied that wherever she went, she was Queen of England still, and would remain so, to the last. The King then married Anne Boleyn privately; and the new Archbishop of Canterbury, within half a year, declared his marriage with Queen Catherine void, and crowned Anne Boleyn Queen.

She might have known that no good could ever come from such wrong, and that the corpulent brute who had been so faithless and so cruel to his first wife, could be more faithless and more cruel to his second. She might have known that, even when he was in love with her, he had been a mean and selfish coward, running away, like a frightened cur, from her society and her house, when a dangerous sickness broke out in it, and when she might easily have taken it and died, as several of the household did. But, Anne Boleyn arrived at all this knowledge too late, and bought it at a dear price. Her bad marriage with a worse man came to its natural end. Its natural end was not, as we shall too soon see, a natural death for her.

CHAPTER XXVIII—ENGLAND UNDER HENRY THE EIGHTH

PART THE SECOND

The Pope was thrown into a very angry state of mind when he heard of the King's marriage, and fumed exceedingly. Many of the English monks and friars, seeing that their order was in danger, did the same; some even declaimed against the King in church before his face, and were not to be stopped until he himself roared out 'Silence!' The King, not much the worse for this, took it pretty quietly; and was very glad when his Queen gave birth to a daughter, who was christened Elizabeth, and declared Princess of Wales as her sister Mary had already been.

One of the most atrocious features of this reign was that Henry the Eighth was always trimming between the reformed religion and the unreformed one; so that the more he quarrelled with the Pope, the more of his own subjects he roasted alive for not holding the Pope's opinions. Thus, an unfortunate student named John Frith, and a poor simple tailor named Andrew Hewet who loved him very much, and said that whatever John Frith believed *he* believed, were burnt in Smithfield—to show what a capital Christian the King was.

But, these were speedily followed by two much greater victims, Sir Thomas More, and John Fisher, the Bishop of Rochester. The latter, who was a good and amiable old man, had committed no greater offence than believing in Elizabeth Barton, called the Maid of Kent—another of those ridiculous women who pretended to be inspired, and to make all sorts of heavenly revelations, though they indeed uttered nothing but evil nonsense. For this offence—as it was pretended, but really for denying the King to be the supreme Head of the Church—he got into trouble, and was put in prison; but, even then, he might have been suffered to die naturally (short work having been made of executing the Kentish Maid and her principal followers), but that the Pope, to spite the King, resolved to make him a cardinal. Upon that the King made a ferocious joke to the effect that the Pope might send Fisher a red hat—which is the way they make a cardinal—

but he should have no head on which to wear it; and he was tried with all unfairness and injustice, and sentenced to death. He died like a noble and virtuous old man, and left a worthy name behind him. The King supposed, I dare say, that Sir Thomas More would be frightened by this example; but, as he was not to be easily terrified, and, thoroughly believing in the Pope, had made up his mind that the King was not the rightful Head of the Church, he positively refused to say that he was. For this crime he too was tried and sentenced, after having been in prison a whole year. When he was doomed to death, and came away from his trial with the edge of the executioner's axe turned towards him—as was always done in those times when a state prisoner came to that hopeless pass—he bore it quite serenely, and gave his blessing to his son, who pressed through the crowd in Westminster Hall and kneeled down to receive it. But, when he got to the Tower Wharf on his way back to his prison, and his favourite daughter, Margaret Roper, a very good woman, rushed through the guards again and again, to kiss him and to weep upon his neck, he was overcome at last. He soon recovered, and never more showed any feeling but cheerfulness and courage. When he was going up the steps of the scaffold to his death, he said jokingly to the Lieutenant of the Tower, observing that they were weak and shook beneath his tread, 'I pray you, master Lieutenant, see me safe up; and, for my coming down, I can shift for myself.' Also he said to the executioner, after he had laid his head upon the block, 'Let me put my beard out of the way; for that, at least, has never committed any treason.' Then his head was struck off at a blow. These two executions were worthy of King Henry the Eighth. Sir Thomas More was one of the most virtuous men in his dominions, and the Bishop was one of his oldest and truest friends. But to be a friend of that fellow was almost as dangerous as to be his wife.

When the news of these two murders got to Rome, the Pope raged against the murderer more than ever Pope raged since the world began, and prepared a Bull, ordering his subjects to take arms against him and dethrone him. The King took all possible precautions to keep that document out of his dominions, and set to work in return to suppress a great number of the English monasteries and abbeys.

This destruction was begun by a body of commissioners, of whom Cromwell (whom the King had taken into great favour) was the head; and was carried on through some few years to its entire completion. There is no doubt that many of these religious establishments were religious in nothing but in name, and were crammed with lazy, indolent, and sensual monks. There is no doubt that they imposed upon the people in every possible way; that they had images moved by wires, which they pretended were miraculously moved by Heaven; that they had among them a whole tun measure full of teeth, all purporting to have come out of the head of one saint, who must indeed have been a very extraordinary person with that enormous allowance of grinders; that they had bits of coal which they said had fried Saint Lawrence, and bits of toe-nails which they said belonged to other famous saints; penknives, and boots, and girdles, which they said belonged to others; and that all these bits of rubbish were called Relics, and adored by the ignorant people. But, on the other hand, there is no doubt either, that the King's officers and men punished the good monks with the bad; did great injustice; demolished many beautiful things and many valuable libraries; destroyed numbers of paintings, stained glass windows, fine pavements, and carvings; and that the whole court were ravenously greedy and rapacious for the division of this great spoil among them. The King seems to have grown almost mad in the ardour of this pursuit; for he declared Thomas à Becket a traitor, though he had been dead so many years, and had his body dug up out of his grave. He must have been as miraculous as the monks pretended, if they had told the truth, for he was found with one head on his shoulders, and they had shown another as his undoubted and genuine head ever since his death; it had brought them vast sums of money, too. The gold and jewels on his shrine filled two great chests, and eight men tottered as they carried them away. How rich the monasteries were you may infer from the fact that, when they were all suppressed, one hundred and thirty thousand pounds a year—in those days an immense sum—came to the Crown.

These things were not done without causing great discontent among the people. The monks had been good landlords and hospitable entertainers of all travellers, and had been accustomed to give away a great deal of corn, and fruit, and meat, and other things. In those days it was difficult to change goods into money, in consequence of the roads being very few and very bad, and the carts, and waggons of the worst description; and they must either have given away some of the good things they possessed in enormous quantities, or have suffered them to spoil and moulder. So, many of the people missed what it was more agreeable to get idly than to work for; and the monks who were driven out of their homes and wandered about encouraged their discontent; and there were, consequently, great risings in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire. These were put down by terrific executions, from which the monks themselves did not escape, and the King went on grunting and growling in his own fat way, like a Royal pig.

I have told all this story of the religious houses at one time, to make it plainer, and to get back to the King's domestic affairs.

The unfortunate Queen Catherine was by this time dead; and the King was by this time as tired of his second Queen as he had been of his first. As he had fallen in love with Anne when she was in the service of Catherine, so he now fell in love with another lady in the service of Anne. See how wicked deeds are punished, and how bitterly and self-reproachfully the Queen must now have thought of her own rise to the throne! The new fancy was a Lady Jane Seymour; and the King no sooner set his mind on her, than he resolved to have Anne Boleyn's head. So, he brought a number of charges against Anne, accusing her of dreadful crimes which she had never committed, and implicating in them her own brother and certain gentlemen in her service: among whom one Norris, and Mark Smeaton a musician, are best remembered. As the lords and councillors were as afraid of the King and as subservient to him as the meanest peasant in England was, they brought in Anne Boleyn guilty, and the other unfortunate persons accused with her, guilty too. Those gentlemen died like men, with the exception of Smeaton, who had been tempted by the King into telling lies, which he called confessions, and who had expected to be pardoned; but who, I am very glad to say, was not. There was then only the Queen to dispose of. She had been surrounded in the Tower with women spies; had been monstrously persecuted and foully slandered; and had received no justice. But her spirit rose with her afflictions; and, after having in vain tried to soften the King by writing an affecting letter to him which still exists, 'from her doleful prison in the Tower,' she resigned herself to death. She said to those about her, very cheerfully, that she had heard say the executioner was a good one, and that she had a little neck (she laughed and clasped it with her hands as she said that), and would soon be out of her pain. And she *was* soon out of her pain, poor creature, on the Green inside the Tower, and her body was flung into an old box and put away in the ground under the chapel.

There is a story that the King sat in his palace listening very anxiously for the sound of the cannon which was to announce this new murder; and that, when he heard it come booming on the air, he rose up in great spirits and ordered out his dogs to go a-hunting. He was bad enough to do it; but whether he did it or not, it is certain that he married Jane Seymour the very next day.

I have not much pleasure in recording that she lived just long enough to give birth to a son who was christened Edward, and then to die of a fever: for, I cannot but think that any woman who married such a ruffian, and knew what innocent blood was on his hands, deserved the axe that would assuredly have fallen on the neck of Jane Seymour, if she had lived much longer.

Cranmer had done what he could to save some of the Church property for purposes of religion and education; but, the great families had been so hungry to get hold of it, that very little could be rescued for such objects. Even Miles Coverdale, who did the people the inestimable service of translating the Bible into English (which the unreformed religion never permitted to be done), was left in poverty while the great families clutched the Church lands and money. The people had been told that when the Crown came into possession of these funds, it would not be necessary to tax them; but they were taxed afresh directly afterwards. It was fortunate for them, indeed, that so many nobles were so greedy for this wealth; since, if it had remained with the Crown, there might have been no end to tyranny for hundreds of years. One of the most active writers on the Church's side against the King was a member of his own family—a sort of distant cousin, Reginald Pole by name—who attacked him in the most violent manner (though he received a pension from him all the time), and fought for the Church with his pen, day and night. As he was beyond the King's reach—being in Italy—the King politely invited him over to discuss the subject; but he, knowing better than to come, and wisely staying where he was, the King's rage fell upon his brother Lord Montague, the Marquis of Exeter, and some other gentlemen: who were tried for high treason in corresponding with him and aiding him—which they probably did—and were all executed. The Pope made Reginald Pole a cardinal; but, so much against his will, that it is thought he even aspired in his own mind to the vacant throne of England, and had hopes of marrying the Princess Mary. His being made a high priest, however, put an end to all that. His mother, the venerable Countess of Salisbury—who was, unfortunately for herself, within the tyrant's reach—was the last of his relatives on whom his wrath fell. When she was told to lay her grey head upon the block, she answered the executioner, 'No! My head never committed treason, and if you want it, you shall seize it.' So, she ran round and round the scaffold with the executioner striking at her, and her grey hair bedabbled with blood; and even when they held her down upon the block she moved her head about to the last, resolved to be no party to her own barbarous murder. All this the people bore, as they had borne everything else.

Indeed they bore much more; for the slow fires of Smithfield were continually burning, and people were constantly being roasted to death—still to show what a good Christian the King was. He defied the Pope and his Bull, which was now issued, and had come into England; but he burned innumerable people whose only offence was that they differed from the Pope's religious opinions. There was a wretched man named Lambert, among others, who was tried for this before the King, and with whom six bishops argued one after another. When he was quite exhausted (as well he might be, after six bishops), he threw himself on the King's mercy; but the King blustered out that he had no mercy for heretics. So, *he* too fed the fire.

All this the people bore, and more than all this yet. The national spirit seems to have been banished from the kingdom at this time. The very people who were executed for treason, the very wives and friends of the 'bluff' King, spoke of him on the scaffold as a good prince, and a gentle prince—just as serfs in similar circumstances have been known to do, under the Sultan and Bashaws of the East, or under the fierce old tyrants of Russia, who poured boiling and freezing water on them alternately, until they died. The Parliament were as bad as the rest, and gave the King whatever he wanted; among other vile accommodations, they gave him new powers of murdering, at his will and pleasure, any one whom he might choose to call a traitor. But the worst measure they passed was an Act of Six Articles, commonly called at the time 'the whip with six strings;' which punished offences against the Pope's opinions, without mercy, and enforced the very worst parts of the monkish religion. Cranmer would have modified it, if he could; but, being overborne by the Romish party, had not the power. As one of the articles declared that priests should not marry, and as he was married himself, he sent his wife and children into Germany, and began to tremble at his danger; none the less because he was, and had long been, the King's friend. This whip of six strings was made under the King's own eye. It should never be forgotten of him how cruelly he supported the worst of the Popish doctrines when there was nothing to be got by opposing them.

This amiable monarch now thought of taking another wife. He proposed to the French King to have some of the ladies of the French Court exhibited before him, that he might make his Royal choice; but the French King answered that he would rather not have his ladies trotted out to be shown like horses at a fair. He proposed to the Dowager Duchess of Milan, who replied that she might have thought of such a match if she had had two heads; but, that only owning one, she must beg to keep it safe. At last Cromwell represented that there was a Protestant Princess in Germany—those who held the reformed religion were called Protestants, because their leaders had Protested against the abuses and impositions of the unreformed Church—named Anne of Cleves, who was beautiful, and would answer the purpose admirably. The King said was she a large woman, because he must have a fat wife? 'O yes,' said Cromwell; 'she was very large, just the thing.' On hearing this the King sent over his famous painter, Hans Holbein, to take her portrait. Hans made her out to be so good-looking that the King was satisfied, and the marriage was arranged. But, whether anybody had paid Hans to touch up the picture; or whether Hans, like one or two other painters, flattered a princess in the ordinary way of business, I cannot say: all I know is, that when Anne came over and the King went to Rochester to meet her, and first saw her without her seeing him, he swore she was 'a great Flanders mare,' and said he would never marry her. Being obliged to do it now matters had gone so far, he would not give her the presents he had prepared, and would never notice her. He never forgave Cromwell his part in the affair. His downfall dates from that time.

It was quickened by his enemies, in the interests of the unreformed religion, putting in the King's way, at a state dinner, a niece of the Duke of Norfolk, Catherine Howard, a young lady of fascinating manners, though small in stature and not particularly beautiful. Falling in love with her on the spot, the King soon divorced Anne of Cleves after making her the subject of much brutal talk, on pretence that she had been previously betrothed to some one else—which would never do for one of his dignity—and married Catherine. It is probable that on his wedding day, of all days in the year, he sent his faithful Cromwell to the scaffold, and had his head struck off. He further celebrated the occasion by burning at one time, and causing to be drawn to the fire on the same hurdles, some Protestant prisoners for denying the Pope's doctrines, and some Roman Catholic prisoners for denying his own supremacy. Still the people bore it, and not a gentleman in England raised his hand.

But, by a just retribution, it soon came out that Catherine Howard, before her marriage, had been really guilty of such crimes as the King had falsely attributed to his second wife Anne Boleyn; so, again the dreadful axe made the King a widower, and this Queen passed away as so many in that reign had passed away before her. As an appropriate pursuit under the circumstances, Henry then applied himself to superintending the composition of a religious book called 'A necessary doctrine for any Christian Man.' He must have been a little confused in his mind, I think, at about this period; for he was so false to himself as to be true to some one: that some one being Cranmer, whom the Duke of Norfolk and others of his enemies tried to ruin; but to whom the King was steadfast, and to whom he one night gave his ring, charging him when he should find himself, next day, accused of treason, to show it to the council board. This Cranmer did to the confusion of his enemies. I suppose the King thought he might want him a little longer.

He married yet once more. Yes, strange to say, he found in England another woman who would become his wife, and she was Catherine Parr, widow of Lord Latimer. She leaned towards the reformed religion; and it is some comfort to know, that she tormented the King considerably by arguing a variety of doctrinal points with him on all possible occasions. She had very nearly done this to her own destruction. After one of these conversations the King in a very black mood actually instructed Gardiner, one of his Bishops who favoured the Popish opinions, to draw a bill of accusation against her, which would have inevitably brought her to the scaffold where her predecessors had died, but that one of her friends picked up the paper of instructions which had been dropped in the palace, and gave her timely notice. She fell ill with terror; but managed the King so well when he came to entrap her into further statements—by saying that she had only spoken on such points to divert his mind and to get some information from his extraordinary wisdom—that he gave her a kiss and called her his sweetheart. And, when the Chancellor came next day actually to take her to the Tower, the King sent him about his business, and honoured him with the epithets of a beast, a knave, and a fool. So near was Catherine Parr to the block, and so narrow was her escape!

There was war with Scotland in this reign, and a short clumsy war with France for favouring Scotland; but, the events at home were so dreadful, and leave such an enduring stain on the country, that I need say no more of what happened abroad.

A few more horrors, and this reign is over. There was a lady, Anne Askew, in Lincolnshire, who inclined to the Protestant opinions, and whose husband being a fierce Catholic, turned her out of his house. She came to London, and was considered as offending against the six articles, and was taken to the Tower, and put upon the rack—probably because it was hoped that she might, in her agony, criminate some obnoxious persons; if falsely, so much the better. She was tortured without uttering a cry, until the Lieutenant of the Tower would suffer his men to torture her no more; and then two priests who were present actually pulled off their robes, and turned the wheels of the rack with their own hands, so rending and twisting and breaking her that she was afterwards carried to the fire in a chair. She was burned with three others, a gentleman, a clergyman, and a tailor; and so the world went on.

Either the King became afraid of the power of the Duke of Norfolk, and his son the Earl of Surrey, or they gave him some offence, but he resolved to pull *them* down, to follow all the rest who were gone. The son was tried first—of course for nothing—and defended himself bravely; but of course he was found guilty, and of course he was executed. Then his father was laid hold of, and left for death too.

But the King himself was left for death by a Greater King, and the earth was to be rid of him at last. He was now a swollen, hideous spectacle, with a great hole in his leg, and so odious to every sense that it was dreadful to approach him. When he was found to be dying, Cranmer was sent for from his palace at Croydon, and came with all speed, but found him speechless. Happily, in that hour he perished. He was in the fifty-sixth year of his age, and the thirty-eighth of his reign.

Henry the Eighth has been favoured by some Protestant writers, because the Reformation was achieved in his time. But the mighty merit of it lies with other men and not with him; and it can be rendered none the worse by this monster's crimes, and none the better by any defence of them. The plain truth is, that he was a most intolerable ruffian, a disgrace to human nature, and a blot of blood and grease upon the History of England.

CHAPTER XXIX—ENGLAND UNDER EDWARD THE SIXTH

Henry the Eighth had made a will, appointing a council of sixteen to govern the kingdom for his son while he was under age (he was now only ten years old), and another council of twelve to help them. The most powerful of the first council was the Earl of Hertford, the young King's uncle, who lost no time in bringing his nephew with great state up to Enfield, and thence to the Tower. It was considered at the time a striking proof of virtue in the young King that he was sorry for his father's death; but, as common subjects have that virtue too, sometimes, we will say no more about it.

There was a curious part of the late King's will, requiring his executors to fulfil whatever promises he had made. Some of the court wondering what these might be, the Earl of Hertford and the other noblemen interested, said that they were promises to advance and enrich *them*. So, the Earl of Hertford made himself Duke of Somerset, and made his brother Edward Seymour a baron; and there were various similar promotions, all very agreeable to the parties concerned, and very dutiful, no doubt, to the late King's memory. To be more dutiful still, they made themselves rich out of the Church lands, and were very comfortable. The new Duke of Somerset caused himself to be declared Protector of the kingdom, and was, indeed, the King.

As young Edward the Sixth had been brought up in the principles of the Protestant religion, everybody knew that they would be maintained. But Cranmer, to whom they were chiefly entrusted, advanced them steadily and temperately. Many superstitious and ridiculous practices were stopped; but practices which were harmless were not interfered with.

The Duke of Somerset, the Protector, was anxious to have the young King engaged in marriage to the young Queen of Scotland, in order to prevent that princess from making an alliance with any foreign power; but, as a large party in Scotland were unfavourable to this plan, he invaded that country. His excuse for doing so was, that the Border men—that is, the Scotch who lived in that part of the country where England and Scotland joined—troubled the English very much. But there were two sides to this question; for the English Border men troubled the Scotch too; and, through many long years, there were perpetual border quarrels which gave rise to numbers of old tales and songs. However, the Protector invaded Scotland; and Arran, the Scottish Regent, with an army twice as large as his, advanced to meet him. They encountered on the banks of the river Esk, within a few miles of Edinburgh; and there, after a little skirmish, the Protector made such moderate proposals, in offering to retire if the Scotch would only engage not to marry their princess to any foreign prince, that the Regent thought the English were afraid. But in this he made a horrible mistake; for the English soldiers on land, and the English sailors on the water, so set upon the Scotch, that they broke and fled, and more than ten thousand of them were killed. It was a dreadful battle, for the fugitives were slain without mercy. The ground for four miles, all the way to Edinburgh, was strewn with dead men, and with arms, and legs, and heads. Some hid themselves in streams and were drowned; some threw away their armour and were killed running, almost naked; but in this battle of Pinkey the English lost only two or three hundred men. They were much better clothed than the Scotch; at the poverty of whose appearance and country they were exceedingly astonished.

A Parliament was called when Somerset came back, and it repealed the whip with six strings, and did one or two other good things; though it unhappily retained the punishment of burning for those people who did not make believe to believe, in all religious matters, what the Government had declared that they must and should believe. It also made a foolish law (meant to put down beggars), that any man who lived idly and loitered about for three days together, should be burned with a hot iron, made a slave, and wear an iron fetter. But this savage absurdity soon came to an end, and went the way of a great many other foolish laws.

The Protector was now so proud that he sat in Parliament before all the nobles, on the right hand of the throne. Many other noblemen, who only wanted to be as proud if they could get a chance, became his enemies of course; and it is supposed that he came back suddenly from Scotland because he had received news that his brother, Lord Seymour, was becoming dangerous to him. This lord was now High Admiral of England; a very handsome man, and a great favourite with the Court ladies—even with the young Princess Elizabeth, who romped with him a little more than young princesses in these times do with any one. He had married Catherine Parr, the late King's widow, who was now dead; and, to strengthen his power, he secretly supplied the young King with money. He may even have engaged with some of his brother's enemies in a plot to carry the boy off. On these and other accusations, at any rate, he was confined in the Tower, impeached, and found guilty; his own brother's name being—unnatural and sad to tell—the first signed to the warrant of his execution. He was executed on Tower Hill, and died denying his treason. One of his last proceedings in this world was to write two letters, one to the Princess Elizabeth, and one to the Princess Mary, which a servant of his took charge of, and concealed in his shoe. These letters are supposed to have urged them against his brother, and to revenge his death. What they truly contained is not known; but there is no doubt that he had, at one time, obtained great influence over the Princess Elizabeth.

All this while, the Protestant religion was making progress. The images which the people had gradually come to worship, were removed from the churches; the people were informed that they need not confess themselves to priests unless they chose; a common prayer-book was drawn up in the English language, which all could understand, and many other improvements were made; still moderately. For Cranmer was a very moderate man, and even restrained the Protestant clergy from violently abusing the unreformed religion—as they very often did, and which was not a good example. But the people were at this time in great distress. The rapacious nobility who had come into possession of the Church lands, were very bad landlords. They enclosed great quantities of ground for the feeding of sheep, which was then more profitable than the growing of crops; and this increased the general distress. So the people, who still understood little of what was going on about them, and still readily believed what the homeless monks told them—many of whom had been their good friends in their better days—took it into their heads that all this was owing to the reformed religion, and therefore rose, in many parts of the country.

The most powerful risings were in Devonshire and Norfolk. In Devonshire, the rebellion was so strong that ten thousand men united within a few days, and even laid siege to Exeter. But Lord Russell, coming to the assistance of the citizens who defended that town, defeated the rebels; and, not only hanged the Mayor of one place, but hanged the vicar of another from his own church steeple. What with hanging and killing by the sword, four thousand of the rebels are supposed to have fallen in that one county. In Norfolk (where the rising was more against the enclosure of open lands than against the reformed religion), the popular leader was a man named Robert Ket, a tanner of Wymondham. The mob were, in the first instance, excited against the tanner by one John Flowerdew, a gentleman who owed him a grudge: but the tanner was more than a match for the gentleman, since he soon got the people on his side, and established himself near Norwich with quite an army. There was a large oak-tree in that place, on a spot called Moushold Hill, which Ket named the Tree of Reformation; and under its green boughs, he and his men sat, in the midsummer weather, holding courts of justice, and debating affairs of state. They were even impartial enough to allow some rather tiresome public speakers to get up into this Tree of Reformation, and point out their errors to them, in long discourses, while they lay listening (not always without some grumbling and growling) in the shade below. At last, one sunny July day, a herald appeared below the tree, and proclaimed Ket and all his men traitors, unless from that moment they dispersed and went home: in which case they were to receive a pardon. But, Ket and his men made light of the herald and became stronger than ever, until the Earl of Warwick went after them with a sufficient force, and cut them all to pieces. A few were hanged, drawn, and quartered, as traitors, and their limbs were sent into various country places to be a terror to the people. Nine of them were hanged upon nine green branches of the Oak of Reformation; and so, for the time, that tree may be said to have withered away.

The Protector, though a haughty man, had compassion for the real distresses of the common people, and a sincere desire to help them. But he was too proud and too high in degree to hold even their favour steadily; and many of the nobles always envied and hated him, because they were as proud and not as high as he. He was at this time building a great Palace in the Strand: to get the stone for which he blew up church steeples with gunpowder, and pulled down bishops’ houses: thus making himself still more disliked. At length, his principal enemy, the Earl of Warwick—Dudley by name, and the son of that Dudley who had made himself so odious with Empson, in the reign of Henry the Seventh—joined with seven other members of the Council against him, formed a separate Council; and, becoming stronger in a few days, sent him to the Tower under twenty-nine articles of accusation. After being sentenced by the Council to the forfeiture of all his offices and lands, he was liberated and pardoned, on making a very humble submission. He was even taken back into the Council again, after having suffered this fall, and married his daughter, Lady Anne Seymour, to Warwick's eldest son. But such a reconciliation was little likely to last, and did not outlive a year. Warwick, having got himself made Duke of Northumberland, and having advanced the more important of his friends, then finished the history by causing the Duke of Somerset and his friend Lord Grey, and others, to be arrested for treason, in having conspired to seize and dethrone the King. They were also accused of having intended to seize the new Duke of Northumberland, with his friends Lord Northampton and Lord Pembroke; to murder them if they found need; and to raise the City to revolt. All this the fallen Protector positively denied; except that he confessed to having spoken of the murder of those three noblemen, but having never designed it. He was acquitted of the charge of treason, and found guilty of the other charges; so when the people—who remembered his having been their friend, now that he was disgraced and in danger, saw him come out from his trial with the axe turned from him—they thought he was altogether acquitted, and sent up a loud shout of joy.

But the Duke of Somerset was ordered to be beheaded on Tower Hill, at eight o'clock in the morning, and proclamations were issued bidding the citizens keep at home until after ten. They filled the streets, however, and crowded the place of execution as soon as it was light; and, with sad faces and sad hearts, saw the once powerful Protector ascend the scaffold to lay his head upon the dreadful block. While he was yet saying his last words to them with manly courage, and telling them, in particular, how it comforted him, at that pass, to have assisted in reforming the national religion, a member of the Council was seen riding up on horseback. They again thought that the Duke was saved by his bringing a reprieve, and again shouted for joy. But the Duke himself told them they were mistaken, and laid down his head and had it struck off at a blow.

Many of the bystanders rushed forward and steeped their handkerchiefs in his blood, as a mark of their affection. He had, indeed, been capable of many good acts, and one of them was discovered after he was no more. The Bishop of Durham, a very good man, had been informed against to the Council, when the Duke was in power, as having answered a treacherous letter proposing a rebellion against the reformed religion. As the answer could not be found, he could not be declared guilty; but it was now discovered, hidden by the Duke himself among some private papers, in his regard for that good man. The Bishop lost his office, and was deprived of his possessions.

It is not very pleasant to know that while his uncle lay in prison under sentence of death, the young King was being vastly entertained by plays, and dances, and sham fights: but there is no doubt of it, for he kept a journal himself. It is pleasanter to know that not a single Roman Catholic was burnt in this reign for holding that religion; though two wretched victims suffered for heresy. One, a woman named Joan Bocher, for professing some opinions that even she could only explain in unintelligible jargon. The other, a Dutchman, named Von Paris, who practised as a surgeon in London. Edward was, to his credit, exceedingly unwilling to sign the warrant for the woman's execution: shedding tears before he did so, and telling Cranmer, who urged him to do it (though Cranmer really would have spared the woman at first, but for her own determined obstinacy), that the guilt was not his, but that of the man who so strongly urged the dreadful act. We shall see, too soon, whether the time ever came when Cranmer is likely to have remembered this with sorrow and remorse.

Cranmer and Ridley (at first Bishop of Rochester, and afterwards Bishop of London) were the most powerful of the clergy of this reign. Others were imprisoned and deprived of their property for still adhering to the unreformed religion; the most important among whom were Gardiner Bishop of Winchester, Heath Bishop of Worcester, Day Bishop of Chichester, and Bonner that Bishop of London who was superseded by Ridley. The Princess Mary, who inherited her mother's gloomy temper, and hated the reformed religion as connected with her mother's wrongs and sorrows—she knew nothing else about it, always refusing to read a single book in which it was truly described—held by the unreformed religion too, and was the only person in the kingdom for whom the old Mass was allowed to be performed; nor would the young King have made that exception even in her favour, but for the strong persuasions of Cranmer and Ridley. He always viewed it with horror; and when he fell into a sickly condition, after having been very ill, first of the measles and then of the small-pox, he was greatly troubled in mind to think that if he died, and she, the next heir to the throne, succeeded, the Roman Catholic religion would be set up again.

This uneasiness, the Duke of Northumberland was not slow to encourage: for, if the Princess Mary came to the throne, he, who had taken part with the Protestants, was sure to be disgraced. Now, the Duchess of Suffolk was descended from King Henry the Seventh; and, if she resigned what little or no right she had, in favour of her daughter Lady Jane Grey, that would be the succession to promote the Duke's greatness; because Lord Guilford Dudley, one of his sons, was, at this very time, newly married to her. So, he worked upon the King's fears, and persuaded him to set aside both the Princess Mary and the Princess Elizabeth, and assert his right to appoint his successor. Accordingly the young King handed to the Crown lawyers a writing signed half a dozen times over by himself, appointing Lady Jane Grey to succeed to the Crown, and requiring them to have his will made out according to law. They were much against it at first, and told the King so; but the Duke of Northumberland—being so violent about it that the lawyers even expected him to beat them, and hotly declaring that, stripped to his shirt, he would fight any man in such a quarrel—they yielded. Cranmer, also, at first hesitated; pleading that he had sworn to maintain the succession of the Crown to the Princess Mary; but, he was a weak man in his resolutions, and afterwards signed the document with the rest of the council.

It was completed none too soon; for Edward was now sinking in a rapid decline; and, by way of making him better, they handed him over to a woman-doctor who pretended to be able to cure it. He speedily got worse. On the sixth of July, in the year one thousand five hundred and fifty-three, he died, very peaceably and piously, praying God, with his last breath, to protect the reformed religion.

This King died in the sixteenth year of his age, and in the seventh of his reign. It is difficult to judge what the character of one so young might afterwards have become among so many bad, ambitious, quarrelling nobles. But, he was an amiable boy, of very good abilities, and had nothing coarse or cruel or brutal in his disposition—which in the son of such a father is rather surprising.

CHAPTER XXX—ENGLAND UNDER MARY

The Duke of Northumberland was very anxious to keep the young King’s death a secret, in order that he might get the two Princesses into his power. But, the Princess Mary, being informed of that event as she was on her way to London to see her sick brother, turned her horse’s head, and rode away into Norfolk. The Earl of Arundel was her friend, and it was he who sent her warning of what had happened.

As the secret could not be kept, the Duke of Northumberland and the council sent for the Lord Mayor of London and some of the aldermen, and made a merit of telling it to them. Then, they made it known to the people, and set off to inform Lady Jane Grey that she was to be Queen.

She was a pretty girl of only sixteen, and was amiable, learned, and clever. When the lords who came to her, fell on their knees before her, and told her what tidings they brought, she was so astonished that she fainted. On recovering, she expressed her sorrow for the young King’s death, and said that she knew she was unfit to govern the kingdom; but that if she must be Queen, she prayed God to direct her. She was then at Sion House, near Brentford; and the lords took her down the river in state to the Tower, that she might remain there (as the custom was) until she was crowned. But the people were not at all favourable to Lady Jane, considering that the right to be Queen was Mary’s, and greatly disliking the Duke of Northumberland. They were not put into a better humour by the Duke’s causing a vintner’s servant, one Gabriel Pot, to be taken up for expressing his dissatisfaction among the crowd, and to have his ears nailed to the pillory, and cut off. Some powerful men among the nobility declared on Mary’s side. They raised troops to support her cause, had her proclaimed Queen at Norwich, and gathered around her at the castle of Framlingham, which belonged to the Duke of Norfolk. For, she was not considered so safe as yet, but that it was best to keep her in a castle on the sea-coast, from whence she might be sent abroad, if necessary.

The Council would have despatched Lady Jane’s father, the Duke of Suffolk, as the general of the army against this force; but, as Lady Jane implored that her father might remain with her, and as he was known to be but a weak man, they told the Duke of Northumberland that he must take the command himself. He was not very ready to do so, as he mistrusted the Council much; but there was no help for it, and he set forth with a heavy heart, observing to a lord who rode beside him through Shoreditch at the head of the troops, that, although the people pressed in great numbers to look at them, they were terribly silent.

And his fears for himself turned out to be well founded. While he was waiting at Cambridge for further help from the Council, the Council took it into their heads to turn their backs on Lady Jane's cause, and to take up the Princess Mary's. This was chiefly owing to the before-mentioned Earl of Arundel, who represented to the Lord Mayor and aldermen, in a second interview with those sagacious persons, that, as for himself, he did not perceive the Reformed religion to be in much danger—which Lord Pembroke backed by flourishing his sword as another kind of persuasion. The Lord Mayor and aldermen, thus enlightened, said there could be no doubt that the Princess Mary ought to be Queen. So, she was proclaimed at the Cross by St. Paul's, and barrels of wine were given to the people, and they got very drunk, and danced round blazing bonfires—little thinking, poor wretches, what other bonfires would soon be blazing in Queen Mary's name.

After a ten days' dream of royalty, Lady Jane Grey resigned the Crown with great willingness, saying that she had only accepted it in obedience to her father and mother; and went gladly back to her pleasant house by the river, and her books. Mary then came on towards London; and at Wanstead in Essex, was joined by her half-sister, the Princess Elizabeth. They passed through the streets of London to the Tower, and there the new Queen met some eminent prisoners then confined in it, kissed them, and gave them their liberty. Among these was that Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, who had been imprisoned in the last reign for holding to the unreformed religion. Him she soon made chancellor.

The Duke of Northumberland had been taken prisoner, and, together with his son and five others, was quickly brought before the Council. He, not unnaturally, asked that Council, in his defence, whether it was treason to obey orders that had been issued under the great seal; and, if it were, whether they, who had obeyed them too, ought to be his judges? But they made light of these points; and, being resolved to have him out of the way, soon sentenced him to death. He had risen into power upon the death of another man, and made but a poor show (as might be expected) when he himself lay low. He entreated Gardiner to let him live, if it were only in a mouse's hole; and, when he ascended the scaffold to be beheaded on Tower Hill, addressed the people in a miserable way, saying that he had been incited by others, and exhorting them to return to the unreformed religion, which he told them was his faith. There seems reason to suppose that he expected a pardon even then, in return for this confession; but it matters little whether he did or not. His head was struck off.

Mary was now crowned Queen. She was thirty-seven years of age, short and thin, wrinkled in the face, and very unhealthy. But she had a great liking for show and for bright colours, and all the ladies of her Court were magnificently dressed. She had a great liking too for old customs, without much sense in them; and she was oiled in the oldest way, and blessed in the oldest way, and done all manner of things to in the oldest way, at her coronation. I hope they did her good.

She soon began to show her desire to put down the Reformed religion, and put up the unreformed one: though it was dangerous work as yet, the people being something wiser than they used to be. They even cast a shower of stones—and among them a dagger—at one of the royal chaplains who attacked the Reformed religion in a public sermon. But the Queen and her priests went steadily on. Ridley, the powerful bishop of the last reign, was seized and sent to the Tower. Latimer, also celebrated among the Clergy of the last reign, was likewise sent to the Tower, and Cranmer speedily followed. Latimer was an aged man; and, as his guards took him through Smithfield, he looked round it, and said, 'This is a place that hath long groaned for me.' For he knew well, what kind of bonfires would soon be burning. Nor was the knowledge confined to him. The prisons were fast filled with the chief Protestants, who were there left rotting in darkness, hunger, dirt, and separation from their friends; many, who had time left them for escape, fled from the kingdom; and the dullest of the people began, now, to see what was coming.

It came on fast. A Parliament was got together; not without strong suspicion of unfairness; and they annulled the divorce, formerly pronounced by Cranmer between the Queen's mother and King Henry the Eighth, and unmade all the laws on the subject of religion that had been made in the last King Edward's reign. They began their proceedings, in violation of the law, by having the old mass said before them in Latin, and by turning out a bishop who would not kneel down. They also declared guilty of treason, Lady Jane Grey for aspiring to the Crown; her husband, for being her husband; and Cranmer, for not believing in the mass aforesaid. They then prayed the Queen graciously to choose a husband for herself, as soon as might be.

Now, the question who should be the Queen's husband had given rise to a great deal of discussion, and to several contending parties. Some said Cardinal Pole was the man—but the Queen was of opinion that he was *not* the man, he being too old and too much of a student. Others said that the gallant young Courtenay, whom the Queen had made Earl of Devonshire, was the man—and the Queen thought so too, for a while; but she changed her mind. At last it appeared that Philip, Prince of Spain, was certainly the man—though certainly not the people's man; for they detested the idea of such a marriage from the beginning to the end, and murmured that the Spaniard would establish in England, by the aid of foreign soldiers, the worst abuses of the Popish religion, and even the terrible Inquisition itself.

These discontents gave rise to a conspiracy for marrying young Courtenay to the Princess Elizabeth, and setting them up, with popular tumults all over the kingdom, against the Queen. This was discovered in time by Gardiner; but in Kent, the old bold county, the people rose in their old bold way. Sir Thomas Wyat, a man of great daring, was their leader. He raised his standard at Maidstone, marched on to Rochester, established himself in the old castle there, and prepared to hold out against the Duke of Norfolk, who came against him with a party of the Queen's guards, and a body of five hundred London men. The London men, however, were all for Elizabeth, and not at all for Mary. They declared, under the castle walls, for Wyat; the Duke retreated; and Wyat came on to Deptford, at the head of fifteen thousand men.

But these, in their turn, fell away. When he came to Southwark, there were only two thousand left. Not dismayed by finding the London citizens in arms, and the guns at the Tower ready to oppose his crossing the river there, Wyat led them off to Kingston-upon-Thames, intending to cross the bridge that he knew to be in that place, and so to work his way round to Ludgate, one of the old gates of the City. He found the bridge broken down, but mended it, came across, and bravely fought his way up Fleet Street to Ludgate Hill. Finding the gate closed against him, he fought his way back again, sword in hand, to Temple Bar. Here, being overpowered, he surrendered himself, and three or four hundred of his men were taken, besides a hundred killed. Wyat, in a moment of weakness (and perhaps of torture) was afterwards made to accuse the Princess Elizabeth as his accomplice to some very small extent. But his manhood soon returned to him, and he refused to save his life by making any more false confessions. He was quartered and distributed in the usual brutal way, and from fifty to a hundred of his followers were hanged. The rest were led out, with halters round their necks, to be pardoned, and to make a parade of crying out, 'God save Queen Mary!'

In the danger of this rebellion, the Queen showed herself to be a woman of courage and spirit. She disdained to retreat to any place of safety, and went down to the Guildhall, sceptre in hand, and made a gallant speech to the Lord Mayor and citizens. But on the day after Wyat's defeat, she did the most cruel act, even of her cruel reign, in signing the warrant for the execution of Lady Jane Grey.

They tried to persuade Lady Jane to accept the unreformed religion; but she steadily refused. On the morning when she was to die, she saw from her window the bleeding and headless body of her husband brought back in a cart from the scaffold on Tower Hill where he had laid down his life. But, as she had declined to see him before his execution, lest she should be overpowered and not make a good end, so, she even now showed a constancy and calmness that will never be forgotten. She came up to the scaffold with a firm step and a quiet face, and addressed the bystanders in a steady voice. They were not numerous; for she was too young, too innocent and fair, to be murdered before the people on Tower Hill, as her husband had just been; so, the place of her execution was within the Tower itself. She said that she had done an unlawful act in taking what was Queen Mary's right; but that she had done so with no bad intent, and that she died a humble Christian. She begged the executioner to despatch her quickly, and she asked him, 'Will you take my head off before I lay me down?' He answered, 'No, Madam,' and then she was very quiet while they bandaged her eyes. Being blinded, and unable to see the block on which she was to lay her young head, she was seen to feel about for it with her hands, and was heard to say, confused, 'O what shall I do! Where is it?' Then they guided her to the right place, and the executioner struck off her head. You know too well, now, what dreadful deeds the executioner did in England, through many, many years, and how his axe descended on the hateful block through the necks of some of the bravest, wisest, and best in the land. But it never struck so cruel and so vile a blow as this.

The father of Lady Jane soon followed, but was little pitied. Queen Mary's next object was to lay hold of Elizabeth, and this was pursued with great eagerness. Five hundred men were sent to her retired house at Ashridge, by Berkhampstead, with orders to bring her up, alive or dead. They got there at ten at night, when she was sick in bed. But, their leaders followed her lady into her bedchamber, whence she was brought out betimes next morning, and put into a litter to be conveyed to London. She was so weak and ill, that she was five days on the road; still, she was so resolved to be seen by the people that she had the curtains of the litter opened; and so, very pale and sickly, passed through the streets. She wrote to her sister, saying she was innocent of any crime, and asking why she was made a prisoner; but she got no answer, and was ordered to the Tower. They took her in by the Traitor's Gate, to which she objected, but in vain. One of the lords who conveyed her offered to cover her with his cloak, as it was raining, but she put it away from her, proudly and scornfully, and passed into the Tower, and sat down in a court-yard on a stone. They besought her to come in out of the wet; but she answered that it was better sitting there, than in a worse place. At length she went to her apartment, where she was kept a prisoner, though not so close a prisoner as at Woodstock, whither she was afterwards removed, and where she is said to have one day envied a milkmaid whom she heard singing in the sunshine as she went through the green fields. Gardiner, than whom there were not many worse men among the fierce and sullen priests, cared little to keep secret his stern desire for her death: being used to say that it was of little service to shake off the leaves, and lop the branches of the tree of heresy, if its root, the hope of heretics, were left. He failed, however, in his benevolent design. Elizabeth was, at length, released; and Hatfield House was assigned to her as a residence, under the care of one Sir Thomas Pope.

It would seem that Philip, the Prince of Spain, was a main cause of this change in Elizabeth's fortunes. He was not an amiable man, being, on the contrary, proud, overbearing, and gloomy; but he and the Spanish lords who came over with him, assuredly did discountenance the idea of doing any violence to the Princess. It may have been mere prudence, but we will hope it was manhood and honour. The Queen had been expecting her husband with great impatience, and at length he came, to her great joy, though he never cared much for her. They were married by Gardiner, at Winchester, and there was more holiday-making among the people; but they had their old distrust of this Spanish marriage, in which even the Parliament shared. Though the members of that Parliament were far from honest, and were strongly suspected to have been bought with Spanish money, they would pass no bill to enable the Queen to set aside the Princess Elizabeth and appoint her own successor.

Although Gardiner failed in this object, as well as in the darker one of bringing the Princess to the scaffold, he went on at a great pace in the revival of the unreformed religion. A new Parliament was packed, in which there were no Protestants. Preparations were made to receive Cardinal Pole in England as the Pope's messenger, bringing his holy declaration that all the nobility who had acquired Church property, should keep it—which was done to enlist their selfish interest on the Pope's side. Then a great scene was enacted, which was the triumph of the Queen's plans. Cardinal Pole arrived in great splendour and dignity, and was received with great pomp. The Parliament joined in a petition expressive of their sorrow at the change in the national religion, and praying him to receive the country again into the Popish Church. With the Queen sitting on her throne, and the King on one side of her, and the Cardinal on the other, and the Parliament present, Gardiner read the petition aloud. The Cardinal then made a great speech, and was so obliging as to say that all was forgotten and forgiven, and that the kingdom was solemnly made Roman Catholic again.

Everything was now ready for the lighting of the terrible bonfires. The Queen having declared to the Council, in writing, that she would wish none of her subjects to be burnt without some of the Council being present, and that she would particularly wish there to be good sermons at all burnings, the Council knew pretty well what was to be done next. So, after the Cardinal had blessed all the bishops as a preface to the burnings, the Chancellor Gardiner opened a High Court at Saint Mary Overy, on the Southwark side of London Bridge, for the trial of heretics. Here, two of the late Protestant clergymen, Hooper, Bishop of Gloucester, and Rogers, a Prebendary of St. Paul's, were brought to be tried. Hooper was tried first for being married, though a priest, and for not believing in the mass. He admitted both of these accusations, and said that the mass was a wicked imposition. Then they tried Rogers, who said the same. Next morning the two were brought up to be sentenced; and then Rogers said that his poor wife, being a German woman and a stranger in the land, he hoped might be allowed to come to speak to him before he died. To this the inhuman Gardiner replied, that she was not his wife. ‘Yea, but she is, my lord,’ said Rogers, ‘and she hath been my wife these eighteen years.’ His request was still refused, and they were both sent to Newgate; all those who stood in the streets to sell things, being ordered to put out their lights that the people might not see them. But, the people stood at their doors with candles in their hands, and prayed for them as they went by. Soon afterwards, Rogers was taken out of jail to be burnt in Smithfield; and, in the crowd as he went along, he saw his poor wife and his ten children, of whom the youngest was a little baby. And so he was burnt to death.

The next day, Hooper, who was to be burnt at Gloucester, was brought out to take his last journey, and was made to wear a hood over his face that he might not be known by the people. But, they did know him for all that, down in his own part of the country; and, when he came near Gloucester, they lined the road, making prayers and lamentations. His guards took him to a lodging, where he slept soundly all night. At nine o’clock next morning, he was brought forth leaning on a staff; for he had taken cold in prison, and was infirm. The iron stake, and the iron chain which was to bind him to it, were fixed up near a great elm-tree in a pleasant open place before the cathedral, where, on peaceful Sundays, he had been accustomed to preach and to pray, when he was bishop of Gloucester. This tree, which had no leaves then, it being February, was filled with people; and the priests of Gloucester College were looking complacently on from a window, and there was a great concourse of spectators in every spot from which a glimpse of the dreadful sight could be beheld. When the old man kneeled down on the small platform at the foot of the stake, and prayed aloud, the nearest people were observed to be so attentive to his prayers that they were ordered to stand farther back; for it did not suit the Romish Church to have those Protestant words heard. His prayers concluded, he went up to the stake and was stripped to his shirt, and chained ready for the fire. One of his guards had such compassion on him that, to shorten his agonies, he tied some packets of gunpowder about him. Then they heaped up wood and straw and reeds, and set them all alight. But, unhappily, the wood was green and damp, and there was a wind blowing that blew what flame there was, away. Thus, through three-quarters of an hour, the good old man was scorched and roasted and smoked, as the fire rose and sank; and all that time they saw him, as he burned, moving his lips in prayer, and beating his breast with one hand, even after the other was burnt away and had fallen off.

Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer, were taken to Oxford to dispute with a commission of priests and doctors about the mass. They were shamefully treated; and it is recorded that the Oxford scholars hissed and howled and groaned, and misconducted themselves in an anything but a scholarly way. The prisoners were taken back to jail, and afterwards tried in St. Mary's Church. They were all found guilty. On the sixteenth of the month of October, Ridley and Latimer were brought out, to make another of the dreadful bonfires.

The scene of the suffering of these two good Protestant men was in the City ditch, near Baliol College. On coming to the dreadful spot, they kissed the stakes, and then embraced each other. And then a learned doctor got up into a pulpit which was placed there, and preached a sermon from the text, 'Though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.' When you think of the charity of burning men alive, you may imagine that this learned doctor had a rather brazen face. Ridley would have answered his sermon when it came to an end, but was not allowed. When Latimer was stripped, it appeared that he had dressed himself under his other clothes, in a new shroud; and, as he stood in it before all the people, it was noted of him, and long remembered, that, whereas he had been stooping and feeble but a few minutes before, he now stood upright and handsome, in the knowledge that he was dying for a just and a great cause. Ridley's brother-in-law was there with bags of gunpowder; and when they were both chained up, he tied them round their bodies. Then, a light was thrown upon the pile to fire it. 'Be of good comfort, Master Ridley,' said Latimer, at that awful moment, 'and play the man! We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.' And then he was seen to make motions with his hands as if he were washing them in the flames, and to stroke his aged face with them, and was heard to cry, 'Father of Heaven, receive my soul!' He died quickly, but the fire, after having burned the legs of Ridley, sunk. There he lingered, chained to the iron post, and crying, 'O! I cannot burn! O! for Christ's sake let the fire come unto me!' And still, when his brother-in-law had heaped on more wood, he was heard through the blinding smoke, still dismally crying, ‘O! I cannot burn, I cannot burn!’ At last, the gunpowder caught fire, and ended his miseries.

Five days after this fearful scene, Gardiner went to his tremendous account before God, for the cruelties he had so much assisted in committing.

Cranmer remained still alive and in prison. He was brought out again in February, for more examining and trying, by Bonner, Bishop of London: another man of blood, who had succeeded to Gardiner’s work, even in his lifetime, when Gardiner was tired of it. Cranmer was now degraded as a priest, and left for death; but, if the Queen hated any one on earth, she hated him, and it was resolved that he should be ruined and disgraced to the utmost. There is no doubt that the Queen and her husband personally urged on these deeds, because they wrote to the Council, urging them to be active in the kindling of the fearful fires. As Cranmer was known not to be a firm man, a plan was laid for surrounding him with artful people, and inducing him to recant to the unreformed religion. Deans and friars visited him, played at bowls with him, showed him various attentions, talked persuasively with him, gave him money for his prison comforts, and induced him to sign, I fear, as many as six recantations. But when, after all, he was taken out to be burnt, he was nobly true to his better self, and made a glorious end.

After prayers and a sermon, Dr. Cole, the preacher of the day (who had been one of the artful priests about Cranmer in prison), required him to make a public confession of his faith before the people. This, Cole did, expecting that he would declare himself a Roman Catholic. ‘I will make a profession of my faith,’ said Cranmer, ‘and with a good will too.’

Then, he arose before them all, and took from the sleeve of his robe a written prayer and read it aloud. That done, he kneeled and said the Lord’s Prayer, all the people joining; and then he arose again and told them that he believed in the Bible, and that in what he had lately written, he had written what was not the truth, and that, because his right hand had signed those papers, he would burn his right hand first when he came to the fire. As for the Pope, he did refuse him and denounce him as the enemy of Heaven. Hereupon the pious Dr. Cole cried out to the guards to stop that heretic’s mouth and take him away.

So they took him away, and chained him to the stake, where he hastily took off his own clothes to make ready for the flames. And he stood before the people with a bald head and a white and flowing beard. He was so firm now when the worst was come, that he again declared against his recantation, and was so impressive and so undismayed, that a certain lord, who was one of the directors of the execution, called out to the men to make haste! When the fire was lighted, Cranmer, true to his latest word, stretched out his right hand, and crying out, ‘This hand hath offended!’ held it among the flames, until it blazed and burned away. His heart was found entire among his ashes, and he left at last a memorable name in English history. Cardinal Pole celebrated the day by saying his first mass, and next day he was made Archbishop of Canterbury in Cranmer’s place.

The Queen’s husband, who was now mostly abroad in his own dominions, and generally made a coarse jest of her to his more familiar courtiers, was at war with France, and came over to seek the assistance of England. England was very unwilling to engage in a French war for his sake; but it happened that the King of France, at this very time, aided a descent upon the English coast. Hence, war was declared, greatly to Philip’s satisfaction; and the Queen raised a sum of money with which to carry it on, by every unjustifiable means in her power. It met with no profitable return, for the French Duke of Guise surprised Calais, and the English sustained a complete defeat. The losses they met with in France greatly mortified the national pride, and the Queen never recovered the blow.

There was a bad fever raging in England at this time, and I am glad to write that the Queen took it, and the hour of her death came. ‘When I am dead and my body is opened,’ she said to those around those around her, ‘ye shall find Calais written on my heart.’ I should have thought, if anything were written on it, they would have found the words—Jane Grey, Hooper, Rogers, Ridley, Latimer, Cranmer, and three hundred people burnt alive within four years of my wicked reign, including sixty women and forty little children. But it is enough that their deaths were written in Heaven.

The Queen died on the seventeenth of November, fifteen hundred and fifty-eight, after reigning not quite five years and a half, and in the forty-fourth year of her age. Cardinal Pole died of the same fever next day.

As Bloody Queen Mary, this woman has become famous, and as Bloody Queen Mary, she will ever be justly remembered with horror and detestation in Great Britain. Her memory has been held in such abhorrence that some writers have arisen in later years to take her part, and to show that she was, upon the whole, quite an amiable and cheerful sovereign! ‘By their fruits ye shall know them,’ said Our Saviour. The stake and the fire were the fruits of this reign, and you will judge this Queen by nothing else.

CHAPTER XXXI—ENGLAND UNDER ELIZABETH

There was great rejoicing all over the land when the Lords of the Council went down to Hatfield, to hail the Princess Elizabeth as the new Queen of England. Weary of the barbarities of Mary's reign, the people looked with hope and gladness to the new Sovereign. The nation seemed to wake from a horrible dream; and Heaven, so long hidden by the smoke of the fires that roasted men and women to death, appeared to brighten once more.

Queen Elizabeth was five-and-twenty years of age when she rode through the streets of London, from the Tower to Westminster Abbey, to be crowned. Her countenance was strongly marked, but on the whole, commanding and dignified; her hair was red, and her nose something too long and sharp for a woman's. She was not the beautiful creature her courtiers made out; but she was well enough, and no doubt looked all the better for coming after the dark and gloomy Mary. She was well educated, but a roundabout writer, and rather a hard swearer and coarse talker. She was clever, but cunning and deceitful, and inherited much of her father's violent temper. I mention this now, because she has been so over-praised by one party, and so over-abused by another, that it is hardly possible to understand the greater part of her reign without first understanding what kind of woman she really was.

She began her reign with the great advantage of having a very wise and careful Minister, Sir William Cecil, whom she afterwards made Lord Burleigh. Altogether, the people had greater reason for rejoicing than they usually had, when there were processions in the streets; and they were happy with some reason. All kinds of shows and images were set up; Gog and Magog were hoisted to the top of Temple Bar, and (which was more to the purpose) the Corporation dutifully presented the young Queen with the sum of a thousand marks in gold—so heavy a present, that she was obliged to take it into her carriage with both hands. The coronation was a great success; and, on the next day, one of the courtiers presented a petition to the new Queen, praying that as it was the custom to release some prisoners on such occasions, she would have the goodness to release the four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and also the Apostle Saint Paul, who had been for some time shut up in a strange language so that the people could not get at them.

To this, the Queen replied that it would be better first to inquire of themselves whether they desired to be released or not; and, as a means of finding out, a great public discussion—a sort of religious tournament—was appointed to take place between certain champions of the two religions, in Westminster Abbey. You may suppose that it was soon made pretty clear to common sense, that for people to benefit by what they repeat or read, it is rather necessary they should understand something about it. Accordingly, a Church Service in plain English was settled, and other laws and regulations were made, completely establishing the great work of the Reformation. The Romish bishops and champions were not harshly dealt with, all things considered; and the Queen's Ministers were both prudent and merciful.

The one great trouble of this reign, and the unfortunate cause of the greater part of such turmoil and bloodshed as occurred in it, was Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. We will try to understand, in as few words as possible, who Mary was, what she was, and how she came to be a thorn in the royal pillow of Elizabeth.

She was the daughter of the Queen Regent of Scotland, Mary of Guise. She had been married, when a mere child, to the Dauphin, the son and heir of the King of France. The Pope, who pretended that no one could rightfully wear the crown of England without his gracious permission, was strongly opposed to Elizabeth, who had not asked for the said gracious permission. And as Mary Queen of Scots would have inherited the English crown in right of her birth, supposing the English Parliament not to have altered the succession, the Pope himself, and most of the discontented who were followers of his, maintained that Mary was the rightful Queen of England, and Elizabeth the wrongful Queen. Mary being so closely connected with France, and France being jealous of England, there was far greater danger in this than there would have been if she had had no alliance with that great power. And when her young husband, on the death of his father, became Francis the Second, King of France, the matter grew very serious. For, the young couple styled themselves King and Queen of England, and the Pope was disposed to help them by doing all the mischief he could.

Now, the reformed religion, under the guidance of a stern and powerful preacher, named John Knox, and other such men, had been making fierce progress in Scotland. It was still a half savage country, where there was a great deal of murdering and rioting continually going on; and the Reformers, instead of reforming those evils as they should have done, went to work in the ferocious old Scottish spirit, laying churches and chapels waste, pulling down pictures and altars, and knocking about the Grey Friars, and the Black Friars, and the White Friars, and the friars of all sorts of colours, in all directions. This obdurate and harsh spirit of the Scottish Reformers (the Scotch have always been rather a sullen and frowning people in religious matters) put up the blood of the Romish French court, and caused France to send troops over to Scotland, with the hope of setting the friars of all sorts of colours on their legs again; of conquering that country first, and England afterwards; and so crushing the Reformation all to pieces. The Scottish Reformers, who had formed a great league which they called The Congregation of the Lord, secretly represented to Elizabeth that, if the reformed religion got the worst of it with them, it would be likely to get the worst of it in England too; and thus, Elizabeth, though she had a high notion of the rights of Kings and Queens to do anything they liked, sent an army to Scotland to support the Reformers, who were in arms against their sovereign. All these proceedings led to a treaty of peace at Edinburgh, under which the French consented to depart from the kingdom. By a separate treaty, Mary and her young husband engaged to renounce their assumed title of King and Queen of England. But this treaty they never fulfilled.

It happened, soon after matters had got to this state, that the young French King died, leaving Mary a young widow. She was then invited by her Scottish subjects to return home and reign over them; and as she was not now happy where she was, she, after a little time, complied.

Elizabeth had been Queen three years, when Mary Queen of Scots embarked at Calais for her own rough, quarrelling country. As she came out of the harbour, a vessel was lost before her eyes, and she said, ‘O! good God! what an omen this is for such a voyage!’ She was very fond of France, and sat on the deck, looking back at it and weeping, until it was quite dark. When she went to bed, she directed to be called at daybreak, if the French coast were still visible, that she might behold it for the last time. As it proved to be a clear morning, this was done, and she again wept for the country she was leaving, and said many times, ‘Farewell, France! Farewell, France! I shall never see thee again!’ All this was long remembered afterwards, as sorrowful and interesting in a fair young princess of nineteen. Indeed, I am afraid it gradually came, together with her other distresses, to surround her with greater sympathy than she deserved.

When she came to Scotland, and took up her abode at the palace of Holyrood in Edinburgh, she found herself among uncouth strangers and wild uncomfortable customs very different from her experiences in the court of France. The very people who were disposed to love her, made her head ache when she was tired out by her voyage, with a serenade of discordant music—a fearful concert of bagpipes, I suppose—and brought her and her train home to her palace on miserable little Scotch horses that appeared to be half starved. Among the people who were not disposed to love her, she found the powerful leaders of the Reformed Church, who were bitter upon her amusements, however innocent, and denounced music and dancing as works of the devil. John Knox himself often lectured her, violently and angrily, and did much to make her life unhappy. All these reasons confirmed her old attachment to the Romish religion, and caused her, there is no doubt, most imprudently and dangerously both for herself and for England too, to give a solemn pledge to the heads of the Romish Church that if she ever succeeded to the English crown, she would set up that religion again. In reading her unhappy history, you must always remember this; and also that during her whole life she was constantly put forward against the Queen, in some form or other, by the Romish party.

That Elizabeth, on the other hand, was not inclined to like her, is pretty certain. Elizabeth was very vain and jealous, and had an extraordinary dislike to people being married. She treated Lady Catherine Grey, sister of the beheaded Lady Jane, with such shameful severity, for no other reason than her being secretly married, that she died and her husband was ruined; so, when a second marriage for Mary began to be talked about, probably Elizabeth disliked her more. Not that Elizabeth wanted suitors of her own, for they started up from Spain, Austria, Sweden, and England. Her English lover at this time, and one whom she much favoured too, was Lord Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester—himself secretly married to Amy Robsart, the daughter of an English gentleman, whom he was strongly suspected of causing to be murdered, down at his country seat, Cumnor Hall in

Berkshire, that he might be free to marry the Queen. Upon this story, the great writer, Sir Walter Scott, has founded one of his best romances. But if Elizabeth knew how to lead her handsome favourite on, for her own vanity and pleasure, she knew how to stop him for her own pride; and his love, and all the other proposals, came to nothing. The Queen always declared in good set speeches, that she would never be married at all, but would live and die a Maiden Queen. It was a very pleasant and meritorious declaration, I suppose; but it has been puffed and trumpeted so much, that I am rather tired of it myself.

Divers princes proposed to marry Mary, but the English court had reasons for being jealous of them all, and even proposed as a matter of policy that she should marry that very Earl of Leicester who had aspired to be the husband of Elizabeth. At last, Lord Darnley, son of the Earl of Lennox, and himself descended from the Royal Family of Scotland, went over with Elizabeth's consent to try his fortune at Holyrood. He was a tall simpleton; and could dance and play the guitar; but I know of nothing else he could do, unless it were to get very drunk, and eat gluttonously, and make a contemptible spectacle of himself in many mean and vain ways. However, he gained Mary's heart, not disdaining in the pursuit of his object to ally himself with one of her secretaries, David Rizzio, who had great influence with her. He soon married the Queen. This marriage does not say much for her, but what followed will presently say less.

Mary's brother, the Earl of Murray, and head of the Protestant party in Scotland, had opposed this marriage, partly on religious grounds, and partly perhaps from personal dislike of the very contemptible bridegroom. When it had taken place, through Mary's gaining over to it the more powerful of the lords about her, she banished Murray for his pains; and, when he and some other nobles rose in arms to support the reformed religion, she herself, within a month of her wedding day, rode against them in armour with loaded pistols in her saddle. Driven out of Scotland, they presented themselves before Elizabeth—who called them traitors in public, and assisted them in private, according to her crafty nature.

Mary had been married but a little while, when she began to hate her husband, who, in his turn, began to hate that David Rizzio, with whom he had leagued to gain her favour, and whom he now believed to be her lover. He hated Rizzio to that extent, that he made a compact with Lord Ruthven and three other lords to get rid of him by murder. This wicked agreement they made in solemn secrecy upon the first of March, fifteen hundred and sixty-six, and on the night of Saturday the ninth, the conspirators were brought by Darnley up a private staircase, dark and steep, into a range of rooms where they knew that Mary was sitting at supper with her sister, Lady Argyle, and this doomed man. When they went into the room, Darnley took the Queen round the waist, and Lord Ruthven, who had risen from a bed of sickness to do this murder, came in, gaunt and ghastly, leaning on two men. Rizzio ran behind the Queen for shelter and protection. 'Let him come out of the room,' said Ruthven. 'He shall not leave the room,' replied the Queen; 'I read his danger in your face, and it is my will that he remain here.' They then set upon him, struggled with him, overturned the table, dragged him out, and killed him with fifty-six stabs. When the Queen heard that he was dead, she said, 'No more tears. I will think now of revenge!'

Within a day or two, she gained her husband over, and prevailed on the tall idiot to abandon the conspirators and fly with her to Dunbar. There, he issued a proclamation, audaciously and falsely denying that he had any knowledge of the late bloody business; and there they were joined by the Earl Bothwell and some other nobles. With their help, they raised eight thousand men; returned to Edinburgh, and drove the assassins into England. Mary soon afterwards gave birth to a son—still thinking of revenge.

That she should have had a greater scorn for her husband after his late cowardice and treachery than she had had before, was natural enough. There is little doubt that she now began to love Bothwell instead, and to plan with him means of getting rid of Darnley. Bothwell had such power over her that he induced her even to pardon the assassins of Rizzio. The arrangements for the Christening of the young Prince were entrusted to him, and he was one of the most important people at the ceremony, where the child was named James: Elizabeth being his godmother, though not present on the occasion. A week afterwards, Darnley, who had left Mary and gone to his father's house at Glasgow, being taken ill with the small-pox, she sent her own physician to attend him. But there is reason to apprehend that this was merely a show and a pretence, and that she knew what was doing, when Bothwell within another month proposed to one of the late conspirators against Rizzio, to murder Darnley, 'for that it was the Queen's mind that he should be taken away.' It is certain that on that very day she wrote to her ambassador in France, complaining of him, and yet went immediately to Glasgow, feigning to be very anxious about him, and to love him very much. If she wanted to get him in her power, she succeeded to her heart's content; for she induced him to go back with her to Edinburgh, and to occupy, instead of the palace, a lone house outside the city called the Kirk of Field. Here, he lived for about a week. One Sunday night, she remained with him until ten o'clock, and then left him, to go to Holyrood to be present at an entertainment given in celebration of the marriage of one of her favourite servants. At two o'clock in the morning the city was shaken by a great explosion, and the Kirk of Field was blown to atoms.

Darnley's body was found next day lying under a tree at some distance. How it came there, undisfigured and unscorched by gunpowder, and how this crime came to be so clumsily and strangely committed, it is impossible to discover. The deceitful character of Mary, and the deceitful character of Elizabeth, have rendered almost every part of their joint history uncertain and obscure. But, I fear that Mary was unquestionably a party to her husband's murder, and that this was the revenge she had threatened. The Scotch people universally believed it. Voices cried out in the streets of Edinburgh in the dead of the night, for justice on the murderess. Placards were posted by unknown hands in the public places denouncing Bothwell as the murderer, and the Queen as his accomplice; and, when he afterwards married her (though himself already married), previously making a show of taking her prisoner by force, the indignation of the people knew no bounds. The women particularly are described as having been quite frantic against the Queen, and to have hooted and cried after her in the streets with terrific vehemence.

Such guilty unions seldom prosper. This husband and wife had lived together but a month, when they were separated for ever by the successes of a band of Scotch nobles who associated against them for the protection of the young Prince: whom Bothwell had vainly endeavoured to lay hold of, and whom he would certainly have murdered, if the Earl of Mar, in whose hands the boy was, had not been firmly and honourably faithful to his trust. Before this angry power, Bothwell fled abroad, where he died, a prisoner and mad, nine miserable years afterwards. Mary being found by the associated lords to deceive them at every turn, was sent a prisoner to Lochleven Castle; which, as it stood in the midst of a lake, could only be approached by boat. Here, one Lord Lindsay, who was so much of a brute that the nobles would have done better if they had chosen a mere gentleman for their messenger, made her sign her abdication, and appoint Murray, Regent of Scotland. Here, too, Murray saw her in a sorrowing and humbled state.

She had better have remained in the castle of Lochleven, dull prison as it was, with the rippling of the lake against it, and the moving shadows of the water on the room walls; but she could not rest there, and more than once tried to escape. The first time she had nearly succeeded, dressed in the clothes of her own washer-woman, but, putting up her hand to prevent one of the boatmen from lifting her veil, the men suspected her, seeing how white it was, and rowed her back again. A short time afterwards, her fascinating manners enlisted in her cause a boy in the Castle, called the little Douglas, who, while the family were at supper, stole the keys of the great gate, went softly out with the Queen, locked the gate on the outside, and rowed her away across the lake, sinking the keys as they went along. On the opposite shore she was met by another Douglas, and some few lords; and, so accompanied, rode away on horseback to Hamilton, where they raised three thousand men. Here, she issued a proclamation declaring that the abdication she had signed in her prison was illegal, and requiring the Regent to yield to his lawful Queen. Being a steady soldier, and in no way discomposed although he was without an army, Murray pretended to treat with her, until he had collected a force about half equal to her own, and then he gave her battle. In one quarter of an hour he cut down all her hopes. She had another weary ride on horse-back of sixty long Scotch miles, and took shelter at Dundrennan Abbey, whence she fled for safety to Elizabeth's dominions.

Mary Queen of Scots came to England—to her own ruin, the trouble of the kingdom, and the misery and death of many—in the year one thousand five hundred and sixty-eight. How she left it and the world, nineteen years afterwards, we have now to see.

SECOND PART

When Mary Queen of Scots arrived in England, without money and even without any other clothes than those she wore, she wrote to Elizabeth, representing herself as an innocent and injured piece of Royalty, and entreating her assistance to oblige her Scottish subjects to take her back again and obey her. But, as her character was already known in England to be a very different one from what she made it out to be, she was told in answer that she must first clear herself. Made uneasy by this condition, Mary, rather than stay in England, would have gone to Spain, or to France, or would even have gone back to Scotland. But, as her doing either would have been likely to trouble England afresh, it was decided that she should be detained here. She first came to Carlisle, and, after that, was moved about from castle to castle, as was considered necessary; but England she never left again.

After trying very hard to get rid of the necessity of clearing herself, Mary, advised by Lord Herries, her best friend in England, agreed to answer the charges against her, if the Scottish noblemen who made them would attend to maintain them before such English noblemen as Elizabeth might appoint for that purpose. Accordingly, such an assembly, under the name of a conference, met, first at York, and afterwards at Hampton Court. In its presence Lord Lennox, Darnley's father, openly charged Mary with the murder of his son; and whatever Mary's friends may now say or write in her behalf, there is no doubt that, when her brother Murray produced against her a casket containing certain guilty letters and verses which he stated to have passed between her and Bothwell, she withdrew from the inquiry. Consequently, it is to be supposed that she was then considered guilty by those who had the best opportunities of judging of the truth, and that the feeling which afterwards arose in her behalf was a very generous but not a very reasonable one.

However, the Duke of Norfolk, an honourable but rather weak nobleman, partly because Mary was captivating, partly because he was ambitious, partly because he was over-persuaded by artful plotters against Elizabeth, conceived a strong idea that he would like to marry the Queen of Scots—though he was a little frightened, too, by the letters in the casket. This idea being secretly encouraged by some of the noblemen of Elizabeth's court, and even by the favourite Earl of Leicester (because it was objected to by other favourites who were his rivals), Mary expressed her approval of it, and the King of France and the King of Spain are supposed to have done the same. It was not so quietly planned, though, but that it came to Elizabeth's ears, who warned the Duke 'to be careful what sort of pillow he was going to lay his head upon.' He made a humble reply at the time; but turned sulky soon afterwards, and, being considered dangerous, was sent to the Tower.

Thus, from the moment of Mary's coming to England she began to be the centre of plots and miseries.

A rise of the Catholics in the north was the next of these, and it was only checked by many executions and much bloodshed. It was followed by a great conspiracy of the Pope and some of the Catholic sovereigns of Europe to depose Elizabeth, place Mary on the throne, and restore the unreformed religion. It is almost impossible to doubt that Mary knew and approved of this; and the Pope himself was so hot in the matter that he issued a bull, in which he openly called Elizabeth the 'pretended Queen' of England, excommunicated her, and excommunicated all her subjects who should continue to obey her. A copy of this miserable paper got into London, and was found one morning publicly posted on the Bishop of London's gate. A great hue and cry being raised, another copy was found in the chamber of a student of Lincoln's Inn, who confessed, being put upon the rack, that he had received it from one John Felton, a rich gentleman who lived across the Thames, near Southwark. This John Felton, being put upon the rack too, confessed that he had posted the placard on the Bishop's gate. For this offence he was, within four days, taken to St. Paul's Churchyard, and there hanged and quartered. As to the Pope's bull, the people by the reformation having thrown off the Pope, did not care much, you may suppose, for the Pope's throwing off them. It was a mere dirty piece of paper, and not half so powerful as a street ballad.

On the very day when Felton was brought to his trial, the poor Duke of Norfolk was released. It would have been well for him if he had kept away from the Tower evermore, and from the snares that had taken him there. But, even while he was in that dismal place he corresponded with Mary, and as soon as he was out of it, he began to plot again. Being discovered in correspondence with the Pope, with a view to a rising in England which should force Elizabeth to consent to his marriage with Mary and to repeal the laws against the Catholics, he was re-committed to the Tower and brought to trial. He was found guilty by the unanimous verdict of the Lords who tried him, and was sentenced to the block.

It is very difficult to make out, at this distance of time, and between opposite accounts, whether Elizabeth really was a humane woman, or desired to appear so, or was fearful of shedding the blood of people of great name who were popular in the country. Twice she commanded and countermanded the execution of this Duke, and it did not take place until five months after his trial. The scaffold was erected on Tower Hill, and there he died like a brave man. He refused to have his eyes bandaged, saying that he was not at all afraid of death; and he admitted the justice of his sentence, and was much regretted by the people.

Although Mary had shrunk at the most important time from disproving her guilt, she was very careful never to do anything that would admit it. All such proposals as were made to her by Elizabeth for her release, required that admission in some form or other, and therefore came to nothing. Moreover, both women being artful and treacherous, and neither ever trusting the other, it was not likely that they could ever make an agreement. So, the Parliament, aggravated by what the Pope had done, made new and strong laws against the spreading of the Catholic religion in England, and declared it treason in any one to say that the Queen and her successors were not the lawful sovereigns of England. It would have done more than this, but for Elizabeth's moderation.

Since the Reformation, there had come to be three great sects of religious people—or people who called themselves so—in England; that is to say, those who belonged to the Reformed Church, those who belonged to the Unreformed Church, and those who were called the Puritans, because they said that they wanted to have everything very pure and plain in all the Church service. These last were for the most part an uncomfortable people, who thought it highly meritorious to dress in a hideous manner, talk through their noses, and oppose all harmless enjoyments. But they were powerful too, and very much in earnest, and they were one and all the determined enemies of the Queen of Scots. The Protestant feeling in England was further strengthened by the tremendous cruelties to which Protestants were exposed in France and in the Netherlands. Scores of thousands of them were put to death in those countries with every cruelty that can be imagined, and at last, in the autumn of the year one thousand five hundred and seventy-two, one of the greatest barbarities ever committed in the world took place at Paris.

It is called in history, The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew, because it took place on Saint Bartholomew's Eve. The day fell on Saturday the twenty-third of August. On that day all the great leaders of the Protestants (who were there called Huguenots) were assembled together, for the purpose, as was represented to them, of doing honour to the marriage of their chief, the young King of Navarre, with the sister of Charles the Ninth: a miserable young King who then occupied the French throne. This dull creature was made to believe by his mother and other fierce Catholics about him that the Huguenots meant to take his life; and he was persuaded to give secret orders that, on the tolling of a great bell, they should be fallen upon by an overpowering force of armed men, and slaughtered wherever they could be found. When the appointed hour was close at hand, the stupid wretch, trembling from head to foot, was taken into a balcony by his mother to see the atrocious work begun. The moment the bell tolled, the murderers broke forth. During all that night and the two next days, they broke into the houses, fired the houses, shot and stabbed the Protestants, men, women, and children, and flung their bodies into the streets. They were shot at in the streets as they passed along, and their blood ran down the gutters. Upwards of ten thousand Protestants were killed in Paris alone; in all France four or five times that number. To return thanks to Heaven for these diabolical murders, the Pope and his train actually went in public procession at Rome, and as if this were not shame enough for them, they had a medal struck to commemorate the event. But, however comfortable the wholesale murders were to these high authorities, they had not that soothing effect upon the doll-King. I am happy to state that he never knew a moment’s peace afterwards; that he was continually crying out that he saw the Huguenots covered with blood and wounds falling dead before him; and that he died within a year, shrieking and yelling and raving to that degree, that if all the Popes who had ever lived had been rolled into one, they would not have afforded His guilty Majesty the slightest consolation.

When the terrible news of the massacre arrived in England, it made a powerful impression indeed upon the people. If they began to run a little wild against the Catholics at about this time, this fearful reason for it, coming so soon after the days of bloody Queen Mary, must be remembered in their excuse. The Court was not quite so honest as the people—but perhaps it sometimes is not. It received the French ambassador, with all the lords and ladies dressed in deep mourning, and keeping a profound silence. Nevertheless, a proposal of marriage which he had made to Elizabeth only two days before the eve of Saint Bartholomew, on behalf of the Duke of Alençon, the French King’s brother, a boy of seventeen, still went on; while on the other hand, in her usual crafty way, the Queen secretly supplied the Huguenots with money and weapons.

I must say that for a Queen who made all those fine speeches, of which I have confessed myself to be rather tired, about living and dying a Maiden Queen, Elizabeth was ‘going’ to be married pretty often. Besides always having some English favourite or other whom she by turns encouraged and swore at and knocked about—for the maiden Queen was very free with her fists—she held this French Duke off and on through several years. When he at last came over to England, the marriage articles were actually drawn up, and it was settled that the wedding should take place in six weeks. The Queen was then so bent upon it, that she prosecuted a poor Puritan named Stubbs, and a poor bookseller named Page, for writing and publishing a pamphlet against it. Their right hands were chopped off for this crime; and poor Stubbs—more loyal than I should have been myself under the circumstances—immediately pulled off his hat with his left hand, and cried, ‘God save the Queen!’ Stubbs was cruelly treated; for the marriage never took place after all, though the Queen pledged herself to the Duke with a ring from her own finger. He went away, no better than he came, when the courtship had lasted some ten years altogether; and he died a couple of years afterwards, mourned by Elizabeth, who appears to have been really fond of him. It is not much to her credit, for he was a bad enough member of a bad family.

To return to the Catholics. There arose two orders of priests, who were very busy in England, and who were much dreaded. These were the Jesuits (who were everywhere in all sorts of disguises), and the Seminary Priests. The people had a great horror of the first, because they were known to have taught that murder was lawful if it were done with an object of which they approved; and they had a great horror of the second, because they came to teach the old religion, and to be the successors of ‘Queen Mary’s priests,’ as those yet lingering in England were called, when they should die out. The severest laws were made against them, and were most unmercifully executed. Those who sheltered them in their houses often suffered heavily for what was an act of humanity; and the rack, that cruel torture which tore men’s limbs asunder, was constantly kept going. What these unhappy men confessed, or what was ever confessed by any one under that agony, must always be received with great doubt, as it is certain that people have frequently owned to the most absurd and impossible crimes to escape such dreadful suffering. But I cannot doubt it to have been proved by papers, that there were many plots, both among the Jesuits, and with France, and with Scotland, and with Spain, for the destruction of Queen Elizabeth, for the placing of Mary on the throne, and for the revival of the old religion.

If the English people were too ready to believe in plots, there were, as I have said, good reasons for it. When the massacre of Saint Bartholomew was yet fresh in their recollection, a great Protestant Dutch hero, the Prince of Orange, was shot by an assassin, who confessed that he had been kept and trained for the purpose in a college of Jesuits. The Dutch, in this surprise and distress, offered to make Elizabeth their sovereign, but she declined the honour, and sent them a small army instead, under the command of the Earl of Leicester, who, although a capital Court favourite, was not much of a general. He did so little in Holland, that his campaign there would probably have been forgotten, but for its occasioning the death of one of the best writers, the best knights, and the best gentlemen, of that or any age. This was Sir Philip Sidney, who was wounded by a musket ball in the thigh as he mounted a fresh horse, after having had his own killed under him. He had to ride back wounded, a long distance, and was very faint with fatigue and loss of blood, when some water, for which he had eagerly asked, was handed to him. But he was so good and gentle even then, that seeing a poor badly wounded common soldier lying on the ground, looking at the water with longing eyes, he said, ‘Thy necessity is greater than mine,’ and gave it up to him. This touching action of a noble heart is perhaps as well known as any incident in history—is as famous far and wide as the blood-stained Tower of London, with its axe, and block, and murders out of number. So delightful is an act of true humanity, and so glad are mankind to remember it.

At home, intelligence of plots began to thicken every day. I suppose the people never did live under such continual terrors as those by which they were possessed now, of Catholic risings, and burnings, and poisonings, and I don’t know what. Still, we must always remember that they lived near and close to awful realities of that kind, and that with their experience it was not difficult to believe in any enormity. The government had the same fear, and did not take the best means of discovering the truth—for, besides torturing the suspected, it employed paid spies, who will always lie for their own profit. It even made some of the conspiracies it brought to light, by sending false letters to disaffected people, inviting them to join in pretended plots, which they too readily did.

But, one great real plot was at length discovered, and it ended the career of Mary, Queen of Scots. A seminary priest named Ballard, and a Spanish soldier named Savage, set on and encouraged by certain French priests, imparted a design to one Antony Babington—a gentleman of fortune in Derbyshire, who had been for some time a secret agent of Mary's—for murdering the Queen. Babington then confided the scheme to some other Catholic gentlemen who were his friends, and they joined in it heartily. They were vain, weak-headed young men, ridiculously confident, and preposterously proud of their plan; for they got a gimcrack painting made, of the six choice spirits who were to murder Elizabeth, with Babington in an attitude for the centre figure. Two of their number, however, one of whom was a priest, kept Elizabeth's wisest minister, Sir Francis Walsingham, acquainted with the whole project from the first. The conspirators were completely deceived to the final point, when Babington gave Savage, because he was shabby, a ring from his finger, and some money from his purse, wherewith to buy himself new clothes in which to kill the Queen. Walsingham, having then full evidence against the whole band, and two letters of Mary's besides, resolved to seize them. Suspecting something wrong, they stole out of the city, one by one, and hid themselves in St. John's Wood, and other places which really were hiding places then; but they were all taken, and all executed. When they were seized, a gentleman was sent from Court to inform Mary of the fact, and of her being involved in the discovery. Her friends have complained that she was kept in very hard and severe custody. It does not appear very likely, for she was going out a hunting that very morning.

Queen Elizabeth had been warned long ago, by one in France who had good information of what was secretly doing, that in holding Mary alive, she held 'the wolf who would devour her.' The Bishop of London had, more lately, given the Queen's favourite minister the advice in writing, 'forthwith to cut off the Scottish Queen's head.' The question now was, what to do with her? The Earl of Leicester wrote a little note home from Holland, recommending that she should be quietly poisoned; that noble favourite having accustomed his mind, it is possible, to remedies of that nature. His black advice, however, was disregarded, and she was brought to trial at Fotheringay Castle in Northamptonshire, before a tribunal of forty, composed of both religions. There, and in the Star Chamber at Westminster, the trial lasted a fortnight. She defended herself with great ability, but could only deny the confessions that had been made by Babington and others; could only call her own letters, produced against her by her own secretaries, forgeries; and, in short, could only deny everything. She was found guilty, and declared to have incurred the penalty of death. The Parliament met, approved the sentence, and prayed the Queen to have it executed. The Queen replied that she requested them to consider whether no means could be found of saving Mary's life without endangering her own. The Parliament rejoined, No; and the citizens illuminated their houses and lighted bonfires, in token of their joy that all these plots and troubles were to be ended by the death of the Queen of Scots.

She, feeling sure that her time was now come, wrote a letter to the Queen of England, making three entreaties; first, that she might be buried in France; secondly, that she might not be executed in secret, but before her servants and some others; thirdly, that after her death, her servants should not be molested, but should be suffered to go home with the legacies she left them. It was an affecting letter, and Elizabeth shed tears over it, but sent no answer. Then came a special ambassador from France, and another from Scotland, to intercede for Mary's life; and then the nation began to clamour, more and more, for her death.

What the real feelings or intentions of Elizabeth were, can never be known now; but I strongly suspect her of only wishing one thing more than Mary's death, and that was to keep free of the blame of it. On the first of February, one thousand five hundred and eighty-seven, Lord Burleigh having drawn out the warrant for the execution, the Queen sent to the secretary Davison to bring it to her, that she might sign it: which she did. Next day, when Davison told her it was sealed, she angrily asked him why such haste was necessary? Next day but one, she joked about it, and swore a little. Again, next day but one, she seemed to complain that it was not yet done, but still she would not be plain with those about her. So, on the seventh, the Earls of Kent and Shrewsbury, with the Sheriff of Northamptonshire, came with the warrant to Fotheringay, to tell the Queen of Scots to prepare for death.

When those messengers of ill omen were gone, Mary made a frugal supper, drank to her servants, read over her will, went to bed, slept for some hours, and then arose and passed the remainder of the night saying prayers.

In the morning she dressed herself in her best clothes; and, at eight o'clock when the sheriff came for her to her chapel, took leave of her servants who were there assembled praying with her, and went down-stairs, carrying a Bible in one hand and a crucifix in the other. Two of her women and four of her men were allowed to be present in the hall; where a low scaffold, only two feet from the ground, was erected and covered with black; and where the executioner from the Tower, and his assistant, stood, dressed in black velvet. The hall was full of people. While the sentence was being read she sat upon a stool; and, when it was finished, she again denied her guilt, as she had done before. The Earl of Kent and the Dean of Peterborough, in their Protestant zeal, made some very unnecessary speeches to her; to which she replied that she died in the Catholic religion, and they need not trouble themselves about that matter. When her head and neck were uncovered by the executioners, she said that she had not been used to be undressed by such hands, or before so much company. Finally, one of her women fastened a cloth over her face, and she laid her neck upon the block, and repeated more than once in Latin, 'Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit!' Some say her head was struck off in two blows, some say in three. However that be, when it was held up, streaming with blood, the real hair beneath the false hair she had long worn was seen to be as grey as that of a woman of seventy, though she was at that time only in her forty-sixth year. All her beauty was gone.

But she was beautiful enough to her little dog, who cowered under her dress, frightened, when she went upon the scaffold, and who lay down beside her headless body when all her earthly sorrows were over.

THIRD PART

On its being formally made known to Elizabeth that the sentence had been executed on the Queen of Scots, she showed the utmost grief and rage, drove her favourites from her with violent indignation, and sent Davison to the Tower; from which place he was only released in the end by paying an immense fine which completely ruined him. Elizabeth not only over-acted her part in making these pretences, but most basely reduced to poverty one of her faithful servants for no other fault than obeying her commands.

James, King of Scotland, Mary's son, made a show likewise of being very angry on the occasion; but he was a pensioner of England to the amount of five thousand pounds a year, and he had known very little of his mother, and he possibly regarded her as the murderer of his father, and he soon took it quietly.

Philip, King of Spain, however, threatened to do greater things than ever had been done yet, to set up the Catholic religion and punish Protestant England. Elizabeth, hearing that he and the Prince of Parma were making great preparations for this purpose, in order to be beforehand with them sent out Admiral Drake (a famous navigator, who had sailed about the world, and had already brought great plunder from Spain) to the port of Cadiz, where he burnt a hundred vessels full of stores. This great loss obliged the Spaniards to put off the invasion for a year; but it was none the less formidable for that, amounting to one hundred and thirty ships, nineteen thousand soldiers, eight thousand sailors, two thousand slaves, and between two and three thousand great guns. England was not idle in making ready to resist this great force. All the men between sixteen years old and sixty, were trained and drilled; the national fleet of ships (in number only thirty-four at first) was enlarged by public contributions and by private ships, fitted out by noblemen; the city of London, of its own accord, furnished double the number of ships and men that it was required to provide; and, if ever the national spirit was up in England, it was up all through the country to resist the Spaniards. Some of the Queen's advisers were for seizing the principal English Catholics, and putting them to death; but the Queen—who, to her honour, used to say, that she would never believe any ill of her subjects, which a parent would not believe of her own children—rejected the advice, and only confined a few of those who were the most suspected, in the fens in Lincolnshire. The great body of Catholics deserved this confidence; for they behaved most loyally, nobly, and bravely.

So, with all England firing up like one strong, angry man, and with both sides of the Thames fortified, and with the soldiers under arms, and with the sailors in their ships, the country waited for the coming of the proud Spanish fleet, which was called The Invincible Armada. The Queen herself, riding in armour on a white horse, and the Earl of Essex and the Earl of Leicester holding her bridal rein, made a brave speech to the troops at Tilbury Fort opposite Gravesend, which was received with such enthusiasm as is seldom known. Then came the Spanish Armada into the

English Channel, sailing along in the form of a half moon, of such great size that it was seven miles broad. But the English were quickly upon it, and woe then to all the Spanish ships that dropped a little out of the half moon, for the English took them instantly! And it soon appeared that the great Armada was anything but invincible, for on a summer night, bold Drake sent eight blazing fire-ships right into the midst of it. In terrible consternation the Spaniards tried to get out to sea, and so became dispersed; the English pursued them at a great advantage; a storm came on, and drove the Spaniards among rocks and shoals; and the swift end of the Invincible fleet was, that it lost thirty great ships and ten thousand men, and, defeated and disgraced, sailed home again. Being afraid to go by the English Channel, it sailed all round Scotland and Ireland; some of the ships getting cast away on the latter coast in bad weather, the Irish, who were a kind of savages, plundered those vessels and killed their crews. So ended this great attempt to invade and conquer England. And I think it will be a long time before any other invincible fleet coming to England with the same object, will fare much better than the Spanish Armada.

Though the Spanish king had had this bitter taste of English bravery, he was so little the wiser for it, as still to entertain his old designs, and even to conceive the absurd idea of placing his daughter on the English throne. But the Earl of Essex, Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Thomas Howard, and some other distinguished leaders, put to sea from Plymouth, entered the port of Cadiz once more, obtained a complete victory over the shipping assembled there, and got possession of the town. In obedience to the Queen’s express instructions, they behaved with great humanity; and the principal loss of the Spaniards was a vast sum of money which they had to pay for ransom. This was one of many gallant achievements on the sea, effected in this reign. Sir Walter Raleigh himself, after marrying a maid of honour and giving offence to the Maiden Queen thereby, had already sailed to South America in search of gold.

The Earl of Leicester was now dead, and so was Sir Thomas Walsingham, whom Lord Burleigh was soon to follow. The principal favourite was the Earl of Essex, a spirited and handsome man, a favourite with the people too as well as with the Queen, and possessed of many admirable qualities. It was much debated at Court whether there should be peace with Spain or no, and he was very urgent for war. He also tried hard to have his own way in the appointment of a deputy to govern in Ireland.

One day, while this question was in dispute, he hastily took offence, and turned his back upon the Queen; as a gentle reminder of which impropriety, the Queen gave him a tremendous box on the ear, and told him to go to the devil. He went home instead, and did not reappear at Court for half a year or so, when he and the Queen were reconciled, though never (as some suppose) thoroughly.

From this time the fate of the Earl of Essex and that of the Queen seemed to be blended together. The Irish were still perpetually quarrelling and fighting among themselves, and he went over to Ireland as Lord Lieutenant, to the great joy of his enemies (Sir Walter Raleigh among the rest), who were glad to have so dangerous a rival far off. Not being by any means successful there, and knowing that his enemies would take advantage of that circumstance to injure him with the Queen, he came home again, though against her orders. The Queen being taken by surprise when he appeared before her, gave him her hand to kiss, and he was overjoyed—though it was not a very lovely hand by this time—but in the course of the same day she ordered him to confine himself to his room, and two or three days afterwards had him taken into custody. With the same sort of caprice—and as capricious an old woman she now was, as ever wore a crown or a head either—she sent him broth from her own table on his falling ill from anxiety, and cried about him.

He was a man who could find comfort and occupation in his books, and he did so for a time; not the least happy time, I dare say, of his life. But it happened unfortunately for him, that he held a monopoly in sweet wines: which means that nobody could sell them without purchasing his permission. This right, which was only for a term, expiring, he applied to have it renewed. The Queen refused, with the rather strong observation—but she *did* make strong observations—that an unruly beast must be stinted in his food. Upon this, the angry Earl, who had been already deprived of many offices, thought himself in danger of complete ruin, and turned against the Queen, whom he called a vain old woman who had grown as crooked in her mind as she had in her figure. These uncomplimentary expressions the ladies of the Court immediately snapped up and carried to the Queen, whom they did not put in a better tempter, you may believe. The same Court ladies, when they had beautiful dark hair of their own, used to wear false red hair, to be like the Queen. So they were not very high-spirited ladies, however high in rank.

The worst object of the Earl of Essex, and some friends of his who used to meet at Lord Southampton’s house, was to obtain possession of the Queen, and oblige her by force to dismiss her ministers and change her favourites. On Saturday the seventh of February, one thousand six hundred and one, the council suspecting this, summoned the Earl to come before them. He, pretending to be ill, declined; it was then settled among his friends, that as the next day would be Sunday, when many of the citizens usually assembled at the Cross by St. Paul’s Cathedral, he should make one bold effort to induce them to rise and follow him to the Palace.

So, on the Sunday morning, he and a small body of adherents started out of his house—Essex House by the Strand, with steps to the river—having first shut up in it, as prisoners, some members of the council who came to examine him—and hurried into the City with the Earl at their head crying out ‘For the Queen! For the Queen! A plot is laid for my life!’ No one heeded them, however, and when they came to St. Paul’s there were no citizens there. In the meantime the prisoners at Essex House had been released by one of the Earl’s own friends; he had been promptly proclaimed a traitor in the City itself; and the streets were barricaded with carts and guarded by soldiers. The Earl got back to his house by water, with difficulty, and after an attempt to defend his house against the troops and cannon by which it was soon surrounded, gave himself up that night. He was brought to trial on the nineteenth, and found guilty; on the twenty-fifth, he was executed on Tower Hill, where he died, at thirty-four years old, both courageously and penitently. His step-father suffered with him. His enemy, Sir Walter Raleigh, stood near the scaffold all the time—but not so near it as we shall see him stand, before we finish his history.

In this case, as in the cases of the Duke of Norfolk and Mary Queen of Scots, the Queen had commanded, and countermanded, and again commanded, the execution. It is probable that the death of her young and gallant favourite in the prime of his good qualities, was never off her mind afterwards, but she held out, the same vain, obstinate and capricious woman, for another year. Then she danced before her Court on a state occasion—and cut, I should think, a mighty ridiculous figure, doing so in an immense ruff, stomacher and wig, at seventy years old. For another year still, she held out, but, without any more dancing, and as a moody, sorrowful, broken creature. At last, on the tenth of March, one thousand six hundred and three, having been ill of a very bad cold, and made worse by the death of the Countess of Nottingham who was her intimate friend, she fell into a stupor and was supposed to be dead. She recovered her consciousness, however, and then nothing would induce her to go to bed; for she said that she knew that if she did, she should never get up again. There she lay for ten days, on cushions on the floor, without any food, until the Lord Admiral got her into bed at last, partly by persuasions and partly by main force. When they asked her who should succeed her, she replied that her seat had been the seat of Kings, and that she would have for her successor, 'No rascal's son, but a King's.' Upon this, the lords present stared at one another, and took the liberty of asking whom she meant; to which she replied, 'Whom should I mean, but our cousin of Scotland!' This was on the twenty-third of March. They asked her once again that day, after she was speechless, whether she was still in the same mind? She struggled up in bed, and joined her hands over her head in the form of a crown, as the only reply she could make. At three o'clock next morning, she very quietly died, in the forty-fifth year of her reign.

That reign had been a glorious one, and is made for ever memorable by the distinguished men who flourished in it. Apart from the great voyagers, statesmen, and scholars, whom it produced, the names of Bacon, Spenser, and Shakespeare, will always be remembered with pride and veneration by the civilised world, and will always impart (though with no great reason, perhaps) some portion of their lustre to the name of Elizabeth herself. It was a great reign for discovery, for commerce, and for English enterprise and spirit in general. It was a great reign for the Protestant religion and for the Reformation which made England free. The Queen was very popular, and in her progresses, or journeys about her dominions, was everywhere received with the liveliest joy. I think the truth is, that she was not half so good as she has been made out, and not half so bad as she has been made out. She had her fine qualities, but she was coarse, capricious, and treacherous, and had all the faults of an excessively vain young woman long after she was an old one. On the whole, she had a great deal too much of her father in her, to please me.

Many improvements and luxuries were introduced in the course of these five-and-forty years in the general manner of living; but cock-fighting, bull-baiting, and bear-baiting, were still the national amusements; and a coach was so rarely seen, and was such an ugly and cumbersome affair when it was seen, that even the Queen herself, on many high occasions, rode on horseback on a pillion behind the Lord Chancellor.

CHAPTER XXXII—ENGLAND UNDER JAMES THE FIRST

'Our cousin of Scotland' was ugly, awkward, and shuffling both in mind and person. His tongue was much too large for his mouth, his legs were much too weak for his body, and his dull goggle-eyes stared and rolled like an idiot's. He was cunning, covetous, wasteful, idle, drunken, greedy, dirty, cowardly, a great swearer, and the most conceited man on earth. His figure—what is commonly called rickety from his birth—presented a most ridiculous appearance, dressed in thick padded clothes, as a safeguard against being stabbed (of which he lived in continual fear), of a grass-green colour from head to foot, with a hunting-horn dangling at his side instead of a sword, and his hat and feather sticking over one eye, or hanging on the back of his head, as he happened to toss it on. He used to loll on the necks of his favourite courtiers, and slobber their faces, and kiss and pinch their cheeks; and the greatest favourite he ever had, used to sign himself in his letters to his royal master, His Majesty's 'dog and slave,' and used to address his majesty as 'his Sowship.' His majesty was the worst rider ever seen, and thought himself the best. He was one of the most impertinent talkers (in the broadest Scotch) ever heard, and boasted of being unanswerable in all manner of argument. He wrote some of the most wearisome treatises ever read—among others, a book upon witchcraft, in which he was a devout believer—and thought himself a prodigy of authorship. He thought, and wrote, and said, that a king had a right to make and unmake what laws he pleased, and ought to be accountable to nobody on earth. This is the plain, true character of the personage whom the greatest men about the court praised and flattered to that degree, that I doubt if there be anything much more shameful in the annals of human nature.

He came to the English throne with great ease. The miseries of a disputed succession had been felt so long, and so dreadfully, that he was proclaimed within a few hours of Elizabeth's death, and was accepted by the nation, even without being asked to give any pledge that he would govern well, or that he would redress crying grievances. He took a month to come from Edinburgh to London; and, by way of exercising his new power, hanged a pickpocket on the journey without any trial, and knighted everybody he could lay hold of. He made two hundred knights before he got to his palace in London, and seven hundred before he had been in it three months. He also shovelled sixty-two new peers into the House of Lords—and there was a pretty large sprinkling of Scotchmen among them, you may believe.

His Sowship's prime Minister, Cecil (for I cannot do better than call his majesty what his favourite called him), was the enemy of Sir Walter Raleigh, and also of Sir Walter's political friend, Lord Cobham; and his Sowship's first trouble was a plot originated by these two, and entered into by some others, with the old object of seizing the King and keeping him in imprisonment until he should change his ministers. There were Catholic priests in the plot, and there were Puritan noblemen too; for, although the Catholics and Puritans were strongly opposed to each other, they united at this time against his Sowship, because they knew that he had a design against both, after pretending to be friendly to each; this design being to have only one high and convenient form of the Protestant religion, which everybody should be bound to belong to, whether they liked it or not. This plot was mixed up with another, which may or may not have had some reference to placing on the throne, at some time, the Lady Arabella Stuart; whose misfortune it was, to be the daughter of the younger brother of his Sowship's father, but who was quite innocent of any part in the scheme. Sir Walter Raleigh was accused on the confession of Lord Cobham—a miserable creature, who said one thing at one time, and another thing at another time, and could be relied upon in nothing. The trial of Sir Walter Raleigh lasted from eight in the morning until nearly midnight; he defended himself with such eloquence, genius, and spirit against all accusations, and against the insults of Coke, the Attorney-General—who, according to the custom of the time, foully abused him—that those who went there detesting the prisoner, came away admiring him, and declaring that anything so wonderful and so captivating was never heard. He was found guilty, nevertheless, and sentenced to death. Execution was deferred, and he was taken to the Tower. The two Catholic priests, less fortunate, were executed with the usual atrocity; and Lord Cobham and two others were pardoned on the scaffold. His Sowship thought it wonderfully knowing in him to surprise the people by pardoning these three at the very block; but, blundering, and bungling, as usual, he had very nearly overreached himself. For, the messenger on horseback who brought the pardon, came so late, that he was pushed to the outside of the crowd, and was obliged to shout and roar out what he came for. The miserable Cobham did not gain much by being spared that day. He lived, both as a prisoner and a beggar, utterly despised, and miserably poor, for thirteen years, and then died in an old outhouse belonging to one of his former servants.

This plot got rid of, and Sir Walter Raleigh safely shut up in the Tower, his Sowship held a great dispute with the Puritans on their presenting a petition to him, and had it all his own way—not so very wonderful, as he would talk continually, and would not hear anybody else—and filled the Bishops with admiration. It was comfortably settled that there was to be only one form of religion, and that all men were to think exactly alike. But, although this was arranged two centuries and a half ago, and although the arrangement was supported by much fining and imprisonment, I do not find that it is quite successful, even yet.

His Sowship, having that uncommonly high opinion of himself as a king, had a very low opinion of Parliament as a power that audaciously wanted to control him. When he called his first Parliament after he had been king a year, he accordingly thought he would take pretty high ground with them, and told them that he commanded them ‘as an absolute king.’ The Parliament thought those strong words, and saw the necessity of upholding their authority. His Sowship had three children: Prince Henry, Prince Charles, and the Princess Elizabeth. It would have been well for one of these, and we shall too soon see which, if he had learnt a little wisdom concerning Parliaments from his father’s obstinacy.

Now, the people still labouring under their old dread of the Catholic religion, this Parliament revived and strengthened the severe laws against it. And this so angered Robert Catesby, a restless Catholic gentleman of an old family, that he formed one of the most desperate and terrible designs ever conceived in the mind of man; no less a scheme than the Gunpowder Plot.

His object was, when the King, lords, and commons, should be assembled at the next opening of Parliament, to blow them up, one and all, with a great mine of gunpowder. The first person to whom he confided this horrible idea was Thomas Winter, a Worcestershire gentleman who had served in the army abroad, and had been secretly employed in Catholic projects. While Winter was yet undecided, and when he had gone over to the Netherlands, to learn from the Spanish Ambassador there whether there was any hope of Catholics being relieved through the intercession of the King of Spain with his Sowship, he found at Ostend a tall, dark, daring man, whom he had known when they were both soldiers abroad, and whose name was Guido—or Guy—Fawkes. Resolved to join the plot, he proposed it to this man, knowing him to be the man for any desperate deed, and they two came back to England together. Here, they admitted two other conspirators; Thomas Percy, related to the Earl of Northumberland, and John Wright, his brother-in-law. All these met together in a solitary house in the open fields which were then near Clement's Inn, now a closely blocked-up part of London; and when they had all taken a great oath of secrecy, Catesby told the rest what his plan was. They then went up-stairs into a garret, and received the Sacrament from Father Gerard, a Jesuit, who is said not to have known actually of the Gunpowder Plot, but who, I think, must have had his suspicions that there was something desperate afoot.

Percy was a Gentleman Pensioner, and as he had occasional duties to perform about the Court, then kept at Whitehall, there would be nothing suspicious in his living at Westminster. So, having looked well about him, and having found a house to let, the back of which joined the Parliament House, he hired it of a person named Ferris, for the purpose of undermining the wall. Having got possession of this house, the conspirators hired another on the Lambeth side of the Thames, which they used as a storehouse for wood, gunpowder, and other combustible matters. These were to be removed at night (and afterwards were removed), bit by bit, to the house at Westminster; and, that there might be some trusty person to keep watch over the Lambeth stores, they admitted another conspirator, by name Robert Kay, a very poor Catholic gentleman.

All these arrangements had been made some months, and it was a dark, wintry, December night, when the conspirators, who had been in the meantime dispersed to avoid observation, met in the house at Westminster, and began to dig. They had laid in a good stock of eatables, to avoid going in and out, and they dug and dug with great ardour. But, the wall being tremendously thick, and the work very severe, they took into their plot Christopher Wright, a younger brother of John Wright, that they might have a new pair of hands to help. And Christopher Wright fell to like a fresh man, and they dug and dug by night and by day, and Fawkes stood sentinel all the time. And if any man's heart seemed to fail him at all, Fawkes said, 'Gentlemen, we have abundance of powder and shot here, and there is no fear of our being taken alive, even if discovered.' The same Fawkes, who, in the capacity of sentinel, was always prowling about, soon picked up the intelligence that the King had prorogued the Parliament again, from the seventh of February, the day first fixed upon, until the third of October. When the conspirators knew this, they agreed to separate until after the Christmas holidays, and to take no notice of each other in the meanwhile, and never to write letters to one another on any account. So, the house in Westminster was shut up again, and I suppose the neighbours thought that those strange-looking men who lived there so gloomily, and went out so seldom, were gone away to have a merry Christmas somewhere.

It was the beginning of February, sixteen hundred and five, when Catesby met his fellow-conspirators again at this Westminster house. He had now admitted three more; John Grant, a Warwickshire gentleman of a melancholy temper, who lived in a doleful house near Stratford-upon-Avon, with a frowning wall all round it, and a deep moat; Robert Winter, eldest brother of Thomas; and Catesby's own servant, Thomas Bates, who, Catesby thought, had had some suspicion of what his master was about. These three had all suffered more or less for their religion in Elizabeth's time. And now, they all began to dig again, and they dug and dug by night and by day.

They found it dismal work alone there, underground, with such a fearful secret on their minds, and so many murders before them. They were filled with wild fancies. Sometimes, they thought they heard a great bell tolling, deep down in the earth under the Parliament House; sometimes, they thought they heard low voices muttering about the Gunpowder Plot; once in the morning, they really did hear a great rumbling noise over their heads, as they dug and sweated in their mine. Every man stopped and looked aghast at his neighbour, wondering what had happened, when that bold prowler, Fawkes, who had been out to look, came in and told them that it was only a dealer in coals who had occupied a cellar under the Parliament House, removing his stock in trade to some other place. Upon this, the conspirators, who with all their digging and digging had not yet dug through the tremendously thick wall, changed their plan; hired that cellar, which was directly under the House of Lords; put six-and-thirty barrels of gunpowder in it, and covered them over with fagots and coals. Then they all dispersed again till September, when the following new conspirators were admitted; Sir Edward Baynham, of Gloucestershire; Sir Everard Digby, of Rutlandshire; Ambrose Rookwood, of Suffolk; Francis Tresham, of Northamptonshire. Most of these were rich, and were to assist the plot, some with money and some with horses on which the conspirators were to ride through the country and rouse the Catholics after the Parliament should be blown into air.

Parliament being again prorogued from the third of October to the fifth of November, and the conspirators being uneasy lest their design should have been found out, Thomas Winter said he would go up into the House of Lords on the day of the prorogation, and see how matters looked. Nothing could be better. The unconscious Commissioners were walking about and talking to one another, just over the six-and-thirty barrels of gunpowder. He came back and told the rest so, and they went on with their preparations. They hired a ship, and kept it ready in the Thames, in which Fawkes was to sail for Flanders after firing with a slow match the train that was to explode the powder. A number of Catholic gentlemen not in the secret, were invited, on pretence of a hunting party, to meet Sir Everard Digby at Dunchurch on the fatal day, that they might be ready to act together. And now all was ready.

But, now, the great wickedness and danger which had been all along at the bottom of this wicked plot, began to show itself. As the fifth of November drew near, most of the conspirators, remembering that they had friends and relations who would be in the House of Lords that day, felt some natural relenting, and a wish to warn them to keep away. They were not much comforted by Catesby’s declaring that in such a cause he would blow up his own son. Lord Mounteagle, Tresham’s brother-in-law, was certain to be in the house; and when Tresham found that he could not prevail upon the rest to devise any means of sparing their friends, he wrote a mysterious letter to this lord and left it at his lodging in the dusk, urging him to keep away from the opening of Parliament, ‘since God and man had concurred to punish the wickedness of the times.’ It contained the words ‘that the Parliament should receive a terrible blow, and yet should not see who hurt them.’ And it added, ‘the danger is past, as soon as you have burnt the letter.’

The ministers and courtiers made out that his Sowship, by a direct miracle from Heaven, found out what this letter meant. The truth is, that they were not long (as few men would be) in finding out for themselves; and it was decided to let the conspirators alone, until the very day before the opening of Parliament. That the conspirators had their fears, is certain; for, Tresham himself said before them all, that they were every one dead men; and, although even he did not take flight, there is reason to suppose that he had warned other persons besides Lord Mounteagle. However, they were all firm; and Fawkes, who was a man of iron, went down every day and night to keep watch in the cellar as usual. He was there about two in the afternoon of the fourth, when the Lord Chamberlain and Lord Mounteagle threw open the door and looked in. ‘Who are you, friend?’ said they. ‘Why,’ said Fawkes, ‘I am Mr. Percy’s servant, and am looking after his store of fuel here.’ ‘Your master has laid in a pretty good store,’ they returned, and shut the door, and went away. Fawkes, upon this, posted off to the other conspirators to tell them all was quiet, and went back and shut himself up in the dark, black cellar again, where he heard the bell go twelve o’clock and usher in the fifth of November. About two hours afterwards, he slowly opened the door, and came out to look about him, in his old prowling way. He was instantly seized and bound, by a party of soldiers under Sir Thomas Knevett. He had a watch upon him, some touchwood, some tinder, some slow matches; and there was a dark lantern with a candle in it, lighted, behind the door. He had his boots and spurs on—to ride to the ship, I suppose—and it was well for the soldiers that they took him so suddenly. If they had left him but a moment’s time to light a match, he certainly would have tossed it in among the powder, and blown up himself and them.

They took him to the King’s bed-chamber first of all, and there the King (causing him to be held very tight, and keeping a good way off), asked him how he could have the heart to intend to destroy so many innocent people? ‘Because,’ said Guy Fawkes, ‘desperate diseases need desperate remedies.’ To a little Scotch favourite, with a face like a terrier, who asked him (with no particular wisdom) why he had collected so much gunpowder, he replied, because he had meant to blow Scotchmen back to Scotland, and it would take a deal of powder to do that. Next day he was carried to the Tower, but would make no confession. Even after being horribly tortured, he confessed nothing that the Government did not already know; though he must have been in a fearful state—as his signature, still preserved, in contrast with his natural hand-writing before he was put upon the dreadful rack, most frightfully shows. Bates, a very different man, soon said the Jesuits had had to do with the plot, and probably, under the torture, would as readily have said anything. Tresham, taken and put in the Tower too, made confessions and unmade them, and died of an illness that was heavy upon him. Rookwood, who had stationed relays of his own horses all the way to Dunchurch, did not mount to escape until the middle of the day, when the news of the plot was all over London. On the road, he came up with the two Wrights, Catesby, and Percy; and they all galloped together into Northamptonshire. Thence to Dunchurch, where they found the proposed party assembled. Finding, however, that there had been a plot, and that it had been discovered, the party disappeared in the course of the night, and left them alone with Sir Everard Digby. Away they all rode again, through Warwickshire and Worcestershire, to a house called Holbeach, on the borders of Staffordshire. They tried to raise the Catholics on their way, but were indignantly driven off by them. All this time they were hotly pursued by the sheriff of Worcester, and a fast increasing concourse of riders. At last, resolving to defend themselves at Holbeach, they shut themselves up in the house, and put some wet powder before the fire to dry. But it blew up, and Catesby was singed and blackened, and almost killed, and some of the others were sadly hurt. Still, knowing that they must die, they resolved to die there, and with only their swords in their hands appeared at the windows to be shot at by the sheriff and his assistants. Catesby said to Thomas Winter, after Thomas had been hit in the right arm which dropped powerless by his side, ‘Stand by me, Tom, and we will die together!’—which they did, being shot through the body by two bullets from one gun. John Wright, and Christopher Wright, and Percy, were also shot. Rookwood and Digby were taken: the former with a broken arm and a wound in his body too.

It was the fifteenth of January, before the trial of Guy Fawkes, and such of the other conspirators as were left alive, came on. They were all found guilty, all hanged, drawn, and quartered: some, in St. Paul’s Churchyard, on the top of Ludgate-hill; some, before the Parliament House. A Jesuit priest, named Henry Garnet, to whom the dreadful design was said to have been communicated, was taken and tried; and two of his servants, as well as a poor priest who was taken with him, were tortured without mercy. He himself was not tortured, but was surrounded in the Tower by tamperers and traitors, and so was made unfairly to convict himself out of his own mouth.

He said, upon his trial, that he had done all he could to prevent the deed, and that he could not make public what had been told him in confession—though I am afraid he knew of the plot in other ways. He was found guilty and executed, after a manful defence, and the Catholic Church made a saint of him; some rich and powerful persons, who had had nothing to do with the project, were fined and imprisoned for it by the Star Chamber; the Catholics, in general, who had recoiled with horror from the idea of the infernal contrivance, were unjustly put under more severe laws than before; and this was the end of the Gunpowder Plot.

SECOND PART

His Sowship would pretty willingly, I think, have blown the House of Commons into the air himself; for, his dread and jealousy of it knew no bounds all through his reign. When he was hard pressed for money he was obliged to order it to meet, as he could get no money without it; and when it asked him first to abolish some of the monopolies in necessaries of life which were a great grievance to the people, and to redress other public wrongs, he flew into a rage and got rid of it again. At one time he wanted it to consent to the Union of England with Scotland, and quarrelled about that. At another time it wanted him to put down a most infamous Church abuse, called the High Commission Court, and he quarrelled with it about that. At another time it entreated him not to be quite so fond of his archbishops and bishops who made speeches in his praise too awful to be related, but to have some little consideration for the poor Puritan clergy who were persecuted for preaching in their own way, and not according to the archbishops and bishops; and they quarrelled about that. In short, what with hating the House of Commons, and pretending not to hate it; and what with now sending some of its members who opposed him, to Newgate or to the Tower, and now telling the rest that they must not presume to make speeches about the public affairs which could not possibly concern them; and what with cajoling, and bullying, and fighting, and being frightened; the House of Commons was the plague of his Sowship's existence. It was pretty firm, however, in maintaining its rights, and insisting that the Parliament should make the laws, and not the King by his own single proclamations (which he tried hard to do); and his Sowship was so often distressed for money, in consequence, that he sold every sort of title and public office as if they were merchandise, and even invented a new dignity called a Baronetcy, which anybody could buy for a thousand pounds.

These disputes with his Parliaments, and his hunting, and his drinking, and his lying in bed—for he was a great sluggard—occupied his Sowship pretty well. The rest of his time he chiefly passed in hugging and slobbering his favourites. The first of these was Sir Philip Herbert, who had no knowledge whatever, except of dogs, and horses, and hunting, but whom he soon made Earl of Montgomery. The next, and a much more famous one, was Robert Carr, or Ker (for it is not certain which was his right name), who came from the Border country, and whom he soon made Viscount Rochester, and afterwards, Earl of Somerset. The way in which his Sowship doted on this handsome young man, is even more odious to think of, than the way in which the really great men of England condescended to bow down before him. The favourite's great friend was a certain Sir Thomas Overbury, who wrote his love-letters for him, and assisted him in the duties of his many high places, which his own ignorance prevented him from discharging. But this same Sir Thomas having just manhood enough to dissuade the favourite from a wicked marriage with the beautiful Countess of Essex, who was to get a divorce from her husband for the purpose, the said Countess, in her rage, got Sir Thomas put into the Tower, and there poisoned him. Then the favourite and this bad woman were publicly married by the King's pet bishop, with as much to-do and rejoicing, as if he had been the best man, and she the best woman, upon the face of the earth.

But, after a longer sunshine than might have been expected—of seven years or so, that is to say—another handsome young man started up and eclipsed the Earl of Somerset. This was George Villiers, the youngest son of a Leicestershire gentleman: who came to Court with all the Paris fashions on him, and could dance as well as the best mountebank that ever was seen. He soon danced himself into the good graces of his Sowship, and danced the other favourite out of favour. Then, it was all at once discovered that the Earl and Countess of Somerset had not deserved all those great promotions and mighty rejoicings, and they were separately tried for the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury, and for other crimes. But, the King was so afraid of his late favourite's publicly telling some disgraceful things he knew of him—which he darkly threatened to do—that he was even examined with two men standing, one on either side of him, each with a cloak in his hand, ready to throw it over his head and stop his mouth if he should break out with what he had it in his power to tell. So, a very lame affair was purposely made of the trial, and his punishment was an allowance of four thousand pounds a year in retirement, while the Countess was pardoned, and allowed to pass into retirement too. They hated one another by this time, and lived to revile and torment each other some years.

While these events were in progress, and while his Sowship was making such an exhibition of himself, from day to day and from year to year, as is not often seen in any sty, three remarkable deaths took place in England. The first was that of the Minister, Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, who was past sixty, and had never been strong, being deformed from his birth. He said at last that he had no wish to live; and no Minister need have had, with his experience of the meanness and wickedness of those disgraceful times. The second was that of the Lady Arabella Stuart, who alarmed his Sowship mightily, by privately marrying William Seymour, son of Lord Beauchamp, who was a descendant of King Henry the Seventh, and who, his Sowship thought, might consequently increase and strengthen any claim she might one day set up to the throne. She was separated from her husband (who was put in the Tower) and thrust into a boat to be confined at Durham. She escaped in a man's dress to get away in a French ship from Gravesend to France, but unhappily missed her husband, who had escaped too, and was soon taken. She went raving mad in the miserable Tower, and died there after four years. The last, and the most important of these three deaths, was that of Prince Henry, the heir to the throne, in the nineteenth year of his age. He was a promising young prince, and greatly liked; a quiet, well-conducted youth, of whom two very good things are known: first, that his father was jealous of him; secondly, that he was the friend of Sir Walter Raleigh, languishing through all those years in the Tower, and often said that no man but his father would keep such a bird in such a cage. On the occasion of the preparations for the marriage of his sister the Princess Elizabeth with a foreign prince (and an unhappy marriage it turned out), he came from Richmond, where he had been very ill, to greet his new brother-in-law, at the palace at Whitehall. There he played a great game at tennis, in his shirt, though it was very cold weather, and was seized with an alarming illness, and died within a fortnight of a putrid fever. For this young prince Sir Walter Raleigh wrote, in his prison in the Tower, the beginning of a History of the World: a wonderful instance how little his Sowship could do to confine a great man's mind, however long he might imprison his body.

And this mention of Sir Walter Raleigh, who had many faults, but who never showed so many merits as in trouble and adversity, may bring me at once to the end of his sad story. After an imprisonment in the Tower of twelve long years, he proposed to resume those old sea voyages of his, and to go to South America in search of gold. His Sowship, divided between his wish to be on good terms with the Spaniards through whose territory Sir Walter must pass (he had long had an idea of marrying Prince Henry to a Spanish Princess), and his avaricious eagerness to get hold of the gold, did not know what to do. But, in the end, he set Sir Walter free, taking securities for his return; and Sir Walter fitted out an expedition at his own coast and, on the twenty-eighth of March, one thousand six hundred and seventeen, sailed away in command of one of its ships, which he ominously called the Destiny. The expedition failed; the common men, not finding the gold they had expected, mutinied; a quarrel broke out between Sir Walter and the Spaniards, who hated him for old successes of his against them; and he took and burnt a little town called Saint Thomas. For this he was denounced to his Sowship by the Spanish Ambassador as a pirate; and returning almost broken-hearted, with his hopes and fortunes shattered, his company of friends dispersed, and his brave son (who had been one of them) killed, he was taken—through the treachery of Sir Lewis Stukely, his near relation, a scoundrel and a Vice-Admiral—and was once again immured in his prison-home of so many years.

His Sowship being mightily disappointed in not getting any gold, Sir Walter Raleigh was tried as unfairly, and with as many lies and evasions as the judges and law officers and every other authority in Church and State habitually practised under such a King. After a great deal of prevarication on all parts but his own, it was declared that he must die under his former sentence, now fifteen years old. So, on the twenty-eighth of October, one thousand six hundred and eighteen, he was shut up in the Gate House at Westminster to pass his late night on earth, and there he took leave of his good and faithful lady who was worthy to have lived in better days. At eight o'clock next morning, after a cheerful breakfast, and a pipe, and a cup of good wine, he was taken to Old Palace Yard in Westminster, where the scaffold was set up, and where so many people of high degree were assembled to see him die, that it was a matter of some difficulty to get him through the crowd. He behaved most nobly, but if anything lay heavy on his mind, it was that Earl of Essex, whose head he had seen roll off; and he solemnly said that he had had no hand in bringing him to the block, and that he had shed tears for him when he died. As the morning was very cold, the Sheriff said, would he come down to a fire for a little space, and warm himself? But Sir Walter thanked him, and said no, he would rather it were done at once, for he was ill of fever and ague, and in another quarter of an hour his shaking fit would come upon him if he were still alive, and his enemies might then suppose that he trembled for fear. With that, he kneeled and made a very beautiful and Christian prayer. Before he laid his head upon the block he felt the edge of the axe, and said, with a smile upon his face, that it was a sharp medicine, but would cure the worst disease. When he was bent down ready for death, he said to the executioner, finding that he hesitated, ‘What dost thou fear? Strike, man!’ So, the axe came down and struck his head off, in the sixty-sixth year of his age.

The new favourite got on fast. He was made a viscount, he was made Duke of Buckingham, he was made a marquis, he was made Master of the Horse, he was made Lord High Admiral—and the Chief Commander of the gallant English forces that had dispersed the Spanish Armada, was displaced to make room for him. He had the whole kingdom at his disposal, and his mother sold all the profits and honours of the State, as if she had kept a shop. He blazed all over with diamonds and other precious stones, from his hatband and his earrings to his shoes. Yet he was an ignorant presumptuous, swaggering compound of knave and fool, with nothing but his beauty and his dancing to recommend him. This is the gentleman who called himself his Majesty’s dog and slave, and called his Majesty Your Sowship. His Sowship called him Steenie; it is supposed, because that was a nickname for Stephen, and because St. Stephen was generally represented in pictures as a handsome saint.

His Sowship was driven sometimes to his wits’-end by his trimming between the general dislike of the Catholic religion at home, and his desire to wheedle and flatter it abroad, as his only means of getting a rich princess for his son’s wife: a part of whose fortune he might cram into his greasy pockets. Prince Charles—or as his Sowship called him, Baby Charles—being now Prince of Wales, the old project of a marriage with the Spanish King’s daughter had been revived for him; and as she could not marry a

Protestant without leave from the Pope, his Sowship himself secretly and meanly wrote to his Infallibility, asking for it. The negotiation for this Spanish marriage takes up a larger space in great books, than you can imagine, but the upshot of it all is, that when it had been held off by the Spanish Court for a long time, Baby Charles and Steenie set off in disguise as Mr. Thomas Smith and Mr. John Smith, to see the Spanish Princess; that Baby Charles pretended to be desperately in love with her, and jumped off walls to look at her, and made a considerable fool of himself in a good many ways; that she was called Princess of Wales and that the whole Spanish Court believed Baby Charles to be all but dying for her sake, as he expressly told them he was; that Baby Charles and Steenie came back to England, and were received with as much rapture as if they had been a blessing to it; that Baby Charles had actually fallen in love with Henrietta Maria, the French King's sister, whom he had seen in Paris; that he thought it a wonderfully fine and princely thing to have deceived the Spaniards, all through; and that he openly said, with a chuckle, as soon as he was safe and sound at home again, that the Spaniards were great fools to have believed him.

Like most dishonest men, the Prince and the favourite complained that the people whom they had deluded were dishonest. They made such misrepresentations of the treachery of the Spaniards in this business of the Spanish match, that the English nation became eager for a war with them. Although the gravest Spaniards laughed at the idea of his Sowship in a warlike attitude, the Parliament granted money for the beginning of hostilities, and the treaties with Spain were publicly declared to be at an end. The Spanish ambassador in London—probably with the help of the fallen favourite, the Earl of Somerset—being unable to obtain speech with his Sowship, slipped a paper into his hand, declaring that he was a prisoner in his own house, and was entirely governed by Buckingham and his creatures. The first effect of this letter was that his Sowship began to cry and whine, and took Baby Charles away from Steenie, and went down to Windsor, gabbling all sorts of nonsense. The end of it was that his Sowship hugged his dog and slave, and said he was quite satisfied.

He had given the Prince and the favourite almost unlimited power to settle anything with the Pope as to the Spanish marriage; and he now, with a view to the French one, signed a treaty that all Roman Catholics in England should exercise their religion freely, and should never be required to take any oath contrary thereto. In return for this, and for other concessions much less to be defended, Henrietta Maria was to become the Prince's wife, and was to bring him a fortune of eight hundred thousand crowns.

His Sowship's eyes were getting red with eagerly looking for the money, when the end of a gluttonous life came upon him; and, after a fortnight's illness, on Sunday the twenty-seventh of March, one thousand six hundred and twenty-five, he died. He had reigned twenty-two years, and was fifty-nine years old. I know of nothing more abominable in history than the adulation that was lavished on this King, and the vice and corruption that such a barefaced habit of lying produced in his court. It is much to be doubted whether one man of honour, and not utterly self-disgraced, kept his place near James the First. Lord Bacon, that able and wise philosopher, as the First Judge in the Kingdom in this reign, became a public spectacle of dishonesty and corruption; and in his base flattery of his Sowship, and in his crawling servility to his dog and slave, disgraced himself even more. But, a creature like his Sowship set upon a throne is like the Plague, and everybody receives infection from him.

CHAPTER XXXIII—ENGLAND UNDER CHARLES THE FIRST

Baby Charles became King Charles the First, in the twenty-fifth year of his age. Unlike his father, he was usually amiable in his private character, and grave and dignified in his bearing; but, like his father, he had monstrously exaggerated notions of the rights of a king, and was evasive, and not to be trusted. If his word could have been relied upon, his history might have had a different end.

His first care was to send over that insolent upstart, Buckingham, to bring Henrietta Maria from Paris to be his Queen; upon which occasion Buckingham—with his usual audacity—made love to the young Queen of Austria, and was very indignant indeed with Cardinal Richelieu, the French Minister, for thwarting his intentions. The English people were very well disposed to like their new Queen, and to receive her with great favour when she came among them as a stranger. But, she held the Protestant religion in great dislike, and brought over a crowd of unpleasant priests, who made her do some very ridiculous things, and forced themselves upon the public notice in many disagreeable ways. Hence, the people soon came to dislike her, and she soon came to dislike them; and she did so much all through this reign in setting the King (who was dotingly fond of her) against his subjects, that it would have been better for him if she had never been born.

Now, you are to understand that King Charles the First—of his own determination to be a high and mighty King not to be called to account by anybody, and urged on by his Queen besides—deliberately set himself to put his Parliament down and to put himself up. You are also to understand, that even in pursuit of this wrong idea (enough in itself to have ruined any king) he never took a straight course, but always took a crooked one.

He was bent upon war with Spain, though neither the House of Commons nor the people were quite clear as to the justice of that war, now that they began to think a little more about the story of the Spanish match. But the King rushed into it hotly, raised money by illegal means to meet its expenses, and encountered a miserable failure at Cadiz, in the very first year of his reign. An expedition to Cadiz had been made in the hope of plunder, but as it was not successful, it was necessary to get a grant of money from the Parliament; and when they met, in no very complying humour, the King told them, ‘to make haste to let him have it, or it would be the worse for themselves.’ Not put in a more complying humour by this, they impeached the King’s favourite, the Duke of Buckingham, as the cause (which he undoubtedly was) of many great public grievances and wrongs. The King, to save him, dissolved the Parliament without getting the money he wanted; and when the Lords implored him to consider and grant a little delay, he replied, ‘No, not one minute.’ He then began to raise money for himself by the following means among others.

He levied certain duties called tonnage and poundage which had not been granted by the Parliament, and could lawfully be levied by no other power; he called upon the seaport towns to furnish, and to pay all the cost for three months of, a fleet of armed ships; and he required the people to unite in lending him large sums of money, the repayment of which was very doubtful. If the poor people refused, they were pressed as soldiers or sailors; if the gentry refused, they were sent to prison. Five gentlemen, named Sir Thomas Darnel, John Corbet, Walter Earl, John Heveningham, and Everard Hampden, for refusing were taken up by a warrant of the King’s privy council, and were sent to prison without any cause but the King’s pleasure being stated for their imprisonment. Then the question came to be solemnly tried, whether this was not a violation of Magna Charta, and an encroachment by the King on the highest rights of the English people. His lawyers contended No, because to encroach upon the rights of the English people would be to do wrong, and the King could do no wrong. The accommodating judges decided in favour of this wicked nonsense; and here was a fatal division between the King and the people.

For all this, it became necessary to call another Parliament. The people, sensible of the danger in which their liberties were, chose for it those who were best known for their determined opposition to the King; but still the King, quite blinded by his determination to carry everything before him, addressed them when they met, in a contemptuous manner, and just told them in so many words that he had only called them together because he wanted money. The Parliament, strong enough and resolute enough to know that they would lower his tone, cared little for what he said, and laid before him one of the great documents of history, which is called the Petition of Right, requiring that the free men of England should no longer be called upon to lend the King money, and should no longer be pressed or imprisoned for refusing to do so; further, that the free men of England should no longer be seized by the King's special mandate or warrant, it being contrary to their rights and liberties and the laws of their country. At first the King returned an answer to this petition, in which he tried to shirk it altogether; but, the House of Commons then showing their determination to go on with the impeachment of Buckingham, the King in alarm returned an answer, giving his consent to all that was required of him. He not only afterwards departed from his word and honour on these points, over and over again, but, at this very time, he did the mean and dissembling act of publishing his first answer and not his second—merely that the people might suppose that the Parliament had not got the better of him.

That pestilent Buckingham, to gratify his own wounded vanity, had by this time involved the country in war with France, as well as with Spain. For such miserable causes and such miserable creatures are wars sometimes made! But he was destined to do little more mischief in this world. One morning, as he was going out of his house to his carriage, he turned to speak to a certain Colonel Fryer who was with him; and he was violently stabbed with a knife, which the murderer left sticking in his heart. This happened in his hall. He had had angry words up-stairs, just before, with some French gentlemen, who were immediately suspected by his servants, and had a close escape from being set upon and killed. In the midst of the noise, the real murderer, who had gone to the kitchen and might easily have got away, drew his sword and cried out, 'I am the man!' His name was John Felton, a Protestant and a retired officer in the army. He said he had had no personal ill-will to the Duke, but had killed him as a curse to the country. He had aimed his blow well, for Buckingham had only had time to cry out, 'Villain!' and then he drew out the knife, fell against a table, and died.

The council made a mighty business of examining John Felton about this murder, though it was a plain case enough, one would think. He had come seventy miles to do it, he told them, and he did it for the reason he had declared; if they put him upon the rack, as that noble Marquis of Dorset whom he saw before him, had the goodness to threaten, he gave that marquis warning, that he would accuse *him* as his accomplice! The King was unpleasantly anxious to have him racked, nevertheless; but as the judges now found out that torture was contrary to the law of England—it is a pity they did not make the discovery a little sooner—John Felton was simply executed for the murder he had done. A murder it undoubtedly was, and not in the least to be defended: though he had freed England from one of the most profligate, contemptible, and base court favourites to whom it has ever yielded.

A very different man now arose. This was Sir Thomas Wentworth, a Yorkshire gentleman, who had sat in Parliament for a long time, and who had favoured arbitrary and haughty principles, but who had gone over to the people's side on receiving offence from Buckingham. The King, much wanting such a man—for, besides being naturally favourable to the King's cause, he had great abilities—made him first a Baron, and then a Viscount, and gave him high employment, and won him most completely.

A Parliament, however, was still in existence, and was *not* to be won. On the twentieth of January, one thousand six hundred and twenty-nine, Sir John Eliot, a great man who had been active in the Petition of Right, brought forward other strong resolutions against the King's chief instruments, and called upon the Speaker to put them to the vote. To this the Speaker answered, 'he was commanded otherwise by the King,' and got up to leave the chair—which, according to the rules of the House of Commons would have obliged it to adjourn without doing anything more—when two members, named Mr. Hollis and Mr. Valentine, held him down. A scene of great confusion arose among the members; and while many swords were drawn and flashing about, the King, who was kept informed of all that was going on, told the captain of his guard to go down to the House and force the doors. The resolutions were by that time, however, voted, and the House adjourned. Sir John Eliot and those two members who had held the Speaker down, were quickly summoned before the council. As they claimed it to be their privilege not to answer out of Parliament for anything they had said in it, they were committed to the Tower. The King then went down and dissolved the Parliament, in a speech wherein he made mention of these gentlemen as 'Vipers'—which did not do him much good that ever I have heard of.

As they refused to gain their liberty by saying they were sorry for what they had done, the King, always remarkably unforgiving, never overlooked their offence. When they demanded to be brought up before the court of King's Bench, he even resorted to the meanness of having them moved about from prison to prison, so that the writs issued for that purpose should not legally find them. At last they came before the court and were sentenced to heavy fines, and to be imprisoned during the King's pleasure. When Sir John Eliot's health had quite given way, and he so longed for change of air and scene as to petition for his release, the King sent back the answer (worthy of his Sowship himself) that the petition was not humble enough. When he sent another petition by his young son, in which he pathetically offered to go back to prison when his health was restored, if he might be released for its recovery, the King still disregarded it. When he died in the Tower, and his children petitioned to be allowed to take his body down to Cornwall, there to lay it among the ashes of his forefathers, the King returned for answer, 'Let Sir John Eliot's body be buried in the church of that parish where he died.' All this was like a very little King indeed, I think.

And now, for twelve long years, steadily pursuing his design of setting himself up and putting the people down, the King called no Parliament; but ruled without one. If twelve thousand volumes were written in his praise (as a good many have been) it would still remain a fact, impossible to be denied, that for twelve years King Charles the First reigned in England unlawfully and despotically, seized upon his subjects' goods and money at his pleasure, and punished according to his unbridled will all who ventured to oppose him. It is a fashion with some people to think that this King's career was cut short; but I must say myself that I think he ran a pretty long one.

William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, was the King's right-hand man in the religious part of the putting down of the people's liberties. Laud, who was a sincere man, of large learning but small sense—for the two things sometimes go together in very different quantities—though a Protestant, held opinions so near those of the Catholics, that the Pope wanted to make a Cardinal of him, if he would have accepted that favour. He looked upon vows, robes, lighted candles, images, and so forth, as amazingly important in religious ceremonies; and he brought in an immensity of bowing and candle-snuffing. He also regarded archbishops and bishops as a sort of miraculous persons, and was inveterate in the last degree against any who thought otherwise. Accordingly, he offered up thanks to Heaven, and was in a state of much pious pleasure, when a Scotch clergyman, named Leighton, was pilloried, whipped, branded in the cheek, and had one of his ears cut off and one of his nostrils slit, for calling bishops trumpery and the inventions of men. He originated on a Sunday morning the prosecution of William Prynne, a barrister who was of similar opinions, and who was fined a thousand pounds; who was pilloried; who had his ears cut off on two occasions—one ear at a time—and who was imprisoned for life. He highly approved of the punishment of Doctor Bastwick, a physician; who was also fined a thousand pounds; and who afterwards had *his* ears cut off, and was imprisoned for life. These were gentle methods of persuasion, some will tell you: I think, they were rather calculated to be alarming to the people.

In the money part of the putting down of the people's liberties, the King was equally gentle, as some will tell you: as I think, equally alarming. He levied those duties of tonnage and poundage, and increased them as he thought fit. He granted monopolies to companies of merchants on their paying him for them, notwithstanding the great complaints that had, for years and years, been made on the subject of monopolies. He fined the people for disobeying proclamations issued by his Sowship in direct violation of law. He revived the detested Forest laws, and took private property to himself as his forest right. Above all, he determined to have what was called Ship Money; that is to say, money for the support of the fleet—not only from the seaports, but from all the counties of England: having found out that, in some ancient time or other, all the counties paid it. The grievance of this ship money being somewhat too strong, John Chambers, a citizen of London, refused to pay his part of it. For this the Lord Mayor ordered John Chambers to prison, and for that John Chambers brought a suit against the Lord Mayor. Lord Say, also, behaved like a real nobleman, and declared he would not pay. But, the sturdiest and best opponent of the ship money was John Hampden, a gentleman of Buckinghamshire, who had sat among the 'vipers' in the House of Commons when there was such a thing, and who had been the bosom friend of Sir John Eliot. This case was tried before the twelve judges in the Court of Exchequer, and again the King's lawyers said it was impossible that ship money could be wrong, because the King could do no wrong, however hard he tried—and he really did try very hard during these twelve years. Seven of the judges said that was quite true, and Mr. Hampden was bound to pay: five of the judges said that was quite false, and Mr. Hampden was not bound to pay. So, the King triumphed (as he thought), by making Hampden the most popular man in England; where matters were getting to that height now, that many honest Englishmen could not endure their country, and sailed away across the seas to found a colony in Massachusetts Bay in America. It is said that Hampden himself and his relation Oliver Cromwell were going with a company of such voyagers, and were actually on board ship, when they were stopped by a proclamation, prohibiting sea captains to carry out such passengers without the royal license. But O! it would have been well for the King if he had let them go! This was the state of England. If Laud had been a madman just broke loose, he could not have done more mischief than he did in Scotland. In his endeavours (in which he was seconded by the King, then in person in that part of his dominions) to force his own ideas of bishops, and his own religious forms and ceremonies upon the Scotch, he roused that nation to a perfect frenzy. They formed a solemn league, which they called The Covenant, for the preservation of their own religious forms; they rose in arms throughout the whole country; they summoned all their men to prayers and sermons twice a day by beat of drum; they sang psalms, in which they compared their enemies to all the evil spirits that ever were heard of; and they solemnly vowed to smite them with the sword. At first the King tried force, then treaty, then a Scottish Parliament which did not answer at all. Then he tried the Earl of Strafford, formerly Sir Thomas Wentworth; who, as Lord Wentworth, had been governing Ireland. He, too, had carried it with a very high hand there, though to the benefit and prosperity of that country.

Strafford and Laud were for conquering the Scottish people by force of arms. Other lords who were taken into council, recommended that a Parliament should at last be called; to which the King unwillingly consented. So, on the thirteenth of April, one thousand six hundred and forty, that then strange sight, a Parliament, was seen at Westminster. It is called the Short Parliament, for it lasted a very little while. While the members were all looking at one another, doubtful who would dare to speak, Mr. Pym arose and set forth all that the King had done unlawfully during the past twelve years, and what was the position to which England was reduced. This great example set, other members took courage and spoke the truth freely, though with great patience and moderation. The King, a little frightened, sent to say that if they would grant him a certain sum on certain terms, no more ship money should be raised. They debated the matter for two days; and then, as they would not give him all he asked without promise or inquiry, he dissolved them.

But they knew very well that he must have a Parliament now; and he began to make that discovery too, though rather late in the day. Wherefore, on the twenty-fourth of September, being then at York with an army collected against the Scottish people, but his own men sullen and discontented like the rest of the nation, the King told the great council of the Lords, whom he had called to meet him there, that he would summon another Parliament to assemble on the third of November. The soldiers of the Covenant had now forced their way into England and had taken possession of the northern counties, where the coals are got. As it would never do to be without coals, and as the King's troops could make no head against the Covenanters so full of gloomy zeal, a truce was made, and a treaty with Scotland was taken into consideration. Meanwhile the northern counties paid the Covenanters to leave the coals alone, and keep quiet.

We have now disposed of the Short Parliament. We have next to see what memorable things were done by the Long one.

SECOND PART

The Long Parliament assembled on the third of November, one thousand six hundred and forty-one. That day week the Earl of Strafford arrived from York, very sensible that the spirited and determined men who formed that Parliament were no friends towards him, who had not only deserted the cause of the people, but who had on all occasions opposed himself to their liberties. The King told him, for his comfort, that the Parliament 'should not hurt one hair of his head.' But, on the very next day Mr. Pym, in the House of Commons, and with great solemnity, impeached the Earl of Strafford as a traitor. He was immediately taken into custody and fell from his proud height.

It was the twenty-second of March before he was brought to trial in Westminster Hall; where, although he was very ill and suffered great pain, he defended himself with such ability and majesty, that it was doubtful whether he would not get the best of it. But on the thirteenth day of the trial, Pym produced in the House of Commons a copy of some notes of a council, found by young Sir Harry Vane in a red velvet cabinet belonging to his father (Secretary Vane, who sat at the council-table with the Earl), in which Strafford had distinctly told the King that he was free from all rules and obligations of government, and might do with his people whatever he liked; and in which he had added—'You have an army in Ireland that you may employ to reduce this kingdom to obedience.' It was not clear whether by the words 'this kingdom,' he had really meant England or Scotland; but the Parliament contended that he meant England, and this was treason. At the same sitting of the House of Commons it was resolved to bring in a bill of attainder declaring the treason to have been committed: in preference to proceeding with the trial by impeachment, which would have required the treason to be proved.

So, a bill was brought in at once, was carried through the House of Commons by a large majority, and was sent up to the House of Lords. While it was still uncertain whether the House of Lords would pass it and the King consent to it, Pym disclosed to the House of Commons that the King and Queen had both been plotting with the officers of the army to bring up the soldiers and control the Parliament, and also to introduce two hundred soldiers into the Tower of London to effect the Earl's escape. The plotting with the army was revealed by one George Goring, the son of a lord of that name: a bad fellow who was one of the original plotters, and turned traitor. The King had actually given his warrant for the admission of the two hundred men into the Tower, and they would have got in too, but for the refusal of the governor—a sturdy Scotchman of the name of Balfour—to admit them. These matters being made public, great numbers of people began to riot outside the Houses of Parliament, and to cry out for the execution of the Earl of Strafford, as one of the King's chief instruments against them. The bill passed the House of Lords while the people were in this state of agitation, and was laid before the King for his assent, together with another bill declaring that the Parliament then assembled should not be dissolved or adjourned without their own consent. The King—not unwilling to save a faithful servant, though he had no great attachment for him—was in some doubt what to do; but he gave his consent to both bills, although he in his heart believed that the bill against the Earl of Strafford was unlawful and unjust. The Earl had written to him, telling him that he was willing to die for his sake. But he had not expected that his royal master would take him at his word quite so readily; for, when he heard his doom, he laid his hand upon his heart, and said, 'Put not your trust in Princes!'

The King, who never could be straightforward and plain, through one single day or through one single sheet of paper, wrote a letter to the Lords, and sent it by the young Prince of Wales, entreating them to prevail with the Commons that 'that unfortunate man should fulfil the natural course of his life in a close imprisonment.' In a postscript to the very same letter, he added, 'If he must die, it were charity to reprieve him till Saturday.' If there had been any doubt of his fate, this weakness and meanness would have settled it. The very next day, which was the twelfth of May, he was brought out to be beheaded on Tower Hill.

Archbishop Laud, who had been so fond of having people's ears cropped off and their noses slit, was now confined in the Tower too; and when the Earl went by his window to his death, he was there, at his request, to give him his blessing. They had been great friends in the King's cause, and the Earl had written to him in the days of their power that he thought it would be an admirable thing to have Mr. Hampden publicly whipped for refusing to pay the ship money. However, those high and mighty doings were over now, and the Earl went his way to death with dignity and heroism. The governor wished him to get into a coach at the Tower gate, for fear the people should tear him to pieces; but he said it was all one to him whether he died by the axe or by the people's hands. So, he walked, with a firm tread and a stately look, and sometimes pulled off his hat to them as he passed along. They were profoundly quiet. He made a speech on the scaffold from some notes he had prepared (the paper was found lying there after his head was struck off), and one blow of the axe killed him, in the forty-ninth year of his age.

This bold and daring act, the Parliament accompanied by other famous measures, all originating (as even this did) in the King's having so grossly and so long abused his power. The name of Delinquents was applied to all sheriffs and other officers who had been concerned in raising the ship money, or any other money, from the people, in an unlawful manner; the Hampden judgment was reversed; the judges who had decided against Hampden were called upon to give large securities that they would take such consequences as Parliament might impose upon them; and one was arrested as he sat in High Court, and carried off to prison. Laud was impeached; the unfortunate victims whose ears had been cropped and whose noses had been slit, were brought out of prison in triumph; and a bill was passed declaring that a Parliament should be called every third year, and that if the King and the King's officers did not call it, the people should assemble of themselves and summon it, as of their own right and power. Great illuminations and rejoicings took place over all these things, and the country was wildly excited. That the Parliament took advantage of this excitement and stirred them up by every means, there is no doubt; but you are always to remember those twelve long years, during which the King had tried so hard whether he really could do any wrong or not.

All this time there was a great religious outcry against the right of the Bishops to sit in Parliament; to which the Scottish people particularly objected. The English were divided on this subject, and, partly on this account and partly because they had had foolish expectations that the Parliament would be able to take off nearly all the taxes, numbers of them sometimes wavered and inclined towards the King.

I believe myself, that if, at this or almost any other period of his life, the King could have been trusted by any man not out of his senses, he might have saved himself and kept his throne. But, on the English army being disbanded, he plotted with the officers again, as he had done before, and established the fact beyond all doubt by putting his signature of approval to a petition against the Parliamentary leaders, which was drawn up by certain officers. When the Scottish army was disbanded, he went to Edinburgh in four days—which was going very fast at that time—to plot again, and so darkly too, that it is difficult to decide what his whole object was. Some suppose that he wanted to gain over the Scottish Parliament, as he did in fact gain over, by presents and favours, many Scottish lords and men of power. Some think that he went to get proofs against the Parliamentary leaders in England of their having treasonably invited the Scottish people to come and help them. With whatever object he went to Scotland, he did little good by going. At the instigation of the Earl of Montrose, a desperate man who was then in prison for plotting, he tried to kidnap three Scottish lords who escaped. A committee of the Parliament at home, who had followed to watch him, writing an account of this Incident, as it was called, to the Parliament, the Parliament made a fresh stir about it; were, or feigned to be, much alarmed for themselves; and wrote to the Earl of Essex, the commander-in-chief, for a guard to protect them.

It is not absolutely proved that the King plotted in Ireland besides, but it is very probable that he did, and that the Queen did, and that he had some wild hope of gaining the Irish people over to his side by favouring a rise among them. Whether or no, they did rise in a most brutal and savage rebellion; in which, encouraged by their priests, they committed such atrocities upon numbers of the English, of both sexes and of all ages, as nobody could believe, but for their being related on oath by eye-witnesses. Whether one hundred thousand or two hundred thousand Protestants were murdered in this outbreak, is uncertain; but, that it was as ruthless and barbarous an outbreak as ever was known among any savage people, is certain.

The King came home from Scotland, determined to make a great struggle for his lost power. He believed that, through his presents and favours, Scotland would take no part against him; and the Lord Mayor of London received him with such a magnificent dinner that he thought he must have become popular again in England. It would take a good many Lord Mayors, however, to make a people, and the King soon found himself mistaken.

Not so soon, though, but that there was a great opposition in the Parliament to a celebrated paper put forth by Pym and Hampden and the rest, called ‘The Remonstrance,’ which set forth all the illegal acts that the King had ever done, but politely laid the blame of them on his bad advisers. Even when it was passed and presented to him, the King still thought himself strong enough to discharge Balfour from his command in the Tower, and to put in his place a man of bad character; to whom the Commons instantly objected, and whom he was obliged to abandon. At this time, the old outcry about the Bishops became louder than ever, and the old Archbishop of York was so near being murdered as he went down to the House of Lords—being laid hold of by the mob and violently knocked about, in return for very foolishly scolding a shrill boy who was yelping out ‘No Bishops!’—that he sent for all the Bishops who were in town, and proposed to them to sign a declaration that, as they could no longer without danger to their lives attend their duty in Parliament, they protested against the lawfulness of everything done in their absence. This they asked the King to send to the House of Lords, which he did. Then the House of Commons impeached the whole party of Bishops and sent them off to the Tower:

Taking no warning from this; but encouraged by there being a moderate party in the Parliament who objected to these strong measures, the King, on the third of January, one thousand six hundred and forty-two, took the rashest step that ever was taken by mortal man.

Of his own accord and without advice, he sent the Attorney-General to the House of Lords, to accuse of treason certain members of Parliament who as popular leaders were the most obnoxious to him; Lord Kimbolton, Sir Arthur Haselrig, Denzil Hollis, John Pym (they used to call him King Pym, he possessed such power and looked so big), John Hampden, and William Strode. The houses of those members he caused to be entered, and their papers to be sealed up. At the same time, he sent a messenger to the House of Commons demanding to have the five gentlemen who were members of that House immediately produced. To this the House replied that they should appear as soon as there was any legal charge against them, and immediately adjourned.

Next day, the House of Commons send into the City to let the Lord Mayor know that their privileges are invaded by the King, and that there is no safety for anybody or anything. Then, when the five members are gone out of the way, down comes the King himself, with all his guard and from two to three hundred gentlemen and soldiers, of whom the greater part were armed. These he leaves in the hall; and then, with his nephew at his side, goes into the House, takes off his hat, and walks up to the Speaker's chair. The Speaker leaves it, the King stands in front of it, looks about him steadily for a little while, and says he has come for those five members. No one speaks, and then he calls John Pym by name. No one speaks, and then he calls Denzil Hollis by name. No one speaks, and then he asks the Speaker of the House where those five members are? The Speaker, answering on his knee, nobly replies that he is the servant of that House, and that he has neither eyes to see, nor tongue to speak, anything but what the House commands him. Upon this, the King, beaten from that time evermore, replies that he will seek them himself, for they have committed treason; and goes out, with his hat in his hand, amid some audible murmurs from the members.

No words can describe the hurry that arose out of doors when all this was known. The five members had gone for safety to a house in Coleman-street, in the City, where they were guarded all night; and indeed the whole city watched in arms like an army. At ten o'clock in the morning, the King, already frightened at what he had done, came to the Guildhall, with only half a dozen lords, and made a speech to the people, hoping they would not shelter those whom he accused of treason. Next day, he issued a proclamation for the apprehension of the five members; but the Parliament minded it so little that they made great arrangements for having them brought down to Westminster in great state, five days afterwards. The King was so alarmed now at his own imprudence, if not for his own safety, that he left his palace at Whitehall, and went away with his Queen and children to Hampton Court.

It was the eleventh of May, when the five members were carried in state and triumph to Westminster. They were taken by water. The river could not be seen for the boats on it; and the five members were hemmed in by barges full of men and great guns, ready to protect them, at any cost. Along the Strand a large body of the train-bands of London, under their commander, Skippon, marched to be ready to assist the little fleet. Beyond them, came a crowd who choked the streets, roaring incessantly about the Bishops and the Papists, and crying out contemptuously as they passed Whitehall, 'What has become of the King?' With this great noise outside the House of Commons, and with great silence within, Mr. Pym rose and informed the House of the great kindness with which they had been received in the City. Upon that, the House called the sheriffs in and thanked them, and requested the train-bands, under their commander Skippon, to guard the House of Commons every day. Then, came four thousand men on horseback out of Buckinghamshire, offering their services as a guard too, and bearing a petition to the King, complaining of the injury that had been done to Mr. Hampden, who was their county man and much beloved and honoured.

When the King set off for Hampton Court, the gentlemen and soldiers who had been with him followed him out of town as far as Kingston-upon-Thames; next day, Lord Digby came to them from the King at Hampton Court, in his coach and six, to inform them that the King accepted their protection. This, the Parliament said, was making war against the kingdom, and Lord Digby fled abroad. The Parliament then immediately applied themselves to getting hold of the military power of the country, well knowing that the King was already trying hard to use it against them, and that he had secretly sent the Earl of Newcastle to Hull, to secure a valuable magazine of arms and gunpowder that was there. In those times, every county had its own magazines of arms and powder, for its own train-bands or militia; so, the Parliament brought in a bill claiming the right (which up to this time had belonged to the King) of appointing the Lord Lieutenants of counties, who commanded these train-bands; also, of having all the forts, castles, and garrisons in the kingdom, put into the hands of such governors as they, the Parliament, could confide in. It also passed a law depriving the Bishops of their votes. The King gave his assent to that bill, but would not abandon the right of appointing the Lord Lieutenants, though he said he was willing to appoint such as might be suggested to him by the Parliament. When the Earl of Pembroke asked him whether he would not give way on that question for a time, he said, ‘By God! not for one hour!’ and upon this he and the Parliament went to war.

His young daughter was betrothed to the Prince of Orange. On pretence of taking her to the country of her future husband, the Queen was already got safely away to Holland, there to pawn the Crown jewels for money to raise an army on the King’s side. The Lord Admiral being sick, the House of Commons now named the Earl of Warwick to hold his place for a year. The King named another gentleman; the House of Commons took its own way, and the Earl of Warwick became Lord Admiral without the King’s consent. The Parliament sent orders down to Hull to have that magazine removed to London; the King went down to Hull to take it himself. The citizens would not admit him into the town, and the governor would not admit him into the castle. The Parliament resolved that whatever the two Houses passed, and the King would not consent to, should be called an Ordinance, and should be as much a law as if he did consent to it. The King protested against this, and gave notice that these ordinances were not to be obeyed. The King, attended by the majority of the House of Peers, and by many members of the House of Commons, established himself at York. The Chancellor went to him with the Great Seal, and the Parliament made a new Great Seal. The Queen sent over a ship full of arms and ammunition, and the King issued letters to borrow money at high interest. The Parliament raised twenty regiments of foot and seventy-five troops of horse; and the people willingly aided them with their money, plate, jewellery, and trinkets—the married women even with their wedding-rings. Every member of Parliament who could raise a troop or a regiment in his own part of the country, dressed it according to his taste and in his own colours, and commanded it. Foremost among them all, Oliver Cromwell raised a troop of horse—thoroughly in earnest and thoroughly well armed—who were, perhaps, the best soldiers that ever were seen.

In some of their proceedings, this famous Parliament passed the bounds of previous law and custom, yielded to and favoured riotous assemblages of the people, and acted tyrannically in imprisoning some who differed from the popular leaders. But again, you are always to remember that the twelve years during which the King had had his own wilful way, had gone before; and that nothing could make the times what they might, could, would, or should have been, if those twelve years had never rolled away.

THIRD PART

I shall not try to relate the particulars of the great civil war between King Charles the First and the Long Parliament, which lasted nearly four years, and a full account of which would fill many large books. It was a sad thing that Englishmen should once more be fighting against Englishmen on English ground; but, it is some consolation to know that on both sides there was great humanity, forbearance, and honour. The soldiers of the Parliament were far more remarkable for these good qualities than the soldiers of the King (many of whom fought for mere pay without much caring for the cause); but those of the nobility and gentry who were on the King's side were so brave, and so faithful to him, that their conduct cannot but command our highest admiration. Among them were great numbers of Catholics, who took the royal side because the Queen was so strongly of their persuasion.

The King might have distinguished some of these gallant spirits, if he had been as generous a spirit himself, by giving them the command of his army. Instead of that, however, true to his old high notions of royalty, he entrusted it to his two nephews, Prince Rupert and Prince Maurice, who were of royal blood and came over from abroad to help him. It might have been better for him if they had stayed away; since Prince Rupert was an impetuous, hot-headed fellow, whose only idea was to dash into battle at all times and seasons, and lay about him.

The general-in-chief of the Parliamentary army was the Earl of Essex, a gentleman of honour and an excellent soldier. A little while before the war broke out, there had been some rioting at Westminster between certain officious law students and noisy soldiers, and the shopkeepers and their apprentices, and the general people in the streets. At that time the King's friends called the crowd, Roundheads, because the apprentices wore short hair; the crowd, in return, called their opponents Cavaliers, meaning that they were a blustering set, who pretended to be very military. These two words now began to be used to distinguish the two sides in the civil war. The Royalists also called the Parliamentary men Rebels and Rogues, while the Parliamentary men called *them* Malignants, and spoke of themselves as the Godly, the Honest, and so forth.

The war broke out at Portsmouth, where that double traitor Goring had again gone over to the King and was besieged by the Parliamentary troops. Upon this, the King proclaimed the Earl of Essex and the officers serving under him, traitors, and called upon his loyal subjects to meet him in arms at Nottingham on the twenty-fifth of August. But his loyal subjects came about him in scanty numbers, and it was a windy, gloomy day, and the Royal Standard got blown down, and the whole affair was very melancholy. The chief engagements after this, took place in the vale of the Red Horse near Banbury, at Brentford, at Devizes, at Chalgrave Field (where Mr. Hampden was so sorely wounded while fighting at the head of his men, that he died within a week), at Newbury (in which battle Lord Falkland, one of the best noblemen on the King's side, was killed), at Leicester, at Naseby, at Winchester, at Marston Moor near York, at Newcastle, and in many other parts of England and Scotland. These battles were attended with various successes. At one time, the King was victorious; at another time, the Parliament. But almost all the great and busy towns were against the King; and when it was considered necessary to fortify London, all ranks of people, from labouring men and women, up to lords and ladies, worked hard together with heartiness and good will. The most distinguished leaders on the Parliamentary side were Hampden, Sir Thomas Fairfax, and, above all, Oliver Cromwell, and his son-in-law Ireton.

During the whole of this war, the people, to whom it was very expensive and irksome, and to whom it was made the more distressing by almost every family being divided—some of its members attaching themselves to one side and some to the other—were over and over again most anxious for peace. So were some of the best men in each cause. Accordingly, treaties of peace were discussed between commissioners from the Parliament and the King; at York, at Oxford (where the King held a little Parliament of his own), and at Uxbridge. But they came to nothing. In all these negotiations, and in all his difficulties, the King showed himself at his best. He was courageous, cool, self-possessed, and clever; but, the old taint of his character was always in him, and he was never for one single moment to be trusted. Lord Clarendon, the historian, one of his highest admirers, supposes that he had unhappily promised the Queen never to make peace without her consent, and that this must often be taken as his excuse. He never kept his word from night to morning. He signed a cessation of hostilities with the blood-stained Irish rebels for a sum of money, and invited the Irish regiments over, to help him against the Parliament. In the battle of Naseby, his cabinet was seized and was found to contain a correspondence with the Queen, in which he expressly told her that he had deceived the Parliament—a mongrel Parliament, he called it now, as an improvement on his old term of vipers—in pretending to recognise it and to treat with it; and from which it further appeared that he had long been in secret treaty with the Duke of Lorraine for a foreign army of ten thousand men. Disappointed in this, he sent a most devoted friend of his, the Earl of Glamorgan, to Ireland, to conclude a secret treaty with the Catholic powers, to send him an Irish army of ten thousand men; in return for which he was to bestow great favours on the Catholic religion. And, when this treaty was discovered in the carriage of a fighting Irish Archbishop who was killed in one of the many skirmishes of those days, he basely denied and deserted his attached friend, the Earl, on his being charged with high treason; and—even worse than this—had left blanks in the secret instructions he gave him with his own kingly hand, expressly that he might thus save himself.

At last, on the twenty-seventh day of April, one thousand six hundred and forty-six, the King found himself in the city of Oxford, so surrounded by the Parliamentary army who were closing in upon him on all sides that he felt that if he would escape he must delay no longer. So, that night, having altered the cut of his hair and beard, he was dressed up as a servant and put upon a horse with a cloak strapped behind him, and rode out of the town behind one of his own faithful followers, with a clergyman of that country who knew the road well, for a guide. He rode towards London as far as Harrow, and then altered his plans and resolved, it would seem, to go to the Scottish camp. The Scottish men had been invited over to help the Parliamentary army, and had a large force then in England. The King was so desperately intriguing in everything he did, that it is doubtful what he exactly meant by this step. He took it, anyhow, and delivered himself up to the Earl of Leven, the Scottish general-in-chief, who treated him as an honourable prisoner. Negotiations between the Parliament on the one hand and the Scottish authorities on the other, as to what should be done with him, lasted until the following February. Then, when the King had refused to the Parliament the concession of that old militia point for twenty years, and had refused to Scotland the recognition of its Solemn League and Covenant, Scotland got a handsome sum for its army and its help, and the King into the bargain. He was taken, by certain Parliamentary commissioners appointed to receive him, to one of his own houses, called Holmby House, near Althorpe, in Northamptonshire.

While the Civil War was still in progress, John Pym died, and was buried with great honour in Westminster Abbey—not with greater honour than he deserved, for the liberties of Englishmen owe a mighty debt to Pym and Hampden. The war was but newly over when the Earl of Essex died, of an illness brought on by his having overheated himself in a stag hunt in Windsor Forest. He, too, was buried in Westminster Abbey, with great state. I wish it were not necessary to add that Archbishop Laud died upon the scaffold when the war was not yet done. His trial lasted in all nearly a year, and, it being doubtful even then whether the charges brought against him amounted to treason, the odious old contrivance of the worst kings was resorted to, and a bill of attainder was brought in against him. He was a violently prejudiced and mischievous person; had had strong ear-cropping and nose-splitting propensities, as you know; and had done a world of harm. But he died peaceably, and like a brave old man.

FOURTH PART

When the Parliament had got the King into their hands, they became very anxious to get rid of their army, in which Oliver Cromwell had begun to acquire great power; not only because of his courage and high abilities, but because he professed to be very sincere in the Scottish sort of Puritan religion that was then exceedingly popular among the soldiers. They were as much opposed to the Bishops as to the Pope himself; and the very privates, drummers, and trumpeters, had such an inconvenient habit of starting up and preaching long-winded discourses, that I would not have belonged to that army on any account.

So, the Parliament, being far from sure but that the army might begin to preach and fight against them now it had nothing else to do, proposed to disband the greater part of it, to send another part to serve in Ireland against the rebels, and to keep only a small force in England. But, the army would not consent to be broken up, except upon its own conditions; and, when the Parliament showed an intention of compelling it, it acted for itself in an unexpected manner. A certain cornet, of the name of Joice, arrived at Holmby House one night, attended by four hundred horsemen, went into the King's room with his hat in one hand and a pistol in the other, and told the King that he had come to take him away. The King was willing enough to go, and only stipulated that he should be publicly required to do so next morning. Next morning, accordingly, he appeared on the top of the steps of the house, and asked Comet Joice before his men and the guard set there by the Parliament, what authority he had for taking him away? To this Cornet Joice replied, 'The authority of the army.' 'Have you a written commission?' said the King. Joice, pointing to his four hundred men on horseback, replied, 'That is my commission.' 'Well,' said the King, smiling, as if he were pleased, 'I never before read such a commission; but it is written in fair and legible characters. This is a company of as handsome proper gentlemen as I have seen a long while.' He was asked where he would like to live, and he said at Newmarket. So, to Newmarket he and Cornet Joice and the four hundred horsemen rode; the King remarking, in the same smiling way, that he could ride as far at a spell as Cornet Joice, or any man there.

The King quite believed, I think, that the army were his friends. He said as much to Fairfax when that general, Oliver Cromwell, and Ireton, went to persuade him to return to the custody of the Parliament. He preferred to remain as he was, and resolved to remain as he was. And when the army moved nearer and nearer London to frighten the Parliament into yielding to their demands, they took the King with them. It was a deplorable thing that England should be at the mercy of a great body of soldiers with arms in their hands; but the King certainly favoured them at this important time of his life, as compared with the more lawful power that tried to control him. It must be added, however, that they treated him, as yet, more respectfully and kindly than the Parliament had done. They allowed him to be attended by his own servants, to be splendidly entertained at various houses, and to see his children—at Cavesham House, near Reading—for two days.

Whereas, the Parliament had been rather hard with him, and had only allowed him to ride out and play at bowls.

It is much to be believed that if the King could have been trusted, even at this time, he might have been saved. Even Oliver Cromwell expressly said that he did believe that no man could enjoy his possessions in peace, unless the King had his rights. He was not unfriendly towards the King; he had been present when he received his children, and had been much affected by the pitiable nature of the scene; he saw the King often; he frequently walked and talked with him in the long galleries and pleasant gardens of the Palace at Hampton Court, whither he was now removed; and in all this risked something of his influence with the army. But, the King was in secret hopes of help from the Scottish people; and the moment he was encouraged to join them he began to be cool to his new friends, the army, and to tell the officers that they could not possibly do without him. At the very time, too, when he was promising to make Cromwell and Ireton noblemen, if they would help him up to his old height, he was writing to the Queen that he meant to hang them. They both afterwards declared that they had been privately informed that such a letter would be found, on a certain evening, sewed up in a saddle which would be taken to the Blue Boar in Holborn to be sent to Dover; and that they went there, disguised as common soldiers, and sat drinking in the inn-yard until a man came with the saddle, which they ripped up with their knives, and therein found the letter. I see little reason to doubt the story. It is certain that Oliver Cromwell told one of the King's most faithful followers that the King could not be trusted, and that he would not be answerable if anything amiss were to happen to him. Still, even after that, he kept a promise he had made to the King, by letting him know that there was a plot with a certain portion of the army to seize him. I believe that, in fact, he sincerely wanted the King to escape abroad, and so to be got rid of without more trouble or danger. That Oliver himself had work enough with the army is pretty plain; for some of the troops were so mutinous against him, and against those who acted with him at this time, that he found it necessary to have one man shot at the head of his regiment to overawe the rest.

The King, when he received Oliver's warning, made his escape from Hampton Court; after some indecision and uncertainty, he went to Carisbrooke Castle in the Isle of Wight. At first, he was pretty free there; but, even there, he carried on a pretended treaty with the Parliament, while he was really treating with commissioners from Scotland to send an army into England to take his part. When he broke off this treaty with the Parliament (having settled with Scotland) and was treated as a prisoner, his treatment was not changed too soon, for he had plotted to escape that very night to a ship sent by the Queen, which was lying off the island.

He was doomed to be disappointed in his hopes from Scotland. The agreement he had made with the Scottish Commissioners was not favourable enough to the religion of that country to please the Scottish clergy; and they preached against it. The consequence was, that the army raised in Scotland and sent over, was too small to do much; and that, although it was helped by a rising of the Royalists in England and by good soldiers from Ireland, it could make no head against the Parliamentary army under such men as Cromwell and Fairfax. The King's eldest son, the Prince of Wales, came over from Holland with nineteen ships (a part of the English fleet having gone over to him) to help his father; but nothing came of his voyage, and he was fain to return. The most remarkable event of this second civil war was the cruel execution by the Parliamentary General, of Sir Charles Lucas and Sir George Lisle, two grand Royalist generals, who had bravely defended Colchester under every disadvantage of famine and distress for nearly three months. When Sir Charles Lucas was shot, Sir George Lisle kissed his body, and said to the soldiers who were to shoot him, 'Come nearer, and make sure of me.' 'I warrant you, Sir George,' said one of the soldiers, 'we shall hit you.' 'Ay?' he returned with a smile, 'but I have been nearer to you, my friends, many a time, and you have missed me.'

The Parliament, after being fearfully bullied by the army—who demanded to have seven members whom they disliked given up to them—had voted that they would have nothing more to do with the King. On the conclusion, however, of this second civil war (which did not last more than six months), they appointed commissioners to treat with him. The King, then so far released again as to be allowed to live in a private house at Newport in the Isle of Wight, managed his own part of the negotiation with a sense that was admired by all who saw him, and gave up, in the end, all that was asked of him—even yielding (which he had steadily refused, so far) to the temporary abolition of the bishops, and the transfer of their church land to the Crown. Still, with his old fatal vice upon him, when his best friends joined the commissioners in beseeching him to yield all those points as the only means of saving himself from the army, he was plotting to escape from the island; he was holding correspondence with his friends and the Catholics in Ireland, though declaring that he was not; and he was writing, with his own hand, that in what he yielded he meant nothing but to get time to escape.

Matters were at this pass when the army, resolved to defy the Parliament, marched up to London. The Parliament, not afraid of them now, and boldly led by Hollis, voted that the King's concessions were sufficient ground for settling the peace of the kingdom. Upon that, Colonel Rich and Colonel Pride went down to the House of Commons with a regiment of horse soldiers and a regiment of foot; and Colonel Pride, standing in the lobby with a list of the members who were obnoxious to the army in his hand, had them pointed out to him as they came through, and took them all into custody. This proceeding was afterwards called by the people, for a joke, Pride's Purge. Cromwell was in the North, at the head of his men, at the time, but when he came home, approved of what had been done.

What with imprisoning some members and causing others to stay away, the army had now reduced the House of Commons to some fifty or so. These soon voted that it was treason in a king to make war against his parliament and his people, and sent an ordinance up to the House of Lords for the King's being tried as a traitor. The House of Lords, then sixteen in number, to a man rejected it. Thereupon, the Commons made an ordinance of their own, that they were the supreme government of the country, and would bring the King to trial.

The King had been taken for security to a place called Hurst Castle: a lonely house on a rock in the sea, connected with the coast of Hampshire by a rough road two miles long at low water. Thence, he was ordered to be removed to Windsor; thence, after being but rudely used there, and having none but soldiers to wait upon him at table, he was brought up to St. James's Palace in London, and told that his trial was appointed for next day.

On Saturday, the twentieth of January, one thousand six hundred and forty-nine, this memorable trial began. The House of Commons had settled that one hundred and thirty-five persons should form the Court, and these were taken from the House itself, from among the officers of the army, and from among the lawyers and citizens. John Bradshaw, serjeant-at-law, was appointed president. The place was Westminster Hall. At the upper end, in a red velvet chair, sat the president, with his hat (lined with plates of iron for his protection) on his head. The rest of the Court sat on side benches, also wearing their hats. The King's seat was covered with velvet, like that of the president, and was opposite to it. He was brought from St. James's to Whitehall, and from Whitehall he came by water to his trial.

When he came in, he looked round very steadily on the Court, and on the great number of spectators, and then sat down: presently he got up and looked round again. On the indictment 'against Charles Stuart, for high treason,' being read, he smiled several times, and he denied the authority of the Court, saying that there could be no parliament without a House of Lords, and that he saw no House of Lords there. Also, that the King ought to be there, and that he saw no King in the King's right place. Bradshaw replied, that the Court was satisfied with its authority, and that its authority was God's authority and the kingdom's. He then adjourned the Court to the following Monday. On that day, the trial was resumed, and went on all the week. When the Saturday came, as the King passed forward to his place in the Hall, some soldiers and others cried for 'justice!' and execution on him. That day, too, Bradshaw, like an angry Sultan, wore a red robe, instead of the black robe he had worn before. The King was sentenced to death that day. As he went out, one solitary soldier said, 'God bless you, Sir!' For this, his officer struck him. The King said he thought the punishment exceeded the offence. The silver head of his walking-stick had fallen off while he leaned upon it, at one time of the trial. The accident seemed to disturb him, as if he thought it ominous of the falling of his own head; and he admitted as much, now it was all over.

Being taken back to Whitehall, he sent to the House of Commons, saying that as the time of his execution might be nigh, he wished he might be allowed to see his darling children. It was granted. On the Monday he was taken back to St. James's; and his two children then in England, the Princess Elizabeth thirteen years old, and the Duke Of Gloucester nine years old, were brought to take leave of him, from Sion House, near Brentford. It was a sad and touching scene, when he kissed and fondled those poor children, and made a little present of two diamond seals to the Princess, and gave them tender messages to their mother (who little deserved them, for she had a lover of her own whom she married soon afterwards), and told them that he died 'for the laws and liberties of the land.’ I am bound to say that I don’t think he did, but I dare say he believed so.

There were ambassadors from Holland that day, to intercede for the unhappy King, whom you and I both wish the Parliament had spared; but they got no answer. The Scottish Commissioners interceded too; so did the Prince of Wales, by a letter in which he offered as the next heir to the throne, to accept any conditions from the Parliament; so did the Queen, by letter likewise.

Notwithstanding all, the warrant for the execution was this day signed. There is a story that as Oliver Cromwell went to the table with the pen in his hand to put his signature to it, he drew his pen across the face of one of the commissioners, who was standing near, and marked it with ink. That commissioner had not signed his own name yet, and the story adds that when he came to do it he marked Cromwell’s face with ink in the same way.

The King slept well, untroubled by the knowledge that it was his last night on earth, and rose on the thirtieth of January, two hours before day, and dressed himself carefully. He put on two shirts lest he should tremble with the cold, and had his hair very carefully combed. The warrant had been directed to three officers of the army, Colonel Hacker, Colonel Hunks, and Colonel Phayer. At ten o’clock, the first of these came to the door and said it was time to go to Whitehall. The King, who had always been a quick walker, walked at his usual speed through the Park, and called out to the guard, with his accustomed voice of command, ‘March on apace!’ When he came to Whitehall, he was taken to his own bedroom, where a breakfast was set forth. As he had taken the Sacrament, he would eat nothing more; but, at about the time when the church bells struck twelve at noon (for he had to wait, through the scaffold not being ready), he took the advice of the good Bishop Juxon who was with him, and ate a little bread and drank a glass of claret. Soon after he had taken this refreshment, Colonel Hacker came to the chamber with the warrant in his hand, and called for Charles Stuart.

And then, through the long gallery of Whitehall Palace, which he had often seen light and gay and merry and crowded, in very different times, the fallen King passed along, until he came to the centre window of the Banqueting House, through which he emerged upon the scaffold, which was hung with black. He looked at the two executioners, who were dressed in black and masked; he looked at the troops of soldiers on horseback and on foot, and all looked up at him in silence; he looked at the vast array of spectators, filling up the view beyond, and turning all their faces upon him; he looked at his old Palace of St. James's; and he looked at the block. He seemed a little troubled to find that it was so low, and asked, 'if there were no place higher?' Then, to those upon the scaffold, he said, 'that it was the Parliament who had begun the war, and not he; but he hoped they might be guiltless too, as ill instruments had gone between them. In one respect,' he said, 'he suffered justly; and that was because he had permitted an unjust sentence to be executed on another.' In this he referred to the Earl of Strafford.

He was not at all afraid to die; but he was anxious to die easily. When some one touched the axe while he was speaking, he broke off and called out, 'Take heed of the axe! take heed of the axe!' He also said to Colonel Hacker, 'Take care that they do not put me to pain.' He told the executioner, 'I shall say but very short prayers, and then thrust out my hands'—as the sign to strike.

He put his hair up, under a white satin cap which the bishop had carried, and said, 'I have a good cause and a gracious God on my side.' The bishop told him that he had but one stage more to travel in this weary world, and that, though it was a turbulent and troublesome stage, it was a short one, and would carry him a great way—all the way from earth to Heaven. The King's last word, as he gave his cloak and the George—the decoration from his breast—to the bishop, was, 'Remember!' He then kneeled down, laid his head on the block, spread out his hands, and was instantly killed. One universal groan broke from the crowd; and the soldiers, who had sat on their horses and stood in their ranks immovable as statues, were of a sudden all in motion, clearing the streets.

Thus, in the forty-ninth year of his age, falling at the same time of his career as Strafford had fallen in his, perished Charles the First. With all my sorrow for him, I cannot agree with him that he died 'the martyr of the people;' for the people had been martyrs to him, and to his ideas of a King's rights, long before. Indeed, I am afraid that he was but a bad judge of martyrs; for he had called that infamous Duke of Buckingham 'the Martyr of his Sovereign.'

CHAPTER XXXIV—ENGLAND UNDER OLIVER CROMWELL

Before sunset on the memorable day on which King Charles the First was executed, the House of Commons passed an act declaring it treason in any one to proclaim the Prince of Wales—or anybody else—King of England. Soon afterwards, it declared that the House of Lords was useless and dangerous, and ought to be abolished; and directed that the late King's statue should be taken down from the Royal Exchange in the City and other public places. Having laid hold of some famous Royalists who had escaped from prison, and having beheaded the Duke Of Hamilton, Lord Holland, and Lord Capel, in Palace Yard (all of whom died very courageously), they then appointed a Council of State to govern the country. It consisted of forty-one members, of whom five were peers. Bradshaw was made president. The House of Commons also re-admitted members who had opposed the King's death, and made up its numbers to about a hundred and fifty.

But, it still had an army of more than forty thousand men to deal with, and a very hard task it was to manage them. Before the King's execution, the army had appointed some of its officers to remonstrate between them and the Parliament; and now the common soldiers began to take that office upon themselves. The regiments under orders for Ireland mutinied; one troop of horse in the city of London seized their own flag, and refused to obey orders. For this, the ringleader was shot: which did not mend the matter, for, both his comrades and the people made a public funeral for him, and accompanied the body to the grave with sound of trumpets and with a gloomy procession of persons carrying bundles of rosemary steeped in blood. Oliver was the only man to deal with such difficulties as these, and he soon cut them short by bursting at midnight into the town of Burford, near Salisbury, where the mutineers were sheltered, taking four hundred of them prisoners, and shooting a number of them by sentence of court-martial. The soldiers soon found, as all men did, that Oliver was not a man to be trifled with. And there was an end of the mutiny.

The Scottish Parliament did not know Oliver yet; so, on hearing of the King's execution, it proclaimed the Prince of Wales King Charles the Second, on condition of his respecting the Solemn League and Covenant. Charles was abroad at that time, and so was Montrose, from whose help he had hopes enough to keep him holding on and off with commissioners from Scotland, just as his father might have done. These hopes were soon at an end; for, Montrose, having raised a few hundred exiles in Germany, and landed with them in Scotland, found that the people there, instead of joining him, deserted the country at his approach. He was soon taken prisoner and carried to Edinburgh. There he was received with every possible insult, and carried to prison in a cart, his officers going two and two before him. He was sentenced by the Parliament to be hanged on a gallows thirty feet high, to have his head set on a spike in Edinburgh, and his limbs distributed in other places, according to the old barbarous manner. He said he had always acted under the Royal orders, and only wished he had limbs enough to be distributed through Christendom, that it might be the more widely known how loyal he had been. He went to the scaffold in a bright and brilliant dress, and made a bold end at thirty-eight years of age. The breath was scarcely out of his body when Charles abandoned his memory, and denied that he had ever given him orders to rise in his behalf. O the family failing was strong in that Charles then!

Oliver had been appointed by the Parliament to command the army in Ireland, where he took a terrible vengeance for the sanguinary rebellion, and made tremendous havoc, particularly in the siege of Drogheda, where no quarter was given, and where he found at least a thousand of the inhabitants shut up together in the great church: every one of whom was killed by his soldiers, usually known as Oliver's Ironsides. There were numbers of friars and priests among them, and Oliver gruffly wrote home in his despatch that these were 'knocked on the head' like the rest.

But, Charles having got over to Scotland where the men of the Solemn League and Covenant led him a prodigiously dull life and made him very weary with long sermons and grim Sundays, the Parliament called the redoubtable Oliver home to knock the Scottish men on the head for setting up that Prince. Oliver left his son-in-law, Ireton, as general in Ireland in his stead (he died there afterwards), and he imitated the example of his father-in-law with such good will that he brought the country to subjection, and laid it at the feet of the Parliament. In the end, they passed an act for the settlement of Ireland, generally pardoning all the common people, but exempting from this grace such of the wealthier sort as had been concerned in the rebellion, or in any killing of Protestants, or who refused to lay down their arms. Great numbers of Irish were got out of the country to serve under Catholic powers abroad, and a quantity of land was declared to have been forfeited by past offences, and was given to people who had lent money to the Parliament early in the war. These were sweeping measures; but, if Oliver Cromwell had had his own way fully, and had stayed in Ireland, he would have done more yet.

However, as I have said, the Parliament wanted Oliver for Scotland; so, home Oliver came, and was made Commander of all the Forces of the Commonwealth of England, and in three days away he went with sixteen thousand soldiers to fight the Scottish men. Now, the Scottish men, being then—as you will generally find them now—mighty cautious, reflected that the troops they had were not used to war like the Ironsides, and would be beaten in an open fight. Therefore they said, 'If we live quiet in our trenches in Edinburgh here, and if all the farmers come into the town and desert the country, the Ironsides will be driven out by iron hunger and be forced to go away.' This was, no doubt, the wisest plan; but as the Scottish clergy *would* interfere with what they knew nothing about, and would perpetually preach long sermons exhorting the soldiers to come out and fight, the soldiers got it in their heads that they absolutely must come out and fight. Accordingly, in an evil hour for themselves, they came out of their safe position. Oliver fell upon them instantly, and killed three thousand, and took ten thousand prisoners.

To gratify the Scottish Parliament, and preserve their favour, Charles had signed a declaration they laid before him, reproaching the memory of his father and mother, and representing himself as a most religious Prince, to whom the Solemn League and Covenant was as dear as life. He meant no sort of truth in this, and soon afterwards galloped away on horseback to join some tiresome Highland friends, who were always flourishing dirks and broadswords. He was overtaken and induced to return; but this attempt, which was called 'The Start,' did him just so much service, that they did not preach quite such long sermons at him afterwards as they had done before.

On the first of January, one thousand six hundred and fifty-one, the Scottish people crowned him at Scone. He immediately took the chief command of an army of twenty thousand men, and marched to Stirling. His hopes were heightened, I dare say, by the redoubtable Oliver being ill of an ague; but Oliver scrambled out of bed in no time, and went to work with such energy that he got behind the Royalist army and cut it off from all communication with Scotland. There was nothing for it then, but to go on to England; so it went on as far as Worcester, where the mayor and some of the gentry proclaimed King Charles the Second straightway. His proclamation, however, was of little use to him, for very few Royalists appeared; and, on the very same day, two people were publicly beheaded on Tower Hill for espousing his cause. Up came Oliver to Worcester too, at double quick speed, and he and his Ironsides so laid about them in the great battle which was fought there, that they completely beat the Scottish men, and destroyed the Royalist army; though the Scottish men fought so gallantly that it took five hours to do.

The escape of Charles after this battle of Worcester did him good service long afterwards, for it induced many of the generous English people to take a romantic interest in him, and to think much better of him than he ever deserved. He fled in the night, with not more than sixty followers, to the house of a Catholic lady in Staffordshire. There, for his greater safety, the whole sixty left him. He cropped his hair, stained his face and hands brown as if they were sunburnt, put on the clothes of a labouring countryman, and went out in the morning with his axe in his hand, accompanied by four wood-cutters who were brothers, and another man who was their brother-in-law. These good fellows made a bed for him under a tree, as the weather was very bad; and the wife of one of them brought him food to eat; and the old mother of the four brothers came and fell down on her knees before him in the wood, and thanked God that her sons were engaged in saving his life. At night, he came out of the forest and went on to another house which was near the river Severn, with the intention of passing into Wales; but the place swarmed with soldiers, and the bridges were guarded, and all the boats were made fast. So, after lying in a hayloft covered over with hay, for some time, he came out of his place, attended by Colonel Careless, a Catholic gentleman who had met him there, and with whom he lay hid, all next day, up in the shady branches of a fine old oak. It was lucky for the King that it was September-time, and that the leaves had not begun to fall, since he and the Colonel, perched up in this tree, could catch glimpses of the soldiers riding about below, and could hear the crash in the wood as they went about beating the boughs.

After this, he walked and walked until his feet were all blistered; and, having been concealed all one day in a house which was searched by the troopers while he was there, went with Lord Wilmot, another of his good friends, to a place called Bentley, where one Miss Lane, a Protestant lady, had obtained a pass to be allowed to ride through the guards to see a relation of hers near Bristol. Disguised as a servant, he rode in the saddle before this young lady to the house of Sir John Winter, while Lord Wilmot rode there boldly, like a plain country gentleman, with dogs at his heels. It happened that Sir John Winter's butler had been servant in Richmond Palace, and knew Charles the moment he set eyes upon him; but, the butler was faithful and kept the secret. As no ship could be found to carry him abroad, it was planned that he should go—still travelling with Miss Lane as her servant—to another house, at Trent near Sherborne in Dorsetshire; and then Miss Lane and her cousin, Mr. Lascelles, who had gone on horseback beside her all the way, went home. I hope Miss Lane was going to marry that cousin, for I am sure she must have been a brave, kind girl. If I had been that cousin, I should certainly have loved Miss Lane.

When Charles, lonely for the loss of Miss Lane, was safe at Trent, a ship was hired at Lyme, the master of which engaged to take two gentlemen to France. In the evening of the same day, the King—now riding as servant before another young lady—set off for a public-house at a place called Charmouth, where the captain of the vessel was to take him on board. But, the captain's wife, being afraid of her husband getting into trouble, locked him up and would not let him sail. Then they went away to Bridport; and, coming to the inn there, found the stable-yard full of soldiers who were on the look-out for Charles, and who talked about him while they drank. He had such presence of mind, that he led the horses of his party through the yard as any other servant might have done, and said, 'Come out of the way, you soldiers; let us have room to pass here!' As he went along, he met a half-tipsy ostler, who rubbed his eyes and said to him, 'Why, I was formerly servant to Mr. Potter at Exeter, and surely I have sometimes seen you there, young man?' He certainly had, for Charles had lodged there. His ready answer was, 'Ah, I did live with him once; but I have no time to talk now. We'll have a pot of beer together when I come back.'

From this dangerous place he returned to Trent, and lay there concealed several days. Then he escaped to Heale, near Salisbury; where, in the house of a widow lady, he was hidden five days, until the master of a collier lying off Shoreham in Sussex, undertook to convey a ‘gentleman’ to France. On the night of the fifteenth of October, accompanied by two colonels and a merchant, the King rode to Brighton, then a little fishing village, to give the captain of the ship a supper before going on board; but, so many people knew him, that this captain knew him too, and not only he, but the landlord and landlady also. Before he went away, the landlord came behind his chair, kissed his hand, and said he hoped to live to be a lord and to see his wife a lady; at which Charles laughed. They had had a good supper by this time, and plenty of smoking and drinking, at which the King was a first-rate hand; so, the captain assured him that he would stand by him, and he did. It was agreed that the captain should pretend to sail to Deal, and that Charles should address the sailors and say he was a gentleman in debt who was running away from his creditors, and that he hoped they would join him in persuading the captain to put him ashore in France. As the King acted his part very well indeed, and gave the sailors twenty shillings to drink, they begged the captain to do what such a worthy gentleman asked. He pretended to yield to their entreaties, and the King got safe to Normandy.

Ireland being now subdued, and Scotland kept quiet by plenty of forts and soldiers put there by Oliver, the Parliament would have gone on quietly enough, as far as fighting with any foreign enemy went, but for getting into trouble with the Dutch, who in the spring of the year one thousand six hundred and fifty-one sent a fleet into the Downs under their Admiral Van Tromp, to call upon the bold English Admiral Blake (who was there with half as many ships as the Dutch) to strike his flag. Blake fired a raging broadside instead, and beat off Van Tromp; who, in the autumn, came back again with seventy ships, and challenged the bold Blake—who still was only half as strong—to fight him. Blake fought him all day; but, finding that the Dutch were too many for him, got quietly off at night. What does Van Tromp upon this, but goes cruising and boasting about the Channel, between the North Foreland and the Isle of Wight, with a great Dutch broom tied to his masthead, as a sign that he could and would sweep the English of the sea! Within three months, Blake lowered his tone though, and his broom too; for, he and two other bold commanders, Dean and Monk, fought him three whole days, took twenty-three of his ships, shivered his broom to pieces, and settled his business.

Things were no sooner quiet again, than the army began to complain to the Parliament that they were not governing the nation properly, and to hint that they thought they could do it better themselves. Oliver, who had now made up his mind to be the head of the state, or nothing at all, supported them in this, and called a meeting of officers and his own Parliamentary friends, at his lodgings in Whitehall, to consider the best way of getting rid of the Parliament. It had now lasted just as many years as the King's unbridled power had lasted, before it came into existence. The end of the deliberation was, that Oliver went down to the House in his usual plain black dress, with his usual grey worsted stockings, but with an unusual party of soldiers behind him. These last he left in the lobby, and then went in and sat down. Presently he got up, made the Parliament a speech, told them that the Lord had done with them, stamped his foot and said, 'You are no Parliament. Bring them in! Bring them in!' At this signal the door flew open, and the soldiers appeared. 'This is not honest,' said Sir Harry Vane, one of the members. 'Sir Harry Vane!' cried Cromwell; 'O, Sir Harry Vane! The Lord deliver me from Sir Harry Vane!' Then he pointed out members one by one, and said this man was a drunkard, and that man a dissipated fellow, and that man a liar, and so on. Then he caused the Speaker to be walked out of his chair, told the guard to clear the House, called the mace upon the table—which is a sign that the House is sitting—'a fool's bauble,' and said, 'here, carry it away!' Being obeyed in all these orders, he quietly locked the door, put the key in his pocket, walked back to Whitehall again, and told his friends, who were still assembled there, what he had done.

They formed a new Council of State after this extraordinary proceeding, and got a new Parliament together in their own way: which Oliver himself opened in a sort of sermon, and which he said was the beginning of a perfect heaven upon earth. In this Parliament there sat a well-known leather-seller, who had taken the singular name of Praise God Barebones, and from whom it was called, for a joke, Barebones's Parliament, though its general name was the Little Parliament. As it soon appeared that it was not going to put Oliver in the first place, it turned out to be not at all like the beginning of heaven upon earth, and Oliver said it really was not to be borne with. So he cleared off that Parliament in much the same way as he had disposed of the other; and then the council of officers decided that he must be made the supreme authority of the kingdom, under the title of the Lord Protector of the Commonwealth.

So, on the sixteenth of December, one thousand six hundred and fifty-three, a great procession was formed at Oliver's door, and he came out in a black velvet suit and a big pair of boots, and got into his coach and went down to Westminster, attended by the judges, and the lord mayor, and the aldermen, and all the other great and wonderful personages of the country. There, in the Court of Chancery, he publicly accepted the office of Lord Protector. Then he was sworn, and the City sword was handed to him, and the seal was handed to him, and all the other things were handed to him which are usually handed to Kings and Queens on state occasions. When Oliver had handed them all back, he was quite made and completely finished off as Lord Protector; and several of the Ironsides preached about it at great length, all the evening.

SECOND PART

Oliver Cromwell—whom the people long called Old Noll—in accepting the office of Protector, had bound himself by a certain paper which was handed to him, called 'the Instrument,' to summon a Parliament, consisting of between four and five hundred members, in the election of which neither the Royalists nor the Catholics were to have any share. He had also pledged himself that this Parliament should not be dissolved without its own consent until it had sat five months.

When this Parliament met, Oliver made a speech to them of three hours long, very wisely advising them what to do for the credit and happiness of the country. To keep down the more violent members, he required them to sign a recognition of what they were forbidden by 'the Instrument' to do; which was, chiefly, to take the power from one single person at the head of the state or to command the army. Then he dismissed them to go to work. With his usual vigour and resolution he went to work himself with some frantic preachers—who were rather overdoing their sermons in calling him a villain and a tyrant—by shutting up their chapels, and sending a few of them off to prison.

There was not at that time, in England or anywhere else, a man so able to govern the country as Oliver Cromwell. Although he ruled with a strong hand, and levied a very heavy tax on the Royalists (but not until they had plotted against his life), he ruled wisely, and as the times required. He caused England to be so respected abroad, that I wish some lords and gentlemen who have governed it under kings and queens in later days would have taken a leaf out of Oliver Cromwell's book. He sent bold Admiral Blake to the Mediterranean Sea, to make the Duke of Tuscany pay sixty thousand pounds for injuries he had done to British subjects, and spoliation he had committed on English merchants. He further despatched him and his fleet to Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli, to have every English ship and every English man delivered up to him that had been taken by pirates in those parts. All this was gloriously done; and it began to be thoroughly well known, all over the world, that England was governed by a man in earnest, who would not allow the English name to be insulted or slighted anywhere.

These were not all his foreign triumphs. He sent a fleet to sea against the Dutch; and the two powers, each with one hundred ships upon its side, met in the English Channel off the North Foreland, where the fight lasted all day long. Dean was killed in this fight; but Monk, who commanded in the same ship with him, threw his cloak over his body, that the sailors might not know of his death, and be disheartened. Nor were they. The English broadsides so exceedingly astonished the Dutch that they sheered off at last, though the redoubtable Van Tromp fired upon them with his own guns for deserting their flag. Soon afterwards, the two fleets engaged again, off the coast of Holland. There, the valiant Van Tromp was shot through the heart, and the Dutch gave in, and peace was made.

Further than this, Oliver resolved not to bear the domineering and bigoted conduct of Spain, which country not only claimed a right to all the gold and silver that could be found in South America, and treated the ships of all other countries who visited those regions, as pirates, but put English subjects into the horrible Spanish prisons of the Inquisition. So, Oliver told the Spanish ambassador that English ships must be free to go wherever they would, and that English merchants must not be thrown into those same dungeons, no, not for the pleasure of all the priests in Spain. To this, the Spanish ambassador replied that the gold and silver country, and the Holy Inquisition, were his King's two eyes, neither of which he could submit to have put out. Very well, said Oliver, then he was afraid he (Oliver) must damage those two eyes directly.

So, another fleet was despatched under two commanders, Penn and Venables, for Hispaniola; where, however, the Spaniards got the better of the fight. Consequently, the fleet came home again, after taking Jamaica on the way. Oliver, indignant with the two commanders who had not done what bold Admiral Blake would have done, clapped them both into prison, declared war against Spain, and made a treaty with France, in virtue of which it was to shelter the King and his brother the Duke of York no longer. Then, he sent a fleet abroad under bold Admiral Blake, which brought the King of Portugal to his senses—just to keep its hand in—and then engaged a Spanish fleet, sunk four great ships, and took two more, laden with silver to the value of two millions of pounds: which dazzling prize was brought from Portsmouth to London in waggons, with the populace of all the towns and villages through which the waggons passed, shouting with all their might. After this victory, bold Admiral Blake sailed away to the port of Santa Cruz to cut off the Spanish treasure-ships coming from Mexico. There, he found them, ten in number, with seven others to take care of them, and a big castle, and seven batteries, all roaring and blazing away at him with great guns. Blake cared no more for great guns than for pop-guns—no more for their hot iron balls than for snow-balls. He dashed into the harbour, captured and burnt every one of the ships, and came sailing out again triumphantly, with the victorious English flag flying at his masthead. This was the last triumph of this great commander, who had sailed and fought until he was quite worn out. He died, as his successful ship was coming into Plymouth Harbour amidst the joyful acclamations of the people, and was buried in state in Westminster Abbey. Not to lie there, long.

Over and above all this, Oliver found that the Vaudois, or Protestant people of the valleys of Lucerne, were insolently treated by the Catholic powers, and were even put to death for their religion, in an audacious and bloody manner. Instantly, he informed those powers that this was a thing which Protestant England would not allow; and he speedily carried his point, through the might of his great name, and established their right to worship God in peace after their own harmless manner.

Lastly, his English army won such admiration in fighting with the French against the Spaniards, that, after they had assaulted the town of Dunkirk together, the French King in person gave it up to the English, that it might be a token to them of their might and valour.

There were plots enough against Oliver among the frantic religionists (who called themselves Fifth Monarchy Men), and among the disappointed

Republicans. He had a difficult game to play, for the Royalists were always ready to side with either party against him. The 'King over the water,' too, as Charles was called, had no scruples about plotting with any one against his life; although there is reason to suppose that he would willingly have married one of his daughters, if Oliver would have had such a son-in-law. There was a certain Colonel Saxby of the army, once a great supporter of Oliver's but now turned against him, who was a grievous trouble to him through all this part of his career; and who came and went between the discontented in England and Spain, and Charles who put himself in alliance with Spain on being thrown off by France. This man died in prison at last; but not until there had been very serious plots between the Royalists and Republicans, and an actual rising of them in England, when they burst into the city of Salisbury, on a Sunday night, seized the judges who were going to hold the assizes there next day, and would have hanged them but for the merciful objections of the more temperate of their number. Oliver was so vigorous and shrewd that he soon put this revolt down, as he did most other conspiracies; and it was well for one of its chief managers—that same Lord Wilmot who had assisted in Charles's flight, and was now Earl of Rochester—that he made his escape. Oliver seemed to have eyes and ears everywhere, and secured such sources of information as his enemies little dreamed of. There was a chosen body of six persons, called the Sealed Knot, who were in the closest and most secret confidence of Charles. One of the foremost of these very men, a Sir Richard Willis, reported to Oliver everything that passed among them, and had two hundred a year for it.

Miles Syndarcomb, also of the old army, was another conspirator against the Protector. He and a man named Cecil, bribed one of his Life Guards to let them have good notice when he was going out—intending to shoot him from a window. But, owing either to his caution or his good fortune, they could never get an aim at him. Disappointed in this design, they got into the chapel in Whitehall, with a basketful of combustibles, which were to explode by means of a slow match in six hours; then, in the noise and confusion of the fire, they hoped to kill Oliver. But, the Life Guardsman himself disclosed this plot; and they were seized, and Miles died (or killed himself in prison) a little while before he was ordered for execution. A few such plotters Oliver caused to be beheaded, a few more to be hanged, and many more, including those who rose in arms against him, to be sent as slaves to the West Indies. If he were rigid, he was impartial too, in asserting the laws of England. When a Portuguese nobleman, the brother of the Portuguese ambassador, killed a London citizen in mistake for another man with whom he had had a quarrel, Oliver caused him to be tried before a jury of Englishmen and foreigners, and had him executed in spite of the entreaties of all the ambassadors in London.

One of Oliver's own friends, the Duke of Oldenburgh, in sending him a present of six fine coach-horses, was very near doing more to please the Royalists than all the plotters put together. One day, Oliver went with his coach, drawn by these six horses, into Hyde Park, to dine with his secretary and some of his other gentlemen under the trees there. After dinner, being merry, he took it into his head to put his friends inside and to drive them home: a postillion riding one of the foremost horses, as the custom was. On account of Oliver's being too free with the whip, the six fine horses went off at a gallop, the postillion got thrown, and Oliver fell upon the coach-pole and narrowly escaped being shot by his own pistol, which got entangled with his clothes in the harness, and went off. He was dragged some distance by the foot, until his foot came out of the shoe, and then he came safely to the ground under the broad body of the coach, and was very little the worse. The gentlemen inside were only bruised, and the discontented people of all parties were much disappointed.

The rest of the history of the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell is a history of his Parliaments. His first one not pleasing him at all, he waited until the five months were out, and then dissolved it. The next was better suited to his views; and from that he desired to get—if he could with safety to himself—the title of King. He had had this in his mind some time: whether because he thought that the English people, being more used to the title, were more likely to obey it; or whether because he really wished to be a king himself, and to leave the succession to that title in his family, is far from clear. He was already as high, in England and in all the world, as he would ever be, and I doubt if he cared for the mere name. However, a paper, called the 'Humble Petition and Advice,' was presented to him by the House of Commons, praying him to take a high title and to appoint his successor. That he would have taken the title of King there is no doubt, but for the strong opposition of the army. This induced him to forbear, and to assent only to the other points of the petition. Upon which occasion there was another grand show in Westminster Hall, when the Speaker of the House of Commons formally invested him with a purple robe lined with ermine, and presented him with a splendidly bound Bible, and put a golden sceptre in his hand. The next time the Parliament met, he called a House of Lords of sixty members, as the petition gave him power to do; but as that Parliament did not please him either, and would not proceed to the business of the country, he jumped into a coach one morning, took six Guards with him, and sent them to the right-about. I wish this had been a warning to Parliaments to avoid long speeches, and do more work.

It was the month of August, one thousand six hundred and fifty-eight, when Oliver Cromwell's favourite daughter, Elizabeth Claypole (who had lately lost her youngest son), lay very ill, and his mind was greatly troubled, because he loved her dearly. Another of his daughters was married to Lord Falconberg, another to the grandson of the Earl of Warwick, and he had made his son Richard one of the Members of the Upper House. He was very kind and loving to them all, being a good father and a good husband; but he loved this daughter the best of the family, and went down to Hampton Court to see her, and could hardly be induced to stir from her sick room until she died. Although his religion had been of a gloomy kind, his disposition had been always cheerful. He had been fond of music in his home, and had kept open table once a week for all officers of the army not below the rank of captain, and had always preserved in his house a quiet, sensible dignity. He encouraged men of genius and learning, and loved to have them about him. Milton was one of his great friends. He was good humoured too, with the nobility, whose dresses and manners were very different from his; and to show them what good information he had, he would sometimes jokingly tell them when they were his guests, where they had last drunk the health of the 'King over the water,' and would recommend them to be more private (if they could) another time. But he had lived in busy times, had borne the weight of heavy State affairs, and had often gone in fear of his life. He was ill of the gout and ague; and when the death of his beloved child came upon him in addition, he sank, never to raise his head again. He told his physicians on the twenty-fourth of August that the Lord had assured him that he was not to die in that illness, and that he would certainly get better. This was only his sick fancy, for on the third of September, which was the anniversary of the great battle of Worcester, and the day of the year which he called his fortunate day, he died, in the sixtieth year of his age. He had been delirious, and had lain insensible some hours, but he had been overheard to murmur a very good prayer the day before. The whole country lamented his death. If you want to know the real worth of Oliver Cromwell, and his real services to his country, you can hardly do better than compare England under him, with England under Charles the Second.

He had appointed his son Richard to succeed him, and after there had been, at Somerset House in the Strand, a lying in state more splendid than sensible—as all such vanities after death are, I think—Richard became Lord Protector. He was an amiable country gentleman, but had none of his father's great genius, and was quite unfit for such a post in such a storm of parties. Richard's Protectorate, which only lasted a year and a half, is a history of quarrels between the officers of the army and the Parliament, and between the officers among themselves; and of a growing discontent among the people, who had far too many long sermons and far too few amusements, and wanted a change. At last, General Monk got the army well into his own hands, and then in pursuance of a secret plan he seems to have entertained from the time of Oliver's death, declared for the King's cause. He did not do this openly; but, in his place in the House of Commons, as one of the members for Devonshire, strongly advocated the proposals of one Sir John Greenville, who came to the House with a letter from Charles, dated from Breda, and with whom he had previously been in secret communication. There had been plots and counterplots, and a recall of the last members of the Long Parliament, and an end of the Long Parliament, and risings of the Royalists that were made too soon; and most men being tired out, and there being no one to head the country now great Oliver was dead, it was readily agreed to welcome Charles Stuart. Some of the wiser and better members said—what was most true—that in the letter from Breda, he gave no real promise to govern well, and that it would be best to make him pledge himself beforehand as to what he should be bound to do for the benefit of the kingdom. Monk said, however, it would be all right when he came, and he could not come too soon.

So, everybody found out all in a moment that the country *must* be prosperous and happy, having another Stuart to condescend to reign over it; and there was a prodigious firing off of guns, lighting of bonfires, ringing of bells, and throwing up of caps. The people drank the King's health by thousands in the open streets, and everybody rejoiced. Down came the Arms of the Commonwealth, up went the Royal Arms instead, and out came the public money. Fifty thousand pounds for the King, ten thousand pounds for his brother the Duke of York, five thousand pounds for his brother the Duke of Gloucester. Prayers for these gracious Stuarts were put up in all the churches; commissioners were sent to Holland (which suddenly found out that Charles was a great man, and that it loved him) to invite the King home; Monk and the Kentish grandees went to Dover, to kneel down before him as he landed. He kissed and embraced Monk, made him ride in the coach with himself and his brothers, came on to London amid wonderful shoutings, and passed through the army at Blackheath on the twenty-ninth of May (his birthday), in the year one thousand six hundred and sixty. Greeted by splendid dinners under tents, by flags and tapestry streaming from all the houses, by delighted crowds in all the streets, by troops of noblemen and gentlemen in rich dresses, by City companies, train-bands, drummers, trumpeters, the great Lord Mayor, and the majestic Aldermen, the King went on to Whitehall. On entering it, he commemorated his Restoration with the joke that it really would seem to have been his own fault that he had not come long ago, since everybody told him that he had always wished for him with all his heart.

CHAPTER XXXV—ENGLAND UNDER CHARLES THE SECOND, CALLED THE MERRY MONARCH

There never were such profligate times in England as under Charles the Second. Whenever you see his portrait, with his swarthy, ill-looking face and great nose, you may fancy him in his Court at Whitehall, surrounded by some of the very worst vagabonds in the kingdom (though they were lords and ladies), drinking, gambling, indulging in vicious conversation, and committing every kind of profligate excess. It has been a fashion to call Charles the Second 'The Merry Monarch.' Let me try to give you a general idea of some of the merry things that were done, in the merry days when this merry gentleman sat upon his merry throne, in merry England.

The first merry proceeding was—of course—to declare that he was one of the greatest, the wisest, and the noblest kings that ever shone, like the blessed sun itself, on this benighted earth. The next merry and pleasant piece of business was, for the Parliament, in the humblest manner, to give him one million two hundred thousand pounds a year, and to settle upon him for life that old disputed tonnage and poundage which had been so bravely fought for. Then, General Monk being made Earl of Albemarle, and a few other Royalists similarly rewarded, the law went to work to see what was to be done to those persons (they were called Regicides) who had been concerned in making a martyr of the late King. Ten of these were merrily executed; that is to say, six of the judges, one of the council, Colonel Hacker and another officer who had commanded the Guards, and Hugh Peters, a preacher who had preached against the martyr with all his heart. These executions were so extremely merry, that every horrible circumstance which Cromwell had abandoned was revived with appalling cruelty. The hearts of the sufferers were torn out of their living bodies; their bowels were burned before their faces; the executioner cut jokes to the next victim, as he rubbed his filthy hands together, that were reeking with the blood of the last; and the heads of the dead were drawn on sledges with the living to the place of suffering. Still, even so merry a monarch could not force one of these dying men to say that he was sorry for what he had done.

Nay, the most memorable thing said among them was, that if the thing were to do again they would do it.

Sir Harry Vane, who had furnished the evidence against Strafford, and was one of the most staunch of the Republicans, was also tried, found guilty, and ordered for execution. When he came upon the scaffold on Tower Hill, after conducting his own defence with great power, his notes of what he had meant to say to the people were torn away from him, and the drums and trumpets were ordered to sound lustily and drown his voice; for, the people had been so much impressed by what the Regicides had calmly said with their last breath, that it was the custom now, to have the drums and trumpets always under the scaffold, ready to strike up. Vane said no more than this: ‘It is a bad cause which cannot bear the words of a dying man:’ and bravely died.

These merry scenes were succeeded by another, perhaps even merrier. On the anniversary of the late King’s death, the bodies of Oliver Cromwell, Ireton, and Bradshaw, were torn out of their graves in Westminster Abbey, dragged to Tyburn, hanged there on a gallows all day long, and then beheaded. Imagine the head of Oliver Cromwell set upon a pole to be stared at by a brutal crowd, not one of whom would have dared to look the living Oliver in the face for half a moment! Think, after you have read this reign, what England was under Oliver Cromwell who was torn out of his grave, and what it was under this merry monarch who sold it, like a merry Judas, over and over again.

Of course, the remains of Oliver’s wife and daughter were not to be spared either, though they had been most excellent women. The base clergy of that time gave up their bodies, which had been buried in the Abbey, and—to the eternal disgrace of England—they were thrown into a pit, together with the mouldering bones of Pym and of the brave and bold old Admiral Blake.

The clergy acted this disgraceful part because they hoped to get the nonconformists, or dissenters, thoroughly put down in this reign, and to have but one prayer-book and one service for all kinds of people, no matter what their private opinions were. This was pretty well, I think, for a Protestant Church, which had displaced the Romish Church because people had a right to their own opinions in religious matters. However, they carried it with a high hand, and a prayer-book was agreed upon, in which the extremest opinions of Archbishop Laud were not forgotten. An Act was passed, too, preventing any dissenter from holding any office under any corporation. So, the regular clergy in their triumph were soon as merry as the King. The army being by this time disbanded, and the King crowned, everything was to go on easily for evermore.

I must say a word here about the King's family. He had not been long upon the throne when his brother the Duke of Gloucester, and his sister the Princess of Orange, died within a few months of each other, of small-pox. His remaining sister, the Princess Henrietta, married the Duke of Orleans, the brother of Louis the Fourteenth, King of France. His brother James, Duke of York, was made High Admiral, and by-and-by became a Catholic. He was a gloomy, sullen, bilious sort of man, with a remarkable partiality for the ugliest women in the country. He married, under very discreditable circumstances, Anne Hyde, the daughter of Lord Clarendon, then the King's principal Minister—not at all a delicate minister either, but doing much of the dirty work of a very dirty palace. It became important now that the King himself should be married; and divers foreign Monarchs, not very particular about the character of their son-in-law, proposed their daughters to him. The King of Portugal offered his daughter, Catherine of Braganza, and fifty thousand pounds: in addition to which, the French King, who was favourable to that match, offered a loan of another fifty thousand. The King of Spain, on the other hand, offered any one out of a dozen of Princesses, and other hopes of gain. But the ready money carried the day, and Catherine came over in state to her merry marriage.

The whole Court was a great flaunting crowd of debauched men and shameless women; and Catherine's merry husband insulted and outraged her in every possible way, until she consented to receive those worthless creatures as her very good friends, and to degrade herself by their companionship. A Mrs. Palmer, whom the King made Lady Castlemaine, and afterwards Duchess of Cleveland, was one of the most powerful of the bad women about the Court, and had great influence with the King nearly all through his reign. Another merry lady named Moll Davies, a dancer at the theatre, was afterwards her rival. So was Nell Gwyn, first an orange girl and then an actress, who really had good in her, and of whom one of the worst things I know is, that actually she does seem to have been fond of the King. The first Duke of St. Albans was this orange girl's child. In like manner the son of a merry waiting-lady, whom the King created Duchess

Of Portsmouth, became the Duke of Richmond. Upon the whole it is not so bad a thing to be a commoner.

The Merry Monarch was so exceedingly merry among these merry ladies, and some equally merry (and equally infamous) lords and gentlemen, that he soon got through his hundred thousand pounds, and then, by way of raising a little pocket-money, made a merry bargain. He sold Dunkirk to the French King for five millions of livres. When I think of the dignity to which Oliver Cromwell raised England in the eyes of foreign powers, and when I think of the manner in which he gained for England this very Dunkirk, I am much inclined to consider that if the Merry Monarch had been made to follow his father for this action, he would have received his just deserts.

Though he was like his father in none of that father's greater qualities, he was like him in being worthy of no trust. When he sent that letter to the Parliament, from Breda, he did expressly promise that all sincere religious opinions should be respected. Yet he was no sooner firm in his power than he consented to one of the worst Acts of Parliament ever passed. Under this law, every minister who should not give his solemn assent to the Prayer-Book by a certain day, was declared to be a minister no longer, and to be deprived of his church. The consequence of this was that some two thousand honest men were taken from their congregations, and reduced to dire poverty and distress. It was followed by another outrageous law, called the Conventicle Act, by which any person above the age of sixteen who was present at any religious service not according to the Prayer-Book, was to be imprisoned three months for the first offence, six for the second, and to be transported for the third. This Act alone filled the prisons, which were then most dreadful dungeons, to overflowing.

The Covenanters in Scotland had already fared no better. A base Parliament, usually known as the Drunken Parliament, in consequence of its principal members being seldom sober, had been got together to make laws against the Covenanters, and to force all men to be of one mind in religious matters. The Marquis of Argyle, relying on the King's honour, had given himself up to him; but, he was wealthy, and his enemies wanted his wealth. He was tried for treason, on the evidence of some private letters in which he had expressed opinions—as well he might—more favourable to the government of the late Lord Protector than of the present merry and religious King. He was executed, as were two men of mark among the

Covenanters; and Sharp, a traitor who had once been the friend of the Presbyterians and betrayed them, was made Archbishop of St. Andrew's, to teach the Scotch how to like bishops.

Things being in this merry state at home, the Merry Monarch undertook a war with the Dutch; principally because they interfered with an African company, established with the two objects of buying gold-dust and slaves, of which the Duke of York was a leading member. After some preliminary hostilities, the said Duke sailed to the coast of Holland with a fleet of ninety-eight vessels of war, and four fire-ships. This engaged with the Dutch fleet, of no fewer than one hundred and thirteen ships. In the great battle between the two forces, the Dutch lost eighteen ships, four admirals, and seven thousand men. But, the English on shore were in no mood of exultation when they heard the news.

For, this was the year and the time of the Great Plague in London. During the winter of one thousand six hundred and sixty-four it had been whispered about, that some few people had died here and there of the disease called the Plague, in some of the unwholesome suburbs around London. News was not published at that time as it is now, and some people believed these rumours, and some disbelieved them, and they were soon forgotten. But, in the month of May, one thousand six hundred and sixty-five, it began to be said all over the town that the disease had burst out with great violence in St. Giles's, and that the people were dying in great numbers. This soon turned out to be awfully true. The roads out of London were choked up by people endeavouring to escape from the infected city, and large sums were paid for any kind of conveyance. The disease soon spread so fast, that it was necessary to shut up the houses in which sick people were, and to cut them off from communication with the living. Every one of these houses was marked on the outside of the door with a red cross, and the words, Lord, have mercy upon us! The streets were all deserted, grass grew in the public ways, and there was a dreadful silence in the air. When night came on, dismal rumblings used to be heard, and these were the wheels of the death-carts, attended by men with veiled faces and holding cloths to their mouths, who rang doleful bells and cried in a loud and solemn voice, 'Bring out your dead!' The corpses put into these carts were buried by torchlight in great pits; no service being performed over them; all men being afraid to stay for a moment on the brink of the ghastly graves. In the general fear, children ran away from their parents, and parents from their children. Some who were taken ill, died alone, and without any help. Some were stabbed or strangled by hired nurses who robbed them of all their money, and stole the very beds on which they lay. Some went mad, dropped from the windows, ran through the streets, and in their pain and frenzy flung themselves into the river.

These were not all the horrors of the time. The wicked and dissolute, in wild desperation, sat in the taverns singing roaring songs, and were stricken as they drank, and went out and died. The fearful and superstitious persuaded themselves that they saw supernatural sights—burning swords in the sky, gigantic arms and darts. Others pretended that at nights vast crowds of ghosts walked round and round the dismal pits. One madman, naked, and carrying a brazier full of burning coals upon his head, stalked through the streets, crying out that he was a Prophet, commissioned to denounce the vengeance of the Lord on wicked London. Another always went to and fro, exclaiming, ‘Yet forty days, and London shall be destroyed!’ A third awoke the echoes in the dismal streets, by night and by day, and made the blood of the sick run cold, by calling out incessantly, in a deep hoarse voice, ‘O, the great and dreadful God!’

Through the months of July and August and September, the Great Plague raged more and more. Great fires were lighted in the streets, in the hope of stopping the infection; but there was a plague of rain too, and it beat the fires out. At last, the winds which usually arise at that time of the year which is called the equinox, when day and night are of equal length all over the world, began to blow, and to purify the wretched town. The deaths began to decrease, the red crosses slowly to disappear, the fugitives to return, the shops to open, pale frightened faces to be seen in the streets. The Plague had been in every part of England, but in close and unwholesome London it had killed one hundred thousand people.

All this time, the Merry Monarch was as merry as ever, and as worthless as ever. All this time, the debauched lords and gentlemen and the shameless ladies danced and gamed and drank, and loved and hated one another, according to their merry ways.

So little humanity did the government learn from the late affliction, that one of the first things the Parliament did when it met at Oxford (being as yet afraid to come to London), was to make a law, called the Five Mile Act, expressly directed against those poor ministers who, in the time of the Plague, had manfully come back to comfort the unhappy people. This infamous law, by forbidding them to teach in any school, or to come within five miles of any city, town, or village, doomed them to starvation and death.

The fleet had been at sea, and healthy. The King of France was now in alliance with the Dutch, though his navy was chiefly employed in looking on while the English and Dutch fought. The Dutch gained one victory; and the English gained another and a greater; and Prince Rupert, one of the English admirals, was out in the Channel one windy night, looking for the French Admiral, with the intention of giving him something more to do than he had had yet, when the gale increased to a storm, and blew him into Saint Helen's. That night was the third of September, one thousand six hundred and sixty-six, and that wind fanned the Great Fire of London.

It broke out at a baker's shop near London Bridge, on the spot on which the Monument now stands as a remembrance of those raging flames. It spread and spread, and burned and burned, for three days. The nights were lighter than the days; in the daytime there was an immense cloud of smoke, and in the night-time there was a great tower of fire mounting up into the sky, which lighted the whole country landscape for ten miles round. Showers of hot ashes rose into the air and fell on distant places; flying sparks carried the conflagration to great distances, and kindled it in twenty new spots at a time; church steeples fell down with tremendous crashes; houses crumbled into cinders by the hundred and the thousand. The summer had been intensely hot and dry, the streets were very narrow, and the houses mostly built of wood and plaster. Nothing could stop the tremendous fire, but the want of more houses to burn; nor did it stop until the whole way from the Tower to Temple Bar was a desert, composed of the ashes of thirteen thousand houses and eighty-nine churches.

This was a terrible visitation at the time, and occasioned great loss and suffering to the two hundred thousand burnt-out people, who were obliged to lie in the fields under the open night sky, or in hastily-made huts of mud and straw, while the lanes and roads were rendered impassable by carts which had broken down as they tried to save their goods. But the Fire was a great blessing to the City afterwards, for it arose from its ruins very much improved—built more regularly, more widely, more cleanly and carefully, and therefore much more healthily. It might be far more healthy than it is, but there are some people in it still—even now, at this time, nearly two hundred years later—so selfish, so pig-headed, and so ignorant, that I doubt if even another Great Fire would warm them up to do their duty.

The Catholics were accused of having wilfully set London in flames; one poor Frenchman, who had been mad for years, even accused himself of having with his own hand fired the first house. There is no reasonable doubt, however, that the fire was accidental. An inscription on the Monument long attributed it to the Catholics; but it is removed now, and was always a malicious and stupid untruth.

SECOND PART

That the Merry Monarch might be very merry indeed, in the merry times when his people were suffering under pestilence and fire, he drank and gambled and flung away among his favourites the money which the Parliament had voted for the war. The consequence of this was that the stout-hearted English sailors were merrily starving of want, and dying in the streets; while the Dutch, under their admirals De Witt and De Ruyter, came into the River Thames, and up the River Medway as far as Upnor, burned the guard-ships, silenced the weak batteries, and did what they would to the English coast for six whole weeks. Most of the English ships that could have prevented them had neither powder nor shot on board; in this merry reign, public officers made themselves as merry as the King did with the public money; and when it was entrusted to them to spend in national defences or preparations, they put it into their own pockets with the merriest grace in the world.

Lord Clarendon had, by this time, run as long a course as is usually allotted to the unscrupulous ministers of bad kings. He was impeached by his political opponents, but unsuccessfully. The King then commanded him to withdraw from England and retire to France, which he did, after defending himself in writing. He was no great loss at home, and died abroad some seven years afterwards.

There then came into power a ministry called the Cabal Ministry, because it was composed of Lord Clifford, the Earl of Arlington, the Duke of Buckingham (a great rascal, and the King's most powerful favourite), Lord Ashley, and the Duke of Lauderdale, c. a. b. a. l. As the French were making conquests in Flanders, the first Cabal proceeding was to make a treaty with the Dutch, for uniting with Spain to oppose the French. It was no sooner made than the Merry Monarch, who always wanted to get money without being accountable to a Parliament for his expenditure, apologised to the King of France for having had anything to do with it, and concluded a secret treaty with him, making himself his infamous pensioner to the amount of two millions of livres down, and three millions more a year; and engaging to desert that very Spain, to make war against those very Dutch, and to declare himself a Catholic when a convenient time should arrive. This religious king had lately been crying to his Catholic brother on the subject of his strong desire to be a Catholic; and now he merrily concluded this treasonable conspiracy against the country he governed, by undertaking to become one as soon as he safely could. For all of which, though he had had ten merry heads instead of one, he richly deserved to lose them by the headsman's axe.

As his one merry head might have been far from safe, if these things had been known, they were kept very quiet, and war was declared by France and England against the Dutch. But, a very uncommon man, afterwards most important to English history and to the religion and liberty of this land, arose among them, and for many long years defeated the whole projects of France. This was William of Nassau, Prince of Orange, son of the last Prince of Orange of the same name, who married the daughter of Charles the First of England. He was a young man at this time, only just of age; but he was brave, cool, intrepid, and wise. His father had been so detested that, upon his death, the Dutch had abolished the authority to which this son would have otherwise succeeded (Stadtholder it was called), and placed the chief power in the hands of John de Witt, who educated this young prince. Now, the Prince became very popular, and John de Witt's brother Cornelius was sentenced to banishment on a false accusation of conspiring to kill him. John went to the prison where he was, to take him away to exile, in his coach; and a great mob who collected on the occasion, then and there cruelly murdered both the brothers. This left the government in the hands of the Prince, who was really the choice of the nation; and from this time he exercised it with the greatest vigour, against the whole power of France, under its famous generals Condé and Turenne, and in support of the Protestant religion. It was full seven years before this war ended in a treaty of peace made at Nimeguen, and its details would occupy a very considerable space. It is enough to say that William of Orange established a famous character with the whole world; and that the Merry Monarch, adding to and improving on his former baseness, bound himself to do everything the King of France liked, and nothing the King of France did not like, for a pension of one hundred thousand pounds a year, which was afterwards doubled. Besides this, the King of France, by means of his corrupt ambassador—who wrote accounts of his proceedings in England, which are not always to be believed, I think—bought our English members of Parliament, as he wanted them. So, in point of fact, during a considerable portion of this merry reign, the King of France was the real King of this country.

But there was a better time to come, and it was to come (though his royal uncle little thought so) through that very William, Prince of Orange. He came over to England, saw Mary, the elder daughter of the Duke of York, and married her. We shall see by-and-by what came of that marriage, and why it is never to be forgotten.

This daughter was a Protestant, but her mother died a Catholic. She and her sister Anne, also a Protestant, were the only survivors of eight children. Anne afterwards married George, Prince of Denmark, brother to the King of that country.

Lest you should do the Merry Monarch the injustice of supposing that he was even good humoured (except when he had everything his own way), or that he was high spirited and honourable, I will mention here what was done to a member of the House of Commons, Sir John Coventry. He made a remark in a debate about taxing the theatres, which gave the King offence. The King agreed with his illegitimate son, who had been born abroad, and whom he had made Duke of Monmouth, to take the following merry vengeance. To waylay him at night, fifteen armed men to one, and to slit his nose with a penknife. Like master, like man. The King's favourite, the Duke of Buckingham, was strongly suspected of setting on an assassin to murder the Duke of Ormond as he was returning home from a dinner; and that Duke's spirited son, Lord Ossory, was so persuaded of his guilt, that he said to him at Court, even as he stood beside the King, 'My lord, I know very well that you are at the bottom of this late attempt upon my father. But I give you warning, if he ever come to a violent end, his blood shall be upon you, and wherever I meet you I will pistol you! I will do so, though I find you standing behind the King's chair; and I tell you this in his

Majesty’s presence, that you may be quite sure of my doing what I threaten.’ Those were merry times indeed.

There was a fellow named Blood, who was seized for making, with two companions, an audacious attempt to steal the crown, the globe, and sceptre, from the place where the jewels were kept in the Tower. This robber, who was a swaggering ruffian, being taken, declared that he was the man who had endeavoured to kill the Duke of Ormond, and that he had meant to kill the King too, but was overawed by the majesty of his appearance, when he might otherwise have done it, as he was bathing at Battersea. The King being but an ill-looking fellow, I don’t believe a word of this. Whether he was flattered, or whether he knew that Buckingham had really set Blood on to murder the Duke, is uncertain. But it is quite certain that he pardoned this thief, gave him an estate of five hundred a year in Ireland (which had had the honour of giving him birth), and presented him at Court to the debauched lords and the shameless ladies, who made a great deal of him—as I have no doubt they would have made of the Devil himself, if the King had introduced him.

Infamously pensioned as he was, the King still wanted money, and consequently was obliged to call Parliaments. In these, the great object of the Protestants was to thwart the Catholic Duke of York, who married a second time; his new wife being a young lady only fifteen years old, the Catholic sister of the Duke of Modena. In this they were seconded by the Protestant Dissenters, though to their own disadvantage: since, to exclude Catholics from power, they were even willing to exclude themselves. The King’s object was to pretend to be a Protestant, while he was really a Catholic; to swear to the bishops that he was devoutly attached to the English Church, while he knew he had bargained it away to the King of France; and by cheating and deceiving them, and all who were attached to royalty, to become despotic and be powerful enough to confess what a rascal he was. Meantime, the King of France, knowing his merry pensioner well, intrigued with the King’s opponents in Parliament, as well as with the King and his friends.

The fears that the country had of the Catholic religion being restored, if the Duke of York should come to the throne, and the low cunning of the King in pretending to share their alarms, led to some very terrible results. A certain Dr. Tonge, a dull clergyman in the City, fell into the hands of a certain Titus Oates, a most infamous character, who pretended to have acquired among the Jesuits abroad a knowledge of a great plot for the murder of the King, and the re-establishment if the Catholic religion. Titus Oates, being produced by this unlucky Dr. Tonge and solemnly examined before the council, contradicted himself in a thousand ways, told the most ridiculous and improbable stories, and implicated Coleman, the Secretary of the Duchess of York. Now, although what he charged against Coleman was not true, and although you and I know very well that the real dangerous Catholic plot was that one with the King of France of which the Merry Monarch was himself the head, there happened to be found among Coleman's papers, some letters, in which he did praise the days of Bloody Queen Mary, and abuse the Protestant religion. This was great good fortune for Titus, as it seemed to confirm him; but better still was in store. Sir Edmundbury Godfrey, the magistrate who had first examined him, being unexpectedly found dead near Primrose Hill, was confidently believed to have been killed by the Catholics. I think there is no doubt that he had been melancholy mad, and that he killed himself; but he had a great Protestant funeral, and Titus was called the Saver of the Nation, and received a pension of twelve hundred pounds a year.

As soon as Oates's wickedness had met with this success, up started another villain, named William Bedloe, who, attracted by a reward of five hundred pounds offered for the apprehension of the murderers of Godfrey, came forward and charged two Jesuits and some other persons with having committed it at the Queen's desire. Oates, going into partnership with this new informer, had the audacity to accuse the poor Queen herself of high treason. Then appeared a third informer, as bad as either of the two, and accused a Catholic banker named Stayley of having said that the King was the greatest rogue in the world (which would not have been far from the truth), and that he would kill him with his own hand. This banker, being at once tried and executed, Coleman and two others were tried and executed. Then, a miserable wretch named Prance, a Catholic silversmith, being accused by Bedloe, was tortured into confessing that he had taken part in Godfrey's murder, and into accusing three other men of having committed it. Then, five Jesuits were accused by Oates, Bedloe, and Prance together, and were all found guilty, and executed on the same kind of contradictory and absurd evidence. The Queen's physician and three monks were next put on their trial; but Oates and Bedloe had for the time gone far enough and these four were acquitted. The public mind, however, was so full of a

Catholic plot, and so strong against the Duke of York, that James consented to obey a written order from his brother, and to go with his family to Brussels, provided that his rights should never be sacrificed in his absence to the Duke of Monmouth. The House of Commons, not satisfied with this as the King hoped, passed a bill to exclude the Duke from ever succeeding to the throne. In return, the King dissolved the Parliament. He had deserted his old favourite, the Duke of Buckingham, who was now in the opposition.

To give any sufficient idea of the miseries of Scotland in this merry reign, would occupy a hundred pages. Because the people would not have bishops, and were resolved to stand by their solemn League and Covenant, such cruelties were inflicted upon them as make the blood run cold. Ferocious dragoons galloped through the country to punish the peasants for deserting the churches; sons were hanged up at their fathers' doors for refusing to disclose where their fathers were concealed; wives were tortured to death for not betraying their husbands; people were taken out of their fields and gardens, and shot on the public roads without trial; lighted matches were tied to the fingers of prisoners, and a most horrible torment called the Boot was invented, and constantly applied, which ground and mashed the victims' legs with iron wedges. Witnesses were tortured as well as prisoners. All the prisons were full; all the gibbets were heavy with bodies; murder and plunder devastated the whole country. In spite of all, the Covenanters were by no means to be dragged into the churches, and persisted in worshipping God as they thought right. A body of ferocious Highlanders, turned upon them from the mountains of their own country, had no greater effect than the English dragoons under Grahame of Claverhouse, the most cruel and rapacious of all their enemies, whose name will ever be cursed through the length and breadth of Scotland. Archbishop Sharp had ever aided and abetted all these outrages. But he fell at last; for, when the injuries of the Scottish people were at their height, he was seen, in his coach-and-six coming across a moor, by a body of men, headed by one John Balfour, who were waiting for another of their oppressors. Upon this they cried out that Heaven had delivered him into their hands, and killed him with many wounds. If ever a man deserved such a death, I think Archbishop Sharp did.

It made a great noise directly, and the Merry Monarch—strongly suspected of having goaded the Scottish people on, that he might have an excuse for a greater army than the Parliament were willing to give him—

sent down his son, the Duke of Monmouth, as commander-in-chief, with instructions to attack the Scottish rebels, or Whigs as they were called, whenever he came up with them. Marching with ten thousand men from Edinburgh, he found them, in number four or five thousand, drawn up at Bothwell Bridge, by the Clyde. They were soon dispersed; and Monmouth showed a more humane character towards them, than he had shown towards that Member of Parliament whose nose he had caused to be slit with a penknife. But the Duke of Lauderdale was their bitter foe, and sent Claverhouse to finish them.

As the Duke of York became more and more unpopular, the Duke of Monmouth became more and more popular. It would have been decent in the latter not to have voted in favour of the renewed bill for the exclusion of James from the throne; but he did so, much to the King's amusement, who used to sit in the House of Lords by the fire, hearing the debates, which he said were as good as a play. The House of Commons passed the bill by a large majority, and it was carried up to the House of Lords by Lord Russell, one of the best of the leaders on the Protestant side. It was rejected there, chiefly because the bishops helped the King to get rid of it; and the fear of Catholic plots revived again. There had been another got up, by a fellow out of Newgate, named Dangerfield, which is more famous than it deserves to be, under the name of the Meal-Tub Plot. This jail-bird having been got out of Newgate by a Mrs. Cellier, a Catholic nurse, had turned Catholic himself, and pretended that he knew of a plot among the Presbyterians against the King's life. This was very pleasant to the Duke of York, who hated the Presbyterians, who returned the compliment. He gave Dangerfield twenty guineas, and sent him to the King his brother. But Dangerfield, breaking down altogether in his charge, and being sent back to Newgate, almost astonished the Duke out of his five senses by suddenly swearing that the Catholic nurse had put that false design into his head, and that what he really knew about, was, a Catholic plot against the King; the evidence of which would be found in some papers, concealed in a meal-tub in Mrs. Cellier's house. There they were, of course—for he had put them there himself—and so the tub gave the name to the plot. But, the nurse was acquitted on her trial, and it came to nothing.

Lord Ashley, of the Cabal, was now Lord Shaftesbury, and was strong against the succession of the Duke of York. The House of Commons, aggravated to the utmost extent, as we may well suppose, by suspicions of the King’s conspiracy with the King of France, made a desperate point of the exclusion, still, and were bitter against the Catholics generally. So unjustly bitter were they, I grieve to say, that they impeached the venerable Lord Stafford, a Catholic nobleman seventy years old, of a design to kill the King. The witnesses were that atrocious Oates and two other birds of the same feather. He was found guilty, on evidence quite as foolish as it was false, and was beheaded on Tower Hill. The people were opposed to him when he first appeared upon the scaffold; but, when he had addressed them and shown them how innocent he was and how wickedly he was sent there, their better nature was aroused, and they said, ‘We believe you, my Lord. God bless you, my Lord!’

The House of Commons refused to let the King have any money until he should consent to the Exclusion Bill; but, as he could get it and did get it from his master the King of France, he could afford to hold them very cheap. He called a Parliament at Oxford, to which he went down with a great show of being armed and protected as if he were in danger of his life, and to which the opposition members also went armed and protected, alleging that they were in fear of the Papists, who were numerous among the King’s guards. However, they went on with the Exclusion Bill, and were so earnest upon it that they would have carried it again, if the King had not popped his crown and state robes into a sedan-chair, bundled himself into it along with them, hurried down to the chamber where the House of Lords met, and dissolved the Parliament. After which he scampered home, and the members of Parliament scampered home too, as fast as their legs could carry them.

The Duke of York, then residing in Scotland, had, under the law which excluded Catholics from public trust, no right whatever to public employment. Nevertheless, he was openly employed as the King’s representative in Scotland, and there gratified his sullen and cruel nature to his heart’s content by directing the dreadful cruelties against the Covenanters. There were two ministers named Cargill and Cameron who had escaped from the battle of Bothwell Bridge, and who returned to Scotland, and raised the miserable but still brave and unsubdued Covenanters afresh, under the name of Cameronians. As Cameron publicly posted a declaration that the King was a forsworn tyrant, no mercy was shown to his unhappy followers after he was slain in battle. The Duke of York, who was particularly fond of the Boot and derived great pleasure from having it applied, offered their lives to some of these people, if they would cry on the scaffold 'God save the King!' But their relations, friends, and countrymen, had been so barbarously tortured and murdered in this merry reign, that they preferred to die, and did die. The Duke then obtained his merry brother's permission to hold a Parliament in Scotland, which first, with most shameless deceit, confirmed the laws for securing the Protestant religion against Popery, and then declared that nothing must or should prevent the succession of the Popish Duke. After this double-faced beginning, it established an oath which no human being could understand, but which everybody was to take, as a proof that his religion was the lawful religion. The Earl of Argyle, taking it with the explanation that he did not consider it to prevent him from favouring any alteration either in the Church or State which was not inconsistent with the Protestant religion or with his loyalty, was tried for high treason before a Scottish jury of which the Marquis of Montrose was foreman, and was found guilty. He escaped the scaffold, for that time, by getting away, in the disguise of a page, in the train of his daughter, Lady Sophia Lindsay. It was absolutely proposed, by certain members of the Scottish Council, that this lady should be whipped through the streets of Edinburgh. But this was too much even for the Duke, who had the manliness then (he had very little at most times) to remark that Englishmen were not accustomed to treat ladies in that manner. In those merry times nothing could equal the brutal servility of the Scottish fawners, but the conduct of similar degraded beings in England.

After the settlement of these little affairs, the Duke returned to England, and soon resumed his place at the Council, and his office of High Admiral—all this by his brother's favour, and in open defiance of the law. It would have been no loss to the country, if he had been drowned when his ship, in going to Scotland to fetch his family, struck on a sand-bank, and was lost with two hundred souls on board. But he escaped in a boat with some friends; and the sailors were so brave and unselfish, that, when they saw him rowing away, they gave three cheers, while they themselves were going down for ever.

The Merry Monarch, having got rid of his Parliament, went to work to make himself despotic, with all speed. Having had the villainy to order the execution of Oliver Plunket, Bishop of Armagh, falsely accused of a plot to establish Popery in that country by means of a French army—the very thing this royal traitor was himself trying to do at home—and having tried to ruin

Lord Shaftesbury, and failed—he turned his hand to controlling the corporations all over the country; because, if he could only do that, he could get what juries he chose, to bring in perjured verdicts, and could get what members he chose returned to Parliament. These merry times produced, and made Chief Justice of the Court of King's Bench, a drunken ruffian of the name of Jeffreys; a red-faced, swollen, bloated, horrible creature, with a bullying, roaring voice, and a more savage nature perhaps than was ever lodged in any human breast. This monster was the Merry Monarch's especial favourite, and he testified his admiration of him by giving him a ring from his own finger, which the people used to call Judge Jeffreys's Bloodstone. Him the King employed to go about and bully the corporations, beginning with London; or, as Jeffreys himself elegantly called it, 'to give them a lick with the rough side of his tongue.' And he did it so thoroughly, that they soon became the basest and most sycophantic bodies in the kingdom—except the University of Oxford, which, in that respect, was quite pre-eminent and unapproachable.

Lord Shaftesbury (who died soon after the King's failure against him), Lord William Russell, the Duke of Monmouth, Lord Howard, Lord Jersey, Algernon Sidney, John Hampden (grandson of the great Hampden), and some others, used to hold a council together after the dissolution of the Parliament, arranging what it might be necessary to do, if the King carried his Popish plot to the utmost height. Lord Shaftesbury having been much the most violent of this party, brought two violent men into their secrets—Rumsey, who had been a soldier in the Republican army; and West, a lawyer. These two knew an old officer of Cromwell's, called Rumbold, who had married a maltster's widow, and so had come into possession of a solitary dwelling called the Rye House, near Hoddesdon, in Hertfordshire. Rumbold said to them what a capital place this house of his would be from which to shoot at the King, who often passed there going to and fro from Newmarket. They liked the idea, and entertained it. But, one of their body gave information; and they, together with Shepherd a wine merchant, Lord Russell, Algernon Sidney, Lord Essex, Lord Howard, and Hampden, were all arrested.

Lord Russell might have easily escaped, but scorned to do so, being innocent of any wrong; Lord Essex might have easily escaped, but scorned to do so, lest his flight should prejudice Lord Russell. But it weighed upon his mind that he had brought into their council, Lord Howard—who now turned a miserable traitor—against a great dislike Lord Russell had always had of him. He could not bear the reflection, and destroyed himself before Lord Russell was brought to trial at the Old Bailey.

He knew very well that he had nothing to hope, having always been manful in the Protestant cause against the two false brothers, the one on the throne, and the other standing next to it. He had a wife, one of the noblest and best of women, who acted as his secretary on his trial, who comforted him in his prison, who supped with him on the night before he died, and whose love and virtue and devotion have made her name imperishable. Of course, he was found guilty, and was sentenced to be beheaded in Lincoln's Inn-fields, not many yards from his own house. When he had parted from his children on the evening before his death, his wife still stayed with him until ten o'clock at night; and when their final separation in this world was over, and he had kissed her many times, he still sat for a long while in his prison, talking of her goodness. Hearing the rain fall fast at that time, he calmly said, 'Such a rain to-morrow will spoil a great show, which is a dull thing on a rainy day.' At midnight he went to bed, and slept till four; even when his servant called him, he fell asleep again while his clothes were being made ready. He rode to the scaffold in his own carriage, attended by two famous clergymen, Tillotson and Burnet, and sang a psalm to himself very softly, as he went along. He was as quiet and as steady as if he had been going out for an ordinary ride. After saying that he was surprised to see so great a crowd, he laid down his head upon the block, as if upon the pillow of his bed, and had it struck off at the second blow. His noble wife was busy for him even then; for that true-hearted lady printed and widely circulated his last words, of which he had given her a copy. They made the blood of all the honest men in England boil.

The University of Oxford distinguished itself on the very same day by pretending to believe that the accusation against Lord Russell was true, and by calling the King, in a written paper, the Breath of their Nostrils and the Anointed of the Lord. This paper the Parliament afterwards caused to be burned by the common hangman; which I am sorry for, as I wish it had been framed and glazed and hung up in some public place, as a monument of baseness for the scorn of mankind.

Next, came the trial of Algernon Sidney, at which Jeffreys presided, like a great crimson toad, sweltering and swelling with rage. 'I pray God, Mr. Sidney,' said this Chief Justice of a merry reign, after passing sentence, 'to work in you a temper fit to go to the other world, for I see you are not fit for this.' 'My lord,' said the prisoner, composedly holding out his arm, 'feel my pulse, and see if I be disordered. I thank Heaven I never was in better temper than I am now.' Algernon Sidney was executed on Tower Hill, on the seventh of December, one thousand six hundred and eighty-three. He died a hero, and died, in his own words, 'For that good old cause in which he had been engaged from his youth, and for which God had so often and so wonderfully declared himself.'

The Duke of Monmouth had been making his uncle, the Duke of York, very jealous, by going about the country in a royal sort of way, playing at the people's games, becoming godfather to their children, and even touching for the King's evil, or stroking the faces of the sick to cure them—though, for the matter of that, I should say he did them about as much good as any crowned king could have done. His father had got him to write a letter, confessing his having had a part in the conspiracy, for which Lord Russell had been beheaded; but he was ever a weak man, and as soon as he had written it, he was ashamed of it and got it back again. For this, he was banished to the Netherlands; but he soon returned and had an interview with his father, unknown to his uncle. It would seem that he was coming into the Merry Monarch's favour again, and that the Duke of York was sliding out of it, when Death appeared to the merry galleries at Whitehall, and astonished the debauched lords and gentlemen, and the shameless ladies, very considerably.

On Monday, the second of February, one thousand six hundred and eighty-five, the merry pensioner and servant of the King of France fell down in a fit of apoplexy. By the Wednesday his case was hopeless, and on the Thursday he was told so. As he made a difficulty about taking the sacrament from the Protestant Bishop of Bath, the Duke of York got all who were present away from the bed, and asked his brother, in a whisper, if he should send for a Catholic priest? The King replied, 'For God's sake, brother, do!' The Duke smuggled in, up the back stairs, disguised in a wig and gown, a priest named Huddleston, who had saved the King's life after the battle of Worcester: telling him that this worthy man in the wig had once saved his body, and was now come to save his soul.

The Merry Monarch lived through that night, and died before noon on the next day, which was Friday, the sixth. Two of the last things he said were of a human sort, and your remembrance will give him the full benefit of them. When the Queen sent to say she was too unwell to attend him and to ask his pardon, he said, ‘Alas! poor woman, *she* beg *my* pardon! I beg hers with all my heart. Take back that answer to her.’ And he also said, in reference to Nell Gwyn, ‘Do not let poor Nelly starve.’

He died in the fifty-fifth year of his age, and the twenty-fifth of his reign.

CHAPTER XXXVI—ENGLAND UNDER JAMES THE SECOND

King James the Second was a man so very disagreeable, that even the best of historians has favoured his brother Charles, as becoming, by comparison, quite a pleasant character. The one object of his short reign was to re-establish the Catholic religion in England; and this he doggedly pursued with such a stupid obstinacy, that his career very soon came to a close.

The first thing he did, was, to assure his council that he would make it his endeavour to preserve the Government, both in Church and State, as it was by law established; and that he would always take care to defend and support the Church. Great public acclamations were raised over this fair speech, and a great deal was said, from the pulpits and elsewhere, about the word of a King which was never broken, by credulous people who little supposed that he had formed a secret council for Catholic affairs, of which a mischievous Jesuit, called Father Petre, was one of the chief members. With tears of joy in his eyes, he received, as the beginning of *his* pension from the King of France, five hundred thousand livres; yet, with a mixture of meanness and arrogance that belonged to his contemptible character, he was always jealous of making some show of being independent of the King of France, while he pocketed his money. As—notwithstanding his publishing two papers in favour of Popery (and not likely to do it much service, I should think) written by the King, his brother, and found in his strong-box; and his open display of himself attending mass—the Parliament was very obsequious, and granted him a large sum of money, he began his reign with a belief that he could do what he pleased, and with a determination to do it.

Before we proceed to its principal events, let us dispose of Titus Oates. He was tried for perjury, a fortnight after the coronation, and besides being very heavily fined, was sentenced to stand twice in the pillory, to be whipped from Aldgate to Newgate one day, and from Newgate to Tyburn two days afterwards, and to stand in the pillory five times a year as long as he lived. This fearful sentence was actually inflicted on the rascal. Being unable to stand after his first flogging, he was dragged on a sledge from Newgate to Tyburn, and flogged as he was drawn along. He was so strong a villain that he did not die under the torture, but lived to be afterwards pardoned and rewarded, though not to be ever believed in any more. Dangerfield, the only other one of that crew left alive, was not so fortunate. He was almost killed by a whipping from Newgate to Tyburn, and, as if that were not punishment enough, a ferocious barrister of Gray's Inn gave him a poke in the eye with his cane, which caused his death; for which the ferocious barrister was deservedly tried and executed.

As soon as James was on the throne, Argyle and Monmouth went from Brussels to Rotterdam, and attended a meeting of Scottish exiles held there, to concert measures for a rising in England. It was agreed that Argyle should effect a landing in Scotland, and Monmouth in England; and that two Englishmen should be sent with Argyle to be in his confidence, and two Scotchmen with the Duke of Monmouth.

Argyle was the first to act upon this contract. But, two of his men being taken prisoners at the Orkney Islands, the Government became aware of his intention, and was able to act against him with such vigour as to prevent his raising more than two or three thousand Highlanders, although he sent a fiery cross, by trusty messengers, from clan to clan and from glen to glen, as the custom then was when those wild people were to be excited by their chiefs. As he was moving towards Glasgow with his small force, he was betrayed by some of his followers, taken, and carried, with his hands tied behind his back, to his old prison in Edinburgh Castle. James ordered him to be executed, on his old shamefully unjust sentence, within three days; and he appears to have been anxious that his legs should have been pounded with his old favourite the boot. However, the boot was not applied; he was simply beheaded, and his head was set upon the top of Edinburgh Jail. One of those Englishmen who had been assigned to him was that old soldier Rumbold, the master of the Rye House. He was sorely wounded, and within a week after Argyle had suffered with great courage, was brought up for trial, lest he should die and disappoint the King. He, too, was executed, after defending himself with great spirit, and saying that he did not believe that God had made the greater part of mankind to carry saddles on their backs and bridles in their mouths, and to be ridden by a few, booted and spurred for the purpose—in which I thoroughly agree with Rumbold.

The Duke of Monmouth, partly through being detained and partly through idling his time away, was five or six weeks behind his friend when he landed at Lyme, in Dorset: having at his right hand an unlucky nobleman called Lord Grey of Werk, who of himself would have ruined a far more promising expedition. He immediately set up his standard in the market-place, and proclaimed the King a tyrant, and a Popish usurper, and I know not what else; charging him, not only with what he had done, which was bad enough, but with what neither he nor anybody else had done, such as setting fire to London, and poisoning the late King. Raising some four thousand men by these means, he marched on to Taunton, where there were many Protestant dissenters who were strongly opposed to the Catholics. Here, both the rich and poor turned out to receive him, ladies waved a welcome to him from all the windows as he passed along the streets, flowers were strewn in his way, and every compliment and honour that could be devised was showered upon him. Among the rest, twenty young ladies came forward, in their best clothes, and in their brightest beauty, and gave him a Bible ornamented with their own fair hands, together with other presents.

Encouraged by this homage, he proclaimed himself King, and went on to Bridgewater. But, here the Government troops, under the Earl of Feversham, were close at hand; and he was so dispirited at finding that he made but few powerful friends after all, that it was a question whether he should disband his army and endeavour to escape. It was resolved, at the instance of that unlucky Lord Grey, to make a night attack on the King's army, as it lay encamped on the edge of a morass called Sedgemoor. The horsemen were commanded by the same unlucky lord, who was not a brave man. He gave up the battle almost at the first obstacle—which was a deep drain; and although the poor countrymen, who had turned out for Monmouth, fought bravely with scythes, poles, pitchforks, and such poor weapons as they had, they were soon dispersed by the trained soldiers, and fled in all directions. When the Duke of Monmouth himself fled, was not known in the confusion; but the unlucky Lord Grey was taken early next day, and then another of the party was taken, who confessed that he had parted from the Duke only four hours before. Strict search being made, he was found disguised as a peasant, hidden in a ditch under fern and nettles, with a few peas in his pocket which he had gathered in the fields to eat. The only other articles he had upon him were a few papers and little books:

one of the latter being a strange jumble, in his own writing, of charms, songs, recipes, and prayers. He was completely broken. He wrote a miserable letter to the King, beseeching and entreating to be allowed to see him. When he was taken to London, and conveyed bound into the King's presence, he crawled to him on his knees, and made a most degrading exhibition. As James never forgave or relented towards anybody, he was not likely to soften towards the issuer of the Lyme proclamation, so he told the suppliant to prepare for death.

On the fifteenth of July, one thousand six hundred and eighty-five, this unfortunate favourite of the people was brought out to die on Tower Hill. The crowd was immense, and the tops of all the houses were covered with gazers. He had seen his wife, the daughter of the Duke of Buccleuch, in the Tower, and had talked much of a lady whom he loved far better—the Lady Harriet Wentworth—who was one of the last persons he remembered in this life. Before laying down his head upon the block he felt the edge of the axe, and told the executioner that he feared it was not sharp enough, and that the axe was not heavy enough. On the executioner replying that it was of the proper kind, the Duke said, 'I pray you have a care, and do not use me so awkwardly as you used my Lord Russell.' The executioner, made nervous by this, and trembling, struck once and merely gashed him in the neck. Upon this, the Duke of Monmouth raised his head and looked the man reproachfully in the face. Then he struck twice, and then thrice, and then threw down the axe, and cried out in a voice of horror that he could not finish that work. The sheriffs, however, threatening him with what should be done to himself if he did not, he took it up again and struck a fourth time and a fifth time. Then the wretched head at last fell off, and James, Duke of Monmouth, was dead, in the thirty-sixth year of his age. He was a showy, graceful man, with many popular qualities, and had found much favour in the open hearts of the English.

The atrocities, committed by the Government, which followed this Monmouth rebellion, form the blackest and most lamentable page in English history. The poor peasants, having been dispersed with great loss, and their leaders having been taken, one would think that the implacable King might have been satisfied. But no; he let loose upon them, among other intolerable monsters, a Colonel Kirk, who had served against the Moors, and whose soldiers—called by the people Kirk's lambs, because they bore a lamb upon their flag, as the emblem of Christianity—were worthy of their leader. The atrocities committed by these demons in human shape are far too horrible to be related here. It is enough to say, that besides most ruthlessly murdering and robbing them, and ruining them by making them buy their pardons at the price of all they possessed, it was one of Kirk's favourite amusements, as he and his officers sat drinking after dinner, and toasting the King, to have batches of prisoners hanged outside the windows for the company's diversion; and that when their feet quivered in the convulsions of death, he used to swear that they should have music to their dancing, and would order the drums to beat and the trumpets to play. The detestable King informed him, as an acknowledgment of these services, that he was 'very well satisfied with his proceedings.' But the King's great delight was in the proceedings of Jeffreys, now a peer, who went down into the west, with four other judges, to try persons accused of having had any share in the rebellion. The King pleasantly called this 'Jeffreys's campaign.' The people down in that part of the country remember it to this day as The Bloody Assize.

It began at Winchester, where a poor deaf old lady, Mrs. Alicia Lisle, the widow of one of the judges of Charles the First (who had been murdered abroad by some Royalist assassins), was charged with having given shelter in her house to two fugitives from Sedgemoor. Three times the jury refused to find her guilty, until Jeffreys bullied and frightened them into that false verdict. When he had extorted it from them, he said, 'Gentlemen, if I had been one of you, and she had been my own mother, I would have found her guilty;'—as I dare say he would. He sentenced her to be burned alive, that very afternoon. The clergy of the cathedral and some others interfered in her favour, and she was beheaded within a week. As a high mark of his approbation, the King made Jeffreys Lord Chancellor; and he then went on to Dorchester, to Exeter, to Taunton, and to Wells. It is astonishing, when we read of the enormous injustice and barbarity of this beast, to know that no one struck him dead on the judgment-seat. It was enough for any man or woman to be accused by an enemy, before Jeffreys, to be found guilty of high treason. One man who pleaded not guilty, he ordered to be taken out of court upon the instant, and hanged; and this so terrified the prisoners in general that they mostly pleaded guilty at once. At Dorchester alone, in the course of a few days, Jeffreys hanged eighty people; besides whipping, transporting, imprisoning, and selling as slaves, great numbers. He executed, in all, two hundred and fifty, or three hundred.

These executions took place, among the neighbours and friends of the sentenced, in thirty-six towns and villages. Their bodies were mangled, steeped in caldrons of boiling pitch and tar, and hung up by the roadsides, in the streets, over the very churches. The sight and smell of heads and limbs, the hissing and bubbling of the infernal caldrons, and the tears and terrors of the people, were dreadful beyond all description. One rustic, who was forced to steep the remains in the black pot, was ever afterwards called 'Tom Boilman.' The hangman has ever since been called Jack Ketch, because a man of that name went hanging and hanging, all day long, in the train of Jeffreys. You will hear much of the horrors of the great French Revolution. Many and terrible they were, there is no doubt; but I know of nothing worse, done by the maddened people of France in that awful time, than was done by the highest judge in England, with the express approval of the King of England, in The Bloody Assize.

Nor was even this all. Jeffreys was as fond of money for himself as of misery for others, and he sold pardons wholesale to fill his pockets. The King ordered, at one time, a thousand prisoners to be given to certain of his favourites, in order that they might bargain with them for their pardons. The young ladies of Taunton who had presented the Bible, were bestowed upon the maids of honour at court; and those precious ladies made very hard bargains with them indeed. When The Bloody Assize was at its most dismal height, the King was diverting himself with horse-races in the very place where Mrs. Lisle had been executed. When Jeffreys had done his worst, and came home again, he was particularly complimented in the Royal Gazette; and when the King heard that through drunkenness and raging he was very ill, his odious Majesty remarked that such another man could not easily be found in England. Besides all this, a former sheriff of London, named Cornish, was hanged within sight of his own house, after an abominably conducted trial, for having had a share in the Rye House Plot, on evidence given by Rumsey, which that villain was obliged to confess was directly opposed to the evidence he had given on the trial of Lord Russell. And on the very same day, a worthy widow, named Elizabeth Gaunt, was burned alive at Tyburn, for having sheltered a wretch who himself gave evidence against her. She settled the fuel about herself with her own hands, so that the flames should reach her quickly: and nobly said, with her last breath, that she had obeyed the sacred command of God, to give refuge to the outcast, and not to betray the wanderer.

After all this hanging, beheading, burning, boiling, mutilating, exposing, robbing, transporting, and selling into slavery, of his unhappy subjects, the King not unnaturally thought that he could do whatever he would. So, he went to work to change the religion of the country with all possible speed; and what he did was this.

He first of all tried to get rid of what was called the Test Act—which prevented the Catholics from holding public employments—by his own power of dispensing with the penalties. He tried it in one case, and, eleven of the twelve judges deciding in his favour, he exercised it in three others, being those of three dignitaries of University College, Oxford, who had become Papists, and whom he kept in their places and sanctioned. He revived the hated Ecclesiastical Commission, to get rid of Compton, Bishop of London, who manfully opposed him. He solicited the Pope to favour England with an ambassador, which the Pope (who was a sensible man then) rather unwillingly did. He flourished Father Petre before the eyes of the people on all possible occasions. He favoured the establishment of convents in several parts of London. He was delighted to have the streets, and even the court itself, filled with Monks and Friars in the habits of their orders. He constantly endeavoured to make Catholics of the Protestants about him. He held private interviews, which he called ‘closetings,’ with those Members of Parliament who held offices, to persuade them to consent to the design he had in view. When they did not consent, they were removed, or resigned of themselves, and their places were given to Catholics. He displaced Protestant officers from the army, by every means in his power, and got Catholics into their places too. He tried the same thing with the corporations, and also (though not so successfully) with the Lord Lieutenants of counties. To terrify the people into the endurance of all these measures, he kept an army of fifteen thousand men encamped on Hounslow Heath, where mass was openly performed in the General’s tent, and where priests went among the soldiers endeavouring to persuade them to become Catholics. For circulating a paper among those men advising them to be true to their religion, a Protestant clergyman, named Johnson, the chaplain of the late Lord Russell, was actually sentenced to stand three times in the pillory, and was actually whipped from Newgate to Tyburn. He dismissed his own brother-in-law from his Council because he was a Protestant, and made a Privy Councillor of the before-mentioned Father Petre. He handed Ireland over to Richard Talbot, Earl of Tyrconnell, a worthless, dissolute knave, who played the same game there for his master, and who played the deeper game for himself of one day putting it under the protection of the French King. In going to these extremities, every man of sense and judgment among the Catholics, from the Pope to a porter, knew that the King was a mere bigoted fool, who would undo himself and the cause he sought to advance; but he was deaf to all reason, and, happily for England ever afterwards, went tumbling off his throne in his own blind way.

A spirit began to arise in the country, which the besotted blunderer little expected. He first found it out in the University of Cambridge. Having made a Catholic a dean at Oxford without any opposition, he tried to make a monk a master of arts at Cambridge: which attempt the University resisted, and defeated him. He then went back to his favourite Oxford. On the death of the President of Magdalen College, he commanded that there should be elected to succeed him, one Mr. Anthony Farmer, whose only recommendation was, that he was of the King's religion. The University plucked up courage at last, and refused. The King substituted another man, and it still refused, resolving to stand by its own election of a Mr. Hough. The dull tyrant, upon this, punished Mr. Hough, and five-and-twenty more, by causing them to be expelled and declared incapable of holding any church preferment; then he proceeded to what he supposed to be his highest step, but to what was, in fact, his last plunge head-foremost in his tumble off his throne.

He had issued a declaration that there should be no religious tests or penal laws, in order to let in the Catholics more easily; but the Protestant dissenters, unmindful of themselves, had gallantly joined the regular church in opposing it tooth and nail. The King and Father Petre now resolved to have this read, on a certain Sunday, in all the churches, and to order it to be circulated for that purpose by the bishops. The latter took counsel with the Archbishop of Canterbury, who was in disgrace; and they resolved that the declaration should not be read, and that they would petition the King against it. The Archbishop himself wrote out the petition, and six bishops went into the King's bedchamber the same night to present it, to his infinite astonishment. Next day was the Sunday fixed for the reading, and it was only read by two hundred clergymen out of ten thousand. The King resolved against all advice to prosecute the bishops in the Court of King's Bench, and within three weeks they were summoned before the Privy Council, and committed to the Tower. As the six bishops were taken to that dismal place, by water, the people who were assembled in immense numbers fell upon their knees, and wept for them, and prayed for them. When they got to the Tower, the officers and soldiers on guard besought them for their blessing. While they were confined there, the soldiers every day drank to their release with loud shouts. When they were brought up to the Court of King's Bench for their trial, which the Attorney-General said was for the high offence of censuring the Government, and giving their opinion about affairs of state, they were attended by similar multitudes, and surrounded by a throng of noblemen and gentlemen. When the jury went out at seven o'clock at night to consider of their verdict, everybody (except the King) knew that they would rather starve than yield to the King's brewer, who was one of them, and wanted a verdict for his customer. When they came into court next morning, after resisting the brewer all night, and gave a verdict of not guilty, such a shout rose up in Westminster Hall as it had never heard before; and it was passed on among the people away to Temple Bar, and away again to the Tower. It did not pass only to the east, but passed to the west too, until it reached the camp at Hounslow, where the fifteen thousand soldiers took it up and echoed it. And still, when the dull King, who was then with Lord Feversham, heard the mighty roar, asked in alarm what it was, and was told that it was 'nothing but the acquittal of the bishops,' he said, in his dogged way, 'Call you that nothing? It is so much the worse for them.'

Between the petition and the trial, the Queen had given birth to a son, which Father Petre rather thought was owing to Saint Winifred. But I doubt if Saint Winifred had much to do with it as the King's friend, inasmuch as the entirely new prospect of a Catholic successor (for both the King's daughters were Protestants) determined the Earls of Shrewsbury, Danby, and Devonshire, Lord Lumley, the Bishop of London, Admiral Russell, and Colonel Sidney, to invite the Prince of Orange over to England. The Royal Mole, seeing his danger at last, made, in his fright, many great concessions, besides raising an army of forty thousand men; but the Prince of Orange was not a man for James the Second to cope with. His preparations were extraordinarily vigorous, and his mind was resolved.

For a fortnight after the Prince was ready to sail for England, a great wind from the west prevented the departure of his fleet. Even when the wind lulled, and it did sail, it was dispersed by a storm, and was obliged to put back to refit. At last, on the first of November, one thousand six hundred and eighty-eight, the Protestant east wind, as it was long called, began to blow; and on the third, the people of Dover and the people of Calais saw a fleet twenty miles long sailing gallantly by, between the two places. On Monday, the fifth, it anchored at Torbay in Devonshire, and the Prince, with a splendid retinue of officers and men, marched into Exeter. But the people in that western part of the country had suffered so much in The Bloody Assize, that they had lost heart. Few people joined him; and he began to think of returning, and publishing the invitation he had received from those lords, as his justification for having come at all. At this crisis, some of the gentry joined him; the Royal army began to falter; an engagement was signed, by which all who set their hand to it declared that they would support one another in defence of the laws and liberties of the three Kingdoms, of the Protestant religion, and of the Prince of Orange. From that time, the cause received no check; the greatest towns in England began, one after another, to declare for the Prince; and he knew that it was all safe with him when the University of Oxford offered to melt down its plate, if he wanted any money.

By this time the King was running about in a pitiable way, touching people for the King's evil in one place, reviewing his troops in another, and bleeding from the nose in a third. The young Prince was sent to Portsmouth, Father Petre went off like a shot to France, and there was a general and swift dispersal of all the priests and friars. One after another, the King's most important officers and friends deserted him and went over to the Prince. In the night, his daughter Anne fled from Whitehall Palace; and the Bishop of London, who had once been a soldier, rode before her with a drawn sword in his hand, and pistols at his saddle. 'God help me,' cried the miserable King: 'my very children have forsaken me!' In his wildness, after debating with such lords as were in London, whether he should or should not call a Parliament, and after naming three of them to negotiate with the Prince, he resolved to fly to France. He had the little Prince of Wales brought back from Portsmouth; and the child and the Queen crossed the river to Lambeth in an open boat, on a miserable wet night, and got safely away. This was on the night of the ninth of December.

At one o'clock on the morning of the eleventh, the King, who had, in the meantime, received a letter from the Prince of Orange, stating his objects, got out of bed, told Lord Northumberland who lay in his room not to open the door until the usual hour in the morning, and went down the back stairs (the same, I suppose, by which the priest in the wig and gown had come up to his brother) and crossed the river in a small boat: sinking the great seal of England by the way. Horses having been provided, he rode, accompanied by Sir Edward Hales, to Feversham, where he embarked in a Custom House Hoy. The master of this Hoy, wanting more ballast, ran into the Isle of Sheppy to get it, where the fishermen and smugglers crowded about the boat, and informed the King of their suspicions that he was a 'hatchet-faced Jesuit.' As they took his money and would not let him go, he told them who he was, and that the Prince of Orange wanted to take his life; and he began to scream for a boat—and then to cry, because he had lost a piece of wood on his ride which he called a fragment of Our Saviour's cross. He put himself into the hands of the Lord Lieutenant of the county, and his detention was made known to the Prince of Orange at Windsor—who, only wanting to get rid of him, and not caring where he went, so that he went away, was very much disconcerted that they did not let him go. However, there was nothing for it but to have him brought back, with some state in the way of Life Guards, to Whitehall. And as soon as he got there, in his infatuation, he heard mass, and set a Jesuit to say grace at his public dinner.

The people had been thrown into the strangest state of confusion by his flight, and had taken it into their heads that the Irish part of the army were going to murder the Protestants. Therefore, they set the bells a ringing, and lighted watch-fires, and burned Catholic Chapels, and looked about in all directions for Father Petre and the Jesuits, while the Pope's ambassador was running away in the dress of a footman. They found no Jesuits; but a man, who had once been a frightened witness before Jeffreys in court, saw a swollen, drunken face looking through a window down at Wapping, which he well remembered. The face was in a sailor's dress, but he knew it to be the face of that accursed judge, and he seized him. The people, to their lasting honour, did not tear him to pieces. After knocking him about a little, they took him, in the basest agonies of terror, to the Lord Mayor, who sent him, at his own shrieking petition, to the Tower for safety. There, he died.

Their bewilderment continuing, the people now lighted bonfires and made rejoicings, as if they had any reason to be glad to have the King back again. But, his stay was very short, for the English guards were removed from Whitehall, Dutch guards were marched up to it, and he was told by one of his late ministers that the Prince would enter London, next day, and he had better go to Ham. He said, Ham was a cold, damp place, and he would rather go to Rochester. He thought himself very cunning in this, as he meant to escape from Rochester to France. The Prince of Orange and his friends knew that, perfectly well, and desired nothing more. So, he went to Gravesend, in his royal barge, attended by certain lords, and watched by Dutch troops, and pitied by the generous people, who were far more forgiving than he had ever been, when they saw him in his humiliation. On the night of the twenty-third of December, not even then understanding that everybody wanted to get rid of him, he went out, absurdly, through his Rochester garden, down to the Medway, and got away to France, where he rejoined the Queen.

There had been a council in his absence, of the lords, and the authorities of London. When the Prince came, on the day after the King's departure, he summoned the Lords to meet him, and soon afterwards, all those who had served in any of the Parliaments of King Charles the Second. It was finally resolved by these authorities that the throne was vacant by the conduct of King James the Second; that it was inconsistent with the safety and welfare of this Protestant kingdom, to be governed by a Popish prince; that the Prince and Princess of Orange should be King and Queen during their lives and the life of the survivor of them; and that their children should succeed them, if they had any. That if they had none, the Princess Anne and her children should succeed; that if she had none, the heirs of the Prince of Orange should succeed.

On the thirteenth of January, one thousand six hundred and eighty-nine, the Prince and Princess, sitting on a throne in Whitehall, bound themselves to these conditions. The Protestant religion was established in England, and England's great and glorious Revolution was complete.

CHAPTER XXXVII

I have now arrived at the close of my little history. The events which succeeded the famous Revolution of one thousand six hundred and eighty-eight, would neither be easily related nor easily understood in such a book as this.

William and Mary reigned together, five years. After the death of his good wife, William occupied the throne, alone, for seven years longer. During his reign, on the sixteenth of September, one thousand seven hundred and one, the poor weak creature who had once been James the Second of England, died in France. In the meantime he had done his utmost (which was not much) to cause William to be assassinated, and to regain his lost dominions. James's son was declared, by the French King, the rightful King of England; and was called in France The Chevalier Saint George, and in England The Pretender. Some infatuated people in England, and particularly in Scotland, took up the Pretender's cause from time to time—as if the country had not had Stuarts enough!—and many lives were sacrificed, and much misery was occasioned. King William died on Sunday, the seventh of March, one thousand seven hundred and two, of the consequences of an accident occasioned by his horse stumbling with him. He was always a brave, patriotic Prince, and a man of remarkable abilities. His manner was cold, and he made but few friends; but he had truly loved his queen. When he was dead, a lock of her hair, in a ring, was found tied with a black ribbon round his left arm.

He was succeeded by the Princess Anne, a popular Queen, who reigned twelve years. In her reign, in the month of May, one thousand seven hundred and seven, the Union between England and Scotland was effected, and the two countries were incorporated under the name of Great Britain. Then, from the year one thousand seven hundred and fourteen to the year one thousand, eight hundred and thirty, reigned the four Georges.

It was in the reign of George the Second, one thousand seven hundred and forty-five, that the Pretender did his last mischief, and made his last appearance. Being an old man by that time, he and the Jacobites—as his friends were called—put forward his son, Charles Edward, known as the young Chevalier. The Highlanders of Scotland, an extremely troublesome and wrong-headed race on the subject of the Stuarts, espoused his cause, and he joined them, and there was a Scottish rebellion to make him king, in which many gallant and devoted gentlemen lost their lives. It was a hard matter for Charles Edward to escape abroad again, with a high price on his head; but the Scottish people were extraordinarily faithful to him, and, after undergoing many romantic adventures, not unlike those of Charles the Second, he escaped to France. A number of charming stories and delightful songs arose out of the Jacobite feelings, and belong to the Jacobite times. Otherwise I think the Stuarts were a public nuisance altogether.

It was in the reign of George the Third that England lost North America, by persisting in taxing her without her own consent. That immense country, made independent under Washington, and left to itself, became the United States; one of the greatest nations of the earth. In these times in which I write, it is honourably remarkable for protecting its subjects, wherever they may travel, with a dignity and a determination which is a model for England. Between you and me, England has rather lost ground in this respect since the days of Oliver Cromwell.

The Union of Great Britain with Ireland—which had been getting on very ill by itself—took place in the reign of George the Third, on the second of July, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-eight.

William the Fourth succeeded George the Fourth, in the year one thousand eight hundred and thirty, and reigned seven years. Queen Victoria, his niece, the only child of the Duke of Kent, the fourth son of George the Third, came to the throne on the twentieth of June, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-seven. She was married to Prince Albert of Saxe Gotha on the tenth of February, one thousand eight hundred and forty. She is very good, and much beloved. So I end, like the crier, with

God Save the Queen!

THE END OF
A Child's History of England

THE CHIMES

CHAPTER I - First Quarter.

Here are not many people - and as it is desirable that a story-teller and a story-reader should establish a mutual understanding as soon as possible, I beg it to be noticed that I confine this observation neither to young people nor to little people, but extend it to all conditions of people: little and big, young and old: yet growing up, or already growing down again - there are not, I say, many people who would care to sleep in a church. I don't mean at sermon-time in warm weather (when the thing has actually been done, once or twice), but in the night, and alone. A great multitude of persons will be violently astonished, I know, by this position, in the broad bold Day. But it applies to Night. It must be argued by night, and I will undertake to maintain it successfully on any gusty winter's night appointed for the purpose, with any one opponent chosen from the rest, who will meet me singly in an old churchyard, before an old church-door; and will previously empower me to lock him in, if needful to his satisfaction, until morning.

For the night-wind has a dismal trick of wandering round and round a building of that sort, and moaning as it goes; and of trying, with its unseen hand, the windows and the doors; and seeking out some crevices by which to enter. And when it has got in; as one not finding what it seeks, whatever that may be, it wails and howls to issue forth again: and not content with stalking through the aisles, and gliding round and round the pillars, and tempting the deep organ, soars up to the roof, and strives to rend the rafters:

then flings itself despairingly upon the stones below, and passes, muttering, into the vaults. Anon, it comes up stealthily, and creeps along the walls, seeming to read, in whispers, the Inscriptions sacred to the Dead. At some of these, it breaks out shrilly, as with laughter; and at others, moans and cries as if it were lamenting. It has a ghostly sound too, lingering within the altar; where it seems to chaunt, in its wild way, of Wrong and Murder done, and false Gods worshipped, in defiance of the Tables of the Law, which look so fair and smooth, but are so flawed and broken. Ugh! Heaven preserve us, sitting snugly round the fire! It has an awful voice, that wind at Midnight, singing in a church!

But, high up in the steeple! There the foul blast roars and whistles! High up in the steeple, where it is free to come and go through many an airy arch and loophole, and to twist and twine itself about the giddy stair, and twirl the groaning weathercock, and make the very tower shake and shiver! High up in the steeple, where the belfry is, and iron rails are ragged with rust, and sheets of lead and copper, shrivelled by the changing weather, crackle and heave beneath the unaccustomed tread; and birds stuff shabby nests into corners of old oaken joists and beams; and dust grows old and grey; and speckled spiders, indolent and fat with long security, swing idly to and fro in the vibration of the bells, and never loose their hold upon their thread-spun castles in the air, or climb up sailor-like in quick alarm, or drop upon the ground and ply a score of nimble legs to save one life! High up in the steeple of an old church, far above the light and murmur of the town and far below the flying clouds that shadow it, is the wild and dreary place at night: and high up in the steeple of an old church, dwelt the Chimes I tell of.

They were old Chimes, trust me. Centuries ago, these Bells had been baptized by bishops: so many centuries ago, that the register of their baptism was lost long, long before the memory of man, and no one knew their names. They had had their Godfathers and Godmothers, these Bells (for my own part, by the way, I would rather incur the responsibility of being Godfather to a Bell than a Boy), and had their silver mugs no doubt, besides. But Time had mowed down their sponsors, and Henry the Eighth had melted down their mugs; and they now hung, nameless and mugless, in the church-tower.

Not speechless, though. Far from it. They had clear, loud, lusty, sounding voices, had these Bells; and far and wide they might be heard upon the wind. Much too sturdy Chimes were they, to be dependent on the pleasure of the wind, moreover; for, fighting gallantly against it when it took an adverse whim, they would pour their cheerful notes into a listening ear right royally; and bent on being heard on stormy nights, by some poor mother watching a sick child, or some lone wife whose husband was at sea, they had been sometimes known to beat a blustering Nor' Wester; aye, 'all to fits,' as Toby Veck said; - for though they chose to call him Trotty Veck, his name was Toby, and nobody could make it anything else either (except Tobias) without a special act of parliament; he having been as lawfully christened in his day as the Bells had been in theirs, though with not quite so much of solemnity or public rejoicing.

For my part, I confess myself of Toby Veck's belief, for I am sure he had opportunities enough of forming a correct one. And whatever Toby Veck said, I say. And I take my stand by Toby Veck, although he *did* stand all day long (and weary work it was) just outside the church-door. In fact he was a ticket-porter, Toby Veck, and waited there for jobs.

And a breezy, goose-skinned, blue-nosed, red-eyed, stony-toed, tooth-chattering place it was, to wait in, in the winter-time, as Toby Veck well knew. The wind came tearing round the corner - especially the east wind - as if it had sallied forth, express, from the confines of the earth, to have a blow at Toby. And oftentimes it seemed to come upon him sooner than it had expected, for bouncing round the corner, and passing Toby, it would suddenly wheel round again, as if it cried 'Why, here he is!' Incontinently his little white apron would be caught up over his head like a naughty boy's garments, and his feeble little cane would be seen to wrestle and struggle unavailingly in his hand, and his legs would undergo tremendous agitation, and Toby himself all aslant, and facing now in this direction, now in that, would be so banged and buffeted, and to touzled, and worried, and hustled, and lifted off his feet, as to render it a state of things but one degree removed from a positive miracle, that he wasn't carried up bodily into the air as a colony of frogs or snails or other very portable creatures sometimes are, and rained down again, to the great astonishment of the natives, on some strange corner of the world where ticket-porters are unknown.

But, windy weather, in spite of its using him so roughly, was, after all, a sort of holiday for Toby. That's the fact. He didn't seem to wait so long for a sixpence in the wind, as at other times; the having to fight with that boisterous element took off his attention, and quite freshened him up, when he was getting hungry and low-spirited. A hard frost too, or a fall of snow, was an Event; and it seemed to do him good, somehow or other - it would have been hard to say in what respect though, Toby! So wind and frost and snow, and perhaps a good stiff storm of hail, were Toby Veck's red-letter days.

Wet weather was the worst; the cold, damp, clammy wet, that wrapped him up like a moist great-coat - the only kind of great-coat Toby owned, or could have added to his comfort by dispensing with. Wet days, when the rain came slowly, thickly, obstinately down; when the street's throat, like his own, was choked with mist; when smoking umbrellas passed and re-passed, spinning round and round like so many teetotums, as they knocked against each other on the crowded footway, throwing off a little whirlpool of uncomfortable sprinklings; when gutters brawled and waterspouts were full and noisy; when the wet from the projecting stones and ledges of the church fell drip, drip, drip, on Toby, making the wisp of straw on which he stood mere mud in no time; those were the days that tried him. Then, indeed, you might see Toby looking anxiously out from his shelter in an angle of the church wall - such a meagre shelter that in summer time it never cast a shadow thicker than a good-sized walking stick upon the sunny pavement - with a disconsolate and lengthened face. But coming out, a minute afterwards, to warm himself by exercise, and trotting up and down some dozen times, he would brighten even then, and go back more brightly to his niche.

They called him Trotty from his pace, which meant speed if it didn't make it. He could have walked faster perhaps; most likely; but rob him of his trot, and Toby would have taken to his bed and died. It bespattered him with mud in dirty weather; it cost him a world of trouble; he could have walked with infinitely greater ease; but that was one reason for his clinging to it so tenaciously. A weak, small, spare old man, he was a very Hercules, this Toby, in his good intentions. He loved to earn his money. He delighted to believe - Toby was very poor, and couldn't well afford to part with a delight - that he was worth his salt. With a shilling or an eighteenpenny message or small parcel in hand, his courage always high, rose higher. As he trotted on, he would call out to fast Postmen ahead of him, to get out of the way; devoutly believing that in the natural course of things he must inevitably overtake and run them down; and he had perfect faith - not often tested - in his being able to carry anything that man could lift.

Thus, even when he came out of his nook to warm himself on a wet day, Toby trotted. Making, with his leaky shoes, a crooked line of slushy footprints in the mire; and blowing on his chilly hands and rubbing them against each other, poorly defended from the searching cold by threadbare mufflers of grey worsted, with a private apartment only for the thumb, and a common room or tap for the rest of the fingers; Toby, with his knees bent and his cane beneath his arm, still trotted. Falling out into the road to look up at the belfry when the Chimes resounded, Toby trotted still.

He made this last excursion several times a day, for they were company to him; and when he heard their voices, he had an interest in glancing at their lodging-place, and thinking how they were moved, and what hammers beat upon them. Perhaps he was the more curious about these Bells, because there were points of resemblance between themselves and him. They hung there, in all weathers, with the wind and rain driving in upon them; facing only the outsides of all those houses; never getting any nearer to the blazing fires that gleamed and shone upon the windows, or came puffing out of the chimney tops; and incapable of participation in any of the good things that were constantly being handled, through the street doors and the area railings, to prodigious cooks. Faces came and went at many windows: sometimes pretty faces, youthful faces, pleasant faces: sometimes the reverse: but Toby knew no more (though he often speculated on these trifles, standing idle in the streets) whence they came, or where they went, or whether, when the lips moved, one kind word was said of him in all the year, than did the Chimes themselves.

Toby was not a casuist - that he knew of, at least - and I don't mean to say that when he began to take to the Bells, and to knit up his first rough acquaintance with them into something of a closer and more delicate woof, he passed through these considerations one by one, or held any formal review or great field-day in his thoughts. But what I mean to say, and do say is, that as the functions of Toby's body, his digestive organs for example, did of their own cunning, and by a great many operations of which he was altogether ignorant, and the knowledge of which would have astonished him very much, arrive at a certain end; so his mental faculties, without his privity or concurrence, set all these wheels and springs in motion, with a thousand others, when they worked to bring about his liking for the Bells.

And though I had said his love, I would not have recalled the word, though it would scarcely have expressed his complicated feeling. For, being but a simple man, he invested them with a strange and solemn character. They were so mysterious, often heard and never seen; so high up, so far off, so full of such a deep strong melody, that he regarded them with a species of awe; and sometimes when he looked up at the dark arched windows in the tower, he half expected to be beckoned to by something which was not a Bell, and yet was what he had heard so often sounding in the Chimes. For all this, Toby scouted with indignation a certain flying rumour that the Chimes were haunted, as implying the possibility of their being connected with any Evil thing. In short, they were very often in his ears, and very often in his thoughts, but always in his good opinion; and he very often got such a crick in his neck by staring with his mouth wide open, at the steeple where they hung, that he was fain to take an extra trot or two, afterwards, to cure it.

The very thing he was in the act of doing one cold day, when the last drowsy sound of Twelve o'clock, just struck, was humming like a melodious monster of a Bee, and not by any means a busy bee, all through the steeple!

'Dinner-time, eh!' said Toby, trotting up and down before the church. 'Ah!'

Toby's nose was very red, and his eyelids were very red, and he winked very much, and his shoulders were very near his ears, and his legs were very stiff, and altogether he was evidently a long way upon the frosty side of cool.

‘Dinner-time, eh!’ repeated Toby, using his right-hand muffler like an infantine boxing-glove, and punishing his chest for being cold. ‘Ah-h-h-h!’

He took a silent trot, after that, for a minute or two.

‘There’s nothing,’ said Toby, breaking forth afresh - but here he stopped short in his trot, and with a face of great interest and some alarm, felt his nose carefully all the way up. It was but a little way (not being much of a nose) and he had soon finished.

‘I thought it was gone,’ said Toby, trotting off again. ‘It’s all right, however. I am sure I couldn’t blame it if it was to go. It has a precious hard service of it in the bitter weather, and precious little to look forward to; for I don’t take snuff myself. It’s a good deal tried, poor creetur, at the best of times; for when it *does* get hold of a pleasant whiff or so (which an’t too often) it’s generally from somebody else’s dinner, a-coming home from the baker’s.’

The reflection reminded him of that other reflection, which he had left unfinished.

‘There’s nothing,’ said Toby, ‘more regular in its coming round than dinner-time, and nothing less regular in its coming round than dinner. That’s the great difference between ’em. It’s took me a long time to find it out. I wonder whether it would be worth any gentleman’s while, now, to buy that obserwation for the Papers; or the Parliament!’

Toby was only joking, for he gravely shook his head in self-depreciation.

‘Why! Lord!’ said Toby. ‘The Papers is full of obserwations as it is; and so’s the Parliament. Here’s last week’s paper, now;’ taking a very dirty one from his pocket, and holding it from him at arm’s length; ‘full of obserwations! Full of obserwations! I like to know the news as well as any man,’ said Toby, slowly; folding it a little smaller, and putting it in his pocket again: ‘but it almost goes against the grain with me to read a paper now. It frightens me almost. I don’t know what we poor people are coming to. Lord send we may be coming to something better in the New Year nigh upon us!’

‘Why, father, father!’ said a pleasant voice, hard by.

But Toby, not hearing it, continued to trot backwards and forwards: musing as he went, and talking to himself.

‘It seems as if we can’t go right, or do right, or be righted,’ said Toby. ‘I hadn’t much schooling, myself, when I was young; and I can’t make out whether we have any business on the face of the earth, or not. Sometimes I think we must have - a little; and sometimes I think we must be intruding. I get so puzzled sometimes that I am not even able to make up my mind whether there is any good at all in us, or whether we are born bad. We seem to be dreadful things; we seem to give a deal of trouble; we are always being complained of and guarded against. One way or other, we fill the papers. Talk of a New Year!’ said Toby, mournfully. ‘I can bear up as well as another man at most times; better than a good many, for I am as strong as a lion, and all men an’t; but supposing it should really be that we have no right to a New Year - supposing we really *are* intruding - ’

‘Why, father, father!’ said the pleasant voice again.

Toby heard it this time; started; stopped; and shortening his sight, which had been directed a long way off as seeking the enlightenment in the very heart of the approaching year, found himself face to face with his own child, and looking close into her eyes.

Bright eyes they were. Eyes that would bear a world of looking in, before their depth was fathomed. Dark eyes, that reflected back the eyes which searched them; not flashingly, or at the owner’s will, but with a clear, calm, honest, patient radiance, claiming kindred with that light which Heaven called into being. Eyes that were beautiful and true, and beaming with Hope. With Hope so young and fresh; with Hope so buoyant, vigorous, and bright, despite the twenty years of work and poverty on which they had looked; that they became a voice to Trotty Veck, and said: ‘I think we have some business here - a little!’

Trotty kissed the lips belonging to the eyes, and squeezed the blooming face between his hands.

‘Why, Pet,’ said Trotty. ‘What’s to do? I didn’t expect you to-day, Meg.’

‘Neither did I expect to come, father,’ cried the girl, nodding her head and smiling as she spoke. ‘But here I am! And not alone; not alone!’

‘Why you don’t mean to say,’ observed Trotty, looking curiously at a covered basket which she carried in her hand, ‘that you - ’

‘Smell it, father dear,’ said Meg. ‘Only smell it!’

Trotty was going to lift up the cover at once, in a great hurry, when she gaily interposed her hand.

‘No, no, no,’ said Meg, with the glee of a child. ‘Lengthen it out a little. Let me just lift up the corner; just the lit-tle ti-ny cor-ner, you know,’ said Meg, suiting the action to the word with the utmost gentleness, and speaking very softly, as if she were afraid of being overheard by something inside the basket; ‘there. Now. What’s that?’

Toby took the shortest possible sniff at the edge of the basket, and cried out in a rapture:

‘Why, it’s hot!’

‘It’s burning hot!’ cried Meg. ‘Ha, ha, ha! It’s scalding hot!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’ roared Toby, with a sort of kick. ‘It’s scalding hot!’

‘But what is it, father?’ said Meg. ‘Come. You haven’t guessed what it is. And you must guess what it is. I can’t think of taking it out, till you guess what it is. Don’t be in such a hurry! Wait a minute! A little bit more of the cover. Now guess!’

Meg was in a perfect fright lest he should guess right too soon; shrinking away, as she held the basket towards him; curling up her pretty shoulders; stopping her ear with her hand, as if by so doing she could keep the right word out of Toby’s lips; and laughing softly the whole time.

Meanwhile Toby, putting a hand on each knee, bent down his nose to the basket, and took a long inspiration at the lid; the grin upon his withered face expanding in the process, as if he were inhaling laughing gas.

‘Ah! It’s very nice,’ said Toby. ‘It an’t - I suppose it an’t Polonies?’

‘No, no, no!’ cried Meg, delighted. ‘Nothing like Polonies!’

‘No,’ said Toby, after another sniff. ‘It’s - it’s mellower than Polonies. It’s very nice. It improves every moment. It’s too decided for Trotters. An’t it?’

Meg was in an ecstasy. He could not have gone wider of the mark than Trotters - except Polonies.

‘Liver?’ said Toby, communing with himself. ‘No. There’s a mildness about it that don’t answer to liver. Pettitoes? No. It an’t faint enough for pettitoes. It wants the stringiness of Cocks’ heads. And I know it an’t sausages. I’ll tell you what it is. It’s chitterlings!’

‘No, it an’t!’ cried Meg, in a burst of delight. ‘No, it an’t!’

‘Why, what am I a-thinking of!’ said Toby, suddenly recovering a position as near the perpendicular as it was possible for him to assume. ‘I shall forget my own name next. It’s tripe!’

Tripe it was; and Meg, in high joy, protested he should say, in half a minute more, it was the best tripe ever stewed.

‘And so,’ said Meg, busying herself exultingly with the basket, ‘I’ll lay the cloth at once, father; for I have brought the tripe in a basin, and tied the basin up in a pocket-handkerchief; and if I like to be proud for once, and spread that for a cloth, and call it a cloth, there’s no law to prevent me; is there, father?’

‘Not that I know of, my dear,’ said Toby. ‘But they’re always a-bringing up some new law or other.’

‘And according to what I was reading you in the paper the other day, father; what the Judge said, you know; we poor people are supposed to know them all. Ha ha! What a mistake! My goodness me, how clever they think us!’

‘Yes, my dear,’ cried Trotty; ‘and they’d be very fond of any one of us that *did* know ’em all. He’d grow fat upon the work he’d get, that man, and be popular with the gentlefolks in his neighbourhood. Very much so!’

‘He’d eat his dinner with an appetite, whoever he was, if it smelt like this,’ said Meg, cheerfully. ‘Make haste, for there’s a hot potato besides, and half a pint of fresh-drawn beer in a bottle. Where will you dine, father? On the Post, or on the Steps? Dear, dear, how grand we are. Two places to choose from!’

‘The steps to-day, my Pet,’ said Trotty. ‘Steps in dry weather. Post in wet. There’s a greater conveniency in the steps at all times, because of the sitting down; but they’re rheumatic in the damp.’

‘Then here,’ said Meg, clapping her hands, after a moment’s bustle; ‘here it is, all ready! And beautiful it looks! Come, father. Come!’

Since his discovery of the contents of the basket, Trotty had been standing looking at her - and had been speaking too - in an abstracted manner, which showed that though she was the object of his thoughts and eyes, to the exclusion even of tripe, he neither saw nor thought about her as she was at that moment, but had before him some imaginary rough sketch or drama of her future life. Roused, now, by her cheerful summons, he shook off a melancholy shake of the head which was just coming upon him, and trotted to her side. As he was stooping to sit down, the Chimes rang.

‘Amen!’ said Trotty, pulling off his hat and looking up towards them.

‘Amen to the Bells, father?’ cried Meg.

‘They broke in like a grace, my dear,’ said Trotty, taking his seat. ‘They’d say a good one, I am sure, if they could. Many’s the kind thing they say to me.’

‘The Bells do, father!’ laughed Meg, as she set the basin, and a knife and fork, before him. ‘Well!’

‘Seem to, my Pet,’ said Trotty, falling to with great vigour. ‘And where’s the difference? If I hear ’em, what does it matter whether they speak it or not? Why bless you, my dear,’ said Toby, pointing at the tower with his fork, and becoming more animated under the influence of dinner, ‘how often have I heard them bells say, “Toby Veck, Toby Veck, keep a good heart, Toby! Toby Veck, Toby Veck, keep a good heart, Toby!” A million times? More!’

‘Well, I never!’ cried Meg.

She had, though - over and over again. For it was Toby’s constant topic.

‘When things is very bad,’ said Trotty; ‘very bad indeed, I mean; almost at the worst; then it’s “Toby Veck, Toby Veck, job coming soon, Toby! Toby Veck, Toby Veck, job coming soon, Toby!” That way.’

‘And it comes - at last, father,’ said Meg, with a touch of sadness in her pleasant voice.

‘Always,’ answered the unconscious Toby. ‘Never fails.’

While this discourse was holding, Trotty made no pause in his attack upon the savoury meat before him, but cut and ate, and cut and drank, and cut and chewed, and dodged about, from tripe to hot potato, and from hot potato back again to tripe, with an unctuous and unflagging relish. But happening now to look all round the street - in case anybody should be beckoning from any door or window, for a porter - his eyes, in coming back again, encountered Meg: sitting opposite to him, with her arms folded and only busy in watching his progress with a smile of happiness.

‘Why, Lord forgive me!’ said Trotty, dropping his knife and fork. ‘My dove! Meg! why didn’t you tell me what a beast I was?’

‘Father?’

‘Sitting here,’ said Trotty, in penitent explanation, ‘cramming, and stuffing, and gorging myself; and you before me there, never so much as breaking your precious fast, nor wanting to, when - ’

‘But I have broken it, father,’ interposed his daughter, laughing, ‘all to bits. I have had my dinner.’

‘Nonsense,’ said Trotty. ‘Two dinners in one day! It an’t possible! You might as well tell me that two New Year’s Days will come together, or that I have had a gold head all my life, and never changed it.’

‘I have had my dinner, father, for all that,’ said Meg, coming nearer to him. ‘And if you’ll go on with yours, I’ll tell you how and where; and how your dinner came to be brought; and - and something else besides.’

Toby still appeared incredulous; but she looked into his face with her clear eyes, and laying her hand upon his shoulder, motioned him to go on while the meat was hot. So Trotty took up his knife and fork again, and went to work. But much more slowly than before, and shaking his head, as if he were not at all pleased with himself.

‘I had my dinner, father,’ said Meg, after a little hesitation, ‘with - with Richard. His dinner-time was early; and as he brought his dinner with him when he came to see me, we - we had it together, father.’

Trotty took a little beer, and smacked his lips. Then he said, ‘Oh!’ - because she waited.

‘And Richard says, father - ’ Meg resumed. Then stopped.

‘What does Richard say, Meg?’ asked Toby.

‘Richard says, father - ’ Another stoppage.

‘Richard’s a long time saying it,’ said Toby.

‘He says then, father,’ Meg continued, lifting up her eyes at last, and speaking in a tremble, but quite plainly; ‘another year is nearly gone, and where is the use of waiting on from year to year, when it is so unlikely we shall ever be better off than we are now? He says we are poor now, father, and we shall be poor then, but we are young now, and years will make us old before we know it. He says that if we wait: people in our condition: until we see our way quite clearly, the way will be a narrow one indeed - the common way - the Grave, father.'

A bolder man than Trotty Veck must needs have drawn upon his boldness largely, to deny it. Trotty held his peace.

'And how hard, father, to grow old, and die, and think we might have cheered and helped each other! How hard in all our lives to love each other; and to grieve, apart, to see each other working, changing, growing old and grey. Even if I got the better of it, and forgot him (which I never could), oh father dear, how hard to have a heart so full as mine is now, and live to have it slowly drained out every drop, without the recollection of one happy moment of a woman's life, to stay behind and comfort me, and make me better!'

Trotty sat quite still. Meg dried her eyes, and said more gaily: that is to say, with here a laugh, and there a sob, and here a laugh and sob together:

'So Richard says, father; as his work was yesterday made certain for some time to come, and as I love him, and have loved him full three years - ah! longer than that, if he knew it! - will I marry him on New Year's Day; the best and happiest day, he says, in the whole year, and one that is almost sure to bring good fortune with it. It's a short notice, father - isn't it? - but I haven't my fortune to be settled, or my wedding dresses to be made, like the great ladies, father, have I? And he said so much, and said it in his way; so strong and earnest, and all the time so kind and gentle; that I said I'd come and talk to you, father. And as they paid the money for that work of mine this morning (unexpectedly, I am sure!) and as you have fared very poorly for a whole week, and as I couldn't help wishing there should be something to make this day a sort of holiday to you as well as a dear and happy day to me, father, I made a little treat and brought it to surprise you.'

'And see how he leaves it cooling on the step!' said another voice.

It was the voice of this same Richard, who had come upon them unobserved, and stood before the father and daughter; looking down upon them with a face as glowing as the iron on which his stout sledge-hammer daily rung. A handsome, well-made, powerful youngster he was; with eyes that sparkled like the red-hot droppings from a furnace fire; black hair that curled about his swarthy temples rarely; and a smile - a smile that bore out Meg's eulogium on his style of conversation.

'See how he leaves it cooling on the step!' said Richard. 'Meg don't know what he likes. Not she!'

Trotty, all action and enthusiasm, immediately reached up his hand to Richard, and was going to address him in great hurry, when the house-door opened without any warning, and a footman very nearly put his foot into the tripe.

'Out of the vays here, will you! You must always go and be a-settin on our steps, must you! You can't go and give a turn to none of the neighbours never, can't you! *Will* you clear the road, or won't you?'

Strictly speaking, the last question was irrelevant, as they had already done it.

'What's the matter, what's the matter!' said the gentleman for whom the door was opened; coming out of the house at that kind of light-heavy pace - that peculiar compromise between a walk and a jog-trot - with which a gentleman upon the smooth down-hill of life, wearing creaking boots, a watch-chain, and clean linen, *may* come out of his house: not only without any abatement of his dignity, but with an expression of having important and wealthy engagements elsewhere. 'What's the matter! What's the matter!'

'You're always a-being begged, and prayed, upon your bended knees you are,' said the footman with great emphasis to Trotty Veck, 'to let our door-steps be. Why don't you let 'em be? CAN'T you let 'em be?'

'There! That'll do, that'll do!' said the gentleman. 'Halloa there! Porter!' beckoning with his head to Trotty Veck. 'Come here. What's that? Your dinner?'

'Yes, sir,' said Trotty, leaving it behind him in a corner.

'Don't leave it there,' exclaimed the gentleman. 'Bring it here, bring it here. So! This is your dinner, is it?'

'Yes, sir,' repeated Trotty, looking with a fixed eye and a watery mouth, at the piece of tripe he had reserved for a last delicious tit-bit; which the gentleman was now turning over and over on the end of the fork.

Two other gentlemen had come out with him. One was a low-spirited gentleman of middle age, of a meagre habit, and a disconsolate face; who kept his hands continually in the pockets of his scanty pepper-and-salt trousers, very large and dog's-eared from that custom; and was not particularly well brushed or washed. The other, a full-sized, sleek, well-conditioned gentleman, in a blue coat with bright buttons, and a white cravat. This gentleman had a very red face, as if an undue proportion of the blood in his body were squeezed up into his head; which perhaps accounted for his having also the appearance of being rather cold about the heart.

He who had Toby's meat upon the fork, called to the first one by the name of Filer; and they both drew near together. Mr. Filer being exceedingly short-sighted, was obliged to go so close to the remnant of Toby's dinner before he could make out what it was, that Toby's heart leaped up into his mouth. But Mr. Filer didn't eat it.

'This is a description of animal food, Alderman,' said Filer, making little punches in it with a pencil-case, 'commonly known to the labouring population of this country, by the name of tripe.'

The Alderman laughed, and winked; for he was a merry fellow, Alderman Cute. Oh, and a sly fellow too! A knowing fellow. Up to everything. Not to be imposed upon. Deep in the people's hearts! He knew them, Cute did. I believe you!

'But who eats tripe?' said Mr. Filer, looking round. 'Tripe is without an exception the least economical, and the most wasteful article of consumption that the markets of this country can by possibility produce. The loss upon a pound of tripe has been found to be, in the boiling, seven-eights of a fifth more than the loss upon a pound of any other animal substance whatever. Tripe is more expensive, properly understood, than the hothouse pine-apple. Taking into account the number of animals slaughtered yearly within the bills of mortality alone; and forming a low estimate of the quantity of tripe which the carcases of those animals, reasonably well butchered, would yield; I find that the waste on that amount of tripe, if boiled, would victual a garrison of five hundred men for five months of thirty-one days each, and a February over. The Waste, the Waste!'

Trotty stood aghast, and his legs shook under him. He seemed to have starved a garrison of five hundred men with his own hand.

'Who eats tripe?' said Mr. Filer, warmly. 'Who eats tripe?'

Trotty made a miserable bow.

'You do, do you?' said Mr. Filer. 'Then I'll tell you something. You snatch your tripe, my friend, out of the mouths of widows and orphans.'

'I hope not, sir,' said Trotty, faintly. 'I'd sooner die of want!'

'Divide the amount of tripe before-mentioned, Alderman,' said Mr. Filer, 'by the estimated number of existing widows and orphans, and the result will be one pennyweight of tripe to each. Not a grain is left for that man. Consequently, he's a robber.'

Trotty was so shocked, that it gave him no concern to see the Alderman finish the tripe himself. It was a relief to get rid of it, anyhow.

'And what do you say?' asked the Alderman, jocosely, of the red-faced gentleman in the blue coat. 'You have heard friend Filer. What do *you say*?'

'What's it possible to say?' returned the gentleman. 'What *is* to be said? Who can take any interest in a fellow like this,' meaning Trotty; 'in such degenerate times as these? Look at him. What an object! The good old times, the grand old times, the great old times! *Those* were the times for a bold peasantry, and all that sort of thing. Those were the times for every sort of thing, in fact. There's nothing now-a-days. Ah!' sighed the red-faced gentleman. 'The good old times, the good old times!'

The gentleman didn't specify what particular times he alluded to; nor did he say whether he objected to the present times, from a disinterested consciousness that they had done nothing very remarkable in producing himself.

'The good old times, the good old times,' repeated the gentleman. 'What times they were! They were the only times. It's of no use talking about any other times, or discussing what the people are in *these* times. You don't call these, times, do you? I don't. Look into Strutt's Costumes, and see what a Porter used to be, in any of the good old English reigns.'

'He hadn't, in his very best circumstances, a shirt to his back, or a stocking to his foot; and there was scarcely a vegetable in all England for him to put into his mouth,' said Mr. Filer. 'I can prove it, by tables.'

But still the red-faced gentleman extolled the good old times, the grand old times, the great old times. No matter what anybody else said, he still went turning round and round in one set form of words concerning them; as a poor squirrel turns and turns in its revolving cage; touching the mechanism, and trick of which, it has probably quite as distinct perceptions, as ever this red-faced gentleman had of his deceased Millennium.

It is possible that poor Trotty's faith in these very vague Old Times was not entirely destroyed, for he felt vague enough at that moment. One thing, however, was plain to him, in the midst of his distress; to wit, that however these gentlemen might differ in details, his misgivings of that morning, and of many other mornings, were well founded. 'No, no. We can't go right or do right,' thought Trotty in despair. 'There is no good in us. We are born bad!'

But Trotty had a father's heart within him; which had somehow got into his breast in spite of this decree; and he could not bear that Meg, in the blush of her brief joy, should have her fortune read by these wise gentlemen. 'God help her,' thought poor Trotty. 'She will know it soon enough.'

He anxiously signed, therefore, to the young smith, to take her away. But he was so busy, talking to her softly at a little distance, that he only became conscious of this desire, simultaneously with Alderman Cute. Now, the Alderman had not yet had his say, but *he* was a philosopher, too - practical, though! Oh, very practical - and, as he had no idea of losing any portion of his audience, he cried 'Stop!'

'Now, you know,' said the Alderman, addressing his two friends, with a self-complacent smile upon his face which was habitual to him, 'I am a plain man, and a practical man; and I go to work in a plain practical way. That's my way. There is not the least mystery or difficulty in dealing with this sort of people if you only understand 'em, and can talk to 'em in their own manner. Now, you Porter! Don't you ever tell me, or anybody else, my friend, that you haven't always enough to eat, and of the best; because I know better. I have tasted your tripe, you know, and you can't "chaff" me. You understand what "chaff" means, eh? That's the right word, isn't it? Ha, ha, ha! Lord bless you,' said the Alderman, turning to his friends again, 'it's the easiest thing on earth to deal with this sort of people, if you understand 'em.'

Famous man for the common people, Alderman Cute! Never out of temper with them! Easy, affable, joking, knowing gentleman!

'You see, my friend,' pursued the Alderman, 'there's a great deal of nonsense talked about Want - "hard up," you know; that's the phrase, isn't it? ha! ha! ha! - and I intend to Put it Down. There's a certain amount of cant in vogue about Starvation, and I mean to Put it Down. That's all! Lord bless you,' said the Alderman, turning to his friends again, 'you may Put Down anything among this sort of people, if you only know the way to set about it.'

Trotty took Meg's hand and drew it through his arm. He didn't seem to know what he was doing though.

‘Your daughter, eh?’ said the Alderman, chucking her familiarly under the chin.

Always affable with the working classes, Alderman Cute! Knew what pleased them! Not a bit of pride!

‘Where’s her mother?’ asked that worthy gentleman.

‘Dead,’ said Toby. ‘Her mother got up linen; and was called to Heaven when She was born.’

‘Not to get up linen *there*, I suppose,’ remarked the Alderman pleasantly

Toby might or might not have been able to separate his wife in Heaven from her old pursuits. But query: If Mrs. Alderman Cute had gone to Heaven, would Mr. Alderman Cute have pictured her as holding any state or station there?

‘And you’re making love to her, are you?’ said Cute to the young smith.

‘Yes,’ returned Richard quickly, for he was nettled by the question. ‘And we are going to be married on New Year’s Day.’

‘What do you mean!’ cried Filer sharply. ‘Married!’

‘Why, yes, we’re thinking of it, Master,’ said Richard. ‘We’re rather in a hurry, you see, in case it should be Put Down first.’

‘Ah!’ cried Filer, with a groan. ‘Put *that* down indeed, Alderman, and you’ll do something. Married! Married!! The ignorance of the first principles of political economy on the part of these people; their improvidence; their wickedness; is, by Heavens! enough to - Now look at that couple, will you!’

Well? They were worth looking at. And marriage seemed as reasonable and fair a deed as they need have in contemplation.

‘A man may live to be as old as Methuselah,’ said Mr. Filer, ‘and may labour all his life for the benefit of such people as those; and may heap up facts on figures, facts on figures, facts on figures, mountains high and dry; and he can no more hope to persuade ’em that they have no right or business to be married, than he can hope to persuade ’em that they have no earthly right or business to be born. And *that* we know they haven’t. We reduced it to a mathematical certainty long ago!’

Alderman Cute was mightily diverted, and laid his right forefinger on the side of his nose, as much as to say to both his friends, ‘Observe me, will you! Keep your eye on the practical man!’ - and called Meg to him.

‘Come here, my girl!’ said Alderman Cute.

The young blood of her lover had been mounting, wrathfully, within the last few minutes; and he was indisposed to let her come. But, setting a constraint upon himself, he came forward with a stride as Meg approached, and stood beside her. Trotty kept her hand within his arm still, but looked from face to face as wildly as a sleeper in a dream.

‘Now, I’m going to give you a word or two of good advice, my girl,’ said the Alderman, in his nice easy way. ‘It’s my place to give advice, you know, because I’m a Justice. You know I’m a Justice, don’t you?’

Meg timidly said, ‘Yes.’ But everybody knew Alderman Cute was a Justice! Oh dear, so active a Justice always! Who such a mote of brightness in the public eye, as Cute!

‘You are going to be married, you say,’ pursued the Alderman. ‘Very unbecoming and indelicate in one of your sex! But never mind that. After you are married, you’ll quarrel with your husband and come to be a distressed wife. You may think not; but you will, because I tell you so. Now, I give you fair warning, that I have made up my mind to Put distressed wives Down. So, don’t be brought before me. You’ll have children - boys. Those boys will grow up bad, of course, and run wild in the streets, without shoes and stockings. Mind, my young friend! I’ll convict ’em summarily, every one, for I am determined to Put boys without shoes and stockings, Down. Perhaps your husband will die young (most likely) and leave you with a baby. Then you’ll be turned out of doors, and wander up and down the streets. Now, don’t wander near me, my dear, for I am resolved, to Put all wandering mothers Down. All young mothers, of all sorts and kinds, it's my determination to Put Down. Don't think to plead illness as an excuse with me; or babies as an excuse with me; for all sick persons and young children (I hope you know the church-service, but I'm afraid not) I am determined to Put Down. And if you attempt, desperately, and ungratefully, and impiously, and fraudulently attempt, to drown yourself, or hang yourself, I'll have no pity for you, for I have made up my mind to Put all suicide Down! If there is one thing,' said the Alderman, with his self-satisfied smile, 'on which I can be said to have made up my mind more than on another, it is to Put suicide Down. So don't try it on. That's the phrase, isn't it? Ha, ha! now we understand each other.'

Toby knew not whether to be agonised or glad, to see that Meg had turned a deadly white, and dropped her lover's hand.

'And as for you, you dull dog,' said the Alderman, turning with even increased cheerfulness and urbanity to the young smith, 'what are you thinking of being married for? What do you want to be married for, you silly fellow? If I was a fine, young, strapping chap like you, I should be ashamed of being milksop enough to pin myself to a woman's apron-strings! Why, she'll be an old woman before you're a middle-aged man! And a pretty figure you'll cut then, with a draggle-tailed wife and a crowd of squalling children crying after you wherever you go!'

O, he knew how to banter the common people, Alderman Cute!

'There! Go along with you,' said the Alderman, 'and repent. Don't make such a fool of yourself as to get married on New Year's Day. You'll think very differently of it, long before next New Year's Day: a trim young fellow like you, with all the girls looking after you. There! Go along with you!'

They went along. Not arm in arm, or hand in hand, or interchanging bright glances; but, she in tears; he, gloomy and down-looking. Were these the hearts that had so lately made old Toby's leap up from its faintness? No, no. The Alderman (a blessing on his head!) had Put *them* Down.

'As you happen to be here,' said the Alderman to Toby, 'you shall carry a letter for me. Can you be quick? You're an old man.'

Toby, who had been looking after Meg, quite stupidly, made shift to murmur out that he was very quick, and very strong.

‘How old are you?’ inquired the Alderman.

‘I’m over sixty, sir,’ said Toby.

‘O! This man’s a great deal past the average age, you know,’ cried Mr. Filer breaking in as if his patience would bear some trying, but this really was carrying matters a little too far.

‘I feel I’m intruding, sir,’ said Toby. ‘I - I misdoubted it this morning. Oh dear me!’

The Alderman cut him short by giving him the letter from his pocket. Toby would have got a shilling too; but Mr. Filer clearly showing that in that case he would rob a certain given number of persons of ninepence-halfpenny a-piece, he only got sixpence; and thought himself very well off to get that.

Then the Alderman gave an arm to each of his friends, and walked off in high feather; but, he immediately came hurrying back alone, as if he had forgotten something.

‘Porter!’ said the Alderman.

‘Sir!’ said Toby.

‘Take care of that daughter of yours. She’s much too handsome.’

‘Even her good looks are stolen from somebody or other, I suppose,’ thought Toby, looking at the sixpence in his hand, and thinking of the tripe. ‘She’s been and robbed five hundred ladies of a bloom a-piece, I shouldn’t wonder. It’s very dreadful!’

‘She’s much too handsome, my man,’ repeated the Alderman. ‘The chances are, that she’ll come to no good, I clearly see. Observe what I say. Take care of her!’ With which, he hurried off again.

‘Wrong every way. Wrong every way!’ said Trotty, clasping his hands. ‘Born bad. No business here!’

The Chimes came clashing in upon him as he said the words. Full, loud, and sounding - but with no encouragement. No, not a drop.

‘The tune’s changed,’ cried the old man, as he listened. ‘There’s not a word of all that fancy in it. Why should there be? I have no business with the New Year nor with the old one neither. Let me die!’

Still the Bells, pealing forth their changes, made the very air spin. Put ’em down, Put ’em down! Good old Times, Good old Times! Facts and Figures, Facts and Figures! Put ’em down, Put ’em down! If they said anything they said this, until the brain of Toby reeled.

He pressed his bewildered head between his hands, as if to keep it from splitting asunder. A well-timed action, as it happened; for finding the letter in one of them, and being by that means reminded of his charge, he fell, mechanically, into his usual trot, and trotted off.

CHAPTER II - The Second Quarter.

The letter Toby had received from Alderman Cute, was addressed to a great man in the great district of the town. The greatest district of the town. It must have been the greatest district of the town, because it was commonly called ‘the world’ by its inhabitants. The letter positively seemed heavier in Toby’s hand, than another letter. Not because the Alderman had sealed it with a very large coat of arms and no end of wax, but because of the weighty name on the superscription, and the ponderous amount of gold and silver with which it was associated.

‘How different from us!’ thought Toby, in all simplicity and earnestness, as he looked at the direction. ‘Divide the lively turtles in the bills of mortality, by the number of gentlefolks able to buy ’em; and whose share does he take but his own! As to snatching tripe from anybody’s mouth - he’d scorn it!’

With the involuntary homage due to such an exalted character, Toby interposed a corner of his apron between the letter and his fingers.

‘His children,’ said Trotty, and a mist rose before his eyes; ‘his daughters - Gentlemen may win their hearts and marry them; they may be happy wives and mothers; they may be handsome like my darling M-e-’.

He couldn’t finish the name. The final letter swelled in his throat, to the size of the whole alphabet.

‘Never mind,’ thought Trotty. ‘I know what I mean. That’s more than enough for me.’ And with this consolatory rumination, trotted on.

It was a hard frost, that day. The air was bracing, crisp, and clear. The wintry sun, though powerless for warmth, looked brightly down upon the ice it was too weak to melt, and set a radiant glory there. At other times, Trotty might have learned a poor man’s lesson from the wintry sun; but, he was past that, now.

The Year was Old, that day. The patient Year had lived through the reproaches and misuses of its slanderers, and faithfully performed its work. Spring, summer, autumn, winter. It had laboured through the destined round, and now laid down its weary head to die. Shut out from hope, high impulse, active happiness, itself, but active messenger of many joys to others, it made appeal in its decline to have its toiling days and patient hours remembered, and to die in peace. Trotty might have read a poor man’s allegory in the fading year; but he was past that, now.

And only he? Or has the like appeal been ever made, by seventy years at once upon an English labourer’s head, and made in vain!

The streets were full of motion, and the shops were decked out gaily. The New Year, like an Infant Heir to the whole world, was waited for, with welcomes, presents, and rejoicings. There were books and toys for the New Year, glittering trinkets for the New Year, dresses for the New Year, schemes of fortune for the New Year; new inventions to beguile it. Its life was parcelled out in almanacks and pocket-books; the coming of its moons, and stars, and tides, was known beforehand to the moment; all the workings of its seasons in their days and nights, were calculated with as much precision as Mr. Filer could work sums in men and women.

The New Year, the New Year. Everywhere the New Year! The Old Year was already looked upon as dead; and its effects were selling cheap, like some drowned mariner's aboardship. Its patterns were Last Year's, and going at a sacrifice, before its breath was gone. Its treasures were mere dirt, beside the riches of its unborn successor!

Trotty had no portion, to his thinking, in the New Year or the Old.

'Put 'em down, Put 'em down! Facts and Figures, Facts and Figures! Good old Times, Good old Times! Put 'em down, Put 'em down!' - his trot went to that measure, and would fit itself to nothing else.

But, even that one, melancholy as it was, brought him, in due time, to the end of his journey. To the mansion of Sir Joseph Bowley, Member of Parliament.

The door was opened by a Porter. Such a Porter! Not of Toby's order. Quite another thing. His place was the ticket though; not Toby's.

This Porter underwent some hard panting before he could speak; having breathed himself by coming incautiously out of his chair, without first taking time to think about it and compose his mind. When he had found his voice - which it took him a long time to do, for it was a long way off, and hidden under a load of meat - he said in a fat whisper,

'Who's it from?'

Toby told him.

‘You’re to take it in, yourself,’ said the Porter, pointing to a room at the end of a long passage, opening from the hall. ‘Everything goes straight in, on this day of the year. You’re not a bit too soon; for the carriage is at the door now, and they have only come to town for a couple of hours, a’ purpose.’

Toby wiped his feet (which were quite dry already) with great care, and took the way pointed out to him; observing as he went that it was an awfully grand house, but hushed and covered up, as if the family were in the country. Knocking at the room-door, he was told to enter from within; and doing so found himself in a spacious library, where, at a table strewn with files and papers, were a stately lady in a bonnet; and a not very stately gentleman in black who wrote from her dictation; while another, and an older, and a much statelier gentleman, whose hat and cane were on the table, walked up and down, with one hand in his breast, and looked complacently from time to time at his own picture - a full length; a very full length - hanging over the fireplace.

‘What is this?’ said the last-named gentleman. ‘Mr. Fish, will you have the goodness to attend?’

Mr. Fish begged pardon, and taking the letter from Toby, handed it, with great respect.

‘From Alderman Cute, Sir Joseph.’

‘Is this all? Have you nothing else, Porter?’ inquired Sir Joseph.

Toby replied in the negative.

‘You have no bill or demand upon me - my name is Bowley, Sir Joseph Bowley - of any kind from anybody, have you?’ said Sir Joseph. ‘If you have, present it. There is a cheque-book by the side of Mr. Fish. I allow nothing to be carried into the New Year. Every description of account is settled in this house at the close of the old one. So that if death was to - to - ’

‘To cut,’ suggested Mr. Fish.

‘To sever, sir,’ returned Sir Joseph, with great asperity, ‘the cord of existence - my affairs would be found, I hope, in a state of preparation.’

‘My dear Sir Joseph!’ said the lady, who was greatly younger than the gentleman. ‘How shocking!’

‘My lady Bowley,’ returned Sir Joseph, floundering now and then, as in the great depth of his observations, ‘at this season of the year we should think of - of - ourselves. We should look into our - our accounts. We should feel that every return of so eventful a period in human transactions, involves a matter of deep moment between a man and his - and his banker.’

Sir Joseph delivered these words as if he felt the full morality of what he was saying; and desired that even Trotty should have an opportunity of being improved by such discourse. Possibly he had this end before him in still forbearing to break the seal of the letter, and in telling Trotty to wait where he was, a minute.

‘You were desiring Mr. Fish to say, my lady - ’ observed Sir Joseph.

‘Mr. Fish has said that, I believe,’ returned his lady, glancing at the letter. ‘But, upon my word, Sir Joseph, I don’t think I can let it go after all. It is so very dear.’

‘What is dear?’ inquired Sir Joseph.

‘That Charity, my love. They only allow two votes for a subscription of five pounds. Really monstrous!’

‘My lady Bowley,’ returned Sir Joseph, ‘you surprise me. Is the luxury of feeling in proportion to the number of votes; or is it, to a rightly constituted mind, in proportion to the number of applicants, and the wholesome state of mind to which their canvassing reduces them? Is there no excitement of the purest kind in having two votes to dispose of among fifty people?’

‘Not to me, I acknowledge,’ replied the lady. ‘It bores one. Besides, one can’t oblige one’s acquaintance. But you are the Poor Man’s Friend, you know, Sir Joseph. You think otherwise.’

‘I *am* the Poor Man’s Friend,’ observed Sir Joseph, glancing at the poor man present. ‘As such I may be taunted. As such I have been taunted. But I ask no other title.’

‘Bless him for a noble gentleman!’ thought Trotty.

‘I don’t agree with Cute here, for instance,’ said Sir Joseph, holding out the letter. ‘I don’t agree with the Filer party. I don’t agree with any party. My friend the Poor Man, has no business with anything of that sort, and nothing of that sort has any business with him. My friend the Poor Man, in my district, is my business. No man or body of men has any right to interfere between my friend and me. That is the ground I take. I assume a - a paternal character towards my friend. I say, “My good fellow, I will treat you paternally.”’

Toby listened with great gravity, and began to feel more comfortable.

‘Your only business, my good fellow,’ pursued Sir Joseph, looking abstractedly at Toby; ‘your only business in life is with me. You needn’t trouble yourself to think about anything. I will think for you; I know what is good for you; I am your perpetual parent. Such is the dispensation of an all-wise Providence! Now, the design of your creation is - not that you should swill, and guzzle, and associate your enjoyments, brutally, with food; Toby thought remorsefully of the tripe; ‘but that you should feel the Dignity of Labour. Go forth erect into the cheerful morning air, and - and stop there. Live hard and temperately, be respectful, exercise your self-denial, bring up your family on next to nothing, pay your rent as regularly as the clock strikes, be punctual in your dealings (I set you a good example; you will find Mr. Fish, my confidential secretary, with a cash-box before him at all times); and you may trust to me to be your Friend and Father.’

‘Nice children, indeed, Sir Joseph!’ said the lady, with a shudder. ‘Rheumatisms, and fevers, and crooked legs, and asthmas, and all kinds of horrors!’

‘My lady,’ returned Sir Joseph, with solemnity, ‘not the less am I the Poor Man’s Friend and Father. Not the less shall he receive encouragement at my hands. Every quarter-day he will be put in communication with Mr. Fish. Every New Year's Day, myself and friends will drink his health. Once every year, myself and friends will address him with the deepest feeling. Once in his life, he may even perhaps receive; in public, in the presence of the gentry; a Trifle from a Friend. And when, upheld no more by these stimulants, and the Dignity of Labour, he sinks into his comfortable grave, then, my lady' - here Sir Joseph blew his nose - 'I will be a Friend and a Father - on the same terms - to his children.'

Toby was greatly moved.

'O! You have a thankful family, Sir Joseph!' cried his wife.

'My lady,' said Sir Joseph, quite majestically, 'Ingratitude is known to be the sin of that class. I expect no other return.'

'Ah! Born bad!' thought Toby. 'Nothing melts us.'

'What man can do, *I* do,' pursued Sir Joseph. 'I do my duty as the Poor Man's Friend and Father; and I endeavour to educate his mind, by inculcating on all occasions the one great moral lesson which that class requires. That is, entire Dependence on myself. They have no business whatever with - with themselves. If wicked and designing persons tell them otherwise, and they become impatient and discontented, and are guilty of insubordinate conduct and black-hearted ingratitude; which is undoubtedly the case; I am their Friend and Father still. It is so Ordained. It is in the nature of things.'

With that great sentiment, he opened the Alderman's letter; and read it.

'Very polite and attentive, I am sure!' exclaimed Sir Joseph. 'My lady, the Alderman is so obliging as to remind me that he has had "the distinguished honour" - he is very good - of meeting me at the house of our mutual friend Deedles, the banker; and he does me the favour to inquire whether it will be agreeable to me to have Will Fern put down.'

'*Most* agreeable!' replied my Lady Bowley. 'The worst man among them! He has been committing a robbery, I hope?'

‘Why no,’ said Sir Joseph’, referring to the letter. ‘Not quite. Very near. Not quite. He came up to London, it seems, to look for employment (trying to better himself - that’s his story), and being found at night asleep in a shed, was taken into custody, and carried next morning before the Alderman. The Alderman observes (very properly) that he is determined to put this sort of thing down; and that if it will be agreeable to me to have Will Fern put down, he will be happy to begin with him.’

‘Let him be made an example of, by all means,’ returned the lady. ‘Last winter, when I introduced pinking and eyelet-holing among the men and boys in the village, as a nice evening employment, and had the lines,

O let us love our occupations,
Bless the squire and his relations,
Live upon our daily rations,
And always know our proper stations,

set to music on the new system, for them to sing the while; this very Fern - I see him now - touched that hat of his, and said, “I humbly ask your pardon, my lady, but *an’t* I something different from a great girl?” I expected it, of course; who can expect anything but insolence and ingratitude from that class of people! That is not to the purpose, however. Sir Joseph! Make an example of him!’

‘Hem!’ coughed Sir Joseph. ‘Mr. Fish, if you’ll have the goodness to attend - ’

Mr. Fish immediately seized his pen, and wrote from Sir Joseph’s dictation.

‘Private. My dear Sir. I am very much indebted to you for your courtesy in the matter of the man William Fern, of whom, I regret to add, I can say nothing favourable. I have uniformly considered myself in the light of his Friend and Father, but have been repaid (a common case, I grieve to say) with ingratitude, and constant opposition to my plans. He is a turbulent and rebellious spirit. His character will not bear investigation. Nothing will persuade him to be happy when he might. Under these circumstances, it appears to me, I own, that when he comes before you again (as you informed me he promised to do to-morrow, pending your inquiries, and I think he may be so far relied upon), his committal for some short term as a Vagabond, would be a service to society, and would be a salutary example in a country where - for the sake of those who are, through good and evil report, the Friends and Fathers of the Poor, as well as with a view to that, generally speaking, misguided class themselves - examples are greatly needed. And I am,' and so forth.

'It appears,' remarked Sir Joseph when he had signed this letter, and Mr. Fish was sealing it, 'as if this were Ordained: really. At the close of the year, I wind up my account and strike my balance, even with William Fern!'

Trotty, who had long ago relapsed, and was very low-spirited, stepped forward with a rueful face to take the letter.

'With my compliments and thanks,' said Sir Joseph. 'Stop!'

'Stop!' echoed Mr. Fish.

'You have heard, perhaps,' said Sir Joseph, oracularly, 'certain remarks into which I have been led respecting the solemn period of time at which we have arrived, and the duty imposed upon us of settling our affairs, and being prepared. You have observed that I don't shelter myself behind my superior standing in society, but that Mr. Fish - that gentleman - has a cheque-book at his elbow, and is in fact here, to enable me to turn over a perfectly new leaf, and enter on the epoch before us with a clean account. Now, my friend, can you lay your hand upon your heart, and say, that you also have made preparations for a New Year?'

'I am afraid, sir,' stammered Trotty, looking meekly at him, 'that I am a - a - little behind-hand with the world.'

' Behind-hand with the world!' repeated Sir Joseph Bowley, in a tone of terrible distinctness.

‘I am afraid, sir,’ faltered Trotty, ‘that there’s a matter of ten or twelve shillings owing to Mrs. Chickenstalker.’

‘To Mrs. Chickenstalker!’ repeated Sir Joseph, in the same tone as before.

‘A shop, sir,’ exclaimed Toby, ‘in the general line. Also a - a little money on account of rent. A very little, sir. It oughtn’t to be owing, I know, but we have been hard put to it, indeed!’

Sir Joseph looked at his lady, and at Mr. Fish, and at Trotty, one after another, twice all round. He then made a despondent gesture with both hands at once, as if he gave the thing up altogether.

‘How a man, even among this improvident and impracticable race; an old man; a man grown grey; can look a New Year in the face, with his affairs in this condition; how he can lie down on his bed at night, and get up again in the morning, and - There!’ he said, turning his back on Trotty. ‘Take the letter. Take the letter!’

‘I heartily wish it was otherwise, sir,’ said Trotty, anxious to excuse himself. ‘We have been tried very hard.’

Sir Joseph still repeating ‘Take the letter, take the letter!’ and Mr. Fish not only saying the same thing, but giving additional force to the request by motioning the bearer to the door, he had nothing for it but to make his bow and leave the house. And in the street, poor Trotty pulled his worn old hat down on his head, to hide the grief he felt at getting no hold on the New Year, anywhere.

He didn’t even lift his hat to look up at the Bell tower when he came to the old church on his return. He halted there a moment, from habit: and knew that it was growing dark, and that the steeple rose above him, indistinct and faint, in the murky air. He knew, too, that the Chimes would ring immediately; and that they sounded to his fancy, at such a time, like voices in the clouds. But he only made the more haste to deliver the Alderman’s letter, and get out of the way before they began; for he dreaded to hear them tagging ‘Friends and Fathers, Friends and Fathers,’ to the burden they had rung out last.

Toby discharged himself of his commission, therefore, with all possible speed, and set off trotting homeward. But what with his pace, which was at best an awkward one in the street; and what with his hat, which didn't improve it; he trotted against somebody in less than no time, and was sent staggering out into the road.

'I beg your pardon, I'm sure!' said Trotty, pulling up his hat in great confusion, and between the hat and the torn lining, fixing his head into a kind of bee-hive. 'I hope I haven't hurt you.'

As to hurting anybody, Toby was not such an absolute Samson, but that he was much more likely to be hurt himself: and indeed, he had flown out into the road, like a shuttlecock. He had such an opinion of his own strength, however, that he was in real concern for the other party: and said again,

'I hope I haven't hurt you?'

The man against whom he had run; a sun-browned, sinewy, country-looking man, with grizzled hair, and a rough chin; stared at him for a moment, as if he suspected him to be in jest. But, satisfied of his good faith, he answered:

'No, friend. You have not hurt me.'

'Nor the child, I hope?' said Trotty.

'Nor the child,' returned the man. 'I thank you kindly.'

As he said so, he glanced at a little girl he carried in his arms, asleep: and shading her face with the long end of the poor handkerchief he wore about his throat, went slowly on.

The tone in which he said 'I thank you kindly,' penetrated Trotty's heart. He was so jaded and foot-sore, and so soiled with travel, and looked about him so forlorn and strange, that it was a comfort to him to be able to thank any one: no matter for how little. Toby stood gazing after him as he plodded wearily away, with the child's arm clinging round his neck.

At the figure in the worn shoes - now the very shade and ghost of shoes - rough leather leggings, common frock, and broad slouched hat, Trotty stood gazing, blind to the whole street. And at the child's arm, clinging round its neck.

Before he merged into the darkness the traveller stopped; and looking round, and seeing Trotty standing there yet, seemed undecided whether to return or go on. After doing first the one and then the other, he came back, and Trotty went half-way to meet him.

'You can tell me, perhaps,' said the man with a faint smile, 'and if you can I am sure you will, and I'd rather ask you than another - where Alderman Cute lives.'

'Close at hand,' replied Toby. 'I'll show you his house with pleasure.'

'I was to have gone to him elsewhere to-morrow,' said the man, accompanying Toby, 'but I'm uneasy under suspicion, and want to clear myself, and to be free to go and seek my bread - I don't know where. So, maybe he'll forgive my going to his house to-night.'

'It's impossible,' cried Toby with a start, 'that your name's Fern!'

'Eh!' cried the other, turning on him in astonishment.

'Fern! Will Fern!' said Trotty.

'That's my name,' replied the other.

'Why then,' said Trotty, seizing him by the arm, and looking cautiously round, 'for Heaven's sake don't go to him! Don't go to him! He'll put you down as sure as ever you were born. Here! come up this alley, and I'll tell you what I mean. Don't go to *him*.'

His new acquaintance looked as if he thought him mad; but he bore him company nevertheless. When they were shrouded from observation, Trotty told him what he knew, and what character he had received, and all about it.

The subject of his history listened to it with a calmness that surprised him. He did not contradict or interrupt it, once. He nodded his head now and then - more in corroboration of an old and worn-out story, it appeared, than in refutation of it; and once or twice threw back his hat, and passed his freckled hand over a brow, where every furrow he had ploughed seemed to have set its image in little. But he did no more.

‘It’s true enough in the main,’ he said, ‘master, I could sift grain from husk here and there, but let it be as ’tis. What odds? I have gone against his plans; to my misfortun’. I can’t help it; I should do the like to-morrow. As to character, them gentlefolks will search and search, and pry and pry, and have it as free from spot or speck in us, afore they’ll help us to a dry good word! - Well! I hope they don’t lose good opinion as easy as we do, or their lives is strict indeed, and hardly worth the keeping. For myself, master, I never took with that hand’ - holding it before him - ‘what wasn’t my own; and never held it back from work, however hard, or poorly paid. Whoever can deny it, let him chop it off! But when work won’t maintain me like a human creetur; when my living is so bad, that I am Hungry, out of doors and in; when I see a whole working life begin that way, go on that way, and end that way, without a chance or change; then I say to the gentlefolks “Keep away from me! Let my cottage be. My doors is dark enough without your darkening of ’em more. Don’t look for me to come up into the Park to help the show when there’s a Birthday, or a fine Speechmaking, or what not. Act your Plays and Games without me, and be welcome to ’em, and enjoy ’em. We’ve nowt to do with one another. I’m best let alone!”’

Seeing that the child in his arms had opened her eyes, and was looking about her in wonder, he checked himself to say a word or two of foolish prattle in her ear, and stand her on the ground beside him. Then slowly winding one of her long tresses round and round his rough forefinger like a ring, while she hung about his dusty leg, he said to Trotty:

‘I’m not a cross-grained man by natu’, I believe; and easy satisfied, I’m sure. I bear no ill-will against none of ’em. I only want to live like one of the Almighty’s creeturs. I can’t - I don’t - and so there’s a pit dug between me, and them that can and do. There’s others like me. You might tell ’em off by hundreds and by thousands, sooner than by ones.’

Trotty knew he spoke the Truth in this, and shook his head to signify as much.

‘I’ve got a bad name this way,’ said Fern; ‘and I’m not likely, I’m afeared, to get a better. ‘Tan’t lawful to be out of sorts, and I AM out of sorts, though God knows I’d sooner bear a cheerful spirit if I could. Well! I don’t know as this Alderman could hurt *me* much by sending me to jail; but without a friend to speak a word for me, he might do it; and you see - !’ pointing downward with his finger, at the child.

‘She has a beautiful face,’ said Trotty.

‘Why yes!’ replied the other in a low voice, as he gently turned it up with both his hands towards his own, and looked upon it steadfastly. ‘I’ve thought so, many times. I’ve thought so, when my hearth was very cold, and cupboard very bare. I thought so t’other night, when we were taken like two thieves. But they - they shouldn’t try the little face too often, should they, Lilian? That’s hardly fair upon a man!’

He sunk his voice so low, and gazed upon her with an air so stern and strange, that Toby, to divert the current of his thoughts, inquired if his wife were living.

‘I never had one,’ he returned, shaking his head. ‘She’s my brother’s child: a orphan. Nine year old, though you’d hardly think it; but she’s tired and worn out now. They’d have taken care on her, the Union - eight-and-twenty mile away from where we live - between four walls (as they took care of my old father when he couldn’t work no more, though he didn’t trouble ’em long); but I took her instead, and she’s lived with me ever since. Her mother had a friend once, in London here. We are trying to find her, and to find work too; but it’s a large place. Never mind. More room for us to walk about in, Lilly!’

Meeting the child’s eyes with a smile which melted Toby more than tears, he shook him by the hand.

'I don't so much as know your name,' he said, 'but I've opened my heart free to you, for I'm thankful to you; with good reason. I'll take your advice, and keep clear of this - '

'Justice,' suggested Toby.

'Ah!' he said. 'If that's the name they give him. This Justice. And to-morrow will try whether there's better fortun' to be met with, somewheres near London. Good night. A Happy New Year!'

'Stay!' cried Trotty, catching at his hand, as he relaxed his grip. 'Stay! The New Year never can be happy to me, if we part like this. The New Year never can be happy to me, if I see the child and you go wandering away, you don't know where, without a shelter for your heads. Come home with me! I'm a poor man, living in a poor place; but I can give you lodging for one night and never miss it. Come home with me! Here! I'll take her!' cried Trotty, lifting up the child. 'A pretty one! I'd carry twenty times her weight, and never know I'd got it. Tell me if I go too quick for you. I'm very fast. I always was!' Trotty said this, taking about six of his trotting paces to one stride of his fatigued companion; and with his thin legs quivering again, beneath the load he bore.

'Why, she's as light,' said Trotty, trotting in his speech as well as in his gait; for he couldn't bear to be thanked, and dreaded a moment's pause; 'as light as a feather. Lighter than a Peacock's feather - a great deal lighter. Here we are and here we go! Round this first turning to the right, Uncle Will, and past the pump, and sharp off up the passage to the left, right opposite the public-house. Here we are and here we go! Cross over, Uncle Will, and mind the kidney pieman at the corner! Here we are and here we go! Down the Mews here, Uncle Will, and stop at the black door, with "T. Veck, Ticket Porter," wrote upon a board; and here we are and here we go, and here we are indeed, my precious. Meg, surprising you!'

With which words Trotty, in a breathless state, set the child down before his daughter in the middle of the floor. The little visitor looked once at Meg; and doubting nothing in that face, but trusting everything she saw there; ran into her arms.

‘Here we are and here we go!’ cried Trotty, running round the room, and choking audibly. ‘Here, Uncle Will, here’s a fire you know! Why don’t you come to the fire? Oh here we are and here we go! Meg, my precious darling, where’s the kettle? Here it is and here it goes, and it’ll bile in no time!’

Trotty really had picked up the kettle somewhere or other in the course of his wild career and now put it on the fire: while Meg, seating the child in a warm corner, knelt down on the ground before her, and pulled off her shoes, and dried her wet feet on a cloth. Ay, and she laughed at Trotty too - so pleasantly, so cheerfully, that Trotty could have blessed her where she kneeled; for he had seen that, when they entered, she was sitting by the fire in tears.

‘Why, father!’ said Meg. ‘You’re crazy to-night, I think. I don’t know what the Bells would say to that. Poor little feet. How cold they are!’

‘Oh, they’re warmer now!’ exclaimed the child. ‘They’re quite warm now!’

‘No, no, no,’ said Meg. ‘We haven’t rubbed ’em half enough. We’re so busy. So busy! And when they’re done, we’ll brush out the damp hair; and when that’s done, we’ll bring some colour to the poor pale face with fresh water; and when that’s done, we’ll be so gay, and brisk, and happy - !’

The child, in a burst of sobbing, clasped her round the neck; caressed her fair cheek with its hand; and said, ‘Oh Meg! oh dear Meg!’

Toby’s blessing could have done no more. Who could do more!

‘Why, father!’ cried Meg, after a pause.

‘Here I am and here I go, my dear!’ said Trotty.

‘Good Gracious me!’ cried Meg. ‘He’s crazy! He’s put the dear child’s bonnet on the kettle, and hung the lid behind the door!’

‘I didn’t go for to do it, my love,’ said Trotty, hastily repairing this mistake. ‘Meg, my dear?’

Meg looked towards him and saw that he had elaborately stationed himself behind the chair of their male visitor, where with many mysterious gestures he was holding up the sixpence he had earned.

‘I see, my dear,’ said Trotty, ‘as I was coming in, half an ounce of tea lying somewhere on the stairs; and I’m pretty sure there was a bit of bacon too. As I don’t remember where it was exactly, I’ll go myself and try to find ’em.’

With this inscrutable artifice, Toby withdrew to purchase the viands he had spoken of, for ready money, at Mrs. Chickenstalker’s; and presently came back, pretending he had not been able to find them, at first, in the dark.

‘But here they are at last,’ said Trotty, setting out the tea-things, ‘all correct! I was pretty sure it was tea, and a rasher. So it is. Meg, my pet, if you’ll just make the tea, while your unworthy father toasts the bacon, we shall be ready, immediate. It’s a curious circumstance,’ said Trotty, proceeding in his cookery, with the assistance of the toasting-fork, ‘curious, but well known to my friends, that I never care, myself, for rashers, nor for tea. I like to see other people enjoy ’em,’ said Trotty, speaking very loud, to impress the fact upon his guest, ‘but to me, as food, they’re disagreeable.’

Yet Trotty sniffed the savour of the hissing bacon - ah! - as if he liked it; and when he poured the boiling water in the tea-pot, looked lovingly down into the depths of that snug cauldron, and suffered the fragrant steam to curl about his nose, and wreathe his head and face in a thick cloud. However, for all this, he neither ate nor drank, except at the very beginning, a mere morsel for form’s sake, which he appeared to eat with infinite relish, but declared was perfectly uninteresting to him.

No. Trotty’s occupation was, to see Will Fern and Lilian eat and drink; and so was Meg’s. And never did spectators at a city dinner or court banquet find such high delight in seeing others feast: although it were a monarch or a pope: as those two did, in looking on that night. Meg smiled at Trotty, Trotty laughed at Meg. Meg shook her head, and made belief to clap her hands, applauding Trotty; Trotty conveyed, in dumb-show, unintelligible narratives of how and when and where he had found their visitors, to Meg; and they were happy. Very happy.

‘Although,’ thought Trotty, sorrowfully, as he watched Meg’s face; ‘that match is broken off, I see!’

‘Now, I’ll tell you what,’ said Trotty after tea. ‘The little one, she sleeps with Meg, I know.’

‘With good Meg!’ cried the child, caressing her. ‘With Meg.’

‘That’s right,’ said Trotty. ‘And I shouldn’t wonder if she kiss Meg’s father, won’t she? *I’m* Meg’s father.’

Mightily delighted Trotty was, when the child went timidly towards him, and having kissed him, fell back upon Meg again.

‘She’s as sensible as Solomon,’ said Trotty. ‘Here we come and here we - no, we don’t - I don’t mean that - I - what was I saying, Meg, my precious?’

Meg looked towards their guest, who leaned upon her chair, and with his face turned from her, fondled the child’s head, half hidden in her lap.

‘To be sure,’ said Toby. ‘To be sure! I don’t know what I’m rambling on about, to-night. My wits are wool-gathering, I think. Will Fern, you come along with me. You’re tired to death, and broken down for want of rest. You come along with me.’ The man still played with the child’s curls, still leaned upon Meg’s chair, still turned away his face. He didn’t speak, but in his rough coarse fingers, clenching and expanding in the fair hair of the child, there was an eloquence that said enough.

‘Yes, yes,’ said Trotty, answering unconsciously what he saw expressed in his daughter’s face. ‘Take her with you, Meg. Get her to bed. There! Now, Will, I’ll show you where you lie. It’s not much of a place: only a loft; but, having a loft, I always say, is one of the great conveniences of living in a mews; and till this coach-house and stable gets a better let, we live here cheap. There’s plenty of sweet hay up there, belonging to a neighbour; and it's as clean as hands, and Meg, can make it. Cheer up! Don't give way. A new heart for a New Year, always!'

The hand released from the child's hair, had fallen, trembling, into Trotty's hand. So Trotty, talking without intermission, led him out as tenderly and easily as if he had been a child himself. Returning before Meg, he listened for an instant at the door of her little chamber; an adjoining room. The child was murmuring a simple Prayer before lying down to sleep; and when she had remembered Meg's name, 'Dearly, Dearly' - so her words ran - Trotty heard her stop and ask for his.

It was some short time before the foolish little old fellow could compose himself to mend the fire, and draw his chair to the warm hearth. But, when he had done so, and had trimmed the light, he took his newspaper from his pocket, and began to read. Carelessly at first, and skimming up and down the columns; but with an earnest and a sad attention, very soon.

For this same dreaded paper re-directed Trotty's thoughts into the channel they had taken all that day, and which the day's events had so marked out and shaped. His interest in the two wanderers had set him on another course of thinking, and a happier one, for the time; but being alone again, and reading of the crimes and violences of the people, he relapsed into his former train.

In this mood, he came to an account (and it was not the first he had ever read) of a woman who had laid her desperate hands not only on her own life but on that of her young child. A crime so terrible, and so revolting to his soul, dilated with the love of Meg, that he let the journal drop, and fell back in his chair, appalled!

'Unnatural and cruel!' Toby cried. 'Unnatural and cruel! None but people who were bad at heart, born bad, who had no business on the earth, could do such deeds. It's too true, all I've heard to-day; too just, too full of proof. We're Bad!'

The Chimes took up the words so suddenly - burst out so loud, and clear, and sonorous - that the Bells seemed to strike him in his chair.

And what was that, they said?

‘Toby Veck, Toby Veck, waiting for you Toby! Toby Veck, Toby Veck, waiting for you Toby! Come and see us, come and see us, Drag him to us, drag him to us, Haunt and hunt him, haunt and hunt him, Break his slumbers, break his slumbers! Toby Veck Toby Veck, door open wide Toby, Toby Veck Toby Veck, door open wide Toby - ’ then fiercely back to their impetuous strain again, and ringing in the very bricks and plaster on the walls.

Toby listened. Fancy, fancy! His remorse for having run away from them that afternoon! No, no. Nothing of the kind. Again, again, and yet a dozen times again. ‘Haunt and hunt him, haunt and hunt him, Drag him to us, drag him to us!’ Deafening the whole town!

‘Meg,’ said Trotty softly: tapping at her door. ‘Do you hear anything?’

‘I hear the Bells, father. Surely they’re very loud to-night.’

‘Is she asleep?’ said Toby, making an excuse for peeping in.

‘So peacefully and happily! I can’t leave her yet though, father. Look how she holds my hand!’

‘Meg,’ whispered Trotty. ‘Listen to the Bells!’

She listened, with her face towards him all the time. But it underwent no change. She didn’t understand them.

Trotty withdrew, resumed his seat by the fire, and once more listened by himself. He remained here a little time.

It was impossible to bear it; their energy was dreadful.

‘If the tower-door is really open,’ said Toby, hastily laying aside his apron, but never thinking of his hat, ‘what’s to hinder me from going up into the steeple and satisfying myself? If it’s shut, I don’t want any other satisfaction. That’s enough.’

He was pretty certain as he slipped out quietly into the street that he should find it shut and locked, for he knew the door well, and had so rarely seen it open, that he couldn’t reckon above three times in all. It was a low arched portal, outside the church, in a dark nook behind a column; and had such great iron hinges, and such a monstrous lock, that there was more hinge and lock than door.

But what was his astonishment when, coming bare-headed to the church; and putting his hand into this dark nook, with a certain misgiving that it might be unexpectedly seized, and a shivering propensity to draw it back again; he found that the door, which opened outwards, actually stood ajar!

He thought, on the first surprise, of going back; or of getting a light, or a companion, but his courage aided him immediately, and he determined to ascend alone.

‘What have I to fear?’ said Trotty. ‘It’s a church! Besides, the ringers may be there, and have forgotten to shut the door.’ So he went in, feeling his way as he went, like a blind man; for it was very dark. And very quiet, for the Chimes were silent.

The dust from the street had blown into the recess; and lying there, heaped up, made it so soft and velvet-like to the foot, that there was something startling, even in that. The narrow stair was so close to the door, too, that he stumbled at the very first; and shutting the door upon himself, by striking it with his foot, and causing it to rebound back heavily, he couldn’t open it again.

This was another reason, however, for going on. Trotty groped his way, and went on. Up, up, up, and round, and round; and up, up, up; higher, higher, higher up!

It was a disagreeable staircase for that groping work; so low and narrow, that his groping hand was always touching something; and it often felt so like a man or ghostly figure standing up erect and making room for him to pass without discovery, that he would rub the smooth wall upward searching for its face, and downward searching for its feet, while a chill tingling crept all over him. Twice or thrice, a door or niche broke the monotonous surface; and then it seemed a gap as wide as the whole church; and he felt on the brink of an abyss, and going to tumble headlong down, until he found the wall again.

Still up, up, up; and round and round; and up, up, up; higher, higher, higher up!

At length, the dull and stifling atmosphere began to freshen: presently to feel quite windy: presently it blew so strong, that he could hardly keep his legs. But, he got to an arched window in the tower, breast high, and holding tight, looked down upon the house-tops, on the smoking chimneys, on the blur and blotch of lights (towards the place where Meg was wondering where he was and calling to him perhaps), all kneaded up together in a leaven of mist and darkness.

This was the belfry, where the ringers came. He had caught hold of one of the frayed ropes which hung down through apertures in the oaken roof. At first he started, thinking it was hair; then trembled at the very thought of waking the deep Bell. The Bells themselves were higher. Higher, Trotty, in his fascination, or in working out the spell upon him, groped his way. By ladders now, and toilsomely, for it was steep, and not too certain holding for the feet.

Up, up, up; and climb and clamber; up, up, up; higher, higher, higher up!

Until, ascending through the floor, and pausing with his head just raised above its beams, he came among the Bells. It was barely possible to make out their great shapes in the gloom; but there they were. Shadowy, and dark, and dumb.

A heavy sense of dread and loneliness fell instantly upon him, as he climbed into this airy nest of stone and metal. His head went round and round. He listened, and then raised a wild ‘Holloa!’ Holloa! was mournfully protracted by the echoes.

Giddy, confused, and out of breath, and frightened, Toby looked about him vacantly, and sunk down in a swoon.

CHAPTER III - Third Quarter.

Black are the brooding clouds and troubled the deep waters, when the Sea of Thought, first heaving from a calm, gives up its Dead. Monsters uncouth and wild, arise in premature, imperfect resurrection; the several parts and shapes of different things are joined and mixed by chance; and when, and how, and by what wonderful degrees, each separates from each, and every sense and object of the mind resumes its usual form and lives again, no man - though every man is every day the casket of this type of the Great Mystery - can tell.

So, when and how the darkness of the night-black steeple changed to shining light; when and how the solitary tower was peopled with a myriad figures; when and how the whispered ‘Haunt and hunt him,’ breathing monotonously through his sleep or swoon, became a voice exclaiming in the waking ears of Trotty, ‘Break his slumbers;’ when and how he ceased to have a sluggish and confused idea that such things were, companioning a host of others that were not; there are no dates or means to tell. But, awake and standing on his feet upon the boards where he had lately lain, he saw this Goblin Sight.

He saw the tower, whither his charmed footsteps had brought him, swarming with dwarf phantoms, spirits, elfin creatures of the Bells. He saw them leaping, flying, dropping, pouring from the Bells without a pause. He saw them, round him on the ground; above him, in the air; clambering from him, by the ropes below; looking down upon him, from the massive iron-girded beams; peeping in upon him, through the chinks and loopholes in the walls; spreading away and away from him in enlarging circles, as the water ripples give way to a huge stone that suddenly comes plashing in among them. He saw them, of all aspects and all shapes. He saw them ugly, handsome, crippled, exquisitely formed. He saw them young, he saw them old, he saw them kind, he saw them cruel, he saw them merry, he saw them grim; he saw them dance, and heard them sing; he saw them tear their hair, and heard them howl. He saw the air thick with them. He saw them come and go, incessantly. He saw them riding downward, soaring upward, sailing off afar, perching near at hand, all restless and all violently active. Stone, and brick, and slate, and tile, became transparent to him as to them. He saw them *in* the houses, busy at the sleepers' beds. He saw them soothing people in their dreams; he saw them beating them with knotted whips; he saw them yelling in their ears; he saw them playing softest music on their pillows; he saw them cheering some with the songs of birds and the perfume of flowers; he saw them flashing awful faces on the troubled rest of others, from enchanted mirrors which they carried in their hands.

He saw these creatures, not only among sleeping men but waking also, active in pursuits irreconcilable with one another, and possessing or assuming natures the most opposite. He saw one buckling on innumerable wings to increase his speed; another loading himself with chains and weights, to retard his. He saw some putting the hands of clocks forward, some putting the hands of clocks backward, some endeavouring to stop the clock entirely. He saw them representing, here a marriage ceremony, there a funeral; in this chamber an election, in that a ball he saw, everywhere, restless and untiring motion.

Bewildered by the host of shifting and extraordinary figures, as well as by the uproar of the Bells, which all this while were ringing, Trotty clung to a wooden pillar for support, and turned his white face here and there, in mute and stunned astonishment.

As he gazed, the Chimes stopped. Instantaneous change! The whole swarm fainted! their forms collapsed, their speed deserted them; they sought to fly, but in the act of falling died and melted into air. No fresh supply succeeded them. One straggler leaped down pretty briskly from the surface of the Great Bell, and alighted on his feet, but he was dead and gone before he could turn round. Some few of the late company who had gambolled in the tower, remained there, spinning over and over a little longer; but these became at every turn more faint, and few, and feeble, and soon went the way of the rest. The last of all was one small hunchback, who had got into an echoing corner, where he twirled and twirled, and floated by himself a long time; showing such perseverance, that at last he dwindled to a leg and even to a foot, before he finally retired; but he vanished in the end, and then the tower was silent.

Then and not before, did Trotty see in every Bell a bearded figure of the bulk and stature of the Bell - incomprehensibly, a figure and the Bell itself. Gigantic, grave, and darkly watchful of him, as he stood rooted to the ground.

Mysterious and awful figures! Resting on nothing; poised in the night air of the tower, with their draped and hooded heads merged in the dim roof; motionless and shadowy. Shadowy and dark, although he saw them by some light belonging to themselves - none else was there - each with its muffled hand upon its goblin mouth.

He could not plunge down wildly through the opening in the floor; for all power of motion had deserted him. Otherwise he would have done so - aye, would have thrown himself, headforemost, from the steeple-top, rather than have seen them watching him with eyes that would have waked and watched although the pupils had been taken out.

Again, again, the dread and terror of the lonely place, and of the wild and fearful night that reigned there, touched him like a spectral hand. His distance from all help; the long, dark, winding, ghost-beleaguered way that lay between him and the earth on which men lived; his being high, high, high, up there, where it had made him dizzy to see the birds fly in the day; cut off from all good people, who at such an hour were safe at home and sleeping in their beds; all this struck coldly through him, not as a reflection but a bodily sensation. Meantime his eyes and thoughts and fears, were fixed upon the watchful figures; which, rendered unlike any figures of this world by the deep gloom and shade enwrapping and enfolding them, as well as by their looks and forms and supernatural hovering above the floor, were nevertheless as plainly to be seen as were the stalwart oaken frames, cross-pieces, bars and beams, set up there to support the Bells. These hemmed them, in a very forest of hewn timber; from the entanglements, intricacies, and depths of which, as from among the boughs of a dead wood blighted for their phantom use, they kept their darksome and unwinking watch.

A blast of air - how cold and shrill! - came moaning through the tower. As it died away, the Great Bell, or the Goblin of the Great Bell, spoke.

‘What visitor is this!’ it said. The voice was low and deep, and Trotty fancied that it sounded in the other figures as well.

‘I thought my name was called by the Chimes!’ said Trotty, raising his hands in an attitude of supplication. ‘I hardly know why I am here, or how I came. I have listened to the Chimes these many years. They have cheered me often.’

‘And you have thanked them?’ said the Bell.

‘A thousand times!’ cried Trotty.

‘How?’

‘I am a poor man,’ faltered Trotty, ‘and could only thank them in words.’

‘And always so?’ inquired the Goblin of the Bell. ‘Have you never done us wrong in words?’

‘No!’ cried Trotty eagerly.

‘Never done us foul, and false, and wicked wrong, in words?’ pursued the Goblin of the Bell.

Trotty was about to answer, ‘Never!’ But he stopped, and was confused.

‘The voice of Time,’ said the Phantom, ‘cries to man, Advance! Time is for his advancement and improvement; for his greater worth, his greater happiness, his better life; his progress onward to that goal within its knowledge and its view, and set there, in the period when Time and He began. Ages of darkness, wickedness, and violence, have come and gone - millions uncountable, have suffered, lived, and died - to point the way before him. Who seeks to turn him back, or stay him on his course, arrests a mighty engine which will strike the meddler dead; and be the fiercer and the wilder, ever, for its momentary check!’

‘I never did so to my knowledge, sir,’ said Trotty. ‘It was quite by accident if I did. I wouldn’t go to do it, I’m sure.’

‘Who puts into the mouth of Time, or of its servants,’ said the Goblin of the Bell, ‘a cry of lamentation for days which have had their trial and their failure, and have left deep traces of it which the blind may see - a cry that only serves the present time, by showing men how much it needs their help when any ears can listen to regrets for such a past - who does this, does a wrong. And you have done that wrong, to us, the Chimes.’

Trotty’s first excess of fear was gone. But he had felt tenderly and gratefully towards the Bells, as you have seen; and when he heard himself arraigned as one who had offended them so weightily, his heart was touched with penitence and grief.

‘If you knew,’ said Trotty, clasping his hands earnestly - ‘or perhaps you do know - if you know how often you have kept me company; how often you have cheered me up when I’ve been low; how you were quite the plaything of my little daughter Meg (almost the only one she ever had) when first her mother died, and she and me were left alone; you won’t bear malice for a hasty word!’

‘Who hears in us, the Chimes, one note bespeaking disregard, or stern regard, of any hope, or joy, or pain, or sorrow, of the many-sorrowed throng; who hears us make response to any creed that gauges human passions and affections, as it gauges the amount of miserable food on which humanity may pine and wither; does us wrong. That wrong you have done us!’ said the Bell.

‘I have!’ said Trotty. ‘Oh forgive me!’

‘Who hears us echo the dull vermin of the earth: the Putters Down of crushed and broken natures, formed to be raised up higher than such maggots of the time can crawl or can conceive,’ pursued the Goblin of the Bell; ‘who does so, does us wrong. And you have done us wrong!’

‘Not meaning it,’ said Trotty. ‘In my ignorance. Not meaning it!’

‘Lastly, and most of all,’ pursued the Bell. ‘Who turns his back upon the fallen and disfigured of his kind; abandons them as vile; and does not trace and track with pitying eyes the unfenced precipice by which they fell from good - grasping in their fall some tufts and shreds of that lost soil, and clinging to them still when bruised and dying in the gulf below; does wrong to Heaven and man, to time and to eternity. And you have done that wrong!’

‘Spare me!’ cried Trotty, falling on his knees; ‘for Mercy’s sake!’

‘Listen!’ said the Shadow.

‘Listen!’ cried the other Shadows.

‘Listen!’ said a clear and childlike voice, which Trotty thought he recognised as having heard before.

The organ sounded faintly in the church below. Swelling by degrees, the melody ascended to the roof, and filled the choir and nave. Expanding more and more, it rose up, up; up, up; higher, higher, higher up; awakening agitated hearts within the burly piles of oak: the hollow bells, the iron-bound doors, the stairs of solid stone; until the tower walls were insufficient to contain it, and it soared into the sky.

No wonder that an old man’s breast could not contain a sound so vast and mighty. It broke from that weak prison in a rush of tears; and Trotty put his hands before his face.

‘Listen!’ said the Shadow.

‘Listen!’ said the other Shadows.

‘Listen!’ said the child’s voice.

A solemn strain of blended voices, rose into the tower.

It was a very low and mournful strain - a Dirge - and as he listened, Trotty heard his child among the singers.

‘She is dead!’ exclaimed the old man. ‘Meg is dead! Her Spirit calls to me. I hear it!’

‘The Spirit of your child bewails the dead, and mingles with the dead - dead hopes, dead fancies, dead imaginings of youth,’ returned the Bell, ‘but she is living. Learn from her life, a living truth. Learn from the creature dearest to your heart, how bad the bad are born. See every bud and leaf plucked one by one from off the fairest stem, and know how bare and wretched it may be. Follow her! To desperation!’

Each of the shadowy figures stretched its right arm forth, and pointed downward.

‘The Spirit of the Chimes is your companion,’ said the figure.

‘Go! It stands behind you!’

Trotty turned, and saw - the child! The child Will Fern had carried in the street; the child whom Meg had watched, but now, asleep!

‘I carried her myself, to-night,’ said Trotty. ‘In these arms!’

‘Show him what he calls himself,’ said the dark figures, one and all.

The tower opened at his feet. He looked down, and beheld his own form, lying at the bottom, on the outside: crushed and motionless.

‘No more a living man!’ cried Trotty. ‘Dead!’

‘Dead!’ said the figures all together.

‘Gracious Heaven! And the New Year - ’

‘Past,’ said the figures.

‘What!’ he cried, shuddering. ‘I missed my way, and coming on the outside of this tower in the dark, fell down - a year ago?’

‘Nine years ago!’ replied the figures.

As they gave the answer, they recalled their outstretched hands; and where their figures had been, there the Bells were.

And they rung; their time being come again. And once again, vast multitudes of phantoms sprung into existence; once again, were incoherently engaged, as they had been before; once again, faded on the stopping of the Chimes; and dwindled into nothing.

‘What are these?’ he asked his guide. ‘If I am not mad, what are these?’

‘Spirits of the Bells. Their sound upon the air,’ returned the child. ‘They take such shapes and occupations as the hopes and thoughts of mortals, and the recollections they have stored up, give them.’

‘And you,’ said Trotty wildly. ‘What are you?’

‘Hush, hush!’ returned the child. ‘Look here!’

In a poor, mean room; working at the same kind of embroidery which he had often, often seen before her; Meg, his own dear daughter, was presented to his view. He made no effort to imprint his kisses on her face; he did not strive to clasp her to his loving heart; he knew that such endearments were, for him, no more. But, he held his trembling breath, and brushed away the blinding tears, that he might look upon her; that he might only see her.

Ah! Changed. Changed. The light of the clear eye, how dimmed. The bloom, how faded from the cheek. Beautiful she was, as she had ever been, but Hope, Hope, Hope, oh where was the fresh Hope that had spoken to him like a voice!

She looked up from her work, at a companion. Following her eyes, the old man started back.

In the woman grown, he recognised her at a glance. In the long silken hair, he saw the self-same curls; around the lips, the child’s expression lingering still. See! In the eyes, now turned inquiringly on Meg, there shone the very look that scanned those features when he brought her home!

Then what was this, beside him!

Looking with awe into its face, he saw a something reigning there: a lofty something, undefined and indistinct, which made it hardly more than a remembrance of that child - as yonder figure might be - yet it was the same: the same: and wore the dress.

Hark. They were speaking!

‘Meg,’ said Lilian, hesitating. ‘How often you raise your head from your work to look at me!’

‘Are my looks so altered, that they frighten you?’ asked Meg.

‘Nay, dear! But you smile at that, yourself! Why not smile, when you look at me, Meg?’

‘I do so. Do I not?’ she answered: smiling on her.

‘Now you do,’ said Lilian, ‘but not usually. When you think I’m busy, and don’t see you, you look so anxious and so doubtful, that I hardly like to raise my eyes. There is little cause for smiling in this hard and toilsome life, but you were once so cheerful.’

‘Am I not now!’ cried Meg, speaking in a tone of strange alarm, and rising to embrace her. ‘Do I make our weary life more weary to you, Lilian!’

‘You have been the only thing that made it life,’ said Lilian, fervently kissing her; ‘sometimes the only thing that made me care to live so, Meg. Such work, such work! So many hours, so many days, so many long, long nights of hopeless, cheerless, never-ending work - not to heap up riches, not to live grandly or gaily, not to live upon enough, however coarse; but to earn bare bread; to scrape together just enough to toil upon, and want upon, and keep alive in us the consciousness of our hard fate! Oh Meg, Meg!’ she raised her voice and twined her arms about her as she spoke, like one in pain. ‘How can the cruel world go round, and bear to look upon such lives!’

‘Lilly!’ said Meg, soothing her, and putting back her hair from her wet face. ‘Why, Lilly! You! So pretty and so young!’

‘Oh Meg!’ she interrupted, holding her at arm’s-length, and looking in her face imploringly. ‘The worst of all, the worst of all! Strike me old, Meg! Wither me, and shrivel me, and free me from the dreadful thoughts that tempt me in my youth!’

Trotty turned to look upon his guide. But the Spirit of the child had taken flight. Was gone.

Neither did he himself remain in the same place; for, Sir Joseph Bowley, Friend and Father of the Poor, held a great festivity at Bowley Hall, in honour of the natal day of Lady Bowley. And as Lady Bowley had been born on New Year’s Day (which the local newspapers considered an especial pointing of the finger of Providence to number One, as Lady Bowley’s destined figure in Creation), it was on a New Year’s Day that this festivity took place.

Bowley Hall was full of visitors. The red-faced gentleman was there, Mr. Filer was there, the great Alderman Cute was there - Alderman Cute had a sympathetic feeling with great people, and had considerably improved his acquaintance with Sir Joseph Bowley on the strength of his attentive letter: indeed had become quite a friend of the family since then - and many guests were there. Trotty’s ghost was there, wandering about, poor phantom, drearily; and looking for its guide.

There was to be a great dinner in the Great Hall. At which Sir Joseph Bowley, in his celebrated character of Friend and Father of the Poor, was to make his great speech. Certain plum-puddings were to be eaten by his Friends and Children in another Hall first; and, at a given signal, Friends and Children flocking in among their Friends and Fathers, were to form a family assemblage, with not one manly eye therein unmoistened by emotion.

But, there was more than this to happen. Even more than this. Sir Joseph Bowley, Baronet and Member of Parliament, was to play a match at skittles

- real skittles - with his tenants!

‘Which quite reminds me,’ said Alderman Cute, ‘of the days of old King Hal, stout King Hal, bluff King Hal. Ah! Fine character!’

‘Very,’ said Mr. Filer, dryly. ‘For marrying women and murdering ’em. Considerably more than the average number of wives by the bye.’

‘You’ll marry the beautiful ladies, and not murder ’em, eh?’ said Alderman Cute to the heir of Bowley, aged twelve. ‘Sweet boy! We shall have this little gentleman in Parliament now,’ said the Alderman, holding him by the shoulders, and looking as reflective as he could, ‘before we know where we are. We shall hear of his successes at the poll; his speeches in the House; his overtures from Governments; his brilliant achievements of all kinds; ah! we shall make our little orations about him in the Common Council, I’ll be bound; before we have time to look about us!’

‘Oh, the difference of shoes and stockings!’ Trotty thought. But his heart yearned towards the child, for the love of those same shoeless and stockingless boys, predestined (by the Alderman) to turn out bad, who might have been the children of poor Meg.

‘Richard,’ moaned Trotty, roaming among the company, to and fro; ‘where is he? I can’t find Richard! Where is Richard?’ Not likely to be there, if still alive! But Trotty’s grief and solitude confused him; and he still went wandering among the gallant company, looking for his guide, and saying, ‘Where is Richard? Show me Richard!’

He was wandering thus, when he encountered Mr. Fish, the confidential Secretary: in great agitation.

‘Bless my heart and soul!’ cried Mr. Fish. ‘Where’s Alderman Cute? Has anybody seen the Alderman?’

Seen the Alderman? Oh dear! Who could ever help seeing the Alderman? He was so considerate, so affable, he bore so much in mind the natural desires of folks to see him, that if he had a fault, it was the being constantly

On View. And wherever the great people were, there, to be sure, attracted by the kindred sympathy between great souls, was Cute.

Several voices cried that he was in the circle round Sir Joseph. Mr. Fish made way there; found him; and took him secretly into a window near at hand. Trotty joined them. Not of his own accord. He felt that his steps were led in that direction.

‘My dear Alderman Cute,’ said Mr. Fish. ‘A little more this way. The most dreadful circumstance has occurred. I have this moment received the intelligence. I think it will be best not to acquaint Sir Joseph with it till the day is over. You understand Sir Joseph, and will give me your opinion. The most frightful and deplorable event!’

‘Fish!’ returned the Alderman. ‘Fish! My good fellow, what is the matter? Nothing revolutionary, I hope! No - no attempted interference with the magistrates?’

‘Deedles, the banker,’ gasped the Secretary. ‘Deedles Brothers - who was to have been here to-day - high in office in the Goldsmiths’ Company - ’

‘Not stopped!’ exclaimed the Alderman, ‘It can’t be!’

‘Shot himself.’

‘Good God!’

‘Put a double-barrelled pistol to his mouth, in his own counting house,’ said Mr. Fish, ‘and blew his brains out. No motive. Princely circumstances!’

‘Circumstances!’ exclaimed the Alderman. ‘A man of noble fortune. One of the most respectable of men. Suicide, Mr. Fish! By his own hand!’

‘This very morning,’ returned Mr. Fish.

‘Oh the brain, the brain!’ exclaimed the pious Alderman, lifting up his hands. ‘Oh the nerves, the nerves; the mysteries of this machine called Man! Oh the little that unhinges it: poor creatures that we are! Perhaps a dinner, Mr. Fish. Perhaps the conduct of his son, who, I have heard, ran very wild, and was in the habit of drawing bills upon him without the least authority! A most respectable man. One of the most respectable men I ever knew! A lamentable instance, Mr. Fish. A public calamity! I shall make a point of wearing the deepest mourning. A most respectable man! But there is One above. We must submit, Mr. Fish. We must submit!'

What, Alderman! No word of Putting Down? Remember, Justice, your high moral boast and pride. Come, Alderman! Balance those scales. Throw me into this, the empty one, no dinner, and Nature's founts in some poor woman, dried by starving misery and rendered obdurate to claims for which her offspring *has* authority in holy mother Eve. Weigh me the two, you Daniel, going to judgment, when your day shall come! Weigh them, in the eyes of suffering thousands, audience (not unmindful) of the grim farce you play. Or supposing that you strayed from your five wits - it's not so far to go, but that it might be - and laid hands upon that throat of yours, warning your fellows (if you have a fellow) how they croak their comfortable wickedness to raving heads and stricken hearts. What then?

The words rose up in Trotty's breast, as if they had been spoken by some other voice within him. Alderman Cute pledged himself to Mr. Fish that he would assist him in breaking the melancholy catastrophe to Sir Joseph when the day was over. Then, before they parted, wringing Mr. Fish's hand in bitterness of soul, he said, 'The most respectable of men!' And added that he hardly knew (not even he), why such afflictions were allowed on earth.

'It's almost enough to make one think, if one didn't know better,' said Alderman Cute, 'that at times some motion of a capsizing nature was going on in things, which affected the general economy of the social fabric. Deedles Brothers!'

The skittle-playing came off with immense success. Sir Joseph knocked the pins about quite skilfully; Master Bowley took an innings at a shorter distance also; and everybody said that now, when a Baronet and the Son of a Baronet played at skittles, the country was coming round again, as fast as it could come.

At its proper time, the Banquet was served up. Trotty involuntarily repaired to the Hall with the rest, for he felt himself conducted thither by some stronger impulse than his own free will. The sight was gay in the extreme; the ladies were very handsome; the visitors delighted, cheerful, and good-tempered. When the lower doors were opened, and the people flocked in, in their rustic dresses, the beauty of the spectacle was at its height; but Trotty only murmured more and more, ‘Where is Richard! He should help and comfort her! I can’t see Richard!’

There had been some speeches made; and Lady Bowley’s health had been proposed; and Sir Joseph Bowley had returned thanks, and had made his great speech, showing by various pieces of evidence that he was the born Friend and Father, and so forth; and had given as a Toast, his Friends and Children, and the Dignity of Labour; when a slight disturbance at the bottom of the Hall attracted Toby’s notice. After some confusion, noise, and opposition, one man broke through the rest, and stood forward by himself.

Not Richard. No. But one whom he had thought of, and had looked for, many times. In a scantier supply of light, he might have doubted the identity of that worn man, so old, and grey, and bent; but with a blaze of lamps upon his gnarled and knotted head, he knew Will Fern as soon as he stepped forth.

‘What is this!’ exclaimed Sir Joseph, rising. ‘Who gave this man admittance? This is a criminal from prison! Mr. Fish, sir, *will* you have the goodness - ’

‘A minute!’ said Will Fern. ‘A minute! My Lady, you was born on this day along with a New Year. Get me a minute’s leave to speak.’

She made some intercession for him. Sir Joseph took his seat again, with native dignity.

The ragged visitor - for he was miserably dressed - looked round upon the company, and made his homage to them with a humble bow.

‘Gentlefolks!’ he said. ‘You’ve drunk the Labourer. Look at me!’

‘Just come from jail,’ said Mr. Fish.

‘Just come from jail,’ said Will. ‘And neither for the first time, nor the second, nor the third, nor yet the fourth.’

Mr. Filer was heard to remark testily, that four times was over the average; and he ought to be ashamed of himself.

‘Gentlefolks!’ repeated Will Fern. ‘Look at me! You see I’m at the worst. Beyond all hurt or harm; beyond your help; for the time when your kind words or kind actions could have done me good,’ - he struck his hand upon his breast, and shook his head, ‘is gone, with the scent of last year’s beans or clover on the air. Let me say a word for these,’ pointing to the labouring people in the Hall; ‘and when you’re met together, hear the real Truth spoke out for once.’

‘There’s not a man here,’ said the host, ‘who would have him for a spokesman.’

‘Like enough, Sir Joseph. I believe it. Not the less true, perhaps, is what I say. Perhaps that’s a proof on it. Gentlefolks, I’ve lived many a year in this place. You may see the cottage from the sunk fence over yonder. I’ve seen the ladies draw it in their books, a hundred times. It looks well in a picter, I’ve heerd say; but there an’t weather in picters, and maybe ’tis fitter for that, than for a place to live in. Well! I lived there. How hard - how bitter hard, I lived there, I won’t say. Any day in the year, and every day, you can judge for your own selves.’

He spoke as he had spoken on the night when Trotty found him in the street. His voice was deeper and more husky, and had a trembling in it now and then; but he never raised it passionately, and seldom lifted it above the firm stern level of the homely facts he stated.

‘’Tis harder than you think for, gentlefolks, to grow up decent, commonly decent, in such a place. That I growed up a man and not a brute, says something for me - as I was then. As I am now, there’s nothing can be said for me or done for me. I’m past it.’

‘I am glad this man has entered,’ observed Sir Joseph, looking round serenely. ‘Don’t disturb him. It appears to be Ordained. He is an example: a living example. I hope and trust, and confidently expect, that it will not be lost upon my Friends here.’

‘I dragged on,’ said Fern, after a moment’s silence, ‘somehow. Neither me nor any other man knows how; but so heavy, that I couldn’t put a cheerful face upon it, or make believe that I was anything but what I was. Now, gentlemen - you gentlemen that sits at Sessions - when you see a man with discontent writ on his face, you says to one another, “He’s suspicious. I has my doubts,” says you, “about Will Fern. Watch that fellow!” I don’t say, gentlemen, it ain’t quite nat’ral, but I say ’tis so; and from that hour, whatever Will Fern does, or lets alone - all one - it goes against him.’

Alderman Cute stuck his thumbs in his waistcoat-pockets, and leaning back in his chair, and smiling, winked at a neighbouring chandelier. As much as to say, ‘Of course! I told you so. The common cry! Lord bless you, we are up to all this sort of thing - myself and human nature.’

‘Now, gentlemen,’ said Will Fern, holding out his hands, and flushing for an instant in his haggard face, ‘see how your laws are made to trap and hunt us when we’re brought to this. I tries to live elsewhere. And I’m a vagabond. To jail with him! I comes back here. I goes a-nutting in your woods, and breaks - who don’t? - a limber branch or two. To jail with him! One of your keepers sees me in the broad day, near my own patch of garden, with a gun. To jail with him! I has a nat’ral angry word with that man, when I’m free again. To jail with him! I cuts a stick. To jail with him! I eats a rotten apple or a turnip. To jail with him! It’s twenty mile away; and coming back I begs a trifle on the road. To jail with him! At last, the constable, the keeper - anybody - finds me anywhere, a-doing anything. To jail with him, for he’s a vagrant, and a jail-bird known; and jail’s the only home he’s got.’

The Alderman nodded sagaciously, as who should say, ‘A very good home too!’

‘Do I say this to serve MY cause!’ cried Fern. ‘Who can give me back my liberty, who can give me back my good name, who can give me back my innocent niece? Not all the Lords and Ladies in wide England. But, gentlemen, gentlemen, dealing with other men like me, begin at the right end. Give us, in mercy, better homes when we're a-lying in our cradles; give us better food when we're a-working for our lives; give us kinder laws to bring us back when were a-going wrong; and don't set jail, jail, jail, afore us, everywhere we turn. There an't a condescension you can show the Labourer then, that he won't take, as ready and as grateful as a man can be; for, he has a patient, peaceful, willing heart. But you must put his rightful spirit in him first; for, whether he's a wreck and ruin such as me, or is like one of them that stand here now, his spirit is divided from you at this time. Bring it back, gentlefolks, bring it back! Bring it back, afore the day comes when even his Bible changes in his altered mind, and the words seem to him to read, as they have sometimes read in my own eyes - in jail: "Whither thou goest, I can Not go; where thou lodgest, I do Not lodge; thy people are Not my people; Nor thy God my God!'

A sudden stir and agitation took place in Hall. Trotty thought at first, that several had risen to eject the man; and hence this change in its appearance. But, another moment showed him that the room and all the company had vanished from his sight, and that his daughter was again before him, seated at her work. But in a poorer, meaner garret than before; and with no Lilian by her side.

The frame at which she had worked, was put away upon a shelf and covered up. The chair in which she had sat, was turned against the wall. A history was written in these little things, and in Meg's grief-worn face. Oh! who could fail to read it!

Meg strained her eyes upon her work until it was too dark to see the threads; and when the night closed in, she lighted her feeble candle and worked on. Still her old father was invisible about her; looking down upon her; loving her - how dearly loving her! - and talking to her in a tender voice about the old times, and the Bells. Though he knew, poor Trotty, though he knew she could not hear him.

A great part of the evening had worn away, when a knock came at her door. She opened it. A man was on the threshold. A slouching, moody, drunken sloven, wasted by intemperance and vice, and with his matted hair and unshorn beard in wild disorder; but, with some traces on him, too, of having been a man of good proportion and good features in his youth.

He stopped until he had her leave to enter; and she, retiring a pace of two from the open door, silently and sorrowfully looked upon him. Trotty had his wish. He saw Richard.

‘May I come in, Margaret?’

‘Yes! Come in. Come in!’

It was well that Trotty knew him before he spoke; for with any doubt remaining on his mind, the harsh discordant voice would have persuaded him that it was not Richard but some other man.

There were but two chairs in the room. She gave him hers, and stood at some short distance from him, waiting to hear what he had to say.

He sat, however, staring vacantly at the floor; with a lustreless and stupid smile. A spectacle of such deep degradation, of such abject hopelessness, of such a miserable downfall, that she put her hands before her face and turned away, lest he should see how much it moved her.

Roused by the rustling of her dress, or some such trifling sound, he lifted his head, and began to speak as if there had been no pause since he entered.

‘Still at work, Margaret? You work late.’

‘I generally do.’

‘And early?’

‘And early.’

‘So she said. She said you never tired; or never owned that you tired. Not all the time you lived together. Not even when you fainted, between work and fasting. But I told you that, the last time I came.’

‘You did,’ she answered. ‘And I implored you to tell me nothing more; and you made me a solemn promise, Richard, that you never would.’

‘A solemn promise,’ he repeated, with a drivelling laugh and vacant stare. ‘A solemn promise. To be sure. A solemn promise!’ Awakening, as it were, after a time; in the same manner as before; he said with sudden animation:

‘How can I help it, Margaret? What am I to do? She has been to me again!’

‘Again!’ cried Meg, clasping her hands. ‘O, does she think of me so often! Has she been again!’

‘Twenty times again,’ said Richard. ‘Margaret, she haunts me. She comes behind me in the street, and thrusts it in my hand. I hear her foot upon the ashes when I’m at my work (ha, ha! that an’t often), and before I can turn my head, her voice is in my ear, saying, “Richard, don’t look round. For Heaven’s love, give her this!” She brings it where I live: she sends it in letters; she taps at the window and lays it on the sill. What *can* I do? Look at it!’

He held out in his hand a little purse, and chinked the money it enclosed.

‘Hide it,’ sad Meg. ‘Hide it! When she comes again, tell her, Richard, that I love her in my soul. That I never lie down to sleep, but I bless her, and pray for her. That, in my solitary work, I never cease to have her in my thoughts. That she is with me, night and day. That if I died to-morrow, I would remember her with my last breath. But, that I cannot look upon it!’

He slowly recalled his hand, and crushing the purse together, said with a kind of drowsy thoughtfulness:

‘I told her so. I told her so, as plain as words could speak. I’ve taken this gift back and left it at her door, a dozen times since then. But when she came at last, and stood before me, face to face, what could I do?’

‘You saw her!’ exclaimed Meg. ‘You saw her! O, Lilian, my sweet girl! O, Lilian, Lilian!’

‘I saw her,’ he went on to say, not answering, but engaged in the same slow pursuit of his own thoughts. ‘There she stood: trembling! “How does she look, Richard? Does she ever speak of me? Is she thinner? My old place at the table: what’s in my old place? And the frame she taught me our old work on - has she burnt it, Richard!” There she was. I heard her say it.’

Meg checked her sobs, and with the tears streaming from her eyes, bent over him to listen. Not to lose a breath.

With his arms resting on his knees; and stooping forward in his chair, as if what he said were written on the ground in some half legible character, which it was his occupation to decipher and connect; he went on.

‘“Richard, I have fallen very low; and you may guess how much I have suffered in having this sent back, when I can bear to bring it in my hand to you. But you loved her once, even in my memory, dearly. Others stepped in between you; fears, and jealousies, and doubts, and vanities, estranged you from her; but you did love her, even in my memory!” I suppose I did,’ he said, interrupting himself for a moment. ‘I did! That’s neither here nor there - “O Richard, if you ever did; if you have any memory for what is gone and lost, take it to her once more. Once more! Tell her how I laid my head upon your shoulder, where her own head might have lain, and was so humble to you, Richard. Tell her that you looked into my face, and saw the beauty which she used to praise, all gone: all gone: and in its place, a poor, wan, hollow cheek, that she would weep to see. Tell her everything, and take it back, and she will not refuse again. She will not have the heart!”’

So he sat musing, and repeating the last words, until he woke again, and rose.

‘You won’t take it, Margaret?’

She shook her head, and motioned an entreaty to him to leave her.

‘Good night, Margaret.’

‘Good night!’

He turned to look upon her; struck by her sorrow, and perhaps by the pity for himself which trembled in her voice. It was a quick and rapid action; and for the moment some flash of his old bearing kindled in his form. In the next he went as he had come. Nor did this glimmer of a quenched fire seem to light him to a quicker sense of his debasement.

In any mood, in any grief, in any torture of the mind or body, Meg’s work must be done. She sat down to her task, and plied it. Night, midnight. Still she worked.

She had a meagre fire, the night being very cold; and rose at intervals to mend it. The Chimes rang half-past twelve while she was thus engaged; and when they ceased she heard a gentle knocking at the door. Before she could so much as wonder who was there, at that unusual hour, it opened.

O Youth and Beauty, happy as ye should be, look at this. O Youth and Beauty, blest and blessing all within your reach, and working out the ends of your Beneficent Creator, look at this!

She saw the entering figure; screamed its name; cried ‘Lilian!’

It was swift, and fell upon its knees before her: clinging to her dress.

‘Up, dear! Up! Lilian! My own dearest!’

‘Never more, Meg; never more! Here! Here! Close to you, holding to you, feeling your dear breath upon my face!’

‘Sweet Lilian! Darling Lilian! Child of my heart - no mother’s love can be more tender - lay your head upon my breast!’

‘Never more, Meg. Never more! When I first looked into your face, you knelt before me. On my knees before you, let me die. Let it be here!’

‘You have come back. My Treasure! We will live together, work together, hope together, die together!’

‘Ah! Kiss my lips, Meg; fold your arms about me; press me to your bosom; look kindly on me; but don’t raise me. Let it be here. Let me see the last of your dear face upon my knees!’

O Youth and Beauty, happy as ye should be, look at this! O Youth and Beauty, working out the ends of your Beneficent Creator, look at this!

‘Forgive me, Meg! So dear, so dear! Forgive me! I know you do, I see you do, but say so, Meg!’

She said so, with her lips on Lilian’s cheek. And with her arms twined round - she knew it now - a broken heart.

‘His blessing on you, dearest love. Kiss me once more! He suffered her to sit beside His feet, and dry them with her hair. O Meg, what Mercy and Compassion!’

As she died, the Spirit of the child returning, innocent and radiant, touched the old man with its hand, and beckoned him away.

CHAPTER IV - Fourth Quarter.

Some new remembrance of the ghostly figures in the Bells; some faint impression of the ringing of the Chimes; some giddy consciousness of having seen the swarm of phantoms reproduced and reproduced until the recollection of them lost itself in the confusion of their numbers; some hurried knowledge, how conveyed to him he knew not, that more years had passed; and Trotty, with the Spirit of the child attending him, stood looking on at mortal company.

Fat company, rosy-cheeked company, comfortable company. They were but two, but they were red enough for ten. They sat before a bright fire, with a small low table between them; and unless the fragrance of hot tea and muffins lingered longer in that room than in most others, the table had seen service very lately. But all the cups and saucers being clean, and in their proper places in the corner-cupboard; and the brass toasting-fork hanging in its usual nook and spreading its four idle fingers out as if it wanted to be measured for a glove; there remained no other visible tokens of the meal just finished, than such as purred and washed their whiskers in the person of the basking cat, and glistened in the gracious, not to say the greasy, faces of her patrons.

This cosy couple (married, evidently) had made a fair division of the fire between them, and sat looking at the glowing sparks that dropped into the grate; now nodding off into a doze; now waking up again when some hot fragment, larger than the rest, came rattling down, as if the fire were coming with it.

It was in no danger of sudden extinction, however; for it gleamed not only in the little room, and on the panes of window-glass in the door, and on the curtain half drawn across them, but in the little shop beyond. A little shop, quite crammed and choked with the abundance of its stock; a perfectly voracious little shop, with a maw as accommodating and full as any shark's. Cheese, butter, firewood, soap, pickles, matches, bacon, table-beer, peg-tops, sweetmeats, boys' kites, bird-seed, cold ham, birch brooms, hearth-stones, salt, vinegar, blacking, red-herrings, stationery, lard, mushroom-ketchup, staylaces, loaves of bread, shuttlecocks, eggs, and slate pencil; everything was fish that came to the net of this greedy little shop, and all articles were in its net. How many other kinds of petty merchandise were there, it would be difficult to say; but balls of packthread, ropes of onions, pounds of candles, cabbage-nets, and brushes, hung in bunches from the ceiling, like extraordinary fruit; while various odd canisters emitting aromatic smells, established the veracity of the inscription over the outer door, which informed the public that the keeper of this little shop was a licensed dealer in tea, coffee, tobacco, pepper, and snuff.

Glancing at such of these articles as were visible in the shining of the blaze, and the less cheerful radiance of two smoky lamps which burnt but dimly in the shop itself, as though its plethora sat heavy on their lungs; and glancing, then, at one of the two faces by the parlour-fire; Trotty had small difficulty in recognising in the stout old lady, Mrs. Chickenstalker: always inclined to corpulency, even in the days when he had known her as established in the general line, and having a small balance against him in her books.

The features of her companion were less easy to him. The great broad chin, with creases in it large enough to hide a finger in; the astonished eyes, that seemed to expostulate with themselves for sinking deeper and deeper into the yielding fat of the soft face; the nose afflicted with that disordered action of its functions which is generally termed The Snuffles; the short thick throat and labouring chest, with other beauties of the like description; though calculated to impress the memory, Trotty could at first allot to nobody he had ever known: and yet he had some recollection of them too. At length, in Mrs. Chickenstalker's partner in the general line, and in the crooked and eccentric line of life, he recognised the former porter of Sir Joseph Bowley; an apoplectic innocent, who had connected himself in Trotty's mind with Mrs. Chickenstalker years ago, by giving him admission to the mansion where he had confessed his obligations to that lady, and drawn on his unlucky head such grave reproach.

Trotty had little interest in a change like this, after the changes he had seen; but association is very strong sometimes; and he looked involuntarily behind the parlour-door, where the accounts of credit customers were usually kept in chalk. There was no record of his name. Some names were there, but they were strange to him, and infinitely fewer than of old; from which he argued that the porter was an advocate of ready-money transactions, and on coming into the business had looked pretty sharp after the Chickenstalker defaulters.

So desolate was Trotty, and so mournful for the youth and promise of his blighted child, that it was a sorrow to him, even to have no place in Mrs. Chickenstalker's ledger.

'What sort of a night is it, Anne?' inquired the former porter of Sir Joseph Bowley, stretching out his legs before the fire, and rubbing as much of them as his short arms could reach; with an air that added, ‘Here I am if it’s bad, and I don’t want to go out if it’s good.’

‘Blowing and sleeting hard,’ returned his wife; ‘and threatening snow. Dark. And very cold.’

‘I’m glad to think we had muffins,’ said the former porter, in the tone of one who had set his conscience at rest. ‘It’s a sort of night that’s meant for muffins. Likewise crumpets. Also Sally Lunns.’

The former porter mentioned each successive kind of eatable, as if he were musingly summing up his good actions. After which he rubbed his fat legs as before, and jerking them at the knees to get the fire upon the yet unroasted parts, laughed as if somebody had tickled him.

‘You’re in spirits, Tugby, my dear,’ observed his wife.

The firm was Tugby, late Chickenstalker.

‘No,’ said Tugby. ‘No. Not particular. I’m a little elewated. The muffins came so pat!’

With that he chuckled until he was black in the face; and had so much ado to become any other colour, that his fat legs took the strangest excursions into the air. Nor were they reduced to anything like decorum until Mrs. Tugby had thumped him violently on the back, and shaken him as if he were a great bottle.

‘Good gracious, goodness, lord-a-mercy bless and save the man!’ cried Mrs. Tugby, in great terror. ‘What’s he doing?’

Mr. Tugby wiped his eyes, and faintly repeated that he found himself a little elewated.

‘Then don’t be so again, that’s a dear good soul,’ said Mrs. Tugby, ‘if you don’t want to frighten me to death, with your struggling and fighting!’

Mr. Tugby said he wouldn’t; but, his whole existence was a fight, in which, if any judgment might be founded on the constantly-increasing shortness of his breath, and the deepening purple of his face, he was always getting the worst of it.

‘So it’s blowing, and sleeting, and threatening snow; and it’s dark, and very cold, is it, my dear?’ said Mr. Tugby, looking at the fire, and reverting to the cream and marrow of his temporary elevation.

‘Hard weather indeed,’ returned his wife, shaking her head.

‘Aye, aye! Years,’ said Mr. Tugby, ‘are like Christians in that respect. Some of ’em die hard; some of ’em die easy. This one hasn’t many days to run, and is making a fight for it. I like him all the better. There’s a customer, my love!’

Attentive to the rattling door, Mrs. Tugby had already risen.

‘Now then!’ said that lady, passing out into the little shop. ‘What’s wanted? Oh! I beg your pardon, sir, I’m sure. I didn’t think it was you.’

She made this apology to a gentleman in black, who, with his wristbands tucked up, and his hat cocked loungingly on one side, and his hands in his pockets, sat down astride on the table-beer barrel, and nodded in return.

‘This is a bad business up-stairs, Mrs. Tugby,’ said the gentleman. ‘The man can’t live.’

‘Not the back-attic can’t!’ cried Tugby, coming out into the shop to join the conference.

‘The back-attic, Mr. Tugby,’ said the gentleman, ‘is coming down-stairs fast, and will be below the basement very soon.’

Looking by turns at Tugby and his wife, he sounded the barrel with his knuckles for the depth of beer, and having found it, played a tune upon the empty part.

‘The back-attic, Mr. Tugby,’ said the gentleman: Tugby having stood in silent consternation for some time: ‘is Going.’

‘Then,’ said Tugby, turning to his wife, ‘he must Go, you know, before he’s Gone.’

‘I don’t think you can move him,’ said the gentleman, shaking his head. ‘I wouldn’t take the responsibility of saying it could be done, myself. You had better leave him where he is. He can’t live long.’

‘It’s the only subject,’ said Tugby, bringing the butter-scale down upon the counter with a crash, by weighing his fist on it, ‘that we’ve ever had a word upon; she and me; and look what it comes to! He’s going to die here, after all. Going to die upon the premises. Going to die in our house!’

‘And where should he have died, Tugby?’ cried his wife.

‘In the workhouse,’ he returned. ‘What are workhouses made for?’

‘Not for that,’ said Mrs. Tugby, with great energy. ‘Not for that! Neither did I marry you for that. Don’t think it, Tugby. I won’t have it. I won’t allow it. I’d be separated first, and never see your face again. When my widow’s name stood over that door, as it did for many years: this house being known as Mrs. Chickenstalker’s far and wide, and never known but to its honest credit and its good report: when my widow’s name stood over that door, Tugby, I knew him as a handsome, steady, manly, independent youth; I knew her as the sweetest-looking, sweetest-tempered girl, eyes ever saw; I knew her father (poor old creetur, he fell down from the steeple walking in his sleep, and killed himself), for the simplest, hardest-working, childest-hearted man, that ever drew the breath of life; and when I turn them out of house and home, may angels turn me out of Heaven. As they would! And serve me right!’

Her old face, which had been a plump and dimpled one before the changes which had come to pass, seemed to shine out of her as she said these words; and when she dried her eyes, and shook her head and her handkerchief at Tugby, with an expression of firmness which it was quite clear was not to be easily resisted, Trotty said, ‘Bless her! Bless her!’

Then he listened, with a panting heart, for what should follow. Knowing nothing yet, but that they spoke of Meg.

If Tugby had been a little elevated in the parlour, he more than balanced that account by being not a little depressed in the shop, where he now stood staring at his wife, without attempting a reply; secretly conveying, however - either in a fit of abstraction or as a precautionary measure - all the money from the till into his own pockets, as he looked at her.

The gentleman upon the table-beer cask, who appeared to be some authorised medical attendant upon the poor, was far too well accustomed, evidently, to little differences of opinion between man and wife, to interpose any remark in this instance. He sat softly whistling, and turning little drops of beer out of the tap upon the ground, until there was a perfect calm: when he raised his head, and said to Mrs. Tugby, late Chickenstalker:

‘There’s something interesting about the woman, even now. How did she come to marry him?’

‘Why that,’ said Mrs. Tugby, taking a seat near him, ‘is not the least cruel part of her story, sir. You see they kept company, she and Richard, many years ago. When they were a young and beautiful couple, everything was settled, and they were to have been married on a New Year’s Day. But, somehow, Richard got it into his head, through what the gentlemen told him, that he might do better, and that he’d soon repent it, and that she wasn’t good enough for him, and that a young man of spirit had no business to be married. And the gentlemen frightened her, and made her melancholy, and timid of his deserting her, and of her children coming to the gallows, and of its being wicked to be man and wife, and a good deal more of it. And in short, they lingered and lingered, and their trust in one another was broken, and so at last was the match. But the fault was his. She would have married him, sir, joyfully. I’ve seen her heart swell many times afterwards, when he passed her in a proud and careless way; and never did a woman grieve more truly for a man, than she for Richard when he first went wrong.’

‘Oh! he went wrong, did he?’ said the gentleman, pulling out the vent-peg of the table-beer, and trying to peep down into the barrel through the hole.

‘Well, sir, I don’t know that he rightly understood himself, you see. I think his mind was troubled by their having broke with one another; and that but for being ashamed before the gentlemen, and perhaps for being uncertain too, how she might take it, he’d have gone through any suffering or trial to have had Meg’s promise and Meg’s hand again. That’s my belief. He never said so; more’s the pity! He took to drinking, idling, bad companions: all the fine resources that were to be so much better for him than the Home he might have had. He lost his looks, his character, his health, his strength, his friends, his work: everything!’

‘He didn’t lose everything, Mrs. Tugby,’ returned the gentleman, ‘because he gained a wife; and I want to know how he gained her.’

‘I’m coming to it, sir, in a moment. This went on for years and years; he sinking lower and lower; she enduring, poor thing, miseries enough to wear her life away. At last, he was so cast down, and cast out, that no one would employ or notice him; and doors were shut upon him, go where he would. Applying from place to place, and door to door; and coming for the hundredth time to one gentleman who had often and often tried him (he was a good workman to the very end); that gentleman, who knew his history, said, “I believe you are incorrigible; there is only one person in the world who has a chance of reclaiming you; ask me to trust you no more, until she tries to do it.” Something like that, in his anger and vexation.’

‘Ah!’ said the gentleman. ‘Well?’

‘Well, sir, he went to her, and kneeled to her; said it was so; said it ever had been so; and made a prayer to her to save him.’

‘And she? - Don’t distress yourself, Mrs. Tugby.’

‘She came to me that night to ask me about living here. “What he was once to me,” she said, “is buried in a grave, side by side with what I was to him. But I have thought of this; and I will make the trial. In the hope of saving him; for the love of the light-hearted girl (you remember her) who was to have been married on a New Year’s Day; and for the love of her Richard.” And she said he had come to her from Lilian, and Lilian had trusted to him, and she never could forget that. So they were married; and when they came home here, and I saw them, I hoped that such prophecies as parted them when they were young, may not often fulfil themselves as they did in this case, or I wouldn't be the makers of them for a Mine of Gold.'

The gentleman got off the cask, and stretched himself, observing:

'I suppose he used her ill, as soon as they were married?'

'I don't think he ever did that,' said Mrs. Tugby, shaking her head, and wiping her eyes. 'He went on better for a short time; but, his habits were too old and strong to be got rid of; he soon fell back a little; and was falling fast back, when his illness came so strong upon him. I think he has always felt for her. I am sure he has. I have seen him, in his crying fits and tremblings, try to kiss her hand; and I have heard him call her "Meg," and say it was her nineteenth birthday. There he has been lying, now, these weeks and months. Between him and her baby, she has not been able to do her old work; and by not being able to be regular, she has lost it, even if she could have done it. How they have lived, I hardly know!'

'I know,' muttered Mr. Tugby; looking at the till, and round the shop, and at his wife; and rolling his head with immense intelligence. 'Like Fighting Cocks!'

He was interrupted by a cry - a sound of lamentation - from the upper story of the house. The gentleman moved hurriedly to the door.

'My friend,' he said, looking back, 'you needn't discuss whether he shall be removed or not. He has spared you that trouble, I believe.'

Saying so, he ran up-stairs, followed by Mrs. Tugby; while Mr. Tugby panted and grumbled after them at leisure: being rendered more than commonly short-winded by the weight of the till, in which there had been an inconvenient quantity of copper. Trotty, with the child beside him, floated up the staircase like mere air.

'Follow her! Follow her! Follow her!' He heard the ghostly voices in the Bells repeat their words as he ascended. 'Learn it, from the creature dearest to your heart!'

It was over. It was over. And this was she, her father's pride and joy! This haggard, wretched woman, weeping by the bed, if it deserved that name, and pressing to her breast, and hanging down her head upon, an infant. Who can tell how spare, how sickly, and how poor an infant! Who can tell how dear!

'Thank God!' cried Trotty, holding up his folded hands. 'O, God be thanked! She loves her child!'

The gentleman, not otherwise hard-hearted or indifferent to such scenes, than that he saw them every day, and knew that they were figures of no moment in the Filer sums - mere scratches in the working of these calculations - laid his hand upon the heart that beat no more, and listened for the breath, and said, 'His pain is over. It's better as it is!' Mrs. Tugby tried to comfort her with kindness. Mr. Tugby tried philosophy.

'Come, come!' he said, with his hands in his pockets, 'you mustn't give way, you know. That won't do. You must fight up. What would have become of me if *I* had given way when I was porter, and we had as many as six runaway carriage-doubles at our door in one night! But, I fell back upon my strength of mind, and didn't open it!'

Again Trotty heard the voices saying, 'Follow her!' He turned towards his guide, and saw it rising from him, passing through the air. 'Follow her!' it said. And vanished.

He hovered round her; sat down at her feet; looked up into her face for one trace of her old self; listened for one note of her old pleasant voice. He flitted round the child: so wan, so prematurely old, so dreadful in its gravity, so plaintive in its feeble, mournful, miserable wail. He almost worshipped it. He clung to it as her only safeguard; as the last unbroken link that bound her to endurance. He set his father's hope and trust on the frail baby; watched her every look upon it as she held it in her arms; and cried a thousand times, 'She loves it! God be thanked, she loves it!'

He saw the woman tend her in the night; return to her when her grudging husband was asleep, and all was still; encourage her, shed tears with her, set nourishment before her. He saw the day come, and the night again; the day, the night; the time go by; the house of death relieved of death; the room left to herself and to the child; he heard it moan and cry; he saw it harass her, and tire her out, and when she slumbered in exhaustion, drag her back to consciousness, and hold her with its little hands upon the rack; but she was constant to it, gentle with it, patient with it. Patient! Was its loving mother in her inmost heart and soul, and had its Being knitted up with hers as when she carried it unborn.

All this time, she was in want: languishing away, in dire and pining want. With the baby in her arms, she wandered here and there, in quest of occupation; and with its thin face lying in her lap, and looking up in hers, did any work for any wretched sum; a day and night of labour for as many farthings as there were figures on the dial. If she had quarrelled with it; if she had neglected it; if she had looked upon it with a moment's hate; if, in the frenzy of an instant, she had struck it! No. His comfort was, She loved it always.

She told no one of her extremity, and wandered abroad in the day lest she should be questioned by her only friend: for any help she received from her hands, occasioned fresh disputes between the good woman and her husband; and it was new bitterness to be the daily cause of strife and discord, where she owed so much.

She loved it still. She loved it more and more. But a change fell on the aspect of her love. One night.

She was singing faintly to it in its sleep, and walking to and fro to hush it, when her door was softly opened, and a man looked in.

'For the last time,' he said.

'William Fern!'

'For the last time.'

He listened like a man pursued: and spoke in whispers.

‘Margaret, my race is nearly run. I couldn’t finish it, without a parting word with you. Without one grateful word.’

‘What have you done?’ she asked: regarding him with terror.

He looked at her, but gave no answer.

After a short silence, he made a gesture with his hand, as if he set her question by; as if he brushed it aside; and said:

‘It’s long ago, Margaret, now: but that night is as fresh in my memory as ever ’twas. We little thought, then,’ he added, looking round, ‘that we should ever meet like this. Your child, Margaret? Let me have it in my arms. Let me hold your child.’

He put his hat upon the floor, and took it. And he trembled as he took it, from head to foot.

‘Is it a girl?’

‘Yes.’

He put his hand before its little face.

‘See how weak I’m grown, Margaret, when I want the courage to look at it! Let her be, a moment. I won’t hurt her. It’s long ago, but - What’s her name?’

‘Margaret,’ she answered, quickly.

‘I’m glad of that,’ he said. ‘I’m glad of that!’ He seemed to breathe more freely; and after pausing for an instant, took away his hand, and looked upon the infant’s face. But covered it again, immediately.

‘Margaret!’ he said; and gave her back the child. ‘It’s Lilian’s.’

‘Lilian’s!’

‘I held the same face in my arms when Lilian’s mother died and left her.’

‘When Lilian’s mother died and left her!’ she repeated, wildly.

‘How shrill you speak! Why do you fix your eyes upon me so? Margaret!’

She sunk down in a chair, and pressed the infant to her breast, and wept over it. Sometimes, she released it from her embrace, to look anxiously in its face: then strained it to her bosom again. At those times, when she gazed upon it, then it was that something fierce and terrible began to mingle with her love. Then it was that her old father quailed.

‘Follow her!’ was sounded through the house. ‘Learn it, from the creature dearest to your heart!’

‘Margaret,’ said Fern, bending over her, and kissing her upon the brow: ‘I thank you for the last time. Good night. Good bye! Put your hand in mine, and tell me you’ll forget me from this hour, and try to think the end of me was here.’

‘What have you done?’ she asked again.

‘There’ll be a Fire to-night,’ he said, removing from her. ‘There’ll be Fires this winter-time, to light the dark nights, East, West, North, and South. When you see the distant sky red, they’ll be blazing. When you see the distant sky red, think of me no more; or, if you do, remember what a Hell was lighted up inside of me, and think you see its flames reflected in the clouds. Good night. Good bye!’ She called to him; but he was gone. She sat down stupefied, until her infant roused her to a sense of hunger, cold, and darkness. She paced the room with it the livelong night, hushing it and soothing it. She said at intervals, ‘Like Lilian, when her mother died and left her!’ Why was her step so quick, her eye so wild, her love so fierce and terrible, whenever she repeated those words?

‘But, it is Love,’ said Trotty. ‘It is Love. She’ll never cease to love it. My poor Meg!’

She dressed the child next morning with unusual care - ah, vain expenditure of care upon such squalid robes! - and once more tried to find some means of life. It was the last day of the Old Year. She tried till night, and never broke her fast. She tried in vain.

She mingled with an abject crowd, who tarried in the snow, until it pleased some officer appointed to dispense the public charity (the lawful charity; not that once preached upon a Mount), to call them in, and question them, and say to this one, ‘Go to such a place,’ to that one, ‘Come next week;’ to make a football of another wretch, and pass him here and there, from hand to hand, from house to house, until he wearied and lay down to die; or started up and robbed, and so became a higher sort of criminal, whose claims allowed of no delay. Here, too, she failed.

She loved her child, and wished to have it lying on her breast. And that was quite enough.

It was night: a bleak, dark, cutting night: when, pressing the child close to her for warmth, she arrived outside the house she called her home. She was so faint and giddy, that she saw no one standing in the doorway until she was close upon it, and about to enter. Then, she recognised the master of the house, who had so disposed himself - with his person it was not difficult - as to fill up the whole entry.

‘O!’ he said softly. ‘You have come back?’

She looked at the child, and shook her head.

‘Don’t you think you have lived here long enough without paying any rent? Don’t you think that, without any money, you’ve been a pretty constant customer at this shop, now?’ said Mr. Tugby.

She repeated the same mute appeal.

‘Suppose you try and deal somewhere else,’ he said. ‘And suppose you provide yourself with another lodging. Come! Don’t you think you could manage it?’

She said in a low voice, that it was very late. To-morrow.

‘Now I see what you want,’ said Tugby; ‘and what you mean. You know there are two parties in this house about you, and you delight in setting ’em by the ears. I don’t want any quarrels; I’m speaking softly to avoid a quarrel; but if you don’t go away, I’ll speak out loud, and you shall cause words high enough to please you. But you shan’t come in. That I am determined.’

She put her hair back with her hand, and looked in a sudden manner at the sky, and the dark lowering distance.

‘This is the last night of an Old Year, and I won’t carry ill-blood and quarrellings and disturbances into a New One, to please you nor anybody else,’ said Tugby, who was quite a retail Friend and Father. ‘I wonder you an’t ashamed of yourself, to carry such practices into a New Year. If you haven’t any business in the world, but to be always giving way, and always making disturbances between man and wife, you’d be better out of it. Go along with you.’

‘Follow her! To desperation!’

Again the old man heard the voices. Looking up, he saw the figures hovering in the air, and pointing where she went, down the dark street.

‘She loves it!’ he exclaimed, in agonised entreaty for her. ‘Chimes! she loves it still!’

‘Follow her!’ The shadow swept upon the track she had taken, like a cloud.

He joined in the pursuit; he kept close to her; he looked into her face. He saw the same fierce and terrible expression mingling with her love, and kindling in her eyes. He heard her say, ‘Like Lilian! To be changed like Lilian!’ and her speed redoubled.

O, for something to awaken her! For any sight, or sound, or scent, to call up tender recollections in a brain on fire! For any gentle image of the Past, to rise before her!

‘I was her father! I was her father!’ cried the old man, stretching out his hands to the dark shadows flying on above. ‘Have mercy on her, and on me! Where does she go? Turn her back! I was her father!’

But they only pointed to her, as she hurried on; and said, ‘To desperation! Learn it from the creature dearest to your heart!’ A hundred voices echoed it. The air was made of breath expended in those words. He seemed to take them in, at every gasp he drew. They were everywhere, and not to be escaped. And still she hurried on; the same light in her eyes, the same words in her mouth, ‘Like Lilian! To be changed like Lilian!’ All at once she stopped.

‘Now, turn her back!’ exclaimed the old man, tearing his white hair. ‘My child! Meg! Turn her back! Great Father, turn her back!’

In her own scanty shawl, she wrapped the baby warm. With her fevered hands, she smoothed its limbs, composed its face, arranged its mean attire. In her wasted arms she folded it, as though she never would resign it more. And with her dry lips, kissed it in a final pang, and last long agony of Love.

Putting its tiny hand up to her neck, and holding it there, within her dress, next to her distracted heart, she set its sleeping face against her: closely, steadily, against her: and sped onward to the River.

To the rolling River, swift and dim, where Winter Night sat brooding like the last dark thoughts of many who had sought a refuge there before her. Where scattered lights upon the banks gleamed sullen, red, and dull, as torches that were burning there, to show the way to Death. Where no abode of living people cast its shadow, on the deep, impenetrable, melancholy shade.

To the River! To that portal of Eternity, her desperate footsteps tended with the swiftness of its rapid waters running to the sea. He tried to touch her as she passed him, going down to its dark level: but, the wild distempered form, the fierce and terrible love, the desperation that had left all human check or hold behind, swept by him like the wind.

He followed her. She paused a moment on the brink, before the dreadful plunge. He fell down on his knees, and in a shriek addressed the figures in the Bells now hovering above them.

‘I have learnt it!’ cried the old man. ‘From the creature dearest to my heart! O, save her, save her!’

He could wind his fingers in her dress; could hold it! As the words escaped his lips, he felt his sense of touch return, and knew that he detained her.

The figures looked down steadfastly upon him.

‘I have learnt it!’ cried the old man. ‘O, have mercy on me in this hour, if, in my love for her, so young and good, I slandered Nature in the breasts of mothers rendered desperate! Pity my presumption, wickedness, and ignorance, and save her.’ He felt his hold relaxing. They were silent still.

‘Have mercy on her!’ he exclaimed, ‘as one in whom this dreadful crime has sprung from Love perverted; from the strongest, deepest Love we fallen creatures know! Think what her misery must have been, when such seed bears such fruit! Heaven meant her to be good. There is no loving mother on the earth who might not come to this, if such a life had gone before. O, have mercy on my child, who, even at this pass, means mercy to her own, and dies herself, and perils her immortal soul, to save it!’

She was in his arms. He held her now. His strength was like a giant’s.

‘I see the Spirit of the Chimes among you!’ cried the old man, singling out the child, and speaking in some inspiration, which their looks conveyed to him. ‘I know that our inheritance is held in store for us by Time. I know there is a sea of Time to rise one day, before which all who wrong us or oppress us will be swept away like leaves. I see it, on the flow! I know that we must trust and hope, and neither doubt ourselves, nor doubt the good in one another. I have learnt it from the creature dearest to my heart. I clasp her in my arms again. O Spirits, merciful and good, I take your lesson to my breast along with her! O Spirits, merciful and good, I am grateful!’

He might have said more; but, the Bells, the old familiar Bells, his own dear, constant, steady friends, the Chimes, began to ring the joy-peals for a New Year: so lustily, so merrily, so happily, so gaily, that he leapt upon his feet, and broke the spell that bound him.

‘And whatever you do, father,’ said Meg, ‘don’t eat tripe again, without asking some doctor whether it’s likely to agree with you; for how you *have* been going on, Good gracious!’

She was working with her needle, at the little table by the fire; dressing her simple gown with ribbons for her wedding. So quietly happy, so blooming and youthful, so full of beautiful promise, that he uttered a great cry as if it were an Angel in his house; then flew to clasp her in his arms.

But, he caught his feet in the newspaper, which had fallen on the hearth; and somebody came rushing in between them.

‘No!’ cried the voice of this same somebody; a generous and jolly voice it was! ‘Not even you. Not even you. The first kiss of Meg in the New Year is mine. Mine! I have been waiting outside the house, this hour, to hear the Bells and claim it. Meg, my precious prize, a happy year! A life of happy years, my darling wife!’

And Richard smothered her with kisses.

You never in all your life saw anything like Trotty after this. I don’t care where you have lived or what you have seen; you never in all your life saw anything at all approaching him! He sat down in his chair and beat his knees and cried; he sat down in his chair and beat his knees and laughed; he sat down in his chair and beat his knees and laughed and cried together; he got out of his chair and hugged Meg; he got out of his chair and hugged Richard; he got out of his chair and hugged them both at once; he kept running up to Meg, and squeezing her fresh face between his hands and kissing it, going from her backwards not to lose sight of it, and running up again like a figure in a magic lantern; and whatever he did, he was constantly sitting himself down in his chair, and never stopping in it for one single moment; being - that’s the truth - beside himself with joy.

‘And to-morrow’s your wedding-day, my pet!’ cried Trotty. ‘Your real, happy wedding-day!’

‘To-day!’ cried Richard, shaking hands with him. ‘To-day. The Chimes are ringing in the New Year. Hear them!’

They WERE ringing! Bless their sturdy hearts, they WERE ringing! Great Bells as they were; melodious, deep-mouthed, noble Bells; cast in no common metal; made by no common founder; when had they ever chimed like that, before!

‘But, to-day, my pet,’ said Trotty. ‘You and Richard had some words to-day.’

‘Because he’s such a bad fellow, father,’ said Meg. ‘An’t you, Richard? Such a headstrong, violent man! He’d have made no more of speaking his mind to that great Alderman, and putting *him* down I don’t know where, than he would of - ’

‘ - Kissing Meg,’ suggested Richard. Doing it too!

‘No. Not a bit more,’ said Meg. ‘But I wouldn’t let him, father. Where would have been the use!’

‘Richard my boy!’ cried Trotty. ‘You was turned up Trumps originally; and Trumps you must be, till you die! But, you were crying by the fire to-night, my pet, when I came home! Why did you cry by the fire?’

‘I was thinking of the years we’ve passed together, father. Only that. And thinking that you might miss me, and be lonely.’

Trotty was backing off to that extraordinary chair again, when the child, who had been awakened by the noise, came running in half-dressed.

‘Why, here she is!’ cried Trotty, catching her up. ‘Here’s little Lilian! Ha ha ha! Here we are and here we go! O here we are and here we go again! And here we are and here we go! and Uncle Will too!’ Stopping in his trot to greet him heartily. ‘O, Uncle Will, the vision that I’ve had to-night, through lodging you! O, Uncle Will, the obligations that you’ve laid me under, by your coming, my good friend!’

Before Will Fern could make the least reply, a band of music burst into the room, attended by a lot of neighbours, screaming ‘A Happy New Year, Meg!’ ‘A Happy Wedding!’ ‘Many of ’em!’ and other fragmentary good wishes of that sort. The Drum (who was a private friend of Trotty’s) then stepped forward, and said:

‘Trotty Veck, my boy! It’s got about, that your daughter is going to be married to-morrow. There an’t a soul that knows you that don’t wish you well, or that knows her and don’t wish her well. Or that knows you both, and don’t wish you both all the happiness the New Year can bring. And here we are, to play it in and dance it in, accordingly.’

Which was received with a general shout. The Drum was rather drunk, by-the-bye; but, never mind.

‘What a happiness it is, I’m sure,’ said Trotty, ‘to be so esteemed! How kind and neighbourly you are! It’s all along of my dear daughter. She deserves it!’

They were ready for a dance in half a second (Meg and Richard at the top); and the Drum was on the very brink of feathering away with all his power; when a combination of prodigious sounds was heard outside, and a good-humoured comely woman of some fifty years of age, or thereabouts, came running in, attended by a man bearing a stone pitcher of terrific size, and closely followed by the marrow-bones and cleavers, and the bells; not *the* Bells, but a portable collection on a frame.

Trotty said, ‘It’s Mrs. Chickenstalker!’ And sat down and beat his knees again.

‘Married, and not tell me, Meg!’ cried the good woman. ‘Never! I couldn’t rest on the last night of the Old Year without coming to wish you joy. I couldn’t have done it, Meg. Not if I had been bed-ridden. So here I am; and as it’s New Year’s Eve, and the Eve of your wedding too, my dear, I had a little flip made, and brought it with me.’

Mrs. Chickenstalker’s notion of a little flip did honour to her character. The pitcher steamed and smoked and reeked like a volcano; and the man who had carried it, was faint.

‘Mrs. Tugby!’ said Trotty, who had been going round and round her, in an ecstasy. - ‘I *should* say, Chickenstalker - Bless your heart and soul! A Happy New Year, and many of ’em! Mrs. Tugby,’ said Trotty when he had saluted her; - ‘I *should* say, Chickenstalker - This is William Fern and Lilian.’

The worthy dame, to his surprise, turned very pale and very red.

‘Not Lilian Fern whose mother died in Dorsetshire!’ said she.

Her uncle answered ‘Yes,’ and meeting hastily, they exchanged some hurried words together; of which the upshot was, that Mrs. Chickenstalker shook him by both hands; saluted Trotty on his cheek again of her own free will; and took the child to her capacious breast.

‘Will Fern!’ said Trotty, pulling on his right-hand muffler. ‘Not the friend you was hoping to find?’

‘Ay!’ returned Will, putting a hand on each of Trotty’s shoulders. ‘And like to prove a’most as good a friend, if that can be, as one I found.’

‘O!’ said Trotty. ‘Please to play up there. Will you have the goodness!’

To the music of the band, and, the bells, the marrow-bones and cleavers, all at once; and while the Chimes were yet in lusty operation out of doors; Trotty, making Meg and Richard, second couple, led off Mrs. Chickenstalker down the dance, and danced it in a step unknown before or since; founded on his own peculiar trot.

Had Trotty dreamed? Or, are his joys and sorrows, and the actors in them, but a dream; himself a dream; the teller of this tale a dreamer, waking but now? If it be so, O listener, dear to him in all his visions, try to bear in mind the stern realities from which these shadows come; and in your sphere

- none is too wide, and none too limited for such an end - endeavour to correct, improve, and soften them. So may the New Year be a happy one to you, happy to many more whose happiness depends on you! So may each year be happier than the last, and not the meanest of our brethren or sisterhood debarred their rightful share, in what our Great Creator formed them to enjoy.

THE END OF
The Chimes

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

IN PROSE

BEING

A Ghost Story of Christmas

BY

CHARLES DICKENS

PREFACE

I HAVE endeavoured in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it.

Their faithful Friend and Servant,

C. D.

December, 1843.

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STAVE ONE.

MARLEY’S GHOST.

Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it: and Scrooge’s name was good upon ’Change, for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Mind! I don’t mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a door-nail. I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail as the deadest piece of ironmongery in the trade. But the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile; and my unhallowed hands shall not disturb it, or the Country’s done for. You will therefore permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he were partners for I don’t know how many years. Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend, and sole mourner. And even Scrooge was not so dreadfully cut up by the sad event, but that he was an excellent man of business on the very day of the funeral, and solemnised it with an undoubted bargain.

The mention of Marley’s funeral brings me back to the point I started from. There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate. If we were not perfectly convinced that Hamlet’s Father died before the play began, there would be nothing more remarkable in his taking a stroll at night, in an easterly wind, upon his own ramparts, than there would be in any other middle-aged gentleman rashly turning out after dark in a breezy spot—say Saint Paul’s Churchyard for instance—literally to astonish his son’s weak mind.

Scrooge never painted out Old Marley’s name. There it stood, years afterwards, above the warehouse door: Scrooge and Marley. The firm was known as Scrooge and Marley. Sometimes people new to the business called Scrooge Scrooge, and sometimes Marley, but he answered to both names. It was all the same to him.

Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days; and didn’t thaw it one degree at Christmas.

External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty. Foul weather didn’t know where to have him. The heaviest rain, and snow, and hail, and sleet, could boast of the advantage over him in only one respect. They often "came down" handsomely, and Scrooge never did.

Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, with gladsome looks, "My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?" No beggars implored him to bestow a trifle, no children asked him what it was o’clock, no man or woman ever once in all his life inquired the way to such and such a place, of Scrooge. Even the blind men’s dogs appeared to know him; and when they saw him coming on, would tug their owners into doorways and up courts; and then would wag their tails as though they said, "No eye at all is better than an evil eye, dark master!"

But what did Scrooge care! It was the very thing he liked. To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance, was what the knowing ones call "nuts" to Scrooge.

Once upon a time—of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve—old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather: foggy withal: and he could hear the people in the court outside, go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement stones to warm them. The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already—it had not been light all day—and candles were flaring in the windows of the neighbouring offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms. To see the dingy cloud come drooping down, obscuring everything, one might have thought that Nature lived hard by, and was brewing on a large scale.

The door of Scrooge’s counting-house was open that he might keep his eye upon his clerk, who in a dismal little cell beyond, a sort of tank, was copying letters. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk’s fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. But he couldn’t replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room; and so surely as the clerk came in with the shovel, the master predicted that it would be necessary for them to part. Wherefore the clerk put on his white comforter, and tried to warm himself at the candle; in which effort, not being a man of a strong imagination, he failed.

"A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!" cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge’s nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach.

"Bah!" said Scrooge, "Humbug!"

He had so heated himself with rapid walking in the fog and frost, this nephew of Scrooge’s, that he was all in a glow; his face was ruddy and handsome; his eyes sparkled, and his breath smoked again.

"Christmas a humbug, uncle!" said Scrooge’s nephew. "You don’t mean that, I am sure?"

"I do," said Scrooge. "Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You’re poor enough."

"Come, then," returned the nephew gaily. "What right have you to be dismal? What reason have you to be morose? You’re rich enough."

Scrooge having no better answer ready on the spur of the moment, said, "Bah!" again; and followed it up with "Humbug."

"Don’t be cross, uncle!" said the nephew.

"What else can I be," returned the uncle, "when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! Out upon merry Christmas! What’s Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, but not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in ’em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you? If I could work my will," said Scrooge indignantly, "every idiot who goes about with ‘Merry Christmas’ on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. He should!"

"Uncle!" pleaded the nephew.

"Nephew!" returned the uncle sternly, "keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine."

"Keep it!" repeated Scrooge’s nephew. "But you don’t keep it."

"Let me leave it alone, then," said Scrooge. "Much good may it do you! Much good it has ever done you!"

"There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say," returned the nephew. "Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round—apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that—as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it *has* done me good, and *will* do me good; and I say, God bless it!"

The clerk in the Tank involuntarily applauded. Becoming immediately sensible of the impropriety, he poked the fire, and extinguished the last frail spark for ever.

"Let me hear another sound from *you*," said Scrooge, "and you’ll keep your Christmas by losing your situation! You’re quite a powerful speaker, sir," he added, turning to his nephew. "I wonder you don’t go into Parliament."

"Don’t be angry, uncle. Come! Dine with us to-morrow."

Scrooge said that he would see him—yes, indeed he did. He went the whole length of the expression, and said that he would see him in that extremity first.

"But why?" cried Scrooge’s nephew. "Why?"

"Why did you get married?" said Scrooge.

"Because I fell in love."

"Because you fell in love!" growled Scrooge, as if that were the only one thing in the world more ridiculous than a merry Christmas. "Good afternoon!"

"Nay, uncle, but you never came to see me before that happened. Why give it as a reason for not coming now?"

"Good afternoon," said Scrooge.

"I want nothing from you; I ask nothing of you; why cannot we be friends?"

"Good afternoon," said Scrooge.

"I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so resolute. We have never had any quarrel, to which I have been a party. But I have made the trial in homage to Christmas, and I’ll keep my Christmas humour to the last. So A Merry Christmas, uncle!"

"Good afternoon!" said Scrooge.

"And A Happy New Year!"

"Good afternoon!" said Scrooge.

His nephew left the room without an angry word, notwithstanding. He stopped at the outer door to bestow the greetings of the season on the clerk, who, cold as he was, was warmer than Scrooge; for he returned them cordially.

"There’s another fellow," muttered Scrooge; who overheard him: "my clerk, with fifteen shillings a week, and a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas. I’ll retire to Bedlam."

This lunatic, in letting Scrooge’s nephew out, had let two other people in. They were portly gentlemen, pleasant to behold, and now stood, with their hats off, in Scrooge’s office. They had books and papers in their hands, and bowed to him.

"Scrooge and Marley’s, I believe," said one of the gentlemen, referring to his list. "Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge, or Mr. Marley?"

"Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years," Scrooge replied. "He died seven years ago, this very night."

"We have no doubt his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner," said the gentleman, presenting his credentials.

It certainly was; for they had been two kindred spirits. At the ominous word "liberality," Scrooge frowned, and shook his head, and handed the credentials back.

"At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge," said the gentleman, taking up a pen, "it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the Poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessaries; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir."

"Are there no prisons?" asked Scrooge.

"Plenty of prisons," said the gentleman, laying down the pen again.

"And the Union workhouses?" demanded Scrooge. "Are they still in operation?"

"They are. Still," returned the gentleman, "I wish I could say they were not."

"The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigour, then?" said Scrooge.

"Both very busy, sir."

"Oh! I was afraid, from what you said at first, that something had occurred to stop them in their useful course," said Scrooge. "I’m very glad to hear it."

"Under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude," returned the gentleman, "a few of us are endeavouring to raise a fund to buy the Poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. We choose this time, because it is a time, of all others, when Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?"

"Nothing!" Scrooge replied.

"You wish to be anonymous?"

"I wish to be left alone," said Scrooge. "Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I don’t make merry myself at Christmas and I can’t afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned—they cost enough; and those who are badly off must go there."

"Many can’t go there; and many would rather die."

"If they would rather die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Besides—excuse me—I don’t know that."

"But you might know it," observed the gentleman.

"It’s not my business," Scrooge returned. "It’s enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people’s. Mine occupies me constantly. Good afternoon, gentlemen!"

Seeing clearly that it would be useless to pursue their point, the gentlemen withdrew. Scrooge resumed his labours with an improved opinion of himself, and in a more facetious temper than was usual with him.

Meanwhile the fog and darkness thickened so, that people ran about with flaring links, proffering their services to go before horses in carriages, and conduct them on their way. The ancient tower of a church, whose gruff old bell was always peeping slily down at Scrooge out of a Gothic window in the wall, became invisible, and struck the hours and quarters in the clouds, with tremulous vibrations afterwards as if its teeth were chattering in its frozen head up there. The cold became intense. In the main street, at the corner of the court, some labourers were repairing the gas-pipes, and had lighted a great fire in a brazier, round which a party of ragged men and boys were gathered: warming their hands and winking their eyes before the blaze in rapture. The water-plug being left in solitude, its overflowings sullenly congealed, and turned to misanthropic ice. The brightness of the shops where holly sprigs and berries crackled in the lamp heat of the windows, made pale faces ruddy as they passed. Poulterers' and grocers' trades became a splendid joke: a glorious pageant, with which it was next to impossible to believe that such dull principles as bargain and sale had anything to do. The Lord Mayor, in the stronghold of the mighty Mansion House, gave orders to his fifty cooks and butlers to keep Christmas as a Lord Mayor's household should; and even the little tailor, whom he had fined five shillings on the previous Monday for being drunk and bloodthirsty in the streets, stirred up to-morrow's pudding in his garret, while his lean wife and the baby sallied out to buy the beef.

Foggier yet, and colder. Piercing, searching, biting cold. If the good Saint Dunstan had but nipped the Evil Spirit's nose with a touch of such weather as that, instead of using his familiar weapons, then indeed he would have roared to lusty purpose. The owner of one scant young nose, gnawed and mumbled by the hungry cold as bones are gnawed by dogs, stooped down at Scrooge's keyhole to regale him with a Christmas carol: but at the first sound of

"God bless you, merry gentleman!
May nothing you dismay!"

Scrooge seized the ruler with such energy of action, that the singer fled in terror, leaving the keyhole to the fog and even more congenial frost.

At length the hour of shutting up the counting-house arrived. With an ill-will Scrooge dismounted from his stool, and tacitly admitted the fact to the expectant clerk in the Tank, who instantly snuffed his candle out, and put on his hat.

"You’ll want all day to-morrow, I suppose?" said Scrooge.

"If quite convenient, sir."

"It’s not convenient," said Scrooge, "and it’s not fair. If I was to stop half-a-crown for it, you’d think yourself ill-used, I’ll be bound?"

The clerk smiled faintly.

"And yet," said Scrooge, "you don’t think *me* ill-used, when I pay a day’s wages for no work."

The clerk observed that it was only once a year.

"A poor excuse for picking a man’s pocket every twenty-fifth of December!" said Scrooge, buttoning his great-coat to the chin. "But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier next morning."

The clerk promised that he would; and Scrooge walked out with a growl. The office was closed in a twinkling, and the clerk, with the long ends of his white comforter dangling below his waist (for he boasted no great-coat), went down a slide on Cornhill, at the end of a lane of boys, twenty times, in honour of its being Christmas Eve, and then ran home to Camden Town as hard as he could pelt, to play at blindman’s-buff.

Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern; and having read all the newspapers, and beguiled the rest of the evening with his banker’s-book, went home to bed. He lived in chambers which had once belonged to his deceased partner. They were a gloomy suite of rooms, in a lowering pile of building up a yard, where it had so little business to be, that one could scarcely help fancying it must have run there when it was a young house, playing at hide-and-seek with other houses, and forgotten the way out again. It was old enough now, and dreary enough, for nobody lived in it but Scrooge, the other rooms being all let out as offices. The yard was so dark that even Scrooge, who knew its every stone, was fain to grope with his hands. The fog and frost so hung about the black old gateway of the house, that it seemed as if the Genius of the Weather sat in mournful meditation on the threshold.

Now, it is a fact, that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on the door, except that it was very large. It is also a fact, that Scrooge had seen it, night and morning, during his whole residence in that place; also that Scrooge had as little of what is called fancy about him as any man in the city of London, even including—which is a bold word—the corporation, aldermen, and livery. Let it also be borne in mind that Scrooge had not bestowed one thought on Marley, since his last mention of his seven years' dead partner that afternoon. And then let any man explain to me, if he can, how it happened that Scrooge, having his key in the lock of the door, saw in the knocker, without its undergoing any intermediate process of change—not a knocker, but Marley's face.

Marley's face. It was not in impenetrable shadow as the other objects in the yard were, but had a dismal light about it, like a bad lobster in a dark cellar. It was not angry or ferocious, but looked at Scrooge as Marley used to look: with ghostly spectacles turned up on its ghostly forehead. The hair was curiously stirred, as if by breath or hot air; and, though the eyes were wide open, they were perfectly motionless. That, and its livid colour, made it horrible; but its horror seemed to be in spite of the face and beyond its control, rather than a part of its own expression.

As Scrooge looked fixedly at this phenomenon, it was a knocker again.

To say that he was not startled, or that his blood was not conscious of a terrible sensation to which it had been a stranger from infancy, would be untrue. But he put his hand upon the key he had relinquished, turned it sturdily, walked in, and lighted his candle.

He *did* pause, with a moment's irresolution, before he shut the door; and he *did* look cautiously behind it first, as if he half expected to be terrified with the sight of Marley's pigtail sticking out into the hall. But there was nothing on the back of the door, except the screws and nuts that held the knocker on, so he said "Pooh, pooh!" and closed it with a bang.

The sound resounded through the house like thunder. Every room above, and every cask in the wine-merchant's cellars below, appeared to have a separate peal of echoes of its own. Scrooge was not a man to be frightened by echoes. He fastened the door, and walked across the hall, and up the stairs; slowly too: trimming his candle as he went.

You may talk vaguely about driving a coach-and-six up a good old flight of stairs, or through a bad young Act of Parliament; but I mean to say you might have got a hearse up that staircase, and taken it broadwise, with the splinter-bar towards the wall and the door towards the balustrades: and done it easy. There was plenty of width for that, and room to spare; which is perhaps the reason why Scrooge thought he saw a locomotive hearse going on before him in the gloom. Half-a-dozen gas-lamps out of the street wouldn't have lighted the entry too well, so you may suppose that it was pretty dark with Scrooge's dip.

Up Scrooge went, not caring a button for that. Darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it. But before he shut his heavy door, he walked through his rooms to see that all was right. He had just enough recollection of the face to desire to do that.

Sitting-room, bedroom, lumber-room. All as they should be. Nobody under the table, nobody under the sofa; a small fire in the grate; spoon and basin ready; and the little saucepan of gruel (Scrooge had a cold in his head) upon the hob. Nobody under the bed; nobody in the closet; nobody in his dressing-gown, which was hanging up in a suspicious attitude against the wall. Lumber-room as usual. Old fire-guard, old shoes, two fish-baskets, washing-stand on three legs, and a poker.

Quite satisfied, he closed his door, and locked himself in; double-locked himself in, which was not his custom. Thus secured against surprise, he took off his cravat; put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and his nightcap; and sat down before the fire to take his gruel.

It was a very low fire indeed; nothing on such a bitter night. He was obliged to sit close to it, and brood over it, before he could extract the least sensation of warmth from such a handful of fuel. The fireplace was an old one, built by some Dutch merchant long ago, and paved all round with quaint Dutch tiles, designed to illustrate the Scriptures. There were Cains and Abels, Pharaoh’s daughters; Queens of Sheba, Angelic messengers descending through the air on clouds like feather-beds, Abrahams, Belshazzars, Apostles putting off to sea in butter-boats, hundreds of figures to attract his thoughts; and yet that face of Marley, seven years dead, came like the ancient Prophet’s rod, and swallowed up the whole. If each smooth tile had been a blank at first, with power to shape some picture on its surface from the disjointed fragments of his thoughts, there would have been a copy of old Marley’s head on every one.

"Humbug!" said Scrooge; and walked across the room.

After several turns, he sat down again. As he threw his head back in the chair, his glance happened to rest upon a bell, a disused bell, that hung in the room, and communicated for some purpose now forgotten with a chamber in the highest story of the building. It was with great astonishment, and with a strange, inexplicable dread, that as he looked, he saw this bell begin to swing. It swung so softly in the outset that it scarcely made a sound; but soon it rang out loudly, and so did every bell in the house.

This might have lasted half a minute, or a minute, but it seemed an hour. The bells ceased as they had begun, together. They were succeeded by a clanking noise, deep down below; as if some person were dragging a heavy chain over the casks in the wine-merchant’s cellar. Scrooge then remembered to have heard that ghosts in haunted houses were described as dragging chains.

The cellar-door flew open with a booming sound, and then he heard the noise much louder, on the floors below; then coming up the stairs; then coming straight towards his door.

"It’s humbug still!" said Scrooge. "I won’t believe it."

His colour changed though, when, without a pause, it came on through the heavy door, and passed into the room before his eyes. Upon its coming in, the dying flame leaped up, as though it cried, "I know him; Marley’s Ghost!" and fell again.

The same face: the very same. Marley in his pigtail, usual waistcoat, tights and boots; the tassels on the latter bristling, like his pigtail, and his coat-skirts, and the hair upon his head. The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long, and wound about him like a tail; and it was made (for Scrooge observed it closely) of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel. His body was transparent; so that Scrooge, observing him, and looking through his waistcoat, could see the two buttons on his coat behind.

Scrooge had often heard it said that Marley had no bowels, but he had never believed it until now.

No, nor did he believe it even now. Though he looked the phantom through and through, and saw it standing before him; though he felt the chilling influence of its death-cold eyes; and marked the very texture of the folded kerchief bound about its head and chin, which wrapper he had not observed before; he was still incredulous, and fought against his senses.

"How now!" said Scrooge, caustic and cold as ever. "What do you want with me?"

"Much!"—Marley’s voice, no doubt about it.

"Who are you?"

"Ask me who I *was*."

"Who *were* you then?" said Scrooge, raising his voice. "You’re particular, for a shade." He was going to say "*to* a shade," but substituted this, as more appropriate.

"In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley."

"Can you—can you sit down?" asked Scrooge, looking doubtfully at him.

"I can."

"Do it, then."

Scrooge asked the question, because he didn’t know whether a ghost so transparent might find himself in a condition to take a chair; and felt that in the event of its being impossible, it might involve the necessity of an embarrassing explanation. But the ghost sat down on the opposite side of the fireplace, as if he were quite used to it.

"You don’t believe in me," observed the Ghost.

"I don’t," said Scrooge.

"What evidence would you have of my reality beyond that of your senses?"

"I don’t know," said Scrooge.

"Why do you doubt your senses?"

"Because," said Scrooge, "a little thing affects them. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There’s more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!"

Scrooge was not much in the habit of cracking jokes, nor did he feel, in his heart, by any means waggish then. The truth is, that he tried to be smart, as a means of distracting his own attention, and keeping down his terror; for the spectre’s voice disturbed the very marrow in his bones.

To sit, staring at those fixed glazed eyes, in silence for a moment, would play, Scrooge felt, the very deuce with him. There was something very awful, too, in the spectre’s being provided with an infernal atmosphere of its own. Scrooge could not feel it himself, but this was clearly the case; for though the Ghost sat perfectly motionless, its hair, and skirts, and tassels, were still agitated as by the hot vapour from an oven.

"You see this toothpick?" said Scrooge, returning quickly to the charge, for the reason just assigned; and wishing, though it were only for a second, to divert the vision’s stony gaze from himself.

"I do," replied the Ghost.

"You are not looking at it," said Scrooge.

"But I see it," said the Ghost, "notwithstanding."

"Well!" returned Scrooge, "I have but to swallow this, and be for the rest of my days persecuted by a legion of goblins, all of my own creation. Humbug, I tell you! humbug!"

At this the spirit raised a frightful cry, and shook its chain with such a dismal and appalling noise, that Scrooge held on tight to his chair, to save himself from falling in a swoon. But how much greater was his horror, when the phantom taking off the bandage round its head, as if it were too warm to wear indoors, its lower jaw dropped down upon its breast!

Scrooge fell upon his knees, and clasped his hands before his face.

"Mercy!" he said. "Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?"

"Man of the worldly mind!" replied the Ghost, "do you believe in me or not?"

"I do," said Scrooge. "I must. But why do spirits walk the earth, and why do they come to me?"

"It is required of every man," the Ghost returned, "that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellowmen, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world—oh, woe is me!—and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!"

Again the spectre raised a cry, and shook its chain and wrung its shadowy hands.

"You are fettered," said Scrooge, trembling. "Tell me why?"

"I wear the chain I forged in life," replied the Ghost. "I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to *you?*"

Scrooge trembled more and more.

"Or would you know," pursued the Ghost, "the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have laboured on it, since. It is a ponderous chain!"

Scrooge glanced about him on the floor, in the expectation of finding himself surrounded by some fifty or sixty fathoms of iron cable: but he could see nothing.

"Jacob," he said, imploringly. "Old Jacob Marley, tell me more. Speak comfort to me, Jacob!"

"I have none to give," the Ghost replied. "It comes from other regions, Ebenezer Scrooge, and is conveyed by other ministers, to other kinds of men. Nor can I tell you what I would. A very little more is all permitted to me. I cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere. My spirit never walked beyond our counting-house—mark me!—in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole; and weary journeys lie before me!"

It was a habit with Scrooge, whenever he became thoughtful, to put his hands in his breeches pockets. Pondering on what the Ghost had said, he did so now, but without lifting up his eyes, or getting off his knees.

"You must have been very slow about it, Jacob," Scrooge observed, in a business-like manner, though with humility and deference.

"Slow!" the Ghost repeated.

"Seven years dead," mused Scrooge. "And travelling all the time!"

"The whole time," said the Ghost. "No rest, no peace. Incessant torture of remorse."

"You travel fast?" said Scrooge.

"On the wings of the wind," replied the Ghost.

"You might have got over a great quantity of ground in seven years," said Scrooge.

The Ghost, on hearing this, set up another cry, and clanked its chain so hideously in the dead silence of the night, that the Ward would have been justified in indicting it for a nuisance.

"Oh! captive, bound, and double-ironed," cried the phantom, "not to know, that ages of incessant labour by immortal creatures, for this earth must pass into eternity before the good of which it is susceptible is all developed. Not to know that any Christian spirit working kindly in its little sphere, whatever it may be, will find its mortal life too short for its vast means of usefulness. Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one life’s opportunity misused! Yet such was I! Oh! such was I!"

"But you were always a good man of business, Jacob," faltered Scrooge, who now began to apply this to himself.

"Business!" cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. "Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!"

It held up its chain at arm’s length, as if that were the cause of all its unavailing grief, and flung it heavily upon the ground again.

"At this time of the rolling year," the spectre said, "I suffer most. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode! Were there no poor homes to which its light would have conducted *me!*"

Scrooge was very much dismayed to hear the spectre going on at this rate, and began to quake exceedingly.

"Hear me!" cried the Ghost. "My time is nearly gone."

"I will," said Scrooge. "But don’t be hard upon me! Don’t be flowery, Jacob! Pray!"

"How it is that I appear before you in a shape that you can see, I may not tell. I have sat invisible beside you many and many a day."

It was not an agreeable idea. Scrooge shivered, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"That is no light part of my penance," pursued the Ghost. "I am here to-night to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my procuring, Ebenezer."

"You were always a good friend to me," said Scrooge. "Thank’ee!"

"You will be haunted," resumed the Ghost, "by Three Spirits."

Scrooge’s countenance fell almost as low as the Ghost’s had done.

"Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, Jacob?" he demanded, in a faltering voice.

"It is."

"I—I think I’d rather not," said Scrooge.

"Without their visits," said the Ghost, "you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. Expect the first to-morrow, when the bell tolls One."

"Couldn’t I take ’em all at once, and have it over, Jacob?" hinted Scrooge.

"Expect the second on the next night at the same hour. The third upon the next night when the last stroke of Twelve has ceased to vibrate. Look to see me no more; and look that, for your own sake, you remember what has passed between us!"

When it had said these words, the spectre took its wrapper from the table, and bound it round its head, as before. Scrooge knew this, by the smart sound its teeth made, when the jaws were brought together by the bandage. He ventured to raise his eyes again, and found his supernatural visitor confronting him in an erect attitude, with its chain wound over and about its arm.

The apparition walked backward from him; and at every step it took, the window raised itself a little, so that when the spectre reached it, it was wide open.

It beckoned Scrooge to approach, which he did. When they were within two paces of each other, Marley's Ghost held up its hand, warning him to come no nearer. Scrooge stopped.

Not so much in obedience, as in surprise and fear: for on the raising of the hand, he became sensible of confused noises in the air; incoherent sounds of lamentation and regret; wailings inexpressibly sorrowful and self-accusatory. The spectre, after listening for a moment, joined in the mournful dirge; and floated out upon the bleak, dark night.

Scrooge followed to the window: desperate in his curiosity. He looked out.

The air was filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning as they went. Every one of them wore chains like Marley's Ghost; some few (they might be guilty governments) were linked together; none were free. Many had been personally known to Scrooge in their lives. He had been quite familiar with one old ghost, in a white waistcoat, with a monstrous iron safe attached to its ankle, who cried piteously at being unable to assist a wretched woman with an infant, whom it saw below, upon a door-step. The misery with them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and had lost the power for ever.

Whether these creatures faded into mist, or mist enshrouded them, he could not tell. But they and their spirit voices faded together; and the night became as it had been when he walked home.

Scrooge closed the window, and examined the door by which the Ghost had entered. It was double-locked, as he had locked it with his own hands, and the bolts were undisturbed. He tried to say "Humbug!" but stopped at the first syllable. And being, from the emotion he had undergone, or the fatigues of the day, or his glimpse of the Invisible World, or the dull conversation of the Ghost, or the lateness of the hour, much in need of repose; went straight to bed, without undressing, and fell asleep upon the instant.

STAVE TWO.

THE FIRST OF THE THREE SPIRITS.

When Scrooge awoke, it was so dark, that looking out of bed, he could scarcely distinguish the transparent window from the opaque walls of his chamber. He was endeavouring to pierce the darkness with his ferret eyes, when the chimes of a neighbouring church struck the four quarters. So he listened for the hour.

To his great astonishment the heavy bell went on from six to seven, and from seven to eight, and regularly up to twelve; then stopped. Twelve! It was past two when he went to bed. The clock was wrong. An icicle must have got into the works. Twelve!

He touched the spring of his repeater, to correct this most preposterous clock. Its rapid little pulse beat twelve: and stopped.

"Why, it isn’t possible," said Scrooge, "that I can have slept through a whole day and far into another night. It isn’t possible that anything has happened to the sun, and this is twelve at noon!"

The idea being an alarming one, he scrambled out of bed, and groped his way to the window. He was obliged to rub the frost off with the sleeve of his dressing-gown before he could see anything; and could see very little then. All he could make out was, that it was still very foggy and extremely cold, and that there was no noise of people running to and fro, and making a great stir, as there unquestionably would have been if night had beaten off bright day, and taken possession of the world. This was a great relief, because "three days after sight of this First of Exchange pay to Mr. Ebenezer Scrooge or his order," and so forth, would have become a mere United States’ security if there were no days to count by.

Scrooge went to bed again, and thought, and thought, and thought it over and over and over, and could make nothing of it. The more he thought, the more perplexed he was; and the more he endeavoured not to think, the more he thought.

Marley’s Ghost bothered him exceedingly. Every time he resolved within himself, after mature inquiry, that it was all a dream, his mind flew back again, like a strong spring released, to its first position, and presented the same problem to be worked all through, "Was it a dream or not?"

Scrooge lay in this state until the chime had gone three quarters more, when he remembered, on a sudden, that the Ghost had warned him of a visitation when the bell tolled one. He resolved to lie awake until the hour was passed; and, considering that he could no more go to sleep than go to Heaven, this was perhaps the wisest resolution in his power.

The quarter was so long, that he was more than once convinced he must have sunk into a doze unconsciously, and missed the clock. At length it broke upon his listening ear.

"Ding, dong!"

"A quarter past," said Scrooge, counting.

"Ding, dong!"

"Half-past!" said Scrooge.

"Ding, dong!"

"A quarter to it," said Scrooge.

"Ding, dong!"

"The hour itself," said Scrooge, triumphantly, "and nothing else!"

He spoke before the hour bell sounded, which it now did with a deep, dull, hollow, melancholy One. Light flashed up in the room upon the instant, and the curtains of his bed were drawn.

The curtains of his bed were drawn aside, I tell you, by a hand. Not the curtains at his feet, nor the curtains at his back, but those to which his face was addressed. The curtains of his bed were drawn aside; and Scrooge, starting up into a half-recumbent attitude, found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor who drew them: as close to it as I am now to you, and I am standing in the spirit at your elbow.

It was a strange figure—like a child: yet not so like a child as like an old man, viewed through some supernatural medium, which gave him the appearance of having receded from the view, and being diminished to a child’s proportions. Its hair, which hung about its neck and down its back, was white as if with age; and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it, and the tenderest bloom was on the skin. The arms were very long and muscular; the hands the same, as if its hold were of uncommon strength. Its legs and feet, most delicately formed, were, like those upper members, bare. It wore a tunic of the purest white; and round its waist was bound a lustrous belt, the sheen of which was beautiful. It held a branch of fresh green holly in its hand; and, in singular contradiction of that wintry emblem, had its dress trimmed with summer flowers. But the strangest thing about it was, that from the crown of its head there sprung a bright clear jet of light, by which all this was visible; and which was doubtless the occasion of its using, in its duller moments, a great extinguisher for a cap, which it now held under its arm.

Even this, though, when Scrooge looked at it with increasing steadiness, was *not* its strangest quality. For as its belt sparkled and glittered now in one part and now in another, and what was light one instant, at another time was dark, so the figure itself fluctuated in its distinctness: being now a thing with one arm, now with one leg, now with twenty legs, now a pair of legs without a head, now a head without a body: of which dissolving parts, no outline would be visible in the dense gloom wherein they melted away. And in the very wonder of this, it would be itself again; distinct and clear as ever.

"Are you the Spirit, sir, whose coming was foretold to me?" asked Scrooge.

"I am!"

The voice was soft and gentle. Singularly low, as if instead of being so close beside him, it were at a distance.

"Who, and what are you?" Scrooge demanded.

"I am the Ghost of Christmas Past."

"Long Past?" inquired Scrooge: observant of its dwarfish stature.

"No. Your past."

Perhaps, Scrooge could not have told anybody why, if anybody could have asked him; but he had a special desire to see the Spirit in his cap; and begged him to be covered.

"What!" exclaimed the Ghost, "would you so soon put out, with worldly hands, the light I give? Is it not enough that you are one of those whose passions made this cap, and force me through whole trains of years to wear it low upon my brow!"

Scrooge reverently disclaimed all intention to offend or any knowledge of having wilfully "bonneted" the Spirit at any period of his life. He then made bold to inquire what business brought him there.

"Your welfare!" said the Ghost.

Scrooge expressed himself much obliged, but could not help thinking that a night of unbroken rest would have been more conducive to that end. The Spirit must have heard him thinking, for it said immediately:

"Your reclamation, then. Take heed!"

It put out its strong hand as it spoke, and clasped him gently by the arm.

"Rise! and walk with me!"

It would have been in vain for Scrooge to plead that the weather and the hour were not adapted to pedestrian purposes; that bed was warm, and the thermometer a long way below freezing; that he was clad but lightly in his slippers, dressing-gown, and nightcap; and that he had a cold upon him at that time. The grasp, though gentle as a woman’s hand, was not to be resisted. He rose: but finding that the Spirit made towards the window, clasped his robe in supplication.

"I am a mortal," Scrooge remonstrated, "and liable to fall."

"Bear but a touch of my hand *there*," said the Spirit, laying it upon his heart, "and you shall be upheld in more than this!"

As the words were spoken, they passed through the wall, and stood upon an open country road, with fields on either hand. The city had entirely vanished. Not a vestige of it was to be seen. The darkness and the mist had vanished with it, for it was a clear, cold, winter day, with snow upon the ground.

"Good Heaven!" said Scrooge, clasping his hands together, as he looked about him. "I was bred in this place. I was a boy here!"

The Spirit gazed upon him mildly. Its gentle touch, though it had been light and instantaneous, appeared still present to the old man’s sense of feeling. He was conscious of a thousand odours floating in the air, each one connected with a thousand thoughts, and hopes, and joys, and cares long, long, forgotten!

"Your lip is trembling," said the Ghost. "And what is that upon your cheek?"

Scrooge muttered, with an unusual catching in his voice, that it was a pimple; and begged the Ghost to lead him where he would.

"You recollect the way?" inquired the Spirit.

"Remember it!" cried Scrooge with fervour; "I could walk it blindfold."

"Strange to have forgotten it for so many years!" observed the Ghost. "Let us go on."

They walked along the road, Scrooge recognising every gate, and post, and tree; until a little market-town appeared in the distance, with its bridge, its church, and winding river. Some shaggy ponies now were seen trotting towards them with boys upon their backs, who called to other boys in country gigs and carts, driven by farmers. All these boys were in great spirits, and shouted to each other, until the broad fields were so full of merry music, that the crisp air laughed to hear it!

"These are but shadows of the things that have been," said the Ghost. "They have no consciousness of us."

The jocund travellers came on; and as they came, Scrooge knew and named them every one. Why was he rejoiced beyond all bounds to see them! Why did his cold eye glisten, and his heart leap up as they went past! Why was he filled with gladness when he heard them give each other Merry Christmas, as they parted at cross-roads and bye-ways, for their several homes! What was merry Christmas to Scrooge? Out upon merry Christmas! What good had it ever done to him?

"The school is not quite deserted," said the Ghost. "A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still."

Scrooge said he knew it. And he sobbed.

They left the high-road, by a well-remembered lane, and soon approached a mansion of dull red brick, with a little weathercock-surmounted cupola, on the roof, and a bell hanging in it. It was a large house, but one of broken fortunes; for the spacious offices were little used, their walls were damp and mossy, their windows broken, and their gates decayed. Fowls clucked and strutted in the stables; and the coach-houses and sheds were over-run with grass. Nor was it more retentive of its ancient state, within; for entering the dreary hall, and glancing through the open doors of many rooms, they found them poorly furnished, cold, and vast. There was an earthy savour in the air, a chilly bareness in the place, which associated itself somehow with too much getting up by candle-light, and not too much to eat.

They went, the Ghost and Scrooge, across the hall, to a door at the back of the house. It opened before them, and disclosed a long, bare, melancholy room, made barer still by lines of plain deal forms and desks. At one of these a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire; and Scrooge sat down upon a form, and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he used to be.

Not a latent echo in the house, not a squeak and scuffle from the mice behind the panelling, not a drip from the half-thawed water-spout in the dull yard behind, not a sigh among the leafless boughs of one despondent poplar, not the idle swinging of an empty store-house door, no, not a clicking in the fire, but fell upon the heart of Scrooge with a softening influence, and gave a freer passage to his tears.

The Spirit touched him on the arm, and pointed to his younger self, intent upon his reading. Suddenly a man, in foreign garments: wonderfully real and distinct to look at: stood outside the window, with an axe stuck in his belt, and leading by the bridle an ass laden with wood.

"Why, it’s Ali Baba!" Scrooge exclaimed in ecstasy. "It’s dear old honest Ali Baba! Yes, yes, I know! One Christmas time, when yonder solitary child was left here all alone, he *did* come, for the first time, just like that. Poor boy! And Valentine," said Scrooge, "and his wild brother, Orson; there they go! And what’s his name, who was put down in his drawers, asleep, at the Gate of Damascus; don’t you see him! And the Sultan’s Groom turned upside down by the Genii; there he is upon his head! Serve him right. I’m glad of it. What business had *he* to be married to the Princess!"

To hear Scrooge expending all the earnestness of his nature on such subjects, in a most extraordinary voice between laughing and crying; and to see his heightened and excited face; would have been a surprise to his business friends in the city, indeed.

"There’s the Parrot!" cried Scrooge. "Green body and yellow tail, with a thing like a lettuce growing out of the top of his head; there he is! Poor Robin Crusoe, he called him, when he came home again after sailing round the island. ‘Poor Robin Crusoe, where have you been, Robin Crusoe?’ The man thought he was dreaming, but he wasn’t. It was the Parrot, you know. There goes Friday, running for his life to the little creek! Halloa! Hoop! Halloo!"

Then, with a rapidity of transition very foreign to his usual character, he said, in pity for his former self, "Poor boy!" and cried again.

"I wish," Scrooge muttered, putting his hand in his pocket, and looking about him, after drying his eyes with his cuff: "but it’s too late now."

"What is the matter?" asked the Spirit.

"Nothing," said Scrooge. "Nothing. There was a boy singing a Christmas Carol at my door last night. I should like to have given him something: that’s all."

The Ghost smiled thoughtfully, and waved its hand: saying as it did so, "Let us see another Christmas!"

Scrooge’s former self grew larger at the words, and the room became a little darker and more dirty. The panels shrunk, the windows cracked; fragments of plaster fell out of the ceiling, and the naked laths were shown instead; but how all this was brought about, Scrooge knew no more than you do. He only knew that it was quite correct; that everything had happened so; that there he was, alone again, when all the other boys had gone home for the jolly holidays.

He was not reading now, but walking up and down despairingly. Scrooge looked at the Ghost, and with a mournful shaking of his head, glanced anxiously towards the door.

It opened; and a little girl, much younger than the boy, came darting in, and putting her arms about his neck, and often kissing him, addressed him as her "Dear, dear brother."

"I have come to bring you home, dear brother!" said the child, clapping her tiny hands, and bending down to laugh. "To bring you home, home, home!"

"Home, little Fan?" returned the boy.

"Yes!" said the child, brimful of glee. "Home, for good and all. Home, for ever and ever. Father is so much kinder than he used to be, that home’s like Heaven! He spoke so gently to me one dear night when I was going to bed, that I was not afraid to ask him once more if you might come home; and he said Yes, you should; and sent me in a coach to bring you. And you’re to be a man!" said the child, opening her eyes, "and are never to come back here; but first, we’re to be together all the Christmas long, and have the merriest time in all the world."

"You are quite a woman, little Fan!" exclaimed the boy.

She clapped her hands and laughed, and tried to touch his head; but being too little, laughed again, and stood on tiptoe to embrace him. Then she began to drag him, in her childish eagerness, towards the door; and he, nothing loth to go, accompanied her.

A terrible voice in the hall cried, "Bring down Master Scrooge’s box, there!" and in the hall appeared the schoolmaster himself, who glared on Master Scrooge with a ferocious condescension, and threw him into a dreadful state of mind by shaking hands with him. He then conveyed him and his sister into the veriest old well of a shivering best-parlour that ever was seen, where the maps upon the wall, and the celestial and terrestrial globes in the windows, were waxy with cold. Here he produced a decanter of curiously light wine, and a block of curiously heavy cake, and administered instalments of those dainties to the young people: at the same time, sending out a meagre servant to offer a glass of "something" to the postboy, who answered that he thanked the gentleman, but if it was the same tap as he had tasted before, he had rather not. Master Scrooge’s trunk being by this time tied on to the top of the chaise, the children bade the schoolmaster good-bye right willingly; and getting into it, drove gaily down the garden-sweep: the quick wheels dashing the hoar-frost and snow from off the dark leaves of the evergreens like spray.

"Always a delicate creature, whom a breath might have withered," said the Ghost. "But she had a large heart!"

"So she had," cried Scrooge. "You’re right. I will not gainsay it, Spirit. God forbid!"

"She died a woman," said the Ghost, "and had, as I think, children."

"One child," Scrooge returned.

"True," said the Ghost. "Your nephew!"

Scrooge seemed uneasy in his mind; and answered briefly, "Yes."

Although they had but that moment left the school behind them, they were now in the busy thoroughfares of a city, where shadowy passengers passed and repassed; where shadowy carts and coaches battled for the way, and all the strife and tumult of a real city were. It was made plain enough, by the dressing of the shops, that here too it was Christmas time again; but it was evening, and the streets were lighted up.

The Ghost stopped at a certain warehouse door, and asked Scrooge if he knew it.

"Know it!" said Scrooge. "Was I apprenticed here!"

They went in. At sight of an old gentleman in a Welsh wig, sitting behind such a high desk, that if he had been two inches taller he must have knocked his head against the ceiling, Scrooge cried in great excitement:

"Why, it’s old Fezziwig! Bless his heart; it’s Fezziwig alive again!"

Old Fezziwig laid down his pen, and looked up at the clock, which pointed to the hour of seven. He rubbed his hands; adjusted his capacious waistcoat; laughed all over himself, from his shoes to his organ of benevolence; and called out in a comfortable, oily, rich, fat, jovial voice:

"Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!"

Scrooge’s former self, now grown a young man, came briskly in, accompanied by his fellow-’prentice.

"Dick Wilkins, to be sure!" said Scrooge to the Ghost. "Bless me, yes. There he is. He was very much attached to me, was Dick. Poor Dick! Dear, dear!"

"Yo ho, my boys!" said Fezziwig. "No more work to-night. Christmas Eve, Dick. Christmas, Ebenezer! Let’s have the shutters up," cried old Fezziwig, with a sharp clap of his hands, "before a man can say Jack Robinson!"

You wouldn’t believe how those two fellows went at it! They charged into the street with the shutters—one, two, three—had ’em up in their places—four, five, six—barred ’em and pinned ’em—seven, eight, nine—and came back before you could have got to twelve, panting like race-horses.

"Hilli-ho!" cried old Fezziwig, skipping down from the high desk, with wonderful agility. "Clear away, my lads, and let’s have lots of room here! Hilli-ho, Dick! Chirrup, Ebenezer!"

Clear away! There was nothing they wouldn’t have cleared away, or couldn’t have cleared away, with old Fezziwig looking on. It was done in a minute. Every movable was packed off, as if it were dismissed from public life for evermore; the floor was swept and watered, the lamps were trimmed, fuel was heaped upon the fire; and the warehouse was as snug, and warm, and dry, and bright a ball-room, as you would desire to see upon a winter’s night.

In came a fiddler with a music-book, and went up to the lofty desk, and made an orchestra of it, and tuned like fifty stomach-aches. In came Mrs. Fezziwig, one vast substantial smile. In came the three Miss Fezziwigs, beaming and lovable. In came the six young followers whose hearts they broke. In came all the young men and women employed in the business. In came the housemaid, with her cousin, the baker. In came the cook, with her brother’s particular friend, the milkman. In came the boy from over the way, who was suspected of not having board enough from his master; trying to hide himself behind the girl from next door but one, who was proved to have had her ears pulled by her mistress. In they all came, one after another; some shyly, some boldly, some gracefully, some awkwardly, some pushing, some pulling; in they all came, anyhow and everyhow. Away they all went, twenty couple at once; hands half round and back again the other way; down the middle and up again; round and round in various stages of affectionate grouping; old top couple always turning up in the wrong place; new top couple starting off again, as soon as they got there; all top couples at last, and not a bottom one to help them! When this result was brought about, old Fezziwig, clapping his hands to stop the dance, cried out, "Well done!" and the fiddler plunged his hot face into a pot of porter, especially provided for that purpose. But scorning rest, upon his reappearance, he instantly began again, though there were no dancers yet, as if the other fiddler had been carried home, exhausted, on a shutter, and he were a bran-new man resolved to beat him out of sight, or perish.

There were more dances, and there were forfeits, and more dances, and there was cake, and there was negus, and there was a great piece of Cold Roast, and there was a great piece of Cold Boiled, and there were mince-pies, and plenty of beer. But the great effect of the evening came after the Roast and Boiled, when the fiddler (an artful dog, mind! The sort of man who knew his business better than you or I could have told it him!) struck up "Sir Roger de Coverley." Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig. Top couple, too; with a good stiff piece of work cut out for them; three or four and twenty pair of partners; people who were not to be trifled with; people who *would* dance, and had no notion of walking.

Mr. Fezziwig’s Ball

But if they had been twice as many—ah, four times—old Fezziwig would have been a match for them, and so would Mrs. Fezziwig. As to *her*, she was worthy to be his partner in every sense of the term. If that’s not high praise, tell me higher, and I’ll use it. A positive light appeared to issue from Fezziwig’s calves. They shone in every part of the dance like moons. You couldn’t have predicted, at any given time, what would have become of them next. And when old Fezziwig and Mrs. Fezziwig had gone all through the dance; advance and retire, both hands to your partner, bow and curtsey, corkscrew, thread-the-needle, and back again to your place; Fezziwig "cut"—cut so deftly, that he appeared to wink with his legs, and came upon his feet again without a stagger.

When the clock struck eleven, this domestic ball broke up. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig took their stations, one on either side of the door, and shaking hands with every person individually as he or she went out, wished him or her a Merry Christmas. When everybody had retired but the two ’prentices, they did the same to them; and thus the cheerful voices died away, and the lads were left to their beds; which were under a counter in the back-shop.

During the whole of this time, Scrooge had acted like a man out of his wits. His heart and soul were in the scene, and with his former self. He corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest agitation. It was not until now, when the bright faces of his former self and Dick were turned from them, that he remembered the Ghost, and became conscious that it was looking full upon him, while the light upon its head burnt very clear.

"A small matter," said the Ghost, "to make these silly folks so full of gratitude."

"Small!" echoed Scrooge.

The Spirit signed to him to listen to the two apprentices, who were pouring out their hearts in praise of Fezziwig: and when he had done so, said,

"Why! Is it not? He has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money: three or four perhaps. Is that so much that he deserves this praise?"

"It isn’t that," said Scrooge, heated by the remark, and speaking unconsciously like his former, not his latter, self. "It isn’t that, Spirit. He has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. Say that his power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count ’em up: what then? The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune."

He felt the Spirit’s glance, and stopped.

"What is the matter?" asked the Ghost.

"Nothing particular," said Scrooge.

"Something, I think?" the Ghost insisted.

"No," said Scrooge, "No. I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now. That’s all."

His former self turned down the lamps as he gave utterance to the wish; and Scrooge and the Ghost again stood side by side in the open air.

"My time grows short," observed the Spirit. "Quick!"

This was not addressed to Scrooge, or to any one whom he could see, but it produced an immediate effect. For again Scrooge saw himself. He was older now; a man in the prime of life. His face had not the harsh and rigid lines of later years; but it had begun to wear the signs of care and avarice. There was an eager, greedy, restless motion in the eye, which showed the passion that had taken root, and where the shadow of the growing tree would fall.

He was not alone, but sat by the side of a fair young girl in a mourning-dress: in whose eyes there were tears, which sparkled in the light that shone out of the Ghost of Christmas Past.

"It matters little," she said, softly. "To you, very little. Another idol has displaced me; and if it can cheer and comfort you in time to come, as I would have tried to do, I have no just cause to grieve."

"What Idol has displaced you?" he rejoined.

"A golden one."

"This is the even-handed dealing of the world!" he said. "There is nothing on which it is so hard as poverty; and there is nothing it professes to condemn with such severity as the pursuit of wealth!"

"You fear the world too much," she answered, gently. "All your other hopes have merged into the hope of being beyond the chance of its sordid reproach. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master-passion, Gain, engrosses you. Have I not?"

"What then?" he retorted. "Even if I have grown so much wiser, what then? I am not changed towards you."

She shook her head.

"Am I?"

"Our contract is an old one. It was made when we were both poor and content to be so, until, in good season, we could improve our worldly fortune by our patient industry. You *are* changed. When it was made, you were another man."

"I was a boy," he said impatiently.

"Your own feeling tells you that you were not what you are," she returned. "I am. That which promised happiness when we were one in heart, is fraught with misery now that we are two. How often and how keenly I have thought of this, I will not say. It is enough that I *have* thought of it, and can release you."

"Have I ever sought release?"

"In words. No. Never."

"In what, then?"

"In a changed nature; in an altered spirit; in another atmosphere of life; another Hope as its great end. In everything that made my love of any worth or value in your sight. If this had never been between us," said the girl, looking mildly, but with steadiness, upon him; "tell me, would you seek me out and try to win me now? Ah, no!"

He seemed to yield to the justice of this supposition, in spite of himself. But he said with a struggle, "You think not."

"I would gladly think otherwise if I could," she answered, "Heaven knows! When *I* have learned a Truth like this, I know how strong and irresistible it must be. But if you were free to-day, to-morrow, yesterday, can even I believe that you would choose a dowerless girl—you who, in your very confidence with her, weigh everything by Gain: or, choosing her, if for a moment you were false enough to your one guiding principle to do so, do I not know that your repentance and regret would surely follow? I do; and I release you. With a full heart, for the love of him you once were."

He was about to speak; but with her head turned from him, she resumed.

"You may—the memory of what is past half makes me hope you will—have pain in this. A very, very brief time, and you will dismiss the recollection of it, gladly, as an unprofitable dream, from which it happened well that you awoke. May you be happy in the life you have chosen!"

She left him, and they parted.

"Spirit!" said Scrooge, "show me no more! Conduct me home. Why do you delight to torture me?"

"One shadow more!" exclaimed the Ghost.

"No more!" cried Scrooge. "No more. I don’t wish to see it. Show me no more!"

But the relentless Ghost pinioned him in both his arms, and forced him to observe what happened next.

They were in another scene and place; a room, not very large or handsome, but full of comfort. Near to the winter fire sat a beautiful young girl, so like that last that Scrooge believed it was the same, until he saw *her*, now a comely matron, sitting opposite her daughter. The noise in this room was perfectly tumultuous, for there were more children there, than Scrooge in his agitated state of mind could count; and, unlike the celebrated herd in the poem, they were not forty children conducting themselves like one, but every child was conducting itself like forty. The consequences were uproarious beyond belief; but no one seemed to care; on the contrary, the mother and daughter laughed heartily, and enjoyed it very much; and the latter, soon beginning to mingle in the sports, got pillaged by the young brigands most ruthlessly. What would I not have given to be one of them! Though I never could have been so rude, no, no! I wouldn’t for the wealth of all the world have crushed that braided hair, and torn it down; and for the precious little shoe, I wouldn’t have plucked it off, God bless my soul! to save my life. As to measuring her waist in sport, as they did, bold young brood, I couldn’t have done it; I should have expected my arm to have grown round it for a punishment, and never come straight again. And yet I should have dearly liked, I own, to have touched her lips; to have questioned her, that she might have opened them; to have looked upon the lashes of her downcast eyes, and never raised a blush; to have let loose waves of hair, an inch of which would be a keepsake beyond price: in short, I should have liked, I do confess, to have had the lightest licence of a child, and yet to have been man enough to know its value.

But now a knocking at the door was heard, and such a rush immediately ensued that she with laughing face and plundered dress was borne towards it the centre of a flushed and boisterous group, just in time to greet the father, who came home attended by a man laden with Christmas toys and presents. Then the shouting and the struggling, and the onslaught that was made on the defenceless porter! The scaling him with chairs for ladders to dive into his pockets, despoil him of brown-paper parcels, hold on tight by his cravat, hug him round his neck, pommel his back, and kick his legs in irrepressible affection! The shouts of wonder and delight with which the development of every package was received! The terrible announcement that the baby had been taken in the act of putting a doll’s frying-pan into his mouth, and was more than suspected of having swallowed a fictitious turkey, glued on a wooden platter! The immense relief of finding this a false alarm! The joy, and gratitude, and ecstasy! They are all indescribable alike. It is enough that by degrees the children and their emotions got out of the parlour, and by one stair at a time, up to the top of the house; where they went to bed, and so subsided.

And now Scrooge looked on more attentively than ever, when the master of the house, having his daughter leaning fondly on him, sat down with her and her mother at his own fireside; and when he thought that such another creature, quite as graceful and as full of promise, might have called him father, and been a spring-time in the haggard winter of his life, his sight grew very dim indeed.

"Belle," said the husband, turning to his wife with a smile, "I saw an old friend of yours this afternoon."

"Who was it?"

"Guess!"

"How can I? Tut, don’t I know?" she added in the same breath, laughing as he laughed. "Mr. Scrooge."

"Mr. Scrooge it was. I passed his office window; and as it was not shut up, and he had a candle inside, I could scarcely help seeing him. His partner lies upon the point of death, I hear; and there he sat alone. Quite alone in the world, I do believe."

"Spirit!" said Scrooge in a broken voice, "remove me from this place."

"I told you these were shadows of the things that have been," said the Ghost. "That they are what they are, do not blame me!"

"Remove me!" Scrooge exclaimed, "I cannot bear it!"

He turned upon the Ghost, and seeing that it looked upon him with a face, in which in some strange way there were fragments of all the faces it had shown him, wrestled with it.

"Leave me! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!"

In the struggle, if that can be called a struggle in which the Ghost with no visible resistance on its own part was undisturbed by any effort of its adversary, Scrooge observed that its light was burning high and bright; and dimly connecting that with its influence over him, he seized the extinguisher-cap, and by a sudden action pressed it down upon its head.

The Spirit dropped beneath it, so that the extinguisher covered its whole form; but though Scrooge pressed it down with all his force, he could not hide the light: which streamed from under it, in an unbroken flood upon the ground.

He was conscious of being exhausted, and overcome by an irresistible drowsiness; and, further, of being in his own bedroom. He gave the cap a parting squeeze, in which his hand relaxed; and had barely time to reel to bed, before he sank into a heavy sleep.

STAVE THREE.

THE SECOND OF THE THREE SPIRITS.

Awaking in the middle of a prodigiously tough snore, and sitting up in bed to get his thoughts together, Scrooge had no occasion to be told that the bell was again upon the stroke of One. He felt that he was restored to consciousness in the right nick of time, for the especial purpose of holding a conference with the second messenger despatched to him through Jacob Marley’s intervention. But finding that he turned uncomfortably cold when he began to wonder which of his curtains this new spectre would draw back, he put them every one aside with his own hands; and lying down again, established a sharp look-out all round the bed. For he wished to challenge the Spirit on the moment of its appearance, and did not wish to be taken by surprise, and made nervous.

Gentlemen of the free-and-easy sort, who plume themselves on being acquainted with a move or two, and being usually equal to the time-of-day, express the wide range of their capacity for adventure by observing that they are good for anything from pitch-and-toss to manslaughter; between which opposite extremes, no doubt, there lies a tolerably wide and comprehensive range of subjects. Without venturing for Scrooge quite as hardily as this, I don’t mind calling on you to believe that he was ready for a good broad field of strange appearances, and that nothing between a baby and rhinoceros would have astonished him very much.

Now, being prepared for almost anything, he was not by any means prepared for nothing; and, consequently, when the Bell struck One, and no shape appeared, he was taken with a violent fit of trembling. Five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour went by, yet nothing came. All this time, he lay upon his bed, the very core and centre of a blaze of ruddy light, which streamed upon it when the clock proclaimed the hour; and which, being only light, was more alarming than a dozen ghosts, as he was powerless to make out what it meant, or would be at; and was sometimes apprehensive that he might be at that very moment an interesting case of spontaneous combustion, without having the consolation of knowing it. At last, however, he began to think—as you or I would have thought at first; for it is always the person not in the predicament who knows what ought to have been done in it, and would unquestionably have done it too—at last, I say, he began to think that the source and secret of this ghostly light might be in the adjoining room, from whence, on further tracing it, it seemed to shine. This idea taking full possession of his mind, he got up softly and shuffled in his slippers to the door.

The moment Scrooge's hand was on the lock, a strange voice called him by his name, and bade him enter. He obeyed.

It was his own room. There was no doubt about that. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. The walls and ceiling were so hung with living green, that it looked a perfect grove; from every part of which, bright gleaming berries glistened. The crisp leaves of holly, mistletoe, and ivy reflected back the light, as if so many little mirrors had been scattered there; and such a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney, as that dull petrification of a hearth had never known in Scrooge's time, or Marley's, or for many and many a winter season gone. Heaped up on the floor, to form a kind of throne, were turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, sucking-pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince-pies, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes, and seething bowls of punch, that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam. In easy state upon this couch, there sat a jolly Giant, glorious to see; who bore a glowing torch, in shape not unlike Plenty's horn, and held it up, high up, to shed its light on Scrooge, as he came peeping round the door.

"Come in!" exclaimed the Ghost. "Come in! and know me better, man!"

Scrooge entered timidly, and hung his head before this Spirit. He was not the dogged Scrooge he had been; and though the Spirit's eyes were clear and kind, he did not like to meet them.

"I am the Ghost of Christmas Present," said the Spirit. "Look upon me!"

Scrooge reverently did so. It was clothed in one simple green robe, or mantle, bordered with white fur. This garment hung so loosely on the figure, that its capacious breast was bare, as if disdaining to be warded or concealed by any artifice. Its feet, observable beneath the ample folds of the garment, were also bare; and on its head it wore no other covering than a holly wreath, set here and there with shining icicles. Its dark brown curls were long and free; free as its genial face, its sparkling eye, its open hand, its cheery voice, its unconstrained demeanour, and its joyful air. Girded round its middle was an antique scabbard; but no sword was in it, and the ancient sheath was eaten up with rust.

"You have never seen the like of me before!" exclaimed the Spirit.

"Never," Scrooge made answer to it.

"Have never walked forth with the younger members of my family; meaning (for I am very young) my elder brothers born in these later years?" pursued the Phantom.

"I don’t think I have," said Scrooge. "I am afraid I have not. Have you had many brothers, Spirit?"

"More than eighteen hundred," said the Ghost.

"A tremendous family to provide for!" muttered Scrooge.

The Ghost of Christmas Present rose.

"Spirit," said Scrooge submissively, "conduct me where you will. I went forth last night on compulsion, and I learnt a lesson which is working now. To-night, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it."

"Touch my robe!"

Scrooge did as he was told, and held it fast.

Holly, mistletoe, red berries, ivy, turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, meat, pigs, sausages, oysters, pies, puddings, fruit, and punch, all vanished instantly. So did the room, the fire, the ruddy glow, the hour of night, and they stood in the city streets on Christmas morning, where (for the weather was severe) the people made a rough, but brisk and not unpleasant kind of music, in scraping the snow from the pavement in front of their dwellings, and from the tops of their houses, whence it was mad delight to the boys to see it come plumping down into the road below, and splitting into artificial little snow-storms.

The house fronts looked black enough, and the windows blacker, contrasting with the smooth white sheet of snow upon the roofs, and with the dirtier snow upon the ground; which last deposit had been ploughed up in deep furrows by the heavy wheels of carts and waggons; furrows that crossed and re-crossed each other hundreds of times where the great streets branched off; and made intricate channels, hard to trace in the thick yellow mud and icy water. The sky was gloomy, and the shortest streets were choked up with a dingy mist, half thawed, half frozen, whose heavier particles descended in a shower of sooty atoms, as if all the chimneys in

Great Britain had, by one consent, caught fire, and were blazing away to their dear hearts' content. There was nothing very cheerful in the climate or the town, and yet was there an air of cheerfulness abroad that the clearest summer air and brightest summer sun might have endeavoured to diffuse in vain.

For, the people who were shovelling away on the housetops were jovial and full of glee; calling out to one another from the parapets, and now and then exchanging a facetious snowball—better-natured missile far than many a wordy jest—laughing heartily if it went right and not less heartily if it went wrong. The poulterers' shops were still half open, and the fruiterers' were radiant in their glory. There were great, round, pot-bellied baskets of chestnuts, shaped like the waistcoats of jolly old gentlemen, lolling at the doors, and tumbling out into the street in their apoplectic opulence. There were ruddy, brown-faced, broad-girthed Spanish Onions, shining in the fatness of their growth like Spanish Friars, and winking from their shelves in wanton slyness at the girls as they went by, and glanced demurely at the hung-up mistletoe. There were pears and apples, clustered high in blooming pyramids; there were bunches of grapes, made, in the shopkeepers' benevolence to dangle from conspicuous hooks, that people's mouths might water gratis as they passed; there were piles of filberts, mossy and brown, recalling, in their fragrance, ancient walks among the woods, and pleasant shufflings ankle deep through withered leaves; there were Norfolk Biffins, squat and swarthy, setting off the yellow of the oranges and lemons, and, in the great compactness of their juicy persons, urgently entreating and beseeching to be carried home in paper bags and eaten after dinner. The very gold and silver fish, set forth among these choice fruits in a bowl, though members of a dull and stagnant-blooded race, appeared to know that there was something going on; and, to a fish, went gasping round and round their little world in slow and passionless excitement.

The Grocers'! oh, the Grocers'! nearly closed, with perhaps two shutters down, or one; but through those gaps such glimpses! It was not alone that the scales descending on the counter made a merry sound, or that the twine and roller parted company so briskly, or that the canisters were rattled up and down like juggling tricks, or even that the blended scents of tea and coffee were so grateful to the nose, or even that the raisins were so plentiful and rare, the almonds so extremely white, the sticks of cinnamon so long and straight, the other spices so delicious, the candied fruits so caked and spotted with molten sugar as to make the coldest lookers-on feel faint and subsequently bilious. Nor was it that the figs were moist and pulpy, or that the French plums blushed in modest tartness from their highly-decorated boxes, or that everything was good to eat and in its Christmas dress; but the customers were all so hurried and so eager in the hopeful promise of the day, that they tumbled up against each other at the door, crashing their wicker baskets wildly, and left their purchases upon the counter, and came running back to fetch them, and committed hundreds of the like mistakes, in the best humour possible; while the Grocer and his people were so frank and fresh that the polished hearts with which they fastened their aprons behind might have been their own, worn outside for general inspection, and for Christmas daws to peck at if they chose.

But soon the steeples called good people all, to church and chapel, and away they came, flocking through the streets in their best clothes, and with their gayest faces. And at the same time there emerged from scores of bye-streets, lanes, and nameless turnings, innumerable people, carrying their dinners to the bakers’ shops. The sight of these poor revellers appeared to interest the Spirit very much, for he stood with Scrooge beside him in a baker’s doorway, and taking off the covers as their bearers passed, sprinkled incense on their dinners from his torch. And it was a very uncommon kind of torch, for once or twice when there were angry words between some dinner-carriers who had jostled each other, he shed a few drops of water on them from it, and their good humour was restored directly. For they said, it was a shame to quarrel upon Christmas Day. And so it was! God love it, so it was!

In time the bells ceased, and the bakers were shut up; and yet there was a genial shadowing forth of all these dinners and the progress of their cooking, in the thawed blotch of wet above each baker’s oven; where the pavement smoked as if its stones were cooking too.

"Is there a peculiar flavour in what you sprinkle from your torch?" asked Scrooge.

"There is. My own."

"Would it apply to any kind of dinner on this day?" asked Scrooge.

"To any kindly given. To a poor one most."

"Why to a poor one most?" asked Scrooge.

"Because it needs it most."

"Spirit," said Scrooge, after a moment's thought, "I wonder you, of all the beings in the many worlds about us, should desire to cramp these people's opportunities of innocent enjoyment."

"I!" cried the Spirit.

"You would deprive them of their means of dining every seventh day, often the only day on which they can be said to dine at all," said Scrooge. "Wouldn't you?"

"I!" cried the Spirit.

"You seek to close these places on the Seventh Day?" said Scrooge. "And it comes to the same thing."

"*I* seek!" exclaimed the Spirit.

"Forgive me if I am wrong. It has been done in your name, or at least in that of your family," said Scrooge.

"There are some upon this earth of yours," returned the Spirit, "who lay claim to know us, and who do their deeds of passion, pride, ill-will, hatred, envy, bigotry, and selfishness in our name, who are as strange to us and all our kith and kin, as if they had never lived. Remember that, and charge their doings on themselves, not us."

Scrooge promised that he would; and they went on, invisible, as they had been before, into the suburbs of the town. It was a remarkable quality of the Ghost (which Scrooge had observed at the baker's), that notwithstanding his gigantic size, he could accommodate himself to any place with ease; and that he stood beneath a low roof quite as gracefully and like a supernatural creature, as it was possible he could have done in any lofty hall.

And perhaps it was the pleasure the good Spirit had in showing off this power of his, or else it was his own kind, generous, hearty nature, and his sympathy with all poor men, that led him straight to Scrooge's clerk's; for there he went, and took Scrooge with him, holding to his robe; and on the threshold of the door the Spirit smiled, and stopped to bless Bob Cratchit's dwelling with the sprinkling of his torch. Think of that! Bob had but fifteen "Bob" a-week himself; he pocketed on Saturdays but fifteen copies of his Christian name; and yet the Ghost of Christmas Present blessed his four-roomed house!

Then up rose Mrs. Cratchit, Cratchit's wife, dressed out but poorly in a twice-turned gown, but brave in ribbons, which are cheap and make a goodly show for sixpence; and she laid the cloth, assisted by Belinda

Cratchit, second of her daughters, also brave in ribbons; while Master Peter Cratchit plunged a fork into the saucepan of potatoes, and getting the corners of his monstrous shirt collar (Bob’s private property, conferred upon his son and heir in honour of the day) into his mouth, rejoiced to find himself so gallantly attired, and yearned to show his linen in the fashionable Parks. And now two smaller Cratchits, boy and girl, came tearing in, screaming that outside the baker’s they had smelt the goose, and known it for their own; and basking in luxurious thoughts of sage and onion, these young Cratchits danced about the table, and exalted Master Peter Cratchit to the skies, while he (not proud, although his collars nearly choked him) blew the fire, until the slow potatoes bubbling up, knocked loudly at the saucepan-lid to be let out and peeled.

"What has ever got your precious father then?" said Mrs. Cratchit. "And your brother, Tiny Tim! And Martha warn’t as late last Christmas Day by half-an-hour?"

"Here’s Martha, mother!" said a girl, appearing as she spoke.

"Here’s Martha, mother!" cried the two young Cratchits. "Hurrah! There’s *such* a goose, Martha!"

"Why, bless your heart alive, my dear, how late you are!" said Mrs. Cratchit, kissing her a dozen times, and taking off her shawl and bonnet for her with officious zeal.

"We’d a deal of work to finish up last night," replied the girl, "and had to clear away this morning, mother!"

"Well! Never mind so long as you are come," said Mrs. Cratchit. "Sit ye down before the fire, my dear, and have a warm, Lord bless ye!"

"No, no! There’s father coming," cried the two young Cratchits, who were everywhere at once. "Hide, Martha, hide!"

So Martha hid herself, and in came little Bob, the father, with at least three feet of comforter exclusive of the fringe, hanging down before him; and his threadbare clothes darned up and brushed, to look seasonable; and Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. Alas for Tiny Tim, he bore a little crutch, and had his limbs supported by an iron frame!

"Why, where’s our Martha?" cried Bob Cratchit, looking round.

"Not coming," said Mrs. Cratchit.

"Not coming!" said Bob, with a sudden declension in his high spirits; for he had been Tim’s blood horse all the way from church, and had come home rampant. "Not coming upon Christmas Day!"

Martha didn’t like to see him disappointed, if it were only in joke; so she came out prematurely from behind the closet door, and ran into his arms, while the two young Cratchits hustled Tiny Tim, and bore him off into the wash-house, that he might hear the pudding singing in the copper.

"And how did little Tim behave?" asked Mrs. Cratchit, when she had rallied Bob on his credulity, and Bob had hugged his daughter to his heart’s content.

"As good as gold," said Bob, "and better. Somehow he gets thoughtful, sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see."

Bob’s voice was tremulous when he told them this, and trembled more when he said that Tiny Tim was growing strong and hearty.

His active little crutch was heard upon the floor, and back came Tiny Tim before another word was spoken, escorted by his brother and sister to his stool before the fire; and while Bob, turning up his cuffs—as if, poor fellow, they were capable of being made more shabby—compounded some hot mixture in a jug with gin and lemons, and stirred it round and round and put it on the hob to simmer; Master Peter, and the two ubiquitous young Cratchits went to fetch the goose, with which they soon returned in high procession.

Such a bustle ensued that you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds; a feathered phenomenon, to which a black swan was a matter of course—and in truth it was something very like it in that house. Mrs. Cratchit made the gravy (ready beforehand in a little saucepan) hissing hot; Master Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigour; Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple-sauce; Martha dusted the hot plates; Bob took Tiny Tim beside him in a tiny corner at the table; the two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody, not forgetting themselves, and mounting guard upon their posts, crammed spoons into their mouths, lest they should shriek for goose before their turn came to be helped. At last the dishes were set on, and grace was said. It was succeeded by a breathless pause, as Mrs. Cratchit, looking slowly all along the carving-knife, prepared to plunge it in the breast; but when she did, and when the long expected gush of stuffing issued forth, one murmur of delight arose all round the board, and even

Tiny Tim, excited by the two young Cratchits, beat on the table with the handle of his knife, and feebly cried Hurrah!

There never was such a goose. Bob said he didn't believe there ever was such a goose cooked. Its tenderness and flavour, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration. Eked out by apple-sauce and mashed potatoes, it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family; indeed, as Mrs. Cratchit said with great delight (surveying one small atom of a bone upon the dish), they hadn't ate it all at last! Yet every one had had enough, and the youngest Cratchits in particular, were steeped in sage and onion to the eyebrows! But now, the plates being changed by Miss Belinda, Mrs. Cratchit left the room alone—too nervous to bear witnesses—to take the pudding up and bring it in.

Suppose it should not be done enough! Suppose it should break in turning out! Suppose somebody should have got over the wall of the back-yard, and stolen it, while they were merry with the goose—a supposition at which the two young Cratchits became livid! All sorts of horrors were supposed.

Hallo! A great deal of steam! The pudding was out of the copper. A smell like a washing-day! That was the cloth. A smell like an eating-house and a pastrycook's next door to each other, with a laundress's next door to that! That was the pudding! In half a minute Mrs. Cratchit entered—flushed, but smiling proudly—with the pudding, like a speckled cannon-ball, so hard and firm, blazing in half of half-a-quartern of ignited brandy, and bedight with Christmas holly stuck into the top.

Oh, a wonderful pudding! Bob Cratchit said, and calmly too, that he regarded it as the greatest success achieved by Mrs. Cratchit since their marriage. Mrs. Cratchit said that now the weight was off her mind, she would confess she had had her doubts about the quantity of flour. Everybody had something to say about it, but nobody said or thought it was at all a small pudding for a large family. It would have been flat heresy to do so. Any Cratchit would have blushed to hint at such a thing.

At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up. The compound in the jug being tasted, and considered perfect, apples and oranges were put upon the table, and a shovel-full of chestnuts on the fire. Then all the Cratchit family drew round the hearth, in what Bob Cratchit called a circle, meaning half a one; and at Bob Cratchit's elbow stood the family display of glass. Two tumblers, and a custard-cup without a handle.

These held the hot stuff from the jug, however, as well as golden goblets would have done; and Bob served it out with beaming looks, while the chestnuts on the fire sputtered and cracked noisily. Then Bob proposed:

"A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!"

Which all the family re-echoed.

"God bless us every one!" said Tiny Tim, the last of all.

He sat very close to his father’s side upon his little stool. Bob held his withered little hand in his, as if he loved the child, and wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him.

"Spirit," said Scrooge, with an interest he had never felt before, "tell me if Tiny Tim will live."

"I see a vacant seat," replied the Ghost, "in the poor chimney-corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die."

"No, no," said Scrooge. "Oh, no, kind Spirit! say he will be spared."

"If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, none other of my race," returned the Ghost, "will find him here. What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population."

Scrooge hung his head to hear his own words quoted by the Spirit, and was overcome with penitence and grief.

"Man," said the Ghost, "if man you be in heart, not adamant, forbear that wicked cant until you have discovered What the surplus is, and Where it is. Will you decide what men shall live, what men shall die? It may be, that in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man’s child. Oh God! to hear the Insect on the leaf pronouncing on the too much life among his hungry brothers in the dust!"

Scrooge bent before the Ghost’s rebuke, and trembling cast his eyes upon the ground. But he raised them speedily, on hearing his own name.

"Mr. Scrooge!" said Bob; "I’ll give you Mr. Scrooge, the Founder of the Feast!"

"The Founder of the Feast indeed!" cried Mrs. Cratchit, reddening. "I wish I had him here. I’d give him a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I hope he’d have a good appetite for it."

"My dear," said Bob, "the children! Christmas Day."

"It should be Christmas Day, I am sure," said she, "on which one drinks the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr. Scrooge. You know he is, Robert! Nobody knows it better than you do, poor fellow!"

"My dear," was Bob's mild answer, "Christmas Day."

"I'll drink his health for your sake and the Day's," said Mrs. Cratchit, "not for his. Long life to him! A merry Christmas and a happy new year! He'll be very merry and very happy, I have no doubt!"

The children drank the toast after her. It was the first of their proceedings which had no heartiness. Tiny Tim drank it last of all, but he didn't care twopence for it. Scrooge was the Ogre of the family. The mention of his name cast a dark shadow on the party, which was not dispelled for full five minutes.

After it had passed away, they were ten times merrier than before, from the mere relief of Scrooge the Baleful being done with. Bob Cratchit told them how he had a situation in his eye for Master Peter, which would bring in, if obtained, full five-and-sixpence weekly. The two young Cratchits laughed tremendously at the idea of Peter's being a man of business; and Peter himself looked thoughtfully at the fire from between his collars, as if he were deliberating what particular investments he should favour when he came into the receipt of that bewildering income. Martha, who was a poor apprentice at a milliner's, then told them what kind of work she had to do, and how many hours she worked at a stretch, and how she meant to lie abed to-morrow morning for a good long rest; to-morrow being a holiday she passed at home. Also how she had seen a countess and a lord some days before, and how the lord "was much about as tall as Peter;" at which Peter pulled up his collars so high that you couldn't have seen his head if you had been there. All this time the chestnuts and the jug went round and round; and by-and-bye they had a song, about a lost child travelling in the snow, from Tiny Tim, who had a plaintive little voice, and sang it very well indeed.

There was nothing of high mark in this. They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were far from being water-proof; their clothes were scanty; and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a pawnbroker's. But, they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time; and when they faded, and looked happier yet in the bright sprinklings of the Spirit's torch at parting, Scrooge had his eye upon them, and especially on Tiny Tim, until the last.

By this time it was getting dark, and snowing pretty heavily; and as Scrooge and the Spirit went along the streets, the brightness of the roaring fires in kitchens, parlours, and all sorts of rooms, was wonderful. Here, the flickering of the blaze showed preparations for a cosy dinner, with hot plates baking through and through before the fire, and deep red curtains, ready to be drawn to shut out cold and darkness. There all the children of the house were running out into the snow to meet their married sisters, brothers, cousins, uncles, aunts, and be the first to greet them. Here, again, were shadows on the window-blind of guests assembling; and there a group of handsome girls, all hooded and fur-booted, and all chattering at once, tripped lightly off to some near neighbour’s house; where, woe upon the single man who saw them enter—artful witches, well they knew it—in a glow!

But, if you had judged from the numbers of people on their way to friendly gatherings, you might have thought that no one was at home to give them welcome when they got there, instead of every house expecting company, and piling up its fires half-chimney high. Blessings on it, how the Ghost exulted! How it bared its breadth of breast, and opened its capacious palm, and floated on, outpouring, with a generous hand, its bright and harmless mirth on everything within its reach! The very lamplighter, who ran on before, dotting the dusky street with specks of light, and who was dressed to spend the evening somewhere, laughed out loudly as the Spirit passed, though little kenned the lamplighter that he had any company but Christmas!

And now, without a word of warning from the Ghost, they stood upon a bleak and desert moor, where monstrous masses of rude stone were cast about, as though it were the burial-place of giants; and water spread itself wheresoever it listed, or would have done so, but for the frost that held it prisoner; and nothing grew but moss and furze, and coarse rank grass. Down in the west the setting sun had left a streak of fiery red, which glared upon the desolation for an instant, like a sullen eye, and frowning lower, lower, lower yet, was lost in the thick gloom of darkest night.

"What place is this?" asked Scrooge.

"A place where Miners live, who labour in the bowels of the earth," returned the Spirit. "But they know me. See!"

A light shone from the window of a hut, and swiftly they advanced towards it. Passing through the wall of mud and stone, they found a cheerful company assembled round a glowing fire. An old, old man and woman, with their children and their children's children, and another generation beyond that, all decked out gaily in their holiday attire. The old man, in a voice that seldom rose above the howling of the wind upon the barren waste, was singing them a Christmas song—it had been a very old song when he was a boy—and from time to time they all joined in the chorus. So surely as they raised their voices, the old man got quite blithe and loud; and so surely as they stopped, his vigour sank again.

The Spirit did not tarry here, but bade Scrooge hold his robe, and passing on above the moor, sped—whither? Not to sea? To sea. To Scrooge's horror, looking back, he saw the last of the land, a frightful range of rocks, behind them; and his ears were deafened by the thundering of water, as it rolled and roared, and raged among the dreadful caverns it had worn, and fiercely tried to undermine the earth.

Built upon a dismal reef of sunken rocks, some league or so from shore, on which the waters chafed and dashed, the wild year through, there stood a solitary lighthouse. Great heaps of sea-weed clung to its base, and storm-birds—born of the wind one might suppose, as sea-weed of the water—rose and fell about it, like the waves they skimmed.

But even here, two men who watched the light had made a fire, that through the loophole in the thick stone wall shed out a ray of brightness on the awful sea. Joining their horny hands over the rough table at which they sat, they wished each other Merry Christmas in their can of grog; and one of them: the elder, too, with his face all damaged and scarred with hard weather, as the figure-head of an old ship might be: struck up a sturdy song that was like a Gale in itself.

Again the Ghost sped on, above the black and heaving sea—on, on—until, being far away, as he told Scrooge, from any shore, they lighted on a ship. They stood beside the helmsman at the wheel, the look-out in the bow, the officers who had the watch; dark, ghostly figures in their several stations; but every man among them hummed a Christmas tune, or had a Christmas thought, or spoke below his breath to his companion of some bygone Christmas Day, with homeward hopes belonging to it. And every man on board, waking or sleeping, good or bad, had had a kinder word for another on that day than on any day in the year; and had shared to some extent in its festivities; and had remembered those he cared for at a distance, and had known that they delighted to remember him.

It was a great surprise to Scrooge, while listening to the moaning of the wind, and thinking what a solemn thing it was to move on through the lonely darkness over an unknown abyss, whose depths were secrets as profound as Death: it was a great surprise to Scrooge, while thus engaged, to hear a hearty laugh. It was a much greater surprise to Scrooge to recognise it as his own nephew’s and to find himself in a bright, dry, gleaming room, with the Spirit standing smiling by his side, and looking at that same nephew with approving affability!

"Ha, ha!" laughed Scrooge’s nephew. "Ha, ha, ha!"

If you should happen, by any unlikely chance, to know a man more blest in a laugh than Scrooge’s nephew, all I can say is, I should like to know him too. Introduce him to me, and I’ll cultivate his acquaintance.

It is a fair, even-handed, noble adjustment of things, that while there is infection in disease and sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good-humour. When Scrooge’s nephew laughed in this way: holding his sides, rolling his head, and twisting his face into the most extravagant contortions: Scrooge’s niece, by marriage, laughed as heartily as he. And their assembled friends being not a bit behindhand, roared out lustily.

"Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"He said that Christmas was a humbug, as I live!" cried Scrooge’s nephew. "He believed it too!"

"More shame for him, Fred!" said Scrooge’s niece, indignantly. Bless those women; they never do anything by halves. They are always in earnest.

She was very pretty: exceedingly pretty. With a dimpled, surprised-looking, capital face; a ripe little mouth, that seemed made to be kissed—as no doubt it was; all kinds of good little dots about her chin, that melted into one another when she laughed; and the sunniest pair of eyes you ever saw in any little creature’s head. Altogether she was what you would have called provoking, you know; but satisfactory, too. Oh, perfectly satisfactory.

"He’s a comical old fellow," said Scrooge’s nephew, "that’s the truth: and not so pleasant as he might be. However, his offences carry their own punishment, and I have nothing to say against him."

"I’m sure he is very rich, Fred," hinted Scrooge’s niece. "At least you always tell *me* so."

"What of that, my dear!" said Scrooge’s nephew. "His wealth is of no use to him. He don’t do any good with it. He don’t make himself comfortable with it. He hasn’t the satisfaction of thinking—ha, ha, ha!—that he is ever going to benefit US with it."

"I have no patience with him," observed Scrooge’s niece. Scrooge’s niece’s sisters, and all the other ladies, expressed the same opinion.

"Oh, I have!" said Scrooge’s nephew. "I am sorry for him; I couldn’t be angry with him if I tried. Who suffers by his ill whims! Himself, always. Here, he takes it into his head to dislike us, and he won’t come and dine with us. What’s the consequence? He don’t lose much of a dinner."

"Indeed, I think he loses a very good dinner," interrupted Scrooge’s niece. Everybody else said the same, and they must be allowed to have been competent judges, because they had just had dinner; and, with the dessert upon the table, were clustered round the fire, by lamplight.

"Well! I’m very glad to hear it," said Scrooge’s nephew, "because I haven’t great faith in these young housekeepers. What do *you* say, Topper?"

Topper had clearly got his eye upon one of Scrooge’s niece’s sisters, for he answered that a bachelor was a wretched outcast, who had no right to express an opinion on the subject. Whereat Scrooge’s niece’s sister—the plump one with the lace tucker: not the one with the roses—blushed.

"Do go on, Fred," said Scrooge’s niece, clapping her hands. "He never finishes what he begins to say! He is such a ridiculous fellow!"

Scrooge’s nephew revelled in another laugh, and as it was impossible to keep the infection off; though the plump sister tried hard to do it with aromatic vinegar; his example was unanimously followed.

"I was only going to say," said Scrooge’s nephew, "that the consequence of his taking a dislike to us, and not making merry with us, is, as I think, that he loses some pleasant moments, which could do him no harm. I am sure he loses pleasanter companions than he can find in his own thoughts, either in his mouldy old office, or his dusty chambers. I mean to give him the same chance every year, whether he likes it or not, for I pity him. He may rail at Christmas till he dies, but he can’t help thinking better of it—I defy him—if he finds me going there, in good temper, year after year, and saying Uncle Scrooge, how are you? If it only puts him in the vein to leave his poor clerk fifty pounds, *that’s* something; and I think I shook him yesterday."

It was their turn to laugh now at the notion of his shaking Scrooge. But being thoroughly good-natured, and not much caring what they laughed at, so that they laughed at any rate, he encouraged them in their merriment, and passed the bottle joyously.

After tea, they had some music. For they were a musical family, and knew what they were about, when they sung a Glee or Catch, I can assure you: especially Topper, who could growl away in the bass like a good one, and never swell the large veins in his forehead, or get red in the face over it. Scrooge’s niece played well upon the harp; and played among other tunes a simple little air (a mere nothing: you might learn to whistle it in two minutes), which had been familiar to the child who fetched Scrooge from the boarding-school, as he had been reminded by the Ghost of Christmas Past. When this strain of music sounded, all the things that Ghost had shown him, came upon his mind; he softened more and more; and thought that if he could have listened to it often, years ago, he might have cultivated the kindnesses of life for his own happiness with his own hands, without resorting to the sexton’s spade that buried Jacob Marley.

But they didn’t devote the whole evening to music. After a while they played at forfeits; for it is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child himself. Stop! There was first a game at blind-man’s buff. Of course there was. And I no more believe Topper was really blind than I believe he had eyes in his boots. My opinion is, that it was a done thing between him and Scrooge’s nephew; and that the Ghost of Christmas Present knew it. The way he went after that plump sister in the lace tucker, was an outrage on the credulity of human nature. Knocking down the fire-irons, tumbling over the chairs, bumping against the piano, smothering himself among the curtains, wherever she went, there went he! He always knew where the plump sister was. He wouldn’t catch anybody else. If you had fallen up against him (as some of them did), on purpose, he would have made a feint of endeavouring to seize you, which would have been an affront to your understanding, and would instantly have sidled off in the direction of the plump sister. She often cried out that it wasn’t fair; and it really was not. But when at last, he caught her; when, in spite of all her silken rustlings, and her rapid flutterings past him, he got her into a corner whence there was no escape; then his conduct was the most execrable. For his pretending not to know her; his pretending that it was necessary to touch her head-dress, and further to assure himself of her identity by pressing a certain ring upon her finger, and a certain chain about her neck; was vile, monstrous! No doubt she told him her opinion of it, when, another blind-man being in office, they were so very confidential together, behind the curtains.

Scrooge’s niece was not one of the blind-man’s buff party, but was made comfortable with a large chair and a footstool, in a snug corner, where the Ghost and Scrooge were close behind her. But she joined in the forfeits, and loved her love to admiration with all the letters of the alphabet. Likewise at the game of How, When, and Where, she was very great, and to the secret joy of Scrooge’s nephew, beat her sisters hollow: though they were sharp girls too, as Topper could have told you. There might have been twenty people there, young and old, but they all played, and so did Scrooge; for wholly forgetting in the interest he had in what was going on, that his voice made no sound in their ears, he sometimes came out with his guess quite loud, and very often guessed quite right, too; for the sharpest needle, best Whitechapel, warranted not to cut in the eye, was not sharper than Scrooge; blunt as he took it in his head to be.

The Ghost was greatly pleased to find him in this mood, and looked upon him with such favour, that he begged like a boy to be allowed to stay until the guests departed. But this the Spirit said could not be done.

"Here is a new game," said Scrooge. "One half hour, Spirit, only one!"

It was a Game called Yes and No, where Scrooge’s nephew had to think of something, and the rest must find out what; he only answering to their questions yes or no, as the case was. The brisk fire of questioning to which he was exposed, elicited from him that he was thinking of an animal, a live animal, rather a disagreeable animal, a savage animal, an animal that growled and grunted sometimes, and talked sometimes, and lived in London, and walked about the streets, and wasn’t made a show of, and wasn’t led by anybody, and didn’t live in a menagerie, and was never killed in a market, and was not a horse, or an ass, or a cow, or a bull, or a tiger, or a dog, or a pig, or a cat, or a bear. At every fresh question that was put to him, this nephew burst into a fresh roar of laughter; and was so inexpressibly tickled, that he was obliged to get up off the sofa and stamp. At last the plump sister, falling into a similar state, cried out:

"I have found it out! I know what it is, Fred! I know what it is!"

"What is it?" cried Fred.

"It’s your Uncle Scro-o-o-o-oge!"

Which it certainly was. Admiration was the universal sentiment, though some objected that the reply to "Is it a bear?" ought to have been "Yes;" inasmuch as an answer in the negative was sufficient to have diverted their thoughts from Mr. Scrooge, supposing they had ever had any tendency that way.

"He has given us plenty of merriment, I am sure," said Fred, "and it would be ungrateful not to drink his health. Here is a glass of mulled wine ready to our hand at the moment; and I say, 'Uncle Scrooge!' "

"Well! Uncle Scrooge!" they cried.

"A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to the old man, whatever he is!" said Scrooge's nephew. "He wouldn't take it from me, but may he have it, nevertheless. Uncle Scrooge!"

Uncle Scrooge had imperceptibly become so gay and light of heart, that he would have pledged the unconscious company in return, and thanked them in an inaudible speech, if the Ghost had given him time. But the whole scene passed off in the breath of the last word spoken by his nephew; and he and the Spirit were again upon their travels.

Much they saw, and far they went, and many homes they visited, but always with a happy end. The Spirit stood beside sick beds, and they were cheerful; on foreign lands, and they were close at home; by struggling men, and they were patient in their greater hope; by poverty, and it was rich. In almshouse, hospital, and jail, in misery's every refuge, where vain man in his little brief authority had not made fast the door, and barred the Spirit out, he left his blessing, and taught Scrooge his precepts.

It was a long night, if it were only a night; but Scrooge had his doubts of this, because the Christmas Holidays appeared to be condensed into the space of time they passed together. It was strange, too, that while Scrooge remained unaltered in his outward form, the Ghost grew older, clearly older. Scrooge had observed this change, but never spoke of it, until they left a children's Twelfth Night party, when, looking at the Spirit as they stood together in an open place, he noticed that its hair was grey.

"Are spirits' lives so short?" asked Scrooge.

"My life upon this globe, is very brief," replied the Ghost. "It ends to-night."

"To-night!" cried Scrooge.

"To-night at midnight. Hark! The time is drawing near."

The chimes were ringing the three quarters past eleven at that moment.

"Forgive me if I am not justified in what I ask," said Scrooge, looking intently at the Spirit’s robe, "but I see something strange, and not belonging to yourself, protruding from your skirts. Is it a foot or a claw?"

"It might be a claw, for the flesh there is upon it," was the Spirit’s sorrowful reply. "Look here."

From the foldings of its robe, it brought two children; wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable. They knelt down at its feet, and clung upon the outside of its garment.

"Oh, Man! look here. Look, look, down here!" exclaimed the Ghost.

They were a boy and girl. Yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish; but prostrate, too, in their humility. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints, a stale and shrivelled hand, like that of age, had pinched, and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds. Where angels might have sat enthroned, devils lurked, and glared out menacing. No change, no degradation, no perversion of humanity, in any grade, through all the mysteries of wonderful creation, has monsters half so horrible and dread.

Scrooge started back, appalled. Having them shown to him in this way, he tried to say they were fine children, but the words choked themselves, rather than be parties to a lie of such enormous magnitude.

"Spirit! are they yours?" Scrooge could say no more.

"They are Man’s," said the Spirit, looking down upon them. "And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased. Deny it!" cried the Spirit, stretching out its hand towards the city. "Slander those who tell it ye! Admit it for your factious purposes, and make it worse. And bide the end!"

"Have they no refuge or resource?" cried Scrooge.

"Are there no prisons?" said the Spirit, turning on him for the last time with his own words. "Are there no workhouses?"

The bell struck twelve.

Scrooge looked about him for the Ghost, and saw it not. As the last stroke ceased to vibrate, he remembered the prediction of old Jacob Marley, and lifting up his eyes, beheld a solemn Phantom, draped and hooded, coming, like a mist along the ground, towards him.

STAVE FOUR.

THE LAST OF THE SPIRITS.

The Phantom slowly, gravely, silently, approached. When it came near him, Scrooge bent down upon his knee; for in the very air through which this Spirit moved it seemed to scatter gloom and mystery.

It was shrouded in a deep black garment, which concealed its head, its face, its form, and left nothing of it visible save one outstretched hand. But for this it would have been difficult to detach its figure from the night, and separate it from the darkness by which it was surrounded.

He felt that it was tall and stately when it came beside him, and that its mysterious presence filled him with a solemn dread. He knew no more, for the Spirit neither spoke nor moved.

"I am in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come?" said Scrooge.

The Spirit answered not, but pointed onward with its hand.

"You are about to show me shadows of the things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us," Scrooge pursued. "Is that so, Spirit?"

The upper portion of the garment was contracted for an instant in its folds, as if the Spirit had inclined its head. That was the only answer he received.

Although well used to ghostly company by this time, Scrooge feared the silent shape so much that his legs trembled beneath him, and he found that he could hardly stand when he prepared to follow it. The Spirit paused a moment, as observing his condition, and giving him time to recover.

But Scrooge was all the worse for this. It thrilled him with a vague uncertain horror, to know that behind the dusky shroud, there were ghostly eyes intently fixed upon him, while he, though he stretched his own to the utmost, could see nothing but a spectral hand and one great heap of black.

"Ghost of the Future!" he exclaimed, "I fear you more than any spectre I have seen. But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me?"

It gave him no reply. The hand was pointed straight before them.

"Lead on!" said Scrooge. "Lead on! The night is waning fast, and it is precious time to me, I know. Lead on, Spirit!"

The Phantom moved away as it had come towards him. Scrooge followed in the shadow of its dress, which bore him up, he thought, and carried him along.

They scarcely seemed to enter the city; for the city rather seemed to spring up about them, and encompass them of its own act. But there they were, in the heart of it; on ’Change, amongst the merchants; who hurried up and down, and chinked the money in their pockets, and conversed in groups, and looked at their watches, and trifled thoughtfully with their great gold seals; and so forth, as Scrooge had seen them often.

The Spirit stopped beside one little knot of business men. Observing that the hand was pointed to them, Scrooge advanced to listen to their talk.

"No," said a great fat man with a monstrous chin, "I don’t know much about it, either way. I only know he’s dead."

"When did he die?" inquired another.

"Last night, I believe."

"Why, what was the matter with him?" asked a third, taking a vast quantity of snuff out of a very large snuff-box. "I thought he’d never die."

"God knows," said the first, with a yawn.

"What has he done with his money?" asked a red-faced gentleman with a pendulous excrescence on the end of his nose, that shook like the gills of a turkey-cock.

"I haven’t heard," said the man with the large chin, yawning again. "Left it to his company, perhaps. He hasn’t left it to *me*. That’s all I know."

This pleasantry was received with a general laugh.

"It’s likely to be a very cheap funeral," said the same speaker; "for upon my life I don’t know of anybody to go to it. Suppose we make up a party and volunteer?"

"I don’t mind going if a lunch is provided," observed the gentleman with the excrescence on his nose. "But I must be fed, if I make one."

Another laugh.

"Well, I am the most disinterested among you, after all," said the first speaker, "for I never wear black gloves, and I never eat lunch. But I’ll offer to go, if anybody else will. When I come to think of it, I’m not at all sure that I wasn’t his most particular friend; for we used to stop and speak whenever we met. Bye, bye!"

Speakers and listeners strolled away, and mixed with other groups. Scrooge knew the men, and looked towards the Spirit for an explanation.

The Phantom glided on into a street. Its finger pointed to two persons meeting. Scrooge listened again, thinking that the explanation might lie here.

He knew these men, also, perfectly. They were men of business: very wealthy, and of great importance. He had made a point always of standing well in their esteem: in a business point of view, that is; strictly in a business point of view.

"How are you?" said one.

"How are you?" returned the other.

"Well!" said the first. "Old Scratch has got his own at last, hey?"

"So I am told," returned the second. "Cold, isn’t it?"

"Seasonable for Christmas time. You’re not a skater, I suppose?"

"No. No. Something else to think of. Good morning!"

Not another word. That was their meeting, their conversation, and their parting.

Scrooge was at first inclined to be surprised that the Spirit should attach importance to conversations apparently so trivial; but feeling assured that they must have some hidden purpose, he set himself to consider what it was likely to be. They could scarcely be supposed to have any bearing on the death of Jacob, his old partner, for that was Past, and this Ghost’s province was the Future. Nor could he think of any one immediately connected with himself, to whom he could apply them. But nothing doubting that to whomsoever they applied they had some latent moral for his own improvement, he resolved to treasure up every word he heard, and everything he saw; and especially to observe the shadow of himself when it appeared. For he had an expectation that the conduct of his future self would give him the clue he missed, and would render the solution of these riddles easy.

He looked about in that very place for his own image; but another man stood in his accustomed corner, and though the clock pointed to his usual time of day for being there, he saw no likeness of himself among the multitudes that poured in through the Porch. It gave him little surprise, however; for he had been revolving in his mind a change of life, and thought and hoped he saw his new-born resolutions carried out in this.

Quiet and dark, beside him stood the Phantom, with its outstretched hand. When he roused himself from his thoughtful quest, he fancied from the turn of the hand, and its situation in reference to himself, that the Unseen Eyes were looking at him keenly. It made him shudder, and feel very cold.

They left the busy scene, and went into an obscure part of the town, where Scrooge had never penetrated before, although he recognised its situation, and its bad repute. The ways were foul and narrow; the shops and houses wretched; the people half-naked, drunken, slipshod, ugly. Alleys and archways, like so many cesspools, disgorged their offences of smell, and dirt, and life, upon the straggling streets; and the whole quarter reeked with crime, with filth, and misery.

Far in this den of infamous resort, there was a low-browed, beetling shop, below a pent-house roof, where iron, old rags, bottles, bones, and greasy offal, were bought. Upon the floor within, were piled up heaps of rusty keys, nails, chains, hinges, files, scales, weights, and refuse iron of all kinds. Secrets that few would like to scrutinise were bred and hidden in mountains of unseemly rags, masses of corrupted fat, and sepulchres of bones. Sitting in among the wares he dealt in, by a charcoal stove, made of old bricks, was a grey-haired rascal, nearly seventy years of age; who had screened himself from the cold air without, by a frousy curtaining of miscellaneous tatters, hung upon a line; and smoked his pipe in all the luxury of calm retirement.

Scrooge and the Phantom came into the presence of this man, just as a woman with a heavy bundle slunk into the shop. But she had scarcely entered, when another woman, similarly laden, came in too; and she was closely followed by a man in faded black, who was no less startled by the sight of them, than they had been upon the recognition of each other. After a short period of blank astonishment, in which the old man with the pipe had joined them, they all three burst into a laugh.

"Let the charwoman alone to be the first!" cried she who had entered first. "Let the laundress alone to be the second; and let the undertaker’s man alone to be the third. Look here, old Joe, here’s a chance! If we haven’t all three met here without meaning it!"

"You couldn’t have met in a better place," said old Joe, removing his pipe from his mouth. "Come into the parlour. You were made free of it long ago, you know; and the other two an’t strangers. Stop till I shut the door of the shop. Ah! How it skreeks! There an’t such a rusty bit of metal in the place as its own hinges, I believe; and I’m sure there’s no such old bones here, as mine. Ha, ha! We’re all suitable to our calling, we’re well matched. Come into the parlour. Come into the parlour."

The parlour was the space behind the screen of rags. The old man raked the fire together with an old stair-rod, and having trimmed his smoky lamp (for it was night), with the stem of his pipe, put it in his mouth again.

While he did this, the woman who had already spoken threw her bundle on the floor, and sat down in a flaunting manner on a stool; crossing her elbows on her knees, and looking with a bold defiance at the other two.

"What odds then! What odds, Mrs. Dilber?" said the woman. "Every person has a right to take care of themselves. *He* always did."

"That’s true, indeed!" said the laundress. "No man more so."

"Why then, don’t stand staring as if you was afraid, woman; who’s the wiser? We’re not going to pick holes in each other’s coats, I suppose?"

"No, indeed!" said Mrs. Dilber and the man together. "We should hope not."

"Very well, then!" cried the woman. "That’s enough. Who’s the worse for the loss of a few things like these? Not a dead man, I suppose."

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Dilber, laughing.

"If he wanted to keep ’em after he was dead, a wicked old screw," pursued the woman, "why wasn’t he natural in his lifetime? If he had been, he’d have had somebody to look after him when he was struck with Death, instead of lying gasping out his last there, alone by himself."

"It’s the truest word that ever was spoke," said Mrs. Dilber. "It’s a judgment on him."

"I wish it was a little heavier judgment," replied the woman; "and it should have been, you may depend upon it, if I could have laid my hands on anything else. Open that bundle, old Joe, and let me know the value of it. Speak out plain. I’m not afraid to be the first, nor afraid for them to see it. We know pretty well that we were helping ourselves, before we met here, I believe. It’s no sin. Open the bundle, Joe."

But the gallantry of her friends would not allow of this; and the man in faded black, mounting the breach first, produced *his* plunder. It was not extensive. A seal or two, a pencil-case, a pair of sleeve-buttons, and a brooch of no great value, were all. They were severally examined and appraised by old Joe, who chalked the sums he was disposed to give for each, upon the wall, and added them up into a total when he found there was nothing more to come.

"That’s your account," said Joe, "and I wouldn’t give another sixpence, if I was to be boiled for not doing it. Who’s next?"

Mrs. Dilber was next. Sheets and towels, a little wearing apparel, two old-fashioned silver teaspoons, a pair of sugar-tongs, and a few boots. Her account was stated on the wall in the same manner.

"I always give too much to ladies. It’s a weakness of mine, and that’s the way I ruin myself," said old Joe. "That’s your account. If you asked me for another penny, and made it an open question, I’d repent of being so liberal and knock off half-a-crown."

"And now undo *my* bundle, Joe," said the first woman.

Joe went down on his knees for the greater convenience of opening it, and having unfastened a great many knots, dragged out a large and heavy roll of some dark stuff.

"What do you call this?" said Joe. "Bed-curtains!"

"Ah!" returned the woman, laughing and leaning forward on her crossed arms. "Bed-curtains!"

"You don’t mean to say you took ’em down, rings and all, with him lying there?" said Joe.

"Yes I do," replied the woman. "Why not?"

"You were born to make your fortune," said Joe, "and you’ll certainly do it."

"I certainly shan’t hold my hand, when I can get anything in it by reaching it out, for the sake of such a man as He was, I promise you, Joe," returned the woman coolly. "Don’t drop that oil upon the blankets, now."

"His blankets?" asked Joe.

"Whose else’s do you think?" replied the woman. "He isn’t likely to take cold without ’em, I dare say."

"I hope he didn’t die of anything catching? Eh?" said old Joe, stopping in his work, and looking up.

"Don’t you be afraid of that," returned the woman. "I an’t so fond of his company that I’d loiter about him for such things, if he did. Ah! you may look through that shirt till your eyes ache; but you won’t find a hole in it, nor a threadbare place. It’s the best he had, and a fine one too. They’d have wasted it, if it hadn’t been for me."

"What do you call wasting of it?" asked old Joe.

"Putting it on him to be buried in, to be sure," replied the woman with a laugh. "Somebody was fool enough to do it, but I took it off again. If calico an’t good enough for such a purpose, it isn’t good enough for anything. It’s quite as becoming to the body. He can’t look uglier than he did in that one."

Scrooge listened to this dialogue in horror. As they sat grouped about their spoil, in the scanty light afforded by the old man’s lamp, he viewed them with a detestation and disgust, which could hardly have been greater, though they had been obscene demons, marketing the corpse itself.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the same woman, when old Joe, producing a flannel bag with money in it, told out their several gains upon the ground. "This is the end of it, you see! He frightened every one away from him when he was alive, to profit us when he was dead! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Spirit!" said Scrooge, shuddering from head to foot. "I see, I see. The case of this unhappy man might be my own. My life tends that way, now. Merciful Heaven, what is this!"

He recoiled in terror, for the scene had changed, and now he almost touched a bed: a bare, uncurtained bed: on which, beneath a ragged sheet, there lay a something covered up, which, though it was dumb, announced itself in awful language.

The room was very dark, too dark to be observed with any accuracy, though Scrooge glanced round it in obedience to a secret impulse, anxious to know what kind of room it was. A pale light, rising in the outer air, fell straight upon the bed; and on it, plundered and bereft, unwatched, unwept, uncared for, was the body of this man.

Scrooge glanced towards the Phantom. Its steady hand was pointed to the head. The cover was so carelessly adjusted that the slightest raising of it, the motion of a finger upon Scrooge’s part, would have disclosed the face. He thought of it, felt how easy it would be to do, and longed to do it; but had no more power to withdraw the veil than to dismiss the spectre at his side.

Oh cold, cold, rigid, dreadful Death, set up thine altar here, and dress it with such terrors as thou hast at thy command: for this is thy dominion! But of the loved, revered, and honoured head, thou canst not turn one hair to thy dread purposes, or make one feature odious. It is not that the hand is heavy and will fall down when released; it is not that the heart and pulse are still; but that the hand was open, generous, and true; the heart brave, warm, and tender; and the pulse a man’s. Strike, Shadow, strike! And see his good deeds springing from the wound, to sow the world with life immortal!

No voice pronounced these words in Scrooge’s ears, and yet he heard them when he looked upon the bed. He thought, if this man could be raised up now, what would be his foremost thoughts? Avarice, hard-dealing, griping cares? They have brought him to a rich end, truly!

He lay, in the dark empty house, with not a man, a woman, or a child, to say that he was kind to me in this or that, and for the memory of one kind word I will be kind to him. A cat was tearing at the door, and there was a sound of gnawing rats beneath the hearth-stone. What *they* wanted in the room of death, and why they were so restless and disturbed, Scrooge did not dare to think.

"Spirit!" he said, "this is a fearful place. In leaving it, I shall not leave its lesson, trust me. Let us go!"

Still the Ghost pointed with an unmoved finger to the head.

"I understand you," Scrooge returned, "and I would do it, if I could. But I have not the power, Spirit. I have not the power."

Again it seemed to look upon him.

"If there is any person in the town, who feels emotion caused by this man’s death," said Scrooge quite agonised, "show that person to me, Spirit, I beseech you!"

The Phantom spread its dark robe before him for a moment, like a wing; and withdrawing it, revealed a room by daylight, where a mother and her children were.

She was expecting some one, and with anxious eagerness; for she walked up and down the room; started at every sound; looked out from the window; glanced at the clock; tried, but in vain, to work with her needle; and could hardly bear the voices of the children in their play.

At length the long-expected knock was heard. She hurried to the door, and met her husband; a man whose face was careworn and depressed, though he was young. There was a remarkable expression in it now; a kind of serious delight of which he felt ashamed, and which he struggled to repress.

He sat down to the dinner that had been hoarding for him by the fire; and when she asked him faintly what news (which was not until after a long silence), he appeared embarrassed how to answer.

"Is it good?" she said, "or bad?"—to help him.

"Bad," he answered.

"We are quite ruined?"

"No. There is hope yet, Caroline."

"If *he* relents," she said, amazed, "there is! Nothing is past hope, if such a miracle has happened."

"He is past relenting," said her husband. "He is dead."

She was a mild and patient creature if her face spoke truth; but she was thankful in her soul to hear it, and she said so, with clasped hands. She prayed forgiveness the next moment, and was sorry; but the first was the emotion of her heart.

"What the half-drunken woman whom I told you of last night, said to me, when I tried to see him and obtain a week's delay; and what I thought was a mere excuse to avoid me; turns out to have been quite true. He was not only very ill, but dying, then."

"To whom will our debt be transferred?"

"I don't know. But before that time we shall be ready with the money; and even though we were not, it would be a bad fortune indeed to find so merciless a creditor in his successor. We may sleep to-night with light hearts, Caroline!"

Yes. Soften it as they would, their hearts were lighter. The children's faces, hushed and clustered round to hear what they so little understood, were brighter; and it was a happier house for this man's death! The only emotion that the Ghost could show him, caused by the event, was one of pleasure.

"Let me see some tenderness connected with a death," said Scrooge; "or that dark chamber, Spirit, which we left just now, will be for ever present to me."

The Ghost conducted him through several streets familiar to his feet; and as they went along, Scrooge looked here and there to find himself, but nowhere was he to be seen. They entered poor Bob Cratchit's house; the dwelling he had visited before; and found the mother and the children seated round the fire.

Quiet. Very quiet. The noisy little Cratchits were as still as statues in one corner, and sat looking up at Peter, who had a book before him. The mother and her daughters were engaged in sewing. But surely they were very quiet!

" ‘And He took a child, and set him in the midst of them.’ "

Where had Scrooge heard those words? He had not dreamed them. The boy must have read them out, as he and the Spirit crossed the threshold. Why did he not go on?

The mother laid her work upon the table, and put her hand up to her face.

"The colour hurts my eyes," she said.

The colour? Ah, poor Tiny Tim!

"They’re better now again," said Cratchit’s wife. "It makes them weak by candle-light; and I wouldn’t show weak eyes to your father when he comes home, for the world. It must be near his time."

"Past it rather," Peter answered, shutting up his book. "But I think he has walked a little slower than he used, these few last evenings, mother."

They were very quiet again. At last she said, and in a steady, cheerful voice, that only faltered once:

"I have known him walk with—I have known him walk with Tiny Tim upon his shoulder, very fast indeed."

"And so have I," cried Peter. "Often."

"And so have I," exclaimed another. So had all.

"But he was very light to carry," she resumed, intent upon her work, "and his father loved him so, that it was no trouble: no trouble. And there is your father at the door!"

She hurried out to meet him; and little Bob in his comforter—he had need of it, poor fellow—came in. His tea was ready for him on the hob, and they all tried who should help him to it most. Then the two young Cratchits got upon his knees and laid, each child a little cheek, against his face, as if they said, "Don’t mind it, father. Don’t be grieved!"

Bob was very cheerful with them, and spoke pleasantly to all the family. He looked at the work upon the table, and praised the industry and speed of Mrs. Cratchit and the girls. They would be done long before Sunday, he said.

"Sunday! You went to-day, then, Robert?" said his wife.

"Yes, my dear," returned Bob. "I wish you could have gone. It would have done you good to see how green a place it is. But you’ll see it often. I promised him that I would walk there on a Sunday. My little, little child!" cried Bob. "My little child!"

He broke down all at once. He couldn’t help it. If he could have helped it, he and his child would have been farther apart perhaps than they were.

He left the room, and went up-stairs into the room above, which was lighted cheerfully, and hung with Christmas. There was a chair set close beside the child, and there were signs of some one having been there, lately. Poor Bob sat down in it, and when he had thought a little and composed himself, he kissed the little face. He was reconciled to what had happened, and went down again quite happy.

They drew about the fire, and talked; the girls and mother working still. Bob told them of the extraordinary kindness of Mr. Scrooge’s nephew, whom he had scarcely seen but once, and who, meeting him in the street that day, and seeing that he looked a little—"just a little down you know," said Bob, inquired what had happened to distress him. "On which," said Bob, "for he is the pleasantest-spoken gentleman you ever heard, I told him. ‘I am heartily sorry for it, Mr. Cratchit,’ he said, ‘and heartily sorry for your good wife.’ By the bye, how he ever knew *that*, I don’t know."

"Knew what, my dear?"

"Why, that you were a good wife," replied Bob.

"Everybody knows that!" said Peter.

"Very well observed, my boy!" cried Bob. "I hope they do. ‘Heartily sorry,’ he said, ‘for your good wife. If I can be of service to you in any way,’ he said, giving me his card, ‘that’s where I live. Pray come to me.’ Now, it wasn’t," cried Bob, "for the sake of anything he might be able to do for us, so much as for his kind way, that this was quite delightful. It really seemed as if he had known our Tiny Tim, and felt with us."

"I’m sure he’s a good soul!" said Mrs. Cratchit.

"You would be surer of it, my dear," returned Bob, "if you saw and spoke to him. I shouldn’t be at all surprised—mark what I say!—if he got Peter a better situation."

"Only hear that, Peter," said Mrs. Cratchit.

"And then," cried one of the girls, "Peter will be keeping company with some one, and setting up for himself."

"Get along with you!" retorted Peter, grinning.

"It’s just as likely as not," said Bob, "one of these days; though there’s plenty of time for that, my dear. But however and whenever we part from one another, I am sure we shall none of us forget poor Tiny Tim—shall we—or this first parting that there was among us?"

"Never, father!" cried they all.

"And I know," said Bob, "I know, my dears, that when we recollect how patient and how mild he was; although he was a little, little child; we shall not quarrel easily among ourselves, and forget poor Tiny Tim in doing it."

"No, never, father!" they all cried again.

"I am very happy," said little Bob, "I am very happy!"

Mrs. Cratchit kissed him, his daughters kissed him, the two young Cratchits kissed him, and Peter and himself shook hands. Spirit of Tiny Tim, thy childish essence was from God!

"Spectre," said Scrooge, "something informs me that our parting moment is at hand. I know it, but I know not how. Tell me what man that was whom we saw lying dead?"

The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come conveyed him, as before—though at a different time, he thought: indeed, there seemed no order in these latter visions, save that they were in the Future—into the resorts of business men, but showed him not himself. Indeed, the Spirit did not stay for anything, but went straight on, as to the end just now desired, until besought by Scrooge to tarry for a moment.

"This court," said Scrooge, "through which we hurry now, is where my place of occupation is, and has been for a length of time. I see the house. Let me behold what I shall be, in days to come!"

The Spirit stopped; the hand was pointed elsewhere.

"The house is yonder," Scrooge exclaimed. "Why do you point away?"

The inexorable finger underwent no change.

Scrooge hastened to the window of his office, and looked in. It was an office still, but not his. The furniture was not the same, and the figure in the chair was not himself. The Phantom pointed as before.

He joined it once again, and wondering why and whither he had gone, accompanied it until they reached an iron gate. He paused to look round before entering.

A churchyard. Here, then; the wretched man whose name he had now to learn, lay underneath the ground. It was a worthy place. Walled in by houses; overrun by grass and weeds, the growth of vegetation’s death, not life; choked up with too much burying; fat with repleted appetite. A worthy place!

The Spirit stood among the graves, and pointed down to One. He advanced towards it trembling. The Phantom was exactly as it had been, but he dreaded that he saw new meaning in its solemn shape.

"Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point," said Scrooge, "answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of things that May be, only?"

Still the Ghost pointed downward to the grave by which it stood.

"Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead," said Scrooge. "But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!"

The Spirit was immovable as ever.

Scrooge crept towards it, trembling as he went; and following the finger, read upon the stone of the neglected grave his own name, Ebenezer Scrooge.

The Last of the Spirits

"Am *I* that man who lay upon the bed?" he cried, upon his knees.

The finger pointed from the grave to him, and back again.

"No, Spirit! Oh no, no!"

The finger still was there.

"Spirit!" he cried, tight clutching at its robe, "hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. Why show me this, if I am past all hope!"

For the first time the hand appeared to shake.

"Good Spirit," he pursued, as down upon the ground he fell before it: "Your nature intercedes for me, and pities me. Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life!"

The kind hand trembled.

"I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!"

In his agony, he caught the spectral hand. It sought to free itself, but he was strong in his entreaty, and detained it. The Spirit, stronger yet, repulsed him.

Holding up his hands in a last prayer to have his fate reversed, he saw an alteration in the Phantom’s hood and dress. It shrunk, collapsed, and dwindled down into a bedpost.

STAVE FIVE.

THE END OF IT.

Yes! and the bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the Time before him was his own, to make amends in!

"I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!" Scrooge repeated, as he scrambled out of bed. "The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. Oh Jacob Marley! Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this! I say it on my knees, old Jacob; on my knees!"

He was so fluttered and so glowing with his good intentions, that his broken voice would scarcely answer to his call. He had been sobbing violently in his conflict with the Spirit, and his face was wet with tears.

"They are not torn down," cried Scrooge, folding one of his bed-curtains in his arms, "they are not torn down, rings and all. They are here—I am here—the shadows of the things that would have been, may be dispelled. They will be. I know they will!"

His hands were busy with his garments all this time; turning them inside out, putting them on upside down, tearing them, mislaying them, making them parties to every kind of extravagance.

"I don’t know what to do!" cried Scrooge, laughing and crying in the same breath; and making a perfect Laocoön of himself with his stockings. "I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world. Hallo here! Whoop! Hallo!"

He had frisked into the sitting-room, and was now standing there: perfectly winded.

"There’s the saucepan that the gruel was in!" cried Scrooge, starting off again, and going round the fireplace. "There’s the door, by which the Ghost of Jacob Marley entered! There’s the corner where the Ghost of Christmas

Present, sat! There’s the window where I saw the wandering Spirits! It’s all right, it’s all true, it all happened. Ha ha ha!"

Really, for a man who had been out of practice for so many years, it was a splendid laugh, a most illustrious laugh. The father of a long, long line of brilliant laughs!

"I don’t know what day of the month it is!" said Scrooge. "I don’t know how long I’ve been among the Spirits. I don’t know anything. I’m quite a baby. Never mind. I don’t care. I’d rather be a baby. Hallo! Whoop! Hallo here!"

He was checked in his transports by the churches ringing out the lustiest peals he had ever heard. Clash, clang, hammer; ding, dong, bell. Bell, dong, ding; hammer, clang, clash! Oh, glorious, glorious!

Running to the window, he opened it, and put out his head. No fog, no mist; clear, bright, jovial, stirring, cold; cold, piping for the blood to dance to; Golden sunlight; Heavenly sky; sweet fresh air; merry bells. Oh, glorious! Glorious!

"What’s to-day!" cried Scrooge, calling downward to a boy in Sunday clothes, who perhaps had loitered in to look about him.

"Eh?" returned the boy, with all his might of wonder.

"What’s to-day, my fine fellow?" said Scrooge.

"To-day!" replied the boy. "Why, Christmas Day."

"It’s Christmas Day!" said Scrooge to himself. "I haven’t missed it. The Spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can. Of course they can. Hallo, my fine fellow!"

"Hallo!" returned the boy.

"Do you know the Poulterer’s, in the next street but one, at the corner?" Scrooge inquired.

"I should hope I did," replied the lad.

"An intelligent boy!" said Scrooge. "A remarkable boy! Do you know whether they’ve sold the prize Turkey that was hanging up there?—Not the little prize Turkey: the big one?"

"What, the one as big as me?" returned the boy.

"What a delightful boy!" said Scrooge. "It’s a pleasure to talk to him. Yes, my buck!"

"It’s hanging there now," replied the boy.

"Is it?" said Scrooge. "Go and buy it."

"Walk-er!" exclaimed the boy.

"No, no," said Scrooge, "I am in earnest. Go and buy it, and tell ’em to bring it here, that I may give them the direction where to take it. Come back with the man, and I’ll give you a shilling. Come back with him in less than five minutes and I’ll give you half-a-crown!"

The boy was off like a shot. He must have had a steady hand at a trigger who could have got a shot off half so fast.

"I’ll send it to Bob Cratchit’s!" whispered Scrooge, rubbing his hands, and splitting with a laugh. "He sha’n’t know who sends it. It’s twice the size of Tiny Tim. Joe Miller never made such a joke as sending it to Bob’s will be!"

The hand in which he wrote the address was not a steady one, but write it he did, somehow, and went down-stairs to open the street door, ready for the coming of the poulterer’s man. As he stood there, waiting his arrival, the knocker caught his eye.

"I shall love it, as long as I live!" cried Scrooge, patting it with his hand. "I scarcely ever looked at it before. What an honest expression it has in its face! It’s a wonderful knocker!—Here’s the Turkey! Hallo! Whoop! How are you! Merry Christmas!"

It *was* a Turkey! He never could have stood upon his legs, that bird. He would have snapped ’em short off in a minute, like sticks of sealing-wax.

"Why, it’s impossible to carry that to Camden Town," said Scrooge. "You must have a cab."

The chuckle with which he said this, and the chuckle with which he paid for the Turkey, and the chuckle with which he paid for the cab, and the chuckle with which he recompensed the boy, were only to be exceeded by the chuckle with which he sat down breathless in his chair again, and chuckled till he cried.

Shaving was not an easy task, for his hand continued to shake very much; and shaving requires attention, even when you don’t dance while you are at it. But if he had cut the end of his nose off, he would have put a piece of sticking-plaister over it, and been quite satisfied.

He dressed himself "all in his best," and at last got out into the streets. The people were by this time pouring forth, as he had seen them with the Ghost of Christmas Present; and walking with his hands behind him, Scrooge regarded every one with a delighted smile. He looked so irresistibly pleasant, in a word, that three or four good-humoured fellows said, "Good morning, sir! A merry Christmas to you!" And Scrooge said often afterwards, that of all the blithe sounds he had ever heard, those were the blithest in his ears.

He had not gone far, when coming on towards him he beheld the portly gentleman, who had walked into his counting-house the day before, and said, "Scrooge and Marley’s, I believe?" It sent a pang across his heart to think how this old gentleman would look upon him when they met; but he knew what path lay straight before him, and he took it.

"My dear sir," said Scrooge, quickening his pace, and taking the old gentleman by both his hands. "How do you do? I hope you succeeded yesterday. It was very kind of you. A merry Christmas to you, sir!"

"Mr. Scrooge?"

"Yes," said Scrooge. "That is my name, and I fear it may not be pleasant to you. Allow me to ask your pardon. And will you have the goodness"—here Scrooge whispered in his ear.

"Lord bless me!" cried the gentleman, as if his breath were taken away. "My dear Mr. Scrooge, are you serious?"

"If you please," said Scrooge. "Not a farthing less. A great many back-payments are included in it, I assure you. Will you do me that favour?"

"My dear sir," said the other, shaking hands with him. "I don’t know what to say to such munifi—"

"Don’t say anything, please," retorted Scrooge. "Come and see me. Will you come and see me?"

"I will!" cried the old gentleman. And it was clear he meant to do it.

"Thank’ee," said Scrooge. "I am much obliged to you. I thank you fifty times. Bless you!"

He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro, and patted children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows, and found that everything could yield him pleasure. He had never dreamed that any walk—that anything—could give him so much happiness. In the afternoon he turned his steps towards his nephew’s house.

He passed the door a dozen times, before he had the courage to go up and knock. But he made a dash, and did it:

"Is your master at home, my dear?" said Scrooge to the girl. Nice girl! Very.

"Yes, sir."

"Where is he, my love?" said Scrooge.

"He’s in the dining-room, sir, along with mistress. I’ll show you upstairs, if you please."

"Thank’ee. He knows me," said Scrooge, with his hand already on the dining-room lock. "I’ll go in here, my dear."

He turned it gently, and sidled his face in, round the door. They were looking at the table (which was spread out in great array); for these young housekeepers are always nervous on such points, and like to see that everything is right.

"Fred!" said Scrooge.

Dear heart alive, how his niece by marriage started! Scrooge had forgotten, for the moment, about her sitting in the corner with the footstool, or he wouldn’t have done it, on any account.

"Why bless my soul!" cried Fred, "who’s that?"

"It’s I. Your uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?"

Let him in! It is a mercy he didn’t shake his arm off. He was at home in five minutes. Nothing could be heartier. His niece looked just the same. So did Topper when *he* came. So did the plump sister when *she* came. So did every one when *they* came. Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, won-der-ful happiness!

But he was early at the office next morning. Oh, he was early there. If he could only be there first, and catch Bob Cratchit coming late! That was the thing he had set his heart upon.

And he did it; yes, he did! The clock struck nine. No Bob. A quarter past. No Bob. He was full eighteen minutes and a half behind his time. Scrooge sat with his door wide open, that he might see him come into the Tank.

His hat was off, before he opened the door; his comforter too. He was on his stool in a jiffy; driving away with his pen, as if he were trying to overtake nine o’clock.

"Hallo!" growled Scrooge, in his accustomed voice, as near as he could feign it. "What do you mean by coming here at this time of day?"

"I am very sorry, sir," said Bob. "I *am* behind my time."

"You are?" repeated Scrooge. "Yes. I think you are. Step this way, sir, if you please."

"It’s only once a year, sir," pleaded Bob, appearing from the Tank. "It shall not be repeated. I was making rather merry yesterday, sir."

"Now, I’ll tell you what, my friend," said Scrooge, "I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore," he continued, leaping from his stool, and giving Bob such a dig in the waistcoat that he staggered back into the Tank again; "and therefore I am about to raise your salary!"

Bob trembled, and got a little nearer to the ruler. He had a momentary idea of knocking Scrooge down with it, holding him, and calling to the people in the court for help and a strait-waistcoat.

"A merry Christmas, Bob!" said Scrooge, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken, as he clapped him on the back. "A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you, for many a year! I’ll raise your salary, and endeavour to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop, Bob! Make up the fires, and buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit!"

Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them; for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset; and knowing that such as these would be blind anyway, he thought it quite as well that they should wrinkle up their eyes in grins, as have the malady in less attractive forms. His own heart laughed: and that was quite enough for him.

He had no further intercourse with Spirits, but lived upon the Total Abstinence Principle, ever afterwards; and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless Us, Every One!

THE END OF
A Christmas Carol

THE CHRISTMAS GOBLINS.

BY CHARLES DICKENS.

In an old abbey town, a long, long while ago there officiated as sexton and gravedigger in the churchyard one Gabriel Grubb. He was an ill conditioned cross-grained, surly fellow, who consorted with nobody but himself and an old wicker-bottle which fitted into his large, deep waistcoat pocket.

A little before twilight one Christmas Eve, Gabriel shouldered his spade, lighted his lantern, and betook himself toward the old churchyard, for he had a grave to finish by next morning, and feeling very low, he thought it might raise his spirits, perhaps, if he went on with his work at once.

He strode along until he turned into the dark lane which led to the churchyard—a nice, gloomy, mournful place into which the towns-people did not care to go except in broad daylight, consequently he was not a little indignant to hear a young urchin roaring out some jolly song about a Merry Christmas. Gabriel waited until the boy came up, then rapped him over the head with his lantern five or six times to teach him to modulate his voice. And as the boy hurried away, with his hand to his head, Gabriel Grubb chuckled to himself and entered the churchyard, locking the gate behind him.

He took off his coat, put down his lantern, and getting into an unfinished grave, worked at it for an hour or so with right good will. But the earth was hardened with the frost, and it was no easy matter to break it up and shovel it out. At any other time this would have made Gabriel very miserable, but he was so pleased at having stopped the small boy's singing that he took little heed of the scanty progress he had made when he had finished work for the night, and looked down into the grave with grim satisfaction, murmuring as he gathered up his things:

"Brave lodgings for one, brave lodgings for one,
A few feet of cold earth when life is done."

"Ho! ho!" he laughed, as he set himself down on a flat tombstone, which was a favorite resting-place of his, and drew forth his wicker-bottle. "A coffin at Christmas! A Christmas box. Ho! ho! ho!"

"Ho! ho! ho!" repeated a voice close beside him.

"It was the echoes," said he, raising the bottle to his lips again.

"It was not," said a deep voice.

Gabriel started up and stood rooted to the spot with terror, for his eyes rested on a form that made his blood run cold.

Seated on an upright tombstone close to him was a strange, unearthly figure. He was sitting perfectly still, grinning at Gabriel Grubb with such a grin as only a goblin could call up.

"What do you here on Christmas Eve?" said the goblin, sternly.

"I came to dig a grave, sir," stammered Gabriel.

"What man wanders among graves on such a night as this?" cried the goblin.

"Gabriel Grubb! Gabriel Grubb!" screamed a wild chorus of voices that seemed to fill the churchyard.

"What have you got in that bottle?" said the goblin.

"Hollands, sir," replied the sexton, trembling more than ever, for he had bought it of the smugglers, and he thought his questioner might be in the excise department of the goblins.

"Who drinks Hollands alone, and in a churchyard on such a night as this?"

"Gabriel Grubb! Gabriel Grubb!" exclaimed the wild voices again.

"And who, then, is our lawful prize?" exclaimed the goblin, raising his voice.

The invisible chorus replied, "Gabriel Grubb! Gabriel Grubb!"

"Well, Gabriel, what do you say to this?" said the goblin, as he grinned a broader grin than before.

The sexton gasped for breath.

"What do you think of this, Gabriel?"

"It's—it's very curious, sir, very curious, sir, and very pretty," replied the sexton, half-dead with fright. "But I think I'll go back and finish my work, sir, if you please."

"Work!" said the goblin, "what work?"

"The grave, sir."

"Oh! the grave, eh? Who makes graves at a time when other men are merry, and takes a pleasure in it?"

Again the voices replied, "Gabriel Grubb! Gabriel Grubb!"

"I'm afraid my friends want you, Gabriel," said the goblin.

"Under favor, sir," replied the horror-stricken sexton, "I don't think they can; they don't know me, sir; I don't think the gentlemen have ever seen me."

"Oh! yes, they have. We know the man who struck the boy in the envious malice of his heart because the boy could be merry and he could not."

Here the goblin gave a loud, shrill laugh which the echoes returned twenty-fold.

"I—I am afraid I must leave you, sir," said the sexton, making an effort to move.

"Leave us!" said the goblin; "ho! ho! ho!"

As the goblin laughed he suddenly darted toward Gabriel, laid his hand upon his collar, and sank with him through the earth. And when he had had time to fetch his breath he found himself in what appeared to be a large cavern, surrounded on all sides by goblins ugly and grim.

"And now," said the king of the goblins, seated in the centre of the room on an elevated seat—his friend of the churchyard—"show the man of misery and gloom a few of the pictures from our great storehouses."

As the goblin said this a cloud rolled gradually away and disclosed a small and scantily furnished but neat apartment. Little children were gathered round a bright fire, clinging to their mother's gown, or gamboling round her chair. A frugal meal was spread upon the table and an elbow-chair was placed near the fire. Soon the father entered and the children ran to meet him. As he sat down to his meal the mother sat by his side and all seemed happiness and comfort.

"What do you think of that?" said the goblin.

Gabriel murmured something about its being very pretty.

"Show him some more," said the goblin.

Many a time the cloud went and came, and many a lesson it taught to Gabriel Grubb. He saw that men who worked hard and earned their scanty bread were cheerful and happy. And he came to the conclusion it was a very respectable sort of a world after all. No sooner had he formed it than the cloud closed over the last picture seemed to settle on his senses and lull him to repose. One by one the goblins faded from his sight, and as the last one disappeared he sank to sleep.

The day had broken when he awoke, and found himself lying on the flat gravestone, with the wicker-bottle empty by his side. He got on his feet as well as he could, and brushing the frost off his coat, turned his face toward the town.

But he was an altered man, he had learned lessons of gentleness and good-nature by his strange adventures in the goblin's cavern.

THE END OF
The Christmas Goblins

THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH

By CHARLES DICKENS

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INTRODUCTION

The combined qualities of the realist and the idealist which Dickens possessed to a remarkable degree, together with his naturally jovial attitude toward life in general, seem to have given him a remarkably happy feeling toward Christmas, though the privations and hardships of his boyhood could have allowed him but little real experience with this day of days.

Dickens gave his first formal expression to his Christmas thoughts in his series of small books, the first of which was the famous "Christmas Carol," the one perfect chrysolite. The success of the book was immediate. Thackeray wrote of it: "Who can listen to objections regarding such a book as this? It seems to me a national benefit, and to every man or woman who reads it, a personal kindness."

This volume was put forth in a very attractive manner, with illustrations by John Leech, who was the first artist to make these characters live, and his drawings were varied and spirited.

There followed upon this four others: "The Chimes," "The Cricket on the Hearth," "The Battle of Life," and "The Haunted Man," with illustrations on their first appearance by Doyle, Maclise, and others. The five are known to-day as the "Christmas Books." Of them all the "Carol" is the best known and loved, and "The Cricket on the Hearth," although third in the series, is perhaps next in point of popularity, and is especially familiar to Americans through Joseph Jefferson's characterisation of Caleb Plummer.

Dickens seems to have put his whole self into these glowing little stories. Whoever sees but a clever ghost story in the "Christmas Carol" misses its chief charm and lesson, for there is a different meaning in the movements of Scrooge and his attendant spirits. A new life is brought to Scrooge when he, "running to his window, opened it and put out his head. No fog, no mist; clear, bright, jovial, stirring cold; cold, piping for the blood to dance to; Golden sun-light; Heavenly sky; sweet fresh air; merry bells. Oh, glorious! Glorious!" All this brightness has its attendant shadow, and deep from the childish heart comes that true note of pathos, the ever memorable toast of Tiny Tim, "God bless Us, Every One!" "The Cricket on the Hearth" strikes a different note. Charmingly, poetically, the sweet chirping of the little cricket is associated with human feelings and actions, and at the crisis of the story decides the fate and fortune of the carrier and his wife.

Dickens's greatest gift was characterization, and no English writer, save Shakespeare, has drawn so many and so varied characters. It would be as absurd to interpret all of these as caricatures as to deny Dickens his great and varied powers of creation. Dickens exaggerated many of his comic and satirical characters, as was his right, for caricature and satire are very closely related, while exaggeration is the very essence of comedy. But there remains a host of characters marked by humour and pathos. Yet the pictorial presentation of Dickens's characters has ever tended toward the grotesque. The interpretations in this volume aim to eliminate the grosser phases of the caricature in favour of the more human. If the interpretations seem novel, if Scrooge be not as he has been pictured, it is because a more human Scrooge was desired—a Scrooge not wholly bad, a Scrooge of a better heart, a Scrooge to whom the resurrection described in this story was possible. It has been the illustrator's whole aim to make these people live in some form more fully consistent with their types.

George Alfred Williams.

Chatham, N.J.

THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH

A FAIRY TALE OF HOME

CHIRP THE FIRST

The kettle began it! Don't tell me what Mrs. Peerybingle said. I know better. Mrs. Peerybingle may leave it on record to the end of time that she couldn't say which of them began it; but I say the kettle did. I ought to know, I hope? The kettle began it, full five minutes by the little waxy-faced Dutch clock in the corner, before the Cricket uttered a chirp.

As if the clock hadn't finished striking, and the convulsive little Haymaker at the top of it, jerking away right and left with a scythe in front of a Moorish Palace, hadn't mowed down half an acre of imaginary grass before the Cricket joined in at all!

Why, I am not naturally positive. Every one knows that I wouldn't set my own opinion against the opinion of Mrs. Peerybingle, unless I were quite sure, on any account whatever. Nothing should induce me. But, this is a question of fact. And the fact is, that the kettle began it at least five minutes before the Cricket gave any sign of being in existence. Contradict me, and I'll say ten.

Let me narrate exactly how it happened. I should have proceeded to do so, in my very first word, but for this plain consideration—if I am to tell a story I must begin at the beginning; and how is it possible to begin at the beginning without beginning at the kettle?

It appeared as if there were a sort of match, or trial of skill, you must understand, between the kettle and the Cricket. And this is what led to it, and how it came about.

Mrs. Peerybingle, going out into the raw twilight, and clicking over the wet stones in a pair of pattens that worked innumerable rough impressions of the first proposition in Euclid all about the yard—Mrs. Peerybingle filled the kettle at the water-butt. Presently returning, less the pattens (and a good deal less, for they were tall, and Mrs. Peerybingle was but short), she set the kettle on the fire. In doing which she lost her temper, or mislaid it for an instant; for, the water being uncomfortably cold, and in that slippy, slushy, sleety sort of state wherein it seems to penetrate through every kind of substance, patten rings included—had laid hold of Mrs. Peerybingle's toes, and even splashed her legs. And when we rather plume ourselves (with reason too) upon our legs, and keep ourselves particularly neat in point of stockings, we find this, for the moment, hard to bear.

Besides, the kettle was aggravating and obstinate. It wouldn't allow itself to be adjusted on the top bar; it wouldn't hear of accommodating itself kindly to the knobs of coal; it *would* lean forward with a drunken air, and dribble, a very Idiot of a kettle, on the hearth. It was quarrelsome, and hissed and spluttered morosely at the fire. To sum up all, the lid, resisting Mrs. Peerybingle's fingers, first of all turned topsy-turvy, and then, with an ingenious pertinacity deserving of a better cause, dived sideways in—down to the very bottom of the kettle. And the hull of the Royal George has never made half the monstrous resistance to coming out of the water which the lid of that kettle employed against Mrs. Peerybingle before she got it up again.

It looked sullen and pig-headed enough, even then; carrying its handle with an air of defiance, and cocking its spout pertly and mockingly at Mrs. Peerybingle, as if it said, "I won't boil. Nothing shall induce me!"

But, Mrs. Peerybingle, with restored good-humour, dusted her chubby little hands against each other, and sat down before the kettle laughing. Meantime, the jolly blaze uprose and fell, flashing and gleaming on the little Hay-maker at the top of the Dutch clock, until one might have thought he stood stock-still before the Moorish Palace, and nothing was in motion but the flame.

He was on the move, however; and had his spasms, two to the second, all right and regular. But his sufferings when the clock was going to strike were frightful to behold; and when a Cuckoo looked out of a trap-door in the Palace, and gave note six times, it shook him, each time, like a spectral voice—or like a something wiry plucking at his legs.

It was not until a violent commotion and a whirring noise among the weights and ropes below him had quite subsided that this terrified Hay-maker became himself again. Nor was he startled without reason; for these rattling, bony skeletons of clocks are very disconcerting in their operation, and I wonder very much how any set of men, but most of all how Dutchmen, can have had a liking to invent them. There is a popular belief that Dutchmen love broad cases and much clothing for their own lower selves; and they might know better than to leave their clocks so very lank and unprotected, surely.

Now it was, you observe, that the kettle began to spend the evening. Now it was that the kettle, growing mellow and musical, began to have irrepressible gurglings in its throat, and to indulge in short vocal snorts, which it checked in the bud, as if it hadn't quite made up its mind yet to be good company. Now it was that after two or three such vain attempts to stifle its convivial sentiments, it threw off all moroseness, all reserve, and burst into a stream of song so cosy and hilarious as never maudlin nightingale yet formed the least idea of.

So plain, too! Bless you, you might have understood it like a book—better than some books you and I could name, perhaps. With its warm breath gushing forth in a light cloud which merrily and gracefully ascended a few feet, then hung about the chimney-corner as its own domestic Heaven, it trolled its song with that strong energy of cheerfulness, that its iron body hummed and stirred upon the fire; and the lid itself, the recently rebellious lid—such is the influence of a bright example—performed a sort of jig, and clattered like a deaf and dumb young cymbal that had never known the use of its twin brother.

That this song of the kettle's was a song of invitation and welcome to somebody out of doors: to somebody at that moment coming on towards the snug small home and the crisp fire: there is no doubt whatever. Mrs. Peerybingle knew it perfectly, as she sat musing before the hearth. It's a dark night, sang the kettle, and the rotten leaves are lying by the way; and, above, all is mist and darkness, and, below, all is mire and clay; and there's only one relief in all the sad and murky air; and I don't know that it is one, for it's nothing but a glare; of deep and angry crimson, where the sun and wind together; set a brand upon the clouds for being guilty of such weather; and the widest open country is a long dull streak of black; and there's hoar frost on the finger-post, and thaw upon the track; and the ice it isn't water, and the water isn't free; and you couldn't say that anything is what it ought to be; but he's coming, coming, coming!—

And here, if you like, the Cricket DID chime in! with a Chirrup, Chirrup, Chirrup of such magnitude, by way of chorus; with a voice so astoundingly disproportionate to its size, as compared with the kettle; (size! you couldn't see it!) that, if it had then and there burst itself like an overcharged gun, if it had fallen a victim on the spot, and chirruped its little body into fifty pieces, it would have seemed a natural and inevitable consequence, for which it had expressly laboured.

The kettle had had the last of its solo performance. It persevered with undiminished ardour; but the Cricket took first fiddle, and kept it. Good

Heaven, how it chirped! Its shrill, sharp, piercing voice resounded through the house, and seemed to twinkle in the outer darkness like a star. There was an indescribable little trill and tremble in it at its loudest, which suggested its being carried off its legs, and made to leap again, by its own intense enthusiasm. Yet they went very well together, the Cricket and the kettle. The burden of the song was still the same; and louder, louder, louder still, they sang it in their emulation.

The fair little listener—for fair she was, and young; though something of what is called the dumpling shape; but I don't myself object to that—lighted a candle, glanced at the Hay-maker on the top of the clock, who was getting in a pretty average crop of minutes; and looked out of the window, where she saw nothing, owing to the darkness, but her own face imaged in the glass. And my opinion is (and so would yours have been) that she might have looked a long way and seen nothing half so agreeable. When she came back, and sat down in her former seat, the Cricket and the kettle were still keeping it up, with a perfect fury of competition. The kettle's weak side clearly being that he didn't know when he was beat.

There was all the excitement of a race about it. Chirp, chirp, chirp! Cricket a mile ahead. Hum, hum, hum—m—m! Kettle making play in the distance, like a great top. Chirp, chirp, chirp! Cricket round the corner. Hum, hum, hum—m—m! Kettle sticking to him in his own way; no idea of giving in. Chirp, chirp, chirp! Cricket fresher than ever. Hum, hum, hum—m—m! Kettle slow and steady. Chirp, chirp, chirp! Cricket going in to finish him. Hum, hum, hum—m—m! Kettle not to be finished. Until at last they got so jumbled together, in the hurry-skurry, helter-skelter, of the match, that whether the kettle chirped and the Cricket hummed, or the Cricket chirped and the kettle hummed, or they both chirped and both hummed, it would have taken a clearer head than yours or mine to have decided with anything like certainty. But of this there is no doubt: that, the kettle and the Cricket, at one and the same moment, and by some power of amalgamation best known to themselves, sent, each, his fireside song of comfort streaming into a ray of the candle that shone out through the window, and a long way down the lane. And this light, bursting on a certain person who, on the instant, approached towards it through the gloom, expressed the whole thing to him, literally in a twinkling, and cried, "Welcome home, old fellow! Welcome home, my boy!"

This end attained, the kettle, being dead beat, boiled over, and was taken off the fire. Mrs. Peerybingle then went running to the door, where, what with the wheels of a cart, the tramp of a horse, the voice of a man, the tearing in and out of an excited dog, and the surprising and mysterious appearance of a baby, there was soon the very What's-his-name to play.

Where the baby came from, or how Mrs. Peerybingle got hold of it in that flash of time, *I* don't know. But a live baby there was in Mrs. Peerybingle's arms; and a pretty tolerable amount of pride she seemed to have in it, when she was drawn gently to the fire, by a sturdy figure of a man, much taller and much older than herself, who had to stoop a long way down to kiss her. But she was worth the trouble. Six foot six, with the lumbago, might have done it.

"Oh goodness, John!" said Mrs. P. "What a state you're in with the weather!"

He was something the worse for it undeniably. The thick mist hung in clots upon his eyelashes like candied thaw; and, between the fog and fire together, there were rainbows in his very whiskers.

"Why, you see, Dot," John made answer slowly, as he unrolled a shawl from about his throat, and warmed his hands; "it—it an't exactly summer weather. So no wonder."

"I wish you wouldn't call me Dot, John. I don't like it," said Mrs. Peerybingle: pouting in a way that clearly showed she *did* like it very much.

"Why, what else are you?" returned John, looking down upon her with a smile, and giving her waist as light a squeeze as his huge hand and arm could give. "A dot and"—here he glanced at the baby—"a dot and carry—I won't say it, for fear I should spoil it; but I was very near a joke. I don't know as ever I was nearer."

He was often near to something or other very clever, by his own account: this lumbering, slow, honest John; this John so heavy, but so light of spirit; so rough upon the surface, but so gentle at the core; so dull without, so quick within; so stolid, but so good! Oh, Mother Nature, give thy children the true poetry of heart that hid itself in this poor Carrier's breast—he was but a Carrier, by the way—and we can bear to have them talking prose, and leading lives of prose; and bear to bless thee for their company!

It was pleasant to see Dot, with her little figure and her baby in her arms: a very doll of a baby: glancing with a coquettish thoughtfulness at the fire, and inclining her delicate little head just enough on one side to let it rest in an odd, half-natural, half-affected, wholly nestling and agreeable manner, on the great rugged figure of the Carrier. It was pleasant to see him, with his tender awkwardness, endeavouring to adapt his rude support to her slight need, and make his burly middle age a leaning-staff not inappropriate to her blooming youth. It was pleasant to observe how Tilly Slowboy, waiting in the background for the baby, took special cognizance (though in her earliest teens) of this grouping; and stood with her mouth and eyes wide open, and her head thrust forward, taking it in as if it were air. Nor was it less agreeable to observe how John the Carrier, reference being made by Dot to the aforesaid baby, checked his hand when on the point of touching the infant, as if he thought he might crack it; and, bending down, surveyed it from a safe distance, with a kind of puzzled pride, such as an amiable mastiff might be supposed to show if he found himself, one day, the father of a young canary.

"An't he beautiful, John? Don't he look precious in his sleep?"

"Very precious," said John. "Very much so. He generally *is* asleep, an't he?"

"Lor, John! Good gracious, no!"

"Oh!" said John, pondering. "I thought his eyes was generally shut. Halloa!"

"Goodness, John, how you startle one!"

"It an't right for him to turn 'em up in that way," said the astonished Carrier, "is it? See how he's winking with both of 'em at once! and look at his mouth! Why, he's gasping like a gold and silver fish!"

"You don't deserve to be a father, you don't," said Dot, with all the dignity of an experienced matron. "But how should you know what little complaints children are troubled with, John? You wouldn't so much as know their names, you stupid fellow." And when she had turned the baby over on her left arm, and had slapped its back as a restorative, she pinched her husband's ear, laughing.

"No," said John, pulling off his outer coat. "It's very true, Dot. I don't know much about it. I only know that I've been fighting pretty stiffly with the wind to-night. It's been blowing north-east, straight into the cart, the whole way home."

"Poor old man, so it has!" cried Mrs. Peerybingle, instantly becoming very active. "Here, take the precious darling, Tilly, while I make myself of some use. Bless it, I could smother it with kissing it, I could! Hie then, good dog! Hie, Boxer, boy! Only let me make the tea first, John; and then I'll help you with the parcels, like a busy bee. 'How doth the little'—and all the rest of it, you know, John. Did you ever learn 'How doth the little,' when you went to school, John?"

"Not to quite know it," John returned. "I was very near it once. But I should only have spoilt it, I dare say."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Dot. She had the blithest little laugh you ever heard. "What a dear old darling of a dunce you are, John, to be sure!"

Not at all disputing this position, John went out to see that the boy with the lantern, which had been dancing to and fro before the door and window, like a Will of the Wisp, took due care of the horse; who was fatter than you would quite believe, if I gave you his measure, and so old that his birthday was lost in the mists of antiquity. Boxer, feeling that his attentions were due to the family in general, and must be impartially distributed, dashed in and out with bewildering inconstancy; now describing a circle of short barks round the horse, where he was being rubbed down at the stable door; now feigning to make savage rushes at his mistress, and facetiously bringing himself to sudden stops; now eliciting a shriek from Tilly Slowboy, in the low nursing-chair near the fire, by the unexpected application of his moist nose to her countenance; now exhibiting an obtrusive interest in the baby; now going round and round upon the hearth, and lying down as if he had established himself for the night; now getting up again, and taking that nothing of a fag-end of a tail of his out into the weather, as if he had just remembered an appointment, and was off at a round trot, to keep it.

"There! There's the teapot, ready on the hob!" said Dot; as briskly busy as a child at play at keeping house. "And there's the cold knuckle of ham; and there's the butter; and there's the crusty loaf, and all! Here's a clothes basket for the small parcels, John, if you've got any there. Where are you, John? Don't let the dear child fall under the grate, Tilly, whatever you do!"

It may be noted of Miss Slowboy, in spite of her rejecting the caution with some vivacity, that she had a rare and surprising talent for getting this baby into difficulties: and had several times imperilled its short life in a quiet way peculiarly her own. She was of a spare and straight shape, this young lady, insomuch that her garments appeared to be in constant danger of sliding off those sharp pegs, her shoulders, on which they were loosely hung. Her costume was remarkable for the partial development, on all possible occasions, of some flannel vestment of a singular structure; also for affording glimpses, in the region of the back, of a corset, or a pair of stays, in colour a dead green. Being always in a state of gaping admiration at everything, and absorbed, besides, in the perpetual contemplation of her mistress's perfections and the baby's, Miss Slowboy, in her little errors of judgment, may be said to have done equal honour to her head and to her heart; and though these did less honour to the baby's head, which they were the occasional means of bringing into contact with deal doors, dressers, stair-rails, bed-posts, and other foreign substances, still they were the honest results of Tilly Slowboy's constant astonishment at finding herself so kindly treated, and installed in such a comfortable home. For the maternal and paternal Slowboy were alike unknown to Fame, and Tilly had been bred by public charity, a foundling; which word, though only differing from fondling by one vowel's length, is very different in meaning, and expresses quite another thing.

To have seen little Mrs. Peerybingle come back with her husband, tugging at the clothes basket, and making the most strenuous exertions to do nothing at all (for he carried it), would have amused you almost as much as it amused him. It may have entertained the Cricket, too, for anything I know; but, certainly, it now began to chirp again vehemently.

"Heyday!" said John in his slow way. "It's merrier than ever to-night, I think."

"And it's sure to bring us good fortune, John! It always has done so. To have a Cricket on the Hearth is the luckiest thing in all the world!"

John looked at her as if he had very nearly got the thought into his head that she was his Cricket in chief, and he quite agreed with her. But it was probably one of his narrow escapes, for he said nothing.

"The first time I heard its cheerful little note, John, was on that night when you brought me home—when you brought me to my new home here; its little mistress. Nearly a year ago. You recollect, John?"

Oh, yes! John remembered. I should think so!

"Its chirp was such a welcome to me! It seemed so full of promise and encouragement. It seemed to say, you would be kind and gentle with me, and would not expect (I had a fear of that, John, then) to find an old head on the shoulders of your foolish little wife."

John thoughtfully patted one of the shoulders, and then the head, as though he would have said No, no; he had had no such expectation; he had been quite content to take them as they were. And really he had reason. They were very comely.

"It spoke the truth, John, when it seemed to say so: for you have ever been, I am sure, the best, the most considerate, the most affectionate of husbands to me. This has been a happy home, John; and I love the Cricket for its sake!"

"Why, so do I, then," said the Carrier. "So do I, Dot."

"I love it for the many times I have heard it, and the many thoughts its harmless music has given me. Sometimes, in the twilight, when I have felt a little solitary and down-hearted, John—before baby was here, to keep me company and make the house gay—when I have thought how lonely you would be if I should die; how lonely I should be, if I could know that you had lost me, dear; its Chirp, Chirp, Chirp upon the hearth has seemed to tell me of another little voice, so sweet, so very dear to me, before whose coming sound my trouble vanished like a dream. And when I used to fear—I did fear once, John; I was very young, you know—that ours might prove to be an ill-assorted marriage, I being such a child, and you more like my guardian than my husband; and that you might not, however hard you tried, be able to learn to love me, as you hoped and prayed you might; its Chirp, Chirp, Chirp has cheered me up again, and filled me with new trust and confidence. I was thinking of these things to-night, dear, when I sat expecting you; and I love the Cricket for their sake!"

"And so do I," repeated John. "But, Dot! *I* hope and pray that I might learn to love you? How you talk! I had learnt that long before I brought you here, to be the Cricket's little mistress, Dot!"

She laid her hand, an instant, on his arm, and looked up at him with an agitated face, as if she would have told him something. Next moment, she was down upon her knees before the basket; speaking in a sprightly voice, and busy with the parcels.

"There are not many of them to-night, John, but I saw some goods behind the cart just now; and though they give more trouble, perhaps, still they pay as well; so we have no reason to grumble, have we? Besides, you have been delivering, I dare say, as you came along?"

"Oh, yes!" John said. "A good many."

"Why, what's this round box? Heart alive, John, it's a wedding-cake!"

"Leave a woman alone to find out that," said John admiringly. "Now, a man would never have thought of it! Whereas, it's my belief that if you was to pack a wedding-cake up in a tea-chest, or a turn-up bedstead, or a pickled-salmon keg, or any unlikely thing, a woman would be sure to find it out directly. Yes; I called for it at the pastrycook's."

"And it weighs I don't know what—whole hundredweights!" cried Dot, making a great demonstration of trying to lift it. "Whose is it, John? Where is it going?"

"Read the writing on the other side," said John.

"Why, John! My Goodness, John!"

"Ah! who'd have thought it?" John returned.

"You never mean to say," pursued Dot, sitting on the floor and shaking her head at him, "that it's Gruff and Tackleton the toymaker!"

John nodded.

Mrs. Peerybingle nodded also, fifty times at least. Not in assent—in dumb and pitying amazement; screwing up her lips, the while, with all their little force (they were never made for screwing up; I am clear of that), and looking the good Carrier through and through, in her abstraction. Miss Slowboy, in the meantime, who had a mechanical power of reproducing scraps of current conversation for the delectation of the baby, with all the sense struck out of them, and all the nouns changed into the plural number, inquired aloud of that young creature, Was it Gruffs and Tackletons the toymakers then, and Would it call at Pastrycooks for wedding-cakes, and Did its mothers know the boxes when its fathers brought them home; and so on.

"And that is really to come about!" said Dot. "Why, she and I were girls at school together, John."

He might have been thinking of her, or nearly thinking of her, perhaps, as she was in that same school-time. He looked upon her with a thoughtful pleasure, but he made no answer.

"And he's as old! As unlike her!—Why, how many years older than you is Gruff and Tackleton, John?"

"How many more cups of tea shall I drink to-night, at one sitting, than Gruff and Tackleton ever took in four, I wonder?" replied John good-humouredly, as he drew a chair to the round table, and began at the cold ham. "As to eating, I eat but little; but that little I enjoy, Dot."

Even this, his usual sentiment at meal-times, one of his innocent delusions (for his appetite was always obstinate, and flatly contradicted him), awoke no smile in the face of his little wife, who stood among the parcels, pushing the cake-box slowly from her with her foot, and never once looked, though her eyes were cast down too, upon the dainty shoe she generally was so mindful of. Absorbed in thought, she stood there, heedless alike of the tea and John (although he called to her and rapped the table with his knife to startle her), until he rose and touched her on the arm; when she looked at him for a moment, and hurried to her place behind the tea-board, laughing at her negligence. But not as she had laughed before. The manner and the music were quite changed.

The Cricket, too, had stopped. Somehow, the room was not so cheerful as it had been. Nothing like it.

"So, these are all the parcels, are they, John?" she said, breaking a long silence, which the honest Carrier had devoted to the practical illustration of one part of his favourite sentiment—certainly enjoying what he ate, if it couldn't be admitted that he ate but little. "So these are all the parcels, are they, John?"

"That's all," said John. "Why—no—I"—laying down his knife and fork, and taking a long breath—"I declare—I've clean forgotten the old gentleman!"

"The old gentleman?"

"In the cart," said John. "He was asleep among the straw, the last time I saw him. I've very nearly remembered him, twice, since I came in; but he went out of my head again. Halloa! Yahip there! Rouse up! That's my hearty!"

John said these latter words outside the door, whither he had hurried with the candle in his hand.

Miss Slowboy, conscious of some mysterious reference to The Old Gentleman, and connecting, in her mystified imagination, certain associations of a religious nature with the phrase, was so disturbed, that hastily rising from the low chair by the fire to seek protection near the skirt of her mistress, and coming into contact, as she crossed the doorway, with an ancient Stranger, she instinctively made a charge or butt at him with the only offensive instrument within her reach. This instrument happening to be the baby, great commotion and alarm ensued, which the sagacity of Boxer rather tended to increase; for that good dog, more thoughtful than his master, had, it seemed, been watching the old gentleman in his sleep, lest he should walk off with a few young poplar-trees that were tied up behind the cart; and he still attended on him very closely, worrying his gaiters, in fact, and making dead sets at the buttons.

"You're such an undeniably good sleeper, sir," said John, when tranquillity was restored (in the meantime the old gentleman had stood, bareheaded and motionless, in the centre of the room), "that I have half a mind to ask you where the other six are—only that would be a joke, and I know I should spoil it. Very near, though," murmured the Carrier with a chuckle; "very near!"

The Stranger, who had long white hair, good features, singularly bold and well defined for an old man, and dark, bright, penetrating eyes, looked round with a smile, and saluted the Carrier's wife by gravely inclining his head.

His garb was very quaint and odd—a long, long way behind the time. Its hue was brown, all over. In his hand he held a great brown club or walking-stick; and, striking this upon the floor, it fell asunder, and became a chair. On which he sat down quite composedly.

"There!" said the Carrier, turning to his wife. "That's the way I found him, sitting by the roadside! Upright as a milestone. And almost as deaf."

"Sitting in the open air, John?"

"In the open air," replied the Carrier, "just at dusk. 'Carriage Paid,' he said; and gave me eighteen-pence. Then he got in. And there he is."

"He's going, John, I think!"

Not at all. He was only going to speak.

"If you please, I was to be left till called for," said the Stranger mildly. "Don't mind me."

With that he took a pair of spectacles from one of his large pockets, and a book from another, and leisurely began to read. Making no more of Boxer than if he had been a house lamb!

The Carrier and his wife exchanged a look of perplexity. The Stranger raised his head; and, glancing from the latter to the former, said:

"Your daughter, my good friend?"

"Wife," returned John.

"Niece?" said the Stranger.

"Wife!" roared John.

"Indeed?" observed the Stranger. "Surely? Very young!"

He quietly turned over, and resumed his reading. But, before he could have read two lines, he again interrupted himself to say:

"Baby yours?"

John gave him a gigantic nod: equivalent to an answer in the affirmative, delivered through a speaking trumpet.

"Girl?"

"Bo-o-oy!" roared John.

"Also very young, eh?"

Mrs. Peerybingle instantly struck in. "Two months and three da-ays. Vaccinated just six weeks ago-o! Took very fine-ly! Considered, by the doctor, a remarkably beautiful chi-ild! Equal to the general run of children at five months o-ld! Takes notice in a way quite wonder-ful! May seem impossible to you, but feels his legs al-ready!"

Here, the breathless little mother, who had been shrieking these short sentences into the old man's ear, until her pretty face was crimsoned, held up the Baby before him as a stubborn and triumphant fact; while Tilly Slowboy, with a melodious cry of "Ketcher, Ketcher"—which sounded like some unknown words, adapted to a popular Sneeze—performed some cow-like gambols around that all unconscious Innocent.

"Hark! He's called for, sure enough," said John. "There's somebody at the door. Open it, Tilly."

Before she could reach it, however, it was opened from without; being a primitive sort of door, with a latch that any one could lift if he chose—and a good many people did choose, for all kinds of neighbours liked to have a cheerful word or two with the Carrier, though he was no great talker himself. Being opened, it gave admission to a little, meagre, thoughtful, dingy-faced man, who seemed to have made himself a great-coat from the sackcloth covering of some old box; for, when he turned to shut the door and keep the weather out, he disclosed upon the back of that garment the inscription G & T in large black capitals. Also the word GLASS in bold characters.

"Good evening, John!" said the little man. "Good evening, mum! Good evening, Tilly! Good evening, Unbeknown! How's Baby, mum? Boxer's pretty well I hope?"

"All thriving, Caleb," replied Dot. "I am sure you need only look at the dear child, for one, to know that."

"And I'm sure I need only look at you for another," said Caleb.

He didn't look at her, though; he had a wandering and thoughtful eye, which seemed to be always projecting itself into some other time and place, no matter what he said; a description which will equally apply to his voice.

"Or at John for another," said Caleb. "Or at Tilly, as far as that goes. Or certainly at Boxer."

"Busy just now, Caleb?" asked the Carrier.

"Why, pretty well, John," he returned, with the distraught air of a man who was casting about for the Philosopher's stone, at least. "Pretty much so. There's rather a run on Noah's Arks at present. I could have wished to improve on the Family, but I don't see how it's to be done at the price. It would be a satisfaction to one's mind to make it clearer which was Shems and Hams, and which was Wives. Flies an't on that scale, neither, as compared with elephants, you know! Ah, well! Have you got anything in the parcel line for me, John?"

The Carrier put his hand into a pocket of the coat he had taken off; and brought out, carefully preserved in moss and paper, a tiny flower-pot.

"There it is!" he said, adjusting it with great care. "Not so much as a leaf damaged. Full of buds!"

Caleb's dull eye brightened as he took it, and thanked him.

"Dear, Caleb," said the Carrier. "Very dear at this season."

"Never mind that. It would be cheap to me, what ever it cost," returned the little man. "Anything else, John?"

"A small box," replied the Carrier. "Here you are!"

"'For Caleb Plummer,'" said the little man, spelling out the direction. "'With Cash.' With Cash, John? I don't think it's for me."

"With Care," returned the Carrier, looking over his shoulder. "Where do you make out cash?"

"Oh! To be sure!" said Caleb. "It's all right. With care! Yes, yes; that's mine. It might have been with cash, indeed, if my dear Boy in the Golden South Americas had lived, John. You loved him like a son; didn't you? You needn't say you did. *I* know, of course. 'Caleb Plummer. With care.' Yes, yes, it's all right. It's a box of dolls' eyes for my daughters' work. I wish it was her own sight in a box, John."

"I wish it was, or could be!" cried the Carrier.

"Thankee," said the little man. "You speak very hearty. To think that she should never see the Dolls—and them a staring at her, so bold, all day long! That's where it cuts. What's the damage, John?"

"I'll damage you," said John, "if you inquire. Dot! Very near?"

"Well! it's like you to say so," observed the little man. "It's your kind way. Let me see. I think that's all."

"I think not," said the Carrier. "Try again."

"Something for our Governor, eh?" said Caleb after pondering a little while. "To be sure. That's what I came for; but my head's so running on them Arks and things! He hasn't been here, has he?"

"Not he," returned the Carrier. "He's too busy, courting."

"He's coming round, though," said Caleb; "for he told me to keep on the near side of the road going home, and it was ten to one he'd take me up. I had better go, by-the-bye.—You couldn't have the goodness to let me pinch Boxer's tail, mum, for half a moment, could you?"

"Why, Caleb, what a question!"

"Oh, never mind, mum!" said the little man. "He mightn't like it, perhaps. There's a small order just come in for barking dogs; and I should wish to go as close to Natur' as I could for sixpence. That's all. Never mind, mum."

It happened opportunely that Boxer, without receiving the proposed stimulus, began to bark with great zeal. But, as this implied the approach of some new visitor, Caleb, postponing his study from the life to a more convenient season, shouldered the round box, and took a hurried leave. He might have spared himself the trouble, for he met the visitor upon the threshold.

"Oh! You are here, are you? Wait a bit. I'll take you home. John Peerybingle, my service to you. More of my service to your pretty wife. Handsomer every day! Better too, if possible! And younger," mused the speaker in a low voice, "that's the devil of it!"

"I should be astonished at your paying compliments, Mr. Tackleton," said Dot, not with the best grace in the world, "but for your condition."

"You know all about it, then?"

"I have got myself to believe it somehow," said Dot.

"After a hard struggle, I suppose?"

"Very."

Tackleton the Toy merchant, pretty generally known as Gruff and Tackleton—for that was the firm, though Gruff had been bought out long ago; only leaving his name, and, as some said, his nature, according to its Dictionary meaning, in the business—Tackleton the Toy merchant was a man whose vocation had been quite misunderstood by his Parents and

Guardians. If they had made him a Money Lender, or a sharp Attorney, or a Sheriff's Officer, or a Broker, he might have sown his discontented oats in his youth, and, after having had the full run of himself in ill-natured transactions, might have turned out amiable, at last, for the sake of a little freshness and novelty. But, cramped and chafing in the peaceable pursuit of toymaking, he was a domestic Ogre, who had been living on children all his life, and was their implacable enemy. He despised all toys; wouldn't have bought one for the world; delighted, in his malice, to insinuate grim expressions into the faces of brown-paper farmers who drove pigs to market, bellmen who advertised lost lawyers' consciences, movable old ladies who darned stockings or carved pies; and other like samples of his stock-in-trade. In appalling masks; hideous, hairy, red-eyed Jacks in Boxes; Vampire Kites; demoniacal Tumblers who wouldn't lie down, and were perpetually flying forward, to stare infants out of countenance; his soul perfectly revelled. They were his only relief, and safety-valve. He was great in such inventions. Anything suggestive of a Pony nightmare was delicious to him. He had even lost money (and he took to that toy very kindly) by getting up Goblin slides for magic lanterns, whereon the Powers of Darkness were depicted as a sort of supernatural shell-fish, with human faces. In intensifying the portraiture of Giants, he had sunk quite a little capital; and, though no painter himself, he could indicate, for the instruction of his artists, with a piece of chalk, a certain furtive leer for the countenances of those monsters, which was safe to destroy the peace of mind of any young gentleman between the ages of six and eleven, for the whole Christmas or Midsummer Vacation.

What he was in toys, he was (as most men are) in other things. You may easily suppose, therefore, that within the great green cape, which reached down to the calves of his legs, there was buttoned up to the chin an uncommonly pleasant fellow; and that he was about as choice a spirit, and as agreeable a companion, as ever stood in a pair of bull-headed-looking boots with mahogany-coloured tops.

Still, Tackleton, the toy merchant, was going to be married. In spite of all this, he was going to be married. And to a young wife too, a beautiful young wife.

He didn't look much like a Bridegroom, as he stood in the Carrier's kitchen, with a twist in his dry face, and a screw in his body, and his hat jerked over the bridge of his nose, and his hands tucked down into the bottoms of his pockets, and his whole sarcastic, ill-conditioned self peering out of one little corner of one little eye, like the concentrated essence of any number of ravens. But a Bridegroom he designed to be.

"In three days' time. Next Thursday. The last day of the first month in the year. That's my wedding-day," said Tackleton.

Did I mention that he had always one eye wide open, and one eye nearly shut; and that the one eye nearly shut was always the expressive eye? I don't think I did.

"That's my wedding-day!" said Tackleton, rattling his money.

"Why, it's our wedding-day too," exclaimed the Carrier.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Tackleton. "Odd! You're just such another couple. Just!"

The indignation of Dot at this presumptuous assertion is not to be described. What next? His imagination would compass the possibility of just such another Baby, perhaps. The man was mad.

"I say! A word with you," murmured Tackleton, nudging the Carrier with his elbow, and taking him a little apart. "You'll come to the wedding? We're in the same boat, you know."

"How in the same boat?" inquired the Carrier.

"A little disparity, you know," said Tackleton with another nudge. "Come and spend an evening with us beforehand."

"Why?" demanded John, astonished at this pressing hospitality.

"Why?" returned the other. "That's a new way of receiving an invitation. Why, for pleasure—sociability, you know, and all that."

"I thought you were never sociable," said John in his plain way.

"Tchah! It's of no use to be anything but free with you, I see," said Tackleton. "Why, then, the truth is, you have a—what tea-drinking people call a sort of a comfortable appearance together, you and your wife. We know better, you know, but——"

"No, we don't know better," interposed John. "What are you talking about?"

"Well! We *don't* know better, then," said Tackleton. "We'll agree that we don't. As you like; what does it matter? I was going to say, as you have that sort of appearance, your company will produce a favourable effect on Mrs. Tackleton that will be. And, though I don't think your good lady's very friendly to me in this matter, still she can't help herself from falling into my views, for there's a compactness and cosiness of appearance about her that always tells, even in an indifferent case. You'll say you'll come?"

"We have arranged to keep our Wedding-day (as far as that goes) at home," said John. "We have made the promise to ourselves these six months. We think, you see, that home—"

"Bah! what's home?" cried Tackleton. "Four walls and a ceiling! (Why don't you kill that Cricket? *I* would! I always do. I hate their noise.) There are four walls and a ceiling at my house. Come to me!"

"You kill your Crickets, eh?" said John.

"Scrunch 'em, sir," returned the other, setting his heel heavily on the floor. "You'll say you'll come? It's as much your interest as mine, you know, that the women should persuade each other that they're quiet and contented, and couldn't be better off. I know their way. Whatever one woman says, another woman is determined to clinch always. There's that spirit of emulation among 'em, sir, that if your wife says to my wife, 'I'm the happiest woman in the world, and mine's the best husband in the world, and I dote on him,' my wife will say the same to yours, or more, and half believe it."

"Do you mean to say she don't, then?" asked the Carrier.

"Don't!" cried Tackleton with a short, sharp laugh. "Don't what?"

The Carrier had some faint idea of adding, "dote upon you." But, happening to meet the half-closed eye, as it twinkled upon him over the turned-up collar of the cape, which was within an ace of poking it out, he felt it such an unlikely part and parcel of anything to be doted on, that he substituted, "that she don't believe it?"

"Ah, you dog! You're joking," said Tackleton.

But the Carrier, though slow to understand the full drift of his meaning, eyed him in such a serious manner, that he was obliged to be a little more explanatory.

"I have the humour," said Tackleton: holding up the fingers of his left hand, and tapping the forefinger, to imply, "There I am, Tackleton to wit": "I have the humour, sir, to marry a young wife, and a pretty wife": here he rapped his little finger, to express the Bride; not sparingly, but sharply; with a sense of power. "I'm able to gratify that humour, and I do. It's my whim. But—now look there!"

He pointed to where Dot was sitting, thoughtfully before the fire: leaning her dimpled chin upon her hand, and watching the bright blaze. The

Carrier looked at her, and then at him, and then at her, and then at him again.

"She honours and obeys, no doubt, you know," said Tackleton; "and that, as I am not a man of sentiment, is quite enough for *me*. But do you think there's anything more in it?"

"I think," observed the Carrier, "that I should chuck any man out of window who said there wasn't."

"Exactly so," returned the other with an unusual alacrity of assent. "To be sure! Doubtless you would. Of course. I'm certain of it. Good night. Pleasant dreams!"

The Carrier was puzzled, and made uncomfortable and uncertain, in spite of himself. He couldn't help showing it in his manner.

"Good night, my dear friend!" said Tackleton compassionately. "I'm off. We're exactly alike in reality, I see. You won't give us to-morrow evening? Well! Next day you go out visiting, I know. I'll meet you there, and bring my wife that is to be. It'll do her good. You're agreeable? Thankee. What's that?"

It was a loud cry from the Carrier's wife: a loud, sharp, sudden cry, that made the room ring like a glass vessel. She had risen from her seat, and stood like one transfixed by terror and surprise. The Stranger had advanced towards the fire to warm himself, and stood within a short stride of her chair. But quite still.

"Dot!" cried the Carrier. "Mary! Darling! What's the matter?"

They were all about her in a moment. Caleb, who had been dozing on the cake-box, in the first imperfect recovery of his suspended presence of mind, seized Miss Slowboy by the hair of her head, but immediately apologised.

"Mary!" exclaimed the Carrier, supporting her in his arms. "Are you ill? What is it? Tell me dear!"

She only answered by beating her hands together, and falling into a wild fit of laughter. Then, sinking from his grasp upon the ground, she covered her face with her apron, and wept bitterly. And then, she laughed again, and then she cried again, and then she said how cold she was, and suffered him to lead her to the fire, where she sat down as before. The old man standing, as before, quite still.

"I'm better, John," she said. "I'm quite well now—I——"

"John!" But John was on the other side of her. Why turn her face towards the strange old gentleman, as if addressing him. Was her brain wandering?

"Only a fancy, John dear—a kind of shock—a something coming suddenly before my eyes—I don't know what it was. It's quite gone, quite gone."

"I'm glad it's gone," muttered Tackleton, turning the expressive eye all round the room. "I wonder where it's gone, and what it was. Humph! Caleb, come here! Who's that with the grey hair?"

"I don't know, sir," returned Caleb in a whisper. "Never see him before in all my life. A beautiful figure for a nut-cracker; quite a new model. With a screw-jaw opening down into his waistcoat, he'd be lovely."

"Not ugly enough," said Tackleton.

"Or for a fire-box either," observed Caleb in deep contemplation, "what a model! Unscrew his head to put the matches in; turn him heels up'ards for the light; and what a fire-box for a gentleman's mantel-shelf, just as he stands!"

"Not half ugly enough," said Tackleton. "Nothing in him at all. Come! Bring that box! All right now, I hope?"

"Oh, quite gone! Quite gone!" said the little woman, waving him hurriedly away. "Good night!"

"Good night!" said Tackleton. "Good night, John Peerybingle! Take care how you carry that box, Caleb. Let it fall, and I'll murder you! Dark as pitch, and weather worse than ever, eh? Good night!"

So, with another sharp look round the room, he went out at the door; followed by Caleb with the wedding-cake on his head.

The Carrier had been so much astounded by his little wife, and so busily engaged in soothing and tending her, that he had scarcely been conscious of the Stranger's presence until now, when he again stood there, their only guest.

"He don't belong to them, you see," said John. "I must give him a hint to go."

"I beg your pardon, friend," said the old gentleman, advancing to him; "the more so as I fear your wife has not been well; but the Attendant whom my infirmity," he touched his ears, and shook his head, "renders almost indispensable, not having arrived, I fear there must be some mistake. The bad night which made the shelter of your comfortable cart (may I never have a worse!) so acceptable, is still as bad as ever. Would you, in your kindness, suffer me to rent a bed here?"

"Yes, yes," cried Dot. "Yes! Certainly!"

"Oh!" said the Carrier, surprised by the rapidity of this consent. "Well! I don't object; but still I'm not quite sure that——"

"Hush!" she interrupted. "Dear John!"

"Why, he's stone deaf," urged John.

"I know he is, but——Yes, sir, certainly. Yes, certainly! I'll make him up a bed directly, John."

As she hurried off to do it, the flutter of her spirits, and the agitation of her manner, were so strange, that the Carrier stood looking after her, quite confounded.

"Did its mothers make it up a Beds, then!" cried Miss Slowboy to the Baby; "and did its hair grow brown and curly when its caps was lifted off, and frighten it, a precious Pets, a sitting by the fires!"

With that unaccountable attraction of the mind to trifles, which is often incidental to a state of doubt and confusion, the Carrier, as he walked slowly to and fro, found himself mentally repeating even these absurd words, many times. So many times, that he got them by heart, and was still conning them over and over, like a lesson, when Tilly, after administering as much friction to the little bald head with her hand as she thought wholesome (according to the practice of nurses), had once more tied the Baby's cap on.

"And frighten it, a precious Pets, a sitting by the fires. What frightened Dot, I wonder?" mused the Carrier, pacing to and fro.

He scouted, from his heart, the insinuations of the toy merchant, and yet they filled him with a vague, indefinite uneasiness. For Tackleton was quick and sly; and he had that painful sense, himself, of being a man of slow perception, that a broken hint was always worrying to him. He certainly had no intention in his mind of linking anything that Tackleton had said with the unusual conduct of his wife, but the two subjects of reflection came into his mind together, and he could not keep them asunder.

The bed was soon made ready; and the visitor, declining all refreshment but a cup of tea, retired. Then, Dot—quite well again, she said, quite well again—arranged the great chair in the chimney-corner for her husband; filled his pipe and gave it him; and took her usual little stool beside him on the hearth.

She always *would* sit on that little stool. I think she must have had a kind of notion that it was a coaxing, wheedling little stool.

She was, out and out, the very best filler of a pipe, I should say, in the four quarters of the globe. To see her put that chubby little finger in the bowl, and then blow down the pipe to clear the tube, and, when she had done so, affect to think that there was really something in the tube, and blow a dozen times, and hold it to her eye like a telescope, with a most provoking twist in her capital little face, as she looked down it, was quite a brilliant thing. As to the tobacco, she was perfect mistress of the subject; and her lighting of the pipe, with a wisp of paper, when the Carrier had it in his mouth—going so very near his nose, and yet not scorching it—was Art, high Art.

And the Cricket and the Kettle, turning up again, acknowledged it! The bright fire, blazing up again, acknowledged it! The little Mower on the clock, in his unheeded work, acknowledged it! The Carrier, in his smoothing forehead and expanding face, acknowledged it, the readiest of all.

And as he soberly and thoughtfully puffed at his old pipe, and as the Dutch clock ticked, and as the red fire gleamed, and as the Cricket chirped, that Genius of his Hearth and Home (for such the Cricket was) came out, in fairy shape, into the room, and summoned many forms of Home about him. Dots of all ages and all sizes filled the chamber. Dots who were merry children, running on before him, gathering flowers in the fields; coy Dots, half shrinking from, half yielding to, the pleading of his own rough image; newly-married Dots, alighting at the door, and taking wondering possession of the household keys; motherly little Dots, attended by fictitious Slowboys, bearing babies to be christened; matronly Dots, still young and blooming, watching Dots of daughters, as they danced at rustic balls; fat Dots, encircled and beset by troops of rosy grandchildren; withered Dots, who leaned on sticks, and tottered as they crept along. Old Carriers, too, appeared with blind old Boxers lying at their feet; and newer carts with younger drivers ("Peerybingle Brothers" on the tilt); and sick old Carriers, tended by the gentlest hands; and graves of dead and gone old Carriers, green in the churchyard. And as the Cricket showed him all these things—he saw them plainly, though his eyes were fixed upon the fire—the Carrier's heart grew light and happy, and he thanked his Household Gods with all his might, and cared no more for Gruff and Tackleton than you do.

But what was that young figure of a man, which the same Fairy Cricket set so near Her stool, and which remained there, singly and alone? Why did it linger still, so near her, with its arm upon the chimney-piece, ever repeating "Married! and not to me!"

Oh, Dot! Oh, failing Dot! There is no place for it in all your husband's visions. Why has its shadow fallen on his hearth?

CHIRP THE SECOND

Caleb Plummer and his Blind Daughter lived all alone by themselves, as the Story Books say—and my blessing, with yours, to back it I hope, on the Story Books, for saying anything in this work-a-day world!—Caleb Plummer and his Blind Daughter lived all alone by themselves, in a little cracked nutshell of a wooden house, which was, in truth, no better than a pimple on the prominent red-brick nose of Gruff and Tackleton. The premises of Gruff and Tackleton were the great feature of the street; but you might have knocked down Caleb Plummer's dwelling with a hammer or two, and carried off the pieces in a cart.

If any one had done the dwelling-house of Caleb Plummer the honour to miss it after such an inroad, it would have been, no doubt, to commend its demolition as a vast improvement. It stuck to the premises of Gruff and Tackleton like a barnacle to a ship's keel, or a snail to a door, or a little bunch of toadstools to the stem of a tree. But it was the germ from which the full-grown trunk of Gruff and Tackleton had sprung; and, under its crazy roof, the Gruff before last had, in a small way, made toys for a generation of old boys and girls, who had played with them, and found them out, and broken them, and gone to sleep.

I have said that Caleb and his poor Blind Daughter lived here. I should have said that Caleb lived here, and his poor Blind Daughter somewhere else—in an enchanted home of Caleb's furnishing, where scarcity and shabbiness were not, and trouble never entered. Caleb was no sorcerer; but in the only magic art that still remains to us, the magic of devoted, deathless love, Nature had been the mistress of his study; and, from her teaching, all the wonder came.

The Blind Girl never knew that ceilings were discoloured, walls blotched and bare of plaster here and there, high crevices unstopped and widening every day, beams mouldering and tending downward. The Blind Girl never knew that iron was rusting, wood rotting, paper peeling off; the size, and shape, and true proportion of the dwelling, withering away. The Blind Girl never knew that ugly shapes of delf and earthenware were on the board; that sorrow and faint-heartedness were in the house; that Caleb's scanty hairs were turning greyer and more grey before her sightless face.

The Blind Girl never knew they had a master, cold, exacting, and uninterested—never knew that Tackleton was Tackleton, in short; but lived in the belief of an eccentric humorist, who loved to have his jest with them, and who, while he was the Guardian Angel of their lives, disdained to hear one word of thankfulness.

And all was Caleb's doing; all the doing of her simple father! But he, too, had a Cricket on his Hearth; and listening sadly to its music when the motherless Blind Child was very young that Spirit had inspired him with the thought that even her great deprivation might be almost changed into a blessing, and the girl made happy by these little means. For all the Cricket tribe are potent Spirits, even though the people who hold converse with them do not know it (which is frequently the case), and there are not in the unseen world voices more gentle and more true, that may be so implicitly relied on, or that are so certain to give none but tenderest counsel, as the Voices in which the Spirits of the Fireside and the Hearth address themselves to humankind.

Caleb and his daughter were at work together in their usual working-room, which served them for their ordinary living-room as well; and a strange place it was. There were houses in it, finished and unfinished, for Dolls of all stations in life. Suburban tenements for Dolls of moderate means; kitchens and single apartments for Dolls of the lower classes; capital town residences for Dolls of high estate. Some of these establishments were already furnished according to estimate, with a view to the convenience of Dolls of limited income; others could be fitted on the most expensive scale, at a moment's notice, from whole shelves of chairs and tables, sofas, bedsteads, and upholstery. The nobility and gentry and public in general, for whose accommodation these tenements were designed, lay here and there, in baskets, staring straight up at the ceiling; but in denoting their degrees in society, and confining them to their respective stations (which experience shows to be lamentably difficult in real life), the makers of these Dolls had far improved on Nature, who is often froward and perverse; for they, not resting on such arbitrary marks as satin, cotton print, and bits of rag, had superadded striking personal differences which allowed of no mistake. Thus, the Doll-lady of distinction had wax limbs of perfect symmetry; but only she and her compeers. The next grade in the social scale being made of leather, and the next of coarse linen stuff. As to the common people, they had just so many matches out of tinder-boxes for their arms and legs, and there they were—established in their sphere at once, beyond the possibility of getting out of it.

There were various other samples of his handicraft besides Dolls in Caleb Plummer's room. There were Noah's arks, in which the Birds and Beasts were an uncommonly tight fit, I assure you; though they could be crammed in, anyhow, at the roof, and rattled and shaken into the smallest compass. By a bold poetical licence, most of these Noah's arks had knockers on the doors; inconsistent appendages, perhaps, as suggestive of morning callers and a Postman, yet a pleasant finish to the outside of the building. There were scores of melancholy little carts, which, when the wheels went round, performed most doleful music. Many small fiddles, drums, and other instruments of torture; no end of cannon, shields, swords, spears, and guns. There were little tumblers in red breeches, incessantly swarming up high obstacles of red tape, and coming down, head first, on the other side; and there were innumerable old gentlemen of respectable, not to say venerable appearance, insanely flying over horizontal pegs, inserted, for the purpose, in their own street-doors. There were beasts of all sorts; horses, in particular, of every breed, from the spotted barrel on four pegs with a small tippet for a mane, to the thorough-bred rocker on his highest mettle. As it would have been hard to count the dozens upon dozens of grotesque figures that were ever ready to commit all sorts of absurdities on the turning of a handle, so it would have been no easy task to mention any human folly, vice, or weakness that had not its type, immediate or remote, in Caleb Plummer's room. And not in an exaggerated form, for very little handles will move men and women to as strange performances as any Toy was ever made to undertake.

In the midst of all these objects, Caleb and his daughter sat at work. The Blind Girl busy as a Doll's dressmaker; Caleb painting and glazing the four-pair front of a desirable family mansion.

The care imprinted in the lines of Caleb's face, and his absorbed and dreamy manner, which would have sat well on some alchemist or abstruse student, were at first sight an odd contrast to his occupation and the trivialities about him. But trivial things, invented and pursued for bread, become very serious matters of fact: and, apart from this consideration, I am not at all prepared to say, myself, that if Caleb had been a Lord Chamberlain, or a Member of Parliament, or a lawyer, or even a great speculator, he would have dealt in toys one whit less whimsical, while I have a very great doubt whether they would have been as harmless.

"So you were out in the rain last night, father, in your beautiful new great-coat," said Caleb's daughter.

"In my beautiful new great-coat," answered Caleb, glancing towards a clothes-line in the room, on which the sackcloth garment previously described was carefully hung up to dry.

"How glad I am you bought it, father!"

"And of such a tailor too," said Caleb. "Quite a fashionable tailor. It's too good for me."

The Blind Girl rested from her work, and laughed with delight. "Too good, father! What can be too good for you?"

"I'm half ashamed to wear it, though," said Caleb, watching the effect of what he said upon her brightening face, "upon my word! When I hear the boys and people say behind me, 'Halloa! Here's a swell!' I don't know which way to look. And when the beggar wouldn't go away last night; and, when I said I was a very common man, said, 'No, your Honour! Bless your Honour, don't say that!' I was quite ashamed. I really felt as if I hadn't a right to wear it."

Happy Blind Girl! How merry she was in her exultation!

"I see you, father," she said, clasping her hands, "as plainly as if I had the eyes I never want when you are with me. A blue coat——"

"Bright blue," said Caleb.

"Yes, yes! Bright blue!" exclaimed the girl, turning up her radiant face; "the colour I can just remember in the blessed sky! You told me it was blue before! A bright blue coat——"

"Made loose to the figure," suggested Caleb.

"Yes! loose to the figure!" cried the Blind Girl, laughing heartily; "and in it, you, dear father, with your merry eye, your smiling face, your free step, and your dark hair—looking so young and handsome!"

"Halloa! Halloa!" said Caleb. "I shall be vain presently!"

"*I* think you are already," cried the Blind Girl, pointing at him in her glee. "I know you, father! Ha, ha, ha! I've found you out, you see!"

How different the picture in her mind, from Caleb, as he sat observing her! She had spoken of his free step. She was right in that. For years and years he had never once crossed that threshold at his own slow pace, but with a footfall counterfeited for her ear; and never had he, when his heart was heaviest, forgotten the light tread that was to render hers so cheerful and courageous!

Heaven knows! But I think Caleb's vague bewilderment of manner may have half originated in his having confused himself about himself and everything around him, for the love of his Blind Daughter. How could the little man be otherwise than bewildered, after labouring for so many years to destroy his own identity, and that of all the objects that had any bearing on it?

"There we are," said Caleb, falling back a pace or two to form the better judgment of his work; "as near the real thing as sixpenn'orth of halfpence is to sixpence. What a pity that the whole front of the house opens at once! If there was only a staircase in it now, and regular doors to the rooms to go in at! But that's the worst of my calling, I'm always deluding myself, and swindling myself."

"You are speaking quite softly. You are not tired, father?"

"Tired!" echoed Caleb with a great burst of animation. "What should tire me, Bertha? *I* was never tired. What does it mean?"

To give the greater force to his words, he checked himself in an involuntary imitation of two half-length stretching and yawning figures on the mantel-shelf, who were represented as in one eternal state of weariness from the waist upwards; and hummed a fragment of a song. It was a Bacchanalian song, something about a Sparkling Bowl. He sang it with an assumption of a Devil-may-care voice, that made his face a thousand times more meagre and more thoughtful than ever.

"What! You're singing, are you?" said Tackleton, putting his head in at the door. "Go it! *I* can't sing."

Nobody would have suspected him of it. He hadn't what is generally termed a singing face, by any means.

"I can't afford to sing," said Tackleton. "I'm glad *you* can. I hope you can afford to work too. Hardly time for both, I should think?"

"If you could only see him, Bertha, how he's winking at me!" whispered Caleb. "Such a man to joke! You'd think, if you didn't know him, he was in earnest—wouldn't you now?"

The Blind Girl smiled and nodded.

"The bird that can sing and won't sing must be made to sing, they say," grumbled Tackleton. "What about the owl that can't sing, and oughtn't to sing, and will sing; is there anything that *he* should be made to do?"

"The extent to which he's winking at this moment!" whispered Caleb to his daughter. "Oh, my gracious!"

"Always merry and light-hearted with us!" cried the smiling Bertha.

"Oh! you're there, are you?" answered Tackleton. "Poor Idiot!"

He really did believe she was an Idiot; and he founded the belief, I can't say whether consciously or not, upon her being fond of him.

"Well! and being there,—how are you?" said Tackleton in his grudging way.

"Oh! well; quite well! And as happy as even you can wish me to be. As happy as you would make the whole world, if you could!"

"Poor Idiot!" muttered Tackleton. "No gleam of reason. Not a gleam!"

The Blind Girl took his hand and kissed it; held it for a moment in her own two hands; and laid her cheek against it tenderly before releasing it. There was such unspeakable affection and such fervent gratitude in the act, that Tackleton himself was moved to say, in a milder growl than usual:

"What's the matter now?"

"I stood it close beside my pillow when I went to sleep last night, and remembered it in my dreams. And when the day broke, and the glorious red sun—the *red* sun, father?"

"Red in the mornings and the evenings, Bertha," said poor Caleb with a woeful glance at his employer.

"When it rose, and the bright light I almost fear to strike myself against in walking, came into the room, I turned the little tree towards it, and blessed Heaven for making things so precious, and blessed you for sending them to cheer me!"

"Bedlam broke loose!" said Tackleton under his breath. "We shall arrive at the strait-waistcoat and mufflers soon. We're getting on!"

Caleb, with his hands hooked loosely in each other, stared vacantly before him while his daughter spoke, as if he really were uncertain (I believe he was) whether Tackleton had done anything to deserve her thanks or not. If he could have been a perfectly free agent at that moment, required, on pain of death, to kick the toy merchant, or fall at his feet, according to his merits, I believe it would have been an even chance which course he would have taken. Yet Caleb knew that with his own hands he had brought the little rose-tree home for her so carefully, and that with his own lips he had forged the innocent deception which should help to keep her from suspecting how much, how very much, he every day denied himself, that she might be happier.

"Bertha!" said Tackleton, assuming, for the nonce, a little cordiality. "Come here."

"Oh, I can come straight to you! You needn't guide me!" she rejoined.

"Shall I tell you a secret, Bertha?"

"If you will!" she answered eagerly.

How bright the darkened face! How adorned with light the listening head!

"This is the day on which little what's-her-name, the spoilt child, Peerybingle's wife, pays her regular visit to you—makes her fantastic Picnic here, an't it?" said Tackleton with a strong expression of distaste for the whole concern.

"Yes," replied Bertha. "This is the day."

"I thought so," said Tackleton. "I should like to join the party."

"Do you hear that, father?" cried the Blind Girl in an ecstasy.

"Yes, yes, I hear it," murmured Caleb with the fixed look of a sleep-walker; "but I don't believe it. It's one of my lies, I've no doubt."

"You see I—I want to bring the Peerybingles a little more into company with May Fielding," said Tackleton. "I'm going to be married to May."

"Married!" cried the Blind Girl, starting from him.

"She's such a con-founded idiot," muttered Tackleton, "that I was afraid she'd never comprehend me. Ah, Bertha! Married! Church, parson, clerk, beadle, glass coach, bells, breakfast, bridecake, favours, marrow-bones, cleavers, and all the rest of the tomfoolery. A wedding, you know; a wedding. Don't you know what a wedding is?"

"I know," replied the Blind Girl in a gentle tone. "I understand!"

"Do you?" muttered Tackleton. "It's more than I expected. Well! On that account I want to join the party, and to bring May and her mother. I'll send in a little something or other, before the afternoon. A cold leg of mutton, or some comfortable trifle of that sort. You'll expect me?"

"Yes," she answered.

She had drooped her head, and turned away; and so stood, with her hands crossed, musing.

"I don't think you will," muttered Tackleton, looking at her; "for you seem to have forgotten all about it already. Caleb!"

"I may venture to say I'm here, I suppose," thought Caleb. "Sir!"

"Take care she don't forget what I've been saying to her."

"*She* never forgets," returned Caleb. "It's one of the few things she an't clever in."

"Every man thinks his own geese swans," observed the toy merchant with a shrug. "Poor devil!"

Having delivered himself of which remark with infinite contempt, old Gruff and Tackleton withdrew.

Bertha remained where he had left her, lost in meditation. The gaiety had vanished from her downcast face, and it was very sad. Three or four times she shook her head, as if bewailing some remembrance or some loss; but her sorrowful reflections found no vent in words.

It was not until Caleb had been occupied some time in yoking a team of horses to a waggon by the summary process of nailing the harness to the vital parts of their bodies, that she drew near to his working-stool, and, sitting down beside him, said:

"Father, I am lonely in the dark. I want my eyes, my patient, willing eyes."

"Here they are," said Caleb. "Always ready. They are more yours than mine, Bertha, any hour in the four-and-twenty. What shall your eyes do for you, dear?"

"Look round the room, father."

"All right," said Caleb. "No sooner said than done, Bertha."

"Tell me about it."

"It's much the same as usual," said Caleb. "Homely, but very snug. The gay colours on the walls; the bright flowers on the plates and dishes; the shining wood, where there are beams or panels; the general cheerfulness and neatness of the building,—make it very pretty."

Cheerful and neat it was, wherever Bertha's hands could busy themselves. But nowhere else were cheerfulness and neatness possible in the old crazy shed which Caleb's fancy so transformed.

"You have your working dress on, and are not so gallant as when you wear the handsome coat?" said Bertha, touching him.

"Not quite so gallant," answered Caleb. "Pretty brisk, though."

"Father," said the Blind Girl, drawing close to his side, and stealing one arm round his neck, "tell me something about May. She is very fair?"

"She is indeed," said Caleb. And she was indeed. It was quite a rare thing to Caleb not to have to draw on his invention.

"Her hair is dark," said Bertha pensively, "darker than mine. Her voice is sweet and musical, I know. I have often loved to hear it. Her shape——"

"There's not a Doll's in all the room to equal it," said Caleb. "And her eyes!——"

He stopped; for Bertha had drawn closer round his neck, and, from the arm that clung about him, came a warning pressure which he understood too well.

He coughed a moment, hammered for a moment, and then fell back upon the song about the sparkling bowl, his infallible resource in all such difficulties.

"Our friend, father, our benefactor. I am never tired, you know, of hearing about him.—Now, was I ever?" she said hastily.

"Of course not," answered Caleb, "and with reason."

"Ah! With how much reason!" cried the Blind Girl. With such fervency, that Caleb, though his motives were so pure, could not endure to meet her face; but dropped his eyes, as if she could have read in them his innocent deceit.

"Then tell me again about him, dear father," said Bertha. "Many times again! His face is benevolent, kind, and tender. Honest and true, I am sure it is. The manly heart that tries to cloak all favours with a show of roughness and unwillingness, beats in its every look and glance."

"And makes it noble," added Caleb in his quiet desperation.

"And makes it noble," cried the Blind Girl. "He is older than May, father."

"Ye-es," said Caleb reluctantly. "He's a little older than May. But that don't signify."

"Oh, father, yes! To be his patient companion in infirmity and age; to be his gentle nurse in sickness, and his constant friend in suffering and sorrow; to know no weariness in working for his sake; to watch him, tend him, sit beside his bed and talk to him awake, and pray for him asleep; what privileges these would be! What opportunities for proving all her truth and her devotion to him! Would she do all this, dear father?"

"No doubt of it," said Caleb.

"I love her, father; I can love her from my soul!" exclaimed the Blind Girl. And, saying so, she laid her poor blind face on Caleb's shoulder, and so wept and wept, that he was almost sorry to have brought that tearful happiness upon her.

In the meantime there had been a pretty sharp commotion at John Peerybingle's, for little Mrs. Peerybingle naturally couldn't think of going anywhere without the Baby; and to get the Baby under way took time. Not that there was much of the Baby, speaking of it as a thing of weight and measure, but there was a vast deal to do about and about it, and it all had to be done by easy stages. For instance, when the Baby was got, by hook and by crook, to a certain point of dressing, and you might have rationally supposed that another touch or two would finish him off, and turn him out a tiptop Baby challenging the world, he was unexpectedly extinguished in a flannel cap, and hustled off to bed; where he simmered (so to speak) between two blankets for the best part of an hour. From this state of inaction he was then recalled, shining very much and roaring violently, to partake of—well? I would rather say, if you'll permit me to speak generally—of a slight repast. After which he went to sleep again. Mrs. Peerybingle took advantage of this interval, to make herself as smart in a small way as ever you saw anybody in all your life; and, during the same short truce, Miss Slowboy insinuated herself into a spencer of a fashion so surprising and ingenious, that it had no connection with herself, or anything else in the universe, but was a shrunken, dog's-eared, independent fact, pursuing its lonely course without the least regard to anybody. By this time, the Baby, being all alive again, was invested, by the united efforts of Mrs. Peerybingle and Miss Slowboy, with a cream-coloured mantle for its body, and a sort of nankeen raised pie for its head; and so, in course of time, they all three got down to the door, where the old horse had already taken more than the full value of his day's toll out of the Turnpike Trust, by tearing up the road with his impatient autographs; and whence Boxer might be dimly seen in the remote perspective, standing looking back, and tempting him to come on without orders.

As to a chair, or anything of that kind for helping Mrs. Peerybingle into the cart, you know very little of John, if you think *that* was necessary. Before you could have seen him lift her from the ground, there she was in her place, fresh and rosy, saying, "John! How *can* you? Think of Tilly!"

If I might be allowed to mention a young lady's legs on any terms, I would observe of Miss Slowboy's that there was a fatality about them which rendered them singularly liable to be grazed; and that she never effected the smallest ascent or descent without recording the circumstance upon them with a notch, as Robinson Crusoe marked the days upon his wooden calendar. But, as this might be considered ungenteel, I'll think of it.

"John! You've got the basket with the Veal and Ham Pie and things, and the bottles of Beer?" said Dot. "If you haven't you must turn round again this very minute."

"You're a nice little article," returned the Carrier, "to be talking about turning round, after keeping me a full quarter of an hour behind my time."

"I am sorry for it, John," said Dot in a great bustle, "but I really could not think of going to Bertha's—I would not do it, John, on any account—without the Veal and Ham Pie and things, and the bottles of Beer. Way!"

This monosyllable was addressed to the horse, who didn't mind it at all.

"Oh, *do* way, John!" said Mrs. Peerybingle. "Please!"

"It'll be time enough to do that," returned John, "when I begin to leave things behind me. The basket's safe enough."

"What a hard-hearted monster you must be, John, not to have said so at once, and save me such a turn! I declare I wouldn't go to Bertha's without the Veal and Ham Pie and things, and the bottles of Beer, for any money. Regularly once a fortnight ever since we have been married, John, have we made our little Picnic there. If anything was to go wrong with it, I should almost think we were never to be lucky again."

"It was a kind thought in the first instance," said the Carrier; "and I honour you for it, little woman."

"My dear John!" replied Dot, turning very red. "Don't talk about honouring *me*. Good gracious!"

"By-the-bye"—observed the Carrier—"that old gentleman——"

Again so visibly and instantly embarrassed!

"He's an odd fish," said the Carrier, looking straight along the road before them. "I can't make him out. I don't believe there's any harm in him."

"None at all. I'm—I'm sure there's none at all."

"Yes," said the Carrier, with his eyes attracted to her face by the great earnestness of her manner. "I am glad you feel so certain of it, because it's a confirmation to me. It's curious that he should have taken it into his head to ask leave to go on lodging with us; an't it? Things come about so strangely."

"So very strangely," she rejoined in a low voice, scarcely audible.

"However, he's a good-natured old gentleman," said John, "and pays as a gentleman, and I think his word is to be relied upon, like a gentleman's. I had quite a long talk with him this morning: he can hear me better already, he says, as he gets more used to my voice. He told me a great deal about himself, and I told him a good deal about myself, and a rare lot of questions he asked me. I gave him information about my having two beats, you know, in my business; one day to the right from our house and back again; another day to the left from our house and back again (for he's a stranger, and don't know the names of places about here); and he seemed quite pleased. 'Why, then I shall be returning home to-night your way,' he says, 'when I thought you'd be coming in an exactly opposite direction. That's capital! I may trouble you for another lift, perhaps, but I'll engage not to fall so sound asleep again.' He *was* sound asleep, sure-ly!—Dot! what are you thinking of?"

"Thinking of, John? I—I was listening to you."

"Oh! That's all right!" said the honest Carrier. "I was afraid, from the look of your face, that I had gone rambling on so long as to set you thinking about something else. I was very near it, I'll be bound."

Dot making no reply, they jogged on, for some little time, in silence. But, it was not easy to remain silent very long in John Peerybingle's cart, for everybody on the road had something to say. Though it might only be "How are you?" and, indeed, it was very often nothing else, still, to give that back again in the right spirit of cordiality, required, not merely a nod and a smile, but as wholesome an action of the lungs withal as a long-winded Parliamentary speech. Sometimes, passengers on foot, or horseback, plodded on a little way beside the cart, for the express purpose of having a chat; and then there was a great deal to be said on both sides.

Then, Boxer gave occasion to more good-natured recognitions of, and by, the Carrier, than half-a-dozen Christians could have done! Everybody knew him all along the road—especially the fowls and pigs, who, when they saw him approaching, with his body all on one side, and his ears pricked up inquisitively, and that knob of a tail making the most of itself in the air, immediately withdrew into remote back-settlements, without waiting for the honour of a nearer acquaintance. He had business elsewhere; going down all the turnings, looking into all the wells, bolting in and out of all the cottages, dashing into the midst of all the Dame Schools, fluttering all the pigeons, magnifying the tails of all the cats, and trotting into the public-houses like a regular customer. Wherever he went, somebody or other might have been heard to cry, "Halloa! here's Boxer!" and out came that somebody forthwith, accompanied by at least two or three other somebodies, to give John Peerybingle and his pretty wife Good day.

The packages and parcels for the errand cart were numerous; and there were many stoppages to take them in and give them out, which were not by any means the worst parts of the journey. Some people were so full of expectation about their parcels, and other people were so full of wonder about their parcels, and other people were so full of inexhaustible directions about their parcels, and John had such a lively interest in all the parcels, that it was as good as a play. Likewise, there were articles to carry, which required to be considered and discussed, and in reference to the adjustment and disposition of which councils had to be holden by the Carrier and the senders: at which Boxer usually assisted, in short fits of the closest attention, and long fits of tearing round and round the assembled sages, and barking himself hoarse. Of all these little incidents, Dot was the amused and open-eyed spectatress from her chair in the cart; and as she sat there, looking on—a charming little portrait framed to admiration by the tilt—there was no lack of nudgings and glancings and whisperings and envyings among the younger men. And this delighted John the Carrier beyond measure; for he was proud to have his little wife admired, knowing that she didn't mind it—that, if anything, she rather liked it perhaps.

The trip was a little foggy, to be sure, in the January weather; and was raw and cold. But who cared for such trifles? Not Dot, decidedly. Not Tilly Slowboy, for she deemed sitting in a cart, on any terms, to be the highest point of human joys; the crowning circumstance of earthly hope. Not the Baby, I'll be sworn; for it's not in Baby nature to be warmer or more sound asleep, though its capacity is great in both respects, than that blessed young Peerybingle was, all the way.

You couldn't see very far in the fog, of course; but you could see a great deal! It's astonishing how much you may see in a thicker fog than that, if you will only take the trouble to look for it. Why, even to sit watching for the Fairyrings in the fields, and for the patches of hoar frost still lingering in the shade, near hedges and by trees, was a pleasant occupation, to make no mention of the unexpected shapes in which the trees themselves came starting out of the mist, and glided into it again. The hedges were tangled and bare, and waved a multitude of blighted garlands in the wind; but there was no discouragement in this. It was agreeable to contemplate; for it made the fireside warmer in possession, and the summer greener in expectancy.

The river looked chilly; but it was in motion, and moving at a good pace—which was a great point. The canal was rather slow and torpid; that must be admitted. Never mind. It would freeze the sooner when the frost set fairly in, and then there would be skating and sliding; and the heavy old barges, frozen up somewhere near a wharf, would smoke their rusty iron chimney-pipes all day, and have a lazy time of it.

In one place there was a great mound of weeds or stubble burning; and they watched the fire, so white in the daytime, flaring through the fog, with only here and there a dash of red in it, until, in consequence, as she observed, of the smoke "getting up her nose," Miss Slowboy choked—she could do anything of that sort, on the smallest provocation—and woke the Baby, who wouldn't go to sleep again. But Boxer, who was in advance some quarter of a mile or so, had already passed the outposts of the town, and gained the corner of the street where Caleb and his daughter lived; and, long before they had reached the door, he and the Blind Girl were on the pavement waiting to receive them.

Boxer, by the way, made certain delicate distinctions of his own, in his communication with Bertha, which persuade me fully that he knew her to be blind. He never sought to attract her attention by looking at her, as he often did with other people, but touched her invariably. What experience he could ever have had of blind people or blind dogs I don't know. He had never lived with a blind master; nor had Mr. Boxer the elder, nor Mrs. Boxer, nor any of his respectable family on either side, ever been visited with blindness, that I am aware of. He may have found it out for himself, perhaps, but he had got hold of it somehow; and therefore he had hold of Bertha too, by the skirt, and kept hold, until Mrs. Peerybingle and the Baby, and Miss Slowboy and the basket, were all got safely within doors.

May Fielding was already come; and so was her mother—a little querulous chip of an old lady with a peevish face, who, in right of having preserved a waist like a bedpost, was supposed to be a most transcendent figure; and who, in consequence of having once been better off, or of labouring under an impression that she might have been, if something had happened which never did happen, and seemed to have never been particularly likely to come to pass—but it's all the same—was very genteel and patronising indeed. Gruff and Tackleton was also there, doing the agreeable, with the evident sensation of being as perfectly at home, and as unquestionably in his own element, as a fresh young salmon on the top of the Great Pyramid.

"May! My dear old friend!" cried Dot, running up to meet her. "What a happiness to see you!"

Her old friend was, to the full, as hearty and as glad as she; and it really was, if you'll believe me, quite a pleasant sight to see them embrace. Tackleton was a man of taste, beyond all question. May was very pretty.

You know sometimes, when you are used to a pretty face, how, when it comes into contact and comparison with another pretty face, it seems for the moment to be homely and faded, and hardly to deserve the high opinion you have had of it. Now, this was not at all the case, either with Dot or May; for May's face set off Dot's, and Dot's face set off May's, so naturally and agreeably, that, as John Peerybingle was very near saying when he came into the room, they ought to have been born sisters—which was the only improvement you could have suggested.

Tackleton had brought his leg of mutton, and, wonderful to relate, a tart besides—but we don't mind a little dissipation when our brides are in the case; we don't get married every day—and, in addition to these dainties, there were the Veal and Ham Pie, and "things," as Mrs. Peerybingle called them; which were chiefly nuts and oranges, and cakes, and such small deer. When the repast was set forth on the board, flanked by Caleb's contribution, which was a great wooden bowl of smoking potatoes (he was prohibited, by solemn compact, from producing any other viands), Tackleton led his intended mother-in-law to the post of honour. For the better gracing of this place at the high festival, the majestic old soul had adorned herself with a cap, calculated to inspire the thoughtless with sentiments of awe. She also wore her gloves. But let us be genteel, or die!

Caleb sat next his daughter; Dot and her old schoolfellow were side by side; the good Carrier took care of the bottom of the table. Miss Slowboy was isolated, for the time being, from every article of furniture but the chair she sat on, that she might have nothing else to knock the Baby's head against.

As Tilly stared about her at the dolls and toys, they stared at her and at the company. The venerable old gentleman at the street-doors (who were all in full action) showed especial interest in the party, pausing occasionally before leaping, as if they were listening to the conversation, and then plunging wildly over and over, a great many times, without halting for breath—as in a frantic state of delight with the whole proceedings.

Certainly, if these old gentlemen were inclined to have a fiendish joy in the contemplation of Tackleton's discomfiture, they had good reason to be satisfied. Tackleton couldn't get on at all; and the more cheerful his intended bride became in Dot's society, the less he liked it, though he had brought them together for that purpose. For he was a regular dog in the manger, was Tackleton; and, when they laughed and he couldn't, he took it into his head, immediately, that they must be laughing at him.

"Ah, May!" said Dot. "Dear, dear, what changes! To talk of those merry school days makes one young again."

"Why, you an't particularly old at any time, are you?" said Tackleton.

"Look at my sober, plodding husband there," returned Dot. "He adds twenty years to my age at least. Don't you, John?"

"Forty," John replied.

"How many *you*'ll add to Mary's, I am sure I don't know," said Dot, laughing. "But she can't be much less than a hundred years of age on her next birthday."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Tackleton. Hollow as a drum that laugh, though. And he looked as if he could have twisted Dot's neck comfortably.

"Dear, dear!" said Dot. "Only to remember how we used to talk, at school, about the husbands we would choose. I don't know how young, and how handsome, and how gay, and how lively mine was not to be! And as to May's!—Ah dear! I don't know whether to laugh or cry, when I think what silly girls we were."

May seemed to know which to do; for the colour flashed into her face, and tears stood in her eyes.

"Even the very persons themselves—real live young men—we fixed on sometimes," said Dot. "We little thought how things would come about. I never fixed on John, I'm sure; I never so much as thought of him. And, if I had told you you were ever to be married to Mr. Tackleton, why, you'd have slapped me. Wouldn't you, May?"

Though May didn't say yes, she certainly didn't say no, or express no, by any means.

Tackleton laughed—quite shouted, he laughed so loud. John Peerybingle laughed too, in his ordinary good-natured and contented manner; but his was a mere whisper of a laugh to Tackleton's.

"You couldn't help yourselves, for all that. You couldn't resist us, you see," said Tackleton. "Here we are! Here we are! Where are your gay young bridegrooms now?"

"Some of them are dead," said Dot; "and some of them forgotten. Some of them, if they could stand among us at this moment, would not believe we were the same creatures; would not believe that what they saw and heard was real, and we *could* forget them so. No! they would not believe one word of it!"

"Why, Dot!" exclaimed the Carrier. "Little woman!"

She had spoken with such earnestness and fire, that she stood in need of some recalling to herself, without doubt. Her husband's check was very gentle, for he merely interfered, as he supposed, to shield old Tackleton; but it proved effectual, for she stopped, and said no more. There was an uncommon agitation, even in her silence, which the wary Tackleton, who had brought his half-shut eye to bear upon her, noted closely, and remembered to some purpose too.

May uttered no word, good or bad, but sat quite still, with her eyes cast down, and made no sign of interest in what had passed. The good lady her mother now interposed, observing, in the first instance, that girls were girls, and bygones bygones, and that, so long as young people were young and thoughtless, they would probably conduct themselves like young and thoughtless persons: with two or three other positions of a no less sound and incontrovertible character. She then remarked, in a devout spirit, that she thanked Heaven she had always found in her daughter May a dutiful and obedient child: for which she took no credit to herself, though she had every reason to believe it was entirely owing to herself. With regard to Mr. Tackleton, she said, That he was in a moral point of view an undeniable individual, and That he was in an eligible point of view a son-in-law to be desired, no one in their senses could doubt. (She was very emphatic here.) With regard to the family into which he was so soon about, after some solicitation, to be admitted, she believed Mr. Tackleton knew that, although reduced in purse, it had some pretensions to gentility; and that if certain circumstances, not wholly unconnected, she would go so far as to say, with the Indigo Trade, but to which she would not more particularly refer, had happened differently, it might perhaps have been in possession of wealth. She then remarked that she would not allude to the past, and would not mention that her daughter had for some time rejected the suit of Mr.

Tackleton; and that she would not say a great many other things which she did say at great length. Finally, she delivered it as the general result of her observation and experience, that those marriages in which there was least of what was romantically and sillily called love, were always the happiest; and that she anticipated the greatest possible amount of bliss—not rapturous bliss; but the solid, steady-going article—from the approaching nuptials. She concluded by informing the company that to-morrow was the day she had lived for expressly; and that, when it was over, she would desire nothing better than to be packed up and disposed of in any genteel place of burial.

As these remarks were quite unanswerable—which is the happy property of all remarks that are sufficiently wide of the purpose—they changed the current of the conversation, and diverted the general attention to the Veal and Ham Pie, the cold mutton, the potatoes, and the tart. In order that the bottled beer might not be slighted, John Peerybingle proposed To-morrow: the Wedding-day; and called upon them to drink a bumper to it, before he proceeded on his journey.

For you ought to know that he only rested there, and gave the old horse a bait. He had to go some four or five miles farther on; and, when he returned in the evening, he called for Dot, and took another rest on his way home. This was the order of the day on all the Picnic occasions, and had been ever since their institution.

There were two persons present, besides the bride and bridegroom elect, who did but indifferent honour to the toast. One of these was Dot, too flushed and discomposed to adapt herself to any small occurrence of the moment; the other, Bertha, who rose up hurriedly before the rest, and left the table.

"Good-bye!" said stout John Peerybingle, pulling on his dreadnought coat. "I shall be back at the old time. Good-bye all!"

"Good-bye, John," returned Caleb.

He seemed to say it by rote, and to wave his hand in the same unconscious manner; for he stood observing Bertha with an anxious wondering face, that never altered its expression.

"Good-bye, young shaver!" said the jolly Carrier, bending down to kiss the child; which Tilly Slowboy, now intent upon her knife and fork, had deposited asleep (and, strange to say, without damage) in a little cot of Bertha's furnishing; "good-bye! Time will come, I suppose, when *you*'ll turn out into the cold, my little friend, and leave your old father to enjoy his pipe and his rheumatics in the chimney-corner; eh? Where's Dot?"

"I'm here, John!" she said, starting.

"Come, come!" returned the Carrier, clapping his sounding hands. "Where's the pipe?"

"I quite forgot the pipe, John."

Forgot the pipe! Was such a wonder ever heard of? She! Forgot the pipe!

"I'll—I'll fill it directly. It's soon done."

But it was not so soon done, either. It lay in the usual place—the Carrier's dreadnought pocket—with the little pouch, her own work, from which she was used to fill it; but her hand shook so, that she entangled it (and yet her hand was small enough to have come out easily, I am sure), and bungled terribly. The filling of the pipe and lighting it, those little offices in which I have commended her discretion, were vilely done from first to last. During the whole process, Tackleton stood looking on maliciously with the half-closed eye; which, whenever it met hers—or caught it, for it can hardly be said to have ever met another eye: rather being a kind of trap to snatch it up—augmented her confusion in a most remarkable degree.

"Why, what a clumsy Dot you are this afternoon!" said John. "I could have done it better myself, I verily believe!"

With these good-natured words, he strode away, and presently was heard, in company with Boxer, and the old horse, and the cart, making lively music down the road. What time the dreamy Caleb still stood, watching his blind daughter, with the same expression on his face.

"Bertha!" said Caleb, softly. "What has happened? How changed you are, my darling, in a few hours—since this morning! *You* silent and dull all day! What is it? Tell me!"

"Oh, father, father!" cried the Blind Girl, bursting into tears. "Oh, my hard, hard fate!"

Caleb drew his hand across his eyes before he answered her.

"But think how cheerful and how happy you have been, Bertha! How good, and how much loved, by many people."

"That strikes me to the heart, dear father! Always so mindful of me! Always so kind to me!"

Caleb was very much perplexed to understand her.

"To be—to be blind, Bertha, my poor dear," he faltered, "is a great affliction; but——"

"I have never felt it!" cried the Blind Girl. "I have never felt it in its fulness. Never! I have sometimes wished that I could see you, or could see him—only once, dear father, only for one little minute—that I might know what it is I treasure up," she laid her hands upon her breast, "and hold here! That I might be sure I have it right! And sometimes (but then I was a child) I have wept in my prayers at night, to think that, when your images ascended from my heart to Heaven, they might not be the true resemblance of yourselves. But I have never had these feelings long. They have passed away, and left me tranquil and contented."

"And they will again," said Caleb.

"But, father! Oh, my good gentle father, bear with me, if I am wicked!" said the Blind Girl. "This is not the sorrow that so weighs me down!"

Her father could not choose but let his moist eyes overflow; she was so earnest and pathetic. But he did not understand her yet.

"Bring her to me," said Bertha. "I cannot hold it closed and shut within myself. Bring her to me, father!"

She knew he hesitated, and said, "May. Bring May!"

May heard the mention of her name, and, coming quietly towards her, touched her on the arm. The Blind Girl turned immediately, and held her by both hands.

"Look into my face, Dear heart, Sweet heart!" said Bertha. "Read it with your beautiful eyes, and tell me if the truth is written on it."

"Dear Bertha, yes!"

The Blind Girl, still upturning the blank sightless face, down which the tears were coursing fast, addressed her in these words:

"There is not, in my soul, a wish or thought that is not for your good, bright May! There is not, in my soul, a grateful recollection stronger than the deep remembrance which is stored there of the many many times when, in the full pride of sight and beauty, you have had consideration for Blind Bertha, even when we two were children, or when Bertha was as much a child as ever blindness can be! Every blessing on your head! Light upon your happy course! Not the less, my dear May,"—and she drew towards her in a closer grasp,—"not the less, my bird, because, to-day, the knowledge that you are to be His wife has wrung my heart almost to breaking! Father, May, Mary! Oh, forgive me that it is so, for the sake of all he has done to relieve the weariness of my dark life: and for the sake of the belief you have in me, when I call Heaven to witness that I could not wish him married to a wife more worthy of his goodness!"

While speaking, she had released May Fielding's hands, and clasped her garments in an attitude of mingled supplication and love. Sinking lower and lower down, as she proceeded in her strange confession, she dropped at last at the feet of her friend, and hid her blind face in the folds of her dress.

"Great Power!" exclaimed her father, smitten at one blow with the truth, "have I deceived her from her cradle, but to break her heart at last?"

It was well for all of them that Dot, that beaming, useful, busy little Dot—for such she was, whatever faults she had, and however you may learn to hate her, in good time—it was well for all of them, I say, that she was there, or where this would have ended, it were hard to tell. But Dot, recovering her self-possession, interposed, before May could reply, or Caleb say another word.

"Come, come, dear Bertha! come away with me! Give her your arm, May! So. How composed she is, you see, already; and how good it is of her to mind us," said the cheery little woman, kissing her upon the forehead. "Come away, dear Bertha! Come! and here's her good father will come with her, won't you, Caleb? To—be—sure!"

Well, well! she was a noble little Dot in such things, and it must have been an obdurate nature that could have withstood her influence. When she had got poor Caleb and his Bertha away, that they might comfort and console each other, as she knew they only could, she presently came bouncing back,—the saying is, as fresh as any daisy; *I* say fresher—to mount guard over that bridling little piece of consequence in the cap and gloves, and prevent the dear old creature from making discoveries.

"So bring me the precious Baby, Tilly," said she, drawing a chair to the fire; "and while I have it in my lap, here's Mrs. Fielding, Tilly, will tell me all about the management of Babies, and put me right in twenty points where I'm as wrong as can be. Won't you, Mrs. Fielding?"

Not even the Welsh Giant, who, according to the popular expression, was so "slow" as to perform a fatal surgical operation upon himself, in emulation of a juggling trick achieved by his arch enemy at breakfast-time; not even he fell half so readily into the snare prepared for him as the old lady into this artful pitfall. The fact of Tackleton having walked out; and furthermore, of two or three people having been talking together at a distance, for two minutes, leaving her to her own resources; was quite enough to have put her on her dignity, and the bewailment of that mysterious convulsion in the Indigo Trade, for four-and-twenty hours. But this becoming deference to her experience, on the part of the young mother, was so irresistible, that after a short affectation of humility, she began to enlighten her with the best grace in the world; and, sitting bolt upright before the wicked Dot, she did, in half an hour, deliver more infallible domestic recipes and precepts than would (if acted on) have utterly destroyed and done up that Young Peerybingle, though he had been an Infant Samson.

To change the theme, Dot did a little needlework—she carried the contents of a whole workbox in her pocket; however she contrived it, *I* don't know—then did a little nursing; then a little more needlework; then had a little whispering chat with May, while the old lady dozed; and so in little bits of bustle, which was quite her manner always, found it a very short afternoon. Then, as it grew dark, and as it was a solemn part of this Institution of the Picnic that she should perform all Bertha's household tasks, she trimmed the fire, and swept the hearth, and set the tea-board out, and drew the curtain, and lighted a candle. Then she played an air or two on a rude kind of harp, which Caleb had contrived for Bertha, and played them very well; for Nature had made her delicate little ear as choice a one for music as it would have been for jewels, if she had had any to wear. By this time it was the established hour for having tea; and Tackleton came back again to share the meal, and spend the evening.

Caleb and Bertha had returned some time before, and Caleb had sat down to his afternoon's work. But he couldn't settle to it, poor fellow, being anxious and remorseful for his daughter. It was touching to see him sitting idle on his working stool, regarding her so wistfully, and always saying in his face, "Have I deceived her from her cradle, but to break her heart?"

When it was night, and tea was done, and Dot had nothing more to do in washing up the cups and saucers; in a word—for I must come to it, and there is no use in putting it off—when the time drew nigh for expecting the Carrier's return in every sound of distant wheels, her manner changed again, her colour came and went, and she was very restless. Not as good wives are when listening for their husbands. No, no, no. It was another sort of restlessness from that.

Wheels heard. A horse's feet. The barking of a dog. The gradual approach of all the sounds. The scratching paw of Boxer at the door!

"Whose step is that?" cried Bertha, starting up.

"Whose step?" returned the Carrier, standing in the portal, with his brown face ruddy as a winter berry from the keen night air. "Why, mine."

"The other step," said Bertha. "The man's tread behind you!"

"She is not to be deceived," observed the Carrier, laughing. "Come along, sir. You'll be welcome, never fear!"

He spoke in a loud tone; and, as he spoke, the deaf old gentleman entered.

"He's not so much a stranger that you haven't seen him once, Caleb," said the Carrier. "You'll give him house room till we go?"

"Oh, surely, John, and take it as an honour!"

"He's the best company on earth to talk secrets in," said John. "I have reasonable good lungs, but he tries 'em I can tell you. Sit down, sir. All friends here, and glad to see you!"

When he had imparted this assurance, in a voice that amply corroborated what he had said about his lungs, he added in his natural tone, "A chair in the chimney-corner, and leave to sit quite silent and look pleasantly about him, is all he cares for. He's easily pleased."

Bertha had been listening intently. She called Caleb to her side, when he had set the chair, and asked him, in a low voice, to describe their visitor. When he had done so (truly now, with scrupulous fidelity), she moved, for the first time since he had come in, and sighed, and seemed to have no further interest concerning him.

The Carrier was in high spirits, good fellow that he was, and fonder of his little wife than ever.

"A clumsy Dot she was, this afternoon!" he said, encircling her with his rough arm, as she stood, removed from the rest; "and yet I like her somehow. See yonder, Dot!"

He pointed to the old man. She looked down. I think she trembled.

"He's—ha, ha, ha!—he's full of admiration for you!" said the Carrier. "Talked of nothing else the whole way here. Why, he's a brave old boy! I like him for it!"

"I wish he had a better subject, John," she said with an uneasy glance about the room. At Tackleton especially.

"A better subject!" cried the jovial John. "There's no such thing. Come! off with the great-coat, off with the thick shawl, off with the heavy wrappers! and a cosy half-hour by the fire. My humble service, mistress. A game at cribbage, you and I? That's hearty. The cards and board, Dot. And a glass of beer here, if there's any left, small wife!"

His challenge was addressed to the old lady, who, accepting it with gracious readiness, they were soon engaged upon the game. At first, the Carrier looked about him sometimes with a smile, or now and then called Dot to peep over his shoulder at his hand, and advise him on some knotty point. But his adversary being a rigid disciplinarian, and subject to an occasional weakness in respect of pegging more than she was entitled to, required such vigilance on his part, as left him neither eyes nor ears to spare. Thus, his whole attention gradually became absorbed upon the cards; and he thought of nothing else, until a hand upon his shoulder restored him to a consciousness of Tackleton.

"I am sorry to disturb you—but a word directly."

"I'm going to deal," returned the Carrier. "It's a crisis."

"It is," said Tackleton. "Come here, man!"

There was that in his pale face which made the other rise immediately, and ask him, in a hurry, what the matter was.

"Hush! John Peerybingle," said Tackleton, "I am sorry for this. I am indeed. I have been afraid of it. I have suspected it from the first."

"What is it?" asked the Carrier with a frightened aspect.

"Hush! I'll show you, if you'll come with me."

The Carrier accompanied him without another word. They went across a yard, where the stars were shining, and by a little side-door, into Tackleton's own counting-house, where there was a glass window, commanding the ware-room, which was closed for the night. There was no light in the counting-house itself, but there were lamps in the long narrow ware-room; and consequently the window was bright.

"A moment!" said Tackleton. "Can you bear to look through that window, do you think?"

"Why not?" returned the Carrier.

"A moment more," said Tackleton. "Don't commit any violence. It's of no use. It's dangerous too. You're a strong-made man; and you might do murder before you know it."

The Carrier looked him in the face, and recoiled a step as if he had been struck. In one stride he was at the window, and he saw——

Oh, Shadow on the Hearth! Oh, truthful Cricket! Oh, perfidious wife!

He saw her with the old man—old no longer, but erect and gallant—bearing in his hand the false white hair that had won his way into their desolate and miserable home. He saw her listening to him, as he bent his head to whisper in her ear; and suffering him to clasp her round the waist, as they moved slowly down the dim wooden gallery towards the door by which they had entered it. He saw them stop, and saw her turn—to have the face, the face he loved so, so presented to his view!—and saw her, with her own hands, adjust the lie upon his head, laughing, as she did it, at his unsuspicious nature!

He clenched his strong right hand at first, as if it would have beaten down a lion. But, opening it immediately again, he spread it out before the eyes of Tackleton (for he was tender of her even then), and so, as they passed out, fell down upon a desk, and was as weak as any infant.

He was wrapped up to the chin, and busy with his horse and parcels, when she came into the room, prepared for going home.

"Now, John dear! Good night, May! Good night, Bertha!"

Could she kiss them? Could she be blithe and cheerful in her parting? Could she venture to reveal her face to them without a blush? Yes. Tackleton observed her closely, and she did all this.

Tilly was hushing the baby, and she crossed and recrossed Tackleton a dozen times, repeating drowsily:

"Did the knowledge that it was to be its wives, then, wring its hearts almost to breaking; and did its fathers deceive it from its cradles but to break its hearts at last!"

"Now, Tilly, give me the Baby! Good night, Mr. Tackleton. Where's John, for goodness' sake?"

"He's going to walk beside the horse's head," said Tackleton; who helped her to her seat.

"My dear John! Walk? To-night?"

The muffled figure of her husband made a hasty sign in the affirmative; and, the false stranger and the little nurse being in their places, the old horse moved off. Boxer, the unconscious Boxer, running on before, running back, running round and round the cart, and barking as triumphantly and merrily as ever.

When Tackleton had gone off likewise, escorting May and her mother home, poor Caleb sat down by the fire beside his daughter; anxious and remorseful at the core; and still saying, in his wistful contemplation of her, "Have I deceived her from her cradle, but to break her heart at last?"

The toys that had been set in motion for the Baby had all stopped and run down long ago. In the faint light and silence, the imperturbably calm dolls, the agitated rocking-horses with distended eyes and nostrils, the old gentlemen at the street-doors, standing half doubled up upon their failing knees and ankles, the wry-faced nut-crackers, the very Beasts upon their way into the Ark, in twos, like a Boarding-School out walking, might have been imagined to be stricken motionless with fantastic wonder at Dot being false, or Tackleton beloved, under any combination of circumstances.

CHIRP THE THIRD

The Dutch clock in the corner struck Ten when the Carrier sat down by his fireside. So troubled and grief-worn that he seemed to scare the Cuckoo, who, having cut his ten melodious announcements as short as possible, plunged back into the Moorish Palace again, and clapped his little door behind him, as if the unwonted spectacle were too much for his feelings.

If the little Hay-maker had been armed with the sharpest of scythes, and had cut at every stroke into the Carrier's heart, he never could have gashed and wounded it as Dot had done.

It was a heart so full of love for her; so bound up and held together by innumerable threads of winning remembrance, spun from the daily working of her many qualities of endearment; it was a heart in which she had enshrined herself so gently and so closely; a heart so single and so earnest in its Truth, so strong in right, so weak in wrong,—that it could cherish neither passion nor revenge at first, and had only room to hold the broken image of its Idol.

But, slowly, slowly, as the Carrier sat brooding on his hearth, now cold and dark, other and fiercer thoughts began to rise within him, as an angry wind comes rising in the night. The Stranger was beneath his outraged roof. Three steps would take him to his chamber door. One blow would beat it in. "You might do murder before you know it," Tackleton had said. How could it be murder, if he gave the villain time to grapple with him hand to hand? He was the younger man.

It was an ill-timed thought, bad for the dark mood of his mind. It was an angry thought, goading him to some avenging act, that should change the cheerful house into a haunted place which lonely travellers would dread to pass by night; and where the timid would see shadows struggling in the ruined windows when the moon was dim, and hear wild noises in the stormy weather.

He was the younger man! Yes, yes; some lover who had won the heart that *he* had never touched. Some lover of her early choice, of whom she had thought and dreamed, for whom she had pined and pined, when he had fancied her so happy by his side. Oh, agony to think of it!

She had been above-stairs with the Baby; getting it to bed. As he sat brooding on the hearth, she came close beside him, without his knowledge—in the turning of the rack of his great misery, he lost all other sounds—and put her little stool at his feet. He only knew it when he felt her hand upon his own, and saw her looking up into his face.

With wonder? No. It was his first impression, and he was fain to look at her again, to set it right. No, not with wonder. With an eager and inquiring look; but not with wonder. At first it was alarmed and serious; then, it changed into a strange, wild, dreadful smile of recognition of his thoughts; then, there was nothing but her clasped hands on her brow, and her bent head, and falling hair.

Though the power of Omnipotence had been his to wield at that moment, he had too much of its diviner property of Mercy in his breast, to have turned one feather's weight of it against her. But he could not bear to see her crouching down upon the little seat where he had often looked on her, with love and pride, so innocent and gay; and, when she rose and left him, sobbing as she went, he felt it a relief to have the vacant place beside him rather than her so long-cherished presence. This in itself was anguish keener than all, reminding him how desolate he was become, and how the great bond of his life was rent asunder.

The more he felt this, and the more he knew he could have better borne to see her lying prematurely dead before him with her little child upon her breast, the higher and the stronger rose his wrath against his enemy. He looked about him for a weapon.

There was a gun hanging on the wall. He took it down, and moved a pace or two towards the door of the perfidious Stranger's room. He knew the gun was loaded. Some shadowy idea that it was just to shoot this man like a wild beast seized him, and dilated in his mind until it grew into a monstrous demon in complete possession of him, casting out all milder thoughts, and setting up its undivided empire.

That phrase is wrong. Not casting out his milder thoughts, but artfully transforming them. Changing them into scourges to drive him on. Turning water into blood, love into hate, gentleness into blind ferocity. Her image, sorrowing, humbled, but still pleading to his tenderness and mercy with resistless power, never left his mind; but, staying there, it urged him to the door; raised the weapon to his shoulder; fitted and nerved his fingers to the trigger; and cried "Kill him! In his bed!"

He reversed the gun to beat the stock upon the door; he already held it lifted in the air; some indistinct design was in his thoughts of calling out to him to fly, for God's sake, by the window——

When suddenly, the struggling fire illuminated the whole chimney with a glow of light; and the Cricket on the Hearth began to Chirp!

No sound he could have heard, no human voice, not even hers, could so have moved and softened him. The artless words in which she had told him of her love for this same Cricket were once more freshly spoken; her trembling, earnest manner at the moment was again before him; her pleasant voice—oh, what a voice it was for making household music at the fireside of an honest man!—thrilled through and through his better nature, and awoke it into life and action.

He recoiled from the door, like a man walking in his sleep, awakened from a frightful dream; and put the gun aside. Clasping his hands before his face, he then sat down again beside the fire, and found relief in tears.

The Cricket on the Hearth came out into the room, and stood in Fairy shape before him.

"'I love it,'" said the Fairy Voice, repeating what he well remembered, "'for the many times I have heard it, and the many thoughts its harmless music has given me.'"

"She said so!" cried the Carrier. "True!"

"'This has been a happy home, John! and I love the Cricket for its sake!'"

"It has been, Heaven knows," returned the Carrier. "She made it happy, always,—until now."

"So gracefully sweet-tempered; so domestic, joyful, busy, and light-hearted!" said the Voice.

"Otherwise I never could have loved her as I did," returned the Carrier.

The Voice, correcting him, said "do."

The Carrier repeated "as I did." But not firmly. His faltering tongue resisted his control, and would speak in its own way for itself and him.

The Figure, in an attitude of invocation, raised its hand and said:

"Upon your own hearth——"

"The hearth she has blighted," interposed the Carrier.

"The hearth she has—how often!—blessed and brightened," said the Cricket; "the hearth which, but for her, were only a few stones and bricks and rusty bars, but which has been, through her, the Altar of your Home; on which you have nightly sacrificed some petty passion, selfishness, or care, and offered up the homage of a tranquil mind, a trusting nature, and an overflowing heart; so that the smoke from this poor chimney has gone upward with a better fragrance than the richest incense that is burnt before the richest shrines in all the gaudy temples of this world!—Upon your own hearth; in its quiet sanctuary; surrounded by its gentle influences and associations; hear her! Hear me! Hear everything that speaks the language of your hearth and home!"

"And pleads for her?" inquired the Carrier.

"All things that speak the language of your hearth and home *must* plead for her!" returned the Cricket. "For they speak the truth."

And while the Carrier, with his head upon his hands, continued to sit meditating in his chair, the Presence stood beside him, suggesting his reflections by its power, and presenting them before him, as in a glass or picture. It was not a solitary Presence. From the hearth-stone, from the chimney, from the clock, the pipe, the kettle, and the cradle; from the floor, the walls, the ceiling, and the stairs; from the cart without, and the cupboard within, and the household implements; from everything and every place with which she had ever been familiar, and with which she had ever entwined one recollection of herself in her unhappy husband's mind,—Fairies came trooping forth. Not to stand beside him as the Cricket did, but to busy and bestir themselves. To do all honour to her image. To pull him by the skirts, and point to it when it appeared. To cluster round it, and embrace it, and strew flowers for it to tread on. To try to crown its fair head with their tiny hands. To show that they were fond of it, and loved it; and that there was not one ugly, wicked, or accusatory creature to claim knowledge of it—none but their playful and approving selves.

His thoughts were constant to her image. It was always there.

She sat plying her needle, before the fire, and singing to herself. Such a blithe, thriving, steady little Dot! The Fairy figures turned upon him all at once, by one consent, with one prodigious concentrated stare, and seemed to say, "Is this the light wife you are mourning for?"

There were sounds of gaiety outside, musical instruments, and noisy tongues, and laughter. A crowd of young merry-makers came pouring in, among whom were May Fielding and a score of pretty girls. Dot was the fairest of them all; as young as any of them too. They came to summon her to join their party. It was a dance. If ever little foot were made for dancing, hers was, surely. But she laughed, and shook her head, and pointed to her cookery on the fire, and her table ready spread; with an exulting defiance that rendered her more charming than she was before. And so she merrily dismissed them, nodding to her would-be partners, one by one, as they passed out, with a comical indifference, enough to make them go and drown themselves immediately if they were her admirers—and they must have been so, more or less; they couldn't help it. And yet indifference was not her character. Oh no! For presently there came a certain Carrier to the door; and, bless her, what a welcome she bestowed upon him!

Again the staring figures turned upon him all at once, and seemed to say, "Is this the wife who has forsaken you?"

A shadow fell upon the mirror or the picture: call it what you will. A great shadow of the Stranger, as he first stood underneath their roof; covering its surface, and blotting out all other objects. But, the nimble Fairies worked like bees to clear it off again. And Dot again was there. Still bright and beautiful.

Rocking her little Baby in its cradle, singing to it softly, and resting her head upon a shoulder which had its counterpart in the musing figure by which the Fairy Cricket stood.

The night—I mean the real night: not going by Fairy clocks—was wearing now; and, in this stage of the Carrier's thoughts, the moon burst out, and shone brightly in the sky. Perhaps some calm and quiet light had risen also in his mind; and he could think more soberly of what had happened.

Although the shadow of the Stranger fell at intervals upon the glass—always distinct, and big, and thoroughly defined—it never fell so darkly as at first. Whenever it appeared, the Fairies uttered a general cry of consternation, and plied their little arms and legs with inconceivable activity to rub it out. And whenever they got at Dot again, and showed her to him once more, bright and beautiful, they cheered in the most inspiring manner.

They never showed her otherwise than beautiful and bright, for they were Household Spirits to whom falsehood is an annihilation; and being so, what Dot was there for them, but the one active, beaming, pleasant little creature who had been the light and sun of the Carrier's Home?

The Fairies were prodigiously excited when they showed her, with the Baby, gossipping among a knot of sage old matrons, and affecting to be wondrous old and matronly herself, and leaning in a staid demure old way upon her husband's arm, attempting—she! such a bud of a little woman—to convey the idea of having abjured the vanities of the world in general, and of being the sort of person to whom it was no novelty at all to be a mother; yet, in the same breath, they showed her laughing at the Carrier for being awkward, and pulling up his shirt collar to make him smart, and mincing merrily about that very room to teach him how to dance!

They turned, and stared immensely at him when they showed her with the Blind Girl; for, though she carried cheerfulness and animation with her wheresoever she went, she bore those influences into Caleb Plummer's home, heaped up and running over. The Blind Girl's love for her, and trust in her, and gratitude to her; her own good busy way of setting Bertha's thanks aside; her dexterous little arts for filling up each moment of the visit in doing something useful to the house, and really working hard while feigning to make holiday; her bountiful provision of those standing delicacies, the Veal and Ham Pie and the bottles of Beer; her radiant little face arriving at the door, and taking leave; the wonderful expression in her whole self, from her neat foot to the crown of her head, of being a part of the establishment—a something necessary to it, which it couldn't be without,—all this the Fairies revelled in, and loved her for. And once again they looked upon him all at once, appealingly, and seemed to say, while some among them nestled in her dress and fondled her, "Is this the wife who has betrayed your confidence?"

More than once, or twice, or thrice, in the long thoughtful night, they showed her to him sitting on her favourite seat, with her bent head, her hands clasped on her brow, her falling hair. As he had seen her last. And when they found her thus, they neither turned nor looked upon him, but gathered close round her, and comforted and kissed her, and pressed on one another, to show sympathy and kindness to her, and forgot him altogether.

Thus the night passed. The moon went down; the stars grew pale; the cold day broke; the sun rose. The Carrier still sat, musing, in the chimney-corner. He had sat there, with his head upon his hands, all night. All night the faithful Cricket had been Chirp, Chirp, Chirping on the Hearth. All night he had listened to its voice. All night the Household Fairies had been busy with him. All night she had been amiable and blameless in the glass, except when that one shadow fell upon it.

He rose up when it was broad day, and washed and dressed himself. He couldn't go about his customary cheerful avocations—he wanted spirit for them—but it mattered the less that it was Tackleton's wedding-day, and he had arranged to make his rounds by proxy. He had thought to have gone merrily to church with Dot. But such plans were at an end. It was their own wedding-day too. Ah! how little he had looked for such a close to such a year!

The Carrier expected that Tackleton would pay him an early visit; and he was right. He had not walked to and fro before his own door many minutes, when he saw the toy merchant coming in his chaise along the road. As the chaise drew nearer, he perceived that Tackleton was dressed out sprucely for his marriage, and that he had decorated his horse's head with flowers and favours.

The horse looked much more like a bridegroom than Tackleton, whose half-closed eye was more disagreeably expressive than ever. But the Carrier took little heed of this. His thoughts had other occupation.

"John Peerybingle!" said Tackleton with an air of condolence. "My good fellow, how do you find yourself this morning?"

"I have had but a poor night, Master Tackleton," returned the Carrier, shaking his head: "for I have been a good deal disturbed in my mind. But it's over now! Can you spare me half an hour or so, for some private talk?"

"I came on purpose," returned Tackleton, alighting. "Never mind the horse. He'll stand quiet enough, with the reins over this post, if you'll give him a mouthful of hay."

The Carrier having brought it from his stable and set it before him, they turned into the house.

"You are not married before noon," he said, "I think?"

"No," answered Tackleton. "Plenty of time. Plenty of time."

When they entered the kitchen, Tilly Slowboy was rapping at the Stranger's door; which was only removed from it by a few steps. One of her very red eyes (for Tilly had been crying all night long, because her mistress cried) was at the keyhole; and she was knocking very loud, and seemed frightened.

"If you please I can't make nobody hear," said Tilly, looking round. "I hope nobody an't gone and been and died if you please!"

This philanthropic wish Miss Slowboy emphasized with various new raps and kicks at the door, which led to no result whatever.

"Shall I go?" said Tackleton. "It's curious."

The Carrier, who had turned his face from the door, signed him to go if he would.

So Tackleton went to Tilly Slowboy's relief; and he too kicked and knocked; and he too failed to get the least reply. But he thought of trying the handle of the door; and, as it opened easily, he peeped in, looked in, went in, and soon came running out again.

"John Peerybingle," said Tackleton in his ear, "I hope there has been nothing—nothing rash in the night?"

The Carrier turned upon him quickly.

"Because he's gone!" said Tackleton; "and the window's open. I don't see any marks—to be sure, it's almost on a level with the garden: but I was afraid there might have been some—some scuffle. Eh?"

He nearly shut up the expressive eye altogether; he looked at him so hard. And he gave his eye, and his face, and his whole person, a sharp twist. As if he would have screwed the truth out of him.

"Make yourself easy," said the Carrier. "He went into that room last night, without harm in word or deed from me, and no one has entered it since. He is away of his own free-will. I'd go out gladly at that door, and beg my bread from house to house, for life, if I could so change the past that he had never come. But he has come and gone. And I have done with him!"

"Oh!—Well, I think he has got off pretty easy," said Tackleton, taking a chair.

The sneer was lost upon the Carrier, who sat down too, and shaded his face with his hand, for some little time, before proceeding.

"You showed me last night," he said at length, "my wife—my wife that I love—secretly——"

"And tenderly," insinuated Tackleton.

"—Conniving at that man's disguise, and giving him opportunities of meeting her alone. I think there's no sight I wouldn't have rather seen than that. I think there's no man in the world I wouldn't have rather had to show it me."

"I confess to having had my suspicions always," said Tackleton. "And that has made me objectionable here, I know."

"But, as you did show it me," pursued the Carrier, not minding him; "and as you saw her, my wife, my wife that I love"—his voice, and eye, and hand grew steadier and firmer as he repeated these words: evidently in pursuance of a steadfast purpose—"as you saw her at this disadvantage, it is right and just that you should also see with my eyes, and look into my breast, and know what my mind is upon the subject. For it's settled," said the Carrier, regarding him attentively. "And nothing can shake it now."

Tackleton muttered a few general words of assent about its being necessary to vindicate something or other; but he was overawed by the manner of his companion. Plain and unpolished as it was, it had a something dignified and noble in it, which nothing but the soul of generous honour dwelling in the man could have imparted.

"I am a plain, rough man," pursued the Carrier "with very little to recommend me. I am not a clever man, as you very well know. I am not a young man. I loved my little Dot, because I had seen her grow up, from a child, in her father's house; because I knew how precious she was; because she had been my life for years and years. There's many men I can't compare with, who never could have loved my little Dot like me, I think!"

He paused, and softly beat the ground a short time with his foot, before resuming:

"I often thought that though I wasn't good enough for her, I should make her a kind husband, and perhaps know her value better than another; and in this way I reconciled it to myself, and came to think it might be possible that we should be married. And, in the end, it came about, and we *were* married!"

"Hah!" said Tackleton with a significant shake of his head.

"I had studied myself; I had had experience of myself; I knew how much I loved her, and how happy I should be," pursued the Carrier. "But I had not—I feel it now—sufficiently considered her."

"To be sure," said Tackleton. "Giddiness, frivolity, fickleness, love of admiration! Not considered! All left out of sight! Hah!"

"You had best not interrupt me," said the Carrier with some sternness, "till you understand me; and you're wide of doing so. If, yesterday, I'd have struck that man down at a blow, who dared to breathe a word against her, to-day I'd set my foot upon his face, if he was my brother!"

The toy merchant gazed at him in astonishment. He went on in a softer tone:

"Did I consider," said the Carrier, "that I took her—at her age, and with her beauty—from her young companions, and the many scenes of which she was the ornament; in which she was the brightest little star that ever shone, to shut her up from day to day in my dull house, and keep my tedious company? Did I consider how little suited I was to her sprightly humour, and how wearisome a plodding man like me must be to one of her quick spirit? Did I consider that it was no merit in me, or claim in me, that I loved her, when everybody must who knew her? Never. I took advantage of her hopeful nature and her cheerful disposition; and I married her. I wish I never had! For her sake; not for mine!"

The toy merchant gazed at him without winking. Even the half-shut eye was open now.

"Heaven bless her!" said the Carrier, "for the cheerful constancy with which she has tried to keep the knowledge of this from me! And Heaven help me, that, in my slow mind, I have not found it out before! Poor child! Poor Dot! *I* not to find it out, who have seen her eyes fill with tears when such a marriage as our own was spoken of! I, who have seen the secret trembling on her lips a hundred times, and never suspected it, till last night! Poor girl! That I could ever hope she would be fond of me! That I could ever believe she was!"

"She made a show of it," said Tackleton. "She made such a show of it, that, to tell you the truth, it was the origin of my misgivings."

And here he asserted the superiority of May Fielding, who certainly made no sort of show of being fond of *him*.

"She has tried," said the poor Carrier with greater emotion than he had exhibited yet; "I only now begin to know how hard she has tried, to be my dutiful and zealous wife. How good she has been; how much she has done; how brave and strong a heart she has; let the happiness I have known under this roof bear witness! It will be some help and comfort to me when I am here alone."

"Here alone?" said Tackleton. "Oh! Then you do mean to take some notice of this?"

"I mean," returned the Carrier, "to do her the greatest kindness, and make her the best reparation, in my power. I can release her from the daily pain of an unequal marriage, and the struggle to conceal it. She shall be as free as I can render her."

"Make *her* reparation!" exclaimed Tackleton, twisting and turning his great ears with his hands. "There must be something wrong here. You didn't say that, of course."

The Carrier set his grip upon the collar of the toy merchant, and shook him like a reed.

"Listen to me!" he said. "And take care that you hear me right. Listen to me. Do I speak plainly?"

"Very plainly indeed," answered Tackleton.

"As if I meant it?"

"Very much as if you meant it."

"I sat upon that hearth, last night, all night," exclaimed the Carrier. "On the spot where she has often sat beside me, with her sweet face looking into mine. I called up her whole life day by day. I had her dear self, in its every passage, in review before me. And, upon my soul, she is innocent, if there is One to judge the innocent and guilty!"

Staunch Cricket on the Hearth! Loyal Household Fairies!

"Passion and distrust have left me!" said the Carrier; "and nothing but my grief remains. In an unhappy moment some old lover, better suited to her tastes and years than I, forsaken, perhaps, for me, against her will, returned. In an unhappy moment, taken by surprise, and wanting time to think of what she did, she made herself a party to his treachery by concealing it. Last night she saw him, in the interview we witnessed. It was wrong. But, otherwise than this, she is innocent, if there is truth on earth!"

"If that is your opinion——" Tackleton began.

"So, let her go!" pursued the Carrier. "Go, with my blessing for the many happy hours she has given me, and my forgiveness for any pang she has caused me. Let her go, and have the peace of mind I wish her! She'll never hate me. She'll learn to like me better when I'm not a drag upon her, and she wears the chain I have riveted more lightly. This is the day on which I took her, with so little thought for her enjoyment, from her home. To-day she shall return to it, and I will trouble her no more. Her father and mother will be here to-day—we had made a little plan for keeping it together—and they shall take her home. I can trust her there, or anywhere. She leaves me without blame, and she will live so I am sure. If I should die—I may perhaps while she is still young; I have lost some courage in a few hours—she'll find that I remembered her, and loved her to the last! This is the end of what you showed me. Now, it's over!"

"Oh no, John, not over! Do not say it's over yet! Not quite yet. I have heard your noble words. I could not steal away, pretending to be ignorant of what has affected me with such deep gratitude. Do not say it's over till the clock has struck again!"

She had entered shortly after Tackleton, and had remained there. She never looked at Tackleton, but fixed her eyes upon her husband. But she kept away from him, setting as wide a space as possible between them; and, though she spoke with most impassioned earnestness, she went no nearer to him even then. How different in this from her old self!

"No hand can make the clock which will strike again for me the hours that are gone," replied the Carrier with a faint smile. "But let it be so, if you will, my dear. It will strike soon. It's of little matter what we say. I'd try to please you in a harder case than that."

"Well!" muttered Tackleton. "I must be off, for, when the clock strikes again, it'll be necessary for me to be upon my way to church. Good morning, John Peerybingle. I'm sorry to be deprived of the pleasure of your company. Sorry for the loss, and the occasion of it too!"

"I have spoken plainly?" said the Carrier, accompanying him to the door.

"Oh, quite!"

"And you'll remember what I have said?"

"Why, if you compel me to make the observation," said Tackleton, previously taking the precaution of getting into his chaise, "I must say that it was so very unexpected, that I'm far from being likely to forget it."

"The better for us both," returned the Carrier. "Good-bye. I give you joy!"

"I wish I could give it to *you*," said Tackleton. "As I can't, thankee. Between ourselves (as I told you before, eh?) I don't much think I shall have the less joy in my married life because May hasn't been too officious about me, and too demonstrative. Good-bye! Take care of yourself."

The Carrier stood looking after him until he was smaller in the distance than his horse's flowers and favours near at hand; and then, with a deep sigh, went strolling like a restless, broken man, among some neighbouring elms; unwilling to return until the clock was on the eve of striking.

His little wife, being left alone, sobbed piteously; but often dried her eyes and checked herself, to say how good he was, how excellent he was! and once or twice she laughed; so heartily, triumphantly, and incoherently (still crying all the time), that Tilly was quite horrified.

"Ow, if you please, don't!" said Tilly. "It's enough to dead and bury the Baby, so it is if you please."

"Will you bring him sometimes to see his father, Tilly," inquired her mistress, drying her eyes,—"when I can't live here, and have gone to my old home?"

"Ow, if you please, don't!" cried Tilly, throwing back her head, and bursting out into a howl—she looked at the moment uncommonly like Boxer. "Ow, if you please, don't! Ow, what has everybody gone and been and done with everybody, making everybody else so wretched? Ow-w-w-w!"

The soft-hearted Slowboy tailed off at this juncture into such a deplorable howl, the more tremendous from its long suppression, that she must infallibly have awakened the Baby, and frightened him into something serious (probably convulsions), if her eyes had not encountered Caleb Plummer leading in his daughter. This spectacle restoring her to a sense of the proprieties, she stood for some few moments silent, with her mouth wide open; and then, posting off to the bed on which the Baby lay asleep, danced in a weird, St. Vitus manner on the floor, and at the same time rummaged with her face and head among the bedclothes, apparently deriving much relief from those extraordinary operations.

"Mary!" said Bertha. "Not at the marriage!"

"I told her you would not be there, mum," whispered Caleb. "I heard as much last night. But bless you," said the little man, taking her tenderly by both hands, "*I* don't care for what they say. *I* don't believe them. There an't much of me, but that little should be torn to pieces sooner than I'd trust a word against you!"

He put his arms about her neck and hugged her, as a child might have hugged one of his own dolls.

"Bertha couldn't stay at home this morning," said Caleb. "She was afraid, I know, to hear the bells ring, and couldn't trust herself to be so near them on their wedding-day. So we started in good time, and came here. I have been thinking of what I have done," said Caleb after a moment's pause; "I have been blaming myself till I hardly knew what to do, or where to turn, for the distress of mind I have caused her; and I've come to the conclusion that I'd better, if you'll stay with me, mum, the while, tell her the truth. You'll stay with me the while?" he inquired, trembling from head to foot. "I don't know what effect it may have upon her; I don't know what she'll think of me; I don't know that she'll ever care for her poor father afterwards. But it's best for her that she should be undeceived, and I must bear the consequences as I deserve!"

"Mary," said Bertha, "where is your hand? Ah! Here it is; here it is!" pressing it to her lips with a smile, and drawing it through her arm. "I heard them speaking softly among themselves last night of some blame against you. They were wrong."

The Carrier's wife was silent. Caleb answered for her.

"They were wrong," he said.

"I knew it!" cried Bertha, proudly. "I told them so. I scorned to hear a word! Blame *her* with justice!" she pressed the hand between her own, and the soft cheek against her face. "No, I am not so blind as that."

Her father went on one side of her, while Dot remained upon the other, holding her hand.

"I know you all," said Bertha, "better than you think. But none so well as her. Not even you, father. There is nothing half so real and so true about me as she is. If I could be restored to sight this instant, and not a word were spoken, I could choose her from a crowd! My sister!"

"Bertha, my dear!" said Caleb. "I have something on my mind I want to tell you while we three are alone. Hear me kindly! I have a confession to make to you, my darling!"

"A confession, father?"

"I have wandered from the truth, and lost myself, my child," said Caleb with a pitiable expression in his bewildered face. "I have wandered from the truth, intending to be kind to you; and have been cruel."

She turned her wonder-stricken face towards him, and repeated "Cruel!"

"He accuses himself too strongly, Bertha," said Dot. "You'll say so presently. You'll be the first to tell him so."

"He cruel to me!" cried Bertha with a smile of incredulity.

"Not meaning it, my child," said Caleb. "But I have been: though I never suspected it till yesterday. My dear blind daughter, hear me and forgive me. The world you live in, heart of mine, doesn't exist as I have represented it. The eyes you have trusted in have been false to you."

She turned her wonder-stricken face towards him still; but drew back, and clung closer to her friend.

"Your road in life was rough, my poor one," said Caleb, "and I meant to smooth it for you. I have altered objects, changed the characters of people, invented many things that never have been, to make you happier. I have had concealments from you, put deceptions on you, God forgive me! and surrounded you with fancies."

"But living people are not fancies?" she said hurriedly, and turning very pale, and still retiring from him. "You can't change them."

"I have done so, Bertha," pleaded Caleb. "There is one person that you know, my dove——"

"Oh, father! why do you say, I know?" she answered in a term of keen reproach. "What and whom do *I* know? I who have no leader! I so miserably blind!"

In the anguish of her heart, she stretched out her hands, as if she were groping her way; then spread them, in a manner most forlorn and sad, upon her face.

"The marriage that takes place to-day," said Caleb, "is with a stern, sordid, grinding man. A hard master to you and me, my dear, for many years. Ugly in his looks, and in his nature. Cold and callous always. Unlike what I have painted him to you in everything, my child. In everything."

"Oh, why," cried the Blind Girl, tortured, as it seemed, almost beyond endurance, "why did you ever do this? Why did you ever fill my heart so full, and then come in like Death, and tear away the objects of my love? O Heaven, how blind I am! How helpless and alone!"

Her afflicted father hung his head, and offered no reply but in his penitence and sorrow.

She had been but a short time in this passion of regret when the Cricket on the Hearth, unheard by all but her, began to chirp. Not merrily, but in a low, faint, sorrowing way. It was so mournful, that her tears began to flow; and, when the Presence which had been beside the Carrier all night, appeared behind her, pointing to her father, they fell down like rain.

She heard the Cricket-voice more plainly soon, and was conscious, through her blindness, of the Presence hovering about her father.

"Mary," said the Blind Girl, "tell me what my home is. What it truly is."

"It is a poor place, Bertha; very poor and bare indeed. The house will scarcely keep out wind and rain another winter. It is as roughly shielded from the weather, Bertha," Dot continued in a low, clear voice, "as your poor father in his sackcloth coat."

The Blind Girl, greatly agitated, rose, and led the Carrier's little wife aside.

"Those presents that I took such care of; that came almost at my wish, and were so dearly welcome to me," she said, trembling; "where did they come from? Did you send them?"

"No."

"Who, then?"

Dot saw she knew already, and was silent. The Blind Girl spread her hands before her face again. But in quite another manner now.

"Dear Mary, a moment. One moment. More this way. Speak softly to me. You are true I know. You'd not deceive me now; would you?"

"No, Bertha, indeed!"

"No, I am sure you would not. You have too much pity for me. Mary, look across the room to where we were just now—to where my father is—my father, so compassionate and loving to me—and tell me what you see."

"I see," said Dot, who understood her well, "an old man sitting in a chair, and leaning sorrowfully on the back, with his face resting on his hand. As if his child should comfort him, Bertha."

"Yes, yes. She will. Go on."

"He is an old man, worn with care and work. He is a spare, dejected, thoughtful, grey-haired man. I see him now, despondent and bowed down, and striving against nothing. But, Bertha, I have seen him many times before, and striving hard in many ways, for one great sacred object. And I honour his grey head, and bless him!"

The Blind Girl broke away from her; and, throwing herself upon her knees before him, took the grey head to her breast.

"It is my sight restored. It is my sight!" she cried. "I have been blind, and now my eyes are open. I never knew him! To think I might have died, and never truly seen the father who has been so loving to me!"

There were no words for Caleb's emotion.

"There is not a gallant figure on this earth," exclaimed the Blind Girl, holding him in her embrace, "that I would love so dearly, and would cherish so devotedly, as this! The greyer, and more worn, the dearer, father! Never let them say I am blind again. There's not a furrow in his face, there's not a hair upon his head, that shall be forgotten in my prayers and thanks to Heaven!"

Caleb managed to articulate, "My Bertha!"

"And in my blindness I believed him," said the girl, caressing him with tears of exquisite affection, "to be so different. And having him beside me day by day, so mindful of me always, never dreamed of this!"

"The fresh smart father in the blue coat, Bertha," said poor Caleb. "He's gone!"

"Nothing is gone," she answered. "Dearest father, no! Everything is here—in you. The father that I loved so well; the father that I never loved enough, and never knew; the benefactor whom I first began to reverence and love, because he had such sympathy for me,—all are here in you. Nothing is dead to me. The soul of all that was most dear to me is here—here, with the worn face, and the grey head. And I am not blind, father, any longer!"

Dot's whole attention had been concentrated, during this discourse, upon the father and daughter; but looking, now, towards the little Hay-maker in the Moorish meadow, she saw that the clock was within a few minutes of striking, and fell, immediately, into a nervous and excited state.

"Father!" said Bertha, hesitating. "Mary!"

"Yes, my dear," returned Caleb. "Here she is."

"There is no change in *her*. You never told me anything of *her* that was not true?"

"I should have done it, my dear, I'm afraid," returned Caleb, "if I could have made her better than she was. But I must have changed her for the worse, if I had changed her at all. Nothing could improve her, Bertha."

Confident as the Blind Girl had been when she asked the question, her delight and pride in the reply, and her renewed embrace of Dot, were charming to behold.

"More changes than you think for may happen, though, my dear," said Dot. "Changes for the better, I mean; changes for great joy to some of us. You mustn't let them startle you too much, if any such should ever happen, and affect you. Are those wheels upon the road? You've a quick ear, Bertha. Are they wheels?"

"Yes. Coming very fast."

"I—I—I know you have a quick ear," said Dot, placing her hand upon her heart, and evidently talking on as fast as she could, to hide its palpitating state, "because I have noticed it often, and because you were so quick to find out that strange step last night. Though why you should have said, as I very well recollect you did say, Bertha, 'Whose step is that?' and why you should have taken any greater observation of it than of any other step, I don't know. Though, as I said just now, there are great changes in the world: great changes: and we can't do better than prepare ourselves to be surprised at hardly anything."

Caleb wondered what this meant; perceiving that she spoke to him, no less than to his daughter. He saw her, with astonishment, so fluttered and distressed that she could scarcely breathe; and holding to a chair, to save herself from falling.

"They are wheels indeed!" she panted. "Coming nearer! Nearer! Very close! And now you hear them stopping at the garden-gate! And now you hear a step outside the door—the same step, Bertha, is it not?—and now ——!"

She uttered a wild cry of uncontrollable delight; and running up to Caleb, put her hands upon his eyes, as a young man rushed into the room, and, flinging away his hat into the air, came sweeping down upon them.

"Is it over?" cried Dot.

"Yes!"

"Happily over?"

"Yes!"

"Do you recollect the voice, dear Caleb? Did you ever hear the like of it before?" cried Dot.

"If my boy in the Golden South Americas was alive——!" said Caleb, trembling.

"He is alive!" shrieked Dot, removing her hands from his eyes, and clapping them in ecstasy. "Look at him! See where he stands before you, healthy and strong! Your own dear son. Your own dear living, loving brother, Bertha!"

All honour to the little creature for her transports! All honour to her tears and laughter, when the three were locked in one another's arms! All honour to the heartiness with which she met the sunburnt sailor-fellow, with his dark streaming hair, half-way, and never turned her rosy little mouth aside, but suffered him to kiss it freely, and to press her to his bounding heart!

And honour to the Cuckoo too—why not?—for bursting out of the trap-door in the Moorish Palace like a housebreaker, and hiccoughing twelve times on the assembled company, as if he had got drunk for joy!

The Carrier, entering, started back. And well he might, to find himself in such good company.

"Look, John!" said Caleb, exultingly, "look here! My own boy from the Golden South Americas! My own son! Him that you fitted out, and sent away yourself! Him that you were always such a friend to!"

The Carrier advanced to seize him by the hand; but, recoiling, as some feature in his face awakened a remembrance of the Deaf Man in the Cart, said:

"Edward! Was it you?"

"Now tell him all!" cried Dot. "Tell him all, Edward; and don't spare me, for nothing shall make me spare myself in his eyes, ever again."

"I was the man," said Edward.

"And could you steal, disguised, into the house of your old friend?" rejoined the Carrier. "There was a frank boy once—how many years is it, Caleb, since we heard that he was dead, and had it proved, we thought?—who never would have done that."

"There was a generous friend of mine once; more a father to me than a friend," said Edward; "who never would have judged me, or any other man, unheard. You were he. So I am certain you will hear me now."

The Carrier, with a troubled glance at Dot, who still kept far away from him, replied, "Well! that's but fair. I will."

"You must know that when I left here a boy," said Edward, "I was in love, and my love was returned. She was a very young girl, who perhaps (you may tell me) didn't know her own mind. But I knew mine, and I had a passion for her."

"You had!" exclaimed the Carrier. "You!"

"Indeed I had," returned the other. "And she returned it. I have ever since believed she did, and now I am sure she did."

"Heaven help me!" said the Carrier. "This is worse than all."

"Constant to her," said Edward, "and returning, full of hope, after many hardships and perils, to redeem my part of our old contract, I heard, twenty miles away, that she was false to me; that she had forgotten me; and had bestowed herself upon another and a richer man. I had no mind to reproach her; but I wished to see her, and to prove beyond dispute that this was true. I hoped she might have been forced into it against her own desire and recollection. It would be small comfort, but it would be some, I thought, and on I came. That I might have the truth, the real truth, observing freely for myself, and judging for myself, without obstruction on the one hand, or presenting my own influence (if I had any) before her, on the other, I dressed myself unlike myself—you know how; and waited on the road—you know where. You had no suspicion of me; neither had—had she," pointing to Dot, "until I whispered in her ear at that fireside, and she so nearly betrayed me."

"But when she knew that Edward was alive, and had come back," sobbed Dot, now speaking for herself, as she had burned to do, all through this narrative; "and when she knew his purpose, she advised him by all means to keep his secret close; for his old friend John Peerybingle was much too open in his nature, and too clumsy in all artifice—being a clumsy man in general," said Dot, half laughing and half crying—"to keep it for him. And when she—that's me, John," sobbed the little woman—"told him all, and how his sweetheart had believed him to be dead; and how she had at last been over-persuaded by her mother into a marriage which the silly, dear old thing called advantageous; and when she—that's me again, John—told him they were not yet married (though close upon it), and that it would be nothing but a sacrifice if it went on, for there was no love on her side; and when he went nearly mad with joy to hear it,—then she—that's me again—said she would go between them, as she had often done before in old times, John, and would sound his sweetheart, and be sure that what she—me again, John—said and thought was right. And it WAS right, John! And they were brought together, John! And they were married, John, an hour ago! And here's the Bride! And Gruff and Tackleton may die a bachelor! And I'm a happy little woman, May, God bless you!"

She was an irresistible little woman, if that be anything to the purpose; and never so completely irresistible as in her present transports. There never were congratulations so endearing and delicious as those she lavished on herself and on the Bride.

Amid the tumult of emotions in his breast, the honest Carrier had stood confounded. Flying, now, towards her, Dot stretched out her hand to stop him, and retreated as before.

"No, John, no! Hear all! Don't love me any more, John, till you've heard every word I have to say. It was wrong to have a secret from you, John. I'm very sorry. I didn't think it any harm, till I came and sat down by you on the little stool last night. But when I knew, by what was written in your face, that you had seen me walking in the gallery with Edward, and when I knew what you thought, I felt how giddy and how wrong it was. But oh, dear John, how could you, could you think so?"

Little woman, how she sobbed again! John Peerybingle would have caught her in his arms. But no; she wouldn't let him.

"Don't love me yet, please, John! Not for a long time yet! When I was sad about this intended marriage, dear, it was because I remembered May and Edward such young lovers; and knew that her heart was far away from Tackleton. You believe that, now, don't you, John?"

John was going to make another rush at this appeal; but she stopped him again.

"No; keep there, please, John! When I laugh at you, as I sometimes do, John, and call you clumsy and a dear old goose, and names of that sort, it's because I love you, John, so well, and take such pleasure in your ways, and wouldn't see you altered in the least respect to have you made a king to-morrow."

"Hooroar!" said Caleb with unusual vigour. "My opinion!"

"And when I speak of people being middle-aged and steady, John, and pretend that we are a humdrum couple, going on in a jog-trot sort of way, it's only because I'm such a silly little thing, John, that I like, sometimes, to act as a kind of Play with Baby, and all that: and make believe."

She saw that he was coming; and stopped him again. But she was very nearly too late.

"No, don't love me for another minute or two, if you please, John! What I want most to tell you, I have kept to the last. My dear, good, generous John, when we were talking the other night about the Cricket, I had it on my lips to say, that at first I did not love you quite so dearly as I do now; when I first came home here, I was half afraid that I mightn't learn to love you every bit as well as I hoped and prayed I might—being so very young, John! But, dear John, every day and hour I loved you more and more. And if I could have loved you better than I do, the noble words I heard you say this morning would have made me. But I can't. All the affection that I had (it was a great deal, John) I gave you, as you well deserve, long, long ago, and I have no more left to give. Now, my dear husband, take me to your heart again! That's my home, John; and never, never think of sending me to any other!"

You never will derive so much delight from seeing a glorious little woman in the arms of a third party as you would have felt if you had seen Dot run into the Carrier's embrace. It was the most complete, unmitigated, soul-fraught little piece of earnestness that ever you beheld in all your days.

You may be sure the Carrier was in a state of perfect rapture; and you may be sure Dot was likewise; and you may be sure they all were, inclusive of Miss Slowboy, who wept copiously for joy, and, wishing to include her young charge in the general interchange of congratulations, handed round the Baby to everybody in succession, as if it were something to drink.

But, now, the sound of wheels was heard again outside the door; and somebody exclaimed that Gruff and Tackleton was coming back. Speedily that worthy gentleman appeared, looking warm and flustered.

"Why, what the Devil's this, John Peerybingle?" said Tackleton. "There's some mistake. I appointed Mrs. Tackleton to meet me at the church, and I'll swear I passed her on the road, on her way here. Oh! here she is! I beg your pardon, sir; I haven't the pleasure of knowing you; but, if you can do me the favour to spare this young lady, she has rather a particular engagement this morning."

"But I can't spare her," returned Edward. "I couldn't think of it."

"What do you mean, you vagabond?" said Tackleton.

"I mean that, as I can make allowance for your being vexed," returned the other with a smile, "I am as deaf to harsh discourse this morning as I was to all discourse last night."

The look that Tackleton bestowed upon him, and the start he gave!

"I am sorry, sir," said Edward, holding out May's left hand, and especially the third finger, "that the young lady can't accompany you to church; but, as she has been there once this morning, perhaps you'll excuse her."

Tackleton looked hard at the third finger, and took a little piece of silver paper, apparently containing a ring, from his waistcoat pocket.

"Miss Slowboy," said Tackleton, "will you have the kindness to throw that in the fire? Thankee."

"It was a previous engagement, quite an old engagement, that prevented my wife from keeping her appointment with you, I assure you," said Edward.

"Mr. Tackleton will do me the justice to acknowledge that I revealed it to him faithfully; and that I told him, many times, I never could forget it," said May, blushing.

"Oh, certainly!" said Tackleton. "Oh, to be sure! Oh, it's all right, it's quite correct! Mrs. Edward Plummer, I infer?"

"That's the name," returned the bridegroom.

"Ah! I shouldn't have known you, sir," said Tackleton, scrutinising his face narrowly, and making a low bow. "I give you joy, sir!"

"Thankee."

"Mrs. Peerybingle," said Tackleton, turning suddenly to where she stood with her husband; "I'm sorry. You haven't done me a very great kindness, but, upon my life, I am sorry. You are better than I thought you. John Peerybingle, I am sorry. You understand me; that's enough. It's quite correct, ladies and gentlemen all, and perfectly satisfactory. Good morning!"

With these words he carried it off, and carried himself off too: merely stopping at the door to take the flowers and favours from his horse's head, and to kick that animal once in the ribs, as a means of informing him that there was a screw loose in his arrangements.

Of course, it became a serious duty now to make such a day of it as should mark these events for a high Feast and Festival in the Peerybingle Calendar for evermore. Accordingly, Dot went to work to produce such an entertainment as should reflect undying honour on the house and on every one concerned; and, in a very short space of time, she was up to her dimpled elbows in flour, and whitening the Carrier's coat, every time he came near her, by stopping him to give him a kiss. That good fellow washed the greens, and peeled the turnips, and broke the plates, and upset iron pots full of cold water on the fire, and made himself useful in all sorts of ways: while a couple of professional assistants, hastily called in from somewhere in the neighbourhood, as on a point of life or death, ran against each other in all the doorways and round all the corners, and everybody tumbled over Tilly Slowboy and the Baby, everywhere. Tilly never came out in such force before. Her ubiquity was the theme of general admiration. She was a stumbling-block in the passage at five-and-twenty minutes past two; a man-trap in the kitchen at half-past two precisely; and a pitfall in the garret at five-and-twenty minutes to three. The Baby's head was, as it were, a test and touchstone for every description of matter, animal, vegetable, and mineral. Nothing was in use that day that didn't come, at some time or other, into close acquaintance with it.

Then there was a great Expedition set on foot to go and find out Mrs. Fielding; and to be dismally penitent to that excellent gentlewoman; and to bring her back, by force, if needful, to be happy and forgiving. And when the Expedition first discovered her, she would listen to no terms at all, but said, an unspeakable number of times, that ever she should have lived to see the day! and couldn't be got to say anything else, except "Now carry me to the grave": which seemed absurd, on account of her not being dead, or anything at all like it. After a time she lapsed into a state of dreadful calmness, and observed that, when that unfortunate train of circumstances had occurred in the Indigo Trade, she had foreseen that she would be exposed, during her whole life, to every species of insult and contumely; and that she was glad to find it was the case; and begged they wouldn't trouble themselves about her,—for what was she?—oh dear! a nobody!—but would forget that such a being lived, and would take their course in life without her. From this bitterly sarcastic mood she passed into an angry one, in which she gave vent to the remarkable expression that the worm would turn if trodden on; and, after that, she yielded to a soft regret, and said, if they had only given her their confidence, what might she not have had it in her power to suggest! Taking advantage of this crisis in her feelings, the Expedition embraced her; and she very soon had her gloves on, and was on her way to John Peerybingle's in a state of unimpeachable gentility; with a paper parcel at her side containing a cap of state, almost as tall, and quite as stiff, as a mitre.

Then, there were Dot's father and mother to come in another little chaise; and they were behind their time; and fears were entertained; and there was much looking out for them down the road; and Mrs. Fielding always would look in the wrong and morally impossible direction; and, being apprised thereof, hoped she might take the liberty of looking where she pleased. At last they came; a chubby little couple, jogging along in a snug and comfortable little way that quite belonged to the Dot family; and Dot and her mother, side by side, were wonderful to see. They were so like each other.

Then Dot's mother had to renew her acquaintance with May's mother; and May's mother always stood on her gentility; and Dot's mother never stood on anything but her active little feet. And old Dot—so to call Dot's father, I forgot it wasn't his right name, but never mind—took liberties, and shook hands at first sight, and seemed to think a cap but so much starch and muslin, and didn't defer himself at all to the Indigo Trade, but said there was no help for it now; and, in Mrs. Fielding's summing up, was a good-natured kind of man—but coarse, my dear.

I wouldn't have missed Dot, doing the honours in her wedding-gown, my benison on her bright face! for any money. No! nor the good Carrier, so jovial and so ruddy, at the bottom of the table. Nor the brown, fresh sailor-fellow, and his handsome wife. Nor any one among them. To have missed the dinner would have been to miss as jolly and as stout a meal as man need eat; and to have missed the overflowing cups in which they drank The Wedding Day would have been the greatest miss of all.

After dinner Caleb sang the song about the Sparkling Bowl. As I'm a living man, hoping to keep so for a year or two, he sang it through.

And, by-the-bye, a most unlooked-for incident occurred, just as he finished the last verse.

There was a tap at the door; and a man came staggering in, without saying with your leave, or by your leave, with something heavy on his head. Setting this down in the middle of the table, symmetrically in the centre of the nuts and apples, he said:

"Mr. Tackleton's compliments, and, as he hasn't got no use for the cake himself, p'raps you'll eat it."

And, with those words, he walked off.

There was some surprise among the company, as you may imagine. Mrs. Fielding, being a lady of infinite discernment, suggested that the cake was poisoned, and related a narrative of a cake which, within her knowledge, had turned a seminary for young ladies blue. But she was overruled by acclamation; and the cake was cut by May with much ceremony and rejoicing.

I don't think any one had tasted it, when there came another tap at the door, and the same man appeared again, having under his arm a vast brown-paper parcel.

"Mr. Tackleton's compliments, and he's sent a few toys for the Babby. They ain't ugly."

After the delivery of which expressions, he retired again.

The whole party would have experienced great difficulty in finding words for their astonishment, even if they had had ample time to seek them. But they had none at all; for the messenger had scarcely shut the door behind him, when there came another tap, and Tackleton himself walked in.

"Mrs. Peerybingle!" said the toy merchant, hat in hand, "I'm sorry. I'm more sorry than I was this morning. I have had time to think of it. John Peerybingle! I am sour by disposition; but I can't help being sweetened, more or less, by coming face to face with such a man as you. Caleb! This unconscious little nurse gave me a broken hint last night, of which I have found the thread. I blush to think how easily I might have bound you and your daughter to me, and what a miserable idiot I was when I took her for one! Friends, one and all, my house is very lonely to-night. I have not so much as a Cricket on my Hearth. I have scared them all away. Be gracious to me: let me join this happy party!"

He was at home in five minutes. You never saw such a fellow. What *had* he been doing with himself all his life, never to have known before his great capacity of being jovial? Or what had the Fairies been doing with him, to have effected such a change?

"John! you won't send me home this evening, will you?" whispered Dot.

He had been very near it, though.

There wanted but one living creature to make the party complete; and, in the twinkling of an eye, there he was, very thirsty with hard running, and engaged in hopeless endeavours to squeeze his head into a narrow pitcher. He had gone with the cart to its journey's end, very much disgusted with the absence of his master, and stupendously rebellious to the Deputy. After lingering about the stable for some little time, vainly attempting to incite the old horse to the mutinous act of returning on his own account, he had walked into the taproom, and laid himself down before the fire. But, suddenly yielding to the conviction that the Deputy was a humbug, and must be abandoned, he had got up again, turned tail, and come home.

There was a dance in the evening. With which general mention of that recreation, I should have left it alone, if I had not some reason to suppose that it was quite an original dance, and one of a most uncommon figure. It was formed in an odd way; in this way.

Edward, that sailor-fellow—a good free dashing sort of fellow he was—had been telling them various marvels concerning parrots, and mines, and Mexicans, and gold dust, when all at once he took it in his head to jump up from his seat and propose a dance; for Bertha's harp was there, and she such a hand upon it as you seldom hear. Dot (sly little piece of affectation when she chose) said her dancing days were over; I think because the Carrier was smoking his pipe, and she liked sitting by him best. Mrs. Fielding had no choice, of course, but to say *her* dancing days were over, after that; and everybody said the same, except May; May was ready.

So, May and Edward get up, amid great applause, to dance alone; and Bertha plays her liveliest tune.

Well! if you'll believe me, they had not been dancing five minutes, when suddenly the Carrier flings his pipe away, takes Dot round the waist, dashes out into the room, and starts off with her, toe and heel, quite wonderfully. Tackleton no sooner sees this than he skims across to Mrs. Fielding, takes her round the waist, and follows suit. Old Dot no sooner sees this than up he is, all alive, whisks off Mrs. Dot into the middle of the dance, and is foremost there. Caleb no sooner sees this than he clutches Tilly Slowboy by both hands, and goes off at score; Miss Slowboy, firm in the belief that diving hotly in among the other couples, and effecting any number of concussions with them, is your only principle of footing it.

Hark! how the Cricket joins the music with its Chirp, Chirp, Chirp; and how the kettle hums!

But what is this? Even as I listen to them blithely, and turn towards Dot, for one last glimpse of a little figure very pleasant to me, she and the rest have vanished into air, and I am left alone. A Cricket sings upon the Hearth; a broken child's toy lies upon the ground: and nothing else remains.

THE END OF
The Cricket on the Hearth

DAVID COPPERFIELD

By Charles Dickens

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED TO
THE HON. Mr. AND Mrs. RICHARD WATSON,
OF ROCKINGHAM, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE.

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PREFACE TO 1850 EDITION

I do not find it easy to get sufficiently far away from this Book, in the first sensations of having finished it, to refer to it with the composure which this formal heading would seem to require. My interest in it, is so recent and strong; and my mind is so divided between pleasure and regret—pleasure in the achievement of a long design, regret in the separation from many companions—that I am in danger of wearying the reader whom I love, with personal confidences, and private emotions.

Besides which, all that I could say of the Story, to any purpose, I have endeavoured to say in it.

It would concern the reader little, perhaps, to know, how sorrowfully the pen is laid down at the close of a two-years' imaginative task; or how an Author feels as if he were dismissing some portion of himself into the shadowy world, when a crowd of the creatures of his brain are going from him for ever. Yet, I have nothing else to tell; unless, indeed, I were to confess (which might be of less moment still) that no one can ever believe this Narrative, in the reading, more than I have believed it in the writing.

Instead of looking back, therefore, I will look forward. I cannot close this Volume more agreeably to myself, than with a hopeful glance towards the time when I shall again put forth my two green leaves once a month, and with a faithful remembrance of the genial sun and showers that have fallen on these leaves of David Copperfield, and made me happy.

London, October, 1850.

PREFACE TO THE CHARLES DICKENS EDITION

I REMARKED in the original Preface to this Book, that I did not find it easy to get sufficiently far away from it, in the first sensations of having finished it, to refer to it with the composure which this formal heading would seem to require. My interest in it was so recent and strong, and my mind was so divided between pleasure and regret—pleasure in the achievement of a long design, regret in the separation from many companions—that I was in danger of wearying the reader with personal confidences and private emotions.

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So true are these avowals at the present day, that I can now only take the reader into one confidence more. Of all my books, I like this the best. It will be easily believed that I am a fond parent to every child of my fancy, and that no one can ever love that family as dearly as I love them. But, like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child. And his name is

DAVID COPPERFIELD.

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1869
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THE PERSONAL HISTORY AND EXPERIENCE OF DAVID COPPERFIELD THE YOUNGER

CHAPTER 1. I AM BORN

Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously.

In consideration of the day and hour of my birth, it was declared by the nurse, and by some sage women in the neighbourhood who had taken a lively interest in me several months before there was any possibility of our becoming personally acquainted, first, that I was destined to be unlucky in life; and secondly, that I was privileged to see ghosts and spirits; both these gifts inevitably attaching, as they believed, to all unlucky infants of either gender, born towards the small hours on a Friday night.

I need say nothing here, on the first head, because nothing can show better than my history whether that prediction was verified or falsified by the result. On the second branch of the question, I will only remark, that unless I ran through that part of my inheritance while I was still a baby, I have not come into it yet. But I do not at all complain of having been kept out of this property; and if anybody else should be in the present enjoyment of it, he is heartily welcome to keep it.

I was born with a caul, which was advertised for sale, in the newspapers, at the low price of fifteen guineas. Whether sea-going people were short of money about that time, or were short of faith and preferred cork jackets, I don't know; all I know is, that there was but one solitary bidding, and that was from an attorney connected with the bill-broking business, who offered two pounds in cash, and the balance in sherry, but declined to be guaranteed from drowning on any higher bargain. Consequently the advertisement was withdrawn at a dead loss—for as to sherry, my poor dear mother's own sherry was in the market then—and ten years afterwards, the caul was put up in a raffle down in our part of the country, to fifty members at half-a-crown a head, the winner to spend five shillings. I was present myself, and I remember to have felt quite uncomfortable and confused, at a part of myself being disposed of in that way. The caul was won, I recollect, by an old lady with a hand-basket, who, very reluctantly, produced from it the stipulated five shillings, all in halfpence, and twopence halfpenny short—as it took an immense time and a great waste of arithmetic, to endeavour without any effect to prove to her. It is a fact which will be long remembered as remarkable down there, that she was never drowned, but died triumphantly in bed, at ninety-two. I have understood that it was, to the last, her proudest boast, that she never had been on the water in her life, except upon a bridge; and that over her tea (to which she was extremely partial) she, to the last, expressed her indignation at the impiety of mariners and others, who had the presumption to go 'meandering' about the world. It was in vain to represent to her that some conveniences, tea perhaps included, resulted from this objectionable practice. She always returned, with greater emphasis and with an instinctive knowledge of the strength of her objection, 'Let us have no meandering.'

Not to meander myself, at present, I will go back to my birth.

I was born at Blunderstone, in Suffolk, or 'there by', as they say in Scotland. I was a posthumous child. My father's eyes had closed upon the light of this world six months, when mine opened on it. There is something strange to me, even now, in the reflection that he never saw me; and something stranger yet in the shadowy remembrance that I have of my first childish associations with his white grave-stone in the churchyard, and of the indefinable compassion I used to feel for it lying out alone there in the dark night, when our little parlour was warm and bright with fire and candle, and the doors of our house were—almost cruelly, it seemed to me sometimes—bolted and locked against it.

An aunt of my father's, and consequently a great-aunt of mine, of whom I shall have more to relate by and by, was the principal magnate of our family. Miss Trotwood, or Miss Betsey, as my poor mother always called her, when she sufficiently overcame her dread of this formidable personage to mention her at all (which was seldom), had been married to a husband younger than herself, who was very handsome, except in the sense of the homely adage, 'handsome is, that handsome does'—for he was strongly suspected of having beaten Miss Betsey, and even of having once, on a disputed question of supplies, made some hasty but determined arrangements to throw her out of a two pair of stairs' window. These evidences of an incompatibility of temper induced Miss Betsey to pay him off, and effect a separation by mutual consent. He went to India with his capital, and there, according to a wild legend in our family, he was once seen riding on an elephant, in company with a Baboon; but I think it must have been a Baboo—or a Begum. Anyhow, from India tidings of his death reached home, within ten years. How they affected my aunt, nobody knew; for immediately upon the separation, she took her maiden name again, bought a cottage in a hamlet on the sea-coast a long way off, established herself there as a single woman with one servant, and was understood to live secluded, ever afterwards, in an inflexible retirement.

My father had once been a favourite of hers, I believe; but she was mortally affronted by his marriage, on the ground that my mother was 'a wax doll'. She had never seen my mother, but she knew her to be not yet twenty. My father and Miss Betsey never met again. He was double my mother's age when he married, and of but a delicate constitution. He died a year afterwards, and, as I have said, six months before I came into the world.

This was the state of matters, on the afternoon of, what I may be excused for calling, that eventful and important Friday. I can make no claim therefore to have known, at that time, how matters stood; or to have any remembrance, founded on the evidence of my own senses, of what follows.

My mother was sitting by the fire, but poorly in health, and very low in spirits, looking at it through her tears, and desponding heavily about herself and the fatherless little stranger, who was already welcomed by some grosses of prophetic pins, in a drawer upstairs, to a world not at all excited on the subject of his arrival; my mother, I say, was sitting by the fire, that bright, windy March afternoon, very timid and sad, and very doubtful of ever coming alive out of the trial that was before her, when, lifting her eyes as she dried them, to the window opposite, she saw a strange lady coming up the garden.

MY mother had a sure foreboding at the second glance, that it was Miss Betsey. The setting sun was glowing on the strange lady, over the garden-fence, and she came walking up to the door with a fell rigidity of figure and composure of countenance that could have belonged to nobody else.

When she reached the house, she gave another proof of her identity. My father had often hinted that she seldom conducted herself like any ordinary Christian; and now, instead of ringing the bell, she came and looked in at that identical window, pressing the end of her nose against the glass to that extent, that my poor dear mother used to say it became perfectly flat and white in a moment.

She gave my mother such a turn, that I have always been convinced I am indebted to Miss Betsey for having been born on a Friday.

My mother had left her chair in her agitation, and gone behind it in the corner. Miss Betsey, looking round the room, slowly and inquiringly, began on the other side, and carried her eyes on, like a Saracen's Head in a Dutch clock, until they reached my mother. Then she made a frown and a gesture to my mother, like one who was accustomed to be obeyed, to come and open the door. My mother went.

'Mrs. David Copperfield, I think,' said Miss Betsey; the emphasis referring, perhaps, to my mother's mourning weeds, and her condition.

'Yes,' said my mother, faintly.

'Miss Trotwood,' said the visitor. 'You have heard of her, I dare say?'

My mother answered she had had that pleasure. And she had a disagreeable consciousness of not appearing to imply that it had been an overpowering pleasure.

'Now you see her,' said Miss Betsey. My mother bent her head, and begged her to walk in.

They went into the parlour my mother had come from, the fire in the best room on the other side of the passage not being lighted—not having been lighted, indeed, since my father's funeral; and when they were both seated, and Miss Betsey said nothing, my mother, after vainly trying to restrain herself, began to cry. 'Oh tut, tut, tut!' said Miss Betsey, in a hurry. 'Don't do that! Come, come!'

My mother couldn't help it notwithstanding, so she cried until she had had her cry out.

'Take off your cap, child,' said Miss Betsey, 'and let me see you.'

MY mother was too much afraid of her to refuse compliance with this odd request, if she had any disposition to do so. Therefore she did as she was told, and did it with such nervous hands that her hair (which was luxuriant and beautiful) fell all about her face.

'Why, bless my heart!' exclaimed Miss Betsey. 'You are a very Baby!'

My mother was, no doubt, unusually youthful in appearance even for her years; she hung her head, as if it were her fault, poor thing, and said, sobbing, that indeed she was afraid she was but a childish widow, and would be but a childish mother if she lived. In a short pause which ensued, she had a fancy that she felt Miss Betsey touch her hair, and that with no ungentle hand; but, looking at her, in her timid hope, she found that lady sitting with the skirt of her dress tucked up, her hands folded on one knee, and her feet upon the fender, frowning at the fire.

'In the name of Heaven,' said Miss Betsey, suddenly, 'why Rookery?'

'Do you mean the house, ma'am?' asked my mother.

'Why Rookery?' said Miss Betsey. 'Cookery would have been more to the purpose, if you had had any practical ideas of life, either of you.'

'The name was Mr. Copperfield's choice,' returned my mother. 'When he bought the house, he liked to think that there were rooks about it.'

The evening wind made such a disturbance just now, among some tall old elm-trees at the bottom of the garden, that neither my mother nor Miss Betsey could forbear glancing that way. As the elms bent to one another, like giants who were whispering secrets, and after a few seconds of such repose, fell into a violent flurry, tossing their wild arms about, as if their late confidences were really too wicked for their peace of mind, some weatherbeaten ragged old rooks'-nests, burdening their higher branches, swung like wrecks upon a stormy sea.

'Where are the birds?' asked Miss Betsey.

'The—?' My mother had been thinking of something else.

'The rooks—what has become of them?' asked Miss Betsey.

'There have not been any since we have lived here,' said my mother. 'We thought—Mr. Copperfield thought—it was quite a large rookery; but the nests were very old ones, and the birds have deserted them a long while.'

'David Copperfield all over!' cried Miss Betsey. 'David Copperfield from head to foot! Calls a house a rookery when there's not a rook near it, and takes the birds on trust, because he sees the nests!'

'Mr. Copperfield,' returned my mother, 'is dead, and if you dare to speak unkindly of him to me—'

My poor dear mother, I suppose, had some momentary intention of committing an assault and battery upon my aunt, who could easily have settled her with one hand, even if my mother had been in far better training for such an encounter than she was that evening. But it passed with the action of rising from her chair; and she sat down again very meekly, and fainted.

When she came to herself, or when Miss Betsey had restored her, whichever it was, she found the latter standing at the window. The twilight was by this time shading down into darkness; and dimly as they saw each other, they could not have done that without the aid of the fire.

'Well?' said Miss Betsey, coming back to her chair, as if she had only been taking a casual look at the prospect; 'and when do you expect—'

'I am all in a tremble,' faltered my mother. 'I don't know what's the matter. I shall die, I am sure!'

'No, no, no,' said Miss Betsey. 'Have some tea.'

'Oh dear me, dear me, do you think it will do me any good?' cried my mother in a helpless manner.

'Of course it will,' said Miss Betsey. 'It's nothing but fancy. What do you call your girl?'

'I don't know that it will be a girl, yet, ma'am,' said my mother innocently.

'Bless the Baby!' exclaimed Miss Betsey, unconsciously quoting the second sentiment of the pincushion in the drawer upstairs, but applying it to my mother instead of me, 'I don't mean that. I mean your servant-girl.'

'Peggotty,' said my mother.

'Peggotty!' repeated Miss Betsey, with some indignation. 'Do you mean to say, child, that any human being has gone into a Christian church, and got herself named Peggotty?' 'It's her surname,' said my mother, faintly. 'Mr. Copperfield called her by it, because her Christian name was the same as mine.'

'Here! Peggotty!' cried Miss Betsey, opening the parlour door. 'Tea. Your mistress is a little unwell. Don't dawdle.'

Having issued this mandate with as much potentiality as if she had been a recognized authority in the house ever since it had been a house, and having looked out to confront the amazed Peggotty coming along the passage with a candle at the sound of a strange voice, Miss Betsey shut the door again, and sat down as before: with her feet on the fender, the skirt of her dress tucked up, and her hands folded on one knee.

'You were speaking about its being a girl,' said Miss Betsey. 'I have no doubt it will be a girl. I have a presentiment that it must be a girl. Now child, from the moment of the birth of this girl—'

'Perhaps boy,' my mother took the liberty of putting in.

'I tell you I have a presentiment that it must be a girl,' returned Miss Betsey. 'Don't contradict. From the moment of this girl's birth, child, I intend to be her friend. I intend to be her godmother, and I beg you'll call her Betsey Trotwood Copperfield. There must be no mistakes in life with THIS Betsey Trotwood. There must be no trifling with HER affections, poor dear. She must be well brought up, and well guarded from reposing any foolish confidences where they are not deserved. I must make that MY care.'

There was a twitch of Miss Betsey's head, after each of these sentences, as if her own old wrongs were working within her, and she repressed any plainer reference to them by strong constraint. So my mother suspected, at least, as she observed her by the low glimmer of the fire: too much scared by Miss Betsey, too uneasy in herself, and too subdued and bewildered altogether, to observe anything very clearly, or to know what to say.

'And was David good to you, child?' asked Miss Betsey, when she had been silent for a little while, and these motions of her head had gradually ceased. 'Were you comfortable together?'

'We were very happy,' said my mother. 'Mr. Copperfield was only too good to me.'

'What, he spoilt you, I suppose?' returned Miss Betsey.

'For being quite alone and dependent on myself in this rough world again, yes, I fear he did indeed,' sobbed my mother.

'Well! Don't cry!' said Miss Betsey. 'You were not equally matched, child—if any two people can be equally matched—and so I asked the question. You were an orphan, weren't you?' 'Yes.'

'And a governess?'

'I was nursery-governess in a family where Mr. Copperfield came to visit. Mr. Copperfield was very kind to me, and took a great deal of notice of me, and paid me a good deal of attention, and at last proposed to me. And I accepted him. And so we were married,' said my mother simply.

'Ha! Poor Baby!' mused Miss Betsey, with her frown still bent upon the fire. 'Do you know anything?'

'I beg your pardon, ma'am,' faltered my mother.

'About keeping house, for instance,' said Miss Betsey.

'Not much, I fear,' returned my mother. 'Not so much as I could wish. But Mr. Copperfield was teaching me—'

('Much he knew about it himself!') said Miss Betsey in a parenthesis. —'And I hope I should have improved, being very anxious to learn, and he very patient to teach me, if the great misfortune of his death'—my mother broke down again here, and could get no farther.

'Well, well!' said Miss Betsey. —'I kept my housekeeping-book regularly, and balanced it with Mr. Copperfield every night,' cried my mother in another burst of distress, and breaking down again.

'Well, well!' said Miss Betsey. 'Don't cry any more.' —'And I am sure we never had a word of difference respecting it, except when Mr. Copperfield objected to my threes and fives being too much like each other, or to my putting curly tails to my sevens and nines,' resumed my mother in another burst, and breaking down again.

'You'll make yourself ill,' said Miss Betsey, 'and you know that will not be good either for you or for my god-daughter. Come! You mustn't do it!'

This argument had some share in quieting my mother, though her increasing indisposition had a larger one. There was an interval of silence, only broken by Miss Betsey's occasionally ejaculating 'Ha!' as she sat with her feet upon the fender.

'David had bought an annuity for himself with his money, I know,' said she, by and by. 'What did he do for you?'

'Mr. Copperfield,' said my mother, answering with some difficulty, 'was so considerate and good as to secure the reversion of a part of it to me.'

'How much?' asked Miss Betsey.

'A hundred and five pounds a year,' said my mother.

'He might have done worse,' said my aunt.

The word was appropriate to the moment. My mother was so much worse that Peggotty, coming in with the teaboard and candles, and seeing at a glance how ill she was,—as Miss Betsey might have done sooner if there had been light enough,—conveyed her upstairs to her own room with all speed; and immediately dispatched Ham Peggotty, her nephew, who had been for some days past secreted in the house, unknown to my mother, as a special messenger in case of emergency, to fetch the nurse and doctor.

Those allied powers were considerably astonished, when they arrived within a few minutes of each other, to find an unknown lady of portentous appearance, sitting before the fire, with her bonnet tied over her left arm, stopping her ears with jewellers' cotton. Peggotty knowing nothing about her, and my mother saying nothing about her, she was quite a mystery in the parlour; and the fact of her having a magazine of jewellers' cotton in her pocket, and sticking the article in her ears in that way, did not detract from the solemnity of her presence.

The doctor having been upstairs and come down again, and having satisfied himself, I suppose, that there was a probability of this unknown lady and himself having to sit there, face to face, for some hours, laid himself out to be polite and social. He was the meekest of his sex, the mildest of little men. He sidled in and out of a room, to take up the less space. He walked as softly as the Ghost in Hamlet, and more slowly. He carried his head on one side, partly in modest depreciation of himself, partly in modest propitiation of everybody else. It is nothing to say that he hadn't a word to throw at a dog. He couldn't have thrown a word at a mad dog. He might have offered him one gently, or half a one, or a fragment of one; for he spoke as slowly as he walked; but he wouldn't have been rude to him, and he couldn't have been quick with him, for any earthly consideration.

Mr. Chillip, looking mildly at my aunt with his head on one side, and making her a little bow, said, in allusion to the jewellers' cotton, as he softly touched his left ear:

'Some local irritation, ma'am?'

'What!' replied my aunt, pulling the cotton out of one ear like a cork.

Mr. Chillip was so alarmed by her abruptness—as he told my mother afterwards—that it was a mercy he didn't lose his presence of mind. But he repeated sweetly:

'Some local irritation, ma'am?'

'Nonsense!' replied my aunt, and corked herself again, at one blow.

Mr. Chillip could do nothing after this, but sit and look at her feebly, as she sat and looked at the fire, until he was called upstairs again. After some quarter of an hour's absence, he returned.

'Well?' said my aunt, taking the cotton out of the ear nearest to him.

'Well, ma'am,' returned Mr. Chillip, 'we are—we are progressing slowly, ma'am.'

'Ba—a—ah!' said my aunt, with a perfect shake on the contemptuous interjection. And corked herself as before.

Really—really—as Mr. Chillip told my mother, he was almost shocked; speaking in a professional point of view alone, he was almost shocked. But he sat and looked at her, notwithstanding, for nearly two hours, as she sat looking at the fire, until he was again called out. After another absence, he again returned.

'Well?' said my aunt, taking out the cotton on that side again.

'Well, ma'am,' returned Mr. Chillip, 'we are—we are progressing slowly, ma'am.'

'Ya—a—ah!' said my aunt. With such a snarl at him, that Mr. Chillip absolutely could not bear it. It was really calculated to break his spirit, he said afterwards. He preferred to go and sit upon the stairs, in the dark and a strong draught, until he was again sent for.

Ham Peggotty, who went to the national school, and was a very dragon at his catechism, and who may therefore be regarded as a credible witness, reported next day, that happening to peep in at the parlour-door an hour after this, he was instantly descried by Miss Betsey, then walking to and fro in a state of agitation, and pounced upon before he could make his escape. That there were now occasional sounds of feet and voices overhead which he inferred the cotton did not exclude, from the circumstance of his evidently being clutched by the lady as a victim on whom to expend her superabundant agitation when the sounds were loudest. That, marching him constantly up and down by the collar (as if he had been taking too much laudanum), she, at those times, shook him, rumpled his hair, made light of his linen, stopped his ears as if she confounded them with her own, and otherwise tousled and maltreated him. This was in part confirmed by his aunt, who saw him at half past twelve o'clock, soon after his release, and affirmed that he was then as red as I was.

The mild Mr. Chillip could not possibly bear malice at such a time, if at any time. He sidled into the parlour as soon as he was at liberty, and said to my aunt in his meekest manner:

'Well, ma'am, I am happy to congratulate you.'

'What upon?' said my aunt, sharply.

Mr. Chillip was fluttered again, by the extreme severity of my aunt's manner; so he made her a little bow and gave her a little smile, to mollify her.

'Mercy on the man, what's he doing!' cried my aunt, impatiently. 'Can't he speak?'

'Be calm, my dear ma'am,' said Mr. Chillip, in his softest accents.

'There is no longer any occasion for uneasiness, ma'am. Be calm.'

It has since been considered almost a miracle that my aunt didn't shake him, and shake what he had to say, out of him. She only shook her own head at him, but in a way that made him quail.

'Well, ma'am,' resumed Mr. Chillip, as soon as he had courage, 'I am happy to congratulate you. All is now over, ma'am, and well over.'

During the five minutes or so that Mr. Chillip devoted to the delivery of this oration, my aunt eyed him narrowly.

'How is she?' said my aunt, folding her arms with her bonnet still tied on one of them.

'Well, ma'am, she will soon be quite comfortable, I hope,' returned Mr. Chillip. 'Quite as comfortable as we can expect a young mother to be, under these melancholy domestic circumstances. There cannot be any objection to your seeing her presently, ma'am. It may do her good.'

'And SHE. How is SHE?' said my aunt, sharply.

Mr. Chillip laid his head a little more on one side, and looked at my aunt like an amiable bird.

'The baby,' said my aunt. 'How is she?'

'Ma'am,' returned Mr. Chillip, 'I apprehended you had known. It's a boy.'

My aunt said never a word, but took her bonnet by the strings, in the manner of a sling, aimed a blow at Mr. Chillip's head with it, put it on bent, walked out, and never came back. She vanished like a discontented fairy; or like one of those supernatural beings, whom it was popularly supposed I was entitled to see; and never came back any more.

No. I lay in my basket, and my mother lay in her bed; but Betsey Trotwood Copperfield was for ever in the land of dreams and shadows, the tremendous region whence I had so lately travelled; and the light upon the window of our room shone out upon the earthly bourne of all such travellers, and the mound above the ashes and the dust that once was he, without whom I had never been.

CHAPTER 2. I OBSERVE

The first objects that assume a distinct presence before me, as I look far back, into the blank of my infancy, are my mother with her pretty hair and youthful shape, and Peggotty with no shape at all, and eyes so dark that they seemed to darken their whole neighbourhood in her face, and cheeks and arms so hard and red that I wondered the birds didn't peck her in preference to apples.

I believe I can remember these two at a little distance apart, dwarfed to my sight by stooping down or kneeling on the floor, and I going unsteadily from the one to the other. I have an impression on my mind which I cannot distinguish from actual remembrance, of the touch of Peggotty's forefinger as she used to hold it out to me, and of its being roughened by needlework, like a pocket nutmeg-grater.

This may be fancy, though I think the memory of most of us can go farther back into such times than many of us suppose; just as I believe the power of observation in numbers of very young children to be quite wonderful for its closeness and accuracy. Indeed, I think that most grown men who are remarkable in this respect, may with greater propriety be said not to have lost the faculty, than to have acquired it; the rather, as I generally observe such men to retain a certain freshness, and gentleness, and capacity of being pleased, which are also an inheritance they have preserved from their childhood.

I might have a misgiving that I am 'meandering' in stopping to say this, but that it brings me to remark that I build these conclusions, in part upon my own experience of myself; and if it should appear from anything I may set down in this narrative that I was a child of close observation, or that as a man I have a strong memory of my childhood, I undoubtedly lay claim to both of these characteristics.

Looking back, as I was saying, into the blank of my infancy, the first objects I can remember as standing out by themselves from a confusion of things, are my mother and Peggotty. What else do I remember? Let me see.

There comes out of the cloud, our house—not new to me, but quite familiar, in its earliest remembrance. On the ground-floor is Peggotty's kitchen, opening into a back yard; with a pigeon-house on a pole, in the centre, without any pigeons in it; a great dog-kennel in a corner, without any dog; and a quantity of fowls that look terribly tall to me, walking about, in a menacing and ferocious manner. There is one cock who gets upon a post to crow, and seems to take particular notice of me as I look at him through the kitchen window, who makes me shiver, he is so fierce. Of the geese outside the side-gate who come waddling after me with their long necks stretched out when I go that way, I dream at night: as a man environed by wild beasts might dream of lions.

Here is a long passage—what an enormous perspective I make of it!—leading from Peggotty's kitchen to the front door. A dark store-room opens out of it, and that is a place to be run past at night; for I don't know what may be among those tubs and jars and old tea-chests, when there is nobody in there with a dimly-burning light, letting a mouldy air come out of the door, in which there is the smell of soap, pickles, pepper, candles, and coffee, all at one whiff. Then there are the two parlours: the parlour in which we sit of an evening, my mother and I and Peggotty—for Peggotty is quite our companion, when her work is done and we are alone—and the best parlour where we sit on a Sunday; grandly, but not so comfortably. There is something of a doleful air about that room to me, for Peggotty has told me—I don't know when, but apparently ages ago—about my father's funeral, and the company having their black cloaks put on. One Sunday night my mother reads to Peggotty and me in there, how Lazarus was raised up from the dead. And I am so frightened that they are afterwards obliged to take me out of bed, and show me the quiet churchyard out of the bedroom window, with the dead all lying in their graves at rest, below the solemn moon.

There is nothing half so green that I know anywhere, as the grass of that churchyard; nothing half so shady as its trees; nothing half so quiet as its tombstones. The sheep are feeding there, when I kneel up, early in the morning, in my little bed in a closet within my mother's room, to look out at it; and I see the red light shining on the sun-dial, and think within myself, 'Is the sun-dial glad, I wonder, that it can tell the time again?'

Here is our pew in the church. What a high-backed pew! With a window near it, out of which our house can be seen, and IS seen many times during the morning's service, by Peggotty, who likes to make herself as sure as she can that it's not being robbed, or is not in flames. But though Peggotty's eye wanders, she is much offended if mine does, and frowns to me, as I stand upon the seat, that I am to look at the clergyman. But I can't always look at him—I know him without that white thing on, and I am afraid of his wondering why I stare so, and perhaps stopping the service to inquire—and what am I to do? It's a dreadful thing to gape, but I must do something. I look at my mother, but she pretends not to see me. I look at a boy in the aisle, and he makes faces at me. I look at the sunlight coming in at the open door through the porch, and there I see a stray sheep—I don't mean a sinner, but mutton—half making up his mind to come into the church. I feel that if I looked at him any longer, I might be tempted to say something out loud; and what would become of me then! I look up at the monumental tablets on the wall, and try to think of Mr. Bodgers late of this parish, and what the feelings of Mrs. Bodgers must have been, when affliction sore, long time Mr. Bodgers bore, and physicians were in vain. I wonder whether they called in Mr. Chillip, and he was in vain; and if so, how he likes to be reminded of it once a week. I look from Mr. Chillip, in his Sunday neckcloth, to the pulpit; and think what a good place it would be to play in, and what a castle it would make, with another boy coming up the stairs to attack it, and having the velvet cushion with the tassels thrown down on his head. In time my eyes gradually shut up; and, from seeming to hear the clergyman singing a drowsy song in the heat, I hear nothing, until I fall off the seat with a crash, and am taken out, more dead than alive, by Peggotty.

And now I see the outside of our house, with the latticed bedroom-windows standing open to let in the sweet-smelling air, and the ragged old rooks'-nests still dangling in the elm-trees at the bottom of the front garden. Now I am in the garden at the back, beyond the yard where the empty pigeon-house and dog-kennel are—a very preserve of butterflies, as I remember it, with a high fence, and a gate and padlock; where the fruit clusters on the trees, riper and richer than fruit has ever been since, in any other garden, and where my mother gathers some in a basket, while I stand by, bolting furtive gooseberries, and trying to look unmoved. A great wind rises, and the summer is gone in a moment. We are playing in the winter twilight, dancing about the parlour. When my mother is out of breath and rests herself in an elbow-chair, I watch her winding her bright curls round her fingers, and straitening her waist, and nobody knows better than I do that she likes to look so well, and is proud of being so pretty.

That is among my very earliest impressions. That, and a sense that we were both a little afraid of Peggotty, and submitted ourselves in most things to her direction, were among the first opinions—if they may be so called—that I ever derived from what I saw.

Peggotty and I were sitting one night by the parlour fire, alone. I had been reading to Peggotty about crocodiles. I must have read very perspicuously, or the poor soul must have been deeply interested, for I remember she had a cloudy impression, after I had done, that they were a sort of vegetable. I was tired of reading, and dead sleepy; but having leave, as a high treat, to sit up until my mother came home from spending the evening at a neighbour's, I would rather have died upon my post (of course) than have gone to bed. I had reached that stage of sleepiness when Peggotty seemed to swell and grow immensely large. I propped my eyelids open with my two forefingers, and looked perseveringly at her as she sat at work; at the little bit of wax-candle she kept for her thread—how old it looked, being so wrinkled in all directions!—at the little house with a thatched roof, where the yard-measure lived; at her work-box with a sliding lid, with a view of St. Paul's Cathedral (with a pink dome) painted on the top; at the brass thimble on her finger; at herself, whom I thought lovely. I felt so sleepy, that I knew if I lost sight of anything for a moment, I was gone.

'Peggotty,' says I, suddenly, 'were you ever married?'

'Lord, Master Davy,' replied Peggotty. 'What's put marriage in your head?'

She answered with such a start, that it quite awoke me. And then she stopped in her work, and looked at me, with her needle drawn out to its thread's length.

'But WERE you ever married, Peggotty?' says I. 'You are a very handsome woman, an't you?'

I thought her in a different style from my mother, certainly; but of another school of beauty, I considered her a perfect example. There was a red velvet footstool in the best parlour, on which my mother had painted a nosegay. The ground-work of that stool, and Peggotty's complexion appeared to me to be one and the same thing. The stool was smooth, and Peggotty was rough, but that made no difference.

'Me handsome, Davy!' said Peggotty. 'Lawk, no, my dear! But what put marriage in your head?'

'I don't know!—You mustn't marry more than one person at a time, may you, Peggotty?'

'Certainly not,' says Peggotty, with the promptest decision.

'But if you marry a person, and the person dies, why then you may marry another person, mayn't you, Peggotty?'

'YOU MAY,' says Peggotty, 'if you choose, my dear. That's a matter of opinion.'

'But what is your opinion, Peggotty?' said I.

I asked her, and looked curiously at her, because she looked so curiously at me.

'My opinion is,' said Peggotty, taking her eyes from me, after a little indecision and going on with her work, 'that I never was married myself, Master Davy, and that I don't expect to be. That's all I know about the subject.'

'You an't cross, I suppose, Peggotty, are you?' said I, after sitting quiet for a minute.

I really thought she was, she had been so short with me; but I was quite mistaken: for she laid aside her work (which was a stocking of her own), and opening her arms wide, took my curly head within them, and gave it a good squeeze. I know it was a good squeeze, because, being very plump, whenever she made any little exertion after she was dressed, some of the buttons on the back of her gown flew off. And I recollect two bursting to the opposite side of the parlour, while she was hugging me.

'Now let me hear some more about the Crorkindills,' said Peggotty, who was not quite right in the name yet, 'for I an't heard half enough.'

I couldn't quite understand why Peggotty looked so queer, or why she was so ready to go back to the crocodiles. However, we returned to those monsters, with fresh wakefulness on my part, and we left their eggs in the sand for the sun to hatch; and we ran away from them, and baffled them by constantly turning, which they were unable to do quickly, on account of their unwieldy make; and we went into the water after them, as natives, and put sharp pieces of timber down their throats; and in short we ran the whole crocodile gauntlet. I did, at least; but I had my doubts of Peggotty, who was thoughtfully sticking her needle into various parts of her face and arms, all the time.

We had exhausted the crocodiles, and begun with the alligators, when the garden-bell rang. We went out to the door; and there was my mother, looking unusually pretty, I thought, and with her a gentleman with beautiful black hair and whiskers, who had walked home with us from church last Sunday.

As my mother stooped down on the threshold to take me in her arms and kiss me, the gentleman said I was a more highly privileged little fellow than a monarch—or something like that; for my later understanding comes, I am sensible, to my aid here.

'What does that mean?' I asked him, over her shoulder.

He patted me on the head; but somehow, I didn't like him or his deep voice, and I was jealous that his hand should touch my mother's in touching me—which it did. I put it away, as well as I could.

'Oh, Davy!' remonstrated my mother.

'Dear boy!' said the gentleman. 'I cannot wonder at his devotion!'

I never saw such a beautiful colour on my mother's face before. She gently chid me for being rude; and, keeping me close to her shawl, turned to thank the gentleman for taking so much trouble as to bring her home. She put out her hand to him as she spoke, and, as he met it with his own, she glanced, I thought, at me.

'Let us say "good night", my fine boy,' said the gentleman, when he had bent his head—I saw him!—over my mother's little glove.

'Good night!' said I.

'Come! Let us be the best friends in the world!' said the gentleman, laughing. 'Shake hands!'

My right hand was in my mother's left, so I gave him the other.

'Why, that's the Wrong hand, Davy!' laughed the gentleman.

MY mother drew my right hand forward, but I was resolved, for my former reason, not to give it him, and I did not. I gave him the other, and he shook it heartily, and said I was a brave fellow, and went away.

At this minute I see him turn round in the garden, and give us a last look with his ill-omened black eyes, before the door was shut.

Peggotty, who had not said a word or moved a finger, secured the fastenings instantly, and we all went into the parlour. My mother, contrary to her usual habit, instead of coming to the elbow-chair by the fire, remained at the other end of the room, and sat singing to herself. —'Hope you have had a pleasant evening, ma'am,' said Peggotty, standing as stiff as a barrel in the centre of the room, with a candlestick in her hand.

'Much obliged to you, Peggotty,' returned my mother, in a cheerful voice, 'I have had a VERY pleasant evening.'

'A stranger or so makes an agreeable change,' suggested Peggotty.

'A very agreeable change, indeed,' returned my mother.

Peggotty continuing to stand motionless in the middle of the room, and my mother resuming her singing, I fell asleep, though I was not so sound asleep but that I could hear voices, without hearing what they said. When I half awoke from this uncomfortable doze, I found Peggotty and my mother both in tears, and both talking.

'Not such a one as this, Mr. Copperfield wouldn't have liked,' said Peggotty. 'That I say, and that I swear!'

'Good Heavens!' cried my mother, 'you'll drive me mad! Was ever any poor girl so ill-used by her servants as I am! Why do I do myself the injustice of calling myself a girl? Have I never been married, Peggotty?'

'God knows you have, ma'am,' returned Peggotty. 'Then, how can you dare,' said my mother—'you know I don't mean how can you dare, Peggotty, but how can you have the heart—to make me so uncomfortable and say such bitter things to me, when you are well aware that I haven't, out of this place, a single friend to turn to?'

'The more's the reason,' returned Peggotty, 'for saying that it won't do. No! That it won't do. No! No price could make it do. No!'—I thought Peggotty would have thrown the candlestick away, she was so emphatic with it.

'How can you be so aggravating,' said my mother, shedding more tears than before, 'as to talk in such an unjust manner! How can you go on as if it was all settled and arranged, Peggotty, when I tell you over and over again, you cruel thing, that beyond the commonest civilities nothing has passed! You talk of admiration. What am I to do? If people are so silly as to indulge the sentiment, is it my fault? What am I to do, I ask you? Would you wish me to shave my head and black my face, or disfigure myself with a burn, or a scald, or something of that sort? I dare say you would, Peggotty. I dare say you'd quite enjoy it.'

Peggotty seemed to take this aspersion very much to heart, I thought.

'And my dear boy,' cried my mother, coming to the elbow-chair in which I was, and caressing me, 'my own little Davy! Is it to be hinted to me that I am wanting in affection for my precious treasure, the dearest little fellow that ever was!'

'Nobody never went and hinted no such a thing,' said Peggotty.

'You did, Peggotty!' returned my mother. 'You know you did. What else was it possible to infer from what you said, you unkind creature, when you know as well as I do, that on his account only last quarter I wouldn't buy myself a new parasol, though that old green one is frayed the whole way up, and the fringe is perfectly mangy? You know it is, Peggotty. You can't deny it.' Then, turning affectionately to me, with her cheek against mine, 'Am I a naughty mama to you, Davy? Am I a nasty, cruel, selfish, bad mama? Say I am, my child; say "yes", dear boy, and Peggotty will love you; and Peggotty's love is a great deal better than mine, Davy. I don't love you at all, do I?'

At this, we all fell a-crying together. I think I was the loudest of the party, but I am sure we were all sincere about it. I was quite heart-broken myself, and am afraid that in the first transports of wounded tenderness I called Peggotty a 'Beast'. That honest creature was in deep affliction, I remember, and must have become quite buttonless on the occasion; for a little volley of those explosives went off, when, after having made it up with my mother, she kneeled down by the elbow-chair, and made it up with me.

We went to bed greatly dejected. My sobs kept waking me, for a long time; and when one very strong sob quite hoisted me up in bed, I found my mother sitting on the coverlet, and leaning over me. I fell asleep in her arms, after that, and slept soundly.

Whether it was the following Sunday when I saw the gentleman again, or whether there was any greater lapse of time before he reappeared, I cannot recall. I don't profess to be clear about dates. But there he was, in church, and he walked home with us afterwards. He came in, too, to look at a famous geranium we had, in the parlour-window. It did not appear to me that he took much notice of it, but before he went he asked my mother to give him a bit of the blossom. She begged him to choose it for himself, but he refused to do that—I could not understand why—so she plucked it for him, and gave it into his hand. He said he would never, never part with it any more; and I thought he must be quite a fool not to know that it would fall to pieces in a day or two.

Peggotty began to be less with us, of an evening, than she had always been. My mother deferred to her very much—more than usual, it occurred to me—and we were all three excellent friends; still we were different from what we used to be, and were not so comfortable among ourselves. Sometimes I fancied that Peggotty perhaps objected to my mother's wearing all the pretty dresses she had in her drawers, or to her going so often to visit at that neighbour's; but I couldn't, to my satisfaction, make out how it was.

Gradually, I became used to seeing the gentleman with the black whiskers. I liked him no better than at first, and had the same uneasy jealousy of him; but if I had any reason for it beyond a child's instinctive dislike, and a general idea that Peggotty and I could make much of my mother without any help, it certainly was not THE reason that I might have found if I had been older. No such thing came into my mind, or near it. I could observe, in little pieces, as it were; but as to making a net of a number of these pieces, and catching anybody in it, that was, as yet, beyond me.

One autumn morning I was with my mother in the front garden, when Mr. Murdstone—I knew him by that name now—came by, on horseback. He reined up his horse to salute my mother, and said he was going to Lowestoft to see some friends who were there with a yacht, and merrily proposed to take me on the saddle before him if I would like the ride.

The air was so clear and pleasant, and the horse seemed to like the idea of the ride so much himself, as he stood snorting and pawing at the garden-gate, that I had a great desire to go. So I was sent upstairs to Peggotty to be made spruce; and in the meantime Mr. Murdstone dismounted, and, with his horse's bridle drawn over his arm, walked slowly up and down on the outer side of the sweetbriar fence, while my mother walked slowly up and down on the inner to keep him company. I recollect Peggotty and I peeping out at them from my little window; I recollect how closely they seemed to be examining the sweetbriar between them, as they strolled along; and how, from being in a perfectly angelic temper, Peggotty turned cross in a moment, and brushed my hair the wrong way, excessively hard.

Mr. Murdstone and I were soon off, and trotting along on the green turf by the side of the road. He held me quite easily with one arm, and I don't think I was restless usually; but I could not make up my mind to sit in front of him without turning my head sometimes, and looking up in his face. He had that kind of shallow black eye—I want a better word to express an eye that has no depth in it to be looked into—which, when it is abstracted, seems from some peculiarity of light to be disfigured, for a moment at a time, by a cast. Several times when I glanced at him, I observed that appearance with a sort of awe, and wondered what he was thinking about so closely. His hair and whiskers were blacker and thicker, looked at so near, than even I had given them credit for being. A squareness about the lower part of his face, and the dotted indication of the strong black beard he shaved close every day, reminded me of the wax-work that had travelled into our neighbourhood some half-a-year before. This, his regular eyebrows, and the rich white, and black, and brown, of his complexion—confound his complexion, and his memory!—made me think him, in spite of my misgivings, a very handsome man. I have no doubt that my poor dear mother thought him so too.

We went to an hotel by the sea, where two gentlemen were smoking cigars in a room by themselves. Each of them was lying on at least four chairs, and had a large rough jacket on. In a corner was a heap of coats and boat-cloaks, and a flag, all bundled up together.

They both rolled on to their feet in an untidy sort of manner, when we came in, and said, 'Halloa, Murdstone! We thought you were dead!'

'Not yet,' said Mr. Murdstone.

'And who's this shaver?' said one of the gentlemen, taking hold of me.

'That's Davy,' returned Mr. Murdstone.

'Davy who?' said the gentleman. 'Jones?'

'Copperfield,' said Mr. Murdstone.

'What! Bewitching Mrs. Copperfield's encumbrance?' cried the gentleman. 'The pretty little widow?'

'Quinion,' said Mr. Murdstone, 'take care, if you please. Somebody's sharp.'

'Who is?' asked the gentleman, laughing. I looked up, quickly; being curious to know.

'Only Brooks of Sheffield,' said Mr. Murdstone.

I was quite relieved to find that it was only Brooks of Sheffield; for, at first, I really thought it was I.

There seemed to be something very comical in the reputation of Mr. Brooks of Sheffield, for both the gentlemen laughed heartily when he was mentioned, and Mr. Murdstone was a good deal amused also. After some laughing, the gentleman whom he had called Quinion, said:

'And what is the opinion of Brooks of Sheffield, in reference to the projected business?'

'Why, I don't know that Brooks understands much about it at present,' replied Mr. Murdstone; 'but he is not generally favourable, I believe.'

There was more laughter at this, and Mr. Quinion said he would ring the bell for some sherry in which to drink to Brooks. This he did; and when the wine came, he made me have a little, with a biscuit, and, before I drank it, stand up and say, 'Confusion to Brooks of Sheffield!' The toast was received with great applause, and such hearty laughter that it made me laugh too; at which they laughed the more. In short, we quite enjoyed ourselves.

We walked about on the cliff after that, and sat on the grass, and looked at things through a telescope—I could make out nothing myself when it was put to my eye, but I pretended I could—and then we came back to the hotel to an early dinner. All the time we were out, the two gentlemen smoked incessantly—which, I thought, if I might judge from the smell of their rough coats, they must have been doing, ever since the coats had first come home from the tailor's. I must not forget that we went on board the yacht, where they all three descended into the cabin, and were busy with some papers. I saw them quite hard at work, when I looked down through the open skylight. They left me, during this time, with a very nice man with a very large head of red hair and a very small shiny hat upon it, who had got a cross-barred shirt or waistcoat on, with 'Skylark' in capital letters across the chest. I thought it was his name; and that as he lived on board ship and hadn't a street door to put his name on, he put it there instead; but when I called him Mr. Skylark, he said it meant the vessel.

I observed all day that Mr. Murdstone was graver and steadier than the two gentlemen. They were very gay and careless. They joked freely with one another, but seldom with him. It appeared to me that he was more clever and cold than they were, and that they regarded him with something of my own feeling. I remarked that, once or twice when Mr. Quinion was talking, he looked at Mr. Murdstone sideways, as if to make sure of his not being displeased; and that once when Mr. Passnidge (the other gentleman) was in high spirits, he trod upon his foot, and gave him a secret caution with his eyes, to observe Mr. Murdstone, who was sitting stern and silent. Nor do I recollect that Mr. Murdstone laughed at all that day, except at the Sheffield joke—and that, by the by, was his own.

We went home early in the evening. It was a very fine evening, and my mother and he had another stroll by the sweetbriar, while I was sent in to get my tea. When he was gone, my mother asked me all about the day I had had, and what they had said and done. I mentioned what they had said about her, and she laughed, and told me they were impudent fellows who talked nonsense—but I knew it pleased her. I knew it quite as well as I know it now. I took the opportunity of asking if she was at all acquainted with Mr. Brooks of Sheffield, but she answered No, only she supposed he must be a manufacturer in the knife and fork way.

Can I say of her face—altered as I have reason to remember it, perished as I know it is—that it is gone, when here it comes before me at this instant, as distinct as any face that I may choose to look on in a crowded street? Can I say of her innocent and girlish beauty, that it faded, and was no more, when its breath falls on my cheek now, as it fell that night? Can I say she ever changed, when my remembrance brings her back to life, thus only; and, truer to its loving youth than I have been, or man ever is, still holds fast what it cherished then?

I write of her just as she was when I had gone to bed after this talk, and she came to bid me good night. She kneeled down playfully by the side of the bed, and laying her chin upon her hands, and laughing, said:

'What was it they said, Davy? Tell me again. I can't believe it.'

'"Bewitching—"' I began.

My mother put her hands upon my lips to stop me.

'It was never bewitching,' she said, laughing. 'It never could have been bewitching, Davy. Now I know it wasn't!'

'Yes, it was. "Bewitching Mrs. Copperfield",' I repeated stoutly. 'And, "pretty."'

'No, no, it was never pretty. Not pretty,' interposed my mother, laying her fingers on my lips again.

'Yes it was. "Pretty little widow."'

'What foolish, impudent creatures!' cried my mother, laughing and covering her face. 'What ridiculous men! An't they? Davy dear—'

'Well, Ma.'

'Don't tell Peggotty; she might be angry with them. I am dreadfully angry with them myself; but I would rather Peggotty didn't know.'

I promised, of course; and we kissed one another over and over again, and I soon fell fast asleep.

It seems to me, at this distance of time, as if it were the next day when Peggotty broached the striking and adventurous proposition I am about to mention; but it was probably about two months afterwards.

We were sitting as before, one evening (when my mother was out as before), in company with the stocking and the yard-measure, and the bit of wax, and the box with St. Paul's on the lid, and the crocodile book, when Peggotty, after looking at me several times, and opening her mouth as if she were going to speak, without doing it—which I thought was merely gaping, or I should have been rather alarmed—said coaxingly:

'Master Davy, how should you like to go along with me and spend a fortnight at my brother's at Yarmouth? Wouldn't that be a treat?'

'Is your brother an agreeable man, Peggotty?' I inquired, provisionally.

'Oh, what an agreeable man he is!' cried Peggotty, holding up her hands. 'Then there's the sea; and the boats and ships; and the fishermen; and the beach; and Am to play with—'

Peggotty meant her nephew Ham, mentioned in my first chapter; but she spoke of him as a morsel of English Grammar.

I was flushed by her summary of delights, and replied that it would indeed be a treat, but what would my mother say?

'Why then I'll as good as bet a guinea,' said Peggotty, intent upon my face, 'that she'll let us go. I'll ask her, if you like, as soon as ever she comes home. There now!'

'But what's she to do while we're away?' said I, putting my small elbows on the table to argue the point. 'She can't live by herself.'

If Peggotty were looking for a hole, all of a sudden, in the heel of that stocking, it must have been a very little one indeed, and not worth darning.

'I say! Peggotty! She can't live by herself, you know.'

'Oh, bless you!' said Peggotty, looking at me again at last. 'Don't you know? She's going to stay for a fortnight with Mrs. Grayper. Mrs. Grayper's going to have a lot of company.'

Oh! If that was it, I was quite ready to go. I waited, in the utmost impatience, until my mother came home from Mrs. Grayper's (for it was that identical neighbour), to ascertain if we could get leave to carry out this great idea. Without being nearly so much surprised as I had expected, my mother entered into it readily; and it was all arranged that night, and my board and lodging during the visit were to be paid for.

The day soon came for our going. It was such an early day that it came soon, even to me, who was in a fever of expectation, and half afraid that an earthquake or a fiery mountain, or some other great convulsion of nature, might interpose to stop the expedition. We were to go in a carrier's cart, which departed in the morning after breakfast. I would have given any money to have been allowed to wrap myself up over-night, and sleep in my hat and boots.

It touches me nearly now, although I tell it lightly, to recollect how eager I was to leave my happy home; to think how little I suspected what I did leave for ever.

I am glad to recollect that when the carrier's cart was at the gate, and my mother stood there kissing me, a grateful fondness for her and for the old place I had never turned my back upon before, made me cry. I am glad to know that my mother cried too, and that I felt her heart beat against mine.

I am glad to recollect that when the carrier began to move, my mother ran out at the gate, and called to him to stop, that she might kiss me once more. I am glad to dwell upon the earnestness and love with which she lifted up her face to mine, and did so.

As we left her standing in the road, Mr. Murdstone came up to where she was, and seemed to expostulate with her for being so moved. I was looking back round the awning of the cart, and wondered what business it was of his. Peggotty, who was also looking back on the other side, seemed anything but satisfied; as the face she brought back in the cart denoted.

I sat looking at Peggotty for some time, in a reverie on this supposititious case: whether, if she were employed to lose me like the boy in the fairy tale, I should be able to track my way home again by the buttons she would shed.

CHAPTER 3. I HAVE A CHANGE

The carrier's horse was the laziest horse in the world, I should hope, and shuffled along, with his head down, as if he liked to keep people waiting to whom the packages were directed. I fancied, indeed, that he sometimes chuckled audibly over this reflection, but the carrier said he was only troubled with a cough. The carrier had a way of keeping his head down, like his horse, and of drooping sleepily forward as he drove, with one of his arms on each of his knees. I say 'drove', but it struck me that the cart would have gone to Yarmouth quite as well without him, for the horse did all that; and as to conversation, he had no idea of it but whistling.

Peggotty had a basket of refreshments on her knee, which would have lasted us out handsomely, if we had been going to London by the same conveyance. We ate a good deal, and slept a good deal. Peggotty always went to sleep with her chin upon the handle of the basket, her hold of which never relaxed; and I could not have believed unless I had heard her do it, that one defenceless woman could have snored so much.

We made so many deviations up and down lanes, and were such a long time delivering a bedstead at a public-house, and calling at other places, that I was quite tired, and very glad, when we saw Yarmouth. It looked rather spongy and soppy, I thought, as I carried my eye over the great dull waste that lay across the river; and I could not help wondering, if the world were really as round as my geography book said, how any part of it came to be so flat. But I reflected that Yarmouth might be situated at one of the poles; which would account for it.

As we drew a little nearer, and saw the whole adjacent prospect lying a straight low line under the sky, I hinted to Peggotty that a mound or so might have improved it; and also that if the land had been a little more separated from the sea, and the town and the tide had not been quite so much mixed up, like toast and water, it would have been nicer. But Peggotty said, with greater emphasis than usual, that we must take things as we found them, and that, for her part, she was proud to call herself a Yarmouth Bloater.

When we got into the street (which was strange enough to me) and smelt the fish, and pitch, and oakum, and tar, and saw the sailors walking about, and the carts jingling up and down over the stones, I felt that I had done so busy a place an injustice; and said as much to Peggotty, who heard my expressions of delight with great complacency, and told me it was well known (I suppose to those who had the good fortune to be born Bloaters) that Yarmouth was, upon the whole, the finest place in the universe.

'Here's my Am!' screamed Peggotty, 'growed out of knowledge!'

He was waiting for us, in fact, at the public-house; and asked me how I found myself, like an old acquaintance. I did not feel, at first, that I knew him as well as he knew me, because he had never come to our house since the night I was born, and naturally he had the advantage of me. But our intimacy was much advanced by his taking me on his back to carry me home. He was, now, a huge, strong fellow of six feet high, broad in proportion, and round-shouldered; but with a simpering boy's face and curly light hair that gave him quite a sheepish look. He was dressed in a canvas jacket, and a pair of such very stiff trousers that they would have stood quite as well alone, without any legs in them. And you couldn't so properly have said he wore a hat, as that he was covered in a-top, like an old building, with something pitchy.

Ham carrying me on his back and a small box of ours under his arm, and Peggotty carrying another small box of ours, we turned down lanes bestrewn with bits of chips and little hillocks of sand, and went past gas-works, rope-walks, boat-builders' yards, shipwrights' yards, ship-breakers' yards, caulkers' yards, riggers' lofts, smiths' forges, and a great litter of such places, until we came out upon the dull waste I had already seen at a distance; when Ham said,

'Yon's our house, Mas'r Davy!'

I looked in all directions, as far as I could stare over the wilderness, and away at the sea, and away at the river, but no house could I make out. There was a black barge, or some other kind of superannuated boat, not far off, high and dry on the ground, with an iron funnel sticking out of it for a chimney and smoking very cosily; but nothing else in the way of a habitation that was visible to me.

'That's not it?' said I. 'That ship-looking thing?'

'That's it, Mas'r Davy,' returned Ham.

If it had been Aladdin's palace, roc's egg and all, I suppose I could not have been more charmed with the romantic idea of living in it. There was a delightful door cut in the side, and it was roofed in, and there were little windows in it; but the wonderful charm of it was, that it was a real boat which had no doubt been upon the water hundreds of times, and which had never been intended to be lived in, on dry land. That was the captivation of it to me. If it had ever been meant to be lived in, I might have thought it small, or inconvenient, or lonely; but never having been designed for any such use, it became a perfect abode.

It was beautifully clean inside, and as tidy as possible. There was a table, and a Dutch clock, and a chest of drawers, and on the chest of drawers there was a tea-tray with a painting on it of a lady with a parasol, taking a walk with a military-looking child who was trundling a hoop. The tray was kept from tumbling down, by a bible; and the tray, if it had tumbled down, would have smashed a quantity of cups and saucers and a teapot that were grouped around the book. On the walls there were some common coloured pictures, framed and glazed, of scripture subjects; such as I have never seen since in the hands of pedlars, without seeing the whole interior of Peggotty's brother's house again, at one view. Abraham in red going to sacrifice Isaac in blue, and Daniel in yellow cast into a den of green lions, were the most prominent of these. Over the little mantelshelf, was a picture of the 'Sarah Jane' lugger, built at Sunderland, with a real little wooden stern stuck on to it; a work of art, combining composition with carpentry, which I considered to be one of the most enviable possessions that the world could afford. There were some hooks in the beams of the ceiling, the use of which I did not divine then; and some lockers and boxes and conveniences of that sort, which served for seats and eked out the chairs.

All this I saw in the first glance after I crossed the threshold—child-like, according to my theory—and then Peggotty opened a little door and showed me my bedroom. It was the completest and most desirable bedroom ever seen—in the stern of the vessel; with a little window, where the rudder used to go through; a little looking-glass, just the right height for me, nailed against the wall, and framed with oyster-shells; a little bed, which there was just room enough to get into; and a nosegay of seaweed in a blue mug on the table. The walls were whitewashed as white as milk, and the patchwork counterpane made my eyes quite ache with its brightness. One thing I particularly noticed in this delightful house, was the smell of fish; which was so searching, that when I took out my pocket-handkerchief to wipe my nose, I found it smelt exactly as if it had wrapped up a lobster. On my imparting this discovery in confidence to Peggotty, she informed me that her brother dealt in lobsters, crabs, and crawfish; and I afterwards found that a heap of these creatures, in a state of wonderful conglomeration with one another, and never leaving off pinching whatever they laid hold of, were usually to be found in a little wooden outhouse where the pots and kettles were kept.

We were welcomed by a very civil woman in a white apron, whom I had seen curtseying at the door when I was on Ham's back, about a quarter of a mile off. Likewise by a most beautiful little girl (or I thought her so) with a necklace of blue beads on, who wouldn't let me kiss her when I offered to, but ran away and hid herself. By and by, when we had dined in a sumptuous manner off boiled dabs, melted butter, and potatoes, with a chop for me, a hairy man with a very good-natured face came home. As he called Peggotty 'Lass', and gave her a hearty smack on the cheek, I had no doubt, from the general propriety of her conduct, that he was her brother; and so he turned out—being presently introduced to me as Mr. Peggotty, the master of the house.

'Glad to see you, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'You'll find us rough, sir, but you'll find us ready.'

I thanked him, and replied that I was sure I should be happy in such a delightful place.

'How's your Ma, sir?' said Mr. Peggotty. 'Did you leave her pretty jolly?'

I gave Mr. Peggotty to understand that she was as jolly as I could wish, and that she desired her compliments—which was a polite fiction on my part.

'I'm much obleeged to her, I'm sure,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'Well, sir, if you can make out here, fur a fortnut, 'long wi' her,' nodding at his sister, 'and Ham, and little Em'ly, we shall be proud of your company.'

Having done the honours of his house in this hospitable manner, Mr. Peggotty went out to wash himself in a kettleful of hot water, remarking that 'cold would never get his muck off'. He soon returned, greatly improved in appearance; but so rubicund, that I couldn't help thinking his face had this in common with the lobsters, crabs, and crawfish,—that it went into the hot water very black, and came out very red.

After tea, when the door was shut and all was made snug (the nights being cold and misty now), it seemed to me the most delicious retreat that the imagination of man could conceive. To hear the wind getting up out at sea, to know that the fog was creeping over the desolate flat outside, and to look at the fire, and think that there was no house near but this one, and this one a boat, was like enchantment. Little Em'ly had overcome her shyness, and was sitting by my side upon the lowest and least of the lockers, which was just large enough for us two, and just fitted into the chimney corner. Mrs. Peggotty with the white apron, was knitting on the opposite side of the fire. Peggotty at her needlework was as much at home with St. Paul's and the bit of wax-candle, as if they had never known any other roof. Ham, who had been giving me my first lesson in all-fours, was trying to recollect a scheme of telling fortunes with the dirty cards, and was printing off fishy impressions of his thumb on all the cards he turned. Mr. Peggotty was smoking his pipe. I felt it was a time for conversation and confidence.

'Mr. Peggotty!' says I.

'Sir,' says he.

'Did you give your son the name of Ham, because you lived in a sort of ark?'

Mr. Peggotty seemed to think it a deep idea, but answered:

'No, sir. I never giv him no name.'

'Who gave him that name, then?' said I, putting question number two of the catechism to Mr. Peggotty.

'Why, sir, his father giv it him,' said Mr. Peggotty.

'I thought you were his father!'

'My brother Joe was his father,' said Mr. Peggotty.

'Dead, Mr. Peggotty?' I hinted, after a respectful pause.

'Drowndead,' said Mr. Peggotty.

I was very much surprised that Mr. Peggotty was not Ham's father, and began to wonder whether I was mistaken about his relationship to anybody else there. I was so curious to know, that I made up my mind to have it out with Mr. Peggotty.

'Little Em'ly,' I said, glancing at her. 'She is your daughter, isn't she, Mr. Peggotty?'

'No, sir. My brother-in-law, Tom, was her father.'

I couldn't help it. '—Dead, Mr. Peggotty?' I hinted, after another respectful silence.

'Drowndead,' said Mr. Peggotty.

I felt the difficulty of resuming the subject, but had not got to the bottom of it yet, and must get to the bottom somehow. So I said:

'Haven't you ANY children, Mr. Peggotty?'

'No, master,' he answered with a short laugh. 'I'm a bacheldore.'

'A bachelor!' I said, astonished. 'Why, who's that, Mr. Peggotty?' pointing to the person in the apron who was knitting.

'That's Missis Gummidge,' said Mr. Peggotty.

'Gummidge, Mr. Peggotty?'

But at this point Peggotty—I mean my own peculiar Peggotty—made such impressive motions to me not to ask any more questions, that I could only sit and look at all the silent company, until it was time to go to bed. Then, in the privacy of my own little cabin, she informed me that Ham and Em'ly were an orphan nephew and niece, whom my host had at different times adopted in their childhood, when they were left destitute: and that Mrs. Gummidge was the widow of his partner in a boat, who had died very poor. He was but a poor man himself, said Peggotty, but as good as gold and as true as steel—those were her similes. The only subject, she informed me, on which he ever showed a violent temper or swore an oath, was this generosity of his; and if it were ever referred to, by any one of them, he struck the table a heavy blow with his right hand (had split it on one such occasion), and swore a dreadful oath that he would be 'Gormed' if he didn't cut and run for good, if it was ever mentioned again. It appeared, in answer to my inquiries, that nobody had the least idea of the etymology of this terrible verb passive to be gormed; but that they all regarded it as constituting a most solemn imprecation.

I was very sensible of my entertainer's goodness, and listened to the women's going to bed in another little crib like mine at the opposite end of the boat, and to him and Ham hanging up two hammocks for themselves on the hooks I had noticed in the roof, in a very luxurious state of mind, enhanced by my being sleepy. As slumber gradually stole upon me, I heard the wind howling out at sea and coming on across the flat so fiercely, that I had a lazy apprehension of the great deep rising in the night. But I bethought myself that I was in a boat, after all; and that a man like Mr. Peggotty was not a bad person to have on board if anything did happen.

Nothing happened, however, worse than morning. Almost as soon as it shone upon the oyster-shell frame of my mirror I was out of bed, and out with little Em'ly, picking up stones upon the beach.

'You're quite a sailor, I suppose?' I said to Em'ly. I don't know that I supposed anything of the kind, but I felt it an act of gallantry to say something; and a shining sail close to us made such a pretty little image of itself, at the moment, in her bright eye, that it came into my head to say this.

'No,' replied Em'ly, shaking her head, 'I'm afraid of the sea.'

'Afraid!' I said, with a becoming air of boldness, and looking very big at the mighty ocean. 'I an't!'

'Ah! but it's cruel,' said Em'ly. 'I have seen it very cruel to some of our men. I have seen it tear a boat as big as our house, all to pieces.'

'I hope it wasn't the boat that—'

'That father was drownded in?' said Em'ly. 'No. Not that one, I never see that boat.'

'Nor him?' I asked her.

Little Em'ly shook her head. 'Not to remember!'

Here was a coincidence! I immediately went into an explanation how I had never seen my own father; and how my mother and I had always lived by ourselves in the happiest state imaginable, and lived so then, and always meant to live so; and how my father's grave was in the churchyard near our house, and shaded by a tree, beneath the boughs of which I had walked and heard the birds sing many a pleasant morning. But there were some differences between Em'ly's orphanhood and mine, it appeared. She had lost her mother before her father; and where her father's grave was no one knew, except that it was somewhere in the depths of the sea.

'Besides,' said Em'ly, as she looked about for shells and pebbles, 'your father was a gentleman and your mother is a lady; and my father was a fisherman and my mother was a fisherman's daughter, and my uncle Dan is a fisherman.'

'Dan is Mr. Peggotty, is he?' said I.

'Uncle Dan—yonder,' answered Em'ly, nodding at the boat-house.

'Yes. I mean him. He must be very good, I should think?'

'Good?' said Em'ly. 'If I was ever to be a lady, I'd give him a sky-blue coat with diamond buttons, nankeen trousers, a red velvet waistcoat, a cocked hat, a large gold watch, a silver pipe, and a box of money.'

I said I had no doubt that Mr. Peggotty well deserved these treasures. I must acknowledge that I felt it difficult to picture him quite at his ease in the raiment proposed for him by his grateful little niece, and that I was particularly doubtful of the policy of the cocked hat; but I kept these sentiments to myself.

Little Em'ly had stopped and looked up at the sky in her enumeration of these articles, as if they were a glorious vision. We went on again, picking up shells and pebbles.

'You would like to be a lady?' I said.

Emily looked at me, and laughed and nodded 'yes'.

'I should like it very much. We would all be gentlefolks together, then. Me, and uncle, and Ham, and Mrs. Gummidge. We wouldn't mind then, when there comes stormy weather.—-Not for our own sakes, I mean. We would for the poor fishermen's, to be sure, and we'd help 'em with money when they come to any hurt.' This seemed to me to be a very satisfactory and therefore not at all improbable picture. I expressed my pleasure in the contemplation of it, and little Em'ly was emboldened to say, shyly,

'Don't you think you are afraid of the sea, now?'

It was quiet enough to reassure me, but I have no doubt if I had seen a moderately large wave come tumbling in, I should have taken to my heels, with an awful recollection of her drowned relations. However, I said 'No,' and I added, 'You don't seem to be either, though you say you are,'—for she was walking much too near the brink of a sort of old jetty or wooden causeway we had strolled upon, and I was afraid of her falling over.

'I'm not afraid in this way,' said little Em'ly. 'But I wake when it blows, and tremble to think of Uncle Dan and Ham and believe I hear 'em crying out for help. That's why I should like so much to be a lady. But I'm not afraid in this way. Not a bit. Look here!'

She started from my side, and ran along a jagged timber which protruded from the place we stood upon, and overhung the deep water at some height, without the least defence. The incident is so impressed on my remembrance, that if I were a draughtsman I could draw its form here, I dare say, accurately as it was that day, and little Em'ly springing forward to her destruction (as it appeared to me), with a look that I have never forgotten, directed far out to sea.

The light, bold, fluttering little figure turned and came back safe to me, and I soon laughed at my fears, and at the cry I had uttered; fruitlessly in any case, for there was no one near. But there have been times since, in my manhood, many times there have been, when I have thought, Is it possible, among the possibilities of hidden things, that in the sudden rashness of the child and her wild look so far off, there was any merciful attraction of her into danger, any tempting her towards him permitted on the part of her dead father, that her life might have a chance of ending that day? There has been a time since when I have wondered whether, if the life before her could have been revealed to me at a glance, and so revealed as that a child could fully comprehend it, and if her preservation could have depended on a motion of my hand, I ought to have held it up to save her. There has been a time since—I do not say it lasted long, but it has been—when I have asked myself the question, would it have been better for little Em'ly to have had the waters close above her head that morning in my sight; and when I have answered Yes, it would have been.

This may be premature. I have set it down too soon, perhaps. But let it stand.

We strolled a long way, and loaded ourselves with things that we thought curious, and put some stranded starfish carefully back into the water—I hardly know enough of the race at this moment to be quite certain whether they had reason to feel obliged to us for doing so, or the reverse—and then made our way home to Mr. Peggotty's dwelling. We stopped under the lee of the lobster-outhouse to exchange an innocent kiss, and went in to breakfast glowing with health and pleasure.

'Like two young mavishes,' Mr. Peggotty said. I knew this meant, in our local dialect, like two young thrushes, and received it as a compliment.

Of course I was in love with little Em'ly. I am sure I loved that baby quite as truly, quite as tenderly, with greater purity and more disinterestedness, than can enter into the best love of a later time of life, high and ennobling as it is. I am sure my fancy raised up something round that blue-eyed mite of a child, which etherealized, and made a very angel of her. If, any sunny forenoon, she had spread a little pair of wings and flown away before my eyes, I don't think I should have regarded it as much more than I had had reason to expect.

We used to walk about that dim old flat at Yarmouth in a loving manner, hours and hours. The days sported by us, as if Time had not grown up himself yet, but were a child too, and always at play. I told Em'ly I adored her, and that unless she confessed she adored me I should be reduced to the necessity of killing myself with a sword. She said she did, and I have no doubt she did.

As to any sense of inequality, or youthfulness, or other difficulty in our way, little Em'ly and I had no such trouble, because we had no future. We made no more provision for growing older, than we did for growing younger. We were the admiration of Mrs. Gummidge and Peggotty, who used to whisper of an evening when we sat, lovingly, on our little locker side by side, 'Lor! wasn't it beautiful!' Mr. Peggotty smiled at us from behind his pipe, and Ham grinned all the evening and did nothing else. They had something of the sort of pleasure in us, I suppose, that they might have had in a pretty toy, or a pocket model of the Colosseum.

I soon found out that Mrs. Gummidge did not always make herself so agreeable as she might have been expected to do, under the circumstances of her residence with Mr. Peggotty. Mrs. Gummidge's was rather a fretful disposition, and she whimpered more sometimes than was comfortable for other parties in so small an establishment. I was very sorry for her; but there were moments when it would have been more agreeable, I thought, if Mrs. Gummidge had had a convenient apartment of her own to retire to, and had stopped there until her spirits revived.

Mr. Peggotty went occasionally to a public-house called The Willing Mind. I discovered this, by his being out on the second or third evening of our visit, and by Mrs. Gummidge's looking up at the Dutch clock, between eight and nine, and saying he was there, and that, what was more, she had known in the morning he would go there.

Mrs. Gummidge had been in a low state all day, and had burst into tears in the forenoon, when the fire smoked. 'I am a lone lorn creetur',' were Mrs. Gummidge's words, when that unpleasant occurrence took place, 'and everythink goes contrary with me.'

'Oh, it'll soon leave off,' said Peggotty—I again mean our Peggotty—'and besides, you know, it's not more disagreeable to you than to us.'

'I feel it more,' said Mrs. Gummidge.

It was a very cold day, with cutting blasts of wind. Mrs. Gummidge's peculiar corner of the fireside seemed to me to be the warmest and snuggest in the place, as her chair was certainly the easiest, but it didn't suit her that day at all. She was constantly complaining of the cold, and of its occasioning a visitation in her back which she called 'the creeps'. At last she shed tears on that subject, and said again that she was 'a lone lorn creetur' and everythink went contrary with her'.

'It is certainly very cold,' said Peggotty. 'Everybody must feel it so.'

'I feel it more than other people,' said Mrs. Gummidge.

So at dinner; when Mrs. Gummidge was always helped immediately after me, to whom the preference was given as a visitor of distinction. The fish were small and bony, and the potatoes were a little burnt. We all acknowledged that we felt this something of a disappointment; but Mrs. Gummidge said she felt it more than we did, and shed tears again, and made that former declaration with great bitterness.

Accordingly, when Mr. Peggotty came home about nine o'clock, this unfortunate Mrs. Gummidge was knitting in her corner, in a very wretched and miserable condition. Peggotty had been working cheerfully. Ham had been patching up a great pair of waterboots; and I, with little Em'ly by my side, had been reading to them. Mrs. Gummidge had never made any other remark than a forlorn sigh, and had never raised her eyes since tea.

'Well, Mates,' said Mr. Peggotty, taking his seat, 'and how are you?'

We all said something, or looked something, to welcome him, except Mrs. Gummidge, who only shook her head over her knitting.

'What's amiss?' said Mr. Peggotty, with a clap of his hands. 'Cheer up, old Mawther!' (Mr. Peggotty meant old girl.)

Mrs. Gummidge did not appear to be able to cheer up. She took out an old black silk handkerchief and wiped her eyes; but instead of putting it in her pocket, kept it out, and wiped them again, and still kept it out, ready for use.

'What's amiss, dame?' said Mr. Peggotty.

'Nothing,' returned Mrs. Gummidge. 'You've come from The Willing Mind, Dan'l?'

'Why yes, I've took a short spell at The Willing Mind tonight,' said Mr. Peggotty.

'I'm sorry I should drive you there,' said Mrs. Gummidge.

'Drive! I don't want no driving,' returned Mr. Peggotty with an honest laugh. 'I only go too ready.'

'Very ready,' said Mrs. Gummidge, shaking her head, and wiping her eyes. 'Yes, yes, very ready. I am sorry it should be along of me that you're so ready.'

'Along o' you! It an't along o' you!' said Mr. Peggotty. 'Don't ye believe a bit on it.'

'Yes, yes, it is,' cried Mrs. Gummidge. 'I know what I am. I know that I am a lone lorn creetur', and not only that everythink goes contrary with me, but that I go contrary with everybody. Yes, yes. I feel more than other people do, and I show it more. It's my misfortun'.'

I really couldn't help thinking, as I sat taking in all this, that the misfortune extended to some other members of that family besides Mrs. Gummidge. But Mr. Peggotty made no such retort, only answering with another entreaty to Mrs. Gummidge to cheer up.

'I an't what I could wish myself to be,' said Mrs. Gummidge. 'I am far from it. I know what I am. My troubles has made me contrary. I feel my troubles, and they make me contrary. I wish I didn't feel 'em, but I do. I wish I could be hardened to 'em, but I an't. I make the house uncomfortable. I don't wonder at it. I've made your sister so all day, and Master Davy.'

Here I was suddenly melted, and roared out, 'No, you haven't, Mrs. Gummidge,' in great mental distress.

'It's far from right that I should do it,' said Mrs. Gummidge. 'It an't a fit return. I had better go into the house and die. I am a lone lorn creetur', and had much better not make myself contrary here. If thinks must go contrary with me, and I must go contrary myself, let me go contrary in my parish. Dan'l, I'd better go into the house, and die and be a riddance!'

Mrs. Gummidge retired with these words, and betook herself to bed. When she was gone, Mr. Peggotty, who had not exhibited a trace of any feeling but the profoundest sympathy, looked round upon us, and nodding his head with a lively expression of that sentiment still animating his face, said in a whisper:

'She's been thinking of the old 'un!'

I did not quite understand what old one Mrs. Gummidge was supposed to have fixed her mind upon, until Peggotty, on seeing me to bed, explained that it was the late Mr. Gummidge; and that her brother always took that for a received truth on such occasions, and that it always had a moving effect upon him. Some time after he was in his hammock that night, I heard him myself repeat to Ham, 'Poor thing! She's been thinking of the old 'un!' And whenever Mrs. Gummidge was overcome in a similar manner during the remainder of our stay (which happened some few times), he always said the same thing in extenuation of the circumstance, and always with the tenderest commiseration.

So the fortnight slipped away, varied by nothing but the variation of the tide, which altered Mr. Peggotty's times of going out and coming in, and altered Ham's engagements also. When the latter was unemployed, he sometimes walked with us to show us the boats and ships, and once or twice he took us for a row. I don't know why one slight set of impressions should be more particularly associated with a place than another, though I believe this obtains with most people, in reference especially to the associations of their childhood. I never hear the name, or read the name, of Yarmouth, but I am reminded of a certain Sunday morning on the beach, the bells ringing for church, little Em'ly leaning on my shoulder, Ham lazily dropping stones into the water, and the sun, away at sea, just breaking through the heavy mist, and showing us the ships, like their own shadows.

At last the day came for going home. I bore up against the separation from Mr. Peggotty and Mrs. Gummidge, but my agony of mind at leaving little Em'ly was piercing. We went arm-in-arm to the public-house where the carrier put up, and I promised, on the road, to write to her. (I redeemed that promise afterwards, in characters larger than those in which apartments are usually announced in manuscript, as being to let.) We were greatly overcome at parting; and if ever, in my life, I have had a void made in my heart, I had one made that day.

Now, all the time I had been on my visit, I had been ungrateful to my home again, and had thought little or nothing about it. But I was no sooner turned towards it, than my reproachful young conscience seemed to point that way with a ready finger; and I felt, all the more for the sinking of my spirits, that it was my nest, and that my mother was my comforter and friend.

This gained upon me as we went along; so that the nearer we drew, the more familiar the objects became that we passed, the more excited I was to get there, and to run into her arms. But Peggotty, instead of sharing in those transports, tried to check them (though very kindly), and looked confused and out of sorts.

Blunderstone Rookery would come, however, in spite of her, when the carrier's horse pleased—and did. How well I recollect it, on a cold grey afternoon, with a dull sky, threatening rain!

The door opened, and I looked, half laughing and half crying in my pleasant agitation, for my mother. It was not she, but a strange servant.

'Why, Peggotty!' I said, ruefully, 'isn't she come home?'

'Yes, yes, Master Davy,' said Peggotty. 'She's come home. Wait a bit, Master Davy, and I'll—I'll tell you something.'

Between her agitation, and her natural awkwardness in getting out of the cart, Peggotty was making a most extraordinary festoon of herself, but I felt too blank and strange to tell her so. When she had got down, she took me by the hand; led me, wondering, into the kitchen; and shut the door.

'Peggotty!' said I, quite frightened. 'What's the matter?'

'Nothing's the matter, bless you, Master Davy dear!' she answered, assuming an air of sprightliness.

'Something's the matter, I'm sure. Where's mama?'

'Where's mama, Master Davy?' repeated Peggotty.

'Yes. Why hasn't she come out to the gate, and what have we come in here for? Oh, Peggotty!' My eyes were full, and I felt as if I were going to tumble down.

'Bless the precious boy!' cried Peggotty, taking hold of me. 'What is it? Speak, my pet!'

'Not dead, too! Oh, she's not dead, Peggotty?'

Peggotty cried out No! with an astonishing volume of voice; and then sat down, and began to pant, and said I had given her a turn.

I gave her a hug to take away the turn, or to give her another turn in the right direction, and then stood before her, looking at her in anxious inquiry.

'You see, dear, I should have told you before now,' said Peggotty, 'but I hadn't an opportunity. I ought to have made it, perhaps, but I couldn't azackly'—that was always the substitute for exactly, in Peggotty's militia of words—'bring my mind to it.'

'Go on, Peggotty,' said I, more frightened than before.

'Master Davy,' said Peggotty, untying her bonnet with a shaking hand, and speaking in a breathless sort of way. 'What do you think? You have got a Pa!'

I trembled, and turned white. Something—I don't know what, or how—connected with the grave in the churchyard, and the raising of the dead, seemed to strike me like an unwholesome wind.

'A new one,' said Peggotty.

'A new one?' I repeated.

Peggotty gave a gasp, as if she were swallowing something that was very hard, and, putting out her hand, said:

'Come and see him.'

'I don't want to see him.' —'And your mama,' said Peggotty.

I ceased to draw back, and we went straight to the best parlour, where she left me. On one side of the fire, sat my mother; on the other, Mr.

Murdstone. My mother dropped her work, and arose hurriedly, but timidly I thought.

'Now, Clara my dear,' said Mr. Murdstone. 'Recollect! control yourself, always control yourself! Davy boy, how do you do?'

I gave him my hand. After a moment of suspense, I went and kissed my mother: she kissed me, patted me gently on the shoulder, and sat down again to her work. I could not look at her, I could not look at him, I knew quite well that he was looking at us both; and I turned to the window and looked out there, at some shrubs that were drooping their heads in the cold.

As soon as I could creep away, I crept upstairs. My old dear bedroom was changed, and I was to lie a long way off. I rambled downstairs to find anything that was like itself, so altered it all seemed; and roamed into the yard. I very soon started back from there, for the empty dog-kennel was filled up with a great dog—deep mouthed and black-haired like Him—and he was very angry at the sight of me, and sprang out to get at me.

CHAPTER 4. I FALL INTO DISGRACE

If the room to which my bed was removed were a sentient thing that could give evidence, I might appeal to it at this day—who sleeps there now, I wonder!—to bear witness for me what a heavy heart I carried to it. I went up there, hearing the dog in the yard bark after me all the way while I climbed the stairs; and, looking as blank and strange upon the room as the room looked upon me, sat down with my small hands crossed, and thought.

I thought of the oddest things. Of the shape of the room, of the cracks in the ceiling, of the paper on the walls, of the flaws in the window-glass making ripples and dimples on the prospect, of the washing-stand being rickety on its three legs, and having a discontented something about it, which reminded me of Mrs. Gummidge under the influence of the old one. I was crying all the time, but, except that I was conscious of being cold and dejected, I am sure I never thought why I cried. At last in my desolation I began to consider that I was dreadfully in love with little Em'ly, and had been torn away from her to come here where no one seemed to want me, or to care about me, half as much as she did. This made such a very miserable piece of business of it, that I rolled myself up in a corner of the counterpane, and cried myself to sleep.

I was awoke by somebody saying 'Here he is!' and uncovering my hot head. My mother and Peggotty had come to look for me, and it was one of them who had done it.

'Davy,' said my mother. 'What's the matter?'

I thought it was very strange that she should ask me, and answered, 'Nothing.' I turned over on my face, I recollect, to hide my trembling lip, which answered her with greater truth. 'Davy,' said my mother. 'Davy, my child!'

I dare say no words she could have uttered would have affected me so much, then, as her calling me her child. I hid my tears in the bedclothes, and pressed her from me with my hand, when she would have raised me up.

'This is your doing, Peggotty, you cruel thing!' said my mother. 'I have no doubt at all about it. How can you reconcile it to your conscience, I wonder, to prejudice my own boy against me, or against anybody who is dear to me? What do you mean by it, Peggotty?'

Poor Peggotty lifted up her hands and eyes, and only answered, in a sort of paraphrase of the grace I usually repeated after dinner, 'Lord forgive you, Mrs. Copperfield, and for what you have said this minute, may you never be truly sorry!'

'It's enough to distract me,' cried my mother. 'In my honeymoon, too, when my most inveterate enemy might relent, one would think, and not envy me a little peace of mind and happiness. Davy, you naughty boy! Peggotty, you savage creature! Oh, dear me!' cried my mother, turning from one of us to the other, in her pettish wilful manner, 'what a troublesome world this is, when one has the most right to expect it to be as agreeable as possible!'

I felt the touch of a hand that I knew was neither hers nor Peggotty's, and slipped to my feet at the bed-side. It was Mr. Murdstone's hand, and he kept it on my arm as he said:

'What's this? Clara, my love, have you forgotten?—Firmness, my dear!'

'I am very sorry, Edward,' said my mother. 'I meant to be very good, but I am so uncomfortable.'

'Indeed!' he answered. 'That's a bad hearing, so soon, Clara.'

'I say it's very hard I should be made so now,' returned my mother, pouting; 'and it is—very hard—isn't it?'

He drew her to him, whispered in her ear, and kissed her. I knew as well, when I saw my mother's head lean down upon his shoulder, and her arm touch his neck—I knew as well that he could mould her pliant nature into any form he chose, as I know, now, that he did it.

'Go you below, my love,' said Mr. Murdstone. 'David and I will come down, together. My friend,' turning a darkening face on Peggotty, when he had watched my mother out, and dismissed her with a nod and a smile; 'do you know your mistress's name?'

'She has been my mistress a long time, sir,' answered Peggotty, 'I ought to know it.' 'That's true,' he answered. 'But I thought I heard you, as I came upstairs, address her by a name that is not hers. She has taken mine, you know. Will you remember that?'

Peggotty, with some uneasy glances at me, curtseyed herself out of the room without replying; seeing, I suppose, that she was expected to go, and had no excuse for remaining. When we two were left alone, he shut the door, and sitting on a chair, and holding me standing before him, looked steadily into my eyes. I felt my own attracted, no less steadily, to his. As I recall our being opposed thus, face to face, I seem again to hear my heart beat fast and high.

'David,' he said, making his lips thin, by pressing them together, 'if I have an obstinate horse or dog to deal with, what do you think I do?'

'I don't know.'

'I beat him.'

I had answered in a kind of breathless whisper, but I felt, in my silence, that my breath was shorter now.

'I make him wince, and smart. I say to myself, "I'll conquer that fellow"; and if it were to cost him all the blood he had, I should do it. What is that upon your face?'

'Dirt,' I said.

He knew it was the mark of tears as well as I. But if he had asked the question twenty times, each time with twenty blows, I believe my baby heart would have burst before I would have told him so.

'You have a good deal of intelligence for a little fellow,' he said, with a grave smile that belonged to him, 'and you understood me very well, I see. Wash that face, sir, and come down with me.'

He pointed to the washing-stand, which I had made out to be like Mrs. Gummidge, and motioned me with his head to obey him directly. I had little doubt then, and I have less doubt now, that he would have knocked me down without the least compunction, if I had hesitated.

'Clara, my dear,' he said, when I had done his bidding, and he walked me into the parlour, with his hand still on my arm; 'you will not be made uncomfortable any more, I hope. We shall soon improve our youthful humours.'

God help me, I might have been improved for my whole life, I might have been made another creature perhaps, for life, by a kind word at that season. A word of encouragement and explanation, of pity for my childish ignorance, of welcome home, of reassurance to me that it was home, might have made me dutiful to him in my heart henceforth, instead of in my hypocritical outside, and might have made me respect instead of hate him. I thought my mother was sorry to see me standing in the room so scared and strange, and that, presently, when I stole to a chair, she followed me with her eyes more sorrowfully still—missing, perhaps, some freedom in my childish tread—but the word was not spoken, and the time for it was gone.

We dined alone, we three together. He seemed to be very fond of my mother—I am afraid I liked him none the better for that—and she was very fond of him. I gathered from what they said, that an elder sister of his was coming to stay with them, and that she was expected that evening. I am not certain whether I found out then, or afterwards, that, without being actively concerned in any business, he had some share in, or some annual charge upon the profits of, a wine-merchant's house in London, with which his family had been connected from his great-grandfather's time, and in which his sister had a similar interest; but I may mention it in this place, whether or no.

After dinner, when we were sitting by the fire, and I was meditating an escape to Peggotty without having the hardihood to slip away, lest it should offend the master of the house, a coach drove up to the garden-gate and he went out to receive the visitor. My mother followed him. I was timidly following her, when she turned round at the parlour door, in the dusk, and taking me in her embrace as she had been used to do, whispered me to love my new father and be obedient to him. She did this hurriedly and secretly, as if it were wrong, but tenderly; and, putting out her hand behind her, held mine in it, until we came near to where he was standing in the garden, where she let mine go, and drew hers through his arm.

It was Miss Murdstone who was arrived, and a gloomy-looking lady she was; dark, like her brother, whom she greatly resembled in face and voice; and with very heavy eyebrows, nearly meeting over her large nose, as if, being disabled by the wrongs of her sex from wearing whiskers, she had carried them to that account. She brought with her two uncompromising hard black boxes, with her initials on the lids in hard brass nails. When she paid the coachman she took her money out of a hard steel purse, and she kept the purse in a very jail of a bag which hung upon her arm by a heavy chain, and shut up like a bite. I had never, at that time, seen such a metallic lady altogether as Miss Murdstone was.

She was brought into the parlour with many tokens of welcome, and there formally recognized my mother as a new and near relation. Then she looked at me, and said:

'Is that your boy, sister-in-law?'

My mother acknowledged me.

'Generally speaking,' said Miss Murdstone, 'I don't like boys. How d'ye do, boy?'

Under these encouraging circumstances, I replied that I was very well, and that I hoped she was the same; with such an indifferent grace, that Miss Murdstone disposed of me in two words:

'Wants manner!'

Having uttered which, with great distinctness, she begged the favour of being shown to her room, which became to me from that time forth a place of awe and dread, wherein the two black boxes were never seen open or known to be left unlocked, and where (for I peeped in once or twice when she was out) numerous little steel fetters and rivets, with which Miss Murdstone embellished herself when she was dressed, generally hung upon the looking-glass in formidable array.

As well as I could make out, she had come for good, and had no intention of ever going again. She began to 'help' my mother next morning, and was in and out of the store-closet all day, putting things to rights, and making havoc in the old arrangements. Almost the first remarkable thing I observed in Miss Murdstone was, her being constantly haunted by a suspicion that the servants had a man secreted somewhere on the premises. Under the influence of this delusion, she dived into the coal-cellar at the most untimely hours, and scarcely ever opened the door of a dark cupboard without clapping it to again, in the belief that she had got him.

Though there was nothing very airy about Miss Murdstone, she was a perfect Lark in point of getting up. She was up (and, as I believe to this hour, looking for that man) before anybody in the house was stirring. Peggotty gave it as her opinion that she even slept with one eye open; but I could not concur in this idea; for I tried it myself after hearing the suggestion thrown out, and found it couldn't be done.

On the very first morning after her arrival she was up and ringing her bell at cock-crow. When my mother came down to breakfast and was going to make the tea, Miss Murdstone gave her a kind of peck on the cheek, which was her nearest approach to a kiss, and said:

'Now, Clara, my dear, I am come here, you know, to relieve you of all the trouble I can. You're much too pretty and thoughtless'—my mother blushed but laughed, and seemed not to dislike this character—'to have any duties imposed upon you that can be undertaken by me. If you'll be so good as give me your keys, my dear, I'll attend to all this sort of thing in future.'

From that time, Miss Murdstone kept the keys in her own little jail all day, and under her pillow all night, and my mother had no more to do with them than I had.

My mother did not suffer her authority to pass from her without a shadow of protest. One night when Miss Murdstone had been developing certain household plans to her brother, of which he signified his approbation, my mother suddenly began to cry, and said she thought she might have been consulted.

'Clara!' said Mr. Murdstone sternly. 'Clara! I wonder at you.'

'Oh, it's very well to say you wonder, Edward!' cried my mother, 'and it's very well for you to talk about firmness, but you wouldn't like it yourself.'

Firmness, I may observe, was the grand quality on which both Mr. and Miss Murdstone took their stand. However I might have expressed my comprehension of it at that time, if I had been called upon, I nevertheless did clearly comprehend in my own way, that it was another name for tyranny; and for a certain gloomy, arrogant, devil's humour, that was in them both. The creed, as I should state it now, was this. Mr. Murdstone was firm; nobody in his world was to be so firm as Mr. Murdstone; nobody else in his world was to be firm at all, for everybody was to be bent to his firmness. Miss Murdstone was an exception. She might be firm, but only by relationship, and in an inferior and tributary degree. My mother was another exception. She might be firm, and must be; but only in bearing their firmness, and firmly believing there was no other firmness upon earth.

'It's very hard,' said my mother, 'that in my own house—'

'My own house?' repeated Mr. Murdstone. 'Clara!'

'OUR own house, I mean,' faltered my mother, evidently frightened—'I hope you must know what I mean, Edward—it's very hard that in YOUR own house I may not have a word to say about domestic matters. I am sure I managed very well before we were married. There's evidence,' said my mother, sobbing; 'ask Peggotty if I didn't do very well when I wasn't interfered with!'

'Edward,' said Miss Murdstone, 'let there be an end of this. I go tomorrow.'

'Jane Murdstone,' said her brother, 'be silent! How dare you to insinuate that you don't know my character better than your words imply?'

'I am sure,' my poor mother went on, at a grievous disadvantage, and with many tears, 'I don't want anybody to go. I should be very miserable and unhappy if anybody was to go. I don't ask much. I am not unreasonable.

I only want to be consulted sometimes. I am very much obliged to anybody who assists me, and I only want to be consulted as a mere form, sometimes. I thought you were pleased, once, with my being a little inexperienced and girlish, Edward—I am sure you said so—but you seem to hate me for it now, you are so severe.'

'Edward,' said Miss Murdstone, again, 'let there be an end of this. I go tomorrow.'

'Jane Murdstone,' thundered Mr. Murdstone. 'Will you be silent? How dare you?'

Miss Murdstone made a jail-delivery of her pocket-handkerchief, and held it before her eyes.

'Clara,' he continued, looking at my mother, 'you surprise me! You astound me! Yes, I had a satisfaction in the thought of marrying an inexperienced and artless person, and forming her character, and infusing into it some amount of that firmness and decision of which it stood in need. But when Jane Murdstone is kind enough to come to my assistance in this endeavour, and to assume, for my sake, a condition something like a housekeeper's, and when she meets with a base return—'

'Oh, pray, pray, Edward,' cried my mother, 'don't accuse me of being ungrateful. I am sure I am not ungrateful. No one ever said I was before. I have many faults, but not that. Oh, don't, my dear!'

'When Jane Murdstone meets, I say,' he went on, after waiting until my mother was silent, 'with a base return, that feeling of mine is chilled and altered.'

'Don't, my love, say that!' implored my mother very piteously. 'Oh, don't, Edward! I can't bear to hear it. Whatever I am, I am affectionate. I know I am affectionate. I wouldn't say it, if I wasn't sure that I am. Ask Peggotty. I am sure she'll tell you I'm affectionate.'

'There is no extent of mere weakness, Clara,' said Mr. Murdstone in reply, 'that can have the least weight with me. You lose breath.'

'Pray let us be friends,' said my mother, 'I couldn't live under coldness or unkindness. I am so sorry. I have a great many defects, I know, and it's very good of you, Edward, with your strength of mind, to endeavour to correct them for me. Jane, I don't object to anything. I should be quite broken-hearted if you thought of leaving—' My mother was too much overcome to go on.

'Jane Murdstone,' said Mr. Murdstone to his sister, 'any harsh words between us are, I hope, uncommon. It is not my fault that so unusual an occurrence has taken place tonight. I was betrayed into it by another. Nor is it your fault. You were betrayed into it by another. Let us both try to forget it. And as this,' he added, after these magnanimous words, 'is not a fit scene for the boy—David, go to bed!'

I could hardly find the door, through the tears that stood in my eyes. I was so sorry for my mother's distress; but I groped my way out, and groped my way up to my room in the dark, without even having the heart to say good night to Peggotty, or to get a candle from her. When her coming up to look for me, an hour or so afterwards, awoke me, she said that my mother had gone to bed poorly, and that Mr. and Miss Murdstone were sitting alone.

Going down next morning rather earlier than usual, I paused outside the parlour door, on hearing my mother's voice. She was very earnestly and humbly entreating Miss Murdstone's pardon, which that lady granted, and a perfect reconciliation took place. I never knew my mother afterwards to give an opinion on any matter, without first appealing to Miss Murdstone, or without having first ascertained by some sure means, what Miss Murdstone's opinion was; and I never saw Miss Murdstone, when out of temper (she was infirm that way), move her hand towards her bag as if she were going to take out the keys and offer to resign them to my mother, without seeing that my mother was in a terrible fright.

The gloomy taint that was in the Murdstone blood, darkened the Murdstone religion, which was austere and wrathful. I have thought, since, that its assuming that character was a necessary consequence of Mr. Murdstone's firmness, which wouldn't allow him to let anybody off from the utmost weight of the severest penalties he could find any excuse for. Be this as it may, I well remember the tremendous visages with which we used to go to church, and the changed air of the place. Again, the dreaded Sunday comes round, and I file into the old pew first, like a guarded captive brought to a condemned service. Again, Miss Murdstone, in a black velvet gown, that looks as if it had been made out of a pall, follows close upon me; then my mother; then her husband. There is no Peggotty now, as in the old time. Again, I listen to Miss Murdstone mumbling the responses, and emphasizing all the dread words with a cruel relish. Again, I see her dark eyes roll round the church when she says 'miserable sinners', as if she were calling all the congregation names. Again, I catch rare glimpses of my mother, moving her lips timidly between the two, with one of them muttering at each ear like low thunder. Again, I wonder with a sudden fear whether it is likely that our good old clergyman can be wrong, and Mr. and Miss Murdstone right, and that all the angels in Heaven can be destroying angels. Again, if I move a finger or relax a muscle of my face, Miss Murdstone pokes me with her prayer-book, and makes my side ache.

Yes, and again, as we walk home, I note some neighbours looking at my mother and at me, and whispering. Again, as the three go on arm-in-arm, and I linger behind alone, I follow some of those looks, and wonder if my mother's step be really not so light as I have seen it, and if the gaiety of her beauty be really almost worried away. Again, I wonder whether any of the neighbours call to mind, as I do, how we used to walk home together, she and I; and I wonder stupidly about that, all the dreary dismal day.

There had been some talk on occasions of my going to boarding-school. Mr. and Miss Murdstone had originated it, and my mother had of course agreed with them. Nothing, however, was concluded on the subject yet. In the meantime, I learnt lessons at home. Shall I ever forget those lessons! They were presided over nominally by my mother, but really by Mr. Murdstone and his sister, who were always present, and found them a favourable occasion for giving my mother lessons in that miscalled firmness, which was the bane of both our lives. I believe I was kept at home for that purpose. I had been apt enough to learn, and willing enough, when my mother and I had lived alone together. I can faintly remember learning the alphabet at her knee. To this day, when I look upon the fat black letters in the primer, the puzzling novelty of their shapes, and the easy good-nature of O and Q and S, seem to present themselves again before me as they used to do. But they recall no feeling of disgust or reluctance. On the contrary, I seem to have walked along a path of flowers as far as the crocodile-book, and to have been cheered by the gentleness of my mother's voice and manner all the way. But these solemn lessons which succeeded those, I remember as the death-blow of my peace, and a grievous daily drudgery and misery. They were very long, very numerous, very hard—perfectly unintelligible, some of them, to me—and I was generally as much bewildered by them as I believe my poor mother was herself.

Let me remember how it used to be, and bring one morning back again.

I come into the second-best parlour after breakfast, with my books, and an exercise-book, and a slate. My mother is ready for me at her writing-desk, but not half so ready as Mr. Murdstone in his easy-chair by the window (though he pretends to be reading a book), or as Miss Murdstone, sitting near my mother stringing steel beads. The very sight of these two has such an influence over me, that I begin to feel the words I have been at infinite pains to get into my head, all sliding away, and going I don't know where. I wonder where they do go, by the by?

I hand the first book to my mother. Perhaps it is a grammar, perhaps a history, or geography. I take a last drowning look at the page as I give it into her hand, and start off aloud at a racing pace while I have got it fresh. I trip over a word. Mr. Murdstone looks up. I trip over another word. Miss Murdstone looks up. I redden, tumble over half-a-dozen words, and stop. I think my mother would show me the book if she dared, but she does not dare, and she says softly:

'Oh, Davy, Davy!'

'Now, Clara,' says Mr. Murdstone, 'be firm with the boy. Don't say, "Oh, Davy, Davy!" That's childish. He knows his lesson, or he does not know it.'

'He does NOT know it,' Miss Murdstone interposes awfully.

'I am really afraid he does not,' says my mother.

'Then, you see, Clara,' returns Miss Murdstone, 'you should just give him the book back, and make him know it.'

'Yes, certainly,' says my mother; 'that is what I intend to do, my dear Jane. Now, Davy, try once more, and don't be stupid.'

I obey the first clause of the injunction by trying once more, but am not so successful with the second, for I am very stupid. I tumble down before I get to the old place, at a point where I was all right before, and stop to think. But I can't think about the lesson. I think of the number of yards of net in Miss Murdstone's cap, or of the price of Mr. Murdstone's dressing-gown, or any such ridiculous problem that I have no business with, and don't want to have anything at all to do with. Mr. Murdstone makes a movement of impatience which I have been expecting for a long time. Miss Murdstone does the same. My mother glances submissively at them, shuts the book, and lays it by as an arrear to be worked out when my other tasks are done.

There is a pile of these arrears very soon, and it swells like a rolling snowball. The bigger it gets, the more stupid I get. The case is so hopeless, and I feel that I am wallowing in such a bog of nonsense, that I give up all idea of getting out, and abandon myself to my fate. The despairing way in which my mother and I look at each other, as I blunder on, is truly melancholy. But the greatest effect in these miserable lessons is when my mother (thinking nobody is observing her) tries to give me the cue by the motion of her lips. At that instant, Miss Murdstone, who has been lying in wait for nothing else all along, says in a deep warning voice:

'Clara!'

My mother starts, colours, and smiles faintly. Mr. Murdstone comes out of his chair, takes the book, throws it at me or boxes my ears with it, and turns me out of the room by the shoulders.

Even when the lessons are done, the worst is yet to happen, in the shape of an appalling sum. This is invented for me, and delivered to me orally by Mr. Murdstone, and begins, 'If I go into a cheesemonger's shop, and buy five thousand double-Gloucester cheeses at fourpence-halfpenny each, present payment'—at which I see Miss Murdstone secretly overjoyed. I pore over these cheeses without any result or enlightenment until dinner-time, when, having made a Mulatto of myself by getting the dirt of the slate into the pores of my skin, I have a slice of bread to help me out with the cheeses, and am considered in disgrace for the rest of the evening.

It seems to me, at this distance of time, as if my unfortunate studies generally took this course. I could have done very well if I had been without the Murdstones; but the influence of the Murdstones upon me was like the fascination of two snakes on a wretched young bird. Even when I did get through the morning with tolerable credit, there was not much gained but dinner; for Miss Murdstone never could endure to see me untasked, and if I rashly made any show of being unemployed, called her brother's attention to me by saying, 'Clara, my dear, there's nothing like work—give your boy an exercise'; which caused me to be clapped down to some new labour, there and then. As to any recreation with other children of my age, I had very little of that; for the gloomy theology of the Murdstones made all children out to be a swarm of little vipers (though there WAS a child once set in the midst of the Disciples), and held that they contaminated one another.

The natural result of this treatment, continued, I suppose, for some six months or more, was to make me sullen, dull, and dogged. I was not made the less so by my sense of being daily more and more shut out and alienated from my mother. I believe I should have been almost stupefied but for one circumstance.

It was this. My father had left a small collection of books in a little room upstairs, to which I had access (for it adjoined my own) and which nobody else in our house ever troubled. From that blessed little room, Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Tom Jones, the Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and Robinson Crusoe, came out, a glorious host, to keep me company. They kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time,—they, and the Arabian Nights, and the Tales of the Genii,—and did me no harm; for whatever harm was in some of them was not there for me; I knew nothing of it. It is astonishing to me now, how I found time, in the midst of my porings and blunderings over heavier themes, to read those books as I did. It is curious to me how I could ever have consoled myself under my small troubles (which were great troubles to me), by impersonating my favourite characters in them—as I did—and by putting Mr. and Miss Murdstone into all the bad ones—which I did too. I have been Tom Jones (a child's Tom Jones, a harmless creature) for a week together. I have sustained my own idea of Roderick Random for a month at a stretch, I verily believe. I had a greedy relish for a few volumes of Voyages and Travels—I forget what, now—that were on those shelves; and for days and days I can remember to have gone about my region of our house, armed with the centre-piece out of an old set of boot-trees—the perfect realization of Captain Somebody, of the Royal British Navy, in danger of being beset by savages, and resolved to sell his life at a great price. The Captain never lost dignity, from having his ears boxed with the Latin Grammar. I did; but the Captain was a Captain and a hero, in despite of all the grammars of all the languages in the world, dead or alive.

This was my only and my constant comfort. When I think of it, the picture always rises in my mind, of a summer evening, the boys at play in the churchyard, and I sitting on my bed, reading as if for life. Every barn in the neighbourhood, every stone in the church, and every foot of the churchyard, had some association of its own, in my mind, connected with these books, and stood for some locality made famous in them. I have seen Tom Pipes go climbing up the church-steeple; I have watched Strap, with the knapsack on his back, stopping to rest himself upon the wicket-gate; and

I know that Commodore Trunnion held that club with Mr. Pickle, in the parlour of our little village alehouse.

The reader now understands, as well as I do, what I was when I came to that point of my youthful history to which I am now coming again.

One morning when I went into the parlour with my books, I found my mother looking anxious, Miss Murdstone looking firm, and Mr. Murdstone binding something round the bottom of a cane—a lithe and limber cane, which he left off binding when I came in, and poised and switched in the air.

'I tell you, Clara,' said Mr. Murdstone, 'I have been often flogged myself.'

'To be sure; of course,' said Miss Murdstone.

'Certainly, my dear Jane,' faltered my mother, meekly. 'But—but do you think it did Edward good?'

'Do you think it did Edward harm, Clara?' asked Mr. Murdstone, gravely.

'That's the point,' said his sister.

To this my mother returned, 'Certainly, my dear Jane,' and said no more.

I felt apprehensive that I was personally interested in this dialogue, and sought Mr. Murdstone's eye as it lighted on mine.

'Now, David,' he said—and I saw that cast again as he said it—'you must be far more careful today than usual.' He gave the cane another poise, and another switch; and having finished his preparation of it, laid it down beside him, with an impressive look, and took up his book.

This was a good freshener to my presence of mind, as a beginning. I felt the words of my lessons slipping off, not one by one, or line by line, but by the entire page; I tried to lay hold of them; but they seemed, if I may so express it, to have put skates on, and to skim away from me with a smoothness there was no checking.

We began badly, and went on worse. I had come in with an idea of distinguishing myself rather, conceiving that I was very well prepared; but it turned out to be quite a mistake. Book after book was added to the heap of failures, Miss Murdstone being firmly watchful of us all the time. And when we came at last to the five thousand cheeses (canes he made it that day, I remember), my mother burst out crying.

'Clara!' said Miss Murdstone, in her warning voice.

'I am not quite well, my dear Jane, I think,' said my mother.

I saw him wink, solemnly, at his sister, as he rose and said, taking up the cane:

'Why, Jane, we can hardly expect Clara to bear, with perfect firmness, the worry and torment that David has occasioned her today. That would be stoical. Clara is greatly strengthened and improved, but we can hardly expect so much from her. David, you and I will go upstairs, boy.'

As he took me out at the door, my mother ran towards us. Miss Murdstone said, 'Clara! are you a perfect fool?' and interfered. I saw my mother stop her ears then, and I heard her crying.

He walked me up to my room slowly and gravely—I am certain he had a delight in that formal parade of executing justice—and when we got there, suddenly twisted my head under his arm.

'Mr. Murdstone! Sir!' I cried to him. 'Don't! Pray don't beat me! I have tried to learn, sir, but I can't learn while you and Miss Murdstone are by. I can't indeed!'

'Can't you, indeed, David?' he said. 'We'll try that.'

He had my head as in a vice, but I twined round him somehow, and stopped him for a moment, entreating him not to beat me. It was only a moment that I stopped him, for he cut me heavily an instant afterwards, and in the same instant I caught the hand with which he held me in my mouth, between my teeth, and bit it through. It sets my teeth on edge to think of it.

He beat me then, as if he would have beaten me to death. Above all the noise we made, I heard them running up the stairs, and crying out—I heard my mother crying out—and Peggotty. Then he was gone; and the door was locked outside; and I was lying, fevered and hot, and torn, and sore, and raging in my puny way, upon the floor.

How well I recollect, when I became quiet, what an unnatural stillness seemed to reign through the whole house! How well I remember, when my smart and passion began to cool, how wicked I began to feel!

I sat listening for a long while, but there was not a sound. I crawled up from the floor, and saw my face in the glass, so swollen, red, and ugly that it almost frightened me. My stripes were sore and stiff, and made me cry afresh, when I moved; but they were nothing to the guilt I felt. It lay heavier on my breast than if I had been a most atrocious criminal, I dare say.

It had begun to grow dark, and I had shut the window (I had been lying, for the most part, with my head upon the sill, by turns crying, dozing, and looking listlessly out), when the key was turned, and Miss Murdstone came in with some bread and meat, and milk. These she put down upon the table without a word, glaring at me the while with exemplary firmness, and then retired, locking the door after her.

Long after it was dark I sat there, wondering whether anybody else would come. When this appeared improbable for that night, I undressed, and went to bed; and, there, I began to wonder fearfully what would be done to me. Whether it was a criminal act that I had committed? Whether I should be taken into custody, and sent to prison? Whether I was at all in danger of being hanged?

I never shall forget the waking, next morning; the being cheerful and fresh for the first moment, and then the being weighed down by the stale and dismal oppression of remembrance. Miss Murdstone reappeared before I was out of bed; told me, in so many words, that I was free to walk in the garden for half an hour and no longer; and retired, leaving the door open, that I might avail myself of that permission.

I did so, and did so every morning of my imprisonment, which lasted five days. If I could have seen my mother alone, I should have gone down on my knees to her and besought her forgiveness; but I saw no one, Miss Murdstone excepted, during the whole time—except at evening prayers in the parlour; to which I was escorted by Miss Murdstone after everybody else was placed; where I was stationed, a young outlaw, all alone by myself near the door; and whence I was solemnly conducted by my jailer, before any one arose from the devotional posture. I only observed that my mother was as far off from me as she could be, and kept her face another way so that I never saw it; and that Mr. Murdstone's hand was bound up in a large linen wrapper.

The length of those five days I can convey no idea of to any one. They occupy the place of years in my remembrance. The way in which I listened to all the incidents of the house that made themselves audible to me; the ringing of bells, the opening and shutting of doors, the murmuring of voices, the footsteps on the stairs; to any laughing, whistling, or singing, outside, which seemed more dismal than anything else to me in my solitude and disgrace—the uncertain pace of the hours, especially at night, when I would wake thinking it was morning, and find that the family were not yet gone to bed, and that all the length of night had yet to come—the depressed dreams and nightmares I had—the return of day, noon, afternoon, evening, when the boys played in the churchyard, and I watched them from a distance within the room, being ashamed to show myself at the window lest they should know I was a prisoner—the strange sensation of never hearing myself speak—the fleeting intervals of something like cheerfulness, which came with eating and drinking, and went away with it—the setting in of rain one evening, with a fresh smell, and its coming down faster and faster between me and the church, until it and gathering night seemed to quench me in gloom, and fear, and remorse—all this appears to have gone round and round for years instead of days, it is so vividly and strongly stamped on my remembrance. On the last night of my restraint, I was awakened by hearing my own name spoken in a whisper. I started up in bed, and putting out my arms in the dark, said:

'Is that you, Peggotty?'

There was no immediate answer, but presently I heard my name again, in a tone so very mysterious and awful, that I think I should have gone into a fit, if it had not occurred to me that it must have come through the keyhole.

I groped my way to the door, and putting my own lips to the keyhole, whispered: 'Is that you, Peggotty dear?'

'Yes, my own precious Davy,' she replied. 'Be as soft as a mouse, or the Cat'll hear us.'

I understood this to mean Miss Murdstone, and was sensible of the urgency of the case; her room being close by.

'How's mama, dear Peggotty? Is she very angry with me?'

I could hear Peggotty crying softly on her side of the keyhole, as I was doing on mine, before she answered. 'No. Not very.'

'What is going to be done with me, Peggotty dear? Do you know?'

'School. Near London,' was Peggotty's answer. I was obliged to get her to repeat it, for she spoke it the first time quite down my throat, in consequence of my having forgotten to take my mouth away from the keyhole and put my ear there; and though her words tickled me a good deal, I didn't hear them.

'When, Peggotty?'

'Tomorrow.'

'Is that the reason why Miss Murdstone took the clothes out of my drawers?' which she had done, though I have forgotten to mention it.

'Yes,' said Peggotty. 'Box.'

'Shan't I see mama?'

'Yes,' said Peggotty. 'Morning.'

Then Peggotty fitted her mouth close to the keyhole, and delivered these words through it with as much feeling and earnestness as a keyhole has ever been the medium of communicating, I will venture to assert: shooting in each broken little sentence in a convulsive little burst of its own.

'Davy, dear. If I ain't been azackly as intimate with you. Lately, as I used to be. It ain't because I don't love you. Just as well and more, my pretty poppet. It's because I thought it better for you. And for someone else besides. Davy, my darling, are you listening? Can you hear?'

'Ye-ye-ye-yes, Peggotty!' I sobbed.

'My own!' said Peggotty, with infinite compassion. 'What I want to say, is. That you must never forget me. For I'll never forget you. And I'll take as much care of your mama, Davy. As ever I took of you. And I won't leave her. The day may come when she'll be glad to lay her poor head. On her stupid, cross old Peggotty's arm again. And I'll write to you, my dear. Though I ain't no scholar. And I'll—I'll—' Peggotty fell to kissing the keyhole, as she couldn't kiss me.

'Thank you, dear Peggotty!' said I. 'Oh, thank you! Thank you! Will you promise me one thing, Peggotty? Will you write and tell Mr. Peggotty and little Em'ly, and Mrs. Gummidge and Ham, that I am not so bad as they might suppose, and that I sent 'em all my love—especially to little Em'ly? Will you, if you please, Peggotty?'

The kind soul promised, and we both of us kissed the keyhole with the greatest affection—I patted it with my hand, I recollect, as if it had been her honest face—and parted. From that night there grew up in my breast a feeling for Peggotty which I cannot very well define. She did not replace my mother; no one could do that; but she came into a vacancy in my heart, which closed upon her, and I felt towards her something I have never felt for any other human being. It was a sort of comical affection, too; and yet if she had died, I cannot think what I should have done, or how I should have acted out the tragedy it would have been to me.

In the morning Miss Murdstone appeared as usual, and told me I was going to school; which was not altogether such news to me as she supposed. She also informed me that when I was dressed, I was to come downstairs into the parlour, and have my breakfast. There, I found my mother, very pale and with red eyes: into whose arms I ran, and begged her pardon from my suffering soul.

'Oh, Davy!' she said. 'That you could hurt anyone I love! Try to be better, pray to be better! I forgive you; but I am so grieved, Davy, that you should have such bad passions in your heart.'

They had persuaded her that I was a wicked fellow, and she was more sorry for that than for my going away. I felt it sorely. I tried to eat my parting breakfast, but my tears dropped upon my bread-and-butter, and trickled into my tea. I saw my mother look at me sometimes, and then glance at the watchful Miss Murdstone, and than look down, or look away.

'Master Copperfield's box there!' said Miss Murdstone, when wheels were heard at the gate.

I looked for Peggotty, but it was not she; neither she nor Mr. Murdstone appeared. My former acquaintance, the carrier, was at the door. The box was taken out to his cart, and lifted in.

'Clara!' said Miss Murdstone, in her warning note.

'Ready, my dear Jane,' returned my mother. 'Good-bye, Davy. You are going for your own good. Good-bye, my child. You will come home in the holidays, and be a better boy.'

'Clara!' Miss Murdstone repeated.

'Certainly, my dear Jane,' replied my mother, who was holding me. 'I forgive you, my dear boy. God bless you!'

'Clara!' Miss Murdstone repeated.

Miss Murdstone was good enough to take me out to the cart, and to say on the way that she hoped I would repent, before I came to a bad end; and then I got into the cart, and the lazy horse walked off with it.

CHAPTER 5. I AM SENT AWAY FROM HOME

We might have gone about half a mile, and my pocket-handkerchief was quite wet through, when the carrier stopped short. Looking out to ascertain for what, I saw, to MY amazement, Peggotty burst from a hedge and climb into the cart. She took me in both her arms, and squeezed me to her stays until the pressure on my nose was extremely painful, though I never thought of that till afterwards when I found it very tender. Not a single word did Peggotty speak. Releasing one of her arms, she put it down in her pocket to the elbow, and brought out some paper bags of cakes which she crammed into my pockets, and a purse which she put into my hand, but not one word did she say. After another and a final squeeze with both arms, she got down from the cart and ran away; and, my belief is, and has always been, without a solitary button on her gown. I picked up one, of several that were rolling about, and treasured it as a keepsake for a long time.

The carrier looked at me, as if to inquire if she were coming back. I shook my head, and said I thought not. 'Then come up,' said the carrier to the lazy horse; who came up accordingly.

Having by this time cried as much as I possibly could, I began to think it was of no use crying any more, especially as neither Roderick Random, nor that Captain in the Royal British Navy, had ever cried, that I could remember, in trying situations. The carrier, seeing me in this resolution, proposed that my pocket-handkerchief should be spread upon the horse's back to dry. I thanked him, and assented; and particularly small it looked, under those circumstances.

I had now leisure to examine the purse. It was a stiff leather purse, with a snap, and had three bright shillings in it, which Peggotty had evidently polished up with whitening, for my greater delight. But its most precious contents were two half-crowns folded together in a bit of paper, on which was written, in my mother's hand, 'For Davy. With my love.' I was so overcome by this, that I asked the carrier to be so good as to reach me my pocket-handkerchief again; but he said he thought I had better do without it, and I thought I really had, so I wiped my eyes on my sleeve and stopped myself.

For good, too; though, in consequence of my previous emotions, I was still occasionally seized with a stormy sob. After we had jogged on for some little time, I asked the carrier if he was going all the way.

'All the way where?' inquired the carrier.

'There,' I said.

'Where's there?' inquired the carrier.

'Near London,' I said.

'Why that horse,' said the carrier, jerking the rein to point him out, 'would be deader than pork afore he got over half the ground.'

'Are you only going to Yarmouth then?' I asked.

'That's about it,' said the carrier. 'And there I shall take you to the stage-cutch, and the stage-cutch that'll take you to—wherever it is.'

As this was a great deal for the carrier (whose name was Mr. Barkis) to say—he being, as I observed in a former chapter, of a phlegmatic temperament, and not at all conversational—I offered him a cake as a mark of attention, which he ate at one gulp, exactly like an elephant, and which made no more impression on his big face than it would have done on an elephant's.

'Did SHE make 'em, now?' said Mr. Barkis, always leaning forward, in his slouching way, on the footboard of the cart with an arm on each knee.

'Peggotty, do you mean, sir?'

'Ah!' said Mr. Barkis. 'Her.'

'Yes. She makes all our pastry, and does all our cooking.'

'Do she though?' said Mr. Barkis. He made up his mouth as if to whistle, but he didn't whistle. He sat looking at the horse's ears, as if he saw something new there; and sat so, for a considerable time. By and by, he said:

'No sweethearts, I b'lieve?'

'Sweetmeats did you say, Mr. Barkis?' For I thought he wanted something else to eat, and had pointedly alluded to that description of refreshment.

'Hearts,' said Mr. Barkis. 'Sweet hearts; no person walks with her!'

'With Peggotty?'

'Ah!' he said. 'Her.'

'Oh, no. She never had a sweetheart.'

'Didn't she, though!' said Mr. Barkis.

Again he made up his mouth to whistle, and again he didn't whistle, but sat looking at the horse's ears.

'So she makes,' said Mr. Barkis, after a long interval of reflection, 'all the apple parsties, and doos all the cooking, do she?'

I replied that such was the fact.

'Well. I'll tell you what,' said Mr. Barkis. 'P'raps you might be writin' to her?'

'I shall certainly write to her,' I rejoined.

'Ah!' he said, slowly turning his eyes towards me. 'Well! If you was writin' to her, p'raps you'd recollect to say that Barkis was willin'; would you?'

'That Barkis is willing,' I repeated, innocently. 'Is that all the message?'

'Ye-es,' he said, considering. 'Ye-es. Barkis is willin'.'

'But you will be at Blunderstone again tomorrow, Mr. Barkis,' I said, faltering a little at the idea of my being far away from it then, and could give your own message so much better.'

As he repudiated this suggestion, however, with a jerk of his head, and once more confirmed his previous request by saying, with profound gravity, 'Barkis is willin'. That's the message,' I readily undertook its transmission. While I was waiting for the coach in the hotel at Yarmouth that very afternoon, I procured a sheet of paper and an inkstand, and wrote a note to Peggotty, which ran thus: 'My dear Peggotty. I have come here safe. Barkis is willing. My love to mama. Yours affectionately. P.S. He says he particularly wants you to know—BARKIS IS WILLING.'

When I had taken this commission on myself prospectively, Mr. Barkis relapsed into perfect silence; and I, feeling quite worn out by all that had happened lately, lay down on a sack in the cart and fell asleep. I slept soundly until we got to Yarmouth; which was so entirely new and strange to me in the inn-yard to which we drove, that I at once abandoned a latent hope I had had of meeting with some of Mr. Peggotty's family there, perhaps even with little Em'ly herself.

The coach was in the yard, shining very much all over, but without any horses to it as yet; and it looked in that state as if nothing was more unlikely than its ever going to London. I was thinking this, and wondering what would ultimately become of my box, which Mr. Barkis had put down on the yard-pavement by the pole (he having driven up the yard to turn his cart), and also what would ultimately become of me, when a lady looked out of a bow-window where some fowls and joints of meat were hanging up, and said:

'Is that the little gentleman from Blunderstone?'

'Yes, ma'am,' I said.

'What name?' inquired the lady.

'Copperfield, ma'am,' I said.

'That won't do,' returned the lady. 'Nobody's dinner is paid for here, in that name.'

'Is it Murdstone, ma'am?' I said.

'If you're Master Murdstone,' said the lady, 'why do you go and give another name, first?'

I explained to the lady how it was, who than rang a bell, and called out, 'William! show the coffee-room!' upon which a waiter came running out of a kitchen on the opposite side of the yard to show it, and seemed a good deal surprised when he was only to show it to me.

It was a large long room with some large maps in it. I doubt if I could have felt much stranger if the maps had been real foreign countries, and I cast away in the middle of them. I felt it was taking a liberty to sit down, with my cap in my hand, on the corner of the chair nearest the door; and when the waiter laid a cloth on purpose for me, and put a set of castors on it, I think I must have turned red all over with modesty.

He brought me some chops, and vegetables, and took the covers off in such a bouncing manner that I was afraid I must have given him some offence. But he greatly relieved my mind by putting a chair for me at the table, and saying, very affably, 'Now, six-foot! come on!'

I thanked him, and took my seat at the board; but found it extremely difficult to handle my knife and fork with anything like dexterity, or to avoid splashing myself with the gravy, while he was standing opposite, staring so hard, and making me blush in the most dreadful manner every time I caught his eye. After watching me into the second chop, he said:

'There's half a pint of ale for you. Will you have it now?'

I thanked him and said, 'Yes.' Upon which he poured it out of a jug into a large tumbler, and held it up against the light, and made it look beautiful.

'My eye!' he said. 'It seems a good deal, don't it?'

'It does seem a good deal,' I answered with a smile. For it was quite delightful to me, to find him so pleasant. He was a twinkling-eyed, pimple-faced man, with his hair standing upright all over his head; and as he stood with one arm a-kimbo, holding up the glass to the light with the other hand, he looked quite friendly.

'There was a gentleman here, yesterday,' he said—'a stout gentleman, by the name of Topsawyer—perhaps you know him?'

'No,' I said, 'I don't think—'

'In breeches and gaiters, broad-brimmed hat, grey coat, speckled choker,' said the waiter.

'No,' I said bashfully, 'I haven't the pleasure—'

'He came in here,' said the waiter, looking at the light through the tumbler, 'ordered a glass of this ale—WOULD order it—I told him not—drank it, and fell dead. It was too old for him. It oughtn't to be drawn; that's the fact.'

I was very much shocked to hear of this melancholy accident, and said I thought I had better have some water.

'Why you see,' said the waiter, still looking at the light through the tumbler, with one of his eyes shut up, 'our people don't like things being ordered and left. It offends 'em. But I'll drink it, if you like. I'm used to it, and use is everything. I don't think it'll hurt me, if I throw my head back, and take it off quick. Shall I?'

I replied that he would much oblige me by drinking it, if he thought he could do it safely, but by no means otherwise. When he did throw his head back, and take it off quick, I had a horrible fear, I confess, of seeing him meet the fate of the lamented Mr. Topsawyer, and fall lifeless on the carpet. But it didn't hurt him. On the contrary, I thought he seemed the fresher for it.

'What have we got here?' he said, putting a fork into my dish. 'Not chops?'

'Chops,' I said.

'Lord bless my soul!' he exclaimed, 'I didn't know they were chops. Why, a chop's the very thing to take off the bad effects of that beer! Ain't it lucky?'

So he took a chop by the bone in one hand, and a potato in the other, and ate away with a very good appetite, to my extreme satisfaction. He afterwards took another chop, and another potato; and after that, another chop and another potato. When we had done, he brought me a pudding, and having set it before me, seemed to ruminate, and to become absent in his mind for some moments.

'How's the pie?' he said, rousing himself.

'It's a pudding,' I made answer.

'Pudding!' he exclaimed. 'Why, bless me, so it is! What!' looking at it nearer. 'You don't mean to say it's a batter-pudding!'

'Yes, it is indeed.'

'Why, a batter-pudding,' he said, taking up a table-spoon, 'is my favourite pudding! Ain't that lucky? Come on, little 'un, and let's see who'll get most.'

The waiter certainly got most. He entreated me more than once to come in and win, but what with his table-spoon to my tea-spoon, his dispatch to my dispatch, and his appetite to my appetite, I was left far behind at the first mouthful, and had no chance with him. I never saw anyone enjoy a pudding so much, I think; and he laughed, when it was all gone, as if his enjoyment of it lasted still.

Finding him so very friendly and companionable, it was then that I asked for the pen and ink and paper, to write to Peggotty. He not only brought it immediately, but was good enough to look over me while I wrote the letter. When I had finished it, he asked me where I was going to school.

I said, 'Near London,' which was all I knew.

'Oh! my eye!' he said, looking very low-spirited, 'I am sorry for that.'

'Why?' I asked him.

'Oh, Lord!' he said, shaking his head, 'that's the school where they broke the boy's ribs—two ribs—a little boy he was. I should say he was—let me see—how old are you, about?'

I told him between eight and nine.

'That's just his age,' he said. 'He was eight years and six months old when they broke his first rib; eight years and eight months old when they broke his second, and did for him.'

I could not disguise from myself, or from the waiter, that this was an uncomfortable coincidence, and inquired how it was done. His answer was not cheering to my spirits, for it consisted of two dismal words, 'With whopping.'

The blowing of the coach-horn in the yard was a seasonable diversion, which made me get up and hesitatingly inquire, in the mingled pride and diffidence of having a purse (which I took out of my pocket), if there were anything to pay.

'There's a sheet of letter-paper,' he returned. 'Did you ever buy a sheet of letter-paper?'

I could not remember that I ever had.

'It's dear,' he said, 'on account of the duty. Threepence. That's the way we're taxed in this country. There's nothing else, except the waiter. Never mind the ink. I lose by that.'

'What should you—what should I—how much ought I to—what would it be right to pay the waiter, if you please?' I stammered, blushing.

'If I hadn't a family, and that family hadn't the cowpock,' said the waiter, 'I wouldn't take a sixpence. If I didn't support a aged pairint, and a lovely sister,'—here the waiter was greatly agitated—'I wouldn't take a farthing. If I had a good place, and was treated well here, I should beg acceptance of a trifle, instead of taking of it. But I live on broken wittles—and I sleep on the coals'—here the waiter burst into tears.

I was very much concerned for his misfortunes, and felt that any recognition short of ninepence would be mere brutality and hardness of heart. Therefore I gave him one of my three bright shillings, which he received with much humility and veneration, and spun up with his thumb, directly afterwards, to try the goodness of.

It was a little disconcerting to me, to find, when I was being helped up behind the coach, that I was supposed to have eaten all the dinner without any assistance. I discovered this, from overhearing the lady in the bow-window say to the guard, 'Take care of that child, George, or he'll burst!' and from observing that the women-servants who were about the place came out to look and giggle at me as a young phenomenon. My unfortunate friend the waiter, who had quite recovered his spirits, did not appear to be disturbed by this, but joined in the general admiration without being at all confused. If I had any doubt of him, I suppose this half awakened it; but I am inclined to believe that with the simple confidence of a child, and the natural reliance of a child upon superior years (qualities I am very sorry any children should prematurely change for worldly wisdom), I had no serious mistrust of him on the whole, even then.

I felt it rather hard, I must own, to be made, without deserving it, the subject of jokes between the coachman and guard as to the coach drawing heavy behind, on account of my sitting there, and as to the greater expediency of my travelling by waggon. The story of my supposed appetite getting wind among the outside passengers, they were merry upon it likewise; and asked me whether I was going to be paid for, at school, as two brothers or three, and whether I was contracted for, or went upon the regular terms; with other pleasant questions. But the worst of it was, that I knew I should be ashamed to eat anything, when an opportunity offered, and that, after a rather light dinner, I should remain hungry all night—for I had left my cakes behind, at the hotel, in my hurry. My apprehensions were realized. When we stopped for supper I couldn't muster courage to take any, though I should have liked it very much, but sat by the fire and said I didn't want anything. This did not save me from more jokes, either; for a husky-voiced gentleman with a rough face, who had been eating out of a sandwich-box nearly all the way, except when he had been drinking out of a bottle, said I was like a boa-constrictor who took enough at one meal to last him a long time; after which, he actually brought a rash out upon himself with boiled beef.

We had started from Yarmouth at three o'clock in the afternoon, and we were due in London about eight next morning. It was Mid-summer weather, and the evening was very pleasant. When we passed through a village, I pictured to myself what the insides of the houses were like, and what the inhabitants were about; and when boys came running after us, and got up behind and swung there for a little way, I wondered whether their fathers were alive, and whether they Were happy at home. I had plenty to think of, therefore, besides my mind running continually on the kind of place I was going to—which was an awful speculation. Sometimes, I remember, I resigned myself to thoughts of home and Peggotty; and to endeavouring, in a confused blind way, to recall how I had felt, and what sort of boy I used to be, before I bit Mr. Murdstone: which I couldn't satisfy myself about by any means, I seemed to have bitten him in such a remote antiquity.

The night was not so pleasant as the evening, for it got chilly; and being put between two gentlemen (the rough-faced one and another) to prevent my tumbling off the coach, I was nearly smothered by their falling asleep, and completely blocking me up. They squeezed me so hard sometimes, that I could not help crying out, 'Oh! If you please!'—which they didn't like at all, because it woke them. Opposite me was an elderly lady in a great fur cloak, who looked in the dark more like a haystack than a lady, she was wrapped up to such a degree. This lady had a basket with her, and she hadn't known what to do with it, for a long time, until she found that on account of my legs being short, it could go underneath me. It cramped and hurt me so, that it made me perfectly miserable; but if I moved in the least, and made a glass that was in the basket rattle against something else (as it was sure to do), she gave me the cruellest poke with her foot, and said, 'Come, don't YOU fidget. YOUR bones are young enough, I'm sure!'

At last the sun rose, and then my companions seemed to sleep easier. The difficulties under which they had laboured all night, and which had found utterance in the most terrific gasps and snorts, are not to be conceived. As the sun got higher, their sleep became lighter, and so they gradually one by one awoke. I recollect being very much surprised by the feint everybody made, then, of not having been to sleep at all, and by the uncommon indignation with which everyone repelled the charge. I labour under the same kind of astonishment to this day, having invariably observed that of all human weaknesses, the one to which our common nature is the least disposed to confess (I cannot imagine why) is the weakness of having gone to sleep in a coach.

What an amazing place London was to me when I saw it in the distance, and how I believed all the adventures of all my favourite heroes to be constantly enacting and re-enacting there, and how I vaguely made it out in my own mind to be fuller of wonders and wickedness than all the cities of the earth, I need not stop here to relate. We approached it by degrees, and got, in due time, to the inn in the Whitechapel district, for which we were bound. I forget whether it was the Blue Bull, or the Blue Boar; but I know it was the Blue Something, and that its likeness was painted up on the back of the coach.

The guard's eye lighted on me as he was getting down, and he said at the booking-office door:

'Is there anybody here for a yoongster booked in the name of Murdstone, from Bloonderstone, Sooffolk, to be left till called for?'

Nobody answered.

'Try Copperfield, if you please, sir,' said I, looking helplessly down.

'Is there anybody here for a yoongster, booked in the name of Murdstone, from Bloonderstone, Sooffolk, but owning to the name of Copperfield, to be left till called for?' said the guard. 'Come! IS there anybody?'

No. There was nobody. I looked anxiously around; but the inquiry made no impression on any of the bystanders, if I except a man in gaiters, with one eye, who suggested that they had better put a brass collar round my neck, and tie me up in the stable.

A ladder was brought, and I got down after the lady, who was like a haystack: not daring to stir, until her basket was removed. The coach was clear of passengers by that time, the luggage was very soon cleared out, the horses had been taken out before the luggage, and now the coach itself was wheeled and backed off by some hostlers, out of the way. Still, nobody appeared, to claim the dusty youngster from Blunderstone, Suffolk.

More solitary than Robinson Crusoe, who had nobody to look at him and see that he was solitary, I went into the booking-office, and, by invitation of the clerk on duty, passed behind the counter, and sat down on the scale at which they weighed the luggage. Here, as I sat looking at the parcels, packages, and books, and inhaling the smell of stables (ever since associated with that morning), a procession of most tremendous considerations began to march through my mind. Supposing nobody should ever fetch me, how long would they consent to keep me there? Would they keep me long enough to spend seven shillings? Should I sleep at night in one of those wooden bins, with the other luggage, and wash myself at the pump in the yard in the morning; or should I be turned out every night, and expected to come again to be left till called for, when the office opened next day? Supposing there was no mistake in the case, and Mr. Murdstone had devised this plan to get rid of me, what should I do? If they allowed me to remain there until my seven shillings were spent, I couldn't hope to remain there when I began to starve. That would obviously be inconvenient and unpleasant to the customers, besides entailing on the Blue Whatever-it-was, the risk of funeral expenses. If I started off at once, and tried to walk back home, how could I ever find my way, how could I ever hope to walk so far, how could I make sure of anyone but Peggotty, even if I got back? If I found out the nearest proper authorities, and offered myself to go for a soldier, or a sailor, I was such a little fellow that it was most likely they wouldn't take me in. These thoughts, and a hundred other such thoughts, turned me burning hot, and made me giddy with apprehension and dismay. I was in the height of my fever when a man entered and whispered to the clerk, who presently slanted me off the scale, and pushed me over to him, as if I were weighed, bought, delivered, and paid for.

As I went out of the office, hand in hand with this new acquaintance, I stole a look at him. He was a gaunt, sallow young man, with hollow cheeks, and a chin almost as black as Mr. Murdstone's; but there the likeness ended, for his whiskers were shaved off, and his hair, instead of being glossy, was rusty and dry. He was dressed in a suit of black clothes which were rather rusty and dry too, and rather short in the sleeves and legs; and he had a white neck-kerchief on, that was not over-clean. I did not, and do not, suppose that this neck-kerchief was all the linen he wore, but it was all he showed or gave any hint of.

'You're the new boy?' he said. 'Yes, sir,' I said.

I supposed I was. I didn't know.

'I'm one of the masters at Salem House,' he said.

I made him a bow and felt very much overawed. I was so ashamed to allude to a commonplace thing like my box, to a scholar and a master at Salem House, that we had gone some little distance from the yard before I had the hardihood to mention it. We turned back, on my humbly insinuating that it might be useful to me hereafter; and he told the clerk that the carrier had instructions to call for it at noon.

'If you please, sir,' I said, when we had accomplished about the same distance as before, 'is it far?'

'It's down by Blackheath,' he said.

'Is that far, sir?' I diffidently asked.

'It's a good step,' he said. 'We shall go by the stage-coach. It's about six miles.'

I was so faint and tired, that the idea of holding out for six miles more, was too much for me. I took heart to tell him that I had had nothing all night, and that if he would allow me to buy something to eat, I should be very much obliged to him. He appeared surprised at this—I see him stop and look at me now—and after considering for a few moments, said he wanted to call on an old person who lived not far off, and that the best way would be for me to buy some bread, or whatever I liked best that was wholesome, and make my breakfast at her house, where we could get some milk.

Accordingly we looked in at a baker's window, and after I had made a series of proposals to buy everything that was bilious in the shop, and he had rejected them one by one, we decided in favour of a nice little loaf of brown bread, which cost me threepence. Then, at a grocer's shop, we bought an egg and a slice of streaky bacon; which still left what I thought a good deal of change, out of the second of the bright shillings, and made me consider London a very cheap place. These provisions laid in, we went on through a great noise and uproar that confused my weary head beyond description, and over a bridge which, no doubt, was London Bridge (indeed I think he told me so, but I was half asleep), until we came to the poor person's house, which was a part of some alms-houses, as I knew by their look, and by an inscription on a stone over the gate which said they were established for twenty-five poor women.

The Master at Salem House lifted the latch of one of a number of little black doors that were all alike, and had each a little diamond-paned window on one side, and another little diamond—paned window above; and we went into the little house of one of these poor old women, who was blowing a fire to make a little saucepan boil. On seeing the master enter, the old woman stopped with the bellows on her knee, and said something that I thought sounded like 'My Charley!' but on seeing me come in too, she got up, and rubbing her hands made a confused sort of half curtsey.

'Can you cook this young gentleman's breakfast for him, if you please?' said the Master at Salem House.

'Can I?' said the old woman. 'Yes can I, sure!'

'How's Mrs. Fibbitson today?' said the Master, looking at another old woman in a large chair by the fire, who was such a bundle of clothes that I feel grateful to this hour for not having sat upon her by mistake.

'Ah, she's poorly,' said the first old woman. 'It's one of her bad days. If the fire was to go out, through any accident, I verily believe she'd go out too, and never come to life again.'

As they looked at her, I looked at her also. Although it was a warm day, she seemed to think of nothing but the fire. I fancied she was jealous even of the saucepan on it; and I have reason to know that she took its impressment into the service of boiling my egg and broiling my bacon, in dudgeon; for I saw her, with my own discomfited eyes, shake her fist at me once, when those culinary operations were going on, and no one else was looking. The sun streamed in at the little window, but she sat with her own back and the back of the large chair towards it, screening the fire as if she were sedulously keeping IT warm, instead of it keeping her warm, and watching it in a most distrustful manner. The completion of the preparations for my breakfast, by relieving the fire, gave her such extreme joy that she laughed aloud—and a very unmelodious laugh she had, I must say.

I sat down to my brown loaf, my egg, and my rasher of bacon, with a basin of milk besides, and made a most delicious meal. While I was yet in the full enjoyment of it, the old woman of the house said to the Master:

'Have you got your flute with you?'

'Yes,' he returned.

'Have a blow at it,' said the old woman, coaxingly. 'Do!'

The Master, upon this, put his hand underneath the skirts of his coat, and brought out his flute in three pieces, which he screwed together, and began immediately to play. My impression is, after many years of consideration, that there never can have been anybody in the world who played worse. He made the most dismal sounds I have ever heard produced by any means, natural or artificial. I don't know what the tunes were—if there were such things in the performance at all, which I doubt—but the influence of the strain upon me was, first, to make me think of all my sorrows until I could hardly keep my tears back; then to take away my appetite; and lastly, to make me so sleepy that I couldn't keep my eyes open. They begin to close again, and I begin to nod, as the recollection rises fresh upon me. Once more the little room, with its open corner cupboard, and its square-backed chairs, and its angular little staircase leading to the room above, and its three peacock's feathers displayed over the mantelpiece—I remember wondering when I first went in, what that peacock would have thought if he had known what his finery was doomed to come to—fades from before me, and I nod, and sleep. The flute becomes inaudible, the wheels of the coach are heard instead, and I am on my journey. The coach jolts, I wake with a start, and the flute has come back again, and the Master at Salem House is sitting with his legs crossed, playing it dolefully, while the old woman of the house looks on delighted. She fades in her turn, and he fades, and all fades, and there is no flute, no Master, no Salem House, no David Copperfield, no anything but heavy sleep.

I dreamed, I thought, that once while he was blowing into this dismal flute, the old woman of the house, who had gone nearer and nearer to him in her ecstatic admiration, leaned over the back of his chair and gave him an affectionate squeeze round the neck, which stopped his playing for a moment. I was in the middle state between sleeping and waking, either then or immediately afterwards; for, as he resumed—it was a real fact that he had stopped playing—I saw and heard the same old woman ask Mrs. Fibbitson if it wasn't delicious (meaning the flute), to which Mrs. Fibbitson replied, 'Ay, ay! yes!' and nodded at the fire: to which, I am persuaded, she gave the credit of the whole performance.

When I seemed to have been dozing a long while, the Master at Salem House unscrewed his flute into the three pieces, put them up as before, and took me away. We found the coach very near at hand, and got upon the roof; but I was so dead sleepy, that when we stopped on the road to take up somebody else, they put me inside where there were no passengers, and where I slept profoundly, until I found the coach going at a footpace up a steep hill among green leaves. Presently, it stopped, and had come to its destination.

A short walk brought us—I mean the Master and me—to Salem House, which was enclosed with a high brick wall, and looked very dull. Over a door in this wall was a board with SALEM HOUSE upon it; and through a grating in this door we were surveyed when we rang the bell by a surly face, which I found, on the door being opened, belonged to a stout man with a bull-neck, a wooden leg, overhanging temples, and his hair cut close all round his head.

'The new boy,' said the Master.

The man with the wooden leg eyed me all over—it didn't take long, for there was not much of me—and locked the gate behind us, and took out the key. We were going up to the house, among some dark heavy trees, when he called after my conductor. 'Hallo!'

We looked back, and he was standing at the door of a little lodge, where he lived, with a pair of boots in his hand.

'Here! The cobbler's been,' he said, 'since you've been out, Mr. Mell, and he says he can't mend 'em any more. He says there ain't a bit of the original boot left, and he wonders you expect it.'

With these words he threw the boots towards Mr. Mell, who went back a few paces to pick them up, and looked at them (very disconsolately, I was afraid), as we went on together. I observed then, for the first time, that the boots he had on were a good deal the worse for wear, and that his stocking was just breaking out in one place, like a bud.

Salem House was a square brick building with wings; of a bare and unfurnished appearance. All about it was so very quiet, that I said to Mr. Mell I supposed the boys were out; but he seemed surprised at my not knowing that it was holiday-time. That all the boys were at their several homes. That Mr. Creakle, the proprietor, was down by the sea-side with Mrs. and Miss Creakle; and that I was sent in holiday-time as a punishment for my misdoing, all of which he explained to me as we went along.

I gazed upon the schoolroom into which he took me, as the most forlorn and desolate place I had ever seen. I see it now. A long room with three long rows of desks, and six of forms, and bristling all round with pegs for hats and slates. Scraps of old copy-books and exercises litter the dirty floor. Some silkworms' houses, made of the same materials, are scattered over the desks. Two miserable little white mice, left behind by their owner, are running up and down in a fusty castle made of pasteboard and wire, looking in all the corners with their red eyes for anything to eat. A bird, in a cage very little bigger than himself, makes a mournful rattle now and then in hopping on his perch, two inches high, or dropping from it; but neither sings nor chirps. There is a strange unwholesome smell upon the room, like mildewed corduroys, sweet apples wanting air, and rotten books. There could not well be more ink splashed about it, if it had been roofless from its first construction, and the skies had rained, snowed, hailed, and blown ink through the varying seasons of the year.

Mr. Mell having left me while he took his irreparable boots upstairs, I went softly to the upper end of the room, observing all this as I crept along. Suddenly I came upon a pasteboard placard, beautifully written, which was lying on the desk, and bore these words: 'TAKE CARE OF HIM. HE BITES.'

I got upon the desk immediately, apprehensive of at least a great dog underneath. But, though I looked all round with anxious eyes, I could see nothing of him. I was still engaged in peering about, when Mr. Mell came back, and asked me what I did up there?

'I beg your pardon, sir,' says I, 'if you please, I'm looking for the dog.'

'Dog?' he says. 'What dog?'

'Isn't it a dog, sir?'

'Isn't what a dog?'

'That's to be taken care of, sir; that bites.'

'No, Copperfield,' says he, gravely, 'that's not a dog. That's a boy. My instructions are, Copperfield, to put this placard on your back. I am sorry to make such a beginning with you, but I must do it.' With that he took me down, and tied the placard, which was neatly constructed for the purpose, on my shoulders like a knapsack; and wherever I went, afterwards, I had the consolation of carrying it.

What I suffered from that placard, nobody can imagine. Whether it was possible for people to see me or not, I always fancied that somebody was reading it. It was no relief to turn round and find nobody; for wherever my back was, there I imagined somebody always to be. That cruel man with the wooden leg aggravated my sufferings. He was in authority; and if he ever saw me leaning against a tree, or a wall, or the house, he roared out from his lodge door in a stupendous voice, 'Hallo, you sir! You Copperfield! Show that badge conspicuous, or I'll report you!' The playground was a bare gravelled yard, open to all the back of the house and the offices; and I knew that the servants read it, and the butcher read it, and the baker read it; that everybody, in a word, who came backwards and forwards to the house, of a morning when I was ordered to walk there, read that I was to be taken care of, for I bit, I recollect that I positively began to have a dread of myself, as a kind of wild boy who did bite.

There was an old door in this playground, on which the boys had a custom of carving their names. It was completely covered with such inscriptions. In my dread of the end of the vacation and their coming back, I could not read a boy's name, without inquiring in what tone and with what emphasis HE would read, 'Take care of him. He bites.' There was one boy—a certain J. Steerforth—who cut his name very deep and very often, who, I conceived, would read it in a rather strong voice, and afterwards pull my hair. There was another boy, one Tommy Traddles, who I dreaded would make game of it, and pretend to be dreadfully frightened of me. There was a third, George Demple, who I fancied would sing it. I have looked, a little shrinking creature, at that door, until the owners of all the names—there were five-and-forty of them in the school then, Mr. Mell said—seemed to send me to Coventry by general acclamation, and to cry out, each in his own way, 'Take care of him. He bites!'

It was the same with the places at the desks and forms. It was the same with the groves of deserted bedsteads I peeped at, on my way to, and when I was in, my own bed. I remember dreaming night after night, of being with my mother as she used to be, or of going to a party at Mr. Peggotty's, or of travelling outside the stage-coach, or of dining again with my unfortunate friend the waiter, and in all these circumstances making people scream and stare, by the unhappy disclosure that I had nothing on but my little night-shirt, and that placard.

In the monotony of my life, and in my constant apprehension of the re-opening of the school, it was such an insupportable affliction! I had long tasks every day to do with Mr. Mell; but I did them, there being no Mr. and Miss Murdstone here, and got through them without disgrace. Before, and after them, I walked about—supervised, as I have mentioned, by the man with the wooden leg. How vividly I call to mind the damp about the house, the green cracked flagstones in the court, an old leaky water-butt, and the discoloured trunks of some of the grim trees, which seemed to have dripped more in the rain than other trees, and to have blown less in the sun! At one we dined, Mr. Mell and I, at the upper end of a long bare dining-room, full of deal tables, and smelling of fat. Then, we had more tasks until tea, which Mr. Mell drank out of a blue teacup, and I out of a tin pot. All day long, and until seven or eight in the evening, Mr. Mell, at his own detached desk in the schoolroom, worked hard with pen, ink, ruler, books, and writing-paper, making out the bills (as I found) for last half-year. When he had put up his things for the night he took out his flute, and blew at it, until I almost thought he would gradually blow his whole being into the large hole at the top, and ooze away at the keys.

I picture my small self in the dimly-lighted rooms, sitting with my head upon my hand, listening to the doleful performance of Mr. Mell, and conning tomorrow's lessons. I picture myself with my books shut up, still listening to the doleful performance of Mr. Mell, and listening through it to what used to be at home, and to the blowing of the wind on Yarmouth flats, and feeling very sad and solitary. I picture myself going up to bed, among the unused rooms, and sitting on my bed-side crying for a comfortable word from Peggotty. I picture myself coming downstairs in the morning, and looking through a long ghastly gash of a staircase window at the school-bell hanging on the top of an out-house with a weathercock above it; and dreading the time when it shall ring J. Steerforth and the rest to work: which is only second, in my foreboding apprehensions, to the time when the man with the wooden leg shall unlock the rusty gate to give admission to the awful Mr. Creakle. I cannot think I was a very dangerous character in any of these aspects, but in all of them I carried the same warning on my back.

Mr. Mell never said much to me, but he was never harsh to me. I suppose we were company to each other, without talking. I forgot to mention that he would talk to himself sometimes, and grin, and clench his fist, and grind his teeth, and pull his hair in an unaccountable manner. But he had these peculiarities: and at first they frightened me, though I soon got used to them.

CHAPTER 6. I ENLARGE MY CIRCLE OF ACQUAINTANCE

I HAD led this life about a month, when the man with the wooden leg began to stump about with a mop and a bucket of water, from which I inferred that preparations were making to receive Mr. Creakle and the boys. I was not mistaken; for the mop came into the schoolroom before long, and turned out Mr. Mell and me, who lived where we could, and got on how we could, for some days, during which we were always in the way of two or three young women, who had rarely shown themselves before, and were so continually in the midst of dust that I sneezed almost as much as if Salem House had been a great snuff-box.

One day I was informed by Mr. Mell that Mr. Creakle would be home that evening. In the evening, after tea, I heard that he was come. Before bedtime, I was fetched by the man with the wooden leg to appear before him.

Mr. Creakle's part of the house was a good deal more comfortable than ours, and he had a snug bit of garden that looked pleasant after the dusty playground, which was such a desert in miniature, that I thought no one but a camel, or a dromedary, could have felt at home in it. It seemed to me a bold thing even to take notice that the passage looked comfortable, as I went on my way, trembling, to Mr. Creakle's presence: which so abashed me, when I was ushered into it, that I hardly saw Mrs. Creakle or Miss Creakle (who were both there, in the parlour), or anything but Mr. Creakle, a stout gentleman with a bunch of watch-chain and seals, in an arm-chair, with a tumbler and bottle beside him.

'So!' said Mr. Creakle. 'This is the young gentleman whose teeth are to be filed! Turn him round.'

The wooden-legged man turned me about so as to exhibit the placard; and having afforded time for a full survey of it, turned me about again, with my face to Mr. Creakle, and posted himself at Mr. Creakle's side. Mr. Creakle's face was fiery, and his eyes were small, and deep in his head; he had thick veins in his forehead, a little nose, and a large chin. He was bald on the top of his head; and had some thin wet-looking hair that was just turning grey, brushed across each temple, so that the two sides interlaced on his forehead. But the circumstance about him which impressed me most, was, that he had no voice, but spoke in a whisper. The exertion this cost him, or the consciousness of talking in that feeble way, made his angry face so much more angry, and his thick veins so much thicker, when he spoke, that I am not surprised, on looking back, at this peculiarity striking me as his chief one. 'Now,' said Mr. Creakle. 'What's the report of this boy?'

'There's nothing against him yet,' returned the man with the wooden leg. 'There has been no opportunity.'

I thought Mr. Creakle was disappointed. I thought Mrs. and Miss Creakle (at whom I now glanced for the first time, and who were, both, thin and quiet) were not disappointed.

'Come here, sir!' said Mr. Creakle, beckoning to me.

'Come here!' said the man with the wooden leg, repeating the gesture.

'I have the happiness of knowing your father-in-law,' whispered Mr. Creakle, taking me by the ear; 'and a worthy man he is, and a man of a strong character. He knows me, and I know him. Do YOU know me? Hey?' said Mr. Creakle, pinching my ear with ferocious playfulness.

'Not yet, sir,' I said, flinching with the pain.

'Not yet? Hey?' repeated Mr. Creakle. 'But you will soon. Hey?'

'You will soon. Hey?' repeated the man with the wooden leg. I afterwards found that he generally acted, with his strong voice, as Mr. Creakle's interpreter to the boys.

I was very much frightened, and said, I hoped so, if he pleased. I felt, all this while, as if my ear were blazing; he pinched it so hard.

'I'll tell you what I am,' whispered Mr. Creakle, letting it go at last, with a screw at parting that brought the water into my eyes. 'I'm a Tartar.'

'A Tartar,' said the man with the wooden leg.

'When I say I'll do a thing, I do it,' said Mr. Creakle; 'and when I say I will have a thing done, I will have it done.'

'—Will have a thing done, I will have it done,' repeated the man with the wooden leg.

'I am a determined character,' said Mr. Creakle. 'That's what I am. I do my duty. That's what I do. My flesh and blood'—he looked at Mrs. Creakle as he said this—'when it rises against me, is not my flesh and blood. I discard it. Has that fellow'—to the man with the wooden leg—'been here again?'

'No,' was the answer.

'No,' said Mr. Creakle. 'He knows better. He knows me. Let him keep away. I say let him keep away,' said Mr. Creakle, striking his hand upon the table, and looking at Mrs. Creakle, 'for he knows me. Now you have begun to know me too, my young friend, and you may go. Take him away.'

I was very glad to be ordered away, for Mrs. and Miss Creakle were both wiping their eyes, and I felt as uncomfortable for them as I did for myself. But I had a petition on my mind which concerned me so nearly, that I couldn't help saying, though I wondered at my own courage:

'If you please, sir—'

Mr. Creakle whispered, 'Hah! What's this?' and bent his eyes upon me, as if he would have burnt me up with them.

'If you please, sir,' I faltered, 'if I might be allowed (I am very sorry indeed, sir, for what I did) to take this writing off, before the boys come back—'

Whether Mr. Creakle was in earnest, or whether he only did it to frighten me, I don't know, but he made a burst out of his chair, before which I precipitately retreated, without waiting for the escort Of the man with the wooden leg, and never once stopped until I reached my own bedroom, where, finding I was not pursued, I went to bed, as it was time, and lay quaking, for a couple of hours.

Next morning Mr. Sharp came back. Mr. Sharp was the first master, and superior to Mr. Mell. Mr. Mell took his meals with the boys, but Mr. Sharp dined and supped at Mr. Creakle's table. He was a limp, delicate-looking gentleman, I thought, with a good deal of nose, and a way of carrying his head on one side, as if it were a little too heavy for him. His hair was very smooth and wavy; but I was informed by the very first boy who came back that it was a wig (a second-hand one HE said), and that Mr. Sharp went out every Saturday afternoon to get it curled.

It was no other than Tommy Traddles who gave me this piece of intelligence. He was the first boy who returned. He introduced himself by informing me that I should find his name on the right-hand corner of the gate, over the top-bolt; upon that I said, 'Traddles?' to which he replied, 'The same,' and then he asked me for a full account of myself and family.

It was a happy circumstance for me that Traddles came back first. He enjoyed my placard so much, that he saved me from the embarrassment of either disclosure or concealment, by presenting me to every other boy who came back, great or small, immediately on his arrival, in this form of introduction, 'Look here! Here's a game!' Happily, too, the greater part of the boys came back low-spirited, and were not so boisterous at my expense as I had expected. Some of them certainly did dance about me like wild Indians, and the greater part could not resist the temptation of pretending that I was a dog, and patting and soothing me, lest I should bite, and saying, 'Lie down, sir!' and calling me Towzer. This was naturally confusing, among so many strangers, and cost me some tears, but on the whole it was much better than I had anticipated.

I was not considered as being formally received into the school, however, until J. Steerforth arrived. Before this boy, who was reputed to be a great scholar, and was very good-looking, and at least half-a-dozen years my senior, I was carried as before a magistrate. He inquired, under a shed in the playground, into the particulars of my punishment, and was pleased to express his opinion that it was 'a jolly shame'; for which I became bound to him ever afterwards.

'What money have you got, Copperfield?' he said, walking aside with me when he had disposed of my affair in these terms. I told him seven shillings.

'You had better give it to me to take care of,' he said. 'At least, you can if you like. You needn't if you don't like.'

I hastened to comply with his friendly suggestion, and opening Peggotty's purse, turned it upside down into his hand.

'Do you want to spend anything now?' he asked me.

'No thank you,' I replied.

'You can, if you like, you know,' said Steerforth. 'Say the word.'

'No, thank you, sir,' I repeated.

'Perhaps you'd like to spend a couple of shillings or so, in a bottle of currant wine by and by, up in the bedroom?' said Steerforth. 'You belong to my bedroom, I find.'

It certainly had not occurred to me before, but I said, Yes, I should like that.

'Very good,' said Steerforth. 'You'll be glad to spend another shilling or so, in almond cakes, I dare say?'

I said, Yes, I should like that, too.

'And another shilling or so in biscuits, and another in fruit, eh?' said Steerforth. 'I say, young Copperfield, you're going it!'

I smiled because he smiled, but I was a little troubled in my mind, too.

'Well!' said Steerforth. 'We must make it stretch as far as we can; that's all. I'll do the best in my power for you. I can go out when I like, and I'll smuggle the prog in.' With these words he put the money in his pocket, and kindly told me not to make myself uneasy; he would take care it should be all right. He was as good as his word, if that were all right which I had a secret misgiving was nearly all wrong—for I feared it was a waste of my mother's two half-crowns—though I had preserved the piece of paper they were wrapped in: which was a precious saving. When we went upstairs to bed, he produced the whole seven shillings' worth, and laid it out on my bed in the moonlight, saying:

'There you are, young Copperfield, and a royal spread you've got.'

I couldn't think of doing the honours of the feast, at my time of life, while he was by; my hand shook at the very thought of it. I begged him to do me the favour of presiding; and my request being seconded by the other boys who were in that room, he acceded to it, and sat upon my pillow, handing round the viands—with perfect fairness, I must say—and dispensing the currant wine in a little glass without a foot, which was his own property. As to me, I sat on his left hand, and the rest were grouped about us, on the nearest beds and on the floor.

How well I recollect our sitting there, talking in whispers; or their talking, and my respectfully listening, I ought rather to say; the moonlight falling a little way into the room, through the window, painting a pale window on the floor, and the greater part of us in shadow, except when Steerforth dipped a match into a phosphorus-box, when he wanted to look for anything on the board, and shed a blue glare over us that was gone directly! A certain mysterious feeling, consequent on the darkness, the secrecy of the revel, and the whisper in which everything was said, steals over me again, and I listen to all they tell me with a vague feeling of solemnity and awe, which makes me glad that they are all so near, and frightens me (though I feign to laugh) when Traddles pretends to see a ghost in the corner.

I heard all kinds of things about the school and all belonging to it. I heard that Mr. Creakle had not preferred his claim to being a Tartar without reason; that he was the sternest and most severe of masters; that he laid about him, right and left, every day of his life, charging in among the boys like a trooper, and slashing away, unmercifully. That he knew nothing himself, but the art of slashing, being more ignorant (J. Steerforth said) than the lowest boy in the school; that he had been, a good many years ago, a small hop-dealer in the Borough, and had taken to the schooling business after being bankrupt in hops, and making away with Mrs. Creakle's money. With a good deal more of that sort, which I wondered how they knew.

I heard that the man with the wooden leg, whose name was Tungay, was an obstinate barbarian who had formerly assisted in the hop business, but had come into the scholastic line with Mr. Creakle, in consequence, as was supposed among the boys, of his having broken his leg in Mr. Creakle's service, and having done a deal of dishonest work for him, and knowing his secrets. I heard that with the single exception of Mr. Creakle, Tungay considered the whole establishment, masters and boys, as his natural enemies, and that the only delight of his life was to be sour and malicious. I heard that Mr. Creakle had a son, who had not been Tungay's friend, and who, assisting in the school, had once held some remonstrance with his father on an occasion when its discipline was very cruelly exercised, and was supposed, besides, to have protested against his father's usage of his mother. I heard that Mr. Creakle had turned him out of doors, in consequence; and that Mrs. and Miss Creakle had been in a sad way, ever since.

But the greatest wonder that I heard of Mr. Creakle was, there being one boy in the school on whom he never ventured to lay a hand, and that boy being J. Steerforth. Steerforth himself confirmed this when it was stated, and said that he should like to begin to see him do it. On being asked by a mild boy (not me) how he would proceed if he did begin to see him do it, he dipped a match into his phosphorus-box on purpose to shed a glare over his reply, and said he would commence by knocking him down with a blow on the forehead from the seven-and-sixpenny ink-bottle that was always on the mantelpiece. We sat in the dark for some time, breathless.

I heard that Mr. Sharp and Mr. Mell were both supposed to be wretchedly paid; and that when there was hot and cold meat for dinner at Mr. Creakle's table, Mr. Sharp was always expected to say he preferred cold; which was again corroborated by J. Steerforth, the only parlour-boarder. I heard that Mr. Sharp's wig didn't fit him; and that he needn't be so 'bounceable'—somebody else said 'bumptious'—about it, because his own red hair was very plainly to be seen behind.

I heard that one boy, who was a coal-merchant's son, came as a set-off against the coal-bill, and was called, on that account, 'Exchange or Barter'—a name selected from the arithmetic book as expressing this arrangement. I heard that the table beer was a robbery of parents, and the pudding an imposition. I heard that Miss Creakle was regarded by the school in general as being in love with Steerforth; and I am sure, as I sat in the dark, thinking of his nice voice, and his fine face, and his easy manner, and his curling hair, I thought it very likely. I heard that Mr. Mell was not a bad sort of fellow, but hadn't a sixpence to bless himself with; and that there was no doubt that old Mrs. Mell, his mother, was as poor as job. I thought of my breakfast then, and what had sounded like 'My Charley!' but I was, I am glad to remember, as mute as a mouse about it.

The hearing of all this, and a good deal more, outlasted the banquet some time. The greater part of the guests had gone to bed as soon as the eating and drinking were over; and we, who had remained whispering and listening half-undressed, at last betook ourselves to bed, too.

'Good night, young Copperfield,' said Steerforth. 'I'll take care of you.' 'You're very kind,' I gratefully returned. 'I am very much obliged to you.'

'You haven't got a sister, have you?' said Steerforth, yawning.

'No,' I answered.

'That's a pity,' said Steerforth. 'If you had had one, I should think she would have been a pretty, timid, little, bright-eyed sort of girl. I should have liked to know her. Good night, young Copperfield.'

'Good night, sir,' I replied.

I thought of him very much after I went to bed, and raised myself, I recollect, to look at him where he lay in the moonlight, with his handsome face turned up, and his head reclining easily on his arm. He was a person of great power in my eyes; that was, of course, the reason of my mind running on him. No veiled future dimly glanced upon him in the moonbeams. There was no shadowy picture of his footsteps, in the garden that I dreamed of walking in all night.

CHAPTER 7. MY 'FIRST HALF' AT SALEM HOUSE

School began in earnest next day. A profound impression was made upon me, I remember, by the roar of voices in the schoolroom suddenly becoming hushed as death when Mr. Creakle entered after breakfast, and stood in the doorway looking round upon us like a giant in a story-book surveying his captives.

Tungay stood at Mr. Creakle's elbow. He had no occasion, I thought, to cry out 'Silence!' so ferociously, for the boys were all struck speechless and motionless.

Mr. Creakle was seen to speak, and Tungay was heard, to this effect.

'Now, boys, this is a new half. Take care what you're about, in this new half. Come fresh up to the lessons, I advise you, for I come fresh up to the punishment. I won't flinch. It will be of no use your rubbing yourselves; you won't rub the marks out that I shall give you. Now get to work, every boy!'

When this dreadful exordium was over, and Tungay had stumped out again, Mr. Creakle came to where I sat, and told me that if I were famous for biting, he was famous for biting, too. He then showed me the cane, and asked me what I thought of THAT, for a tooth? Was it a sharp tooth, hey? Was it a double tooth, hey? Had it a deep prong, hey? Did it bite, hey? Did it bite? At every question he gave me a fleshy cut with it that made me writhe; so I was very soon made free of Salem House (as Steerforth said), and was very soon in tears also.

Not that I mean to say these were special marks of distinction, which only I received. On the contrary, a large majority of the boys (especially the smaller ones) were visited with similar instances of notice, as Mr. Creakle made the round of the schoolroom. Half the establishment was writhing and crying, before the day's work began; and how much of it had writhed and cried before the day's work was over, I am really afraid to recollect, lest I should seem to exaggerate.

I should think there never can have been a man who enjoyed his profession more than Mr. Creakle did. He had a delight in cutting at the boys, which was like the satisfaction of a craving appetite. I am confident that he couldn't resist a chubby boy, especially; that there was a fascination in such a subject, which made him restless in his mind, until he had scored and marked him for the day. I was chubby myself, and ought to know. I am sure when I think of the fellow now, my blood rises against him with the disinterested indignation I should feel if I could have known all about him without having ever been in his power; but it rises hotly, because I know him to have been an incapable brute, who had no more right to be possessed of the great trust he held, than to be Lord High Admiral, or Commander-in-Chief—in either of which capacities it is probable that he would have done infinitely less mischief.

Miserable little propitiators of a remorseless Idol, how abject we were to him! What a launch in life I think it now, on looking back, to be so mean and servile to a man of such parts and pretensions!

Here I sit at the desk again, watching his eye—humbly watching his eye, as he rules a ciphering-book for another victim whose hands have just been flattened by that identical ruler, and who is trying to wipe the sting out with a pocket-handkerchief. I have plenty to do. I don't watch his eye in idleness, but because I am morbidly attracted to it, in a dread desire to know what he will do next, and whether it will be my turn to suffer, or somebody else's. A lane of small boys beyond me, with the same interest in his eye, watch it too. I think he knows it, though he pretends he don't. He makes dreadful mouths as he rules the ciphering-book; and now he throws his eye sideways down our lane, and we all droop over our books and tremble. A moment afterwards we are again eyeing him. An unhappy culprit, found guilty of imperfect exercise, approaches at his command. The culprit falters excuses, and professes a determination to do better tomorrow. Mr. Creakle cuts a joke before he beats him, and we laugh at it,—miserable little dogs, we laugh, with our visages as white as ashes, and our hearts sinking into our boots.

Here I sit at the desk again, on a drowsy summer afternoon. A buzz and hum go up around me, as if the boys were so many bluebottles. A cloggy sensation of the lukewarm fat of meat is upon me (we dined an hour or two ago), and my head is as heavy as so much lead. I would give the world to go to sleep. I sit with my eye on Mr. Creakle, blinking at him like a young owl; when sleep overpowers me for a minute, he still looms through my slumber, ruling those ciphering-books, until he softly comes behind me and wakes me to plainer perception of him, with a red ridge across my back.

Here I am in the playground, with my eye still fascinated by him, though I can't see him. The window at a little distance from which I know he is having his dinner, stands for him, and I eye that instead. If he shows his face near it, mine assumes an imploring and submissive expression. If he looks out through the glass, the boldest boy (Steerforth excepted) stops in the middle of a shout or yell, and becomes contemplative. One day, Traddles (the most unfortunate boy in the world) breaks that window accidentally, with a ball. I shudder at this moment with the tremendous sensation of seeing it done, and feeling that the ball has bounded on to Mr. Creakle's sacred head.

Poor Traddles! In a tight sky-blue suit that made his arms and legs like German sausages, or roly-poly puddings, he was the merriest and most miserable of all the boys. He was always being caned—I think he was caned every day that half-year, except one holiday Monday when he was only ruler'd on both hands—and was always going to write to his uncle about it, and never did. After laying his head on the desk for a little while, he would cheer up, somehow, begin to laugh again, and draw skeletons all over his slate, before his eyes were dry. I used at first to wonder what comfort Traddles found in drawing skeletons; and for some time looked upon him as a sort of hermit, who reminded himself by those symbols of mortality that caning couldn't last for ever. But I believe he only did it because they were easy, and didn't want any features.

He was very honourable, Traddles was, and held it as a solemn duty in the boys to stand by one another. He suffered for this on several occasions; and particularly once, when Steerforth laughed in church, and the Beadle thought it was Traddles, and took him out. I see him now, going away in custody, despised by the congregation. He never said who was the real offender, though he smarted for it next day, and was imprisoned so many hours that he came forth with a whole churchyard-full of skeletons swarming all over his Latin Dictionary. But he had his reward. Steerforth said there was nothing of the sneak in Traddles, and we all felt that to be the highest praise. For my part, I could have gone through a good deal (though I was much less brave than Traddles, and nothing like so old) to have won such a recompense.

To see Steerforth walk to church before us, arm-in-arm with Miss Creakle, was one of the great sights of my life. I didn't think Miss Creakle equal to little Em'ly in point of beauty, and I didn't love her (I didn't dare); but I thought her a young lady of extraordinary attractions, and in point of gentility not to be surpassed. When Steerforth, in white trousers, carried her parasol for her, I felt proud to know him; and believed that she could not choose but adore him with all her heart. Mr. Sharp and Mr. Mell were both notable personages in my eyes; but Steerforth was to them what the sun was to two stars.

Steerforth continued his protection of me, and proved a very useful friend; since nobody dared to annoy one whom he honoured with his countenance. He couldn't—or at all events he didn't—defend me from Mr. Creakle, who was very severe with me; but whenever I had been treated worse than usual, he always told me that I wanted a little of his pluck, and that he wouldn't have stood it himself; which I felt he intended for encouragement, and considered to be very kind of him. There was one advantage, and only one that I know of, in Mr. Creakle's severity. He found my placard in his way when he came up or down behind the form on which I sat, and wanted to make a cut at me in passing; for this reason it was soon taken off, and I saw it no more.

An accidental circumstance cemented the intimacy between Steerforth and me, in a manner that inspired me with great pride and satisfaction, though it sometimes led to inconvenience. It happened on one occasion, when he was doing me the honour of talking to me in the playground, that I hazarded the observation that something or somebody—I forget what now—was like something or somebody in Peregrine Pickle. He said nothing at the time; but when I was going to bed at night, asked me if I had got that book?

I told him no, and explained how it was that I had read it, and all those other books of which I have made mention.

'And do you recollect them?' Steerforth said.

'Oh yes,' I replied; I had a good memory, and I believed I recollected them very well.

'Then I tell you what, young Copperfield,' said Steerforth, 'you shall tell 'em to me. I can't get to sleep very early at night, and I generally wake rather early in the morning. We'll go over 'em one after another. We'll make some regular Arabian Nights of it.'

I felt extremely flattered by this arrangement, and we commenced carrying it into execution that very evening. What ravages I committed on my favourite authors in the course of my interpretation of them, I am not in a condition to say, and should be very unwilling to know; but I had a profound faith in them, and I had, to the best of my belief, a simple, earnest manner of narrating what I did narrate; and these qualities went a long way.

The drawback was, that I was often sleepy at night, or out of spirits and indisposed to resume the story; and then it was rather hard work, and it must be done; for to disappoint or to displease Steerforth was of course out of the question. In the morning, too, when I felt weary, and should have enjoyed another hour's repose very much, it was a tiresome thing to be roused, like the Sultana Scheherazade, and forced into a long story before the getting-up bell rang; but Steerforth was resolute; and as he explained to me, in return, my sums and exercises, and anything in my tasks that was too hard for me, I was no loser by the transaction. Let me do myself justice, however. I was moved by no interested or selfish motive, nor was I moved by fear of him. I admired and loved him, and his approval was return enough. It was so precious to me that I look back on these trifles, now, with an aching heart.

Steerforth was considerate, too; and showed his consideration, in one particular instance, in an unflinching manner that was a little tantalizing, I suspect, to poor Traddles and the rest. Peggotty's promised letter—what a comfortable letter it was!—arrived before 'the half' was many weeks old; and with it a cake in a perfect nest of oranges, and two bottles of cowslip wine. This treasure, as in duty bound, I laid at the feet of Steerforth, and begged him to dispense.

'Now, I'll tell you what, young Copperfield,' said he: 'the wine shall be kept to wet your whistle when you are story-telling.'

I blushed at the idea, and begged him, in my modesty, not to think of it. But he said he had observed I was sometimes hoarse—a little roopy was his exact expression—and it should be, every drop, devoted to the purpose he had mentioned. Accordingly, it was locked up in his box, and drawn off by himself in a phial, and administered to me through a piece of quill in the cork, when I was supposed to be in want of a restorative. Sometimes, to make it a more sovereign specific, he was so kind as to squeeze orange juice into it, or to stir it up with ginger, or dissolve a peppermint drop in it; and although I cannot assert that the flavour was improved by these experiments, or that it was exactly the compound one would have chosen for a stomachic, the last thing at night and the first thing in the morning, I drank it gratefully and was very sensible of his attention.

We seem, to me, to have been months over Peregrine, and months more over the other stories. The institution never flagged for want of a story, I am certain; and the wine lasted out almost as well as the matter. Poor Traddles—I never think of that boy but with a strange disposition to laugh, and with tears in my eyes—was a sort of chorus, in general; and affected to be convulsed with mirth at the comic parts, and to be overcome with fear when there was any passage of an alarming character in the narrative. This rather put me out, very often. It was a great jest of his, I recollect, to pretend that he couldn't keep his teeth from chattering, whenever mention was made of an Alguazill in connexion with the adventures of Gil Blas; and I remember that when Gil Blas met the captain of the robbers in Madrid, this unlucky joker counterfeited such an ague of terror, that he was overheard by Mr. Creakle, who was prowling about the passage, and handsomely flogged for disorderly conduct in the bedroom. Whatever I had within me that was romantic and dreamy, was encouraged by so much story-telling in the dark; and in that respect the pursuit may not have been very profitable to me. But the being cherished as a kind of plaything in my room, and the consciousness that this accomplishment of mine was bruited about among the boys, and attracted a good deal of notice to me though I was the youngest there, stimulated me to exertion. In a school carried on by sheer cruelty, whether it is presided over by a dunce or not, there is not likely to be much learnt. I believe our boys were, generally, as ignorant a set as any schoolboys in existence; they were too much troubled and knocked about to learn; they could no more do that to advantage, than any one can do anything to advantage in a life of constant misfortune, torment, and worry. But my little vanity, and Steerforth's help, urged me on somehow; and without saving me from much, if anything, in the way of punishment, made me, for the time I was there, an exception to the general body, insomuch that I did steadily pick up some crumbs of knowledge.

In this I was much assisted by Mr. Mell, who had a liking for me that I am grateful to remember. It always gave me pain to observe that Steerforth treated him with systematic disparagement, and seldom lost an occasion of wounding his feelings, or inducing others to do so. This troubled me the more for a long time, because I had soon told Steerforth, from whom I could no more keep such a secret, than I could keep a cake or any other tangible possession, about the two old women Mr. Mell had taken me to see; and I was always afraid that Steerforth would let it out, and twit him with it.

We little thought, any one of us, I dare say, when I ate my breakfast that first morning, and went to sleep under the shadow of the peacock's feathers to the sound of the flute, what consequences would come of the introduction into those alms-houses of my insignificant person. But the visit had its unforeseen consequences; and of a serious sort, too, in their way.

One day when Mr. Creakle kept the house from indisposition, which naturally diffused a lively joy through the school, there was a good deal of noise in the course of the morning's work. The great relief and satisfaction experienced by the boys made them difficult to manage; and though the dreaded Tungay brought his wooden leg in twice or thrice, and took notes of the principal offenders' names, no great impression was made by it, as they were pretty sure of getting into trouble tomorrow, do what they would, and thought it wise, no doubt, to enjoy themselves today.

It was, properly, a half-holiday; being Saturday. But as the noise in the playground would have disturbed Mr. Creakle, and the weather was not favourable for going out walking, we were ordered into school in the afternoon, and set some lighter tasks than usual, which were made for the occasion. It was the day of the week on which Mr. Sharp went out to get his wig curled; so Mr. Mell, who always did the drudgery, whatever it was, kept school by himself. If I could associate the idea of a bull or a bear with anyone so mild as Mr. Mell, I should think of him, in connexion with that afternoon when the uproar was at its height, as of one of those animals, baited by a thousand dogs. I recall him bending his aching head, supported on his bony hand, over the book on his desk, and wretchedly endeavouring to get on with his tiresome work, amidst an uproar that might have made the Speaker of the House of Commons giddy. Boys started in and out of their places, playing at puss in the corner with other boys; there were laughing boys, singing boys, talking boys, dancing boys, howling boys; boys shuffled with their feet, boys whirled about him, grinning, making faces, mimicking him behind his back and before his eyes; mimicking his poverty, his boots, his coat, his mother, everything belonging to him that they should have had consideration for.

'Silence!' cried Mr. Mell, suddenly rising up, and striking his desk with the book. 'What does this mean! It's impossible to bear it. It's maddening. How can you do it to me, boys?'

It was my book that he struck his desk with; and as I stood beside him, following his eye as it glanced round the room, I saw the boys all stop, some suddenly surprised, some half afraid, and some sorry perhaps.

Steerforth's place was at the bottom of the school, at the opposite end of the long room. He was lounging with his back against the wall, and his hands in his pockets, and looked at Mr. Mell with his mouth shut up as if he were whistling, when Mr. Mell looked at him.

'Silence, Mr. Steerforth!' said Mr. Mell.

'Silence yourself,' said Steerforth, turning red. 'Whom are you talking to?'

'Sit down,' said Mr. Mell.

'Sit down yourself,' said Steerforth, 'and mind your business.'

There was a titter, and some applause; but Mr. Mell was so white, that silence immediately succeeded; and one boy, who had darted out behind him to imitate his mother again, changed his mind, and pretended to want a pen mended.

'If you think, Steerforth,' said Mr. Mell, 'that I am not acquainted with the power you can establish over any mind here'—he laid his hand, without considering what he did (as I supposed), upon my head—'or that I have not observed you, within a few minutes, urging your juniors on to every sort of outrage against me, you are mistaken.'

'I don't give myself the trouble of thinking at all about you,' said Steerforth, coolly; 'so I'm not mistaken, as it happens.'

'And when you make use of your position of favouritism here, sir,' pursued Mr. Mell, with his lip trembling very much, 'to insult a gentleman —'

'A what?—where is he?' said Steerforth.

Here somebody cried out, 'Shame, J. Steerforth! Too bad!' It was Traddles; whom Mr. Mell instantly discomfited by bidding him hold his tongue. —'To insult one who is not fortunate in life, sir, and who never gave you the least offence, and the many reasons for not insulting whom you are old enough and wise enough to understand,' said Mr. Mell, with his lips trembling more and more, 'you commit a mean and base action. You can sit down or stand up as you please, sir. Copperfield, go on.'

'Young Copperfield,' said Steerforth, coming forward up the room, 'stop a bit. I tell you what, Mr. Mell, once for all. When you take the liberty of calling me mean or base, or anything of that sort, you are an impudent beggar. You are always a beggar, you know; but when you do that, you are an impudent beggar.'

I am not clear whether he was going to strike Mr. Mell, or Mr. Mell was going to strike him, or there was any such intention on either side. I saw a rigidity come upon the whole school as if they had been turned into stone, and found Mr. Creakle in the midst of us, with Tungay at his side, and Mrs. and Miss Creakle looking in at the door as if they were frightened. Mr. Mell, with his elbows on his desk and his face in his hands, sat, for some moments, quite still.

'Mr. Mell,' said Mr. Creakle, shaking him by the arm; and his whisper was so audible now, that Tungay felt it unnecessary to repeat his words; 'you have not forgotten yourself, I hope?'

'No, sir, no,' returned the Master, showing his face, and shaking his head, and rubbing his hands in great agitation. 'No, sir. No. I have remembered myself, I—no, Mr. Creakle, I have not forgotten myself, I—I have remembered myself, sir. I—I—could wish you had remembered me a little sooner, Mr. Creakle. It—it—would have been more kind, sir, more just, sir. It would have saved me something, sir.'

Mr. Creakle, looking hard at Mr. Mell, put his hand on Tungay's shoulder, and got his feet upon the form close by, and sat upon the desk. After still looking hard at Mr. Mell from his throne, as he shook his head, and rubbed his hands, and remained in the same state of agitation, Mr. Creakle turned to Steerforth, and said:

'Now, sir, as he don't condescend to tell me, what is this?'

Steerforth evaded the question for a little while; looking in scorn and anger on his opponent, and remaining silent. I could not help thinking even in that interval, I remember, what a noble fellow he was in appearance, and how homely and plain Mr. Mell looked opposed to him.

'What did he mean by talking about favourites, then?' said Steerforth at length.

'Favourites?' repeated Mr. Creakle, with the veins in his forehead swelling quickly. 'Who talked about favourites?'

'He did,' said Steerforth.

'And pray, what did you mean by that, sir?' demanded Mr. Creakle, turning angrily on his assistant.

'I meant, Mr. Creakle,' he returned in a low voice, 'as I said; that no pupil had a right to avail himself of his position of favouritism to degrade me.'

'To degrade YOU?' said Mr. Creakle. 'My stars! But give me leave to ask you, Mr. What's-your-name'; and here Mr. Creakle folded his arms, cane and all, upon his chest, and made such a knot of his brows that his little eyes were hardly visible below them; 'whether, when you talk about favourites, you showed proper respect to me? To me, sir,' said Mr. Creakle, darting his head at him suddenly, and drawing it back again, 'the principal of this establishment, and your employer.'

'It was not judicious, sir, I am willing to admit,' said Mr. Mell. 'I should not have done so, if I had been cool.'

Here Steerforth struck in.

'Then he said I was mean, and then he said I was base, and then I called him a beggar. If I had been cool, perhaps I shouldn't have called him a beggar. But I did, and I am ready to take the consequences of it.'

Without considering, perhaps, whether there were any consequences to be taken, I felt quite in a glow at this gallant speech. It made an impression on the boys too, for there was a low stir among them, though no one spoke a word.

'I am surprised, Steerforth—although your candour does you honour,' said Mr. Creakle, 'does you honour, certainly—I am surprised, Steerforth, I must say, that you should attach such an epithet to any person employed and paid in Salem House, sir.'

Steerforth gave a short laugh.

'That's not an answer, sir,' said Mr. Creakle, 'to my remark. I expect more than that from you, Steerforth.'

If Mr. Mell looked homely, in my eyes, before the handsome boy, it would be quite impossible to say how homely Mr. Creakle looked. 'Let him deny it,' said Steerforth.

'Deny that he is a beggar, Steerforth?' cried Mr. Creakle. 'Why, where does he go a-begging?'

'If he is not a beggar himself, his near relation's one,' said Steerforth. 'It's all the same.'

He glanced at me, and Mr. Mell's hand gently patted me upon the shoulder. I looked up with a flush upon my face and remorse in my heart, but Mr. Mell's eyes were fixed on Steerforth. He continued to pat me kindly on the shoulder, but he looked at him.

'Since you expect me, Mr. Creakle, to justify myself,' said Steerforth, 'and to say what I mean,—what I have to say is, that his mother lives on charity in an alms-house.'

Mr. Mell still looked at him, and still patted me kindly on the shoulder, and said to himself, in a whisper, if I heard right: 'Yes, I thought so.'

Mr. Creakle turned to his assistant, with a severe frown and laboured politeness:

'Now, you hear what this gentleman says, Mr. Mell. Have the goodness, if you please, to set him right before the assembled school.'

'He is right, sir, without correction,' returned Mr. Mell, in the midst of a dead silence; 'what he has said is true.'

'Be so good then as declare publicly, will you,' said Mr. Creakle, putting his head on one side, and rolling his eyes round the school, 'whether it ever came to my knowledge until this moment?'

'I believe not directly,' he returned.

'Why, you know not,' said Mr. Creakle. 'Don't you, man?'

'I apprehend you never supposed my worldly circumstances to be very good,' replied the assistant. 'You know what my position is, and always has been, here.'

'I apprehend, if you come to that,' said Mr. Creakle, with his veins swelling again bigger than ever, 'that you've been in a wrong position altogether, and mistook this for a charity school. Mr. Mell, we'll part, if you please. The sooner the better.'

'There is no time,' answered Mr. Mell, rising, 'like the present.'

'Sir, to you!' said Mr. Creakle.

'I take my leave of you, Mr. Creakle, and all of you,' said Mr. Mell, glancing round the room, and again patting me gently on the shoulders. 'James Steerforth, the best wish I can leave you is that you may come to be ashamed of what you have done today. At present I would prefer to see you anything rather than a friend, to me, or to anyone in whom I feel an interest.'

Once more he laid his hand upon my shoulder; and then taking his flute and a few books from his desk, and leaving the key in it for his successor, he went out of the school, with his property under his arm. Mr. Creakle then made a speech, through Tungay, in which he thanked Steerforth for asserting (though perhaps too warmly) the independence and respectability of Salem House; and which he wound up by shaking hands with Steerforth, while we gave three cheers—I did not quite know what for, but I supposed for Steerforth, and so joined in them ardently, though I felt miserable. Mr. Creakle then caned Tommy Traddles for being discovered in tears, instead of cheers, on account of Mr. Mell's departure; and went back to his sofa, or his bed, or wherever he had come from.

We were left to ourselves now, and looked very blank, I recollect, on one another. For myself, I felt so much self-reproach and contrition for my part in what had happened, that nothing would have enabled me to keep back my tears but the fear that Steerforth, who often looked at me, I saw, might think it unfriendly—or, I should rather say, considering our relative ages, and the feeling with which I regarded him, undutiful—if I showed the emotion which distressed me. He was very angry with Traddles, and said he was glad he had caught it.

Poor Traddles, who had passed the stage of lying with his head upon the desk, and was relieving himself as usual with a burst of skeletons, said he didn't care. Mr. Mell was ill-used.

'Who has ill-used him, you girl?' said Steerforth.

'Why, you have,' returned Traddles.

'What have I done?' said Steerforth.

'What have you done?' retorted Traddles. 'Hurt his feelings, and lost him his situation.'

'His feelings?' repeated Steerforth disdainfully. 'His feelings will soon get the better of it, I'll be bound. His feelings are not like yours, Miss Traddles. As to his situation—which was a precious one, wasn't it?—do you suppose I am not going to write home, and take care that he gets some money? Polly?'

We thought this intention very noble in Steerforth, whose mother was a widow, and rich, and would do almost anything, it was said, that he asked her. We were all extremely glad to see Traddles so put down, and exalted Steerforth to the skies: especially when he told us, as he condescended to do, that what he had done had been done expressly for us, and for our cause; and that he had conferred a great boon upon us by unselfishly doing it. But I must say that when I was going on with a story in the dark that night, Mr. Mell's old flute seemed more than once to sound mournfully in my ears; and that when at last Steerforth was tired, and I lay down in my bed, I fancied it playing so sorrowfully somewhere, that I was quite wretched.

I soon forgot him in the contemplation of Steerforth, who, in an easy amateur way, and without any book (he seemed to me to know everything by heart), took some of his classes until a new master was found. The new master came from a grammar school; and before he entered on his duties, dined in the parlour one day, to be introduced to Steerforth. Steerforth approved of him highly, and told us he was a Brick. Without exactly understanding what learned distinction was meant by this, I respected him greatly for it, and had no doubt whatever of his superior knowledge: though he never took the pains with me—not that I was anybody—that Mr. Mell had taken.

There was only one other event in this half-year, out of the daily school-life, that made an impression upon me which still survives. It survives for many reasons.

One afternoon, when we were all harassed into a state of dire confusion, and Mr. Creakle was laying about him dreadfully, Tungay came in, and called out in his usual strong way: 'Visitors for Copperfield!'

A few words were interchanged between him and Mr. Creakle, as, who the visitors were, and what room they were to be shown into; and then I, who had, according to custom, stood up on the announcement being made, and felt quite faint with astonishment, was told to go by the back stairs and get a clean frill on, before I repaired to the dining-room. These orders I obeyed, in such a flutter and hurry of my young spirits as I had never known before; and when I got to the parlour door, and the thought came into my head that it might be my mother—I had only thought of Mr. or Miss Murdstone until then—I drew back my hand from the lock, and stopped to have a sob before I went in.

At first I saw nobody; but feeling a pressure against the door, I looked round it, and there, to my amazement, were Mr. Peggotty and Ham, ducking at me with their hats, and squeezing one another against the wall. I could not help laughing; but it was much more in the pleasure of seeing them, than at the appearance they made. We shook hands in a very cordial way; and I laughed and laughed, until I pulled out my pocket-handkerchief and wiped my eyes.

Mr. Peggotty (who never shut his mouth once, I remember, during the visit) showed great concern when he saw me do this, and nudged Ham to say something.

'Cheer up, Mas'r Davy bor'!' said Ham, in his simpering way. 'Why, how you have growed!'

'Am I grown?' I said, drying my eyes. I was not crying at anything in particular that I know of; but somehow it made me cry, to see old friends.

'Growed, Mas'r Davy bor'? Ain't he growed!' said Ham.

'Ain't he growed!' said Mr. Peggotty.

They made me laugh again by laughing at each other, and then we all three laughed until I was in danger of crying again.

'Do you know how mama is, Mr. Peggotty?' I said. 'And how my dear, dear, old Peggotty is?'

'Oncommon,' said Mr. Peggotty.

'And little Em'ly, and Mrs. Gummidge?'

'On—common,' said Mr. Peggotty.

There was a silence. Mr. Peggotty, to relieve it, took two prodigious lobsters, and an enormous crab, and a large canvas bag of shrimps, out of his pockets, and piled them up in Ham's arms.

'You see,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'knowing as you was partial to a little relish with your wittles when you was along with us, we took the liberty. The old Mawther biled 'em, she did. Mrs. Gummidge biled 'em. Yes,' said Mr. Peggotty, slowly, who I thought appeared to stick to the subject on account of having no other subject ready, 'Mrs. Gummidge, I do assure you, she biled 'em.'

I expressed my thanks; and Mr. Peggotty, after looking at Ham, who stood smiling sheepishly over the shellfish, without making any attempt to help him, said:

'We come, you see, the wind and tide making in our favour, in one of our Yarmouth lugs to Gravesen'. My sister she wrote to me the name of this here place, and wrote to me as if ever I chanced to come to Gravesen', I was to come over and inquire for Mas'r Davy and give her dooty, humbly wishing him well and reporting of the fam'ly as they was oncommon toe-be-sure. Little Em'ly, you see, she'll write to my sister when I go back, as I see you and as you was similarly oncommon, and so we make it quite a merry-go-rounder.'

I was obliged to consider a little before I understood what Mr. Peggotty meant by this figure, expressive of a complete circle of intelligence. I then thanked him heartily; and said, with a consciousness of reddening, that I supposed little Em'ly was altered too, since we used to pick up shells and pebbles on the beach?

'She's getting to be a woman, that's wot she's getting to be,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'Ask HIM.' He meant Ham, who beamed with delight and assent over the bag of shrimps.

'Her pretty face!' said Mr. Peggotty, with his own shining like a light.

'Her learning!' said Ham.

'Her writing!' said Mr. Peggotty. 'Why it's as black as jet! And so large it is, you might see it anywheres.'

It was perfectly delightful to behold with what enthusiasm Mr. Peggotty became inspired when he thought of his little favourite. He stands before me again, his bluff hairy face irradiating with a joyful love and pride, for which I can find no description. His honest eyes fire up, and sparkle, as if their depths were stirred by something bright. His broad chest heaves with pleasure. His strong loose hands clench themselves, in his earnestness; and he emphasizes what he says with a right arm that shows, in my pigmy view, like a sledge-hammer.

Ham was quite as earnest as he. I dare say they would have said much more about her, if they had not been abashed by the unexpected coming in of Steerforth, who, seeing me in a corner speaking with two strangers, stopped in a song he was singing, and said: 'I didn't know you were here, young Copperfield!' (for it was not the usual visiting room) and crossed by us on his way out.

I am not sure whether it was in the pride of having such a friend as Steerforth, or in the desire to explain to him how I came to have such a friend as Mr. Peggotty, that I called to him as he was going away. But I said, modestly—Good Heaven, how it all comes back to me this long time afterwards—!

'Don't go, Steerforth, if you please. These are two Yarmouth boatmen—very kind, good people—who are relations of my nurse, and have come from Gravesend to see me.'

'Aye, aye?' said Steerforth, returning. 'I am glad to see them. How are you both?'

There was an ease in his manner—a gay and light manner it was, but not swaggering—which I still believe to have borne a kind of enchantment with it. I still believe him, in virtue of this carriage, his animal spirits, his delightful voice, his handsome face and figure, and, for aught I know, of some inborn power of attraction besides (which I think a few people possess), to have carried a spell with him to which it was a natural weakness to yield, and which not many persons could withstand. I could not but see how pleased they were with him, and how they seemed to open their hearts to him in a moment.

'You must let them know at home, if you please, Mr. Peggotty,' I said, 'when that letter is sent, that Mr. Steerforth is very kind to me, and that I don't know what I should ever do here without him.'

'Nonsense!' said Steerforth, laughing. 'You mustn't tell them anything of the sort.'

'And if Mr. Steerforth ever comes into Norfolk or Suffolk, Mr. Peggotty,' I said, 'while I am there, you may depend upon it I shall bring him to Yarmouth, if he will let me, to see your house. You never saw such a good house, Steerforth. It's made out of a boat!'

'Made out of a boat, is it?' said Steerforth. 'It's the right sort of a house for such a thorough-built boatman.'

'So 'tis, sir, so 'tis, sir,' said Ham, grinning. 'You're right, young gen'l'm'n! Mas'r Davy bor', gen'l'm'n's right. A thorough-built boatman! Hor, hor! That's what he is, too!'

Mr. Peggotty was no less pleased than his nephew, though his modesty forbade him to claim a personal compliment so vociferously.

'Well, sir,' he said, bowing and chuckling, and tucking in the ends of his neckerchief at his breast: 'I thankee, sir, I thankee! I do my endeavours in my line of life, sir.'

'The best of men can do no more, Mr. Peggotty,' said Steerforth. He had got his name already.

'I'll pound it, it's wot you do yourself, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty, shaking his head, 'and wot you do well—right well! I thankee, sir. I'm obleeged to you, sir, for your welcoming manner of me. I'm rough, sir, but I'm ready—least ways, I hope I'm ready, you unnerstand. My house ain't much for to see, sir, but it's hearty at your service if ever you should come along with Mas'r Davy to see it. I'm a reg'lar Dodman, I am,' said Mr. Peggotty, by which he meant snail, and this was in allusion to his being slow to go, for he had attempted to go after every sentence, and had somehow or other come back again; 'but I wish you both well, and I wish you happy!'

Ham echoed this sentiment, and we parted with them in the heartiest manner. I was almost tempted that evening to tell Steerforth about pretty little Em'ly, but I was too timid of mentioning her name, and too much afraid of his laughing at me. I remember that I thought a good deal, and in an uneasy sort of way, about Mr. Peggotty having said that she was getting on to be a woman; but I decided that was nonsense.

We transported the shellfish, or the 'relish' as Mr. Peggotty had modestly called it, up into our room unobserved, and made a great supper that evening. But Traddles couldn't get happily out of it. He was too unfortunate even to come through a supper like anybody else. He was taken ill in the night—quite prostrate he was—in consequence of Crab; and after being drugged with black draughts and blue pills, to an extent which Demple (whose father was a doctor) said was enough to undermine a horse's constitution, received a caning and six chapters of Greek Testament for refusing to confess.

The rest of the half-year is a jumble in my recollection of the daily strife and struggle of our lives; of the waning summer and the changing season; of the frosty mornings when we were rung out of bed, and the cold, cold smell of the dark nights when we were rung into bed again; of the evening schoolroom dimly lighted and indifferently warmed, and the morning schoolroom which was nothing but a great shivering-machine; of the alternation of boiled beef with roast beef, and boiled mutton with roast mutton; of clods of bread-and-butter, dog's-eared lesson-books, cracked slates, tear-blotted copy-books, canings, rulerings, hair-cuttings, rainy Sundays, suet-puddings, and a dirty atmosphere of ink, surrounding all.

I well remember though, how the distant idea of the holidays, after seeming for an immense time to be a stationary speck, began to come towards us, and to grow and grow. How from counting months, we came to weeks, and then to days; and how I then began to be afraid that I should not be sent for and when I learnt from Steerforth that I had been sent for, and was certainly to go home, had dim forebodings that I might break my leg first. How the breaking-up day changed its place fast, at last, from the week after next to next week, this week, the day after tomorrow, tomorrow, today, tonight—when I was inside the Yarmouth mail, and going home.

I had many a broken sleep inside the Yarmouth mail, and many an incoherent dream of all these things. But when I awoke at intervals, the ground outside the window was not the playground of Salem House, and the sound in my ears was not the sound of Mr. Creakle giving it to Traddles, but the sound of the coachman touching up the horses.

CHAPTER 8. MY HOLIDAYS. ESPECIALLY ONE HAPPY AFTERNOON

When we arrived before day at the inn where the mail stopped, which was not the inn where my friend the waiter lived, I was shown up to a nice little bedroom, with DOLPHIN painted on the door. Very cold I was, I know, notwithstanding the hot tea they had given me before a large fire downstairs; and very glad I was to turn into the Dolphin's bed, pull the Dolphin's blankets round my head, and go to sleep.

Mr. Barkis the carrier was to call for me in the morning at nine o'clock. I got up at eight, a little giddy from the shortness of my night's rest, and was ready for him before the appointed time. He received me exactly as if not five minutes had elapsed since we were last together, and I had only been into the hotel to get change for sixpence, or something of that sort.

As soon as I and my box were in the cart, and the carrier seated, the lazy horse walked away with us all at his accustomed pace.

'You look very well, Mr. Barkis,' I said, thinking he would like to know it.

Mr. Barkis rubbed his cheek with his cuff, and then looked at his cuff as if he expected to find some of the bloom upon it; but made no other acknowledgement of the compliment.

'I gave your message, Mr. Barkis,' I said: 'I wrote to Peggotty.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Barkis.

Mr. Barkis seemed gruff, and answered drily.

'Wasn't it right, Mr. Barkis?' I asked, after a little hesitation.

'Why, no,' said Mr. Barkis.

'Not the message?'

'The message was right enough, perhaps,' said Mr. Barkis; 'but it come to an end there.'

Not understanding what he meant, I repeated inquisitively: 'Came to an end, Mr. Barkis?'

'Nothing come of it,' he explained, looking at me sideways. 'No answer.'

'There was an answer expected, was there, Mr. Barkis?' said I, opening my eyes. For this was a new light to me.

'When a man says he's willin',' said Mr. Barkis, turning his glance slowly on me again, 'it's as much as to say, that man's a-waitin' for a answer.'

'Well, Mr. Barkis?'

'Well,' said Mr. Barkis, carrying his eyes back to his horse's ears; 'that man's been a-waitin' for a answer ever since.'

'Have you told her so, Mr. Barkis?'

'No—no,' growled Mr. Barkis, reflecting about it. 'I ain't got no call to go and tell her so. I never said six words to her myself, I ain't a-goin' to tell her so.'

'Would you like me to do it, Mr. Barkis?' said I, doubtfully. 'You might tell her, if you would,' said Mr. Barkis, with another slow look at me, 'that Barkis was a-waitin' for a answer. Says you—what name is it?'

'Her name?'

'Ah!' said Mr. Barkis, with a nod of his head.

'Peggotty.'

'Chrisen name? Or nat'ral name?' said Mr. Barkis.

'Oh, it's not her Christian name. Her Christian name is Clara.'

'Is it though?' said Mr. Barkis.

He seemed to find an immense fund of reflection in this circumstance, and sat pondering and inwardly whistling for some time.

'Well!' he resumed at length. 'Says you, "Peggotty! Barkis is waitin' for a answer." Says she, perhaps, "Answer to what?" Says you, "To what I told you." "What is that?" says she. "Barkis is willin'," says you.'

This extremely artful suggestion Mr. Barkis accompanied with a nudge of his elbow that gave me quite a stitch in my side. After that, he slouched over his horse in his usual manner; and made no other reference to the subject except, half an hour afterwards, taking a piece of chalk from his pocket, and writing up, inside the tilt of the cart, 'Clara Peggotty'—apparently as a private memorandum.

Ah, what a strange feeling it was to be going home when it was not home, and to find that every object I looked at, reminded me of the happy old home, which was like a dream I could never dream again! The days when my mother and I and Peggotty were all in all to one another, and there was no one to come between us, rose up before me so sorrowfully on the road, that I am not sure I was glad to be there—not sure but that I would rather have remained away, and forgotten it in Steerforth's company. But there I was; and soon I was at our house, where the bare old elm-trees wrung their many hands in the bleak wintry air, and shreds of the old rooks'-nests drifted away upon the wind.

The carrier put my box down at the garden-gate, and left me. I walked along the path towards the house, glancing at the windows, and fearing at every step to see Mr. Murdstone or Miss Murdstone lowering out of one of them. No face appeared, however; and being come to the house, and knowing how to open the door, before dark, without knocking, I went in with a quiet, timid step.

God knows how infantine the memory may have been, that was awakened within me by the sound of my mother's voice in the old parlour, when I set foot in the hall. She was singing in a low tone. I think I must have lain in her arms, and heard her singing so to me when I was but a baby. The strain was new to me, and yet it was so old that it filled my heart brim-full; like a friend come back from a long absence.

I believed, from the solitary and thoughtful way in which my mother murmured her song, that she was alone. And I went softly into the room. She was sitting by the fire, suckling an infant, whose tiny hand she held against her neck. Her eyes were looking down upon its face, and she sat singing to it. I was so far right, that she had no other companion.

I spoke to her, and she started, and cried out. But seeing me, she called me her dear Davy, her own boy! and coming half across the room to meet me, kneeled down upon the ground and kissed me, and laid my head down on her bosom near the little creature that was nestling there, and put its hand to my lips.

I wish I had died. I wish I had died then, with that feeling in my heart! I should have been more fit for Heaven than I ever have been since.

'He is your brother,' said my mother, fondling me. 'Davy, my pretty boy! My poor child!' Then she kissed me more and more, and clasped me round the neck. This she was doing when Peggotty came running in, and bounced down on the ground beside us, and went mad about us both for a quarter of an hour.

It seemed that I had not been expected so soon, the carrier being much before his usual time. It seemed, too, that Mr. and Miss Murdstone had gone out upon a visit in the neighbourhood, and would not return before night. I had never hoped for this. I had never thought it possible that we three could be together undisturbed, once more; and I felt, for the time, as if the old days were come back.

We dined together by the fireside. Peggotty was in attendance to wait upon us, but my mother wouldn't let her do it, and made her dine with us. I had my own old plate, with a brown view of a man-of-war in full sail upon it, which Peggotty had hoarded somewhere all the time I had been away, and would not have had broken, she said, for a hundred pounds. I had my own old mug with David on it, and my own old little knife and fork that wouldn't cut.

While we were at table, I thought it a favourable occasion to tell Peggotty about Mr. Barkis, who, before I had finished what I had to tell her, began to laugh, and throw her apron over her face.

'Peggotty,' said my mother. 'What's the matter?'

Peggotty only laughed the more, and held her apron tight over her face when my mother tried to pull it away, and sat as if her head were in a bag.

'What are you doing, you stupid creature?' said my mother, laughing.

'Oh, drat the man!' cried Peggotty. 'He wants to marry me.'

'It would be a very good match for you; wouldn't it?' said my mother.

'Oh! I don't know,' said Peggotty. 'Don't ask me. I wouldn't have him if he was made of gold. Nor I wouldn't have anybody.'

'Then, why don't you tell him so, you ridiculous thing?' said my mother.

'Tell him so,' retorted Peggotty, looking out of her apron. 'He has never said a word to me about it. He knows better. If he was to make so bold as say a word to me, I should slap his face.'

Her own was as red as ever I saw it, or any other face, I think; but she only covered it again, for a few moments at a time, when she was taken with a violent fit of laughter; and after two or three of those attacks, went on with her dinner.

I remarked that my mother, though she smiled when Peggotty looked at her, became more serious and thoughtful. I had seen at first that she was changed. Her face was very pretty still, but it looked careworn, and too delicate; and her hand was so thin and white that it seemed to me to be almost transparent. But the change to which I now refer was superadded to this: it was in her manner, which became anxious and fluttered. At last she said, putting out her hand, and laying it affectionately on the hand of her old servant, 'Peggotty, dear, you are not going to be married?'

'Me, ma'am?' returned Peggotty, staring. 'Lord bless you, no!'

'Not just yet?' said my mother, tenderly.

'Never!' cried Peggotty.

My mother took her hand, and said:

'Don't leave me, Peggotty. Stay with me. It will not be for long, perhaps. What should I ever do without you!'

'Me leave you, my precious!' cried Peggotty. 'Not for all the world and his wife. Why, what's put that in your silly little head?'—For Peggotty had been used of old to talk to my mother sometimes like a child.

But my mother made no answer, except to thank her, and Peggotty went running on in her own fashion.

'Me leave you? I think I see myself. Peggotty go away from you? I should like to catch her at it! No, no, no,' said Peggotty, shaking her head, and folding her arms; 'not she, my dear. It isn't that there ain't some Cats that would be well enough pleased if she did, but they sha'n't be pleased. They shall be aggravated. I'll stay with you till I am a cross cranky old woman. And when I'm too deaf, and too lame, and too blind, and too mumbly for want of teeth, to be of any use at all, even to be found fault with, than I shall go to my Davy, and ask him to take me in.'

'And, Peggotty,' says I, 'I shall be glad to see you, and I'll make you as welcome as a queen.'

'Bless your dear heart!' cried Peggotty. 'I know you will!' And she kissed me beforehand, in grateful acknowledgement of my hospitality. After that, she covered her head up with her apron again and had another laugh about Mr. Barkis. After that, she took the baby out of its little cradle, and nursed it. After that, she cleared the dinner table; after that, came in with another cap on, and her work-box, and the yard-measure, and the bit of wax-candle, all just the same as ever.

We sat round the fire, and talked delightfully. I told them what a hard master Mr. Creakle was, and they pitied me very much. I told them what a fine fellow Steerforth was, and what a patron of mine, and Peggotty said she would walk a score of miles to see him. I took the little baby in my arms when it was awake, and nursed it lovingly. When it was asleep again, I crept close to my mother's side according to my old custom, broken now a long time, and sat with my arms embracing her waist, and my little red cheek on her shoulder, and once more felt her beautiful hair drooping over me—like an angel's wing as I used to think, I recollect—and was very happy indeed.

While I sat thus, looking at the fire, and seeing pictures in the red-hot coals, I almost believed that I had never been away; that Mr. and Miss Murdstone were such pictures, and would vanish when the fire got low; and that there was nothing real in all that I remembered, save my mother, Peggotty, and I.

Peggotty darned away at a stocking as long as she could see, and then sat with it drawn on her left hand like a glove, and her needle in her right, ready to take another stitch whenever there was a blaze. I cannot conceive whose stockings they can have been that Peggotty was always darning, or where such an unfailing supply of stockings in want of darning can have come from. From my earliest infancy she seems to have been always employed in that class of needlework, and never by any chance in any other.

'I wonder,' said Peggotty, who was sometimes seized with a fit of wondering on some most unexpected topic, 'what's become of Davy's great-aunt?' 'Lor, Peggotty!' observed my mother, rousing herself from a reverie, 'what nonsense you talk!'

'Well, but I really do wonder, ma'am,' said Peggotty.

'What can have put such a person in your head?' inquired my mother. 'Is there nobody else in the world to come there?'

'I don't know how it is,' said Peggotty, 'unless it's on account of being stupid, but my head never can pick and choose its people. They come and they go, and they don't come and they don't go, just as they like. I wonder what's become of her?'

'How absurd you are, Peggotty!' returned my mother. 'One would suppose you wanted a second visit from her.'

'Lord forbid!' cried Peggotty.

'Well then, don't talk about such uncomfortable things, there's a good soul,' said my mother. 'Miss Betsey is shut up in her cottage by the sea, no doubt, and will remain there. At all events, she is not likely ever to trouble us again.'

'No!' mused Peggotty. 'No, that ain't likely at all.—-I wonder, if she was to die, whether she'd leave Davy anything?'

'Good gracious me, Peggotty,' returned my mother, 'what a nonsensical woman you are! when you know that she took offence at the poor dear boy's ever being born at all.'

'I suppose she wouldn't be inclined to forgive him now,' hinted Peggotty.

'Why should she be inclined to forgive him now?' said my mother, rather sharply.

'Now that he's got a brother, I mean,' said Peggotty.

MY mother immediately began to cry, and wondered how Peggotty dared to say such a thing.

'As if this poor little innocent in its cradle had ever done any harm to you or anybody else, you jealous thing!' said she. 'You had much better go and marry Mr. Barkis, the carrier. Why don't you?'

'I should make Miss Murdstone happy, if I was to,' said Peggotty.

'What a bad disposition you have, Peggotty!' returned my mother. 'You are as jealous of Miss Murdstone as it is possible for a ridiculous creature to be. You want to keep the keys yourself, and give out all the things, I suppose? I shouldn't be surprised if you did. When you know that she only does it out of kindness and the best intentions! You know she does, Peggotty—you know it well.'

Peggotty muttered something to the effect of 'Bother the best intentions!' and something else to the effect that there was a little too much of the best intentions going on.

'I know what you mean, you cross thing,' said my mother. 'I understand you, Peggotty, perfectly. You know I do, and I wonder you don't colour up like fire. But one point at a time. Miss Murdstone is the point now, Peggotty, and you sha'n't escape from it. Haven't you heard her say, over and over again, that she thinks I am too thoughtless and too—a—a—'

'Pretty,' suggested Peggotty.

'Well,' returned my mother, half laughing, 'and if she is so silly as to say so, can I be blamed for it?'

'No one says you can,' said Peggotty.

'No, I should hope not, indeed!' returned my mother. 'Haven't you heard her say, over and over again, that on this account she wished to spare me a great deal of trouble, which she thinks I am not suited for, and which I really don't know myself that I AM suited for; and isn't she up early and late, and going to and fro continually—and doesn't she do all sorts of things, and grope into all sorts of places, coal-holes and pantries and I don't know where, that can't be very agreeable—and do you mean to insinuate that there is not a sort of devotion in that?'

'I don't insinuate at all,' said Peggotty.

'You do, Peggotty,' returned my mother. 'You never do anything else, except your work. You are always insinuating. You revel in it. And when you talk of Mr. Murdstone's good intentions—'

'I never talked of 'em,' said Peggotty.

'No, Peggotty,' returned my mother, 'but you insinuated. That's what I told you just now. That's the worst of you. You WILL insinuate. I said, at the moment, that I understood you, and you see I did. When you talk of Mr. Murdstone's good intentions, and pretend to slight them (for I don't believe you really do, in your heart, Peggotty), you must be as well convinced as I am how good they are, and how they actuate him in everything. If he seems to have been at all stern with a certain person, Peggotty—you understand, and so I am sure does Davy, that I am not alluding to anybody present—it is solely because he is satisfied that it is for a certain person's benefit. He naturally loves a certain person, on my account; and acts solely for a certain person's good. He is better able to judge of it than I am; for I very well know that I am a weak, light, girlish creature, and that he is a firm, grave, serious man. And he takes,' said my mother, with the tears which were engendered in her affectionate nature, stealing down her face, 'he takes great pains with me; and I ought to be very thankful to him, and very submissive to him even in my thoughts; and when I am not, Peggotty, I worry and condemn myself, and feel doubtful of my own heart, and don't know what to do.'

Peggotty sat with her chin on the foot of the stocking, looking silently at the fire.

'There, Peggotty,' said my mother, changing her tone, 'don't let us fall out with one another, for I couldn't bear it. You are my true friend, I know, if I have any in the world. When I call you a ridiculous creature, or a vexatious thing, or anything of that sort, Peggotty, I only mean that you are my true friend, and always have been, ever since the night when Mr. Copperfield first brought me home here, and you came out to the gate to meet me.'

Peggotty was not slow to respond, and ratify the treaty of friendship by giving me one of her best hugs. I think I had some glimpses of the real character of this conversation at the time; but I am sure, now, that the good creature originated it, and took her part in it, merely that my mother might comfort herself with the little contradictory summary in which she had indulged. The design was efficacious; for I remember that my mother seemed more at ease during the rest of the evening, and that Peggotty observed her less.

When we had had our tea, and the ashes were thrown up, and the candles snuffed, I read Peggotty a chapter out of the Crocodile Book, in remembrance of old times—she took it out of her pocket: I don't know whether she had kept it there ever since—and then we talked about Salem House, which brought me round again to Steerforth, who was my great subject. We were very happy; and that evening, as the last of its race, and destined evermore to close that volume of my life, will never pass out of my memory.

It was almost ten o'clock before we heard the sound of wheels. We all got up then; and my mother said hurriedly that, as it was so late, and Mr. and Miss Murdstone approved of early hours for young people, perhaps I had better go to bed. I kissed her, and went upstairs with my candle directly, before they came in. It appeared to my childish fancy, as I ascended to the bedroom where I had been imprisoned, that they brought a cold blast of air into the house which blew away the old familiar feeling like a feather.

I felt uncomfortable about going down to breakfast in the morning, as I had never set eyes on Mr. Murdstone since the day when I committed my memorable offence. However, as it must be done, I went down, after two or three false starts half-way, and as many runs back on tiptoe to my own room, and presented myself in the parlour.

He was standing before the fire with his back to it, while Miss Murdstone made the tea. He looked at me steadily as I entered, but made no sign of recognition whatever. I went up to him, after a moment of confusion, and said: 'I beg your pardon, sir. I am very sorry for what I did, and I hope you will forgive me.'

'I am glad to hear you are sorry, David,' he replied.

The hand he gave me was the hand I had bitten. I could not restrain my eye from resting for an instant on a red spot upon it; but it was not so red as I turned, when I met that sinister expression in his face.

'How do you do, ma'am?' I said to Miss Murdstone.

'Ah, dear me!' sighed Miss Murdstone, giving me the tea-caddy scoop instead of her fingers. 'How long are the holidays?'

'A month, ma'am.'

'Counting from when?'

'From today, ma'am.'

'Oh!' said Miss Murdstone. 'Then here's one day off.'

She kept a calendar of the holidays in this way, and every morning checked a day off in exactly the same manner. She did it gloomily until she came to ten, but when she got into two figures she became more hopeful, and, as the time advanced, even jocular.

It was on this very first day that I had the misfortune to throw her, though she was not subject to such weakness in general, into a state of violent consternation. I came into the room where she and my mother were sitting; and the baby (who was only a few weeks old) being on my mother's lap, I took it very carefully in my arms. Suddenly Miss Murdstone gave such a scream that I all but dropped it.

'My dear Jane!' cried my mother.

'Good heavens, Clara, do you see?' exclaimed Miss Murdstone.

'See what, my dear Jane?' said my mother; 'where?'

'He's got it!' cried Miss Murdstone. 'The boy has got the baby!'

She was limp with horror; but stiffened herself to make a dart at me, and take it out of my arms. Then, she turned faint; and was so very ill that they were obliged to give her cherry brandy. I was solemnly interdicted by her, on her recovery, from touching my brother any more on any pretence whatever; and my poor mother, who, I could see, wished otherwise, meekly confirmed the interdict, by saying: 'No doubt you are right, my dear Jane.'

On another occasion, when we three were together, this same dear baby—it was truly dear to me, for our mother's sake—was the innocent occasion of Miss Murdstone's going into a passion. My mother, who had been looking at its eyes as it lay upon her lap, said:

'Davy! come here!' and looked at mine.

I saw Miss Murdstone lay her beads down.

'I declare,' said my mother, gently, 'they are exactly alike. I suppose they are mine. I think they are the colour of mine. But they are wonderfully alike.'

'What are you talking about, Clara?' said Miss Murdstone.

'My dear Jane,' faltered my mother, a little abashed by the harsh tone of this inquiry, 'I find that the baby's eyes and Davy's are exactly alike.'

'Clara!' said Miss Murdstone, rising angrily, 'you are a positive fool sometimes.'

'My dear Jane,' remonstrated my mother.

'A positive fool,' said Miss Murdstone. 'Who else could compare my brother's baby with your boy? They are not at all alike. They are exactly unlike. They are utterly dissimilar in all respects. I hope they will ever remain so. I will not sit here, and hear such comparisons made.' With that she stalked out, and made the door bang after her.

In short, I was not a favourite with Miss Murdstone. In short, I was not a favourite there with anybody, not even with myself; for those who did like me could not show it, and those who did not, showed it so plainly that I had a sensitive consciousness of always appearing constrained, boorish, and dull.

I felt that I made them as uncomfortable as they made me. If I came into the room where they were, and they were talking together and my mother seemed cheerful, an anxious cloud would steal over her face from the moment of my entrance. If Mr. Murdstone were in his best humour, I checked him. If Miss Murdstone were in her worst, I intensified it. I had perception enough to know that my mother was the victim always; that she was afraid to speak to me or to be kind to me, lest she should give them some offence by her manner of doing so, and receive a lecture afterwards; that she was not only ceaselessly afraid of her own offending, but of my offending, and uneasily watched their looks if I only moved. Therefore I resolved to keep myself as much out of their way as I could; and many a wintry hour did I hear the church clock strike, when I was sitting in my cheerless bedroom, wrapped in my little great-coat, poring over a book.

In the evening, sometimes, I went and sat with Peggotty in the kitchen. There I was comfortable, and not afraid of being myself. But neither of these resources was approved of in the parlour. The tormenting humour which was dominant there stopped them both. I was still held to be necessary to my poor mother's training, and, as one of her trials, could not be suffered to absent myself.

'David,' said Mr. Murdstone, one day after dinner when I was going to leave the room as usual; 'I am sorry to observe that you are of a sullen disposition.'

'As sulky as a bear!' said Miss Murdstone.

I stood still, and hung my head.

'Now, David,' said Mr. Murdstone, 'a sullen obdurate disposition is, of all tempers, the worst.'

'And the boy's is, of all such dispositions that ever I have seen,' remarked his sister, 'the most confirmed and stubborn. I think, my dear Clara, even you must observe it?'

'I beg your pardon, my dear Jane,' said my mother, 'but are you quite sure—I am certain you'll excuse me, my dear Jane—that you understand Davy?'

'I should be somewhat ashamed of myself, Clara,' returned Miss Murdstone, 'if I could not understand the boy, or any boy. I don't profess to be profound; but I do lay claim to common sense.'

'No doubt, my dear Jane,' returned my mother, 'your understanding is very vigorous—'

'Oh dear, no! Pray don't say that, Clara,' interposed Miss Murdstone, angrily.

'But I am sure it is,' resumed my mother; 'and everybody knows it is. I profit so much by it myself, in many ways—at least I ought to—that no one can be more convinced of it than myself; and therefore I speak with great diffidence, my dear Jane, I assure you.'

'We'll say I don't understand the boy, Clara,' returned Miss Murdstone, arranging the little fetters on her wrists. 'We'll agree, if you please, that I don't understand him at all. He is much too deep for me. But perhaps my brother's penetration may enable him to have some insight into his character. And I believe my brother was speaking on the subject when we—not very decently—interrupted him.'

'I think, Clara,' said Mr. Murdstone, in a low grave voice, 'that there may be better and more dispassionate judges of such a question than you.'

'Edward,' replied my mother, timidly, 'you are a far better judge of all questions than I pretend to be. Both you and Jane are. I only said—'

'You only said something weak and inconsiderate,' he replied. 'Try not to do it again, my dear Clara, and keep a watch upon yourself.'

MY mother's lips moved, as if she answered 'Yes, my dear Edward,' but she said nothing aloud.

'I was sorry, David, I remarked,' said Mr. Murdstone, turning his head and his eyes stiffly towards me, 'to observe that you are of a sullen disposition. This is not a character that I can suffer to develop itself beneath my eyes without an effort at improvement. You must endeavour, sir, to change it. We must endeavour to change it for you.'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' I faltered. 'I have never meant to be sullen since I came back.'

'Don't take refuge in a lie, sir!' he returned so fiercely, that I saw my mother involuntarily put out her trembling hand as if to interpose between us. 'You have withdrawn yourself in your sullenness to your own room. You have kept your own room when you ought to have been here. You know now, once for all, that I require you to be here, and not there. Further, that I require you to bring obedience here. You know me, David. I will have it done.'

Miss Murdstone gave a hoarse chuckle.

'I will have a respectful, prompt, and ready bearing towards myself,' he continued, 'and towards Jane Murdstone, and towards your mother. I will not have this room shunned as if it were infected, at the pleasure of a child. Sit down.'

He ordered me like a dog, and I obeyed like a dog.

'One thing more,' he said. 'I observe that you have an attachment to low and common company. You are not to associate with servants. The kitchen will not improve you, in the many respects in which you need improvement. Of the woman who abets you, I say nothing—since you, Clara,' addressing my mother in a lower voice, 'from old associations and long-established fancies, have a weakness respecting her which is not yet overcome.'

'A most unaccountable delusion it is!' cried Miss Murdstone.

'I only say,' he resumed, addressing me, 'that I disapprove of your preferring such company as Mistress Peggotty, and that it is to be abandoned. Now, David, you understand me, and you know what will be the consequence if you fail to obey me to the letter.'

I knew well—better perhaps than he thought, as far as my poor mother was concerned—and I obeyed him to the letter. I retreated to my own room no more; I took refuge with Peggotty no more; but sat wearily in the parlour day after day, looking forward to night, and bedtime.

What irksome constraint I underwent, sitting in the same attitude hours upon hours, afraid to move an arm or a leg lest Miss Murdstone should complain (as she did on the least pretence) of my restlessness, and afraid to move an eye lest she should light on some look of dislike or scrutiny that would find new cause for complaint in mine! What intolerable dulness to sit listening to the ticking of the clock; and watching Miss Murdstone's little shiny steel beads as she strung them; and wondering whether she would ever be married, and if so, to what sort of unhappy man; and counting the divisions in the moulding of the chimney-piece; and wandering away, with my eyes, to the ceiling, among the curls and corkscrews in the paper on the wall!

What walks I took alone, down muddy lanes, in the bad winter weather, carrying that parlour, and Mr. and Miss Murdstone in it, everywhere: a monstrous load that I was obliged to bear, a daymare that there was no possibility of breaking in, a weight that brooded on my wits, and blunted them!

What meals I had in silence and embarrassment, always feeling that there were a knife and fork too many, and that mine; an appetite too many, and that mine; a plate and chair too many, and those mine; a somebody too many, and that I!

What evenings, when the candles came, and I was expected to employ myself, but, not daring to read an entertaining book, pored over some hard-headed, harder-hearted treatise on arithmetic; when the tables of weights and measures set themselves to tunes, as 'Rule Britannia', or 'Away with Melancholy'; when they wouldn't stand still to be learnt, but would go threading my grandmother's needle through my unfortunate head, in at one ear and out at the other! What yawns and dozes I lapsed into, in spite of all my care; what starts I came out of concealed sleeps with; what answers I never got, to little observations that I rarely made; what a blank space I seemed, which everybody overlooked, and yet was in everybody's way; what a heavy relief it was to hear Miss Murdstone hail the first stroke of nine at night, and order me to bed!

Thus the holidays lagged away, until the morning came when Miss Murdstone said: 'Here's the last day off!' and gave me the closing cup of tea of the vacation.

I was not sorry to go. I had lapsed into a stupid state; but I was recovering a little and looking forward to Steerforth, albeit Mr. Creakle loomed behind him. Again Mr. Barkis appeared at the gate, and again Miss Murdstone in her warning voice, said: 'Clara!' when my mother bent over me, to bid me farewell.

I kissed her, and my baby brother, and was very sorry then; but not sorry to go away, for the gulf between us was there, and the parting was there, every day. And it is not so much the embrace she gave me, that lives in my mind, though it was as fervent as could be, as what followed the embrace.

I was in the carrier's cart when I heard her calling to me. I looked out, and she stood at the garden-gate alone, holding her baby up in her arms for me to see. It was cold still weather; and not a hair of her head, nor a fold of her dress, was stirred, as she looked intently at me, holding up her child.

So I lost her. So I saw her afterwards, in my sleep at school—a silent presence near my bed—looking at me with the same intent face—holding up her baby in her arms.

CHAPTER 9. I HAVE A MEMORABLE BIRTHDAY

I PASS over all that happened at school, until the anniversary of my birthday came round in March. Except that Steerforth was more to be admired than ever, I remember nothing. He was going away at the end of the half-year, if not sooner, and was more spirited and independent than before in my eyes, and therefore more engaging than before; but beyond this I remember nothing. The great remembrance by which that time is marked in my mind, seems to have swallowed up all lesser recollections, and to exist alone.

It is even difficult for me to believe that there was a gap of full two months between my return to Salem House and the arrival of that birthday. I can only understand that the fact was so, because I know it must have been so; otherwise I should feel convinced that there was no interval, and that the one occasion trod upon the other's heels.

How well I recollect the kind of day it was! I smell the fog that hung about the place; I see the hoar frost, ghostly, through it; I feel my rimy hair fall clammy on my cheek; I look along the dim perspective of the schoolroom, with a sputtering candle here and there to light up the foggy morning, and the breath of the boys wreathing and smoking in the raw cold as they blow upon their fingers, and tap their feet upon the floor. It was after breakfast, and we had been summoned in from the playground, when Mr. Sharp entered and said:

'David Copperfield is to go into the parlour.'

I expected a hamper from Peggotty, and brightened at the order. Some of the boys about me put in their claim not to be forgotten in the distribution of the good things, as I got out of my seat with great alacrity.

'Don't hurry, David,' said Mr. Sharp. 'There's time enough, my boy, don't hurry.'

I might have been surprised by the feeling tone in which he spoke, if I had given it a thought; but I gave it none until afterwards. I hurried away to the parlour; and there I found Mr. Creakle, sitting at his breakfast with the cane and a newspaper before him, and Mrs. Creakle with an opened letter in her hand. But no hamper.

'David Copperfield,' said Mrs. Creakle, leading me to a sofa, and sitting down beside me. 'I want to speak to you very particularly. I have something to tell you, my child.'

Mr. Creakle, at whom of course I looked, shook his head without looking at me, and stopped up a sigh with a very large piece of buttered toast.

'You are too young to know how the world changes every day,' said Mrs. Creakle, 'and how the people in it pass away. But we all have to learn it, David; some of us when we are young, some of us when we are old, some of us at all times of our lives.'

I looked at her earnestly.

'When you came away from home at the end of the vacation,' said Mrs. Creakle, after a pause, 'were they all well?' After another pause, 'Was your mama well?'

I trembled without distinctly knowing why, and still looked at her earnestly, making no attempt to answer.

'Because,' said she, 'I grieve to tell you that I hear this morning your mama is very ill.'

A mist rose between Mrs. Creakle and me, and her figure seemed to move in it for an instant. Then I felt the burning tears run down my face, and it was steady again.

'She is very dangerously ill,' she added.

I knew all now.

'She is dead.'

There was no need to tell me so. I had already broken out into a desolate cry, and felt an orphan in the wide world.

She was very kind to me. She kept me there all day, and left me alone sometimes; and I cried, and wore myself to sleep, and awoke and cried again. When I could cry no more, I began to think; and then the oppression on my breast was heaviest, and my grief a dull pain that there was no ease for.

And yet my thoughts were idle; not intent on the calamity that weighed upon my heart, but idly loitering near it. I thought of our house shut up and hushed. I thought of the little baby, who, Mrs. Creakle said, had been pining away for some time, and who, they believed, would die too. I thought of my father's grave in the churchyard, by our house, and of my mother lying there beneath the tree I knew so well. I stood upon a chair when I was left alone, and looked into the glass to see how red my eyes were, and how sorrowful my face. I considered, after some hours were gone, if my tears were really hard to flow now, as they seemed to be, what, in connexion with my loss, it would affect me most to think of when I drew near home—for I was going home to the funeral. I am sensible of having felt that a dignity attached to me among the rest of the boys, and that I was important in my affliction.

If ever child were stricken with sincere grief, I was. But I remember that this importance was a kind of satisfaction to me, when I walked in the playground that afternoon while the boys were in school. When I saw them glancing at me out of the windows, as they went up to their classes, I felt distinguished, and looked more melancholy, and walked slower. When school was over, and they came out and spoke to me, I felt it rather good in myself not to be proud to any of them, and to take exactly the same notice of them all, as before.

I was to go home next night; not by the mail, but by the heavy night-coach, which was called the Farmer, and was principally used by country-people travelling short intermediate distances upon the road. We had no story-telling that evening, and Traddles insisted on lending me his pillow. I don't know what good he thought it would do me, for I had one of my own: but it was all he had to lend, poor fellow, except a sheet of letter-paper full of skeletons; and that he gave me at parting, as a soother of my sorrows and a contribution to my peace of mind.

I left Salem House upon the morrow afternoon. I little thought then that I left it, never to return. We travelled very slowly all night, and did not get into Yarmouth before nine or ten o'clock in the morning. I looked out for Mr. Barkis, but he was not there; and instead of him a fat, short-winded, merry-looking, little old man in black, with rusty little bunches of ribbons at the knees of his breeches, black stockings, and a broad-brimmed hat, came puffing up to the coach window, and said:

'Master Copperfield?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Will you come with me, young sir, if you please,' he said, opening the door, 'and I shall have the pleasure of taking you home.'

I put my hand in his, wondering who he was, and we walked away to a shop in a narrow street, on which was written OMER, DRAPER, TAILOR, HABERDASHER, FUNERAL FURNISHER, &c. It was a close and stifling little shop; full of all sorts of clothing, made and unmade, including one window full of beaver-hats and bonnets. We went into a little back-parlour behind the shop, where we found three young women at work on a quantity of black materials, which were heaped upon the table, and little bits and cuttings of which were littered all over the floor. There was a good fire in the room, and a breathless smell of warm black crape—I did not know what the smell was then, but I know now.

The three young women, who appeared to be very industrious and comfortable, raised their heads to look at me, and then went on with their work. Stitch, stitch, stitch. At the same time there came from a workshop across a little yard outside the window, a regular sound of hammering that kept a kind of tune: RAT—tat-tat, RAT—tat-tat, RAT—tat-tat, without any variation.

'Well,' said my conductor to one of the three young women. 'How do you get on, Minnie?'

'We shall be ready by the trying-on time,' she replied gaily, without looking up. 'Don't you be afraid, father.'

Mr. Omer took off his broad-brimmed hat, and sat down and panted. He was so fat that he was obliged to pant some time before he could say:

'That's right.'

'Father!' said Minnie, playfully. 'What a porpoise you do grow!'

'Well, I don't know how it is, my dear,' he replied, considering about it. 'I am rather so.'

'You are such a comfortable man, you see,' said Minnie. 'You take things so easy.'

'No use taking 'em otherwise, my dear,' said Mr. Omer.

'No, indeed,' returned his daughter. 'We are all pretty gay here, thank Heaven! Ain't we, father?'

'I hope so, my dear,' said Mr. Omer. 'As I have got my breath now, I think I'll measure this young scholar. Would you walk into the shop, Master Copperfield?'

I preceded Mr. Omer, in compliance with his request; and after showing me a roll of cloth which he said was extra super, and too good mourning for anything short of parents, he took my various dimensions, and put them down in a book. While he was recording them he called my attention to his stock in trade, and to certain fashions which he said had 'just come up', and to certain other fashions which he said had 'just gone out'.

'And by that sort of thing we very often lose a little mint of money,' said Mr. Omer. 'But fashions are like human beings. They come in, nobody knows when, why, or how; and they go out, nobody knows when, why, or how. Everything is like life, in my opinion, if you look at it in that point of view.'

I was too sorrowful to discuss the question, which would possibly have been beyond me under any circumstances; and Mr. Omer took me back into the parlour, breathing with some difficulty on the way.

He then called down a little break-neck range of steps behind a door: 'Bring up that tea and bread-and-butter!' which, after some time, during which I sat looking about me and thinking, and listening to the stitching in the room and the tune that was being hammered across the yard, appeared on a tray, and turned out to be for me.

'I have been acquainted with you,' said Mr. Omer, after watching me for some minutes, during which I had not made much impression on the breakfast, for the black things destroyed my appetite, 'I have been acquainted with you a long time, my young friend.'

'Have you, sir?'

'All your life,' said Mr. Omer. 'I may say before it. I knew your father before you. He was five foot nine and a half, and he lays in five-and-twenty foot of ground.'

'RAT—tat-tat, RAT—tat-tat, RAT—tat-tat,' across the yard.

'He lays in five and twen-ty foot of ground, if he lays in a fraction,' said Mr. Omer, pleasantly. 'It was either his request or her direction, I forget which.'

'Do you know how my little brother is, sir?' I inquired.

Mr. Omer shook his head.

'RAT—tat-tat, RAT—tat-tat, RAT—tat-tat.'

'He is in his mother's arms,' said he.

'Oh, poor little fellow! Is he dead?'

'Don't mind it more than you can help,' said Mr. Omer. 'Yes. The baby's dead.'

My wounds broke out afresh at this intelligence. I left the scarcely-tasted breakfast, and went and rested my head on another table, in a corner of the little room, which Minnie hastily cleared, lest I should spot the mourning that was lying there with my tears. She was a pretty, good-natured girl, and put my hair away from my eyes with a soft, kind touch; but she was very cheerful at having nearly finished her work and being in good time, and was so different from me!

Presently the tune left off, and a good-looking young fellow came across the yard into the room. He had a hammer in his hand, and his mouth was full of little nails, which he was obliged to take out before he could speak.

'Well, Joram!' said Mr. Omer. 'How do you get on?'

'All right,' said Joram. 'Done, sir.'

Minnie coloured a little, and the other two girls smiled at one another.

'What! you were at it by candle-light last night, when I was at the club, then? Were you?' said Mr. Omer, shutting up one eye.

'Yes,' said Joram. 'As you said we could make a little trip of it, and go over together, if it was done, Minnie and me—and you.'

'Oh! I thought you were going to leave me out altogether,' said Mr. Omer, laughing till he coughed.

'—As you was so good as to say that,' resumed the young man, 'why I turned to with a will, you see. Will you give me your opinion of it?'

'I will,' said Mr. Omer, rising. 'My dear'; and he stopped and turned to me: 'would you like to see your—'

'No, father,' Minnie interposed.

'I thought it might be agreeable, my dear,' said Mr. Omer. 'But perhaps you're right.'

I can't say how I knew it was my dear, dear mother's coffin that they went to look at. I had never heard one making; I had never seen one that I know of.—but it came into my mind what the noise was, while it was going on; and when the young man entered, I am sure I knew what he had been doing.

The work being now finished, the two girls, whose names I had not heard, brushed the shreds and threads from their dresses, and went into the shop to put that to rights, and wait for customers. Minnie stayed behind to fold up what they had made, and pack it in two baskets. This she did upon her knees, humming a lively little tune the while. Joram, who I had no doubt was her lover, came in and stole a kiss from her while she was busy (he didn't appear to mind me, at all), and said her father was gone for the chaise, and he must make haste and get himself ready. Then he went out again; and then she put her thimble and scissors in her pocket, and stuck a needle threaded with black thread neatly in the bosom of her gown, and put on her outer clothing smartly, at a little glass behind the door, in which I saw the reflection of her pleased face.

All this I observed, sitting at the table in the corner with my head leaning on my hand, and my thoughts running on very different things. The chaise soon came round to the front of the shop, and the baskets being put in first, I was put in next, and those three followed. I remember it as a kind of half chaise-cart, half pianoforte-van, painted of a sombre colour, and drawn by a black horse with a long tail. There was plenty of room for us all.

I do not think I have ever experienced so strange a feeling in my life (I am wiser now, perhaps) as that of being with them, remembering how they had been employed, and seeing them enjoy the ride. I was not angry with them; I was more afraid of them, as if I were cast away among creatures with whom I had no community of nature. They were very cheerful. The old man sat in front to drive, and the two young people sat behind him, and whenever he spoke to them leaned forward, the one on one side of his chubby face and the other on the other, and made a great deal of him. They would have talked to me too, but I held back, and moped in my corner; scared by their love-making and hilarity, though it was far from boisterous, and almost wondering that no judgement came upon them for their hardness of heart.

So, when they stopped to bait the horse, and ate and drank and enjoyed themselves, I could touch nothing that they touched, but kept my fast unbroken. So, when we reached home, I dropped out of the chaise behind, as quickly as possible, that I might not be in their company before those solemn windows, looking blindly on me like closed eyes once bright. And oh, how little need I had had to think what would move me to tears when I came back—seeing the window of my mother's room, and next it that which, in the better time, was mine!

I was in Peggotty's arms before I got to the door, and she took me into the house. Her grief burst out when she first saw me; but she controlled it soon, and spoke in whispers, and walked softly, as if the dead could be disturbed. She had not been in bed, I found, for a long time. She sat up at night still, and watched. As long as her poor dear pretty was above the ground, she said, she would never desert her.

Mr. Murdstone took no heed of me when I went into the parlour where he was, but sat by the fireside, weeping silently, and pondering in his elbow-chair. Miss Murdstone, who was busy at her writing-desk, which was covered with letters and papers, gave me her cold finger-nails, and asked me, in an iron whisper, if I had been measured for my mourning.

I said: 'Yes.'

'And your shirts,' said Miss Murdstone; 'have you brought 'em home?'

'Yes, ma'am. I have brought home all my clothes.'

This was all the consolation that her firmness administered to me. I do not doubt that she had a choice pleasure in exhibiting what she called her self-command, and her firmness, and her strength of mind, and her common sense, and the whole diabolical catalogue of her unamiable qualities, on such an occasion. She was particularly proud of her turn for business; and she showed it now in reducing everything to pen and ink, and being moved by nothing. All the rest of that day, and from morning to night afterwards, she sat at that desk, scratching composedly with a hard pen, speaking in the same imperturbable whisper to everybody; never relaxing a muscle of her face, or softening a tone of her voice, or appearing with an atom of her dress astray.

Her brother took a book sometimes, but never read it that I saw. He would open it and look at it as if he were reading, but would remain for a whole hour without turning the leaf, and then put it down and walk to and fro in the room. I used to sit with folded hands watching him, and counting his footsteps, hour after hour. He very seldom spoke to her, and never to me. He seemed to be the only restless thing, except the clocks, in the whole motionless house.

In these days before the funeral, I saw but little of Peggotty, except that, in passing up or down stairs, I always found her close to the room where my mother and her baby lay, and except that she came to me every night, and sat by my bed's head while I went to sleep. A day or two before the burial—I think it was a day or two before, but I am conscious of confusion in my mind about that heavy time, with nothing to mark its progress—she took me into the room. I only recollect that underneath some white covering on the bed, with a beautiful cleanliness and freshness all around it, there seemed to me to lie embodied the solemn stillness that was in the house; and that when she would have turned the cover gently back, I cried: 'Oh no! oh no!' and held her hand.

If the funeral had been yesterday, I could not recollect it better. The very air of the best parlour, when I went in at the door, the bright condition of the fire, the shining of the wine in the decanters, the patterns of the glasses and plates, the faint sweet smell of cake, the odour of Miss Murdstone's dress, and our black clothes. Mr. Chillip is in the room, and comes to speak to me.

'And how is Master David?' he says, kindly.

I cannot tell him very well. I give him my hand, which he holds in his.

'Dear me!' says Mr. Chillip, meekly smiling, with something shining in his eye. 'Our little friends grow up around us. They grow out of our knowledge, ma'am?' This is to Miss Murdstone, who makes no reply.

'There is a great improvement here, ma'am?' says Mr. Chillip.

Miss Murdstone merely answers with a frown and a formal bend: Mr. Chillip, discomfited, goes into a corner, keeping me with him, and opens his mouth no more.

I remark this, because I remark everything that happens, not because I care about myself, or have done since I came home. And now the bell begins to sound, and Mr. Omer and another come to make us ready. As Peggotty was wont to tell me, long ago, the followers of my father to the same grave were made ready in the same room.

There are Mr. Murdstone, our neighbour Mr. Grayper, Mr. Chillip, and I. When we go out to the door, the Bearers and their load are in the garden; and they move before us down the path, and past the elms, and through the gate, and into the churchyard, where I have so often heard the birds sing on a summer morning.

We stand around the grave. The day seems different to me from every other day, and the light not of the same colour—of a sadder colour. Now there is a solemn hush, which we have brought from home with what is resting in the mould; and while we stand bareheaded, I hear the voice of the clergyman, sounding remote in the open air, and yet distinct and plain, saying: 'I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord!' Then I hear sobs; and, standing apart among the lookers-on, I see that good and faithful servant, whom of all the people upon earth I love the best, and unto whom my childish heart is certain that the Lord will one day say: 'Well done.'

There are many faces that I know, among the little crowd; faces that I knew in church, when mine was always wondering there; faces that first saw my mother, when she came to the village in her youthful bloom. I do not mind them—I mind nothing but my grief—and yet I see and know them all; and even in the background, far away, see Minnie looking on, and her eye glancing on her sweetheart, who is near me.

It is over, and the earth is filled in, and we turn to come away. Before us stands our house, so pretty and unchanged, so linked in my mind with the young idea of what is gone, that all my sorrow has been nothing to the sorrow it calls forth. But they take me on; and Mr. Chillip talks to me; and when we get home, puts some water to my lips; and when I ask his leave to go up to my room, dismisses me with the gentleness of a woman.

All this, I say, is yesterday's event. Events of later date have floated from me to the shore where all forgotten things will reappear, but this stands like a high rock in the ocean.

I knew that Peggotty would come to me in my room. The Sabbath stillness of the time (the day was so like Sunday! I have forgotten that) was suited to us both. She sat down by my side upon my little bed; and holding my hand, and sometimes putting it to her lips, and sometimes smoothing it with hers, as she might have comforted my little brother, told me, in her way, all that she had to tell concerning what had happened.

'She was never well,' said Peggotty, 'for a long time. She was uncertain in her mind, and not happy. When her baby was born, I thought at first she would get better, but she was more delicate, and sunk a little every day. She used to like to sit alone before her baby came, and then she cried; but afterwards she used to sing to it—so soft, that I once thought, when I heard her, it was like a voice up in the air, that was rising away.

'I think she got to be more timid, and more frightened-like, of late; and that a hard word was like a blow to her. But she was always the same to me. She never changed to her foolish Peggotty, didn't my sweet girl.'

Here Peggotty stopped, and softly beat upon my hand a little while.

'The last time that I saw her like her own old self, was the night when you came home, my dear. The day you went away, she said to me, "I never shall see my pretty darling again. Something tells me so, that tells the truth, I know."

'She tried to hold up after that; and many a time, when they told her she was thoughtless and light-hearted, made believe to be so; but it was all a bygone then. She never told her husband what she had told me—she was afraid of saying it to anybody else—till one night, a little more than a week before it happened, when she said to him: "My dear, I think I am dying."

'"It's off my mind now, Peggotty," she told me, when I laid her in her bed that night. "He will believe it more and more, poor fellow, every day for a few days to come; and then it will be past. I am very tired. If this is sleep, sit by me while I sleep: don't leave me. God bless both my children! God protect and keep my fatherless boy!"

'I never left her afterwards,' said Peggotty. 'She often talked to them two downstairs—for she loved them; she couldn't bear not to love anyone who was about her—but when they went away from her bed-side, she always turned to me, as if there was rest where Peggotty was, and never fell asleep in any other way.

'On the last night, in the evening, she kissed me, and said: "If my baby should die too, Peggotty, please let them lay him in my arms, and bury us together." (It was done; for the poor lamb lived but a day beyond her.) "Let my dearest boy go with us to our resting-place," she said, "and tell him that his mother, when she lay here, blessed him not once, but a thousand times."'

Another silence followed this, and another gentle beating on my hand.

'It was pretty far in the night,' said Peggotty, 'when she asked me for some drink; and when she had taken it, gave me such a patient smile, the dear!—so beautiful!

'Daybreak had come, and the sun was rising, when she said to me, how kind and considerate Mr. Copperfield had always been to her, and how he had borne with her, and told her, when she doubted herself, that a loving heart was better and stronger than wisdom, and that he was a happy man in hers. "Peggotty, my dear," she said then, "put me nearer to you," for she was very weak. "Lay your good arm underneath my neck," she said, "and turn me to you, for your face is going far off, and I want it to be near." I put it as she asked; and oh Davy! the time had come when my first parting words to you were true—when she was glad to lay her poor head on her stupid cross old Peggotty's arm—and she died like a child that had gone to sleep!'

Thus ended Peggotty's narration. From the moment of my knowing of the death of my mother, the idea of her as she had been of late had vanished from me. I remembered her, from that instant, only as the young mother of my earliest impressions, who had been used to wind her bright curls round and round her finger, and to dance with me at twilight in the parlour. What Peggotty had told me now, was so far from bringing me back to the later period, that it rooted the earlier image in my mind. It may be curious, but it is true. In her death she winged her way back to her calm untroubled youth, and cancelled all the rest.

The mother who lay in the grave, was the mother of my infancy; the little creature in her arms, was myself, as I had once been, hushed for ever on her bosom.

CHAPTER 10. I BECOME NEGLECTED, AND AM PROVIDED FOR

The first act of business Miss Murdstone performed when the day of the solemnity was over, and light was freely admitted into the house, was to give Peggotty a month's warning. Much as Peggotty would have disliked such a service, I believe she would have retained it, for my sake, in preference to the best upon earth. She told me we must part, and told me why; and we condoled with one another, in all sincerity.

As to me or my future, not a word was said, or a step taken. Happy they would have been, I dare say, if they could have dismissed me at a month's warning too. I mustered courage once, to ask Miss Murdstone when I was going back to school; and she answered dryly, she believed I was not going back at all. I was told nothing more. I was very anxious to know what was going to be done with me, and so was Peggotty; but neither she nor I could pick up any information on the subject.

There was one change in my condition, which, while it relieved me of a great deal of present uneasiness, might have made me, if I had been capable of considering it closely, yet more uncomfortable about the future. It was this. The constraint that had been put upon me, was quite abandoned. I was so far from being required to keep my dull post in the parlour, that on several occasions, when I took my seat there, Miss Murdstone frowned to me to go away. I was so far from being warned off from Peggotty's society, that, provided I was not in Mr. Murdstone's, I was never sought out or inquired for. At first I was in daily dread of his taking my education in hand again, or of Miss Murdstone's devoting herself to it; but I soon began to think that such fears were groundless, and that all I had to anticipate was neglect.

I do not conceive that this discovery gave me much pain then. I was still giddy with the shock of my mother's death, and in a kind of stunned state as to all tributary things. I can recollect, indeed, to have speculated, at odd times, on the possibility of my not being taught any more, or cared for any more; and growing up to be a shabby, moody man, lounging an idle life away, about the village; as well as on the feasibility of my getting rid of this picture by going away somewhere, like the hero in a story, to seek my fortune: but these were transient visions, daydreams I sat looking at sometimes, as if they were faintly painted or written on the wall of my room, and which, as they melted away, left the wall blank again.

'Peggotty,' I said in a thoughtful whisper, one evening, when I was warming my hands at the kitchen fire, 'Mr. Murdstone likes me less than he used to. He never liked me much, Peggotty; but he would rather not even see me now, if he can help it.'

'Perhaps it's his sorrow,' said Peggotty, stroking my hair.

'I am sure, Peggotty, I am sorry too. If I believed it was his sorrow, I should not think of it at all. But it's not that; oh, no, it's not that.'

'How do you know it's not that?' said Peggotty, after a silence.

'Oh, his sorrow is another and quite a different thing. He is sorry at this moment, sitting by the fireside with Miss Murdstone; but if I was to go in, Peggotty, he would be something besides.'

'What would he be?' said Peggotty.

'Angry,' I answered, with an involuntary imitation of his dark frown. 'If he was only sorry, he wouldn't look at me as he does. I am only sorry, and it makes me feel kinder.'

Peggotty said nothing for a little while; and I warmed my hands, as silent as she.

'Davy,' she said at length.

'Yes, Peggotty?' 'I have tried, my dear, all ways I could think of—all the ways there are, and all the ways there ain't, in short—to get a suitable service here, in Blunderstone; but there's no such a thing, my love.'

'And what do you mean to do, Peggotty,' says I, wistfully. 'Do you mean to go and seek your fortune?'

'I expect I shall be forced to go to Yarmouth,' replied Peggotty, 'and live there.'

'You might have gone farther off,' I said, brightening a little, 'and been as bad as lost. I shall see you sometimes, my dear old Peggotty, there. You won't be quite at the other end of the world, will you?'

'Contrary ways, please God!' cried Peggotty, with great animation. 'As long as you are here, my pet, I shall come over every week of my life to see you. One day, every week of my life!'

I felt a great weight taken off my mind by this promise: but even this was not all, for Peggotty went on to say:

'I'm a-going, Davy, you see, to my brother's, first, for another fortnight's visit—just till I have had time to look about me, and get to be something like myself again. Now, I have been thinking that perhaps, as they don't want you here at present, you might be let to go along with me.'

If anything, short of being in a different relation to every one about me, Peggotty excepted, could have given me a sense of pleasure at that time, it would have been this project of all others. The idea of being again surrounded by those honest faces, shining welcome on me; of renewing the peacefulness of the sweet Sunday morning, when the bells were ringing, the stones dropping in the water, and the shadowy ships breaking through the mist; of roaming up and down with little Em'ly, telling her my troubles, and finding charms against them in the shells and pebbles on the beach; made a calm in my heart. It was ruffled next moment, to be sure, by a doubt of Miss Murdstone's giving her consent; but even that was set at rest soon, for she came out to take an evening grope in the store-closet while we were yet in conversation, and Peggotty, with a boldness that amazed me, broached the topic on the spot.

'The boy will be idle there,' said Miss Murdstone, looking into a pickle-jar, 'and idleness is the root of all evil. But, to be sure, he would be idle here—or anywhere, in my opinion.'

Peggotty had an angry answer ready, I could see; but she swallowed it for my sake, and remained silent.

'Humph!' said Miss Murdstone, still keeping her eye on the pickles; 'it is of more importance than anything else—it is of paramount importance—that my brother should not be disturbed or made uncomfortable. I suppose I had better say yes.'

I thanked her, without making any demonstration of joy, lest it should induce her to withdraw her assent. Nor could I help thinking this a prudent course, since she looked at me out of the pickle-jar, with as great an access of sourness as if her black eyes had absorbed its contents. However, the permission was given, and was never retracted; for when the month was out, Peggotty and I were ready to depart.

Mr. Barkis came into the house for Peggotty's boxes. I had never known him to pass the garden-gate before, but on this occasion he came into the house. And he gave me a look as he shouldered the largest box and went out, which I thought had meaning in it, if meaning could ever be said to find its way into Mr. Barkis's visage.

Peggotty was naturally in low spirits at leaving what had been her home so many years, and where the two strong attachments of her life—for my mother and myself—had been formed. She had been walking in the churchyard, too, very early; and she got into the cart, and sat in it with her handkerchief at her eyes.

So long as she remained in this condition, Mr. Barkis gave no sign of life whatever. He sat in his usual place and attitude like a great stuffed figure. But when she began to look about her, and to speak to me, he nodded his head and grinned several times. I have not the least notion at whom, or what he meant by it.

'It's a beautiful day, Mr. Barkis!' I said, as an act of politeness.

'It ain't bad,' said Mr. Barkis, who generally qualified his speech, and rarely committed himself.

'Peggotty is quite comfortable now, Mr. Barkis,' I remarked, for his satisfaction.

'Is she, though?' said Mr. Barkis.

After reflecting about it, with a sagacious air, Mr. Barkis eyed her, and said:

'ARE you pretty comfortable?'

Peggotty laughed, and answered in the affirmative.

'But really and truly, you know. Are you?' growled Mr. Barkis, sliding nearer to her on the seat, and nudging her with his elbow. 'Are you? Really and truly pretty comfortable? Are you? Eh?'

At each of these inquiries Mr. Barkis shuffled nearer to her, and gave her another nudge; so that at last we were all crowded together in the left-hand corner of the cart, and I was so squeezed that I could hardly bear it.

Peggotty calling his attention to my sufferings, Mr. Barkis gave me a little more room at once, and got away by degrees. But I could not help observing that he seemed to think he had hit upon a wonderful expedient for expressing himself in a neat, agreeable, and pointed manner, without the inconvenience of inventing conversation. He manifestly chuckled over it for some time. By and by he turned to Peggotty again, and repeating, 'Are you pretty comfortable though?' bore down upon us as before, until the breath was nearly edged out of my body. By and by he made another descent upon us with the same inquiry, and the same result. At length, I got up whenever

I saw him coming, and standing on the foot-board, pretended to look at the prospect; after which I did very well.

He was so polite as to stop at a public-house, expressly on our account, and entertain us with broiled mutton and beer. Even when Peggotty was in the act of drinking, he was seized with one of those approaches, and almost choked her. But as we drew nearer to the end of our journey, he had more to do and less time for gallantry; and when we got on Yarmouth pavement, we were all too much shaken and jolted, I apprehend, to have any leisure for anything else.

Mr. Peggotty and Ham waited for us at the old place. They received me and Peggotty in an affectionate manner, and shook hands with Mr. Barkis, who, with his hat on the very back of his head, and a shame-faced leer upon his countenance, and pervading his very legs, presented but a vacant appearance, I thought. They each took one of Peggotty's trunks, and we were going away, when Mr. Barkis solemnly made a sign to me with his forefinger to come under an archway.

'I say,' growled Mr. Barkis, 'it was all right.'

I looked up into his face, and answered, with an attempt to be very profound: 'Oh!'

'It didn't come to a end there,' said Mr. Barkis, nodding confidentially. 'It was all right.'

Again I answered, 'Oh!'

'You know who was willin',' said my friend. 'It was Barkis, and Barkis only.'

I nodded assent.

'It's all right,' said Mr. Barkis, shaking hands; 'I'm a friend of your'n. You made it all right, first. It's all right.'

In his attempts to be particularly lucid, Mr. Barkis was so extremely mysterious, that I might have stood looking in his face for an hour, and most assuredly should have got as much information out of it as out of the face of a clock that had stopped, but for Peggotty's calling me away. As we were going along, she asked me what he had said; and I told her he had said it was all right.

'Like his impudence,' said Peggotty, 'but I don't mind that! Davy dear, what should you think if I was to think of being married?'

'Why—I suppose you would like me as much then, Peggotty, as you do now?' I returned, after a little consideration.

Greatly to the astonishment of the passengers in the street, as well as of her relations going on before, the good soul was obliged to stop and embrace me on the spot, with many protestations of her unalterable love.

'Tell me what should you say, darling?' she asked again, when this was over, and we were walking on.

'If you were thinking of being married—to Mr. Barkis, Peggotty?'

'Yes,' said Peggotty.

'I should think it would be a very good thing. For then you know, Peggotty, you would always have the horse and cart to bring you over to see me, and could come for nothing, and be sure of coming.'

'The sense of the dear!' cried Peggotty. 'What I have been thinking of, this month back! Yes, my precious; and I think I should be more independent altogether, you see; let alone my working with a better heart in my own house, than I could in anybody else's now. I don't know what I might be fit for, now, as a servant to a stranger. And I shall be always near my pretty's resting-place,' said Peggotty, musing, 'and be able to see it when I like; and when I lie down to rest, I may be laid not far off from my darling girl!'

We neither of us said anything for a little while.

'But I wouldn't so much as give it another thought,' said Peggotty, cheerily 'if my Davy was anyways against it—not if I had been asked in church thirty times three times over, and was wearing out the ring in my pocket.'

'Look at me, Peggotty,' I replied; 'and see if I am not really glad, and don't truly wish it!' As indeed I did, with all my heart.

'Well, my life,' said Peggotty, giving me a squeeze, 'I have thought of it night and day, every way I can, and I hope the right way; but I'll think of it again, and speak to my brother about it, and in the meantime we'll keep it to ourselves, Davy, you and me. Barkis is a good plain creature,' said Peggotty, 'and if I tried to do my duty by him, I think it would be my fault if I wasn't—if I wasn't pretty comfortable,' said Peggotty, laughing heartily. This quotation from Mr. Barkis was so appropriate, and tickled us both so much, that we laughed again and again, and were quite in a pleasant humour when we came within view of Mr. Peggotty's cottage.

It looked just the same, except that it may, perhaps, have shrunk a little in my eyes; and Mrs. Gummidge was waiting at the door as if she had stood there ever since. All within was the same, down to the seaweed in the blue mug in my bedroom. I went into the out-house to look about me; and the very same lobsters, crabs, and crawfish possessed by the same desire to pinch the world in general, appeared to be in the same state of conglomeration in the same old corner.

But there was no little Em'ly to be seen, so I asked Mr. Peggotty where she was.

'She's at school, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty, wiping the heat consequent on the porterage of Peggotty's box from his forehead; 'she'll be home,' looking at the Dutch clock, 'in from twenty minutes to half-an-hour's time. We all on us feel the loss of her, bless ye!'

Mrs. Gummidge moaned.

'Cheer up, Mawther!' cried Mr. Peggotty.

'I feel it more than anybody else,' said Mrs. Gummidge; 'I'm a lone lorn creetur', and she used to be a'most the only thing that didn't go contrary with me.'

Mrs. Gummidge, whimpering and shaking her head, applied herself to blowing the fire. Mr. Peggotty, looking round upon us while she was so engaged, said in a low voice, which he shaded with his hand: 'The old 'un!' From this I rightly conjectured that no improvement had taken place since my last visit in the state of Mrs. Gummidge's spirits.

Now, the whole place was, or it should have been, quite as delightful a place as ever; and yet it did not impress me in the same way. I felt rather disappointed with it. Perhaps it was because little Em'ly was not at home. I knew the way by which she would come, and presently found myself strolling along the path to meet her.

A figure appeared in the distance before long, and I soon knew it to be Em'ly, who was a little creature still in stature, though she was grown. But when she drew nearer, and I saw her blue eyes looking bluer, and her dimpled face looking brighter, and her whole self prettier and gayer, a curious feeling came over me that made me pretend not to know her, and pass by as if I were looking at something a long way off. I have done such a thing since in later life, or I am mistaken.

Little Em'ly didn't care a bit. She saw me well enough; but instead of turning round and calling after me, ran away laughing. This obliged me to run after her, and she ran so fast that we were very near the cottage before I caught her.

'Oh, it's you, is it?' said little Em'ly.

'Why, you knew who it was, Em'ly,' said I.

'And didn't YOU know who it was?' said Em'ly. I was going to kiss her, but she covered her cherry lips with her hands, and said she wasn't a baby now, and ran away, laughing more than ever, into the house.

She seemed to delight in teasing me, which was a change in her I wondered at very much. The tea table was ready, and our little locker was put out in its old place, but instead of coming to sit by me, she went and bestowed her company upon that grumbling Mrs. Gummidge: and on Mr. Peggotty's inquiring why, rumpled her hair all over her face to hide it, and could do nothing but laugh.

'A little puss, it is!' said Mr. Peggotty, patting her with his great hand.

'So sh' is! so sh' is!' cried Ham. 'Mas'r Davy bor', so sh' is!' and he sat and chuckled at her for some time, in a state of mingled admiration and delight, that made his face a burning red.

Little Em'ly was spoiled by them all, in fact; and by no one more than Mr. Peggotty himself, whom she could have coaxed into anything, by only going and laying her cheek against his rough whisker. That was my opinion, at least, when I saw her do it; and I held Mr. Peggotty to be thoroughly in the right. But she was so affectionate and sweet-natured, and had such a pleasant manner of being both sly and shy at once, that she captivated me more than ever.

She was tender-hearted, too; for when, as we sat round the fire after tea, an allusion was made by Mr. Peggotty over his pipe to the loss I had sustained, the tears stood in her eyes, and she looked at me so kindly across the table, that I felt quite thankful to her.

'Ah!' said Mr. Peggotty, taking up her curls, and running them over his hand like water, 'here's another orphan, you see, sir. And here,' said Mr. Peggotty, giving Ham a backhanded knock in the chest, 'is another of 'em, though he don't look much like it.'

'If I had you for my guardian, Mr. Peggotty,' said I, shaking my head, 'I don't think I should FEEL much like it.'

'Well said, Mas'r Davy bor'!' cried Ham, in an ecstasy. 'Hoorah! Well said! Nor more you wouldn't! Hor! Hor!'—Here he returned Mr. Peggotty's back-hander, and little Em'ly got up and kissed Mr. Peggotty. 'And how's your friend, sir?' said Mr. Peggotty to me.

'Steerforth?' said I.

'That's the name!' cried Mr. Peggotty, turning to Ham. 'I knowed it was something in our way.'

'You said it was Rudderford,' observed Ham, laughing.

'Well!' retorted Mr. Peggotty. 'And ye steer with a rudder, don't ye? It ain't fur off. How is he, sir?'

'He was very well indeed when I came away, Mr. Peggotty.'

'There's a friend!' said Mr. Peggotty, stretching out his pipe. 'There's a friend, if you talk of friends! Why, Lord love my heart alive, if it ain't a treat to look at him!'

'He is very handsome, is he not?' said I, my heart warming with this praise.

'Handsome!' cried Mr. Peggotty. 'He stands up to you like—like a—why I don't know what he don't stand up to you like. He's so bold!'

'Yes! That's just his character,' said I. 'He's as brave as a lion, and you can't think how frank he is, Mr. Peggotty.'

'And I do suppose, now,' said Mr. Peggotty, looking at me through the smoke of his pipe, 'that in the way of book-larning he'd take the wind out of a'most anything.'

'Yes,' said I, delighted; 'he knows everything. He is astonishingly clever.'

'There's a friend!' murmured Mr. Peggotty, with a grave toss of his head.

'Nothing seems to cost him any trouble,' said I. 'He knows a task if he only looks at it. He is the best cricketer you ever saw. He will give you almost as many men as you like at draughts, and beat you easily.'

Mr. Peggotty gave his head another toss, as much as to say: 'Of course he will.'

'He is such a speaker,' I pursued, 'that he can win anybody over; and I don't know what you'd say if you were to hear him sing, Mr. Peggotty.'

Mr. Peggotty gave his head another toss, as much as to say: 'I have no doubt of it.'

'Then, he's such a generous, fine, noble fellow,' said I, quite carried away by my favourite theme, 'that it's hardly possible to give him as much praise as he deserves. I am sure I can never feel thankful enough for the generosity with which he has protected me, so much younger and lower in the school than himself.'

I was running on, very fast indeed, when my eyes rested on little Em'ly's face, which was bent forward over the table, listening with the deepest attention, her breath held, her blue eyes sparkling like jewels, and the colour mantling in her cheeks. She looked so extraordinarily earnest and pretty, that I stopped in a sort of wonder; and they all observed her at the same time, for as I stopped, they laughed and looked at her.

'Em'ly is like me,' said Peggotty, 'and would like to see him.'

Em'ly was confused by our all observing her, and hung down her head, and her face was covered with blushes. Glancing up presently through her stray curls, and seeing that we were all looking at her still (I am sure I, for one, could have looked at her for hours), she ran away, and kept away till it was nearly bedtime.

I lay down in the old little bed in the stern of the boat, and the wind came moaning on across the flat as it had done before. But I could not help fancying, now, that it moaned of those who were gone; and instead of thinking that the sea might rise in the night and float the boat away, I thought of the sea that had risen, since I last heard those sounds, and drowned my happy home. I recollect, as the wind and water began to sound fainter in my ears, putting a short clause into my prayers, petitioning that I might grow up to marry little Em'ly, and so dropping lovingly asleep.

The days passed pretty much as they had passed before, except—it was a great exception—that little Em'ly and I seldom wandered on the beach now. She had tasks to learn, and needle-work to do; and was absent during a great part of each day. But I felt that we should not have had those old wanderings, even if it had been otherwise. Wild and full of childish whims as Em'ly was, she was more of a little woman than I had supposed. She seemed to have got a great distance away from me, in little more than a year. She liked me, but she laughed at me, and tormented me; and when I went to meet her, stole home another way, and was laughing at the door when I came back, disappointed. The best times were when she sat quietly at work in the doorway, and I sat on the wooden step at her feet, reading to her. It seems to me, at this hour, that I have never seen such sunlight as on those bright April afternoons; that I have never seen such a sunny little figure as I used to see, sitting in the doorway of the old boat; that I have never beheld such sky, such water, such glorified ships sailing away into golden air.

On the very first evening after our arrival, Mr. Barkis appeared in an exceedingly vacant and awkward condition, and with a bundle of oranges tied up in a handkerchief. As he made no allusion of any kind to this property, he was supposed to have left it behind him by accident when he went away; until Ham, running after him to restore it, came back with the information that it was intended for Peggotty. After that occasion he appeared every evening at exactly the same hour, and always with a little bundle, to which he never alluded, and which he regularly put behind the door and left there. These offerings of affection were of a most various and eccentric description. Among them I remember a double set of pigs' trotters, a huge pin-cushion, half a bushel or so of apples, a pair of jet earrings, some Spanish onions, a box of dominoes, a canary bird and cage, and a leg of pickled pork.

Mr. Barkis's wooing, as I remember it, was altogether of a peculiar kind. He very seldom said anything; but would sit by the fire in much the same attitude as he sat in his cart, and stare heavily at Peggotty, who was opposite. One night, being, as I suppose, inspired by love, he made a dart at the bit of wax-candle she kept for her thread, and put it in his waistcoat-pocket and carried it off. After that, his great delight was to produce it when it was wanted, sticking to the lining of his pocket, in a partially melted state, and pocket it again when it was done with. He seemed to enjoy himself very much, and not to feel at all called upon to talk. Even when he took Peggotty out for a walk on the flats, he had no uneasiness on that head, I believe; contenting himself with now and then asking her if she was pretty comfortable; and I remember that sometimes, after he was gone, Peggotty would throw her apron over her face, and laugh for half-an-hour. Indeed, we were all more or less amused, except that miserable Mrs. Gummidge, whose courtship would appear to have been of an exactly parallel nature, she was so continually reminded by these transactions of the old one.

At length, when the term of my visit was nearly expired, it was given out that Peggotty and Mr. Barkis were going to make a day's holiday together, and that little Em'ly and I were to accompany them. I had but a broken sleep the night before, in anticipation of the pleasure of a whole day with Em'ly. We were all astir betimes in the morning; and while we were yet at breakfast, Mr. Barkis appeared in the distance, driving a chaise-cart towards the object of his affections.

Peggotty was dressed as usual, in her neat and quiet mourning; but Mr. Barkis bloomed in a new blue coat, of which the tailor had given him such good measure, that the cuffs would have rendered gloves unnecessary in the coldest weather, while the collar was so high that it pushed his hair up on end on the top of his head. His bright buttons, too, were of the largest size.

Rendered complete by drab pantaloons and a buff waistcoat, I thought Mr. Barkis a phenomenon of respectability.

When we were all in a bustle outside the door, I found that Mr. Peggotty was prepared with an old shoe, which was to be thrown after us for luck, and which he offered to Mrs. Gummidge for that purpose.

'No. It had better be done by somebody else, Dan'l,' said Mrs. Gummidge. 'I'm a lone lorn creetur' myself, and everythink that reminds me of creetur's that ain't lone and lorn, goes contrary with me.'

'Come, old gal!' cried Mr. Peggotty. 'Take and heave it.'

'No, Dan'l,' returned Mrs. Gummidge, whimpering and shaking her head. 'If I felt less, I could do more. You don't feel like me, Dan'l; thinks don't go contrary with you, nor you with them; you had better do it yourself.'

But here Peggotty, who had been going about from one to another in a hurried way, kissing everybody, called out from the cart, in which we all were by this time (Em'ly and I on two little chairs, side by side), that Mrs. Gummidge must do it. So Mrs. Gummidge did it; and, I am sorry to relate, cast a damp upon the festive character of our departure, by immediately bursting into tears, and sinking subdued into the arms of Ham, with the declaration that she knowed she was a burden, and had better be carried to the House at once. Which I really thought was a sensible idea, that Ham might have acted on.

Away we went, however, on our holiday excursion; and the first thing we did was to stop at a church, where Mr. Barkis tied the horse to some rails, and went in with Peggotty, leaving little Em'ly and me alone in the chaise. I took that occasion to put my arm round Em'ly's waist, and propose that as I was going away so very soon now, we should determine to be very affectionate to one another, and very happy, all day. Little Em'ly consenting, and allowing me to kiss her, I became desperate; informing her, I recollect, that I never could love another, and that I was prepared to shed the blood of anybody who should aspire to her affections.

How merry little Em'ly made herself about it! With what a demure assumption of being immensely older and wiser than I, the fairy little woman said I was 'a silly boy'; and then laughed so charmingly that I forgot the pain of being called by that disparaging name, in the pleasure of looking at her.

Mr. Barkis and Peggotty were a good while in the church, but came out at last, and then we drove away into the country. As we were going along, Mr. Barkis turned to me, and said, with a wink,—by the by, I should hardly have thought, before, that he could wink:

'What name was it as I wrote up in the cart?'

'Clara Peggotty,' I answered.

'What name would it be as I should write up now, if there was a tilt here?'

'Clara Peggotty, again?' I suggested.

'Clara Peggotty BARKIS!' he returned, and burst into a roar of laughter that shook the chaise.

In a word, they were married, and had gone into the church for no other purpose. Peggotty was resolved that it should be quietly done; and the clerk had given her away, and there had been no witnesses of the ceremony. She was a little confused when Mr. Barkis made this abrupt announcement of their union, and could not hug me enough in token of her unimpaired affection; but she soon became herself again, and said she was very glad it was over.

We drove to a little inn in a by-road, where we were expected, and where we had a very comfortable dinner, and passed the day with great satisfaction. If Peggotty had been married every day for the last ten years, she could hardly have been more at her ease about it; it made no sort of difference in her: she was just the same as ever, and went out for a stroll with little Em'ly and me before tea, while Mr. Barkis philosophically smoked his pipe, and enjoyed himself, I suppose, with the contemplation of his happiness. If so, it sharpened his appetite; for I distinctly call to mind that, although he had eaten a good deal of pork and greens at dinner, and had finished off with a fowl or two, he was obliged to have cold boiled bacon for tea, and disposed of a large quantity without any emotion.

I have often thought, since, what an odd, innocent, out-of-the-way kind of wedding it must have been! We got into the chaise again soon after dark, and drove cosily back, looking up at the stars, and talking about them. I was their chief exponent, and opened Mr. Barkis's mind to an amazing extent. I told him all I knew, but he would have believed anything I might have taken it into my head to impart to him; for he had a profound veneration for my abilities, and informed his wife in my hearing, on that very occasion, that I was 'a young Roeshus'—by which I think he meant prodigy.

When we had exhausted the subject of the stars, or rather when I had exhausted the mental faculties of Mr. Barkis, little Em'ly and I made a cloak of an old wrapper, and sat under it for the rest of the journey. Ah, how I loved her! What happiness (I thought) if we were married, and were going away anywhere to live among the trees and in the fields, never growing older, never growing wiser, children ever, rambling hand in hand through sunshine and among flowery meadows, laying down our heads on moss at night, in a sweet sleep of purity and peace, and buried by the birds when we were dead! Some such picture, with no real world in it, bright with the light of our innocence, and vague as the stars afar off, was in my mind all the way. I am glad to think there were two such guileless hearts at Peggotty's marriage as little Em'ly's and mine. I am glad to think the Loves and Graces took such airy forms in its homely procession.

Well, we came to the old boat again in good time at night; and there Mr. and Mrs. Barkis bade us good-bye, and drove away snugly to their own home. I felt then, for the first time, that I had lost Peggotty. I should have gone to bed with a sore heart indeed under any other roof but that which sheltered little Em'ly's head.

Mr. Peggotty and Ham knew what was in my thoughts as well as I did, and were ready with some supper and their hospitable faces to drive it away. Little Em'ly came and sat beside me on the locker for the only time in all that visit; and it was altogether a wonderful close to a wonderful day.

It was a night tide; and soon after we went to bed, Mr. Peggotty and Ham went out to fish. I felt very brave at being left alone in the solitary house, the protector of Em'ly and Mrs. Gummidge, and only wished that a lion or a serpent, or any ill-disposed monster, would make an attack upon us, that I might destroy him, and cover myself with glory. But as nothing of the sort happened to be walking about on Yarmouth flats that night, I provided the best substitute I could by dreaming of dragons until morning.

With morning came Peggotty; who called to me, as usual, under my window as if Mr. Barkis the carrier had been from first to last a dream too. After breakfast she took me to her own home, and a beautiful little home it was. Of all the moveables in it, I must have been impressed by a certain old bureau of some dark wood in the parlour (the tile-floored kitchen was the general sitting-room), with a retreating top which opened, let down, and became a desk, within which was a large quarto edition of Foxe's Book of Martyrs. This precious volume, of which I do not recollect one word, I immediately discovered and immediately applied myself to; and I never visited the house afterwards, but I kneeled on a chair, opened the casket where this gem was enshrined, spread my arms over the desk, and fell to devouring the book afresh. I was chiefly edified, I am afraid, by the pictures, which were numerous, and represented all kinds of dismal horrors; but the Martyrs and Peggotty's house have been inseparable in my mind ever since, and are now.

I took leave of Mr. Peggotty, and Ham, and Mrs. Gummidge, and little Em'ly, that day; and passed the night at Peggotty's, in a little room in the roof (with the Crocodile Book on a shelf by the bed's head) which was to be always mine, Peggotty said, and should always be kept for me in exactly the same state.

'Young or old, Davy dear, as long as I am alive and have this house over my head,' said Peggotty, 'you shall find it as if I expected you here directly minute. I shall keep it every day, as I used to keep your old little room, my darling; and if you was to go to China, you might think of it as being kept just the same, all the time you were away.'

I felt the truth and constancy of my dear old nurse, with all my heart, and thanked her as well as I could. That was not very well, for she spoke to me thus, with her arms round my neck, in the morning, and I was going home in the morning, and I went home in the morning, with herself and Mr. Barkis in the cart. They left me at the gate, not easily or lightly; and it was a strange sight to me to see the cart go on, taking Peggotty away, and leaving me under the old elm-trees looking at the house, in which there was no face to look on mine with love or liking any more.

And now I fell into a state of neglect, which I cannot look back upon without compassion. I fell at once into a solitary condition,—apart from all friendly notice, apart from the society of all other boys of my own age, apart from all companionship but my own spiritless thoughts,—which seems to cast its gloom upon this paper as I write.

What would I have given, to have been sent to the hardest school that ever was kept!—to have been taught something, anyhow, anywhere! No such hope dawned upon me. They disliked me; and they sullenly, sternly, steadily, overlooked me. I think Mr. Murdstone's means were straitened at about this time; but it is little to the purpose. He could not bear me; and in putting me from him he tried, as I believe, to put away the notion that I had any claim upon him—and succeeded.

I was not actively ill-used. I was not beaten, or starved; but the wrong that was done to me had no intervals of relenting, and was done in a systematic, passionless manner. Day after day, week after week, month after month, I was coldly neglected. I wonder sometimes, when I think of it, what they would have done if I had been taken with an illness; whether I should have lain down in my lonely room, and languished through it in my usual solitary way, or whether anybody would have helped me out.

When Mr. and Miss Murdstone were at home, I took my meals with them; in their absence, I ate and drank by myself. At all times I lounged about the house and neighbourhood quite disregarded, except that they were jealous of my making any friends: thinking, perhaps, that if I did, I might complain to someone. For this reason, though Mr. Chillip often asked me to go and see him (he was a widower, having, some years before that, lost a little small light-haired wife, whom I can just remember connecting in my own thoughts with a pale tortoise-shell cat), it was but seldom that I enjoyed the happiness of passing an afternoon in his closet of a surgery; reading some book that was new to me, with the smell of the whole Pharmacopoeia coming up my nose, or pounding something in a mortar under his mild directions.

For the same reason, added no doubt to the old dislike of her, I was seldom allowed to visit Peggotty. Faithful to her promise, she either came to see me, or met me somewhere near, once every week, and never empty-handed; but many and bitter were the disappointments I had, in being refused permission to pay a visit to her at her house. Some few times, however, at long intervals, I was allowed to go there; and then I found out that Mr. Barkis was something of a miser, or as Peggotty dutifully expressed it, was 'a little near', and kept a heap of money in a box under his bed, which he pretended was only full of coats and trousers. In this coffer, his riches hid themselves with such a tenacious modesty, that the smallest instalments could only be tempted out by artifice; so that Peggotty had to prepare a long and elaborate scheme, a very Gunpowder Plot, for every Saturday's expenses.

All this time I was so conscious of the waste of any promise I had given, and of my being utterly neglected, that I should have been perfectly miserable, I have no doubt, but for the old books. They were my only comfort; and I was as true to them as they were to me, and read them over and over I don't know how many times more.

I now approach a period of my life, which I can never lose the remembrance of, while I remember anything: and the recollection of which has often, without my invocation, come before me like a ghost, and haunted happier times.

I had been out, one day, loitering somewhere, in the listless, meditative manner that my way of life engendered, when, turning the corner of a lane near our house, I came upon Mr. Murdstone walking with a gentleman. I was confused, and was going by them, when the gentleman cried:

'What! Brooks!'

'No, sir, David Copperfield,' I said.

'Don't tell me. You are Brooks,' said the gentleman. 'You are Brooks of Sheffield. That's your name.'

At these words, I observed the gentleman more attentively. His laugh coming to my remembrance too, I knew him to be Mr. Quinion, whom I had gone over to Lowestoft with Mr. Murdstone to see, before—it is no matter—I need not recall when.

'And how do you get on, and where are you being educated, Brooks?' said Mr. Quinion.

He had put his hand upon my shoulder, and turned me about, to walk with them. I did not know what to reply, and glanced dubiously at Mr. Murdstone.

'He is at home at present,' said the latter. 'He is not being educated anywhere. I don't know what to do with him. He is a difficult subject.'

That old, double look was on me for a moment; and then his eyes darkened with a frown, as it turned, in its aversion, elsewhere.

'Humph!' said Mr. Quinion, looking at us both, I thought. 'Fine weather!'

Silence ensued, and I was considering how I could best disengage my shoulder from his hand, and go away, when he said:

'I suppose you are a pretty sharp fellow still? Eh, Brooks?'

'Aye! He is sharp enough,' said Mr. Murdstone, impatiently. 'You had better let him go. He will not thank you for troubling him.'

On this hint, Mr. Quinion released me, and I made the best of my way home. Looking back as I turned into the front garden, I saw Mr. Murdstone leaning against the wicket of the churchyard, and Mr. Quinion talking to him. They were both looking after me, and I felt that they were speaking of me.

Mr. Quinion lay at our house that night. After breakfast, the next morning, I had put my chair away, and was going out of the room, when Mr. Murdstone called me back. He then gravely repaired to another table, where his sister sat herself at her desk. Mr. Quinion, with his hands in his pockets, stood looking out of window; and I stood looking at them all.

'David,' said Mr. Murdstone, 'to the young this is a world for action; not for moping and droning in.' —'As you do,' added his sister.

'Jane Murdstone, leave it to me, if you please. I say, David, to the young this is a world for action, and not for moping and droning in. It is especially so for a young boy of your disposition, which requires a great deal of correcting; and to which no greater service can be done than to force it to conform to the ways of the working world, and to bend it and break it.'

'For stubbornness won't do here,' said his sister 'What it wants is, to be crushed. And crushed it must be. Shall be, too!'

He gave her a look, half in remonstrance, half in approval, and went on:

'I suppose you know, David, that I am not rich. At any rate, you know it now. You have received some considerable education already. Education is costly; and even if it were not, and I could afford it, I am of opinion that it would not be at all advantageous to you to be kept at school. What is before you, is a fight with the world; and the sooner you begin it, the better.'

I think it occurred to me that I had already begun it, in my poor way: but it occurs to me now, whether or no.

'You have heard the "counting-house" mentioned sometimes,' said Mr. Murdstone.

'The counting-house, sir?' I repeated. 'Of Murdstone and Grinby, in the wine trade,' he replied.

I suppose I looked uncertain, for he went on hastily:

'You have heard the "counting-house" mentioned, or the business, or the cellars, or the wharf, or something about it.'

'I think I have heard the business mentioned, sir,' I said, remembering what I vaguely knew of his and his sister's resources. 'But I don't know when.'

'It does not matter when,' he returned. 'Mr. Quinion manages that business.'

I glanced at the latter deferentially as he stood looking out of window.

'Mr. Quinion suggests that it gives employment to some other boys, and that he sees no reason why it shouldn't, on the same terms, give employment to you.'

'He having,' Mr. Quinion observed in a low voice, and half turning round, 'no other prospect, Murdstone.'

Mr. Murdstone, with an impatient, even an angry gesture, resumed, without noticing what he had said:

'Those terms are, that you will earn enough for yourself to provide for your eating and drinking, and pocket-money. Your lodging (which I have arranged for) will be paid by me. So will your washing—'

'—Which will be kept down to my estimate,' said his sister.

'Your clothes will be looked after for you, too,' said Mr. Murdstone; 'as you will not be able, yet awhile, to get them for yourself. So you are now going to London, David, with Mr. Quinion, to begin the world on your own account.'

'In short, you are provided for,' observed his sister; 'and will please to do your duty.'

Though I quite understood that the purpose of this announcement was to get rid of me, I have no distinct remembrance whether it pleased or frightened me. My impression is, that I was in a state of confusion about it, and, oscillating between the two points, touched neither. Nor had I much time for the clearing of my thoughts, as Mr. Quinion was to go upon the morrow.

Behold me, on the morrow, in a much-worn little white hat, with a black crape round it for my mother, a black jacket, and a pair of hard, stiff corduroy trousers—which Miss Murdstone considered the best armour for the legs in that fight with the world which was now to come off. Behold me so attired, and with my little worldly all before me in a small trunk, sitting, a lone lorn child (as Mrs. Gummidge might have said), in the post-chaise that was carrying Mr. Quinion to the London coach at Yarmouth! See, how our house and church are lessening in the distance; how the grave beneath the tree is blotted out by intervening objects; how the spire points upwards from my old playground no more, and the sky is empty!

CHAPTER 11. I BEGIN LIFE ON MY OWN ACCOUNT, AND DON'T LIKE IT

I know enough of the world now, to have almost lost the capacity of being much surprised by anything; but it is matter of some surprise to me, even now, that I can have been so easily thrown away at such an age. A child of excellent abilities, and with strong powers of observation, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt bodily or mentally, it seems wonderful to me that nobody should have made any sign in my behalf. But none was made; and I became, at ten years old, a little labouring hind in the service of Murdstone and Grinby.

Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse was at the waterside. It was down in Blackfriars. Modern improvements have altered the place; but it was the last house at the bottom of a narrow street, curving down hill to the river, with some stairs at the end, where people took boat. It was a crazy old house with a wharf of its own, abutting on the water when the tide was in, and on the mud when the tide was out, and literally overrun with rats. Its panelled rooms, discoloured with the dirt and smoke of a hundred years, I dare say; its decaying floors and staircase; the squeaking and scuffling of the old grey rats down in the cellars; and the dirt and rottenness of the place; are things, not of many years ago, in my mind, but of the present instant. They are all before me, just as they were in the evil hour when I went among them for the first time, with my trembling hand in Mr. Quinion's.

Murdstone and Grinby's trade was among a good many kinds of people, but an important branch of it was the supply of wines and spirits to certain packet ships. I forget now where they chiefly went, but I think there were some among them that made voyages both to the East and West Indies. I know that a great many empty bottles were one of the consequences of this traffic, and that certain men and boys were employed to examine them against the light, and reject those that were flawed, and to rinse and wash them. When the empty bottles ran short, there were labels to be pasted on full ones, or corks to be fitted to them, or seals to be put upon the corks, or finished bottles to be packed in casks. All this work was my work, and of the boys employed upon it I was one.

There were three or four of us, counting me. My working place was established in a corner of the warehouse, where Mr. Quinion could see me, when he chose to stand up on the bottom rail of his stool in the counting-house, and look at me through a window above the desk. Hither, on the first morning of my so auspiciously beginning life on my own account, the oldest of the regular boys was summoned to show me my business. His name was Mick Walker, and he wore a ragged apron and a paper cap. He informed me that his father was a bargeman, and walked, in a black velvet head-dress, in the Lord Mayor's Show. He also informed me that our principal associate would be another boy whom he introduced by the—to me—extraordinary name of Mealy Potatoes. I discovered, however, that this youth had not been christened by that name, but that it had been bestowed upon him in the warehouse, on account of his complexion, which was pale or mealy. Mealy's father was a waterman, who had the additional distinction of being a fireman, and was engaged as such at one of the large theatres; where some young relation of Mealy's—I think his little sister—did Imps in the Pantomimes.

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these henceforth everyday associates with those of my happier childhood—not to say with Steerforth, Traddles, and the rest of those boys; and felt my hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my bosom. The deep remembrance of the sense I had, of being utterly without hope now; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that day by day what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, would pass away from me, little by little, never to be brought back any more; cannot be written. As often as Mick Walker went away in the course of that forenoon, I mingled my tears with the water in which I was washing the bottles; and sobbed as if there were a flaw in my own breast, and it were in danger of bursting.

The counting-house clock was at half past twelve, and there was general preparation for going to dinner, when Mr. Quinion tapped at the counting-house window, and beckoned to me to go in. I went in, and found there a stoutish, middle-aged person, in a brown surtout and black tights and shoes, with no more hair upon his head (which was a large one, and very shining) than there is upon an egg, and with a very extensive face, which he turned full upon me. His clothes were shabby, but he had an imposing shirt-collar on. He carried a jaunty sort of a stick, with a large pair of rusty tassels to it; and a quizzing-glass hung outside his coat,—for ornament, I afterwards found, as he very seldom looked through it, and couldn't see anything when he did.

'This,' said Mr. Quinion, in allusion to myself, 'is he.'

'This,' said the stranger, with a certain condescending roll in his voice, and a certain indescribable air of doing something genteel, which impressed me very much, 'is Master Copperfield. I hope I see you well, sir?'

I said I was very well, and hoped he was. I was sufficiently ill at ease, Heaven knows; but it was not in my nature to complain much at that time of my life, so I said I was very well, and hoped he was.

'I am,' said the stranger, 'thank Heaven, quite well. I have received a letter from Mr. Murdstone, in which he mentions that he would desire me to receive into an apartment in the rear of my house, which is at present unoccupied—and is, in short, to be let as a—in short,' said the stranger, with a smile and in a burst of confidence, 'as a bedroom—the young beginner whom I have now the pleasure to—' and the stranger waved his hand, and settled his chin in his shirt-collar.

'This is Mr. Micawber,' said Mr. Quinion to me.

'Ahem!' said the stranger, 'that is my name.'

'Mr. Micawber,' said Mr. Quinion, 'is known to Mr. Murdstone. He takes orders for us on commission, when he can get any. He has been written to by Mr. Murdstone, on the subject of your lodgings, and he will receive you as a lodger.'

'My address,' said Mr. Micawber, 'is Windsor Terrace, City Road. I—in short,' said Mr. Micawber, with the same genteel air, and in another burst of confidence—'I live there.'

I made him a bow.

'Under the impression,' said Mr. Micawber, 'that your peregrinations in this metropolis have not as yet been extensive, and that you might have some difficulty in penetrating the arcana of the Modern Babylon in the direction of the City Road,—in short,' said Mr. Micawber, in another burst of confidence, 'that you might lose yourself—I shall be happy to call this evening, and install you in the knowledge of the nearest way.'

I thanked him with all my heart, for it was friendly in him to offer to take that trouble.

'At what hour,' said Mr. Micawber, 'shall I—'

'At about eight,' said Mr. Quinion.

'At about eight,' said Mr. Micawber. 'I beg to wish you good day, Mr. Quinion. I will intrude no longer.'

So he put on his hat, and went out with his cane under his arm: very upright, and humming a tune when he was clear of the counting-house.

Mr. Quinion then formally engaged me to be as useful as I could in the warehouse of Murdstone and Grinby, at a salary, I think, of six shillings a week. I am not clear whether it was six or seven. I am inclined to believe, from my uncertainty on this head, that it was six at first and seven afterwards. He paid me a week down (from his own pocket, I believe), and I gave Mealy sixpence out of it to get my trunk carried to Windsor Terrace that night: it being too heavy for my strength, small as it was. I paid sixpence more for my dinner, which was a meat pie and a turn at a neighbouring pump; and passed the hour which was allowed for that meal, in walking about the streets.

At the appointed time in the evening, Mr. Micawber reappeared. I washed my hands and face, to do the greater honour to his gentility, and we walked to our house, as I suppose I must now call it, together; Mr. Micawber impressing the name of streets, and the shapes of corner houses upon me, as we went along, that I might find my way back, easily, in the morning.

Arrived at this house in Windsor Terrace (which I noticed was shabby like himself, but also, like himself, made all the show it could), he presented me to Mrs. Micawber, a thin and faded lady, not at all young, who was sitting in the parlour (the first floor was altogether unfurnished, and the blinds were kept down to delude the neighbours), with a baby at her breast. This baby was one of twins; and I may remark here that I hardly ever, in all my experience of the family, saw both the twins detached from Mrs. Micawber at the same time. One of them was always taking refreshment.

There were two other children; Master Micawber, aged about four, and Miss Micawber, aged about three. These, and a dark-complexioned young woman, with a habit of snorting, who was servant to the family, and informed me, before half an hour had expired, that she was 'a Orfling', and came from St. Luke's workhouse, in the neighbourhood, completed the establishment. My room was at the top of the house, at the back: a close chamber; stencilled all over with an ornament which my young imagination represented as a blue muffin; and very scantily furnished.

'I never thought,' said Mrs. Micawber, when she came up, twin and all, to show me the apartment, and sat down to take breath, 'before I was married, when I lived with papa and mama, that I should ever find it necessary to take a lodger. But Mr. Micawber being in difficulties, all considerations of private feeling must give way.'

I said: 'Yes, ma'am.'

'Mr. Micawber's difficulties are almost overwhelming just at present,' said Mrs. Micawber; 'and whether it is possible to bring him through them, I don't know. When I lived at home with papa and mama, I really should have hardly understood what the word meant, in the sense in which I now employ it, but experientia does it,—as papa used to say.'

I cannot satisfy myself whether she told me that Mr. Micawber had been an officer in the Marines, or whether I have imagined it. I only know that I believe to this hour that he WAS in the Marines once upon a time, without knowing why. He was a sort of town traveller for a number of miscellaneous houses, now; but made little or nothing of it, I am afraid.

'If Mr. Micawber's creditors will not give him time,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'they must take the consequences; and the sooner they bring it to an issue the better. Blood cannot be obtained from a stone, neither can anything on account be obtained at present (not to mention law expenses) from Mr. Micawber.'

I never can quite understand whether my precocious self-dependence confused Mrs. Micawber in reference to my age, or whether she was so full of the subject that she would have talked about it to the very twins if there had been nobody else to communicate with, but this was the strain in which she began, and she went on accordingly all the time I knew her.

Poor Mrs. Micawber! She said she had tried to exert herself, and so, I have no doubt, she had. The centre of the street door was perfectly covered with a great brass-plate, on which was engraved 'Mrs. Micawber's Boarding Establishment for Young Ladies': but I never found that any young lady had ever been to school there; or that any young lady ever came, or proposed to come; or that the least preparation was ever made to receive any young lady. The only visitors I ever saw, or heard of, were creditors. THEY used to come at all hours, and some of them were quite ferocious. One dirty-faced man, I think he was a boot-maker, used to edge himself into the passage as early as seven o'clock in the morning, and call up the stairs to Mr. Micawber—'Come! You ain't out yet, you know. Pay us, will you? Don't hide, you know; that's mean. I wouldn't be mean if I was you. Pay us, will you? You just pay us, d'ye hear? Come!' Receiving no answer to these taunts, he would mount in his wrath to the words 'swindlers' and 'robbers'; and these being ineffectual too, would sometimes go to the extremity of crossing the street, and roaring up at the windows of the second floor, where he knew Mr. Micawber was. At these times, Mr. Micawber would be transported with grief and mortification, even to the length (as I was once made aware by a scream from his wife) of making motions at himself with a razor; but within half-an-hour afterwards, he would polish up his shoes with extraordinary pains, and go out, humming a tune with a greater air of gentility than ever. Mrs. Micawber was quite as elastic. I have known her to be thrown into fainting fits by the king's taxes at three o'clock, and to eat lamb chops, breaded, and drink warm ale (paid for with two tea-spoons that had gone to the pawnbroker's) at four. On one occasion, when an execution had just been put in, coming home through some chance as early as six o'clock, I saw her lying (of course with a twin) under the grate in a swoon, with her hair all torn about her face; but I never knew her more cheerful than she was, that very same night, over a veal cutlet before the kitchen fire, telling me stories about her papa and mama, and the company they used to keep.

In this house, and with this family, I passed my leisure time. My own exclusive breakfast of a penny loaf and a pennyworth of milk, I provided myself. I kept another small loaf, and a modicum of cheese, on a particular shelf of a particular cupboard, to make my supper on when I came back at night. This made a hole in the six or seven shillings, I know well; and I was out at the warehouse all day, and had to support myself on that money all the week. From Monday morning until Saturday night, I had no advice, no counsel, no encouragement, no consolation, no assistance, no support, of any kind, from anyone, that I can call to mind, as I hope to go to heaven!

I was so young and childish, and so little qualified—how could I be otherwise?—to undertake the whole charge of my own existence, that often, in going to Murdstone and Grinby's, of a morning, I could not resist the stale pastry put out for sale at half-price at the pastrycooks' doors, and spent in that the money I should have kept for my dinner. Then, I went without my dinner, or bought a roll or a slice of pudding. I remember two pudding shops, between which I was divided, according to my finances. One was in a court close to St. Martin's Church—at the back of the church,—which is now removed altogether. The pudding at that shop was made of currants, and was rather a special pudding, but was dear, twopennyworth not being larger than a pennyworth of more ordinary pudding. A good shop for the latter was in the Strand—somewhere in that part which has been rebuilt since. It was a stout pale pudding, heavy and flabby, and with great flat raisins in it, stuck in whole at wide distances apart. It came up hot at about my time every day, and many a day did I dine off it. When I dined regularly and handsomely, I had a saveloy and a penny loaf, or a fourpenny plate of red beef from a cook's shop; or a plate of bread and cheese and a glass of beer, from a miserable old public-house opposite our place of business, called the Lion, or the Lion and something else that I have forgotten. Once, I remember carrying my own bread (which I had brought from home in the morning) under my arm, wrapped in a piece of paper, like a book, and going to a famous alamode beef-house near Drury Lane, and ordering a 'small plate' of that delicacy to eat with it. What the waiter thought of such a strange little apparition coming in all alone, I don't know; but I can see him now, staring at me as I ate my dinner, and bringing up the other waiter to look. I gave him a halfpenny for himself, and I wish he hadn't taken it.

We had half-an-hour, I think, for tea. When I had money enough, I used to get half-a-pint of ready-made coffee and a slice of bread and butter. When I had none, I used to look at a venison shop in Fleet Street; or I have strolled, at such a time, as far as Covent Garden Market, and stared at the pineapples. I was fond of wandering about the Adelphi, because it was a mysterious place, with those dark arches. I see myself emerging one evening from some of these arches, on a little public-house close to the river, with an open space before it, where some coal-heavers were dancing; to look at whom I sat down upon a bench. I wonder what they thought of me!

I was such a child, and so little, that frequently when I went into the bar of a strange public-house for a glass of ale or porter, to moisten what I had had for dinner, they were afraid to give it me. I remember one hot evening I went into the bar of a public-house, and said to the landlord: 'What is your best—your very best—ale a glass?' For it was a special occasion. I don't know what. It may have been my birthday.

'Twopence-halfpenny,' says the landlord, 'is the price of the Genuine Stunning ale.'

'Then,' says I, producing the money, 'just draw me a glass of the Genuine Stunning, if you please, with a good head to it.'

The landlord looked at me in return over the bar, from head to foot, with a strange smile on his face; and instead of drawing the beer, looked round the screen and said something to his wife. She came out from behind it, with her work in her hand, and joined him in surveying me. Here we stand, all three, before me now. The landlord in his shirt-sleeves, leaning against the bar window-frame; his wife looking over the little half-door; and I, in some confusion, looking up at them from outside the partition. They asked me a good many questions; as, what my name was, how old I was, where I lived, how I was employed, and how I came there. To all of which, that I might commit nobody, I invented, I am afraid, appropriate answers. They served me with the ale, though I suspect it was not the Genuine Stunning; and the landlord's wife, opening the little half-door of the bar, and bending down, gave me my money back, and gave me a kiss that was half admiring and half compassionate, but all womanly and good, I am sure.

I know I do not exaggerate, unconsciously and unintentionally, the scantiness of my resources or the difficulties of my life. I know that if a shilling were given me by Mr. Quinion at any time, I spent it in a dinner or a tea. I know that I worked, from morning until night, with common men and boys, a shabby child. I know that I lounged about the streets, insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed. I know that, but for the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond.

Yet I held some station at Murdstone and Grinby's too. Besides that Mr. Quinion did what a careless man so occupied, and dealing with a thing so anomalous, could, to treat me as one upon a different footing from the rest, I never said, to man or boy, how it was that I came to be there, or gave the least indication of being sorry that I was there. That I suffered in secret, and that I suffered exquisitely, no one ever knew but I. How much I suffered, it is, as I have said already, utterly beyond my power to tell. But I kept my own counsel, and I did my work. I knew from the first, that, if I could not do my work as well as any of the rest, I could not hold myself above slight and contempt. I soon became at least as expeditious and as skilful as either of the other boys. Though perfectly familiar with them, my conduct and manner were different enough from theirs to place a space between us. They and the men generally spoke of me as 'the little gent', or 'the young Suffolker.' A certain man named Gregory, who was foreman of the packers, and another named Tipp, who was the carman, and wore a red jacket, used to address me sometimes as 'David': but I think it was mostly when we were very confidential, and when I had made some efforts to entertain them, over our work, with some results of the old readings; which were fast perishing out of my remembrance. Mealy Potatoes uprose once, and rebelled against my being so distinguished; but Mick Walker settled him in no time.

My rescue from this kind of existence I considered quite hopeless, and abandoned, as such, altogether. I am solemnly convinced that I never for one hour was reconciled to it, or was otherwise than miserably unhappy; but I bore it; and even to Peggotty, partly for the love of her and partly for shame, never in any letter (though many passed between us) revealed the truth.

Mr. Micawber's difficulties were an addition to the distressed state of my mind. In my forlorn state I became quite attached to the family, and used to walk about, busy with Mrs. Micawber's calculations of ways and means, and heavy with the weight of Mr. Micawber's debts. On a Saturday night, which was my grand treat,—partly because it was a great thing to walk home with six or seven shillings in my pocket, looking into the shops and thinking what such a sum would buy, and partly because I went home early,—Mrs. Micawber would make the most heart-rending confidences to me; also on a Sunday morning, when I mixed the portion of tea or coffee I had bought over-night, in a little shaving-pot, and sat late at my breakfast. It was nothing at all unusual for Mr. Micawber to sob violently at the beginning of one of these Saturday night conversations, and sing about jack's delight being his lovely Nan, towards the end of it. I have known him come home to supper with a flood of tears, and a declaration that nothing was now left but a jail; and go to bed making a calculation of the expense of putting bow-windows to the house, 'in case anything turned up', which was his favourite expression. And Mrs. Micawber was just the same.

A curious equality of friendship, originating, I suppose, in our respective circumstances, sprung up between me and these people, notwithstanding the ludicrous disparity in our years. But I never allowed myself to be prevailed upon to accept any invitation to eat and drink with them out of their stock (knowing that they got on badly with the butcher and baker, and had often not too much for themselves), until Mrs. Micawber took me into her entire confidence. This she did one evening as follows:

'Master Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'I make no stranger of you, and therefore do not hesitate to say that Mr. Micawber's difficulties are coming to a crisis.'

It made me very miserable to hear it, and I looked at Mrs. Micawber's red eyes with the utmost sympathy.

'With the exception of the heel of a Dutch cheese—which is not adapted to the wants of a young family'—said Mrs. Micawber, 'there is really not a scrap of anything in the larder. I was accustomed to speak of the larder when I lived with papa and mama, and I use the word almost unconsciously. What I mean to express is, that there is nothing to eat in the house.'

'Dear me!' I said, in great concern.

I had two or three shillings of my week's money in my pocket—from which I presume that it must have been on a Wednesday night when we held this conversation—and I hastily produced them, and with heartfelt emotion begged Mrs. Micawber to accept of them as a loan. But that lady, kissing me, and making me put them back in my pocket, replied that she couldn't think of it.

'No, my dear Master Copperfield,' said she, 'far be it from my thoughts! But you have a discretion beyond your years, and can render me another kind of service, if you will; and a service I will thankfully accept of.'

I begged Mrs. Micawber to name it.

'I have parted with the plate myself,' said Mrs. Micawber. 'Six tea, two salt, and a pair of sugars, I have at different times borrowed money on, in secret, with my own hands. But the twins are a great tie; and to me, with my recollections, of papa and mama, these transactions are very painful. There are still a few trifles that we could part with. Mr. Micawber's feelings would never allow him to dispose of them; and Clickett'—this was the girl from the workhouse—'being of a vulgar mind, would take painful liberties if so much confidence was reposed in her. Master Copperfield, if I might ask you —'

I understood Mrs. Micawber now, and begged her to make use of me to any extent. I began to dispose of the more portable articles of property that very evening; and went out on a similar expedition almost every morning, before I went to Murdstone and Grinby's.

Mr. Micawber had a few books on a little chiffonier, which he called the library; and those went first. I carried them, one after another, to a bookstall in the City Road—one part of which, near our house, was almost all bookstalls and bird shops then—and sold them for whatever they would bring. The keeper of this bookstall, who lived in a little house behind it, used to get tipsy every night, and to be violently scolded by his wife every morning. More than once, when I went there early, I had audience of him in a turn-up bedstead, with a cut in his forehead or a black eye, bearing witness to his excesses over-night (I am afraid he was quarrelsome in his drink), and he, with a shaking hand, endeavouring to find the needful shillings in one or other of the pockets of his clothes, which lay upon the floor, while his wife, with a baby in her arms and her shoes down at heel, never left off rating him. Sometimes he had lost his money, and then he would ask me to call again; but his wife had always got some—had taken his, I dare say, while he was drunk—and secretly completed the bargain on the stairs, as we went down together. At the pawnbroker's shop, too, I began to be very well known. The principal gentleman who officiated behind the counter, took a good deal of notice of me; and often got me, I recollect, to decline a Latin noun or adjective, or to conjugate a Latin verb, in his ear, while he transacted my business. After all these occasions Mrs. Micawber made a little treat, which was generally a supper; and there was a peculiar relish in these meals which I well remember.

At last Mr. Micawber's difficulties came to a crisis, and he was arrested early one morning, and carried over to the King's Bench Prison in the Borough. He told me, as he went out of the house, that the God of day had now gone down upon him—and I really thought his heart was broken and mine too. But I heard, afterwards, that he was seen to play a lively game at skittles, before noon.

On the first Sunday after he was taken there, I was to go and see him, and have dinner with him. I was to ask my way to such a place, and just short of that place I should see such another place, and just short of that I should see a yard, which I was to cross, and keep straight on until I saw a turnkey. All this I did; and when at last I did see a turnkey (poor little fellow that I was!), and thought how, when Roderick Random was in a debtors' prison, there was a man there with nothing on him but an old rug, the turnkey swam before my dimmed eyes and my beating heart.

Mr. Micawber was waiting for me within the gate, and we went up to his room (top story but one), and cried very much. He solemnly conjured me, I remember, to take warning by his fate; and to observe that if a man had twenty pounds a-year for his income, and spent nineteen pounds nineteen shillings and sixpence, he would be happy, but that if he spent twenty pounds one he would be miserable. After which he borrowed a shilling of me for porter, gave me a written order on Mrs. Micawber for the amount, and put away his pocket-handkerchief, and cheered up.

We sat before a little fire, with two bricks put within the rusted grate, one on each side, to prevent its burning too many coals; until another debtor, who shared the room with Mr. Micawber, came in from the bakehouse with the loin of mutton which was our joint-stock repast. Then I was sent up to 'Captain Hopkins' in the room overhead, with Mr. Micawber's compliments, and I was his young friend, and would Captain Hopkins lend me a knife and fork.

Captain Hopkins lent me the knife and fork, with his compliments to Mr. Micawber. There was a very dirty lady in his little room, and two wan girls, his daughters, with shock heads of hair. I thought it was better to borrow Captain Hopkins's knife and fork, than Captain Hopkins's comb. The Captain himself was in the last extremity of shabbiness, with large whiskers, and an old, old brown great-coat with no other coat below it. I saw his bed rolled up in a corner; and what plates and dishes and pots he had, on a shelf; and I divined (God knows how) that though the two girls with the shock heads of hair were Captain Hopkins's children, the dirty lady was not married to Captain Hopkins. My timid station on his threshold was not occupied more than a couple of minutes at most; but I came down again with all this in my knowledge, as surely as the knife and fork were in my hand.

There was something gipsy-like and agreeable in the dinner, after all. I took back Captain Hopkins's knife and fork early in the afternoon, and went home to comfort Mrs. Micawber with an account of my visit. She fainted when she saw me return, and made a little jug of egg-hot afterwards to console us while we talked it over.

I don't know how the household furniture came to be sold for the family benefit, or who sold it, except that I did not. Sold it was, however, and carried away in a van; except the bed, a few chairs, and the kitchen table. With these possessions we encamped, as it were, in the two parlours of the emptied house in Windsor Terrace; Mrs. Micawber, the children, the Orfling, and myself; and lived in those rooms night and day. I have no idea for how long, though it seems to me for a long time. At last Mrs. Micawber resolved to move into the prison, where Mr. Micawber had now secured a room to himself. So I took the key of the house to the landlord, who was very glad to get it; and the beds were sent over to the King's Bench, except mine, for which a little room was hired outside the walls in the neighbourhood of that Institution, very much to my satisfaction, since the Micawbers and I had become too used to one another, in our troubles, to part. The Orfling was likewise accommodated with an inexpensive lodging in the same neighbourhood. Mine was a quiet back-garret with a sloping roof, commanding a pleasant prospect of a timberyard; and when I took possession of it, with the reflection that Mr. Micawber's troubles had come to a crisis at last, I thought it quite a paradise.

All this time I was working at Murdstone and Grinby's in the same common way, and with the same common companions, and with the same sense of unmerited degradation as at first. But I never, happily for me no doubt, made a single acquaintance, or spoke to any of the many boys whom I saw daily in going to the warehouse, in coming from it, and in prowling about the streets at meal-times. I led the same secretly unhappy life; but I led it in the same lonely, self-reliant manner. The only changes I am conscious of are, firstly, that I had grown more shabby, and secondly, that I was now relieved of much of the weight of Mr. and Mrs. Micawber's cares; for some relatives or friends had engaged to help them at their present pass, and they lived more comfortably in the prison than they had lived for a long while out of it. I used to breakfast with them now, in virtue of some arrangement, of which I have forgotten the details. I forget, too, at what hour the gates were opened in the morning, admitting of my going in; but I know that I was often up at six o'clock, and that my favourite lounging-place in the interval was old London Bridge, where I was wont to sit in one of the stone recesses, watching the people going by, or to look over the balustrades at the sun shining in the water, and lighting up the golden flame on the top of the Monument. The Orfling met me here sometimes, to be told some astonishing fictions respecting the wharves and the Tower; of which I can say no more than that I hope I believed them myself. In the evening I used to go back to the prison, and walk up and down the parade with Mr. Micawber; or play casino with Mrs. Micawber, and hear reminiscences of her papa and mama. Whether Mr. Murdstone knew where I was, I am unable to say. I never told them at Murdstone and Grinby's.

Mr. Micawber's affairs, although past their crisis, were very much involved by reason of a certain 'Deed', of which I used to hear a great deal, and which I suppose, now, to have been some former composition with his creditors, though I was so far from being clear about it then, that I am conscious of having confounded it with those demoniacal parchments which are held to have, once upon a time, obtained to a great extent in Germany. At last this document appeared to be got out of the way, somehow; at all events it ceased to be the rock-ahead it had been; and Mrs. Micawber informed me that 'her family' had decided that Mr. Micawber should apply for his release under the Insolvent Debtors Act, which would set him free, she expected, in about six weeks.

'And then,' said Mr. Micawber, who was present, 'I have no doubt I shall, please Heaven, begin to be beforehand with the world, and to live in a perfectly new manner, if—in short, if anything turns up.'

By way of going in for anything that might be on the cards, I call to mind that Mr. Micawber, about this time, composed a petition to the House of Commons, praying for an alteration in the law of imprisonment for debt. I set down this remembrance here, because it is an instance to myself of the manner in which I fitted my old books to my altered life, and made stories for myself, out of the streets, and out of men and women; and how some main points in the character I shall unconsciously develop, I suppose, in writing my life, were gradually forming all this while.

There was a club in the prison, in which Mr. Micawber, as a gentleman, was a great authority. Mr. Micawber had stated his idea of this petition to the club, and the club had strongly approved of the same. Wherefore Mr. Micawber (who was a thoroughly good-natured man, and as active a creature about everything but his own affairs as ever existed, and never so happy as when he was busy about something that could never be of any profit to him) set to work at the petition, invented it, engrossed it on an immense sheet of paper, spread it out on a table, and appointed a time for all the club, and all within the walls if they chose, to come up to his room and sign it.

When I heard of this approaching ceremony, I was so anxious to see them all come in, one after another, though I knew the greater part of them already, and they me, that I got an hour's leave of absence from Murdstone and Grinby's, and established myself in a corner for that purpose. As many of the principal members of the club as could be got into the small room without filling it, supported Mr. Micawber in front of the petition, while my old friend Captain Hopkins (who had washed himself, to do honour to so solemn an occasion) stationed himself close to it, to read it to all who were unacquainted with its contents. The door was then thrown open, and the general population began to come in, in a long file: several waiting outside, while one entered, affixed his signature, and went out. To everybody in succession, Captain Hopkins said: 'Have you read it?'—'No.'—-'Would you like to hear it read?' If he weakly showed the least disposition to hear it, Captain Hopkins, in a loud sonorous voice, gave him every word of it. The Captain would have read it twenty thousand times, if twenty thousand people would have heard him, one by one. I remember a certain luscious roll he gave to such phrases as 'The people's representatives in Parliament assembled,' 'Your petitioners therefore humbly approach your honourable house,' 'His gracious Majesty's unfortunate subjects,' as if the words were something real in his mouth, and delicious to taste; Mr. Micawber, meanwhile, listening with a little of an author's vanity, and contemplating (not severely) the spikes on the opposite wall.

As I walked to and fro daily between Southwark and Blackfriars, and lounged about at meal-times in obscure streets, the stones of which may, for anything I know, be worn at this moment by my childish feet, I wonder how many of these people were wanting in the crowd that used to come filing before me in review again, to the echo of Captain Hopkins's voice! When my thoughts go back, now, to that slow agony of my youth, I wonder how much of the histories I invented for such people hangs like a mist of fancy over well-remembered facts! When I tread the old ground, I do not wonder that I seem to see and pity, going on before me, an innocent romantic boy, making his imaginative world out of such strange experiences and sordid things!

CHAPTER 12. LIKING LIFE ON MY OWN ACCOUNT NO BETTER, I FORM A GREAT RESOLUTION

In due time, Mr. Micawber's petition was ripe for hearing; and that gentleman was ordered to be discharged under the Act, to my great joy. His creditors were not implacable; and Mrs. Micawber informed me that even the revengeful boot-maker had declared in open court that he bore him no malice, but that when money was owing to him he liked to be paid. He said he thought it was human nature.

M r Micawber returned to the King's Bench when his case was over, as some fees were to be settled, and some formalities observed, before he could be actually released. The club received him with transport, and held an harmonic meeting that evening in his honour; while Mrs. Micawber and I had a lamb's fry in private, surrounded by the sleeping family.

'On such an occasion I will give you, Master Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'in a little more flip,' for we had been having some already, 'the memory of my papa and mama.'

'Are they dead, ma'am?' I inquired, after drinking the toast in a wine-glass.

'My mama departed this life,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'before Mr. Micawber's difficulties commenced, or at least before they became pressing. My papa lived to bail Mr. Micawber several times, and then expired, regretted by a numerous circle.'

Mrs. Micawber shook her head, and dropped a pious tear upon the twin who happened to be in hand.

As I could hardly hope for a more favourable opportunity of putting a question in which I had a near interest, I said to Mrs. Micawber:

'May I ask, ma'am, what you and Mr. Micawber intend to do, now that Mr. Micawber is out of his difficulties, and at liberty? Have you settled yet?'

'My family,' said Mrs. Micawber, who always said those two words with an air, though I never could discover who came under the denomination, 'my family are of opinion that Mr. Micawber should quit London, and exert his talents in the country. Mr. Micawber is a man of great talent, Master Copperfield.'

I said I was sure of that.

'Of great talent,' repeated Mrs. Micawber. 'My family are of opinion, that, with a little interest, something might be done for a man of his ability in the Custom House. The influence of my family being local, it is their wish that Mr. Micawber should go down to Plymouth. They think it indispensable that he should be upon the spot.'

'That he may be ready?' I suggested.

'Exactly,' returned Mrs. Micawber. 'That he may be ready—in case of anything turning up.'

'And do you go too, ma'am?'

The events of the day, in combination with the twins, if not with the flip, had made Mrs. Micawber hysterical, and she shed tears as she replied:

'I never will desert Mr. Micawber. Mr. Micawber may have concealed his difficulties from me in the first instance, but his sanguine temper may have led him to expect that he would overcome them. The pearl necklace and bracelets which I inherited from mama, have been disposed of for less than half their value; and the set of coral, which was the wedding gift of my papa, has been actually thrown away for nothing. But I never will desert Mr. Micawber. No!' cried Mrs. Micawber, more affected than before, 'I never will do it! It's of no use asking me!'

I felt quite uncomfortable—as if Mrs. Micawber supposed I had asked her to do anything of the sort!—and sat looking at her in alarm.

'Mr. Micawber has his faults. I do not deny that he is improvident. I do not deny that he has kept me in the dark as to his resources and his liabilities both,' she went on, looking at the wall; 'but I never will desert Mr. Micawber!'

Mrs. Micawber having now raised her voice into a perfect scream, I was so frightened that I ran off to the club-room, and disturbed Mr. Micawber in the act of presiding at a long table, and leading the chorus of

Gee up, Dobbin,
Gee ho, Dobbin,
Gee up, Dobbin,
Gee up, and gee ho—o—o!

with the tidings that Mrs. Micawber was in an alarming state, upon which he immediately burst into tears, and came away with me with his waistcoat full of the heads and tails of shrimps, of which he had been partaking.

'Emma, my angel!' cried Mr. Micawber, running into the room; 'what is the matter?'

'I never will desert you, Micawber!' she exclaimed.

'My life!' said Mr. Micawber, taking her in his arms. 'I am perfectly aware of it.'

'He is the parent of my children! He is the father of my twins! He is the husband of my affections,' cried Mrs. Micawber, struggling; 'and I ne—ver—will—desert Mr. Micawber!'

Mr. Micawber was so deeply affected by this proof of her devotion (as to me, I was dissolved in tears), that he hung over her in a passionate manner, imploring her to look up, and to be calm. But the more he asked Mrs. Micawber to look up, the more she fixed her eyes on nothing; and the more he asked her to compose herself, the more she wouldn't. Consequently Mr. Micawber was soon so overcome, that he mingled his tears with hers and mine; until he begged me to do him the favour of taking a chair on the staircase, while he got her into bed. I would have taken my leave for the night, but he would not hear of my doing that until the strangers' bell should ring. So I sat at the staircase window, until he came out with another chair and joined me.

'How is Mrs. Micawber now, sir?' I said.

'Very low,' said Mr. Micawber, shaking his head; 'reaction. Ah, this has been a dreadful day! We stand alone now—everything is gone from us!'

Mr. Micawber pressed my hand, and groaned, and afterwards shed tears. I was greatly touched, and disappointed too, for I had expected that we should be quite gay on this happy and long-looked-for occasion. But Mr. and Mrs. Micawber were so used to their old difficulties, I think, that they felt quite shipwrecked when they came to consider that they were released from them. All their elasticity was departed, and I never saw them half so wretched as on this night; insomuch that when the bell rang, and Mr. Micawber walked with me to the lodge, and parted from me there with a blessing, I felt quite afraid to leave him by himself, he was so profoundly miserable.

But through all the confusion and lowness of spirits in which we had been, so unexpectedly to me, involved, I plainly discerned that Mr. and Mrs. Micawber and their family were going away from London, and that a parting between us was near at hand. It was in my walk home that night, and in the sleepless hours which followed when I lay in bed, that the thought first occurred to me—though I don't know how it came into my head—which afterwards shaped itself into a settled resolution.

I had grown to be so accustomed to the Micawbers, and had been so intimate with them in their distresses, and was so utterly friendless without them, that the prospect of being thrown upon some new shift for a lodging, and going once more among unknown people, was like being that moment turned adrift into my present life, with such a knowledge of it ready made as experience had given me. All the sensitive feelings it wounded so cruelly, all the shame and misery it kept alive within my breast, became more poignant as I thought of this; and I determined that the life was unendurable.

That there was no hope of escape from it, unless the escape was my own act, I knew quite well. I rarely heard from Miss Murdstone, and never from Mr. Murdstone: but two or three parcels of made or mended clothes had come up for me, consigned to Mr. Quinion, and in each there was a scrap of paper to the effect that J. M. trusted D. C. was applying himself to business, and devoting himself wholly to his duties—not the least hint of my ever being anything else than the common drudge into which I was fast settling down.

The very next day showed me, while my mind was in the first agitation of what it had conceived, that Mrs. Micawber had not spoken of their going away without warrant. They took a lodging in the house where I lived, for a week; at the expiration of which time they were to start for Plymouth. Mr. Micawber himself came down to the counting-house, in the afternoon, to tell Mr. Quinion that he must relinquish me on the day of his departure, and to give me a high character, which I am sure I deserved. And Mr. Quinion, calling in Tipp the carman, who was a married man, and had a room to let, quartered me prospectively on him—by our mutual consent, as he had every reason to think; for I said nothing, though my resolution was now taken.

I passed my evenings with Mr. and Mrs. Micawber, during the remaining term of our residence under the same roof; and I think we became fonder of one another as the time went on. On the last Sunday, they invited me to dinner; and we had a loin of pork and apple sauce, and a pudding. I had bought a spotted wooden horse over-night as a parting gift to little Wilkins Micawber—that was the boy—and a doll for little Emma. I had also bestowed a shilling on the Orfling, who was about to be disbanded.

We had a very pleasant day, though we were all in a tender state about our approaching separation.

'I shall never, Master Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'revert to the period when Mr. Micawber was in difficulties, without thinking of you. Your conduct has always been of the most delicate and obliging description. You have never been a lodger. You have been a friend.'

'My dear,' said Mr. Micawber; 'Copperfield,' for so he had been accustomed to call me, of late, 'has a heart to feel for the distresses of his fellow-creatures when they are behind a cloud, and a head to plan, and a hand to—in short, a general ability to dispose of such available property as could be made away with.'

I expressed my sense of this commendation, and said I was very sorry we were going to lose one another.

'My dear young friend,' said Mr. Micawber, 'I am older than you; a man of some experience in life, and—and of some experience, in short, in difficulties, generally speaking. At present, and until something turns up (which I am, I may say, hourly expecting), I have nothing to bestow but advice. Still my advice is so far worth taking, that—in short, that I have never taken it myself, and am the'—here Mr. Micawber, who had been beaming and smiling, all over his head and face, up to the present moment, checked himself and frowned—'the miserable wretch you behold.'

'My dear Micawber!' urged his wife.

'I say,' returned Mr. Micawber, quite forgetting himself, and smiling again, 'the miserable wretch you behold. My advice is, never do tomorrow what you can do today. Procrastination is the thief of time. Collar him!'

'My poor papa's maxim,' Mrs. Micawber observed.

'My dear,' said Mr. Micawber, 'your papa was very well in his way, and Heaven forbid that I should disparage him. Take him for all in all, we ne'er shall—in short, make the acquaintance, probably, of anybody else possessing, at his time of life, the same legs for gaiters, and able to read the same description of print, without spectacles. But he applied that maxim to our marriage, my dear; and that was so far prematurely entered into, in consequence, that I never recovered the expense.' Mr. Micawber looked aside at Mrs. Micawber, and added: 'Not that I am sorry for it. Quite the contrary, my love.' After which, he was grave for a minute or so.

'My other piece of advice, Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'you know. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen nineteen and six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery. The blossom is blighted, the leaf is withered, the god of day goes down upon the dreary scene, and—and in short you are for ever floored. As I am!'

To make his example the more impressive, Mr. Micawber drank a glass of punch with an air of great enjoyment and satisfaction, and whistled the College Hornpipe.

I did not fail to assure him that I would store these precepts in my mind, though indeed I had no need to do so, for, at the time, they affected me visibly. Next morning I met the whole family at the coach office, and saw them, with a desolate heart, take their places outside, at the back.

'Master Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'God bless you! I never can forget all that, you know, and I never would if I could.'

'Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'farewell! Every happiness and prosperity! If, in the progress of revolving years, I could persuade myself that my blighted destiny had been a warning to you, I should feel that I had not occupied another man's place in existence altogether in vain. In case of anything turning up (of which I am rather confident), I shall be extremely happy if it should be in my power to improve your prospects.'

I think, as Mrs. Micawber sat at the back of the coach, with the children, and I stood in the road looking wistfully at them, a mist cleared from her eyes, and she saw what a little creature I really was. I think so, because she beckoned to me to climb up, with quite a new and motherly expression in her face, and put her arm round my neck, and gave me just such a kiss as she might have given to her own boy. I had barely time to get down again before the coach started, and I could hardly see the family for the handkerchiefs they waved. It was gone in a minute. The Orfling and I stood looking vacantly at each other in the middle of the road, and then shook hands and said good-bye; she going back, I suppose, to St. Luke's workhouse, as I went to begin my weary day at Murdstone and Grinby's.

But with no intention of passing many more weary days there. No. I had resolved to run away.—-To go, by some means or other, down into the country, to the only relation I had in the world, and tell my story to my aunt, Miss Betsey. I have already observed that I don't know how this desperate idea came into my brain. But, once there, it remained there; and hardened into a purpose than which I have never entertained a more determined purpose in my life. I am far from sure that I believed there was anything hopeful in it, but my mind was thoroughly made up that it must be carried into execution.

Again, and again, and a hundred times again, since the night when the thought had first occurred to me and banished sleep, I had gone over that old story of my poor mother's about my birth, which it had been one of my great delights in the old time to hear her tell, and which I knew by heart. My aunt walked into that story, and walked out of it, a dread and awful personage; but there was one little trait in her behaviour which I liked to dwell on, and which gave me some faint shadow of encouragement. I could not forget how my mother had thought that she felt her touch her pretty hair with no ungentle hand; and though it might have been altogether my mother's fancy, and might have had no foundation whatever in fact, I made a little picture, out of it, of my terrible aunt relenting towards the girlish beauty that I recollected so well and loved so much, which softened the whole narrative. It is very possible that it had been in my mind a long time, and had gradually engendered my determination.

As I did not even know where Miss Betsey lived, I wrote a long letter to Peggotty, and asked her, incidentally, if she remembered; pretending that I had heard of such a lady living at a certain place I named at random, and had a curiosity to know if it were the same. In the course of that letter, I told Peggotty that I had a particular occasion for half a guinea; and that if she could lend me that sum until I could repay it, I should be very much obliged to her, and would tell her afterwards what I had wanted it for.

Peggotty's answer soon arrived, and was, as usual, full of affectionate devotion. She enclosed the half guinea (I was afraid she must have had a world of trouble to get it out of Mr. Barkis's box), and told me that Miss Betsey lived near Dover, but whether at Dover itself, at Hythe, Sandgate, or Folkestone, she could not say. One of our men, however, informing me on my asking him about these places, that they were all close together, I deemed this enough for my object, and resolved to set out at the end of that week.

Being a very honest little creature, and unwilling to disgrace the memory I was going to leave behind me at Murdstone and Grinby's, I considered myself bound to remain until Saturday night; and, as I had been paid a week's wages in advance when I first came there, not to present myself in the counting-house at the usual hour, to receive my stipend. For this express reason, I had borrowed the half-guinea, that I might not be without a fund for my travelling-expenses. Accordingly, when the Saturday night came, and we were all waiting in the warehouse to be paid, and Tipp the carman, who always took precedence, went in first to draw his money, I shook Mick Walker by the hand; asked him, when it came to his turn to be paid, to say to Mr. Quinion that I had gone to move my box to Tipp's; and, bidding a last good night to Mealy Potatoes, ran away.

My box was at my old lodging, over the water, and I had written a direction for it on the back of one of our address cards that we nailed on the casks: 'Master David, to be left till called for, at the Coach Office, Dover.' This I had in my pocket ready to put on the box, after I should have got it out of the house; and as I went towards my lodging, I looked about me for someone who would help me to carry it to the booking-office.

There was a long-legged young man with a very little empty donkey-cart, standing near the Obelisk, in the Blackfriars Road, whose eye I caught as I was going by, and who, addressing me as 'Sixpenn'orth of bad ha'pence,' hoped 'I should know him agin to swear to'—in allusion, I have no doubt, to my staring at him. I stopped to assure him that I had not done so in bad manners, but uncertain whether he might or might not like a job.

'Wot job?' said the long-legged young man.

'To move a box,' I answered.

'Wot box?' said the long-legged young man.

I told him mine, which was down that street there, and which I wanted him to take to the Dover coach office for sixpence.

'Done with you for a tanner!' said the long-legged young man, and directly got upon his cart, which was nothing but a large wooden tray on wheels, and rattled away at such a rate, that it was as much as I could do to keep pace with the donkey.

There was a defiant manner about this young man, and particularly about the way in which he chewed straw as he spoke to me, that I did not much like; as the bargain was made, however, I took him upstairs to the room I was leaving, and we brought the box down, and put it on his cart.

Now, I was unwilling to put the direction-card on there, lest any of my landlord's family should fathom what I was doing, and detain me; so I said to the young man that I would be glad if he would stop for a minute, when he came to the dead-wall of the King's Bench prison. The words were no sooner out of my mouth, than he rattled away as if he, my box, the cart, and the donkey, were all equally mad; and I was quite out of breath with running and calling after him, when I caught him at the place appointed.

Being much flushed and excited, I tumbled my half-guinea out of my pocket in pulling the card out. I put it in my mouth for safety, and though my hands trembled a good deal, had just tied the card on very much to my satisfaction, when I felt myself violently chucked under the chin by the long-legged young man, and saw my half-guinea fly out of my mouth into his hand.

'Wot!' said the young man, seizing me by my jacket collar, with a frightful grin. 'This is a pollis case, is it? You're a-going to bolt, are you? Come to the pollis, you young warmin, come to the pollis!'

'You give me my money back, if you please,' said I, very much frightened; 'and leave me alone.'

'Come to the pollis!' said the young man. 'You shall prove it yourn to the pollis.'

'Give me my box and money, will you,' I cried, bursting into tears.

The young man still replied: 'Come to the pollis!' and was dragging me against the donkey in a violent manner, as if there were any affinity between that animal and a magistrate, when he changed his mind, jumped into the cart, sat upon my box, and, exclaiming that he would drive to the pollis straight, rattled away harder than ever.

I ran after him as fast as I could, but I had no breath to call out with, and should not have dared to call out, now, if I had. I narrowly escaped being run over, twenty times at least, in half a mile. Now I lost him, now I saw him, now I lost him, now I was cut at with a whip, now shouted at, now down in the mud, now up again, now running into somebody's arms, now running headlong at a post. At length, confused by fright and heat, and doubting whether half London might not by this time be turning out for my apprehension, I left the young man to go where he would with my box and money; and, panting and crying, but never stopping, faced about for Greenwich, which I had understood was on the Dover Road: taking very little more out of the world, towards the retreat of my aunt, Miss Betsey, than I had brought into it, on the night when my arrival gave her so much umbrage.

CHAPTER 13. THE SEQUEL OF MY RESOLUTION

For anything I know, I may have had some wild idea of running all the way to Dover, when I gave up the pursuit of the young man with the donkey-cart, and started for Greenwich. My scattered senses were soon collected as to that point, if I had; for I came to a stop in the Kent Road, at a terrace with a piece of water before it, and a great foolish image in the middle, blowing a dry shell. Here I sat down on a doorstep, quite spent and exhausted with the efforts I had already made, and with hardly breath enough to cry for the loss of my box and half-guinea.

It was by this time dark; I heard the clocks strike ten, as I sat resting. But it was a summer night, fortunately, and fine weather. When I had recovered my breath, and had got rid of a stifling sensation in my throat, I rose up and went on. In the midst of my distress, I had no notion of going back. I doubt if I should have had any, though there had been a Swiss snow-drift in the Kent Road.

But my standing possessed of only three-halfpence in the world (and I am sure I wonder how they came to be left in my pocket on a Saturday night!) troubled me none the less because I went on. I began to picture to myself, as a scrap of newspaper intelligence, my being found dead in a day or two, under some hedge; and I trudged on miserably, though as fast as I could, until I happened to pass a little shop, where it was written up that ladies' and gentlemen's wardrobes were bought, and that the best price was given for rags, bones, and kitchen-stuff. The master of this shop was sitting at the door in his shirt-sleeves, smoking; and as there were a great many coats and pairs of trousers dangling from the low ceiling, and only two feeble candles burning inside to show what they were, I fancied that he looked like a man of a revengeful disposition, who had hung all his enemies, and was enjoying himself.

My late experiences with Mr. and Mrs. Micawber suggested to me that here might be a means of keeping off the wolf for a little while. I went up the next by-street, took off my waistcoat, rolled it neatly under my arm, and came back to the shop door.

'If you please, sir,' I said, 'I am to sell this for a fair price.'

Mr. Dolloby—Dolloby was the name over the shop door, at least—took the waistcoat, stood his pipe on its head, against the door-post, went into the shop, followed by me, snuffed the two candles with his fingers, spread the waistcoat on the counter, and looked at it there, held it up against the light, and looked at it there, and ultimately said:

'What do you call a price, now, for this here little weskit?'

'Oh! you know best, sir,' I returned modestly.

'I can't be buyer and seller too,' said Mr. Dolloby. 'Put a price on this here little weskit.'

'Would eighteenpence be?'—I hinted, after some hesitation.

Mr. Dolloby rolled it up again, and gave it me back. 'I should rob my family,' he said, 'if I was to offer ninepence for it.'

This was a disagreeable way of putting the business; because it imposed upon me, a perfect stranger, the unpleasantness of asking Mr. Dolloby to rob his family on my account. My circumstances being so very pressing, however, I said I would take ninepence for it, if he pleased. Mr. Dolloby, not without some grumbling, gave ninepence. I wished him good night, and walked out of the shop the richer by that sum, and the poorer by a waistcoat. But when I buttoned my jacket, that was not much. Indeed, I foresaw pretty clearly that my jacket would go next, and that I should have to make the best of my way to Dover in a shirt and a pair of trousers, and might deem myself lucky if I got there even in that trim. But my mind did not run so much on this as might be supposed. Beyond a general impression of the distance before me, and of the young man with the donkey-cart having used me cruelly, I think I had no very urgent sense of my difficulties when I once again set off with my ninepence in my pocket.

A plan had occurred to me for passing the night, which I was going to carry into execution. This was, to lie behind the wall at the back of my old school, in a corner where there used to be a haystack. I imagined it would be a kind of company to have the boys, and the bedroom where I used to tell the stories, so near me: although the boys would know nothing of my being there, and the bedroom would yield me no shelter.

I had had a hard day's work, and was pretty well jaded when I came climbing out, at last, upon the level of Blackheath. It cost me some trouble to find out Salem House; but I found it, and I found a haystack in the corner, and I lay down by it; having first walked round the wall, and looked up at the windows, and seen that all was dark and silent within. Never shall I forget the lonely sensation of first lying down, without a roof above my head!

Sleep came upon me as it came on many other outcasts, against whom house-doors were locked, and house-dogs barked, that night—and I dreamed of lying on my old school-bed, talking to the boys in my room; and found myself sitting upright, with Steerforth's name upon my lips, looking wildly at the stars that were glistening and glimmering above me. When I remembered where I was at that untimely hour, a feeling stole upon me that made me get up, afraid of I don't know what, and walk about. But the fainter glimmering of the stars, and the pale light in the sky where the day was coming, reassured me: and my eyes being very heavy, I lay down again and slept—though with a knowledge in my sleep that it was cold—until the warm beams of the sun, and the ringing of the getting-up bell at Salem House, awoke me. If I could have hoped that Steerforth was there, I would have lurked about until he came out alone; but I knew he must have left long since. Traddles still remained, perhaps, but it was very doubtful; and I had not sufficient confidence in his discretion or good luck, however strong my reliance was on his good nature, to wish to trust him with my situation. So I crept away from the wall as Mr. Creakle's boys were getting up, and struck into the long dusty track which I had first known to be the Dover Road when I was one of them, and when I little expected that any eyes would ever see me the wayfarer I was now, upon it.

What a different Sunday morning from the old Sunday morning at Yarmouth! In due time I heard the church-bells ringing, as I plodded on; and I met people who were going to church; and I passed a church or two where the congregation were inside, and the sound of singing came out into the sunshine, while the beadle sat and cooled himself in the shade of the porch, or stood beneath the yew-tree, with his hand to his forehead, glowering at me going by. But the peace and rest of the old Sunday morning were on everything, except me. That was the difference. I felt quite wicked in my dirt and dust, with my tangled hair. But for the quiet picture I had conjured up, of my mother in her youth and beauty, weeping by the fire, and my aunt relenting to her, I hardly think I should have had the courage to go on until next day. But it always went before me, and I followed.

I got, that Sunday, through three-and-twenty miles on the straight road, though not very easily, for I was new to that kind of toil. I see myself, as evening closes in, coming over the bridge at Rochester, footsore and tired, and eating bread that I had bought for supper. One or two little houses, with the notice, 'Lodgings for Travellers', hanging out, had tempted me; but I was afraid of spending the few pence I had, and was even more afraid of the vicious looks of the trampers I had met or overtaken. I sought no shelter, therefore, but the sky; and toiling into Chatham,—which, in that night's aspect, is a mere dream of chalk, and drawbridges, and mastless ships in a muddy river, roofed like Noah's arks,—crept, at last, upon a sort of grass-grown battery overhanging a lane, where a sentry was walking to and fro. Here I lay down, near a cannon; and, happy in the society of the sentry's footsteps, though he knew no more of my being above him than the boys at Salem House had known of my lying by the wall, slept soundly until morning.

Very stiff and sore of foot I was in the morning, and quite dazed by the beating of drums and marching of troops, which seemed to hem me in on every side when I went down towards the long narrow street. Feeling that I could go but a very little way that day, if I were to reserve any strength for getting to my journey's end, I resolved to make the sale of my jacket its principal business. Accordingly, I took the jacket off, that I might learn to do without it; and carrying it under my arm, began a tour of inspection of the various slop-shops.

It was a likely place to sell a jacket in; for the dealers in second-hand clothes were numerous, and were, generally speaking, on the look-out for customers at their shop doors. But as most of them had, hanging up among their stock, an officer's coat or two, epaulettes and all, I was rendered timid by the costly nature of their dealings, and walked about for a long time without offering my merchandise to anyone.

This modesty of mine directed my attention to the marine-store shops, and such shops as Mr. Dolloby's, in preference to the regular dealers. At last I found one that I thought looked promising, at the corner of a dirty lane, ending in an enclosure full of stinging-nettles, against the palings of which some second-hand sailors' clothes, that seemed to have overflowed the shop, were fluttering among some cots, and rusty guns, and oilskin hats, and certain trays full of so many old rusty keys of so many sizes that they seemed various enough to open all the doors in the world.

Into this shop, which was low and small, and which was darkened rather than lighted by a little window, overhung with clothes, and was descended into by some steps, I went with a palpitating heart; which was not relieved when an ugly old man, with the lower part of his face all covered with a stubbly grey beard, rushed out of a dirty den behind it, and seized me by the hair of my head. He was a dreadful old man to look at, in a filthy flannel waistcoat, and smelling terribly of rum. His bedstead, covered with a tumbled and ragged piece of patchwork, was in the den he had come from, where another little window showed a prospect of more stinging-nettles, and a lame donkey.

'Oh, what do you want?' grinned this old man, in a fierce, monotonous whine. 'Oh, my eyes and limbs, what do you want? Oh, my lungs and liver, what do you want? Oh, goroo, goroo!'

I was so much dismayed by these words, and particularly by the repetition of the last unknown one, which was a kind of rattle in his throat, that I could make no answer; hereupon the old man, still holding me by the hair, repeated:

'Oh, what do you want? Oh, my eyes and limbs, what do you want? Oh, my lungs and liver, what do you want? Oh, goroo!'—which he screwed out of himself, with an energy that made his eyes start in his head.

'I wanted to know,' I said, trembling, 'if you would buy a jacket.'

'Oh, let's see the jacket!' cried the old man. 'Oh, my heart on fire, show the jacket to us! Oh, my eyes and limbs, bring the jacket out!'

With that he took his trembling hands, which were like the claws of a great bird, out of my hair; and put on a pair of spectacles, not at all ornamental to his inflamed eyes.

'Oh, how much for the jacket?' cried the old man, after examining it. 'Oh—goroo!—how much for the jacket?'

'Half-a-crown,' I answered, recovering myself.

'Oh, my lungs and liver,' cried the old man, 'no! Oh, my eyes, no! Oh, my limbs, no! Eighteenpence. Goroo!'

Every time he uttered this ejaculation, his eyes seemed to be in danger of starting out; and every sentence he spoke, he delivered in a sort of tune, always exactly the same, and more like a gust of wind, which begins low, mounts up high, and falls again, than any other comparison I can find for it.

'Well,' said I, glad to have closed the bargain, 'I'll take eighteenpence.'

'Oh, my liver!' cried the old man, throwing the jacket on a shelf. 'Get out of the shop! Oh, my lungs, get out of the shop! Oh, my eyes and limbs—goroo!—don't ask for money; make it an exchange.' I never was so frightened in my life, before or since; but I told him humbly that I wanted money, and that nothing else was of any use to me, but that I would wait for it, as he desired, outside, and had no wish to hurry him. So I went outside, and sat down in the shade in a corner. And I sat there so many hours, that the shade became sunlight, and the sunlight became shade again, and still I sat there waiting for the money.

There never was such another drunken madman in that line of business, I hope. That he was well known in the neighbourhood, and enjoyed the reputation of having sold himself to the devil, I soon understood from the visits he received from the boys, who continually came skirmishing about the shop, shouting that legend, and calling to him to bring out his gold. 'You ain't poor, you know, Charley, as you pretend. Bring out your gold. Bring out some of the gold you sold yourself to the devil for. Come! It's in the lining of the mattress, Charley. Rip it open and let's have some!' This, and many offers to lend him a knife for the purpose, exasperated him to such a degree, that the whole day was a succession of rushes on his part, and flights on the part of the boys. Sometimes in his rage he would take me for one of them, and come at me, mouthing as if he were going to tear me in pieces; then, remembering me, just in time, would dive into the shop, and lie upon his bed, as I thought from the sound of his voice, yelling in a frantic way, to his own windy tune, the 'Death of Nelson'; with an Oh! before every line, and innumerable Goroos interspersed. As if this were not bad enough for me, the boys, connecting me with the establishment, on account of the patience and perseverance with which I sat outside, half-dressed, pelted me, and used me very ill all day.

He made many attempts to induce me to consent to an exchange; at one time coming out with a fishing-rod, at another with a fiddle, at another with a cocked hat, at another with a flute. But I resisted all these overtures, and sat there in desperation; each time asking him, with tears in my eyes, for my money or my jacket. At last he began to pay me in halfpence at a time; and was full two hours getting by easy stages to a shilling.

'Oh, my eyes and limbs!' he then cried, peeping hideously out of the shop, after a long pause, 'will you go for twopence more?'

'I can't,' I said; 'I shall be starved.'

'Oh, my lungs and liver, will you go for threepence?'

'I would go for nothing, if I could,' I said, 'but I want the money badly.'

'Oh, go-roo!' (it is really impossible to express how he twisted this ejaculation out of himself, as he peeped round the door-post at me, showing nothing but his crafty old head); 'will you go for fourpence?'

I was so faint and weary that I closed with this offer; and taking the money out of his claw, not without trembling, went away more hungry and thirsty than I had ever been, a little before sunset. But at an expense of threepence I soon refreshed myself completely; and, being in better spirits then, limped seven miles upon my road.

My bed at night was under another haystack, where I rested comfortably, after having washed my blistered feet in a stream, and dressed them as well as I was able, with some cool leaves. When I took the road again next morning, I found that it lay through a succession of hop-grounds and orchards. It was sufficiently late in the year for the orchards to be ruddy with ripe apples; and in a few places the hop-pickers were already at work. I thought it all extremely beautiful, and made up my mind to sleep among the hops that night: imagining some cheerful companionship in the long perspectives of poles, with the graceful leaves twining round them.

The trampers were worse than ever that day, and inspired me with a dread that is yet quite fresh in my mind. Some of them were most ferocious-looking ruffians, who stared at me as I went by; and stopped, perhaps, and called after me to come back and speak to them, and when I took to my heels, stoned me. I recollect one young fellow—a tinker, I suppose, from his wallet and brazier—who had a woman with him, and who faced about and stared at me thus; and then roared to me in such a tremendous voice to come back, that I halted and looked round.

'Come here, when you're called,' said the tinker, 'or I'll rip your young body open.'

I thought it best to go back. As I drew nearer to them, trying to propitiate the tinker by my looks, I observed that the woman had a black eye.

'Where are you going?' said the tinker, gripping the bosom of my shirt with his blackened hand.

'I am going to Dover,' I said.

'Where do you come from?' asked the tinker, giving his hand another turn in my shirt, to hold me more securely.

'I come from London,' I said.

'What lay are you upon?' asked the tinker. 'Are you a prig?'

'N-no,' I said.

'Ain't you, by G—? If you make a brag of your honesty to me,' said the tinker, 'I'll knock your brains out.'

With his disengaged hand he made a menace of striking me, and then looked at me from head to foot.

'Have you got the price of a pint of beer about you?' said the tinker. 'If you have, out with it, afore I take it away!'

I should certainly have produced it, but that I met the woman's look, and saw her very slightly shake her head, and form 'No!' with her lips.

'I am very poor,' I said, attempting to smile, 'and have got no money.'

'Why, what do you mean?' said the tinker, looking so sternly at me, that I almost feared he saw the money in my pocket.

'Sir!' I stammered.

'What do you mean,' said the tinker, 'by wearing my brother's silk handkerchief! Give it over here!' And he had mine off my neck in a moment, and tossed it to the woman.

The woman burst into a fit of laughter, as if she thought this a joke, and tossed it back to me, nodded once, as slightly as before, and made the word 'Go!' with her lips. Before I could obey, however, the tinker seized the handkerchief out of my hand with a roughness that threw me away like a feather, and putting it loosely round his own neck, turned upon the woman with an oath, and knocked her down. I never shall forget seeing her fall backward on the hard road, and lie there with her bonnet tumbled off, and her hair all whitened in the dust; nor, when I looked back from a distance, seeing her sitting on the pathway, which was a bank by the roadside, wiping the blood from her face with a corner of her shawl, while he went on ahead.

This adventure frightened me so, that, afterwards, when I saw any of these people coming, I turned back until I could find a hiding-place, where I remained until they had gone out of sight; which happened so often, that I was very seriously delayed. But under this difficulty, as under all the other difficulties of my journey, I seemed to be sustained and led on by my fanciful picture of my mother in her youth, before I came into the world. It always kept me company. It was there, among the hops, when I lay down to sleep; it was with me on my waking in the morning; it went before me all day. I have associated it, ever since, with the sunny street of Canterbury, dozing as it were in the hot light; and with the sight of its old houses and gateways, and the stately, grey Cathedral, with the rooks sailing round the towers. When I came, at last, upon the bare, wide downs near Dover, it relieved the solitary aspect of the scene with hope; and not until I reached that first great aim of my journey, and actually set foot in the town itself, on the sixth day of my flight, did it desert me. But then, strange to say, when I stood with my ragged shoes, and my dusty, sunburnt, half-clothed figure, in the place so long desired, it seemed to vanish like a dream, and to leave me helpless and dispirited.

I inquired about my aunt among the boatmen first, and received various answers. One said she lived in the South Foreland Light, and had singed her whiskers by doing so; another, that she was made fast to the great buoy outside the harbour, and could only be visited at half-tide; a third, that she was locked up in Maidstone jail for child-stealing; a fourth, that she was seen to mount a broom in the last high wind, and make direct for Calais. The fly-drivers, among whom I inquired next, were equally jocose and equally disrespectful; and the shopkeepers, not liking my appearance, generally replied, without hearing what I had to say, that they had got nothing for me. I felt more miserable and destitute than I had done at any period of my running away. My money was all gone, I had nothing left to dispose of; I was hungry, thirsty, and worn out; and seemed as distant from my end as if I had remained in London.

The morning had worn away in these inquiries, and I was sitting on the step of an empty shop at a street corner, near the market-place, deliberating upon wandering towards those other places which had been mentioned, when a fly-driver, coming by with his carriage, dropped a horsecloth. Something good-natured in the man's face, as I handed it up, encouraged me to ask him if he could tell me where Miss Trotwood lived; though I had asked the question so often, that it almost died upon my lips.

'Trotwood,' said he. 'Let me see. I know the name, too. Old lady?'

'Yes,' I said, 'rather.'

'Pretty stiff in the back?' said he, making himself upright.

'Yes,' I said. 'I should think it very likely.'

'Carries a bag?' said he—'bag with a good deal of room in it—is gruffish, and comes down upon you, sharp?'

My heart sank within me as I acknowledged the undoubted accuracy of this description.

'Why then, I tell you what,' said he. 'If you go up there,' pointing with his whip towards the heights, 'and keep right on till you come to some houses facing the sea, I think you'll hear of her. My opinion is she won't stand anything, so here's a penny for you.'

I accepted the gift thankfully, and bought a loaf with it. Dispatching this refreshment by the way, I went in the direction my friend had indicated, and walked on a good distance without coming to the houses he had mentioned. At length I saw some before me; and approaching them, went into a little shop (it was what we used to call a general shop, at home), and inquired if they could have the goodness to tell me where Miss Trotwood lived. I addressed myself to a man behind the counter, who was weighing some rice for a young woman; but the latter, taking the inquiry to herself, turned round quickly.

'My mistress?' she said. 'What do you want with her, boy?'

'I want,' I replied, 'to speak to her, if you please.'

'To beg of her, you mean,' retorted the damsel.

'No,' I said, 'indeed.' But suddenly remembering that in truth I came for no other purpose, I held my peace in confusion, and felt my face burn.

MY aunt's handmaid, as I supposed she was from what she had said, put her rice in a little basket and walked out of the shop; telling me that I could follow her, if I wanted to know where Miss Trotwood lived. I needed no second permission; though I was by this time in such a state of consternation and agitation, that my legs shook under me. I followed the young woman, and we soon came to a very neat little cottage with cheerful bow-windows: in front of it, a small square gravelled court or garden full of flowers, carefully tended, and smelling deliciously.

'This is Miss Trotwood's,' said the young woman. 'Now you know; and that's all I have got to say.' With which words she hurried into the house, as if to shake off the responsibility of my appearance; and left me standing at the garden-gate, looking disconsolately over the top of it towards the parlour window, where a muslin curtain partly undrawn in the middle, a large round green screen or fan fastened on to the windowsill, a small table, and a great chair, suggested to me that my aunt might be at that moment seated in awful state.

My shoes were by this time in a woeful condition. The soles had shed themselves bit by bit, and the upper leathers had broken and burst until the very shape and form of shoes had departed from them. My hat (which had served me for a night-cap, too) was so crushed and bent, that no old battered handleless saucepan on a dunghill need have been ashamed to vie with it. My shirt and trousers, stained with heat, dew, grass, and the Kentish soil on which I had slept—and torn besides—might have frightened the birds from my aunt's garden, as I stood at the gate. My hair had known no comb or brush since I left London. My face, neck, and hands, from unaccustomed exposure to the air and sun, were burnt to a berry-brown. From head to foot I was powdered almost as white with chalk and dust, as if I had come out of a lime-kiln. In this plight, and with a strong consciousness of it, I waited to introduce myself to, and make my first impression on, my formidable aunt.

The unbroken stillness of the parlour window leading me to infer, after a while, that she was not there, I lifted up my eyes to the window above it, where I saw a florid, pleasant-looking gentleman, with a grey head, who shut up one eye in a grotesque manner, nodded his head at me several times, shook it at me as often, laughed, and went away.

I had been discomposed enough before; but I was so much the more discomposed by this unexpected behaviour, that I was on the point of slinking off, to think how I had best proceed, when there came out of the house a lady with her handkerchief tied over her cap, and a pair of gardening gloves on her hands, wearing a gardening pocket like a toll-man's apron, and carrying a great knife. I knew her immediately to be Miss Betsey, for she came stalking out of the house exactly as my poor mother had so often described her stalking up our garden at Blunderstone Rookery.

'Go away!' said Miss Betsey, shaking her head, and making a distant chop in the air with her knife. 'Go along! No boys here!'

I watched her, with my heart at my lips, as she marched to a corner of her garden, and stooped to dig up some little root there. Then, without a scrap of courage, but with a great deal of desperation, I went softly in and stood beside her, touching her with my finger.

'If you please, ma'am,' I began.

She started and looked up.

'If you please, aunt.'

'EH?' exclaimed Miss Betsey, in a tone of amazement I have never heard approached.

'If you please, aunt, I am your nephew.'

'Oh, Lord!' said my aunt. And sat flat down in the garden-path.

'I am David Copperfield, of Blunderstone, in Suffolk—where you came, on the night when I was born, and saw my dear mama. I have been very unhappy since she died. I have been slighted, and taught nothing, and thrown upon myself, and put to work not fit for me. It made me run away to you. I was robbed at first setting out, and have walked all the way, and have never slept in a bed since I began the journey.' Here my self-support gave way all at once; and with a movement of my hands, intended to show her my ragged state, and call it to witness that I had suffered something, I broke into a passion of crying, which I suppose had been pent up within me all the week.

My aunt, with every sort of expression but wonder discharged from her countenance, sat on the gravel, staring at me, until I began to cry; when she got up in a great hurry, collared me, and took me into the parlour. Her first proceeding there was to unlock a tall press, bring out several bottles, and pour some of the contents of each into my mouth. I think they must have been taken out at random, for I am sure I tasted aniseed water, anchovy sauce, and salad dressing. When she had administered these restoratives, as I was still quite hysterical, and unable to control my sobs, she put me on the sofa, with a shawl under my head, and the handkerchief from her own head under my feet, lest I should sully the cover; and then, sitting herself down behind the green fan or screen I have already mentioned, so that I could not see her face, ejaculated at intervals, 'Mercy on us!' letting those exclamations off like minute guns.

After a time she rang the bell. 'Janet,' said my aunt, when her servant came in. 'Go upstairs, give my compliments to Mr. Dick, and say I wish to speak to him.'

Janet looked a little surprised to see me lying stiffly on the sofa (I was afraid to move lest it should be displeasing to my aunt), but went on her errand. My aunt, with her hands behind her, walked up and down the room, until the gentleman who had squinted at me from the upper window came in laughing.

'Mr. Dick,' said my aunt, 'don't be a fool, because nobody can be more discreet than you can, when you choose. We all know that. So don't be a fool, whatever you are.'

The gentleman was serious immediately, and looked at me, I thought, as if he would entreat me to say nothing about the window.

'Mr. Dick,' said my aunt, 'you have heard me mention David Copperfield? Now don't pretend not to have a memory, because you and I know better.'

'David Copperfield?' said Mr. Dick, who did not appear to me to remember much about it. 'David Copperfield? Oh yes, to be sure. David, certainly.'

'Well,' said my aunt, 'this is his boy—his son. He would be as like his father as it's possible to be, if he was not so like his mother, too.'

'His son?' said Mr. Dick. 'David's son? Indeed!'

'Yes,' pursued my aunt, 'and he has done a pretty piece of business. He has run away. Ah! His sister, Betsey Trotwood, never would have run away.' My aunt shook her head firmly, confident in the character and behaviour of the girl who never was born.

'Oh! you think she wouldn't have run away?' said Mr. Dick.

'Bless and save the man,' exclaimed my aunt, sharply, 'how he talks! Don't I know she wouldn't? She would have lived with her god-mother, and we should have been devoted to one another. Where, in the name of wonder, should his sister, Betsey Trotwood, have run from, or to?'

'Nowhere,' said Mr. Dick.

'Well then,' returned my aunt, softened by the reply, 'how can you pretend to be wool-gathering, Dick, when you are as sharp as a surgeon's lancet? Now, here you see young David Copperfield, and the question I put to you is, what shall I do with him?'

'What shall you do with him?' said Mr. Dick, feebly, scratching his head. 'Oh! do with him?'

'Yes,' said my aunt, with a grave look, and her forefinger held up. 'Come! I want some very sound advice.'

'Why, if I was you,' said Mr. Dick, considering, and looking vacantly at me, 'I should—' The contemplation of me seemed to inspire him with a sudden idea, and he added, briskly, 'I should wash him!'

'Janet,' said my aunt, turning round with a quiet triumph, which I did not then understand, 'Mr. Dick sets us all right. Heat the bath!'

Although I was deeply interested in this dialogue, I could not help observing my aunt, Mr. Dick, and Janet, while it was in progress, and completing a survey I had already been engaged in making of the room.

MY aunt was a tall, hard-featured lady, but by no means ill-looking. There was an inflexibility in her face, in her voice, in her gait and carriage, amply sufficient to account for the effect she had made upon a gentle creature like my mother; but her features were rather handsome than otherwise, though unbending and austere. I particularly noticed that she had a very quick, bright eye. Her hair, which was grey, was arranged in two plain divisions, under what I believe would be called a mob-cap; I mean a cap, much more common then than now, with side-pieces fastening under the chin. Her dress was of a lavender colour, and perfectly neat; but scantily made, as if she desired to be as little encumbered as possible. I remember that I thought it, in form, more like a riding-habit with the superfluous skirt cut off, than anything else. She wore at her side a gentleman's gold watch, if I might judge from its size and make, with an appropriate chain and seals; she had some linen at her throat not unlike a shirt-collar, and things at her wrists like little shirt-wristbands.

Mr. Dick, as I have already said, was grey-headed, and florid: I should have said all about him, in saying so, had not his head been curiously bowed—not by age; it reminded me of one of Mr. Creakle's boys' heads after a beating—and his grey eyes prominent and large, with a strange kind of watery brightness in them that made me, in combination with his vacant manner, his submission to my aunt, and his childish delight when she praised him, suspect him of being a little mad; though, if he were mad, how he came to be there puzzled me extremely. He was dressed like any other ordinary gentleman, in a loose grey morning coat and waistcoat, and white trousers; and had his watch in his fob, and his money in his pockets: which he rattled as if he were very proud of it.

Janet was a pretty blooming girl, of about nineteen or twenty, and a perfect picture of neatness. Though I made no further observation of her at the moment, I may mention here what I did not discover until afterwards, namely, that she was one of a series of protegees whom my aunt had taken into her service expressly to educate in a renouncement of mankind, and who had generally completed their abjuration by marrying the baker.

The room was as neat as Janet or my aunt. As I laid down my pen, a moment since, to think of it, the air from the sea came blowing in again, mixed with the perfume of the flowers; and I saw the old-fashioned furniture brightly rubbed and polished, my aunt's inviolable chair and table by the round green fan in the bow-window, the drugget-covered carpet, the cat, the kettle-holder, the two canaries, the old china, the punchbowl full of dried rose-leaves, the tall press guarding all sorts of bottles and pots, and, wonderfully out of keeping with the rest, my dusty self upon the sofa, taking note of everything.

Janet had gone away to get the bath ready, when my aunt, to my great alarm, became in one moment rigid with indignation, and had hardly voice to cry out, 'Janet! Donkeys!'

Upon which, Janet came running up the stairs as if the house were in flames, darted out on a little piece of green in front, and warned off two saddle-donkeys, lady-ridden, that had presumed to set hoof upon it; while my aunt, rushing out of the house, seized the bridle of a third animal laden with a bestriding child, turned him, led him forth from those sacred precincts, and boxed the ears of the unlucky urchin in attendance who had dared to profane that hallowed ground.

To this hour I don't know whether my aunt had any lawful right of way over that patch of green; but she had settled it in her own mind that she had, and it was all the same to her. The one great outrage of her life, demanding to be constantly avenged, was the passage of a donkey over that immaculate spot. In whatever occupation she was engaged, however interesting to her the conversation in which she was taking part, a donkey turned the current of her ideas in a moment, and she was upon him straight. Jugs of water, and watering-pots, were kept in secret places ready to be discharged on the offending boys; sticks were laid in ambush behind the door; sallies were made at all hours; and incessant war prevailed. Perhaps this was an agreeable excitement to the donkey-boys; or perhaps the more sagacious of the donkeys, understanding how the case stood, delighted with constitutional obstinacy in coming that way. I only know that there were three alarms before the bath was ready; and that on the occasion of the last and most desperate of all, I saw my aunt engage, single-handed, with a sandy-headed lad of fifteen, and bump his sandy head against her own gate, before he seemed to comprehend what was the matter. These interruptions were of the more ridiculous to me, because she was giving me broth out of a table-spoon at the time (having firmly persuaded herself that I was actually starving, and must receive nourishment at first in very small quantities), and, while my mouth was yet open to receive the spoon, she would put it back into the basin, cry 'Janet! Donkeys!' and go out to the assault.

The bath was a great comfort. For I began to be sensible of acute pains in my limbs from lying out in the fields, and was now so tired and low that I could hardly keep myself awake for five minutes together. When I had bathed, they (I mean my aunt and Janet) enrobed me in a shirt and a pair of trousers belonging to Mr. Dick, and tied me up in two or three great shawls. What sort of bundle I looked like, I don't know, but I felt a very hot one. Feeling also very faint and drowsy, I soon lay down on the sofa again and fell asleep.

It might have been a dream, originating in the fancy which had occupied my mind so long, but I awoke with the impression that my aunt had come and bent over me, and had put my hair away from my face, and laid my head more comfortably, and had then stood looking at me. The words, 'Pretty fellow,' or 'Poor fellow,' seemed to be in my ears, too; but certainly there was nothing else, when I awoke, to lead me to believe that they had been uttered by my aunt, who sat in the bow-window gazing at the sea from behind the green fan, which was mounted on a kind of swivel, and turned any way.

We dined soon after I awoke, off a roast fowl and a pudding; I sitting at table, not unlike a trussed bird myself, and moving my arms with considerable difficulty. But as my aunt had swathed me up, I made no complaint of being inconvenienced. All this time I was deeply anxious to know what she was going to do with me; but she took her dinner in profound silence, except when she occasionally fixed her eyes on me sitting opposite, and said, 'Mercy upon us!' which did not by any means relieve my anxiety.

The cloth being drawn, and some sherry put upon the table (of which I had a glass), my aunt sent up for Mr. Dick again, who joined us, and looked as wise as he could when she requested him to attend to my story, which she elicited from me, gradually, by a course of questions. During my recital, she kept her eyes on Mr. Dick, who I thought would have gone to sleep but for that, and who, whensoever he lapsed into a smile, was checked by a frown from my aunt.

'Whatever possessed that poor unfortunate Baby, that she must go and be married again,' said my aunt, when I had finished, 'I can't conceive.'

'Perhaps she fell in love with her second husband,' Mr. Dick suggested.

'Fell in love!' repeated my aunt. 'What do you mean? What business had she to do it?'

'Perhaps,' Mr. Dick simpered, after thinking a little, 'she did it for pleasure.'

'Pleasure, indeed!' replied my aunt. 'A mighty pleasure for the poor Baby to fix her simple faith upon any dog of a fellow, certain to ill-use her in some way or other. What did she propose to herself, I should like to know! She had had one husband. She had seen David Copperfield out of the world, who was always running after wax dolls from his cradle. She had got a baby—oh, there were a pair of babies when she gave birth to this child sitting here, that Friday night!—and what more did she want?'

Mr. Dick secretly shook his head at me, as if he thought there was no getting over this.

'She couldn't even have a baby like anybody else,' said my aunt. 'Where was this child's sister, Betsey Trotwood? Not forthcoming. Don't tell me!'

Mr. Dick seemed quite frightened.

'That little man of a doctor, with his head on one side,' said my aunt, 'Jellips, or whatever his name was, what was he about? All he could do, was to say to me, like a robin redbreast—as he is—"It's a boy." A boy! Yah, the imbecility of the whole set of 'em!'

The heartiness of the ejaculation startled Mr. Dick exceedingly; and me, too, if I am to tell the truth.

'And then, as if this was not enough, and she had not stood sufficiently in the light of this child's sister, Betsey Trotwood,' said my aunt, 'she marries a second time—goes and marries a Murderer—or a man with a name like it—and stands in THIS child's light! And the natural consequence is, as anybody but a baby might have foreseen, that he prowls and wanders. He's as like Cain before he was grown up, as he can be.'

Mr. Dick looked hard at me, as if to identify me in this character.

'And then there's that woman with the Pagan name,' said my aunt, 'that Peggotty, she goes and gets married next. Because she has not seen enough of the evil attending such things, she goes and gets married next, as the child relates. I only hope,' said my aunt, shaking her head, 'that her husband is one of those Poker husbands who abound in the newspapers, and will beat her well with one.'

I could not bear to hear my old nurse so decried, and made the subject of such a wish. I told my aunt that indeed she was mistaken. That Peggotty was the best, the truest, the most faithful, most devoted, and most self-denying friend and servant in the world; who had ever loved me dearly, who had ever loved my mother dearly; who had held my mother's dying head upon her arm, on whose face my mother had imprinted her last grateful kiss. And my remembrance of them both, choking me, I broke down as I was trying to say that her home was my home, and that all she had was mine, and that I would have gone to her for shelter, but for her humble station, which made me fear that I might bring some trouble on her—I broke down, I say, as I was trying to say so, and laid my face in my hands upon the table.

'Well, well!' said my aunt, 'the child is right to stand by those who have stood by him—Janet! Donkeys!'

I thoroughly believe that but for those unfortunate donkeys, we should have come to a good understanding; for my aunt had laid her hand on my shoulder, and the impulse was upon me, thus emboldened, to embrace her and beseech her protection. But the interruption, and the disorder she was thrown into by the struggle outside, put an end to all softer ideas for the present, and kept my aunt indignantly declaiming to Mr. Dick about her determination to appeal for redress to the laws of her country, and to bring actions for trespass against the whole donkey proprietorship of Dover, until tea-time.

After tea, we sat at the window—on the look-out, as I imagined, from my aunt's sharp expression of face, for more invaders—until dusk, when Janet set candles, and a backgammon-board, on the table, and pulled down the blinds.

'Now, Mr. Dick,' said my aunt, with her grave look, and her forefinger up as before, 'I am going to ask you another question. Look at this child.'

'David's son?' said Mr. Dick, with an attentive, puzzled face.

'Exactly so,' returned my aunt. 'What would you do with him, now?'

'Do with David's son?' said Mr. Dick.

'Ay,' replied my aunt, 'with David's son.'

'Oh!' said Mr. Dick. 'Yes. Do with—I should put him to bed.'

'Janet!' cried my aunt, with the same complacent triumph that I had remarked before. 'Mr. Dick sets us all right. If the bed is ready, we'll take him up to it.'

Janet reporting it to be quite ready, I was taken up to it; kindly, but in some sort like a prisoner; my aunt going in front and Janet bringing up the rear. The only circumstance which gave me any new hope, was my aunt's stopping on the stairs to inquire about a smell of fire that was prevalent there; and janet's replying that she had been making tinder down in the kitchen, of my old shirt. But there were no other clothes in my room than the odd heap of things I wore; and when I was left there, with a little taper which my aunt forewarned me would burn exactly five minutes, I heard them lock my door on the outside. Turning these things over in my mind I deemed it possible that my aunt, who could know nothing of me, might suspect I had a habit of running away, and took precautions, on that account, to have me in safe keeping.

The room was a pleasant one, at the top of the house, overlooking the sea, on which the moon was shining brilliantly. After I had said my prayers, and the candle had burnt out, I remember how I still sat looking at the moonlight on the water, as if I could hope to read my fortune in it, as in a bright book; or to see my mother with her child, coming from Heaven, along that shining path, to look upon me as she had looked when I last saw her sweet face. I remember how the solemn feeling with which at length I turned my eyes away, yielded to the sensation of gratitude and rest which the sight of the white-curtained bed—and how much more the lying softly down upon it, nestling in the snow-white sheets!—inspired. I remember how I thought of all the solitary places under the night sky where I had slept, and how I prayed that I never might be houseless any more, and never might forget the houseless. I remember how I seemed to float, then, down the melancholy glory of that track upon the sea, away into the world of dreams.

CHAPTER 14. MY AUNT MAKES UP HER MIND ABOUT ME

On going down in the morning, I found my aunt musing so profoundly over the breakfast table, with her elbow on the tray, that the contents of the urn had overflowed the teapot and were laying the whole table-cloth under water, when my entrance put her meditations to flight. I felt sure that I had been the subject of her reflections, and was more than ever anxious to know her intentions towards me. Yet I dared not express my anxiety, lest it should give her offence.

My eyes, however, not being so much under control as my tongue, were attracted towards my aunt very often during breakfast. I never could look at her for a few moments together but I found her looking at me—in an odd thoughtful manner, as if I were an immense way off, instead of being on the other side of the small round table. When she had finished her breakfast, my aunt very deliberately leaned back in her chair, knitted her brows, folded her arms, and contemplated me at her leisure, with such a fixedness of attention that I was quite overpowered by embarrassment. Not having as yet finished my own breakfast, I attempted to hide my confusion by proceeding with it; but my knife tumbled over my fork, my fork tripped up my knife, I chipped bits of bacon a surprising height into the air instead of cutting them for my own eating, and choked myself with my tea, which persisted in going the wrong way instead of the right one, until I gave in altogether, and sat blushing under my aunt's close scrutiny.

'Hallo!' said my aunt, after a long time.

I looked up, and met her sharp bright glance respectfully.

'I have written to him,' said my aunt.

'To—?'

'To your father-in-law,' said my aunt. 'I have sent him a letter that I'll trouble him to attend to, or he and I will fall out, I can tell him!'

'Does he know where I am, aunt?' I inquired, alarmed.

'I have told him,' said my aunt, with a nod.

'Shall I—be—given up to him?' I faltered.

'I don't know,' said my aunt. 'We shall see.'

'Oh! I can't think what I shall do,' I exclaimed, 'if I have to go back to Mr. Murdstone!'

'I don't know anything about it,' said my aunt, shaking her head. 'I can't say, I am sure. We shall see.'

My spirits sank under these words, and I became very downcast and heavy of heart. My aunt, without appearing to take much heed of me, put on a coarse apron with a bib, which she took out of the press; washed up the teacups with her own hands; and, when everything was washed and set in the tray again, and the cloth folded and put on the top of the whole, rang for Janet to remove it. She next swept up the crumbs with a little broom (putting on a pair of gloves first), until there did not appear to be one microscopic speck left on the carpet; next dusted and arranged the room, which was dusted and arranged to a hair's breadth already. When all these tasks were performed to her satisfaction, she took off the gloves and apron, folded them up, put them in the particular corner of the press from which they had been taken, brought out her work-box to her own table in the open window, and sat down, with the green fan between her and the light, to work.

'I wish you'd go upstairs,' said my aunt, as she threaded her needle, 'and give my compliments to Mr. Dick, and I'll be glad to know how he gets on with his Memorial.'

I rose with all alacrity, to acquit myself of this commission.

'I suppose,' said my aunt, eyeing me as narrowly as she had eyed the needle in threading it, 'you think Mr. Dick a short name, eh?'

'I thought it was rather a short name, yesterday,' I confessed.

'You are not to suppose that he hasn't got a longer name, if he chose to use it,' said my aunt, with a loftier air. 'Babley—Mr. Richard Babley—that's the gentleman's true name.'

I was going to suggest, with a modest sense of my youth and the familiarity I had been already guilty of, that I had better give him the full benefit of that name, when my aunt went on to say:

'But don't you call him by it, whatever you do. He can't bear his name. That's a peculiarity of his. Though I don't know that it's much of a peculiarity, either; for he has been ill-used enough, by some that bear it, to have a mortal antipathy for it, Heaven knows. Mr. Dick is his name here, and everywhere else, now—if he ever went anywhere else, which he don't. So take care, child, you don't call him anything BUT Mr. Dick.'

I promised to obey, and went upstairs with my message; thinking, as I went, that if Mr. Dick had been working at his Memorial long, at the same rate as I had seen him working at it, through the open door, when I came down, he was probably getting on very well indeed. I found him still driving at it with a long pen, and his head almost laid upon the paper. He was so intent upon it, that I had ample leisure to observe the large paper kite in a corner, the confusion of bundles of manuscript, the number of pens, and, above all, the quantity of ink (which he seemed to have in, in half-gallon jars by the dozen), before he observed my being present.

'Ha! Phoebus!' said Mr. Dick, laying down his pen. 'How does the world go? I'll tell you what,' he added, in a lower tone, 'I shouldn't wish it to be mentioned, but it's a—' here he beckoned to me, and put his lips close to my ear—'it's a mad world. Mad as Bedlam, boy!' said Mr. Dick, taking snuff from a round box on the table, and laughing heartily.

Without presuming to give my opinion on this question, I delivered my message.

'Well,' said Mr. Dick, in answer, 'my compliments to her, and I—I believe I have made a start. I think I have made a start,' said Mr. Dick, passing his hand among his grey hair, and casting anything but a confident look at his manuscript. 'You have been to school?'

'Yes, sir,' I answered; 'for a short time.'

'Do you recollect the date,' said Mr. Dick, looking earnestly at me, and taking up his pen to note it down, 'when King Charles the First had his head cut off?' I said I believed it happened in the year sixteen hundred and forty-nine.

'Well,' returned Mr. Dick, scratching his ear with his pen, and looking dubiously at me. 'So the books say; but I don't see how that can be. Because, if it was so long ago, how could the people about him have made that mistake of putting some of the trouble out of his head, after it was taken off, into mine?'

I was very much surprised by the inquiry; but could give no information on this point.

'It's very strange,' said Mr. Dick, with a despondent look upon his papers, and with his hand among his hair again, 'that I never can get that quite right. I never can make that perfectly clear. But no matter, no matter!' he said cheerfully, and rousing himself, 'there's time enough! My compliments to Miss Trotwood, I am getting on very well indeed.'

I was going away, when he directed my attention to the kite.

'What do you think of that for a kite?' he said.

I answered that it was a beautiful one. I should think it must have been as much as seven feet high.

'I made it. We'll go and fly it, you and I,' said Mr. Dick. 'Do you see this?'

He showed me that it was covered with manuscript, very closely and laboriously written; but so plainly, that as I looked along the lines, I thought I saw some allusion to King Charles the First's head again, in one or two places.

'There's plenty of string,' said Mr. Dick, 'and when it flies high, it takes the facts a long way. That's my manner of diffusing 'em. I don't know where they may come down. It's according to circumstances, and the wind, and so forth; but I take my chance of that.'

His face was so very mild and pleasant, and had something so reverend in it, though it was hale and hearty, that I was not sure but that he was having a good-humoured jest with me. So I laughed, and he laughed, and we parted the best friends possible.

'Well, child,' said my aunt, when I went downstairs. 'And what of Mr. Dick, this morning?'

I informed her that he sent his compliments, and was getting on very well indeed.

'What do you think of him?' said my aunt.

I had some shadowy idea of endeavouring to evade the question, by replying that I thought him a very nice gentleman; but my aunt was not to be so put off, for she laid her work down in her lap, and said, folding her hands upon it:

'Come! Your sister Betsey Trotwood would have told me what she thought of anyone, directly. Be as like your sister as you can, and speak out!'

'Is he—is Mr. Dick—I ask because I don't know, aunt—is he at all out of his mind, then?' I stammered; for I felt I was on dangerous ground.

'Not a morsel,' said my aunt.

'Oh, indeed!' I observed faintly.

'If there is anything in the world,' said my aunt, with great decision and force of manner, 'that Mr. Dick is not, it's that.'

I had nothing better to offer, than another timid, 'Oh, indeed!'

'He has been CALLED mad,' said my aunt. 'I have a selfish pleasure in saying he has been called mad, or I should not have had the benefit of his society and advice for these last ten years and upwards—in fact, ever since your sister, Betsey Trotwood, disappointed me.'

'So long as that?' I said.

'And nice people they were, who had the audacity to call him mad,' pursued my aunt. 'Mr. Dick is a sort of distant connexion of mine—it doesn't matter how; I needn't enter into that. If it hadn't been for me, his own brother would have shut him up for life. That's all.'

I am afraid it was hypocritical in me, but seeing that my aunt felt strongly on the subject, I tried to look as if I felt strongly too.

'A proud fool!' said my aunt. 'Because his brother was a little eccentric—though he is not half so eccentric as a good many people—he didn't like to have him visible about his house, and sent him away to some private asylum-place: though he had been left to his particular care by their deceased father, who thought him almost a natural. And a wise man he must have been to think so! Mad himself, no doubt.'

Again, as my aunt looked quite convinced, I endeavoured to look quite convinced also.

'So I stepped in,' said my aunt, 'and made him an offer. I said, "Your brother's sane—a great deal more sane than you are, or ever will be, it is to be hoped. Let him have his little income, and come and live with me. I am not afraid of him, I am not proud, I am ready to take care of him, and shall not ill-treat him as some people (besides the asylum-folks) have done." After a good deal of squabbling,' said my aunt, 'I got him; and he has been here ever since. He is the most friendly and amenable creature in existence; and as for advice!—But nobody knows what that man's mind is, except myself.'

My aunt smoothed her dress and shook her head, as if she smoothed defiance of the whole world out of the one, and shook it out of the other.

'He had a favourite sister,' said my aunt, 'a good creature, and very kind to him. But she did what they all do—took a husband. And HE did what they all do—made her wretched. It had such an effect upon the mind of Mr. Dick (that's not madness, I hope!) that, combined with his fear of his brother, and his sense of his unkindness, it threw him into a fever. That was before he came to me, but the recollection of it is oppressive to him even now. Did he say anything to you about King Charles the First, child?'

'Yes, aunt.'

'Ah!' said my aunt, rubbing her nose as if she were a little vexed. 'That's his allegorical way of expressing it. He connects his illness with great disturbance and agitation, naturally, and that's the figure, or the simile, or whatever it's called, which he chooses to use. And why shouldn't he, if he thinks proper!'

I said: 'Certainly, aunt.'

'It's not a business-like way of speaking,' said my aunt, 'nor a worldly way. I am aware of that; and that's the reason why I insist upon it, that there shan't be a word about it in his Memorial.'

'Is it a Memorial about his own history that he is writing, aunt?'

'Yes, child,' said my aunt, rubbing her nose again. 'He is memorializing the Lord Chancellor, or the Lord Somebody or other—one of those people, at all events, who are paid to be memorialized—about his affairs. I suppose it will go in, one of these days. He hasn't been able to draw it up yet, without introducing that mode of expressing himself; but it don't signify; it keeps him employed.'

In fact, I found out afterwards that Mr. Dick had been for upwards of ten years endeavouring to keep King Charles the First out of the Memorial; but he had been constantly getting into it, and was there now.

'I say again,' said my aunt, 'nobody knows what that man's mind is except myself; and he's the most amenable and friendly creature in existence. If he likes to fly a kite sometimes, what of that! Franklin used to fly a kite. He was a Quaker, or something of that sort, if I am not mistaken. And a Quaker flying a kite is a much more ridiculous object than anybody else.'

If I could have supposed that my aunt had recounted these particulars for my especial behoof, and as a piece of confidence in me, I should have felt very much distinguished, and should have augured favourably from such a mark of her good opinion. But I could hardly help observing that she had launched into them, chiefly because the question was raised in her own mind, and with very little reference to me, though she had addressed herself to me in the absence of anybody else.

At the same time, I must say that the generosity of her championship of poor harmless Mr. Dick, not only inspired my young breast with some selfish hope for myself, but warmed it unselfishly towards her. I believe that I began to know that there was something about my aunt, notwithstanding her many eccentricities and odd humours, to be honoured and trusted in. Though she was just as sharp that day as on the day before, and was in and out about the donkeys just as often, and was thrown into a tremendous state of indignation, when a young man, going by, ogled Janet at a window (which was one of the gravest misdemeanours that could be committed against my aunt's dignity), she seemed to me to command more of my respect, if not less of my fear.

The anxiety I underwent, in the interval which necessarily elapsed before a reply could be received to her letter to Mr. Murdstone, was extreme; but I made an endeavour to suppress it, and to be as agreeable as I could in a quiet way, both to my aunt and Mr. Dick. The latter and I would have gone out to fly the great kite; but that I had still no other clothes than the anything but ornamental garments with which I had been decorated on the first day, and which confined me to the house, except for an hour after dark, when my aunt, for my health's sake, paraded me up and down on the cliff outside, before going to bed. At length the reply from Mr. Murdstone came, and my aunt informed me, to my infinite terror, that he was coming to speak to her herself on the next day. On the next day, still bundled up in my curious habiliments, I sat counting the time, flushed and heated by the conflict of sinking hopes and rising fears within me; and waiting to be startled by the sight of the gloomy face, whose non-arrival startled me every minute.

MY aunt was a little more imperious and stern than usual, but I observed no other token of her preparing herself to receive the visitor so much dreaded by me. She sat at work in the window, and I sat by, with my thoughts running astray on all possible and impossible results of Mr. Murdstone's visit, until pretty late in the afternoon. Our dinner had been indefinitely postponed; but it was growing so late, that my aunt had ordered it to be got ready, when she gave a sudden alarm of donkeys, and to my consternation and amazement, I beheld Miss Murdstone, on a side-saddle, ride deliberately over the sacred piece of green, and stop in front of the house, looking about her.

'Go along with you!' cried my aunt, shaking her head and her fist at the window. 'You have no business there. How dare you trespass? Go along! Oh! you bold-faced thing!'

MY aunt was so exasperated by the coolness with which Miss Murdstone looked about her, that I really believe she was motionless, and unable for the moment to dart out according to custom. I seized the opportunity to inform her who it was; and that the gentleman now coming near the offender (for the way up was very steep, and he had dropped behind), was Mr. Murdstone himself.

'I don't care who it is!' cried my aunt, still shaking her head and gesticulating anything but welcome from the bow-window. 'I won't be trespassed upon. I won't allow it. Go away! Janet, turn him round. Lead him off!' and I saw, from behind my aunt, a sort of hurried battle-piece, in which the donkey stood resisting everybody, with all his four legs planted different ways, while Janet tried to pull him round by the bridle, Mr. Murdstone tried to lead him on, Miss Murdstone struck at Janet with a parasol, and several boys, who had come to see the engagement, shouted vigorously. But my aunt, suddenly descrying among them the young malefactor who was the donkey's guardian, and who was one of the most inveterate offenders against her, though hardly in his teens, rushed out to the scene of action, pounced upon him, captured him, dragged him, with his jacket over his head, and his heels grinding the ground, into the garden, and, calling upon Janet to fetch the constables and justices, that he might be taken, tried, and executed on the spot, held him at bay there. This part of the business, however, did not last long; for the young rascal, being expert at a variety of feints and dodges, of which my aunt had no conception, soon went whooping away, leaving some deep impressions of his nailed boots in the flower-beds, and taking his donkey in triumph with him.

Miss Murdstone, during the latter portion of the contest, had dismounted, and was now waiting with her brother at the bottom of the steps, until my aunt should be at leisure to receive them. My aunt, a little ruffled by the combat, marched past them into the house, with great dignity, and took no notice of their presence, until they were announced by Janet.

'Shall I go away, aunt?' I asked, trembling.

'No, sir,' said my aunt. 'Certainly not!' With which she pushed me into a corner near her, and fenced Me in with a chair, as if it were a prison or a bar of justice. This position I continued to occupy during the whole interview, and from it I now saw Mr. and Miss Murdstone enter the room.

'Oh!' said my aunt, 'I was not aware at first to whom I had the pleasure of objecting. But I don't allow anybody to ride over that turf. I make no exceptions. I don't allow anybody to do it.'

'Your regulation is rather awkward to strangers,' said Miss Murdstone.

'Is it!' said my aunt.

Mr. Murdstone seemed afraid of a renewal of hostilities, and interposing began:

'Miss Trotwood!'

'I beg your pardon,' observed my aunt with a keen look. 'You are the Mr. Murdstone who married the widow of my late nephew, David Copperfield, of Blunderstone Rookery!—Though why Rookery, I don't know!'

'I am,' said Mr. Murdstone.

'You'll excuse my saying, sir,' returned my aunt, 'that I think it would have been a much better and happier thing if you had left that poor child alone.'

'I so far agree with what Miss Trotwood has remarked,' observed Miss Murdstone, bridling, 'that I consider our lamented Clara to have been, in all essential respects, a mere child.'

'It is a comfort to you and me, ma'am,' said my aunt, 'who are getting on in life, and are not likely to be made unhappy by our personal attractions, that nobody can say the same of us.'

'No doubt!' returned Miss Murdstone, though, I thought, not with a very ready or gracious assent. 'And it certainly might have been, as you say, a better and happier thing for my brother if he had never entered into such a marriage. I have always been of that opinion.'

'I have no doubt you have,' said my aunt. 'Janet,' ringing the bell, 'my compliments to Mr. Dick, and beg him to come down.'

Until he came, my aunt sat perfectly upright and stiff, frowning at the wall. When he came, my aunt performed the ceremony of introduction.

'Mr. Dick. An old and intimate friend. On whose judgement,' said my aunt, with emphasis, as an admonition to Mr. Dick, who was biting his forefinger and looking rather foolish, 'I rely.'

Mr. Dick took his finger out of his mouth, on this hint, and stood among the group, with a grave and attentive expression of face.

My aunt inclined her head to Mr. Murdstone, who went on:

'Miss Trotwood: on the receipt of your letter, I considered it an act of greater justice to myself, and perhaps of more respect to you-'

'Thank you,' said my aunt, still eyeing him keenly. 'You needn't mind me.'

'To answer it in person, however inconvenient the journey,' pursued Mr. Murdstone, 'rather than by letter. This unhappy boy who has run away from his friends and his occupation—'

'And whose appearance,' interposed his sister, directing general attention to me in my indefinable costume, 'is perfectly scandalous and disgraceful.'

'Jane Murdstone,' said her brother, 'have the goodness not to interrupt me. This unhappy boy, Miss Trotwood, has been the occasion of much domestic trouble and uneasiness; both during the lifetime of my late dear wife, and since. He has a sullen, rebellious spirit; a violent temper; and an untoward, intractable disposition. Both my sister and myself have endeavoured to correct his vices, but ineffectually. And I have felt—we both have felt, I may say; my sister being fully in my confidence—that it is right you should receive this grave and dispassionate assurance from our lips.'

'It can hardly be necessary for me to confirm anything stated by my brother,' said Miss Murdstone; 'but I beg to observe, that, of all the boys in the world, I believe this is the worst boy.'

'Strong!' said my aunt, shortly.

'But not at all too strong for the facts,' returned Miss Murdstone.

'Ha!' said my aunt. 'Well, sir?'

'I have my own opinions,' resumed Mr. Murdstone, whose face darkened more and more, the more he and my aunt observed each other, which they did very narrowly, 'as to the best mode of bringing him up; they are founded, in part, on my knowledge of him, and in part on my knowledge of my own means and resources. I am responsible for them to myself, I act upon them, and I say no more about them. It is enough that I place this boy under the eye of a friend of my own, in a respectable business; that it does not please him; that he runs away from it; makes himself a common vagabond about the country; and comes here, in rags, to appeal to you, Miss Trotwood. I wish to set before you, honourably, the exact consequences—so far as they are within my knowledge—of your abetting him in this appeal.'

'But about the respectable business first,' said my aunt. 'If he had been your own boy, you would have put him to it, just the same, I suppose?'

'If he had been my brother's own boy,' returned Miss Murdstone, striking in, 'his character, I trust, would have been altogether different.'

'Or if the poor child, his mother, had been alive, he would still have gone into the respectable business, would he?' said my aunt.

'I believe,' said Mr. Murdstone, with an inclination of his head, 'that Clara would have disputed nothing which myself and my sister Jane Murdstone were agreed was for the best.'

Miss Murdstone confirmed this with an audible murmur.

'Humph!' said my aunt. 'Unfortunate baby!'

Mr. Dick, who had been rattling his money all this time, was rattling it so loudly now, that my aunt felt it necessary to check him with a look, before saying:

'The poor child's annuity died with her?'

'Died with her,' replied Mr. Murdstone.

'And there was no settlement of the little property—the house and garden—the what's-its-name Rookery without any rooks in it—upon her boy?'

'It had been left to her, unconditionally, by her first husband,' Mr. Murdstone began, when my aunt caught him up with the greatest irascibility and impatience.

'Good Lord, man, there's no occasion to say that. Left to her unconditionally! I think I see David Copperfield looking forward to any condition of any sort or kind, though it stared him point-blank in the face! Of course it was left to her unconditionally. But when she married again—when she took that most disastrous step of marrying you, in short,' said my aunt, 'to be plain—did no one put in a word for the boy at that time?'

'My late wife loved her second husband, ma'am,' said Mr. Murdstone, 'and trusted implicitly in him.'

'Your late wife, sir, was a most unworldly, most unhappy, most unfortunate baby,' returned my aunt, shaking her head at him. 'That's what she was. And now, what have you got to say next?'

'Merely this, Miss Trotwood,' he returned. 'I am here to take David back—to take him back unconditionally, to dispose of him as I think proper, and to deal with him as I think right. I am not here to make any promise, or give any pledge to anybody. You may possibly have some idea, Miss Trotwood, of abetting him in his running away, and in his complaints to you. Your manner, which I must say does not seem intended to propitiate, induces me to think it possible. Now I must caution you that if you abet him once, you abet him for good and all; if you step in between him and me, now, you must step in, Miss Trotwood, for ever. I cannot trifle, or be trifled with. I am here, for the first and last time, to take him away. Is he ready to go? If he is not—and you tell me he is not; on any pretence; it is indifferent to me what—my doors are shut against him henceforth, and yours, I take it for granted, are open to him.'

To this address, my aunt had listened with the closest attention, sitting perfectly upright, with her hands folded on one knee, and looking grimly on the speaker. When he had finished, she turned her eyes so as to command Miss Murdstone, without otherwise disturbing her attitude, and said:

'Well, ma'am, have YOU got anything to remark?'

'Indeed, Miss Trotwood,' said Miss Murdstone, 'all that I could say has been so well said by my brother, and all that I know to be the fact has been so plainly stated by him, that I have nothing to add except my thanks for your politeness. For your very great politeness, I am sure,' said Miss Murdstone; with an irony which no more affected my aunt, than it discomposed the cannon I had slept by at Chatham.

'And what does the boy say?' said my aunt. 'Are you ready to go, David?'

I answered no, and entreated her not to let me go. I said that neither Mr. nor Miss Murdstone had ever liked me, or had ever been kind to me. That they had made my mama, who always loved me dearly, unhappy about me, and that I knew it well, and that Peggotty knew it. I said that I had been more miserable than I thought anybody could believe, who only knew how young I was. And I begged and prayed my aunt—I forget in what terms now, but I remember that they affected me very much then—to befriend and protect me, for my father's sake.

'Mr. Dick,' said my aunt, 'what shall I do with this child?'

Mr. Dick considered, hesitated, brightened, and rejoined, 'Have him measured for a suit of clothes directly.'

'Mr. Dick,' said my aunt triumphantly, 'give me your hand, for your common sense is invaluable.' Having shaken it with great cordiality, she pulled me towards her and said to Mr. Murdstone:

'You can go when you like; I'll take my chance with the boy. If he's all you say he is, at least I can do as much for him then, as you have done. But I don't believe a word of it.'

'Miss Trotwood,' rejoined Mr. Murdstone, shrugging his shoulders, as he rose, 'if you were a gentleman—'

'Bah! Stuff and nonsense!' said my aunt. 'Don't talk to me!'

'How exquisitely polite!' exclaimed Miss Murdstone, rising. 'Overpowering, really!'

'Do you think I don't know,' said my aunt, turning a deaf ear to the sister, and continuing to address the brother, and to shake her head at him with infinite expression, 'what kind of life you must have led that poor, unhappy, misdirected baby? Do you think I don't know what a woeful day it was for the soft little creature when you first came in her way—smirking and making great eyes at her, I'll be bound, as if you couldn't say boh! to a goose!'

'I never heard anything so elegant!' said Miss Murdstone.

'Do you think I can't understand you as well as if I had seen you,' pursued my aunt, 'now that I DO see and hear you—which, I tell you candidly, is anything but a pleasure to me? Oh yes, bless us! who so smooth and silky as Mr. Murdstone at first! The poor, benighted innocent had never seen such a man. He was made of sweetness. He worshipped her. He doted on her boy—tenderly doted on him! He was to be another father to him, and they were all to live together in a garden of roses, weren't they? Ugh! Get along with you, do!' said my aunt.

'I never heard anything like this person in my life!' exclaimed Miss Murdstone.

'And when you had made sure of the poor little fool,' said my aunt—'God forgive me that I should call her so, and she gone where YOU won't go in a hurry—because you had not done wrong enough to her and hers, you must begin to train her, must you? begin to break her, like a poor caged bird, and wear her deluded life away, in teaching her to sing YOUR notes?'

'This is either insanity or intoxication,' said Miss Murdstone, in a perfect agony at not being able to turn the current of my aunt's address towards herself; 'and my suspicion is that it's intoxication.'

Miss Betsey, without taking the least notice of the interruption, continued to address herself to Mr. Murdstone as if there had been no such thing.

'Mr. Murdstone,' she said, shaking her finger at him, 'you were a tyrant to the simple baby, and you broke her heart. She was a loving baby—I know that; I knew it, years before you ever saw her—and through the best part of her weakness you gave her the wounds she died of. There is the truth for your comfort, however you like it. And you and your instruments may make the most of it.'

'Allow me to inquire, Miss Trotwood,' interposed Miss Murdstone, 'whom you are pleased to call, in a choice of words in which I am not experienced, my brother's instruments?'

'It was clear enough, as I have told you, years before YOU ever saw her—and why, in the mysterious dispensations of Providence, you ever did see her, is more than humanity can comprehend—it was clear enough that the poor soft little thing would marry somebody, at some time or other; but I did hope it wouldn't have been as bad as it has turned out. That was the time, Mr. Murdstone, when she gave birth to her boy here,' said my aunt; 'to the poor child you sometimes tormented her through afterwards, which is a disagreeable remembrance and makes the sight of him odious now. Aye, aye! you needn't wince!' said my aunt. 'I know it's true without that.'

He had stood by the door, all this while, observant of her with a smile upon his face, though his black eyebrows were heavily contracted. I remarked now, that, though the smile was on his face still, his colour had gone in a moment, and he seemed to breathe as if he had been running.

'Good day, sir,' said my aunt, 'and good-bye! Good day to you, too, ma'am,' said my aunt, turning suddenly upon his sister. 'Let me see you ride a donkey over my green again, and as sure as you have a head upon your shoulders, I'll knock your bonnet off, and tread upon it!'

It would require a painter, and no common painter too, to depict my aunt's face as she delivered herself of this very unexpected sentiment, and Miss Murdstone's face as she heard it. But the manner of the speech, no less than the matter, was so fiery, that Miss Murdstone, without a word in answer, discreetly put her arm through her brother's, and walked haughtily out of the cottage; my aunt remaining in the window looking after them; prepared, I have no doubt, in case of the donkey's reappearance, to carry her threat into instant execution.

No attempt at defiance being made, however, her face gradually relaxed, and became so pleasant, that I was emboldened to kiss and thank her; which I did with great heartiness, and with both my arms clasped round her neck. I then shook hands with Mr. Dick, who shook hands with me a great many times, and hailed this happy close of the proceedings with repeated bursts of laughter.

'You'll consider yourself guardian, jointly with me, of this child, Mr. Dick,' said my aunt.

'I shall be delighted,' said Mr. Dick, 'to be the guardian of David's son.'

'Very good,' returned my aunt, 'that's settled. I have been thinking, do you know, Mr. Dick, that I might call him Trotwood?'

'Certainly, certainly. Call him Trotwood, certainly,' said Mr. Dick. 'David's son's Trotwood.'

'Trotwood Copperfield, you mean,' returned my aunt.

'Yes, to be sure. Yes. Trotwood Copperfield,' said Mr. Dick, a little abashed.

My aunt took so kindly to the notion, that some ready-made clothes, which were purchased for me that afternoon, were marked 'Trotwood Copperfield', in her own handwriting, and in indelible marking-ink, before I put them on; and it was settled that all the other clothes which were ordered to be made for me (a complete outfit was bespoke that afternoon) should be marked in the same way.

Thus I began my new life, in a new name, and with everything new about me. Now that the state of doubt was over, I felt, for many days, like one in a dream. I never thought that I had a curious couple of guardians, in my aunt and Mr. Dick. I never thought of anything about myself, distinctly. The two things clearest in my mind were, that a remoteness had come upon the old Blunderstone life—which seemed to lie in the haze of an immeasurable distance; and that a curtain had for ever fallen on my life at Murdstone and Grinby's. No one has ever raised that curtain since. I have lifted it for a moment, even in this narrative, with a reluctant hand, and dropped it gladly. The remembrance of that life is fraught with so much pain to me, with so much mental suffering and want of hope, that I have never had the courage even to examine how long I was doomed to lead it. Whether it lasted for a year, or more, or less, I do not know. I only know that it was, and ceased to be; and that I have written, and there I leave it.

CHAPTER 15. I MAKE ANOTHER BEGINNING

Mr. Dick and I soon became the best of friends, and very often, when his day's work was done, went out together to fly the great kite. Every day of his life he had a long sitting at the Memorial, which never made the least progress, however hard he laboured, for King Charles the First always strayed into it, sooner or later, and then it was thrown aside, and another one begun. The patience and hope with which he bore these perpetual disappointments, the mild perception he had that there was something wrong about King Charles the First, the feeble efforts he made to keep him out, and the certainty with which he came in, and tumbled the Memorial out of all shape, made a deep impression on me. What Mr. Dick supposed would come of the Memorial, if it were completed; where he thought it was to go, or what he thought it was to do; he knew no more than anybody else, I believe. Nor was it at all necessary that he should trouble himself with such questions, for if anything were certain under the sun, it was certain that the Memorial never would be finished. It was quite an affecting sight, I used to think, to see him with the kite when it was up a great height in the air. What he had told me, in his room, about his belief in its disseminating the statements pasted on it, which were nothing but old leaves of abortive Memorials, might have been a fancy with him sometimes; but not when he was out, looking up at the kite in the sky, and feeling it pull and tug at his hand. He never looked so serene as he did then. I used to fancy, as I sat by him of an evening, on a green slope, and saw him watch the kite high in the quiet air, that it lifted his mind out of its confusion, and bore it (such was my boyish thought) into the skies. As he wound the string in and it came lower and lower down out of the beautiful light, until it fluttered to the ground, and lay there like a dead thing, he seemed to wake gradually out of a dream; and I remember to have seen him take it up, and look about him in a lost way, as if they had both come down together, so that I pitied him with all my heart.

While I advanced in friendship and intimacy with Mr. Dick, I did not go backward in the favour of his staunch friend, my aunt. She took so kindly to me, that, in the course of a few weeks, she shortened my adopted name of Trotwood into Trot; and even encouraged me to hope, that if I went on as I had begun, I might take equal rank in her affections with my sister Betsey Trotwood.

'Trot,' said my aunt one evening, when the backgammon-board was placed as usual for herself and Mr. Dick, 'we must not forget your education.'

This was my only subject of anxiety, and I felt quite delighted by her referring to it.

'Should you like to go to school at Canterbury?' said my aunt.

I replied that I should like it very much, as it was so near her.

'Good,' said my aunt. 'Should you like to go tomorrow?'

Being already no stranger to the general rapidity of my aunt's evolutions, I was not surprised by the suddenness of the proposal, and said: 'Yes.'

'Good,' said my aunt again. 'Janet, hire the grey pony and chaise tomorrow morning at ten o'clock, and pack up Master Trotwood's clothes tonight.'

I was greatly elated by these orders; but my heart smote me for my selfishness, when I witnessed their effect on Mr. Dick, who was so low-spirited at the prospect of our separation, and played so ill in consequence, that my aunt, after giving him several admonitory raps on the knuckles with her dice-box, shut up the board, and declined to play with him any more. But, on hearing from my aunt that I should sometimes come over on a Saturday, and that he could sometimes come and see me on a Wednesday, he revived; and vowed to make another kite for those occasions, of proportions greatly surpassing the present one. In the morning he was downhearted again, and would have sustained himself by giving me all the money he had in his possession, gold and silver too, if my aunt had not interposed, and limited the gift to five shillings, which, at his earnest petition, were afterwards increased to ten. We parted at the garden-gate in a most affectionate manner, and Mr. Dick did not go into the house until my aunt had driven me out of sight of it.

My aunt, who was perfectly indifferent to public opinion, drove the grey pony through Dover in a masterly manner; sitting high and stiff like a state coachman, keeping a steady eye upon him wherever he went, and making a point of not letting him have his own way in any respect. When we came into the country road, she permitted him to relax a little, however; and looking at me down in a valley of cushion by her side, asked me whether I was happy?

'Very happy indeed, thank you, aunt,' I said.

She was much gratified; and both her hands being occupied, patted me on the head with her whip.

'Is it a large school, aunt?' I asked.

'Why, I don't know,' said my aunt. 'We are going to Mr. Wickfield's first.'

'Does he keep a school?' I asked.

'No, Trot,' said my aunt. 'He keeps an office.'

I asked for no more information about Mr. Wickfield, as she offered none, and we conversed on other subjects until we came to Canterbury, where, as it was market-day, my aunt had a great opportunity of insinuating the grey pony among carts, baskets, vegetables, and huckster's goods. The hair-breadth turns and twists we made, drew down upon us a variety of speeches from the people standing about, which were not always complimentary; but my aunt drove on with perfect indifference, and I dare say would have taken her own way with as much coolness through an enemy's country.

At length we stopped before a very old house bulging out over the road; a house with long low lattice-windows bulging out still farther, and beams with carved heads on the ends bulging out too, so that I fancied the whole house was leaning forward, trying to see who was passing on the narrow pavement below. It was quite spotless in its cleanliness. The old-fashioned brass knocker on the low arched door, ornamented with carved garlands of fruit and flowers, twinkled like a star; the two stone steps descending to the door were as white as if they had been covered with fair linen; and all the angles and corners, and carvings and mouldings, and quaint little panes of glass, and quainter little windows, though as old as the hills, were as pure as any snow that ever fell upon the hills.

When the pony-chaise stopped at the door, and my eyes were intent upon the house, I saw a cadaverous face appear at a small window on the ground floor (in a little round tower that formed one side of the house), and quickly disappear. The low arched door then opened, and the face came out. It was quite as cadaverous as it had looked in the window, though in the grain of it there was that tinge of red which is sometimes to be observed in the skins of red-haired people. It belonged to a red-haired person—a youth of fifteen, as I take it now, but looking much older—whose hair was cropped as close as the closest stubble; who had hardly any eyebrows, and no eyelashes, and eyes of a red-brown, so unsheltered and unshaded, that I remember wondering how he went to sleep. He was high-shouldered and bony; dressed in decent black, with a white wisp of a neckcloth; buttoned up to the throat; and had a long, lank, skeleton hand, which particularly attracted my attention, as he stood at the pony's head, rubbing his chin with it, and looking up at us in the chaise.

'Is Mr. Wickfield at home, Uriah Heep?' said my aunt.

'Mr. Wickfield's at home, ma'am,' said Uriah Heep, 'if you'll please to walk in there'—pointing with his long hand to the room he meant.

We got out; and leaving him to hold the pony, went into a long low parlour looking towards the street, from the window of which I caught a glimpse, as I went in, of Uriah Heep breathing into the pony's nostrils, and immediately covering them with his hand, as if he were putting some spell upon him. Opposite to the tall old chimney-piece were two portraits: one of a gentleman with grey hair (though not by any means an old man) and black eyebrows, who was looking over some papers tied together with red tape; the other, of a lady, with a very placid and sweet expression of face, who was looking at me.

I believe I was turning about in search of Uriah's picture, when, a door at the farther end of the room opening, a gentleman entered, at sight of whom I turned to the first-mentioned portrait again, to make quite sure that it had not come out of its frame. But it was stationary; and as the gentleman advanced into the light, I saw that he was some years older than when he had had his picture painted.

'Miss Betsey Trotwood,' said the gentleman, 'pray walk in. I was engaged for a moment, but you'll excuse my being busy. You know my motive. I have but one in life.'

Miss Betsey thanked him, and we went into his room, which was furnished as an office, with books, papers, tin boxes, and so forth. It looked into a garden, and had an iron safe let into the wall; so immediately over the mantelshelf, that I wondered, as I sat down, how the sweeps got round it when they swept the chimney.

'Well, Miss Trotwood,' said Mr. Wickfield; for I soon found that it was he, and that he was a lawyer, and steward of the estates of a rich gentleman of the county; 'what wind blows you here? Not an ill wind, I hope?'

'No,' replied my aunt. 'I have not come for any law.'

'That's right, ma'am,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'You had better come for anything else.' His hair was quite white now, though his eyebrows were still black. He had a very agreeable face, and, I thought, was handsome. There was a certain richness in his complexion, which I had been long accustomed, under Peggotty's tuition, to connect with port wine; and I fancied it was in his voice too, and referred his growing corpulency to the same cause. He was very cleanly dressed, in a blue coat, striped waistcoat, and nankeen trousers; and his fine frilled shirt and cambric neckcloth looked unusually soft and white, reminding my strolling fancy (I call to mind) of the plumage on the breast of a swan.

'This is my nephew,' said my aunt.

'Wasn't aware you had one, Miss Trotwood,' said Mr. Wickfield.

'My grand-nephew, that is to say,' observed my aunt.

'Wasn't aware you had a grand-nephew, I give you my word,' said Mr. Wickfield.

'I have adopted him,' said my aunt, with a wave of her hand, importing that his knowledge and his ignorance were all one to her, 'and I have brought him here, to put to a school where he may be thoroughly well taught, and well treated. Now tell me where that school is, and what it is, and all about it.'

'Before I can advise you properly,' said Mr. Wickfield—'the old question, you know. What's your motive in this?'

'Deuce take the man!' exclaimed my aunt. 'Always fishing for motives, when they're on the surface! Why, to make the child happy and useful.'

'It must be a mixed motive, I think,' said Mr. Wickfield, shaking his head and smiling incredulously.

'A mixed fiddlestick,' returned my aunt. 'You claim to have one plain motive in all you do yourself. You don't suppose, I hope, that you are the only plain dealer in the world?'

'Ay, but I have only one motive in life, Miss Trotwood,' he rejoined, smiling. 'Other people have dozens, scores, hundreds. I have only one. There's the difference. However, that's beside the question. The best school? Whatever the motive, you want the best?'

My aunt nodded assent.

'At the best we have,' said Mr. Wickfield, considering, 'your nephew couldn't board just now.'

'But he could board somewhere else, I suppose?' suggested my aunt.

Mr. Wickfield thought I could. After a little discussion, he proposed to take my aunt to the school, that she might see it and judge for herself; also, to take her, with the same object, to two or three houses where he thought I could be boarded. My aunt embracing the proposal, we were all three going out together, when he stopped and said:

'Our little friend here might have some motive, perhaps, for objecting to the arrangements. I think we had better leave him behind?'

My aunt seemed disposed to contest the point; but to facilitate matters I said I would gladly remain behind, if they pleased; and returned into Mr. Wickfield's office, where I sat down again, in the chair I had first occupied, to await their return.

It so happened that this chair was opposite a narrow passage, which ended in the little circular room where I had seen Uriah Heep's pale face looking out of the window. Uriah, having taken the pony to a neighbouring stable, was at work at a desk in this room, which had a brass frame on the top to hang paper upon, and on which the writing he was making a copy of was then hanging. Though his face was towards me, I thought, for some time, the writing being between us, that he could not see me; but looking that way more attentively, it made me uncomfortable to observe that, every now and then, his sleepless eyes would come below the writing, like two red suns, and stealthily stare at me for I dare say a whole minute at a time, during which his pen went, or pretended to go, as cleverly as ever. I made several attempts to get out of their way—such as standing on a chair to look at a map on the other side of the room, and poring over the columns of a Kentish newspaper—but they always attracted me back again; and whenever I looked towards those two red suns, I was sure to find them, either just rising or just setting.

At length, much to my relief, my aunt and Mr. Wickfield came back, after a pretty long absence. They were not so successful as I could have wished; for though the advantages of the school were undeniable, my aunt had not approved of any of the boarding-houses proposed for me.

'It's very unfortunate,' said my aunt. 'I don't know what to do, Trot.'

'It does happen unfortunately,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'But I'll tell you what you can do, Miss Trotwood.'

'What's that?' inquired my aunt.

'Leave your nephew here, for the present. He's a quiet fellow. He won't disturb me at all. It's a capital house for study. As quiet as a monastery, and almost as roomy. Leave him here.'

My aunt evidently liked the offer, though she was delicate of accepting it. So did I. 'Come, Miss Trotwood,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'This is the way out of the difficulty. It's only a temporary arrangement, you know. If it don't act well, or don't quite accord with our mutual convenience, he can easily go to the right-about. There will be time to find some better place for him in the meanwhile. You had better determine to leave him here for the present!'

'I am very much obliged to you,' said my aunt; 'and so is he, I see; but —'

'Come! I know what you mean,' cried Mr. Wickfield. 'You shall not be oppressed by the receipt of favours, Miss Trotwood. You may pay for him, if you like. We won't be hard about terms, but you shall pay if you will.'

'On that understanding,' said my aunt, 'though it doesn't lessen the real obligation, I shall be very glad to leave him.'

'Then come and see my little housekeeper,' said Mr. Wickfield.

We accordingly went up a wonderful old staircase; with a balustrade so broad that we might have gone up that, almost as easily; and into a shady old drawing-room, lighted by some three or four of the quaint windows I had looked up at from the street: which had old oak seats in them, that seemed to have come of the same trees as the shining oak floor, and the great beams in the ceiling. It was a prettily furnished room, with a piano and some lively furniture in red and green, and some flowers. It seemed to be all old nooks and corners; and in every nook and corner there was some queer little table, or cupboard, or bookcase, or seat, or something or other, that made me think there was not such another good corner in the room; until I looked at the next one, and found it equal to it, if not better. On everything there was the same air of retirement and cleanliness that marked the house outside.

Mr. Wickfield tapped at a door in a corner of the panelled wall, and a girl of about my own age came quickly out and kissed him. On her face, I saw immediately the placid and sweet expression of the lady whose picture had looked at me downstairs. It seemed to my imagination as if the portrait had grown womanly, and the original remained a child. Although her face was quite bright and happy, there was a tranquillity about it, and about her

—a quiet, good, calm spirit—that I never have forgotten; that I shall never forget. This was his little housekeeper, his daughter Agnes, Mr. Wickfield said. When I heard how he said it, and saw how he held her hand, I guessed what the one motive of his life was.

She had a little basket-trifle hanging at her side, with keys in it; and she looked as staid and as discreet a housekeeper as the old house could have. She listened to her father as he told her about me, with a pleasant face; and when he had concluded, proposed to my aunt that we should go upstairs and see my room. We all went together, she before us: and a glorious old room it was, with more oak beams, and diamond panes; and the broad balustrade going all the way up to it.

I cannot call to mind where or when, in my childhood, I had seen a stained glass window in a church. Nor do I recollect its subject. But I know that when I saw her turn round, in the grave light of the old staircase, and wait for us, above, I thought of that window; and I associated something of its tranquil brightness with Agnes Wickfield ever afterwards.

My aunt was as happy as I was, in the arrangement made for me; and we went down to the drawing-room again, well pleased and gratified. As she would not hear of staying to dinner, lest she should by any chance fail to arrive at home with the grey pony before dark; and as I apprehend Mr. Wickfield knew her too well to argue any point with her; some lunch was provided for her there, and Agnes went back to her governess, and Mr. Wickfield to his office. So we were left to take leave of one another without any restraint.

She told me that everything would be arranged for me by Mr. Wickfield, and that I should want for nothing, and gave me the kindest words and the best advice.

'Trot,' said my aunt in conclusion, 'be a credit to yourself, to me, and Mr. Dick, and Heaven be with you!'

I was greatly overcome, and could only thank her, again and again, and send my love to Mr. Dick.

'Never,' said my aunt, 'be mean in anything; never be false; never be cruel. Avoid those three vices, Trot, and I can always be hopeful of you.'

I promised, as well as I could, that I would not abuse her kindness or forget her admonition.

'The pony's at the door,' said my aunt, 'and I am off! Stay here.' With these words she embraced me hastily, and went out of the room, shutting the door after her. At first I was startled by so abrupt a departure, and almost feared I had displeased her; but when I looked into the street, and saw how dejectedly she got into the chaise, and drove away without looking up, I understood her better and did not do her that injustice.

By five o'clock, which was Mr. Wickfield's dinner-hour, I had mustered up my spirits again, and was ready for my knife and fork. The cloth was only laid for us two; but Agnes was waiting in the drawing-room before dinner, went down with her father, and sat opposite to him at table. I doubted whether he could have dined without her.

We did not stay there, after dinner, but came upstairs into the drawing-room again: in one snug corner of which, Agnes set glasses for her father, and a decanter of port wine. I thought he would have missed its usual flavour, if it had been put there for him by any other hands.

There he sat, taking his wine, and taking a good deal of it, for two hours; while Agnes played on the piano, worked, and talked to him and me. He was, for the most part, gay and cheerful with us; but sometimes his eyes rested on her, and he fell into a brooding state, and was silent. She always observed this quickly, I thought, and always roused him with a question or caress. Then he came out of his meditation, and drank more wine.

Agnes made the tea, and presided over it; and the time passed away after it, as after dinner, until she went to bed; when her father took her in his arms and kissed her, and, she being gone, ordered candles in his office. Then I went to bed too.

But in the course of the evening I had rambled down to the door, and a little way along the street, that I might have another peep at the old houses, and the grey Cathedral; and might think of my coming through that old city on my journey, and of my passing the very house I lived in, without knowing it. As I came back, I saw Uriah Heep shutting up the office; and feeling friendly towards everybody, went in and spoke to him, and at parting, gave him my hand. But oh, what a clammy hand his was! as ghostly to the touch as to the sight! I rubbed mine afterwards, to warm it, AND TO RUB HIS OFF.

It was such an uncomfortable hand, that, when I went to my room, it was still cold and wet upon my memory. Leaning out of the window, and seeing one of the faces on the beam-ends looking at me sideways, I fancied it was Uriah Heep got up there somehow, and shut him out in a hurry.

CHAPTER 16. I AM A NEW BOY IN MORE SENSES THAN ONE

Next morning, after breakfast, I entered on school life again. I went, accompanied by Mr. Wickfield, to the scene of my future studies—a grave building in a courtyard, with a learned air about it that seemed very well suited to the stray rooks and jackdaws who came down from the Cathedral towers to walk with a clerkly bearing on the grass-plot—and was introduced to my new master, Doctor Strong.

Doctor Strong looked almost as rusty, to my thinking, as the tall iron rails and gates outside the house; and almost as stiff and heavy as the great stone urns that flanked them, and were set up, on the top of the red-brick wall, at regular distances all round the court, like sublimated skittles, for Time to play at. He was in his library (I mean Doctor Strong was), with his clothes not particularly well brushed, and his hair not particularly well combed; his knee-smalls unbraced; his long black gaiters unbuttoned; and his shoes yawning like two caverns on the hearth-rug. Turning upon me a lustreless eye, that reminded me of a long-forgotten blind old horse who once used to crop the grass, and tumble over the graves, in Blunderstone churchyard, he said he was glad to see me: and then he gave me his hand; which I didn't know what to do with, as it did nothing for itself.

But, sitting at work, not far from Doctor Strong, was a very pretty young lady—whom he called Annie, and who was his daughter, I supposed—who got me out of my difficulty by kneeling down to put Doctor Strong's shoes on, and button his gaiters, which she did with great cheerfulness and quickness. When she had finished, and we were going out to the schoolroom, I was much surprised to hear Mr. Wickfield, in bidding her good morning, address her as 'Mrs. Strong'; and I was wondering could she be Doctor Strong's son's wife, or could she be Mrs. Doctor Strong, when Doctor Strong himself unconsciously enlightened me.

'By the by, Wickfield,' he said, stopping in a passage with his hand on my shoulder; 'you have not found any suitable provision for my wife's cousin yet?'

'No,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'No. Not yet.'

'I could wish it done as soon as it can be done, Wickfield,' said Doctor Strong, 'for Jack Maldon is needy, and idle; and of those two bad things, worse things sometimes come. What does Doctor Watts say,' he added, looking at me, and moving his head to the time of his quotation, '"Satan finds some mischief still, for idle hands to do."'

'Egad, Doctor,' returned Mr. Wickfield, 'if Doctor Watts knew mankind, he might have written, with as much truth, "Satan finds some mischief still, for busy hands to do." The busy people achieve their full share of mischief in the world, you may rely upon it. What have the people been about, who have been the busiest in getting money, and in getting power, this century or two? No mischief?'

'Jack Maldon will never be very busy in getting either, I expect,' said Doctor Strong, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

'Perhaps not,' said Mr. Wickfield; 'and you bring me back to the question, with an apology for digressing. No, I have not been able to dispose of Mr. Jack Maldon yet. I believe,' he said this with some hesitation, 'I penetrate your motive, and it makes the thing more difficult.'

'My motive,' returned Doctor Strong, 'is to make some suitable provision for a cousin, and an old playfellow, of Annie's.'

'Yes, I know,' said Mr. Wickfield; 'at home or abroad.'

'Aye!' replied the Doctor, apparently wondering why he emphasized those words so much. 'At home or abroad.'

'Your own expression, you know,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'Or abroad.'

'Surely,' the Doctor answered. 'Surely. One or other.'

'One or other? Have you no choice?' asked Mr. Wickfield.

'No,' returned the Doctor.

'No?' with astonishment.

'Not the least.'

'No motive,' said Mr. Wickfield, 'for meaning abroad, and not at home?'

'No,' returned the Doctor.

'I am bound to believe you, and of course I do believe you,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'It might have simplified my office very much, if I had known it before. But I confess I entertained another impression.'

Doctor Strong regarded him with a puzzled and doubting look, which almost immediately subsided into a smile that gave me great encouragement; for it was full of amiability and sweetness, and there was a simplicity in it, and indeed in his whole manner, when the studious, pondering frost upon it was got through, very attractive and hopeful to a young scholar like me. Repeating 'no', and 'not the least', and other short assurances to the same purport, Doctor Strong jogged on before us, at a queer, uneven pace; and we followed: Mr. Wickfield, looking grave, I observed, and shaking his head to himself, without knowing that I saw him.

The schoolroom was a pretty large hall, on the quietest side of the house, confronted by the stately stare of some half-dozen of the great urns, and commanding a peep of an old secluded garden belonging to the Doctor, where the peaches were ripening on the sunny south wall. There were two great aloes, in tubs, on the turf outside the windows; the broad hard leaves of which plant (looking as if they were made of painted tin) have ever since, by association, been symbolical to me of silence and retirement. About five-and-twenty boys were studiously engaged at their books when we went in, but they rose to give the Doctor good morning, and remained standing when they saw Mr. Wickfield and me.

'A new boy, young gentlemen,' said the Doctor; 'Trotwood Copperfield.'

One Adams, who was the head-boy, then stepped out of his place and welcomed me. He looked like a young clergyman, in his white cravat, but he was very affable and good-humoured; and he showed me my place, and presented me to the masters, in a gentlemanly way that would have put me at my ease, if anything could.

It seemed to me so long, however, since I had been among such boys, or among any companions of my own age, except Mick Walker and Mealy Potatoes, that I felt as strange as ever I have done in my life. I was so conscious of having passed through scenes of which they could have no knowledge, and of having acquired experiences foreign to my age, appearance, and condition as one of them, that I half believed it was an imposture to come there as an ordinary little schoolboy. I had become, in the Murdstone and Grinby time, however short or long it may have been, so unused to the sports and games of boys, that I knew I was awkward and inexperienced in the commonest things belonging to them. Whatever I had learnt, had so slipped away from me in the sordid cares of my life from day to night, that now, when I was examined about what I knew, I knew nothing, and was put into the lowest form of the school. But, troubled as I was, by my want of boyish skill, and of book-learning too, I was made infinitely more uncomfortable by the consideration, that, in what I did know, I was much farther removed from my companions than in what I did not. My mind ran upon what they would think, if they knew of my familiar acquaintance with the King's Bench Prison? Was there anything about me which would reveal my proceedings in connexion with the Micawber family—all those pawnings, and sellings, and suppers—in spite of myself? Suppose some of the boys had seen me coming through Canterbury, wayworn and ragged, and should find me out? What would they say, who made so light of money, if they could know how I had scraped my halfpence together, for the purchase of my daily saveloy and beer, or my slices of pudding? How would it affect them, who were so innocent of London life, and London streets, to discover how knowing I was (and was ashamed to be) in some of the meanest phases of both? All this ran in my head so much, on that first day at Doctor Strong's, that I felt distrustful of my slightest look and gesture; shrunk within myself whensoever I was approached by one of my new schoolfellows; and hurried off the minute school was over, afraid of committing myself in my response to any friendly notice or advance.

But there was such an influence in Mr. Wickfield's old house, that when I knocked at it, with my new school-books under my arm, I began to feel my uneasiness softening away. As I went up to my airy old room, the grave shadow of the staircase seemed to fall upon my doubts and fears, and to make the past more indistinct. I sat there, sturdily conning my books, until dinner-time (we were out of school for good at three); and went down, hopeful of becoming a passable sort of boy yet.

Agnes was in the drawing-room, waiting for her father, who was detained by someone in his office. She met me with her pleasant smile, and asked me how I liked the school. I told her I should like it very much, I hoped; but I was a little strange to it at first.

'You have never been to school,' I said, 'have you?' 'Oh yes! Every day.'

'Ah, but you mean here, at your own home?'

'Papa couldn't spare me to go anywhere else,' she answered, smiling and shaking her head. 'His housekeeper must be in his house, you know.'

'He is very fond of you, I am sure,' I said.

She nodded 'Yes,' and went to the door to listen for his coming up, that she might meet him on the stairs. But, as he was not there, she came back again.

'Mama has been dead ever since I was born,' she said, in her quiet way. 'I only know her picture, downstairs. I saw you looking at it yesterday. Did you think whose it was?'

I told her yes, because it was so like herself.

'Papa says so, too,' said Agnes, pleased. 'Hark! That's papa now!'

Her bright calm face lighted up with pleasure as she went to meet him, and as they came in, hand in hand. He greeted me cordially; and told me I should certainly be happy under Doctor Strong, who was one of the gentlest of men.

'There may be some, perhaps—I don't know that there are—who abuse his kindness,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'Never be one of those, Trotwood, in anything. He is the least suspicious of mankind; and whether that's a merit, or whether it's a blemish, it deserves consideration in all dealings with the Doctor, great or small.'

He spoke, I thought, as if he were weary, or dissatisfied with something; but I did not pursue the question in my mind, for dinner was just then announced, and we went down and took the same seats as before.

We had scarcely done so, when Uriah Heep put in his red head and his lank hand at the door, and said:

'Here's Mr. Maldon begs the favour of a word, sir.'

'I am but this moment quit of Mr. Maldon,' said his master.

'Yes, sir,' returned Uriah; 'but Mr. Maldon has come back, and he begs the favour of a word.'

As he held the door open with his hand, Uriah looked at me, and looked at Agnes, and looked at the dishes, and looked at the plates, and looked at every object in the room, I thought,—yet seemed to look at nothing; he made such an appearance all the while of keeping his red eyes dutifully on his master. 'I beg your pardon. It's only to say, on reflection,' observed a voice behind Uriah, as Uriah's head was pushed away, and the speaker's substituted—'pray excuse me for this intrusion—that as it seems I have no choice in the matter, the sooner I go abroad the better. My cousin Annie did say, when we talked of it, that she liked to have her friends within reach rather than to have them banished, and the old Doctor—'

'Doctor Strong, was that?' Mr. Wickfield interposed, gravely.

'Doctor Strong, of course,' returned the other; 'I call him the old Doctor; it's all the same, you know.'

'I don't know,' returned Mr. Wickfield.

'Well, Doctor Strong,' said the other—'Doctor Strong was of the same mind, I believed. But as it appears from the course you take with me he has changed his mind, why there's no more to be said, except that the sooner I am off, the better. Therefore, I thought I'd come back and say, that the sooner I am off the better. When a plunge is to be made into the water, it's of no use lingering on the bank.'

'There shall be as little lingering as possible, in your case, Mr. Maldon, you may depend upon it,' said Mr. Wickfield.

'Thank'ee,' said the other. 'Much obliged. I don't want to look a gift-horse in the mouth, which is not a gracious thing to do; otherwise, I dare say, my cousin Annie could easily arrange it in her own way. I suppose Annie would only have to say to the old Doctor—'

'Meaning that Mrs. Strong would only have to say to her husband—do I follow you?' said Mr. Wickfield.

'Quite so,' returned the other, '—would only have to say, that she wanted such and such a thing to be so and so; and it would be so and so, as a matter of course.'

'And why as a matter of course, Mr. Maldon?' asked Mr. Wickfield, sedately eating his dinner.

'Why, because Annie's a charming young girl, and the old Doctor—Doctor Strong, I mean—is not quite a charming young boy,' said Mr. Jack Maldon, laughing. 'No offence to anybody, Mr. Wickfield. I only mean that I suppose some compensation is fair and reasonable in that sort of marriage.'

'Compensation to the lady, sir?' asked Mr. Wickfield gravely.

'To the lady, sir,' Mr. Jack Maldon answered, laughing. But appearing to remark that Mr. Wickfield went on with his dinner in the same sedate, immovable manner, and that there was no hope of making him relax a muscle of his face, he added: 'However, I have said what I came to say, and, with another apology for this intrusion, I may take myself off. Of course I shall observe your directions, in considering the matter as one to be arranged between you and me solely, and not to be referred to, up at the Doctor's.'

'Have you dined?' asked Mr. Wickfield, with a motion of his hand towards the table.

'Thank'ee. I am going to dine,' said Mr. Maldon, 'with my cousin Annie. Good-bye!'

Mr. Wickfield, without rising, looked after him thoughtfully as he went out. He was rather a shallow sort of young gentleman, I thought, with a handsome face, a rapid utterance, and a confident, bold air. And this was the first I ever saw of Mr. Jack Maldon; whom I had not expected to see so soon, when I heard the Doctor speak of him that morning.

When we had dined, we went upstairs again, where everything went on exactly as on the previous day. Agnes set the glasses and decanters in the same corner, and Mr. Wickfield sat down to drink, and drank a good deal. Agnes played the piano to him, sat by him, and worked and talked, and played some games at dominoes with me. In good time she made tea; and afterwards, when I brought down my books, looked into them, and showed me what she knew of them (which was no slight matter, though she said it was), and what was the best way to learn and understand them. I see her, with her modest, orderly, placid manner, and I hear her beautiful calm voice, as I write these words. The influence for all good, which she came to exercise over me at a later time, begins already to descend upon my breast. I love little Em'ly, and I don't love Agnes—no, not at all in that way—but I feel that there are goodness, peace, and truth, wherever Agnes is; and that the soft light of the coloured window in the church, seen long ago, falls on her always, and on me when I am near her, and on everything around.

The time having come for her withdrawal for the night, and she having left us, I gave Mr. Wickfield my hand, preparatory to going away myself. But he checked me and said: 'Should you like to stay with us, Trotwood, or to go elsewhere?'

'To stay,' I answered, quickly.

'You are sure?'

'If you please. If I may!'

'Why, it's but a dull life that we lead here, boy, I am afraid,' he said.

'Not more dull for me than Agnes, sir. Not dull at all!'

'Than Agnes,' he repeated, walking slowly to the great chimney-piece, and leaning against it. 'Than Agnes!'

He had drank wine that evening (or I fancied it), until his eyes were bloodshot. Not that I could see them now, for they were cast down, and shaded by his hand; but I had noticed them a little while before.

'Now I wonder,' he muttered, 'whether my Agnes tires of me. When should I ever tire of her! But that's different, that's quite different.'

He was musing, not speaking to me; so I remained quiet.

'A dull old house,' he said, 'and a monotonous life; but I must have her near me. I must keep her near me. If the thought that I may die and leave my darling, or that my darling may die and leave me, comes like a spectre, to distress my happiest hours, and is only to be drowned in—'

He did not supply the word; but pacing slowly to the place where he had sat, and mechanically going through the action of pouring wine from the empty decanter, set it down and paced back again.

'If it is miserable to bear, when she is here,' he said, 'what would it be, and she away? No, no, no. I cannot try that.'

He leaned against the chimney-piece, brooding so long that I could not decide whether to run the risk of disturbing him by going, or to remain quietly where I was, until he should come out of his reverie. At length he aroused himself, and looked about the room until his eyes encountered mine.

'Stay with us, Trotwood, eh?' he said in his usual manner, and as if he were answering something I had just said. 'I am glad of it. You are company to us both. It is wholesome to have you here. Wholesome for me, wholesome for Agnes, wholesome perhaps for all of us.'

'I am sure it is for me, sir,' I said. 'I am so glad to be here.'

'That's a fine fellow!' said Mr. Wickfield. 'As long as you are glad to be here, you shall stay here.' He shook hands with me upon it, and clapped me on the back; and told me that when I had anything to do at night after Agnes had left us, or when I wished to read for my own pleasure, I was free to come down to his room, if he were there and if I desired it for company's sake, and to sit with him. I thanked him for his consideration; and, as he went down soon afterwards, and I was not tired, went down too, with a book in my hand, to avail myself, for half-an-hour, of his permission.

But, seeing a light in the little round office, and immediately feeling myself attracted towards Uriah Heep, who had a sort of fascination for me, I went in there instead. I found Uriah reading a great fat book, with such demonstrative attention, that his lank forefinger followed up every line as he read, and made clammy tracks along the page (or so I fully believed) like a snail.

'You are working late tonight, Uriah,' says I.

'Yes, Master Copperfield,' says Uriah.

As I was getting on the stool opposite, to talk to him more conveniently, I observed that he had not such a thing as a smile about him, and that he could only widen his mouth and make two hard creases down his cheeks, one on each side, to stand for one.

'I am not doing office-work, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah.

'What work, then?' I asked.

'I am improving my legal knowledge, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah. 'I am going through Tidd's Practice. Oh, what a writer Mr. Tidd is, Master Copperfield!'

My stool was such a tower of observation, that as I watched him reading on again, after this rapturous exclamation, and following up the lines with his forefinger, I observed that his nostrils, which were thin and pointed, with sharp dints in them, had a singular and most uncomfortable way of expanding and contracting themselves—that they seemed to twinkle instead of his eyes, which hardly ever twinkled at all.

'I suppose you are quite a great lawyer?' I said, after looking at him for some time.

'Me, Master Copperfield?' said Uriah. 'Oh, no! I'm a very umble person.'

It was no fancy of mine about his hands, I observed; for he frequently ground the palms against each other as if to squeeze them dry and warm, besides often wiping them, in a stealthy way, on his pocket-handkerchief.

'I am well aware that I am the umblest person going,' said Uriah Heep, modestly; 'let the other be where he may. My mother is likewise a very umble person. We live in a numble abode, Master Copperfield, but have much to be thankful for. My father's former calling was umble. He was a sexton.'

'What is he now?' I asked.

'He is a partaker of glory at present, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah Heep. 'But we have much to be thankful for. How much have I to be thankful for in living with Mr. Wickfield!'

I asked Uriah if he had been with Mr. Wickfield long?

'I have been with him, going on four year, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah; shutting up his book, after carefully marking the place where he had left off. 'Since a year after my father's death. How much have I to be thankful for, in that! How much have I to be thankful for, in Mr. Wickfield's kind intention to give me my articles, which would otherwise not lay within the umble means of mother and self!'

'Then, when your articled time is over, you'll be a regular lawyer, I suppose?' said I.

'With the blessing of Providence, Master Copperfield,' returned Uriah.

'Perhaps you'll be a partner in Mr. Wickfield's business, one of these days,' I said, to make myself agreeable; 'and it will be Wickfield and Heep, or Heep late Wickfield.'

'Oh no, Master Copperfield,' returned Uriah, shaking his head, 'I am much too umble for that!'

He certainly did look uncommonly like the carved face on the beam outside my window, as he sat, in his humility, eyeing me sideways, with his mouth widened, and the creases in his cheeks.

'Mr. Wickfield is a most excellent man, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah. 'If you have known him long, you know it, I am sure, much better than I can inform you.'

I replied that I was certain he was; but that I had not known him long myself, though he was a friend of my aunt's.

'Oh, indeed, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah. 'Your aunt is a sweet lady, Master Copperfield!'

He had a way of writhing when he wanted to express enthusiasm, which was very ugly; and which diverted my attention from the compliment he had paid my relation, to the snaky twistings of his throat and body.

'A sweet lady, Master Copperfield!' said Uriah Heep. 'She has a great admiration for Miss Agnes, Master Copperfield, I believe?'

I said, 'Yes,' boldly; not that I knew anything about it, Heaven forgive me!

'I hope you have, too, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah. 'But I am sure you must have.'

'Everybody must have,' I returned.

'Oh, thank you, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah Heep, 'for that remark! It is so true! Umble as I am, I know it is so true! Oh, thank you, Master Copperfield!' He writhed himself quite off his stool in the excitement of his feelings, and, being off, began to make arrangements for going home.

'Mother will be expecting me,' he said, referring to a pale, inexpressive-faced watch in his pocket, 'and getting uneasy; for though we are very umble, Master Copperfield, we are much attached to one another. If you would come and see us, any afternoon, and take a cup of tea at our lowly dwelling, mother would be as proud of your company as I should be.'

I said I should be glad to come.

'Thank you, Master Copperfield,' returned Uriah, putting his book away upon the shelf—'I suppose you stop here, some time, Master Copperfield?'

I said I was going to be brought up there, I believed, as long as I remained at school.

'Oh, indeed!' exclaimed Uriah. 'I should think YOU would come into the business at last, Master Copperfield!'

I protested that I had no views of that sort, and that no such scheme was entertained in my behalf by anybody; but Uriah insisted on blandly replying to all my assurances, 'Oh, yes, Master Copperfield, I should think you would, indeed!' and, 'Oh, indeed, Master Copperfield, I should think you would, certainly!' over and over again. Being, at last, ready to leave the office for the night, he asked me if it would suit my convenience to have the light put out; and on my answering 'Yes,' instantly extinguished it. After shaking hands with me—his hand felt like a fish, in the dark—he opened the door into the street a very little, and crept out, and shut it, leaving me to grope my way back into the house: which cost me some trouble and a fall over his stool. This was the proximate cause, I suppose, of my dreaming about him, for what appeared to me to be half the night; and dreaming, among other things, that he had launched Mr. Peggotty's house on a piratical expedition, with a black flag at the masthead, bearing the inscription 'Tidd's Practice', under which diabolical ensign he was carrying me and little Em'ly to the Spanish Main, to be drowned.

I got a little the better of my uneasiness when I went to school next day, and a good deal the better next day, and so shook it off by degrees, that in less than a fortnight I was quite at home, and happy, among my new companions. I was awkward enough in their games, and backward enough in their studies; but custom would improve me in the first respect, I hoped, and hard work in the second. Accordingly, I went to work very hard, both in play and in earnest, and gained great commendation. And, in a very little while, the Murdstone and Grinby life became so strange to me that I hardly believed in it, while my present life grew so familiar, that I seemed to have been leading it a long time.

Doctor Strong's was an excellent school; as different from Mr. Creakle's as good is from evil. It was very gravely and decorously ordered, and on a sound system; with an appeal, in everything, to the honour and good faith of the boys, and an avowed intention to rely on their possession of those qualities unless they proved themselves unworthy of it, which worked wonders. We all felt that we had a part in the management of the place, and in sustaining its character and dignity. Hence, we soon became warmly attached to it—I am sure I did for one, and I never knew, in all my time, of any other boy being otherwise—and learnt with a good will, desiring to do it credit. We had noble games out of hours, and plenty of liberty; but even then, as I remember, we were well spoken of in the town, and rarely did any disgrace, by our appearance or manner, to the reputation of Doctor Strong and Doctor Strong's boys.

Some of the higher scholars boarded in the Doctor's house, and through them I learned, at second hand, some particulars of the Doctor's history—as, how he had not yet been married twelve months to the beautiful young lady I had seen in the study, whom he had married for love; for she had not a sixpence, and had a world of poor relations (so our fellows said) ready to swarm the Doctor out of house and home. Also, how the Doctor's cogitating manner was attributable to his being always engaged in looking out for Greek roots; which, in my innocence and ignorance, I supposed to be a botanical furor on the Doctor's part, especially as he always looked at the ground when he walked about, until I understood that they were roots of words, with a view to a new Dictionary which he had in contemplation. Adams, our head-boy, who had a turn for mathematics, had made a calculation, I was informed, of the time this Dictionary would take in completing, on the Doctor's plan, and at the Doctor's rate of going. He considered that it might be done in one thousand six hundred and forty-nine years, counting from the Doctor's last, or sixty-second, birthday.

But the Doctor himself was the idol of the whole school: and it must have been a badly composed school if he had been anything else, for he was the kindest of men; with a simple faith in him that might have touched the stone hearts of the very urns upon the wall. As he walked up and down that part of the courtyard which was at the side of the house, with the stray rooks and jackdaws looking after him with their heads cocked slyly, as if they knew how much more knowing they were in worldly affairs than he, if any sort of vagabond could only get near enough to his creaking shoes to attract his attention to one sentence of a tale of distress, that vagabond was made for the next two days. It was so notorious in the house, that the masters and head-boys took pains to cut these marauders off at angles, and to get out of windows, and turn them out of the courtyard, before they could make the Doctor aware of their presence; which was sometimes happily effected within a few yards of him, without his knowing anything of the matter, as he jogged to and fro. Outside his own domain, and unprotected, he was a very sheep for the shearers. He would have taken his gaiters off his legs, to give away. In fact, there was a story current among us (I have no idea, and never had, on what authority, but I have believed it for so many years that I feel quite certain it is true), that on a frosty day, one winter-time, he actually did bestow his gaiters on a beggar-woman, who occasioned some scandal in the neighbourhood by exhibiting a fine infant from door to door, wrapped in those garments, which were universally recognized, being as well known in the vicinity as the Cathedral. The legend added that the only person who did not identify them was the Doctor himself, who, when they were shortly afterwards displayed at the door of a little second-hand shop of no very good repute, where such things were taken in exchange for gin, was more than once observed to handle them approvingly, as if admiring some curious novelty in the pattern, and considering them an improvement on his own.

It was very pleasant to see the Doctor with his pretty young wife. He had a fatherly, benignant way of showing his fondness for her, which seemed in itself to express a good man. I often saw them walking in the garden where the peaches were, and I sometimes had a nearer observation of them in the study or the parlour. She appeared to me to take great care of the Doctor, and to like him very much, though I never thought her vitally interested in the Dictionary: some cumbrous fragments of which work the Doctor always carried in his pockets, and in the lining of his hat, and generally seemed to be expounding to her as they walked about.

I saw a good deal of Mrs. Strong, both because she had taken a liking for me on the morning of my introduction to the Doctor, and was always afterwards kind to me, and interested in me; and because she was very fond of Agnes, and was often backwards and forwards at our house. There was a curious constraint between her and Mr. Wickfield, I thought (of whom she seemed to be afraid), that never wore off. When she came there of an evening, she always shrunk from accepting his escort home, and ran away with me instead. And sometimes, as we were running gaily across the Cathedral yard together, expecting to meet nobody, we would meet Mr. Jack Maldon, who was always surprised to see us.

Mrs. Strong's mama was a lady I took great delight in. Her name was Mrs. Markleham; but our boys used to call her the Old Soldier, on account of her generalship, and the skill with which she marshalled great forces of relations against the Doctor. She was a little, sharp-eyed woman, who used to wear, when she was dressed, one unchangeable cap, ornamented with some artificial flowers, and two artificial butterflies supposed to be hovering above the flowers. There was a superstition among us that this cap had come from France, and could only originate in the workmanship of that ingenious nation: but all I certainly know about it, is, that it always made its appearance of an evening, wheresoever Mrs. Markleham made HER appearance; that it was carried about to friendly meetings in a Hindoo basket; that the butterflies had the gift of trembling constantly; and that they improved the shining hours at Doctor Strong's expense, like busy bees.

I observed the Old Soldier—not to adopt the name disrespectfully—to pretty good advantage, on a night which is made memorable to me by something else I shall relate. It was the night of a little party at the Doctor's, which was given on the occasion of Mr. Jack Maldon's departure for India, whither he was going as a cadet, or something of that kind: Mr. Wickfield having at length arranged the business. It happened to be the Doctor's birthday, too. We had had a holiday, had made presents to him in the morning, had made a speech to him through the head-boy, and had cheered him until we were hoarse, and until he had shed tears. And now, in the evening, Mr. Wickfield, Agnes, and I, went to have tea with him in his private capacity.

Mr. Jack Maldon was there, before us. Mrs. Strong, dressed in white, with cherry-coloured ribbons, was playing the piano, when we went in; and he was leaning over her to turn the leaves. The clear red and white of her complexion was not so blooming and flower-like as usual, I thought, when she turned round; but she looked very pretty, Wonderfully pretty.

'I have forgotten, Doctor,' said Mrs. Strong's mama, when we were seated, 'to pay you the compliments of the day—though they are, as you may suppose, very far from being mere compliments in my case. Allow me to wish you many happy returns.'

'I thank you, ma'am,' replied the Doctor.

'Many, many, many, happy returns,' said the Old Soldier. 'Not only for your own sake, but for Annie's, and John Maldon's, and many other people's. It seems but yesterday to me, John, when you were a little creature, a head shorter than Master Copperfield, making baby love to Annie behind the gooseberry bushes in the back-garden.'

'My dear mama,' said Mrs. Strong, 'never mind that now.'

'Annie, don't be absurd,' returned her mother. 'If you are to blush to hear of such things now you are an old married woman, when are you not to blush to hear of them?'

'Old?' exclaimed Mr. Jack Maldon. 'Annie? Come!'

'Yes, John,' returned the Soldier. 'Virtually, an old married woman. Although not old by years—for when did you ever hear me say, or who has ever heard me say, that a girl of twenty was old by years!—your cousin is the wife of the Doctor, and, as such, what I have described her. It is well for you, John, that your cousin is the wife of the Doctor. You have found in him an influential and kind friend, who will be kinder yet, I venture to predict, if you deserve it. I have no false pride. I never hesitate to admit, frankly, that there are some members of our family who want a friend. You were one yourself, before your cousin's influence raised up one for you.'

The Doctor, in the goodness of his heart, waved his hand as if to make light of it, and save Mr. Jack Maldon from any further reminder. But Mrs. Markleham changed her chair for one next the Doctor's, and putting her fan on his coat-sleeve, said:

'No, really, my dear Doctor, you must excuse me if I appear to dwell on this rather, because I feel so very strongly. I call it quite my monomania, it is such a subject of mine. You are a blessing to us. You really are a Boon, you know.'

'Nonsense, nonsense,' said the Doctor.

'No, no, I beg your pardon,' retorted the Old Soldier. 'With nobody present, but our dear and confidential friend Mr. Wickfield, I cannot consent to be put down. I shall begin to assert the privileges of a mother-in-law, if you go on like that, and scold you. I am perfectly honest and outspoken. What I am saying, is what I said when you first overpowered me with surprise—you remember how surprised I was?—by proposing for Annie. Not that there was anything so very much out of the way, in the mere fact of the proposal—it would be ridiculous to say that!—but because, you having known her poor father, and having known her from a baby six months old, I hadn't thought of you in such a light at all, or indeed as a marrying man in any way,—simply that, you know.'

'Aye, aye,' returned the Doctor, good-humouredly. 'Never mind.'

'But I DO mind,' said the Old Soldier, laying her fan upon his lips. 'I mind very much. I recall these things that I may be contradicted if I am wrong. Well! Then I spoke to Annie, and I told her what had happened. I said, "My dear, here's Doctor Strong has positively been and made you the subject of a handsome declaration and an offer." Did I press it in the least? No. I said, "Now, Annie, tell me the truth this moment; is your heart free?" "Mama," she said crying, "I am extremely young"—which was perfectly true—"and I hardly know if I have a heart at all." "Then, my dear," I said, "you may rely upon it, it's free. At all events, my love," said I, "Doctor Strong is in an agitated state of mind, and must be answered. He cannot be kept in his present state of suspense." "Mama," said Annie, still crying, "would he be unhappy without me? If he would, I honour and respect him so much, that I think I will have him." So it was settled. And then, and not till then, I said to Annie, "Annie, Doctor Strong will not only be your husband, but he will represent your late father: he will represent the head of our family, he will represent the wisdom and station, and I may say the means, of our family; and will be, in short, a Boon to it." I used the word at the time, and I have used it again, today. If I have any merit it is consistency.'

The daughter had sat quite silent and still during this speech, with her eyes fixed on the ground; her cousin standing near her, and looking on the ground too. She now said very softly, in a trembling voice:

'Mama, I hope you have finished?' 'No, my dear Annie,' returned the Old Soldier, 'I have not quite finished. Since you ask me, my love, I reply that I have not. I complain that you really are a little unnatural towards your own family; and, as it is of no use complaining to you. I mean to complain to your husband. Now, my dear Doctor, do look at that silly wife of yours.'

As the Doctor turned his kind face, with its smile of simplicity and gentleness, towards her, she drooped her head more. I noticed that Mr. Wickfield looked at her steadily.

'When I happened to say to that naughty thing, the other day,' pursued her mother, shaking her head and her fan at her, playfully, 'that there was a family circumstance she might mention to you—indeed, I think, was bound to mention—she said, that to mention it was to ask a favour; and that, as you were too generous, and as for her to ask was always to have, she wouldn't.'

'Annie, my dear,' said the Doctor. 'That was wrong. It robbed me of a pleasure.'

'Almost the very words I said to her!' exclaimed her mother. 'Now really, another time, when I know what she would tell you but for this reason, and won't, I have a great mind, my dear Doctor, to tell you myself.'

'I shall be glad if you will,' returned the Doctor.

'Shall I?'

'Certainly.'

'Well, then, I will!' said the Old Soldier. 'That's a bargain.' And having, I suppose, carried her point, she tapped the Doctor's hand several times with her fan (which she kissed first), and returned triumphantly to her former station.

Some more company coming in, among whom were the two masters and Adams, the talk became general; and it naturally turned on Mr. Jack Maldon, and his voyage, and the country he was going to, and his various plans and prospects. He was to leave that night, after supper, in a post-chaise, for Gravesend; where the ship, in which he was to make the voyage, lay; and was to be gone—unless he came home on leave, or for his health—I don't know how many years. I recollect it was settled by general consent that India was quite a misrepresented country, and had nothing objectionable in it, but a tiger or two, and a little heat in the warm part of the day. For my own part, I looked on Mr. Jack Maldon as a modern Sindbad, and pictured him the bosom friend of all the Rajahs in the East, sitting under canopies, smoking curly golden pipes—a mile long, if they could be straightened out.

Mrs. Strong was a very pretty singer: as I knew, who often heard her singing by herself. But, whether she was afraid of singing before people, or was out of voice that evening, it was certain that she couldn't sing at all. She tried a duet, once, with her cousin Maldon, but could not so much as begin; and afterwards, when she tried to sing by herself, although she began sweetly, her voice died away on a sudden, and left her quite distressed, with her head hanging down over the keys. The good Doctor said she was nervous, and, to relieve her, proposed a round game at cards; of which he knew as much as of the art of playing the trombone. But I remarked that the Old Soldier took him into custody directly, for her partner; and instructed him, as the first preliminary of initiation, to give her all the silver he had in his pocket.

We had a merry game, not made the less merry by the Doctor's mistakes, of which he committed an innumerable quantity, in spite of the watchfulness of the butterflies, and to their great aggravation. Mrs. Strong had declined to play, on the ground of not feeling very well; and her cousin

Maldon had excused himself because he had some packing to do. When he had done it, however, he returned, and they sat together, talking, on the sofa. From time to time she came and looked over the Doctor's hand, and told him what to play. She was very pale, as she bent over him, and I thought her finger trembled as she pointed out the cards; but the Doctor was quite happy in her attention, and took no notice of this, if it were so.

At supper, we were hardly so gay. Everyone appeared to feel that a parting of that sort was an awkward thing, and that the nearer it approached, the more awkward it was. Mr. Jack Maldon tried to be very talkative, but was not at his ease, and made matters worse. And they were not improved, as it appeared to me, by the Old Soldier: who continually recalled passages of Mr. Jack Maldon's youth.

The Doctor, however, who felt, I am sure, that he was making everybody happy, was well pleased, and had no suspicion but that we were all at the utmost height of enjoyment.

'Annie, my dear,' said he, looking at his watch, and filling his glass, 'it is past your cousin jack's time, and we must not detain him, since time and tide—both concerned in this case—wait for no man. Mr. Jack Maldon, you have a long voyage, and a strange country, before you; but many men have had both, and many men will have both, to the end of time. The winds you are going to tempt, have wafted thousands upon thousands to fortune, and brought thousands upon thousands happily back.'

'It's an affecting thing,' said Mrs. Markleham—'however it's viewed, it's affecting, to see a fine young man one has known from an infant, going away to the other end of the world, leaving all he knows behind, and not knowing what's before him. A young man really well deserves constant support and patronage,' looking at the Doctor, 'who makes such sacrifices.'

'Time will go fast with you, Mr. Jack Maldon,' pursued the Doctor, 'and fast with all of us. Some of us can hardly expect, perhaps, in the natural course of things, to greet you on your return. The next best thing is to hope to do it, and that's my case. I shall not weary you with good advice. You have long had a good model before you, in your cousin Annie. Imitate her virtues as nearly as you can.'

Mrs. Markleham fanned herself, and shook her head.

'Farewell, Mr. Jack,' said the Doctor, standing up; on which we all stood up. 'A prosperous voyage out, a thriving career abroad, and a happy return home!'

We all drank the toast, and all shook hands with Mr. Jack Maldon; after which he hastily took leave of the ladies who were there, and hurried to the door, where he was received, as he got into the chaise, with a tremendous broadside of cheers discharged by our boys, who had assembled on the lawn for the purpose. Running in among them to swell the ranks, I was very near the chaise when it rolled away; and I had a lively impression made upon me, in the midst of the noise and dust, of having seen Mr. Jack Maldon rattle past with an agitated face, and something cherry-coloured in his hand.

After another broadside for the Doctor, and another for the Doctor's wife, the boys dispersed, and I went back into the house, where I found the guests all standing in a group about the Doctor, discussing how Mr. Jack Maldon had gone away, and how he had borne it, and how he had felt it, and all the rest of it. In the midst of these remarks, Mrs. Markleham cried: 'Where's Annie?'

No Annie was there; and when they called to her, no Annie replied. But all pressing out of the room, in a crowd, to see what was the matter, we found her lying on the hall floor. There was great alarm at first, until it was found that she was in a swoon, and that the swoon was yielding to the usual means of recovery; when the Doctor, who had lifted her head upon his knee, put her curls aside with his hand, and said, looking around:

'Poor Annie! She's so faithful and tender-hearted! It's the parting from her old playfellow and friend—her favourite cousin—that has done this. Ah! It's a pity! I am very sorry!'

When she opened her eyes, and saw where she was, and that we were all standing about her, she arose with assistance: turning her head, as she did so, to lay it on the Doctor's shoulder—or to hide it, I don't know which. We went into the drawing-room, to leave her with the Doctor and her mother; but she said, it seemed, that she was better than she had been since morning, and that she would rather be brought among us; so they brought her in, looking very white and weak, I thought, and sat her on a sofa.

'Annie, my dear,' said her mother, doing something to her dress. 'See here! You have lost a bow. Will anybody be so good as find a ribbon; a cherry-coloured ribbon?'

It was the one she had worn at her bosom. We all looked for it; I myself looked everywhere, I am certain—but nobody could find it.

'Do you recollect where you had it last, Annie?' said her mother.

I wondered how I could have thought she looked white, or anything but burning red, when she answered that she had had it safe, a little while ago, she thought, but it was not worth looking for.

Nevertheless, it was looked for again, and still not found. She entreated that there might be no more searching; but it was still sought for, in a desultory way, until she was quite well, and the company took their departure.

We walked very slowly home, Mr. Wickfield, Agnes, and I—Agnes and I admiring the moonlight, and Mr. Wickfield scarcely raising his eyes from the ground. When we, at last, reached our own door, Agnes discovered that she had left her little reticule behind. Delighted to be of any service to her, I ran back to fetch it.

I went into the supper-room where it had been left, which was deserted and dark. But a door of communication between that and the Doctor's study, where there was a light, being open, I passed on there, to say what I wanted, and to get a candle.

The Doctor was sitting in his easy-chair by the fireside, and his young wife was on a stool at his feet. The Doctor, with a complacent smile, was reading aloud some manuscript explanation or statement of a theory out of that interminable Dictionary, and she was looking up at him. But with such a face as I never saw. It was so beautiful in its form, it was so ashy pale, it was so fixed in its abstraction, it was so full of a wild, sleep-walking, dreamy horror of I don't know what. The eyes were wide open, and her brown hair fell in two rich clusters on her shoulders, and on her white dress, disordered by the want of the lost ribbon. Distinctly as I recollect her look, I cannot say of what it was expressive, I cannot even say of what it is expressive to me now, rising again before my older judgement. Penitence, humiliation, shame, pride, love, and trustfulness—I see them all; and in them all, I see that horror of I don't know what.

My entrance, and my saying what I wanted, roused her. It disturbed the Doctor too, for when I went back to replace the candle I had taken from the table, he was patting her head, in his fatherly way, and saying he was a merciless drone to let her tempt him into reading on; and he would have her go to bed.

But she asked him, in a rapid, urgent manner, to let her stay—to let her feel assured (I heard her murmur some broken words to this effect) that she was in his confidence that night. And, as she turned again towards him, after glancing at me as I left the room and went out at the door, I saw her cross her hands upon his knee, and look up at him with the same face, something quieted, as he resumed his reading.

It made a great impression on me, and I remembered it a long time afterwards; as I shall have occasion to narrate when the time comes.

CHAPTER 17. SOMEBODY TURNS UP

It has not occurred to me to mention Peggotty since I ran away; but, of course, I wrote her a letter almost as soon as I was housed at Dover, and another, and a longer letter, containing all particulars fully related, when my aunt took me formally under her protection. On my being settled at Doctor Strong's I wrote to her again, detailing my happy condition and prospects. I never could have derived anything like the pleasure from spending the money Mr. Dick had given me, that I felt in sending a gold half-guinea to Peggotty, per post, enclosed in this last letter, to discharge the sum I had borrowed of her: in which epistle, not before, I mentioned about the young man with the donkey-cart.

To these communications Peggotty replied as promptly, if not as concisely, as a merchant's clerk. Her utmost powers of expression (which were certainly not great in ink) were exhausted in the attempt to write what she felt on the subject of my journey. Four sides of incoherent and interjectional beginnings of sentences, that had no end, except blots, were inadequate to afford her any relief. But the blots were more expressive to me than the best composition; for they showed me that Peggotty had been crying all over the paper, and what could I have desired more?

I made out, without much difficulty, that she could not take quite kindly to my aunt yet. The notice was too short after so long a prepossession the other way. We never knew a person, she wrote; but to think that Miss Betsey should seem to be so different from what she had been thought to be, was a Moral!—that was her word. She was evidently still afraid of Miss Betsey, for she sent her grateful duty to her but timidly; and she was evidently afraid of me, too, and entertained the probability of my running away again soon: if I might judge from the repeated hints she threw out, that the coach-fare to Yarmouth was always to be had of her for the asking.

She gave me one piece of intelligence which affected me very much, namely, that there had been a sale of the furniture at our old home, and that Mr. and Miss Murdstone were gone away, and the house was shut up, to be let or sold. God knows I had no part in it while they remained there, but it pained me to think of the dear old place as altogether abandoned; of the weeds growing tall in the garden, and the fallen leaves lying thick and wet upon the paths. I imagined how the winds of winter would howl round it, how the cold rain would beat upon the window-glass, how the moon would make ghosts on the walls of the empty rooms, watching their solitude all night. I thought afresh of the grave in the churchyard, underneath the tree: and it seemed as if the house were dead too, now, and all connected with my father and mother were faded away.

There was no other news in Peggotty's letters. Mr. Barkis was an excellent husband, she said, though still a little near; but we all had our faults, and she had plenty (though I am sure I don't know what they were); and he sent his duty, and my little bedroom was always ready for me. Mr. Peggotty was well, and Ham was well, and Mrs.. Gummidge was but poorly, and little Em'ly wouldn't send her love, but said that Peggotty might send it, if she liked.

All this intelligence I dutifully imparted to my aunt, only reserving to myself the mention of little Em'ly, to whom I instinctively felt that she would not very tenderly incline. While I was yet new at Doctor Strong's, she made several excursions over to Canterbury to see me, and always at unseasonable hours: with the view, I suppose, of taking me by surprise. But, finding me well employed, and bearing a good character, and hearing on all hands that I rose fast in the school, she soon discontinued these visits. I saw her on a Saturday, every third or fourth week, when I went over to Dover for a treat; and I saw Mr. Dick every alternate Wednesday, when he arrived by stage-coach at noon, to stay until next morning.

On these occasions Mr. Dick never travelled without a leathern writing-desk, containing a supply of stationery and the Memorial; in relation to which document he had a notion that time was beginning to press now, and that it really must be got out of hand.

Mr. Dick was very partial to gingerbread. To render his visits the more agreeable, my aunt had instructed me to open a credit for him at a cake shop, which was hampered with the stipulation that he should not be served with more than one shilling's-worth in the course of any one day. This, and the reference of all his little bills at the county inn where he slept, to my aunt, before they were paid, induced me to suspect that he was only allowed to rattle his money, and not to spend it. I found on further investigation that this was so, or at least there was an agreement between him and my aunt that he should account to her for all his disbursements. As he had no idea of deceiving her, and always desired to please her, he was thus made chary of launching into expense. On this point, as well as on all other possible points, Mr. Dick was convinced that my aunt was the wisest and most wonderful of women; as he repeatedly told me with infinite secrecy, and always in a whisper.

'Trotwood,' said Mr. Dick, with an air of mystery, after imparting this confidence to me, one Wednesday; 'who's the man that hides near our house and frightens her?'

'Frightens my aunt, sir?'

Mr. Dick nodded. 'I thought nothing would have frightened her,' he said, 'for she's—' here he whispered softly, 'don't mention it—the wisest and most wonderful of women.' Having said which, he drew back, to observe the effect which this description of her made upon me.

'The first time he came,' said Mr. Dick, 'was—let me see—sixteen hundred and forty-nine was the date of King Charles's execution. I think you said sixteen hundred and forty-nine?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I don't know how it can be,' said Mr. Dick, sorely puzzled and shaking his head. 'I don't think I am as old as that.'

'Was it in that year that the man appeared, sir?' I asked.

'Why, really' said Mr. Dick, 'I don't see how it can have been in that year, Trotwood. Did you get that date out of history?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I suppose history never lies, does it?' said Mr. Dick, with a gleam of hope.

'Oh dear, no, sir!' I replied, most decisively. I was ingenuous and young, and I thought so.

'I can't make it out,' said Mr. Dick, shaking his head. 'There's something wrong, somewhere. However, it was very soon after the mistake was made of putting some of the trouble out of King Charles's head into my head, that the man first came. I was walking out with Miss Trotwood after tea, just at dark, and there he was, close to our house.'

'Walking about?' I inquired.

'Walking about?' repeated Mr. Dick. 'Let me see, I must recollect a bit. N-no, no; he was not walking about.'

I asked, as the shortest way to get at it, what he WAS doing.

'Well, he wasn't there at all,' said Mr. Dick, 'until he came up behind her, and whispered. Then she turned round and fainted, and I stood still and looked at him, and he walked away; but that he should have been hiding ever since (in the ground or somewhere), is the most extraordinary thing!'

'HAS he been hiding ever since?' I asked.

'To be sure he has,' retorted Mr. Dick, nodding his head gravely. 'Never came out, till last night! We were walking last night, and he came up behind her again, and I knew him again.'

'And did he frighten my aunt again?'

'All of a shiver,' said Mr. Dick, counterfeiting that affection and making his teeth chatter. 'Held by the palings. Cried. But, Trotwood, come here,' getting me close to him, that he might whisper very softly; 'why did she give him money, boy, in the moonlight?'

'He was a beggar, perhaps.'

Mr. Dick shook his head, as utterly renouncing the suggestion; and having replied a great many times, and with great confidence, 'No beggar, no beggar, no beggar, sir!' went on to say, that from his window he had afterwards, and late at night, seen my aunt give this person money outside the garden rails in the moonlight, who then slunk away—into the ground again, as he thought probable—and was seen no more: while my aunt came hurriedly and secretly back into the house, and had, even that morning, been quite different from her usual self; which preyed on Mr. Dick's mind.

I had not the least belief, in the outset of this story, that the unknown was anything but a delusion of Mr. Dick's, and one of the line of that ill-fated Prince who occasioned him so much difficulty; but after some reflection I began to entertain the question whether an attempt, or threat of an attempt, might have been twice made to take poor Mr. Dick himself from under my aunt's protection, and whether my aunt, the strength of whose kind feeling towards him I knew from herself, might have been induced to pay a price for his peace and quiet. As I was already much attached to Mr. Dick, and very solicitous for his welfare, my fears favoured this supposition; and for a long time his Wednesday hardly ever came round, without my entertaining a misgiving that he would not be on the coach-box as usual. There he always appeared, however, grey-headed, laughing, and happy; and he never had anything more to tell of the man who could frighten my aunt.

These Wednesdays were the happiest days of Mr. Dick's life; they were far from being the least happy of mine. He soon became known to every boy in the school; and though he never took an active part in any game but kite-flying, was as deeply interested in all our sports as anyone among us. How often have I seen him, intent upon a match at marbles or pegtop, looking on with a face of unutterable interest, and hardly breathing at the critical times! How often, at hare and hounds, have I seen him mounted on a little knoll, cheering the whole field on to action, and waving his hat above his grey head, oblivious of King Charles the Martyr's head, and all belonging to it! How many a summer hour have I known to be but blissful minutes to him in the cricket-field! How many winter days have I seen him, standing blue-nosed, in the snow and east wind, looking at the boys going down the long slide, and clapping his worsted gloves in rapture!

He was an universal favourite, and his ingenuity in little things was transcendent. He could cut oranges into such devices as none of us had an idea of. He could make a boat out of anything, from a skewer upwards. He could turn cramp-bones into chessmen; fashion Roman chariots from old court cards; make spoked wheels out of cotton reels, and bird-cages of old wire. But he was greatest of all, perhaps, in the articles of string and straw; with which we were all persuaded he could do anything that could be done by hands.

Mr. Dick's renown was not long confined to us. After a few Wednesdays, Doctor Strong himself made some inquiries of me about him, and I told him all my aunt had told me; which interested the Doctor so much that he requested, on the occasion of his next visit, to be presented to him. This ceremony I performed; and the Doctor begging Mr. Dick, whensoever he should not find me at the coach office, to come on there, and rest himself until our morning's work was over, it soon passed into a custom for Mr. Dick to come on as a matter of course, and, if we were a little late, as often happened on a Wednesday, to walk about the courtyard, waiting for me. Here he made the acquaintance of the Doctor's beautiful young wife (paler than formerly, all this time; more rarely seen by me or anyone, I think; and not so gay, but not less beautiful), and so became more and more familiar by degrees, until, at last, he would come into the school and wait. He always sat in a particular corner, on a particular stool, which was called 'Dick', after him; here he would sit, with his grey head bent forward, attentively listening to whatever might be going on, with a profound veneration for the learning he had never been able to acquire.

This veneration Mr. Dick extended to the Doctor, whom he thought the most subtle and accomplished philosopher of any age. It was long before

Mr. Dick ever spoke to him otherwise than bareheaded; and even when he and the Doctor had struck up quite a friendship, and would walk together by the hour, on that side of the courtyard which was known among us as The Doctor's Walk, Mr. Dick would pull off his hat at intervals to show his respect for wisdom and knowledge. How it ever came about that the Doctor began to read out scraps of the famous Dictionary, in these walks, I never knew; perhaps he felt it all the same, at first, as reading to himself. However, it passed into a custom too; and Mr. Dick, listening with a face shining with pride and pleasure, in his heart of hearts believed the Dictionary to be the most delightful book in the world.

As I think of them going up and down before those schoolroom windows—the Doctor reading with his complacent smile, an occasional flourish of the manuscript, or grave motion of his head; and Mr. Dick listening, enchained by interest, with his poor wits calmly wandering God knows where, upon the wings of hard words—I think of it as one of the pleasantest things, in a quiet way, that I have ever seen. I feel as if they might go walking to and fro for ever, and the world might somehow be the better for it—as if a thousand things it makes a noise about, were not one half so good for it, or me.

Agnes was one of Mr. Dick's friends, very soon; and in often coming to the house, he made acquaintance with Uriah. The friendship between himself and me increased continually, and it was maintained on this odd footing: that, while Mr. Dick came professedly to look after me as my guardian, he always consulted me in any little matter of doubt that arose, and invariably guided himself by my advice; not only having a high respect for my native sagacity, but considering that I inherited a good deal from my aunt.

One Thursday morning, when I was about to walk with Mr. Dick from the hotel to the coach office before going back to school (for we had an hour's school before breakfast), I met Uriah in the street, who reminded me of the promise I had made to take tea with himself and his mother: adding, with a writhe, 'But I didn't expect you to keep it, Master Copperfield, we're so very umble.'

I really had not yet been able to make up my mind whether I liked Uriah or detested him; and I was very doubtful about it still, as I stood looking him in the face in the street. But I felt it quite an affront to be supposed proud, and said I only wanted to be asked.

'Oh, if that's all, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah, 'and it really isn't our umbleness that prevents you, will you come this evening? But if it is our umbleness, I hope you won't mind owning to it, Master Copperfield; for we are well aware of our condition.'

I said I would mention it to Mr. Wickfield, and if he approved, as I had no doubt he would, I would come with pleasure. So, at six o'clock that evening, which was one of the early office evenings, I announced myself as ready, to Uriah.

'Mother will be proud, indeed,' he said, as we walked away together. 'Or she would be proud, if it wasn't sinful, Master Copperfield.'

'Yet you didn't mind supposing I was proud this morning,' I returned.

'Oh dear, no, Master Copperfield!' returned Uriah. 'Oh, believe me, no! Such a thought never came into my head! I shouldn't have deemed it at all proud if you had thought US too umble for you. Because we are so very umble.'

'Have you been studying much law lately?' I asked, to change the subject.

'Oh, Master Copperfield,' he said, with an air of self-denial, 'my reading is hardly to be called study. I have passed an hour or two in the evening, sometimes, with Mr. Tidd.'

'Rather hard, I suppose?' said I. 'He is hard to me sometimes,' returned Uriah. 'But I don't know what he might be to a gifted person.'

After beating a little tune on his chin as he walked on, with the two forefingers of his skeleton right hand, he added:

'There are expressions, you see, Master Copperfield—Latin words and terms—in Mr. Tidd, that are trying to a reader of my umble attainments.'

'Would you like to be taught Latin?' I said briskly. 'I will teach it you with pleasure, as I learn it.'

'Oh, thank you, Master Copperfield,' he answered, shaking his head. 'I am sure it's very kind of you to make the offer, but I am much too umble to accept it.'

'What nonsense, Uriah!'

'Oh, indeed you must excuse me, Master Copperfield! I am greatly obliged, and I should like it of all things, I assure you; but I am far too umble. There are people enough to tread upon me in my lowly state, without my doing outrage to their feelings by possessing learning. Learning ain't for me. A person like myself had better not aspire. If he is to get on in life, he must get on umbly, Master Copperfield!'

I never saw his mouth so wide, or the creases in his cheeks so deep, as when he delivered himself of these sentiments: shaking his head all the time, and writhing modestly.

'I think you are wrong, Uriah,' I said. 'I dare say there are several things that I could teach you, if you would like to learn them.'

'Oh, I don't doubt that, Master Copperfield,' he answered; 'not in the least. But not being umble yourself, you don't judge well, perhaps, for them that are. I won't provoke my betters with knowledge, thank you. I'm much too umble. Here is my umble dwelling, Master Copperfield!'

We entered a low, old-fashioned room, walked straight into from the street, and found there Mrs. Heep, who was the dead image of Uriah, only short. She received me with the utmost humility, and apologized to me for giving her son a kiss, observing that, lowly as they were, they had their natural affections, which they hoped would give no offence to anyone. It was a perfectly decent room, half parlour and half kitchen, but not at all a snug room. The tea-things were set upon the table, and the kettle was boiling on the hob. There was a chest of drawers with an escritoire top, for Uriah to read or write at of an evening; there was Uriah's blue bag lying down and vomiting papers; there was a company of Uriah's books commanded by Mr. Tidd; there was a corner cupboard: and there were the usual articles of furniture. I don't remember that any individual object had a bare, pinched, spare look; but I do remember that the whole place had.

It was perhaps a part of Mrs. Heep's humility, that she still wore weeds. Notwithstanding the lapse of time that had occurred since Mr. Heep's decease, she still wore weeds. I think there was some compromise in the cap; but otherwise she was as weedy as in the early days of her mourning.

'This is a day to be remembered, my Uriah, I am sure,' said Mrs. Heep, making the tea, 'when Master Copperfield pays us a visit.'

'I said you'd think so, mother,' said Uriah.

'If I could have wished father to remain among us for any reason,' said Mrs. Heep, 'it would have been, that he might have known his company this afternoon.'

I felt embarrassed by these compliments; but I was sensible, too, of being entertained as an honoured guest, and I thought Mrs. Heep an agreeable woman.

'My Uriah,' said Mrs. Heep, 'has looked forward to this, sir, a long while. He had his fears that our umbleness stood in the way, and I joined in them myself. Umble we are, umble we have been, umble we shall ever be,' said Mrs. Heep.

'I am sure you have no occasion to be so, ma'am,' I said, 'unless you like.'

'Thank you, sir,' retorted Mrs. Heep. 'We know our station and are thankful in it.'

I found that Mrs. Heep gradually got nearer to me, and that Uriah gradually got opposite to me, and that they respectfully plied me with the choicest of the eatables on the table. There was nothing particularly choice there, to be sure; but I took the will for the deed, and felt that they were very attentive. Presently they began to talk about aunts, and then I told them about mine; and about fathers and mothers, and then I told them about mine; and then Mrs. Heep began to talk about fathers-in-law, and then I began to tell her about mine—but stopped, because my aunt had advised me to observe a silence on that subject. A tender young cork, however, would have had no more chance against a pair of corkscrews, or a tender young tooth against a pair of dentists, or a little shuttlecock against two battledores, than I had against Uriah and Mrs. Heep. They did just what they liked with me; and wormed things out of me that I had no desire to tell, with a certainty I blush to think of, the more especially, as in my juvenile frankness, I took some credit to myself for being so confidential and felt that I was quite the patron of my two respectful entertainers.

They were very fond of one another: that was certain. I take it, that had its effect upon me, as a touch of nature; but the skill with which the one followed up whatever the other said, was a touch of art which I was still less proof against. When there was nothing more to be got out of me about myself (for on the Murdstone and Grinby life, and on my journey, I was dumb), they began about Mr. Wickfield and Agnes. Uriah threw the ball to Mrs. Heep, Mrs. Heep caught it and threw it back to Uriah, Uriah kept it up a little while, then sent it back to Mrs. Heep, and so they went on tossing it about until I had no idea who had got it, and was quite bewildered. The ball itself was always changing too. Now it was Mr. Wickfield, now Agnes, now the excellence of Mr. Wickfield, now my admiration of Agnes; now the extent of Mr. Wickfield's business and resources, now our domestic life after dinner; now, the wine that Mr. Wickfield took, the reason why he took it, and the pity that it was he took so much; now one thing, now another, then everything at once; and all the time, without appearing to speak very often, or to do anything but sometimes encourage them a little, for fear they should be overcome by their humility and the honour of my company, I found myself perpetually letting out something or other that I had no business to let out and seeing the effect of it in the twinkling of Uriah's dinted nostrils.

I had begun to be a little uncomfortable, and to wish myself well out of the visit, when a figure coming down the street passed the door—it stood open to air the room, which was warm, the weather being close for the time of year—came back again, looked in, and walked in, exclaiming loudly, 'Copperfield! Is it possible?'

It was Mr. Micawber! It was Mr. Micawber, with his eye-glass, and his walking-stick, and his shirt-collar, and his genteel air, and the condescending roll in his voice, all complete!

'My dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, putting out his hand, 'this is indeed a meeting which is calculated to impress the mind with a sense of the instability and uncertainty of all human—in short, it is a most extraordinary meeting. Walking along the street, reflecting upon the probability of something turning up (of which I am at present rather sanguine), I find a young but valued friend turn up, who is connected with the most eventful period of my life; I may say, with the turning-point of my existence. Copperfield, my dear fellow, how do you do?'

I cannot say—I really cannot say—that I was glad to see Mr. Micawber there; but I was glad to see him too, and shook hands with him, heartily, inquiring how Mrs. Micawber was.

'Thank you,' said Mr. Micawber, waving his hand as of old, and settling his chin in his shirt-collar. 'She is tolerably convalescent. The twins no longer derive their sustenance from Nature's founts—in short,' said Mr. Micawber, in one of his bursts of confidence, 'they are weaned—and Mrs. Micawber is, at present, my travelling companion. She will be rejoiced, Copperfield, to renew her acquaintance with one who has proved himself in all respects a worthy minister at the sacred altar of friendship.'

I said I should be delighted to see her.

'You are very good,' said Mr. Micawber.

Mr. Micawber then smiled, settled his chin again, and looked about him.

'I have discovered my friend Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber genteelly, and without addressing himself particularly to anyone, 'not in solitude, but partaking of a social meal in company with a widow lady, and one who is apparently her offspring—in short,' said Mr. Micawber, in another of his bursts of confidence, 'her son. I shall esteem it an honour to be presented.'

I could do no less, under these circumstances, than make Mr. Micawber known to Uriah Heep and his mother; which I accordingly did. As they abased themselves before him, Mr. Micawber took a seat, and waved his hand in his most courtly manner.

'Any friend of my friend Copperfield's,' said Mr. Micawber, 'has a personal claim upon myself.'

'We are too umble, sir,' said Mrs. Heep, 'my son and me, to be the friends of Master Copperfield. He has been so good as take his tea with us, and we are thankful to him for his company, also to you, sir, for your notice.'

'Ma'am,' returned Mr. Micawber, with a bow, 'you are very obliging: and what are you doing, Copperfield? Still in the wine trade?'

I was excessively anxious to get Mr. Micawber away; and replied, with my hat in my hand, and a very red face, I have no doubt, that I was a pupil at Doctor Strong's.

'A pupil?' said Mr. Micawber, raising his eyebrows. 'I am extremely happy to hear it. Although a mind like my friend Copperfield's'—to Uriah and Mrs. Heep—'does not require that cultivation which, without his knowledge of men and things, it would require, still it is a rich soil teeming with latent vegetation—in short,' said Mr. Micawber, smiling, in another burst of confidence, 'it is an intellect capable of getting up the classics to any extent.'

Uriah, with his long hands slowly twining over one another, made a ghastly writhe from the waist upwards, to express his concurrence in this estimation of me.

'Shall we go and see Mrs. Micawber, sir?' I said, to get Mr. Micawber away.

'If you will do her that favour, Copperfield,' replied Mr. Micawber, rising. 'I have no scruple in saying, in the presence of our friends here, that I am a man who has, for some years, contended against the pressure of pecuniary difficulties.' I knew he was certain to say something of this kind; he always would be so boastful about his difficulties. 'Sometimes I have risen superior to my difficulties. Sometimes my difficulties have—in short, have floored me. There have been times when I have administered a succession of facers to them; there have been times when they have been too many for me, and I have given in, and said to Mrs. Micawber, in the words of Cato, "Plato, thou reasonest well. It's all up now. I can show fight no more." But at no time of my life,' said Mr. Micawber, 'have I enjoyed a higher degree of satisfaction than in pouring my griefs (if I may describe difficulties, chiefly arising out of warrants of attorney and promissory notes at two and four months, by that word) into the bosom of my friend Copperfield.'

Mr. Micawber closed this handsome tribute by saying, 'Mr. Heep! Good evening. Mrs. Heep! Your servant,' and then walking out with me in his most fashionable manner, making a good deal of noise on the pavement with his shoes, and humming a tune as we went.

It was a little inn where Mr. Micawber put up, and he occupied a little room in it, partitioned off from the commercial room, and strongly flavoured with tobacco-smoke. I think it was over the kitchen, because a warm greasy smell appeared to come up through the chinks in the floor, and there was a flabby perspiration on the walls. I know it was near the bar, on account of the smell of spirits and jingling of glasses. Here, recumbent on a small sofa, underneath a picture of a race-horse, with her head close to the fire, and her feet pushing the mustard off the dumb-waiter at the other end of the room, was Mrs. Micawber, to whom Mr. Micawber entered first, saying, 'My dear, allow me to introduce to you a pupil of Doctor Strong's.'

I noticed, by the by, that although Mr. Micawber was just as much confused as ever about my age and standing, he always remembered, as a genteel thing, that I was a pupil of Doctor Strong's.

Mrs. Micawber was amazed, but very glad to see me. I was very glad to see her too, and, after an affectionate greeting on both sides, sat down on the small sofa near her.

'My dear,' said Mr. Micawber, 'if you will mention to Copperfield what our present position is, which I have no doubt he will like to know, I will go and look at the paper the while, and see whether anything turns up among the advertisements.'

'I thought you were at Plymouth, ma'am,' I said to Mrs. Micawber, as he went out.

'My dear Master Copperfield,' she replied, 'we went to Plymouth.'

'To be on the spot,' I hinted.

'Just so,' said Mrs. Micawber. 'To be on the spot. But, the truth is, talent is not wanted in the Custom House. The local influence of my family was quite unavailing to obtain any employment in that department, for a man of Mr. Micawber's abilities. They would rather NOT have a man of Mr. Micawber's abilities. He would only show the deficiency of the others. Apart from which,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'I will not disguise from you, my dear Master Copperfield, that when that branch of my family which is settled in Plymouth, became aware that Mr. Micawber was accompanied by myself, and by little Wilkins and his sister, and by the twins, they did not receive him with that ardour which he might have expected, being so newly released from captivity. In fact,' said Mrs. Micawber, lowering her voice,—'this is between ourselves—our reception was cool.'

'Dear me!' I said.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Micawber. 'It is truly painful to contemplate mankind in such an aspect, Master Copperfield, but our reception was, decidedly, cool. There is no doubt about it. In fact, that branch of my family which is settled in Plymouth became quite personal to Mr. Micawber, before we had been there a week.'

I said, and thought, that they ought to be ashamed of themselves.

'Still, so it was,' continued Mrs. Micawber. 'Under such circumstances, what could a man of Mr. Micawber's spirit do? But one obvious course was left. To borrow, of that branch of my family, the money to return to London, and to return at any sacrifice.'

'Then you all came back again, ma'am?' I said.

'We all came back again,' replied Mrs. Micawber. 'Since then, I have consulted other branches of my family on the course which it is most expedient for Mr. Micawber to take—for I maintain that he must take some course, Master Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, argumentatively. 'It is clear that a family of six, not including a domestic, cannot live upon air.'

'Certainly, ma'am,' said I.

'The opinion of those other branches of my family,' pursued Mrs. Micawber, 'is, that Mr. Micawber should immediately turn his attention to coals.'

'To what, ma'am?'

'To coals,' said Mrs. Micawber. 'To the coal trade. Mr. Micawber was induced to think, on inquiry, that there might be an opening for a man of his talent in the Medway Coal Trade. Then, as Mr. Micawber very properly said, the first step to be taken clearly was, to come and see the Medway. Which we came and saw. I say "we", Master Copperfield; for I never will,' said Mrs. Micawber with emotion, 'I never will desert Mr. Micawber.'

I murmured my admiration and approbation.

'We came,' repeated Mrs. Micawber, 'and saw the Medway. My opinion of the coal trade on that river is, that it may require talent, but that it certainly requires capital. Talent, Mr. Micawber has; capital, Mr. Micawber has not. We saw, I think, the greater part of the Medway; and that is my individual conclusion. Being so near here, Mr. Micawber was of opinion that it would be rash not to come on, and see the Cathedral. Firstly, on account of its being so well worth seeing, and our never having seen it; and secondly, on account of the great probability of something turning up in a cathedral town. We have been here,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'three days. Nothing has, as yet, turned up; and it may not surprise you, my dear Master Copperfield, so much as it would a stranger, to know that we are at present waiting for a remittance from London, to discharge our pecuniary obligations at this hotel. Until the arrival of that remittance,' said Mrs. Micawber with much feeling, 'I am cut off from my home (I allude to lodgings in Pentonville), from my boy and girl, and from my twins.'

I felt the utmost sympathy for Mr. and Mrs. Micawber in this anxious extremity, and said as much to Mr. Micawber, who now returned: adding that I only wished I had money enough, to lend them the amount they needed. Mr. Micawber's answer expressed the disturbance of his mind. He said, shaking hands with me, 'Copperfield, you are a true friend; but when the worst comes to the worst, no man is without a friend who is possessed of shaving materials.' At this dreadful hint Mrs. Micawber threw her arms round Mr. Micawber's neck and entreated him to be calm. He wept; but so far recovered, almost immediately, as to ring the bell for the waiter, and bespeak a hot kidney pudding and a plate of shrimps for breakfast in the morning.

When I took my leave of them, they both pressed me so much to come and dine before they went away, that I could not refuse. But, as I knew I could not come next day, when I should have a good deal to prepare in the evening, Mr. Micawber arranged that he would call at Doctor Strong's in the course of the morning (having a presentiment that the remittance would arrive by that post), and propose the day after, if it would suit me better.

Accordingly I was called out of school next forenoon, and found Mr. Micawber in the parlour; who had called to say that the dinner would take place as proposed. When I asked him if the remittance had come, he pressed my hand and departed.

As I was looking out of window that same evening, it surprised me, and made me rather uneasy, to see Mr. Micawber and Uriah Heep walk past, arm in arm: Uriah humbly sensible of the honour that was done him, and Mr. Micawber taking a bland delight in extending his patronage to Uriah. But I was still more surprised, when I went to the little hotel next day at the appointed dinner-hour, which was four o'clock, to find, from what Mr. Micawber said, that he had gone home with Uriah, and had drunk brandy-and-water at Mrs. Heep's.

'And I'll tell you what, my dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'your friend Heep is a young fellow who might be attorney-general. If I had known that young man, at the period when my difficulties came to a crisis, all I can say is, that I believe my creditors would have been a great deal better managed than they were.'

I hardly understood how this could have been, seeing that Mr. Micawber had paid them nothing at all as it was; but I did not like to ask. Neither did I like to say, that I hoped he had not been too communicative to Uriah; or to inquire if they had talked much about me. I was afraid of hurting Mr. Micawber's feelings, or, at all events, Mrs. Micawber's, she being very sensitive; but I was uncomfortable about it, too, and often thought about it afterwards.

We had a beautiful little dinner. Quite an elegant dish of fish; the kidney-end of a loin of veal, roasted; fried sausage-meat; a partridge, and a pudding. There was wine, and there was strong ale; and after dinner Mrs. Micawber made us a bowl of hot punch with her own hands.

Mr. Micawber was uncommonly convivial. I never saw him such good company. He made his face shine with the punch, so that it looked as if it had been varnished all over. He got cheerfully sentimental about the town, and proposed success to it; observing that Mrs. Micawber and himself had been made extremely snug and comfortable there and that he never should forget the agreeable hours they had passed in Canterbury. He proposed me afterwards; and he, and Mrs. Micawber, and I, took a review of our past acquaintance, in the course of which we sold the property all over again. Then I proposed Mrs. Micawber: or, at least, said, modestly, 'If you'll allow me, Mrs. Micawber, I shall now have the pleasure of drinking your health, ma'am.' On which Mr. Micawber delivered an eulogium on Mrs. Micawber's character, and said she had ever been his guide, philosopher, and friend, and that he would recommend me, when I came to a marrying time of life, to marry such another woman, if such another woman could be found.

As the punch disappeared, Mr. Micawber became still more friendly and convivial. Mrs. Micawber's spirits becoming elevated, too, we sang 'Auld Lang Syne'. When we came to 'Here's a hand, my trusty frere', we all joined hands round the table; and when we declared we would 'take a right gude Willie Waught', and hadn't the least idea what it meant, we were really affected.

In a word, I never saw anybody so thoroughly jovial as Mr. Micawber was, down to the very last moment of the evening, when I took a hearty farewell of himself and his amiable wife. Consequently, I was not prepared, at seven o'clock next morning, to receive the following communication, dated half past nine in the evening; a quarter of an hour after I had left him:—

'My DEAR YOUNG FRIEND,

'The die is cast—all is over. Hiding the ravages of care with a sickly mask of mirth, I have not informed you, this evening, that there is no hope of the remittance! Under these circumstances, alike humiliating to endure, humiliating to contemplate, and humiliating to relate, I have discharged the pecuniary liability contracted at this establishment, by giving a note of hand, made payable fourteen days after date, at my residence, Pentonville, London. When it becomes due, it will not be taken up. The result is destruction. The bolt is impending, and the tree must fall.

'Let the wretched man who now addresses you, my dear Copperfield, be a beacon to you through life. He writes with that intention, and in that hope. If he could think himself of so much use, one gleam of day might, by possibility, penetrate into the cheerless dungeon of his remaining existence—though his longevity is, at present (to say the least of it), extremely problematical.

'This is the last communication, my dear Copperfield, you will ever receive

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'From
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'The

'Beggared Outcast,

'WILKINS MICAWBER.'

I was so shocked by the contents of this heart-rending letter, that I ran off directly towards the little hotel with the intention of taking it on my way to Doctor Strong's, and trying to soothe Mr. Micawber with a word of comfort. But, half-way there, I met the London coach with Mr. and Mrs. Micawber up behind; Mr. Micawber, the very picture of tranquil enjoyment, smiling at Mrs. Micawber's conversation, eating walnuts out of a paper bag, with a bottle sticking out of his breast pocket. As they did not see me, I thought it best, all things considered, not to see them. So, with a great weight taken off my mind, I turned into a by-street that was the nearest way to school, and felt, upon the whole, relieved that they were gone; though I still liked them very much, nevertheless.

CHAPTER 18. A RETROSPECT

My school-days! The silent gliding on of my existence—the unseen, unfelt progress of my life—from childhood up to youth! Let me think, as I look back upon that flowing water, now a dry channel overgrown with leaves, whether there are any marks along its course, by which I can remember how it ran.

A moment, and I occupy my place in the Cathedral, where we all went together, every Sunday morning, assembling first at school for that purpose. The earthy smell, the sunless air, the sensation of the world being shut out, the resounding of the organ through the black and white arched galleries and aisles, are wings that take me back, and hold me hovering above those days, in a half-sleeping and half-waking dream.

I am not the last boy in the school. I have risen in a few months, over several heads. But the first boy seems to me a mighty creature, dwelling afar off, whose giddy height is unattainable. Agnes says 'No,' but I say 'Yes,' and tell her that she little thinks what stores of knowledge have been mastered by the wonderful Being, at whose place she thinks I, even I, weak aspirant, may arrive in time. He is not my private friend and public patron, as Steerforth was, but I hold him in a reverential respect. I chiefly wonder what he'll be, when he leaves Doctor Strong's, and what mankind will do to maintain any place against him.

But who is this that breaks upon me? This is Miss Shepherd, whom I love.

Miss Shepherd is a boarder at the Misses Nettingalls' establishment. I adore Miss Shepherd. She is a little girl, in a spencer, with a round face and curly flaxen hair. The Misses Nettingalls' young ladies come to the Cathedral too. I cannot look upon my book, for I must look upon Miss Shepherd. When the choristers chaunt, I hear Miss Shepherd. In the service I mentally insert Miss Shepherd's name—I put her in among the Royal Family. At home, in my own room, I am sometimes moved to cry out, 'Oh, Miss Shepherd!' in a transport of love.

For some time, I am doubtful of Miss Shepherd's feelings, but, at length, Fate being propitious, we meet at the dancing-school. I have Miss Shepherd for my partner. I touch Miss Shepherd's glove, and feel a thrill go up the right arm of my jacket, and come out at my hair. I say nothing to Miss Shepherd, but we understand each other. Miss Shepherd and myself live but to be united.

Why do I secretly give Miss Shepherd twelve Brazil nuts for a present, I wonder? They are not expressive of affection, they are difficult to pack into a parcel of any regular shape, they are hard to crack, even in room doors, and they are oily when cracked; yet I feel that they are appropriate to Miss Shepherd. Soft, seedy biscuits, also, I bestow upon Miss Shepherd; and oranges innumerable. Once, I kiss Miss Shepherd in the cloak-room. Ecstasy! What are my agony and indignation next day, when I hear a flying rumour that the Misses Nettingall have stood Miss Shepherd in the stocks for turning in her toes!

Miss Shepherd being the one pervading theme and vision of my life, how do I ever come to break with her? I can't conceive. And yet a coolness grows between Miss Shepherd and myself. Whispers reach me of Miss Shepherd having said she wished I wouldn't stare so, and having avowed a preference for Master Jones—for Jones! a boy of no merit whatever! The gulf between me and Miss Shepherd widens. At last, one day, I meet the Misses Nettingalls' establishment out walking. Miss Shepherd makes a face as she goes by, and laughs to her companion. All is over. The devotion of a life—it seems a life, it is all the same—is at an end; Miss Shepherd comes out of the morning service, and the Royal Family know her no more.

I am higher in the school, and no one breaks my peace. I am not at all polite, now, to the Misses Nettingalls' young ladies, and shouldn't dote on any of them, if they were twice as many and twenty times as beautiful. I think the dancing-school a tiresome affair, and wonder why the girls can't dance by themselves and leave us alone. I am growing great in Latin verses, and neglect the laces of my boots. Doctor Strong refers to me in public as a promising young scholar. Mr. Dick is wild with joy, and my aunt remits me a guinea by the next post.

The shade of a young butcher rises, like the apparition of an armed head in Macbeth. Who is this young butcher? He is the terror of the youth of Canterbury. There is a vague belief abroad, that the beef suet with which he anoints his hair gives him unnatural strength, and that he is a match for a man. He is a broad-faced, bull-necked, young butcher, with rough red cheeks, an ill-conditioned mind, and an injurious tongue. His main use of this tongue, is, to disparage Doctor Strong's young gentlemen. He says, publicly, that if they want anything he'll give it 'em. He names individuals among them (myself included), whom he could undertake to settle with one hand, and the other tied behind him. He waylays the smaller boys to punch their unprotected heads, and calls challenges after me in the open streets. For these sufficient reasons I resolve to fight the butcher.

It is a summer evening, down in a green hollow, at the corner of a wall. I meet the butcher by appointment. I am attended by a select body of our boys; the butcher, by two other butchers, a young publican, and a sweep. The preliminaries are adjusted, and the butcher and myself stand face to face. In a moment the butcher lights ten thousand candles out of my left eyebrow. In another moment, I don't know where the wall is, or where I am, or where anybody is. I hardly know which is myself and which the butcher, we are always in such a tangle and tussle, knocking about upon the trodden grass. Sometimes I see the butcher, bloody but confident; sometimes I see nothing, and sit gasping on my second's knee; sometimes I go in at the butcher madly, and cut my knuckles open against his face, without appearing to discompose him at all. At last I awake, very queer about the head, as from a giddy sleep, and see the butcher walking off, congratulated by the two other butchers and the sweep and publican, and putting on his coat as he goes; from which I augur, justly, that the victory is his.

I am taken home in a sad plight, and I have beef-steaks put to my eyes, and am rubbed with vinegar and brandy, and find a great puffy place bursting out on my upper lip, which swells immoderately. For three or four days I remain at home, a very ill-looking subject, with a green shade over my eyes; and I should be very dull, but that Agnes is a sister to me, and condoles with me, and reads to me, and makes the time light and happy. Agnes has my confidence completely, always; I tell her all about the butcher, and the wrongs he has heaped upon me; she thinks I couldn't have done otherwise than fight the butcher, while she shrinks and trembles at my having fought him.

Time has stolen on unobserved, for Adams is not the head-boy in the days that are come now, nor has he been this many and many a day. Adams has left the school so long, that when he comes back, on a visit to Doctor Strong, there are not many there, besides myself, who know him. Adams is going to be called to the bar almost directly, and is to be an advocate, and to wear a wig. I am surprised to find him a meeker man than I had thought, and less imposing in appearance. He has not staggered the world yet, either;

for it goes on (as well as I can make out) pretty much the same as if he had never joined it.

A blank, through which the warriors of poetry and history march on in stately hosts that seem to have no end—and what comes next! I am the head-boy, now! I look down on the line of boys below me, with a condescending interest in such of them as bring to my mind the boy I was myself, when I first came there. That little fellow seems to be no part of me; I remember him as something left behind upon the road of life—as something I have passed, rather than have actually been—and almost think of him as of someone else.

And the little girl I saw on that first day at Mr. Wickfield's, where is she? Gone also. In her stead, the perfect likeness of the picture, a child likeness no more, moves about the house; and Agnes—my sweet sister, as I call her in my thoughts, my counsellor and friend, the better angel of the lives of all who come within her calm, good, self-denying influence—is quite a woman.

What other changes have come upon me, besides the changes in my growth and looks, and in the knowledge I have garnered all this while? I wear a gold watch and chain, a ring upon my little finger, and a long-tailed coat; and I use a great deal of bear's grease—which, taken in conjunction with the ring, looks bad. Am I in love again? I am. I worship the eldest Miss Larkins.

The eldest Miss Larkins is not a little girl. She is a tall, dark, black-eyed, fine figure of a woman. The eldest Miss Larkins is not a chicken; for the youngest Miss Larkins is not that, and the eldest must be three or four years older. Perhaps the eldest Miss Larkins may be about thirty. My passion for her is beyond all bounds.

The eldest Miss Larkins knows officers. It is an awful thing to bear. I see them speaking to her in the street. I see them cross the way to meet her, when her bonnet (she has a bright taste in bonnets) is seen coming down the pavement, accompanied by her sister's bonnet. She laughs and talks, and seems to like it. I spend a good deal of my own spare time in walking up and down to meet her. If I can bow to her once in the day (I know her to bow to, knowing Mr. Larkins), I am happier. I deserve a bow now and then. The raging agonies I suffer on the night of the Race Ball, where I know the eldest Miss Larkins will be dancing with the military, ought to have some compensation, if there be even-handed justice in the world.

My passion takes away my appetite, and makes me wear my newest silk neckerchief continually. I have no relief but in putting on my best clothes, and having my boots cleaned over and over again. I seem, then, to be worthier of the eldest Miss Larkins. Everything that belongs to her, or is connected with her, is precious to me. Mr. Larkins (a gruff old gentleman with a double chin, and one of his eyes immovable in his head) is fraught with interest to me. When I can't meet his daughter, I go where I am likely to meet him. To say 'How do you do, Mr. Larkins? Are the young ladies and all the family quite well?' seems so pointed, that I blush.

I think continually about my age. Say I am seventeen, and say that seventeen is young for the eldest Miss Larkins, what of that? Besides, I shall be one-and-twenty in no time almost. I regularly take walks outside Mr. Larkins's house in the evening, though it cuts me to the heart to see the officers go in, or to hear them up in the drawing-room, where the eldest Miss Larkins plays the harp. I even walk, on two or three occasions, in a sickly, spoony manner, round and round the house after the family are gone to bed, wondering which is the eldest Miss Larkins's chamber (and pitching, I dare say now, on Mr. Larkins's instead); wishing that a fire would burst out; that the assembled crowd would stand appalled; that I, dashing through them with a ladder, might rear it against her window, save her in my arms, go back for something she had left behind, and perish in the flames. For I am generally disinterested in my love, and think I could be content to make a figure before Miss Larkins, and expire.

Generally, but not always. Sometimes brighter visions rise before me. When I dress (the occupation of two hours), for a great ball given at the Larkins's (the anticipation of three weeks), I indulge my fancy with pleasing images. I picture myself taking courage to make a declaration to Miss Larkins. I picture Miss Larkins sinking her head upon my shoulder, and saying, 'Oh, Mr. Copperfield, can I believe my ears!' I picture Mr. Larkins waiting on me next morning, and saying, 'My dear Copperfield, my daughter has told me all. Youth is no objection. Here are twenty thousand pounds. Be happy!' I picture my aunt relenting, and blessing us; and Mr. Dick and Doctor Strong being present at the marriage ceremony. I am a sensible fellow, I believe—I believe, on looking back, I mean—and modest I am sure; but all this goes on notwithstanding. I repair to the enchanted house, where there are lights, chattering, music, flowers, officers (I am sorry to see), and the eldest Miss Larkins, a blaze of beauty. She is dressed in blue, with blue flowers in her hair—forget-me-nots—as if SHE had any need to wear forget-me-nots. It is the first really grown-up party that I have ever been invited to, and I am a little uncomfortable; for I appear not to belong to anybody, and nobody appears to have anything to say to me, except Mr. Larkins, who asks me how my schoolfellows are, which he needn't do, as I have not come there to be insulted.

But after I have stood in the doorway for some time, and feasted my eyes upon the goddess of my heart, she approaches me—she, the eldest Miss Larkins!—and asks me pleasantly, if I dance?

I stammer, with a bow, 'With you, Miss Larkins.'

'With no one else?' inquires Miss Larkins.

'I should have no pleasure in dancing with anyone else.'

Miss Larkins laughs and blushes (or I think she blushes), and says, 'Next time but one, I shall be very glad.'

The time arrives. 'It is a waltz, I think,' Miss Larkins doubtfully observes, when I present myself. 'Do you waltz? If not, Captain Bailey—'

But I do waltz (pretty well, too, as it happens), and I take Miss Larkins out. I take her sternly from the side of Captain Bailey. He is wretched, I have no doubt; but he is nothing to me. I have been wretched, too. I waltz with the eldest Miss Larkins! I don't know where, among whom, or how long. I only know that I swim about in space, with a blue angel, in a state of blissful delirium, until I find myself alone with her in a little room, resting on a sofa. She admires a flower (pink camellia japonica, price half-a-crown), in my button-hole. I give it her, and say:

'I ask an inestimable price for it, Miss Larkins.'

'Indeed! What is that?' returns Miss Larkins.

'A flower of yours, that I may treasure it as a miser does gold.'

'You're a bold boy,' says Miss Larkins. 'There.'

She gives it me, not displeased; and I put it to my lips, and then into my breast. Miss Larkins, laughing, draws her hand through my arm, and says, 'Now take me back to Captain Bailey.'

I am lost in the recollection of this delicious interview, and the waltz, when she comes to me again, with a plain elderly gentleman who has been playing whist all night, upon her arm, and says:

'Oh! here is my bold friend! Mr. Chestle wants to know you, Mr. Copperfield.'

I feel at once that he is a friend of the family, and am much gratified.

'I admire your taste, sir,' says Mr. Chestle. 'It does you credit. I suppose you don't take much interest in hops; but I am a pretty large grower myself; and if you ever like to come over to our neighbourhood—neighbourhood of Ashford—and take a run about our place,—we shall be glad for you to stop as long as you like.'

I thank Mr. Chestle warmly, and shake hands. I think I am in a happy dream. I waltz with the eldest Miss Larkins once again. She says I waltz so well! I go home in a state of unspeakable bliss, and waltz in imagination, all night long, with my arm round the blue waist of my dear divinity. For some days afterwards, I am lost in rapturous reflections; but I neither see her in the street, nor when I call. I am imperfectly consoled for this disappointment by the sacred pledge, the perished flower.

'Trotwood,' says Agnes, one day after dinner. 'Who do you think is going to be married tomorrow? Someone you admire.'

'Not you, I suppose, Agnes?'

'Not me!' raising her cheerful face from the music she is copying. 'Do you hear him, Papa?—The eldest Miss Larkins.'

'To—to Captain Bailey?' I have just enough power to ask.

'No; to no Captain. To Mr. Chestle, a hop-grower.'

I am terribly dejected for about a week or two. I take off my ring, I wear my worst clothes, I use no bear's grease, and I frequently lament over the late Miss Larkins's faded flower. Being, by that time, rather tired of this kind of life, and having received new provocation from the butcher, I throw the flower away, go out with the butcher, and gloriously defeat him.

This, and the resumption of my ring, as well as of the bear's grease in moderation, are the last marks I can discern, now, in my progress to seventeen.

CHAPTER 19. I LOOK ABOUT ME, AND MAKE A DISCOVERY

I am doubtful whether I was at heart glad or sorry, when my school-days drew to an end, and the time came for my leaving Doctor Strong's. I had been very happy there, I had a great attachment for the Doctor, and I was eminent and distinguished in that little world. For these reasons I was sorry to go; but for other reasons, unsubstantial enough, I was glad. Misty ideas of being a young man at my own disposal, of the importance attaching to a young man at his own disposal, of the wonderful things to be seen and done by that magnificent animal, and the wonderful effects he could not fail to make upon society, lured me away. So powerful were these visionary considerations in my boyish mind, that I seem, according to my present way of thinking, to have left school without natural regret. The separation has not made the impression on me, that other separations have. I try in vain to recall how I felt about it, and what its circumstances were; but it is not momentous in my recollection. I suppose the opening prospect confused me. I know that my juvenile experiences went for little or nothing then; and that life was more like a great fairy story, which I was just about to begin to read, than anything else.

MY aunt and I had held many grave deliberations on the calling to which I should be devoted. For a year or more I had endeavoured to find a satisfactory answer to her often-repeated question, 'What I would like to be?' But I had no particular liking, that I could discover, for anything. If I could have been inspired with a knowledge of the science of navigation, taken the command of a fast-sailing expedition, and gone round the world on a triumphant voyage of discovery, I think I might have considered myself completely suited. But, in the absence of any such miraculous provision, my desire was to apply myself to some pursuit that would not lie too heavily upon her purse; and to do my duty in it, whatever it might be.

Mr. Dick had regularly assisted at our councils, with a meditative and sage demeanour. He never made a suggestion but once; and on that occasion (I don't know what put it in his head), he suddenly proposed that I should be 'a Brazier'. My aunt received this proposal so very ungraciously, that he never ventured on a second; but ever afterwards confined himself to looking watchfully at her for her suggestions, and rattling his money.

'Trot, I tell you what, my dear,' said my aunt, one morning in the Christmas season when I left school: 'as this knotty point is still unsettled, and as we must not make a mistake in our decision if we can help it, I think we had better take a little breathing-time. In the meanwhile, you must try to look at it from a new point of view, and not as a schoolboy.'

'I will, aunt.'

'It has occurred to me,' pursued my aunt, 'that a little change, and a glimpse of life out of doors, may be useful in helping you to know your own mind, and form a cooler judgement. Suppose you were to go down into the old part of the country again, for instance, and see that—that out-of-the-way woman with the savagest of names,' said my aunt, rubbing her nose, for she could never thoroughly forgive Peggotty for being so called.

'Of all things in the world, aunt, I should like it best!'

'Well,' said my aunt, 'that's lucky, for I should like it too. But it's natural and rational that you should like it. And I am very well persuaded that whatever you do, Trot, will always be natural and rational.'

'I hope so, aunt.'

'Your sister, Betsey Trotwood,' said my aunt, 'would have been as natural and rational a girl as ever breathed. You'll be worthy of her, won't you?'

'I hope I shall be worthy of YOU, aunt. That will be enough for me.'

'It's a mercy that poor dear baby of a mother of yours didn't live,' said my aunt, looking at me approvingly, 'or she'd have been so vain of her boy by this time, that her soft little head would have been completely turned, if there was anything of it left to turn.' (My aunt always excused any weakness of her own in my behalf, by transferring it in this way to my poor mother.) 'Bless me, Trotwood, how you do remind me of her!'

'Pleasantly, I hope, aunt?' said I.

'He's as like her, Dick,' said my aunt, emphatically, 'he's as like her, as she was that afternoon before she began to fret—bless my heart, he's as like her, as he can look at me out of his two eyes!'

'Is he indeed?' said Mr. Dick.

'And he's like David, too,' said my aunt, decisively.

'He is very like David!' said Mr. Dick.

'But what I want you to be, Trot,' resumed my aunt, '—I don't mean physically, but morally; you are very well physically—is, a firm fellow. A fine firm fellow, with a will of your own. With resolution,' said my aunt, shaking her cap at me, and clenching her hand. 'With determination. With character, Trot—with strength of character that is not to be influenced, except on good reason, by anybody, or by anything. That's what I want you to be. That's what your father and mother might both have been, Heaven knows, and been the better for it.'

I intimated that I hoped I should be what she described.

'That you may begin, in a small way, to have a reliance upon yourself, and to act for yourself,' said my aunt, 'I shall send you upon your trip, alone. I did think, once, of Mr. Dick's going with you; but, on second thoughts, I shall keep him to take care of me.'

Mr. Dick, for a moment, looked a little disappointed; until the honour and dignity of having to take care of the most wonderful woman in the world, restored the sunshine to his face.

'Besides,' said my aunt, 'there's the Memorial—'

'Oh, certainly,' said Mr. Dick, in a hurry, 'I intend, Trotwood, to get that done immediately—it really must be done immediately! And then it will go in, you know—and then—' said Mr. Dick, after checking himself, and pausing a long time, 'there'll be a pretty kettle of fish!'

In pursuance of my aunt's kind scheme, I was shortly afterwards fitted out with a handsome purse of money, and a portmanteau, and tenderly dismissed upon my expedition. At parting, my aunt gave me some good advice, and a good many kisses; and said that as her object was that I should look about me, and should think a little, she would recommend me to stay a few days in London, if I liked it, either on my way down into Suffolk, or in coming back. In a word, I was at liberty to do what I would, for three weeks or a month; and no other conditions were imposed upon my freedom than the before-mentioned thinking and looking about me, and a pledge to write three times a week and faithfully report myself.

I went to Canterbury first, that I might take leave of Agnes and Mr. Wickfield (my old room in whose house I had not yet relinquished), and also of the good Doctor. Agnes was very glad to see me, and told me that the house had not been like itself since I had left it.

'I am sure I am not like myself when I am away,' said I. 'I seem to want my right hand, when I miss you. Though that's not saying much; for there's no head in my right hand, and no heart. Everyone who knows you, consults with you, and is guided by you, Agnes.'

'Everyone who knows me, spoils me, I believe,' she answered, smiling.

'No. It's because you are like no one else. You are so good, and so sweet-tempered. You have such a gentle nature, and you are always right.'

'You talk,' said Agnes, breaking into a pleasant laugh, as she sat at work, 'as if I were the late Miss Larkins.'

'Come! It's not fair to abuse my confidence,' I answered, reddening at the recollection of my blue enslaver. 'But I shall confide in you, just the same, Agnes. I can never grow out of that. Whenever I fall into trouble, or fall in love, I shall always tell you, if you'll let me—even when I come to fall in love in earnest.'

'Why, you have always been in earnest!' said Agnes, laughing again.

'Oh! that was as a child, or a schoolboy,' said I, laughing in my turn, not without being a little shame-faced. 'Times are altering now, and I suppose I shall be in a terrible state of earnestness one day or other. My wonder is, that you are not in earnest yourself, by this time, Agnes.'

Agnes laughed again, and shook her head.

'Oh, I know you are not!' said I, 'because if you had been you would have told me. Or at least'—for I saw a faint blush in her face, 'you would have let me find it out for myself. But there is no one that I know of, who deserves to love you, Agnes. Someone of a nobler character, and more worthy altogether than anyone I have ever seen here, must rise up, before I give my consent. In the time to come, I shall have a wary eye on all admirers; and shall exact a great deal from the successful one, I assure you.'

We had gone on, so far, in a mixture of confidential jest and earnest, that had long grown naturally out of our familiar relations, begun as mere children. But Agnes, now suddenly lifting up her eyes to mine, and speaking in a different manner, said:

'Trotwood, there is something that I want to ask you, and that I may not have another opportunity of asking for a long time, perhaps—something I would ask, I think, of no one else. Have you observed any gradual alteration in Papa?'

I had observed it, and had often wondered whether she had too. I must have shown as much, now, in my face; for her eyes were in a moment cast down, and I saw tears in them.

'Tell me what it is,' she said, in a low voice.

'I think—shall I be quite plain, Agnes, liking him so much?'

'Yes,' she said.

'I think he does himself no good by the habit that has increased upon him since I first came here. He is often very nervous—or I fancy so.'

'It is not fancy,' said Agnes, shaking her head.

'His hand trembles, his speech is not plain, and his eyes look wild. I have remarked that at those times, and when he is least like himself, he is most certain to be wanted on some business.'

'By Uriah,' said Agnes.

'Yes; and the sense of being unfit for it, or of not having understood it, or of having shown his condition in spite of himself, seems to make him so uneasy, that next day he is worse, and next day worse, and so he becomes jaded and haggard. Do not be alarmed by what I say, Agnes, but in this state I saw him, only the other evening, lay down his head upon his desk, and shed tears like a child.'

Her hand passed softly before my lips while I was yet speaking, and in a moment she had met her father at the door of the room, and was hanging on his shoulder. The expression of her face, as they both looked towards me, I felt to be very touching. There was such deep fondness for him, and gratitude to him for all his love and care, in her beautiful look; and there was such a fervent appeal to me to deal tenderly by him, even in my inmost thoughts, and to let no harsh construction find any place against him; she was, at once, so proud of him and devoted to him, yet so compassionate and sorry, and so reliant upon me to be so, too; that nothing she could have said would have expressed more to me, or moved me more.

We were to drink tea at the Doctor's. We went there at the usual hour; and round the study fireside found the Doctor, and his young wife, and her mother. The Doctor, who made as much of my going away as if I were going to China, received me as an honoured guest; and called for a log of wood to be thrown on the fire, that he might see the face of his old pupil reddening in the blaze.

'I shall not see many more new faces in Trotwood's stead, Wickfield,' said the Doctor, warming his hands; 'I am getting lazy, and want ease. I shall relinquish all my young people in another six months, and lead a quieter life.'

'You have said so, any time these ten years, Doctor,' Mr. Wickfield answered.

'But now I mean to do it,' returned the Doctor. 'My first master will succeed me—I am in earnest at last—so you'll soon have to arrange our contracts, and to bind us firmly to them, like a couple of knaves.'

'And to take care,' said Mr. Wickfield, 'that you're not imposed on, eh? As you certainly would be, in any contract you should make for yourself. Well! I am ready. There are worse tasks than that, in my calling.'

'I shall have nothing to think of then,' said the Doctor, with a smile, 'but my Dictionary; and this other contract-bargain—Annie.'

As Mr. Wickfield glanced towards her, sitting at the tea table by Agnes, she seemed to me to avoid his look with such unwonted hesitation and timidity, that his attention became fixed upon her, as if something were suggested to his thoughts.

'There is a post come in from India, I observe,' he said, after a short silence.

'By the by! and letters from Mr. Jack Maldon!' said the Doctor.

'Indeed!' 'Poor dear Jack!' said Mrs. Markleham, shaking her head. 'That trying climate!—like living, they tell me, on a sand-heap, underneath a burning-glass! He looked strong, but he wasn't. My dear Doctor, it was his spirit, not his constitution, that he ventured on so boldly. Annie, my dear, I am sure you must perfectly recollect that your cousin never was strong—not what can be called ROBUST, you know,' said Mrs. Markleham, with emphasis, and looking round upon us generally, '—from the time when my daughter and himself were children together, and walking about, arm-in-arm, the livelong day.'

Annie, thus addressed, made no reply.

'Do I gather from what you say, ma'am, that Mr. Maldon is ill?' asked Mr. Wickfield.

'Ill!' replied the Old Soldier. 'My dear sir, he's all sorts of things.'

'Except well?' said Mr. Wickfield.

'Except well, indeed!' said the Old Soldier. 'He has had dreadful strokes of the sun, no doubt, and jungle fevers and agues, and every kind of thing you can mention. As to his liver,' said the Old Soldier resignedly, 'that, of course, he gave up altogether, when he first went out!'

'Does he say all this?' asked Mr. Wickfield.

'Say? My dear sir,' returned Mrs. Markleham, shaking her head and her fan, 'you little know my poor Jack Maldon when you ask that question. Say? Not he. You might drag him at the heels of four wild horses first.'

'Mama!' said Mrs. Strong.

'Annie, my dear,' returned her mother, 'once for all, I must really beg that you will not interfere with me, unless it is to confirm what I say. You know as well as I do that your cousin Maldon would be dragged at the heels of any number of wild horses—why should I confine myself to four! I WON'T confine myself to four—eight, sixteen, two-and-thirty, rather than say anything calculated to overturn the Doctor's plans.'

'Wickfield's plans,' said the Doctor, stroking his face, and looking penitently at his adviser. 'That is to say, our joint plans for him. I said myself, abroad or at home.'

'And I said' added Mr. Wickfield gravely, 'abroad. I was the means of sending him abroad. It's my responsibility.'

'Oh! Responsibility!' said the Old Soldier. 'Everything was done for the best, my dear Mr. Wickfield; everything was done for the kindest and best, we know. But if the dear fellow can't live there, he can't live there. And if he can't live there, he'll die there, sooner than he'll overturn the Doctor's plans. I know him,' said the Old Soldier, fanning herself, in a sort of calm prophetic agony, 'and I know he'll die there, sooner than he'll overturn the Doctor's plans.'

'Well, well, ma'am,' said the Doctor cheerfully, 'I am not bigoted to my plans, and I can overturn them myself. I can substitute some other plans. If Mr. Jack Maldon comes home on account of ill health, he must not be allowed to go back, and we must endeavour to make some more suitable and fortunate provision for him in this country.'

Mrs. Markleham was so overcome by this generous speech—which, I need not say, she had not at all expected or led up to—that she could only tell the Doctor it was like himself, and go several times through that operation of kissing the sticks of her fan, and then tapping his hand with it. After which she gently chid her daughter Annie, for not being more demonstrative when such kindnesses were showered, for her sake, on her old playfellow; and entertained us with some particulars concerning other deserving members of her family, whom it was desirable to set on their deserving legs.

All this time, her daughter Annie never once spoke, or lifted up her eyes. All this time, Mr. Wickfield had his glance upon her as she sat by his own daughter's side. It appeared to me that he never thought of being observed by anyone; but was so intent upon her, and upon his own thoughts in connexion with her, as to be quite absorbed. He now asked what Mr. Jack Maldon had actually written in reference to himself, and to whom he had written?

'Why, here,' said Mrs. Markleham, taking a letter from the chimney-piece above the Doctor's head, 'the dear fellow says to the Doctor himself—where is it? Oh!—"I am sorry to inform you that my health is suffering severely, and that I fear I may be reduced to the necessity of returning home for a time, as the only hope of restoration." That's pretty plain, poor fellow! His only hope of restoration! But Annie's letter is plainer still. Annie, show me that letter again.'

'Not now, mama,' she pleaded in a low tone.

'My dear, you absolutely are, on some subjects, one of the most ridiculous persons in the world,' returned her mother, 'and perhaps the most unnatural to the claims of your own family. We never should have heard of the letter at all, I believe, unless I had asked for it myself. Do you call that confidence, my love, towards Doctor Strong? I am surprised. You ought to know better.'

The letter was reluctantly produced; and as I handed it to the old lady, I saw how the unwilling hand from which I took it, trembled.

'Now let us see,' said Mrs. Markleham, putting her glass to her eye, 'where the passage is. "The remembrance of old times, my dearest Annie"—and so forth—it's not there. "The amiable old Proctor"—who's he? Dear me, Annie, how illegibly your cousin Maldon writes, and how stupid I am! "Doctor," of course. Ah! amiable indeed!' Here she left off, to kiss her fan again, and shake it at the Doctor, who was looking at us in a state of placid satisfaction. 'Now I have found it. "You may not be surprised to hear, Annie,"—no, to be sure, knowing that he never was really strong; what did I say just now?—"that I have undergone so much in this distant place, as to have decided to leave it at all hazards; on sick leave, if I can; on total resignation, if that is not to be obtained. What I have endured, and do endure here, is insupportable." And but for the promptitude of that best of creatures,' said Mrs. Markleham, telegraphing the Doctor as before, and refolding the letter, 'it would be insupportable to me to think of.'

Mr. Wickfield said not one word, though the old lady looked to him as if for his commentary on this intelligence; but sat severely silent, with his eyes fixed on the ground. Long after the subject was dismissed, and other topics occupied us, he remained so; seldom raising his eyes, unless to rest them for a moment, with a thoughtful frown, upon the Doctor, or his wife, or both.

The Doctor was very fond of music. Agnes sang with great sweetness and expression, and so did Mrs. Strong. They sang together, and played duets together, and we had quite a little concert. But I remarked two things: first, that though Annie soon recovered her composure, and was quite herself, there was a blank between her and Mr. Wickfield which separated them wholly from each other; secondly, that Mr. Wickfield seemed to dislike the intimacy between her and Agnes, and to watch it with uneasiness. And now, I must confess, the recollection of what I had seen on that night when Mr. Maldon went away, first began to return upon me with a meaning it had never had, and to trouble me. The innocent beauty of her face was not as innocent to me as it had been; I mistrusted the natural grace and charm of her manner; and when I looked at Agnes by her side, and thought how good and true Agnes was, suspicions arose within me that it was an ill-assorted friendship.

She was so happy in it herself, however, and the other was so happy too, that they made the evening fly away as if it were but an hour. It closed in an incident which I well remember. They were taking leave of each other, and Agnes was going to embrace her and kiss her, when Mr. Wickfield stepped between them, as if by accident, and drew Agnes quickly away. Then I saw, as though all the intervening time had been cancelled, and I were still standing in the doorway on the night of the departure, the expression of that night in the face of Mrs. Strong, as it confronted his.

I cannot say what an impression this made upon me, or how impossible I found it, when I thought of her afterwards, to separate her from this look, and remember her face in its innocent loveliness again. It haunted me when I got home. I seemed to have left the Doctor's roof with a dark cloud lowering on it. The reverence that I had for his grey head, was mingled with commiseration for his faith in those who were treacherous to him, and with resentment against those who injured him. The impending shadow of a great affliction, and a great disgrace that had no distinct form in it yet, fell like a stain upon the quiet place where I had worked and played as a boy, and did it a cruel wrong. I had no pleasure in thinking, any more, of the grave old broad-leaved aloe-trees, which remained shut up in themselves a hundred years together, and of the trim smooth grass-plot, and the stone urns, and the Doctor's walk, and the congenial sound of the Cathedral bell hovering above them all. It was as if the tranquil sanctuary of my boyhood had been sacked before my face, and its peace and honour given to the winds.

But morning brought with it my parting from the old house, which Agnes had filled with her influence; and that occupied my mind sufficiently. I should be there again soon, no doubt; I might sleep again—perhaps often—in my old room; but the days of my inhabiting there were gone, and the old time was past. I was heavier at heart when I packed up such of my books and clothes as still remained there to be sent to Dover, than I cared to show to Uriah Heep; who was so officious to help me, that I uncharitably thought him mighty glad that I was going.

I got away from Agnes and her father, somehow, with an indifferent show of being very manly, and took my seat upon the box of the London coach. I was so softened and forgiving, going through the town, that I had half a mind to nod to my old enemy the butcher, and throw him five shillings to drink. But he looked such a very obdurate butcher as he stood scraping the great block in the shop, and moreover, his appearance was so little improved by the loss of a front tooth which I had knocked out, that I thought it best to make no advances.

The main object on my mind, I remember, when we got fairly on the road, was to appear as old as possible to the coachman, and to speak extremely gruff. The latter point I achieved at great personal inconvenience; but I stuck to it, because I felt it was a grown-up sort of thing.

'You are going through, sir?' said the coachman.

'Yes, William,' I said, condescendingly (I knew him); 'I am going to London. I shall go down into Suffolk afterwards.'

'Shooting, sir?' said the coachman.

He knew as well as I did that it was just as likely, at that time of year, I was going down there whaling; but I felt complimented, too.

'I don't know,' I said, pretending to be undecided, 'whether I shall take a shot or not.' 'Birds is got wery shy, I'm told,' said William.

'So I understand,' said I.

'Is Suffolk your county, sir?' asked William.

'Yes,' I said, with some importance. 'Suffolk's my county.'

'I'm told the dumplings is uncommon fine down there,' said William.

I was not aware of it myself, but I felt it necessary to uphold the institutions of my county, and to evince a familiarity with them; so I shook my head, as much as to say, 'I believe you!'

'And the Punches,' said William. 'There's cattle! A Suffolk Punch, when he's a good un, is worth his weight in gold. Did you ever breed any Suffolk Punches yourself, sir?'

'N-no,' I said, 'not exactly.'

'Here's a gen'lm'n behind me, I'll pound it,' said William, 'as has bred 'em by wholesale.'

The gentleman spoken of was a gentleman with a very unpromising squint, and a prominent chin, who had a tall white hat on with a narrow flat brim, and whose close-fitting drab trousers seemed to button all the way up outside his legs from his boots to his hips. His chin was cocked over the coachman's shoulder, so near to me, that his breath quite tickled the back of my head; and as I looked at him, he leered at the leaders with the eye with which he didn't squint, in a very knowing manner.

'Ain't you?' asked William.

'Ain't I what?' said the gentleman behind.

'Bred them Suffolk Punches by wholesale?'

'I should think so,' said the gentleman. 'There ain't no sort of orse that I ain't bred, and no sort of dorg. Orses and dorgs is some men's fancy. They're wittles and drink to me—lodging, wife, and children—reading, writing, and Arithmetic—snuff, tobacker, and sleep.'

'That ain't a sort of man to see sitting behind a coach-box, is it though?' said William in my ear, as he handled the reins.

I construed this remark into an indication of a wish that he should have my place, so I blushingly offered to resign it.

'Well, if you don't mind, sir,' said William, 'I think it would be more correct.'

I have always considered this as the first fall I had in life. When I booked my place at the coach office I had had 'Box Seat' written against the entry, and had given the book-keeper half-a-crown. I was got up in a special great-coat and shawl, expressly to do honour to that distinguished eminence; had glorified myself upon it a good deal; and had felt that I was a credit to the coach. And here, in the very first stage, I was supplanted by a shabby man with a squint, who had no other merit than smelling like a livery-stables, and being able to walk across me, more like a fly than a human being, while the horses were at a canter!

A distrust of myself, which has often beset me in life on small occasions, when it would have been better away, was assuredly not stopped in its growth by this little incident outside the Canterbury coach. It was in vain to take refuge in gruffness of speech. I spoke from the pit of my stomach for the rest of the journey, but I felt completely extinguished, and dreadfully young.

It was curious and interesting, nevertheless, to be sitting up there behind four horses: well educated, well dressed, and with plenty of money in my pocket; and to look out for the places where I had slept on my weary journey. I had abundant occupation for my thoughts, in every conspicuous landmark on the road. When I looked down at the trampers whom we passed, and saw that well-remembered style of face turned up, I felt as if the tinker's blackened hand were in the bosom of my shirt again. When we clattered through the narrow street of Chatham, and I caught a glimpse, in passing, of the lane where the old monster lived who had bought my jacket, I stretched my neck eagerly to look for the place where I had sat, in the sun and in the shade, waiting for my money. When we came, at last, within a stage of London, and passed the veritable Salem House where Mr. Creakle had laid about him with a heavy hand, I would have given all I had, for lawful permission to get down and thrash him, and let all the boys out like so many caged sparrows.

We went to the Golden Cross at Charing Cross, then a mouldy sort of establishment in a close neighbourhood. A waiter showed me into the coffee-room; and a chambermaid introduced me to my small bedchamber, which smelt like a hackney-coach, and was shut up like a family vault. I was still painfully conscious of my youth, for nobody stood in any awe of me at all: the chambermaid being utterly indifferent to my opinions on any subject, and the waiter being familiar with me, and offering advice to my inexperience.

'Well now,' said the waiter, in a tone of confidence, 'what would you like for dinner? Young gentlemen likes poultry in general: have a fowl!'

I told him, as majestically as I could, that I wasn't in the humour for a fowl.

'Ain't you?' said the waiter. 'Young gentlemen is generally tired of beef and mutton: have a weal cutlet!'

I assented to this proposal, in default of being able to suggest anything else.

'Do you care for taters?' said the waiter, with an insinuating smile, and his head on one side. 'Young gentlemen generally has been overdosed with taters.'

I commanded him, in my deepest voice, to order a veal cutlet and potatoes, and all things fitting; and to inquire at the bar if there were any letters for Trotwood Copperfield, Esquire—which I knew there were not, and couldn't be, but thought it manly to appear to expect.

He soon came back to say that there were none (at which I was much surprised) and began to lay the cloth for my dinner in a box by the fire. While he was so engaged, he asked me what I would take with it; and on my replying 'Half a pint of sherry,'thought it a favourable opportunity, I am afraid, to extract that measure of wine from the stale leavings at the bottoms of several small decanters. I am of this opinion, because, while I was reading the newspaper, I observed him behind a low wooden partition, which was his private apartment, very busy pouring out of a number of those vessels into one, like a chemist and druggist making up a prescription. When the wine came, too, I thought it flat; and it certainly had more English crumbs in it, than were to be expected in a foreign wine in anything like a pure state, but I was bashful enough to drink it, and say nothing.

Being then in a pleasant frame of mind (from which I infer that poisoning is not always disagreeable in some stages of the process), I resolved to go to the play. It was Covent Garden Theatre that I chose; and there, from the back of a centre box, I saw Julius Caesar and the new Pantomime. To have all those noble Romans alive before me, and walking in and out for my entertainment, instead of being the stern taskmasters they had been at school, was a most novel and delightful effect. But the mingled reality and mystery of the whole show, the influence upon me of the poetry, the lights, the music, the company, the smooth stupendous changes of glittering and brilliant scenery, were so dazzling, and opened up such illimitable regions of delight, that when I came out into the rainy street, at twelve o'clock at night, I felt as if I had come from the clouds, where I had been leading a romantic life for ages, to a bawling, splashing, link-lighted, umbrella-struggling, hackney-coach-jostling, patten-clinking, muddy, miserable world.

I had emerged by another door, and stood in the street for a little while, as if I really were a stranger upon earth: but the unceremonious pushing and hustling that I received, soon recalled me to myself, and put me in the road back to the hotel; whither I went, revolving the glorious vision all the way; and where, after some porter and oysters, I sat revolving it still, at past one o'clock, with my eyes on the coffee-room fire.

I was so filled with the play, and with the past—for it was, in a manner, like a shining transparency, through which I saw my earlier life moving along—that I don't know when the figure of a handsome well-formed young man dressed with a tasteful easy negligence which I have reason to remember very well, became a real presence to me. But I recollect being conscious of his company without having noticed his coming in—and my still sitting, musing, over the coffee-room fire.

At last I rose to go to bed, much to the relief of the sleepy waiter, who had got the fidgets in his legs, and was twisting them, and hitting them, and putting them through all kinds of contortions in his small pantry. In going towards the door, I passed the person who had come in, and saw him plainly. I turned directly, came back, and looked again. He did not know me, but I knew him in a moment.

At another time I might have wanted the confidence or the decision to speak to him, and might have put it off until next day, and might have lost him. But, in the then condition of my mind, where the play was still running high, his former protection of me appeared so deserving of my gratitude, and my old love for him overflowed my breast so freshly and spontaneously, that I went up to him at once, with a fast-beating heart, and said:

'Steerforth! won't you speak to me?'

He looked at me—just as he used to look, sometimes—but I saw no recognition in his face.

'You don't remember me, I am afraid,' said I.

'My God!' he suddenly exclaimed. 'It's little Copperfield!'

I grasped him by both hands, and could not let them go. But for very shame, and the fear that it might displease him, I could have held him round the neck and cried.

'I never, never, never was so glad! My dear Steerforth, I am so overjoyed to see you!'

'And I am rejoiced to see you, too!' he said, shaking my hands heartily. 'Why, Copperfield, old boy, don't be overpowered!' And yet he was glad, too, I thought, to see how the delight I had in meeting him affected me.

I brushed away the tears that my utmost resolution had not been able to keep back, and I made a clumsy laugh of it, and we sat down together, side by side.

'Why, how do you come to be here?' said Steerforth, clapping me on the shoulder.

'I came here by the Canterbury coach, today. I have been adopted by an aunt down in that part of the country, and have just finished my education there. How do YOU come to be here, Steerforth?'

'Well, I am what they call an Oxford man,' he returned; 'that is to say, I get bored to death down there, periodically—and I am on my way now to my mother's. You're a devilish amiable-looking fellow, Copperfield. Just what you used to be, now I look at you! Not altered in the least!'

'I knew you immediately,' I said; 'but you are more easily remembered.'

He laughed as he ran his hand through the clustering curls of his hair, and said gaily:

'Yes, I am on an expedition of duty. My mother lives a little way out of town; and the roads being in a beastly condition, and our house tedious enough, I remained here tonight instead of going on. I have not been in town half-a-dozen hours, and those I have been dozing and grumbling away at the play.'

'I have been at the play, too,' said I. 'At Covent Garden. What a delightful and magnificent entertainment, Steerforth!'

Steerforth laughed heartily.

'My dear young Davy,' he said, clapping me on the shoulder again, 'you are a very Daisy. The daisy of the field, at sunrise, is not fresher than you are. I have been at Covent Garden, too, and there never was a more miserable business. Holloa, you sir!'

This was addressed to the waiter, who had been very attentive to our recognition, at a distance, and now came forward deferentially.

'Where have you put my friend, Mr. Copperfield?' said Steerforth.

'Beg your pardon, sir?'

'Where does he sleep? What's his number? You know what I mean,' said Steerforth.

'Well, sir,' said the waiter, with an apologetic air. 'Mr. Copperfield is at present in forty-four, sir.'

'And what the devil do you mean,' retorted Steerforth, 'by putting Mr. Copperfield into a little loft over a stable?'

'Why, you see we wasn't aware, sir,' returned the waiter, still apologetically, 'as Mr. Copperfield was anyways particular. We can give Mr. Copperfield seventy-two, sir, if it would be preferred. Next you, sir.'

'Of course it would be preferred,' said Steerforth. 'And do it at once.' The waiter immediately withdrew to make the exchange. Steerforth, very much amused at my having been put into forty-four, laughed again, and clapped me on the shoulder again, and invited me to breakfast with him next morning at ten o'clock—an invitation I was only too proud and happy to accept. It being now pretty late, we took our candles and went upstairs, where we parted with friendly heartiness at his door, and where I found my new room a great improvement on my old one, it not being at all musty, and having an immense four-post bedstead in it, which was quite a little landed estate. Here, among pillows enough for six, I soon fell asleep in a blissful condition, and dreamed of ancient Rome, Steerforth, and friendship, until the early morning coaches, rumbling out of the archway underneath, made me dream of thunder and the gods.

CHAPTER 20. STEERFORTH'S HOME

When the chambermaid tapped at my door at eight o'clock, and informed me that my shaving-water was outside, I felt severely the having no occasion for it, and blushed in my bed. The suspicion that she laughed too, when she said it, preyed upon my mind all the time I was dressing; and gave me, I was conscious, a sneaking and guilty air when I passed her on the staircase, as I was going down to breakfast. I was so sensitively aware, indeed, of being younger than I could have wished, that for some time I could not make up my mind to pass her at all, under the ignoble circumstances of the case; but, hearing her there with a broom, stood peeping out of window at King Charles on horseback, surrounded by a maze of hackney-coaches, and looking anything but regal in a drizzling rain and a dark-brown fog, until I was admonished by the waiter that the gentleman was waiting for me.

It was not in the coffee-room that I found Steerforth expecting me, but in a snug private apartment, red-curtained and Turkey-carpeted, where the fire burnt bright, and a fine hot breakfast was set forth on a table covered with a clean cloth; and a cheerful miniature of the room, the fire, the breakfast, Steerforth, and all, was shining in the little round mirror over the sideboard. I was rather bashful at first, Steerforth being so self-possessed, and elegant, and superior to me in all respects (age included); but his easy patronage soon put that to rights, and made me quite at home. I could not enough admire the change he had wrought in the Golden Cross; or compare the dull forlorn state I had held yesterday, with this morning's comfort and this morning's entertainment. As to the waiter's familiarity, it was quenched as if it had never been. He attended on us, as I may say, in sackcloth and ashes.

'Now, Copperfield,' said Steerforth, when we were alone, 'I should like to hear what you are doing, and where you are going, and all about you. I feel as if you were my property.' Glowing with pleasure to find that he had still this interest in me, I told him how my aunt had proposed the little expedition that I had before me, and whither it tended.

'As you are in no hurry, then,' said Steerforth, 'come home with me to Highgate, and stay a day or two. You will be pleased with my mother—she is a little vain and prosy about me, but that you can forgive her—and she will be pleased with you.'

'I should like to be as sure of that, as you are kind enough to say you are,' I answered, smiling.

'Oh!' said Steerforth, 'everyone who likes me, has a claim on her that is sure to be acknowledged.'

'Then I think I shall be a favourite,' said I.

'Good!' said Steerforth. 'Come and prove it. We will go and see the lions for an hour or two—it's something to have a fresh fellow like you to show them to, Copperfield—and then we'll journey out to Highgate by the coach.'

I could hardly believe but that I was in a dream, and that I should wake presently in number forty-four, to the solitary box in the coffee-room and the familiar waiter again. After I had written to my aunt and told her of my fortunate meeting with my admired old schoolfellow, and my acceptance of his invitation, we went out in a hackney-chariot, and saw a Panorama and some other sights, and took a walk through the Museum, where I could not help observing how much Steerforth knew, on an infinite variety of subjects, and of how little account he seemed to make his knowledge.

'You'll take a high degree at college, Steerforth,' said I, 'if you have not done so already; and they will have good reason to be proud of you.'

'I take a degree!' cried Steerforth. 'Not I! my dear Daisy—will you mind my calling you Daisy?'

'Not at all!' said I.

'That's a good fellow! My dear Daisy,' said Steerforth, laughing. 'I have not the least desire or intention to distinguish myself in that way. I have done quite sufficient for my purpose. I find that I am heavy company enough for myself as I am.'

'But the fame—' I was beginning.

'You romantic Daisy!' said Steerforth, laughing still more heartily: 'why should I trouble myself, that a parcel of heavy-headed fellows may gape and hold up their hands? Let them do it at some other man. There's fame for him, and he's welcome to it.'

I was abashed at having made so great a mistake, and was glad to change the subject. Fortunately it was not difficult to do, for Steerforth could always pass from one subject to another with a carelessness and lightness that were his own.

Lunch succeeded to our sight-seeing, and the short winter day wore away so fast, that it was dusk when the stage-coach stopped with us at an old brick house at Highgate on the summit of the hill. An elderly lady, though not very far advanced in years, with a proud carriage and a handsome face, was in the doorway as we alighted; and greeting Steerforth as 'My dearest James,' folded him in her arms. To this lady he presented me as his mother, and she gave me a stately welcome.

It was a genteel old-fashioned house, very quiet and orderly. From the windows of my room I saw all London lying in the distance like a great vapour, with here and there some lights twinkling through it. I had only time, in dressing, to glance at the solid furniture, the framed pieces of work (done, I supposed, by Steerforth's mother when she was a girl), and some pictures in crayons of ladies with powdered hair and bodices, coming and going on the walls, as the newly-kindled fire crackled and sputtered, when I was called to dinner.

There was a second lady in the dining-room, of a slight short figure, dark, and not agreeable to look at, but with some appearance of good looks too, who attracted my attention: perhaps because I had not expected to see her; perhaps because I found myself sitting opposite to her; perhaps because of something really remarkable in her. She had black hair and eager black eyes, and was thin, and had a scar upon her lip. It was an old scar—I should rather call it seam, for it was not discoloured, and had healed years ago—which had once cut through her mouth, downward towards the chin, but was now barely visible across the table, except above and on her upper lip, the shape of which it had altered. I concluded in my own mind that she was about thirty years of age, and that she wished to be married. She was a little dilapidated—like a house—with having been so long to let; yet had, as I have said, an appearance of good looks. Her thinness seemed to be the effect of some wasting fire within her, which found a vent in her gaunt eyes.

She was introduced as Miss Dartle, and both Steerforth and his mother called her Rosa. I found that she lived there, and had been for a long time Mrs. Steerforth's companion. It appeared to me that she never said anything she wanted to say, outright; but hinted it, and made a great deal more of it by this practice. For example, when Mrs. Steerforth observed, more in jest than earnest, that she feared her son led but a wild life at college, Miss Dartle put in thus:

'Oh, really? You know how ignorant I am, and that I only ask for information, but isn't it always so? I thought that kind of life was on all hands understood to be—eh?' 'It is education for a very grave profession, if you mean that, Rosa,' Mrs. Steerforth answered with some coldness.

'Oh! Yes! That's very true,' returned Miss Dartle. 'But isn't it, though?—I want to be put right, if I am wrong—isn't it, really?'

'Really what?' said Mrs. Steerforth.

'Oh! You mean it's not!' returned Miss Dartle. 'Well, I'm very glad to hear it! Now, I know what to do! That's the advantage of asking. I shall never allow people to talk before me about wastefulness and profligacy, and so forth, in connexion with that life, any more.'

'And you will be right,' said Mrs. Steerforth. 'My son's tutor is a conscientious gentleman; and if I had not implicit reliance on my son, I should have reliance on him.'

'Should you?' said Miss Dartle. 'Dear me! Conscientious, is he? Really conscientious, now?'

'Yes, I am convinced of it,' said Mrs. Steerforth.

'How very nice!' exclaimed Miss Dartle. 'What a comfort! Really conscientious? Then he's not—but of course he can't be, if he's really conscientious. Well, I shall be quite happy in my opinion of him, from this time. You can't think how it elevates him in my opinion, to know for certain that he's really conscientious!'

Her own views of every question, and her correction of everything that was said to which she was opposed, Miss Dartle insinuated in the same way: sometimes, I could not conceal from myself, with great power, though in contradiction even of Steerforth. An instance happened before dinner was done. Mrs. Steerforth speaking to me about my intention of going down into Suffolk, I said at hazard how glad I should be, if Steerforth would only go there with me; and explaining to him that I was going to see my old nurse, and Mr. Peggotty's family, I reminded him of the boatman whom he had seen at school.

'Oh! That bluff fellow!' said Steerforth. 'He had a son with him, hadn't he?'

'No. That was his nephew,' I replied; 'whom he adopted, though, as a son. He has a very pretty little niece too, whom he adopted as a daughter. In short, his house—or rather his boat, for he lives in one, on dry land—is full of people who are objects of his generosity and kindness. You would be delighted to see that household.'

'Should I?' said Steerforth. 'Well, I think I should. I must see what can be done. It would be worth a journey (not to mention the pleasure of a journey with you, Daisy), to see that sort of people together, and to make one of 'em.'

My heart leaped with a new hope of pleasure. But it was in reference to the tone in which he had spoken of 'that sort of people', that Miss Dartle, whose sparkling eyes had been watchful of us, now broke in again.

'Oh, but, really? Do tell me. Are they, though?' she said.

'Are they what? And are who what?' said Steerforth.

'That sort of people.—-Are they really animals and clods, and beings of another order? I want to know SO much.'

'Why, there's a pretty wide separation between them and us,' said Steerforth, with indifference. 'They are not to be expected to be as sensitive as we are. Their delicacy is not to be shocked, or hurt easily. They are wonderfully virtuous, I dare say—some people contend for that, at least; and I am sure I don't want to contradict them—but they have not very fine natures, and they may be thankful that, like their coarse rough skins, they are not easily wounded.'

'Really!' said Miss Dartle. 'Well, I don't know, now, when I have been better pleased than to hear that. It's so consoling! It's such a delight to know that, when they suffer, they don't feel! Sometimes I have been quite uneasy for that sort of people; but now I shall just dismiss the idea of them, altogether. Live and learn. I had my doubts, I confess, but now they're cleared up. I didn't know, and now I do know, and that shows the advantage of asking—don't it?'

I believed that Steerforth had said what he had, in jest, or to draw Miss Dartle out; and I expected him to say as much when she was gone, and we two were sitting before the fire. But he merely asked me what I thought of her.

'She is very clever, is she not?' I asked.

'Clever! She brings everything to a grindstone,' said Steerforth, and sharpens it, as she has sharpened her own face and figure these years past. She has worn herself away by constant sharpening. She is all edge.'

'What a remarkable scar that is upon her lip!' I said.

Steerforth's face fell, and he paused a moment.

'Why, the fact is,' he returned, 'I did that.'

'By an unfortunate accident!'

'No. I was a young boy, and she exasperated me, and I threw a hammer at her. A promising young angel I must have been!' I was deeply sorry to have touched on such a painful theme, but that was useless now.

'She has borne the mark ever since, as you see,' said Steerforth; 'and she'll bear it to her grave, if she ever rests in one—though I can hardly believe she will ever rest anywhere. She was the motherless child of a sort of cousin of my father's. He died one day. My mother, who was then a widow, brought her here to be company to her. She has a couple of thousand pounds of her own, and saves the interest of it every year, to add to the principal. There's the history of Miss Rosa Dartle for you.'

'And I have no doubt she loves you like a brother?' said I.

'Humph!' retorted Steerforth, looking at the fire. 'Some brothers are not loved over much; and some love—but help yourself, Copperfield! We'll drink the daisies of the field, in compliment to you; and the lilies of the valley that toil not, neither do they spin, in compliment to me—the more shame for me!' A moody smile that had overspread his features cleared off as he said this merrily, and he was his own frank, winning self again.

I could not help glancing at the scar with a painful interest when we went in to tea. It was not long before I observed that it was the most susceptible part of her face, and that, when she turned pale, that mark altered first, and became a dull, lead-coloured streak, lengthening out to its full extent, like a mark in invisible ink brought to the fire. There was a little altercation between her and Steerforth about a cast of the dice at back gammon—when I thought her, for one moment, in a storm of rage; and then I saw it start forth like the old writing on the wall.

It was no matter of wonder to me to find Mrs. Steerforth devoted to her son. She seemed to be able to speak or think about nothing else. She showed me his picture as an infant, in a locket, with some of his baby-hair in it; she showed me his picture as he had been when I first knew him; and she wore at her breast his picture as he was now. All the letters he had ever written to her, she kept in a cabinet near her own chair by the fire; and she would have read me some of them, and I should have been very glad to hear them too, if he had not interposed, and coaxed her out of the design.

'It was at Mr. Creakle's, my son tells me, that you first became acquainted,' said Mrs. Steerforth, as she and I were talking at one table, while they played backgammon at another. 'Indeed, I recollect his speaking, at that time, of a pupil younger than himself who had taken his fancy there; but your name, as you may suppose, has not lived in my memory.'

'He was very generous and noble to me in those days, I assure you, ma'am,' said I, 'and I stood in need of such a friend. I should have been quite crushed without him.'

'He is always generous and noble,' said Mrs. Steerforth, proudly.

I subscribed to this with all my heart, God knows. She knew I did; for the stateliness of her manner already abated towards me, except when she spoke in praise of him, and then her air was always lofty.

'It was not a fit school generally for my son,' said she; 'far from it; but there were particular circumstances to be considered at the time, of more importance even than that selection. My son's high spirit made it desirable that he should be placed with some man who felt its superiority, and would be content to bow himself before it; and we found such a man there.'

I knew that, knowing the fellow. And yet I did not despise him the more for it, but thought it a redeeming quality in him if he could be allowed any grace for not resisting one so irresistible as Steerforth.

'My son's great capacity was tempted on, there, by a feeling of voluntary emulation and conscious pride,' the fond lady went on to say. 'He would have risen against all constraint; but he found himself the monarch of the place, and he haughtily determined to be worthy of his station. It was like himself.'

I echoed, with all my heart and soul, that it was like himself.

'So my son took, of his own will, and on no compulsion, to the course in which he can always, when it is his pleasure, outstrip every competitor,' she pursued. 'My son informs me, Mr. Copperfield, that you were quite devoted to him, and that when you met yesterday you made yourself known to him with tears of joy. I should be an affected woman if I made any pretence of being surprised by my son's inspiring such emotions; but I cannot be indifferent to anyone who is so sensible of his merit, and I am very glad to see you here, and can assure you that he feels an unusual friendship for you, and that you may rely on his protection.'

Miss Dartle played backgammon as eagerly as she did everything else. If I had seen her, first, at the board, I should have fancied that her figure had got thin, and her eyes had got large, over that pursuit, and no other in the world. But I am very much mistaken if she missed a word of this, or lost a look of mine as I received it with the utmost pleasure, and honoured by Mrs. Steerforth's confidence, felt older than I had done since I left Canterbury.

When the evening was pretty far spent, and a tray of glasses and decanters came in, Steerforth promised, over the fire, that he would seriously think of going down into the country with me. There was no hurry, he said; a week hence would do; and his mother hospitably said the same. While we were talking, he more than once called me Daisy; which brought Miss Dartle out again.

'But really, Mr. Copperfield,' she asked, 'is it a nickname? And why does he give it you? Is it—eh?—because he thinks you young and innocent? I am so stupid in these things.'

I coloured in replying that I believed it was.

'Oh!' said Miss Dartle. 'Now I am glad to know that! I ask for information, and I am glad to know it. He thinks you young and innocent; and so you are his friend. Well, that's quite delightful!'

She went to bed soon after this, and Mrs. Steerforth retired too. Steerforth and I, after lingering for half-an-hour over the fire, talking about Traddles and all the rest of them at old Salem House, went upstairs together. Steerforth's room was next to mine, and I went in to look at it. It was a picture of comfort, full of easy-chairs, cushions and footstools, worked by his mother's hand, and with no sort of thing omitted that could help to render it complete. Finally, her handsome features looked down on her darling from a portrait on the wall, as if it were even something to her that her likeness should watch him while he slept.

I found the fire burning clear enough in my room by this time, and the curtains drawn before the windows and round the bed, giving it a very snug appearance. I sat down in a great chair upon the hearth to meditate on my happiness; and had enjoyed the contemplation of it for some time, when I found a likeness of Miss Dartle looking eagerly at me from above the chimney-piece.

It was a startling likeness, and necessarily had a startling look. The painter hadn't made the scar, but I made it; and there it was, coming and going; now confined to the upper lip as I had seen it at dinner, and now showing the whole extent of the wound inflicted by the hammer, as I had seen it when she was passionate.

I wondered peevishly why they couldn't put her anywhere else instead of quartering her on me. To get rid of her, I undressed quickly, extinguished my light, and went to bed. But, as I fell asleep, I could not forget that she was still there looking, 'Is it really, though? I want to know'; and when I awoke in the night, I found that I was uneasily asking all sorts of people in my dreams whether it really was or not—without knowing what I meant.

CHAPTER 21. LITTLE EM'LY

There was a servant in that house, a man who, I understood, was usually with Steerforth, and had come into his service at the University, who was in appearance a pattern of respectability. I believe there never existed in his station a more respectable-looking man. He was taciturn, soft-footed, very quiet in his manner, deferential, observant, always at hand when wanted, and never near when not wanted; but his great claim to consideration was his respectability. He had not a pliant face, he had rather a stiff neck, rather a tight smooth head with short hair clinging to it at the sides, a soft way of speaking, with a peculiar habit of whispering the letter S so distinctly, that he seemed to use it oftener than any other man; but every peculiarity that he had he made respectable. If his nose had been upside-down, he would have made that respectable. He surrounded himself with an atmosphere of respectability, and walked secure in it. It would have been next to impossible to suspect him of anything wrong, he was so thoroughly respectable. Nobody could have thought of putting him in a livery, he was so highly respectable. To have imposed any derogatory work upon him, would have been to inflict a wanton insult on the feelings of a most respectable man. And of this, I noticed—the women-servants in the household were so intuitively conscious, that they always did such work themselves, and generally while he read the paper by the pantry fire.

Such a self-contained man I never saw. But in that quality, as in every other he possessed, he only seemed to be the more respectable. Even the fact that no one knew his Christian name, seemed to form a part of his respectability. Nothing could be objected against his surname, Littimer, by which he was known. Peter might have been hanged, or Tom transported; but Littimer was perfectly respectable.

It was occasioned, I suppose, by the reverend nature of respectability in the abstract, but I felt particularly young in this man's presence. How old he was himself, I could not guess—and that again went to his credit on the same score; for in the calmness of respectability he might have numbered fifty years as well as thirty.

Littimer was in my room in the morning before I was up, to bring me that reproachful shaving-water, and to put out my clothes. When I undrew the curtains and looked out of bed, I saw him, in an equable temperature of respectability, unaffected by the east wind of January, and not even breathing frostily, standing my boots right and left in the first dancing position, and blowing specks of dust off my coat as he laid it down like a baby.

I gave him good morning, and asked him what o'clock it was. He took out of his pocket the most respectable hunting-watch I ever saw, and preventing the spring with his thumb from opening far, looked in at the face as if he were consulting an oracular oyster, shut it up again, and said, if I pleased, it was half past eight.

'Mr. Steerforth will be glad to hear how you have rested, sir.'

'Thank you,' said I, 'very well indeed. Is Mr. Steerforth quite well?'

'Thank you, sir, Mr. Steerforth is tolerably well.' Another of his characteristics—no use of superlatives. A cool calm medium always.

'Is there anything more I can have the honour of doing for you, sir? The warning-bell will ring at nine; the family take breakfast at half past nine.'

'Nothing, I thank you.'

'I thank YOU, sir, if you please'; and with that, and with a little inclination of his head when he passed the bed-side, as an apology for correcting me, he went out, shutting the door as delicately as if I had just fallen into a sweet sleep on which my life depended.

Every morning we held exactly this conversation: never any more, and never any less: and yet, invariably, however far I might have been lifted out of myself over-night, and advanced towards maturer years, by Steerforth's companionship, or Mrs. Steerforth's confidence, or Miss Dartle's conversation, in the presence of this most respectable man I became, as our smaller poets sing, 'a boy again'.

He got horses for us; and Steerforth, who knew everything, gave me lessons in riding. He provided foils for us, and Steerforth gave me lessons in fencing—gloves, and I began, of the same master, to improve in boxing. It gave me no manner of concern that Steerforth should find me a novice in these sciences, but I never could bear to show my want of skill before the respectable Littimer. I had no reason to believe that Littimer understood such arts himself; he never led me to suppose anything of the kind, by so much as the vibration of one of his respectable eyelashes; yet whenever he was by, while we were practising, I felt myself the greenest and most inexperienced of mortals.

I am particular about this man, because he made a particular effect on me at that time, and because of what took place thereafter.

The week passed away in a most delightful manner. It passed rapidly, as may be supposed, to one entranced as I was; and yet it gave me so many occasions for knowing Steerforth better, and admiring him more in a thousand respects, that at its close I seemed to have been with him for a much longer time. A dashing way he had of treating me like a plaything, was more agreeable to me than any behaviour he could have adopted. It reminded me of our old acquaintance; it seemed the natural sequel of it; it showed me that he was unchanged; it relieved me of any uneasiness I might have felt, in comparing my merits with his, and measuring my claims upon his friendship by any equal standard; above all, it was a familiar, unrestrained, affectionate demeanour that he used towards no one else. As he had treated me at school differently from all the rest, I joyfully believed that he treated me in life unlike any other friend he had. I believed that I was nearer to his heart than any other friend, and my own heart warmed with attachment to him. He made up his mind to go with me into the country, and the day arrived for our departure. He had been doubtful at first whether to take Littimer or not, but decided to leave him at home. The respectable creature, satisfied with his lot whatever it was, arranged our portmanteaux on the little carriage that was to take us into London, as if they were intended to defy the shocks of ages, and received my modestly proffered donation with perfect tranquillity.

We bade adieu to Mrs. Steerforth and Miss Dartle, with many thanks on my part, and much kindness on the devoted mother's. The last thing I saw was Littimer's unruffled eye; fraught, as I fancied, with the silent conviction that I was very young indeed.

What I felt, in returning so auspiciously to the old familiar places, I shall not endeavour to describe. We went down by the Mail. I was so concerned, I recollect, even for the honour of Yarmouth, that when Steerforth said, as we drove through its dark streets to the inn, that, as well as he could make out, it was a good, queer, out-of-the-way kind of hole, I was highly pleased. We went to bed on our arrival (I observed a pair of dirty shoes and gaiters in connexion with my old friend the Dolphin as we passed that door), and breakfasted late in the morning. Steerforth, who was in great spirits, had been strolling about the beach before I was up, and had made acquaintance, he said, with half the boatmen in the place. Moreover, he had seen, in the distance, what he was sure must be the identical house of Mr. Peggotty, with smoke coming out of the chimney; and had had a great mind, he told me, to walk in and swear he was myself grown out of knowledge.

'When do you propose to introduce me there, Daisy?' he said. 'I am at your disposal. Make your own arrangements.'

'Why, I was thinking that this evening would be a good time, Steerforth, when they are all sitting round the fire. I should like you to see it when it's snug, it's such a curious place.'

'So be it!' returned Steerforth. 'This evening.'

'I shall not give them any notice that we are here, you know,' said I, delighted. 'We must take them by surprise.'

'Oh, of course! It's no fun,' said Steerforth, 'unless we take them by surprise. Let us see the natives in their aboriginal condition.'

'Though they ARE that sort of people that you mentioned,' I returned.

'Aha! What! you recollect my skirmishes with Rosa, do you?' he exclaimed with a quick look. 'Confound the girl, I am half afraid of her. She's like a goblin to me. But never mind her. Now what are you going to do? You are going to see your nurse, I suppose?'

'Why, yes,' I said, 'I must see Peggotty first of all.'

'Well,' replied Steerforth, looking at his watch. 'Suppose I deliver you up to be cried over for a couple of hours. Is that long enough?'

I answered, laughing, that I thought we might get through it in that time, but that he must come also; for he would find that his renown had preceded him, and that he was almost as great a personage as I was.

'I'll come anywhere you like,' said Steerforth, 'or do anything you like. Tell me where to come to; and in two hours I'll produce myself in any state you please, sentimental or comical.'

I gave him minute directions for finding the residence of Mr. Barkis, carrier to Blunderstone and elsewhere; and, on this understanding, went out alone. There was a sharp bracing air; the ground was dry; the sea was crisp and clear; the sun was diffusing abundance of light, if not much warmth; and everything was fresh and lively. I was so fresh and lively myself, in the pleasure of being there, that I could have stopped the people in the streets and shaken hands with them.

The streets looked small, of course. The streets that we have only seen as children always do, I believe, when we go back to them. But I had forgotten nothing in them, and found nothing changed, until I came to Mr.

Omer's shop. OMER AND Joram was now written up, where OMER used to be; but the inscription, DRAPER, TAILOR, HABERDASHER, FUNERAL FURNISHER, &c., remained as it was.

My footsteps seemed to tend so naturally to the shop door, after I had read these words from over the way, that I went across the road and looked in. There was a pretty woman at the back of the shop, dancing a little child in her arms, while another little fellow clung to her apron. I had no difficulty in recognizing either Minnie or Minnie's children. The glass door of the parlour was not open; but in the workshop across the yard I could faintly hear the old tune playing, as if it had never left off.

'Is Mr. Omer at home?' said I, entering. 'I should like to see him, for a moment, if he is.'

'Oh yes, sir, he is at home,' said Minnie; 'the weather don't suit his asthma out of doors. Joe, call your grandfather!'

The little fellow, who was holding her apron, gave such a lusty shout, that the sound of it made him bashful, and he buried his face in her skirts, to her great admiration. I heard a heavy puffing and blowing coming towards us, and soon Mr. Omer, shorter-winded than of yore, but not much older-looking, stood before me.

'Servant, sir,' said Mr. Omer. 'What can I do for you, sir?' 'You can shake hands with me, Mr. Omer, if you please,' said I, putting out my own. 'You were very good-natured to me once, when I am afraid I didn't show that I thought so.'

'Was I though?' returned the old man. 'I'm glad to hear it, but I don't remember when. Are you sure it was me?'

'Quite.'

'I think my memory has got as short as my breath,' said Mr. Omer, looking at me and shaking his head; 'for I don't remember you.'

'Don't you remember your coming to the coach to meet me, and my having breakfast here, and our riding out to Blunderstone together: you, and I, and Mrs. Joram, and Mr. Joram too—who wasn't her husband then?'

'Why, Lord bless my soul!' exclaimed Mr. Omer, after being thrown by his surprise into a fit of coughing, 'you don't say so! Minnie, my dear, you recollect? Dear me, yes; the party was a lady, I think?'

'My mother,' I rejoined.

'To—be—sure,' said Mr. Omer, touching my waistcoat with his forefinger, 'and there was a little child too! There was two parties. The little party was laid along with the other party. Over at Blunderstone it was, of course. Dear me! And how have you been since?'

Very well, I thanked him, as I hoped he had been too.

'Oh! nothing to grumble at, you know,' said Mr. Omer. 'I find my breath gets short, but it seldom gets longer as a man gets older. I take it as it comes, and make the most of it. That's the best way, ain't it?'

Mr. Omer coughed again, in consequence of laughing, and was assisted out of his fit by his daughter, who now stood close beside us, dancing her smallest child on the counter.

'Dear me!' said Mr. Omer. 'Yes, to be sure. Two parties! Why, in that very ride, if you'll believe me, the day was named for my Minnie to marry Joram. "Do name it, sir," says Joram. "Yes, do, father," says Minnie. And now he's come into the business. And look here! The youngest!'

Minnie laughed, and stroked her banded hair upon her temples, as her father put one of his fat fingers into the hand of the child she was dancing on the counter.

'Two parties, of course!' said Mr. Omer, nodding his head retrospectively. 'Ex-actly so! And Joram's at work, at this minute, on a grey one with silver nails, not this measurement'—the measurement of the dancing child upon the counter—'by a good two inches.—-Will you take something?'

I thanked him, but declined.

'Let me see,' said Mr. Omer. 'Barkis's the carrier's wife—Peggotty's the boatman's sister—she had something to do with your family? She was in service there, sure?'

My answering in the affirmative gave him great satisfaction.

'I believe my breath will get long next, my memory's getting so much so,' said Mr. Omer. 'Well, sir, we've got a young relation of hers here, under articles to us, that has as elegant a taste in the dress-making business—I assure you I don't believe there's a Duchess in England can touch her.'

'Not little Em'ly?' said I, involuntarily.

'Em'ly's her name,' said Mr. Omer, 'and she's little too. But if you'll believe me, she has such a face of her own that half the women in this town are mad against her.'

'Nonsense, father!' cried Minnie.

'My dear,' said Mr. Omer, 'I don't say it's the case with you,' winking at me, 'but I say that half the women in Yarmouth—ah! and in five mile round

—are mad against that girl.'

'Then she should have kept to her own station in life, father,' said Minnie, 'and not have given them any hold to talk about her, and then they couldn't have done it.'

'Couldn't have done it, my dear!' retorted Mr. Omer. 'Couldn't have done it! Is that YOUR knowledge of life? What is there that any woman couldn't do, that she shouldn't do—especially on the subject of another woman's good looks?'

I really thought it was all over with Mr. Omer, after he had uttered this libellous pleasantry. He coughed to that extent, and his breath eluded all his attempts to recover it with that obstinacy, that I fully expected to see his head go down behind the counter, and his little black breeches, with the rusty little bunches of ribbons at the knees, come quivering up in a last ineffectual struggle. At length, however, he got better, though he still panted hard, and was so exhausted that he was obliged to sit on the stool of the shop-desk.

'You see,' he said, wiping his head, and breathing with difficulty, 'she hasn't taken much to any companions here; she hasn't taken kindly to any particular acquaintances and friends, not to mention sweethearts. In consequence, an ill-natured story got about, that Em'ly wanted to be a lady. Now my opinion is, that it came into circulation principally on account of her sometimes saying, at the school, that if she was a lady she would like to do so-and-so for her uncle—don't you see?—and buy him such-and-such fine things.'

'I assure you, Mr. Omer, she has said so to me,' I returned eagerly, 'when we were both children.'

Mr. Omer nodded his head and rubbed his chin. 'Just so. Then out of a very little, she could dress herself, you see, better than most others could out of a deal, and that made things unpleasant. Moreover, she was rather what might be called wayward—I'll go so far as to say what I should call wayward myself,' said Mr. Omer; '-didn't know her own mind quite—a little spoiled—and couldn't, at first, exactly bind herself down. No more than that was ever said against her, Minnie?'

'No, father,' said Mrs. Joram. 'That's the worst, I believe.'

'So when she got a situation,' said Mr. Omer, 'to keep a fractious old lady company, they didn't very well agree, and she didn't stop. At last she came here, apprenticed for three years. Nearly two of 'em are over, and she has been as good a girl as ever was. Worth any six! Minnie, is she worth any six, now?'

'Yes, father,' replied Minnie. 'Never say I detracted from her!'

'Very good,' said Mr. Omer. 'That's right. And so, young gentleman,' he added, after a few moments' further rubbing of his chin, 'that you may not consider me long-winded as well as short-breathed, I believe that's all about it.'

As they had spoken in a subdued tone, while speaking of Em'ly, I had no doubt that she was near. On my asking now, if that were not so, Mr. Omer nodded yes, and nodded towards the door of the parlour. My hurried inquiry if I might peep in, was answered with a free permission; and, looking through the glass, I saw her sitting at her work. I saw her, a most beautiful little creature, with the cloudless blue eyes, that had looked into my childish heart, turned laughingly upon another child of Minnie's who was playing near her; with enough of wilfulness in her bright face to justify what I had heard; with much of the old capricious coyness lurking in it; but with nothing in her pretty looks, I am sure, but what was meant for goodness and for happiness, and what was on a good and happy course.

The tune across the yard that seemed as if it never had left off—alas! it was the tune that never DOES leave off—was beating, softly, all the while.

'Wouldn't you like to step in,' said Mr. Omer, 'and speak to her? Walk in and speak to her, sir! Make yourself at home!'

I was too bashful to do so then—I was afraid of confusing her, and I was no less afraid of confusing myself.—but I informed myself of the hour at which she left of an evening, in order that our visit might be timed accordingly; and taking leave of Mr. Omer, and his pretty daughter, and her little children, went away to my dear old Peggotty's.

Here she was, in the tiled kitchen, cooking dinner! The moment I knocked at the door she opened it, and asked me what I pleased to want. I looked at her with a smile, but she gave me no smile in return. I had never ceased to write to her, but it must have been seven years since we had met.

'Is Mr. Barkis at home, ma'am?' I said, feigning to speak roughly to her.

'He's at home, sir,' returned Peggotty, 'but he's bad abed with the rheumatics.'

'Don't he go over to Blunderstone now?' I asked.

'When he's well he do,' she answered.

'Do YOU ever go there, Mrs. Barkis?'

She looked at me more attentively, and I noticed a quick movement of her hands towards each other.

'Because I want to ask a question about a house there, that they call the—what is it?—the Rookery,' said I.

She took a step backward, and put out her hands in an undecided frightened way, as if to keep me off.

'Peggotty!' I cried to her.

She cried, 'My darling boy!' and we both burst into tears, and were locked in one another's arms.

What extravagances she committed; what laughing and crying over me; what pride she showed, what joy, what sorrow that she whose pride and joy I might have been, could never hold me in a fond embrace; I have not the heart to tell. I was troubled with no misgiving that it was young in me to respond to her emotions. I had never laughed and cried in all my life, I dare say—not even to her—more freely than I did that morning.

'Barkis will be so glad,' said Peggotty, wiping her eyes with her apron, 'that it'll do him more good than pints of liniment. May I go and tell him you are here? Will you come up and see him, my dear?'

Of course I would. But Peggotty could not get out of the room as easily as she meant to, for as often as she got to the door and looked round at me, she came back again to have another laugh and another cry upon my shoulder. At last, to make the matter easier, I went upstairs with her; and having waited outside for a minute, while she said a word of preparation to Mr. Barkis, presented myself before that invalid.

He received me with absolute enthusiasm. He was too rheumatic to be shaken hands with, but he begged me to shake the tassel on the top of his nightcap, which I did most cordially. When I sat down by the side of the bed, he said that it did him a world of good to feel as if he was driving me on the Blunderstone road again. As he lay in bed, face upward, and so covered, with that exception, that he seemed to be nothing but a face—like a conventional cherubim—he looked the queerest object I ever beheld.

'What name was it, as I wrote up in the cart, sir?' said Mr. Barkis, with a slow rheumatic smile.

'Ah! Mr. Barkis, we had some grave talks about that matter, hadn't we?'

'I was willin' a long time, sir?' said Mr. Barkis.

'A long time,' said I.

'And I don't regret it,' said Mr. Barkis. 'Do you remember what you told me once, about her making all the apple parsties and doing all the cooking?'

'Yes, very well,' I returned.

'It was as true,' said Mr. Barkis, 'as turnips is. It was as true,' said Mr. Barkis, nodding his nightcap, which was his only means of emphasis, 'as taxes is. And nothing's truer than them.'

Mr. Barkis turned his eyes upon me, as if for my assent to this result of his reflections in bed; and I gave it.

'Nothing's truer than them,' repeated Mr. Barkis; 'a man as poor as I am, finds that out in his mind when he's laid up. I'm a very poor man, sir!'

'I am sorry to hear it, Mr. Barkis.'

'A very poor man, indeed I am,' said Mr. Barkis.

Here his right hand came slowly and feebly from under the bedclothes, and with a purposeless uncertain grasp took hold of a stick which was loosely tied to the side of the bed. After some poking about with this instrument, in the course of which his face assumed a variety of distracted expressions, Mr. Barkis poked it against a box, an end of which had been visible to me all the time. Then his face became composed.

'Old clothes,' said Mr. Barkis.

'Oh!' said I.

'I wish it was Money, sir,' said Mr. Barkis.

'I wish it was, indeed,' said I.

'But it AIN'T,' said Mr. Barkis, opening both his eyes as wide as he possibly could.

I expressed myself quite sure of that, and Mr. Barkis, turning his eyes more gently to his wife, said:

'She's the usefullest and best of women, C. P. Barkis. All the praise that anyone can give to C. P. Barkis, she deserves, and more! My dear, you'll get a dinner today, for company; something good to eat and drink, will you?'

I should have protested against this unnecessary demonstration in my honour, but that I saw Peggotty, on the opposite side of the bed, extremely anxious I should not. So I held my peace.

'I have got a trifle of money somewhere about me, my dear,' said Mr. Barkis, 'but I'm a little tired. If you and Mr. David will leave me for a short nap, I'll try and find it when I wake.'

We left the room, in compliance with this request. When we got outside the door, Peggotty informed me that Mr. Barkis, being now 'a little nearer' than he used to be, always resorted to this same device before producing a single coin from his store; and that he endured unheard-of agonies in crawling out of bed alone, and taking it from that unlucky box. In effect, we presently heard him uttering suppressed groans of the most dismal nature, as this magpie proceeding racked him in every joint; but while Peggotty's eyes were full of compassion for him, she said his generous impulse would do him good, and it was better not to check it. So he groaned on, until he had got into bed again, suffering, I have no doubt, a martyrdom; and then called us in, pretending to have just woke up from a refreshing sleep, and to produce a guinea from under his pillow. His satisfaction in which happy imposition on us, and in having preserved the impenetrable secret of the box, appeared to be a sufficient compensation to him for all his tortures.

I prepared Peggotty for Steerforth's arrival and it was not long before he came. I am persuaded she knew no difference between his having been a personal benefactor of hers, and a kind friend to me, and that she would have received him with the utmost gratitude and devotion in any case. But his easy, spirited good humour; his genial manner, his handsome looks, his natural gift of adapting himself to whomsoever he pleased, and making direct, when he cared to do it, to the main point of interest in anybody's heart; bound her to him wholly in five minutes. His manner to me, alone, would have won her. But, through all these causes combined, I sincerely believe she had a kind of adoration for him before he left the house that night.

He stayed there with me to dinner—if I were to say willingly, I should not half express how readily and gaily. He went into Mr. Barkis's room like light and air, brightening and refreshing it as if he were healthy weather. There was no noise, no effort, no consciousness, in anything he did; but in everything an indescribable lightness, a seeming impossibility of doing anything else, or doing anything better, which was so graceful, so natural, and agreeable, that it overcomes me, even now, in the remembrance.

We made merry in the little parlour, where the Book of Martyrs, unthumbed since my time, was laid out upon the desk as of old, and where I now turned over its terrific pictures, remembering the old sensations they had awakened, but not feeling them. When Peggotty spoke of what she called my room, and of its being ready for me at night, and of her hoping I would occupy it, before I could so much as look at Steerforth, hesitating, he was possessed of the whole case.

'Of course,' he said. 'You'll sleep here, while we stay, and I shall sleep at the hotel.'

'But to bring you so far,' I returned, 'and to separate, seems bad companionship, Steerforth.'

'Why, in the name of Heaven, where do you naturally belong?' he said. 'What is "seems", compared to that?' It was settled at once.

He maintained all his delightful qualities to the last, until we started forth, at eight o'clock, for Mr. Peggotty's boat. Indeed, they were more and more brightly exhibited as the hours went on; for I thought even then, and I have no doubt now, that the consciousness of success in his determination to please, inspired him with a new delicacy of perception, and made it, subtle as it was, more easy to him. If anyone had told me, then, that all this was a brilliant game, played for the excitement of the moment, for the employment of high spirits, in the thoughtless love of superiority, in a mere wasteful careless course of winning what was worthless to him, and next minute thrown away—I say, if anyone had told me such a lie that night, I wonder in what manner of receiving it my indignation would have found a vent! Probably only in an increase, had that been possible, of the romantic feelings of fidelity and friendship with which I walked beside him, over the dark wintry sands towards the old boat; the wind sighing around us even more mournfully, than it had sighed and moaned upon the night when I first darkened Mr. Peggotty's door.

'This is a wild kind of place, Steerforth, is it not?'

'Dismal enough in the dark,' he said: 'and the sea roars as if it were hungry for us. Is that the boat, where I see a light yonder?' 'That's the boat,' said I.

'And it's the same I saw this morning,' he returned. 'I came straight to it, by instinct, I suppose.'

We said no more as we approached the light, but made softly for the door. I laid my hand upon the latch; and whispering Steerforth to keep close to me, went in.

A murmur of voices had been audible on the outside, and, at the moment of our entrance, a clapping of hands: which latter noise, I was surprised to see, proceeded from the generally disconsolate Mrs. Gummidge. But Mrs. Gummidge was not the only person there who was unusually excited. Mr. Peggotty, his face lighted up with uncommon satisfaction, and laughing with all his might, held his rough arms wide open, as if for little Em'ly to run into them; Ham, with a mixed expression in his face of admiration, exultation, and a lumbering sort of bashfulness that sat upon him very well, held little Em'ly by the hand, as if he were presenting her to Mr. Peggotty; little Em'ly herself, blushing and shy, but delighted with Mr. Peggotty's delight, as her joyous eyes expressed, was stopped by our entrance (for she saw us first) in the very act of springing from Ham to nestle in Mr. Peggotty's embrace. In the first glimpse we had of them all, and at the moment of our passing from the dark cold night into the warm light room, this was the way in which they were all employed: Mrs. Gummidge in the background, clapping her hands like a madwoman.

The little picture was so instantaneously dissolved by our going in, that one might have doubted whether it had ever been. I was in the midst of the astonished family, face to face with Mr. Peggotty, and holding out my hand to him, when Ham shouted:

'Mas'r Davy! It's Mas'r Davy!'

In a moment we were all shaking hands with one another, and asking one another how we did, and telling one another how glad we were to meet, and all talking at once. Mr. Peggotty was so proud and overjoyed to see us, that he did not know what to say or do, but kept over and over again shaking hands with me, and then with Steerforth, and then with me, and then ruffling his shaggy hair all over his head, and laughing with such glee and triumph, that it was a treat to see him.

'Why, that you two gent'lmen—gent'lmen growed—should come to this here roof tonight, of all nights in my life,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'is such a thing as never happened afore, I do rightly believe! Em'ly, my darling, come here! Come here, my little witch! There's Mas'r Davy's friend, my dear! There's the gent'lman as you've heerd on, Em'ly. He comes to see you, along with Mas'r Davy, on the brightest night of your uncle's life as ever was or will be, Gorm the t'other one, and horroar for it!'

After delivering this speech all in a breath, and with extraordinary animation and pleasure, Mr. Peggotty put one of his large hands rapturously on each side of his niece's face, and kissing it a dozen times, laid it with a gentle pride and love upon his broad chest, and patted it as if his hand had been a lady's. Then he let her go; and as she ran into the little chamber where I used to sleep, looked round upon us, quite hot and out of breath with his uncommon satisfaction.

'If you two gent'lmen—gent'lmen growed now, and such gent'lmen—' said Mr. Peggotty.

'So th' are, so th' are!' cried Ham. 'Well said! So th' are. Mas'r Davy bor'—gent'lmen growed—so th' are!'

'If you two gent'lmen, gent'lmen growed,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'don't excuse me for being in a state of mind, when you understand matters, I'll arks your pardon. Em'ly, my dear!—She knows I'm a going to tell,' here his delight broke out again, 'and has made off. Would you be so good as look arter her, Mawther, for a minute?'

Mrs. Gummidge nodded and disappeared.

'If this ain't,' said Mr. Peggotty, sitting down among us by the fire, 'the brightest night o' my life, I'm a shellfish—biled too—and more I can't say. This here little Em'ly, sir,' in a low voice to Steerforth, '—her as you see a blushing here just now—'

Steerforth only nodded; but with such a pleased expression of interest, and of participation in Mr. Peggotty's feelings, that the latter answered him as if he had spoken.

'To be sure,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'That's her, and so she is. Thankee, sir.'

Ham nodded to me several times, as if he would have said so too.

'This here little Em'ly of ours,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'has been, in our house, what I suppose (I'm a ignorant man, but that's my belief) no one but a little bright-eyed creetur can be in a house. She ain't my child; I never had one; but I couldn't love her more. You understand! I couldn't do it!'

'I quite understand,' said Steerforth.

'I know you do, sir,' returned Mr. Peggotty, 'and thankee again. Mas'r Davy, he can remember what she was; you may judge for your own self what she is; but neither of you can't fully know what she has been, is, and will be, to my loving art. I am rough, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'I am as rough as a Sea Porkypine; but no one, unless, mayhap, it is a woman, can know, I think, what our little Em'ly is to me. And betwixt ourselves,' sinking his voice lower yet, 'that woman's name ain't Missis Gummidge neither, though she has a world of merits.' Mr. Peggotty ruffled his hair again, with both hands, as a further preparation for what he was going to say, and went on, with a hand upon each of his knees:

'There was a certain person as had know'd our Em'ly, from the time when her father was drownded; as had seen her constant; when a babby, when a young gal, when a woman. Not much of a person to look at, he warn't,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'something o' my own build—rough—a good deal o' the sou'-wester in him—wery salt—but, on the whole, a honest sort of a chap, with his art in the right place.'

I thought I had never seen Ham grin to anything like the extent to which he sat grinning at us now.

'What does this here blessed tarpaulin go and do,' said Mr. Peggotty, with his face one high noon of enjoyment, 'but he loses that there art of his to our little Em'ly. He follers her about, he makes hisself a sort o' servant to her, he loses in a great measure his relish for his wittles, and in the long-run he makes it clear to me wot's amiss. Now I could wish myself, you see, that our little Em'ly was in a fair way of being married. I could wish to see her, at all ewents, under articles to a honest man as had a right to defend her. I don't know how long I may live, or how soon I may die; but I know that if I was capsized, any night, in a gale of wind in Yarmouth Roads here, and was to see the town-lights shining for the last time over the rollers as I couldn't make no head against, I could go down quieter for thinking "There's a man ashore there, iron-true to my little Em'ly, God bless her, and no wrong can touch my Em'ly while so be as that man lives."'

Mr. Peggotty, in simple earnestness, waved his right arm, as if he were waving it at the town-lights for the last time, and then, exchanging a nod with Ham, whose eye he caught, proceeded as before.

'Well! I counsels him to speak to Em'ly. He's big enough, but he's bashfuller than a little un, and he don't like. So I speak. "What! Him!" says Em'ly. "Him that I've know'd so intimate so many years, and like so much. Oh, Uncle! I never can have him. He's such a good fellow!" I gives her a kiss, and I says no more to her than, "My dear, you're right to speak out, you're to choose for yourself, you're as free as a little bird." Then I aways to him, and I says, "I wish it could have been so, but it can't. But you can both be as you was, and wot I say to you is, Be as you was with her, like a man." He says to me, a-shaking of my hand, "I will!" he says. And he was—honourable and manful—for two year going on, and we was just the same at home here as afore.'

Mr. Peggotty's face, which had varied in its expression with the various stages of his narrative, now resumed all its former triumphant delight, as he laid a hand upon my knee and a hand upon Steerforth's (previously wetting them both, for the greater emphasis of the action), and divided the following speech between us:

'All of a sudden, one evening—as it might be tonight—comes little Em'ly from her work, and him with her! There ain't so much in that, you'll say. No, because he takes care on her, like a brother, arter dark, and indeed afore dark, and at all times. But this tarpaulin chap, he takes hold of her hand, and he cries out to me, joyful, "Look here! This is to be my little wife!" And she says, half bold and half shy, and half a laughing and half a crying, "Yes, Uncle! If you please."—If I please!' cried Mr. Peggotty, rolling his head in an ecstasy at the idea; 'Lord, as if I should do anythink else!—"If you please, I am steadier now, and I have thought better of it, and I'll be as good a little wife as I can to him, for he's a dear, good fellow!" Then Missis Gummidge, she claps her hands like a play, and you come in. Theer! the murder's out!' said Mr. Peggotty—'You come in! It took place this here present hour; and here's the man that'll marry her, the minute she's out of her time.'

Ham staggered, as well he might, under the blow Mr. Peggotty dealt him in his unbounded joy, as a mark of confidence and friendship; but feeling called upon to say something to us, he said, with much faltering and great difficulty:

'She warn't no higher than you was, Mas'r Davy—when you first come—when I thought what she'd grow up to be. I see her grown up—gent'lmen—like a flower. I'd lay down my life for her—Mas'r Davy—Oh! most content and cheerful! She's more to me—gent'lmen—than—she's all to me that ever I can want, and more than ever I—than ever I could say. I—I love her true. There ain't a gent'lman in all the land—nor yet sailing upon all the sea—that can love his lady more than I love her, though there's many a common man—would say better—what he meant.'

I thought it affecting to see such a sturdy fellow as Ham was now, trembling in the strength of what he felt for the pretty little creature who had won his heart. I thought the simple confidence reposed in us by Mr. Peggotty and by himself, was, in itself, affecting. I was affected by the story altogether. How far my emotions were influenced by the recollections of my childhood, I don't know. Whether I had come there with any lingering fancy that I was still to love little Em'ly, I don't know. I know that I was filled with pleasure by all this; but, at first, with an indescribably sensitive pleasure, that a very little would have changed to pain.

Therefore, if it had depended upon me to touch the prevailing chord among them with any skill, I should have made a poor hand of it. But it depended upon Steerforth; and he did it with such address, that in a few minutes we were all as easy and as happy as it was possible to be.

'Mr. Peggotty,' he said, 'you are a thoroughly good fellow, and deserve to be as happy as you are tonight. My hand upon it! Ham, I give you joy, my boy. My hand upon that, too! Daisy, stir the fire, and make it a brisk one! and Mr. Peggotty, unless you can induce your gentle niece to come back (for whom I vacate this seat in the corner), I shall go. Any gap at your fireside on such a night—such a gap least of all—I wouldn't make, for the wealth of the Indies!'

So Mr. Peggotty went into my old room to fetch little Em'ly. At first little Em'ly didn't like to come, and then Ham went. Presently they brought her to the fireside, very much confused, and very shy,—but she soon became more assured when she found how gently and respectfully Steerforth spoke to her; how skilfully he avoided anything that would embarrass her; how he talked to Mr. Peggotty of boats, and ships, and tides, and fish; how he referred to me about the time when he had seen Mr. Peggotty at Salem House; how delighted he was with the boat and all belonging to it; how lightly and easily he carried on, until he brought us, by degrees, into a charmed circle, and we were all talking away without any reserve.

Em'ly, indeed, said little all the evening; but she looked, and listened, and her face got animated, and she was charming. Steerforth told a story of a dismal shipwreck (which arose out of his talk with Mr. Peggotty), as if he saw it all before him—and little Em'ly's eyes were fastened on him all the time, as if she saw it too. He told us a merry adventure of his own, as a relief to that, with as much gaiety as if the narrative were as fresh to him as it was to us—and little Em'ly laughed until the boat rang with the musical sounds, and we all laughed (Steerforth too), in irresistible sympathy with what was so pleasant and light-hearted. He got Mr. Peggotty to sing, or rather to roar, 'When the stormy winds do blow, do blow, do blow'; and he sang a sailor's song himself, so pathetically and beautifully, that I could have almost fancied that the real wind creeping sorrowfully round the house, and murmuring low through our unbroken silence, was there to listen.

As to Mrs. Gummidge, he roused that victim of despondency with a success never attained by anyone else (so Mr. Peggotty informed me), since the decease of the old one. He left her so little leisure for being miserable, that she said next day she thought she must have been bewitched.

But he set up no monopoly of the general attention, or the conversation. When little Em'ly grew more courageous, and talked (but still bashfully) across the fire to me, of our old wanderings upon the beach, to pick up shells and pebbles; and when I asked her if she recollected how I used to be devoted to her; and when we both laughed and reddened, casting these looks back on the pleasant old times, so unreal to look at now; he was silent and attentive, and observed us thoughtfully. She sat, at this time, and all the evening, on the old locker in her old little corner by the fire—Ham beside her, where I used to sit. I could not satisfy myself whether it was in her own little tormenting way, or in a maidenly reserve before us, that she kept quite close to the wall, and away from him; but I observed that she did so, all the evening.

As I remember, it was almost midnight when we took our leave. We had had some biscuit and dried fish for supper, and Steerforth had produced from his pocket a full flask of Hollands, which we men (I may say we men, now, without a blush) had emptied. We parted merrily; and as they all stood crowded round the door to light us as far as they could upon our road, I saw the sweet blue eyes of little Em'ly peeping after us, from behind Ham, and heard her soft voice calling to us to be careful how we went.

'A most engaging little Beauty!' said Steerforth, taking my arm. 'Well! It's a quaint place, and they are quaint company, and it's quite a new sensation to mix with them.'

'How fortunate we are, too,' I returned, 'to have arrived to witness their happiness in that intended marriage! I never saw people so happy. How delightful to see it, and to be made the sharers in their honest joy, as we have been!'

'That's rather a chuckle-headed fellow for the girl; isn't he?' said Steerforth.

He had been so hearty with him, and with them all, that I felt a shock in this unexpected and cold reply. But turning quickly upon him, and seeing a laugh in his eyes, I answered, much relieved:

'Ah, Steerforth! It's well for you to joke about the poor! You may skirmish with Miss Dartle, or try to hide your sympathies in jest from me, but I know better. When I see how perfectly you understand them, how exquisitely you can enter into happiness like this plain fisherman's, or humour a love like my old nurse's, I know that there is not a joy or sorrow, not an emotion, of such people, that can be indifferent to you. And I admire and love you for it, Steerforth, twenty times the more!'

He stopped, and, looking in my face, said, 'Daisy, I believe you are in earnest, and are good. I wish we all were!' Next moment he was gaily singing Mr. Peggotty's song, as we walked at a round pace back to Yarmouth.

CHAPTER 22. SOME OLD SCENES, AND SOME NEW PEOPLE

Steerforth and I stayed for more than a fortnight in that part of the country. We were very much together, I need not say; but occasionally we were asunder for some hours at a time. He was a good sailor, and I was but an indifferent one; and when he went out boating with Mr. Peggotty, which was a favourite amusement of his, I generally remained ashore. My occupation of Peggotty's spare-room put a constraint upon me, from which he was free: for, knowing how assiduously she attended on Mr. Barkis all day, I did not like to remain out late at night; whereas Steerforth, lying at the Inn, had nothing to consult but his own humour. Thus it came about, that I heard of his making little treats for the fishermen at Mr. Peggotty's house of call, 'The Willing Mind', after I was in bed, and of his being afloat, wrapped in fishermen's clothes, whole moonlight nights, and coming back when the morning tide was at flood. By this time, however, I knew that his restless nature and bold spirits delighted to find a vent in rough toil and hard weather, as in any other means of excitement that presented itself freshly to him; so none of his proceedings surprised me.

Another cause of our being sometimes apart, was, that I had naturally an interest in going over to Blunderstone, and revisiting the old familiar scenes of my childhood; while Steerforth, after being there once, had naturally no great interest in going there again. Hence, on three or four days that I can at once recall, we went our several ways after an early breakfast, and met again at a late dinner. I had no idea how he employed his time in the interval, beyond a general knowledge that he was very popular in the place, and had twenty means of actively diverting himself where another man might not have found one.

For my own part, my occupation in my solitary pilgrimages was to recall every yard of the old road as I went along it, and to haunt the old spots, of which I never tired. I haunted them, as my memory had often done, and lingered among them as my younger thoughts had lingered when I was far away. The grave beneath the tree, where both my parents lay—on which I had looked out, when it was my father's only, with such curious feelings of compassion, and by which I had stood, so desolate, when it was opened to receive my pretty mother and her baby—the grave which Peggotty's own faithful care had ever since kept neat, and made a garden of, I walked near, by the hour. It lay a little off the churchyard path, in a quiet corner, not so far removed but I could read the names upon the stone as I walked to and fro, startled by the sound of the church-bell when it struck the hour, for it was like a departed voice to me. My reflections at these times were always associated with the figure I was to make in life, and the distinguished things I was to do. My echoing footsteps went to no other tune, but were as constant to that as if I had come home to build my castles in the air at a living mother's side.

There were great changes in my old home. The ragged nests, so long deserted by the rooks, were gone; and the trees were lopped and topped out of their remembered shapes. The garden had run wild, and half the windows of the house were shut up. It was occupied, but only by a poor lunatic gentleman, and the people who took care of him. He was always sitting at my little window, looking out into the churchyard; and I wondered whether his rambling thoughts ever went upon any of the fancies that used to occupy mine, on the rosy mornings when I peeped out of that same little window in my night-clothes, and saw the sheep quietly feeding in the light of the rising sun.

Our old neighbours, Mr. and Mrs. Grayper, were gone to South America, and the rain had made its way through the roof of their empty house, and stained the outer walls. Mr. Chillip was married again to a tall, raw-boned, high-nosed wife; and they had a weazen little baby, with a heavy head that it couldn't hold up, and two weak staring eyes, with which it seemed to be always wondering why it had ever been born.

It was with a singular jumble of sadness and pleasure that I used to linger about my native place, until the reddening winter sun admonished me that it was time to start on my returning walk. But, when the place was left behind, and especially when Steerforth and I were happily seated over our dinner by a blazing fire, it was delicious to think of having been there. So it was, though in a softened degree, when I went to my neat room at night; and, turning over the leaves of the crocodile-book (which was always there, upon a little table), remembered with a grateful heart how blest I was in having such a friend as Steerforth, such a friend as Peggotty, and such a substitute for what I had lost as my excellent and generous aunt.

MY nearest way to Yarmouth, in coming back from these long walks, was by a ferry. It landed me on the flat between the town and the sea, which I could make straight across, and so save myself a considerable circuit by the high road. Mr. Peggotty's house being on that waste-place, and not a hundred yards out of my track, I always looked in as I went by. Steerforth was pretty sure to be there expecting me, and we went on together through the frosty air and gathering fog towards the twinkling lights of the town.

One dark evening, when I was later than usual—for I had, that day, been making my parting visit to Blunderstone, as we were now about to return home—I found him alone in Mr. Peggotty's house, sitting thoughtfully before the fire. He was so intent upon his own reflections that he was quite unconscious of my approach. This, indeed, he might easily have been if he had been less absorbed, for footsteps fell noiselessly on the sandy ground outside; but even my entrance failed to rouse him. I was standing close to him, looking at him; and still, with a heavy brow, he was lost in his meditations.

He gave such a start when I put my hand upon his shoulder, that he made me start too.

'You come upon me,' he said, almost angrily, 'like a reproachful ghost!'

'I was obliged to announce myself, somehow,' I replied. 'Have I called you down from the stars?'

'No,' he answered. 'No.'

'Up from anywhere, then?' said I, taking my seat near him.

'I was looking at the pictures in the fire,' he returned.

'But you are spoiling them for me,' said I, as he stirred it quickly with a piece of burning wood, striking out of it a train of red-hot sparks that went careering up the little chimney, and roaring out into the air.

'You would not have seen them,' he returned. 'I detest this mongrel time, neither day nor night. How late you are! Where have you been?'

'I have been taking leave of my usual walk,' said I.

'And I have been sitting here,' said Steerforth, glancing round the room, 'thinking that all the people we found so glad on the night of our coming down, might—to judge from the present wasted air of the place—be dispersed, or dead, or come to I don't know what harm. David, I wish to God I had had a judicious father these last twenty years!'

'My dear Steerforth, what is the matter?'

'I wish with all my soul I had been better guided!' he exclaimed. 'I wish with all my soul I could guide myself better!'

There was a passionate dejection in his manner that quite amazed me. He was more unlike himself than I could have supposed possible.

'It would be better to be this poor Peggotty, or his lout of a nephew,' he said, getting up and leaning moodily against the chimney-piece, with his face towards the fire, 'than to be myself, twenty times richer and twenty times wiser, and be the torment to myself that I have been, in this Devil's bark of a boat, within the last half-hour!'

I was so confounded by the alteration in him, that at first I could only observe him in silence, as he stood leaning his head upon his hand, and looking gloomily down at the fire. At length I begged him, with all the earnestness I felt, to tell me what had occurred to cross him so unusually, and to let me sympathize with him, if I could not hope to advise him. Before I had well concluded, he began to laugh—fretfully at first, but soon with returning gaiety.

'Tut, it's nothing, Daisy! nothing!' he replied. 'I told you at the inn in London, I am heavy company for myself, sometimes. I have been a nightmare to myself, just now—must have had one, I think. At odd dull times, nursery tales come up into the memory, unrecognized for what they are. I believe I have been confounding myself with the bad boy who "didn't care", and became food for lions—a grander kind of going to the dogs, I suppose. What old women call the horrors, have been creeping over me from head to foot. I have been afraid of myself.'

'You are afraid of nothing else, I think,' said I.

'Perhaps not, and yet may have enough to be afraid of too,' he answered. 'Well! So it goes by! I am not about to be hipped again, David; but I tell you, my good fellow, once more, that it would have been well for me (and for more than me) if I had had a steadfast and judicious father!'

His face was always full of expression, but I never saw it express such a dark kind of earnestness as when he said these words, with his glance bent on the fire.

'So much for that!' he said, making as if he tossed something light into the air, with his hand. '"Why, being gone, I am a man again," like Macbeth. And now for dinner! If I have not (Macbeth-like) broken up the feast with most admired disorder, Daisy.'

'But where are they all, I wonder!' said I.

'God knows,' said Steerforth. 'After strolling to the ferry looking for you, I strolled in here and found the place deserted. That set me thinking, and you found me thinking.'

The advent of Mrs. Gummidge with a basket, explained how the house had happened to be empty. She had hurried out to buy something that was needed, against Mr. Peggotty's return with the tide; and had left the door open in the meanwhile, lest Ham and little Em'ly, with whom it was an early night, should come home while she was gone. Steerforth, after very much improving Mrs. Gummidge's spirits by a cheerful salutation and a jocose embrace, took my arm, and hurried me away.

He had improved his own spirits, no less than Mrs. Gummidge's, for they were again at their usual flow, and he was full of vivacious conversation as we went along.

'And so,' he said, gaily, 'we abandon this buccaneer life tomorrow, do we?'

'So we agreed,' I returned. 'And our places by the coach are taken, you know.'

'Ay! there's no help for it, I suppose,' said Steerforth. 'I have almost forgotten that there is anything to do in the world but to go out tossing on the sea here. I wish there was not.'

'As long as the novelty should last,' said I, laughing.

'Like enough,' he returned; 'though there's a sarcastic meaning in that observation for an amiable piece of innocence like my young friend. Well! I dare say I am a capricious fellow, David. I know I am; but while the iron is hot, I can strike it vigorously too. I could pass a reasonably good examination already, as a pilot in these waters, I think.'

'Mr. Peggotty says you are a wonder,' I returned.

'A nautical phenomenon, eh?' laughed Steerforth.

'Indeed he does, and you know how truly; I know how ardent you are in any pursuit you follow, and how easily you can master it. And that amazes me most in you, Steerforth—that you should be contented with such fitful uses of your powers.'

'Contented?' he answered, merrily. 'I am never contented, except with your freshness, my gentle Daisy. As to fitfulness, I have never learnt the art of binding myself to any of the wheels on which the Ixions of these days are turning round and round. I missed it somehow in a bad apprenticeship, and now don't care about it.—-You know I have bought a boat down here?'

'What an extraordinary fellow you are, Steerforth!' I exclaimed, stopping—for this was the first I had heard of it. 'When you may never care to come near the place again!'

'I don't know that,' he returned. 'I have taken a fancy to the place. At all events,' walking me briskly on, 'I have bought a boat that was for sale—a clipper, Mr. Peggotty says; and so she is—and Mr. Peggotty will be master of her in my absence.'

'Now I understand you, Steerforth!' said I, exultingly. 'You pretend to have bought it for yourself, but you have really done so to confer a benefit on him. I might have known as much at first, knowing you. My dear kind Steerforth, how can I tell you what I think of your generosity?'

'Tush!' he answered, turning red. 'The less said, the better.'

'Didn't I know?' cried I, 'didn't I say that there was not a joy, or sorrow, or any emotion of such honest hearts that was indifferent to you?'

'Aye, aye,' he answered, 'you told me all that. There let it rest. We have said enough!'

Afraid of offending him by pursuing the subject when he made so light of it, I only pursued it in my thoughts as we went on at even a quicker pace than before.

'She must be newly rigged,' said Steerforth, 'and I shall leave Littimer behind to see it done, that I may know she is quite complete. Did I tell you Littimer had come down?'

'No.'

'Oh yes! came down this morning, with a letter from my mother.'

As our looks met, I observed that he was pale even to his lips, though he looked very steadily at me. I feared that some difference between him and his mother might have led to his being in the frame of mind in which I had found him at the solitary fireside. I hinted so.

'Oh no!' he said, shaking his head, and giving a slight laugh. 'Nothing of the sort! Yes. He is come down, that man of mine.'

'The same as ever?' said I.

'The same as ever,' said Steerforth. 'Distant and quiet as the North Pole. He shall see to the boat being fresh named. She's the "Stormy Petrel" now. What does Mr. Peggotty care for Stormy Petrels! I'll have her christened again.'

'By what name?' I asked.

'The "Little Em'ly".'

As he had continued to look steadily at me, I took it as a reminder that he objected to being extolled for his consideration. I could not help showing in my face how much it pleased me, but I said little, and he resumed his usual smile, and seemed relieved.

'But see here,' he said, looking before us, 'where the original little Em'ly comes! And that fellow with her, eh? Upon my soul, he's a true knight. He never leaves her!'

Ham was a boat-builder in these days, having improved a natural ingenuity in that handicraft, until he had become a skilled workman. He was in his working-dress, and looked rugged enough, but manly withal, and a very fit protector for the blooming little creature at his side. Indeed, there was a frankness in his face, an honesty, and an undisguised show of his pride in her, and his love for her, which were, to me, the best of good looks. I thought, as they came towards us, that they were well matched even in that particular.

She withdrew her hand timidly from his arm as we stopped to speak to them, and blushed as she gave it to Steerforth and to me. When they passed on, after we had exchanged a few words, she did not like to replace that hand, but, still appearing timid and constrained, walked by herself. I thought all this very pretty and engaging, and Steerforth seemed to think so too, as we looked after them fading away in the light of a young moon.

Suddenly there passed us—evidently following them—a young woman whose approach we had not observed, but whose face I saw as she went by, and thought I had a faint remembrance of. She was lightly dressed; looked bold, and haggard, and flaunting, and poor; but seemed, for the time, to have given all that to the wind which was blowing, and to have nothing in her mind but going after them. As the dark distant level, absorbing their figures into itself, left but itself visible between us and the sea and clouds, her figure disappeared in like manner, still no nearer to them than before.

'That is a black shadow to be following the girl,' said Steerforth, standing still; 'what does it mean?'

He spoke in a low voice that sounded almost strange to Me.

'She must have it in her mind to beg of them, I think,' said I.

'A beggar would be no novelty,' said Steerforth; 'but it is a strange thing that the beggar should take that shape tonight.'

'Why?' I asked.

'For no better reason, truly, than because I was thinking,' he said, after a pause, 'of something like it, when it came by. Where the Devil did it come from, I wonder!'

'From the shadow of this wall, I think,' said I, as we emerged upon a road on which a wall abutted.

'It's gone!' he returned, looking over his shoulder. 'And all ill go with it. Now for our dinner!'

But he looked again over his shoulder towards the sea-line glimmering afar off, and yet again. And he wondered about it, in some broken expressions, several times, in the short remainder of our walk; and only seemed to forget it when the light of fire and candle shone upon us, seated warm and merry, at table.

Littimer was there, and had his usual effect upon me. When I said to him that I hoped Mrs. Steerforth and Miss Dartle were well, he answered respectfully (and of course respectably), that they were tolerably well, he thanked me, and had sent their compliments. This was all, and yet he seemed to me to say as plainly as a man could say: 'You are very young, sir; you are exceedingly young.'

We had almost finished dinner, when taking a step or two towards the table, from the corner where he kept watch upon us, or rather upon me, as I felt, he said to his master:

'I beg your pardon, sir. Miss Mowcher is down here.'

'Who?' cried Steerforth, much astonished.

'Miss Mowcher, sir.'

'Why, what on earth does she do here?' said Steerforth.

'It appears to be her native part of the country, sir. She informs me that she makes one of her professional visits here, every year, sir. I met her in the street this afternoon, and she wished to know if she might have the honour of waiting on you after dinner, sir.'

'Do you know the Giantess in question, Daisy?' inquired Steerforth.

I was obliged to confess—I felt ashamed, even of being at this disadvantage before Littimer—that Miss Mowcher and I were wholly unacquainted.

'Then you shall know her,' said Steerforth, 'for she is one of the seven wonders of the world. When Miss Mowcher comes, show her in.'

I felt some curiosity and excitement about this lady, especially as Steerforth burst into a fit of laughing when I referred to her, and positively refused to answer any question of which I made her the subject. I remained, therefore, in a state of considerable expectation until the cloth had been removed some half an hour, and we were sitting over our decanter of wine before the fire, when the door opened, and Littimer, with his habitual serenity quite undisturbed, announced:

'Miss Mowcher!'

I looked at the doorway and saw nothing. I was still looking at the doorway, thinking that Miss Mowcher was a long while making her appearance, when, to my infinite astonishment, there came waddling round a sofa which stood between me and it, a pursy dwarf, of about forty or forty-five, with a very large head and face, a pair of roguish grey eyes, and such extremely little arms, that, to enable herself to lay a finger archly against her snub nose, as she ogled Steerforth, she was obliged to meet the finger half-way, and lay her nose against it. Her chin, which was what is called a double chin, was so fat that it entirely swallowed up the strings of her bonnet, bow and all. Throat she had none; waist she had none; legs she had none, worth mentioning; for though she was more than full-sized down to where her waist would have been, if she had had any, and though she terminated, as human beings generally do, in a pair of feet, she was so short that she stood at a common-sized chair as at a table, resting a bag she carried on the seat. This lady—dressed in an off-hand, easy style; bringing her nose and her forefinger together, with the difficulty I have described; standing with her head necessarily on one side, and, with one of her sharp eyes shut up, making an uncommonly knowing face—after ogling Steerforth for a few moments, broke into a torrent of words.

'What! My flower!' she pleasantly began, shaking her large head at him. 'You're there, are you! Oh, you naughty boy, fie for shame, what do you do so far away from home? Up to mischief, I'll be bound. Oh, you're a downy fellow, Steerforth, so you are, and I'm another, ain't I? Ha, ha, ha! You'd have betted a hundred pound to five, now, that you wouldn't have seen me here, wouldn't you? Bless you, man alive, I'm everywhere. I'm here and there, and where not, like the conjurer's half-crown in the lady's handkercher. Talking of handkerchers—and talking of ladies—what a comfort you are to your blessed mother, ain't you, my dear boy, over one of my shoulders, and I don't say which!'

Miss Mowcher untied her bonnet, at this passage of her discourse, threw back the strings, and sat down, panting, on a footstool in front of the fire—

making a kind of arbour of the dining table, which spread its mahogany shelter above her head.

'Oh my stars and what's-their-names!' she went on, clapping a hand on each of her little knees, and glancing shrewdly at me, 'I'm of too full a habit, that's the fact, Steerforth. After a flight of stairs, it gives me as much trouble to draw every breath I want, as if it was a bucket of water. If you saw me looking out of an upper window, you'd think I was a fine woman, wouldn't you?'

'I should think that, wherever I saw you,' replied Steerforth.

'Go along, you dog, do!' cried the little creature, making a whisk at him with the handkerchief with which she was wiping her face, 'and don't be impudent! But I give you my word and honour I was at Lady Mithers's last week—THERE'S a woman! How SHE wears!—and Mithers himself came into the room where I was waiting for her—THERE'S a man! How HE wears! and his wig too, for he's had it these ten years—and he went on at that rate in the complimentary line, that I began to think I should be obliged to ring the bell. Ha! ha! ha! He's a pleasant wretch, but he wants principle.'

'What were you doing for Lady Mithers?' asked Steerforth.

'That's tellings, my blessed infant,' she retorted, tapping her nose again, screwing up her face, and twinkling her eyes like an imp of supernatural intelligence. 'Never YOU mind! You'd like to know whether I stop her hair from falling off, or dye it, or touch up her complexion, or improve her eyebrows, wouldn't you? And so you shall, my darling—when I tell you! Do you know what my great grandfather's name was?'

'No,' said Steerforth.

'It was Walker, my sweet pet,' replied Miss Mowcher, 'and he came of a long line of Walkers, that I inherit all the Hookey estates from.'

I never beheld anything approaching to Miss Mowcher's wink except Miss Mowcher's self-possession. She had a wonderful way too, when listening to what was said to her, or when waiting for an answer to what she had said herself, of pausing with her head cunningly on one side, and one eye turned up like a magpie's. Altogether I was lost in amazement, and sat staring at her, quite oblivious, I am afraid, of the laws of politeness.

She had by this time drawn the chair to her side, and was busily engaged in producing from the bag (plunging in her short arm to the shoulder, at every dive) a number of small bottles, sponges, combs, brushes, bits of flannel, little pairs of curling-irons, and other instruments, which she tumbled in a heap upon the chair. From this employment she suddenly desisted, and said to Steerforth, much to my confusion:

'Who's your friend?'

'Mr. Copperfield,' said Steerforth; 'he wants to know you.'

'Well, then, he shall! I thought he looked as if he did!' returned Miss Mowcher, waddling up to me, bag in hand, and laughing on me as she came. 'Face like a peach!' standing on tiptoe to pinch my cheek as I sat. 'Quite tempting! I'm very fond of peaches. Happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Copperfield, I'm sure.'

I said that I congratulated myself on having the honour to make hers, and that the happiness was mutual.

'Oh, my goodness, how polite we are!' exclaimed Miss Mowcher, making a preposterous attempt to cover her large face with her morsel of a hand. 'What a world of gammon and spinnage it is, though, ain't it!'

This was addressed confidentially to both of us, as the morsel of a hand came away from the face, and buried itself, arm and all, in the bag again.

'What do you mean, Miss Mowcher?' said Steerforth.

'Ha! ha! ha! What a refreshing set of humbugs we are, to be sure, ain't we, my sweet child?' replied that morsel of a woman, feeling in the bag with her head on one side and her eye in the air. 'Look here!' taking something out. 'Scraps of the Russian Prince's nails. Prince Alphabet turned topsy-turvy, I call him, for his name's got all the letters in it, higgledy-piggledy.'

'The Russian Prince is a client of yours, is he?' said Steerforth.

'I believe you, my pet,' replied Miss Mowcher. 'I keep his nails in order for him. Twice a week! Fingers and toes.'

'He pays well, I hope?' said Steerforth.

'Pays, as he speaks, my dear child—through the nose,' replied Miss Mowcher. 'None of your close shavers the Prince ain't. You'd say so, if you saw his moustachios. Red by nature, black by art.'

'By your art, of course,' said Steerforth.

Miss Mowcher winked assent. 'Forced to send for me. Couldn't help it. The climate affected his dye; it did very well in Russia, but it was no go here. You never saw such a rusty Prince in all your born days as he was. Like old iron!' 'Is that why you called him a humbug, just now?' inquired Steerforth.

'Oh, you're a broth of a boy, ain't you?' returned Miss Mowcher, shaking her head violently. 'I said, what a set of humbugs we were in general, and I showed you the scraps of the Prince's nails to prove it. The Prince's nails do more for me in private families of the genteel sort, than all my talents put together. I always carry 'em about. They're the best introduction. If Miss Mowcher cuts the Prince's nails, she must be all right. I give 'em away to the young ladies. They put 'em in albums, I believe. Ha! ha! ha! Upon my life, "the whole social system" (as the men call it when they make speeches in Parliament) is a system of Prince's nails!' said this least of women, trying to fold her short arms, and nodding her large head.

Steerforth laughed heartily, and I laughed too. Miss Mowcher continuing all the time to shake her head (which was very much on one side), and to look into the air with one eye, and to wink with the other.

'Well, well!' she said, smiting her small knees, and rising, 'this is not business. Come, Steerforth, let's explore the polar regions, and have it over.'

She then selected two or three of the little instruments, and a little bottle, and asked (to my surprise) if the table would bear. On Steerforth's replying in the affirmative, she pushed a chair against it, and begging the assistance of my hand, mounted up, pretty nimbly, to the top, as if it were a stage.

'If either of you saw my ankles,' she said, when she was safely elevated, 'say so, and I'll go home and destroy myself!'

'I did not,' said Steerforth.

'I did not,' said I.

'Well then,' cried Miss Mowcher,' I'll consent to live. Now, ducky, ducky, ducky, come to Mrs. Bond and be killed.'

This was an invocation to Steerforth to place himself under her hands; who, accordingly, sat himself down, with his back to the table, and his laughing face towards me, and submitted his head to her inspection, evidently for no other purpose than our entertainment. To see Miss Mowcher standing over him, looking at his rich profusion of brown hair through a large round magnifying glass, which she took out of her pocket, was a most amazing spectacle.

'You're a pretty fellow!' said Miss Mowcher, after a brief inspection. 'You'd be as bald as a friar on the top of your head in twelve months, but for me. Just half a minute, my young friend, and we'll give you a polishing that shall keep your curls on for the next ten years!'

With this, she tilted some of the contents of the little bottle on to one of the little bits of flannel, and, again imparting some of the virtues of that preparation to one of the little brushes, began rubbing and scraping away with both on the crown of Steerforth's head in the busiest manner I ever witnessed, talking all the time.

'There's Charley Pyegrave, the duke's son,' she said. 'You know Charley?' peeping round into his face.

'A little,' said Steerforth.

'What a man HE is! THERE'S a whisker! As to Charley's legs, if they were only a pair (which they ain't), they'd defy competition. Would you believe he tried to do without me—in the Life-Guards, too?'

'Mad!' said Steerforth.

'It looks like it. However, mad or sane, he tried,' returned Miss Mowcher. 'What does he do, but, lo and behold you, he goes into a perfumer's shop, and wants to buy a bottle of the Madagascar Liquid.'

'Charley does?' said Steerforth.

'Charley does. But they haven't got any of the Madagascar Liquid.'

'What is it? Something to drink?' asked Steerforth.

'To drink?' returned Miss Mowcher, stopping to slap his cheek. 'To doctor his own moustachios with, you know. There was a woman in the shop—elderly female—quite a Griffin—who had never even heard of it by name. "Begging pardon, sir," said the Griffin to Charley, "it's not—not—not ROUGE, is it?" "Rouge," said Charley to the Griffin. "What the unmentionable to ears polite, do you think I want with rouge?" "No offence, sir," said the Griffin; "we have it asked for by so many names, I thought it might be." Now that, my child,' continued Miss Mowcher, rubbing all the time as busily as ever, 'is another instance of the refreshing humbug I was speaking of. I do something in that way myself—perhaps a good deal—perhaps a little—sharp's the word, my dear boy—never mind!'

'In what way do you mean? In the rouge way?' said Steerforth.

'Put this and that together, my tender pupil,' returned the wary Mowcher, touching her nose, 'work it by the rule of Secrets in all trades, and the product will give you the desired result. I say I do a little in that way myself. One Dowager, SHE calls it lip-salve. Another, SHE calls it gloves. Another, SHE calls it tucker-edging. Another, SHE calls it a fan. I call it whatever THEY call it. I supply it for 'em, but we keep up the trick so, to one another, and make believe with such a face, that they'd as soon think of laying it on, before a whole drawing-room, as before me. And when I wait upon 'em, they'll say to me sometimes—WITH IT ON—thick, and no mistake—"How am I looking, Mowcher? Am I pale?" Ha! ha! ha! ha! Isn't THAT refreshing, my young friend!'

I never did in my days behold anything like Mowcher as she stood upon the dining table, intensely enjoying this refreshment, rubbing busily at Steerforth's head, and winking at me over it.

'Ah!' she said. 'Such things are not much in demand hereabouts. That sets me off again! I haven't seen a pretty woman since I've been here, jemmy.'

'No?' said Steerforth.

'Not the ghost of one,' replied Miss Mowcher.

'We could show her the substance of one, I think?' said Steerforth, addressing his eyes to mine. 'Eh, Daisy?'

'Yes, indeed,' said I.

'Aha?' cried the little creature, glancing sharply at my face, and then peeping round at Steerforth's. 'Umph?'

The first exclamation sounded like a question put to both of us, and the second like a question put to Steerforth only. She seemed to have found no answer to either, but continued to rub, with her head on one side and her eye turned up, as if she were looking for an answer in the air and were confident of its appearing presently.

'A sister of yours, Mr. Copperfield?' she cried, after a pause, and still keeping the same look-out. 'Aye, aye?'

'No,' said Steerforth, before I could reply. 'Nothing of the sort. On the contrary, Mr. Copperfield used—or I am much mistaken—to have a great admiration for her.'

'Why, hasn't he now?' returned Miss Mowcher. 'Is he fickle? Oh, for shame! Did he sip every flower, and change every hour, until Polly his passion requited?—Is her name Polly?'

The Elfin suddenness with which she pounced upon me with this question, and a searching look, quite disconcerted me for a moment.

'No, Miss Mowcher,' I replied. 'Her name is Emily.'

'Aha?' she cried exactly as before. 'Umph? What a rattle I am! Mr. Copperfield, ain't I volatile?'

Her tone and look implied something that was not agreeable to me in connexion with the subject. So I said, in a graver manner than any of us had yet assumed: 'She is as virtuous as she is pretty. She is engaged to be married to a most worthy and deserving man in her own station of life. I esteem her for her good sense, as much as I admire her for her good looks.'

'Well said!' cried Steerforth. 'Hear, hear, hear! Now I'll quench the curiosity of this little Fatima, my dear Daisy, by leaving her nothing to guess at. She is at present apprenticed, Miss Mowcher, or articled, or whatever it may be, to Omer and Joram, Haberdashers, Milliners, and so forth, in this town. Do you observe? Omer and Joram. The promise of which my friend has spoken, is made and entered into with her cousin; Christian name, Ham; surname, Peggotty; occupation, boat-builder; also of this town. She lives with a relative; Christian name, unknown; surname, Peggotty; occupation, seafaring; also of this town. She is the prettiest and most engaging little fairy in the world. I admire her—as my friend does—exceedingly. If it were not that I might appear to disparage her Intended, which I know my friend would not like, I would add, that to me she seems to be throwing herself away; that I am sure she might do better; and that I swear she was born to be a lady.'

Miss Mowcher listened to these words, which were very slowly and distinctly spoken, with her head on one side, and her eye in the air as if she were still looking for that answer. When he ceased she became brisk again in an instant, and rattled away with surprising volubility.

'Oh! And that's all about it, is it?' she exclaimed, trimming his whiskers with a little restless pair of scissors, that went glancing round his head in all directions. 'Very well: very well! Quite a long story. Ought to end "and they lived happy ever afterwards"; oughtn't it? Ah! What's that game at forfeits? I love my love with an E, because she's enticing; I hate her with an E, because she's engaged. I took her to the sign of the exquisite, and treated her with an elopement, her name's Emily, and she lives in the east? Ha! ha! ha! Mr. Copperfield, ain't I volatile?'

Merely looking at me with extravagant slyness, and not waiting for any reply, she continued, without drawing breath:

'There! If ever any scapegrace was trimmed and touched up to perfection, you are, Steerforth. If I understand any noddle in the world, I understand yours. Do you hear me when I tell you that, my darling? I understand yours,' peeping down into his face. 'Now you may mizzle, jemmy (as we say at Court), and if Mr. Copperfield will take the chair I'll operate on him.'

'What do you say, Daisy?' inquired Steerforth, laughing, and resigning his seat. 'Will you be improved?'

'Thank you, Miss Mowcher, not this evening.'

'Don't say no,' returned the little woman, looking at me with the aspect of a connoisseur; 'a little bit more eyebrow?'

'Thank you,' I returned, 'some other time.'

'Have it carried half a quarter of an inch towards the temple,' said Miss Mowcher. 'We can do it in a fortnight.'

'No, I thank you. Not at present.'

'Go in for a tip,' she urged. 'No? Let's get the scaffolding up, then, for a pair of whiskers. Come!'

I could not help blushing as I declined, for I felt we were on my weak point, now. But Miss Mowcher, finding that I was not at present disposed for any decoration within the range of her art, and that I was, for the time being, proof against the blandishments of the small bottle which she held up before one eye to enforce her persuasions, said we would make a beginning on an early day, and requested the aid of my hand to descend from her elevated station. Thus assisted, she skipped down with much agility, and began to tie her double chin into her bonnet.

'The fee,' said Steerforth, 'is—'

'Five bob,' replied Miss Mowcher, 'and dirt cheap, my chicken. Ain't I volatile, Mr. Copperfield?'

I replied politely: 'Not at all.' But I thought she was rather so, when she tossed up his two half-crowns like a goblin pieman, caught them, dropped them in her pocket, and gave it a loud slap.

'That's the Till!' observed Miss Mowcher, standing at the chair again, and replacing in the bag a miscellaneous collection of little objects she had emptied out of it. 'Have I got all my traps? It seems so. It won't do to be like long Ned Beadwood, when they took him to church "to marry him to somebody", as he says, and left the bride behind. Ha! ha! ha! A wicked rascal, Ned, but droll! Now, I know I'm going to break your hearts, but I am forced to leave you. You must call up all your fortitude, and try to bear it. Good-bye, Mr. Copperfield! Take care of yourself, jockey of Norfolk! How I have been rattling on! It's all the fault of you two wretches. I forgive you! "Bob swore!"—as the Englishman said for "Good night", when he first learnt French, and thought it so like English. "Bob swore," my ducks!'

With the bag slung over her arm, and rattling as she waddled away, she waddled to the door, where she stopped to inquire if she should leave us a lock of her hair. 'Ain't I volatile?' she added, as a commentary on this offer, and, with her finger on her nose, departed.

Steerforth laughed to that degree, that it was impossible for me to help laughing too; though I am not sure I should have done so, but for this inducement. When we had had our laugh quite out, which was after some time, he told me that Miss Mowcher had quite an extensive connexion, and made herself useful to a variety of people in a variety of ways. Some people trifled with her as a mere oddity, he said; but she was as shrewdly and sharply observant as anyone he knew, and as long-headed as she was short-armed. He told me that what she had said of being here, and there, and everywhere, was true enough; for she made little darts into the provinces, and seemed to pick up customers everywhere, and to know everybody. I asked him what her disposition was: whether it was at all mischievous, and if her sympathies were generally on the right side of things: but, not succeeding in attracting his attention to these questions after two or three attempts, I forbore or forgot to repeat them. He told me instead, with much rapidity, a good deal about her skill, and her profits; and about her being a scientific cupper, if I should ever have occasion for her service in that capacity.

She was the principal theme of our conversation during the evening: and when we parted for the night Steerforth called after me over the banisters, 'Bob swore!' as I went downstairs.

I was surprised, when I came to Mr. Barkis's house, to find Ham walking up and down in front of it, and still more surprised to learn from him that little Em'ly was inside. I naturally inquired why he was not there too, instead of pacing the streets by himself?

'Why, you see, Mas'r Davy,' he rejoined, in a hesitating manner, 'Em'ly, she's talking to some 'un in here.'

'I should have thought,' said I, smiling, 'that that was a reason for your being in here too, Ham.'

'Well, Mas'r Davy, in a general way, so 't would be,' he returned; 'but look'ee here, Mas'r Davy,' lowering his voice, and speaking very gravely. 'It's a young woman, sir—a young woman, that Em'ly knowed once, and doen't ought to know no more.'

When I heard these words, a light began to fall upon the figure I had seen following them, some hours ago.

'It's a poor wurem, Mas'r Davy,' said Ham, 'as is trod under foot by all the town. Up street and down street. The mowld o' the churchyard don't hold any that the folk shrink away from, more.'

'Did I see her tonight, Ham, on the sand, after we met you?'

'Keeping us in sight?' said Ham. 'It's like you did, Mas'r Davy. Not that I know'd then, she was theer, sir, but along of her creeping soon arterwards under Em'ly's little winder, when she see the light come, and whispering "Em'ly, Em'ly, for Christ's sake, have a woman's heart towards me. I was once like you!" Those was solemn words, Mas'r Davy, fur to hear!'

'They were indeed, Ham. What did Em'ly do?' 'Says Em'ly, "Martha, is it you? Oh, Martha, can it be you?"—for they had sat at work together, many a day, at Mr. Omer's.'

'I recollect her now!' cried I, recalling one of the two girls I had seen when I first went there. 'I recollect her quite well!'

'Martha Endell,' said Ham. 'Two or three year older than Em'ly, but was at the school with her.'

'I never heard her name,' said I. 'I didn't mean to interrupt you.'

'For the matter o' that, Mas'r Davy,' replied Ham, 'all's told a'most in them words, "Em'ly, Em'ly, for Christ's sake, have a woman's heart towards me. I was once like you!" She wanted to speak to Em'ly. Em'ly couldn't speak to her theer, for her loving uncle was come home, and he wouldn't—no, Mas'r Davy,' said Ham, with great earnestness, 'he couldn't, kind-natur'd, tender-hearted as he is, see them two together, side by side, for all the treasures that's wrecked in the sea.'

I felt how true this was. I knew it, on the instant, quite as well as Ham.

'So Em'ly writes in pencil on a bit of paper,' he pursued, 'and gives it to her out o' winder to bring here. "Show that," she says, "to my aunt, Mrs. Barkis, and she'll set you down by her fire, for the love of me, till uncle is gone out, and I can come." By and by she tells me what I tell you, Mas'r Davy, and asks me to bring her. What can I do? She doen't ought to know any such, but I can't deny her, when the tears is on her face.'

He put his hand into the breast of his shaggy jacket, and took out with great care a pretty little purse.

'And if I could deny her when the tears was on her face, Mas'r Davy,' said Ham, tenderly adjusting it on the rough palm of his hand, 'how could I deny her when she give me this to carry for her—knowing what she brought it for? Such a toy as it is!' said Ham, thoughtfully looking on it. 'With such a little money in it, Em'ly my dear.'

I shook him warmly by the hand when he had put it away again—for that was more satisfactory to me than saying anything—and we walked up and down, for a minute or two, in silence. The door opened then, and Peggotty appeared, beckoning to Ham to come in. I would have kept away, but she came after me, entreating me to come in too. Even then, I would have avoided the room where they all were, but for its being the neat-tiled kitchen I have mentioned more than once. The door opening immediately into it, I found myself among them before I considered whither I was going.

The girl—the same I had seen upon the sands—was near the fire. She was sitting on the ground, with her head and one arm lying on a chair. I fancied, from the disposition of her figure, that Em'ly had but newly risen from the chair, and that the forlorn head might perhaps have been lying on her lap. I saw but little of the girl's face, over which her hair fell loose and scattered, as if she had been disordering it with her own hands; but I saw that she was young, and of a fair complexion. Peggotty had been crying. So had little Em'ly. Not a word was spoken when we first went in; and the Dutch clock by the dresser seemed, in the silence, to tick twice as loud as usual. Em'ly spoke first.

'Martha wants,' she said to Ham, 'to go to London.'

'Why to London?' returned Ham.

He stood between them, looking on the prostrate girl with a mixture of compassion for her, and of jealousy of her holding any companionship with her whom he loved so well, which I have always remembered distinctly. They both spoke as if she were ill; in a soft, suppressed tone that was plainly heard, although it hardly rose above a whisper.

'Better there than here,' said a third voice aloud—Martha's, though she did not move. 'No one knows me there. Everybody knows me here.'

'What will she do there?' inquired Ham.

She lifted up her head, and looked darkly round at him for a moment; then laid it down again, and curved her right arm about her neck, as a woman in a fever, or in an agony of pain from a shot, might twist herself.

'She will try to do well,' said little Em'ly. 'You don't know what she has said to us. Does he—do they—aunt?'

Peggotty shook her head compassionately.

'I'll try,' said Martha, 'if you'll help me away. I never can do worse than I have done here. I may do better. Oh!' with a dreadful shiver, 'take me out of these streets, where the whole town knows me from a child!'

As Em'ly held out her hand to Ham, I saw him put in it a little canvas bag. She took it, as if she thought it were her purse, and made a step or two forward; but finding her mistake, came back to where he had retired near me, and showed it to him.

'It's all yourn, Em'ly,' I could hear him say. 'I haven't nowt in all the wureld that ain't yourn, my dear. It ain't of no delight to me, except for you!'

The tears rose freshly in her eyes, but she turned away and went to Martha. What she gave her, I don't know. I saw her stooping over her, and putting money in her bosom. She whispered something, as she asked was that enough? 'More than enough,' the other said, and took her hand and kissed it.

Then Martha arose, and gathering her shawl about her, covering her face with it, and weeping aloud, went slowly to the door. She stopped a moment before going out, as if she would have uttered something or turned back; but no word passed her lips. Making the same low, dreary, wretched moaning in her shawl, she went away.

As the door closed, little Em'ly looked at us three in a hurried manner and then hid her face in her hands, and fell to sobbing.

'Doen't, Em'ly!' said Ham, tapping her gently on the shoulder. 'Doen't, my dear! You doen't ought to cry so, pretty!'

'Oh, Ham!' she exclaimed, still weeping pitifully, 'I am not so good a girl as I ought to be! I know I have not the thankful heart, sometimes, I ought to have!'

'Yes, yes, you have, I'm sure,' said Ham.

'No! no! no!' cried little Em'ly, sobbing, and shaking her head. 'I am not as good a girl as I ought to be. Not near! not near!' And still she cried, as if her heart would break.

'I try your love too much. I know I do!' she sobbed. 'I'm often cross to you, and changeable with you, when I ought to be far different. You are never so to me. Why am I ever so to you, when I should think of nothing but how to be grateful, and to make you happy!'

'You always make me so,' said Ham, 'my dear! I am happy in the sight of you. I am happy, all day long, in the thoughts of you.'

'Ah! that's not enough!' she cried. 'That is because you are good; not because I am! Oh, my dear, it might have been a better fortune for you, if you had been fond of someone else—of someone steadier and much worthier than me, who was all bound up in you, and never vain and changeable like me!'

'Poor little tender-heart,' said Ham, in a low voice. 'Martha has overset her, altogether.'

'Please, aunt,' sobbed Em'ly, 'come here, and let me lay my head upon you. Oh, I am very miserable tonight, aunt! Oh, I am not as good a girl as I ought to be. I am not, I know!'

Peggotty had hastened to the chair before the fire. Em'ly, with her arms around her neck, kneeled by her, looking up most earnestly into her face.

'Oh, pray, aunt, try to help me! Ham, dear, try to help me! Mr. David, for the sake of old times, do, please, try to help me! I want to be a better girl than I am. I want to feel a hundred times more thankful than I do. I want to feel more, what a blessed thing it is to be the wife of a good man, and to lead a peaceful life. Oh me, oh me! Oh my heart, my heart!'

She dropped her face on my old nurse's breast, and, ceasing this supplication, which in its agony and grief was half a woman's, half a child's, as all her manner was (being, in that, more natural, and better suited to her beauty, as I thought, than any other manner could have been), wept silently, while my old nurse hushed her like an infant.

She got calmer by degrees, and then we soothed her; now talking encouragingly, and now jesting a little with her, until she began to raise her head and speak to us. So we got on, until she was able to smile, and then to laugh, and then to sit up, half ashamed; while Peggotty recalled her stray ringlets, dried her eyes, and made her neat again, lest her uncle should wonder, when she got home, why his darling had been crying.

I saw her do, that night, what I had never seen her do before. I saw her innocently kiss her chosen husband on the cheek, and creep close to his bluff form as if it were her best support. When they went away together, in the waning moonlight, and I looked after them, comparing their departure in my mind with Martha's, I saw that she held his arm with both her hands, and still kept close to him.

CHAPTER 23. I CORROBORATE Mr. DICK, AND CHOOSE A PROFESSION

When I awoke in the morning I thought very much of little Em'ly, and her emotion last night, after Martha had left. I felt as if I had come into the knowledge of those domestic weaknesses and tendernesses in a sacred confidence, and that to disclose them, even to Steerforth, would be wrong. I had no gentler feeling towards anyone than towards the pretty creature who had been my playmate, and whom I have always been persuaded, and shall always be persuaded, to my dying day, I then devotedly loved. The repetition to any ears—even to Steerforth's—of what she had been unable to repress when her heart lay open to me by an accident, I felt would be a rough deed, unworthy of myself, unworthy of the light of our pure childhood, which I always saw encircling her head. I made a resolution, therefore, to keep it in my own breast; and there it gave her image a new grace.

While we were at breakfast, a letter was delivered to me from my aunt. As it contained matter on which I thought Steerforth could advise me as well as anyone, and on which I knew I should be delighted to consult him, I resolved to make it a subject of discussion on our journey home. For the present we had enough to do, in taking leave of all our friends. Mr. Barkis was far from being the last among them, in his regret at our departure; and I believe would even have opened the box again, and sacrificed another guinea, if it would have kept us eight-and-forty hours in Yarmouth. Peggotty and all her family were full of grief at our going. The whole house of Omer and Joram turned out to bid us good-bye; and there were so many seafaring volunteers in attendance on Steerforth, when our portmanteaux went to the coach, that if we had had the baggage of a regiment with us, we should hardly have wanted porters to carry it. In a word, we departed to the regret and admiration of all concerned, and left a great many people very sorry behind US.

Do you stay long here, Littimer?' said I, as he stood waiting to see the coach start.

'No, sir,' he replied; 'probably not very long, sir.'

'He can hardly say, just now,' observed Steerforth, carelessly. 'He knows what he has to do, and he'll do it.'

'That I am sure he will,' said I.

Littimer touched his hat in acknowledgement of my good opinion, and I felt about eight years old. He touched it once more, wishing us a good journey; and we left him standing on the pavement, as respectable a mystery as any pyramid in Egypt.

For some little time we held no conversation, Steerforth being unusually silent, and I being sufficiently engaged in wondering, within myself, when I should see the old places again, and what new changes might happen to me or them in the meanwhile. At length Steerforth, becoming gay and talkative in a moment, as he could become anything he liked at any moment, pulled me by the arm:

'Find a voice, David. What about that letter you were speaking of at breakfast?'

'Oh!' said I, taking it out of my pocket. 'It's from my aunt.'

'And what does she say, requiring consideration?'

'Why, she reminds me, Steerforth,' said I, 'that I came out on this expedition to look about me, and to think a little.'

'Which, of course, you have done?'

'Indeed I can't say I have, particularly. To tell you the truth, I am afraid I have forgotten it.'

'Well! look about you now, and make up for your negligence,' said Steerforth. 'Look to the right, and you'll see a flat country, with a good deal of marsh in it; look to the left, and you'll see the same. Look to the front, and you'll find no difference; look to the rear, and there it is still.' I laughed, and replied that I saw no suitable profession in the whole prospect; which was perhaps to be attributed to its flatness.

'What says our aunt on the subject?' inquired Steerforth, glancing at the letter in my hand. 'Does she suggest anything?'

'Why, yes,' said I. 'She asks me, here, if I think I should like to be a proctor? What do you think of it?'

'Well, I don't know,' replied Steerforth, coolly. 'You may as well do that as anything else, I suppose?'

I could not help laughing again, at his balancing all callings and professions so equally; and I told him so.

'What is a proctor, Steerforth?' said I.

'Why, he is a sort of monkish attorney,' replied Steerforth. 'He is, to some faded courts held in Doctors' Commons,—a lazy old nook near St. Paul's Churchyard—what solicitors are to the courts of law and equity. He is a functionary whose existence, in the natural course of things, would have terminated about two hundred years ago. I can tell you best what he is, by telling you what Doctors' Commons is. It's a little out-of-the-way place, where they administer what is called ecclesiastical law, and play all kinds of tricks with obsolete old monsters of acts of Parliament, which three-fourths of the world know nothing about, and the other fourth supposes to have been dug up, in a fossil state, in the days of the Edwards. It's a place that has an ancient monopoly in suits about people's wills and people's marriages, and disputes among ships and boats.'

'Nonsense, Steerforth!' I exclaimed. 'You don't mean to say that there is any affinity between nautical matters and ecclesiastical matters?'

'I don't, indeed, my dear boy,' he returned; 'but I mean to say that they are managed and decided by the same set of people, down in that same Doctors' Commons. You shall go there one day, and find them blundering through half the nautical terms in Young's Dictionary, apropos of the "Nancy" having run down the "Sarah Jane", or Mr. Peggotty and the Yarmouth boatmen having put off in a gale of wind with an anchor and cable to the "Nelson" Indiaman in distress; and you shall go there another day, and find them deep in the evidence, pro and con, respecting a clergyman who has misbehaved himself; and you shall find the judge in the nautical case, the advocate in the clergyman's case, or contrariwise. They are like actors: now a man's a judge, and now he is not a judge; now he's one thing, now he's another; now he's something else, change and change about; but it's always a very pleasant, profitable little affair of private theatricals, presented to an uncommonly select audience.'

'But advocates and proctors are not one and the same?' said I, a little puzzled. 'Are they?'

'No,' returned Steerforth, 'the advocates are civilians—men who have taken a doctor's degree at college—which is the first reason of my knowing anything about it. The proctors employ the advocates. Both get very comfortable fees, and altogether they make a mighty snug little party. On the whole, I would recommend you to take to Doctors' Commons kindly, David. They plume them-selves on their gentility there, I can tell you, if that's any satisfaction.'

I made allowance for Steerforth's light way of treating the subject, and, considering it with reference to the staid air of gravity and antiquity which I associated with that 'lazy old nook near St. Paul's Churchyard', did not feel indisposed towards my aunt's suggestion; which she left to my free decision, making no scruple of telling me that it had occurred to her, on her lately visiting her own proctor in Doctors' Commons for the purpose of settling her will in my favour.

'That's a laudable proceeding on the part of our aunt, at all events,' said Steerforth, when I mentioned it; 'and one deserving of all encouragement. Daisy, my advice is that you take kindly to Doctors' Commons.'

I quite made up my mind to do so. I then told Steerforth that my aunt was in town awaiting me (as I found from her letter), and that she had taken lodgings for a week at a kind of private hotel at Lincoln's Inn Fields, where there was a stone staircase, and a convenient door in the roof; my aunt being firmly persuaded that every house in London was going to be burnt down every night.

We achieved the rest of our journey pleasantly, sometimes recurring to Doctors' Commons, and anticipating the distant days when I should be a proctor there, which Steerforth pictured in a variety of humorous and whimsical lights, that made us both merry. When we came to our journey's end, he went home, engaging to call upon me next day but one; and I drove to Lincoln's Inn Fields, where I found my aunt up, and waiting supper.

If I had been round the world since we parted, we could hardly have been better pleased to meet again. My aunt cried outright as she embraced me; and said, pretending to laugh, that if my poor mother had been alive, that silly little creature would have shed tears, she had no doubt.

'So you have left Mr. Dick behind, aunt?' said I. 'I am sorry for that. Ah, Janet, how do you do?'

As Janet curtsied, hoping I was well, I observed my aunt's visage lengthen very much.

'I am sorry for it, too,' said my aunt, rubbing her nose. 'I have had no peace of mind, Trot, since I have been here.' Before I could ask why, she told me.

'I am convinced,' said my aunt, laying her hand with melancholy firmness on the table, 'that Dick's character is not a character to keep the donkeys off. I am confident he wants strength of purpose. I ought to have left Janet at home, instead, and then my mind might perhaps have been at ease. If ever there was a donkey trespassing on my green,' said my aunt, with emphasis, 'there was one this afternoon at four o'clock. A cold feeling came over me from head to foot, and I know it was a donkey!'

I tried to comfort her on this point, but she rejected consolation.

'It was a donkey,' said my aunt; 'and it was the one with the stumpy tail which that Murdering sister of a woman rode, when she came to my house.' This had been, ever since, the only name my aunt knew for Miss Murdstone. 'If there is any Donkey in Dover, whose audacity it is harder to me to bear than another's, that,' said my aunt, striking the table, 'is the animal!'

Janet ventured to suggest that my aunt might be disturbing herself unnecessarily, and that she believed the donkey in question was then engaged in the sand-and-gravel line of business, and was not available for purposes of trespass. But my aunt wouldn't hear of it.

Supper was comfortably served and hot, though my aunt's rooms were very high up—whether that she might have more stone stairs for her money, or might be nearer to the door in the roof, I don't know—and consisted of a roast fowl, a steak, and some vegetables, to all of which I did ample justice, and which were all excellent. But my aunt had her own ideas concerning London provision, and ate but little.

'I suppose this unfortunate fowl was born and brought up in a cellar,' said my aunt, 'and never took the air except on a hackney coach-stand. I hope the steak may be beef, but I don't believe it. Nothing's genuine in the place, in my opinion, but the dirt.'

'Don't you think the fowl may have come out of the country, aunt?' I hinted.

'Certainly not,' returned my aunt. 'It would be no pleasure to a London tradesman to sell anything which was what he pretended it was.'

I did not venture to controvert this opinion, but I made a good supper, which it greatly satisfied her to see me do. When the table was cleared, Janet assisted her to arrange her hair, to put on her nightcap, which was of a smarter construction than usual ('in case of fire', my aunt said), and to fold her gown back over her knees, these being her usual preparations for warming herself before going to bed. I then made her, according to certain established regulations from which no deviation, however slight, could ever be permitted, a glass of hot wine and water, and a slice of toast cut into long thin strips. With these accompaniments we were left alone to finish the evening, my aunt sitting opposite to me drinking her wine and water; soaking her strips of toast in it, one by one, before eating them; and looking benignantly on me, from among the borders of her nightcap.

'Well, Trot,' she began, 'what do you think of the proctor plan? Or have you not begun to think about it yet?'

'I have thought a good deal about it, my dear aunt, and I have talked a good deal about it with Steerforth. I like it very much indeed. I like it exceedingly.'

'Come!' said my aunt. 'That's cheering!'

'I have only one difficulty, aunt.'

'Say what it is, Trot,' she returned.

'Why, I want to ask, aunt, as this seems, from what I understand, to be a limited profession, whether my entrance into it would not be very expensive?'

'It will cost,' returned my aunt, 'to article you, just a thousand pounds.'

'Now, my dear aunt,' said I, drawing my chair nearer, 'I am uneasy in my mind about that. It's a large sum of money. You have expended a great deal on my education, and have always been as liberal to me in all things as it was possible to be. You have been the soul of generosity. Surely there are some ways in which I might begin life with hardly any outlay, and yet begin with a good hope of getting on by resolution and exertion. Are you sure that it would not be better to try that course? Are you certain that you can afford to part with so much money, and that it is right that it should be so expended? I only ask you, my second mother, to consider. Are you certain?'

My aunt finished eating the piece of toast on which she was then engaged, looking me full in the face all the while; and then setting her glass on the chimney-piece, and folding her hands upon her folded skirts, replied as follows:

'Trot, my child, if I have any object in life, it is to provide for your being a good, a sensible, and a happy man. I am bent upon it—so is Dick. I should like some people that I know to hear Dick's conversation on the subject. Its sagacity is wonderful. But no one knows the resources of that man's intellect, except myself!'

She stopped for a moment to take my hand between hers, and went on:

'It's in vain, Trot, to recall the past, unless it works some influence upon the present. Perhaps I might have been better friends with your poor father. Perhaps I might have been better friends with that poor child your mother, even after your sister Betsey Trotwood disappointed me. When you came to me, a little runaway boy, all dusty and way-worn, perhaps I thought so. From that time until now, Trot, you have ever been a credit to me and a pride and a pleasure. I have no other claim upon my means; at least'—here to my surprise she hesitated, and was confused—'no, I have no other claim upon my means—and you are my adopted child. Only be a loving child to me in my age, and bear with my whims and fancies; and you will do more for an old woman whose prime of life was not so happy or conciliating as it might have been, than ever that old woman did for you.'

It was the first time I had heard my aunt refer to her past history. There was a magnanimity in her quiet way of doing so, and of dismissing it, which would have exalted her in my respect and affection, if anything could.

'All is agreed and understood between us, now, Trot,' said my aunt, 'and we need talk of this no more. Give me a kiss, and we'll go to the Commons after breakfast tomorrow.'

We had a long chat by the fire before we went to bed. I slept in a room on the same floor with my aunt's, and was a little disturbed in the course of the night by her knocking at my door as often as she was agitated by a distant sound of hackney-coaches or market-carts, and inquiring, 'if I heard the engines?' But towards morning she slept better, and suffered me to do so too.

At about mid-day, we set out for the office of Messrs Spenlow and Jorkins, in Doctors' Commons. My aunt, who had this other general opinion in reference to London, that every man she saw was a pickpocket, gave me her purse to carry for her, which had ten guineas in it and some silver.

We made a pause at the toy shop in Fleet Street, to see the giants of Saint Dunstan's strike upon the bells—we had timed our going, so as to catch them at it, at twelve o'clock—and then went on towards Ludgate Hill, and St. Paul's Churchyard. We were crossing to the former place, when I found that my aunt greatly accelerated her speed, and looked frightened. I observed, at the same time, that a lowering ill-dressed man who had stopped and stared at us in passing, a little before, was coming so close after us as to brush against her.

'Trot! My dear Trot!' cried my aunt, in a terrified whisper, and pressing my arm. 'I don't know what I am to do.'

'Don't be alarmed,' said I. 'There's nothing to be afraid of. Step into a shop, and I'll soon get rid of this fellow.'

'No, no, child!' she returned. 'Don't speak to him for the world. I entreat, I order you!'

'Good Heaven, aunt!' said I. 'He is nothing but a sturdy beggar.'

'You don't know what he is!' replied my aunt. 'You don't know who he is! You don't know what you say!'

We had stopped in an empty door-way, while this was passing, and he had stopped too.

'Don't look at him!' said my aunt, as I turned my head indignantly, 'but get me a coach, my dear, and wait for me in St. Paul's Churchyard.'

'Wait for you?' I replied.

'Yes,' rejoined my aunt. 'I must go alone. I must go with him.'

'With him, aunt? This man?'

'I am in my senses,' she replied, 'and I tell you I must. Get mea coach!'

However much astonished I might be, I was sensible that I had no right to refuse compliance with such a peremptory command. I hurried away a few paces, and called a hackney-chariot which was passing empty. Almost before I could let down the steps, my aunt sprang in, I don't know how, and the man followed. She waved her hand to me to go away, so earnestly, that, all confounded as I was, I turned from them at once. In doing so, I heard her say to the coachman, 'Drive anywhere! Drive straight on!' and presently the chariot passed me, going up the hill.

What Mr. Dick had told me, and what I had supposed to be a delusion of his, now came into my mind. I could not doubt that this person was the person of whom he had made such mysterious mention, though what the nature of his hold upon my aunt could possibly be, I was quite unable to imagine. After half an hour's cooling in the churchyard, I saw the chariot coming back. The driver stopped beside me, and my aunt was sitting in it alone.

She had not yet sufficiently recovered from her agitation to be quite prepared for the visit we had to make. She desired me to get into the chariot, and to tell the coachman to drive slowly up and down a little while. She said no more, except, 'My dear child, never ask me what it was, and don't refer to it,' until she had perfectly regained her composure, when she told me she was quite herself now, and we might get out. On her giving me her purse to pay the driver, I found that all the guineas were gone, and only the loose silver remained.

Doctors' Commons was approached by a little low archway. Before we had taken many paces down the street beyond it, the noise of the city seemed to melt, as if by magic, into a softened distance. A few dull courts and narrow ways brought us to the sky-lighted offices of Spenlow and Jorkins; in the vestibule of which temple, accessible to pilgrims without the ceremony of knocking, three or four clerks were at work as copyists. One of these, a little dry man, sitting by himself, who wore a stiff brown wig that looked as if it were made of gingerbread, rose to receive my aunt, and show us into Mr. Spenlow's room.

'Mr. Spenlow's in Court, ma'am,' said the dry man; 'it's an Arches day; but it's close by, and I'll send for him directly.'

As we were left to look about us while Mr. Spenlow was fetched, I availed myself of the opportunity. The furniture of the room was old-fashioned and dusty; and the green baize on the top of the writing-table had lost all its colour, and was as withered and pale as an old pauper. There were a great many bundles of papers on it, some endorsed as Allegations, and some (to my surprise) as Libels, and some as being in the Consistory Court, and some in the Arches Court, and some in the Prerogative Court, and some in the Admiralty Court, and some in the Delegates' Court; giving me occasion to wonder much, how many Courts there might be in the gross, and how long it would take to understand them all. Besides these, there were sundry immense manuscript Books of Evidence taken on affidavit, strongly bound, and tied together in massive sets, a set to each cause, as if every cause were a history in ten or twenty volumes. All this looked tolerably expensive, I thought, and gave me an agreeable notion of a proctor's business. I was casting my eyes with increasing complacency over these and many similar objects, when hasty footsteps were heard in the room outside, and Mr. Spenlow, in a black gown trimmed with white fur, came hurrying in, taking off his hat as he came.

He was a little light-haired gentleman, with undeniable boots, and the stiffest of white cravats and shirt-collars. He was buttoned up, mighty trim and tight, and must have taken a great deal of pains with his whiskers, which were accurately curled. His gold watch-chain was so massive, that a fancy came across me, that he ought to have a sinewy golden arm, to draw it out with, like those which are put up over the goldbeaters' shops. He was got up with such care, and was so stiff, that he could hardly bend himself; being obliged, when he glanced at some papers on his desk, after sitting down in his chair, to move his whole body, from the bottom of his spine, like Punch.

I had previously been presented by my aunt, and had been courteously received. He now said:

'And so, Mr. Copperfield, you think of entering into our profession? I casually mentioned to Miss Trotwood, when I had the pleasure of an interview with her the other day,'—with another inclination of his body—Punch again—'that there was a vacancy here. Miss Trotwood was good enough to mention that she had a nephew who was her peculiar care, and for whom she was seeking to provide genteelly in life. That nephew, I believe, I have now the pleasure of'—Punch again. I bowed my acknowledgements, and said, my aunt had mentioned to me that there was that opening, and that I believed I should like it very much. That I was strongly inclined to like it, and had taken immediately to the proposal. That I could not absolutely pledge myself to like it, until I knew something more about it. That although it was little else than a matter of form, I presumed I should have an opportunity of trying how I liked it, before I bound myself to it irrevocably.

'Oh surely! surely!' said Mr. Spenlow. 'We always, in this house, propose a month—an initiatory month. I should be happy, myself, to propose two months—three—an indefinite period, in fact—but I have a partner. Mr. Jorkins.'

'And the premium, sir,' I returned, 'is a thousand pounds?'

'And the premium, Stamp included, is a thousand pounds,' said Mr. Spenlow. 'As I have mentioned to Miss Trotwood, I am actuated by no mercenary considerations; few men are less so, I believe; but Mr. Jorkins has his opinions on these subjects, and I am bound to respect Mr. Jorkins's opinions. Mr. Jorkins thinks a thousand pounds too little, in short.'

'I suppose, sir,' said I, still desiring to spare my aunt, 'that it is not the custom here, if an articled clerk were particularly useful, and made himself a perfect master of his profession'—I could not help blushing, this looked so like praising myself—'I suppose it is not the custom, in the later years of his time, to allow him any—'

Mr. Spenlow, by a great effort, just lifted his head far enough out of his cravat to shake it, and answered, anticipating the word 'salary':

'No. I will not say what consideration I might give to that point myself, Mr. Copperfield, if I were unfettered. Mr. Jorkins is immovable.'

I was quite dismayed by the idea of this terrible Jorkins. But I found out afterwards that he was a mild man of a heavy temperament, whose place in the business was to keep himself in the background, and be constantly exhibited by name as the most obdurate and ruthless of men. If a clerk wanted his salary raised, Mr. Jorkins wouldn't listen to such a proposition. If a client were slow to settle his bill of costs, Mr. Jorkins was resolved to have it paid; and however painful these things might be (and always were) to the feelings of Mr. Spenlow, Mr. Jorkins would have his bond. The heart and hand of the good angel Spenlow would have been always open, but for the restraining demon Jorkins. As I have grown older, I think I have had experience of some other houses doing business on the principle of Spenlow and Jorkins!

It was settled that I should begin my month's probation as soon as I pleased, and that my aunt need neither remain in town nor return at its expiration, as the articles of agreement, of which I was to be the subject, could easily be sent to her at home for her signature. When we had got so far, Mr. Spenlow offered to take me into Court then and there, and show me what sort of place it was. As I was willing enough to know, we went out with this object, leaving my aunt behind; who would trust herself, she said, in no such place, and who, I think, regarded all Courts of Law as a sort of powder-mills that might blow up at any time.

Mr. Spenlow conducted me through a paved courtyard formed of grave brick houses, which I inferred, from the Doctors' names upon the doors, to be the official abiding-places of the learned advocates of whom Steerforth had told me; and into a large dull room, not unlike a chapel to my thinking, on the left hand. The upper part of this room was fenced off from the rest; and there, on the two sides of a raised platform of the horse-shoe form, sitting on easy old-fashioned dining-room chairs, were sundry gentlemen in red gowns and grey wigs, whom I found to be the Doctors aforesaid. Blinking over a little desk like a pulpit-desk, in the curve of the horse-shoe, was an old gentleman, whom, if I had seen him in an aviary, I should certainly have taken for an owl, but who, I learned, was the presiding judge. In the space within the horse-shoe, lower than these, that is to say, on about the level of the floor, were sundry other gentlemen, of Mr. Spenlow's rank, and dressed like him in black gowns with white fur upon them, sitting at a long green table. Their cravats were in general stiff, I thought, and their looks haughty; but in this last respect I presently conceived I had done them an injustice, for when two or three of them had to rise and answer a question of the presiding dignitary, I never saw anything more sheepish. The public, represented by a boy with a comforter, and a shabby-genteel man secretly eating crumbs out of his coat pockets, was warming itself at a stove in the centre of the Court. The languid stillness of the place was only broken by the chirping of this fire and by the voice of one of the Doctors, who was wandering slowly through a perfect library of evidence, and stopping to put up, from time to time, at little roadside inns of argument on the journey. Altogether, I have never, on any occasion, made one at such a cosey, dosey, old-fashioned, time-forgotten, sleepy-headed little family-party in all my life; and I felt it would be quite a soothing opiate to belong to it in any character—except perhaps as a suitor.

Very well satisfied with the dreamy nature of this retreat, I informed Mr. Spenlow that I had seen enough for that time, and we rejoined my aunt; in company with whom I presently departed from the Commons, feeling very young when I went out of Spenlow and Jorkins's, on account of the clerks poking one another with their pens to point me out.

We arrived at Lincoln's Inn Fields without any new adventures, except encountering an unlucky donkey in a costermonger's cart, who suggested painful associations to my aunt. We had another long talk about my plans, when we were safely housed; and as I knew she was anxious to get home, and, between fire, food, and pickpockets, could never be considered at her ease for half-an-hour in London, I urged her not to be uncomfortable on my account, but to leave me to take care of myself.

'I have not been here a week tomorrow, without considering that too, my dear,' she returned. 'There is a furnished little set of chambers to be let in the Adelphi, Trot, which ought to suit you to a marvel.'

With this brief introduction, she produced from her pocket an advertisement, carefully cut out of a newspaper, setting forth that in Buckingham Street in the Adelphi there was to be let furnished, with a view of the river, a singularly desirable, and compact set of chambers, forming a genteel residence for a young gentleman, a member of one of the Inns of Court, or otherwise, with immediate possession. Terms moderate, and could be taken for a month only, if required.

'Why, this is the very thing, aunt!' said I, flushed with the possible dignity of living in chambers.

'Then come,' replied my aunt, immediately resuming the bonnet she had a minute before laid aside. 'We'll go and look at 'em.'

Away we went. The advertisement directed us to apply to Mrs. Crupp on the premises, and we rung the area bell, which we supposed to communicate with Mrs. Crupp. It was not until we had rung three or four times that we could prevail on Mrs. Crupp to communicate with us, but at last she appeared, being a stout lady with a flounce of flannel petticoat below a nankeen gown.

'Let us see these chambers of yours, if you please, ma'am,' said my aunt.

'For this gentleman?' said Mrs. Crupp, feeling in her pocket for her keys.

'Yes, for my nephew,' said my aunt.

'And a sweet set they is for sich!' said Mrs. Crupp.

So we went upstairs.

They were on the top of the house—a great point with my aunt, being near the fire-escape—and consisted of a little half-blind entry where you could see hardly anything, a little stone-blind pantry where you could see nothing at all, a sitting-room, and a bedroom. The furniture was rather faded, but quite good enough for me; and, sure enough, the river was outside the windows.

As I was delighted with the place, my aunt and Mrs. Crupp withdrew into the pantry to discuss the terms, while I remained on the sitting-room sofa, hardly daring to think it possible that I could be destined to live in such a noble residence. After a single combat of some duration they returned, and I saw, to my joy, both in Mrs. Crupp's countenance and in my aunt's, that the deed was done.

'Is it the last occupant's furniture?' inquired my aunt.

'Yes, it is, ma'am,' said Mrs. Crupp.

'What's become of him?' asked my aunt.

Mrs. Crupp was taken with a troublesome cough, in the midst of which she articulated with much difficulty. 'He was took ill here, ma'am, and—ugh! ugh! ugh! dear me!—and he died!'

'Hey! What did he die of?' asked my aunt.

'Well, ma'am, he died of drink,' said Mrs. Crupp, in confidence. 'And smoke.'

'Smoke? You don't mean chimneys?' said my aunt.

'No, ma'am,' returned Mrs. Crupp. 'Cigars and pipes.'

'That's not catching, Trot, at any rate,' remarked my aunt, turning to me.

'No, indeed,' said I.

In short, my aunt, seeing how enraptured I was with the premises, took them for a month, with leave to remain for twelve months when that time was out. Mrs. Crupp was to find linen, and to cook; every other necessary was already provided; and Mrs. Crupp expressly intimated that she should always yearn towards me as a son. I was to take possession the day after tomorrow, and Mrs. Crupp said, thank Heaven she had now found summun she could care for!

On our way back, my aunt informed me how she confidently trusted that the life I was now to lead would make me firm and self-reliant, which was all I wanted. She repeated this several times next day, in the intervals of our arranging for the transmission of my clothes and books from Mr. Wickfield's; relative to which, and to all my late holiday, I wrote a long letter to Agnes, of which my aunt took charge, as she was to leave on the succeeding day. Not to lengthen these particulars, I need only add, that she made a handsome provision for all my possible wants during my month of trial; that Steerforth, to my great disappointment and hers too, did not make his appearance before she went away; that I saw her safely seated in the Dover coach, exulting in the coming discomfiture of the vagrant donkeys, with Janet at her side; and that when the coach was gone, I turned my face to the Adelphi, pondering on the old days when I used to roam about its subterranean arches, and on the happy changes which had brought me to the surface.

CHAPTER 24. MY FIRST DISSIPATION

It was a wonderfully fine thing to have that lofty castle to myself, and to feel, when I shut my outer door, like Robinson Crusoe, when he had got into his fortification, and pulled his ladder up after him. It was a wonderfully fine thing to walk about town with the key of my house in my pocket, and to know that I could ask any fellow to come home, and make quite sure of its being inconvenient to nobody, if it were not so to me. It was a wonderfully fine thing to let myself in and out, and to come and go without a word to anyone, and to ring Mrs. Crupp up, gasping, from the depths of the earth, when I wanted her—and when she was disposed to come. All this, I say, was wonderfully fine; but I must say, too, that there were times when it was very dreary.

It was fine in the morning, particularly in the fine mornings. It looked a very fresh, free life, by daylight: still fresher, and more free, by sunlight. But as the day declined, the life seemed to go down too. I don't know how it was; it seldom looked well by candle-light. I wanted somebody to talk to, then. I missed Agnes. I found a tremendous blank, in the place of that smiling repository of my confidence. Mrs. Crupp appeared to be a long way off. I thought about my predecessor, who had died of drink and smoke; and I could have wished he had been so good as to live, and not bother me with his decease.

After two days and nights, I felt as if I had lived there for a year, and yet I was not an hour older, but was quite as much tormented by my own youthfulness as ever.

Steerforth not yet appearing, which induced me to apprehend that he must be ill, I left the Commons early on the third day, and walked out to Highgate. Mrs. Steerforth was very glad to see me, and said that he had gone away with one of his Oxford friends to see another who lived near St. Albans, but that she expected him to return tomorrow. I was so fond of him, that I felt quite jealous of his Oxford friends.

As she pressed me to stay to dinner, I remained, and I believe we talked about nothing but him all day. I told her how much the people liked him at Yarmouth, and what a delightful companion he had been. Miss Dartle was full of hints and mysterious questions, but took a great interest in all our proceedings there, and said, 'Was it really though?' and so forth, so often, that she got everything out of me she wanted to know. Her appearance was exactly what I have described it, when I first saw her; but the society of the two ladies was so agreeable, and came so natural to me, that I felt myself falling a little in love with her. I could not help thinking, several times in the course of the evening, and particularly when I walked home at night, what delightful company she would be in Buckingham Street.

I was taking my coffee and roll in the morning, before going to the Commons—and I may observe in this place that it is surprising how much coffee Mrs. Crupp used, and how weak it was, considering—when Steerforth himself walked in, to my unbounded joy.

'My dear Steerforth,' cried I, 'I began to think I should never see you again!'

'I was carried off, by force of arms,' said Steerforth, 'the very next morning after I got home. Why, Daisy, what a rare old bachelor you are here!'

I showed him over the establishment, not omitting the pantry, with no little pride, and he commended it highly. 'I tell you what, old boy,' he added, 'I shall make quite a town-house of this place, unless you give me notice to quit.'

This was a delightful hearing. I told him if he waited for that, he would have to wait till doomsday.

'But you shall have some breakfast!' said I, with my hand on the bell-rope, 'and Mrs. Crupp shall make you some fresh coffee, and I'll toast you some bacon in a bachelor's Dutch-oven, that I have got here.'

'No, no!' said Steerforth. 'Don't ring! I can't! I am going to breakfast with one of these fellows who is at the Piazza Hotel, in Covent Garden.'

'But you'll come back to dinner?' said I.

'I can't, upon my life. There's nothing I should like better, but I must remain with these two fellows. We are all three off together tomorrow morning.'

'Then bring them here to dinner,' I returned. 'Do you think they would come?'

'Oh! they would come fast enough,' said Steerforth; 'but we should inconvenience you. You had better come and dine with us somewhere.'

I would not by any means consent to this, for it occurred to me that I really ought to have a little house-warming, and that there never could be a better opportunity. I had a new pride in my rooms after his approval of them, and burned with a desire to develop their utmost resources. I therefore made him promise positively in the names of his two friends, and we appointed six o'clock as the dinner-hour.

When he was gone, I rang for Mrs. Crupp, and acquainted her with my desperate design. Mrs. Crupp said, in the first place, of course it was well known she couldn't be expected to wait, but she knew a handy young man, who she thought could be prevailed upon to do it, and whose terms would be five shillings, and what I pleased. I said, certainly we would have him. Next Mrs. Crupp said it was clear she couldn't be in two places at once (which I felt to be reasonable), and that 'a young gal' stationed in the pantry with a bedroom candle, there never to desist from washing plates, would be indispensable. I said, what would be the expense of this young female? and Mrs. Crupp said she supposed eighteenpence would neither make me nor break me. I said I supposed not; and THAT was settled. Then Mrs. Crupp said, Now about the dinner.

It was a remarkable instance of want of forethought on the part of the ironmonger who had made Mrs. Crupp's kitchen fireplace, that it was capable of cooking nothing but chops and mashed potatoes. As to a fish-kittle, Mrs. Crupp said, well! would I only come and look at the range? She couldn't say fairer than that. Would I come and look at it? As I should not have been much the wiser if I HAD looked at it, I declined, and said, 'Never mind fish.' But Mrs. Crupp said, Don't say that; oysters was in, why not them? So THAT was settled. Mrs. Crupp then said what she would recommend would be this. A pair of hot roast fowls—from the pastry-cook's; a dish of stewed beef, with vegetables—from the pastry-cook's; two little corner things, as a raised pie and a dish of kidneys—from the pastrycook's; a tart, and (if I liked) a shape of jelly—from the pastrycook's. This, Mrs. Crupp said, would leave her at full liberty to concentrate her mind on the potatoes, and to serve up the cheese and celery as she could wish to see it done.

I acted on Mrs. Crupp's opinion, and gave the order at the pastry-cook's myself. Walking along the Strand, afterwards, and observing a hard mottled substance in the window of a ham and beef shop, which resembled marble, but was labelled 'Mock Turtle', I went in and bought a slab of it, which I have since seen reason to believe would have sufficed for fifteen people. This preparation, Mrs. Crupp, after some difficulty, consented to warm up;

and it shrunk so much in a liquid state, that we found it what Steerforth called 'rather a tight fit' for four.

These preparations happily completed, I bought a little dessert in Covent Garden Market, and gave a rather extensive order at a retail wine-merchant's in that vicinity. When I came home in the afternoon, and saw the bottles drawn up in a square on the pantry floor, they looked so numerous (though there were two missing, which made Mrs. Crupp very uncomfortable), that I was absolutely frightened at them.

One of Steerforth's friends was named Grainger, and the other Markham. They were both very gay and lively fellows; Grainger, something older than Steerforth; Markham, youthful-looking, and I should say not more than twenty. I observed that the latter always spoke of himself indefinitely, as 'a man', and seldom or never in the first person singular.

'A man might get on very well here, Mr. Copperfield,' said Markham—meaning himself.

'It's not a bad situation,' said I, 'and the rooms are really commodious.'

'I hope you have both brought appetites with you?' said Steerforth.

'Upon my honour,' returned Markham, 'town seems to sharpen a man's appetite. A man is hungry all day long. A man is perpetually eating.'

Being a little embarrassed at first, and feeling much too young to preside, I made Steerforth take the head of the table when dinner was announced, and seated myself opposite to him. Everything was very good; we did not spare the wine; and he exerted himself so brilliantly to make the thing pass off well, that there was no pause in our festivity. I was not quite such good company during dinner as I could have wished to be, for my chair was opposite the door, and my attention was distracted by observing that the handy young man went out of the room very often, and that his shadow always presented itself, immediately afterwards, on the wall of the entry, with a bottle at its mouth. The 'young gal' likewise occasioned me some uneasiness: not so much by neglecting to wash the plates, as by breaking them. For being of an inquisitive disposition, and unable to confine herself (as her positive instructions were) to the pantry, she was constantly peering in at us, and constantly imagining herself detected; in which belief, she several times retired upon the plates (with which she had carefully paved the floor), and did a great deal of destruction.

These, however, were small drawbacks, and easily forgotten when the cloth was cleared, and the dessert put on the table; at which period of the entertainment the handy young man was discovered to be speechless. Giving him private directions to seek the society of Mrs. Crupp, and to remove the 'young gal' to the basement also, I abandoned myself to enjoyment.

I began, by being singularly cheerful and light-hearted; all sorts of half-forgotten things to talk about, came rushing into my mind, and made me hold forth in a most unwonted manner. I laughed heartily at my own jokes, and everybody else's; called Steerforth to order for not passing the wine; made several engagements to go to Oxford; announced that I meant to have a dinner-party exactly like that, once a week, until further notice; and madly took so much snuff out of Grainger's box, that I was obliged to go into the pantry, and have a private fit of sneezing ten minutes long.

I went on, by passing the wine faster and faster yet, and continually starting up with a corkscrew to open more wine, long before any was needed. I proposed Steerforth's health. I said he was my dearest friend, the protector of my boyhood, and the companion of my prime. I said I was delighted to propose his health. I said I owed him more obligations than I could ever repay, and held him in a higher admiration than I could ever express. I finished by saying, 'I'll give you Steerforth! God bless him! Hurrah!' We gave him three times three, and another, and a good one to finish with. I broke my glass in going round the table to shake hands with him, and I said (in two words)

'Steerforth—you'retheguidingstarofmyexistence.'

I went on, by finding suddenly that somebody was in the middle of a song. Markham was the singer, and he sang 'When the heart of a man is depressed with care'. He said, when he had sung it, he would give us 'Woman!' I took objection to that, and I couldn't allow it. I said it was not a respectful way of proposing the toast, and I would never permit that toast to be drunk in my house otherwise than as 'The Ladies!' I was very high with him, mainly I think because I saw Steerforth and Grainger laughing at me—or at him—or at both of us. He said a man was not to be dictated to. I said a man was. He said a man was not to be insulted, then. I said he was right there—never under my roof, where the Lares were sacred, and the laws of hospitality paramount. He said it was no derogation from a man's dignity to confess that I was a devilish good fellow. I instantly proposed his health.

Somebody was smoking. We were all smoking. I was smoking, and trying to suppress a rising tendency to shudder. Steerforth had made a speech about me, in the course of which I had been affected almost to tears. I returned thanks, and hoped the present company would dine with me tomorrow, and the day after—each day at five o'clock, that we might enjoy the pleasures of conversation and society through a long evening. I felt called upon to propose an individual. I would give them my aunt. Miss Betsey Trotwood, the best of her sex!

Somebody was leaning out of my bedroom window, refreshing his forehead against the cool stone of the parapet, and feeling the air upon his face. It was myself. I was addressing myself as 'Copperfield', and saying, 'Why did you try to smoke? You might have known you couldn't do it.' Now, somebody was unsteadily contemplating his features in the looking-glass. That was I too. I was very pale in the looking-glass; my eyes had a vacant appearance; and my hair—only my hair, nothing else—looked drunk.

Somebody said to me, 'Let us go to the theatre, Copperfield!' There was no bedroom before me, but again the jingling table covered with glasses; the lamp; Grainger on my right hand, Markham on my left, and Steerforth opposite—all sitting in a mist, and a long way off. The theatre? To be sure. The very thing. Come along! But they must excuse me if I saw everybody out first, and turned the lamp off—in case of fire.

Owing to some confusion in the dark, the door was gone. I was feeling for it in the window-curtains, when Steerforth, laughing, took me by the arm and led me out. We went downstairs, one behind another. Near the bottom, somebody fell, and rolled down. Somebody else said it was Copperfield. I was angry at that false report, until, finding myself on my back in the passage, I began to think there might be some foundation for it.

A very foggy night, with great rings round the lamps in the streets! There was an indistinct talk of its being wet. I considered it frosty. Steerforth dusted me under a lamp-post, and put my hat into shape, which somebody produced from somewhere in a most extraordinary manner, for I hadn't had it on before. Steerforth then said, 'You are all right, Copperfield, are you not?' and I told him, 'Neverberrer.'

A man, sitting in a pigeon-hole-place, looked out of the fog, and took money from somebody, inquiring if I was one of the gentlemen paid for, and appearing rather doubtful (as I remember in the glimpse I had of him) whether to take the money for me or not. Shortly afterwards, we were very high up in a very hot theatre, looking down into a large pit, that seemed to me to smoke; the people with whom it was crammed were so indistinct. There was a great stage, too, looking very clean and smooth after the streets; and there were people upon it, talking about something or other, but not at all intelligibly. There was an abundance of bright lights, and there was music, and there were ladies down in the boxes, and I don't know what more. The whole building looked to me as if it were learning to swim; it conducted itself in such an unaccountable manner, when I tried to steady it.

On somebody's motion, we resolved to go downstairs to the dress-boxes, where the ladies were. A gentleman lounging, full dressed, on a sofa, with an opera-glass in his hand, passed before my view, and also my own figure at full length in a glass. Then I was being ushered into one of these boxes, and found myself saying something as I sat down, and people about me crying 'Silence!' to somebody, and ladies casting indignant glances at me, and—what! yes!—Agnes, sitting on the seat before me, in the same box, with a lady and gentleman beside her, whom I didn't know. I see her face now, better than I did then, I dare say, with its indelible look of regret and wonder turned upon me.

'Agnes!' I said, thickly, 'Lorblessmer! Agnes!'

'Hush! Pray!' she answered, I could not conceive why. 'You disturb the company. Look at the stage!'

I tried, on her injunction, to fix it, and to hear something of what was going on there, but quite in vain. I looked at her again by and by, and saw her shrink into her corner, and put her gloved hand to her forehead.

'Agnes!' I said. 'I'mafraidyou'renorwell.'

'Yes, yes. Do not mind me, Trotwood,' she returned. 'Listen! Are you going away soon?'

'Amigoarawaysoo?' I repeated.

'Yes.'

I had a stupid intention of replying that I was going to wait, to hand her downstairs. I suppose I expressed it, somehow; for after she had looked at me attentively for a little while, she appeared to understand, and replied in a low tone:

'I know you will do as I ask you, if I tell you I am very earnest in it. Go away now, Trotwood, for my sake, and ask your friends to take you home.'

She had so far improved me, for the time, that though I was angry with her, I felt ashamed, and with a short 'Goori!' (which I intended for 'Good night!') got up and went away. They followed, and I stepped at once out of the box-door into my bedroom, where only Steerforth was with me, helping me to undress, and where I was by turns telling him that Agnes was my sister, and adjuring him to bring the corkscrew, that I might open another bottle of wine.

How somebody, lying in my bed, lay saying and doing all this over again, at cross purposes, in a feverish dream all night—the bed a rocking sea that was never still! How, as that somebody slowly settled down into myself, did I begin to parch, and feel as if my outer covering of skin were a hard board; my tongue the bottom of an empty kettle, furred with long service, and burning up over a slow fire; the palms of my hands, hot plates of metal which no ice could cool!

But the agony of mind, the remorse, and shame I felt when I became conscious next day! My horror of having committed a thousand offences I had forgotten, and which nothing could ever expiate—my recollection of that indelible look which Agnes had given me—the torturing impossibility of communicating with her, not knowing, Beast that I was, how she came to be in London, or where she stayed—my disgust of the very sight of the room where the revel had been held—my racking head—the smell of smoke, the sight of glasses, the impossibility of going out, or even getting up! Oh, what a day it was!

Oh, what an evening, when I sat down by my fire to a basin of mutton broth, dimpled all over with fat, and thought I was going the way of my predecessor, and should succeed to his dismal story as well as to his chambers, and had half a mind to rush express to Dover and reveal all! What an evening, when Mrs. Crupp, coming in to take away the broth-basin, produced one kidney on a cheese-plate as the entire remains of yesterday's feast, and I was really inclined to fall upon her nankeen breast and say, in heartfelt penitence, 'Oh, Mrs. Crupp, Mrs. Crupp, never mind the broken meats! I am very miserable!'—only that I doubted, even at that pass, if Mrs. Crupp were quite the sort of woman to confide in!

CHAPTER 25. GOOD AND BAD ANGELS

I was going out at my door on the morning after that deplorable day of headache, sickness, and repentance, with an odd confusion in my mind relative to the date of my dinner-party, as if a body of Titans had taken an enormous lever and pushed the day before yesterday some months back, when I saw a ticket-porter coming upstairs, with a letter in his hand. He was taking his time about his errand, then; but when he saw me on the top of the staircase, looking at him over the banisters, he swung into a trot, and came up panting as if he had run himself into a state of exhaustion.

'T. Copperfield, Esquire,' said the ticket-porter, touching his hat with his little cane.

I could scarcely lay claim to the name: I was so disturbed by the conviction that the letter came from Agnes. However, I told him I was T. Copperfield, Esquire, and he believed it, and gave me the letter, which he said required an answer. I shut him out on the landing to wait for the answer, and went into my chambers again, in such a nervous state that I was fain to lay the letter down on my breakfast table, and familiarize myself with the outside of it a little, before I could resolve to break the seal.

I found, when I did open it, that it was a very kind note, containing no reference to my condition at the theatre. All it said was, 'My dear Trotwood. I am staying at the house of papa's agent, Mr. Waterbrook, in Ely Place, Holborn. Will you come and see me today, at any time you like to appoint? Ever yours affectionately, AGNES.'

It took me such a long time to write an answer at all to my satisfaction, that I don't know what the ticket-porter can have thought, unless he thought I was learning to write. I must have written half-a-dozen answers at least. I began one, 'How can I ever hope, my dear Agnes, to efface from your remembrance the disgusting impression'—there I didn't like it, and then I tore it up. I began another, 'Shakespeare has observed, my dear Agnes, how strange it is that a man should put an enemy into his mouth'—that reminded me of Markham, and it got no farther. I even tried poetry. I began one note, in a six-syllable line, 'Oh, do not remember'—but that associated itself with the fifth of November, and became an absurdity. After many attempts, I wrote, 'My dear Agnes. Your letter is like you, and what could I say of it that would be higher praise than that? I will come at four o'clock. Affectionately and sorrowfully, T.C.' With this missive (which I was in twenty minds at once about recalling, as soon as it was out of my hands), the ticket-porter at last departed.

If the day were half as tremendous to any other professional gentleman in Doctors' Commons as it was to me, I sincerely believe he made some expiation for his share in that rotten old ecclesiastical cheese. Although I left the office at half past three, and was prowling about the place of appointment within a few minutes afterwards, the appointed time was exceeded by a full quarter of an hour, according to the clock of St. Andrew's, Holborn, before I could muster up sufficient desperation to pull the private bell-handle let into the left-hand door-post of Mr. Waterbrook's house.

The professional business of Mr. Waterbrook's establishment was done on the ground-floor, and the genteel business (of which there was a good deal) in the upper part of the building. I was shown into a pretty but rather close drawing-room, and there sat Agnes, netting a purse.

She looked so quiet and good, and reminded me so strongly of my airy fresh school days at Canterbury, and the sodden, smoky, stupid wretch I had been the other night, that, nobody being by, I yielded to my self-reproach and shame, and—in short, made a fool of myself. I cannot deny that I shed tears. To this hour I am undecided whether it was upon the whole the wisest thing I could have done, or the most ridiculous.

'If it had been anyone but you, Agnes,' said I, turning away my head, 'I should not have minded it half so much. But that it should have been you who saw me! I almost wish I had been dead, first.'

She put her hand—its touch was like no other hand—upon my arm for a moment; and I felt so befriended and comforted, that I could not help moving it to my lips, and gratefully kissing it.

'Sit down,' said Agnes, cheerfully. 'Don't be unhappy, Trotwood. If you cannot confidently trust me, whom will you trust?'

'Ah, Agnes!' I returned. 'You are my good Angel!'

She smiled rather sadly, I thought, and shook her head.

'Yes, Agnes, my good Angel! Always my good Angel!'

'If I were, indeed, Trotwood,' she returned, 'there is one thing that I should set my heart on very much.'

I looked at her inquiringly; but already with a foreknowledge of her meaning.

'On warning you,' said Agnes, with a steady glance, 'against your bad Angel.'

'My dear Agnes,' I began, 'if you mean Steerforth—'

'I do, Trotwood,' she returned. 'Then, Agnes, you wrong him very much. He my bad Angel, or anyone's! He, anything but a guide, a support, and a friend to me! My dear Agnes! Now, is it not unjust, and unlike you, to judge him from what you saw of me the other night?'

'I do not judge him from what I saw of you the other night,' she quietly replied.

'From what, then?'

'From many things—trifles in themselves, but they do not seem to me to be so, when they are put together. I judge him, partly from your account of him, Trotwood, and your character, and the influence he has over you.'

There was always something in her modest voice that seemed to touch a chord within me, answering to that sound alone. It was always earnest; but when it was very earnest, as it was now, there was a thrill in it that quite subdued me. I sat looking at her as she cast her eyes down on her work; I sat seeming still to listen to her; and Steerforth, in spite of all my attachment to him, darkened in that tone.

'It is very bold in me,' said Agnes, looking up again, 'who have lived in such seclusion, and can know so little of the world, to give you my advice so confidently, or even to have this strong opinion. But I know in what it is engendered, Trotwood,—in how true a remembrance of our having grown up together, and in how true an interest in all relating to you. It is that which makes me bold. I am certain that what I say is right. I am quite sure it is. I feel as if it were someone else speaking to you, and not I, when I caution you that you have made a dangerous friend.'

Again I looked at her, again I listened to her after she was silent, and again his image, though it was still fixed in my heart, darkened.

'I am not so unreasonable as to expect,' said Agnes, resuming her usual tone, after a little while, 'that you will, or that you can, at once, change any sentiment that has become a conviction to you; least of all a sentiment that is rooted in your trusting disposition. You ought not hastily to do that. I only ask you, Trotwood, if you ever think of me—I mean,' with a quiet smile, for I was going to interrupt her, and she knew why, 'as often as you think of me—to think of what I have said. Do you forgive me for all this?'

'I will forgive you, Agnes,' I replied, 'when you come to do Steerforth justice, and to like him as well as I do.'

'Not until then?' said Agnes.

I saw a passing shadow on her face when I made this mention of him, but she returned my smile, and we were again as unreserved in our mutual confidence as of old.

'And when, Agnes,' said I, 'will you forgive me the other night?'

'When I recall it,' said Agnes.

She would have dismissed the subject so, but I was too full of it to allow that, and insisted on telling her how it happened that I had disgraced myself, and what chain of accidental circumstances had had the theatre for its final link. It was a great relief to me to do this, and to enlarge on the obligation that I owed to Steerforth for his care of me when I was unable to take care of myself.

'You must not forget,' said Agnes, calmly changing the conversation as soon as I had concluded, 'that you are always to tell me, not only when you fall into trouble, but when you fall in love. Who has succeeded to Miss Larkins, Trotwood?'

'No one, Agnes.'

'Someone, Trotwood,' said Agnes, laughing, and holding up her finger.

'No, Agnes, upon my word! There is a lady, certainly, at Mrs. Steerforth's house, who is very clever, and whom I like to talk to—Miss Dartle—but I don't adore her.'

Agnes laughed again at her own penetration, and told me that if I were faithful to her in my confidence she thought she should keep a little register of my violent attachments, with the date, duration, and termination of each, like the table of the reigns of the kings and queens, in the History of England. Then she asked me if I had seen Uriah.

'Uriah Heep?' said I. 'No. Is he in London?'

'He comes to the office downstairs, every day,' returned Agnes. 'He was in London a week before me. I am afraid on disagreeable business, Trotwood.'

'On some business that makes you uneasy, Agnes, I see,' said I. 'What can that be?'

Agnes laid aside her work, and replied, folding her hands upon one another, and looking pensively at me out of those beautiful soft eyes of hers:

'I believe he is going to enter into partnership with papa.'

'What? Uriah? That mean, fawning fellow, worm himself into such promotion!' I cried, indignantly. 'Have you made no remonstrance about it, Agnes? Consider what a connexion it is likely to be. You must speak out. You must not allow your father to take such a mad step. You must prevent it, Agnes, while there's time.'

Still looking at me, Agnes shook her head while I was speaking, with a faint smile at my warmth: and then replied:

'You remember our last conversation about papa? It was not long after that—not more than two or three days—when he gave me the first intimation of what I tell you. It was sad to see him struggling between his desire to represent it to me as a matter of choice on his part, and his inability to conceal that it was forced upon him. I felt very sorry.'

'Forced upon him, Agnes! Who forces it upon him?'

'Uriah,' she replied, after a moment's hesitation, 'has made himself indispensable to papa. He is subtle and watchful. He has mastered papa's weaknesses, fostered them, and taken advantage of them, until—to say all that I mean in a word, Trotwood,—until papa is afraid of him.'

There was more that she might have said; more that she knew, or that she suspected; I clearly saw. I could not give her pain by asking what it was, for I knew that she withheld it from me, to spare her father. It had long been going on to this, I was sensible: yes, I could not but feel, on the least reflection, that it had been going on to this for a long time. I remained silent.

'His ascendancy over papa,' said Agnes, 'is very great. He professes humility and gratitude—with truth, perhaps: I hope so—but his position is really one of power, and I fear he makes a hard use of his power.'

I said he was a hound, which, at the moment, was a great satisfaction to me.

'At the time I speak of, as the time when papa spoke to me,' pursued Agnes, 'he had told papa that he was going away; that he was very sorry, and unwilling to leave, but that he had better prospects. Papa was very much depressed then, and more bowed down by care than ever you or I have seen him; but he seemed relieved by this expedient of the partnership, though at the same time he seemed hurt by it and ashamed of it.'

'And how did you receive it, Agnes?'

'I did, Trotwood,' she replied, 'what I hope was right. Feeling sure that it was necessary for papa's peace that the sacrifice should be made, I entreated him to make it. I said it would lighten the load of his life—I hope it will!—and that it would give me increased opportunities of being his companion. Oh, Trotwood!' cried Agnes, putting her hands before her face, as her tears started on it, 'I almost feel as if I had been papa's enemy, instead of his loving child. For I know how he has altered, in his devotion to me. I know how he has narrowed the circle of his sympathies and duties, in the concentration of his whole mind upon me. I know what a multitude of things he has shut out for my sake, and how his anxious thoughts of me have shadowed his life, and weakened his strength and energy, by turning them always upon one idea. If I could ever set this right! If I could ever work out his restoration, as I have so innocently been the cause of his decline!'

I had never before seen Agnes cry. I had seen tears in her eyes when I had brought new honours home from school, and I had seen them there when we last spoke about her father, and I had seen her turn her gentle head aside when we took leave of one another; but I had never seen her grieve like this. It made me so sorry that I could only say, in a foolish, helpless manner, 'Pray, Agnes, don't! Don't, my dear sister!'

But Agnes was too superior to me in character and purpose, as I know well now, whatever I might know or not know then, to be long in need of my entreaties. The beautiful, calm manner, which makes her so different in my remembrance from everybody else, came back again, as if a cloud had passed from a serene sky.

'We are not likely to remain alone much longer,' said Agnes, 'and while I have an opportunity, let me earnestly entreat you, Trotwood, to be friendly to Uriah. Don't repel him. Don't resent (as I think you have a general disposition to do) what may be uncongenial to you in him. He may not deserve it, for we know no certain ill of him. In any case, think first of papa and me!'

Agnes had no time to say more, for the room door opened, and Mrs. Waterbrook, who was a large lady—or who wore a large dress: I don't exactly know which, for I don't know which was dress and which was lady

—came sailing in. I had a dim recollection of having seen her at the theatre, as if I had seen her in a pale magic lantern; but she appeared to remember me perfectly, and still to suspect me of being in a state of intoxication.

Finding by degrees, however, that I was sober, and (I hope) that I was a modest young gentleman, Mrs. Waterbrook softened towards me considerably, and inquired, firstly, if I went much into the parks, and secondly, if I went much into society. On my replying to both these questions in the negative, it occurred to me that I fell again in her good opinion; but she concealed the fact gracefully, and invited me to dinner next day. I accepted the invitation, and took my leave, making a call on Uriah in the office as I went out, and leaving a card for him in his absence.

When I went to dinner next day, and on the street door being opened, plunged into a vapour-bath of haunch of mutton, I divined that I was not the only guest, for I immediately identified the ticket-porter in disguise, assisting the family servant, and waiting at the foot of the stairs to carry up my name. He looked, to the best of his ability, when he asked me for it confidentially, as if he had never seen me before; but well did I know him, and well did he know me. Conscience made cowards of us both.

I found Mr. Waterbrook to be a middle-aged gentleman, with a short throat, and a good deal of shirt-collar, who only wanted a black nose to be the portrait of a pug-dog. He told me he was happy to have the honour of making my acquaintance; and when I had paid my homage to Mrs. Waterbrook, presented me, with much ceremony, to a very awful lady in a black velvet dress, and a great black velvet hat, whom I remember as looking like a near relation of Hamlet's—say his aunt.

Mrs. Henry Spiker was this lady's name; and her husband was there too: so cold a man, that his head, instead of being grey, seemed to be sprinkled with hoar-frost. Immense deference was shown to the Henry Spikers, male and female; which Agnes told me was on account of Mr. Henry Spiker being solicitor to something Or to Somebody, I forget what or which, remotely connected with the Treasury.

I found Uriah Heep among the company, in a suit of black, and in deep humility. He told me, when I shook hands with him, that he was proud to be noticed by me, and that he really felt obliged to me for my condescension. I could have wished he had been less obliged to me, for he hovered about me in his gratitude all the rest of the evening; and whenever I said a word to

Agnes, was sure, with his shadowless eyes and cadaverous face, to be looking gauntly down upon us from behind.

There were other guests—all iced for the occasion, as it struck me, like the wine. But there was one who attracted my attention before he came in, on account of my hearing him announced as Mr. Traddles! My mind flew back to Salem House; and could it be Tommy, I thought, who used to draw the skeletons!

I looked for Mr. Traddles with unusual interest. He was a sober, steady-looking young man of retiring manners, with a comic head of hair, and eyes that were rather wide open; and he got into an obscure corner so soon, that I had some difficulty in making him out. At length I had a good view of him, and either my vision deceived me, or it was the old unfortunate Tommy.

I made my way to Mr. Waterbrook, and said, that I believed I had the pleasure of seeing an old schoolfellow there.

'Indeed!' said Mr. Waterbrook, surprised. 'You are too young to have been at school with Mr. Henry Spiker?'

'Oh, I don't mean him!' I returned. 'I mean the gentleman named Traddles.'

'Oh! Aye, aye! Indeed!' said my host, with much diminished interest. 'Possibly.'

'If it's really the same person,' said I, glancing towards him, 'it was at a place called Salem House where we were together, and he was an excellent fellow.'

'Oh yes. Traddles is a good fellow,' returned my host nodding his head with an air of toleration. 'Traddles is quite a good fellow.'

'It's a curious coincidence,' said I.

'It is really,' returned my host, 'quite a coincidence, that Traddles should be here at all: as Traddles was only invited this morning, when the place at table, intended to be occupied by Mrs. Henry Spiker's brother, became vacant, in consequence of his indisposition. A very gentlemanly man, Mrs. Henry Spiker's brother, Mr. Copperfield.'

I murmured an assent, which was full of feeling, considering that I knew nothing at all about him; and I inquired what Mr. Traddles was by profession.

'Traddles,' returned Mr. Waterbrook, 'is a young man reading for the bar. Yes. He is quite a good fellow—nobody's enemy but his own.'

'Is he his own enemy?' said I, sorry to hear this.

'Well,' returned Mr. Waterbrook, pursing up his mouth, and playing with his watch-chain, in a comfortable, prosperous sort of way. 'I should say he was one of those men who stand in their own light. Yes, I should say he would never, for example, be worth five hundred pound. Traddles was recommended to me by a professional friend. Oh yes. Yes. He has a kind of talent for drawing briefs, and stating a case in writing, plainly. I am able to throw something in Traddles's way, in the course of the year; something—for him—considerable. Oh yes. Yes.'

I was much impressed by the extremely comfortable and satisfied manner in which Mr. Waterbrook delivered himself of this little word 'Yes', every now and then. There was wonderful expression in it. It completely conveyed the idea of a man who had been born, not to say with a silver spoon, but with a scaling-ladder, and had gone on mounting all the heights of life one after another, until now he looked, from the top of the fortifications, with the eye of a philosopher and a patron, on the people down in the trenches.

My reflections on this theme were still in progress when dinner was announced. Mr. Waterbrook went down with Hamlet's aunt. Mr. Henry Spiker took Mrs. Waterbrook. Agnes, whom I should have liked to take myself, was given to a simpering fellow with weak legs. Uriah, Traddles, and I, as the junior part of the company, went down last, how we could. I was not so vexed at losing Agnes as I might have been, since it gave me an opportunity of making myself known to Traddles on the stairs, who greeted me with great fervour; while Uriah writhed with such obtrusive satisfaction and self-abasement, that I could gladly have pitched him over the banisters. Traddles and I were separated at table, being billeted in two remote corners: he in the glare of a red velvet lady; I, in the gloom of Hamlet's aunt. The dinner was very long, and the conversation was about the Aristocracy—and Blood. Mrs. Waterbrook repeatedly told us, that if she had a weakness, it was Blood.

It occurred to me several times that we should have got on better, if we had not been quite so genteel. We were so exceedingly genteel, that our scope was very limited. A Mr. and Mrs. Gulpidge were of the party, who had something to do at second-hand (at least, Mr. Gulpidge had) with the law business of the Bank; and what with the Bank, and what with the Treasury, we were as exclusive as the Court Circular. To mend the matter, Hamlet's aunt had the family failing of indulging in soliloquy, and held forth in a desultory manner, by herself, on every topic that was introduced. These were few enough, to be sure; but as we always fell back upon Blood, she had as wide a field for abstract speculation as her nephew himself.

We might have been a party of Ogres, the conversation assumed such a sanguine complexion.

'I confess I am of Mrs. Waterbrook's opinion,' said Mr. Waterbrook, with his wine-glass at his eye. 'Other things are all very well in their way, but give me Blood!'

'Oh! There is nothing,' observed Hamlet's aunt, 'so satisfactory to one! There is nothing that is so much one's beau-ideal of—of all that sort of thing, speaking generally. There are some low minds (not many, I am happy to believe, but there are some) that would prefer to do what I should call bow down before idols. Positively Idols! Before service, intellect, and so on. But these are intangible points. Blood is not so. We see Blood in a nose, and we know it. We meet with it in a chin, and we say, "There it is! That's Blood!" It is an actual matter of fact. We point it out. It admits of no doubt.'

The simpering fellow with the weak legs, who had taken Agnes down, stated the question more decisively yet, I thought.

'Oh, you know, deuce take it,' said this gentleman, looking round the board with an imbecile smile, 'we can't forego Blood, you know. We must have Blood, you know. Some young fellows, you know, may be a little behind their station, perhaps, in point of education and behaviour, and may go a little wrong, you know, and get themselves and other people into a variety of fixes—and all that—but deuce take it, it's delightful to reflect that they've got Blood in 'em! Myself, I'd rather at any time be knocked down by a man who had got Blood in him, than I'd be picked up by a man who hadn't!'

This sentiment, as compressing the general question into a nutshell, gave the utmost satisfaction, and brought the gentleman into great notice until the ladies retired. After that, I observed that Mr. Gulpidge and Mr. Henry Spiker, who had hitherto been very distant, entered into a defensive alliance against us, the common enemy, and exchanged a mysterious dialogue across the table for our defeat and overthrow.

'That affair of the first bond for four thousand five hundred pounds has not taken the course that was expected, Spiker,' said Mr. Gulpidge.

'Do you mean the D. of A.'s?' said Mr. Spiker.

'The C. of B.'s!' said Mr. Gulpidge.

Mr. Spiker raised his eyebrows, and looked much concerned.

'When the question was referred to Lord—I needn't name him,' said Mr. Gulpidge, checking himself—

'I understand,' said Mr. Spiker, 'N.'

Mr. Gulpidge darkly nodded—'was referred to him, his answer was, "Money, or no release."'

'Lord bless my soul!' cried Mr. Spiker.

'"Money, or no release,"' repeated Mr. Gulpidge, firmly. 'The next in reversion—you understand me?'

'K.,' said Mr. Spiker, with an ominous look.

'—K. then positively refused to sign. He was attended at Newmarket for that purpose, and he point-blank refused to do it.'

Mr. Spiker was so interested, that he became quite stony.

'So the matter rests at this hour,' said Mr. Gulpidge, throwing himself back in his chair. 'Our friend Waterbrook will excuse me if I forbear to explain myself generally, on account of the magnitude of the interests involved.'

Mr. Waterbrook was only too happy, as it appeared to me, to have such interests, and such names, even hinted at, across his table. He assumed an expression of gloomy intelligence (though I am persuaded he knew no more about the discussion than I did), and highly approved of the discretion that had been observed. Mr. Spiker, after the receipt of such a confidence, naturally desired to favour his friend with a confidence of his own; therefore the foregoing dialogue was succeeded by another, in which it was Mr. Gulpidge's turn to be surprised, and that by another in which the surprise came round to Mr. Spiker's turn again, and so on, turn and turn about. All this time we, the outsiders, remained oppressed by the tremendous interests involved in the conversation; and our host regarded us with pride, as the victims of a salutary awe and astonishment. I was very glad indeed to get upstairs to Agnes, and to talk with her in a corner, and to introduce Traddles to her, who was shy, but agreeable, and the same good-natured creature still. As he was obliged to leave early, on account of going away next morning for a month, I had not nearly so much conversation with him as I could have wished; but we exchanged addresses, and promised ourselves the pleasure of another meeting when he should come back to town. He was greatly interested to hear that I knew Steerforth, and spoke of him with such warmth that I made him tell Agnes what he thought of him.

But Agnes only looked at me the while, and very slightly shook her head when only I observed her.

As she was not among people with whom I believed she could be very much at home, I was almost glad to hear that she was going away within a few days, though I was sorry at the prospect of parting from her again so soon. This caused me to remain until all the company were gone. Conversing with her, and hearing her sing, was such a delightful reminder to me of my happy life in the grave old house she had made so beautiful, that I could have remained there half the night; but, having no excuse for staying any longer, when the lights of Mr. Waterbrook's society were all snuffed out, I took my leave very much against my inclination. I felt then, more than ever, that she was my better Angel; and if I thought of her sweet face and placid smile, as though they had shone on me from some removed being, like an Angel, I hope I thought no harm.

I have said that the company were all gone; but I ought to have excepted Uriah, whom I don't include in that denomination, and who had never ceased to hover near us. He was close behind me when I went downstairs. He was close beside me, when I walked away from the house, slowly fitting his long skeleton fingers into the still longer fingers of a great Guy Fawkes pair of gloves.

It was in no disposition for Uriah's company, but in remembrance of the entreaty Agnes had made to me, that I asked him if he would come home to my rooms, and have some coffee.

'Oh, really, Master Copperfield,' he rejoined—'I beg your pardon, Mister Copperfield, but the other comes so natural, I don't like that you should put a constraint upon yourself to ask a numble person like me to your ouse.'

'There is no constraint in the case,' said I. 'Will you come?'

'I should like to, very much,' replied Uriah, with a writhe.

'Well, then, come along!' said I.

I could not help being rather short with him, but he appeared not to mind it. We went the nearest way, without conversing much upon the road; and he was so humble in respect of those scarecrow gloves, that he was still putting them on, and seemed to have made no advance in that labour, when we got to my place.

I led him up the dark stairs, to prevent his knocking his head against anything, and really his damp cold hand felt so like a frog in mine, that I was tempted to drop it and run away. Agnes and hospitality prevailed, however, and I conducted him to my fireside. When I lighted my candles, he fell into meek transports with the room that was revealed to him; and when I heated the coffee in an unassuming block-tin vessel in which Mrs. Crupp delighted to prepare it (chiefly, I believe, because it was not intended for the purpose, being a shaving-pot, and because there was a patent invention of great price mouldering away in the pantry), he professed so much emotion, that I could joyfully have scalded him.

'Oh, really, Master Copperfield,—I mean Mister Copperfield,' said Uriah, 'to see you waiting upon me is what I never could have expected! But, one way and another, so many things happen to me which I never could have expected, I am sure, in my umble station, that it seems to rain blessings on my ed. You have heard something, I des-say, of a change in my expectations, Master Copperfield,—I should say, Mister Copperfield?'

As he sat on my sofa, with his long knees drawn up under his coffee-cup, his hat and gloves upon the ground close to him, his spoon going softly round and round, his shadowless red eyes, which looked as if they had scorched their lashes off, turned towards me without looking at me, the disagreeable dints I have formerly described in his nostrils coming and going with his breath, and a snaky undulation pervading his frame from his chin to his boots, I decided in my own mind that I disliked him intensely. It made me very uncomfortable to have him for a guest, for I was young then, and unused to disguise what I so strongly felt.

'You have heard something, I des-say, of a change in my expectations, Master Copperfield,—I should say, Mister Copperfield?' observed Uriah.

'Yes,' said I, 'something.'

'Ah! I thought Miss Agnes would know of it!' he quietly returned. 'I'm glad to find Miss Agnes knows of it. Oh, thank you, Master—Mister Copperfield!'

I could have thrown my bootjack at him (it lay ready on the rug), for having entrapped me into the disclosure of anything concerning Agnes, however immaterial. But I only drank my coffee.

'What a prophet you have shown yourself, Mister Copperfield!' pursued Uriah. 'Dear me, what a prophet you have proved yourself to be! Don't you remember saying to me once, that perhaps I should be a partner in Mr. Wickfield's business, and perhaps it might be Wickfield and Heep? You may not recollect it; but when a person is umble, Master Copperfield, a person treasures such things up!'

'I recollect talking about it,' said I, 'though I certainly did not think it very likely then.' 'Oh! who would have thought it likely, Mister Copperfield!' returned Uriah, enthusiastically. 'I am sure I didn't myself. I recollect saying with my own lips that I was much too umble. So I considered myself really and truly.'

He sat, with that carved grin on his face, looking at the fire, as I looked at him.

'But the umblest persons, Master Copperfield,' he presently resumed, 'may be the instruments of good. I am glad to think I have been the instrument of good to Mr. Wickfield, and that I may be more so. Oh what a worthy man he is, Mister Copperfield, but how imprudent he has been!'

'I am sorry to hear it,' said I. I could not help adding, rather pointedly, 'on all accounts.'

'Decidedly so, Mister Copperfield,' replied Uriah. 'On all accounts. Miss Agnes's above all! You don't remember your own eloquent expressions, Master Copperfield; but I remember how you said one day that everybody must admire her, and how I thanked you for it! You have forgot that, I have no doubt, Master Copperfield?'

'No,' said I, drily.

'Oh how glad I am you have not!' exclaimed Uriah. 'To think that you should be the first to kindle the sparks of ambition in my umble breast, and that you've not forgot it! Oh!—Would you excuse me asking for a cup more coffee?'

Something in the emphasis he laid upon the kindling of those sparks, and something in the glance he directed at me as he said it, had made me start as if I had seen him illuminated by a blaze of light. Recalled by his request, preferred in quite another tone of voice, I did the honours of the shaving-pot; but I did them with an unsteadiness of hand, a sudden sense of being no match for him, and a perplexed suspicious anxiety as to what he might be going to say next, which I felt could not escape his observation.

He said nothing at all. He stirred his coffee round and round, he sipped it, he felt his chin softly with his grisly hand, he looked at the fire, he looked about the room, he gasped rather than smiled at me, he writhed and undulated about, in his deferential servility, he stirred and sipped again, but he left the renewal of the conversation to me.

'So, Mr. Wickfield,' said I, at last, 'who is worth five hundred of you—or me'; for my life, I think, I could not have helped dividing that part of the sentence with an awkward jerk; 'has been imprudent, has he, Mr. Heep?'

'Oh, very imprudent indeed, Master Copperfield,' returned Uriah, sighing modestly. 'Oh, very much so! But I wish you'd call me Uriah, if you please. It's like old times.'

'Well! Uriah,' said I, bolting it out with some difficulty.

'Thank you,' he returned, with fervour. 'Thank you, Master Copperfield! It's like the blowing of old breezes or the ringing of old bellses to hear YOU say Uriah. I beg your pardon. Was I making any observation?'

'About Mr. Wickfield,' I suggested.

'Oh! Yes, truly,' said Uriah. 'Ah! Great imprudence, Master Copperfield. It's a topic that I wouldn't touch upon, to any soul but you. Even to you I can only touch upon it, and no more. If anyone else had been in my place during the last few years, by this time he would have had Mr. Wickfield (oh, what a worthy man he is, Master Copperfield, too!) under his thumb. Un—der—his thumb,' said Uriah, very slowly, as he stretched out his cruel-looking hand above my table, and pressed his own thumb upon it, until it shook, and shook the room.

If I had been obliged to look at him with him splay foot on Mr. Wickfield's head, I think I could scarcely have hated him more.

'Oh, dear, yes, Master Copperfield,' he proceeded, in a soft voice, most remarkably contrasting with the action of his thumb, which did not diminish its hard pressure in the least degree, 'there's no doubt of it. There would have been loss, disgrace, I don't know what at all. Mr. Wickfield knows it. I am the umble instrument of umbly serving him, and he puts me on an eminence I hardly could have hoped to reach. How thankful should I be!' With his face turned towards me, as he finished, but without looking at me, he took his crooked thumb off the spot where he had planted it, and slowly and thoughtfully scraped his lank jaw with it, as if he were shaving himself.

I recollect well how indignantly my heart beat, as I saw his crafty face, with the appropriately red light of the fire upon it, preparing for something else.

'Master Copperfield,' he began—'but am I keeping you up?'

'You are not keeping me up. I generally go to bed late.'

'Thank you, Master Copperfield! I have risen from my umble station since first you used to address me, it is true; but I am umble still. I hope I never shall be otherwise than umble. You will not think the worse of my umbleness, if I make a little confidence to you, Master Copperfield? Will you?'

'Oh no,' said I, with an effort.

'Thank you!' He took out his pocket-handkerchief, and began wiping the palms of his hands. 'Miss Agnes, Master Copperfield—' 'Well, Uriah?'

'Oh, how pleasant to be called Uriah, spontaneously!' he cried; and gave himself a jerk, like a convulsive fish. 'You thought her looking very beautiful tonight, Master Copperfield?'

'I thought her looking as she always does: superior, in all respects, to everyone around her,' I returned.

'Oh, thank you! It's so true!' he cried. 'Oh, thank you very much for that!'

'Not at all,' I said, loftily. 'There is no reason why you should thank me.'

'Why that, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah, 'is, in fact, the confidence that I am going to take the liberty of reposing. Umble as I am,' he wiped his hands harder, and looked at them and at the fire by turns, 'umble as my mother is, and lowly as our poor but honest roof has ever been, the image of Miss Agnes (I don't mind trusting you with my secret, Master Copperfield, for I have always overflowed towards you since the first moment I had the pleasure of beholding you in a pony-shay) has been in my breast for years. Oh, Master Copperfield, with what a pure affection do I love the ground my Agnes walks on!'

I believe I had a delirious idea of seizing the red-hot poker out of the fire, and running him through with it. It went from me with a shock, like a ball fired from a rifle: but the image of Agnes, outraged by so much as a thought of this red-headed animal's, remained in my mind when I looked at him, sitting all awry as if his mean soul griped his body, and made me giddy. He seemed to swell and grow before my eyes; the room seemed full of the echoes of his voice; and the strange feeling (to which, perhaps, no one is quite a stranger) that all this had occurred before, at some indefinite time, and that I knew what he was going to say next, took possession of me.

A timely observation of the sense of power that there was in his face, did more to bring back to my remembrance the entreaty of Agnes, in its full force, than any effort I could have made. I asked him, with a better appearance of composure than I could have thought possible a minute before, whether he had made his feelings known to Agnes.

'Oh no, Master Copperfield!' he returned; 'oh dear, no! Not to anyone but you. You see I am only just emerging from my lowly station. I rest a good deal of hope on her observing how useful I am to her father (for I trust to be very useful to him indeed, Master Copperfield), and how I smooth the way for him, and keep him straight. She's so much attached to her father, Master Copperfield (oh, what a lovely thing it is in a daughter!), that I think she may come, on his account, to be kind to me.'

I fathomed the depth of the rascal's whole scheme, and understood why he laid it bare.

'If you'll have the goodness to keep my secret, Master Copperfield,' he pursued, 'and not, in general, to go against me, I shall take it as a particular favour. You wouldn't wish to make unpleasantness. I know what a friendly heart you've got; but having only known me on my umble footing (on my umblest I should say, for I am very umble still), you might, unbeknown, go against me rather, with my Agnes. I call her mine, you see, Master Copperfield. There's a song that says, "I'd crowns resign, to call her mine!" I hope to do it, one of these days.'

Dear Agnes! So much too loving and too good for anyone that I could think of, was it possible that she was reserved to be the wife of such a wretch as this!

'There's no hurry at present, you know, Master Copperfield,' Uriah proceeded, in his slimy way, as I sat gazing at him, with this thought in my mind. 'My Agnes is very young still; and mother and me will have to work our way upwards, and make a good many new arrangements, before it would be quite convenient. So I shall have time gradually to make her familiar with my hopes, as opportunities offer. Oh, I'm so much obliged to you for this confidence! Oh, it's such a relief, you can't think, to know that you understand our situation, and are certain (as you wouldn't wish to make unpleasantness in the family) not to go against me!'

He took the hand which I dared not withhold, and having given it a damp squeeze, referred to his pale-faced watch.

'Dear me!' he said, 'it's past one. The moments slip away so, in the confidence of old times, Master Copperfield, that it's almost half past one!'

I answered that I had thought it was later. Not that I had really thought so, but because my conversational powers were effectually scattered.

'Dear me!' he said, considering. 'The ouse that I am stopping at—a sort of a private hotel and boarding ouse, Master Copperfield, near the New

River ed—will have gone to bed these two hours.'

'I am sorry,' I returned, 'that there is only one bed here, and that I—'

'Oh, don't think of mentioning beds, Master Copperfield!' he rejoined ecstatically, drawing up one leg. 'But would you have any objections to my laying down before the fire?'

'If it comes to that,' I said, 'pray take my bed, and I'll lie down before the fire.'

His repudiation of this offer was almost shrill enough, in the excess of its surprise and humility, to have penetrated to the ears of Mrs. Crupp, then sleeping, I suppose, in a distant chamber, situated at about the level of low-water mark, soothed in her slumbers by the ticking of an incorrigible clock, to which she always referred me when we had any little difference on the score of punctuality, and which was never less than three-quarters of an hour too slow, and had always been put right in the morning by the best authorities. As no arguments I could urge, in my bewildered condition, had the least effect upon his modesty in inducing him to accept my bedroom, I was obliged to make the best arrangements I could, for his repose before the fire. The mattress of the sofa (which was a great deal too short for his lank figure), the sofa pillows, a blanket, the table-cover, a clean breakfast-cloth, and a great-coat, made him a bed and covering, for which he was more than thankful. Having lent him a night-cap, which he put on at once, and in which he made such an awful figure, that I have never worn one since, I left him to his rest.

I never shall forget that night. I never shall forget how I turned and tumbled; how I wearied myself with thinking about Agnes and this creature; how I considered what could I do, and what ought I to do; how I could come to no other conclusion than that the best course for her peace was to do nothing, and to keep to myself what I had heard. If I went to sleep for a few moments, the image of Agnes with her tender eyes, and of her father looking fondly on her, as I had so often seen him look, arose before me with appealing faces, and filled me with vague terrors. When I awoke, the recollection that Uriah was lying in the next room, sat heavy on me like a waking nightmare; and oppressed me with a leaden dread, as if I had had some meaner quality of devil for a lodger.

The poker got into my dozing thoughts besides, and wouldn't come out. I thought, between sleeping and waking, that it was still red hot, and I had snatched it out of the fire, and run him through the body. I was so haunted at last by the idea, though I knew there was nothing in it, that I stole into the next room to look at him. There I saw him, lying on his back, with his legs extending to I don't know where, gurglings taking place in his throat, stoppages in his nose, and his mouth open like a post-office. He was so much worse in reality than in my distempered fancy, that afterwards I was attracted to him in very repulsion, and could not help wandering in and out every half-hour or so, and taking another look at him. Still, the long, long night seemed heavy and hopeless as ever, and no promise of day was in the murky sky.

When I saw him going downstairs early in the morning (for, thank Heaven! he would not stay to breakfast), it appeared to me as if the night was going away in his person. When I went out to the Commons, I charged Mrs. Crupp with particular directions to leave the windows open, that my sitting-room might be aired, and purged of his presence.

CHAPTER 26. I FALL INTO CAPTIVITY

I saw no more of Uriah Heep, until the day when Agnes left town. I was at the coach office to take leave of her and see her go; and there was he, returning to Canterbury by the same conveyance. It was some small satisfaction to me to observe his spare, short-waisted, high-shouldered, mulberry-coloured great-coat perched up, in company with an umbrella like a small tent, on the edge of the back seat on the roof, while Agnes was, of course, inside; but what I underwent in my efforts to be friendly with him, while Agnes looked on, perhaps deserved that little recompense. At the coach window, as at the dinner-party, he hovered about us without a moment's intermission, like a great vulture: gorging himself on every syllable that I said to Agnes, or Agnes said to me.

In the state of trouble into which his disclosure by my fire had thrown me, I had thought very much of the words Agnes had used in reference to the partnership. 'I did what I hope was right. Feeling sure that it was necessary for papa's peace that the sacrifice should be made, I entreated him to make it.' A miserable foreboding that she would yield to, and sustain herself by, the same feeling in reference to any sacrifice for his sake, had oppressed me ever since. I knew how she loved him. I knew what the devotion of her nature was. I knew from her own lips that she regarded herself as the innocent cause of his errors, and as owing him a great debt she ardently desired to pay. I had no consolation in seeing how different she was from this detestable Rufus with the mulberry-coloured great-coat, for I felt that in the very difference between them, in the self-denial of her pure soul and the sordid baseness of his, the greatest danger lay. All this, doubtless, he knew thoroughly, and had, in his cunning, considered well.

Yet I was so certain that the prospect of such a sacrifice afar off, must destroy the happiness of Agnes; and I was so sure, from her manner, of its being unseen by her then, and having cast no shadow on her yet; that I could as soon have injured her, as given her any warning of what impended. Thus it was that we parted without explanation: she waving her hand and smiling farewell from the coach window; her evil genius writhing on the roof, as if he had her in his clutches and triumphed.

I could not get over this farewell glimpse of them for a long time. When Agnes wrote to tell me of her safe arrival, I was as miserable as when I saw her going away. Whenever I fell into a thoughtful state, this subject was sure to present itself, and all my uneasiness was sure to be redoubled. Hardly a night passed without my dreaming of it. It became a part of my life, and as inseparable from my life as my own head.

I had ample leisure to refine upon my uneasiness: for Steerforth was at Oxford, as he wrote to me, and when I was not at the Commons, I was very much alone. I believe I had at this time some lurking distrust of Steerforth. I wrote to him most affectionately in reply to his, but I think I was glad, upon the whole, that he could not come to London just then. I suspect the truth to be, that the influence of Agnes was upon me, undisturbed by the sight of him; and that it was the more powerful with me, because she had so large a share in my thoughts and interest.

In the meantime, days and weeks slipped away. I was articled to Spenlow and Jorkins. I had ninety pounds a year (exclusive of my house-rent and sundry collateral matters) from my aunt. My rooms were engaged for twelve months certain: and though I still found them dreary of an evening, and the evenings long, I could settle down into a state of equable low spirits, and resign myself to coffee; which I seem, on looking back, to have taken by the gallon at about this period of my existence. At about this time, too, I made three discoveries: first, that Mrs. Crupp was a martyr to a curious disorder called 'the spazzums', which was generally accompanied with inflammation of the nose, and required to be constantly treated with peppermint; secondly, that something peculiar in the temperature of my pantry, made the brandy-bottles burst; thirdly, that I was alone in the world, and much given to record that circumstance in fragments of English versification.

On the day when I was articled, no festivity took place, beyond my having sandwiches and sherry into the office for the clerks, and going alone to the theatre at night. I went to see The Stranger, as a Doctors' Commons sort of play, and was so dreadfully cut up, that I hardly knew myself in my own glass when I got home. Mr. Spenlow remarked, on this occasion, when we concluded our business, that he should have been happy to have seen me at his house at Norwood to celebrate our becoming connected, but for his domestic arrangements being in some disorder, on account of the expected return of his daughter from finishing her education at Paris. But, he intimated that when she came home he should hope to have the pleasure of entertaining me. I knew that he was a widower with one daughter, and expressed my acknowledgements.

Mr. Spenlow was as good as his word. In a week or two, he referred to this engagement, and said, that if I would do him the favour to come down next Saturday, and stay till Monday, he would be extremely happy. Of course I said I would do him the favour; and he was to drive me down in his phaeton, and to bring me back.

When the day arrived, my very carpet-bag was an object of veneration to the stipendiary clerks, to whom the house at Norwood was a sacred mystery. One of them informed me that he had heard that Mr. Spenlow ate entirely off plate and china; and another hinted at champagne being constantly on draught, after the usual custom of table-beer. The old clerk with the wig, whose name was Mr. Tiffey, had been down on business several times in the course of his career, and had on each occasion penetrated to the breakfast-parlour. He described it as an apartment of the most sumptuous nature, and said that he had drunk brown East India sherry there, of a quality so precious as to make a man wink. We had an adjourned cause in the Consistory that day—about excommunicating a baker who had been objecting in a vestry to a paving-rate—and as the evidence was just twice the length of Robinson Crusoe, according to a calculation I made, it was rather late in the day before we finished. However, we got him excommunicated for six weeks, and sentenced in no end of costs; and then the baker's proctor, and the judge, and the advocates on both sides (who were all nearly related), went out of town together, and Mr. Spenlow and I drove away in the phaeton.

The phaeton was a very handsome affair; the horses arched their necks and lifted up their legs as if they knew they belonged to Doctors' Commons. There was a good deal of competition in the Commons on all points of display, and it turned out some very choice equipages then; though I always have considered, and always shall consider, that in my time the great article of competition there was starch: which I think was worn among the proctors to as great an extent as it is in the nature of man to bear.

We were very pleasant, going down, and Mr. Spenlow gave me some hints in reference to my profession. He said it was the genteelest profession in the world, and must on no account be confounded with the profession of a solicitor: being quite another sort of thing, infinitely more exclusive, less mechanical, and more profitable. We took things much more easily in the Commons than they could be taken anywhere else, he observed, and that set us, as a privileged class, apart. He said it was impossible to conceal the disagreeable fact, that we were chiefly employed by solicitors; but he gave me to understand that they were an inferior race of men, universally looked down upon by all proctors of any pretensions.

I asked Mr. Spenlow what he considered the best sort of professional business? He replied, that a good case of a disputed will, where there was a neat little estate of thirty or forty thousand pounds, was, perhaps, the best of all. In such a case, he said, not only were there very pretty pickings, in the way of arguments at every stage of the proceedings, and mountains upon mountains of evidence on interrogatory and counter-interrogatory (to say nothing of an appeal lying, first to the Delegates, and then to the Lords), but, the costs being pretty sure to come out of the estate at last, both sides went at it in a lively and spirited manner, and expense was no consideration. Then, he launched into a general eulogium on the Commons. What was to be particularly admired (he said) in the Commons, was its compactness. It was the most conveniently organized place in the world. It was the complete idea of snugness. It lay in a nutshell. For example: You brought a divorce case, or a restitution case, into the Consistory. Very good. You tried it in the Consistory. You made a quiet little round game of it, among a family group, and you played it out at leisure. Suppose you were not satisfied with the Consistory, what did you do then? Why, you went into the Arches. What was the Arches? The same court, in the same room, with the same bar, and the same practitioners, but another judge, for there the Consistory judge could plead any court-day as an advocate. Well, you played your round game out again. Still you were not satisfied. Very good. What did you do then? Why, you went to the Delegates. Who were the Delegates? Why, the Ecclesiastical Delegates were the advocates without any business, who had looked on at the round game when it was playing in both courts, and had seen the cards shuffled, and cut, and played, and had talked to all the players about it, and now came fresh, as judges, to settle the matter to the satisfaction of everybody! Discontented people might talk of corruption in the Commons, closeness in the Commons, and the necessity of reforming the Commons, said Mr. Spenlow solemnly, in conclusion; but when the price of wheat per bushel had been highest, the Commons had been busiest; and a man might lay his hand upon his heart, and say this to the whole world,—'Touch the Commons, and down comes the country!'

I listened to all this with attention; and though, I must say, I had my doubts whether the country was quite as much obliged to the Commons as Mr. Spenlow made out, I respectfully deferred to his opinion. That about the price of wheat per bushel, I modestly felt was too much for my strength, and quite settled the question. I have never, to this hour, got the better of that bushel of wheat. It has reappeared to annihilate me, all through my life, in connexion with all kinds of subjects. I don't know now, exactly, what it has to do with me, or what right it has to crush me, on an infinite variety of occasions; but whenever I see my old friend the bushel brought in by the head and shoulders (as he always is, I observe), I give up a subject for lost.

This is a digression. I was not the man to touch the Commons, and bring down the country. I submissively expressed, by my silence, my acquiescence in all I had heard from my superior in years and knowledge; and we talked about The Stranger and the Drama, and the pairs of horses, until we came to Mr. Spenlow's gate.

There was a lovely garden to Mr. Spenlow's house; and though that was not the best time of the year for seeing a garden, it was so beautifully kept, that I was quite enchanted. There was a charming lawn, there were clusters of trees, and there were perspective walks that I could just distinguish in the dark, arched over with trellis-work, on which shrubs and flowers grew in the growing season. 'Here Miss Spenlow walks by herself,' I thought. 'Dear me!'

We went into the house, which was cheerfully lighted up, and into a hall where there were all sorts of hats, caps, great-coats, plaids, gloves, whips, and walking-sticks. 'Where is Miss Dora?' said Mr. Spenlow to the servant. 'Dora!' I thought. 'What a beautiful name!'

We turned into a room near at hand (I think it was the identical breakfast-room, made memorable by the brown East Indian sherry), and I heard a voice say, 'Mr. Copperfield, my daughter Dora, and my daughter Dora's confidential friend!' It was, no doubt, Mr. Spenlow's voice, but I didn't know it, and I didn't care whose it was. All was over in a moment. I had fulfilled my destiny. I was a captive and a slave. I loved Dora Spenlow to distraction!

She was more than human to me. She was a Fairy, a Sylph, I don't know what she was—anything that no one ever saw, and everything that everybody ever wanted. I was swallowed up in an abyss of love in an instant. There was no pausing on the brink; no looking down, or looking back; I was gone, headlong, before I had sense to say a word to her.

'I,' observed a well-remembered voice, when I had bowed and murmured something, 'have seen Mr. Copperfield before.'

The speaker was not Dora. No; the confidential friend, Miss Murdstone!

I don't think I was much astonished. To the best of my judgement, no capacity of astonishment was left in me. There was nothing worth mentioning in the material world, but Dora Spenlow, to be astonished about. I said, 'How do you do, Miss Murdstone? I hope you are well.' She answered, 'Very well.' I said, 'How is Mr. Murdstone?' She replied, 'My brother is robust, I am obliged to you.'

Mr. Spenlow, who, I suppose, had been surprised to see us recognize each other, then put in his word.

'I am glad to find,' he said, 'Copperfield, that you and Miss Murdstone are already acquainted.'

'Mr. Copperfield and myself,' said Miss Murdstone, with severe composure, 'are connexions. We were once slightly acquainted. It was in his childish days. Circumstances have separated us since. I should not have known him.'

I replied that I should have known her, anywhere. Which was true enough.

'Miss Murdstone has had the goodness,' said Mr. Spenlow to me, 'to accept the office—if I may so describe it—of my daughter Dora's confidential friend. My daughter Dora having, unhappily, no mother, Miss Murdstone is obliging enough to become her companion and protector.'

A passing thought occurred to me that Miss Murdstone, like the pocket instrument called a life-preserver, was not so much designed for purposes of protection as of assault. But as I had none but passing thoughts for any subject save Dora, I glanced at her, directly afterwards, and was thinking that I saw, in her prettily pettish manner, that she was not very much inclined to be particularly confidential to her companion and protector, when a bell rang, which Mr. Spenlow said was the first dinner-bell, and so carried me off to dress.

The idea of dressing one's self, or doing anything in the way of action, in that state of love, was a little too ridiculous. I could only sit down before my fire, biting the key of my carpet-bag, and think of the captivating, girlish, bright-eyed lovely Dora. What a form she had, what a face she had, what a graceful, variable, enchanting manner!

The bell rang again so soon that I made a mere scramble of my dressing, instead of the careful operation I could have wished under the circumstances, and went downstairs. There was some company. Dora was talking to an old gentleman with a grey head. Grey as he was—and a great-grandfather into the bargain, for he said so—I was madly jealous of him.

What a state of mind I was in! I was jealous of everybody. I couldn't bear the idea of anybody knowing Mr. Spenlow better than I did. It was torturing to me to hear them talk of occurrences in which I had had no share. When a most amiable person, with a highly polished bald head, asked me across the dinner table, if that were the first occasion of my seeing the grounds, I could have done anything to him that was savage and revengeful.

I don't remember who was there, except Dora. I have not the least idea what we had for dinner, besides Dora. My impression is, that I dined off Dora, entirely, and sent away half-a-dozen plates untouched. I sat next to her. I talked to her. She had the most delightful little voice, the gayest little laugh, the pleasantest and most fascinating little ways, that ever led a lost youth into hopeless slavery. She was rather diminutive altogether. So much the more precious, I thought.

When she went out of the room with Miss Murdstone (no other ladies were of the party), I fell into a reverie, only disturbed by the cruel apprehension that Miss Murdstone would disparage me to her. The amiable creature with the polished head told me a long story, which I think was about gardening. I think I heard him say, 'my gardener', several times. I seemed to pay the deepest attention to him, but I was wandering in a garden of Eden all the while, with Dora.

My apprehensions of being disparaged to the object of my engrossing affection were revived when we went into the drawing-room, by the grim and distant aspect of Miss Murdstone. But I was relieved of them in an unexpected manner.

'David Copperfield,' said Miss Murdstone, beckoning me aside into a window. 'A word.'

I confronted Miss Murdstone alone.

'David Copperfield,' said Miss Murdstone, 'I need not enlarge upon family circumstances. They are not a tempting subject.' 'Far from it, ma'am,' I returned.

'Far from it,' assented Miss Murdstone. 'I do not wish to revive the memory of past differences, or of past outrages. I have received outrages from a person—a female I am sorry to say, for the credit of my sex—who is not to be mentioned without scorn and disgust; and therefore I would rather not mention her.'

I felt very fiery on my aunt's account; but I said it would certainly be better, if Miss Murdstone pleased, not to mention her. I could not hear her disrespectfully mentioned, I added, without expressing my opinion in a decided tone.

Miss Murdstone shut her eyes, and disdainfully inclined her head; then, slowly opening her eyes, resumed:

'David Copperfield, I shall not attempt to disguise the fact, that I formed an unfavourable opinion of you in your childhood. It may have been a mistaken one, or you may have ceased to justify it. That is not in question between us now. I belong to a family remarkable, I believe, for some firmness; and I am not the creature of circumstance or change. I may have my opinion of you. You may have your opinion of me.'

I inclined my head, in my turn.

'But it is not necessary,' said Miss Murdstone, 'that these opinions should come into collision here. Under existing circumstances, it is as well on all accounts that they should not. As the chances of life have brought us together again, and may bring us together on other occasions, I would say, let us meet here as distant acquaintances. Family circumstances are a sufficient reason for our only meeting on that footing, and it is quite unnecessary that either of us should make the other the subject of remark. Do you approve of this?'

'Miss Murdstone,' I returned, 'I think you and Mr. Murdstone used me very cruelly, and treated my mother with great unkindness. I shall always think so, as long as I live. But I quite agree in what you propose.'

Miss Murdstone shut her eyes again, and bent her head. Then, just touching the back of my hand with the tips of her cold, stiff fingers, she walked away, arranging the little fetters on her wrists and round her neck; which seemed to be the same set, in exactly the same state, as when I had seen her last. These reminded me, in reference to Miss Murdstone's nature, of the fetters over a jail door; suggesting on the outside, to all beholders, what was to be expected within.

All I know of the rest of the evening is, that I heard the empress of my heart sing enchanted ballads in the French language, generally to the effect that, whatever was the matter, we ought always to dance, Ta ra la, Ta ra la! accompanying herself on a glorified instrument, resembling a guitar. That I was lost in blissful delirium. That I refused refreshment. That my soul recoiled from punch particularly. That when Miss Murdstone took her into custody and led her away, she smiled and gave me her delicious hand. That I caught a view of myself in a mirror, looking perfectly imbecile and idiotic. That I retired to bed in a most maudlin state of mind, and got up in a crisis of feeble infatuation.

It was a fine morning, and early, and I thought I would go and take a stroll down one of those wire-arched walks, and indulge my passion by dwelling on her image. On my way through the hall, I encountered her little dog, who was called Jip—short for Gipsy. I approached him tenderly, for I loved even him; but he showed his whole set of teeth, got under a chair expressly to snarl, and wouldn't hear of the least familiarity.

The garden was cool and solitary. I walked about, wondering what my feelings of happiness would be, if I could ever become engaged to this dear wonder. As to marriage, and fortune, and all that, I believe I was almost as innocently undesigning then, as when I loved little Em'ly. To be allowed to call her 'Dora', to write to her, to dote upon and worship her, to have reason to think that when she was with other people she was yet mindful of me, seemed to me the summit of human ambition—I am sure it was the summit of mine. There is no doubt whatever that I was a lackadaisical young spooney; but there was a purity of heart in all this, that prevents my having quite a contemptuous recollection of it, let me laugh as I may.

I had not been walking long, when I turned a corner, and met her. I tingle again from head to foot as my recollection turns that corner, and my pen shakes in my hand.

'You—are—out early, Miss Spenlow,' said I.

'It's so stupid at home,' she replied, 'and Miss Murdstone is so absurd! She talks such nonsense about its being necessary for the day to be aired, before I come out. Aired!' (She laughed, here, in the most melodious manner.) 'On a Sunday morning, when I don't practise, I must do something.

So I told papa last night I must come out. Besides, it's the brightest time of the whole day. Don't you think so?'

I hazarded a bold flight, and said (not without stammering) that it was very bright to me then, though it had been very dark to me a minute before.

'Do you mean a compliment?' said Dora, 'or that the weather has really changed?'

I stammered worse than before, in replying that I meant no compliment, but the plain truth; though I was not aware of any change having taken place in the weather. It was in the state of my own feelings, I added bashfully: to clench the explanation.

I never saw such curls—how could I, for there never were such curls!—as those she shook out to hide her blushes. As to the straw hat and blue ribbons which was on the top of the curls, if I could only have hung it up in my room in Buckingham Street, what a priceless possession it would have been!

'You have just come home from Paris,' said I.

'Yes,' said she. 'Have you ever been there?'

'No.'

'Oh! I hope you'll go soon! You would like it so much!'

Traces of deep-seated anguish appeared in my countenance. That she should hope I would go, that she should think it possible I could go, was insupportable. I depreciated Paris; I depreciated France. I said I wouldn't leave England, under existing circumstances, for any earthly consideration. Nothing should induce me. In short, she was shaking the curls again, when the little dog came running along the walk to our relief.

He was mortally jealous of me, and persisted in barking at me. She took him up in her arms—oh my goodness!—and caressed him, but he persisted upon barking still. He wouldn't let me touch him, when I tried; and then she beat him. It increased my sufferings greatly to see the pats she gave him for punishment on the bridge of his blunt nose, while he winked his eyes, and licked her hand, and still growled within himself like a little double-bass. At length he was quiet—well he might be with her dimpled chin upon his head!—and we walked away to look at a greenhouse.

'You are not very intimate with Miss Murdstone, are you?' said Dora. —'My pet.'

(The two last words were to the dog. Oh, if they had only been to me!)

'No,' I replied. 'Not at all so.'

'She is a tiresome creature,' said Dora, pouting. 'I can't think what papa can have been about, when he chose such a vexatious thing to be my companion. Who wants a protector? I am sure I don't want a protector. Jip can protect me a great deal better than Miss Murdstone,—can't you, Jip, dear?'

He only winked lazily, when she kissed his ball of a head.

'Papa calls her my confidential friend, but I am sure she is no such thing—is she, Jip? We are not going to confide in any such cross people, Jip and I. We mean to bestow our confidence where we like, and to find out our own friends, instead of having them found out for us—don't we, Jip?'

Jip made a comfortable noise, in answer, a little like a tea-kettle when it sings. As for me, every word was a new heap of fetters, riveted above the last.

'It is very hard, because we have not a kind Mama, that we are to have, instead, a sulky, gloomy old thing like Miss Murdstone, always following us about—isn't it, Jip? Never mind, Jip. We won't be confidential, and we'll make ourselves as happy as we can in spite of her, and we'll tease her, and not please her—won't we, Jip?'

If it had lasted any longer, I think I must have gone down on my knees on the gravel, with the probability before me of grazing them, and of being presently ejected from the premises besides. But, by good fortune the greenhouse was not far off, and these words brought us to it.

It contained quite a show of beautiful geraniums. We loitered along in front of them, and Dora often stopped to admire this one or that one, and I stopped to admire the same one, and Dora, laughing, held the dog up childishly, to smell the flowers; and if we were not all three in Fairyland, certainly I was. The scent of a geranium leaf, at this day, strikes me with a half comical half serious wonder as to what change has come over me in a moment; and then I see a straw hat and blue ribbons, and a quantity of curls, and a little black dog being held up, in two slender arms, against a bank of blossoms and bright leaves.

Miss Murdstone had been looking for us. She found us here; and presented her uncongenial cheek, the little wrinkles in it filled with hair powder, to Dora to be kissed. Then she took Dora's arm in hers, and marched us into breakfast as if it were a soldier's funeral.

How many cups of tea I drank, because Dora made it, I don't know. But, I perfectly remember that I sat swilling tea until my whole nervous system, if I had had any in those days, must have gone by the board. By and by we went to church. Miss Murdstone was between Dora and me in the pew; but I heard her sing, and the congregation vanished. A sermon was delivered—about Dora, of course—and I am afraid that is all I know of the service.

We had a quiet day. No company, a walk, a family dinner of four, and an evening of looking over books and pictures; Miss Murdstone with a homily before her, and her eye upon us, keeping guard vigilantly. Ah! little did Mr. Spenlow imagine, when he sat opposite to me after dinner that day, with his pocket-handkerchief over his head, how fervently I was embracing him, in my fancy, as his son-in-law! Little did he think, when I took leave of him at night, that he had just given his full consent to my being engaged to Dora, and that I was invoking blessings on his head!

We departed early in the morning, for we had a Salvage case coming on in the Admiralty Court, requiring a rather accurate knowledge of the whole science of navigation, in which (as we couldn't be expected to know much about those matters in the Commons) the judge had entreated two old Trinity Masters, for charity's sake, to come and help him out. Dora was at the breakfast-table to make the tea again, however; and I had the melancholy pleasure of taking off my hat to her in the phaeton, as she stood on the door-step with Jip in her arms.

What the Admiralty was to me that day; what nonsense I made of our case in my mind, as I listened to it; how I saw 'DORA' engraved upon the blade of the silver oar which they lay upon the table, as the emblem of that high jurisdiction; and how I felt when Mr. Spenlow went home without me (I had had an insane hope that he might take me back again), as if I were a mariner myself, and the ship to which I belonged had sailed away and left me on a desert island; I shall make no fruitless effort to describe. If that sleepy old court could rouse itself, and present in any visible form the daydreams I have had in it about Dora, it would reveal my truth.

I don't mean the dreams that I dreamed on that day alone, but day after day, from week to week, and term to term. I went there, not to attend to what was going on, but to think about Dora. If ever I bestowed a thought upon the cases, as they dragged their slow length before me, it was only to wonder, in the matrimonial cases (remembering Dora), how it was that married people could ever be otherwise than happy; and, in the Prerogative cases, to consider, if the money in question had been left to me, what were the foremost steps I should immediately have taken in regard to Dora.

Within the first week of my passion, I bought four sumptuous waistcoats—not for myself; I had no pride in them; for Dora—and took to wearing straw-coloured kid gloves in the streets, and laid the foundations of all the corns I have ever had. If the boots I wore at that period could only be produced and compared with the natural size of my feet, they would show what the state of my heart was, in a most affecting manner.

And yet, wretched cripple as I made myself by this act of homage to Dora, I walked miles upon miles daily in the hope of seeing her. Not only was I soon as well known on the Norwood Road as the postmen on that beat, but I pervaded London likewise. I walked about the streets where the best shops for ladies were, I haunted the Bazaar like an unquiet spirit, I fagged through the Park again and again, long after I was quite knocked up. Sometimes, at long intervals and on rare occasions, I saw her. Perhaps I saw her glove waved in a carriage window; perhaps I met her, walked with her and Miss Murdstone a little way, and spoke to her. In the latter case I was always very miserable afterwards, to think that I had said nothing to the purpose; or that she had no idea of the extent of my devotion, or that she cared nothing about me. I was always looking out, as may be supposed, for another invitation to Mr. Spenlow's house. I was always being disappointed, for I got none.

Mrs. Crupp must have been a woman of penetration; for when this attachment was but a few weeks old, and I had not had the courage to write more explicitly even to Agnes, than that I had been to Mr. Spenlow's house, 'whose family,' I added, 'consists of one daughter';—I say Mrs. Crupp must have been a woman of penetration, for, even in that early stage, she found it out. She came up to me one evening, when I was very low, to ask (she being then afflicted with the disorder I have mentioned) if I could oblige her with a little tincture of cardamums mixed with rhubarb, and flavoured with seven drops of the essence of cloves, which was the best remedy for her complaint;—or, if I had not such a thing by me, with a little brandy, which was the next best. It was not, she remarked, so palatable to her, but it was the next best. As I had never even heard of the first remedy, and always had the second in the closet, I gave Mrs. Crupp a glass of the second, which (that I might have no suspicion of its being devoted to any improper use) she began to take in my presence.

'Cheer up, sir,' said Mrs. Crupp. 'I can't abear to see you so, sir: I'm a mother myself.'

I did not quite perceive the application of this fact to myself, but I smiled on Mrs. Crupp, as benignly as was in my power.

'Come, sir,' said Mrs. Crupp. 'Excuse me. I know what it is, sir. There's a lady in the case.'

'Mrs. Crupp?' I returned, reddening.

'Oh, bless you! Keep a good heart, sir!' said Mrs. Crupp, nodding encouragement. 'Never say die, sir! If She don't smile upon you, there's a many as will. You are a young gentleman to be smiled on, Mr. Copperfull, and you must learn your walue, sir.'

Mrs. Crupp always called me Mr. Copperfull: firstly, no doubt, because it was not my name; and secondly, I am inclined to think, in some indistinct association with a washing-day.

'What makes you suppose there is any young lady in the case, Mrs. Crupp?' said I.

'Mr. Copperfull,' said Mrs. Crupp, with a great deal of feeling, 'I'm a mother myself.'

For some time Mrs. Crupp could only lay her hand upon her nankeen bosom, and fortify herself against returning pain with sips of her medicine. At length she spoke again.

'When the present set were took for you by your dear aunt, Mr. Copperfull,' said Mrs. Crupp, 'my remark were, I had now found summun I could care for. "Thank Ev'in!" were the expression, "I have now found summun I can care for!"—You don't eat enough, sir, nor yet drink.'

'Is that what you found your supposition on, Mrs. Crupp?' said I.

'Sir,' said Mrs. Crupp, in a tone approaching to severity, 'I've laundressed other young gentlemen besides yourself. A young gentleman may be over-careful of himself, or he may be under-careful of himself. He may brush his hair too regular, or too un-regular. He may wear his boots much too large for him, or much too small. That is according as the young gentleman has his original character formed. But let him go to which extreme he may, sir, there's a young lady in both of 'em.'

Mrs. Crupp shook her head in such a determined manner, that I had not an inch of vantage-ground left.

'It was but the gentleman which died here before yourself,' said Mrs. Crupp, 'that fell in love—with a barmaid—and had his waistcoats took in directly, though much swelled by drinking.'

'Mrs. Crupp,' said I, 'I must beg you not to connect the young lady in my case with a barmaid, or anything of that sort, if you please.'

'Mr. Copperfull,' returned Mrs. Crupp, 'I'm a mother myself, and not likely. I ask your pardon, sir, if I intrude. I should never wish to intrude where I were not welcome. But you are a young gentleman, Mr. Copperfull, and my adwice to you is, to cheer up, sir, to keep a good heart, and to know your own walue. If you was to take to something, sir,' said Mrs. Crupp, 'if you was to take to skittles, now, which is healthy, you might find it divert your mind, and do you good.'

With these words, Mrs. Crupp, affecting to be very careful of the brandy—which was all gone—thanked me with a majestic curtsey, and retired. As her figure disappeared into the gloom of the entry, this counsel certainly presented itself to my mind in the light of a slight liberty on Mrs. Crupp's part; but, at the same time, I was content to receive it, in another point of view, as a word to the wise, and a warning in future to keep my secret better.

CHAPTER 27. TOMMY TRADDLES

It may have been in consequence of Mrs. Crupp's advice, and, perhaps, for no better reason than because there was a certain similarity in the sound of the word skittles and Traddles, that it came into my head, next day, to go and look after Traddles. The time he had mentioned was more than out, and he lived in a little street near the Veterinary College at Camden Town, which was principally tenanted, as one of our clerks who lived in that direction informed me, by gentlemen students, who bought live donkeys, and made experiments on those quadrupeds in their private apartments. Having obtained from this clerk a direction to the academic grove in question, I set out, the same afternoon, to visit my old schoolfellow.

I found that the street was not as desirable a one as I could have wished it to be, for the sake of Traddles. The inhabitants appeared to have a propensity to throw any little trifles they were not in want of, into the road: which not only made it rank and sloppy, but untidy too, on account of the cabbage-leaves. The refuse was not wholly vegetable either, for I myself saw a shoe, a doubled-up saucepan, a black bonnet, and an umbrella, in various stages of decomposition, as I was looking out for the number I wanted.

The general air of the place reminded me forcibly of the days when I lived with Mr. and Mrs. Micawber. An indescribable character of faded gentility that attached to the house I sought, and made it unlike all the other houses in the street—though they were all built on one monotonous pattern, and looked like the early copies of a blundering boy who was learning to make houses, and had not yet got out of his cramped brick-and-mortar pothooks—reminded me still more of Mr. and Mrs. Micawber. Happening to arrive at the door as it was opened to the afternoon milkman, I was reminded of Mr. and Mrs. Micawber more forcibly yet.

'Now,' said the milkman to a very youthful servant girl. 'Has that there little bill of mine been heerd on?'

'Oh, master says he'll attend to it immediate,' was the reply.

'Because,' said the milkman, going on as if he had received no answer, and speaking, as I judged from his tone, rather for the edification of somebody within the house, than of the youthful servant—an impression which was strengthened by his manner of glaring down the passage—'because that there little bill has been running so long, that I begin to believe it's run away altogether, and never won't be heerd of. Now, I'm not a going to stand it, you know!' said the milkman, still throwing his voice into the house, and glaring down the passage.

As to his dealing in the mild article of milk, by the by, there never was a greater anomaly. His deportment would have been fierce in a butcher or a brandy-merchant.

The voice of the youthful servant became faint, but she seemed to me, from the action of her lips, again to murmur that it would be attended to immediate.

'I tell you what,' said the milkman, looking hard at her for the first time, and taking her by the chin, 'are you fond of milk?'

'Yes, I likes it,' she replied. 'Good,' said the milkman. 'Then you won't have none tomorrow. D'ye hear? Not a fragment of milk you won't have tomorrow.'

I thought she seemed, upon the whole, relieved by the prospect of having any today. The milkman, after shaking his head at her darkly, released her chin, and with anything rather than good-will opened his can, and deposited the usual quantity in the family jug. This done, he went away, muttering, and uttered the cry of his trade next door, in a vindictive shriek.

'Does Mr. Traddles live here?' I then inquired.

A mysterious voice from the end of the passage replied 'Yes.' Upon which the youthful servant replied 'Yes.'

'Is he at home?' said I.

Again the mysterious voice replied in the affirmative, and again the servant echoed it. Upon this, I walked in, and in pursuance of the servant's directions walked upstairs; conscious, as I passed the back parlour-door, that I was surveyed by a mysterious eye, probably belonging to the mysterious voice.

When I got to the top of the stairs—the house was only a story high above the ground floor—Traddles was on the landing to meet me. He was delighted to see me, and gave me welcome, with great heartiness, to his little room. It was in the front of the house, and extremely neat, though sparely furnished. It was his only room, I saw; for there was a sofa-bedstead in it, and his blacking-brushes and blacking were among his books—on the top shelf, behind a dictionary. His table was covered with papers, and he was hard at work in an old coat. I looked at nothing, that I know of, but I saw everything, even to the prospect of a church upon his china inkstand, as I sat down—and this, too, was a faculty confirmed in me in the old Micawber times. Various ingenious arrangements he had made, for the disguise of his chest of drawers, and the accommodation of his boots, his shaving-glass, and so forth, particularly impressed themselves upon me, as evidences of the same Traddles who used to make models of elephants' dens in writing-paper to put flies in; and to comfort himself under ill usage, with the memorable works of art I have so often mentioned.

In a corner of the room was something neatly covered up with a large white cloth. I could not make out what that was.

'Traddles,' said I, shaking hands with him again, after I had sat down, 'I am delighted to see you.'

'I am delighted to see YOU, Copperfield,' he returned. 'I am very glad indeed to see you. It was because I was thoroughly glad to see you when we met in Ely Place, and was sure you were thoroughly glad to see me, that I gave you this address instead of my address at chambers.' 'Oh! You have chambers?' said I.

'Why, I have the fourth of a room and a passage, and the fourth of a clerk,' returned Traddles. 'Three others and myself unite to have a set of chambers—to look business-like—and we quarter the clerk too. Half-a-crown a week he costs me.'

His old simple character and good temper, and something of his old unlucky fortune also, I thought, smiled at me in the smile with which he made this explanation.

'It's not because I have the least pride, Copperfield, you understand,' said Traddles, 'that I don't usually give my address here. It's only on account of those who come to me, who might not like to come here. For myself, I am fighting my way on in the world against difficulties, and it would be ridiculous if I made a pretence of doing anything else.'

'You are reading for the bar, Mr. Waterbrook informed me?' said I.

'Why, yes,' said Traddles, rubbing his hands slowly over one another. 'I am reading for the bar. The fact is, I have just begun to keep my terms, after rather a long delay. It's some time since I was articled, but the payment of that hundred pounds was a great pull. A great pull!' said Traddles, with a wince, as if he had had a tooth out.

'Do you know what I can't help thinking of, Traddles, as I sit here looking at you?' I asked him.

'No,' said he.

'That sky-blue suit you used to wear.'

'Lord, to be sure!' cried Traddles, laughing. 'Tight in the arms and legs, you know? Dear me! Well! Those were happy times, weren't they?'

'I think our schoolmaster might have made them happier, without doing any harm to any of us, I acknowledge,' I returned.

'Perhaps he might,' said Traddles. 'But dear me, there was a good deal of fun going on. Do you remember the nights in the bedroom? When we used to have the suppers? And when you used to tell the stories? Ha, ha, ha! And do you remember when I got caned for crying about Mr. Mell? Old Creakle! I should like to see him again, too!'

'He was a brute to you, Traddles,' said I, indignantly; for his good humour made me feel as if I had seen him beaten but yesterday.

'Do you think so?' returned Traddles. 'Really? Perhaps he was rather. But it's all over, a long while. Old Creakle!'

'You were brought up by an uncle, then?' said I.

'Of course I was!' said Traddles. 'The one I was always going to write to. And always didn't, eh! Ha, ha, ha! Yes, I had an uncle then. He died soon after I left school.'

'Indeed!'

'Yes. He was a retired—what do you call it!—draper—cloth-merchant—and had made me his heir. But he didn't like me when I grew up.'

'Do you really mean that?' said I. He was so composed, that I fancied he must have some other meaning.

'Oh dear, yes, Copperfield! I mean it,' replied Traddles. 'It was an unfortunate thing, but he didn't like me at all. He said I wasn't at all what he expected, and so he married his housekeeper.'

'And what did you do?' I asked.

'I didn't do anything in particular,' said Traddles. 'I lived with them, waiting to be put out in the world, until his gout unfortunately flew to his stomach—and so he died, and so she married a young man, and so I wasn't provided for.'

'Did you get nothing, Traddles, after all?'

'Oh dear, yes!' said Traddles. 'I got fifty pounds. I had never been brought up to any profession, and at first I was at a loss what to do for myself. However, I began, with the assistance of the son of a professional man, who had been to Salem House—Yawler, with his nose on one side. Do you recollect him?'

No. He had not been there with me; all the noses were straight in my day.

'It don't matter,' said Traddles. 'I began, by means of his assistance, to copy law writings. That didn't answer very well; and then I began to state cases for them, and make abstracts, and that sort of work. For I am a plodding kind of fellow, Copperfield, and had learnt the way of doing such things pithily. Well! That put it in my head to enter myself as a law student; and that ran away with all that was left of the fifty pounds. Yawler recommended me to one or two other offices, however—Mr. Waterbrook's for one—and I got a good many jobs. I was fortunate enough, too, to become acquainted with a person in the publishing way, who was getting up an Encyclopaedia, and he set me to work; and, indeed' (glancing at his table), 'I am at work for him at this minute. I am not a bad compiler, Copperfield,' said Traddles, preserving the same air of cheerful confidence in all he said, 'but I have no invention at all; not a particle. I suppose there never was a young man with less originality than I have.'

As Traddles seemed to expect that I should assent to this as a matter of course, I nodded; and he went on, with the same sprightly patience—I can find no better expression—as before.

'So, by little and little, and not living high, I managed to scrape up the hundred pounds at last,' said Traddles; 'and thank Heaven that's paid—though it was—though it certainly was,' said Traddles, wincing again as if he had had another tooth out, 'a pull. I am living by the sort of work I have mentioned, still, and I hope, one of these days, to get connected with some newspaper: which would almost be the making of my fortune. Now, Copperfield, you are so exactly what you used to be, with that agreeable face, and it's so pleasant to see you, that I sha'n't conceal anything. Therefore you must know that I am engaged.'

Engaged! Oh, Dora!

'She is a curate's daughter,' said Traddles; 'one of ten, down in Devonshire. Yes!' For he saw me glance, involuntarily, at the prospect on the inkstand. 'That's the church! You come round here to the left, out of this gate,' tracing his finger along the inkstand, 'and exactly where I hold this pen, there stands the house—facing, you understand, towards the church.'

The delight with which he entered into these particulars, did not fully present itself to me until afterwards; for my selfish thoughts were making a ground-plan of Mr. Spenlow's house and garden at the same moment.

'She is such a dear girl!' said Traddles; 'a little older than me, but the dearest girl! I told you I was going out of town? I have been down there. I walked there, and I walked back, and I had the most delightful time! I dare say ours is likely to be a rather long engagement, but our motto is "Wait and hope!" We always say that. "Wait and hope," we always say. And she would wait, Copperfield, till she was sixty—any age you can mention—for me!'

Traddles rose from his chair, and, with a triumphant smile, put his hand upon the white cloth I had observed.

'However,' he said, 'it's not that we haven't made a beginning towards housekeeping. No, no; we have begun. We must get on by degrees, but we have begun. Here,' drawing the cloth off with great pride and care, 'are two pieces of furniture to commence with. This flower-pot and stand, she bought herself. You put that in a parlour window,' said Traddles, falling a little back from it to survey it with the greater admiration, 'with a plant in it, and—and there you are! This little round table with the marble top (it's two feet ten in circumference), I bought. You want to lay a book down, you know, or somebody comes to see you or your wife, and wants a place to stand a cup of tea upon, and—and there you are again!' said Traddles. 'It's an admirable piece of workmanship—firm as a rock!' I praised them both, highly, and Traddles replaced the covering as carefully as he had removed it.

'It's not a great deal towards the furnishing,' said Traddles, 'but it's something. The table-cloths, and pillow-cases, and articles of that kind, are what discourage me most, Copperfield. So does the ironmongery—candle-boxes, and gridirons, and that sort of necessaries—because those things tell, and mount up. However, "wait and hope!" And I assure you she's the dearest girl!'

'I am quite certain of it,' said I.

'In the meantime,' said Traddles, coming back to his chair; 'and this is the end of my prosing about myself, I get on as well as I can. I don't make much, but I don't spend much. In general, I board with the people downstairs, who are very agreeable people indeed. Both Mr. and Mrs. Micawber have seen a good deal of life, and are excellent company.'

'My dear Traddles!' I quickly exclaimed. 'What are you talking about?'

Traddles looked at me, as if he wondered what I was talking about.

'Mr. and Mrs. Micawber!' I repeated. 'Why, I am intimately acquainted with them!'

An opportune double knock at the door, which I knew well from old experience in Windsor Terrace, and which nobody but Mr. Micawber could ever have knocked at that door, resolved any doubt in my mind as to their being my old friends. I begged Traddles to ask his landlord to walk up. Traddles accordingly did so, over the banister; and Mr. Micawber, not a bit changed—his tights, his stick, his shirt-collar, and his eye-glass, all the same as ever—came into the room with a genteel and youthful air.

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Traddles,' said Mr. Micawber, with the old roll in his voice, as he checked himself in humming a soft tune. 'I was not aware that there was any individual, alien to this tenement, in your sanctum.'

Mr. Micawber slightly bowed to me, and pulled up his shirt-collar.

'How do you do, Mr. Micawber?' said I.

'Sir,' said Mr. Micawber, 'you are exceedingly obliging. I am in statu quo.'

'And Mrs. Micawber?' I pursued.

'Sir,' said Mr. Micawber, 'she is also, thank God, in statu quo.'

'And the children, Mr. Micawber?'

'Sir,' said Mr. Micawber, 'I rejoice to reply that they are, likewise, in the enjoyment of salubrity.'

All this time, Mr. Micawber had not known me in the least, though he had stood face to face with me. But now, seeing me smile, he examined my features with more attention, fell back, cried, 'Is it possible! Have I the pleasure of again beholding Copperfield!' and shook me by both hands with the utmost fervour.

'Good Heaven, Mr. Traddles!' said Mr. Micawber, 'to think that I should find you acquainted with the friend of my youth, the companion of earlier days! My dear!' calling over the banisters to Mrs. Micawber, while Traddles looked (with reason) not a little amazed at this description of me. 'Here is a gentleman in Mr. Traddles's apartment, whom he wishes to have the pleasure of presenting to you, my love!'

Mr. Micawber immediately reappeared, and shook hands with me again.

'And how is our good friend the Doctor, Copperfield?' said Mr. Micawber, 'and all the circle at Canterbury?'

'I have none but good accounts of them,' said I.

'I am most delighted to hear it,' said Mr. Micawber. 'It was at Canterbury where we last met. Within the shadow, I may figuratively say, of that religious edifice immortalized by Chaucer, which was anciently the resort of Pilgrims from the remotest corners of—in short,' said Mr. Micawber, 'in the immediate neighbourhood of the Cathedral.'

I replied that it was. Mr. Micawber continued talking as volubly as he could; but not, I thought, without showing, by some marks of concern in his countenance, that he was sensible of sounds in the next room, as of Mrs. Micawber washing her hands, and hurriedly opening and shutting drawers that were uneasy in their action.

'You find us, Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, with one eye on Traddles, 'at present established, on what may be designated as a small and unassuming scale; but, you are aware that I have, in the course of my career, surmounted difficulties, and conquered obstacles. You are no stranger to the fact, that there have been periods of my life, when it has been requisite that I should pause, until certain expected events should turn up; when it has been necessary that I should fall back, before making what I trust I shall not be accused of presumption in terming—a spring. The present is one of those momentous stages in the life of man. You find me, fallen back, FOR a spring; and I have every reason to believe that a vigorous leap will shortly be the result.'

I was expressing my satisfaction, when Mrs. Micawber came in; a little more slatternly than she used to be, or so she seemed now, to my unaccustomed eyes, but still with some preparation of herself for company, and with a pair of brown gloves on.

'My dear,' said Mr. Micawber, leading her towards me, 'here is a gentleman of the name of Copperfield, who wishes to renew his acquaintance with you.'

It would have been better, as it turned out, to have led gently up to this announcement, for Mrs. Micawber, being in a delicate state of health, was overcome by it, and was taken so unwell, that Mr. Micawber was obliged, in great trepidation, to run down to the water-butt in the backyard, and draw a basinful to lave her brow with. She presently revived, however, and was really pleased to see me. We had half-an-hour's talk, all together; and I asked her about the twins, who, she said, were 'grown great creatures'; and after Master and Miss Micawber, whom she described as 'absolute giants', but they were not produced on that occasion.

Mr. Micawber was very anxious that I should stay to dinner. I should not have been averse to do so, but that I imagined I detected trouble, and calculation relative to the extent of the cold meat, in Mrs. Micawber's eye. I therefore pleaded another engagement; and observing that Mrs. Micawber's spirits were immediately lightened, I resisted all persuasion to forego it.

But I told Traddles, and Mr. and Mrs. Micawber, that before I could think of leaving, they must appoint a day when they would come and dine with me. The occupations to which Traddles stood pledged, rendered it necessary to fix a somewhat distant one; but an appointment was made for the purpose, that suited us all, and then I took my leave.

Mr. Micawber, under pretence of showing me a nearer way than that by which I had come, accompanied me to the corner of the street; being anxious (he explained to me) to say a few words to an old friend, in confidence.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'I need hardly tell you that to have beneath our roof, under existing circumstances, a mind like that which gleams—if I may be allowed the expression—which gleams—in your friend Traddles, is an unspeakable comfort. With a washerwoman, who exposes hard-bake for sale in her parlour-window, dwelling next door, and a Bow-street officer residing over the way, you may imagine that his society is a source of consolation to myself and to Mrs. Micawber. I am at present, my dear Copperfield, engaged in the sale of corn upon commission. It is not an avocation of a remunerative description—in other words, it does not pay—and some temporary embarrassments of a pecuniary nature have been the consequence. I am, however, delighted to add that I have now an immediate prospect of something turning up (I am not at liberty to say in what direction), which I trust will enable me to provide, permanently, both for myself and for your friend Traddles, in whom I have an unaffected interest. You may, perhaps, be prepared to hear that Mrs. Micawber is in a state of health which renders it not wholly improbable that an addition may be ultimately made to those pledges of affection which—in short, to the infantine group. Mrs. Micawber's family have been so good as to express their dissatisfaction at this state of things. I have merely to observe, that I am not aware that it is any business of theirs, and that I repel that exhibition of feeling with scorn, and with defiance!'

Mr. Micawber then shook hands with me again, and left me.

CHAPTER 28. Mr. MICAWBER'S GAUNTLET

Until the day arrived on which I was to entertain my newly-found old friends, I lived principally on Dora and coffee. In my love-lorn condition, my appetite languished; and I was glad of it, for I felt as though it would have been an act of perfidy towards Dora to have a natural relish for my dinner. The quantity of walking exercise I took, was not in this respect attended with its usual consequence, as the disappointment counteracted the fresh air. I have my doubts, too, founded on the acute experience acquired at this period of my life, whether a sound enjoyment of animal food can develop itself freely in any human subject who is always in torment from tight boots. I think the extremities require to be at peace before the stomach will conduct itself with vigour.

On the occasion of this domestic little party, I did not repeat my former extensive preparations. I merely provided a pair of soles, a small leg of mutton, and a pigeon-pie. Mrs. Crupp broke out into rebellion on my first bashful hint in reference to the cooking of the fish and joint, and said, with a dignified sense of injury, 'No! No, sir! You will not ask me sich a thing, for you are better acquainted with me than to suppose me capable of doing what I cannot do with ampial satisfaction to my own feelings!' But, in the end, a compromise was effected; and Mrs. Crupp consented to achieve this feat, on condition that I dined from home for a fortnight afterwards.

And here I may remark, that what I underwent from Mrs. Crupp, in consequence of the tyranny she established over me, was dreadful. I never was so much afraid of anyone. We made a compromise of everything. If I hesitated, she was taken with that wonderful disorder which was always lying in ambush in her system, ready, at the shortest notice, to prey upon her vitals. If I rang the bell impatiently, after half-a-dozen unavailing modest pulls, and she appeared at last—which was not by any means to be relied upon—she would appear with a reproachful aspect, sink breathless on a chair near the door, lay her hand upon her nankeen bosom, and become so ill, that I was glad, at any sacrifice of brandy or anything else, to get rid of her. If I objected to having my bed made at five o'clock in the afternoon—

which I do still think an uncomfortable arrangement—one motion of her hand towards the same nankeen region of wounded sensibility was enough to make me falter an apology. In short, I would have done anything in an honourable way rather than give Mrs. Crupp offence; and she was the terror of my life.

I bought a second-hand dumb-waiter for this dinner-party, in preference to re-engaging the handy young man; against whom I had conceived a prejudice, in consequence of meeting him in the Strand, one Sunday morning, in a waistcoat remarkably like one of mine, which had been missing since the former occasion. The 'young gal' was re-engaged; but on the stipulation that she should only bring in the dishes, and then withdraw to the landing-place, beyond the outer door; where a habit of sniffing she had contracted would be lost upon the guests, and where her retiring on the plates would be a physical impossibility.

Having laid in the materials for a bowl of punch, to be compounded by Mr. Micawber; having provided a bottle of lavender-water, two wax-candles, a paper of mixed pins, and a pincushion, to assist Mrs. Micawber in her toilette at my dressing-table; having also caused the fire in my bedroom to be lighted for Mrs. Micawber's convenience; and having laid the cloth with my own hands, I awaited the result with composure.

At the appointed time, my three visitors arrived together. Mr. Micawber with more shirt-collar than usual, and a new ribbon to his eye-glass; Mrs. Micawber with her cap in a whitey-brown paper parcel; Traddles carrying the parcel, and supporting Mrs. Micawber on his arm. They were all delighted with my residence. When I conducted Mrs. Micawber to my dressing-table, and she saw the scale on which it was prepared for her, she was in such raptures, that she called Mr. Micawber to come in and look.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'this is luxurious. This is a way of life which reminds me of the period when I was myself in a state of celibacy, and Mrs. Micawber had not yet been solicited to plight her faith at the Hymeneal altar.'

'He means, solicited by him, Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, archly. 'He cannot answer for others.'

'My dear,' returned Mr. Micawber with sudden seriousness, 'I have no desire to answer for others. I am too well aware that when, in the inscrutable decrees of Fate, you were reserved for me, it is possible you may have been reserved for one, destined, after a protracted struggle, at length to fall a victim to pecuniary involvements of a complicated nature. I understand your allusion, my love. I regret it, but I can bear it.'

'Micawber!' exclaimed Mrs. Micawber, in tears. 'Have I deserved this! I, who never have deserted you; who never WILL desert you, Micawber!' 'My love,' said Mr. Micawber, much affected, 'you will forgive, and our old and tried friend Copperfield will, I am sure, forgive, the momentary laceration of a wounded spirit, made sensitive by a recent collision with the Minion of Power—in other words, with a ribald Turncock attached to the water-works—and will pity, not condemn, its excesses.'

Mr. Micawber then embraced Mrs. Micawber, and pressed my hand; leaving me to infer from this broken allusion that his domestic supply of water had been cut off that afternoon, in consequence of default in the payment of the company's rates.

To divert his thoughts from this melancholy subject, I informed Mr. Micawber that I relied upon him for a bowl of punch, and led him to the lemons. His recent despondency, not to say despair, was gone in a moment. I never saw a man so thoroughly enjoy himself amid the fragrance of lemon-peel and sugar, the odour of burning rum, and the steam of boiling water, as Mr. Micawber did that afternoon. It was wonderful to see his face shining at us out of a thin cloud of these delicate fumes, as he stirred, and mixed, and tasted, and looked as if he were making, instead of punch, a fortune for his family down to the latest posterity. As to Mrs. Micawber, I don't know whether it was the effect of the cap, or the lavender-water, or the pins, or the fire, or the wax-candles, but she came out of my room, comparatively speaking, lovely. And the lark was never gayer than that excellent woman.

I suppose—I never ventured to inquire, but I suppose—that Mrs. Crupp, after frying the soles, was taken ill. Because we broke down at that point. The leg of mutton came up very red within, and very pale without: besides having a foreign substance of a gritty nature sprinkled over it, as if if had had a fall into the ashes of that remarkable kitchen fireplace. But we were not in condition to judge of this fact from the appearance of the gravy, forasmuch as the 'young gal' had dropped it all upon the stairs—where it remained, by the by, in a long train, until it was worn out. The pigeon-pie was not bad, but it was a delusive pie: the crust being like a disappointing head, phrenologically speaking: full of lumps and bumps, with nothing particular underneath. In short, the banquet was such a failure that I should have been quite unhappy—about the failure, I mean, for I was always unhappy about Dora—if I had not been relieved by the great good humour of my company, and by a bright suggestion from Mr. Micawber.

'My dear friend Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'accidents will occur in the best-regulated families; and in families not regulated by that pervading influence which sanctifies while it enhances the—a—I would say, in short, by the influence of Woman, in the lofty character of Wife, they may be expected with confidence, and must be borne with philosophy. If you will allow me to take the liberty of remarking that there are few comestibles better, in their way, than a Devil, and that I believe, with a little division of labour, we could accomplish a good one if the young person in attendance could produce a gridiron, I would put it to you, that this little misfortune may be easily repaired.'

There was a gridiron in the pantry, on which my morning rasher of bacon was cooked. We had it in, in a twinkling, and immediately applied ourselves to carrying Mr. Micawber's idea into effect. The division of labour to which he had referred was this:—Traddles cut the mutton into slices; Mr. Micawber (who could do anything of this sort to perfection) covered them with pepper, mustard, salt, and cayenne; I put them on the gridiron, turned them with a fork, and took them off, under Mr. Micawber's direction; and Mrs. Micawber heated, and continually stirred, some mushroom ketchup in a little saucepan. When we had slices enough done to begin upon, we fell-to, with our sleeves still tucked up at the wrist, more slices sputtering and blazing on the fire, and our attention divided between the mutton on our plates, and the mutton then preparing.

What with the novelty of this cookery, the excellence of it, the bustle of it, the frequent starting up to look after it, the frequent sitting down to dispose of it as the crisp slices came off the gridiron hot and hot, the being so busy, so flushed with the fire, so amused, and in the midst of such a tempting noise and savour, we reduced the leg of mutton to the bone. My own appetite came back miraculously. I am ashamed to record it, but I really believe I forgot Dora for a little while. I am satisfied that Mr. and Mrs. Micawber could not have enjoyed the feast more, if they had sold a bed to provide it. Traddles laughed as heartily, almost the whole time, as he ate and worked. Indeed we all did, all at once; and I dare say there was never a greater success.

We were at the height of our enjoyment, and were all busily engaged, in our several departments, endeavouring to bring the last batch of slices to a state of perfection that should crown the feast, when I was aware of a strange presence in the room, and my eyes encountered those of the staid Littimer, standing hat in hand before me.

'What's the matter?' I involuntarily asked.

'I beg your pardon, sir, I was directed to come in. Is my master not here, sir?'

'No.'

'Have you not seen him, sir?'

'No; don't you come from him?'

'Not immediately so, sir.'

'Did he tell you you would find him here?'

'Not exactly so, sir. But I should think he might be here tomorrow, as he has not been here today.' 'Is he coming up from Oxford?'

'I beg, sir,' he returned respectfully, 'that you will be seated, and allow me to do this.' With which he took the fork from my unresisting hand, and bent over the gridiron, as if his whole attention were concentrated on it.

We should not have been much discomposed, I dare say, by the appearance of Steerforth himself, but we became in a moment the meekest of the meek before his respectable serving-man. Mr. Micawber, humming a tune, to show that he was quite at ease, subsided into his chair, with the handle of a hastily concealed fork sticking out of the bosom of his coat, as if he had stabbed himself. Mrs. Micawber put on her brown gloves, and assumed a genteel languor. Traddles ran his greasy hands through his hair, and stood it bolt upright, and stared in confusion on the table-cloth. As for me, I was a mere infant at the head of my own table; and hardly ventured to glance at the respectable phenomenon, who had come from Heaven knows where, to put my establishment to rights.

Meanwhile he took the mutton off the gridiron, and gravely handed it round. We all took some, but our appreciation of it was gone, and we merely made a show of eating it. As we severally pushed away our plates, he noiselessly removed them, and set on the cheese. He took that off, too, when it was done with; cleared the table; piled everything on the dumb-waiter; gave us our wine-glasses; and, of his own accord, wheeled the dumb-waiter into the pantry. All this was done in a perfect manner, and he never raised his eyes from what he was about. Yet his very elbows, when he had his back towards me, seemed to teem with the expression of his fixed opinion that I was extremely young.

'Can I do anything more, sir?'

I thanked him and said, No; but would he take no dinner himself?

'None, I am obliged to you, sir.'

'Is Mr. Steerforth coming from Oxford?'

'I beg your pardon, sir?'

'Is Mr. Steerforth coming from Oxford?'

'I should imagine that he might be here tomorrow, sir. I rather thought he might have been here today, sir. The mistake is mine, no doubt, sir.'

'If you should see him first—' said I.

'If you'll excuse me, sir, I don't think I shall see him first.'

'In case you do,' said I, 'pray say that I am sorry he was not here today, as an old schoolfellow of his was here.'

'Indeed, sir!' and he divided a bow between me and Traddles, with a glance at the latter.

He was moving softly to the door, when, in a forlorn hope of saying something naturally—which I never could, to this man—I said:

'Oh! Littimer!'

'Sir!'

'Did you remain long at Yarmouth, that time?'

'Not particularly so, sir.'

'You saw the boat completed?'

'Yes, sir. I remained behind on purpose to see the boat completed.'

'I know!' He raised his eyes to mine respectfully.

'Mr. Steerforth has not seen it yet, I suppose?'

'I really can't say, sir. I think—but I really can't say, sir. I wish you good night, sir.'

He comprehended everybody present, in the respectful bow with which he followed these words, and disappeared. My visitors seemed to breathe more freely when he was gone; but my own relief was very great, for besides the constraint, arising from that extraordinary sense of being at a disadvantage which I always had in this man's presence, my conscience had embarrassed me with whispers that I had mistrusted his master, and I could not repress a vague uneasy dread that he might find it out. How was it, having so little in reality to conceal, that I always DID feel as if this man were finding me out?

Mr. Micawber roused me from this reflection, which was blended with a certain remorseful apprehension of seeing Steerforth himself, by bestowing many encomiums on the absent Littimer as a most respectable fellow, and a thoroughly admirable servant. Mr. Micawber, I may remark, had taken his full share of the general bow, and had received it with infinite condescension.

'But punch, my dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, tasting it, 'like time and tide, waits for no man. Ah! it is at the present moment in high flavour. My love, will you give me your opinion?'

Mrs. Micawber pronounced it excellent.

'Then I will drink,' said Mr. Micawber, 'if my friend Copperfield will permit me to take that social liberty, to the days when my friend Copperfield and myself were younger, and fought our way in the world side by side. I may say, of myself and Copperfield, in words we have sung together before now, that

We twa hae run about the braes
And pu'd the gowans' fine

—in a figurative point of view—on several occasions. I am not exactly aware,' said Mr. Micawber, with the old roll in his voice, and the old indescribable air of saying something genteel, 'what gowans may be, but I have no doubt that Copperfield and myself would frequently have taken a pull at them, if it had been feasible.'

Mr. Micawber, at the then present moment, took a pull at his punch. So we all did: Traddles evidently lost in wondering at what distant time Mr. Micawber and I could have been comrades in the battle of the world.

'Ahem!' said Mr. Micawber, clearing his throat, and warming with the punch and with the fire. 'My dear, another glass?'

Mrs. Micawber said it must be very little; but we couldn't allow that, so it was a glassful.

'As we are quite confidential here, Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, sipping her punch, 'Mr. Traddles being a part of our domesticity, I should much like to have your opinion on Mr. Micawber's prospects. For corn,' said Mrs. Micawber argumentatively, 'as I have repeatedly said to Mr.

Micawber, may be gentlemanly, but it is not remunerative. Commission to the extent of two and ninepence in a fortnight cannot, however limited our ideas, be considered remunerative.'

We were all agreed upon that.

'Then,' said Mrs. Micawber, who prided herself on taking a clear view of things, and keeping Mr. Micawber straight by her woman's wisdom, when he might otherwise go a little crooked, 'then I ask myself this question. If corn is not to be relied upon, what is? Are coals to be relied upon? Not at all. We have turned our attention to that experiment, on the suggestion of my family, and we find it fallacious.'

Mr. Micawber, leaning back in his chair with his hands in his pockets, eyed us aside, and nodded his head, as much as to say that the case was very clearly put.

'The articles of corn and coals,' said Mrs. Micawber, still more argumentatively, 'being equally out of the question, Mr. Copperfield, I naturally look round the world, and say, "What is there in which a person of Mr. Micawber's talent is likely to succeed?" And I exclude the doing anything on commission, because commission is not a certainty. What is best suited to a person of Mr. Micawber's peculiar temperament is, I am convinced, a certainty.'

Traddles and I both expressed, by a feeling murmur, that this great discovery was no doubt true of Mr. Micawber, and that it did him much credit.

'I will not conceal from you, my dear Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'that I have long felt the Brewing business to be particularly adapted to Mr. Micawber. Look at Barclay and Perkins! Look at Truman, Hanbury, and Buxton! It is on that extensive footing that Mr. Micawber, I know from my own knowledge of him, is calculated to shine; and the profits, I am told, are e-NOR-MOUS! But if Mr. Micawber cannot get into those firms—which decline to answer his letters, when he offers his services even in an inferior capacity—what is the use of dwelling upon that idea? None. I may have a conviction that Mr. Micawber's manners—'

'Hem! Really, my dear,' interposed Mr. Micawber.

'My love, be silent,' said Mrs. Micawber, laying her brown glove on his hand. 'I may have a conviction, Mr. Copperfield, that Mr. Micawber's manners peculiarly qualify him for the Banking business. I may argue within myself, that if I had a deposit at a banking-house, the manners of Mr.

Micawber, as representing that banking-house, would inspire confidence, and must extend the connexion. But if the various banking-houses refuse to avail themselves of Mr. Micawber's abilities, or receive the offer of them with contumely, what is the use of dwelling upon THAT idea? None. As to originating a banking-business, I may know that there are members of my family who, if they chose to place their money in Mr. Micawber's hands, might found an establishment of that description. But if they do NOT choose to place their money in Mr. Micawber's hands—which they don't—what is the use of that? Again I contend that we are no farther advanced than we were before.'

I shook my head, and said, 'Not a bit.' Traddles also shook his head, and said, 'Not a bit.'

'What do I deduce from this?' Mrs. Micawber went on to say, still with the same air of putting a case lucidly. 'What is the conclusion, my dear Mr. Copperfield, to which I am irresistibly brought? Am I wrong in saying, it is clear that we must live?'

I answered 'Not at all!' and Traddles answered 'Not at all!' and I found myself afterwards sagely adding, alone, that a person must either live or die.

'Just so,' returned Mrs. Micawber, 'It is precisely that. And the fact is, my dear Mr. Copperfield, that we can not live without something widely different from existing circumstances shortly turning up. Now I am convinced, myself, and this I have pointed out to Mr. Micawber several times of late, that things cannot be expected to turn up of themselves. We must, in a measure, assist to turn them up. I may be wrong, but I have formed that opinion.'

Both Traddles and I applauded it highly.

'Very well,' said Mrs. Micawber. 'Then what do I recommend? Here is Mr. Micawber with a variety of qualifications—with great talent—'

'Really, my love,' said Mr. Micawber.

'Pray, my dear, allow me to conclude. Here is Mr. Micawber, with a variety of qualifications, with great talent—I should say, with genius, but that may be the partiality of a wife—'

Traddles and I both murmured 'No.'

'And here is Mr. Micawber without any suitable position or employment. Where does that responsibility rest? Clearly on society. Then I would make a fact so disgraceful known, and boldly challenge society to set it right. It appears to me, my dear Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, forcibly, 'that what Mr. Micawber has to do, is to throw down the gauntlet to society, and say, in effect, "Show me who will take that up. Let the party immediately step forward."'

I ventured to ask Mrs. Micawber how this was to be done.

'By advertising,' said Mrs. Micawber—'in all the papers. It appears to me, that what Mr. Micawber has to do, in justice to himself, in justice to his family, and I will even go so far as to say in justice to society, by which he has been hitherto overlooked, is to advertise in all the papers; to describe himself plainly as so-and-so, with such and such qualifications and to put it thus: "Now employ me, on remunerative terms, and address, post-paid, to W. M., Post Office, Camden Town."'

'This idea of Mrs. Micawber's, my dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, making his shirt-collar meet in front of his chin, and glancing at me sideways, 'is, in fact, the Leap to which I alluded, when I last had the pleasure of seeing you.'

'Advertising is rather expensive,' I remarked, dubiously.

'Exactly so!' said Mrs. Micawber, preserving the same logical air. 'Quite true, my dear Mr. Copperfield! I have made the identical observation to Mr. Micawber. It is for that reason especially, that I think Mr. Micawber ought (as I have already said, in justice to himself, in justice to his family, and in justice to society) to raise a certain sum of money—on a bill.'

Mr. Micawber, leaning back in his chair, trifled with his eye-glass and cast his eyes up at the ceiling; but I thought him observant of Traddles, too, who was looking at the fire.

'If no member of my family,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'is possessed of sufficient natural feeling to negotiate that bill—I believe there is a better business-term to express what I mean—'

Mr. Micawber, with his eyes still cast up at the ceiling, suggested 'Discount.'

'To discount that bill,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'then my opinion is, that Mr. Micawber should go into the City, should take that bill into the Money Market, and should dispose of it for what he can get. If the individuals in the Money Market oblige Mr. Micawber to sustain a great sacrifice, that is between themselves and their consciences. I view it, steadily, as an investment. I recommend Mr. Micawber, my dear Mr. Copperfield, to do the same; to regard it as an investment which is sure of return, and to make up his mind to any sacrifice.'

I felt, but I am sure I don't know why, that this was self-denying and devoted in Mrs. Micawber, and I uttered a murmur to that effect. Traddles, who took his tone from me, did likewise, still looking at the fire.

'I will not,' said Mrs. Micawber, finishing her punch, and gathering her scarf about her shoulders, preparatory to her withdrawal to my bedroom: 'I will not protract these remarks on the subject of Mr. Micawber's pecuniary affairs. At your fireside, my dear Mr. Copperfield, and in the presence of Mr. Traddles, who, though not so old a friend, is quite one of ourselves, I could not refrain from making you acquainted with the course I advise Mr. Micawber to take. I feel that the time is arrived when Mr. Micawber should exert himself and—I will add—assert himself, and it appears to me that these are the means. I am aware that I am merely a female, and that a masculine judgement is usually considered more competent to the discussion of such questions; still I must not forget that, when I lived at home with my papa and mama, my papa was in the habit of saying, "Emma's form is fragile, but her grasp of a subject is inferior to none." That my papa was too partial, I well know; but that he was an observer of character in some degree, my duty and my reason equally forbid me to doubt.'

With these words, and resisting our entreaties that she would grace the remaining circulation of the punch with her presence, Mrs. Micawber retired to my bedroom. And really I felt that she was a noble woman—the sort of woman who might have been a Roman matron, and done all manner of heroic things, in times of public trouble.

In the fervour of this impression, I congratulated Mr. Micawber on the treasure he possessed. So did Traddles. Mr. Micawber extended his hand to each of us in succession, and then covered his face with his pocket-handkerchief, which I think had more snuff upon it than he was aware of. He then returned to the punch, in the highest state of exhilaration.

He was full of eloquence. He gave us to understand that in our children we lived again, and that, under the pressure of pecuniary difficulties, any accession to their number was doubly welcome. He said that Mrs. Micawber had latterly had her doubts on this point, but that he had dispelled them, and reassured her. As to her family, they were totally unworthy of her, and their sentiments were utterly indifferent to him, and they might—I quote his own expression—go to the Devil.

Mr. Micawber then delivered a warm eulogy on Traddles. He said Traddles's was a character, to the steady virtues of which he (Mr. Micawber) could lay no claim, but which, he thanked Heaven, he could admire. He feelingly alluded to the young lady, unknown, whom Traddles had honoured with his affection, and who had reciprocated that affection by honouring and blessing Traddles with her affection. Mr. Micawber pledged her. So did I. Traddles thanked us both, by saying, with a simplicity and honesty I had sense enough to be quite charmed with, 'I am very much obliged to you indeed. And I do assure you, she's the dearest girl!—'

Mr. Micawber took an early opportunity, after that, of hinting, with the utmost delicacy and ceremony, at the state of MY affections. Nothing but the serious assurance of his friend Copperfield to the contrary, he observed, could deprive him of the impression that his friend Copperfield loved and was beloved. After feeling very hot and uncomfortable for some time, and after a good deal of blushing, stammering, and denying, I said, having my glass in my hand, 'Well! I would give them D.!' which so excited and gratified Mr. Micawber, that he ran with a glass of punch into my bedroom, in order that Mrs. Micawber might drink D., who drank it with enthusiasm, crying from within, in a shrill voice, 'Hear, hear! My dear Mr. Copperfield, I am delighted. Hear!' and tapping at the wall, by way of applause.

Our conversation, afterwards, took a more worldly turn; Mr. Micawber telling us that he found Camden Town inconvenient, and that the first thing he contemplated doing, when the advertisement should have been the cause of something satisfactory turning up, was to move. He mentioned a terrace at the western end of Oxford Street, fronting Hyde Park, on which he had always had his eye, but which he did not expect to attain immediately, as it would require a large establishment. There would probably be an interval, he explained, in which he should content himself with the upper part of a house, over some respectable place of business—say in Piccadilly,—which would be a cheerful situation for Mrs. Micawber; and where, by throwing out a bow-window, or carrying up the roof another story, or making some little alteration of that sort, they might live, comfortably and reputably, for a few years. Whatever was reserved for him, he expressly said, or wherever his abode might be, we might rely on this—there would always be a room for Traddles, and a knife and fork for me. We acknowledged his kindness; and he begged us to forgive his having launched into these practical and business-like details, and to excuse it as natural in one who was making entirely new arrangements in life.

Mrs. Micawber, tapping at the wall again to know if tea were ready, broke up this particular phase of our friendly conversation. She made tea for us in a most agreeable manner; and, whenever I went near her, in handing about the tea-cups and bread-and-butter, asked me, in a whisper, whether D. was fair, or dark, or whether she was short, or tall: or something of that kind; which I think I liked. After tea, we discussed a variety of topics before the fire; and Mrs. Micawber was good enough to sing us (in a small, thin, flat voice, which I remembered to have considered, when I first knew her, the very table-beer of acoustics) the favourite ballads of 'The Dashing White Sergeant', and 'Little Tafflin'. For both of these songs Mrs. Micawber had been famous when she lived at home with her papa and mama. Mr. Micawber told us, that when he heard her sing the first one, on the first occasion of his seeing her beneath the parental roof, she had attracted his attention in an extraordinary degree; but that when it came to Little Tafflin, he had resolved to win that woman or perish in the attempt.

It was between ten and eleven o'clock when Mrs. Micawber rose to replace her cap in the whitey-brown paper parcel, and to put on her bonnet. Mr. Micawber took the opportunity of Traddles putting on his great-coat, to slip a letter into my hand, with a whispered request that I would read it at my leisure. I also took the opportunity of my holding a candle over the banisters to light them down, when Mr. Micawber was going first, leading Mrs. Micawber, and Traddles was following with the cap, to detain Traddles for a moment on the top of the stairs.

'Traddles,' said I, 'Mr. Micawber don't mean any harm, poor fellow: but, if I were you, I wouldn't lend him anything.'

'My dear Copperfield,' returned Traddles, smiling, 'I haven't got anything to lend.'

'You have got a name, you know,' said I.

'Oh! You call THAT something to lend?' returned Traddles, with a thoughtful look.

'Certainly.'

'Oh!' said Traddles. 'Yes, to be sure! I am very much obliged to you, Copperfield; but—I am afraid I have lent him that already.'

'For the bill that is to be a certain investment?' I inquired.

'No,' said Traddles. 'Not for that one. This is the first I have heard of that one. I have been thinking that he will most likely propose that one, on the way home. Mine's another.'

'I hope there will be nothing wrong about it,' said I. 'I hope not,' said Traddles. 'I should think not, though, because he told me, only the other day, that it was provided for. That was Mr. Micawber's expression, "Provided for."'

Mr. Micawber looking up at this juncture to where we were standing, I had only time to repeat my caution. Traddles thanked me, and descended. But I was much afraid, when I observed the good-natured manner in which he went down with the cap in his hand, and gave Mrs. Micawber his arm, that he would be carried into the Money Market neck and heels.

I returned to my fireside, and was musing, half gravely and half laughing, on the character of Mr. Micawber and the old relations between us, when I heard a quick step ascending the stairs. At first, I thought it was Traddles coming back for something Mrs. Micawber had left behind; but as the step approached, I knew it, and felt my heart beat high, and the blood rush to my face, for it was Steerforth's.

I was never unmindful of Agnes, and she never left that sanctuary in my thoughts—if I may call it so—where I had placed her from the first. But when he entered, and stood before me with his hand out, the darkness that had fallen on him changed to light, and I felt confounded and ashamed of having doubted one I loved so heartily. I loved her none the less; I thought of her as the same benignant, gentle angel in my life; I reproached myself, not her, with having done him an injury; and I would have made him any atonement if I had known what to make, and how to make it.

'Why, Daisy, old boy, dumb-foundered!' laughed Steerforth, shaking my hand heartily, and throwing it gaily away. 'Have I detected you in another feast, you Sybarite! These Doctors' Commons fellows are the gayest men in town, I believe, and beat us sober Oxford people all to nothing!' His bright glance went merrily round the room, as he took the seat on the sofa opposite to me, which Mrs. Micawber had recently vacated, and stirred the fire into a blaze.

'I was so surprised at first,' said I, giving him welcome with all the cordiality I felt, 'that I had hardly breath to greet you with, Steerforth.'

'Well, the sight of me is good for sore eyes, as the Scotch say,' replied Steerforth, 'and so is the sight of you, Daisy, in full bloom. How are you, my Bacchanal?'

'I am very well,' said I; 'and not at all Bacchanalian tonight, though I confess to another party of three.'

'All of whom I met in the street, talking loud in your praise,' returned Steerforth. 'Who's our friend in the tights?'

I gave him the best idea I could, in a few words, of Mr. Micawber. He laughed heartily at my feeble portrait of that gentleman, and said he was a man to know, and he must know him. 'But who do you suppose our other friend is?' said I, in my turn.

'Heaven knows,' said Steerforth. 'Not a bore, I hope? I thought he looked a little like one.'

'Traddles!' I replied, triumphantly.

'Who's he?' asked Steerforth, in his careless way.

'Don't you remember Traddles? Traddles in our room at Salem House?'

'Oh! That fellow!' said Steerforth, beating a lump of coal on the top of the fire, with the poker. 'Is he as soft as ever? And where the deuce did you pick him up?'

I extolled Traddles in reply, as highly as I could; for I felt that Steerforth rather slighted him. Steerforth, dismissing the subject with a light nod, and a smile, and the remark that he would be glad to see the old fellow too, for he had always been an odd fish, inquired if I could give him anything to eat? During most of this short dialogue, when he had not been speaking in a wild vivacious manner, he had sat idly beating on the lump of coal with the poker. I observed that he did the same thing while I was getting out the remains of the pigeon-pie, and so forth.

'Why, Daisy, here's a supper for a king!' he exclaimed, starting out of his silence with a burst, and taking his seat at the table. 'I shall do it justice, for I have come from Yarmouth.'

'I thought you came from Oxford?' I returned.

'Not I,' said Steerforth. 'I have been seafaring—better employed.'

'Littimer was here today, to inquire for you,' I remarked, 'and I understood him that you were at Oxford; though, now I think of it, he certainly did not say so.'

'Littimer is a greater fool than I thought him, to have been inquiring for me at all,' said Steerforth, jovially pouring out a glass of wine, and drinking to me. 'As to understanding him, you are a cleverer fellow than most of us, Daisy, if you can do that.'

'That's true, indeed,' said I, moving my chair to the table. 'So you have been at Yarmouth, Steerforth!' interested to know all about it. 'Have you been there long?'

'No,' he returned. 'An escapade of a week or so.'

'And how are they all? Of course, little Emily is not married yet?'

'Not yet. Going to be, I believe—in so many weeks, or months, or something or other. I have not seen much of 'em. By the by'; he laid down his knife and fork, which he had been using with great diligence, and began feeling in his pockets; 'I have a letter for you.'

'From whom?'

'Why, from your old nurse,' he returned, taking some papers out of his breast pocket. '"J. Steerforth, Esquire, debtor, to The Willing Mind"; that's not it. Patience, and we'll find it presently. Old what's-his-name's in a bad way, and it's about that, I believe.'

'Barkis, do you mean?'

'Yes!' still feeling in his pockets, and looking over their contents: 'it's all over with poor Barkis, I am afraid. I saw a little apothecary there—surgeon, or whatever he is—who brought your worship into the world. He was mighty learned about the case, to me; but the upshot of his opinion was, that the carrier was making his last journey rather fast.—-Put your hand into the breast pocket of my great-coat on the chair yonder, and I think you'll find the letter. Is it there?'

'Here it is!' said I.

'That's right!'

It was from Peggotty; something less legible than usual, and brief. It informed me of her husband's hopeless state, and hinted at his being 'a little nearer' than heretofore, and consequently more difficult to manage for his own comfort. It said nothing of her weariness and watching, and praised him highly. It was written with a plain, unaffected, homely piety that I knew to be genuine, and ended with 'my duty to my ever darling'—meaning myself.

While I deciphered it, Steerforth continued to eat and drink.

'It's a bad job,' he said, when I had done; 'but the sun sets every day, and people die every minute, and we mustn't be scared by the common lot. If we failed to hold our own, because that equal foot at all men's doors was heard knocking somewhere, every object in this world would slip from us. No!

Ride on! Rough-shod if need be, smooth-shod if that will do, but ride on! Ride on over all obstacles, and win the race!'

'And win what race?' said I.

'The race that one has started in,' said he. 'Ride on!'

I noticed, I remember, as he paused, looking at me with his handsome head a little thrown back, and his glass raised in his hand, that, though the freshness of the sea-wind was on his face, and it was ruddy, there were traces in it, made since I last saw it, as if he had applied himself to some habitual strain of the fervent energy which, when roused, was so passionately roused within him. I had it in my thoughts to remonstrate with him upon his desperate way of pursuing any fancy that he took—such as this buffeting of rough seas, and braving of hard weather, for example—when my mind glanced off to the immediate subject of our conversation again, and pursued that instead.

'I tell you what, Steerforth,' said I, 'if your high spirits will listen to me —'

'They are potent spirits, and will do whatever you like,' he answered, moving from the table to the fireside again.

'Then I tell you what, Steerforth. I think I will go down and see my old nurse. It is not that I can do her any good, or render her any real service; but she is so attached to me that my visit will have as much effect on her, as if I could do both. She will take it so kindly that it will be a comfort and support to her. It is no great effort to make, I am sure, for such a friend as she has been to me. Wouldn't you go a day's journey, if you were in my place?'

His face was thoughtful, and he sat considering a little before he answered, in a low voice, 'Well! Go. You can do no harm.'

'You have just come back,' said I, 'and it would be in vain to ask you to go with me?'

'Quite,' he returned. 'I am for Highgate tonight. I have not seen my mother this long time, and it lies upon my conscience, for it's something to be loved as she loves her prodigal son.—-Bah! Nonsense!—You mean to go tomorrow, I suppose?' he said, holding me out at arm's length, with a hand on each of my shoulders.

'Yes, I think so.'

'Well, then, don't go till next day. I wanted you to come and stay a few days with us. Here I am, on purpose to bid you, and you fly off to

Yarmouth!'

'You are a nice fellow to talk of flying off, Steerforth, who are always running wild on some unknown expedition or other!'

He looked at me for a moment without speaking, and then rejoined, still holding me as before, and giving me a shake:

'Come! Say the next day, and pass as much of tomorrow as you can with us! Who knows when we may meet again, else? Come! Say the next day! I want you to stand between Rosa Dartle and me, and keep us asunder.'

'Would you love each other too much, without me?'

'Yes; or hate,' laughed Steerforth; 'no matter which. Come! Say the next day!'

I said the next day; and he put on his great-coat and lighted his cigar, and set off to walk home. Finding him in this intention, I put on my own great-coat (but did not light my own cigar, having had enough of that for one while) and walked with him as far as the open road: a dull road, then, at night. He was in great spirits all the way; and when we parted, and I looked after him going so gallantly and airily homeward, I thought of his saying, 'Ride on over all obstacles, and win the race!' and wished, for the first time, that he had some worthy race to run.

I was undressing in my own room, when Mr. Micawber's letter tumbled on the floor. Thus reminded of it, I broke the seal and read as follows. It was dated an hour and a half before dinner. I am not sure whether I have mentioned that, when Mr. Micawber was at any particularly desperate crisis, he used a sort of legal phraseology, which he seemed to think equivalent to winding up his affairs.

'SIR—for I dare not say my dear Copperfield,

'It is expedient that I should inform you that the undersigned is Crushed. Some flickering efforts to spare you the premature knowledge of his calamitous position, you may observe in him this day; but hope has sunk beneath the horizon, and the undersigned is Crushed.

'The present communication is penned within the personal range (I cannot call it the society) of an individual, in a state closely bordering on intoxication, employed by a broker. That individual is in legal possession of the premises, under a distress for rent. His inventory includes, not only the chattels and effects of every description belonging to the undersigned, as yearly tenant of this habitation, but also those appertaining to Mr. Thomas Traddles, lodger, a member of the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple.

'If any drop of gloom were wanting in the overflowing cup, which is now "commended" (in the language of an immortal Writer) to the lips of the undersigned, it would be found in the fact, that a friendly acceptance granted to the undersigned, by the before-mentioned Mr. Thomas Traddles, for the sum Of 23l 4s 9 1/2d is over due, and is NOT provided for. Also, in the fact that the living responsibilities clinging to the undersigned will, in the course of nature, be increased by the sum of one more helpless victim; whose miserable appearance may be looked for—in round numbers—at the expiration of a period not exceeding six lunar months from the present date.

'After premising thus much, it would be a work of supererogation to add, that dust and ashes are for ever scattered

'On
'The
'Head
'Of
'WILKINS MICAWBER.'

Poor Traddles! I knew enough of Mr. Micawber by this time, to foresee that he might be expected to recover the blow; but my night's rest was sorely distressed by thoughts of Traddles, and of the curate's daughter, who was one of ten, down in Devonshire, and who was such a dear girl, and who would wait for Traddles (ominous praise!) until she was sixty, or any age that could be mentioned.

CHAPTER 29. I VISIT STEERFORTH AT HIS HOME, AGAIN

I mentioned to Mr. Spenlow in the morning, that I wanted leave of absence for a short time; and as I was not in the receipt of any salary, and consequently was not obnoxious to the implacable Jorkins, there was no difficulty about it. I took that opportunity, with my voice sticking in my throat, and my sight failing as I uttered the words, to express my hope that Miss Spenlow was quite well; to which Mr. Spenlow replied, with no more emotion than if he had been speaking of an ordinary human being, that he was much obliged to me, and she was very well.

We articled clerks, as germs of the patrician order of proctors, were treated with so much consideration, that I was almost my own master at all times. As I did not care, however, to get to Highgate before one or two o'clock in the day, and as we had another little excommunication case in court that morning, which was called The office of the judge promoted by Tipkins against Bullock for his soul's correction, I passed an hour or two in attendance on it with Mr. Spenlow very agreeably. It arose out of a scuffle between two churchwardens, one of whom was alleged to have pushed the other against a pump; the handle of which pump projecting into a school-house, which school-house was under a gable of the church-roof, made the push an ecclesiastical offence. It was an amusing case; and sent me up to Highgate, on the box of the stage-coach, thinking about the Commons, and what Mr. Spenlow had said about touching the Commons and bringing down the country.

Mrs. Steerforth was pleased to see me, and so was Rosa Dartle. I was agreeably surprised to find that Littimer was not there, and that we were attended by a modest little parlour-maid, with blue ribbons in her cap, whose eye it was much more pleasant, and much less disconcerting, to catch by accident, than the eye of that respectable man. But what I particularly observed, before I had been half-an-hour in the house, was the close and attentive watch Miss Dartle kept upon me; and the lurking manner in which she seemed to compare my face with Steerforth's, and Steerforth's with mine, and to lie in wait for something to come out between the two. So surely as I looked towards her, did I see that eager visage, with its gaunt black eyes and searching brow, intent on mine; or passing suddenly from mine to Steerforth's; or comprehending both of us at once. In this lynx-like scrutiny she was so far from faltering when she saw I observed it, that at such a time she only fixed her piercing look upon me with a more intent expression still. Blameless as I was, and knew that I was, in reference to any wrong she could possibly suspect me of, I shrunk before her strange eyes, quite unable to endure their hungry lustre.

All day, she seemed to pervade the whole house. If I talked to Steerforth in his room, I heard her dress rustle in the little gallery outside. When he and I engaged in some of our old exercises on the lawn behind the house, I saw her face pass from window to window, like a wandering light, until it fixed itself in one, and watched us. When we all four went out walking in the afternoon, she closed her thin hand on my arm like a spring, to keep me back, while Steerforth and his mother went on out of hearing: and then spoke to me.

'You have been a long time,' she said, 'without coming here. Is your profession really so engaging and interesting as to absorb your whole attention? I ask because I always want to be informed, when I am ignorant. Is it really, though?'

I replied that I liked it well enough, but that I certainly could not claim so much for it.

'Oh! I am glad to know that, because I always like to be put right when I am wrong,' said Rosa Dartle. 'You mean it is a little dry, perhaps?'

'Well,' I replied; 'perhaps it was a little dry.'

'Oh! and that's a reason why you want relief and change—excitement and all that?' said she. 'Ah! very true! But isn't it a little—Eh?—for him; I don't mean you?'

A quick glance of her eye towards the spot where Steerforth was walking, with his mother leaning on his arm, showed me whom she meant; but beyond that, I was quite lost. And I looked so, I have no doubt.

'Don't it—I don't say that it does, mind I want to know—don't it rather engross him? Don't it make him, perhaps, a little more remiss than usual in his visits to his blindly-doting—eh?' With another quick glance at them, and such a glance at me as seemed to look into my innermost thoughts.

'Miss Dartle,' I returned, 'pray do not think—'

'I don't!' she said. 'Oh dear me, don't suppose that I think anything! I am not suspicious. I only ask a question. I don't state any opinion. I want to found an opinion on what you tell me. Then, it's not so? Well! I am very glad to know it.'

'It certainly is not the fact,' said I, perplexed, 'that I am accountable for Steerforth's having been away from home longer than usual—if he has been: which I really don't know at this moment, unless I understand it from you. I have not seen him this long while, until last night.'

'No?'

'Indeed, Miss Dartle, no!'

As she looked full at me, I saw her face grow sharper and paler, and the marks of the old wound lengthen out until it cut through the disfigured lip, and deep into the nether lip, and slanted down the face. There was something positively awful to me in this, and in the brightness of her eyes, as she said, looking fixedly at me:

'What is he doing?'

I repeated the words, more to myself than her, being so amazed.

'What is he doing?' she said, with an eagerness that seemed enough to consume her like a fire. 'In what is that man assisting him, who never looks at me without an inscrutable falsehood in his eyes? If you are honourable and faithful, I don't ask you to betray your friend. I ask you only to tell me, is it anger, is it hatred, is it pride, is it restlessness, is it some wild fancy, is it love, what is it, that is leading him?'

'Miss Dartle,' I returned, 'how shall I tell you, so that you will believe me, that I know of nothing in Steerforth different from what there was when I first came here? I can think of nothing. I firmly believe there is nothing. I hardly understand even what you mean.'

As she still stood looking fixedly at me, a twitching or throbbing, from which I could not dissociate the idea of pain, came into that cruel mark; and lifted up the corner of her lip as if with scorn, or with a pity that despised its object. She put her hand upon it hurriedly—a hand so thin and delicate, that when I had seen her hold it up before the fire to shade her face, I had compared it in my thoughts to fine porcelain—and saying, in a quick, fierce, passionate way, 'I swear you to secrecy about this!' said not a word more.

Mrs. Steerforth was particularly happy in her son's society, and Steerforth was, on this occasion, particularly attentive and respectful to her.

It was very interesting to me to see them together, not only on account of their mutual affection, but because of the strong personal resemblance between them, and the manner in which what was haughty or impetuous in him was softened by age and sex, in her, to a gracious dignity. I thought, more than once, that it was well no serious cause of division had ever come between them; or two such natures—I ought rather to express it, two such shades of the same nature—might have been harder to reconcile than the two extremest opposites in creation. The idea did not originate in my own discernment, I am bound to confess, but in a speech of Rosa Dartle's.

She said at dinner:

'Oh, but do tell me, though, somebody, because I have been thinking about it all day, and I want to know.'

'You want to know what, Rosa?' returned Mrs. Steerforth. 'Pray, pray, Rosa, do not be mysterious.'

'Mysterious!' she cried. 'Oh! really? Do you consider me so?'

'Do I constantly entreat you,' said Mrs. Steerforth, 'to speak plainly, in your own natural manner?'

'Oh! then this is not my natural manner?' she rejoined. 'Now you must really bear with me, because I ask for information. We never know ourselves.'

'It has become a second nature,' said Mrs. Steerforth, without any displeasure; 'but I remember,—and so must you, I think,—when your manner was different, Rosa; when it was not so guarded, and was more trustful.'

'I am sure you are right,' she returned; 'and so it is that bad habits grow upon one! Really? Less guarded and more trustful? How can I, imperceptibly, have changed, I wonder! Well, that's very odd! I must study to regain my former self.'

'I wish you would,' said Mrs. Steerforth, with a smile.

'Oh! I really will, you know!' she answered. 'I will learn frankness from—let me see—from James.'

'You cannot learn frankness, Rosa,' said Mrs. Steerforth quickly—for there was always some effect of sarcasm in what Rosa Dartle said, though it was said, as this was, in the most unconscious manner in the world—'in a better school.'

'That I am sure of,' she answered, with uncommon fervour. 'If I am sure of anything, of course, you know, I am sure of that.'

Mrs. Steerforth appeared to me to regret having been a little nettled; for she presently said, in a kind tone:

'Well, my dear Rosa, we have not heard what it is that you want to be satisfied about?'

'That I want to be satisfied about?' she replied, with provoking coldness. 'Oh! It was only whether people, who are like each other in their moral constitution—is that the phrase?'

'It's as good a phrase as another,' said Steerforth.

'Thank you:—whether people, who are like each other in their moral constitution, are in greater danger than people not so circumstanced, supposing any serious cause of variance to arise between them, of being divided angrily and deeply?'

'I should say yes,' said Steerforth.

'Should you?' she retorted. 'Dear me! Supposing then, for instance—any unlikely thing will do for a supposition—that you and your mother were to have a serious quarrel.'

'My dear Rosa,' interposed Mrs. Steerforth, laughing good-naturedly, 'suggest some other supposition! James and I know our duty to each other better, I pray Heaven!'

'Oh!' said Miss Dartle, nodding her head thoughtfully. 'To be sure. That would prevent it? Why, of course it would. Exactly. Now, I am glad I have been so foolish as to put the case, for it is so very good to know that your duty to each other would prevent it! Thank you very much.'

One other little circumstance connected with Miss Dartle I must not omit; for I had reason to remember it thereafter, when all the irremediable past was rendered plain. During the whole of this day, but especially from this period of it, Steerforth exerted himself with his utmost skill, and that was with his utmost ease, to charm this singular creature into a pleasant and pleased companion. That he should succeed, was no matter of surprise to me. That she should struggle against the fascinating influence of his delightful art—delightful nature I thought it then—did not surprise me either; for I knew that she was sometimes jaundiced and perverse. I saw her features and her manner slowly change; I saw her look at him with growing admiration; I saw her try, more and more faintly, but always angrily, as if she condemned a weakness in herself, to resist the captivating power that he possessed; and finally, I saw her sharp glance soften, and her smile become quite gentle, and I ceased to be afraid of her as I had really been all day, and we all sat about the fire, talking and laughing together, with as little reserve as if we had been children.

Whether it was because we had sat there so long, or because Steerforth was resolved not to lose the advantage he had gained, I do not know; but we did not remain in the dining-room more than five minutes after her departure. 'She is playing her harp,' said Steerforth, softly, at the drawing-room door, 'and nobody but my mother has heard her do that, I believe, these three years.' He said it with a curious smile, which was gone directly; and we went into the room and found her alone.

'Don't get up,' said Steerforth (which she had already done)' my dear Rosa, don't! Be kind for once, and sing us an Irish song.'

'What do you care for an Irish song?' she returned.

'Much!' said Steerforth. 'Much more than for any other. Here is Daisy, too, loves music from his soul. Sing us an Irish song, Rosa! and let me sit and listen as I used to do.'

He did not touch her, or the chair from which she had risen, but sat himself near the harp. She stood beside it for some little while, in a curious way, going through the motion of playing it with her right hand, but not sounding it. At length she sat down, and drew it to her with one sudden action, and played and sang.

I don't know what it was, in her touch or voice, that made that song the most unearthly I have ever heard in my life, or can imagine. There was something fearful in the reality of it. It was as if it had never been written, or set to music, but sprung out of passion within her; which found imperfect utterance in the low sounds of her voice, and crouched again when all was still. I was dumb when she leaned beside the harp again, playing it, but not sounding it, with her right hand.

A minute more, and this had roused me from my trance:—Steerforth had left his seat, and gone to her, and had put his arm laughingly about her, and had said, 'Come, Rosa, for the future we will love each other very much!' And she had struck him, and had thrown him off with the fury of a wild cat, and had burst out of the room.

'What is the matter with Rosa?' said Mrs. Steerforth, coming in.

'She has been an angel, mother,' returned Steerforth, 'for a little while; and has run into the opposite extreme, since, by way of compensation.'

'You should be careful not to irritate her, James. Her temper has been soured, remember, and ought not to be tried.'

Rosa did not come back; and no other mention was made of her, until I went with Steerforth into his room to say Good night. Then he laughed about her, and asked me if I had ever seen such a fierce little piece of incomprehensibility.

I expressed as much of my astonishment as was then capable of expression, and asked if he could guess what it was that she had taken so much amiss, so suddenly.

'Oh, Heaven knows,' said Steerforth. 'Anything you like—or nothing! I told you she took everything, herself included, to a grindstone, and sharpened it. She is an edge-tool, and requires great care in dealing with. She is always dangerous. Good night!'

'Good night!' said I, 'my dear Steerforth! I shall be gone before you wake in the morning. Good night!'

He was unwilling to let me go; and stood, holding me out, with a hand on each of my shoulders, as he had done in my own room.

'Daisy,' he said, with a smile—'for though that's not the name your godfathers and godmothers gave you, it's the name I like best to call you by—and I wish, I wish, I wish, you could give it to me!'

'Why so I can, if I choose,' said I.

'Daisy, if anything should ever separate us, you must think of me at my best, old boy. Come! Let us make that bargain. Think of me at my best, if circumstances should ever part us!'

'You have no best to me, Steerforth,' said I, 'and no worst. You are always equally loved, and cherished in my heart.'

So much compunction for having ever wronged him, even by a shapeless thought, did I feel within me, that the confession of having done so was rising to my lips. But for the reluctance I had to betray the confidence of Agnes, but for my uncertainty how to approach the subject with no risk of doing so, it would have reached them before he said, 'God bless you, Daisy, and good night!' In my doubt, it did NOT reach them; and we shook hands, and we parted.

I was up with the dull dawn, and, having dressed as quietly as I could, looked into his room. He was fast asleep; lying, easily, with his head upon his arm, as I had often seen him lie at school.

The time came in its season, and that was very soon, when I almost wondered that nothing troubled his repose, as I looked at him. But he slept—let me think of him so again—as I had often seen him sleep at school;

and thus, in this silent hour, I left him. —Never more, oh God forgive you, Steerforth! to touch that passive hand in love and friendship. Never, never more!

CHAPTER 30. A LOSS

I got down to Yarmouth in the evening, and went to the inn. I knew that Peggotty's spare room—my room—was likely to have occupation enough in a little while, if that great Visitor, before whose presence all the living must give place, were not already in the house; so I betook myself to the inn, and dined there, and engaged my bed.

It was ten o'clock when I went out. Many of the shops were shut, and the town was dull. When I came to Omer and Joram's, I found the shutters up, but the shop door standing open. As I could obtain a perspective view of Mr. Omer inside, smoking his pipe by the parlour door, I entered, and asked him how he was.

'Why, bless my life and soul!' said Mr. Omer, 'how do you find yourself? Take a seat.—-Smoke not disagreeable, I hope?'

'By no means,' said I. 'I like it—in somebody else's pipe.'

'What, not in your own, eh?' Mr. Omer returned, laughing. 'All the better, sir. Bad habit for a young man. Take a seat. I smoke, myself, for the asthma.'

Mr. Omer had made room for me, and placed a chair. He now sat down again very much out of breath, gasping at his pipe as if it contained a supply of that necessary, without which he must perish.

'I am sorry to have heard bad news of Mr. Barkis,' said I.

Mr. Omer looked at me, with a steady countenance, and shook his head.

'Do you know how he is tonight?' I asked.

'The very question I should have put to you, sir,' returned Mr. Omer, 'but on account of delicacy. It's one of the drawbacks of our line of business. When a party's ill, we can't ask how the party is.'

The difficulty had not occurred to me; though I had had my apprehensions too, when I went in, of hearing the old tune. On its being mentioned, I recognized it, however, and said as much.

'Yes, yes, you understand,' said Mr. Omer, nodding his head. 'We dursn't do it. Bless you, it would be a shock that the generality of parties mightn't recover, to say "Omer and Joram's compliments, and how do you find yourself this morning?"—or this afternoon—as it may be.'

Mr. Omer and I nodded at each other, and Mr. Omer recruited his wind by the aid of his pipe.

'It's one of the things that cut the trade off from attentions they could often wish to show,' said Mr. Omer. 'Take myself. If I have known Barkis a year, to move to as he went by, I have known him forty years. But I can't go and say, "how is he?"'

I felt it was rather hard on Mr. Omer, and I told him so.

'I'm not more self-interested, I hope, than another man,' said Mr. Omer. 'Look at me! My wind may fail me at any moment, and it ain't likely that, to my own knowledge, I'd be self-interested under such circumstances. I say it ain't likely, in a man who knows his wind will go, when it DOES go, as if a pair of bellows was cut open; and that man a grandfather,' said Mr. Omer.

I said, 'Not at all.'

'It ain't that I complain of my line of business,' said Mr. Omer. 'It ain't that. Some good and some bad goes, no doubt, to all callings. What I wish is, that parties was brought up stronger-minded.'

Mr. Omer, with a very complacent and amiable face, took several puffs in silence; and then said, resuming his first point:

'Accordingly we're obleeged, in ascertaining how Barkis goes on, to limit ourselves to Em'ly. She knows what our real objects are, and she don't have any more alarms or suspicions about us, than if we was so many lambs. Minnie and Joram have just stepped down to the house, in fact (she's there, after hours, helping her aunt a bit), to ask her how he is tonight; and if you was to please to wait till they come back, they'd give you full partic'lers. Will you take something? A glass of srub and water, now? I smoke on srub and water, myself,' said Mr. Omer, taking up his glass, 'because it's considered softening to the passages, by which this troublesome breath of mine gets into action. But, Lord bless you,' said Mr. Omer, huskily, 'it ain't the passages that's out of order! "Give me breath enough," said I to my daughter Minnie, "and I'll find passages, my dear."'

He really had no breath to spare, and it was very alarming to see him laugh. When he was again in a condition to be talked to, I thanked him for the proffered refreshment, which I declined, as I had just had dinner; and, observing that I would wait, since he was so good as to invite me, until his daughter and his son-in-law came back, I inquired how little Emily was?

'Well, sir,' said Mr. Omer, removing his pipe, that he might rub his chin: 'I tell you truly, I shall be glad when her marriage has taken place.'

'Why so?' I inquired.

'Well, she's unsettled at present,' said Mr. Omer. 'It ain't that she's not as pretty as ever, for she's prettier—I do assure you, she is prettier. It ain't that she don't work as well as ever, for she does. She WAS worth any six, and she IS worth any six. But somehow she wants heart. If you understand,' said Mr. Omer, after rubbing his chin again, and smoking a little, 'what I mean in a general way by the expression, "A long pull, and a strong pull, and a pull altogether, my hearties, hurrah!" I should say to you, that that was—in a general way—what I miss in Em'ly.'

Mr. Omer's face and manner went for so much, that I could conscientiously nod my head, as divining his meaning. My quickness of apprehension seemed to please him, and he went on: 'Now I consider this is principally on account of her being in an unsettled state, you see. We have talked it over a good deal, her uncle and myself, and her sweetheart and myself, after business; and I consider it is principally on account of her being unsettled. You must always recollect of Em'ly,' said Mr. Omer, shaking his head gently, 'that she's a most extraordinary affectionate little thing. The proverb says, "You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear." Well, I don't know about that. I rather think you may, if you begin early in life. She has made a home out of that old boat, sir, that stone and marble couldn't beat.'

'I am sure she has!' said I.

'To see the clinging of that pretty little thing to her uncle,' said Mr. Omer; 'to see the way she holds on to him, tighter and tighter, and closer and closer, every day, is to see a sight. Now, you know, there's a struggle going on when that's the case. Why should it be made a longer one than is needful?'

I listened attentively to the good old fellow, and acquiesced, with all my heart, in what he said.

'Therefore, I mentioned to them,' said Mr. Omer, in a comfortable, easy-going tone, 'this. I said, "Now, don't consider Em'ly nailed down in point of time, at all. Make it your own time. Her services have been more valuable than was supposed; her learning has been quicker than was supposed; Omer and Joram can run their pen through what remains; and she's free when you wish. If she likes to make any little arrangement, afterwards, in the way of doing any little thing for us at home, very well. If she don't, very well still. We're no losers, anyhow." For—don't you see,' said Mr. Omer, touching me with his pipe, 'it ain't likely that a man so short of breath as myself, and a grandfather too, would go and strain points with a little bit of a blue-eyed blossom, like her?'

'Not at all, I am certain,' said I.

'Not at all! You're right!' said Mr. Omer. 'Well, sir, her cousin—you know it's a cousin she's going to be married to?'

'Oh yes,' I replied. 'I know him well.'

'Of course you do,' said Mr. Omer. 'Well, sir! Her cousin being, as it appears, in good work, and well to do, thanked me in a very manly sort of manner for this (conducting himself altogether, I must say, in a way that gives me a high opinion of him), and went and took as comfortable a little house as you or I could wish to clap eyes on. That little house is now furnished right through, as neat and complete as a doll's parlour; and but for Barkis's illness having taken this bad turn, poor fellow, they would have been man and wife—I dare say, by this time. As it is, there's a postponement.'

'And Emily, Mr. Omer?' I inquired. 'Has she become more settled?'

'Why that, you know,' he returned, rubbing his double chin again, 'can't naturally be expected. The prospect of the change and separation, and all that, is, as one may say, close to her and far away from her, both at once. Barkis's death needn't put it off much, but his lingering might. Anyway, it's an uncertain state of matters, you see.'

'I see,' said I.

'Consequently,' pursued Mr. Omer, 'Em'ly's still a little down, and a little fluttered; perhaps, upon the whole, she's more so than she was. Every day she seems to get fonder and fonder of her uncle, and more loth to part from all of us. A kind word from me brings the tears into her eyes; and if you was to see her with my daughter Minnie's little girl, you'd never forget it. Bless my heart alive!' said Mr. Omer, pondering, 'how she loves that child!'

Having so favourable an opportunity, it occurred to me to ask Mr. Omer, before our conversation should be interrupted by the return of his daughter and her husband, whether he knew anything of Martha.

'Ah!' he rejoined, shaking his head, and looking very much dejected. 'No good. A sad story, sir, however you come to know it. I never thought there was harm in the girl. I wouldn't wish to mention it before my daughter Minnie—for she'd take me up directly—but I never did. None of us ever did.'

Mr. Omer, hearing his daughter's footstep before I heard it, touched me with his pipe, and shut up one eye, as a caution. She and her husband came in immediately afterwards.

Their report was, that Mr. Barkis was 'as bad as bad could be'; that he was quite unconscious; and that Mr. Chillip had mournfully said in the kitchen, on going away just now, that the College of Physicians, the College of Surgeons, and Apothecaries' Hall, if they were all called in together, couldn't help him. He was past both Colleges, Mr. Chillip said, and the Hall could only poison him.

Hearing this, and learning that Mr. Peggotty was there, I determined to go to the house at once. I bade good night to Mr. Omer, and to Mr. and Mrs. Joram; and directed my steps thither, with a solemn feeling, which made Mr. Barkis quite a new and different creature.

My low tap at the door was answered by Mr. Peggotty. He was not so much surprised to see me as I had expected. I remarked this in Peggotty, too, when she came down; and I have seen it since; and I think, in the expectation of that dread surprise, all other changes and surprises dwindle into nothing.

I shook hands with Mr. Peggotty, and passed into the kitchen, while he softly closed the door. Little Emily was sitting by the fire, with her hands before her face. Ham was standing near her.

We spoke in whispers; listening, between whiles, for any sound in the room above. I had not thought of it on the occasion of my last visit, but how strange it was to me, now, to miss Mr. Barkis out of the kitchen!

'This is very kind of you, Mas'r Davy,' said Mr. Peggotty.

'It's oncommon kind,' said Ham.

'Em'ly, my dear,' cried Mr. Peggotty. 'See here! Here's Mas'r Davy come! What, cheer up, pretty! Not a wured to Mas'r Davy?'

There was a trembling upon her, that I can see now. The coldness of her hand when I touched it, I can feel yet. Its only sign of animation was to shrink from mine; and then she glided from the chair, and creeping to the other side of her uncle, bowed herself, silently and trembling still, upon his breast.

'It's such a loving art,' said Mr. Peggotty, smoothing her rich hair with his great hard hand, 'that it can't abear the sorrer of this. It's nat'ral in young folk, Mas'r Davy, when they're new to these here trials, and timid, like my little bird,—it's nat'ral.'

She clung the closer to him, but neither lifted up her face, nor spoke a word.

'It's getting late, my dear,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'and here's Ham come fur to take you home. Theer! Go along with t'other loving art! What' Em'ly? Eh, my pretty?'

The sound of her voice had not reached me, but he bent his head as if he listened to her, and then said:

'Let you stay with your uncle? Why, you doen't mean to ask me that! Stay with your uncle, Moppet? When your husband that'll be so soon, is here fur to take you home? Now a person wouldn't think it, fur to see this little thing alongside a rough-weather chap like me,' said Mr. Peggotty, looking round at both of us, with infinite pride; 'but the sea ain't more salt in it than she has fondness in her for her uncle—a foolish little Em'ly!'

'Em'ly's in the right in that, Mas'r Davy!' said Ham. 'Lookee here! As Em'ly wishes of it, and as she's hurried and frightened, like, besides, I'll leave her till morning. Let me stay too!'

'No, no,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'You doen't ought—a married man like you—or what's as good—to take and hull away a day's work. And you doen't ought to watch and work both. That won't do. You go home and turn in. You ain't afeerd of Em'ly not being took good care on, I know.'

Ham yielded to this persuasion, and took his hat to go. Even when he kissed her—and I never saw him approach her, but I felt that nature had given him the soul of a gentleman—she seemed to cling closer to her uncle, even to the avoidance of her chosen husband. I shut the door after him, that it might cause no disturbance of the quiet that prevailed; and when I turned back, I found Mr. Peggotty still talking to her.

'Now, I'm a going upstairs to tell your aunt as Mas'r Davy's here, and that'll cheer her up a bit,' he said. 'Sit ye down by the fire, the while, my dear, and warm those mortal cold hands. You doen't need to be so fearsome, and take on so much. What? You'll go along with me?—Well! come along with me—come! If her uncle was turned out of house and home, and forced to lay down in a dyke, Mas'r Davy,' said Mr. Peggotty, with no less pride than before, 'it's my belief she'd go along with him, now! But there'll be someone else, soon,—someone else, soon, Em'ly!'

Afterwards, when I went upstairs, as I passed the door of my little chamber, which was dark, I had an indistinct impression of her being within it, cast down upon the floor. But, whether it was really she, or whether it was a confusion of the shadows in the room, I don't know now.

I had leisure to think, before the kitchen fire, of pretty little Emily's dread of death—which, added to what Mr. Omer had told me, I took to be the cause of her being so unlike herself—and I had leisure, before Peggotty came down, even to think more leniently of the weakness of it: as I sat counting the ticking of the clock, and deepening my sense of the solemn hush around me. Peggotty took me in her arms, and blessed and thanked me over and over again for being such a comfort to her (that was what she said) in her distress. She then entreated me to come upstairs, sobbing that Mr. Barkis had always liked me and admired me; that he had often talked of me, before he fell into a stupor; and that she believed, in case of his coming to himself again, he would brighten up at sight of me, if he could brighten up at any earthly thing.

The probability of his ever doing so, appeared to me, when I saw him, to be very small. He was lying with his head and shoulders out of bed, in an uncomfortable attitude, half resting on the box which had cost him so much pain and trouble. I learned, that, when he was past creeping out of bed to open it, and past assuring himself of its safety by means of the divining rod I had seen him use, he had required to have it placed on the chair at the bed-side, where he had ever since embraced it, night and day. His arm lay on it now. Time and the world were slipping from beneath him, but the box was there; and the last words he had uttered were (in an explanatory tone) 'Old clothes!'

'Barkis, my dear!' said Peggotty, almost cheerfully: bending over him, while her brother and I stood at the bed's foot. 'Here's my dear boy—my dear boy, Master Davy, who brought us together, Barkis! That you sent messages by, you know! Won't you speak to Master Davy?'

He was as mute and senseless as the box, from which his form derived the only expression it had.

'He's a going out with the tide,' said Mr. Peggotty to me, behind his hand.

My eyes were dim and so were Mr. Peggotty's; but I repeated in a whisper, 'With the tide?'

'People can't die, along the coast,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'except when the tide's pretty nigh out. They can't be born, unless it's pretty nigh in—not properly born, till flood. He's a going out with the tide. It's ebb at half-arter three, slack water half an hour. If he lives till it turns, he'll hold his own till past the flood, and go out with the next tide.'

We remained there, watching him, a long time—hours. What mysterious influence my presence had upon him in that state of his senses, I shall not pretend to say; but when he at last began to wander feebly, it is certain he was muttering about driving me to school.

'He's coming to himself,' said Peggotty.

Mr. Peggotty touched me, and whispered with much awe and reverence. 'They are both a-going out fast.'

'Barkis, my dear!' said Peggotty.

'C. P. Barkis,' he cried faintly. 'No better woman anywhere!'

'Look! Here's Master Davy!' said Peggotty. For he now opened his eyes.

I was on the point of asking him if he knew me, when he tried to stretch out his arm, and said to me, distinctly, with a pleasant smile:

'Barkis is willin'!'

And, it being low water, he went out with the tide.

CHAPTER 31. A GREATER LOSS

It was not difficult for me, on Peggotty's solicitation, to resolve to stay where I was, until after the remains of the poor carrier should have made their last journey to Blunderstone. She had long ago bought, out of her own savings, a little piece of ground in our old churchyard near the grave of 'her sweet girl', as she always called my mother; and there they were to rest.

In keeping Peggotty company, and doing all I could for her (little enough at the utmost), I was as grateful, I rejoice to think, as even now I could wish myself to have been. But I am afraid I had a supreme satisfaction, of a personal and professional nature, in taking charge of Mr. Barkis's will, and expounding its contents.

I may claim the merit of having originated the suggestion that the will should be looked for in the box. After some search, it was found in the box, at the bottom of a horse's nose-bag; wherein (besides hay) there was discovered an old gold watch, with chain and seals, which Mr. Barkis had worn on his wedding-day, and which had never been seen before or since; a silver tobacco-stopper, in the form of a leg; an imitation lemon, full of minute cups and saucers, which I have some idea Mr. Barkis must have purchased to present to me when I was a child, and afterwards found himself unable to part with; eighty-seven guineas and a half, in guineas and half-guineas; two hundred and ten pounds, in perfectly clean Bank notes; certain receipts for Bank of England stock; an old horseshoe, a bad shilling, a piece of camphor, and an oyster-shell. From the circumstance of the latter article having been much polished, and displaying prismatic colours on the inside, I conclude that Mr. Barkis had some general ideas about pearls, which never resolved themselves into anything definite.

For years and years, Mr. Barkis had carried this box, on all his journeys, every day. That it might the better escape notice, he had invented a fiction that it belonged to 'Mr. Blackboy', and was 'to be left with Barkis till called for'; a fable he had elaborately written on the lid, in characters now scarcely legible.

He had hoarded, all these years, I found, to good purpose. His property in money amounted to nearly three thousand pounds. Of this he bequeathed the interest of one thousand to Mr. Peggotty for his life; on his decease, the principal to be equally divided between Peggotty, little Emily, and me, or the survivor or survivors of us, share and share alike. All the rest he died possessed of, he bequeathed to Peggotty; whom he left residuary legatee, and sole executrix of that his last will and testament.

I felt myself quite a proctor when I read this document aloud with all possible ceremony, and set forth its provisions, any number of times, to those whom they concerned. I began to think there was more in the Commons than I had supposed. I examined the will with the deepest attention, pronounced it perfectly formal in all respects, made a pencil-mark or so in the margin, and thought it rather extraordinary that I knew so much.

In this abstruse pursuit; in making an account for Peggotty, of all the property into which she had come; in arranging all the affairs in an orderly manner; and in being her referee and adviser on every point, to our joint delight; I passed the week before the funeral. I did not see little Emily in that interval, but they told me she was to be quietly married in a fortnight.

I did not attend the funeral in character, if I may venture to say so. I mean I was not dressed up in a black coat and a streamer, to frighten the birds; but I walked over to Blunderstone early in the morning, and was in the churchyard when it came, attended only by Peggotty and her brother. The mad gentleman looked on, out of my little window; Mr. Chillip's baby wagged its heavy head, and rolled its goggle eyes, at the clergyman, over its nurse's shoulder; Mr. Omer breathed short in the background; no one else was there; and it was very quiet. We walked about the churchyard for an hour, after all was over; and pulled some young leaves from the tree above my mother's grave.

A dread falls on me here. A cloud is lowering on the distant town, towards which I retraced my solitary steps. I fear to approach it. I cannot bear to think of what did come, upon that memorable night; of what must come again, if I go on.

It is no worse, because I write of it. It would be no better, if I stopped my most unwilling hand. It is done. Nothing can undo it; nothing can make it otherwise than as it was.

My old nurse was to go to London with me next day, on the business of the will. Little Emily was passing that day at Mr. Omer's. We were all to meet in the old boathouse that night. Ham would bring Emily at the usual hour. I would walk back at my leisure. The brother and sister would return as they had come, and be expecting us, when the day closed in, at the fireside.

I parted from them at the wicket-gate, where visionary Strap had rested with Roderick Random's knapsack in the days of yore; and, instead of going straight back, walked a little distance on the road to Lowestoft. Then I turned, and walked back towards Yarmouth. I stayed to dine at a decent alehouse, some mile or two from the Ferry I have mentioned before; and thus the day wore away, and it was evening when I reached it. Rain was falling heavily by that time, and it was a wild night; but there was a moon behind the clouds, and it was not dark.

I was soon within sight of Mr. Peggotty's house, and of the light within it shining through the window. A little floundering across the sand, which was heavy, brought me to the door, and I went in.

It looked very comfortable indeed. Mr. Peggotty had smoked his evening pipe and there were preparations for some supper by and by. The fire was bright, the ashes were thrown up, the locker was ready for little Emily in her old place. In her own old place sat Peggotty, once more, looking (but for her dress) as if she had never left it. She had fallen back, already, on the society of the work-box with St. Paul's upon the lid, the yard-measure in the cottage, and the bit of wax-candle; and there they all were, just as if they had never been disturbed. Mrs. Gummidge appeared to be fretting a little, in her old corner; and consequently looked quite natural, too.

'You're first of the lot, Mas'r Davy!' said Mr. Peggotty with a happy face. 'Doen't keep in that coat, sir, if it's wet.'

'Thank you, Mr. Peggotty,' said I, giving him my outer coat to hang up. 'It's quite dry.'

'So 'tis!' said Mr. Peggotty, feeling my shoulders. 'As a chip! Sit ye down, sir. It ain't o' no use saying welcome to you, but you're welcome, kind and hearty.'

'Thank you, Mr. Peggotty, I am sure of that. Well, Peggotty!' said I, giving her a kiss. 'And how are you, old woman?'

'Ha, ha!' laughed Mr. Peggotty, sitting down beside us, and rubbing his hands in his sense of relief from recent trouble, and in the genuine heartiness of his nature; 'there's not a woman in the wureld, sir—as I tell her—that need to feel more easy in her mind than her! She done her dooty by the departed, and the departed know'd it; and the departed done what was right by her, as she done what was right by the departed;—and—and—and it's all right!'

Mrs. Gummidge groaned.

'Cheer up, my pritty mawther!' said Mr. Peggotty. (But he shook his head aside at us, evidently sensible of the tendency of the late occurrences to recall the memory of the old one.) 'Doen't be down! Cheer up, for your own self, on'y a little bit, and see if a good deal more doen't come nat'ral!'

'Not to me, Dan'l,' returned Mrs. Gummidge. 'Nothink's nat'ral to me but to be lone and lorn.'

'No, no,' said Mr. Peggotty, soothing her sorrows.

'Yes, yes, Dan'l!' said Mrs. Gummidge. 'I ain't a person to live with them as has had money left. Thinks go too contrary with me. I had better be a riddance.'

'Why, how should I ever spend it without you?' said Mr. Peggotty, with an air of serious remonstrance. 'What are you a talking on? Doen't I want you more now, than ever I did?'

'I know'd I was never wanted before!' cried Mrs. Gummidge, with a pitiable whimper, 'and now I'm told so! How could I expect to be wanted, being so lone and lorn, and so contrary!'

Mr. Peggotty seemed very much shocked at himself for having made a speech capable of this unfeeling construction, but was prevented from replying, by Peggotty's pulling his sleeve, and shaking her head. After looking at Mrs. Gummidge for some moments, in sore distress of mind, he glanced at the Dutch clock, rose, snuffed the candle, and put it in the window.

'Theer!'said Mr. Peggotty, cheerily.'Theer we are, Missis Gummidge!' Mrs. Gummidge slightly groaned. 'Lighted up, accordin' to custom! You're a wonderin' what that's fur, sir! Well, it's fur our little Em'ly. You see, the path ain't over light or cheerful arter dark; and when I'm here at the hour as she's a comin' home, I puts the light in the winder. That, you see,' said Mr. Peggotty, bending over me with great glee, 'meets two objects. She says, says Em'ly, "Theer's home!" she says. And likewise, says Em'ly, "My uncle's theer!" Fur if I ain't theer, I never have no light showed.'

'You're a baby!' said Peggotty; very fond of him for it, if she thought so.

'Well,' returned Mr. Peggotty, standing with his legs pretty wide apart, and rubbing his hands up and down them in his comfortable satisfaction, as he looked alternately at us and at the fire. 'I doen't know but I am. Not, you see, to look at.'

'Not azackly,' observed Peggotty.

'No,' laughed Mr. Peggotty, 'not to look at, but to—to consider on, you know. I doen't care, bless you! Now I tell you. When I go a looking and looking about that theer pritty house of our Em'ly's, I'm—I'm Gormed,' said Mr. Peggotty, with sudden emphasis—'theer! I can't say more—if I doen't feel as if the littlest things was her, a'most. I takes 'em up and I put 'em down, and I touches of 'em as delicate as if they was our Em'ly. So 'tis with her little bonnets and that. I couldn't see one on 'em rough used a purpose—not fur the whole wureld. There's a babby fur you, in the form of a great Sea Porkypine!' said Mr. Peggotty, relieving his earnestness with a roar of laughter.

Peggotty and I both laughed, but not so loud.

'It's my opinion, you see,' said Mr. Peggotty, with a delighted face, after some further rubbing of his legs, 'as this is along of my havin' played with her so much, and made believe as we was Turks, and French, and sharks, and every wariety of forinners—bless you, yes; and lions and whales, and I doen't know what all!—when she warn't no higher than my knee. I've got into the way on it, you know. Why, this here candle, now!' said Mr. Peggotty, gleefully holding out his hand towards it, 'I know wery well that arter she's married and gone, I shall put that candle theer, just the same as now. I know wery well that when I'm here o' nights (and where else should I live, bless your arts, whatever fortun' I come into!) and she ain't here or I ain't theer, I shall put the candle in the winder, and sit afore the fire, pretending I'm expecting of her, like I'm a doing now. THERE'S a babby for you,' said Mr. Peggotty, with another roar, 'in the form of a Sea Porkypine! Why, at the present minute, when I see the candle sparkle up, I says to myself, "She's a looking at it! Em'ly's a coming!" THERE'S a babby for you, in the form of a Sea Porkypine! Right for all that,' said Mr. Peggotty, stopping in his roar, and smiting his hands together; 'fur here she is!'

It was only Ham. The night should have turned more wet since I came in, for he had a large sou'wester hat on, slouched over his face.

'Wheer's Em'ly?' said Mr. Peggotty.

Ham made a motion with his head, as if she were outside. Mr. Peggotty took the light from the window, trimmed it, put it on the table, and was busily stirring the fire, when Ham, who had not moved, said:

'Mas'r Davy, will you come out a minute, and see what Em'ly and me has got to show you?'

We went out. As I passed him at the door, I saw, to my astonishment and fright, that he was deadly pale. He pushed me hastily into the open air, and closed the door upon us. Only upon us two.

'Ham! what's the matter?'

'Mas'r Davy!—' Oh, for his broken heart, how dreadfully he wept!

I was paralysed by the sight of such grief. I don't know what I thought, or what I dreaded. I could only look at him.

'Ham! Poor good fellow! For Heaven's sake, tell me what's the matter!'

'My love, Mas'r Davy—the pride and hope of my art—her that I'd have died for, and would die for now—she's gone!'

'Gone!'

'Em'ly's run away! Oh, Mas'r Davy, think HOW she's run away, when I pray my good and gracious God to kill her (her that is so dear above all things) sooner than let her come to ruin and disgrace!'

The face he turned up to the troubled sky, the quivering of his clasped hands, the agony of his figure, remain associated with the lonely waste, in my remembrance, to this hour. It is always night there, and he is the only object in the scene.

'You're a scholar,' he said, hurriedly, 'and know what's right and best. What am I to say, indoors? How am I ever to break it to him, Mas'r Davy?'

I saw the door move, and instinctively tried to hold the latch on the outside, to gain a moment's time. It was too late. Mr. Peggotty thrust forth his face; and never could I forget the change that came upon it when he saw us, if I were to live five hundred years.

I remember a great wail and cry, and the women hanging about him, and we all standing in the room; I with a paper in my hand, which Ham had given me; Mr. Peggotty, with his vest torn open, his hair wild, his face and lips quite white, and blood trickling down his bosom (it had sprung from his mouth, I think), looking fixedly at me.

'Read it, sir,' he said, in a low shivering voice. 'Slow, please. I doen't know as I can understand.'

In the midst of the silence of death, I read thus, from a blotted letter:

'"When you, who love me so much better than I ever have deserved, even when my mind was innocent, see this, I shall be far away."'

'I shall be fur away,' he repeated slowly. 'Stop! Em'ly fur away. Well!'

'"When I leave my dear home—my dear home—oh, my dear home!—in the morning,"'

the letter bore date on the previous night:

'"—it will be never to come back, unless he brings me back a lady. This will be found at night, many hours after, instead of me. Oh, if you knew how my heart is torn. If even you, that I have wronged so much, that never can forgive me, could only know what I suffer! I am too wicked to write about myself! Oh, take comfort in thinking that I am so bad. Oh, for mercy's sake, tell uncle that I never loved him half so dear as now. Oh, don't remember how affectionate and kind you have all been to me—don't remember we were ever to be married—but try to think as if I died when I was little, and was buried somewhere. Pray Heaven that I am going away from, have compassion on my uncle! Tell him that I never loved him half so dear. Be his comfort. Love some good girl that will be what I was once to uncle, and be true to you, and worthy of you, and know no shame but me. God bless all! I'll pray for all, often, on my knees. If he don't bring me back a lady, and I don't pray for my own self, I'll pray for all. My parting love to uncle. My last tears, and my last thanks, for uncle!"'

That was all.

He stood, long after I had ceased to read, still looking at me. At length I ventured to take his hand, and to entreat him, as well as I could, to endeavour to get some command of himself. He replied, 'I thankee, sir, I thankee!' without moving.

Ham spoke to him. Mr. Peggotty was so far sensible of HIS affliction, that he wrung his hand; but, otherwise, he remained in the same state, and no one dared to disturb him.

Slowly, at last, he moved his eyes from my face, as if he were waking from a vision, and cast them round the room. Then he said, in a low voice:

'Who's the man? I want to know his name.'

Ham glanced at me, and suddenly I felt a shock that struck me back.

'There's a man suspected,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'Who is it?'

'Mas'r Davy!' implored Ham. 'Go out a bit, and let me tell him what I must. You doen't ought to hear it, sir.'

I felt the shock again. I sank down in a chair, and tried to utter some reply; but my tongue was fettered, and my sight was weak.

'I want to know his name!' I heard said once more.

'For some time past,' Ham faltered, 'there's been a servant about here, at odd times. There's been a gen'lm'n too. Both of 'em belonged to one another.'

Mr. Peggotty stood fixed as before, but now looking at him.

'The servant,' pursued Ham, 'was seen along with—our poor girl—last night. He's been in hiding about here, this week or over. He was thought to have gone, but he was hiding. Doen't stay, Mas'r Davy, doen't!'

I felt Peggotty's arm round my neck, but I could not have moved if the house had been about to fall upon me.

'A strange chay and hosses was outside town, this morning, on the Norwich road, a'most afore the day broke,' Ham went on. 'The servant went to it, and come from it, and went to it again. When he went to it again, Em'ly was nigh him. The t'other was inside. He's the man.'

'For the Lord's love,' said Mr. Peggotty, falling back, and putting out his hand, as if to keep off what he dreaded. 'Doen't tell me his name's Steerforth!'

'Mas'r Davy,' exclaimed Ham, in a broken voice, 'it ain't no fault of yourn—and I am far from laying of it to you—but his name is Steerforth, and he's a damned villain!'

Mr. Peggotty uttered no cry, and shed no tear, and moved no more, until he seemed to wake again, all at once, and pulled down his rough coat from its peg in a corner.

'Bear a hand with this! I'm struck of a heap, and can't do it,' he said, impatiently. 'Bear a hand and help me. Well!' when somebody had done so. 'Now give me that theer hat!'

Ham asked him whither he was going.

'I'm a going to seek my niece. I'm a going to seek my Em'ly. I'm a going, first, to stave in that theer boat, and sink it where I would have drownded him, as I'm a living soul, if I had had one thought of what was in him! As he sat afore me,' he said, wildly, holding out his clenched right hand, 'as he sat afore me, face to face, strike me down dead, but I'd have drownded him, and thought it right!—I'm a going to seek my niece.'

'Where?' cried Ham, interposing himself before the door.

'Anywhere! I'm a going to seek my niece through the wureld. I'm a going to find my poor niece in her shame, and bring her back. No one stop me! I tell you I'm a going to seek my niece!'

'No, no!' cried Mrs. Gummidge, coming between them, in a fit of crying. 'No, no, Dan'l, not as you are now. Seek her in a little while, my lone lorn Dan'l, and that'll be but right! but not as you are now. Sit ye down, and give me your forgiveness for having ever been a worrit to you, Dan'l—what have my contraries ever been to this!—and let us speak a word about them times when she was first an orphan, and when Ham was too, and when I was a poor widder woman, and you took me in. It'll soften your poor heart, Dan'l,' laying her head upon his shoulder, 'and you'll bear your sorrow better; for you know the promise, Dan'l, "As you have done it unto one of the least of these, you have done it unto me",—and that can never fail under this roof, that's been our shelter for so many, many year!'

He was quite passive now; and when I heard him crying, the impulse that had been upon me to go down upon my knees, and ask their pardon for the desolation I had caused, and curse Steer—forth, yielded to a better feeling, My overcharged heart found the same relief, and I cried too.

CHAPTER 32. THE BEGINNING OF A LONG JOURNEY

What is natural in me, is natural in many other men, I infer, and so I am not afraid to write that I never had loved Steerforth better than when the ties that bound me to him were broken. In the keen distress of the discovery of his unworthiness, I thought more of all that was brilliant in him, I softened more towards all that was good in him, I did more justice to the qualities that might have made him a man of a noble nature and a great name, than ever I had done in the height of my devotion to him. Deeply as I felt my own unconscious part in his pollution of an honest home, I believed that if I had been brought face to face with him, I could not have uttered one reproach. I should have loved him so well still—though he fascinated me no longer—I should have held in so much tenderness the memory of my affection for him, that I think I should have been as weak as a spirit-wounded child, in all but the entertainment of a thought that we could ever be re-united. That thought I never had. I felt, as he had felt, that all was at an end between us. What his remembrances of me were, I have never known—they were light enough, perhaps, and easily dismissed—but mine of him were as the remembrances of a cherished friend, who was dead.

Yes, Steerforth, long removed from the scenes of this poor history! My sorrow may bear involuntary witness against you at the judgement Throne; but my angry thoughts or my reproaches never will, I know!

The news of what had happened soon spread through the town; insomuch that as I passed along the streets next morning, I overheard the people speaking of it at their doors. Many were hard upon her, some few were hard upon him, but towards her second father and her lover there was but one sentiment. Among all kinds of people a respect for them in their distress prevailed, which was full of gentleness and delicacy. The seafaring men kept apart, when those two were seen early, walking with slow steps on the beach; and stood in knots, talking compassionately among themselves.

It was on the beach, close down by the sea, that I found them. It would have been easy to perceive that they had not slept all last night, even if Peggotty had failed to tell me of their still sitting just as I left them, when it was broad day. They looked worn; and I thought Mr. Peggotty's head was bowed in one night more than in all the years I had known him. But they were both as grave and steady as the sea itself, then lying beneath a dark sky, waveless—yet with a heavy roll upon it, as if it breathed in its rest—and touched, on the horizon, with a strip of silvery light from the unseen sun.

'We have had a mort of talk, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty to me, when we had all three walked a little while in silence, 'of what we ought and doen't ought to do. But we see our course now.'

I happened to glance at Ham, then looking out to sea upon the distant light, and a frightful thought came into my mind—not that his face was angry, for it was not; I recall nothing but an expression of stern determination in it—that if ever he encountered Steerforth, he would kill him.

'My dooty here, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'is done. I'm a going to seek my—' he stopped, and went on in a firmer voice: 'I'm a going to seek her. That's my dooty evermore.'

He shook his head when I asked him where he would seek her, and inquired if I were going to London tomorrow? I told him I had not gone today, fearing to lose the chance of being of any service to him; but that I was ready to go when he would.

'I'll go along with you, sir,' he rejoined, 'if you're agreeable, tomorrow.'

We walked again, for a while, in silence.

'Ham,'he presently resumed,'he'll hold to his present work, and go and live along with my sister. The old boat yonder—'

'Will you desert the old boat, Mr. Peggotty?' I gently interposed.

'My station, Mas'r Davy,' he returned, 'ain't there no longer; and if ever a boat foundered, since there was darkness on the face of the deep, that one's gone down. But no, sir, no; I doen't mean as it should be deserted. Fur from that.'

We walked again for a while, as before, until he explained:

'My wishes is, sir, as it shall look, day and night, winter and summer, as it has always looked, since she fust know'd it. If ever she should come a wandering back, I wouldn't have the old place seem to cast her off, you understand, but seem to tempt her to draw nigher to 't, and to peep in, maybe, like a ghost, out of the wind and rain, through the old winder, at the old seat by the fire. Then, maybe, Mas'r Davy, seein' none but Missis

Gummidge there, she might take heart to creep in, trembling; and might come to be laid down in her old bed, and rest her weary head where it was once so gay.'

I could not speak to him in reply, though I tried.

'Every night,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'as reg'lar as the night comes, the candle must be stood in its old pane of glass, that if ever she should see it, it may seem to say "Come back, my child, come back!" If ever there's a knock, Ham (partic'ler a soft knock), arter dark, at your aunt's door, doen't you go nigh it. Let it be her—not you—that sees my fallen child!'

He walked a little in front of us, and kept before us for some minutes. During this interval, I glanced at Ham again, and observing the same expression on his face, and his eyes still directed to the distant light, I touched his arm.

Twice I called him by his name, in the tone in which I might have tried to rouse a sleeper, before he heeded me. When I at last inquired on what his thoughts were so bent, he replied:

'On what's afore me, Mas'r Davy; and over yon.' 'On the life before you, do you mean?' He had pointed confusedly out to sea.

'Ay, Mas'r Davy. I doen't rightly know how 'tis, but from over yon there seemed to me to come—the end of it like,' looking at me as if he were waking, but with the same determined face.

'What end?' I asked, possessed by my former fear.

'I doen't know,'he said, thoughtfully; 'I was calling to mind that the beginning of it all did take place here—and then the end come. But it's gone! Mas'r Davy,' he added; answering, as I think, my look; 'you han't no call to be afeerd of me: but I'm kiender muddled; I don't fare to feel no matters,'—which was as much as to say that he was not himself, and quite confounded.

Mr. Peggotty stopping for us to join him: we did so, and said no more. The remembrance of this, in connexion with my former thought, however, haunted me at intervals, even until the inexorable end came at its appointed time.

We insensibly approached the old boat, and entered. Mrs. Gummidge, no longer moping in her especial corner, was busy preparing breakfast. She took Mr. Peggotty's hat, and placed his seat for him, and spoke so comfortably and softly, that I hardly knew her.

'Dan'l, my good man,' said she, 'you must eat and drink, and keep up your strength, for without it you'll do nowt. Try, that's a dear soul! An if I disturb you with my clicketten,' she meant her chattering, 'tell me so, Dan'l, and I won't.'

When she had served us all, she withdrew to the window, where she sedulously employed herself in repairing some shirts and other clothes belonging to Mr. Peggotty, and neatly folding and packing them in an old oilskin bag, such as sailors carry. Meanwhile, she continued talking, in the same quiet manner:

'All times and seasons, you know, Dan'l,' said Mrs. Gummidge, 'I shall be allus here, and everythink will look accordin' to your wishes. I'm a poor scholar, but I shall write to you, odd times, when you're away, and send my letters to Mas'r Davy. Maybe you'll write to me too, Dan'l, odd times, and tell me how you fare to feel upon your lone lorn journies.'

'You'll be a solitary woman heer, I'm afeerd!' said Mr. Peggotty.

'No, no, Dan'l,' she returned, 'I shan't be that. Doen't you mind me. I shall have enough to do to keep a Beein for you' (Mrs. Gummidge meant a home), 'again you come back—to keep a Beein here for any that may hap to come back, Dan'l. In the fine time, I shall set outside the door as I used to do. If any should come nigh, they shall see the old widder woman true to 'em, a long way off.'

What a change in Mrs. Gummidge in a little time! She was another woman. She was so devoted, she had such a quick perception of what it would be well to say, and what it would be well to leave unsaid; she was so forgetful of herself, and so regardful of the sorrow about her, that I held her in a sort of veneration. The work she did that day! There were many things to be brought up from the beach and stored in the outhouse—as oars, nets, sails, cordage, spars, lobster-pots, bags of ballast, and the like; and though there was abundance of assistance rendered, there being not a pair of working hands on all that shore but would have laboured hard for Mr. Peggotty, and been well paid in being asked to do it, yet she persisted, all day long, in toiling under weights that she was quite unequal to, and fagging to and fro on all sorts of unnecessary errands. As to deploring her misfortunes, she appeared to have entirely lost the recollection of ever having had any. She preserved an equable cheerfulness in the midst of her sympathy, which was not the least astonishing part of the change that had come over her. Querulousness was out of the question. I did not even observe her voice to falter, or a tear to escape from her eyes, the whole day through, until twilight; when she and I and Mr. Peggotty being alone together, and he having fallen asleep in perfect exhaustion, she broke into a half-suppressed fit of sobbing and crying, and taking me to the door, said, 'Ever bless you, Mas'r Davy, be a friend to him, poor dear!' Then, she immediately ran out of the house to wash her face, in order that she might sit quietly beside him, and be found at work there, when he should awake. In short I left her, when I went away at night, the prop and staff of Mr. Peggotty's affliction; and I could not meditate enough upon the lesson that I read in Mrs. Gummidge, and the new experience she unfolded to me.

It was between nine and ten o'clock when, strolling in a melancholy manner through the town, I stopped at Mr. Omer's door. Mr. Omer had taken it so much to heart, his daughter told me, that he had been very low and poorly all day, and had gone to bed without his pipe.

'A deceitful, bad-hearted girl,' said Mrs. Joram. 'There was no good in her, ever!'

'Don't say so,' I returned. 'You don't think so.'

'Yes, I do!' cried Mrs. Joram, angrily.

'No, no,' said I.

Mrs. Joram tossed her head, endeavouring to be very stern and cross; but she could not command her softer self, and began to cry. I was young, to be sure; but I thought much the better of her for this sympathy, and fancied it became her, as a virtuous wife and mother, very well indeed.

'What will she ever do!' sobbed Minnie. 'Where will she go! What will become of her! Oh, how could she be so cruel, to herself and him!'

I remembered the time when Minnie was a young and pretty girl; and I was glad she remembered it too, so feelingly.

'My little Minnie,' said Mrs. Joram, 'has only just now been got to sleep. Even in her sleep she is sobbing for Em'ly. All day long, little Minnie has cried for her, and asked me, over and over again, whether Em'ly was wicked? What can I say to her, when Em'ly tied a ribbon off her own neck round little Minnie's the last night she was here, and laid her head down on the pillow beside her till she was fast asleep! The ribbon's round my little Minnie's neck now. It ought not to be, perhaps, but what can I do? Em'ly is very bad, but they were fond of one another. And the child knows nothing!'

Mrs. Joram was so unhappy that her husband came out to take care of her. Leaving them together, I went home to Peggotty's; more melancholy myself, if possible, than I had been yet.

That good creature—I mean Peggotty—all untired by her late anxieties and sleepless nights, was at her brother's, where she meant to stay till morning. An old woman, who had been employed about the house for some weeks past, while Peggotty had been unable to attend to it, was the house's only other occupant besides myself. As I had no occasion for her services, I sent her to bed, by no means against her will, and sat down before the kitchen fire a little while, to think about all this.

I was blending it with the deathbed of the late Mr. Barkis, and was driving out with the tide towards the distance at which Ham had looked so singularly in the morning, when I was recalled from my wanderings by a knock at the door. There was a knocker upon the door, but it was not that which made the sound. The tap was from a hand, and low down upon the door, as if it were given by a child.

It made me start as much as if it had been the knock of a footman to a person of distinction. I opened the door; and at first looked down, to my amazement, on nothing but a great umbrella that appeared to be walking about of itself. But presently I discovered underneath it, Miss Mowcher.

I might not have been prepared to give the little creature a very kind reception, if, on her removing the umbrella, which her utmost efforts were unable to shut up, she had shown me the 'volatile' expression of face which had made so great an impression on me at our first and last meeting. But her face, as she turned it up to mine, was so earnest; and when I relieved her of the umbrella (which would have been an inconvenient one for the Irish Giant), she wrung her little hands in such an afflicted manner; that I rather inclined towards her.

'Miss Mowcher!' said I, after glancing up and down the empty street, without distinctly knowing what I expected to see besides; 'how do you come here? What is the matter?' She motioned to me with her short right arm, to shut the umbrella for her; and passing me hurriedly, went into the kitchen. When I had closed the door, and followed, with the umbrella in my hand, I found her sitting on the corner of the fender—it was a low iron one, with two flat bars at top to stand plates upon—in the shadow of the boiler, swaying herself backwards and forwards, and chafing her hands upon her knees like a person in pain.

Quite alarmed at being the only recipient of this untimely visit, and the only spectator of this portentous behaviour, I exclaimed again, 'Pray tell me, Miss Mowcher, what is the matter! are you ill?'

'My dear young soul,' returned Miss Mowcher, squeezing her hands upon her heart one over the other. 'I am ill here, I am very ill. To think that it should come to this, when I might have known it and perhaps prevented it, if I hadn't been a thoughtless fool!'

Again her large bonnet (very disproportionate to the figure) went backwards and forwards, in her swaying of her little body to and fro; while a most gigantic bonnet rocked, in unison with it, upon the wall.

'I am surprised,' I began, 'to see you so distressed and serious'-when she interrupted me.

'Yes, it's always so!' she said. 'They are all surprised, these inconsiderate young people, fairly and full grown, to see any natural feeling in a little thing like me! They make a plaything of me, use me for their amusement, throw me away when they are tired, and wonder that I feel more than a toy horse or a wooden soldier! Yes, yes, that's the way. The old way!'

'It may be, with others,' I returned, 'but I do assure you it is not with me. Perhaps I ought not to be at all surprised to see you as you are now: I know so little of you. I said, without consideration, what I thought.'

'What can I do?' returned the little woman, standing up, and holding out her arms to show herself. 'See! What I am, my father was; and my sister is; and my brother is. I have worked for sister and brother these many years—hard, Mr. Copperfield—all day. I must live. I do no harm. If there are people so unreflecting or so cruel, as to make a jest of me, what is left for me to do but to make a jest of myself, them, and everything? If I do so, for the time, whose fault is that? Mine?'

No. Not Miss Mowcher's, I perceived.

'If I had shown myself a sensitive dwarf to your false friend,' pursued the little woman, shaking her head at me, with reproachful earnestness, 'how much of his help or good will do you think I should ever have had? If little Mowcher (who had no hand, young gentleman, in the making of herself) addressed herself to him, or the like of him, because of her misfortunes, when do you suppose her small voice would have been heard? Little Mowcher would have as much need to live, if she was the bitterest and dullest of pigmies; but she couldn't do it. No. She might whistle for her bread and butter till she died of Air.'

Miss Mowcher sat down on the fender again, and took out her handkerchief, and wiped her eyes.

'Be thankful for me, if you have a kind heart, as I think you have,' she said, 'that while I know well what I am, I can be cheerful and endure it all. I am thankful for myself, at any rate, that I can find my tiny way through the world, without being beholden to anyone; and that in return for all that is thrown at me, in folly or vanity, as I go along, I can throw bubbles back. If I don't brood over all I want, it is the better for me, and not the worse for anyone. If I am a plaything for you giants, be gentle with me.'

Miss Mowcher replaced her handkerchief in her pocket, looking at me with very intent expression all the while, and pursued:

'I saw you in the street just now. You may suppose I am not able to walk as fast as you, with my short legs and short breath, and I couldn't overtake you; but I guessed where you came, and came after you. I have been here before, today, but the good woman wasn't at home.'

'Do you know her?' I demanded.

'I know of her, and about her,' she replied, 'from Omer and Joram. I was there at seven o'clock this morning. Do you remember what Steerforth said to me about this unfortunate girl, that time when I saw you both at the inn?'

The great bonnet on Miss Mowcher's head, and the greater bonnet on the wall, began to go backwards and forwards again when she asked this question.

I remembered very well what she referred to, having had it in my thoughts many times that day. I told her so.

'May the Father of all Evil confound him,' said the little woman, holding up her forefinger between me and her sparkling eyes, 'and ten times more confound that wicked servant; but I believed it was YOU who had a boyish passion for her!'

'I?' I repeated.

'Child, child! In the name of blind ill-fortune,' cried Miss Mowcher, wringing her hands impatiently, as she went to and fro again upon the fender, 'why did you praise her so, and blush, and look disturbed?'

I could not conceal from myself that I had done this, though for a reason very different from her supposition.

'What did I know?' said Miss Mowcher, taking out her handkerchief again, and giving one little stamp on the ground whenever, at short intervals, she applied it to her eyes with both hands at once. 'He was crossing you and wheedling you, I saw; and you were soft wax in his hands, I saw. Had I left the room a minute, when his man told me that "Young

Innocence" (so he called you, and you may call him "Old Guilt" all the days of your life) had set his heart upon her, and she was giddy and liked him, but his master was resolved that no harm should come of it—more for your sake than for hers—and that that was their business here? How could I BUT believe him? I saw Steerforth soothe and please you by his praise of her! You were the first to mention her name. You owned to an old admiration of her. You were hot and cold, and red and white, all at once when I spoke to you of her. What could I think—what DID I think—but that you were a young libertine in everything but experience, and had fallen into hands that had experience enough, and could manage you (having the fancy) for your own good? Oh! oh! oh! They were afraid of my finding out the truth,' exclaimed Miss Mowcher, getting off the fender, and trotting up and down the kitchen with her two short arms distressfully lifted up, 'because I am a sharp little thing—I need be, to get through the world at all!—and they deceived me altogether, and I gave the poor unfortunate girl a letter, which I fully believe was the beginning of her ever speaking to Littimer, who was left behind on purpose!'

I stood amazed at the revelation of all this perfidy, looking at Miss Mowcher as she walked up and down the kitchen until she was out of breath: when she sat upon the fender again, and, drying her face with her handkerchief, shook her head for a long time, without otherwise moving, and without breaking silence.

'My country rounds,' she added at length, 'brought me to Norwich, Mr. Copperfield, the night before last. What I happened to find there, about their secret way of coming and going, without you—which was strange—led to my suspecting something wrong. I got into the coach from London last night, as it came through Norwich, and was here this morning. Oh, oh, oh! too late!'

Poor little Mowcher turned so chilly after all her crying and fretting, that she turned round on the fender, putting her poor little wet feet in among the ashes to warm them, and sat looking at the fire, like a large doll. I sat in a chair on the other side of the hearth, lost in unhappy reflections, and looking at the fire too, and sometimes at her.

'I must go,' she said at last, rising as she spoke. 'It's late. You don't mistrust me?'

Meeting her sharp glance, which was as sharp as ever when she asked me, I could not on that short challenge answer no, quite frankly.

'Come!' said she, accepting the offer of my hand to help her over the fender, and looking wistfully up into my face, 'you know you wouldn't mistrust me, if I was a full-sized woman!'

I felt that there was much truth in this; and I felt rather ashamed of myself.

'You are a young man,' she said, nodding. 'Take a word of advice, even from three foot nothing. Try not to associate bodily defects with mental, my good friend, except for a solid reason.'

She had got over the fender now, and I had got over my suspicion. I told her that I believed she had given me a faithful account of herself, and that we had both been hapless instruments in designing hands. She thanked me, and said I was a good fellow.

'Now, mind!' she exclaimed, turning back on her way to the door, and looking shrewdly at me, with her forefinger up again.—'I have some reason to suspect, from what I have heard—my ears are always open; I can't afford to spare what powers I have—that they are gone abroad. But if ever they return, if ever any one of them returns, while I am alive, I am more likely than another, going about as I do, to find it out soon. Whatever I know, you shall know. If ever I can do anything to serve the poor betrayed girl, I will do it faithfully, please Heaven! And Littimer had better have a bloodhound at his back, than little Mowcher!'

I placed implicit faith in this last statement, when I marked the look with which it was accompanied.

'Trust me no more, but trust me no less, than you would trust a full-sized woman,' said the little creature, touching me appealingly on the wrist. 'If ever you see me again, unlike what I am now, and like what I was when you first saw me, observe what company I am in. Call to mind that I am a very helpless and defenceless little thing. Think of me at home with my brother like myself and sister like myself, when my day's work is done. Perhaps you won't, then, be very hard upon me, or surprised if I can be distressed and serious. Good night!'

I gave Miss Mowcher my hand, with a very different opinion of her from that which I had hitherto entertained, and opened the door to let her out. It was not a trifling business to get the great umbrella up, and properly balanced in her grasp; but at last I successfully accomplished this, and saw it go bobbing down the street through the rain, without the least appearance of having anybody underneath it, except when a heavier fall than usual from some over-charged water-spout sent it toppling over, on one side, and discovered Miss Mowcher struggling violently to get it right. After making one or two sallies to her relief, which were rendered futile by the umbrella's hopping on again, like an immense bird, before I could reach it, I came in, went to bed, and slept till morning.

In the morning I was joined by Mr. Peggotty and by my old nurse, and we went at an early hour to the coach office, where Mrs. Gummidge and Ham were waiting to take leave of us.

'Mas'r Davy,' Ham whispered, drawing me aside, while Mr. Peggotty was stowing his bag among the luggage, 'his life is quite broke up. He doen't know wheer he's going; he doen't know—what's afore him; he's bound upon a voyage that'll last, on and off, all the rest of his days, take my wured for 't, unless he finds what he's a seeking of. I am sure you'll be a friend to him, Mas'r Davy?'

'Trust me, I will indeed,' said I, shaking hands with Ham earnestly.

'Thankee. Thankee, very kind, sir. One thing furder. I'm in good employ, you know, Mas'r Davy, and I han't no way now of spending what I gets. Money's of no use to me no more, except to live. If you can lay it out for him, I shall do my work with a better art. Though as to that, sir,' and he spoke very steadily and mildly, 'you're not to think but I shall work at all times, like a man, and act the best that lays in my power!'

I told him I was well convinced of it; and I hinted that I hoped the time might even come, when he would cease to lead the lonely life he naturally contemplated now.

'No, sir,' he said, shaking his head, 'all that's past and over with me, sir. No one can never fill the place that's empty. But you'll bear in mind about the money, as theer's at all times some laying by for him?'

Reminding him of the fact, that Mr. Peggotty derived a steady, though certainly a very moderate income from the bequest of his late brother-in-law, I promised to do so. We then took leave of each other. I cannot leave him even now, without remembering with a pang, at once his modest fortitude and his great sorrow.

As to Mrs. Gummidge, if I were to endeavour to describe how she ran down the street by the side of the coach, seeing nothing but Mr. Peggotty on the roof, through the tears she tried to repress, and dashing herself against the people who were coming in the opposite direction, I should enter on a task of some difficulty. Therefore I had better leave her sitting on a baker's door-step, out of breath, with no shape at all remaining in her bonnet, and one of her shoes off, lying on the pavement at a considerable distance.

When we got to our journey's end, our first pursuit was to look about for a little lodging for Peggotty, where her brother could have a bed. We were so fortunate as to find one, of a very clean and cheap description, over a chandler's shop, only two streets removed from me. When we had engaged this domicile, I bought some cold meat at an eating-house, and took my fellow-travellers home to tea; a proceeding, I regret to state, which did not meet with Mrs. Crupp's approval, but quite the contrary. I ought to observe, however, in explanation of that lady's state of mind, that she was much offended by Peggotty's tucking up her widow's gown before she had been ten minutes in the place, and setting to work to dust my bedroom. This Mrs. Crupp regarded in the light of a liberty, and a liberty, she said, was a thing she never allowed.

Mr. Peggotty had made a communication to me on the way to London for which I was not unprepared. It was, that he purposed first seeing Mrs. Steerforth. As I felt bound to assist him in this, and also to mediate between them; with the view of sparing the mother's feelings as much as possible, I wrote to her that night. I told her as mildly as I could what his wrong was, and what my own share in his injury. I said he was a man in very common life, but of a most gentle and upright character; and that I ventured to express a hope that she would not refuse to see him in his heavy trouble. I mentioned two o'clock in the afternoon as the hour of our coming, and I sent the letter myself by the first coach in the morning.

At the appointed time, we stood at the door—the door of that house where I had been, a few days since, so happy: where my youthful confidence and warmth of heart had been yielded up so freely: which was closed against me henceforth: which was now a waste, a ruin.

No Littimer appeared. The pleasanter face which had replaced his, on the occasion of my last visit, answered to our summons, and went before us to the drawing-room. Mrs. Steerforth was sitting there. Rosa Dartle glided, as we went in, from another part of the room and stood behind her chair.

I saw, directly, in his mother's face, that she knew from himself what he had done. It was very pale; and bore the traces of deeper emotion than my letter alone, weakened by the doubts her fondness would have raised upon it, would have been likely to create. I thought her more like him than ever I had thought her; and I felt, rather than saw, that the resemblance was not lost on my companion.

She sat upright in her arm-chair, with a stately, immovable, passionless air, that it seemed as if nothing could disturb. She looked very steadfastly at Mr. Peggotty when he stood before her; and he looked quite as steadfastly at her. Rosa Dartle's keen glance comprehended all of us. For some moments not a word was spoken.

She motioned to Mr. Peggotty to be seated. He said, in a low voice, 'I shouldn't feel it nat'ral, ma'am, to sit down in this house. I'd sooner stand.' And this was succeeded by another silence, which she broke thus:

'I know, with deep regret, what has brought you here. What do you want of me? What do you ask me to do?'

He put his hat under his arm, and feeling in his breast for Emily's letter, took it out, unfolded it, and gave it to her. 'Please to read that, ma'am. That's my niece's hand!'

She read it, in the same stately and impassive way,—untouched by its contents, as far as I could see,—and returned it to him.

'"Unless he brings me back a lady,"' said Mr. Peggotty, tracing out that part with his finger. 'I come to know, ma'am, whether he will keep his wured?'

'No,' she returned.

'Why not?' said Mr. Peggotty.

'It is impossible. He would disgrace himself. You cannot fail to know that she is far below him.'

'Raise her up!' said Mr. Peggotty.

'She is uneducated and ignorant.'

'Maybe she's not; maybe she is,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'I think not, ma'am; but I'm no judge of them things. Teach her better!'

'Since you oblige me to speak more plainly, which I am very unwilling to do, her humble connexions would render such a thing impossible, if nothing else did.'

'Hark to this, ma'am,' he returned, slowly and quietly. 'You know what it is to love your child. So do I. If she was a hundred times my child, I couldn't love her more. You doen't know what it is to lose your child. I do. All the heaps of riches in the wureld would be nowt to me (if they was mine) to buy her back! But, save her from this disgrace, and she shall never be disgraced by us. Not one of us that she's growed up among, not one of us that's lived along with her and had her for their all in all, these many year, will ever look upon her pritty face again. We'll be content to let her be; we'll be content to think of her, far off, as if she was underneath another sun and sky; we'll be content to trust her to her husband,—to her little children, p'raps,—and bide the time when all of us shall be alike in quality afore our God!'

The rugged eloquence with which he spoke, was not devoid of all effect. She still preserved her proud manner, but there was a touch of softness in her voice, as she answered:

'I justify nothing. I make no counter-accusations. But I am sorry to repeat, it is impossible. Such a marriage would irretrievably blight my son's career, and ruin his prospects. Nothing is more certain than that it never can take place, and never will. If there is any other compensation—'

'I am looking at the likeness of the face,' interrupted Mr. Peggotty, with a steady but a kindling eye, 'that has looked at me, in my home, at my fireside, in my boat—wheer not?—-smiling and friendly, when it was so treacherous, that I go half wild when I think of it. If the likeness of that face don't turn to burning fire, at the thought of offering money to me for my child's blight and ruin, it's as bad. I doen't know, being a lady's, but what it's worse.'

She changed now, in a moment. An angry flush overspread her features; and she said, in an intolerant manner, grasping the arm-chair tightly with her hands:

'What compensation can you make to ME for opening such a pit between me and my son? What is your love to mine? What is your separation to ours?'

Miss Dartle softly touched her, and bent down her head to whisper, but she would not hear a word.

'No, Rosa, not a word! Let the man listen to what I say! My son, who has been the object of my life, to whom its every thought has been devoted, whom I have gratified from a child in every wish, from whom I have had no separate existence since his birth,—to take up in a moment with a miserable girl, and avoid me! To repay my confidence with systematic deception, for her sake, and quit me for her! To set this wretched fancy, against his mother's claims upon his duty, love, respect, gratitude—claims that every day and hour of his life should have strengthened into ties that nothing could be proof against! Is this no injury?'

Again Rosa Dartle tried to soothe her; again ineffectually.

'I say, Rosa, not a word! If he can stake his all upon the lightest object, I can stake my all upon a greater purpose. Let him go where he will, with the means that my love has secured to him! Does he think to reduce me by long absence? He knows his mother very little if he does. Let him put away his whim now, and he is welcome back. Let him not put her away now, and he never shall come near me, living or dying, while I can raise my hand to make a sign against it, unless, being rid of her for ever, he comes humbly to me and begs for my forgiveness. This is my right. This is the acknowledgement I WILL HAVE. This is the separation that there is between us! And is this,' she added, looking at her visitor with the proud intolerant air with which she had begun, 'no injury?'

While I heard and saw the mother as she said these words, I seemed to hear and see the son, defying them. All that I had ever seen in him of an unyielding, wilful spirit, I saw in her. All the understanding that I had now of his misdirected energy, became an understanding of her character too, and a perception that it was, in its strongest springs, the same.

She now observed to me, aloud, resuming her former restraint, that it was useless to hear more, or to say more, and that she begged to put an end to the interview. She rose with an air of dignity to leave the room, when Mr. Peggotty signified that it was needless.

'Doen't fear me being any hindrance to you, I have no more to say, ma'am,' he remarked, as he moved towards the door. 'I come beer with no hope, and I take away no hope. I have done what I thowt should be done, but I never looked fur any good to come of my stan'ning where I do. This has been too evil a house fur me and mine, fur me to be in my right senses and expect it.'

With this, we departed; leaving her standing by her elbow-chair, a picture of a noble presence and a handsome face.

We had, on our way out, to cross a paved hall, with glass sides and roof, over which a vine was trained. Its leaves and shoots were green then, and the day being sunny, a pair of glass doors leading to the garden were thrown open. Rosa Dartle, entering this way with a noiseless step, when we were close to them, addressed herself to me:

'You do well,' she said, 'indeed, to bring this fellow here!'

Such a concentration of rage and scorn as darkened her face, and flashed in her jet-black eyes, I could not have thought compressible even into that face. The scar made by the hammer was, as usual in this excited state of her features, strongly marked. When the throbbing I had seen before, came into it as I looked at her, she absolutely lifted up her hand, and struck it.

'This is a fellow,' she said, 'to champion and bring here, is he not? You are a true man!'

'Miss Dartle,' I returned, 'you are surely not so unjust as to condemn ME!'

'Why do you bring division between these two mad creatures?' she returned. 'Don't you know that they are both mad with their own self-will and pride?'

'Is it my doing?' I returned.

'Is it your doing!' she retorted. 'Why do you bring this man here?'

'He is a deeply-injured man, Miss Dartle,' I replied. 'You may not know it.'

'I know that James Steerforth,' she said, with her hand on her bosom, as if to prevent the storm that was raging there, from being loud, 'has a false, corrupt heart, and is a traitor. But what need I know or care about this fellow, and his common niece?'

'Miss Dartle,' I returned, 'you deepen the injury. It is sufficient already. I will only say, at parting, that you do him a great wrong.'

'I do him no wrong,' she returned. 'They are a depraved, worthless set. I would have her whipped!'

Mr. Peggotty passed on, without a word, and went out at the door.

'Oh, shame, Miss Dartle! shame!' I said indignantly. 'How can you bear to trample on his undeserved affliction!'

'I would trample on them all,' she answered. 'I would have his house pulled down. I would have her branded on the face, dressed in rags, and cast out in the streets to starve. If I had the power to sit in judgement on her, I would see it done. See it done? I would do it! I detest her. If I ever could reproach her with her infamous condition, I would go anywhere to do so. If I could hunt her to her grave, I would. If there was any word of comfort that would be a solace to her in her dying hour, and only I possessed it, I wouldn't part with it for Life itself.'

The mere vehemence of her words can convey, I am sensible, but a weak impression of the passion by which she was possessed, and which made itself articulate in her whole figure, though her voice, instead of being raised, was lower than usual. No description I could give of her would do justice to my recollection of her, or to her entire deliverance of herself to her anger. I have seen passion in many forms, but I have never seen it in such a form as that.

When I joined Mr. Peggotty, he was walking slowly and thoughtfully down the hill. He told me, as soon as I came up with him, that having now discharged his mind of what he had purposed doing in London, he meant 'to set out on his travels', that night. I asked him where he meant to go? He only answered, 'I'm a going, sir, to seek my niece.'

We went back to the little lodging over the chandler's shop, and there I found an opportunity of repeating to Peggotty what he had said to me. She informed me, in return, that he had said the same to her that morning. She knew no more than I did, where he was going, but she thought he had some project shaped out in his mind.

I did not like to leave him, under such circumstances, and we all three dined together off a beefsteak pie—which was one of the many good things for which Peggotty was famous—and which was curiously flavoured on this occasion, I recollect well, by a miscellaneous taste of tea, coffee, butter, bacon, cheese, new loaves, firewood, candles, and walnut ketchup, continually ascending from the shop. After dinner we sat for an hour or so near the window, without talking much; and then Mr. Peggotty got up, and brought his oilskin bag and his stout stick, and laid them on the table.

He accepted, from his sister's stock of ready money, a small sum on account of his legacy; barely enough, I should have thought, to keep him for a month. He promised to communicate with me, when anything befell him; and he slung his bag about him, took his hat and stick, and bade us both 'Good-bye!'

'All good attend you, dear old woman,' he said, embracing Peggotty, 'and you too, Mas'r Davy!' shaking hands with me. 'I'm a-going to seek her, fur and wide. If she should come home while I'm away—but ah, that ain't like to be!—or if I should bring her back, my meaning is, that she and me shall live and die where no one can't reproach her. If any hurt should come to me, remember that the last words I left for her was, "My unchanged love is with my darling child, and I forgive her!"'

He said this solemnly, bare-headed; then, putting on his hat, he went down the stairs, and away. We followed to the door. It was a warm, dusty evening, just the time when, in the great main thoroughfare out of which that by-way turned, there was a temporary lull in the eternal tread of feet upon the pavement, and a strong red sunshine. He turned, alone, at the corner of our shady street, into a glow of light, in which we lost him.

Rarely did that hour of the evening come, rarely did I wake at night, rarely did I look up at the moon, or stars, or watch the falling rain, or hear the wind, but I thought of his solitary figure toiling on, poor pilgrim, and recalled the words:

'I'm a going to seek her, fur and wide. If any hurt should come to me, remember that the last words I left for her was, "My unchanged love is with my darling child, and I forgive her!"'

CHAPTER 33. BLISSFUL

All this time, I had gone on loving Dora, harder than ever. Her idea was my refuge in disappointment and distress, and made some amends to me, even for the loss of my friend. The more I pitied myself, or pitied others, the more I sought for consolation in the image of Dora. The greater the accumulation of deceit and trouble in the world, the brighter and the purer shone the star of Dora high above the world. I don't think I had any definite idea where Dora came from, or in what degree she was related to a higher order of beings; but I am quite sure I should have scouted the notion of her being simply human, like any other young lady, with indignation and contempt.

If I may so express it, I was steeped in Dora. I was not merely over head and ears in love with her, but I was saturated through and through. Enough love might have been wrung out of me, metaphorically speaking, to drown anybody in; and yet there would have remained enough within me, and all over me, to pervade my entire existence.

The first thing I did, on my own account, when I came back, was to take a night-walk to Norwood, and, like the subject of a venerable riddle of my childhood, to go 'round and round the house, without ever touching the house', thinking about Dora. I believe the theme of this incomprehensible conundrum was the moon. No matter what it was, I, the moon-struck slave of Dora, perambulated round and round the house and garden for two hours, looking through crevices in the palings, getting my chin by dint of violent exertion above the rusty nails on the top, blowing kisses at the lights in the windows, and romantically calling on the night, at intervals, to shield my Dora—I don't exactly know what from, I suppose from fire. Perhaps from mice, to which she had a great objection.

My love was so much in my mind and it was so natural to me to confide in Peggotty, when I found her again by my side of an evening with the old set of industrial implements, busily making the tour of my wardrobe, that I imparted to her, in a sufficiently roundabout way, my great secret. Peggotty was strongly interested, but I could not get her into my view of the case at all. She was audaciously prejudiced in my favour, and quite unable to understand why I should have any misgivings, or be low-spirited about it.

'The young lady might think herself well off,' she observed, 'to have such a beau. And as to her Pa,' she said, 'what did the gentleman expect, for gracious sake!'

I observed, however, that Mr. Spenlow's proctorial gown and stiff cravat took Peggotty down a little, and inspired her with a greater reverence for the man who was gradually becoming more and more etherealized in my eyes every day, and about whom a reflected radiance seemed to me to beam when he sat erect in Court among his papers, like a little lighthouse in a sea of stationery. And by the by, it used to be uncommonly strange to me to consider, I remember, as I sat in Court too, how those dim old judges and doctors wouldn't have cared for Dora, if they had known her; how they wouldn't have gone out of their senses with rapture, if marriage with Dora had been proposed to them; how Dora might have sung, and played upon that glorified guitar, until she led me to the verge of madness, yet not have tempted one of those slow-goers an inch out of his road!

I despised them, to a man. Frozen-out old gardeners in the flower-beds of the heart, I took a personal offence against them all. The Bench was nothing to me but an insensible blunderer. The Bar had no more tenderness or poetry in it, than the bar of a public-house.

Taking the management of Peggotty's affairs into my own hands, with no little pride, I proved the will, and came to a settlement with the Legacy Duty-office, and took her to the Bank, and soon got everything into an orderly train. We varied the legal character of these proceedings by going to see some perspiring Wax-work, in Fleet Street (melted, I should hope, these twenty years); and by visiting Miss Linwood's Exhibition, which I remember as a Mausoleum of needlework, favourable to self-examination and repentance; and by inspecting the Tower of London; and going to the top of St. Paul's. All these wonders afforded Peggotty as much pleasure as she was able to enjoy, under existing circumstances: except, I think, St. Paul's, which, from her long attachment to her work-box, became a rival of the picture on the lid, and was, in some particulars, vanquished, she considered, by that work of art.

Peggotty's business, which was what we used to call 'common-form business' in the Commons (and very light and lucrative the common-form business was), being settled, I took her down to the office one morning to pay her bill. Mr. Spenlow had stepped out, old Tiffey said, to get a gentleman sworn for a marriage licence; but as I knew he would be back directly, our place lying close to the Surrogate's, and to the Vicar-General's office too, I told Peggotty to wait.

We were a little like undertakers, in the Commons, as regarded Probate transactions; generally making it a rule to look more or less cut up, when we had to deal with clients in mourning. In a similar feeling of delicacy, we were always blithe and light-hearted with the licence clients. Therefore I hinted to Peggotty that she would find Mr. Spenlow much recovered from the shock of Mr. Barkis's decease; and indeed he came in like a bridegroom.

But neither Peggotty nor I had eyes for him, when we saw, in company with him, Mr. Murdstone. He was very little changed. His hair looked as thick, and was certainly as black, as ever; and his glance was as little to be trusted as of old.

'Ah, Copperfield?' said Mr. Spenlow. 'You know this gentleman, I believe?'

I made my gentleman a distant bow, and Peggotty barely recognized him. He was, at first, somewhat disconcerted to meet us two together; but quickly decided what to do, and came up to me.

'I hope,' he said, 'that you are doing well?'

'It can hardly be interesting to you,' said I. 'Yes, if you wish to know.'

We looked at each other, and he addressed himself to Peggotty.

'And you,' said he. 'I am sorry to observe that you have lost your husband.'

'It's not the first loss I have had in my life, Mr. Murdstone,' replied Peggotty, trembling from head to foot. 'I am glad to hope that there is nobody to blame for this one,—nobody to answer for it.'

'Ha!' said he; 'that's a comfortable reflection. You have done your duty?'

'I have not worn anybody's life away,' said Peggotty, 'I am thankful to think! No, Mr. Murdstone, I have not worrited and frightened any sweet creetur to an early grave!'

He eyed her gloomily—remorsefully I thought—for an instant; and said, turning his head towards me, but looking at my feet instead of my face:

'We are not likely to encounter soon again;—a source of satisfaction to us both, no doubt, for such meetings as this can never be agreeable. I do not expect that you, who always rebelled against my just authority, exerted for your benefit and reformation, should owe me any good-will now. There is an antipathy between us—'

'An old one, I believe?' said I, interrupting him.

He smiled, and shot as evil a glance at me as could come from his dark eyes.

'It rankled in your baby breast,' he said. 'It embittered the life of your poor mother. You are right. I hope you may do better, yet; I hope you may correct yourself.'

Here he ended the dialogue, which had been carried on in a low voice, in a corner of the outer office, by passing into Mr. Spenlow's room, and saying aloud, in his smoothest manner:

'Gentlemen of Mr. Spenlow's profession are accustomed to family differences, and know how complicated and difficult they always are!' With that, he paid the money for his licence; and, receiving it neatly folded from Mr. Spenlow, together with a shake of the hand, and a polite wish for his happiness and the lady's, went out of the office.

I might have had more difficulty in constraining myself to be silent under his words, if I had had less difficulty in impressing upon Peggotty (who was only angry on my account, good creature!) that we were not in a place for recrimination, and that I besought her to hold her peace. She was so unusually roused, that I was glad to compound for an affectionate hug, elicited by this revival in her mind of our old injuries, and to make the best I could of it, before Mr. Spenlow and the clerks.

Mr. Spenlow did not appear to know what the connexion between Mr. Murdstone and myself was; which I was glad of, for I could not bear to acknowledge him, even in my own breast, remembering what I did of the history of my poor mother. Mr. Spenlow seemed to think, if he thought anything about the matter, that my aunt was the leader of the state party in our family, and that there was a rebel party commanded by somebody else—so I gathered at least from what he said, while we were waiting for Mr. Tiffey to make out Peggotty's bill of costs.

'Miss Trotwood,' he remarked, 'is very firm, no doubt, and not likely to give way to opposition. I have an admiration for her character, and I may congratulate you, Copperfield, on being on the right side. Differences between relations are much to be deplored—but they are extremely general—and the great thing is, to be on the right side': meaning, I take it, on the side of the moneyed interest.

'Rather a good marriage this, I believe?' said Mr. Spenlow.

I explained that I knew nothing about it.

'Indeed!' he said. 'Speaking from the few words Mr. Murdstone dropped—as a man frequently does on these occasions—and from what Miss Murdstone let fall, I should say it was rather a good marriage.'

'Do you mean that there is money, sir?' I asked.

'Yes,' said Mr. Spenlow, 'I understand there's money. Beauty too, I am told.'

'Indeed! Is his new wife young?'

'Just of age,' said Mr. Spenlow. 'So lately, that I should think they had been waiting for that.'

'Lord deliver her!' said Peggotty. So very emphatically and unexpectedly, that we were all three discomposed; until Tiffey came in with the bill.

Old Tiffey soon appeared, however, and handed it to Mr. Spenlow, to look over. Mr. Spenlow, settling his chin in his cravat and rubbing it softly, went over the items with a deprecatory air—as if it were all Jorkins's doing—and handed it back to Tiffey with a bland sigh.

'Yes,' he said. 'That's right. Quite right. I should have been extremely happy, Copperfield, to have limited these charges to the actual expenditure out of pocket, but it is an irksome incident in my professional life, that I am not at liberty to consult my own wishes. I have a partner—Mr. Jorkins.'

As he said this with a gentle melancholy, which was the next thing to making no charge at all, I expressed my acknowledgements on Peggotty's behalf, and paid Tiffey in banknotes. Peggotty then retired to her lodging, and Mr. Spenlow and I went into Court, where we had a divorce-suit coming on, under an ingenious little statute (repealed now, I believe, but in virtue of which I have seen several marriages annulled), of which the merits were these. The husband, whose name was Thomas Benjamin, had taken out his marriage licence as Thomas only; suppressing the Benjamin, in case he should not find himself as comfortable as he expected. NOT finding himself as comfortable as he expected, or being a little fatigued with his wife, poor fellow, he now came forward, by a friend, after being married a year or two, and declared that his name was Thomas Benjamin, and therefore he was not married at all. Which the Court confirmed, to his great satisfaction.

I must say that I had my doubts about the strict justice of this, and was not even frightened out of them by the bushel of wheat which reconciles all anomalies. But Mr. Spenlow argued the matter with me. He said, Look at the world, there was good and evil in that; look at the ecclesiastical law, there was good and evil in THAT. It was all part of a system. Very good. There you were!

I had not the hardihood to suggest to Dora's father that possibly we might even improve the world a little, if we got up early in the morning, and took off our coats to the work; but I confessed that I thought we might improve the Commons. Mr. Spenlow replied that he would particularly advise me to dismiss that idea from my mind, as not being worthy of my gentlemanly character; but that he would be glad to hear from me of what improvement I thought the Commons susceptible?

Taking that part of the Commons which happened to be nearest to us—for our man was unmarried by this time, and we were out of Court, and strolling past the Prerogative Office—I submitted that I thought the Prerogative Office rather a queerly managed institution. Mr. Spenlow inquired in what respect? I replied, with all due deference to his experience (but with more deference, I am afraid, to his being Dora's father), that perhaps it was a little nonsensical that the Registry of that Court, containing the original wills of all persons leaving effects within the immense province of Canterbury, for three whole centuries, should be an accidental building, never designed for the purpose, leased by the registrars for their Own private emolument, unsafe, not even ascertained to be fire-proof, choked with the important documents it held, and positively, from the roof to the basement, a mercenary speculation of the registrars, who took great fees from the public, and crammed the public's wills away anyhow and anywhere, having no other object than to get rid of them cheaply. That, perhaps, it was a little unreasonable that these registrars in the receipt of profits amounting to eight or nine thousand pounds a year (to say nothing of the profits of the deputy registrars, and clerks of seats), should not be obliged to spend a little of that money, in finding a reasonably safe place for the important documents which all classes of people were compelled to hand over to them, whether they would or no. That, perhaps, it was a little unjust, that all the great offices in this great office should be magnificent sinecures, while the unfortunate working-clerks in the cold dark room upstairs were the worst rewarded, and the least considered men, doing important services, in London. That perhaps it was a little indecent that the principal registrar of all, whose duty it was to find the public, constantly resorting to this place, all needful accommodation, should be an enormous sinecurist in virtue of that post (and might be, besides, a clergyman, a pluralist, the holder of a staff in a cathedral, and what not),—while the public was put to the inconvenience of which we had a specimen every afternoon when the office was busy, and which we knew to be quite monstrous. That, perhaps, in short, this Prerogative Office of the diocese of Canterbury was altogether such a pestilent job, and such a pernicious absurdity, that but for its being squeezed away in a corner of St. Paul's Churchyard, which few people knew, it must have been turned completely inside out, and upside down, long ago.

Mr. Spenlow smiled as I became modestly warm on the subject, and then argued this question with me as he had argued the other. He said, what was it after all? It was a question of feeling. If the public felt that their wills were in safe keeping, and took it for granted that the office was not to be made better, who was the worse for it? Nobody. Who was the better for it? All the Sinecurists. Very well. Then the good predominated. It might not be a perfect system; nothing was perfect; but what he objected to, was, the insertion of the wedge. Under the Prerogative Office, the country had been glorious. Insert the wedge into the Prerogative Office, and the country would cease to be glorious. He considered it the principle of a gentleman to take things as he found them; and he had no doubt the Prerogative Office would last our time. I deferred to his opinion, though I had great doubts of it myself. I find he was right, however; for it has not only lasted to the present moment, but has done so in the teeth of a great parliamentary report made (not too willingly) eighteen years ago, when all these objections of mine were set forth in detail, and when the existing stowage for wills was described as equal to the accumulation of only two years and a half more. What they have done with them since; whether they have lost many, or whether they sell any, now and then, to the butter shops; I don't know. I am glad mine is not there, and I hope it may not go there, yet awhile.

I have set all this down, in my present blissful chapter, because here it comes into its natural place. Mr. Spenlow and I falling into this conversation, prolonged it and our saunter to and fro, until we diverged into general topics. And so it came about, in the end, that Mr. Spenlow told me this day week was Dora's birthday, and he would be glad if I would come down and join a little picnic on the occasion. I went out of my senses immediately; became a mere driveller next day, on receipt of a little lace-edged sheet of note-paper, 'Favoured by papa. To remind'; and passed the intervening period in a state of dotage.

I think I committed every possible absurdity in the way of preparation for this blessed event. I turn hot when I remember the cravat I bought. My boots might be placed in any collection of instruments of torture. I provided, and sent down by the Norwood coach the night before, a delicate little hamper, amounting in itself, I thought, almost to a declaration. There were crackers in it with the tenderest mottoes that could be got for money. At six in the morning, I was in Covent Garden Market, buying a bouquet for Dora. At ten I was on horseback (I hired a gallant grey, for the occasion), with the bouquet in my hat, to keep it fresh, trotting down to Norwood.

I suppose that when I saw Dora in the garden and pretended not to see her, and rode past the house pretending to be anxiously looking for it, I committed two small fooleries which other young gentlemen in my circumstances might have committed—because they came so very natural to me. But oh! when I DID find the house, and DID dismount at the garden-gate, and drag those stony-hearted boots across the lawn to Dora sitting on a garden-seat under a lilac tree, what a spectacle she was, upon that beautiful morning, among the butterflies, in a white chip bonnet and a dress of celestial blue! There was a young lady with her—comparatively stricken in years—almost twenty, I should say. Her name was Miss Mills. And Dora called her Julia. She was the bosom friend of Dora. Happy Miss Mills!

Jip was there, and Jip WOULD bark at me again. When I presented my bouquet, he gnashed his teeth with jealousy. Well he might. If he had the least idea how I adored his mistress, well he might!

'Oh, thank you, Mr. Copperfield! What dear flowers!' said Dora.

I had had an intention of saying (and had been studying the best form of words for three miles) that I thought them beautiful before I saw them so near HER. But I couldn't manage it. She was too bewildering. To see her lay the flowers against her little dimpled chin, was to lose all presence of mind and power of language in a feeble ecstasy. I wonder I didn't say, 'Kill me, if you have a heart, Miss Mills. Let me die here!'

Then Dora held my flowers to Jip to smell. Then Jip growled, and wouldn't smell them. Then Dora laughed, and held them a little closer to Jip, to make him. Then Jip laid hold of a bit of geranium with his teeth, and worried imaginary cats in it. Then Dora beat him, and pouted, and said, 'My poor beautiful flowers!' as compassionately, I thought, as if Jip had laid hold of me. I wished he had!

'You'll be so glad to hear, Mr. Copperfield,' said Dora, 'that that cross Miss Murdstone is not here. She has gone to her brother's marriage, and will be away at least three weeks. Isn't that delightful?'

I said I was sure it must be delightful to her, and all that was delightful to her was delightful to me. Miss Mills, with an air of superior wisdom and benevolence, smiled upon us.

'She is the most disagreeable thing I ever saw,' said Dora. 'You can't believe how ill-tempered and shocking she is, Julia.'

'Yes, I can, my dear!' said Julia.

'YOU can, perhaps, love,' returned Dora, with her hand on julia's. 'Forgive my not excepting you, my dear, at first.'

I learnt, from this, that Miss Mills had had her trials in the course of a chequered existence; and that to these, perhaps, I might refer that wise benignity of manner which I had already noticed. I found, in the course of the day, that this was the case: Miss Mills having been unhappy in a misplaced affection, and being understood to have retired from the world on her awful stock of experience, but still to take a calm interest in the unblighted hopes and loves of youth.

But now Mr. Spenlow came out of the house, and Dora went to him, saying, 'Look, papa, what beautiful flowers!' And Miss Mills smiled thoughtfully, as who should say, 'Ye Mayflies, enjoy your brief existence in the bright morning of life!' And we all walked from the lawn towards the carriage, which was getting ready.

I shall never have such a ride again. I have never had such another. There were only those three, their hamper, my hamper, and the guitar-case, in the phaeton; and, of course, the phaeton was open; and I rode behind it, and Dora sat with her back to the horses, looking towards me. She kept the bouquet close to her on the cushion, and wouldn't allow Jip to sit on that side of her at all, for fear he should crush it. She often carried it in her hand, often refreshed herself with its fragrance. Our eyes at those times often met; and my great astonishment is that I didn't go over the head of my gallant grey into the carriage.

There was dust, I believe. There was a good deal of dust, I believe. I have a faint impression that Mr. Spenlow remonstrated with me for riding in it; but I knew of none. I was sensible of a mist of love and beauty about

Dora, but of nothing else. He stood up sometimes, and asked me what I thought of the prospect. I said it was delightful, and I dare say it was; but it was all Dora to me. The sun shone Dora, and the birds sang Dora. The south wind blew Dora, and the wild flowers in the hedges were all Doras, to a bud. My comfort is, Miss Mills understood me. Miss Mills alone could enter into my feelings thoroughly.

I don't know how long we were going, and to this hour I know as little where we went. Perhaps it was near Guildford. Perhaps some Arabian-night magician, opened up the place for the day, and shut it up for ever when we came away. It was a green spot, on a hill, carpeted with soft turf. There were shady trees, and heather, and, as far as the eye could see, a rich landscape.

It was a trying thing to find people here, waiting for us; and my jealousy, even of the ladies, knew no bounds. But all of my own sex—especially one impostor, three or four years my elder, with a red whisker, on which he established an amount of presumption not to be endured—were my mortal foes.

We all unpacked our baskets, and employed ourselves in getting dinner ready. Red Whisker pretended he could make a salad (which I don't believe), and obtruded himself on public notice. Some of the young ladies washed the lettuces for him, and sliced them under his directions. Dora was among these. I felt that fate had pitted me against this man, and one of us must fall.

Red Whisker made his salad (I wondered how they could eat it. Nothing should have induced ME to touch it!) and voted himself into the charge of the wine-cellar, which he constructed, being an ingenious beast, in the hollow trunk of a tree. By and by, I saw him, with the majority of a lobster on his plate, eating his dinner at the feet of Dora!

I have but an indistinct idea of what happened for some time after this baleful object presented itself to my view. I was very merry, I know; but it was hollow merriment. I attached myself to a young creature in pink, with little eyes, and flirted with her desperately. She received my attentions with favour; but whether on my account solely, or because she had any designs on Red Whisker, I can't say. Dora's health was drunk. When I drank it, I affected to interrupt my conversation for that purpose, and to resume it immediately afterwards. I caught Dora's eye as I bowed to her, and I thought it looked appealing. But it looked at me over the head of Red Whisker, and I was adamant.

The young creature in pink had a mother in green; and I rather think the latter separated us from motives of policy. Howbeit, there was a general breaking up of the party, while the remnants of the dinner were being put away; and I strolled off by myself among the trees, in a raging and remorseful state. I was debating whether I should pretend that I was not well, and fly—I don't know where—upon my gallant grey, when Dora and Miss Mills met me.

'Mr. Copperfield,' said Miss Mills, 'you are dull.'

I begged her pardon. Not at all.

'And Dora,' said Miss Mills, 'YOU are dull.'

Oh dear no! Not in the least.

'Mr. Copperfield and Dora,' said Miss Mills, with an almost venerable air. 'Enough of this. Do not allow a trivial misunderstanding to wither the blossoms of spring, which, once put forth and blighted, cannot be renewed. I speak,' said Miss Mills, 'from experience of the past—the remote, irrevocable past. The gushing fountains which sparkle in the sun, must not be stopped in mere caprice; the oasis in the desert of Sahara must not be plucked up idly.'

I hardly knew what I did, I was burning all over to that extraordinary extent; but I took Dora's little hand and kissed it—and she let me! I kissed Miss Mills's hand; and we all seemed, to my thinking, to go straight up to the seventh heaven. We did not come down again. We stayed up there all the evening. At first we strayed to and fro among the trees: I with Dora's shy arm drawn through mine: and Heaven knows, folly as it all was, it would have been a happy fate to have been struck immortal with those foolish feelings, and have stayed among the trees for ever!

But, much too soon, we heard the others laughing and talking, and calling 'where's Dora?' So we went back, and they wanted Dora to sing. Red Whisker would have got the guitar-case out of the carriage, but Dora told him nobody knew where it was, but I. So Red Whisker was done for in a moment; and I got it, and I unlocked it, and I took the guitar out, and I sat by her, and I held her handkerchief and gloves, and I drank in every note of her dear voice, and she sang to ME who loved her, and all the others might applaud as much as they liked, but they had nothing to do with it!

I was intoxicated with joy. I was afraid it was too happy to be real, and that I should wake in Buckingham Street presently, and hear Mrs. Crupp clinking the teacups in getting breakfast ready. But Dora sang, and others sang, and Miss Mills sang—about the slumbering echoes in the caverns of Memory; as if she were a hundred years old—and the evening came on; and we had tea, with the kettle boiling gipsy-fashion; and I was still as happy as ever.

I was happier than ever when the party broke up, and the other people, defeated Red Whisker and all, went their several ways, and we went ours through the still evening and the dying light, with sweet scents rising up around us. Mr. Spenlow being a little drowsy after the champagne—honour to the soil that grew the grape, to the grape that made the wine, to the sun that ripened it, and to the merchant who adulterated it!—and being fast asleep in a corner of the carriage, I rode by the side and talked to Dora. She admired my horse and patted him—oh, what a dear little hand it looked upon a horse!—and her shawl would not keep right, and now and then I drew it round her with my arm; and I even fancied that Jip began to see how it was, and to understand that he must make up his mind to be friends with me.

That sagacious Miss Mills, too; that amiable, though quite used up, recluse; that little patriarch of something less than twenty, who had done with the world, and mustn't on any account have the slumbering echoes in the caverns of Memory awakened; what a kind thing she did!

'Mr. Copperfield,' said Miss Mills, 'come to this side of the carriage a moment—if you can spare a moment. I want to speak to you.'

Behold me, on my gallant grey, bending at the side of Miss Mills, with my hand upon the carriage door!

'Dora is coming to stay with me. She is coming home with me the day after tomorrow. If you would like to call, I am sure papa would be happy to see you.' What could I do but invoke a silent blessing on Miss Mills's head, and store Miss Mills's address in the securest corner of my memory! What could I do but tell Miss Mills, with grateful looks and fervent words, how much I appreciated her good offices, and what an inestimable value I set upon her friendship!

Then Miss Mills benignantly dismissed me, saying, 'Go back to Dora!' and I went; and Dora leaned out of the carriage to talk to me, and we talked all the rest of the way; and I rode my gallant grey so close to the wheel that

I grazed his near fore leg against it, and 'took the bark off', as his owner told me, 'to the tune of three pun' sivin'—which I paid, and thought extremely cheap for so much joy. What time Miss Mills sat looking at the moon, murmuring verses—and recalling, I suppose, the ancient days when she and earth had anything in common.

Norwood was many miles too near, and we reached it many hours too soon; but Mr. Spenlow came to himself a little short of it, and said, 'You must come in, Copperfield, and rest!' and I consenting, we had sandwiches and wine-and-water. In the light room, Dora blushing looked so lovely, that I could not tear myself away, but sat there staring, in a dream, until the snoring of Mr. Spenlow inspired me with sufficient consciousness to take my leave. So we parted; I riding all the way to London with the farewell touch of Dora's hand still light on mine, recalling every incident and word ten thousand times; lying down in my own bed at last, as enraptured a young noodle as ever was carried out of his five wits by love.

When I awoke next morning, I was resolute to declare my passion to Dora, and know my fate. Happiness or misery was now the question. There was no other question that I knew of in the world, and only Dora could give the answer to it. I passed three days in a luxury of wretchedness, torturing myself by putting every conceivable variety of discouraging construction on all that ever had taken place between Dora and me. At last, arrayed for the purpose at a vast expense, I went to Miss Mills's, fraught with a declaration.

How many times I went up and down the street, and round the square—painfully aware of being a much better answer to the old riddle than the original one—before I could persuade myself to go up the steps and knock, is no matter now. Even when, at last, I had knocked, and was waiting at the door, I had some flurried thought of asking if that were Mr. Blackboy's (in imitation of poor Barkis), begging pardon, and retreating. But I kept my ground.

Mr. Mills was not at home. I did not expect he would be. Nobody wanted HIM. Miss Mills was at home. Miss Mills would do.

I was shown into a room upstairs, where Miss Mills and Dora were. Jip was there. Miss Mills was copying music (I recollect, it was a new song, called 'Affection's Dirge'), and Dora was painting flowers. What were my feelings, when I recognized my own flowers; the identical Covent Garden Market purchase! I cannot say that they were very like, or that they particularly resembled any flowers that have ever come under my observation; but I knew from the paper round them which was accurately copied, what the composition was.

Miss Mills was very glad to see me, and very sorry her papa was not at home: though I thought we all bore that with fortitude. Miss Mills was conversational for a few minutes, and then, laying down her pen upon 'Affection's Dirge', got up, and left the room.

I began to think I would put it off till tomorrow.

'I hope your poor horse was not tired, when he got home at night,' said Dora, lifting up her beautiful eyes. 'It was a long way for him.'

I began to think I would do it today.

'It was a long way for him,' said I, 'for he had nothing to uphold him on the journey.'

'Wasn't he fed, poor thing?' asked Dora.

I began to think I would put it off till tomorrow.

'Ye-yes,' I said, 'he was well taken care of. I mean he had not the unutterable happiness that I had in being so near you.'

Dora bent her head over her drawing and said, after a little while—I had sat, in the interval, in a burning fever, and with my legs in a very rigid state—

'You didn't seem to be sensible of that happiness yourself, at one time of the day.'

I saw now that I was in for it, and it must be done on the spot.

'You didn't care for that happiness in the least,' said Dora, slightly raising her eyebrows, and shaking her head, 'when you were sitting by Miss Kitt.'

Kitt, I should observe, was the name of the creature in pink, with the little eyes.

'Though certainly I don't know why you should,' said Dora, or why you should call it a happiness at all. But of course you don't mean what you say. And I am sure no one doubts your being at liberty to do whatever you like. Jip, you naughty boy, come here!'

I don't know how I did it. I did it in a moment. I intercepted Jip. I had Dora in my arms. I was full of eloquence. I never stopped for a word. I told her how I loved her. I told her I should die without her. I told her that I idolized and worshipped her. Jip barked madly all the time.

When Dora hung her head and cried, and trembled, my eloquence increased so much the more. If she would like me to die for her, she had but to say the word, and I was ready. Life without Dora's love was not a thing to have on any terms. I couldn't bear it, and I wouldn't. I had loved her every minute, day and night, since I first saw her. I loved her at that minute to distraction. I should always love her, every minute, to distraction. Lovers had loved before, and lovers would love again; but no lover had loved, might, could, would, or should ever love, as I loved Dora. The more I raved, the more Jip barked. Each of us, in his own way, got more mad every moment.

Well, well! Dora and I were sitting on the sofa by and by, quiet enough, and Jip was lying in her lap, winking peacefully at me. It was off my mind. I was in a state of perfect rapture. Dora and I were engaged.

I suppose we had some notion that this was to end in marriage. We must have had some, because Dora stipulated that we were never to be married without her papa's consent. But, in our youthful ecstasy, I don't think that we really looked before us or behind us; or had any aspiration beyond the ignorant present. We were to keep our secret from Mr. Spenlow; but I am sure the idea never entered my head, then, that there was anything dishonourable in that.

Miss Mills was more than usually pensive when Dora, going to find her, brought her back;—I apprehend, because there was a tendency in what had passed to awaken the slumbering echoes in the caverns of Memory. But she gave us her blessing, and the assurance of her lasting friendship, and spoke to us, generally, as became a Voice from the Cloister.

What an idle time it was! What an insubstantial, happy, foolish time it was!

When I measured Dora's finger for a ring that was to be made of Forget-me-nots, and when the jeweller, to whom I took the measure, found me out, and laughed over his order-book, and charged me anything he liked for the pretty little toy, with its blue stones—so associated in my remembrance with Dora's hand, that yesterday, when I saw such another, by chance, on the finger of my own daughter, there was a momentary stirring in my heart, like pain!

When I walked about, exalted with my secret, and full of my own interest, and felt the dignity of loving Dora, and of being beloved, so much, that if I had walked the air, I could not have been more above the people not so situated, who were creeping on the earth!

When we had those meetings in the garden of the square, and sat within the dingy summer-house, so happy, that I love the London sparrows to this hour, for nothing else, and see the plumage of the tropics in their smoky feathers! When we had our first great quarrel (within a week of our betrothal), and when Dora sent me back the ring, enclosed in a despairing cocked-hat note, wherein she used the terrible expression that 'our love had begun in folly, and ended in madness!' which dreadful words occasioned me to tear my hair, and cry that all was over!

When, under cover of the night, I flew to Miss Mills, whom I saw by stealth in a back kitchen where there was a mangle, and implored Miss Mills to interpose between us and avert insanity. When Miss Mills undertook the office and returned with Dora, exhorting us, from the pulpit of her own bitter youth, to mutual concession, and the avoidance of the Desert of Sahara!

When we cried, and made it up, and were so blest again, that the back kitchen, mangle and all, changed to Love's own temple, where we arranged a plan of correspondence through Miss Mills, always to comprehend at least one letter on each side every day!

What an idle time! What an insubstantial, happy, foolish time! Of all the times of mine that Time has in his grip, there is none that in one retrospect I can smile at half so much, and think of half so tenderly.

CHAPTER 34. MY AUNT ASTONISHES ME

I wrote to Agnes as soon as Dora and I were engaged. I wrote her a long letter, in which I tried to make her comprehend how blest I was, and what a darling Dora was. I entreated Agnes not to regard this as a thoughtless passion which could ever yield to any other, or had the least resemblance to the boyish fancies that we used to joke about. I assured her that its profundity was quite unfathomable, and expressed my belief that nothing like it had ever been known.

Somehow, as I wrote to Agnes on a fine evening by my open window, and the remembrance of her clear calm eyes and gentle face came stealing over me, it shed such a peaceful influence upon the hurry and agitation in which I had been living lately, and of which my very happiness partook in some degree, that it soothed me into tears. I remember that I sat resting my head upon my hand, when the letter was half done, cherishing a general fancy as if Agnes were one of the elements of my natural home. As if, in the retirement of the house made almost sacred to me by her presence, Dora and I must be happier than anywhere. As if, in love, joy, sorrow, hope, or disappointment; in all emotions; my heart turned naturally there, and found its refuge and best friend.

Of Steerforth I said nothing. I only told her there had been sad grief at Yarmouth, on account of Emily's flight; and that on me it made a double wound, by reason of the circumstances attending it. I knew how quick she always was to divine the truth, and that she would never be the first to breathe his name.

To this letter, I received an answer by return of post. As I read it, I seemed to hear Agnes speaking to me. It was like her cordial voice in my ears. What can I say more!

While I had been away from home lately, Traddles had called twice or thrice. Finding Peggotty within, and being informed by Peggotty (who always volunteered that information to whomsoever would receive it), that she was my old nurse, he had established a good-humoured acquaintance with her, and had stayed to have a little chat with her about me. So Peggotty said; but I am afraid the chat was all on her own side, and of immoderate length, as she was very difficult indeed to stop, God bless her! when she had me for her theme.

This reminds me, not only that I expected Traddles on a certain afternoon of his own appointing, which was now come, but that Mrs. Crupp had resigned everything appertaining to her office (the salary excepted) until Peggotty should cease to present herself. Mrs. Crupp, after holding divers conversations respecting Peggotty, in a very high-pitched voice, on the staircase—with some invisible Familiar it would appear, for corporeally speaking she was quite alone at those times—addressed a letter to me, developing her views. Beginning it with that statement of universal application, which fitted every occurrence of her life, namely, that she was a mother herself, she went on to inform me that she had once seen very different days, but that at all periods of her existence she had had a constitutional objection to spies, intruders, and informers. She named no names, she said; let them the cap fitted, wear it; but spies, intruders, and informers, especially in widders' weeds (this clause was underlined), she had ever accustomed herself to look down upon. If a gentleman was the victim of spies, intruders, and informers (but still naming no names), that was his own pleasure. He had a right to please himself; so let him do. All that she, Mrs. Crupp, stipulated for, was, that she should not be 'brought in contract' with such persons. Therefore she begged to be excused from any further attendance on the top set, until things were as they formerly was, and as they could be wished to be; and further mentioned that her little book would be found upon the breakfast-table every Saturday morning, when she requested an immediate settlement of the same, with the benevolent view of saving trouble 'and an ill-conwenience' to all parties.

After this, Mrs. Crupp confined herself to making pitfalls on the stairs, principally with pitchers, and endeavouring to delude Peggotty into breaking her legs. I found it rather harassing to live in this state of siege, but was too much afraid of Mrs. Crupp to see any way out of it.

'My dear Copperfield,' cried Traddles, punctually appearing at my door, in spite of all these obstacles, 'how do you do?'

'My dear Traddles,' said I, 'I am delighted to see you at last, and very sorry I have not been at home before. But I have been so much engaged—'

'Yes, yes, I know,' said Traddles, 'of course. Yours lives in London, I think.'

'What did you say?'

'She—excuse me—Miss D., you know,' said Traddles, colouring in his great delicacy, 'lives in London, I believe?'

'Oh yes. Near London.'

'Mine, perhaps you recollect,' said Traddles, with a serious look, 'lives down in Devonshire—one of ten. Consequently, I am not so much engaged as you—in that sense.'

'I wonder you can bear,' I returned, 'to see her so seldom.'

'Hah!' said Traddles, thoughtfully. 'It does seem a wonder. I suppose it is, Copperfield, because there is no help for it?'

'I suppose so,' I replied with a smile, and not without a blush. 'And because you have so much constancy and patience, Traddles.'

'Dear me!' said Traddles, considering about it, 'do I strike you in that way, Copperfield? Really I didn't know that I had. But she is such an extraordinarily dear girl herself, that it's possible she may have imparted something of those virtues to me. Now you mention it, Copperfield, I shouldn't wonder at all. I assure you she is always forgetting herself, and taking care of the other nine.'

'Is she the eldest?' I inquired.

'Oh dear, no,' said Traddles. 'The eldest is a Beauty.'

He saw, I suppose, that I could not help smiling at the simplicity of this reply; and added, with a smile upon his own ingenuous face:

'Not, of course, but that my Sophy—pretty name, Copperfield, I always think?'

'Very pretty!' said I.

'Not, of course, but that Sophy is beautiful too in my eyes, and would be one of the dearest girls that ever was, in anybody's eyes (I should think). But when I say the eldest is a Beauty, I mean she really is a—' he seemed to be describing clouds about himself, with both hands: 'Splendid, you know,' said Traddles, energetically. 'Indeed!' said I.

'Oh, I assure you,' said Traddles, 'something very uncommon, indeed! Then, you know, being formed for society and admiration, and not being able to enjoy much of it in consequence of their limited means, she naturally gets a little irritable and exacting, sometimes. Sophy puts her in good humour!'

'Is Sophy the youngest?' I hazarded.

'Oh dear, no!' said Traddles, stroking his chin. 'The two youngest are only nine and ten. Sophy educates 'em.'

'The second daughter, perhaps?' I hazarded.

'No,' said Traddles. 'Sarah's the second. Sarah has something the matter with her spine, poor girl. The malady will wear out by and by, the doctors say, but in the meantime she has to lie down for a twelvemonth. Sophy nurses her. Sophy's the fourth.'

'Is the mother living?' I inquired.

'Oh yes,' said Traddles, 'she is alive. She is a very superior woman indeed, but the damp country is not adapted to her constitution, and—in fact, she has lost the use of her limbs.'

'Dear me!' said I.

'Very sad, is it not?' returned Traddles. 'But in a merely domestic view it is not so bad as it might be, because Sophy takes her place. She is quite as much a mother to her mother, as she is to the other nine.'

I felt the greatest admiration for the virtues of this young lady; and, honestly with the view of doing my best to prevent the good-nature of Traddles from being imposed upon, to the detriment of their joint prospects in life, inquired how Mr. Micawber was?

'He is quite well, Copperfield, thank you,' said Traddles. 'I am not living with him at present.'

'No?'

'No. You see the truth is,' said Traddles, in a whisper, 'he had changed his name to Mortimer, in consequence of his temporary embarrassments; and he don't come out till after dark—and then in spectacles. There was an execution put into our house, for rent. Mrs. Micawber was in such a dreadful state that I really couldn't resist giving my name to that second bill we spoke of here. You may imagine how delightful it was to my feelings, Copperfield, to see the matter settled with it, and Mrs. Micawber recover her spirits.'

'Hum!' said I. 'Not that her happiness was of long duration,' pursued Traddles, 'for, unfortunately, within a week another execution came in. It broke up the establishment. I have been living in a furnished apartment since then, and the Mortimers have been very private indeed. I hope you won't think it selfish, Copperfield, if I mention that the broker carried off my little round table with the marble top, and Sophy's flower-pot and stand?'

'What a hard thing!' I exclaimed indignantly.

'It was a—it was a pull,' said Traddles, with his usual wince at that expression. 'I don't mention it reproachfully, however, but with a motive. The fact is, Copperfield, I was unable to repurchase them at the time of their seizure; in the first place, because the broker, having an idea that I wanted them, ran the price up to an extravagant extent; and, in the second place, because I—hadn't any money. Now, I have kept my eye since, upon the broker's shop,' said Traddles, with a great enjoyment of his mystery, 'which is up at the top of Tottenham Court Road, and, at last, today I find them put out for sale. I have only noticed them from over the way, because if the broker saw me, bless you, he'd ask any price for them! What has occurred to me, having now the money, is, that perhaps you wouldn't object to ask that good nurse of yours to come with me to the shop—I can show it her from round the corner of the next street—and make the best bargain for them, as if they were for herself, that she can!'

The delight with which Traddles propounded this plan to me, and the sense he had of its uncommon artfulness, are among the freshest things in my remembrance.

I told him that my old nurse would be delighted to assist him, and that we would all three take the field together, but on one condition. That condition was, that he should make a solemn resolution to grant no more loans of his name, or anything else, to Mr. Micawber.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Traddles, 'I have already done so, because I begin to feel that I have not only been inconsiderate, but that I have been positively unjust to Sophy. My word being passed to myself, there is no longer any apprehension; but I pledge it to you, too, with the greatest readiness. That first unlucky obligation, I have paid. I have no doubt Mr. Micawber would have paid it if he could, but he could not. One thing I ought to mention, which I like very much in Mr. Micawber, Copperfield. It refers to the second obligation, which is not yet due. He don't tell me that it is provided for, but he says it WILL BE. Now, I think there is something very fair and honest about that!'

I was unwilling to damp my good friend's confidence, and therefore assented. After a little further conversation, we went round to the chandler's shop, to enlist Peggotty; Traddles declining to pass the evening with me, both because he endured the liveliest apprehensions that his property would be bought by somebody else before he could re-purchase it, and because it was the evening he always devoted to writing to the dearest girl in the world.

I never shall forget him peeping round the corner of the street in Tottenham Court Road, while Peggotty was bargaining for the precious articles; or his agitation when she came slowly towards us after vainly offering a price, and was hailed by the relenting broker, and went back again. The end of the negotiation was, that she bought the property on tolerably easy terms, and Traddles was transported with pleasure.

'I am very much obliged to you, indeed,' said Traddles, on hearing it was to be sent to where he lived, that night. 'If I might ask one other favour, I hope you would not think it absurd, Copperfield?'

I said beforehand, certainly not.

'Then if you WOULD be good enough,' said Traddles to Peggotty, 'to get the flower-pot now, I think I should like (it being Sophy's, Copperfield) to carry it home myself!'

Peggotty was glad to get it for him, and he overwhelmed her with thanks, and went his way up Tottenham Court Road, carrying the flower-pot affectionately in his arms, with one of the most delighted expressions of countenance I ever saw.

We then turned back towards my chambers. As the shops had charms for Peggotty which I never knew them possess in the same degree for anybody else, I sauntered easily along, amused by her staring in at the windows, and waiting for her as often as she chose. We were thus a good while in getting to the Adelphi.

On our way upstairs, I called her attention to the sudden disappearance of Mrs. Crupp's pitfalls, and also to the prints of recent footsteps. We were both very much surprised, coming higher up, to find my outer door standing open (which I had shut) and to hear voices inside.

We looked at one another, without knowing what to make of this, and went into the sitting-room. What was my amazement to find, of all people upon earth, my aunt there, and Mr. Dick! My aunt sitting on a quantity of luggage, with her two birds before her, and her cat on her knee, like a female Robinson Crusoe, drinking tea. Mr. Dick leaning thoughtfully on a great kite, such as we had often been out together to fly, with more luggage piled about him!

'My dear aunt!' cried I. 'Why, what an unexpected pleasure!'

We cordially embraced; and Mr. Dick and I cordially shook hands; and Mrs. Crupp, who was busy making tea, and could not be too attentive, cordially said she had knowed well as Mr. Copperfull would have his heart in his mouth, when he see his dear relations.

'Holloa!' said my aunt to Peggotty, who quailed before her awful presence. 'How are YOU?'

'You remember my aunt, Peggotty?' said I.

'For the love of goodness, child,' exclaimed my aunt, 'don't call the woman by that South Sea Island name! If she married and got rid of it, which was the best thing she could do, why don't you give her the benefit of the change? What's your name now,—P?' said my aunt, as a compromise for the obnoxious appellation.

'Barkis, ma'am,' said Peggotty, with a curtsey.

'Well! That's human,' said my aunt. 'It sounds less as if you wanted a missionary. How d'ye do, Barkis? I hope you're well?'

Encouraged by these gracious words, and by my aunt's extending her hand, Barkis came forward, and took the hand, and curtseyed her acknowledgements.

'We are older than we were, I see,' said my aunt. 'We have only met each other once before, you know. A nice business we made of it then! Trot, my dear, another cup.'

I handed it dutifully to my aunt, who was in her usual inflexible state of figure; and ventured a remonstrance with her on the subject of her sitting on a box.

'Let me draw the sofa here, or the easy-chair, aunt,' said I. 'Why should you be so uncomfortable?'

'Thank you, Trot,' replied my aunt, 'I prefer to sit upon my property.' Here my aunt looked hard at Mrs. Crupp, and observed, 'We needn't trouble you to wait, ma'am.'

'Shall I put a little more tea in the pot afore I go, ma'am?' said Mrs. Crupp.

'No, I thank you, ma'am,' replied my aunt.

'Would you let me fetch another pat of butter, ma'am?' said Mrs. Crupp. 'Or would you be persuaded to try a new-laid hegg? or should I brile a rasher? Ain't there nothing I could do for your dear aunt, Mr. Copperfull?'

'Nothing, ma'am,' returned my aunt. 'I shall do very well, I thank you.'

Mrs. Crupp, who had been incessantly smiling to express sweet temper, and incessantly holding her head on one side, to express a general feebleness of constitution, and incessantly rubbing her hands, to express a desire to be of service to all deserving objects, gradually smiled herself, one-sided herself, and rubbed herself, out of the room. 'Dick!' said my aunt. 'You know what I told you about time-servers and wealth-worshippers?'

Mr. Dick—with rather a scared look, as if he had forgotten it—returned a hasty answer in the affirmative.

'Mrs. Crupp is one of them,' said my aunt. 'Barkis, I'll trouble you to look after the tea, and let me have another cup, for I don't fancy that woman's pouring-out!'

I knew my aunt sufficiently well to know that she had something of importance on her mind, and that there was far more matter in this arrival than a stranger might have supposed. I noticed how her eye lighted on me, when she thought my attention otherwise occupied; and what a curious process of hesitation appeared to be going on within her, while she preserved her outward stiffness and composure. I began to reflect whether I had done anything to offend her; and my conscience whispered me that I had not yet told her about Dora. Could it by any means be that, I wondered!

As I knew she would only speak in her own good time, I sat down near her, and spoke to the birds, and played with the cat, and was as easy as I could be. But I was very far from being really easy; and I should still have been so, even if Mr. Dick, leaning over the great kite behind my aunt, had not taken every secret opportunity of shaking his head darkly at me, and pointing at her.

'Trot,' said my aunt at last, when she had finished her tea, and carefully smoothed down her dress, and wiped her lips—'you needn't go, Barkis!—Trot, have you got to be firm and self-reliant?'

'I hope so, aunt.'

'What do you think?' inquired Miss Betsey.

'I think so, aunt.'

'Then why, my love,' said my aunt, looking earnestly at me, 'why do you think I prefer to sit upon this property of mine tonight?'

I shook my head, unable to guess.

'Because,' said my aunt, 'it's all I have. Because I'm ruined, my dear!'

If the house, and every one of us, had tumbled out into the river together, I could hardly have received a greater shock.

'Dick knows it,' said my aunt, laying her hand calmly on my shoulder. 'I am ruined, my dear Trot! All I have in the world is in this room, except the cottage; and that I have left Janet to let. Barkis, I want to get a bed for this gentleman tonight. To save expense, perhaps you can make up something here for myself. Anything will do. It's only for tonight. We'll talk about this, more, tomorrow.'

I was roused from my amazement, and concern for her—I am sure, for her—by her falling on my neck, for a moment, and crying that she only grieved for me. In another moment she suppressed this emotion; and said with an aspect more triumphant than dejected:

'We must meet reverses boldly, and not suffer them to frighten us, my dear. We must learn to act the play out. We must live misfortune down, Trot!'

CHAPTER 35. DEPRESSION

As soon as I could recover my presence of mind, which quite deserted me in the first overpowering shock of my aunt's intelligence, I proposed to Mr. Dick to come round to the chandler's shop, and take possession of the bed which Mr. Peggotty had lately vacated. The chandler's shop being in Hungerford Market, and Hungerford Market being a very different place in those days, there was a low wooden colonnade before the door (not very unlike that before the house where the little man and woman used to live, in the old weather-glass), which pleased Mr. Dick mightily. The glory of lodging over this structure would have compensated him, I dare say, for many inconveniences; but, as there were really few to bear, beyond the compound of flavours I have already mentioned, and perhaps the want of a little more elbow-room, he was perfectly charmed with his accommodation. Mrs. Crupp had indignantly assured him that there wasn't room to swing a cat there; but, as Mr. Dick justly observed to me, sitting down on the foot of the bed, nursing his leg, 'You know, Trotwood, I don't want to swing a cat. I never do swing a cat. Therefore, what does that signify to ME!'

I tried to ascertain whether Mr. Dick had any understanding of the causes of this sudden and great change in my aunt's affairs. As I might have expected, he had none at all. The only account he could give of it was, that my aunt had said to him, the day before yesterday, 'Now, Dick, are you really and truly the philosopher I take you for?' That then he had said, Yes, he hoped so. That then my aunt had said, 'Dick, I am ruined.' That then he had said, 'Oh, indeed!' That then my aunt had praised him highly, which he was glad of. And that then they had come to me, and had had bottled porter and sandwiches on the road.

Mr. Dick was so very complacent, sitting on the foot of the bed, nursing his leg, and telling me this, with his eyes wide open and a surprised smile, that I am sorry to say I was provoked into explaining to him that ruin meant distress, want, and starvation; but I was soon bitterly reproved for this harshness, by seeing his face turn pale, and tears course down his lengthened cheeks, while he fixed upon me a look of such unutterable woe, that it might have softened a far harder heart than mine. I took infinitely greater pains to cheer him up again than I had taken to depress him; and I soon understood (as I ought to have known at first) that he had been so confident, merely because of his faith in the wisest and most wonderful of women, and his unbounded reliance on my intellectual resources. The latter, I believe, he considered a match for any kind of disaster not absolutely mortal.

'What can we do, Trotwood?' said Mr. Dick. 'There's the Memorial-'

'To be sure there is,' said I. 'But all we can do just now, Mr. Dick, is to keep a cheerful countenance, and not let my aunt see that we are thinking about it.'

He assented to this in the most earnest manner; and implored me, if I should see him wandering an inch out of the right course, to recall him by some of those superior methods which were always at my command. But I regret to state that the fright I had given him proved too much for his best attempts at concealment. All the evening his eyes wandered to my aunt's face, with an expression of the most dismal apprehension, as if he saw her growing thin on the spot. He was conscious of this, and put a constraint upon his head; but his keeping that immovable, and sitting rolling his eyes like a piece of machinery, did not mend the matter at all. I saw him look at the loaf at supper (which happened to be a small one), as if nothing else stood between us and famine; and when my aunt insisted on his making his customary repast, I detected him in the act of pocketing fragments of his bread and cheese; I have no doubt for the purpose of reviving us with those savings, when we should have reached an advanced stage of attenuation.

My aunt, on the other hand, was in a composed frame of mind, which was a lesson to all of us—to me, I am sure. She was extremely gracious to Peggotty, except when I inadvertently called her by that name; and, strange as I knew she felt in London, appeared quite at home. She was to have my bed, and I was to lie in the sitting-room, to keep guard over her. She made a great point of being so near the river, in case of a conflagration; and I suppose really did find some satisfaction in that circumstance.

'Trot, my dear,' said my aunt, when she saw me making preparations for compounding her usual night-draught, 'No!'

'Nothing, aunt?'

'Not wine, my dear. Ale.'

'But there is wine here, aunt. And you always have it made of wine.'

'Keep that, in case of sickness,' said my aunt. 'We mustn't use it carelessly, Trot. Ale for me. Half a pint.'

I thought Mr. Dick would have fallen, insensible. My aunt being resolute, I went out and got the ale myself. As it was growing late, Peggotty and Mr. Dick took that opportunity of repairing to the chandler's shop together. I parted from him, poor fellow, at the corner of the street, with his great kite at his back, a very monument of human misery.

My aunt was walking up and down the room when I returned, crimping the borders of her nightcap with her fingers. I warmed the ale and made the toast on the usual infallible principles. When it was ready for her, she was ready for it, with her nightcap on, and the skirt of her gown turned back on her knees.

'My dear,' said my aunt, after taking a spoonful of it; 'it's a great deal better than wine. Not half so bilious.'

I suppose I looked doubtful, for she added:

'Tut, tut, child. If nothing worse than Ale happens to us, we are well off.'

'I should think so myself, aunt, I am sure,' said I.

'Well, then, why DON'T you think so?' said my aunt.

'Because you and I are very different people,' I returned.

'Stuff and nonsense, Trot!' replied my aunt.

MY aunt went on with a quiet enjoyment, in which there was very little affectation, if any; drinking the warm ale with a tea-spoon, and soaking her strips of toast in it.

'Trot,' said she, 'I don't care for strange faces in general, but I rather like that Barkis of yours, do you know!'

'It's better than a hundred pounds to hear you say so!' said I.

'It's a most extraordinary world,' observed my aunt, rubbing her nose; 'how that woman ever got into it with that name, is unaccountable to me. It would be much more easy to be born a Jackson, or something of that sort, one would think.'

'Perhaps she thinks so, too; it's not her fault,' said I.

'I suppose not,' returned my aunt, rather grudging the admission; 'but it's very aggravating. However, she's Barkis now. That's some comfort. Barkis is uncommonly fond of you, Trot.'

'There is nothing she would leave undone to prove it,' said I.

'Nothing, I believe,' returned my aunt. 'Here, the poor fool has been begging and praying about handing over some of her money—because she has got too much of it. A simpleton!'

My aunt's tears of pleasure were positively trickling down into the warm ale.

'She's the most ridiculous creature that ever was born,' said my aunt. 'I knew, from the first moment when I saw her with that poor dear blessed baby of a mother of yours, that she was the most ridiculous of mortals. But there are good points in Barkis!'

Affecting to laugh, she got an opportunity of putting her hand to her eyes. Having availed herself of it, she resumed her toast and her discourse together.

'Ah! Mercy upon us!' sighed my aunt. 'I know all about it, Trot! Barkis and myself had quite a gossip while you were out with Dick. I know all about it. I don't know where these wretched girls expect to go to, for my part. I wonder they don't knock out their brains against—against mantelpieces,' said my aunt; an idea which was probably suggested to her by her contemplation of mine.

'Poor Emily!' said I.

'Oh, don't talk to me about poor,' returned my aunt. 'She should have thought of that, before she caused so much misery! Give me a kiss, Trot. I am sorry for your early experience.'

As I bent forward, she put her tumbler on my knee to detain me, and said:

'Oh, Trot, Trot! And so you fancy yourself in love! Do you?'

'Fancy, aunt!' I exclaimed, as red as I could be. 'I adore her with my whole soul!'

'Dora, indeed!' returned my aunt. 'And you mean to say the little thing is very fascinating, I suppose?'

'My dear aunt,' I replied, 'no one can form the least idea what she is!'

'Ah! And not silly?' said my aunt.

'Silly, aunt!'

I seriously believe it had never once entered my head for a single moment, to consider whether she was or not. I resented the idea, of course; but I was in a manner struck by it, as a new one altogether.

'Not light-headed?' said my aunt.

'Light-headed, aunt!' I could only repeat this daring speculation with the same kind of feeling with which I had repeated the preceding question.

'Well, well!' said my aunt. 'I only ask. I don't depreciate her. Poor little couple! And so you think you were formed for one another, and are to go through a party-supper-table kind of life, like two pretty pieces of confectionery, do you, Trot?'

She asked me this so kindly, and with such a gentle air, half playful and half sorrowful, that I was quite touched.

'We are young and inexperienced, aunt, I know,' I replied; 'and I dare say we say and think a good deal that is rather foolish. But we love one another truly, I am sure. If I thought Dora could ever love anybody else, or cease to love me; or that I could ever love anybody else, or cease to love her; I don't know what I should do—go out of my mind, I think!'

'Ah, Trot!' said my aunt, shaking her head, and smiling gravely; 'blind, blind, blind!'

'Someone that I know, Trot,' my aunt pursued, after a pause, 'though of a very pliant disposition, has an earnestness of affection in him that reminds me of poor Baby. Earnestness is what that Somebody must look for, to sustain him and improve him, Trot. Deep, downright, faithful earnestness.'

'If you only knew the earnestness of Dora, aunt!' I cried.

'Oh, Trot!' she said again; 'blind, blind!' and without knowing why, I felt a vague unhappy loss or want of something overshadow me like a cloud.

'However,' said my aunt, 'I don't want to put two young creatures out of conceit with themselves, or to make them unhappy; so, though it is a girl and boy attachment, and girl and boy attachments very often—mind! I don't say always!—come to nothing, still we'll be serious about it, and hope for a prosperous issue one of these days. There's time enough for it to come to anything!'

This was not upon the whole very comforting to a rapturous lover; but I was glad to have my aunt in my confidence, and I was mindful of her being fatigued. So I thanked her ardently for this mark of her affection, and for all her other kindnesses towards me; and after a tender good night, she took her nightcap into my bedroom.

How miserable I was, when I lay down! How I thought and thought about my being poor, in Mr. Spenlow's eyes; about my not being what I thought I was, when I proposed to Dora; about the chivalrous necessity of telling Dora what my worldly condition was, and releasing her from her engagement if she thought fit; about how I should contrive to live, during the long term of my articles, when I was earning nothing; about doing something to assist my aunt, and seeing no way of doing anything; about coming down to have no money in my pocket, and to wear a shabby coat, and to be able to carry Dora no little presents, and to ride no gallant greys, and to show myself in no agreeable light! Sordid and selfish as I knew it was, and as I tortured myself by knowing that it was, to let my mind run on my own distress so much, I was so devoted to Dora that I could not help it. I knew that it was base in me not to think more of my aunt, and less of myself; but, so far, selfishness was inseparable from Dora, and I could not put Dora on one side for any mortal creature. How exceedingly miserable I was, that night!

As to sleep, I had dreams of poverty in all sorts of shapes, but I seemed to dream without the previous ceremony of going to sleep. Now I was ragged, wanting to sell Dora matches, six bundles for a halfpenny; now I was at the office in a nightgown and boots, remonstrated with by Mr. Spenlow on appearing before the clients in that airy attire; now I was hungrily picking up the crumbs that fell from old Tiffey's daily biscuit, regularly eaten when St. Paul's struck one; now I was hopelessly endeavouring to get a licence to marry Dora, having nothing but one of Uriah Heep's gloves to offer in exchange, which the whole Commons rejected; and still, more or less conscious of my own room, I was always tossing about like a distressed ship in a sea of bed-clothes.

My aunt was restless, too, for I frequently heard her walking to and fro. Two or three times in the course of the night, attired in a long flannel wrapper in which she looked seven feet high, she appeared, like a disturbed ghost, in my room, and came to the side of the sofa on which I lay. On the first occasion I started up in alarm, to learn that she inferred from a particular light in the sky, that Westminster Abbey was on fire; and to be consulted in reference to the probability of its igniting Buckingham Street, in case the wind changed. Lying still, after that, I found that she sat down near me, whispering to herself 'Poor boy!' And then it made me twenty times more wretched, to know how unselfishly mindful she was of me, and how selfishly mindful I was of myself.

It was difficult to believe that a night so long to me, could be short to anybody else. This consideration set me thinking and thinking of an imaginary party where people were dancing the hours away, until that became a dream too, and I heard the music incessantly playing one tune, and saw Dora incessantly dancing one dance, without taking the least notice of me. The man who had been playing the harp all night, was trying in vain to cover it with an ordinary-sized nightcap, when I awoke; or I should rather say, when I left off trying to go to sleep, and saw the sun shining in through the window at last.

There was an old Roman bath in those days at the bottom of one of the streets out of the Strand—it may be there still—in which I have had many a cold plunge. Dressing myself as quietly as I could, and leaving Peggotty to look after my aunt, I tumbled head foremost into it, and then went for a walk to Hampstead. I had a hope that this brisk treatment might freshen my wits a little; and I think it did them good, for I soon came to the conclusion that the first step I ought to take was, to try if my articles could be cancelled and the premium recovered. I got some breakfast on the Heath, and walked back to Doctors' Commons, along the watered roads and through a pleasant smell of summer flowers, growing in gardens and carried into town on hucksters' heads, intent on this first effort to meet our altered circumstances.

I arrived at the office so soon, after all, that I had half an hour's loitering about the Commons, before old Tiffey, who was always first, appeared with his key. Then I sat down in my shady corner, looking up at the sunlight on the opposite chimney-pots, and thinking about Dora; until Mr. Spenlow came in, crisp and curly.

'How are you, Copperfield?' said he. 'Fine morning!'

'Beautiful morning, sir,' said I. 'Could I say a word to you before you go into Court?'

'By all means,' said he. 'Come into my room.'

I followed him into his room, and he began putting on his gown, and touching himself up before a little glass he had, hanging inside a closet door.

'I am sorry to say,' said I, 'that I have some rather disheartening intelligence from my aunt.'

'No!' said he. 'Dear me! Not paralysis, I hope?'

'It has no reference to her health, sir,' I replied. 'She has met with some large losses. In fact, she has very little left, indeed.'

'You as-tound me, Copperfield!' cried Mr. Spenlow.

I shook my head. 'Indeed, sir,' said I, 'her affairs are so changed, that I wished to ask you whether it would be possible—at a sacrifice on our part of some portion of the premium, of course,' I put in this, on the spur of the moment, warned by the blank expression of his face—'to cancel my articles?'

What it cost me to make this proposal, nobody knows. It was like asking, as a favour, to be sentenced to transportation from Dora.

'To cancel your articles, Copperfield? Cancel?'

I explained with tolerable firmness, that I really did not know where my means of subsistence were to come from, unless I could earn them for myself. I had no fear for the future, I said—and I laid great emphasis on that, as if to imply that I should still be decidedly eligible for a son-in-law one of these days—but, for the present, I was thrown upon my own resources. 'I am extremely sorry to hear this, Copperfield,' said Mr. Spenlow. 'Extremely sorry. It is not usual to cancel articles for any such reason. It is not a professional course of proceeding. It is not a convenient precedent at all. Far from it. At the same time—'

'You are very good, sir,' I murmured, anticipating a concession.

'Not at all. Don't mention it,' said Mr. Spenlow. 'At the same time, I was going to say, if it had been my lot to have my hands unfettered—if I had not a partner—Mr. Jorkins—'

My hopes were dashed in a moment, but I made another effort.

'Do you think, sir,' said I, 'if I were to mention it to Mr. Jorkins—'

Mr. Spenlow shook his head discouragingly. 'Heaven forbid, Copperfield,' he replied, 'that I should do any man an injustice: still less, Mr. jorkins. But I know my partner, Copperfield. Mr. jorkins is not a man to respond to a proposition of this peculiar nature. Mr. jorkins is very difficult to move from the beaten track. You know what he is!'

I am sure I knew nothing about him, except that he had originally been alone in the business, and now lived by himself in a house near Montagu Square, which was fearfully in want of painting; that he came very late of a day, and went away very early; that he never appeared to be consulted about anything; and that he had a dingy little black-hole of his own upstairs, where no business was ever done, and where there was a yellow old cartridge-paper pad upon his desk, unsoiled by ink, and reported to be twenty years of age.

'Would you object to my mentioning it to him, sir?' I asked.

'By no means,' said Mr. Spenlow. 'But I have some experience of Mr. jorkins, Copperfield. I wish it were otherwise, for I should be happy to meet your views in any respect. I cannot have the objection to your mentioning it to Mr. jorkins, Copperfield, if you think it worth while.'

Availing myself of this permission, which was given with a warm shake of the hand, I sat thinking about Dora, and looking at the sunlight stealing from the chimney-pots down the wall of the opposite house, until Mr. jorkins came. I then went up to Mr. jorkins's room, and evidently astonished Mr. jorkins very much by making my appearance there.

'Come in, Mr. Copperfield,' said Mr. jorkins. 'Come in!'

I went in, and sat down; and stated my case to Mr. jorkins pretty much as I had stated it to Mr. Spenlow. Mr. Jorkins was not by any means the awful creature one might have expected, but a large, mild, smooth-faced man of sixty, who took so much snuff that there was a tradition in the Commons that he lived principally on that stimulant, having little room in his system for any other article of diet.

'You have mentioned this to Mr. Spenlow, I suppose?' said Mr. jorkins; when he had heard me, very restlessly, to an end.

I answered Yes, and told him that Mr. Spenlow had introduced his name.

'He said I should object?' asked Mr. jorkins.

I was obliged to admit that Mr. Spenlow had considered it probable.

'I am sorry to say, Mr. Copperfield, I can't advance your object,' said Mr. jorkins, nervously. 'The fact is—but I have an appointment at the Bank, if you'll have the goodness to excuse me.'

With that he rose in a great hurry, and was going out of the room, when I made bold to say that I feared, then, there was no way of arranging the matter?

'No!' said Mr. jorkins, stopping at the door to shake his head. 'Oh, no! I object, you know,' which he said very rapidly, and went out. 'You must be aware, Mr. Copperfield,' he added, looking restlessly in at the door again, 'if Mr. Spenlow objects—'

'Personally, he does not object, sir,' said I.

'Oh! Personally!' repeated Mr. Jorkins, in an impatient manner. 'I assure you there's an objection, Mr. Copperfield. Hopeless! What you wish to be done, can't be done. I—I really have got an appointment at the Bank.' With that he fairly ran away; and to the best of my knowledge, it was three days before he showed himself in the Commons again.

Being very anxious to leave no stone unturned, I waited until Mr. Spenlow came in, and then described what had passed; giving him to understand that I was not hopeless of his being able to soften the adamantine jorkins, if he would undertake the task.

'Copperfield,' returned Mr. Spenlow, with a gracious smile, 'you have not known my partner, Mr. jorkins, as long as I have. Nothing is farther from my thoughts than to attribute any degree of artifice to Mr. jorkins. But Mr. jorkins has a way of stating his objections which often deceives people. No, Copperfield!' shaking his head. 'Mr. jorkins is not to be moved, believe me!'

I was completely bewildered between Mr. Spenlow and Mr. jorkins, as to which of them really was the objecting partner; but I saw with sufficient clearness that there was obduracy somewhere in the firm, and that the recovery of my aunt's thousand pounds was out of the question. In a state of despondency, which I remember with anything but satisfaction, for I know it still had too much reference to myself (though always in connexion with Dora), I left the office, and went homeward.

I was trying to familiarize my mind with the worst, and to present to myself the arrangements we should have to make for the future in their sternest aspect, when a hackney-chariot coming after me, and stopping at my very feet, occasioned me to look up. A fair hand was stretched forth to me from the window; and the face I had never seen without a feeling of serenity and happiness, from the moment when it first turned back on the old oak staircase with the great broad balustrade, and when I associated its softened beauty with the stained-glass window in the church, was smiling on me.

'Agnes!' I joyfully exclaimed. 'Oh, my dear Agnes, of all people in the world, what a pleasure to see you!'

'Is it, indeed?' she said, in her cordial voice.

'I want to talk to you so much!' said I. 'It's such a lightening of my heart, only to look at you! If I had had a conjuror's cap, there is no one I should have wished for but you!'

'What?' returned Agnes.

'Well! perhaps Dora first,' I admitted, with a blush.

'Certainly, Dora first, I hope,' said Agnes, laughing.

'But you next!' said I. 'Where are you going?'

She was going to my rooms to see my aunt. The day being very fine, she was glad to come out of the chariot, which smelt (I had my head in it all this time) like a stable put under a cucumber-frame. I dismissed the coachman, and she took my arm, and we walked on together. She was like Hope embodied, to me. How different I felt in one short minute, having Agnes at my side!

My aunt had written her one of the odd, abrupt notes—very little longer than a Bank note—to which her epistolary efforts were usually limited. She had stated therein that she had fallen into adversity, and was leaving Dover for good, but had quite made up her mind to it, and was so well that nobody need be uncomfortable about her. Agnes had come to London to see my aunt, between whom and herself there had been a mutual liking these many years: indeed, it dated from the time of my taking up my residence in Mr. Wickfield's house. She was not alone, she said. Her papa was with her—and Uriah Heep.

'And now they are partners,' said I. 'Confound him!'

'Yes,' said Agnes. 'They have some business here; and I took advantage of their coming, to come too. You must not think my visit all friendly and disinterested, Trotwood, for—I am afraid I may be cruelly prejudiced—I do not like to let papa go away alone, with him.' 'Does he exercise the same influence over Mr. Wickfield still, Agnes?'

Agnes shook her head. 'There is such a change at home,' said she, 'that you would scarcely know the dear old house. They live with us now.'

'They?' said I.

'Mr. Heep and his mother. He sleeps in your old room,' said Agnes, looking up into my face.

'I wish I had the ordering of his dreams,' said I. 'He wouldn't sleep there long.'

'I keep my own little room,' said Agnes, 'where I used to learn my lessons. How the time goes! You remember? The little panelled room that opens from the drawing-room?'

'Remember, Agnes? When I saw you, for the first time, coming out at the door, with your quaint little basket of keys hanging at your side?'

'It is just the same,' said Agnes, smiling. 'I am glad you think of it so pleasantly. We were very happy.'

'We were, indeed,' said I.

'I keep that room to myself still; but I cannot always desert Mrs. Heep, you know. And so,' said Agnes, quietly, 'I feel obliged to bear her company, when I might prefer to be alone. But I have no other reason to complain of her. If she tires me, sometimes, by her praises of her son, it is only natural in a mother. He is a very good son to her.'

I looked at Agnes when she said these words, without detecting in her any consciousness of Uriah's design. Her mild but earnest eyes met mine with their own beautiful frankness, and there was no change in her gentle face.

'The chief evil of their presence in the house,' said Agnes, 'is that I cannot be as near papa as I could wish—Uriah Heep being so much between us—and cannot watch over him, if that is not too bold a thing to say, as closely as I would. But if any fraud or treachery is practising against him, I hope that simple love and truth will be strong in the end. I hope that real love and truth are stronger in the end than any evil or misfortune in the world.'

A certain bright smile, which I never saw on any other face, died away, even while I thought how good it was, and how familiar it had once been to me; and she asked me, with a quick change of expression (we were drawing very near my street), if I knew how the reverse in my aunt's circumstances had been brought about. On my replying no, she had not told me yet, Agnes became thoughtful, and I fancied I felt her arm tremble in mine.

We found my aunt alone, in a state of some excitement. A difference of opinion had arisen between herself and Mrs. Crupp, on an abstract question (the propriety of chambers being inhabited by the gentler sex); and my aunt, utterly indifferent to spasms on the part of Mrs. Crupp, had cut the dispute short, by informing that lady that she smelt of my brandy, and that she would trouble her to walk out. Both of these expressions Mrs. Crupp considered actionable, and had expressed her intention of bringing before a 'British Judy'—meaning, it was supposed, the bulwark of our national liberties.

MY aunt, however, having had time to cool, while Peggotty was out showing Mr. Dick the soldiers at the Horse Guards—and being, besides, greatly pleased to see Agnes—rather plumed herself on the affair than otherwise, and received us with unimpaired good humour. When Agnes laid her bonnet on the table, and sat down beside her, I could not but think, looking on her mild eyes and her radiant forehead, how natural it seemed to have her there; how trustfully, although she was so young and inexperienced, my aunt confided in her; how strong she was, indeed, in simple love and truth.

We began to talk about my aunt's losses, and I told them what I had tried to do that morning.

'Which was injudicious, Trot,' said my aunt, 'but well meant. You are a generous boy—I suppose I must say, young man, now—and I am proud of you, my dear. So far, so good. Now, Trot and Agnes, let us look the case of Betsey Trotwood in the face, and see how it stands.'

I observed Agnes turn pale, as she looked very attentively at my aunt. My aunt, patting her cat, looked very attentively at Agnes.

'Betsey Trotwood,' said my aunt, who had always kept her money matters to herself. '—I don't mean your sister, Trot, my dear, but myself—had a certain property. It don't matter how much; enough to live on. More; for she had saved a little, and added to it. Betsey funded her property for some time, and then, by the advice of her man of business, laid it out on landed security. That did very well, and returned very good interest, till Betsey was paid off. I am talking of Betsey as if she was a man-of-war. Well! Then, Betsey had to look about her, for a new investment. She thought she was wiser, now, than her man of business, who was not such a good man of business by this time, as he used to be—I am alluding to your father, Agnes—and she took it into her head to lay it out for herself. So she took her pigs,' said my aunt, 'to a foreign market; and a very bad market it turned out to be. First, she lost in the mining way, and then she lost in the diving way—fishing up treasure, or some such Tom Tiddler nonsense,' explained my aunt, rubbing her nose; 'and then she lost in the mining way again, and, last of all, to set the thing entirely to rights, she lost in the banking way. I don't know what the Bank shares were worth for a little while,' said my aunt; 'cent per cent was the lowest of it, I believe; but the Bank was at the other end of the world, and tumbled into space, for what I know; anyhow, it fell to pieces, and never will and never can pay sixpence; and Betsey's sixpences were all there, and there's an end of them. Least said, soonest mended!'

My aunt concluded this philosophical summary, by fixing her eyes with a kind of triumph on Agnes, whose colour was gradually returning.

'Dear Miss Trotwood, is that all the history?' said Agnes.

'I hope it's enough, child,' said my aunt. 'If there had been more money to lose, it wouldn't have been all, I dare say. Betsey would have contrived to throw that after the rest, and make another chapter, I have little doubt. But there was no more money, and there's no more story.'

Agnes had listened at first with suspended breath. Her colour still came and went, but she breathed more freely. I thought I knew why. I thought she had had some fear that her unhappy father might be in some way to blame for what had happened. My aunt took her hand in hers, and laughed.

'Is that all?' repeated my aunt. 'Why, yes, that's all, except, "And she lived happy ever afterwards." Perhaps I may add that of Betsey yet, one of these days. Now, Agnes, you have a wise head. So have you, Trot, in some things, though I can't compliment you always'; and here my aunt shook her own at me, with an energy peculiar to herself. 'What's to be done? Here's the cottage, taking one time with another, will produce say seventy pounds a year. I think we may safely put it down at that. Well!—That's all we've got,' said my aunt; with whom it was an idiosyncrasy, as it is with some horses, to stop very short when she appeared to be in a fair way of going on for a long while.

'Then,' said my aunt, after a rest, 'there's Dick. He's good for a hundred a-year, but of course that must be expended on himself. I would sooner send him away, though I know I am the only person who appreciates him, than have him, and not spend his money on himself. How can Trot and I do best, upon our means? What do you say, Agnes?'

'I say, aunt,' I interposed, 'that I must do something!'

'Go for a soldier, do you mean?' returned my aunt, alarmed; 'or go to sea? I won't hear of it. You are to be a proctor. We're not going to have any knockings on the head in THIS family, if you please, sir.'

I was about to explain that I was not desirous of introducing that mode of provision into the family, when Agnes inquired if my rooms were held for any long term?

'You come to the point, my dear,' said my aunt. 'They are not to be got rid of, for six months at least, unless they could be underlet, and that I don't believe. The last man died here. Five people out of six would die—of course—of that woman in nankeen with the flannel petticoat. I have a little ready money; and I agree with you, the best thing we can do, is, to live the term out here, and get a bedroom hard by.'

I thought it my duty to hint at the discomfort my aunt would sustain, from living in a continual state of guerilla warfare with Mrs. Crupp; but she disposed of that objection summarily by declaring that, on the first demonstration of hostilities, she was prepared to astonish Mrs. Crupp for the whole remainder of her natural life.

'I have been thinking, Trotwood,' said Agnes, diffidently, 'that if you had time—'

'I have a good deal of time, Agnes. I am always disengaged after four or five o'clock, and I have time early in the morning. In one way and another,' said I, conscious of reddening a little as I thought of the hours and hours I had devoted to fagging about town, and to and fro upon the Norwood Road, 'I have abundance of time.'

'I know you would not mind,' said Agnes, coming to me, and speaking in a low voice, so full of sweet and hopeful consideration that I hear it now, 'the duties of a secretary.'

'Mind, my dear Agnes?'

'Because,' continued Agnes, 'Doctor Strong has acted on his intention of retiring, and has come to live in London; and he asked papa, I know, if he could recommend him one. Don't you think he would rather have his favourite old pupil near him, than anybody else?'

'Dear Agnes!' said I. 'What should I do without you! You are always my good angel. I told you so. I never think of you in any other light.'

Agnes answered with her pleasant laugh, that one good Angel (meaning Dora) was enough; and went on to remind me that the Doctor had been used to occupy himself in his study, early in the morning, and in the evening—and that probably my leisure would suit his requirements very well. I was scarcely more delighted with the prospect of earning my own bread, than with the hope of earning it under my old master; in short, acting on the advice of Agnes, I sat down and wrote a letter to the Doctor, stating my object, and appointing to call on him next day at ten in the forenoon. This I addressed to Highgate—for in that place, so memorable to me, he lived—and went and posted, myself, without losing a minute.

Wherever Agnes was, some agreeable token of her noiseless presence seemed inseparable from the place. When I came back, I found my aunt's birds hanging, just as they had hung so long in the parlour window of the cottage; and my easy-chair imitating my aunt's much easier chair in its position at the open window; and even the round green fan, which my aunt had brought away with her, screwed on to the window-sill. I knew who had done all this, by its seeming to have quietly done itself; and I should have known in a moment who had arranged my neglected books in the old order of my school days, even if I had supposed Agnes to be miles away, instead of seeing her busy with them, and smiling at the disorder into which they had fallen.

My aunt was quite gracious on the subject of the Thames (it really did look very well with the sun upon it, though not like the sea before the cottage), but she could not relent towards the London smoke, which, she said, 'peppered everything'. A complete revolution, in which Peggotty bore a prominent part, was being effected in every corner of my rooms, in regard of this pepper; and I was looking on, thinking how little even Peggotty seemed to do with a good deal of bustle, and how much Agnes did without any bustle at all, when a knock came at the door.

'I think,' said Agnes, turning pale, 'it's papa. He promised me that he would come.'

I opened the door, and admitted, not only Mr. Wickfield, but Uriah Heep. I had not seen Mr. Wickfield for some time. I was prepared for a great change in him, after what I had heard from Agnes, but his appearance shocked me.

It was not that he looked many years older, though still dressed with the old scrupulous cleanliness; or that there was an unwholesome ruddiness upon his face; or that his eyes were full and bloodshot; or that there was a nervous trembling in his hand, the cause of which I knew, and had for some years seen at work. It was not that he had lost his good looks, or his old bearing of a gentleman—for that he had not—but the thing that struck me most, was, that with the evidences of his native superiority still upon him, he should submit himself to that crawling impersonation of meanness, Uriah Heep. The reversal of the two natures, in their relative positions, Uriah's of power and Mr. Wickfield's of dependence, was a sight more painful to me than I can express. If I had seen an Ape taking command of a Man, I should hardly have thought it a more degrading spectacle.

He appeared to be only too conscious of it himself. When he came in, he stood still; and with his head bowed, as if he felt it. This was only for a moment; for Agnes softly said to him, 'Papa! Here is Miss Trotwood—and Trotwood, whom you have not seen for a long while!' and then he approached, and constrainedly gave my aunt his hand, and shook hands more cordially with me. In the moment's pause I speak of, I saw Uriah's countenance form itself into a most ill-favoured smile. Agnes saw it too, I think, for she shrank from him.

What my aunt saw, or did not see, I defy the science of physiognomy to have made out, without her own consent. I believe there never was anybody with such an imperturbable countenance when she chose. Her face might have been a dead-wall on the occasion in question, for any light it threw upon her thoughts; until she broke silence with her usual abruptness.

'Well, Wickfield!' said my aunt; and he looked up at her for the first time. 'I have been telling your daughter how well I have been disposing of my money for myself, because I couldn't trust it to you, as you were growing rusty in business matters. We have been taking counsel together, and getting on very well, all things considered. Agnes is worth the whole firm, in my opinion.'

'If I may umbly make the remark,' said Uriah Heep, with a writhe, 'I fully agree with Miss Betsey Trotwood, and should be only too appy if Miss Agnes was a partner.'

'You're a partner yourself, you know,' returned my aunt, 'and that's about enough for you, I expect. How do you find yourself, sir?'

In acknowledgement of this question, addressed to him with extraordinary curtness, Mr. Heep, uncomfortably clutching the blue bag he carried, replied that he was pretty well, he thanked my aunt, and hoped she was the same.

'And you, Master—I should say, Mister Copperfield,' pursued Uriah. 'I hope I see you well! I am rejoiced to see you, Mister Copperfield, even under present circumstances.' I believed that; for he seemed to relish them very much. 'Present circumstances is not what your friends would wish for you, Mister Copperfield, but it isn't money makes the man: it's—I am really unequal with my umble powers to express what it is,' said Uriah, with a fawning jerk, 'but it isn't money!'

Here he shook hands with me: not in the common way, but standing at a good distance from me, and lifting my hand up and down like a pump handle, that he was a little afraid of.

'And how do you think we are looking, Master Copperfield,—I should say, Mister?' fawned Uriah. 'Don't you find Mr. Wickfield blooming, sir? Years don't tell much in our firm, Master Copperfield, except in raising up the umble, namely, mother and self—and in developing,' he added, as an afterthought, 'the beautiful, namely, Miss Agnes.'

He jerked himself about, after this compliment, in such an intolerable manner, that my aunt, who had sat looking straight at him, lost all patience.

'Deuce take the man!' said my aunt, sternly, 'what's he about? Don't be galvanic, sir!'

'I ask your pardon, Miss Trotwood,' returned Uriah; 'I'm aware you're nervous.'

'Go along with you, sir!' said my aunt, anything but appeased. 'Don't presume to say so! I am nothing of the sort. If you're an eel, sir, conduct yourself like one. If you're a man, control your limbs, sir! Good God!' said my aunt, with great indignation, 'I am not going to be serpentined and corkscrewed out of my senses!'

Mr. Heep was rather abashed, as most people might have been, by this explosion; which derived great additional force from the indignant manner in which my aunt afterwards moved in her chair, and shook her head as if she were making snaps or bounces at him. But he said to me aside in a meek voice:

'I am well aware, Master Copperfield, that Miss Trotwood, though an excellent lady, has a quick temper (indeed I think I had the pleasure of knowing her, when I was a numble clerk, before you did, Master Copperfield), and it's only natural, I am sure, that it should be made quicker by present circumstances. The wonder is, that it isn't much worse! I only called to say that if there was anything we could do, in present circumstances, mother or self, or Wickfield and Heep,—we should be really glad. I may go so far?' said Uriah, with a sickly smile at his partner.

'Uriah Heep,' said Mr. Wickfield, in a monotonous forced way, 'is active in the business, Trotwood. What he says, I quite concur in. You know I had an old interest in you. Apart from that, what Uriah says I quite concur in!'

'Oh, what a reward it is,' said Uriah, drawing up one leg, at the risk of bringing down upon himself another visitation from my aunt, 'to be so trusted in! But I hope I am able to do something to relieve him from the fatigues of business, Master Copperfield!'

'Uriah Heep is a great relief to me,' said Mr. Wickfield, in the same dull voice. 'It's a load off my mind, Trotwood, to have such a partner.'

The red fox made him say all this, I knew, to exhibit him to me in the light he had indicated on the night when he poisoned my rest. I saw the same ill-favoured smile upon his face again, and saw how he watched me.

'You are not going, papa?' said Agnes, anxiously. 'Will you not walk back with Trotwood and me?'

He would have looked to Uriah, I believe, before replying, if that worthy had not anticipated him.

'I am bespoke myself,' said Uriah, 'on business; otherwise I should have been appy to have kept with my friends. But I leave my partner to represent the firm. Miss Agnes, ever yours! I wish you good-day, Master Copperfield, and leave my umble respects for Miss Betsey Trotwood.'

With those words, he retired, kissing his great hand, and leering at us like a mask.

We sat there, talking about our pleasant old Canterbury days, an hour or two. Mr. Wickfield, left to Agnes, soon became more like his former self; though there was a settled depression upon him, which he never shook off. For all that, he brightened; and had an evident pleasure in hearing us recall the little incidents of our old life, many of which he remembered very well. He said it was like those times, to be alone with Agnes and me again; and he wished to Heaven they had never changed. I am sure there was an influence in the placid face of Agnes, and in the very touch of her hand upon his arm, that did wonders for him.

My aunt (who was busy nearly all this while with Peggotty, in the inner room) would not accompany us to the place where they were staying, but insisted on my going; and I went. We dined together. After dinner, Agnes sat beside him, as of old, and poured out his wine. He took what she gave him, and no more—like a child—and we all three sat together at a window as the evening gathered in. When it was almost dark, he lay down on a sofa, Agnes pillowing his head and bending over him a little while; and when she came back to the window, it was not so dark but I could see tears glittering in her eyes.

I pray Heaven that I never may forget the dear girl in her love and truth, at that time of my life; for if I should, I must be drawing near the end, and then I would desire to remember her best! She filled my heart with such good resolutions, strengthened my weakness so, by her example, so directed—I know not how, she was too modest and gentle to advise me in many words—the wandering ardour and unsettled purpose within me, that all the little good I have done, and all the harm I have forborne, I solemnly believe I may refer to her.

And how she spoke to me of Dora, sitting at the window in the dark; listened to my praises of her; praised again; and round the little fairy-figure shed some glimpses of her own pure light, that made it yet more precious and more innocent to me! Oh, Agnes, sister of my boyhood, if I had known then, what I knew long afterwards—!

There was a beggar in the street, when I went down; and as I turned my head towards the window, thinking of her calm seraphic eyes, he made me start by muttering, as if he were an echo of the morning: 'Blind! Blind! Blind!'

CHAPTER 36. ENTHUSIASM

I began the next day with another dive into the Roman bath, and then started for Highgate. I was not dispirited now. I was not afraid of the shabby coat, and had no yearnings after gallant greys. My whole manner of thinking of our late misfortune was changed. What I had to do, was, to show my aunt that her past goodness to me had not been thrown away on an insensible, ungrateful object. What I had to do, was, to turn the painful discipline of my younger days to account, by going to work with a resolute and steady heart. What I had to do, was, to take my woodman's axe in my hand, and clear my own way through the forest of difficulty, by cutting down the trees until I came to Dora. And I went on at a mighty rate, as if it could be done by walking.

When I found myself on the familiar Highgate road, pursuing such a different errand from that old one of pleasure, with which it was associated, it seemed as if a complete change had come on my whole life. But that did not discourage me. With the new life, came new purpose, new intention. Great was the labour; priceless the reward. Dora was the reward, and Dora must be won.

I got into such a transport, that I felt quite sorry my coat was not a little shabby already. I wanted to be cutting at those trees in the forest of difficulty, under circumstances that should prove my strength. I had a good mind to ask an old man, in wire spectacles, who was breaking stones upon the road, to lend me his hammer for a little while, and let me begin to beat a path to Dora out of granite. I stimulated myself into such a heat, and got so out of breath, that I felt as if I had been earning I don't know how much.

In this state, I went into a cottage that I saw was to let, and examined it narrowly,—for I felt it necessary to be practical. It would do for me and Dora admirably: with a little front garden for Jip to run about in, and bark at the tradespeople through the railings, and a capital room upstairs for my aunt. I came out again, hotter and faster than ever, and dashed up to Highgate, at such a rate that I was there an hour too early; and, though I had not been, should have been obliged to stroll about to cool myself, before I was at all presentable.

My first care, after putting myself under this necessary course of preparation, was to find the Doctor's house. It was not in that part of Highgate where Mrs. Steerforth lived, but quite on the opposite side of the little town. When I had made this discovery, I went back, in an attraction I could not resist, to a lane by Mrs. Steerforth's, and looked over the corner of the garden wall. His room was shut up close. The conservatory doors were standing open, and Rosa Dartle was walking, bareheaded, with a quick, impetuous step, up and down a gravel walk on one side of the lawn. She gave me the idea of some fierce thing, that was dragging the length of its chain to and fro upon a beaten track, and wearing its heart out.

I came softly away from my place of observation, and avoiding that part of the neighbourhood, and wishing I had not gone near it, strolled about until it was ten o'clock. The church with the slender spire, that stands on the top of the hill now, was not there then to tell me the time. An old red-brick mansion, used as a school, was in its place; and a fine old house it must have been to go to school at, as I recollect it.

When I approached the Doctor's cottage—a pretty old place, on which he seemed to have expended some money, if I might judge from the embellishments and repairs that had the look of being just completed—I saw him walking in the garden at the side, gaiters and all, as if he had never left off walking since the days of my pupilage. He had his old companions about him, too; for there were plenty of high trees in the neighbourhood, and two or three rooks were on the grass, looking after him, as if they had been written to about him by the Canterbury rooks, and were observing him closely in consequence.

Knowing the utter hopelessness of attracting his attention from that distance, I made bold to open the gate, and walk after him, so as to meet him when he should turn round. When he did, and came towards me, he looked at me thoughtfully for a few moments, evidently without thinking about me at all; and then his benevolent face expressed extraordinary pleasure, and he took me by both hands.

'Why, my dear Copperfield,' said the Doctor, 'you are a man! How do you do? I am delighted to see you. My dear Copperfield, how very much you have improved! You are quite—yes—dear me!'

I hoped he was well, and Mrs. Strong too.

'Oh dear, yes!' said the Doctor; 'Annie's quite well, and she'll be delighted to see you. You were always her favourite. She said so, last night, when I showed her your letter. And—yes, to be sure—you recollect Mr. Jack Maldon, Copperfield?'

'Perfectly, sir.'

'Of course,' said the Doctor. 'To be sure. He's pretty well, too.'

'Has he come home, sir?' I inquired.

'From India?' said the Doctor. 'Yes. Mr. Jack Maldon couldn't bear the climate, my dear. Mrs. Markleham—you have not forgotten Mrs. Markleham?'

Forgotten the Old Soldier! And in that short time!

'Mrs. Markleham,' said the Doctor, 'was quite vexed about him, poor thing; so we have got him at home again; and we have bought him a little Patent place, which agrees with him much better.' I knew enough of Mr. Jack Maldon to suspect from this account that it was a place where there was not much to do, and which was pretty well paid. The Doctor, walking up and down with his hand on my shoulder, and his kind face turned encouragingly to mine, went on:

'Now, my dear Copperfield, in reference to this proposal of yours. It's very gratifying and agreeable to me, I am sure; but don't you think you could do better? You achieved distinction, you know, when you were with us. You are qualified for many good things. You have laid a foundation that any edifice may be raised upon; and is it not a pity that you should devote the spring-time of your life to such a poor pursuit as I can offer?'

I became very glowing again, and, expressing myself in a rhapsodical style, I am afraid, urged my request strongly; reminding the Doctor that I had already a profession.

'Well, well,' said the Doctor, 'that's true. Certainly, your having a profession, and being actually engaged in studying it, makes a difference. But, my good young friend, what's seventy pounds a year?'

'It doubles our income, Doctor Strong,' said I.

'Dear me!' replied the Doctor. 'To think of that! Not that I mean to say it's rigidly limited to seventy pounds a-year, because I have always contemplated making any young friend I might thus employ, a present too. Undoubtedly,' said the Doctor, still walking me up and down with his hand on my shoulder. 'I have always taken an annual present into account.'

'My dear tutor,' said I (now, really, without any nonsense), 'to whom I owe more obligations already than I ever can acknowledge—'

'No, no,' interposed the Doctor. 'Pardon me!'

'If you will take such time as I have, and that is my mornings and evenings, and can think it worth seventy pounds a year, you will do me such a service as I cannot express.'

'Dear me!' said the Doctor, innocently. 'To think that so little should go for so much! Dear, dear! And when you can do better, you will? On your word, now?' said the Doctor,—which he had always made a very grave appeal to the honour of us boys.

'On my word, sir!' I returned, answering in our old school manner.

'Then be it so,' said the Doctor, clapping me on the shoulder, and still keeping his hand there, as we still walked up and down.

'And I shall be twenty times happier, sir,' said I, with a little—I hope innocent—flattery, 'if my employment is to be on the Dictionary.'

The Doctor stopped, smilingly clapped me on the shoulder again, and exclaimed, with a triumph most delightful to behold, as if I had penetrated to the profoundest depths of mortal sagacity, 'My dear young friend, you have hit it. It IS the Dictionary!'

How could it be anything else! His pockets were as full of it as his head. It was sticking out of him in all directions. He told me that since his retirement from scholastic life, he had been advancing with it wonderfully; and that nothing could suit him better than the proposed arrangements for morning and evening work, as it was his custom to walk about in the daytime with his considering cap on. His papers were in a little confusion, in consequence of Mr. Jack Maldon having lately proffered his occasional services as an amanuensis, and not being accustomed to that occupation; but we should soon put right what was amiss, and go on swimmingly. Afterwards, when we were fairly at our work, I found Mr. Jack Maldon's efforts more troublesome to me than I had expected, as he had not confined himself to making numerous mistakes, but had sketched so many soldiers, and ladies' heads, over the Doctor's manuscript, that I often became involved in labyrinths of obscurity.

The Doctor was quite happy in the prospect of our going to work together on that wonderful performance, and we settled to begin next morning at seven o'clock. We were to work two hours every morning, and two or three hours every night, except on Saturdays, when I was to rest. On Sundays, of course, I was to rest also, and I considered these very easy terms.

Our plans being thus arranged to our mutual satisfaction, the Doctor took me into the house to present me to Mrs. Strong, whom we found in the Doctor's new study, dusting his books,—a freedom which he never permitted anybody else to take with those sacred favourites.

They had postponed their breakfast on my account, and we sat down to table together. We had not been seated long, when I saw an approaching arrival in Mrs. Strong's face, before I heard any sound of it. A gentleman on horseback came to the gate, and leading his horse into the little court, with the bridle over his arm, as if he were quite at home, tied him to a ring in the empty coach-house wall, and came into the breakfast parlour, whip in hand. It was Mr. Jack Maldon; and Mr. Jack Maldon was not at all improved by India, I thought. I was in a state of ferocious virtue, however, as to young men who were not cutting down trees in the forest of difficulty; and my impression must be received with due allowance.

'Mr. Jack!' said the Doctor. 'Copperfield!'

Mr. Jack Maldon shook hands with me; but not very warmly, I believed; and with an air of languid patronage, at which I secretly took great umbrage. But his languor altogether was quite a wonderful sight; except when he addressed himself to his cousin Annie. 'Have you breakfasted this morning, Mr. Jack?' said the Doctor.

'I hardly ever take breakfast, sir,' he replied, with his head thrown back in an easy-chair. 'I find it bores me.'

'Is there any news today?' inquired the Doctor.

'Nothing at all, sir,' replied Mr. Maldon. 'There's an account about the people being hungry and discontented down in the North, but they are always being hungry and discontented somewhere.'

The Doctor looked grave, and said, as though he wished to change the subject, 'Then there's no news at all; and no news, they say, is good news.'

'There's a long statement in the papers, sir, about a murder,' observed Mr. Maldon. 'But somebody is always being murdered, and I didn't read it.'

A display of indifference to all the actions and passions of mankind was not supposed to be such a distinguished quality at that time, I think, as I have observed it to be considered since. I have known it very fashionable indeed. I have seen it displayed with such success, that I have encountered some fine ladies and gentlemen who might as well have been born caterpillars. Perhaps it impressed me the more then, because it was new to me, but it certainly did not tend to exalt my opinion of, or to strengthen my confidence in, Mr. Jack Maldon.

'I came out to inquire whether Annie would like to go to the opera tonight,' said Mr. Maldon, turning to her. 'It's the last good night there will be, this season; and there's a singer there, whom she really ought to hear. She is perfectly exquisite. Besides which, she is so charmingly ugly,' relapsing into languor.

The Doctor, ever pleased with what was likely to please his young wife, turned to her and said:

'You must go, Annie. You must go.'

'I would rather not,' she said to the Doctor. 'I prefer to remain at home. I would much rather remain at home.'

Without looking at her cousin, she then addressed me, and asked me about Agnes, and whether she should see her, and whether she was not likely to come that day; and was so much disturbed, that I wondered how even the Doctor, buttering his toast, could be blind to what was so obvious.

But he saw nothing. He told her, good-naturedly, that she was young and ought to be amused and entertained, and must not allow herself to be made dull by a dull old fellow. Moreover, he said, he wanted to hear her sing all the new singer's songs to him; and how could she do that well, unless she went? So the Doctor persisted in making the engagement for her, and Mr. Jack Maldon was to come back to dinner. This concluded, he went to his Patent place, I suppose; but at all events went away on his horse, looking very idle.

I was curious to find out next morning, whether she had been. She had not, but had sent into London to put her cousin off; and had gone out in the afternoon to see Agnes, and had prevailed upon the Doctor to go with her; and they had walked home by the fields, the Doctor told me, the evening being delightful. I wondered then, whether she would have gone if Agnes had not been in town, and whether Agnes had some good influence over her too!

She did not look very happy, I thought; but it was a good face, or a very false one. I often glanced at it, for she sat in the window all the time we were at work; and made our breakfast, which we took by snatches as we were employed. When I left, at nine o'clock, she was kneeling on the ground at the Doctor's feet, putting on his shoes and gaiters for him. There was a softened shade upon her face, thrown from some green leaves overhanging the open window of the low room; and I thought all the way to Doctors' Commons, of the night when I had seen it looking at him as he read.

I was pretty busy now; up at five in the morning, and home at nine or ten at night. But I had infinite satisfaction in being so closely engaged, and never walked slowly on any account, and felt enthusiastically that the more I tired myself, the more I was doing to deserve Dora. I had not revealed myself in my altered character to Dora yet, because she was coming to see Miss Mills in a few days, and I deferred all I had to tell her until then; merely informing her in my letters (all our communications were secretly forwarded through Miss Mills), that I had much to tell her. In the meantime, I put myself on a short allowance of bear's grease, wholly abandoned scented soap and lavender water, and sold off three waistcoats at a prodigious sacrifice, as being too luxurious for my stern career.

Not satisfied with all these proceedings, but burning with impatience to do something more, I went to see Traddles, now lodging up behind the parapet of a house in Castle Street, Holborn. Mr. Dick, who had been with me to Highgate twice already, and had resumed his companionship with the Doctor, I took with me.

I took Mr. Dick with me, because, acutely sensitive to my aunt's reverses, and sincerely believing that no galley-slave or convict worked as I did, he had begun to fret and worry himself out of spirits and appetite, as having nothing useful to do. In this condition, he felt more incapable of finishing the Memorial than ever; and the harder he worked at it, the oftener that unlucky head of King Charles the First got into it. Seriously apprehending that his malady would increase, unless we put some innocent deception upon him and caused him to believe that he was useful, or unless we could put him in the way of being really useful (which would be better), I made up my mind to try if Traddles could help us. Before we went, I wrote Traddles a full statement of all that had happened, and Traddles wrote me back a capital answer, expressive of his sympathy and friendship.

We found him hard at work with his inkstand and papers, refreshed by the sight of the flower-pot stand and the little round table in a corner of the small apartment. He received us cordially, and made friends with Mr. Dick in a moment. Mr. Dick professed an absolute certainty of having seen him before, and we both said, 'Very likely.'

The first subject on which I had to consult Traddles was this,—I had heard that many men distinguished in various pursuits had begun life by reporting the debates in Parliament. Traddles having mentioned newspapers to me, as one of his hopes, I had put the two things together, and told Traddles in my letter that I wished to know how I could qualify myself for this pursuit. Traddles now informed me, as the result of his inquiries, that the mere mechanical acquisition necessary, except in rare cases, for thorough excellence in it, that is to say, a perfect and entire command of the mystery of short-hand writing and reading, was about equal in difficulty to the mastery of six languages; and that it might perhaps be attained, by dint of perseverance, in the course of a few years. Traddles reasonably supposed that this would settle the business; but I, only feeling that here indeed were a few tall trees to be hewn down, immediately resolved to work my way on to Dora through this thicket, axe in hand.

'I am very much obliged to you, my dear Traddles!' said I. 'I'll begin tomorrow.'

Traddles looked astonished, as he well might; but he had no notion as yet of my rapturous condition.

'I'll buy a book,' said I, 'with a good scheme of this art in it; I'll work at it at the Commons, where I haven't half enough to do; I'll take down the speeches in our court for practice—Traddles, my dear fellow, I'll master it!'

'Dear me,' said Traddles, opening his eyes, 'I had no idea you were such a determined character, Copperfield!'

I don't know how he should have had, for it was new enough to me. I passed that off, and brought Mr. Dick on the carpet.

'You see,' said Mr. Dick, wistfully, 'if I could exert myself, Mr. Traddles—if I could beat a drum—or blow anything!'

Poor fellow! I have little doubt he would have preferred such an employment in his heart to all others. Traddles, who would not have smiled for the world, replied composedly:

'But you are a very good penman, sir. You told me so, Copperfield?' 'Excellent!' said I. And indeed he was. He wrote with extraordinary neatness.

'Don't you think,' said Traddles, 'you could copy writings, sir, if I got them for you?'

Mr. Dick looked doubtfully at me. 'Eh, Trotwood?'

I shook my head. Mr. Dick shook his, and sighed. 'Tell him about the Memorial,' said Mr. Dick.

I explained to Traddles that there was a difficulty in keeping King Charles the First out of Mr. Dick's manuscripts; Mr. Dick in the meanwhile looking very deferentially and seriously at Traddles, and sucking his thumb.

'But these writings, you know, that I speak of, are already drawn up and finished,' said Traddles after a little consideration. 'Mr. Dick has nothing to do with them. Wouldn't that make a difference, Copperfield? At all events, wouldn't it be well to try?'

This gave us new hope. Traddles and I laying our heads together apart, while Mr. Dick anxiously watched us from his chair, we concocted a scheme in virtue of which we got him to work next day, with triumphant success.

On a table by the window in Buckingham Street, we set out the work Traddles procured for him—which was to make, I forget how many copies of a legal document about some right of way—and on another table we spread the last unfinished original of the great Memorial. Our instructions to Mr. Dick were that he should copy exactly what he had before him, without the least departure from the original; and that when he felt it necessary to make the slightest allusion to King Charles the First, he should fly to the Memorial. We exhorted him to be resolute in this, and left my aunt to observe him. My aunt reported to us, afterwards, that, at first, he was like a man playing the kettle-drums, and constantly divided his attentions between the two; but that, finding this confuse and fatigue him, and having his copy there, plainly before his eyes, he soon sat at it in an orderly business-like manner, and postponed the Memorial to a more convenient time. In a word, although we took great care that he should have no more to do than was good for him, and although he did not begin with the beginning of a week, he earned by the following Saturday night ten shillings and nine-pence; and never, while I live, shall I forget his going about to all the shops in the neighbourhood to change this treasure into sixpences, or his bringing them to my aunt arranged in the form of a heart upon a waiter, with tears of joy and pride in his eyes. He was like one under the propitious influence of a charm, from the moment of his being usefully employed; and if there were a happy man in the world, that Saturday night, it was the grateful creature who thought my aunt the most wonderful woman in existence, and me the most wonderful young man.

'No starving now, Trotwood,' said Mr. Dick, shaking hands with me in a corner. 'I'll provide for her, Sir!' and he flourished his ten fingers in the air, as if they were ten banks.

I hardly know which was the better pleased, Traddles or I. 'It really,' said Traddles, suddenly, taking a letter out of his pocket, and giving it to me, 'put Mr. Micawber quite out of my head!'

The letter (Mr. Micawber never missed any possible opportunity of writing a letter) was addressed to me, 'By the kindness of T. Traddles, Esquire, of the Inner Temple.' It ran thus:—

'MY DEAR COPPERFIELD,

'You may possibly not be unprepared to receive the intimation that something has turned up. I may have mentioned to you on a former occasion that I was in expectation of such an event.

'I am about to establish myself in one of the provincial towns of our favoured island (where the society may be described as a happy admixture of the agricultural and the clerical), in immediate connexion with one of the learned professions. Mrs. Micawber and our offspring will accompany me. Our ashes, at a future period, will probably be found commingled in the cemetery attached to a venerable pile, for which the spot to which I refer has acquired a reputation, shall I say from China to Peru?

'In bidding adieu to the modern Babylon, where we have undergone many vicissitudes, I trust not ignobly, Mrs. Micawber and myself cannot disguise from our minds that we part, it may be for years and it may be for ever, with an individual linked by strong associations to the altar of our domestic life. If, on the eve of such a departure, you will accompany our mutual friend, Mr. Thomas Traddles, to our present abode, and there reciprocate the wishes natural to the occasion, you will confer a Boon

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                 'On
                      'One
                           'Who
                                'Is
                                     'Ever yours,
                                          'WILKINS MICAWBER.'
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I was glad to find that Mr. Micawber had got rid of his dust and ashes, and that something really had turned up at last. Learning from Traddles that the invitation referred to the evening then wearing away, I expressed my readiness to do honour to it; and we went off together to the lodging which Mr. Micawber occupied as Mr. Mortimer, and which was situated near the top of the Gray's Inn Road.

The resources of this lodging were so limited, that we found the twins, now some eight or nine years old, reposing in a turn-up bedstead in the family sitting-room, where Mr. Micawber had prepared, in a wash-hand-stand jug, what he called 'a Brew' of the agreeable beverage for which he was famous. I had the pleasure, on this occasion, of renewing the acquaintance of Master Micawber, whom I found a promising boy of about twelve or thirteen, very subject to that restlessness of limb which is not an unfrequent phenomenon in youths of his age. I also became once more known to his sister, Miss Micawber, in whom, as Mr. Micawber told us, 'her mother renewed her youth, like the Phoenix'.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'yourself and Mr. Traddles find us on the brink of migration, and will excuse any little discomforts incidental to that position.'

Glancing round as I made a suitable reply, I observed that the family effects were already packed, and that the amount of luggage was by no means overwhelming. I congratulated Mrs. Micawber on the approaching change.

'My dear Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'of your friendly interest in all our affairs, I am well assured. My family may consider it banishment, if they please; but I am a wife and mother, and I never will desert Mr. Micawber.'

Traddles, appealed to by Mrs. Micawber's eye, feelingly acquiesced.

'That,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'that, at least, is my view, my dear Mr. Copperfield and Mr. Traddles, of the obligation which I took upon myself when I repeated the irrevocable words, "I, Emma, take thee, Wilkins." I read the service over with a flat-candle on the previous night, and the conclusion I derived from it was, that I never could desert Mr. Micawber. And,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'though it is possible I may be mistaken in my view of the ceremony, I never will!'

'My dear,' said Mr. Micawber, a little impatiently, 'I am not conscious that you are expected to do anything of the sort.'

'I am aware, my dear Mr. Copperfield,' pursued Mrs. Micawber, 'that I am now about to cast my lot among strangers; and I am also aware that the various members of my family, to whom Mr. Micawber has written in the most gentlemanly terms, announcing that fact, have not taken the least notice of Mr. Micawber's communication. Indeed I may be superstitious,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'but it appears to me that Mr. Micawber is destined never to receive any answers whatever to the great majority of the communications he writes. I may augur, from the silence of my family, that they object to the resolution I have taken; but I should not allow myself to be swerved from the path of duty, Mr. Copperfield, even by my papa and mama, were they still living.'

I expressed my opinion that this was going in the right direction. 'It may be a sacrifice,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'to immure one's-self in a Cathedral town; but surely, Mr. Copperfield, if it is a sacrifice in me, it is much more a sacrifice in a man of Mr. Micawber's abilities.'

'Oh! You are going to a Cathedral town?' said I.

Mr. Micawber, who had been helping us all, out of the wash-hand-stand jug, replied:

'To Canterbury. In fact, my dear Copperfield, I have entered into arrangements, by virtue of which I stand pledged and contracted to our friend Heep, to assist and serve him in the capacity of—and to be—his confidential clerk.'

I stared at Mr. Micawber, who greatly enjoyed my surprise.

'I am bound to state to you,' he said, with an official air, 'that the business habits, and the prudent suggestions, of Mrs. Micawber, have in a great measure conduced to this result. The gauntlet, to which Mrs. Micawber referred upon a former occasion, being thrown down in the form of an advertisement, was taken up by my friend Heep, and led to a mutual recognition. Of my friend Heep,' said Mr. Micawber, 'who is a man of remarkable shrewdness, I desire to speak with all possible respect. My friend Heep has not fixed the positive remuneration at too high a figure, but he has made a great deal, in the way of extrication from the pressure of pecuniary difficulties, contingent on the value of my services; and on the value of those services I pin my faith. Such address and intelligence as I chance to possess,' said Mr. Micawber, boastfully disparaging himself, with the old genteel air, 'will be devoted to my friend Heep's service. I have already some acquaintance with the law—as a defendant on civil process—and I shall immediately apply myself to the Commentaries of one of the most eminent and remarkable of our English jurists. I believe it is unnecessary to add that I allude to Mr. justice Blackstone.'

These observations, and indeed the greater part of the observations made that evening, were interrupted by Mrs. Micawber's discovering that Master Micawber was sitting on his boots, or holding his head on with both arms as if he felt it loose, or accidentally kicking Traddles under the table, or shuffling his feet over one another, or producing them at distances from himself apparently outrageous to nature, or lying sideways with his hair among the wine-glasses, or developing his restlessness of limb in some other form incompatible with the general interests of society; and by Master Micawber's receiving those discoveries in a resentful spirit. I sat all the while, amazed by Mr. Micawber's disclosure, and wondering what it meant; until Mrs. Micawber resumed the thread of the discourse, and claimed my attention.

'What I particularly request Mr. Micawber to be careful of, is,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'that he does not, my dear Mr. Copperfield, in applying himself to this subordinate branch of the law, place it out of his power to rise, ultimately, to the top of the tree. I am convinced that Mr. Micawber, giving his mind to a profession so adapted to his fertile resources, and his flow of language, must distinguish himself. Now, for example, Mr. Traddles,' said Mrs. Micawber, assuming a profound air, 'a judge, or even say a Chancellor. Does an individual place himself beyond the pale of those preferments by entering on such an office as Mr. Micawber has accepted?'

'My dear,' observed Mr. Micawber—but glancing inquisitively at Traddles, too; 'we have time enough before us, for the consideration of those questions.'

'Micawber,' she returned, 'no! Your mistake in life is, that you do not look forward far enough. You are bound, in justice to your family, if not to yourself, to take in at a comprehensive glance the extremest point in the horizon to which your abilities may lead you.'

Mr. Micawber coughed, and drank his punch with an air of exceeding satisfaction—still glancing at Traddles, as if he desired to have his opinion.

'Why, the plain state of the case, Mrs. Micawber,' said Traddles, mildly breaking the truth to her. 'I mean the real prosaic fact, you know—'

'Just so,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'my dear Mr. Traddles, I wish to be as prosaic and literal as possible on a subject of so much importance.'

'—Is,' said Traddles, 'that this branch of the law, even if Mr. Micawber were a regular solicitor—'

'Exactly so,' returned Mrs. Micawber. ('Wilkins, you are squinting, and will not be able to get your eyes back.')

'—Has nothing,' pursued Traddles, 'to do with that. Only a barrister is eligible for such preferments; and Mr. Micawber could not be a barrister, without being entered at an inn of court as a student, for five years.'

'Do I follow you?' said Mrs. Micawber, with her most affable air of business. 'Do I understand, my dear Mr. Traddles, that, at the expiration of that period, Mr. Micawber would be eligible as a Judge or Chancellor?'

'He would be ELIGIBLE,' returned Traddles, with a strong emphasis on that word.

'Thank you,' said Mrs. Micawber. 'That is quite sufficient. If such is the case, and Mr. Micawber forfeits no privilege by entering on these duties, my anxiety is set at rest. I speak,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'as a female, necessarily; but I have always been of opinion that Mr. Micawber possesses what I have heard my papa call, when I lived at home, the judicial mind; and I hope Mr. Micawber is now entering on a field where that mind will develop itself, and take a commanding station.'

I quite believe that Mr. Micawber saw himself, in his judicial mind's eye, on the woolsack. He passed his hand complacently over his bald head, and said with ostentatious resignation:

'My dear, we will not anticipate the decrees of fortune. If I am reserved to wear a wig, I am at least prepared, externally,' in allusion to his baldness, 'for that distinction. I do not,' said Mr. Micawber, 'regret my hair, and I may have been deprived of it for a specific purpose. I cannot say. It is my intention, my dear Copperfield, to educate my son for the Church; I will not deny that I should be happy, on his account, to attain to eminence.'

'For the Church?' said I, still pondering, between whiles, on Uriah Heep.

'Yes,' said Mr. Micawber. 'He has a remarkable head-voice, and will commence as a chorister. Our residence at Canterbury, and our local connexion, will, no doubt, enable him to take advantage of any vacancy that may arise in the Cathedral corps.'

On looking at Master Micawber again, I saw that he had a certain expression of face, as if his voice were behind his eyebrows; where it presently appeared to be, on his singing us (as an alternative between that and bed) 'The Wood-Pecker tapping'. After many compliments on this performance, we fell into some general conversation; and as I was too full of my desperate intentions to keep my altered circumstances to myself, I made them known to Mr. and Mrs. Micawber. I cannot express how extremely delighted they both were, by the idea of my aunt's being in difficulties; and how comfortable and friendly it made them.

When we were nearly come to the last round of the punch, I addressed myself to Traddles, and reminded him that we must not separate, without wishing our friends health, happiness, and success in their new career. I begged Mr. Micawber to fill us bumpers, and proposed the toast in due form: shaking hands with him across the table, and kissing Mrs. Micawber, to commemorate that eventful occasion. Traddles imitated me in the first particular, but did not consider himself a sufficiently old friend to venture on the second.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, rising with one of his thumbs in each of his waistcoat pockets, 'the companion of my youth: if I may be allowed the expression—and my esteemed friend Traddles: if I may be permitted to call him so—will allow me, on the part of Mrs. Micawber, myself, and our offspring, to thank them in the warmest and most uncompromising terms for their good wishes. It may be expected that on the eve of a migration which will consign us to a perfectly new existence,' Mr. Micawber spoke as if they were going five hundred thousand miles, 'I should offer a few valedictory remarks to two such friends as I see before me. But all that I have to say in this way, I have said. Whatever station in society I may attain, through the medium of the learned profession of which I am about to become an unworthy member, I shall endeavour not to disgrace, and Mrs. Micawber will be safe to adorn. Under the temporary pressure of pecuniary liabilities, contracted with a view to their immediate liquidation, but remaining unliquidated through a combination of circumstances, I have been under the necessity of assuming a garb from which my natural instincts recoil—I allude to spectacles—and possessing myself of a cognomen, to which I can establish no legitimate pretensions. All I have to say on that score is, that the cloud has passed from the dreary scene, and the God of Day is once more high upon the mountain tops. On Monday next, on the arrival of the four o'clock afternoon coach at Canterbury, my foot will be on my native heath—my name, Micawber!'

Mr. Micawber resumed his seat on the close of these remarks, and drank two glasses of punch in grave succession. He then said with much solemnity:

'One thing more I have to do, before this separation is complete, and that is to perform an act of justice. My friend Mr. Thomas Traddles has, on two several occasions, "put his name", if I may use a common expression, to bills of exchange for my accommodation. On the first occasion Mr. Thomas Traddles was left—let me say, in short, in the lurch. The fulfilment of the second has not yet arrived. The amount of the first obligation,' here Mr. Micawber carefully referred to papers, 'was, I believe, twenty-three, four, nine and a half, of the second, according to my entry of that transaction, eighteen, six, two. These sums, united, make a total, if my calculation is correct, amounting to forty-one, ten, eleven and a half. My friend Copperfield will perhaps do me the favour to check that total?'

I did so and found it correct.

'To leave this metropolis,' said Mr. Micawber, 'and my friend Mr. Thomas Traddles, without acquitting myself of the pecuniary part of this obligation, would weigh upon my mind to an insupportable extent. I have, therefore, prepared for my friend Mr. Thomas Traddles, and I now hold in my hand, a document, which accomplishes the desired object. I beg to hand to my friend Mr. Thomas Traddles my I.O.U. for forty-one, ten, eleven and a half, and I am happy to recover my moral dignity, and to know that I can once more walk erect before my fellow man!'

With this introduction (which greatly affected him), Mr. Micawber placed his I.O.U. in the hands of Traddles, and said he wished him well in every relation of life. I am persuaded, not only that this was quite the same to Mr. Micawber as paying the money, but that Traddles himself hardly knew the difference until he had had time to think about it. Mr. Micawber walked so erect before his fellow man, on the strength of this virtuous action, that his chest looked half as broad again when he lighted us downstairs. We parted with great heartiness on both sides; and when I had seen Traddles to his own door, and was going home alone, I thought, among the other odd and contradictory things I mused upon, that, slippery as Mr. Micawber was, I was probably indebted to some compassionate recollection he retained of me as his boy-lodger, for never having been asked by him for money. I certainly should not have had the moral courage to refuse it; and I have no doubt he knew that (to his credit be it written), quite as well as I did.

CHAPTER 37. A LITTLE COLD WATER

My new life had lasted for more than a week, and I was stronger than ever in those tremendous practical resolutions that I felt the crisis required. I continued to walk extremely fast, and to have a general idea that I was getting on. I made it a rule to take as much out of myself as I possibly could, in my way of doing everything to which I applied my energies. I made a perfect victim of myself. I even entertained some idea of putting myself on a vegetable diet, vaguely conceiving that, in becoming a graminivorous animal, I should sacrifice to Dora.

As yet, little Dora was quite unconscious of my desperate firmness, otherwise than as my letters darkly shadowed it forth. But another Saturday came, and on that Saturday evening she was to be at Miss Mills's; and when Mr. Mills had gone to his whist-club (telegraphed to me in the street, by a bird-cage in the drawing-room middle window), I was to go there to tea.

By this time, we were quite settled down in Buckingham Street, where Mr. Dick continued his copying in a state of absolute felicity. My aunt had obtained a signal victory over Mrs. Crupp, by paying her off, throwing the first pitcher she planted on the stairs out of window, and protecting in person, up and down the staircase, a supernumerary whom she engaged from the outer world. These vigorous measures struck such terror to the breast of Mrs. Crupp, that she subsided into her own kitchen, under the impression that my aunt was mad. My aunt being supremely indifferent to Mrs. Crupp's opinion and everybody else's, and rather favouring than discouraging the idea, Mrs. Crupp, of late the bold, became within a few days so faint-hearted, that rather than encounter my aunt upon the staircase, she would endeavour to hide her portly form behind doors—leaving visible, however, a wide margin of flannel petticoat—or would shrink into dark corners. This gave my aunt such unspeakable satisfaction, that I believe she took a delight in prowling up and down, with her bonnet insanely perched on the top of her head, at times when Mrs. Crupp was likely to be in the way.

My aunt, being uncommonly neat and ingenious, made so many little improvements in our domestic arrangements, that I seemed to be richer instead of poorer. Among the rest, she converted the pantry into a dressing-room for me; and purchased and embellished a bedstead for my occupation, which looked as like a bookcase in the daytime as a bedstead could. I was the object of her constant solicitude; and my poor mother herself could not have loved me better, or studied more how to make me happy.

Peggotty had considered herself highly privileged in being allowed to participate in these labours; and, although she still retained something of her old sentiment of awe in reference to my aunt, had received so many marks of encouragement and confidence, that they were the best friends possible. But the time had now come (I am speaking of the Saturday when I was to take tea at Miss Mills's) when it was necessary for her to return home, and enter on the discharge of the duties she had undertaken in behalf of Ham. 'So good-bye, Barkis,' said my aunt, 'and take care of yourself! I am sure I never thought I could be sorry to lose you!'

I took Peggotty to the coach office and saw her off. She cried at parting, and confided her brother to my friendship as Ham had done. We had heard nothing of him since he went away, that sunny afternoon.

'And now, my own dear Davy,' said Peggotty, 'if, while you're a prentice, you should want any money to spend; or if, when you're out of your time, my dear, you should want any to set you up (and you must do one or other, or both, my darling); who has such a good right to ask leave to lend it you, as my sweet girl's own old stupid me!'

I was not so savagely independent as to say anything in reply, but that if ever I borrowed money of anyone, I would borrow it of her. Next to accepting a large sum on the spot, I believe this gave Peggotty more comfort than anything I could have done.

'And, my dear!' whispered Peggotty, 'tell the pretty little angel that I should so have liked to see her, only for a minute! And tell her that before she marries my boy, I'll come and make your house so beautiful for you, if you'll let me!'

I declared that nobody else should touch it; and this gave Peggotty such delight that she went away in good spirits.

I fatigued myself as much as I possibly could in the Commons all day, by a variety of devices, and at the appointed time in the evening repaired to Mr. Mills's street. Mr. Mills, who was a terrible fellow to fall asleep after dinner, had not yet gone out, and there was no bird-cage in the middle window.

He kept me waiting so long, that I fervently hoped the Club would fine him for being late. At last he came out; and then I saw my own Dora hang up the bird-cage, and peep into the balcony to look for me, and run in again when she saw I was there, while Jip remained behind, to bark injuriously at an immense butcher's dog in the street, who could have taken him like a pill.

Dora came to the drawing-room door to meet me; and Jip came scrambling out, tumbling over his own growls, under the impression that I was a Bandit; and we all three went in, as happy and loving as could be. I soon carried desolation into the bosom of our joys—not that I meant to do it, but that I was so full of the subject—by asking Dora, without the smallest preparation, if she could love a beggar?

My pretty, little, startled Dora! Her only association with the word was a yellow face and a nightcap, or a pair of crutches, or a wooden leg, or a dog with a decanter-stand in his mouth, or something of that kind; and she stared at me with the most delightful wonder.

'How can you ask me anything so foolish?' pouted Dora. 'Love a beggar!'

'Dora, my own dearest!' said I. 'I am a beggar!'

'How can you be such a silly thing,' replied Dora, slapping my hand, 'as to sit there, telling such stories? I'll make Jip bite you!'

Her childish way was the most delicious way in the world to me, but it was necessary to be explicit, and I solemnly repeated:

'Dora, my own life, I am your ruined David!'

'I declare I'll make Jip bite you!' said Dora, shaking her curls, 'if you are so ridiculous.'

But I looked so serious, that Dora left off shaking her curls, and laid her trembling little hand upon my shoulder, and first looked scared and anxious, then began to cry. That was dreadful. I fell upon my knees before the sofa, caressing her, and imploring her not to rend my heart; but, for some time, poor little Dora did nothing but exclaim Oh dear! Oh dear! And oh, she was so frightened! And where was Julia Mills! And oh, take her to Julia Mills, and go away, please! until I was almost beside myself.

At last, after an agony of supplication and protestation, I got Dora to look at me, with a horrified expression of face, which I gradually soothed until it was only loving, and her soft, pretty cheek was lying against mine. Then I told her, with my arms clasped round her, how I loved her, so dearly, and so dearly; how I felt it right to offer to release her from her engagement, because now I was poor; how I never could bear it, or recover it, if I lost her; how I had no fears of poverty, if she had none, my arm being nerved and my heart inspired by her; how I was already working with a courage such as none but lovers knew; how I had begun to be practical, and look into the future; how a crust well earned was sweeter far than a feast inherited; and much more to the same purpose, which I delivered in a burst of passionate eloquence quite surprising to myself, though I had been thinking about it, day and night, ever since my aunt had astonished me.

'Is your heart mine still, dear Dora?' said I, rapturously, for I knew by her clinging to me that it was.

'Oh, yes!' cried Dora. 'Oh, yes, it's all yours. Oh, don't be dreadful!'

I dreadful! To Dora!

'Don't talk about being poor, and working hard!' said Dora, nestling closer to me. 'Oh, don't, don't!'

'My dearest love,' said I, 'the crust well-earned—'

'Oh, yes; but I don't want to hear any more about crusts!' said Dora. 'And Jip must have a mutton-chop every day at twelve, or he'll die.'

I was charmed with her childish, winning way. I fondly explained to Dora that Jip should have his mutton-chop with his accustomed regularity. I drew a picture of our frugal home, made independent by my labour—sketching in the little house I had seen at Highgate, and my aunt in her room upstairs.

'I am not dreadful now, Dora?' said I, tenderly.

'Oh, no, no!' cried Dora. 'But I hope your aunt will keep in her own room a good deal. And I hope she's not a scolding old thing!'

If it were possible for me to love Dora more than ever, I am sure I did. But I felt she was a little impracticable. It damped my new-born ardour, to find that ardour so difficult of communication to her. I made another trial. When she was quite herself again, and was curling Jip's ears, as he lay upon her lap, I became grave, and said:

'My own! May I mention something?'

'Oh, please don't be practical!' said Dora, coaxingly. 'Because it frightens me so!'

'Sweetheart!' I returned; 'there is nothing to alarm you in all this. I want you to think of it quite differently. I want to make it nerve you, and inspire you, Dora!'

'Oh, but that's so shocking!' cried Dora.

'My love, no. Perseverance and strength of character will enable us to bear much worse things.' 'But I haven't got any strength at all,' said Dora, shaking her curls. 'Have I, Jip? Oh, do kiss Jip, and be agreeable!'

It was impossible to resist kissing Jip, when she held him up to me for that purpose, putting her own bright, rosy little mouth into kissing form, as she directed the operation, which she insisted should be performed symmetrically, on the centre of his nose. I did as she bade me—rewarding myself afterwards for my obedience—and she charmed me out of my graver character for I don't know how long.

'But, Dora, my beloved!' said I, at last resuming it; 'I was going to mention something.'

The judge of the Prerogative Court might have fallen in love with her, to see her fold her little hands and hold them up, begging and praying me not to be dreadful any more.

'Indeed I am not going to be, my darling!' I assured her. 'But, Dora, my love, if you will sometimes think,—not despondingly, you know; far from that!—but if you will sometimes think—just to encourage yourself—that you are engaged to a poor man—'

'Don't, don't! Pray don't!' cried Dora. 'It's so very dreadful!'

'My soul, not at all!' said I, cheerfully. 'If you will sometimes think of that, and look about now and then at your papa's housekeeping, and endeavour to acquire a little habit—of accounts, for instance—'

Poor little Dora received this suggestion with something that was half a sob and half a scream.

'—It would be so useful to us afterwards,' I went on. 'And if you would promise me to read a little—a little Cookery Book that I would send you, it would be so excellent for both of us. For our path in life, my Dora,' said I, warming with the subject, 'is stony and rugged now, and it rests with us to smooth it. We must fight our way onward. We must be brave. There are obstacles to be met, and we must meet, and crush them!'

I was going on at a great rate, with a clenched hand, and a most enthusiastic countenance; but it was quite unnecessary to proceed. I had said enough. I had done it again. Oh, she was so frightened! Oh, where was Julia Mills! Oh, take her to Julia Mills, and go away, please! So that, in short, I was quite distracted, and raved about the drawing-room.

I thought I had killed her, this time. I sprinkled water on her face. I went down on my knees. I plucked at my hair. I denounced myself as a remorseless brute and a ruthless beast. I implored her forgiveness. I besought her to look up. I ravaged Miss Mills's work-box for a smelling-bottle, and in my agony of mind applied an ivory needle-case instead, and dropped all the needles over Dora. I shook my fists at Jip, who was as frantic as myself. I did every wild extravagance that could be done, and was a long way beyond the end of my wits when Miss Mills came into the room.

'Who has done this?' exclaimed Miss Mills, succouring her friend.

I replied, 'I, Miss Mills! I have done it! Behold the destroyer!'—or words to that effect—and hid my face from the light, in the sofa cushion.

At first Miss Mills thought it was a quarrel, and that we were verging on the Desert of Sahara; but she soon found out how matters stood, for my dear affectionate little Dora, embracing her, began exclaiming that I was 'a poor labourer'; and then cried for me, and embraced me, and asked me would I let her give me all her money to keep, and then fell on Miss Mills's neck, sobbing as if her tender heart were broken.

Miss Mills must have been born to be a blessing to us. She ascertained from me in a few words what it was all about, comforted Dora, and gradually convinced her that I was not a labourer—from my manner of stating the case I believe Dora concluded that I was a navigator, and went balancing myself up and down a plank all day with a wheelbarrow—and so brought us together in peace. When we were quite composed, and Dora had gone up-stairs to put some rose-water to her eyes, Miss Mills rang for tea. In the ensuing interval, I told Miss Mills that she was evermore my friend, and that my heart must cease to vibrate ere I could forget her sympathy.

I then expounded to Miss Mills what I had endeavoured, so very unsuccessfully, to expound to Dora. Miss Mills replied, on general principles, that the Cottage of content was better than the Palace of cold splendour, and that where love was, all was.

I said to Miss Mills that this was very true, and who should know it better than I, who loved Dora with a love that never mortal had experienced yet? But on Miss Mills observing, with despondency, that it were well indeed for some hearts if this were so, I explained that I begged leave to restrict the observation to mortals of the masculine gender.

I then put it to Miss Mills, to say whether she considered that there was or was not any practical merit in the suggestion I had been anxious to make, concerning the accounts, the housekeeping, and the Cookery Book?

Miss Mills, after some consideration, thus replied:

'Mr. Copperfield, I will be plain with you. Mental suffering and trial supply, in some natures, the place of years, and I will be as plain with you as if I were a Lady Abbess. No. The suggestion is not appropriate to our Dora. Our dearest Dora is a favourite child of nature. She is a thing of light, and airiness, and joy. I am free to confess that if it could be done, it might be well, but—' And Miss Mills shook her head.

I was encouraged by this closing admission on the part of Miss Mills to ask her, whether, for Dora's sake, if she had any opportunity of luring her attention to such preparations for an earnest life, she would avail herself of it? Miss Mills replied in the affirmative so readily, that I further asked her if she would take charge of the Cookery Book; and, if she ever could insinuate it upon Dora's acceptance, without frightening her, undertake to do me that crowning service. Miss Mills accepted this trust, too; but was not sanguine.

And Dora returned, looking such a lovely little creature, that I really doubted whether she ought to be troubled with anything so ordinary. And she loved me so much, and was so captivating (particularly when she made Jip stand on his hind legs for toast, and when she pretended to hold that nose of his against the hot teapot for punishment because he wouldn't), that I felt like a sort of Monster who had got into a Fairy's bower, when I thought of having frightened her, and made her cry.

After tea we had the guitar; and Dora sang those same dear old French songs about the impossibility of ever on any account leaving off dancing, La ra la, La ra la, until I felt a much greater Monster than before.

We had only one check to our pleasure, and that happened a little while before I took my leave, when, Miss Mills chancing to make some allusion to tomorrow morning, I unluckily let out that, being obliged to exert myself now, I got up at five o'clock. Whether Dora had any idea that I was a Private Watchman, I am unable to say; but it made a great impression on her, and she neither played nor sang any more.

It was still on her mind when I bade her adieu; and she said to me, in her pretty coaxing way—as if I were a doll, I used to think:

'Now don't get up at five o'clock, you naughty boy. It's so nonsensical!'

'My love,' said I, 'I have work to do.'

'But don't do it!' returned Dora. 'Why should you?'

It was impossible to say to that sweet little surprised face, otherwise than lightly and playfully, that we must work to live.

'Oh! How ridiculous!' cried Dora.

'How shall we live without, Dora?' said I.

'How? Any how!' said Dora.

She seemed to think she had quite settled the question, and gave me such a triumphant little kiss, direct from her innocent heart, that I would hardly have put her out of conceit with her answer, for a fortune.

Well! I loved her, and I went on loving her, most absorbingly, entirely, and completely. But going on, too, working pretty hard, and busily keeping red-hot all the irons I now had in the fire, I would sit sometimes of a night, opposite my aunt, thinking how I had frightened Dora that time, and how I could best make my way with a guitar-case through the forest of difficulty, until I used to fancy that my head was turning quite grey.

CHAPTER 38. A DISSOLUTION OF PARTNERSHIP

I did not allow my resolution, with respect to the Parliamentary Debates, to cool. It was one of the irons I began to heat immediately, and one of the irons I kept hot, and hammered at, with a perseverance I may honestly admire. I bought an approved scheme of the noble art and mystery of stenography (which cost me ten and sixpence); and plunged into a sea of perplexity that brought me, in a few weeks, to the confines of distraction. The changes that were rung upon dots, which in such a position meant such a thing, and in such another position something else, entirely different; the wonderful vagaries that were played by circles; the unaccountable consequences that resulted from marks like flies' legs; the tremendous effects of a curve in a wrong place; not only troubled my waking hours, but reappeared before me in my sleep. When I had groped my way, blindly, through these difficulties, and had mastered the alphabet, which was an Egyptian Temple in itself, there then appeared a procession of new horrors, called arbitrary characters; the most despotic characters I have ever known; who insisted, for instance, that a thing like the beginning of a cobweb, meant expectation, and that a pen-and-ink sky-rocket, stood for disadvantageous. When I had fixed these wretches in my mind, I found that they had driven everything else out of it; then, beginning again, I forgot them; while I was picking them up, I dropped the other fragments of the system; in short, it was almost heart-breaking.

It might have been quite heart-breaking, but for Dora, who was the stay and anchor of my tempest-driven bark. Every scratch in the scheme was a gnarled oak in the forest of difficulty, and I went on cutting them down, one after another, with such vigour, that in three or four months I was in a condition to make an experiment on one of our crack speakers in the Commons. Shall I ever forget how the crack speaker walked off from me before I began, and left my imbecile pencil staggering about the paper as if it were in a fit!

This would not do, it was quite clear. I was flying too high, and should never get on, so. I resorted to Traddles for advice; who suggested that he should dictate speeches to me, at a pace, and with occasional stoppages, adapted to my weakness. Very grateful for this friendly aid, I accepted the proposal; and night after night, almost every night, for a long time, we had a sort of Private Parliament in Buckingham Street, after I came home from the Doctor's.

I should like to see such a Parliament anywhere else! My aunt and Mr. Dick represented the Government or the Opposition (as the case might be), and Traddles, with the assistance of Enfield's Speakers, or a volume of parliamentary orations, thundered astonishing invectives against them. Standing by the table, with his finger in the page to keep the place, and his right arm flourishing above his head, Traddles, as Mr. Pitt, Mr. Fox, Mr. Sheridan, Mr. Burke, Lord Castlereagh, Viscount Sidmouth, or Mr. Canning, would work himself into the most violent heats, and deliver the most withering denunciations of the profligacy and corruption of my aunt and Mr. Dick; while I used to sit, at a little distance, with my notebook on my knee, fagging after him with all my might and main. The inconsistency and recklessness of Traddles were not to be exceeded by any real politician. He was for any description of policy, in the compass of a week; and nailed all sorts of colours to every denomination of mast. My aunt, looking very like an immovable Chancellor of the Exchequer, would occasionally throw in an interruption or two, as 'Hear!' or 'No!' or 'Oh!' when the text seemed to require it: which was always a signal to Mr. Dick (a perfect country gentleman) to follow lustily with the same cry. But Mr. Dick got taxed with such things in the course of his Parliamentary career, and was made responsible for such awful consequences, that he became uncomfortable in his mind sometimes. I believe he actually began to be afraid he really had been doing something, tending to the annihilation of the British constitution, and the ruin of the country.

Often and often we pursued these debates until the clock pointed to midnight, and the candles were burning down. The result of so much good practice was, that by and by I began to keep pace with Traddles pretty well, and should have been quite triumphant if I had had the least idea what my notes were about. But, as to reading them after I had got them, I might as well have copied the Chinese inscriptions of an immense collection of tea-chests, or the golden characters on all the great red and green bottles in the chemists' shops!

There was nothing for it, but to turn back and begin all over again. It was very hard, but I turned back, though with a heavy heart, and began laboriously and methodically to plod over the same tedious ground at a snail's pace; stopping to examine minutely every speck in the way, on all sides, and making the most desperate efforts to know these elusive characters by sight wherever I met them. I was always punctual at the office; at the Doctor's too: and I really did work, as the common expression is, like a cart-horse. One day, when I went to the Commons as usual, I found Mr. Spenlow in the doorway looking extremely grave, and talking to himself. As he was in the habit of complaining of pains in his head—he had naturally a short throat, and I do seriously believe he over-starched himself—I was at first alarmed by the idea that he was not quite right in that direction; but he soon relieved my uneasiness.

Instead of returning my 'Good morning' with his usual affability, he looked at me in a distant, ceremonious manner, and coldly requested me to accompany him to a certain coffee-house, which, in those days, had a door opening into the Commons, just within the little archway in St. Paul's Churchyard. I complied, in a very uncomfortable state, and with a warm shooting all over me, as if my apprehensions were breaking out into buds. When I allowed him to go on a little before, on account of the narrowness of the way, I observed that he carried his head with a lofty air that was particularly unpromising; and my mind misgave me that he had found out about my darling Dora.

If I had not guessed this, on the way to the coffee-house, I could hardly have failed to know what was the matter when I followed him into an upstairs room, and found Miss Murdstone there, supported by a background of sideboard, on which were several inverted tumblers sustaining lemons, and two of those extraordinary boxes, all corners and flutings, for sticking knives and forks in, which, happily for mankind, are now obsolete.

Miss Murdstone gave me her chilly finger-nails, and sat severely rigid. Mr. Spenlow shut the door, motioned me to a chair, and stood on the hearth-rug in front of the fireplace.

'Have the goodness to show Mr. Copperfield,' said Mr. Spenlow, what you have in your reticule, Miss Murdstone.'

I believe it was the old identical steel-clasped reticule of my childhood, that shut up like a bite. Compressing her lips, in sympathy with the snap, Miss Murdstone opened it—opening her mouth a little at the same time—

and produced my last letter to Dora, teeming with expressions of devoted affection.

'I believe that is your writing, Mr. Copperfield?' said Mr. Spenlow.

I was very hot, and the voice I heard was very unlike mine, when I said, 'It is, sir!'

'If I am not mistaken,' said Mr. Spenlow, as Miss Murdstone brought a parcel of letters out of her reticule, tied round with the dearest bit of blue ribbon, 'those are also from your pen, Mr. Copperfield?'

I took them from her with a most desolate sensation; and, glancing at such phrases at the top, as 'My ever dearest and own Dora,' 'My best beloved angel,' 'My blessed one for ever,' and the like, blushed deeply, and inclined my head.

'No, thank you!' said Mr. Spenlow, coldly, as I mechanically offered them back to him. 'I will not deprive you of them. Miss Murdstone, be so good as to proceed!'

That gentle creature, after a moment's thoughtful survey of the carpet, delivered herself with much dry unction as follows.

'I must confess to having entertained my suspicions of Miss Spenlow, in reference to David Copperfield, for some time. I observed Miss Spenlow and David Copperfield, when they first met; and the impression made upon me then was not agreeable. The depravity of the human heart is such—'

'You will oblige me, ma'am,' interrupted Mr. Spenlow, 'by confining yourself to facts.'

Miss Murdstone cast down her eyes, shook her head as if protesting against this unseemly interruption, and with frowning dignity resumed:

'Since I am to confine myself to facts, I will state them as dryly as I can. Perhaps that will be considered an acceptable course of proceeding. I have already said, sir, that I have had my suspicions of Miss Spenlow, in reference to David Copperfield, for some time. I have frequently endeavoured to find decisive corroboration of those suspicions, but without effect. I have therefore forborne to mention them to Miss Spenlow's father'; looking severely at him—'knowing how little disposition there usually is in such cases, to acknowledge the conscientious discharge of duty.'

Mr. Spenlow seemed quite cowed by the gentlemanly sternness of Miss Murdstone's manner, and deprecated her severity with a conciliatory little wave of his hand.

'On my return to Norwood, after the period of absence occasioned by my brother's marriage,' pursued Miss Murdstone in a disdainful voice, 'and on the return of Miss Spenlow from her visit to her friend Miss Mills, I imagined that the manner of Miss Spenlow gave me greater occasion for suspicion than before. Therefore I watched Miss Spenlow closely.'

Dear, tender little Dora, so unconscious of this Dragon's eye!

'Still,' resumed Miss Murdstone, 'I found no proof until last night. It appeared to me that Miss Spenlow received too many letters from her friend Miss Mills; but Miss Mills being her friend with her father's full concurrence,' another telling blow at Mr. Spenlow, 'it was not for me to interfere. If I may not be permitted to allude to the natural depravity of the human heart, at least I may—I must—be permitted, so far to refer to misplaced confidence.'

Mr. Spenlow apologetically murmured his assent.

'Last evening after tea,' pursued Miss Murdstone, 'I observed the little dog starting, rolling, and growling about the drawing-room, worrying something. I said to Miss Spenlow, "Dora, what is that the dog has in his mouth? It's paper." Miss Spenlow immediately put her hand to her frock, gave a sudden cry, and ran to the dog. I interposed, and said, "Dora, my love, you must permit me."'

Oh Jip, miserable Spaniel, this wretchedness, then, was your work!

'Miss Spenlow endeavoured,' said Miss Murdstone, 'to bribe me with kisses, work-boxes, and small articles of jewellery—that, of course, I pass over. The little dog retreated under the sofa on my approaching him, and was with great difficulty dislodged by the fire-irons. Even when dislodged, he still kept the letter in his mouth; and on my endeavouring to take it from him, at the imminent risk of being bitten, he kept it between his teeth so pertinaciously as to suffer himself to be held suspended in the air by means of the document. At length I obtained possession of it. After perusing it, I taxed Miss Spenlow with having many such letters in her possession; and ultimately obtained from her the packet which is now in David Copperfield's hand.'

Here she ceased; and snapping her reticule again, and shutting her mouth, looked as if she might be broken, but could never be bent.

'You have heard Miss Murdstone,' said Mr. Spenlow, turning to me. 'I beg to ask, Mr. Copperfield, if you have anything to say in reply?'

The picture I had before me, of the beautiful little treasure of my heart, sobbing and crying all night—of her being alone, frightened, and wretched, then—of her having so piteously begged and prayed that stony-hearted woman to forgive her—of her having vainly offered her those kisses, work-boxes, and trinkets—of her being in such grievous distress, and all for me—very much impaired the little dignity I had been able to muster. I am afraid I was in a tremulous state for a minute or so, though I did my best to disguise it.

'There is nothing I can say, sir,' I returned, 'except that all the blame is mine. Dora—'

'Miss Spenlow, if you please,' said her father, majestically.

'—was induced and persuaded by me,' I went on, swallowing that colder designation, 'to consent to this concealment, and I bitterly regret it.'

'You are very much to blame, sir,' said Mr. Spenlow, walking to and fro upon the hearth-rug, and emphasizing what he said with his whole body instead of his head, on account of the stiffness of his cravat and spine. 'You have done a stealthy and unbecoming action, Mr. Copperfield. When I take a gentleman to my house, no matter whether he is nineteen, twenty-nine, or ninety, I take him there in a spirit of confidence. If he abuses my confidence, he commits a dishonourable action, Mr. Copperfield.'

'I feel it, sir, I assure you,' I returned. 'But I never thought so, before. Sincerely, honestly, indeed, Mr. Spenlow, I never thought so, before. I love Miss Spenlow to that extent—'

'Pooh! nonsense!' said Mr. Spenlow, reddening. 'Pray don't tell me to my face that you love my daughter, Mr. Copperfield!'

'Could I defend my conduct if I did not, sir?' I returned, with all humility.

'Can you defend your conduct if you do, sir?' said Mr. Spenlow, stopping short upon the hearth-rug. 'Have you considered your years, and my daughter's years, Mr. Copperfield? Have you considered what it is to undermine the confidence that should subsist between my daughter and myself? Have you considered my daughter's station in life, the projects I may contemplate for her advancement, the testamentary intentions I may have with reference to her? Have you considered anything, Mr. Copperfield?'

'Very little, sir, I am afraid;' I answered, speaking to him as respectfully and sorrowfully as I felt; 'but pray believe me, I have considered my own worldly position. When I explained it to you, we were already engaged—'

'I BEG,' said Mr. Spenlow, more like Punch than I had ever seen him, as he energetically struck one hand upon the other—I could not help noticing that even in my despair; 'that YOU Will NOT talk to me of engagements, Mr. Copperfield!'

The otherwise immovable Miss Murdstone laughed contemptuously in one short syllable.

'When I explained my altered position to you, sir,' I began again, substituting a new form of expression for what was so unpalatable to him, 'this concealment, into which I am so unhappy as to have led Miss Spenlow, had begun. Since I have been in that altered position, I have strained every nerve, I have exerted every energy, to improve it. I am sure I shall improve it in time. Will you grant me time—any length of time? We are both so young, sir,—'

'You are right,' interrupted Mr. Spenlow, nodding his head a great many times, and frowning very much, 'you are both very young. It's all nonsense. Let there be an end of the nonsense. Take away those letters, and throw them in the fire. Give me Miss Spenlow's letters to throw in the fire; and although our future intercourse must, you are aware, be restricted to the Commons here, we will agree to make no further mention of the past. Come, Mr. Copperfield, you don't want sense; and this is the sensible course.'

No. I couldn't think of agreeing to it. I was very sorry, but there was a higher consideration than sense. Love was above all earthly considerations, and I loved Dora to idolatry, and Dora loved me. I didn't exactly say so; I softened it down as much as I could; but I implied it, and I was resolute upon it. I don't think I made myself very ridiculous, but I know I was resolute.

'Very well, Mr. Copperfield,' said Mr. Spenlow, 'I must try my influence with my daughter.'

Miss Murdstone, by an expressive sound, a long drawn respiration, which was neither a sigh nor a moan, but was like both, gave it as her opinion that he should have done this at first.

'I must try,' said Mr. Spenlow, confirmed by this support, 'my influence with my daughter. Do you decline to take those letters, Mr. Copperfield?' For I had laid them on the table.

Yes. I told him I hoped he would not think it wrong, but I couldn't possibly take them from Miss Murdstone.

'Nor from me?' said Mr. Spenlow.

No, I replied with the profoundest respect; nor from him.

'Very well!' said Mr. Spenlow.

A silence succeeding, I was undecided whether to go or stay. At length I was moving quietly towards the door, with the intention of saying that perhaps I should consult his feelings best by withdrawing: when he said, with his hands in his coat pockets, into which it was as much as he could do to get them; and with what I should call, upon the whole, a decidedly pious air:

'You are probably aware, Mr. Copperfield, that I am not altogether destitute of worldly possessions, and that my daughter is my nearest and dearest relative?'

I hurriedly made him a reply to the effect, that I hoped the error into which I had been betrayed by the desperate nature of my love, did not induce him to think me mercenary too?

'I don't allude to the matter in that light,' said Mr. Spenlow. 'It would be better for yourself, and all of us, if you WERE mercenary, Mr. Copperfield—I mean, if you were more discreet and less influenced by all this youthful nonsense. No. I merely say, with quite another view, you are probably aware I have some property to bequeath to my child?'

I certainly supposed so.

'And you can hardly think,' said Mr. Spenlow, 'having experience of what we see, in the Commons here, every day, of the various unaccountable and negligent proceedings of men, in respect of their testamentary arrangements—of all subjects, the one on which perhaps the strangest revelations of human inconsistency are to be met with—but that mine are made?'

I inclined my head in acquiescence.

'I should not allow,' said Mr. Spenlow, with an evident increase of pious sentiment, and slowly shaking his head as he poised himself upon his toes and heels alternately, 'my suitable provision for my child to be influenced by a piece of youthful folly like the present. It is mere folly. Mere nonsense. In a little while, it will weigh lighter than any feather. But I might—I might—if this silly business were not completely relinquished altogether, be induced in some anxious moment to guard her from, and surround her with protections against, the consequences of any foolish step in the way of marriage. Now, Mr. Copperfield, I hope that you will not render it necessary for me to open, even for a quarter of an hour, that closed page in the book of life, and unsettle, even for a quarter of an hour, grave affairs long since composed.'

There was a serenity, a tranquillity, a calm sunset air about him, which quite affected me. He was so peaceful and resigned—clearly had his affairs in such perfect train, and so systematically wound up—that he was a man to feel touched in the contemplation of. I really think I saw tears rise to his eyes, from the depth of his own feeling of all this.

But what could I do? I could not deny Dora and my own heart. When he told me I had better take a week to consider of what he had said, how could I say I wouldn't take a week, yet how could I fail to know that no amount of weeks could influence such love as mine?

'In the meantime, confer with Miss Trotwood, or with any person with any knowledge of life,' said Mr. Spenlow, adjusting his cravat with both hands. 'Take a week, Mr. Copperfield.'

I submitted; and, with a countenance as expressive as I was able to make it of dejected and despairing constancy, came out of the room. Miss Murdstone's heavy eyebrows followed me to the door—I say her eyebrows rather than her eyes, because they were much more important in her face—and she looked so exactly as she used to look, at about that hour of the morning, in our parlour at Blunderstone, that I could have fancied I had been breaking down in my lessons again, and that the dead weight on my mind was that horrible old spelling-book, with oval woodcuts, shaped, to my youthful fancy, like the glasses out of spectacles.

When I got to the office, and, shutting out old Tiffey and the rest of them with my hands, sat at my desk, in my own particular nook, thinking of this earthquake that had taken place so unexpectedly, and in the bitterness of my spirit cursing Jip, I fell into such a state of torment about Dora, that I wonder I did not take up my hat and rush insanely to Norwood. The idea of their frightening her, and making her cry, and of my not being there to comfort her, was so excruciating, that it impelled me to write a wild letter to Mr. Spenlow, beseeching him not to visit upon her the consequences of my awful destiny. I implored him to spare her gentle nature—not to crush a fragile flower—and addressed him generally, to the best of my remembrance, as if, instead of being her father, he had been an Ogre, or the

Dragon of Wantley.3 This letter I sealed and laid upon his desk before he returned; and when he came in, I saw him, through the half-opened door of his room, take it up and read it.

He said nothing about it all the morning; but before he went away in the afternoon he called me in, and told me that I need not make myself at all uneasy about his daughter's happiness. He had assured her, he said, that it was all nonsense; and he had nothing more to say to her. He believed he was an indulgent father (as indeed he was), and I might spare myself any solicitude on her account.

'You may make it necessary, if you are foolish or obstinate, Mr. Copperfield,' he observed, 'for me to send my daughter abroad again, for a term; but I have a better opinion of you. I hope you will be wiser than that, in a few days. As to Miss Murdstone,' for I had alluded to her in the letter, 'I respect that lady's vigilance, and feel obliged to her; but she has strict charge to avoid the subject. All I desire, Mr. Copperfield, is, that it should be forgotten. All you have got to do, Mr. Copperfield, is to forget it.'

All! In the note I wrote to Miss Mills, I bitterly quoted this sentiment. All I had to do, I said, with gloomy sarcasm, was to forget Dora. That was all, and what was that! I entreated Miss Mills to see me, that evening. If it could not be done with Mr. Mills's sanction and concurrence, I besought a clandestine interview in the back kitchen where the Mangle was. I informed her that my reason was tottering on its throne, and only she, Miss Mills, could prevent its being deposed. I signed myself, hers distractedly; and I couldn't help feeling, while I read this composition over, before sending it by a porter, that it was something in the style of Mr. Micawber.

However, I sent it. At night I repaired to Miss Mills's street, and walked up and down, until I was stealthily fetched in by Miss Mills's maid, and taken the area way to the back kitchen. I have since seen reason to believe that there was nothing on earth to prevent my going in at the front door, and being shown up into the drawing-room, except Miss Mills's love of the romantic and mysterious.

In the back kitchen, I raved as became me. I went there, I suppose, to make a fool of myself, and I am quite sure I did it. Miss Mills had received a hasty note from Dora, telling her that all was discovered, and saying. 'Oh pray come to me, Julia, do, do!' But Miss Mills, mistrusting the acceptability of her presence to the higher powers, had not yet gone; and we were all benighted in the Desert of Sahara.

Miss Mills had a wonderful flow of words, and liked to pour them out. I could not help feeling, though she mingled her tears with mine, that she had a dreadful luxury in our afflictions. She petted them, as I may say, and made the most of them. A deep gulf, she observed, had opened between Dora and me, and Love could only span it with its rainbow. Love must suffer in this stern world; it ever had been so, it ever would be so. No matter, Miss Mills remarked. Hearts confined by cobwebs would burst at last, and then Love was avenged.

This was small consolation, but Miss Mills wouldn't encourage fallacious hopes. She made me much more wretched than I was before, and I felt (and told her with the deepest gratitude) that she was indeed a friend. We resolved that she should go to Dora the first thing in the morning, and find some means of assuring her, either by looks or words, of my devotion and misery. We parted, overwhelmed with grief; and I think Miss Mills enjoyed herself completely.

I confided all to my aunt when I got home; and in spite of all she could say to me, went to bed despairing. I got up despairing, and went out despairing. It was Saturday morning, and I went straight to the Commons.

I was surprised, when I came within sight of our office-door, to see the ticket-porters standing outside talking together, and some half-dozen stragglers gazing at the windows which were shut up. I quickened my pace, and, passing among them, wondering at their looks, went hurriedly in.

The clerks were there, but nobody was doing anything. Old Tiffey, for the first time in his life I should think, was sitting on somebody else's stool, and had not hung up his hat.

'This is a dreadful calamity, Mr. Copperfield,' said he, as I entered.

'What is?' I exclaimed. 'What's the matter?'

'Don't you know?' cried Tiffey, and all the rest of them, coming round me.

'No!' said I, looking from face to face.

'Mr. Spenlow,' said Tiffey.

'What about him!'

'Dead!' I thought it was the office reeling, and not I, as one of the clerks caught hold of me. They sat me down in a chair, untied my neck-cloth, and brought me some water. I have no idea whether this took any time.

'Dead?' said I.

'He dined in town yesterday, and drove down in the phaeton by himself,' said Tiffey, 'having sent his own groom home by the coach, as he sometimes did, you know—'

'Well?'

'The phaeton went home without him. The horses stopped at the stable-gate. The man went out with a lantern. Nobody in the carriage.'

'Had they run away?'

'They were not hot,' said Tiffey, putting on his glasses; 'no hotter, I understand, than they would have been, going down at the usual pace. The reins were broken, but they had been dragging on the ground. The house was roused up directly, and three of them went out along the road. They found him a mile off.'

'More than a mile off, Mr. Tiffey,' interposed a junior.

'Was it? I believe you are right,' said Tiffey,—'more than a mile off—not far from the church—lying partly on the roadside, and partly on the path, upon his face. Whether he fell out in a fit, or got out, feeling ill before the fit came on—or even whether he was quite dead then, though there is no doubt he was quite insensible—no one appears to know. If he breathed, certainly he never spoke. Medical assistance was got as soon as possible, but it was quite useless.'

I cannot describe the state of mind into which I was thrown by this intelligence. The shock of such an event happening so suddenly, and happening to one with whom I had been in any respect at variance—the appalling vacancy in the room he had occupied so lately, where his chair and table seemed to wait for him, and his handwriting of yesterday was like a ghost—the in—definable impossibility of separating him from the place, and feeling, when the door opened, as if he might come in—the lazy hush and rest there was in the office, and the insatiable relish with which our people talked about it, and other people came in and out all day, and gorged themselves with the subject—this is easily intelligible to anyone. What I cannot describe is, how, in the innermost recesses of my own heart, I had a lurking jealousy even of Death. How I felt as if its might would push me from my ground in Dora's thoughts. How I was, in a grudging way I have no words for, envious of her grief. How it made me restless to think of her weeping to others, or being consoled by others. How I had a grasping, avaricious wish to shut out everybody from her but myself, and to be all in all to her, at that unseasonable time of all times.

In the trouble of this state of mind—not exclusively my own, I hope, but known to others—I went down to Norwood that night; and finding from one of the servants, when I made my inquiries at the door, that Miss Mills was there, got my aunt to direct a letter to her, which I wrote. I deplored the untimely death of Mr. Spenlow, most sincerely, and shed tears in doing so. I entreated her to tell Dora, if Dora were in a state to hear it, that he had spoken to me with the utmost kindness and consideration; and had coupled nothing but tenderness, not a single or reproachful word, with her name. I know I did this selfishly, to have my name brought before her; but I tried to believe it was an act of justice to his memory. Perhaps I did believe it.

My aunt received a few lines next day in reply; addressed, outside, to her; within, to me. Dora was overcome by grief; and when her friend had asked her should she send her love to me, had only cried, as she was always crying, 'Oh, dear papa! oh, poor papa!' But she had not said No, and that I made the most of.

Mr. jorkins, who had been at Norwood since the occurrence, came to the office a few days afterwards. He and Tiffey were closeted together for some few moments, and then Tiffey looked out at the door and beckoned me in.

'Oh!' said Mr. jorkins. 'Mr. Tiffey and myself, Mr. Copperfield, are about to examine the desks, the drawers, and other such repositories of the deceased, with the view of sealing up his private papers, and searching for a Will. There is no trace of any, elsewhere. It may be as well for you to assist us, if you please.'

I had been in agony to obtain some knowledge of the circumstances in which my Dora would be placed—as, in whose guardianship, and so forth—and this was something towards it. We began the search at once; Mr. jorkins unlocking the drawers and desks, and we all taking out the papers. The office-papers we placed on one side, and the private papers (which were not numerous) on the other. We were very grave; and when we came to a stray seal, or pencil-case, or ring, or any little article of that kind which we associated personally with him, we spoke very low.

We had sealed up several packets; and were still going on dustily and quietly, when Mr. jorkins said to us, applying exactly the same words to his late partner as his late partner had applied to him:

'Mr. Spenlow was very difficult to move from the beaten track. You know what he was! I am disposed to think he had made no will.'

'Oh, I know he had!' said I.

They both stopped and looked at me. 'On the very day when I last saw him,' said I, 'he told me that he had, and that his affairs were long since settled.'

Mr. jorkins and old Tiffey shook their heads with one accord.

'That looks unpromising,' said Tiffey.

'Very unpromising,' said Mr. jorkins.

'Surely you don't doubt—' I began.

'My good Mr. Copperfield!' said Tiffey, laying his hand upon my arm, and shutting up both his eyes as he shook his head: 'if you had been in the Commons as long as I have, you would know that there is no subject on which men are so inconsistent, and so little to be trusted.'

'Why, bless my soul, he made that very remark!' I replied persistently.

'I should call that almost final,' observed Tiffey. 'My opinion is—no will.'

It appeared a wonderful thing to me, but it turned out that there was no will. He had never so much as thought of making one, so far as his papers afforded any evidence; for there was no kind of hint, sketch, or memorandum, of any testamentary intention whatever. What was scarcely less astonishing to me, was, that his affairs were in a most disordered state. It was extremely difficult, I heard, to make out what he owed, or what he had paid, or of what he died possessed. It was considered likely that for years he could have had no clear opinion on these subjects himself. By little and little it came out, that, in the competition on all points of appearance and gentility then running high in the Commons, he had spent more than his professional income, which was not a very large one, and had reduced his private means, if they ever had been great (which was exceedingly doubtful), to a very low ebb indeed. There was a sale of the furniture and lease, at Norwood; and Tiffey told me, little thinking how interested I was in the story, that, paying all the just debts of the deceased, and deducting his share of outstanding bad and doubtful debts due to the firm, he wouldn't give a thousand pounds for all the assets remaining.

This was at the expiration of about six weeks. I had suffered tortures all the time; and thought I really must have laid violent hands upon myself, when Miss Mills still reported to me, that my broken-hearted little Dora would say nothing, when I was mentioned, but 'Oh, poor papa! Oh, dear papa!' Also, that she had no other relations than two aunts, maiden sisters of Mr. Spenlow, who lived at Putney, and who had not held any other than chance communication with their brother for many years. Not that they had ever quarrelled (Miss Mills informed me); but that having been, on the occasion of Dora's christening, invited to tea, when they considered themselves privileged to be invited to dinner, they had expressed their opinion in writing, that it was 'better for the happiness of all parties' that they should stay away. Since which they had gone their road, and their brother had gone his.

These two ladies now emerged from their retirement, and proposed to take Dora to live at Putney. Dora, clinging to them both, and weeping, exclaimed, 'O yes, aunts! Please take Julia Mills and me and Jip to Putney!' So they went, very soon after the funeral.

How I found time to haunt Putney, I am sure I don't know; but I contrived, by some means or other, to prowl about the neighbourhood pretty often. Miss Mills, for the more exact discharge of the duties of friendship, kept a journal; and she used to meet me sometimes, on the Common, and read it, or (if she had not time to do that) lend it to me. How I treasured up the entries, of which I subjoin a sample—!

'Monday. My sweet D. still much depressed. Headache. Called attention to J. as being beautifully sleek. D. fondled J. Associations thus awakened, opened floodgates of sorrow. Rush of grief admitted. (Are tears the dewdrops of the heart? J. M.)

'Tuesday. D. weak and nervous. Beautiful in pallor. (Do we not remark this in moon likewise? J. M.) D., J. M. and J. took airing in carriage. J. looking out of window, and barking violently at dustman, occasioned smile to overspread features of D. (Of such slight links is chain of life composed! J. M.)

'Wednesday. D. comparatively cheerful. Sang to her, as congenial melody, "Evening Bells". Effect not soothing, but reverse. D. inexpressibly affected. Found sobbing afterwards, in own room. Quoted verses respecting self and young Gazelle. Ineffectually. Also referred to Patience on Monument. (Qy. Why on monument? J. M.)

'Thursday. D. certainly improved. Better night. Slight tinge of damask revisiting cheek. Resolved to mention name of D. C. Introduced same, cautiously, in course of airing. D. immediately overcome. "Oh, dear, dear Julia! Oh, I have been a naughty and undutiful child!" Soothed and caressed. Drew ideal picture of D. C. on verge of tomb. D. again overcome. "Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do? Oh, take me somewhere!" Much alarmed. Fainting of D. and glass of water from public-house. (Poetical affinity. Chequered sign on door-post; chequered human life. Alas! J. M.)

'Friday. Day of incident. Man appears in kitchen, with blue bag, "for lady's boots left out to heel". Cook replies, "No such orders." Man argues point. Cook withdraws to inquire, leaving man alone with J. On Cook's return, man still argues point, but ultimately goes. J. missing. D. distracted. Information sent to police. Man to be identified by broad nose, and legs like balustrades of bridge. Search made in every direction. No J. D. weeping bitterly, and inconsolable. Renewed reference to young Gazelle. Appropriate, but unavailing. Towards evening, strange boy calls. Brought into parlour. Broad nose, but no balustrades. Says he wants a pound, and knows a dog. Declines to explain further, though much pressed. Pound being produced by D. takes Cook to little house, where J. alone tied up to leg of table. Joy of D. who dances round J. while he eats his supper. Emboldened by this happy change, mention D. C. upstairs. D. weeps afresh, cries piteously, "Oh, don't, don't, don't! It is so wicked to think of anything but poor papa!"—embraces J. and sobs herself to sleep. (Must not D. C. confine himself to the broad pinions of Time? J. M.)'

Miss Mills and her journal were my sole consolation at this period. To see her, who had seen Dora but a little while before—to trace the initial letter of Dora's name through her sympathetic pages—to be made more and more miserable by her—were my only comforts. I felt as if I had been living in a palace of cards, which had tumbled down, leaving only Miss Mills and me among the ruins; I felt as if some grim enchanter had drawn a magic circle round the innocent goddess of my heart, which nothing indeed but those same strong pinions, capable of carrying so many people over so much, would enable me to enter!

CHAPTER 39. WICKFIELD AND HEEP

My aunt, beginning, I imagine, to be made seriously uncomfortable by my prolonged dejection, made a pretence of being anxious that I should go to Dover, to see that all was working well at the cottage, which was let; and to conclude an agreement, with the same tenant, for a longer term of occupation. Janet was drafted into the service of Mrs. Strong, where I saw her every day. She had been undecided, on leaving Dover, whether or no to give the finishing touch to that renunciation of mankind in which she had been educated, by marrying a pilot; but she decided against that venture. Not so much for the sake of principle, I believe, as because she happened not to like him.

Although it required an effort to leave Miss Mills, I fell rather willingly into my aunt's pretence, as a means of enabling me to pass a few tranquil hours with Agnes. I consulted the good Doctor relative to an absence of three days; and the Doctor wishing me to take that relaxation,—he wished me to take more; but my energy could not bear that,—I made up my mind to go.

As to the Commons, I had no great occasion to be particular about my duties in that quarter. To say the truth, we were getting in no very good odour among the tip-top proctors, and were rapidly sliding down to but a doubtful position. The business had been indifferent under Mr. jorkins, before Mr. Spenlow's time; and although it had been quickened by the infusion of new blood, and by the display which Mr. Spenlow made, still it was not established on a sufficiently strong basis to bear, without being shaken, such a blow as the sudden loss of its active manager. It fell off very much. Mr. jorkins, notwithstanding his reputation in the firm, was an easy-going, incapable sort of man, whose reputation out of doors was not calculated to back it up. I was turned over to him now, and when I saw him take his snuff and let the business go, I regretted my aunt's thousand pounds more than ever.

But this was not the worst of it. There were a number of hangers-on and outsiders about the Commons, who, without being proctors themselves, dabbled in common-form business, and got it done by real proctors, who lent their names in consideration of a share in the spoil;—and there were a good many of these too. As our house now wanted business on any terms, we joined this noble band; and threw out lures to the hangers-on and outsiders, to bring their business to us. Marriage licences and small probates were what we all looked for, and what paid us best; and the competition for these ran very high indeed. Kidnappers and inveiglers were planted in all the avenues of entrance to the Commons, with instructions to do their utmost to cut off all persons in mourning, and all gentlemen with anything bashful in their appearance, and entice them to the offices in which their respective employers were interested; which instructions were so well observed, that I myself, before I was known by sight, was twice hustled into the premises of our principal opponent. The conflicting interests of these touting gentlemen being of a nature to irritate their feelings, personal collisions took place; and the Commons was even scandalized by our principal inveigler (who had formerly been in the wine trade, and afterwards in the sworn brokery line) walking about for some days with a black eye. Any one of these scouts used to think nothing of politely assisting an old lady in black out of a vehicle, killing any proctor whom she inquired for, representing his employer as the lawful successor and representative of that proctor, and bearing the old lady off (sometimes greatly affected) to his employer's office. Many captives were brought to me in this way. As to marriage licences, the competition rose to such a pitch, that a shy gentleman in want of one, had nothing to do but submit himself to the first inveigler, or be fought for, and become the prey of the strongest. One of our clerks, who was an outsider, used, in the height of this contest, to sit with his hat on, that he might be ready to rush out and swear before a surrogate any victim who was brought in. The system of inveigling continues, I believe, to this day. The last time I was in the Commons, a civil able-bodied person in a white apron pounced out upon me from a doorway, and whispering the word 'Marriage-licence' in my ear, was with great difficulty prevented from taking me up in his arms and lifting me into a proctor's. From this digression, let me proceed to Dover.

I found everything in a satisfactory state at the cottage; and was enabled to gratify my aunt exceedingly by reporting that the tenant inherited her feud, and waged incessant war against donkeys. Having settled the little business I had to transact there, and slept there one night, I walked on to Canterbury early in the morning. It was now winter again; and the fresh, cold windy day, and the sweeping downland, brightened up my hopes a little.

Coming into Canterbury, I loitered through the old streets with a sober pleasure that calmed my spirits, and eased my heart. There were the old signs, the old names over the shops, the old people serving in them. It appeared so long, since I had been a schoolboy there, that I wondered the place was so little changed, until I reflected how little I was changed myself. Strange to say, that quiet influence which was inseparable in my mind from Agnes, seemed to pervade even the city where she dwelt. The venerable cathedral towers, and the old jackdaws and rooks whose airy voices made them more retired than perfect silence would have done; the battered gateways, one stuck full with statues, long thrown down, and crumbled away, like the reverential pilgrims who had gazed upon them; the still nooks, where the ivied growth of centuries crept over gabled ends and ruined walls; the ancient houses, the pastoral landscape of field, orchard, and garden; everywhere—on everything—I felt the same serener air, the same calm, thoughtful, softening spirit.

Arrived at Mr. Wickfield's house, I found, in the little lower room on the ground floor, where Uriah Heep had been of old accustomed to sit, Mr. Micawber plying his pen with great assiduity. He was dressed in a legal-looking suit of black, and loomed, burly and large, in that small office.

Mr. Micawber was extremely glad to see me, but a little confused too. He would have conducted me immediately into the presence of Uriah, but I declined.

'I know the house of old, you recollect,' said I, 'and will find my way upstairs. How do you like the law, Mr. Micawber?'

'My dear Copperfield,' he replied. 'To a man possessed of the higher imaginative powers, the objection to legal studies is the amount of detail which they involve. Even in our professional correspondence,' said Mr. Micawber, glancing at some letters he was writing, 'the mind is not at liberty to soar to any exalted form of expression. Still, it is a great pursuit. A great pursuit!'

He then told me that he had become the tenant of Uriah Heep's old house; and that Mrs. Micawber would be delighted to receive me, once more, under her own roof.

'It is humble,' said Mr. Micawber, '—to quote a favourite expression of my friend Heep; but it may prove the stepping-stone to more ambitious domiciliary accommodation.'

I asked him whether he had reason, so far, to be satisfied with his friend Heep's treatment of him? He got up to ascertain if the door were close shut, before he replied, in a lower voice:

'My dear Copperfield, a man who labours under the pressure of pecuniary embarrassments, is, with the generality of people, at a disadvantage. That disadvantage is not diminished, when that pressure necessitates the drawing of stipendiary emoluments, before those emoluments are strictly due and payable. All I can say is, that my friend Heep has responded to appeals to which I need not more particularly refer, in a manner calculated to redound equally to the honour of his head, and of his heart.'

'I should not have supposed him to be very free with his money either,' I observed.

'Pardon me!' said Mr. Micawber, with an air of constraint, 'I speak of my friend Heep as I have experience.'

'I am glad your experience is so favourable,' I returned.

'You are very obliging, my dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber; and hummed a tune.

'Do you see much of Mr. Wickfield?' I asked, to change the subject.

'Not much,' said Mr. Micawber, slightingly. 'Mr. Wickfield is, I dare say, a man of very excellent intentions; but he is—in short, he is obsolete.'

'I am afraid his partner seeks to make him so,' said I.

'My dear Copperfield!' returned Mr. Micawber, after some uneasy evolutions on his stool, 'allow me to offer a remark! I am here, in a capacity of confidence. I am here, in a position of trust. The discussion of some topics, even with Mrs. Micawber herself (so long the partner of my various vicissitudes, and a woman of a remarkable lucidity of intellect), is, I am led to consider, incompatible with the functions now devolving on me. I would therefore take the liberty of suggesting that in our friendly intercourse—which I trust will never be disturbed!—we draw a line. On one side of this line,' said Mr. Micawber, representing it on the desk with the office ruler, 'is the whole range of the human intellect, with a trifling exception; on the other, IS that exception; that is to say, the affairs of Messrs Wickfield and Heep, with all belonging and appertaining thereunto. I trust I give no offence to the companion of my youth, in submitting this proposition to his cooler judgement?'

Though I saw an uneasy change in Mr. Micawber, which sat tightly on him, as if his new duties were a misfit, I felt I had no right to be offended. My telling him so, appeared to relieve him; and he shook hands with me.

'I am charmed, Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'let me assure you, with Miss Wickfield. She is a very superior young lady, of very remarkable attractions, graces, and virtues. Upon my honour,' said Mr. Micawber, indefinitely kissing his hand and bowing with his genteelest air, 'I do Homage to Miss Wickfield! Hem!' 'I am glad of that, at least,' said I.

'If you had not assured us, my dear Copperfield, on the occasion of that agreeable afternoon we had the happiness of passing with you, that D. was your favourite letter,' said Mr. Micawber, 'I should unquestionably have supposed that A. had been so.'

We have all some experience of a feeling, that comes over us occasionally, of what we are saying and doing having been said and done before, in a remote time—of our having been surrounded, dim ages ago, by the same faces, objects, and circumstances—of our knowing perfectly what will be said next, as if we suddenly remembered it! I never had this mysterious impression more strongly in my life, than before he uttered those words.

I took my leave of Mr. Micawber, for the time, charging him with my best remembrances to all at home. As I left him, resuming his stool and his pen, and rolling his head in his stock, to get it into easier writing order, I clearly perceived that there was something interposed between him and me, since he had come into his new functions, which prevented our getting at each other as we used to do, and quite altered the character of our intercourse.

There was no one in the quaint old drawing-room, though it presented tokens of Mrs. Heep's whereabouts. I looked into the room still belonging to Agnes, and saw her sitting by the fire, at a pretty old-fashioned desk she had, writing.

My darkening the light made her look up. What a pleasure to be the cause of that bright change in her attentive face, and the object of that sweet regard and welcome!

'Ah, Agnes!' said I, when we were sitting together, side by side; 'I have missed you so much, lately!'

'Indeed?' she replied. 'Again! And so soon?'

I shook my head.

'I don't know how it is, Agnes; I seem to want some faculty of mind that I ought to have. You were so much in the habit of thinking for me, in the happy old days here, and I came so naturally to you for counsel and support, that I really think I have missed acquiring it.'

'And what is it?' said Agnes, cheerfully.

'I don't know what to call it,' I replied. 'I think I am earnest and persevering?'

'I am sure of it,' said Agnes.

'And patient, Agnes?' I inquired, with a little hesitation.

'Yes,' returned Agnes, laughing. 'Pretty well.'

'And yet,' said I, 'I get so miserable and worried, and am so unsteady and irresolute in my power of assuring myself, that I know I must want—shall I call it—reliance, of some kind?'

'Call it so, if you will,' said Agnes.

'Well!' I returned. 'See here! You come to London, I rely on you, and I have an object and a course at once. I am driven out of it, I come here, and in a moment I feel an altered person. The circumstances that distressed me are not changed, since I came into this room; but an influence comes over me in that short interval that alters me, oh, how much for the better! What is it? What is your secret, Agnes?'

Her head was bent down, looking at the fire.

'It's the old story,' said I. 'Don't laugh, when I say it was always the same in little things as it is in greater ones. My old troubles were nonsense, and now they are serious; but whenever I have gone away from my adopted sister—'

Agnes looked up—with such a Heavenly face!—and gave me her hand, which I kissed.

'Whenever I have not had you, Agnes, to advise and approve in the beginning, I have seemed to go wild, and to get into all sorts of difficulty. When I have come to you, at last (as I have always done), I have come to peace and happiness. I come home, now, like a tired traveller, and find such a blessed sense of rest!'

I felt so deeply what I said, it affected me so sincerely, that my voice failed, and I covered my face with my hand, and broke into tears. I write the truth. Whatever contradictions and inconsistencies there were within me, as there are within so many of us; whatever might have been so different, and so much better; whatever I had done, in which I had perversely wandered away from the voice of my own heart; I knew nothing of. I only knew that I was fervently in earnest, when I felt the rest and peace of having Agnes near me.

In her placid sisterly manner; with her beaming eyes; with her tender voice; and with that sweet composure, which had long ago made the house that held her quite a sacred place to me; she soon won me from this weakness, and led me on to tell all that had happened since our last meeting.

'And there is not another word to tell, Agnes,' said I, when I had made an end of my confidence. 'Now, my reliance is on you.'

'But it must not be on me, Trotwood,' returned Agnes, with a pleasant smile. 'It must be on someone else.'

'On Dora?' said I.

'Assuredly.'

'Why, I have not mentioned, Agnes,' said I, a little embarrassed, 'that Dora is rather difficult to—I would not, for the world, say, to rely upon, because she is the soul of purity and truth—but rather difficult to—I hardly know how to express it, really, Agnes. She is a timid little thing, and easily disturbed and frightened. Some time ago, before her father's death, when I thought it right to mention to her—but I'll tell you, if you will bear with me, how it was.'

Accordingly, I told Agnes about my declaration of poverty, about the cookery-book, the housekeeping accounts, and all the rest of it.

'Oh, Trotwood!' she remonstrated, with a smile. 'Just your old headlong way! You might have been in earnest in striving to get on in the world, without being so very sudden with a timid, loving, inexperienced girl. Poor Dora!'

I never heard such sweet forbearing kindness expressed in a voice, as she expressed in making this reply. It was as if I had seen her admiringly and tenderly embracing Dora, and tacitly reproving me, by her considerate protection, for my hot haste in fluttering that little heart. It was as if I had seen Dora, in all her fascinating artlessness, caressing Agnes, and thanking her, and coaxingly appealing against me, and loving me with all her childish innocence.

I felt so grateful to Agnes, and admired her so! I saw those two together, in a bright perspective, such well-associated friends, each adorning the other so much!

'What ought I to do then, Agnes?' I inquired, after looking at the fire a little while. 'What would it be right to do?'

'I think,' said Agnes, 'that the honourable course to take, would be to write to those two ladies. Don't you think that any secret course is an unworthy one?'

'Yes. If YOU think so,' said I.

'I am poorly qualified to judge of such matters,' replied Agnes, with a modest hesitation, 'but I certainly feel—in short, I feel that your being secret and clandestine, is not being like yourself.'

'Like myself, in the too high opinion you have of me, Agnes, I am afraid,' said I.

'Like yourself, in the candour of your nature,' she returned; 'and therefore I would write to those two ladies. I would relate, as plainly and as openly as possible, all that has taken place; and I would ask their permission to visit sometimes, at their house. Considering that you are young, and striving for a place in life, I think it would be well to say that you would readily abide by any conditions they might impose upon you. I would entreat them not to dismiss your request, without a reference to Dora; and to discuss it with her when they should think the time suitable. I would not be too vehement,' said Agnes, gently, 'or propose too much. I would trust to my fidelity and perseverance—and to Dora.'

'But if they were to frighten Dora again, Agnes, by speaking to her,' said I. 'And if Dora were to cry, and say nothing about me!'

'Is that likely?' inquired Agnes, with the same sweet consideration in her face.

'God bless her, she is as easily scared as a bird,' said I. 'It might be! Or if the two Miss Spenlows (elderly ladies of that sort are odd characters sometimes) should not be likely persons to address in that way!'

'I don't think, Trotwood,' returned Agnes, raising her soft eyes to mine, 'I would consider that. Perhaps it would be better only to consider whether it is right to do this; and, if it is, to do it.'

I had no longer any doubt on the subject. With a lightened heart, though with a profound sense of the weighty importance of my task, I devoted the whole afternoon to the composition of the draft of this letter; for which great purpose, Agnes relinquished her desk to me. But first I went downstairs to see Mr. Wickfield and Uriah Heep.

I found Uriah in possession of a new, plaster-smelling office, built out in the garden; looking extraordinarily mean, in the midst of a quantity of books and papers. He received me in his usual fawning way, and pretended not to have heard of my arrival from Mr. Micawber; a pretence I took the liberty of disbelieving. He accompanied me into Mr. Wickfield's room, which was the shadow of its former self—having been divested of a variety of conveniences, for the accommodation of the new partner—and stood before the fire, warming his back, and shaving his chin with his bony hand, while Mr. Wickfield and I exchanged greetings.

'You stay with us, Trotwood, while you remain in Canterbury?' said Mr. Wickfield, not without a glance at Uriah for his approval.

'Is there room for me?' said I.

'I am sure, Master Copperfield—I should say Mister, but the other comes so natural,' said Uriah,—'I would turn out of your old room with pleasure, if it would be agreeable.'

'No, no,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'Why should you be inconvenienced? There's another room. There's another room.' 'Oh, but you know,' returned Uriah, with a grin, 'I should really be delighted!'

To cut the matter short, I said I would have the other room or none at all; so it was settled that I should have the other room; and, taking my leave of the firm until dinner, I went upstairs again.

I had hoped to have no other companion than Agnes. But Mrs. Heep had asked permission to bring herself and her knitting near the fire, in that room; on pretence of its having an aspect more favourable for her rheumatics, as the wind then was, than the drawing-room or dining-parlour. Though I could almost have consigned her to the mercies of the wind on the topmost pinnacle of the Cathedral, without remorse, I made a virtue of necessity, and gave her a friendly salutation.

'I'm umbly thankful to you, sir,' said Mrs. Heep, in acknowledgement of my inquiries concerning her health, 'but I'm only pretty well. I haven't much to boast of. If I could see my Uriah well settled in life, I couldn't expect much more I think. How do you think my Ury looking, sir?'

I thought him looking as villainous as ever, and I replied that I saw no change in him.

'Oh, don't you think he's changed?' said Mrs. Heep. 'There I must umbly beg leave to differ from you. Don't you see a thinness in him?'

'Not more than usual,' I replied.

'Don't you though!' said Mrs. Heep. 'But you don't take notice of him with a mother's eye!'

His mother's eye was an evil eye to the rest of the world, I thought as it met mine, howsoever affectionate to him; and I believe she and her son were devoted to one another. It passed me, and went on to Agnes.

'Don't YOU see a wasting and a wearing in him, Miss Wickfield?' inquired Mrs. Heep.

'No,' said Agnes, quietly pursuing the work on which she was engaged. 'You are too solicitous about him. He is very well.'

Mrs. Heep, with a prodigious sniff, resumed her knitting.

She never left off, or left us for a moment. I had arrived early in the day, and we had still three or four hours before dinner; but she sat there, plying her knitting-needles as monotonously as an hour-glass might have poured out its sands. She sat on one side of the fire; I sat at the desk in front of it; a little beyond me, on the other side, sat Agnes. Whensoever, slowly pondering over my letter, I lifted up my eyes, and meeting the thoughtful face of Agnes, saw it clear, and beam encouragement upon me, with its own angelic expression, I was conscious presently of the evil eye passing me, and going on to her, and coming back to me again, and dropping furtively upon the knitting. What the knitting was, I don't know, not being learned in that art; but it looked like a net; and as she worked away with those Chinese chopsticks of knitting-needles, she showed in the firelight like an ill-looking enchantress, baulked as yet by the radiant goodness opposite, but getting ready for a cast of her net by and by.

At dinner she maintained her watch, with the same unwinking eyes. After dinner, her son took his turn; and when Mr. Wickfield, himself, and I were left alone together, leered at me, and writhed until I could hardly bear it. In the drawing-room, there was the mother knitting and watching again. All the time that Agnes sang and played, the mother sat at the piano. Once she asked for a particular ballad, which she said her Ury (who was yawning in a great chair) doted on; and at intervals she looked round at him, and reported to Agnes that he was in raptures with the music. But she hardly ever spoke—I question if she ever did—without making some mention of him. It was evident to me that this was the duty assigned to her.

This lasted until bedtime. To have seen the mother and son, like two great bats hanging over the whole house, and darkening it with their ugly forms, made me so uncomfortable, that I would rather have remained downstairs, knitting and all, than gone to bed. I hardly got any sleep. Next day the knitting and watching began again, and lasted all day.

I had not an opportunity of speaking to Agnes, for ten minutes. I could barely show her my letter. I proposed to her to walk out with me; but Mrs. Heep repeatedly complaining that she was worse, Agnes charitably remained within, to bear her company. Towards the twilight I went out by myself, musing on what I ought to do, and whether I was justified in withholding from Agnes, any longer, what Uriah Heep had told me in London; for that began to trouble me again, very much.

I had not walked out far enough to be quite clear of the town, upon the Ramsgate road, where there was a good path, when I was hailed, through the dust, by somebody behind me. The shambling figure, and the scanty great-coat, were not to be mistaken. I stopped, and Uriah Heep came up.

'Well?' said I.

'How fast you walk!' said he. 'My legs are pretty long, but you've given 'em quite a job.'

'Where are you going?' said I.

'I am going with you, Master Copperfield, if you'll allow me the pleasure of a walk with an old acquaintance.' Saying this, with a jerk of his body, which might have been either propitiatory or derisive, he fell into step beside me.

'Uriah!' said I, as civilly as I could, after a silence.

'Master Copperfield!' said Uriah.

'To tell you the truth (at which you will not be offended), I came Out to walk alone, because I have had so much company.'

He looked at me sideways, and said with his hardest grin, 'You mean mother.'

'Why yes, I do,' said I.

'Ah! But you know we're so very umble,' he returned. 'And having such a knowledge of our own umbleness, we must really take care that we're not pushed to the wall by them as isn't umble. All stratagems are fair in love, sir.'

Raising his great hands until they touched his chin, he rubbed them softly, and softly chuckled; looking as like a malevolent baboon, I thought, as anything human could look.

'You see,' he said, still hugging himself in that unpleasant way, and shaking his head at me, 'you're quite a dangerous rival, Master Copperfield.

You always was, you know.'

'Do you set a watch upon Miss Wickfield, and make her home no home, because of me?' said I.

'Oh! Master Copperfield! Those are very arsh words,' he replied.

'Put my meaning into any words you like,' said I. 'You know what it is, Uriah, as well as I do.'

'Oh no! You must put it into words,' he said. 'Oh, really! I couldn't myself.'

'Do you suppose,' said I, constraining myself to be very temperate and quiet with him, on account of Agnes, 'that I regard Miss Wickfield otherwise than as a very dear sister?'

'Well, Master Copperfield,' he replied, 'you perceive I am not bound to answer that question. You may not, you know. But then, you see, you may!'

Anything to equal the low cunning of his visage, and of his shadowless eyes without the ghost of an eyelash, I never saw.

'Come then!' said I. 'For the sake of Miss Wickfield—'

'My Agnes!' he exclaimed, with a sickly, angular contortion of himself. 'Would you be so good as call her Agnes, Master Copperfield!'

'For the sake of Agnes Wickfield—Heaven bless her!'

'Thank you for that blessing, Master Copperfield!'he interposed.

'I will tell you what I should, under any other circumstances, as soon have thought of telling to—Jack Ketch.'

'To who, sir?' said Uriah, stretching out his neck, and shading his ear with his hand.

'To the hangman,' I returned. 'The most unlikely person I could think of,'—though his own face had suggested the allusion quite as a natural sequence. 'I am engaged to another young lady. I hope that contents you.'

'Upon your soul?' said Uriah.

I was about indignantly to give my assertion the confirmation he required, when he caught hold of my hand, and gave it a squeeze.

'Oh, Master Copperfield!' he said. 'If you had only had the condescension to return my confidence when I poured out the fulness of my art, the night I put you so much out of the way by sleeping before your sitting-room fire, I never should have doubted you. As it is, I'm sure I'll take off mother directly, and only too appy. I know you'll excuse the precautions of affection, won't you? What a pity, Master Copperfield, that you didn't condescend to return my confidence! I'm sure I gave you every opportunity.

But you never have condescended to me, as much as I could have wished. I know you have never liked me, as I have liked you!'

All this time he was squeezing my hand with his damp fishy fingers, while I made every effort I decently could to get it away. But I was quite unsuccessful. He drew it under the sleeve of his mulberry-coloured great-coat, and I walked on, almost upon compulsion, arm-in-arm with him.

'Shall we turn?' said Uriah, by and by wheeling me face about towards the town, on which the early moon was now shining, silvering the distant windows.

'Before we leave the subject, you ought to understand,' said I, breaking a pretty long silence, 'that I believe Agnes Wickfield to be as far above you, and as far removed from all your aspirations, as that moon herself!'

'Peaceful! Ain't she!' said Uriah. 'Very! Now confess, Master Copperfield, that you haven't liked me quite as I have liked you. All along you've thought me too umble now, I shouldn't wonder?'

'I am not fond of professions of humility,' I returned, 'or professions of anything else.' 'There now!' said Uriah, looking flabby and lead-coloured in the moonlight. 'Didn't I know it! But how little you think of the rightful umbleness of a person in my station, Master Copperfield! Father and me was both brought up at a foundation school for boys; and mother, she was likewise brought up at a public, sort of charitable, establishment. They taught us all a deal of umbleness—not much else that I know of, from morning to night. We was to be umble to this person, and umble to that; and to pull off our caps here, and to make bows there; and always to know our place, and abase ourselves before our betters. And we had such a lot of betters! Father got the monitor-medal by being umble. So did I. Father got made a sexton by being umble. He had the character, among the gentlefolks, of being such a well-behaved man, that they were determined to bring him in. "Be umble, Uriah," says father to me, "and you'll get on. It was what was always being dinned into you and me at school; it's what goes down best. Be umble," says father, "and you'll do!" And really it ain't done bad!'

It was the first time it had ever occurred to me, that this detestable cant of false humility might have originated out of the Heep family. I had seen the harvest, but had never thought of the seed.

'When I was quite a young boy,' said Uriah, 'I got to know what umbleness did, and I took to it. I ate umble pie with an appetite. I stopped at the umble point of my learning, and says I, "Hold hard!" When you offered to teach me Latin, I knew better. "People like to be above you," says father, "keep yourself down." I am very umble to the present moment, Master Copperfield, but I've got a little power!'

And he said all this—I knew, as I saw his face in the moonlight—that I might understand he was resolved to recompense himself by using his power. I had never doubted his meanness, his craft and malice; but I fully comprehended now, for the first time, what a base, unrelenting, and revengeful spirit, must have been engendered by this early, and this long, suppression.

His account of himself was so far attended with an agreeable result, that it led to his withdrawing his hand in order that he might have another hug of himself under the chin. Once apart from him, I was determined to keep apart; and we walked back, side by side, saying very little more by the way. Whether his spirits were elevated by the communication I had made to him, or by his having indulged in this retrospect, I don't know; but they were raised by some influence. He talked more at dinner than was usual with him; asked his mother (off duty, from the moment of our re-entering the house) whether he was not growing too old for a bachelor; and once looked at Agnes so, that I would have given all I had, for leave to knock him down.

When we three males were left alone after dinner, he got into a more adventurous state. He had taken little or no wine; and I presume it was the mere insolence of triumph that was upon him, flushed perhaps by the temptation my presence furnished to its exhibition.

I had observed yesterday, that he tried to entice Mr. Wickfield to drink; and, interpreting the look which Agnes had given me as she went out, had limited myself to one glass, and then proposed that we should follow her. I would have done so again today; but Uriah was too quick for me.

'We seldom see our present visitor, sir,' he said, addressing Mr. Wickfield, sitting, such a contrast to him, at the end of the table, 'and I should propose to give him welcome in another glass or two of wine, if you have no objections. Mr. Copperfield, your elth and appiness!'

I was obliged to make a show of taking the hand he stretched across to me; and then, with very different emotions, I took the hand of the broken gentleman, his partner.

'Come, fellow-partner,' said Uriah, 'if I may take the liberty,—now, suppose you give us something or another appropriate to Copperfield!'

I pass over Mr. Wickfield's proposing my aunt, his proposing Mr. Dick, his proposing Doctors' Commons, his proposing Uriah, his drinking everything twice; his consciousness of his own weakness, the ineffectual effort that he made against it; the struggle between his shame in Uriah's deportment, and his desire to conciliate him; the manifest exultation with which Uriah twisted and turned, and held him up before me. It made me sick at heart to see, and my hand recoils from writing it.

'Come, fellow-partner!' said Uriah, at last, 'I'll give you another one, and I umbly ask for bumpers, seeing I intend to make it the divinest of her sex.'

Her father had his empty glass in his hand. I saw him set it down, look at the picture she was so like, put his hand to his forehead, and shrink back in his elbow-chair.

'I'm an umble individual to give you her elth,' proceeded Uriah, 'but I admire—adore her.'

No physical pain that her father's grey head could have borne, I think, could have been more terrible to me, than the mental endurance I saw compressed now within both his hands.

'Agnes,' said Uriah, either not regarding him, or not knowing what the nature of his action was, 'Agnes Wickfield is, I am safe to say, the divinest of her sex. May I speak out, among friends? To be her father is a proud distinction, but to be her usband—'

Spare me from ever again hearing such a cry, as that with which her father rose up from the table! 'What's the matter?' said Uriah, turning of a deadly colour. 'You are not gone mad, after all, Mr. Wickfield, I hope? If I say I've an ambition to make your Agnes my Agnes, I have as good a right to it as another man. I have a better right to it than any other man!'

I had my arms round Mr. Wickfield, imploring him by everything that I could think of, oftenest of all by his love for Agnes, to calm himself a little. He was mad for the moment; tearing out his hair, beating his head, trying to force me from him, and to force himself from me, not answering a word, not looking at or seeing anyone; blindly striving for he knew not what, his face all staring and distorted—a frightful spectacle.

I conjured him, incoherently, but in the most impassioned manner, not to abandon himself to this wildness, but to hear me. I besought him to think of Agnes, to connect me with Agnes, to recollect how Agnes and I had grown up together, how I honoured her and loved her, how she was his pride and joy. I tried to bring her idea before him in any form; I even reproached him with not having firmness to spare her the knowledge of such a scene as this. I may have effected something, or his wildness may have spent itself; but by degrees he struggled less, and began to look at me—strangely at first, then with recognition in his eyes. At length he said, 'I know, Trotwood! My darling child and you—I know! But look at him!'

He pointed to Uriah, pale and glowering in a corner, evidently very much out in his calculations, and taken by surprise.

'Look at my torturer,' he replied. 'Before him I have step by step abandoned name and reputation, peace and quiet, house and home.'

'I have kept your name and reputation for you, and your peace and quiet, and your house and home too,' said Uriah, with a sulky, hurried, defeated air of compromise. 'Don't be foolish, Mr. Wickfield. If I have gone a little beyond what you were prepared for, I can go back, I suppose? There's no harm done.'

'I looked for single motives in everyone,' said Mr. Wickfield, and I was satisfied I had bound him to me by motives of interest. But see what he is—oh, see what he is!'

'You had better stop him, Copperfield, if you can,' cried Uriah, with his long forefinger pointing towards me. 'He'll say something presently—mind you!—he'll be sorry to have said afterwards, and you'll be sorry to have heard!'

'I'll say anything!' cried Mr. Wickfield, with a desperate air. 'Why should I not be in all the world's power if I am in yours?'

'Mind! I tell you!' said Uriah, continuing to warn me. 'If you don't stop his mouth, you're not his friend! Why shouldn't you be in all the world's power, Mr. Wickfield? Because you have got a daughter. You and me know what we know, don't we? Let sleeping dogs lie—who wants to rouse 'em? I don't. Can't you see I am as umble as I can be? I tell you, if I've gone too far, I'm sorry. What would you have, sir?'

'Oh, Trotwood, Trotwood!'exclaimed Mr. Wickfield, wringing his hands. 'What I have come down to be, since I first saw you in this house! I was on my downward way then, but the dreary, dreary road I have traversed since! Weak indulgence has ruined me. Indulgence in remembrance, and indulgence in forgetfulness. My natural grief for my child's mother turned to disease; my natural love for my child turned to disease. I have infected everything I touched. I have brought misery on what I dearly love, I know—you know! I thought it possible that I could truly love one creature in the world, and not love the rest; I thought it possible that I could truly mourn for one creature gone out of the world, and not have some part in the grief of all who mourned. Thus the lessons of my life have been perverted! I have preyed on my own morbid coward heart, and it has preyed on me. Sordid in my grief, sordid in my love, sordid in my miserable escape from the darker side of both, oh see the ruin I am, and hate me, shun me!'

He dropped into a chair, and weakly sobbed. The excitement into which he had been roused was leaving him. Uriah came out of his corner.

'I don't know all I have done, in my fatuity,' said Mr. Wickfield, putting out his hands, as if to deprecate my condemnation. 'He knows best,' meaning Uriah Heep, 'for he has always been at my elbow, whispering me. You see the millstone that he is about my neck. You find him in my house, you find him in my business. You heard him, but a little time ago. What need have I to say more!'

'You haven't need to say so much, nor half so much, nor anything at all,' observed Uriah, half defiant, and half fawning. 'You wouldn't have took it up so, if it hadn't been for the wine. You'll think better of it tomorrow, sir. If I have said too much, or more than I meant, what of it? I haven't stood by it!'

The door opened, and Agnes, gliding in, without a vestige of colour in her face, put her arm round his neck, and steadily said, 'Papa, you are not well. Come with me!'

He laid his head upon her shoulder, as if he were oppressed with heavy shame, and went out with her. Her eyes met mine for but an instant, yet I saw how much she knew of what had passed.

'I didn't expect he'd cut up so rough, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah. 'But it's nothing. I'll be friends with him tomorrow. It's for his good. I'm umbly anxious for his good.'

I gave him no answer, and went upstairs into the quiet room where Agnes had so often sat beside me at my books. Nobody came near me until late at night. I took up a book, and tried to read. I heard the clocks strike twelve, and was still reading, without knowing what I read, when Agnes touched me.

'You will be going early in the morning, Trotwood! Let us say good-bye, now!'

She had been weeping, but her face then was so calm and beautiful!

'Heaven bless you!' she said, giving me her hand.

'Dearest Agnes!' I returned, 'I see you ask me not to speak of tonight—but is there nothing to be done?'

'There is God to trust in!' she replied.

'Can I do nothing—I, who come to you with my poor sorrows?'

'And make mine so much lighter,' she replied. 'Dear Trotwood, no!'

'Dear Agnes,' I said, 'it is presumptuous for me, who am so poor in all in which you are so rich—goodness, resolution, all noble qualities—to doubt or direct you; but you know how much I love you, and how much I owe you. You will never sacrifice yourself to a mistaken sense of duty, Agnes?'

More agitated for a moment than I had ever seen her, she took her hands from me, and moved a step back.

'Say you have no such thought, dear Agnes! Much more than sister! Think of the priceless gift of such a heart as yours, of such a love as yours!'

Oh! long, long afterwards, I saw that face rise up before me, with its momentary look, not wondering, not accusing, not regretting. Oh, long, long afterwards, I saw that look subside, as it did now, into the lovely smile, with which she told me she had no fear for herself—I need have none for her—and parted from me by the name of Brother, and was gone!

It was dark in the morning, when I got upon the coach at the inn door. The day was just breaking when we were about to start, and then, as I sat thinking of her, came struggling up the coach side, through the mingled day and night, Uriah's head.

'Copperfield!' said he, in a croaking whisper, as he hung by the iron on the roof, 'I thought you'd be glad to hear before you went off, that there are no squares broke between us. I've been into his room already, and we've made it all smooth. Why, though I'm umble, I'm useful to him, you know; and he understands his interest when he isn't in liquor! What an agreeable man he is, after all, Master Copperfield!'

I obliged myself to say that I was glad he had made his apology.

'Oh, to be sure!' said Uriah. 'When a person's umble, you know, what's an apology? So easy! I say! I suppose,' with a jerk, 'you have sometimes plucked a pear before it was ripe, Master Copperfield?'

'I suppose I have,' I replied.

'I did that last night,' said Uriah; 'but it'll ripen yet! It only wants attending to. I can wait!'

Profuse in his farewells, he got down again as the coachman got up. For anything I know, he was eating something to keep the raw morning air out;

but he made motions with his mouth as if the pear were ripe already, and he were smacking his lips over it.

CHAPTER 40. THE WANDERER

We had a very serious conversation in Buckingham Street that night, about the domestic occurrences I have detailed in the last chapter. My aunt was deeply interested in them, and walked up and down the room with her arms folded, for more than two hours afterwards. Whenever she was particularly discomposed, she always performed one of these pedestrian feats; and the amount of her discomposure might always be estimated by the duration of her walk. On this occasion she was so much disturbed in mind as to find it necessary to open the bedroom door, and make a course for herself, comprising the full extent of the bedrooms from wall to wall; and while Mr. Dick and I sat quietly by the fire, she kept passing in and out, along this measured track, at an unchanging pace, with the regularity of a clock-pendulum.

When my aunt and I were left to ourselves by Mr. Dick's going out to bed, I sat down to write my letter to the two old ladies. By that time she was tired of walking, and sat by the fire with her dress tucked up as usual. But instead of sitting in her usual manner, holding her glass upon her knee, she suffered it to stand neglected on the chimney-piece; and, resting her left elbow on her right arm, and her chin on her left hand, looked thoughtfully at me. As often as I raised my eyes from what I was about, I met hers. 'I am in the lovingest of tempers, my dear,' she would assure me with a nod, 'but I am fidgeted and sorry!'

I had been too busy to observe, until after she was gone to bed, that she had left her night-mixture, as she always called it, untasted on the chimney-piece. She came to her door, with even more than her usual affection of manner, when I knocked to acquaint her with this discovery; but only said, 'I have not the heart to take it, Trot, tonight,' and shook her head, and went in again.

She read my letter to the two old ladies, in the morning, and approved of it. I posted it, and had nothing to do then, but wait, as patiently as I could, for the reply. I was still in this state of expectation, and had been, for nearly a week; when I left the Doctor's one snowy night, to walk home.

It had been a bitter day, and a cutting north-east wind had blown for some time. The wind had gone down with the light, and so the snow had come on. It was a heavy, settled fall, I recollect, in great flakes; and it lay thick. The noise of wheels and tread of people were as hushed, as if the streets had been strewn that depth with feathers.

My shortest way home,—and I naturally took the shortest way on such a night—was through St. Martin's Lane. Now, the church which gives its name to the lane, stood in a less free situation at that time; there being no open space before it, and the lane winding down to the Strand. As I passed the steps of the portico, I encountered, at the corner, a woman's face. It looked in mine, passed across the narrow lane, and disappeared. I knew it. I had seen it somewhere. But I could not remember where. I had some association with it, that struck upon my heart directly; but I was thinking of anything else when it came upon me, and was confused.

On the steps of the church, there was the stooping figure of a man, who had put down some burden on the smooth snow, to adjust it; my seeing the face, and my seeing him, were simultaneous. I don't think I had stopped in my surprise; but, in any case, as I went on, he rose, turned, and came down towards me. I stood face to face with Mr. Peggotty!

Then I remembered the woman. It was Martha, to whom Emily had given the money that night in the kitchen. Martha Endell—side by side with whom, he would not have seen his dear niece, Ham had told me, for all the treasures wrecked in the sea.

We shook hands heartily. At first, neither of us could speak a word.

'Mas'r Davy!' he said, gripping me tight, 'it do my art good to see you, sir. Well met, well met!'

'Well met, my dear old friend!' said I.

'I had my thowts o' coming to make inquiration for you, sir, tonight,' he said, 'but knowing as your aunt was living along wi' you—fur I've been down yonder—Yarmouth way—I was afeerd it was too late. I should have come early in the morning, sir, afore going away.'

'Again?' said I.

'Yes, sir,' he replied, patiently shaking his head, 'I'm away tomorrow.'

'Where were you going now?' I asked.

'Well!' he replied, shaking the snow out of his long hair, 'I was a-going to turn in somewheers.'

In those days there was a side-entrance to the stable-yard of the Golden Cross, the inn so memorable to me in connexion with his misfortune, nearly opposite to where we stood. I pointed out the gateway, put my arm through his, and we went across. Two or three public-rooms opened out of the stable-yard; and looking into one of them, and finding it empty, and a good fire burning, I took him in there.

When I saw him in the light, I observed, not only that his hair was long and ragged, but that his face was burnt dark by the sun. He was greyer, the lines in his face and forehead were deeper, and he had every appearance of having toiled and wandered through all varieties of weather; but he looked very strong, and like a man upheld by steadfastness of purpose, whom nothing could tire out. He shook the snow from his hat and clothes, and brushed it away from his face, while I was inwardly making these remarks. As he sat down opposite to me at a table, with his back to the door by which we had entered, he put out his rough hand again, and grasped mine warmly.

'I'll tell you, Mas'r Davy,' he said,—'wheer all I've been, and what-all we've heerd. I've been fur, and we've heerd little; but I'll tell you!'

I rang the bell for something hot to drink. He would have nothing stronger than ale; and while it was being brought, and being warmed at the fire, he sat thinking. There was a fine, massive gravity in his face, I did not venture to disturb.

'When she was a child,' he said, lifting up his head soon after we were left alone, 'she used to talk to me a deal about the sea, and about them coasts where the sea got to be dark blue, and to lay a-shining and a-shining in the sun. I thowt, odd times, as her father being drownded made her think on it so much. I doen't know, you see, but maybe she believed—or hoped—he had drifted out to them parts, where the flowers is always a-blowing, and the country bright.'

'It is likely to have been a childish fancy,' I replied.

'When she was—lost,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'I know'd in my mind, as he would take her to them countries. I know'd in my mind, as he'd have told her wonders of 'em, and how she was to be a lady theer, and how he got her to listen to him fust, along o' sech like. When we see his mother, I know'd quite well as I was right. I went across-channel to France, and landed theer, as if I'd fell down from the sky.'

I saw the door move, and the snow drift in. I saw it move a little more, and a hand softly interpose to keep it open.

'I found out an English gen'leman as was in authority,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'and told him I was a-going to seek my niece. He got me them papers as I wanted fur to carry me through—I doen't rightly know how they're called—and he would have give me money, but that I was thankful to have no need on. I thank him kind, for all he done, I'm sure! "I've wrote afore you," he says to me, "and I shall speak to many as will come that way, and many will know you, fur distant from here, when you're a-travelling alone." I told him, best as I was able, what my gratitoode was, and went away through France.'

'Alone, and on foot?' said I.

'Mostly a-foot,' he rejoined; 'sometimes in carts along with people going to market; sometimes in empty coaches. Many mile a day a-foot, and often with some poor soldier or another, travelling to see his friends. I couldn't talk to him,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'nor he to me; but we was company for one another, too, along the dusty roads.'

I should have known that by his friendly tone.

'When I come to any town,' he pursued, 'I found the inn, and waited about the yard till someone turned up (someone mostly did) as know'd English. Then I told how that I was on my way to seek my niece, and they told me what manner of gentlefolks was in the house, and I waited to see any as seemed like her, going in or out. When it warn't Em'ly, I went on agen. By little and little, when I come to a new village or that, among the poor people, I found they know'd about me. They would set me down at their cottage doors, and give me what-not fur to eat and drink, and show me where to sleep; and many a woman, Mas'r Davy, as has had a daughter of about Em'ly's age, I've found a-waiting fur me, at Our Saviour's Cross outside the village, fur to do me sim'lar kindnesses. Some has had daughters as was dead. And God only knows how good them mothers was to me!'

It was Martha at the door. I saw her haggard, listening face distinctly. My dread was lest he should turn his head, and see her too.

'They would often put their children—particular their little girls,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'upon my knee; and many a time you might have seen me sitting at their doors, when night was coming in, a'most as if they'd been my Darling's children. Oh, my Darling!'

Overpowered by sudden grief, he sobbed aloud. I laid my trembling hand upon the hand he put before his face. 'Thankee, sir,' he said, 'doen't take no notice.'

In a very little while he took his hand away and put it on his breast, and went on with his story. 'They often walked with me,' he said, 'in the morning, maybe a mile or two upon my road; and when we parted, and I said, "I'm very thankful to you! God bless you!" they always seemed to understand, and answered pleasant. At last I come to the sea. It warn't hard, you may suppose, for a seafaring man like me to work his way over to Italy. When I got theer, I wandered on as I had done afore. The people was just as good to me, and I should have gone from town to town, maybe the country through, but that I got news of her being seen among them Swiss mountains yonder. One as know'd his servant see 'em there, all three, and told me how they travelled, and where they was. I made fur them mountains, Mas'r Davy, day and night. Ever so fur as I went, ever so fur the mountains seemed to shift away from me. But I come up with 'em, and I crossed 'em. When I got nigh the place as I had been told of, I began to think within my own self, "What shall I do when I see her?"'

The listening face, insensible to the inclement night, still drooped at the door, and the hands begged me—prayed me—not to cast it forth.

'I never doubted her,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'No! Not a bit! On'y let her see my face—on'y let her beer my voice—on'y let my stanning still afore her bring to her thoughts the home she had fled away from, and the child she had been—and if she had growed to be a royal lady, she'd have fell down at my feet! I know'd it well! Many a time in my sleep had I heerd her cry out, "Uncle!" and seen her fall like death afore me. Many a time in my sleep had I raised her up, and whispered to her, "Em'ly, my dear, I am come fur to bring forgiveness, and to take you home!"'

He stopped and shook his head, and went on with a sigh.

'He was nowt to me now. Em'ly was all. I bought a country dress to put upon her; and I know'd that, once found, she would walk beside me over them stony roads, go where I would, and never, never, leave me more. To put that dress upon her, and to cast off what she wore—to take her on my arm again, and wander towards home—to stop sometimes upon the road, and heal her bruised feet and her worse-bruised heart—was all that I thowt of now. I doen't believe I should have done so much as look at him. But, Mas'r Davy, it warn't to be—not yet! I was too late, and they was gone. Wheer, I couldn't learn. Some said beer, some said theer. I travelled beer, and I travelled theer, but I found no Em'ly, and I travelled home.'

'How long ago?' I asked.

'A matter o' fower days,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'I sighted the old boat arter dark, and the light a-shining in the winder. When I come nigh and looked in through the glass, I see the faithful creetur Missis Gummidge sittin' by the fire, as we had fixed upon, alone. I called out, "Doen't be afeerd! It's Dan'l!" and I went in. I never could have thowt the old boat would have been so strange!' From some pocket in his breast, he took out, with a very careful hand a small paper bundle containing two or three letters or little packets, which he laid upon the table.

'This fust one come,' he said, selecting it from the rest, 'afore I had been gone a week. A fifty pound Bank note, in a sheet of paper, directed to me, and put underneath the door in the night. She tried to hide her writing, but she couldn't hide it from Me!'

He folded up the note again, with great patience and care, in exactly the same form, and laid it on one side.

'This come to Missis Gummidge,' he said, opening another, 'two or three months ago.'After looking at it for some moments, he gave it to me, and added in a low voice, 'Be so good as read it, sir.'

I read as follows:

'Oh what will you feel when you see this writing, and know it comes from my wicked hand! But try, try—not for my sake, but for uncle's goodness, try to let your heart soften to me, only for a little little time! Try, pray do, to relent towards a miserable girl, and write down on a bit of paper whether he is well, and what he said about me before you left off ever naming me among yourselves—and whether, of a night, when it is my old time of coming home, you ever see him look as if he thought of one he used to love so dear. Oh, my heart is breaking when I think about it! I am kneeling down to you, begging and praying you not to be as hard with me as I deserve—as I well, well, know I deserve—but to be so gentle and so good, as to write down something of him, and to send it to me. You need not call me Little, you need not call me by the name I have disgraced; but oh, listen to my agony, and have mercy on me so far as to write me some word of uncle, never, never to be seen in this world by my eyes again!

'Dear, if your heart is hard towards me—justly hard, I know—but, listen, if it is hard, dear, ask him I have wronged the most—him whose wife I was to have been—before you quite decide against my poor poor prayer! If he should be so compassionate as to say that you might write something for me to read—I think he would, oh, I think he would, if you would only ask him, for he always was so brave and so forgiving—tell him then (but not else), that when I hear the wind blowing at night, I feel as if it was passing angrily from seeing him and uncle, and was going up to God against me. Tell him that if I was to die tomorrow (and oh, if I was fit, I would be so glad to die!) I would bless him and uncle with my last words, and pray for his happy home with my last breath!'

Some money was enclosed in this letter also. Five pounds. It was untouched like the previous sum, and he refolded it in the same way. Detailed instructions were added relative to the address of a reply, which, although they betrayed the intervention of several hands, and made it difficult to arrive at any very probable conclusion in reference to her place of concealment, made it at least not unlikely that she had written from that spot where she was stated to have been seen.

'What answer was sent?' I inquired of Mr. Peggotty.

'Missis Gummidge,' he returned, 'not being a good scholar, sir, Ham kindly drawed it out, and she made a copy on it. They told her I was gone to seek her, and what my parting words was.'

'Is that another letter in your hand?' said I.

'It's money, sir,' said Mr. Peggotty, unfolding it a little way. 'Ten pound, you see. And wrote inside, "From a true friend," like the fust. But the fust was put underneath the door, and this come by the post, day afore yesterday. I'm a-going to seek her at the post-mark.'

He showed it to me. It was a town on the Upper Rhine. He had found out, at Yarmouth, some foreign dealers who knew that country, and they had drawn him a rude map on paper, which he could very well understand. He laid it between us on the table; and, with his chin resting on one hand, tracked his course upon it with the other.

I asked him how Ham was? He shook his head.

'He works,' he said, 'as bold as a man can. His name's as good, in all that part, as any man's is, anywheres in the wureld. Anyone's hand is ready to help him, you understand, and his is ready to help them. He's never been heerd fur to complain. But my sister's belief is ('twixt ourselves) as it has cut him deep.'

'Poor fellow, I can believe it!'

'He ain't no care, Mas'r Davy,' said Mr. Peggotty in a solemn whisper—'kinder no care no-how for his life. When a man's wanted for rough sarvice in rough weather, he's theer. When there's hard duty to be done with danger in it, he steps for'ard afore all his mates. And yet he's as gentle as any child. There ain't a child in Yarmouth that doen't know him.'

He gathered up the letters thoughtfully, smoothing them with his hand; put them into their little bundle; and placed it tenderly in his breast again. The face was gone from the door. I still saw the snow drifting in; but nothing else was there.

'Well!' he said, looking to his bag, 'having seen you tonight, Mas'r Davy (and that doos me good!), I shall away betimes tomorrow morning. You have seen what I've got heer'; putting his hand on where the little packet lay; 'all that troubles me is, to think that any harm might come to me, afore that money was give back. If I was to die, and it was lost, or stole, or elseways made away with, and it was never know'd by him but what I'd took it, I believe the t'other wureld wouldn't hold me! I believe I must come back!'

He rose, and I rose too; we grasped each other by the hand again, before going out.

'I'd go ten thousand mile,' he said, 'I'd go till I dropped dead, to lay that money down afore him. If I do that, and find my Em'ly, I'm content. If I doen't find her, maybe she'll come to hear, sometime, as her loving uncle only ended his search for her when he ended his life; and if I know her, even that will turn her home at last!'

As he went out into the rigorous night, I saw the lonely figure flit away before us. I turned him hastily on some pretence, and held him in conversation until it was gone.

He spoke of a traveller's house on the Dover Road, where he knew he could find a clean, plain lodging for the night. I went with him over Westminster Bridge, and parted from him on the Surrey shore. Everything seemed, to my imagination, to be hushed in reverence for him, as he resumed his solitary journey through the snow.

I returned to the inn yard, and, impressed by my remembrance of the face, looked awfully around for it. It was not there. The snow had covered our late footprints; my new track was the only one to be seen; and even that began to die away (it snowed so fast) as I looked back over my shoulder.

CHAPTER 41. DORA'S AUNTS

At last, an answer came from the two old ladies. They presented their compliments to Mr. Copperfield, and informed him that they had given his letter their best consideration, 'with a view to the happiness of both parties'—which I thought rather an alarming expression, not only because of the use they had made of it in relation to the family difference before-mentioned, but because I had (and have all my life) observed that conventional phrases are a sort of fireworks, easily let off, and liable to take a great variety of shapes and colours not at all suggested by their original form. The Misses Spenlow added that they begged to forbear expressing, 'through the medium of correspondence', an opinion on the subject of Mr. Copperfield's communication; but that if Mr. Copperfield would do them the favour to call, upon a certain day (accompanied, if he thought proper, by a confidential friend), they would be happy to hold some conversation on the subject.

To this favour, Mr. Copperfield immediately replied, with his respectful compliments, that he would have the honour of waiting on the Misses Spenlow, at the time appointed; accompanied, in accordance with their kind permission, by his friend Mr. Thomas Traddles of the Inner Temple. Having dispatched which missive, Mr. Copperfield fell into a condition of strong nervous agitation; and so remained until the day arrived.

It was a great augmentation of my uneasiness to be bereaved, at this eventful crisis, of the inestimable services of Miss Mills. But Mr. Mills, who was always doing something or other to annoy me—or I felt as if he were, which was the same thing—had brought his conduct to a climax, by taking it into his head that he would go to India. Why should he go to India, except to harass me? To be sure he had nothing to do with any other part of the world, and had a good deal to do with that part; being entirely in the India trade, whatever that was (I had floating dreams myself concerning golden shawls and elephants' teeth); having been at Calcutta in his youth; and designing now to go out there again, in the capacity of resident partner. But this was nothing to me. However, it was so much to him that for India he was bound, and Julia with him; and Julia went into the country to take leave of her relations; and the house was put into a perfect suit of bills, announcing that it was to be let or sold, and that the furniture (Mangle and all) was to be taken at a valuation. So, here was another earthquake of which I became the sport, before I had recovered from the shock of its predecessor!

I was in several minds how to dress myself on the important day; being divided between my desire to appear to advantage, and my apprehensions of putting on anything that might impair my severely practical character in the eyes of the Misses Spenlow. I endeavoured to hit a happy medium between these two extremes; my aunt approved the result; and Mr. Dick threw one of his shoes after Traddles and me, for luck, as we went downstairs.

Excellent fellow as I knew Traddles to be, and warmly attached to him as I was, I could not help wishing, on that delicate occasion, that he had never contracted the habit of brushing his hair so very upright. It gave him a surprised look—not to say a hearth-broomy kind of expression—which, my apprehensions whispered, might be fatal to us.

I took the liberty of mentioning it to Traddles, as we were walking to Putney; and saying that if he WOULD smooth it down a little—

'My dear Copperfield,' said Traddles, lifting off his hat, and rubbing his hair all kinds of ways, 'nothing would give me greater pleasure. But it won't.'

'Won't be smoothed down?' said I.

'No,' said Traddles. 'Nothing will induce it. If I was to carry a half-hundred-weight upon it, all the way to Putney, it would be up again the moment the weight was taken off. You have no idea what obstinate hair mine is, Copperfield. I am quite a fretful porcupine.'

I was a little disappointed, I must confess, but thoroughly charmed by his good-nature too. I told him how I esteemed his good-nature; and said that his hair must have taken all the obstinacy out of his character, for he had none.

'Oh!' returned Traddles, laughing. 'I assure you, it's quite an old story, my unfortunate hair. My uncle's wife couldn't bear it. She said it exasperated her. It stood very much in my way, too, when I first fell in love with Sophy. Very much!'

'Did she object to it?'

'SHE didn't,' rejoined Traddles; 'but her eldest sister—the one that's the Beauty—quite made game of it, I understand. In fact, all the sisters laugh at it.'

'Agreeable!' said I.

'Yes,' returned Traddles with perfect innocence, 'it's a joke for us. They pretend that Sophy has a lock of it in her desk, and is obliged to shut it in a clasped book, to keep it down. We laugh about it.'

'By the by, my dear Traddles,' said I, 'your experience may suggest something to me. When you became engaged to the young lady whom you have just mentioned, did you make a regular proposal to her family? Was there anything like—what we are going through today, for instance?' I added, nervously.

'Why,' replied Traddles, on whose attentive face a thoughtful shade had stolen, 'it was rather a painful transaction, Copperfield, in my case. You see, Sophy being of so much use in the family, none of them could endure the thought of her ever being married. Indeed, they had quite settled among themselves that she never was to be married, and they called her the old maid. Accordingly, when I mentioned it, with the greatest precaution, to Mrs. Crewler—'

'The mama?' said I.

'The mama,' said Traddles—'Reverend Horace Crewler—when I mentioned it with every possible precaution to Mrs. Crewler, the effect upon her was such that she gave a scream and became insensible. I couldn't approach the subject again, for months.'

'You did at last?' said I.

'Well, the Reverend Horace did,' said Traddles. 'He is an excellent man, most exemplary in every way; and he pointed out to her that she ought, as a Christian, to reconcile herself to the sacrifice (especially as it was so uncertain), and to bear no uncharitable feeling towards me. As to myself, Copperfield, I give you my word, I felt a perfect bird of prey towards the family.'

'The sisters took your part, I hope, Traddles?'

'Why, I can't say they did,' he returned. 'When we had comparatively reconciled Mrs. Crewler to it, we had to break it to Sarah. You recollect my mentioning Sarah, as the one that has something the matter with her spine?'

'Perfectly!'

'She clenched both her hands,' said Traddles, looking at me in dismay; 'shut her eyes; turned lead-colour; became perfectly stiff; and took nothing for two days but toast-and-water, administered with a tea-spoon.'

'What a very unpleasant girl, Traddles!' I remarked.

'Oh, I beg your pardon, Copperfield!' said Traddles. 'She is a very charming girl, but she has a great deal of feeling. In fact, they all have. Sophy told me afterwards, that the self-reproach she underwent while she was in attendance upon Sarah, no words could describe. I know it must have been severe, by my own feelings, Copperfield; which were like a criminal's. After Sarah was restored, we still had to break it to the other eight; and it produced various effects upon them of a most pathetic nature. The two little ones, whom Sophy educates, have only just left off de-testing me.'

'At any rate, they are all reconciled to it now, I hope?' said I.

'Ye-yes, I should say they were, on the whole, resigned to it,' said Traddles, doubtfully. 'The fact is, we avoid mentioning the subject; and my unsettled prospects and indifferent circumstances are a great consolation to them. There will be a deplorable scene, whenever we are married. It will be much more like a funeral, than a wedding. And they'll all hate me for taking her away!'

His honest face, as he looked at me with a serio-comic shake of his head, impresses me more in the remembrance than it did in the reality, for I was by this time in a state of such excessive trepidation and wandering of mind, as to be quite unable to fix my attention on anything. On our approaching the house where the Misses Spenlow lived, I was at such a discount in respect of my personal looks and presence of mind, that Traddles proposed a gentle stimulant in the form of a glass of ale. This having been administered at a neighbouring public-house, he conducted me, with tottering steps, to the Misses Spenlow's door.

I had a vague sensation of being, as it were, on view, when the maid opened it; and of wavering, somehow, across a hall with a weather-glass in it, into a quiet little drawing-room on the ground-floor, commanding a neat garden. Also of sitting down here, on a sofa, and seeing Traddles's hair start up, now his hat was removed, like one of those obtrusive little figures made of springs, that fly out of fictitious snuff-boxes when the lid is taken off. Also of hearing an old-fashioned clock ticking away on the chimney-piece, and trying to make it keep time to the jerking of my heart,—which it wouldn't. Also of looking round the room for any sign of Dora, and seeing none. Also of thinking that Jip once barked in the distance, and was instantly choked by somebody. Ultimately I found myself backing Traddles into the fireplace, and bowing in great confusion to two dry little elderly ladies, dressed in black, and each looking wonderfully like a preparation in chip or tan of the late Mr. Spenlow.

'Pray,' said one of the two little ladies, 'be seated.'

When I had done tumbling over Traddles, and had sat upon something which was not a cat—my first seat was—I so far recovered my sight, as to perceive that Mr. Spenlow had evidently been the youngest of the family; that there was a disparity of six or eight years between the two sisters; and that the younger appeared to be the manager of the conference, inasmuch as she had my letter in her hand—so familiar as it looked to me, and yet so odd!—and was referring to it through an eye-glass. They were dressed alike, but this sister wore her dress with a more youthful air than the other; and perhaps had a trifle more frill, or tucker, or brooch, or bracelet, or some little thing of that kind, which made her look more lively. They were both upright in their carriage, formal, precise, composed, and quiet. The sister who had not my letter, had her arms crossed on her breast, and resting on each other, like an Idol.

'Mr. Copperfield, I believe,' said the sister who had got my letter, addressing herself to Traddles.

This was a frightful beginning. Traddles had to indicate that I was Mr. Copperfield, and I had to lay claim to myself, and they had to divest themselves of a preconceived opinion that Traddles was Mr. Copperfield, and altogether we were in a nice condition. To improve it, we all distinctly heard Jip give two short barks, and receive another choke.

'Mr. Copperfield!' said the sister with the letter.

I did something—bowed, I suppose—and was all attention, when the other sister struck in.

'My sister Lavinia,' said she 'being conversant with matters of this nature, will state what we consider most calculated to promote the happiness of both parties.'

I discovered afterwards that Miss Lavinia was an authority in affairs of the heart, by reason of there having anciently existed a certain Mr. Pidger, who played short whist, and was supposed to have been enamoured of her. My private opinion is, that this was entirely a gratuitous assumption, and that Pidger was altogether innocent of any such sentiments—to which he had never given any sort of expression that I could ever hear of. Both Miss Lavinia and Miss Clarissa had a superstition, however, that he would have declared his passion, if he had not been cut short in his youth (at about sixty) by over-drinking his constitution, and over-doing an attempt to set it right again by swilling Bath water. They had a lurking suspicion even, that he died of secret love; though I must say there was a picture of him in the house with a damask nose, which concealment did not appear to have ever preyed upon.

'We will not,' said Miss Lavinia, 'enter on the past history of this matter. Our poor brother Francis's death has cancelled that.'

'We had not,' said Miss Clarissa, 'been in the habit of frequent association with our brother Francis; but there was no decided division or disunion between us. Francis took his road; we took ours. We considered it conducive to the happiness of all parties that it should be so. And it was so.'

Each of the sisters leaned a little forward to speak, shook her head after speaking, and became upright again when silent. Miss Clarissa never moved her arms. She sometimes played tunes upon them with her fingers—minuets and marches I should think—but never moved them.

'Our niece's position, or supposed position, is much changed by our brother Francis's death,' said Miss Lavinia; 'and therefore we consider our brother's opinions as regarded her position as being changed too. We have no reason to doubt, Mr. Copperfield, that you are a young gentleman possessed of good qualities and honourable character; or that you have an affection—or are fully persuaded that you have an affection—for our niece.'

I replied, as I usually did whenever I had a chance, that nobody had ever loved anybody else as I loved Dora. Traddles came to my assistance with a confirmatory murmur.

Miss Lavinia was going on to make some rejoinder, when Miss Clarissa, who appeared to be incessantly beset by a desire to refer to her brother Francis, struck in again:

'If Dora's mama,' she said, 'when she married our brother Francis, had at once said that there was not room for the family at the dinner-table, it would have been better for the happiness of all parties.'

'Sister Clarissa,' said Miss Lavinia. 'Perhaps we needn't mind that now.'

'Sister Lavinia,' said Miss Clarissa, 'it belongs to the subject. With your branch of the subject, on which alone you are competent to speak, I should not think of interfering. On this branch of the subject I have a voice and an opinion. It would have been better for the happiness of all parties, if Dora's mama, when she married our brother Francis, had mentioned plainly what her intentions were. We should then have known what we had to expect. We should have said "Pray do not invite us, at any time"; and all possibility of misunderstanding would have been avoided.'

When Miss Clarissa had shaken her head, Miss Lavinia resumed: again referring to my letter through her eye-glass. They both had little bright round twinkling eyes, by the way, which were like birds' eyes. They were not unlike birds, altogether; having a sharp, brisk, sudden manner, and a little short, spruce way of adjusting themselves, like canaries.

Miss Lavinia, as I have said, resumed:

'You ask permission of my sister Clarissa and myself, Mr. Copperfield, to visit here, as the accepted suitor of our niece.'

'If our brother Francis,' said Miss Clarissa, breaking out again, if I may call anything so calm a breaking out, 'wished to surround himself with an atmosphere of Doctors' Commons, and of Doctors' Commons only, what right or desire had we to object? None, I am sure. We have ever been far from wishing to obtrude ourselves on anyone. But why not say so? Let our brother Francis and his wife have their society. Let my sister Lavinia and myself have our society. We can find it for ourselves, I hope.'

As this appeared to be addressed to Traddles and me, both Traddles and I made some sort of reply. Traddles was inaudible. I think I observed, myself, that it was highly creditable to all concerned. I don't in the least know what I meant.

'Sister Lavinia,' said Miss Clarissa, having now relieved her mind, 'you can go on, my dear.'

Miss Lavinia proceeded:

'Mr. Copperfield, my sister Clarissa and I have been very careful indeed in considering this letter; and we have not considered it without finally showing it to our niece, and discussing it with our niece. We have no doubt that you think you like her very much.'

'Think, ma'am,' I rapturously began, 'oh!—'

But Miss Clarissa giving me a look (just like a sharp canary), as requesting that I would not interrupt the oracle, I begged pardon.

'Affection,' said Miss Lavinia, glancing at her sister for corroboration, which she gave in the form of a little nod to every clause, 'mature affection, homage, devotion, does not easily express itself. Its voice is low. It is modest and retiring, it lies in ambush, waits and waits. Such is the mature fruit. Sometimes a life glides away, and finds it still ripening in the shade.'

Of course I did not understand then that this was an allusion to her supposed experience of the stricken Pidger; but I saw, from the gravity with which Miss Clarissa nodded her head, that great weight was attached to these words.

'The light—for I call them, in comparison with such sentiments, the light—inclinations of very young people,' pursued Miss Lavinia, 'are dust, compared to rocks. It is owing to the difficulty of knowing whether they are likely to endure or have any real foundation, that my sister Clarissa and myself have been very undecided how to act, Mr. Copperfield, and Mr.—'

'Traddles,' said my friend, finding himself looked at.

'I beg pardon. Of the Inner Temple, I believe?' said Miss Clarissa, again glancing at my letter.

Traddles said 'Exactly so,' and became pretty red in the face.

Now, although I had not received any express encouragement as yet, I fancied that I saw in the two little sisters, and particularly in Miss Lavinia, an intensified enjoyment of this new and fruitful subject of domestic interest, a settling down to make the most of it, a disposition to pet it, in which there was a good bright ray of hope. I thought I perceived that Miss Lavinia would have uncommon satisfaction in superintending two young lovers, like Dora and me; and that Miss Clarissa would have hardly less satisfaction in seeing her superintend us, and in chiming in with her own particular department of the subject whenever that impulse was strong upon her. This gave me courage to protest most vehemently that I loved Dora better than I could tell, or anyone believe; that all my friends knew how I loved her; that my aunt, Agnes, Traddles, everyone who knew me, knew how I loved her, and how earnest my love had made me. For the truth of this, I appealed to Traddles. And Traddles, firing up as if he were plunging into a Parliamentary Debate, really did come out nobly: confirming me in good round terms, and in a plain sensible practical manner, that evidently made a favourable impression.

'I speak, if I may presume to say so, as one who has some little experience of such things,' said Traddles, 'being myself engaged to a young lady—one of ten, down in Devonshire—and seeing no probability, at present, of our engagement coming to a termination.'

'You may be able to confirm what I have said, Mr. Traddles,' observed Miss Lavinia, evidently taking a new interest in him, 'of the affection that is modest and retiring; that waits and waits?'

'Entirely, ma'am,' said Traddles.

Miss Clarissa looked at Miss Lavinia, and shook her head gravely. Miss Lavinia looked consciously at Miss Clarissa, and heaved a little sigh. 'Sister Lavinia,' said Miss Clarissa, 'take my smelling-bottle.'

Miss Lavinia revived herself with a few whiffs of aromatic vinegar—Traddles and I looking on with great solicitude the while; and then went on to say, rather faintly:

'My sister and myself have been in great doubt, Mr. Traddles, what course we ought to take in reference to the likings, or imaginary likings, of such very young people as your friend Mr. Copperfield and our niece.'

'Our brother Francis's child,' remarked Miss Clarissa. 'If our brother Francis's wife had found it convenient in her lifetime (though she had an unquestionable right to act as she thought best) to invite the family to her dinner-table, we might have known our brother Francis's child better at the present moment. Sister Lavinia, proceed.'

Miss Lavinia turned my letter, so as to bring the superscription towards herself, and referred through her eye-glass to some orderly-looking notes she had made on that part of it.

'It seems to us,' said she, 'prudent, Mr. Traddles, to bring these feelings to the test of our own observation. At present we know nothing of them, and are not in a situation to judge how much reality there may be in them. Therefore we are inclined so far to accede to Mr. Copperfield's proposal, as to admit his visits here.'

'I shall never, dear ladies,' I exclaimed, relieved of an immense load of apprehension, 'forget your kindness!'

'But,' pursued Miss Lavinia,—'but, we would prefer to regard those visits, Mr. Traddles, as made, at present, to us. We must guard ourselves from recognizing any positive engagement between Mr. Copperfield and our niece, until we have had an opportunity—'

'Until YOU have had an opportunity, sister Lavinia,' said Miss Clarissa.

'Be it so,' assented Miss Lavinia, with a sigh—'until I have had an opportunity of observing them.'

'Copperfield,' said Traddles, turning to me, 'you feel, I am sure, that nothing could be more reasonable or considerate.'

'Nothing!' cried I. 'I am deeply sensible of it.'

'In this position of affairs,' said Miss Lavinia, again referring to her notes, 'and admitting his visits on this understanding only, we must require from Mr. Copperfield a distinct assurance, on his word of honour, that no communication of any kind shall take place between him and our niece without our knowledge. That no project whatever shall be entertained with regard to our niece, without being first submitted to us—' 'To you, sister Lavinia,' Miss Clarissa interposed.

'Be it so, Clarissa!' assented Miss Lavinia resignedly—'to me—and receiving our concurrence. We must make this a most express and serious stipulation, not to be broken on any account. We wished Mr. Copperfield to be accompanied by some confidential friend today,' with an inclination of her head towards Traddles, who bowed, 'in order that there might be no doubt or misconception on this subject. If Mr. Copperfield, or if you, Mr. Traddles, feel the least scruple, in giving this promise, I beg you to take time to consider it.'

I exclaimed, in a state of high ecstatic fervour, that not a moment's consideration could be necessary. I bound myself by the required promise, in a most impassioned manner; called upon Traddles to witness it; and denounced myself as the most atrocious of characters if I ever swerved from it in the least degree.

'Stay!' said Miss Lavinia, holding up her hand; 'we resolved, before we had the pleasure of receiving you two gentlemen, to leave you alone for a quarter of an hour, to consider this point. You will allow us to retire.'

It was in vain for me to say that no consideration was necessary. They persisted in withdrawing for the specified time. Accordingly, these little birds hopped out with great dignity; leaving me to receive the congratulations of Traddles, and to feel as if I were translated to regions of exquisite happiness. Exactly at the expiration of the quarter of an hour, they reappeared with no less dignity than they had disappeared. They had gone rustling away as if their little dresses were made of autumn-leaves: and they came rustling back, in like manner.

I then bound myself once more to the prescribed conditions.

'Sister Clarissa,' said Miss Lavinia, 'the rest is with you.'

Miss Clarissa, unfolding her arms for the first time, took the notes and glanced at them.

'We shall be happy,' said Miss Clarissa, 'to see Mr. Copperfield to dinner, every Sunday, if it should suit his convenience. Our hour is three.'

I bowed.

'In the course of the week,' said Miss Clarissa, 'we shall be happy to see Mr. Copperfield to tea. Our hour is half-past six.'

I bowed again.

'Twice in the week,' said Miss Clarissa, 'but, as a rule, not oftener.'

I bowed again.

'Miss Trotwood,' said Miss Clarissa, 'mentioned in Mr. Copperfield's letter, will perhaps call upon us. When visiting is better for the happiness of all parties, we are glad to receive visits, and return them. When it is better for the happiness of all parties that no visiting should take place, (as in the case of our brother Francis, and his establishment) that is quite different.'

I intimated that my aunt would be proud and delighted to make their acquaintance; though I must say I was not quite sure of their getting on very satisfactorily together. The conditions being now closed, I expressed my acknowledgements in the warmest manner; and, taking the hand, first of Miss Clarissa, and then of Miss Lavinia, pressed it, in each case, to my lips.

Miss Lavinia then arose, and begging Mr. Traddles to excuse us for a minute, requested me to follow her. I obeyed, all in a tremble, and was conducted into another room. There I found my blessed darling stopping her ears behind the door, with her dear little face against the wall; and Jip in the plate-warmer with his head tied up in a towel.

Oh! How beautiful she was in her black frock, and how she sobbed and cried at first, and wouldn't come out from behind the door! How fond we were of one another, when she did come out at last; and what a state of bliss I was in, when we took Jip out of the plate-warmer, and restored him to the light, sneezing very much, and were all three reunited!

'My dearest Dora! Now, indeed, my own for ever!'

'Oh, DON'T!' pleaded Dora. 'Please!'

'Are you not my own for ever, Dora?'

'Oh yes, of course I am!' cried Dora, 'but I am so frightened!'

'Frightened, my own?'

'Oh yes! I don't like him,' said Dora. 'Why don't he go?'

'Who, my life?'

'Your friend,' said Dora. 'It isn't any business of his. What a stupid he must be!'

'My love!' (There never was anything so coaxing as her childish ways.) 'He is the best creature!'

'Oh, but we don't want any best creatures!' pouted Dora.

'My dear,' I argued, 'you will soon know him well, and like him of all things. And here is my aunt coming soon; and you'll like her of all things too, when you know her.'

'No, please don't bring her!' said Dora, giving me a horrified little kiss, and folding her hands. 'Don't. I know she's a naughty, mischief-making old thing! Don't let her come here, Doady!' which was a corruption of David.

Remonstrance was of no use, then; so I laughed, and admired, and was very much in love and very happy; and she showed me Jip's new trick of standing on his hind legs in a corner—which he did for about the space of a flash of lightning, and then fell down—and I don't know how long I should have stayed there, oblivious of Traddles, if Miss Lavinia had not come in to take me away. Miss Lavinia was very fond of Dora (she told me Dora was exactly like what she had been herself at her age—she must have altered a good deal), and she treated Dora just as if she had been a toy. I wanted to persuade Dora to come and see Traddles, but on my proposing it she ran off to her own room and locked herself in; so I went to Traddles without her, and walked away with him on air.

'Nothing could be more satisfactory,' said Traddles; 'and they are very agreeable old ladies, I am sure. I shouldn't be at all surprised if you were to be married years before me, Copperfield.'

'Does your Sophy play on any instrument, Traddles?' I inquired, in the pride of my heart.

'She knows enough of the piano to teach it to her little sisters,' said Traddles.

'Does she sing at all?' I asked.

'Why, she sings ballads, sometimes, to freshen up the others a little when they're out of spirits,' said Traddles. 'Nothing scientific.'

'She doesn't sing to the guitar?' said I.

'Oh dear no!' said Traddles.

'Paint at all?'

'Not at all,' said Traddles.

I promised Traddles that he should hear Dora sing, and see some of her flower-painting. He said he should like it very much, and we went home arm in arm in great good humour and delight. I encouraged him to talk about Sophy, on the way; which he did with a loving reliance on her that I very much admired. I compared her in my mind with Dora, with considerable inward satisfaction; but I candidly admitted to myself that she seemed to be an excellent kind of girl for Traddles, too.

Of course my aunt was immediately made acquainted with the successful issue of the conference, and with all that had been said and done in the course of it. She was happy to see me so happy, and promised to call on Dora's aunts without loss of time. But she took such a long walk up and down our rooms that night, while I was writing to Agnes, that I began to think she meant to walk till morning.

My letter to Agnes was a fervent and grateful one, narrating all the good effects that had resulted from my following her advice. She wrote, by return of post, to me. Her letter was hopeful, earnest, and cheerful. She was always cheerful from that time.

I had my hands more full than ever, now. My daily journeys to Highgate considered, Putney was a long way off; and I naturally wanted to go there as often as I could. The proposed tea-drinkings being quite impracticable, I compounded with Miss Lavinia for permission to visit every Saturday afternoon, without detriment to my privileged Sundays. So, the close of every week was a delicious time for me; and I got through the rest of the week by looking forward to it.

I was wonderfully relieved to find that my aunt and Dora's aunts rubbed on, all things considered, much more smoothly than I could have expected. My aunt made her promised visit within a few days of the conference; and within a few more days, Dora's aunts called upon her, in due state and form. Similar but more friendly exchanges took place afterwards, usually at intervals of three or four weeks. I know that my aunt distressed Dora's aunts very much, by utterly setting at naught the dignity of fly-conveyance, and walking out to Putney at extraordinary times, as shortly after breakfast or just before tea; likewise by wearing her bonnet in any manner that happened to be comfortable to her head, without at all deferring to the prejudices of civilization on that subject. But Dora's aunts soon agreed to regard my aunt as an eccentric and somewhat masculine lady, with a strong understanding; and although my aunt occasionally ruffled the feathers of Dora's aunts, by expressing heretical opinions on various points of ceremony, she loved me too well not to sacrifice some of her little peculiarities to the general harmony.

The only member of our small society who positively refused to adapt himself to circumstances, was Jip. He never saw my aunt without immediately displaying every tooth in his head, retiring under a chair, and growling incessantly: with now and then a doleful howl, as if she really were too much for his feelings. All kinds of treatment were tried with him, coaxing, scolding, slapping, bringing him to Buckingham Street (where he instantly dashed at the two cats, to the terror of all beholders); but he never could prevail upon himself to bear my aunt's society. He would sometimes think he had got the better of his objection, and be amiable for a few minutes; and then would put up his snub nose, and howl to that extent, that there was nothing for it but to blind him and put him in the plate-warmer. At length, Dora regularly muffled him in a towel and shut him up there, whenever my aunt was reported at the door.

One thing troubled me much, after we had fallen into this quiet train. It was, that Dora seemed by one consent to be regarded like a pretty toy or plaything. My aunt, with whom she gradually became familiar, always called her Little Blossom; and the pleasure of Miss Lavinia's life was to wait upon her, curl her hair, make ornaments for her, and treat her like a pet child. What Miss Lavinia did, her sister did as a matter of course. It was very odd to me; but they all seemed to treat Dora, in her degree, much as Dora treated Jip in his.

I made up my mind to speak to Dora about this; and one day when we were out walking (for we were licensed by Miss Lavinia, after a while, to go out walking by ourselves), I said to her that I wished she could get them to behave towards her differently.

'Because you know, my darling,' I remonstrated, 'you are not a child.'

'There!' said Dora. 'Now you're going to be cross!'

'Cross, my love?'

'I am sure they're very kind to me,' said Dora, 'and I am very happy—'

'Well! But my dearest life!' said I, 'you might be very happy, and yet be treated rationally.'

Dora gave me a reproachful look—the prettiest look!—and then began to sob, saying, if I didn't like her, why had I ever wanted so much to be engaged to her? And why didn't I go away, now, if I couldn't bear her?

What could I do, but kiss away her tears, and tell her how I doted on her, after that!

'I am sure I am very affectionate,' said Dora; 'you oughtn't to be cruel to me, Doady!'

'Cruel, my precious love! As if I would—or could—be cruel to you, for the world!'

'Then don't find fault with me,' said Dora, making a rosebud of her mouth; 'and I'll be good.'

I was charmed by her presently asking me, of her own accord, to give her that cookery-book I had once spoken of, and to show her how to keep accounts as I had once promised I would. I brought the volume with me on my next visit (I got it prettily bound, first, to make it look less dry and more inviting); and as we strolled about the Common, I showed her an old housekeeping-book of my aunt's, and gave her a set of tablets, and a pretty little pencil-case and box of leads, to practise housekeeping with.

But the cookery-book made Dora's head ache, and the figures made her cry. They wouldn't add up, she said. So she rubbed them out, and drew little nosegays and likenesses of me and Jip, all over the tablets.

Then I playfully tried verbal instruction in domestic matters, as we walked about on a Saturday afternoon. Sometimes, for example, when we passed a butcher's shop, I would say:

'Now suppose, my pet, that we were married, and you were going to buy a shoulder of mutton for dinner, would you know how to buy it?'

My pretty little Dora's face would fall, and she would make her mouth into a bud again, as if she would very much prefer to shut mine with a kiss.

'Would you know how to buy it, my darling?' I would repeat, perhaps, if I were very inflexible.

Dora would think a little, and then reply, perhaps, with great triumph:

'Why, the butcher would know how to sell it, and what need I know? Oh, you silly boy!'

So, when I once asked Dora, with an eye to the cookery-book, what she would do, if we were married, and I were to say I should like a nice Irish stew, she replied that she would tell the servant to make it; and then clapped her little hands together across my arm, and laughed in such a charming manner that she was more delightful than ever.

Consequently, the principal use to which the cookery-book was devoted, was being put down in the corner for Jip to stand upon. But Dora was so pleased, when she had trained him to stand upon it without offering to come off, and at the same time to hold the pencil-case in his mouth, that I was very glad I had bought it.

And we fell back on the guitar-case, and the flower-painting, and the songs about never leaving off dancing, Ta ra la! and were as happy as the week was long. I occasionally wished I could venture to hint to Miss Lavinia, that she treated the darling of my heart a little too much like a plaything; and I sometimes awoke, as it were, wondering to find that I had fallen into the general fault, and treated her like a plaything too—but not often.

CHAPTER 42. MISCHIEF

I feel as if it were not for me to record, even though this manuscript is intended for no eyes but mine, how hard I worked at that tremendous short-hand, and all improvement appertaining to it, in my sense of responsibility to Dora and her aunts. I will only add, to what I have already written of my perseverance at this time of my life, and of a patient and continuous energy which then began to be matured within me, and which I know to be the strong part of my character, if it have any strength at all, that there, on looking back, I find the source of my success. I have been very fortunate in worldly matters; many men have worked much harder, and not succeeded half so well; but I never could have done what I have done, without the habits of punctuality, order, and diligence, without the determination to concentrate myself on one object at a time, no matter how quickly its successor should come upon its heels, which I then formed. Heaven knows I write this, in no spirit of self-laudation. The man who reviews his own life, as I do mine, in going on here, from page to page, had need to have been a good man indeed, if he would be spared the sharp consciousness of many talents neglected, many opportunities wasted, many erratic and perverted feelings constantly at war within his breast, and defeating him. I do not hold one natural gift, I dare say, that I have not abused. My meaning simply is, that whatever I have tried to do in life, I have tried with all my heart to do well; that whatever I have devoted myself to, I have devoted myself to completely; that in great aims and in small, I have always been thoroughly in earnest. I have never believed it possible that any natural or improved ability can claim immunity from the companionship of the steady, plain, hard-working qualities, and hope to gain its end. There is no such thing as such fulfilment on this earth. Some happy talent, and some fortunate opportunity, may form the two sides of the ladder on which some men mount, but the rounds of that ladder must be made of stuff to stand wear and tear; and there is no substitute for thorough-going, ardent, and sincere earnestness. Never to put one hand to anything, on which I could throw my whole self; and never to affect depreciation of my work, whatever it was; I find, now, to have been my golden rules.

How much of the practice I have just reduced to precept, I owe to Agnes, I will not repeat here. My narrative proceeds to Agnes, with a thankful love.

She came on a visit of a fortnight to the Doctor's. Mr. Wickfield was the Doctor's old friend, and the Doctor wished to talk with him, and do him good. It had been matter of conversation with Agnes when she was last in town, and this visit was the result. She and her father came together. I was not much surprised to hear from her that she had engaged to find a lodging in the neighbourhood for Mrs. Heep, whose rheumatic complaint required change of air, and who would be charmed to have it in such company. Neither was I surprised when, on the very next day, Uriah, like a dutiful son, brought his worthy mother to take possession.

'You see, Master Copperfield,' said he, as he forced himself upon my company for a turn in the Doctor's garden, 'where a person loves, a person is a little jealous—leastways, anxious to keep an eye on the beloved one.'

'Of whom are you jealous, now?' said I.

'Thanks to you, Master Copperfield,' he returned, 'of no one in particular just at present—no male person, at least.'

'Do you mean that you are jealous of a female person?'

He gave me a sidelong glance out of his sinister red eyes, and laughed.

'Really, Master Copperfield,' he said, '—I should say Mister, but I know you'll excuse the abit I've got into—you're so insinuating, that you draw me like a corkscrew! Well, I don't mind telling you,' putting his fish-like hand on mine, 'I'm not a lady's man in general, sir, and I never was, with Mrs. Strong.'

His eyes looked green now, as they watched mine with a rascally cunning.

'What do you mean?' said I.

'Why, though I am a lawyer, Master Copperfield,' he replied, with a dry grin, 'I mean, just at present, what I say.'

'And what do you mean by your look?' I retorted, quietly.

'By my look? Dear me, Copperfield, that's sharp practice! What do I mean by my look?'

'Yes,' said I. 'By your look.'

He seemed very much amused, and laughed as heartily as it was in his nature to laugh. After some scraping of his chin with his hand, he went on to say, with his eyes cast downward—still scraping, very slowly:

'When I was but an umble clerk, she always looked down upon me. She was for ever having my Agnes backwards and forwards at her ouse, and she was for ever being a friend to you, Master Copperfield; but I was too far beneath her, myself, to be noticed.'

'Well?' said I; 'suppose you were!'

'—And beneath him too,' pursued Uriah, very distinctly, and in a meditative tone of voice, as he continued to scrape his chin.

'Don't you know the Doctor better,' said I, 'than to suppose him conscious of your existence, when you were not before him?'

He directed his eyes at me in that sidelong glance again, and he made his face very lantern-jawed, for the greater convenience of scraping, as he answered:

'Oh dear, I am not referring to the Doctor! Oh no, poor man! I mean Mr. Maldon!'

My heart quite died within me. All my old doubts and apprehensions on that subject, all the Doctor's happiness and peace, all the mingled possibilities of innocence and compromise, that I could not unravel, I saw, in a moment, at the mercy of this fellow's twisting.

'He never could come into the office, without ordering and shoving me about,' said Uriah. 'One of your fine gentlemen he was! I was very meek and umble—and I am. But I didn't like that sort of thing—and I don't!'

He left off scraping his chin, and sucked in his cheeks until they seemed to meet inside; keeping his sidelong glance upon me all the while.

'She is one of your lovely women, she is,' he pursued, when he had slowly restored his face to its natural form; 'and ready to be no friend to such as me, I know. She's just the person as would put my Agnes up to higher sort of game. Now, I ain't one of your lady's men, Master Copperfield; but I've had eyes in my ed, a pretty long time back. We umble ones have got eyes, mostly speaking—and we look out of 'em.'

I endeavoured to appear unconscious and not disquieted, but, I saw in his face, with poor success.

'Now, I'm not a-going to let myself be run down, Copperfield,' he continued, raising that part of his countenance, where his red eyebrows would have been if he had had any, with malignant triumph, 'and I shall do what I can to put a stop to this friendship. I don't approve of it. I don't mind acknowledging to you that I've got rather a grudging disposition, and want to keep off all intruders. I ain't a-going, if I know it, to run the risk of being plotted against.'

'You are always plotting, and delude yourself into the belief that everybody else is doing the like, I think,' said I.

'Perhaps so, Master Copperfield,' he replied. 'But I've got a motive, as my fellow-partner used to say; and I go at it tooth and nail. I mustn't be put upon, as a numble person, too much. I can't allow people in my way. Really they must come out of the cart, Master Copperfield!'

'I don't understand you,' said I.

'Don't you, though?' he returned, with one of his jerks. 'I'm astonished at that, Master Copperfield, you being usually so quick! I'll try to be plainer, another time.—-Is that Mr. Maldon a-norseback, ringing at the gate, sir?'

'It looks like him,' I replied, as carelessly as I could.

Uriah stopped short, put his hands between his great knobs of knees, and doubled himself up with laughter. With perfectly silent laughter. Not a sound escaped from him. I was so repelled by his odious behaviour, particularly by this concluding instance, that I turned away without any ceremony; and left him doubled up in the middle of the garden, like a scarecrow in want of support.

It was not on that evening; but, as I well remember, on the next evening but one, which was a Sunday; that I took Agnes to see Dora. I had arranged the visit, beforehand, with Miss Lavinia; and Agnes was expected to tea.

I was in a flutter of pride and anxiety; pride in my dear little betrothed, and anxiety that Agnes should like her. All the way to Putney, Agnes being inside the stage-coach, and I outside, I pictured Dora to myself in every one of the pretty looks I knew so well; now making up my mind that I should like her to look exactly as she looked at such a time, and then doubting whether I should not prefer her looking as she looked at such another time; and almost worrying myself into a fever about it.

I was troubled by no doubt of her being very pretty, in any case; but it fell out that I had never seen her look so well. She was not in the drawing-room when I presented Agnes to her little aunts, but was shyly keeping out of the way. I knew where to look for her, now; and sure enough I found her stopping her ears again, behind the same dull old door.

At first she wouldn't come at all; and then she pleaded for five minutes by my watch. When at length she put her arm through mine, to be taken to the drawing-room, her charming little face was flushed, and had never been so pretty. But, when we went into the room, and it turned pale, she was ten thousand times prettier yet.

Dora was afraid of Agnes. She had told me that she knew Agnes was 'too clever'. But when she saw her looking at once so cheerful and so earnest, and so thoughtful, and so good, she gave a faint little cry of pleased surprise, and just put her affectionate arms round Agnes's neck, and laid her innocent cheek against her face.

I never was so happy. I never was so pleased as when I saw those two sit down together, side by side. As when I saw my little darling looking up so naturally to those cordial eyes. As when I saw the tender, beautiful regard which Agnes cast upon her.

Miss Lavinia and Miss Clarissa partook, in their way, of my joy. It was the pleasantest tea-table in the world. Miss Clarissa presided. I cut and handed the sweet seed-cake—the little sisters had a bird-like fondness for picking up seeds and pecking at sugar; Miss Lavinia looked on with benignant patronage, as if our happy love were all her work; and we were perfectly contented with ourselves and one another.

The gentle cheerfulness of Agnes went to all their hearts. Her quiet interest in everything that interested Dora; her manner of making acquaintance with Jip (who responded instantly); her pleasant way, when Dora was ashamed to come over to her usual seat by me; her modest grace and ease, eliciting a crowd of blushing little marks of confidence from Dora; seemed to make our circle quite complete.

'I am so glad,' said Dora, after tea, 'that you like me. I didn't think you would; and I want, more than ever, to be liked, now Julia Mills is gone.'

I have omitted to mention it, by the by. Miss Mills had sailed, and Dora and I had gone aboard a great East Indiaman at Gravesend to see her; and we had had preserved ginger, and guava, and other delicacies of that sort for lunch; and we had left Miss Mills weeping on a camp-stool on the quarter-deck, with a large new diary under her arm, in which the original reflections awakened by the contemplation of Ocean were to be recorded under lock and key.

Agnes said she was afraid I must have given her an unpromising character; but Dora corrected that directly.

'Oh no!' she said, shaking her curls at me; 'it was all praise. He thinks so much of your opinion, that I was quite afraid of it.'

'My good opinion cannot strengthen his attachment to some people whom he knows,' said Agnes, with a smile; 'it is not worth their having.'

'But please let me have it,' said Dora, in her coaxing way, 'if you can!'

We made merry about Dora's wanting to be liked, and Dora said I was a goose, and she didn't like me at any rate, and the short evening flew away on gossamer-wings. The time was at hand when the coach was to call for us. I was standing alone before the fire, when Dora came stealing softly in, to give me that usual precious little kiss before I went.

'Don't you think, if I had had her for a friend a long time ago, Doady,' said Dora, her bright eyes shining very brightly, and her little right hand idly busying itself with one of the buttons of my coat, 'I might have been more clever perhaps?'

'My love!' said I, 'what nonsense!'

'Do you think it is nonsense?' returned Dora, without looking at me. 'Are you sure it is?'

'Of course I am!' 'I have forgotten,' said Dora, still turning the button round and round, 'what relation Agnes is to you, you dear bad boy.'

'No blood-relation,' I replied; 'but we were brought up together, like brother and sister.'

'I wonder why you ever fell in love with me?' said Dora, beginning on another button of my coat.

'Perhaps because I couldn't see you, and not love you, Dora!'

'Suppose you had never seen me at all,' said Dora, going to another button.

'Suppose we had never been born!' said I, gaily.

I wondered what she was thinking about, as I glanced in admiring silence at the little soft hand travelling up the row of buttons on my coat, and at the clustering hair that lay against my breast, and at the lashes of her downcast eyes, slightly rising as they followed her idle fingers. At length her eyes were lifted up to mine, and she stood on tiptoe to give me, more thoughtfully than usual, that precious little kiss—once, twice, three times—and went out of the room.

They all came back together within five minutes afterwards, and Dora's unusual thoughtfulness was quite gone then. She was laughingly resolved to put Jip through the whole of his performances, before the coach came. They took some time (not so much on account of their variety, as Jip's reluctance), and were still unfinished when it was heard at the door. There was a hurried but affectionate parting between Agnes and herself; and Dora was to write to Agnes (who was not to mind her letters being foolish, she said), and Agnes was to write to Dora; and they had a second parting at the coach door, and a third when Dora, in spite of the remonstrances of Miss Lavinia, would come running out once more to remind Agnes at the coach window about writing, and to shake her curls at me on the box.

The stage-coach was to put us down near Covent Garden, where we were to take another stage-coach for Highgate. I was impatient for the short walk in the interval, that Agnes might praise Dora to me. Ah! what praise it was! How lovingly and fervently did it commend the pretty creature I had won, with all her artless graces best displayed, to my most gentle care! How thoughtfully remind me, yet with no pretence of doing so, of the trust in which I held the orphan child!

Never, never, had I loved Dora so deeply and truly, as I loved her that night. When we had again alighted, and were walking in the starlight along the quiet road that led to the Doctor's house, I told Agnes it was her doing.

'When you were sitting by her,' said I, 'you seemed to be no less her guardian angel than mine; and you seem so now, Agnes.'

'A poor angel,' she returned, 'but faithful.'

The clear tone of her voice, going straight to my heart, made it natural to me to say:

'The cheerfulness that belongs to you, Agnes (and to no one else that ever I have seen), is so restored, I have observed today, that I have begun to hope you are happier at home?'

'I am happier in myself,' she said; 'I am quite cheerful and light-hearted.'

I glanced at the serene face looking upward, and thought it was the stars that made it seem so noble.

'There has been no change at home,' said Agnes, after a few moments.

'No fresh reference,' said I, 'to—I wouldn't distress you, Agnes, but I cannot help asking—to what we spoke of, when we parted last?'

'No, none,' she answered.

'I have thought so much about it.'

'You must think less about it. Remember that I confide in simple love and truth at last. Have no apprehensions for me, Trotwood,' she added, after a moment; 'the step you dread my taking, I shall never take.'

Although I think I had never really feared it, in any season of cool reflection, it was an unspeakable relief to me to have this assurance from her own truthful lips. I told her so, earnestly.

'And when this visit is over,' said I,—'for we may not be alone another time,—how long is it likely to be, my dear Agnes, before you come to London again?'

'Probably a long time,' she replied; 'I think it will be best—for papa's sake—to remain at home. We are not likely to meet often, for some time to come; but I shall be a good correspondent of Dora's, and we shall frequently hear of one another that way.'

We were now within the little courtyard of the Doctor's cottage. It was growing late. There was a light in the window of Mrs. Strong's chamber, and Agnes, pointing to it, bade me good night.

'Do not be troubled,' she said, giving me her hand, 'by our misfortunes and anxieties. I can be happier in nothing than in your happiness. If you can ever give me help, rely upon it I will ask you for it. God bless you always!' In her beaming smile, and in these last tones of her cheerful voice, I seemed again to see and hear my little Dora in her company. I stood awhile, looking through the porch at the stars, with a heart full of love and gratitude, and then walked slowly forth. I had engaged a bed at a decent alehouse close by, and was going out at the gate, when, happening to turn my head, I saw a light in the Doctor's study. A half-reproachful fancy came into my mind, that he had been working at the Dictionary without my help. With the view of seeing if this were so, and, in any case, of bidding him good night, if he were yet sitting among his books, I turned back, and going softly across the hall, and gently opening the door, looked in.

The first person whom I saw, to my surprise, by the sober light of the shaded lamp, was Uriah. He was standing close beside it, with one of his skeleton hands over his mouth, and the other resting on the Doctor's table. The Doctor sat in his study chair, covering his face with his hands. Mr. Wickfield, sorely troubled and distressed, was leaning forward, irresolutely touching the Doctor's arm.

For an instant, I supposed that the Doctor was ill. I hastily advanced a step under that impression, when I met Uriah's eye, and saw what was the matter. I would have withdrawn, but the Doctor made a gesture to detain me, and I remained.

'At any rate,' observed Uriah, with a writhe of his ungainly person, 'we may keep the door shut. We needn't make it known to ALL the town.'

Saying which, he went on his toes to the door, which I had left open, and carefully closed it. He then came back, and took up his former position. There was an obtrusive show of compassionate zeal in his voice and manner, more intolerable—at least to me—than any demeanour he could have assumed.

'I have felt it incumbent upon me, Master Copperfield,' said Uriah, 'to point out to Doctor Strong what you and me have already talked about. You didn't exactly understand me, though?'

I gave him a look, but no other answer; and, going to my good old master, said a few words that I meant to be words of comfort and encouragement. He put his hand upon my shoulder, as it had been his custom to do when I was quite a little fellow, but did not lift his grey head.

'As you didn't understand me, Master Copperfield,' resumed Uriah in the same officious manner, 'I may take the liberty of umbly mentioning, being among friends, that I have called Doctor Strong's attention to the goings-on of Mrs. Strong. It's much against the grain with me, I assure you, Copperfield, to be concerned in anything so unpleasant; but really, as it is, we're all mixing ourselves up with what oughtn't to be. That was what my meaning was, sir, when you didn't understand me.' I wonder now, when I recall his leer, that I did not collar him, and try to shake the breath out of his body.

'I dare say I didn't make myself very clear,' he went on, 'nor you neither. Naturally, we was both of us inclined to give such a subject a wide berth. Hows'ever, at last I have made up my mind to speak plain; and I have mentioned to Doctor Strong that—did you speak, sir?'

This was to the Doctor, who had moaned. The sound might have touched any heart, I thought, but it had no effect upon Uriah's.

'—mentioned to Doctor Strong,' he proceeded, 'that anyone may see that Mr. Maldon, and the lovely and agreeable lady as is Doctor Strong's wife, are too sweet on one another. Really the time is come (we being at present all mixing ourselves up with what oughtn't to be), when Doctor Strong must be told that this was full as plain to everybody as the sun, before Mr. Maldon went to India; that Mr. Maldon made excuses to come back, for nothing else; and that he's always here, for nothing else. When you come in, sir, I was just putting it to my fellow-partner,' towards whom he turned, 'to say to Doctor Strong upon his word and honour, whether he'd ever been of this opinion long ago, or not. Come, Mr. Wickfield, sir! Would you be so good as tell us? Yes or no, sir? Come, partner!'

'For God's sake, my dear Doctor,' said Mr. Wickfield again laying his irresolute hand upon the Doctor's arm, 'don't attach too much weight to any suspicions I may have entertained.'

'There!' cried Uriah, shaking his head. 'What a melancholy confirmation: ain't it? Him! Such an old friend! Bless your soul, when I was nothing but a clerk in his office, Copperfield, I've seen him twenty times, if I've seen him once, quite in a taking about it—quite put out, you know (and very proper in him as a father; I'm sure I can't blame him), to think that Miss Agnes was mixing herself up with what oughtn't to be.'

'My dear Strong,' said Mr. Wickfield in a tremulous voice, 'my good friend, I needn't tell you that it has been my vice to look for some one master motive in everybody, and to try all actions by one narrow test. I may have fallen into such doubts as I have had, through this mistake.'

'You have had doubts, Wickfield,' said the Doctor, without lifting up his head. 'You have had doubts.'

'Speak up, fellow-partner,' urged Uriah.

'I had, at one time, certainly,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'I—God forgive me—I thought YOU had.'

'No, no, no!' returned the Doctor, in a tone of most pathetic grief. 'I thought, at one time,' said Mr. Wickfield, 'that you wished to send Maldon abroad to effect a desirable separation.'

'No, no, no!' returned the Doctor. 'To give Annie pleasure, by making some provision for the companion of her childhood. Nothing else.'

'So I found,' said Mr. Wickfield. 'I couldn't doubt it, when you told me so. But I thought—I implore you to remember the narrow construction which has been my besetting sin—that, in a case where there was so much disparity in point of years—'

'That's the way to put it, you see, Master Copperfield!' observed Uriah, with fawning and offensive pity.

'—a lady of such youth, and such attractions, however real her respect for you, might have been influenced in marrying, by worldly considerations only. I make no allowance for innumerable feelings and circumstances that may have all tended to good. For Heaven's sake remember that!'

'How kind he puts it!' said Uriah, shaking his head.

'Always observing her from one point of view,' said Mr. Wickfield; 'but by all that is dear to you, my old friend, I entreat you to consider what it was; I am forced to confess now, having no escape-'

'No! There's no way out of it, Mr. Wickfield, sir,' observed Uriah, 'when it's got to this.'

'—that I did,' said Mr. Wickfield, glancing helplessly and distractedly at his partner, 'that I did doubt her, and think her wanting in her duty to you; and that I did sometimes, if I must say all, feel averse to Agnes being in such a familiar relation towards her, as to see what I saw, or in my diseased theory fancied that I saw. I never mentioned this to anyone. I never meant it to be known to anyone. And though it is terrible to you to hear,' said Mr. Wickfield, quite subdued, 'if you knew how terrible it is for me to tell, you would feel compassion for me!'

The Doctor, in the perfect goodness of his nature, put out his hand. Mr. Wickfield held it for a little while in his, with his head bowed down.

'I am sure,' said Uriah, writhing himself into the silence like a Conger-eel, 'that this is a subject full of unpleasantness to everybody. But since we have got so far, I ought to take the liberty of mentioning that Copperfield has noticed it too.'

I turned upon him, and asked him how he dared refer to me!

'Oh! it's very kind of you, Copperfield,' returned Uriah, undulating all over, 'and we all know what an amiable character yours is; but you know that the moment I spoke to you the other night, you knew what I meant. You know you knew what I meant, Copperfield. Don't deny it! You deny it with the best intentions; but don't do it, Copperfield.'

I saw the mild eye of the good old Doctor turned upon me for a moment, and I felt that the confession of my old misgivings and remembrances was too plainly written in my face to be overlooked. It was of no use raging. I could not undo that. Say what I would, I could not unsay it.

We were silent again, and remained so, until the Doctor rose and walked twice or thrice across the room. Presently he returned to where his chair stood; and, leaning on the back of it, and occasionally putting his handkerchief to his eyes, with a simple honesty that did him more honour, to my thinking, than any disguise he could have effected, said:

'I have been much to blame. I believe I have been very much to blame. I have exposed one whom I hold in my heart, to trials and aspersions—I call them aspersions, even to have been conceived in anybody's inmost mind—of which she never, but for me, could have been the object.'

Uriah Heep gave a kind of snivel. I think to express sympathy.

'Of which my Annie,' said the Doctor, 'never, but for me, could have been the object. Gentlemen, I am old now, as you know; I do not feel, tonight, that I have much to live for. But my life—my Life—upon the truth and honour of the dear lady who has been the subject of this conversation!'

I do not think that the best embodiment of chivalry, the realization of the handsomest and most romantic figure ever imagined by painter, could have said this, with a more impressive and affecting dignity than the plain old Doctor did.

'But I am not prepared,' he went on, 'to deny—perhaps I may have been, without knowing it, in some degree prepared to admit—that I may have unwittingly ensnared that lady into an unhappy marriage. I am a man quite unaccustomed to observe; and I cannot but believe that the observation of several people, of different ages and positions, all too plainly tending in one direction (and that so natural), is better than mine.'

I had often admired, as I have elsewhere described, his benignant manner towards his youthful wife; but the respectful tenderness he manifested in every reference to her on this occasion, and the almost reverential manner in which he put away from him the lightest doubt of her integrity, exalted him, in my eyes, beyond description.

'I married that lady,' said the Doctor, 'when she was extremely young. I took her to myself when her character was scarcely formed. So far as it was developed, it had been my happiness to form it. I knew her father well. I knew her well. I had taught her what I could, for the love of all her beautiful and virtuous qualities. If I did her wrong; as I fear I did, in taking advantage (but I never meant it) of her gratitude and her affection; I ask pardon of that lady, in my heart!'

He walked across the room, and came back to the same place; holding the chair with a grasp that trembled, like his subdued voice, in its earnestness.

'I regarded myself as a refuge, for her, from the dangers and vicissitudes of life. I persuaded myself that, unequal though we were in years, she would live tranquilly and contentedly with me. I did not shut out of my consideration the time when I should leave her free, and still young and still beautiful, but with her judgement more matured—no, gentlemen—upon my truth!'

His homely figure seemed to be lightened up by his fidelity and generosity. Every word he uttered had a force that no other grace could have imparted to it.

'My life with this lady has been very happy. Until tonight, I have had uninterrupted occasion to bless the day on which I did her great injustice.'

His voice, more and more faltering in the utterance of these words, stopped for a few moments; then he went on:

'Once awakened from my dream—I have been a poor dreamer, in one way or other, all my life—I see how natural it is that she should have some regretful feeling towards her old companion and her equal. That she does regard him with some innocent regret, with some blameless thoughts of what might have been, but for me, is, I fear, too true. Much that I have seen, but not noted, has come back upon me with new meaning, during this last trying hour. But, beyond this, gentlemen, the dear lady's name never must be coupled with a word, a breath, of doubt.'

For a little while, his eye kindled and his voice was firm; for a little while he was again silent. Presently, he proceeded as before:

'It only remains for me, to bear the knowledge of the unhappiness I have occasioned, as submissively as I can. It is she who should reproach; not I. To save her from misconstruction, cruel misconstruction, that even my friends have not been able to avoid, becomes my duty. The more retired we live, the better I shall discharge it. And when the time comes—may it come soon, if it be His merciful pleasure!—when my death shall release her from constraint, I shall close my eyes upon her honoured face, with unbounded confidence and love; and leave her, with no sorrow then, to happier and brighter days.'

I could not see him for the tears which his earnestness and goodness, so adorned by, and so adorning, the perfect simplicity of his manner, brought into my eyes. He had moved to the door, when he added:

'Gentlemen, I have shown you my heart. I am sure you will respect it. What we have said tonight is never to be said more. Wickfield, give me an old friend's arm upstairs!'

Mr. Wickfield hastened to him. Without interchanging a word they went slowly out of the room together, Uriah looking after them.

'Well, Master Copperfield!' said Uriah, meekly turning to me. 'The thing hasn't took quite the turn that might have been expected, for the old Scholar—what an excellent man!—is as blind as a brickbat; but this family's out of the cart, I think!'

I needed but the sound of his voice to be so madly enraged as I never was before, and never have been since.

'You villain,' said I, 'what do you mean by entrapping me into your schemes? How dare you appeal to me just now, you false rascal, as if we had been in discussion together?'

As we stood, front to front, I saw so plainly, in the stealthy exultation of his face, what I already so plainly knew; I mean that he forced his confidence upon me, expressly to make me miserable, and had set a deliberate trap for me in this very matter; that I couldn't bear it. The whole of his lank cheek was invitingly before me, and I struck it with my open hand with that force that my fingers tingled as if I had burnt them.

He caught the hand in his, and we stood in that connexion, looking at each other. We stood so, a long time; long enough for me to see the white marks of my fingers die out of the deep red of his cheek, and leave it a deeper red.

'Copperfield,' he said at length, in a breathless voice, 'have you taken leave of your senses?'

'I have taken leave of you,' said I, wresting my hand away. 'You dog, I'll know no more of you.'

'Won't you?' said he, constrained by the pain of his cheek to put his hand there. 'Perhaps you won't be able to help it. Isn't this ungrateful of you, now?'

'I have shown you often enough,' said I, 'that I despise you. I have shown you now, more plainly, that I do. Why should I dread your doing your worst to all about you? What else do you ever do?'

He perfectly understood this allusion to the considerations that had hitherto restrained me in my communications with him. I rather think that neither the blow, nor the allusion, would have escaped me, but for the assurance I had had from Agnes that night. It is no matter.

There was another long pause. His eyes, as he looked at me, seemed to take every shade of colour that could make eyes ugly.

'Copperfield,' he said, removing his hand from his cheek, 'you have always gone against me. I know you always used to be against me at Mr.

Wickfield's.'

'You may think what you like,' said I, still in a towering rage. 'If it is not true, so much the worthier you.'

'And yet I always liked you, Copperfield!' he rejoined.

I deigned to make him no reply; and, taking up my hat, was going out to bed, when he came between me and the door.

'Copperfield,' he said, 'there must be two parties to a quarrel. I won't be one.'

'You may go to the devil!' said I.

'Don't say that!' he replied. 'I know you'll be sorry afterwards. How can you make yourself so inferior to me, as to show such a bad spirit? But I forgive you.'

'You forgive me!' I repeated disdainfully.

'I do, and you can't help yourself,' replied Uriah. 'To think of your going and attacking me, that have always been a friend to you! But there can't be a quarrel without two parties, and I won't be one. I will be a friend to you, in spite of you. So now you know what you've got to expect.'

The necessity of carrying on this dialogue (his part in which was very slow; mine very quick) in a low tone, that the house might not be disturbed at an unseasonable hour, did not improve my temper; though my passion was cooling down. Merely telling him that I should expect from him what I always had expected, and had never yet been disappointed in, I opened the door upon him, as if he had been a great walnut put there to be cracked, and went out of the house. But he slept out of the house too, at his mother's lodging; and before I had gone many hundred yards, came up with me.

'You know, Copperfield,' he said, in my ear (I did not turn my head), 'you're in quite a wrong position'; which I felt to be true, and that made me chafe the more; 'you can't make this a brave thing, and you can't help being forgiven. I don't intend to mention it to mother, nor to any living soul. I'm determined to forgive you. But I do wonder that you should lift your hand against a person that you knew to be so umble!'

I felt only less mean than he. He knew me better than I knew myself. If he had retorted or openly exasperated me, it would have been a relief and a justification; but he had put me on a slow fire, on which I lay tormented half the night.

In the morning, when I came out, the early church-bell was ringing, and he was walking up and down with his mother. He addressed me as if nothing had happened, and I could do no less than reply. I had struck him hard enough to give him the toothache, I suppose. At all events his face was tied up in a black silk handkerchief, which, with his hat perched on the top of it, was far from improving his appearance. I heard that he went to a dentist's in London on the Monday morning, and had a tooth out. I hope it was a double one.

The Doctor gave out that he was not quite well; and remained alone, for a considerable part of every day, during the remainder of the visit. Agnes and her father had been gone a week, before we resumed our usual work. On the day preceding its resumption, the Doctor gave me with his own hands a folded note not sealed. It was addressed to myself; and laid an injunction on me, in a few affectionate words, never to refer to the subject of that evening. I had confided it to my aunt, but to no one else. It was not a subject I could discuss with Agnes, and Agnes certainly had not the least suspicion of what had passed.

Neither, I felt convinced, had Mrs. Strong then. Several weeks elapsed before I saw the least change in her. It came on slowly, like a cloud when there is no wind. At first, she seemed to wonder at the gentle compassion with which the Doctor spoke to her, and at his wish that she should have her mother with her, to relieve the dull monotony of her life. Often, when we were at work, and she was sitting by, I would see her pausing and looking at him with that memorable face. Afterwards, I sometimes observed her rise, with her eyes full of tears, and go out of the room. Gradually, an unhappy shadow fell upon her beauty, and deepened every day. Mrs. Markleham was a regular inmate of the cottage then; but she talked and talked, and saw nothing.

As this change stole on Annie, once like sunshine in the Doctor's house, the Doctor became older in appearance, and more grave; but the sweetness of his temper, the placid kindness of his manner, and his benevolent solicitude for her, if they were capable of any increase, were increased. I saw him once, early on the morning of her birthday, when she came to sit in the window while we were at work (which she had always done, but now began to do with a timid and uncertain air that I thought very touching), take her forehead between his hands, kiss it, and go hurriedly away, too much moved to remain. I saw her stand where he had left her, like a statue; and then bend down her head, and clasp her hands, and weep, I cannot say how sorrowfully.

Sometimes, after that, I fancied that she tried to speak even to me, in intervals when we were left alone. But she never uttered a word. The Doctor always had some new project for her participating in amusements away from home, with her mother; and Mrs. Markleham, who was very fond of amusements, and very easily dissatisfied with anything else, entered into them with great good-will, and was loud in her commendations. But Annie, in a spiritless unhappy way, only went whither she was led, and seemed to have no care for anything.

I did not know what to think. Neither did my aunt; who must have walked, at various times, a hundred miles in her uncertainty. What was strangest of all was, that the only real relief which seemed to make its way into the secret region of this domestic unhappiness, made its way there in the person of Mr. Dick.

What his thoughts were on the subject, or what his observation was, I am as unable to explain, as I dare say he would have been to assist me in the task. But, as I have recorded in the narrative of my school days, his veneration for the Doctor was unbounded; and there is a subtlety of perception in real attachment, even when it is borne towards man by one of the lower animals, which leaves the highest intellect behind. To this mind of the heart, if I may call it so, in Mr. Dick, some bright ray of the truth shot straight.

He had proudly resumed his privilege, in many of his spare hours, of walking up and down the garden with the Doctor; as he had been accustomed to pace up and down The Doctor's Walk at Canterbury. But matters were no sooner in this state, than he devoted all his spare time (and got up earlier to make it more) to these perambulations. If he had never been so happy as when the Doctor read that marvellous performance, the Dictionary, to him; he was now quite miserable unless the Doctor pulled it out of his pocket, and began. When the Doctor and I were engaged, he now fell into the custom of walking up and down with Mrs. Strong, and helping her to trim her favourite flowers, or weed the beds. I dare say he rarely spoke a dozen words in an hour: but his quiet interest, and his wistful face, found immediate response in both their breasts; each knew that the other liked him, and that he loved both; and he became what no one else could be—a link between them.

When I think of him, with his impenetrably wise face, walking up and down with the Doctor, delighted to be battered by the hard words in the

Dictionary; when I think of him carrying huge watering-pots after Annie; kneeling down, in very paws of gloves, at patient microscopic work among the little leaves; expressing as no philosopher could have expressed, in everything he did, a delicate desire to be her friend; showering sympathy, trustfulness, and affection, out of every hole in the watering-pot; when I think of him never wandering in that better mind of his to which unhappiness addressed itself, never bringing the unfortunate King Charles into the garden, never wavering in his grateful service, never diverted from his knowledge that there was something wrong, or from his wish to set it right—I really feel almost ashamed of having known that he was not quite in his wits, taking account of the utmost I have done with mine.

'Nobody but myself, Trot, knows what that man is!' my aunt would proudly remark, when we conversed about it. 'Dick will distinguish himself yet!'

I must refer to one other topic before I close this chapter. While the visit at the Doctor's was still in progress, I observed that the postman brought two or three letters every morning for Uriah Heep, who remained at Highgate until the rest went back, it being a leisure time; and that these were always directed in a business-like manner by Mr. Micawber, who now assumed a round legal hand. I was glad to infer, from these slight premises, that Mr. Micawber was doing well; and consequently was much surprised to receive, about this time, the following letter from his amiable wife.

'CANTERBURY, Monday Evening.

'You will doubtless be surprised, my dear Mr. Copperfield, to receive this communication. Still more so, by its contents. Still more so, by the stipulation of implicit confidence which I beg to impose. But my feelings as a wife and mother require relief; and as I do not wish to consult my family (already obnoxious to the feelings of Mr. Micawber), I know no one of whom I can better ask advice than my friend and former lodger.

'You may be aware, my dear Mr. Copperfield, that between myself and Mr. Micawber (whom I will never desert), there has always been preserved a spirit of mutual confidence. Mr. Micawber may have occasionally given a bill without consulting me, or he may have misled me as to the period when that obligation would become due. This has actually happened. But, in general, Mr. Micawber has had no secrets from the bosom of affection—I allude to his wife—and has invariably, on our retirement to rest, recalled the events of the day.

'You will picture to yourself, my dear Mr. Copperfield, what the poignancy of my feelings must be, when I inform you that Mr. Micawber is entirely changed. He is reserved. He is secret. His life is a mystery to the partner of his joys and sorrows—I again allude to his wife—and if I should assure you that beyond knowing that it is passed from morning to night at the office, I now know less of it than I do of the man in the south, connected with whose mouth the thoughtless children repeat an idle tale respecting cold plum porridge, I should adopt a popular fallacy to express an actual fact.

'But this is not all. Mr. Micawber is morose. He is severe. He is estranged from our eldest son and daughter, he has no pride in his twins, he looks with an eye of coldness even on the unoffending stranger who last became a member of our circle. The pecuniary means of meeting our expenses, kept down to the utmost farthing, are obtained from him with great difficulty, and even under fearful threats that he will Settle himself (the exact expression); and he inexorably refuses to give any explanation whatever of this distracting policy.

'This is hard to bear. This is heart-breaking. If you will advise me, knowing my feeble powers such as they are, how you think it will be best to exert them in a dilemma so unwonted, you will add another friendly obligation to the many you have already rendered me. With loves from the children, and a smile from the happily-unconscious stranger, I remain, dear Mr. Copperfield,

Your afflicted,

'EMMA MICAWBER.'

I did not feel justified in giving a wife of Mrs. Micawber's experience any other recommendation, than that she should try to reclaim Mr. Micawber by patience and kindness (as I knew she would in any case); but the letter set me thinking about him very much.

CHAPTER 43. ANOTHER RETROSPECT

Once again, let me pause upon a memorable period of my life. Let me stand aside, to see the phantoms of those days go by me, accompanying the shadow of myself, in dim procession.

Weeks, months, seasons, pass along. They seem little more than a summer day and a winter evening. Now, the Common where I walk with Dora is all in bloom, a field of bright gold; and now the unseen heather lies in mounds and bunches underneath a covering of snow. In a breath, the river that flows through our Sunday walks is sparkling in the summer sun, is ruffled by the winter wind, or thickened with drifting heaps of ice. Faster than ever river ran towards the sea, it flashes, darkens, and rolls away.

Not a thread changes, in the house of the two little bird-like ladies. The clock ticks over the fireplace, the weather-glass hangs in the hall. Neither clock nor weather-glass is ever right; but we believe in both, devoutly.

I have come legally to man's estate. I have attained the dignity of twenty-one. But this is a sort of dignity that may be thrust upon one. Let me think what I have achieved.

I have tamed that savage stenographic mystery. I make a respectable income by it. I am in high repute for my accomplishment in all pertaining to the art, and am joined with eleven others in reporting the debates in Parliament for a Morning Newspaper. Night after night, I record predictions that never come to pass, professions that are never fulfilled, explanations that are only meant to mystify. I wallow in words. Britannia, that unfortunate female, is always before me, like a trussed fowl: skewered through and through with office-pens, and bound hand and foot with red tape. I am sufficiently behind the scenes to know the worth of political life. I am quite an Infidel about it, and shall never be converted.

My dear old Traddles has tried his hand at the same pursuit, but it is not in Traddles's way. He is perfectly good-humoured respecting his failure, and reminds me that he always did consider himself slow. He has occasional employment on the same newspaper, in getting up the facts of dry subjects, to be written about and embellished by more fertile minds. He is called to the bar; and with admirable industry and self-denial has scraped another hundred pounds together, to fee a Conveyancer whose chambers he attends. A great deal of very hot port wine was consumed at his call; and, considering the figure, I should think the Inner Temple must have made a profit by it.

I have come out in another way. I have taken with fear and trembling to authorship. I wrote a little something, in secret, and sent it to a magazine, and it was published in the magazine. Since then, I have taken heart to write a good many trifling pieces. Now, I am regularly paid for them. Altogether, I am well off, when I tell my income on the fingers of my left hand, I pass the third finger and take in the fourth to the middle joint.

We have removed, from Buckingham Street, to a pleasant little cottage very near the one I looked at, when my enthusiasm first came on. My aunt, however (who has sold the house at Dover, to good advantage), is not going to remain here, but intends removing herself to a still more tiny cottage close at hand. What does this portend? My marriage? Yes!

Yes! I am going to be married to Dora! Miss Lavinia and Miss Clarissa have given their consent; and if ever canary birds were in a flutter, they are. Miss Lavinia, self-charged with the superintendence of my darling's wardrobe, is constantly cutting out brown-paper cuirasses, and differing in opinion from a highly respectable young man, with a long bundle, and a yard measure under his arm. A dressmaker, always stabbed in the breast with a needle and thread, boards and lodges in the house; and seems to me, eating, drinking, or sleeping, never to take her thimble off. They make a lay-figure of my dear. They are always sending for her to come and try something on. We can't be happy together for five minutes in the evening, but some intrusive female knocks at the door, and says, 'Oh, if you please, Miss Dora, would you step upstairs!'

Miss Clarissa and my aunt roam all over London, to find out articles of furniture for Dora and me to look at. It would be better for them to buy the goods at once, without this ceremony of inspection; for, when we go to see a kitchen fender and meat-screen, Dora sees a Chinese house for Jip, with little bells on the top, and prefers that. And it takes a long time to accustom Jip to his new residence, after we have bought it; whenever he goes in or out, he makes all the little bells ring, and is horribly frightened.

Peggotty comes up to make herself useful, and falls to work immediately. Her department appears to be, to clean everything over and over again. She rubs everything that can be rubbed, until it shines, like her own honest forehead, with perpetual friction. And now it is, that I begin to see her solitary brother passing through the dark streets at night, and looking, as he goes, among the wandering faces. I never speak to him at such an hour. I know too well, as his grave figure passes onward, what he seeks, and what he dreads.

Why does Traddles look so important when he calls upon me this afternoon in the Commons—where I still occasionally attend, for form's sake, when I have time? The realization of my boyish day-dreams is at hand. I am going to take out the licence.

It is a little document to do so much; and Traddles contemplates it, as it lies upon my desk, half in admiration, half in awe. There are the names, in the sweet old visionary connexion, David Copperfield and Dora Spenlow; and there, in the corner, is that Parental Institution, the Stamp Office, which is so benignantly interested in the various transactions of human life, looking down upon our Union; and there is the Archbishop of Canterbury invoking a blessing on us in print, and doing it as cheap as could possibly be expected.

Nevertheless, I am in a dream, a flustered, happy, hurried dream. I can't believe that it is going to be; and yet I can't believe but that everyone I pass in the street, must have some kind of perception, that I am to be married the day after tomorrow. The Surrogate knows me, when I go down to be sworn; and disposes of me easily, as if there were a Masonic understanding between us. Traddles is not at all wanted, but is in attendance as my general backer.

'I hope the next time you come here, my dear fellow,' I say to Traddles, 'it will be on the same errand for yourself. And I hope it will be soon.'

'Thank you for your good wishes, my dear Copperfield,' he replies. 'I hope so too. It's a satisfaction to know that she'll wait for me any length of time, and that she really is the dearest girl—'

'When are you to meet her at the coach?' I ask.

'At seven,' says Traddles, looking at his plain old silver watch—the very watch he once took a wheel out of, at school, to make a water-mill. 'That is about Miss Wickfield's time, is it not?'

'A little earlier. Her time is half past eight.' 'I assure you, my dear boy,' says Traddles, 'I am almost as pleased as if I were going to be married myself, to think that this event is coming to such a happy termination. And really the great friendship and consideration of personally associating Sophy with the joyful occasion, and inviting her to be a bridesmaid in conjunction with Miss Wickfield, demands my warmest thanks. I am extremely sensible of it.'

I hear him, and shake hands with him; and we talk, and walk, and dine, and so on; but I don't believe it. Nothing is real.

Sophy arrives at the house of Dora's aunts, in due course. She has the most agreeable of faces,—not absolutely beautiful, but extraordinarily pleasant,—and is one of the most genial, unaffected, frank, engaging creatures I have ever seen. Traddles presents her to us with great pride; and rubs his hands for ten minutes by the clock, with every individual hair upon his head standing on tiptoe, when I congratulate him in a corner on his choice.

I have brought Agnes from the Canterbury coach, and her cheerful and beautiful face is among us for the second time. Agnes has a great liking for Traddles, and it is capital to see them meet, and to observe the glory of Traddles as he commends the dearest girl in the world to her acquaintance.

Still I don't believe it. We have a delightful evening, and are supremely happy; but I don't believe it yet. I can't collect myself. I can't check off my happiness as it takes place. I feel in a misty and unsettled kind of state; as if I had got up very early in the morning a week or two ago, and had never been to bed since. I can't make out when yesterday was. I seem to have been carrying the licence about, in my pocket, many months.

Next day, too, when we all go in a flock to see the house—our house—Dora's and mine—I am quite unable to regard myself as its master. I seem to be there, by permission of somebody else. I half expect the real master to come home presently, and say he is glad to see me. Such a beautiful little house as it is, with everything so bright and new; with the flowers on the carpets looking as if freshly gathered, and the green leaves on the paper as if they had just come out; with the spotless muslin curtains, and the blushing rose-coloured furniture, and Dora's garden hat with the blue ribbon—do I remember, now, how I loved her in such another hat when I first knew her!—already hanging on its little peg; the guitar-case quite at home on its heels in a corner; and everybody tumbling over Jip's pagoda, which is much too big for the establishment. Another happy evening, quite as unreal as all the rest of it, and I steal into the usual room before going away. Dora is not there. I suppose they have not done trying on yet. Miss Lavinia peeps in, and tells me mysteriously that she will not be long. She is rather long, notwithstanding; but by and by I hear a rustling at the door, and someone taps.

I say, 'Come in!' but someone taps again.

I go to the door, wondering who it is; there, I meet a pair of bright eyes, and a blushing face; they are Dora's eyes and face, and Miss Lavinia has dressed her in tomorrow's dress, bonnet and all, for me to see. I take my little wife to my heart; and Miss Lavinia gives a little scream because I tumble the bonnet, and Dora laughs and cries at once, because I am so pleased; and I believe it less than ever.

'Do you think it pretty, Doady?' says Dora.

Pretty! I should rather think I did.

'And are you sure you like me very much?' says Dora.

The topic is fraught with such danger to the bonnet, that Miss Lavinia gives another little scream, and begs me to understand that Dora is only to be looked at, and on no account to be touched. So Dora stands in a delightful state of confusion for a minute or two, to be admired; and then takes off her bonnet—looking so natural without it!—and runs away with it in her hand; and comes dancing down again in her own familiar dress, and asks Jip if I have got a beautiful little wife, and whether he'll forgive her for being married, and kneels down to make him stand upon the cookery-book, for the last time in her single life.

I go home, more incredulous than ever, to a lodging that I have hard by; and get up very early in the morning, to ride to the Highgate road and fetch my aunt.

I have never seen my aunt in such state. She is dressed in lavender-coloured silk, and has a white bonnet on, and is amazing. Janet has dressed her, and is there to look at me. Peggotty is ready to go to church, intending to behold the ceremony from the gallery. Mr. Dick, who is to give my darling to me at the altar, has had his hair curled. Traddles, whom I have taken up by appointment at the turnpike, presents a dazzling combination of cream colour and light blue; and both he and Mr. Dick have a general effect about them of being all gloves.

No doubt I see this, because I know it is so; but I am astray, and seem to see nothing. Nor do I believe anything whatever. Still, as we drive along in an open carriage, this fairy marriage is real enough to fill me with a sort of wondering pity for the unfortunate people who have no part in it, but are sweeping out the shops, and going to their daily occupations.

My aunt sits with my hand in hers all the way. When we stop a little way short of the church, to put down Peggotty, whom we have brought on the box, she gives it a squeeze, and me a kiss.

'God bless you, Trot! My own boy never could be dearer. I think of poor dear Baby this morning.' 'So do I. And of all I owe to you, dear aunt.'

'Tut, child!' says my aunt; and gives her hand in overflowing cordiality to Traddles, who then gives his to Mr. Dick, who then gives his to me, who then gives mine to Traddles, and then we come to the church door.

The church is calm enough, I am sure; but it might be a steam-power loom in full action, for any sedative effect it has on me. I am too far gone for that.

The rest is all a more or less incoherent dream.

A dream of their coming in with Dora; of the pew-opener arranging us, like a drill-sergeant, before the altar rails; of my wondering, even then, why pew-openers must always be the most disagreeable females procurable, and whether there is any religious dread of a disastrous infection of good-humour which renders it indispensable to set those vessels of vinegar upon the road to Heaven.

Of the clergyman and clerk appearing; of a few boatmen and some other people strolling in; of an ancient mariner behind me, strongly flavouring the church with rum; of the service beginning in a deep voice, and our all being very attentive.

Of Miss Lavinia, who acts as a semi-auxiliary bridesmaid, being the first to cry, and of her doing homage (as I take it) to the memory of Pidger, in sobs; of Miss Clarissa applying a smelling-bottle; of Agnes taking care of Dora; of my aunt endeavouring to represent herself as a model of sternness, with tears rolling down her face; of little Dora trembling very much, and making her responses in faint whispers.

Of our kneeling down together, side by side; of Dora's trembling less and less, but always clasping Agnes by the hand; of the service being got through, quietly and gravely; of our all looking at each other in an April state of smiles and tears, when it is over; of my young wife being hysterical in the vestry, and crying for her poor papa, her dear papa.

Of her soon cheering up again, and our signing the register all round. Of my going into the gallery for Peggotty to bring her to sign it; of Peggotty's hugging me in a corner, and telling me she saw my own dear mother married; of its being over, and our going away.

Of my walking so proudly and lovingly down the aisle with my sweet wife upon my arm, through a mist of half-seen people, pulpits, monuments, pews, fonts, organs, and church windows, in which there flutter faint airs of association with my childish church at home, so long ago.

Of their whispering, as we pass, what a youthful couple we are, and what a pretty little wife she is. Of our all being so merry and talkative in the carriage going back. Of Sophy telling us that when she saw Traddles (whom I had entrusted with the licence) asked for it, she almost fainted, having been convinced that he would contrive to lose it, or to have his pocket picked. Of Agnes laughing gaily; and of Dora being so fond of Agnes that she will not be separated from her, but still keeps her hand.

Of there being a breakfast, with abundance of things, pretty and substantial, to eat and drink, whereof I partake, as I should do in any other dream, without the least perception of their flavour; eating and drinking, as I may say, nothing but love and marriage, and no more believing in the viands than in anything else.

Of my making a speech in the same dreamy fashion, without having an idea of what I want to say, beyond such as may be comprehended in the full conviction that I haven't said it. Of our being very sociably and simply happy (always in a dream though); and of Jip's having wedding cake, and its not agreeing with him afterwards.

Of the pair of hired post-horses being ready, and of Dora's going away to change her dress. Of my aunt and Miss Clarissa remaining with us; and our walking in the garden; and my aunt, who has made quite a speech at breakfast touching Dora's aunts, being mightily amused with herself, but a little proud of it too.

Of Dora's being ready, and of Miss Lavinia's hovering about her, loth to lose the pretty toy that has given her so much pleasant occupation. Of Dora's making a long series of surprised discoveries that she has forgotten all sorts of little things; and of everybody's running everywhere to fetch them.

Of their all closing about Dora, when at last she begins to say good-bye, looking, with their bright colours and ribbons, like a bed of flowers. Of my darling being almost smothered among the flowers, and coming out, laughing and crying both together, to my jealous arms.

Of my wanting to carry Jip (who is to go along with us), and Dora's saying no, that she must carry him, or else he'll think she don't like him any more, now she is married, and will break his heart. Of our going, arm in arm, and Dora stopping and looking back, and saying, 'If I have ever been cross or ungrateful to anybody, don't remember it!' and bursting into tears.

Of her waving her little hand, and our going away once more. Of her once more stopping, and looking back, and hurrying to Agnes, and giving Agnes, above all the others, her last kisses and farewells.

We drive away together, and I awake from the dream. I believe it at last. It is my dear, dear, little wife beside me, whom I love so well!

'Are you happy now, you foolish boy?' says Dora, 'and sure you don't repent?'

I have stood aside to see the phantoms of those days go by me. They are gone, and I resume the journey of my story.

CHAPTER 44. OUR HOUSEKEEPING

It was a strange condition of things, the honeymoon being over, and the bridesmaids gone home, when I found myself sitting down in my own small house with Dora; quite thrown out of employment, as I may say, in respect of the delicious old occupation of making love.

It seemed such an extraordinary thing to have Dora always there. It was so unaccountable not to be obliged to go out to see her, not to have any occasion to be tormenting myself about her, not to have to write to her, not to be scheming and devising opportunities of being alone with her. Sometimes of an evening, when I looked up from my writing, and saw her seated opposite, I would lean back in my chair, and think how queer it was that there we were, alone together as a matter of course—nobody's business any more—all the romance of our engagement put away upon a shelf, to rust—no one to please but one another—one another to please, for life.

When there was a debate, and I was kept out very late, it seemed so strange to me, as I was walking home, to think that Dora was at home! It was such a wonderful thing, at first, to have her coming softly down to talk to me as I ate my supper. It was such a stupendous thing to know for certain that she put her hair in papers. It was altogether such an astonishing event to see her do it!

I doubt whether two young birds could have known less about keeping house, than I and my pretty Dora did. We had a servant, of course. She kept house for us. I have still a latent belief that she must have been Mrs. Crupp's daughter in disguise, we had such an awful time of it with Mary Anne.

Her name was Paragon. Her nature was represented to us, when we engaged her, as being feebly expressed in her name. She had a written character, as large as a proclamation; and, according to this document, could do everything of a domestic nature that ever I heard of, and a great many things that I never did hear of. She was a woman in the prime of life; of a severe countenance; and subject (particularly in the arms) to a sort of perpetual measles or fiery rash. She had a cousin in the Life-Guards, with such long legs that he looked like the afternoon shadow of somebody else. His shell-jacket was as much too little for him as he was too big for the premises. He made the cottage smaller than it need have been, by being so very much out of proportion to it. Besides which, the walls were not thick, and, whenever he passed the evening at our house, we always knew of it by hearing one continual growl in the kitchen.

Our treasure was warranted sober and honest. I am therefore willing to believe that she was in a fit when we found her under the boiler; and that the deficient tea-spoons were attributable to the dustman.

But she preyed upon our minds dreadfully. We felt our inexperience, and were unable to help ourselves. We should have been at her mercy, if she had had any; but she was a remorseless woman, and had none. She was the cause of our first little quarrel.

'My dearest life,' I said one day to Dora, 'do you think Mary Anne has any idea of time?'

'Why, Doady?' inquired Dora, looking up, innocently, from her drawing.

'My love, because it's five, and we were to have dined at four.'

Dora glanced wistfully at the clock, and hinted that she thought it was too fast.

'On the contrary, my love,' said I, referring to my watch, 'it's a few minutes too slow.'

My little wife came and sat upon my knee, to coax me to be quiet, and drew a line with her pencil down the middle of my nose; but I couldn't dine off that, though it was very agreeable.

'Don't you think, my dear,' said I, 'it would be better for you to remonstrate with Mary Anne?'

'Oh no, please! I couldn't, Doady!' said Dora.

'Why not, my love?' I gently asked.

'Oh, because I am such a little goose,' said Dora, 'and she knows I am!'

I thought this sentiment so incompatible with the establishment of any system of check on Mary Anne, that I frowned a little.

'Oh, what ugly wrinkles in my bad boy's forehead!' said Dora, and still being on my knee, she traced them with her pencil; putting it to her rosy lips to make it mark blacker, and working at my forehead with a quaint little mockery of being industrious, that quite delighted me in spite of myself.

'There's a good child,' said Dora, 'it makes its face so much prettier to laugh.' 'But, my love,' said I.

'No, no! please!' cried Dora, with a kiss, 'don't be a naughty Blue Beard! Don't be serious!'

'My precious wife,' said I, 'we must be serious sometimes. Come! Sit down on this chair, close beside me! Give me the pencil! There! Now let us talk sensibly. You know, dear'; what a little hand it was to hold, and what a tiny wedding-ring it was to see! 'You know, my love, it is not exactly comfortable to have to go out without one's dinner. Now, is it?'

'N-n-no!' replied Dora, faintly.

'My love, how you tremble!'

'Because I KNOW you're going to scold me,' exclaimed Dora, in a piteous voice.

'My sweet, I am only going to reason.'

'Oh, but reasoning is worse than scolding!' exclaimed Dora, in despair. 'I didn't marry to be reasoned with. If you meant to reason with such a poor little thing as I am, you ought to have told me so, you cruel boy!'

I tried to pacify Dora, but she turned away her face, and shook her curls from side to side, and said, 'You cruel, cruel boy!' so many times, that I really did not exactly know what to do: so I took a few turns up and down the room in my uncertainty, and came back again.

'Dora, my darling!'

'No, I am not your darling. Because you must be sorry that you married me, or else you wouldn't reason with me!' returned Dora.

I felt so injured by the inconsequential nature of this charge, that it gave me courage to be grave.

'Now, my own Dora,' said I, 'you are very childish, and are talking nonsense. You must remember, I am sure, that I was obliged to go out yesterday when dinner was half over; and that, the day before, I was made quite unwell by being obliged to eat underdone veal in a hurry; today, I don't dine at all—and I am afraid to say how long we waited for breakfast—and then the water didn't boil. I don't mean to reproach you, my dear, but this is not comfortable.'

'Oh, you cruel, cruel boy, to say I am a disagreeable wife!' cried Dora.

'Now, my dear Dora, you must know that I never said that!'

'You said, I wasn't comfortable!' cried Dora. 'I said the housekeeping was not comfortable!'

'It's exactly the same thing!' cried Dora. And she evidently thought so, for she wept most grievously.

I took another turn across the room, full of love for my pretty wife, and distracted by self-accusatory inclinations to knock my head against the door. I sat down again, and said:

'I am not blaming you, Dora. We have both a great deal to learn. I am only trying to show you, my dear, that you must—you really must' (I was resolved not to give this up)—'accustom yourself to look after Mary Anne. Likewise to act a little for yourself, and me.'

'I wonder, I do, at your making such ungrateful speeches,' sobbed Dora. 'When you know that the other day, when you said you would like a little bit of fish, I went out myself, miles and miles, and ordered it, to surprise you.'

'And it was very kind of you, my own darling,' said I. 'I felt it so much that I wouldn't on any account have even mentioned that you bought a Salmon—which was too much for two. Or that it cost one pound six—which was more than we can afford.'

'You enjoyed it very much,' sobbed Dora. 'And you said I was a Mouse.'

'And I'll say so again, my love,' I returned, 'a thousand times!'

But I had wounded Dora's soft little heart, and she was not to be comforted. She was so pathetic in her sobbing and bewailing, that I felt as if I had said I don't know what to hurt her. I was obliged to hurry away; I was kept out late; and I felt all night such pangs of remorse as made me miserable. I had the conscience of an assassin, and was haunted by a vague sense of enormous wickedness.

It was two or three hours past midnight when I got home. I found my aunt, in our house, sitting up for me.

'Is anything the matter, aunt?' said I, alarmed.

'Nothing, Trot,' she replied. 'Sit down, sit down. Little Blossom has been rather out of spirits, and I have been keeping her company. That's all.'

I leaned my head upon my hand; and felt more sorry and downcast, as I sat looking at the fire, than I could have supposed possible so soon after the fulfilment of my brightest hopes. As I sat thinking, I happened to meet my aunt's eyes, which were resting on my face. There was an anxious expression in them, but it cleared directly.

'I assure you, aunt,' said I, 'I have been quite unhappy myself all night, to think of Dora's being so. But I had no other intention than to speak to her tenderly and lovingly about our home-affairs.'

MY aunt nodded encouragement.

'You must have patience, Trot,' said she.

'Of course. Heaven knows I don't mean to be unreasonable, aunt!'

'No, no,' said my aunt. 'But Little Blossom is a very tender little blossom, and the wind must be gentle with her.'

I thanked my good aunt, in my heart, for her tenderness towards my wife; and I was sure that she knew I did.

'Don't you think, aunt,' said I, after some further contemplation of the fire, 'that you could advise and counsel Dora a little, for our mutual advantage, now and then?'

'Trot,' returned my aunt, with some emotion, 'no! Don't ask me such a thing.'

Her tone was so very earnest that I raised my eyes in surprise.

'I look back on my life, child,' said my aunt, 'and I think of some who are in their graves, with whom I might have been on kinder terms. If I judged harshly of other people's mistakes in marriage, it may have been because I had bitter reason to judge harshly of my own. Let that pass. I have been a grumpy, frumpy, wayward sort of a woman, a good many years. I am still, and I always shall be. But you and I have done one another some good, Trot,—at all events, you have done me good, my dear; and division must not come between us, at this time of day.'

'Division between us!' cried I.

'Child, child!' said my aunt, smoothing her dress, 'how soon it might come between us, or how unhappy I might make our Little Blossom, if I meddled in anything, a prophet couldn't say. I want our pet to like me, and be as gay as a butterfly. Remember your own home, in that second marriage; and never do both me and her the injury you have hinted at!'

I comprehended, at once, that my aunt was right; and I comprehended the full extent of her generous feeling towards my dear wife.

'These are early days, Trot,' she pursued, 'and Rome was not built in a day, nor in a year. You have chosen freely for yourself'; a cloud passed over her face for a moment, I thought; 'and you have chosen a very pretty and a very affectionate creature. It will be your duty, and it will be your pleasure too—of course I know that; I am not delivering a lecture—to estimate her (as you chose her) by the qualities she has, and not by the qualities she may not have. The latter you must develop in her, if you can. And if you cannot, child,' here my aunt rubbed her nose, 'you must just accustom yourself to do without 'em. But remember, my dear, your future is between you two. No one can assist you; you are to work it out for yourselves. This is marriage, Trot; and Heaven bless you both, in it, for a pair of babes in the wood as you are!'

My aunt said this in a sprightly way, and gave me a kiss to ratify the blessing.

'Now,' said she, 'light my little lantern, and see me into my bandbox by the garden path'; for there was a communication between our cottages in that direction. 'Give Betsey Trotwood's love to Blossom, when you come back; and whatever you do, Trot, never dream of setting Betsey up as a scarecrow, for if I ever saw her in the glass, she's quite grim enough and gaunt enough in her private capacity!'

With this my aunt tied her head up in a handkerchief, with which she was accustomed to make a bundle of it on such occasions; and I escorted her home. As she stood in her garden, holding up her little lantern to light me back, I thought her observation of me had an anxious air again; but I was too much occupied in pondering on what she had said, and too much impressed—for the first time, in reality—by the conviction that Dora and I had indeed to work out our future for ourselves, and that no one could assist us, to take much notice of it.

Dora came stealing down in her little slippers, to meet me, now that I was alone; and cried upon my shoulder, and said I had been hard-hearted and she had been naughty; and I said much the same thing in effect, I believe; and we made it up, and agreed that our first little difference was to be our last, and that we were never to have another if we lived a hundred years.

The next domestic trial we went through, was the Ordeal of Servants. Mary Anne's cousin deserted into our coal-hole, and was brought out, to our great amazement, by a piquet of his companions in arms, who took him away handcuffed in a procession that covered our front-garden with ignominy. This nerved me to get rid of Mary Anne, who went so mildly, on receipt of wages, that I was surprised, until I found out about the tea-spoons, and also about the little sums she had borrowed in my name of the tradespeople without authority. After an interval of Mrs. Kidgerbury—the oldest inhabitant of Kentish Town, I believe, who went out charing, but was too feeble to execute her conceptions of that art—we found another treasure, who was one of the most amiable of women, but who generally made a point of falling either up or down the kitchen stairs with the tray, and almost plunged into the parlour, as into a bath, with the tea-things. The ravages committed by this unfortunate, rendering her dismissal necessary, she was succeeded (with intervals of Mrs. Kidgerbury) by a long line of Incapables; terminating in a young person of genteel appearance, who went to Greenwich Fair in Dora's bonnet. After whom I remember nothing but an average equality of failure.

Everybody we had anything to do with seemed to cheat us. Our appearance in a shop was a signal for the damaged goods to be brought out immediately. If we bought a lobster, it was full of water. All our meat turned out to be tough, and there was hardly any crust to our loaves. In search of the principle on which joints ought to be roasted, to be roasted enough, and not too much, I myself referred to the Cookery Book, and found it there established as the allowance of a quarter of an hour to every pound, and say a quarter over. But the principle always failed us by some curious fatality, and we never could hit any medium between redness and cinders.

I had reason to believe that in accomplishing these failures we incurred a far greater expense than if we had achieved a series of triumphs. It appeared to me, on looking over the tradesmen's books, as if we might have kept the basement storey paved with butter, such was the extensive scale of our consumption of that article. I don't know whether the Excise returns of the period may have exhibited any increase in the demand for pepper; but if our performances did not affect the market, I should say several families must have left off using it. And the most wonderful fact of all was, that we never had anything in the house.

As to the washerwoman pawning the clothes, and coming in a state of penitent intoxication to apologize, I suppose that might have happened several times to anybody. Also the chimney on fire, the parish engine, and perjury on the part of the Beadle. But I apprehend that we were personally fortunate in engaging a servant with a taste for cordials, who swelled our running account for porter at the public-house by such inexplicable items as 'quartern rum shrub (Mrs. C.)'; 'Half-quartern gin and cloves (Mrs. C.)'; 'Glass rum and peppermint (Mrs. C.)'—the parentheses always referring to Dora, who was supposed, it appeared on explanation, to have imbibed the whole of these refreshments.

One of our first feats in the housekeeping way was a little dinner to Traddles. I met him in town, and asked him to walk out with me that afternoon. He readily consenting, I wrote to Dora, saying I would bring him home. It was pleasant weather, and on the road we made my domestic happiness the theme of conversation. Traddles was very full of it; and said, that, picturing himself with such a home, and Sophy waiting and preparing for him, he could think of nothing wanting to complete his bliss.

I could not have wished for a prettier little wife at the opposite end of the table, but I certainly could have wished, when we sat down, for a little more room. I did not know how it was, but though there were only two of us, we were at once always cramped for room, and yet had always room enough to lose everything in. I suspect it may have been because nothing had a place of its own, except Jip's pagoda, which invariably blocked up the main thoroughfare. On the present occasion, Traddles was so hemmed in by the pagoda and the guitar-case, and Dora's flower-painting, and my writing-table, that I had serious doubts of the possibility of his using his knife and fork; but he protested, with his own good-humour, 'Oceans of room, Copperfield! I assure you, Oceans!'

There was another thing I could have wished, namely, that Jip had never been encouraged to walk about the tablecloth during dinner. I began to think there was something disorderly in his being there at all, even if he had not been in the habit of putting his foot in the salt or the melted butter. On this occasion he seemed to think he was introduced expressly to keep Traddles at bay; and he barked at my old friend, and made short runs at his plate, with such undaunted pertinacity, that he may be said to have engrossed the conversation.

However, as I knew how tender-hearted my dear Dora was, and how sensitive she would be to any slight upon her favourite, I hinted no objection. For similar reasons I made no allusion to the skirmishing plates upon the floor; or to the disreputable appearance of the castors, which were all at sixes and sevens, and looked drunk; or to the further blockade of Traddles by wandering vegetable dishes and jugs. I could not help wondering in my own mind, as I contemplated the boiled leg of mutton before me, previous to carving it, how it came to pass that our joints of meat were of such extraordinary shapes—and whether our butcher contracted for all the deformed sheep that came into the world; but I kept my reflections to myself.

'My love,' said I to Dora, 'what have you got in that dish?'

I could not imagine why Dora had been making tempting little faces at me, as if she wanted to kiss me.

'Oysters, dear,' said Dora, timidly.

'Was that YOUR thought?' said I, delighted.

'Ye-yes, Doady,' said Dora.

'There never was a happier one!' I exclaimed, laying down the carving-knife and fork. 'There is nothing Traddles likes so much!'

'Ye-yes, Doady,' said Dora, 'and so I bought a beautiful little barrel of them, and the man said they were very good. But I—I am afraid there's something the matter with them. They don't seem right.' Here Dora shook her head, and diamonds twinkled in her eyes.

'They are only opened in both shells,' said I. 'Take the top one off, my love.'

'But it won't come off!' said Dora, trying very hard, and looking very much distressed.

'Do you know, Copperfield,' said Traddles, cheerfully examining the dish, 'I think it is in consequence—they are capital oysters, but I think it is in consequence—of their never having been opened.'

They never had been opened; and we had no oyster-knives—and couldn't have used them if we had; so we looked at the oysters and ate the mutton. At least we ate as much of it as was done, and made up with capers. If I had permitted him, I am satisfied that Traddles would have made a perfect savage of himself, and eaten a plateful of raw meat, to express enjoyment of the repast; but I would hear of no such immolation on the altar of friendship, and we had a course of bacon instead; there happening, by good fortune, to be cold bacon in the larder.

My poor little wife was in such affliction when she thought I should be annoyed, and in such a state of joy when she found I was not, that the discomfiture I had subdued, very soon vanished, and we passed a happy evening; Dora sitting with her arm on my chair while Traddles and I discussed a glass of wine, and taking every opportunity of whispering in my ear that it was so good of me not to be a cruel, cross old boy. By and by she made tea for us; which it was so pretty to see her do, as if she was busying herself with a set of doll's tea-things, that I was not particular about the quality of the beverage. Then Traddles and I played a game or two at cribbage; and Dora singing to the guitar the while, it seemed to me as if our courtship and marriage were a tender dream of mine, and the night when I first listened to her voice were not yet over.

When Traddles went away, and I came back into the parlour from seeing him out, my wife planted her chair close to mine, and sat down by my side.

'I am very sorry,' she said. 'Will you try to teach me, Doady?'

'I must teach myself first, Dora,' said I. 'I am as bad as you, love.'

'Ah! But you can learn,' she returned; 'and you are a clever, clever man!'

'Nonsense, mouse!' said I.

'I wish,' resumed my wife, after a long silence, 'that I could have gone down into the country for a whole year, and lived with Agnes!'

Her hands were clasped upon my shoulder, and her chin rested on them, and her blue eyes looked quietly into mine.

'Why so?' I asked.

'I think she might have improved me, and I think I might have learned from her,' said Dora.

'All in good time, my love. Agnes has had her father to take care of for these many years, you should remember. Even when she was quite a child, she was the Agnes whom we know,' said I.

'Will you call me a name I want you to call me?' inquired Dora, without moving.

'What is it?' I asked with a smile.

'It's a stupid name,' she said, shaking her curls for a moment. 'Child-wife.'

I laughingly asked my child-wife what her fancy was in desiring to be so called. She answered without moving, otherwise than as the arm I twined about her may have brought her blue eyes nearer to me:

'I don't mean, you silly fellow, that you should use the name instead of Dora. I only mean that you should think of me that way. When you are going to be angry with me, say to yourself, "it's only my child-wife!" When I am very disappointing, say, "I knew, a long time ago, that she would make but a child-wife!" When you miss what I should like to be, and I think can never be, say, "still my foolish child-wife loves me!" For indeed I do.'

I had not been serious with her; having no idea until now, that she was serious herself. But her affectionate nature was so happy in what I now said to her with my whole heart, that her face became a laughing one before her glittering eyes were dry. She was soon my child-wife indeed; sitting down on the floor outside the Chinese House, ringing all the little bells one after another, to punish Jip for his recent bad behaviour; while Jip lay blinking in the doorway with his head out, even too lazy to be teased.

This appeal of Dora's made a strong impression on me. I look back on the time I write of; I invoke the innocent figure that I dearly loved, to come out from the mists and shadows of the past, and turn its gentle head towards me once again; and I can still declare that this one little speech was constantly in my memory. I may not have used it to the best account; I was young and inexperienced; but I never turned a deaf ear to its artless pleading.

Dora told me, shortly afterwards, that she was going to be a wonderful housekeeper. Accordingly, she polished the tablets, pointed the pencil, bought an immense account-book, carefully stitched up with a needle and thread all the leaves of the Cookery Book which Jip had torn, and made quite a desperate little attempt 'to be good', as she called it. But the figures had the old obstinate propensity—they WOULD NOT add up. When she had entered two or three laborious items in the account-book, Jip would walk over the page, wagging his tail, and smear them all out. Her own little right-hand middle finger got steeped to the very bone in ink; and I think that was the only decided result obtained.

Sometimes, of an evening, when I was at home and at work—for I wrote a good deal now, and was beginning in a small way to be known as a writer—I would lay down my pen, and watch my child-wife trying to be good. First of all, she would bring out the immense account-book, and lay it down upon the table, with a deep sigh. Then she would open it at the place where Jip had made it illegible last night, and call Jip up, to look at his misdeeds. This would occasion a diversion in Jip's favour, and some inking of his nose, perhaps, as a penalty. Then she would tell Jip to lie down on the table instantly, 'like a lion'—which was one of his tricks, though I cannot say the likeness was striking—and, if he were in an obedient humour, he would obey. Then she would take up a pen, and begin to write, and find a hair in it. Then she would take up another pen, and begin to write, and find that it spluttered. Then she would take up another pen, and begin to write, and say in a low voice, 'Oh, it's a talking pen, and will disturb Doady!' And then she would give it up as a bad job, and put the account-book away, after pretending to crush the lion with it.

Or, if she were in a very sedate and serious state of mind, she would sit down with the tablets, and a little basket of bills and other documents, which looked more like curl-papers than anything else, and endeavour to get some result out of them. After severely comparing one with another, and making entries on the tablets, and blotting them out, and counting all the fingers of her left hand over and over again, backwards and forwards, she would be so vexed and discouraged, and would look so unhappy, that it gave me pain to see her bright face clouded—and for me!—and I would go softly to her, and say:

'What's the matter, Dora?'

Dora would look up hopelessly, and reply, 'They won't come right. They make my head ache so. And they won't do anything I want!'

Then I would say, 'Now let us try together. Let me show you, Dora.'

Then I would commence a practical demonstration, to which Dora would pay profound attention, perhaps for five minutes; when she would begin to be dreadfully tired, and would lighten the subject by curling my hair, or trying the effect of my face with my shirt-collar turned down. If I tacitly checked this playfulness, and persisted, she would look so scared and disconsolate, as she became more and more bewildered, that the remembrance of her natural gaiety when I first strayed into her path, and of her being my child-wife, would come reproachfully upon me; and I would lay the pencil down, and call for the guitar.

I had a great deal of work to do, and had many anxieties, but the same considerations made me keep them to myself. I am far from sure, now, that it was right to do this, but I did it for my child-wife's sake. I search my breast, and I commit its secrets, if I know them, without any reservation to this paper. The old unhappy loss or want of something had, I am conscious, some place in my heart; but not to the embitterment of my life. When I walked alone in the fine weather, and thought of the summer days when all the air had been filled with my boyish enchantment, I did miss something of the realization of my dreams; but I thought it was a softened glory of the Past, which nothing could have thrown upon the present time. I did feel, sometimes, for a little while, that I could have wished my wife had been my counsellor; had had more character and purpose, to sustain me and improve me by; had been endowed with power to fill up the void which somewhere seemed to be about me; but I felt as if this were an unearthly consummation of my happiness, that never had been meant to be, and never could have been.

I was a boyish husband as to years. I had known the softening influence of no other sorrows or experiences than those recorded in these leaves. If I did any wrong, as I may have done much, I did it in mistaken love, and in my want of wisdom. I write the exact truth. It would avail me nothing to extenuate it now.

Thus it was that I took upon myself the toils and cares of our life, and had no partner in them. We lived much as before, in reference to our scrambling household arrangements; but I had got used to those, and Dora I was pleased to see was seldom vexed now. She was bright and cheerful in the old childish way, loved me dearly, and was happy with her old trifles.

When the debates were heavy—I mean as to length, not quality, for in the last respect they were not often otherwise—and I went home late, Dora would never rest when she heard my footsteps, but would always come downstairs to meet me. When my evenings were unoccupied by the pursuit for which I had qualified myself with so much pains, and I was engaged in writing at home, she would sit quietly near me, however late the hour, and be so mute, that I would often think she had dropped asleep. But generally, when I raised my head, I saw her blue eyes looking at me with the quiet attention of which I have already spoken.

'Oh, what a weary boy!' said Dora one night, when I met her eyes as I was shutting up my desk.

'What a weary girl!' said I. 'That's more to the purpose. You must go to bed another time, my love. It's far too late for you.'

'No, don't send me to bed!' pleaded Dora, coming to my side. 'Pray, don't do that!'

'Dora!' To my amazement she was sobbing on my neck. 'Not well, my dear! not happy!'

'Yes! quite well, and very happy!' said Dora. 'But say you'll let me stop, and see you write.'

'Why, what a sight for such bright eyes at midnight!' I replied.

'Are they bright, though?' returned Dora, laughing. 'I'm so glad they're bright.' 'Little Vanity!' said I.

But it was not vanity; it was only harmless delight in my admiration. I knew that very well, before she told me so.

'If you think them pretty, say I may always stop, and see you write!' said Dora. 'Do you think them pretty?'

'Very pretty.'

'Then let me always stop and see you write.'

'I am afraid that won't improve their brightness, Dora.'

'Yes, it will! Because, you clever boy, you'll not forget me then, while you are full of silent fancies. Will you mind it, if I say something very, very silly?—-more than usual?' inquired Dora, peeping over my shoulder into my face.

'What wonderful thing is that?' said I.

'Please let me hold the pens,' said Dora. 'I want to have something to do with all those many hours when you are so industrious. May I hold the pens?'

The remembrance of her pretty joy when I said yes, brings tears into my eyes. The next time I sat down to write, and regularly afterwards, she sat in her old place, with a spare bundle of pens at her side. Her triumph in this connexion with my work, and her delight when I wanted a new pen—which I very often feigned to do—suggested to me a new way of pleasing my child-wife. I occasionally made a pretence of wanting a page or two of manuscript copied. Then Dora was in her glory. The preparations she made for this great work, the aprons she put on, the bibs she borrowed from the kitchen to keep off the ink, the time she took, the innumerable stoppages she made to have a laugh with Jip as if he understood it all, her conviction that her work was incomplete unless she signed her name at the end, and the way in which she would bring it to me, like a school-copy, and then, when I praised it, clasp me round the neck, are touching recollections to me, simple as they might appear to other men.

She took possession of the keys soon after this, and went jingling about the house with the whole bunch in a little basket, tied to her slender waist. I seldom found that the places to which they belonged were locked, or that they were of any use except as a plaything for Jip—but Dora was pleased, and that pleased me. She was quite satisfied that a good deal was effected by this make-belief of housekeeping; and was as merry as if we had been keeping a baby-house, for a joke.

So we went on. Dora was hardly less affectionate to my aunt than to me, and often told her of the time when she was afraid she was 'a cross old thing'. I never saw my aunt unbend more systematically to anyone. She courted Jip, though Jip never responded; listened, day after day, to the guitar, though I am afraid she had no taste for music; never attacked the Incapables, though the temptation must have been severe; went wonderful distances on foot to purchase, as surprises, any trifles that she found out Dora wanted; and never came in by the garden, and missed her from the room, but she would call out, at the foot of the stairs, in a voice that sounded cheerfully all over the house:

'Where's Little Blossom?'

CHAPTER 45. MR. DICK FULFILS MY AUNT'S PREDICTIONS

It was some time now, since I had left the Doctor. Living in his neighbourhood, I saw him frequently; and we all went to his house on two or three occasions to dinner or tea. The Old Soldier was in permanent quarters under the Doctor's roof. She was exactly the same as ever, and the same immortal butterflies hovered over her cap.

Like some other mothers, whom I have known in the course of my life, Mrs. Markleham was far more fond of pleasure than her daughter was. She required a great deal of amusement, and, like a deep old soldier, pretended, in consulting her own inclinations, to be devoting herself to her child. The Doctor's desire that Annie should be entertained, was therefore particularly acceptable to this excellent parent; who expressed unqualified approval of his discretion.

I have no doubt, indeed, that she probed the Doctor's wound without knowing it. Meaning nothing but a certain matured frivolity and selfishness, not always inseparable from full-blown years, I think she confirmed him in his fear that he was a constraint upon his young wife, and that there was no congeniality of feeling between them, by so strongly commending his design of lightening the load of her life.

'My dear soul,' she said to him one day when I was present, 'you know there is no doubt it would be a little pokey for Annie to be always shut up here.'

The Doctor nodded his benevolent head. 'When she comes to her mother's age,' said Mrs. Markleham, with a flourish of her fan, 'then it'll be another thing. You might put ME into a Jail, with genteel society and a rubber, and I should never care to come out. But I am not Annie, you know; and Annie is not her mother.'

'Surely, surely,' said the Doctor.

'You are the best of creatures—no, I beg your pardon!' for the Doctor made a gesture of deprecation, 'I must say before your face, as I always say behind your back, you are the best of creatures; but of course you don't—now do you?—-enter into the same pursuits and fancies as Annie?'

'No,' said the Doctor, in a sorrowful tone.

'No, of course not,' retorted the Old Soldier. 'Take your Dictionary, for example. What a useful work a Dictionary is! What a necessary work! The meanings of words! Without Doctor Johnson, or somebody of that sort, we might have been at this present moment calling an Italian-iron, a bedstead. But we can't expect a Dictionary—especially when it's making—to interest Annie, can we?'

The Doctor shook his head.

'And that's why I so much approve,' said Mrs. Markleham, tapping him on the shoulder with her shut-up fan, 'of your thoughtfulness. It shows that you don't expect, as many elderly people do expect, old heads on young shoulders. You have studied Annie's character, and you understand it. That's what I find so charming!'

Even the calm and patient face of Doctor Strong expressed some little sense of pain, I thought, under the infliction of these compliments.

'Therefore, my dear Doctor,' said the Old Soldier, giving him several affectionate taps, 'you may command me, at all times and seasons. Now, do understand that I am entirely at your service. I am ready to go with Annie to operas, concerts, exhibitions, all kinds of places; and you shall never find that I am tired. Duty, my dear Doctor, before every consideration in the universe!'

She was as good as her word. She was one of those people who can bear a great deal of pleasure, and she never flinched in her perseverance in the cause. She seldom got hold of the newspaper (which she settled herself down in the softest chair in the house to read through an eye-glass, every day, for two hours), but she found out something that she was certain Annie would like to see. It was in vain for Annie to protest that she was weary of such things. Her mother's remonstrance always was, 'Now, my dear Annie, I am sure you know better; and I must tell you, my love, that you are not making a proper return for the kindness of Doctor Strong.'

This was usually said in the Doctor's presence, and appeared to me to constitute Annie's principal inducement for withdrawing her objections when she made any. But in general she resigned herself to her mother, and went where the Old Soldier would.

It rarely happened now that Mr. Maldon accompanied them. Sometimes my aunt and Dora were invited to do so, and accepted the invitation. Sometimes Dora only was asked. The time had been, when I should have been uneasy in her going; but reflection on what had passed that former night in the Doctor's study, had made a change in my mistrust. I believed that the Doctor was right, and I had no worse suspicions.

My aunt rubbed her nose sometimes when she happened to be alone with me, and said she couldn't make it out; she wished they were happier; she didn't think our military friend (so she always called the Old Soldier) mended the matter at all. My aunt further expressed her opinion, 'that if our military friend would cut off those butterflies, and give 'em to the chimney-sweepers for May-day, it would look like the beginning of something sensible on her part.'

But her abiding reliance was on Mr. Dick. That man had evidently an idea in his head, she said; and if he could only once pen it up into a corner, which was his great difficulty, he would distinguish himself in some extraordinary manner.

Unconscious of this prediction, Mr. Dick continued to occupy precisely the same ground in reference to the Doctor and to Mrs. Strong. He seemed neither to advance nor to recede. He appeared to have settled into his original foundation, like a building; and I must confess that my faith in his ever Moving, was not much greater than if he had been a building.

But one night, when I had been married some months, Mr. Dick put his head into the parlour, where I was writing alone (Dora having gone out with my aunt to take tea with the two little birds), and said, with a significant cough:

'You couldn't speak to me without inconveniencing yourself, Trotwood, I am afraid?'

'Certainly, Mr. Dick,' said I; 'come in!'

'Trotwood,' said Mr. Dick, laying his finger on the side of his nose, after he had shaken hands with me. 'Before I sit down, I wish to make an observation. You know your aunt?'

'A little,' I replied.

'She is the most wonderful woman in the world, sir!'

After the delivery of this communication, which he shot out of himself as if he were loaded with it, Mr. Dick sat down with greater gravity than usual, and looked at me.

'Now, boy,' said Mr. Dick, 'I am going to put a question to you.'

'As many as you please,' said I.

'What do you consider me, sir?' asked Mr. Dick, folding his arms.

'A dear old friend,' said I. 'Thank you, Trotwood,' returned Mr. Dick, laughing, and reaching across in high glee to shake hands with me. 'But I mean, boy,' resuming his gravity, 'what do you consider me in this respect?' touching his forehead.

I was puzzled how to answer, but he helped me with a word.

'Weak?' said Mr. Dick.

'Well,' I replied, dubiously. 'Rather so.'

'Exactly!' cried Mr. Dick, who seemed quite enchanted by my reply. 'That is, Trotwood, when they took some of the trouble out of you-know-who's head, and put it you know where, there was a—' Mr. Dick made his two hands revolve very fast about each other a great number of times, and then brought them into collision, and rolled them over and over one another, to express confusion. 'There was that sort of thing done to me somehow. Eh?'

I nodded at him, and he nodded back again.

'In short, boy,' said Mr. Dick, dropping his voice to a whisper, 'I am simple.'

I would have qualified that conclusion, but he stopped me.

'Yes, I am! She pretends I am not. She won't hear of it; but I am. I know I am. If she hadn't stood my friend, sir, I should have been shut up, to lead a dismal life these many years. But I'll provide for her! I never spend the copying money. I put it in a box. I have made a will. I'll leave it all to her. She shall be rich—noble!'

Mr. Dick took out his pocket-handkerchief, and wiped his eyes. He then folded it up with great care, pressed it smooth between his two hands, put it in his pocket, and seemed to put my aunt away with it.

'Now you are a scholar, Trotwood,' said Mr. Dick. 'You are a fine scholar. You know what a learned man, what a great man, the Doctor is. You know what honour he has always done me. Not proud in his wisdom. Humble, humble—condescending even to poor Dick, who is simple and knows nothing. I have sent his name up, on a scrap of paper, to the kite, along the string, when it has been in the sky, among the larks. The kite has been glad to receive it, sir, and the sky has been brighter with it.'

I delighted him by saying, most heartily, that the Doctor was deserving of our best respect and highest esteem.

'And his beautiful wife is a star,' said Mr. Dick. 'A shining star. I have seen her shine, sir. But,' bringing his chair nearer, and laying one hand upon my knee—'clouds, sir—clouds.'

I answered the solicitude which his face expressed, by conveying the same expression into my own, and shaking my head.

'What clouds?' said Mr. Dick.

He looked so wistfully into my face, and was so anxious to understand, that I took great pains to answer him slowly and distinctly, as I might have entered on an explanation to a child.

'There is some unfortunate division between them,' I replied. 'Some unhappy cause of separation. A secret. It may be inseparable from the discrepancy in their years. It may have grown up out of almost nothing.'

Mr. Dick, who had told off every sentence with a thoughtful nod, paused when I had done, and sat considering, with his eyes upon my face, and his hand upon my knee.

'Doctor not angry with her, Trotwood?' he said, after some time.

'No. Devoted to her.'

'Then, I have got it, boy!' said Mr. Dick.

The sudden exultation with which he slapped me on the knee, and leaned back in his chair, with his eyebrows lifted up as high as he could possibly lift them, made me think him farther out of his wits than ever. He became as suddenly grave again, and leaning forward as before, said—first respectfully taking out his pocket-handkerchief, as if it really did represent my aunt:

'Most wonderful woman in the world, Trotwood. Why has she done nothing to set things right?'

'Too delicate and difficult a subject for such interference,' I replied.

'Fine scholar,' said Mr. Dick, touching me with his finger. 'Why has HE done nothing?'

'For the same reason,' I returned.

'Then, I have got it, boy!' said Mr. Dick. And he stood up before me, more exultingly than before, nodding his head, and striking himself repeatedly upon the breast, until one might have supposed that he had nearly nodded and struck all the breath out of his body.

'A poor fellow with a craze, sir,' said Mr. Dick, 'a simpleton, a weak-minded person—present company, you know!' striking himself again, 'may do what wonderful people may not do. I'll bring them together, boy. I'll try. They'll not blame me. They'll not object to me. They'll not mind what I do, if it's wrong. I'm only Mr. Dick. And who minds Dick? Dick's nobody! Whoo!' He blew a slight, contemptuous breath, as if he blew himself away.

It was fortunate he had proceeded so far with his mystery, for we heard the coach stop at the little garden gate, which brought my aunt and Dora home.

'Not a word, boy!' he pursued in a whisper; 'leave all the blame with Dick—simple Dick—mad Dick. I have been thinking, sir, for some time, that I was getting it, and now I have got it. After what you have said to me, I am sure I have got it. All right!' Not another word did Mr. Dick utter on the subject; but he made a very telegraph of himself for the next half-hour (to the great disturbance of my aunt's mind), to enjoin inviolable secrecy on me.

To my surprise, I heard no more about it for some two or three weeks, though I was sufficiently interested in the result of his endeavours; descrying a strange gleam of good sense—I say nothing of good feeling, for that he always exhibited—in the conclusion to which he had come. At last I began to believe, that, in the flighty and unsettled state of his mind, he had either forgotten his intention or abandoned it.

One fair evening, when Dora was not inclined to go out, my aunt and I strolled up to the Doctor's cottage. It was autumn, when there were no debates to vex the evening air; and I remember how the leaves smelt like our garden at Blunderstone as we trod them under foot, and how the old, unhappy feeling, seemed to go by, on the sighing wind.

It was twilight when we reached the cottage. Mrs. Strong was just coming out of the garden, where Mr. Dick yet lingered, busy with his knife, helping the gardener to point some stakes. The Doctor was engaged with someone in his study; but the visitor would be gone directly, Mrs. Strong said, and begged us to remain and see him. We went into the drawing-room with her, and sat down by the darkening window. There was never any ceremony about the visits of such old friends and neighbours as we were.

We had not sat here many minutes, when Mrs. Markleham, who usually contrived to be in a fuss about something, came bustling in, with her newspaper in her hand, and said, out of breath, 'My goodness gracious, Annie, why didn't you tell me there was someone in the Study!'

'My dear mama,' she quietly returned, 'how could I know that you desired the information?'

'Desired the information!' said Mrs. Markleham, sinking on the sofa. 'I never had such a turn in all my life!'

'Have you been to the Study, then, mama?' asked Annie.

'BEEN to the Study, my dear!' she returned emphatically. 'Indeed I have! I came upon the amiable creature—if you'll imagine my feelings, Miss Trotwood and David—in the act of making his will.'

Her daughter looked round from the window quickly.

'In the act, my dear Annie,' repeated Mrs. Markleham, spreading the newspaper on her lap like a table-cloth, and patting her hands upon it, 'of making his last Will and Testament. The foresight and affection of the dear! I must tell you how it was. I really must, in justice to the darling—for he is nothing less!—tell you how it was. Perhaps you know, Miss Trotwood, that there is never a candle lighted in this house, until one's eyes are literally falling out of one's head with being stretched to read the paper. And that there is not a chair in this house, in which a paper can be what I call, read, except one in the Study. This took me to the Study, where I saw a light. I opened the door. In company with the dear Doctor were two professional people, evidently connected with the law, and they were all three standing at the table: the darling Doctor pen in hand. "This simply expresses then," said the Doctor—Annie, my love, attend to the very words—"this simply expresses then, gentlemen, the confidence I have in Mrs. Strong, and gives her all unconditionally?" One of the professional people replied, "And gives her all unconditionally." Upon that, with the natural feelings of a mother, I said, "Good God, I beg your pardon!" fell over the door-step, and came away through the little back passage where the pantry is.'

Mrs. Strong opened the window, and went out into the verandah, where she stood leaning against a pillar.

'But now isn't it, Miss Trotwood, isn't it, David, invigorating,' said Mrs. Markleham, mechanically following her with her eyes, 'to find a man at Doctor Strong's time of life, with the strength of mind to do this kind of thing? It only shows how right I was. I said to Annie, when Doctor Strong paid a very flattering visit to myself, and made her the subject of a declaration and an offer, I said, "My dear, there is no doubt whatever, in my opinion, with reference to a suitable provision for you, that Doctor Strong will do more than he binds himself to do."'

Here the bell rang, and we heard the sound of the visitors' feet as they went out.

'It's all over, no doubt,' said the Old Soldier, after listening; 'the dear creature has signed, sealed, and delivered, and his mind's at rest. Well it may be! What a mind! Annie, my love, I am going to the Study with my paper, for I am a poor creature without news. Miss Trotwood, David, pray come and see the Doctor.'

I was conscious of Mr. Dick's standing in the shadow of the room, shutting up his knife, when we accompanied her to the Study; and of my aunt's rubbing her nose violently, by the way, as a mild vent for her intolerance of our military friend; but who got first into the Study, or how Mrs. Markleham settled herself in a moment in her easy-chair, or how my aunt and I came to be left together near the door (unless her eyes were quicker than mine, and she held me back), I have forgotten, if I ever knew. But this I know,—that we saw the Doctor before he saw us, sitting at his table, among the folio volumes in which he delighted, resting his head calmly on his hand. That, in the same moment, we saw Mrs. Strong glide in, pale and trembling. That Mr. Dick supported her on his arm. That he laid his other hand upon the Doctor's arm, causing him to look up with an abstracted air. That, as the Doctor moved his head, his wife dropped down on one knee at his feet, and, with her hands imploringly lifted, fixed upon his face the memorable look I had never forgotten. That at this sight Mrs. Markleham dropped the newspaper, and stared more like a figure-head intended for a ship to be called The Astonishment, than anything else I can think of.

The gentleness of the Doctor's manner and surprise, the dignity that mingled with the supplicating attitude of his wife, the amiable concern of Mr. Dick, and the earnestness with which my aunt said to herself, 'That man mad!' (triumphantly expressive of the misery from which she had saved him)—I see and hear, rather than remember, as I write about it.

'Doctor!' said Mr. Dick. 'What is it that's amiss? Look here!'

'Annie!' cried the Doctor. 'Not at my feet, my dear!'

'Yes!' she said. 'I beg and pray that no one will leave the room! Oh, my husband and father, break this long silence. Let us both know what it is that has come between us!'

Mrs. Markleham, by this time recovering the power of speech, and seeming to swell with family pride and motherly indignation, here exclaimed, 'Annie, get up immediately, and don't disgrace everybody belonging to you by humbling yourself like that, unless you wish to see me go out of my mind on the spot!'

'Mama!' returned Annie. 'Waste no words on me, for my appeal is to my husband, and even you are nothing here.'

'Nothing!' exclaimed Mrs. Markleham. 'Me, nothing! The child has taken leave of her senses. Please to get me a glass of water!'

I was too attentive to the Doctor and his wife, to give any heed to this request; and it made no impression on anybody else; so Mrs. Markleham panted, stared, and fanned herself.

'Annie!' said the Doctor, tenderly taking her in his hands. 'My dear! If any unavoidable change has come, in the sequence of time, upon our married life, you are not to blame. The fault is mine, and only mine. There is no change in my affection, admiration, and respect. I wish to make you happy. I truly love and honour you. Rise, Annie, pray!'

But she did not rise. After looking at him for a little while, she sank down closer to him, laid her arm across his knee, and dropping her head upon it, said:

'If I have any friend here, who can speak one word for me, or for my husband in this matter; if I have any friend here, who can give a voice to any suspicion that my heart has sometimes whispered to me; if I have any friend here, who honours my husband, or has ever cared for me, and has anything within his knowledge, no matter what it is, that may help to mediate between us, I implore that friend to speak!'

There was a profound silence. After a few moments of painful hesitation, I broke the silence.

'Mrs. Strong,' I said, 'there is something within my knowledge, which I have been earnestly entreated by Doctor Strong to conceal, and have concealed until tonight. But, I believe the time has come when it would be mistaken faith and delicacy to conceal it any longer, and when your appeal absolves me from his injunction.'

She turned her face towards me for a moment, and I knew that I was right. I could not have resisted its entreaty, if the assurance that it gave me had been less convincing.

'Our future peace,' she said, 'may be in your hands. I trust it confidently to your not suppressing anything. I know beforehand that nothing you, or anyone, can tell me, will show my husband's noble heart in any other light than one. Howsoever it may seem to you to touch me, disregard that. I will speak for myself, before him, and before God afterwards.'

Thus earnestly besought, I made no reference to the Doctor for his permission, but, without any other compromise of the truth than a little softening of the coarseness of Uriah Heep, related plainly what had passed in that same room that night. The staring of Mrs. Markleham during the whole narration, and the shrill, sharp interjections with which she occasionally interrupted it, defy description.

When I had finished, Annie remained, for some few moments, silent, with her head bent down, as I have described. Then, she took the Doctor's hand (he was sitting in the same attitude as when we had entered the room), and pressed it to her breast, and kissed it. Mr. Dick softly raised her; and she stood, when she began to speak, leaning on him, and looking down upon her husband—from whom she never turned her eyes.

'All that has ever been in my mind, since I was married,' she said in a low, submissive, tender voice, 'I will lay bare before you. I could not live and have one reservation, knowing what I know now.'

'Nay, Annie,' said the Doctor, mildly, 'I have never doubted you, my child. There is no need; indeed there is no need, my dear.'

'There is great need,' she answered, in the same way, 'that I should open my whole heart before the soul of generosity and truth, whom, year by year, and day by day, I have loved and venerated more and more, as Heaven knows!'

'Really,' interrupted Mrs. Markleham, 'if I have any discretion at all—'

('Which you haven't, you Marplot,' observed my aunt, in an indignant whisper.) —'I must be permitted to observe that it cannot be requisite to enter into these details.'

'No one but my husband can judge of that, mama,' said Annie without removing her eyes from his face, 'and he will hear me. If I say anything to give you pain, mama, forgive me. I have borne pain first, often and long, myself.'

'Upon my word!' gasped Mrs. Markleham.

'When I was very young,' said Annie, 'quite a little child, my first associations with knowledge of any kind were inseparable from a patient friend and teacher—the friend of my dead father—who was always dear to me. I can remember nothing that I know, without remembering him. He stored my mind with its first treasures, and stamped his character upon them all. They never could have been, I think, as good as they have been to me, if I had taken them from any other hands.'

'Makes her mother nothing!' exclaimed Mrs. Markleham.

'Not so mama,' said Annie; 'but I make him what he was. I must do that. As I grew up, he occupied the same place still. I was proud of his interest: deeply, fondly, gratefully attached to him. I looked up to him, I can hardly describe how—as a father, as a guide, as one whose praise was different from all other praise, as one in whom I could have trusted and confided, if I had doubted all the world. You know, mama, how young and inexperienced I was, when you presented him before me, of a sudden, as a lover.'

'I have mentioned the fact, fifty times at least, to everybody here!' said Mrs. Markleham.

('Then hold your tongue, for the Lord's sake, and don't mention it any more!' muttered my aunt.)

'It was so great a change: so great a loss, I felt it, at first,' said Annie, still preserving the same look and tone, 'that I was agitated and distressed. I was but a girl; and when so great a change came in the character in which I had so long looked up to him, I think I was sorry. But nothing could have made him what he used to be again; and I was proud that he should think me so worthy, and we were married.' '—At Saint Alphage, Canterbury,' observed Mrs. Markleham.

('Confound the woman!' said my aunt, 'she WON'T be quiet!')

'I never thought,' proceeded Annie, with a heightened colour, 'of any worldly gain that my husband would bring to me. My young heart had no room in its homage for any such poor reference. Mama, forgive me when I say that it was you who first presented to my mind the thought that anyone could wrong me, and wrong him, by such a cruel suspicion.'

'Me!' cried Mrs. Markleham.

('Ah! You, to be sure!' observed my aunt, 'and you can't fan it away, my military friend!')

'It was the first unhappiness of my new life,' said Annie. 'It was the first occasion of every unhappy moment I have known. These moments have been more, of late, than I can count; but not—my generous husband!—not for the reason you suppose; for in my heart there is not a thought, a recollection, or a hope, that any power could separate from you!'

She raised her eyes, and clasped her hands, and looked as beautiful and true, I thought, as any Spirit. The Doctor looked on her, henceforth, as steadfastly as she on him.

'Mama is blameless,' she went on, 'of having ever urged you for herself, and she is blameless in intention every way, I am sure,—but when I saw how many importunate claims were pressed upon you in my name; how you were traded on in my name; how generous you were, and how Mr. Wickfield, who had your welfare very much at heart, resented it; the first sense of my exposure to the mean suspicion that my tenderness was bought—and sold to you, of all men on earth—fell upon me like unmerited disgrace, in which I forced you to participate. I cannot tell you what it was—mama cannot imagine what it was—to have this dread and trouble always on my mind, yet know in my own soul that on my marriage-day I crowned the love and honour of my life!'

'A specimen of the thanks one gets,' cried Mrs. Markleham, in tears, 'for taking care of one's family! I wish I was a Turk!'

('I wish you were, with all my heart—and in your native country!' said my aunt.)

'It was at that time that mama was most solicitous about my Cousin Maldon. I had liked him': she spoke softly, but without any hesitation: 'very much. We had been little lovers once. If circumstances had not happened otherwise, I might have come to persuade myself that I really loved him, and might have married him, and been most wretched. There can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose.'

I pondered on those words, even while I was studiously attending to what followed, as if they had some particular interest, or some strange application that I could not divine. 'There can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose'—'no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose.'

'There is nothing,' said Annie, 'that we have in common. I have long found that there is nothing. If I were thankful to my husband for no more, instead of for so much, I should be thankful to him for having saved me from the first mistaken impulse of my undisciplined heart.'

She stood quite still, before the Doctor, and spoke with an earnestness that thrilled me. Yet her voice was just as quiet as before.

'When he was waiting to be the object of your munificence, so freely bestowed for my sake, and when I was unhappy in the mercenary shape I was made to wear, I thought it would have become him better to have worked his own way on. I thought that if I had been he, I would have tried to do it, at the cost of almost any hardship. But I thought no worse of him, until the night of his departure for India. That night I knew he had a false and thankless heart. I saw a double meaning, then, in Mr. Wickfield's scrutiny of me. I perceived, for the first time, the dark suspicion that shadowed my life.'

'Suspicion, Annie!' said the Doctor. 'No, no, no!'

'In your mind there was none, I know, my husband!' she returned. 'And when I came to you, that night, to lay down all my load of shame and grief, and knew that I had to tell that, underneath your roof, one of my own kindred, to whom you had been a benefactor, for the love of me, had spoken to me words that should have found no utterance, even if I had been the weak and mercenary wretch he thought me—my mind revolted from the taint the very tale conveyed. It died upon my lips, and from that hour till now has never passed them.'

Mrs. Markleham, with a short groan, leaned back in her easy-chair; and retired behind her fan, as if she were never coming out any more.

'I have never, but in your presence, interchanged a word with him from that time; then, only when it has been necessary for the avoidance of this explanation. Years have passed since he knew, from me, what his situation here was. The kindnesses you have secretly done for his advancement, and then disclosed to me, for my surprise and pleasure, have been, you will believe, but aggravations of the unhappiness and burden of my secret.'

She sunk down gently at the Doctor's feet, though he did his utmost to prevent her; and said, looking up, tearfully, into his face:

'Do not speak to me yet! Let me say a little more! Right or wrong, if this were to be done again, I think I should do just the same. You never can know what it was to be devoted to you, with those old associations; to find that anyone could be so hard as to suppose that the truth of my heart was bartered away, and to be surrounded by appearances confirming that belief. I was very young, and had no adviser. Between mama and me, in all relating to you, there was a wide division. If I shrunk into myself, hiding the disrespect I had undergone, it was because I honoured you so much, and so much wished that you should honour me!'

'Annie, my pure heart!' said the Doctor, 'my dear girl!'

'A little more! a very few words more! I used to think there were so many whom you might have married, who would not have brought such charge and trouble on you, and who would have made your home a worthier home. I used to be afraid that I had better have remained your pupil, and almost your child. I used to fear that I was so unsuited to your learning and wisdom. If all this made me shrink within myself (as indeed it did), when I had that to tell, it was still because I honoured you so much, and hoped that you might one day honour me.'

'That day has shone this long time, Annie,' said the Doctor, and can have but one long night, my dear.'

'Another word! I afterwards meant—steadfastly meant, and purposed to myself—to bear the whole weight of knowing the unworthiness of one to whom you had been so good. And now a last word, dearest and best of friends! The cause of the late change in you, which I have seen with so much pain and sorrow, and have sometimes referred to my old apprehension—at other times to lingering suppositions nearer to the truth—has been made clear tonight; and by an accident I have also come to know, tonight, the full measure of your noble trust in me, even under that mistake. I do not hope that any love and duty I may render in return, will ever make me worthy of your priceless confidence; but with all this knowledge fresh upon me, I can lift my eyes to this dear face, revered as a father's, loved as a husband's, sacred to me in my childhood as a friend's, and solemnly declare that in my lightest thought I have never wronged you; never wavered in the love and the fidelity I owe you!'

She had her arms around the Doctor's neck, and he leant his head down over her, mingling his grey hair with her dark brown tresses.

'Oh, hold me to your heart, my husband! Never cast me out! Do not think or speak of disparity between us, for there is none, except in all my many imperfections. Every succeeding year I have known this better, as I have esteemed you more and more. Oh, take me to your heart, my husband, for my love was founded on a rock, and it endures!'

In the silence that ensued, my aunt walked gravely up to Mr. Dick, without at all hurrying herself, and gave him a hug and a sounding kiss. And it was very fortunate, with a view to his credit, that she did so; for I am confident that I detected him at that moment in the act of making preparations to stand on one leg, as an appropriate expression of delight.

'You are a very remarkable man, Dick!' said my aunt, with an air of unqualified approbation; 'and never pretend to be anything else, for I know better!'

With that, my aunt pulled him by the sleeve, and nodded to me; and we three stole quietly out of the room, and came away.

'That's a settler for our military friend, at any rate,' said my aunt, on the way home. 'I should sleep the better for that, if there was nothing else to be glad of!'

'She was quite overcome, I am afraid,' said Mr. Dick, with great commiseration.

'What! Did you ever see a crocodile overcome?' inquired my aunt.

'I don't think I ever saw a crocodile,' returned Mr. Dick, mildly.

'There never would have been anything the matter, if it hadn't been for that old Animal,' said my aunt, with strong emphasis. 'It's very much to be wished that some mothers would leave their daughters alone after marriage, and not be so violently affectionate. They seem to think the only return that can be made them for bringing an unfortunate young woman into the world—God bless my soul, as if she asked to be brought, or wanted to come!—is full liberty to worry her out of it again. What are you thinking of, Trot?'

I was thinking of all that had been said. My mind was still running on some of the expressions used. 'There can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose.' 'The first mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart.' 'My love was founded on a rock.' But we were at home; and the trodden leaves were lying under-foot, and the autumn wind was blowing.

CHAPTER 46. INTELLIGENCE

I must have been married, if I may trust to my imperfect memory for dates, about a year or so, when one evening, as I was returning from a solitary walk, thinking of the book I was then writing—for my success had steadily increased with my steady application, and I was engaged at that time upon my first work of fiction—I came past Mrs. Steerforth's house. I had often passed it before, during my residence in that neighbourhood, though never when I could choose another road. Howbeit, it did sometimes happen that it was not easy to find another, without making a long circuit; and so I had passed that way, upon the whole, pretty often.

I had never done more than glance at the house, as I went by with a quickened step. It had been uniformly gloomy and dull. None of the best rooms abutted on the road; and the narrow, heavily-framed old-fashioned windows, never cheerful under any circumstances, looked very dismal, close shut, and with their blinds always drawn down. There was a covered way across a little paved court, to an entrance that was never used; and there was one round staircase window, at odds with all the rest, and the only one unshaded by a blind, which had the same unoccupied blank look. I do not remember that I ever saw a light in all the house. If I had been a casual passer-by, I should have probably supposed that some childless person lay dead in it. If I had happily possessed no knowledge of the place, and had seen it often in that changeless state, I should have pleased my fancy with many ingenious speculations, I dare say.

As it was, I thought as little of it as I might. But my mind could not go by it and leave it, as my body did; and it usually awakened a long train of meditations. Coming before me, on this particular evening that I mention, mingled with the childish recollections and later fancies, the ghosts of half-formed hopes, the broken shadows of disappointments dimly seen and understood, the blending of experience and imagination, incidental to the occupation with which my thoughts had been busy, it was more than commonly suggestive. I fell into a brown study as I walked on, and a voice at my side made me start.

It was a woman's voice, too. I was not long in recollecting Mrs. Steerforth's little parlour-maid, who had formerly worn blue ribbons in her cap. She had taken them out now, to adapt herself, I suppose, to the altered character of the house; and wore but one or two disconsolate bows of sober brown.

'If you please, sir, would you have the goodness to walk in, and speak to Miss Dartle?'

'Has Miss Dartle sent you for me?' I inquired.

'Not tonight, sir, but it's just the same. Miss Dartle saw you pass a night or two ago; and I was to sit at work on the staircase, and when I saw you pass again, to ask you to step in and speak to her.'

I turned back, and inquired of my conductor, as we went along, how Mrs. Steerforth was. She said her lady was but poorly, and kept her own room a good deal.

When we arrived at the house, I was directed to Miss Dartle in the garden, and left to make my presence known to her myself. She was sitting on a seat at one end of a kind of terrace, overlooking the great city. It was a sombre evening, with a lurid light in the sky; and as I saw the prospect scowling in the distance, with here and there some larger object starting up into the sullen glare, I fancied it was no inapt companion to the memory of this fierce woman.

She saw me as I advanced, and rose for a moment to receive me. I thought her, then, still more colourless and thin than when I had seen her last; the flashing eyes still brighter, and the scar still plainer.

Our meeting was not cordial. We had parted angrily on the last occasion; and there was an air of disdain about her, which she took no pains to conceal.

'I am told you wish to speak to me, Miss Dartle,' said I, standing near her, with my hand upon the back of the seat, and declining her gesture of invitation to sit down.

'If you please,' said she. 'Pray has this girl been found?'

'No.'

'And yet she has run away!'

I saw her thin lips working while she looked at me, as if they were eager to load her with reproaches.

'Run away?' I repeated.

'Yes! From him,' she said, with a laugh. 'If she is not found, perhaps she never will be found. She may be dead!'

The vaunting cruelty with which she met my glance, I never saw expressed in any other face that ever I have seen.

'To wish her dead,' said I, 'may be the kindest wish that one of her own sex could bestow upon her. I am glad that time has softened you so much, Miss Dartle.'

She condescended to make no reply, but, turning on me with another scornful laugh, said:

'The friends of this excellent and much-injured young lady are friends of yours. You are their champion, and assert their rights. Do you wish to know what is known of her?'

'Yes,' said I.

She rose with an ill-favoured smile, and taking a few steps towards a wall of holly that was near at hand, dividing the lawn from a kitchen-garden, said, in a louder voice, 'Come here!'—as if she were calling to some unclean beast.

'You will restrain any demonstrative championship or vengeance in this place, of course, Mr. Copperfield?' said she, looking over her shoulder at me with the same expression.

I inclined my head, without knowing what she meant; and she said, 'Come here!' again; and returned, followed by the respectable Mr. Littimer, who, with undiminished respectability, made me a bow, and took up his position behind her. The air of wicked grace: of triumph, in which, strange to say, there was yet something feminine and alluring: with which she reclined upon the seat between us, and looked at me, was worthy of a cruel Princess in a Legend.

'Now,' said she, imperiously, without glancing at him, and touching the old wound as it throbbed: perhaps, in this instance, with pleasure rather than pain. 'Tell Mr. Copperfield about the flight.'

'Mr. James and myself, ma'am—'

'Don't address yourself to me!' she interrupted with a frown.

'Mr. James and myself, sir—'

'Nor to me, if you please,' said I.

Mr. Littimer, without being at all discomposed, signified by a slight obeisance, that anything that was most agreeable to us was most agreeable to him; and began again.

'Mr. James and myself have been abroad with the young woman, ever since she left Yarmouth under Mr. james's protection. We have been in a variety of places, and seen a deal of foreign country. We have been in France, Switzerland, Italy, in fact, almost all parts.'

He looked at the back of the seat, as if he were addressing himself to that; and softly played upon it with his hands, as if he were striking chords upon a dumb piano.

'Mr. James took quite uncommonly to the young woman; and was more settled, for a length of time, than I have known him to be since I have been in his service. The young woman was very improvable, and spoke the languages; and wouldn't have been known for the same country-person. I noticed that she was much admired wherever we went.'

Miss Dartle put her hand upon her side. I saw him steal a glance at her, and slightly smile to himself.

'Very much admired, indeed, the young woman was. What with her dress; what with the air and sun; what with being made so much of; what with this, that, and the other; her merits really attracted general notice.'

He made a short pause. Her eyes wandered restlessly over the distant prospect, and she bit her nether lip to stop that busy mouth.

Taking his hands from the seat, and placing one of them within the other, as he settled himself on one leg, Mr. Littimer proceeded, with his eyes cast down, and his respectable head a little advanced, and a little on one side:

'The young woman went on in this manner for some time, being occasionally low in her spirits, until I think she began to weary Mr. James by giving way to her low spirits and tempers of that kind; and things were not so comfortable. Mr. James he began to be restless again. The more restless he got, the worse she got; and I must say, for myself, that I had a very difficult time of it indeed between the two. Still matters were patched up here, and made good there, over and over again; and altogether lasted, I am sure, for a longer time than anybody could have expected.'

Recalling her eyes from the distance, she looked at me again now, with her former air. Mr. Littimer, clearing his throat behind his hand with a respectable short cough, changed legs, and went on:

'At last, when there had been, upon the whole, a good many words and reproaches, Mr. James he set off one morning, from the neighbourhood of Naples, where we had a villa (the young woman being very partial to the sea), and, under pretence of coming back in a day or so, left it in charge with me to break it out, that, for the general happiness of all concerned, he was'—here an interruption of the short cough—'gone. But Mr. James, I must say, certainly did behave extremely honourable; for he proposed that the young woman should marry a very respectable person, who was fully prepared to overlook the past, and who was, at least, as good as anybody the young woman could have aspired to in a regular way: her connexions being very common.'

He changed legs again, and wetted his lips. I was convinced that the scoundrel spoke of himself, and I saw my conviction reflected in Miss Dartle's face.

'This I also had it in charge to communicate. I was willing to do anything to relieve Mr. James from his difficulty, and to restore harmony between himself and an affectionate parent, who has undergone so much on his account. Therefore I undertook the commission. The young woman's violence when she came to, after I broke the fact of his departure, was beyond all expectations. She was quite mad, and had to be held by force; or, if she couldn't have got to a knife, or got to the sea, she'd have beaten her head against the marble floor.'

Miss Dartle, leaning back upon the seat, with a light of exultation in her face, seemed almost to caress the sounds this fellow had uttered.

'But when I came to the second part of what had been entrusted to me,' said Mr. Littimer, rubbing his hands uneasily, 'which anybody might have supposed would have been, at all events, appreciated as a kind intention, then the young woman came out in her true colours. A more outrageous person I never did see. Her conduct was surprisingly bad. She had no more gratitude, no more feeling, no more patience, no more reason in her, than a stock or a stone. If I hadn't been upon my guard, I am convinced she would have had my blood.'

'I think the better of her for it,' said I, indignantly.

Mr. Littimer bent his head, as much as to say, 'Indeed, sir? But you're young!' and resumed his narrative.

'It was necessary, in short, for a time, to take away everything nigh her, that she could do herself, or anybody else, an injury with, and to shut her up close. Notwithstanding which, she got out in the night; forced the lattice of a window, that I had nailed up myself; dropped on a vine that was trailed below; and never has been seen or heard of, to my knowledge, since.'

'She is dead, perhaps,' said Miss Dartle, with a smile, as if she could have spurned the body of the ruined girl.

'She may have drowned herself, miss,' returned Mr. Littimer, catching at an excuse for addressing himself to somebody. 'It's very possible. Or, she may have had assistance from the boatmen, and the boatmen's wives and children. Being given to low company, she was very much in the habit of talking to them on the beach, Miss Dartle, and sitting by their boats. I have known her do it, when Mr. James has been away, whole days. Mr. James was far from pleased to find out, once, that she had told the children she was a boatman's daughter, and that in her own country, long ago, she had roamed about the beach, like them.'

Oh, Emily! Unhappy beauty! What a picture rose before me of her sitting on the far-off shore, among the children like herself when she was innocent, listening to little voices such as might have called her Mother had she been a poor man's wife; and to the great voice of the sea, with its eternal 'Never more!'

'When it was clear that nothing could be done, Miss Dartle—'

'Did I tell you not to speak to me?' she said, with stern contempt.

'You spoke to me, miss,' he replied. 'I beg your pardon. But it is my service to obey.'

'Do your service,' she returned. 'Finish your story, and go!'

'When it was clear,' he said, with infinite respectability and an obedient bow, 'that she was not to be found, I went to Mr. James, at the place where it had been agreed that I should write to him, and informed him of what had occurred. Words passed between us in consequence, and I felt it due to my character to leave him. I could bear, and I have borne, a great deal from Mr. James; but he insulted me too far. He hurt me. Knowing the unfortunate difference between himself and his mother, and what her anxiety of mind was likely to be, I took the liberty of coming home to England, and relating —'

'For money which I paid him,' said Miss Dartle to me.

'Just so, ma'am—and relating what I knew. I am not aware,' said Mr. Littimer, after a moment's reflection, 'that there is anything else. I am at present out of employment, and should be happy to meet with a respectable situation.'

Miss Dartle glanced at me, as though she would inquire if there were anything that I desired to ask. As there was something which had occurred to my mind, I said in reply:

'I could wish to know from this—creature,' I could not bring myself to utter any more conciliatory word, 'whether they intercepted a letter that was written to her from home, or whether he supposes that she received it.'

He remained calm and silent, with his eyes fixed on the ground, and the tip of every finger of his right hand delicately poised against the tip of every finger of his left.

Miss Dartle turned her head disdainfully towards him.

'I beg your pardon, miss,' he said, awakening from his abstraction, 'but, however submissive to you, I have my position, though a servant. Mr. Copperfield and you, miss, are different people. If Mr. Copperfield wishes to know anything from me, I take the liberty of reminding Mr. Copperfield that he can put a question to me. I have a character to maintain.'

After a momentary struggle with myself, I turned my eyes upon him, and said, 'You have heard my question. Consider it addressed to yourself, if you choose. What answer do you make?'

'Sir,' he rejoined, with an occasional separation and reunion of those delicate tips, 'my answer must be qualified; because, to betray Mr. james's confidence to his mother, and to betray it to you, are two different actions. It is not probable, I consider, that Mr. James would encourage the receipt of letters likely to increase low spirits and unpleasantness; but further than that, sir, I should wish to avoid going.'

'Is that all?' inquired Miss Dartle of me.

I indicated that I had nothing more to say. 'Except,' I added, as I saw him moving off, 'that I understand this fellow's part in the wicked story, and that, as I shall make it known to the honest man who has been her father from her childhood, I would recommend him to avoid going too much into public.'

He had stopped the moment I began, and had listened with his usual repose of manner.

'Thank you, sir. But you'll excuse me if I say, sir, that there are neither slaves nor slave-drivers in this country, and that people are not allowed to take the law into their own hands. If they do, it is more to their own peril, I believe, than to other people's. Consequently speaking, I am not at all afraid of going wherever I may wish, sir.'

With that, he made a polite bow; and, with another to Miss Dartle, went away through the arch in the wall of holly by which he had come. Miss

Dartle and I regarded each other for a little while in silence; her manner being exactly what it was, when she had produced the man.

'He says besides,' she observed, with a slow curling of her lip, 'that his master, as he hears, is coasting Spain; and this done, is away to gratify his seafaring tastes till he is weary. But this is of no interest to you. Between these two proud persons, mother and son, there is a wider breach than before, and little hope of its healing, for they are one at heart, and time makes each more obstinate and imperious. Neither is this of any interest to you; but it introduces what I wish to say. This devil whom you make an angel of. I mean this low girl whom he picked out of the tide-mud,' with her black eyes full upon me, and her passionate finger up, 'may be alive,—for I believe some common things are hard to die. If she is, you will desire to have a pearl of such price found and taken care of. We desire that, too; that he may not by any chance be made her prey again. So far, we are united in one interest; and that is why I, who would do her any mischief that so coarse a wretch is capable of feeling, have sent for you to hear what you have heard.'

I saw, by the change in her face, that someone was advancing behind me. It was Mrs. Steerforth, who gave me her hand more coldly than of yore, and with an augmentation of her former stateliness of manner, but still, I perceived—and I was touched by it—with an ineffaceable remembrance of my old love for her son. She was greatly altered. Her fine figure was far less upright, her handsome face was deeply marked, and her hair was almost white. But when she sat down on the seat, she was a handsome lady still; and well I knew the bright eye with its lofty look, that had been a light in my very dreams at school.

'Is Mr. Copperfield informed of everything, Rosa?'

'Yes.'

'And has he heard Littimer himself?'

'Yes; I have told him why you wished it.' 'You are a good girl. I have had some slight correspondence with your former friend, sir,' addressing me, 'but it has not restored his sense of duty or natural obligation. Therefore I have no other object in this, than what Rosa has mentioned. If, by the course which may relieve the mind of the decent man you brought here (for whom I am sorry—I can say no more), my son may be saved from again falling into the snares of a designing enemy, well!'

She drew herself up, and sat looking straight before her, far away.

'Madam,' I said respectfully, 'I understand. I assure you I am in no danger of putting any strained construction on your motives. But I must say, even to you, having known this injured family from childhood, that if you suppose the girl, so deeply wronged, has not been cruelly deluded, and would not rather die a hundred deaths than take a cup of water from your son's hand now, you cherish a terrible mistake.'

'Well, Rosa, well!' said Mrs. Steerforth, as the other was about to interpose, 'it is no matter. Let it be. You are married, sir, I am told?'

I answered that I had been some time married.

'And are doing well? I hear little in the quiet life I lead, but I understand you are beginning to be famous.'

'I have been very fortunate,' I said, 'and find my name connected with some praise.'

'You have no mother?'—in a softened voice.

'No.'

'It is a pity,' she returned. 'She would have been proud of you. Good night!'

I took the hand she held out with a dignified, unbending air, and it was as calm in mine as if her breast had been at peace. Her pride could still its very pulses, it appeared, and draw the placid veil before her face, through which she sat looking straight before her on the far distance.

As I moved away from them along the terrace, I could not help observing how steadily they both sat gazing on the prospect, and how it thickened and closed around them. Here and there, some early lamps were seen to twinkle in the distant city; and in the eastern quarter of the sky the lurid light still hovered. But, from the greater part of the broad valley interposed, a mist was rising like a sea, which, mingling with the darkness, made it seem as if the gathering waters would encompass them. I have reason to remember this, and think of it with awe; for before I looked upon those two again, a stormy sea had risen to their feet.

Reflecting on what had been thus told me, I felt it right that it should be communicated to Mr. Peggotty. On the following evening I went into London in quest of him. He was always wandering about from place to place, with his one object of recovering his niece before him; but was more in London than elsewhere. Often and often, now, had I seen him in the dead of night passing along the streets, searching, among the few who loitered out of doors at those untimely hours, for what he dreaded to find.

He kept a lodging over the little chandler's shop in Hungerford Market, which I have had occasion to mention more than once, and from which he first went forth upon his errand of mercy. Hither I directed my walk. On making inquiry for him, I learned from the people of the house that he had not gone out yet, and I should find him in his room upstairs.

He was sitting reading by a window in which he kept a few plants. The room was very neat and orderly. I saw in a moment that it was always kept prepared for her reception, and that he never went out but he thought it possible he might bring her home. He had not heard my tap at the door, and only raised his eyes when I laid my hand upon his shoulder.

'Mas'r Davy! Thankee, sir! thankee hearty, for this visit! Sit ye down. You're kindly welcome, sir!'

'Mr. Peggotty,' said I, taking the chair he handed me, 'don't expect much! I have heard some news.'

'Of Em'ly!'

He put his hand, in a nervous manner, on his mouth, and turned pale, as he fixed his eyes on mine.

'It gives no clue to where she is; but she is not with him.'

He sat down, looking intently at me, and listened in profound silence to all I had to tell. I well remember the sense of dignity, beauty even, with which the patient gravity of his face impressed me, when, having gradually removed his eyes from mine, he sat looking downward, leaning his forehead on his hand. He offered no interruption, but remained throughout perfectly still. He seemed to pursue her figure through the narrative, and to let every other shape go by him, as if it were nothing.

When I had done, he shaded his face, and continued silent. I looked out of the window for a little while, and occupied myself with the plants.

'How do you fare to feel about it, Mas'r Davy?' he inquired at length.

'I think that she is living,' I replied.

'I doen't know. Maybe the first shock was too rough, and in the wildness of her art—! That there blue water as she used to speak on. Could she have thowt o' that so many year, because it was to be her grave!'

He said this, musing, in a low, frightened voice; and walked across the little room.

'And yet,' he added, 'Mas'r Davy, I have felt so sure as she was living—I have know'd, awake and sleeping, as it was so trew that I should find her—I have been so led on by it, and held up by it—that I doen't believe I can have been deceived. No! Em'ly's alive!'

He put his hand down firmly on the table, and set his sunburnt face into a resolute expression.

'My niece, Em'ly, is alive, sir!' he said, steadfastly. 'I doen't know wheer it comes from, or how 'tis, but I am told as she's alive!'

He looked almost like a man inspired, as he said it. I waited for a few moments, until he could give me his undivided attention; and then proceeded to explain the precaution, that, it had occurred to me last night, it would be wise to take.

'Now, my dear friend—'I began.

'Thankee, thankee, kind sir,' he said, grasping my hand in both of his.

'If she should make her way to London, which is likely—for where could she lose herself so readily as in this vast city; and what would she wish to do, but lose and hide herself, if she does not go home?—'

'And she won't go home,' he interposed, shaking his head mournfully. 'If she had left of her own accord, she might; not as It was, sir.'

'If she should come here,' said I, 'I believe there is one person, here, more likely to discover her than any other in the world. Do you remember—hear what I say, with fortitude—think of your great object!—do you remember Martha?'

'Of our town?'

I needed no other answer than his face.

'Do you know that she is in London?'

'I have seen her in the streets,' he answered, with a shiver.

'But you don't know,' said I, 'that Emily was charitable to her, with Ham's help, long before she fled from home. Nor, that, when we met one night, and spoke together in the room yonder, over the way, she listened at the door.'

'Mas'r Davy!' he replied in astonishment. 'That night when it snew so hard?'

'That night. I have never seen her since. I went back, after parting from you, to speak to her, but she was gone. I was unwilling to mention her to you then, and I am now; but she is the person of whom I speak, and with whom I think we should communicate. Do you understand?'

'Too well, sir,' he replied. We had sunk our voices, almost to a whisper, and continued to speak in that tone.

'You say you have seen her. Do you think that you could find her? I could only hope to do so by chance.'

'I think, Mas'r Davy, I know wheer to look.'

'It is dark. Being together, shall we go out now, and try to find her tonight?'

He assented, and prepared to accompany me. Without appearing to observe what he was doing, I saw how carefully he adjusted the little room, put a candle ready and the means of lighting it, arranged the bed, and finally took out of a drawer one of her dresses (I remember to have seen her wear it), neatly folded with some other garments, and a bonnet, which he placed upon a chair. He made no allusion to these clothes, neither did I. There they had been waiting for her, many and many a night, no doubt.

'The time was, Mas'r Davy,' he said, as we came downstairs, 'when I thowt this girl, Martha, a'most like the dirt underneath my Em'ly's feet. God forgive me, theer's a difference now!'

As we went along, partly to hold him in conversation, and partly to satisfy myself, I asked him about Ham. He said, almost in the same words as formerly, that Ham was just the same, 'wearing away his life with kiender no care nohow for 't; but never murmuring, and liked by all'.

I asked him what he thought Ham's state of mind was, in reference to the cause of their misfortunes? Whether he believed it was dangerous? What he supposed, for example, Ham would do, if he and Steerforth ever should encounter?

'I doen't know, sir,' he replied. 'I have thowt of it oftentimes, but I can't awize myself of it, no matters.'

I recalled to his remembrance the morning after her departure, when we were all three on the beach. 'Do you recollect,' said I, 'a certain wild way in which he looked out to sea, and spoke about "the end of it"?'

'Sure I do!' said he.

'What do you suppose he meant?'

'Mas'r Davy,' he replied, 'I've put the question to myself a mort o' times, and never found no answer. And theer's one curious thing—that, though he is so pleasant, I wouldn't fare to feel comfortable to try and get his mind upon 't. He never said a wured to me as warn't as dootiful as dootiful could be, and it ain't likely as he'd begin to speak any other ways now; but it's fur from being fleet water in his mind, where them thowts lays. It's deep, sir, and I can't see down.'

'You are right,' said I, 'and that has sometimes made me anxious.'

'And me too, Mas'r Davy,' he rejoined. 'Even more so, I do assure you, than his ventersome ways, though both belongs to the alteration in him. I doen't know as he'd do violence under any circumstances, but I hope as them two may be kep asunders.'

We had come, through Temple Bar, into the city. Conversing no more now, and walking at my side, he yielded himself up to the one aim of his devoted life, and went on, with that hushed concentration of his faculties which would have made his figure solitary in a multitude. We were not far from Blackfriars Bridge, when he turned his head and pointed to a solitary female figure flitting along the opposite side of the street. I knew it, readily, to be the figure that we sought.

We crossed the road, and were pressing on towards her, when it occurred to me that she might be more disposed to feel a woman's interest in the lost girl, if we spoke to her in a quieter place, aloof from the crowd, and where we should be less observed. I advised my companion, therefore, that we should not address her yet, but follow her; consulting in this, likewise, an indistinct desire I had, to know where she went.

He acquiescing, we followed at a distance: never losing sight of her, but never caring to come very near, as she frequently looked about. Once, she stopped to listen to a band of music; and then we stopped too.

She went on a long way. Still we went on. It was evident, from the manner in which she held her course, that she was going to some fixed destination; and this, and her keeping in the busy streets, and I suppose the strange fascination in the secrecy and mystery of so following anyone, made me adhere to my first purpose. At length she turned into a dull, dark street, where the noise and crowd were lost; and I said, 'We may speak to her now'; and, mending our pace, we went after her.

CHAPTER 47. MARTHA

We were now down in Westminster. We had turned back to follow her, having encountered her coming towards us; and Westminster Abbey was the point at which she passed from the lights and noise of the leading streets. She proceeded so quickly, when she got free of the two currents of passengers setting towards and from the bridge, that, between this and the advance she had of us when she struck off, we were in the narrow water-side street by Millbank before we came up with her. At that moment she crossed the road, as if to avoid the footsteps that she heard so close behind; and, without looking back, passed on even more rapidly.

A glimpse of the river through a dull gateway, where some waggons were housed for the night, seemed to arrest my feet. I touched my companion without speaking, and we both forbore to cross after her, and both followed on that opposite side of the way; keeping as quietly as we could in the shadow of the houses, but keeping very near her.

There was, and is when I write, at the end of that low-lying street, a dilapidated little wooden building, probably an obsolete old ferry-house. Its position is just at that point where the street ceases, and the road begins to lie between a row of houses and the river. As soon as she came here, and saw the water, she stopped as if she had come to her destination; and presently went slowly along by the brink of the river, looking intently at it.

All the way here, I had supposed that she was going to some house; indeed, I had vaguely entertained the hope that the house might be in some way associated with the lost girl. But that one dark glimpse of the river, through the gateway, had instinctively prepared me for her going no farther.

The neighbourhood was a dreary one at that time; as oppressive, sad, and solitary by night, as any about London. There were neither wharves nor houses on the melancholy waste of road near the great blank Prison. A sluggish ditch deposited its mud at the prison walls. Coarse grass and rank weeds straggled over all the marshy land in the vicinity. In one part, carcases of houses, inauspiciously begun and never finished, rotted away. In another, the ground was cumbered with rusty iron monsters of steam-boilers, wheels, cranks, pipes, furnaces, paddles, anchors, diving-bells, windmill-sails, and I know not what strange objects, accumulated by some speculator, and grovelling in the dust, underneath which—having sunk into the soil of their own weight in wet weather—they had the appearance of vainly trying to hide themselves. The clash and glare of sundry fiery Works upon the river-side, arose by night to disturb everything except the heavy and unbroken smoke that poured out of their chimneys. Slimy gaps and causeways, winding among old wooden piles, with a sickly substance clinging to the latter, like green hair, and the rags of last year's handbills offering rewards for drowned men fluttering above high-water mark, led down through the ooze and slush to the ebb-tide. There was a story that one of the pits dug for the dead in the time of the Great Plague was hereabout; and a blighting influence seemed to have proceeded from it over the whole place. Or else it looked as if it had gradually decomposed into that nightmare condition, out of the overflowings of the polluted stream.

As if she were a part of the refuse it had cast out, and left to corruption and decay, the girl we had followed strayed down to the river's brink, and stood in the midst of this night-picture, lonely and still, looking at the water.

There were some boats and barges astrand in the mud, and these enabled us to come within a few yards of her without being seen. I then signed to Mr. Peggotty to remain where he was, and emerged from their shade to speak to her. I did not approach her solitary figure without trembling; for this gloomy end to her determined walk, and the way in which she stood, almost within the cavernous shadow of the iron bridge, looking at the lights crookedly reflected in the strong tide, inspired a dread within me.

I think she was talking to herself. I am sure, although absorbed in gazing at the water, that her shawl was off her shoulders, and that she was muffling her hands in it, in an unsettled and bewildered way, more like the action of a sleep-walker than a waking person. I know, and never can forget, that there was that in her wild manner which gave me no assurance but that she would sink before my eyes, until I had her arm within my grasp.

At the same moment I said 'Martha!'

She uttered a terrified scream, and struggled with me with such strength that I doubt if I could have held her alone. But a stronger hand than mine was laid upon her; and when she raised her frightened eyes and saw whose it was, she made but one more effort and dropped down between us. We carried her away from the water to where there were some dry stones, and there laid her down, crying and moaning. In a little while she sat among the stones, holding her wretched head with both her hands.

'Oh, the river!' she cried passionately. 'Oh, the river!'

'Hush, hush!' said I. 'Calm yourself.'

But she still repeated the same words, continually exclaiming, 'Oh, the river!' over and over again.

'I know it's like me!' she exclaimed. 'I know that I belong to it. I know that it's the natural company of such as I am! It comes from country places, where there was once no harm in it—and it creeps through the dismal streets, defiled and miserable—and it goes away, like my life, to a great sea, that is always troubled—and I feel that I must go with it!' I have never known what despair was, except in the tone of those words.

'I can't keep away from it. I can't forget it. It haunts me day and night. It's the only thing in all the world that I am fit for, or that's fit for me. Oh, the dreadful river!'

The thought passed through my mind that in the face of my companion, as he looked upon her without speech or motion, I might have read his niece's history, if I had known nothing of it. I never saw, in any painting or reality, horror and compassion so impressively blended. He shook as if he would have fallen; and his hand—I touched it with my own, for his appearance alarmed me—was deadly cold.

'She is in a state of frenzy,' I whispered to him. 'She will speak differently in a little time.'

I don't know what he would have said in answer. He made some motion with his mouth, and seemed to think he had spoken; but he had only pointed to her with his outstretched hand.

A new burst of crying came upon her now, in which she once more hid her face among the stones, and lay before us, a prostrate image of humiliation and ruin. Knowing that this state must pass, before we could speak to her with any hope, I ventured to restrain him when he would have raised her, and we stood by in silence until she became more tranquil.

'Martha,' said I then, leaning down, and helping her to rise—she seemed to want to rise as if with the intention of going away, but she was weak, and leaned against a boat. 'Do you know who this is, who is with me?'

She said faintly, 'Yes.'

'Do you know that we have followed you a long way tonight?'

She shook her head. She looked neither at him nor at me, but stood in a humble attitude, holding her bonnet and shawl in one hand, without appearing conscious of them, and pressing the other, clenched, against her forehead.

'Are you composed enough,' said I, 'to speak on the subject which so interested you—I hope Heaven may remember it!—that snowy night?'

Her sobs broke out afresh, and she murmured some inarticulate thanks to me for not having driven her away from the door.

'I want to say nothing for myself,' she said, after a few moments. 'I am bad, I am lost. I have no hope at all. But tell him, sir,' she had shrunk away from him, 'if you don't feel too hard to me to do it, that I never was in any way the cause of his misfortune.' 'It has never been attributed to you,' I returned, earnestly responding to her earnestness.

'It was you, if I don't deceive myself,' she said, in a broken voice, 'that came into the kitchen, the night she took such pity on me; was so gentle to me; didn't shrink away from me like all the rest, and gave me such kind help! Was it you, sir?'

'It was,' said I.

'I should have been in the river long ago,' she said, glancing at it with a terrible expression, 'if any wrong to her had been upon my mind. I never could have kept out of it a single winter's night, if I had not been free of any share in that!'

'The cause of her flight is too well understood,' I said. 'You are innocent of any part in it, we thoroughly believe,—we know.'

'Oh, I might have been much the better for her, if I had had a better heart!' exclaimed the girl, with most forlorn regret; 'for she was always good to me! She never spoke a word to me but what was pleasant and right. Is it likely I would try to make her what I am myself, knowing what I am myself, so well? When I lost everything that makes life dear, the worst of all my thoughts was that I was parted for ever from her!'

Mr. Peggotty, standing with one hand on the gunwale of the boat, and his eyes cast down, put his disengaged hand before his face.

'And when I heard what had happened before that snowy night, from some belonging to our town,' cried Martha, 'the bitterest thought in all my mind was, that the people would remember she once kept company with me, and would say I had corrupted her! When, Heaven knows, I would have died to have brought back her good name!'

Long unused to any self-control, the piercing agony of her remorse and grief was terrible.

'To have died, would not have been much—what can I say?—-I would have lived!' she cried. 'I would have lived to be old, in the wretched streets—and to wander about, avoided, in the dark—and to see the day break on the ghastly line of houses, and remember how the same sun used to shine into my room, and wake me once—I would have done even that, to save her!'

Sinking on the stones, she took some in each hand, and clenched them up, as if she would have ground them. She writhed into some new posture constantly: stiffening her arms, twisting them before her face, as though to shut out from her eyes the little light there was, and drooping her head, as if it were heavy with insupportable recollections.

'What shall I ever do!' she said, fighting thus with her despair. 'How can I go on as I am, a solitary curse to myself, a living disgrace to everyone I come near!' Suddenly she turned to my companion. 'Stamp upon me, kill me! When she was your pride, you would have thought I had done her harm if I had brushed against her in the street. You can't believe—why should you?—-a syllable that comes out of my lips. It would be a burning shame upon you, even now, if she and I exchanged a word. I don't complain. I don't say she and I are alike—I know there is a long, long way between us. I only say, with all my guilt and wretchedness upon my head, that I am grateful to her from my soul, and love her. Oh, don't think that all the power I had of loving anything is quite worn out! Throw me away, as all the world does. Kill me for being what I am, and having ever known her; but don't think that of me!'

He looked upon her, while she made this supplication, in a wild distracted manner; and, when she was silent, gently raised her.

'Martha,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'God forbid as I should judge you. Forbid as I, of all men, should do that, my girl! You doen't know half the change that's come, in course of time, upon me, when you think it likely. Well!' he paused a moment, then went on. 'You doen't understand how 'tis that this here gentleman and me has wished to speak to you. You doen't understand what 'tis we has afore us. Listen now!'

His influence upon her was complete. She stood, shrinkingly, before him, as if she were afraid to meet his eyes; but her passionate sorrow was quite hushed and mute.

'If you heerd,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'owt of what passed between Mas'r Davy and me, th' night when it snew so hard, you know as I have been—wheer not—fur to seek my dear niece. My dear niece,' he repeated steadily. 'Fur she's more dear to me now, Martha, than she was dear afore.'

She put her hands before her face; but otherwise remained quiet.

'I have heerd her tell,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'as you was early left fatherless and motherless, with no friend fur to take, in a rough seafaring-way, their place. Maybe you can guess that if you'd had such a friend, you'd have got into a way of being fond of him in course of time, and that my niece was kiender daughter-like to me.'

As she was silently trembling, he put her shawl carefully about her, taking it up from the ground for that purpose.

'Whereby,' said he, 'I know, both as she would go to the wureld's furdest end with me, if she could once see me again; and that she would fly to the wureld's furdest end to keep off seeing me. For though she ain't no call to doubt my love, and doen't—and doen't,' he repeated, with a quiet assurance of the truth of what he said, 'there's shame steps in, and keeps betwixt us.'

I read, in every word of his plain impressive way of delivering himself, new evidence of his having thought of this one topic, in every feature it presented.

'According to our reckoning,' he proceeded, 'Mas'r Davy's here, and mine, she is like, one day, to make her own poor solitary course to London. We believe—Mas'r Davy, me, and all of us—that you are as innocent of everything that has befell her, as the unborn child. You've spoke of her being pleasant, kind, and gentle to you. Bless her, I knew she was! I knew she always was, to all. You're thankful to her, and you love her. Help us all you can to find her, and may Heaven reward you!'

She looked at him hastily, and for the first time, as if she were doubtful of what he had said.

'Will you trust me?' she asked, in a low voice of astonishment.

'Full and free!' said Mr. Peggotty.

'To speak to her, if I should ever find her; shelter her, if I have any shelter to divide with her; and then, without her knowledge, come to you, and bring you to her?' she asked hurriedly.

We both replied together, 'Yes!'

She lifted up her eyes, and solemnly declared that she would devote herself to this task, fervently and faithfully. That she would never waver in it, never be diverted from it, never relinquish it, while there was any chance of hope. If she were not true to it, might the object she now had in life, which bound her to something devoid of evil, in its passing away from her, leave her more forlorn and more despairing, if that were possible, than she had been upon the river's brink that night; and then might all help, human and Divine, renounce her evermore!

She did not raise her voice above her breath, or address us, but said this to the night sky; then stood profoundly quiet, looking at the gloomy water.

We judged it expedient, now, to tell her all we knew; which I recounted at length. She listened with great attention, and with a face that often changed, but had the same purpose in all its varying expressions. Her eyes occasionally filled with tears, but those she repressed. It seemed as if her spirit were quite altered, and she could not be too quiet.

She asked, when all was told, where we were to be communicated with, if occasion should arise. Under a dull lamp in the road, I wrote our two addresses on a leaf of my pocket-book, which I tore out and gave to her, and which she put in her poor bosom. I asked her where she lived herself. She said, after a pause, in no place long. It were better not to know.

Mr. Peggotty suggesting to me, in a whisper, what had already occurred to myself, I took out my purse; but I could not prevail upon her to accept any money, nor could I exact any promise from her that she would do so at another time. I represented to her that Mr. Peggotty could not be called, for one in his condition, poor; and that the idea of her engaging in this search, while depending on her own resources, shocked us both. She continued steadfast. In this particular, his influence upon her was equally powerless with mine. She gratefully thanked him but remained inexorable.

'There may be work to be got,' she said. 'I'll try.'

'At least take some assistance,' I returned, 'until you have tried.'

'I could not do what I have promised, for money,' she replied. 'I could not take it, if I was starving. To give me money would be to take away your trust, to take away the object that you have given me, to take away the only certain thing that saves me from the river.'

'In the name of the great judge,' said I, 'before whom you and all of us must stand at His dread time, dismiss that terrible idea! We can all do some good, if we will.'

She trembled, and her lip shook, and her face was paler, as she answered:

'It has been put into your hearts, perhaps, to save a wretched creature for repentance. I am afraid to think so; it seems too bold. If any good should come of me, I might begin to hope; for nothing but harm has ever come of my deeds yet. I am to be trusted, for the first time in a long while, with my miserable life, on account of what you have given me to try for. I know no more, and I can say no more.'

Again she repressed the tears that had begun to flow; and, putting out her trembling hand, and touching Mr. Peggotty, as if there was some healing virtue in him, went away along the desolate road. She had been ill, probably for a long time. I observed, upon that closer opportunity of observation, that she was worn and haggard, and that her sunken eyes expressed privation and endurance.

We followed her at a short distance, our way lying in the same direction, until we came back into the lighted and populous streets. I had such implicit confidence in her declaration, that I then put it to Mr. Peggotty, whether it would not seem, in the onset, like distrusting her, to follow her any farther. He being of the same mind, and equally reliant on her, we suffered her to take her own road, and took ours, which was towards Highgate. He accompanied me a good part of the way; and when we parted, with a prayer for the success of this fresh effort, there was a new and thoughtful compassion in him that I was at no loss to interpret.

It was midnight when I arrived at home. I had reached my own gate, and was standing listening for the deep bell of St. Paul's, the sound of which I thought had been borne towards me among the multitude of striking clocks, when I was rather surprised to see that the door of my aunt's cottage was open, and that a faint light in the entry was shining out across the road.

Thinking that my aunt might have relapsed into one of her old alarms, and might be watching the progress of some imaginary conflagration in the distance, I went to speak to her. It was with very great surprise that I saw a man standing in her little garden.

He had a glass and bottle in his hand, and was in the act of drinking. I stopped short, among the thick foliage outside, for the moon was up now, though obscured; and I recognized the man whom I had once supposed to be a delusion of Mr. Dick's, and had once encountered with my aunt in the streets of the city.

He was eating as well as drinking, and seemed to eat with a hungry appetite. He seemed curious regarding the cottage, too, as if it were the first time he had seen it. After stooping to put the bottle on the ground, he looked up at the windows, and looked about; though with a covert and impatient air, as if he was anxious to be gone.

The light in the passage was obscured for a moment, and my aunt came out. She was agitated, and told some money into his hand. I heard it chink.

'What's the use of this?' he demanded.

'I can spare no more,' returned my aunt.

'Then I can't go,' said he. 'Here! You may take it back!'

'You bad man,' returned my aunt, with great emotion; 'how can you use me so? But why do I ask? It is because you know how weak I am! What have I to do, to free myself for ever of your visits, but to abandon you to your deserts?'

'And why don't you abandon me to my deserts?' said he.

'You ask me why!' returned my aunt. 'What a heart you must have!'

He stood moodily rattling the money, and shaking his head, until at length he said:

'Is this all you mean to give me, then?'

'It is all I CAN give you,' said my aunt. 'You know I have had losses, and am poorer than I used to be. I have told you so. Having got it, why do you give me the pain of looking at you for another moment, and seeing what you have become?'

'I have become shabby enough, if you mean that,' he said. 'I lead the life of an owl.'

'You stripped me of the greater part of all I ever had,' said my aunt. 'You closed my heart against the whole world, years and years. You treated me falsely, ungratefully, and cruelly. Go, and repent of it. Don't add new injuries to the long, long list of injuries you have done me!'

'Aye!' he returned. 'It's all very fine—Well! I must do the best I can, for the present, I suppose.'

In spite of himself, he appeared abashed by my aunt's indignant tears, and came slouching out of the garden. Taking two or three quick steps, as if I had just come up, I met him at the gate, and went in as he came out. We eyed one another narrowly in passing, and with no favour.

'Aunt,' said I, hurriedly. 'This man alarming you again! Let me speak to him. Who is he?'

'Child,' returned my aunt, taking my arm, 'come in, and don't speak to me for ten minutes.'

We sat down in her little parlour. My aunt retired behind the round green fan of former days, which was screwed on the back of a chair, and occasionally wiped her eyes, for about a quarter of an hour. Then she came out, and took a seat beside me.

'Trot,' said my aunt, calmly, 'it's my husband.'

'Your husband, aunt? I thought he had been dead!'

'Dead to me,' returned my aunt, 'but living.'

I sat in silent amazement.

'Betsey Trotwood don't look a likely subject for the tender passion,' said my aunt, composedly, 'but the time was, Trot, when she believed in that man most entirely. When she loved him, Trot, right well. When there was no proof of attachment and affection that she would not have given him. He repaid her by breaking her fortune, and nearly breaking her heart. So she put all that sort of sentiment, once and for ever, in a grave, and filled it up, and flattened it down.'

'My dear, good aunt!'

'I left him,' my aunt proceeded, laying her hand as usual on the back of mine, 'generously. I may say at this distance of time, Trot, that I left him generously. He had been so cruel to me, that I might have effected a separation on easy terms for myself; but I did not. He soon made ducks and drakes of what I gave him, sank lower and lower, married another woman, I believe, became an adventurer, a gambler, and a cheat. What he is now, you see. But he was a fine-looking man when I married him,' said my aunt, with an echo of her old pride and admiration in her tone; 'and I believed him—I was a fool!—to be the soul of honour!'

She gave my hand a squeeze, and shook her head.

'He is nothing to me now, Trot—less than nothing. But, sooner than have him punished for his offences (as he would be if he prowled about in this country), I give him more money than I can afford, at intervals when he reappears, to go away. I was a fool when I married him; and I am so far an incurable fool on that subject, that, for the sake of what I once believed him to be, I wouldn't have even this shadow of my idle fancy hardly dealt with. For I was in earnest, Trot, if ever a woman was.'

MY aunt dismissed the matter with a heavy sigh, and smoothed her dress.

'There, my dear!' she said. 'Now you know the beginning, middle, and end, and all about it. We won't mention the subject to one another any more;

neither, of course, will you mention it to anybody else. This is my grumpy, frumpy story, and we'll keep it to ourselves, Trot!'

CHAPTER 48. DOMESTIC

I laboured hard at my book, without allowing it to interfere with the punctual discharge of my newspaper duties; and it came out and was very successful. I was not stunned by the praise which sounded in my ears, notwithstanding that I was keenly alive to it, and thought better of my own performance, I have little doubt, than anybody else did. It has always been in my observation of human nature, that a man who has any good reason to believe in himself never flourishes himself before the faces of other people in order that they may believe in him. For this reason, I retained my modesty in very self-respect; and the more praise I got, the more I tried to deserve.

It is not my purpose, in this record, though in all other essentials it is my written memory, to pursue the history of my own fictions. They express themselves, and I leave them to themselves. When I refer to them, incidentally, it is only as a part of my progress.

Having some foundation for believing, by this time, that nature and accident had made me an author, I pursued my vocation with confidence. Without such assurance I should certainly have left it alone, and bestowed my energy on some other endeavour. I should have tried to find out what nature and accident really had made me, and to be that, and nothing else. I had been writing, in the newspaper and elsewhere, so prosperously, that when my new success was achieved, I considered myself reasonably entitled to escape from the dreary debates. One joyful night, therefore, I noted down the music of the parliamentary bagpipes for the last time, and I have never heard it since; though I still recognize the old drone in the newspapers, without any substantial variation (except, perhaps, that there is more of it), all the livelong session.

I now write of the time when I had been married, I suppose, about a year and a half. After several varieties of experiment, we had given up the housekeeping as a bad job. The house kept itself, and we kept a page. The principal function of this retainer was to quarrel with the cook; in which respect he was a perfect Whittington, without his cat, or the remotest chance of being made Lord Mayor.

He appears to me to have lived in a hail of saucepan-lids. His whole existence was a scuffle. He would shriek for help on the most improper occasions,—as when we had a little dinner-party, or a few friends in the evening,—and would come tumbling out of the kitchen, with iron missiles flying after him. We wanted to get rid of him, but he was very much attached to us, and wouldn't go. He was a tearful boy, and broke into such deplorable lamentations, when a cessation of our connexion was hinted at, that we were obliged to keep him. He had no mother—no anything in the way of a relative, that I could discover, except a sister, who fled to America the moment we had taken him off her hands; and he became quartered on us like a horrible young changeling. He had a lively perception of his own unfortunate state, and was always rubbing his eyes with the sleeve of his jacket, or stooping to blow his nose on the extreme corner of a little pocket-handkerchief, which he never would take completely out of his pocket, but always economized and secreted.

This unlucky page, engaged in an evil hour at six pounds ten per annum, was a source of continual trouble to me. I watched him as he grew—and he grew like scarlet beans—with painful apprehensions of the time when he would begin to shave; even of the days when he would be bald or grey. I saw no prospect of ever getting rid of him; and, projecting myself into the future, used to think what an inconvenience he would be when he was an old man.

I never expected anything less, than this unfortunate's manner of getting me out of my difficulty. He stole Dora's watch, which, like everything else belonging to us, had no particular place of its own; and, converting it into money, spent the produce (he was always a weak-minded boy) in incessantly riding up and down between London and Uxbridge outside the coach. He was taken to Bow Street, as well as I remember, on the completion of his fifteenth journey; when four-and-sixpence, and a second-hand fife which he couldn't play, were found upon his person.

The surprise and its consequences would have been much less disagreeable to me if he had not been penitent. But he was very penitent indeed, and in a peculiar way—not in the lump, but by instalments. For example: the day after that on which I was obliged to appear against him, he made certain revelations touching a hamper in the cellar, which we believed to be full of wine, but which had nothing in it except bottles and corks. We supposed he had now eased his mind, and told the worst he knew of the cook; but, a day or two afterwards, his conscience sustained a new twinge, and he disclosed how she had a little girl, who, early every morning, took away our bread; and also how he himself had been suborned to maintain the milkman in coals. In two or three days more, I was informed by the authorities of his having led to the discovery of sirloins of beef among the kitchen-stuff, and sheets in the rag-bag. A little while afterwards, he broke out in an entirely new direction, and confessed to a knowledge of burglarious intentions as to our premises, on the part of the pot-boy, who was immediately taken up. I got to be so ashamed of being such a victim, that I would have given him any money to hold his tongue, or would have offered a round bribe for his being permitted to run away. It was an aggravating circumstance in the case that he had no idea of this, but conceived that he was making me amends in every new discovery: not to say, heaping obligations on my head.

At last I ran away myself, whenever I saw an emissary of the police approaching with some new intelligence; and lived a stealthy life until he was tried and ordered to be transported. Even then he couldn't be quiet, but was always writing us letters; and wanted so much to see Dora before he went away, that Dora went to visit him, and fainted when she found herself inside the iron bars. In short, I had no peace of my life until he was expatriated, and made (as I afterwards heard) a shepherd of, 'up the country' somewhere; I have no geographical idea where.

All this led me into some serious reflections, and presented our mistakes in a new aspect; as I could not help communicating to Dora one evening, in spite of my tenderness for her.

'My love,' said I, 'it is very painful to me to think that our want of system and management, involves not only ourselves (which we have got used to), but other people.'

'You have been silent for a long time, and now you are going to be cross!' said Dora.

'No, my dear, indeed! Let me explain to you what I mean.'

'I think I don't want to know,' said Dora.

'But I want you to know, my love. Put Jip down.'

Dora put his nose to mine, and said 'Boh!' to drive my seriousness away; but, not succeeding, ordered him into his Pagoda, and sat looking at me, with her hands folded, and a most resigned little expression of countenance.

'The fact is, my dear,' I began, 'there is contagion in us. We infect everyone about us.'

I might have gone on in this figurative manner, if Dora's face had not admonished me that she was wondering with all her might whether I was going to propose any new kind of vaccination, or other medical remedy, for this unwholesome state of ours. Therefore I checked myself, and made my meaning plainer.

'It is not merely, my pet,' said I, 'that we lose money and comfort, and even temper sometimes, by not learning to be more careful; but that we incur the serious responsibility of spoiling everyone who comes into our service, or has any dealings with us. I begin to be afraid that the fault is not entirely on one side, but that these people all turn out ill because we don't turn out very well ourselves.'

'Oh, what an accusation,' exclaimed Dora, opening her eyes wide; 'to say that you ever saw me take gold watches! Oh!'

'My dearest,' I remonstrated, 'don't talk preposterous nonsense! Who has made the least allusion to gold watches?'

'You did,' returned Dora. 'You know you did. You said I hadn't turned out well, and compared me to him.'

'To whom?' I asked.

'To the page,' sobbed Dora. 'Oh, you cruel fellow, to compare your affectionate wife to a transported page! Why didn't you tell me your opinion of me before we were married? Why didn't you say, you hard-hearted thing, that you were convinced I was worse than a transported page? Oh, what a dreadful opinion to have of me! Oh, my goodness!'

'Now, Dora, my love,' I returned, gently trying to remove the handkerchief she pressed to her eyes, 'this is not only very ridiculous of you, but very wrong. In the first place, it's not true.'

'You always said he was a story-teller,' sobbed Dora. 'And now you say the same of me! Oh, what shall I do! What shall I do!'

'My darling girl,' I retorted, 'I really must entreat you to be reasonable, and listen to what I did say, and do say. My dear Dora, unless we learn to do our duty to those whom we employ, they will never learn to do their duty to us. I am afraid we present opportunities to people to do wrong, that never ought to be presented. Even if we were as lax as we are, in all our arrangements, by choice—which we are not—even if we liked it, and found it agreeable to be so—which we don't—I am persuaded we should have no right to go on in this way. We are positively corrupting people. We are bound to think of that. I can't help thinking of it, Dora. It is a reflection I am unable to dismiss, and it sometimes makes me very uneasy. There, dear, that's all. Come now. Don't be foolish!'

Dora would not allow me, for a long time, to remove the handkerchief. She sat sobbing and murmuring behind it, that, if I was uneasy, why had I ever been married? Why hadn't I said, even the day before we went to church, that I knew I should be uneasy, and I would rather not? If I couldn't bear her, why didn't I send her away to her aunts at Putney, or to Julia Mills in India? Julia would be glad to see her, and would not call her a transported page; Julia never had called her anything of the sort. In short, Dora was so afflicted, and so afflicted me by being in that condition, that I felt it was of no use repeating this kind of effort, though never so mildly, and I must take some other course.

What other course was left to take? To 'form her mind'? This was a common phrase of words which had a fair and promising sound, and I resolved to form Dora's mind.

I began immediately. When Dora was very childish, and I would have infinitely preferred to humour her, I tried to be grave—and disconcerted her, and myself too. I talked to her on the subjects which occupied my thoughts; and I read Shakespeare to her—and fatigued her to the last degree. I accustomed myself to giving her, as it were quite casually, little scraps of useful information, or sound opinion—and she started from them when I let them off, as if they had been crackers. No matter how incidentally or naturally I endeavoured to form my little wife's mind, I could not help seeing that she always had an instinctive perception of what I was about, and became a prey to the keenest apprehensions. In particular, it was clear to me, that she thought Shakespeare a terrible fellow. The formation went on very slowly.

I pressed Traddles into the service without his knowledge; and whenever he came to see us, exploded my mines upon him for the edification of Dora at second hand. The amount of practical wisdom I bestowed upon Traddles in this manner was immense, and of the best quality; but it had no other effect upon Dora than to depress her spirits, and make her always nervous with the dread that it would be her turn next. I found myself in the condition of a schoolmaster, a trap, a pitfall; of always playing spider to Dora's fly, and always pouncing out of my hole to her infinite disturbance.

Still, looking forward through this intermediate stage, to the time when there should be a perfect sympathy between Dora and me, and when I should have 'formed her mind' to my entire satisfaction, I persevered, even for months. Finding at last, however, that, although I had been all this time a very porcupine or hedgehog, bristling all over with determination, I had effected nothing, it began to occur to me that perhaps Dora's mind was already formed.

On further consideration this appeared so likely, that I abandoned my scheme, which had had a more promising appearance in words than in action; resolving henceforth to be satisfied with my child-wife, and to try to change her into nothing else by any process. I was heartily tired of being sagacious and prudent by myself, and of seeing my darling under restraint; so I bought a pretty pair of ear-rings for her, and a collar for Jip, and went home one day to make myself agreeable.

Dora was delighted with the little presents, and kissed me joyfully; but there was a shadow between us, however slight, and I had made up my mind that it should not be there. If there must be such a shadow anywhere, I would keep it for the future in my own breast.

I sat down by my wife on the sofa, and put the ear-rings in her ears; and then I told her that I feared we had not been quite as good company lately, as we used to be, and that the fault was mine. Which I sincerely felt, and which indeed it was.

'The truth is, Dora, my life,' I said; 'I have been trying to be wise.'

'And to make me wise too,' said Dora, timidly. 'Haven't you, Doady?'

I nodded assent to the pretty inquiry of the raised eyebrows, and kissed the parted lips.

'It's of not a bit of use,' said Dora, shaking her head, until the ear-rings rang again. 'You know what a little thing I am, and what I wanted you to call me from the first. If you can't do so, I am afraid you'll never like me. Are you sure you don't think, sometimes, it would have been better to have —'

'Done what, my dear?' For she made no effort to proceed.

'Nothing!' said Dora.

'Nothing?' I repeated.

She put her arms round my neck, and laughed, and called herself by her favourite name of a goose, and hid her face on my shoulder in such a profusion of curls that it was quite a task to clear them away and see it.

'Don't I think it would have been better to have done nothing, than to have tried to form my little wife's mind?' said I, laughing at myself. 'Is that the question? Yes, indeed, I do.'

'Is that what you have been trying?' cried Dora. 'Oh what a shocking boy!'

'But I shall never try any more,' said I. 'For I love her dearly as she is.'

'Without a story—really?' inquired Dora, creeping closer to me.

'Why should I seek to change,' said I, 'what has been so precious to me for so long! You never can show better than as your own natural self, my sweet Dora; and we'll try no conceited experiments, but go back to our old way, and be happy.'

'And be happy!' returned Dora. 'Yes! All day! And you won't mind things going a tiny morsel wrong, sometimes?'

'No, no,' said I. 'We must do the best we can.'

'And you won't tell me, any more, that we make other people bad,' coaxed Dora; 'will you? Because you know it's so dreadfully cross!'

'No, no,' said I.

'It's better for me to be stupid than uncomfortable, isn't it?' said Dora.

'Better to be naturally Dora than anything else in the world.'

'In the world! Ah, Doady, it's a large place!'

She shook her head, turned her delighted bright eyes up to mine, kissed me, broke into a merry laugh, and sprang away to put on Jip's new collar.

So ended my last attempt to make any change in Dora. I had been unhappy in trying it; I could not endure my own solitary wisdom; I could not reconcile it with her former appeal to me as my child-wife. I resolved to do what I could, in a quiet way, to improve our proceedings myself, but I foresaw that my utmost would be very little, or I must degenerate into the spider again, and be for ever lying in wait.

And the shadow I have mentioned, that was not to be between us any more, but was to rest wholly on my own heart? How did that fall?

The old unhappy feeling pervaded my life. It was deepened, if it were changed at all; but it was as undefined as ever, and addressed me like a strain of sorrowful music faintly heard in the night. I loved my wife dearly, and I was happy; but the happiness I had vaguely anticipated, once, was not the happiness I enjoyed, and there was always something wanting.

In fulfilment of the compact I have made with myself, to reflect my mind on this paper, I again examine it, closely, and bring its secrets to the light. What I missed, I still regarded—I always regarded—as something that had been a dream of my youthful fancy; that was incapable of realization; that I was now discovering to be so, with some natural pain, as all men did. But that it would have been better for me if my wife could have helped me more, and shared the many thoughts in which I had no partner; and that this might have been; I knew.

Between these two irreconcilable conclusions: the one, that what I felt was general and unavoidable; the other, that it was particular to me, and might have been different: I balanced curiously, with no distinct sense of their opposition to each other. When I thought of the airy dreams of youth that are incapable of realization, I thought of the better state preceding manhood that I had outgrown; and then the contented days with Agnes, in the dear old house, arose before me, like spectres of the dead, that might have some renewal in another world, but never more could be reanimated here.

Sometimes, the speculation came into my thoughts, What might have happened, or what would have happened, if Dora and I had never known each other? But she was so incorporated with my existence, that it was the idlest of all fancies, and would soon rise out of my reach and sight, like gossamer floating in the air.

I always loved her. What I am describing, slumbered, and half awoke, and slept again, in the innermost recesses of my mind. There was no evidence of it in me; I know of no influence it had in anything I said or did. I bore the weight of all our little cares, and all my projects; Dora held the pens; and we both felt that our shares were adjusted as the case required. She was truly fond of me, and proud of me; and when Agnes wrote a few earnest words in her letters to Dora, of the pride and interest with which my old friends heard of my growing reputation, and read my book as if they heard me speaking its contents, Dora read them out to me with tears of joy in her bright eyes, and said I was a dear old clever, famous boy.

'The first mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart.' Those words of Mrs. Strong's were constantly recurring to me, at this time; were almost always present to my mind. I awoke with them, often, in the night; I remember to have even read them, in dreams, inscribed upon the walls of houses. For I knew, now, that my own heart was undisciplined when it first loved Dora; and that if it had been disciplined, it never could have felt, when we were married, what it had felt in its secret experience.

'There can be no disparity in marriage, like unsuitability of mind and purpose.' Those words I remembered too. I had endeavoured to adapt Dora to myself, and found it impracticable. It remained for me to adapt myself to Dora; to share with her what I could, and be happy; to bear on my own shoulders what I must, and be happy still. This was the discipline to which I tried to bring my heart, when I began to think. It made my second year much happier than my first; and, what was better still, made Dora's life all sunshine.

But, as that year wore on, Dora was not strong. I had hoped that lighter hands than mine would help to mould her character, and that a baby-smile upon her breast might change my child-wife to a woman. It was not to be. The spirit fluttered for a moment on the threshold of its little prison, and, unconscious of captivity, took wing.

'When I can run about again, as I used to do, aunt,' said Dora, 'I shall make Jip race. He is getting quite slow and lazy.'

'I suspect, my dear,' said my aunt quietly working by her side, 'he has a worse disorder than that. Age, Dora.'

'Do you think he is old?' said Dora, astonished. 'Oh, how strange it seems that Jip should be old!'

'It's a complaint we are all liable to, Little One, as we get on in life,' said my aunt, cheerfully; 'I don't feel more free from it than I used to be, I assure you.'

'But Jip,' said Dora, looking at him with compassion, 'even little Jip! Oh, poor fellow!'

'I dare say he'll last a long time yet, Blossom,' said my aunt, patting Dora on the cheek, as she leaned out of her couch to look at Jip, who responded by standing on his hind legs, and baulking himself in various asthmatic attempts to scramble up by the head and shoulders. 'He must have a piece of flannel in his house this winter, and I shouldn't wonder if he came out quite fresh again, with the flowers in the spring. Bless the little dog!' exclaimed my aunt, 'if he had as many lives as a cat, and was on the point of losing 'em all, he'd bark at me with his last breath, I believe!'

Dora had helped him up on the sofa; where he really was defying my aunt to such a furious extent, that he couldn't keep straight, but barked himself sideways. The more my aunt looked at him, the more he reproached her; for she had lately taken to spectacles, and for some inscrutable reason he considered the glasses personal.

Dora made him lie down by her, with a good deal of persuasion; and when he was quiet, drew one of his long ears through and through her hand, repeating thoughtfully, 'Even little Jip! Oh, poor fellow!'

'His lungs are good enough,' said my aunt, gaily, 'and his dislikes are not at all feeble. He has a good many years before him, no doubt. But if you want a dog to race with, Little Blossom, he has lived too well for that, and I'll give you one.'

'Thank you, aunt,' said Dora, faintly. 'But don't, please!'

'No?' said my aunt, taking off her spectacles.

'I couldn't have any other dog but Jip,' said Dora. 'It would be so unkind to Jip! Besides, I couldn't be such friends with any other dog but Jip; because he wouldn't have known me before I was married, and wouldn't have barked at Doady when he first came to our house. I couldn't care for any other dog but Jip, I am afraid, aunt.'

'To be sure!' said my aunt, patting her cheek again. 'You are right.'

'You are not offended,' said Dora. 'Are you?'

'Why, what a sensitive pet it is!' cried my aunt, bending over her affectionately. 'To think that I could be offended!'

'No, no, I didn't really think so,' returned Dora; 'but I am a little tired, and it made me silly for a moment—I am always a silly little thing, you know, but it made me more silly—to talk about Jip. He has known me in all that has happened to me, haven't you, Jip? And I couldn't bear to slight him, because he was a little altered—could I, Jip?'

Jip nestled closer to his mistress, and lazily licked her hand.

'You are not so old, Jip, are you, that you'll leave your mistress yet?' said Dora. 'We may keep one another company a little longer!'

My pretty Dora! When she came down to dinner on the ensuing Sunday, and was so glad to see old Traddles (who always dined with us on Sunday), we thought she would be 'running about as she used to do', in a few days. But they said, wait a few days more; and then, wait a few days more; and still she neither ran nor walked. She looked very pretty, and was very merry; but the little feet that used to be so nimble when they danced round Jip, were dull and motionless.

I began to carry her downstairs every morning, and upstairs every night. She would clasp me round the neck and laugh, the while, as if I did it for a wager. Jip would bark and caper round us, and go on before, and look back on the landing, breathing short, to see that we were coming. My aunt, the best and most cheerful of nurses, would trudge after us, a moving mass of shawls and pillows. Mr. Dick would not have relinquished his post of candle-bearer to anyone alive. Traddles would be often at the bottom of the staircase, looking on, and taking charge of sportive messages from Dora to the dearest girl in the world. We made quite a gay procession of it, and my child-wife was the gayest there.

But, sometimes, when I took her up, and felt that she was lighter in my arms, a dead blank feeling came upon me, as if I were approaching to some frozen region yet unseen, that numbed my life. I avoided the recognition of this feeling by any name, or by any communing with myself; until one night, when it was very strong upon me, and my aunt had left her with a parting cry of 'Good night, Little Blossom,' I sat down at my desk alone, and cried to think, Oh what a fatal name it was, and how the blossom withered in its bloom upon the tree!

CHAPTER 49. I AM INVOLVED IN MYSTERY

I received one morning by the post, the following letter, dated Canterbury, and addressed to me at Doctor's Commons; which I read with some surprise:

'MY DEAR SIR,

'Circumstances beyond my individual control have, for a considerable lapse of time, effected a severance of that intimacy which, in the limited opportunities conceded to me in the midst of my professional duties, of contemplating the scenes and events of the past, tinged by the prismatic hues of memory, has ever afforded me, as it ever must continue to afford, gratifying emotions of no common description. This fact, my dear sir, combined with the distinguished elevation to which your talents have raised you, deters me from presuming to aspire to the liberty of addressing the companion of my youth, by the familiar appellation of Copperfield! It is sufficient to know that the name to which I do myself the honour to refer, will ever be treasured among the muniments of our house (I allude to the archives connected with our former lodgers, preserved by Mrs. Micawber), with sentiments of personal esteem amounting to affection.

'It is not for one, situated, through his original errors and a fortuitous combination of unpropitious events, as is the foundered Bark (if he may be allowed to assume so maritime a denomination), who now takes up the pen to address you—it is not, I repeat, for one so circumstanced, to adopt the language of compliment, or of congratulation. That he leaves to abler and to purer hands.

'If your more important avocations should admit of your ever tracing these imperfect characters thus far—which may be, or may not be, as circumstances arise—you will naturally inquire by what object am I influenced, then, in inditing the present missive? Allow me to say that I fully defer to the reasonable character of that inquiry, and proceed to develop it; premising that it is not an object of a pecuniary nature.

'Without more directly referring to any latent ability that may possibly exist on my part, of wielding the thunderbolt, or directing the devouring and avenging flame in any quarter, I may be permitted to observe, in passing, that my brightest visions are for ever dispelled—that my peace is shattered and my power of enjoyment destroyed—that my heart is no longer in the right place—and that I no more walk erect before my fellow man. The canker is in the flower. The cup is bitter to the brim. The worm is at his work, and will soon dispose of his victim. The sooner the better. But I will not digress. 'Placed in a mental position of peculiar painfulness, beyond the assuaging reach even of Mrs. Micawber's influence, though exercised in the tripartite character of woman, wife, and mother, it is my intention to fly from myself for a short period, and devote a respite of eight-and-forty hours to revisiting some metropolitan scenes of past enjoyment. Among other havens of domestic tranquillity and peace of mind, my feet will naturally tend towards the King's Bench Prison. In stating that I shall be (D. V.) on the outside of the south wall of that place of incarceration on civil process, the day after tomorrow, at seven in the evening, precisely, my object in this epistolary communication is accomplished.

'I do not feel warranted in soliciting my former friend Mr. Copperfield, or my former friend Mr. Thomas Traddles of the Inner Temple, if that gentleman is still existent and forthcoming, to condescend to meet me, and renew (so far as may be) our past relations of the olden time. I confine myself to throwing out the observation, that, at the hour and place I have indicated, may be found such ruined vestiges as yet

'Remain,
'Of
'A
'Fallen Tower,
'WILKINS MICAWBER.

'P.S. It may be advisable to superadd to the above, the statement that Mrs. Micawber is not in confidential possession of my intentions.'

I read the letter over several times. Making due allowance for Mr. Micawber's lofty style of composition, and for the extraordinary relish with which he sat down and wrote long letters on all possible and impossible occasions, I still believed that something important lay hidden at the bottom of this roundabout communication. I put it down, to think about it; and took it up again, to read it once more; and was still pursuing it, when Traddles found me in the height of my perplexity.

'My dear fellow,' said I, 'I never was better pleased to see you. You come to give me the benefit of your sober judgement at a most opportune time. I have received a very singular letter, Traddles, from Mr. Micawber.'

'No?' cried Traddles. 'You don't say so? And I have received one from Mrs. Micawber!'

With that, Traddles, who was flushed with walking, and whose hair, under the combined effects of exercise and excitement, stood on end as if he saw a cheerful ghost, produced his letter and made an exchange with me. I watched him into the heart of Mr. Micawber's letter, and returned the elevation of eyebrows with which he said '"Wielding the thunderbolt, or directing the devouring and avenging flame!" Bless me, Copperfield!'—and then entered on the perusal of Mrs. Micawber's epistle.

It ran thus:

'My best regards to Mr. Thomas Traddles, and if he should still remember one who formerly had the happiness of being well acquainted with him, may I beg a few moments of his leisure time? I assure Mr. T. T. that I would not intrude upon his kindness, were I in any other position than on the confines of distraction.

'Though harrowing to myself to mention, the alienation of Mr. Micawber (formerly so domesticated) from his wife and family, is the cause of my addressing my unhappy appeal to Mr. Traddles, and soliciting his best indulgence. Mr. T. can form no adequate idea of the change in Mr. Micawber's conduct, of his wildness, of his violence. It has gradually augmented, until it assumes the appearance of aberration of intellect. Scarcely a day passes, I assure Mr. Traddles, on which some paroxysm does not take place. Mr. T. will not require me to depict my feelings, when I inform him that I have become accustomed to hear Mr. Micawber assert that he has sold himself to the D. Mystery and secrecy have long been his principal characteristic, have long replaced unlimited confidence. The slightest provocation, even being asked if there is anything he would prefer for dinner, causes him to express a wish for a separation. Last night, on being childishly solicited for twopence, to buy 'lemon-stunners'—a local sweetmeat—he presented an oyster-knife at the twins!

'I entreat Mr. Traddles to bear with me in entering into these details. Without them, Mr. T. would indeed find it difficult to form the faintest conception of my heart-rending situation.

'May I now venture to confide to Mr. T. the purport of my letter? Will he now allow me to throw myself on his friendly consideration? Oh yes, for I know his heart!

'The quick eye of affection is not easily blinded, when of the female sex. Mr. Micawber is going to London. Though he studiously concealed his hand, this morning before breakfast, in writing the direction-card which he attached to the little brown valise of happier days, the eagle-glance of matrimonial anxiety detected, d, o, n, distinctly traced. The West-End destination of the coach, is the Golden Cross. Dare I fervently implore Mr. T. to see my misguided husband, and to reason with him? Dare I ask Mr. T. to endeavour to step in between Mr. Micawber and his agonized family? Oh no, for that would be too much!

'If Mr. Copperfield should yet remember one unknown to fame, will Mr. T. take charge of my unalterable regards and similar entreaties? In any case, he will have the benevolence to consider this communication strictly private, and on no account whatever to be alluded to, however distantly, in the presence of Mr. Micawber. If Mr. T. should ever reply to it (which I cannot but feel to be most improbable), a letter addressed to M. E., Post Office, Canterbury, will be fraught with less painful consequences than any addressed immediately to one, who subscribes herself, in extreme distress,

'Mr. Thomas Traddles's respectful friend and suppliant,

'EMMA MICAWBER.'

'What do you think of that letter?' said Traddles, casting his eyes upon me, when I had read it twice.

'What do you think of the other?' said I. For he was still reading it with knitted brows.

'I think that the two together, Copperfield,' replied Traddles, 'mean more than Mr. and Mrs. Micawber usually mean in their correspondence—but I don't know what. They are both written in good faith, I have no doubt, and without any collusion. Poor thing!' he was now alluding to Mrs. Micawber's letter, and we were standing side by side comparing the two; 'it will be a charity to write to her, at all events, and tell her that we will not fail to see Mr. Micawber.'

I acceded to this the more readily, because I now reproached myself with having treated her former letter rather lightly. It had set me thinking a good deal at the time, as I have mentioned in its place; but my absorption in my own affairs, my experience of the family, and my hearing nothing more, had gradually ended in my dismissing the subject. I had often thought of the Micawbers, but chiefly to wonder what 'pecuniary liabilities' they were establishing in Canterbury, and to recall how shy Mr. Micawber was of me when he became clerk to Uriah Heep.

However, I now wrote a comforting letter to Mrs. Micawber, in our joint names, and we both signed it. As we walked into town to post it, Traddles and I held a long conference, and launched into a number of speculations, which I need not repeat. We took my aunt into our counsels in the afternoon; but our only decided conclusion was, that we would be very punctual in keeping Mr. Micawber's appointment.

Although we appeared at the stipulated place a quarter of an hour before the time, we found Mr. Micawber already there. He was standing with his arms folded, over against the wall, looking at the spikes on the top, with a sentimental expression, as if they were the interlacing boughs of trees that had shaded him in his youth.

When we accosted him, his manner was something more confused, and something less genteel, than of yore. He had relinquished his legal suit of black for the purposes of this excursion, and wore the old surtout and tights, but not quite with the old air. He gradually picked up more and more of it as we conversed with him; but, his very eye-glass seemed to hang less easily, and his shirt-collar, though still of the old formidable dimensions, rather drooped.

'Gentlemen!' said Mr. Micawber, after the first salutations, 'you are friends in need, and friends indeed. Allow me to offer my inquiries with reference to the physical welfare of Mrs. Copperfield in esse, and Mrs. Traddles in posse,—presuming, that is to say, that my friend Mr. Traddles is not yet united to the object of his affections, for weal and for woe.'

We acknowledged his politeness, and made suitable replies. He then directed our attention to the wall, and was beginning, 'I assure you, gentlemen,' when I ventured to object to that ceremonious form of address, and to beg that he would speak to us in the old way.

'My dear Copperfield,' he returned, pressing my hand, 'your cordiality overpowers me. This reception of a shattered fragment of the Temple once called Man—if I may be permitted so to express myself—bespeaks a heart that is an honour to our common nature. I was about to observe that I again behold the serene spot where some of the happiest hours of my existence fleeted by.'

'Made so, I am sure, by Mrs. Micawber,' said I. 'I hope she is well?'

'Thank you,' returned Mr. Micawber, whose face clouded at this reference, 'she is but so-so. And this,' said Mr. Micawber, nodding his head sorrowfully, 'is the Bench! Where, for the first time in many revolving years, the overwhelming pressure of pecuniary liabilities was not proclaimed, from day to day, by importune voices declining to vacate the passage; where there was no knocker on the door for any creditor to appeal to; where personal service of process was not required, and detainees were merely lodged at the gate! Gentlemen,' said Mr. Micawber, 'when the shadow of that iron-work on the summit of the brick structure has been reflected on the gravel of the Parade, I have seen my children thread the mazes of the intricate pattern, avoiding the dark marks. I have been familiar with every stone in the place. If I betray weakness, you will know how to excuse me.'

'We have all got on in life since then, Mr. Micawber,' said I.

'Mr. Copperfield,' returned Mr. Micawber, bitterly, 'when I was an inmate of that retreat I could look my fellow-man in the face, and punch his head if he offended me. My fellow-man and myself are no longer on those glorious terms!'

Turning from the building in a downcast manner, Mr. Micawber accepted my proffered arm on one side, and the proffered arm of Traddles on the other, and walked away between us.

'There are some landmarks,' observed Mr. Micawber, looking fondly back over his shoulder, 'on the road to the tomb, which, but for the impiety of the aspiration, a man would wish never to have passed. Such is the Bench in my chequered career.'

'Oh, you are in low spirits, Mr. Micawber,' said Traddles.

'I am, sir,' interposed Mr. Micawber.

'I hope,' said Traddles, 'it is not because you have conceived a dislike to the law—for I am a lawyer myself, you know.'

Mr. Micawber answered not a word.

'How is our friend Heep, Mr. Micawber?' said I, after a silence.

'My dear Copperfield,' returned Mr. Micawber, bursting into a state of much excitement, and turning pale, 'if you ask after my employer as your friend, I am sorry for it; if you ask after him as MY friend, I sardonically smile at it. In whatever capacity you ask after my employer, I beg, without offence to you, to limit my reply to this—that whatever his state of health may be, his appearance is foxy: not to say diabolical. You will allow me, as a private individual, to decline pursuing a subject which has lashed me to the utmost verge of desperation in my professional capacity.'

I expressed my regret for having innocently touched upon a theme that roused him so much. 'May I ask,' said I, 'without any hazard of repeating the mistake, how my old friends Mr. and Miss Wickfield are?'

'Miss Wickfield,' said Mr. Micawber, now turning red, 'is, as she always is, a pattern, and a bright example. My dear Copperfield, she is the only starry spot in a miserable existence. My respect for that young lady, my admiration of her character, my devotion to her for her love and truth, and goodness!—Take me,' said Mr. Micawber, 'down a turning, for, upon my soul, in my present state of mind I am not equal to this!'

We wheeled him off into a narrow street, where he took out his pocket-handkerchief, and stood with his back to a wall. If I looked as gravely at him as Traddles did, he must have found our company by no means inspiriting.

'It is my fate,' said Mr. Micawber, unfeignedly sobbing, but doing even that, with a shadow of the old expression of doing something genteel; 'it is my fate, gentlemen, that the finer feelings of our nature have become reproaches to me. My homage to Miss Wickfield, is a flight of arrows in my bosom. You had better leave me, if you please, to walk the earth as a vagabond. The worm will settle my business in double-quick time.'

Without attending to this invocation, we stood by, until he put up his pocket-handkerchief, pulled up his shirt-collar, and, to delude any person in the neighbourhood who might have been observing him, hummed a tune with his hat very much on one side. I then mentioned—not knowing what might be lost if we lost sight of him yet—that it would give me great pleasure to introduce him to my aunt, if he would ride out to Highgate, where a bed was at his service.

'You shall make us a glass of your own punch, Mr. Micawber,' said I, 'and forget whatever you have on your mind, in pleasanter reminiscences.'

'Or, if confiding anything to friends will be more likely to relieve you, you shall impart it to us, Mr. Micawber,' said Traddles, prudently.

'Gentlemen,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'do with me as you will! I am a straw upon the surface of the deep, and am tossed in all directions by the elephants—I beg your pardon; I should have said the elements.'

We walked on, arm-in-arm, again; found the coach in the act of starting; and arrived at Highgate without encountering any difficulties by the way. I was very uneasy and very uncertain in my mind what to say or do for the best—so was Traddles, evidently. Mr. Micawber was for the most part plunged into deep gloom. He occasionally made an attempt to smarten himself, and hum the fag-end of a tune; but his relapses into profound melancholy were only made the more impressive by the mockery of a hat exceedingly on one side, and a shirt-collar pulled up to his eyes.

We went to my aunt's house rather than to mine, because of Dora's not being well. My aunt presented herself on being sent for, and welcomed Mr. Micawber with gracious cordiality. Mr. Micawber kissed her hand, retired to the window, and pulling out his pocket-handkerchief, had a mental wrestle with himself.

Mr. Dick was at home. He was by nature so exceedingly compassionate of anyone who seemed to be ill at ease, and was so quick to find any such person out, that he shook hands with Mr. Micawber, at least half-a-dozen times in five minutes. To Mr. Micawber, in his trouble, this warmth, on the part of a stranger, was so extremely touching, that he could only say, on the occasion of each successive shake, 'My dear sir, you overpower me!' Which gratified Mr. Dick so much, that he went at it again with greater vigour than before.

'The friendliness of this gentleman,' said Mr. Micawber to my aunt, 'if you will allow me, ma'am, to cull a figure of speech from the vocabulary of our coarser national sports—floors me. To a man who is struggling with a complicated burden of perplexity and disquiet, such a reception is trying, I assure you.'

'My friend Mr. Dick,' replied my aunt proudly, 'is not a common man.'

'That I am convinced of,' said Mr. Micawber. 'My dear sir!' for Mr. Dick was shaking hands with him again; 'I am deeply sensible of your cordiality!'

'How do you find yourself?' said Mr. Dick, with an anxious look.

'Indifferent, my dear sir,' returned Mr. Micawber, sighing.

'You must keep up your spirits,' said Mr. Dick, 'and make yourself as comfortable as possible.'

Mr. Micawber was quite overcome by these friendly words, and by finding Mr. Dick's hand again within his own. 'It has been my lot,' he observed, 'to meet, in the diversified panorama of human existence, with an occasional oasis, but never with one so green, so gushing, as the present!'

At another time I should have been amused by this; but I felt that we were all constrained and uneasy, and I watched Mr. Micawber so anxiously, in his vacillations between an evident disposition to reveal something, and a counter-disposition to reveal nothing, that I was in a perfect fever. Traddles, sitting on the edge of his chair, with his eyes wide open, and his hair more emphatically erect than ever, stared by turns at the ground and at Mr. Micawber, without so much as attempting to put in a word. My aunt, though I saw that her shrewdest observation was concentrated on her new guest, had more useful possession of her wits than either of us; for she held him in conversation, and made it necessary for him to talk, whether he liked it or not.

'You are a very old friend of my nephew's, Mr. Micawber,' said my aunt. 'I wish I had had the pleasure of seeing you before.'

'Madam,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'I wish I had had the honour of knowing you at an earlier period. I was not always the wreck you at present behold.'

'I hope Mrs. Micawber and your family are well, sir,' said my aunt.

Mr. Micawber inclined his head. 'They are as well, ma'am,' he desperately observed after a pause, 'as Aliens and Outcasts can ever hope to be.'

'Lord bless you, sir!' exclaimed my aunt, in her abrupt way. 'What are you talking about?'

'The subsistence of my family, ma'am,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'trembles in the balance. My employer—'

Here Mr. Micawber provokingly left off; and began to peel the lemons that had been under my directions set before him, together with all the other appliances he used in making punch.

'Your employer, you know,' said Mr. Dick, jogging his arm as a gentle reminder.

'My good sir,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'you recall me, I am obliged to you.' They shook hands again. 'My employer, ma'am—Mr. Heep—once did me the favour to observe to me, that if I were not in the receipt of the stipendiary emoluments appertaining to my engagement with him, I should probably be a mountebank about the country, swallowing a sword-blade, and eating the devouring element. For anything that I can perceive to the contrary, it is still probable that my children may be reduced to seek a livelihood by personal contortion, while Mrs. Micawber abets their unnatural feats by playing the barrel-organ.'

Mr. Micawber, with a random but expressive flourish of his knife, signified that these performances might be expected to take place after he was no more; then resumed his peeling with a desperate air.

My aunt leaned her elbow on the little round table that she usually kept beside her, and eyed him attentively. Notwithstanding the aversion with which I regarded the idea of entrapping him into any disclosure he was not prepared to make voluntarily, I should have taken him up at this point, but for the strange proceedings in which I saw him engaged; whereof his putting the lemon-peel into the kettle, the sugar into the snuffer-tray, the spirit into the empty jug, and confidently attempting to pour boiling water out of a candlestick, were among the most remarkable. I saw that a crisis was at hand, and it came. He clattered all his means and implements together, rose from his chair, pulled out his pocket-handkerchief, and burst into tears.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, behind his handkerchief, 'this is an occupation, of all others, requiring an untroubled mind, and self-respect. I cannot perform it. It is out of the question.'

'Mr. Micawber,' said I, 'what is the matter? Pray speak out. You are among friends.'

'Among friends, sir!' repeated Mr. Micawber; and all he had reserved came breaking out of him. 'Good heavens, it is principally because I AM among friends that my state of mind is what it is. What is the matter, gentlemen? What is NOT the matter? Villainy is the matter; baseness is the matter; deception, fraud, conspiracy, are the matter; and the name of the whole atrocious mass is—HEEP!'

MY aunt clapped her hands, and we all started up as if we were possessed.

'The struggle is over!' said Mr. Micawber violently gesticulating with his pocket-handkerchief, and fairly striking out from time to time with both arms, as if he were swimming under superhuman difficulties. 'I will lead this life no longer. I am a wretched being, cut off from everything that makes life tolerable. I have been under a Taboo in that infernal scoundrel's service. Give me back my wife, give me back my family, substitute Micawber for the petty wretch who walks about in the boots at present on my feet, and call upon me to swallow a sword tomorrow, and I'll do it. With an appetite!'

I never saw a man so hot in my life. I tried to calm him, that we might come to something rational; but he got hotter and hotter, and wouldn't hear a word.

'I'll put my hand in no man's hand,' said Mr. Micawber, gasping, puffing, and sobbing, to that degree that he was like a man fighting with cold water, 'until I have—blown to fragments—the—a—detestable—serpent—HEEP! I'll partake of no one's hospitality, until I have—a—moved Mount Vesuvius—to eruption—on—a—the abandoned rascal—HEEP! Refreshment—a—underneath this roof—particularly punch—would—a—choke me—unless—I had—previously—choked the eyes—out of the head—a—of—interminable cheat, and liar—HEEP! I—a—I'll know nobody—and—a—say nothing—and—a—live nowhere—until I have crushed—to—a—undiscoverable atoms—the—transcendent and immortal hypocrite and perjurer—HEEP!'

I really had some fear of Mr. Micawber's dying on the spot. The manner in which he struggled through these inarticulate sentences, and, whenever he found himself getting near the name of Heep, fought his way on to it, dashed at it in a fainting state, and brought it out with a vehemence little less than marvellous, was frightful; but now, when he sank into a chair, steaming, and looked at us, with every possible colour in his face that had no business there, and an endless procession of lumps following one another in hot haste up his throat, whence they seemed to shoot into his forehead, he had the appearance of being in the last extremity. I would have gone to his assistance, but he waved me off, and wouldn't hear a word.

'No, Copperfield!—No communication—a—until—Miss Wickfield—a—redress from wrongs inflicted by consummate scoundrel—HEEP!' (I am quite convinced he could not have uttered three words, but for the amazing energy with which this word inspired him when he felt it coming.) 'Inviolable secret—a—from the whole world—a—no exceptions—this day week—a—at breakfast-time—a—everybody present—including aunt—a—and extremely friendly gentleman—to be at the hotel at Canterbury—a—where—Mrs. Micawber and myself—Auld Lang Syne in chorus—and—a—will expose intolerable ruffian—HEEP! No more to say—a—or listen to persuasion—go immediately—not capable—a—bear society—upon the track of devoted and doomed traitor—HEEP!'

With this last repetition of the magic word that had kept him going at all, and in which he surpassed all his previous efforts, Mr. Micawber rushed out of the house; leaving us in a state of excitement, hope, and wonder, that reduced us to a condition little better than his own. But even then his passion for writing letters was too strong to be resisted; for while we were yet in the height of our excitement, hope, and wonder, the following pastoral note was brought to me from a neighbouring tavern, at which he had called to write it:—

'Most secret and confidential.

'MY DEAR SIR,

'I beg to be allowed to convey, through you, my apologies to your excellent aunt for my late excitement. An explosion of a smouldering volcano long suppressed, was the result of an internal contest more easily conceived than described.

'I trust I rendered tolerably intelligible my appointment for the morning of this day week, at the house of public entertainment at Canterbury, where Mrs. Micawber and myself had once the honour of uniting our voices to yours, in the well-known strain of the Immortal exciseman nurtured beyond the Tweed.

'The duty done, and act of reparation performed, which can alone enable me to contemplate my fellow mortal, I shall be known no more. I shall simply require to be deposited in that place of universal resort, where

Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep,

'—With the plain Inscription,

'WILKINS MICAWBER.'

CHAPTER 50. Mr. PEGGOTTY'S DREAM COMES TRUE

By this time, some months had passed since our interview on the bank of the river with Martha. I had never seen her since, but she had communicated with Mr. Peggotty on several occasions. Nothing had come of her zealous intervention; nor could I infer, from what he told me, that any clue had been obtained, for a moment, to Emily's fate. I confess that I began to despair of her recovery, and gradually to sink deeper and deeper into the belief that she was dead.

His conviction remained unchanged. So far as I know—and I believe his honest heart was transparent to me—he never wavered again, in his solemn certainty of finding her. His patience never tired. And, although I trembled for the agony it might one day be to him to have his strong assurance shivered at a blow, there was something so religious in it, so affectingly expressive of its anchor being in the purest depths of his fine nature, that the respect and honour in which I held him were exalted every day.

His was not a lazy trustfulness that hoped, and did no more. He had been a man of sturdy action all his life, and he knew that in all things wherein he wanted help he must do his own part faithfully, and help himself. I have known him set out in the night, on a misgiving that the light might not be, by some accident, in the window of the old boat, and walk to Yarmouth. I have known him, on reading something in the newspaper that might apply to her, take up his stick, and go forth on a journey of three—or four-score miles. He made his way by sea to Naples, and back, after hearing the narrative to which Miss Dartle had assisted me. All his journeys were ruggedly performed; for he was always steadfast in a purpose of saving money for Emily's sake, when she should be found. In all this long pursuit, I never heard him repine; I never heard him say he was fatigued, or out of heart.

Dora had often seen him since our marriage, and was quite fond of him. I fancy his figure before me now, standing near her sofa, with his rough cap in his hand, and the blue eyes of my child-wife raised, with a timid wonder, to his face. Sometimes of an evening, about twilight, when he came to talk with me, I would induce him to smoke his pipe in the garden, as we slowly paced to and fro together; and then, the picture of his deserted home, and the comfortable air it used to have in my childish eyes of an evening when the fire was burning, and the wind moaning round it, came most vividly into my mind.

One evening, at this hour, he told me that he had found Martha waiting near his lodging on the preceding night when he came out, and that she had asked him not to leave London on any account, until he should have seen her again.

'Did she tell you why?' I inquired.

'I asked her, Mas'r Davy,' he replied, 'but it is but few words as she ever says, and she on'y got my promise and so went away.'

'Did she say when you might expect to see her again?' I demanded.

'No, Mas'r Davy,' he returned, drawing his hand thoughtfully down his face. 'I asked that too; but it was more (she said) than she could tell.'

As I had long forborne to encourage him with hopes that hung on threads, I made no other comment on this information than that I supposed he would see her soon. Such speculations as it engendered within me I kept to myself, and those were faint enough.

I was walking alone in the garden, one evening, about a fortnight afterwards. I remember that evening well. It was the second in Mr. Micawber's week of suspense. There had been rain all day, and there was a damp feeling in the air. The leaves were thick upon the trees, and heavy with wet; but the rain had ceased, though the sky was still dark; and the hopeful birds were singing cheerfully. As I walked to and fro in the garden, and the twilight began to close around me, their little voices were hushed; and that peculiar silence which belongs to such an evening in the country when the lightest trees are quite still, save for the occasional droppings from their boughs, prevailed.

There was a little green perspective of trellis-work and ivy at the side of our cottage, through which I could see, from the garden where I was walking, into the road before the house. I happened to turn my eyes towards this place, as I was thinking of many things; and I saw a figure beyond, dressed in a plain cloak. It was bending eagerly towards me, and beckoning.

'Martha!' said I, going to it.

'Can you come with me?' she inquired, in an agitated whisper. 'I have been to him, and he is not at home. I wrote down where he was to come, and left it on his table with my own hand. They said he would not be out long. I have tidings for him. Can you come directly?'

My answer was, to pass out at the gate immediately. She made a hasty gesture with her hand, as if to entreat my patience and my silence, and turned towards London, whence, as her dress betokened, she had come expeditiously on foot.

I asked her if that were not our destination? On her motioning Yes, with the same hasty gesture as before, I stopped an empty coach that was coming by, and we got into it. When I asked her where the coachman was to drive, she answered, 'Anywhere near Golden Square! And quick!'—then shrunk into a corner, with one trembling hand before her face, and the other making the former gesture, as if she could not bear a voice.

Now much disturbed, and dazzled with conflicting gleams of hope and dread, I looked at her for some explanation. But seeing how strongly she desired to remain quiet, and feeling that it was my own natural inclination too, at such a time, I did not attempt to break the silence. We proceeded without a word being spoken. Sometimes she glanced out of the window, as though she thought we were going slowly, though indeed we were going fast; but otherwise remained exactly as at first.

We alighted at one of the entrances to the Square she had mentioned, where I directed the coach to wait, not knowing but that we might have some occasion for it. She laid her hand on my arm, and hurried me on to one of the sombre streets, of which there are several in that part, where the houses were once fair dwellings in the occupation of single families, but have, and had, long degenerated into poor lodgings let off in rooms. Entering at the open door of one of these, and releasing my arm, she beckoned me to follow her up the common staircase, which was like a tributary channel to the street.

The house swarmed with inmates. As we went up, doors of rooms were opened and people's heads put out; and we passed other people on the stairs, who were coming down. In glancing up from the outside, before we entered, I had seen women and children lolling at the windows over flower-pots; and we seemed to have attracted their curiosity, for these were principally the observers who looked out of their doors. It was a broad panelled staircase, with massive balustrades of some dark wood; cornices above the doors, ornamented with carved fruit and flowers; and broad seats in the windows. But all these tokens of past grandeur were miserably decayed and dirty; rot, damp, and age, had weakened the flooring, which in many places was unsound and even unsafe. Some attempts had been made, I noticed, to infuse new blood into this dwindling frame, by repairing the costly old wood-work here and there with common deal; but it was like the marriage of a reduced old noble to a plebeian pauper, and each party to the ill-assorted union shrunk away from the other. Several of the back windows on the staircase had been darkened or wholly blocked up. In those that remained, there was scarcely any glass; and, through the crumbling frames by which the bad air seemed always to come in, and never to go out, I saw, through other glassless windows, into other houses in a similar condition, and looked giddily down into a wretched yard, which was the common dust-heap of the mansion.

We proceeded to the top-storey of the house. Two or three times, by the way, I thought I observed in the indistinct light the skirts of a female figure going up before us. As we turned to ascend the last flight of stairs between us and the roof, we caught a full view of this figure pausing for a moment, at a door. Then it turned the handle, and went in.

'What's this!' said Martha, in a whisper. 'She has gone into my room. I don't know her!'

I knew her. I had recognized her with amazement, for Miss Dartle.

I said something to the effect that it was a lady whom I had seen before, in a few words, to my conductress; and had scarcely done so, when we heard her voice in the room, though not, from where we stood, what she was saying. Martha, with an astonished look, repeated her former action, and softly led me up the stairs; and then, by a little back-door which seemed to have no lock, and which she pushed open with a touch, into a small empty garret with a low sloping roof, little better than a cupboard. Between this, and the room she had called hers, there was a small door of communication, standing partly open. Here we stopped, breathless with our ascent, and she placed her hand lightly on my lips. I could only see, of the room beyond, that it was pretty large; that there was a bed in it; and that there were some common pictures of ships upon the walls. I could not see Miss Dartle, or the person whom we had heard her address. Certainly, my companion could not, for my position was the best. A dead silence prevailed for some moments. Martha kept one hand on my lips, and raised the other in a listening attitude.

'It matters little to me her not being at home,' said Rosa Dartle haughtily, 'I know nothing of her. It is you I come to see.'

'Me?' replied a soft voice.

At the sound of it, a thrill went through my frame. For it was Emily's!

'Yes,' returned Miss Dartle, 'I have come to look at you. What? You are not ashamed of the face that has done so much?'

The resolute and unrelenting hatred of her tone, its cold stern sharpness, and its mastered rage, presented her before me, as if I had seen her standing in the light. I saw the flashing black eyes, and the passion-wasted figure; and I saw the scar, with its white track cutting through her lips, quivering and throbbing as she spoke.

'I have come to see,' she said, 'James Steerforth's fancy; the girl who ran away with him, and is the town-talk of the commonest people of her native place; the bold, flaunting, practised companion of persons like James Steerforth. I want to know what such a thing is like.'

There was a rustle, as if the unhappy girl, on whom she heaped these taunts, ran towards the door, and the speaker swiftly interposed herself before it. It was succeeded by a moment's pause.

When Miss Dartle spoke again, it was through her set teeth, and with a stamp upon the ground.

'Stay there!' she said, 'or I'll proclaim you to the house, and the whole street! If you try to evade me, I'll stop you, if it's by the hair, and raise the very stones against you!'

A frightened murmur was the only reply that reached my ears. A silence succeeded. I did not know what to do. Much as I desired to put an end to the interview, I felt that I had no right to present myself; that it was for Mr. Peggotty alone to see her and recover her. Would he never come? I thought impatiently.

'So!' said Rosa Dartle, with a contemptuous laugh, 'I see her at last! Why, he was a poor creature to be taken by that delicate mock-modesty, and that hanging head!'

'Oh, for Heaven's sake, spare me!' exclaimed Emily. 'Whoever you are, you know my pitiable story, and for Heaven's sake spare me, if you would be spared yourself!'

'If I would be spared!' returned the other fiercely; 'what is there in common between US, do you think!'

'Nothing but our sex,' said Emily, with a burst of tears.

'And that,' said Rosa Dartle, 'is so strong a claim, preferred by one so infamous, that if I had any feeling in my breast but scorn and abhorrence of you, it would freeze it up. Our sex! You are an honour to our sex!'

'I have deserved this,' said Emily, 'but it's dreadful! Dear, dear lady, think what I have suffered, and how I am fallen! Oh, Martha, come back! Oh, home, home!'

Miss Dartle placed herself in a chair, within view of the door, and looked downward, as if Emily were crouching on the floor before her. Being now between me and the light, I could see her curled lip, and her cruel eyes intently fixed on one place, with a greedy triumph.

'Listen to what I say!' she said; 'and reserve your false arts for your dupes. Do you hope to move me by your tears? No more than you could charm me by your smiles, you purchased slave.'

'Oh, have some mercy on me!' cried Emily. 'Show me some compassion, or I shall die mad!'

'It would be no great penance,' said Rosa Dartle, 'for your crimes. Do you know what you have done? Do you ever think of the home you have laid waste?'

'Oh, is there ever night or day, when I don't think of it!' cried Emily; and now I could just see her, on her knees, with her head thrown back, her pale face looking upward, her hands wildly clasped and held out, and her hair streaming about her. 'Has there ever been a single minute, waking or sleeping, when it hasn't been before me, just as it used to be in the lost days when I turned my back upon it for ever and for ever! Oh, home, home! Oh dear, dear uncle, if you ever could have known the agony your love would cause me when I fell away from good, you never would have shown it to me so constant, much as you felt it; but would have been angry to me, at least once in my life, that I might have had some comfort! I have none, none, no comfort upon earth, for all of them were always fond of me!' She dropped on her face, before the imperious figure in the chair, with an imploring effort to clasp the skirt of her dress.

Rosa Dartle sat looking down upon her, as inflexible as a figure of brass. Her lips were tightly compressed, as if she knew that she must keep a strong constraint upon herself—I write what I sincerely believe—or she would be tempted to strike the beautiful form with her foot. I saw her, distinctly, and the whole power of her face and character seemed forced into that expression.—-Would he never come?

'The miserable vanity of these earth-worms!' she said, when she had so far controlled the angry heavings of her breast, that she could trust herself to speak. 'YOUR home! Do you imagine that I bestow a thought on it, or suppose you could do any harm to that low place, which money would not pay for, and handsomely? YOUR home! You were a part of the trade of your home, and were bought and sold like any other vendible thing your people dealt in.'

'Oh, not that!' cried Emily. 'Say anything of me; but don't visit my disgrace and shame, more than I have done, on folks who are as honourable as you! Have some respect for them, as you are a lady, if you have no mercy for me.'

'I speak,' she said, not deigning to take any heed of this appeal, and drawing away her dress from the contamination of Emily's touch, 'I speak of HIS home—where I live. Here,' she said, stretching out her hand with her contemptuous laugh, and looking down upon the prostrate girl, 'is a worthy cause of division between lady-mother and gentleman-son; of grief in a house where she wouldn't have been admitted as a kitchen-girl; of anger, and repining, and reproach. This piece of pollution, picked up from the water-side, to be made much of for an hour, and then tossed back to her original place!'

'No! no!' cried Emily, clasping her hands together. 'When he first came into my way—that the day had never dawned upon me, and he had met me being carried to my grave!—I had been brought up as virtuous as you or any lady, and was going to be the wife of as good a man as you or any lady in the world can ever marry. If you live in his home and know him, you know, perhaps, what his power with a weak, vain girl might be. I don't defend myself, but I know well, and he knows well, or he will know when he comes to die, and his mind is troubled with it, that he used all his power to deceive me, and that I believed him, trusted him, and loved him!'

Rosa Dartle sprang up from her seat; recoiled; and in recoiling struck at her, with a face of such malignity, so darkened and disfigured by passion, that I had almost thrown myself between them. The blow, which had no aim, fell upon the air. As she now stood panting, looking at her with the utmost detestation that she was capable of expressing, and trembling from head to foot with rage and scorn, I thought I had never seen such a sight, and never could see such another.

'YOU love him? You?' she cried, with her clenched hand, quivering as if it only wanted a weapon to stab the object of her wrath.

Emily had shrunk out of my view. There was no reply.

'And tell that to ME,' she added, 'with your shameful lips? Why don't they whip these creatures? If I could order it to be done, I would have this girl whipped to death.'

And so she would, I have no doubt. I would not have trusted her with the rack itself, while that furious look lasted. She slowly, very slowly, broke into a laugh, and pointed at Emily with her hand, as if she were a sight of shame for gods and men.

'SHE love!' she said. 'THAT carrion! And he ever cared for her, she'd tell me. Ha, ha! The liars that these traders are!'

Her mockery was worse than her undisguised rage. Of the two, I would have much preferred to be the object of the latter. But, when she suffered it to break loose, it was only for a moment. She had chained it up again, and however it might tear her within, she subdued it to herself.

'I came here, you pure fountain of love,' she said, 'to see—as I began by telling you—what such a thing as you was like. I was curious. I am satisfied. Also to tell you, that you had best seek that home of yours, with all speed, and hide your head among those excellent people who are expecting you, and whom your money will console. When it's all gone, you can believe, and trust, and love again, you know! I thought you a broken toy that had lasted its time; a worthless spangle that was tarnished, and thrown away. But, finding you true gold, a very lady, and an ill-used innocent, with a fresh heart full of love and trustfulness—which you look like, and is quite consistent with your story!—I have something more to say. Attend to it; for what I say I'll do. Do you hear me, you fairy spirit? What I say, I mean to do!'

Her rage got the better of her again, for a moment; but it passed over her face like a spasm, and left her smiling.

'Hide yourself,' she pursued, 'if not at home, somewhere. Let it be somewhere beyond reach; in some obscure life—or, better still, in some obscure death. I wonder, if your loving heart will not break, you have found no way of helping it to be still! I have heard of such means sometimes. I believe they may be easily found.'

A low crying, on the part of Emily, interrupted her here. She stopped, and listened to it as if it were music.

'I am of a strange nature, perhaps,' Rosa Dartle went on; 'but I can't breathe freely in the air you breathe. I find it sickly. Therefore, I will have it cleared; I will have it purified of you. If you live here tomorrow, I'll have your story and your character proclaimed on the common stair. There are decent women in the house, I am told; and it is a pity such a light as you should be among them, and concealed. If, leaving here, you seek any refuge in this town in any character but your true one (which you are welcome to bear, without molestation from me), the same service shall be done you, if I hear of your retreat. Being assisted by a gentleman who not long ago aspired to the favour of your hand, I am sanguine as to that.'

Would he never, never come? How long was I to bear this? How long could I bear it? 'Oh me, oh me!' exclaimed the wretched Emily, in a tone that might have touched the hardest heart, I should have thought; but there was no relenting in Rosa Dartle's smile. 'What, what, shall I do!'

'Do?' returned the other. 'Live happy in your own reflections! Consecrate your existence to the recollection of James Steerforth's tenderness—he would have made you his serving-man's wife, would he not?—-or to feeling grateful to the upright and deserving creature who would have taken you as his gift. Or, if those proud remembrances, and the consciousness of your own virtues, and the honourable position to which they have raised you in the eyes of everything that wears the human shape, will not sustain you, marry that good man, and be happy in his condescension. If this will not do either, die! There are doorways and dust-heaps for such deaths, and such despair—find one, and take your flight to Heaven!'

I heard a distant foot upon the stairs. I knew it, I was certain. It was his, thank God!

She moved slowly from before the door when she said this, and passed out of my sight.

'But mark!' she added, slowly and sternly, opening the other door to go away, 'I am resolved, for reasons that I have and hatreds that I entertain, to cast you out, unless you withdraw from my reach altogether, or drop your pretty mask. This is what I had to say; and what I say, I mean to do!'

The foot upon the stairs came nearer—nearer—passed her as she went down—rushed into the room!

'Uncle!'

A fearful cry followed the word. I paused a moment, and looking in, saw him supporting her insensible figure in his arms. He gazed for a few seconds in the face; then stooped to kiss it—oh, how tenderly!—and drew a handkerchief before it.

'Mas'r Davy,' he said, in a low tremulous voice, when it was covered, 'I thank my Heav'nly Father as my dream's come true! I thank Him hearty for having guided of me, in His own ways, to my darling!'

With those words he took her up in his arms; and, with the veiled face lying on his bosom, and addressed towards his own, carried her, motionless and unconscious, down the stairs.

CHAPTER 51. THE BEGINNING OF A LONGER JOURNEY

It was yet early in the morning of the following day, when, as I was walking in my garden with my aunt (who took little other exercise now, being so much in attendance on my dear Dora), I was told that Mr. Peggotty desired to speak with me. He came into the garden to meet me half-way, on my going towards the gate; and bared his head, as it was always his custom to do when he saw my aunt, for whom he had a high respect. I had been telling her all that had happened overnight. Without saying a word, she walked up with a cordial face, shook hands with him, and patted him on the arm. It was so expressively done, that she had no need to say a word. Mr. Peggotty understood her quite as well as if she had said a thousand.

'I'll go in now, Trot,' said my aunt, 'and look after Little Blossom, who will be getting up presently.'

'Not along of my being heer, ma'am, I hope?' said Mr. Peggotty. 'Unless my wits is gone a bahd's neezing'—by which Mr. Peggotty meant to say, bird's-nesting—'this morning, 'tis along of me as you're a-going to quit us?'

'You have something to say, my good friend,' returned my aunt, 'and will do better without me.'

'By your leave, ma'am,' returned Mr. Peggotty, 'I should take it kind, pervising you doen't mind my clicketten, if you'd bide heer.'

'Would you?' said my aunt, with short good-nature. 'Then I am sure I will!'

So, she drew her arm through Mr. Peggotty's, and walked with him to a leafy little summer-house there was at the bottom of the garden, where she sat down on a bench, and I beside her. There was a seat for Mr. Peggotty too, but he preferred to stand, leaning his hand on the small rustic table. As he stood, looking at his cap for a little while before beginning to speak, I could not help observing what power and force of character his sinewy hand expressed, and what a good and trusty companion it was to his honest brow and iron-grey hair.

'I took my dear child away last night,' Mr. Peggotty began, as he raised his eyes to ours, 'to my lodging, wheer I have a long time been expecting of her and preparing fur her. It was hours afore she knowed me right; and when she did, she kneeled down at my feet, and kiender said to me, as if it was her prayers, how it all come to be. You may believe me, when I heerd her voice, as I had heerd at home so playful—and see her humbled, as it might be in the dust our Saviour wrote in with his blessed hand—I felt a wownd go to my 'art, in the midst of all its thankfulness.'

He drew his sleeve across his face, without any pretence of concealing why; and then cleared his voice.

'It warn't for long as I felt that; for she was found. I had on'y to think as she was found, and it was gone. I doen't know why I do so much as mention of it now, I'm sure. I didn't have it in my mind a minute ago, to say a word about myself; but it come up so nat'ral, that I yielded to it afore I was aweer.'

'You are a self-denying soul,' said my aunt, 'and will have your reward.'

Mr. Peggotty, with the shadows of the leaves playing athwart his face, made a surprised inclination of the head towards my aunt, as an acknowledgement of her good opinion; then took up the thread he had relinquished.

'When my Em'ly took flight,' he said, in stern wrath for the moment, 'from the house wheer she was made a prisoner by that theer spotted snake as Mas'r Davy see,—and his story's trew, and may GOD confound him!—she took flight in the night. It was a dark night, with a many stars a-shining. She was wild. She ran along the sea beach, believing the old boat was theer; and calling out to us to turn away our faces, for she was a-coming by. She heerd herself a-crying out, like as if it was another person; and cut herself on them sharp-pinted stones and rocks, and felt it no more than if she had been rock herself. Ever so fur she run, and there was fire afore her eyes, and roarings in her ears. Of a sudden—or so she thowt, you unnerstand—the day broke, wet and windy, and she was lying b'low a heap of stone upon the shore, and a woman was a-speaking to her, saying, in the language of that country, what was it as had gone so much amiss?'

He saw everything he related. It passed before him, as he spoke, so vividly, that, in the intensity of his earnestness, he presented what he described to me, with greater distinctness than I can express. I can hardly believe, writing now long afterwards, but that I was actually present in these scenes; they are impressed upon me with such an astonishing air of fidelity.

'As Em'ly's eyes—which was heavy—see this woman better,' Mr. Peggotty went on, 'she know'd as she was one of them as she had often talked to on the beach. Fur, though she had run (as I have said) ever so fur in the night, she had oftentimes wandered long ways, partly afoot, partly in boats and carriages, and know'd all that country, 'long the coast, miles and miles. She hadn't no children of her own, this woman, being a young wife; but she was a-looking to have one afore long. And may my prayers go up to Heaven that 'twill be a happiness to her, and a comfort, and a honour, all her life! May it love her and be dootiful to her, in her old age; helpful of her at the last; a Angel to her heer, and heerafter!'

'Amen!' said my aunt.

'She had been summat timorous and down,' said Mr. Peggotty, and had sat, at first, a little way off, at her spinning, or such work as it was, when Em'ly talked to the children. But Em'ly had took notice of her, and had gone and spoke to her; and as the young woman was partial to the children herself, they had soon made friends. Sermuchser, that when Em'ly went that way, she always giv Em'ly flowers. This was her as now asked what it was that had gone so much amiss. Em'ly told her, and she—took her home. She did indeed. She took her home,' said Mr. Peggotty, covering his face.

He was more affected by this act of kindness, than I had ever seen him affected by anything since the night she went away. My aunt and I did not attempt to disturb him.

'It was a little cottage, you may suppose,' he said, presently, 'but she found space for Em'ly in it,—her husband was away at sea,—and she kep it secret, and prevailed upon such neighbours as she had (they was not many near) to keep it secret too. Em'ly was took bad with fever, and, what is very strange to me is,—maybe 'tis not so strange to scholars,—the language of that country went out of her head, and she could only speak her own, that no one unnerstood. She recollects, as if she had dreamed it, that she lay there always a-talking her own tongue, always believing as the old boat was round the next pint in the bay, and begging and imploring of 'em to send theer and tell how she was dying, and bring back a message of forgiveness, if it was on'y a wured. A'most the whole time, she thowt,—now, that him as I made mention on just now was lurking for her unnerneath the winder; now that him as had brought her to this was in the room,—and cried to the good young woman not to give her up, and know'd, at the same time, that she couldn't unnerstand, and dreaded that she must be took away. Likewise the fire was afore her eyes, and the roarings in her ears; and theer was no today, nor yesterday, nor yet tomorrow; but everything in her life as ever had been, or as ever could be, and everything as never had been, and as never could be, was a crowding on her all at once, and nothing clear nor welcome, and yet she sang and laughed about it! How long this lasted, I doen't know; but then theer come a sleep; and in that sleep, from being a many times stronger than her own self, she fell into the weakness of the littlest child.'

Here he stopped, as if for relief from the terrors of his own description. After being silent for a few moments, he pursued his story.

'It was a pleasant arternoon when she awoke; and so quiet, that there warn't a sound but the rippling of that blue sea without a tide, upon the shore. It was her belief, at first, that she was at home upon a Sunday morning; but the vine leaves as she see at the winder, and the hills beyond, warn't home, and contradicted of her. Then, come in her friend to watch alongside of her bed; and then she know'd as the old boat warn't round that next pint in the bay no more, but was fur off; and know'd where she was, and why; and broke out a-crying on that good young woman's bosom, wheer I hope her baby is a-lying now, a-cheering of her with its pretty eyes!'

He could not speak of this good friend of Emily's without a flow of tears. It was in vain to try. He broke down again, endeavouring to bless her!

'That done my Em'ly good,' he resumed, after such emotion as I could not behold without sharing in; and as to my aunt, she wept with all her heart; 'that done Em'ly good, and she begun to mend. But, the language of that country was quite gone from her, and she was forced to make signs. So she went on, getting better from day to day, slow, but sure, and trying to learn the names of common things—names as she seemed never to have heerd in all her life—till one evening come, when she was a-setting at her window, looking at a little girl at play upon the beach. And of a sudden this child held out her hand, and said, what would be in English, "Fisherman's daughter, here's a shell!"—for you are to unnerstand that they used at first to call her "Pretty lady", as the general way in that country is, and that she had taught 'em to call her "Fisherman's daughter" instead. The child says of a sudden, "Fisherman's daughter, here's a shell!" Then Em'ly unnerstands her; and she answers, bursting out a-crying; and it all comes back!

'When Em'ly got strong again,' said Mr. Peggotty, after another short interval of silence, 'she cast about to leave that good young creetur, and get to her own country. The husband was come home, then; and the two together put her aboard a small trader bound to Leghorn, and from that to France. She had a little money, but it was less than little as they would take for all they done. I'm a'most glad on it, though they was so poor! What they done, is laid up wheer neither moth or rust doth corrupt, and wheer thieves do not break through nor steal. Mas'r Davy, it'll outlast all the treasure in the wureld.

'Em'ly got to France, and took service to wait on travelling ladies at a inn in the port. Theer, theer come, one day, that snake. —Let him never come nigh me. I doen't know what hurt I might do him!—Soon as she see him, without him seeing her, all her fear and wildness returned upon her, and she fled afore the very breath he draw'd. She come to England, and was set ashore at Dover.

'I doen't know,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'for sure, when her 'art begun to fail her; but all the way to England she had thowt to come to her dear home. Soon as she got to England she turned her face tow'rds it. But, fear of not being forgiv, fear of being pinted at, fear of some of us being dead along of her, fear of many things, turned her from it, kiender by force, upon the road: "Uncle, uncle," she says to me, "the fear of not being worthy to do what my torn and bleeding breast so longed to do, was the most fright'ning fear of all! I turned back, when my 'art was full of prayers that I might crawl to the old door-step, in the night, kiss it, lay my wicked face upon it, and theer be found dead in the morning."

'She come,' said Mr. Peggotty, dropping his voice to an awe-stricken whisper, 'to London. She—as had never seen it in her life—alone—without a penny—young—so pretty—come to London. A'most the moment as she lighted heer, all so desolate, she found (as she believed) a friend; a decent woman as spoke to her about the needle-work as she had been brought up to do, about finding plenty of it fur her, about a lodging fur the night, and making secret inquiration concerning of me and all at home, tomorrow. When my child,' he said aloud, and with an energy of gratitude that shook him from head to foot, 'stood upon the brink of more than I can say or think on—Martha, trew to her promise, saved her.'

I could not repress a cry of joy.

'Mas'r Davy!' said he, gripping my hand in that strong hand of his, 'it was you as first made mention of her to me. I thankee, sir! She was arnest. She had know'd of her bitter knowledge wheer to watch and what to do. She had done it. And the Lord was above all! She come, white and hurried, upon Em'ly in her sleep. She says to her, "Rise up from worse than death, and come with me!" Them belonging to the house would have stopped her, but they might as soon have stopped the sea. "Stand away from me," she says, "I am a ghost that calls her from beside her open grave!" She told Em'ly she had seen me, and know'd I loved her, and forgive her. She wrapped her, hasty, in her clothes. She took her, faint and trembling, on her arm. She heeded no more what they said, than if she had had no ears. She walked among 'em with my child, minding only her; and brought her safe out, in the dead of the night, from that black pit of ruin!

'She attended on Em'ly,' said Mr. Peggotty, who had released my hand, and put his own hand on his heaving chest; 'she attended to my Em'ly, lying wearied out, and wandering betwixt whiles, till late next day. Then she went in search of me; then in search of you, Mas'r Davy. She didn't tell Em'ly what she come out fur, lest her 'art should fail, and she should think of hiding of herself. How the cruel lady know'd of her being theer, I can't say. Whether him as I have spoke so much of, chanced to see 'em going theer, or whether (which is most like, to my thinking) he had heerd it from the woman, I doen't greatly ask myself. My niece is found.

'All night long,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'we have been together, Em'ly and me. 'Tis little (considering the time) as she has said, in wureds, through them broken-hearted tears; 'tis less as I have seen of her dear face, as grow'd into a woman's at my hearth. But, all night long, her arms has been about my neck; and her head has laid heer; and we knows full well, as we can put our trust in one another, ever more.'

He ceased to speak, and his hand upon the table rested there in perfect repose, with a resolution in it that might have conquered lions.

'It was a gleam of light upon me, Trot,' said my aunt, drying her eyes, 'when I formed the resolution of being godmother to your sister Betsey Trotwood, who disappointed me; but, next to that, hardly anything would have given me greater pleasure, than to be godmother to that good young creature's baby!'

Mr. Peggotty nodded his understanding of my aunt's feelings, but could not trust himself with any verbal reference to the subject of her commendation. We all remained silent, and occupied with our own reflections (my aunt drying her eyes, and now sobbing convulsively, and now laughing and calling herself a fool); until I spoke.

'You have quite made up your mind,' said I to Mr. Peggotty, 'as to the future, good friend? I need scarcely ask you.'

'Quite, Mas'r Davy,' he returned; 'and told Em'ly. Theer's mighty countries, fur from heer. Our future life lays over the sea.'

'They will emigrate together, aunt,' said I.

'Yes!' said Mr. Peggotty, with a hopeful smile. 'No one can't reproach my darling in Australia. We will begin a new life over theer!'

I asked him if he yet proposed to himself any time for going away.

'I was down at the Docks early this morning, sir,' he returned, 'to get information concerning of them ships. In about six weeks or two months from now, there'll be one sailing—I see her this morning—went aboard—and we shall take our passage in her.'

'Quite alone?' I asked.

'Aye, Mas'r Davy!' he returned. 'My sister, you see, she's that fond of you and yourn, and that accustomed to think on'y of her own country, that it wouldn't be hardly fair to let her go. Besides which, theer's one she has in charge, Mas'r Davy, as doen't ought to be forgot.'

'Poor Ham!' said I.

'My good sister takes care of his house, you see, ma'am, and he takes kindly to her,' Mr. Peggotty explained for my aunt's better information. 'He'll set and talk to her, with a calm spirit, wen it's like he couldn't bring himself to open his lips to another. Poor fellow!' said Mr. Peggotty, shaking his head, 'theer's not so much left him, that he could spare the little as he has!'

'And Mrs. Gummidge?' said I.

'Well, I've had a mort of consideration, I do tell you,' returned Mr. Peggotty, with a perplexed look which gradually cleared as he went on, 'concerning of Missis Gummidge. You see, wen Missis Gummidge falls a-thinking of the old 'un, she an't what you may call good company. Betwixt you and me, Mas'r Davy—and you, ma'am—wen Mrs. Gummidge takes to wimicking,'—our old country word for crying,—'she's liable to be considered to be, by them as didn't know the old 'un, peevish-like. Now I DID know the old 'un,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'and I know'd his merits, so I unnerstan' her; but 'tan't entirely so, you see, with others—nat'rally can't be!'

My aunt and I both acquiesced.

'Wheerby,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'my sister might—I doen't say she would, but might—find Missis Gummidge give her a leetle trouble now-and-again.

Theerfur 'tan't my intentions to moor Missis Gummidge 'long with them, but to find a Beein' fur her wheer she can fisherate for herself.' (A Beein' signifies, in that dialect, a home, and to fisherate is to provide.) 'Fur which purpose,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'I means to make her a 'lowance afore I go, as'll leave her pretty comfort'ble. She's the faithfullest of creeturs. 'Tan't to be expected, of course, at her time of life, and being lone and lorn, as the good old Mawther is to be knocked about aboardship, and in the woods and wilds of a new and fur-away country. So that's what I'm a-going to do with her.'

He forgot nobody. He thought of everybody's claims and strivings, but his own.

'Em'ly,' he continued, 'will keep along with me—poor child, she's sore in need of peace and rest!—until such time as we goes upon our voyage. She'll work at them clothes, as must be made; and I hope her troubles will begin to seem longer ago than they was, wen she finds herself once more by her rough but loving uncle.'

MY aunt nodded confirmation of this hope, and imparted great satisfaction to Mr. Peggotty.

'Theer's one thing furder, Mas'r Davy,' said he, putting his hand in his breast-pocket, and gravely taking out the little paper bundle I had seen before, which he unrolled on the table. 'Theer's these here banknotes—fifty pound, and ten. To them I wish to add the money as she come away with. I've asked her about that (but not saying why), and have added of it up. I an't a scholar. Would you be so kind as see how 'tis?'

He handed me, apologetically for his scholarship, a piece of paper, and observed me while I looked it over. It was quite right.

'Thankee, sir,' he said, taking it back. 'This money, if you doen't see objections, Mas'r Davy, I shall put up jest afore I go, in a cover directed to him; and put that up in another, directed to his mother. I shall tell her, in no more wureds than I speak to you, what it's the price on; and that I'm gone, and past receiving of it back.'

I told him that I thought it would be right to do so—that I was thoroughly convinced it would be, since he felt it to be right.

'I said that theer was on'y one thing furder,' he proceeded with a grave smile, when he had made up his little bundle again, and put it in his pocket; 'but theer was two. I warn't sure in my mind, wen I come out this morning, as I could go and break to Ham, of my own self, what had so thankfully happened. So I writ a letter while I was out, and put it in the post-office, telling of 'em how all was as 'tis; and that I should come down tomorrow to unload my mind of what little needs a-doing of down theer, and, most-like, take my farewell leave of Yarmouth.'

'And do you wish me to go with you?' said I, seeing that he left something unsaid.

'If you could do me that kind favour, Mas'r Davy,' he replied. 'I know the sight on you would cheer 'em up a bit.'

My little Dora being in good spirits, and very desirous that I should go—as I found on talking it over with her—I readily pledged myself to accompany him in accordance with his wish. Next morning, consequently, we were on the Yarmouth coach, and again travelling over the old ground.

As we passed along the familiar street at night—Mr. Peggotty, in despite of all my remonstrances, carrying my bag—I glanced into Omer and Joram's shop, and saw my old friend Mr. Omer there, smoking his pipe. I felt reluctant to be present, when Mr. Peggotty first met his sister and Ham; and made Mr. Omer my excuse for lingering behind.

'How is Mr. Omer, after this long time?' said I, going in.

He fanned away the smoke of his pipe, that he might get a better view of me, and soon recognized me with great delight.

'I should get up, sir, to acknowledge such an honour as this visit,' said he, 'only my limbs are rather out of sorts, and I am wheeled about. With the exception of my limbs and my breath, howsoever, I am as hearty as a man can be, I'm thankful to say.'

I congratulated him on his contented looks and his good spirits, and saw, now, that his easy-chair went on wheels.

'It's an ingenious thing, ain't it?' he inquired, following the direction of my glance, and polishing the elbow with his arm. 'It runs as light as a feather, and tracks as true as a mail-coach. Bless you, my little Minnie—my grand-daughter you know, Minnie's child—puts her little strength against the back, gives it a shove, and away we go, as clever and merry as ever you see anything! And I tell you what—it's a most uncommon chair to smoke a pipe in.'

I never saw such a good old fellow to make the best of a thing, and find out the enjoyment of it, as Mr. Omer. He was as radiant, as if his chair, his asthma, and the failure of his limbs, were the various branches of a great invention for enhancing the luxury of a pipe.

'I see more of the world, I can assure you,' said Mr. Omer, 'in this chair, than ever I see out of it. You'd be surprised at the number of people that looks in of a day to have a chat. You really would! There's twice as much in the newspaper, since I've taken to this chair, as there used to be. As to general reading, dear me, what a lot of it I do get through! That's what I feel so strong, you know! If it had been my eyes, what should I have done? If it had been my ears, what should I have done? Being my limbs, what does it signify? Why, my limbs only made my breath shorter when I used 'em. And now, if I want to go out into the street or down to the sands, I've only got to call Dick, Joram's youngest 'prentice, and away I go in my own carriage, like the Lord Mayor of London.'

He half suffocated himself with laughing here.

'Lord bless you!' said Mr. Omer, resuming his pipe, 'a man must take the fat with the lean; that's what he must make up his mind to, in this life. Joram does a fine business. Ex-cellent business!'

'I am very glad to hear it,' said I.

'I knew you would be,' said Mr. Omer. 'And Joram and Minnie are like Valentines. What more can a man expect? What's his limbs to that!'

His supreme contempt for his own limbs, as he sat smoking, was one of the pleasantest oddities I have ever encountered.

'And since I've took to general reading, you've took to general writing, eh, sir?' said Mr. Omer, surveying me admiringly. 'What a lovely work that was of yours! What expressions in it! I read it every word—every word. And as to feeling sleepy! Not at all!'

I laughingly expressed my satisfaction, but I must confess that I thought this association of ideas significant.

'I give you my word and honour, sir,' said Mr. Omer, 'that when I lay that book upon the table, and look at it outside; compact in three separate and indiwidual wollumes—one, two, three; I am as proud as Punch to think that I once had the honour of being connected with your family. And dear me, it's a long time ago, now, ain't it? Over at Blunderstone. With a pretty little party laid along with the other party. And you quite a small party then, yourself. Dear, dear!'

I changed the subject by referring to Emily. After assuring him that I did not forget how interested he had always been in her, and how kindly he had always treated her, I gave him a general account of her restoration to her uncle by the aid of Martha; which I knew would please the old man. He listened with the utmost attention, and said, feelingly, when I had done:

'I am rejoiced at it, sir! It's the best news I have heard for many a day. Dear, dear, dear! And what's going to be undertook for that unfortunate young woman, Martha, now?'

'You touch a point that my thoughts have been dwelling on since yesterday,' said I, 'but on which I can give you no information yet, Mr. Omer. Mr. Peggotty has not alluded to it, and I have a delicacy in doing so. I am sure he has not forgotten it. He forgets nothing that is disinterested and good.'

'Because you know,' said Mr. Omer, taking himself up, where he had left off, 'whatever is done, I should wish to be a member of. Put me down for anything you may consider right, and let me know. I never could think the girl all bad, and I am glad to find she's not. So will my daughter Minnie be. Young women are contradictory creatures in some things—her mother was just the same as her—but their hearts are soft and kind. It's all show with Minnie, about Martha. Why she should consider it necessary to make any show, I don't undertake to tell you. But it's all show, bless you. She'd do her any kindness in private. So, put me down for whatever you may consider right, will you be so good? and drop me a line where to forward it. Dear me!' said Mr. Omer, 'when a man is drawing on to a time of life, where the two ends of life meet; when he finds himself, however hearty he is, being wheeled about for the second time, in a speeches of go-cart; he should be over-rejoiced to do a kindness if he can. He wants plenty. And I don't speak of myself, particular,' said Mr. Omer, 'because, sir, the way I look at it is, that we are all drawing on to the bottom of the hill, whatever age we are, on account of time never standing still for a single moment. So let us always do a kindness, and be over-rejoiced. To be sure!'

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and put it on a ledge in the back of his chair, expressly made for its reception.

'There's Em'ly's cousin, him that she was to have been married to,' said Mr. Omer, rubbing his hands feebly, 'as fine a fellow as there is in Yarmouth! He'll come and talk or read to me, in the evening, for an hour together sometimes. That's a kindness, I should call it! All his life's a kindness.'

'I am going to see him now,' said I.

'Are you?' said Mr. Omer. 'Tell him I was hearty, and sent my respects. Minnie and Joram's at a ball. They would be as proud to see you as I am, if they was at home. Minnie won't hardly go out at all, you see, "on account of father", as she says. So I swore tonight, that if she didn't go, I'd go to bed at six. In consequence of which,' Mr. Omer shook himself and his chair with laughter at the success of his device, 'she and Joram's at a ball.'

I shook hands with him, and wished him good night.

'Half a minute, sir,' said Mr. Omer. 'If you was to go without seeing my little elephant, you'd lose the best of sights. You never see such a sight! Minnie!' A musical little voice answered, from somewhere upstairs, 'I am coming, grandfather!' and a pretty little girl with long, flaxen, curling hair, soon came running into the shop.

'This is my little elephant, sir,' said Mr. Omer, fondling the child. 'Siamese breed, sir. Now, little elephant!'

The little elephant set the door of the parlour open, enabling me to see that, in these latter days, it was converted into a bedroom for Mr. Omer who could not be easily conveyed upstairs; and then hid her pretty forehead, and tumbled her long hair, against the back of Mr. Omer's chair.

'The elephant butts, you know, sir,' said Mr. Omer, winking, 'when he goes at a object. Once, elephant. Twice. Three times!'

At this signal, the little elephant, with a dexterity that was next to marvellous in so small an animal, whisked the chair round with Mr. Omer in it, and rattled it off, pell-mell, into the parlour, without touching the door-post: Mr. Omer indescribably enjoying the performance, and looking back at me on the road as if it were the triumphant issue of his life's exertions.

After a stroll about the town I went to Ham's house. Peggotty had now removed here for good; and had let her own house to the successor of Mr. Barkis in the carrying business, who had paid her very well for the good-will, cart, and horse. I believe the very same slow horse that Mr. Barkis drove was still at work.

I found them in the neat kitchen, accompanied by Mrs. Gummidge, who had been fetched from the old boat by Mr. Peggotty himself. I doubt if she could have been induced to desert her post, by anyone else. He had evidently told them all. Both Peggotty and Mrs. Gummidge had their aprons to their eyes, and Ham had just stepped out 'to take a turn on the beach'. He presently came home, very glad to see me; and I hope they were all the better for my being there. We spoke, with some approach to cheerfulness, of

Mr. Peggotty's growing rich in a new country, and of the wonders he would describe in his letters. We said nothing of Emily by name, but distantly referred to her more than once. Ham was the serenest of the party.

But, Peggotty told me, when she lighted me to a little chamber where the Crocodile book was lying ready for me on the table, that he always was the same. She believed (she told me, crying) that he was broken-hearted; though he was as full of courage as of sweetness, and worked harder and better than any boat-builder in any yard in all that part. There were times, she said, of an evening, when he talked of their old life in the boat-house; and then he mentioned Emily as a child. But, he never mentioned her as a woman.

I thought I had read in his face that he would like to speak to me alone. I therefore resolved to put myself in his way next evening, as he came home from his work. Having settled this with myself, I fell asleep. That night, for the first time in all those many nights, the candle was taken out of the window, Mr. Peggotty swung in his old hammock in the old boat, and the wind murmured with the old sound round his head.

All next day, he was occupied in disposing of his fishing-boat and tackle; in packing up, and sending to London by waggon, such of his little domestic possessions as he thought would be useful to him; and in parting with the rest, or bestowing them on Mrs. Gummidge. She was with him all day. As I had a sorrowful wish to see the old place once more, before it was locked up, I engaged to meet them there in the evening. But I so arranged it, as that I should meet Ham first.

It was easy to come in his way, as I knew where he worked. I met him at a retired part of the sands, which I knew he would cross, and turned back with him, that he might have leisure to speak to me if he really wished. I had not mistaken the expression of his face. We had walked but a little way together, when he said, without looking at me:

'Mas'r Davy, have you seen her?'

'Only for a moment, when she was in a swoon,' I softly answered.

We walked a little farther, and he said:

'Mas'r Davy, shall you see her, d'ye think?'

'It would be too painful to her, perhaps,' said I.

'I have thowt of that,' he replied. 'So 'twould, sir, so 'twould.'

'But, Ham,' said I, gently, 'if there is anything that I could write to her, for you, in case I could not tell it; if there is anything you would wish to make known to her through me; I should consider it a sacred trust.'

'I am sure on't. I thankee, sir, most kind! I think theer is something I could wish said or wrote.'

'What is it?'

We walked a little farther in silence, and then he spoke.

''Tan't that I forgive her. 'Tan't that so much. 'Tis more as I beg of her to forgive me, for having pressed my affections upon her. Odd times, I think that if I hadn't had her promise fur to marry me, sir, she was that trustful of me, in a friendly way, that she'd have told me what was struggling in her mind, and would have counselled with me, and I might have saved her.'

I pressed his hand. 'Is that all?' 'Theer's yet a something else,' he returned, 'if I can say it, Mas'r Davy.'

We walked on, farther than we had walked yet, before he spoke again. He was not crying when he made the pauses I shall express by lines. He was merely collecting himself to speak very plainly.

'I loved her—and I love the mem'ry of her—too deep—to be able to lead her to believe of my own self as I'm a happy man. I could only be happy—by forgetting of her—and I'm afeerd I couldn't hardly bear as she should be told I done that. But if you, being so full of learning, Mas'r Davy, could think of anything to say as might bring her to believe I wasn't greatly hurt: still loving of her, and mourning for her: anything as might bring her to believe as I was not tired of my life, and yet was hoping fur to see her without blame, wheer the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest—anything as would ease her sorrowful mind, and yet not make her think as I could ever marry, or as 'twas possible that anyone could ever be to me what she was—I should ask of you to say that—with my prayers for her—that was so dear.'

I pressed his manly hand again, and told him I would charge myself to do this as well as I could.

'I thankee, sir,' he answered. ''Twas kind of you to meet me. 'Twas kind of you to bear him company down. Mas'r Davy, I unnerstan' very well, though my aunt will come to Lon'on afore they sail, and they'll unite once more, that I am not like to see him agen. I fare to feel sure on't. We doen't say so, but so 'twill be, and better so. The last you see on him—the very last—will you give him the lovingest duty and thanks of the orphan, as he was ever more than a father to?'

This I also promised, faithfully.

'I thankee agen, sir,' he said, heartily shaking hands. 'I know wheer you're a-going. Good-bye!'

With a slight wave of his hand, as though to explain to me that he could not enter the old place, he turned away. As I looked after his figure, crossing the waste in the moonlight, I saw him turn his face towards a strip of silvery light upon the sea, and pass on, looking at it, until he was a shadow in the distance.

The door of the boat-house stood open when I approached; and, on entering, I found it emptied of all its furniture, saving one of the old lockers, on which Mrs. Gummidge, with a basket on her knee, was seated, looking at Mr. Peggotty. He leaned his elbow on the rough chimney-piece, and gazed upon a few expiring embers in the grate; but he raised his head, hopefully, on my coming in, and spoke in a cheery manner.

'Come, according to promise, to bid farewell to 't, eh, Mas'r Davy?' he said, taking up the candle. 'Bare enough, now, an't it?' 'Indeed you have made good use of the time,' said I.

'Why, we have not been idle, sir. Missis Gummidge has worked like a—I doen't know what Missis Gummidge an't worked like,' said Mr. Peggotty, looking at her, at a loss for a sufficiently approving simile.

Mrs. Gummidge, leaning on her basket, made no observation.

'Theer's the very locker that you used to sit on, 'long with Em'ly!' said Mr. Peggotty, in a whisper. 'I'm a-going to carry it away with me, last of all. And heer's your old little bedroom, see, Mas'r Davy! A'most as bleak tonight, as 'art could wish!'

In truth, the wind, though it was low, had a solemn sound, and crept around the deserted house with a whispered wailing that was very mournful. Everything was gone, down to the little mirror with the oyster-shell frame. I thought of myself, lying here, when that first great change was being wrought at home. I thought of the blue-eyed child who had enchanted me. I thought of Steerforth: and a foolish, fearful fancy came upon me of his being near at hand, and liable to be met at any turn.

''Tis like to be long,' said Mr. Peggotty, in a low voice, 'afore the boat finds new tenants. They look upon 't, down beer, as being unfortunate now!'

'Does it belong to anybody in the neighbourhood?' I asked.

'To a mast-maker up town,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'I'm a-going to give the key to him tonight.'

We looked into the other little room, and came back to Mrs. Gummidge, sitting on the locker, whom Mr. Peggotty, putting the light on the chimney-piece, requested to rise, that he might carry it outside the door before extinguishing the candle.

'Dan'l,' said Mrs. Gummidge, suddenly deserting her basket, and clinging to his arm 'my dear Dan'l, the parting words I speak in this house is, I mustn't be left behind. Doen't ye think of leaving me behind, Dan'l! Oh, doen't ye ever do it!'

Mr. Peggotty, taken aback, looked from Mrs. Gummidge to me, and from me to Mrs. Gummidge, as if he had been awakened from a sleep.

'Doen't ye, dearest Dan'l, doen't ye!' cried Mrs. Gummidge, fervently. 'Take me 'long with you, Dan'l, take me 'long with you and Em'ly! I'll be your servant, constant and trew. If there's slaves in them parts where you're a-going, I'll be bound to you for one, and happy, but doen't ye leave me behind, Dan'l, that's a deary dear!'

'My good soul,' said Mr. Peggotty, shaking his head, 'you doen't know what a long voyage, and what a hard life 'tis!' 'Yes, I do, Dan'l! I can guess!' cried Mrs. Gummidge. 'But my parting words under this roof is, I shall go into the house and die, if I am not took. I can dig, Dan'l. I can work. I can live hard. I can be loving and patient now—more than you think, Dan'l, if you'll on'y try me. I wouldn't touch the 'lowance, not if I was dying of want, Dan'l Peggotty; but I'll go with you and Em'ly, if you'll on'y let me, to the world's end! I know how 'tis; I know you think that I am lone and lorn; but, deary love, 'tan't so no more! I ain't sat here, so long, a-watching, and a-thinking of your trials, without some good being done me. Mas'r Davy, speak to him for me! I knows his ways, and Em'ly's, and I knows their sorrows, and can be a comfort to 'em, some odd times, and labour for 'em allus! Dan'l, deary Dan'l, let me go 'long with you!'

And Mrs. Gummidge took his hand, and kissed it with a homely pathos and affection, in a homely rapture of devotion and gratitude, that he well deserved.

We brought the locker out, extinguished the candle, fastened the door on the outside, and left the old boat close shut up, a dark speck in the cloudy night. Next day, when we were returning to London outside the coach, Mrs. Gummidge and her basket were on the seat behind, and Mrs. Gummidge was happy.

CHAPTER 52. I ASSIST AT AN EXPLOSION

When the time Mr. Micawber had appointed so mysteriously, was within four-and-twenty hours of being come, my aunt and I consulted how we should proceed; for my aunt was very unwilling to leave Dora. Ah! how easily I carried Dora up and down stairs, now!

We were disposed, notwithstanding Mr. Micawber's stipulation for my aunt's attendance, to arrange that she should stay at home, and be represented by Mr. Dick and me. In short, we had resolved to take this course, when Dora again unsettled us by declaring that she never would forgive herself, and never would forgive her bad boy, if my aunt remained behind, on any pretence.

'I won't speak to you,' said Dora, shaking her curls at my aunt. 'I'll be disagreeable! I'll make Jip bark at you all day. I shall be sure that you really are a cross old thing, if you don't go!'

'Tut, Blossom!' laughed my aunt. 'You know you can't do without me!'

'Yes, I can,' said Dora. 'You are no use to me at all. You never run up and down stairs for me, all day long. You never sit and tell me stories about Doady, when his shoes were worn out, and he was covered with dust—oh, what a poor little mite of a fellow! You never do anything at all to please me, do you, dear?' Dora made haste to kiss my aunt, and say, 'Yes, you do! I'm only joking!'-lest my aunt should think she really meant it.

'But, aunt,' said Dora, coaxingly, 'now listen. You must go. I shall tease you, 'till you let me have my own way about it. I shall lead my naughty boy such a life, if he don't make you go. I shall make myself so disagreeable—and so will Jip! You'll wish you had gone, like a good thing, for ever and ever so long, if you don't go. Besides,' said Dora, putting back her hair, and looking wonderingly at my aunt and me, 'why shouldn't you both go? I am not very ill indeed. Am I?'

'Why, what a question!' cried my aunt.

'What a fancy!' said I.

'Yes! I know I am a silly little thing!' said Dora, slowly looking from one of us to the other, and then putting up her pretty lips to kiss us as she lay upon her couch. 'Well, then, you must both go, or I shall not believe you; and then I shall cry!'

I saw, in my aunt's face, that she began to give way now, and Dora brightened again, as she saw it too.

'You'll come back with so much to tell me, that it'll take at least a week to make me understand!' said Dora. 'Because I know I shan't understand, for a length of time, if there's any business in it. And there's sure to be some business in it! If there's anything to add up, besides, I don't know when I shall make it out; and my bad boy will look so miserable all the time. There! Now you'll go, won't you? You'll only be gone one night, and Jip will take care of me while you are gone. Doady will carry me upstairs before you go, and I won't come down again till you come back; and you shall take Agnes a dreadfully scolding letter from me, because she has never been to see us!'

We agreed, without any more consultation, that we would both go, and that Dora was a little Impostor, who feigned to be rather unwell, because she liked to be petted. She was greatly pleased, and very merry; and we four, that is to say, my aunt, Mr. Dick, Traddles, and I, went down to Canterbury by the Dover mail that night.

At the hotel where Mr. Micawber had requested us to await him, which we got into, with some trouble, in the middle of the night, I found a letter, importing that he would appear in the morning punctually at half past nine. After which, we went shivering, at that uncomfortable hour, to our respective beds, through various close passages; which smelt as if they had been steeped, for ages, in a solution of soup and stables.

Early in the morning, I sauntered through the dear old tranquil streets, and again mingled with the shadows of the venerable gateways and churches. The rooks were sailing about the cathedral towers; and the towers themselves, overlooking many a long unaltered mile of the rich country and its pleasant streams, were cutting the bright morning air, as if there were no such thing as change on earth. Yet the bells, when they sounded, told me sorrowfully of change in everything; told me of their own age, and my pretty Dora's youth; and of the many, never old, who had lived and loved and died, while the reverberations of the bells had hummed through the rusty armour of the Black Prince hanging up within, and, motes upon the deep of Time, had lost themselves in air, as circles do in water.

I looked at the old house from the corner of the street, but did not go nearer to it, lest, being observed, I might unwittingly do any harm to the design I had come to aid. The early sun was striking edgewise on its gables and lattice-windows, touching them with gold; and some beams of its old peace seemed to touch my heart.

I strolled into the country for an hour or so, and then returned by the main street, which in the interval had shaken off its last night's sleep. Among those who were stirring in the shops, I saw my ancient enemy the butcher, now advanced to top-boots and a baby, and in business for himself. He was nursing the baby, and appeared to be a benignant member of society.

We all became very anxious and impatient, when we sat down to breakfast. As it approached nearer and nearer to half past nine o'clock, our restless expectation of Mr. Micawber increased. At last we made no more pretence of attending to the meal, which, except with Mr. Dick, had been a mere form from the first; but my aunt walked up and down the room, Traddles sat upon the sofa affecting to read the paper with his eyes on the ceiling; and I looked out of the window to give early notice of Mr. Micawber's coming. Nor had I long to watch, for, at the first chime of the half hour, he appeared in the street.

'Here he is,' said I, 'and not in his legal attire!'

My aunt tied the strings of her bonnet (she had come down to breakfast in it), and put on her shawl, as if she were ready for anything that was resolute and uncompromising. Traddles buttoned his coat with a determined air. Mr. Dick, disturbed by these formidable appearances, but feeling it necessary to imitate them, pulled his hat, with both hands, as firmly over his ears as he possibly could; and instantly took it off again, to welcome Mr. Micawber.

'Gentlemen, and madam,' said Mr. Micawber, 'good morning! My dear sir,' to Mr. Dick, who shook hands with him violently, 'you are extremely good.'

'Have you breakfasted?' said Mr. Dick. 'Have a chop!'

'Not for the world, my good sir!' cried Mr. Micawber, stopping him on his way to the bell; 'appetite and myself, Mr. Dixon, have long been strangers.'

Mr. Dixon was so well pleased with his new name, and appeared to think it so obliging in Mr. Micawber to confer it upon him, that he shook hands with him again, and laughed rather childishly.

'Dick,' said my aunt, 'attention!'

Mr. Dick recovered himself, with a blush.

'Now, sir,' said my aunt to Mr. Micawber, as she put on her gloves, 'we are ready for Mount Vesuvius, or anything else, as soon as YOU please.'

'Madam,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'I trust you will shortly witness an eruption. Mr. Traddles, I have your permission, I believe, to mention here that we have been in communication together?'

'It is undoubtedly the fact, Copperfield,' said Traddles, to whom I looked in surprise. 'Mr. Micawber has consulted me in reference to what he has in contemplation; and I have advised him to the best of my judgement.'

'Unless I deceive myself, Mr. Traddles,' pursued Mr. Micawber, 'what I contemplate is a disclosure of an important nature.'

'Highly so,' said Traddles.

'Perhaps, under such circumstances, madam and gentlemen,' said Mr. Micawber, 'you will do me the favour to submit yourselves, for the moment, to the direction of one who, however unworthy to be regarded in any other light but as a Waif and Stray upon the shore of human nature, is still your fellow-man, though crushed out of his original form by individual errors, and the accumulative force of a combination of circumstances?'

'We have perfect confidence in you, Mr. Micawber,' said I, 'and will do what you please.'

'Mr. Copperfield,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'your confidence is not, at the existing juncture, ill-bestowed. I would beg to be allowed a start of five minutes by the clock; and then to receive the present company, inquiring for Miss Wickfield, at the office of Wickfield and Heep, whose Stipendiary I am.'

My aunt and I looked at Traddles, who nodded his approval.

'I have no more,' observed Mr. Micawber, 'to say at present.'

With which, to my infinite surprise, he included us all in a comprehensive bow, and disappeared; his manner being extremely distant, and his face extremely pale.

Traddles only smiled, and shook his head (with his hair standing upright on the top of it), when I looked to him for an explanation; so I took out my watch, and, as a last resource, counted off the five minutes. My aunt, with her own watch in her hand, did the like. When the time was expired, Traddles gave her his arm; and we all went out together to the old house, without saying one word on the way.

We found Mr. Micawber at his desk, in the turret office on the ground floor, either writing, or pretending to write, hard. The large office-ruler was stuck into his waistcoat, and was not so well concealed but that a foot or more of that instrument protruded from his bosom, like a new kind of shirt-frill.

As it appeared to me that I was expected to speak, I said aloud:

'How do you do, Mr. Micawber?'

'Mr. Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, gravely, 'I hope I see you well?'

'Is Miss Wickfield at home?' said I.

'Mr. Wickfield is unwell in bed, sir, of a rheumatic fever,' he returned; 'but Miss Wickfield, I have no doubt, will be happy to see old friends. Will you walk in, sir?'

He preceded us to the dining-room—the first room I had entered in that house—and flinging open the door of Mr. Wickfield's former office, said, in a sonorous voice:

'Miss Trotwood, Mr. David Copperfield, Mr. Thomas Traddles, and Mr. Dixon!'

I had not seen Uriah Heep since the time of the blow. Our visit astonished him, evidently; not the less, I dare say, because it astonished ourselves. He did not gather his eyebrows together, for he had none worth mentioning; but he frowned to that degree that he almost closed his small eyes, while the hurried raising of his grisly hand to his chin betrayed some trepidation or surprise. This was only when we were in the act of entering his room, and when I caught a glance at him over my aunt's shoulder. A moment afterwards, he was as fawning and as humble as ever.

'Well, I am sure,' he said. 'This is indeed an unexpected pleasure! To have, as I may say, all friends round St. Paul's at once, is a treat unlooked for! Mr. Copperfield, I hope I see you well, and—if I may umbly express myself so—friendly towards them as is ever your friends, whether or not. Mrs. Copperfield, sir, I hope she's getting on. We have been made quite uneasy by the poor accounts we have had of her state, lately, I do assure you.'

I felt ashamed to let him take my hand, but I did not know yet what else to do.

'Things are changed in this office, Miss Trotwood, since I was an umble clerk, and held your pony; ain't they?' said Uriah, with his sickliest smile. 'But I am not changed, Miss Trotwood.'

'Well, sir,' returned my aunt, 'to tell you the truth, I think you are pretty constant to the promise of your youth; if that's any satisfaction to you.'

'Thank you, Miss Trotwood,' said Uriah, writhing in his ungainly manner, 'for your good opinion! Micawber, tell 'em to let Miss Agnes know—and mother. Mother will be quite in a state, when she sees the present company!' said Uriah, setting chairs.

'You are not busy, Mr. Heep?' said Traddles, whose eye the cunning red eye accidentally caught, as it at once scrutinized and evaded us.

'No, Mr. Traddles,' replied Uriah, resuming his official seat, and squeezing his bony hands, laid palm to palm between his bony knees. 'Not so much so as I could wish. But lawyers, sharks, and leeches, are not easily satisfied, you know! Not but what myself and Micawber have our hands pretty full, in general, on account of Mr. Wickfield's being hardly fit for any occupation, sir. But it's a pleasure as well as a duty, I am sure, to work for him. You've not been intimate with Mr. Wickfield, I think, Mr. Traddles? I believe I've only had the honour of seeing you once myself?'

'No, I have not been intimate with Mr. Wickfield,' returned Traddles; 'or I might perhaps have waited on you long ago, Mr. Heep.'

There was something in the tone of this reply, which made Uriah look at the speaker again, with a very sinister and suspicious expression. But, seeing only Traddles, with his good-natured face, simple manner, and hair on end, he dismissed it as he replied, with a jerk of his whole body, but especially his throat:

'I am sorry for that, Mr. Traddles. You would have admired him as much as we all do. His little failings would only have endeared him to you the more. But if you would like to hear my fellow-partner eloquently spoken of, I should refer you to Copperfield. The family is a subject he's very strong upon, if you never heard him.'

I was prevented from disclaiming the compliment (if I should have done so, in any case), by the entrance of Agnes, now ushered in by Mr. Micawber. She was not quite so self-possessed as usual, I thought; and had evidently undergone anxiety and fatigue. But her earnest cordiality, and her quiet beauty, shone with the gentler lustre for it.

I saw Uriah watch her while she greeted us; and he reminded me of an ugly and rebellious genie watching a good spirit. In the meanwhile, some slight sign passed between Mr. Micawber and Traddles; and Traddles, unobserved except by me, went out.

'Don't wait, Micawber,' said Uriah.

Mr. Micawber, with his hand upon the ruler in his breast, stood erect before the door, most unmistakably contemplating one of his fellow-men, and that man his employer.

'What are you waiting for?' said Uriah. 'Micawber! did you hear me tell you not to wait?'

'Yes!' replied the immovable Mr. Micawber.

'Then why DO you wait?' said Uriah.

'Because I—in short, choose,' replied Mr. Micawber, with a burst.

Uriah's cheeks lost colour, and an unwholesome paleness, still faintly tinged by his pervading red, overspread them. He looked at Mr. Micawber attentively, with his whole face breathing short and quick in every feature.

'You are a dissipated fellow, as all the world knows,' he said, with an effort at a smile, 'and I am afraid you'll oblige me to get rid of you. Go along! I'll talk to you presently.'

'If there is a scoundrel on this earth,' said Mr. Micawber, suddenly breaking out again with the utmost vehemence, 'with whom I have already talked too much, that scoundrel's name is—HEEP!'

Uriah fell back, as if he had been struck or stung. Looking slowly round upon us with the darkest and wickedest expression that his face could wear, he said, in a lower voice:

'Oho! This is a conspiracy! You have met here by appointment! You are playing Booty with my clerk, are you, Copperfield? Now, take care. You'll make nothing of this. We understand each other, you and me. There's no love between us. You were always a puppy with a proud stomach, from your first coming here; and you envy me my rise, do you? None of your plots against me; I'll counterplot you! Micawber, you be off. I'll talk to you presently.'

'Mr. Micawber,' said I, 'there is a sudden change in this fellow, in more respects than the extraordinary one of his speaking the truth in one particular, which assures me that he is brought to bay. Deal with him as he deserves!'

'You are a precious set of people, ain't you?' said Uriah, in the same low voice, and breaking out into a clammy heat, which he wiped from his forehead, with his long lean hand, 'to buy over my clerk, who is the very scum of society,—as you yourself were, Copperfield, you know it, before anyone had charity on you,—to defame me with his lies? Miss Trotwood, you had better stop this; or I'll stop your husband shorter than will be pleasant to you. I won't know your story professionally, for nothing, old lady! Miss Wickfield, if you have any love for your father, you had better not join that gang. I'll ruin him, if you do. Now, come! I have got some of you under the harrow. Think twice, before it goes over you. Think twice, you, Micawber, if you don't want to be crushed. I recommend you to take yourself off, and be talked to presently, you fool! while there's time to retreat. Where's mother?' he said, suddenly appearing to notice, with alarm, the absence of Traddles, and pulling down the bell-rope. 'Fine doings in a person's own house!'

'Mrs. Heep is here, sir,' said Traddles, returning with that worthy mother of a worthy son. 'I have taken the liberty of making myself known to her.'

'Who are you to make yourself known?' retorted Uriah. 'And what do you want here?'

'I am the agent and friend of Mr. Wickfield, sir,' said Traddles, in a composed and business-like way. 'And I have a power of attorney from him in my pocket, to act for him in all matters.'

'The old ass has drunk himself into a state of dotage,' said Uriah, turning uglier than before, 'and it has been got from him by fraud!'

'Something has been got from him by fraud, I know,' returned Traddles quietly; 'and so do you, Mr. Heep. We will refer that question, if you please, to Mr. Micawber.'

'Ury—!' Mrs. Heep began, with an anxious gesture.

'YOU hold your tongue, mother,' he returned; 'least said, soonest mended.'

'But, my Ury—'

'Will you hold your tongue, mother, and leave it to me?'

Though I had long known that his servility was false, and all his pretences knavish and hollow, I had had no adequate conception of the extent of his hypocrisy, until I now saw him with his mask off. The suddenness with which he dropped it, when he perceived that it was useless to him; the malice, insolence, and hatred, he revealed; the leer with which he exulted, even at this moment, in the evil he had done—all this time being desperate too, and at his wits' end for the means of getting the better of us—though perfectly consistent with the experience I had of him, at first took even me by surprise, who had known him so long, and disliked him so heartily.

I say nothing of the look he conferred on me, as he stood eyeing us, one after another; for I had always understood that he hated me, and I remembered the marks of my hand upon his cheek. But when his eyes passed on to Agnes, and I saw the rage with which he felt his power over her slipping away, and the exhibition, in their disappointment, of the odious passions that had led him to aspire to one whose virtues he could never appreciate or care for, I was shocked by the mere thought of her having lived, an hour, within sight of such a man.

After some rubbing of the lower part of his face, and some looking at us with those bad eyes, over his grisly fingers, he made one more address to me, half whining, and half abusive.

'You think it justifiable, do you, Copperfield, you who pride yourself so much on your honour and all the rest of it, to sneak about my place, eaves-dropping with my clerk? If it had been ME, I shouldn't have wondered; for I don't make myself out a gentleman (though I never was in the streets either, as you were, according to Micawber), but being you!—And you're not afraid of doing this, either? You don't think at all of what I shall do, in return; or of getting yourself into trouble for conspiracy and so forth? Very well. We shall see! Mr. What's-your-name, you were going to refer some question to Micawber. There's your referee. Why don't you make him speak? He has learnt his lesson, I see.'

Seeing that what he said had no effect on me or any of us, he sat on the edge of his table with his hands in his pockets, and one of his splay feet twisted round the other leg, waiting doggedly for what might follow.

Mr. Micawber, whose impetuosity I had restrained thus far with the greatest difficulty, and who had repeatedly interposed with the first syllable Of SCOUN-drel! without getting to the second, now burst forward, drew the ruler from his breast (apparently as a defensive weapon), and produced from his pocket a foolscap document, folded in the form of a large letter. Opening this packet, with his old flourish, and glancing at the contents, as if he cherished an artistic admiration of their style of composition, he began to read as follows:

'"Dear Miss Trotwood and gentlemen—"'

'Bless and save the man!' exclaimed my aunt in a low voice. 'He'd write letters by the ream, if it was a capital offence!'

Mr. Micawber, without hearing her, went on.

'"In appearing before you to denounce probably the most consummate Villain that has ever existed,"' Mr. Micawber, without looking off the letter, pointed the ruler, like a ghostly truncheon, at Uriah Heep, '"I ask no consideration for myself. The victim, from my cradle, of pecuniary liabilities to which I have been unable to respond, I have ever been the sport and toy of debasing circumstances. Ignominy, Want, Despair, and Madness, have, collectively or separately, been the attendants of my career."'

The relish with which Mr. Micawber described himself as a prey to these dismal calamities, was only to be equalled by the emphasis with which he read his letter; and the kind of homage he rendered to it with a roll of his head, when he thought he had hit a sentence very hard indeed.

'"In an accumulation of Ignominy, Want, Despair, and Madness, I entered the office—or, as our lively neighbour the Gaul would term it, the Bureau—of the Firm, nominally conducted under the appellation of Wickfield and—HEEP, but in reality, wielded by—HEEP alone. HEEP, and only HEEP, is the mainspring of that machine. HEEP, and only HEEP, is the Forger and the Cheat."'

Uriah, more blue than white at these words, made a dart at the letter, as if to tear it in pieces. Mr. Micawber, with a perfect miracle of dexterity or luck, caught his advancing knuckles with the ruler, and disabled his right hand. It dropped at the wrist, as if it were broken. The blow sounded as if it had fallen on wood.

'The Devil take you!' said Uriah, writhing in a new way with pain. 'I'll be even with you.'

'Approach me again, you—you—you HEEP of infamy,' gasped Mr. Micawber, 'and if your head is human, I'll break it. Come on, come on!'

I think I never saw anything more ridiculous—I was sensible of it, even at the time—than Mr. Micawber making broad-sword guards with the ruler, and crying, 'Come on!' while Traddles and I pushed him back into a corner, from which, as often as we got him into it, he persisted in emerging again.

His enemy, muttering to himself, after wringing his wounded hand for sometime, slowly drew off his neck-kerchief and bound it up; then held it in his other hand, and sat upon his table with his sullen face looking down.

Mr. Micawber, when he was sufficiently cool, proceeded with his letter.

"'The stipendiary emoluments in consideration of which I entered into the service of—HEEP,'" always pausing before that word and uttering it with astonishing vigour, "'were not defined, beyond the pittance of twenty-two shillings and six per week. The rest was left contingent on the value of my professional exertions; in other and more expressive words, on the baseness of my nature, the cupidity of my motives, the poverty of my family, the general moral (or rather immoral) resemblance between myself and—HEEP. Need I say, that it soon became necessary for me to solicit from—HEEP—pecuniary advances towards the support of Mrs. Micawber, and our blighted but rising family? Need I say that this necessity had been foreseen by—HEEP? That those advances were secured by I.O.U.'s and other similar acknowledgements, known to the legal institutions of this country? And that I thus became immeshed in the web he had spun for my reception?'"

Mr. Micawber's enjoyment of his epistolary powers, in describing this unfortunate state of things, really seemed to outweigh any pain or anxiety that the reality could have caused him. He read on:

"'Then it was that—HEEP—began to favour me with just so much of his confidence, as was necessary to the discharge of his infernal business. Then it was that I began, if I may so Shakespearianly express myself, to dwindle, peak, and pine. I found that my services were constantly called into requisition for the falsification of business, and the mystification of an individual whom I will designate as Mr. W. That Mr. W. was imposed upon, kept in ignorance, and deluded, in every possible way; yet, that all this while, the ruffian—HEEP—was professing unbounded gratitude to, and unbounded friendship for, that much-abused gentleman. This was bad enough; but, as the philosophic Dane observes, with that universal applicability which distinguishes the illustrious ornament of the Elizabethan Era, worse remains behind!'"

Mr. Micawber was so very much struck by this happy rounding off with a quotation, that he indulged himself, and us, with a second reading of the sentence, under pretence of having lost his place.

"'It is not my intention,'" he continued reading on, "'to enter on a detailed list, within the compass of the present epistle (though it is ready elsewhere), of the various malpractices of a minor nature, affecting the individual whom I have denominated Mr. W., to which I have been a tacitly consenting party. My object, when the contest within myself between stipend and no stipend, baker and no baker, existence and non-existence, ceased, was to take advantage of my opportunities to discover and expose the major malpractices committed, to that gentleman's grievous wrong and injury, by—HEEP. Stimulated by the silent monitor within, and by a no less touching and appealing monitor without—to whom I will briefly refer as Miss W.—I entered on a not unlaborious task of clandestine investigation, protracted—now, to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief, over a period exceeding twelve calendar months."'

He read this passage as if it were from an Act of Parliament; and appeared majestically refreshed by the sound of the words.

'"My charges against—HEEP,"' he read on, glancing at him, and drawing the ruler into a convenient position under his left arm, in case of need, '"are as follows."'

We all held our breath, I think. I am sure Uriah held his.

'"First,"' said Mr. Micawber, '"When Mr. W.'s faculties and memory for business became, through causes into which it is not necessary or expedient for me to enter, weakened and confused,—HEEP—designedly perplexed and complicated the whole of the official transactions. When Mr. W. was least fit to enter on business,—HEEP was always at hand to force him to enter on it. He obtained Mr. W.'s signature under such circumstances to documents of importance, representing them to be other documents of no importance. He induced Mr. W. to empower him to draw out, thus, one particular sum of trust-money, amounting to twelve six fourteen, two and nine, and employed it to meet pretended business charges and deficiencies which were either already provided for, or had never really existed. He gave this proceeding, throughout, the appearance of having originated in Mr. W.'s own dishonest intention, and of having been accomplished by Mr. W.'s own dishonest act; and has used it, ever since, to torture and constrain him."'

'You shall prove this, you Copperfield!' said Uriah, with a threatening shake of the head. 'All in good time!'

'Ask—HEEP—Mr. Traddles, who lived in his house after him,' said Mr. Micawber, breaking off from the letter; 'will you?'

'The fool himself—and lives there now,' said Uriah, disdainfully.

'Ask—HEEP—if he ever kept a pocket-book in that house,' said Mr. Micawber; 'will you?'

I saw Uriah's lank hand stop, involuntarily, in the scraping of his chin.

'Or ask him,' said Mr. Micawber,'if he ever burnt one there. If he says yes, and asks you where the ashes are, refer him to Wilkins Micawber, and he will hear of something not at all to his advantage!'

The triumphant flourish with which Mr. Micawber delivered himself of these words, had a powerful effect in alarming the mother; who cried out, in much agitation:

'Ury, Ury! Be umble, and make terms, my dear!'

'Mother!' he retorted, 'will you keep quiet? You're in a fright, and don't know what you say or mean. Umble!' he repeated, looking at me, with a snarl; 'I've umbled some of 'em for a pretty long time back, umble as I was!'

Mr. Micawber, genteelly adjusting his chin in his cravat, presently proceeded with his composition.

'"Second. HEEP has, on several occasions, to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief—"'

'But that won't do,' muttered Uriah, relieved. 'Mother, you keep quiet.'

'We will endeavour to provide something that WILL do, and do for you finally, sir, very shortly,' replied Mr. Micawber.

'"Second. HEEP has, on several occasions, to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief, systematically forged, to various entries, books, and documents, the signature of Mr. W.; and has distinctly done so in one instance, capable of proof by me. To wit, in manner following, that is to say:"'

Again, Mr. Micawber had a relish in this formal piling up of words, which, however ludicrously displayed in his case, was, I must say, not at all peculiar to him. I have observed it, in the course of my life, in numbers of men. It seems to me to be a general rule. In the taking of legal oaths, for instance, deponents seem to enjoy themselves mightily when they come to several good words in succession, for the expression of one idea; as, that they utterly detest, abominate, and abjure, or so forth; and the old anathemas were made relishing on the same principle. We talk about the tyranny of words, but we like to tyrannize over them too; we are fond of having a large superfluous establishment of words to wait upon us on great occasions; we think it looks important, and sounds well. As we are not particular about the meaning of our liveries on state occasions, if they be but fine and numerous enough, so, the meaning or necessity of our words is a secondary consideration, if there be but a great parade of them. And as individuals get into trouble by making too great a show of liveries, or as slaves when they are too numerous rise against their masters, so I think I could mention a nation that has got into many great difficulties, and will get into many greater, from maintaining too large a retinue of words.

Mr. Micawber read on, almost smacking his lips:

'"To wit, in manner following, that is to say. Mr. W. being infirm, and it being within the bounds of probability that his decease might lead to some discoveries, and to the downfall of—HEEP'S—power over the W. family,—as I, Wilkins Micawber, the undersigned, assume—unless the filial affection of his daughter could be secretly influenced from allowing any investigation of the partnership affairs to be ever made, the said—HEEP—deemed it expedient to have a bond ready by him, as from Mr. W., for the before-mentioned sum of twelve six fourteen, two and nine, with interest, stated therein to have been advanced by—HEEP—to Mr. W. to save Mr. W. from dishonour; though really the sum was never advanced by him, and has long been replaced. The signatures to this instrument purporting to be executed by Mr. W. and attested by Wilkins Micawber, are forgeries by—HEEP. I have, in my possession, in his hand and pocket-book, several similar imitations of Mr. W.'s signature, here and there defaced by fire, but legible to anyone. I never attested any such document. And I have the document itself, in my possession."' Uriah Heep, with a start, took out of his pocket a bunch of keys, and opened a certain drawer; then, suddenly bethought himself of what he was about, and turned again towards us, without looking in it.

'"And I have the document,"' Mr. Micawber read again, looking about as if it were the text of a sermon, '"in my possession,—that is to say, I had, early this morning, when this was written, but have since relinquished it to Mr. Traddles."'

'It is quite true,' assented Traddles.

'Ury, Ury!' cried the mother, 'be umble and make terms. I know my son will be umble, gentlemen, if you'll give him time to think. Mr. Copperfield, I'm sure you know that he was always very umble, sir!'

It was singular to see how the mother still held to the old trick, when the son had abandoned it as useless.

'Mother,' he said, with an impatient bite at the handkerchief in which his hand was wrapped, 'you had better take and fire a loaded gun at me.'

'But I love you, Ury,' cried Mrs. Heep. And I have no doubt she did; or that he loved her, however strange it may appear; though, to be sure, they were a congenial couple. 'And I can't bear to hear you provoking the gentlemen, and endangering of yourself more. I told the gentleman at first, when he told me upstairs it was come to light, that I would answer for your being umble, and making amends. Oh, see how umble I am, gentlemen, and don't mind him!'

'Why, there's Copperfield, mother,' he angrily retorted, pointing his lean finger at me, against whom all his animosity was levelled, as the prime mover in the discovery; and I did not undeceive him; 'there's Copperfield, would have given you a hundred pound to say less than you've blurted out!'

'I can't help it, Ury,' cried his mother. 'I can't see you running into danger, through carrying your head so high. Better be umble, as you always was.'

He remained for a little, biting the handkerchief, and then said to me with a scowl:

'What more have you got to bring forward? If anything, go on with it. What do you look at me for?'

Mr. Micawber promptly resumed his letter, glad to revert to a performance with which he was so highly satisfied.

'"Third. And last. I am now in a condition to show, by—HEEP'S—false books, and—HEEP'S—real memoranda, beginning with the partially destroyed pocket-book (which I was unable to comprehend, at the time of its accidental discovery by Mrs. Micawber, on our taking possession of our present abode, in the locker or bin devoted to the reception of the ashes calcined on our domestic hearth), that the weaknesses, the faults, the very virtues, the parental affections, and the sense of honour, of the unhappy Mr. W. have been for years acted on by, and warped to the base purposes of—HEEP. That Mr. W. has been for years deluded and plundered, in every conceivable manner, to the pecuniary aggrandisement of the avaricious, false, and grasping—HEEP. That the engrossing object of—HEEP—was, next to gain, to subdue Mr. and Miss W. (of his ulterior views in reference to the latter I say nothing) entirely to himself. That his last act, completed but a few months since, was to induce Mr. W. to execute a relinquishment of his share in the partnership, and even a bill of sale on the very furniture of his house, in consideration of a certain annuity, to be well and truly paid by—HEEP—on the four common quarter-days in each and every year. That these meshes; beginning with alarming and falsified accounts of the estate of which Mr. W. is the receiver, at a period when Mr. W. had launched into imprudent and ill-judged speculations, and may not have had the money, for which he was morally and legally responsible, in hand; going on with pretended borrowings of money at enormous interest, really coming from—HEEP—and by—HEEP—fraudulently obtained or withheld from Mr. W. himself, on pretence of such speculations or otherwise; perpetuated by a miscellaneous catalogue of unscrupulous chicaneries—gradually thickened, until the unhappy Mr. W. could see no world beyond. Bankrupt, as he believed, alike in circumstances, in all other hope, and in honour, his sole reliance was upon the monster in the garb of man,"'—Mr. Micawber made a good deal of this, as a new turn of expression,—'"who, by making himself necessary to him, had achieved his destruction. All this I undertake to show. Probably much more!"'

I whispered a few words to Agnes, who was weeping, half joyfully, half sorrowfully, at my side; and there was a movement among us, as if Mr. Micawber had finished. He said, with exceeding gravity, 'Pardon me,' and proceeded, with a mixture of the lowest spirits and the most intense enjoyment, to the peroration of his letter.

'"I have now concluded. It merely remains for me to substantiate these accusations; and then, with my ill-starred family, to disappear from the landscape on which we appear to be an encumbrance. That is soon done. It may be reasonably inferred that our baby will first expire of inanition, as being the frailest member of our circle; and that our twins will follow next in order. So be it! For myself, my Canterbury Pilgrimage has done much; imprisonment on civil process, and want, will soon do more. I trust that the labour and hazard of an investigation—of which the smallest results have been slowly pieced together, in the pressure of arduous avocations, under grinding penurious apprehensions, at rise of morn, at dewy eve, in the shadows of night, under the watchful eye of one whom it were superfluous to call Demon—combined with the struggle of parental Poverty to turn it, when completed, to the right account, may be as the sprinkling of a few drops of sweet water on my funeral pyre. I ask no more. Let it be, in justice, merely said of me, as of a gallant and eminent naval Hero, with whom I have no pretensions to cope, that what I have done, I did, in despite of mercenary and selfish objects,

    For England, home, and Beauty.

`'"Remaining always, &c.  &c., WILKINS MICAWBER."'`

Much affected, but still intensely enjoying himself, Mr. Micawber folded up his letter, and handed it with a bow to my aunt, as something she might like to keep.

There was, as I had noticed on my first visit long ago, an iron safe in the room. The key was in it. A hasty suspicion seemed to strike Uriah; and, with a glance at Mr. Micawber, he went to it, and threw the doors clanking open. It was empty.

'Where are the books?' he cried, with a frightful face. 'Some thief has stolen the books!'

Mr. Micawber tapped himself with the ruler. 'I did, when I got the key from you as usual—but a little earlier—and opened it this morning.'

'Don't be uneasy,' said Traddles. 'They have come into my possession. I will take care of them, under the authority I mentioned.'

'You receive stolen goods, do you?' cried Uriah.

'Under such circumstances,' answered Traddles, 'yes.'

What was my astonishment when I beheld my aunt, who had been profoundly quiet and attentive, make a dart at Uriah Heep, and seize him by the collar with both hands!

'You know what I want?' said my aunt.

'A strait-waistcoat,' said he.

'No. My property!' returned my aunt. 'Agnes, my dear, as long as I believed it had been really made away with by your father, I wouldn't—and, my dear, I didn't, even to Trot, as he knows—breathe a syllable of its having been placed here for investment. But, now I know this fellow's answerable for it, and I'll have it! Trot, come and take it away from him!'

Whether my aunt supposed, for the moment, that he kept her property in his neck-kerchief, I am sure I don't know; but she certainly pulled at it as if she thought so. I hastened to put myself between them, and to assure her that we would all take care that he should make the utmost restitution of everything he had wrongly got. This, and a few moments' reflection, pacified her; but she was not at all disconcerted by what she had done (though I cannot say as much for her bonnet) and resumed her seat composedly.

During the last few minutes, Mrs. Heep had been clamouring to her son to be 'umble'; and had been going down on her knees to all of us in succession, and making the wildest promises. Her son sat her down in his chair; and, standing sulkily by her, holding her arm with his hand, but not rudely, said to me, with a ferocious look:

'What do you want done?'

'I will tell you what must be done,' said Traddles.

'Has that Copperfield no tongue?' muttered Uriah, 'I would do a good deal for you if you could tell me, without lying, that somebody had cut it out.'

'My Uriah means to be umble!' cried his mother. 'Don't mind what he says, good gentlemen!'

'What must be done,' said Traddles, 'is this. First, the deed of relinquishment, that we have heard of, must be given over to me now—here.'

'Suppose I haven't got it,' he interrupted.

'But you have,' said Traddles; 'therefore, you know, we won't suppose so.' And I cannot help avowing that this was the first occasion on which I really did justice to the clear head, and the plain, patient, practical good sense, of my old schoolfellow. 'Then,' said Traddles, 'you must prepare to disgorge all that your rapacity has become possessed of, and to make restoration to the last farthing. All the partnership books and papers must remain in our possession; all your books and papers; all money accounts and securities, of both kinds. In short, everything here.'

'Must it? I don't know that,' said Uriah. 'I must have time to think about that.'

'Certainly,' replied Traddles; 'but, in the meanwhile, and until everything is done to our satisfaction, we shall maintain possession of these things; and beg you—in short, compel you—to keep to your own room, and hold no communication with anyone.'

'I won't do it!' said Uriah, with an oath.

'Maidstone jail is a safer place of detention,' observed Traddles; 'and though the law may be longer in righting us, and may not be able to right us so completely as you can, there is no doubt of its punishing YOU. Dear me, you know that quite as well as I! Copperfield, will you go round to the Guildhall, and bring a couple of officers?'

Here, Mrs. Heep broke out again, crying on her knees to Agnes to interfere in their behalf, exclaiming that he was very humble, and it was all true, and if he didn't do what we wanted, she would, and much more to the same purpose; being half frantic with fears for her darling. To inquire what he might have done, if he had had any boldness, would be like inquiring what a mongrel cur might do, if it had the spirit of a tiger. He was a coward, from head to foot; and showed his dastardly nature through his sullenness and mortification, as much as at any time of his mean life.

'Stop!' he growled to me; and wiped his hot face with his hand. 'Mother, hold your noise. Well! Let 'em have that deed. Go and fetch it!'

'Do you help her, Mr. Dick,' said Traddles, 'if you please.'

Proud of his commission, and understanding it, Mr. Dick accompanied her as a shepherd's dog might accompany a sheep. But, Mrs. Heep gave him little trouble; for she not only returned with the deed, but with the box in which it was, where we found a banker's book and some other papers that were afterwards serviceable.

'Good!' said Traddles, when this was brought. 'Now, Mr. Heep, you can retire to think: particularly observing, if you please, that I declare to you, on the part of all present, that there is only one thing to be done; that it is what I have explained; and that it must be done without delay.'

Uriah, without lifting his eyes from the ground, shuffled across the room with his hand to his chin, and pausing at the door, said:

'Copperfield, I have always hated you. You've always been an upstart, and you've always been against me.'

'As I think I told you once before,' said I, 'it is you who have been, in your greed and cunning, against all the world. It may be profitable to you to reflect, in future, that there never were greed and cunning in the world yet, that did not do too much, and overreach themselves. It is as certain as death.'

'Or as certain as they used to teach at school (the same school where I picked up so much umbleness), from nine o'clock to eleven, that labour was a curse; and from eleven o'clock to one, that it was a blessing and a cheerfulness, and a dignity, and I don't know what all, eh?' said he with a sneer. 'You preach, about as consistent as they did. Won't umbleness go down? I shouldn't have got round my gentleman fellow-partner without it, I think. —Micawber, you old bully, I'll pay YOU!'

Mr. Micawber, supremely defiant of him and his extended finger, and making a great deal of his chest until he had slunk out at the door, then addressed himself to me, and proffered me the satisfaction of 'witnessing the re-establishment of mutual confidence between himself and Mrs.

Micawber'. After which, he invited the company generally to the contemplation of that affecting spectacle.

'The veil that has long been interposed between Mrs. Micawber and myself, is now withdrawn,' said Mr. Micawber; 'and my children and the Author of their Being can once more come in contact on equal terms.'

As we were all very grateful to him, and all desirous to show that we were, as well as the hurry and disorder of our spirits would permit, I dare say we should all have gone, but that it was necessary for Agnes to return to her father, as yet unable to bear more than the dawn of hope; and for someone else to hold Uriah in safe keeping. So, Traddles remained for the latter purpose, to be presently relieved by Mr. Dick; and Mr. Dick, my aunt, and I, went home with Mr. Micawber. As I parted hurriedly from the dear girl to whom I owed so much, and thought from what she had been saved, perhaps, that morning—her better resolution notwithstanding—I felt devoutly thankful for the miseries of my younger days which had brought me to the knowledge of Mr. Micawber.

His house was not far off; and as the street door opened into the sitting-room, and he bolted in with a precipitation quite his own, we found ourselves at once in the bosom of the family. Mr. Micawber exclaiming, 'Emma! my life!' rushed into Mrs. Micawber's arms. Mrs. Micawber shrieked, and folded Mr. Micawber in her embrace. Miss Micawber, nursing the unconscious stranger of Mrs. Micawber's last letter to me, was sensibly affected. The stranger leaped. The twins testified their joy by several inconvenient but innocent demonstrations. Master Micawber, whose disposition appeared to have been soured by early disappointment, and whose aspect had become morose, yielded to his better feelings, and blubbered.

'Emma!' said Mr. Micawber. 'The cloud is past from my mind. Mutual confidence, so long preserved between us once, is restored, to know no further interruption. Now, welcome poverty!' cried Mr. Micawber, shedding tears. 'Welcome misery, welcome houselessness, welcome hunger, rags, tempest, and beggary! Mutual confidence will sustain us to the end!'

With these expressions, Mr. Micawber placed Mrs. Micawber in a chair, and embraced the family all round; welcoming a variety of bleak prospects, which appeared, to the best of my judgement, to be anything but welcome to them; and calling upon them to come out into Canterbury and sing a chorus, as nothing else was left for their support.

But Mrs. Micawber having, in the strength of her emotions, fainted away, the first thing to be done, even before the chorus could be considered complete, was to recover her. This my aunt and Mr. Micawber did; and then my aunt was introduced, and Mrs. Micawber recognized me.

'Excuse me, dear Mr. Copperfield,' said the poor lady, giving me her hand, 'but I am not strong; and the removal of the late misunderstanding between Mr. Micawber and myself was at first too much for me.'

'Is this all your family, ma'am?' said my aunt.

'There are no more at present,' returned Mrs. Micawber.

'Good gracious, I didn't mean that, ma'am,' said my aunt. 'I mean, are all these yours?'

'Madam,' replied Mr. Micawber, 'it is a true bill.'

'And that eldest young gentleman, now,' said my aunt, musing, 'what has he been brought up to?'

'It was my hope when I came here,' said Mr. Micawber, 'to have got Wilkins into the Church: or perhaps I shall express my meaning more strictly, if I say the Choir. But there was no vacancy for a tenor in the venerable Pile for which this city is so justly eminent; and he has—in short, he has contracted a habit of singing in public-houses, rather than in sacred edifices.'

'But he means well,' said Mrs. Micawber, tenderly.

'I dare say, my love,' rejoined Mr. Micawber, 'that he means particularly well; but I have not yet found that he carries out his meaning, in any given direction whatsoever.'

Master Micawber's moroseness of aspect returned upon him again, and he demanded, with some temper, what he was to do? Whether he had been born a carpenter, or a coach-painter, any more than he had been born a bird? Whether he could go into the next street, and open a chemist's shop? Whether he could rush to the next assizes, and proclaim himself a lawyer? Whether he could come out by force at the opera, and succeed by violence? Whether he could do anything, without being brought up to something?

My aunt mused a little while, and then said:

'Mr. Micawber, I wonder you have never turned your thoughts to emigration.'

'Madam,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'it was the dream of my youth, and the fallacious aspiration of my riper years.' I am thoroughly persuaded, by the by, that he had never thought of it in his life.

'Aye?' said my aunt, with a glance at me. 'Why, what a thing it would be for yourselves and your family, Mr. and Mrs. Micawber, if you were to emigrate now.'

'Capital, madam, capital,' urged Mr. Micawber, gloomily.

'That is the principal, I may say the only difficulty, my dear Mr. Copperfield,' assented his wife.

'Capital?' cried my aunt. 'But you are doing us a great service—have done us a great service, I may say, for surely much will come out of the fire—and what could we do for you, that would be half so good as to find the capital?'

'I could not receive it as a gift,' said Mr. Micawber, full of fire and animation, 'but if a sufficient sum could be advanced, say at five per cent interest, per annum, upon my personal liability—say my notes of hand, at twelve, eighteen, and twenty-four months, respectively, to allow time for something to turn up—'

'Could be? Can be and shall be, on your own terms,' returned my aunt, 'if you say the word. Think of this now, both of you. Here are some people David knows, going out to Australia shortly. If you decide to go, why shouldn't you go in the same ship? You may help each other. Think of this now, Mr. and Mrs. Micawber. Take your time, and weigh it well.'

'There is but one question, my dear ma'am, I could wish to ask,' said Mrs. Micawber. 'The climate, I believe, is healthy?'

'Finest in the world!' said my aunt.

'Just so,' returned Mrs. Micawber. 'Then my question arises. Now, are the circumstances of the country such, that a man of Mr. Micawber's abilities would have a fair chance of rising in the social scale? I will not say, at present, might he aspire to be Governor, or anything of that sort; but would there be a reasonable opening for his talents to develop themselves—that would be amply sufficient—and find their own expansion?'

'No better opening anywhere,' said my aunt, 'for a man who conducts himself well, and is industrious.'

'For a man who conducts himself well,' repeated Mrs. Micawber, with her clearest business manner, 'and is industrious. Precisely. It is evident to me that Australia is the legitimate sphere of action for Mr. Micawber!'

'I entertain the conviction, my dear madam,' said Mr. Micawber, 'that it is, under existing circumstances, the land, the only land, for myself and family; and that something of an extraordinary nature will turn up on that shore. It is no distance—comparatively speaking; and though consideration is due to the kindness of your proposal, I assure you that is a mere matter of form.'

Shall I ever forget how, in a moment, he was the most sanguine of men, looking on to fortune; or how Mrs. Micawber presently discoursed about the habits of the kangaroo! Shall I ever recall that street of Canterbury on a market-day, without recalling him, as he walked back with us; expressing, in the hardy roving manner he assumed, the unsettled habits of a temporary sojourner in the land; and looking at the bullocks, as they came by, with the eye of an Australian farmer!

CHAPTER 53. ANOTHER RETROSPECT

I must pause yet once again. O, my child-wife, there is a figure in the moving crowd before my memory, quiet and still, saying in its innocent love and childish beauty, Stop to think of me—turn to look upon the Little Blossom, as it flutters to the ground!

I do. All else grows dim, and fades away. I am again with Dora, in our cottage. I do not know how long she has been ill. I am so used to it in feeling, that I cannot count the time. It is not really long, in weeks or months; but, in my usage and experience, it is a weary, weary while.

They have left off telling me to 'wait a few days more'. I have begun to fear, remotely, that the day may never shine, when I shall see my child-wife running in the sunlight with her old friend Jip.

He is, as it were suddenly, grown very old. It may be that he misses in his mistress, something that enlivened him and made him younger; but he mopes, and his sight is weak, and his limbs are feeble, and my aunt is sorry that he objects to her no more, but creeps near her as he lies on Dora's bed—she sitting at the bedside—and mildly licks her hand.

Dora lies smiling on us, and is beautiful, and utters no hasty or complaining word. She says that we are very good to her; that her dear old careful boy is tiring himself out, she knows; that my aunt has no sleep, yet is always wakeful, active, and kind. Sometimes, the little bird-like ladies come to see her; and then we talk about our wedding-day, and all that happy time.

What a strange rest and pause in my life there seems to be—and in all life, within doors and without—when I sit in the quiet, shaded, orderly room, with the blue eyes of my child-wife turned towards me, and her little fingers twining round my hand! Many and many an hour I sit thus; but, of all those times, three times come the freshest on my mind.

It is morning; and Dora, made so trim by my aunt's hands, shows me how her pretty hair will curl upon the pillow yet, an how long and bright it is, and how she likes to have it loosely gathered in that net she wears.

'Not that I am vain of it, now, you mocking boy,' she says, when I smile; 'but because you used to say you thought it so beautiful; and because, when I first began to think about you, I used to peep in the glass, and wonder whether you would like very much to have a lock of it. Oh what a foolish fellow you were, Doady, when I gave you one!'

'That was on the day when you were painting the flowers I had given you, Dora, and when I told you how much in love I was.'

'Ah! but I didn't like to tell you,' says Dora, 'then, how I had cried over them, because I believed you really liked me! When I can run about again as I used to do, Doady, let us go and see those places where we were such a silly couple, shall we? And take some of the old walks? And not forget poor papa?'

'Yes, we will, and have some happy days. So you must make haste to get well, my dear.'

'Oh, I shall soon do that! I am so much better, you don't know!'

It is evening; and I sit in the same chair, by the same bed, with the same face turned towards me. We have been silent, and there is a smile upon her face. I have ceased to carry my light burden up and down stairs now. She lies here all the day.

'Doady!'

'My dear Dora!'

'You won't think what I am going to say, unreasonable, after what you told me, such a little while ago, of Mr. Wickfield's not being well? I want to see Agnes. Very much I want to see her.'

'I will write to her, my dear.'

'Will you?'

'Directly.'

'What a good, kind boy! Doady, take me on your arm. Indeed, my dear, it's not a whim. It's not a foolish fancy. I want, very much indeed, to see her!'

'I am certain of it. I have only to tell her so, and she is sure to come.'

'You are very lonely when you go downstairs, now?' Dora whispers, with her arm about my neck.

'How can I be otherwise, my own love, when I see your empty chair?'

'My empty chair!' She clings to me for a little while, in silence. 'And you really miss me, Doady?' looking up, and brightly smiling. 'Even poor, giddy, stupid me?'

'My heart, who is there upon earth that I could miss so much?'

'Oh, husband! I am so glad, yet so sorry!' creeping closer to me, and folding me in both her arms. She laughs and sobs, and then is quiet, and quite happy.

'Quite!' she says. 'Only give Agnes my dear love, and tell her that I want very, very, much to see her; and I have nothing left to wish for.'

'Except to get well again, Dora.'

'Ah, Doady! Sometimes I think—you know I always was a silly little thing!—that that will never be!'

'Don't say so, Dora! Dearest love, don't think so!'

'I won't, if I can help it, Doady. But I am very happy; though my dear boy is so lonely by himself, before his child-wife's empty chair!'

It is night; and I am with her still. Agnes has arrived; has been among us for a whole day and an evening. She, my aunt, and I, have sat with Dora since the morning, all together. We have not talked much, but Dora has been perfectly contented and cheerful. We are now alone.

Do I know, now, that my child-wife will soon leave me? They have told me so; they have told me nothing new to my thoughts—but I am far from sure that I have taken that truth to heart. I cannot master it. I have withdrawn by myself, many times today, to weep. I have remembered Who wept for a parting between the living and the dead. I have bethought me of all that gracious and compassionate history. I have tried to resign myself, and to console myself; and that, I hope, I may have done imperfectly; but what I cannot firmly settle in my mind is, that the end will absolutely come. I hold her hand in mine, I hold her heart in mine, I see her love for me, alive in all its strength. I cannot shut out a pale lingering shadow of belief that she will be spared.

'I am going to speak to you, Doady. I am going to say something I have often thought of saying, lately. You won't mind?' with a gentle look.

'Mind, my darling?'

'Because I don't know what you will think, or what you may have thought sometimes. Perhaps you have often thought the same. Doady, dear, I am afraid I was too young.'

I lay my face upon the pillow by her, and she looks into my eyes, and speaks very softly. Gradually, as she goes on, I feel, with a stricken heart, that she is speaking of herself as past.

'I am afraid, dear, I was too young. I don't mean in years only, but in experience, and thoughts, and everything. I was such a silly little creature! I am afraid it would have been better, if we had only loved each other as a boy and girl, and forgotten it. I have begun to think I was not fit to be a wife.'

I try to stay my tears, and to reply, 'Oh, Dora, love, as fit as I to be a husband!'

'I don't know,' with the old shake of her curls. 'Perhaps! But if I had been more fit to be married I might have made you more so, too. Besides, you are very clever, and I never was.'

'We have been very happy, my sweet Dora.'

'I was very happy, very. But, as years went on, my dear boy would have wearied of his child-wife. She would have been less and less a companion for him. He would have been more and more sensible of what was wanting in his home. She wouldn't have improved. It is better as it is.'

'Oh, Dora, dearest, dearest, do not speak to me so. Every word seems a reproach!'

'No, not a syllable!' she answers, kissing me. 'Oh, my dear, you never deserved it, and I loved you far too well to say a reproachful word to you, in earnest—it was all the merit I had, except being pretty—or you thought me so. Is it lonely, down-stairs, Doady?'

'Very! Very!'

'Don't cry! Is my chair there?'

'In its old place.'

'Oh, how my poor boy cries! Hush, hush! Now, make me one promise. I want to speak to Agnes. When you go downstairs, tell Agnes so, and send her up to me; and while I speak to her, let no one come—not even aunt. I want to speak to Agnes by herself. I want to speak to Agnes, quite alone.'

I promise that she shall, immediately; but I cannot leave her, for my grief.

'I said that it was better as it is!' she whispers, as she holds me in her arms. 'Oh, Doady, after more years, you never could have loved your child-wife better than you do; and, after more years, she would so have tried and disappointed you, that you might not have been able to love her half so well! I know I was too young and foolish. It is much better as it is!'

Agnes is downstairs, when I go into the parlour; and I give her the message. She disappears, leaving me alone with Jip.

His Chinese house is by the fire; and he lies within it, on his bed of flannel, querulously trying to sleep. The bright moon is high and clear. As I look out on the night, my tears fall fast, and my undisciplined heart is chastened heavily—heavily.

I sit down by the fire, thinking with a blind remorse of all those secret feelings I have nourished since my marriage. I think of every little trifle between me and Dora, and feel the truth, that trifles make the sum of life. Ever rising from the sea of my remembrance, is the image of the dear child as I knew her first, graced by my young love, and by her own, with every fascination wherein such love is rich. Would it, indeed, have been better if we had loved each other as a boy and a girl, and forgotten it? Undisciplined heart, reply!

How the time wears, I know not; until I am recalled by my child-wife's old companion. More restless than he was, he crawls out of his house, and looks at me, and wanders to the door, and whines to go upstairs.

'Not tonight, Jip! Not tonight!'

He comes very slowly back to me, licks my hand, and lifts his dim eyes to my face.

'Oh, Jip! It may be, never again!'

He lies down at my feet, stretches himself out as if to sleep, and with a plaintive cry, is dead.

'Oh, Agnes! Look, look, here!' —That face, so full of pity, and of grief, that rain of tears, that awful mute appeal to me, that solemn hand upraised towards Heaven!

'Agnes?'

It is over. Darkness comes before my eyes; and, for a time, all things are blotted out of my remembrance.

CHAPTER 54. Mr. MICAWBER'S TRANSACTIONS

This is not the time at which I am to enter on the state of my mind beneath its load of sorrow. I came to think that the Future was walled up before me, that the energy and action of my life were at an end, that I never could find any refuge but in the grave. I came to think so, I say, but not in the first shock of my grief. It slowly grew to that. If the events I go on to relate, had not thickened around me, in the beginning to confuse, and in the end to augment, my affliction, it is possible (though I think not probable), that I might have fallen at once into this condition. As it was, an interval occurred before I fully knew my own distress; an interval, in which I even supposed that its sharpest pangs were past; and when my mind could soothe itself by resting on all that was most innocent and beautiful, in the tender story that was closed for ever.

When it was first proposed that I should go abroad, or how it came to be agreed among us that I was to seek the restoration of my peace in change and travel, I do not, even now, distinctly know. The spirit of Agnes so pervaded all we thought, and said, and did, in that time of sorrow, that I assume I may refer the project to her influence. But her influence was so quiet that I know no more.

And now, indeed, I began to think that in my old association of her with the stained-glass window in the church, a prophetic foreshadowing of what she would be to me, in the calamity that was to happen in the fullness of time, had found a way into my mind. In all that sorrow, from the moment, never to be forgotten, when she stood before me with her upraised hand, she was like a sacred presence in my lonely house. When the Angel of Death alighted there, my child-wife fell asleep—they told me so when I could bear to hear it—on her bosom, with a smile. From my swoon, I first awoke to a consciousness of her compassionate tears, her words of hope and peace, her gentle face bending down as from a purer region nearer Heaven, over my undisciplined heart, and softening its pain.

Let me go on.

I was to go abroad. That seemed to have been determined among us from the first. The ground now covering all that could perish of my departed wife, I waited only for what Mr. Micawber called the 'final pulverization of Heep'; and for the departure of the emigrants.

At the request of Traddles, most affectionate and devoted of friends in my trouble, we returned to Canterbury: I mean my aunt, Agnes, and I. We proceeded by appointment straight to Mr. Micawber's house; where, and at Mr. Wickfield's, my friend had been labouring ever since our explosive meeting. When poor Mrs. Micawber saw me come in, in my black clothes, she was sensibly affected. There was a great deal of good in Mrs. Micawber's heart, which had not been dunned out of it in all those many years.

'Well, Mr. and Mrs. Micawber,' was my aunt's first salutation after we were seated. 'Pray, have you thought about that emigration proposal of mine?'

'My dear madam,' returned Mr. Micawber, 'perhaps I cannot better express the conclusion at which Mrs. Micawber, your humble servant, and I may add our children, have jointly and severally arrived, than by borrowing the language of an illustrious poet, to reply that our Boat is on the shore, and our Bark is on the sea.'

'That's right,' said my aunt. 'I augur all sort of good from your sensible decision.'

'Madam, you do us a great deal of honour,' he rejoined. He then referred to a memorandum. 'With respect to the pecuniary assistance enabling us to launch our frail canoe on the ocean of enterprise, I have reconsidered that important business-point; and would beg to propose my notes of hand—drawn, it is needless to stipulate, on stamps of the amounts respectively required by the various Acts of Parliament applying to such securities—at eighteen, twenty-four, and thirty months. The proposition I originally submitted, was twelve, eighteen, and twenty-four; but I am apprehensive that such an arrangement might not allow sufficient time for the requisite amount of—Something—to turn up. We might not,' said Mr. Micawber, looking round the room as if it represented several hundred acres of highly cultivated land, 'on the first responsibility becoming due, have been successful in our harvest, or we might not have got our harvest in. Labour, I believe, is sometimes difficult to obtain in that portion of our colonial possessions where it will be our lot to combat with the teeming soil.'

'Arrange it in any way you please, sir,' said my aunt.

'Madam,' he replied, 'Mrs. Micawber and myself are deeply sensible of the very considerate kindness of our friends and patrons. What I wish is, to be perfectly business-like, and perfectly punctual. Turning over, as we are about to turn over, an entirely new leaf; and falling back, as we are now in the act of falling back, for a Spring of no common magnitude; it is important to my sense of self-respect, besides being an example to my son, that these arrangements should be concluded as between man and man.'

I don't know that Mr. Micawber attached any meaning to this last phrase; I don't know that anybody ever does, or did; but he appeared to relish it uncommonly, and repeated, with an impressive cough, 'as between man and man'.

'I propose,' said Mr. Micawber, 'Bills—a convenience to the mercantile world, for which, I believe, we are originally indebted to the Jews, who appear to me to have had a devilish deal too much to do with them ever since—because they are negotiable. But if a Bond, or any other description of security, would be preferred, I should be happy to execute any such instrument. As between man and man.'

MY aunt observed, that in a case where both parties were willing to agree to anything, she took it for granted there would be no difficulty in settling this point. Mr. Micawber was of her opinion.

'In reference to our domestic preparations, madam,' said Mr. Micawber, with some pride, 'for meeting the destiny to which we are now understood to be self-devoted, I beg to report them. My eldest daughter attends at five every morning in a neighbouring establishment, to acquire the process—if process it may be called—of milking cows. My younger children are instructed to observe, as closely as circumstances will permit, the habits of the pigs and poultry maintained in the poorer parts of this city: a pursuit from which they have, on two occasions, been brought home, within an inch of being run over. I have myself directed some attention, during the past week, to the art of baking; and my son Wilkins has issued forth with a walking-stick and driven cattle, when permitted, by the rugged hirelings who had them in charge, to render any voluntary service in that direction—which I regret to say, for the credit of our nature, was not often; he being generally warned, with imprecations, to desist.'

'All very right indeed,' said my aunt, encouragingly. 'Mrs. Micawber has been busy, too, I have no doubt.'

'My dear madam,' returned Mrs. Micawber, with her business-like air. 'I am free to confess that I have not been actively engaged in pursuits immediately connected with cultivation or with stock, though well aware that both will claim my attention on a foreign shore. Such opportunities as I have been enabled to alienate from my domestic duties, I have devoted to corresponding at some length with my family. For I own it seems to me, my dear Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, who always fell back on me, I suppose from old habit, to whomsoever else she might address her discourse at starting, 'that the time is come when the past should be buried in oblivion; when my family should take Mr. Micawber by the hand, and Mr. Micawber should take my family by the hand; when the lion should lie down with the lamb, and my family be on terms with Mr. Micawber.'

I said I thought so too.

'This, at least, is the light, my dear Mr. Copperfield,' pursued Mrs. Micawber, 'in which I view the subject. When I lived at home with my papa and mama, my papa was accustomed to ask, when any point was under discussion in our limited circle, "In what light does my Emma view the subject?" That my papa was too partial, I know; still, on such a point as the frigid coldness which has ever subsisted between Mr. Micawber and my family, I necessarily have formed an opinion, delusive though it may be.'

'No doubt. Of course you have, ma'am,' said my aunt.

'Precisely so,' assented Mrs. Micawber. 'Now, I may be wrong in my conclusions; it is very likely that I am, but my individual impression is, that the gulf between my family and Mr. Micawber may be traced to an apprehension, on the part of my family, that Mr. Micawber would require pecuniary accommodation. I cannot help thinking,' said Mrs. Micawber, with an air of deep sagacity, 'that there are members of my family who have been apprehensive that Mr. Micawber would solicit them for their names. —-I do not mean to be conferred in Baptism upon our children, but to be inscribed on Bills of Exchange, and negotiated in the Money Market.'

The look of penetration with which Mrs. Micawber announced this discovery, as if no one had ever thought of it before, seemed rather to astonish my aunt; who abruptly replied, 'Well, ma'am, upon the whole, I shouldn't wonder if you were right!'

'Mr. Micawber being now on the eve of casting off the pecuniary shackles that have so long enthralled him,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'and of commencing a new career in a country where there is sufficient range for his abilities,—which, in my opinion, is exceedingly important; Mr. Micawber's abilities peculiarly requiring space,—it seems to me that my family should signalize the occasion by coming forward. What I could wish to see, would be a meeting between Mr. Micawber and my family at a festive entertainment, to be given at my family's expense; where Mr. Micawber's health and prosperity being proposed, by some leading member of my family, Mr. Micawber might have an opportunity of developing his views.'

'My dear,' said Mr. Micawber, with some heat, 'it may be better for me to state distinctly, at once, that if I were to develop my views to that assembled group, they would possibly be found of an offensive nature: my impression being that your family are, in the aggregate, impertinent Snobs; and, in detail, unmitigated Ruffians.'

'Micawber,' said Mrs. Micawber, shaking her head, 'no! You have never understood them, and they have never understood you.'

Mr. Micawber coughed.

'They have never understood you, Micawber,' said his wife. 'They may be incapable of it. If so, that is their misfortune. I can pity their misfortune.'

'I am extremely sorry, my dear Emma,' said Mr. Micawber, relenting, 'to have been betrayed into any expressions that might, even remotely, have the appearance of being strong expressions. All I would say is, that I can go abroad without your family coming forward to favour me,—in short, with a parting Shove of their cold shoulders; and that, upon the whole, I would rather leave England with such impetus as I possess, than derive any acceleration of it from that quarter. At the same time, my dear, if they should condescend to reply to your communications—which our joint experience renders most improbable—far be it from me to be a barrier to your wishes.'

The matter being thus amicably settled, Mr. Micawber gave Mrs. Micawber his arm, and glancing at the heap of books and papers lying before Traddles on the table, said they would leave us to ourselves; which they ceremoniously did.

'My dear Copperfield,' said Traddles, leaning back in his chair when they were gone, and looking at me with an affection that made his eyes red, and his hair all kinds of shapes, 'I don't make any excuse for troubling you with business, because I know you are deeply interested in it, and it may divert your thoughts. My dear boy, I hope you are not worn out?'

'I am quite myself,' said I, after a pause. 'We have more cause to think of my aunt than of anyone. You know how much she has done.'

'Surely, surely,' answered Traddles. 'Who can forget it!'

'But even that is not all,' said I. 'During the last fortnight, some new trouble has vexed her; and she has been in and out of London every day. Several times she has gone out early, and been absent until evening. Last night, Traddles, with this journey before her, it was almost midnight before she came home. You know what her consideration for others is. She will not tell me what has happened to distress her.'

My aunt, very pale, and with deep lines in her face, sat immovable until I had finished; when some stray tears found their way to her cheeks, and she put her hand on mine.

'It's nothing, Trot; it's nothing. There will be no more of it. You shall know by and by. Now Agnes, my dear, let us attend to these affairs.'

'I must do Mr. Micawber the justice to say,' Traddles began, 'that although he would appear not to have worked to any good account for himself, he is a most untiring man when he works for other people. I never saw such a fellow. If he always goes on in the same way, he must be, virtually, about two hundred years old, at present. The heat into which he has been continually putting himself; and the distracted and impetuous manner in which he has been diving, day and night, among papers and books; to say nothing of the immense number of letters he has written me between this house and Mr. Wickfield's, and often across the table when he has been sitting opposite, and might much more easily have spoken; is quite extraordinary.'

'Letters!' cried my aunt. 'I believe he dreams in letters!'

'There's Mr. Dick, too,' said Traddles, 'has been doing wonders! As soon as he was released from overlooking Uriah Heep, whom he kept in such charge as I never saw exceeded, he began to devote himself to Mr. Wickfield. And really his anxiety to be of use in the investigations we have been making, and his real usefulness in extracting, and copying, and fetching, and carrying, have been quite stimulating to us.'

'Dick is a very remarkable man,' exclaimed my aunt; 'and I always said he was. Trot, you know it.'

'I am happy to say, Miss Wickfield,' pursued Traddles, at once with great delicacy and with great earnestness, 'that in your absence Mr. Wickfield has considerably improved. Relieved of the incubus that had fastened upon him for so long a time, and of the dreadful apprehensions under which he had lived, he is hardly the same person. At times, even his impaired power of concentrating his memory and attention on particular points of business, has recovered itself very much; and he has been able to assist us in making some things clear, that we should have found very difficult indeed, if not hopeless, without him. But what I have to do is to come to results; which are short enough; not to gossip on all the hopeful circumstances I have observed, or I shall never have done.' His natural manner and agreeable simplicity made it transparent that he said this to put us in good heart, and to enable Agnes to hear her father mentioned with greater confidence; but it was not the less pleasant for that.

'Now, let me see,' said Traddles, looking among the papers on the table. 'Having counted our funds, and reduced to order a great mass of unintentional confusion in the first place, and of wilful confusion and falsification in the second, we take it to be clear that Mr. Wickfield might now wind up his business, and his agency-trust, and exhibit no deficiency or defalcation whatever.'

'Oh, thank Heaven!' cried Agnes, fervently.

'But,' said Traddles, 'the surplus that would be left as his means of support—and I suppose the house to be sold, even in saying this—would be so small, not exceeding in all probability some hundreds of pounds, that perhaps, Miss Wickfield, it would be best to consider whether he might not retain his agency of the estate to which he has so long been receiver. His friends might advise him, you know; now he is free. You yourself, Miss Wickfield—Copperfield—I—'

'I have considered it, Trotwood,' said Agnes, looking to me, 'and I feel that it ought not to be, and must not be; even on the recommendation of a friend to whom I am so grateful, and owe so much.'

'I will not say that I recommend it,' observed Traddles. 'I think it right to suggest it. No more.'

'I am happy to hear you say so,' answered Agnes, steadily, 'for it gives me hope, almost assurance, that we think alike. Dear Mr. Traddles and dear Trotwood, papa once free with honour, what could I wish for! I have always aspired, if I could have released him from the toils in which he was held, to render back some little portion of the love and care I owe him, and to devote my life to him. It has been, for years, the utmost height of my hopes.

To take our future on myself, will be the next great happiness—the next to his release from all trust and responsibility—that I can know.'

'Have you thought how, Agnes?'

'Often! I am not afraid, dear Trotwood. I am certain of success. So many people know me here, and think kindly of me, that I am certain. Don't mistrust me. Our wants are not many. If I rent the dear old house, and keep a school, I shall be useful and happy.'

The calm fervour of her cheerful voice brought back so vividly, first the dear old house itself, and then my solitary home, that my heart was too full for speech. Traddles pretended for a little while to be busily looking among the papers.

'Next, Miss Trotwood,' said Traddles, 'that property of yours.'

'Well, sir,' sighed my aunt. 'All I have got to say about it is, that if it's gone, I can bear it; and if it's not gone, I shall be glad to get it back.'

'It was originally, I think, eight thousand pounds, Consols?' said Traddles.

'Right!' replied my aunt.

'I can't account for more than five,' said Traddles, with an air of perplexity.

'—thousand, do you mean?' inquired my aunt, with uncommon composure, 'or pounds?'

'Five thousand pounds,' said Traddles.

'It was all there was,' returned my aunt. 'I sold three, myself. One, I paid for your articles, Trot, my dear; and the other two I have by me. When I lost the rest, I thought it wise to say nothing about that sum, but to keep it secretly for a rainy day. I wanted to see how you would come out of the trial, Trot; and you came out nobly—persevering, self-reliant, self-denying! So did Dick. Don't speak to me, for I find my nerves a little shaken!'

Nobody would have thought so, to see her sitting upright, with her arms folded; but she had wonderful self-command.

'Then I am delighted to say,' cried Traddles, beaming with joy, 'that we have recovered the whole money!'

'Don't congratulate me, anybody!' exclaimed my aunt. 'How so, sir?'

'You believed it had been misappropriated by Mr. Wickfield?' said Traddles.

'Of course I did,' said my aunt, 'and was therefore easily silenced. Agnes, not a word!'

'And indeed,' said Traddles, 'it was sold, by virtue of the power of management he held from you; but I needn't say by whom sold, or on whose actual signature. It was afterwards pretended to Mr. Wickfield, by that rascal,—and proved, too, by figures,—that he had possessed himself of the money (on general instructions, he said) to keep other deficiencies and difficulties from the light. Mr. Wickfield, being so weak and helpless in his hands as to pay you, afterwards, several sums of interest on a pretended principal which he knew did not exist, made himself, unhappily, a party to the fraud.'

'And at last took the blame upon himself,' added my aunt; 'and wrote me a mad letter, charging himself with robbery, and wrong unheard of. Upon which I paid him a visit early one morning, called for a candle, burnt the letter, and told him if he ever could right me and himself, to do it; and if he couldn't, to keep his own counsel for his daughter's sake.—-If anybody speaks to me, I'll leave the house!'

We all remained quiet; Agnes covering her face.

'Well, my dear friend,' said my aunt, after a pause, 'and you have really extorted the money back from him?'

'Why, the fact is,' returned Traddles, 'Mr. Micawber had so completely hemmed him in, and was always ready with so many new points if an old one failed, that he could not escape from us. A most remarkable circumstance is, that I really don't think he grasped this sum even so much for the gratification of his avarice, which was inordinate, as in the hatred he felt for Copperfield. He said so to me, plainly. He said he would even have spent as much, to baulk or injure Copperfield.'

'Ha!' said my aunt, knitting her brows thoughtfully, and glancing at Agnes. 'And what's become of him?'

'I don't know. He left here,' said Traddles, 'with his mother, who had been clamouring, and beseeching, and disclosing, the whole time. They went away by one of the London night coaches, and I know no more about him; except that his malevolence to me at parting was audacious. He seemed to consider himself hardly less indebted to me, than to Mr. Micawber; which I consider (as I told him) quite a compliment.'

'Do you suppose he has any money, Traddles?' I asked.

'Oh dear, yes, I should think so,' he replied, shaking his head, seriously. 'I should say he must have pocketed a good deal, in one way or other. But, I think you would find, Copperfield, if you had an opportunity of observing his course, that money would never keep that man out of mischief. He is such an incarnate hypocrite, that whatever object he pursues, he must pursue crookedly. It's his only compensation for the outward restraints he puts upon himself. Always creeping along the ground to some small end or other, he will always magnify every object in the way; and consequently will hate and suspect everybody that comes, in the most innocent manner, between him and it. So the crooked courses will become crookeder, at any moment, for the least reason, or for none. It's only necessary to consider his history here,' said Traddles, 'to know that.'

'He's a monster of meanness!' said my aunt.

'Really I don't know about that,' observed Traddles thoughtfully. 'Many people can be very mean, when they give their minds to it.'

'And now, touching Mr. Micawber,' said my aunt.

'Well, really,' said Traddles, cheerfully, 'I must, once more, give Mr. Micawber high praise. But for his having been so patient and persevering for so long a time, we never could have hoped to do anything worth speaking of. And I think we ought to consider that Mr. Micawber did right, for right's sake, when we reflect what terms he might have made with Uriah Heep himself, for his silence.'

'I think so too,' said I.

'Now, what would you give him?' inquired my aunt.

'Oh! Before you come to that,' said Traddles, a little disconcerted, 'I am afraid I thought it discreet to omit (not being able to carry everything before me) two points, in making this lawless adjustment—for it's perfectly lawless from beginning to end—of a difficult affair. Those I.O.U.'s, and so forth, which Mr. Micawber gave him for the advances he had—'

'Well! They must be paid,' said my aunt.

'Yes, but I don't know when they may be proceeded on, or where they are,' rejoined Traddles, opening his eyes; 'and I anticipate, that, between this time and his departure, Mr. Micawber will be constantly arrested, or taken in execution.'

'Then he must be constantly set free again, and taken out of execution,' said my aunt. 'What's the amount altogether?'

'Why, Mr. Micawber has entered the transactions—he calls them transactions—with great form, in a book,' rejoined Traddles, smiling; 'and he makes the amount a hundred and three pounds, five.'

'Now, what shall we give him, that sum included?' said my aunt. 'Agnes, my dear, you and I can talk about division of it afterwards. What should it be? Five hundred pounds?'

Upon this, Traddles and I both struck in at once. We both recommended a small sum in money, and the payment, without stipulation to Mr. Micawber, of the Uriah claims as they came in. We proposed that the family should have their passage and their outfit, and a hundred pounds; and that Mr. Micawber's arrangement for the repayment of the advances should be gravely entered into, as it might be wholesome for him to suppose himself under that responsibility. To this, I added the suggestion, that I should give some explanation of his character and history to Mr. Peggotty, who I knew could be relied on; and that to Mr. Peggotty should be quietly entrusted the discretion of advancing another hundred. I further proposed to interest Mr. Micawber in Mr. Peggotty, by confiding so much of Mr. Peggotty's story to him as I might feel justified in relating, or might think expedient; and to endeavour to bring each of them to bear upon the other, for the common advantage. We all entered warmly into these views; and I may mention at once, that the principals themselves did so, shortly afterwards, with perfect good will and harmony.

Seeing that Traddles now glanced anxiously at my aunt again, I reminded him of the second and last point to which he had adverted.

'You and your aunt will excuse me, Copperfield, if I touch upon a painful theme, as I greatly fear I shall,' said Traddles, hesitating; 'but I think it necessary to bring it to your recollection. On the day of Mr. Micawber's memorable denunciation a threatening allusion was made by Uriah Heep to your aunt's—husband.'

My aunt, retaining her stiff position, and apparent composure, assented with a nod.

'Perhaps,' observed Traddles, 'it was mere purposeless impertinence?'

'No,' returned my aunt.

'There was—pardon me—really such a person, and at all in his power?' hinted Traddles.

'Yes, my good friend,' said my aunt.

Traddles, with a perceptible lengthening of his face, explained that he had not been able to approach this subject; that it had shared the fate of Mr. Micawber's liabilities, in not being comprehended in the terms he had made; that we were no longer of any authority with Uriah Heep; and that if he could do us, or any of us, any injury or annoyance, no doubt he would.

My aunt remained quiet; until again some stray tears found their way to her cheeks. 'You are quite right,' she said. 'It was very thoughtful to mention it.'

'Can I—or Copperfield—do anything?' asked Traddles, gently.

'Nothing,' said my aunt. 'I thank you many times. Trot, my dear, a vain threat! Let us have Mr. and Mrs. Micawber back. And don't any of you speak to me!' With that she smoothed her dress, and sat, with her upright carriage, looking at the door.

'Well, Mr. and Mrs. Micawber!' said my aunt, when they entered. 'We have been discussing your emigration, with many apologies to you for keeping you out of the room so long; and I'll tell you what arrangements we propose.'

These she explained to the unbounded satisfaction of the family,—children and all being then present,—and so much to the awakening of Mr. Micawber's punctual habits in the opening stage of all bill transactions, that he could not be dissuaded from immediately rushing out, in the highest spirits, to buy the stamps for his notes of hand. But, his joy received a sudden check; for within five minutes, he returned in the custody of a sheriff 's officer, informing us, in a flood of tears, that all was lost. We, being quite prepared for this event, which was of course a proceeding of Uriah Heep's, soon paid the money; and in five minutes more Mr. Micawber was seated at the table, filling up the stamps with an expression of perfect joy, which only that congenial employment, or the making of punch, could impart in full completeness to his shining face. To see him at work on the stamps, with the relish of an artist, touching them like pictures, looking at them sideways, taking weighty notes of dates and amounts in his pocket-book, and contemplating them when finished, with a high sense of their precious value, was a sight indeed.

'Now, the best thing you can do, sir, if you'll allow me to advise you,' said my aunt, after silently observing him, 'is to abjure that occupation for evermore.'

'Madam,' replied Mr. Micawber, 'it is my intention to register such a vow on the virgin page of the future. Mrs. Micawber will attest it. I trust,' said Mr. Micawber, solemnly, 'that my son Wilkins will ever bear in mind, that he had infinitely better put his fist in the fire, than use it to handle the serpents that have poisoned the life-blood of his unhappy parent!' Deeply affected, and changed in a moment to the image of despair, Mr. Micawber regarded the serpents with a look of gloomy abhorrence (in which his late admiration of them was not quite subdued), folded them up and put them in his pocket.

This closed the proceedings of the evening. We were weary with sorrow and fatigue, and my aunt and I were to return to London on the morrow. It was arranged that the Micawbers should follow us, after effecting a sale of their goods to a broker; that Mr. Wickfield's affairs should be brought to a settlement, with all convenient speed, under the direction of Traddles; and that Agnes should also come to London, pending those arrangements. We passed the night at the old house, which, freed from the presence of the Heeps, seemed purged of a disease; and I lay in my old room, like a shipwrecked wanderer come home.

We went back next day to my aunt's house—not to mine—and when she and I sat alone, as of old, before going to bed, she said:

'Trot, do you really wish to know what I have had upon my mind lately?'

'Indeed I do, aunt. If there ever was a time when I felt unwilling that you should have a sorrow or anxiety which I could not share, it is now.'

'You have had sorrow enough, child,' said my aunt, affectionately, 'without the addition of my little miseries. I could have no other motive, Trot, in keeping anything from you.'

'I know that well,' said I. 'But tell me now.'

'Would you ride with me a little way tomorrow morning?' asked my aunt.

'Of course.'

'At nine,' said she. 'I'll tell you then, my dear.'

At nine, accordingly, we went out in a little chariot, and drove to London. We drove a long way through the streets, until we came to one of the large hospitals. Standing hard by the building was a plain hearse. The driver recognized my aunt, and, in obedience to a motion of her hand at the window, drove slowly off; we following.

'You understand it now, Trot,' said my aunt. 'He is gone!'

'Did he die in the hospital?'

'Yes.'

She sat immovable beside me; but, again I saw the stray tears on her face.

'He was there once before,' said my aunt presently. 'He was ailing a long time—a shattered, broken man, these many years. When he knew his state in this last illness, he asked them to send for me. He was sorry then. Very sorry.'

'You went, I know, aunt.'

'I went. I was with him a good deal afterwards.'

'He died the night before we went to Canterbury?' said I. My aunt nodded. 'No one can harm him now,' she said. 'It was a vain threat.'

We drove away, out of town, to the churchyard at Hornsey. 'Better here than in the streets,' said my aunt. 'He was born here.'

We alighted; and followed the plain coffin to a corner I remember well, where the service was read consigning it to the dust.

'Six-and-thirty years ago, this day, my dear,' said my aunt, as we walked back to the chariot, 'I was married. God forgive us all!' We took our seats in silence; and so she sat beside me for a long time, holding my hand. At length she suddenly burst into tears, and said:

'He was a fine-looking man when I married him, Trot—and he was sadly changed!'

It did not last long. After the relief of tears, she soon became composed, and even cheerful. Her nerves were a little shaken, she said, or she would not have given way to it. God forgive us all!

So we rode back to her little cottage at Highgate, where we found the following short note, which had arrived by that morning's post from Mr. Micawber:

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        'Canterbury,

            'Friday.
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'My dear Madam, and Copperfield,

'The fair land of promise lately looming on the horizon is again enveloped in impenetrable mists, and for ever withdrawn from the eyes of a drifting wretch whose Doom is sealed!

'Another writ has been issued (in His Majesty's High Court of King's Bench at Westminster), in another cause of HEEP V. MICAWBER, and the defendant in that cause is the prey of the sheriff having legal jurisdiction in this bailiwick.

'Now's the day, and now's the hour,
See the front of battle lower,
See approach proud EDWARD'S power—
Chains and slavery!

'Consigned to which, and to a speedy end (for mental torture is not supportable beyond a certain point, and that point I feel I have attained), my course is run. Bless you, bless you! Some future traveller, visiting, from motives of curiosity, not unmingled, let us hope, with sympathy, the place of confinement allotted to debtors in this city, may, and I trust will, Ponder, as he traces on its wall, inscribed with a rusty nail,

'The obscure initials,

'W. M.

'P.S. I re-open this to say that our common friend, Mr. Thomas Traddles (who has not yet left us, and is looking extremely well), has paid the debt and costs, in the noble name of Miss Trotwood; and that myself and family are at the height of earthly bliss.'

CHAPTER 55. TEMPEST

I now approach an event in my life, so indelible, so awful, so bound by an infinite variety of ties to all that has preceded it, in these pages, that, from the beginning of my narrative, I have seen it growing larger and larger as I advanced, like a great tower in a plain, and throwing its fore-cast shadow even on the incidents of my childish days.

For years after it occurred, I dreamed of it often. I have started up so vividly impressed by it, that its fury has yet seemed raging in my quiet room, in the still night. I dream of it sometimes, though at lengthened and uncertain intervals, to this hour. I have an association between it and a stormy wind, or the lightest mention of a sea-shore, as strong as any of which my mind is conscious. As plainly as I behold what happened, I will try to write it down. I do not recall it, but see it done; for it happens again before me.

The time drawing on rapidly for the sailing of the emigrant-ship, my good old nurse (almost broken-hearted for me, when we first met) came up to London. I was constantly with her, and her brother, and the Micawbers (they being very much together); but Emily I never saw.

One evening when the time was close at hand, I was alone with Peggotty and her brother. Our conversation turned on Ham. She described to us how tenderly he had taken leave of her, and how manfully and quietly he had borne himself. Most of all, of late, when she believed he was most tried. It was a subject of which the affectionate creature never tired; and our interest in hearing the many examples which she, who was so much with him, had to relate, was equal to hers in relating them.

MY aunt and I were at that time vacating the two cottages at Highgate; I intending to go abroad, and she to return to her house at Dover. We had a temporary lodging in Covent Garden. As I walked home to it, after this evening's conversation, reflecting on what had passed between Ham and myself when I was last at Yarmouth, I wavered in the original purpose I had formed, of leaving a letter for Emily when I should take leave of her uncle on board the ship, and thought it would be better to write to her now. She might desire, I thought, after receiving my communication, to send some parting word by me to her unhappy lover. I ought to give her the opportunity.

I therefore sat down in my room, before going to bed, and wrote to her. I told her that I had seen him, and that he had requested me to tell her what I have already written in its place in these sheets. I faithfully repeated it. I had no need to enlarge upon it, if I had had the right. Its deep fidelity and goodness were not to be adorned by me or any man. I left it out, to be sent round in the morning; with a line to Mr. Peggotty, requesting him to give it to her; and went to bed at daybreak.

I was weaker than I knew then; and, not falling asleep until the sun was up, lay late, and unrefreshed, next day. I was roused by the silent presence of my aunt at my bedside. I felt it in my sleep, as I suppose we all do feel such things.

'Trot, my dear,' she said, when I opened my eyes, 'I couldn't make up my mind to disturb you. Mr. Peggotty is here; shall he come up?'

I replied yes, and he soon appeared.

'Mas'r Davy,' he said, when we had shaken hands, 'I giv Em'ly your letter, sir, and she writ this heer; and begged of me fur to ask you to read it, and if you see no hurt in't, to be so kind as take charge on't.'

'Have you read it?' said I.

He nodded sorrowfully. I opened it, and read as follows:

'I have got your message. Oh, what can I write, to thank you for your good and blessed kindness to me!

'I have put the words close to my heart. I shall keep them till I die. They are sharp thorns, but they are such comfort. I have prayed over them, oh, I have prayed so much. When I find what you are, and what uncle is, I think what God must be, and can cry to him.

'Good-bye for ever. Now, my dear, my friend, good-bye for ever in this world. In another world, if I am forgiven, I may wake a child and come to you. All thanks and blessings. Farewell, evermore.'

This, blotted with tears, was the letter.

'May I tell her as you doen't see no hurt in't, and as you'll be so kind as take charge on't, Mas'r Davy?' said Mr. Peggotty, when I had read it. 'Unquestionably,' said I—'but I am thinking—'

'Yes, Mas'r Davy?'

'I am thinking,' said I, 'that I'll go down again to Yarmouth. There's time, and to spare, for me to go and come back before the ship sails. My mind is constantly running on him, in his solitude; to put this letter of her writing in his hand at this time, and to enable you to tell her, in the moment of parting, that he has got it, will be a kindness to both of them. I solemnly accepted his commission, dear good fellow, and cannot discharge it too completely. The journey is nothing to me. I am restless, and shall be better in motion. I'll go down tonight.'

Though he anxiously endeavoured to dissuade me, I saw that he was of my mind; and this, if I had required to be confirmed in my intention, would have had the effect. He went round to the coach office, at my request, and took the box-seat for me on the mail. In the evening I started, by that conveyance, down the road I had traversed under so many vicissitudes.

'Don't you think that,' I asked the coachman, in the first stage out of London, 'a very remarkable sky? I don't remember to have seen one like it.'

'Nor I—not equal to it,' he replied. 'That's wind, sir. There'll be mischief done at sea, I expect, before long.'

It was a murky confusion—here and there blotted with a colour like the colour of the smoke from damp fuel—of flying clouds, tossed up into most remarkable heaps, suggesting greater heights in the clouds than there were depths below them to the bottom of the deepest hollows in the earth, through which the wild moon seemed to plunge headlong, as if, in a dread disturbance of the laws of nature, she had lost her way and were frightened. There had been a wind all day; and it was rising then, with an extraordinary great sound. In another hour it had much increased, and the sky was more overcast, and blew hard.

But, as the night advanced, the clouds closing in and densely over-spreading the whole sky, then very dark, it came on to blow, harder and harder. It still increased, until our horses could scarcely face the wind. Many times, in the dark part of the night (it was then late in September, when the nights were not short), the leaders turned about, or came to a dead stop; and we were often in serious apprehension that the coach would be blown over. Sweeping gusts of rain came up before this storm, like showers of steel; and, at those times, when there was any shelter of trees or lee walls to be got, we were fain to stop, in a sheer impossibility of continuing the struggle.

When the day broke, it blew harder and harder. I had been in Yarmouth when the seamen said it blew great guns, but I had never known the like of this, or anything approaching to it. We came to Ipswich—very late, having had to fight every inch of ground since we were ten miles out of London; and found a cluster of people in the market-place, who had risen from their beds in the night, fearful of falling chimneys. Some of these, congregating about the inn-yard while we changed horses, told us of great sheets of lead having been ripped off a high church-tower, and flung into a by-street, which they then blocked up. Others had to tell of country people, coming in from neighbouring villages, who had seen great trees lying torn out of the earth, and whole ricks scattered about the roads and fields. Still, there was no abatement in the storm, but it blew harder.

As we struggled on, nearer and nearer to the sea, from which this mighty wind was blowing dead on shore, its force became more and more terrific. Long before we saw the sea, its spray was on our lips, and showered salt rain upon us. The water was out, over miles and miles of the flat country adjacent to Yarmouth; and every sheet and puddle lashed its banks, and had its stress of little breakers setting heavily towards us. When we came within sight of the sea, the waves on the horizon, caught at intervals above the rolling abyss, were like glimpses of another shore with towers and buildings. When at last we got into the town, the people came out to their doors, all aslant, and with streaming hair, making a wonder of the mail that had come through such a night.

I put up at the old inn, and went down to look at the sea; staggering along the street, which was strewn with sand and seaweed, and with flying blotches of sea-foam; afraid of falling slates and tiles; and holding by people I met, at angry corners. Coming near the beach, I saw, not only the boatmen, but half the people of the town, lurking behind buildings; some, now and then braving the fury of the storm to look away to sea, and blown sheer out of their course in trying to get zigzag back.

Joining these groups, I found bewailing women whose husbands were away in herring or oyster boats, which there was too much reason to think might have foundered before they could run in anywhere for safety. Grizzled old sailors were among the people, shaking their heads, as they looked from water to sky, and muttering to one another; ship-owners, excited and uneasy; children, huddling together, and peering into older faces; even stout mariners, disturbed and anxious, levelling their glasses at the sea from behind places of shelter, as if they were surveying an enemy.

The tremendous sea itself, when I could find sufficient pause to look at it, in the agitation of the blinding wind, the flying stones and sand, and the awful noise, confounded me. As the high watery walls came rolling in, and, at their highest, tumbled into surf, they looked as if the least would engulf the town. As the receding wave swept back with a hoarse roar, it seemed to scoop out deep caves in the beach, as if its purpose were to undermine the earth. When some white-headed billows thundered on, and dashed themselves to pieces before they reached the land, every fragment of the late whole seemed possessed by the full might of its wrath, rushing to be gathered to the composition of another monster. Undulating hills were changed to valleys, undulating valleys (with a solitary storm-bird sometimes skimming through them) were lifted up to hills; masses of water shivered and shook the beach with a booming sound; every shape tumultuously rolled on, as soon as made, to change its shape and place, and beat another shape and place away; the ideal shore on the horizon, with its towers and buildings, rose and fell; the clouds fell fast and thick; I seemed to see a rending and upheaving of all nature.

Not finding Ham among the people whom this memorable wind—for it is still remembered down there, as the greatest ever known to blow upon that coast—had brought together, I made my way to his house. It was shut; and as no one answered to my knocking, I went, by back ways and by-lanes, to the yard where he worked. I learned, there, that he had gone to Lowestoft, to meet some sudden exigency of ship-repairing in which his skill was required; but that he would be back tomorrow morning, in good time.

I went back to the inn; and when I had washed and dressed, and tried to sleep, but in vain, it was five o'clock in the afternoon. I had not sat five minutes by the coffee-room fire, when the waiter, coming to stir it, as an excuse for talking, told me that two colliers had gone down, with all hands, a few miles away; and that some other ships had been seen labouring hard in the Roads, and trying, in great distress, to keep off shore. Mercy on them, and on all poor sailors, said he, if we had another night like the last!

I was very much depressed in spirits; very solitary; and felt an uneasiness in Ham's not being there, disproportionate to the occasion. I was seriously affected, without knowing how much, by late events; and my long exposure to the fierce wind had confused me. There was that jumble in my thoughts and recollections, that I had lost the clear arrangement of time and distance. Thus, if I had gone out into the town, I should not have been surprised, I think, to encounter someone who I knew must be then in

London. So to speak, there was in these respects a curious inattention in my mind. Yet it was busy, too, with all the remembrances the place naturally awakened; and they were particularly distinct and vivid.

In this state, the waiter's dismal intelligence about the ships immediately connected itself, without any effort of my volition, with my uneasiness about Ham. I was persuaded that I had an apprehension of his returning from Lowestoft by sea, and being lost. This grew so strong with me, that I resolved to go back to the yard before I took my dinner, and ask the boat-builder if he thought his attempting to return by sea at all likely? If he gave me the least reason to think so, I would go over to Lowestoft and prevent it by bringing him with me.

I hastily ordered my dinner, and went back to the yard. I was none too soon; for the boat-builder, with a lantern in his hand, was locking the yard-gate. He quite laughed when I asked him the question, and said there was no fear; no man in his senses, or out of them, would put off in such a gale of wind, least of all Ham Peggotty, who had been born to seafaring.

So sensible of this, beforehand, that I had really felt ashamed of doing what I was nevertheless impelled to do, I went back to the inn. If such a wind could rise, I think it was rising. The howl and roar, the rattling of the doors and windows, the rumbling in the chimneys, the apparent rocking of the very house that sheltered me, and the prodigious tumult of the sea, were more fearful than in the morning. But there was now a great darkness besides; and that invested the storm with new terrors, real and fanciful.

I could not eat, I could not sit still, I could not continue steadfast to anything. Something within me, faintly answering to the storm without, tossed up the depths of my memory and made a tumult in them. Yet, in all the hurry of my thoughts, wild running with the thundering sea,—the storm, and my uneasiness regarding Ham were always in the fore-ground.

My dinner went away almost untasted, and I tried to refresh myself with a glass or two of wine. In vain. I fell into a dull slumber before the fire, without losing my consciousness, either of the uproar out of doors, or of the place in which I was. Both became overshadowed by a new and indefinable horror; and when I awoke—or rather when I shook off the lethargy that bound me in my chair—my whole frame thrilled with objectless and unintelligible fear.

I walked to and fro, tried to read an old gazetteer, listened to the awful noises: looked at faces, scenes, and figures in the fire. At length, the steady ticking of the undisturbed clock on the wall tormented me to that degree that I resolved to go to bed.

It was reassuring, on such a night, to be told that some of the inn-servants had agreed together to sit up until morning. I went to bed, exceedingly weary and heavy; but, on my lying down, all such sensations vanished, as if by magic, and I was broad awake, with every sense refined.

For hours I lay there, listening to the wind and water; imagining, now, that I heard shrieks out at sea; now, that I distinctly heard the firing of signal guns; and now, the fall of houses in the town. I got up, several times, and looked out; but could see nothing, except the reflection in the window-panes of the faint candle I had left burning, and of my own haggard face looking in at me from the black void.

At length, my restlessness attained to such a pitch, that I hurried on my clothes, and went downstairs. In the large kitchen, where I dimly saw bacon and ropes of onions hanging from the beams, the watchers were clustered together, in various attitudes, about a table, purposely moved away from the great chimney, and brought near the door. A pretty girl, who had her ears stopped with her apron, and her eyes upon the door, screamed when I appeared, supposing me to be a spirit; but the others had more presence of mind, and were glad of an addition to their company. One man, referring to the topic they had been discussing, asked me whether I thought the souls of the collier-crews who had gone down, were out in the storm?

I remained there, I dare say, two hours. Once, I opened the yard-gate, and looked into the empty street. The sand, the sea-weed, and the flakes of foam, were driving by; and I was obliged to call for assistance before I could shut the gate again, and make it fast against the wind.

There was a dark gloom in my solitary chamber, when I at length returned to it; but I was tired now, and, getting into bed again, fell—off a tower and down a precipice—into the depths of sleep. I have an impression that for a long time, though I dreamed of being elsewhere and in a variety of scenes, it was always blowing in my dream. At length, I lost that feeble hold upon reality, and was engaged with two dear friends, but who they were I don't know, at the siege of some town in a roar of cannonading.

The thunder of the cannon was so loud and incessant, that I could not hear something I much desired to hear, until I made a great exertion and awoke. It was broad day—eight or nine o'clock; the storm raging, in lieu of the batteries; and someone knocking and calling at my door.

'What is the matter?' I cried.

'A wreck! Close by!'

I sprung out of bed, and asked, what wreck?

'A schooner, from Spain or Portugal, laden with fruit and wine. Make haste, sir, if you want to see her! It's thought, down on the beach, she'll go to pieces every moment.'

The excited voice went clamouring along the staircase; and I wrapped myself in my clothes as quickly as I could, and ran into the street.

Numbers of people were there before me, all running in one direction, to the beach. I ran the same way, outstripping a good many, and soon came facing the wild sea.

The wind might by this time have lulled a little, though not more sensibly than if the cannonading I had dreamed of, had been diminished by the silencing of half-a-dozen guns out of hundreds. But the sea, having upon it the additional agitation of the whole night, was infinitely more terrific than when I had seen it last. Every appearance it had then presented, bore the expression of being swelled; and the height to which the breakers rose, and, looking over one another, bore one another down, and rolled in, in interminable hosts, was most appalling. In the difficulty of hearing anything but wind and waves, and in the crowd, and the unspeakable confusion, and my first breathless efforts to stand against the weather, I was so confused that I looked out to sea for the wreck, and saw nothing but the foaming heads of the great waves. A half-dressed boatman, standing next me, pointed with his bare arm (a tattoo'd arrow on it, pointing in the same direction) to the left. Then, O great Heaven, I saw it, close in upon us!

One mast was broken short off, six or eight feet from the deck, and lay over the side, entangled in a maze of sail and rigging; and all that ruin, as the ship rolled and beat—which she did without a moment's pause, and with a violence quite inconceivable—beat the side as if it would stave it in. Some efforts were even then being made, to cut this portion of the wreck away; for, as the ship, which was broadside on, turned towards us in her rolling, I plainly descried her people at work with axes, especially one active figure with long curling hair, conspicuous among the rest. But a great cry, which was audible even above the wind and water, rose from the shore at this moment; the sea, sweeping over the rolling wreck, made a clean breach, and carried men, spars, casks, planks, bulwarks, heaps of such toys, into the boiling surge.

The second mast was yet standing, with the rags of a rent sail, and a wild confusion of broken cordage flapping to and fro. The ship had struck once, the same boatman hoarsely said in my ear, and then lifted in and struck again. I understood him to add that she was parting amidships, and I could readily suppose so, for the rolling and beating were too tremendous for any human work to suffer long. As he spoke, there was another great cry of pity from the beach; four men arose with the wreck out of the deep, clinging to the rigging of the remaining mast; uppermost, the active figure with the curling hair.

There was a bell on board; and as the ship rolled and dashed, like a desperate creature driven mad, now showing us the whole sweep of her deck, as she turned on her beam-ends towards the shore, now nothing but her keel, as she sprung wildly over and turned towards the sea, the bell rang; and its sound, the knell of those unhappy men, was borne towards us on the wind. Again we lost her, and again she rose. Two men were gone. The agony on the shore increased. Men groaned, and clasped their hands; women shrieked, and turned away their faces. Some ran wildly up and down along the beach, crying for help where no help could be. I found myself one of these, frantically imploring a knot of sailors whom I knew, not to let those two lost creatures perish before our eyes.

They were making out to me, in an agitated way—I don't know how, for the little I could hear I was scarcely composed enough to understand—that the lifeboat had been bravely manned an hour ago, and could do nothing; and that as no man would be so desperate as to attempt to wade off with a rope, and establish a communication with the shore, there was nothing left to try; when I noticed that some new sensation moved the people on the beach, and saw them part, and Ham come breaking through them to the front.

I ran to him—as well as I know, to repeat my appeal for help. But, distracted though I was, by a sight so new to me and terrible, the determination in his face, and his look out to sea—exactly the same look as I remembered in connexion with the morning after Emily's flight—awoke me to a knowledge of his danger. I held him back with both arms; and implored the men with whom I had been speaking, not to listen to him, not to do murder, not to let him stir from off that sand!

Another cry arose on shore; and looking to the wreck, we saw the cruel sail, with blow on blow, beat off the lower of the two men, and fly up in triumph round the active figure left alone upon the mast.

Against such a sight, and against such determination as that of the calmly desperate man who was already accustomed to lead half the people present, I might as hopefully have entreated the wind. 'Mas'r Davy,' he said, cheerily grasping me by both hands, 'if my time is come, 'tis come. If 'tan't, I'll bide it. Lord above bless you, and bless all! Mates, make me ready! I'm a-going off!'

I was swept away, but not unkindly, to some distance, where the people around me made me stay; urging, as I confusedly perceived, that he was bent on going, with help or without, and that I should endanger the precautions for his safety by troubling those with whom they rested. I don't know what I answered, or what they rejoined; but I saw hurry on the beach, and men running with ropes from a capstan that was there, and penetrating into a circle of figures that hid him from me. Then, I saw him standing alone, in a seaman's frock and trousers: a rope in his hand, or slung to his wrist: another round his body: and several of the best men holding, at a little distance, to the latter, which he laid out himself, slack upon the shore, at his feet.

The wreck, even to my unpractised eye, was breaking up. I saw that she was parting in the middle, and that the life of the solitary man upon the mast hung by a thread. Still, he clung to it. He had a singular red cap on,—not like a sailor's cap, but of a finer colour; and as the few yielding planks between him and destruction rolled and bulged, and his anticipative death-knell rung, he was seen by all of us to wave it. I saw him do it now, and thought I was going distracted, when his action brought an old remembrance to my mind of a once dear friend.

Ham watched the sea, standing alone, with the silence of suspended breath behind him, and the storm before, until there was a great retiring wave, when, with a backward glance at those who held the rope which was made fast round his body, he dashed in after it, and in a moment was buffeting with the water; rising with the hills, falling with the valleys, lost beneath the foam; then drawn again to land. They hauled in hastily.

He was hurt. I saw blood on his face, from where I stood; but he took no thought of that. He seemed hurriedly to give them some directions for leaving him more free—or so I judged from the motion of his arm—and was gone as before.

And now he made for the wreck, rising with the hills, falling with the valleys, lost beneath the rugged foam, borne in towards the shore, borne on towards the ship, striving hard and valiantly. The distance was nothing, but the power of the sea and wind made the strife deadly. At length he neared the wreck. He was so near, that with one more of his vigorous strokes he would be clinging to it,—when a high, green, vast hill-side of water, moving on shoreward, from beyond the ship, he seemed to leap up into it with a mighty bound, and the ship was gone!

Some eddying fragments I saw in the sea, as if a mere cask had been broken, in running to the spot where they were hauling in. Consternation was in every face. They drew him to my very feet—insensible—dead. He was carried to the nearest house; and, no one preventing me now, I remained near him, busy, while every means of restoration were tried; but he had been beaten to death by the great wave, and his generous heart was stilled for ever.

As I sat beside the bed, when hope was abandoned and all was done, a fisherman, who had known me when Emily and I were children, and ever since, whispered my name at the door.

'Sir,' said he, with tears starting to his weather-beaten face, which, with his trembling lips, was ashy pale, 'will you come over yonder?'

The old remembrance that had been recalled to me, was in his look. I asked him, terror-stricken, leaning on the arm he held out to support me:

'Has a body come ashore?'

He said, 'Yes.'

'Do I know it?' I asked then.

He answered nothing.

But he led me to the shore. And on that part of it where she and I had looked for shells, two children—on that part of it where some lighter fragments of the old boat, blown down last night, had been scattered by the wind—among the ruins of the home he had wronged—I saw him lying with his head upon his arm, as I had often seen him lie at school.

CHAPTER 56. THE NEW WOUND, AND THE OLD

No need, O Steerforth, to have said, when we last spoke together, in that hour which I so little deemed to be our parting-hour—no need to have said, 'Think of me at my best!' I had done that ever; and could I change now, looking on this sight!

They brought a hand-bier, and laid him on it, and covered him with a flag, and took him up and bore him on towards the houses. All the men who carried him had known him, and gone sailing with him, and seen him merry and bold. They carried him through the wild roar, a hush in the midst of all the tumult; and took him to the cottage where Death was already.

But when they set the bier down on the threshold, they looked at one another, and at me, and whispered. I knew why. They felt as if it were not right to lay him down in the same quiet room.

We went into the town, and took our burden to the inn. So soon as I could at all collect my thoughts, I sent for Joram, and begged him to provide me a conveyance in which it could be got to London in the night. I knew that the care of it, and the hard duty of preparing his mother to receive it, could only rest with me; and I was anxious to discharge that duty as faithfully as I could.

I chose the night for the journey, that there might be less curiosity when I left the town. But, although it was nearly midnight when I came out of the yard in a chaise, followed by what I had in charge, there were many people waiting. At intervals, along the town, and even a little way out upon the road, I saw more: but at length only the bleak night and the open country were around me, and the ashes of my youthful friendship.

Upon a mellow autumn day, about noon, when the ground was perfumed by fallen leaves, and many more, in beautiful tints of yellow, red, and brown, yet hung upon the trees, through which the sun was shining, I arrived at Highgate. I walked the last mile, thinking as I went along of what I had to do; and left the carriage that had followed me all through the night, awaiting orders to advance.

The house, when I came up to it, looked just the same. Not a blind was raised; no sign of life was in the dull paved court, with its covered way leading to the disused door. The wind had quite gone down, and nothing moved.

I had not, at first, the courage to ring at the gate; and when I did ring, my errand seemed to me to be expressed in the very sound of the bell. The little parlour-maid came out, with the key in her hand; and looking earnestly at me as she unlocked the gate, said:

'I beg your pardon, sir. Are you ill?'

'I have been much agitated, and am fatigued.'

'Is anything the matter, sir?—-Mr. James?—' 'Hush!' said I. 'Yes, something has happened, that I have to break to Mrs. Steerforth. She is at home?'

The girl anxiously replied that her mistress was very seldom out now, even in a carriage; that she kept her room; that she saw no company, but would see me. Her mistress was up, she said, and Miss Dartle was with her. What message should she take upstairs?

Giving her a strict charge to be careful of her manner, and only to carry in my card and say I waited, I sat down in the drawing-room (which we had now reached) until she should come back. Its former pleasant air of occupation was gone, and the shutters were half closed. The harp had not been used for many and many a day. His picture, as a boy, was there. The cabinet in which his mother had kept his letters was there. I wondered if she ever read them now; if she would ever read them more!

The house was so still that I heard the girl's light step upstairs. On her return, she brought a message, to the effect that Mrs. Steerforth was an invalid and could not come down; but that if I would excuse her being in her chamber, she would be glad to see me. In a few moments I stood before her.

She was in his room; not in her own. I felt, of course, that she had taken to occupy it, in remembrance of him; and that the many tokens of his old sports and accomplishments, by which she was surrounded, remained there, just as he had left them, for the same reason. She murmured, however, even in her reception of me, that she was out of her own chamber because its aspect was unsuited to her infirmity; and with her stately look repelled the least suspicion of the truth.

At her chair, as usual, was Rosa Dartle. From the first moment of her dark eyes resting on me, I saw she knew I was the bearer of evil tidings. The scar sprung into view that instant. She withdrew herself a step behind the chair, to keep her own face out of Mrs. Steerforth's observation; and scrutinized me with a piercing gaze that never faltered, never shrunk.

'I am sorry to observe you are in mourning, sir,' said Mrs. Steerforth.

'I am unhappily a widower,' said I.

'You are very young to know so great a loss,' she returned. 'I am grieved to hear it. I am grieved to hear it. I hope Time will be good to you.'

'I hope Time,' said I, looking at her, 'will be good to all of us. Dear Mrs. Steerforth, we must all trust to that, in our heaviest misfortunes.'

The earnestness of my manner, and the tears in my eyes, alarmed her. The whole course of her thoughts appeared to stop, and change.

I tried to command my voice in gently saying his name, but it trembled. She repeated it to herself, two or three times, in a low tone. Then, addressing me, she said, with enforced calmness:

'My son is ill.'

'Very ill.'

'You have seen him?'

'I have.'

'Are you reconciled?'

I could not say Yes, I could not say No. She slightly turned her head towards the spot where Rosa Dartle had been standing at her elbow, and in that moment I said, by the motion of my lips, to Rosa, 'Dead!'

That Mrs. Steerforth might not be induced to look behind her, and read, plainly written, what she was not yet prepared to know, I met her look quickly; but I had seen Rosa Dartle throw her hands up in the air with vehemence of despair and horror, and then clasp them on her face.

The handsome lady—so like, oh so like!—regarded me with a fixed look, and put her hand to her forehead. I besought her to be calm, and prepare herself to bear what I had to tell; but I should rather have entreated her to weep, for she sat like a stone figure.

'When I was last here,' I faltered, 'Miss Dartle told me he was sailing here and there. The night before last was a dreadful one at sea. If he were at sea that night, and near a dangerous coast, as it is said he was; and if the vessel that was seen should really be the ship which—'

'Rosa!' said Mrs. Steerforth, 'come to me!'

She came, but with no sympathy or gentleness. Her eyes gleamed like fire as she confronted his mother, and broke into a frightful laugh.

'Now,' she said, 'is your pride appeased, you madwoman? Now has he made atonement to you—with his life! Do you hear?—-His life!'

Mrs. Steerforth, fallen back stiffly in her chair, and making no sound but a moan, cast her eyes upon her with a wide stare.

'Aye!' cried Rosa, smiting herself passionately on the breast, 'look at me! Moan, and groan, and look at me! Look here!' striking the scar, 'at your dead child's handiwork!'

The moan the mother uttered, from time to time, went to My heart. Always the same. Always inarticulate and stifled. Always accompanied with an incapable motion of the head, but with no change of face. Always proceeding from a rigid mouth and closed teeth, as if the jaw were locked and the face frozen up in pain.

'Do you remember when he did this?' she proceeded. 'Do you remember when, in his inheritance of your nature, and in your pampering of his pride and passion, he did this, and disfigured me for life? Look at me, marked until I die with his high displeasure; and moan and groan for what you made him!'

'Miss Dartle,' I entreated her. 'For Heaven's sake—'

'I WILL speak!' she said, turning on me with her lightning eyes. 'Be silent, you! Look at me, I say, proud mother of a proud, false son! Moan for your nurture of him, moan for your corruption of him, moan for your loss of him, moan for mine!'

She clenched her hand, and trembled through her spare, worn figure, as if her passion were killing her by inches.

'You, resent his self-will!' she exclaimed. 'You, injured by his haughty temper! You, who opposed to both, when your hair was grey, the qualities which made both when you gave him birth! YOU, who from his cradle reared him to be what he was, and stunted what he should have been! Are you rewarded, now, for your years of trouble?'

'Oh, Miss Dartle, shame! Oh cruel!'

'I tell you,' she returned, 'I WILL speak to her. No power on earth should stop me, while I was standing here! Have I been silent all these years, and shall I not speak now? I loved him better than you ever loved him!' turning on her fiercely. 'I could have loved him, and asked no return. If I had been his wife, I could have been the slave of his caprices for a word of love a year. I should have been. Who knows it better than I? You were exacting, proud, punctilious, selfish. My love would have been devoted—would have trod your paltry whimpering under foot!'

With flashing eyes, she stamped upon the ground as if she actually did it.

'Look here!' she said, striking the scar again, with a relentless hand. 'When he grew into the better understanding of what he had done, he saw it, and repented of it! I could sing to him, and talk to him, and show the ardour that I felt in all he did, and attain with labour to such knowledge as most interested him; and I attracted him. When he was freshest and truest, he loved me. Yes, he did! Many a time, when you were put off with a slight word, he has taken Me to his heart!'

She said it with a taunting pride in the midst of her frenzy—for it was little less—yet with an eager remembrance of it, in which the smouldering embers of a gentler feeling kindled for the moment.

'I descended—as I might have known I should, but that he fascinated me with his boyish courtship—into a doll, a trifle for the occupation of an idle hour, to be dropped, and taken up, and trifled with, as the inconstant humour took him. When he grew weary, I grew weary. As his fancy died out, I would no more have tried to strengthen any power I had, than I would have married him on his being forced to take me for his wife. We fell away from one another without a word. Perhaps you saw it, and were not sorry. Since then, I have been a mere disfigured piece of furniture between you both; having no eyes, no ears, no feelings, no remembrances. Moan? Moan for what you made him; not for your love. I tell you that the time was, when I loved him better than you ever did!'

She stood with her bright angry eyes confronting the wide stare, and the set face; and softened no more, when the moaning was repeated, than if the face had been a picture.

'Miss Dartle,' said I, 'if you can be so obdurate as not to feel for this afflicted mother—'

'Who feels for me?' she sharply retorted. 'She has sown this. Let her moan for the harvest that she reaps today!'

'And if his faults—' I began.

'Faults!' she cried, bursting into passionate tears. 'Who dares malign him? He had a soul worth millions of the friends to whom he stooped!'

'No one can have loved him better, no one can hold him in dearer remembrance than I,' I replied. 'I meant to say, if you have no compassion for his mother; or if his faults—you have been bitter on them—'

'It's false,' she cried, tearing her black hair; 'I loved him!'

'—if his faults cannot,' I went on, 'be banished from your remembrance, in such an hour; look at that figure, even as one you have never seen before, and render it some help!'

All this time, the figure was unchanged, and looked unchangeable. Motionless, rigid, staring; moaning in the same dumb way from time to time, with the same helpless motion of the head; but giving no other sign of life. Miss Dartle suddenly kneeled down before it, and began to loosen the dress.

'A curse upon you!' she said, looking round at me, with a mingled expression of rage and grief. 'It was in an evil hour that you ever came here! A curse upon you! Go!'

After passing out of the room, I hurried back to ring the bell, the sooner to alarm the servants. She had then taken the impassive figure in her arms, and, still upon her knees, was weeping over it, kissing it, calling to it, rocking it to and fro upon her bosom like a child, and trying every tender means to rouse the dormant senses. No longer afraid of leaving her, I noiselessly turned back again; and alarmed the house as I went out.

Later in the day, I returned, and we laid him in his mother's room. She was just the same, they told me; Miss Dartle never left her; doctors were in attendance, many things had been tried; but she lay like a statue, except for the low sound now and then.

I went through the dreary house, and darkened the windows. The windows of the chamber where he lay, I darkened last. I lifted up the leaden hand, and held it to my heart; and all the world seemed death and silence, broken only by his mother's moaning.

CHAPTER 57. THE EMIGRANTS

One thing more, I had to do, before yielding myself to the shock of these emotions. It was, to conceal what had occurred, from those who were going away; and to dismiss them on their voyage in happy ignorance. In this, no time was to be lost.

I took Mr. Micawber aside that same night, and confided to him the task of standing between Mr. Peggotty and intelligence of the late catastrophe. He zealously undertook to do so, and to intercept any newspaper through which it might, without such precautions, reach him.

'If it penetrates to him, sir,' said Mr. Micawber, striking himself on the breast, 'it shall first pass through this body!'

Mr. Micawber, I must observe, in his adaptation of himself to a new state of society, had acquired a bold buccaneering air, not absolutely lawless, but defensive and prompt. One might have supposed him a child of the wilderness, long accustomed to live out of the confines of civilization, and about to return to his native wilds.

He had provided himself, among other things, with a complete suit of oilskin, and a straw hat with a very low crown, pitched or caulked on the outside. In this rough clothing, with a common mariner's telescope under his arm, and a shrewd trick of casting up his eye at the sky as looking out for dirty weather, he was far more nautical, after his manner, than Mr. Peggotty. His whole family, if I may so express it, were cleared for action. I found Mrs. Micawber in the closest and most uncompromising of bonnets, made fast under the chin; and in a shawl which tied her up (as I had been tied up, when my aunt first received me) like a bundle, and was secured behind at the waist, in a strong knot. Miss Micawber I found made snug for stormy weather, in the same manner; with nothing superfluous about her. Master Micawber was hardly visible in a Guernsey shirt, and the shaggiest suit of slops I ever saw; and the children were done up, like preserved meats, in impervious cases. Both Mr. Micawber and his eldest son wore their sleeves loosely turned back at the wrists, as being ready to lend a hand in any direction, and to 'tumble up', or sing out, 'Yeo—Heave—Yeo!' on the shortest notice.

Thus Traddles and I found them at nightfall, assembled on the wooden steps, at that time known as Hungerford Stairs, watching the departure of a boat with some of their property on board. I had told Traddles of the terrible event, and it had greatly shocked him; but there could be no doubt of the kindness of keeping it a secret, and he had come to help me in this last service. It was here that I took Mr. Micawber aside, and received his promise.

The Micawber family were lodged in a little, dirty, tumble-down public-house, which in those days was close to the stairs, and whose protruding wooden rooms overhung the river. The family, as emigrants, being objects of some interest in and about Hungerford, attracted so many beholders, that we were glad to take refuge in their room. It was one of the wooden chambers upstairs, with the tide flowing underneath. My aunt and Agnes were there, busily making some little extra comforts, in the way of dress, for the children. Peggotty was quietly assisting, with the old insensible work-box, yard-measure, and bit of wax-candle before her, that had now outlived so much.

It was not easy to answer her inquiries; still less to whisper Mr. Peggotty, when Mr. Micawber brought him in, that I had given the letter, and all was well. But I did both, and made them happy. If I showed any trace of what I felt, my own sorrows were sufficient to account for it.

'And when does the ship sail, Mr. Micawber?' asked my aunt.

Mr. Micawber considered it necessary to prepare either my aunt or his wife, by degrees, and said, sooner than he had expected yesterday.

'The boat brought you word, I suppose?' said my aunt.

'It did, ma'am,' he returned.

'Well?' said my aunt. 'And she sails—'

'Madam,' he replied, 'I am informed that we must positively be on board before seven tomorrow morning.'

'Heyday!' said my aunt, 'that's soon. Is it a sea-going fact, Mr. Peggotty?'

''Tis so, ma'am. She'll drop down the river with that theer tide. If Mas'r Davy and my sister comes aboard at Gravesen', arternoon o' next day, they'll see the last on us.'

'And that we shall do,' said I, 'be sure!'

'Until then, and until we are at sea,' observed Mr. Micawber, with a glance of intelligence at me, 'Mr. Peggotty and myself will constantly keep a double look-out together, on our goods and chattels. Emma, my love,' said

Mr. Micawber, clearing his throat in his magnificent way, 'my friend Mr. Thomas Traddles is so obliging as to solicit, in my ear, that he should have the privilege of ordering the ingredients necessary to the composition of a moderate portion of that Beverage which is peculiarly associated, in our minds, with the Roast Beef of Old England. I allude to—in short, Punch. Under ordinary circumstances, I should scruple to entreat the indulgence of Miss Trotwood and Miss Wickfield, but-'

'I can only say for myself,' said my aunt, 'that I will drink all happiness and success to you, Mr. Micawber, with the utmost pleasure.'

'And I too!' said Agnes, with a smile.

Mr. Micawber immediately descended to the bar, where he appeared to be quite at home; and in due time returned with a steaming jug. I could not but observe that he had been peeling the lemons with his own clasp-knife, which, as became the knife of a practical settler, was about a foot long; and which he wiped, not wholly without ostentation, on the sleeve of his coat. Mrs. Micawber and the two elder members of the family I now found to be provided with similar formidable instruments, while every child had its own wooden spoon attached to its body by a strong line. In a similar anticipation of life afloat, and in the Bush, Mr. Micawber, instead of helping Mrs. Micawber and his eldest son and daughter to punch, in wine-glasses, which he might easily have done, for there was a shelf-full in the room, served it out to them in a series of villainous little tin pots; and I never saw him enjoy anything so much as drinking out of his own particular pint pot, and putting it in his pocket at the close of the evening.

'The luxuries of the old country,' said Mr. Micawber, with an intense satisfaction in their renouncement, 'we abandon. The denizens of the forest cannot, of course, expect to participate in the refinements of the land of the Free.'

Here, a boy came in to say that Mr. Micawber was wanted downstairs.

'I have a presentiment,' said Mrs. Micawber, setting down her tin pot, 'that it is a member of my family!'

'If so, my dear,' observed Mr. Micawber, with his usual suddenness of warmth on that subject, 'as the member of your family—whoever he, she, or it, may be—has kept us waiting for a considerable period, perhaps the Member may now wait MY convenience.'

'Micawber,' said his wife, in a low tone, 'at such a time as this—'

'"It is not meet,"' said Mr. Micawber, rising, '"that every nice offence should bear its comment!" Emma, I stand reproved.'

'The loss, Micawber,' observed his wife, 'has been my family's, not yours. If my family are at length sensible of the deprivation to which their own conduct has, in the past, exposed them, and now desire to extend the hand of fellowship, let it not be repulsed.'

'My dear,' he returned, 'so be it!'

'If not for their sakes; for mine, Micawber,' said his wife.

'Emma,' he returned, 'that view of the question is, at such a moment, irresistible. I cannot, even now, distinctly pledge myself to fall upon your family's neck; but the member of your family, who is now in attendance, shall have no genial warmth frozen by me.'

Mr. Micawber withdrew, and was absent some little time; in the course of which Mrs. Micawber was not wholly free from an apprehension that words might have arisen between him and the Member. At length the same boy reappeared, and presented me with a note written in pencil, and headed, in a legal manner, 'Heep v. Micawber'. From this document, I learned that Mr. Micawber being again arrested, 'Was in a final paroxysm of despair; and that he begged me to send him his knife and pint pot, by bearer, as they might prove serviceable during the brief remainder of his existence, in jail. He also requested, as a last act of friendship, that I would see his family to the Parish Workhouse, and forget that such a Being ever lived.

Of course I answered this note by going down with the boy to pay the money, where I found Mr. Micawber sitting in a corner, looking darkly at the Sheriff 's Officer who had effected the capture. On his release, he embraced me with the utmost fervour; and made an entry of the transaction in his pocket-book—being very particular, I recollect, about a halfpenny I inadvertently omitted from my statement of the total.

This momentous pocket-book was a timely reminder to him of another transaction. On our return to the room upstairs (where he accounted for his absence by saying that it had been occasioned by circumstances over which he had no control), he took out of it a large sheet of paper, folded small, and quite covered with long sums, carefully worked. From the glimpse I had of them, I should say that I never saw such sums out of a school ciphering-book. These, it seemed, were calculations of compound interest on what he called 'the principal amount of forty-one, ten, eleven and a half', for various periods. After a careful consideration of these, and an elaborate estimate of his resources, he had come to the conclusion to select that sum which represented the amount with compound interest to two years, fifteen calendar months, and fourteen days, from that date. For this he had drawn a note-of-hand with great neatness, which he handed over to Traddles on the spot, a discharge of his debt in full (as between man and man), with many acknowledgements.

'I have still a presentiment,' said Mrs. Micawber, pensively shaking her head, 'that my family will appear on board, before we finally depart.'

Mr. Micawber evidently had his presentiment on the subject too, but he put it in his tin pot and swallowed it.

'If you have any opportunity of sending letters home, on your passage, Mrs. Micawber,' said my aunt, 'you must let us hear from you, you know.'

'My dear Miss Trotwood,' she replied, 'I shall only be too happy to think that anyone expects to hear from us. I shall not fail to correspond. Mr. Copperfield, I trust, as an old and familiar friend, will not object to receive occasional intelligence, himself, from one who knew him when the twins were yet unconscious?'

I said that I should hope to hear, whenever she had an opportunity of writing.

'Please Heaven, there will be many such opportunities,' said Mr. Micawber. 'The ocean, in these times, is a perfect fleet of ships; and we can hardly fail to encounter many, in running over. It is merely crossing,' said Mr. Micawber, trifling with his eye-glass, 'merely crossing. The distance is quite imaginary.'

I think, now, how odd it was, but how wonderfully like Mr. Micawber, that, when he went from London to Canterbury, he should have talked as if he were going to the farthest limits of the earth; and, when he went from England to Australia, as if he were going for a little trip across the channel.

'On the voyage, I shall endeavour,' said Mr. Micawber, 'occasionally to spin them a yarn; and the melody of my son Wilkins will, I trust, be acceptable at the galley-fire. When Mrs. Micawber has her sea-legs on—an expression in which I hope there is no conventional impropriety—she will give them, I dare say, "Little Tafflin". Porpoises and dolphins, I believe, will be frequently observed athwart our Bows; and, either on the starboard or the larboard quarter, objects of interest will be continually descried. In short,' said Mr. Micawber, with the old genteel air, 'the probability is, all will be found so exciting, alow and aloft, that when the lookout, stationed in the main-top, cries Land-oh! we shall be very considerably astonished!'

With that he flourished off the contents of his little tin pot, as if he had made the voyage, and had passed a first-class examination before the highest naval authorities.

'What I chiefly hope, my dear Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'is, that in some branches of our family we may live again in the old country. Do not frown, Micawber! I do not now refer to my own family, but to our children's children. However vigorous the sapling,' said Mrs. Micawber, shaking her head, 'I cannot forget the parent-tree; and when our race attains to eminence and fortune, I own I should wish that fortune to flow into the coffers of Britannia.'

'My dear,' said Mr. Micawber, 'Britannia must take her chance. I am bound to say that she has never done much for me, and that I have no particular wish upon the subject.'

'Micawber,' returned Mrs. Micawber, 'there, you are wrong. You are going out, Micawber, to this distant clime, to strengthen, not to weaken, the connexion between yourself and Albion.'

'The connexion in question, my love,' rejoined Mr. Micawber, 'has not laid me, I repeat, under that load of personal obligation, that I am at all sensitive as to the formation of another connexion.'

'Micawber,' returned Mrs. Micawber. 'There, I again say, you are wrong. You do not know your power, Micawber. It is that which will strengthen, even in this step you are about to take, the connexion between yourself and Albion.'

Mr. Micawber sat in his elbow-chair, with his eyebrows raised; half receiving and half repudiating Mrs. Micawber's views as they were stated, but very sensible of their foresight.

'My dear Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'I wish Mr. Micawber to feel his position. It appears to me highly important that Mr. Micawber should, from the hour of his embarkation, feel his position. Your old knowledge of me, my dear Mr. Copperfield, will have told you that I have not the sanguine disposition of Mr. Micawber. My disposition is, if I may say so, eminently practical. I know that this is a long voyage. I know that it will involve many privations and inconveniences. I cannot shut my eyes to those facts. But I also know what Mr. Micawber is. I know the latent power of Mr. Micawber. And therefore I consider it vitally important that Mr. Micawber should feel his position.'

'My love,' he observed, 'perhaps you will allow me to remark that it is barely possible that I DO feel my position at the present moment.'

'I think not, Micawber,' she rejoined. 'Not fully. My dear Mr. Copperfield, Mr. Micawber's is not a common case. Mr. Micawber is going to a distant country expressly in order that he may be fully understood and appreciated for the first time. I wish Mr. Micawber to take his stand upon that vessel's prow, and firmly say, "This country I am come to conquer! Have you honours? Have you riches? Have you posts of profitable pecuniary emolument? Let them be brought forward. They are mine!"'

Mr. Micawber, glancing at us all, seemed to think there was a good deal in this idea.

'I wish Mr. Micawber, if I make myself understood,' said Mrs. Micawber, in her argumentative tone, 'to be the Caesar of his own fortunes. That, my dear Mr. Copperfield, appears to me to be his true position. From the first moment of this voyage, I wish Mr. Micawber to stand upon that vessel's prow and say, "Enough of delay: enough of disappointment: enough of limited means. That was in the old country. This is the new. Produce your reparation. Bring it forward!"'

Mr. Micawber folded his arms in a resolute manner, as if he were then stationed on the figure-head.

'And doing that,' said Mrs. Micawber, '—feeling his position—am I not right in saying that Mr. Micawber will strengthen, and not weaken, his connexion with Britain? An important public character arising in that hemisphere, shall I be told that its influence will not be felt at home? Can I be so weak as to imagine that Mr. Micawber, wielding the rod of talent and of power in Australia, will be nothing in England? I am but a woman; but I should be unworthy of myself and of my papa, if I were guilty of such absurd weakness.'

Mrs. Micawber's conviction that her arguments were unanswerable, gave a moral elevation to her tone which I think I had never heard in it before.

'And therefore it is,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'that I the more wish, that, at a future period, we may live again on the parent soil. Mr. Micawber may be —I cannot disguise from myself that the probability is, Mr. Micawber will be—a page of History; and he ought then to be represented in the country which gave him birth, and did NOT give him employment!'

'My love,' observed Mr. Micawber, 'it is impossible for me not to be touched by your affection. I am always willing to defer to your good sense. What will be—will be. Heaven forbid that I should grudge my native country any portion of the wealth that may be accumulated by our descendants!'

'That's well,' said my aunt, nodding towards Mr. Peggotty, 'and I drink my love to you all, and every blessing and success attend you!'

Mr. Peggotty put down the two children he had been nursing, one on each knee, to join Mr. and Mrs. Micawber in drinking to all of us in return; and when he and the Micawbers cordially shook hands as comrades, and his brown face brightened with a smile, I felt that he would make his way, establish a good name, and be beloved, go where he would.

Even the children were instructed, each to dip a wooden spoon into Mr. Micawber's pot, and pledge us in its contents. When this was done, my aunt and Agnes rose, and parted from the emigrants. It was a sorrowful farewell. They were all crying; the children hung about Agnes to the last; and we left poor Mrs. Micawber in a very distressed condition, sobbing and weeping by a dim candle, that must have made the room look, from the river, like a miserable light-house.

I went down again next morning to see that they were away. They had departed, in a boat, as early as five o'clock. It was a wonderful instance to me of the gap such partings make, that although my association of them with the tumble-down public-house and the wooden stairs dated only from last night, both seemed dreary and deserted, now that they were gone.

In the afternoon of the next day, my old nurse and I went down to Gravesend. We found the ship in the river, surrounded by a crowd of boats; a favourable wind blowing; the signal for sailing at her mast-head. I hired a boat directly, and we put off to her; and getting through the little vortex of confusion of which she was the centre, went on board.

Mr. Peggotty was waiting for us on deck. He told me that Mr. Micawber had just now been arrested again (and for the last time) at the suit of Heep, and that, in compliance with a request I had made to him, he had paid the money, which I repaid him. He then took us down between decks; and there, any lingering fears I had of his having heard any rumours of what had happened, were dispelled by Mr. Micawber's coming out of the gloom, taking his arm with an air of friendship and protection, and telling me that they had scarcely been asunder for a moment, since the night before last.

It was such a strange scene to me, and so confined and dark, that, at first, I could make out hardly anything; but, by degrees, it cleared, as my eyes became more accustomed to the gloom, and I seemed to stand in a picture by OSTADE. Among the great beams, bulks, and ringbolts of the ship, and the emigrant-berths, and chests, and bundles, and barrels, and heaps of miscellaneous baggage—'lighted up, here and there, by dangling lanterns; and elsewhere by the yellow daylight straying down a windsail or a hatchway—were crowded groups of people, making new friendships, taking leave of one another, talking, laughing, crying, eating and drinking; some, already settled down into the possession of their few feet of space, with their little households arranged, and tiny children established on stools, or in dwarf elbow-chairs; others, despairing of a resting-place, and wandering disconsolately. From babies who had but a week or two of life behind them, to crooked old men and women who seemed to have but a week or two of life before them; and from ploughmen bodily carrying out soil of England on their boots, to smiths taking away samples of its soot and smoke upon their skins; every age and occupation appeared to be crammed into the narrow compass of the 'tween decks.

As my eye glanced round this place, I thought I saw sitting, by an open port, with one of the Micawber children near her, a figure like Emily's; it first attracted my attention, by another figure parting from it with a kiss; and as it glided calmly away through the disorder, reminding me of—Agnes! But in the rapid motion and confusion, and in the unsettlement of my own thoughts, I lost it again; and only knew that the time was come when all visitors were being warned to leave the ship; that my nurse was crying on a chest beside me; and that Mrs. Gummidge, assisted by some younger stooping woman in black, was busily arranging Mr. Peggotty's goods.

'Is there any last wured, Mas'r Davy?' said he. 'Is there any one forgotten thing afore we parts?'

'One thing!' said I. 'Martha!'

He touched the younger woman I have mentioned on the shoulder, and Martha stood before me.

'Heaven bless you, you good man!' cried I. 'You take her with you!'

She answered for him, with a burst of tears. I could speak no more at that time, but I wrung his hand; and if ever I have loved and honoured any man, I loved and honoured that man in my soul.

The ship was clearing fast of strangers. The greatest trial that I had, remained. I told him what the noble spirit that was gone, had given me in charge to say at parting. It moved him deeply. But when he charged me, in return, with many messages of affection and regret for those deaf ears, he moved me more.

The time was come. I embraced him, took my weeping nurse upon my arm, and hurried away. On deck, I took leave of poor Mrs. Micawber. She was looking distractedly about for her family, even then; and her last words to me were, that she never would desert Mr. Micawber.

We went over the side into our boat, and lay at a little distance, to see the ship wafted on her course. It was then calm, radiant sunset. She lay between us, and the red light; and every taper line and spar was visible against the glow. A sight at once so beautiful, so mournful, and so hopeful, as the glorious ship, lying, still, on the flushed water, with all the life on board her crowded at the bulwarks, and there clustering, for a moment, bare-headed and silent, I never saw.

Silent, only for a moment. As the sails rose to the wind, and the ship began to move, there broke from all the boats three resounding cheers, which those on board took up, and echoed back, and which were echoed and re-echoed. My heart burst out when I heard the sound, and beheld the waving of the hats and handkerchiefs—and then I saw her!

Then I saw her, at her uncle's side, and trembling on his shoulder. He pointed to us with an eager hand; and she saw us, and waved her last good-bye to me. Aye, Emily, beautiful and drooping, cling to him with the utmost trust of thy bruised heart; for he has clung to thee, with all the might of his great love!

Surrounded by the rosy light, and standing high upon the deck, apart together, she clinging to him, and he holding her, they solemnly passed away. The night had fallen on the Kentish hills when we were rowed ashore—and fallen darkly upon me.

CHAPTER 58. ABSENCE

It was a long and gloomy night that gathered on me, haunted by the ghosts of many hopes, of many dear remembrances, many errors, many unavailing sorrows and regrets.

I went away from England; not knowing, even then, how great the shock was, that I had to bear. I left all who were dear to me, and went away; and believed that I had borne it, and it was past. As a man upon a field of battle will receive a mortal hurt, and scarcely know that he is struck, so I, when I was left alone with my undisciplined heart, had no conception of the wound with which it had to strive.

The knowledge came upon me, not quickly, but little by little, and grain by grain. The desolate feeling with which I went abroad, deepened and widened hourly. At first it was a heavy sense of loss and sorrow, wherein I could distinguish little else. By imperceptible degrees, it became a hopeless consciousness of all that I had lost—love, friendship, interest; of all that had been shattered—my first trust, my first affection, the whole airy castle of my life; of all that remained—a ruined blank and waste, lying wide around me, unbroken, to the dark horizon.

If my grief were selfish, I did not know it to be so. I mourned for my child-wife, taken from her blooming world, so young. I mourned for him who might have won the love and admiration of thousands, as he had won mine long ago. I mourned for the broken heart that had found rest in the stormy sea; and for the wandering remnants of the simple home, where I had heard the night-wind blowing, when I was a child.

From the accumulated sadness into which I fell, I had at length no hope of ever issuing again. I roamed from place to place, carrying my burden with me everywhere. I felt its whole weight now; and I drooped beneath it, and I said in my heart that it could never be lightened.

When this despondency was at its worst, I believed that I should die. Sometimes, I thought that I would like to die at home; and actually turned back on my road, that I might get there soon. At other times, I passed on farther away,—from city to city, seeking I know not what, and trying to leave I know not what behind.

It is not in my power to retrace, one by one, all the weary phases of distress of mind through which I passed. There are some dreams that can only be imperfectly and vaguely described; and when I oblige myself to look back on this time of my life, I seem to be recalling such a dream. I see myself passing on among the novelties of foreign towns, palaces, cathedrals, temples, pictures, castles, tombs, fantastic streets—the old abiding places of History and Fancy—as a dreamer might; bearing my painful load through all, and hardly conscious of the objects as they fade before me. Listlessness to everything, but brooding sorrow, was the night that fell on my undisciplined heart. Let me look up from it—as at last I did, thank Heaven!—and from its long, sad, wretched dream, to dawn.

For many months I travelled with this ever-darkening cloud upon my mind. Some blind reasons that I had for not returning home—reasons then struggling within me, vainly, for more distinct expression—kept me on my pilgrimage. Sometimes, I had proceeded restlessly from place to place, stopping nowhere; sometimes, I had lingered long in one spot. I had had no purpose, no sustaining soul within me, anywhere.

I was in Switzerland. I had come out of Italy, over one of the great passes of the Alps, and had since wandered with a guide among the by-ways of the mountains. If those awful solitudes had spoken to my heart, I did not know it. I had found sublimity and wonder in the dread heights and precipices, in the roaring torrents, and the wastes of ice and snow; but as yet, they had taught me nothing else.

I came, one evening before sunset, down into a valley, where I was to rest. In the course of my descent to it, by the winding track along the mountain-side, from which I saw it shining far below, I think some long-unwonted sense of beauty and tranquillity, some softening influence awakened by its peace, moved faintly in my breast. I remember pausing once, with a kind of sorrow that was not all oppressive, not quite despairing. I remember almost hoping that some better change was possible within me.

I came into the valley, as the evening sun was shining on the remote heights of snow, that closed it in, like eternal clouds. The bases of the mountains forming the gorge in which the little village lay, were richly green; and high above this gentler vegetation, grew forests of dark fir, cleaving the wintry snow-drift, wedge-like, and stemming the avalanche. Above these, were range upon range of craggy steeps, grey rock, bright ice, and smooth verdure-specks of pasture, all gradually blending with the crowning snow. Dotted here and there on the mountain's-side, each tiny dot a home, were lonely wooden cottages, so dwarfed by the towering heights that they appeared too small for toys. So did even the clustered village in the valley, with its wooden bridge across the stream, where the stream tumbled over broken rocks, and roared away among the trees. In the quiet air, there was a sound of distant singing—shepherd voices; but, as one bright evening cloud floated midway along the mountain's-side, I could almost have believed it came from there, and was not earthly music. All at once, in this serenity, great Nature spoke to me; and soothed me to lay down my weary head upon the grass, and weep as I had not wept yet, since Dora died!

I had found a packet of letters awaiting me but a few minutes before, and had strolled out of the village to read them while my supper was making ready. Other packets had missed me, and I had received none for a long time. Beyond a line or two, to say that I was well, and had arrived at such a place, I had not had fortitude or constancy to write a letter since I left home.

The packet was in my hand. I opened it, and read the writing of Agnes.

She was happy and useful, was prospering as she had hoped. That was all she told me of herself. The rest referred to me.

She gave me no advice; she urged no duty on me; she only told me, in her own fervent manner, what her trust in me was. She knew (she said) how such a nature as mine would turn affliction to good. She knew how trial and emotion would exalt and strengthen it. She was sure that in my every purpose I should gain a firmer and a higher tendency, through the grief I had undergone. She, who so gloried in my fame, and so looked forward to its augmentation, well knew that I would labour on. She knew that in me, sorrow could not be weakness, but must be strength. As the endurance of my childish days had done its part to make me what I was, so greater calamities would nerve me on, to be yet better than I was; and so, as they had taught me, would I teach others. She commended me to God, who had taken my innocent darling to His rest; and in her sisterly affection cherished me always, and was always at my side go where I would; proud of what I had done, but infinitely prouder yet of what I was reserved to do.

I put the letter in my breast, and thought what had I been an hour ago! When I heard the voices die away, and saw the quiet evening cloud grow dim, and all the colours in the valley fade, and the golden snow upon the mountain-tops become a remote part of the pale night sky, yet felt that the night was passing from my mind, and all its shadows clearing, there was no name for the love I bore her, dearer to me, henceforward, than ever until then.

I read her letter many times. I wrote to her before I slept. I told her that I had been in sore need of her help; that without her I was not, and I never had been, what she thought me; but that she inspired me to be that, and I would try.

I did try. In three months more, a year would have passed since the beginning of my sorrow. I determined to make no resolutions until the expiration of those three months, but to try. I lived in that valley, and its neighbourhood, all the time.

The three months gone, I resolved to remain away from home for some time longer; to settle myself for the present in Switzerland, which was growing dear to me in the remembrance of that evening; to resume my pen; to work.

I resorted humbly whither Agnes had commended me; I sought out Nature, never sought in vain; and I admitted to my breast the human interest I had lately shrunk from. It was not long, before I had almost as many friends in the valley as in Yarmouth: and when I left it, before the winter set in, for Geneva, and came back in the spring, their cordial greetings had a homely sound to me, although they were not conveyed in English words.

I worked early and late, patiently and hard. I wrote a Story, with a purpose growing, not remotely, out of my experience, and sent it to Traddles, and he arranged for its publication very advantageously for me; and the tidings of my growing reputation began to reach me from travellers whom I encountered by chance. After some rest and change, I fell to work, in my old ardent way, on a new fancy, which took strong possession of me. As I advanced in the execution of this task, I felt it more and more, and roused my utmost energies to do it well. This was my third work of fiction. It was not half written, when, in an interval of rest, I thought of returning home.

For a long time, though studying and working patiently, I had accustomed myself to robust exercise. My health, severely impaired when I left England, was quite restored. I had seen much. I had been in many countries, and I hope I had improved my store of knowledge.

I have now recalled all that I think it needful to recall here, of this term of absence—with one reservation. I have made it, thus far, with no purpose of suppressing any of my thoughts; for, as I have elsewhere said, this narrative is my written memory. I have desired to keep the most secret current of my mind apart, and to the last. I enter on it now. I cannot so completely penetrate the mystery of my own heart, as to know when I began to think that I might have set its earliest and brightest hopes on Agnes. I cannot say at what stage of my grief it first became associated with the reflection, that, in my wayward boyhood, I had thrown away the treasure of her love. I believe I may have heard some whisper of that distant thought, in the old unhappy loss or want of something never to be realized, of which I had been sensible. But the thought came into my mind as a new reproach and new regret, when I was left so sad and lonely in the world.

If, at that time, I had been much with her, I should, in the weakness of my desolation, have betrayed this. It was what I remotely dreaded when I was first impelled to stay away from England. I could not have borne to lose the smallest portion of her sisterly affection; yet, in that betrayal, I should have set a constraint between us hitherto unknown.

I could not forget that the feeling with which she now regarded me had grown up in my own free choice and course. That if she had ever loved me with another love—and I sometimes thought the time was when she might have done so—I had cast it away. It was nothing, now, that I had accustomed myself to think of her, when we were both mere children, as one who was far removed from my wild fancies. I had bestowed my passionate tenderness upon another object; and what I might have done, I had not done; and what Agnes was to me, I and her own noble heart had made her.

In the beginning of the change that gradually worked in me, when I tried to get a better understanding of myself and be a better man, I did glance, through some indefinite probation, to a period when I might possibly hope to cancel the mistaken past, and to be so blessed as to marry her. But, as time wore on, this shadowy prospect faded, and departed from me. If she had ever loved me, then, I should hold her the more sacred; remembering the confidences I had reposed in her, her knowledge of my errant heart, the sacrifice she must have made to be my friend and sister, and the victory she had won. If she had never loved me, could I believe that she would love me now?

I had always felt my weakness, in comparison with her constancy and fortitude; and now I felt it more and more. Whatever I might have been to her, or she to me, if I had been more worthy of her long ago, I was not now, and she was not. The time was past. I had let it go by, and had deservedly lost her.

That I suffered much in these contentions, that they filled me with unhappiness and remorse, and yet that I had a sustaining sense that it was required of me, in right and honour, to keep away from myself, with shame, the thought of turning to the dear girl in the withering of my hopes, from whom I had frivolously turned when they were bright and fresh—which consideration was at the root of every thought I had concerning her—is all equally true. I made no effort to conceal from myself, now, that I loved her, that I was devoted to her; but I brought the assurance home to myself, that it was now too late, and that our long-subsisting relation must be undisturbed.

I had thought, much and often, of my Dora's shadowing out to me what might have happened, in those years that were destined not to try us; I had considered how the things that never happen, are often as much realities to us, in their effects, as those that are accomplished. The very years she spoke of, were realities now, for my correction; and would have been, one day, a little later perhaps, though we had parted in our earliest folly. I endeavoured to convert what might have been between myself and Agnes, into a means of making me more self-denying, more resolved, more conscious of myself, and my defects and errors. Thus, through the reflection that it might have been, I arrived at the conviction that it could never be.

These, with their perplexities and inconsistencies, were the shifting quicksands of my mind, from the time of my departure to the time of my return home, three years afterwards. Three years had elapsed since the sailing of the emigrant ship; when, at that same hour of sunset, and in the same place, I stood on the deck of the packet vessel that brought me home, looking on the rosy water where I had seen the image of that ship reflected.

Three years. Long in the aggregate, though short as they went by. And home was very dear to me, and Agnes too—but she was not mine—she was never to be mine. She might have been, but that was past!

CHAPTER 59. RETURN

I landed in London on a wintry autumn evening. It was dark and raining, and I saw more fog and mud in a minute than I had seen in a year. I walked from the Custom House to the Monument before I found a coach; and although the very house-fronts, looking on the swollen gutters, were like old friends to me, I could not but admit that they were very dingy friends.

I have often remarked—I suppose everybody has—that one's going away from a familiar place, would seem to be the signal for change in it. As I looked out of the coach window, and observed that an old house on Fish-street Hill, which had stood untouched by painter, carpenter, or bricklayer, for a century, had been pulled down in my absence; and that a neighbouring street, of time-honoured insalubrity and inconvenience, was being drained and widened; I half expected to find St. Paul's Cathedral looking older.

For some changes in the fortunes of my friends, I was prepared. My aunt had long been re-established at Dover, and Traddles had begun to get into some little practice at the Bar, in the very first term after my departure. He had chambers in Gray's Inn, now; and had told me, in his last letters, that he was not without hopes of being soon united to the dearest girl in the world.

They expected me home before Christmas; but had no idea of my returning so soon. I had purposely misled them, that I might have the pleasure of taking them by surprise. And yet, I was perverse enough to feel a chill and disappointment in receiving no welcome, and rattling, alone and silent, through the misty streets.

The well-known shops, however, with their cheerful lights, did something for me; and when I alighted at the door of the Gray's Inn Coffee-house, I had recovered my spirits. It recalled, at first, that so-different time when I had put up at the Golden Cross, and reminded me of the changes that had come to pass since then; but that was natural.

'Do you know where Mr. Traddles lives in the Inn?' I asked the waiter, as I warmed myself by the coffee-room fire.

'Holborn Court, sir. Number two.'

'Mr. Traddles has a rising reputation among the lawyers, I believe?' said I.

'Well, sir,' returned the waiter, 'probably he has, sir; but I am not aware of it myself.'

This waiter, who was middle-aged and spare, looked for help to a waiter of more authority—a stout, potential old man, with a double chin, in black breeches and stockings, who came out of a place like a churchwarden's pew, at the end of the coffee-room, where he kept company with a cash-box, a Directory, a Law-list, and other books and papers.

'Mr. Traddles,' said the spare waiter. 'Number two in the Court.'

The potential waiter waved him away, and turned, gravely, to me.

'I was inquiring,' said I, 'whether Mr. Traddles, at number two in the Court, has not a rising reputation among the lawyers?'

'Never heard his name,' said the waiter, in a rich husky voice.

I felt quite apologetic for Traddles.

'He's a young man, sure?' said the portentous waiter, fixing his eyes severely on me. 'How long has he been in the Inn?'

'Not above three years,' said I.

The waiter, who I supposed had lived in his churchwarden's pew for forty years, could not pursue such an insignificant subject. He asked me what I would have for dinner?

I felt I was in England again, and really was quite cast down on Traddles's account. There seemed to be no hope for him. I meekly ordered a bit of fish and a steak, and stood before the fire musing on his obscurity.

As I followed the chief waiter with my eyes, I could not help thinking that the garden in which he had gradually blown to be the flower he was, was an arduous place to rise in. It had such a prescriptive, stiff-necked, long-established, solemn, elderly air. I glanced about the room, which had had its sanded floor sanded, no doubt, in exactly the same manner when the chief waiter was a boy—if he ever was a boy, which appeared improbable; and at the shining tables, where I saw myself reflected, in unruffled depths of old mahogany; and at the lamps, without a flaw in their trimming or cleaning; and at the comfortable green curtains, with their pure brass rods, snugly enclosing the boxes; and at the two large coal fires, brightly burning; and at the rows of decanters, burly as if with the consciousness of pipes of expensive old port wine below; and both England, and the law, appeared to me to be very difficult indeed to be taken by storm. I went up to my bedroom to change my wet clothes; and the vast extent of that old wainscoted apartment (which was over the archway leading to the Inn, I remember), and the sedate immensity of the four-post bedstead, and the indomitable gravity of the chests of drawers, all seemed to unite in sternly frowning on the fortunes of Traddles, or on any such daring youth. I came down again to my dinner; and even the slow comfort of the meal, and the orderly silence of the place—which was bare of guests, the Long Vacation not yet being over—were eloquent on the audacity of Traddles, and his small hopes of a livelihood for twenty years to come.

I had seen nothing like this since I went away, and it quite dashed my hopes for my friend. The chief waiter had had enough of me. He came near me no more; but devoted himself to an old gentleman in long gaiters, to meet whom a pint of special port seemed to come out of the cellar of its own accord, for he gave no order. The second waiter informed me, in a whisper, that this old gentleman was a retired conveyancer living in the Square, and worth a mint of money, which it was expected he would leave to his laundress's daughter; likewise that it was rumoured that he had a service of plate in a bureau, all tarnished with lying by, though more than one spoon and a fork had never yet been beheld in his chambers by mortal vision. By this time, I quite gave Traddles up for lost; and settled in my own mind that there was no hope for him.

Being very anxious to see the dear old fellow, nevertheless, I dispatched my dinner, in a manner not at all calculated to raise me in the opinion of the chief waiter, and hurried out by the back way. Number two in the Court was soon reached; and an inscription on the door-post informing me that Mr. Traddles occupied a set of chambers on the top storey, I ascended the staircase. A crazy old staircase I found it to be, feebly lighted on each landing by a club—headed little oil wick, dying away in a little dungeon of dirty glass.

In the course of my stumbling upstairs, I fancied I heard a pleasant sound of laughter; and not the laughter of an attorney or barrister, or attorney's clerk or barrister's clerk, but of two or three merry girls. Happening, however, as I stopped to listen, to put my foot in a hole where the Honourable Society of Gray's Inn had left a plank deficient, I fell down with some noise, and when I recovered my footing all was silent.

Groping my way more carefully, for the rest of the journey, my heart beat high when I found the outer door, which had Mr. TRADDLES painted on it, open. I knocked. A considerable scuffling within ensued, but nothing else. I therefore knocked again.

A small sharp-looking lad, half-footboy and half-clerk, who was very much out of breath, but who looked at me as if he defied me to prove it legally, presented himself.

'Is Mr. Traddles within?' I said.

'Yes, sir, but he's engaged.'

'I want to see him.'

After a moment's survey of me, the sharp-looking lad decided to let me in; and opening the door wider for that purpose, admitted me, first, into a little closet of a hall, and next into a little sitting-room; where I came into the presence of my old friend (also out of breath), seated at a table, and bending over papers.

'Good God!' cried Traddles, looking up. 'It's Copperfield!' and rushed into my arms, where I held him tight.

'All well, my dear Traddles?'

'All well, my dear, dear Copperfield, and nothing but good news!'

We cried with pleasure, both of us.

'My dear fellow,' said Traddles, rumpling his hair in his excitement, which was a most unnecessary operation, 'my dearest Copperfield, my long-lost and most welcome friend, how glad I am to see you! How brown you are! How glad I am! Upon my life and honour, I never was so rejoiced, my beloved Copperfield, never!'

I was equally at a loss to express my emotions. I was quite unable to speak, at first.

'My dear fellow!' said Traddles. 'And grown so famous! My glorious Copperfield! Good gracious me, WHEN did you come, WHERE have you come from, WHAT have you been doing?'

Never pausing for an answer to anything he said, Traddles, who had clapped me into an easy-chair by the fire, all this time impetuously stirred the fire with one hand, and pulled at my neck-kerchief with the other, under some wild delusion that it was a great-coat. Without putting down the poker, he now hugged me again; and I hugged him; and, both laughing, and both wiping our eyes, we both sat down, and shook hands across the hearth.

'To think,' said Traddles, 'that you should have been so nearly coming home as you must have been, my dear old boy, and not at the ceremony!'

'What ceremony, my dear Traddles?'

'Good gracious me!' cried Traddles, opening his eyes in his old way. 'Didn't you get my last letter?'

'Certainly not, if it referred to any ceremony.'

'Why, my dear Copperfield,' said Traddles, sticking his hair upright with both hands, and then putting his hands on my knees, 'I am married!'

'Married!' I cried joyfully.

'Lord bless me, yes!' said Traddles—'by the Reverend Horace—to Sophy—down in Devonshire. Why, my dear boy, she's behind the window curtain! Look here!'

To my amazement, the dearest girl in the world came at that same instant, laughing and blushing, from her place of concealment. And a more cheerful, amiable, honest, happy, bright-looking bride, I believe (as I could not help saying on the spot) the world never saw. I kissed her as an old acquaintance should, and wished them joy with all my might of heart.

'Dear me,' said Traddles, 'what a delightful re-union this is! You are so extremely brown, my dear Copperfield! God bless my soul, how happy I am!'

'And so am I,' said I.

'And I am sure I am!' said the blushing and laughing Sophy.

'We are all as happy as possible!' said Traddles. 'Even the girls are happy. Dear me, I declare I forgot them!'

'Forgot?' said I.

'The girls,' said Traddles. 'Sophy's sisters. They are staying with us. They have come to have a peep at London. The fact is, when—was it you that tumbled upstairs, Copperfield?'

'It was,' said I, laughing.

'Well then, when you tumbled upstairs,' said Traddles, 'I was romping with the girls. In point of fact, we were playing at Puss in the Corner. But as that wouldn't do in Westminster Hall, and as it wouldn't look quite professional if they were seen by a client, they decamped. And they are now—listening, I have no doubt,' said Traddles, glancing at the door of another room.

'I am sorry,' said I, laughing afresh, 'to have occasioned such a dispersion.'

'Upon my word,' rejoined Traddles, greatly delighted, 'if you had seen them running away, and running back again, after you had knocked, to pick up the combs they had dropped out of their hair, and going on in the maddest manner, you wouldn't have said so. My love, will you fetch the girls?'

Sophy tripped away, and we heard her received in the adjoining room with a peal of laughter.

'Really musical, isn't it, my dear Copperfield?' said Traddles. 'It's very agreeable to hear. It quite lights up these old rooms. To an unfortunate bachelor of a fellow who has lived alone all his life, you know, it's positively delicious. It's charming. Poor things, they have had a great loss in Sophy—who, I do assure you, Copperfield is, and ever was, the dearest girl!—and it gratifies me beyond expression to find them in such good spirits. The society of girls is a very delightful thing, Copperfield. It's not professional, but it's very delightful.'

Observing that he slightly faltered, and comprehending that in the goodness of his heart he was fearful of giving me some pain by what he had said, I expressed my concurrence with a heartiness that evidently relieved and pleased him greatly.

'But then,' said Traddles, 'our domestic arrangements are, to say the truth, quite unprofessional altogether, my dear Copperfield. Even Sophy's being here, is unprofessional. And we have no other place of abode. We have put to sea in a cockboat, but we are quite prepared to rough it. And Sophy's an extraordinary manager! You'll be surprised how those girls are stowed away. I am sure I hardly know how it's done!'

'Are many of the young ladies with you?' I inquired.

'The eldest, the Beauty is here,' said Traddles, in a low confidential voice, 'Caroline. And Sarah's here—the one I mentioned to you as having something the matter with her spine, you know. Immensely better! And the two youngest that Sophy educated are with us. And Louisa's here.'

'Indeed!' cried I.

'Yes,' said Traddles. 'Now the whole set—I mean the chambers—is only three rooms; but Sophy arranges for the girls in the most wonderful way, and they sleep as comfortably as possible. Three in that room,' said Traddles, pointing. 'Two in that.'

I could not help glancing round, in search of the accommodation remaining for Mr. and Mrs. Traddles. Traddles understood me.

'Well!' said Traddles, 'we are prepared to rough it, as I said just now, and we did improvise a bed last week, upon the floor here. But there's a little room in the roof—a very nice room, when you're up there—which Sophy papered herself, to surprise me; and that's our room at present. It's a capital little gipsy sort of place. There's quite a view from it.'

'And you are happily married at last, my dear Traddles!' said I. 'How rejoiced I am!'

'Thank you, my dear Copperfield,' said Traddles, as we shook hands once more. 'Yes, I am as happy as it's possible to be. There's your old friend, you see,' said Traddles, nodding triumphantly at the flower-pot and stand; 'and there's the table with the marble top! All the other furniture is plain and serviceable, you perceive. And as to plate, Lord bless you, we haven't so much as a tea-spoon.'

'All to be earned?' said I, cheerfully.

'Exactly so,' replied Traddles, 'all to be earned. Of course we have something in the shape of tea-spoons, because we stir our tea. But they're Britannia metal.'

'The silver will be the brighter when it comes,' said I.

'The very thing we say!' cried Traddles. 'You see, my dear Copperfield,' falling again into the low confidential tone, 'after I had delivered my argument in DOE dem. JIPES versus WIGZIELL, which did me great service with the profession, I went down into Devonshire, and had some serious conversation in private with the Reverend Horace. I dwelt upon the fact that Sophy—who I do assure you, Copperfield, is the dearest girl!—'

'I am certain she is!' said I.

'She is, indeed!' rejoined Traddles. 'But I am afraid I am wandering from the subject. Did I mention the Reverend Horace?'

'You said that you dwelt upon the fact—'

'True! Upon the fact that Sophy and I had been engaged for a long period, and that Sophy, with the permission of her parents, was more than content to take me—in short,' said Traddles, with his old frank smile, 'on our present Britannia-metal footing. Very well. I then proposed to the Reverend Horace—who is a most excellent clergyman, Copperfield, and ought to be a Bishop; or at least ought to have enough to live upon, without pinching himself—that if I could turn the corner, say of two hundred and fifty pounds, in one year; and could see my way pretty clearly to that, or something better, next year; and could plainly furnish a little place like this, besides; then, and in that case, Sophy and I should be united. I took the liberty of representing that we had been patient for a good many years; and that the circumstance of Sophy's being extraordinarily useful at home, ought not to operate with her affectionate parents, against her establishment in life—don't you see?'

'Certainly it ought not,' said I.

'I am glad you think so, Copperfield,' rejoined Traddles, 'because, without any imputation on the Reverend Horace, I do think parents, and brothers, and so forth, are sometimes rather selfish in such cases. Well! I also pointed out, that my most earnest desire was, to be useful to the family; and that if I got on in the world, and anything should happen to him—I refer to the Reverend Horace—'

'I understand,' said I.

'—Or to Mrs. Crewler—it would be the utmost gratification of my wishes, to be a parent to the girls. He replied in a most admirable manner, exceedingly flattering to my feelings, and undertook to obtain the consent of Mrs. Crewler to this arrangement. They had a dreadful time of it with her. It mounted from her legs into her chest, and then into her head—'

'What mounted?' I asked.

'Her grief,' replied Traddles, with a serious look. 'Her feelings generally. As I mentioned on a former occasion, she is a very superior woman, but has lost the use of her limbs. Whatever occurs to harass her, usually settles in her legs; but on this occasion it mounted to the chest, and then to the head, and, in short, pervaded the whole system in a most alarming manner. However, they brought her through it by unremitting and affectionate attention; and we were married yesterday six weeks. You have no idea what a Monster I felt, Copperfield, when I saw the whole family crying and fainting away in every direction! Mrs. Crewler couldn't see me before we left—couldn't forgive me, then, for depriving her of her child—but she is a good creature, and has done so since. I had a delightful letter from her, only this morning.'

'And in short, my dear friend,' said I, 'you feel as blest as you deserve to feel!'

'Oh! That's your partiality!' laughed Traddles. 'But, indeed, I am in a most enviable state. I work hard, and read Law insatiably. I get up at five every morning, and don't mind it at all. I hide the girls in the daytime, and make merry with them in the evening. And I assure you I am quite sorry that they are going home on Tuesday, which is the day before the first day of Michaelmas Term. But here,' said Traddles, breaking off in his confidence, and speaking aloud, 'ARE the girls! Mr. Copperfield, Miss Crewler—Miss Sarah—Miss Louisa—Margaret and Lucy!'

They were a perfect nest of roses; they looked so wholesome and fresh. They were all pretty, and Miss Caroline was very handsome; but there was a loving, cheerful, fireside quality in Sophy's bright looks, which was better than that, and which assured me that my friend had chosen well. We all sat round the fire; while the sharp boy, who I now divined had lost his breath in putting the papers out, cleared them away again, and produced the tea-things. After that, he retired for the night, shutting the outer door upon us with a bang. Mrs. Traddles, with perfect pleasure and composure beaming from her household eyes, having made the tea, then quietly made the toast as she sat in a corner by the fire.

She had seen Agnes, she told me while she was toasting. 'Tom' had taken her down into Kent for a wedding trip, and there she had seen my aunt, too; and both my aunt and Agnes were well, and they had all talked of nothing but me. 'Tom' had never had me out of his thoughts, she really believed, all the time I had been away. 'Tom' was the authority for everything. 'Tom' was evidently the idol of her life; never to be shaken on his pedestal by any commotion; always to be believed in, and done homage to with the whole faith of her heart, come what might.

The deference which both she and Traddles showed towards the Beauty, pleased me very much. I don't know that I thought it very reasonable; but I thought it very delightful, and essentially a part of their character. If Traddles ever for an instant missed the tea-spoons that were still to be won, I have no doubt it was when he handed the Beauty her tea. If his sweet-tempered wife could have got up any self-assertion against anyone, I am satisfied it could only have been because she was the Beauty's sister. A few slight indications of a rather petted and capricious manner, which I observed in the Beauty, were manifestly considered, by Traddles and his wife, as her birthright and natural endowment. If she had been born a Queen Bee, and they labouring Bees, they could not have been more satisfied of that.

But their self-forgetfulness charmed me. Their pride in these girls, and their submission of themselves to all their whims, was the pleasantest little testimony to their own worth I could have desired to see. If Traddles were addressed as 'a darling', once in the course of that evening; and besought to bring something here, or carry something there, or take something up, or put something down, or find something, or fetch something, he was so addressed, by one or other of his sisters-in-law, at least twelve times in an hour. Neither could they do anything without Sophy. Somebody's hair fell down, and nobody but Sophy could put it up. Somebody forgot how a particular tune went, and nobody but Sophy could hum that tune right. Somebody wanted to recall the name of a place in Devonshire, and only Sophy knew it. Something was wanted to be written home, and Sophy alone could be trusted to write before breakfast in the morning. Somebody broke down in a piece of knitting, and no one but Sophy was able to put the defaulter in the right direction. They were entire mistresses of the place, and Sophy and Traddles waited on them. How many children Sophy could have taken care of in her time, I can't imagine; but she seemed to be famous for knowing every sort of song that ever was addressed to a child in the English tongue; and she sang dozens to order with the clearest little voice in the world, one after another (every sister issuing directions for a different tune, and the Beauty generally striking in last), so that I was quite fascinated. The best of all was, that, in the midst of their exactions, all the sisters had a great tenderness and respect both for Sophy and Traddles. I am sure, when I took my leave, and Traddles was coming out to walk with me to the coffee-house, I thought I had never seen an obstinate head of hair, or any other head of hair, rolling about in such a shower of kisses.

Altogether, it was a scene I could not help dwelling on with pleasure, for a long time after I got back and had wished Traddles good night. If I had beheld a thousand roses blowing in a top set of chambers, in that withered Gray's Inn, they could not have brightened it half so much. The idea of those Devonshire girls, among the dry law-stationers and the attorneys' offices; and of the tea and toast, and children's songs, in that grim atmosphere of pounce and parchment, red-tape, dusty wafers, ink-jars, brief and draft paper, law reports, writs, declarations, and bills of costs; seemed almost as pleasantly fanciful as if I had dreamed that the Sultan's famous family had been admitted on the roll of attorneys, and had brought the talking bird, the singing tree, and the golden water into Gray's Inn Hall. Somehow, I found that I had taken leave of Traddles for the night, and come back to the coffee-house, with a great change in my despondency about him. I began to think he would get on, in spite of all the many orders of chief waiters in England.

Drawing a chair before one of the coffee-room fires to think about him at my leisure, I gradually fell from the consideration of his happiness to tracing prospects in the live-coals, and to thinking, as they broke and changed, of the principal vicissitudes and separations that had marked my life. I had not seen a coal fire, since I had left England three years ago: though many a wood fire had I watched, as it crumbled into hoary ashes, and mingled with the feathery heap upon the hearth, which not inaptly figured to me, in my despondency, my own dead hopes.

I could think of the past now, gravely, but not bitterly; and could contemplate the future in a brave spirit. Home, in its best sense, was for me no more. She in whom I might have inspired a dearer love, I had taught to be my sister. She would marry, and would have new claimants on her tenderness; and in doing it, would never know the love for her that had grown up in my heart. It was right that I should pay the forfeit of my headlong passion. What I reaped, I had sown.

I was thinking. And had I truly disciplined my heart to this, and could I resolutely bear it, and calmly hold the place in her home which she had calmly held in mine,—when I found my eyes resting on a countenance that might have arisen out of the fire, in its association with my early remembrances.

Little Mr. Chillip the Doctor, to whose good offices I was indebted in the very first chapter of this history, sat reading a newspaper in the shadow of an opposite corner. He was tolerably stricken in years by this time; but, being a mild, meek, calm little man, had worn so easily, that I thought he looked at that moment just as he might have looked when he sat in our parlour, waiting for me to be born.

Mr. Chillip had left Blunderstone six or seven years ago, and I had never seen him since. He sat placidly perusing the newspaper, with his little head on one side, and a glass of warm sherry negus at his elbow. He was so extremely conciliatory in his manner that he seemed to apologize to the very newspaper for taking the liberty of reading it.

I walked up to where he was sitting, and said, 'How do you do, Mr. Chillip?'

He was greatly fluttered by this unexpected address from a stranger, and replied, in his slow way, 'I thank you, sir, you are very good. Thank you, sir. I hope YOU are well.'

'You don't remember me?' said I.

'Well, sir,' returned Mr. Chillip, smiling very meekly, and shaking his head as he surveyed me, 'I have a kind of an impression that something in your countenance is familiar to me, sir; but I couldn't lay my hand upon your name, really.'

'And yet you knew it, long before I knew it myself,' I returned.

'Did I indeed, sir?' said Mr. Chillip. 'Is it possible that I had the honour, sir, of officiating when—?'

'Yes,' said I.

'Dear me!' cried Mr. Chillip. 'But no doubt you are a good deal changed since then, sir?'

'Probably,' said I.

'Well, sir,' observed Mr. Chillip, 'I hope you'll excuse me, if I am compelled to ask the favour of your name?'

On my telling him my name, he was really moved. He quite shook hands with me—which was a violent proceeding for him, his usual course being to slide a tepid little fish-slice, an inch or two in advance of his hip, and evince the greatest discomposure when anybody grappled with it. Even now, he put his hand in his coat-pocket as soon as he could disengage it, and seemed relieved when he had got it safe back.

'Dear me, sir!' said Mr. Chillip, surveying me with his head on one side. 'And it's Mr. Copperfield, is it? Well, sir, I think I should have known you, if I had taken the liberty of looking more closely at you. There's a strong resemblance between you and your poor father, sir.'

'I never had the happiness of seeing my father,' I observed.

'Very true, sir,' said Mr. Chillip, in a soothing tone. 'And very much to be deplored it was, on all accounts! We are not ignorant, sir,' said Mr. Chillip, slowly shaking his little head again, 'down in our part of the country, of your fame. There must be great excitement here, sir,' said Mr. Chillip, tapping himself on the forehead with his forefinger. 'You must find it a trying occupation, sir!'

'What is your part of the country now?' I asked, seating myself near him.

'I am established within a few miles of Bury St. Edmund's, sir,' said Mr. Chillip. 'Mrs. Chillip, coming into a little property in that neighbourhood, under her father's will, I bought a practice down there, in which you will be glad to hear I am doing well. My daughter is growing quite a tall lass now, sir,' said Mr. Chillip, giving his little head another little shake. 'Her mother let down two tucks in her frocks only last week. Such is time, you see, sir!'

As the little man put his now empty glass to his lips, when he made this reflection, I proposed to him to have it refilled, and I would keep him company with another. 'Well, sir,' he returned, in his slow way, 'it's more than I am accustomed to; but I can't deny myself the pleasure of your conversation. It seems but yesterday that I had the honour of attending you in the measles. You came through them charmingly, sir!'

I acknowledged this compliment, and ordered the negus, which was soon produced. 'Quite an uncommon dissipation!' said Mr. Chillip, stirring it, 'but I can't resist so extraordinary an occasion. You have no family, sir?'

I shook my head.

'I was aware that you sustained a bereavement, sir, some time ago,' said Mr. Chillip. 'I heard it from your father-in-law's sister. Very decided character there, sir?'

'Why, yes,' said I, 'decided enough. Where did you see her, Mr. Chillip?'

'Are you not aware, sir,' returned Mr. Chillip, with his placidest smile, 'that your father-in-law is again a neighbour of mine?'

'No,' said I.

'He is indeed, sir!' said Mr. Chillip. 'Married a young lady of that part, with a very good little property, poor thing.—-And this action of the brain now, sir? Don't you find it fatigue you?' said Mr. Chillip, looking at me like an admiring Robin.

I waived that question, and returned to the Murdstones. 'I was aware of his being married again. Do you attend the family?' I asked.

'Not regularly. I have been called in,' he replied. 'Strong phrenological developments of the organ of firmness, in Mr. Murdstone and his sister, sir.'

I replied with such an expressive look, that Mr. Chillip was emboldened by that, and the negus together, to give his head several short shakes, and thoughtfully exclaim, 'Ah, dear me! We remember old times, Mr. Copperfield!'

'And the brother and sister are pursuing their old course, are they?' said I.

'Well, sir,' replied Mr. Chillip, 'a medical man, being so much in families, ought to have neither eyes nor ears for anything but his profession. Still, I must say, they are very severe, sir: both as to this life and the next.'

'The next will be regulated without much reference to them, I dare say,' I returned: 'what are they doing as to this?'

Mr. Chillip shook his head, stirred his negus, and sipped it.

'She was a charming woman, sir!' he observed in a plaintive manner.

'The present Mrs. Murdstone?'

A charming woman indeed, sir,' said Mr. Chillip; 'as amiable, I am sure, as it was possible to be! Mrs. Chillip's opinion is, that her spirit has been entirely broken since her marriage, and that she is all but melancholy mad. And the ladies,' observed Mr. Chillip, timorously, 'are great observers, sir.'

'I suppose she was to be subdued and broken to their detestable mould, Heaven help her!' said I. 'And she has been.'

'Well, sir, there were violent quarrels at first, I assure you,' said Mr. Chillip; 'but she is quite a shadow now. Would it be considered forward if I was to say to you, sir, in confidence, that since the sister came to help, the brother and sister between them have nearly reduced her to a state of imbecility?'

I told him I could easily believe it.

'I have no hesitation in saying,' said Mr. Chillip, fortifying himself with another sip of negus, 'between you and me, sir, that her mother died of it—or that tyranny, gloom, and worry have made Mrs. Murdstone nearly imbecile. She was a lively young woman, sir, before marriage, and their gloom and austerity destroyed her. They go about with her, now, more like her keepers than her husband and sister-in-law. That was Mrs. Chillip's remark to me, only last week. And I assure you, sir, the ladies are great observers. Mrs. Chillip herself is a great observer!'

'Does he gloomily profess to be (I am ashamed to use the word in such association) religious still?' I inquired.

'You anticipate, sir,' said Mr. Chillip, his eyelids getting quite red with the unwonted stimulus in which he was indulging. 'One of Mrs. Chillip's most impressive remarks. Mrs. Chillip,' he proceeded, in the calmest and slowest manner, 'quite electrified me, by pointing out that Mr. Murdstone sets up an image of himself, and calls it the Divine Nature. You might have knocked me down on the flat of my back, sir, with the feather of a pen, I assure you, when Mrs. Chillip said so. The ladies are great observers, sir?'

'Intuitively,' said I, to his extreme delight.

'I am very happy to receive such support in my opinion, sir,' he rejoined. 'It is not often that I venture to give a non-medical opinion, I assure you.

Mr. Murdstone delivers public addresses sometimes, and it is said,—in short, sir, it is said by Mrs. Chillip,—that the darker tyrant he has lately been, the more ferocious is his doctrine.'

'I believe Mrs. Chillip to be perfectly right,' said I.

'Mrs. Chillip does go so far as to say,' pursued the meekest of little men, much encouraged, 'that what such people miscall their religion, is a vent for their bad humours and arrogance. And do you know I must say, sir,' he continued, mildly laying his head on one side, 'that I DON'T find authority for Mr. and Miss Murdstone in the New Testament?'

'I never found it either!' said I.

'In the meantime, sir,' said Mr. Chillip, 'they are much disliked; and as they are very free in consigning everybody who dislikes them to perdition, we really have a good deal of perdition going on in our neighbourhood! However, as Mrs. Chillip says, sir, they undergo a continual punishment; for they are turned inward, to feed upon their own hearts, and their own hearts are very bad feeding. Now, sir, about that brain of yours, if you'll excuse my returning to it. Don't you expose it to a good deal of excitement, sir?'

I found it not difficult, in the excitement of Mr. Chillip's own brain, under his potations of negus, to divert his attention from this topic to his own affairs, on which, for the next half-hour, he was quite loquacious; giving me to understand, among other pieces of information, that he was then at the Gray's Inn Coffee-house to lay his professional evidence before a Commission of Lunacy, touching the state of mind of a patient who had become deranged from excessive drinking. 'And I assure you, sir,' he said, 'I am extremely nervous on such occasions. I could not support being what is called Bullied, sir. It would quite unman me. Do you know it was some time before I recovered the conduct of that alarming lady, on the night of your birth, Mr. Copperfield?'

I told him that I was going down to my aunt, the Dragon of that night, early in the morning; and that she was one of the most tender-hearted and excellent of women, as he would know full well if he knew her better. The mere notion of the possibility of his ever seeing her again, appeared to terrify him. He replied with a small pale smile, 'Is she so, indeed, sir? Really?' and almost immediately called for a candle, and went to bed, as if he were not quite safe anywhere else. He did not actually stagger under the negus; but I should think his placid little pulse must have made two or three more beats in a minute, than it had done since the great night of my aunt's disappointment, when she struck at him with her bonnet.

Thoroughly tired, I went to bed too, at midnight; passed the next day on the Dover coach; burst safe and sound into my aunt's old parlour while she was at tea (she wore spectacles now); and was received by her, and Mr. Dick, and dear old Peggotty, who acted as housekeeper, with open arms and tears of joy. My aunt was mightily amused, when we began to talk composedly, by my account of my meeting with Mr. Chillip, and of his holding her in such dread remembrance; and both she and Peggotty had a great deal to say about my poor mother's second husband, and 'that murdering woman of a sister',—on whom I think no pain or penalty would have induced my aunt to bestow any Christian or Proper Name, or any other designation.

CHAPTER 60. AGNES

My aunt and I, when we were left alone, talked far into the night. How the emigrants never wrote home, otherwise than cheerfully and hopefully; how Mr. Micawber had actually remitted divers small sums of money, on account of those 'pecuniary liabilities', in reference to which he had been so business-like as between man and man; how Janet, returning into my aunt's service when she came back to Dover, had finally carried out her renunciation of mankind by entering into wedlock with a thriving tavern-keeper; and how my aunt had finally set her seal on the same great principle, by aiding and abetting the bride, and crowning the marriage-ceremony with her presence; were among our topics—already more or less familiar to me through the letters I had had. Mr. Dick, as usual, was not forgotten. My aunt informed me how he incessantly occupied himself in copying everything he could lay his hands on, and kept King Charles the First at a respectful distance by that semblance of employment; how it was one of the main joys and rewards of her life that he was free and happy, instead of pining in monotonous restraint; and how (as a novel general conclusion) nobody but she could ever fully know what he was.

'And when, Trot,' said my aunt, patting the back of my hand, as we sat in our old way before the fire, 'when are you going over to Canterbury?'

'I shall get a horse, and ride over tomorrow morning, aunt, unless you will go with me?'

'No!' said my aunt, in her short abrupt way. 'I mean to stay where I am.'

Then, I should ride, I said. I could not have come through Canterbury today without stopping, if I had been coming to anyone but her.

She was pleased, but answered, 'Tut, Trot; MY old bones would have kept till tomorrow!' and softly patted my hand again, as I sat looking thoughtfully at the fire.

Thoughtfully, for I could not be here once more, and so near Agnes, without the revival of those regrets with which I had so long been occupied. Softened regrets they might be, teaching me what I had failed to learn when my younger life was all before me, but not the less regrets. 'Oh, Trot,' I seemed to hear my aunt say once more; and I understood her better now—'Blind, blind, blind!'

We both kept silence for some minutes. When I raised my eyes, I found that she was steadily observant of me. Perhaps she had followed the current of my mind; for it seemed to me an easy one to track now, wilful as it had been once.

'You will find her father a white-haired old man,' said my aunt, 'though a better man in all other respects—a reclaimed man. Neither will you find him measuring all human interests, and joys, and sorrows, with his one poor little inch-rule now. Trust me, child, such things must shrink very much, before they can be measured off in that way.'

'Indeed they must,' said I.

'You will find her,' pursued my aunt, 'as good, as beautiful, as earnest, as disinterested, as she has always been. If I knew higher praise, Trot, I would bestow it on her.'

There was no higher praise for her; no higher reproach for me. Oh, how had I strayed so far away!

'If she trains the young girls whom she has about her, to be like herself,' said my aunt, earnest even to the filling of her eyes with tears, 'Heaven knows, her life will be well employed! Useful and happy, as she said that day! How could she be otherwise than useful and happy!'

'Has Agnes any—' I was thinking aloud, rather than speaking.

'Well? Hey? Any what?' said my aunt, sharply.

'Any lover,' said I.

'A score,' cried my aunt, with a kind of indignant pride. 'She might have married twenty times, my dear, since you have been gone!'

'No doubt,' said I. 'No doubt. But has she any lover who is worthy of her? Agnes could care for no other.'

My aunt sat musing for a little while, with her chin upon her hand. Slowly raising her eyes to mine, she said:

'I suspect she has an attachment, Trot.'

'A prosperous one?' said I.

'Trot,' returned my aunt gravely, 'I can't say. I have no right to tell you even so much. She has never confided it to me, but I suspect it.'

She looked so attentively and anxiously at me (I even saw her tremble), that I felt now, more than ever, that she had followed my late thoughts. I summoned all the resolutions I had made, in all those many days and nights, and all those many conflicts of my heart.

'If it should be so,' I began, 'and I hope it is-'

'I don't know that it is,' said my aunt curtly. 'You must not be ruled by my suspicions. You must keep them secret. They are very slight, perhaps. I have no right to speak.'

'If it should be so,' I repeated, 'Agnes will tell me at her own good time. A sister to whom I have confided so much, aunt, will not be reluctant to confide in me.'

My aunt withdrew her eyes from mine, as slowly as she had turned them upon me; and covered them thoughtfully with her hand. By and by she put her other hand on my shoulder; and so we both sat, looking into the past, without saying another word, until we parted for the night.

I rode away, early in the morning, for the scene of my old school-days. I cannot say that I was yet quite happy, in the hope that I was gaining a victory over myself; even in the prospect of so soon looking on her face again.

The well-remembered ground was soon traversed, and I came into the quiet streets, where every stone was a boy's book to me. I went on foot to the old house, and went away with a heart too full to enter. I returned; and looking, as I passed, through the low window of the turret-room where first Uriah Heep, and afterwards Mr. Micawber, had been wont to sit, saw that it was a little parlour now, and that there was no office. Otherwise the staid old house was, as to its cleanliness and order, still just as it had been when I first saw it. I requested the new maid who admitted me, to tell Miss Wickfield that a gentleman who waited on her from a friend abroad, was there; and I was shown up the grave old staircase (cautioned of the steps I knew so well), into the unchanged drawing-room. The books that Agnes and I had read together, were on their shelves; and the desk where I had laboured at my lessons, many a night, stood yet at the same old corner of the table. All the little changes that had crept in when the Heeps were there, were changed again. Everything was as it used to be, in the happy time.

I stood in a window, and looked across the ancient street at the opposite houses, recalling how I had watched them on wet afternoons, when I first came there; and how I had used to speculate about the people who appeared at any of the windows, and had followed them with my eyes up and down stairs, while women went clicking along the pavement in pattens, and the dull rain fell in slanting lines, and poured out of the water-spout yonder, and flowed into the road. The feeling with which I used to watch the tramps, as they came into the town on those wet evenings, at dusk, and limped past, with their bundles drooping over their shoulders at the ends of sticks, came freshly back to me; fraught, as then, with the smell of damp earth, and wet leaves and briar, and the sensation of the very airs that blew upon me in my own toilsome journey.

The opening of the little door in the panelled wall made me start and turn. Her beautiful serene eyes met mine as she came towards me. She stopped and laid her hand upon her bosom, and I caught her in my arms.

'Agnes! my dear girl! I have come too suddenly upon you.'

'No, no! I am so rejoiced to see you, Trotwood!'

'Dear Agnes, the happiness it is to me, to see you once again!'

I folded her to my heart, and, for a little while, we were both silent. Presently we sat down, side by side; and her angel-face was turned upon me with the welcome I had dreamed of, waking and sleeping, for whole years.

She was so true, she was so beautiful, she was so good,—I owed her so much gratitude, she was so dear to me, that I could find no utterance for what I felt. I tried to bless her, tried to thank her, tried to tell her (as I had often done in letters) what an influence she had upon me; but all my efforts were in vain. My love and joy were dumb.

With her own sweet tranquillity, she calmed my agitation; led me back to the time of our parting; spoke to me of Emily, whom she had visited, in secret, many times; spoke to me tenderly of Dora's grave. With the unerring instinct of her noble heart, she touched the chords of my memory so softly and harmoniously, that not one jarred within me; I could listen to the sorrowful, distant music, and desire to shrink from nothing it awoke. How could I, when, blended with it all, was her dear self, the better angel of my life?

'And you, Agnes,' I said, by and by. 'Tell me of yourself. You have hardly ever told me of your own life, in all this lapse of time!'

'What should I tell?' she answered, with her radiant smile. 'Papa is well. You see us here, quiet in our own home; our anxieties set at rest, our home restored to us; and knowing that, dear Trotwood, you know all.'

'All, Agnes?' said I.

She looked at me, with some fluttering wonder in her face.

'Is there nothing else, Sister?' I said.

Her colour, which had just now faded, returned, and faded again. She smiled; with a quiet sadness, I thought; and shook her head.

I had sought to lead her to what my aunt had hinted at; for, sharply painful to me as it must be to receive that confidence, I was to discipline my heart, and do my duty to her. I saw, however, that she was uneasy, and I let it pass.

'You have much to do, dear Agnes?'

'With my school?' said she, looking up again, in all her bright composure.

'Yes. It is laborious, is it not?'

'The labour is so pleasant,' she returned, 'that it is scarcely grateful in me to call it by that name.'

'Nothing good is difficult to you,' said I.

Her colour came and went once more; and once more, as she bent her head, I saw the same sad smile.

'You will wait and see papa,' said Agnes, cheerfully, 'and pass the day with us? Perhaps you will sleep in your own room? We always call it yours.'

I could not do that, having promised to ride back to my aunt's at night; but I would pass the day there, joyfully.

'I must be a prisoner for a little while,' said Agnes, 'but here are the old books, Trotwood, and the old music.'

'Even the old flowers are here,' said I, looking round; 'or the old kinds.'

'I have found a pleasure,' returned Agnes, smiling, 'while you have been absent, in keeping everything as it used to be when we were children. For we were very happy then, I think.'

'Heaven knows we were!' said I.

'And every little thing that has reminded me of my brother,' said Agnes, with her cordial eyes turned cheerfully upon me, 'has been a welcome companion. Even this,' showing me the basket-trifle, full of keys, still hanging at her side, 'seems to jingle a kind of old tune!'

She smiled again, and went out at the door by which she had come.

It was for me to guard this sisterly affection with religious care. It was all that I had left myself, and it was a treasure. If I once shook the foundations of the sacred confidence and usage, in virtue of which it was given to me, it was lost, and could never be recovered. I set this steadily before myself. The better I loved her, the more it behoved me never to forget it.

I walked through the streets; and, once more seeing my old adversary the butcher—now a constable, with his staff hanging up in the shop—went down to look at the place where I had fought him; and there meditated on Miss Shepherd and the eldest Miss Larkins, and all the idle loves and likings, and dislikings, of that time. Nothing seemed to have survived that time but Agnes; and she, ever a star above me, was brighter and higher.

When I returned, Mr. Wickfield had come home, from a garden he had, a couple of miles or so out of town, where he now employed himself almost every day. I found him as my aunt had described him. We sat down to dinner, with some half-dozen little girls; and he seemed but the shadow of his handsome picture on the wall.

The tranquillity and peace belonging, of old, to that quiet ground in my memory, pervaded it again. When dinner was done, Mr. Wickfield taking no wine, and I desiring none, we went up-stairs; where Agnes and her little charges sang and played, and worked. After tea the children left us; and we three sat together, talking of the bygone days.

'My part in them,' said Mr. Wickfield, shaking his white head, 'has much matter for regret—for deep regret, and deep contrition, Trotwood, you well know. But I would not cancel it, if it were in my power.'

I could readily believe that, looking at the face beside him.

'I should cancel with it,' he pursued, 'such patience and devotion, such fidelity, such a child's love, as I must not forget, no! even to forget myself.'

'I understand you, sir,' I softly said. 'I hold it—I have always held it—in veneration.'

'But no one knows, not even you,' he returned, 'how much she has done, how much she has undergone, how hard she has striven. Dear Agnes!'

She had put her hand entreatingly on his arm, to stop him; and was very, very pale.

'Well, well!' he said with a sigh, dismissing, as I then saw, some trial she had borne, or was yet to bear, in connexion with what my aunt had told me. 'Well! I have never told you, Trotwood, of her mother. Has anyone?'

'Never, sir.'

'It's not much—though it was much to suffer. She married me in opposition to her father's wish, and he renounced her. She prayed him to forgive her, before my Agnes came into this world. He was a very hard man, and her mother had long been dead. He repulsed her. He broke her heart.'

Agnes leaned upon his shoulder, and stole her arm about his neck.

'She had an affectionate and gentle heart,' he said; 'and it was broken. I knew its tender nature very well. No one could, if I did not. She loved me dearly, but was never happy. She was always labouring, in secret, under this distress; and being delicate and downcast at the time of his last repulse—for it was not the first, by many—pined away and died. She left me Agnes, two weeks old; and the grey hair that you recollect me with, when you first came.' He kissed Agnes on her cheek.

'My love for my dear child was a diseased love, but my mind was all unhealthy then. I say no more of that. I am not speaking of myself, Trotwood, but of her mother, and of her. If I give you any clue to what I am, or to what I have been, you will unravel it, I know. What Agnes is, I need not say. I have always read something of her poor mother's story, in her character; and so I tell it you tonight, when we three are again together, after such great changes. I have told it all.'

His bowed head, and her angel-face and filial duty, derived a more pathetic meaning from it than they had had before. If I had wanted anything by which to mark this night of our re-union, I should have found it in this.

Agnes rose up from her father's side, before long; and going softly to her piano, played some of the old airs to which we had often listened in that place.

'Have you any intention of going away again?' Agnes asked me, as I was standing by.

'What does my sister say to that?'

'I hope not.'

'Then I have no such intention, Agnes.'

'I think you ought not, Trotwood, since you ask me,' she said, mildly. 'Your growing reputation and success enlarge your power of doing good; and if I could spare my brother,' with her eyes upon me, 'perhaps the time could not.'

'What I am, you have made me, Agnes. You should know best.'

'I made you, Trotwood?'

'Yes! Agnes, my dear girl!' I said, bending over her. 'I tried to tell you, when we met today, something that has been in my thoughts since Dora died. You remember, when you came down to me in our little room—pointing upward, Agnes?'

'Oh, Trotwood!' she returned, her eyes filled with tears. 'So loving, so confiding, and so young! Can I ever forget?'

'As you were then, my sister, I have often thought since, you have ever been to me. Ever pointing upward, Agnes; ever leading me to something better; ever directing me to higher things!'

She only shook her head; through her tears I saw the same sad quiet smile.

'And I am so grateful to you for it, Agnes, so bound to you, that there is no name for the affection of my heart. I want you to know, yet don't know how to tell you, that all my life long I shall look up to you, and be guided by you, as I have been through the darkness that is past. Whatever betides, whatever new ties you may form, whatever changes may come between us, I shall always look to you, and love you, as I do now, and have always done. You will always be my solace and resource, as you have always been. Until I die, my dearest sister, I shall see you always before me, pointing upward!'

She put her hand in mine, and told me she was proud of me, and of what I said; although I praised her very far beyond her worth. Then she went on softly playing, but without removing her eyes from me. 'Do you know, what I have heard tonight, Agnes,' said I, strangely seems to be a part of the feeling with which I regarded you when I saw you first—with which I sat beside you in my rough school-days?'

'You knew I had no mother,' she replied with a smile, 'and felt kindly towards me.'

'More than that, Agnes, I knew, almost as if I had known this story, that there was something inexplicably gentle and softened, surrounding you; something that might have been sorrowful in someone else (as I can now understand it was), but was not so in you.'

She softly played on, looking at me still.

'Will you laugh at my cherishing such fancies, Agnes?'

'No!'

'Or at my saying that I really believe I felt, even then, that you could be faithfully affectionate against all discouragement, and never cease to be so, until you ceased to live?—-Will you laugh at such a dream?'

'Oh, no! Oh, no!'

For an instant, a distressful shadow crossed her face; but, even in the start it gave me, it was gone; and she was playing on, and looking at me with her own calm smile.

As I rode back in the lonely night, the wind going by me like a restless memory, I thought of this, and feared she was not happy. I was not happy; but, thus far, I had faithfully set the seal upon the Past, and, thinking of her, pointing upward, thought of her as pointing to that sky above me, where, in the mystery to come, I might yet love her with a love unknown on earth, and tell her what the strife had been within me when I loved her here.

CHAPTER 61. I AM SHOWN TWO INTERESTING PENITENTS

For a time—at all events until my book should be completed, which would be the work of several months—I took up my abode in my aunt's house at Dover; and there, sitting in the window from which I had looked out at the moon upon the sea, when that roof first gave me shelter, I quietly pursued my task.

In pursuance of my intention of referring to my own fictions only when their course should incidentally connect itself with the progress of my story, I do not enter on the aspirations, the delights, anxieties, and triumphs of my art. That I truly devoted myself to it with my strongest earnestness, and bestowed upon it every energy of my soul, I have already said. If the books I have written be of any worth, they will supply the rest. I shall otherwise have written to poor purpose, and the rest will be of interest to no one.

Occasionally, I went to London; to lose myself in the swarm of life there, or to consult with Traddles on some business point. He had managed for me, in my absence, with the soundest judgement; and my worldly affairs were prospering. As my notoriety began to bring upon me an enormous quantity of letters from people of whom I had no knowledge—chiefly about nothing, and extremely difficult to answer—I agreed with Traddles to have my name painted up on his door. There, the devoted postman on that beat delivered bushels of letters for me; and there, at intervals, I laboured through them, like a Home Secretary of State without the salary.

Among this correspondence, there dropped in, every now and then, an obliging proposal from one of the numerous outsiders always lurking about the Commons, to practise under cover of my name (if I would take the necessary steps remaining to make a proctor of myself), and pay me a percentage on the profits. But I declined these offers; being already aware that there were plenty of such covert practitioners in existence, and considering the Commons quite bad enough, without my doing anything to make it worse.

The girls had gone home, when my name burst into bloom on Traddles's door; and the sharp boy looked, all day, as if he had never heard of Sophy, shut up in a back room, glancing down from her work into a sooty little strip of garden with a pump in it. But there I always found her, the same bright housewife; often humming her Devonshire ballads when no strange foot was coming up the stairs, and blunting the sharp boy in his official closet with melody.

I wondered, at first, why I so often found Sophy writing in a copy-book; and why she always shut it up when I appeared, and hurried it into the table-drawer. But the secret soon came out. One day, Traddles (who had just come home through the drizzling sleet from Court) took a paper out of his desk, and asked me what I thought of that handwriting?

'Oh, DON'T, Tom!' cried Sophy, who was warming his slippers before the fire.

'My dear,' returned Tom, in a delighted state, 'why not? What do you say to that writing, Copperfield?'

'It's extraordinarily legal and formal,' said I. 'I don't think I ever saw such a stiff hand.'

'Not like a lady's hand, is it?' said Traddles.

'A lady's!' I repeated. 'Bricks and mortar are more like a lady's hand!'

Traddles broke into a rapturous laugh, and informed me that it was Sophy's writing; that Sophy had vowed and declared he would need a copying-clerk soon, and she would be that clerk; that she had acquired this hand from a pattern; and that she could throw off—I forget how many folios an hour. Sophy was very much confused by my being told all this, and said that when 'Tom' was made a judge he wouldn't be so ready to proclaim it. Which 'Tom' denied; averring that he should always be equally proud of it, under all circumstances.

'What a thoroughly good and charming wife she is, my dear Traddles!' said I, when she had gone away, laughing.

'My dear Copperfield,' returned Traddles, 'she is, without any exception, the dearest girl! The way she manages this place; her punctuality, domestic knowledge, economy, and order; her cheerfulness, Copperfield!'

'Indeed, you have reason to commend her!' I returned. 'You are a happy fellow. I believe you make yourselves, and each other, two of the happiest people in the world.'

'I am sure we ARE two of the happiest people,' returned Traddles. 'I admit that, at all events. Bless my soul, when I see her getting up by candle-light on these dark mornings, busying herself in the day's arrangements, going out to market before the clerks come into the Inn, caring for no weather, devising the most capital little dinners out of the plainest materials, making puddings and pies, keeping everything in its right place, always so neat and ornamental herself, sitting up at night with me if it's ever so late, sweet-tempered and encouraging always, and all for me, I positively sometimes can't believe it, Copperfield!'

He was tender of the very slippers she had been warming, as he put them on, and stretched his feet enjoyingly upon the fender.

'I positively sometimes can't believe it,' said Traddles. 'Then our pleasures! Dear me, they are inexpensive, but they are quite wonderful! When we are at home here, of an evening, and shut the outer door, and draw those curtains—which she made—where could we be more snug? When it's fine, and we go out for a walk in the evening, the streets abound in enjoyment for us. We look into the glittering windows of the jewellers' shops; and I show Sophy which of the diamond-eyed serpents, coiled up on white satin rising grounds, I would give her if I could afford it; and Sophy shows me which of the gold watches that are capped and jewelled and engine-turned, and possessed of the horizontal lever-escape-movement, and all sorts of things, she would buy for me if she could afford it; and we pick out the spoons and forks, fish-slices, butter-knives, and sugar-tongs, we should both prefer if we could both afford it; and really we go away as if we had got them! Then, when we stroll into the squares, and great streets, and see a house to let, sometimes we look up at it, and say, how would THAT do, if I was made a judge? And we parcel it out—such a room for us, such rooms for the girls, and so forth; until we settle to our satisfaction that it would do, or it wouldn't do, as the case may be. Sometimes, we go at half-price to the pit of the theatre—the very smell of which is cheap, in my opinion, at the money—and there we thoroughly enjoy the play: which Sophy believes every word of, and so do I. In walking home, perhaps we buy a little bit of something at a cook's-shop, or a little lobster at the fishmongers, and bring it here, and make a splendid supper, chatting about what we have seen. Now, you know, Copperfield, if I was Lord Chancellor, we couldn't do this!'

'You would do something, whatever you were, my dear Traddles,' thought I, 'that would be pleasant and amiable. And by the way,' I said aloud, 'I suppose you never draw any skeletons now?'

'Really,' replied Traddles, laughing, and reddening, 'I can't wholly deny that I do, my dear Copperfield. For being in one of the back rows of the King's Bench the other day, with a pen in my hand, the fancy came into my head to try how I had preserved that accomplishment. And I am afraid there's a skeleton—in a wig—on the ledge of the desk.'

After we had both laughed heartily, Traddles wound up by looking with a smile at the fire, and saying, in his forgiving way, 'Old Creakle!'

'I have a letter from that old—Rascal here,' said I. For I never was less disposed to forgive him the way he used to batter Traddles, than when I saw Traddles so ready to forgive him himself.

'From Creakle the schoolmaster?' exclaimed Traddles. 'No!'

'Among the persons who are attracted to me in my rising fame and fortune,' said I, looking over my letters, 'and who discover that they were always much attached to me, is the self-same Creakle. He is not a schoolmaster now, Traddles. He is retired. He is a Middlesex Magistrate.'

I thought Traddles might be surprised to hear it, but he was not so at all.

'How do you suppose he comes to be a Middlesex Magistrate?' said I.

'Oh dear me!' replied Traddles, 'it would be very difficult to answer that question. Perhaps he voted for somebody, or lent money to somebody, or bought something of somebody, or otherwise obliged somebody, or jobbed for somebody, who knew somebody who got the lieutenant of the county to nominate him for the commission.'

'On the commission he is, at any rate,' said I. 'And he writes to me here, that he will be glad to show me, in operation, the only true system of prison discipline; the only unchallengeable way of making sincere and lasting converts and penitents—which, you know, is by solitary confinement. What do you say?'

'To the system?' inquired Traddles, looking grave.

'No. To my accepting the offer, and your going with me?'

'I don't object,' said Traddles.

'Then I'll write to say so. You remember (to say nothing of our treatment) this same Creakle turning his son out of doors, I suppose, and the life he used to lead his wife and daughter?'

'Perfectly,' said Traddles.

'Yet, if you'll read his letter, you'll find he is the tenderest of men to prisoners convicted of the whole calendar of felonies,' said I; 'though I can't find that his tenderness extends to any other class of created beings.'

Traddles shrugged his shoulders, and was not at all surprised. I had not expected him to be, and was not surprised myself; or my observation of similar practical satires would have been but scanty. We arranged the time of our visit, and I wrote accordingly to Mr. Creakle that evening.

On the appointed day—I think it was the next day, but no matter—Traddles and I repaired to the prison where Mr. Creakle was powerful. It was an immense and solid building, erected at a vast expense. I could not help thinking, as we approached the gate, what an uproar would have been made in the country, if any deluded man had proposed to spend one half the money it had cost, on the erection of an industrial school for the young, or a house of refuge for the deserving old.

In an office that might have been on the ground-floor of the Tower of Babel, it was so massively constructed, we were presented to our old schoolmaster; who was one of a group, composed of two or three of the busier sort of magistrates, and some visitors they had brought. He received me, like a man who had formed my mind in bygone years, and had always loved me tenderly. On my introducing Traddles, Mr. Creakle expressed, in like manner, but in an inferior degree, that he had always been Traddles's guide, philosopher, and friend. Our venerable instructor was a great deal older, and not improved in appearance. His face was as fiery as ever; his eyes were as small, and rather deeper set. The scanty, wet-looking grey hair, by which I remembered him, was almost gone; and the thick veins in his bald head were none the more agreeable to look at.

After some conversation among these gentlemen, from which I might have supposed that there was nothing in the world to be legitimately taken into account but the supreme comfort of prisoners, at any expense, and nothing on the wide earth to be done outside prison-doors, we began our inspection. It being then just dinner-time, we went, first into the great kitchen, where every prisoner's dinner was in course of being set out separately (to be handed to him in his cell), with the regularity and precision of clock-work. I said aside, to Traddles, that I wondered whether it occurred to anybody, that there was a striking contrast between these plentiful repasts of choice quality, and the dinners, not to say of paupers, but of soldiers, sailors, labourers, the great bulk of the honest, working community; of whom not one man in five hundred ever dined half so well. But I learned that the 'system' required high living; and, in short, to dispose of the system, once for all, I found that on that head and on all others, 'the system' put an end to all doubts, and disposed of all anomalies. Nobody appeared to have the least idea that there was any other system, but THE system, to be considered.

As we were going through some of the magnificent passages, I inquired of Mr. Creakle and his friends what were supposed to be the main advantages of this all-governing and universally over-riding system? I found them to be the perfect isolation of prisoners—so that no one man in confinement there, knew anything about another; and the reduction of prisoners to a wholesome state of mind, leading to sincere contrition and repentance.

Now, it struck me, when we began to visit individuals in their cells, and to traverse the passages in which those cells were, and to have the manner of the going to chapel and so forth, explained to us, that there was a strong probability of the prisoners knowing a good deal about each other, and of their carrying on a pretty complete system of intercourse. This, at the time I write, has been proved, I believe, to be the case; but, as it would have been flat blasphemy against the system to have hinted such a doubt then, I looked out for the penitence as diligently as I could.

And here again, I had great misgivings. I found as prevalent a fashion in the form of the penitence, as I had left outside in the forms of the coats and waistcoats in the windows of the tailors' shops. I found a vast amount of profession, varying very little in character: varying very little (which I thought exceedingly suspicious), even in words. I found a great many foxes, disparaging whole vineyards of inaccessible grapes; but I found very few foxes whom I would have trusted within reach of a bunch. Above all, I found that the most professing men were the greatest objects of interest; and that their conceit, their vanity, their want of excitement, and their love of deception (which many of them possessed to an almost incredible extent, as their histories showed), all prompted to these professions, and were all gratified by them.

However, I heard so repeatedly, in the course of our goings to and fro, of a certain Number Twenty Seven, who was the Favourite, and who really appeared to be a Model Prisoner, that I resolved to suspend my judgement until I should see Twenty Seven. Twenty Eight, I understood, was also a bright particular star; but it was his misfortune to have his glory a little dimmed by the extraordinary lustre of Twenty Seven. I heard so much of Twenty Seven, of his pious admonitions to everybody around him, and of the beautiful letters he constantly wrote to his mother (whom he seemed to consider in a very bad way), that I became quite impatient to see him.

I had to restrain my impatience for some time, on account of Twenty Seven being reserved for a concluding effect. But, at last, we came to the door of his cell; and Mr. Creakle, looking through a little hole in it, reported to us, in a state of the greatest admiration, that he was reading a Hymn Book.

There was such a rush of heads immediately, to see Number Twenty Seven reading his Hymn Book, that the little hole was blocked up, six or seven heads deep. To remedy this inconvenience, and give us an opportunity of conversing with Twenty Seven in all his purity, Mr. Creakle directed the door of the cell to be unlocked, and Twenty Seven to be invited out into the passage. This was done; and whom should Traddles and I then behold, to our amazement, in this converted Number Twenty Seven, but Uriah Heep!

He knew us directly; and said, as he came out—with the old writhe,—

'How do you do, Mr. Copperfield? How do you do, Mr. Traddles?'

This recognition caused a general admiration in the party. I rather thought that everyone was struck by his not being proud, and taking notice of us.

'Well, Twenty Seven,' said Mr. Creakle, mournfully admiring him. 'How do you find yourself today?'

'I am very umble, sir!' replied Uriah Heep.

'You are always so, Twenty Seven,' said Mr. Creakle.

Here, another gentleman asked, with extreme anxiety: 'Are you quite comfortable?'

'Yes, I thank you, sir!' said Uriah Heep, looking in that direction. 'Far more comfortable here, than ever I was outside. I see my follies, now, sir. That's what makes me comfortable.'

Several gentlemen were much affected; and a third questioner, forcing himself to the front, inquired with extreme feeling: 'How do you find the beef?'

'Thank you, sir,' replied Uriah, glancing in the new direction of this voice, 'it was tougher yesterday than I could wish; but it's my duty to bear. I have committed follies, gentlemen,' said Uriah, looking round with a meek smile, 'and I ought to bear the consequences without repining.' A murmur, partly of gratification at Twenty Seven's celestial state of mind, and partly of indignation against the Contractor who had given him any cause of complaint (a note of which was immediately made by Mr. Creakle), having subsided, Twenty Seven stood in the midst of us, as if he felt himself the principal object of merit in a highly meritorious museum. That we, the neophytes, might have an excess of light shining upon us all at once, orders were given to let out Twenty Eight.

I had been so much astonished already, that I only felt a kind of resigned wonder when Mr. Littimer walked forth, reading a good book!

'Twenty Eight,' said a gentleman in spectacles, who had not yet spoken, 'you complained last week, my good fellow, of the cocoa. How has it been since?'

'I thank you, sir,' said Mr. Littimer, 'it has been better made. If I might take the liberty of saying so, sir, I don't think the milk which is boiled with it is quite genuine; but I am aware, sir, that there is a great adulteration of milk, in London, and that the article in a pure state is difficult to be obtained.'

It appeared to me that the gentleman in spectacles backed his Twenty Eight against Mr. Creakle's Twenty Seven, for each of them took his own man in hand.

'What is your state of mind, Twenty Eight?' said the questioner in spectacles.

'I thank you, sir,' returned Mr. Littimer; 'I see my follies now, sir. I am a good deal troubled when I think of the sins of my former companions, sir; but I trust they may find forgiveness.'

'You are quite happy yourself?' said the questioner, nodding encouragement.

'I am much obliged to you, sir,' returned Mr. Littimer. 'Perfectly so.'

'Is there anything at all on your mind now?' said the questioner. 'If so, mention it, Twenty Eight.'

'Sir,' said Mr. Littimer, without looking up, 'if my eyes have not deceived me, there is a gentleman present who was acquainted with me in my former life. It may be profitable to that gentleman to know, sir, that I attribute my past follies, entirely to having lived a thoughtless life in the service of young men; and to having allowed myself to be led by them into weaknesses, which I had not the strength to resist. I hope that gentleman will take warning, sir, and will not be offended at my freedom. It is for his good. I am conscious of my own past follies. I hope he may repent of all the wickedness and sin to which he has been a party.'

I observed that several gentlemen were shading their eyes, each with one hand, as if they had just come into church.

'This does you credit, Twenty Eight,' returned the questioner. 'I should have expected it of you. Is there anything else?'

'Sir,' returned Mr. Littimer, slightly lifting up his eyebrows, but not his eyes, 'there was a young woman who fell into dissolute courses, that I endeavoured to save, sir, but could not rescue. I beg that gentleman, if he has it in his power, to inform that young woman from me that I forgive her her bad conduct towards myself, and that I call her to repentance—if he will be so good.'

'I have no doubt, Twenty Eight,' returned the questioner, 'that the gentleman you refer to feels very strongly—as we all must—what you have so properly said. We will not detain you.'

'I thank you, sir,' said Mr. Littimer. 'Gentlemen, I wish you a good day, and hoping you and your families will also see your wickedness, and amend!'

With this, Number Twenty Eight retired, after a glance between him and Uriah; as if they were not altogether unknown to each other, through some medium of communication; and a murmur went round the group, as his door shut upon him, that he was a most respectable man, and a beautiful case.

'Now, Twenty Seven,' said Mr. Creakle, entering on a clear stage with his man, 'is there anything that anyone can do for you? If so, mention it.'

'I would umbly ask, sir,' returned Uriah, with a jerk of his malevolent head, 'for leave to write again to mother.'

'It shall certainly be granted,' said Mr. Creakle.

'Thank you, sir! I am anxious about mother. I am afraid she ain't safe.'

Somebody incautiously asked, what from? But there was a scandalized whisper of 'Hush!'

'Immortally safe, sir,' returned Uriah, writhing in the direction of the voice. 'I should wish mother to be got into my state. I never should have been got into my present state if I hadn't come here. I wish mother had come here. It would be better for everybody, if they got took up, and was brought here.'

This sentiment gave unbounded satisfaction—greater satisfaction, I think, than anything that had passed yet.

'Before I come here,' said Uriah, stealing a look at us, as if he would have blighted the outer world to which we belonged, if he could, 'I was given to follies; but now I am sensible of my follies. There's a deal of sin outside. There's a deal of sin in mother. There's nothing but sin everywhere—except here.'

'You are quite changed?' said Mr. Creakle.

'Oh dear, yes, sir!' cried this hopeful penitent.

'You wouldn't relapse, if you were going out?' asked somebody else.

'Oh de-ar no, sir!'

'Well!' said Mr. Creakle, 'this is very gratifying. You have addressed Mr. Copperfield, Twenty Seven. Do you wish to say anything further to him?'

'You knew me, a long time before I came here and was changed, Mr. Copperfield,' said Uriah, looking at me; and a more villainous look I never saw, even on his visage. 'You knew me when, in spite of my follies, I was umble among them that was proud, and meek among them that was violent—you was violent to me yourself, Mr. Copperfield. Once, you struck me a blow in the face, you know.'

General commiseration. Several indignant glances directed at me.

'But I forgive you, Mr. Copperfield,' said Uriah, making his forgiving nature the subject of a most impious and awful parallel, which I shall not record. 'I forgive everybody. It would ill become me to bear malice. I freely forgive you, and I hope you'll curb your passions in future. I hope Mr. W. will repent, and Miss W., and all of that sinful lot. You've been visited with affliction, and I hope it may do you good; but you'd better have come here. Mr. W. had better have come here, and Miss W. too. The best wish I could give you, Mr. Copperfield, and give all of you gentlemen, is, that you could be took up and brought here. When I think of my past follies, and my present state, I am sure it would be best for you. I pity all who ain't brought here!'

He sneaked back into his cell, amidst a little chorus of approbation; and both Traddles and I experienced a great relief when he was locked in.

It was a characteristic feature in this repentance, that I was fain to ask what these two men had done, to be there at all. That appeared to be the last thing about which they had anything to say. I addressed myself to one of the two warders, who, I suspected from certain latent indications in their faces, knew pretty well what all this stir was worth.

'Do you know,' said I, as we walked along the passage, 'what felony was Number Twenty Seven's last "folly"?'

The answer was that it was a Bank case.

'A fraud on the Bank of England?' I asked. 'Yes, sir. Fraud, forgery, and conspiracy. He and some others. He set the others on. It was a deep plot for a large sum. Sentence, transportation for life. Twenty Seven was the knowingest bird of the lot, and had very nearly kept himself safe; but not quite. The Bank was just able to put salt upon his tail—and only just.'

'Do you know Twenty Eight's offence?'

'Twenty Eight,' returned my informant, speaking throughout in a low tone, and looking over his shoulder as we walked along the passage, to guard himself from being overheard, in such an unlawful reference to these Immaculates, by Creakle and the rest; 'Twenty Eight (also transportation) got a place, and robbed a young master of a matter of two hundred and fifty pounds in money and valuables, the night before they were going abroad. I particularly recollect his case, from his being took by a dwarf.'

'A what?'

'A little woman. I have forgot her name?'

'Not Mowcher?'

'That's it! He had eluded pursuit, and was going to America in a flaxen wig, and whiskers, and such a complete disguise as never you see in all your born days; when the little woman, being in Southampton, met him walking along the street—picked him out with her sharp eye in a moment—ran betwixt his legs to upset him—and held on to him like grim Death.'

'Excellent Miss Mowcher!' cried I.

'You'd have said so, if you had seen her, standing on a chair in the witness-box at the trial, as I did,' said my friend. 'He cut her face right open, and pounded her in the most brutal manner, when she took him; but she never loosed her hold till he was locked up. She held so tight to him, in fact, that the officers were obliged to take 'em both together. She gave her evidence in the gamest way, and was highly complimented by the Bench, and cheered right home to her lodgings. She said in Court that she'd have took him single-handed (on account of what she knew concerning him), if he had been Samson. And it's my belief she would!'

It was mine too, and I highly respected Miss Mowcher for it.

We had now seen all there was to see. It would have been in vain to represent to such a man as the Worshipful Mr. Creakle, that Twenty Seven and Twenty Eight were perfectly consistent and unchanged; that exactly what they were then, they had always been; that the hypocritical knaves were just the subjects to make that sort of profession in such a place; that they knew its market-value at least as well as we did, in the immediate service it would do them when they were expatriated; in a word, that it was a rotten, hollow, painfully suggestive piece of business altogether. We left them to their system and themselves, and went home wondering.

'Perhaps it's a good thing, Traddles,' said I, 'to have an unsound Hobby ridden hard; for it's the sooner ridden to death.'

'I hope so,' replied Traddles.

CHAPTER 62. A LIGHT SHINES ON MY WAY

The year came round to Christmas-time, and I had been at home above two months. I had seen Agnes frequently. However loud the general voice might be in giving me encouragement, and however fervent the emotions and endeavours to which it roused me, I heard her lightest word of praise as I heard nothing else.

At least once a week, and sometimes oftener, I rode over there, and passed the evening. I usually rode back at night; for the old unhappy sense was always hovering about me now—most sorrowfully when I left her—and I was glad to be up and out, rather than wandering over the past in weary wakefulness or miserable dreams. I wore away the longest part of many wild sad nights, in those rides; reviving, as I went, the thoughts that had occupied me in my long absence.

Or, if I were to say rather that I listened to the echoes of those thoughts, I should better express the truth. They spoke to me from afar off. I had put them at a distance, and accepted my inevitable place. When I read to Agnes what I wrote; when I saw her listening face; moved her to smiles or tears; and heard her cordial voice so earnest on the shadowy events of that imaginative world in which I lived; I thought what a fate mine might have been—but only thought so, as I had thought after I was married to Dora, what I could have wished my wife to be.

My duty to Agnes, who loved me with a love, which, if I disquieted, I wronged most selfishly and poorly, and could never restore; my matured assurance that I, who had worked out my own destiny, and won what I had impetuously set my heart on, had no right to murmur, and must bear; comprised what I felt and what I had learned. But I loved her: and now it even became some consolation to me, vaguely to conceive a distant day when I might blamelessly avow it; when all this should be over; when I could say 'Agnes, so it was when I came home; and now I am old, and I never have loved since!'

She did not once show me any change in herself. What she always had been to me, she still was; wholly unaltered.

Between my aunt and me there had been something, in this connexion, since the night of my return, which I cannot call a restraint, or an avoidance of the subject, so much as an implied understanding that we thought of it together, but did not shape our thoughts into words. When, according to our old custom, we sat before the fire at night, we often fell into this train; as naturally, and as consciously to each other, as if we had unreservedly said so. But we preserved an unbroken silence. I believed that she had read, or partly read, my thoughts that night; and that she fully comprehended why I gave mine no more distinct expression.

This Christmas-time being come, and Agnes having reposed no new confidence in me, a doubt that had several times arisen in my mind—whether she could have that perception of the true state of my breast, which restrained her with the apprehension of giving me pain—began to oppress me heavily. If that were so, my sacrifice was nothing; my plainest obligation to her unfulfilled; and every poor action I had shrunk from, I was hourly doing. I resolved to set this right beyond all doubt;—if such a barrier were between us, to break it down at once with a determined hand.

It was—what lasting reason have I to remember it!—a cold, harsh, winter day. There had been snow, some hours before; and it lay, not deep, but hard-frozen on the ground. Out at sea, beyond my window, the wind blew ruggedly from the north. I had been thinking of it, sweeping over those mountain wastes of snow in Switzerland, then inaccessible to any human foot; and had been speculating which was the lonelier, those solitary regions, or a deserted ocean.

'Riding today, Trot?' said my aunt, putting her head in at the door.

'Yes,' said I, 'I am going over to Canterbury. It's a good day for a ride.'

'I hope your horse may think so too,' said my aunt; 'but at present he is holding down his head and his ears, standing before the door there, as if he thought his stable preferable.'

My aunt, I may observe, allowed my horse on the forbidden ground, but had not at all relented towards the donkeys.

'He will be fresh enough, presently!' said I.

'The ride will do his master good, at all events,' observed my aunt, glancing at the papers on my table. 'Ah, child, you pass a good many hours here! I never thought, when I used to read books, what work it was to write them.'

'It's work enough to read them, sometimes,' I returned. 'As to the writing, it has its own charms, aunt.'

'Ah! I see!' said my aunt. 'Ambition, love of approbation, sympathy, and much more, I suppose? Well: go along with you!'

'Do you know anything more,' said I, standing composedly before her—she had patted me on the shoulder, and sat down in my chair—'of that attachment of Agnes?'

She looked up in my face a little while, before replying:

'I think I do, Trot.'

'Are you confirmed in your impression?' I inquired.

'I think I am, Trot.'

She looked so steadfastly at me: with a kind of doubt, or pity, or suspense in her affection: that I summoned the stronger determination to show her a perfectly cheerful face.

'And what is more, Trot—' said my aunt.

'Yes!'

'I think Agnes is going to be married.'

'God bless her!' said I, cheerfully.

'God bless her!' said my aunt, 'and her husband too!'

I echoed it, parted from my aunt, and went lightly downstairs, mounted, and rode away. There was greater reason than before to do what I had resolved to do.

How well I recollect the wintry ride! The frozen particles of ice, brushed from the blades of grass by the wind, and borne across my face; the hard clatter of the horse's hoofs, beating a tune upon the ground; the stiff-tilled soil; the snowdrift, lightly eddying in the chalk-pit as the breeze ruffled it; the smoking team with the waggon of old hay, stopping to breathe on the hill-top, and shaking their bells musically; the whitened slopes and sweeps of Down-land lying against the dark sky, as if they were drawn on a huge slate!

I found Agnes alone. The little girls had gone to their own homes now, and she was alone by the fire, reading. She put down her book on seeing me come in; and having welcomed me as usual, took her work-basket and sat in one of the old-fashioned windows.

I sat beside her on the window-seat, and we talked of what I was doing, and when it would be done, and of the progress I had made since my last visit. Agnes was very cheerful; and laughingly predicted that I should soon become too famous to be talked to, on such subjects.

'So I make the most of the present time, you see,' said Agnes, 'and talk to you while I may.'

As I looked at her beautiful face, observant of her work, she raised her mild clear eyes, and saw that I was looking at her.

'You are thoughtful today, Trotwood!'

'Agnes, shall I tell you what about? I came to tell you.'

She put aside her work, as she was used to do when we were seriously discussing anything; and gave me her whole attention.

'My dear Agnes, do you doubt my being true to you?'

'No!' she answered, with a look of astonishment.

'Do you doubt my being what I always have been to you?'

'No!' she answered, as before.

'Do you remember that I tried to tell you, when I came home, what a debt of gratitude I owed you, dearest Agnes, and how fervently I felt towards you?'

'I remember it,' she said, gently, 'very well.'

'You have a secret,' said I. 'Let me share it, Agnes.'

She cast down her eyes, and trembled.

'I could hardly fail to know, even if I had not heard—but from other lips than yours, Agnes, which seems strange—that there is someone upon whom you have bestowed the treasure of your love. Do not shut me out of what concerns your happiness so nearly! If you can trust me, as you say you can, and as I know you may, let me be your friend, your brother, in this matter, of all others!'

With an appealing, almost a reproachful, glance, she rose from the window; and hurrying across the room as if without knowing where, put her hands before her face, and burst into such tears as smote me to the heart.

And yet they awakened something in me, bringing promise to my heart. Without my knowing why, these tears allied themselves with the quietly sad smile which was so fixed in my remembrance, and shook me more with hope than fear or sorrow.

'Agnes! Sister! Dearest! What have I done?'

'Let me go away, Trotwood. I am not well. I am not myself. I will speak to you by and by—another time. I will write to you. Don't speak to me now. Don't! don't!'

I sought to recollect what she had said, when I had spoken to her on that former night, of her affection needing no return. It seemed a very world that I must search through in a moment. 'Agnes, I cannot bear to see you so, and think that I have been the cause. My dearest girl, dearer to me than anything in life, if you are unhappy, let me share your unhappiness. If you are in need of help or counsel, let me try to give it to you. If you have indeed a burden on your heart, let me try to lighten it. For whom do I live now, Agnes, if it is not for you!'

'Oh, spare me! I am not myself! Another time!' was all I could distinguish.

Was it a selfish error that was leading me away? Or, having once a clue to hope, was there something opening to me that I had not dared to think of?

'I must say more. I cannot let you leave me so! For Heaven's sake, Agnes, let us not mistake each other after all these years, and all that has come and gone with them! I must speak plainly. If you have any lingering thought that I could envy the happiness you will confer; that I could not resign you to a dearer protector, of your own choosing; that I could not, from my removed place, be a contented witness of your joy; dismiss it, for I don't deserve it! I have not suffered quite in vain. You have not taught me quite in vain. There is no alloy of self in what I feel for you.'

She was quiet now. In a little time, she turned her pale face towards me, and said in a low voice, broken here and there, but very clear:

'I owe it to your pure friendship for me, Trotwood—which, indeed, I do not doubt—to tell you, you are mistaken. I can do no more. If I have sometimes, in the course of years, wanted help and counsel, they have come to me. If I have sometimes been unhappy, the feeling has passed away. If I have ever had a burden on my heart, it has been lightened for me. If I have any secret, it is—no new one; and is—not what you suppose. I cannot reveal it, or divide it. It has long been mine, and must remain mine.'

'Agnes! Stay! A moment!'

She was going away, but I detained her. I clasped my arm about her waist. 'In the course of years!' 'It is not a new one!' New thoughts and hopes were whirling through my mind, and all the colours of my life were changing.

'Dearest Agnes! Whom I so respect and honour—whom I so devotedly love! When I came here today, I thought that nothing could have wrested this confession from me. I thought I could have kept it in my bosom all our lives, till we were old. But, Agnes, if I have indeed any new-born hope that I may ever call you something more than Sister, widely different from Sister!—'

Her tears fell fast; but they were not like those she had lately shed, and I saw my hope brighten in them.

'Agnes! Ever my guide, and best support! If you had been more mindful of yourself, and less of me, when we grew up here together, I think my heedless fancy never would have wandered from you. But you were so much better than I, so necessary to me in every boyish hope and disappointment, that to have you to confide in, and rely upon in everything, became a second nature, supplanting for the time the first and greater one of loving you as I do!'

Still weeping, but not sadly—joyfully! And clasped in my arms as she had never been, as I had thought she never was to be!

'When I loved Dora—fondly, Agnes, as you know—'

'Yes!' she cried, earnestly. 'I am glad to know it!'

'When I loved her—even then, my love would have been incomplete, without your sympathy. I had it, and it was perfected. And when I lost her, Agnes, what should I have been without you, still!'

Closer in my arms, nearer to my heart, her trembling hand upon my shoulder, her sweet eyes shining through her tears, on mine!

'I went away, dear Agnes, loving you. I stayed away, loving you. I returned home, loving you!'

And now, I tried to tell her of the struggle I had had, and the conclusion I had come to. I tried to lay my mind before her, truly, and entirely. I tried to show her how I had hoped I had come into the better knowledge of myself and of her; how I had resigned myself to what that better knowledge brought; and how I had come there, even that day, in my fidelity to this. If she did so love me (I said) that she could take me for her husband, she could do so, on no deserving of mine, except upon the truth of my love for her, and the trouble in which it had ripened to be what it was; and hence it was that I revealed it. And O, Agnes, even out of thy true eyes, in that same time, the spirit of my child-wife looked upon me, saying it was well; and winning me, through thee, to tenderest recollections of the Blossom that had withered in its bloom!

'I am so blest, Trotwood—my heart is so overcharged—but there is one thing I must say.'

'Dearest, what?'

She laid her gentle hands upon my shoulders, and looked calmly in my face.

'Do you know, yet, what it is?'

'I am afraid to speculate on what it is. Tell me, my dear.'

'I have loved you all my life!'

O, we were happy, we were happy! Our tears were not for the trials (hers so much the greater) through which we had come to be thus, but for the rapture of being thus, never to be divided more!

We walked, that winter evening, in the fields together; and the blessed calm within us seemed to be partaken by the frosty air. The early stars began to shine while we were lingering on, and looking up to them, we thanked our GOD for having guided us to this tranquillity.

We stood together in the same old-fashioned window at night, when the moon was shining; Agnes with her quiet eyes raised up to it; I following her glance. Long miles of road then opened out before my mind; and, toiling on, I saw a ragged way-worn boy, forsaken and neglected, who should come to call even the heart now beating against mine, his own.

It was nearly dinner-time next day when we appeared before my aunt. She was up in my study, Peggotty said: which it was her pride to keep in readiness and order for me. We found her, in her spectacles, sitting by the fire.

'Goodness me!' said my aunt, peering through the dusk, 'who's this you're bringing home?'

'Agnes,' said I.

As we had arranged to say nothing at first, my aunt was not a little discomfited. She darted a hopeful glance at me, when I said 'Agnes'; but seeing that I looked as usual, she took off her spectacles in despair, and rubbed her nose with them.

She greeted Agnes heartily, nevertheless; and we were soon in the lighted parlour downstairs, at dinner. My aunt put on her spectacles twice or thrice, to take another look at me, but as often took them off again, disappointed, and rubbed her nose with them. Much to the discomfiture of Mr. Dick, who knew this to be a bad symptom.

'By the by, aunt,' said I, after dinner; 'I have been speaking to Agnes about what you told me.'

'Then, Trot,' said my aunt, turning scarlet, 'you did wrong, and broke your promise.'

'You are not angry, aunt, I trust? I am sure you won't be, when you learn that Agnes is not unhappy in any attachment.'

'Stuff and nonsense!' said my aunt.

As my aunt appeared to be annoyed, I thought the best way was to cut her annoyance short. I took Agnes in my arm to the back of her chair, and we both leaned over her. My aunt, with one clap of her hands, and one look through her spectacles, immediately went into hysterics, for the first and only time in all my knowledge of her.

The hysterics called up Peggotty. The moment my aunt was restored, she flew at Peggotty, and calling her a silly old creature, hugged her with all her might. After that, she hugged Mr. Dick (who was highly honoured, but a good deal surprised); and after that, told them why. Then, we were all happy together.

I could not discover whether my aunt, in her last short conversation with me, had fallen on a pious fraud, or had really mistaken the state of my mind. It was quite enough, she said, that she had told me Agnes was going to be married; and that I now knew better than anyone how true it was.

We were married within a fortnight. Traddles and Sophy, and Doctor and Mrs. Strong, were the only guests at our quiet wedding. We left them full of joy; and drove away together. Clasped in my embrace, I held the source of every worthy aspiration I had ever had; the centre of myself, the circle of my life, my own, my wife; my love of whom was founded on a rock!

'Dearest husband!' said Agnes. 'Now that I may call you by that name, I have one thing more to tell you.'

'Let me hear it, love.'

'It grows out of the night when Dora died. She sent you for me.'

'She did.'

'She told me that she left me something. Can you think what it was?'

I believed I could. I drew the wife who had so long loved me, closer to my side.

'She told me that she made a last request to me, and left me a last charge.'

'And it was—'

'That only I would occupy this vacant place.'

And Agnes laid her head upon my breast, and wept; and I wept with her, though we were so happy.

CHAPTER 63. A VISITOR

What I have purposed to record is nearly finished; but there is yet an incident conspicuous in my memory, on which it often rests with delight, and without which one thread in the web I have spun would have a ravelled end.

I had advanced in fame and fortune, my domestic joy was perfect, I had been married ten happy years. Agnes and I were sitting by the fire, in our house in London, one night in spring, and three of our children were playing in the room, when I was told that a stranger wished to see me.

He had been asked if he came on business, and had answered No; he had come for the pleasure of seeing me, and had come a long way. He was an old man, my servant said, and looked like a farmer.

As this sounded mysterious to the children, and moreover was like the beginning of a favourite story Agnes used to tell them, introductory to the arrival of a wicked old Fairy in a cloak who hated everybody, it produced some commotion. One of our boys laid his head in his mother's lap to be out of harm's way, and little Agnes (our eldest child) left her doll in a chair to represent her, and thrust out her little heap of golden curls from between the window-curtains, to see what happened next.

'Let him come in here!' said I.

There soon appeared, pausing in the dark doorway as he entered, a hale, grey-haired old man. Little Agnes, attracted by his looks, had run to bring him in, and I had not yet clearly seen his face, when my wife, starting up, cried out to me, in a pleased and agitated voice, that it was Mr. Peggotty!

It WAS Mr. Peggotty. An old man now, but in a ruddy, hearty, strong old age. When our first emotion was over, and he sat before the fire with the children on his knees, and the blaze shining on his face, he looked, to me, as vigorous and robust, withal as handsome, an old man, as ever I had seen.

'Mas'r Davy,' said he. And the old name in the old tone fell so naturally on my ear! 'Mas'r Davy, 'tis a joyful hour as I see you, once more, 'long with your own trew wife!'

'A joyful hour indeed, old friend!' cried I.

'And these heer pretty ones,' said Mr. Peggotty. 'To look at these heer flowers! Why, Mas'r Davy, you was but the heighth of the littlest of these, when I first see you! When Em'ly warn't no bigger, and our poor lad were BUT a lad!'

'Time has changed me more than it has changed you since then,' said I. 'But let these dear rogues go to bed; and as no house in England but this must hold you, tell me where to send for your luggage (is the old black bag among it, that went so far, I wonder!), and then, over a glass of Yarmouth grog, we will have the tidings of ten years!'

'Are you alone?' asked Agnes.

'Yes, ma'am,' he said, kissing her hand, 'quite alone.'

We sat him between us, not knowing how to give him welcome enough; and as I began to listen to his old familiar voice, I could have fancied he was still pursuing his long journey in search of his darling niece.

'It's a mort of water,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'fur to come across, and on'y stay a matter of fower weeks. But water ('specially when 'tis salt) comes nat'ral to me; and friends is dear, and I am heer. —Which is verse,' said Mr. Peggotty, surprised to find it out, 'though I hadn't such intentions.'

'Are you going back those many thousand miles, so soon?' asked Agnes.

'Yes, ma'am,' he returned. 'I giv the promise to Em'ly, afore I come away. You see, I doen't grow younger as the years comes round, and if I hadn't sailed as 'twas, most like I shouldn't never have done 't. And it's allus been on my mind, as I must come and see Mas'r Davy and your own sweet blooming self, in your wedded happiness, afore I got to be too old.'

He looked at us, as if he could never feast his eyes on us sufficiently. Agnes laughingly put back some scattered locks of his grey hair, that he might see us better.

'And now tell us,' said I, 'everything relating to your fortunes.'

'Our fortuns, Mas'r Davy,' he rejoined, 'is soon told. We haven't fared nohows, but fared to thrive. We've allus thrived. We've worked as we ought to 't, and maybe we lived a leetle hard at first or so, but we have allus thrived. What with sheep-farming, and what with stock-farming, and what with one thing and what with t'other, we are as well to do, as well could be. Theer's been kiender a blessing fell upon us,' said Mr. Peggotty, reverentially inclining his head, 'and we've done nowt but prosper. That is, in the long run. If not yesterday, why then today. If not today, why then tomorrow.'

'And Emily?' said Agnes and I, both together.

'Em'ly,' said he, 'arter you left her, ma'am—and I never heerd her saying of her prayers at night, t'other side the canvas screen, when we was settled in the Bush, but what I heerd your name—and arter she and me lost sight of Mas'r Davy, that theer shining sundown—was that low, at first, that, if she had know'd then what Mas'r Davy kep from us so kind and thowtful, 'tis my opinion she'd have drooped away. But theer was some poor folks aboard as had illness among 'em, and she took care of them; and theer was the children in our company, and she took care of them; and so she got to be busy, and to be doing good, and that helped her.'

'When did she first hear of it?' I asked.

'I kep it from her arter I heerd on 't,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'going on nigh a year. We was living then in a solitary place, but among the beautifullest trees, and with the roses a-covering our Beein to the roof. Theer come along one day, when I was out a-working on the land, a traveller from our own Norfolk or Suffolk in England (I doen't rightly mind which), and of course we took him in, and giv him to eat and drink, and made him welcome. We all do that, all the colony over. He'd got an old newspaper with him, and some other account in print of the storm. That's how she know'd it. When I came home at night, I found she know'd it.'

He dropped his voice as he said these words, and the gravity I so well remembered overspread his face.

'Did it change her much?' we asked.

'Aye, for a good long time,' he said, shaking his head; 'if not to this present hour. But I think the solitoode done her good. And she had a deal to mind in the way of poultry and the like, and minded of it, and come through. I wonder,' he said thoughtfully, 'if you could see my Em'ly now, Mas'r Davy, whether you'd know her!'

'Is she so altered?' I inquired.

'I doen't know. I see her ev'ry day, and doen't know; But, odd-times, I have thowt so. A slight figure,' said Mr. Peggotty, looking at the fire, 'kiender worn; soft, sorrowful, blue eyes; a delicate face; a pritty head, leaning a little down; a quiet voice and way—timid a'most. That's Em'ly!'

We silently observed him as he sat, still looking at the fire.

'Some thinks,' he said, 'as her affection was ill-bestowed; some, as her marriage was broken off by death. No one knows how 'tis. She might have married well, a mort of times, "but, uncle," she says to me, "that's gone for ever." Cheerful along with me; retired when others is by; fond of going any distance fur to teach a child, or fur to tend a sick person, or fur to do some kindness tow'rds a young girl's wedding (and she's done a many, but has never seen one); fondly loving of her uncle; patient; liked by young and old; sowt out by all that has any trouble. That's Em'ly!'

He drew his hand across his face, and with a half-suppressed sigh looked up from the fire.

'Is Martha with you yet?' I asked.

'Martha,' he replied, 'got married, Mas'r Davy, in the second year. A young man, a farm-labourer, as come by us on his way to market with his mas'r's drays—a journey of over five hundred mile, theer and back—made offers fur to take her fur his wife (wives is very scarce theer), and then to set up fur their two selves in the Bush. She spoke to me fur to tell him her trew story. I did. They was married, and they live fower hundred mile away from any voices but their own and the singing birds.'

'Mrs. Gummidge?' I suggested.

It was a pleasant key to touch, for Mr. Peggotty suddenly burst into a roar of laughter, and rubbed his hands up and down his legs, as he had been accustomed to do when he enjoyed himself in the long-shipwrecked boat.

'Would you believe it!' he said. 'Why, someun even made offer fur to marry her! If a ship's cook that was turning settler, Mas'r Davy, didn't make offers fur to marry Missis Gummidge, I'm Gormed—and I can't say no fairer than that!'

I never saw Agnes laugh so. This sudden ecstasy on the part of Mr. Peggotty was so delightful to her, that she could not leave off laughing; and the more she laughed the more she made me laugh, and the greater Mr. Peggotty's ecstasy became, and the more he rubbed his legs.

'And what did Mrs. Gummidge say?' I asked, when I was grave enough.

'If you'll believe me,' returned Mr. Peggotty, 'Missis Gummidge, 'stead of saying "thank you, I'm much obleeged to you, I ain't a-going fur to change my condition at my time of life," up'd with a bucket as was standing by, and laid it over that theer ship's cook's head 'till he sung out fur help, and I went in and reskied of him.'

Mr. Peggotty burst into a great roar of laughter, and Agnes and I both kept him company.

'But I must say this, for the good creetur,' he resumed, wiping his face, when we were quite exhausted; 'she has been all she said she'd be to us, and more. She's the willingest, the trewest, the honestest-helping woman, Mas'r

Davy, as ever draw'd the breath of life. I have never know'd her to be lone and lorn, for a single minute, not even when the colony was all afore us, and we was new to it. And thinking of the old 'un is a thing she never done, I do assure you, since she left England!'

'Now, last, not least, Mr. Micawber,' said I. 'He has paid off every obligation he incurred here—even to Traddles's bill, you remember my dear Agnes—and therefore we may take it for granted that he is doing well. But what is the latest news of him?'

Mr. Peggotty, with a smile, put his hand in his breast-pocket, and produced a flat-folded, paper parcel, from which he took out, with much care, a little odd-looking newspaper.

'You are to understan', Mas'r Davy,' said he, 'as we have left the Bush now, being so well to do; and have gone right away round to Port Middlebay Harbour, wheer theer's what we call a town.'

'Mr. Micawber was in the Bush near you?' said I.

'Bless you, yes,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'and turned to with a will. I never wish to meet a better gen'l'man for turning to with a will. I've seen that theer bald head of his a perspiring in the sun, Mas'r Davy, till I a'most thowt it would have melted away. And now he's a Magistrate.'

'A Magistrate, eh?' said I.

Mr. Peggotty pointed to a certain paragraph in the newspaper, where I read aloud as follows, from the Port Middlebay Times:

'The public dinner to our distinguished fellow-colonist and townsman, WILKINS MICAWBER, ESQUIRE, Port Middlebay District Magistrate, came off yesterday in the large room of the Hotel, which was crowded to suffocation. It is estimated that not fewer than forty-seven persons must have been accommodated with dinner at one time, exclusive of the company in the passage and on the stairs. The beauty, fashion, and exclusiveness of Port Middlebay, flocked to do honour to one so deservedly esteemed, so highly talented, and so widely popular. Doctor Mell (of Colonial Salem-House Grammar School, Port Middlebay) presided, and on his right sat the distinguished guest. After the removal of the cloth, and the singing of Non Nobis (beautifully executed, and in which we were at no loss to distinguish the bell-like notes of that gifted amateur, WILKINS MICAWBER, ESQUIRE, JUNIOR), the usual loyal and patriotic toasts were severally given and rapturously received. Doctor Mell, in a speech replete with feeling, then proposed "Our distinguished Guest, the ornament of our town. May he never leave us but to better himself, and may his success among us be such as to render his bettering himself impossible!" The cheering with which the toast was received defies description. Again and again it rose and fell, like the waves of ocean. At length all was hushed, and WILKINS MICAWBER, ESQUIRE, presented himself to return thanks. Far be it from us, in the present comparatively imperfect state of the resources of our establishment, to endeavour to follow our distinguished townsman through the smoothly-flowing periods of his polished and highly-ornate address! Suffice it to observe, that it was a masterpiece of eloquence; and that those passages in which he more particularly traced his own successful career to its source, and warned the younger portion of his auditory from the shoals of ever incurring pecuniary liabilities which they were unable to liquidate, brought a tear into the manliest eye present. The remaining toasts were DOCTOR MELL; Mrs. MICAWBER (who gracefully bowed her acknowledgements from the side-door, where a galaxy of beauty was elevated on chairs, at once to witness and adorn the gratifying scene), Mrs. RIDGER BEGS (late Miss Micawber); Mrs. MELL; WILKINS MICAWBER, ESQUIRE, JUNIOR (who convulsed the assembly by humorously remarking that he found himself unable to return thanks in a speech, but would do so, with their permission, in a song); Mrs. MICAWBER'S FAMILY (well known, it is needless to remark, in the mother-country), &c. &c. &c. At the conclusion of the proceedings the tables were cleared as if by art-magic for dancing. Among the votaries of TERPSICHORE, who disported themselves until Sol gave warning for departure, Wilkins Micawber, Esquire, Junior, and the lovely and accomplished Miss Helena, fourth daughter of Doctor Mell, were particularly remarkable.'

I was looking back to the name of Doctor Mell, pleased to have discovered, in these happier circumstances, Mr. Mell, formerly poor pinched usher to my Middlesex magistrate, when Mr. Peggotty pointing to another part of the paper, my eyes rested on my own name, and I read thus:

'TO DAVID COPPERFIELD, ESQUIRE,
'THE EMINENT AUTHOR.

'My Dear Sir,

'Years have elapsed, since I had an opportunity of ocularly perusing the lineaments, now familiar to the imaginations of a considerable portion of the civilized world.

'But, my dear Sir, though estranged (by the force of circumstances over which I have had no control) from the personal society of the friend and companion of my youth, I have not been unmindful of his soaring flight. Nor have I been debarred,

Though seas between us braid ha' roared,

(BURNS) from participating in the intellectual feasts he has spread before us.

'I cannot, therefore, allow of the departure from this place of an individual whom we mutually respect and esteem, without, my dear Sir, taking this public opportunity of thanking you, on my own behalf, and, I may undertake to add, on that of the whole of the Inhabitants of Port Middlebay, for the gratification of which you are the ministering agent.

'Go on, my dear Sir! You are not unknown here, you are not unappreciated. Though "remote", we are neither "unfriended", "melancholy", nor (I may add) "slow". Go on, my dear Sir, in your Eagle course! The inhabitants of Port Middlebay may at least aspire to watch it, with delight, with entertainment, with instruction!

'Among the eyes elevated towards you from this portion of the globe, will ever be found, while it has light and life,

'The
'Eye
'Appertaining to

'WILKINS MICAWBER,
'Magistrate.'

I found, on glancing at the remaining contents of the newspaper, that Mr. Micawber was a diligent and esteemed correspondent of that journal. There was another letter from him in the same paper, touching a bridge; there was an advertisement of a collection of similar letters by him, to be shortly republished, in a neat volume, 'with considerable additions'; and, unless I am very much mistaken, the Leading Article was his also.

We talked much of Mr. Micawber, on many other evenings while Mr. Peggotty remained with us. He lived with us during the whole term of his stay,—which, I think, was something less than a month,—and his sister and my aunt came to London to see him. Agnes and I parted from him aboard-ship, when he sailed; and we shall never part from him more, on earth.

But before he left, he went with me to Yarmouth, to see a little tablet I had put up in the churchyard to the memory of Ham. While I was copying the plain inscription for him at his request, I saw him stoop, and gather a tuft of grass from the grave and a little earth.

'For Em'ly,' he said, as he put it in his breast. 'I promised, Mas'r Davy.'

CHAPTER 64. A LAST RETROSPECT

And now my written story ends. I look back, once more—for the last time—before I close these leaves.

I see myself, with Agnes at my side, journeying along the road of life. I see our children and our friends around us; and I hear the roar of many voices, not indifferent to me as I travel on.

What faces are the most distinct to me in the fleeting crowd? Lo, these; all turning to me as I ask my thoughts the question!

Here is my aunt, in stronger spectacles, an old woman of four-score years and more, but upright yet, and a steady walker of six miles at a stretch in winter weather.

Always with her, here comes Peggotty, my good old nurse, likewise in spectacles, accustomed to do needle-work at night very close to the lamp, but never sitting down to it without a bit of wax candle, a yard-measure in a little house, and a work-box with a picture of St. Paul's upon the lid.

The cheeks and arms of Peggotty, so hard and red in my childish days, when I wondered why the birds didn't peck her in preference to apples, are shrivelled now; and her eyes, that used to darken their whole neighbourhood in her face, are fainter (though they glitter still); but her rough forefinger, which I once associated with a pocket nutmeg-grater, is just the same, and when I see my least child catching at it as it totters from my aunt to her, I think of our little parlour at home, when I could scarcely walk. My aunt's old disappointment is set right, now. She is godmother to a real living Betsey Trotwood; and Dora (the next in order) says she spoils her.

There is something bulky in Peggotty's pocket. It is nothing smaller than the Crocodile Book, which is in rather a dilapidated condition by this time, with divers of the leaves torn and stitched across, but which Peggotty exhibits to the children as a precious relic. I find it very curious to see my own infant face, looking up at me from the Crocodile stories; and to be reminded by it of my old acquaintance Brooks of Sheffield.

Among my boys, this summer holiday time, I see an old man making giant kites, and gazing at them in the air, with a delight for which there are no words. He greets me rapturously, and whispers, with many nods and winks, 'Trotwood, you will be glad to hear that I shall finish the Memorial when I have nothing else to do, and that your aunt's the most extraordinary woman in the world, sir!'

Who is this bent lady, supporting herself by a stick, and showing me a countenance in which there are some traces of old pride and beauty, feebly contending with a querulous, imbecile, fretful wandering of the mind? She is in a garden; and near her stands a sharp, dark, withered woman, with a white scar on her lip. Let me hear what they say.

'Rosa, I have forgotten this gentleman's name.'

Rosa bends over her, and calls to her, 'Mr. Copperfield.'

'I am glad to see you, sir. I am sorry to observe you are in mourning. I hope Time will be good to you.'

Her impatient attendant scolds her, tells her I am not in mourning, bids her look again, tries to rouse her.

'You have seen my son, sir,' says the elder lady. 'Are you reconciled?'

Looking fixedly at me, she puts her hand to her forehead, and moans. Suddenly, she cries, in a terrible voice, 'Rosa, come to me. He is dead!' Rosa kneeling at her feet, by turns caresses her, and quarrels with her; now fiercely telling her, 'I loved him better than you ever did!'—now soothing her to sleep on her breast, like a sick child. Thus I leave them; thus I always find them; thus they wear their time away, from year to year.

What ship comes sailing home from India, and what English lady is this, married to a growling old Scotch Croesus with great flaps of ears? Can this be Julia Mills?

Indeed it is Julia Mills, peevish and fine, with a black man to carry cards and letters to her on a golden salver, and a copper-coloured woman in linen, with a bright handkerchief round her head, to serve her Tiffin in her dressing-room. But Julia keeps no diary in these days; never sings Affection's Dirge; eternally quarrels with the old Scotch Croesus, who is a sort of yellow bear with a tanned hide. Julia is steeped in money to the throat, and talks and thinks of nothing else. I liked her better in the Desert of Sahara.

Or perhaps this IS the Desert of Sahara! For, though Julia has a stately house, and mighty company, and sumptuous dinners every day, I see no green growth near her; nothing that can ever come to fruit or flower. What Julia calls 'society', I see; among it Mr. Jack Maldon, from his Patent Place, sneering at the hand that gave it him, and speaking to me of the Doctor as 'so charmingly antique'. But when society is the name for such hollow gentlemen and ladies, Julia, and when its breeding is professed indifference to everything that can advance or can retard mankind, I think we must have lost ourselves in that same Desert of Sahara, and had better find the way out.

And lo, the Doctor, always our good friend, labouring at his Dictionary (somewhere about the letter D), and happy in his home and wife. Also the Old Soldier, on a considerably reduced footing, and by no means so influential as in days of yore!

Working at his chambers in the Temple, with a busy aspect, and his hair (where he is not bald) made more rebellious than ever by the constant friction of his lawyer's-wig, I come, in a later time, upon my dear old Traddles. His table is covered with thick piles of papers; and I say, as I look around me:

'If Sophy were your clerk, now, Traddles, she would have enough to do!'

'You may say that, my dear Copperfield! But those were capital days, too, in Holborn Court! Were they not?'

'When she told you you would be a judge? But it was not the town talk then!'

'At all events,' says Traddles, 'if I ever am one—' 'Why, you know you will be.'

'Well, my dear Copperfield, WHEN I am one, I shall tell the story, as I said I would.'

We walk away, arm in arm. I am going to have a family dinner with Traddles. It is Sophy's birthday; and, on our road, Traddles discourses to me of the good fortune he has enjoyed.

'I really have been able, my dear Copperfield, to do all that I had most at heart. There's the Reverend Horace promoted to that living at four hundred and fifty pounds a year; there are our two boys receiving the very best education, and distinguishing themselves as steady scholars and good fellows; there are three of the girls married very comfortably; there are three more living with us; there are three more keeping house for the Reverend Horace since Mrs. Crewler's decease; and all of them happy.'

'Except—' I suggest.

'Except the Beauty,' says Traddles. 'Yes. It was very unfortunate that she should marry such a vagabond. But there was a certain dash and glare about him that caught her. However, now we have got her safe at our house, and got rid of him, we must cheer her up again.'

Traddles's house is one of the very houses—or it easily may have been—which he and Sophy used to parcel out, in their evening walks. It is a large house; but Traddles keeps his papers in his dressing-room and his boots with his papers; and he and Sophy squeeze themselves into upper rooms, reserving the best bedrooms for the Beauty and the girls. There is no room to spare in the house; for more of 'the girls' are here, and always are here, by some accident or other, than I know how to count. Here, when we go in, is a crowd of them, running down to the door, and handing Traddles about to be kissed, until he is out of breath. Here, established in perpetuity, is the poor Beauty, a widow with a little girl; here, at dinner on Sophy's birthday, are the three married girls with their three husbands, and one of the husband's brothers, and another husband's cousin, and another husband's sister, who appears to me to be engaged to the cousin. Traddles, exactly the same simple, unaffected fellow as he ever was, sits at the foot of the large table like a Patriarch; and Sophy beams upon him, from the head, across a cheerful space that is certainly not glittering with Britannia metal.

And now, as I close my task, subduing my desire to linger yet, these faces fade away. But one face, shining on me like a Heavenly light by which I see all other objects, is above them and beyond them all. And that remains.

I turn my head, and see it, in its beautiful serenity, beside me.

My lamp burns low, and I have written far into the night; but the dear presence, without which I were nothing, bears me company.

O Agnes, O my soul, so may thy face be by me when I close my life indeed; so may I, when realities are melting from me, like the shadows which I now dismiss, still find thee near me, pointing upward!

THE END OF
David Copperfield

DOCTOR MARIGOLD

I am a Cheap Jack, and my own father's name was Willum Marigold. It was in his lifetime supposed by some that his name was William, but my own father always consistently said, No, it was Willum. On which point I content myself with looking at the argument this way: If a man is not allowed to know his own name in a free country, how much is he allowed to know in a land of slavery? As to looking at the argument through the medium of the Register, Willum Marigold come into the world before Registers come up much,—and went out of it too. They wouldn't have been greatly in his line neither, if they had chanced to come up before him.

I was born on the Queen's highway, but it was the King's at that time. A doctor was fetched to my own mother by my own father, when it took place on a common; and in consequence of his being a very kind gentleman, and accepting no fee but a tea-tray, I was named Doctor, out of gratitude and compliment to him. There you have me. Doctor Marigold.

I am at present a middle-aged man of a broadish build, in cords, leggings, and a sleeved waistcoat the strings of which is always gone behind. Repair them how you will, they go like fiddle-strings. You have been to the theatre, and you have seen one of the wiolin-players screw up his wiolin, after listening to it as if it had been whispering the secret to him that it feared it was out of order, and then you have heard it snap. That's as exactly similar to my waistcoat as a waistcoat and a wiolin can be like one another.

I am partial to a white hat, and I like a shawl round my neck wore loose and easy. Sitting down is my favourite posture. If I have a taste in point of personal jewelry, it is mother-of-pearl buttons. There you have me again, as large as life.

The doctor having accepted a tea-tray, you'll guess that my father was a Cheap Jack before me. You are right. He was. It was a pretty tray. It represented a large lady going along a serpentining up-hill gravel-walk, to attend a little church. Two swans had likewise come astray with the same intentions. When I call her a large lady, I don't mean in point of breadth, for there she fell below my views, but she more than made it up in heighth; her heighth and slimness was—in short THE heighth of both.

I often saw that tray, after I was the innocently smiling cause (or more likely screeching one) of the doctor’s standing it up on a table against the wall in his consulting-room. Whenever my own father and mother were in that part of the country, I used to put my head (I have heard my own mother say it was flaxen curls at that time, though you wouldn’t know an old hearth-broom from it now till you come to the handle, and found it wasn’t me) in at the doctor’s door, and the doctor was always glad to see me, and said, “Aha, my brother practitioner! Come in, little M.D. How are your inclinations as to sixpence?”

You can’t go on for ever, you’ll find, nor yet could my father nor yet my mother. If you don’t go off as a whole when you are about due, you’re liable to go off in part, and two to one your head’s the part. Gradually my father went off his, and my mother went off hers. It was in a harmless way, but it put out the family where I boarded them. The old couple, though retired, got to be wholly and solely devoted to the Cheap Jack business, and were always selling the family off. Whenever the cloth was laid for dinner, my father began rattling the plates and dishes, as we do in our line when we put up crockery for a bid, only he had lost the trick of it, and mostly let ’em drop and broke ’em. As the old lady had been used to sit in the cart, and hand the articles out one by one to the old gentleman on the footboard to sell, just in the same way she handed him every item of the family’s property, and they disposed of it in their own imaginations from morning to night. At last the old gentleman, lying bedridden in the same room with the old lady, cries out in the old patter, fluent, after having been silent for two days and nights: “Now here, my jolly companions every one,—which the Nightingale club in a village was held, At the sign of the Cabbage and Shears, Where the singers no doubt would have greatly excelled, But for want of taste, voices and ears,—now, here, my jolly companions, every one, is a working model of a used-up old Cheap Jack, without a tooth in his head, and with a pain in every bone: so like life that it would be just as good if it wasn’t better, just as bad if it wasn’t worse, and just as new if it wasn’t worn out. Bid for the working model of the old Cheap Jack, who has drunk more gunpowder-tea with the ladies in his time than would blow the lid off a washerwoman’s copper, and carry it as many thousands of miles higher than the moon as naught nix naught, divided by the national debt, carry nothing to the poor-rates, three under, and two over. Now, my hearts of oak and men of straw, what do you say for the lot? Two shillings, a shilling, tenpence, eightpence, sixpence, fourpence. Twopence? Who said twopence? The gentleman in the scarecrow's hat? I am ashamed of the gentleman in the scarecrow's hat. I really am ashamed of him for his want of public spirit. Now I'll tell you what I'll do with you. Come! I'll throw you in a working model of a old woman that was married to the old Cheap Jack so long ago that upon my word and honour it took place in Noah's Ark, before the Unicorn could get in to forbid the banns by blowing a tune upon his horn. There now! Come! What do you say for both? I'll tell you what I'll do with you. I don't bear you malice for being so backward. Here! If you make me a bid that'll only reflect a little credit on your town, I'll throw you in a warming-pan for nothing, and lend you a toasting-fork for life. Now come; what do you say after that splendid offer? Say two pound, say thirty shillings, say a pound, say ten shillings, say five, say two and six. You don't say even two and six? You say two and three? No. You shan't have the lot for two and three. I'd sooner give it to you, if you was good-looking enough. Here! Missis! Chuck the old man and woman into the cart, put the horse to, and drive 'em away and bury 'em!" Such were the last words of Willum Marigold, my own father, and they were carried out, by him and by his wife, my own mother, on one and the same day, as I ought to know, having followed as mourner.

My father had been a lovely one in his time at the Cheap Jack work, as his dying observations went to prove. But I top him. I don't say it because it's myself, but because it has been universally acknowledged by all that has had the means of comparison. I have worked at it. I have measured myself against other public speakers,—Members of Parliament, Platforms, Pulpits, Counsel learned in the law,—and where I have found 'em good, I have took a bit of imagination from 'em, and where I have found 'em bad, I have let 'em alone. Now I'll tell you what. I mean to go down into my grave declaring that of all the callings ill used in Great Britain, the Cheap Jack calling is the worst used. Why ain't we a profession? Why ain't we endowed with privileges? Why are we forced to take out a hawker's license, when no such thing is expected of the political hawkers? Where's the difference betwixt us? Except that we are Cheap Jacks and they are Dear Jacks, *I* don't see any difference but what's in our favour.

For look here! Say it's election time. I am on the footboard of my cart in the market-place, on a Saturday night. I put up a general miscellaneous lot. I say: "Now here, my free and independent woters, I'm a going to give you such a chance as you never had in all your born days, nor yet the days preceding. Now I'll show you what I am a going to do with you. Here's a pair of razors that'll shave you closer than the Board of Guardians; here's a flat-iron worth its weight in gold; here's a frying-pan artificially flavoured with essence of beefsteaks to that degree that you've only got for the rest of your lives to fry bread and dripping in it and there you are replete with animal food; here's a genuine chronometer watch in such a solid silver case that you may knock at the door with it when you come home late from a social meeting, and rouse your wife and family, and save up your knocker for the postman; and here's half-a-dozen dinner plates that you may play the cymbals with to charm baby when it's fractious. Stop! I'll throw in another article, and I'll give you that, and it's a rolling-pin; and if the baby can only get it well into its mouth when its teeth is coming and rub the gums once with it, they'll come through double, in a fit of laughter equal to being tickled. Stop again! I'll throw you in another article, because I don't like the looks of you, for you haven't the appearance of buyers unless I lose by you, and because I'd rather lose than not take money to-night, and that's a looking-glass in which you may see how ugly you look when you don't bid. What do you say now? Come! Do you say a pound? Not you, for you haven't got it. Do you say ten shillings? Not you, for you owe more to the tallyman. Well then, I'll tell you what I'll do with you. I'll heap 'em all on the footboard of the cart,—there they are! razors, flat watch, dinner plates, rolling-pin, and away for four shillings, and I'll give you sixpence for your trouble!" This is me, the Cheap Jack. But on the Monday morning, in the same market-place, comes the Dear Jack on the hustings—*his* cart—and, what does *he* say? "Now my free and independent woters, I am a going to give you such a chance" (he begins just like me) "as you never had in all your born days, and that's the chance of sending Myself to Parliament. Now I'll tell you what I am a going to do for you. Here's the interests of this magnificent town promoted above all the rest of the civilised and uncivilised earth. Here's your railways carried, and your neighbours' railways jockeyed. Here's all your sons in the Post-office. Here's Britannia smiling on you. Here's the eyes of Europe on you. Here's uniwersal prosperity for you, repletion of animal food, golden cornfields, gladsome homesteads, and rounds of applause from your own hearts, all in one lot, and that's myself. Will you take me as I stand? You won't? Well, then, I'll tell you what I'll do with you. Come now! I'll throw you in anything you ask for. There! Church-rates, abolition of more malt tax, no malt tax, universal education to the highest mark, or uniwersal ignorance to the lowest, total abolition of flogging in the army or a dozen for every private once a month all round, Wrongs of Men or Rights of Women—only say which it shall be, take ’em or leave ’em, and I’m of your opinion altogether, and the lot’s your own on your own terms. There! You won’t take it yet! Well, then, I’ll tell you what I’ll do with you. Come! You *are* such free and independent woters, and I am so proud of you,—you *are* such a noble and enlightened constituency, and I *am* so ambitious of the honour and dignity of being your member, which is by far the highest level to which the wings of the human mind can soar,—that I’ll tell you what I’ll do with you. I’ll throw you in all the public-houses in your magnificent town for nothing. Will that content you? It won’t? You won’t take the lot yet? Well, then, before I put the horse in and drive away, and make the offer to the next most magnificent town that can be discovered, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. Take the lot, and I’ll drop two thousand pound in the streets of your magnificent town for them to pick up that can. Not enough? Now look here. This is the very furthest that I’m a going to. I’ll make it two thousand five hundred. And still you won’t? Here, missis! Put the horse—no, stop half a moment, I shouldn’t like to turn my back upon you neither for a trifle, I’ll make it two thousand seven hundred and fifty pound. There! Take the lot on your own terms, and I’ll count out two thousand seven hundred and fifty pound on the footboard of the cart, to be dropped in the streets of your magnificent town for them to pick up that can. What do you say? Come now! You won’t do better, and you may do worse. You take it? Hooray! Sold again, and got the seat!”

These Dear Jacks soap the people shameful, but we Cheap Jacks don’t. We tell ’em the truth about themselves to their faces, and scorn to court ’em. As to wenturesomeness in the way of puffing up the lots, the Dear Jacks beat us hollow. It is considered in the Cheap Jack calling, that better patter can be made out of a gun than any article we put up from the cart, except a pair of spectacles. I often hold forth about a gun for a quarter of an hour, and feel as if I need never leave off. But when I tell ’em what the gun can do, and what the gun has brought down, I never go half so far as the Dear Jacks do when they make speeches in praise of *their* guns—their great guns that set ’em on to do it. Besides, I’m in business for myself: I ain’t sent down into the market-place to order, as they are. Besides, again, my guns don’t know what I say in their laudation, and their guns do, and the whole concern of ’em have reason to be sick and ashamed all round. These are some of my arguments for declaring that the Cheap Jack calling is treated ill in Great Britain, and for turning warm when I think of the other Jacks in question setting themselves up to pretend to look down upon it.

I courted my wife from the footboard of the cart. I did indeed. She was a Suffolk young woman, and it was in Ipswich market-place right opposite the corn-chandler’s shop. I had noticed her up at a window last Saturday that was, appreciating highly. I had took to her, and I had said to myself, “If not already disposed of, I’ll have that lot.” Next Saturday that come, I pitched the cart on the same pitch, and I was in very high feather indeed, keeping ’em laughing the whole of the time, and getting off the goods briskly. At last I took out of my waistcoat-pocket a small lot wrapped in soft paper, and I put it this way (looking up at the window where she was). “Now here, my blooming English maidens, is an article, the last article of the present evening’s sale, which I offer to only you, the lovely Suffolk Dumplings biling over with beauty, and I won’t take a bid of a thousand pounds for from any man alive. Now what is it? Why, I’ll tell you what it is. It’s made of fine gold, and it’s not broke, though there’s a hole in the middle of it, and it’s stronger than any fetter that ever was forged, though it’s smaller than any finger in my set of ten. Why ten? Because, when my parents made over my property to me, I tell you true, there was twelve sheets, twelve towels, twelve table-cloths, twelve knives, twelve forks, twelve tablespoons, and twelve teaspoons, but my set of fingers was two short of a dozen, and could never since be matched. Now what else is it? Come, I’ll tell you. It’s a hoop of solid gold, wrapped in a silver curl-paper, that I myself took off the shining locks of the ever beautiful old lady in Threadneedle Street, London city; I wouldn’t tell you so if I hadn’t the paper to show, or you mightn’t believe it even of me. Now what else is it? It’s a man-trap and a handcuff, the parish stocks and a leg-lock, all in gold and all in one. Now what else is it? It’s a wedding-ring. Now I’ll tell you what I’m a going to do with it. I’m not a going to offer this lot for money; but I mean to give it to the next of you beauties that laughs, and I’ll pay her a visit to-morrow morning at exactly half after nine o’clock as the chimes go, and I’ll take her out for a walk to put up the banns.” She laughed, and got the ring handed up to her. When I called in the morning, she says, “O dear! It’s never you, and you never mean it?” “It’s ever me,” says I, “and I am ever yours, and I ever mean it." So we got married, after being put up three times—which, by the bye, is quite in the Cheap Jack way again, and shows once more how the Cheap Jack customs pervade society.

She wasn't a bad wife, but she had a temper. If she could have parted with that one article at a sacrifice, I wouldn't have swopped her away in exchange for any other woman in England. Not that I ever did swop her away, for we lived together till she died, and that was thirteen year. Now, my lords and ladies and gentlefolks all, I'll let you into a secret, though you won't believe it. Thirteen year of temper in a Palace would try the worst of you, but thirteen year of temper in a Cart would try the best of you. You are kept so very close to it in a cart, you see. There's thousands of couples among you getting on like sweet ile upon a whetstone in houses five and six pairs of stairs high, that would go to the Divorce Court in a cart. Whether the jolting makes it worse, I don't undertake to decide; but in a cart it does come home to you, and stick to you. Wiolence in a cart is *so* wiolent, and aggrawation in a cart is *so* aggrawating.

We might have had such a pleasant life! A roomy cart, with the large goods hung outside, and the bed slung underneath it when on the road, an iron pot and a kettle, a fireplace for the cold weather, a chimney for the smoke, a hanging-shelf and a cupboard, a dog and a horse. What more do you want? You draw off upon a bit of turf in a green lane or by the roadside, you hobble your old horse and turn him grazing, you light your fire upon the ashes of the last visitors, you cook your stew, and you wouldn't call the Emperor of France your father. But have a temper in the cart, flinging language and the hardest goods in stock at you, and where are you then? Put a name to your feelings.

My dog knew as well when she was on the turn as I did. Before she broke out, he would give a howl, and bolt. How he knew it, was a mystery to me; but the sure and certain knowledge of it would wake him up out of his soundest sleep, and he would give a howl, and bolt. At such times I wished I was him.

The worst of it was, we had a daughter born to us, and I love children with all my heart. When she was in her furies she beat the child. This got to be so shocking, as the child got to be four or five year old, that I have many a time gone on with my whip over my shoulder, at the old horse's head, sobbing and crying worse than ever little Sophy did. For how could I prevent it? Such a thing is not to be tried with such a temper—in a cart—

without coming to a fight. It’s in the natural size and formation of a cart to bring it to a fight. And then the poor child got worse terrified than before, as well as worse hurt generally, and her mother made complaints to the next people we lighted on, and the word went round, “Here’s a wretch of a Cheap Jack been a beating his wife.”

Little Sophy was such a brave child! She grew to be quite devoted to her poor father, though he could do so little to help her. She had a wonderful quantity of shining dark hair, all curling natural about her. It is quite astonishing to me now, that I didn’t go tearing mad when I used to see her run from her mother before the cart, and her mother catch her by this hair, and pull her down by it, and beat her.

Such a brave child I said she was! Ah! with reason.

“Don’t you mind next time, father dear,” she would whisper to me, with her little face still flushed, and her bright eyes still wet; “if I don’t cry out, you may know I am not much hurt. And even if I do cry out, it will only be to get mother to let go and leave off.” What I have seen the little spirit bear—for me—without crying out!

Yet in other respects her mother took great care of her. Her clothes were always clean and neat, and her mother was never tired of working at ’em. Such is the inconsistency in things. Our being down in the marsh country in unhealthy weather, I consider the cause of Sophy’s taking bad low fever; but however she took it, once she got it she turned away from her mother for evermore, and nothing would persuade her to be touched by her mother’s hand. She would shiver and say, “No, no, no,” when it was offered at, and would hide her face on my shoulder, and hold me tighter round the neck.

The Cheap Jack business had been worse than ever I had known it, what with one thing and what with another (and not least with railroads, which will cut it all to pieces, I expect, at last), and I was run dry of money. For which reason, one night at that period of little Sophy’s being so bad, either we must have come to a dead-lock for victuals and drink, or I must have pitched the cart as I did.

I couldn’t get the dear child to lie down or leave go of me, and indeed I hadn’t the heart to try, so I stepped out on the footboard with her holding round my neck. They all set up a laugh when they see us, and one chuckle-headed Joskin (that I hated for it) made the bidding, “Tuppence for her!”

“Now, you country boobies,” says I, feeling as if my heart was a heavy weight at the end of a broken sashline, “I give you notice that I am a going to charm the money out of your pockets, and to give you so much more than your money’s worth that you’ll only persuade yourselves to draw your Saturday night’s wages ever again arterwards by the hopes of meeting me to lay ’em out with, which you never will, and why not? Because I’ve made my fortunes by selling my goods on a large scale for seventy-five per cent. less than I give for ’em, and I am consequently to be elevated to the House of Peers next week, by the title of the Duke of Cheap and Markis Jackaloorul. Now let’s know what you want to-night, and you shall have it. But first of all, shall I tell you why I have got this little girl round my neck? You don’t want to know? Then you shall. She belongs to the Fairies. She’s a fortune-teller. She can tell me all about you in a whisper, and can put me up to whether you’re going to buy a lot or leave it. Now do you want a saw? No, she says you don’t, because you’re too clumsy to use one. Else here’s a saw which would be a lifelong blessing to a handy man, at four shillings, at three and six, at three, at two and six, at two, at eighteen-pence. But none of you shall have it at any price, on account of your well-known awkwardness, which would make it manslaughter. The same objection applies to this set of three planes which I won’t let you have neither, so don’t bid for ’em. Now I am a going to ask her what you do want.” (Then I whispered, “Your head burns so, that I am afraid it hurts you bad, my pet,” and she answered, without opening her heavy eyes, “Just a little, father.”) “O! This little fortune-teller says it’s a memorandum-book you want. Then why didn’t you mention it? Here it is. Look at it. Two hundred superfine hot-pressed wire-wove pages—if you don’t believe me, count ’em—ready ruled for your expenses, an everlastingly pointed pencil to put ’em down with, a double-bladed penknife to scratch ’em out with, a book of printed tables to calculate your income with, and a camp-stool to sit down upon while you give your mind to it! Stop! And an umbrella to keep the moon off when you give your mind to it on a pitch-dark night. Now I won’t ask you how much for the lot, but how little? How little are you thinking of? Don’t be ashamed to mention it, because my fortune-teller knows already.” (Then making believe to whisper, I kissed her,—and she kissed me.) “Why, she says you are thinking of as little as three and threepence! I couldn’t have believed it, even of you, unless she told me. Three and threepence! And a set of printed tables in the lot that’ll calculate your income up to forty thousand a year! With an income of forty thousand a year, you grudge three and sixpence. Well then, I'll tell you my opinion. I so despise the threepence, that I'd sooner take three shillings. There. For three shillings, three shillings, three shillings! Gone. Hand 'em over to the lucky man."

As there had been no bid at all, everybody looked about and grinned at everybody, while I touched little Sophy's face and asked her if she felt faint, or giddy. "Not very, father. It will soon be over." Then turning from the pretty patient eyes, which were opened now, and seeing nothing but grins across my lighted grease-pot, I went on again in my Cheap Jack style. "Where's the butcher?" (My sorrowful eye had just caught sight of a fat young butcher on the outside of the crowd.) "She says the good luck is the butcher's. Where is he?" Everybody handed on the blushing butcher to the front, and there was a roar, and the butcher felt himself obliged to put his hand in his pocket, and take the lot. The party so picked out, in general, does feel obliged to take the lot—good four times out of six. Then we had another lot, the counterpart of that one, and sold it sixpence cheaper, which is always wery much enjoyed. Then we had the spectacles. It ain't a special profitable lot, but I put 'em on, and I see what the Chancellor of the Exchequer is going to take off the taxes, and I see what the sweetheart of the young woman in the shawl is doing at home, and I see what the Bishops has got for dinner, and a deal more that seldom fails to fetch 'em 'up in their spirits; and the better their spirits, the better their bids. Then we had the ladies' lot—the teapot, tea-caddy, glass sugar-basin, half-a-dozen spoons, and caudle-cup—and all the time I was making similar excuses to give a look or two and say a word or two to my poor child. It was while the second ladies' lot was holding 'em enchained that I felt her lift herself a little on my shoulder, to look across the dark street. "What troubles you, darling?" "Nothing troubles me, father. I am not at all troubled. But don't I see a pretty churchyard over there?" "Yes, my dear." "Kiss me twice, dear father, and lay me down to rest upon that churchyard grass so soft and green." I staggered back into the cart with her head dropped on my shoulder, and I says to her mother, "Quick. Shut the door! Don't let those laughing people see!" "What's the matter?" she cries. "O woman, woman," I tells her, "you'll never catch my little Sophy by her hair again, for she has flown away from you!"

Maybe those were harder words than I meant ’em; but from that time forth my wife took to brooding, and would sit in the cart or walk beside it, hours at a stretch, with her arms crossed, and her eyes looking on the ground. When her furies took her (which was rather seldomer than before) they took her in a new way, and she banged herself about to that extent that I was forced to hold her. She got none the better for a little drink now and then, and through some years I used to wonder, as I plodded along at the old horse’s head, whether there was many carts upon the road that held so much dreariness as mine, for all my being looked up to as the King of the Cheap Jacks. So sad our lives went on till one summer evening, when, as we were coming into Exeter, out of the farther West of England, we saw a woman beating a child in a cruel manner, who screamed, “Don’t beat me! O mother, mother, mother!” Then my wife stopped her ears, and ran away like a wild thing, and next day she was found in the river.

Me and my dog were all the company left in the cart now; and the dog learned to give a short bark when they wouldn’t bid, and to give another and a nod of his head when I asked him, “Who said half a crown? Are you the gentleman, sir, that offered half a crown?” He attained to an immense height of popularity, and I shall always believe taught himself entirely out of his own head to growl at any person in the crowd that bid as low as sixpence. But he got to be well on in years, and one night when I was conwulsing York with the spectacles, he took a conwulsion on his own account upon the very footboard by me, and it finished him.

Being naturally of a tender turn, I had dreadful lonely feelings on me arter this. I conquered ’em at selling times, having a reputation to keep (not to mention keeping myself), but they got me down in private, and rolled upon me. That’s often the way with us public characters. See us on the footboard, and you’d give pretty well anything you possess to be us. See us off the footboard, and you’d add a trifle to be off your bargain. It was under those circumstances that I come acquainted with a giant. I might have been too high to fall into conversation with him, had it not been for my lonely feelings. For the general rule is, going round the country, to draw the line at dressing up. When a man can’t trust his getting a living to his undisguised abilities, you consider him below your sort. And this giant when on view figured as a Roman.

He was a languid young man, which I attribute to the distance betwixt his extremities. He had a little head and less in it, he had weak eyes and weak knees, and altogether you couldn't look at him without feeling that there was greatly too much of him both for his joints and his mind. But he was an amiable though timid young man (his mother let him out, and spent the money), and we come acquainted when he was walking to ease the horse betwixt two fairs. He was called Rinaldo di Velasco, his name being Pickleson.

This giant, otherwise Pickleson, mentioned to me under the seal of confidence that, beyond his being a burden to himself, his life was made a burden to him by the cruelty of his master towards a step-daughter who was deaf and dumb. Her mother was dead, and she had no living soul to take her part, and was used most hard. She travelled with his master's caravan only because there was nowhere to leave her, and this giant, otherwise Pickleson, did go so far as to believe that his master often tried to lose her. He was such a very languid young man, that I don't know how long it didn't take him to get this story out, but it passed through his defective circulation to his top extremity in course of time.

When I heard this account from the giant, otherwise Pickleson, and likewise that the poor girl had beautiful long dark hair, and was often pulled down by it and beaten, I couldn't see the giant through what stood in my eyes. Having wiped 'em, I give him sixpence (for he was kept as short as he was long), and he laid it out in two three-penn'orths of gin-and-water, which so brisked him up, that he sang the Favourite Comic of Shivery Shakey, ain't it cold?—a popular effect which his master had tried every other means to get out of him as a Roman wholly in vain.

His master's name was Mim, a wery hoarse man, and I knew him to speak to. I went to that Fair as a mere civilian, leaving the cart outside the town, and I looked about the back of the Vans while the performing was going on, and at last, sitting dozing against a muddy cart-wheel, I come upon the poor girl who was deaf and dumb. At the first look I might almost have judged that she had escaped from the Wild Beast Show; but at the second I thought better of her, and thought that if she was more cared for and more kindly used she would be like my child. She was just the same age that my own daughter would have been, if her pretty head had not fell down upon my shoulder that unfortunate night.

To cut it short, I spoke confidential to Mim while he was beating the gong outside betwixt two lots of Pickleson's publics, and I put it to him, "She lies heavy on your own hands; what'll you take for her?" Mim was a most ferocious swearer. Suppressing that part of his reply which was much the longest part, his reply was, “A pair of braces.” “Now I’ll tell you,” says I, “what I’m a going to do with you. I’m a going to fetch you half-a-dozen pair of the primest braces in the cart, and then to take her away with me.” Says Mim (again ferocious), “I’ll believe it when I’ve got the goods, and no sooner.” I made all the haste I could, lest he should think twice of it, and the bargain was completed, which Pickleson he was thereby so relieved in his mind that he come out at his little back door, longways like a serpent, and give us Shivery Shakey in a whisper among the wheels at parting.

It was happy days for both of us when Sophy and me began to travel in the cart. I at once give her the name of Sophy, to put her ever towards me in the attitude of my own daughter. We soon made out to begin to understand one another, through the goodness of the Heavens, when she knowed that I meant true and kind by her. In a very little time she was wonderful fond of me. You have no idea what it is to have anybody wonderful fond of you, unless you have been got down and rolled upon by the lonely feelings that I have mentioned as having once got the better of me.

You’d have laughed—or the rewerse—it’s according to your disposition—if you could have seen me trying to teach Sophy. At first I was helped—you’d never guess by what—milestones. I got some large alphabets in a box, all the letters separate on bits of bone, and saying we was going to WINDSOR, I give her those letters in that order, and then at every milestone I showed her those same letters in that same order again, and pointed towards the abode of royalty. Another time I give her CART, and then chalked the same upon the cart. Another time I give her DOCTOR MARIGOLD, and hung a corresponding inscription outside my waistcoat. People that met us might stare a bit and laugh, but what did *I* care, if she caught the idea? She caught it after long patience and trouble, and then we did begin to get on swimmingly, I believe you! At first she was a little given to consider me the cart, and the cart the abode of royalty, but that soon wore off.

We had our signs, too, and they was hundreds in number. Sometimes she would sit looking at me and considering hard how to communicate with me about something fresh,—how to ask me what she wanted explained,—and then she was (or I thought she was; what does it signify?) so like my child with those years added to her, that I half-believed it was herself, trying to tell me where she had been to up in the skies, and what she had seen since that unhappy night when she flied away. She had a pretty face, and now that there was no one to drag at her bright dark hair, and it was all in order, there was a something touching in her looks that made the cart most peaceful and most quiet, though not at all melancholy. [N.B. In the Cheap Jack patter, we generally sound it lemonjolly, and it gets a laugh.]

The way she learnt to understand any look of mine was truly surprising. When I sold of a night, she would sit in the cart unseen by them outside, and would give a eager look into my eyes when I looked in, and would hand me straight the precise article or articles I wanted. And then she would clap her hands, and laugh for joy. And as for me, seeing her so bright, and remembering what she was when I first lighted on her, starved and beaten and ragged, leaning asleep against the muddy cart-wheel, it give me such heart that I gained a greater heighth of reputation than ever, and I put Pickleson down (by the name of Mim's Travelling Giant otherwise Pickleson) for a fypunnote in my will.

This happiness went on in the cart till she was sixteen year old. By which time I began to feel not satisfied that I had done my whole duty by her, and to consider that she ought to have better teaching than I could give her. It drew a many tears on both sides when I commenced explaining my views to her; but what's right is right, and you can't neither by tears nor laughter do away with its character.

So I took her hand in mine, and I went with her one day to the Deaf and Dumb Establishment in London, and when the gentleman come to speak to us, I says to him: "Now I'll tell you what I'll do with you, sir. I am nothing but a Cheap Jack, but of late years I have laid by for a rainy day notwithstanding. This is my only daughter (adopted), and you can't produce a deafer nor a dumber. Teach her the most that can be taught her in the shortest separation that can be named,—state the figure for it,—and I am game to put the money down. I won't bate you a single farthing, sir, but I'll put down the money here and now, and I'll thankfully throw you in a pound to take it. There!" The gentleman smiled, and then, "Well, well," says he, "I must first know what she has learned already. How do you communicate with her?" Then I showed him, and she wrote in printed writing many names of things and so forth; and we held some sprightly conversation, Sophy and me, about a little story in a book which the gentleman showed her, and which she was able to read. "This is most extraordinary," says the gentleman; "is it possible that you have been her only teacher?" "I have been her only teacher, sir," I says, "besides herself." "Then," says the gentleman, and more acceptable words was never spoke to me, "you're a clever fellow, and a good fellow." This he makes known to Sophy, who kisses his hands, claps her own, and laughs and cries upon it.

We saw the gentleman four times in all, and when he took down my name and asked how in the world it ever chanced to be Doctor, it come out that he was own nephew by the sister's side, if you'll believe me, to the very Doctor that I was called after. This made our footing still easier, and he says to me:

"Now, Marigold, tell me what more do you want your adopted daughter to know?"

"I want her, sir, to be cut off from the world as little as can be, considering her deprivations, and therefore to be able to read whatever is wrote with perfect ease and pleasure."

"My good fellow," urges the gentleman, opening his eyes wide, "why *I* can't do that myself!"

I took his joke, and gave him a laugh (knowing by experience how flat you fall without it), and I mended my words accordingly.

"What do you mean to do with her afterwards?" asks the gentleman, with a sort of a doubtful eye. "To take her about the country?"

"In the cart, sir, but only in the cart. She will live a private life, you understand, in the cart. I should never think of bringing her infirmities before the public. I wouldn't make a show of her for any money."

The gentleman nodded, and seemed to approve.

"Well," says he, "can you part with her for two years?"

"To do her that good,—yes, sir."

"There's another question," says the gentleman, looking towards her,—"can she part with you for two years?"

I don't know that it was a harder matter of itself (for the other was hard enough to me), but it was harder to get over. However, she was pacified to it at last, and the separation betwixt us was settled. How it cut up both of us when it took place, and when I left her at the door in the dark of an evening, I don't tell. But I know this; remembering that night, I shall never pass that same establishment without a heartache and a swelling in the throat; and I couldn't put you up the best of lots in sight of it with my usual spirit,—no, not even the gun, nor the pair of spectacles,—for five hundred pound reward from the Secretary of State for the Home Department, and throw in the honour of putting my legs under his mahogany arterwards.

Still, the loneliness that followed in the cart was not the old loneliness, because there was a term put to it, however long to look forward to; and because I could think, when I was anyways down, that she belonged to me and I belonged to her. Always planning for her coming back, I bought in a few months' time another cart, and what do you think I planned to do with it? I'll tell you. I planned to fit it up with shelves and books for her reading, and to have a seat in it where I could sit and see her read, and think that I had been her first teacher. Not hurrying over the job, I had the fittings knocked together in contriving ways under my own inspection, and here was her bed in a berth with curtains, and there was her reading-table, and here was her writing-desk, and elsewhere was her books in rows upon rows, picters and no picters, bindings and no bindings, gilt-edged and plain, just as I could pick 'em up for her in lots up and down the country, North and South and West and East, Winds liked best and winds liked least, Here and there and gone astray, Over the hills and far away. And when I had got together pretty well as many books as the cart would neatly hold, a new scheme come into my head, which, as it turned out, kept my time and attention a good deal employed, and helped me over the two years' stile.

Without being of an awaricious temper, I like to be the owner of things. I shouldn't wish, for instance, to go partners with yourself in the Cheap Jack cart. It's not that I mistrust you, but that I'd rather know it was mine. Similarly, very likely you'd rather know it was yours. Well! A kind of a jealousy began to creep into my mind when I reflected that all those books would have been read by other people long before they was read by her. It seemed to take away from her being the owner of 'em like. In this way, the question got into my head: Couldn't I have a book new-made express for her, which she should be the first to read?

It pleased me, that thought did; and as I never was a man to let a thought sleep (you must wake up all the whole family of thoughts you've got and burn their nightcaps, or you won't do in the Cheap Jack line), I set to work at it. Considering that I was in the habit of changing so much about the country, and that I should have to find out a literary character here to make a deal with, and another literary character there to make a deal with, as opportunities presented, I hit on the plan that this same book should be a general miscellaneous lot,—like the razors, flat-iron, chronometer watch, dinner plates, rolling-pin, and looking-glass,—and shouldn't be offered as a single indiwidual article, like the spectacles or the gun. When I had come to that conclusion, I come to another, which shall likewise be yours.

Often had I regretted that she never had heard me on the footboard, and that she never could hear me. It ain't that *I* am vain, but that *you* don't like to put your own light under a bushel. What's the worth of your reputation, if you can't convey the reason for it to the person you most wish to value it? Now I'll put it to you. Is it worth sixpence, fippence, fourpence, threepence, twopence, a penny, a halfpenny, a farthing? No, it ain't. Not worth a farthing. Very well, then. My conclusion was that I would begin her book with some account of myself. So that, through reading a specimen or two of me on the footboard, she might form an idea of my merits there. I was aware that I couldn't do myself justice. A man can't write his eye (at least *I* don't know how to), nor yet can a man write his voice, nor the rate of his talk, nor the quickness of his action, nor his general spicy way. But he can write his turns of speech, when he is a public speaker,—and indeed I have heard that he very often does, before he speaks 'em.

Well! Having formed that resolution, then come the question of a name. How did I hammer that hot iron into shape? This way. The most difficult explanation I had ever had with her was, how I come to be called Doctor, and yet was no Doctor. After all, I felt that I had failed of getting it correctly into her mind, with my utmost pains. But trusting to her improvement in the two years, I thought that I might trust to her understanding it when she should come to read it as put down by my own hand. Then I thought I would try a joke with her and watch how it took, by which of itself I might fully judge of her understanding it. We had first discovered the mistake we had dropped into, through her having asked me to prescribe for her when she had supposed me to be a Doctor in a medical point of view; so thinks I, "Now, if I give this book the name of my Prescriptions, and if she catches the idea that my only Prescriptions are for her amusement and interest,—to make her laugh in a pleasant way, or to make her cry in a pleasant way,—it will be a delightful proof to both of us that we have got over our difficulty." It fell out to absolute perfection. For when she saw the book, as I had it got up,—the printed and pressed book,—lying on her desk in her cart, and saw the title, DOCTOR MARIGOLD'S PRESCRIPTIONS, she looked at me for a moment with astonishment, then fluttered the leaves, then broke out a laughing in the charmingest way, then felt her pulse and shook her head, then turned the pages pretending to read them most attentive, then kissed the book to me, and put it to her bosom with both her hands. I never was better pleased in all my life!

But let me not anticipate. (I take that expression out of a lot of romances I bought for her. I never opened a single one of ’em—and I have opened many—but I found the romancer saying “let me not anticipate.” Which being so, I wonder why he did anticipate, or who asked him to it.) Let me not, I say, anticipate. This same book took up all my spare time. It was no play to get the other articles together in the general miscellaneous lot, but when it come to my own article! There! I couldn’t have believed the blotting, nor yet the buckling to at it, nor the patience over it. Which again is like the footboard. The public have no idea.

At last it was done, and the two years’ time was gone after all the other time before it, and where it’s all gone to, who knows? The new cart was finished,—yellow outside, relieved with wermilion and brass fittings,—the old horse was put in it, a new ’un and a boy being laid on for the Cheap Jack cart,—and I cleaned myself up to go and fetch her. Bright cold weather it was, cart-chimneys smoking, carts pitched private on a piece of waste ground over at Wandsworth, where you may see ’em from the Sou’western Railway when not upon the road. (Look out of the right-hand window going down.)

“Marigold,” says the gentleman, giving his hand hearty, “I am very glad to see you.”

“Yet I have my doubts, sir,” says I, “if you can be half as glad to see me as I am to see you.”

“The time has appeared so long,—has it, Marigold?”

“I won’t say that, sir, considering its real length; but—”

“What a start, my good fellow!”

Ah! I should think it was! Grown such a woman, so pretty, so intelligent, so expressive! I knew then that she must be really like my child, or I could never have known her, standing quiet by the door.

“You are affected,” says the gentleman in a kindly manner.

“I feel, sir,” says I, “that I am but a rough chap in a sleeved waistcoat.”

“I feel,” says the gentleman, “that it was you who raised her from misery and degradation, and brought her into communication with her kind. But why do we converse alone together, when we can converse so well with her? Address her in your own way.”

“I am such a rough chap in a sleeved waistcoat, sir,” says I, “and she is such a graceful woman, and she stands so quiet at the door!”

“*Try* if she moves at the old sign,” says the gentleman.

They had got it up together o’ purpose to please me! For when I give her the old sign, she rushed to my feet, and dropped upon her knees, holding up her hands to me with pouring tears of love and joy; and when I took her hands and lifted her, she clasped me round the neck, and lay there; and I don’t know what a fool I didn’t make of myself, until we all three settled down into talking without sound, as if there was a something soft and pleasant spread over the whole world for us.

* * * * *

[A portion is here omitted from the text, having reference to the sketches contributed by other writers; but the reader will be pleased to have what follows retained in a note:

“Now I’ll tell you what I am a-going to do with you. I am a-going to offer you the general miscellaneous lot, her own book, never read by anybody else but me, added to and completed by me after her first reading of it, eight-and-forty printed pages, six-and-ninety columns, Whiting’s own work, Beaufort House to wit, thrown off by the steam-ingine, best of paper, beautiful green wrapper, folded like clean linen come home from the clear-starcher’s, and so exquisitely stitched that, regarded as a piece of needlework alone, it’s better than the sampler of a seamstress undergoing a Competitive examination for Starvation before the Civil Service Commissioners—and I offer the lot for what? For eight pound? Not so much. For six pound? Less. For four pound. Why, I hardly expect you to believe me, but that’s the sum. Four pound! The stitching alone cost half as much again. Here’s forty-eight original pages, ninety-six original columns, for four pound. You want more for the money? Take it. Three whole pages of advertisements of thrilling interest thrown in for nothing. Read ’em and believe ’em. More? My best of wishes for your merry Christmases and your happy New Years, your long lives and your true prosperities. Worth twenty pound good if they are delivered as I send them. Remember! Here’s a final prescription added, “To be taken for life,” which will tell you how the cart broke down, and where the journey ended. You think Four Pound too much? And still you think so? Come! I’ll tell you what then. Say Four Pence, and keep the secret.”]

* * * * *

So every item of my plan was crowned with success. Our reunited life was more than all that we had looked forward to. Content and joy went with us as the wheels of the two carts went round, and the same stopped with us when the two carts stopped. I was as pleased and as proud as a Pug-Dog with his muzzle black-leaded for a evening party, and his tail extra curled by machinery.

But I had left something out of my calculations. Now, what had I left out? To help you to guess I'll say, a figure. Come. Make a guess and guess right. Nought? No. Nine? No. Eight? No. Seven? No. Six? No. Five? No. Four? No. Three? No. Two? No. One? No. Now I'll tell you what I'll do with you. I'll say it's another sort of figure altogether. There. Why then, says you, it's a mortal figure. No, nor yet a mortal figure. By such means you got yourself penned into a corner, and you can't help guessing a *im*mortal figure. That's about it. Why didn't you say so sooner?

Yes. It was a immortal figure that I had altogether left out of my Calculations. Neither man's, nor woman's, but a child's. Girl's or boy's? Boy's. "I, says the sparrow with my bow and arrow." Now you have got it.

We were down at Lancaster, and I had done two nights more than fair average business (though I cannot in honour recommend them as a quick audience) in the open square there, near the end of the street where Mr. Sly's King's Arms and Royal Hotel stands. Mim's travelling giant, otherwise Pickleson, happened at the self-same time to be trying it on in the town. The genteel lay was adopted with him. No hint of a van. Green baize alcove leading up to Pickleson in a Auction Room. Printed poster, "Free list suspended, with the exception of that proud boast of an enlightened country, a free press. Schools admitted by private arrangement. Nothing to raise a blush in the cheek of youth or shock the most fastidious." Mim swearing most horrible and terrific, in a pink calico pay-place, at the slackness of the public. Serious handbill in the shops, importing that it was all but impossible to come to a right understanding of the history of David without seeing Pickleson.

I went to the Auction Room in question, and I found it entirely empty of everything but echoes and mouldiness, with the single exception of Pickleson on a piece of red drugget. This suited my purpose, as I wanted a private and confidential word with him, which was: "Pickleson. Owing much happiness to you, I put you in my will for a fypunnote; but, to save trouble, here’s fourpunten down, which may equally suit your views, and let us so conclude the transaction.” Pickleson, who up to that remark had had the dejected appearance of a long Roman rushlight that couldn’t anyhow get lighted, brightened up at his top extremity, and made his acknowledgments in a way which (for him) was parliamentary eloquence. He likewise did add, that, having ceased to draw as a Roman, Mim had made proposals for his going in as a conwerted Indian Giant worked upon by The Dairyman’s Daughter. This, Pickleson, having no acquaintance with the tract named after that young woman, and not being willing to couple gag with his serious views, had declined to do, thereby leading to words and the total stoppage of the unfortunate young man’s beer. All of which, during the whole of the interview, was confirmed by the ferocious growling of Mim down below in the pay-place, which shook the giant like a leaf.

But what was to the present point in the remarks of the travelling giant, otherwise Pickleson, was this: “Doctor Marigold,”—I give his words without a hope of conweying their feebleness,—“who is the strange young man that hangs about your carts?”—“The strange young *man*?” I gives him back, thinking that he meant her, and his languid circulation had dropped a syllable. “Doctor,” he returns, with a pathos calculated to draw a tear from even a manly eye, “I am weak, but not so weak yet as that I don’t know my words. I repeat them, Doctor. The strange young man.” It then appeared that Pickleson, being forced to stretch his legs (not that they wanted it) only at times when he couldn’t be seen for nothing, to wit in the dead of the night and towards daybreak, had twice seen hanging about my carts, in that same town of Lancaster where I had been only two nights, this same unknown young man.

It put me rather out of sorts. What it meant as to particulars I no more foreboded then than you forebode now, but it put me rather out of sorts. Howsoever, I made light of it to Pickleson, and I took leave of Pickleson, advising him to spend his legacy in getting up his stamina, and to continue to stand by his religion. Towards morning I kept a look out for the strange young man, and—what was more—I saw the strange young man. He was well dressed and well looking. He loitered very nigh my carts, watching them like as if he was taking care of them, and soon after daybreak turned and went away. I sent a hail after him, but he never started or looked round, or took the smallest notice.

We left Lancaster within an hour or two, on our way towards Carlisle. Next morning, at daybreak, I looked out again for the strange young man. I did not see him. But next morning I looked out again, and there he was once more. I sent another hail after him, but as before he gave not the slightest sign of being anyways disturbed. This put a thought into my head. Acting on it I watched him in different manners and at different times not necessary to enter into, till I found that this strange young man was deaf and dumb.

The discovery turned me over, because I knew that a part of that establishment where she had been was allotted to young men (some of them well off), and I thought to myself, "If she favours him, where am I? and where is all that I have worked and planned for?" Hoping—I must confess to the selfishness—that she might *not* favour him, I set myself to find out. At last I was by accident present at a meeting between them in the open air, looking on leaning behind a fir-tree without their knowing of it. It was a moving meeting for all the three parties concerned. I knew every syllable that passed between them as well as they did. I listened with my eyes, which had come to be as quick and true with deaf and dumb conversation as my ears with the talk of people that can speak. He was a-going out to China as clerk in a merchant's house, which his father had been before him. He was in circumstances to keep a wife, and he wanted her to marry him and go along with him. She persisted, no. He asked if she didn't love him. Yes, she loved him dearly, dearly; but she could never disappoint her beloved, good, noble, generous, and I-don't-know-what-all father (meaning me, the Cheap Jack in the sleeved waistcoat) and she would stay with him, Heaven bless him! though it was to break her heart. Then she cried most bitterly, and that made up my mind.

While my mind had been in an unsettled state about her favouring this young man, I had felt that unreasonable towards Pickleson, that it was well for him he had got his legacy down. For I often thought, "If it hadn't been for this same weak-minded giant, I might never have come to trouble my head and wex my soul about the young man." But, once that I knew she loved him,—once that I had seen her weep for him,—it was a different thing. I made it right in my mind with Pickleson on the spot, and I shook myself together to do what was right by all.

She had left the young man by that time (for it took a few minutes to get me thoroughly well shook together), and the young man was leaning against another of the fir-trees,—of which there was a cluster,—with his face upon his arm. I touched him on the back. Looking up and seeing me, he says, in our deaf-and-dumb talk, “Do not be angry.”

“I am not angry, good boy. I am your friend. Come with me.”

I left him at the foot of the steps of the Library Cart, and I went up alone. She was drying her eyes.

“You have been crying, my dear.”

“Yes, father.”

“Why?”

“A headache.”

“Not a heartache?”

“I said a headache, father.”

“Doctor Marigold must prescribe for that headache.”

She took up the book of my Prescriptions, and held it up with a forced smile; but seeing me keep still and look earnest, she softly laid it down again, and her eyes were very attentive.

“The Prescription is not there, Sophy.”

“Where is it?”

“Here, my dear.”

I brought her young husband in, and I put her hand in his, and my only farther words to both of them were these: “Doctor Marigold’s last Prescription. To be taken for life.” After which I bolted.

When the wedding come off, I mounted a coat (blue, and bright buttons), for the first and last time in all my days, and I give Sophy away with my own hand. There were only us three and the gentleman who had had charge of her for those two years. I give the wedding dinner of four in the Library Cart. Pigeon-pie, a leg of pickled pork, a pair of fowls, and suitable garden stuff. The best of drinks. I give them a speech, and the gentleman give us a speech, and all our jokes told, and the whole went off like a sky-rocket. In the course of the entertainment I explained to Sophy that I should keep the Library Cart as my living-cart when not upon the road, and that I should keep all her books for her just as they stood, till she come back to claim them. So she went to China with her young husband, and it was a parting sorrowful and heavy, and I got the boy I had another service; and so as of old, when my child and wife were gone, I went plodding along alone, with my whip over my shoulder, at the old horse’s head.

Sophy wrote me many letters, and I wrote her many letters. About the end of the first year she sent me one in an unsteady hand: "Dearest father, not a week ago I had a darling little daughter, but I am so well that they let me write these words to you. Dearest and best father, I hope my child may not be deaf and dumb, but I do not yet know." When I wrote back, I hinted the question; but as Sophy never answered that question, I felt it to be a sad one, and I never repeated it. For a long time our letters were regular, but then they got irregular, through Sophy's husband being moved to another station, and through my being always on the move. But we were in one another's thoughts, I was equally sure, letters or no letters.

Five years, odd months, had gone since Sophy went away. I was still the King of the Cheap Jacks, and at a greater height of popularity than ever. I had had a first-rate autumn of it, and on the twenty-third of December, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-four, I found myself at Uxbridge, Middlesex, clean sold out. So I jogged up to London with the old horse, light and easy, to have my Christmas-eve and Christmas-day alone by the fire in the Library Cart, and then to buy a regular new stock of goods all round, to sell 'em again and get the money.

I am a neat hand at cookery, and I'll tell you what I knocked up for my Christmas-eve dinner in the Library Cart. I knocked up a beefsteak-pudding for one, with two kidneys, a dozen oysters, and a couple of mushrooms thrown in. It's a pudding to put a man in good humour with everything, except the two bottom buttons of his waistcoat. Having relished that pudding and cleared away, I turned the lamp low, and sat down by the light of the fire, watching it as it shone upon the backs of Sophy's books.

Sophy's books so brought Sophy's self, that I saw her touching face quite plainly, before I dropped off dozing by the fire. This may be a reason why Sophy, with her deaf-and-dumb child in her arms, seemed to stand silent by me all through my nap. I was on the road, off the road, in all sorts of places, North and South and West and East, Winds liked best and winds liked least, Here and there and gone astray, Over the hills and far away, and still she stood silent by me, with her silent child in her arms. Even when I woke with a start, she seemed to vanish, as if she had stood by me in that very place only a single instant before.

I had started at a real sound, and the sound was on the steps of the cart. It was the light hurried tread of a child, coming clambering up. That tread of a child had once been so familiar to me, that for half a moment I believed I was a-going to see a little ghost.

But the touch of a real child was laid upon the outer handle of the door, and the handle turned, and the door opened a little way, and a real child peeped in. A bright little comely girl with large dark eyes.

Looking full at me, the tiny creature took off her mite of a straw hat, and a quantity of dark curls fell about her face. Then she opened her lips, and said in a pretty voice,

"Grandfather!"

"Ah, my God!" I cries out. "She can speak!"

"Yes, dear grandfather. And I am to ask you whether there was ever any one that I remind you of?"

In a moment Sophy was round my neck, as well as the child, and her husband was a-wringing my hand with his face hid, and we all had to shake ourselves together before we could get over it. And when we did begin to get over it, and I saw the pretty child a-talking, pleased and quick and eager and busy, to her mother, in the signs that I had first taught her mother, the happy and yet pitying tears fell rolling down my face.

THE END OF
Doctor Marigold

DOMBEY AND SON

by Charles Dickens

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PREFACE OF 1848
PREFACE OF 1867

CHAPTER 1. Dombey and Son

Dombey sat in the corner of the darkened room in the great arm-chair by the bedside, and Son lay tucked up warm in a little basket bedstead, carefully disposed on a low settee immediately in front of the fire and close to it, as if his constitution were analogous to that of a muffin, and it was essential to toast him brown while he was very new.

Dombey was about eight-and-forty years of age. Son about eight-and-forty minutes. Dombey was rather bald, rather red, and though a handsome well-made man, too stern and pompous in appearance, to be prepossessing. Son was very bald, and very red, and though (of course) an undeniably fine infant, somewhat crushed and spotty in his general effect, as yet. On the brow of Dombey, Time and his brother Care had set some marks, as on a tree that was to come down in good time—remorseless twins they are for striding through their human forests, notching as they go—while the countenance of Son was crossed with a thousand little creases, which the same deceitful Time would take delight in smoothing out and wearing away with the flat part of his scythe, as a preparation of the surface for his deeper operations.

Dombey, exulting in the long-looked-for event, jingled and jingled the heavy gold watch-chain that depended from below his trim blue coat, whereof the buttons sparkled phosphorescently in the feeble rays of the distant fire. Son, with his little fists curled up and clenched, seemed, in his feeble way, to be squaring at existence for having come upon him so unexpectedly.

'The House will once again, Mrs Dombey,' said Mr Dombey, 'be not only in name but in fact Dombey and Son;' and he added, in a tone of luxurious satisfaction, with his eyes half-closed as if he were reading the name in a device of flowers, and inhaling their fragrance at the same time; 'Dom-bey and Son!'

The words had such a softening influence, that he appended a term of endearment to Mrs Dombey's name (though not without some hesitation, as being a man but little used to that form of address): and said, 'Mrs Dombey, my—my dear.'

A transient flush of faint surprise overspread the sick lady's face as she raised her eyes towards him.

'He will be christened Paul, my—Mrs Dombey—of course.'

She feebly echoed, 'Of course,' or rather expressed it by the motion of her lips, and closed her eyes again.

'His father's name, Mrs Dombey, and his grandfather's! I wish his grandfather were alive this day! There is some inconvenience in the necessity of writing Junior,' said Mr Dombey, making a fictitious autograph on his knee; 'but it is merely of a private and personal complexion. It doesn't enter into the correspondence of the House. Its signature remains the same.' And again he said 'Dombey and Son, in exactly the same tone as before.

Those three words conveyed the one idea of Mr Dombey's life. The earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and moon were made to give them light. Rivers and seas were formed to float their ships; rainbows gave them promise of fair weather; winds blew for or against their enterprises; stars and planets circled in their orbits, to preserve inviolate a system of which they were the centre. Common abbreviations took new meanings in his eyes, and had sole reference to them. A. D. had no concern with Anno Domini, but stood for anno Dombei—and Son.

He had risen, as his father had before him, in the course of life and death, from Son to Dombey, and for nearly twenty years had been the sole representative of the Firm. Of those years he had been married, ten—married, as some said, to a lady with no heart to give him; whose happiness was in the past, and who was content to bind her broken spirit to the dutiful and meek endurance of the present. Such idle talk was little likely to reach the ears of Mr Dombey, whom it nearly concerned; and probably no one in the world would have received it with such utter incredulity as he, if it had reached him. Dombey and Son had often dealt in hides, but never in hearts. They left that fancy ware to boys and girls, and boarding-schools and books. Mr Dombey would have reasoned: That a matrimonial alliance with himself must, in the nature of things, be gratifying and honourable to any woman of common sense. That the hope of giving birth to a new partner in such a House, could not fail to awaken a glorious and stirring ambition in the breast of the least ambitious of her sex. That Mrs Dombey had entered on that social contract of matrimony: almost necessarily part of a genteel and wealthy station, even without reference to the perpetuation of family

Firms: with her eyes fully open to these advantages. That Mrs Dombey had had daily practical knowledge of his position in society. That Mrs Dombey had always sat at the head of his table, and done the honours of his house in a remarkably lady-like and becoming manner. That Mrs Dombey must have been happy. That she couldn't help it.

Or, at all events, with one drawback. Yes. That he would have allowed. With only one; but that one certainly involving much. With the drawback of hope deferred. That hope deferred, which, (as the Scripture very correctly tells us, Mr Dombey would have added in a patronising way; for his highest distinct idea even of Scripture, if examined, would have been found to be; that as forming part of a general whole, of which Dombey and Son formed another part, it was therefore to be commended and upheld) maketh the heart sick. They had been married ten years, and until this present day on which Mr Dombey sat jingling and jingling his heavy gold watch-chain in the great arm-chair by the side of the bed, had had no issue.—To speak of; none worth mentioning. There had been a girl some six years before, and the child, who had stolen into the chamber unobserved, was now crouching timidly, in a corner whence she could see her mother's face. But what was a girl to Dombey and Son! In the capital of the House's name and dignity, such a child was merely a piece of base coin that couldn't be invested—a bad Boy—nothing more.

Mr Dombey's cup of satisfaction was so full at this moment, however, that he felt he could afford a drop or two of its contents, even to sprinkle on the dust in the by-path of his little daughter.

So he said, 'Florence, you may go and look at your pretty brother, if you like, I daresay. Don't touch him!'

The child glanced keenly at the blue coat and stiff white cravat, which, with a pair of creaking boots and a very loud ticking watch, embodied her idea of a father; but her eyes returned to her mother's face immediately, and she neither moved nor answered.

'Her insensibility is as proof against a brother as against every thing else,' said Mr Dombey to himself He seemed so confirmed in a previous opinion by the discovery, as to be quite glad of it.'

Next moment, the lady had opened her eyes and seen the child; and the child had run towards her; and, standing on tiptoe, the better to hide her face in her embrace, had clung about her with a desperate affection very much at variance with her years.

'Oh Lord bless me!' said Mr Dombey, rising testily. 'A very illadvised and feverish proceeding this, I am sure. Please to ring there for Miss Florence's nurse. Really the person should be more care-'

'Wait! I—had better ask Doctor Peps if he'll have the goodness to step upstairs again perhaps. I'll go down. I'll go down. I needn't beg you,' he added, pausing for a moment at the settee before the fire, 'to take particular care of this young gentleman, Mrs ——'

'Blockitt, Sir?' suggested the nurse, a simpering piece of faded gentility, who did not presume to state her name as a fact, but merely offered it as a mild suggestion.

'Of this young gentleman, Mrs Blockitt.'

'No, Sir, indeed. I remember when Miss Florence was born—'

'Ay, ay, ay,' said Mr Dombey, bending over the basket bedstead, and slightly bending his brows at the same time. 'Miss Florence was all very well, but this is another matter. This young gentleman has to accomplish a destiny. A destiny, little fellow!' As he thus apostrophised the infant he raised one of his hands to his lips, and kissed it; then, seeming to fear that the action involved some compromise of his dignity, went, awkwardly enough, away.

Doctor Parker Peps, one of the Court Physicians, and a man of immense reputation for assisting at the increase of great families, was walking up and down the drawing-room with his hands behind him, to the unspeakable admiration of the family Surgeon, who had regularly puffed the case for the last six weeks, among all his patients, friends, and acquaintances, as one to which he was in hourly expectation day and night of being summoned, in conjunction with Doctor Parker Pep.

'Well, Sir,' said Doctor Parker Peps in a round, deep, sonorous voice, muffled for the occasion, like the knocker; 'do you find that your dear lady is at all roused by your visit?'

'Stimulated as it were?' said the family practitioner faintly: bowing at the same time to the Doctor, as much as to say, 'Excuse my putting in a word, but this is a valuable connexion.'

Mr Dombey was quite discomfited by the question. He had thought so little of the patient, that he was not in a condition to answer it. He said that it would be a satisfaction to him, if Doctor Parker Peps would walk upstairs again.

'Good! We must not disguise from you, Sir,' said Doctor Parker Peps, 'that there is a want of power in Her Grace the Duchess—I beg your pardon; I confound names; I should say, in your amiable lady. That there is a certain degree of languor, and a general absence of elasticity, which we would rather—not—

'See,' interposed the family practitioner with another inclination of the head.

'Quite so,' said Doctor Parker Peps,' which we would rather not see. It would appear that the system of Lady Cankaby—excuse me: I should say of Mrs Dombey: I confuse the names of cases—'

'So very numerous,' murmured the family practitioner—'can't be expected I'm sure—quite wonderful if otherwise—Doctor Parker Peps's West-End practice—'

'Thank you,' said the Doctor, 'quite so. It would appear, I was observing, that the system of our patient has sustained a shock, from which it can only hope to rally by a great and strong—'

'And vigorous,' murmured the family practitioner.

'Quite so,' assented the Doctor—'and vigorous effort. Mr Pilkins here, who from his position of medical adviser in this family—no one better qualified to fill that position, I am sure.'

'Oh!' murmured the family practitioner. '"Praise from Sir Hubert Stanley!"'

'You are good enough,' returned Doctor Parker Peps, 'to say so. Mr Pilkins who, from his position, is best acquainted with the patient's constitution in its normal state (an acquaintance very valuable to us in forming our opinions in these occasions), is of opinion, with me, that Nature must be called upon to make a vigorous effort in this instance; and that if our interesting friend the Countess of Dombey—I beg your pardon; Mrs Dombey— should not be—'

'Able,' said the family practitioner.

'To make,' said Doctor Parker Peps.

'That effort,' said the family practitioner.

'Successfully,' said they both together.

'Then,' added Doctor Parker Peps, alone and very gravely, a crisis might arise, which we should both sincerely deplore.'

With that, they stood for a few seconds looking at the ground. Then, on the motion—made in dumb show—of Doctor Parker Peps, they went upstairs; the family practitioner opening the room door for that distinguished professional, and following him out, with most obsequious politeness.

To record of Mr Dombey that he was not in his way affected by this intelligence, would be to do him an injustice. He was not a man of whom it could properly be said that he was ever startled, or shocked; but he certainly had a sense within him, that if his wife should sicken and decay, he would be very sorry, and that he would find a something gone from among his plate and furniture, and other household possessions, which was well worth the having, and could not be lost without sincere regret. Though it would be a cool, business-like, gentlemanly, self-possessed regret, no doubt.

His meditations on the subject were soon interrupted, first by the rustling of garments on the staircase, and then by the sudden whisking into the room of a lady rather past the middle age than otherwise but dressed in a very juvenile manner, particularly as to the tightness of her bodice, who, running up to him with a kind of screw in her face and carriage, expressive of suppressed emotion, flung her arms around his neck, and said, in a choking voice,

'My dear Paul! He's quite a Dombey!'

'Well, well!' returned her brother—for Mr Dombey was her brother—'I think he is like the family. Don't agitate yourself, Louisa.'

'It's very foolish of me,' said Louisa, sitting down, and taking out her pocket-handkerchief, 'but he's—he's such a perfect Dombey!'

Mr Dombey coughed.

'It's so extraordinary,' said Louisa; smiling through her tears, which indeed were not overpowering, 'as to be perfectly ridiculous. So completely our family. I never saw anything like it in my life!'

'But what is this about Fanny, herself?' said Mr Dombey. 'How is Fanny?'

'My dear Paul,' returned Louisa, 'it's nothing whatever. Take my word, it's nothing whatever. There is exhaustion, certainly, but nothing like what I underwent myself, either with George or Frederick. An effort is necessary. That's all. If dear Fanny were a Dombey!—But I daresay she'll make it; I have no doubt she'll make it. Knowing it to be required of her, as a duty, of course she'll make it. My dear Paul, it's very weak and silly of me, I know, to be so trembly and shaky from head to foot; but I am so very queer that I must ask you for a glass of wine and a morsel of that cake.'

Mr Dombey promptly supplied her with these refreshments from a tray on the table.

'I shall not drink my love to you, Paul,' said Louisa: 'I shall drink to the little Dombey. Good gracious me!—it's the most astonishing thing I ever knew in all my days, he's such a perfect Dombey.'

Quenching this expression of opinion in a short hysterical laugh which terminated in tears, Louisa cast up her eyes, and emptied her glass.

'I know it's very weak and silly of me,' she repeated, 'to be so trembly and shaky from head to foot, and to allow my feelings so completely to get the better of me, but I cannot help it. I thought I should have fallen out of the staircase window as I came down from seeing dear Fanny, and that tiddy ickle sing.' These last words originated in a sudden vivid reminiscence of the baby.

They were succeeded by a gentle tap at the door.

'Mrs Chick,' said a very bland female voice outside, 'how are you now, my dear friend?'

'My dear Paul,' said Louisa in a low voice, as she rose from her seat, 'it's Miss Tox. The kindest creature! I never could have got here without her! Miss Tox, my brother Mr Dombey. Paul, my dear, my very particular friend Miss Tox.'

The lady thus specially presented, was a long lean figure, wearing such a faded air that she seemed not to have been made in what linen-drapers call 'fast colours' originally, and to have, by little and little, washed out. But for this she might have been described as the very pink of general propitiation and politeness. From a long habit of listening admiringly to everything that was said in her presence, and looking at the speakers as if she were mentally engaged in taking off impressions of their images upon her soul, never to part with the same but with life, her head had quite settled on one side. Her hands had contracted a spasmodic habit of raising themselves of their own accord as in involuntary admiration. Her eyes were liable to a similar affection. She had the softest voice that ever was heard; and her nose, stupendously aquiline, had a little knob in the very centre or key-stone of the bridge, whence it tended downwards towards her face, as in an invincible determination never to turn up at anything.

Miss Tox's dress, though perfectly genteel and good, had a certain character of angularity and scantiness. She was accustomed to wear odd weedy little flowers in her bonnets and caps. Strange grasses were sometimes perceived in her hair; and it was observed by the curious, of all her collars, frills, tuckers, wristbands, and other gossamer articles—indeed of everything she wore which had two ends to it intended to unite—that the two ends were never on good terms, and wouldn't quite meet without a struggle. She had furry articles for winter wear, as tippets, boas, and muffs, which stood up on end in rampant manner, and were not at all sleek. She was much given to the carrying about of small bags with snaps to them, that went off like little pistols when they were shut up; and when full-dressed, she wore round her neck the barrenest of lockets, representing a fishy old eye, with no approach to speculation in it. These and other appearances of a similar nature, had served to propagate the opinion, that Miss Tox was a lady of what is called a limited independence, which she turned to the best account. Possibly her mincing gait encouraged the belief, and suggested that her clipping a step of ordinary compass into two or three, originated in her habit of making the most of everything.

'I am sure,' said Miss Tox, with a prodigious curtsey, 'that to have the honour of being presented to Mr Dombey is a distinction which I have long sought, but very little expected at the present moment. My dear Mrs Chick—may I say Louisa!'

Mrs Chick took Miss Tox's hand in hers, rested the foot of her wine-glass upon it, repressed a tear, and said in a low voice, 'God bless you!'

'My dear Louisa then,' said Miss Tox, 'my sweet friend, how are you now?'

'Better,' Mrs Chick returned. 'Take some wine. You have been almost as anxious as I have been, and must want it, I am sure.'

Mr Dombey of course officiated, and also refilled his sister's glass, which she (looking another way, and unconscious of his intention) held straight and steady the while, and then regarded with great astonishment, saying, 'My dear Paul, what have you been doing!'

'Miss Tox, Paul,' pursued Mrs Chick, still retaining her hand, 'knowing how much I have been interested in the anticipation of the event of to-day, and how trembly and shaky I have been from head to foot in expectation of it, has been working at a little gift for Fanny, which I promised to present. Miss Tox is ingenuity itself.'

'My dear Louisa,' said Miss Tox. 'Don't say so.

'It is only a pincushion for the toilette table, Paul,' resumed his sister; 'one of those trifles which are insignificant to your sex in general, as it's very natural they should be—we have no business to expect they should be otherwise—but to which we attach some interest.

'Miss Tox is very good,' said Mr Dombey.

'And I do say, and will say, and must say,' pursued his sister, pressing the foot of the wine-glass on Miss Tox's hand, at each of the three clauses, 'that Miss Tox has very prettily adapted the sentiment to the occasion. I call "Welcome little Dombey" Poetry, myself!'

'Is that the device?' inquired her brother.

'That is the device,' returned Louisa.

'But do me the justice to remember, my dear Louisa,' said Miss Toxin a tone of low and earnest entreaty, 'that nothing but the—I have some difficulty in expressing myself—the dubiousness of the result would have induced me to take so great a liberty: "Welcome, Master Dombey," would have been much more congenial to my feelings, as I am sure you know. But the uncertainty attendant on angelic strangers, will, I hope, excuse what must otherwise appear an unwarrantable familiarity.' Miss Tox made a graceful bend as she spoke, in favour of Mr Dombey, which that gentleman graciously acknowledged. Even the sort of recognition of Dombey and Son, conveyed in the foregoing conversation, was so palatable to him, that his sister, Mrs Chick—though he affected to consider her a weak good-natured person—had perhaps more influence over him than anybody else.

'My dear Paul,' that lady broke out afresh, after silently contemplating his features for a few moments, 'I don't know whether to laugh or cry when I look at you, I declare, you do so remind me of that dear baby upstairs.'

'Well!' said Mrs Chick, with a sweet smile, 'after this, I forgive Fanny everything!'

It was a declaration in a Christian spirit, and Mrs Chick felt that it did her good. Not that she had anything particular to forgive in her sister-in-law, nor indeed anything at all, except her having married her brother—in itself a species of audacity—and her having, in the course of events, given birth to a girl instead of a boy: which, as Mrs Chick had frequently observed, was not quite what she had expected of her, and was not a pleasant return for all the attention and distinction she had met with.

Mr Dombey being hastily summoned out of the room at this moment, the two ladies were left alone together. Miss Tox immediately became spasmodic.

'I knew you would admire my brother. I told you so beforehand, my dear,' said Louisa. Miss Tox's hands and eyes expressed how much. 'And as to his property, my dear!'

'Ah!' said Miss Tox, with deep feeling. 'Im-mense!'

'But his deportment, my dear Louisa!' said Miss Tox. 'His presence! His dignity! No portrait that I have ever seen of anyone has been half so replete with those qualities. Something so stately, you know: so uncompromising: so very wide across the chest: so upright! A pecuniary Duke of York, my love, and nothing short of it!' said Miss Tox. 'That's what I should designate him.'

'Why, my dear Paul!' exclaimed his sister, as he returned, 'you look quite pale! There's nothing the matter?'

'I am sorry to say, Louisa, that they tell me that Fanny—'

'Now, my dear Paul,' returned his sister rising, 'don't believe it. Do not allow yourself to receive a turn unnecessarily. Remember of what importance you are to society, and do not allow yourself to be worried by what is so very inconsiderately told you by people who ought to know better. Really I'm surprised at them.'

'I hope I know, Louisa,' said Mr Dombey, stiffly, 'how to bear myself before the world.'

'Nobody better, my dear Paul. Nobody half so well. They would be ignorant and base indeed who doubted it.'

'Ignorant and base indeed!' echoed Miss Tox softly.

'But,' pursued Louisa, 'if you have any reliance on my experience, Paul, you may rest assured that there is nothing wanting but an effort on Fanny's part. And that effort,' she continued, taking off her bonnet, and adjusting her cap and gloves, in a business-like manner, 'she must be encouraged, and really, if necessary, urged to make. Now, my dear Paul, come upstairs with me.'

Mr Dombey, who, besides being generally influenced by his sister for the reason already mentioned, had really faith in her as an experienced and bustling matron, acquiesced; and followed her, at once, to the sick chamber.

The lady lay upon her bed as he had left her, clasping her little daughter to her breast. The child clung close about her, with the same intensity as before, and never raised her head, or moved her soft cheek from her mother's face, or looked on those who stood around, or spoke, or moved, or shed a tear.

'Restless without the little girl,' the Doctor whispered Mr Dombey. 'We found it best to have her in again.'

'Can nothing be done?' asked Mr Dombey.

The Doctor shook his head. 'We can do no more.'

The windows stood open, and the twilight was gathering without.

The scent of the restoratives that had been tried was pungent in the room, but had no fragrance in the dull and languid air the lady breathed.

There was such a solemn stillness round the bed; and the two medical attendants seemed to look on the impassive form with so much compassion and so little hope, that Mrs Chick was for the moment diverted from her purpose. But presently summoning courage, and what she called presence of mind, she sat down by the bedside, and said in the low precise tone of one who endeavours to awaken a sleeper:

'Fanny! Fanny!'

There was no sound in answer but the loud ticking of Mr Dombey's watch and Doctor Parker Peps's watch, which seemed in the silence to be running a race.

'Fanny, my dear,' said Mrs Chick, with assumed lightness, 'here's Mr Dombey come to see you. Won't you speak to him? They want to lay your little boy- -the baby, Fanny, you know; you have hardly seen him yet, I think—in bed; but they can't till you rouse yourself a little. Don't you think it's time you roused yourself a little? Eh?'

She bent her ear to the bed, and listened: at the same time looking round at the bystanders, and holding up her finger.

'Eh?' she repeated, 'what was it you said, Fanny? I didn't hear you.'

No word or sound in answer. Mr Dombey's watch and Dr Parker Peps's watch seemed to be racing faster.

'Now, really, Fanny my dear,' said the sister-in-law, altering her position, and speaking less confidently, and more earnestly, in spite of herself, 'I shall have to be quite cross with you, if you don't rouse yourself. It's necessary for you to make an effort, and perhaps a very great and painful effort which you are not disposed to make; but this is a world of effort you know, Fanny, and we must never yield, when so much depends upon us. Come! Try! I must really scold you if you don't!'

The race in the ensuing pause was fierce and furious. The watches seemed to jostle, and to trip each other up.

'Fanny!' said Louisa, glancing round, with a gathering alarm. 'Only look at me. Only open your eyes to show me that you hear and understand me; will you? Good Heaven, gentlemen, what is to be done!'

The two medical attendants exchanged a look across the bed; and the Physician, stooping down, whispered in the child's ear. Not having understood the purport of his whisper, the little creature turned her perfectly colourless face and deep dark eyes towards him; but without loosening her hold in the least.

The whisper was repeated.

'Mama!' said the child.

The little voice, familiar and dearly loved, awakened some show of consciousness, even at that ebb. For a moment, the closed eye lids trembled, and the nostril quivered, and the faintest shadow of a smile was seen.

'Mama!' cried the child sobbing aloud. 'Oh dear Mama! oh dear Mama!'

The Doctor gently brushed the scattered ringlets of the child, aside from the face and mouth of the mother. Alas how calm they lay there; how little breath there was to stir them!

Thus, clinging fast to that slight spar within her arms, the mother drifted out upon the dark and unknown sea that rolls round all the world.

CHAPTER 2. In which Timely Provision is made for an Emergency that will sometimes arise in the best-regulated Families

'I shall never cease to congratulate myself,' said Mrs Chick,' on having said, when I little thought what was in store for us,—really as if I was inspired by something,—that I forgave poor dear Fanny everything. Whatever happens, that must always be a comfort to me!'

Mrs Chick made this impressive observation in the drawing-room, after having descended thither from the inspection of the mantua-makers upstairs, who were busy on the family mourning. She delivered it for the behoof of Mr Chick, who was a stout bald gentleman, with a very large face, and his hands continually in his pockets, and who had a tendency in his nature to whistle and hum tunes, which, sensible of the indecorum of such sounds in a house of grief, he was at some pains to repress at present.

'Don't you over-exert yourself, Loo,' said Mr Chick, 'or you'll be laid up with spasms, I see. Right tol loor rul! Bless my soul, I forgot! We're here one day and gone the next!'

Mrs Chick contented herself with a glance of reproof, and then proceeded with the thread of her discourse.

'I am sure,' she said, 'I hope this heart-rending occurrence will be a warning to all of us, to accustom ourselves to rouse ourselves, and to make efforts in time where they're required of us. There's a moral in everything, if we would only avail ourselves of it. It will be our own faults if we lose sight of this one.'

Mr Chick invaded the grave silence which ensued on this remark with the singularly inappropriate air of 'A cobbler there was;' and checking himself, in some confusion, observed, that it was undoubtedly our own faults if we didn't improve such melancholy occasions as the present.

'Which might be better improved, I should think, Mr C.,' retorted his helpmate, after a short pause, 'than by the introduction, either of the college hornpipe, or the equally unmeaning and unfeeling remark of rump-te-iddity, bow-wow-wow!'—which Mr Chick had indeed indulged in, under his breath, and which Mrs Chick repeated in a tone of withering scorn.

'Merely habit, my dear,' pleaded Mr Chick.

'Nonsense! Habit!' returned his wife. 'If you're a rational being, don't make such ridiculous excuses. Habit! If I was to get a habit (as you call it) of walking on the ceiling, like the flies, I should hear enough of it, I daresay.

It appeared so probable that such a habit might be attended with some degree of notoriety, that Mr Chick didn't venture to dispute the position.

'Bow-wow-wow!' repeated Mrs Chick with an emphasis of blighting contempt on the last syllable. 'More like a professional singer with the hydrophobia, than a man in your station of life!'

'How's the Baby, Loo?' asked Mr Chick: to change the subject.

'What Baby do you mean?' answered Mrs Chick.

'The poor bereaved little baby,' said Mr Chick. 'I don't know of any other, my dear.'

'You don't know of any other,'retorted Mrs Chick. 'More shame for you, I was going to say.

Mr Chick looked astonished.

'I am sure the morning I have had, with that dining-room downstairs, one mass of babies, no one in their senses would believe.'

'One mass of babies!' repeated Mr Chick, staring with an alarmed expression about him.

'It would have occurred to most men,' said Mrs Chick, 'that poor dear Fanny being no more,—those words of mine will always be a balm and comfort to me,' here she dried her eyes; 'it becomes necessary to provide a Nurse.'

'Oh! Ah!' said Mr Chick. 'Toor-ru!—such is life, I mean. I hope you are suited, my dear.'

'Indeed I am not,' said Mrs Chick; 'nor likely to be, so far as I can see, and in the meantime the poor child seems likely to be starved to death. Paul is so very particular—naturally so, of course, having set his whole heart on this one boy—and there are so many objections to everybody that offers, that I don't see, myself, the least chance of an arrangement. Meanwhile, of course, the child is—'

'Going to the Devil,' said Mr Chick, thoughtfully, 'to be sure.'

Admonished, however, that he had committed himself, by the indignation expressed in Mrs Chick's countenance at the idea of a Dombey going there; and thinking to atone for his misconduct by a bright suggestion, he added:

'Couldn't something temporary be done with a teapot?'

If he had meant to bring the subject prematurely to a close, he could not have done it more effectually. After looking at him for some moments in silent resignation, Mrs Chick said she trusted he hadn't said it in aggravation, because that would do very little honour to his heart. She trusted he hadn't said it seriously, because that would do very little honour to his head. As in any case, he couldn't, however sanguine his disposition, hope to offer a remark that would be a greater outrage on human nature in general, we would beg to leave the discussion at that point.

Mrs Chick then walked majestically to the window and peeped through the blind, attracted by the sound of wheels. Mr Chick, finding that his destiny was, for the time, against him, said no more, and walked off. But it was not always thus with Mr Chick. He was often in the ascendant himself, and at those times punished Louisa roundly. In their matrimonial bickerings they were, upon the whole, a well-matched, fairly-balanced, give-and-take couple. It would have been, generally speaking, very difficult to have betted on the winner. Often when Mr Chick seemed beaten, he would suddenly make a start, turn the tables, clatter them about the ears of Mrs Chick, and carry all before him. Being liable himself to similar unlooked for checks from Mrs Chick, their little contests usually possessed a character of uncertainty that was very animating.

Miss Tox had arrived on the wheels just now alluded to, and came running into the room in a breathless condition. 'My dear Louisa,'said Miss Tox, 'is the vacancy still unsupplied?'

'You good soul, yes,' said Mrs Chick.

'Then, my dear Louisa,' returned Miss Tox, 'I hope and believe—but in one moment, my dear, I'll introduce the party.'

Running downstairs again as fast as she had run up, Miss Tox got the party out of the hackney-coach, and soon returned with it under convoy.

It then appeared that she had used the word, not in its legal or business acceptation, when it merely expresses an individual, but as a noun of multitude, or signifying many: for Miss Tox escorted a plump rosy-cheeked wholesome apple-faced young woman, with an infant in her arms; a younger woman not so plump, but apple-faced also, who led a plump and apple-faced child in each hand; another plump and also apple-faced boy who walked by himself; and finally, a plump and apple-faced man, who carried in his arms another plump and apple-faced boy, whom he stood down on the floor, and admonished, in a husky whisper, to 'kitch hold of his brother Johnny.'

'My dear Louisa,' said Miss Tox, 'knowing your great anxiety, and wishing to relieve it, I posted off myself to the Queen Charlotte's Royal Married Females,' which you had forgot, and put the question, Was there anybody there that they thought would suit? No, they said there was not. When they gave me that answer, I do assure you, my dear, I was almost driven to despair on your account. But it did so happen, that one of the Royal Married Females, hearing the inquiry, reminded the matron of another who had gone to her own home, and who, she said, would in all likelihood be most satisfactory. The moment I heard this, and had it corroborated by the matron—excellent references and unimpeachable character—I got the address, my dear, and posted off again.'

'Like the dear good Tox, you are!' said Louisa.

'Not at all,' returned Miss Tox. 'Don't say so. Arriving at the house (the cleanest place, my dear! You might eat your dinner off the floor), I found the whole family sitting at table; and feeling that no account of them could be half so comfortable to you and Mr Dombey as the sight of them all together, I brought them all away. This gentleman,' said Miss Tox, pointing out the apple-faced man, 'is the father. Will you have the goodness to come a little forward, Sir?'

The apple-faced man having sheepishly complied with this request, stood chuckling and grinning in a front row.

'This is his wife, of course,' said Miss Tox, singling out the young woman with the baby. 'How do you do, Polly?'

'I'm pretty well, I thank you, Ma'am,' said Polly.

By way of bringing her out dexterously, Miss Tox had made the inquiry as in condescension to an old acquaintance whom she hadn't seen for a fortnight or so.

'I'm glad to hear it,' said Miss Tox. 'The other young woman is her unmarried sister who lives with them, and would take care of her children. Her name's Jemima. How do you do, Jemima?'

'I'm pretty well, I thank you, Ma'am,' returned Jemima.

'I'm very glad indeed to hear it,' said Miss Tox. 'I hope you'll keep so. Five children. Youngest six weeks. The fine little boy with the blister on his nose is the eldest The blister, I believe,' said Miss Tox, looking round upon the family, 'is not constitutional, but accidental?'

The apple-faced man was understood to growl, 'Flat iron.

'I beg your pardon, Sir,' said Miss Tox, 'did you?

'Flat iron,' he repeated.

'Oh yes,' said Miss Tox. 'Yes! quite true. I forgot. The little creature, in his mother's absence, smelt a warm flat iron. You're quite right, Sir. You were going to have the goodness to inform me, when we arrived at the door that you were by trade a—'

'Stoker,' said the man.

'A choker!' said Miss Tox, quite aghast.

'Stoker,' said the man. 'Steam ingine.'

'Oh-h! Yes!' returned Miss Tox, looking thoughtfully at him, and seeming still to have but a very imperfect understanding of his meaning.

'And how do you like it, Sir?'

'Which, Mum?' said the man.

'That,' replied Miss Tox. 'Your trade.'

'Oh! Pretty well, Mum. The ashes sometimes gets in here;' touching his chest: 'and makes a man speak gruff, as at the present time. But it is ashes, Mum, not crustiness.'

Miss Tox seemed to be so little enlightened by this reply, as to find a difficulty in pursuing the subject. But Mrs Chick relieved her, by entering into a close private examination of Polly, her children, her marriage certificate, testimonials, and so forth. Polly coming out unscathed from this ordeal, Mrs Chick withdrew with her report to her brother's room, and as an emphatic comment on it, and corroboration of it, carried the two rosiest little Toodles with her. Toodle being the family name of the apple-faced family.

Mr Dombey had remained in his own apartment since the death of his wife, absorbed in visions of the youth, education, and destination of his baby son. Something lay at the bottom of his cool heart, colder and heavier than its ordinary load; but it was more a sense of the child's loss than his own, awakening within him an almost angry sorrow. That the life and progress on which he built such hopes, should be endangered in the outset by so mean a want; that Dombey and Son should be tottering for a nurse, was a sore humiliation. And yet in his pride and jealousy, he viewed with so much bitterness the thought of being dependent for the very first step towards the accomplishment of his soul's desire, on a hired serving-woman who would be to the child, for the time, all that even his alliance could have made his own wife, that in every new rejection of a candidate he felt a secret pleasure. The time had now come, however, when he could no longer be divided between these two sets of feelings. The less so, as there seemed to be no flaw in the title of Polly Toodle after his sister had set it forth, with many commendations on the indefatigable friendship of Miss Tox.

'These children look healthy,' said Mr Dombey. 'But my God, to think of their some day claiming a sort of relationship to Paul!'

'But what relationship is there!' Louisa began—

'Is there!' echoed Mr Dombey, who had not intended his sister to participate in the thought he had unconsciously expressed. 'Is there, did you say, Louisa!'

'Can there be, I mean—'

'Why none,' said Mr Dombey, sternly. 'The whole world knows that, I presume. Grief has not made me idiotic, Louisa. Take them away, Louisa! Let me see this woman and her husband.'

Mrs Chick bore off the tender pair of Toodles, and presently returned with that tougher couple whose presence her brother had commanded.

'My good woman,' said Mr Dombey, turning round in his easy chair, as one piece, and not as a man with limbs and joints, 'I understand you are poor, and wish to earn money by nursing the little boy, my son, who has been so prematurely deprived of what can never be replaced. I have no objection to your adding to the comforts of your family by that means. So far as I can tell, you seem to be a deserving object. But I must impose one or two conditions on you, before you enter my house in that capacity. While you are here, I must stipulate that you are always known as—say as Richards—an ordinary name, and convenient. Have you any objection to be known as Richards? You had better consult your husband.'

'Well?' said Mr Dombey, after a pretty long pause. 'What does your husband say to your being called Richards?'

As the husband did nothing but chuckle and grin, and continually draw his right hand across his mouth, moistening the palm, Mrs Toodle, after nudging him twice or thrice in vain, dropped a curtsey and replied 'that perhaps if she was to be called out of her name, it would be considered in the wages.'

'Oh, of course,' said Mr Dombey. 'I desire to make it a question of wages, altogether. Now, Richards, if you nurse my bereaved child, I wish you to remember this always. You will receive a liberal stipend in return for the discharge of certain duties, in the performance of which, I wish you to see as little of your family as possible. When those duties cease to be required and rendered, and the stipend ceases to be paid, there is an end of all relations between us. Do you understand me?'

Mrs Toodle seemed doubtful about it; and as to Toodle himself, he had evidently no doubt whatever, that he was all abroad.

'You have children of your own,' said Mr Dombey. 'It is not at all in this bargain that you need become attached to my child, or that my child need become attached to you. I don't expect or desire anything of the kind. Quite the reverse. When you go away from here, you will have concluded what is a mere matter of bargain and sale, hiring and letting: and will stay away. The child will cease to remember you; and you will cease, if you please, to remember the child.'

Mrs Toodle, with a little more colour in her cheeks than she had had before, said 'she hoped she knew her place.'

'I hope you do, Richards,' said Mr Dombey. 'I have no doubt you know it very well. Indeed it is so plain and obvious that it could hardly be otherwise. Louisa, my dear, arrange with Richards about money, and let her have it when and how she pleases. Mr what's-your name, a word with you, if you please!'

Thus arrested on the threshold as he was following his wife out of the room, Toodle returned and confronted Mr Dombey alone. He was a strong, loose, round-shouldered, shuffling, shaggy fellow, on whom his clothes sat negligently: with a good deal of hair and whisker, deepened in its natural tint, perhaps by smoke and coal-dust: hard knotty hands: and a square forehead, as coarse in grain as the bark of an oak. A thorough contrast in all respects, to Mr Dombey, who was one of those close-shaved close-cut moneyed gentlemen who are glossy and crisp like new bank-notes, and who seem to be artificially braced and tightened as by the stimulating action of golden showerbaths.

'You have a son, I believe?' said Mr Dombey.

'Four on 'em, Sir. Four hims and a her. All alive!'

'Why, it's as much as you can afford to keep them!' said Mr Dombey.

'I couldn't hardly afford but one thing in the world less, Sir.'

'What is that?'

'To lose 'em, Sir.'

'Can you read?' asked Mr Dombey.

'Why, not partick'ler, Sir.'

'Write?'

'With chalk, Sir?'

'With anything?'

'I could make shift to chalk a little bit, I think, if I was put to it,' said Toodle after some reflection.

'And yet,' said Mr Dombey, 'you are two or three and thirty, I suppose?'

'Thereabouts, I suppose, Sir,' answered Toodle, after more reflection

'Then why don't you learn?' asked Mr Dombey.

'So I'm a going to, Sir. One of my little boys is a going to learn me, when he's old enough, and been to school himself.'

'Well,' said Mr Dombey, after looking at him attentively, and with no great favour, as he stood gazing round the room (principally round the ceiling) and still drawing his hand across and across his mouth. 'You heard what I said to your wife just now?'

'Polly heerd it,' said Toodle, jerking his hat over his shoulder in the direction of the door, with an air of perfect confidence in his better half. 'It's all right.'

'But I ask you if you heard it. You did, I suppose, and understood it?' pursued Mr Dombey.

'I heerd it,' said Toodle, 'but I don't know as I understood it rightly Sir, 'account of being no scholar, and the words being—ask your pardon—rayther high. But Polly heerd it. It's all right.'

'As you appear to leave everything to her,' said Mr Dombey, frustrated in his intention of impressing his views still more distinctly on the husband, as the stronger character, 'I suppose it is of no use my saying anything to you.'

'Not a bit,' said Toodle. 'Polly heerd it. She's awake, Sir.'

'I won't detain you any longer then,' returned Mr Dombey, disappointed. 'Where have you worked all your life?'

'Mostly underground, Sir, 'till I got married. I come to the level then. I'm a going on one of these here railroads when they comes into full play.'

As he added in one of his hoarse whispers, 'We means to bring up little Biler to that line,' Mr Dombey inquired haughtily who little Biler was.

'The eldest on 'em, Sir,' said Toodle, with a smile. 'It ain't a common name. Sermuchser that when he was took to church the gen'lm'n said, it wam't a chris'en one, and he couldn't give it. But we always calls him Biler just the same. For we don't mean no harm. Not we.

'Do you mean to say, Man,' inquired Mr Dombey; looking at him with marked displeasure, 'that you have called a child after a boiler?'

'No, no, Sir,' returned Toodle, with a tender consideration for his mistake. 'I should hope not! No, Sir. Arter a BILER Sir. The Steamingine was a'most as good as a godfather to him, and so we called him Biler, don't you see!'

As the last straw breaks the laden camel's back, this piece of information crushed the sinking spirits of Mr Dombey. He motioned his child's foster- father to the door, who departed by no means unwillingly: and then turning the key, paced up and down the room in solitary wretchedness.

It would be harsh, and perhaps not altogether true, to say of him that he felt these rubs and gratings against his pride more keenly than he had felt his wife's death: but certainly they impressed that event upon him with new force, and communicated to it added weight and bitterness. It was a rude shock to his sense of property in his child, that these people—the mere dust of the earth, as he thought them—should be necessary to him; and it was natural that in proportion as he felt disturbed by it, he should deplore the occurrence which had made them so. For all his starched, impenetrable dignity and composure, he wiped blinding tears from his eyes as he paced up and down his room; and often said, with an emotion of which he would not, for the world, have had a witness, 'Poor little fellow!'

It may have been characteristic of Mr Dombey's pride, that he pitied himself through the child. Not poor me. Not poor widower, confiding by constraint in the wife of an ignorant Hind who has been working 'mostly underground' all his life, and yet at whose door Death had never knocked, and at whose poor table four sons daily sit—but poor little fellow!

Those words being on his lips, it occurred to him—and it is an instance of the strong attraction with which his hopes and fears and all his thoughts were tending to one centre—that a great temptation was being placed in this woman's way. Her infant was a boy too. Now, would it be possible for her to change them?

Though he was soon satisfied that he had dismissed the idea as romantic and unlikely—though possible, there was no denying—he could not help pursuing it so far as to entertain within himself a picture of what his condition would be, if he should discover such an imposture when he was grown old. Whether a man so situated would be able to pluck away the result of so many years of usage, confidence, and belief, from the impostor, and endow a stranger with it?

But it was idle speculating thus. It couldn't happen. In a moment afterwards he determined that it could, but that such women were constantly observed, and had no opportunity given them for the accomplishment of such a design, even when they were so wicked as to entertain it. In another moment, he was remembering how few such cases seemed to have ever happened. In another moment he was wondering whether they ever happened and were not found out.

As his unusual emotion subsided, these misgivings gradually melted away, though so much of their shadow remained behind, that he was constant in his resolution to look closely after Richards himself, without appearing to do so. Being now in an easier frame of mind, he regarded the woman's station as rather an advantageous circumstance than otherwise, by placing, in itself, a broad distance between her and the child, and rendering their separation easy and natural. Thence he passed to the contemplation of the future glories of Dombey and Son, and dismissed the memory of his wife, for the time being, with a tributary sigh or two.

Meanwhile terms were ratified and agreed upon between Mrs Chick and Richards, with the assistance of Miss Tox; and Richards being with much ceremony invested with the Dombey baby, as if it were an Order, resigned her own, with many tears and kisses, to Jemima. Glasses of wine were then produced, to sustain the drooping spirits of the family; and Miss Tox, busying herself in dispensing 'tastes' to the younger branches, bred them up to their father's business with such surprising expedition, that she made chokers of four of them in a quarter of a minute.

'You'll take a glass yourself, Sir, won't you?' said Miss Tox, as Toodle appeared.

'Thankee, Mum,' said Toodle, 'since you are suppressing.'

'And you're very glad to leave your dear good wife in such a comfortable home, ain't you, Sir?'said Miss Tox, nodding and winking at him stealthily.

'No, Mum,' said Toodle. 'Here's wishing of her back agin.'

Polly cried more than ever at this. So Mrs Chick, who had her matronly apprehensions that this indulgence in grief might be prejudicial to the little Dombey ('acid, indeed,' she whispered Miss Tox), hastened to the rescue.

'Your little child will thrive charmingly with your sister Jemima, Richards,' said Mrs Chick; 'and you have only to make an effort—this is a world of effort, you know, Richards—to be very happy indeed. You have been already measured for your mourning, haven't you, Richards?'

'Ye—es, Ma'am,' sobbed Polly.

'And it'll fit beautifully. I know,' said Mrs Chick, 'for the same young person has made me many dresses. The very best materials, too!'

'Lor, you'll be so smart,' said Miss Tox, 'that your husband won't know you; will you, Sir?'

'I should know her,' said Toodle, gruffly, 'anyhows and anywheres.'

Toodle was evidently not to be bought over.

'As to living, Richards, you know,' pursued Mrs Chick, 'why, the very best of everything will be at your disposal. You will order your little dinner every day; and anything you take a fancy to, I'm sure will be as readily provided as if you were a Lady.'

'Yes to be sure!' said Miss Tox, keeping up the ball with great sympathy. 'And as to porter!—quite unlimited, will it not, Louisa?'

'Oh, certainly!' returned Mrs Chick in the same tone. 'With a little abstinence, you know, my dear, in point of vegetables.'

'And pickles, perhaps,' suggested Miss Tox.

'With such exceptions,' said Louisa, 'she'll consult her choice entirely, and be under no restraint at all, my love.'

'And then, of course, you know,' said Miss Tox, 'however fond she is of her own dear little child—and I'm sure, Louisa, you don't blame her for being fond of it?'

'Oh no!' cried Mrs Chick, benignantly.

'Still,' resumed Miss Tox, 'she naturally must be interested in her young charge, and must consider it a privilege to see a little cherub connected with the superior classes, gradually unfolding itself from day to day at one common fountain—is it not so, Louisa?'

'Most undoubtedly!' said Mrs Chick. 'You see, my love, she's already quite contented and comfortable, and means to say goodbye to her sister Jemima and her little pets, and her good honest husband, with a light heart and a smile; don't she, my dear?'

'Oh yes!' cried Miss Tox. 'To be sure she does!'

Notwithstanding which, however, poor Polly embraced them all round in great distress, and coming to her spouse at last, could not make up her mind to part from him, until he gently disengaged himself, at the close of the following allegorical piece of consolation:

'Polly, old 'ooman, whatever you do, my darling, hold up your head and fight low. That's the only rule as I know on, that'll carry anyone through life. You always have held up your head and fought low, Polly. Do it now, or Bricks is no longer so. God bless you, Polly! Me and J'mima will do your duty by you; and with relating to your'n, hold up your head and fight low, Polly, and you can't go wrong!'

Fortified by this golden secret, Folly finally ran away to avoid any more particular leave-taking between herself and the children. But the stratagem hardly succeeded as well as it deserved; for the smallest boy but one divining her intent, immediately began swarming upstairs after her—if that word of doubtful etymology be admissible—on his arms and legs; while the eldest (known in the family by the name of Biler, in remembrance of the steam engine) beat a demoniacal tattoo with his boots, expressive of grief; in which he was joined by the rest of the family.

A quantity of oranges and halfpence thrust indiscriminately on each young Toodle, checked the first violence of their regret, and the family were speedily transported to their own home, by means of the hackney-coach kept in waiting for that purpose. The children, under the guardianship of Jemima, blocked up the window, and dropped out oranges and halfpence all the way along. Mr Toodle himself preferred to ride behind among the spikes, as being the mode of conveyance to which he was best accustomed.

CHAPTER 3. In which Mr Dombey, as a Man and a Father, is seen at the Head of the Home-Department

The funeral of the deceased lady having been 'performed to the entire satisfaction of the undertaker, as well as of the neighbourhood at large, which is generally disposed to be captious on such a point, and is prone to take offence at any omissions or short-comings in the ceremonies, the various members of Mr Dombey's household subsided into their several places in the domestic system. That small world, like the great one out of doors, had the capacity of easily forgetting its dead; and when the cook had said she was a quiet-tempered lady, and the house-keeper had said it was the common lot, and the butler had said who'd have thought it, and the housemaid had said she couldn't hardly believe it, and the footman had said it seemed exactly like a dream, they had quite worn the subject out, and began to think their mourning was wearing rusty too.

On Richards, who was established upstairs in a state of honourable captivity, the dawn of her new life seemed to break cold and grey. Mr Dombey's house was a large one, on the shady side of a tall, dark, dreadfully genteel street in the region between Portland Place and Bryanstone Square.' It was a corner house, with great wide areas containing cellars frowned upon by barred windows, and leered at by crooked-eyed doors leading to dustbins. It was a house of dismal state, with a circular back to it, containing a whole suite of drawing-rooms looking upon a gravelled yard, where two gaunt trees, with blackened trunks and branches, rattled rather than rustled, their leaves were so smoked-dried. The summer sun was never on the street, but in the morning about breakfast-time, when it came with the water-carts and the old clothes men, and the people with geraniums, and the umbrella- mender, and the man who trilled the little bell of the Dutch clock as he went along. It was soon gone again to return no more that day; and the bands of music and the straggling Punch's shows going after it, left it a prey to the most dismal of organs, and white mice; with now and then a porcupine, to vary the entertainments; until the butlers whose families were dining out, began to stand at the house-doors in the twilight, and the lamp-lighter made his nightly failure in attempting to brighten up the street with gas.

It was as blank a house inside as outside. When the funeral was over, Mr Dombey ordered the furniture to be covered up—perhaps to preserve it for the son with whom his plans were all associated—and the rooms to be ungarnished, saving such as he retained for himself on the ground floor. Accordingly, mysterious shapes were made of tables and chairs, heaped together in the middle of rooms, and covered over with great winding-sheets. Bell-handles, window-blinds, and looking-glasses, being papered up in journals, daily and weekly, obtruded fragmentary accounts of deaths and dreadful murders. Every chandelier or lustre, muffled in holland, looked like a monstrous tear depending from the ceiling's eye. Odours, as from vaults and damp places, came out of the chimneys. The dead and buried lady was awful in a picture-frame of ghastly bandages. Every gust of wind that rose, brought eddying round the corner from the neighbouring mews, some fragments of the straw that had been strewn before the house when she was ill, mildewed remains of which were still cleaving to the neighbourhood: and these, being always drawn by some invisible attraction to the threshold of the dirty house to let immediately opposite, addressed a dismal eloquence to Mr Dombey's windows.

The apartments which Mr Dombey reserved for his own inhabiting, were attainable from the hall, and consisted of a sitting-room; a library, which was in fact a dressing-room, so that the smell of hot-pressed paper, vellum, morocco, and Russia leather, contended in it with the smell of divers pairs of boots; and a kind of conservatory or little glass breakfast-room beyond, commanding a prospect of the trees before mentioned, and, generally speaking, of a few prowling cats. These three rooms opened upon one another. In the morning, when Mr Dombey was at his breakfast in one or other of the two first-mentioned of them, as well as in the afternoon when he came home to dinner, a bell was rung for Richards to repair to this glass chamber, and there walk to and fro with her young charge. From the glimpses she caught of Mr Dombey at these times, sitting in the dark distance, looking out towards the infant from among the dark heavy furniture—the house had been inhabited for years by his father, and in many of its appointments was old-fashioned and grim—she began to entertain ideas of him in his solitary state, as if he were a lone prisoner in a cell, or a strange apparition that was not to be accosted or understood. Mr Dombey came to be, in the course of a few days, invested in his own person, to her simple thinking, with all the mystery and gloom of his house. As she walked up and down the glass room, or sat hushing the baby there—which she very often did for hours together, when the dusk was closing in, too—she would sometimes try to pierce the gloom beyond, and make out how he was looking and what he was doing. Sensible that she was plainly to be seen by him' however, she never dared to pry in that direction but very furtively and for a moment at a time. Consequently she made out nothing, and Mr Dombey in his den remained a very shade.

Little Paul Dombey's foster-mother had led this life herself, and had carried little Paul through it for some weeks; and had returned upstairs one day from a melancholy saunter through the dreary rooms of state (she never went out without Mrs Chick, who called on fine mornings, usually accompanied by Miss Tox, to take her and Baby for an airing—or in other words, to march them gravely up and down the pavement, like a walking funeral); when, as she was sitting in her own room, the door was slowly and quietly opened, and a dark-eyed little girl looked in.

'It's Miss Florence come home from her aunt's, no doubt,' thought Richards, who had never seen the child before. 'Hope I see you well, Miss.'

'Is that my brother?' asked the child, pointing to the Baby.

'Yes, my pretty,' answered Richards. 'Come and kiss him.'

But the child, instead of advancing, looked her earnestly in the face, and said:

'What have you done with my Mama?'

'Lord bless the little creeter!' cried Richards, 'what a sad question! I done? Nothing, Miss.'

'What have they done with my Mama?' inquired the child, with exactly the same look and manner.

'I never saw such a melting thing in all my life!' said Richards, who naturally substituted 'for this child one of her own, inquiring for herself in like circumstances. 'Come nearer here, my dear Miss! Don't be afraid of me.'

'I am not afraid of you,' said the child, drawing nearer. 'But I want to know what they have done with my Mama.'

Her heart swelled so as she stood before the woman, looking into her eyes, that she was fain to press her little hand upon her breast and hold it there. Yet there was a purpose in the child that prevented both her slender figure and her searching gaze from faltering.

'My darling,' said Richards, 'you wear that pretty black frock in remembrance of your Mama.'

'I can remember my Mama,' returned the child, with tears springing to her eyes, 'in any frock.'

'But people put on black, to remember people when they're gone.'

'Where gone?' asked the child.

'Come and sit down by me,' said Richards, 'and I'll tell you a story.'

With a quick perception that it was intended to relate to what she had asked, little Florence laid aside the bonnet she had held in her hand until now, and sat down on a stool at the Nurse's feet, looking up into her face.

'Once upon a time,' said Richards, 'there was a lady—a very good lady, and her little daughter dearly loved her.'

'A very good lady and her little daughter dearly loved her,' repeated the child.

'Who, when God thought it right that it should be so, was taken ill and died.'

The child shuddered.

'Died, never to be seen again by anyone on earth, and was buried in the ground where the trees grow.

'The cold ground?' said the child, shuddering again. 'No! The warm ground,' returned Polly, seizing her advantage, 'where the ugly little seeds turn into beautiful flowers, and into grass, and corn, and I don't know what all besides. Where good people turn into bright angels, and fly away to Heaven!'

The child, who had dropped her head, raised it again, and sat looking at her intently.

'So; let me see,' said Polly, not a little flurried between this earnest scrutiny, her desire to comfort the child, her sudden success, and her very slight confidence in her own powers.' So, when this lady died, wherever they took her, or wherever they put her, she went to GOD! and she prayed to Him, this lady did,' said Polly, affecting herself beyond measure; being heartily in earnest, 'to teach her little daughter to be sure of that in her heart: and to know that she was happy there and loved her still: and to hope and try—Oh, all her life—to meet her there one day, never, never, never to part any more.'

'It was my Mama!' exclaimed the child, springing up, and clasping her round the neck.

'And the child's heart,' said Polly, drawing her to her breast: 'the little daughter's heart was so full of the truth of this, that even when she heard it from a strange nurse that couldn't tell it right, but was a poor mother herself and that was all, she found a comfort in it—didn't feel so lonely—sobbed and cried upon her bosom—took kindly to the baby lying in her lap—and—there, there, there!' said Polly, smoothing the child's curls and dropping tears upon them. 'There, poor dear!'

'Oh well, Miss Floy! And won't your Pa be angry neither!' cried a quick voice at the door, proceeding from a short, brown, womanly girl of fourteen, with a little snub nose, and black eyes like jet beads. 'When it was 'tickerlerly given out that you wasn't to go and worrit the wet nurse.

'She don't worry me,' was the surprised rejoinder of Polly. 'I am very fond of children.'

'Oh! but begging your pardon, Mrs Richards, that don't matter, you know,' returned the black-eyed girl, who was so desperately sharp and biting that she seemed to make one's eyes water. 'I may be very fond of pennywinkles, Mrs Richards, but it don't follow that I'm to have 'em for tea. 'Well, it don't matter,' said Polly. 'Oh, thank'ee, Mrs Richards, don't it!' returned the sharp girl. 'Remembering, however, if you'll be so good, that Miss Floy's under my charge, and Master Paul's under your'n.'

'But still we needn't quarrel,' said Polly.

'Oh no, Mrs Richards,' rejoined Spitfire. 'Not at all, I don't wish it, we needn't stand upon that footing, Miss Floy being a permanency, Master Paul a temporary.' Spitfire made use of none but comma pauses; shooting out whatever she had to say in one sentence, and in one breath, if possible.

'Miss Florence has just come home, hasn't she?' asked Polly.

'Yes, Mrs Richards, just come, and here, Miss Floy, before you've been in the house a quarter of an hour, you go a smearing your wet face against the expensive mourning that Mrs Richards is a wearing for your Ma!' With this remonstrance, young Spitfire, whose real name was Susan Nipper, detached the child from her new friend by a wrench—as if she were a tooth. But she seemed to do it, more in the excessively sharp exercise of her official functions, than with any deliberate unkindness.

'She'll be quite happy, now she has come home again,' said Polly, nodding to her with an encouraging smile upon her wholesome face, 'and will be so pleased to see her dear Papa to-night.'

'Lork, Mrs Richards!' cried Miss Nipper, taking up her words with a jerk. 'Don't. See her dear Papa indeed! I should like to see her do it!'

'Won't she then?' asked Polly.

'Lork, Mrs Richards, no, her Pa's a deal too wrapped up in somebody else, and before there was a somebody else to be wrapped up in she never was a favourite, girls are thrown away in this house, Mrs Richards, I assure you.

The child looked quickly from one nurse to the other, as if she understood and felt what was said.

'You surprise me!' cried Folly. 'Hasn't Mr Dombey seen her since—'

'No,' interrupted Susan Nipper. 'Not once since, and he hadn't hardly set his eyes upon her before that for months and months, and I don't think he'd have known her for his own child if he had met her in the streets, or would know her for his own child if he was to meet her in the streets to-morrow, Mrs Richards, as to me,' said Spitfire, with a giggle, 'I doubt if he's aweer of my existence.'

'Pretty dear!' said Richards; meaning, not Miss Nipper, but the little Florence.

'Oh! there's a Tartar within a hundred miles of where we're now in conversation, I can tell you, Mrs Richards, present company always excepted too,' said Susan Nipper; 'wish you good morning, Mrs Richards, now Miss Floy, you come along with me, and don't go hanging back like a naughty wicked child that judgments is no example to, don't!'

In spite of being thus adjured, and in spite also of some hauling on the part of Susan Nipper, tending towards the dislocation of her right shoulder, little Florence broke away, and kissed her new friend, affectionately.

'Oh dear! after it was given out so 'tickerlerly, that Mrs Richards wasn't to be made free with!' exclaimed Susan. 'Very well, Miss Floy!'

'God bless the sweet thing!' said Richards, 'Good-bye, dear!'

'Good-bye!' returned the child. 'God bless you! I shall come to see you again soon, and you'll come to see me? Susan will let us. Won't you, Susan?'

Spitfire seemed to be in the main a good-natured little body, although a disciple of that school of trainers of the young idea which holds that childhood, like money, must be shaken and rattled and jostled about a good deal to keep it bright. For, being thus appealed to with some endearing gestures and caresses, she folded her small arms and shook her head, and conveyed a relenting expression into her very-wide-open black eyes.

'It ain't right of you to ask it, Miss Floy, for you know I can't refuse you, but Mrs Richards and me will see what can be done, if Mrs Richards likes, I may wish, you see, to take a voyage to Chaney, Mrs Richards, but I mayn't know how to leave the London Docks.'

Richards assented to the proposition.

'This house ain't so exactly ringing with merry-making,' said Miss Nipper, 'that one need be lonelier than one must be. Your Toxes and your Chickses may draw out my two front double teeth, Mrs Richards, but that's no reason why I need offer 'em the whole set.'

This proposition was also assented to by Richards, as an obvious one.

'So I'm able, I'm sure,'said Susan Nipper, 'to live friendly, Mrs Richards, while Master Paul continues a permanency, if the means can be planned out without going openly against orders, but goodness gracious Miss Floy, you haven't got your things off yet, you naughty child, you haven't, come along!'

With these words, Susan Nipper, in a transport of coercion, made a charge at her young ward, and swept her out of the room.

The child, in her grief and neglect, was so gentle, so quiet, and uncomplaining; was possessed of so much affection that no one seemed to care to have, and so much sorrowful intelligence that no one seemed to mind or think about the wounding of, that Polly's heart was sore when she was left alone again. In the simple passage that had taken place between herself and the motherless little girl, her own motherly heart had been touched no less than the child's; and she felt, as the child did, that there was something of confidence and interest between them from that moment.

Notwithstanding Mr Toodle's great reliance on Polly, she was perhaps in point of artificial accomplishments very little his superior. She had been good-humouredly working and drudging for her life all her life, and was a sober steady-going person, with matter-of-fact ideas about the butcher and baker, and the division of pence into farthings. But she was a good plain sample of a nature that is ever, in the mass, better, truer, higher, nobler, quicker to feel, and much more constant to retain, all tenderness and pity, self-denial and devotion, than the nature of men. And, perhaps, unlearned as she was, she could have brought a dawning knowledge home to Mr Dombey at that early day, which would not then have struck him in the end like lightning.

But this is from the purpose. Polly only thought, at that time, of improving on her successful propitiation of Miss Nipper, and devising some means of having little Florence aide her, lawfully, and without rebellion. An opening happened to present itself that very night.

She had been rung down into the glass room as usual, and had walked about and about it a long time, with the baby in her arms, when, to her great surprise and dismay, Mr Dombey—whom she had seen at first leaning on his elbow at the table, and afterwards walking up and down the middle room, drawing, each time, a little nearer, she thought, to the open folding doors—came out, suddenly, and stopped before her.

'Good evening, Richards.'

Just the same austere, stiff gentleman, as he had appeared to her on that first day. Such a hard-looking gentleman, that she involuntarily dropped her eyes and her curtsey at the same time.

'How is Master Paul, Richards?'

'Quite thriving, Sir, and well.'

'He looks so,' said Mr Dombey, glancing with great interest at the tiny face she uncovered for his observation, and yet affecting to be half careless of it. 'They give you everything you want, I hope?'

'Oh yes, thank you, Sir.'

She suddenly appended such an obvious hesitation to this reply, however, that Mr Dombey, who had turned away; stopped, and turned round again, inquiringly.

'If you please, Sir, the child is very much disposed to take notice of things,' said Richards, with another curtsey, 'and—upstairs is a little dull for him, perhaps, Sir.'

'I begged them to take you out for airings, constantly,' said Mr Dombey. 'Very well! You shall go out oftener. You're quite right to mention it.'

'I beg your pardon, Sir,' faltered Polly, 'but we go out quite plenty Sir, thank you.'

'What would you have then?' asked Mr Dombey.

'Indeed Sir, I don't exactly know,' said Polly, 'unless—'

'Yes?'

'I believe nothing is so good for making children lively and cheerful, Sir, as seeing other children playing about 'em,' observed Polly, taking courage.

'I think I mentioned to you, Richards, when you came here,' said Mr Dombey, with a frown, 'that I wished you to see as little of your family as possible.'

'Oh dear yes, Sir, I wasn't so much as thinking of that.'

'I am glad of it,' said Mr Dombey hastily. 'You can continue your walk if you please.'

With that, he disappeared into his inner room; and Polly had the satisfaction of feeling that he had thoroughly misunderstood her object, and that she had fallen into disgrace without the least advancement of her purpose.

Next night, she found him walking about the conservatory when she came down. As she stopped at the door, checked by this unusual sight, and uncertain whether to advance or retreat, he called her in. His mind was too much set on Dombey and Son, it soon appeared, to admit of his having forgotten her suggestion.

'If you really think that sort of society is good for the child,' he said sharply, as if there had been no interval since she proposed it, 'where's Miss Florence?'

'Nothing could be better than Miss Florence, Sir,' said Polly eagerly, 'but I understood from her maid that they were not to—'

Mr Dombey rang the bell, and walked till it was answered.

'Tell them always to let Miss Florence be with Richards when she chooses, and go out with her, and so forth. Tell them to let the children be together, when Richards wishes it.'

The iron was now hot, and Richards striking on it boldly—it was a good cause and she bold in it, though instinctively afraid of Mr Dombey—requested that Miss Florence might be sent down then and there, to make friends with her little brother.

She feigned to be dandling the child as the servant retired on this errand, but she thought that she saw Mr Dombey's colour changed; that the expression of his face quite altered; that he turned, hurriedly, as if to gainsay what he had said, or she had said, or both, and was only deterred by very shame.

And she was right. The last time he had seen his slighted child, there had been that in the sad embrace between her and her dying mother, which was at once a revelation and a reproach to him. Let him be absorbed as he would in the Son on whom he built such high hopes, he could not forget that closing scene. He could not forget that he had had no part in it. That, at the bottom of its clear depths of tenderness and truth' lay those two figures clasped in each other's arms, while he stood on the bank above them, looking down a mere spectator—not a sharer with them—quite shut out.

Unable to exclude these things from his remembrance, or to keep his mind free from such imperfect shapes of the meaning with which they were fraught, as were able to make themselves visible to him through the mist of his pride, his previous feeling of indifference towards little Florence changed into an uneasiness of an extraordinary kind. Young as she was, and possessing in any eyes but his (and perhaps in his too) even more than the usual amount of childish simplicity and confidence, he almost felt as if she watched and distrusted him. As if she held the clue to something secret in his breast, of the nature of which he was hardly informed himself. As if she had an innate knowledge of one jarring and discordant string within him, and her very breath could sound it.

His feeling about the child had been negative from her birth. He had never conceived an aversion to her: it had not been worth his while or in his humour. She had never been a positively disagreeable object to him. But now he was ill at ease about her. She troubled his peace. He would have preferred to put her idea aside altogether, if he had known how. Perhaps—who shall decide on such mysteries!—he was afraid that he might come to hate her.

When little Florence timidly presented herself, Mr Dombey stopped in his pacing up and down and looked towards her. Had he looked with greater interest and with a father's eye, he might have read in her keen glance the impulses and fears that made her waver; the passionate desire to run clinging to him, crying, as she hid her face in his embrace, 'Oh father, try to love me! there's no one else!' the dread of a repulse; the fear of being too bold, and of offending him; the pitiable need in which she stood of some assurance and encouragement; and how her overcharged young heart was wandering to find some natural resting-place, for its sorrow and affection.

But he saw nothing of this. He saw her pause irresolutely at the door and look towards him; and he saw no more.

'Come in,' he said, 'come in: what is the child afraid of?'

She came in; and after glancing round her for a moment with an uncertain air, stood pressing her small hands hard together, close within the door.

'Come here, Florence,' said her father, coldly. 'Do you know who I am?'

'Yes, Papa.'

'Have you nothing to say to me?'

The tears that stood in her eyes as she raised them quickly to his face, were frozen by the expression it wore. She looked down again, and put out her trembling hand.

Mr Dombey took it loosely in his own, and stood looking down upon her for a moment, as if he knew as little as the child, what to say or do.

'There! Be a good girl,' he said, patting her on the head, and regarding her as it were by stealth with a disturbed and doubtful look. 'Go to Richards! Go!'

His little daughter hesitated for another instant as though she would have clung about him still, or had some lingering hope that he might raise her in his arms and kiss her. She looked up in his face once more. He thought how like her expression was then, to what it had been when she looked round at the Doctor—that night—and instinctively dropped her hand and turned away.

It was not difficult to perceive that Florence was at a great disadvantage in her father's presence. It was not only a constraint upon the child's mind, but even upon the natural grace and freedom of her actions. As she sported and played about her baby brother that night, her manner was seldom so winning and so pretty as it naturally was, and sometimes when in his pacing to and fro, he came near her (she had, perhaps, for the moment, forgotten him) it changed upon the instant and became forced and embarrassed.

Still, Polly persevered with all the better heart for seeing this; and, judging of Mr Dombey by herself, had great confidence in the mute appeal of poor little Florence's mourning dress.' It's hard indeed,' thought Polly, 'if he takes only to one little motherless child, when he has another, and that a girl, before his eyes.'

So, Polly kept her before his eyes, as long as she could, and managed so well with little Paul, as to make it very plain that he was all the livelier for his sister's company. When it was time to withdraw upstairs again, she would have sent Florence into the inner room to say good-night to her father, but the child was timid and drew back; and when she urged her again, said, spreading her hands before her eyes, as if to shut out her own unworthiness, 'Oh no, no! He don't want me. He don't want me!'

The little altercation between them had attracted the notice of Mr Dombey, who inquired from the table where he was sitting at his wine, what the matter was.

'Miss Florence was afraid of interrupting, Sir, if she came in to say good-night,' said Richards.

'It doesn't matter,' returned Mr Dombey. 'You can let her come and go without regarding me.'

The child shrunk as she listened—and was gone, before her humble friend looked round again.

However, Polly triumphed not a little in the success of her well-intentioned scheme, and in the address with which she had brought it to bear: whereof she made a full disclosure to Spitfire when she was once more safely entrenched upstairs. Miss Nipper received that proof of her confidence, as well as the prospect of their free association for the future, rather coldly, and was anything but enthusiastic in her demonstrations of joy.

'I thought you would have been pleased,' said Polly.

'Oh yes, Mrs Richards, I'm very well pleased, thank you,' returned Susan, who had suddenly become so very upright that she seemed to have put an additional bone in her stays.

'You don't show it,' said Polly.

'Oh! Being only a permanency I couldn't be expected to show it like a temporary,' said Susan Nipper. 'Temporaries carries it all before 'em here, I find, but though there's a excellent party-wall between this house and the next, I mayn't exactly like to go to it, Mrs Richards, notwithstanding!'

CHAPTER 4. In which some more First Appearances are made on the Stage of these Adventures

Though the offices of Dombey and Son were within the liberties of the City of London, and within hearing of Bow Bells, when their clashing voices were not drowned by the uproar in the streets, yet were there hints of adventurous and romantic story to be observed in some of the adjacent objects. Gog and Magog held their state within ten minutes' walk; the Royal Exchange was close at hand; the Bank of England, with its vaults of gold and silver 'down among the dead men' underground, was their magnificent neighbour. Just round the corner stood the rich East India House, teeming with suggestions of precious stuffs and stones, tigers, elephants, howdahs, hookahs, umbrellas, palm trees, palanquins, and gorgeous princes of a brown complexion sitting on carpets, with their slippers very much turned up at the toes. Anywhere in the immediate vicinity there might be seen pictures of ships speeding away full sail to all parts of the world; outfitting warehouses ready to pack off anybody anywhere, fully equipped in half an hour; and little timber midshipmen in obsolete naval uniforms, eternally employed outside the shop doors of nautical Instrument-makers in taking observations of the hackney carriages.

Sole master and proprietor of one of these effigies—of that which might be called, familiarly, the woodenest—of that which thrust itself out above the pavement, right leg foremost, with a suavity the least endurable, and had the shoe buckles and flapped waistcoat the least reconcileable to human reason, and bore at its right eye the most offensively disproportionate piece of machinery—sole master and proprietor of that Midshipman, and proud of him too, an elderly gentleman in a Welsh wig had paid house-rent, taxes, rates, and dues, for more years than many a full-grown midshipman of flesh and blood has numbered in his life; and midshipmen who have attained a pretty green old age, have not been wanting in the English Navy.

The stock-in-trade of this old gentleman comprised chronometers, barometers, telescopes, compasses, charts, maps, sextants, quadrants, and specimens of every kind of instrument used in the working of a ship's course, or the keeping of a ship's reckoning, or the prosecuting of a ship's discoveries. Objects in brass and glass were in his drawers and on his shelves, which none but the initiated could have found the top of, or guessed the use of, or having once examined, could have ever got back again into their mahogany nests without assistance. Everything was jammed into the tightest cases, fitted into the narrowest corners, fenced up behind the most impertinent cushions, and screwed into the acutest angles, to prevent its philosophical composure from being disturbed by the rolling of the sea. Such extraordinary precautions were taken in every instance to save room, and keep the thing compact; and so much practical navigation was fitted, and cushioned, and screwed into every box (whether the box was a mere slab, as some were, or something between a cocked hat and a star-fish, as others were, and those quite mild and modest boxes as compared with others); that the shop itself, partaking of the general infection, seemed almost to become a snug, sea-going, ship-shape concern, wanting only good sea-room, in the event of an unexpected launch, to work its way securely to any desert island in the world.

Many minor incidents in the household life of the Ships'

Instrument-maker who was proud of his little Midshipman, assisted and bore out this fancy. His acquaintance lying chiefly among ship-chandlers and so forth, he had always plenty of the veritable ships' biscuit on his table. It was familiar with dried meats and tongues, possessing an extraordinary flavour of rope yarn. Pickles were produced upon it, in great wholesale jars, with 'dealer in all kinds of Ships' Provisions' on the label; spirits were set forth in case bottles with no throats. Old prints of ships with alphabetical references to their various mysteries, hung in frames upon the walls; the Tartar Frigate under weigh, was on the plates; outlandish shells, seaweeds, and mosses, decorated the chimney-piece; the little wainscotted back parlour was lighted by a sky-light, like a cabin.

Here he lived too, in skipper-like state, all alone with his nephew Walter: a boy of fourteen who looked quite enough like a midshipman, to carry out the prevailing idea. But there it ended, for Solomon Gills himself (more generally called old Sol) was far from having a maritime appearance. To say nothing of his Welsh wig, which was as plain and stubborn a Welsh wig as ever was worn, and in which he looked like anything but a Rover, he was a slow, quiet-spoken, thoughtful old fellow, with eyes as red as if they had been small suns looking at you through a fog; and a newly-awakened manner, such as he might have acquired by having stared for three or four days successively through every optical instrument in his shop, and suddenly came back to the world again, to find it green. The only change ever known in his outward man, was from a complete suit of coffee-colour cut very square, and ornamented with glaring buttons, to the same suit of coffee-colour minus the inexpressibles, which were then of a pale nankeen. He wore a very precise shirt-frill, and carried a pair of first-rate spectacles on his forehead, and a tremendous chronometer in his fob, rather than doubt which precious possession, he would have believed in a conspiracy against it on part of all the clocks and watches in the City, and even of the very Sun itself. Such as he was, such he had been in the shop and parlour behind the little Midshipman, for years upon years; going regularly aloft to bed every night in a howling garret remote from the lodgers, where, when gentlemen of England who lived below at ease had little or no idea of the state of the weather, it often blew great guns.

It is half-past five o'clock, and an autumn afternoon, when the reader and Solomon Gills become acquainted. Solomon Gills is in the act of seeing what time it is by the unimpeachable chronometer. The usual daily clearance has been making in the City for an hour or more; and the human tide is still rolling westward. 'The streets have thinned,' as Mr Gills says, 'very much.' It threatens to be wet to-night. All the weatherglasses in the shop are in low spirits, and the rain already shines upon the cocked hat of the wooden Midshipman.

'Where's Walter, I wonder!' said Solomon Gills, after he had carefully put up the chronometer again. 'Here's dinner been ready, half an hour, and no Walter!'

Turning round upon his stool behind the counter, Mr Gills looked out among the instruments in the window, to see if his nephew might be crossing the road. No. He was not among the bobbing umbrellas, and he certainly was not the newspaper boy in the oilskin cap who was slowly working his way along the piece of brass outside, writing his name over Mr Gills's name with his forefinger.

'If I didn't know he was too fond of me to make a run of it, and go and enter himself aboard ship against my wishes, I should begin to be fidgetty,' said Mr Gills, tapping two or three weather-glasses with his knuckles. 'I really should. All in the Downs, eh! Lots of moisture! Well! it's wanted.'

I believe,' said Mr Gills, blowing the dust off the glass top of a compass-case, 'that you don't point more direct and due to the back parlour than the boy's inclination does after all. And the parlour couldn't bear straighter either. Due north. Not the twentieth part of a point either way.'

'Halloa, Uncle Sol!'

'Halloa, my boy!' cried the Instrument-maker, turning briskly round. 'What! you are here, are you?'

A cheerful looking, merry boy, fresh with running home in the rain; fair-faced, bright-eyed, and curly-haired.

'Well, Uncle, how have you got on without me all day? Is dinner ready? I'm so hungry.'

'As to getting on,' said Solomon good-naturedly, 'it would be odd if I couldn't get on without a young dog like you a great deal better than with you. As to dinner being ready, it's been ready this half hour and waiting for you. As to being hungry, I am!'

'Come along then, Uncle!' cried the boy. 'Hurrah for the admiral!'

'Confound the admiral!' returned Solomon Gills. 'You mean the Lord Mayor.'

'No I don't!' cried the boy. 'Hurrah for the admiral! Hurrah for the admiral! For-ward!'

At this word of command, the Welsh wig and its wearer were borne without resistance into the back parlour, as at the head of a boarding party of five hundred men; and Uncle Sol and his nephew were speedily engaged on a fried sole with a prospect of steak to follow.

'The Lord Mayor, Wally,' said Solomon, 'for ever! No more admirals. The Lord Mayor's your admiral.'

'Oh, is he though!' said the boy, shaking his head. 'Why, the Sword Bearer's better than him. He draws his sword sometimes.

'And a pretty figure he cuts with it for his pains,' returned the Uncle. 'Listen to me, Wally, listen to me. Look on the mantelshelf.'

'Why who has cocked my silver mug up there, on a nail?' exclaimed the boy.

I have,' said his Uncle. 'No more mugs now. We must begin to drink out of glasses to-day, Walter. We are men of business. We belong to the City. We started in life this morning.

'Well, Uncle,' said the boy, 'I'll drink out of anything you like, so long as I can drink to you. Here's to you, Uncle Sol, and Hurrah for the—

'Lord Mayor,' interrupted the old man.

'For the Lord Mayor, Sheriffs, Common Council, and Livery,' said the boy. 'Long life to 'em!'

The uncle nodded his head with great satisfaction. 'And now,' he said, 'let's hear something about the Firm.'

'Oh! there's not much to be told about the Firm, Uncle,' said the boy, plying his knife and fork.' It's a precious dark set of offices, and in the room where I sit, there's a high fender, and an iron safe, and some cards about ships that are going to sail, and an almanack, and some desks and stools, and an inkbottle, and some books, and some boxes, and a lot of cobwebs, and in one of 'em, just over my head, a shrivelled-up blue-bottle that looks as if it had hung there ever so long.'

'Nothing else?' said the Uncle.

'No, nothing else, except an old birdcage (I wonder how that ever came there!) and a coal-scuttle.'

'No bankers' books, or cheque books, or bills, or such tokens of wealth rolling in from day to day?' said old Sol, looking wistfully at his nephew out of the fog that always seemed to hang about him, and laying an unctuous emphasis upon the words.

'Oh yes, plenty of that I suppose,' returned his nephew carelessly; 'but all that sort of thing's in Mr Carker's room, or Mr Morfin's, or MR Dombey's.'

'Has Mr Dombey been there to-day?' inquired the Uncle.

'Oh yes! In and out all day.'

'He didn't take any notice of you, I suppose?'.

'Yes he did. He walked up to my seat,—I wish he wasn't so solemn and stiff, Uncle,—and said, "Oh! you are the son of Mr Gills the Ships' Instrument- maker." "Nephew, Sir," I said. "I said nephew, boy," said he. But I could take my oath he said son, Uncle.'

'You're mistaken I daresay. It's no matter.

'No, it's no matter, but he needn't have been so sharp, I thought. There was no harm in it though he did say son. Then he told me that you had spoken to him about me, and that he had found me employment in the House accordingly, and that I was expected to be attentive and punctual, and then he went away. I thought he didn't seem to like me much.'

'You mean, I suppose,' observed the Instrument-maker, 'that you didn't seem to like him much?'

'Well, Uncle,' returned the boy, laughing. 'Perhaps so; I never thought of that.'

Solomon looked a little graver as he finished his dinner, and glanced from time to time at the boy's bright face. When dinner was done, and the cloth was cleared away (the entertainment had been brought from a neighbouring eating-house), he lighted a candle, and went down below into a little cellar, while his nephew, standing on the mouldy staircase, dutifully held the light. After a moment's groping here and there, he presently returned with a very ancient-looking bottle, covered with dust and dirt.

'Why, Uncle Sol!' said the boy, 'what are you about? that's the wonderful Madeira!—there's only one more bottle!'

Uncle Sol nodded his head, implying that he knew very well what he was about; and having drawn the cork in solemn silence, filled two glasses and set the bottle and a third clean glass on the table.

'You shall drink the other bottle, Wally,' he said, 'when you come to good fortune; when you are a thriving, respected, happy man; when the start in life you have made to-day shall have brought you, as I pray Heaven it may!—to a smooth part of the course you have to run, my child. My love to you!'

Some of the fog that hung about old Sol seemed to have got into his throat; for he spoke huskily. His hand shook too, as he clinked his glass against his nephew's. But having once got the wine to his lips, he tossed it off like a man, and smacked them afterwards.

'Dear Uncle,' said the boy, affecting to make light of it, while the tears stood in his eyes, 'for the honour you have done me, et cetera, et cetera. I shall now beg to propose Mr Solomon Gills with three times three and one cheer more. Hurrah! and you'll return thanks, Uncle, when we drink the last bottle together; won't you?'

They clinked their glasses again; and Walter, who was hoarding his wine, took a sip of it, and held the glass up to his eye with as critical an air as he could possibly assume.

His Uncle sat looking at him for some time in silence. When their eyes at last met, he began at once to pursue the theme that had occupied his thoughts, aloud, as if he had been speaking all the time.

'You see, Walter,' he said, 'in truth this business is merely a habit with me. I am so accustomed to the habit that I could hardly live if I relinquished it: but there's nothing doing, nothing doing. When that uniform was worn,' pointing out towards the little Midshipman, 'then indeed, fortunes were to be made, and were made. But competition, competition—new invention, new invention—alteration, alteration—the world's gone past me. I hardly know where I am myself, much less where my customers are.

'Never mind 'em, Uncle!'

'Since you came home from weekly boarding-school at Peckham, for instance—and that's ten days,' said Solomon, 'I don't remember more than one person that has come into the shop.'

'Two, Uncle, don't you recollect? There was the man who came to ask for change for a sovereign—'

'That's the one,' said Solomon.

'Why Uncle! don't you call the woman anybody, who came to ask the way to Mile-End Turnpike?'

'Oh! it's true,' said Solomon, 'I forgot her. Two persons.'

'To be sure, they didn't buy anything,' cried the boy.

'No. They didn't buy anything,' said Solomon, quietly.

'Nor want anything,' cried the boy.

'No. If they had, they'd gone to another shop,' said Solomon, in the same tone.

'But there were two of 'em, Uncle,' cried the boy, as if that were a great triumph. 'You said only one.'

'Well, Wally,' resumed the old man, after a short pause: 'not being like the Savages who came on Robinson Crusoe's Island, we can't live on a man who asks for change for a sovereign, and a woman who inquires the way to Mile-End Turnpike. As I said just now, the world has gone past me. I don't blame it; but I no longer understand it. Tradesmen are not the same as they used to be, apprentices are not the same, business is not the same, business commodities are not the same. Seven-eighths of my stock is old-fashioned. I am an old-fashioned man in an old-fashioned shop, in a street that is not the same as I remember it. I have fallen behind the time, and am too old to catch it again. Even the noise it makes a long way ahead, confuses me.'

Walter was going to speak, but his Uncle held up his hand.

'Therefore, Wally—therefore it is that I am anxious you should be early in the busy world, and on the world's track. I am only the ghost of this business—its substance vanished long ago; and when I die, its ghost will be laid. As it is clearly no inheritance for you then, I have thought it best to use for your advantage, almost the only fragment of the old connexion that stands by me, through long habit. Some people suppose me to be wealthy. I wish for your sake they were right. But whatever I leave behind me, or whatever I can give you, you in such a House as Dombey's are in the road to use well and make the most of. Be diligent, try to like it, my dear boy, work for a steady independence, and be happy!'

'I'll do everything I can, Uncle, to deserve your affection. Indeed I will,' said the boy, earnestly.

'I know it,' said Solomon. 'I am sure of it,' and he applied himself to a second glass of the old Madeira, with increased relish. 'As to the Sea,' he pursued, 'that's well enough in fiction, Wally, but it won't do in fact: it won't do at all. It's natural enough that you should think about it, associating it with all these familiar things; but it won't do, it won't do.'

Solomon Gills rubbed his hands with an air of stealthy enjoyment, as he talked of the sea, though; and looked on the seafaring objects about him with inexpressible complacency.

'Think of this wine for instance,' said old Sol, 'which has been to the East Indies and back, I'm not able to say how often, and has been once round the world. Think of the pitch-dark nights, the roaring winds, and rolling seas:'

'The thunder, lightning, rain, hail, storm of all kinds,' said the boy.

'To be sure,' said Solomon,—'that this wine has passed through. Think what a straining and creaking of timbers and masts: what a whistling and howling of the gale through ropes and rigging:'

'What a clambering aloft of men, vying with each other who shall lie out first upon the yards to furl the icy sails, while the ship rolls and pitches, like mad!' cried his nephew.

'Exactly so,' said Solomon: 'has gone on, over the old cask that held this wine. Why, when the Charming Sally went down in the—'

'In the Baltic Sea, in the dead of night; five-and-twenty minutes past twelve when the captain's watch stopped in his pocket; he lying dead against the main-mast—on the fourteenth of February, seventeen forty-nine!' cried Walter, with great animation.

'Ay, to be sure!' cried old Sol, 'quite right! Then, there were five hundred casks of such wine aboard; and all hands (except the first mate, first lieutenant, two seamen, and a lady, in a leaky boat) going to work to stave the casks, got drunk and died drunk, singing "Rule Britannia", when she settled and went down, and ending with one awful scream in chorus.'

'But when the George the Second drove ashore, Uncle, on the coast of Cornwall, in a dismal gale, two hours before daybreak, on the fourth of March, 'seventy-one, she had near two hundred horses aboard; and the horses breaking loose down below, early in the gale, and tearing to and fro, and trampling each other to death, made such noises, and set up such human cries, that the crew believing the ship to be full of devils, some of the best men, losing heart and head, went overboard in despair, and only two were left alive, at last, to tell the tale.'

'And when,' said old Sol, 'when the Polyphemus—'

'Private West India Trader, burden three hundred and fifty tons, Captain, John Brown of Deptford. Owners, Wiggs and Co.,' cried Walter.

'The same,' said Sol; 'when she took fire, four days' sail with a fair wind out of Jamaica Harbour, in the night—'

'There were two brothers on board,' interposed his nephew, speaking very fast and loud, 'and there not being room for both of them in the only boat that wasn't swamped, neither of them would consent to go, until the elder took the younger by the waist, and flung him in. And then the younger, rising in the boat, cried out, "Dear Edward, think of your promised wife at home. I'm only a boy. No one waits at home for me. Leap down into my place!" and flung himself in the sea!'

The kindling eye and heightened colour of the boy, who had risen from his seat in the earnestness of what he said and felt, seemed to remind old Sol of something he had forgotten, or that his encircling mist had hitherto shut out. Instead of proceeding with any more anecdotes, as he had evidently intended but a moment before, he gave a short dry cough, and said, 'Well! suppose we change the subject.'

The truth was, that the simple-minded Uncle in his secret attraction towards the marvellous and adventurous—of which he was, in some sort, a distant relation, by his trade—had greatly encouraged the same attraction in the nephew; and that everything that had ever been put before the boy to deter him from a life of adventure, had had the usual unaccountable effect of sharpening his taste for it. This is invariable. It would seem as if there never was a book written, or a story told, expressly with the object of keeping boys on shore, which did not lure and charm them to the ocean, as a matter of course.

But an addition to the little party now made its appearance, in the shape of a gentleman in a wide suit of blue, with a hook instead of a hand attached to his right wrist; very bushy black eyebrows; and a thick stick in his left hand, covered all over (like his nose) with knobs. He wore a loose black silk handkerchief round his neck, and such a very large coarse shirt collar, that it looked like a small sail. He was evidently the person for whom the spare wine-glass was intended, and evidently knew it; for having taken off his rough outer coat, and hung up, on a particular peg behind the door, such a hard glazed hat as a sympathetic person's head might ache at the sight of, and which left a red rim round his own forehead as if he had been wearing a tight basin, he brought a chair to where the clean glass was, and sat himself down behind it. He was usually addressed as Captain, this visitor; and had been a pilot, or a skipper, or a privateersman, or all three perhaps; and was a very salt-looking man indeed.

His face, remarkable for a brown solidity, brightened as he shook hands with Uncle and nephew; but he seemed to be of a laconic disposition, and merely said:

'How goes it?'

'All well,' said Mr Gills, pushing the bottle towards him.

He took it up, and having surveyed and smelt it, said with extraordinary expression:

'The?'

'The,' returned the Instrument-maker.

Upon that he whistled as he filled his glass, and seemed to think they were making holiday indeed.

'Wal'r!' he said, arranging his hair (which was thin) with his hook, and then pointing it at the Instrument-maker, 'Look at him! Love! Honour! And Obey! Overhaul your catechism till you find that passage, and when found turn the leaf down. Success, my boy!'

He was so perfectly satisfied both with his quotation and his reference to it, that he could not help repeating the words again in a low voice, and saying he had forgotten 'em these forty year.

'But I never wanted two or three words in my life that I didn't know where to lay my hand upon 'em, Gills,' he observed. 'It comes of not wasting language as some do.'

The reflection perhaps reminded him that he had better, like young Norval's father, "'ncrease his store." At any rate he became silent, and remained so, until old Sol went out into the shop to light it up, when he turned to Walter, and said, without any introductory remark:

'I suppose he could make a clock if he tried?'

'I shouldn't wonder, Captain Cuttle,' returned the boy.

'And it would go!' said Captain Cuttle, making a species of serpent in the air with his hook. 'Lord, how that clock would go!'

For a moment or two he seemed quite lost in contemplating the pace of this ideal timepiece, and sat looking at the boy as if his face were the dial.

'But he's chockful of science,' he observed, waving his hook towards the stock-in-trade. 'Look'ye here! Here's a collection of 'em. Earth, air, or water. It's all one. Only say where you'll have it. Up in a balloon? There you are. Down in a bell? There you are. D'ye want to put the North Star in a pair of scales and weigh it? He'll do it for you.'

It may be gathered from these remarks that Captain Cuttle's reverence for the stock of instruments was profound, and that his philosophy knew little or no distinction between trading in it and inventing it.

'Ah!' he said, with a sigh, 'it's a fine thing to understand 'em. And yet it's a fine thing not to understand 'em. I hardly know which is best. It's so comfortable to sit here and feel that you might be weighed, measured, magnified, electrified, polarized, played the very devil with: and never know how.'

Nothing short of the wonderful Madeira, combined with the occasion (which rendered it desirable to improve and expand Walter's mind), could have ever loosened his tongue to the extent of giving utterance to this prodigious oration. He seemed quite amazed himself at the manner in which it opened up to view the sources of the taciturn delight he had had in eating Sunday dinners in that parlour for ten years. Becoming a sadder and a wiser man, he mused and held his peace.

'Come!' cried the subject of this admiration, returning. 'Before you have your glass of grog, Ned, we must finish the bottle.'

'Stand by!' said Ned, filling his glass. 'Give the boy some more.'

'No more, thank'e, Uncle!'

'Yes, yes,' said Sol, 'a little more. We'll finish the bottle, to the House, Ned—Walter's House. Why it may be his House one of these days, in part. Who knows? Sir Richard Whittington married his master's daughter.'

'"Turn again Whittington, Lord Mayor of London, and when you are old you will never depart from it,"' interposed the Captain. 'Wal'r! Overhaul the book, my lad.'

'And although Mr Dombey hasn't a daughter,' Sol began.

'Yes, yes, he has, Uncle,' said the boy, reddening and laughing.

'Has he?' cried the old man. 'Indeed I think he has too.

'Oh! I know he has,' said the boy. 'Some of 'em were talking about it in the office today. And they do say, Uncle and Captain Cuttle,' lowering his voice, 'that he's taken a dislike to her, and that she's left, unnoticed, among the servants, and that his mind's so set all the while upon having his son in the House, that although he's only a baby now, he is going to have balances struck oftener than formerly, and the books kept closer than they used to be, and has even been seen (when he thought he wasn't) walking in the Docks, looking at his ships and property and all that, as if he was exulting like, over what he and his son will possess together. That's what they say. Of course, I don't know.

'He knows all about her already, you see,' said the instrument-maker.

'Nonsense, Uncle,' cried the boy, still reddening and laughing, boy-like. 'How can I help hearing what they tell me?'

'The Son's a little in our way at present, I'm afraid, Ned,' said the old man, humouring the joke.

'Very much,' said the Captain.

'Nevertheless, we'll drink him,' pursued Sol. 'So, here's to Dombey and Son.'

'Oh, very well, Uncle,' said the boy, merrily. 'Since you have introduced the mention of her, and have connected me with her and have said that I know all about her, I shall make bold to amend the toast. So here's to Dombey—and Son—and Daughter!'

CHAPTER 5. Paul's Progress and Christening

Little Paul, suffering no contamination from the blood of the Toodles, grew stouter and stronger every day. Every day, too, he was more and more ardently cherished by Miss Tox, whose devotion was so far appreciated by Mr Dombey that he began to regard her as a woman of great natural good sense, whose feelings did her credit and deserved encouragement. He was so lavish of this condescension, that he not only bowed to her, in a particular manner, on several occasions, but even entrusted such stately recognitions of her to his sister as 'pray tell your friend, Louisa, that she is very good,' or 'mention to Miss Tox, Louisa, that I am obliged to her;'specialities which made a deep impression on the lady thus distinguished.

Whether Miss Tox conceived that having been selected by the Fates to welcome the little Dombey before he was born, in Kirby, Beard and Kirby's Best Mixed Pins, it therefore naturally devolved upon her to greet him with all other forms of welcome in all other early stages of his existence—or whether her overflowing goodness induced her to volunteer into the domestic militia as a substitute in some sort for his deceased Mama—or whether she was conscious of any other motives—are questions which in this stage of the Firm's history herself only could have solved. Nor have they much bearing on the fact (of which there is no doubt), that Miss Tox's constancy and zeal were a heavy discouragement to Richards, who lost flesh hourly under her patronage, and was in some danger of being superintended to death.

Miss Tox was often in the habit of assuring Mrs Chick, that nothing could exceed her interest in all connected with the development of that sweet child;' and an observer of Miss Tox's proceedings might have inferred so much without declaratory confirmation. She would preside over the innocent repasts of the young heir, with ineffable satisfaction, almost with an air of joint proprietorship with Richards in the entertainment. At the little ceremonies of the bath and toilette, she assisted with enthusiasm. The administration of infantine doses of physic awakened all the active sympathy of her character; and being on one occasion secreted in a cupboard (whither she had fled in modesty), when Mr Dombey was introduced into the nursery by his sister, to behold his son, in the course of preparation for bed, taking a short walk uphill over Richards's gown, in a short and airy linen jacket, Miss Tox was so transported beyond the ignorant present as to be unable to refrain from crying out, 'Is he not beautiful Mr Dombey! Is he not a Cupid, Sir!' and then almost sinking behind the closet door with confusion and blushes.

'Louisa,' said Mr Dombey, one day, to his sister, 'I really think I must present your friend with some little token, on the occasion of Paul's christening. She has exerted herself so warmly in the child's behalf from the first, and seems to understand her position so thoroughly (a very rare merit in this world, I am sorry to say), that it would really be agreeable to me to notice her.'

Let it be no detraction from the merits of Miss Tox, to hint that in Mr Dombey's eyes, as in some others that occasionally see the light, they only achieved that mighty piece of knowledge, the understanding of their own position, who showed a fitting reverence for his. It was not so much their merit that they knew themselves, as that they knew him, and bowed low before him.

'My dear Paul,' returned his sister, 'you do Miss Tox but justice, as a man of your penetration was sure, I knew, to do. I believe if there are three words in the English language for which she has a respect amounting almost to veneration, those words are, Dombey and Son.'

'Well,' said Mr Dombey, 'I believe it. It does Miss Tox credit.'

'And as to anything in the shape of a token, my dear Paul,' pursued his sister, 'all I can say is that anything you give Miss Tox will be hoarded and prized, I am sure, like a relic. But there is a way, my dear Paul, of showing your sense of Miss Tox's friendliness in a still more flattering and acceptable manner, if you should be so inclined.'

'How is that?' asked Mr Dombey.

'Godfathers, of course,' continued Mrs Chick, 'are important in point of connexion and influence.'

'I don't know why they should be, to my son, said Mr Dombey, coldly.

'Very true, my dear Paul,' retorted Mrs Chick, with an extraordinary show of animation, to cover the suddenness of her conversion; 'and spoken like yourself. I might have expected nothing else from you. I might have known that such would have been your opinion. Perhaps;' here Mrs Chick faltered again, as not quite comfortably feeling her way; 'perhaps that is a reason why you might have the less objection to allowing Miss Tox to be godmother to the dear thing, if it were only as deputy and proxy for someone else. That it would be received as a great honour and distinction, Paul, I need not say.

'Louisa,' said Mr Dombey, after a short pause, 'it is not to be supposed —'

'Certainly not,' cried Mrs Chick, hastening to anticipate a refusal, 'I never thought it was.'

Mr Dombey looked at her impatiently.

'Don't flurry me, my dear Paul,' said his sister; 'for that destroys me. I am far from strong. I have not been quite myself, since poor dear Fanny departed.'

Mr Dombey glanced at the pocket-handkerchief which his sister applied to her eyes, and resumed:

'It is not be supposed, I say 'And I say,' murmured Mrs Chick, 'that I never thought it was.'

'Good Heaven, Louisa!' said Mr Dombey.

'No, my dear Paul,' she remonstrated with tearful dignity, 'I must really be allowed to speak. I am not so clever, or so reasoning, or so eloquent, or so anything, as you are. I know that very well. So much the worse for me. But if they were the last words I had to utter—and last words should be very solemn to you and me, Paul, after poor dear Fanny—I would still say I never thought it was. And what is more,' added Mrs Chick with increased dignity, as if she had withheld her crushing argument until now, 'I never did think it was.' Mr Dombey walked to the window and back again.

'It is not to be supposed, Louisa,' he said (Mrs Chick had nailed her colours to the mast, and repeated 'I know it isn't,' but he took no notice of it), 'but that there are many persons who, supposing that I recognised any claim at all in such a case, have a claim upon me superior to Miss Tox's. But I do not. I recognise no such thing. Paul and myself will be able, when the time comes, to hold our own—the House, in other words, will be able to hold its own, and maintain its own, and hand down its own of itself, and without any such common-place aids. The kind of foreign help which people usually seek for their children, I can afford to despise; being above it, I hope. So that Paul's infancy and childhood pass away well, and I see him becoming qualified without waste of time for the career on which he is destined to enter, I am satisfied. He will make what powerful friends he pleases in after-life, when he is actively maintaining—and extending, if that is possible—the dignity and credit of the Firm. Until then, I am enough for him, perhaps, and all in all. I have no wish that people should step in between us. I would much rather show my sense of the obliging conduct of a deserving person like your friend. Therefore let it be so; and your husband and myself will do well enough for the other sponsors, I daresay.'

In the course of these remarks, delivered with great majesty and grandeur, Mr Dombey had truly revealed the secret feelings of his breast. An indescribable distrust of anybody stepping in between himself and his son; a haughty dread of having any rival or partner in the boy's respect and deference; a sharp misgiving, recently acquired, that he was not infallible in his power of bending and binding human wills; as sharp a jealousy of any second check or cross; these were, at that time the master keys of his soul. In all his life, he had never made a friend. His cold and distant nature had neither sought one, nor found one. And now, when that nature concentrated its whole force so strongly on a partial scheme of parental interest and ambition, it seemed as if its icy current, instead of being released by this influence, and running clear and free, had thawed for but an instant to admit its burden, and then frozen with it into one unyielding block.

Elevated thus to the godmothership of little Paul, in virtue of her insignificance, Miss Tox was from that hour chosen and appointed to office; and Mr Dombey further signified his pleasure that the ceremony, already long delayed, should take place without further postponement. His sister, who had been far from anticipating so signal a success, withdrew as soon as she could, to communicate it to her best of friends; and Mr Dombey was left alone in his library. He had already laid his hand upon the bellrope to convey his usual summons to Richards, when his eye fell upon a writing-desk, belonging to his deceased wife, which had been taken, among other things, from a cabinet in her chamber. It was not the first time that his eye had lighted on it He carried the key in his pocket; and he brought it to his table and opened it now—having previously locked the room door—with a well- accustomed hand.

From beneath a leaf of torn and cancelled scraps of paper, he took one letter that remained entire. Involuntarily holding his breath as he opened this document, and 'bating in the stealthy action something of his arrogant demeanour, he sat down, resting his head upon one hand, and read it through.

He read it slowly and attentively, and with a nice particularity to every syllable. Otherwise than as his great deliberation seemed unnatural, and perhaps the result of an effort equally great, he allowed no sign of emotion to escape him. When he had read it through, he folded and refolded it slowly several times, and tore it carefully into fragments. Checking his hand in the act of throwing these away, he put them in his pocket, as if unwilling to trust them even to the chances of being re-united and deciphered; and instead of ringing, as usual, for little Paul, he sat solitary, all the evening, in his cheerless room.

There was anything but solitude in the nursery; for there, Mrs Chick and Miss Tox were enjoying a social evening, so much to the disgust of Miss Susan Nipper, that that young lady embraced every opportunity of making wry faces behind the door. Her feelings were so much excited on the occasion, that she found it indispensable to afford them this relief, even without having the comfort of any audience or sympathy whatever. As the knight-errants of old relieved their minds by carving their mistress's names in deserts, and wildernesses, and other savage places where there was no probability of there ever being anybody to read them, so did Miss Susan Nipper curl her snub nose into drawers and wardrobes, put away winks of disparagement in cupboards, shed derisive squints into stone pitchers, and contradict and call names out in the passage.

The two interlopers, however, blissfully unconscious of the young lady's sentiments, saw little Paul safe through all the stages of undressing, airy exercise, supper and bed; and then sat down to tea before the fire. The two children now lay, through the good offices of Polly, in one room; and it was not until the ladies were established at their tea-table that, happening to look towards the little beds, they thought of Florence.

'How sound she sleeps!' said Miss Tox.

'Why, you know, my dear, she takes a great deal of exercise in the course of the day,' returned Mrs Chick, 'playing about little Paul so much.'

'She is a curious child,' said Miss Tox.

'My dear,' retorted Mrs Chick, in a low voice: 'Her Mama, all over!'

'In deed!' said Miss Tox. 'Ah dear me!'

A tone of most extraordinary compassion Miss Tox said it in, though she had no distinct idea why, except that it was expected of her.

'Florence will never, never, never be a Dombey,'said Mrs Chick, 'not if she lives to be a thousand years old.'

Miss Tox elevated her eyebrows, and was again full of commiseration.

'I quite fret and worry myself about her,' said Mrs Chick, with a sigh of modest merit. 'I really don't see what is to become of her when she grows older, or what position she is to take. She don't gain on her Papa in the least. How can one expect she should, when she is so very unlike a Dombey?'

Miss Tox looked as if she saw no way out of such a cogent argument as that, at all.

'And the child, you see,' said Mrs Chick, in deep confidence, 'has poor dear Fanny's nature. She'll never make an effort in after-life, I'll venture to say. Never! She'll never wind and twine herself about her Papa's heart like—'

'Like the ivy?' suggested Miss Tox.

'Like the ivy,' Mrs Chick assented. 'Never! She'll never glide and nestle into the bosom of her Papa's affections like—the—'

'Startled fawn?' suggested Miss Tox.

'Like the startled fawn,' said Mrs Chick. 'Never! Poor Fanny! Yet, how I loved her!'

'You must not distress yourself, my dear,' said Miss Tox, in a soothing voice. 'Now really! You have too much feeling.'

'We have all our faults,' said Mrs Chick, weeping and shaking her head. 'I daresay we have. I never was blind to hers. I never said I was. Far from it. Yet how I loved her!'

What a satisfaction it was to Mrs Chick—a common-place piece of folly enough, compared with whom her sister-in-law had been a very angel of womanly intelligence and gentleness—to patronise and be tender to the memory of that lady: in exact pursuance of her conduct to her in her lifetime: and to thoroughly believe herself, and take herself in, and make herself uncommonly comfortable on the strength of her toleration! What a mighty pleasant virtue toleration should be when we are right, to be so very pleasant when we are wrong, and quite unable to demonstrate how we come to be invested with the privilege of exercising it!

Mrs Chick was yet drying her eyes and shaking her head, when Richards made bold to caution her that Miss Florence was awake and sitting in her bed. She had risen, as the nurse said, and the lashes of her eyes were wet with tears. But no one saw them glistening save Polly. No one else leant over her, and whispered soothing words to her, or was near enough to hear the flutter of her beating heart.

'Oh! dear nurse!' said the child, looking earnestly up in her face, 'let me lie by my brother!'

'Why, my pet?' said Richards.

'Oh! I think he loves me,' cried the child wildly. 'Let me lie by him. Pray do!'

Mrs Chick interposed with some motherly words about going to sleep like a dear, but Florence repeated her supplication, with a frightened look, and in a voice broken by sobs and tears.

'I'll not wake him,' she said, covering her face and hanging down her head. 'I'll only touch him with my hand, and go to sleep. Oh, pray, pray, let me lie by my brother to-night, for I believe he's fond of me!'

Richards took her without a word, and carrying her to the little bed in which the infant was sleeping, laid her down by his side. She crept as near him as she could without disturbing his rest; and stretching out one arm so that it timidly embraced his neck, and hiding her face on the other, over which her damp and scattered hair fell loose, lay motionless.

'Poor little thing,' said Miss Tox; 'she has been dreaming, I daresay.'

Dreaming, perhaps, of loving tones for ever silent, of loving eyes for ever closed, of loving arms again wound round her, and relaxing in that dream within the dam which no tongue can relate. Seeking, perhaps—in dreams—some natural comfort for a heart, deeply and sorely wounded, though so young a child's: and finding it, perhaps, in dreams, if not in waking, cold, substantial truth. This trivial incident had so interrupted the current of conversation, that it was difficult of resumption; and Mrs Chick moreover had been so affected by the contemplation of her own tolerant nature, that she was not in spirits. The two friends accordingly soon made an end of their tea, and a servant was despatched to fetch a hackney cabriolet for Miss Tox. Miss Tox had great experience in hackney cabs, and her starting in one was generally a work of time, as she was systematic in the preparatory arrangements.

'Have the goodness, if you please, Towlinson,' said Miss Tox, 'first of all, to carry out a pen and ink and take his number legibly.'

'Yes, Miss,' said Towlinson.

'Then, if you please, Towlinson,' said Miss Tox, 'have the goodness to turn the cushion. Which,' said Miss Tox apart to Mrs Chick, 'is generally damp, my dear.'

'Yes, Miss,' said Towlinson.

'I'll trouble you also, if you please, Towlinson,' said Miss Tox, 'with this card and this shilling. He's to drive to the card, and is to understand that he will not on any account have more than the shilling.'

'No, Miss,' said Towlinson.

'And—I'm sorry to give you so much trouble, Towlinson,' said Miss Tox, looking at him pensively.

'Not at all, Miss,' said Towlinson.

'Mention to the man, then, if you please, Towlinson,' said Miss Tox, 'that the lady's uncle is a magistrate, and that if he gives her any of his impertinence he will be punished terribly. You can pretend to say that, if you please, Towlinson, in a friendly way, and because you know it was done to another man, who died.'

'Certainly, Miss,' said Towlinson.

'And now good-night to my sweet, sweet, sweet, godson,' said Miss Tox, with a soft shower of kisses at each repetition of the adjective; 'and Louisa, my dear friend, promise me to take a little something warm before you go to bed, and not to distress yourself!'

It was with extreme difficulty that Nipper, the black-eyed, who looked on steadfastly, contained herself at this crisis, and until the subsequent departure of Mrs Chick. But the nursery being at length free of visitors, she made herself some recompense for her late restraint.

'You might keep me in a strait-waistcoat for six weeks,' said Nipper, 'and when I got it off I'd only be more aggravated, who ever heard the like of them two Griffins, Mrs Richards?'

'And then to talk of having been dreaming, poor dear!' said Polly.

'Oh you beauties!' cried Susan Nipper, affecting to salute the door by which the ladies had departed. 'Never be a Dombey won't she? It's to be hoped she won't, we don't want any more such, one's enough.'

'Don't wake the children, Susan dear,' said Polly.

'I'm very much beholden to you, Mrs Richards,' said Susan, who was not by any means discriminating in her wrath, 'and really feel it as a honour to receive your commands, being a black slave and a mulotter. Mrs Richards, if there's any other orders, you can give me, pray mention 'em.'

'Nonsense; orders,' said Polly.

'Oh! bless your heart, Mrs Richards,' cried Susan, 'temporaries always orders permanencies here, didn't you know that, why wherever was you born, Mrs Richards? But wherever you was born, Mrs Richards,' pursued Spitfire, shaking her head resolutely, 'and whenever, and however (which is best known to yourself), you may bear in mind, please, that it's one thing to give orders, and quite another thing to take 'em. A person may tell a person to dive off a bridge head foremost into five-and-forty feet of water, Mrs Richards, but a person may be very far from diving.'

'There now,' said Polly, 'you're angry because you're a good little thing, and fond of Miss Florence; and yet you turn round on me, because there's nobody else.'

'It's very easy for some to keep their tempers, and be soft-spoken, Mrs Richards,' returned Susan, slightly mollified, 'when their child's made as much of as a prince, and is petted and patted till it wishes its friends further, but when a sweet young pretty innocent, that never ought to have a cross word spoken to or of it, is rundown, the case is very different indeed. My goodness gracious me, Miss Floy, you naughty, sinful child, if you don't shut your eyes this minute, I'll call in them hobgoblins that lives in the cock-loft to come and eat you up alive!'

Here Miss Nipper made a horrible lowing, supposed to issue from a conscientious goblin of the bull species, impatient to discharge the severe duty of his position. Having further composed her young charge by covering her head with the bedclothes, and making three or four angry dabs at the pillow, she folded her arms, and screwed up her mouth, and sat looking at the fire for the rest of the evening.

Though little Paul was said, in nursery phrase, 'to take a deal of notice for his age,' he took as little notice of all this as of the preparations for his christening on the next day but one; which nevertheless went on about him, as to his personal apparel, and that of his sister and the two nurses, with great activity. Neither did he, on the arrival of the appointed morning, show any sense of its importance; being, on the contrary, unusually inclined to sleep, and unusually inclined to take it ill in his attendants that they dressed him to go out.

It happened to be an iron-grey autumnal day, with a shrewd east wind blowing—a day in keeping with the proceedings. Mr Dombey represented in himself the wind, the shade, and the autumn of the christening. He stood in his library to receive the company, as hard and cold as the weather; and when he looked out through the glass room, at the trees in the little garden, their brown and yellow leaves came fluttering down, as if he blighted them.

Ugh! They were black, cold rooms; and seemed to be in mourning, like the inmates of the house. The books precisely matched as to size, and drawn up in line, like soldiers, looked in their cold, hard, slippery uniforms, as if they had but one idea among them, and that was a freezer. The bookcase, glazed and locked, repudiated all familiarities. Mr Pitt, in bronze, on the top, with no trace of his celestial origin' about him, guarded the unattainable treasure like an enchanted Moor. A dusty urn at each high corner, dug up from an ancient tomb, preached desolation and decay, as from two pulpits; and the chimney-glass, reflecting Mr Dombey and his portrait at one blow, seemed fraught with melancholy meditations.

The stiff and stark fire-irons appeared to claim a nearer relationship than anything else there to Mr Dombey, with his buttoned coat, his white cravat, his heavy gold watch-chain, and his creaking boots.

But this was before the arrival of Mr and Mrs Chick, his lawful relatives, who soon presented themselves.

'My dear Paul,' Mrs Chick murmured, as she embraced him, 'the beginning, I hope, of many joyful days!'

'Thank you, Louisa,' said Mr Dombey, grimly. 'How do you do, Mr John?'

'How do you do, Sir?' said Chick.

He gave Mr Dombey his hand, as if he feared it might electrify him. Mr Dombey tool: it as if it were a fish, or seaweed, or some such clammy substance, and immediately returned it to him with exalted politeness.

'Perhaps, Louisa,' said Mr Dombey, slightly turning his head in his cravat, as if it were a socket, 'you would have preferred a fire?'

'Oh, my dear Paul, no,' said Mrs Chick, who had much ado to keep her teeth from chattering; 'not for me.'

'Mr John,' said Mr Dombey, 'you are not sensible of any chill?'

Mr John, who had already got both his hands in his pockets over the wrists, and was on the very threshold of that same canine chorus which had given Mrs Chick so much offence on a former occasion, protested that he was perfectly comfortable.

He added in a low voice, 'With my tiddle tol toor rul'—when he was providentially stopped by Towlinson, who announced:

'Miss Tox!'

And enter that fair enslaver, with a blue nose and indescribably frosty face, referable to her being very thinly clad in a maze of fluttering odds and ends, to do honour to the ceremony.

'How do you do, Miss Tox?' said Mr Dombey.

Miss Tox, in the midst of her spreading gauzes, went down altogether like an opera-glass shutting-up; she curtseyed so low, in acknowledgment of Mr Dombey's advancing a step or two to meet her.

'I can never forget this occasion, Sir,' said Miss Tox, softly. "Tis impossible. My dear Louisa, I can hardly believe the evidence of my senses.'

If Miss Tox could believe the evidence of one of her senses, it was a very cold day. That was quite clear. She took an early opportunity of promoting the circulation in the tip of her nose by secretly chafing it with her pocket handkerchief, lest, by its very low temperature, it should disagreeably astonish the baby when she came to kiss it.

The baby soon appeared, carried in great glory by Richards; while Florence, in custody of that active young constable, Susan Nipper, brought up the rear. Though the whole nursery party were dressed by this time in lighter mourning than at first, there was enough in the appearance of the bereaved children to make the day no brighter. The baby too—it might have been Miss Tox's nose—began to cry. Thereby, as it happened, preventing Mr Chick from the awkward fulfilment of a very honest purpose he had; which was, to make much of Florence. For this gentleman, insensible to the superior claims of a perfect Dombey (perhaps on account of having the honour to be united to a Dombey himself, and being familiar with excellence), really liked her, and showed that he liked her, and was about to show it in his own way now, when Paul cried, and his helpmate stopped him short—

'Now Florence, child!' said her aunt, briskly, 'what are you doing, love? Show yourself to him. Engage his attention, my dear!'

The atmosphere became or might have become colder and colder, when Mr Dombey stood frigidly watching his little daughter, who, clapping her hands, and standing On tip-toe before the throne of his son and heir, lured him to bend down from his high estate, and look at her. Some honest act of Richards's may have aided the effect, but he did look down, and held his peace. As his sister hid behind her nurse, he followed her with his eyes; and when she peeped out with a merry cry to him, he sprang up and crowed lustily—laughing outright when she ran in upon him; and seeming to fondle her curls with his tiny hands, while she smothered him with kisses.

Was Mr Dombey pleased to see this? He testified no pleasure by the relaxation of a nerve; but outward tokens of any kind of feeling were unusual with him. If any sunbeam stole into the room to light the children at their play, it never reached his face. He looked on so fixedly and coldly, that the warm light vanished even from the laughing eyes of little Florence, when, at last, they happened to meet his.

It was a dull, grey, autumn day indeed, and in a minute's pause and silence that took place, the leaves fell sorrowfully.

'Mr John,' said Mr Dombey, referring to his watch, and assuming his hat and gloves. 'Take my sister, if you please: my arm today is Miss Tox's. You had better go first with Master Paul, Richards. Be very careful.'

In Mr Dombey's carriage, Dombey and Son, Miss Tox, Mrs Chick, Richards, and Florence. In a little carriage following it, Susan Nipper and the owner Mr Chick. Susan looking out of window, without intermission, as a relief from the embarrassment of confronting the large face of that gentleman, and thinking whenever anything rattled that he was putting up in paper an appropriate pecuniary compliment for herself.

Once upon the road to church, Mr Dombey clapped his hands for the amusement of his son. At which instance of parental enthusiasm Miss Tox was enchanted. But exclusive of this incident, the chief difference between the christening party and a party in a mourning coach consisted in the colours of the carriage and horses.

Arrived at the church steps, they were received by a portentous beadle.' Mr Dombey dismounting first to help the ladies out, and standing near him at the church door, looked like another beadle. A beadle less gorgeous but more dreadful; the beadle of private life; the beadle of our business and our bosoms.

Miss Tox's hand trembled as she slipped it through Mr Dombey's arm, and felt herself escorted up the steps, preceded by a cocked hat and a Babylonian collar. It seemed for a moment like that other solemn institution, 'Wilt thou have this man, Lucretia?' 'Yes, I will.'

'Please to bring the child in quick out of the air there,' whispered the beadle, holding open the inner door of the church.

Little Paul might have asked with Hamlet 'into my grave?' so chill and earthy was the place. The tall shrouded pulpit and reading desk; the dreary perspective of empty pews stretching away under the galleries, and empty benches mounting to the roof and lost in the shadow of the great grim organ; the dusty matting and cold stone slabs; the grisly free seats' in the aisles; and the damp corner by the bell-rope, where the black trestles used for funerals were stowed away, along with some shovels and baskets, and a coil or two of deadly-looking rope; the strange, unusual, uncomfortable smell, and the cadaverous light; were all in unison. It was a cold and dismal scene.

'There's a wedding just on, Sir,' said the beadle, 'but it'll be over directly, if you'll walk into the westry here.

Before he turned again to lead the way, he gave Mr Dombey a bow and a half smile of recognition, importing that he (the beadle) remembered to have had the pleasure of attending on him when he buried his wife, and hoped he had enjoyed himself since.

The very wedding looked dismal as they passed in front of the altar. The bride was too old and the bridegroom too young, and a superannuated beau with one eye and an eyeglass stuck in its blank companion, was giving away the lady, while the friends were shivering. In the vestry the fire was smoking; and an over-aged and over-worked and under-paid attorney's clerk, 'making a search,' was running his forefinger down the parchment pages of an immense register (one of a long series of similar volumes) gorged with burials. Over the fireplace was a ground-plan of the vaults underneath the church; and Mr Chick, skimming the literary portion of it aloud, by way of enlivening the company, read the reference to Mrs Dombey's tomb in full, before he could stop himself.

After another cold interval, a wheezy little pew-opener afflicted with an asthma, appropriate to the churchyard, if not to the church, summoned them to the font—a rigid marble basin which seemed to have been playing a churchyard game at cup and ball with its matter of fact pedestal, and to have been just that moment caught on the top of it. Here they waited some little time while the marriage party enrolled themselves; and meanwhile the wheezy little pew-opener—partly in consequence of her infirmity, and partly that the marriage party might not forget her—went about the building coughing like a grampus.

Presently the clerk (the only cheerful-looking object there, and he was an undertaker) came up with a jug of warm water, and said something, as he poured it into the font, about taking the chill off; which millions of gallons boiling hot could not have done for the occasion. Then the clergyman, an amiable and mild-looking young curate, but obviously afraid of the baby, appeared like the principal character in a ghost-story, 'a tall figure all in white;' at sight of whom Paul rent the air with his cries, and never left off again till he was taken out black in the face.

Even when that event had happened, to the great relief of everybody, he was heard under the portico, during the rest of the ceremony, now fainter, now louder, now hushed, now bursting forth again with an irrepressible sense of his wrongs. This so distracted the attention of the two ladies, that Mrs Chick was constantly deploying into the centre aisle, to send out messages by the pew-opener, while Miss Tox kept her Prayer-book open at the Gunpowder Plot, and occasionally read responses from that service.

During the whole of these proceedings, Mr Dombey remained as impassive and gentlemanly as ever, and perhaps assisted in making it so cold, that the young curate smoked at the mouth as he read. The only time that he unbent his visage in the least, was when the clergyman, in delivering (very unaffectedly and simply) the closing exhortation, relative to the future examination of the child by the sponsors, happened to rest his eye on Mr Chick; and then Mr Dombey might have been seen to express by a majestic look, that he would like to catch him at it.

It might have been well for Mr Dombey, if he had thought of his own dignity a little less; and had thought of the great origin and purpose of the ceremony in which he took so formal and so stiff a part, a little more. His arrogance contrasted strangely with its history.

When it was all over, he again gave his arm to Miss Tox, and conducted her to the vestry, where he informed the clergyman how much pleasure it would have given him to have solicited the honour of his company at dinner, but for the unfortunate state of his household affairs. The register signed, and the fees paid, and the pew-opener (whose cough was very bad again) remembered, and the beadle gratified, and the sexton (who was accidentally on the doorsteps, looking with great interest at the weather) not forgotten, they got into the carriage again, and drove home in the same bleak fellowship.

There they found Mr Pitt turning up his nose at a cold collation, set forth in a cold pomp of glass and silver, and looking more like a dead dinner lying in state than a social refreshment. On their arrival Miss Tox produced a mug for her godson, and Mr Chick a knife and fork and spoon in a case. Mr Dombey also produced a bracelet for Miss Tox; and, on the receipt of this token, Miss Tox was tenderly affected.

'Mr John,' said Mr Dombey, 'will you take the bottom of the table, if you please? What have you got there, Mr John?'

'I have got a cold fillet of veal here, Sir,' replied Mr Chick, rubbing his numbed hands hard together. 'What have you got there, Sir?'

'This,' returned Mr Dombey, 'is some cold preparation of calf's head, I think. I see cold fowls—ham—patties—salad—lobster. Miss Tox will do me the honour of taking some wine? Champagne to Miss Tox.'

There was a toothache in everything. The wine was so bitter cold that it forced a little scream from Miss Tox, which she had great difficulty in turning into a 'Hem!' The veal had come from such an airy pantry, that the first taste of it had struck a sensation as of cold lead to Mr Chick's extremities. Mr Dombey alone remained unmoved. He might have been hung up for sale at a Russian fair as a specimen of a frozen gentleman.

The prevailing influence was too much even for his sister. She made no effort at flattery or small talk, and directed all her efforts to looking as warm as she could.

'Well, Sir,' said Mr Chick, making a desperate plunge, after a long silence, and filling a glass of sherry; 'I shall drink this, if you'll allow me, Sir, to little Paul.'

'Bless him!' murmured Miss Tox, taking a sip of wine.

'Dear little Dombey!' murmured Mrs Chick.

'Mr John,' said Mr Dombey, with severe gravity, 'my son would feel and express himself obliged to you, I have no doubt, if he could appreciate the favour you have done him. He will prove, in time to come, I trust, equal to any responsibility that the obliging disposition of his relations and friends, in private, or the onerous nature of our position, in public, may impose upon him.'

The tone in which this was said admitting of nothing more, Mr Chick relapsed into low spirits and silence. Not so Miss Tox, who, having listened to Mr Dombey with even a more emphatic attention than usual, and with a more expressive tendency of her head to one side, now leant across the table, and said to Mrs Chick softly:

'Louisa!'

'My dear,' said Mrs Chick.

'Onerous nature of our position in public may—I have forgotten the exact term.'

'Expose him to,' said Mrs Chick.

'Pardon me, my dear,' returned Miss Tox, 'I think not. It was more rounded and flowing. Obliging disposition of relations and friends in private, or onerous nature of position in public—may—impose upon him!'

'Impose upon him, to be sure,' said Mrs Chick.

Miss Tox struck her delicate hands together lightly, in triumph; and added, casting up her eyes, 'eloquence indeed!'

Mr Dombey, in the meanwhile, had issued orders for the attendance of Richards, who now entered curtseying, but without the baby; Paul being asleep after the fatigues of the morning. Mr Dombey, having delivered a glass of wine to this vassal, addressed her in the following words: Miss Tox previously settling her head on one side, and making other little arrangements for engraving them on her heart.

'During the six months or so, Richards, which have seen you an inmate of this house, you have done your duty. Desiring to connect some little service to you with this occasion, I considered how I could best effect that object, and I also advised with my sister, Mrs—'

'Chick,' interposed the gentleman of that name.

'Oh, hush if you please!' said Miss Tox.

'I was about to say to you, Richards,' resumed Mr Dombey, with an appalling glance at Mr John, 'that I was further assisted in my decision, by the recollection of a conversation I held with your husband in this room, on the occasion of your being hired, when he disclosed to me the melancholy fact that your family, himself at the head, were sunk and steeped in ignorance.

Richards quailed under the magnificence of the reproof.

'I am far from being friendly,' pursued Mr Dombey, 'to what is called by persons of levelling sentiments, general education. But it is necessary that the inferior classes should continue to be taught to know their position, and to conduct themselves properly. So far I approve of schools. Having the power of nominating a child on the foundation of an ancient establishment, called (from a worshipful company) the Charitable Grinders; where not only is a wholesome education bestowed upon the scholars, but where a dress and badge is likewise provided for them; I have (first communicating, through Mrs Chick, with your family) nominated your eldest son to an existing vacancy; and he has this day, I am informed, assumed the habit. The number of her son, I believe,' said Mr Dombey, turning to his sister and speaking of the child as if he were a hackney-coach, is one hundred and forty-seven. Louisa, you can tell her.'

'One hundred and forty-seven,' said Mrs Chick 'The dress, Richards, is a nice, warm, blue baize tailed coat and cap, turned up with orange coloured binding; red worsted stockings; and very strong leather small-clothes. One might wear the articles one's self,' said Mrs Chick, with enthusiasm, 'and be grateful.'

'There, Richards!' said Miss Tox. 'Now, indeed, you may be proud. The Charitable Grinders!'

'I am sure I am very much obliged, Sir,' returned Richards faintly, 'and take it very kind that you should remember my little ones.' At the same time a vision of Biler as a Charitable Grinder, with his very small legs encased in the serviceable clothing described by Mrs Chick, swam before Richards's eyes, and made them water.

'I am very glad to see you have so much feeling, Richards,' said Miss Tox.

'It makes one almost hope, it really does,' said Mrs Chick, who prided herself on taking trustful views of human nature, 'that there may yet be some faint spark of gratitude and right feeling in the world.'

Richards deferred to these compliments by curtseying and murmuring her thanks; but finding it quite impossible to recover her spirits from the disorder into which they had been thrown by the image of her son in his precocious nether garments, she gradually approached the door and was heartily relieved to escape by it.

Such temporary indications of a partial thaw that had appeared with her, vanished with her; and the frost set in again, as cold and hard as ever. Mr Chick was twice heard to hum a tune at the bottom of the table, but on both occasions it was a fragment of the Dead March in Saul. The party seemed to get colder and colder, and to be gradually resolving itself into a congealed and solid state, like the collation round which it was assembled. At length Mrs Chick looked at Miss Tox, and Miss Tox returned the look, and they both rose and said it was really time to go. Mr Dombey receiving this announcement with perfect equanimity, they took leave of that gentleman, and presently departed under the protection of Mr Chick; who, when they had turned their backs upon the house and left its master in his usual solitary state, put his hands in his pockets, threw himself back in the carriage, and whistled 'With a hey ho chevy!' all through; conveying into his face as he did so, an expression of such gloomy and terrible defiance, that Mrs Chick dared not protest, or in any way molest him.

Richards, though she had little Paul on her lap, could not forget her own first-born. She felt it was ungrateful; but the influence of the day fell even on the Charitable Grinders, and she could hardly help regarding his pewter badge, number one hundred and forty-seven, as, somehow, a part of its formality and sternness. She spoke, too, in the nursery, of his 'blessed legs,' and was again troubled by his spectre in uniform.

'I don't know what I wouldn't give,' said Polly, 'to see the poor little dear before he gets used to 'em.'

'Why, then, I tell you what, Mrs Richards,' retorted Nipper, who had been admitted to her confidence, 'see him and make your mind easy.'

'Mr Dombey wouldn't like it,' said Polly.

'Oh, wouldn't he, Mrs Richards!' retorted Nipper, 'he'd like it very much, I think when he was asked.'

'You wouldn't ask him, I suppose, at all?' said Polly.

'No, Mrs Richards, quite contrairy,' returned Susan, 'and them two inspectors Tox and Chick, not intending to be on duty tomorrow, as I heard 'em say, me and Mid Floy will go along with you tomorrow morning, and welcome, Mrs Richards, if you like, for we may as well walk there as up and down a street, and better too.'

Polly rejected the idea pretty stoutly at first; but by little and little she began to entertain it, as she entertained more and more distinctly the forbidden pictures of her children, and her own home. At length, arguing that there could be no great harm in calling for a moment at the door, she yielded to the Nipper proposition.

The matter being settled thus, little Paul began to cry most piteously, as if he had a foreboding that no good would come of it.

'What's the matter with the child?' asked Susan.

'He's cold, I think,' said Polly, walking with him to and fro, and hushing him.

It was a bleak autumnal afternoon indeed; and as she walked, and hushed, and, glancing through the dreary windows, pressed the little fellow closer to her breast, the withered leaves came showering down.

CHAPTER 6. Paul's Second Deprivation

Polly was beset by so many misgivings in the morning, that but for the incessant promptings of her black-eyed companion, she would have abandoned all thoughts of the expedition, and formally petitioned for leave to see number one hundred and forty-seven, under the awful shadow of Mr Dombey's roof. But Susan who was personally disposed in favour of the excursion, and who (like Tony Lumpkin), if she could bear the disappointments of other people with tolerable fortitude, could not abide to disappoint herself, threw so many ingenious doubts in the way of this second thought, and stimulated the original intention with so many ingenious arguments, that almost as soon as Mr Dombey's stately back was turned, and that gentleman was pursuing his daily road towards the City, his unconscious son was on his way to Staggs's Gardens.

This euphonious locality was situated in a suburb, known by the inhabitants of Staggs's Gardens by the name of Camberling Town; a designation which the Strangers' Map of London, as printed (with a view to pleasant and commodious reference) on pocket handkerchiefs, condenses, with some show of reason, into Camden Town. Hither the two nurses bent their steps, accompanied by their charges; Richards carrying Paul, of course, and Susan leading little Florence by the hand, and giving her such jerks and pokes from time to time, as she considered it wholesome to administer.

The first shock of a great earthquake had, just at that period, rent the whole neighbourhood to its centre. Traces of its course were visible on every side. Houses were knocked down; streets broken through and stopped; deep pits and trenches dug in the ground; enormous heaps of earth and clay thrown up; buildings that were undermined and shaking, propped by great beams of wood. Here, a chaos of carts, overthrown and jumbled together, lay topsy- turvy at the bottom of a steep unnatural hill; there, confused treasures of iron soaked and rusted in something that had accidentally become a pond. Everywhere were bridges that led nowhere; thoroughfares that were wholly impassable; Babel towers of chimneys, wanting half their height; temporary wooden houses and enclosures, in the most unlikely situations; carcases of ragged tenements, and fragments of unfinished walls and arches, and piles of scaffolding, and wildernesses of bricks, and giant forms of cranes, and tripods straddling above nothing. There were a hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness, wildly mingled out of their places, upside down, burrowing in the earth, aspiring in the air, mouldering in the water, and unintelligible as any dream. Hot springs and fiery eruptions, the usual attendants upon earthquakes, lent their contributions of confusion to the scene. Boiling water hissed and heaved within dilapidated walls; whence, also, the glare and roar of flames came issuing forth; and mounds of ashes blocked up rights of way, and wholly changed the law and custom of the neighbourhood.

In short, the yet unfinished and unopened Railroad was in progress; and, from the very core of all this dire disorder, trailed smoothly away, upon its mighty course of civilisation and improvement.

But as yet, the neighbourhood was shy to own the Railroad. One or two bold speculators had projected streets; and one had built a little, but had stopped among the mud and ashes to consider farther of it. A bran-new Tavern, redolent of fresh mortar and size, and fronting nothing at all, had taken for its sign The Railway Arms; but that might be rash enterprise—and then it hoped to sell drink to the workmen. So, the Excavators' House of Call had sprung up from a beer-shop; and the old-established Ham and Beef Shop had become the Railway Eating House, with a roast leg of pork daily, through interested motives of a similar immediate and popular description. Lodging-house keepers were favourable in like manner; and for the like reasons were not to be trusted. The general belief was very slow. There were frowzy fields, and cow-houses, and dunghills, and dustheaps, and ditches, and gardens, and summer-houses, and carpet-beating grounds, at the very door of the Railway. Little tumuli of oyster shells in the oyster season, and of lobster shells in the lobster season, and of broken crockery and faded cabbage leaves in all seasons, encroached upon its high places. Posts, and rails, and old cautions to trespassers, and backs of mean houses, and patches of wretched vegetation, stared it out of countenance. Nothing was the better for it, or thought of being so. If the miserable waste ground lying near it could have laughed, it would have laughed it to scorn, like many of the miserable neighbours.

Staggs's Gardens was uncommonly incredulous. It was a little row of houses, with little squalid patches of ground before them, fenced off with old doors, barrel staves, scraps of tarpaulin, and dead bushes; with bottomless tin kettles and exhausted iron fenders, thrust into the gaps. Here, the Staggs's Gardeners trained scarlet beans, kept fowls and rabbits, erected rotten summer-houses (one was an old boat), dried clothes, and smoked pipes. Some were of opinion that Staggs's Gardens derived its name from a deceased capitalist, one Mr Staggs, who had built it for his delectation. Others, who had a natural taste for the country, held that it dated from those rural times when the antlered herd, under the familiar denomination of Staggses, had resorted to its shady precincts. Be this as it may, Staggs's Gardens was regarded by its population as a sacred grove not to be withered by Railroads; and so confident were they generally of its long outliving any such ridiculous inventions, that the master chimney-sweeper at the corner, who was understood to take the lead in the local politics of the Gardens, had publicly declared that on the occasion of the Railroad opening, if ever it did open, two of his boys should ascend the flues of his dwelling, with instructions to hail the failure with derisive cheers from the chimney-pots.

To this unhallowed spot, the very name of which had hitherto been carefully concealed from Mr Dombey by his sister, was little Paul now borne by Fate and Richards

'That's my house, Susan,' said Polly, pointing it out.

'Is it, indeed, Mrs Richards?' said Susan, condescendingly.

'And there's my sister Jemima at the door, I do declare' cried Polly, 'with my own sweet precious baby in her arms!'

The sight added such an extensive pair of wings to Polly's impatience, that she set off down the Gardens at a run, and bouncing on Jemima, changed babies with her in a twinkling; to the unutterable astonishment of that young damsel, on whom the heir of the Dombeys seemed to have fallen from the clouds.

'Why, Polly!' cried Jemima. 'You! what a turn you have given me! who'd have thought it! come along in Polly! How well you do look to be sure! The children will go half wild to see you Polly, that they will.'

That they did, if one might judge from the noise they made, and the way in which they dashed at Polly and dragged her to a low chair in the chimney corner, where her own honest apple face became immediately the centre of a bunch of smaller pippins, all laying their rosy cheeks close to it, and all evidently the growth of the same tree. As to Polly, she was full as noisy and vehement as the children; and it was not until she was quite out of breath, and her hair was hanging all about her flushed face, and her new christening attire was very much dishevelled, that any pause took place in the confusion. Even then, the smallest Toodle but one remained in her lap, holding on tight with both arms round her neck; while the smallest Toodle but two mounted on the back of the chair, and made desperate efforts, with one leg in the air, to kiss her round the corner.

'Look! there's a pretty little lady come to see you,' said Polly; 'and see how quiet she is! what a beautiful little lady, ain't she?'

This reference to Florence, who had been standing by the door not unobservant of what passed, directed the attention of the younger branches towards her; and had likewise the happy effect of leading to the formal recognition of Miss Nipper, who was not quite free from a misgiving that she had been already slighted.

'Oh do come in and sit down a minute, Susan, please,' said Polly. 'This is my sister Jemima, this is. Jemima, I don't know what I should ever do with myself, if it wasn't for Susan Nipper; I shouldn't be here now but for her.'

'Oh do sit down, Miss Nipper, if you please,' quoth Jemima.

Susan took the extreme corner of a chair, with a stately and ceremonious aspect.

'I never was so glad to see anybody in all my life; now really I never was, Miss Nipper,' said Jemima.

Susan relaxing, took a little more of the chair, and smiled graciously.

'Do untie your bonnet-strings, and make yourself at home, Miss Nipper, please,' entreated Jemima. 'I am afraid it's a poorer place than you're used to; but you'll make allowances, I'm sure.'

The black-eyed was so softened by this deferential behaviour, that she caught up little Miss Toodle who was running past, and took her to Banbury Cross immediately.

'But where's my pretty boy?' said Polly. 'My poor fellow? I came all this way to see him in his new clothes.'

'Ah what a pity!' cried Jemima. 'He'll break his heart, when he hears his mother has been here. He's at school, Polly.'

'Gone already!'

'Yes. He went for the first time yesterday, for fear he should lose any learning. But it's half-holiday, Polly: if you could only stop till he comes home—you and Miss Nipper, leastways,' said Jemima, mindful in good time of the dignity of the black-eyed.

'And how does he look, Jemima, bless him!' faltered Polly.

'Well, really he don't look so bad as you'd suppose,' returned Jemima.

'Ah!' said Polly, with emotion, 'I knew his legs must be too short.'

His legs is short,' returned Jemima; 'especially behind; but they'll get longer, Polly, every day.'

It was a slow, prospective kind of consolation; but the cheerfulness and good nature with which it was administered, gave it a value it did not intrinsically possess. After a moment's silence, Polly asked, in a more sprightly manner:

'And where's Father, Jemima dear?'—for by that patriarchal appellation, Mr Toodle was generally known in the family.

'There again!' said Jemima. 'What a pity! Father took his dinner with him this morning, and isn't coming home till night. But he's always talking of you, Polly, and telling the children about you; and is the peaceablest, patientest, best-temperedest soul in the world, as he always was and will be!'

'Thankee, Jemima,' cried the simple Polly; delighted by the speech, and disappointed by the absence.

'Oh you needn't thank me, Polly,' said her sister, giving her a sounding kiss upon the cheek, and then dancing little Paul cheerfully. 'I say the same of you sometimes, and think it too.'

In spite of the double disappointment, it was impossible to regard in the light of a failure a visit which was greeted with such a reception; so the sisters talked hopefully about family matters, and about Biler, and about all his brothers and sisters: while the black-eyed, having performed several journeys to Banbury Cross and back, took sharp note of the furniture, the Dutch clock, the cupboard, the castle on the mantel-piece with red and green windows in it, susceptible of illumination by a candle-end within; and the pair of small black velvet kittens, each with a lady's reticule in its mouth; regarded by the Staggs's Gardeners as prodigies of imitative art. The conversation soon becoming general lest the black-eyed should go off at score and turn sarcastic, that young lady related to Jemima a summary of everything she knew concerning Mr Dombey, his prospects, family, pursuits, and character. Also an exact inventory of her personal wardrobe, and some account of her principal relations and friends. Having relieved her mind of these disclosures, she partook of shrimps and porter, and evinced a disposition to swear eternal friendship.

Little Florence herself was not behind-hand in improving the occasion; for, being conducted forth by the young Toodles to inspect some toad-stools and other curiosities of the Gardens, she entered with them, heart and soul, on the formation of a temporary breakwater across a small green pool that had collected in a corner. She was still busily engaged in that labour, when sought and found by Susan; who, such was her sense of duty, even under the humanizing influence of shrimps, delivered a moral address to her (punctuated with thumps) on her degenerate nature, while washing her face and hands; and predicted that she would bring the grey hairs of her family in general, with sorrow to the grave. After some delay, occasioned by a pretty long confidential interview above stairs on pecuniary subjects, between Polly and Jemima, an interchange of babies was again effected—for Polly had all this time retained her own child, and Jemima little Paul—and the visitors took leave.

But first the young Toodles, victims of a pious fraud, were deluded into repairing in a body to a chandler's shop in the neighbourhood, for the ostensible purpose of spending a penny; and when the coast was quite clear, Polly fled: Jemima calling after her that if they could only go round towards the City Road on their way back, they would be sure to meet little Biler coming from school.

'Do you think that we might make time to go a little round in that direction, Susan?' inquired Polly, when they halted to take breath.

'Why not, Mrs Richards?' returned Susan.

'It's getting on towards our dinner time you know,' said Polly.

But lunch had rendered her companion more than indifferent to this grave consideration, so she allowed no weight to it, and they resolved to go 'a little round.'

Now, it happened that poor Biler's life had been, since yesterday morning, rendered weary by the costume of the Charitable Grinders. The youth of the streets could not endure it. No young vagabond could be brought to bear its contemplation for a moment, without throwing himself upon the unoffending wearer, and doing him a mischief. His social existence had been more like that of an early Christian, than an innocent child of the nineteenth century. He had been stoned in the streets. He had been overthrown into gutters; bespattered with mud; violently flattened against posts. Entire strangers to his person had lifted his yellow cap off his head, and cast it to the winds. His legs had not only undergone verbal criticisms and revilings, but had been handled and pinched. That very morning, he had received a perfectly unsolicited black eye on his way to the Grinders' establishment, and had been punished for it by the master: a superannuated old Grinder of savage disposition, who had been appointed schoolmaster because he didn't know anything, and wasn't fit for anything, and for whose cruel cane all chubby little boys had a perfect fascination.'

Thus it fell out that Biler, on his way home, sought unfrequented paths; and slunk along by narrow passages and back streets, to avoid his tormentors. Being compelled to emerge into the main road, his ill fortune brought him at last where a small party of boys, headed by a ferocious young butcher, were lying in wait for any means of pleasurable excitement that might happen. These, finding a Charitable Grinder in the midst of them—unaccountably delivered over, as it were, into their hands—set up a general yell and rushed upon him.

But it so fell out likewise, that, at the same time, Polly, looking hopelessly along the road before her, after a good hour's walk, had said it was no use going any further, when suddenly she saw this sight. She no sooner saw it than, uttering a hasty exclamation, and giving Master Dombey to the black-eyed, she started to the rescue of her unhappy little son.

Surprises, like misfortunes, rarely come alone. The astonished Susan Nipper and her two young charges were rescued by the bystanders from under the very wheels of a passing carriage before they knew what had happened; and at that moment (it was market day) a thundering alarm of 'Mad Bull!' was raised.

With a wild confusion before her, of people running up and down, and shouting, and wheels running over them, and boys fighting, and mad bulls coming up, and the nurse in the midst of all these dangers being torn to pieces, Florence screamed and ran. She ran till she was exhausted, urging Susan to do the same; and then, stopping and wringing her hands as she remembered they had left the other nurse behind, found, with a sensation of terror not to be described, that she was quite alone.

'Susan! Susan!' cried Florence, clapping her hands in the very ecstasy of her alarm. 'Oh, where are they? where are they?'

'Where are they?' said an old woman, coming hobbling across as fast as she could from the opposite side of the way. 'Why did you run away from 'em?'

'I was frightened,' answered Florence. 'I didn't know what I did. I thought they were with me. Where are they?'

The old woman took her by the wrist, and said, 'I'll show you.'

She was a very ugly old woman, with red rims round her eyes, and a mouth that mumbled and chattered of itself when she was not speaking. She was miserably dressed, and carried some skins over her arm. She seemed to have followed Florence some little way at all events, for she had lost her breath; and this made her uglier still, as she stood trying to regain it: working her shrivelled yellow face and throat into all sorts of contortions.

Florence was afraid of her, and looked, hesitating, up the street, of which she had almost reached the bottom. It was a solitary place—more a back road than a street—and there was no one in it but her-self and the old woman.

'You needn't be frightened now,' said the old woman, still holding her tight. 'Come along with me.'

'I—I don't know you. What's your name?' asked Florence.

'Mrs Brown,' said the old woman. 'Good Mrs Brown.'

'Are they near here?' asked Florence, beginning to be led away.

'Susan ain't far off,' said Good Mrs Brown; 'and the others are close to her.'

'Is anybody hurt?' cried Florence.

'Not a bit of it,' said Good Mrs Brown.

The child shed tears of delight on hearing this, and accompanied the old woman willingly; though she could not help glancing at her face as they went along—particularly at that industrious mouth—and wondering whether Bad Mrs Brown, if there were such a person, was at all like her.

They had not gone far, but had gone by some very uncomfortable places, such as brick-fields and tile-yards, when the old woman turned down a dirty lane, where the mud lay in deep black ruts in the middle of the road. She stopped before a shabby little house, as closely shut up as a house that was full of cracks and crevices could be. Opening the door with a key she took out of her bonnet, she pushed the child before her into a back room, where there was a great heap of rags of different colours lying on the floor; a heap of bones, and a heap of sifted dust or cinders; but there was no furniture at all, and the walls and ceiling were quite black.

The child became so terrified the she was stricken speechless, and looked as though about to swoon.

'Now don't be a young mule,' said Good Mrs Brown, reviving her with a shake. 'I'm not a going to hurt you. Sit upon the rags.'

Florence obeyed her, holding out her folded hands, in mute supplication.

'I'm not a going to keep you, even, above an hour,' said Mrs Brown. 'D'ye understand what I say?'

The child answered with great difficulty, 'Yes.'

'Then,' said Good Mrs Brown, taking her own seat on the bones, 'don't vex me. If you don't, I tell you I won't hurt you. But if you do, I'll kill you. I could have you killed at any time—even if you was in your own bed at home. Now let's know who you are, and what you are, and all about it.'

The old woman's threats and promises; the dread of giving her offence; and the habit, unusual to a child, but almost natural to Florence now, of being quiet, and repressing what she felt, and feared, and hoped; enabled her to do this bidding, and to tell her little history, or what she knew of it. Mrs Brown listened attentively, until she had finished.

'So your name's Dombey, eh?' said Mrs Brown.

'I want that pretty frock, Miss Dombey,' said Good Mrs Brown, 'and that little bonnet, and a petticoat or two, and anything else you can spare. Come! Take 'em off.'

Florence obeyed, as fast as her trembling hands would allow; keeping, all the while, a frightened eye on Mrs Brown. When she had divested herself of all the articles of apparel mentioned by that lady, Mrs B. examined them at leisure, and seemed tolerably well satisfied with their quality and value.

'Humph!' she said, running her eyes over the child's slight figure, 'I don't see anything else—except the shoes. I must have the shoes, Miss Dombey.'

Poor little Florence took them off with equal alacrity, only too glad to have any more means of conciliation about her. The old woman then produced some wretched substitutes from the bottom of the heap of rags, which she turned up for that purpose; together with a girl's cloak, quite worn out and very old; and the crushed remains of a bonnet that had probably been picked up from some ditch or dunghill. In this dainty raiment, she instructed Florence to dress herself; and as such preparation seemed a prelude to her release, the child complied with increased readiness, if possible.

In hurriedly putting on the bonnet, if that may be called a bonnet which was more like a pad to carry loads on, she caught it in her hair which grew luxuriantly, and could not immediately disentangle it. Good Mrs Brown whipped out a large pair of scissors, and fell into an unaccountable state of excitement.

'Why couldn't you let me be!' said Mrs Brown, 'when I was contented? You little fool!'

'I beg your pardon. I don't know what I have done,' panted Florence. 'I couldn't help it.'

'Couldn't help it!' cried Mrs Brown. 'How do you expect I can help it? Why, Lord!' said the old woman, ruffling her curls with a furious pleasure, 'anybody but me would have had 'em off, first of all.' Florence was so relieved to find that it was only her hair and not her head which Mrs Brown coveted, that she offered no resistance or entreaty, and merely raised her mild eyes towards the face of that good soul.

'If I hadn't once had a gal of my own—beyond seas now—that was proud of her hair,' said Mrs Brown, 'I'd have had every lock of it. She's far away, she's far away! Oho! Oho!'

Mrs Brown's was not a melodious cry, but, accompanied with a wild tossing up of her lean arms, it was full of passionate grief, and thrilled to the heart of Florence, whom it frightened more than ever. It had its part, perhaps, in saving her curls; for Mrs Brown, after hovering about her with the scissors for some moments, like a new kind of butterfly, bade her hide them under the bonnet and let no trace of them escape to tempt her. Having accomplished this victory over herself, Mrs Brown resumed her seat on the bones, and smoked a very short black pipe, mowing and mumbling all the time, as if she were eating the stem.

When the pipe was smoked out, she gave the child a rabbit-skin to carry, that she might appear the more like her ordinary companion, and told her that she was now going to lead her to a public street whence she could inquire her way to her friends. But she cautioned her, with threats of summary and deadly vengeance in case of disobedience, not to talk to strangers, nor to repair to her own home (which may have been too near for Mrs Brown's convenience), but to her father's office in the City; also to wait at the street corner where she would be left, until the clock struck three. These directions Mrs Brown enforced with assurances that there would be potent eyes and ears in her employment cognizant of all she did; and these directions Florence promised faithfully and earnestly to observe.

At length, Mrs Brown, issuing forth, conducted her changed and ragged little friend through a labyrinth of narrow streets and lanes and alleys, which emerged, after a long time, upon a stable yard, with a gateway at the end, whence the roar of a great thoroughfare made itself audible. Pointing out this gateway, and informing Florence that when the clocks struck three she was to go to the left, Mrs Brown, after making a parting grasp at her hair which seemed involuntary and quite beyond her own control, told her she knew what to do, and bade her go and do it: remembering that she was watched.

With a lighter heart, but still sore afraid, Florence felt herself released, and tripped off to the corner. When she reached it, she looked back and saw the head of Good Mrs Brown peeping out of the low wooden passage, where she had issued her parting injunctions; likewise the fist of Good Mrs Brown shaking towards her. But though she often looked back afterwards—every minute, at least, in her nervous recollection of the old woman—she could not see her again.

Florence remained there, looking at the bustle in the street, and more and more bewildered by it; and in the meanwhile the clocks appeared to have made up their minds never to strike three any more. At last the steeples rang out three o'clock; there was one close by, so she couldn't be mistaken; and—after often looking over her shoulder, and often going a little way, and as often coming back again, lest the all-powerful spies of Mrs Brown should take offence—she hurried off, as fast as she could in her slipshod shoes, holding the rabbit-skin tight in her hand.

All she knew of her father's offices was that they belonged to Dombey and Son, and that that was a great power belonging to the City. So she could only ask the way to Dombey and Son's in the City; and as she generally made inquiry of children—being afraid to ask grown people—she got very little satisfaction indeed. But by dint of asking her way to the City after a while, and dropping the rest of her inquiry for the present, she really did advance, by slow degrees, towards the heart of that great region which is governed by the terrible Lord Mayor.

Tired of walking, repulsed and pushed about, stunned by the noise and confusion, anxious for her brother and the nurses, terrified by what she had undergone, and the prospect of encountering her angry father in such an altered state; perplexed and frightened alike by what had passed, and what was passing, and what was yet before her; Florence went upon her weary way with tearful eyes, and once or twice could not help stopping to ease her bursting heart by crying bitterly. But few people noticed her at those times, in the garb she wore: or if they did, believed that she was tutored to excite compassion, and passed on. Florence, too, called to her aid all the firmness and self-reliance of a character that her sad experience had prematurely formed and tried: and keeping the end she had in view steadily before her, steadily pursued it.

It was full two hours later in the afternoon than when she had started on this strange adventure, when, escaping from the clash and clangour of a narrow street full of carts and waggons, she peeped into a kind of wharf or landing-place upon the river-side, where there were a great many packages, casks, and boxes, strewn about; a large pair of wooden scales; and a little wooden house on wheels, outside of which, looking at the neighbouring masts and boats, a stout man stood whistling, with his pen behind his ear, and his hands in his pockets, as if his day's work were nearly done.

'Now then! 'said this man, happening to turn round. 'We haven't got anything for you, little girl. Be off!'

'If you please, is this the City?' asked the trembling daughter of the Dombeys.

'Ah! It's the City. You know that well enough, I daresay. Be off! We haven't got anything for you.'

'I don't want anything, thank you,' was the timid answer. 'Except to know the way to Dombey and Son's.'

The man who had been strolling carelessly towards her, seemed surprised by this reply, and looking attentively in her face, rejoined:

'Why, what can you want with Dombey and Son's?'

'To know the way there, if you please.'

The man looked at her yet more curiously, and rubbed the back of his head so hard in his wonderment that he knocked his own hat off.

'Joe!' he called to another man—a labourer—as he picked it up and put it on again.

'Joe it is!' said Joe.

'Where's that young spark of Dombey's who's been watching the shipment of them goods?'

'Just gone, by t'other gate,' said Joe.

'Call him back a minute.'

Joe ran up an archway, bawling as he went, and very soon returned with a blithe-looking boy.

'You're Dombey's jockey, ain't you?' said the first man.

'I'm in Dombey's House, Mr Clark,' returned the boy.

'Look'ye here, then,' said Mr Clark.

Obedient to the indication of Mr Clark's hand, the boy approached towards Florence, wondering, as well he might, what he had to do with her. But she, who had heard what passed, and who, besides the relief of so suddenly considering herself safe at her journey's end, felt reassured beyond all measure by his lively youthful face and manner, ran eagerly up to him, leaving one of the slipshod shoes upon the ground and caught his hand in both of hers.

'I am lost, if you please!' said Florence.

'Lost!' cried the boy.

'Yes, I was lost this morning, a long way from here—and I have had my clothes taken away, since—and I am not dressed in my own now—and my name is Florence Dombey, my little brother's only sister—and, oh dear, dear, take care of me, if you please!' sobbed Florence, giving full vent to the childish feelings she had so long suppressed, and bursting into tears. At the same time her miserable bonnet falling off, her hair came tumbling down about her face: moving to speechless admiration and commiseration, young Walter, nephew of Solomon Gills, Ships' Instrument-maker in general.

Mr Clark stood rapt in amazement: observing under his breath, I never saw such a start on this wharf before. Walter picked up the shoe, and put it on the little foot as the Prince in the story might have fitted Cinderella's slipper on. He hung the rabbit-skin over his left arm; gave the right to Florence; and felt, not to say like Richard Whittington—that is a tame comparison—but like Saint George of England, with the dragon lying dead before him.

'Don't cry, Miss Dombey,' said Walter, in a transport of enthusiasm.

'What a wonderful thing for me that I am here! You are as safe now as if you were guarded by a whole boat's crew of picked men from a man-of-war. Oh, don't cry.'

'I won't cry any more,' said Florence. 'I am only crying for joy.'

'Crying for joy!' thought Walter, 'and I'm the cause of it! Come along, Miss Dombey. There's the other shoe off now! Take mine, Miss Dombey.'

'No, no, no,' said Florence, checking him in the act of impetuously pulling off his own. 'These do better. These do very well.'

'Why, to be sure,' said Walter, glancing at her foot, 'mine are a mile too large. What am I thinking about! You never could walk in mine! Come along, Miss Dombey. Let me see the villain who will dare molest you now.'

So Walter, looking immensely fierce, led off Florence, looking very happy; and they went arm-in-arm along the streets, perfectly indifferent to any astonishment that their appearance might or did excite by the way.

It was growing dark and foggy, and beginning to rain too; but they cared nothing for this: being both wholly absorbed in the late adventures of Florence, which she related with the innocent good faith and confidence of her years, while Walter listened as if, far from the mud and grease of Thames Street, they were rambling alone among the broad leaves and tall trees of some desert island in the tropics—as he very likely fancied, for the time, they were.

'Have we far to go?' asked Florence at last, lilting up her eyes to her companion's face.

'Ah! By-the-bye,' said Walter, stopping, 'let me see; where are we? Oh! I know. But the offices are shut up now, Miss Dombey. There's nobody there. Mr Dombey has gone home long ago. I suppose we must go home too? or, stay. Suppose I take you to my Uncle's, where I live—it's very near here—and go to your house in a coach to tell them you are safe, and bring you back some clothes. Won't that be best?'

'I think so,' answered Florence. 'Don't you? What do you think?'

As they stood deliberating in the street, a man passed them, who glanced quickly at Walter as he went by, as if he recognised him; but seeming to correct that first impression, he passed on without stopping.

'Why, I think it's Mr Carker,' said Walter. 'Carker in our House. Not Carker our Manager, Miss Dombey—the other Carker; the Junior—Halloa! Mr Carker!'

'Is that Walter Gay?' said the other, stopping and returning. 'I couldn't believe it, with such a strange companion.

As he stood near a lamp, listening with surprise to Walter's hurried explanation, he presented a remarkable contrast to the two youthful figures arm- in-arm before him. He was not old, but his hair was white; his body was bent, or bowed as if by the weight of some great trouble: and there were deep lines in his worn and melancholy face. The fire of his eyes, the expression of his features, the very voice in which he spoke, were all subdued and quenched, as if the spirit within him lay in ashes. He was respectably, though very plainly dressed, in black; but his clothes, moulded to the general character of his figure, seemed to shrink and abase themselves upon him, and to join in the sorrowful solicitation which the whole man from head to foot expressed, to be left unnoticed, and alone in his humility.

And yet his interest in youth and hopefulness was not extinguished with the other embers of his soul, for he watched the boy's earnest countenance as he spoke with unusual sympathy, though with an inexplicable show of trouble and compassion, which escaped into his looks, however hard he strove to hold it prisoner. When Walter, in conclusion, put to him the question he had put to Florence, he still stood glancing at him with the same expression, as if he had read some fate upon his face, mournfully at variance with its present brightness.

'What do you advise, Mr Carker?' said Walter, smiling. 'You always give me good advice, you know, when you do speak to me. That's not often, though.'

'I think your own idea is the best,' he answered: looking from Florence to Walter, and back again.

'Mr Carker,' said Walter, brightening with a generous thought, 'Come! Here's a chance for you. Go you to Mr Dombey's, and be the messenger of good news. It may do you some good, Sir. I'll remain at home. You shall go.'

'I!' returned the other.

'Yes. Why not, Mr Carker?' said the boy.

He merely shook him by the hand in answer; he seemed in a manner ashamed and afraid even to do that; and bidding him good-night, and advising him to make haste, turned away.

'Come, Miss Dombey,' said Walter, looking after him as they turned away also, 'we'll go to my Uncle's as quick as we can. Did you ever hear Mr Dombey speak of Mr Carker the Junior, Miss Florence?'

'No,' returned the child, mildly, 'I don't often hear Papa speak.'

'Ah! true! more shame for him,' thought Walter. After a minute's pause, during which he had been looking down upon the gentle patient little face moving on at his side, he said, 'The strangest man, Mr Carker the Junior is, Miss Florence, that ever you heard of. If you could understand what an extraordinary interest he takes in me, and yet how he shuns me and avoids me; and what a low place he holds in our office, and how he is never advanced, and never complains, though year after year he sees young men passed over his head, and though his brother (younger than he is), is our head Manager, you would be as much puzzled about him as I am.'

As Florence could hardly be expected to understand much about it, Walter bestirred himself with his accustomed boyish animation and restlessness to change the subject; and one of the unfortunate shoes coming off again opportunely, proposed to carry Florence to his uncle's in his arms. Florence, though very tired, laughingly declined the proposal, lest he should let her fall; and as they were already near the wooden Midshipman, and as Walter went on to cite various precedents, from shipwrecks and other moving accidents, where younger boys than he had triumphantly rescued and carried off older girls than Florence, they were still in full conversation about it when they arrived at the Instrument-maker's door.

'Holloa, Uncle Sol!' cried Walter, bursting into the shop, and speaking incoherently and out of breath, from that time forth, for the rest of the evening. 'Here's a wonderful adventure! Here's Mr Dombey's daughter lost in the streets, and robbed of her clothes by an old witch of a woman—found by me—brought home to our parlour to rest—look here!'

'Good Heaven!' said Uncle Sol, starting back against his favourite compass-case. 'It can't be! Well, I—'

'No, nor anybody else,' said Walter, anticipating the rest. 'Nobody would, nobody could, you know. Here! just help me lift the little sofa near the fire, will you, Uncle Sol—take care of the plates—cut some dinner for her, will you, Uncle—throw those shoes under the grate. Miss Florence—put your feet on the fender to dry—how damp they are—here's an adventure, Uncle, eh?—God bless my soul, how hot I am!'

Solomon Gills was quite as hot, by sympathy, and in excessive bewilderment. He patted Florence's head, pressed her to eat, pressed her to drink, rubbed the soles of her feet with his pocket-handkerchief heated at the fire, followed his locomotive nephew with his eyes, and ears, and had no clear perception of anything except that he was being constantly knocked against and tumbled over by that excited young gentleman, as he darted about the room attempting to accomplish twenty things at once, and doing nothing at all.

'Here, wait a minute, Uncle,' he continued, catching up a candle, 'till I run upstairs, and get another jacket on, and then I'll be off. I say, Uncle, isn't this an adventure?'

'My dear boy,' said Solomon, who, with his spectacles on his forehead and the great chronometer in his pocket, was incessantly oscillating between Florence on the sofa, and his nephew in all parts of the parlour, 'it's the most extraordinary—'

'No, but do, Uncle, please—do, Miss Florence—dinner, you know, Uncle.'

'Yes, yes, yes,' cried Solomon, cutting instantly into a leg of mutton, as if he were catering for a giant. 'I'll take care of her, Wally! I understand. Pretty dear! Famished, of course. You go and get ready. Lord bless me! Sir Richard Whittington thrice Lord Mayor of London.'

Walter was not very long in mounting to his lofty garret and descending from it, but in the meantime Florence, overcome by fatigue, had sunk into a doze before the fire. The short interval of quiet, though only a few minutes in duration, enabled Solomon Gills so far to collect his wits as to make some little arrangements for her comfort, and to darken the room, and to screen her from the blaze. Thus, when the boy returned, she was sleeping peacefully.

'That's capital!' he whispered, giving Solomon such a hug that it squeezed a new expression into his face. 'Now I'm off. I'll just take a crust of bread with me, for I'm very hungry—and don't wake her, Uncle Sol.'

'No, no,' said Solomon. 'Pretty child.'

'Pretty, indeed!' cried Walter. 'I never saw such a face, Uncle Sol. Now I'm off.'

'That's right,' said Solomon, greatly relieved.

'I say, Uncle Sol,' cried Walter, putting his face in at the door.

'Here he is again,' said Solomon.

'How does she look now?'

'Quite happy,' said Solomon.

'That's famous! now I'm off.'

'I hope you are,' said Solomon to himself.

'I say, Uncle Sol,' cried Walter, reappearing at the door.

'Here he is again!' said Solomon.

'We met Mr Carker the Junior in the street, queerer than ever. He bade me good-bye, but came behind us here—there's an odd thing!—for when we reached the shop door, I looked round, and saw him going quietly away, like a servant who had seen me home, or a faithful dog. How does she look now, Uncle?'

'Pretty much the same as before, Wally,' replied Uncle Sol.

'That's right. Now I am off!'

And this time he really was: and Solomon Gills, with no appetite for dinner, sat on the opposite side of the fire, watching Florence in her slumber, building a great many airy castles of the most fantastic architecture; and looking, in the dim shade, and in the close vicinity of all the instruments, like a magician disguised in a Welsh wig and a suit of coffee colour, who held the child in an enchanted sleep.

In the meantime, Walter proceeded towards Mr Dombey's house at a pace seldom achieved by a hack horse from the stand; and yet with his head out of window every two or three minutes, in impatient remonstrance with the driver. Arriving at his journey's end, he leaped out, and breathlessly announcing his errand to the servant, followed him straight into the library, we there was a great confusion of tongues, and where Mr Dombey, his sister, and Miss Tox, Richards, and Nipper, were all congregated together.

'Oh! I beg your pardon, Sir,' said Walter, rushing up to him, 'but I'm happy to say it's all right, Sir. Miss Dombey's found!'

The boy with his open face, and flowing hair, and sparkling eyes, panting with pleasure and excitement, was wonderfully opposed to Mr Dombey, as he sat confronting him in his library chair.

'I told you, Louisa, that she would certainly be found,' said Mr Dombey, looking slightly over his shoulder at that lady, who wept in company with Miss Tox. 'Let the servants know that no further steps are necessary. This boy who brings the information, is young Gay, from the office. How was my daughter found, Sir? I know how she was lost.' Here he looked majestically at Richards. 'But how was she found? Who found her?'

'Why, I believe I found Miss Dombey, Sir,' said Walter modestly, 'at least I don't know that I can claim the merit of having exactly found her, Sir, but I was the fortunate instrument of—'

'What do you mean, Sir,' interrupted Mr Dombey, regarding the boy's evident pride and pleasure in his share of the transaction with an instinctive dislike, 'by not having exactly found my daughter, and by being a fortunate instrument? Be plain and coherent, if you please.'

It was quite out of Walter's power to be coherent; but he rendered himself as explanatory as he could, in his breathless state, and stated why he had come alone.

'You hear this, girl?' said Mr Dombey sternly to the black-eyed. 'Take what is necessary, and return immediately with this young man to fetch Miss Florence home. Gay, you will be rewarded to-morrow.

'Oh! thank you, Sir,' said Walter. 'You are very kind. I'm sure I was not thinking of any reward, Sir.'

'You are a boy,' said Mr Dombey, suddenly and almost fiercely; 'and what you think of, or affect to think of, is of little consequence. You have done well, Sir. Don't undo it. Louisa, please to give the lad some wine.'

Mr Dombey's glance followed Walter Gay with sharp disfavour, as he left the room under the pilotage of Mrs Chick; and it may be that his mind's eye followed him with no greater relish, as he rode back to his Uncle's with Miss Susan Nipper.

There they found that Florence, much refreshed by sleep, had dined, and greatly improved the acquaintance of Solomon Gills, with whom she was on terms of perfect confidence and ease. The black-eyed (who had cried so much that she might now be called the red-eyed, and who was very silent and depressed) caught her in her arms without a word of contradiction or reproach, and made a very hysterical meeting of it. Then converting the parlour, for the nonce, into a private tiring room, she dressed her, with great care, in proper clothes; and presently led her forth, as like a Dombey as her natural disqualifications admitted of her being made.

'Good-night!' said Florence, running up to Solomon. 'You have been very good to me.

Old Sol was quite delighted, and kissed her like her grand-father.

'Good-night, Walter! Good-bye!' said Florence.

'Good-bye!' said Walter, giving both his hands.

'I'll never forget you,' pursued Florence. 'No! indeed I never will. Good-bye, Walter!' In the innocence of her grateful heart, the child lifted up her face to his. Walter, bending down his own, raised it again, all red and burning; and looked at Uncle Sol, quite sheepishly.

'Where's Walter?' 'Good-night, Walter!' 'Good-bye, Walter!' 'Shake hands once more, Walter!' This was still Florence's cry, after she was shut up with her little maid, in the coach. And when the coach at length moved off, Walter on the door-step gaily turned the waving of her handkerchief, while the wooden Midshipman behind him seemed, like himself, intent upon that coach alone, excluding all the other passing coaches from his observation.

In good time Mr Dombey's mansion was gained again, and again there was a noise of tongues in the library. Again, too, the coach was ordered to wait— 'for Mrs Richards,' one of Susan's fellow-servants ominously whispered, as she passed with Florence.

The entrance of the lost child made a slight sensation, but not much. Mr Dombey, who had never found her, kissed her once upon the forehead, and cautioned her not to run away again, or wander anywhere with treacherous attendants. Mrs Chick stopped in her lamentations on the corruption of human nature, even when beckoned to the paths of virtue by a Charitable Grinder; and received her with a welcome something short of the reception due to none but perfect Dombeys. Miss Tox regulated her feelings by the models before her. Richards, the culprit Richards, alone poured out her heart in broken words of welcome, and bowed herself over the little wandering head as if she really loved it.

'Ah, Richards!' said Mrs Chick, with a sigh. 'It would have been much more satisfactory to those who wish to think well of their fellow creatures, and much more becoming in you, if you had shown some proper feeling, in time, for the little child that is now going to be prematurely deprived of its natural nourishment.

'Cut off,' said Miss Tox, in a plaintive whisper, 'from one common fountain!'

'If it was ungrateful case,' said Mrs Chick, solemnly, 'and I had your reflections, Richards, I should feel as if the Charitable Grinders' dress would blight my child, and the education choke him.'

For the matter of that—but Mrs Chick didn't know it—he had been pretty well blighted by the dress already; and as to the education, even its retributive effect might be produced in time, for it was a storm of sobs and blows.

'Louisa!' said Mr Dombey. 'It is not necessary to prolong these observations. The woman is discharged and paid. You leave this house, Richards, for taking my son—my son,' said Mr Dombey, emphatically repeating these two words, 'into haunts and into society which are not to be thought of without a shudder. As to the accident which befel Miss Florence this morning, I regard that as, in one great sense, a happy and fortunate circumstance; inasmuch as, but for that occurrence, I never could have known—and from your own lips too—of what you had been guilty. I think, Louisa, the other nurse, the young person,' here Miss Nipper sobbed aloud, 'being so much younger, and necessarily influenced by Paul's nurse, may remain. Have the goodness to direct that this woman's coach is paid to'—Mr Dombey stopped and winced—'to Staggs's Gardens.'

Polly moved towards the door, with Florence holding to her dress, and crying to her in the most pathetic manner not to go away. It was a dagger in the haughty father's heart, an arrow in his brain, to see how the flesh and blood he could not disown clung to this obscure stranger, and he sitting by. Not that he cared to whom his daughter turned, or from whom turned away. The swift sharp agony struck through him, as he thought of what his son might do.

His son cried lustily that night, at all events. Sooth to say, poor Paul had better reason for his tears than sons of that age often have, for he had lost his second mother—his first, so far as he knew—by a stroke as sudden as that natural affliction which had darkened the beginning of his life. At the same blow, his sister too, who cried herself to sleep so mournfully, had lost as good and true a friend. But that is quite beside the question. Let us waste no words about it.

CHAPTER 7. A Bird's-eye Glimpse of Miss Tox's Dwelling-place: also of the State of Miss Tox's Affections

Miss Tox inhabited a dark little house that had been squeezed, at some remote period of English History, into a fashionable neighbourhood at the west end of the town, where it stood in the shade like a poor relation of the great street round the corner, coldly looked down upon by mighty mansions. It was not exactly in a court, and it was not exactly in a yard; but it was in the dullest of No-Thoroughfares, rendered anxious and haggard by distant double knocks. The name of this retirement, where grass grew between the chinks in the stone pavement, was Princess's Place; and in Princess's Place was Princess's Chapel, with a tinkling bell, where sometimes as many as five-and-twenty people attended service on a Sunday. The Princess's Arms was also there, and much resorted to by splendid footmen. A sedan chair was kept inside the railing before the Princess's Arms, but it had never come out within the memory of man; and on fine mornings, the top of every rail (there were eight-and-forty, as Miss Tox had often counted) was decorated with a pewter-pot.

There was another private house besides Miss Tox's in Princess's Place: not to mention an immense Pair of gates, with an immense pair of lion-headed knockers on them, which were never opened by any chance, and were supposed to constitute a disused entrance to somebody's stables. Indeed, there was a smack of stabling in the air of Princess's Place; and Miss Tox's bedroom (which was at the back) commanded a vista of Mews, where hostlers, at whatever sort of work engaged, were continually accompanying themselves with effervescent noises; and where the most domestic and confidential garments of coachmen and their wives and families, usually hung, like Macbeth's banners, on the outward walls.'

At this other private house in Princess's Place, tenanted by a retired butler who had married a housekeeper, apartments were let Furnished, to a single gentleman: to wit, a wooden-featured, blue-faced Major, with his eyes starting out of his head, in whom Miss Tox recognised, as she herself expressed it, 'something so truly military;' and between whom and herself, an occasional interchange of newspapers and pamphlets, and such Platonic dalliance, was effected through the medium of a dark servant of the Major's who Miss Tox was quite content to classify as a 'native,' without connecting him with any geographical idea whatever.

Perhaps there never was a smaller entry and staircase, than the entry and staircase of Miss Tox's house. Perhaps, taken altogether, from top to bottom, it was the most inconvenient little house in England, and the crookedest; but then, Miss Tox said, what a situation! There was very little daylight to be got there in the winter: no sun at the best of times: air was out of the question, and traffic was walled out. Still Miss Tox said, think of the situation! So said the blue-faced Major, whose eyes were starting out of his head: who gloried in Princess's Place: and who delighted to turn the conversation at his club, whenever he could, to something connected with some of the great people in the great street round the corner, that he might have the satisfaction of saying they were his neighbours.

In short, with Miss Tox and the blue-faced Major, it was enough for Princess's Place—as with a very small fragment of society, it is enough for many a little hanger-on of another sort—to be well connected, and to have genteel blood in its veins. It might be poor, mean, shabby, stupid, dull. No matter. The great street round the corner trailed off into Princess's Place; and that which of High Holborn would have become a choleric word, spoken of Princess's Place became flat blasphemy.

The dingy tenement inhabited by Miss Tox was her own; having been devised and bequeathed to her by the deceased owner of the fishy eye in the locket, of whom a miniature portrait, with a powdered head and a pigtail, balanced the kettle-holder on opposite sides of the parlour fireplace. The greater part of the furniture was of the powdered-head and pig-tail period: comprising a plate-warmer, always languishing and sprawling its four attenuated bow legs in somebody's way; and an obsolete harpsichord, illuminated round the maker's name with a painted garland of sweet peas. In any part of the house, visitors were usually cognizant of a prevailing mustiness; and in warm weather Miss Tox had been seen apparently writing in sundry chinks and crevices of the wainscoat with the the wrong end of a pen dipped in spirits of turpentine.

Although Major Bagstock had arrived at what is called in polite literature, the grand meridian of life, and was proceeding on his journey downhill with hardly any throat, and a very rigid pair of jaw-bones, and long-flapped elephantine ears, and his eyes and complexion in the state of artificial excitement already mentioned, he was mightily proud of awakening an interest in Miss Tox, and tickled his vanity with the fiction that she was a splendid woman who had her eye on him. This he had several times hinted at the club: in connexion with little jocularities, of which old Joe Bagstock, old Joey Bagstock, old J. Bagstock, old Josh Bagstock, or so forth, was the perpetual theme: it being, as it were, the Major's stronghold and donjon- keep of light humour, to be on the most familiar terms with his own name.

'Joey B., Sir,'the Major would say, with a flourish of his walking-stick, 'is worth a dozen of you. If you had a few more of the Bagstock breed among you, Sir, you'd be none the worse for it. Old Joe, Sir, needn't look far for a wile even now, if he was on the look-out; but he's hard-hearted, Sir, is Joe—he's tough, Sir, tough, and de-vilish sly!' After such a declaration, wheezing sounds would be heard; and the Major's blue would deepen into purple, while his eyes strained and started convulsively.

Notwithstanding his very liberal laudation of himself, however, the Major was selfish. It may be doubted whether there ever was a more entirely selfish person at heart; or at stomach is perhaps a better expression, seeing that he was more decidedly endowed with that latter organ than with the former. He had no idea of being overlooked or slighted by anybody; least of all, had he the remotest comprehension of being overlooked and slighted by Miss Tox.

And yet, Miss Tox, as it appeared, forgot him—gradually forgot him. She began to forget him soon after her discovery of the Toodle family. She continued to forget him up to the time of the christening. She went on forgetting him with compound interest after that. Something or somebody had superseded him as a source of interest.

'Good morning, Ma'am,' said the Major, meeting Miss Tox in Princess's Place, some weeks after the changes chronicled in the last chapter.

'Good morning, Sir,' said Miss Tox; very coldly.

'Joe Bagstock, Ma'am,' observed the Major, with his usual gallantry, 'has not had the happiness of bowing to you at your window, for a considerable period. Joe has been hardly used, Ma'am. His sun has been behind a cloud.'

Miss Tox inclined her head; but very coldly indeed.

'Joe's luminary has been out of town, Ma'am, perhaps,' inquired the Major.

'I? out of town? oh no, I have not been out of town,' said Miss Tox. 'I have been much engaged lately. My time is nearly all devoted to some very intimate friends. I am afraid I have none to spare, even now. Good morning, Sir!'

As Miss Tox, with her most fascinating step and carriage, disappeared from Princess's Place, the Major stood looking after her with a bluer face than ever: muttering and growling some not at all complimentary remarks.

'Why, damme, Sir,' said the Major, rolling his lobster eyes round and round Princess's Place, and apostrophizing its fragrant air, 'six months ago, the woman loved the ground Josh Bagstock walked on. What's the meaning of it?'

The Major decided, after some consideration, that it meant mantraps; that it meant plotting and snaring; that Miss Tox was digging pitfalls. 'But you won't catch Joe, Ma'am,' said the Major. 'He's tough, Ma'am, tough, is J.B. Tough, and de-vilish sly!' over which reflection he chuckled for the rest of the day.

But still, when that day and many other days were gone and past, it seemed that Miss Tox took no heed whatever of the Major, and thought nothing at all about him. She had been wont, once upon a time, to look out at one of her little dark windows by accident, and blushingly return the Major's greeting; but now, she never gave the Major a chance, and cared nothing at all whether he looked over the way or not. Other changes had come to pass too. The Major, standing in the shade of his own apartment, could make out that an air of greater smartness had recently come over Miss Tox's house; that a new cage with gilded wires had been provided for the ancient little canary bird; that divers ornaments, cut out of coloured card-boards and paper, seemed to decorate the chimney-piece and tables; that a plant or two had suddenly sprung up in the windows; that Miss Tox occasionally practised on the harpsichord, whose garland of sweet peas was always displayed ostentatiously, crowned with the Copenhagen and Bird Waltzes in a Music Book of Miss Tox's own copying.

Over and above all this, Miss Tox had long been dressed with uncommon care and elegance in slight mourning. But this helped the Major out of his difficulty; and be determined within himself that she had come into a small legacy, and grown proud.

It was on the very next day after he had eased his mind by arriving at this decision, that the Major, sitting at his breakfast, saw an apparition so tremendous and wonderful in Miss Tox's little drawing-room, that he remained for some time rooted to his chair; then, rushing into the next room, returned with a double-barrelled opera-glass, through which he surveyed it intently for some minutes.

'It's a Baby, Sir,' said the Major, shutting up the glass again, 'for fifty thousand pounds!'

The Major couldn't forget it. He could do nothing but whistle, and stare to that extent, that his eyes, compared with what they now became, had been in former times quite cavernous and sunken. Day after day, two, three, four times a week, this Baby reappeared. The Major continued to stare and whistle. To all other intents and purposes he was alone in Princess's Place. Miss Tox had ceased to mind what he did. He might have been black as well as blue, and it would have been of no consequence to her.

The perseverance with which she walked out of Princess's Place to fetch this baby and its nurse, and walked back with them, and walked home with them again, and continually mounted guard over them; and the perseverance with which she nursed it herself, and fed it, and played with it, and froze its young blood with airs upon the harpsichord, was extraordinary. At about this same period too, she was seized with a passion for looking at a certain bracelet; also with a passion for looking at the moon, of which she would take long observations from her chamber window. But whatever she looked at; sun, moon, stars, or bracelet; she looked no more at the Major. And the Major whistled, and stared, and wondered, and dodged about his room, and could make nothing of it.

'You'll quite win my brother Paul's heart, and that's the truth, my dear,' said Mrs Chick, one day.

Miss Tox turned pale.

'He grows more like Paul every day,' said Mrs Chick.

Miss Tox returned no other reply than by taking the little Paul in her arms, and making his cockade perfectly flat and limp with her caresses.

'His mother, my dear,' said Miss Tox, 'whose acquaintance I was to have made through you, does he at all resemble her?'

'Not at all,' returned Louisa

'She was—she was pretty, I believe?' faltered Miss Tox.

'Why, poor dear Fanny was interesting,' said Mrs Chick, after some judicial consideration. 'Certainly interesting. She had not that air of commanding superiority which one would somehow expect, almost as a matter of course, to find in my brother's wife; nor had she that strength and vigour of mind which such a man requires.'

Miss Tox heaved a deep sigh.

'But she was pleasing:' said Mrs Chick: 'extremely so. And she meant!—oh, dear, how well poor Fanny meant!'

'You Angel!' cried Miss Tox to little Paul. 'You Picture of your own Papa!'

If the Major could have known how many hopes and ventures, what a multitude of plans and speculations, rested on that baby head; and could have seen them hovering, in all their heterogeneous confusion and disorder, round the puckered cap of the unconscious little Paul; he might have stared indeed. Then would he have recognised, among the crowd, some few ambitious motes and beams belonging to Miss Tox; then would he perhaps have understood the nature of that lady's faltering investment in the Dombey Firm.

If the child himself could have awakened in the night, and seen, gathered about his cradle-curtains, faint reflections of the dreams that other people had of him, they might have scared him, with good reason. But he slumbered on, alike unconscious of the kind intentions of Miss Tox, the wonder of the Major, the early sorrows of his sister, and the stern visions of his father; and innocent that any spot of earth contained a Dombey or a Son.

CHAPTER 8. Paul's Further Progress, Growth and Character

Beneath the watching and attentive eyes of Time—so far another Major—Paul's slumbers gradually changed. More and more light broke in upon them; distincter and distincter dreams disturbed them; an accumulating crowd of objects and impressions swarmed about his rest; and so he passed from babyhood to childhood, and became a talking, walking, wondering Dombey.

On the downfall and banishment of Richards, the nursery may be said to have been put into commission: as a Public Department is sometimes, when no individual Atlas can be found to support it The Commissioners were, of course, Mrs Chick and Miss Tox: who devoted themselves to their duties with such astonishing ardour that Major Bagstock had every day some new reminder of his being forsaken, while Mr Chick, bereft of domestic supervision, cast himself upon the gay world, dined at clubs and coffee-houses, smelt of smoke on three different occasions, went to the play by himself, and in short, loosened (as Mrs Chick once told him) every social bond, and moral obligation.

Yet, in spite of his early promise, all this vigilance and care could not make little Paul a thriving boy. Naturally delicate, perhaps, he pined and wasted after the dismissal of his nurse, and, for a long time, seemed but to wait his opportunity of gliding through their hands, and seeking his lost mother. This dangerous ground in his steeple-chase towards manhood passed, he still found it very rough riding, and was grievously beset by all the obstacles in his course. Every tooth was a break-neck fence, and every pimple in the measles a stone wall to him. He was down in every fit of the hooping-cough, and rolled upon and crushed by a whole field of small diseases, that came trooping on each other's heels to prevent his getting up again. Some bird of prey got into his throat instead of the thrush; and the very chickens turning ferocious—if they have anything to do with that infant malady to which they lend their name—worried him like tiger-cats.

The chill of Paul's christening had struck home, perhaps to some sensitive part of his nature, which could not recover itself in the cold shade of his father; but he was an unfortunate child from that day. Mrs Wickam often said she never see a dear so put upon.

Mrs Wickam was a waiter's wife—which would seem equivalent to being any other man's widow—whose application for an engagement in Mr Dombey's service had been favourably considered, on account of the apparent impossibility of her having any followers, or anyone to follow; and who, from within a day or two of Paul's sharp weaning, had been engaged as his nurse. Mrs Wickam was a meek woman, of a fair complexion, with her eyebrows always elevated, and her head always drooping; who was always ready to pity herself, or to be pitied, or to pity anybody else; and who had a surprising natural gift of viewing all subjects in an utterly forlorn and pitiable light, and bringing dreadful precedents to bear upon them, and deriving the greatest consolation from the exercise of that talent.

It is hardly necessary to observe, that no touch of this quality ever reached the magnificent knowledge of Mr Dombey. It would have been remarkable, indeed, if any had; when no one in the house—not even Mrs Chick or Miss Tox—dared ever whisper to him that there had, on any one occasion, been the least reason for uneasiness in reference to little Paul. He had settled, within himself, that the child must necessarily pass through a certain routine of minor maladies, and that the sooner he did so the better. If he could have bought him off, or provided a substitute, as in the case of an unlucky drawing for the militia, he would have been glad to do so, on liberal terms. But as this was not feasible, he merely wondered, in his haughty- manner, now and then, what Nature meant by it; and comforted himself with the reflection that there was another milestone passed upon the road, and that the great end of the journey lay so much the nearer. For the feeling uppermost in his mind, now and constantly intensifying, and increasing in it as Paul grew older, was impatience. Impatience for the time to come, when his visions of their united consequence and grandeur would be triumphantly realized.

Some philosophers tell us that selfishness is at the root of our best loves and affections.' Mr Dombey's young child was, from the beginning, so distinctly important to him as a part of his own greatness, or (which is the same thing) of the greatness of Dombey and Son, that there is no doubt his parental affection might have been easily traced, like many a goodly superstructure of fair fame, to a very low foundation. But he loved his son with all the love he had. If there were a warm place in his frosty heart, his son occupied it; if its very hard surface could receive the impression of any image, the image of that son was there; though not so much as an infant, or as a boy, but as a grown man—the 'Son' of the Firm. Therefore he was impatient to advance into the future, and to hurry over the intervening passages of his history. Therefore he had little or no anxiety' about them, in spite of his love; feeling as if the boy had a charmed life, and must become the man with whom he held such constant communication in his thoughts, and for whom he planned and projected, as for an existing reality, every day.

Thus Paul grew to be nearly five years old. He was a pretty little fellow; though there was something wan and wistful in his small face, that gave occasion to many significant shakes of Mrs Wickam's head, and many long-drawn inspirations of Mrs Wickam's breath. His temper gave abundant promise of being imperious in after-life; and he had as hopeful an apprehension of his own importance, and the rightful subservience of all other things and persons to it, as heart could desire. He was childish and sportive enough at times, and not of a sullen disposition; but he had a strange, old- fashioned, thoughtful way, at other times, of sitting brooding in his miniature arm-chair, when he looked (and talked) like one of those terrible little Beings in the Fairy tales, who, at a hundred and fifty or two hundred years of age, fantastically represent the children for whom they have been substituted. He would frequently be stricken with this precocious mood upstairs in the nursery; and would sometimes lapse into it suddenly, exclaiming that he was tired: even while playing with Florence, or driving Miss Tox in single harness. But at no time did he fall into it so surely, as when, his little chair being carried down into his father's room, he sat there with him after dinner, by the fire. They were the strangest pair at such a time that ever firelight shone upon. Mr Dombey so erect and solemn, gazing at the blare; his little image, with an old, old face, peering into the red perspective with the fixed and rapt attention of a sage. Mr Dombey entertaining complicated worldly schemes and plans; the little image entertaining Heaven knows what wild fancies, half-formed thoughts, and wandering speculations. Mr Dombey stiff with starch and arrogance; the little image by inheritance, and in unconscious imitation. The two so very much alike, and yet so monstrously contrasted.

On one of these occasions, when they had both been perfectly quiet for a long time, and Mr Dombey only knew that the child was awake by occasionally glancing at his eye, where the bright fire was sparkling like a jewel, little Paul broke silence thus:

'Papa! what's money?'

The abrupt question had such immediate reference to the subject of Mr Dombey's thoughts, that Mr Dombey was quite disconcerted.

'What is money, Paul?' he answered. 'Money?'

'Yes,' said the child, laying his hands upon the elbows of his little chair, and turning the old face up towards Mr Dombey's; 'what is money?'

Mr Dombey was in a difficulty. He would have liked to give him some explanation involving the terms circulating-medium, currency, depreciation of currency', paper, bullion, rates of exchange, value of precious metals in the market, and so forth; but looking down at the little chair, and seeing what a long way down it was, he answered: 'Gold, and silver, and copper. Guineas, shillings, half-pence. You know what they are?'

'Oh yes, I know what they are,' said Paul. 'I don't mean that, Papa. I mean what's money after all?'

Heaven and Earth, how old his face was as he turned it up again towards his father's!

'What is money after all!' said Mr Dombey, backing his chair a little, that he might the better gaze in sheer amazement at the presumptuous atom that propounded such an inquiry.

'I mean, Papa, what can it do?' returned Paul, folding his arms (they were hardly long enough to fold), and looking at the fire, and up at him, and at the fire, and up at him again.

Mr Dombey drew his chair back to its former place, and patted him on the head. 'You'll know better by-and-by, my man,' he said. 'Money, Paul, can do anything.' He took hold of the little hand, and beat it softly against one of his own, as he said so.

But Paul got his hand free as soon as he could; and rubbing it gently to and fro on the elbow of his chair, as if his wit were in the palm, and he were sharpening it—and looking at the fire again, as though the fire had been his adviser and prompter—repeated, after a short pause:

'Anything, Papa?'

'Yes. Anything—almost,' said Mr Dombey.

'Anything means everything, don't it, Papa?' asked his son: not observing, or possibly not understanding, the qualification.

'It includes it: yes,' said Mr Dombey.

'Why didn't money save me my Mama?' returned the child. 'It isn't cruel, is it?'

'Cruel!' said Mr Dombey, settling his neckcloth, and seeming to resent the idea. 'No. A good thing can't be cruel.'

'If it's a good thing, and can do anything,' said the little fellow, thoughtfully, as he looked back at the fire, 'I wonder why it didn't save me my Mama.'

He didn't ask the question of his father this time. Perhaps he had seen, with a child's quickness, that it had already made his father uncomfortable. But he repeated the thought aloud, as if it were quite an old one to him, and had troubled him very much; and sat with his chin resting on his hand, still cogitating and looking for an explanation in the fire.

Mr Dombey having recovered from his surprise, not to say his alarm (for it was the very first occasion on which the child had ever broached the subject of his mother to him, though he had had him sitting by his side, in this same manner, evening after evening), expounded to him how that money, though a very potent spirit, never to be disparaged on any account whatever, could not keep people alive whose time was come to die; and how that we must all die, unfortunately, even in the City, though we were never so rich. But how that money caused us to be honoured, feared, respected, courted, and admired, and made us powerful and glorious in the eyes of all men; and how that it could, very often, even keep off death, for a long time together. How, for example, it had secured to his Mama the services of Mr Pilkins, by which be, Paul, had often profited himself; likewise of the great Doctor Parker Peps, whom he had never known. And how it could do all, that could be done. This, with more to the same purpose, Mr Dombey instilled into the mind of his son, who listened attentively, and seemed to understand the greater part of what was said to him.

'It can't make me strong and quite well, either, Papa; can it?' asked Paul, after a short silence; rubbing his tiny hands.

'Why, you are strong and quite well,' returned Mr Dombey. 'Are you not?'

Oh! the age of the face that was turned up again, with an expression, half of melancholy, half of slyness, on it!

'You are as strong and well as such little people usually are? Eh?' said Mr Dombey.

'Florence is older than I am, but I'm not as strong and well as Florence, 'I know,' returned the child; 'and I believe that when Florence was as little as me, she could play a great deal longer at a time without tiring herself. I am so tired sometimes,' said little Paul, warming his hands, and looking in between the bars of the grate, as if some ghostly puppet-show were performing there, 'and my bones ache so (Wickam says it's my bones), that I don't know what to do.'

'Ay! But that's at night,' said Mr Dombey, drawing his own chair closer to his son's, and laying his hand gently on his back; 'little people should be tired at night, for then they sleep well.'

'Oh, it's not at night, Papa,' returned the child, 'it's in the day; and I lie down in Florence's lap, and she sings to me. At night I dream about such cu-ri-ous things!'

And he went on, warming his hands again, and thinking about them, like an old man or a young goblin.

Mr Dombey was so astonished, and so uncomfortable, and so perfectly at a loss how to pursue the conversation, that he could only sit looking at his son by the light of the fire, with his hand resting on his back, as if it were detained there by some magnetic attraction. Once he advanced his other hand, and turned the contemplative face towards his own for a moment. But it sought the fire again as soon as he released it; and remained, addressed towards the flickering blaze, until the nurse appeared, to summon him to bed.

'I want Florence to come for me,' said Paul.

'Won't you come with your poor Nurse Wickam, Master Paul?' inquired that attendant, with great pathos.

'No, I won't,' replied Paul, composing himself in his arm-chair again, like the master of the house.

Invoking a blessing upon his innocence, Mrs Wickam withdrew, and presently Florence appeared in her stead. The child immediately started up with sudden readiness and animation, and raised towards his father in bidding him good-night, a countenance so much brighter, so much younger, and so much more child-like altogether, that Mr Dombey, while he felt greatly reassured by the change, was quite amazed at it.

After they had left the room together, he thought he heard a soft voice singing; and remembering that Paul had said his sister sung to him, he had the curiosity to open the door and listen, and look after them. She was toiling up the great, wide, vacant staircase, with him in her arms; his head was lying on her shoulder, one of his arms thrown negligently round her neck. So they went, toiling up; she singing all the way, and Paul sometimes crooning out a feeble accompaniment. Mr Dombey looked after them until they reached the top of the staircase—not without halting to rest by the way — and passed out of his sight; and then he still stood gazing upwards, until the dull rays of the moon, glimmering in a melancholy manner through the dim skylight, sent him back to his room.

Mrs Chick and Miss Tox were convoked in council at dinner next day; and when the cloth was removed, Mr Dombey opened the proceedings by requiring to be informed, without any gloss or reservation, whether there was anything the matter with Paul, and what Mr Pilkins said about him.

'For the child is hardly,' said Mr Dombey, 'as stout as I could wish.'

'My dear Paul,' returned Mrs Chick, 'with your usual happy discrimination, which I am weak enough to envy you, every time I am in your company; and so I think is Miss Tox.'

'Oh my dear!' said Miss Tox, softly, 'how could it be otherwise? Presumptuous as it is to aspire to such a level; still, if the bird of night may —but I'll not trouble Mr Dombey with the sentiment. It merely relates to the Bulbul.'

Mr Dombey bent his head in stately recognition of the Bulbuls as an old-established body.

'With your usual happy discrimination, my dear Paul,' resumed Mrs Chick, 'you have hit the point at once. Our darling is altogether as stout as we could wish. The fact is, that his mind is too much for him. His soul is a great deal too large for his frame. I am sure the way in which that dear child talks!'said Mrs Chick, shaking her head; 'no one would believe. His expressions, Lucretia, only yesterday upon the subject of Funerals!

'I am afraid,' said Mr Dombey, interrupting her testily, 'that some of those persons upstairs suggest improper subjects to the child. He was speaking to me last night about his—about his Bones,' said Mr Dombey, laying an irritated stress upon the word. 'What on earth has anybody to do with the— with the—Bones of my son? He is not a living skeleton, I suppose.

'Very far from it,' said Mrs Chick, with unspeakable expression.

'I hope so,' returned her brother. 'Funerals again! who talks to the child of funerals? We are not undertakers, or mutes, or grave-diggers, I believe.'

'Very far from it,' interposed Mrs Chick, with the same profound expression as before.

'Then who puts such things into his head?' said Mr Dombey. 'Really I was quite dismayed and shocked last night. Who puts such things into his head, Louisa?'

'My dear Paul,' said Mrs Chick, after a moment's silence, 'it is of no use inquiring. I do not think, I will tell you candidly that Wickam is a person of very cheerful spirit, or what one would call a—'

'A daughter of Momus,' Miss Tox softly suggested.

'Exactly so,' said Mrs Chick; 'but she is exceedingly attentive and useful, and not at all presumptuous; indeed I never saw a more biddable woman. I would say that for her, if I was put upon my trial before a Court of Justice.'

'Well! you are not put upon your trial before a Court of Justice, at present, Louisa,' returned Mr Dombey, chafing,' and therefore it don't matter.

'My dear Paul,' said Mrs Chick, in a warning voice, 'I must be spoken to kindly, or there is an end of me,' at the same time a premonitory redness developed itself in Mrs Chick's eyelids which was an invariable sign of rain, unless the weather changed directly.

'I was inquiring, Louisa,' observed Mr Dombey, in an altered voice, and after a decent interval, 'about Paul's health and actual state.

'If the dear child,' said Mrs Chick, in the tone of one who was summing up what had been previously quite agreed upon, instead of saying it all for the first time, 'is a little weakened by that last attack, and is not in quite such vigorous health as we could wish; and if he has some temporary weakness in his system, and does occasionally seem about to lose, for the moment, the use of his—'

Mrs Chick was afraid to say limbs, after Mr Dombey's recent objection to bones, and therefore waited for a suggestion from Miss Tox, who, true to her office, hazarded 'members.'

'Members!' repeated Mr Dombey.

'I think the medical gentleman mentioned legs this morning, my dear Louisa, did he not?' said Miss Tox.

'Why, of course he did, my love,' retorted Mrs Chick, mildly reproachful. 'How can you ask me? You heard him. I say, if our dear Paul should lose, for the moment, the use of his legs, these are casualties common to many children at his time of life, and not to be prevented by any care or caution. The sooner you understand that, Paul, and admit that, the better. If you have any doubt as to the amount of care, and caution, and affection, and self- sacrifice, that has been bestowed upon little Paul, I should wish to refer the question to your medical attendant, or to any of your dependants in this house. Call Towlinson,' said Mrs Chick, 'I believe he has no prejudice in our favour; quite the contrary. I should wish to hear what accusation Towlinson can make!'

'Surely you must know, Louisa,' observed Mr Dombey, 'that I don't question your natural devotion to, and regard for, the future head of my house.'

'I am glad to hear it, Paul,' said Mrs Chick; 'but really you are very odd, and sometimes talk very strangely, though without meaning it, I know. If your dear boy's soul is too much for his body, Paul, you should remember whose fault that is—who he takes after, I mean—and make the best of it. He's as like his Papa as he can be. People have noticed it in the streets. The very beadle, I am informed, observed it, so long ago as at his christening. He's a very respectable man, with children of his own. He ought to know.'

'Mr Pilkins saw Paul this morning, I believe?' said Mr Dombey.

'Yes, he did,' returned his sister. 'Miss Tox and myself were present. Miss Tox and myself are always present. We make a point of it. Mr Pilkins has seen him for some days past, and a very clever man I believe him to be. He says it is nothing to speak of; which I can confirm, if that is any consolation; but he recommended, to-day, sea-air. Very wisely, Paul, I feel convinced.'

'Sea-air,' repeated Mr Dombey, looking at his sister.

'There is nothing to be made uneasy by, in that,'said Mrs Chick. 'My George and Frederick were both ordered sea-air, when they were about his age; and I have been ordered it myself a great many times. I quite agree with you, Paul, that perhaps topics may be incautiously mentioned upstairs before him, which it would be as well for his little mind not to expatiate upon; but I really don't see how that is to be helped, in the case of a child of his quickness. If he were a common child, there would be nothing in it. I must say I think, with Miss Tox, that a short absence from this house, the air of Brighton, and the bodily and mental training of so judicious a person as Mrs Pipchin for instance—'

'Who is Mrs Pipchin, Louisa?' asked Mr Dombey; aghast at this familiar introduction of a name he had never heard before.

'Mrs Pipchin, my dear Paul,' returned his sister, 'is an elderly lady—Miss Tox knows her whole history—who has for some time devoted all the energies of her mind, with the greatest success, to the study and treatment of infancy, and who has been extremely well connected. Her husband broke his heart in—how did you say her husband broke his heart, my dear? I forget the precise circumstances.

'In pumping water out of the Peruvian Mines,' replied Miss Tox.

'Not being a Pumper himself, of course,' said Mrs Chick, glancing at her brother; and it really did seem necessary to offer the explanation, for Miss Tox had spoken of him as if he had died at the handle; 'but having invested money in the speculation, which failed. I believe that Mrs Pipchin's management of children is quite astonishing. I have heard it commended in private circles ever since I was—dear me—how high!' Mrs Chick's eye wandered about the bookcase near the bust of Mr Pitt, which was about ten feet from the ground.

'Perhaps I should say of Mrs Pipchin, my dear Sir,' observed Miss Tox, with an ingenuous blush, 'having been so pointedly referred to, that the encomium which has been passed upon her by your sweet sister is well merited. Many ladies and gentleman, now grown up to be interesting members of society, have been indebted to her care. The humble individual who addresses you was once under her charge. I believe juvenile nobility itself is no stranger to her establishment.'

'Do I understand that this respectable matron keeps an establishment, Miss Tox?' the Mr Dombey, condescendingly.

'Why, I really don't know,' rejoined that lady, 'whether I am justified in calling it so. It is not a Preparatory School by any means. Should I express my meaning,' said Miss Tox, with peculiar sweetness,'if I designated it an infantine Boarding-House of a very select description?'

'On an exceedingly limited and particular scale,' suggested Mrs Chick, with a glance at her brother.

'Oh! Exclusion itself!' said Miss Tox.

There was something in this. Mrs Pipchin's husband having broken his heart of the Peruvian mines was good. It had a rich sound. Besides, Mr Dombey was in a state almost amounting to consternation at the idea of Paul remaining where he was one hour after his removal had been recommended by the medical practitioner. It was a stoppage and delay upon the road the child must traverse, slowly at the best, before the goal was reached. Their recommendation of Mrs Pipchin had great weight with him; for he knew that they were jealous of any interference with their charge, and he never for a moment took it into account that they might be solicitous to divide a responsibility, of which he had, as shown just now, his own established views. Broke his heart of the Peruvian mines, mused Mr Dombey. Well! a very respectable way of doing It.

'Supposing we should decide, on to-morrow's inquiries, to send Paul down to Brighton to this lady, who would go with him?' inquired Mr Dombey, after some reflection.

'I don't think you could send the child anywhere at present without Florence, my dear Paul,' returned his sister, hesitating. 'It's quite an infatuation with him. He's very young, you know, and has his fancies.'

Mr Dombey turned his head away, and going slowly to the bookcase, and unlocking it, brought back a book to read.

'Anybody else, Louisa?' he said, without looking up, and turning over the leaves.

'Wickam, of course. Wickam would be quite sufficient, I should say,' returned his sister. 'Paul being in such hands as Mrs Pipchin's, you could hardly send anybody who would be a further check upon her. You would go down yourself once a week at least, of course.'

'Of course,' said Mr Dombey; and sat looking at one page for an hour afterwards, without reading one word.

This celebrated Mrs Pipchin was a marvellous ill-favoured, ill-conditioned old lady, of a stooping figure, with a mottled face, like bad marble, a hook nose, and a hard grey eye, that looked as if it might have been hammered at on an anvil without sustaining any injury. Forty years at least had elapsed since the Peruvian mines had been the death of Mr Pipchin; but his relict still wore black bombazeen, of such a lustreless, deep, dead, sombre shade, that gas itself couldn't light her up after dark, and her presence was a quencher to any number of candles. She was generally spoken of as 'a great manager' of children; and the secret of her management was, to give them everything that they didn't like, and nothing that they did—which was found to sweeten their dispositions very much. She was such a bitter old lady, that one was tempted to believe there had been some mistake in the application of the Peruvian machinery, and that all her waters of gladness and milk of human kindness, had been pumped out dry, instead of the mines.

The Castle of this ogress and child-queller was in a steep by-street at Brighton; where the soil was more than usually chalky, flinty, and sterile, and the houses were more than usually brittle and thin; where the small front-gardens had the unaccountable property of producing nothing but marigolds, whatever was sown in them; and where snails were constantly discovered holding on to the street doors, and other public places they were not expected to ornament, with the tenacity of cupping-glasses. In the winter time the air couldn't be got out of the Castle, and in the summer time it couldn't be got in. There was such a continual reverberation of wind in it, that it sounded like a great shell, which the inhabitants were obliged to hold to their ears night and day, whether they liked it or no. It was not, naturally, a fresh-smelling house; and in the window of the front parlour, which was never opened, Mrs Pipchin kept a collection of plants in pots, which imparted an earthy flavour of their own to the establishment. However choice examples of their kind, too, these plants were of a kind peculiarly adapted to the embowerment of Mrs Pipchin. There were half-a-dozen specimens of the cactus, writhing round bits of lath, like hairy serpents; another specimen shooting out broad claws, like a green lobster; several creeping vegetables, possessed of sticky and adhesive leaves; and one uncomfortable flower-pot hanging to the ceiling, which appeared to have boiled over, and tickling people underneath with its long green ends, reminded them of spiders—in which Mrs Pipchin's dwelling was uncommonly prolific, though perhaps it challenged competition still more proudly, in the season, in point of earwigs.

Mrs Pipchin's scale of charges being high, however, to all who could afford to pay, and Mrs Pipchin very seldom sweetening the equable acidity of her nature in favour of anybody, she was held to be an old 'lady of remarkable firmness, who was quite scientific in her knowledge of the childish character.' On this reputation, and on the broken heart of Mr Pipchin, she had contrived, taking one year with another, to eke out a tolerable sufficient living since her husband's demise. Within three days after Mrs Chick's first allusion to her, this excellent old lady had the satisfaction of anticipating a handsome addition to her current receipts, from the pocket of Mr Dombey; and of receiving Florence and her little brother Paul, as inmates of the Castle.

Mrs Chick and Miss Tox, who had brought them down on the previous night (which they all passed at an Hotel), had just driven away from the door, on their journey home again; and Mrs Pipchin, with her back to the fire, stood, reviewing the new-comers, like an old soldier. Mrs Pipchin's middle-aged niece, her good-natured and devoted slave, but possessing a gaunt and iron-bound aspect, and much afflicted with boils on her nose, was divesting Master Bitherstone of the clean collar he had worn on parade. Miss Pankey, the only other little boarder at present, had that moment been walked off to the Castle Dungeon (an empty apartment at the back, devoted to correctional purposes), for having sniffed thrice, in the presence of visitors.

'Well, Sir,' said Mrs Pipchin to Paul, 'how do you think you shall like me?'

'I don't think I shall like you at all,' replied Paul. 'I want to go away. This isn't my house.'

'No. It's mine,' retorted Mrs Pipchin.

'It's a very nasty one,' said Paul.

'There's a worse place in it than this though,' said Mrs Pipchin, 'where we shut up our bad boys.'

'Has he ever been in it?' asked Paul: pointing out Master Bitherstone.

Mrs Pipchin nodded assent; and Paul had enough to do, for the rest of that day, in surveying Master Bitherstone from head to foot, and watching all the workings of his countenance, with the interest attaching to a boy of mysterious and terrible experiences.

At one o'clock there was a dinner, chiefly of the farinaceous and vegetable kind, when Miss Pankey (a mild little blue-eyed morsel of a child, who was shampoo'd every morning, and seemed in danger of being rubbed away, altogether) was led in from captivity by the ogress herself, and instructed that nobody who sniffed before visitors ever went to Heaven. When this great truth had been thoroughly impressed upon her, she was regaled with rice; and subsequently repeated the form of grace established in the Castle, in which there was a special clause, thanking Mrs Pipchin for a good dinner. Mrs Pipchin's niece, Berinthia, took cold pork. Mrs Pipchin, whose constitution required warm nourishment, made a special repast of mutton-chops, which were brought in hot and hot, between two plates, and smelt very nice.

As it rained after dinner, and they couldn't go out walking on the beach, and Mrs Pipchin's constitution required rest after chops, they went away with Berry (otherwise Berinthia) to the Dungeon; an empty room looking out upon a chalk wall and a water-butt, and made ghastly by a ragged fireplace without any stove in it. Enlivened by company, however, this was the best place after all; for Berry played with them there, and seemed to enjoy a game at romps as much as they did; until Mrs Pipchin knocking angrily at the wall, like the Cock Lane Ghost' revived, they left off, and Berry told them stories in a whisper until twilight.

For tea there was plenty of milk and water, and bread and butter, with a little black tea-pot for Mrs Pipchin and Berry, and buttered toast unlimited for Mrs Pipchin, which was brought in, hot and hot, like the chops. Though Mrs Pipchin got very greasy, outside, over this dish, it didn't seem to lubricate her internally, at all; for she was as fierce as ever, and the hard grey eye knew no softening.

After tea, Berry brought out a little work-box, with the Royal Pavilion on the lid, and fell to working busily; while Mrs Pipchin, having put on her spectacles and opened a great volume bound in green baize, began to nod. And whenever Mrs Pipchin caught herself falling forward into the fire, and woke up, she filliped Master Bitherstone on the nose for nodding too.

At last it was the children's bedtime, and after prayers they went to bed. As little Miss Pankey was afraid of sleeping alone in the dark, Mrs Pipchin always made a point of driving her upstairs herself, like a sheep; and it was cheerful to hear Miss Pankey moaning long afterwards, in the least eligible chamber, and Mrs Pipchin now and then going in to shake her. At about half-past nine o'clock the odour of a warm sweet-bread (Mrs Pipchin's constitution wouldn't go to sleep without sweet-bread) diversified the prevailing fragrance of the house, which Mrs Wickam said was 'a smell of building;' and slumber fell upon the Castle shortly after.

The breakfast next morning was like the tea over night, except that Mrs Pipchin took her roll instead of toast, and seemed a little more irate when it was over. Master Bitherstone read aloud to the rest a pedigree from Genesis judiciously selected by Mrs Pipchin), getting over the names with the ease and clearness of a person tumbling up the treadmill. That done, Miss

Pankey was borne away to be shampoo'd; and Master Bitherstone to have something else done to him with salt water, from which he always returned very blue and dejected. Paul and Florence went out in the meantime on the beach with Wickam—who was constantly in tears—and at about noon Mrs Pipchin presided over some Early Readings. It being a part of Mrs Pipchin's system not to encourage a child's mind to develop and expand itself like a young flower, but to open it by force like an oyster, the moral of these lessons was usually of a violent and stunning character: the hero—a naughty boy—seldom, in the mildest catastrophe, being finished off anything less than a lion, or a bear.

Such was life at Mrs Pipchin's. On Saturday Mr Dombey came down; and Florence and Paul would go to his Hotel, and have tea They passed the whole of Sunday with him, and generally rode out before dinner; and on these occasions Mr Dombey seemed to grow, like Falstaff's assailants, and instead of being one man in buckram, to become a dozen. Sunday evening was the most melancholy evening in the week; for Mrs Pipchin always made a point of being particularly cross on Sunday nights. Miss Pankey was generally brought back from an aunt's at Rottingdean, in deep distress; and Master Bitherstone, whose relatives were all in India, and who was required to sit, between the services, in an erect position with his head against the parlour wall, neither moving hand nor foot, suffered so acutely in his young spirits that he once asked Florence, on a Sunday night, if she could give him any idea of the way back to Bengal.

But it was generally said that Mrs Pipchin was a woman of system with children; and no doubt she was. Certainly the wild ones went home tame enough, after sojourning for a few months beneath her hospitable roof. It was generally said, too, that it was highly creditable of Mrs Pipchin to have devoted herself to this way of life, and to have made such a sacrifice of her feelings, and such a resolute stand against her troubles, when Mr Pipchin broke his heart in the Peruvian mines.

At this exemplary old lady, Paul would sit staring in his little arm-chair by the fire, for any length of time. He never seemed to know what weariness was, when he was looking fixedly at Mrs Pipchin. He was not fond of her; he was not afraid of her; but in those old, old moods of his, she seemed to have a grotesque attraction for him. There he would sit, looking at her, and warming his hands, and looking at her, until he sometimes quite confounded Mrs Pipchin, Ogress as she was. Once she asked him, when they were alone, what he was thinking about.

'You,' said Paul, without the least reserve.

'And what are you thinking about me?' asked Mrs Pipchin.

'I'm thinking how old you must be,' said Paul.

'You mustn't say such things as that, young gentleman,' returned the dame. 'That'll never do.'

'Why not?' asked Paul.

'Because it's not polite,' said Mrs Pipchin, snappishly.

'Not polite?' said Paul.

'No.'

'It's not polite,' said Paul, innocently, 'to eat all the mutton chops and toast, Wickam says.

'Wickam,' retorted Mrs Pipchin, colouring, 'is a wicked, impudent, bold-faced hussy.'

'What's that?' inquired Paul.

'Never you mind, Sir,' retorted Mrs Pipchin. 'Remember the story of the little boy that was gored to death by a mad bull for asking questions.'

'If the bull was mad,' said Paul, 'how did he know that the boy had asked questions? Nobody can go and whisper secrets to a mad bull. I don't believe that story.

'You don't believe it, Sir?' repeated Mrs Pipchin, amazed.

'No,' said Paul.

'Not if it should happen to have been a tame bull, you little Infidel?' said Mrs Pipchin.

As Paul had not considered the subject in that light, and had founded his conclusions on the alleged lunacy of the bull, he allowed himself to be put down for the present. But he sat turning it over in his mind, with such an obvious intention of fixing Mrs Pipchin presently, that even that hardy old lady deemed it prudent to retreat until he should have forgotten the subject.

From that time, Mrs Pipchin appeared to have something of the same odd kind of attraction towards Paul, as Paul had towards her. She would make him move his chair to her side of the fire, instead of sitting opposite; and there he would remain in a nook between Mrs Pipchin and the fender, with all the light of his little face absorbed into the black bombazeen drapery, studying every line and wrinkle of her countenance, and peering at the hard grey eye, until Mrs Pipchin was sometimes fain to shut it, on pretence of dozing. Mrs Pipchin had an old black cat, who generally lay coiled upon the centre foot of the fender, purring egotistically, and winking at the fire until the contracted pupils of his eyes were like two notes of admiration. The good old lady might have been—not to record it disrespectfully—a witch, and Paul and the cat her two familiars, as they all sat by the fire together. It would have been quite in keeping with the appearance of the party if they had all sprung up the chimney in a high wind one night, and never been heard of any more.

This, however, never came to pass. The cat, and Paul, and Mrs Pipchin, were constantly to be found in their usual places after dark; and Paul, eschewing the companionship of Master Bitherstone, went on studying Mrs Pipchin, and the cat, and the fire, night after night, as if they were a book of necromancy, in three volumes.

Mrs Wickam put her own construction on Paul's eccentricities; and being confirmed in her low spirits by a perplexed view of chimneys from the room where she was accustomed to sit, and by the noise of the wind, and by the general dulness (gashliness was Mrs Wickam's strong expression) of her present life, deduced the most dismal reflections from the foregoing premises. It was a part of Mrs Pipchin's policy to prevent her own 'young hussy'- -that was Mrs Pipchin's generic name for female servant—from communicating with Mrs Wickam: to which end she devoted much of her time to concealing herself behind doors, and springing out on that devoted maiden, whenever she made an approach towards Mrs Wickam's apartment. But Berry was free to hold what converse she could in that quarter, consistently with the discharge of the multifarious duties at which she toiled incessantly from morning to night; and to Berry Mrs Wickam unburdened her mind.

'What a pretty fellow he is when he's asleep!' said Berry, stopping to look at Paul in bed, one night when she took up Mrs Wickam's supper.

'Ah!' sighed Mrs Wickam. 'He need be.'

'Why, he's not ugly when he's awake,' observed Berry.

'No, Ma'am. Oh, no. No more was my Uncle's Betsey Jane,' said Mrs Wickam.

Berry looked as if she would like to trace the connexion of ideas between Paul Dombey and Mrs Wickam's Uncle's Betsey Jane.

'My Uncle's wife,' Mrs Wickam went on to say, 'died just like his Mama. My Uncle's child took on just as Master Paul do.'

'Took on! You don't think he grieves for his Mama, sure?' argued Berry, sitting down on the side of the bed. 'He can't remember anything about her, you know, Mrs Wickam. It's not possible.'

'No, Ma'am,' said Mrs Wickam 'No more did my Uncle's child. But my Uncle's child said very strange things sometimes, and looked very strange, and went on very strange, and was very strange altogether. My Uncle's child made people's blood run cold, some times, she did!'

'How?' asked Berry.

'I wouldn't have sat up all night alone with Betsey Jane!' said Mrs Wickam, 'not if you'd have put Wickam into business next morning for himself. I couldn't have done it, Miss Berry.

Miss Berry naturally asked why not? But Mrs Wickam, agreeably to the usage of some ladies in her condition, pursued her own branch of the subject, without any compunction.

'Betsey Jane,' said Mrs Wickam, 'was as sweet a child as I could wish to see. I couldn't wish to see a sweeter. Everything that a child could have in the way of illnesses, Betsey Jane had come through. The cramps was as common to her,' said Mrs Wickam, 'as biles is to yourself, Miss Berry.' Miss Berry involuntarily wrinkled her nose.

'But Betsey Jane,' said Mrs Wickam, lowering her voice, and looking round the room, and towards Paul in bed, 'had been minded, in her cradle, by her departed mother. I couldn't say how, nor I couldn't say when, nor I couldn't say whether the dear child knew it or not, but Betsey Jane had been watched by her mother, Miss Berry!' and Mrs Wickam, with a very white face, and with watery eyes, and with a tremulous voice, again looked fearfully round the room, and towards Paul in bed.

'Nonsense!' cried Miss Berry—somewhat resentful of the idea.

'You may say nonsense! I ain't offended, Miss. I hope you may be able to think in your own conscience that it is nonsense; you'll find your spirits all the better for it in this—you'll excuse my being so free—in this burying-ground of a place; which is wearing of me down. Master Paul's a little restless in his sleep. Pat his back, if you please.'

'Of course you think,' said Berry, gently doing what she was asked, 'that he has been nursed by his mother, too?'

'Betsey Jane,' returned Mrs Wickam in her most solemn tones, 'was put upon as that child has been put upon, and changed as that child has changed. I have seen her sit, often and often, think, think, thinking, like him. I have seen her look, often and often, old, old, old, like him. I have heard her, many a time, talk just like him. I consider that child and Betsey Jane on the same footing entirely, Miss Berry.'

'Is your Uncle's child alive?' asked Berry.

'Yes, Miss, she is alive,' returned Mrs Wickam with an air of triumph, for it was evident. Miss Berry expected the reverse; 'and is married to a silver-chaser. Oh yes, Miss, SHE is alive,' said Mrs Wickam, laying strong stress on her nominative case.

It being clear that somebody was dead, Mrs Pipchin's niece inquired who it was.

'I wouldn't wish to make you uneasy,' returned Mrs Wickam, pursuing her supper. Don't ask me.'

This was the surest way of being asked again. Miss Berry repeated her question, therefore; and after some resistance, and reluctance, Mrs Wickam laid down her knife, and again glancing round the room and at Paul in bed, replied:

'She took fancies to people; whimsical fancies, some of them; others, affections that one might expect to see—only stronger than common. They all died.'

This was so very unexpected and awful to Mrs Pipchin's niece, that she sat upright on the hard edge of the bedstead, breathing short, and surveying her informant with looks of undisguised alarm.

Mrs Wickam shook her left fore-finger stealthily towards the bed where Florence lay; then turned it upside down, and made several emphatic points at the floor; immediately below which was the parlour in which Mrs Pipchin habitually consumed the toast.

'Remember my words, Miss Berry,' said Mrs Wickam, 'and be thankful that Master Paul is not too fond of you. I am, that he's not too fond of me, I assure you; though there isn't much to live for—you'll excuse my being so free—in this jail of a house!'

Miss Berry's emotion might have led to her patting Paul too hard on the back, or might have produced a cessation of that soothing monotony, but he turned in his bed just now, and, presently awaking, sat up in it with his hair hot and wet from the effects of some childish dream, and asked for Florence.

She was out of her own bed at the first sound of his voice; and bending over his pillow immediately, sang him to sleep again. Mrs Wickam shaking her head, and letting fall several tears, pointed out the little group to Berry, and turned her eyes up to the ceiling.

'He's asleep now, my dear,' said Mrs Wickam after a pause, 'you'd better go to bed again. Don't you feel cold?'

'No, nurse,' said Florence, laughing. 'Not at all.'

'Ah!' sighed Mrs Wickam, and she shook her head again, expressing to the watchful Berry, 'we shall be cold enough, some of us, by and by!'

Berry took the frugal supper-tray, with which Mrs Wickam had by this time done, and bade her good-night.

'Good-night, Miss!' returned Wickam softly. 'Good-night! Your aunt is an old lady, Miss Berry, and it's what you must have looked for, often.'

This consolatory farewell, Mrs Wickam accompanied with a look of heartfelt anguish; and being left alone with the two children again, and becoming conscious that the wind was blowing mournfully, she indulged in melancholy—that cheapest and most accessible of luxuries—until she was overpowered by slumber.

Although the niece of Mrs Pipchin did not expect to find that exemplary dragon prostrate on the hearth-rug when she went downstairs, she was relieved to find her unusually fractious and severe, and with every present appearance of intending to live a long time to be a comfort to all who knew her. Nor had she any symptoms of declining, in the course of the ensuing week, when the constitutional viands still continued to disappear in regular succession, notwithstanding that Paul studied her as attentively as ever, and occupied his usual seat between the black skirts and the fender, with unwavering constancy.

But as Paul himself was no stronger at the expiration of that time than he had been on his first arrival, though he looked much healthier in the face, a little carriage was got for him, in which he could lie at his ease, with an alphabet and other elementary works of reference, and be wheeled down to the sea-side. Consistent in his odd tastes, the child set aside a ruddy-faced lad who was proposed as the drawer of this carriage, and selected, instead, his grandfather—a weazen, old, crab-faced man, in a suit of battered oilskin, who had got tough and stringy from long pickling in salt water, and who smelt like a weedy sea-beach when the tide is out.

With this notable attendant to pull him along, and Florence always walking by his side, and the despondent Wickam bringing up the rear, he went down to the margin of the ocean every day; and there he would sit or lie in his carriage for hours together: never so distressed as by the company of children—Florence alone excepted, always.

'Go away, if you please,' he would say to any child who came to bear him company. Thank you, but I don't want you.'

Some small voice, near his ear, would ask him how he was, perhaps.

'I am very well, I thank you,' he would answer. 'But you had better go and play, if you please.'

Then he would turn his head, and watch the child away, and say to Florence, 'We don't want any others, do we? Kiss me, Floy.'

He had even a dislike, at such times, to the company of Wickam, and was well pleased when she strolled away, as she generally did, to pick up shells and acquaintances. His favourite spot was quite a lonely one, far away from most loungers; and with Florence sitting by his side at work, or reading to him, or talking to him, and the wind blowing on his face, and the water coming up among the wheels of his bed, he wanted nothing more.

'Floy,' he said one day, 'where's India, where that boy's friends live?'

'Oh, it's a long, long distance off,' said Florence, raising her eyes from her work.

'Weeks off?' asked Paul.

'Yes dear. Many weeks' journey, night and day.'

'If you were in India, Floy,' said Paul, after being silent for a minute, 'I should—what is it that Mama did? I forget.'

'Loved me!' answered Florence.

'No, no. Don't I love you now, Floy? What is it?—Died. in you were in India, I should die, Floy.'

She hurriedly put her work aside, and laid her head down on his pillow, caressing him. And so would she, she said, if he were there. He would be better soon.

'Oh! I am a great deal better now!' he answered. 'I don't mean that. I mean that I should die of being so sorry and so lonely, Floy!'

Another time, in the same place, he fell asleep, and slept quietly for a long time. Awaking suddenly, he listened, started up, and sat listening.

Florence asked him what he thought he heard.

'I want to know what it says,' he answered, looking steadily in her face. 'The sea' Floy, what is it that it keeps on saying?'

She told him that it was only the noise of the rolling waves.

'Yes, yes,' he said. 'But I know that they are always saying something. Always the same thing. What place is over there?' He rose up, looking eagerly at the horizon.

She told him that there was another country opposite, but he said he didn't mean that: he meant further away—farther away!

Very often afterwards, in the midst of their talk, he would break off, to try to understand what it was that the waves were always saying; and would rise up in his couch to look towards that invisible region, far away.

CHAPTER 9. In which the Wooden Midshipman gets into Trouble

That spice of romance and love of the marvellous, of which there was a pretty strong infusion in the nature of young Walter Gay, and which the guardianship of his Uncle, old Solomon Gills, had not very much weakened by the waters of stern practical experience, was the occasion of his attaching an uncommon and delightful interest to the adventure of Florence with Good Mrs Brown. He pampered and cherished it in his memory, especially that part of it with which he had been associated: until it became the spoiled child of his fancy, and took its own way, and did what it liked with it.

The recollection of those incidents, and his own share in them, may have been made the more captivating, perhaps, by the weekly dreamings of old Sol and Captain Cuttle on Sundays. Hardly a Sunday passed, without mysterious references being made by one or other of those worthy chums to Richard Whittington; and the latter gentleman had even gone so far as to purchase a ballad of considerable antiquity, that had long fluttered among many others, chiefly expressive of maritime sentiments, on a dead wall in the Commercial Road: which poetical performance set forth the courtship and nuptials of a promising young coal-whipper with a certain 'lovely Peg,' the accomplished daughter of the master and part-owner of a Newcastle collier. In this stirring legend, Captain Cuttle descried a profound metaphysical bearing on the case of Walter and Florence; and it excited him so much, that on very festive occasions, as birthdays and a few other non-Dominical holidays, he would roar through the whole song in the little back parlour; making an amazing shake on the word Pe-e-eg, with which every verse concluded, in compliment to the heroine of the piece.

But a frank, free-spirited, open-hearted boy, is not much given to analysing the nature of his own feelings, however strong their hold upon him: and Walter would have found it difficult to decide this point. He had a great affection for the wharf where he had encountered Florence, and for the streets (albeit not enchanting in themselves) by which they had come home. The shoes that had so often tumbled off by the way, he preserved in his own room; and, sitting in the little back parlour of an evening, he had drawn a whole gallery of fancy portraits of Good Mrs Brown. It may be that he became a little smarter in his dress after that memorable occasion; and he certainly liked in his leisure time to walk towards that quarter of the town where Mr Dombey's house was situated, on the vague chance of passing little Florence in the street. But the sentiment of all this was as boyish and innocent as could be. Florence was very pretty, and it is pleasant to admire a pretty face. Florence was defenceless and weak, and it was a proud thought that he had been able to render her any protection and assistance. Florence was the most grateful little creature in the world, and it was delightful to see her bright gratitude beaming in her face. Florence was neglected and coldly looked upon, and his breast was full of youthful interest for the slighted child in her dull, stately home.

Thus it came about that, perhaps some half-a-dozen times in the course of the year, Walter pulled off his hat to Florence in the street, and Florence would stop to shake hands. Mrs Wickam (who, with a characteristic alteration of his name, invariably spoke of him as 'Young Graves') was so well used to this, knowing the story of their acquaintance, that she took no heed of it at all. Miss Nipper, on the other hand, rather looked out for these occasions: her sensitive young heart being secretly propitiated by Walter's good looks, and inclining to the belief that its sentiments were responded to.

In this way, Walter, so far from forgetting or losing sight of his acquaintance with Florence, only remembered it better and better. As to its adventurous beginning, and all those little circumstances which gave it a distinctive character and relish, he took them into account, more as a pleasant story very agreeable to his imagination, and not to be dismissed from it, than as a part of any matter of fact with which he was concerned. They set off Florence very much, to his fancy; but not himself. Sometimes he thought (and then he walked very fast) what a grand thing it would have been for him to have been going to sea on the day after that first meeting, and to have gone, and to have done wonders there, and to have stopped away a long time, and to have come back an Admiral of all the colours of the dolphin, or at least a Post-Captain with epaulettes of insupportable brightness, and have married Florence (then a beautiful young woman) in spite of Mr Dombey's teeth, cravat, and watch-chain, and borne her away to the blue shores of somewhere or other, triumphantly. But these flights of fancy seldom burnished the brass plate of Dombey and Son's Offices into a tablet of golden hope, or shed a brilliant lustre on their dirty skylights; and when the Captain and Uncle Sol talked about Richard Whittington and masters' daughters, Walter felt that he understood his true position at Dombey and Son's, much better than they did.

So it was that he went on doing what he had to do from day to day, in a cheerful, pains-taking, merry spirit; and saw through the sanguine complexion of Uncle Sol and Captain Cuttle; and yet entertained a thousand indistinct and visionary fancies of his own, to which theirs were work-a-day probabilities. Such was his condition at the Pipchin period, when he looked a little older than of yore, but not much; and was the same light-footed, light-hearted, light-headed lad, as when he charged into the parlour at the head of Uncle Sol and the imaginary boarders, and lighted him to bring up the Madeira.

'Uncle Sol,' said Walter, 'I don't think you're well. You haven't eaten any breakfast. I shall bring a doctor to you, if you go on like this.'

'He can't give me what I want, my boy,' said Uncle Sol. 'At least he is in good practice if he can—and then he wouldn't.'

'What is it, Uncle? Customers?'

'Ay,' returned Solomon, with a sigh. 'Customers would do.'

'Confound it, Uncle!' said Walter, putting down his breakfast cup with a clatter, and striking his hand on the table: 'when I see the people going up and down the street in shoals all day, and passing and re-passing the shop every minute, by scores, I feel half tempted to rush out, collar somebody, bring him in, and make him buy fifty pounds' worth of instruments for ready money. What are you looking in at the door for?—' continued Walter, apostrophizing an old gentleman with a powdered head (inaudibly to him of course), who was staring at a ship's telescope with all his might and main. 'That's no use. I could do that. Come in and buy it!'

The old gentleman, however, having satiated his curiosity, walked calmly away.

'There he goes!' said Walter. 'That's the way with 'em all. But, Uncle—I say, Uncle Sol'—for the old man was meditating and had not responded to his first appeal. 'Don't be cast down. Don't be out of spirits, Uncle. When orders do come, they'll come in such a crowd, you won't be able to execute 'em.'

'I shall be past executing 'em, whenever they come, my boy,' returned Solomon Gills. 'They'll never come to this shop again, till I am out of t.'

'I say, Uncle! You musn't really, you know!' urged Walter. 'Don't!'

Old Sol endeavoured to assume a cheery look, and smiled across the little table at him as pleasantly as he could.

'There's nothing more than usual the matter; is there, Uncle?' said Walter, leaning his elbows on the tea tray, and bending over, to speak the more confidentially and kindly. 'Be open with me, Uncle, if there is, and tell me all about it.'

'No, no, no,' returned Old Sol. 'More than usual? No, no. What should there be the matter more than usual?'

Walter answered with an incredulous shake of his head. 'That's what I want to know,' he said, 'and you ask me! I'll tell you what, Uncle, when I see you like this, I am quite sorry that I live with you.'

Old Sol opened his eyes involuntarily.

'Yes. Though nobody ever was happier than I am and always have been with you, I am quite sorry that I live with you, when I see you with anything in your mind.'

'I am a little dull at such times, I know,' observed Solomon, meekly rubbing his hands.

'What I mean, Uncle Sol,' pursued Walter, bending over a little more to pat him on the shoulder, 'is, that then I feel you ought to have, sitting here and pouring out the tea instead of me, a nice little dumpling of a wife, you know,—a comfortable, capital, cosy old lady, who was just a match for you, and knew how to manage you, and keep you in good heart. Here am I, as loving a nephew as ever was (I am sure I ought to be!) but I am only a nephew, and I can't be such a companion to you when you're low and out of sorts as she would have made herself, years ago, though I'm sure I'd give any money if I could cheer you up. And so I say, when I see you with anything on your mind, that I feel quite sorry you haven't got somebody better about you than a blundering young rough-and-tough boy like me, who has got the will to console you, Uncle, but hasn't got the way—hasn't got the way,' repeated Walter, reaching over further yet, to shake his Uncle by the hand.

'Wally, my dear boy,' said Solomon, 'if the cosy little old lady had taken her place in this parlour five and forty years ago, I never could have been fonder of her than I am of you.'

'I know that, Uncle Sol,' returned Walter. 'Lord bless you, I know that. But you wouldn't have had the whole weight of any uncomfortable secrets if she had been with you, because she would have known how to relieve you of 'em, and I don't.'

'Yes, yes, you do,' returned the Instrument-maker.

'Well then, what's the matter, Uncle Sol?' said Walter, coaxingly. 'Come! What's the matter?'

Solomon Gills persisted that there was nothing the matter; and maintained it so resolutely, that his nephew had no resource but to make a very indifferent imitation of believing him.

'All I can say is, Uncle Sol, that if there is—'

'But there isn't,' said Solomon.

'Very well,' said Walter. 'Then I've no more to say; and that's lucky, for my time's up for going to business. I shall look in by-and-by when I'm out, to see how you get on, Uncle. And mind, Uncle! I'll never believe you again, and never tell you anything more about Mr Carker the Junior, if I find out that you have been deceiving me!'

Solomon Gills laughingly defied him to find out anything of the kind; and Walter, revolving in his thoughts all sorts of impracticable ways of making fortunes and placing the wooden Midshipman in a position of independence, betook himself to the offices of Dombey and Son with a heavier countenance than he usually carried there.

There lived in those days, round the corner—in Bishopsgate Street Without—one Brogley, sworn broker and appraiser, who kept a shop where every description of second-hand furniture was exhibited in the most uncomfortable aspect, and under circumstances and in combinations the most completely foreign to its purpose. Dozens of chairs hooked on to washing-stands, which with difficulty poised themselves on the shoulders of sideboards, which in their turn stood upon the wrong side of dining-tables, gymnastic with their legs upward on the tops of other dining-tables, were among its most reasonable arrangements. A banquet array of dish-covers, wine-glasses, and decanters was generally to be seen, spread forth upon the bosom of a four- post bedstead, for the entertainment of such genial company as half-a-dozen pokers, and a hall lamp. A set of window curtains with no windows belonging to them, would be seen gracefully draping a barricade of chests of drawers, loaded with little jars from chemists' shops; while a homeless hearthrug severed from its natural companion the fireside, braved the shrewd east wind in its adversity, and trembled in melancholy accord with the shrill complainings of a cabinet piano, wasting away, a string a day, and faintly resounding to the noises of the street in its jangling and distracted brain. Of motionless clocks that never stirred a finger, and seemed as incapable of being successfully wound up, as the pecuniary affairs of their former owners, there was always great choice in Mr Brogley's shop; and various looking-glasses, accidentally placed at compound interest of reflection and refraction, presented to the eye an eternal perspective of bankruptcy and ruin.

Mr Brogley himself was a moist-eyed, pink-complexioned, crisp-haired man, of a bulky figure and an easy temper—for that class of Caius Marius who sits upon the ruins of other people's Carthages, can keep up his spirits well enough. He had looked in at Solomon's shop sometimes, to ask a question about articles in Solomon's way of business; and Walter knew him sufficiently to give him good day when they met in the street. But as that was the extent of the broker's acquaintance with Solomon Gills also, Walter was not a little surprised when he came back in the course of the forenoon, agreeably to his promise, to find Mr Brogley sitting in the back parlour with his hands in his pockets, and his hat hanging up behind the door.

'Well, Uncle Sol!' said Walter. The old man was sitting ruefully on the opposite side of the table, with his spectacles over his eyes, for a wonder, instead of on his forehead. 'How are you now?'

Solomon shook his head, and waved one hand towards the broker, as introducing him.

'Is there anything the matter?' asked Walter, with a catching in his breath.

'No, no. There's nothing the matter, said Mr Brogley. 'Don't let it put you out of the way.' Walter looked from the broker to his Uncle in mute amazement. 'The fact is,' said Mr Brogley, 'there's a little payment on a bond debt—three hundred and seventy odd, overdue: and I'm in possession.'

'In possession!' cried Walter, looking round at the shop.

'Ah!' said Mr Brogley, in confidential assent, and nodding his head as if he would urge the advisability of their all being comfortable together. 'It's an execution. That's what it is. Don't let it put you out of the way. I come myself, because of keeping it quiet and sociable. You know me. It's quite private.'

'Uncle Sol!' faltered Walter.

'Wally, my boy,' returned his uncle. 'It's the first time. Such a calamity never happened to me before. I'm an old man to begin.' Pushing up his spectacles again (for they were useless any longer to conceal his emotion), he covered his face with his hand, and sobbed aloud, and his tears fell down upon his coffee-coloured waistcoat.

'Uncle Sol! Pray! oh don't!' exclaimed Walter, who really felt a thrill of terror in seeing the old man weep. 'For God's sake don't do that. Mr Brogley, what shall I do?'

'I should recommend you looking up a friend or so,' said Mr Brogley, 'and talking it over.'

'To be sure!' cried Walter, catching at anything. 'Certainly! Thankee. Captain Cuttle's the man, Uncle. Wait till I run to Captain Cuttle. Keep your eye upon my Uncle, will you, Mr Brogley, and make him as comfortable as you can while I am gone? Don't despair, Uncle Sol. Try and keep a good heart, there's a dear fellow!'

Saying this with great fervour, and disregarding the old man's broken remonstrances, Walter dashed out of the shop again as hard as he could go; and, having hurried round to the office to excuse himself on the plea of his Uncle's sudden illness, set off, full speed, for Captain Cuttle's residence.

Everything seemed altered as he ran along the streets. There were the usual entanglement and noise of carts, drays, omnibuses, waggons, and foot passengers, but the misfortune that had fallen on the wooden Midshipman made it strange and new. Houses and shops were different from what they used to be, and bore Mr Brogley's warrant on their fronts in large characters. The broker seemed to have got hold of the very churches; for their spires rose into the sky with an unwonted air. Even the sky itself was changed, and had an execution in it plainly.

Captain Cuttle lived on the brink of a little canal near the India Docks, where there was a swivel bridge which opened now and then to let some wandering monster of a ship come roaming up the street like a stranded leviathan. The gradual change from land to water, on the approach to Captain Cuttle's lodgings, was curious. It began with the erection of flagstaffs, as appurtenances to public-houses; then came slop-sellers' shops, with Guernsey shirts, sou'wester hats, and canvas pantaloons, at once the tightest and the loosest of their order, hanging up outside. These were succeeded by anchor and chain-cable forges, where sledgehammers were dinging upon iron all day long. Then came rows of houses, with little vane-surmounted masts uprearing themselves from among the scarlet beans. Then, ditches. Then, pollard willows. Then, more ditches. Then, unaccountable patches of dirty water, hardly to be descried, for the ships that covered them. Then, the air was perfumed with chips; and all other trades were swallowed up in mast, oar, and block-making, and boatbuilding. Then, the ground grew marshy and unsettled. Then, there was nothing to be smelt but rum and sugar. Then, Captain Cuttle's lodgings—at once a first floor and a top storey, in Brig Place—were close before you.

The Captain was one of those timber-looking men, suits of oak as well as hearts, whom it is almost impossible for the liveliest imagination to separate from any part of their dress, however insignificant. Accordingly, when Walter knocked at the door, and the Captain instantly poked his head out of one of his little front windows, and hailed him, with the hard glared hat already on it, and the shirt-collar like a sail, and the wide suit of blue, all standing as usual, Walter was as fully persuaded that he was always in that state, as if the Captain had been a bird and those had been his feathers.

'Wal'r, my lad!'said Captain Cuttle. 'Stand by and knock again. Hard! It's washing day.'

Walter, in his impatience, gave a prodigious thump with the knocker.

'Hard it is!' said Captain Cuttle, and immediately drew in his head, as if he expected a squall.

Nor was he mistaken: for a widow lady, with her sleeves rolled up to her shoulders, and her arms frothy with soap-suds and smoking with hot water, replied to the summons with startling rapidity. Before she looked at Walter she looked at the knocker, and then, measuring him with her eyes from head to foot, said she wondered he had left any of it.

'Captain Cuttle's at home, I know,' said Walter with a conciliatory smile.

'Is he?' replied the widow lady. 'In-deed!'

'He has just been speaking to me,' said Walter, in breathless explanation.

'Has he?' replied the widow lady. 'Then p'raps you'll give him Mrs MacStinger's respects, and say that the next time he lowers himself and his lodgings by talking out of the winder she'll thank him to come down and open the door too.' Mrs MacStinger spoke loud, and listened for any observations that might be offered from the first floor.

'I'll mention it,' said Walter, 'if you'll have the goodness to let me in, Ma'am.'

For he was repelled by a wooden fortification extending across the doorway, and put there to prevent the little MacStingers in their moments of recreation from tumbling down the steps.

'A boy that can knock my door down,' said Mrs MacStinger, contemptuously, 'can get over that, I should hope!' But Walter, taking this as a permission to enter, and getting over it, Mrs MacStinger immediately demanded whether an Englishwoman's house was her castle or not; and whether she was to be broke in upon by 'raff.' On these subjects her thirst for information was still very importunate, when Walter, having made his way up the little staircase through an artificial fog occasioned by the washing, which covered the banisters with a clammy perspiration, entered Captain Cuttle's room, and found that gentleman in ambush behind the door.

'Never owed her a penny, Wal'r,' said Captain Cuttle, in a low voice, and with visible marks of trepidation on his countenance. 'Done her a world of good turns, and the children too. Vixen at times, though. Whew!'

'I should go away, Captain Cuttle,' said Walter.

'Dursn't do it, Wal'r,' returned the Captain. 'She'd find me out, wherever I went. Sit down. How's Gills?'

The Captain was dining (in his hat) off cold loin of mutton, porter, and some smoking hot potatoes, which he had cooked himself, and took out of a little saucepan before the fire as he wanted them. He unscrewed his hook at dinner-time, and screwed a knife into its wooden socket instead, with which he had already begun to peel one of these potatoes for Walter. His rooms were very small, and strongly impregnated with tobacco-smoke, but snug enough: everything being stowed away, as if there were an earthquake regularly every half-hour.

'How's Gills?' inquired the Captain.

Walter, who had by this time recovered his breath, and lost his spirits—or such temporary spirits as his rapid journey had given him—looked at his questioner for a moment, said 'Oh, Captain Cuttle!' and burst into tears.

No words can describe the Captain's consternation at this sight Mrs MacStinger faded into nothing before it. He dropped the potato and the fork—and would have dropped the knife too if he could—and sat gazing at the boy, as if he expected to hear next moment that a gulf had opened in the City, which had swallowed up his old friend, coffee-coloured suit, buttons, chronometer, spectacles, and all.

But when Walter told him what was really the matter, Captain Cuttle, after a moment's reflection, started up into full activity. He emptied out of a little tin canister on the top shelf of the cupboard, his whole stock of ready money (amounting to thirteen pounds and half-a-crown), which he transferred to one of the pockets of his square blue coat; further enriched that repository with the contents of his plate chest, consisting of two withered atomies of tea-spoons, and an obsolete pair of knock-knee'd sugar-tongs; pulled up his immense double-cased silver watch from the depths in which it reposed, to assure himself that that valuable was sound and whole; re-attached the hook to his right wrist; and seizing the stick covered over with knobs, bade Walter come along.

Remembering, however, in the midst of his virtuous excitement, that Mrs MacStinger might be lying in wait below, Captain Cuttle hesitated at last, not without glancing at the window, as if he had some thoughts of escaping by that unusual means of egress, rather than encounter his terrible enemy. He decided, however, in favour of stratagem.

'Wal'r,' said the Captain, with a timid wink, 'go afore, my lad. Sing out, "good-bye, Captain Cuttle," when you're in the passage, and shut the door. Then wait at the corner of the street 'till you see me.

These directions were not issued without a previous knowledge of the enemy's tactics, for when Walter got downstairs, Mrs MacStinger glided out of the little back kitchen, like an avenging spirit. But not gliding out upon the Captain, as she had expected, she merely made a further allusion to the knocker, and glided in again.

Some five minutes elapsed before Captain Cuttle could summon courage to attempt his escape; for Walter waited so long at the street corner, looking back at the house, before there were any symptoms of the hard glazed hat. At length the Captain burst out of the door with the suddenness of an explosion, and coming towards him at a great pace, and never once looking over his shoulder, pretended, as soon as they were well out of the street, to whistle a tune.

'Uncle much hove down, Wal'r?' inquired the Captain, as they were walking along.

'I am afraid so. If you had seen him this morning, you would never have forgotten it.'

'Walk fast, Wal'r, my lad,' returned the Captain, mending his pace; 'and walk the same all the days of your life. Overhaul the catechism for that advice, and keep it!'

The Captain was too busy with his own thoughts of Solomon Gills, mingled perhaps with some reflections on his late escape from Mrs

MacStinger, to offer any further quotations on the way for Walter's moral improvement They interchanged no other word until they arrived at old Sol's door, where the unfortunate wooden Midshipman, with his instrument at his eye, seemed to be surveying the whole horizon in search of some friend to help him out of his difficulty.

'Gills!' said the Captain, hurrying into the back parlour, and taking him by the hand quite tenderly. 'Lay your head well to the wind, and we'll fight through it. All you've got to do,' said the Captain, with the solemnity of a man who was delivering himself of one of the most precious practical tenets ever discovered by human wisdom, 'is to lay your head well to the wind, and we'll fight through it!'

Old Sol returned the pressure of his hand, and thanked him.

Captain Cuttle, then, with a gravity suitable to the nature of the occasion, put down upon the table the two tea-spoons and the sugar-tongs, the silver watch, and the ready money; and asked Mr Brogley, the broker, what the damage was.

'Come! What do you make of it?' said Captain Cuttle.

'Why, Lord help you!' returned the broker; 'you don't suppose that property's of any use, do you?'

'Why not?' inquired the Captain.

'Why? The amount's three hundred and seventy, odd,' replied the broker.

'Never mind,' returned the Captain, though he was evidently dismayed by the figures: 'all's fish that comes to your net, I suppose?'

'Certainly,' said Mr Brogley. 'But sprats ain't whales, you know.'

The philosophy of this observation seemed to strike the Captain. He ruminated for a minute; eyeing the broker, meanwhile, as a deep genius; and then called the Instrument-maker aside.

'Gills,' said Captain Cuttle, 'what's the bearings of this business? Who's the creditor?'

'Hush!' returned the old man. 'Come away. Don't speak before Wally. It's a matter of security for Wally's father—an old bond. I've paid a good deal of it, Ned, but the times are so bad with me that I can't do more just now. I've foreseen it, but I couldn't help it. Not a word before Wally, for all the world.'

'You've got some money, haven't you?' whispered the Captain.

'Yes, yes—oh yes—I've got some,' returned old Sol, first putting his hands into his empty pockets, and then squeezing his Welsh wig between them, as if he thought he might wring some gold out of it; 'but I—the little I have got, isn't convertible, Ned; it can't be got at. I have been trying to do something with it for Wally, and I'm old fashioned, and behind the time. It's here and there, and—and, in short, it's as good as nowhere,' said the old man, looking in bewilderment about him.

He had so much the air of a half-witted person who had been hiding his money in a variety of places, and had forgotten where, that the Captain followed his eyes, not without a faint hope that he might remember some few hundred pounds concealed up the chimney, or down in the cellar. But Solomon Gills knew better than that.

'I'm behind the time altogether, my dear Ned,' said Sol, in resigned despair, 'a long way. It's no use my lagging on so far behind it. The stock had better be sold—it's worth more than this debt—and I had better go and die somewhere, on the balance. I haven't any energy left. I don't understand things. This had better be the end of it. Let 'em sell the stock and take him down,' said the old man, pointing feebly to the wooden Midshipman, 'and let us both be broken up together.'

'And what d'ye mean to do with Wal'r?'said the Captain. 'There, there! Sit ye down, Gills, sit ye down, and let me think o' this. If I warn't a man on a small annuity, that was large enough till to-day, I hadn't need to think of it. But you only lay your head well to the wind,' said the Captain, again administering that unanswerable piece of consolation, 'and you're all right!'

Old Sol thanked him from his heart, and went and laid it against the back parlour fire-place instead.

Captain Cuttle walked up and down the shop for some time, cogitating profoundly, and bringing his bushy black eyebrows to bear so heavily on his nose, like clouds setting on a mountain, that Walter was afraid to offer any interruption to the current of his reflections. Mr Brogley, who was averse to being any constraint upon the party, and who had an ingenious cast of mind, went, softly whistling, among the stock; rattling weather-glasses, shaking compasses as if they were physic, catching up keys with loadstones, looking through telescopes, endeavouring to make himself acquainted with the use of the globes, setting parallel rulers astride on to his nose, and amusing himself with other philosophical transactions.

'Wal'r!' said the Captain at last. 'I've got it.'

'Have you, Captain Cuttle?' cried Walter, with great animation.

'Come this way, my lad,' said the Captain. 'The stock's the security. I'm another. Your governor's the man to advance money.'

'Mr Dombey!' faltered Walter.

The Captain nodded gravely. 'Look at him,' he said. 'Look at Gills. If they was to sell off these things now, he'd die of it. You know he would. We mustn't leave a stone unturned—and there's a stone for you.'

'A stone!—Mr Dombey!' faltered Walter.

'You run round to the office, first of all, and see if he's there,' said Captain Cuttle, clapping him on the back. 'Quick!'

Walter felt he must not dispute the command—a glance at his Uncle would have determined him if he had felt otherwise—and disappeared to execute it. He soon returned, out of breath, to say that Mr Dombey was not there. It was Saturday, and he had gone to Brighton.

'I tell you what, Wal'r!' said the Captain, who seemed to have prepared himself for this contingency in his absence. 'We'll go to Brighton. I'll back you, my boy. I'll back you, Wal'r. We'll go to Brighton by the afternoon's coach.'

If the application must be made to Mr Dombey at all, which was awful to think of, Walter felt that he would rather prefer it alone and unassisted, than backed by the personal influence of Captain Cuttle, to which he hardly thought Mr Dombey would attach much weight. But as the Captain appeared to be of quite another opinion, and was bent upon it, and as his friendship was too zealous and serious to be trifled with by one so much younger than himself, he forbore to hint the least objection. Cuttle, therefore, taking a hurried leave of Solomon Gills, and returning the ready money, the teaspoons, the sugar-tongs, and the silver watch, to his pocket—with a view, as Walter thought, with horror, to making a gorgeous impression on Mr Dombey—bore him off to the coach-office, with—out a minute's delay, and repeatedly assured him, on the road, that he would stick by him to the last.

CHAPTER 10. Containing the Sequel of the Midshipman's Disaster

Major Bagstock, after long and frequent observation of Paul, across Princess's Place, through his double-barrelled opera-glass; and after receiving many minute reports, daily, weekly, and monthly, on that subject, from the native who kept himself in constant communication with Miss Tox's maid for that purpose; came to the conclusion that Dombey, Sir, was a man to be known, and that J. B. was the boy to make his acquaintance.

Miss Tox, however, maintaining her reserved behaviour, and frigidly declining to understand the Major whenever he called (which he often did) on any little fishing excursion connected with this project, the Major, in spite of his constitutional toughness and slyness, was fain to leave the accomplishment of his desire in some measure to chance, 'which,' as he was used to observe with chuckles at his club, 'has been fifty to one in favour of Joey B., Sir, ever since his elder brother died of Yellow Jack in the West Indies.'

It was some time coming to his aid in the present instance, but it befriended him at last. When the dark servant, with full particulars, reported Miss Tox absent on Brighton service, the Major was suddenly touched with affectionate reminiscences of his friend Bill Bitherstone of Bengal, who had written to ask him, if he ever went that way, to bestow a call upon his only son. But when the same dark servant reported Paul at Mrs Pipchin's, and the Major, referring to the letter favoured by Master Bitherstone on his arrival in England—to which he had never had the least idea of paying any attention—saw the opening that presented itself, he was made so rabid by the gout, with which he happened to be then laid up, that he threw a footstool at the dark servant in return for his intelligence, and swore he would be the death of the rascal before he had done with him: which the dark servant was more than half disposed to believe.

At length the Major being released from his fit, went one Saturday growling down to Brighton, with the native behind him; apostrophizing Miss Tox all the way, and gloating over the prospect of carrying by storm the distinguished friend to whom she attached so much mystery, and for whom she had deserted him.

'Would you, Ma'am, would you!' said the Major, straining with vindictiveness, and swelling every already swollen vein in his head. 'Would you give Joey B. the go-by, Ma'am? Not yet, Ma'am, not yet! Damme, not yet, Sir. Joe is awake, Ma'am. Bagstock is alive, Sir. J. B. knows a move or two, Ma'am. Josh has his weather-eye open, Sir. You'll find him tough, Ma'am. Tough, Sir, tough is Joseph. Tough, and de-vilish sly!'

And very tough indeed Master Bitherstone found him, when he took that young gentleman out for a walk. But the Major, with his complexion like a Stilton cheese, and his eyes like a prawn's, went roving about, perfectly indifferent to Master Bitherstone's amusement, and dragging Master Bitherstone along, while he looked about him high and low, for Mr Dombey and his children.

In good time the Major, previously instructed by Mrs Pipchin, spied out Paul and Florence, and bore down upon them; there being a stately gentleman (Mr Dombey, doubtless) in their company. Charging with Master Bitherstone into the very heart of the little squadron, it fell out, of course, that Master Bitherstone spoke to his fellow-sufferers. Upon that the Major stopped to notice and admire them; remembered with amazement that he had seen and spoken to them at his friend Miss Tox's in Princess's Place; opined that Paul was a devilish fine fellow, and his own little friend; inquired if he remembered Joey B. the Major; and finally, with a sudden recollection of the conventionalities of life, turned and apologised to Mr Dombey.

'But my little friend here, Sir,' said the Major, 'makes a boy of me again: An old soldier, Sir—Major Bagstock, at your service—is not ashamed to confess it.' Here the Major lifted his hat. 'Damme, Sir,' cried the Major with sudden warmth, 'I envy you.' Then he recollected himself, and added, 'Excuse my freedom.'

Mr Dombey begged he wouldn't mention it.

'An old campaigner, Sir,' said the Major, 'a smoke-dried, sun-burnt, used-up, invalided old dog of a Major, Sir, was not afraid of being condemned for his whim by a man like Mr Dombey. I have the honour of addressing Mr Dombey, I believe?'

'I am the present unworthy representative of that name, Major,' returned Mr Dombey.

'By G-, Sir!' said the Major, 'it's a great name. It's a name, Sir,' said the Major firmly, as if he defied Mr Dombey to contradict him, and would feel it his painful duty to bully him if he did, 'that is known and honoured in the British possessions abroad. It is a name, Sir, that a man is proud to recognise. There is nothing adulatory in Joseph Bagstock, Sir. His Royal Highness the Duke of York observed on more than one occasion, "there is no adulation in Joey. He is a plain old soldier is Joe. He is tough to a fault is Joseph:" but it's a great name, Sir. By the Lord, it's a great name!' said the Major, solemnly.

'You are good enough to rate it higher than it deserves, perhaps, Major,' returned Mr Dombey.

'No, Sir,' said the Major, in a severe tone. No, Mr Dombey, let us understand each other. That is not the Bagstock vein, Sir. You don't know Joseph B. He is a blunt old blade is Josh. No flattery in him, Sir. Nothing like it.'

Mr Dombey inclined his head, and said he believed him to be in earnest, and that his high opinion was gratifying.

'My little friend here, Sir,' croaked the Major, looking as amiably as he could, on Paul, 'will certify for Joseph Bagstock that he is a thorough-going, down-right, plain-spoken, old Trump, Sir, and nothing more. That boy, Sir,' said the Major in a lower tone, 'will live in history. That boy, Sir, is not a common production. Take care of him, Mr Dombey.'

Mr Dombey seemed to intimate that he would endeavour to do so.

'Here is a boy here, Sir,' pursued the Major, confidentially, and giving him a thrust with his cane. 'Son of Bitherstone of Bengal. Bill Bitherstone formerly of ours. That boy's father and myself, Sir, were sworn friends. Wherever you went, Sir, you heard of nothing but Bill Bitherstone and Joe Bagstock. Am I blind to that boy's defects? By no means. He's a fool, Sir.'

Mr Dombey glanced at the libelled Master Bitherstone, of whom he knew at least as much as the Major did, and said, in quite a complacent manner, 'Really?'

'That is what he is, sir,' said the Major. 'He's a fool. Joe Bagstock never minces matters. The son of my old friend Bill Bitherstone, of Bengal, is a born fool, Sir.' Here the Major laughed till he was almost black. 'My little friend is destined for a public school,' I' presume, Mr Dombey?' said the Major when he had recovered.

'I am not quite decided,' returned Mr Dombey. 'I think not. He is delicate.'

'If he's delicate, Sir,' said the Major, 'you are right. None but the tough fellows could live through it, Sir, at Sandhurst. We put each other to the torture there, Sir. We roasted the new fellows at a slow fire, and hung 'em out of a three pair of stairs window, with their heads downwards. Joseph Bagstock, Sir, was held out of the window by the heels of his boots, for thirteen minutes by the college clock.'

The Major might have appealed to his countenance in corroboration of this story. It certainly looked as if he had hung out a little too long.

'But it made us what we were, Sir,' said the Major, settling his shirt frill. 'We were iron, Sir, and it forged us. Are you remaining here, Mr Dombey?'

'I generally come down once a week, Major,' returned that gentleman. 'I stay at the Bedford.'

'I shall have the honour of calling at the Bedford, Sir, if you'll permit me,' said the Major. 'Joey B., Sir, is not in general a calling man, but Mr Dombey's is not a common name. I am much indebted to my little friend, Sir, for the honour of this introduction.'

Mr Dombey made a very gracious reply; and Major Bagstock, having patted Paul on the head, and said of Florence that her eyes would play the Devil with the youngsters before long—'and the oldsters too, Sir, if you come to that,' added the Major, chuckling very much—stirred up Master Bitherstone with his walking-stick, and departed with that young gentleman, at a kind of half-trot; rolling his head and coughing with great dignity, as he staggered away, with his legs very wide asunder.

In fulfilment of his promise, the Major afterwards called on Mr Dombey; and Mr Dombey, having referred to the army list, afterwards called on the Major. Then the Major called at Mr Dombey's house in town; and came down again, in the same coach as Mr Dombey. In short, Mr Dombey and the Major got on uncommonly well together, and uncommonly fast: and Mr Dombey observed of the Major, to his sister, that besides being quite a military man he was really something more, as he had a very admirable idea of the importance of things unconnected with his own profession.

At length Mr Dombey, bringing down Miss Tox and Mrs Chick to see the children, and finding the Major again at Brighton, invited him to dinner at the Bedford, and complimented Miss Tox highly, beforehand, on her neighbour and acquaintance.

'My dearest Louisa,' said Miss Tox to Mrs Chick, when they were alone together, on the morning of the appointed day, 'if I should seem at all reserved to Major Bagstock, or under any constraint with him, promise me not to notice it.'

'My dear Lucretia,' returned Mrs Chick, 'what mystery is involved in this remarkable request? I must insist upon knowing.'

'Since you are resolved to extort a confession from me, Louisa,' said Miss Tox instantly, 'I have no alternative but to confide to you that the Major has been particular.'

'Particular!' repeated Mrs Chick.

'The Major has long been very particular indeed, my love, in his attentions,' said Miss Tox, 'occasionally they have been so very marked, that my position has been one of no common difficulty.'

'Is he in good circumstances?' inquired Mrs Chick.

'I have every reason to believe, my dear—indeed I may say I know,' returned Miss Tox, 'that he is wealthy. He is truly military, and full of anecdote. I have been informed that his valour, when he was in active service, knew no bounds. I am told that he did all sorts of things in the Peninsula, with every description of fire-arm; and in the East and West Indies, my love, I really couldn't undertake to say what he did not do.'

'Very creditable to him indeed,' said Mrs Chick, 'extremely so; and you have given him no encouragement, my dear?'

'If I were to say, Louisa,' replied Miss Tox, with every demonstration of making an effort that rent her soul, 'that I never encouraged Major Bagstock slightly, I should not do justice to the friendship which exists between you and me. It is, perhaps, hardly in the nature of woman to receive such attentions as the Major once lavished upon myself without betraying some sense of obligation. But that is past—long past. Between the Major and me there is now a yawning chasm, and I will not feign to give encouragement, Louisa, where I cannot give my heart. My affections,' said Miss Tox—'but, Louisa, this is madness!' and departed from the room.

All this Mrs Chick communicated to her brother before dinner: and it by no means indisposed Mr Dombey to receive the Major with unwonted cordiality. The Major, for his part, was in a state of plethoric satisfaction that knew no bounds: and he coughed, and choked, and chuckled, and gasped, and swelled, until the waiters seemed positively afraid of him.

'Your family monopolises Joe's light, Sir,' said the Major, when he had saluted Miss Tox. 'Joe lives in darkness. Princess's Place is changed into Kamschatka in the winter time. There is no ray of sun, Sir, for Joey B., now.'

'Miss Tox is good enough to take a great deal of interest in Paul, Major,' returned Mr Dombey on behalf of that blushing virgin.

'Damme Sir,' said the Major, 'I'm jealous of my little friend. I'm pining away Sir. The Bagstock breed is degenerating in the forsaken person of old Joe.' And the Major, becoming bluer and bluer and puffing his cheeks further and further over the stiff ridge of his tight cravat, stared at Miss Tox, until his eyes seemed as if he were at that moment being overdone before the slow fire at the military college.

Notwithstanding the palpitation of the heart which these allusions occasioned her, they were anything but disagreeable to Miss Tox, as they enabled her to be extremely interesting, and to manifest an occasional incoherence and distraction which she was not at all unwilling to display. The Major gave her abundant opportunities of exhibiting this emotion: being profuse in his complaints, at dinner, of her desertion of him and Princess's Place: and as he appeared to derive great enjoyment from making them, they all got on very well.

None the worse on account of the Major taking charge of the whole conversation, and showing as great an appetite in that respect as in regard of the various dainties on the table, among which he may be almost said to have wallowed: greatly to the aggravation of his inflammatory tendencies. Mr Dombey's habitual silence and reserve yielding readily to this usurpation, the Major felt that he was coming out and shining: and in the flow of spirits thus engendered, rang such an infinite number of new changes on his own name that he quite astonished himself. In a word, they were all very well pleased. The Major was considered to possess an inexhaustible fund of conversation; and when he took a late farewell, after a long rubber, Mr Dombey again complimented the blushing Miss Tox on her neighbour and acquaintance.

But all the way home to his own hotel, the Major incessantly said to himself, and of himself, 'Sly, Sir—sly, Sir—de-vil-ish sly!' And when he got there, sat down in a chair, and fell into a silent fit of laughter, with which he was sometimes seized, and which was always particularly awful. It held him so long on this occasion that the dark servant, who stood watching him at a distance, but dared not for his life approach, twice or thrice gave him over for lost. His whole form, but especially his face and head, dilated beyond all former experience; and presented to the dark man's view, nothing but a heaving mass of indigo. At length he burst into a violent paroxysm of coughing, and when that was a little better burst into such ejaculations as the following:

'Would you, Ma'am, would you? Mrs Dombey, eh, Ma'am? I think not, Ma'am. Not while Joe B. can put a spoke in your wheel, Ma'am. J. B.'s even with you now, Ma'am. He isn't altogether bowled out, yet, Sir, isn't Bagstock. She's deep, Sir, deep, but Josh is deeper. Wide awake is old Joe—broad awake, and staring, Sir!' There was no doubt of this last assertion being true, and to a very fearful extent; as it continued to be during the greater part of that night, which the Major chiefly passed in similar exclamations, diversified with fits of coughing and choking that startled the whole house.

It was on the day after this occasion (being Sunday) when, as Mr Dombey, Mrs Chick, and Miss Tox were sitting at breakfast, still eulogising the Major, Florence came running in: her face suffused with a bright colour, and her eyes sparkling joyfully: and cried,

'Papa! Papa! Here's Walter! and he won't come in.'

'Who?' cried Mr Dombey. 'What does she mean? What is this?'

'Walter, Papa!' said Florence timidly; sensible of having approached the presence with too much familiarity. 'Who found me when I was lost.'

'Does she mean young Gay, Louisa?' inquired Mr Dombey, knitting his brows. 'Really, this child's manners have become very boisterous. She cannot mean young Gay, I think. See what it is, will you?'

Mrs Chick hurried into the passage, and returned with the information that it was young Gay, accompanied by a very strange-looking person; and that young Gay said he would not take the liberty of coming in, hearing Mr Dombey was at breakfast, but would wait until Mr Dombey should signify that he might approach.

'Tell the boy to come in now,' said Mr Dombey. 'Now, Gay, what is the matter? Who sent you down here? Was there nobody else to come?'

'I beg your pardon, Sir,' returned Walter. 'I have not been sent. I have been so bold as to come on my own account, which I hope you'll pardon when I mention the cause.

But Mr Dombey, without attending to what he said, was looking impatiently on either side of him (as if he were a pillar in his way) at some object behind.

'What's that?' said Mr Dombey. 'Who is that? I think you have made some mistake in the door, Sir.'

'Oh, I'm very sorry to intrude with anyone, Sir,' cried Walter, hastily: 'but this is—this is Captain Cuttle, Sir.'

'Wal'r, my lad,' observed the Captain in a deep voice: 'stand by!'

At the same time the Captain, coming a little further in, brought out his wide suit of blue, his conspicuous shirt-collar, and his knobby nose in full relief, and stood bowing to Mr Dombey, and waving his hook politely to the ladies, with the hard glazed hat in his one hand, and a red equator round his head which it had newly imprinted there.

Mr Dombey regarded this phenomenon with amazement and indignation, and seemed by his looks to appeal to Mrs Chick and Miss Tox against it. Little Paul, who had come in after Florence, backed towards Miss Tox as the Captain waved his book, and stood on the defensive.

'Now, Gay,' said Mr Dombey. 'What have you got to say to me?'

Again the Captain observed, as a general opening of the conversation that could not fail to propitiate all parties, 'Wal'r, standby!'

'I am afraid, Sir,' began Walter, trembling, and looking down at the ground, 'that I take a very great liberty in coming—indeed, I am sure I do. I should hardly have had the courage to ask to see you, Sir, even after coming down, I am afraid, if I had not overtaken Miss Dombey, and—'

'Well!' said Mr Dombey, following his eyes as he glanced at the attentive Florence, and frowning unconsciously as she encouraged him with a smile. 'Go on, if you please.'

'Ay, ay,' observed the Captain, considering it incumbent on him, as a point of good breeding, to support Mr Dombey. 'Well said! Go on, Wal'r.'

Captain Cuttle ought to have been withered by the look which Mr Dombey bestowed upon him in acknowledgment of his patronage. But quite innocent of this, he closed one eye in reply, and gave Mr Dombey to understand, by certain significant motions of his hook, that Walter was a little bashful at first, and might be expected to come out shortly.

'It is entirely a private and personal matter, that has brought me here, Sir,' continued Walter, faltering, 'and Captain Cuttle—'

'Here!' interposed the Captain, as an assurance that he was at hand, and might be relied upon.

'Who is a very old friend of my poor Uncle's, and a most excellent man, Sir,' pursued Walter, raising his eyes with a look of entreaty in the Captain's behalf, 'was so good as to offer to come with me, which I could hardly refuse.'

'No, no, no;' observed the Captain complacently. 'Of course not. No call for refusing. Go on, Wal'r.'

'And therefore, Sir,' said Walter, venturing to meet Mr Dombey's eye, and proceeding with better courage in the very desperation of the case, now that there was no avoiding it, 'therefore I have come, with him, Sir, to say that my poor old Uncle is in very great affliction and distress. That, through the gradual loss of his business, and not being able to make a payment, the apprehension of which has weighed very heavily upon his mind, months and months, as indeed I know, Sir, he has an execution in his house, and is in danger of losing all he has, and breaking his heart. And that if you would, in your kindness, and in your old knowledge of him as a respectable man, do anything to help him out of his difficulty, Sir, we never could thank you enough for it.'

Walter's eyes filled with tears as he spoke; and so did those of Florence. Her father saw them glistening, though he appeared to look at Walter only.

'It is a very large sum, Sir,' said Walter. 'More than three hundred pounds. My Uncle is quite beaten down by his misfortune, it lies so heavy on him; and is quite unable to do anything for his own relief. He doesn't even know yet, that I have come to speak to you. You would wish me to say, Sir,' added Walter, after a moment's hesitation, 'exactly what it is I want. I really don't know, Sir. There is my Uncle's stock, on which I believe I may say, confidently, there are no other demands, and there is Captain Cuttle, who would wish to be security too. I—I hardly like to mention,' said Walter, 'such earnings as mine; but if you would allow them—accumulate—payment—advance—Uncle—frugal, honourable, old man.' Walter trailed off, through these broken sentences, into silence: and stood with downcast head, before his employer.

Considering this a favourable moment for the display of the valuables, Captain Cuttle advanced to the table; and clearing a space among the breakfast- cups at Mr Dombey's elbow, produced the silver watch, the ready money, the teaspoons, and the sugar-tongs; and piling them up into a heap that they might look as precious as possible, delivered himself of these words:

'Half a loaf's better than no bread, and the same remark holds good with crumbs. There's a few. Annuity of one hundred pound premium also ready to be made over. If there is a man chock full of science in the world, it's old Sol Gills. If there is a lad of promise—one flowing,' added the Captain, in one of his happy quotations, 'with milk and honey—it's his nevy!'

The Captain then withdrew to his former place, where he stood arranging his scattered locks with the air of a man who had given the finishing touch to a difficult performance.

When Walter ceased to speak, Mr Dombey's eyes were attracted to little Paul, who, seeing his sister hanging down her head and silently weeping in her commiseration for the distress she had heard described, went over to her, and tried to comfort her: looking at Walter and his father as he did so, with a very expressive face. After the momentary distraction of Captain Cuttle's address, which he regarded with lofty indifference, Mr Dombey again turned his eyes upon his son, and sat steadily regarding the child, for some moments, in silence.

'What was this debt contracted for?' asked Mr Dombey, at length. 'Who is the creditor?'

'He don't know,' replied the Captain, putting his hand on Walter's shoulder. 'I do. It came of helping a man that's dead now, and that's cost my friend Gills many a hundred pound already. More particulars in private, if agreeable.'

'People who have enough to do to hold their own way,' said Mr Dombey, unobservant of the Captain's mysterious signs behind Walter, and still looking at his son, 'had better be content with their own obligations and difficulties, and not increase them by engaging for other men. It is an act of dishonesty and presumption, too,' said Mr Dombey, sternly; 'great presumption; for the wealthy could do no more. Paul, come here!'

The child obeyed: and Mr Dombey took him on his knee.

'If you had money now—' said Mr Dombey. 'Look at me!'

Paul, whose eyes had wandered to his sister, and to Walter, looked his father in the face.

'If you had money now,' said Mr Dombey; 'as much money as young Gay has talked about; what would you do?'

'Give it to his old Uncle,' returned Paul.

'Lend it to his old Uncle, eh?' retorted Mr Dombey. 'Well! When you are old enough, you know, you will share my money, and we shall use it together.'

'Dombey and Son,' interrupted Paul, who had been tutored early in the phrase.

'Dombey and Son,' repeated his father. 'Would you like to begin to be Dombey and Son, now, and lend this money to young Gay's Uncle?'

'Oh! if you please, Papa!' said Paul: 'and so would Florence.'

'Girls,' said Mr Dombey, 'have nothing to do with Dombey and Son. Would you like it?'

'Yes, Papa, yes!'

'Then you shall do it,' returned his father. 'And you see, Paul,' he added, dropping his voice, 'how powerful money is, and how anxious people are to get it. Young Gay comes all this way to beg for money, and you, who are so grand and great, having got it, are going to let him have it, as a great favour and obligation.'

Paul turned up the old face for a moment, in which there was a sharp understanding of the reference conveyed in these words: but it was a young and childish face immediately afterwards, when he slipped down from his father's knee, and ran to tell Florence not to cry any more, for he was going to let young Gay have the money.

Mr Dombey then turned to a side-table, and wrote a note and sealed it. During the interval, Paul and Florence whispered to Walter, and Captain Cuttle beamed on the three, with such aspiring and ineffably presumptuous thoughts as Mr Dombey never could have believed in. The note being finished, Mr Dombey turned round to his former place, and held it out to Walter.

'Give that,' he said, 'the first thing to-morrow morning, to Mr Carker. He will immediately take care that one of my people releases your Uncle from his present position, by paying the amount at issue; and that such arrangements are made for its repayment as may be consistent with your Uncle's circumstances. You will consider that this is done for you by Master Paul.'

Walter, in the emotion of holding in his hand the means of releasing his good Uncle from his trouble, would have endeavoured to express something of his gratitude and joy. But Mr Dombey stopped him short.

'You will consider that it is done,' he repeated, 'by Master Paul. I have explained that to him, and he understands it. I wish no more to be said.'

As he motioned towards the door, Walter could only bow his head and retire. Miss Tox, seeing that the Captain appeared about to do the same, interposed.

'My dear Sir,' she said, addressing Mr Dombey, at whose munificence both she and Mrs Chick were shedding tears copiously; 'I think you have overlooked something. Pardon me, Mr Dombey, I think, in the nobility of your character, and its exalted scope, you have omitted a matter of detail.'

'Indeed, Miss Tox!' said Mr Dombey.

'The gentleman with the—Instrument,' pursued Miss Tox, glancing at Captain Cuttle, 'has left upon the table, at your elbow—'

'Good Heaven!' said Mr Dombey, sweeping the Captain's property from him, as if it were so much crumb indeed. 'Take these things away. I am obliged to you, Miss Tox; it is like your usual discretion. Have the goodness to take these things away, Sir!'

Captain Cuttle felt he had no alternative but to comply. But he was so much struck by the magnanimity of Mr Dombey, in refusing treasures lying heaped up to his hand, that when he had deposited the teaspoons and sugar-tongs in one pocket, and the ready money in another, and had lowered the great watch down slowly into its proper vault, he could not refrain from seizing that gentleman's right hand in his own solitary left, and while he held it open with his powerful fingers, bringing the hook down upon its palm in a transport of admiration. At this touch of warm feeling and cold iron, Mr Dombey shivered all over.

Captain Cuttle then kissed his hook to the ladies several times, with great elegance and gallantry; and having taken a particular leave of Paul and Florence, accompanied Walter out of the room. Florence was running after them in the earnestness of her heart, to send some message to old Sol, when Mr Dombey called her back, and bade her stay where she was.

'Will you never be a Dombey, my dear child!' said Mrs Chick, with pathetic reproachfulness.

'Dear aunt,' said Florence. 'Don't be angry with me. I am so thankful to Papa!'

She would have run and thrown her arms about his neck if she had dared; but as she did not dare, she glanced with thankful eyes towards him, as he sat musing; sometimes bestowing an uneasy glance on her, but, for the most part, watching Paul, who walked about the room with the new-blown dignity of having let young Gay have the money.

And young Gay—Walter—what of him?

He was overjoyed to purge the old man's hearth from bailiffs and brokers, and to hurry back to his Uncle with the good tidings. He was overjoyed to have it all arranged and settled next day before noon; and to sit down at evening in the little back parlour with old Sol and Captain Cuttle; and to see the Instrument-maker already reviving, and hopeful for the future, and feeling that the wooden Midshipman was his own again. But without the least impeachment of his gratitude to Mr Dombey, it must be confessed that Walter was humbled and cast down. It is when our budding hopes are nipped beyond recovery by some rough wind, that we are the most disposed to picture to ourselves what flowers they might have borne, if they had flourished; and now, when Walter found himself cut off from that great Dombey height, by the depth of a new and terrible tumble, and felt that all his old wild fancies had been scattered to the winds in the fall, he began to suspect that they might have led him on to harmless visions of aspiring to Florence in the remote distance of time.

The Captain viewed the subject in quite a different light. He appeared to entertain a belief that the interview at which he had assisted was so very satisfactory and encouraging, as to be only a step or two removed from a regular betrothal of Florence to Walter; and that the late transaction had immensely forwarded, if not thoroughly established, the Whittingtonian hopes. Stimulated by this conviction, and by the improvement in the spirits of his old friend, and by his own consequent gaiety, he even attempted, in favouring them with the ballad of 'Lovely Peg' for the third time in one evening, to make an extemporaneous substitution of the name 'Florence;' but finding this difficult, on account of the word Peg invariably rhyming to leg (in which personal beauty the original was described as having excelled all competitors), he hit upon the happy thought of changing it to Fle-e- eg; which he accordingly did, with an archness almost supernatural, and a voice quite vociferous, notwithstanding that the time was close at band when he must seek the abode of the dreadful Mrs MacStinger.

That same evening the Major was diffuse at his club, on the subject of his friend Dombey in the City. 'Damme, Sir,' said the Major, 'he's a prince, is my friend Dombey in the City. I tell you what, Sir. If you had a few more men among you like old Joe Bagstock and my friend Dombey in the City, Sir, you'd do!'

CHAPTER 11. Paul's Introduction to a New Scene

Mrs Pipchin's constitution was made of such hard metal, in spite of its liability to the fleshly weaknesses of standing in need of repose after chops, and of requiring to be coaxed to sleep by the soporific agency of sweet-breads, that it utterly set at naught the predictions of Mrs Wickam, and showed no symptoms of decline. Yet, as Paul's rapt interest in the old lady continued unbated, Mrs Wickam would not budge an inch from the position she had taken up. Fortifying and entrenching herself on the strong ground of her Uncle's Betsey Jane, she advised Miss Berry, as a friend, to prepare herself for the worst; and forewarned her that her aunt might, at any time, be expected to go off suddenly, like a powder-mill.

'I hope, Miss Berry,' Mrs Wickam would observe, 'that you'll come into whatever little property there may be to leave. You deserve it, I am sure, for yours is a trying life. Though there don't seem much worth coming into—you'll excuse my being so open—in this dismal den.'

Poor Berry took it all in good part, and drudged and slaved away as usual; perfectly convinced that Mrs Pipchin was one of the most meritorious persons in the world, and making every day innumerable sacrifices of herself upon the altar of that noble old woman. But all these immolations of Berry were somehow carried to the credit of Mrs Pipchin by Mrs Pipchin's friends and admirers; and were made to harmonise with, and carry out, that melancholy fact of the deceased Mr Pipchin having broken his heart in the Peruvian mines.

For example, there was an honest grocer and general dealer in the retail line of business, between whom and Mrs Pipchin there was a small memorandum book, with a greasy red cover, perpetually in question, and concerning which divers secret councils and conferences were continually being held between the parties to that register, on the mat in the passage, and with closed doors in the parlour. Nor were there wanting dark hints from Master Bitherstone (whose temper had been made revengeful by the solar heats of India acting on his blood), of balances unsettled, and of a failure, on one occasion within his memory, in the supply of moist sugar at tea-time. This grocer being a bachelor and not a man who looked upon the surface for beauty, had once made honourable offers for the hand of Berry, which Mrs Pipchin had, with contumely and scorn, rejected. Everybody said how laudable this was in Mrs Pipchin, relict of a man who had died of the Peruvian mines; and what a staunch, high, independent spirit the old lady had. But nobody said anything about poor Berry, who cried for six weeks (being soundly rated by her good aunt all the time), and lapsed into a state of hopeless spinsterhood.

'Berry's very fond of you, ain't she?' Paul once asked Mrs Pipchin when they were sitting by the fire with the cat.

'Yes,' said Mrs Pipchin.

'Why?' asked Paul.

'Why!' returned the disconcerted old lady. 'How can you ask such things, Sir! why are you fond of your sister Florence?'

'Because she's very good,' said Paul. 'There's nobody like Florence.'

'Well!' retorted Mrs Pipchin, shortly, 'and there's nobody like me, I suppose.'

'Ain't there really though?' asked Paul, leaning forward in his chair, and looking at her very hard.

'No,' said the old lady.

'I am glad of that,' observed Paul, rubbing his hands thoughtfully. 'That's a very good thing.'

Mrs Pipchin didn't dare to ask him why, lest she should receive some perfectly annihilating answer. But as a compensation to her wounded feelings, she harassed Master Bitherstone to that extent until bed-time, that he began that very night to make arrangements for an overland return to India, by secreting from his supper a quarter of a round of bread and a fragment of moist Dutch cheese, as the beginning of a stock of provision to support him on the voyage.

Mrs Pipchin had kept watch and ward over little Paul and his sister for nearly twelve months. They had been home twice, but only for a few days; and had been constant in their weekly visits to Mr Dombey at the hotel. By little and little Paul had grown stronger, and had become able to dispense with his carriage; though he still looked thin and delicate; and still remained the same old, quiet, dreamy child that he had been when first consigned to Mrs Pipchin's care. One Saturday afternoon, at dusk, great consternation was occasioned in the Castle by the unlooked-for announcement of Mr

Dombey as a visitor to Mrs Pipchin. The population of the parlour was immediately swept upstairs as on the wings of a whirlwind, and after much slamming of bedroom doors, and trampling overhead, and some knocking about of Master Bitherstone by Mrs Pipchin, as a relief to the perturbation of her spirits, the black bombazeen garments of the worthy old lady darkened the audience-chamber where Mr Dombey was contemplating the vacant arm-chair of his son and heir.

'Mrs Pipchin,' said Mr Dombey, 'How do you do?'

'Thank you, Sir,' said Mrs Pipchin, 'I am pretty well, considering.'

Mrs Pipchin always used that form of words. It meant, considering her virtues, sacrifices, and so forth.

'I can't expect, Sir, to be very well,' said Mrs Pipchin, taking a chair and fetching her breath; 'but such health as I have, I am grateful for.'

Mr Dombey inclined his head with the satisfied air of a patron, who felt that this was the sort of thing for which he paid so much a quarter. After a moment's silence he went on to say:

'Mrs Pipchin, I have taken the liberty of calling, to consult you in reference to my son. I have had it in my mind to do so for some time past; but have deferred it from time to time, in order that his health might be thoroughly re-established. You have no misgivings on that subject, Mrs Pipchin?'

'Brighton has proved very beneficial, Sir,' returned Mrs Pipchin. 'Very beneficial, indeed.'

'I purpose,' said Mr Dombey, 'his remaining at Brighton.'

Mrs Pipchin rubbed her hands, and bent her grey eyes on the fire.

'But,' pursued Mr Dombey, stretching out his forefinger, 'but possibly that he should now make a change, and lead a different kind of life here. In short, Mrs Pipchin, that is the object of my visit. My son is getting on, Mrs Pipchin. Really, he is getting on.'

There was something melancholy in the triumphant air with which Mr Dombey said this. It showed how long Paul's childish life had been to him, and how his hopes were set upon a later stage of his existence. Pity may appear a strange word to connect with anyone so haughty and so cold, and yet he seemed a worthy subject for it at that moment.

'Six years old!' said Mr Dombey, settling his neckcloth—perhaps to hide an irrepressible smile that rather seemed to strike upon the surface of his face and glance away, as finding no resting-place, than to play there for an instant. 'Dear me, six will be changed to sixteen, before we have time to look about us.'

'Ten years,' croaked the unsympathetic Pipchin, with a frosty glistening of her hard grey eye, and a dreary shaking of her bent head, 'is a long time.'

'It depends on circumstances, returned Mr Dombey; 'at all events, Mrs Pipchin, my son is six years old, and there is no doubt, I fear, that in his studies he is behind many children of his age—or his youth,' said Mr Dombey, quickly answering what he mistrusted was a shrewd twinkle of the frosty eye, 'his youth is a more appropriate expression. Now, Mrs Pipchin, instead of being behind his peers, my son ought to be before them; far before them. There is an eminence ready for him to mount upon. There is nothing of chance or doubt in the course before my son. His way in life was clear and prepared, and marked out before he existed. The education of such a young gentleman must not be delayed. It must not be left imperfect. It must be very steadily and seriously undertaken, Mrs Pipchin.'

'Well, Sir,' said Mrs Pipchin, 'I can say nothing to the contrary.'

'I was quite sure, Mrs Pipchin,' returned Mr Dombey, approvingly, 'that a person of your good sense could not, and would not.'

'There is a great deal of nonsense—and worse—talked about young people not being pressed too hard at first, and being tempted on, and all the rest of it, Sir,' said Mrs Pipchin, impatiently rubbing her hooked nose. 'It never was thought of in my time, and it has no business to be thought of now. My opinion is "keep 'em at it".'

'My good madam,' returned Mr Dombey, 'you have not acquired your reputation undeservedly; and I beg you to believe, Mrs Pipchin, that I am more than satisfied with your excellent system of management, and shall have the greatest pleasure in commending it whenever my poor commendation—' Mr Dombey's loftiness when he affected to disparage his own importance, passed all bounds—'can be of any service. I have been thinking of Doctor Blimber's, Mrs Pipchin.'

'My neighbour, Sir?' said Mrs Pipchin. 'I believe the Doctor's is an excellent establishment. I've heard that it's very strictly conducted, and there is nothing but learning going on from morning to night.'

'And it's very expensive,' added Mr Dombey.

'And it's very expensive, Sir,' returned Mrs Pipchin, catching at the fact, as if in omitting that, she had omitted one of its leading merits.

'I have had some communication with the Doctor, Mrs Pipchin,' said Mr Dombey, hitching his chair anxiously a little nearer to the fire, 'and he does not consider Paul at all too young for his purpose. He mentioned several instances of boys in Greek at about the same age. If I have any little uneasiness in my own mind, Mrs Pipchin, on the subject of this change, it is not on that head. My son not having known a mother has gradually concentrated much—too much—of his childish affection on his sister. Whether their separation—' Mr Dombey said no more, but sat silent.

'Hoity-toity!' exclaimed Mrs Pipchin, shaking out her black bombazeen skirts, and plucking up all the ogress within her. 'If she don't like it, Mr Dombey, she must be taught to lump it.' The good lady apologised immediately afterwards for using so common a figure of speech, but said (and truly) that that was the way she reasoned with 'em.

Mr Dombey waited until Mrs Pipchin had done bridling and shaking her head, and frowning down a legion of Bitherstones and Pankeys; and then said quietly, but correctively, 'He, my good madam, he.'

Mrs Pipchin's system would have applied very much the same mode of cure to any uneasiness on the part of Paul, too; but as the hard grey eye was sharp enough to see that the recipe, however Mr Dombey might admit its efficacy in the case of the daughter, was not a sovereign remedy for the son, she argued the point; and contended that change, and new society, and the different form of life he would lead at Doctor Blimber's, and the studies he would have to master, would very soon prove sufficient alienations. As this chimed in with Mr Dombey's own hope and belief, it gave that gentleman a still higher opinion of Mrs Pipchin's understanding; and as Mrs Pipchin, at the same time, bewailed the loss of her dear little friend (which was not an overwhelming shock to her, as she had long expected it, and had not looked, in the beginning, for his remaining with her longer than three months), he formed an equally good opinion of Mrs Pipchin's disinterestedness. It was plain that he had given the subject anxious consideration, for he had formed a plan, which he announced to the ogress, of sending Paul to the Doctor's as a weekly boarder for the first half year, during which time Florence would remain at the Castle, that she might receive her brother there, on Saturdays. This would wean him by degrees, Mr Dombey said; possibly with a recollection of his not having been weaned by degrees on a former occasion.

Mr Dombey finished the interview by expressing his hope that Mrs Pipchin would still remain in office as general superintendent and overseer of his son, pending his studies at Brighton; and having kissed Paul, and shaken hands with Florence, and beheld Master Bitherstone in his collar of state, and made Miss Pankey cry by patting her on the head (in which region she was uncommonly tender, on account of a habit Mrs Pipchin had of sounding it with her knuckles, like a cask), he withdrew to his hotel and dinner: resolved that Paul, now that he was getting so old and well, should begin a vigorous course of education forthwith, to qualify him for the position in which he was to shine; and that Doctor Blimber should take him in hand immediately.

Whenever a young gentleman was taken in hand by Doctor Blimber, he might consider himself sure of a pretty tight squeeze. The Doctor only undertook the charge of ten young gentlemen, but he had, always ready, a supply of learning for a hundred, on the lowest estimate; and it was at once the business and delight of his life to gorge the unhappy ten with it.

In fact, Doctor Blimber's establishment was a great hot-house, in which there was a forcing apparatus incessantly at work. All the boys blew before their time. Mental green-peas were produced at Christmas, and intellectual asparagus all the year round. Mathematical gooseberries (very sour ones too) were common at untimely seasons, and from mere sprouts of bushes, under Doctor Blimber's cultivation. Every description of Greek and Latin vegetable was got off the driest twigs of boys, under the frostiest circumstances. Nature was of no consequence at all. No matter what a young gentleman was intended to bear, Doctor Blimber made him bear to pattern, somehow or other.

This was all very pleasant and ingenious, but the system of forcing was attended with its usual disadvantages. There was not the right taste about the premature productions, and they didn't keep well. Moreover, one young gentleman, with a swollen nose and an excessively large head (the oldest of the ten who had 'gone through' everything), suddenly left off blowing one day, and remained in the establishment a mere stalk. And people did say that the Doctor had rather overdone it with young Toots, and that when he began to have whiskers he left off having brains.

There young Toots was, at any rate; possessed of the gruffest of voices and the shrillest of minds; sticking ornamental pins into his shirt, and keeping a ring in his waistcoat pocket to put on his little finger by stealth, when the pupils went out walking; constantly falling in love by sight with nurserymaids, who had no idea of his existence; and looking at the gas-lighted world over the little iron bars in the left-hand corner window of the front three pairs of stairs, after bed-time, like a greatly overgrown cherub who had sat up aloft much too long.

The Doctor was a portly gentleman in a suit of black, with strings at his knees, and stockings below them. He had a bald head, highly polished; a deep voice; and a chin so very double, that it was a wonder how he ever managed to shave into the creases. He had likewise a pair of little eyes that were always half shut up, and a mouth that was always half expanded into a grin, as if he had, that moment, posed a boy, and were waiting to convict him from his own lips. Insomuch, that when the Doctor put his right hand into the breast of his coat, and with his other hand behind him, and a scarcely perceptible wag of his head, made the commonest observation to a nervous stranger, it was like a sentiment from the sphynx, and settled his business.

The Doctor's was a mighty fine house, fronting the sea. Not a joyful style of house within, but quite the contrary. Sad-coloured curtains, whose proportions were spare and lean, hid themselves despondently behind the windows. The tables and chairs were put away in rows, like figures in a sum; fires were so rarely lighted in the rooms of ceremony, that they felt like wells, and a visitor represented the bucket; the dining-room seemed the last place in the world where any eating or drinking was likely to occur; there was no sound through all the house but the ticking of a great clock in the hall, which made itself audible in the very garrets; and sometimes a dull cooing of young gentlemen at their lessons, like the murmurings of an assemblage of melancholy pigeons.

Miss Blimber, too, although a slim and graceful maid, did no soft violence to the gravity of the house. There was no light nonsense about Miss Blimber. She kept her hair short and crisp, and wore spectacles. She was dry and sandy with working in the graves of deceased languages. None of your live languages for Miss Blimber. They must be dead—stone dead—and then Miss Blimber dug them up like a Ghoul.

Mrs Blimber, her Mama, was not learned herself, but she pretended to be, and that did quite as well. She said at evening parties, that if she could have known Cicero, she thought she could have died contented. It was the steady joy of her life to see the Doctor's young gentlemen go out walking, unlike all other young gentlemen, in the largest possible shirt-collars, and the stiffest possible cravats. It was so classical, she said.

As to Mr Feeder, B.A., Doctor Blimber's assistant, he was a kind of human barrel-organ, with a little list of tunes at which he was continually working, over and over again, without any variation. He might have been fitted up with a change of barrels, perhaps, in early life, if his destiny had been favourable; but it had not been; and he had only one, with which, in a monotonous round, it was his occupation to bewilder the young ideas of Doctor Blimber's young gentlemen. The young gentlemen were prematurely full of carking anxieties. They knew no rest from the pursuit of stony-hearted verbs, savage noun-substantives, inflexible syntactic passages, and ghosts of exercises that appeared to them in their dreams. Under the forcing system, a young gentleman usually took leave of his spirits in three weeks. He had all the cares of the world on his head in three months. He conceived bitter sentiments against his parents or guardians in four; he was an old misanthrope, in five; envied Curtius that blessed refuge in the earth, in six; and at the end of the first twelvemonth had arrived at the conclusion, from which he never afterwards departed, that all the fancies of the poets, and lessons of the sages, were a mere collection of words and grammar, and had no other meaning in the world.

But he went on blow, blow, blowing, in the Doctor's hothouse, all the time; and the Doctor's glory and reputation were great, when he took his wintry growth home to his relations and friends.

Upon the Doctor's door-steps one day, Paul stood with a fluttering heart, and with his small right hand in his father's. His other hand was locked in that of Florence. How tight the tiny pressure of that one; and how loose and cold the other!

Mrs Pipchin hovered behind the victim, with her sable plumage and her hooked beak, like a bird of ill-omen. She was out of breath—for Mr Dombey, full of great thoughts, had walked fast—and she croaked hoarsely as she waited for the opening of the door.

'Now, Paul,' said Mr Dombey, exultingly. 'This is the way indeed to be Dombey and Son, and have money. You are almost a man already.'

'Almost,' returned the child.

Even his childish agitation could not master the sly and quaint yet touching look, with which he accompanied the reply.

It brought a vague expression of dissatisfaction into Mr Dombey's face; but the door being opened, it was quickly gone.

'Doctor Blimber is at home, I believe?' said Mr Dombey.

The man said yes; and as they passed in, looked at Paul as if he were a little mouse, and the house were a trap. He was a weak-eyed young man, with the first faint streaks or early dawn of a grin on his countenance. It was mere imbecility; but Mrs Pipchin took it into her head that it was impudence, and made a snap at him directly.

'How dare you laugh behind the gentleman's back?' said Mrs Pipchin. 'And what do you take me for?'

'I ain't a laughing at nobody, and I'm sure I don't take you for nothing, Ma'am,' returned the young man, in consternation.

'A pack of idle dogs!' said Mrs Pipchin, 'only fit to be turnspits. Go and tell your master that Mr Dombey's here, or it'll be worse for you!'

The weak-eyed young man went, very meekly, to discharge himself of this commission; and soon came back to invite them to the Doctor's study.

'You're laughing again, Sir,' said Mrs Pipchin, when it came to her turn, bringing up the rear, to pass him in the hall.

'I ain't,' returned the young man, grievously oppressed. 'I never see such a thing as this!'

'What is the matter, Mrs Pipchin?' said Mr Dombey, looking round. 'Softly! Pray!'

Mrs Pipchin, in her deference, merely muttered at the young man as she passed on, and said, 'Oh! he was a precious fellow'—leaving the young man, who was all meekness and incapacity, affected even to tears by the incident. But Mrs Pipchin had a way of falling foul of all meek people; and her friends said who could wonder at it, after the Peruvian mines!

The Doctor was sitting in his portentous study, with a globe at each knee, books all round him, Homer over the door, and Minerva on the mantel-shelf. 'And how do you do, Sir?' he said to Mr Dombey, 'and how is my little friend?' Grave as an organ was the Doctor's speech; and when he ceased, the great clock in the hall seemed (to Paul at least) to take him up, and to go on saying, 'how, is, my, lit, tle, friend? how, is, my, lit, tle, friend?' over and over and over again.

The little friend being something too small to be seen at all from where the Doctor sat, over the books on his table, the Doctor made several futile attempts to get a view of him round the legs; which Mr Dombey perceiving, relieved the Doctor from his embarrassment by taking Paul up in his arms, and sitting him on another little table, over against the Doctor, in the middle of the room.

'Ha!' said the Doctor, leaning back in his chair with his hand in his breast. 'Now I see my little friend. How do you do, my little friend?'

The clock in the hall wouldn't subscribe to this alteration in the form of words, but continued to repeat how, is, my, lit, tle, friend? how, is, my, lit, tle, friend?'

'Very well, I thank you, Sir,' returned Paul, answering the clock quite as much as the Doctor.

'Ha!' said Doctor Blimber. 'Shall we make a man of him?'

'Do you hear, Paul?' added Mr Dombey; Paul being silent.

'Shall we make a man of him?' repeated the Doctor.

'I had rather be a child,' replied Paul.

'Indeed!' said the Doctor. 'Why?'

The child sat on the table looking at him, with a curious expression of suppressed emotion in his face, and beating one hand proudly on his knee as if he had the rising tears beneath it, and crushed them. But his other hand strayed a little way the while, a little farther—farther from him yet—until it lighted on the neck of Florence. 'This is why,' it seemed to say, and then the steady look was broken up and gone; the working lip was loosened; and the tears came streaming forth.

'Mrs Pipchin,' said his father, in a querulous manner, 'I am really very sorry to see this.'

'Come away from him, do, Miss Dombey,' quoth the matron.

'Never mind,' said the Doctor, blandly nodding his head, to keep Mrs Pipchin back. 'Never mind; we shall substitute new cares and new impressions, Mr Dombey, very shortly. You would still wish my little friend to acquire—'

'Everything, if you please, Doctor,' returned Mr Dombey, firmly.

'Yes,' said the Doctor, who, with his half-shut eyes, and his usual smile, seemed to survey Paul with the sort of interest that might attach to some choice little animal he was going to stuff. 'Yes, exactly. Ha! We shall impart a great variety of information to our little friend, and bring him quickly forward, I daresay. I daresay. Quite a virgin soil, I believe you said, Mr Dombey?'

'Except some ordinary preparation at home, and from this lady,' replied Mr Dombey, introducing Mrs Pipchin, who instantly communicated a rigidity to her whole muscular system, and snorted defiance beforehand, in case the Doctor should disparage her; 'except so far, Paul has, as yet, applied himself to no studies at all.'

Doctor Blimber inclined his head, in gentle tolerance of such insignificant poaching as Mrs Pipchin's, and said he was glad to hear it. It was much more satisfactory, he observed, rubbing his hands, to begin at the foundation. And again he leered at Paul, as if he would have liked to tackle him with the Greek alphabet, on the spot.

'That circumstance, indeed, Doctor Blimber,' pursued Mr Dombey, glancing at his little son, 'and the interview I have already had the pleasure of holding with you, renders any further explanation, and consequently, any further intrusion on your valuable time, so unnecessary, that—'

'Now, Miss Dombey!' said the acid Pipchin.

'Permit me,' said the Doctor, 'one moment. Allow me to present Mrs Blimber and my daughter; who will be associated with the domestic life of our young Pilgrim to Parnassus Mrs Blimber,' for the lady, who had perhaps been in waiting, opportunely entered, followed by her daughter, that fair Sexton in spectacles, 'Mr Dombey. My daughter Cornelia, Mr Dombey. Mr Dombey, my love,' pursued the Doctor, turning to his wife, 'is so confiding as to—do you see our little friend?'

Mrs Blimber, in an excess of politeness, of which Mr Dombey was the object, apparently did not, for she was backing against the little friend, and very much endangering his position on the table. But, on this hint, she turned to admire his classical and intellectual lineaments, and turning again to Mr Dombey, said, with a sigh, that she envied his dear son.

'Like a bee, Sir,' said Mrs Blimber, with uplifted eyes, 'about to plunge into a garden of the choicest flowers, and sip the sweets for the first time Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Terence, Plautus, Cicero. What a world of honey have we here. It may appear remarkable, Mr Dombey, in one who is a wife—the wife of such a husband—'

'Hush, hush,' said Doctor Blimber. 'Fie for shame.'

'Mr Dombey will forgive the partiality of a wife,' said Mrs Blimber, with an engaging smile.

Mr Dombey answered 'Not at all:' applying those words, it is to be presumed, to the partiality, and not to the forgiveness.

'And it may seem remarkable in one who is a mother also,' resumed Mrs Blimber.

'And such a mother,' observed Mr Dombey, bowing with some confused idea of being complimentary to Cornelia.

'But really,' pursued Mrs Blimber, 'I think if I could have known Cicero, and been his friend, and talked with him in his retirement at Tusculum (beau-ti-ful Tusculum!), I could have died contented.'

A learned enthusiasm is so very contagious, that Mr Dombey half believed this was exactly his case; and even Mrs Pipchin, who was not, as we have seen, of an accommodating disposition generally, gave utterance to a little sound between a groan and a sigh, as if she would have said that nobody but Cicero could have proved a lasting consolation under that failure of the Peruvian MInes, but that he indeed would have been a very Davy-lamp of refuge.

Cornelia looked at Mr Dombey through her spectacles, as if she would have liked to crack a few quotations with him from the authority in question. But this design, if she entertained it, was frustrated by a knock at the room-door.

'Who is that?' said the Doctor. 'Oh! Come in, Toots; come in. Mr Dombey, Sir.' Toots bowed. 'Quite a coincidence!' said Doctor Blimber. 'Here we have the beginning and the end. Alpha and Omega Our head boy, Mr Dombey.'

The Doctor might have called him their head and shoulders boy, for he was at least that much taller than any of the rest. He blushed very much at finding himself among strangers, and chuckled aloud.

'An addition to our little Portico, Toots,' said the Doctor; 'Mr Dombey's son.'

Young Toots blushed again; and finding, from a solemn silence which prevailed, that he was expected to say something, said to Paul, 'How are you?' in a voice so deep, and a manner so sheepish, that if a lamb had roared it couldn't have been more surprising.

'Ask Mr Feeder, if you please, Toots,' said the Doctor, 'to prepare a few introductory volumes for Mr Dombey's son, and to allot him a convenient seat for study. My dear, I believe Mr Dombey has not seen the dormitories.'

'If Mr Dombey will walk upstairs,' said Mrs Blimber, 'I shall be more than proud to show him the dominions of the drowsy god.'

With that, Mrs Blimber, who was a lady of great suavity, and a wiry figure, and who wore a cap composed of sky-blue materials, pied upstairs with Mr Dombey and Cornelia; Mrs Pipchin following, and looking out sharp for her enemy the footman.

While they were gone, Paul sat upon the table, holding Florence by the hand, and glancing timidly from the Doctor round and round the room, while the Doctor, leaning back in his chair, with his hand in his breast as usual, held a book from him at arm's length, and read. There was something very awful in this manner of reading. It was such a determined, unimpassioned, inflexible, cold-blooded way of going to work. It left the Doctor's countenance exposed to view; and when the Doctor smiled suspiciously at his author, or knit his brows, or shook his head and made wry faces at him, as much as to say, 'Don't tell me, Sir; I know better,' it was terrific.

Toots, too, had no business to be outside the door, ostentatiously examining the wheels in his watch, and counting his half-crowns. But that didn't last long; for Doctor Blimber, happening to change the position of his tight plump legs, as if he were going to get up, Toots swiftly vanished, and appeared no more.

Mr Dombey and his conductress were soon heard coming downstairs again, talking all the way; and presently they re-entered the Doctor's study.

'I hope, Mr Dombey,' said the Doctor, laying down his book, 'that the arrangements meet your approval.'

'They are excellent, Sir,' said Mr Dombey.

'Very fair, indeed,' said Mrs Pipchin, in a low voice; never disposed to give too much encouragement.

'Mrs Pipchin,' said Mr Dombey, wheeling round, 'will, with your permission, Doctor and Mrs Blimber, visit Paul now and then.'

'Whenever Mrs Pipchin pleases,' observed the Doctor.

'Always happy to see her,' said Mrs Blimber.

'I think,' said Mr Dombey, 'I have given all the trouble I need, and may take my leave. Paul, my child,' he went close to him, as he sat upon the table. 'Good-bye.'

'Good-bye, Papa.'

The limp and careless little hand that Mr Dombey took in his, was singularly out of keeping with the wistful face. But he had no part in its sorrowful expression. It was not addressed to him. No, no. To Florence—all to Florence.

If Mr Dombey in his insolence of wealth, had ever made an enemy, hard to appease and cruelly vindictive in his hate, even such an enemy might have received the pang that wrung his proud heart then, as compensation for his injury.

He bent down, over his boy, and kissed him. If his sight were dimmed as he did so, by something that for a moment blurred the little face, and made it indistinct to him, his mental vision may have been, for that short time, the clearer perhaps.

'I shall see you soon, Paul. You are free on Saturdays and Sundays, you know.'

'Yes, Papa,' returned Paul: looking at his sister. 'On Saturdays and Sundays.'

'And you'll try and learn a great deal here, and be a clever man,' said Mr Dombey; 'won't you?'

'I'll try,' returned the child, wearily.

'And you'll soon be grown up now!' said Mr Dombey.

'Oh! very soon!' replied the child. Once more the old, old look passed rapidly across his features like a strange light. It fell on Mrs Pipchin, and extinguished itself in her black dress. That excellent ogress stepped forward to take leave and to bear off Florence, which she had long been thirsting to do. The move on her part roused Mr Dombey, whose eyes were fixed on Paul. After patting him on the head, and pressing his small hand again, he took leave of Doctor Blimber, Mrs Blimber, and Miss Blimber, with his usual polite frigidity, and walked out of the study.

Despite his entreaty that they would not think of stirring, Doctor Blimber, Mrs Blimber, and Miss Blimber all pressed forward to attend him to the hall; and thus Mrs Pipchin got into a state of entanglement with Miss Blimber and the Doctor, and was crowded out of the study before she could clutch Florence. To which happy accident Paul stood afterwards indebted for the dear remembrance, that Florence ran back to throw her arms round his neck, and that hers was the last face in the doorway: turned towards him with a smile of encouragement, the brighter for the tears through which it beamed.

It made his childish bosom heave and swell when it was gone; and sent the globes, the books, blind Homer and Minerva, swimming round the room. But they stopped, all of a sudden; and then he heard the loud clock in the hall still gravely inquiring 'how, is, my, lit, tle, friend? how, is, my, lit, tle, friend?' as it had done before.

He sat, with folded hands, upon his pedestal, silently listening. But he might have answered 'weary, weary! very lonely, very sad!' And there, with an aching void in his young heart, and all outside so cold, and bare, and strange, Paul sat as if he had taken life unfurnished, and the upholsterer were never coming.

CHAPTER 12. Paul's Education

After the lapse of some minutes, which appeared an immense time to little Paul Dombey on the table, Doctor Blimber came back. The Doctor's walk was stately, and calculated to impress the juvenile mind with solemn feelings. It was a sort of march; but when the Doctor put out his right foot, he gravely turned upon his axis, with a semi-circular sweep towards the left; and when he put out his left foot, he turned in the same manner towards the right. So that he seemed, at every stride he took, to look about him as though he were saying, 'Can anybody have the goodness to indicate any subject, in any direction, on which I am uninformed? I rather think not.'

Mrs Blimber and Miss Blimber came back in the Doctor's company; and the Doctor, lifting his new pupil off the table, delivered him over to Miss Blimber.

'Cornelia,' said the Doctor, 'Dombey will be your charge at first. Bring him on, Cornelia, bring him on.'

Miss Blimber received her young ward from the Doctor's hands; and Paul, feeling that the spectacles were surveying him, cast down his eyes.

'How old are you, Dombey?' said Miss Blimber.

'Six,' answered Paul, wondering, as he stole a glance at the young lady, why her hair didn't grow long like Florence's, and why she was like a boy.

'How much do you know of your Latin Grammar, Dombey?' said Miss Blimber.

'None of it,' answered Paul. Feeling that the answer was a shock to Miss Blimber's sensibility, he looked up at the three faces that were looking down at him, and said:

'I have'n't been well. I have been a weak child. I couldn't learn a Latin Grammar when I was out, every day, with old Glubb. I wish you'd tell old Glubb to come and see me, if you please.'

'What a dreadfully low name' said Mrs Blimber. 'Unclassical to a degree! Who is the monster, child?'

'What monster?' inquired Paul.

'Glubb,' said Mrs Blimber, with a great disrelish.

'He's no more a monster than you are,' returned Paul.

'What!' cried the Doctor, in a terrible voice. 'Ay, ay, ay? Aha! What's that?'

Paul was dreadfully frightened; but still he made a stand for the absent Glubb, though he did it trembling.

'He's a very nice old man, Ma'am,' he said. 'He used to draw my couch. He knows all about the deep sea, and the fish that are in it, and the great monsters that come and lie on rocks in the sun, and dive into the water again when they're startled, blowing and splashing so, that they can be heard for miles. There are some creatures, said Paul, warming with his subject, 'I don't know how many yards long, and I forget their names, but Florence knows, that pretend to be in distress; and when a man goes near them, out of compassion, they open their great jaws, and attack him. But all he has got to do,' said Paul, boldly tendering this information to the very Doctor himself, 'is to keep on turning as he runs away, and then, as they turn slowly, because they are so long, and can't bend, he's sure to beat them. And though old Glubb don't know why the sea should make me think of my Mama that's dead, or what it is that it is always saying—always saying! he knows a great deal about it. And I wish,' the child concluded, with a sudden falling of his countenance, and failing in his animation, as he looked like one forlorn, upon the three strange faces, 'that you'd let old Glubb come here to see me, for I know him very well, and he knows me.

'Ha!' said the Doctor, shaking his head; 'this is bad, but study will do much.'

Mrs Blimber opined, with something like a shiver, that he was an unaccountable child; and, allowing for the difference of visage, looked at him pretty much as Mrs Pipchin had been used to do.

'Take him round the house, Cornelia,' said the Doctor, 'and familiarise him with his new sphere. Go with that young lady, Dombey.'

Dombey obeyed; giving his hand to the abstruse Cornelia, and looking at her sideways, with timid curiosity, as they went away together. For her spectacles, by reason of the glistening of the glasses, made her so mysterious, that he didn't know where she was looking, and was not indeed quite sure that she had any eyes at all behind them.

Cornelia took him first to the schoolroom, which was situated at the back of the hall, and was approached through two baize doors, which deadened and muffled the young gentlemen's voices. Here, there were eight young gentlemen in various stages of mental prostration, all very hard at work, and very grave indeed. Toots, as an old hand, had a desk to himself in one corner: and a magnificent man, of immense age, he looked, in Paul's young eyes, behind it.

Mr Feeder, B.A., who sat at another little desk, had his Virgil stop on, and was slowly grinding that tune to four young gentlemen. Of the remaining four, two, who grasped their foreheads convulsively, were engaged in solving mathematical problems; one with his face like a dirty window, from much crying, was endeavouring to flounder through a hopeless number of lines before dinner; and one sat looking at his task in stony stupefaction and despair—which it seemed had been his condition ever since breakfast time.

The appearance of a new boy did not create the sensation that might have been expected. Mr Feeder, B.A. (who was in the habit of shaving his head for coolness, and had nothing but little bristles on it), gave him a bony hand, and told him he was glad to see him—which Paul would have been very glad to have told him, if he could have done so with the least sincerity. Then Paul, instructed by Cornelia, shook hands with the four young gentlemen at Mr Feeder's desk; then with the two young gentlemen at work on the problems, who were very feverish; then with the young gentleman at work against time, who was very inky; and lastly with the young gentleman in a state of stupefaction, who was flabby and quite cold.

Paul having been already introduced to Toots, that pupil merely chuckled and breathed hard, as his custom was, and pursued the occupation in which he was engaged. It was not a severe one; for on account of his having 'gone through' so much (in more senses than one), and also of his having, as before hinted, left off blowing in his prime, Toots now had licence to pursue his own course of study: which was chiefly to write long letters to himself from persons of distinction, adds 'P. Toots, Esquire, Brighton, Sussex,' and to preserve them in his desk with great care.

These ceremonies passed, Cornelia led Paul upstairs to the top of the house; which was rather a slow journey, on account of Paul being obliged to land both feet on every stair, before he mounted another. But they reached their journey's end at last; and there, in a front room, looking over the wild sea, Cornelia showed him a nice little bed with white hangings, close to the window, on which there was already beautifully written on a card in round text—down strokes very thick, and up strokes very fine—DOMBEY; while two other little bedsteads in the same room were announced, through like means, as respectively appertaining unto BRIGGS and TOZER.

Just as they got downstairs again into the hall, Paul saw the weak-eyed young man who had given that mortal offence to Mrs Pipchin, suddenly seize a very large drumstick, and fly at a gong that was hanging up, as if he had gone mad, or wanted vengeance. Instead of receiving warning, however, or being instantly taken into custody, the young man left off unchecked, after having made a dreadful noise. Then Cornelia Blimber said to Dombey that dinner would be ready in a quarter of an hour, and perhaps he had better go into the schoolroom among his 'friends.'

So Dombey, deferentially passing the great clock which was still as anxious as ever to know how he found himself, opened the schoolroom door a very little way, and strayed in like a lost boy: shutting it after him with some difficulty. His friends were all dispersed about the room except the stony friend, who remained immoveable. Mr Feeder was stretching himself in his grey gown, as if, regardless of expense, he were resolved to pull the sleeves off.

'Heigh ho hum!' cried Mr Feeder, shaking himself like a cart-horse. 'Oh dear me, dear me! Ya-a-a-ah!'

Paul was quite alarmed by Mr Feeder's yawning; it was done on such a great scale, and he was so terribly in earnest. All the boys too (Toots excepted) seemed knocked up, and were getting ready for dinner—some newly tying their neckcloths, which were very stiff indeed; and others washing their hands or brushing their hair, in an adjoining ante-chamber—as if they didn't think they should enjoy it at all.

Young Toots who was ready beforehand, and had therefore nothing to do, and had leisure to bestow upon Paul, said, with heavy good nature:

'Sit down, Dombey.'

'Thank you, Sir,' said Paul.

His endeavouring to hoist himself on to a very high window-seat, and his slipping down again, appeared to prepare Toots's mind for the reception of a discovery.

'You're a very small chap;' said Mr Toots.

'Yes, Sir, I'm small,' returned Paul. 'Thank you, Sir.'

For Toots had lifted him into the seat, and done it kindly too.

'Who's your tailor?' inquired Toots, after looking at him for some moments.

'It's a woman that has made my clothes as yet,' said Paul. 'My sister's dressmaker.'

'My tailor's Burgess and Co.,' said Toots. 'Fash'nable. But very dear.'

Paul had wit enough to shake his head, as if he would have said it was easy to see that; and indeed he thought so.

'Your father's regularly rich, ain't he?' inquired Mr Toots.

'Yes, Sir,' said Paul. 'He's Dombey and Son.'

'And which?' demanded Toots.

'And Son, Sir,' replied Paul.

Mr Toots made one or two attempts, in a low voice, to fix the Firm in his mind; but not quite succeeding, said he would get Paul to mention the name again to-morrow morning, as it was rather important. And indeed he purposed nothing less than writing himself a private and confidential letter from Dombey and Son immediately.

By this time the other pupils (always excepting the stony boy) gathered round. They were polite, but pale; and spoke low; and they were so depressed in their spirits, that in comparison with the general tone of that company, Master Bitherstone was a perfect Miller, or complete Jest Book.' And yet he had a sense of injury upon him, too, had Bitherstone.

'You sleep in my room, don't you?' asked a solemn young gentleman, whose shirt-collar curled up the lobes of his ears.

'Master Briggs?' inquired Paul.

'Tozer,' said the young gentleman.

Paul answered yes; and Tozer pointing out the stony pupil, said that was Briggs. Paul had already felt certain that it must be either Briggs or Tozer, though he didn't know why.

'Is yours a strong constitution?' inquired Tozer.

Paul said he thought not. Tozer replied that he thought not also, judging from Paul's looks, and that it was a pity, for it need be. He then asked Paul if he were going to begin with Cornelia; and on Paul saying 'yes,' all the young gentlemen (Briggs excepted) gave a low groan.

It was drowned in the tintinnabulation of the gong, which sounding again with great fury, there was a general move towards the dining-room; still excepting Briggs the stony boy, who remained where he was, and as he was; and on its way to whom Paul presently encountered a round of bread, genteelly served on a plate and napkin, and with a silver fork lying crosswise on the top of it.

Doctor Blimber was already in his place in the dining-room, at the top of the table, with Miss Blimber and Mrs Blimber on either side of him. Mr Feeder in a black coat was at the bottom. Paul's chair was next to Miss Blimber; but it being found, when he sat in it, that his eyebrows were not much above the level of the table-cloth, some books were brought in from the Doctor's study, on which he was elevated, and on which he always sat from that time—carrying them in and out himself on after occasions, like a little elephant and castle.'

Grace having been said by the Doctor, dinner began. There was some nice soup; also roast meat, boiled meat, vegetables, pie, and cheese. Every young gentleman had a massive silver fork, and a napkin; and all the arrangements were stately and handsome. In particular, there was a butler in a blue coat and bright buttons, who gave quite a winey flavour to the table beer; he poured it out so superbly.

Nobody spoke, unless spoken to, except Doctor Blimber, Mrs Blimber, and Miss Blimber, who conversed occasionally. Whenever a young gentleman was not actually engaged with his knife and fork or spoon, his eye, with an irresistible attraction, sought the eye of Doctor Blimber, Mrs Blimber, or Miss Blimber, and modestly rested there. Toots appeared to be the only exception to this rule. He sat next Mr Feeder on Paul's side of the table, and frequently looked behind and before the intervening boys to catch a glimpse of Paul.

Only once during dinner was there any conversation that included the young gentlemen. It happened at the epoch of the cheese, when the Doctor, having taken a glass of port wine, and hemmed twice or thrice, said:

'It is remarkable, Mr Feeder, that the Romans—'

At the mention of this terrible people, their implacable enemies, every young gentleman fastened his gaze upon the Doctor, with an assumption of the deepest interest. One of the number who happened to be drinking, and who caught the Doctor's eye glaring at him through the side of his tumbler, left off so hastily that he was convulsed for some moments, and in the sequel ruined Doctor Blimber's point.

'It is remarkable, Mr Feeder,' said the Doctor, beginning again slowly, 'that the Romans, in those gorgeous and profuse entertainments of which we read in the days of the Emperors, when luxury had attained a height unknown before or since, and when whole provinces were ravaged to supply the splendid means of one Imperial Banquet—'

Here the offender, who had been swelling and straining, and waiting in vain for a full stop, broke out violently.

'Johnson,' said Mr Feeder, in a low reproachful voice, 'take some water.'

The Doctor, looking very stern, made a pause until the water was brought, and then resumed:

'And when, Mr Feeder—'

But Mr Feeder, who saw that Johnson must break out again, and who knew that the Doctor would never come to a period before the young gentlemen until he had finished all he meant to say, couldn't keep his eye off Johnson; and thus was caught in the fact of not looking at the Doctor, who consequently stopped.

'I beg your pardon, Sir,' said Mr Feeder, reddening. 'I beg your pardon, Doctor Blimber.'

'And when,' said the Doctor, raising his voice, 'when, Sir, as we read, and have no reason to doubt—incredible as it may appear to the vulgar—of our time—the brother of Vitellius prepared for him a feast, in which were served, of fish, two thousand dishes—'

'Take some water, Johnson—dishes, Sir,' said Mr Feeder.

'Of various sorts of fowl, five thousand dishes.'

'Or try a crust of bread,' said Mr Feeder.

'And one dish,' pursued Doctor Blimber, raising his voice still higher as he looked all round the table, 'called, from its enormous dimensions, the Shield of Minerva, and made, among other costly ingredients, of the brains of pheasants—'

'Ow, ow, ow!' (from Johnson.)

'Woodcocks—'

'Ow, ow, ow!'

'The sounds of the fish called scari—'

'You'll burst some vessel in your head,' said Mr Feeder. 'You had better let it come.'

'And the spawn of the lamprey, brought from the Carpathian Sea,' pursued the Doctor, in his severest voice; 'when we read of costly entertainments such as these, and still remember, that we have a Titus—'

'What would be your mother's feelings if you died of apoplexy!' said Mr Feeder.

'A Domitian—'

'And you're blue, you know,' said Mr Feeder.

'A Nero, a Tiberius, a Caligula, a Heliogabalus, and many more, pursued the Doctor; 'it is, Mr Feeder—if you are doing me the honour to attend— remarkable; VERY remarkable, Sir—'

But Johnson, unable to suppress it any longer, burst at that moment into such an overwhelming fit of coughing, that although both his immediate neighbours thumped him on the back, and Mr Feeder himself held a glass of water to his lips, and the butler walked him up and down several times between his own chair and the sideboard, like a sentry, it was a full five minutes before he was moderately composed. Then there was a profound silence.

'Gentlemen,' said Doctor Blimber, 'rise for Grace! Cornelia, lift Dombey down'—nothing of whom but his scalp was accordingly seen above the tablecloth. 'Johnson will repeat to me tomorrow morning before breakfast, without book, and from the Greek Testament, the first chapter of the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Ephesians. We will resume our studies, Mr Feeder, in half-an-hour.'

The young gentlemen bowed and withdrew. Mr Feeder did likewise. During the half-hour, the young gentlemen, broken into pairs, loitered arm-in-arm up and down a small piece of ground behind the house, or endeavoured to kindle a spark of animation in the breast of Briggs. But nothing happened so vulgar as play. Punctually at the appointed time, the gong was sounded, and the studies, under the joint auspices of Doctor Blimber and Mr Feeder, were resumed.

As the Olympic game of lounging up and down had been cut shorter than usual that day, on Johnson's account, they all went out for a walk before tea. Even Briggs (though he hadn't begun yet) partook of this dissipation; in the enjoyment of which he looked over the cliff two or three times darkly. Doctor Blimber accompanied them; and Paul had the honour of being taken in tow by the Doctor himself: a distinguished state of things, in which he looked very little and feeble.

Tea was served in a style no less polite than the dinner; and after tea, the young gentlemen rising and bowing as before, withdrew to fetch up the unfinished tasks of that day, or to get up the already looming tasks of to-morrow. In the meantime Mr Feeder withdrew to his own room; and Paul sat in a corner wondering whether Florence was thinking of him, and what they were all about at Mrs Pipchin's.

Mr Toots, who had been detained by an important letter from the Duke of Wellington, found Paul out after a time; and having looked at him for a long while, as before, inquired if he was fond of waistcoats.

Paul said 'Yes, Sir.'

'So am I,' said Toots.

No word more spoke Toots that night; but he stood looking at Paul as if he liked him; and as there was company in that, and Paul was not inclined to talk, it answered his purpose better than conversation.

At eight o'clock or so, the gong sounded again for prayers in the dining-room, where the butler afterwards presided over a side-table, on which bread and cheese and beer were spread for such young gentlemen as desired to partake of those refreshments. The ceremonies concluded by the Doctor's saying, 'Gentlemen, we will resume our studies at seven to-morrow;' and then, for the first time, Paul saw Cornelia Blimber's eye, and saw that it was upon him. When the Doctor had said these words, 'Gentlemen, we will resume our studies at seven tomorrow,' the pupils bowed again, and went to bed.

In the confidence of their own room upstairs, Briggs said his head ached ready to split, and that he should wish himself dead if it wasn't for his mother, and a blackbird he had at home Tozer didn't say much, but he sighed a good deal, and told Paul to look out, for his turn would come to-morrow. After uttering those prophetic words, he undressed himself moodily, and got into bed. Briggs was in his bed too, and Paul in his bed too, before the weak-eyed young man appeared to take away the candle, when he wished them good-night and pleasant dreams. But his benevolent wishes were in vain, as far as Briggs and Tozer were concerned; for Paul, who lay awake for a long while, and often woke afterwards, found that Briggs was ridden by his lesson as a nightmare: and that Tozer, whose mind was affected in his sleep by similar causes, in a minor degree talked unknown tongues, or scraps of Greek and Latin—it was all one to Paul—which, in the silence of night, had an inexpressibly wicked and guilty effect.

Paul had sunk into a sweet sleep, and dreamed that he was walking hand in hand with Florence through beautiful gardens, when they came to a large sunflower which suddenly expanded itself into a gong, and began to sound. Opening his eyes, he found that it was a dark, windy morning, with a drizzling rain: and that the real gong was giving dreadful note of preparation, down in the hall.

So he got up directly, and found Briggs with hardly any eyes, for nightmare and grief had made his face puffy, putting his boots on: while Tozer stood shivering and rubbing his shoulders in a very bad humour. Poor Paul couldn't dress himself easily, not being used to it, and asked them if they would have the goodness to tie some strings for him; but as Briggs merely said 'Bother!' and Tozer, 'Oh yes!' he went down when he was otherwise ready, to the next storey, where he saw a pretty young woman in leather gloves, cleaning a stove. The young woman seemed surprised at his appearance, and asked him where his mother was. When Paul told her she was dead, she took her gloves off, and did what he wanted; and furthermore rubbed his hands to warm them; and gave him a kiss; and told him whenever he wanted anything of that sort—meaning in the dressing way—to ask for 'Melia; which Paul, thanking her very much, said he certainly would. He then proceeded softly on his journey downstairs, towards the room in which the young gentlemen resumed their studies, when, passing by a door that stood ajar, a voice from within cried, 'Is that Dombey?' On Paul replying, 'Yes, Ma'am:' for he knew the voice to be Miss Blimber's: Miss Blimber said, 'Come in, Dombey.' And in he went. Miss Blimber presented exactly the appearance she had presented yesterday, except that she wore a shawl. Her little light curls were as crisp as ever, and she had already her spectacles on, which made Paul wonder whether she went to bed in them. She had a cool little sitting-room of her own up there, with some books in it, and no fire But Miss Blimber was never cold, and never sleepy.

Now, Dombey,' said Miss Blimber, 'I am going out for a constitutional.'

Paul wondered what that was, and why she didn't send the footman out to get it in such unfavourable weather. But he made no observation on the subject: his attention being devoted to a little pile of new books, on which Miss Blimber appeared to have been recently engaged.

'These are yours, Dombey,' said Miss Blimber.

'All of 'em, Ma'am?' said Paul.

'Yes,' returned Miss Blimber; 'and Mr Feeder will look you out some more very soon, if you are as studious as I expect you will be, Dombey.'

'Thank you, Ma'am,' said Paul.

'I am going out for a constitutional,' resumed Miss Blimber; 'and while I am gone, that is to say in the interval between this and breakfast, Dombey, I wish you to read over what I have marked in these books, and to tell me if you quite understand what you have got to learn. Don't lose time, Dombey, for you have none to spare, but take them downstairs, and begin directly.'

'Yes, Ma'am,' answered Paul.

There were so many of them, that although Paul put one hand under the bottom book and his other hand and his chin on the top book, and hugged them all closely, the middle book slipped out before he reached the door, and then they all tumbled down on the floor. Miss Blimber said, 'Oh, Dombey, Dombey, this is really very careless!' and piled them up afresh for him; and this time, by dint of balancing them with great nicety, Paul got out of the room, and down a few stairs before two of them escaped again. But he held the rest so tight, that he only left one more on the first floor, and one in the passage; and when he had got the main body down into the schoolroom, he set off upstairs again to collect the stragglers. Having at last amassed the whole library, and climbed into his place, he fell to work, encouraged by a remark from Tozer to the effect that he 'was in for it now;' which was the only interruption he received till breakfast time. At that meal, for which he had no appetite, everything was quite as solemn and genteel as at the others; and when it was finished, he followed Miss Blimber upstairs.

'Now, Dombey,' said Miss Blimber. 'How have you got on with those books?'

They comprised a little English, and a deal of Latin—names of things, declensions of articles and substantives, exercises thereon, and preliminary rules—a trifle of orthography, a glance at ancient history, a wink or two at modern ditto, a few tables, two or three weights and measures, and a little general information. When poor Paul had spelt out number two, he found he had no idea of number one; fragments whereof afterwards obtruded themselves into number three, which slided into number four, which grafted itself on to number two. So that whether twenty Romuluses made a Remus, or hic haec hoc was troy weight, or a verb always agreed with an ancient Briton, or three times four was Taurus a bull, were open questions with him.

'Oh, Dombey, Dombey!' said Miss Blimber, 'this is very shocking.'

'If you please,' said Paul, 'I think if I might sometimes talk a little to old Glubb, I should be able to do better.'

'Nonsense, Dombey,' said Miss Blimber. 'I couldn't hear of it. This is not the place for Glubbs of any kind. You must take the books down, I suppose, Dombey, one by one, and perfect yourself in the day's instalment of subject

A, before you turn at all to subject B. I am sorry to say, Dombey, that your education appears to have been very much neglected.'

'So Papa says,' returned Paul; 'but I told you—I have been a weak child. Florence knows I have. So does Wickam.'

'Who is Wickam?' asked Miss Blimber.

'She has been my nurse,' Paul answered.

'I must beg you not to mention Wickam to me, then,' said Miss Blimber.'I couldn't allow it'.

'You asked me who she was,' said Paul.

'Very well,' returned Miss Blimber; 'but this is all very different indeed from anything of that sort, Dombey, and I couldn't think of permitting it. As to having been weak, you must begin to be strong. And now take away the top book, if you please, Dombey, and return when you are master of the theme.'

Miss Blimber expressed her opinions on the subject of Paul's uninstructed state with a gloomy delight, as if she had expected this result, and were glad to find that they must be in constant communication. Paul withdrew with the top task, as he was told, and laboured away at it, down below: sometimes remembering every word of it, and sometimes forgetting it all, and everything else besides: until at last he ventured upstairs again to repeat the lesson, when it was nearly all driven out of his head before he began, by Miss Blimber's shutting up the book, and saying, 'Good, Dombey!' a proceeding so suggestive of the knowledge inside of her, that Paul looked upon the young lady with consternation, as a kind of learned Guy Faux, or artificial Bogle, stuffed full of scholastic straw.

He acquitted himself very well, nevertheless; and Miss Blimber, commending him as giving promise of getting on fast, immediately provided him with subject B; from which he passed to C, and even D before dinner. It was hard work, resuming his studies, soon after dinner; and he felt giddy and confused and drowsy and dull. But all the other young gentlemen had similar sensations, and were obliged to resume their studies too, if there were any comfort in that. It was a wonder that the great clock in the hall, instead of being constant to its first inquiry, never said, 'Gentlemen, we will now resume our studies,' for that phrase was often enough repeated in its neighbourhood. The studies went round like a mighty wheel, and the young gentlemen were always stretched upon it.

After tea there were exercises again, and preparations for next day by candlelight. And in due course there was bed; where, but for that resumption of the studies which took place in dreams, were rest and sweet forgetfulness.

Oh Saturdays! Oh happy Saturdays, when Florence always came at noon, and never would, in any weather, stay away, though Mrs Pipchin snarled and growled, and worried her bitterly. Those Saturdays were Sabbaths for at least two little Christians among all the Jews, and did the holy Sabbath work of strengthening and knitting up a brother's and a sister's love.

Not even Sunday nights—the heavy Sunday nights, whose shadow darkened the first waking burst of light on Sunday mornings—could mar those precious Saturdays. Whether it was the great sea-shore, where they sat, and strolled together; or whether it was only Mrs Pipchin's dull back room, in which she sang to him so softly, with his drowsy head upon her arm; Paul never cared. It was Florence. That was all he thought of. So, on Sunday nights, when the Doctor's dark door stood agape to swallow him up for another week, the time was come for taking leave of Florence; no one else.

Mrs Wickam had been drafted home to the house in town, and Miss Nipper, now a smart young woman, had come down. To many a single combat with Mrs Pipchin, did Miss Nipper gallantly devote herself, and if ever Mrs Pipchin in all her life had found her match, she had found it now. Miss Nipper threw away the scabbard the first morning she arose in Mrs Pipchin's house. She asked and gave no quarter. She said it must be war, and war it was; and Mrs Pipchin lived from that time in the midst of surprises, harassings, and defiances, and skirmishing attacks that came bouncing in upon her from the passage, even in unguarded moments of chops, and carried desolation to her very toast.

Miss Nipper had returned one Sunday night with Florence, from walking back with Paul to the Doctor's, when Florence took from her bosom a little piece of paper, on which she had pencilled down some words.

'See here, Susan,' she said. 'These are the names of the little books that Paul brings home to do those long exercises with, when he is so tired. I copied them last night while he was writing.'

'Don't show 'em to me, Miss Floy, if you please,' returned Nipper, 'I'd as soon see Mrs Pipchin.'

'I want you to buy them for me, Susan, if you will, tomorrow morning. I have money enough,' said Florence.

'Why, goodness gracious me, Miss Floy,' returned Miss Nipper, 'how can you talk like that, when you have books upon books already, and masterses and mississes a teaching of you everything continual, though my belief is that your Pa, Miss Dombey, never would have learnt you nothing, never would have thought of it, unless you'd asked him—when he couldn't well refuse; but giving consent when asked, and offering when unasked, Miss, is quite two things; I may not have my objections to a young man's keeping company with me, and when he puts the question, may say "yes," but that's not saying "would you be so kind as like me."'

'But you can buy me the books, Susan; and you will, when you know why I want them.'

'Well, Miss, and why do you want 'em?' replied Nipper; adding, in a lower voice, 'If it was to fling at Mrs Pipchin's head, I'd buy a cart-load.'

'Paul has a great deal too much to do, Susan,' said Florence, 'I am sure of it.'

'And well you may be, Miss,' returned her maid, 'and make your mind quite easy that the willing dear is worked and worked away. If those is Latin legs,' exclaimed Miss Nipper, with strong feeling—in allusion to Paul's; 'give me English ones.'

'I am afraid he feels lonely and lost at Doctor Blimber's, Susan,' pursued Florence, turning away her face.

'Ah,' said Miss Nipper, with great sharpness, 'Oh, them "Blimbers"'

'Don't blame anyone,' said Florence. 'It's a mistake.'

'I say nothing about blame, Miss,' cried Miss Nipper, 'for I know that you object, but I may wish, Miss, that the family was set to work to make new roads, and that Miss Blimber went in front and had the pickaxe.'

After this speech, Miss Nipper, who was perfectly serious, wiped her eyes.

'I think I could perhaps give Paul some help, Susan, if I had these books,' said Florence, 'and make the coming week a little easier to him. At least I want to try. So buy them for me, dear, and I will never forget how kind it was of you to do it!'

It must have been a harder heart than Susan Nipper's that could have rejected the little purse Florence held out with these words, or the gentle look of entreaty with which she seconded her petition. Susan put the purse in her pocket without reply, and trotted out at once upon her errand.

The books were not easy to procure; and the answer at several shops was, either that they were just out of them, or that they never kept them, or that they had had a great many last month, or that they expected a great many next week But Susan was not easily baffled in such an enterprise; and having entrapped a white-haired youth, in a black calico apron, from a library where she was known, to accompany her in her quest, she led him such a life in going up and down, that he exerted himself to the utmost, if it were only to get rid of her; and finally enabled her to return home in triumph.

With these treasures then, after her own daily lessons were over, Florence sat down at night to track Paul's footsteps through the thorny ways of learning; and being possessed of a naturally quick and sound capacity, and taught by that most wonderful of masters, love, it was not long before she gained upon Paul's heels, and caught and passed him.

Not a word of this was breathed to Mrs Pipchin: but many a night when they were all in bed, and when Miss Nipper, with her hair in papers and herself asleep in some uncomfortable attitude, reposed unconscious by her side; and when the chinking ashes in the grate were cold and grey; and when the candles were burnt down and guttering out;—Florence tried so hard to be a substitute for one small Dombey, that her fortitude and perseverance might have almost won her a free right to bear the name herself.

And high was her reward, when one Saturday evening, as little Paul was sitting down as usual to 'resume his studies,' she sat down by his side, and showed him all that was so rough, made smooth, and all that was so dark, made clear and plain, before him. It was nothing but a startled look in Paul's wan face—a flush—a smile—and then a close embrace—but God knows how her heart leapt up at this rich payment for her trouble.

'Oh, Floy!' cried her brother, 'how I love you! How I love you, Floy!'

'And I you, dear!'

'Oh! I am sure of that, Floy.'

He said no more about it, but all that evening sat close by her, very quiet; and in the night he called out from his little room within hers, three or four times, that he loved her.

Regularly, after that, Florence was prepared to sit down with Paul on Saturday night, and patiently assist him through so much as they could anticipate together of his next week's work. The cheering thought that he was labouring on where Florence had just toiled before him, would, of itself, have been a stimulant to Paul in the perpetual resumption of his studies; but coupled with the actual lightening of his load, consequent on this assistance, it saved him, possibly, from sinking underneath the burden which the fair Cornelia Blimber piled upon his back.

It was not that Miss Blimber meant to be too hard upon him, or that Doctor Blimber meant to bear too heavily on the young gentlemen in general. Cornelia merely held the faith in which she had been bred; and the Doctor, in some partial confusion of his ideas, regarded the young gentlemen as if they were all Doctors, and were born grown up. Comforted by the applause of the young gentlemen's nearest relations, and urged on by their blind vanity and ill-considered haste, it would have been strange if Doctor Blimber had discovered his mistake, or trimmed his swelling sails to any other tack.

Thus in the case of Paul. When Doctor Blimber said he made great progress and was naturally clever, Mr Dombey was more bent than ever on his being forced and crammed. In the case of Briggs, when Doctor Blimber reported that he did not make great progress yet, and was not naturally clever, Briggs senior was inexorable in the same purpose. In short, however high and false the temperature at which the Doctor kept his hothouse, the owners of the plants were always ready to lend a helping hand at the bellows, and to stir the fire.

Such spirits as he had in the outset, Paul soon lost of course. But he retained all that was strange, and old, and thoughtful in his character: and under circumstances so favourable to the development of those tendencies, became even more strange, and old, and thoughtful, than before.

The only difference was, that he kept his character to himself. He grew more thoughtful and reserved, every day; and had no such curiosity in any living member of the Doctor's household, as he had had in Mrs Pipchin. He loved to be alone; and in those short intervals when he was not occupied with his books, liked nothing so well as wandering about the house by himself, or sitting on the stairs, listening to the great clock in the hall. He was intimate with all the paperhanging in the house; saw things that no one else saw in the patterns; found out miniature tigers and lions running up the bedroom walls, and squinting faces leering in the squares and diamonds of the floor-cloth.

The solitary child lived on, surrounded by this arabesque work of his musing fancy, and no one understood him. Mrs Blimber thought him 'odd,' and sometimes the servants said among themselves that little Dombey 'moped;' but that was all.

Unless young Toots had some idea on the subject, to the expression of which he was wholly unequal. Ideas, like ghosts (according to the common notion of ghosts), must be spoken to a little before they will explain themselves; and Toots had long left off asking any questions of his own mind. Some mist there may have been, issuing from that leaden casket, his cranium, which, if it could have taken shape and form, would have become a genie; but it could not; and it only so far followed the example of the smoke in the Arabian story, as to roll out in a thick cloud, and there hang and hover. But it left a little figure visible upon a lonely shore, and Toots was always staring at it.

'How are you?' he would say to Paul, fifty times a day. 'Quite well, Sir, thank you,' Paul would answer. 'Shake hands,' would be Toots's next advance.

Which Paul, of course, would immediately do. Mr Toots generally said again, after a long interval of staring and hard breathing, 'How are you?' To which Paul again replied, 'Quite well, Sir, thank you.'

One evening Mr Toots was sitting at his desk, oppressed by correspondence, when a great purpose seemed to flash upon him. He laid down his pen, and went off to seek Paul, whom he found at last, after a long search, looking through the window of his little bedroom.

'I say!' cried Toots, speaking the moment he entered the room, lest he should forget it; 'what do you think about?'

'Oh! I think about a great many things,' replied Paul.

'Do you, though?' said Toots, appearing to consider that fact in itself surprising. 'If you had to die,' said Paul, looking up into his face—Mr Toots started, and seemed much disturbed.

'Don't you think you would rather die on a moonlight night, when the sky was quite clear, and the wind blowing, as it did last night?'

Mr Toots said, looking doubtfully at Paul, and shaking his head, that he didn't know about that.

'Not blowing, at least,' said Paul, 'but sounding in the air like the sea sounds in the shells. It was a beautiful night. When I had listened to the water for a long time, I got up and looked out. There was a boat over there, in the full light of the moon; a boat with a sail.'

The child looked at him so steadfastly, and spoke so earnestly, that Mr Toots, feeling himself called upon to say something about this boat, said, 'Smugglers.' But with an impartial remembrance of there being two sides to every question, he added, 'or Preventive.'

'A boat with a sail,' repeated Paul, 'in the full light of the moon. The sail like an arm, all silver. It went away into the distance, and what do you think it seemed to do as it moved with the waves?'

'Pitch,' said Mr Toots.

'It seemed to beckon,' said the child, 'to beckon me to come!—There she is! There she is!'

Toots was almost beside himself with dismay at this sudden exclamation, after what had gone before, and cried 'Who?'

'My sister Florence!' cried Paul, 'looking up here, and waving her hand. She sees me—she sees me! Good-night, dear, good-night, good-night.'

His quick transition to a state of unbounded pleasure, as he stood at his window, kissing and clapping his hands: and the way in which the light retreated from his features as she passed out of his view, and left a patient melancholy on the little face: were too remarkable wholly to escape even Toots's notice. Their interview being interrupted at this moment by a visit from Mrs Pipchin, who usually brought her black skirts to bear upon Paul just before dusk, once or twice a week, Toots had no opportunity of improving the occasion: but it left so marked an impression on his mind that he twice returned, after having exchanged the usual salutations, to ask Mrs Pipchin how she did. This the irascible old lady conceived to be a deeply devised and long-meditated insult, originating in the diabolical invention of the weak-eyed young man downstairs, against whom she accordingly lodged a formal complaint with Doctor Blimber that very night; who mentioned to the young man that if he ever did it again, he should be obliged to part with him.

The evenings being longer now, Paul stole up to his window every evening to look out for Florence. She always passed and repassed at a certain time, until she saw him; and their mutual recognition was a gleam of sunshine in Paul's daily life. Often after dark, one other figure walked alone before the Doctor's house. He rarely joined them on the Saturdays now. He could not bear it. He would rather come unrecognised, and look up at the windows where his son was qualifying for a man; and wait, and watch, and plan, and hope.

Oh! could he but have seen, or seen as others did, the slight spare boy above, watching the waves and clouds at twilight, with his earnest eyes, and breasting the window of his solitary cage when birds flew by, as if he would have emulated them, and soared away!

CHAPTER 13. Shipping Intelligence and Office Business

Mr Dombey's offices were in a court where there was an old-established stall of choice fruit at the corner: where perambulating merchants, of both sexes, offered for sale at any time between the hours of ten and five, slippers, pocket-books, sponges, dogs' collars, and Windsor soap; and sometimes a pointer or an oil-painting.

The pointer always came that way, with a view to the Stock Exchange, where a sporting taste (originating generally in bets of new hats) is much in vogue. The other commodities were addressed to the general public; but they were never offered by the vendors to Mr Dombey. When he appeared, the dealers in those wares fell off respectfully. The principal slipper and dogs' collar man—who considered himself a public character, and whose portrait was screwed on to an artist's door in Cheapside—threw up his forefinger to the brim of his hat as Mr Dombey went by. The ticket-porter, if he were not absent on a job, always ran officiously before, to open Mr Dombey's office door as wide as possible, and hold it open, with his hat off, while he entered.

The clerks within were not a whit behind-hand in their demonstrations of respect. A solemn hush prevailed, as Mr Dombey passed through the outer office. The wit of the Counting-House became in a moment as mute as the row of leathern fire-buckets hanging up behind him. Such vapid and flat daylight as filtered through the ground-glass windows and skylights, leaving a black sediment upon the panes, showed the books and papers, and the figures bending over them, enveloped in a studious gloom, and as much abstracted in appearance, from the world without, as if they were assembled at the bottom of the sea; while a mouldy little strong room in the obscure perspective, where a shaded lamp was always burning, might have represented the cavern of some ocean monster, looking on with a red eye at these mysteries of the deep.

When Perch the messenger, whose place was on a little bracket, like a timepiece, saw Mr Dombey come in—or rather when he felt that he was coming, for he had usually an instinctive sense of his approach—he hurried into Mr Dombey's room, stirred the fire, carried fresh coals from the bowels of the coal-box, hung the newspaper to air upon the fender, put the chair ready, and the screen in its place, and was round upon his heel on the instant of Mr Dombey's entrance, to take his great-coat and hat, and hang them up. Then Perch took the newspaper, and gave it a turn or two in his hands before the fire, and laid it, deferentially, at Mr Dombey's elbow. And so little objection had Perch to being deferential in the last degree, that if he might have laid himself at Mr Dombey's feet, or might have called him by some such title as used to be bestowed upon the Caliph Haroun Alraschid, he would have been all the better pleased.

As this honour would have been an innovation and an experiment, Perch was fain to content himself by expressing as well as he could, in his manner, You are the light of my Eyes. You are the Breath of my Soul. You are the commander of the Faithful Perch! With this imperfect happiness to cheer him, he would shut the door softly, walk away on tiptoe, and leave his great chief to be stared at, through a dome-shaped window in the leads, by ugly chimney-pots and backs of houses, and especially by the bold window of a hair-cutting saloon on a first floor, where a waxen effigy, bald as a Mussulman in the morning, and covered, after eleven o'clock in the day, with luxuriant hair and whiskers in the latest Christian fashion, showed him the wrong side of its head for ever.

Between Mr Dombey and the common world, as it was accessible through the medium of the outer office—to which Mr Dombey's presence in his own room may be said to have struck like damp, or cold air—there were two degrees of descent. Mr Carker in his own office was the first step; Mr Morfin, in his own office, was the second. Each of these gentlemen occupied a little chamber like a bath-room, opening from the passage outside Mr Dombey's door. Mr Carker, as Grand Vizier, inhabited the room that was nearest to the Sultan. Mr Morfin, as an officer of inferior state, inhabited the room that was nearest to the clerks.

The gentleman last mentioned was a cheerful-looking, hazel-eyed elderly bachelor: gravely attired, as to his upper man, in black; and as to his legs, in pepper-and-salt colour. His dark hair was just touched here and there with specks of gray, as though the tread of Time had splashed it; and his whiskers were already white. He had a mighty respect for Mr Dombey, and rendered him due homage; but as he was of a genial temper himself, and never wholly at his ease in that stately presence, he was disquieted by no jealousy of the many conferences enjoyed by Mr Carker, and felt a secret satisfaction in having duties to discharge, which rarely exposed him to be singled out for such distinction. He was a great musical amateur in his way—after business; and had a paternal affection for his violoncello, which was once in every week transported from Islington, his place of abode, to a certain club-room hard by the Bank, where quartettes of the most tormenting and excruciating nature were executed every Wednesday evening by a private party.

Mr Carker was a gentleman thirty-eight or forty years old, of a florid complexion, and with two unbroken rows of glistening teeth, whose regularity and whiteness were quite distressing. It was impossible to escape the observation of them, for he showed them whenever he spoke; and bore so wide a smile upon his countenance (a smile, however, very rarely, indeed, extending beyond his mouth), that there was something in it like the snarl of a cat. He affected a stiff white cravat, after the example of his principal, and was always closely buttoned up and tightly dressed. His manner towards Mr Dombey was deeply conceived and perfectly expressed. He was familiar with him, in the very extremity of his sense of the distance between them. 'Mr Dombey, to a man in your position from a man in mine, there is no show of subservience compatible with the transaction of business between us, that I should think sufficient. I frankly tell you, Sir, I give it up altogether. I feel that I could not satisfy my own mind; and Heaven knows, Mr Dombey, you can afford to dispense with the endeavour.' If he had carried these words about with him printed on a placard, and had constantly offered it to Mr Dombey's perusal on the breast of his coat, he could not have been more explicit than he was.

This was Carker the Manager. Mr Carker the Junior, Walter's friend, was his brother; two or three years older than he, but widely removed in station. The younger brother's post was on the top of the official ladder; the elder brother's at the bottom. The elder brother never gained a stave, or raised his foot to mount one. Young men passed above his head, and rose and rose; but he was always at the bottom. He was quite resigned to occupy that low condition: never complained of it: and certainly never hoped to escape from it.

'How do you do this morning?' said Mr Carker the Manager, entering Mr Dombey's room soon after his arrival one day: with a bundle of papers in his hand.

'How do you do, Carker?' said Mr Dombey.

'Coolish!' observed Carker, stirring the fire.

'Rather,' said Mr Dombey.

'Any news of the young gentleman who is so important to us all?' asked Carker, with his whole regiment of teeth on parade.

'Yes—not direct news—I hear he's very well,' said Mr Dombey. Who had come from Brighton over-night. But no one knew It.

'Very well, and becoming a great scholar, no doubt?' observed the Manager.

'I hope so,' returned Mr Dombey.

'Egad!' said Mr Carker, shaking his head, 'Time flies!'

'I think so, sometimes,' returned Mr Dombey, glancing at his newspaper.

'Oh! You! You have no reason to think so,' observed Carker. 'One who sits on such an elevation as yours, and can sit there, unmoved, in all seasons — hasn't much reason to know anything about the flight of time. It's men like myself, who are low down and are not superior in circumstances, and who inherit new masters in the course of Time, that have cause to look about us. I shall have a rising sun to worship, soon.'

'Time enough, time enough, Carker!' said Mr Dombey, rising from his chair, and standing with his back to the fire. 'Have you anything there for me?'

'I don't know that I need trouble you,' returned Carker, turning over the papers in his hand. 'You have a committee today at three, you know.'

'And one at three, three-quarters,' added Mr Dombey.

'Catch you forgetting anything!' exclaimed Carker, still turning over his papers. 'If Mr Paul inherits your memory, he'll be a troublesome customer in the House. One of you is enough.'

'You have an accurate memory of your own,' said Mr Dombey.

'Oh! I!' returned the manager. 'It's the only capital of a man like me.'

Mr Dombey did not look less pompous or at all displeased, as he stood leaning against the chimney-piece, surveying his (of course unconscious) clerk, from head to foot. The stiffness and nicety of Mr Carker's dress, and a certain arrogance of manner, either natural to him or imitated from a pattern not far off, gave great additional effect to his humility. He seemed a man who would contend against the power that vanquished him, if he could, but who was utterly borne down by the greatness and superiority of Mr Dombey.

'Is Morfin here?' asked Mr Dombey after a short pause, during which Mr Carker had been fluttering his papers, and muttering little abstracts of their contents to himself.

'Morfin's here,' he answered, looking up with his widest and almost sudden smile; 'humming musical recollections—of his last night's quartette party, I suppose—through the walls between us, and driving me half mad. I wish he'd make a bonfire of his violoncello, and burn his music-books in it.'

'You respect nobody, Carker, I think,' said Mr Dombey.

'No?' inquired Carker, with another wide and most feline show of his teeth. 'Well! Not many people, I believe. I wouldn't answer perhaps,' he murmured, as if he were only thinking it, 'for more than one.'

A dangerous quality, if real; and a not less dangerous one, if feigned. But Mr Dombey hardly seemed to think so, as he still stood with his back to the fire, drawn up to his full height, and looking at his head-clerk with a dignified composure, in which there seemed to lurk a stronger latent sense of power than usual.

'Talking of Morfin,' resumed Mr Carker, taking out one paper from the rest, 'he reports a junior dead in the agency at Barbados, and proposes to reserve a passage in the Son and Heir—she'll sail in a month or so—for the successor. You don't care who goes, I suppose? We have nobody of that sort here.'

Mr Dombey shook his head with supreme indifference.

'It's no very precious appointment,' observed Mr Carker, taking up a pen, with which to endorse a memorandum on the back of the paper. 'I hope he may bestow it on some orphan nephew of a musical friend. It may perhaps stop his fiddle-playing, if he has a gift that way. Who's that? Come in!'

'I beg your pardon, Mr Carker. I didn't know you were here, Sir,' answered Walter; appearing with some letters in his hand, unopened, and newly arrived. 'Mr Carker the junior, Sir—'

At the mention of this name, Mr Carker the Manager was or affected to be, touched to the quick with shame and humiliation. He cast his eyes full on Mr Dombey with an altered and apologetic look, abased them on the ground, and remained for a moment without speaking.

'I thought, Sir,' he said suddenly and angrily, turning on Walter, 'that you had been before requested not to drag Mr Carker the Junior into your conversation.'

'I beg your pardon,' returned Walter. 'I was only going to say that Mr Carker the Junior had told me he believed you were gone out, or I should not have knocked at the door when you were engaged with Mr Dombey. These are letters for Mr Dombey, Sir.'

'Very well, Sir,' returned Mr Carker the Manager, plucking them sharply from his hand. 'Go about your business.'

But in taking them with so little ceremony, Mr Carker dropped one on the floor, and did not see what he had done; neither did Mr Dombey observe the letter lying near his feet. Walter hesitated for a moment, thinking that one or other of them would notice it; but finding that neither did, he stopped, came back, picked it up, and laid it himself on Mr Dombey's desk. The letters were post-letters; and it happened that the one in question was Mrs Pipchin's regular report, directed as usual—for Mrs Pipchin was but an indifferent penwoman—by Florence. Mr Dombey, having his attention silently called to this letter by Walter, started, and looked fiercely at him, as if he believed that he had purposely selected it from all the rest.

'You can leave the room, Sir!' said Mr Dombey, haughtily.

He crushed the letter in his hand; and having watched Walter out at the door, put it in his pocket without breaking the seal.

'These continual references to Mr Carker the Junior,' Mr Carker the Manager began, as soon as they were alone, 'are, to a man in my position, uttered before one in yours, so unspeakably distressing—'

'Nonsense, Carker,' Mr Dombey interrupted. 'You are too sensitive.'

'I am sensitive,' he returned. 'If one in your position could by any possibility imagine yourself in my place: which you cannot: you would be so too.'

As Mr Dombey's thoughts were evidently pursuing some other subject, his discreet ally broke off here, and stood with his teeth ready to present to him, when he should look up.

'You want somebody to send to the West Indies, you were saying,' observed Mr Dombey, hurriedly.

'Yes,' replied Carker.

'Send young Gay.'

'Good, very good indeed. Nothing easier,' said Mr Carker, without any show of surprise, and taking up the pen to re-endorse the letter, as coolly as he had done before. '"Send young Gay."'

'Call him back,' said Mr Dombey.

Mr Carker was quick to do so, and Walter was quick to return.

'Gay,' said Mr Dombey, turning a little to look at him over his shoulder. 'Here is a—

'An opening,' said Mr Carker, with his mouth stretched to the utmost.

'In the West Indies. At Barbados. I am going to send you,' said Mr Dombey, scorning to embellish the bare truth, 'to fill a junior situation in the counting-house at Barbados. Let your Uncle know from me, that I have chosen you to go to the West Indies.'

Walter's breath was so completely taken away by his astonishment, that he could hardly find enough for the repetition of the words 'West Indies.'

'Somebody must go,' said Mr Dombey, 'and you are young and healthy, and your Uncle's circumstances are not good. Tell your Uncle that you are appointed. You will not go yet. There will be an interval of a month—or two perhaps.'

'Shall I remain there, Sir?' inquired Walter.

'Will you remain there, Sir!' repeated Mr Dombey, turning a little more round towards him. 'What do you mean? What does he mean, Carker?'

'Live there, Sir,' faltered Walter.

'Certainly,' returned Mr Dombey.

Walter bowed.

'That's all,' said Mr Dombey, resuming his letters. 'You will explain to him in good time about the usual outfit and so forth, Carker, of course. He needn't wait, Carker.'

'You needn't wait, Gay,' observed Mr Carker: bare to the gums.

'Unless,' said Mr Dombey, stopping in his reading without looking off the letter, and seeming to listen. 'Unless he has anything to say.'

'No, Sir,' returned Walter, agitated and confused, and almost stunned, as an infinite variety of pictures presented themselves to his mind; among which Captain Cuttle, in his glazed hat, transfixed with astonishment at Mrs MacStinger's, and his uncle bemoaning his loss in the little back parlour, held prominent places. 'I hardly know—I—I am much obliged, Sir.'

'He needn't wait, Carker,' said Mr Dombey.

And as Mr Carker again echoed the words, and also collected his papers as if he were going away too, Walter felt that his lingering any longer would be an unpardonable intrusion—especially as he had nothing to say—and therefore walked out quite confounded.

Going along the passage, with the mingled consciousness and helplessness of a dream, he heard Mr Dombey's door shut again, as Mr Carker came out: and immediately afterwards that gentleman called to him.

'Bring your friend Mr Carker the Junior to my room, Sir, if you please.'

Walter went to the outer office and apprised Mr Carker the Junior of his errand, who accordingly came out from behind a partition where he sat alone in one corner, and returned with him to the room of Mr Carker the Manager.

That gentleman was standing with his back to the fire, and his hands under his coat-tails, looking over his white cravat, as unpromisingly as Mr Dombey himself could have looked. He received them without any change in his attitude or softening of his harsh and black expression: merely signing to Walter to close the door.

'John Carker,' said the Manager, when this was done, turning suddenly upon his brother, with his two rows of teeth bristling as if he would have bitten him, 'what is the league between you and this young man, in virtue of which I am haunted and hunted by the mention of your name? Is it not enough for you, John Carker, that I am your near relation, and can't detach myself from that—'

'Say disgrace, James,' interposed the other in a low voice, finding that he stammered for a word. 'You mean it, and have reason, say disgrace.'

'From that disgrace,' assented his brother with keen emphasis, 'but is the fact to be blurted out and trumpeted, and proclaimed continually in the presence of the very House! In moments of confidence too? Do you think your name is calculated to harmonise in this place with trust and confidence, John Carker?'

'No,' returned the other. 'No, James. God knows I have no such thought.'

'What is your thought, then?' said his brother, 'and why do you thrust yourself in my way? Haven't you injured me enough already?'

'I have never injured you, James, wilfully.'

'You are my brother,' said the Manager. 'That's injury enough.'

'I wish I could undo it, James.'

'I wish you could and would.'

During this conversation, Walter had looked from one brother to the other, with pain and amazement. He who was the Senior in years, and Junior in the House, stood, with his eyes cast upon the ground, and his head bowed, humbly listening to the reproaches of the other. Though these were rendered very bitter by the tone and look with which they were accompanied, and by the presence of Walter whom they so much surprised and shocked, he entered no other protest against them than by slightly raising his right hand in a deprecatory manner, as if he would have said, 'Spare me!' So, had they been blows, and he a brave man, under strong constraint, and weakened by bodily suffering, he might have stood before the executioner.

Generous and quick in all his emotions, and regarding himself as the innocent occasion of these taunts, Walter now struck in, with all the earnestness he felt.

'Mr Carker,' he said, addressing himself to the Manager. 'Indeed, indeed, this is my fault solely. In a kind of heedlessness, for which I cannot blame myself enough, I have, I have no doubt, mentioned Mr Carker the Junior much oftener than was necessary; and have allowed his name sometimes to slip through my lips, when it was against your expressed wish. But it has been my own mistake, Sir. We have never exchanged one word upon the subject—very few, indeed, on any subject. And it has not been,' added Walter, after a moment's pause, 'all heedlessness on my part, Sir; for I have felt an interest in Mr Carker ever since I have been here, and have hardly been able to help speaking of him sometimes, when I have thought of him so much!'

Walter said this from his soul, and with the very breath of honour. For he looked upon the bowed head, and the downcast eyes, and upraised hand, and thought, 'I have felt it; and why should I not avow it in behalf of this unfriended, broken man!'

Mr Carker the Manager looked at him, as he spoke, and when he had finished speaking, with a smile that seemed to divide his face into two parts.

'You are an excitable youth, Gay,' he said; 'and should endeavour to cool down a little now, for it would be unwise to encourage feverish predispositions. Be as cool as you can, Gay. Be as cool as you can. You might have asked Mr John Carker himself (if you have not done so) whether he claims to be, or is, an object of such strong interest.'

'James, do me justice,' said his brother. 'I have claimed nothing; and I claim nothing. Believe me, on my—

'Honour?' said his brother, with another smile, as he warmed himself before the fire.

'On my Me—on my fallen life!' returned the other, in the same low voice, but with a deeper stress on his words than he had yet seemed capable of giving them. 'Believe me, I have held myself aloof, and kept alone. This has been unsought by me. I have avoided him and everyone.

'Indeed, you have avoided me, Mr Carker,' said Walter, with the tears rising to his eyes; so true was his compassion. 'I know it, to my disappointment and regret. When I first came here, and ever since, I am sure I have tried to be as much your friend, as one of my age could presume to be; but it has been of no use.

'And observe,' said the Manager, taking him up quickly, 'it will be of still less use, Gay, if you persist in forcing Mr John Carker's name on people's attention. That is not the way to befriend Mr John Carker. Ask him if he thinks it is.'

'It is no service to me,' said the brother. 'It only leads to such a conversation as the present, which I need not say I could have well spared. No one can be a better friend to me:' he spoke here very distinctly, as if he would impress it upon Walter: 'than in forgetting me, and leaving me to go my way, unquestioned and unnoticed.'

'Your memory not being retentive, Gay, of what you are told by others,' said Mr Carker the Manager, warming himself with great and increased satisfaction, 'I thought it well that you should be told this from the best authority,' nodding towards his brother. 'You are not likely to forget it now, I hope. That's all, Gay. You can go.

Walter passed out at the door, and was about to close it after him, when, hearing the voices of the brothers again, and also the mention of his own name, he stood irresolutely, with his hand upon the lock, and the door ajar, uncertain whether to return or go away. In this position he could not help overhearing what followed.

'Think of me more leniently, if you can, James,' said John Carker, 'when I tell you I have had—how could I help having, with my history, written here'—striking himself upon the breast—'my whole heart awakened by my observation of that boy, Walter Gay. I saw in him when he first came here, almost my other self.'

'Your other self!' repeated the Manager, disdainfully.

'Not as I am, but as I was when I first came here too; as sanguine, giddy, youthful, inexperienced; flushed with the same restless and adventurous fancies; and full of the same qualities, fraught with the same capacity of leading on to good or evil.'

'I hope not,' said his brother, with some hidden and sarcastic meaning in his tone.

'You strike me sharply; and your hand is steady, and your thrust is very deep,' returned the other, speaking (or so Walter thought) as if some cruel weapon actually stabbed him as he spoke. 'I imagined all this when he was a boy. I believed it. It was a truth to me. I saw him lightly walking on the edge of an unseen gulf where so many others walk with equal gaiety, and from which—'

'The old excuse,' interrupted his brother, as he stirred the fire. 'So many. Go on. Say, so many fall.'

'From which ONE traveller fell,' returned the other, 'who set forward, on his way, a boy like him, and missed his footing more and more, and slipped a little and a little lower; and went on stumbling still, until he fell headlong and found himself below a shattered man. Think what I suffered, when I watched that boy.'

'You have only yourself to thank for it,' returned the brother.

'Only myself,' he assented with a sigh. 'I don't seek to divide the blame or shame.'

'You have divided the shame,' James Carker muttered through his teeth. And, through so many and such close teeth, he could mutter well.

'Ah, James,' returned his brother, speaking for the first time in an accent of reproach, and seeming, by the sound of his voice, to have covered his face with his hands, 'I have been, since then, a useful foil to you. You have trodden on me freely in your climbing up. Don't spurn me with your heel!'

A silence ensued. After a time, Mr Carker the Manager was heard rustling among his papers, as if he had resolved to bring the interview to a conclusion. At the same time his brother withdrew nearer to the door.

'That's all,' he said. 'I watched him with such trembling and such fear, as was some little punishment to me, until he passed the place where I first fell; and then, though I had been his father, I believe I never could have thanked God more devoutly. I didn't dare to warn him, and advise him; but if I had seen direct cause, I would have shown him my example. I was afraid to be seen speaking with him, lest it should be thought I did him harm, and tempted him to evil, and corrupted him: or lest I really should. There may be such contagion in me; I don't know. Piece out my history, in connexion with young Walter Gay, and what he has made me feel; and think of me more leniently, James, if you can.

With these words he came out to where Walter was standing. He turned a little paler when he saw him there, and paler yet when Walter caught him by the hand, and said in a whisper:

'Mr Carker, pray let me thank you! Let me say how much I feel for you! How sorry I am, to have been the unhappy cause of all this! How I almost look upon you now as my protector and guardian! How very, very much, I feel obliged to you and pity you!' said Walter, squeezing both his hands, and hardly knowing, in his agitation, what he did or said.

Mr Morfin's room being close at hand and empty, and the door wide open, they moved thither by one accord: the passage being seldom free from someone passing to or fro. When they were there, and Walter saw in Mr Carker's face some traces of the emotion within, he almost felt as if he had never seen the face before; it was so greatly changed.

'Walter,' he said, laying his hand on his shoulder. 'I am far removed from you, and may I ever be. Do you know what I am?'

'What you are!' appeared to hang on Walter's lips, as he regarded him attentively.

'It was begun,' said Carker, 'before my twenty-first birthday—led up to, long before, but not begun till near that time. I had robbed them when I came of age. I robbed them afterwards. Before my twenty-second birthday, it was all found out; and then, Walter, from all men's society, I died.'

Again his last few words hung trembling upon Walter's lips, but he could neither utter them, nor any of his own.

'The House was very good to me. May Heaven reward the old man for his forbearance! This one, too, his son, who was then newly in the Firm, where I had held great trust! I was called into that room which is now his—I have never entered it since—and came out, what you know me. For many years I sat in my present seat, alone as now, but then a known and recognised example to the rest. They were all merciful to me, and I lived. Time has altered that part of my poor expiation; and I think, except the three heads of the House, there is no one here who knows my story rightly. Before the little boy grows up, and has it told to him, my corner may be vacant. I would rather that it might be so! This is the only change to me since that day, when I left all youth, and hope, and good men's company, behind me in that room. God bless you, Walter! Keep you, and all dear to you, in honesty, or strike them dead!'

Some recollection of his trembling from head to foot, as if with excessive cold, and of his bursting into tears, was all that Walter could add to this, when he tried to recall exactly what had passed between them.

When Walter saw him next, he was bending over his desk in his old silent, drooping, humbled way. Then, observing him at his work, and feeling how resolved he evidently was that no further intercourse should arise between them, and thinking again and again on all he had seen and heard that morning in so short a time, in connexion with the history of both the Carkers, Walter could hardly believe that he was under orders for the West Indies, and would soon be lost to Uncle Sol, and Captain Cuttle, and to glimpses few and far between of Florence Dombey—no, he meant Paul—and to all he loved, and liked, and looked for, in his daily life.

But it was true, and the news had already penetrated to the outer office; for while he sat with a heavy heart, pondering on these things, and resting his head upon his arm, Perch the messenger, descending from his mahogany bracket, and jogging his elbow, begged his pardon, but wished to say in his ear, Did he think he could arrange to send home to England a jar of preserved Ginger, cheap, for Mrs Perch's own eating, in the course of her recovery from her next confinement?

CHAPTER 14. Paul grows more and more Old-fashioned, and goes Home for the Holidays

When the Midsummer vacation approached, no indecent manifestations of joy were exhibited by the leaden-eyed young gentlemen assembled at Doctor Blimber's. Any such violent expression as 'breaking up,' would have been quite inapplicable to that polite establishment. The young gentlemen oozed away, semi-annually, to their own homes; but they never broke up. They would have scorned the action.

Tozer, who was constantly galled and tormented by a starched white cambric neckerchief, which he wore at the express desire of Mrs Tozer, his parent, who, designing him for the Church, was of opinion that he couldn't be in that forward state of preparation too soon—Tozer said, indeed, that choosing between two evils, he thought he would rather stay where he was, than go home. However inconsistent this declaration might appear with that passage in Tozer's Essay on the subject, wherein he had observed 'that the thoughts of home and all its recollections, awakened in his mind the most pleasing emotions of anticipation and delight,' and had also likened himself to a Roman General, flushed with a recent victory over the Iceni, or laden with Carthaginian spoil, advancing within a few hours' march of the Capitol, presupposed, for the purposes of the simile, to be the dwelling-place of Mrs Tozer, still it was very sincerely made. For it seemed that Tozer had a dreadful Uncle, who not only volunteered examinations of him, in the holidays, on abstruse points, but twisted innocent events and things, and wrenched them to the same fell purpose. So that if this Uncle took him to the Play, or, on a similar pretence of kindness, carried him to see a Giant, or a Dwarf, or a Conjuror, or anything, Tozer knew he had read up some classical allusion to the subject beforehand, and was thrown into a state of mortal apprehension: not foreseeing where he might break out, or what authority he might not quote against him.

As to Briggs, his father made no show of artifice about it. He never would leave him alone. So numerous and severe were the mental trials of that unfortunate youth in vacation time, that the friends of the family (then resident near Bayswater, London) seldom approached the ornamental piece of water in Kensington Gardens,' without a vague expectation of seeing Master Briggs's hat floating on the surface, and an unfinished exercise lying on the bank. Briggs, therefore, was not at all sanguine on the subject of holidays; and these two sharers of little Paul's bedroom were so fair a sample of the young gentlemen in general, that the most elastic among them contemplated the arrival of those festive periods with genteel resignation.

It was far otherwise with little Paul. The end of these first holidays was to witness his separation from Florence, but who ever looked forward to the end of holidays whose beginning was not yet come! Not Paul, assuredly. As the happy time drew near, the lions and tigers climbing up the bedroom walls became quite tame and frolicsome. The grim sly faces in the squares and diamonds of the floor-cloth, relaxed and peeped out at him with less wicked eyes. The grave old clock had more of personal interest in the tone of its formal inquiry; and the restless sea went rolling on all night, to the sounding of a melancholy strain—yet it was pleasant too—that rose and fell with the waves, and rocked him, as it were, to sleep.

Mr Feeder, B.A., seemed to think that he, too, would enjoy the holidays very much. Mr Toots projected a life of holidays from that time forth; for, as he regularly informed Paul every day, it was his 'last half' at Doctor Blimber's, and he was going to begin to come into his property directly.

It was perfectly understood between Paul and Mr Toots, that they were intimate friends, notwithstanding their distance in point of years and station. As the vacation approached, and Mr Toots breathed harder and stared oftener in Paul's society, than he had done before, Paul knew that he meant he was sorry they were going to lose sight of each other, and felt very much obliged to him for his patronage and good opinion.

It was even understood by Doctor Blimber, Mrs Blimber, and Miss Blimber, as well as by the young gentlemen in general, that Toots had somehow constituted himself protector and guardian of Dombey, and the circumstance became so notorious, even to Mrs Pipchin, that the good old creature cherished feelings of bitterness and jealousy against Toots; and, in the sanctuary of her own home, repeatedly denounced him as a 'chuckle-headed noodle.' Whereas the innocent Toots had no more idea of awakening Mrs Pipchin's wrath, than he had of any other definite possibility or proposition. On the contrary, he was disposed to consider her rather a remarkable character, with many points of interest about her. For this reason he smiled on her with so much urbanity, and asked her how she did, so often, in the course of her visits to little Paul, that at last she one night told him plainly, she wasn't used to it, whatever he might think; and she could not, and she would not bear it, either from himself or any other puppy then existing: at which unexpected acknowledgment of his civilities, Mr Toots was so alarmed that he secreted himself in a retired spot until she had gone. Nor did he ever again face the doughty Mrs Pipchin, under Doctor Blimber's roof.

They were within two or three weeks of the holidays, when, one day, Cornelia Blimber called Paul into her room, and said, 'Dombey, I am going to send home your analysis.'

'Thank you, Ma'am,' returned Paul.

'You know what I mean, do you, Dombey?' inquired Miss Blimber, looking hard at him, through the spectacles.

'No, Ma'am,' said Paul.

'Dombey, Dombey,' said Miss Blimber, 'I begin to be afraid you are a sad boy. When you don't know the meaning of an expression, why don't you seek for information?'

'Mrs Pipchin told me I wasn't to ask questions,' returned Paul.

'I must beg you not to mention Mrs Pipchin to me, on any account, Dombey,' returned Miss Blimber. 'I couldn't think of allowing it. The course of study here, is very far removed from anything of that sort. A repetition of such allusions would make it necessary for me to request to hear, without a mistake, before breakfast-time to-morrow morning, from Verbum personale down to simillimia cygno.'

'I didn't mean, Ma'am—' began little Paul.

'I must trouble you not to tell me that you didn't mean, if you please, Dombey,' said Miss Blimber, who preserved an awful politeness in her admonitions. 'That is a line of argument I couldn't dream of permitting.'

Paul felt it safest to say nothing at all, so he only looked at Miss Blimber's spectacles. Miss Blimber having shaken her head at him gravely, referred to a paper lying before her.

'"Analysis of the character of P. Dombey." If my recollection serves me,' said Miss Blimber breaking off, 'the word analysis as opposed to synthesis, is thus defined by Walker. "The resolution of an object, whether of the senses or of the intellect, into its first elements." As opposed to synthesis, you observe. Now you know what analysis is, Dombey.'

Dombey didn't seem to be absolutely blinded by the light let in upon his intellect, but he made Miss Blimber a little bow.

'"Analysis,"' resumed Miss Blimber, casting her eye over the paper, '"of the character of P. Dombey." I find that the natural capacity of Dombey is extremely good; and that his general disposition to study may be stated in an equal ratio. Thus, taking eight as our standard and highest number, I find these qualities in Dombey stated each at six three-fourths!'

Miss Blimber paused to see how Paul received this news. Being undecided whether six three-fourths meant six pounds fifteen, or sixpence three farthings, or six foot three, or three quarters past six, or six somethings that he hadn't learnt yet, with three unknown something elses over, Paul rubbed his hands and looked straight at Miss Blimber. It happened to answer as well as anything else he could have done; and Cornelia proceeded.

'"Violence two. Selfishness two. Inclination to low company, as evinced in the case of a person named Glubb, originally seven, but since reduced. Gentlemanly demeanour four, and improving with advancing years." Now what I particularly wish to call your attention to, Dombey, is the general observation at the close of this analysis.'

Paul set himself to follow it with great care.

'"It may be generally observed of Dombey,"' said Miss Blimber, reading in a loud voice, and at every second word directing her spectacles towards the little figure before her: '"that his abilities and inclinations are good, and that he has made as much progress as under the circumstances could have been expected. But it is to be lamented of this young gentleman that he is singular (what is usually termed old-fashioned) in his character and conduct, and that, without presenting anything in either which distinctly calls for reprobation, he is often very unlike other young gentlemen of his age and social position." Now, Dombey,' said Miss Blimber, laying down the paper, 'do you understand that?'

'I think I do, Ma'am,' said Paul.

'This analysis, you see, Dombey,' Miss Blimber continued, 'is going to be sent home to your respected parent. It will naturally be very painful to him to find that you are singular in your character and conduct. It is naturally painful to us; for we can't like you, you know, Dombey, as well as we could wish.'

She touched the child upon a tender point. He had secretly become more and more solicitous from day to day, as the time of his departure drew more near, that all the house should like him. From some hidden reason, very imperfectly understood by himself—if understood at all—he felt a gradually increasing impulse of affection, towards almost everything and everybody in the place. He could not bear to think that they would be quite indifferent to him when he was gone. He wanted them to remember him kindly; and he had made it his business even to conciliate a great hoarse shaggy dog, chained up at the back of the house, who had previously been the terror of his life: that even he might miss him when he was no longer there.

Little thinking that in this, he only showed again the difference between himself and his compeers, poor tiny Paul set it forth to Miss Blimber as well as he could, and begged her, in despite of the official analysis, to have the goodness to try and like him. To Mrs Blimber, who had joined them, he preferred the same petition: and when that lady could not forbear, even in his presence, from giving utterance to her often-repeated opinion, that he was an odd child, Paul told her that he was sure she was quite right; that he thought it must be his bones, but he didn't know; and that he hoped she would overlook it, for he was fond of them all.

'Not so fond,' said Paul, with a mixture of timidity and perfect frankness, which was one of the most peculiar and most engaging qualities of the child, 'not so fond as I am of Florence, of course; that could never be. You couldn't expect that, could you, Ma'am?'

'Oh! the old-fashioned little soul!' cried Mrs Blimber, in a whisper.

'But I like everybody here very much,' pursued Paul, 'and I should grieve to go away, and think that anyone was glad that I was gone, or didn't care.'

Mrs Blimber was now quite sure that Paul was the oddest child in the world; and when she told the Doctor what had passed, the Doctor did not controvert his wife's opinion. But he said, as he had said before, when Paul first came, that study would do much; and he also said, as he had said on that occasion, 'Bring him on, Cornelia! Bring him on!'

Cornelia had always brought him on as vigorously as she could; and Paul had had a hard life of it. But over and above the getting through his tasks, he had long had another purpose always present to him, and to which he still held fast. It was, to be a gentle, useful, quiet little fellow, always striving to secure the love and attachment of the rest; and though he was yet often to be seen at his old post on the stairs, or watching the waves and clouds from his solitary window, he was oftener found, too, among the other boys, modestly rendering them some little voluntary service. Thus it came to pass, that even among those rigid and absorbed young anchorites, who mortified themselves beneath the roof of Doctor Blimber, Paul was an object of general interest; a fragile little plaything that they all liked, and that no one would have thought of treating roughly. But he could not change his nature, or rewrite the analysis; and so they all agreed that Dombey was old-fashioned.

There were some immunities, however, attaching to the character enjoyed by no one else. They could have better spared a newer-fashioned child, and that alone was much. When the others only bowed to Doctor Blimber and family on retiring for the night, Paul would stretch out his morsel of a hand, and boldly shake the Doctor's; also Mrs Blimber's; also Cornelia's. If anybody was to be begged off from impending punishment, Paul was always the delegate. The weak-eyed young man himself had once consulted him, in reference to a little breakage of glass and china. And it was darkly rumoured that the butler, regarding him with favour such as that stern man had never shown before to mortal boy, had sometimes mingled porter with his table- beer to make him strong.

Over and above these extensive privileges, Paul had free right of entry to Mr Feeder's room, from which apartment he had twice led Mr Toots into the open air in a state of faintness, consequent on an unsuccessful attempt to smoke a very blunt cigar: one of a bundle which that young gentleman had covertly purchased on the shingle from a most desperate smuggler, who had acknowledged, in confidence, that two hundred pounds was the price set upon his head, dead or alive, by the Custom House. It was a snug room, Mr Feeder's, with his bed in another little room inside of it; and a flute, which Mr Feeder couldn't play yet, but was going to make a point of learning, he said, hanging up over the fireplace. There were some books in it, too, and a fishing-rod; for Mr Feeder said he should certainly make a point of learning to fish, when he could find time. Mr Feeder had amassed, with similar intentions, a beautiful little curly secondhand key-bugle, a chess-board and men, a Spanish Grammar, a set of sketching materials, and a pair of boxing-gloves. The art of self-defence Mr Feeder said he should undoubtedly make a point of learning, as he considered it the duty of every man to do; for it might lead to the protection of a female in distress. But Mr Feeder's great possession was a large green jar of snuff, which Mr Toots had brought down as a present, at the close of the last vacation; and for which he had paid a high price, having been the genuine property of the Prince Regent. Neither Mr Toots nor Mr Feeder could partake of this or any other snuff, even in the most stinted and moderate degree, without being seized with convulsions of sneezing. Nevertheless it was their great delight to moisten a box-full with cold tea, stir it up on a piece of parchment with a paper-knife, and devote themselves to its consumption then and there. In the course of which cramming of their noses, they endured surprising torments with the constancy of martyrs: and, drinking table-beer at intervals, felt all the glories of dissipation.

To little Paul sitting silent in their company, and by the side of his chief patron, Mr Toots, there was a dread charm in these reckless occasions: and when Mr Feeder spoke of the dark mysteries of London, and told Mr Toots that he was going to observe it himself closely in all its ramifications in the approaching holidays, and for that purpose had made arrangements to board with two old maiden ladies at Peckham, Paul regarded him as if he were the hero of some book of travels or wild adventure, and was almost afraid of such a slashing person.

Going into this room one evening, when the holidays were very near, Paul found Mr Feeder filling up the blanks in some printed letters, while some others, already filled up and strewn before him, were being folded and sealed by Mr Toots. Mr Feeder said, 'Aha, Dombey, there you are, are you?'—for they were always kind to him, and glad to see him—and then said, tossing one of the letters towards him, 'And there you are, too, Dombey. That's yours.'

'Mine, Sir?' said Paul.

'Your invitation,' returned Mr Feeder.

Paul, looking at it, found, in copper-plate print, with the exception of his own name and the date, which were in Mr Feeder's penmanship, that Doctor and Mrs Blimber requested the pleasure of Mr P. Dombey's company at an early party on Wednesday Evening the Seventeenth Instant; and that the hour was half-past seven o'clock; and that the object was Quadrilles. Mr Toots also showed him, by holding up a companion sheet of paper, that Doctor and Mrs Blimber requested the pleasure of Mr Toots's company at an early party on Wednesday Evening the Seventeenth Instant, when the hour was half-past seven o'clock, and when the object was Quadrilles. He also found, on glancing at the table where Mr Feeder sat, that the pleasure of Mr Briggs's company, and of Mr Tozer's company, and of every young gentleman's company, was requested by Doctor and Mrs Blimber on the same genteel Occasion.

Mr Feeder then told him, to his great joy, that his sister was invited, and that it was a half-yearly event, and that, as the holidays began that day, he could go away with his sister after the party, if he liked, which Paul interrupted him to say he would like, very much. Mr Feeder then gave him to understand that he would be expected to inform Doctor and Mrs Blimber, in superfine small-hand, that Mr P. Dombey would be happy to have the honour of waiting on them, in accordance with their polite invitation. Lastly, Mr Feeder said, he had better not refer to the festive occasion, in the hearing of Doctor and Mrs Blimber; as these preliminaries, and the whole of the arrangements, were conducted on principles of classicality and high breeding; and that Doctor and Mrs Blimber on the one hand, and the young gentlemen on the other, were supposed, in their scholastic capacities, not to have the least idea of what was in the wind.

Paul thanked Mr Feeder for these hints, and pocketing his invitation, sat down on a stool by the side of Mr Toots, as usual. But Paul's head, which had long been ailing more or less, and was sometimes very heavy and painful, felt so uneasy that night, that he was obliged to support it on his hand. And yet it dropped so, that by little and little it sunk on Mr Toots's knee, and rested there, as if it had no care to be ever lifted up again.

That was no reason why he should be deaf; but he must have been, he thought, for, by and by, he heard Mr Feeder calling in his ear, and gently shaking him to rouse his attention. And when he raised his head, quite scared, and looked about him, he found that Doctor Blimber had come into the room; and that the window was open, and that his forehead was wet with sprinkled water; though how all this had been done without his knowledge, was very curious indeed.

'Ah! Come, come! That's well! How is my little friend now?' said Doctor Blimber, encouragingly.

'Oh, quite well, thank you, Sir,' said Paul.

But there seemed to be something the matter with the floor, for he couldn't stand upon it steadily; and with the walls too, for they were inclined to turn round and round, and could only be stopped by being looked at very hard indeed. Mr Toots's head had the appearance of being at once bigger and farther off than was quite natural; and when he took Paul in his arms, to carry him upstairs, Paul observed with astonishment that the door was in quite a different place from that in which he had expected to find it, and almost thought, at first, that Mr Toots was going to walk straight up the chimney.

It was very kind of Mr Toots to carry him to the top of the house so tenderly; and Paul told him that it was. But Mr Toots said he would do a great deal more than that, if he could; and indeed he did more as it was: for he helped Paul to undress, and helped him to bed, in the kindest manner possible, and then sat down by the bedside and chuckled very much; while Mr Feeder, B.A., leaning over the bottom of the bedstead, set all the little bristles on his head bolt upright with his bony hands, and then made believe to spar at Paul with great science, on account of his being all right again, which was so uncommonly facetious, and kind too in Mr Feeder, that Paul, not being able to make up his mind whether it was best to laugh or cry at him, did both at once.

How Mr Toots melted away, and Mr Feeder changed into Mrs Pipchin, Paul never thought of asking; neither was he at all curious to know; but when he saw Mrs Pipchin standing at the bottom of the bed, instead of Mr Feeder, he cried out, 'Mrs Pipchin, don't tell Florence!'

'Don't tell Florence what, my little Paul?' said Mrs Pipchin, coming round to the bedside, and sitting down in the chair.

'About me,' said Paul.

'No, no,' said Mrs Pipchin.

'What do you think I mean to do when I grow up, Mrs Pipchin?' inquired Paul, turning his face towards her on his pillow, and resting his chin wistfully on his folded hands.

Mrs Pipchin couldn't guess.

'I mean,' said Paul, 'to put my money all together in one Bank, never try to get any more, go away into the country with my darling Florence, have a beautiful garden, fields, and woods, and live there with her all my life!'

'Indeed!' cried Mrs Pipchin.

'Yes,' said Paul. 'That's what I mean to do, when I—' He stopped, and pondered for a moment.

Mrs Pipchin's grey eye scanned his thoughtful face.

'If I grow up,' said Paul. Then he went on immediately to tell Mrs Pipchin all about the party, about Florence's invitation, about the pride he would have in the admiration that would be felt for her by all the boys, about their being so kind to him and fond of him, about his being so fond of them, and about his being so glad of it. Then he told Mrs Pipchin about the analysis, and about his being certainly old-fashioned, and took Mrs Pipchin's opinion on that point, and whether she knew why it was, and what it meant. Mrs Pipchin denied the fact altogether, as the shortest way of getting out of the difficulty; but Paul was far from satisfied with that reply, and looked so searchingly at Mrs Pipchin for a truer answer, that she was obliged to get up and look out of the window to avoid his eyes.

There was a certain calm Apothecary, 'who attended at the establishment when any of the young gentlemen were ill, and somehow he got into the room and appeared at the bedside, with Mrs Blimber. How they came there, or how long they had been there, Paul didn't know; but when he saw them, he sat up in bed, and answered all the Apothecary's questions at full length, and whispered to him that Florence was not to know anything about it, if he pleased, and that he had set his mind upon her coming to the party. He was very chatty with the Apothecary, and they parted excellent friends. Lying down again with his eyes shut, he heard the Apothecary say, out of the room and quite a long way off—or he dreamed it—that there was a want of vital power (what was that, Paul wondered!) and great constitutional weakness. That as the little fellow had set his heart on parting with his school-mates on the seventeenth, it would be better to indulge the fancy if he grew no worse. That he was glad to hear from Mrs Pipchin, that the little fellow would go to his friends in London on the eighteenth. That he would write to Mr Dombey, when he should have gained a better knowledge of the case, and before that day. That there was no immediate cause for—what? Paul lost that word And that the little fellow had a fine mind, but was an old-fashioned boy.

What old fashion could that be, Paul wondered with a palpitating heart, that was so visibly expressed in him; so plainly seen by so many people!

He could neither make it out, nor trouble himself long with the effort. Mrs Pipchin was again beside him, if she had ever been away (he thought she had gone out with the Doctor, but it was all a dream perhaps), and presently a bottle and glass got into her hands magically, and she poured out the contents for him. After that, he had some real good jelly, which Mrs

Blimber brought to him herself; and then he was so well, that Mrs Pipchin went home, at his urgent solicitation, and Briggs and Tozer came to bed. Poor Briggs grumbled terribly about his own analysis, which could hardly have discomposed him more if it had been a chemical process; but he was very good to Paul, and so was Tozer, and so were all the rest, for they every one looked in before going to bed, and said, 'How are you now, Dombey?' 'Cheer up, little Dombey!' and so forth. After Briggs had got into bed, he lay awake for a long time, still bemoaning his analysis, and saying he knew it was all wrong, and they couldn't have analysed a murderer worse, and—how would Doctor Blimber like it if his pocket-money depended on it? It was very easy, Briggs said, to make a galley-slave of a boy all the half-year, and then score him up idle; and to crib two dinners a-week out of his board, and then score him up greedy; but that wasn't going to be submitted to, he believed, was it? Oh! Ah!

Before the weak-eyed young man performed on the gong next morning, he came upstairs to Paul and told him he was to lie still, which Paul very gladly did. Mrs Pipchin reappeared a little before the Apothecary, and a little after the good young woman whom Paul had seen cleaning the stove on that first morning (how long ago it seemed now!) had brought him his breakfast. There was another consultation a long way off, or else Paul dreamed it again; and then the Apothecary, coming back with Doctor and Mrs Blimber, said:

'Yes, I think, Doctor Blimber, we may release this young gentleman from his books just now; the vacation being so very near at hand.'

'By all means,' said Doctor Blimber. 'My love, you will inform Cornelia, if you please.'

'Assuredly,' said Mrs Blimber.

The Apothecary bending down, looked closely into Paul's eyes, and felt his head, and his pulse, and his heart, with so much interest and care, that Paul said, 'Thank you, Sir.'

'Our little friend,' observed Doctor Blimber, 'has never complained.'

'Oh no!' replied the Apothecary. 'He was not likely to complain.'

'You find him greatly better?' said Doctor Blimber.

'Oh! he is greatly better, Sir,' returned the Apothecary.

Paul had begun to speculate, in his own odd way, on the subject that might occupy the Apothecary's mind just at that moment; so musingly had he answered the two questions of Doctor Blimber. But the Apothecary happening to meet his little patient's eyes, as the latter set off on that mental expedition, and coming instantly out of his abstraction with a cheerful smile, Paul smiled in return and abandoned it.

He lay in bed all that day, dozing and dreaming, and looking at Mr Toots; but got up on the next, and went downstairs. Lo and behold, there was something the matter with the great clock; and a workman on a pair of steps had taken its face off, and was poking instruments into the works by the light of a candle! This was a great event for Paul, who sat down on the bottom stair, and watched the operation attentively: now and then glancing at the clock face, leaning all askew, against the wall hard by, and feeling a little confused by a suspicion that it was ogling him.

The workman on the steps was very civil; and as he said, when he observed Paul, 'How do you do, Sir?' Paul got into conversation with him, and told him he hadn't been quite well lately. The ice being thus broken, Paul asked him a multitude of questions about chimes and clocks: as, whether people watched up in the lonely church steeples by night to make them strike, and how the bells were rung when people died, and whether those were different bells from wedding bells, or only sounded dismal in the fancies of the living. Finding that his new acquaintance was not very well informed on the subject of the Curfew Bell of ancient days, Paul gave him an account of that institution; and also asked him, as a practical man, what he thought about King Alfred's idea of measuring time by the burning of candles; to which the workman replied, that he thought it would be the ruin of the clock trade if it was to come up again. In fine, Paul looked on, until the clock had quite recovered its familiar aspect, and resumed its sedate inquiry; when the workman, putting away his tools in a long basket, bade him good day, and went away. Though not before he had whispered something, on the door-mat, to the footman, in which there was the phrase 'old-fashioned'—for Paul heard it. What could that old fashion be, that seemed to make the people sorry! What could it be!

Having nothing to learn now, he thought of this frequently; though not so often as he might have done, if he had had fewer things to think of. But he had a great many; and was always thinking, all day long.

First, there was Florence coming to the party. Florence would see that the boys were fond of him; and that would make her happy. This was his great theme. Let Florence once be sure that they were gentle and good to him, and that he had become a little favourite among them, and then the would always think of the time he had passed there, without being very sorry. Florence might be all the happier too for that, perhaps, when he came back.

When he came back! Fifty times a day, his noiseless little feet went up the stairs to his own room, as he collected every book, and scrap, and trifle that belonged to him, and put them all together there, down to the minutest thing, for taking home! There was no shade of coming back on little Paul; no preparation for it, or other reference to it, grew out of anything he thought or did, except this slight one in connexion with his sister. On the contrary, he had to think of everything familiar to him, in his contemplative moods and in his wanderings about the house, as being to be parted with; and hence the many things he had to think of, all day long.

He had to peep into those rooms upstairs, and think how solitary they would be when he was gone, and wonder through how many silent days, weeks, months, and years, they would continue just as grave and undisturbed. He had to think—would any other child (old-fashioned, like himself) stray there at any time, to whom the same grotesque distortions of pattern and furniture would manifest themselves; and would anybody tell that boy of little Dombey, who had been there once? He had to think of a portrait on the stairs, which always looked earnestly after him as he went away, eyeing it over his shoulder; and which, when he passed it in the company of anyone, still seemed to gaze at him, and not at his companion. He had much to think of, in association with a print that hung up in another place, where, in the centre of a wondering group, one figure that he knew, a figure with a light about its head—benignant, mild, and merciful—stood pointing upward.

At his own bedroom window, there were crowds of thoughts that mixed with these, and came on, one upon another, like the rolling waves. Where those wild birds lived, that were always hovering out at sea in troubled weather; where the clouds rose and first began; whence the wind issued on its rushing flight, and where it stopped; whether the spot where he and Florence had so often sat, and watched, and talked about these things, could ever be exactly as it used to be without them; whether it could ever be the same to Florence, if he were in some distant place, and she were sitting there alone.

He had to think, too, of Mr Toots, and Mr Feeder, B.A., of all the boys; and of Doctor Blimber, Mrs Blimber, and Miss Blimber; of home, and of his aunt and Miss Tox; of his father; Dombey and Son, Walter with the poor old Uncle who had got the money he wanted, and that gruff-voiced Captain with the iron hand. Besides all this, he had a number of little visits to pay, in the course of the day; to the schoolroom, to Doctor Blimber's study, to Mrs Blimber's private apartment, to Miss Blimber's, and to the dog. For he was free of the whole house now, to range it as he chose; and, in his desire to part with everybody on affectionate terms, he attended, in his way, to them all. Sometimes he found places in books for Briggs, who was always losing them; sometimes he looked up words in dictionaries for other young gentlemen who were in extremity; sometimes he held skeins of silk for Mrs Blimber to wind; sometimes he put Cornelia's desk to rights; sometimes he would even creep into the Doctor's study, and, sitting on the carpet near his learned feet, turn the globes softly, and go round the world, or take a flight among the far-off stars.

In those days immediately before the holidays, in short, when the other young gentlemen were labouring for dear life through a general resumption of the studies of the whole half-year, Paul was such a privileged pupil as had never been seen in that house before. He could hardly believe it himself; but his liberty lasted from hour to hour, and from day to day; and little Dombey was caressed by everyone. Doctor Blimber was so particular about him, that he requested Johnson to retire from the dinner-table one day, for having thoughtlessly spoken to him as 'poor little Dombey;' which Paul thought rather hard and severe, though he had flushed at the moment, and wondered why Johnson should pity him. It was the more questionable justice, Paul thought, in the Doctor, from his having certainly overheard that great authority give his assent on the previous evening, to the proposition (stated by Mrs Blimber) that poor dear little Dombey was more old-fashioned than ever. And now it was that Paul began to think it must surely be old-fashioned to be very thin, and light, and easily tired, and soon disposed to lie down anywhere and rest; for he couldn't help feeling that these were more and more his habits every day.

At last the party-day arrived; and Doctor Blimber said at breakfast, 'Gentlemen, we will resume our studies on the twenty-fifth of next month.' Mr Toots immediately threw off his allegiance, and put on his ring: and mentioning the Doctor in casual conversation shortly afterwards, spoke of him as 'Blimber'! This act of freedom inspired the older pupils with admiration and envy; but the younger spirits were appalled, and seemed to marvel that no beam fell down and crushed him.

Not the least allusion was made to the ceremonies of the evening, either at breakfast or at dinner; but there was a bustle in the house all day, and in the course of his perambulations, Paul made acquaintance with various strange benches and candlesticks, and met a harp in a green greatcoat standing on the landing outside the drawing-room door. There was something queer, too, about Mrs Blimber's head at dinner-time, as if she had screwed her hair up too tight; and though Miss Blimber showed a graceful bunch of plaited hair on each temple, she seemed to have her own little curls in paper underneath, and in a play-bill too; for Paul read 'Theatre Royal' over one of her sparkling spectacles, and 'Brighton' over the other.

There was a grand array of white waistcoats and cravats in the young gentlemen's bedrooms as evening approached; and such a smell of singed hair, that Doctor Blimber sent up the footman with his compliments, and wished to know if the house was on fire. But it was only the hairdresser curling the young gentlemen, and over-heating his tongs in the ardour of business.

When Paul was dressed—which was very soon done, for he felt unwell and drowsy, and was not able to stand about it very long—he went down into the drawing-room; where he found Doctor Blimber pacing up and down the room full dressed, but with a dignified and unconcerned demeanour, as if he thought it barely possible that one or two people might drop in by and by. Shortly afterwards, Mrs Blimber appeared, looking lovely, Paul thought; and attired in such a number of skirts that it was quite an excursion to walk round her. Miss Blimber came down soon after her Mama; a little squeezed in appearance, but very charming.

Mr Toots and Mr Feeder were the next arrivals. Each of these gentlemen brought his hat in his hand, as if he lived somewhere else; and when they were announced by the butler, Doctor Blimber said, 'Ay, ay, ay! God bless my soul!' and seemed extremely glad to see them. Mr Toots was one blaze of jewellery and buttons; and he felt the circumstance so strongly, that when he had shaken hands with the Doctor, and had bowed to Mrs Blimber and Miss Blimber, he took Paul aside, and said, 'What do you think of this, Dombey?'

But notwithstanding this modest confidence in himself, Mr Toots appeared to be involved in a good deal of uncertainty whether, on the whole, it was judicious to button the bottom button of his waistcoat, and whether, on a calm revision of all the circumstances, it was best to wear his waistbands turned up or turned down. Observing that Mr Feeder's were turned up, Mr Toots turned his up; but the waistbands of the next arrival being turned down, Mr Toots turned his down. The differences in point of waistcoat-buttoning, not only at the bottom, but at the top too, became so numerous and complicated as the arrivals thickened, that Mr Toots was continually fingering that article of dress, as if he were performing on some instrument; and appeared to find the incessant execution it demanded, quite bewildering. All the young gentlemen, tightly cravatted, curled, and pumped, and with their best hats in their hands, having been at different times announced and introduced, Mr Baps, the dancing-master, came, accompanied by Mrs Baps, to whom Mrs Blimber was extremely kind and condescending. Mr Baps was a very grave gentleman, with a slow and measured manner of speaking; and before he had stood under the lamp five minutes, he began to talk to Toots (who had been silently comparing pumps with him) about what you were to do with your raw materials when they came into your ports in return for your drain of gold. Mr Toots, to whom the question seemed perplexing, suggested 'Cook 'em.' But Mr Baps did not appear to think that would do.

Paul now slipped away from the cushioned corner of a sofa, which had been his post of observation, and went downstairs into the tea-room to be ready for Florence, whom he had not seen for nearly a fortnight, as he had remained at Doctor Blimber's on the previous Saturday and Sunday, lest he should take cold. Presently she came: looking so beautiful in her simple ball dress, with her fresh flowers in her hand, that when she knelt down on the ground to take Paul round the neck and kiss him (for there was no one there, but his friend and another young woman waiting to serve out the tea), he could hardly make up his mind to let her go again, or to take away her bright and loving eyes from his face.

'But what is the matter, Floy?' asked Paul, almost sure that he saw a tear there.

'Nothing, darling; nothing,' returned Florence.

Paul touched her cheek gently with his finger—and it was a tear! 'Why, Floy!' said he.

'We'll go home together, and I'll nurse you, love,' said Florence.

'Nurse me!' echoed Paul.

Paul couldn't understand what that had to do with it, nor why the two young women looked on so seriously, nor why Florence turned away her face for a moment, and then turned it back, lighted up again with smiles.

'Floy,' said Paul, holding a ringlet of her dark hair in his hand. 'Tell me, dear, Do you think I have grown old-fashioned?'

His sister laughed, and fondled him, and told him 'No.'

'Because I know they say so,' returned Paul, 'and I want to know what they mean, Floy.' But a loud double knock coming at the door, and Florence hurrying to the table, there was no more said between them. Paul wondered again when he saw his friend whisper to Florence, as if she were comforting her; but a new arrival put that out of his head speedily.

It was Sir Barnet Skettles, Lady Skettles, and Master Skettles. Master Skettles was to be a new boy after the vacation, and Fame had been busy, in Mr Feeder's room, with his father, who was in the House of Commons, and of whom Mr Feeder had said that when he did catch the Speaker's eye (which he had been expected to do for three or four years), it was anticipated that he would rather touch up the Radicals.

'And what room is this now, for instance?' said Lady Skettles to Paul's friend, 'Melia.

'Doctor Blimber's study, Ma'am,' was the reply.

Lady Skettles took a panoramic survey of it through her glass, and said to Sir Barnet Skettles, with a nod of approval, 'Very good.' Sir Barnet assented, but Master Skettles looked suspicious and doubtful.

'And this little creature, now,' said Lady Skettles, turning to Paul. 'Is he one of the—'

'Young gentlemen, Ma'am; yes, Ma'am,' said Paul's friend.

'And what is your name, my pale child?' said Lady Skettles.

'Dombey,' answered Paul.

Sir Barnet Skettles immediately interposed, and said that he had had the honour of meeting Paul's father at a public dinner, and that he hoped he was very well. Then Paul heard him say to Lady Skettles, 'City—very rich—most respectable—Doctor mentioned it.' And then he said to Paul, 'Will you tell your good Papa that Sir Barnet Skettles rejoiced to hear that he was very well, and sent him his best compliments?'

'Yes, Sir,' answered Paul.

'That is my brave boy,' said Sir Barnet Skettles. 'Barnet,' to Master Skettles, who was revenging himself for the studies to come, on the plum-cake, 'this is a young gentleman you ought to know. This is a young gentleman you may know, Barnet,' said Sir Barnet Skettles, with an emphasis on the permission.

'What eyes! What hair! What a lovely face!' exclaimed Lady Skettles softly, as she looked at Florence through her glass. 'My sister,' said Paul, presenting her.

The satisfaction of the Skettleses was now complex And as Lady Skettles had conceived, at first sight, a liking for Paul, they all went upstairs together: Sir Barnet Skettles taking care of Florence, and young Barnet following.

Young Barnet did not remain long in the background after they had reached the drawing-room, for Dr Blimber had him out in no time, dancing with Florence. He did not appear to Paul to be particularly happy, or particularly anything but sulky, or to care much what he was about; but as Paul heard Lady Skettles say to Mrs Blimber, while she beat time with her fan, that her dear boy was evidently smitten to death by that angel of a child, Miss Dombey, it would seem that Skettles Junior was in a state of bliss, without showing it.

Little Paul thought it a singular coincidence that nobody had occupied his place among the pillows; and that when he came into the room again, they should all make way for him to go back to it, remembering it was his. Nobody stood before him either, when they observed that he liked to see Florence dancing, but they left the space in front quite clear, so that he might follow her with his eyes. They were so kind, too, even the strangers, of whom there were soon a great many, that they came and spoke to him every now and then, and asked him how he was, and if his head ached, and whether he was tired. He was very much obliged to them for all their kindness and attention, and reclining propped up in his corner, with Mrs Blimber and Lady Skettles on the same sofa, and Florence coming and sitting by his side as soon as every dance was ended, he looked on very happily indeed.

Florence would have sat by him all night, and would not have danced at all of her own accord, but Paul made her, by telling her how much it pleased him. And he told her the truth, too; for his small heart swelled, and his face glowed, when he saw how much they all admired her, and how she was the beautiful little rosebud of the room.

From his nest among the pillows, Paul could see and hear almost everything that passed as if the whole were being done for his amusement. Among other little incidents that he observed, he observed Mr Baps the dancing-master get into conversation with Sir Barnet Skettles, and very soon ask him, as he had asked Mr Toots, what you were to do with your raw materials, when they came into your ports in return for your drain of gold—which was such a mystery to Paul that he was quite desirous to know what ought to be done with them. Sir Barnet Skettles had much to say upon the question, and said it; but it did not appear to solve the question, for Mr Baps retorted, Yes, but supposing Russia stepped in with her tallows; which struck Sir Barnet almost dumb, for he could only shake his head after that, and say, Why then you must fall back upon your cottons, he supposed.

Sir Barnet Skettles looked after Mr Baps when he went to cheer up Mrs Baps (who, being quite deserted, was pretending to look over the music-book of the gentleman who played the harp), as if he thought him a remarkable kind of man; and shortly afterwards he said so in those words to Doctor Blimber, and inquired if he might take the liberty of asking who he was, and whether he had ever been in the Board of Trade. Doctor Blimber answered no, he believed not; and that in fact he was a Professor of—'

'Of something connected with statistics, I'll swear?' observed Sir Barnet Skettles.

'Why no, Sir Barnet,' replied Doctor Blimber, rubbing his chin. 'No, not exactly.'

'Figures of some sort, I would venture a bet,' said Sir Barnet Skettles.

'Why yes,' said Doctor Blimber, yes, but not of that sort. Mr Baps is a very worthy sort of man, Sir Barnet, and—in fact he's our Professor of dancing.'

Paul was amazed to see that this piece of information quite altered Sir Barnet Skettles's opinion of Mr Baps, and that Sir Barnet flew into a perfect rage, and glowered at Mr Baps over on the other side of the room. He even went so far as to D Mr Baps to Lady Skettles, in telling her what had happened, and to say that it was like his most con-sum-mate and con-foun-ded impudence.

There was another thing that Paul observed. Mr Feeder, after imbibing several custard-cups of negus, began to enjoy himself. The dancing in general was ceremonious, and the music rather solemn—a little like church music in fact—but after the custard-cups, Mr Feeder told Mr Toots that he was going to throw a little spirit into the thing. After that, Mr Feeder not only began to dance as if he meant dancing and nothing else, but secretly to stimulate the music to perform wild tunes. Further, he became particular in his attentions to the ladies; and dancing with Miss Blimber, whispered to her—whispered to her!—though not so softly but that Paul heard him say this remarkable poetry,

'Had I a heart for falsehood framed, I ne'er could injure You!'

This, Paul heard him repeat to four young ladies, in succession. Well might Mr Feeder say to Mr Toots, that he was afraid he should be the worse for it to-morrow!

Mrs Blimber was a little alarmed by this—comparatively speaking—profligate behaviour; and especially by the alteration in the character of the music, which, beginning to comprehend low melodies that were popular in the streets, might not unnaturally be supposed to give offence to Lady Skettles. But Lady Skettles was so very kind as to beg Mrs Blimber not to mention it; and to receive her explanation that Mr Feeder's spirits sometimes betrayed him into excesses on these occasions, with the greatest courtesy and politeness; observing, that he seemed a very nice sort of person for his situation, and that she particularly liked the unassuming style of his hair—which (as already hinted) was about a quarter of an inch long.

Once, when there was a pause in the dancing, Lady Skettles told Paul that he seemed very fond of music. Paul replied, that he was; and if she was too, she ought to hear his sister, Florence, sing. Lady Skettles presently discovered that she was dying with anxiety to have that gratification; and though Florence was at first very much frightened at being asked to sing before so many people, and begged earnestly to be excused, yet, on Paul calling her to him, and saying, 'Do, Floy! Please! For me, my dear!' she went straight to the piano, and began. When they all drew a little away, that Paul might see her; and when he saw her sitting there all alone, so young, and good, and beautiful, and kind to him; and heard her thrilling voice, so natural and sweet, and such a golden link between him and all his life's love and happiness, rising out of the silence; he turned his face away, and hid his tears. Not, as he told them when they spoke to him, not that the music was too plaintive or too sorrowful, but it was so dear to him.

They all loved Florence. How could they help it! Paul had known beforehand that they must and would; and sitting in his cushioned corner, with calmly folded hands; and one leg loosely doubled under him, few would have thought what triumph and delight expanded his childish bosom while he watched her, or what a sweet tranquillity he felt. Lavish encomiums on 'Dombey's sister' reached his ears from all the boys: admiration of the self-possessed and modest little beauty was on every lip: reports of her intelligence and accomplishments floated past him, constantly; and, as if borne in upon the air of the summer night, there was a half intelligible sentiment diffused around, referring to Florence and himself, and breathing sympathy for both, that soothed and touched him.

He did not know why. For all that the child observed, and felt, and thought, that night—the present and the absent; what was then and what had been— were blended like the colours in the rainbow, or in the plumage of rich birds when the sun is shining on them, or in the softening sky when the same sun is setting. The many things he had had to think of lately, passed before him in the music; not as claiming his attention over again, or as likely evermore to occupy it, but as peacefully disposed of and gone. A solitary window, gazed through years ago, looked out upon an ocean, miles and miles away; upon its waters, fancies, busy with him only yesterday, were hushed and lulled to rest like broken waves. The same mysterious murmur he had wondered at, when lying on his couch upon the beach, he thought he still heard sounding through his sister's song, and through the hum of voices, and the tread of feet, and having some part in the faces flitting by, and even in the heavy gentleness of Mr Toots, who frequently came up to shake him by the hand. Through the universal kindness he still thought he heard it, speaking to him; and even his old-fashioned reputation seemed to be allied to it, he knew not how. Thus little Paul sat musing, listening, looking on, and dreaming; and was very happy.

Until the time arrived for taking leave: and then, indeed, there was a sensation in the party. Sir Barnet Skettles brought up Skettles Junior to shake hands with him, and asked him if he would remember to tell his good Papa, with his best compliments, that he, Sir Barnet Skettles, had said he hoped the two young gentlemen would become intimately acquainted. Lady Skettles kissed him, and patted his hair upon his brow, and held him in her arms; and even Mrs Baps—poor Mrs Baps! Paul was glad of that—came over from beside the music-book of the gentleman who played the harp, and took leave of him quite as heartily as anybody in the room.

'Good-bye, Doctor Blimber,' said Paul, stretching out his hand.

'Good-bye, my little friend,' returned the Doctor.

'I'm very much obliged to you, Sir,' said Paul, looking innocently up into his awful face. 'Ask them to take care of Diogenes, if you please.'

Diogenes was the dog: who had never in his life received a friend into his confidence, before Paul. The Doctor promised that every attention should be paid to Diogenes in Paul's absence, and Paul having again thanked him, and shaken hands with him, bade adieu to Mrs Blimber and Cornelia with such heartfelt earnestness that Mrs Blimber forgot from that moment to mention Cicero to Lady Skettles, though she had fully intended it all the evening. Cornelia, taking both Paul's hands in hers, said,'Dombey, Dombey, you have always been my favourite pupil. God bless you!' And it showed, Paul thought, how easily one might do injustice to a person; for Miss Blimber meant it—though she was a Forcer—and felt it.

A boy then went round among the young gentlemen, of 'Dombey's going!' 'Little Dombey's going!' and there was a general move after Paul and Florence down the staircase and into the hall, in which the whole Blimber family were included. Such a circumstance, Mr Feeder said aloud, as had never happened in the case of any former young gentleman within his experience; but it would be difficult to say if this were sober fact or custard-cups. The servants, with the butler at their head, had all an interest in seeing Little Dombey go; and even the weak-eyed young man, taking out his books and trunks to the coach that was to carry him and Florence to Mrs Pipchin's for the night, melted visibly.

Not even the influence of the softer passion on the young gentlemen—and they all, to a boy, doted on Florence—could restrain them from taking quite a noisy leave of Paul; waving hats after him, pressing downstairs to shake hands with him, crying individually 'Dombey, don't forget me!' and indulging in many such ebullitions of feeling, uncommon among those young Chesterfields. Paul whispered Florence, as she wrapped him up before the door was opened, Did she hear them? Would she ever forget it? Was she glad to know it? And a lively delight was in his eyes as he spoke to her.

Once, for a last look, he turned and gazed upon the faces thus addressed to him, surprised to see how shining and how bright, and numerous they were, and how they were all piled and heaped up, as faces are at crowded theatres. They swam before him as he looked, like faces in an agitated glass; and next moment he was in the dark coach outside, holding close to Florence. From that time, whenever he thought of Doctor Blimber's, it came back as he had seen it in this last view; and it never seemed to be a real place again, but always a dream, full of eyes.

This was not quite the last of Doctor Blimber's, however. There was something else. There was Mr Toots. Who, unexpectedly letting down one of the coach-windows, and looking in, said, with a most egregious chuckle, 'Is Dombey there?' and immediately put it up again, without waiting for an answer. Nor was this quite the last of Mr Toots, even; for before the coachman could drive off, he as suddenly let down the other window, and looking in with a precisely similar chuckle, said in a precisely similar tone of voice, 'Is Dombey there?' and disappeared precisely as before.

How Florence laughed! Paul often remembered it, and laughed himself whenever he did so.

But there was much, soon afterwards—next day, and after that—which Paul could only recollect confusedly. As, why they stayed at Mrs Pipchin's days and nights, instead of going home; why he lay in bed, with Florence sitting by his side; whether that had been his father in the room, or only a tall shadow on the wall; whether he had heard his doctor say, of someone, that if they had removed him before the occasion on which he had built up fancies, strong in proportion to his own weakness, it was very possible he might have pined away.

He could not even remember whether he had often said to Florence, 'Oh Floy, take me home, and never leave me!' but he thought he had. He fancied sometimes he had heard himself repeating, 'Take me home, Floy! take me home!'

But he could remember, when he got home, and was carried up the well-remembered stairs, that there had been the rumbling of a coach for many hours together, while he lay upon the seat, with Florence still beside him, and old Mrs Pipchin sitting opposite. He remembered his old bed too, when they laid him down in it: his aunt, Miss Tox, and Susan: but there was something else, and recent too, that still perplexed him.

'I want to speak to Florence, if you please,' he said. 'To Florence by herself, for a moment!'

She bent down over him, and the others stood away.

'Floy, my pet, wasn't that Papa in the hall, when they brought me from the coach?'

'Yes, dear.'

'He didn't cry, and go into his room, Floy, did he, when he saw me coming in?'

Florence shook her head, and pressed her lips against his cheek.

'I'm very glad he didn't cry,' said little Paul. 'I thought he did. Don't tell them that I asked.'

CHAPTER 15. Amazing Artfulness of Captain Cuttle, and a new Pursuit for Walter Gay

Walter could not, for several days, decide what to do in the Barbados business; and even cherished some faint hope that Mr Dombey might not have meant what he had said, or that he might change his mind, and tell him he was not to go. But as nothing occurred to give this idea (which was sufficiently improbable in itself) any touch of confirmation, and as time was slipping by, and he had none to lose, he felt that he must act, without hesitating any longer.

Walter's chief difficulty was, how to break the change in his affairs to Uncle Sol, to whom he was sensible it would be a terrible blow. He had the greater difficulty in dashing Uncle Sol's spirits with such an astounding piece of intelligence, because they had lately recovered very much, and the old man had become so cheerful, that the little back parlour was itself again. Uncle Sol had paid the first appointed portion of the debt to Mr Dombey, and was hopeful of working his way through the rest; and to cast him down afresh, when he had sprung up so manfully from his troubles, was a very distressing necessity.

Yet it would never do to run away from him. He must know of it beforehand; and how to tell him was the point. As to the question of going or not going, Walter did not consider that he had any power of choice in the matter. Mr Dombey had truly told him that he was young, and that his Uncle's circumstances were not good; and Mr Dombey had plainly expressed, in the glance with which he had accompanied that reminder, that if he declined to go he might stay at home if he chose, but not in his counting-house. His Uncle and he lay under a great obligation to Mr Dombey, which was of Walter's own soliciting. He might have begun in secret to despair of ever winning that gentleman's favour, and might have thought that he was now and then disposed to put a slight upon him, which was hardly just. But what would have been duty without that, was still duty with it—or Walter thought so— and duty must be done.

When Mr Dombey had looked at him, and told him he was young, and that his Uncle's circumstances were not good, there had been an expression of disdain in his face; a contemptuous and disparaging assumption that he would be quite content to live idly on a reduced old man, which stung the boy's generous soul. Determined to assure Mr Dombey, in so far as it was possible to give him the assurance without expressing it in words, that indeed he mistook his nature, Walter had been anxious to show even more cheerfulness and activity after the West Indian interview than he had shown before: if that were possible, in one of his quick and zealous disposition. He was too young and inexperienced to think, that possibly this very quality in him was not agreeable to Mr Dombey, and that it was no stepping-stone to his good opinion to be elastic and hopeful of pleasing under the shadow of his powerful displeasure, whether it were right or wrong. But it may have been—it may have been—that the great man thought himself defied in this new exposition of an honest spirit, and purposed to bring it down.

'Well! at last and at least, Uncle Sol must be told,' thought Walter, with a sigh. And as Walter was apprehensive that his voice might perhaps quaver a little, and that his countenance might not be quite as hopeful as he could wish it to be, if he told the old man himself, and saw the first effects of his communication on his wrinkled face, he resolved to avail himself of the services of that powerful mediator, Captain Cuttle. Sunday coming round, he set off therefore, after breakfast, once more to beat up Captain Cuttle's quarters.

It was not unpleasant to remember, on the way thither, that Mrs MacStinger resorted to a great distance every Sunday morning, to attend the ministry of the Reverend Melchisedech Howler, who, having been one day discharged from the West India Docks on a false suspicion (got up expressly against him by the general enemy) of screwing gimlets into puncheons, and applying his lips to the orifice, had announced the destruction of the world for that day two years, at ten in the morning, and opened a front parlour for the reception of ladies and gentlemen of the Ranting persuasion, upon whom, on the first occasion of their assemblage, the admonitions of the Reverend Melchisedech had produced so powerful an effect, that, in their rapturous performance of a sacred jig, which closed the service, the whole flock broke through into a kitchen below, and disabled a mangle belonging to one of the fold.

This the Captain, in a moment of uncommon conviviality, had confided to Walter and his Uncle, between the repetitions of lovely Peg, on the night when Brogley the broker was paid out. The Captain himself was punctual in his attendance at a church in his own neighbourhood, which hoisted the Union Jack every Sunday morning; and where he was good enough—the lawful beadle being infirm—to keep an eye upon the boys, over whom he exercised great power, in virtue of his mysterious hook. Knowing the regularity of the Captain's habits, Walter made all the haste he could, that he might anticipate his going out; and he made such good speed, that he had the pleasure, on turning into Brig Place, to behold the broad blue coat and waistcoat hanging out of the Captain's open window, to air in the sun.

It appeared incredible that the coat and waistcoat could be seen by mortal eyes without the Captain; but he certainly was not in them, otherwise his legs—the houses in Brig Place not being lofty—would have obstructed the street door, which was perfectly clear. Quite wondering at this discovery, Walter gave a single knock.

'Stinger,' he distinctly heard the Captain say, up in his room, as if that were no business of his. Therefore Walter gave two knocks.

'Cuttle,' he heard the Captain say upon that; and immediately afterwards the Captain, in his clean shirt and braces, with his neckerchief hanging loosely round his throat like a coil of rope, and his glazed hat on, appeared at the window, leaning out over the broad blue coat and waistcoat.

'Wal'r!' cried the Captain, looking down upon him in amazement.

'Ay, ay, Captain Cuttle,' returned Walter, 'only me'

'What's the matter, my lad?' inquired the Captain, with great concern. 'Gills an't been and sprung nothing again?'

'No, no,' said Walter. 'My Uncle's all right, Captain Cuttle.'

The Captain expressed his gratification, and said he would come down below and open the door, which he did.

'Though you're early, Wal'r,' said the Captain, eyeing him still doubtfully, when they got upstairs:

'Why, the fact is, Captain Cuttle,' said Walter, sitting down, 'I was afraid you would have gone out, and I want to benefit by your friendly counsel.'

'So you shall,' said the Captain; 'what'll you take?'

'I want to take your opinion, Captain Cuttle,' returned Walter, smiling. 'That's the only thing for me.'

'Come on then,' said the Captain. 'With a will, my lad!'

Walter related to him what had happened; and the difficulty in which he felt respecting his Uncle, and the relief it would be to him if Captain Cuttle, in his kindness, would help him to smooth it away; Captain Cuttle's infinite consternation and astonishment at the prospect unfolded to him, gradually swallowing that gentleman up, until it left his face quite vacant, and the suit of blue, the glazed hat, and the hook, apparently without an owner.

'You see, Captain Cuttle,' pursued Walter, 'for myself, I am young, as Mr Dombey said, and not to be considered. I am to fight my way through the world, I know; but there are two points I was thinking, as I came along, that I should be very particular about, in respect to my Uncle. I don't mean to say that I deserve to be the pride and delight of his life—you believe me, I know—but I am. Now, don't you think I am?'

The Captain seemed to make an endeavour to rise from the depths of his astonishment, and get back to his face; but the effort being ineffectual, the glazed hat merely nodded with a mute, unutterable meaning.

'If I live and have my health,' said Walter, 'and I am not afraid of that, still, when I leave England I can hardly hope to see my Uncle again. He is old, Captain Cuttle; and besides, his life is a life of custom—'

'Steady, Wal'r! Of a want of custom?' said the Captain, suddenly reappearing.

'Too true,' returned Walter, shaking his head: 'but I meant a life of habit, Captain Cuttle—that sort of custom. And if (as you very truly said, I am sure) he would have died the sooner for the loss of the stock, and all those objects to which he has been accustomed for so many years, don't you think he might die a little sooner for the loss of—'

'Of his Nevy,' interposed the Captain. 'Right!'

'Well then,' said Walter, trying to speak gaily, 'we must do our best to make him believe that the separation is but a temporary one, after all; but as I know better, or dread that I know better, Captain Cuttle, and as I have so many reasons for regarding him with affection, and duty, and honour, I am afraid I should make but a very poor hand at that, if I tried to persuade him of it. That's my great reason for wishing you to break it out to him; and that's the first point.'

'Keep her off a point or so!' observed the Captain, in a comtemplative voice.

'What did you say, Captain Cuttle?' inquired Walter.

'Stand by!' returned the Captain, thoughtfully.

Walter paused to ascertain if the Captain had any particular information to add to this, but as he said no more, went on.

'Now, the second point, Captain Cuttle. I am sorry to say, I am not a favourite with Mr Dombey. I have always tried to do my best, and I have always done it; but he does not like me. He can't help his likings and dislikings, perhaps. I say nothing of that. I only say that I am certain he does not like me. He does not send me to this post as a good one; he disclaims to represent it as being better than it is; and I doubt very much if it will ever lead me to advancement in the House—whether it does not, on the contrary, dispose of me for ever, and put me out of the way. Now, we must say nothing of this to my Uncle, Captain Cuttle, but must make it out to be as favourable and promising as we can; and when I tell you what it really is, I only do so, that in case any means should ever arise of lending me a hand, so far off, I may have one friend at home who knows my real situation.

'Wal'r, my boy,' replied the Captain, 'in the Proverbs of Solomon you will find the following words, "May we never want a friend in need, nor a bottle to give him!" When found, make a note of.'

Here the Captain stretched out his hand to Walter, with an air of downright good faith that spoke volumes; at the same time repeating (for he felt proud of the accuracy and pointed application of his quotation), 'When found, make a note of.'

'Captain Cuttle,' said Walter, taking the immense fist extended to him by the Captain in both his hands, which it completely filled, next to my Uncle Sol, I love you. There is no one on earth in whom I can more safely trust, I am sure. As to the mere going away, Captain Cuttle, I don't care for that; why should I care for that! If I were free to seek my own fortune—if I were free to go as a common sailor—if I were free to venture on my own account to the farthest end of the world—I would gladly go! I would have gladly gone, years ago, and taken my chance of what might come of it. But it was against my Uncle's wishes, and against the plans he had formed for me; and there was an end of that. But what I feel, Captain Cuttle, is that we have been a little mistaken all along, and that, so far as any improvement in my prospects is concerned, I am no better off now than I was when I first entered Dombey's House—perhaps a little worse, for the House may have been kindly inclined towards me then, and it certainly is not now.'

'Turn again, Whittington,' muttered the disconsolate Captain, after looking at Walter for some time.

'Ay,' replied Walter, laughing, 'and turn a great many times, too, Captain Cuttle, I'm afraid, before such fortune as his ever turns up again. Not that I complain,' he added, in his lively, animated, energetic way. 'I have nothing to complain of. I am provided for. I can live. When I leave my Uncle, I leave him to you; and I can leave him to no one better, Captain Cuttle. I haven't told you all this because I despair, not I; it's to convince you that I can't pick and choose in Dombey's House, and that where I am sent, there I must go, and what I am offered, that I must take. It's better for my Uncle that I should be sent away; for Mr Dombey is a valuable friend to him, as he proved himself, you know when, Captain Cuttle; and I am persuaded he won't be less valuable when he hasn't me there, every day, to awaken his dislike. So hurrah for the West Indies, Captain Cuttle! How does that tune go that the sailors sing?

'For the Port of Barbados, Boys!
Cheerily!
Leaving old England behind us, Boys!
Cheerily!' Here the Captain roared in chorus—
'Oh cheerily, cheerily!
Oh cheer-i-ly!'

The last line reaching the quick ears of an ardent skipper not quite sober, who lodged opposite, and who instantly sprung out of bed, threw up his window, and joined in, across the street, at the top of his voice, produced a fine effect. When it was impossible to sustain the concluding note any longer, the skipper bellowed forth a terrific 'ahoy!' intended in part as a friendly greeting, and in part to show that he was not at all breathed. That done, he shut down his window, and went to bed again.

'And now, Captain Cuttle,' said Walter, handing him the blue coat and waistcoat, and bustling very much, 'if you'll come and break the news to Uncle Sol (which he ought to have known, days upon days ago, by rights), I'll leave you at the door, you know, and walk about until the afternoon.'

The Captain, however, scarcely appeared to relish the commission, or to be by any means confident of his powers of executing it. He had arranged the future life and adventures of Walter so very differently, and so entirely to his own satisfaction; he had felicitated himself so often on the sagacity and foresight displayed in that arrangement, and had found it so complete and perfect in all its parts; that to suffer it to go to pieces all at once, and even to assist in breaking it up, required a great effort of his resolution. The Captain, too, found it difficult to unload his old ideas upon the subject, and to take a perfectly new cargo on board, with that rapidity which the circumstances required, or without jumbling and confounding the two. Consequently, instead of putting on his coat and waistcoat with anything like the impetuosity that could alone have kept pace with Walter's mood, he declined to invest himself with those garments at all at present; and informed Walter that on such a serious matter, he must be allowed to 'bite his nails a bit'.

'It's an old habit of mine, Wal'r,' said the Captain, 'any time these fifty year. When you see Ned Cuttle bite his nails, Wal'r, then you may know that Ned Cuttle's aground.'

Thereupon the Captain put his iron hook between his teeth, as if it were a hand; and with an air of wisdom and profundity that was the very concentration and sublimation of all philosophical reflection and grave inquiry, applied himself to the consideration of the subject in its various branches.

'There's a friend of mine,' murmured the Captain, in an absent manner, 'but he's at present coasting round to Whitby, that would deliver such an opinion on this subject, or any other that could be named, as would give Parliament six and beat 'em. Been knocked overboard, that man,' said the Captain, 'twice, and none the worse for it. Was beat in his apprenticeship, for three weeks (off and on), about the head with a ring-bolt. And yet a clearer-minded man don't walk.'

Despite of his respect for Captain Cuttle, Walter could not help inwardly rejoicing at the absence of this sage, and devoutly hoping that his limpid intellect might not be brought to bear on his difficulties until they were quite settled.

'If you was to take and show that man the buoy at the Nore,' said Captain Cuttle in the same tone, 'and ask him his opinion of it, Wal'r, he'd give you an opinion that was no more like that buoy than your Uncle's buttons are. There ain't a man that walks—certainly not on two legs—that can come near him. Not near him!'

'What's his name, Captain Cuttle?' inquired Walter, determined to be interested in the Captain's friend.

'His name's Bunsby, said the Captain. 'But Lord, it might be anything for the matter of that, with such a mind as his!'

The exact idea which the Captain attached to this concluding piece of praise, he did not further elucidate; neither did Walter seek to draw it forth. For on his beginning to review, with the vivacity natural to himself and to his situation, the leading points in his own affairs, he soon discovered that the Captain had relapsed into his former profound state of mind; and that while he eyed him steadfastly from beneath his bushy eyebrows, he evidently neither saw nor heard him, but remained immersed in cogitation.

In fact, Captain Cuttle was labouring with such great designs, that far from being aground, he soon got off into the deepest of water, and could find no bottom to his penetration. By degrees it became perfectly plain to the Captain that there was some mistake here; that it was undoubtedly much more likely to be Walter's mistake than his; that if there were really any West India scheme afoot, it was a very different one from what Walter, who was young and rash, supposed; and could only be some new device for making his fortune with unusual celerity. 'Or if there should be any little hitch between 'em,' thought the Captain, meaning between Walter and Mr Dombey, 'it only wants a word in season from a friend of both parties, to set it right and smooth, and make all taut again.' Captain Cuttle's deduction from these considerations was, that as he already enjoyed the pleasure of knowing Mr Dombey, from having spent a very agreeable half-hour in his company at Brighton (on the morning when they borrowed the money); and that, as a couple of men of the world, who understood each other, and were mutually disposed to make things comfortable, could easily arrange any little difficulty of this sort, and come at the real facts; the friendly thing for him to do would be, without saying anything about it to Walter at present, just to step up to Mr Dombey's house—say to the servant 'Would ye be so good, my lad, as report Cap'en Cuttle here?'—meet Mr Dombey in a confidential spirit—hook him by the button-hole—talk it over—make it all right—and come away triumphant!

As these reflections presented themselves to the Captain's mind, and by slow degrees assumed this shape and form, his visage cleared like a doubtful morning when it gives place to a bright noon. His eyebrows, which had been in the highest degree portentous, smoothed their rugged bristling aspect, and became serene; his eyes, which had been nearly closed in the severity of his mental exercise, opened freely; a smile which had been at first but three specks—one at the right-hand corner of his mouth, and one at the corner of each eye—gradually overspread his whole face, and, rippling up into his forehead, lifted the glazed hat: as if that too had been aground with Captain Cuttle, and were now, like him, happily afloat again.

Finally, the Captain left off biting his nails, and said, 'Now, Wal'r, my boy, you may help me on with them slops.' By which the Captain meant his coat and waistcoat.

Walter little imagined why the Captain was so particular in the arrangement of his cravat, as to twist the pendent ends into a sort of pigtail, and pass them through a massive gold ring with a picture of a tomb upon it, and a neat iron railing, and a tree, in memory of some deceased friend. Nor why the Captain pulled up his shirt-collar to the utmost limits allowed by the Irish linen below, and by so doing decorated himself with a complete pair of blinkers; nor why he changed his shoes, and put on an unparalleled pair of ankle-jacks, which he only wore on extraordinary occasions. The Captain being at length attired to his own complete satisfaction, and having glanced at himself from head to foot in a shaving-glass which he removed from a nail for that purpose, took up his knotted stick, and said he was ready.

The Captain's walk was more complacent than usual when they got out into the street; but this Walter supposed to be the effect of the ankle-jacks, and took little heed of. Before they had gone very far, they encountered a woman selling flowers; when the Captain stopping short, as if struck by a happy idea, made a purchase of the largest bundle in her basket: a most glorious nosegay, fan-shaped, some two feet and a half round, and composed of all the jolliest-looking flowers that blow.

Armed with this little token which he designed for Mr Dombey, Captain Cuttle walked on with Walter until they reached the Instrument-maker's door, before which they both paused.

'You're going in?' said Walter.

'Yes,' returned the Captain, who felt that Walter must be got rid of before he proceeded any further, and that he had better time his projected visit somewhat later in the day.

'And you won't forget anything?'

'No,' returned the Captain.

'I'll go upon my walk at once,' said Walter, 'and then I shall be out of the way, Captain Cuttle.'

'Take a good long 'un, my lad!' replied the Captain, calling after him. Walter waved his hand in assent, and went his way.

His way was nowhere in particular; but he thought he would go out into the fields, where he could reflect upon the unknown life before him, and resting under some tree, ponder quietly. He knew no better fields than those near Hampstead, and no better means of getting at them than by passing Mr Dombey's house.

It was as stately and as dark as ever, when he went by and glanced up at its frowning front. The blinds were all pulled down, but the upper windows stood wide open, and the pleasant air stirring those curtains and waving them to and fro was the only sign of animation in the whole exterior. Walter walked softly as he passed, and was glad when he had left the house a door or two behind.

He looked back then; with the interest he had always felt for the place since the adventure of the lost child, years ago; and looked especially at those upper windows. While he was thus engaged, a chariot drove to the door, and a portly gentleman in black, with a heavy watch-chain, alighted, and went in. When he afterwards remembered this gentleman and his equipage together, Walter had no doubt be was a physician; and then he wondered who was ill; but the discovery did not occur to him until he had walked some distance, thinking listlessly of other things.

Though still, of what the house had suggested to him; for Walter pleased himself with thinking that perhaps the time might come, when the beautiful child who was his old friend and had always been so grateful to him and so glad to see him since, might interest her brother in his behalf and influence his fortunes for the better. He liked to imagine this—more, at that moment, for the pleasure of imagining her continued remembrance of him, than for any worldly profit he might gain: but another and more sober fancy whispered to him that if he were alive then, he would be beyond the sea and forgotten; she married, rich, proud, happy. There was no more reason why she should remember him with any interest in such an altered state of things, than any plaything she ever had. No, not so much.

Yet Walter so idealised the pretty child whom he had found wandering in the rough streets, and so identified her with her innocent gratitude of that night and the simplicity and truth of its expression, that he blushed for himself as a libeller when he argued that she could ever grow proud. On the other hand, his meditations were of that fantastic order that it seemed hardly less libellous in him to imagine her grown a woman: to think of her as anything but the same artless, gentle, winning little creature, that she had been in the days of Good Mrs Brown. In a word, Walter found out that to reason with himself about Florence at all, was to become very unreasonable indeed; and that he could do no better than preserve her image in his mind as something precious, unattainable, unchangeable, and indefinite—indefinite in all but its power of giving him pleasure, and restraining him like an angel's hand from anything unworthy.

It was a long stroll in the fields that Walter took that day, listening to the birds, and the Sunday bells, and the softened murmur of the town—breathing sweet scents; glancing sometimes at the dim horizon beyond which his voyage and his place of destination lay; then looking round on the green English grass and the home landscape. But he hardly once thought, even of going away, distinctly; and seemed to put off reflection idly, from hour to hour, and from minute to minute, while he yet went on reflecting all the time.

Walter had left the fields behind him, and was plodding homeward in the same abstracted mood, when he heard a shout from a man, and then a woman's voice calling to him loudly by name. Turning quickly in his surprise, he saw that a hackney-coach, going in the contrary direction, had stopped at no great distance; that the coachman was looking back from his box and making signals to him with his whip; and that a young woman inside was leaning out of the window, and beckoning with immense energy. Running up to this coach, he found that the young woman was Miss Nipper, and that Miss Nipper was in such a flutter as to be almost beside herself.

'Staggs's Gardens, Mr Walter!' said Miss Nipper; 'if you please, oh do!'

'Eh?' cried Walter; 'what is the matter?'

'Oh, Mr Walter, Staggs's Gardens, if you please!' said Susan.

'There!' cried the coachman, appealing to Walter, with a sort of exalting despair; 'that's the way the young lady's been a goin' on for up'ards of a mortal hour, and me continivally backing out of no thoroughfares, where she would drive up. I've had a many fares in this coach, first and last, but never such a fare as her.'

'Do you want to go to Staggs's Gardens, Susan?' inquired Walter.

'Ah! She wants to go there! WHERE IS IT?' growled the coachman.

'I don't know where it is!' exclaimed Susan, wildly. 'Mr Walter, I was there once myself, along with Miss Floy and our poor darling Master Paul, on the very day when you found Miss Floy in the City, for we lost her coming home, Mrs Richards and me, and a mad bull, and Mrs Richards's eldest, and though I went there afterwards, I can't remember where it is, I think it's sunk into the ground. Oh, Mr Walter, don't desert me, Staggs's Gardens, if you please! Miss Floy's darling—all our darlings—little, meek, meek Master Paul! Oh Mr Walter!'

'Good God!' cried Walter. 'Is he very ill?'

'The pretty flower!' cried Susan, wringing her hands, 'has took the fancy that he'd like to see his old nurse, and I've come to bring her to his bedside, Mrs Staggs, of Polly Toodle's Gardens, someone pray!'

Greatly moved by what he heard, and catching Susan's earnestness immediately, Walter, now that he understood the nature of her errand, dashed into it with such ardour that the coachman had enough to do to follow closely as he ran before, inquiring here and there and everywhere, the way to Staggs's Gardens.

There was no such place as Staggs's Gardens. It had vanished from the earth. Where the old rotten summer-houses once had stood, palaces now reared their heads, and granite columns of gigantic girth opened a vista to the railway world beyond. The miserable waste ground, where the refuse-matter had been heaped of yore, was swallowed up and gone; and in its frowsy stead were tiers of warehouses, crammed with rich goods and costly merchandise. The old by-streets now swarmed with passengers and vehicles of every kind: the new streets that had stopped disheartened in the mud and waggon-ruts, formed towns within themselves, originating wholesome comforts and conveniences belonging to themselves, and never tried nor thought of until they sprung into existence. Bridges that had led to nothing, led to villas, gardens, churches, healthy public walks. The carcasses of houses, and beginnings of new thoroughfares, had started off upon the line at steam's own speed, and shot away into the country in a monster train.'

As to the neighbourhood which had hesitated to acknowledge the railroad in its straggling days, that had grown wise and penitent, as any Christian might in such a case, and now boasted of its powerful and prosperous relation. There were railway patterns in its drapers' shops, and railway journals in the windows of its newsmen. There were railway hotels, office-houses, lodging-houses, boarding-houses; railway plans, maps, views, wrappers, bottles, sandwich-boxes, and time-tables; railway hackney-coach and stands; railway omnibuses, railway streets and buildings, railway hangers-on and parasites, and flatterers out of all calculation. There was even railway time observed in clocks, as if the sun itself had given in. Among the vanquished was the master chimney-sweeper, whilom incredulous at Staggs's Gardens, who now lived in a stuccoed house three stories high, and gave himself out, with golden flourishes upon a varnished board, as contractor for the cleansing of railway chimneys by machinery.

To and from the heart of this great change, all day and night, throbbing currents rushed and returned incessantly like its life's blood. Crowds of people and mountains of goods, departing and arriving scores upon scores of times in every four-and-twenty hours, produced a fermentation in the place that was always in action. The very houses seemed disposed to pack up and take trips. Wonderful Members of Parliament, who, little more than twenty years before, had made themselves merry with the wild railroad theories of engineers, and given them the liveliest rubs in cross-examination, went down into the north with their watches in their hands, and sent on messages before by the electric telegraph, to say that they were coming. Night and day the conquering engines rumbled at their distant work, or, advancing smoothly to their journey's end, and gliding like tame dragons into the allotted corners grooved out to the inch for their reception, stood bubbling and trembling there, making the walls quake, as if they were dilating with the secret knowledge of great powers yet unsuspected in them, and strong purposes not yet achieved.

But Staggs's Gardens had been cut up root and branch. Oh woe the day when 'not a rood of English ground'—laid out in Staggs's Gardens—is secure!

At last, after much fruitless inquiry, Walter, followed by the coach and Susan, found a man who had once resided in that vanished land, and who was no other than the master sweep before referred to, grown stout, and knocking a double knock at his own door. He knowed Toodle, he said, well. Belonged to the Railroad, didn't he?

'Yes' sir, yes!' cried Susan Nipper from the coach window.

Where did he live now? hastily inquired Walter.

He lived in the Company's own Buildings, second turning to the right, down the yard, cross over, and take the second on the right again. It was number eleven; they couldn't mistake it; but if they did, they had only to ask for Toodle, Engine Fireman, and any one would show them which was his house. At this unexpected stroke of success Susan Nipper dismounted from the coach with all speed, took Walter's arm, and set off at a breathless pace on foot; leaving the coach there to await their return.

'Has the little boy been long ill, Susan?' inquired Walter, as they hurried on.

'Ailing for a deal of time, but no one knew how much,' said Susan; adding, with excessive sharpness, 'Oh, them Blimbers!'

'Blimbers?' echoed Walter.

'I couldn't forgive myself at such a time as this, Mr Walter,' said Susan, 'and when there's so much serious distress to think about, if I rested hard on anyone, especially on them that little darling Paul speaks well of, but I may wish that the family was set to work in a stony soil to make new roads, and that Miss Blimber went in front, and had the pickaxe!'

Miss Nipper then took breath, and went on faster than before, as if this extraordinary aspiration had relieved her. Walter, who had by this time no breath of his own to spare, hurried along without asking any more questions; and they soon, in their impatience, burst in at a little door and came into a clean parlour full of children.

'Where's Mrs Richards?' exclaimed Susan Nipper, looking round. 'Oh Mrs Richards, Mrs Richards, come along with me, my dear creetur!'

'Why, if it ain't Susan!' cried Polly, rising with her honest face and motherly figure from among the group, in great surprise.

'Yes, Mrs Richards, it's me,' said Susan, 'and I wish it wasn't, though I may not seem to flatter when I say so, but little Master Paul is very ill, and told his Pa today that he would like to see the face of his old nurse, and him and Miss Floy hope you'll come along with me—and Mr Walter, Mrs Richards—forgetting what is past, and do a kindness to the sweet dear that is withering away. Oh, Mrs Richards, withering away!' Susan Nipper crying, Polly shed tears to see her, and to hear what she had said; and all the children gathered round (including numbers of new babies); and Mr Toodle, who had just come home from Birmingham, and was eating his dinner out of a basin, laid down his knife and fork, and put on his wife's bonnet and shawl for her, which were hanging up behind the door; then tapped her on the back; and said, with more fatherly feeling than eloquence, 'Polly! cut away!'

So they got back to the coach, long before the coachman expected them; and Walter, putting Susan and Mrs Richards inside, took his seat on the box himself that there might be no more mistakes, and deposited them safely in the hall of Mr Dombey's house—where, by the bye, he saw a mighty nosegay lying, which reminded him of the one Captain Cuttle had purchased in his company that morning. He would have lingered to know more of the young invalid, or waited any length of time to see if he could render the least service; but, painfully sensible that such conduct would be looked upon by Mr Dombey as presumptuous and forward, he turned slowly, sadly, anxiously, away.

He had not gone five minutes' walk from the door, when a man came running after him, and begged him to return. Walter retraced his steps as quickly as he could, and entered the gloomy house with a sorrowful foreboding.

CHAPTER 16. What the Waves were always saying

Paul had never risen from his little bed. He lay there, listening to the noises in the street, quite tranquilly; not caring much how the time went, but watching it and watching everything about him with observing eyes.

When the sunbeams struck into his room through the rustling blinds, and quivered on the opposite wall like golden water, he knew that evening was coming on, and that the sky was red and beautiful. As the reflection died away, and a gloom went creeping up the wall, he watched it deepen, deepen, deepen, into night. Then he thought how the long streets were dotted with lamps, and how the peaceful stars were shining overhead. His fancy had a strange tendency to wander to the river, which he knew was flowing through the great city; and now he thought how black it was, and how deep it would look, reflecting the hosts of stars—and more than all, how steadily it rolled away to meet the sea.

As it grew later in the night, and footsteps in the street became so rare that he could hear them coming, count them as they passed, and lose them in the hollow distance, he would lie and watch the many-coloured ring about the candle, and wait patiently for day. His only trouble was, the swift and rapid river. He felt forced, sometimes, to try to stop it—to stem it with his childish hands—or choke its way with sand—and when he saw it coming on, resistless, he cried out! But a word from Florence, who was always at his side, restored him to himself; and leaning his poor head upon her breast, he told Floy of his dream, and smiled.

When day began to dawn again, he watched for the sun; and when its cheerful light began to sparkle in the room, he pictured to himself—pictured! he saw—the high church towers rising up into the morning sky, the town reviving, waking, starting into life once more, the river glistening as it rolled (but rolling fast as ever), and the country bright with dew. Familiar sounds and cries came by degrees into the street below; the servants in the house were roused and busy; faces looked in at the door, and voices asked his attendants softly how he was. Paul always answered for himself, 'I am better. I am a great deal better, thank you! Tell Papa so!'

By little and little, he got tired of the bustle of the day, the noise of carriages and carts, and people passing and repassing; and would fall asleep, or be troubled with a restless and uneasy sense again—the child could hardly tell whether this were in his sleeping or his waking moments—of that rushing river. 'Why, will it never stop, Floy?' he would sometimes ask her. 'It is bearing me away, I think!'

But Floy could always soothe and reassure him; and it was his daily delight to make her lay her head down on his pillow, and take some rest.

'You are always watching me, Floy, let me watch you, now!' They would prop him up with cushions in a corner of his bed, and there he would recline the while she lay beside him: bending forward oftentimes to kiss her, and whispering to those who were near that she was tired, and how she had sat up so many nights beside him.

Thus, the flush of the day, in its heat and light, would gradually decline; and again the golden water would be dancing on the wall.

He was visited by as many as three grave doctors—they used to assemble downstairs, and come up together—and the room was so quiet, and Paul was so observant of them (though he never asked of anybody what they said), that he even knew the difference in the sound of their watches. But his interest centred in Sir Parker Peps, who always took his seat on the side of the bed. For Paul had heard them say long ago, that that gentleman had been with his Mama when she clasped Florence in her arms, and died. And he could not forget it, now. He liked him for it. He was not afraid.

The people round him changed as unaccountably as on that first night at Doctor Blimber's—except Florence; Florence never changed—and what had been Sir Parker Peps, was now his father, sitting with his head upon his hand. Old Mrs Pipchin dozing in an easy chair, often changed to Miss Tox, or his aunt; and Paul was quite content to shut his eyes again, and see what happened next, without emotion. But this figure with its head upon its hand returned so often, and remained so long, and sat so still and solemn, never speaking, never being spoken to, and rarely lifting up its face, that Paul began to wonder languidly, if it were real; and in the night-time saw it sitting there, with fear.

'Floy!' he said. 'What is that?'

'Where, dearest?'

'There! at the bottom of the bed.'

'There's nothing there, except Papa!'

The figure lifted up its head, and rose, and coming to the bedside, said:

'My own boy! Don't you know me?'

Paul looked it in the face, and thought, was this his father? But the face so altered to his thinking, thrilled while he gazed, as if it were in pain; and before he could reach out both his hands to take it between them, and draw it towards him, the figure turned away quickly from the little bed, and went out at the door.

Paul looked at Florence with a fluttering heart, but he knew what she was going to say, and stopped her with his face against her lips. The next time he observed the figure sitting at the bottom of the bed, he called to it.

'Don't be sorry for me, dear Papa! Indeed I am quite happy!'

His father coming and bending down to him—which he did quickly, and without first pausing by the bedside—Paul held him round the neck, and repeated those words to him several times, and very earnestly; and Paul never saw him in his room again at any time, whether it were day or night, but he called out, 'Don't be sorry for me! Indeed I am quite happy!' This was the beginning of his always saying in the morning that he was a great deal better, and that they were to tell his father so.

How many times the golden water danced upon the wall; how many nights the dark, dark river rolled towards the sea in spite of him; Paul never counted, never sought to know. If their kindness, or his sense of it, could have increased, they were more kind, and he more grateful every day; but whether they were many days or few, appeared of little moment now, to the gentle boy.

One night he had been thinking of his mother, and her picture in the drawing-room downstairs, and thought she must have loved sweet Florence better than his father did, to have held her in her arms when she felt that she was dying—for even he, her brother, who had such dear love for her, could have no greater wish than that. The train of thought suggested to him to inquire if he had ever seen his mother? for he could not remember whether they had told him, yes or no, the river running very fast, and confusing his mind.

'Floy, did I ever see Mama?'

'No, darling, why?'

'Did I ever see any kind face, like Mama's, looking at me when I was a baby, Floy?'

He asked, incredulously, as if he had some vision of a face before him.

'Oh yes, dear!'

'Whose, Floy?'

'Your old nurse's. Often.'

'And where is my old nurse?' said Paul. 'Is she dead too? Floy, are we all dead, except you?'

There was a hurry in the room, for an instant—longer, perhaps; but it seemed no more—then all was still again; and Florence, with her face quite colourless, but smiling, held his head upon her arm. Her arm trembled very much.

'Show me that old nurse, Floy, if you please!'

'She is not here, darling. She shall come to-morrow.'

'Thank you, Floy!'

Paul closed his eyes with those words, and fell asleep. When he awoke, the sun was high, and the broad day was clear and He lay a little, looking at the windows, which were open, and the curtains rustling in the air, and waving to and fro: then he said, 'Floy, is it tomorrow? Is she come?'

Someone seemed to go in quest of her. Perhaps it was Susan. Paul thought he heard her telling him when he had closed his eyes again, that she would soon be back; but he did not open them to see. She kept her word—perhaps she had never been away—but the next thing that happened was a noise of footsteps on the stairs, and then Paul woke—woke mind and body—and sat upright in his bed. He saw them now about him. There was no grey mist before them, as there had been sometimes in the night. He knew them every one, and called them by their names.

'And who is this? Is this my old nurse?' said the child, regarding with a radiant smile, a figure coming in.

Yes, yes. No other stranger would have shed those tears at sight of him, and called him her dear boy, her pretty boy, her own poor blighted child. No other woman would have stooped down by his bed, and taken up his wasted hand, and put it to her lips and breast, as one who had some right to fondle it. No other woman would have so forgotten everybody there but him and Floy, and been so full of tenderness and pity.

'Floy! this is a kind good face!' said Paul. 'I am glad to see it again. Don't go away, old nurse! Stay here.'

His senses were all quickened, and he heard a name he knew.

'Who was that, who said "Walter"?' he asked, looking round. 'Someone said Walter. Is he here? I should like to see him very much.'

Nobody replied directly; but his father soon said to Susan, 'Call him back, then: let him come up!' Alter a short pause of expectation, during which he looked with smiling interest and wonder, on his nurse, and saw that she had not forgotten Floy, Walter was brought into the room. His open face and manner, and his cheerful eyes, had always made him a favourite with Paul; and when Paul saw him' he stretched Out his hand, and said 'Good-bye!'

'Good-bye, my child!' said Mrs Pipchin, hurrying to his bed's head. 'Not good-bye?'

For an instant, Paul looked at her with the wistful face with which he had so often gazed upon her in his corner by the fire. 'Yes,' he said placidly, 'good-bye! Walter dear, good-bye!'—turning his head to where he stood, and putting out his hand again. 'Where is Papa?'

He felt his father's breath upon his cheek, before the words had parted from his lips.

'Remember Walter, dear Papa,' he whispered, looking in his face. 'Remember Walter. I was fond of Walter!' The feeble hand waved in the air, as if it cried 'good-bye!' to Walter once again.

'Now lay me down,' he said, 'and, Floy, come close to me, and let me see you!'

Sister and brother wound their arms around each other, and the golden light came streaming in, and fell upon them, locked together.

'How fast the river runs, between its green banks and the rushes, 'Floy! But it's very near the sea. I hear the waves! They always said so!'

Presently he told her the motion of the boat upon the stream was lulling him to rest. How green the banks were now, how bright the flowers growing on them, and how tall the rushes! Now the boat was out at sea, but gliding smoothly on. And now there was a shore before him. Who stood on the bank—!

He put his hands together, as he had been used to do at his prayers. He did not remove his arms to do it; but they saw him fold them so, behind her neck.

'Mama is like you, Floy. I know her by the face! But tell them that the print upon the stairs at school is not divine enough. The light about the head is shining on me as I go!'

The golden ripple on the wall came back again, and nothing else stirred in the room. The old, old fashion! The fashion that came in with our first garments, and will last unchanged until our race has run its course, and the wide firmament is rolled up like a scroll. The old, old fashion—Death!

Oh thank GOD, all who see it, for that older fashion yet, of Immortality! And look upon us, angels of young children, with regards not quite estranged, when the swift river bears us to the ocean!

'Dear me, dear me! To think,' said Miss Tox, bursting out afresh that night, as if her heart were broken, 'that Dombey and Son should be a Daughter after all!'

CHAPTER 17. Captain Cuttle does a little Business for the Young People

Captain Cuttle, in the exercise of that surprising talent for deep-laid and unfathomable scheming, with which (as is not unusual in men of transparent simplicity) he sincerely believed himself to be endowed by nature, had gone to Mr Dombey's house on the eventful Sunday, winking all the way as a vent for his superfluous sagacity, and had presented himself in the full lustre of the ankle-jacks before the eyes of Towlinson. Hearing from that individual, to his great concern, of the impending calamity, Captain Cuttle, in his delicacy, sheered off again confounded; merely handing in the nosegay as a small mark of his solicitude, and leaving his respectful compliments for the family in general, which he accompanied with an expression of his hope that they would lay their heads well to the wind under existing circumstances, and a friendly intimation that he would 'look up again' to- morrow.

The Captain's compliments were never heard of any more. The Captain's nosegay, after lying in the hall all night, was swept into the dust-bin next morning; and the Captain's sly arrangement, involved in one catastrophe with greater hopes and loftier designs, was crushed to pieces. So, when an avalanche bears down a mountain-forest, twigs and bushes suffer with the trees, and all perish together.

When Walter returned home on the Sunday evening from his long walk, and its memorable close, he was too much occupied at first by the tidings he had to give them, and by the emotions naturally awakened in his breast by the scene through which he had passed, to observe either that his Uncle was evidently unacquainted with the intelligence the Captain had undertaken to impart, or that the Captain made signals with his hook, warning him to avoid the subject. Not that the Captain's signals were calculated to have proved very comprehensible, however attentively observed; for, like those Chinese sages who are said in their conferences to write certain learned words in the air that are wholly impossible of pronunciation, the Captain made such waves and flourishes as nobody without a previous knowledge of his mystery, would have been at all likely to understand.

Captain Cuttle, however, becoming cognisant of what had happened, relinquished these attempts, as he perceived the slender chance that now existed of his being able to obtain a little easy chat with Mr Dombey before the period of Walter's departure. But in admitting to himself, with a disappointed and crestfallen countenance, that Sol Gills must be told, and that Walter must go—taking the case for the present as he found it, and not having it enlightened or improved beforehand by the knowing management of a friend—the Captain still felt an unabated confidence that he, Ned Cuttle, was the man for Mr Dombey; and that, to set Walter's fortunes quite square, nothing was wanted but that they two should come together. For the Captain never could forget how well he and Mr Dombey had got on at Brighton; with what nicety each of them had put in a word when it was wanted; how exactly they had taken one another's measure; nor how Ned Cuttle had pointed out that resources in the first extremity, and had brought the interview to the desired termination. On all these grounds the Captain soothed himself with thinking that though Ned Cuttle was forced by the pressure of events to 'stand by' almost useless for the present, Ned would fetch up with a wet sail in good time, and carry all before him.

Under the influence of this good-natured delusion, Captain Cuttle even went so far as to revolve in his own bosom, while he sat looking at Walter and listening with a tear on his shirt-collar to what he related, whether it might not be at once genteel and politic to give Mr Dombey a verbal invitation, whenever they should meet, to come and cut his mutton in Brig Place on some day of his own naming, and enter on the question of his young friend's prospects over a social glass. But the uncertain temper of Mrs MacStinger, and the possibility of her setting up her rest in the passage during such an entertainment, and there delivering some homily of an uncomplimentary nature, operated as a check on the Captain's hospitable thoughts, and rendered him timid of giving them encouragement.

One fact was quite clear to the Captain, as Walter, sitting thoughtfully over his untasted dinner, dwelt on all that had happened; namely, that however Walter's modesty might stand in the way of his perceiving it himself, he was, as one might say, a member of Mr Dombey's family. He had been, in his own person, connected with the incident he so pathetically described; he had been by name remembered and commended in close association with it; and his fortunes must have a particular interest in his employer's eyes. If the Captain had any lurking doubt whatever of his own conclusions, he had not the least doubt that they were good conclusions for the peace of mind of the Instrument-maker. Therefore he availed himself of so favourable a moment for breaking the West Indian intelligence to his friend, as a piece of extraordinary preferment; declaring that for his part he would freely give a hundred thousand pounds (if he had it) for Walter's gain in the long-run, and that he had no doubt such an investment would yield a handsome premium.

Solomon Gills was at first stunned by the communication, which fell upon the little back-parlour like a thunderbolt, and tore up the hearth savagely. But the Captain flashed such golden prospects before his dim sight: hinted so mysteriously at 'Whittingtonian consequences; laid such emphasis on what Walter had just now told them: and appealed to it so confidently as a corroboration of his predictions, and a great advance towards the realisation of the romantic legend of Lovely Peg: that he bewildered the old man. Walter, for his part, feigned to be so full of hope and ardour, and so sure of coming home again soon, and backed up the Captain with such expressive shakings of his head and rubbings of his hands, that Solomon, looking first at him then at Captain Cuttle, began to think he ought to be transported with joy.

'But I'm behind the time, you understand,' he observed in apology, passing his hand nervously down the whole row of bright buttons on his coat, and then up again, as if they were beads and he were telling them twice over: 'and I would rather have my dear boy here. It's an old-fashioned notion, I daresay. He was always fond of the sea He's'—and he looked wistfully at Walter—'he's glad to go.'

'Uncle Sol!' cried Walter, quickly, 'if you say that, I won't go. No, Captain Cuttle, I won't. If my Uncle thinks I could be glad to leave him, though I was going to be made Governor of all the Islands in the West Indies, that's enough. I'm a fixture.'

'Wal'r, my lad,' said the Captain. 'Steady! Sol Gills, take an observation of your nevy.

Following with his eyes the majestic action of the Captain's hook, the old man looked at Walter.

'Here is a certain craft,' said the Captain, with a magnificent sense of the allegory into which he was soaring, 'a-going to put out on a certain voyage. What name is wrote upon that craft indelibly? Is it The Gay? or,' said the

Captain, raising his voice as much as to say, observe the point of this, 'is it The Gills?'

'Ned,' said the old man, drawing Walter to his side, and taking his arm tenderly through his, 'I know. I know. Of course I know that Wally considers me more than himself always. That's in my mind. When I say he is glad to go, I mean I hope he is. Eh? look you, Ned and you too, Wally, my dear, this is new and unexpected to me; and I'm afraid my being behind the time, and poor, is at the bottom of it. Is it really good fortune for him, do you tell me, now?' said the old man, looking anxiously from one to the other. 'Really and truly? Is it? I can reconcile myself to almost anything that advances Wally, but I won't have Wally putting himself at any disadvantage for me, or keeping anything from me. You, Ned Cuttle!' said the old man, fastening on the Captain, to the manifest confusion of that diplomatist; 'are you dealing plainly by your old friend? Speak out, Ned Cuttle. Is there anything behind? Ought he to go? How do you know it first, and why?'

As it was a contest of affection and self-denial, Walter struck in with infinite effect, to the Captain's relief; and between them they tolerably reconciled old Sol Gills, by continued talking, to the project; or rather so confused him, that nothing, not even the pain of separation, was distinctly clear to his mind.

He had not much time to balance the matter; for on the very next day, Walter received from Mr Carker the Manager, the necessary credentials for his passage and outfit, together with the information that the Son and Heir would sail in a fortnight, or within a day or two afterwards at latest. In the hurry of preparation: which Walter purposely enhanced as much as possible: the old man lost what little self-possession he ever had; and so the time of departure drew on rapidly.

The Captain, who did not fail to make himself acquainted with all that passed, through inquiries of Walter from day to day, found the time still tending on towards his going away, without any occasion offering itself, or seeming likely to offer itself, for a better understanding of his position. It was after much consideration of this fact, and much pondering over such an unfortunate combination of circumstances, that a bright idea occurred to the Captain. Suppose he made a call on Mr Carker, and tried to find out from him how the land really lay!

Captain Cuttle liked this idea very much. It came upon him in a moment of inspiration, as he was smoking an early pipe in Brig Place after breakfast; and it was worthy of the tobacco. It would quiet his conscience, which was an honest one, and was made a little uneasy by what Walter had confided to him, and what Sol Gills had said; and it would be a deep, shrewd act of friendship. He would sound Mr Carker carefully, and say much or little, just as he read that gentleman's character, and discovered that they got on well together or the reverse.

Accordingly, without the fear of Walter before his eyes (who he knew was at home packing), Captain Cuttle again assumed his ankle-jacks and mourning brooch, and issued forth on this second expedition. He purchased no propitiatory nosegay on the present occasion, as he was going to a place of business; but he put a small sunflower in his button-hole to give himself an agreeable relish of the country; and with this, and the knobby stick, and the glazed hat, bore down upon the offices of Dombey and Son.

After taking a glass of warm rum-and-water at a tavern close by, to collect his thoughts, the Captain made a rush down the court, lest its good effects should evaporate, and appeared suddenly to Mr Perch.

'Matey,' said the Captain, in persuasive accents. 'One of your Governors is named Carker.' Mr Perch admitted it; but gave him to understand, as in official duty bound, that all his Governors were engaged, and never expected to be disengaged any more.

'Look'ee here, mate,' said the Captain in his ear; 'my name's Cap'en Cuttle.'

The Captain would have hooked Perch gently to him, but Mr Perch eluded the attempt; not so much in design, as in starting at the sudden thought that such a weapon unexpectedly exhibited to Mrs Perch might, in her then condition, be destructive to that lady's hopes.

'If you'll be so good as just report Cap'en Cuttle here, when you get a chance,' said the Captain, 'I'll wait.'

Saying which, the Captain took his seat on Mr Perch's bracket, and drawing out his handkerchief from the crown of the glazed hat which he jammed between his knees (without injury to its shape, for nothing human could bend it), rubbed his head well all over, and appeared refreshed. He subsequently arranged his hair with his hook, and sat looking round the office, contemplating the clerks with a serene respect.

The Captain's equanimity was so impenetrable, and he was altogether so mysterious a being, that Perch the messenger was daunted.

'What name was it you said?' asked Mr Perch, bending down over him as he sat on the bracket.

'Cap'en,' in a deep hoarse whisper.

'Yes,' said Mr Perch, keeping time with his head.

'Cuttle.'

'Oh!' said Mr Perch, in the same tone, for he caught it, and couldn't help it; the Captain, in his diplomacy, was so impressive. 'I'll see if he's disengaged now. I don't know. Perhaps he may be for a minute.'

'Ay, ay, my lad, I won't detain him longer than a minute,' said the Captain, nodding with all the weighty importance that he felt within him. Perch, soon returning, said, 'Will Captain Cuttle walk this way?'

Mr Carker the Manager, standing on the hearth-rug before the empty fireplace, which was ornamented with a castellated sheet of brown paper, looked at the Captain as he came in, with no very special encouragement.

'Mr Carker?' said Captain Cuttle.

'I believe so,' said Mr Carker, showing all his teeth.

The Captain liked his answering with a smile; it looked pleasant. 'You see,' began the Captain, rolling his eyes slowly round the little room, and taking in as much of it as his shirt-collar permitted; 'I'm a seafaring man myself, Mr Carker, and Wal'r, as is on your books here, is almost a son of mine.'

'Walter Gay?' said Mr Carker, showing all his teeth again.

'Wal'r Gay it is,' replied the Captain, 'right!' The Captain's manner expressed a warm approval of Mr Carker's quickness of perception. 'I'm a intimate friend of his and his Uncle's. Perhaps,' said the Captain, 'you may have heard your head Governor mention my name?—Captain Cuttle.'

'No!' said Mr Carker, with a still wider demonstration than before.

'Well,' resumed the Captain, 'I've the pleasure of his acquaintance. I waited upon him down on the Sussex coast there, with my young friend Wal'r, when—in short, when there was a little accommodation wanted.' The Captain nodded his head in a manner that was at once comfortable, easy, and expressive. 'You remember, I daresay?'

'I think,' said Mr Carker, 'I had the honour of arranging the business.'

'To be sure!' returned the Captain. 'Right again! you had. Now I've took the liberty of coming here—

'Won't you sit down?' said Mr Carker, smiling.

'Thank'ee,' returned the Captain, availing himself of the offer. 'A man does get more way upon himself, perhaps, in his conversation, when he sits down. Won't you take a cheer yourself?'

'No thank you,' said the Manager, standing, perhaps from the force of winter habit, with his back against the chimney-piece, and looking down upon the Captain with an eye in every tooth and gum. 'You have taken the liberty, you were going to say—though it's none—'

'Thank'ee kindly, my lad,' returned the Captain: 'of coming here, on account of my friend Wal'r. Sol Gills, his Uncle, is a man of science, and in science he may be considered a clipper; but he ain't what I should altogether call a able seaman—not man of practice. Wal'r is as trim a lad as ever stepped; but he's a little down by the head in one respect, and that is, modesty. Now what I should wish to put to you,' said the Captain, lowering his voice, and speaking in a kind of confidential growl, 'in a friendly way, entirely between you and me, and for my own private reckoning, 'till your head Governor has wore round a bit, and I can come alongside of him, is this—Is everything right and comfortable here, and is Wal'r out'ard bound with a pretty fair wind?'

'What do you think now, Captain Cuttle?' returned Carker, gathering up his skirts and settling himself in his position. 'You are a practical man; what do you think?'

The acuteness and the significance of the Captain's eye as he cocked it in reply, no words short of those unutterable Chinese words before referred to could describe.

'Come!' said the Captain, unspeakably encouraged, 'what do you say? Am I right or wrong?'

So much had the Captain expressed in his eye, emboldened and incited by Mr Carker's smiling urbanity, that he felt himself in as fair a condition to put the question, as if he had expressed his sentiments with the utmost elaboration.

'Right,' said Mr Carker, 'I have no doubt.'

'Out'ard bound with fair weather, then, I say,' cried Captain Cuttle.

Mr Carker smiled assent.

'Wind right astarn, and plenty of it,' pursued the Captain.

Mr Carker smiled assent again.

'Ay, ay!' said Captain Cuttle, greatly relieved and pleased. 'I know'd how she headed, well enough; I told Wal'r so. Thank'ee, thank'ee.'

'Gay has brilliant prospects,' observed Mr Carker, stretching his mouth wider yet: 'all the world before him.'

'All the world and his wife too, as the saying is,' returned the delighted Captain.

At the word 'wife' (which he had uttered without design), the Captain stopped, cocked his eye again, and putting the glazed hat on the top of the knobby stick, gave it a twirl, and looked sideways at his always smiling friend.

'I'd bet a gill of old Jamaica,' said the Captain, eyeing him attentively, 'that I know what you're a smiling at.'

Mr Carker took his cue, and smiled the more.

'It goes no farther?' said the Captain, making a poke at the door with the knobby stick to assure himself that it was shut.

'Not an inch,' said Mr Carker.

'You're thinking of a capital F perhaps?' said the Captain.

Mr Carker didn't deny it.

'Anything about a L,' said the Captain, 'or a O?'

Mr Carker still smiled.

'Am I right, again?' inquired the Captain in a whisper, with the scarlet circle on his forehead swelling in his triumphant joy.

Mr Carker, in reply, still smiling, and now nodding assent, Captain Cuttle rose and squeezed him by the hand, assuring him, warmly, that they were on the same tack, and that as for him (Cuttle) he had laid his course that way all along. 'He know'd her first,' said the Captain, with all the secrecy and gravity that the subject demanded, 'in an uncommon manner—you remember his finding her in the street when she was a'most a babby—he has liked her ever since, and she him, as much as two youngsters can. We've always said, Sol Gills and me, that they was cut out for each other.'

A cat, or a monkey, or a hyena, or a death's-head, could not have shown the Captain more teeth at one time, than Mr Carker showed him at this period of their interview.

'There's a general indraught that way,' observed the happy Captain. 'Wind and water sets in that direction, you see. Look at his being present t'other day!'

'Most favourable to his hopes,' said Mr Carker.

'Look at his being towed along in the wake of that day!' pursued the Captain. 'Why what can cut him adrift now?'

'Nothing,' replied Mr Carker.

'You're right again,' returned the Captain, giving his hand another squeeze. 'Nothing it is. So! steady! There's a son gone: pretty little creetur. Ain't there?'

'Yes, there's a son gone,' said the acquiescent Carker.

'Pass the word, and there's another ready for you,' quoth the Captain. 'Nevy of a scientific Uncle! Nevy of Sol Gills! Wal'r! Wal'r, as is already in your business! And'—said the Captain, rising gradually to a quotation he was preparing for a final burst, 'who—comes from Sol Gills's daily, to your business, and your buzzums.' The Captain's complacency as he gently jogged Mr Carker with his elbow, on concluding each of the foregoing short sentences, could be surpassed by nothing but the exultation with which he fell back and eyed him when he had finished this brilliant display of eloquence and sagacity; his great blue waistcoat heaving with the throes of such a masterpiece, and his nose in a state of violent inflammation from the same cause.

'Am I right?' said the Captain.

'Captain Cuttle,' said Mr Carker, bending down at the knees, for a moment, in an odd manner, as if he were falling together to hug the whole of himself at once, 'your views in reference to Walter Gay are thoroughly and accurately right. I understand that we speak together in confidence.

'Honour!' interposed the Captain. 'Not a word.'

'To him or anyone?' pursued the Manager.

Captain Cuttle frowned and shook his head.

'But merely for your own satisfaction and guidance—and guidance, of course,' repeated Mr Carker, 'with a view to your future proceedings.'

'Thank'ee kindly, I am sure,' said the Captain, listening with great attention.

'I have no hesitation in saying, that's the fact. You have hit the probabilities exactly.'

'And with regard to your head Governor,' said the Captain, 'why an interview had better come about nat'ral between us. There's time enough.'

Mr Carker, with his mouth from ear to ear, repeated, 'Time enough.' Not articulating the words, but bowing his head affably, and forming them with his tongue and lips.

'And as I know—it's what I always said—that Wal'r's in a way to make his fortune,' said the Captain.

'To make his fortune,' Mr Carker repeated, in the same dumb manner.

'And as Wal'r's going on this little voyage is, as I may say, in his day's work, and a part of his general expectations here,' said the Captain.

'Of his general expectations here,' assented Mr Carker, dumbly as before.

'Why, so long as I know that,' pursued the Captain, 'there's no hurry, and my mind's at ease.

Mr Carker still blandly assenting in the same voiceless manner, Captain Cuttle was strongly confirmed in his opinion that he was one of the most agreeable men he had ever met, and that even Mr Dombey might improve himself on such a model. With great heartiness, therefore, the Captain once again extended his enormous hand (not unlike an old block in colour), and gave him a grip that left upon his smoother flesh a proof impression of the chinks and crevices with which the Captain's palm was liberally tattooed.

'Farewell!' said the Captain. 'I ain't a man of many words, but I take it very kind of you to be so friendly, and above-board. You'll excuse me if I've been at all intruding, will you?' said the Captain.

'Not at all,' returned the other.

'Thank'ee. My berth ain't very roomy,' said the Captain, turning back again, 'but it's tolerably snug; and if you was to find yourself near Brig Place, number nine, at any time—will you make a note of it?—and would come upstairs, without minding what was said by the person at the door, I should be proud to see you.

With that hospitable invitation, the Captain said 'Good day!' and walked out and shut the door; leaving Mr Carker still reclining against the chimney-piece. In whose sly look and watchful manner; in whose false mouth, stretched but not laughing; in whose spotless cravat and very whiskers; even in whose silent passing of his soft hand over his white linen and his smooth face; there was something desperately cat-like.

The unconscious Captain walked out in a state of self-glorification that imparted quite a new cut to the broad blue suit. 'Stand by, Ned!' said the Captain to himself. 'You've done a little business for the youngsters today, my lad!'

In his exultation, and in his familiarity, present and prospective, with the House, the Captain, when he reached the outer office, could not refrain from rallying Mr Perch a little, and asking him whether he thought everybody was still engaged. But not to be bitter on a man who had done his duty, the Captain whispered in his ear, that if he felt disposed for a glass of rum-and-water, and would follow, he would be happy to bestow the same upon him.

Before leaving the premises, the Captain, somewhat to the astonishment of the clerks, looked round from a central point of view, and took a general survey of the officers part and parcel of a project in which his young friend was nearly interested. The strong-room excited his especial admiration; but, that he might not appear too particular, he limited himself to an approving glance, and, with a graceful recognition of the clerks as a body, that was full of politeness and patronage, passed out into the court. Being promptly joined by Mr Perch, he conveyed that gentleman to the tavern, and fulfilled his pledge—hastily, for Perch's time was precious.

'I'll give you for a toast,' said the Captain, 'Wal'r!'

'Who?' submitted Mr Perch.

'Wal'r!' repeated the Captain, in a voice of thunder.

Mr Perch, who seemed to remember having heard in infancy that there was once a poet of that name, made no objection; but he was much astonished at the Captain's coming into the City to propose a poet; indeed, if he had proposed to put a poet's statue up—say Shakespeare's for example—in a civic thoroughfare, he could hardly have done a greater outrage to Mr Perch's experience. On the whole, he was such a mysterious and incomprehensible character, that Mr Perch decided not to mention him to Mrs Perch at all, in case of giving rise to any disagreeable consequences.

Mysterious and incomprehensible, the Captain, with that lively sense upon him of having done a little business for the youngsters, remained all day, even to his most intimate friends; and but that Walter attributed his winks and grins, and other such pantomimic reliefs of himself, to his satisfaction in the success of their innocent deception upon old Sol Gills, he would assuredly have betrayed himself before night. As it was, however, he kept his own secret; and went home late from the Instrument-maker's house, wearing the glazed hat so much on one side, and carrying such a beaming expression in his eyes, that Mrs MacStinger (who might have been brought up at Doctor Blimber's, she was such a Roman matron) fortified herself, at the first glimpse of him, behind the open street door, and refused to come out to the contemplation of her blessed infants, until he was securely lodged in his own room.

CHAPTER 18. Father and Daughter

There is a hush through Mr Dombey's house. Servants gliding up and down stairs rustle, but make no sound of footsteps. They talk together constantly, and sit long at meals, making much of their meat and drink, and enjoying themselves after a grim unholy fashion. Mrs Wickam, with her eyes suffused with tears, relates melancholy anecdotes; and tells them how she always said at Mrs Pipchin's that it would be so, and takes more table-ale than usual, and is very sorry but sociable. Cook's state of mind is similar. She promises a little fry for supper, and struggles about equally against her feelings and the onions. Towlinson begins to think there's a fate in it, and wants to know if anybody can tell him of any good that ever came of living in a corner house. It seems to all of them as having happened a long time ago; though yet the child lies, calm and beautiful, upon his little bed.

After dark there come some visitors—noiseless visitors, with shoes of felt—who have been there before; and with them comes that bed of rest which is so strange a one for infant sleepers. All this time, the bereaved father has not been seen even by his attendant; for he sits in an inner corner of his own dark room when anyone is there, and never seems to move at other times, except to pace it to and fro. But in the morning it is whispered among the household that he was heard to go upstairs in the dead night, and that he stayed there—in the room—until the sun was shining.

At the offices in the City, the ground-glass windows are made more dim by shutters; and while the lighted lamps upon the desks are half extinguished by the day that wanders in, the day is half extinguished by the lamps, and an unusual gloom prevails. There is not much business done. The clerks are indisposed to work; and they make assignations to eat chops in the afternoon, and go up the river. Perch, the messenger, stays long upon his errands; and finds himself in bars of public-houses, invited thither by friends, and holding forth on the uncertainty of human affairs. He goes home to Ball's Pond earlier in the evening than usual, and treats Mrs Perch to a veal cutlet and Scotch ale. Mr Carker the Manager treats no one; neither is he treated; but alone in his own room he shows his teeth all day;

and it would seem that there is something gone from Mr Carker's path—some obstacle removed—which clears his way before him.

Now the rosy children living opposite to Mr Dombey's house, peep from their nursery windows down into the street; for there are four black horses at his door, with feathers on their heads; and feathers tremble on the carriage that they draw; and these, and an array of men with scarves and staves, attract a crowd. The juggler who was going to twirl the basin, puts his loose coat on again over his fine dress; and his trudging wife, one-sided with her heavy baby in her arms, loiters to see the company come out. But closer to her dingy breast she presses her baby, when the burden that is so easily carried is borne forth; and the youngest of the rosy children at the high window opposite, needs no restraining hand to check her in her glee, when, pointing with her dimpled finger, she looks into her nurse's face, and asks 'What's that?'

And now, among the knot of servants dressed in mourning, and the weeping women, Mr Dombey passes through the hall to the other carriage that is waiting to receive him. He is not 'brought down,' these observers think, by sorrow and distress of mind. His walk is as erect, his bearing is as stiff as ever it has been. He hides his face behind no handkerchief, and looks before him. But that his face is something sunk and rigid, and is pale, it bears the same expression as of old. He takes his place within the carriage, and three other gentlemen follow. Then the grand funeral moves slowly down the street. The feathers are yet nodding in the distance, when the juggler has the basin spinning on a cane, and has the same crowd to admire it. But the juggler's wife is less alert than usual with the money-box, for a child's burial has set her thinking that perhaps the baby underneath her shabby shawl may not grow up to be a man, and wear a sky-blue fillet round his head, and salmon-coloured worsted drawers, and tumble in the mud.

The feathers wind their gloomy way along the streets, and come within the sound of a church bell. In this same church, the pretty boy received all that will soon be left of him on earth—a name. All of him that is dead, they lay there, near the perishable substance of his mother. It is well. Their ashes lie where Florence in her walks—oh lonely, lonely walks!—may pass them any day.

The service over, and the clergyman withdrawn, Mr Dombey looks round, demanding in a low voice, whether the person who has been requested to attend to receive instructions for the tablet, is there?

Someone comes forward, and says 'Yes.'

Mr Dombey intimates where he would have it placed; and shows him, with his hand upon the wall, the shape and size; and how it is to follow the memorial to the mother. Then, with his pencil, he writes out the inscription, and gives it to him: adding, 'I wish to have it done at once.

'It shall be done immediately, Sir.'

'There is really nothing to inscribe but name and age, you see.'

The man bows, glancing at the paper, but appears to hesitate. Mr Dombey not observing his hesitation, turns away, and leads towards the porch.

'I beg your pardon, Sir;' a touch falls gently on his mourning cloak; 'but as you wish it done immediately, and it may be put in hand when I get back--'

'Well?'

'Will you be so good as read it over again? I think there's a mistake.'

'Where?'

The statuary gives him back the paper, and points out, with his pocket rule, the words, 'beloved and only child.'

'It should be, "son," I think, Sir?'

'You are right. Of course. Make the correction.'

The father, with a hastier step, pursues his way to the coach. When the other three, who follow closely, take their seats, his face is hidden for the first time—shaded by his cloak. Nor do they see it any more that day. He alights first, and passes immediately into his own room. The other mourners (who are only Mr Chick, and two of the medical attendants) proceed upstairs to the drawing-room, to be received by Mrs Chick and Miss Tox. And what the face is, in the shut-up chamber underneath: or what the thoughts are: what the heart is, what the contest or the suffering: no one knows.

The chief thing that they know, below stairs, in the kitchen, is that 'it seems like Sunday.' They can hardly persuade themselves but that there is something unbecoming, if not wicked, in the conduct of the people out of doors, who pursue their ordinary occupations, and wear their everyday attire. It is quite a novelty to have the blinds up, and the shutters open; and they make themselves dismally comfortable over bottles of wine, which are freely broached as on a festival. They are much inclined to moralise. Mr

Towlinson proposes with a sigh, 'Amendment to us all!' for which, as Cook says with another sigh, 'There's room enough, God knows.' In the evening, Mrs Chick and Miss Tox take to needlework again. In the evening also, Mr Towlinson goes out to take the air, accompanied by the housemaid, who has not yet tried her mourning bonnet. They are very tender to each other at dusky street-corners, and Towlinson has visions of leading an altered and blameless existence as a serious greengrocer in Oxford Market.

There is sounder sleep and deeper rest in Mr Dombey's house tonight, than there has been for many nights. The morning sun awakens the old household, settled down once more in their old ways. The rosy children opposite run past with hoops. There is a splendid wedding in the church. The juggler's wife is active with the money-box in another quarter of the town. The mason sings and whistles as he chips out P-A-U-L in the marble slab before him.

And can it be that in a world so full and busy, the loss of one weak creature makes a void in any heart, so wide and deep that nothing but the width and depth of vast eternity can fill it up! Florence, in her innocent affliction, might have answered, 'Oh my brother, oh my dearly loved and loving brother! Only friend and companion of my slighted childhood! Could any less idea shed the light already dawning on your early grave, or give birth to the softened sorrow that is springing into life beneath this rain of tears!'

'My dear child,' said Mrs Chick, who held it as a duty incumbent on her, to improve the occasion, 'when you are as old as I am—'

'Which will be the prime of life,' observed Miss Tox.

'You will then,' pursued Mrs Chick, gently squeezing Miss Tox's hand in acknowledgment of her friendly remark, 'you will then know that all grief is unavailing, and that it is our duty to submit.'

'I will try, dear aunt I do try,' answered Florence, sobbing.

'I am glad to hear it,' said Mrs Chick, 'because; my love, as our dear Miss Tox—of whose sound sense and excellent judgment, there cannot possibly be two opinions—'

'My dear Louisa, I shall really be proud, soon,' said Miss Tox—'will tell you, and confirm by her experience,' pursued Mrs Chick, 'we are called upon on all occasions to make an effort It is required of us. If any—my dear,' turning to Miss Tox, 'I want a word. Mis—Mis-'

'Demeanour?' suggested Miss Tox.

'No, no, no,' said Mrs Chic 'How can you! Goodness me, it's on, the end of my tongue. Mis-'

Placed affection?' suggested Miss Tox, timidly.

'Good gracious, Lucretia!' returned Mrs Chick 'How very monstrous! Misanthrope, is the word I want. The idea! Misplaced affection! I say, if any misanthrope were to put, in my presence, the question "Why were we born?" I should reply, "To make an effort".'

'Very good indeed,' said Miss Tox, much impressed by the originality of the sentiment 'Very good.'

'Unhappily,' pursued Mrs Chick, 'we have a warning under our own eyes. We have but too much reason to suppose, my dear child, that if an effort had been made in time, in this family, a train of the most trying and distressing circumstances might have been avoided. Nothing shall ever persuade me,' observed the good matron, with a resolute air, 'but that if that effort had been made by poor dear Fanny, the poor dear darling child would at least have had a stronger constitution.'

Mrs Chick abandoned herself to her feelings for half a moment; but, as a practical illustration of her doctrine, brought herself up short, in the middle of a sob, and went on again.

'Therefore, Florence, pray let us see that you have some strength of mind, and do not selfishly aggravate the distress in which your poor Papa is plunged.'

'Dear aunt!' said Florence, kneeling quickly down before her, that she might the better and more earnestly look into her face. 'Tell me more about Papa. Pray tell me about him! Is he quite heartbroken?'

Miss Tox was of a tender nature, and there was something in this appeal that moved her very much. Whether she saw it in a succession, on the part of the neglected child, to the affectionate concern so often expressed by her dead brother—or a love that sought to twine itself about the heart that had loved him, and that could not bear to be shut out from sympathy with such a sorrow, in such sad community of love and grief—or whether the only recognised the earnest and devoted spirit which, although discarded and repulsed, was wrung with tenderness long unreturned, and in the waste and solitude of this bereavement cried to him to seek a comfort in it, and to give some, by some small response—whatever may have been her understanding of it, it moved Miss Tox. For the moment she forgot the majesty of Mrs Chick, and, patting Florence hastily on the cheek, turned aside and suffered the tears to gush from her eyes, without waiting for a lead from that wise matron.

Mrs Chick herself lost, for a moment, the presence of mind on which she so much prided herself; and remained mute, looking on the beautiful young face that had so long, so steadily, and patiently, been turned towards the little bed. But recovering her voice—which was synonymous with her presence of mind, indeed they were one and the same thing—she replied with dignity:

'Florence, my dear child, your poor Papa is peculiar at times; and to question me about him, is to question me upon a subject which I really do not pretend to understand. I believe I have as much influence with your Papa as anybody has. Still, all I can say is, that he has said very little to me; and that I have only seen him once or twice for a minute at a time, and indeed have hardly seen him then, for his room has been dark. I have said to your Papa, "Paul!"—that is the exact expression I used—"Paul! why do you not take something stimulating?" Your Papa's reply has always been, "Louisa, have the goodness to leave me. I want nothing. I am better by myself." If I was to be put upon my oath to-morrow, Lucretia, before a magistrate,' said Mrs Chick, 'I have no doubt I could venture to swear to those identical words.'

Miss Tox expressed her admiration by saying, 'My Louisa is ever methodical!'

'In short, Florence,' resumed her aunt, 'literally nothing has passed between your poor Papa and myself, until to-day; when I mentioned to your Papa that Sir Barnet and Lady Skettles had written exceedingly kind notes—our sweet boy! Lady Skettles loved him like a—where's my pocket handkerchief?'

Miss Tox produced one.

'Exceedingly kind notes, proposing that you should visit them for change of scene. Mentioning to your Papa that I thought Miss Tox and myself might now go home (in which he quite agreed), I inquired if he had any objection to your accepting this invitation. He said, "No, Louisa, not the least!"' Florence raised her tearful eye.

'At the same time, if you would prefer staying here, Florence, to paying this visit at present, or to going home with me—'

'I should much prefer it, aunt,' was the faint rejoinder.

'Why then, child,'said Mrs Chick, 'you can. It's a strange choice, I must say. But you always were strange. Anybody else at your time of life, and after what has passed—my dear Miss Tox, I have lost my pocket handkerchief again—would be glad to leave here, one would suppose.

'I should not like to feel,' said Florence, 'as if the house was avoided. I should not like to think that the—his—the rooms upstairs were quite empty and dreary, aunt. I would rather stay here, for the present. Oh my brother! oh my brother!'

It was a natural emotion, not to be suppressed; and it would make way even between the fingers of the hands with which she covered up her face. The overcharged and heavy-laden breast must some times have that vent, or the poor wounded solitary heart within it would have fluttered like a bird with broken wings, and sunk down in the dust.'

'Well, child!' said Mrs Chick, after a pause 'I wouldn't on any account say anything unkind to you, and that I'm sure you know. You will remain here, then, and do exactly as you like. No one will interfere with you, Florence, or wish to interfere with you, I'm sure.

Florence shook her head in sad assent'

'I had no sooner begun to advise your poor Papa that he really ought to seek some distraction and restoration in a temporary change,' said Mrs Chick, 'than he told me he had already formed the intention of going into the country for a short time. I'm sure I hope he'll go very soon. He can't go too soon. But I suppose there are some arrangements connected with his private papers and so forth, consequent on the affliction that has tried us all so much—I can't think what's become of mine: Lucretia, lend me yours, my dear—that may occupy him for one or two evenings in his own room. Your Papa's a Dombey, child, if ever there was one,' said Mrs Chick, drying both her eyes at once with great care on opposite corners of Miss Tox's handkerchief 'He'll make an effort. There's no fear of him.'

'Is there nothing, aunt,' said Florence, trembling, 'I might do to—' 'Lord, my dear child,' interposed Mrs Chick, hastily, 'what are you talking about? If your Papa said to Me—I have given you his exact words, "Louisa, I want nothing; I am better by myself"—what do you think he'd say to you? You mustn't show yourself to him, child. Don't dream of such a thing.'

'Aunt,' said Florence, 'I will go and lie down on my bed.'

Mrs Chick approved of this resolution, and dismissed her with a kiss. But Miss Tox, on a faint pretence of looking for the mislaid handkerchief, went upstairs after her; and tried in a few stolen minutes to comfort her, in spite of great discouragement from Susan Nipper. For Miss Nipper, in her burning zeal, disparaged Miss Tox as a crocodile; yet her sympathy seemed genuine, and had at least the vantage-ground of disinterestedness—there was little favour to be won by it.

And was there no one nearer and dearer than Susan, to uphold the striving heart in its anguish? Was there no other neck to clasp; no other face to turn to? no one else to say a soothing word to such deep sorrow? Was Florence so alone in the bleak world that nothing else remained to her? Nothing. Stricken motherless and brotherless at once—for in the loss of little Paul, that first and greatest loss fell heavily upon her—this was the only help she had. Oh, who can tell how much she needed help at first!

At first, when the house subsided into its accustomed course, and they had all gone away, except the servants, and her father shut up in his own rooms, Florence could do nothing but weep, and wander up and down, and sometimes, in a sudden pang of desolate remembrance, fly to her own chamber, wring her hands, lay her face down on her bed, and know no consolation: nothing but the bitterness and cruelty of grief. This commonly ensued upon the recognition of some spot or object very tenderly dated with him; and it made the ale house, at first, a place of agony.

But it is not in the nature of pure love to burn so fiercely and unkindly long. The flame that in its grosser composition has the taint of earth may prey upon the breast that gives it shelter; but the fire from heaven is as gentle in the heart, as when it rested on the heads of the assembled twelve, and showed each man his brother, brightened and unhurt. The image conjured up, there soon returned the placid face, the softened voice, the loving looks, the quiet trustfulness and peace; and Florence, though she wept still, wept more tranquilly, and courted the remembrance.

It was not very long before the golden water, dancing on the wall, in the old place, at the old serene time, had her calm eye fixed upon it as it ebbed away. It was not very long before that room again knew her, often; sitting there alone, as patient and as mild as when she had watched beside the little bed. When any sharp sense of its being empty smote upon her, she could kneel beside it, and pray GOD—it was the pouring out of her full heart—to let one angel love her and remember her.

It was not very long before, in the midst of the dismal house so wide and dreary, her low voice in the twilight, slowly and stopping sometimes, touched the old air to which he had so often listened, with his drooping head upon her arm. And after that, and when it was quite dark, a little strain of music trembled in the room: so softly played and sung, that it was more lIke the mournful recollection of what she had done at his request on that last night, than the reality repeated. But it was repeated, often—very often, in the shadowy solitude; and broken murmurs of the strain still trembled on the keys, when the sweet voice was hushed in tears.

Thus she gained heart to look upon the work with which her fingers had been busy by his side on the sea-shore; and thus it was not very long before she took to it again—with something of a human love for it, as if it had been sentient and had known him; and, sitting in a window, near her mother's picture, in the unused room so long deserted, wore away the thoughtful hours.

Why did the dark eyes turn so often from this work to where the rosy children lived? They were not immediately suggestive of her loss; for they were all girls: four little sisters. But they were motherless like her—and had a father.

It was easy to know when he had gone out and was expected home, for the elder child was always dressed and waiting for him at the drawing-room window, or on the balcony; and when he appeared, her expectant face lighted up with joy, while the others at the high window, and always on the watch too, clapped their hands, and drummed them on the sill, and called to him. The elder child would come down to the hall, and put her hand in his, and lead him up the stairs; and Florence would see her afterwards sitting by his side, or on his knee, or hanging coaxingly about his neck and talking to him: and though they were always gay together, he would often watch her face as if he thought her like her mother that was dead. Florence would sometimes look no more at this, and bursting into tears would hide behind the curtain as if she were frightened, or would hurry from the window. Yet she could not help returning; and her work would soon fall unheeded from her hands again.

It was the house that had been empty, years ago. It had remained so for a long time. At last, and while she had been away from home, this family had taken it; and it was repaired and newly painted; and there were birds and flowers about it; and it looked very different from its old self. But she never thought of the house. The children and their father were all in all.

When he had dined, she could see them, through the open windows, go down with their governess or nurse, and cluster round the table; and in the still summer weather, the sound of their childish voices and clear laughter would come ringing across the street, into the drooping air of the room in which she sat. Then they would climb and clamber upstairs with him, and romp about him on the sofa, or group themselves at his knee, a very nosegay of little faces, while he seemed to tell them some story. Or they would come running out into the balcony; and then Florence would hide herself quickly, lest it should check them in their joy, to see her in her black dress, sitting there alone.

The elder child remained with her father when the rest had gone away, and made his tea for him—happy little house-keeper she was then!—and sat conversing with him, sometimes at the window, sometimes in the room, until the candles came. He made her his companion, though she was some years younger than Florence; and she could be as staid and pleasantly demure, with her little book or work-box, as a woman. When they had candles, Florence from her own dark room was not afraid to look again. But when the time came for the child to say 'Good-night, Papa,' and go to bed, Florence would sob and tremble as she raised her face to him, and could look no more.

Though still she would turn, again and again, before going to bed herself from the simple air that had lulled him to rest so often, long ago, and from the other low soft broken strain of music, back to that house. But that she ever thought of it, or watched it, was a secret which she kept within her own young breast.

And did that breast of Florence—Florence, so ingenuous and true—so worthy of the love that he had borne her, and had whispered in his last faint words—whose guileless heart was mirrored in the beauty of her face, and breathed in every accent of her gentle voice—did that young breast hold any other secret? Yes. One more.

When no one in the house was stirring, and the lights were all extinguished, she would softly leave her own room, and with noiseless feet descend the staircase, and approach her father's door. Against it, scarcely breathing, she would rest her face and head, and press her lips, in the yearning of her love. She crouched upon the cold stone floor outside it, every night, to listen even for his breath; and in her one absorbing wish to be allowed to show him some affection, to be a consolation to him, to win him over to the endurance of some tenderness from her, his solitary child, she would have knelt down at his feet, if she had dared, in humble supplication.

No one knew it' No one thought of it. The door was ever closed, and he shut up within. He went out once or twice, and it was said in the house that he was very soon going on his country journey; but he lived in those rooms, and lived alone, and never saw her, or inquired for her. Perhaps he did not even know that she was in the house.

One day, about a week after the funeral, Florence was sitting at her work, when Susan appeared, with a face half laughing and half crying, to announce a visitor.

'A visitor! To me, Susan!' said Florence, looking up in astonishment.

'Well, it is a wonder, ain't it now, Miss Floy?' said Susan; 'but I wish you had a many visitors, I do, indeed, for you'd be all the better for it, and it's my opinion that the sooner you and me goes even to them old Skettleses, Miss, the better for both, I may not wish to live in crowds, Miss Floy, but still I'm not a oyster.'

To do Miss Nipper justice, she spoke more for her young mistress than herself; and her face showed it.

'But the visitor, Susan,' said Florence.

Susan, with an hysterical explosion that was as much a laugh as a sob, and as much a sob as a laugh, answered,

'Mr Toots!'

The smile that appeared on Florence's face passed from it in a moment, and her eyes filled with tears. But at any rate it was a smile, and that gave great satisfaction to Miss Nipper.

'My own feelings exactly, Miss Floy,' said Susan, putting her apron to her eyes, and shaking her head. 'Immediately I see that Innocent in the Hall, Miss Floy, I burst out laughing first, and then I choked.'

Susan Nipper involuntarily proceeded to do the like again on the spot. In the meantime Mr Toots, who had come upstairs after her, all unconscious of the effect he produced, announced himself with his knuckles on the door, and walked in very briskly.

'How d'ye do, Miss Dombey?' said Mr Toots. 'I'm very well, I thank you; how are you?'

Mr Toots—than whom there were few better fellows in the world, though there may have been one or two brighter spirits—had laboriously invented this long burst of discourse with the view of relieving the feelings both of Florence and himself. But finding that he had run through his property, as it were, in an injudicious manner, by squandering the whole before taking a chair, or before Florence had uttered a word, or before he had well got in at the door, he deemed it advisable to begin again.

'How d'ye do, Miss Dombey?' said Mr Toots. 'I'm very well, I thank you; how are you?'

Florence gave him her hand, and said she was very well.

'I'm very well indeed,' said Mr Toots, taking a chair. 'Very well indeed, I am. I don't remember,' said Mr Toots, after reflecting a little, 'that I was ever better, thank you.'

'It's very kind of you to come,' said Florence, taking up her work, 'I am very glad to see you.'

Mr Toots responded with a chuckle. Thinking that might be too lively, he corrected it with a sigh. Thinking that might be too melancholy, he corrected it with a chuckle. Not thoroughly pleasing himself with either mode of reply, he breathed hard.

'You were very kind to my dear brother,' said Florence, obeying her own natural impulse to relieve him by saying so. 'He often talked to me about you.'

'Oh it's of no consequence,' said Mr Toots hastily. 'Warm, ain't it?'

'It is beautiful weather,' replied Florence.

'It agrees with me!' said Mr Toots. 'I don't think I ever was so well as I find myself at present, I'm obliged to you.

After stating this curious and unexpected fact, Mr Toots fell into a deep well of silence.

'You have left Dr Blimber's, I think?' said Florence, trying to help him out.

'I should hope so,' returned Mr Toots. And tumbled in again.

He remained at the bottom, apparently drowned, for at least ten minutes. At the expiration of that period, he suddenly floated, and said,

'Well! Good morning, Miss Dombey.'

'Are you going?' asked Florence, rising.

'I don't know, though. No, not just at present,' said Mr Toots, sitting down again, most unexpectedly. 'The fact is—I say, Miss Dombey!'

'Don't be afraid to speak to me,' said Florence, with a quiet smile, 'I should be very glad if you would talk about my brother.'

'Would you, though?' retorted Mr Toots, with sympathy in every fibre of his otherwise expressionless face. 'Poor Dombey! I'm sure I never thought that Burgess and Co.—fashionable tailors (but very dear), that we used to talk about—would make this suit of clothes for such a purpose.' Mr Toots was dressed in mourning. 'Poor Dombey! I say! Miss Dombey!' blubbered Toots.

'Yes,' said Florence.

'There's a friend he took to very much at last. I thought you'd lIke to have him, perhaps, as a sort of keepsake. You remember his remembering Diogenes?'

'Oh yes! oh yes' cried Florence.

'Poor Dombey! So do I,' said Mr Toots.

Mr Toots, seeing Florence in tears, had great difficulty in getting beyond this point, and had nearly tumbled into the well again. But a chuckle saved him on the brink.

'I say,' he proceeded, 'Miss Dombey! I could have had him stolen for ten shillings, if they hadn't given him up: and I would: but they were glad to get rid of him, I think. If you'd like to have him, he's at the door. I brought him on purpose for you. He ain't a lady's dog, you know,' said Mr Toots, 'but you won't mind that, will you?'

In fact, Diogenes was at that moment, as they presently ascertained from looking down into the street, staring through the window of a hackney cabriolet, into which, for conveyance to that spot, he had been ensnared, on a false pretence of rats among the straw. Sooth to say, he was as unlike a lady's dog as might be; and in his gruff anxiety to get out, presented an appearance sufficiently unpromising, as he gave short yelps out of one side of his mouth, and overbalancing himself by the intensity of every one of those efforts, tumbled down into the straw, and then sprung panting up again, putting out his tongue, as if he had come express to a Dispensary to be examined for his health.

But though Diogenes was as ridiculous a dog as one would meet with on a summer's day; a blundering, ill-favoured, clumsy, bullet-headed dog, continually acting on a wrong idea that there was an enemy in the neighbourhood, whom it was meritorious to bark at; and though he was far from good- tempered, and certainly was not clever, and had hair all over his eyes, and a comic nose, and an inconsistent tail, and a gruff voice; he was dearer to Florence, in virtue of that parting remembrance of him, and that request that he might be taken care of, than the most valuable and beautiful of his kind. So dear, indeed, was this same ugly Diogenes, and so welcome to her, that she took the jewelled hand of Mr Toots and kissed it in her gratitude. And when Diogenes, released, came tearing up the stairs and bouncing into the room (such a business as there was, first, to get him out of the cabriolet!), dived under all the furniture, and wound a long iron chain, that dangled from his neck, round legs of chairs and tables, and then tugged at it until his eyes became unnaturally visible, in consequence of their nearly starting out of his head; and when he growled at Mr Toots, who affected familiarity; and went pell-mell at Towlinson, morally convinced that he was the enemy whom he had barked at round the corner all his life and had never seen yet; Florence was as pleased with him as if he had been a miracle of discretion.

Mr Toots was so overjoyed by the success of his present, and was so delighted to see Florence bending down over Diogenes, smoothing his coarse back with her little delicate hand—Diogenes graciously allowing it from the first moment of their acquaintance—that he felt it difficult to take leave, and would, no doubt, have been a much longer time in making up his mind to do so, if he had not been assisted by Diogenes himself, who suddenly took it into his head to bay Mr Toots, and to make short runs at him with his mouth open. Not exactly seeing his way to the end of these demonstrations, and sensible that they placed the pantaloons constructed by the art of Burgess and Co. in jeopardy, Mr Toots, with chuckles, lapsed out at the door: by which, after looking in again two or three times, without any object at all, and being on each occasion greeted with a fresh run from Diogenes, he finally took himself off and got away.

'Come, then, Di! Dear Di! Make friends with your new mistress. Let us love each other, Di!'said Florence, fondling his shaggy head. And Di, the rough and gruff, as if his hairy hide were pervious to the tear that dropped upon it, and his dog's heart melted as it fell, put his nose up to her face, and swore fidelity.

Diogenes the man did not speak plainer to Alexander the Great than Diogenes the dog spoke to Florence.' He subscribed to the offer of his little mistress cheerfully, and devoted himself to her service. A banquet was immediately provided for him in a corner; and when he had eaten and drunk his fill, he went to the window where Florence was sitting, looking on, rose up on his hind legs, with his awkward fore paws on her shoulders, licked her face and hands, nestled his great head against her heart, and wagged his tail till he was tired. Finally, Diogenes coiled himself up at her feet and went to sleep.

Although Miss Nipper was nervous in regard of dogs, and felt it necessary to come into the room with her skirts carefully collected about her, as if she were crossing a brook on stepping-stones; also to utter little screams and stand up on chairs when Diogenes stretched himself, she was in her own manner affected by the kindness of Mr Toots, and could not see Florence so alive to the attachment and society of this rude friend of little Paul's, without some mental comments thereupon that brought the water to her eyes. Mr Dombey, as a part of her reflections, may have been, in the association of ideas, connected with the dog; but, at any rate, after observing Diogenes and his mistress all the evening, and after exerting herself with much good-will to provide Diogenes a bed in an ante-chamber outside his mistress's door, she said hurriedly to Florence, before leaving her for the night:

'Your Pa's a going off, Miss Floy, tomorrow morning.'

'To-morrow morning, Susan?'

'Yes, Miss; that's the orders. Early.'

'Do you know,' asked Florence, without looking at her, 'where Papa is going, Susan?'

'Not exactly, Miss. He's going to meet that precious Major first, and I must say if I was acquainted with any Major myself (which Heavens forbid), it shouldn't be a blue one!'

'Hush, Susan!' urged Florence gently.

'Well, Miss Floy,' returned Miss Nipper, who was full of burning indignation, and minded her stops even less than usual. 'I can't help it, blue he is, and while I was a Christian, although humble, I would have natural-coloured friends, or none.'

It appeared from what she added and had gleaned downstairs, that Mrs Chick had proposed the Major for Mr Dombey's companion, and that Mr Dombey, after some hesitation, had invited him.

'Talk of him being a change, indeed!' observed Miss Nipper to herself with boundless contempt. 'If he's a change, give me a constancy.

'Good-night, Susan,' said Florence.

'Good-night, my darling dear Miss Floy.'

Her tone of commiseration smote the chord so often roughly touched, but never listened to while she or anyone looked on. Florence left alone, laid her head upon her hand, and pressing the other over her swelling heart, held free communication with her sorrows.

It was a wet night; and the melancholy rain fell pattering and dropping with a weary sound. A sluggish wind was blowing, and went moaning round the house, as if it were in pain or grief. A shrill noise quivered through the trees. While she sat weeping, it grew late, and dreary midnight tolled out from the steeples.

Florence was little more than a child in years—not yet fourteen-and the loneliness and gloom of such an hour in the great house where Death had lately made its own tremendous devastation, might have set an older fancy brooding on vague terrors. But her innocent imagination was too full of one theme to admit them. Nothing wandered in her thoughts but love—a wandering love, indeed, and castaway—but turning always to her father. There was nothing in the dropping of the rain, the moaning of the wind, the shuddering of the trees, the striking of the solemn clocks, that shook this one thought, or diminished its interest' Her recollections of the dear dead boy—and they were never absent—were itself, the same thing. And oh, to be shut out: to be so lost: never to have looked into her father's face or touched him, since that hour!

She could not go to bed, poor child, and never had gone yet, since then, without making her nightly pilgrimage to his door. It would have been a strange sad sight, to see her' now, stealing lightly down the stairs through the thick gloom, and stopping at it with a beating heart, and blinded eyes, and hair that fell down loosely and unthought of; and touching it outside with her wet cheek. But the night covered it, and no one knew.

The moment that she touched the door on this night, Florence found that it was open. For the first time it stood open, though by but a hair's-breadth: and there was a light within. The first impulse of the timid child—and she yielded to it—was to retire swiftly. Her next, to go back, and to enter; and this second impulse held her in irresolution on the staircase.

In its standing open, even by so much as that chink, there seemed to be hope. There was encouragement in seeing a ray of light from within, stealing through the dark stern doorway, and falling in a thread upon the marble floor. She turned back, hardly knowing what she did, but urged on by the love within her, and the trial they had undergone together, but not shared: and with her hands a little raised and trembling, glided in.

Her father sat at his old table in the middle room. He had been arranging some papers, and destroying others, and the latter lay in fragile ruins before him. The rain dripped heavily upon the glass panes in the outer room, where he had so often watched poor Paul, a baby; and the low complainings of the wind were heard without.

But not by him. He sat with his eyes fixed on the table, so immersed in thought, that a far heavier tread than the light foot of his child could make, might have failed to rouse him. His face was turned towards her. By the waning lamp, and at that haggard hour, it looked worn and dejected; and in the utter loneliness surrounding him, there was an appeal to Florence that struck home.

'Papa! Papa! speak to me, dear Papa!'

He started at her voice, and leaped up from his seat. She was close before him' with extended arms, but he fell back.

'What is the matter?' he said, sternly. 'Why do you come here? What has frightened you?'

If anything had frightened her, it was the face he turned upon her. The glowing love within the breast of his young daughter froze before it, and she stood and looked at him as if stricken into stone.

There was not one touch of tenderness or pity in it. There was not one gleam of interest, parental recognition, or relenting in it. There was a change in it, but not of that kind. The old indifference and cold constraint had given place to something: what, she never thought and did not dare to think, and yet she felt it in its force, and knew it well without a name: that as it looked upon her, seemed to cast a shadow on her head.

Did he see before him the successful rival of his son, in health and life? Did he look upon his own successful rival in that son's affection? Did a mad jealousy and withered pride, poison sweet remembrances that should have endeared and made her precious to him? Could it be possible that it was gall to him to look upon her in her beauty and her promise: thinking of his infant boy!

Florence had no such thoughts. But love is quick to know when it is spurned and hopeless: and hope died out of hers, as she stood looking in her father's face.

'I ask you, Florence, are you frightened? Is there anything the matter, that you come here?'

'I came, Papa—'

'Against my wishes. Why?'

She saw he knew why: it was written broadly on his face: and dropped her head upon her hands with one prolonged low cry.

Let him remember it in that room, years to come. It has faded from the air, before he breaks the silence. It may pass as quickly from his brain, as he believes, but it is there. Let him remember it in that room, years to come!

He took her by the arm. His hand was cold, and loose, and scarcely closed upon her.

'You are tired, I daresay,' he said, taking up the light, and leading her towards the door, 'and want rest. We all want rest. Go, Florence. You have been dreaming.'

The dream she had had, was over then, God help her! and she felt that it could never more come back.

'I will remain here to light you up the stairs. The whole house is yours above there,' said her father, slowly. 'You are its mistress now. Good- night!'

Still covering her face, she sobbed, and answered 'Good-night, dear Papa,' and silently ascended. Once she looked back as if she would have returned to him, but for fear. It was a momentary thought, too hopeless to encourage; and her father stood there with the light—hard, unresponsive, motionless—until the fluttering dress of his fair child was lost in the darkness.

Let him remember it in that room, years to come. The rain that falls upon the roof: the wind that mourns outside the door: may have foreknowledge in their melancholy sound. Let him remember it in that room, years to come!

The last time he had watched her, from the same place, winding up those stairs, she had had her brother in her arms. It did not move his heart towards her now, it steeled it: but he went into his room, and locked his door, and sat down in his chair, and cried for his lost boy.

Diogenes was broad awake upon his post, and waiting for his little mistress.

'Oh, Di! Oh, dear Di! Love me for his sake!'

Diogenes already loved her for her own, and didn't care how much he showed it. So he made himself vastly ridiculous by performing a variety of uncouth bounces in the ante-chamber, and concluded, when poor Florence was at last asleep, and dreaming of the rosy children opposite, by scratching open her bedroom door: rolling up his bed into a pillow: lying down on the boards, at the full length of his tether, with his head towards her: and looking lazily at her, upside down, out of the tops of his eyes, until from winking and winking he fell asleep himself, and dreamed, with gruff barks, of his enemy.

CHAPTER 19. Walter goes away

The wooden Midshipman at the Instrument-maker's door, like the hard-hearted little Midshipman he was, remained supremely indifferent to Walter's going away, even when the very last day of his sojourn in the back parlour was on the decline. With his quadrant at his round black knob of an eye, and his figure in its old attitude of indomitable alacrity, the Midshipman displayed his elfin small-clothes to the best advantage, and, absorbed in scientific pursuits, had no sympathy with worldly concerns. He was so far the creature of circumstances, that a dry day covered him with dust, and a misty day peppered him with little bits of soot, and a wet day brightened up his tarnished uniform for the moment, and a very hot day blistered him; but otherwise he was a callous, obdurate, conceited Midshipman, intent on his own discoveries, and caring as little for what went on about him, terrestrially, as Archimedes at the taking of Syracuse.

Such a Midshipman he seemed to be, at least, in the then position of domestic affairs. Walter eyed him kindly many a time in passing in and out; and poor old Sol, when Walter was not there, would come and lean against the doorpost, resting his weary wig as near the shoe-buckles of the guardian genius of his trade and shop as he could. But no fierce idol with a mouth from ear to ear, and a murderous visage made of parrot's feathers, was ever more indifferent to the appeals of its savage votaries, than was the Midshipman to these marks of attachment.

Walter's heart felt heavy as he looked round his old bedroom, up among the parapets and chimney-pots, and thought that one more night already darkening would close his acquaintance with it, perhaps for ever. Dismantled of his little stock of books and pictures, it looked coldly and reproachfully on him for his desertion, and had already a foreshadowing upon it of its coming strangeness. 'A few hours more,' thought Walter, 'and no dream I ever had here when I was a schoolboy will be so little mine as this old room. The dream may come back in my sleep, and I may return waking to this place, it may be: but the dream at least will serve no other master, and the room may have a score, and every one of them may change, neglect, misuse it.'

But his Uncle was not to be left alone in the little back parlour, where he was then sitting by himself; for Captain Cuttle, considerate in his roughness, stayed away against his will, purposely that they should have some talk together unobserved: so Walter, newly returned home from his last day's bustle, descended briskly, to bear him company.

'Uncle,' he said gaily, laying his hand upon the old man's shoulder, 'what shall I send you home from Barbados?'

'Hope, my dear Wally. Hope that we shall meet again, on this side of the grave. Send me as much of that as you can.'

'So I will, Uncle: I have enough and to spare, and I'll not be chary of it! And as to lively turtles, and limes for Captain Cuttle's punch, and preserves for you on Sundays, and all that sort of thing, why I'll send you ship-loads, Uncle: when I'm rich enough.'

Old Sol wiped his spectacles, and faintly smiled.

'That's right, Uncle!' cried Walter, merrily, and clapping him half a dozen times more upon the shoulder. 'You cheer up me! I'll cheer up you! We'll be as gay as larks to-morrow morning, Uncle, and we'll fly as high! As to my anticipations, they are singing out of sight now.

'Wally, my dear boy,' returned the old man, 'I'll do my best, I'll do my best.'

'And your best, Uncle,' said Walter, with his pleasant laugh, 'is the best best that I know. You'll not forget what you're to send me, Uncle?'

'No, Wally, no,' replied the old man; 'everything I hear about Miss Dombey, now that she is left alone, poor lamb, I'll write. I fear it won't be much though, Wally.'

'Why, I'll tell you what, Uncle,' said Walter, after a moment's hesitation, 'I have just been up there.'

'Ay, ay, ay?' murmured the old man, raising his eyebrows, and his spectacles with them.

'Not to see her,' said Walter, 'though I could have seen her, I daresay, if I had asked, Mr Dombey being out of town: but to say a parting word to Susan. I thought I might venture to do that, you know, under the circumstances, and remembering when I saw Miss Dombey last.'

'Yes, my boy, yes,' replied his Uncle, rousing himself from a temporary abstraction.

'So I saw her,' pursued Walter, 'Susan, I mean: and I told her I was off and away to-morrow. And I said, Uncle, that you had always had an interest in Miss Dombey since that night when she was here, and always wished her well and happy, and always would be proud and glad to serve her in the least: I thought I might say that, you know, under the circumstances. Don't you think so?'

'Yes, my boy, yes,' replied his Uncle, in the tone as before.

'And I added,' pursued Walter, 'that if she—Susan, I mean—could ever let you know, either through herself, or Mrs Richards, or anybody else who might be coming this way, that Miss Dombey was well and happy, you would take it very kindly, and would write so much to me, and I should take it very kindly too. There! Upon my word, Uncle,' said Walter, 'I scarcely slept all last night through thinking of doing this; and could not make up my mind when I was out, whether to do it or not; and yet I am sure it is the true feeling of my heart, and I should have been quite miserable afterwards if I had not relieved it.'

His honest voice and manner corroborated what he said, and quite established its ingenuousness.

'So, if you ever see her, Uncle,' said Walter, 'I mean Miss Dombey now—and perhaps you may, who knows!—tell her how much I felt for her; how much I used to think of her when I was here; how I spoke of her, with the tears in my eyes, Uncle, on this last night before I went away. Tell her that I said I never could forget her gentle manner, or her beautiful face, or her sweet kind disposition that was better than all. And as I didn't take them from a woman's feet, or a young lady's: only a little innocent child's,' said Walter: 'tell her, if you don't mind, Uncle, that I kept those shoes— she'll remember how often they fell off, that night—and took them away with me as a remembrance!'

They were at that very moment going out at the door in one of Walter's trunks. A porter carrying off his baggage on a truck for shipment at the docks on board the Son and Heir, had got possession of them; and wheeled them away under the very eye of the insensible Midshipman before their owner had well finished speaking.

But that ancient mariner might have been excused his insensibility to the treasure as it rolled away. For, under his eye at the same moment, accurately within his range of observation, coming full into the sphere of his startled and intensely wide-awake look-out, were Florence and Susan Nipper: Florence looking up into his face half timidly, and receiving the whole shock of his wooden ogling!

More than this, they passed into the shop, and passed in at the parlour door before they were observed by anybody but the Midshipman. And Walter, having his back to the door, would have known nothing of their apparition even then, but for seeing his Uncle spring out of his own chair, and nearly tumble over another.

'Why, Uncle!' exclaimed Walter. 'What's the matter?'

Old Solomon replied, 'Miss Dombey!'

'Is it possible?' cried Walter, looking round and starting up in his turn. 'Here!'

Why, It was so possible and so actual, that, while the words were on his lips, Florence hurried past him; took Uncle Sol's snuff-coloured lapels, one in each hand; kissed him on the cheek; and turning, gave her hand to Walter with a simple truth and earnestness that was her own, and no one else's in the world!

'Going away, Walter!' said Florence.

'Yes, Miss Dombey,' he replied, but not so hopefully as he endeavoured: 'I have a voyage before me.'

'And your Uncle,' said Florence, looking back at Solomon. 'He is sorry you are going, I am sure. Ah! I see he is! Dear Walter, I am very sorry too.'

'Goodness knows,' exclaimed Miss Nipper, 'there's a many we could spare instead, if numbers is a object, Mrs Pipchin as a overseer would come cheap at her weight in gold, and if a knowledge of black slavery should be required, them Blimbers is the very people for the sitiwation.'

With that Miss Nipper untied her bonnet strings, and alter looking vacantly for some moments into a little black teapot that was set forth with the usual homely service on the table, shook her head and a tin canister, and began unasked to make the tea.

In the meantime Florence had turned again to the Instrument-maker, who was as full of admiration as surprise. 'So grown!' said old Sol. 'So improved! And yet not altered! Just the same!'

'Indeed!' said Florence.

'Ye—yes,' returned old Sol, rubbing his hands slowly, and considering the matter half aloud, as something pensive in the bright eyes looking at him arrested his attention. 'Yes, that expression was in the younger face, too!'

'You remember me,' said Florence with a smile, 'and what a little creature I was then?'

'My dear young lady,' returned the Instrument-maker, 'how could I forget you, often as I have thought of you and heard of you since! At the very moment, indeed, when you came in, Wally was talking about you to me, and leaving messages for you, and—'

'Was he?' said Florence. 'Thank you, Walter! Oh thank you, Walter! I was afraid you might be going away and hardly thinking of me;' and again she gave him her little hand so freely and so faithfully that Walter held it for some moments in his own, and could not bear to let it go.

Yet Walter did not hold it as he might have held it once, nor did its touch awaken those old day-dreams of his boyhood that had floated past him sometimes even lately, and confused him with their indistinct and broken shapes. The purity and innocence of her endearing manner, and its perfect trustfulness, and the undisguised regard for him that lay so deeply seated in her constant eyes, and glowed upon her fair face through the smile that shaded—for alas! it was a smile too sad to brighten—it, were not of their romantic race. They brought back to his thoughts the early death-bed he had seen her tending, and the love the child had borne her; and on the wings of such remembrances she seemed to rise up, far above his idle fancies, into clearer and serener air.

'I—I am afraid I must call you Walter's Uncle, Sir,' said Florence to the old man, 'if you'll let me.'

'My dear young lady,' cried old Sol. 'Let you! Good gracious!'

'We always knew you by that name, and talked of you,' said Florence, glancing round, and sighing gently. 'The nice old parlour! Just the same! How well I recollect it!'

Old Sol looked first at her, then at his nephew, and then rubbed his hands, and rubbed his spectacles, and said below his breath, 'Ah! time, time, time!'

There was a short silence; during which Susan Nipper skilfully impounded two extra cups and saucers from the cupboard, and awaited the drawing of the tea with a thoughtful air.

'I want to tell Walter's Uncle,' said Florence, laying her hand timidly upon the old man's as it rested on the table, to bespeak his attention, 'something that I am anxious about. He is going to be left alone, and if he will allow me—not to take Walter's place, for that I couldn't do, but to be his true friend and help him if I ever can while Walter is away, I shall be very much obliged to him indeed. Will you? May I, Walter's Uncle?'

The Instrument-maker, without speaking, put her hand to his lips, and Susan Nipper, leaning back with her arms crossed, in the chair of presidency into which she had voted herself, bit one end of her bonnet strings, and heaved a gentle sigh as she looked up at the skylight.

'You will let me come to see you,' said Florence, 'when I can; and you will tell me everything about yourself and Walter; and you will have no secrets from Susan when she comes and I do not, but will confide in us, and trust us, and rely upon us. And you'll try to let us be a comfort to you? Will you, Walter's Uncle?'

The sweet face looking into his, the gentle pleading eyes, the soft voice, and the light touch on his arm made the more winning by a child's respect and honour for his age, that gave to all an air of graceful doubt and modest hesitation—these, and her natural earnestness, so overcame the poor old Instrument-maker, that he only answered:

'Wally! say a word for me, my dear. I'm very grateful.'

'No, Walter,' returned Florence with her quiet smile. 'Say nothing for him, if you please. I understand him very well, and we must learn to talk together without you, dear Walter.'

The regretful tone in which she said these latter words, touched Walter more than all the rest.

'Miss Florence,' he replied, with an effort to recover the cheerful manner he had preserved while talking with his Uncle, 'I know no more than my Uncle, what to say in acknowledgment of such kindness, I am sure. But what could I say, after all, if I had the power of talking for an hour, except that it is like you?'

Susan Nipper began upon a new part of her bonnet string, and nodded at the skylight, in approval of the sentiment expressed.

'Oh! but, Walter,' said Florence, 'there is something that I wish to say to you before you go away, and you must call me Florence, if you please, and not speak like a stranger.'

'Like a stranger!' returned Walter, 'No. I couldn't speak so. I am sure, at least, I couldn't feel like one.'

'Ay, but that is not enough, and is not what I mean. For, Walter,' added Florence, bursting into tears, 'he liked you very much, and said before he died that he was fond of you, and said "Remember Walter!" and if you'll be a brother to me, Walter, now that he is gone and I have none on earth, I'll be your sister all my life, and think of you like one wherever we may be! This is what I wished to say, dear Walter, but I cannot say it as I would, because my heart is full.'

And in its fulness and its sweet simplicity, she held out both her hands to him. Walter taking them, stooped down and touched the tearful face that neither shrunk nor turned away, nor reddened as he did so, but looked up at him with confidence and truth. In that one moment, every shadow of doubt or agitation passed away from Walter's soul. It seemed to him that he responded to her innocent appeal, beside the dead child's bed: and, in the solemn presence he had seen there, pledged himself to cherish and protect her very image, in his banishment, with brotherly regard; to garner up her simple faith, inviolate; and hold himself degraded if he breathed upon it any thought that was not in her own breast when she gave it to him.

Susan Nipper, who had bitten both her bonnet strings at once, and imparted a great deal of private emotion to the skylight, during this transaction, now changed the subject by inquiring who took milk and who took sugar; and being enlightened on these points, poured out the tea. They all four gathered socially about the little table, and took tea under that young lady's active superintendence; and the presence of Florence in the back parlour, brightened the Tartar frigate on the wall.

Half an hour ago Walter, for his life, would have hardly called her by her name. But he could do so now when she entreated him. He could think of her being there, without a lurking misgiving that it would have been better if she had not come. He could calmly think how beautiful she was, how full of promise, what a home some happy man would find in such a heart one day. He could reflect upon his own place in that heart, with pride; and with a brave determination, if not to deserve it—he still thought that far above him—never to deserve it less.

Some fairy influence must surely have hovered round the hands of Susan Nipper when she made the tea, engendering the tranquil air that reigned in the back parlour during its discussion. Some counter-influence must surely have hovered round the hands of Uncle Sol's chronometer, and moved them faster than the Tartar frigate ever went before the wind. Be this as it may, the visitors had a coach in waiting at a quiet corner not far off; and the chronometer, on being incidentally referred to, gave such a positive opinion that it had been waiting a long time, that it was impossible to doubt the fact, especially when stated on such unimpeachable authority. If Uncle

Sol had been going to be hanged by his own time, he never would have allowed that the chronometer was too fast, by the least fraction of a second.

Florence at parting recapitulated to the old man all that she had said before, and bound him to the compact. Uncle Sol attended her lovingly to the legs of the wooden Midshipman, and there resigned her to Walter, who was ready to escort her and Susan Nipper to the coach.

'Walter,' said Florence by the way, 'I have been afraid to ask before your Uncle. Do you think you will be absent very long?'

'Indeed,' said Walter, 'I don't know. I fear so. Mr Dombey signified as much, I thought, when he appointed me.'

'Is it a favour, Walter?' inquired Florence, after a moment's hesitation, and looking anxiously in his face.

'The appointment?' returned Walter.

'Yes.'

Walter would have given anything to have answered in the affirmative, but his face answered before his lips could, and Florence was too attentive to it not to understand its reply.

'I am afraid you have scarcely been a favourite with Papa,' she said, timidly.

'There is no reason,' replied Walter, smiling, 'why I should be.'

'No reason, Walter!'

'There was no reason,' said Walter, understanding what she meant. 'There are many people employed in the House. Between Mr Dombey and a young man like me, there's a wide space of separation. If I do my duty, I do what I ought, and do no more than all the rest.'

Had Florence any misgiving of which she was hardly conscious: any misgiving that had sprung into an indistinct and undefined existence since that recent night when she had gone down to her father's room: that Walter's accidental interest in her, and early knowledge of her, might have involved him in that powerful displeasure and dislike? Had Walter any such idea, or any sudden thought that it was in her mind at that moment? Neither of them hinted at it. Neither of them spoke at all, for some short time. Susan, walking on the other side of Walter, eyed them both sharply; and certainly Miss Nipper's thoughts travelled in that direction, and very confidently too.

'You may come back very soon,' said Florence, 'perhaps, Walter.'

'I may come back,' said Walter, 'an old man, and find you an old lady. But I hope for better things.'

'Papa,' said Florence, after a moment, 'will—will recover from his grief, and—speak more freely to me one day, perhaps; and if he should, I will tell him how much I wish to see you back again, and ask him to recall you for my sake.'

There was a touching modulation in these words about her father, that Walter understood too well.

The coach being close at hand, he would have left her without speaking, for now he felt what parting was; but Florence held his hand when she was seated, and then he found there was a little packet in her own.

'Walter,' she said, looking full upon him with her affectionate eyes, 'like you, I hope for better things. I will pray for them, and believe that they will arrive. I made this little gift for Paul. Pray take it with my love, and do not look at it until you are gone away. And now, God bless you, Walter! never forget me. You are my brother, dear!'

He was glad that Susan Nipper came between them, or he might have left her with a sorrowful remembrance of him. He was glad too that she did not look out of the coach again, but waved the little hand to him instead, as long as he could see it.

In spite of her request, he could not help opening the packet that night when he went to bed. It was a little purse: and there was was money in it.

Bright rose the sun next morning, from his absence in strange countries and up rose Walter with it to receive the Captain, who was already at the door: having turned out earlier than was necessary, in order to get under weigh while Mrs MacStinger was still slumbering. The Captain pretended to be in tip-top spirits, and brought a very smoky tongue in one of the pockets of the of the broad blue coat for breakfast.

'And, Wal'r,' said the Captain, when they took their seats at table, if your Uncle's the man I think him, he'll bring out the last bottle of the Madeira on the present occasion.'

'No, no, Ned,' returned the old man. 'No! That shall be opened when Walter comes home again.'

'Well said!' cried the Captain. 'Hear him!'

'There it lies,' said Sol Gills, 'down in the little cellar, covered with dirt and cobwebs. There may be dirt and cobwebs over you and me perhaps, Ned, before it sees the light.'

'Hear him! 'cried the Captain. 'Good morality! Wal'r, my lad. Train up a fig-tree in the way it should go, and when you are old sit under the shade on it. Overhaul the—Well,' said the Captain on second thoughts, 'I ain't quite certain where that's to be found, but when found, make a note of. Sol Gills, heave ahead again!'

'But there or somewhere, it shall lie, Ned, until Wally comes back to claim it,' said the old man. 'That's all I meant to say.'

'And well said too,' returned the Captain; 'and if we three don't crack that bottle in company, I'll give you two leave to.'

Notwithstanding the Captain's excessive joviality, he made but a poor hand at the smoky tongue, though he tried very hard, when anybody looked at him, to appear as if he were eating with a vast appetite. He was terribly afraid, likewise, of being left alone with either Uncle or nephew; appearing to consider that his only chance of safety as to keeping up appearances, was in there being always three together. This terror on the part of the Captain, reduced him to such ingenious evasions as running to the door, when Solomon went to put his coat on, under pretence of having seen an extraordinary hackney-coach pass: and darting out into the road when Walter went upstairs to take leave of the lodgers, on a feint of smelling fire in a neighbouring chimney. These artifices Captain Cuttle deemed inscrutable by any uninspired observer.

Walter was coming down from his parting expedition upstairs, and was crossing the shop to go back to the little parlour, when he saw a faded face he knew, looking in at the door, and darted towards it.

'Mr Carker!' cried Walter, pressing the hand of John Carker the Junior. 'Pray come in! This is kind of you, to be here so early to say good-bye to me. You knew how glad it would make me to shake hands with you, once, before going away. I cannot say how glad I am to have this opportunity. Pray come in.'

'It is not likely that we may ever meet again, Walter,' returned the other, gently resisting his invitation, 'and I am glad of this opportunity too. I may venture to speak to you, and to take you by the hand, on the eve of separation. I shall not have to resist your frank approaches, Walter, any more.

There was a melancholy in his smile as he said it, that showed he had found some company and friendship for his thoughts even in that.

'Ah, Mr Carker!' returned Walter. 'Why did you resist them? You could have done me nothing but good, I am very sure.

He shook his head. 'If there were any good,' he said, 'I could do on this earth, I would do it, Walter, for you. The sight of you from day to day, has been at once happiness and remorse to me. But the pleasure has outweighed the pain. I know that, now, by knowing what I lose.'

'Come in, Mr Carker, and make acquaintance with my good old Uncle,' urged Walter. 'I have often talked to him about you, and he will be glad to tell you all he hears from me. I have not,' said Walter, noticing his hesitation, and speaking with embarrassment himself: 'I have not told him anything about our last conversation, Mr Carker; not even him, believe me.

The grey Junior pressed his hand, and tears rose in his eyes.

'If I ever make acquaintance with him, Walter,' he returned, 'it will be that I may hear tidings of you. Rely on my not wronging your forbearance and consideration. It would be to wrong it, not to tell him all the truth, before I sought a word of confidence from him. But I have no friend or acquaintance except you: and even for your sake, am little likely to make any.'

'I wish,' said Walter, 'you had suffered me to be your friend indeed. I always wished it, Mr Carker, as you know; but never half so much as now, when we are going to part.'

'It is enough replied the other, 'that you have been the friend of my own breast, and that when I have avoided you most, my heart inclined the most towards you, and was fullest of you. Walter, good-bye!'

'Good-bye, Mr Carker. Heaven be with you, Sir!' cried Walter with emotion.

'If,' said the other, retaining his hand while he spoke; 'if when you come back, you miss me from my old corner, and should hear from anyone where I am lying, come and look upon my grave. Think that I might have been as honest and as happy as you! And let me think, when I know time is coming on, that some one like my former self may stand there, for a moment, and remember me with pity and forgiveness! Walter, good-bye!'

His figure crept like a shadow down the bright, sun-lighted street, so cheerful yet so solemn in the early summer morning; and slowly passed away.

The relentless chronometer at last announced that Walter must turn his back upon the wooden Midshipman: and away they went, himself, his Uncle, and the Captain, in a hackney-coach to a wharf, where they were to take steam-boat for some Reach down the river, the name of which, as the

Captain gave it out, was a hopeless mystery to the ears of landsmen. Arrived at this Reach (whither the ship had repaired by last night's tide), they were boarded by various excited watermen, and among others by a dirty Cyclops of the Captain's acquaintance, who, with his one eye, had made the Captain out some mile and a half off, and had been exchanging unintelligible roars with him ever since. Becoming the lawful prize of this personage, who was frightfully hoarse and constitutionally in want of shaving, they were all three put aboard the Son and Heir. And the Son and Heir was in a pretty state of confusion, with sails lying all bedraggled on the wet decks, loose ropes tripping people up, men in red shirts running barefoot to and fro, casks blockading every foot of space, and, in the thickest of the fray, a black cook in a black caboose up to his eyes in vegetables and blinded with smoke.

The Captain immediately drew Walter into a corner, and with a great effort, that made his face very red, pulled up the silver watch, which was so big, and so tight in his pocket, that it came out like a bung.

'Wal'r,' said the Captain, handing it over, and shaking him heartily by the hand, 'a parting gift, my lad. Put it back half an hour every morning, and about another quarter towards the arternoon, and it's a watch that'll do you credit.'

'Captain Cuttle! I couldn't think of it!' cried Walter, detaining him, for he was running away. 'Pray take it back. I have one already.'

'Then, Wal'r,' said the Captain, suddenly diving into one of his pockets and bringing up the two teaspoons and the sugar-tongs, with which he had armed himself to meet such an objection, 'take this here trifle of plate, instead.'

'No, no, I couldn't indeed!' cried Walter, 'a thousand thanks! Don't throw them away, Captain Cuttle!' for the Captain was about to jerk them overboard. 'They'll be of much more use to you than me. Give me your stick. I have often thought I should like to have it. There! Good-bye, Captain Cuttle! Take care of my Uncle! Uncle Sol, God bless you!'

They were over the side in the confusion, before Walter caught another glimpse of either; and when he ran up to the stern, and looked after them, he saw his Uncle hanging down his head in the boat, and Captain Cuttle rapping him on the back with the great silver watch (it must have been very painful), and gesticulating hopefully with the teaspoons and sugar-tongs. Catching sight of Walter, Captain Cuttle dropped the property into the bottom of the boat with perfect unconcern, being evidently oblivious of its existence, and pulling off the glazed hat hailed him lustily. The glazed hat made quite a show in the sun with its glistening, and the Captain continued to wave it until he could be seen no longer. Then the confusion on board, which had been rapidly increasing, reached its height; two or three other boats went away with a cheer; the sails shone bright and full above, as Walter watched them spread their surface to the favourable breeze; the water flew in sparkles from the prow; and off upon her voyage went the Son and Heir, as hopefully and trippingly as many another son and heir, gone down, had started on his way before her.

Day after day, old Sol and Captain Cuttle kept her reckoning in the little hack parlour and worked out her course, with the chart spread before them on the round table. At night, when old Sol climbed upstairs, so lonely, to the attic where it sometimes blew great guns, he looked up at the stars and listened to the wind, and kept a longer watch than would have fallen to his lot on board the ship. The last bottle of the old Madeira, which had had its cruising days, and known its dangers of the deep, lay silently beneath its dust and cobwebs, in the meanwhile, undisturbed.

CHAPTER 20. Mr Dombey goes upon a Journey

'Mr Dombey, Sir,' said Major Bagstock, 'Joee' B. is not in general a man of sentiment, for Joseph is tough. But Joe has his feelings, Sir, and when they are awakened—Damme, Mr Dombey,' cried the Major with sudden ferocity, 'this is weakness, and I won't submit to it!'

Major Bagstock delivered himself of these expressions on receiving Mr Dombey as his guest at the head of his own staircase in Princess's Place. Mr Dombey had come to breakfast with the Major, previous to their setting forth on their trip; and the ill-starved Native had already undergone a world of misery arising out of the muffins, while, in connexion with the general question of boiled eggs, life was a burden to him.

'It is not for an old soldier of the Bagstock breed,' observed the Major, relapsing into a mild state, 'to deliver himself up, a prey to his own emotions; but—damme, Sir,' cried the Major, in another spasm of ferocity, 'I condole with you!'

The Major's purple visage deepened in its hue, and the Major's lobster eyes stood out in bolder relief, as he shook Mr Dombey by the hand, imparting to that peaceful action as defiant a character as if it had been the prelude to his immediately boxing Mr Dombey for a thousand pounds a side and the championship of England. With a rotatory motion of his head, and a wheeze very like the cough of a horse, the Major then conducted his visitor to the sitting-room, and there welcomed him (having now composed his feelings) with the freedom and frankness of a travelling companion.

'Dombey,' said the Major, 'I'm glad to see you. I'm proud to see you. There are not many men in Europe to whom J. Bagstock would say that—for Josh is blunt. Sir: it's his nature—but Joey B. is proud to see you, Dombey.'

'Major,' returned Mr Dombey, 'you are very obliging.'

'No, Sir,' said the Major, 'Devil a bit! That's not my character. If that had been Joe's character, Joe might have been, by this time, Lieutenant- General Sir Joseph Bagstock, K.C.B., and might have received you in very different quarters. You don't know old Joe yet, I find. But this occasion, being special, is a source of pride to me. By the Lord, Sir,' said the Major resolutely, 'it's an honour to me!'

Mr Dombey, in his estimation of himself and his money, felt that this was very true, and therefore did not dispute the point. But the instinctive recognition of such a truth by the Major, and his plain avowal of it, were very able. It was a confirmation to Mr Dombey, if he had required any, of his not being mistaken in the Major. It was an assurance to him that his power extended beyond his own immediate sphere; and that the Major, as an officer and a gentleman, had a no less becoming sense of it, than the beadle of the Royal Exchange.

And if it were ever consolatory to know this, or the like of this, it was consolatory then, when the impotence of his will, the instability of his hopes, the feebleness of wealth, had been so direfully impressed upon him. What could it do, his boy had asked him. Sometimes, thinking of the baby question, he could hardly forbear inquiring, himself, what could it do indeed: what had it done?

But these were lonely thoughts, bred late at night in the sullen despondency and gloom of his retirement, and pride easily found its reassurance in many testimonies to the truth, as unimpeachable and precious as the Major's. Mr Dombey, in his friendlessness, inclined to the Major. It cannot be said that he warmed towards him, but he thawed a little, The Major had had some part—and not too much—in the days by the seaside. He was a man of the world, and knew some great people. He talked much, and told stories; and Mr Dombey was disposed to regard him as a choice spirit who shone in society, and who had not that poisonous ingredient of poverty with which choice spirits in general are too much adulterated. His station was undeniable. Altogether the Major was a creditable companion, well accustomed to a life of leisure, and to such places as that they were about to visit, and having an air of gentlemanly ease about him that mixed well enough with his own City character, and did not compete with it at all. If Mr Dombey had any lingering idea that the Major, as a man accustomed, in the way of his calling, to make light of the ruthless hand that had lately crushed his hopes, might unconsciously impart some useful philosophy to him, and scare away his weak regrets, he hid it from himself, and left it lying at the bottom of his pride, unexamined.

'Where is my scoundrel?' said the Major, looking wrathfully round the room.

The Native, who had no particular name, but answered to any vituperative epithet, presented himself instantly at the door and ventured to come no nearer.

'You villain!' said the choleric Major, 'where's the breakfast?'

The dark servant disappeared in search of it, and was quickly heard reascending the stairs in such a tremulous state, that the plates and dishes on the tray he carried, trembling sympathetically as he came, rattled again, all the way up.

'Dombey,' said the Major, glancing at the Native as he arranged the table, and encouraging him with an awful shake of his fist when he upset a spoon, 'here is a devilled grill, a savoury pie, a dish of kidneys, and so forth. Pray sit down. Old Joe can give you nothing but camp fare, you see.

'Very excellent fare, Major,' replied his guest; and not in mere politeness either; for the Major always took the best possible care of himself, and indeed ate rather more of rich meats than was good for him, insomuch that his Imperial complexion was mainly referred by the faculty to that circumstance.

'You have been looking over the way, Sir,' observed the Major. 'Have you seen our friend?'

'You mean Miss Tox,' retorted Mr Dombey. 'No.'

'Charming woman, Sir,' said the Major, with a fat laugh rising in his short throat, and nearly suffocating him.

'Miss Tox is a very good sort of person, I believe,' replied Mr Dombey.

The haughty coldness of the reply seemed to afford Major Bagstock infinite delight. He swelled and swelled, exceedingly: and even laid down his knife and fork for a moment, to rub his hands.

'Old Joe, Sir,' said the Major, 'was a bit of a favourite in that quarter once. But Joe has had his day. J. Bagstock is extinguished—outrivalled—floored, Sir.'

'I should have supposed,' Mr Dombey replied, 'that the lady's day for favourites was over: but perhaps you are jesting, Major.'

'Perhaps you are jesting, Dombey?' was the Major's rejoinder.

There never was a more unlikely possibility. It was so clearly expressed in Mr Dombey's face, that the Major apologised.

'I beg your pardon,' he said. 'I see you are in earnest. I tell you what, Dombey.' The Major paused in his eating, and looked mysteriously indignant. 'That's a de-vilish ambitious woman, Sir.'

Mr Dombey said 'Indeed?' with frigid indifference: mingled perhaps with some contemptuous incredulity as to Miss Tox having the presumption to harbour such a superior quality.

'That woman, Sir,' said the Major, 'is, in her way, a Lucifer. Joey B. has had his day, Sir, but he keeps his eyes. He sees, does Joe. His Royal Highness the late Duke of York observed of Joey, at a levee, that he saw.'

The Major accompanied this with such a look, and, between eating, drinking, hot tea, devilled grill, muffins, and meaning, was altogether so swollen and inflamed about the head, that even Mr Dombey showed some anxiety for him.

'That ridiculous old spectacle, Sir,' pursued the Major, 'aspires. She aspires sky-high, Sir. Matrimonially, Dombey.'

'I am sorry for her,' said Mr Dombey.

'Don't say that, Dombey,' returned the Major in a warning voice.

'Why should I not, Major?' said Mr Dombey.

The Major gave no answer but the horse's cough, and went on eating vigorously.

'She has taken an interest in your household,' said the Major, stopping short again, 'and has been a frequent visitor at your house for some time now.'

'Yes,' replied Mr Dombey with great stateliness, 'Miss Tox was originally received there, at the time of Mrs Dombey's death, as a friend of my sister's; and being a well-behaved person, and showing a liking for the poor infant, she was permitted—may I say encouraged—to repeat her visits with my sister, and gradually to occupy a kind of footing of familiarity in the family. I have,' said Mr Dombey, in the tone of a man who was making a great and valuable concession, 'I have a respect for Miss Tox. She his been so obliging as to render many little services in my house: trifling and insignificant services perhaps, Major, but not to be disparaged on that account: and I hope I have had the good fortune to be enabled to acknowledge them by such attention and notice as it has been in my power to bestow. I hold myself indebted to Miss Tox, Major,' added Mr Dombey, with a slight wave of his hand, 'for the pleasure of your acquaintance.'

'Dombey,' said the Major, warmly: 'no! No, Sir! Joseph Bagstock can never permit that assertion to pass uncontradicted. Your knowledge of old Joe, Sir, such as he is, and old Joe's knowledge of you, Sir, had its origin in a noble fellow, Sir—in a great creature, Sir. Dombey!' said the Major, with a struggle which it was not very difficult to parade, his whole life being a struggle against all kinds of apoplectic symptoms, 'we knew each other through your boy.'

Mr Dombey seemed touched, as it is not improbable the Major designed he should be, by this allusion. He looked down and sighed: and the Major, rousing himself fiercely, again said, in reference to the state of mind into which he felt himself in danger of falling, that this was weakness, and nothing should induce him to submit to it.

'Our friend had a remote connexion with that event,' said the Major, 'and all the credit that belongs to her, J. B. is willing to give her, Sir. Notwithstanding which, Ma'am,' he added, raising his eyes from his plate, and casting them across Princess's Place, to where Miss Tox was at that moment visible at her window watering her flowers, 'you're a scheming jade, Ma'am, and your ambition is a piece of monstrous impudence. If it only made yourself ridiculous, Ma'am,' said the Major, rolling his head at the unconscious Miss Tox, while his starting eyes appeared to make a leap towards her, 'you might do that to your heart's content, Ma'am, without any objection, I assure you, on the part of Bagstock.' Here the Major laughed frightfully up in the tips of his ears and in the veins of his head. 'But when, Ma'am,' said the Major, 'you compromise other people, and generous, unsuspicious people too, as a repayment for their condescension, you stir the blood of old Joe in his body.'

'Major,' said Mr Dombey, reddening, 'I hope you do not hint at anything so absurd on the part of Miss Tox as—'

'Dombey,' returned the Major, 'I hint at nothing. But Joey B. has lived in the world, Sir: lived in the world with his eyes open, Sir, and his ears cocked: and Joe tells you, Dombey, that there's a devilish artful and ambitious woman over the way.'

Mr Dombey involuntarily glanced over the way; and an angry glance he sent in that direction, too.

'That's all on such a subject that shall pass the lips of Joseph Bagstock,' said the Major firmly. 'Joe is not a tale-bearer, but there are times when he must speak, when he will speak!—confound your arts, Ma'am,' cried the Major, again apostrophising his fair neighbour, with great ire,—'when the provocation is too strong to admit of his remaining silent.'

The emotion of this outbreak threw the Major into a paroxysm of horse's coughs, which held him for a long time. On recovering he added:

'And now, Dombey, as you have invited Joe—old Joe, who has no other merit, Sir, but that he is tough and hearty—to be your guest and guide at Leamington, command him in any way you please, and he is wholly yours. I don't know, Sir,' said the Major, wagging his double chin with a jocose air, 'what it is you people see in Joe to make you hold him in such great request, all of you; but this I know, Sir, that if he wasn't pretty tough, and obstinate in his refusals, you'd kill him among you with your invitations and so forth, in double-quick time.'

Mr Dombey, in a few words, expressed his sense of the preference he received over those other distinguished members of society who were clamouring for the possession of Major Bagstock. But the Major cut him short by giving him to understand that he followed his own inclinations, and that they had risen up in a body and said with one accord, 'J. B., Dombey is the man for you to choose as a friend.'

The Major being by this time in a state of repletion, with essence of savoury pie oozing out at the corners of his eyes, and devilled grill and kidneys tightening his cravat: and the time moreover approaching for the departure of the railway train to Birmingham, by which they were to leave town: the Native got him into his great-coat with immense difficulty, and buttoned him up until his face looked staring and gasping, over the top of that garment, as if he were in a barrel. The Native then handed him separately, and with a decent interval between each supply, his washleather gloves, his thick stick, and his hat; which latter article the Major wore with a rakish air on one side of his head, by way of toning down his remarkable visage. The Native had previously packed, in all possible and impossible parts of Mr Dombey's chariot, which was in waiting, an unusual quantity of carpet-bags and small portmanteaus, no less apoplectic in appearance than the Major himself: and having filled his own pockets with Seltzer water, East India sherry, sandwiches, shawls, telescopes, maps, and newspapers, any or all of which light baggage the Major might require at any instant of the journey, he announced that everything was ready. To complete the equipment of this unfortunate foreigner (currently believed to be a prince in his own country), when he took his seat in the rumble by the side of Mr Towlinson, a pile of the Major's cloaks and great-coats was hurled upon him by the landlord, who aimed at him from the pavement with those great missiles like a Titan, and so covered him up, that he proceeded, in a living tomb, to the railroad station.

But before the carriage moved away, and while the Native was in the act of sepulture, Miss Tox appearing at her window, waved a lilywhite handkerchief. Mr Dombey received this parting salutation very coldly—very coldly even for him—and honouring her with the slightest possible inclination of his head, leaned back in the carriage with a very discontented look. His marked behaviour seemed to afford the Major (who was all politeness in his recognition of Miss Tox) unbounded satisfaction; and he sat for a long time afterwards, leering, and choking, like an over-fed Mephistopheles.

During the bustle of preparation at the railway, Mr Dombey and the Major walked up and down the platform side by side; the former taciturn and gloomy, and the latter entertaining him, or entertaining himself, with a variety of anecdotes and reminiscences, in most of which Joe Bagstock was the principal performer. Neither of the two observed that in the course of these walks, they attracted the attention of a working man who was standing near the engine, and who touched his hat every time they passed; for Mr Dombey habitually looked over the vulgar herd, not at them; and the Major was looking, at the time, into the core of one of his stories. At length, however, this man stepped before them as they turned round, and pulling his hat off, and keeping it off, ducked his head to Mr Dombey.

'Beg your pardon, Sir,' said the man, 'but I hope you're a doin' pretty well, Sir.'

He was dressed in a canvas suit abundantly besmeared with coal-dust and oil, and had cinders in his whiskers, and a smell of half-slaked ashes all over him. He was not a bad-looking fellow, nor even what could be fairly called a dirty-looking fellow, in spite of this; and, in short, he was Mr Toodle, professionally clothed.

'I shall have the honour of stokin' of you down, Sir,' said Mr Toodle. 'Beg your pardon, Sir.—I hope you find yourself a coming round?'

Mr Dombey looked at him, in return for his tone of interest, as if a man like that would make his very eyesight dirty.

''Scuse the liberty, Sir,' said Toodle, seeing he was not clearly remembered, 'but my wife Polly, as was called Richards in your family—'

A change in Mr Dombey's face, which seemed to express recollection of him, and so it did, but it expressed in a much stronger degree an angry sense of humiliation, stopped Mr Toodle short.

'Your wife wants money, I suppose,' said Mr Dombey, putting his hand in his pocket, and speaking (but that he always did) haughtily.

'No thank'ee, Sir,' returned Toodle, 'I can't say she does. I don't.'

Mr Dombey was stopped short now in his turn: and awkwardly: with his hand in his pocket.

'No, Sir,' said Toodle, turning his oilskin cap round and round; 'we're a doin' pretty well, Sir; we haven't no cause to complain in the worldly way, Sir. We've had four more since then, Sir, but we rubs on.'

Mr Dombey would have rubbed on to his own carriage, though in so doing he had rubbed the stoker underneath the wheels; but his attention was arrested by something in connexion with the cap still going slowly round and round in the man's hand.

'We lost one babby,' observed Toodle, 'there's no denyin'.'

'Lately,' added Mr Dombey, looking at the cap.

'No, Sir, up'ard of three years ago, but all the rest is hearty. And in the matter o readin', Sir,' said Toodle, ducking again, as if to remind Mr Dombey of what had passed between them on that subject long ago, 'them boys o' mine, they learned me, among 'em, arter all. They've made a wery tolerable scholar of me, Sir, them boys.'

'Come, Major!' said Mr Dombey.

'Beg your pardon, Sir,' resumed Toodle, taking a step before them and deferentially stopping them again, still cap in hand: 'I wouldn't have troubled you with such a pint except as a way of gettin' in the name of my son Biler—christened Robin—him as you was so good as to make a Charitable Grinder on.'

'Well, man,' said Mr Dombey in his severest manner. 'What about him?'

'Why, Sir,' returned Toodle, shaking his head with a face of great anxiety and distress, 'I'm forced to say, Sir, that he's gone wrong.

'He has gone wrong, has he?' said Mr Dombey, with a hard kind of satisfaction.

'He has fell into bad company, you see, genelmen,' pursued the father, looking wistfully at both, and evidently taking the Major into the conversation with the hope of having his sympathy. 'He has got into bad ways. God send he may come to again, genelmen, but he's on the wrong track now! You could hardly be off hearing of it somehow, Sir,' said Toodle, again addressing Mr Dombey individually; 'and it's better I should out and say my boy's gone rather wrong. Polly's dreadful down about it, genelmen,' said Toodle with the same dejected look, and another appeal to the Major.

'A son of this man's whom I caused to be educated, Major,' said Mr Dombey, giving him his arm. 'The usual return!'

'Take advice from plain old Joe, and never educate that sort of people, Sir,' returned the Major. 'Damme, Sir, it never does! It always fails!'

The simple father was beginning to submit that he hoped his son, the quondam Grinder, huffed and cuffed, and flogged and badged, and taught, as parrots are, by a brute jobbed into his place of schoolmaster with as much fitness for it as a hound, might not have been educated on quite a right plan in some undiscovered respect, when Mr Dombey angrily repeating 'The usual return!' led the Major away. And the Major being heavy to hoist into Mr Dombey's carriage, elevated in mid-air, and having to stop and swear that he would flay the Native alive, and break every bone in his skin, and visit other physical torments upon him, every time he couldn't get his foot on the step, and fell back on that dark exile, had barely time before they started to repeat hoarsely that it would never do: that it always failed: and that if he were to educate 'his own vagabond,' he would certainly be hanged.

Mr Dombey assented bitterly; but there was something more in his bitterness, and in his moody way of falling back in the carriage, and looking with knitted brows at the changing objects without, than the failure of that noble educational system administered by the Grinders' Company. He had seen upon the man's rough cap a piece of new crape, and he had assured himself, from his manner and his answers, that he wore it for his son.

Sol from high to low, at home or abroad, from Florence in his great house to the coarse churl who was feeding the fire then smoking before them, everyone set up some claim or other to a share in his dead boy, and was a bidder against him! Could he ever forget how that woman had wept over his pillow, and called him her own child! or how he, waking from his sleep, had asked for her, and had raised himself in his bed and brightened when she came in!

To think of this presumptuous raker among coals and ashes going on before there, with his sign of mourning! To think that he dared to enter, even by a common show like that, into the trial and disappointment of a proud gentleman's secret heart! To think that this lost child, who was to have divided with him his riches, and his projects, and his power, and allied with whom he was to have shut out all the world as with a double door of gold, should have let in such a herd to insult him with their knowledge of his defeated hopes, and their boasts of claiming community of feeling with himself, so far removed: if not of having crept into the place wherein he would have lorded it, alone!

He found no pleasure or relief in the journey. Tortured by these thoughts he carried monotony with him, through the rushing landscape, and hurried headlong, not through a rich and varied country, but a wilderness of blighted plans and gnawing jealousies. The very speed at which the train was whirled along, mocked the swift course of the young life that had been borne away so steadily and so inexorably to its foredoomed end. The power that forced itself upon its iron way—its own—defiant of all paths and roads, piercing through the heart of every obstacle, and dragging living creatures of all classes, ages, and degrees behind it, was a type of the triumphant monster, Death.

Away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, from the town, burrowing among the dwellings of men and making the streets hum, flashing out into the meadows for a moment, mining in through the damp earth, booming on in darkness and heavy air, bursting out again into the sunny day so bright and wide; away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, through the fields, through the woods, through the corn, through the hay, through the chalk, through the mould, through the clay, through the rock, among objects close at hand and almost in the grasp, ever flying from the traveller, and a deceitful distance ever moving slowly within him: like as in the track of the remorseless monster, Death!

Through the hollow, on the height, by the heath, by the orchard, by the park, by the garden, over the canal, across the river, where the sheep are feeding, where the mill is going, where the barge is floating, where the dead are lying, where the factory is smoking, where the stream is running, where the village clusters, where the great cathedral rises, where the bleak moor lies, and the wild breeze smooths or ruffles it at its inconstant will; away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, and no trace to leave behind but dust and vapour: like as in the track of the remorseless monster, Death!

Breasting the wind and light, the shower and sunshine, away, and still away, it rolls and roars, fierce and rapid, smooth and certain, and great works and massive bridges crossing up above, fall like a beam of shadow an inch broad, upon the eye, and then are lost. Away, and still away, onward and onward ever: glimpses of cottage-homes, of houses, mansions, rich estates, of husbandry and handicraft, of people, of old roads and paths that look deserted, small, and insignificant as they are left behind: and so they do, and what else is there but such glimpses, in the track of the indomitable monster, Death!

Away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, plunging down into the earth again, and working on in such a storm of energy and perseverance, that amidst the darkness and whirlwind the motion seems reversed, and to tend furiously backward, until a ray of light upon the Wet wall shows its surface flying past like a fierce stream, Away once more into the day, and through the day, with a shrill yell of exultation, roaring, rattling, tearing on, spurning everything with its dark breath, sometimes pausing for a minute where a crowd of faces are, that in a minute more are not; sometimes lapping water greedily, and before the spout at which it drinks' has ceased to drip upon the ground, shrieking, roaring, rattling through the purple distance!

Louder and louder yet, it shrieks and cries as it comes tearing on resistless to the goal: and now its way, still like the way of Death, is strewn with ashes thickly. Everything around is blackened. There are dark pools of water, muddy lanes, and miserable habitations far below. There are jagged walls and falling houses close at hand, and through the battered roofs and broken windows, wretched rooms are seen, where 'want and fever hide themselves in many wretched shapes, while smoke and crowded gables, and distorted chimneys, and deformity of brick and mortar penning up deformity of mind and body, choke the murky distance. As Mr Dombey looks out of his carriage window, it is never in his thoughts that the monster who has brought him there has let the light of day in on these things: not made or caused them. It was the journey's fitting end, and might have been the end of everything; it was so ruinous and dreary.'

So, pursuing the one course of thought, he had the one relentless monster still before him. All things looked black, and cold, and deadly upon him, and he on them. He found a likeness to his misfortune everywhere. There was a remorseless triumph going on about him, and it galled and stung him in his pride and jealousy, whatever form it took: though most of all when it divided with him the love and memory of his lost boy.

There was a face—he had looked upon it, on the previous night, and it on him with eyes that read his soul, though they were dim with tears, and hidden soon behind two quivering hands—that often had attended him in fancy, on this ride. He had seen it, with the expression of last night, timidly pleading to him. It was not reproachful, but there was something of doubt, almost of hopeful incredulity in it, which, as he once more saw that fade away into a desolate certainty of his dislike, was like reproach. It was a trouble to him to think of this face of Florence.

Because he felt any new compunction towards it? No. Because the feeling it awakened in him—of which he had had some old foreshadowing in older times- -was full-formed now, and spoke out plainly, moving him too much, and threatening to grow too strong for his composure. Because the face was abroad, in the expression of defeat and persecution that seemed to encircle him like the air. Because it barbed the arrow of that cruel and remorseless enemy on which his thoughts so ran, and put into its grasp a double-handed sword. Because he knew full well, in his own breast, as he stood there, tinging the scene of transition before him with the morbid colours of his own mind, and making it a ruin and a picture of decay, instead of hopeful change, and promise of better things, that life had quite as much to do with his complainings as death. One child was gone, and one child left. Why was the object of his hope removed instead of her?

The sweet, calm, gentle presence in his fancy, moved him to no reflection but that. She had been unwelcome to him from the first; she was an aggravation of his bitterness now. If his son had been his only child, and the same blow had fallen on him, it would have been heavy to bear; but infinitely lighter than now, when it might have fallen on her (whom he could have lost, or he believed it, without a pang), and had not. Her loving and innocent face rising before him, had no softening or winning influence. He rejected the angel, and took up with the tormenting spirit crouching in his bosom. Her patience, goodness, youth, devotion, love, were as so many atoms in the ashes upon which he set his heel. He saw her image in the blight and blackness all around him, not irradiating but deepening the gloom. More than once upon this journey, and now again as he stood pondering at this journey's end, tracing figures in the dust with his stick, the thought came into his mind, what was there he could interpose between himself and it?

The Major, who had been blowing and panting all the way down, like another engine, and whose eye had often wandered from his newspaper to leer at the prospect, as if there were a procession of discomfited Miss Toxes pouring out in the smoke of the train, and flying away over the fields to hide themselves in any place of refuge, aroused his friends by informing him that the post-horses were harnessed and the carriage ready.

'Dombey,' said the Major, rapping him on the arm with his cane, 'don't be thoughtful. It's a bad habit, Old Joe, Sir, wouldn't be as tough as you see him, if he had ever encouraged it. You are too great a man, Dombey, to be thoughtful. In your position, Sir, you're far above that kind of thing.'

The Major even in his friendly remonstrances, thus consulting the dignity and honour of Mr Dombey, and showing a lively sense of their importance, Mr Dombey felt more than ever disposed to defer to a gentleman possessing so much good sense and such a well-regulated mind; accordingly he made an effort to listen to the Major's stories, as they trotted along the turnpike road; and the Major, finding both the pace and the road a great deal better adapted to his conversational powers than the mode of travelling they had just relinquished, came out of his entertainment.

But still the Major, blunt and tough as he was, and as he so very often said he was, administered some palatable catering to his companion's appetite. He related, or rather suffered it to escape him, accidentally, and as one might say, grudgingly and against his will, how there was great curiosity and excitement at the club, in regard of his friend Dombey. How he was suffocated with questions, Sir. How old Joe Bagstock was a greater man than ever, there, on the strength of Dombey. How they said, 'Bagstock, your friend Dombey now, what is the view he takes of such and such a question? Though, by the Rood, Sir,' said the Major, with a broad stare, 'how they discovered that J. B. ever came to know you, is a mystery!'

In this flow of spirits and conversation, only interrupted by his usual plethoric symptoms, and by intervals of lunch, and from time to time by some violent assault upon the Native, who wore a pair of ear-rings in his dark-brown ears, and on whom his European clothes sat with an outlandish impossibility of adjustment—being, of their own accord, and without any reference to the tailor's art, long where they ought to be short, short where they ought to be long, tight where they ought to be loose, and loose where they ought to be tight—and to which he imparted a new grace, whenever the Major attacked him, by shrinking into them like a shrivelled nut, or a cold monkey—in this flow of spirits and conversation, the Major continued all day: so that when evening came on, and found them trotting through the green and leafy road near Leamington, the Major's voice, what with talking and eating and chuckling and choking, appeared to be in the box under the rumble, or in some neighbouring hay-stack. Nor did the Major improve it at the Royal Hotel, where rooms and dinner had been ordered, and where he so oppressed his organs of speech by eating and drinking, that when he retired to bed he had no voice at all, except to cough with, and could only make himself intelligible to the dark servant by gasping at him.

He not only rose next morning, however, like a giant refreshed, but conducted himself, at breakfast like a giant refreshing. At this meal they arranged their daily habits. The Major was to take the responsibility of ordering everything to eat and drink; and they were to have a late breakfast together every morning, and a late dinner together every day. Mr Dombey would prefer remaining in his own room, or walking in the country by himself, on that first day of their sojourn at Leamington; but next morning he would be happy to accompany the Major to the Pump-room, and about the town. So they parted until dinner-time. Mr Dombey retired to nurse his wholesome thoughts in his own way. The Major, attended by the Native carrying a camp- stool, a great-coat, and an umbrella, swaggered up and down through all the public places: looking into subscription books to find out who was there, looking up old ladies by whom he was much admired, reporting J. B. tougher than ever, and puffing his rich friend Dombey wherever he went. There never was a man who stood by a friend more staunchly than the Major, when in puffing him, he puffed himself.

It was surprising how much new conversation the Major had to let off at dinner-time, and what occasion he gave Mr Dombey to admire his social qualities. At breakfast next morning, he knew the contents of the latest newspapers received; and mentioned several subjects in connexion with them, on which his opinion had recently been sought by persons of such power and might, that they were only to be obscurely hinted at. Mr Dombey, who had been so long shut up within himself, and who had rarely, at any time, overstepped the enchanted circle within which the operations of Dombey and Son were conducted, began to think this an improvement on his solitary life; and in place of excusing himself for another day, as he had thought of doing when alone, walked out with the Major arm-in-arm.

CHAPTER 21. New Faces

The MAJOR, more blue-faced and staring—more over-ripe, as it were, than ever—and giving vent, every now and then, to one of the horse's coughs, not so much of necessity as in a spontaneous explosion of importance, walked arm-in-arm with Mr Dombey up the sunny side of the way, with his cheeks swelling over his tight stock, his legs majestically wide apart, and his great head wagging from side to side, as if he were remonstrating within himself for being such a captivating object. They had not walked many yards, before the Major encountered somebody he knew, nor many yards farther before the Major encountered somebody else he knew, but he merely shook his fingers at them as he passed, and led Mr Dombey on: pointing out the localities as they went, and enlivening the walk with any current scandal suggested by them.

In this manner the Major and Mr Dombey were walking arm-in-arm, much to their own satisfaction, when they beheld advancing towards them, a wheeled chair, in which a lady was seated, indolently steering her carriage by a kind of rudder in front, while it was propelled by some unseen power in the rear. Although the lady was not young, she was very blooming in the face—quite rosy—and her dress and attitude were perfectly juvenile. Walking by the side of the chair, and carrying her gossamer parasol with a proud and weary air, as if so great an effort must be soon abandoned and the parasol dropped, sauntered a much younger lady, very handsome, very haughty, very wilful, who tossed her head and drooped her eyelids, as though, if there were anything in all the world worth looking into, save a mirror, it certainly was not the earth or sky.

'Why, what the devil have we here, Sir!' cried the Major, stopping as this little cavalcade drew near.

'My dearest Edith!' drawled the lady in the chair, 'Major Bagstock!'

The Major no sooner heard the voice, than he relinquished Mr Dombey's arm, darted forward, took the hand of the lady in the chair and pressed it to his lips. With no less gallantry, the Major folded both his gloves upon his heart, and bowed low to the other lady. And now, the chair having stopped, the motive power became visible in the shape of a flushed page pushing behind, who seemed to have in part outgrown and in part out-pushed his strength, for when he stood upright he was tall, and wan, and thin, and his plight appeared the more forlorn from his having injured the shape of his hat, by butting at the carriage with his head to urge it forward, as is sometimes done by elephants in Oriental countries.

'Joe Bagstock,' said the Major to both ladies, 'is a proud and happy man for the rest of his life.'

'You false creature! said the old lady in the chair, insipidly. 'Where do you come from? I can't bear you.'

'Then suffer old Joe to present a friend, Ma'am,' said the Major, promptly, 'as a reason for being tolerated. Mr Dombey, Mrs Skewton.' The lady in the chair was gracious. 'Mr Dombey, Mrs Granger.' The lady with the parasol was faintly conscious of Mr Dombey's taking off his hat, and bowing low. 'I am delighted, Sir,' said the Major, 'to have this opportunity.'

The Major seemed in earnest, for he looked at all the three, and leered in his ugliest manner.

'Mrs Skewton, Dombey,' said the Major, 'makes havoc in the heart of old Josh.'

Mr Dombey signified that he didn't wonder at it.

'You perfidious goblin,' said the lady in the chair, 'have done! How long have you been here, bad man?'

'One day,' replied the Major.

'And can you be a day, or even a minute,' returned the lady, slightly settling her false curls and false eyebrows with her fan, and showing her false teeth, set off by her false complexion, 'in the garden of what's-its-name.'

'Eden, I suppose, Mama,' interrupted the younger lady, scornfully.

'My dear Edith,' said the other, 'I cannot help it. I never can remember those frightful names—without having your whole Soul and Being inspired by the sight of Nature; by the perfume,' said Mrs Skewton, rustling a handkerchief that was faint and sickly with essences, 'of her artless breath, you creature!'

The discrepancy between Mrs Skewton's fresh enthusiasm of words, and forlornly faded manner, was hardly less observable than that between her age, which was about seventy, and her dress, which would have been youthful for twenty-seven. Her attitude in the wheeled chair (which she never varied) was one in which she had been taken in a barouche, some fifty years before, by a then fashionable artist who had appended to his published sketch the name of Cleopatra: in consequence of a discovery made by the critics of the time, that it bore an exact resemblance to that Princess as she reclined on board her galley. Mrs Skewton was a beauty then, and bucks threw wine-glasses over their heads by dozens in her honour. The beauty and the barouche had both passed away, but she still preserved the attitude, and for this reason expressly, maintained the wheeled chair and the butting page: there being nothing whatever, except the attitude, to prevent her from walking.

'Mr Dombey is devoted to Nature, I trust?' said Mrs Skewton, settling her diamond brooch. And by the way, she chiefly lived upon the reputation of some diamonds, and her family connexions.

'My friend Dombey, Ma'am,' returned the Major, 'may be devoted to her in secret, but a man who is paramount in the greatest city in the universe—

'No one can be a stranger,' said Mrs Skewton, 'to Mr Dombey's immense influence.'

As Mr Dombey acknowledged the compliment with a bend of his head, the younger lady glancing at him, met his eyes.

'You reside here, Madam?' said Mr Dombey, addressing her.

'No, we have been to a great many places. To Harrogate and Scarborough, and into Devonshire. We have been visiting, and resting here and there. Mama likes change.'

'Edith of course does not,' said Mrs Skewton, with a ghastly archness.

'I have not found that there is any change in such places,' was the answer, delivered with supreme indifference.

'They libel me. There is only one change, Mr Dombey,' observed Mrs Skewton, with a mincing sigh, 'for which I really care, and that I fear I shall never be permitted to enjoy. People cannot spare one. But seclusion and contemplation are my what-his-name—'

'If you mean Paradise, Mama, you had better say so, to render yourself intelligible,' said the younger lady.

'My dearest Edith,' returned Mrs Skewton, 'you know that I am wholly dependent upon you for those odious names. I assure you, Mr Dombey, Nature intended me for an Arcadian. I am thrown away in society. Cows are my passion. What I have ever sighed for, has been to retreat to a Swiss farm, and live entirely surrounded by cows—and china.'

This curious association of objects, suggesting a remembrance of the celebrated bull who got by mistake into a crockery shop, was received with perfect gravity by Mr Dombey, who intimated his opinion that Nature was, no doubt, a very respectable institution.

'What I want,' drawled Mrs Skewton, pinching her shrivelled throat, 'is heart.' It was frightfully true in one sense, if not in that in which she used the phrase. 'What I want, is frankness, confidence, less conventionality, and freer play of soul. We are so dreadfully artificial.'

We were, indeed.

'In short,' said Mrs Skewton, 'I want Nature everywhere. It would be so extremely charming.'

'Nature is inviting us away now, Mama, if you are ready,' said the younger lady, curling her handsome lip. At this hint, the wan page, who had been surveying the party over the top of the chair, vanished behind it, as if the ground had swallowed him up.

'Stop a moment, Withers!' said Mrs Skewton, as the chair began to move; calling to the page with all the languid dignity with which she had called in days of yore to a coachman with a wig, cauliflower nosegay, and silk stockings. 'Where are you staying, abomination?' The Major was staying at the Royal Hotel, with his friend Dombey.

'You may come and see us any evening when you are good,' lisped Mrs Skewton. 'If Mr Dombey will honour us, we shall be happy. Withers, go on!'

The Major again pressed to his blue lips the tips of the fingers that were disposed on the ledge of the wheeled chair with careful carelessness, after the Cleopatra model: and Mr Dombey bowed. The elder lady honoured them both with a very gracious smile and a girlish wave of her hand; the younger lady with the very slightest inclination of her head that common courtesy allowed.

The last glimpse of the wrinkled face of the mother, with that patched colour on it which the sun made infinitely more haggard and dismal than any want of colour could have been, and of the proud beauty of the daughter with her graceful figure and erect deportment, engendered such an involuntary disposition on the part of both the Major and Mr Dombey to look after them, that they both turned at the same moment. The Page, nearly as much aslant as his own shadow, was toiling after the chair, uphill, like a slow battering-ram; the top of Cleopatra's bonnet was fluttering in exactly the same corner to the inch as before; and the Beauty, loitering by herself a little in advance, expressed in all her elegant form, from head to foot, the same supreme disregard of everything and everybody.

'I tell you what, Sir,' said the Major, as they resumed their walk again. 'If Joe Bagstock were a younger man, there's not a woman in the world whom he'd prefer for Mrs Bagstock to that woman. By George, Sir!' said the Major, 'she's superb!'

'Do you mean the daughter?' inquired Mr Dombey.

'Is Joey B. a turnip, Dombey,' said the Major, 'that he should mean the mother?'

'You were complimentary to the mother,' returned Mr Dombey.

'An ancient flame, Sir,' chuckled Major Bagstock. 'Devilish ancient. I humour her.'

'She impresses me as being perfectly genteel,' said Mr Dombey.

'Genteel, Sir,' said the Major, stopping short, and staring in his companion's face. 'The Honourable Mrs Skewton, Sir, is sister to the late Lord Feenix, and aunt to the present Lord. The family are not wealthy—they're poor, indeed—and she lives upon a small jointure; but if you come to blood, Sir!' The Major gave a flourish with his stick and walked on again, in despair of being able to say what you came to, if you came to that.

'You addressed the daughter, I observed,' said Mr Dombey, after a short pause, 'as Mrs Granger.'

'Edith Skewton, Sir,' returned the Major, stopping short again, and punching a mark in the ground with his cane, to represent her, 'married (at eighteen) Granger of Ours;' whom the Major indicated by another punch. 'Granger, Sir,' said the Major, tapping the last ideal portrait, and rolling his head emphatically, 'was Colonel of Ours; a de-vilish handsome fellow, Sir, of forty-one. He died, Sir, in the second year of his marriage.' The Major ran the representative of the deceased Granger through and through the body with his walking-stick, and went on again, carrying his stick over his shoulder.

'How long is this ago?' asked Mr Dombey, making another halt.

'Edith Granger, Sir,' replied the Major, shutting one eye, putting his head on one side, passing his cane into his left hand, and smoothing his shirt- frill with his right, 'is, at this present time, not quite thirty. And damme, Sir,' said the Major, shouldering his stick once more, and walking on again, 'she's a peerless woman!'

'Was there any family?' asked Mr Dombey presently.

'Yes, Sir,' said the Major. 'There was a boy.'

Mr Dombey's eyes sought the ground, and a shade came over his face.

'Who was drowned, Sir,' pursued the Major. 'When a child of four or five years old.'

'Indeed?' said Mr Dombey, raising his head.

'By the upsetting of a boat in which his nurse had no business to have put him,' said the Major. 'That's his history. Edith Granger is Edith Granger still; but if tough old Joey B., Sir, were a little younger and a little richer, the name of that immortal paragon should be Bagstock.'

The Major heaved his shoulders, and his cheeks, and laughed more like an over-fed Mephistopheles than ever, as he said the words.

'Provided the lady made no objection, I suppose?' said Mr Dombey coldly.

'By Gad, Sir,' said the Major, 'the Bagstock breed are not accustomed to that sort of obstacle. Though it's true enough that Edith might have married twenty times, but for being proud, Sir, proud.'

Mr Dombey seemed, by his face, to think no worse of her for that.

'It's a great quality after all,' said the Major. 'By the Lord, it's a high quality! Dombey! You are proud yourself, and your friend, Old Joe, respects you for it, Sir.'

With this tribute to the character of his ally, which seemed to be wrung from him by the force of circumstances and the irresistible tendency of their conversation, the Major closed the subject, and glided into a general exposition of the extent to which he had been beloved and doted on by splendid women and brilliant creatures.

On the next day but one, Mr Dombey and the Major encountered the Honourable Mrs Skewton and her daughter in the Pump-room; on the day after, they met them again very near the place where they had met them first. After meeting them thus, three or four times in all, it became a point of mere civility to old acquaintances that the Major should go there one evening. Mr Dombey had not originally intended to pay visits, but on the Major announcing this intention, he said he would have the pleasure of accompanying him. So the Major told the Native to go round before dinner, and say, with his and Mr Dombey's compliments, that they would have the honour of visiting the ladies that same evening, if the ladies were alone. In answer to which message, the Native brought back a very small note with a very large quantity of scent about it, indited by the Honourable Mrs

Skewton to Major Bagstock, and briefly saying, 'You are a shocking bear and I have a great mind not to forgive you, but if you are very good indeed,' which was underlined, 'you may come. Compliments (in which Edith unites) to Mr Dombey.'

The Honourable Mrs Skewton and her daughter, Mrs Granger, resided, while at Leamington, in lodgings that were fashionable enough and dear enough, but rather limited in point of space and conveniences; so that the Honourable Mrs Skewton, being in bed, had her feet in the window and her head in the fireplace, while the Honourable Mrs Skewton's maid was quartered in a closet within the drawing-room, so extremely small, that, to avoid developing the whole of its accommodations, she was obliged to writhe in and out of the door like a beautiful serpent. Withers, the wan page, slept out of the house immediately under the tiles at a neighbouring milk-shop; and the wheeled chair, which was the stone of that young Sisyphus, passed the night in a shed belonging to the same dairy, where new-laid eggs were produced by the poultry connected with the establishment, who roosted on a broken donkey- cart, persuaded, to all appearance, that it grew there, and was a species of tree.

Mr Dombey and the Major found Mrs Skewton arranged, as Cleopatra, among the cushions of a sofa: very airily dressed; and certainly not resembling Shakespeare's Cleopatra, whom age could not wither. On their way upstairs they had heard the sound of a harp, but it had ceased on their being announced, and Edith now stood beside it handsomer and haughtier than ever. It was a remarkable characteristic of this lady's beauty that it appeared to vaunt and assert itself without her aid, and against her will. She knew that she was beautiful: it was impossible that it could be otherwise: but she seemed with her own pride to defy her very self.

Whether she held cheap attractions that could only call forth admiration that was worthless to her, or whether she designed to render them more precious to admirers by this usage of them, those to whom they were precious seldom paused to consider.

'I hope, Mrs Granger,' said Mr Dombey, advancing a step towards her, 'we are not the cause of your ceasing to play?'

'You! oh no!'

'Why do you not go on then, my dearest Edith?' said Cleopatra.

'I left off as I began—of my own fancy.'

The exquisite indifference of her manner in saying this: an indifference quite removed from dulness or insensibility, for it was pointed with proud purpose: was well set off by the carelessness with which she drew her hand across the strings, and came from that part of the room.

'Do you know, Mr Dombey,' said her languishing mother, playing with a hand-screen, 'that occasionally my dearest Edith and myself actually almost differ—'

'Not quite, sometimes, Mama?' said Edith.

'Oh never quite, my darling! Fie, fie, it would break my heart,' returned her mother, making a faint attempt to pat her with the screen, which Edith made no movement to meet, '—about these old conventionalities of manner that are observed in little things? Why are we not more natural? Dear me! With all those yearnings, and gushings, and impulsive throbbings that we have implanted in our souls, and which are so very charming, why are we not more natural?'

Mr Dombey said it was very true, very true.

'We could be more natural I suppose if we tried?' said Mrs Skewton.

Mr Dombey thought it possible.

'Devil a bit, Ma'am,' said the Major. 'We couldn't afford it. Unless the world was peopled with J.B.'s—tough and blunt old Joes, Ma'am, plain red herrings with hard roes, Sir—we couldn't afford it. It wouldn't do.'

'You naughty Infidel,' said Mrs Skewton, 'be mute.'

'Cleopatra commands,' returned the Major, kissing his hand, 'and Antony Bagstock obeys.'

'The man has no sensitiveness,' said Mrs Skewton, cruelly holding up the hand-screen so as to shut the Major out. 'No sympathy. And what do we live for but sympathy! What else is so extremely charming! Without that gleam of sunshine on our cold cold earth,' said Mrs Skewton, arranging her lace tucker, and complacently observing the effect of her bare lean arm, looking upward from the wrist, 'how could we possibly bear it? In short, obdurate man!' glancing at the Major, round the screen, 'I would have my world all heart; and Faith is so excessively charming, that I won't allow you to disturb it, do you hear?'

The Major replied that it was hard in Cleopatra to require the world to be all heart, and yet to appropriate to herself the hearts of all the world; which obliged Cleopatra to remind him that flattery was insupportable to her, and that if he had the boldness to address her in that strain any more, she would positively send him home.

Withers the Wan, at this period, handing round the tea, Mr Dombey again addressed himself to Edith.

'There is not much company here, it would seem?' said Mr Dombey, in his own portentous gentlemanly way.

'I believe not. We see none.'

'Why really,' observed Mrs Skewton from her couch, 'there are no people here just now with whom we care to associate.'

'They have not enough heart,' said Edith, with a smile. The very twilight of a smile: so singularly were its light and darkness blended.

'My dearest Edith rallies me, you see!' said her mother, shaking her head: which shook a little of itself sometimes, as if the palsy Bed now and then in opposition to the diamonds. 'Wicked one!'

'You have been here before, if I am not mistaken?' said Mr Dombey. Still to Edith.

'Oh, several times. I think we have been everywhere.'

'A beautiful country!'

'I suppose it is. Everybody says so.'

'Your cousin Feenix raves about it, Edith,' interposed her mother from her couch.

The daughter slightly turned her graceful head, and raising her eyebrows by a hair's-breadth, as if her cousin Feenix were of all the mortal world the least to be regarded, turned her eyes again towards Mr Dombey.

'I hope, for the credit of my good taste, that I am tired of the neighbourhood,' she said.

'You have almost reason to be, Madam,' he replied, glancing at a variety of landscape drawings, of which he had already recognised several as representing neighbouring points of view, and which were strewn abundantly about the room, 'if these beautiful productions are from your hand.'

She gave him no reply, but sat in a disdainful beauty, quite amazing.

'Have they that interest?' said Mr Dombey. 'Are they yours?'

'Yes.'

'And you play, I already know.'

'Yes.'

'And sing?'

'Yes.'

She answered all these questions with a strange reluctance; and with that remarkable air of opposition to herself, already noticed as belonging to her beauty. Yet she was not embarrassed, but wholly self-possessed. Neither did she seem to wish to avoid the conversation, for she addressed her face, and—so far as she could—her manner also, to him; and continued to do so, when he was silent.

'You have many resources against weariness at least,' said Mr Dombey.

'Whatever their efficiency may be,' she returned, 'you know them all now. I have no more.

'May I hope to prove them all?' said Mr Dombey, with solemn gallantry, laying down a drawing he had held, and motioning towards the harp.

'Oh certainly! If you desire it!'

She rose as she spoke, and crossing by her mother's couch, and directing a stately look towards her, which was instantaneous in its duration, but inclusive (if anyone had seen it) of a multitude of expressions, among which that of the twilight smile, without the smile itself, overshadowed all the rest, went out of the room.

The Major, who was quite forgiven by this time, had wheeled a little table up to Cleopatra, and was sitting down to play picquet with her. Mr Dombey, not knowing the game, sat down to watch them for his edification until Edith should return.

'We are going to have some music, Mr Dombey, I hope?' said Cleopatra.

'Mrs Granger has been kind enough to promise so,' said Mr Dombey.

'Ah! That's very nice. Do you propose, Major?'

'No, Ma'am,' said the Major. 'Couldn't do it.'

'You're a barbarous being,' replied the lady, 'and my hand's destroyed. You are fond of music, Mr Dombey?'

'Eminently so,' was Mr Dombey's answer.

'Yes. It's very nice,' said Cleopatra, looking at her cards. 'So much heart in it—undeveloped recollections of a previous state of existence'—and all that—which is so truly charming. Do you know,' simpered Cleopatra, reversing the knave of clubs, who had come into her game with his heels uppermost, 'that if anything could tempt me to put a period to my life, it would be curiosity to find out what it's all about, and what it means; there are so many provoking mysteries, really, that are hidden from us. Major, you to play.'

The Major played; and Mr Dombey, looking on for his instruction, would soon have been in a state of dire confusion, but that he gave no attention to the game whatever, and sat wondering instead when Edith would come back.

She came at last, and sat down to her harp, and Mr Dombey rose and stood beside her, listening. He had little taste for music, and no knowledge of the strain she played, but he saw her bending over it, and perhaps he heard among the sounding strings some distant music of his own, that tamed the monster of the iron road, and made it less inexorable.

Cleopatra had a sharp eye, verily, at picquet. It glistened like a bird's, and did not fix itself upon the game, but pierced the room from end to end, and gleamed on harp, performer, listener, everything.

When the haughty beauty had concluded, she arose, and receiving Mr Dombey's thanks and compliments in exactly the same manner as before, went with scarcely any pause to the piano, and began there.

Edith Granger, any song but that! Edith Granger, you are very handsome, and your touch upon the keys is brilliant, and your voice is deep and rich; but not the air that his neglected daughter sang to his dead son!

Alas, he knows it not; and if he did, what air of hers would stir him, rigid man! Sleep, lonely Florence, sleep! Peace in thy dreams, although the night has turned dark, and the clouds are gathering, and threaten to discharge themselves in hail!

CHAPTER 22. A Trifle of Management by Mr Carker the Manager

Mr Carker the Manager sat at his desk, smooth and soft as usual, reading those letters which were reserved for him to open, backing them occasionally with such memoranda and references as their business purport required, and parcelling them out into little heaps for distribution through the several departments of the House. The post had come in heavy that morning, and Mr Carker the Manager had a good deal to do.

The general action of a man so engaged—pausing to look over a bundle of papers in his hand, dealing them round in various portions, taking up another bundle and examining its contents with knitted brows and pursed-out lips—dealing, and sorting, and pondering by turns—would easily suggest some whimsical resemblance to a player at cards. The face of Mr Carker the Manager was in good keeping with such a fancy. It was the face of a man who studied his play, warily: who made himself master of all the strong and weak points of the game: who registered the cards in his mind as they fell about him, knew exactly what was on them, what they missed, and what they made: who was crafty to find out what the other players held, and who never betrayed his own hand.

The letters were in various languages, but Mr Carker the Manager read them all. If there had been anything in the offices of Dombey and Son that he could read, there would have been a card wanting in the pack. He read almost at a glance, and made combinations of one letter with another and one business with another as he went on, adding new matter to the heaps—much as a man would know the cards at sight, and work out their combinations in his mind after they were turned. Something too deep for a partner, and much too deep for an adversary, Mr Carker the Manager sat in the rays of the sun that came down slanting on him through the skylight, playing his game alone.

And although it is not among the instincts wild or domestic of the cat tribe to play at cards, feline from sole to crown was Mr Carker the Manager, as he basked in the strip of summer-light and warmth that shone upon his table and the ground as if they were a crooked dial-plate, and himself the only figure on it. With hair and whiskers deficient in colour at all times, but feebler than common in the rich sunshine, and more like the coat of a sandy tortoise-shell cat; with long nails, nicely pared and sharpened; with a natural antipathy to any speck of dirt, which made him pause sometimes and watch the falling motes of dust, and rub them off his smooth white hand or glossy linen: Mr Carker the Manager, sly of manner, sharp of tooth, soft of foot, watchful of eye, oily of tongue, cruel of heart, nice of habit, sat with a dainty steadfastness and patience at his work, as if he were waiting at a mouse's hole.

At length the letters were disposed of, excepting one which he reserved for a particular audience. Having locked the more confidential correspondence in a drawer, Mr Carker the Manager rang his bell.

'Why do you answer it?' was his reception of his brother.

'The messenger is out, and I am the next,' was the submissive reply.

'You are the next?' muttered the Manager. 'Yes! Creditable to me! There!'

Pointing to the heaps of opened letters, he turned disdainfully away, in his elbow-chair, and broke the seal of that one which he held in his hand.

'I am sorry to trouble you, James,' said the brother, gathering them up, 'but—'

'Oh! you have something to say. I knew that. Well?'

Mr Carker the Manager did not raise his eyes or turn them on his brother, but kept them on his letter, though without opening it.

'Well?' he repeated sharply.

'I am uneasy about Harriet.'

'Harriet who? what Harriet? I know nobody of that name.'

'She is not well, and has changed very much of late.'

'She changed very much, a great many years ago,' replied the Manager; 'and that is all I have to say.

'I think if you would hear me—

'Why should I hear you, Brother John?' returned the Manager, laying a sarcastic emphasis on those two words, and throwing up his head, but not lifting his eyes. 'I tell you, Harriet Carker made her choice many years ago between her two brothers. She may repent it, but she must abide by it.'

'Don't mistake me. I do not say she does repent it. It would be black ingratitude in me to hint at such a thing,' returned the other. 'Though believe me, James, I am as sorry for her sacrifice as you.'

'As I?' exclaimed the Manager. 'As I?'

'As sorry for her choice—for what you call her choice—as you are angry at it,' said the Junior.

'Angry?' repeated the other, with a wide show of his teeth.

'Displeased. Whatever word you like best. You know my meaning. There is no offence in my intention.'

'There is offence in everything you do,' replied his brother, glancing at him with a sudden scowl, which in a moment gave place to a wider smile than the last. 'Carry those papers away, if you please. I am busy.

His politeness was so much more cutting than his wrath, that the Junior went to the door. But stopping at it, and looking round, he said:

'When Harriet tried in vain to plead for me with you, on your first just indignation, and my first disgrace; and when she left you, James, to follow my broken fortunes, and devote herself, in her mistaken affection, to a ruined brother, because without her he had no one, and was lost; she was young and pretty. I think if you could see her now—if you would go and see her—she would move your admiration and compassion.'

The Manager inclined his head, and showed his teeth, as who should say, in answer to some careless small-talk, 'Dear me! Is that the case?' but said never a word.

'We thought in those days: you and I both: that she would marry young, and lead a happy and light-hearted life,' pursued the other. 'Oh if you knew how cheerfully she cast those hopes away; how cheerfully she has gone forward on the path she took, and never once looked back; you never could say again that her name was strange in your ears. Never!'

Again the Manager inclined his head and showed his teeth, and seemed to say, 'Remarkable indeed! You quite surprise me!' And again he uttered never a word.

'May I go on?' said John Carker, mildly.

'On your way?' replied his smiling brother. 'If you will have the goodness.

John Carker, with a sigh, was passing slowly out at the door, when his brother's voice detained him for a moment on the threshold.

'If she has gone, and goes, her own way cheerfully,' he said, throwing the still unfolded letter on his desk, and putting his hands firmly in his pockets, 'you may tell her that I go as cheerfully on mine. If she has never once looked back, you may tell her that I have, sometimes, to recall her taking part with you, and that my resolution is no easier to wear away;' he smiled very sweetly here; 'than marble.'

'I tell her nothing of you. We never speak about you. Once a year, on your birthday, Harriet says always, "Let us remember James by name, and wish him happy," but we say no more.'

'Tell it then, if you please,' returned the other, 'to yourself. You can't repeat it too often, as a lesson to you to avoid the subject in speaking to me. I know no Harriet Carker. There is no such person. You may have a sister; make much of her. I have none.'

Mr Carker the Manager took up the letter again, and waved it with a smile of mock courtesy towards the door. Unfolding it as his brother withdrew, and looking darkly after him as he left the room, he once more turned round in his elbow-chair, and applied himself to a diligent perusal of its contents.

It was in the writing of his great chief, Mr Dombey, and dated from Leamington. Though he was a quick reader of all other letters, Mr Carker read this slowly; weighing the words as he went, and bringing every tooth in his head to bear upon them. When he had read it through once, he turned it over again, and picked out these passages. 'I find myself benefited by the change, and am not yet inclined to name any time for my return.' 'I wish, Carker, you would arrange to come down once and see me here, and let me know how things are going on, in person.' 'I omitted to speak to you about young Gay. If not gone per Son and Heir, or if Son and Heir still lying in the Docks, appoint some other young man and keep him in the City for the present. I am not decided.' 'Now that's unfortunate!' said Mr Carker the Manager, expanding his mouth, as if it were made of India-rubber: 'for he's far away.'

Still that passage, which was in a postscript, attracted his attention and his teeth, once more.

'I think,' he said, 'my good friend Captain Cuttle mentioned something about being towed along in the wake of that day. What a pity he's so far away!'

He refolded the letter, and was sitting trifling with it, standing it long-wise and broad-wise on his table, and turning it over and over on all sides—doing pretty much the same thing, perhaps, by its contents—when Mr Perch the messenger knocked softly at the door, and coming in on tiptoe, bending his body at every step as if it were the delight of his life to bow, laid some papers on the table.

'Would you please to be engaged, Sir?' asked Mr Perch, rubbing his hands, and deferentially putting his head on one side, like a man who felt he had no business to hold it up in such a presence, and would keep it as much out of the way as possible.

'Who wants me?'

'Why, Sir,' said Mr Perch, in a soft voice, 'really nobody, Sir, to speak of at present. Mr Gills the Ship's Instrument-maker, Sir, has looked in, about a little matter of payment, he says: but I mentioned to him, Sir, that you was engaged several deep; several deep.'

Mr Perch coughed once behind his hand, and waited for further orders.

'Anybody else?'

'Well, Sir,' said Mr Perch, 'I wouldn't of my own self take the liberty of mentioning, Sir, that there was anybody else; but that same young lad that was here yesterday, Sir, and last week, has been hanging about the place; and it looks, Sir,' added Mr Perch, stopping to shut the door, 'dreadful unbusiness-like to see him whistling to the sparrows down the court, and making of 'em answer him.'

'You said he wanted something to do, didn't you, Perch?' asked Mr Carker, leaning back in his chair and looking at that officer.

'Why, Sir,' said Mr Perch, coughing behind his hand again, 'his expression certainly were that he was in wants of a sitiwation, and that he considered something might be done for him about the Docks, being used to fishing with a rod and line: but—' Mr Perch shook his head very dubiously indeed.

'What does he say when he comes?' asked Mr Carker.

'Indeed, Sir,' said Mr Perch, coughing another cough behind his hand, which was always his resource as an expression of humility when nothing else occurred to him, 'his observation generally air that he would humbly wish to see one of the gentlemen, and that he wants to earn a living. But you see, Sir,' added Perch, dropping his voice to a whisper, and turning, in the inviolable nature of his confidence, to give the door a thrust with his hand and knee, as if that would shut it any more when it was shut already, 'it's hardly to be bore, Sir, that a common lad like that should come a prowling here, and saying that his mother nursed our House's young gentleman, and that he hopes our House will give him a chance on that account. I am sure, Sir,' observed Mr Perch, 'that although Mrs Perch was at that time nursing as thriving a little girl, Sir, as we've ever took the liberty of adding to our family, I wouldn't have made so free as drop a hint of her being capable of imparting nourishment, not if it was never so!'

Mr Carker grinned at him like a shark, but in an absent, thoughtful manner.

'Whether,' submitted Mr Perch, after a short silence, and another cough, 'it mightn't be best for me to tell him, that if he was seen here any more he would be given into custody; and to keep to it! With respect to bodily fear,' said Mr Perch, 'I'm so timid, myself, by nature, Sir, and my nerves is so unstrung by Mrs Perch's state, that I could take my affidavit easy.'

'Let me see this fellow, Perch,' said Mr Carker. 'Bring him in!'

'Yes, Sir. Begging your pardon, Sir,' said Mr Perch, hesitating at the door, 'he's rough, Sir, in appearance.'

'Never mind. If he's there, bring him in. I'll see Mr Gills directly. Ask him to wait.'

Mr Perch bowed; and shutting the door, as precisely and carefully as if he were not coming back for a week, went on his quest among the sparrows in the court. While he was gone, Mr Carker assumed his favourite attitude before the fire-place, and stood looking at the door; presenting, with his under lip tucked into the smile that showed his whole row of upper teeth, a singularly crouching apace.

The messenger was not long in returning, followed by a pair of heavy boots that came bumping along the passage like boxes. With the unceremonious words 'Come along with you!'—a very unusual form of introduction from his lips—Mr Perch then ushered into the presence a strong-built lad of fifteen, with a round red face, a round sleek head, round black eyes, round limbs, and round body, who, to carry out the general rotundity of his appearance, had a round hat in his hand, without a particle of brim to it.

Obedient to a nod from Mr Carker, Perch had no sooner confronted the visitor with that gentleman than he withdrew. The moment they were face to face alone, Mr Carker, without a word of preparation, took him by the throat, and shook him until his head seemed loose upon his shoulders.

The boy, who in the midst of his astonishment could not help staring wildly at the gentleman with so many white teeth who was choking him, and at the office walls, as though determined, if he were choked, that his last look should be at the mysteries for his intrusion into which he was paying such a severe penalty, at last contrived to utter—

'Come, Sir! You let me alone, will you!'

'Let you alone!' said Mr Carker. 'What! I have got you, have I?' There was no doubt of that, and tightly too. 'You dog,' said Mr Carker, through his set jaws, 'I'll strangle you!'

Biler whimpered, would he though? oh no he wouldn't—and what was he doing of—and why didn't he strangle some—body of his own size and not him: but Biler was quelled by the extraordinary nature of his reception, and, as his head became stationary, and he looked the gentleman in the face, or rather in the teeth, and saw him snarling at him, he so far forgot his manhood as to cry.

'I haven't done nothing to you, Sir,' said Biler, otherwise Rob, otherwise Grinder, and always Toodle.

'You young scoundrel!' replied Mr Carker, slowly releasing him, and moving back a step into his favourite position. 'What do you mean by daring to come here?'

'I didn't mean no harm, Sir,' whimpered Rob, putting one hand to his throat, and the knuckles of the other to his eyes. 'I'll never come again, Sir. I only wanted work.'

'Work, young Cain that you are!' repeated Mr Carker, eyeing him narrowly. 'Ain't you the idlest vagabond in London?'

The impeachment, while it much affected Mr Toodle Junior, attached to his character so justly, that he could not say a word in denial. He stood looking at the gentleman, therefore, with a frightened, self-convicted, and remorseful air. As to his looking at him, it may be observed that he was fascinated by Mr Carker, and never took his round eyes off him for an instant.

'Ain't you a thief?' said Mr Carker, with his hands behind him in his pockets.

'No, sir,' pleaded Rob.

'You are!' said Mr Carker.

'I ain't indeed, Sir,' whimpered Rob. 'I never did such a thing as thieve, Sir, if you'll believe me. I know I've been a going wrong, Sir, ever since I took to bird-catching' and walking-matching. I'm sure a cove might think,' said Mr Toodle Junior, with a burst of penitence, 'that singing birds was innocent company, but nobody knows what harm is in them little creeturs and what they brings you down to.'

They seemed to have brought him down to a velveteen jacket and trousers very much the worse for wear, a particularly small red waistcoat like a gorget, an interval of blue check, and the hat before mentioned.

'I ain't been home twenty times since them birds got their will of me,' said Rob, 'and that's ten months. How can I go home when everybody's miserable to see me! I wonder,' said Biler, blubbering outright, and smearing his eyes with his coat-cuff, 'that I haven't been and drownded myself over and over again.'

All of which, including his expression of surprise at not having achieved this last scarce performance, the boy said, just as if the teeth of Mr Carker drew it out of him, and he had no power of concealing anything with that battery of attraction in full play.

'You're a nice young gentleman!' said Mr Carker, shaking his head at him. 'There's hemp-seed sown for you, my fine fellow!'

'I'm sure, Sir,' returned the wretched Biler, blubbering again, and again having recourse to his coat-cuff: 'I shouldn't care, sometimes, if it was growed too. My misfortunes all began in wagging, Sir; but what could I do, exceptin' wag?'

'Excepting what?' said Mr Carker.

'Wag, Sir. Wagging from school.'

'Do you mean pretending to go there, and not going?' said Mr Carker.

'Yes, Sir, that's wagging, Sir,' returned the quondam Grinder, much affected. 'I was chivied through the streets, Sir, when I went there, and pounded when I got there. So I wagged, and hid myself, and that began it.'

'And you mean to tell me,' said Mr Carker, taking him by the throat again, holding him out at arm's-length, and surveying him in silence for some moments, 'that you want a place, do you?'

'I should be thankful to be tried, Sir,' returned Toodle Junior, faintly.

Mr Carker the Manager pushed him backward into a corner—the boy submitting quietly, hardly venturing to breathe, and never once removing his eyes from his face—and rang the bell.

'Tell Mr Gills to come here.'

Mr Perch was too deferential to express surprise or recognition of the figure in the corner: and Uncle Sol appeared immediately.

'Mr Gills!' said Carker, with a smile, 'sit down. How do you do? You continue to enjoy your health, I hope?'

'Thank you, Sir,' returned Uncle Sol, taking out his pocket-book, and handing over some notes as he spoke. 'Nothing ails me in body but old age. Twenty-five, Sir.'

'You are as punctual and exact, Mr Gills,' replied the smiling Manager, taking a paper from one of his many drawers, and making an endorsement on it, while Uncle Sol looked over him, 'as one of your own chronometers. Quite right.'

'The Son and Heir has not been spoken, I find by the list, Sir,' said Uncle Sol, with a slight addition to the usual tremor in his voice.

'The Son and Heir has not been spoken,' returned Carker. 'There seems to have been tempestuous weather, Mr Gills, and she has probably been driven out of her course.'

'She is safe, I trust in Heaven!' said old Sol.

'She is safe, I trust in Heaven!' assented Mr Carker in that voiceless manner of his: which made the observant young Toodle tremble again. 'Mr Gills,' he added aloud, throwing himself back in his chair, 'you must miss your nephew very much?'

Uncle Sol, standing by him, shook his head and heaved a deep sigh.

'Mr Gills,' said Carker, with his soft hand playing round his mouth, and looking up into the Instrument-maker's face, 'it would be company to you to have a young fellow in your shop just now, and it would be obliging me if you would give one house-room for the present. No, to be sure,' he added quickly, in anticipation of what the old man was going to say, 'there's not much business doing there, I know; but you can make him clean the place out, polish up the instruments; drudge, Mr Gills. That's the lad!'

Sol Gills pulled down his spectacles from his forehead to his eyes, and looked at Toodle Junior standing upright in the corner: his head presenting the appearance (which it always did) of having been newly drawn out of a bucket of cold water; his small waistcoat rising and falling quickly in the play of his emotions; and his eyes intently fixed on Mr Carker, without the least reference to his proposed master.

'Will you give him house-room, Mr Gills?' said the Manager.

Old Sol, without being quite enthusiastic on the subject, replied that he was glad of any opportunity, however slight, to oblige Mr Carker, whose wish on such a point was a command: and that the wooden Midshipman would consider himself happy to receive in his berth any visitor of Mr Carker's selecting.

Mr Carker bared himself to the tops and bottoms of his gums: making the watchful Toodle Junior tremble more and more: and acknowledged the Instrument- maker's politeness in his most affable manner.

'I'll dispose of him so, then, Mr Gills,' he answered, rising, and shaking the old man by the hand, 'until I make up my mind what to do with him, and what he deserves. As I consider myself responsible for him, Mr Gills,' here he smiled a wide smile at Rob, who shook before it: 'I shall be glad if you'll look sharply after him, and report his behaviour to me. I'll ask a question or two of his parents as I ride home this afternoon—respectable people—to confirm some particulars in his own account of himself; and that done, Mr Gills, I'll send him round to you to-morrow morning. Goodbye!'

His smile at parting was so full of teeth, that it confused old Sol, and made him vaguely uncomfortable. He went home, thinking of raging seas, foundering ships, drowning men, an ancient bottle of Madeira never brought to light, and other dismal matters.

'Now, boy!' said Mr Carker, putting his hand on young Toodle's shoulder, and bringing him out into the middle of the room. 'You have heard me?'

Rob said, 'Yes, Sir.'

'Perhaps you understand,' pursued his patron, 'that if you ever deceive or play tricks with me, you had better have drowned yourself, indeed, once for all, before you came here?'

There was nothing in any branch of mental acquisition that Rob seemed to understand better than that.

'If you have lied to me,' said Mr Carker, 'in anything, never come in my way again. If not, you may let me find you waiting for me somewhere near your mother's house this afternoon. I shall leave this at five o'clock, and ride there on horseback. Now, give me the address.'

Rob repeated it slowly, as Mr Carker wrote it down. Rob even spelt it over a second time, letter by letter, as if he thought that the omission of a dot or scratch would lead to his destruction. Mr Carker then handed him out of the room; and Rob, keeping his round eyes fixed upon his patron to the last, vanished for the time being.

Mr Carker the Manager did a great deal of business in the course of the day, and stowed his teeth upon a great many people. In the office, in the court, in the street, and on 'Change, they glistened and bristled to a terrible extent. Five o'clock arriving, and with it Mr Carker's bay horse, they got on horseback, and went gleaming up Cheapside.

As no one can easily ride fast, even if inclined to do so, through the press and throng of the City at that hour, and as Mr Carker was not inclined, he went leisurely along, picking his way among the carts and carriages, avoiding whenever he could the wetter and more dirty places in the over-watered road, and taking infinite pains to keep himself and his steed clean. Glancing at the passersby while he was thus ambling on his way, he suddenly encountered the round eyes of the sleek-headed Rob intently fixed upon his face as if they had never been taken off, while the boy himself, with a pocket-handkerchief twisted up like a speckled eel and girded round his waist, made a very conspicuous demonstration of being prepared to attend upon him, at whatever pace he might think proper to go.

This attention, however flattering, being one of an unusual kind, and attracting some notice from the other passengers, Mr Carker took advantage of a clearer thoroughfare and a cleaner road, and broke into a trot. Rob immediately did the same. Mr Carker presently tried a canter; Rob Was still in attendance. Then a short gallop; it Was all one to the boy. Whenever Mr Carker turned his eyes to that side of the road, he still saw Toodle Junior holding his course, apparently without distress, and working himself along by the elbows after the most approved manner of professional gentlemen who get over the ground for wagers.

Ridiculous as this attendance was, it was a sign of an influence established over the boy, and therefore Mr Carker, affecting not to notice it, rode away into the neighbourhood of Mr Toodle's house. On his slackening his pace here, Rob appeared before him to point out the turnings; and when he called to a man at a neighbouring gateway to hold his horse, pending his visit to the buildings that had succeeded Staggs's Gardens, Rob dutifully held the stirrup, while the Manager dismounted.

'Now, Sir,' said Mr Carker, taking him by the shoulder, 'come along!'

The prodigal son was evidently nervous of visiting the parental abode; but Mr Carker pushing him on before, he had nothing for it but to open the right door, and suffer himself to be walked into the midst of his brothers and sisters, mustered in overwhelming force round the family tea-table. At sight of the prodigal in the grasp of a stranger, these tender relations united in a general howl, which smote upon the prodigal's breast so sharply when he saw his mother stand up among them, pale and trembling, with the baby in her arms, that he lent his own voice to the chorus.

Nothing doubting now that the stranger, if not Mr Ketch' in person, was one of that company, the whole of the young family wailed the louder, while its more infantine members, unable to control the transports of emotion appertaining to their time of life, threw themselves on their backs like young birds when terrified by a hawk, and kicked violently. At length, poor Polly making herself audible, said, with quivering lips, 'Oh Rob, my poor boy, what have you done at last!'

'Nothing, mother,' cried Rob, in a piteous voice, 'ask the gentleman!'

'Don't be alarmed,' said Mr Carker, 'I want to do him good.'

At this announcement, Polly, who had not cried yet, began to do so. The elder Toodles, who appeared to have been meditating a rescue, unclenched their fists. The younger Toodles clustered round their mother's gown, and peeped from under their own chubby arms at their desperado brother and his unknown friend. Everybody blessed the gentleman with the beautiful teeth, who wanted to do good.

'This fellow,' said Mr Carker to Polly, giving him a gentle shake, 'is your son, eh, Ma'am?'

'Yes, Sir,' sobbed Polly, with a curtsey; 'yes, Sir.'

'A bad son, I am afraid?' said Mr Carker.

'Never a bad son to me, Sir,' returned Polly.

'To whom then?' demanded Mr Carker.

'He has been a little wild, Sir,' returned Polly, checking the baby, who was making convulsive efforts with his arms and legs to launch himself on Biler, through the ambient air, 'and has gone with wrong companions: but I hope he has seen the misery of that, Sir, and will do well again.'

Mr Carker looked at Polly, and the clean room, and the clean children, and the simple Toodle face, combined of father and mother, that was reflected and repeated everywhere about him—and seemed to have achieved the real purpose of his visit.

'Your husband, I take it, is not at home?' he said.

'No, Sir,' replied Polly. 'He's down the line at present.'

The prodigal Rob seemed very much relieved to hear it: though still in the absorption of all his faculties in his patron, he hardly took his eyes from Mr Carker's face, unless for a moment at a time to steal a sorrowful glance at his mother.

'Then,' said Mr Carker, 'I'll tell you how I have stumbled on this boy of yours, and who I am, and what I am going to do for him.'

This Mr Carker did, in his own way; saying that he at first intended to have accumulated nameless terrors on his presumptuous head, for coming to the whereabout of Dombey and Son. That he had relented, in consideration of his youth, his professed contrition, and his friends. That he was afraid he took a rash step in doing anything for the boy, and one that might expose him to the censure of the prudent; but that he did it of himself and for himself, and risked the consequences single-handed; and that his mother's past connexion with Mr Dombey's family had nothing to do with it, and that Mr Dombey had nothing to do with it, but that he, Mr Carker, was the be-all and the end-all of this business. Taking great credit to himself for his goodness, and receiving no less from all the family then present, Mr Carker signified, indirectly but still pretty plainly, that Rob's implicit fidelity, attachment, and devotion, were for evermore his due, and the least homage he could receive. And with this great truth Rob himself was so impressed, that, standing gazing on his patron with tears rolling down his cheeks, he nodded his shiny head until it seemed almost as loose as it had done under the same patron's hands that morning.

Polly, who had passed Heaven knows how many sleepless nights on account of this her dissipated firstborn, and had not seen him for weeks and weeks, could have almost kneeled to Mr Carker the Manager, as to a Good Spirit—in spite of his teeth. But Mr Carker rising to depart, she only thanked him with her mother's prayers and blessings; thanks so rich when paid out of the Heart's mint, especially for any service Mr Carker had rendered, that he might have given back a large amount of change, and yet been overpaid.

As that gentleman made his way among the crowding children to the door, Rob retreated on his mother, and took her and the baby in the same repentant hug.

'I'll try hard, dear mother, now. Upon my soul I will!' said Rob.

'Oh do, my dear boy! I am sure you will, for our sakes and your own!' cried Polly, kissing him. 'But you're coming back to speak to me, when you have seen the gentleman away?'

'I don't know, mother.' Rob hesitated, and looked down. 'Father—when's he coming home?'

'Not till two o'clock to-morrow morning.'

'I'll come back, mother dear!' cried Rob. And passing through the shrill cry of his brothers and sisters in reception of this promise, he followed Mr Carker out.

'What!' said Mr Carker, who had heard this. 'You have a bad father, have you?'

'No, Sir!' returned Rob, amazed. 'There ain't a better nor a kinder father going, than mine is.'

'Why don't you want to see him then?' inquired his patron.

'There's such a difference between a father and a mother, Sir,' said Rob, after faltering for a moment. 'He couldn't hardly believe yet that I was doing to do better—though I know he'd try to but a mother—she always believes what's,' good, Sir; at least I know my mother does, God bless her!'

Mr Carker's mouth expanded, but he said no more until he was mounted on his horse, and had dismissed the man who held it, when, looking down from the saddle steadily into the attentive and watchful face of the boy, he said:

'You'll come to me tomorrow morning, and you shall be shown where that old gentleman lives; that old gentleman who was with me this morning; where you are going, as you heard me say.'

'Yes, Sir,' returned Rob.

'I have a great interest in that old gentleman, and in serving him, you serve me, boy, do you understand? Well,' he added, interrupting him, for he saw his round face brighten when he was told that: 'I see you do. I want to know all about that old gentleman, and how he goes on from day to day—for I am anxious to be of service to him—and especially who comes there to see him. Do you understand?'

Rob nodded his steadfast face, and said 'Yes, Sir,' again.

'I should like to know that he has friends who are attentive to him, and that they don't desert him—for he lives very much alone now, poor fellow; but that they are fond of him, and of his nephew who has gone abroad. There is a very young lady who may perhaps come to see him. I want particularly to know all about her.'

'I'll take care, Sir,' said the boy.

'And take care,' returned his patron, bending forward to advance his grinning face closer to the boy's, and pat him on the shoulder with the handle of his whip: 'take care you talk about affairs of mine to nobody but me.'

'To nobody in the world, Sir,' replied Rob, shaking his head.

'Neither there,' said Mr Carker, pointing to the place they had just left, 'nor anywhere else. I'll try how true and grateful you can be. I'll prove you!' Making this, by his display of teeth and by the action of his head, as much a threat as a promise, he turned from Rob's eyes, which were nailed upon him as if he had won the boy by a charm, body and soul, and rode away. But again becoming conscious, after trotting a short distance, that his devoted henchman, girt as before, was yielding him the same attendance, to the great amusement of sundry spectators, he reined up, and ordered him off. To ensure his obedience, he turned in the saddle and watched him as he retired. It was curious to see that even then Rob could not keep his eyes wholly averted from his patron's face, but, constantly turning and turning again to look after him' involved himself in a tempest of buffetings and jostlings from the other passengers in the street: of which, in the pursuit of the one paramount idea, he was perfectly heedless.

Mr Carker the Manager rode on at a foot-pace, with the easy air of one who had performed all the business of the day in a satisfactory manner, and got it comfortably off his mind. Complacent and affable as man could be, Mr Carker picked his way along the streets and hummed a soft tune as he went He seemed to purr, he was so glad.

And in some sort, Mr Carker, in his fancy, basked upon a hearth too. Coiled up snugly at certain feet, he was ready for a spring, Or for a tear, or for a scratch, or for a velvet touch, as the humour took him and occasion served. Was there any bird in a cage, that came in for a share of his regards?

'A very young lady!' thought Mr Carker the Manager, through his song. 'Ay! when I saw her last, she was a little child. With dark eyes and hair, I recollect, and a good face; a very good face! I daresay she's pretty.'

More affable and pleasant yet, and humming his song until his many teeth vibrated to it, Mr Carker picked his way along, and turned at last into the shady street where Mr Dombey's house stood. He had been so busy, winding webs round good faces, and obscuring them with meshes, that he hardly thought of being at this point of his ride, until, glancing down the cold perspective of tall houses, he reined in his horse quickly within a few yards of the door. But to explain why Mr Carker reined in his horse quickly, and what he looked at in no small surprise, a few digressive words are necessary.

Mr Toots, emancipated from the Blimber thraldom and coming into the possession of a certain portion of his worldly wealth, 'which,' as he had been wont, during his last half-year's probation, to communicate to Mr Feeder every evening as a new discovery, 'the executors couldn't keep him out of' had applied himself with great diligence, to the science of Life. Fired with a noble emulation to pursue a brilliant and distinguished career, Mr Toots had furnished a choice set of apartments; had established among them a sporting bower, embellished with the portraits of winning horses, in which he took no particle of interest; and a divan, which made him poorly. In this delicious abode, Mr Toots devoted himself to the cultivation of those gentle arts which refine and humanise existence, his chief instructor in which was an interesting character called the Game Chicken, who was always to be heard of at the bar of the Black Badger, wore a shaggy white great-coat in the warmest weather, and knocked Mr Toots about the head three times a week, for the small consideration of ten and six per visit.

The Game Chicken, who was quite the Apollo of Mr Toots's Pantheon, had introduced to him a marker who taught billiards, a Life Guard who taught fencing, a jobmaster who taught riding, a Cornish gentleman who was up to anything in the athletic line, and two or three other friends connected no less intimately with the fine arts. Under whose auspices Mr Toots could hardly fail to improve apace, and under whose tuition he went to work.

But however it came about, it came to pass, even while these gentlemen had the gloss of novelty upon them, that Mr Toots felt, he didn't know how, unsettled and uneasy. There were husks in his corn, that even Game Chickens couldn't peck up; gloomy giants in his leisure, that even Game Chickens couldn't knock down. Nothing seemed to do Mr Toots so much good as incessantly leaving cards at Mr Dombey's door. No taxgatherer in the British Dominions—that wide-spread territory on which the sun never sets, and where the tax-gatherer never goes to bed—was more regular and persevering in his calls than Mr Toots.

Mr Toots never went upstairs; and always performed the same ceremonies, richly dressed for the purpose, at the hall door.

'Oh! Good morning!' would be Mr Toots's first remark to the servant. 'For Mr Dombey,' would be Mr Toots's next remark, as he handed in a card. 'For Miss Dombey,' would be his next, as he handed in another.

Mr Toots would then turn round as if to go away; but the man knew him by this time, and knew he wouldn't.

'Oh, I beg your pardon,' Mr Toots would say, as if a thought had suddenly descended on him. 'Is the young woman at home?'

The man would rather think she was, but wouldn't quite know. Then he would ring a bell that rang upstairs, and would look up the staircase, and would say, yes, she was at home, and was coming down. Then Miss Nipper would appear, and the man would retire.

'Oh! How de do?' Mr Toots would say, with a chuckle and a blush.

Susan would thank him, and say she was very well.

'How's Diogenes going on?' would be Mr Toots's second interrogation.

Very well indeed. Miss Florence was fonder and fonder of him every day. Mr Toots was sure to hail this with a burst of chuckles, like the opening of a bottle of some effervescent beverage.

'Miss Florence is quite well, Sir,' Susan would add.

Oh, it's of no consequence, thank'ee,' was the invariable reply of Mr Toots; and when he had said so, he always went away very fast.

Now it is certain that Mr Toots had a filmy something in his mind, which led him to conclude that if he could aspire successfully in the fulness of time, to the hand of Florence, he would be fortunate and blest. It is certain that Mr Toots, by some remote and roundabout road, had got to that point, and that there he made a stand. His heart was wounded; he was touched; he was in love. He had made a desperate attempt, one night, and had sat up all night for the purpose, to write an acrostic on Florence, which affected him to tears in the conception. But he never proceeded in the execution further than the words 'For when I gaze,'—the flow of imagination in which he had previously written down the initial letters of the other seven lines, deserting him at that point.

Beyond devising that very artful and politic measure of leaving a card for Mr Dombey daily, the brain of Mr Toots had not worked much in reference to the subject that held his feelings prisoner. But deep consideration at length assured Mr Toots that an important step to gain, was, the conciliation of Miss Susan Nipper, preparatory to giving her some inkling of his state of mind.

A little light and playful gallantry towards this lady seemed the means to employ in that early chapter of the history, for winning her to his interests. Not being able quite to make up his mind about it, he consulted the Chicken—without taking that gentleman into his confidence; merely informing him that a friend in Yorkshire had written to him (Mr Toots) for his opinion on such a question. The Chicken replying that his opinion always was, 'Go in and win,' and further, 'When your man's before you and your work cut out, go in and do it,' Mr Toots considered this a figurative way of supporting his own view of the case, and heroically resolved to kiss Miss Nipper next day.

Upon the next day, therefore, Mr Toots, putting into requisition some of the greatest marvels that Burgess and Co. had ever turned out, went off to Mr Dombey's upon this design. But his heart failed him so much as he approached the scene of action, that, although he arrived on the ground at three o'clock in the afternoon, it was six before he knocked at the door.

Everything happened as usual, down to the point where Susan said her young mistress was well, and Mr Toots said it was of no consequence. To her amazement, Mr Toots, instead of going off, like a rocket, after that observation, lingered and chuckled.

'Perhaps you'd like to walk upstairs, Sir!' said Susan.

'Well, I think I will come in!' said Mr Toots.

But instead of walking upstairs, the bold Toots made an awkward plunge at Susan when the door was shut, and embracing that fair creature, kissed her on the cheek.

'Go along with you!' cried Susan, 'or Ill tear your eyes out.'

'Just another!' said Mr Toots.

'Go along with you!' exclaimed Susan, giving him a push 'Innocents like you, too! Who'll begin next? Go along, Sir!'

Susan was not in any serious strait, for she could hardly speak for laughing; but Diogenes, on the staircase, hearing a rustling against the wall, and a shuffling of feet, and seeing through the banisters that there was some contention going on, and foreign invasion in the house, formed a different opinion, dashed down to the rescue, and in the twinkling of an eye had Mr Toots by the leg.

Susan screamed, laughed, opened the street-door, and ran downstairs; the bold Toots tumbled staggering out into the street, with Diogenes holding on to one leg of his pantaloons, as if Burgess and Co. were his cooks, and had provided that dainty morsel for his holiday entertainment; Diogenes shaken off, rolled over and over in the dust, got up' again, whirled round the giddy Toots and snapped at him: and all this turmoil Mr Carker, reigning up his horse and sitting a little at a distance, saw to his amazement, issue from the stately house of Mr Dombey.

Mr Carker remained watching the discomfited Toots, when Diogenes was called in, and the door shut: and while that gentleman, taking refuge in a doorway near at hand, bound up the torn leg of his pantaloons with a costly silk handkerchief that had formed part of his expensive outfit for the advent.

'I beg your pardon, Sir,' said Mr Carker, riding up, with his most propitiatory smile. 'I hope you are not hurt?'

'Oh no, thank you,' replied Mr Toots, raising his flushed face, 'it's of no consequence' Mr Toots would have signified, if he could, that he liked it very much.

'If the dog's teeth have entered the leg, Sir—' began Carker, with a display of his own.

'No, thank you,' said Mr Toots, 'it's all quite right. It's very comfortable, thank you.'

'I have the pleasure of knowing Mr Dombey,' observed Carker.

'Have you though?' rejoined the blushing Took

'And you will allow me, perhaps, to apologise, in his absence,' said Mr Carker, taking off his hat, 'for such a misadventure, and to wonder how it can possibly have happened.'

Mr Toots is so much gratified by this politeness, and the lucky chance of making friends with a friend of Mr Dombey, that he pulls out his card-case which he never loses an opportunity of using, and hands his name and address to Mr Carker: who responds to that courtesy by giving him his own, and with that they part.

As Mr Carker picks his way so softly past the house, looking up at the windows, and trying to make out the pensive face behind the curtain looking at the children opposite, the rough head of Diogenes came clambering up close by it, and the dog, regardless of all soothing, barks and growls, and makes at him from that height, as if he would spring down and tear him limb from limb.

Well spoken, Di, so near your Mistress! Another, and another with your head up, your eyes flashing, and your vexed mouth worrying itself, for want of him! Another, as he picks his way along! You have a good scent, Di,—cats, boy, cats!

CHAPTER 23. Florence solitary, and the Midshipman mysterious

Florence lived alone in the great dreary house, and day succeeded day, and still she lived alone; and the blank walls looked down upon her with a vacant stare, as if they had a Gorgon-like mind to stare her youth and beauty into stone.

No magic dwelling-place in magic story, shut up in the heart of a thick wood, was ever more solitary and deserted to the fancy, than was her father's mansion in its grim reality, as it stood lowering on the street: always by night, when lights were shining from neighbouring windows, a blot upon its scanty brightness; always by day, a frown upon its never-smiling face.

There were not two dragon sentries keeping ward before the gate of this above, as in magic legend are usually found on duty over the wronged innocence imprisoned; but besides a glowering visage, with its thin lips parted wickedly, that surveyed all comers from above the archway of the door, there was a monstrous fantasy of rusty iron, curling and twisting like a petrifaction of an arbour over threshold, budding in spikes and corkscrew points, and bearing, one on either side, two ominous extinguishers, that seemed to say, 'Who enter here, leave light behind!' There were no talismanic characters engraven on the portal, but the house was now so neglected in appearance, that boys chalked the railings and the pavement—particularly round the corner where the side wall was—and drew ghosts on the stable door; and being sometimes driven off by Mr Towlinson, made portraits of him, in return, with his ears growing out horizontally from under his hat. Noise ceased to be, within the shadow of the roof. The brass band that came into the street once a week, in the morning, never brayed a note in at those windows; but all such company, down to a poor little piping organ of weak intellect, with an imbecile party of automaton dancers, waltzing in and out at folding-doors, fell off from it with one accord, and shunned it as a hopeless place.

The spell upon it was more wasting than the spell that used to set enchanted houses sleeping once upon a time, but left their waking freshness unimpaired. The passive desolation of disuse was everywhere silently manifest about it. Within doors, curtains, drooping heavily, lost their old folds and shapes, and hung like cumbrous palls. Hecatombs of furniture, still piled and covered up, shrunk like imprisoned and forgotten men, and changed insensibly. Mirrors were dim as with the breath of years. Patterns of carpets faded and became perplexed and faint, like the memory of those years' trifling incidents. Boards, starting at unwonted footsteps, creaked and shook. Keys rusted in the locks of doors. Damp started on the walls, and as the stains came out, the pictures seemed to go in and secrete themselves. Mildew and mould began to lurk in closets. Fungus trees grew in corners of the cellars. Dust accumulated, nobody knew whence nor how; spiders, moths, and grubs were heard of every day. An exploratory blackbeetle now and then was found immovable upon the stairs, or in an upper room, as wondering how he got there. Rats began to squeak and scuffle in the night time, through dark galleries they mined behind the panelling.

The dreary magnificence of the state rooms, seen imperfectly by the doubtful light admitted through closed shutters, would have answered well enough for an enchanted abode. Such as the tarnished paws of gilded lions, stealthily put out from beneath their wrappers; the marble lineaments of busts on pedestals, fearfully revealing themselves through veils; the clocks that never told the time, or, if wound up by any chance, told it wrong, and struck unearthly numbers, which are not upon the dial; the accidental tinklings among the pendant lustres, more startling than alarm-bells; the softened sounds and laggard air that made their way among these objects, and a phantom crowd of others, shrouded and hooded, and made spectral of shape. But, besides, there was the great staircase, where the lord of the place so rarely set his foot, and by which his little child had gone up to Heaven. There were other staircases and passages where no one went for weeks together; there were two closed rooms associated with dead members of the family, and with whispered recollections of them; and to all the house but Florence, there was a gentle figure moving through the solitude and gloom, that gave to every lifeless thing a touch of present human interest and wonder.

For Florence lived alone in the deserted house, and day succeeded day, and still she lived alone, and the cold walls looked down upon her with a vacant stare, as if they had a Gorgon-like mind to stare her youth and beauty into stone.

The grass began to grow upon the roof, and in the crevices of the basement paving. A scaly crumbling vegetation sprouted round the window-sills. Fragments of mortar lost their hold upon the insides of the unused chimneys, and came dropping down. The two trees with the smoky trunks were blighted high up, and the withered branches domineered above the leaves, Through the whole building white had turned yellow, yellow nearly black; and since the time when the poor lady died, it had slowly become a dark gap in the long monotonous street.

But Florence bloomed there, like the king's fair daughter in the story. Her books, her music, and her daily teachers, were her only real companions, Susan Nipper and Diogenes excepted: of whom the former, in her attendance on the studies of her young mistress, began to grow quite learned herself, while the latter, softened possibly by the same influences, would lay his head upon the window-ledge, and placidly open and shut his eyes upon the street, all through a summer morning; sometimes pricking up his head to look with great significance after some noisy dog in a cart, who was barking his way along, and sometimes, with an exasperated and unaccountable recollection of his supposed enemy in the neighbourhood, rushing to the door, whence, after a deafening disturbance, he would come jogging back with a ridiculous complacency that belonged to him, and lay his jaw upon the window- ledge again, with the air of a dog who had done a public service.

So Florence lived in her wilderness of a home, within the circle of her innocent pursuits and thoughts, and nothing harmed her. She could go down to her father's rooms now, and think of him, and suffer her loving heart humbly to approach him, without fear of repulse. She could look upon the objects that had surrounded him in his sorrow, and could nestle near his chair, and not dread the glance that she so well remembered. She could render him such little tokens of her duty and service' as putting everything in order for him with her own hands, binding little nosegays for table, changing them as one by one they withered and he did not come back, preparing something for him every' day, and leaving some timid mark of her presence near his usual seat. To-day, it was a little painted stand for his watch; tomorrow she would be afraid to leave it, and would substitute some other trifle of her making not so likely to attract his eye. Waking in the night, perhaps, she would tremble at the thought of his coming home and angrily rejecting it, and would hurry down with slippered feet and quickly beating heart, and bring it away. At another time, she would only lay her face upon his desk, and leave a kiss there, and a tear.

Still no one knew of this. Unless the household found it out when she was not there—and they all held Mr Dombey's rooms in awe—it was as deep a secret in her breast as what had gone before it. Florence stole into those rooms at twilight, early in the morning, and at times when meals were served downstairs. And although they were in every nook the better and the brighter for her care, she entered and passed out as quietly as any sunbeam, opting that she left her light behind.

Shadowy company attended Florence up and down the echoing house, and sat with her in the dismantled rooms. As if her life were an enchanted vision, there arose out of her solitude ministering thoughts, that made it fanciful and unreal. She imagined so often what her life would have been if her father could have loved her and she had been a favourite child, that sometimes, for the moment, she almost believed it was so, and, borne on by the current of that pensive fiction, seemed to remember how they had watched her brother in his grave together; how they had freely shared his heart between them; how they were united in the dear remembrance of him; how they often spoke about him yet; and her kind father, looking at her gently, told her of their common hope and trust in God. At other times she pictured to herself her mother yet alive. And oh the happiness of falling on her neck, and clinging to her with the love and confidence of all her soul! And oh the desolation of the solitary house again, with evening coming on, and no one there!

But there was one thought, scarcely shaped out to herself, yet fervent and strong within her, that upheld Florence when she strove and filled her true young heart, so sorely tried, with constancy of purpose. Into her mind, as 'into all others contending with the great affliction of our mortal nature, there had stolen solemn wonderings and hopes, arising in the dim world beyond the present life, and murmuring, like faint music, of recognition in the far-off land between her brother and her mother: of some present consciousness in both of her: some love and commiseration for her: and some knowledge of her as she went her way upon the earth. It was a soothing consolation to Florence to give shelter to these thoughts, until one day—it was soon after she had last seen her father in his own room, late at night—the fancy came upon her, that, in weeping for his alienated heart, she might stir the spirits of the dead against him' Wild, weak, childish, as it may have been to think so, and to tremble at the half-formed thought, it was the impulse of her loving nature; and from that hour Florence strove against the cruel wound in her breast, and tried to think of him whose hand had made it, only with hope.

Her father did not know—she held to it from that time—how much she loved him. She was very young, and had no mother, and had never learned, by some fault or misfortune, how to express to him that she loved him. She would be patient, and would try to gain that art in time, and win him to a better knowledge of his only child.

This became the purpose of her life. The morning sun shone down upon the faded house, and found the resolution bright and fresh within the bosom of its solitary mistress, Through all the duties of the day, it animated her; for Florence hoped that the more she knew, and the more accomplished she became, the more glad he would be when he came to know and like her. Sometimes she wondered, with a swelling heart and rising tear, whether she was proficient enough in anything to surprise him when they should become companions. Sometimes she tried to think if there were any kind of knowledge that would bespeak his interest more readily than another. Always: at her books, her music, and her work: in her morning walks, and in her nightly prayers: she had her engrossing aim in view. Strange study for a child, to learn the road to a hard parent's heart!

There were many careless loungers through the street, as the summer evening deepened into night, who glanced across the road at the sombre house, and saw the youthful figure at the window, such a contrast to it, looking upward at the stars as they began to shine, who would have slept the worse if they had known on what design she mused so steady. The reputation of the mansion as a haunted house, would not have been the gayer with some humble dwellers elsewhere, who were struck by its external gloom in passing and repassing on their daily avocations, and so named it, if they could have read its story in the darkening face. But Florence held her sacred purpose, unsuspected and unaided: and studied only how to bring her father to the understanding that she loved him, and made no appeal against him in any wandering thought.

Thus Florence lived alone in the deserted house, and day succeeded day, and still she lived alone, and the monotonous walls looked down upon her with a stare, as if they had a Gorgon-like intent to stare her youth and beauty into stone.

Susan Nipper stood opposite to her young mistress one morning, as she folded and sealed a note she had been writing: and showed in her looks an approving knowledge of its contents.

'Better late than never, dear Miss Floy,' said Susan, 'and I do say, that even a visit to them old Skettleses will be a Godsend.'

'It is very good of Sir Barnet and Lady Skettles, Susan,' returned Florence, with a mild correction of that young lady's familiar mention of the family in question, 'to repeat their invitation so kindly.'

Miss Nipper, who was perhaps the most thoroughgoing partisan on the face of the earth, and who carried her partisanship into all matters great or small, and perpetually waged war with it against society, screwed up her lips and shook her head, as a protest against any recognition of disinterestedness in the Skettleses, and a plea in bar that they would have valuable consideration for their kindness, in the company of Florence.

'They know what they're about, if ever people did,' murmured Miss Nipper, drawing in her breath 'oh! trust them Skettleses for that!'

'I am not very anxious to go to Fulham, Susan, I confess,' said Florence thoughtfully: 'but it will be right to go. I think it will be better.'

'Much better,' interposed Susan, with another emphatic shake of her head.

'And so,' said Florence, 'though I would prefer to have gone when there was no one there, instead of in this vacation time, when it seems there are some young people staying in the house, I have thankfully said yes.'

'For which I say, Miss Floy, Oh be joyful!' returned Susan, 'Ah!

This last ejaculation, with which Miss Nipper frequently wound up a sentence, at about that epoch of time, was supposed below the level of the hall to have a general reference to Mr Dombey, and to be expressive of a yearning in Miss Nipper to favour that gentleman with a piece of her mind. But she never explained it; and it had, in consequence, the charm of mystery, in addition to the advantage of the sharpest expression.

'How long it is before we have any news of Walter, Susan!' observed Florence, after a moment's silence.

'Long indeed, Miss Floy!' replied her maid. 'And Perch said, when he came just now to see for letters—but what signifies what he says!' exclaimed Susan, reddening and breaking off. 'Much he knows about it!'

Florence raised her eyes quickly, and a flush overspread her face.

'If I hadn't,' said Susan Nipper, evidently struggling with some latent anxiety and alarm, and looking full at her young mistress, while endeavouring to work herself into a state of resentment with the unoffending Mr Perch's image, 'if I hadn't more manliness than that insipidest of his sex, I'd never take pride in my hair again, but turn it up behind my ears, and wear coarse caps, without a bit of border, until death released me from my insignificance. I may not be a Amazon, Miss Floy, and wouldn't so demean myself by such disfigurement, but anyways I'm not a giver up, I hope.'

'Give up! What?' cried Florence, with a face of terror.

'Why, nothing, Miss,' said Susan. 'Good gracious, nothing! It's only that wet curl-paper of a man, Perch, that anyone might almost make away with, with a touch, and really it would be a blessed event for all parties if someone would take pity on him, and would have the goodness!'

'Does he give up the ship, Susan?' inquired Florence, very pale.

'No, Miss,' returned Susan, 'I should like to see' him make so bold as do it to my face! No, Miss, but he goes 'on about some bothering ginger that Mr Walter was to send to Mrs Perch, and shakes his dismal head, and says he hopes it may be coming; anyhow, he says, it can't come now in time for the intended occasion, but may do for next, which really,' said Miss Nipper, with aggravated scorn, 'puts me out of patience with the man, for though I can bear a great deal, I am not a camel, neither am I,' added Susan, after a moment's consideration, 'if I know myself, a dromedary neither.'

'What else does he say, Susan?' inquired Florence, earnestly. 'Won't you tell me?'

'As if I wouldn't tell you anything, Miss Floy, and everything!' said Susan. 'Why, nothing Miss, he says that there begins to be a general talk about the ship, and that they have never had a ship on that voyage half so long unheard of, and that the Captain's wife was at the office yesterday, and seemed a little put out about it, but anyone could say that, we knew nearly that before.'

'I must visit Walter's uncle,' said Florence, hurriedly, 'before I leave home. I will go and see him this morning. Let us walk there, directly, Susan.

Miss Nipper having nothing to urge against the proposal, but being perfectly acquiescent, they were soon equipped, and in the streets, and on their way towards the little Midshipman.

The state of mind in which poor Walter had gone to Captain Cuttle's, on the day when Brogley the broker came into possession, and when there seemed to him to be an execution in the very steeples, was pretty much the same as that in which Florence now took her way to Uncle Sol's; with this difference, that Florence suffered the added pain of thinking that she had been, perhaps, the innocent occasion of involving Walter in peril, and all to whom he was dear, herself included, in an agony of suspense. For the rest, uncertainty and danger seemed written upon everything. The weathercocks on spires and housetops were mysterious with hints of stormy wind, and pointed, like so many ghostly fingers, out to dangerous seas, where fragments of great wrecks were drifting, perhaps, and helpless men were rocked upon them into a sleep as deep as the unfathomable waters. When Florence came into the City, and passed gentlemen who were talking together, she dreaded to hear them speaking of the ship, an'd saying it was lost. Pictures and prints of vessels fighting with the rolling waves filled her with alarm. The smoke and clouds, though moving gently, moved too fast for her apprehensions, and made her fear there was a tempest blowing at that moment on the ocean.

Susan Nipper may or may not have been affected similarly, but having her attention much engaged in struggles with boys, whenever there was any press of people—for, between that grade of human kind and herself, there was some natural animosity that invariably broke out, whenever they came together- -it would seem that she had not much leisure on the road for intellectual operations.

Arriving in good time abreast of the wooden Midshipman on the opposite side of the way, and waiting for an opportunity to cross the street, they were a little surprised at first to see, at the Instrument-maker's door, a round-headed lad, with his chubby face addressed towards the sky, who, as they looked at him, suddenly thrust into his capacious mouth two fingers of each hand, and with the assistance of that machinery whistled, with astonishing shrillness, to some pigeons at a considerable elevation in the air.

'Mrs Richards's eldest, Miss!' said Susan, 'and the worrit of Mrs Richards's life!'

As Polly had been to tell Florence of the resuscitated prospects of her son and heir, Florence was prepared for the meeting: so, a favourable moment presenting itself, they both hastened across, without any further contemplation of Mrs Richards's bane' That sporting character, unconscious of their approach, again whistled with his utmost might, and then yelled in a rapture of excitement, 'Strays! Whip! Strays!' which identification had such an effect upon the conscience-stricken pigeons, that instead of going direct to some town in the North of England, as appeared to have been their original intention, they began to wheel and falter; whereupon Mrs Richards's first born pierced them with another whistle, and again yelled, in a voice that rose above the turmoil of the street, 'Strays! Who-oop! Strays!'

From this transport, he was abruptly recalled to terrestrial objects, by a poke from Miss Nipper, which sent him into the shop.

'Is this the way you show your penitence, when Mrs Richards has been fretting for you months and months?' said Susan, following the poke. 'Where's Mr Gills?'

Rob, who smoothed his first rebellious glance at Miss Nipper when he saw Florence following, put his knuckles to his hair, in honour of the latter, and said to the former, that Mr Gills was out.'

'Fetch him home,' said Miss Nipper, with authority, 'and say that my young lady's here.'

'I don't know where he's gone,' said Rob.

'Is that your penitence?' cried Susan, with stinging sharpness.

'Why how can I go and fetch him when I don't know where to go?' whimpered the baited Rob. 'How can you be so unreasonable?'

'Did Mr Gills say when he should be home?' asked Florence.

'Yes, Miss,' replied Rob, with another application of his knuckles to his hair. 'He said he should be home early in the afternoon; in about a couple of hours from now, Miss.'

'Is he very anxious about his nephew?' inquired Susan.

'Yes, Miss,' returned Rob, preferring to address himself to Florence and slighting Nipper; 'I should say he was, very much so. He ain't indoors, Miss, not a quarter of an hour together. He can't settle in one place five minutes. He goes about, like a—just like a stray,' said Rob, stooping to get a glimpse of the pigeons through the window, and checking himself, with his fingers half-way to his mouth, on the verge of another whistle.

'Do you know a friend of Mr Gills, called Captain Cuttle?' inquired Florence, after a moment's reflection.

'Him with a hook, Miss?' rejoined Rob, with an illustrative twist of his left hand. Yes, Miss. He was here the day before yesterday.'

'Has he not been here since?' asked Susan.

'No, Miss,' returned Rob, still addressing his reply to Florence.

'Perhaps Walter's Uncle has gone there, Susan,' observed Florence, turning to her.

'To Captain Cuttle's, Miss?' interposed Rob; 'no, he's not gone there, Miss. Because he left particular word that if Captain Cuttle called, I should tell him how surprised he was, not to have seen him yesterday, and should make him stop till he came back.'

'Do you know where Captain Cuttle lives?' asked Florence.

Rob replied in the affirmative, and turning to a greasy parchment book on the shop desk, read the address aloud.

Florence again turned to her maid and took counsel with her in a low voice, while Rob the round-eyed, mindful of his patron's secret charge, looked on and listened. Florence proposed that they could go to Captain Cuttle's house; hear from his own lips, what he thought of the absence of any tidings ofthe Son and Heir; and bring him, if they could, to comfort Uncle Sol. Susan at first objected slightly, on the score of distance; but a hackney- coach being mentioned by her mistress, withdrew that opposition, and gave in her assent. There were some minutes of discussion between them before they came to this conclusion, during which the staring Rob paid close attention to both speakers, and inclined his ear to each by turns, as if he were appointed arbitrator of the argument.

In time, Rob was despatched for a coach, the visitors keeping shop meanwhile; and when he brought it, they got into it, leaving word for Uncle Sol that they would be sure to call again, on their way back. Rob having stared after the coach until it was as invisible as the pigeons had now become, sat down behind the desk with a most assiduous demeanour; and in order that he might forget nothing of what had transpired, made notes of it on various small scraps of paper, with a vast expenditure of ink. There was no danger of these documents betraying anything, if accidentally lost; for long before a word was dry, it became as profound a mystery to Rob, as if he had had no part whatever in its production.

While he was yet busy with these labours, the hackney-coach, after encountering unheard-of difficulties from swivel-bridges, soft roads, impassable canals, caravans of casks, settlements of scarlet-beans and little wash-houses, and many such obstacles abounding in that country, stopped at the corner of Brig Place. Alighting here, Florence and Susan Nipper walked down the street, and sought out the abode of Captain Cuttle.

It happened by evil chance to be one of Mrs MacStinger's great cleaning days. On these occasions, Mrs MacStinger was knocked up by the policeman at a quarter before three in the morning, and rarely such before twelve o'clock next night. The chief object of this institution appeared to be, that Mrs MacStinger should move all the furniture into the back garden at early dawn, walk about the house in pattens all day, and move the furniture back again after dark. These ceremonies greatly fluttered those doves the young MacStingers, who were not only unable at such times to find any resting- place for the soles of their feet, but generally came in for a good deal of pecking from the maternal bird during the progress of the solemnities.

At the moment when Florence and Susan Nipper presented themselves at Mrs MacStinger's door, that worthy but redoubtable female was in the act of conveying Alexander MacStinger, aged two years and three months, along the passage, for forcible deposition in a sitting posture on the street pavement: Alexander being black in the face with holding his breath after punishment, and a cool paving-stone being usually found to act as a powerful restorative in such cases.

The feelings of Mrs MacStinger, as a woman and a mother, were outraged by the look of pity for Alexander which she observed on Florence's face. Therefore, Mrs MacStinger asserting those finest emotions of our nature, in preference to weakly gratifying her curiosity, shook and buffeted Alexander both before and during the application of the paving-stone, and took no further notice of the strangers.

'I beg your pardon, Ma'am,' said Florence, when the child had found his breath again, and was using it. 'Is this Captain Cuttle's house?'

'No,' said Mrs MacStinger.

'Not Number Nine?' asked Florence, hesitating.

'Who said it wasn't Number Nine?' said Mrs MacStinger.

Susan Nipper instantly struck in, and begged to inquire what Mrs MacStinger meant by that, and if she knew whom she was talking to.

Mrs MacStinger in retort, looked at her all over. 'What do you want with Captain Cuttle, I should wish to know?' said Mrs MacStinger.

'Should you? Then I'm sorry that you won't be satisfied,' returned Miss Nipper.

'Hush, Susan! If you please!' said Florence. 'Perhaps you can have the goodness to tell us where Captain Cuttle lives, Ma'am as he don't live here.'

'Who says he don't live here?' retorted the implacable MacStinger. 'I said it wasn't Cap'en Cuttle's house—and it ain't his house—and forbid it, that it ever should be his house—for Cap'en Cuttle don't know how to keep a house—and don't deserve to have a house—it's my house—and when I let the upper floor to Cap'en Cuttle, oh I do a thankless thing, and cast pearls before swine!'

Mrs MacStinger pitched her voice for the upper windows in offering these remarks, and cracked off each clause sharply by itself as if from a rifle possessing an infinity of barrels. After the last shot, the Captain's voice was heard to say, in feeble remonstrance from his own room, 'Steady below!'

'Since you want Cap'en Cuttle, there he is!' said Mrs MacStinger, with an angry motion of her hand. On Florence making bold to enter, without any more parley, and on Susan following, Mrs MacStinger recommenced her pedestrian exercise in pattens, and Alexander MacStinger (still on the paving-stone), who had stopped in his crying to attend to the conversation, began to wail again, entertaining himself during that dismal performance, which was quite mechanical, with a general survey of the prospect, terminating in the hackney-coach.

The Captain in his own apartment was sitting with his hands in his pockets and his legs drawn up under his chair, on a very small desolate island, lying about midway in an ocean of soap and water. The Captain's windows had been cleaned, the walls had been cleaned, the stove had been cleaned, and everything the stove excepted, was wet, and shining with soft soap and sand: the smell of which dry-saltery impregnated the air. In the midst of the dreary scene, the Captain, cast away upon his island, looked round on the waste of waters with a rueful countenance, and seemed waiting for some friendly bark to come that way, and take him off.

But when the Captain, directing his forlorn visage towards the door, saw Florence appear with her maid, no words can describe his astonishment. Mrs MacStinger's eloquence having rendered all other sounds but imperfectly distinguishable, he had looked for no rarer visitor than the potboy or the milkman; wherefore, when Florence appeared, and coming to the confines of the island, put her hand in his, the Captain stood up, aghast, as if he supposed her, for the moment, to be some young member of the Flying Dutchman's family.'

Instantly recovering his self-possession, however, the Captain's first care was to place her on dry land, which he happily accomplished, with one motion of his arm. Issuing forth, then, upon the main, Captain Cuttle took Miss Nipper round the waist, and bore her to the island also. Captain Cuttle, then, with great respect and admiration, raised the hand of Florence to his lips, and standing off a little (for the island was not large enough for three), beamed on her from the soap and water like a new description of Triton.

'You are amazed to see us, I am sure,'said Florence, with a smile.

The inexpressibly gratified Captain kissed his hook in reply, and growled, as if a choice and delicate compliment were included in the words, 'Stand by! Stand by!'

'But I couldn't rest,' said Florence, 'without coming to ask you what you think about dear Walter—who is my brother now—and whether there is anything to fear, and whether you will not go and console his poor Uncle every day, until we have some intelligence of him?'

At these words Captain Cuttle, as by an involuntary gesture, clapped his hand to his head, on which the hard glazed hat was not, and looked discomfited.

'Have you any fears for Walter's safety?' inquired Florence, from whose face the Captain (so enraptured he was with it) could not take his eyes: while she, in her turn, looked earnestly at him, to be assured of the sincerity of his reply.

'No, Heart's-delight,' said Captain Cuttle, 'I am not afeard. Wal'r is a lad as'll go through a deal o' hard weather. Wal'r is a lad as'll bring as much success to that 'ere brig as a lad is capable on. Wal'r,' said the Captain, his eyes glistening with the praise of his young friend, and his hook raised to announce a beautiful quotation, 'is what you may call a out'ard and visible sign of an in'ard and spirited grasp, and when found make a note of.'

Florence, who did not quite understand this, though the Captain evidently thought it full of meaning, and highly satisfactory, mildly looked to him for something more.

'I am not afeard, my Heart's-delight,' resumed the Captain, 'There's been most uncommon bad weather in them latitudes, there's no denyin', and they have drove and drove and been beat off, may be t'other side the world. But the ship's a good ship, and the lad's a good lad; and it ain't easy, thank the Lord,' the Captain made a little bow, 'to break up hearts of oak, whether they're in brigs or buzzums. Here we have 'em both ways, which is bringing it up with a round turn, and so I ain't a bit afeard as yet.'

'As yet?' repeated Florence.

'Not a bit,' returned the Captain, kissing his iron hand; 'and afore I begin to be, my Hearts-delight, Wal'r will have wrote home from the island, or from some port or another, and made all taut and shipsahape.' And with regard to old Sol Gills, here the Captain became solemn, 'who I'll stand by, and not desert until death do us part, and when the stormy winds do blow, do blow, do blow—overhaul the Catechism,' said the Captain parenthetically, 'and there you'll find them expressions—if it would console Sol Gills to have the opinion of a seafaring man as has got a mind equal to any undertaking that he puts it alongside of, and as was all but smashed in his 'prenticeship, and of which the name is Bunsby, that 'ere man shall give him such an opinion in his own parlour as'll stun him. Ah!' said Captain Cuttle, vauntingly, 'as much as if he'd gone and knocked his head again a door!'

'Let us take this gentleman to see him, and let us hear what he says,' cried Florence. 'Will you go with us now? We have a coach here.'

Again the Captain clapped his hand to his head, on which the hard glazed hat was not, and looked discomfited. But at this instant a most remarkable phenomenon occurred. The door opening, without any note of preparation, and apparently of itself, the hard glazed hat in question skimmed into the room like a bird, and alighted heavily at the Captain's feet. The door then shut as violently as it had opened, and nothing ensued in explanation of the prodigy.

Captain Cuttle picked up his hat, and having turned it over with a look of interest and welcome, began to polish it on his sleeve' While doing so, the Captain eyed his visitors intently, and said in a low voice,

'You see I should have bore down on Sol Gills yesterday, and this morning, but she—she took it away and kep it. That's the long and short ofthe subject.'

'Who did, for goodness sake?' asked Susan Nipper.

'The lady of the house, my dear,'returned the Captain, in a gruff whisper, and making signals of secrecy.'We had some words about the swabbing of these here planks, and she—In short,' said the Captain, eyeing the door, and relieving himself with a long breath, 'she stopped my liberty.'

'Oh! I wish she had me to deal with!' said Susan, reddening with the energy of the wish. 'I'd stop her!'

'Would you, do you, my dear?' rejoined the Captain, shaking his head doubtfully, but regarding the desperate courage of the fair aspirant with obvious admiration. 'I don't know. It's difficult navigation. She's very hard to carry on with, my dear. You never can tell how she'll head, you see. She's full one minute, and round upon you next. And when she in a tartar,' said the Captain, with the perspiration breaking out upon his forehead. There was nothing but a whistle emphatic enough for the conclusion of the sentence, so the Captain whistled tremulously. After which he again shook his head, and recurring to his admiration of Miss Nipper's devoted bravery, timidly repeated, 'Would you, do you think, my dear?'

Susan only replied with a bridling smile, but that was so very full of defiance, that there is no knowing how long Captain Cuttle might have stood entranced in its contemplation, if Florence in her anxiety had not again proposed their immediately resorting to the oracular Bunsby. Thus reminded of his duty, Captain Cuttle Put on the glazed hat firmly, took up another knobby stick, with which he had supplied the place of that one given to Walter, and offering his arm to Florence, prepared to cut his way through the enemy.

It turned out, however, that Mrs MacStinger had already changed her course, and that she headed, as the Captain had remarked she often did, in quite a new direction. For when they got downstairs, they found that exemplary woman beating the mats on the doorsteps, with Alexander, still upon the paving- stone, dimly looming through a fog of dust; and so absorbed was Mrs MacStinger in her household occupation, that when Captain Cuttle and his visitors passed, she beat the harder, and neither by word nor gesture showed any consciousness of their vicinity. The Captain was so well pleased with this easy escape—although the effect of the door-mats on him was like a copious administration of snuff, and made him sneeze until the tears ran down his face—that he could hardly believe his good fortune; but more than once, between the door and the hackney-coach, looked over his shoulder, with an obvious apprehension of Mrs MacStinger's giving chase yet.

However, they got to the corner of Brig Place without any molestation from that terrible fire-ship; and the Captain mounting the coach-box—for his gallantry would not allow him to ride inside with the ladies, though besought to do so—piloted the driver on his course for Captain Bunsby's vessel, which was called the Cautious Clara, and was lying hard by Ratcliffe.

Arrived at the wharf off which this great commander's ship was jammed in among some five hundred companions, whose tangled rigging looked like monstrous cobwebs half swept down, Captain Cuttle appeared at the coach-window, and invited Florence and Miss Nipper to accompany him on board; observing that Bunsby was to the last degree soft-hearted in respect of ladies, and that nothing would so much tend to bring his expansive intellect into a state of harmony as their presentation to the Cautious Clara.

Florence readily consented; and the Captain, taking her little hand in his prodigious palm, led her, with a mixed expression of patronage, paternity, pride, and ceremony, that was pleasant to see, over several very dirty decks, until, coming to the Clara, they found that cautious craft (which lay outside the tier) with her gangway removed, and half-a-dozen feet of river interposed between herself and her nearest neighbour. It appeared, from Captain Cuttle's explanation, that the great Bunsby, like himself, was cruelly treated by his landlady, and that when her usage of him for the time being was so hard that he could bear it no longer, he set this gulf between them as a last resource.

'Clara a-hoy!' cried the Captain, putting a hand to each side of his mouth.

'A-hoy!' cried a boy, like the Captain's echo, tumbling up from below.

'Bunsby aboard?' cried the Captain, hailing the boy in a stentorian voice, as if he were half-a-mile off instead of two yards.

'Ay, ay!' cried the boy, in the same tone.

The boy then shoved out a plank to Captain Cuttle, who adjusted it carefully, and led Florence across: returning presently for Miss Nipper. So they stood upon the deck of the Cautious Clara, in whose standing rigging, divers fluttering articles of dress were curing, in company with a few tongues and some mackerel.

Immediately there appeared, coming slowly up above the bulk-head of the cabin, another bulk-head 'human, and very large—with one stationary eye in the mahogany face, and one revolving one, on the principle of some lighthouses. This head was decorated with shaggy hair, like oakum,' which had no governing inclination towards the north, east, west, or south, but inclined to all four quarters of the compass, and to every point upon it. The head was followed by a perfect desert of chin, and by a shirt-collar and neckerchief, and by a dreadnought pilot-coat, and by a pair of dreadnought pilot- trousers, whereof the waistband was so very broad and high, that it became a succedaneum for a waistcoat: being ornamented near the wearer's breastbone with some massive wooden buttons, like backgammon men. As the lower portions of these pantaloons became revealed, Bunsby stood confessed; his hands in their pockets, which were of vast size; and his gaze directed, not to Captain Cuttle or the ladies, but the mast-head.

The profound appearance of this philosopher, who was bulky and strong, and on whose extremely red face an expression of taciturnity sat enthroned, not inconsistent with his character, in which that quality was proudly conspicuous, almost daunted Captain Cuttle, though on familiar terms with him. Whispering to Florence that Bunsby had never in his life expressed surprise, and was considered not to know what it meant, the Captain watched him as he eyed his mast-head, and afterwards swept the horizon; and when the revolving eye seemed to be coming round in his direction, said:

'Bunsby, my lad, how fares it?'

A deep, gruff, husky utterance, which seemed to have no connexion with Bunsby, and certainly had not the least effect upon his face, replied, 'Ay, ay, shipmet, how goes it?' At the same time Bunsby's right hand and arm, emerging from a pocket, shook the Captain's, and went back again.

'Bunsby,' said the Captain, striking home at once, 'here you are; a man of mind, and a man as can give an opinion. Here's a young lady as wants to take that opinion, in regard of my friend Wal'r; likewise my t'other friend, Sol Gills, which is a character for you to come within hail of, being a man of science, which is the mother of invention, and knows no law. Bunsby, will you wear, to oblige me, and come along with us?'

The great commander, who seemed by expression of his visage to be always on the look-out for something in the extremest distance' and to have no ocular knowledge of anything within ten miles, made no reply whatever.

'Here is a man,' said the Captain, addressing himself to his fair auditors, and indicating the commander with his outstretched hook, 'that has fell down, more than any man alive; that has had more accidents happen to his own self than the Seamen's Hospital to all hands; that took as many spars and bars and bolts about the outside of his head when he was young, as you'd want a order for on Chatham-yard to build a pleasure yacht with; and yet that his opinions in that way, it's my belief, for there ain't nothing like 'em afloat or ashore.'

The stolid commander appeared by a very slight vibration in his elbows, to express some satisfaction in this encomium; but if his face had been as distant as his gaze was, it could hardly have enlightened the beholders less in reference to anything that was passing in his thoughts.

'Shipmate,' said Bunsby, all of a sudden, and stooping down to look out under some interposing spar, 'what'll the ladies drink?'

Captain Cuttle, whose delicacy was shocked by such an inquiry in connection with Florence, drew the sage aside, and seeming to explain in his ear, accompanied him below; where, that he might not take offence, the Captain drank a dram himself' which Florence and Susan, glancing down the open skylight, saw the sage, with difficulty finding room for himself between his berth and a very little brass fireplace, serve out for self and friend. They soon reappeared on deck, and Captain Cuttle, triumphing in the success of his enterprise, conducted Florence back to the coach, while Bunsby followed, escorting Miss Nipper, whom he hugged upon the way (much to that young lady's indignation) with his pilot-coated arm, like a blue bear.

The Captain put his oracle inside, and gloried so much in having secured him, and having got that mind into a hackney-coach, that he could not refrain from often peeping in at Florence through the little window behind the driver, and testifying his delight in smiles, and also in taps upon his forehead, to hint to her that the brain of Bunsby was hard at it' In the meantime, Bunsby, still hugging Miss Nipper (for his friend, the Captain, had not exaggerated the softness of his heart), uniformly preserved his gravity of deportment, and showed no other consciousness of her or anything.

Uncle Sol, who had come home, received them at the door, and ushered them immediately into the little back parlour: strangely altered by the absence of Walter. On the table, and about the room, were the charts and maps on which the heavy-hearted Instrument-maker had again and again tracked the missing vessel across the sea, and on which, with a pair of compasses that he still had in his hand, he had been measuring, a minute before, how far she must have driven, to have driven here or there: and trying to demonstrate that a long time must elapse before hope was exhausted.

'Whether she can have run,' said Uncle Sol, looking wistfully over the chart; 'but no, that's almost impossible or whether she can have been forced by stress of weather,—but that's not reasonably likely. Or whether there is any hope she so far changed her course as—but even I can hardly hope that!' With such broken suggestions, poor old Uncle Sol roamed over the great sheet before him, and could not find a speck of hopeful probability in it large enough to set one small point of the compasses upon.

Florence saw immediately—it would have been difficult to help seeing—that there was a singular, indescribable change in the old man, and that while his manner was far more restless and unsettled than usual, there was yet a curious, contradictory decision in it, that perplexed her very much. She fancied once that he spoke wildly, and at random; for on her saying she regretted not to have seen him when she had been there before that morning, he at first replied that he had been to see her, and directly afterwards seemed to wish to recall that answer.

'You have been to see me?' said Florence. 'To-day?'

'Yes, my dear young lady,' returned Uncle Sol, looking at her and away from her in a confused manner. 'I wished to see you with my own eyes, and to hear you with my own ears, once more before—' There he stopped.

'Before when? Before what?' said Florence, putting her hand upon his arm.

'Did I say "before?"' replied old Sol. 'If I did, I must have meant before we should have news of my dear boy.'

'You are not well,' said Florence, tenderly. 'You have been so very anxious I am sure you are not well.'

'I am as well,' returned the old man, shutting up his right hand, and holding it out to show her: 'as well and firm as any man at my time of life can hope to be. See! It's steady. Is its master not as capable of resolution and fortitude as many a younger man? I think so. We shall see.'

There was that in his manner more than in his words, though they remained with her too, which impressed Florence so much, that she would have confided her uneasiness to Captain Cuttle at that moment, if the Captain had not seized that moment for expounding the state of circumstance, on which the opinion of the sagacious Bunsby was requested, and entreating that profound authority to deliver the same.

Bunsby, whose eye continued to be addressed to somewhere about the half-way house between London and Gravesend, two or three times put out his rough right arm, as seeking to wind it for inspiration round the fair form of Miss Nipper; but that young female having withdrawn herself, in displeasure, to the opposite side of the table, the soft heart of the Commander of the Cautious Clara met with no response to its impulses. After sundry failures in this wise, the Commander, addressing himself to nobody, thus spake; or rather the voice within him said of its own accord, and quite independent of himself, as if he were possessed by a gruff spirit:

'My name's Jack Bunsby!'

'He was christened John,' cried the delighted Captain Cuttle. 'Hear him!'

'And what I says,' pursued the voice, after some deliberation, 'I stands to.

The Captain, with Florence on his arm, nodded at the auditory, and seemed to say, 'Now he's coming out. This is what I meant when I brought him.'

'Whereby,' proceeded the voice, 'why not? If so, what odds? Can any man say otherwise? No. Awast then!'

When it had pursued its train of argument to this point, the voice stopped, and rested. It then proceeded very slowly, thus:

'Do I believe that this here Son and Heir's gone down, my lads? Mayhap. Do I say so? Which? If a skipper stands out by Sen' George's Channel, making for the Downs, what's right ahead of him? The Goodwins. He isn't forced to run upon the Goodwins, but he may. The bearings of this observation lays in the application on it. That ain't no part of my duty. Awast then, keep a bright look-out for'ard, and good luck to you!'

The voice here went out of the back parlour and into the street, taking the Commander of the Cautious Clara with it, and accompanying him on board again with all convenient expedition, where he immediately turned in, and refreshed his mind with a nap.

The students of the sage's precepts, left to their own application of his wisdom—upon a principle which was the main leg of the Bunsby tripod, as it is perchance of some other oracular stools—looked upon one another in a little uncertainty; while Rob the Grinder, who had taken the innocent freedom of peering in, and listening, through the skylight in the roof, came softly down from the leads, in a state of very dense confusion. Captain Cuttle, however, whose admiration of Bunsby was, if possible, enhanced by the splendid manner in which he had justified his reputation and come through this solemn reference, proceeded to explain that Bunsby meant nothing but confidence; that Bunsby had no misgivings; and that such an opinion as that man had given, coming from such a mind as his, was Hope's own anchor, with good roads to cast it in. Florence endeavoured to believe that the Captain was right; but the Nipper, with her arms tight folded, shook her head in resolute denial, and had no more trust in Bunsby than in Mr Perch himself.

The philosopher seemed to have left Uncle Sol pretty much where he had found him, for he still went roaming about the watery world, compasses in hand, and discovering no rest for them. It was in pursuance of a whisper in his ear from Florence, while the old man was absorbed in this pursuit, that Captain Cuttle laid his heavy hand upon his shoulder.

'What cheer, Sol Gills?' cried the Captain, heartily.

'But so-so, Ned,' returned the Instrument-maker. 'I have been remembering, all this afternoon, that on the very day when my boy entered Dombey's House, and came home late to dinner, sitting just there where you stand, we talked of storm and shipwreck, and I could hardly turn him from the subject.'

But meeting the eyes of Florence, which were fixed with earnest scrutiny upon his face, the old man stopped and smiled.

'Stand by, old friend!' cried the Captain. 'Look alive! I tell you what, Sol Gills; arter I've convoyed Heart's-delight safe home,' here the Captain kissed his hook to Florence, 'I'll come back and take you in tow for the rest of this blessed day. You'll come and eat your dinner along with me, Sol, somewheres or another.'

'Not to-day, Ned!' said the old man quickly, and appearing to be unaccountably startled by the proposition. 'Not to-day. I couldn't do it!'

'Why not?' returned the Captain, gazing at him in astonishment.

'I—I have so much to do. I—I mean to think of, and arrange. I couldn't do it, Ned, indeed. I must go out again, and be alone, and turn my mind to many things to-day.'

The Captain looked at the Instrument-maker, and looked at Florence, and again at the Instrument-maker. 'To-morrow, then,' he suggested, at last.

'Yes, yes. To-morrow,' said the old man. 'Think of me to-morrow. Say to-morrow.'

'I shall come here early, mind, Sol Gills,' stipulated the Captain.

'Yes, yes. The first thing tomorrow morning,' said old Sol; 'and now good-bye, Ned Cuttle, and God bless you!'

Squeezing both the Captain's hands, with uncommon fervour, as he said it, the old man turned to Florence, folded hers in his own, and put them to his lips; then hurried her out to the coach with very singular precipitation. Altogether, he made such an effect on Captain Cuttle that the Captain lingered behind, and instructed Rob to be particularly gentle and attentive to his master until the morning: which injunction he strengthened with the payment of one shilling down, and the promise of another sixpence before noon next day. This kind office performed, Captain Cuttle, who considered himself the natural and lawful body-guard of Florence, mounted the box with a mighty sense of his trust, and escorted her home. At parting, he assured her that he would stand by Sol Gills, close and true; and once again inquired of Susan Nipper, unable to forget her gallant words in reference to Mrs MacStinger, 'Would you, do you think my dear, though?'

When the desolate house had closed upon the two, the Captain's thoughts reverted to the old Instrument-maker, and he felt uncomfortable. Therefore, instead of going home, he walked up and down the street several times, and, eking out his leisure until evening, dined late at a certain angular little tavern in the City, with a public parlour like a wedge, to which glazed hats much resorted. The Captain's principal intention was to pass Sol Gills's, after dark, and look in through the window: which he did, The parlour door stood open, and he could see his old friend writing busily and steadily at the table within, while the little Midshipman, already sheltered from the night dews, watched him from the counter; under which Rob the Grinder made his own bed, preparatory to shutting the shop. Reassured by the tranquillity that reigned within the precincts of the wooden mariner, the Captain headed for Brig Place, resolving to weigh anchor betimes in the morning.

CHAPTER 24. The Study of a Loving Heart

Sir Barnet and Lady Skettles, very good people, resided in a pretty villa at Fulham, on the banks of the Thames; which was one of the most desirable residences in the world when a rowing-match happened to be going past, but had its little inconveniences at other times, among which may be enumerated the occasional appearance of the river in the drawing-room, and the contemporaneous disappearance of the lawn and shrubbery.

Sir Barnet Skettles expressed his personal consequence chiefly through an antique gold snuffbox, and a ponderous silk pocket-kerchief, which he had an imposing manner of drawing out of his pocket like a banner and using with both hands at once. Sir Barnet's object in life was constantly to extend the range of his acquaintance. Like a heavy body dropped into water—not to disparage so worthy a gentleman by the comparison—it was in the nature of things that Sir Barnet must spread an ever widening circle about him, until there was no room left. Or, like a sound in air, the vibration of which, according to the speculation of an ingenious modern philosopher, may go on travelling for ever through the interminable fields of space, nothing but coming to the end of his moral tether could stop Sir Barnet Skettles in his voyage of discovery through the social system.

Sir Barnet was proud of making people acquainted with people. He liked the thing for its own sake, and it advanced his favourite object too. For example, if Sir Barnet had the good fortune to get hold of a law recruit, or a country gentleman, and ensnared him to his hospitable villa, Sir Barnet would say to him, on the morning after his arrival, 'Now, my dear Sir, is there anybody you would like to know? Who is there you would wish to meet? Do you take any interest in writing people, or in painting or sculpturing people, or in acting people, or in anything of that sort?' Possibly the patient answered yes, and mentioned somebody, of whom Sir Barnet had no more personal knowledge than of Ptolemy the Great. Sir Barnet replied, that nothing on earth was easier, as he knew him very well: immediately called on the aforesaid somebody, left his card, wrote a short note,—'My dear Sir- -penalty of your eminent position—friend at my house naturally desirous—Lady Skettles and myself participate—trust that genius being superior to ceremonies, you will do us the distinguished favour of giving us the pleasure,' etc, etc.—and so killed a brace of birds with one stone, dead as door-nails.

With the snuff-box and banner in full force, Sir Barnet Skettles propounded his usual inquiry to Florence on the first morning of her visit. When Florence thanked him, and said there was no one in particular whom she desired to see, it was natural she should think with a pang, of poor lost Walter. When Sir Barnet Skettles, urging his kind offer, said, 'My dear Miss Dombey, are you sure you can remember no one whom your good Papa—to whom I beg you present the best compliments of myself and Lady Skettles when you write—might wish you to know?' it was natural, perhaps, that her poor head should droop a little, and that her voice should tremble as it softly answered in the negative.

Skettles Junior, much stiffened as to his cravat, and sobered down as to his spirits' was at home for the holidays, and appeared to feel himself aggrieved by the solicitude of his excellent mother that he should be attentive to Florence. Another and a deeper injury under which the soul of young Barnet chafed, was the company of Dr and Mrs Blimber, who had been invited on a visit to the paternal roof-tree, and of whom the young gentleman often said he would have preferred their passing the vacation at Jericho.

'Is there anybody you can suggest now, Doctor Blimber?' said Sir Barnet Skettles, turning to that gentleman.

'You are very kind, Sir Barnet,' returned Doctor Blimber. 'Really I am not aware that there is, in particular. I like to know my fellow-men in general, Sir Barnet. What does Terence say? Anyone who is the parent of a son is interesting to me.

'Has Mrs Blimber any wish to see any remarkable person?' asked Sir Barnet, courteously.

Mrs Blimber replied, with a sweet smile and a shake of her sky-blue cap, that if Sir Barnet could have made her known to Cicero, she would have troubled him; but such an introduction not being feasible, and she already enjoying the friendship of himself and his amiable lady, and possessing with the Doctor her husband their joint confidence in regard to their dear son—here young Barnet was observed to curl his nose—she asked no more.

Sir Barnet was fain, under these circumstances, to content himself for the time with the company assembled. Florence was glad of that; for she had a study to pursue among them, and it lay too near her heart, and was too precious and momentous, to yield to any other interest.

There were some children staying in the house. Children who were as frank and happy with fathers and with mothers as those rosy faces opposite home. Children who had no restraint upon their love, and freely showed it. Florence sought to learn their secret; sought to find out what it was she had missed; what simple art they knew, and she knew not; how she could be taught by them to show her father that she loved him, and to win his love again.

Many a day did Florence thoughtfully observe these children. On many a bright morning did she leave her bed when the glorious sun rose, and walking up and down upon the river's bank' before anyone in the house was stirring, look up at the windows of their rooms, and think of them, asleep, so gently tended and affectionately thought of. Florence would feel more lonely then, than in the great house all alone; and would think sometimes that she was better there than here, and that there was greater peace in hiding herself than in mingling with others of her age, and finding how unlike them all she was. But attentive to her study, though it touched her to the quick at every little leaf she turned in the hard book, Florence remained among them, and tried with patient hope, to gain the knowledge that she wearied for.

Ah! how to gain it! how to know the charm in its beginning! There were daughters here, who rose up in the morning, and lay down to rest at night, possessed of fathers' hearts already. They had no repulse to overcome, no coldness to dread, no frown to smooth away. As the morning advanced, and the windows opened one by one, and the dew began to dry upon the flowers and and youthful feet began to move upon the lawn, Florence, glancing round at the bright faces, thought what was there she could learn from these children? It was too late to learn from them; each could approach her father fearlessly, and put up her lips to meet the ready kiss, and wind her arm about the neck that bent down to caress her. She could not begin by being so bold. Oh! could it be that there was less and less hope as she studied more and more!

She remembered well, that even the old woman who had robbed her when a little child—whose image and whose house, and all she had said and done, were stamped upon her recollection, with the enduring sharpness of a fearful impression made at that early period of life—had spoken fondly of her daughter, and how terribly even she had cried out in the pain of hopeless separation from her child But her own mother, she would think again, when she recalled this, had loved her well. Then, sometimes, when her thoughts reverted swiftly to the void between herself and her father, Florence would tremble, and the tears would start upon her face, as she pictured to herself her mother living on, and coming also to dislike her, because of her wanting the unknown grace that should conciliate that father naturally, and had never done so from her cradle She knew that this imagination did wrong to her mother's memory, and had no truth in it, or base to rest upon; and yet she tried so hard to justify him, and to find the whole blame in herself, that she could not resist its passing, like a wild cloud, through the distance of her mind.

There came among the other visitors, soon after Florence, one beautiful girl, three or four years younger than she, who was an orphan child, and who was accompanied by her aunt, a grey-haired lady, who spoke much to Florence, and who greatly liked (but that they all did) to hear her sing of an evening, and would always sit near her at that time, with motherly interest. They had only been two days in the house, when Florence, being in an arbour in the garden one warm morning, musingly observant of a youthful group upon the turf, through some intervening boughs,—and wreathing flowers for the head of one little creature among them who was the pet and plaything of the rest, heard this same lady and her niece, in pacing up and down a sheltered nook close by, speak of herself.

'Is Florence an orphan like me, aunt?' said the child.

'No, my love. She has no mother, but her father is living.'

'Is she in mourning for her poor Mama, now?' inquired the child quickly.

'No; for her only brother.'

'Has she no other brother?'

'None.'

'No sister?'

'None,'

'I am very, very sorry!' said the little girl

As they stopped soon afterwards to watch some boats, and had been silent in the meantime, Florence, who had risen when she heard her name, and had gathered up her flowers to go and meet them, that they might know of her being within hearing, resumed her seat and work, expecting to hear no more; but the conversation recommenced next moment.

'Florence is a favourite with everyone here, and deserves to be, I am sure,' said the child, earnestly. 'Where is her Papa?'

The aunt replied, after a moment's pause, that she did not know. Her tone of voice arrested Florence, who had started from her seat again; and held her fastened to the spot, with her work hastily caught up to her bosom, and her two hands saving it from being scattered on the ground.

'He is in England, I hope, aunt?' said the child.

'I believe so. Yes; I know he is, indeed.'

'Has he ever been here?'

'I believe not. No.'

'Is he coming here to see her?'

'I believe not.

'Is he lame, or blind, or ill, aunt?' asked the child.

The flowers that Florence held to her breast began to fall when she heard those words, so wonderingly spoke She held them closer; and her face hung down upon them'

'Kate,' said the lady, after another moment of silence, 'I will tell you the whole truth about Florence as I have heard it, and believe it to be. Tell no one else, my dear, because it may be little known here, and your doing so would give her pain.'

'I never will!' exclaimed the child.

'I know you never will,' returned the lady. 'I can trust you as myself. I fear then, Kate, that Florence's father cares little for her, very seldom sees her, never was kind to her in her life, and now quite shuns her and avoids her. She would love him dearly if he would suffer her, but he will not—though for no fault of hers; and she is greatly to be loved and pitied by all gentle hearts.'

More of the flowers that Florence held fell scattering on the ground; those that remained were wet, but not with dew; and her face dropped upon her laden hands.

'Poor Florence! Dear, good Florence!' cried the child.

'Do you know why I have told you this, Kate?' said the lady.

'That I may be very kind to her, and take great care to try to please her. Is that the reason, aunt?'

'Partly,' said the lady, 'but not all. Though we see her so cheerful; with a pleasant smile for everyone; ready to oblige us all, and bearing her part in every amusement here: she can hardly be quite happy, do you think she can, Kate?'

'I am afraid not,' said the little girl.

'And you can understand,' pursued the lady, 'why her observation of children who have parents who are fond of them, and proud of them—like many here, just now—should make her sorrowful in secret?'

'Yes, dear aunt,' said the child, 'I understand that very well. Poor Florence!'

More flowers strayed upon the ground, and those she yet held to her breast trembled as if a wintry wind were rustling them.

'My Kate,' said the lady, whose voice was serious, but very calm and sweet, and had so impressed Florence from the first moment of her hearing it, 'of all the youthful people here, you are her natural and harmless friend; you have not the innocent means, that happier children have—'

'There are none happier, aunt!' exclaimed the child, who seemed to cling about her.

'As other children have, dear Kate, of reminding her of her misfortune. Therefore I would have you, when you try to be her little friend, try all the more for that, and feel that the bereavement you sustained—thank Heaven! before you knew its weight—gives you claim and hold upon poor Florence.'

'But I am not without a parent's love, aunt, and I never have been,' said the child, 'with you.'

'However that may be, my dear,' returned the lady, 'your misfortune is a lighter one than Florence's; for not an orphan in the wide world can be so deserted as the child who is an outcast from a living parent's love.'

The flowers were scattered on the ground like dust; the empty hands were spread upon the face; and orphaned Florence, shrinking down upon the ground, wept long and bitterly.

But true of heart and resolute in her good purpose, Florence held to it as her dying mother held by her upon the day that gave Paul life. He did not know how much she loved him. However long the time in coming, and however slow the interval, she must try to bring that knowledge to her father's heart one day or other. Meantime she must be careful in no thoughtless word, or look, or burst of feeling awakened by any chance circumstance, to complain against him, or to give occasion for these whispers to his prejudice.

Even in the response she made the orphan child, to whom she was attracted strongly, and whom she had such occasion to remember, Florence was mindful of him' If she singled her out too plainly (Florence thought) from among the rest, she would confirm—in one mind certainly: perhaps in more—the belief that he was cruel and unnatural. Her own delight was no set-off to this, 'What she had overheard was a reason, not for soothing herself, but for saving him; and Florence did it, in pursuance of the study of her heart.

She did so always. If a book were read aloud, and there were anything in the story that pointed at an unkind father, she was in pain for their application of it to him; not for herself. So with any trifle of an interlude that was acted, or picture that was shown, or game that was played, among them. The occasions for such tenderness towards him were so many, that her mind misgave her often, it would indeed be better to go back to the old house, and live again within the shadow of its dull walls, undisturbed. How few who saw sweet Florence, in her spring of womanhood, the modest little queen of those small revels, imagined what a load of sacred care lay heavy in her breast! How few of those who stiffened in her father's freezing atmosphere, suspected what a heap of fiery coals was piled upon his head!

Florence pursued her study patiently, and, failing to acquire the secret of the nameless grace she sought, among the youthful company who were assembled in the house, often walked out alone, in the early morning, among the children of the poor. But still she found them all too far advanced to learn from. They had won their household places long ago, and did not stand without, as she did, with a bar across the door.

There was one man whom she several times observed at work very early, and often with a girl of about her own age seated near him' He was a very poor man, who seemed to have no regular employment, but now went roaming about the banks of the river when the tide was low, looking out for bits and scraps in the mud; and now worked at the unpromising little patch of garden-ground before his cottage; and now tinkered up a miserable old boat that belonged to him; or did some job of that kind for a neighbour, as chance occurred. Whatever the man's labour, the girl was never employed; but sat, when she was with him, in a listless, moping state, and idle.

Florence had often wished to speak to this man; yet she had never taken courage to do so, as he made no movement towards her. But one morning when she happened to come upon him suddenly, from a by-path among some pollard willows which terminated in the little shelving piece of stony ground that lay between his dwelling and the water, where he was bending over a fire he had made to caulk the old boat which was lying bottom upwards, close by, he raised his head at the sound of her footstep, and gave her Good morning.

'Good morning,' said Florence, approaching nearer, 'you are at work early.'

'I'd be glad to be often at work earlier, Miss, if I had work to do.'

'Is it so hard to get?' asked Florence.

'I find it so,' replied the man.

Florence glanced to where the girl was sitting, drawn together, with her elbows on her knees, and her chin on her hands, and said:

'Is that your daughter?'

He raised his head quickly, and looking towards the girl with a brightened face, nodded to her, and said 'Yes,' Florence looked towards her too, and gave her a kind salutation; the girl muttered something in return, ungraciously and sullenly.

'Is she in want of employment also?' said Florence.

The man shook his head. 'No, Miss,' he said. 'I work for both,'

'Are there only you two, then?' inquired Florence.

'Only us two,' said the man. 'Her mother his been dead these ten year. Martha!' lifted up his head again, and whistled to her) 'won't you say a word to the pretty young lady?'

The girl made an impatient gesture with her cowering shoulders, and turned her head another way. Ugly, misshapen, peevish, ill-conditioned, ragged, dirty—but beloved! Oh yes! Florence had seen her father's look towards her, and she knew whose look it had no likeness to.

'I'm afraid she's worse this morning, my poor girl!' said the man, suspending his work, and contemplating his ill-favoured child, with a compassion that was the more tender for being rougher.

'She is ill, then!' said Florence.

The man drew a deep sigh 'I don't believe my Martha's had five short days' good health,' he answered, looking at her still, 'in as many long years.'

'Ay! and more than that, John,' said a neighbour, who had come down to help him with the boat.

'More than that, you say, do you?' cried the other, pushing back his battered hat, and drawing his hand across his forehead. 'Very like. It seems a long, long time.'

'And the more the time,' pursued the neighbour, 'the more you've favoured and humoured her, John, till she's got to be a burden to herself, and everybody else.'

'Not to me,' said her father, falling to his work. 'Not to me.'

Florence could feel—who better?—how truly he spoke. She drew a little closer to him, and would have been glad to touch his rugged hand, and thank him for his goodness to the miserable object that he looked upon with eyes so different from any other man's.

'Who would favour my poor girl—to call it favouring—if I didn't?' said the father.

'Ay, ay,' cried the neighbour. 'In reason, John. But you! You rob yourself to give to her. You bind yourself hand and foot on her account. You make your life miserable along of her. And what does she care! You don't believe she knows it?'

The father lifted up his head again, and whistled to her. Martha made the same impatient gesture with her crouching shoulders, in reply; and he was glad and happy.

'Only for that, Miss,' said the neighbour, with a smile, in which there was more of secret sympathy than he expressed; 'only to get that, he never lets her out of his sight!'

'Because the day'll come, and has been coming a long while,' observed the other, bending low over his work, 'when to get half as much from that unfort'nate child of mine—to get the trembling of a finger, or the waving of a hair—would be to raise the dead.'

Florence softly put some money near his hand on the old boat, and left him.

And now Florence began to think, if she were to fall ill, if she were to fade like her dear brother, would he then know that she had loved him; would she then grow dear to him; would he come to her bedside, when she was weak and dim of sight, and take her into his embrace, and cancel all the past? Would he so forgive her, in that changed condition, for not having been able to lay open her childish heart to him, as to make it easy to relate with what emotions she had gone out of his room that night; what she had meant to say if she had had the courage; and how she had endeavoured, afterwards, to learn the way she never knew in infancy?

Yes, she thought if she were dying, he would relent. She thought, that if she lay, serene and not unwilling to depart, upon the bed that was curtained round with recollections of their darling boy, he would be touched home, and would say, 'Dear Florence, live for me, and we will love each other as we might have done, and be as happy as we might have been these many years!' She thought that if she heard such words from him, and had her arms clasped round him' she could answer with a smile, 'It is too late for anything but this; I never could be happier, dear father!' and so leave him, with a blessing on her lips.

The golden water she remembered on the wall, appeared to Florence, in the light of such reflections, only as a current flowing on to rest, and to a region where the dear ones, gone before, were waiting, hand in hand; and often when she looked upon the darker river rippling at her feet, she thought with awful wonder, but not terror, of that river which her brother had so often said was bearing him away.

The father and his sick daughter were yet fresh in Florence's mind, and, indeed, that incident was not a week old, when Sir Barnet and his lady going out walking in the lanes one afternoon, proposed to her to bear them company. Florence readily consenting, Lady Skettles ordered out young Barnet as a matter of course. For nothing delighted Lady Skettles so much, as beholding her eldest son with Florence on his arm.

Barnet, to say the truth, appeared to entertain an opposite sentiment on the subject, and on such occasions frequently expressed himself audibly, though indefinitely, in reference to 'a parcel of girls.' As it was not easy to ruffle her sweet temper, however, Florence generally reconciled the young gentleman to his fate after a few minutes, and they strolled on amicably: Lady Skettles and Sir Barnet following, in a state of perfect complacency and high gratification.

This was the order of procedure on the afternoon in question; and Florence had almost succeeded in overruling the present objections of Skettles Junior to his destiny, when a gentleman on horseback came riding by, looked at them earnestly as he passed, drew in his rein, wheeled round, and came riding back again, hat in hand.

The gentleman had looked particularly at Florence; and when the little party stopped, on his riding back, he bowed to her, before saluting Sir Barnet and his lady. Florence had no remembrance of having ever seen him, but she started involuntarily when he came near her, and drew back.

'My horse is perfectly quiet, I assure you,' said the gentleman.

It was not that, but something in the gentleman himself—Florence could not have said what—that made her recoil as if she had been stung.

'I have the honour to address Miss Dombey, I believe?' said the gentleman, with a most persuasive smile. On Florence inclining her head, he added, 'My name is Carker. I can hardly hope to be remembered by Miss Dombey, except by name. Carker.'

Florence, sensible of a strange inclination to shiver, though the day was hot, presented him to her host and hostess; by whom he was very graciously received.

'I beg pardon,' said Mr Carker, 'a thousand times! But I am going down tomorrow morning to Mr Dombey, at Leamington, and if Miss Dombey can entrust me with any commission, need I say how very happy I shall be?'

Sir Barnet immediately divining that Florence would desire to write a letter to her father, proposed to return, and besought Mr Carker to come home and dine in his riding gear. Mr Carker had the misfortune to be engaged to dinner, but if Miss Dombey wished to write, nothing would delight him more than to accompany them back, and to be her faithful slave in waiting as long as she pleased. As he said this with his widest smile, and bent down close to her to pat his horse's neck, Florence meeting his eyes, saw, rather than heard him say, 'There is no news of the ship!'

Confused, frightened, shrinking from him, and not even sure that he had said those words, for he seemed to have shown them to her in some extraordinary manner through his smile, instead of uttering them, Florence faintly said that she was obliged to him, but she would not write; she had nothing to say.

'Nothing to send, Miss Dombey?' said the man of teeth.

'Nothing,' said Florence, 'but my—but my dear love—if you please.'

Disturbed as Florence was, she raised her eyes to his face with an imploring and expressive look, that plainly besought him, if he knew—which he as plainly did—that any message between her and her father was an uncommon charge, but that one most of all, to spare her. Mr Carker smiled and bowed low, and being charged by Sir Barnet with the best compliments of himself and Lady Skettles, took his leave, and rode away: leaving a favourable impression on that worthy couple. Florence was seized with such a shudder as he went, that Sir Barnet, adopting the popular superstition, supposed somebody was passing over her grave. Mr Carker turning a corner, on the instant, looked back, and bowed, and disappeared, as if he rode off to the churchyard straight, to do it.

CHAPTER 25. Strange News of Uncle Sol

Captain Cuttle, though no sluggard, did not turn out so early on the morning after he had seen Sol Gills, through the shop-window, writing in the parlour, with the Midshipman upon the counter, and Rob the Grinder making up his bed below it, but that the clocks struck six as he raised himself on his elbow, and took a survey of his little chamber. The Captain's eyes must have done severe duty, if he usually opened them as wide on awaking as he did that morning; and were but roughly rewarded for their vigilance, if he generally rubbed them half as hard. But the occasion was no common one, for Rob the Grinder had certainly never stood in the doorway of Captain Cuttle's room before, and in it he stood then, panting at the Captain, with a flushed and touzled air of Bed about him, that greatly heightened both his colour and expression.

'Holloa!' roared the Captain. 'What's the matter?'

Before Rob could stammer a word in answer, Captain Cuttle turned out, all in a heap, and covered the boy's mouth with his hand.

'Steady, my lad,' said the Captain, 'don't ye speak a word to me as yet!'

The Captain, looking at his visitor in great consternation, gently shouldered him into the next room, after laying this injunction upon him; and disappearing for a few moments, forthwith returned in the blue suit. Holding up his hand in token of the injunction not yet being taken off, Captain Cuttle walked up to the cupboard, and poured himself out a dram; a counterpart of which he handed to the messenger. The Captain then stood himself up in a corner, against the wall, as if to forestall the possibility of being knocked backwards by the communication that was to be made to him; and having swallowed his liquor, with his eyes fixed on the messenger, and his face as pale as his face could be, requested him to 'heave ahead.'

'Do you mean, tell you, Captain?' asked Rob, who had been greatly impressed by these precautions.

'Ay!' said the Captain.

'Well, Sir,' said Rob, 'I ain't got much to tell. But look here!'

Rob produced a bundle of keys. The Captain surveyed them, remained in his corner, and surveyed the messenger.

'And look here!' pursued Rob.

The boy produced a sealed packet, which Captain Cuttle stared at as he had stared at the keys.

'When I woke this morning, Captain,' said Rob, 'which was about a quarter after five, I found these on my pillow. The shop-door was unbolted and unlocked, and Mr Gills gone.'

'Gone!' roared the Captain.

'Flowed, Sir,' returned Rob.

The Captain's voice was so tremendous, and he came out of his corner with such way on him, that Rob retreated before him into another corner: holding out the keys and packet, to prevent himself from being run down.

'"For Captain Cuttle," Sir,' cried Rob, 'is on the keys, and on the packet too. Upon my word and honour, Captain Cuttle, I don't know anything more about it. I wish I may die if I do! Here's a sitiwation for a lad that's just got a sitiwation,' cried the unfortunate Grinder, screwing his cuff into his face: 'his master bolted with his place, and him blamed for it!'

These lamentations had reference to Captain Cuttle's gaze, or rather glare, which was full of vague suspicions, threatenings, and denunciations. Taking the proffered packet from his hand, the Captain opened it and read as follows:— 'My dear Ned Cuttle. Enclosed is my will!' The Captain turned it over, with a doubtful look—'and Testament—Where's the Testament?' said the Captain, instantly impeaching the ill-fated Grinder. 'What have you done with that, my lad?'

'I never see it,' whimpered Rob. 'Don't keep on suspecting an innocent lad, Captain. I never touched the Testament.'

Captain Cuttle shook his head, implying that somebody must be made answerable for it; and gravely proceeded:

'Which don't break open for a year, or until you have decisive intelligence of my dear Walter, who is dear to you, Ned, too, I am sure.' The Captain paused and shook his head in some emotion; then, as a re-establishment of his dignity in this trying position, looked with exceeding sternness at the Grinder. 'If you should never hear of me, or see me more, Ned, remember an old friend as he will remember you to the last—kindly; and at least until the period I have mentioned has expired, keep a home in the old place for Walter. There are no debts, the loan from Dombey's House is paid off and all my keys I send with this. Keep this quiet, and make no inquiry for me; it is useless. So no more, dear Ned, from your true friend, Solomon Gills.' The Captain took a long breath, and then read these words written below: '"The boy Rob, well recommended, as I told you, from Dombey's House. If all else should come to the hammer, take care, Ned, of the little Midshipman."'

To convey to posterity any idea of the manner in which the Captain, after turning this letter over and over, and reading it a score of times, sat down in his chair, and held a court-martial on the subject in his own mind, would require the united genius of all the great men, who, discarding their own untoward days, have determined to go down to posterity, and have never got there. At first the Captain was too much confounded and distressed to think of anything but the letter itself; and even when his thoughts began to glance upon the various attendant facts, they might, perhaps, as well have occupied themselves with their former theme, for any light they reflected on them. In this state of mind, Captain Cuttle having the Grinder before the court, and no one else, found it a great relief to decide, generally, that he was an object of suspicion: which the Captain so clearly expressed in his visage, that Rob remonstrated.

'Oh, don't, Captain!' cried the Grinder. 'I wonder how you can! what have I done to be looked at, like that?'

'My lad,' said Captain Cuttle, 'don't you sing out afore you're hurt. And don't you commit yourself, whatever you do.'

'I haven't been and committed nothing, Captain!' answered Rob.

'Keep her free, then,' said the Captain, impressively, 'and ride easy.

With a deep sense of the responsibility imposed upon him' and the necessity of thoroughly fathoming this mysterious affair as became a man in his relations with the parties, Captain Cuttle resolved to go down and examine the premises, and to keep the Grinder with him. Considering that youth as under arrest at present, the Captain was in some doubt whether it might not be expedient to handcuff him, or tie his ankles together, or attach a weight to his legs; but not being clear as to the legality of such formalities, the Captain decided merely to hold him by the shoulder all the way, and knock him down if he made any objection.

However, he made none, and consequently got to the Instrument-maker's house without being placed under any more stringent restraint. As the shutters were not yet taken down, the Captain's first care was to have the shop opened; and when the daylight was freely admitted, he proceeded, with its aid, to further investigation.

The Captain's first care was to establish himself in a chair in the shop, as President of the solemn tribunal that was sitting within him; and to require Rob to lie down in his bed under the counter, show exactly where he discovered the keys and packet when he awoke, how he found the door when he went to try it, how he started off to Brig Place—cautiously preventing the latter imitation from being carried farther than the threshold—and so on to the end of the chapter. When all this had been done several times, the Captain shook his head and seemed to think the matter had a bad look.

Next, the Captain, with some indistinct idea of finding a body, instituted a strict search over the whole house; groping in the cellars with a lighted candle, thrusting his hook behind doors, bringing his head into violent contact with beams, and covering himself with cobwebs. Mounting up to the old man's bed-room, they found that he had not been in bed on the previous night, but had merely lain down on the coverlet, as was evident from the impression yet remaining there.

'And I think, Captain,' said Rob, looking round the room, 'that when Mr Gills was going in and out so often, these last few days, he was taking little things away, piecemeal, not to attract attention.'

'Ay!' said the Captain, mysteriously. 'Why so, my lad?'

'Why,' returned Rob, looking about, 'I don't see his shaving tackle. Nor his brushes, Captain. Nor no shirts. Nor yet his shoes.'

As each of these articles was mentioned, Captain Cuttle took particular notice of the corresponding department of the Grinder, lest he should appear to have been in recent use, or should prove to be in present possession thereof. But Rob had no occasion to shave, was not brushed, and wore the clothes he had on for a long time past, beyond all possibility of a mistake.

'And what should you say,' said the Captain—'not committing yourself—about his time of sheering off? Hey?'

'Why, I think, Captain,' returned Rob, 'that he must have gone pretty soon after I began to snore.'

'What o'clock was that?' said the Captain, prepared to be very particular about the exact time.

'How can I tell, Captain!' answered Rob. 'I only know that I'm a heavy sleeper at first, and a light one towards morning; and if Mr Gills had come through the shop near daybreak, though ever so much on tiptoe, I'm pretty sure I should have heard him shut the door at all events.

On mature consideration of this evidence, Captain Cuttle began to think that the Instrument-maker must have vanished of his own accord; to which logical conclusion he was assisted by the letter addressed to himself, which, as being undeniably in the old man's handwriting, would seem, with no great forcing, to bear the construction, that he arranged of his own will to go, and so went. The Captain had next to consider where and why? and as there was no way whatsoever that he saw to the solution of the first difficulty, he confined his meditations to the second.

Remembering the old man's curious manner, and the farewell he had taken of him; unaccountably fervent at the time, but quite intelligible now: a terrible apprehension strengthened on the Captain, that, overpowered by his anxieties and regrets for Walter, he had been driven to commit suicide. Unequal to the wear and tear of daily life, as he had often professed himself to be, and shaken as he no doubt was by the uncertainty and deferred hope he had undergone, it seemed no violently strained misgiving, but only too probable. Free from debt, and with no fear for his personal liberty, or the seizure of his goods, what else but such a state of madness could have hurried him away alone and secretly? As to his carrying some apparel with him, if he had really done so—and they were not even sure of that—he might have done so, the Captain argued, to prevent inquiry, to distract attention from his probable fate, or to ease the very mind that was now revolving all these possibilities. Such, reduced into plain language, and condensed within a small compass, was the final result and substance of Captain Cuttle's deliberations: which took a long time to arrive at this pass, and were, like some more public deliberations, very discursive and disorderly.

Dejected and despondent in the extreme, Captain Cuttle felt it just to release Rob from the arrest in which he had placed him, and to enlarge him, subject to a kind of honourable inspection which he still resolved to exercise; and having hired a man, from Brogley the Broker, to sit in the shop during their absence, the Captain, taking Rob with him, issued forth upon a dismal quest after the mortal remains of Solomon Gills.

Not a station-house, or bone-house, or work-house in the metropolis escaped a visitation from the hard glazed hat. Along the wharves, among the shipping on the bank-side, up the river, down the river, here, there, everywhere, it went gleaming where men were thickest, like the hero's helmet in an epic battle. For a whole week the Captain read of all the found and missing people in all the newspapers and handbills, and went forth on expeditions at all hours of the day to identify Solomon Gills, in poor little ship-boys who had fallen overboard, and in tall foreigners with dark beards who had taken poison—'to make sure,' Captain Cuttle said, 'that it wam't him.' It is a sure thing that it never was, and that the good Captain had no other satisfaction.

Captain Cuttle at last abandoned these attempts as hopeless, and set himself to consider what was to be done next. After several new perusals of his poor friend's letter, he considered that the maintenance of' a home in the old place for Walter' was the primary duty imposed upon him. Therefore, the Captain's decision was, that he would keep house on the premises of Solomon Gills himself, and would go into the instrument-business, and see what came of it.

But as this step involved the relinquishment of his apartments at Mrs MacStinger's, and he knew that resolute woman would never hear of his deserting them, the Captain took the desperate determination of running away.

'Now, look ye here, my lad,' said the Captain to Rob, when he had matured this notable scheme, 'to-morrow, I shan't be found in this here roadstead till night—not till arter midnight p'rhaps. But you keep watch till you hear me knock, and the moment you do, turn-to, and open the door.'

'Very good, Captain,' said Rob.

'You'll continue to be rated on these here books,' pursued the Captain condescendingly, 'and I don't say but what you may get promotion, if you and me should pull together with a will. But the moment you hear me knock to-morrow night, whatever time it is, turn-to and show yourself smart with the door.'

'I'll be sure to do it, Captain,' replied Rob.

'Because you understand,' resumed the Captain, coming back again to enforce this charge upon his mind, 'there may be, for anything I can say, a chase; and I might be took while I was waiting, if you didn't show yourself smart with the door.'

Rob again assured the Captain that he would be prompt and wakeful; and the Captain having made this prudent arrangement, went home to Mrs MacStinger's for the last time.

The sense the Captain had of its being the last time, and of the awful purpose hidden beneath his blue waistcoat, inspired him with such a mortal dread of Mrs MacStinger, that the sound of that lady's foot downstairs at any time of the day, was sufficient to throw him into a fit of trembling. It fell out, too, that Mrs MacStinger was in a charming temper—mild and placid as a house—lamb; and Captain Cuttle's conscience suffered terrible twinges, when she came up to inquire if she could cook him nothing for his dinner.

'A nice small kidney-pudding now, Cap'en Cuttle,' said his landlady: 'or a sheep's heart. Don't mind my trouble.'

'No thank'ee, Ma'am,' returned the Captain.

'Have a roast fowl,' said Mrs MacStinger, 'with a bit of weal stuffing and some egg sauce. Come, Cap'en Cuttle! Give yourself a little treat!'

'No thank'ee, Ma'am,' returned the Captain very humbly.

'I'm sure you're out of sorts, and want to be stimulated,' said Mrs MacStinger. 'Why not have, for once in a way, a bottle of sherry wine?'

'Well, Ma'am,' rejoined the Captain, 'if you'd be so good as take a glass or two, I think I would try that. Would you do me the favour, Ma'am,' said the Captain, torn to pieces by his conscience, 'to accept a quarter's rent ahead?'

'And why so, Cap'en Cuttle?' retorted Mrs MacStinger—sharply, as the Captain thought.

The Captain was frightened to dead 'If you would Ma'am,' he said with submission, 'it would oblige me. I can't keep my money very well. It pays itself out. I should take it kind if you'd comply.'

'Well, Cap'en Cuttle,' said the unconscious MacStinger, rubbing her hands, 'you can do as you please. It's not for me, with my family, to refuse, no more than it is to ask.'

'And would you, Ma'am,' said the Captain, taking down the tin canister in which he kept his cash' from the top shelf of the cupboard, 'be so good as offer eighteen-pence a-piece to the little family all round? If you could make it convenient, Ma'am, to pass the word presently for them children to come for'ard, in a body, I should be glad to see 'em.'

These innocent MacStingers were so many daggers to the Captain's breast, when they appeared in a swarm, and tore at him with the confiding trustfulness he so little deserved. The eye of Alexander MacStinger, who had been his favourite, was insupportable to the Captain; the voice of Juliana MacStinger, who was the picture of her mother, made a coward of him.

Captain Cuttle kept up appearances, nevertheless, tolerably well, and for an hour or two was very hardly used and roughly handled by the young MacStingers: who in their childish frolics, did a little damage also to the glazed hat, by sitting in it, two at a time, as in a nest, and drumming on the inside of the crown with their shoes. At length the Captain sorrowfully dismissed them: taking leave of these cherubs with the poignant remorse and grief of a man who was going to execution.

In the silence of night, the Captain packed up his heavier property in a chest, which he locked, intending to leave it there, in all probability for ever, but on the forlorn chance of one day finding a man sufficiently bold and desperate to come and ask for it. Of his lighter necessaries, the Captain made a bundle; and disposed his plate about his person, ready for flight. At the hour of midnight, when Brig Place was buried in slumber, and Mrs MacStinger was lulled in sweet oblivion, with her infants around her, the guilty Captain, stealing down on tiptoe, in the dark, opened the door, closed it softly after him, and took to his heels.

Pursued by the image of Mrs MacStinger springing out of bed, and, regardless of costume, following and bringing him back; pursued also by a consciousness of his enormous crime; Captain Cuttle held on at a great pace, and allowed no grass to grow under his feet, between Brig Place and the Instrument-maker's door. It opened when he knocked—for Rob was on the watch—and when it was bolted and locked behind him, Captain Cuttle felt comparatively safe.

'Whew!' cried the Captain, looking round him. 'It's a breather!'

'Nothing the matter, is there, Captain?' cried the gaping Rob.

'No, no!' said Captain Cuttle, after changing colour, and listening to a passing footstep in the street. 'But mind ye, my lad; if any lady, except either of them two as you see t'other day, ever comes and asks for Cap'en Cuttle, be sure to report no person of that name known, nor never heard of here; observe them orders, will you?'

'I'll take care, Captain,' returned Rob.

'You might say—if you liked,' hesitated the Captain, 'that you'd read in the paper that a Cap'en of that name was gone to Australia, emigrating, along with a whole ship's complement of people as had all swore never to come back no more.

Rob nodded his understanding of these instructions; and Captain Cuttle promising to make a man of him, if he obeyed orders, dismissed him, yawning, to his bed under the counter, and went aloft to the chamber of Solomon Gills.

What the Captain suffered next day, whenever a bonnet passed, or how often he darted out of the shop to elude imaginary MacStingers, and sought safety in the attic, cannot be told. But to avoid the fatigues attendant on this means of self-preservation, the Captain curtained the glass door of communication between the shop and parlour, on the inside; fitted a key to it from the bunch that had been sent to him; and cut a small hole of espial in the wall. The advantage of this fortification is obvious. On a bonnet appearing, the Captain instantly slipped into his garrison, locked himself up, and took a secret observation of the enemy. Finding it a false alarm, the Captain instantly slipped out again. And the bonnets in the street were so very numerous, and alarms were so inseparable from their appearance, that the Captain was almost incessantly slipping in and out all day long.

Captain Cuttle found time, however, in the midst of this fatiguing service to inspect the stock; in connexion with which he had the general idea (very laborious to Rob) that too much friction could not be bestowed upon it, and that it could not be made too bright. He also ticketed a few attractive- looking articles at a venture, at prices ranging from ten shillings to fifty pounds, and exposed them in the window to the great astonishment of the public.

After effecting these improvements, Captain Cuttle, surrounded by the instruments, began to feel scientific: and looked up at the stars at night, through the skylight, when he was smoking his pipe in the little back parlour before going to bed, as if he had established a kind of property in them. As a tradesman in the City, too, he began to have an interest in the Lord Mayor, and the Sheriffs, and in Public Companies; and felt bound to read the quotations of the Funds every day, though he was unable to make out, on any principle of navigation, what the figures meant, and could have very well dispensed with the fractions. Florence, the Captain waited on, with his strange news of Uncle Sol, immediately after taking possession of the Midshipman; but she was away from home. So the Captain sat himself down in his altered station of life, with no company but Rob the Grinder; and losing count of time, as men do when great changes come upon them, thought musingly of Walter, and of Solomon Gills, and even of Mrs MacStinger herself, as among the things that had been.

CHAPTER 26. Shadows of the Past and Future

'Your most obedient, Sir,' said the Major. 'Damme, Sir, a friend of my friend Dombey's is a friend of mine, and I'm glad to see you!'

'I am infinitely obliged, Carker,' explained Mr Dombey, 'to Major Bagstock, for his company and conversation. 'Major Bagstock has rendered me great service, Carker.'

Mr Carker the Manager, hat in hand, just arrived at Leamington, and just introduced to the Major, showed the Major his whole double range of teeth, and trusted he might take the liberty of thanking him with all his heart for having effected so great an Improvement in Mr Dombey's looks and spirits.'

'By Gad, Sir,' said the Major, in reply, 'there are no thanks due to me, for it's a give and take affair. A great creature like our friend Dombey, Sir,' said the Major, lowering his voice, but not lowering it so much as to render it inaudible to that gentleman, 'cannot help improving and exalting his friends. He strengthens and invigorates a man, Sir, does Dombey, in his moral nature.'

Mr Carker snapped at the expression. In his moral nature. Exactly. The very words he had been on the point of suggesting.

'But when my friend Dombey, Sir,' added the Major, 'talks to you of Major Bagstock, I must crave leave to set him and you right. He means plain Joe, Sir—Joey B.—Josh. Bagstock—Joseph—rough and tough Old J., Sir. At your service.'

Mr Carker's excessively friendly inclinations towards the Major, and Mr Carker's admiration of his roughness, toughness, and plainness, gleamed out of every tooth in Mr Carker's head.

'And now, Sir,' said the Major, 'you and Dombey have the devil's own amount of business to talk over.'

'By no means, Major,' observed Mr Dombey.

'Dombey,' said the Major, defiantly, 'I know better; a man of your mark—the Colossus of commerce—is not to be interrupted. Your moments are precious. We shall meet at dinner-time. In the interval, old Joseph will be scarce. The dinner-hour is a sharp seven, Mr Carker.'

With that, the Major, greatly swollen as to his face, withdrew; but immediately putting in his head at the door again, said:

'I beg your pardon. Dombey, have you any message to 'em?'

Mr Dombey in some embarrassment, and not without a glance at the courteous keeper of his business confidence, entrusted the Major with his compliments.

'By the Lord, Sir,' said the Major, 'you must make it something warmer than that, or old Joe will be far from welcome.'

'Regards then, if you will, Major,' returned Mr Dombey.

'Damme, Sir,' said the Major, shaking his shoulders and his great cheeks jocularly: 'make it something warmer than that.'

'What you please, then, Major,' observed Mr Dombey.

'Our friend is sly, Sir, sly, Sir, de-vilish sly,' said the Major, staring round the door at Carker. 'So is Bagstock.' But stopping in the midst of a chuckle, and drawing himself up to his full height, the Major solemnly exclaimed, as he struck himself on the chest, 'Dombey! I envy your feelings. God bless you!' and withdrew.

'You must have found the gentleman a great resource,' said Carker, following him with his teeth.

'Very great indeed,' said Mr Dombey.

'He has friends here, no doubt,' pursued Carker. 'I perceive, from what he has said, that you go into society here. Do you know,' smiling horribly, 'I am so very glad that you go into society!'

Mr Dombey acknowledged this display of interest on the part of his second in command, by twirling his watch-chain, and slightly moving his head.

'You were formed for society,' said Carker. 'Of all the men I know, you are the best adapted, by nature and by position, for society. Do you know I have been frequently amazed that you should have held it at arm's length so long!'

'I have had my reasons, Carker. I have been alone, and indifferent to it. But you have great social qualifications yourself, and are the more likely to have been surprised.'

'Oh! I!' returned the other, with ready self-disparagement. 'It's quite another matter in the case of a man like me. I don't come into comparison with you.'

Mr Dombey put his hand to his neckcloth, settled his chin in it, coughed, and stood looking at his faithful friend and servant for a few moments in silence.

'I shall have the pleasure, Carker,' said Mr Dombey at length: making as if he swallowed something a little too large for his throat: 'to present you to my—to the Major's friends. Highly agreeable people.'

'Ladies among them, I presume?' insinuated the smooth Manager.

'They are all—that is to say, they are both—ladies,' replied Mr Dombey.

'Only two?' smiled Carker.

'They are only two. I have confined my visits to their residence, and have made no other acquaintance here.'

'Sisters, perhaps?' quoth Carker.

'Mother and daughter,' replied Mr Dombey.

As Mr Dombey dropped his eyes, and adjusted his neckcloth again, the smiling face of Mr Carker the Manager became in a moment, and without any stage of transition, transformed into a most intent and frowning face, scanning his closely, and with an ugly sneer. As Mr Dombey raised his eyes, it changed back, no less quickly, to its old expression, and showed him every gum of which it stood possessed.

'You are very kind,' said Carker, 'I shall be delighted to know them. Speaking of daughters, I have seen Miss Dombey.'

There was a sudden rush of blood to Mr Dombey's face.

'I took the liberty of waiting on her,' said Carker, 'to inquire if she could charge me with any little commission. I am not so fortunate as to be the bearer of any but her—but her dear love.'

Wolf's face that it was then, with even the hot tongue revealing itself through the stretched mouth, as the eyes encountered Mr Dombey's!

'What business intelligence is there?' inquired the latter gentleman, after a silence, during which Mr Carker had produced some memoranda and other papers.

'There is very little,' returned Carker. 'Upon the whole we have not had our usual good fortune of late, but that is of little moment to you. At Lloyd's, they give up the Son and Heir for lost. Well, she was insured, from her keel to her masthead.'

'Carker,' said Mr Dombey, taking a chair near him, 'I cannot say that young man, Gay, ever impressed me favourably—'

'Nor me,' interposed the Manager.

'But I wish,' said Mr Dombey, without heeding the interruption, 'he had never gone on board that ship. I wish he had never been sent out.

'It is a pity you didn't say so, in good time, is it not?' retorted Carker, coolly. 'However, I think it's all for the best. I really, think it's all for the best. Did I mention that there was something like a little confidence between Miss Dombey and myself?'

'No,' said Mr Dombey, sternly.

'I have no doubt,' returned Mr Carker, after an impressive pause, 'that wherever Gay is, he is much better where he is, than at home here. If I were, or could be, in your place, I should be satisfied of that. I am quite satisfied of it myself. Miss Dombey is confiding and young—perhaps hardly proud enough, for your daughter—if she have a fault. Not that that is much though, I am sure. Will you check these balances with me?'

Mr Dombey leaned back in his chair, instead of bending over the papers that were laid before him, and looked the Manager steadily in the face. The Manager, with his eyelids slightly raised, affected to be glancing at his figures, and to await the leisure of his principal. He showed that he affected this, as if from great delicacy, and with a design to spare Mr Dombey's feelings; and the latter, as he looked at him, was cognizant of his intended consideration, and felt that but for it, this confidential Carker would have said a great deal more, which he, Mr Dombey, was too proud to ask for. It was his way in business, often. Little by little, Mr Dombey's gaze relaxed, and his attention became diverted to the papers before him; but while busy with the occupation they afforded him, he frequently stopped, and looked at Mr Carker again. Whenever he did so, Mr Carker was demonstrative, as before, in his delicacy, and impressed it on his great chief more and more.

While they were thus engaged; and under the skilful culture of the Manager, angry thoughts in reference to poor Florence brooded and bred in Mr Dombey's breast, usurping the place of the cold dislike that generally reigned there; Major Bagstock, much admired by the old ladies of Leamington, and followed by the Native, carrying the usual amount of light baggage, straddled along the shady side of the way, to make a morning call on Mrs Skewton. It being midday when the Major reached the bower of Cleopatra, he had the good fortune to find his Princess on her usual sofa, languishing over a cup of coffee, with the room so darkened and shaded for her more luxurious repose, that Withers, who was in attendance on her, loomed like a phantom page.

'What insupportable creature is this, coming in?' said Mrs Skewton, 'I cannot hear it. Go away, whoever you are!'

'You have not the heart to banish J. B., Ma'am!' said the Major halting midway, to remonstrate, with his cane over his shoulder.

'Oh it's you, is it? On second thoughts, you may enter,' observed Cleopatra.

The Major entered accordingly, and advancing to the sofa pressed her charming hand to his lips.

'Sit down,' said Cleopatra, listlessly waving her fan, 'a long way off. Don't come too near me, for I am frightfully faint and sensitive this morning, and you smell of the Sun. You are absolutely tropical.'

'By George, Ma'am,' said the Major, 'the time has been when Joseph Bagstock has been grilled and blistered by the Sun; then time was, when he was forced, Ma'am, into such full blow, by high hothouse heat in the West Indies, that he was known as the Flower. A man never heard of Bagstock, Ma'am, in those days; he heard of the Flower—the Flower of Ours. The Flower may have faded, more or less, Ma'am,' observed the Major, dropping into a much nearer chair than had been indicated by his cruel Divinity, 'but it is a tough plant yet, and constant as the evergreen.'

Here the Major, under cover of the dark room, shut up one eye, rolled his head like a Harlequin, and, in his great self-satisfaction, perhaps went nearer to the confines of apoplexy than he had ever gone before.

'Where is Mrs Granger?' inquired Cleopatra of her page.

Withers believed she was in her own room.

'Very well,' said Mrs Skewton. 'Go away, and shut the door. I am engaged.'

As Withers disappeared, Mrs Skewton turned her head languidly towards the Major, without otherwise moving, and asked him how his friend was.

'Dombey, Ma'am,' returned the Major, with a facetious gurgling in his throat, 'is as well as a man in his condition can be. His condition is a desperate one, Ma'am. He is touched, is Dombey! Touched!' cried the Major. 'He is bayonetted through the body.'

Cleopatra cast a sharp look at the Major, that contrasted forcibly with the affected drawl in which she presently said:

'Major Bagstock, although I know but little of the world,—nor can I really regret my experience, for I fear it is a false place, full of withering conventionalities: where Nature is but little regarded, and where the music of the heart, and the gushing of the soul, and all that sort of thing, which is so truly poetical, is seldom heard,—I cannot misunderstand your meaning. There is an allusion to Edith—to my extremely dear child,' said Mrs Skewton, tracing the outline of her eyebrows with her forefinger, 'in your words, to which the tenderest of chords vibrates excessively.'

'Bluntness, Ma'am,' returned the Major, 'has ever been the characteristic of the Bagstock breed. You are right. Joe admits it.'

'And that allusion,' pursued Cleopatra, 'would involve one of the most—if not positively the most—touching, and thrilling, and sacred emotions of which our sadly-fallen nature is susceptible, I conceive.'

The Major laid his hand upon his lips, and wafted a kiss to Cleopatra, as if to identify the emotion in question.

'I feel that I am weak. I feel that I am wanting in that energy, which should sustain a Mama: not to say a parent: on such a subject,' said Mrs Skewton, trimming her lips with the laced edge of her pocket-handkerchief; 'but I can hardly approach a topic so excessively momentous to my dearest Edith without a feeling of faintness. Nevertheless, bad man, as you have boldly remarked upon it, and as it has occasioned me great anguish:' Mrs Skewton touched her left side with her fan: 'I will not shrink from my duty.'

The Major, under cover of the dimness, swelled, and swelled, and rolled his purple face about, and winked his lobster eye, until he fell into a fit of wheezing, which obliged him to rise and take a turn or two about the room, before his fair friend could proceed.

'Mr Dombey,' said Mrs Skewton, when she at length resumed, 'was obliging enough, now many weeks ago, to do us the honour of visiting us here; in company, my dear Major, with yourself. I acknowledge—let me be open—that it is my failing to be the creature of impulse, and to wear my heart as it were, outside. I know my failing full well. My enemy cannot know it better. But I am not penitent; I would rather not be frozen by the heartless world, and am content to bear this imputation justly.'

Mrs Skewton arranged her tucker, pinched her wiry throat to give it a soft surface, and went on, with great complacency.

'It gave me (my dearest Edith too, I am sure) infinite pleasure to receive Mr Dombey. As a friend of yours, my dear Major, we were naturally disposed to be prepossessed in his favour; and I fancied that I observed an amount of Heart in Mr Dombey, that was excessively refreshing.'

'There is devilish little heart in Dombey now, Ma'am,' said the Major.

'Wretched man!' cried Mrs Skewton, looking at him languidly, 'pray be silent.'

'J. B. is dumb, Ma'am,' said the Major.

'Mr Dombey,' pursued Cleopatra, smoothing the rosy hue upon her cheeks, 'accordingly repeated his visit; and possibly finding some attraction in the simplicity and primitiveness of our tastes—for there is always a charm in nature—it is so very sweet—became one of our little circle every evening. Little did I think of the awful responsibility into which I plunged when I encouraged Mr Dombey—to—

'To beat up these quarters, Ma'am,' suggested Major Bagstock.

'Coarse person! 'said Mrs Skewton, 'you anticipate my meaning, though in odious language.

Here Mrs Skewton rested her elbow on the little table at her side, and suffering her wrist to droop in what she considered a graceful and becoming manner, dangled her fan to and fro, and lazily admired her hand while speaking.

'The agony I have endured,' she said mincingly, 'as the truth has by degrees dawned upon me, has been too exceedingly terrific to dilate upon. My whole existence is bound up in my sweetest Edith; and to see her change from day to day—my beautiful pet, who has positively garnered up her heart since the death of that most delightful creature, Granger—is the most affecting thing in the world.'

Mrs Skewton's world was not a very trying one, if one might judge of it by the influence of its most affecting circumstance upon her; but this by the way.

'Edith,' simpered Mrs Skewton, 'who is the perfect pearl of my life, is said to resemble me. I believe we are alike.'

'There is one man in the world who never will admit that anyone resembles you, Ma'am,' said the Major; 'and that man's name is Old Joe Bagstock.'

Cleopatra made as if she would brain the flatterer with her fan, but relenting, smiled upon him and proceeded:

'If my charming girl inherits any advantages from me, wicked one!': the Major was the wicked one: 'she inherits also my foolish nature. She has great force of character—mine has been said to be immense, though I don't believe it—but once moved, she is susceptible and sensitive to the last extent. What are my feelings when I see her pining! They destroy me.

The Major advancing his double chin, and pursing up his blue lips into a soothing expression, affected the profoundest sympathy.

'The confidence,' said Mrs Skewton, 'that has subsisted between us—the free development of soul, and openness of sentiment—is touching to think of. We have been more like sisters than Mama and child.'

'J. B.'s own sentiment,' observed the Major, 'expressed by J. B. fifty thousand times!'

'Do not interrupt, rude man!' said Cleopatra. 'What are my feelings, then, when I find that there is one subject avoided by us! That there is a what's-his-name—a gulf—opened between us. That my own artless Edith is changed to me! They are of the most poignant description, of course.'

The Major left his chair, and took one nearer to the little table.

'From day to day I see this, my dear Major,' proceeded Mrs Skewton. 'From day to day I feel this. From hour to hour I reproach myself for that excess of faith and trustfulness which has led to such distressing consequences; and almost from minute to minute, I hope that Mr Dombey may explain himself, and relieve the torture I undergo, which is extremely wearing. But nothing happens, my dear Major; I am the slave of remorse—take care of the coffee- cup: you are so very awkward—my darling Edith is an altered being; and I really don't see what is to be done, or what good creature I can advise with.'

Major Bagstock, encouraged perhaps by the softened and confidential tone into which Mrs Skewton, after several times lapsing into it for a moment, seemed now to have subsided for good, stretched out his hand across the little table, and said with a leer,

'Advise with Joe, Ma'am.'

'Then, you aggravating monster,' said Cleopatra, giving one hand to the Major, and tapping his knuckles with her fan, which she held in the other: 'why don't you talk to me? you know what I mean. Why don't you tell me something to the purpose?'

The Major laughed, and kissed the hand she had bestowed upon him, and laughed again immensely.

'Is there as much Heart in Mr Dombey as I gave him credit for?' languished Cleopatra tenderly. 'Do you think he is in earnest, my dear

Major? Would you recommend his being spoken to, or his being left alone? Now tell me, like a dear man, what would you advise.'

'Shall we marry him to Edith Granger, Ma'am?' chuckled the Major, hoarsely.

'Mysterious creature!' returned Cleopatra, bringing her fan to bear upon the Major's nose. 'How can we marry him?'

'Shall we marry him to Edith Granger, Ma'am, I say?' chuckled the Major again.

Mrs Skewton returned no answer in words, but smiled upon the Major with so much archness and vivacity, that that gallant officer considering himself challenged, would have imprinted a kiss on her exceedingly red lips, but for her interposing the fan with a very winning and juvenile dexterity. It might have been in modesty; it might have been in apprehension of some danger to their bloom.

'Dombey, Ma'am,' said the Major, 'is a great catch.'

'Oh, mercenary wretch!' cried Cleopatra, with a little shriek, 'I am shocked.'

'And Dombey, Ma'am,' pursued the Major, thrusting forward his head, and distending his eyes, 'is in earnest. Joseph says it; Bagstock knows it; J. B. keeps him to the mark. Leave Dombey to himself, Ma'am. Dombey is safe, Ma'am. Do as you have done; do no more; and trust to J. B. for the end.'

'You really think so, my dear Major?' returned Cleopatra, who had eyed him very cautiously, and very searchingly, in spite of her listless bearing.

'Sure of it, Ma'am,' rejoined the Major. 'Cleopatra the peerless, and her Antony Bagstock, will often speak of this, triumphantly, when sharing the elegance and wealth of Edith Dombey's establishment. Dombey's right-hand man, Ma'am,' said the Major, stopping abruptly in a chuckle, and becoming serious, 'has arrived.'

'This morning?' said Cleopatra.

'This morning, Ma'am,' returned the Major. 'And Dombey's anxiety for his arrival, Ma'am, is to be referred—take J. B.'s word for this; for Joe is devilish sly'—the Major tapped his nose, and screwed up one of his eyes tight: which did not enhance his native beauty—'to his desire that what is in the wind should become known to him' without Dombey's telling and consulting him. For Dombey is as proud, Ma'am,' said the Major, 'as Lucifer.'

'A charming quality,' lisped Mrs Skewton; 'reminding one of dearest Edith.'

'Well, Ma'am,' said the Major. 'I have thrown out hints already, and the right-hand man understands 'em; and I'll throw out more, before the day is done. Dombey projected this morning a ride to Warwick Castle, and to Kenilworth, to-morrow, to be preceded by a breakfast with us. I undertook the delivery of this invitation. Will you honour us so far, Ma'am?' said the Major, swelling with shortness of breath and slyness, as he produced a note, addressed to the Honourable Mrs Skewton, by favour of Major Bagstock, wherein hers ever faithfully, Paul Dombey, besought her and her amiable and accomplished daughter to consent to the proposed excursion; and in a postscript unto which, the same ever faithfully Paul Dombey entreated to be recalled to the remembrance of Mrs Granger.

'Hush!' said Cleopatra, suddenly, 'Edith!'

The loving mother can scarcely be described as resuming her insipid and affected air when she made this exclamation; for she had never cast it off; nor was it likely that she ever would or could, in any other place than in the grave. But hurriedly dismissing whatever shadow of earnestness, or faint confession of a purpose, laudable or wicked, that her face, or voice, or manner: had, for the moment, betrayed, she lounged upon the couch, her most insipid and most languid self again, as Edith entered the room.

Edith, so beautiful and stately, but so cold and so repelling. Who, slightly acknowledging the presence of Major Bagstock, and directing a keen glance at her mother, drew back the from a window, and sat down there, looking out.

'My dearest Edith,' said Mrs Skewton, 'where on earth have you been? I have wanted you, my love, most sadly.'

'You said you were engaged, and I stayed away,' she answered, without turning her head.

'It was cruel to Old Joe, Ma'am,' said the Major in his gallantry.

'It was very cruel, I know,' she said, still looking out—and said with such calm disdain, that the Major was discomfited, and could think of nothing in reply.

'Major Bagstock, my darling Edith,' drawled her mother, 'who is generally the most useless and disagreeable creature in the world: as you know—'

'It is surely not worthwhile, Mama,' said Edith, looking round, 'to observe these forms of speech. We are quite alone. We know each other.'

The quiet scorn that sat upon her handsome face—a scorn that evidently lighted on herself, no less than them—was so intense and deep, that her mother's simper, for the instant, though of a hardy constitution, drooped before it.

'My darling girl,' she began again.

'Not woman yet?' said Edith, with a smile.

'How very odd you are to-day, my dear! Pray let me say, my love, that Major Bagstock has brought the kindest of notes from Mr Dombey, proposing that we should breakfast with him to-morrow, and ride to Warwick and Kenilworth. Will you go, Edith?'

'Will I go!' she repeated, turning very red, and breathing quickly as she looked round at her mother.

'I knew you would, my own, observed the latter carelessly. 'It is, as you say, quite a form to ask. Here is Mr Dombey's letter, Edith.'

'Thank you. I have no desire to read it,' was her answer.

'Then perhaps I had better answer it myself,' said Mrs Skewton, 'though I had thought of asking you to be my secretary, darling.' As Edith made no movement, and no answer, Mrs Skewton begged the Major to wheel her little table nearer, and to set open the desk it contained, and to take out pen and paper for her; all which congenial offices of gallantry the Major discharged, with much submission and devotion.

'Your regards, Edith, my dear?' said Mrs Skewton, pausing, pen in hand, at the postscript.

'What you will, Mama,' she answered, without turning her head, and with supreme indifference.

Mrs Skewton wrote what she would, without seeking for any more explicit directions, and handed her letter to the Major, who receiving it as a precious charge, made a show of laying it near his heart, but was fain to put it in the pocket of his pantaloons on account of the insecurity of his waistcoat The Major then took a very polished and chivalrous farewell of both ladies, which the elder one acknowledged in her usual manner, while the younger, sitting with her face addressed to the window, bent her head so slightly that it would have been a greater compliment to the Major to have made no sign at all, and to have left him to infer that he had not been heard or thought of.

'As to alteration in her, Sir,' mused the Major on his way back; on which expedition—the afternoon being sunny and hot—he ordered the Native and the light baggage to the front, and walked in the shadow of that expatriated prince: 'as to alteration, Sir, and pining, and so forth, that won't go down with Joseph Bagstock, None of that, Sir. It won't do here. But as to there being something of a division between 'em—or a gulf as the mother calls it—damme, Sir, that seems true enough. And it's odd enough! Well, Sir!' panted the Major, 'Edith Granger and Dombey are well matched; let 'em fight it out! Bagstock backs the winner!'

The Major, by saying these latter words aloud, in the vigour of his thoughts, caused the unhappy Native to stop, and turn round, in the belief that he was personally addressed. Exasperated to the last degree by this act of insubordination, the Major (though he was swelling with enjoyment of his own humour), at the moment of its occurrence instantly thrust his cane among the Native's ribs, and continued to stir him up, at short intervals, all the way to the hotel.

Nor was the Major less exasperated as he dressed for dinner, during which operation the dark servant underwent the pelting of a shower of miscellaneous objects, varying in size from a boot to a hairbrush, and including everything that came within his master's reach. For the Major plumed himself on having the Native in a perfect state of drill, and visited the least departure from strict discipline with this kind of fatigue duty. Add to this, that he maintained the Native about his person as a counter-irritant against the gout, and all other vexations, mental as well as bodily; and the Native would appear to have earned his pay—which was not large.

At length, the Major having disposed of all the missiles that were convenient to his hand, and having called the Native so many new names as must have given him great occasion to marvel at the resources of the English language, submitted to have his cravat put on; and being dressed, and finding himself in a brisk flow of spirits after this exercise, went downstairs to enliven 'Dombey' and his right-hand man.

Dombey was not yet in the room, but the right-hand man was there, and his dental treasures were, as usual, ready for the Major.

'Well, Sir!' said the Major. 'How have you passed the time since I had the happiness of meeting you? Have you walked at all?'

'A saunter of barely half an hour's duration,' returned Carker. 'We have been so much occupied.'

'Business, eh?' said the Major.

'A variety of little matters necessary to be gone through,' replied Carker. 'But do you know—this is quite unusual with me, educated in a distrustful school, and who am not generally disposed to be communicative,' he said, breaking off, and speaking in a charming tone of frankness—'but I feel quite confidential with you, Major Bagstock.'

'You do me honour, Sir,' returned the Major. 'You may be.'

'Do you know, then,' pursued Carker, 'that I have not found my friend—our friend, I ought rather to call him—'

'Meaning Dombey, Sir?' cried the Major. 'You see me, Mr Carker, standing here! J. B.?'

He was puffy enough to see, and blue enough; and Mr Carker intimated the he had that pleasure.

'Then you see a man, Sir, who would go through fire and water to serve Dombey,' returned Major Bagstock.

Mr Carker smiled, and said he was sure of it. 'Do you know, Major,' he proceeded: 'to resume where I left off' that I have not found our friend so attentive to business today, as usual?'

'No?' observed the delighted Major.

'I have found him a little abstracted, and with his attention disposed to wander,' said Carker.

'By Jove, Sir,' cried the Major, 'there's a lady in the case.'

'Indeed, I begin to believe there really is,' returned Carker; 'I thought you might be jesting when you seemed to hint at it; for I know you military men—

The Major gave the horse's cough, and shook his head and shoulders, as much as to say, 'Well! we are gay dogs, there's no denying.' He then seized Mr Carker by the button-hole, and with starting eyes whispered in his ear, that she was a woman of extraordinary charms, Sir. That she was a young widow, Sir. That she was of a fine family, Sir. That Dombey was over head and ears in love with her, Sir, and that it would be a good match on both sides; for she had beauty, blood, and talent, and Dombey had fortune; and what more could any couple have? Hearing Mr Dombey's footsteps without, the Major cut himself short by saying, that Mr Carker would see her tomorrow morning, and would judge for himself; and between his mental excitement, and the exertion of saying all this in wheezy whispers, the

Major sat gurgling in the throat and watering at the eyes, until dinner was ready.

The Major, like some other noble animals, exhibited himself to great advantage at feeding-time. On this occasion, he shone resplendent at one end of the table, supported by the milder lustre of Mr Dombey at the other; while Carker on one side lent his ray to either light, or suffered it to merge into both, as occasion arose.

During the first course or two, the Major was usually grave; for the Native, in obedience to general orders, secretly issued, collected every sauce and cruet round him, and gave him a great deal to do, in taking out the stoppers, and mixing up the contents in his plate. Besides which, the Native had private zests and flavours on a side-table, with which the Major daily scorched himself; to say nothing of strange machines out of which he spirited unknown liquids into the Major's drink. But on this occasion, Major Bagstock, even amidst these many occupations, found time to be social; and his sociality consisted in excessive slyness for the behoof of Mr Carker, and the betrayal of Mr Dombey's state of mind.

'Dombey,' said the Major, 'you don't eat; what's the matter?'

'Thank you,' returned the gentleman, 'I am doing very well; I have no great appetite today.'

'Why, Dombey, what's become of it?' asked the Major. 'Where's it gone? You haven't left it with our friends, I'll swear, for I can answer for their having none to-day at luncheon. I can answer for one of 'em, at least: I won't say which.'

Then the Major winked at Carker, and became so frightfully sly, that his dark attendant was obliged to pat him on the back, without orders, or he would probably have disappeared under the table.

In a later stage of the dinner: that is to say, when the Native stood at the Major's elbow ready to serve the first bottle of champagne: the Major became still slyer.

'Fill this to the brim, you scoundrel,' said the Major, holding up his glass. 'Fill Mr Carker's to the brim too. And Mr Dombey's too. By Gad, gentlemen,' said the Major, winking at his new friend, while Mr Dombey looked into his plate with a conscious air, 'we'll consecrate this glass of wine to a Divinity whom Joe is proud to know, and at a distance humbly and reverently to admire. Edith,' said the Major, 'is her name; angelic Edith!'

'To angelic Edith!' cried the smiling Carker.

'Edith, by all means,' said Mr Dombey.

The entrance of the waiters with new dishes caused the Major to be slyer yet, but in a more serious vein. 'For though among ourselves, Joe Bagstock mingles jest and earnest on this subject, Sir,' said the Major, laying his finger on his lips, and speaking half apart to Carker, 'he holds that name too sacred to be made the property of these fellows, or of any fellows. Not a word!, Sir' while they are here!'

This was respectful and becoming on the Major's part, and Mr Dombey plainly felt it so. Although embarrassed in his own frigid way, by the Major's allusions, Mr Dombey had no objection to such rallying, it was clear, but rather courted it. Perhaps the Major had been pretty near the truth, when he had divined that morning that the great man who was too haughty formally to consult with, or confide in his prime minister, on such a matter, yet wished him to be fully possessed of it. Let this be how it may, he often glanced at Mr Carker while the Major plied his light artillery, and seemed watchful of its effect upon him.

But the Major, having secured an attentive listener, and a smiler who had not his match in all the world—'in short, a devilish intelligent and able fellow,' as he often afterwards declared—was not going to let him off with a little slyness personal to Mr Dombey. Therefore, on the removal of the cloth, the Major developed himself as a choice spirit in the broader and more comprehensive range of narrating regimental stories, and cracking regimental jokes, which he did with such prodigal exuberance, that Carker was (or feigned to be) quite exhausted with laughter and admiration: while Mr Dombey looked on over his starched cravat, like the Major's proprietor, or like a stately showman who was glad to see his bear dancing well.

When the Major was too hoarse with meat and drink, and the display of his social powers, to render himself intelligible any longer, they adjourned to coffee. After which, the Major inquired of Mr Carker the Manager, with little apparent hope of an answer in the affirmative, if he played picquet.

'Yes, I play picquet a little,' said Mr Carker.

'Backgammon, perhaps?' observed the Major, hesitating.

'Yes, I play backgammon a little too,' replied the man of teeth.

'Carker plays at all games, I believe,' said Mr Dombey, laying himself on a sofa like a man of wood, without a hinge or a joint in him; 'and plays them well.'

In sooth, he played the two in question, to such perfection, that the Major was astonished, and asked him, at random, if he played chess.

'Yes, I play chess a little,' answered Carker. 'I have sometimes played, and won a game—it's a mere trick—without seeing the board.'

'By Gad, Sir!' said the Major, staring, 'you are a contrast to Dombey, who plays nothing.'

'Oh! He!' returned the Manager. 'He has never had occasion to acquire such little arts. To men like me, they are sometimes useful. As at present, Major Bagstock, when they enable me to take a hand with you.'

It might be only the false mouth, so smooth and wide; and yet there seemed to lurk beneath the humility and subserviency of this short speech, a something like a snarl; and, for a moment, one might have thought that the white teeth were prone to bite the hand they fawned upon. But the Major thought nothing about it; and Mr Dombey lay meditating with his eyes half shut, during the whole of the play, which lasted until bed-time.

By that time, Mr Carker, though the winner, had mounted high into the Major's good opinion, insomuch that when he left the Major at his own room before going to bed, the Major as a special attention, sent the Native—who always rested on a mattress spread upon the ground at his master's door— along the gallery, to light him to his room in state.

There was a faint blur on the surface of the mirror in Mr Carker's chamber, and its reflection was, perhaps, a false one. But it showed, that night, the image of a man, who saw, in his fancy, a crowd of people slumbering on the ground at his feet, like the poor Native at his master's door: who picked his way among them: looking down, maliciously enough: but trod upon no upturned face—as yet.

CHAPTER 27. Deeper Shadows

Mr Carker the Manager rose with the lark, and went out, walking in the summer day. His meditations—and he meditated with contracted brows while he strolled along—hardly seemed to soar as high as the lark, or to mount in that direction; rather they kept close to their nest upon the earth, and looked about, among the dust and worms. But there was not a bird in the air, singing unseen, farther beyond the reach of human eye than Mr Carker's thoughts. He had his face so perfectly under control, that few could say more, in distinct terms, of its expression, than that it smiled or that it pondered. It pondered now, intently. As the lark rose higher, he sank deeper in thought. As the lark poured out her melody clearer and stronger, he fell into a graver and profounder silence. At length, when the lark came headlong down, with an accumulating stream of song, and dropped among the green wheat near him, rippling in the breath of the morning like a river, he sprang up from his reverie, and looked round with a sudden smile, as courteous and as soft as if he had had numerous observers to propitiate; nor did he relapse, after being thus awakened; but clearing his face, like one who bethought himself that it might otherwise wrinkle and tell tales, went smiling on, as if for practice.

Perhaps with an eye to first impressions, Mr Carker was very carefully and trimly dressed, that morning. Though always somewhat formal, in his dress, in imitation of the great man whom he served, he stopped short of the extent of Mr Dombey's stiffness: at once perhaps because he knew it to be ludicrous, and because in doing so he found another means of expressing his sense of the difference and distance between them. Some people quoted him indeed, in this respect, as a pointed commentary, and not a flattering one, on his icy patron—but the world is prone to misconstruction, and Mr Carker was not accountable for its bad propensity.

Clean and florid: with his light complexion, fading as it were, in the sun, and his dainty step enhancing the softness of the turf: Mr Carker the Manager strolled about meadows, and green lanes, and glided among avenues of trees, until it was time to return to breakfast. Taking a nearer way back, Mr Carker pursued it, airing his teeth, and said aloud as he did so, 'Now to see the second Mrs Dombey!'

He had strolled beyond the town, and re-entered it by a pleasant walk, where there was a deep shade of leafy trees, and where there were a few benches here and there for those who chose to rest. It not being a place of general resort at any hour, and wearing at that time of the still morning the air of being quite deserted and retired, Mr Carker had it, or thought he had it, all to himself. So, with the whim of an idle man, to whom there yet remained twenty minutes for reaching a destination easily able in ten, Mr Carker threaded the great boles of the trees, and went passing in and out, before this one and behind that, weaving a chain of footsteps on the dewy ground.

But he found he was mistaken in supposing there was no one in the grove, for as he softly rounded the trunk of one large tree, on which the obdurate bark was knotted and overlapped like the hide of a rhinoceros or some kindred monster of the ancient days before the Flood, he saw an unexpected figure sitting on a bench near at hand, about which, in another moment, he would have wound the chain he was making.

It was that of a lady, elegantly dressed and very handsome, whose dark proud eyes were fixed upon the ground, and in whom some passion or struggle was raging. For as she sat looking down, she held a corner of her under lip within her mouth, her bosom heaved, her nostril quivered, her head trembled, indignant tears were on her cheek, and her foot was set upon the moss as though she would have crushed it into nothing. And yet almost the self-same glance that showed him this, showed him the self-same lady rising with a scornful air of weariness and lassitude, and turning away with nothing expressed in face or figure but careless beauty and imperious disdain.

A withered and very ugly old woman, dressed not so much like a gipsy as like any of that medley race of vagabonds who tramp about the country, begging, and stealing, and tinkering, and weaving rushes, by turns, or all together, had been observing the lady, too; for, as she rose, this second figure strangely confronting the first, scrambled up from the ground—out of it, it almost appeared—and stood in the way.

'Let me tell your fortune, my pretty lady,' said the old woman, munching with her jaws, as if the Death's Head beneath her yellow skin were impatient to get out.

'I can tell it for myself,' was the reply.

'Ay, ay, pretty lady; but not right. You didn't tell it right when you were sitting there. I see you! Give me a piece of silver, pretty lady, and I'll tell your fortune true. There's riches, pretty lady, in your face.'

'I know,' returned the lady, passing her with a dark smile, and a proud step. 'I knew it before.

'What! You won't give me nothing?' cried the old woman. 'You won't give me nothing to tell your fortune, pretty lady? How much will you give me to tell it, then? Give me something, or I'll call it after you!' croaked the old woman, passionately.

Mr Carker, whom the lady was about to pass close, slinking against his tree as she crossed to gain the path, advanced so as to meet her, and pulling off his hat as she went by, bade the old woman hold her peace. The lady acknowledged his interference with an inclination of the head, and went her way.

'You give me something then, or I'll call it after her!' screamed the old woman, throwing up her arms, and pressing forward against his outstretched hand. 'Or come,' she added, dropping her voice suddenly, looking at him earnestly, and seeming in a moment to forget the object of her wrath, 'give me something, or I'll call it after you!'

'After me, old lady!' returned the Manager, putting his hand in his pocket.

'Yes,' said the woman, steadfast in her scrutiny, and holding out her shrivelled hand. 'I know!'

'What do you know?' demanded Carker, throwing her a shilling. 'Do you know who the handsome lady is?'

Munching like that sailor's wife of yore, who had chestnuts In her lap, and scowling like the witch who asked for some in vain, the old woman picked the shilling up, and going backwards, like a crab, or like a heap of crabs: for her alternately expanding and contracting hands might have represented two of that species, and her creeping face, some half-a-dozen more: crouched on the veinous root of an old tree, pulled out a short black pipe from within the crown of her bonnet, lighted it with a match, and smoked in silence, looking fixedly at her questioner.

Mr Carker laughed, and turned upon his heel.

'Good!' said the old woman. 'One child dead, and one child living: one wife dead, and one wife coming. Go and meet her!'

In spite of himself, the Manager looked round again, and stopped. The old woman, who had not removed her pipe, and was munching and mumbling while she smoked, as if in conversation with an invisible familiar, pointed with her finger in the direction he was going, and laughed.

'What was that you said, Bedlamite?' he demanded.

The woman mumbled, and chattered, and smoked, and still pointed before him; but remained silent Muttering a farewell that was not complimentary, Mr Carker pursued his way; but as he turned out of that place, and looked over his shoulder at the root of the old tree, he could yet see the finger pointing before him, and thought he heard the woman screaming, 'Go and meet her!'

Preparations for a choice repast were completed, he found, at the hotel; and Mr Dombey, and the Major, and the breakfast, were awaiting the ladies. Individual constitution has much to do with the development of such facts, no doubt; but in this case, appetite carried it hollow over the tender passion; Mr Dombey being very cool and collected, and the Major fretting and fuming in a state of violent heat and irritation. At length the door was thrown open by the Native, and, after a pause, occupied by her languishing along the gallery, a very blooming, but not very youthful lady, appeared.

'My dear Mr Dombey,' said the lady, 'I am afraid we are late, but Edith has been out already looking for a favourable point of view for a sketch, and kept me waiting for her. Falsest of Majors,' giving him her little finger, 'how do you do?'

'Mrs Skewton,' said Mr Dombey, 'let me gratify my friend Carker:' Mr Dombey unconsciously emphasised the word friend, as saying "no really; I do allow him to take credit for that distinction:" 'by presenting him to you. You have heard me mention Mr Carker.'

'I am charmed, I am sure,' said Mrs Skewton, graciously.

Mr Carker was charmed, of course. Would he have been more charmed on Mr Dombey's behalf, if Mrs Skewton had been (as he at first supposed her) the Edith whom they had toasted overnight?

'Why, where, for Heaven's sake, is Edith?' exclaimed Mrs Skewton, looking round. 'Still at the door, giving Withers orders about the mounting of those drawings! My dear Mr Dombey, will you have the kindness—

Mr Dombey was already gone to seek her. Next moment he returned, bearing on his arm the same elegantly dressed and very handsome lady whom Mr Carker had encountered underneath the trees.

'Carker—' began Mr Dombey. But their recognition of each other was so manifest, that Mr Dombey stopped surprised.

'I am obliged to the gentleman,' said Edith, with a stately bend, 'for sparing me some annoyance from an importunate beggar just now.'

'I am obliged to my good fortune,' said Mr Carker, bowing low, 'for the opportunity of rendering so slight a service to one whose servant I am proud to be.'

As her eye rested on him for an instant, and then lighted on the ground, he saw in its bright and searching glance a suspicion that he had not come up at the moment of his interference, but had secretly observed her sooner. As he saw that, she saw in his eye that her distrust was not without foundation.

'Really,' cried Mrs Skewton, who had taken this opportunity of inspecting Mr Carker through her glass, and satisfying herself (as she lisped audibly to the Major) that he was all heart; 'really now, this is one of the most enchanting coincidences that I ever heard of. The idea! My dearest Edith, there is such an obvious destiny in it, that really one might almost be induced to cross one's arms upon one's frock, and say, like those wicked Turks, there is no What's-his-name but Thingummy, and What-you-may-call-it is his prophet!'

Edith designed no revision of this extraordinary quotation from the Koran, but Mr Dombey felt it necessary to offer a few polite remarks.

'It gives me great pleasure,' said Mr Dombey, with cumbrous gallantry, 'that a gentleman so nearly connected with myself as Carker is, should have had the honour and happiness of rendering the least assistance to Mrs Granger.' Mr Dombey bowed to her. 'But it gives me some pain, and it occasions me to be really envious of Carker;' he unconsciously laid stress on these words, as sensible that they must appear to involve a very surprising proposition; 'envious of Carker, that I had not that honour and that happiness myself.' Mr Dombey bowed again. Edith, saving for a curl of her lip, was motionless.

'By the Lord, Sir,' cried the Major, bursting into speech at sight of the waiter, who was come to announce breakfast, 'it's an extraordinary thing to me that no one can have the honour and happiness of shooting all such beggars through the head without being brought to book for it. But here's an arm for Mrs Granger if she'll do J. B. the honour to accept it; and the greatest service Joe can render you, Ma'am, just now, is, to lead you into table!'

With this, the Major gave his arm to Edith; Mr Dombey led the way with Mrs Skewton; Mrs Carker went last, smiling on the party.

'I am quite rejoiced, Mr Carker,' said the lady-mother, at breakfast, after another approving survey of him through her glass, 'that you have timed your visit so happily, as to go with us to-day. It is the most enchanting expedition!'

'Any expedition would be enchanting in such society,' returned Carker; 'but I believe it is, in itself, full of interest.'

'Oh!' cried Mrs Skewton, with a faded little scream of rapture, 'the Castle is charming!—associations of the Middle Ages—and all that—which is so truly exquisite. Don't you dote upon the Middle Ages, Mr Carker?'

'Very much, indeed,' said Mr Carker.

'Such charming times!' cried Cleopatra. 'So full of faith! So vigorous and forcible! So picturesque! So perfectly removed from commonplace! Oh dear! If they would only leave us a little more of the poetry of existence in these terrible days!'

Mrs Skewton was looking sharp after Mr Dombey all the time she said this, who was looking at Edith: who was listening, but who never lifted up her eyes.

'We are dreadfully real, Mr Carker,' said Mrs Skewton; 'are we not?'

Few people had less reason to complain of their reality than Cleopatra, who had as much that was false about her as could well go to the composition of anybody with a real individual existence. But Mr Carker commiserated our reality nevertheless, and agreed that we were very hardly used in that regard.

'Pictures at the Castle, quite divine!' said Cleopatra. 'I hope you dote upon pictures?'

'I assure you, Mrs Skewton,' said Mr Dombey, with solemn encouragement of his Manager, 'that Carker has a very good taste for pictures; quite a natural power of appreciating them. He is a very creditable artist himself. He will be delighted, I am sure, with Mrs Granger's taste and skill.'

'Damme, Sir!' cried Major Bagstock, 'my opinion is, that you're the admirable Carker, and can do anything.'

'Oh!' smiled Carker, with humility, 'you are much too sanguine, Major Bagstock. I can do very little. But Mr Dombey is so generous in his estimation of any trivial accomplishment a man like myself may find it almost necessary to acquire, and to which, in his very different sphere, he is far superior, that—' Mr Carker shrugged his shoulders, deprecating further praise, and said no more.

All this time, Edith never raised her eyes, unless to glance towards her mother when that lady's fervent spirit shone forth in words. But as Carker ceased, she looked at Mr Dombey for a moment. For a moment only; but with a transient gleam of scornful wonder on her face, not lost on one observer, who was smiling round the board.

Mr Dombey caught the dark eyelash in its descent, and took the opportunity of arresting it.

'You have been to Warwick often, unfortunately?' said Mr Dombey.

'Several times.'

'The visit will be tedious to you, I am afraid.'

'Oh no; not at all.'

'Ah! You are like your cousin Feenix, my dearest Edith,' said Mrs Skewton. 'He has been to Warwick Castle fifty times, if he has been there once; yet if he came to Leamington to-morrow—I wish he would, dear angel!—he would make his fifty-second visit next day.'

'We are all enthusiastic, are we not, Mama?' said Edith, with a cold smile.

'Too much so, for our peace, perhaps, my dear,' returned her mother; 'but we won't complain. Our own emotions are our recompense. If, as your cousin Feenix says, the sword wears out the what's-its-name—'

'The scabbard, perhaps,' said Edith.

'Exactly—a little too fast, it is because it is bright and glowing, you know, my dearest love.'

Mrs Skewton heaved a gentle sigh, supposed to cast a shadow on the surface of that dagger of lath, whereof her susceptible bosom was the sheath: and leaning her head on one side, in the Cleopatra manner, looked with pensive affection on her darling child.

Edith had turned her face towards Mr Dombey when he first addressed her, and had remained in that attitude, while speaking to her mother, and while her mother spoke to her, as though offering him her attention, if he had anything more to say. There was something in the manner of this simple courtesy: almost defiant, and giving it the character of being rendered on compulsion, or as a matter of traffic to which she was a reluctant party again not lost upon that same observer who was smiling round the board. It set him thinking of her as he had first seen her, when she had believed herself to be alone among the trees.

Mr Dombey having nothing else to say, proposed—the breakfast being now finished, and the Major gorged, like any Boa Constrictor—that they should start. A barouche being in waiting, according to the orders of that gentleman, the two ladies, the Major and himself, took their seats in it; the Native and the wan page mounted the box, Mr Towlinson being left behind; and Mr Carker, on horseback, brought up the rear. Mr Carker cantered behind the carriage at the distance of a hundred yards or so, and watched it, during all the ride, as if he were a cat, indeed, and its four occupants, mice. Whether he looked to one side of the road, or to the other—over distant landscape, with its smooth undulations, wind-mills, corn, grass, bean fields, wild-flowers, farm-yards, hayricks, and the spire among the wood—or upwards in the sunny air, where butterflies were sporting round his head, and birds were pouring out their songs—or downward, where the shadows of the branches interlaced, and made a trembling carpet on the road—or onward, where the overhanging trees formed aisles and arches, dim with the softened light that steeped through leaves—one corner of his eye was ever on the formal head of Mr Dombey, addressed towards him, and the feather in the bonnet, drooping so neglectfully and scornfully between them; much as he had seen the haughty eyelids droop; not least so, when the face met that now fronting it. Once, and once only, did his wary glance release these objects; and that was, when a leap over a low hedge, and a gallop across a field, enabled him to anticipate the carriage coming by the road, and to be standing ready, at the journey's end, to hand the ladies out. Then, and but then, he met her glance for an instant in her first surprise; but when he touched her, in alighting, with his soft white hand, it overlooked him altogether as before.

Mrs Skewton was bent on taking charge of Mr Carker herself, and showing him the beauties of the Castle. She was determined to have his arm, and the Major's too. It would do that incorrigible creature: who was the most barbarous infidel in point of poetry: good to be in such company. This chance arrangement left Mr Dombey at liberty to escort Edith: which he did: stalking before them through the apartments with a gentlemanly solemnity.

'Those darling byegone times, Mr Carker,' said Cleopatra, 'with their delicious fortresses, and their dear old dungeons, and their delightful places of torture, and their romantic vengeances, and their picturesque assaults and sieges, and everything that makes life truly charming! How dreadfully we have degenerated!'

'Yes, we have fallen off deplorably,' said Mr Carker.

The peculiarity of their conversation was, that Mrs Skewton, in spite of her ecstasies, and Mr Carker, in spite of his urbanity, were both intent on watching Mr Dombey and Edith. With all their conversational endowments, they spoke somewhat distractedly, and at random, in consequence.

'We have no Faith left, positively,' said Mrs Skewton, advancing her shrivelled ear; for Mr Dombey was saying something to Edith. 'We have no Faith in the dear old Barons, who were the most delightful creatures—or in the dear old Priests, who were the most warlike of men—or even in the days of that inestimable Queen Bess, upon the wall there, which were so extremely golden. Dear creature! She was all Heart And that charming father of hers! I hope you dote on Harry the Eighth!'

'I admire him very much,' said Carker.

'So bluff!' cried Mrs Skewton, 'wasn't he? So burly. So truly English. Such a picture, too, he makes, with his dear little peepy eyes, and his benevolent chin!'

'Ah, Ma'am!' said Carker, stopping short; 'but if you speak of pictures, there's a composition! What gallery in the world can produce the counterpart of that?'

As the smiling gentleman thus spake, he pointed through a doorway to where Mr Dombey and Edith were standing alone in the centre of another room.

They were not interchanging a word or a look. Standing together, arm in arm, they had the appearance of being more divided than if seas had rolled between them. There was a difference even in the pride of the two, that removed them farther from each other, than if one had been the proudest and the other the humblest specimen of humanity in all creation. He, self-important, unbending, formal, austere. She, lovely and graceful, in an uncommon degree, but totally regardless of herself and him and everything around, and spurning her own attractions with her haughty brow and lip, as if they were a badge or livery she hated. So unmatched were they, and opposed, so forced and linked together by a chain which adverse hazard and mischance had forged: that fancy might have imagined the pictures on the walls around them, startled by the unnatural conjunction, and observant of it in their several expressions. Grim knights and warriors looked scowling on them. A churchman, with his hand upraised, denounced the mockery of such a couple coming to God's altar. Quiet waters in landscapes, with the sun reflected in their depths, asked, if better means of escape were not at hand, was there no drowning left? Ruins cried, 'Look here, and see what We are, wedded to uncongenial Time!' Animals, opposed by nature, worried one another, as a moral to them. Loves and Cupids took to flight afraid, and Martyrdom had no such torment in its painted history of suffering.

Nevertheless, Mrs Skewton was so charmed by the sight to which Mr Carker invoked her attention, that she could not refrain from saying, half aloud, how sweet, how very full of soul it was! Edith, overhearing, looked round, and flushed indignant scarlet to her hair.

'My dearest Edith knows I was admiring her!' said Cleopatra, tapping her, almost timidly, on the back with her parasol. 'Sweet pet!'

Again Mr Carker saw the strife he had witnessed so unexpectedly among the trees. Again he saw the haughty languor and indifference come over it, and hide it like a cloud.

She did not raise her eyes to him; but with a slight peremptory motion of them, seemed to bid her mother come near. Mrs Skewton thought it expedient to understand the hint, and advancing quickly, with her two cavaliers, kept near her daughter from that time.

Mr Carker now, having nothing to distract his attention, began to discourse upon the pictures and to select the best, and point them out to Mr Dombey: speaking with his usual familiar recognition of Mr Dombey's greatness, and rendering homage by adjusting his eye-glass for him, or finding out the right place in his catalogue, or holding his stick, or the like. These services did not so much originate with Mr Carker, in truth, as with Mr Dombey himself, who was apt to assert his chieftainship by saying, with subdued authority, and in an easy way—for him—'Here, Carker, have the goodness to assist me, will you?' which the smiling gentleman always did with pleasure.

They made the tour of the pictures, the walls, crow's nest, and so forth; and as they were still one little party, and the Major was rather in the shade:

being sleepy during the process of digestion: Mr Carker became communicative and agreeable. At first, he addressed himself for the most part to Mrs Skewton; but as that sensitive lady was in such ecstasies with the works of art, after the first quarter of an hour, that she could do nothing but yawn (they were such perfect inspirations, she observed as a reason for that mark of rapture), he transferred his attentions to Mr Dombey. Mr Dombey said little beyond an occasional 'Very true, Carker,' or 'Indeed, Carker,' but he tacitly encouraged Carker to proceed, and inwardly approved of his behaviour very much: deeming it as well that somebody should talk, and thinking that his remarks, which were, as one might say, a branch of the parent establishment, might amuse Mrs Granger. Mr Carker, who possessed an excellent discretion, never took the liberty of addressing that lady, direct; but she seemed to listen, though she never looked at him; and once or twice, when he was emphatic in his peculiar humility, the twilight smile stole over her face, not as a light, but as a deep black shadow.

Warwick Castle being at length pretty well exhausted, and the Major very much so: to say nothing of Mrs Skewton, whose peculiar demonstrations of delight had become very frequent Indeed: the carriage was again put In requisition, and they rode to several admired points of view In the neighbourhood. Mr Dombey ceremoniously observed of one of these, that a sketch, however slight, from the fair hand of Mrs Granger, would be a remembrance to him of that agreeable day: though he wanted no artificial remembrance, he was sure (here Mr Dombey made another of his bows), which he must always highly value. Withers the lean having Edith's sketch-book under his arm, was immediately called upon by Mrs Skewton to produce the same: and the carriage stopped, that Edith might make the drawing, which Mr Dombey was to put away among his treasures.

'But I am afraid I trouble you too much,' said Mr Dombey.

'By no means. Where would you wish it taken from?' she answered, turning to him with the same enforced attention as before.

Mr Dombey, with another bow, which cracked the starch in his cravat, would beg to leave that to the Artist.

'I would rather you chose for yourself,' said Edith.

'Suppose then,' said Mr Dombey, 'we say from here. It appears a good spot for the purpose, or—Carker, what do you think?'

There happened to be in the foreground, at some little distance, a grove of trees, not unlike that In which Mr Carker had made his chain of footsteps in the morning, and with a seat under one tree, greatly resembling, in the general character of its situation, the point where his chain had broken.

'Might I venture to suggest to Mrs Granger,' said Carker, 'that that is an interesting—almost a curious—point of view?'

She followed the direction of his riding-whip with her eyes, and raised them quickly to his face. It was the second glance they had exchanged since their introduction; and would have been exactly like the first, but that its expression was plainer.

'Will you like that?' said Edith to Mr Dombey.

'I shall be charmed,' said Mr Dombey to Edith.

Therefore the carriage was driven to the spot where Mr Dombey was to be charmed; and Edith, without moving from her seat, and opening her sketch-book with her usual proud indifference, began to sketch.

'My pencils are all pointless,' she said, stopping and turning them over.

'Pray allow me,' said Mr Dombey. 'Or Carker will do it better, as he understands these things. Carker, have the goodness to see to these pencils for Mrs Granger.

Mr Carker rode up close to the carriage-door on Mrs Granger's side, and letting the rein fall on his horse's neck, took the pencils from her hand with a smile and a bow, and sat in the saddle leisurely mending them. Having done so, he begged to be allowed to hold them, and to hand them to her as they were required; and thus Mr Carker, with many commendations of Mrs Granger's extraordinary skill—especially in trees—remained—close at her side, looking over the drawing as she made it. Mr Dombey in the meantime stood bolt upright in the carriage like a highly respectable ghost, looking on too; while Cleopatra and the Major dallied as two ancient doves might do.

'Are you satisfied with that, or shall I finish it a little more?' said Edith, showing the sketch to Mr Dombey.

Mr Dombey begged that it might not be touched; it was perfection.

'It is most extraordinary,' said Carker, bringing every one of his red gums to bear upon his praise. 'I was not prepared for anything so beautiful, and so unusual altogether.'

This might have applied to the sketcher no less than to the sketch; but Mr Carker's manner was openness itself—not as to his mouth alone, but as to his whole spirit. So it continued to be while the drawing was laid aside for Mr Dombey, and while the sketching materials were put up; then he handed in the pencils (which were received with a distant acknowledgment of his help, but without a look), and tightening his rein, fell back, and followed the carriage again.

Thinking, perhaps, as he rode, that even this trivial sketch had been made and delivered to its owner, as if it had been bargained for and bought. Thinking, perhaps, that although she had assented with such perfect readiness to his request, her haughty face, bent over the drawing, or glancing at the distant objects represented in it, had been the face of a proud woman, engaged in a sordid and miserable transaction. Thinking, perhaps, of such things: but smiling certainly, and while he seemed to look about him freely, in enjoyment of the air and exercise, keeping always that sharp corner of his eye upon the carriage.

A stroll among the haunted ruins of Kenilworth, and more rides to more points of view: most of which, Mrs Skewton reminded Mr Dombey, Edith had already sketched, as he had seen in looking over her drawings: brought the day's expedition to a close. Mrs Skewton and Edith were driven to their own lodgings; Mr Carker was graciously invited by Cleopatra to return thither with Mr Dombey and the Major, in the evening, to hear some of Edith's music; and the three gentlemen repaired to their hotel to dinner.

The dinner was the counterpart of yesterday's, except that the Major was twenty-four hours more triumphant and less mysterious. Edith was toasted again. Mr Dombey was again agreeably embarrassed. And Mr Carker was full of interest and praise.

There were no other visitors at Mrs Skewton's. Edith's drawings were strewn about the room, a little more abundantly than usual perhaps; and Withers, the wan page, handed round a little stronger tea. The harp was there; the piano was there; and Edith sang and played. But even the music was played by Edith to Mr Dombey's order, as it were, in the same uncompromising way. As thus.

'Edith, my dearest love,' said Mrs Skewton, half an hour after tea, 'Mr Dombey is dying to hear you, I know.'

'Mr Dombey has life enough left to say so for himself, Mama, I have no doubt.'

'I shall be immensely obliged,' said Mr Dombey.

'What do you wish?'

'Piano?' hesitated Mr Dombey.

'Whatever you please. You have only to choose.

Accordingly, she began with the piano. It was the same with the harp; the same with her singing; the same with the selection of the pieces that she sang and played. Such frigid and constrained, yet prompt and pointed acquiescence with the wishes he imposed upon her, and on no one else, was sufficiently remarkable to penetrate through all the mysteries of picquet, and impress itself on Mr Carker's keen attention. Nor did he lose sight of the fact that Mr Dombey was evidently proud of his power, and liked to show it.

Nevertheless, Mr Carker played so well—some games with the Major, and some with Cleopatra, whose vigilance of eye in respect of Mr Dombey and Edith no lynx could have surpassed—that he even heightened his position in the lady-mother's good graces; and when on taking leave he regretted that he would be obliged to return to London next morning, Cleopatra trusted: community of feeling not being met with every day: that it was far from being the last time they would meet.

'I hope so,' said Mr Carker, with an expressive look at the couple in the distance, as he drew towards the door, following the Major. 'I think so.'

Mr Dombey, who had taken a stately leave of Edith, bent, or made some approach to a bend, over Cleopatra's couch, and said, in a low voice:

'I have requested Mrs Granger's permission to call on her to-morrow morning—for a purpose—and she has appointed twelve o'clock. May I hope to have the pleasure of finding you at home, Madam, afterwards?'

Cleopatra was so much fluttered and moved, by hearing this, of course, incomprehensible speech, that she could only shut her eyes, and shake her head, and give Mr Dombey her hand; which Mr Dombey, not exactly knowing what to do with, dropped.

'Dombey, come along!' cried the Major, looking in at the door. 'Damme, Sir, old Joe has a great mind to propose an alteration in the name of the Royal Hotel, and that it should be called the Three Jolly Bachelors, in honour of ourselves and Carker.' With this, the Major slapped Mr Dombey on the back, and winking over his shoulder at the ladies, with a frightful tendency of blood to the head, carried him off.

Mrs Skewton reposed on her sofa, and Edith sat apart, by her harp, in silence. The mother, trifling with her fan, looked stealthily at the daughter more than once, but the daughter, brooding gloomily with downcast eyes, was not to be disturbed.

Thus they remained for a long hour, without a word, until Mrs Skewton's maid appeared, according to custom, to prepare her gradually for night. At night, she should have been a skeleton, with dart and hour-glass, rather than a woman, this attendant; for her touch was as the touch of Death. The painted object shrivelled underneath her hand; the form collapsed, the hair dropped off, the arched dark eyebrows changed to scanty tufts of grey; the pale lips shrunk, the skin became cadaverous and loose; an old, worn, yellow, nodding woman, with red eyes, alone remained in Cleopatra's place, huddled up, like a slovenly bundle, in a greasy flannel gown.

The very voice was changed, as it addressed Edith, when they were alone again.

'Why don't you tell me,' it said sharply, 'that he is coming here to-morrow by appointment?'

'Because you know it,' returned Edith, 'Mother.'

The mocking emphasis she laid on that one word!

'You know he has bought me,' she resumed. 'Or that he will, to-morrow. He has considered of his bargain; he has shown it to his friend; he is even rather proud of it; he thinks that it will suit him, and may be had sufficiently cheap; and he will buy to-morrow. God, that I have lived for this, and that I feel it!'

Compress into one handsome face the conscious self-abasement, and the burning indignation of a hundred women, strong in passion and in pride; and there it hid itself with two white shuddering arms.

'What do you mean?' returned the angry mother. 'Haven't you from a child—'

'A child!' said Edith, looking at her, 'when was I a child? What childhood did you ever leave to me? I was a woman—artful, designing, mercenary, laying snares for men—before I knew myself, or you, or even understood the base and wretched aim of every new display I learnt You gave birth to a woman. Look upon her. She is in her pride tonight.'

And as she spoke, she struck her hand upon her beautiful bosom, as though she would have beaten down herself.

'Look at me,' she said, 'who have never known what it is to have an honest heart, and love. Look at me, taught to scheme and plot when children play; and married in my youth—an old age of design—to one for whom I had no feeling but indifference. Look at me, whom he left a widow, dying before his inheritance descended to him—a judgment on you! well deserved!—and tell me what has been my life for ten years since.'

'We have been making every effort to endeavour to secure to you a good establishment,' rejoined her mother. 'That has been your life. And now you have got it.'

'There is no slave in a market: there is no horse in a fair: so shown and offered and examined and paraded, Mother, as I have been, for ten shameful years,' cried Edith, with a burning brow, and the same bitter emphasis on the one word. 'Is it not so? Have I been made the bye-word of all kinds of men? Have fools, have profligates, have boys, have dotards, dangled after me, and one by one rejected me, and fallen off, because you were too plain with all your cunning: yes, and too true, with all those false pretences: until we have almost come to be notorious? The licence of look and touch,' she said, with flashing eyes, 'have I submitted to it, in half the places of resort upon the map of England? Have I been hawked and vended here and there, until the last grain of self-respect is dead within me, and I loathe myself? Has been my late childhood? I had none before. Do not tell me that I had, tonight of all nights in my life!'

'You might have been well married,' said her mother, 'twenty times at least, Edith, if you had given encouragement enough.'

'No! Who takes me, refuse that I am, and as I well deserve to be,' she answered, raising her head, and trembling in her energy of shame and stormy pride, 'shall take me, as this man does, with no art of mine put forth to lure him. He sees me at the auction, and he thinks it well to buy me. Let him! When he came to view me—perhaps to bid—he required to see the roll of my accomplishments. I gave it to him. When he would have me show one of them, to justify his purchase to his men, I require of him to say which he demands, and I exhibit it. I will do no more. He makes the purchase of his own will, and with his own sense of its worth, and the power of his money; and I hope it may never disappoint him. I have not vaunted and pressed the bargain; neither have you, so far as I have been able to prevent you.

'You talk strangely to-night, Edith, to your own Mother.'

'It seems so to me; stranger to me than you,' said Edith. 'But my education was completed long ago. I am too old now, and have fallen too low, by degrees, to take a new course, and to stop yours, and to help myself. The germ of all that purifies a woman's breast, and makes it true and good, has never stirred in mine, and I have nothing else to sustain me when I despise myself.' There had been a touching sadness in her voice, but it was gone, when she went on to say, with a curled lip, 'So, as we are genteel and poor, I am content that we should be made rich by these means; all I say is, I have kept the only purpose I have had the strength to form—I had almost said the power, with you at my side, Mother—and have not tempted this man on.'

'This man! You speak,' said her mother, 'as if you hated him.'

'And you thought I loved him, did you not?' she answered, stopping on her way across the room, and looking round. 'Shall I tell you,' she continued, with her eyes fixed on her mother, 'who already knows us thoroughly, and reads us right, and before whom I have even less of self-respect or confidence than before my own inward self; being so much degraded by his knowledge of me?'

'This is an attack, I suppose,' returned her mother coldly, 'on poor, unfortunate what's-his-name—Mr Carker! Your want of self-respect and confidence, my dear, in reference to that person (who is very agreeable, it strikes me), is not likely to have much effect on your establishment. Why do you look at me so hard? Are you ill?'

Edith suddenly let fall her face, as if it had been stung, and while she pressed her hands upon it, a terrible tremble crept over her whole frame. It was quickly gone; and with her usual step, she passed out of the room.

The maid who should have been a skeleton, then reappeared, and giving one arm to her mistress, who appeared to have taken off her manner with her charms, and to have put on paralysis with her flannel gown, collected the ashes of Cleopatra, and carried them away in the other, ready for tomorrow's revivification.

CHAPTER 28. Alterations

'So the day has come at length, Susan,' said Florence to the excellent Nipper, 'when we are going back to our quiet home!'

Susan drew in her breath with an amount of expression not easily described, further relieving her feelings with a smart cough, answered, 'Very quiet indeed, Miss Floy, no doubt. Excessive so.'

'When I was a child,' said Florence, thoughtfully, and after musing for some moments, 'did you ever see that gentleman who has taken the trouble to ride down here to speak to me, now three times—three times, I think, Susan?'

'Three times, Miss,' returned the Nipper. 'Once when you was out a walking with them Sket—'

Florence gently looked at her, and Miss Nipper checked herself.

'With Sir Barnet and his lady, I mean to say, Miss, and the young gentleman. And two evenings since then.'

'When I was a child, and when company used to come to visit Papa, did you ever see that gentleman at home, Susan?' asked Florence.

'Well, Miss,' returned her maid, after considering, 'I really couldn't say I ever did. When your poor dear Ma died, Miss Floy, I was very new in the family, you see, and my element:' the Nipper bridled, as opining that her merits had been always designedly extinguished by Mr Dombey: 'was the floor below the attics.'

'To be sure,' said Florence, still thoughtfully; 'you are not likely to have known who came to the house. I quite forgot.'

'Not, Miss, but what we talked about the family and visitors,' said Susan, 'and but what I heard much said, although the nurse before Mrs Richards make unpleasant remarks when I was in company, and hint at little Pitchers, but that could only be attributed, poor thing,' observed Susan, with composed forbearance, 'to habits of intoxication, for which she was required to leave, and did.'

Florence, who was seated at her chamber window, with her face resting on her hand, sat looking out, and hardly seemed to hear what Susan said, she was so lost in thought.

'At all events, Miss,' said Susan, 'I remember very well that this same gentleman, Mr Carker, was almost, if not quite, as great a gentleman with your Papa then, as he is now. It used to be said in the house then, Miss, that he was at the head of all your Pa's affairs in the City, and managed the whole, and that your Pa minded him more than anybody, which, begging your pardon, Miss Floy, he might easy do, for he never minded anybody else. I knew that, Pitcher as I might have been.'

Susan Nipper, with an injured remembrance of the nurse before Mrs Richards, emphasised 'Pitcher' strongly.

'And that Mr Carker has not fallen off, Miss,' she pursued, 'but has stood his ground, and kept his credit with your Pa, I know from what is always said among our people by that Perch, whenever he comes to the house; and though he's the weakest weed in the world, Miss Floy, and no one can have a moment's patience with the man, he knows what goes on in the City tolerable well, and says that your Pa does nothing without Mr Carker, and leaves all to Mr Carker, and acts according to Mr Carker, and has Mr Carker always at his elbow, and I do believe that he believes (that washiest of Perches!) that after your Pa, the Emperor of India is the child unborn to Mr Carker.'

Not a word of this was lost on Florence, who, with an awakened interest in Susan's speech, no longer gazed abstractedly on the prospect without, but looked at her, and listened with attention.

'Yes, Susan,' she said, when that young lady had concluded. 'He is in Papa's confidence, and is his friend, I am sure.'

Florence's mind ran high on this theme, and had done for some days. Mr Carker, in the two visits with which he had followed up his first one, had assumed a confidence between himself and her—a right on his part to be mysterious and stealthy, in telling her that the ship was still unheard of—a kind of mildly restrained power and authority over her—that made her wonder, and caused her great uneasiness. She had no means of repelling it, or of freeing herself from the web he was gradually winding about her; for that would have required some art and knowledge of the world, opposed to such address as his; and Florence had none. True, he had said no more to her than that there was no news of the ship, and that he feared the worst; but how he came to know that she was interested in the ship, and why he had the right to signify his knowledge to her, so insidiously and darkly, troubled Florence very much.

This conduct on the part of Mr Carker, and her habit of often considering it with wonder and uneasiness, began to invest him with an uncomfortable fascination in Florence's thoughts. A more distinct remembrance of his features, voice, and manner: which she sometimes courted, as a means of reducing him to the level of a real personage, capable of exerting no greater charm over her than another: did not remove the vague impression. And yet he never frowned, or looked upon her with an air of dislike or animosity, but was always smiling and serene.

Again, Florence, in pursuit of her strong purpose with reference to her father, and her steady resolution to believe that she was herself unwittingly to blame for their so cold and distant relations, would recall to mind that this gentleman was his confidential friend, and would think, with an anxious heart, could her struggling tendency to dislike and fear him be a part of that misfortune in her, which had turned her father's love adrift, and left her so alone? She dreaded that it might be; sometimes believed it was: then she resolved that she would try to conquer this wrong feeling; persuaded herself that she was honoured and encouraged by the notice of her father's friend; and hoped that patient observation of him and trust in him would lead her bleeding feet along that stony road which ended in her father's heart.

Thus, with no one to advise her—for she could advise with no one without seeming to complain against him—gentle Florence tossed on an uneasy sea of doubt and hope; and Mr Carker, like a scaly monster of the deep, swam down below, and kept his shining eye upon her. Florence had a new reason in all this for wishing to be at home again. Her lonely life was better suited to her course of timid hope and doubt; and she feared sometimes, that in her absence she might miss some hopeful chance of testifying her affection for her father. Heaven knows, she might have set her mind at rest, poor child! on this last point; but her slighted love was fluttering within her, and, even in her sleep, it flew away in dreams, and nestled, like a wandering bird come home, upon her father's neck.

Of Walter she thought often. Ah! how often, when the night was gloomy, and the wind was blowing round the house! But hope was strong in her breast. It is so difficult for the young and ardent, even with such experience as hers, to imagine youth and ardour quenched like a weak flame, and the bright day of life merging into night, at noon, that hope was strong yet. Her tears fell frequently for Walter's sufferings; but rarely for his supposed death, and never long.

She had written to the old Instrument-maker, but had received no answer to her note: which indeed required none. Thus matters stood with Florence on the morning when she was going home, gladly, to her old secluded life.

Doctor and Mrs Blimber, accompanied (much against his will) by their valued charge, Master Barnet, were already gone back to Brighton, where that young gentleman and his fellow-pilgrims to Parnassus were then, no doubt, in the continual resumption of their studies. The holiday time was past and over; most of the juvenile guests at the villa had taken their departure; and Florence's long visit was come to an end.

There was one guest, however, albeit not resident within the house, who had been very constant in his attentions to the family, and who still remained devoted to them. This was Mr Toots, who after renewing, some weeks ago, the acquaintance he had had the happiness of forming with Skettles Junior, on the night when he burst the Blimberian bonds and soared into freedom with his ring on, called regularly every other day, and left a perfect pack of cards at the hall-door; so many indeed, that the ceremony was quite a deal on the part of Mr Toots, and a hand at whist on the part of the servant.

Mr Toots, likewise, with the bold and happy idea of preventing the family from forgetting him (but there is reason to suppose that this expedient originated in the teeming brain of the Chicken), had established a six-oared cutter, manned by aquatic friends of the Chicken's and steered by that illustrious character in person, who wore a bright red fireman's coat for the purpose, and concealed the perpetual black eye with which he was afflicted, beneath a green shade. Previous to the institution of this equipage, Mr Toots sounded the Chicken on a hypothetical case, as, supposing the Chicken to be enamoured of a young lady named Mary, and to have conceived the intention of starting a boat of his own, what would he call that boat? The Chicken replied, with divers strong asseverations, that he would either christen it Poll or The Chicken's Delight. Improving on this idea, Mr Toots, after deep study and the exercise of much invention, resolved to call his boat The Toots's Joy, as a delicate compliment to Florence, of which no man knowing the parties, could possibly miss the appreciation.

Stretched on a crimson cushion in his gallant bark, with his shoes in the air, Mr Toots, in the exercise of his project, had come up the river, day after day, and week after week, and had flitted to and fro, near Sir Barnet's garden, and had caused his crew to cut across and across the river at sharp angles, for his better exhibition to any lookers-out from Sir Barnet's windows, and had had such evolutions performed by the Toots's Joy as had filled all the neighbouring part of the water-side with astonishment. But whenever he saw anyone in Sir Barnet's garden on the brink of the river, Mr Toots always feigned to be passing there, by a combination of coincidences of the most singular and unlikely description.

'How are you, Toots?' Sir Barnet would say, waving his hand from the lawn, while the artful Chicken steered close in shore.

'How de do, Sir Barnet?' Mr Toots would answer, What a surprising thing that I should see you here!'

Mr Toots, in his sagacity, always said this, as if, instead of that being Sir Barnet's house, it were some deserted edifice on the banks of the Nile, or Ganges.

'I never was so surprised!' Mr Toots would exclaim.—'Is Miss Dombey there?'

Whereupon Florence would appear, perhaps.

'Oh, Diogenes is quite well, Miss Dombey,' Toots would cry. 'I called to ask this morning.'

'Thank you very much!' the pleasant voice of Florence would reply.

'Won't you come ashore, Toots?' Sir Barnet would say then. 'Come! you're in no hurry. Come and see us.'

'Oh, it's of no consequence, thank you!' Mr Toots would blushingly rejoin. 'I thought Miss Dombey might like to know, that's all. Good-bye!' And poor Mr Toots, who was dying to accept the invitation, but hadn't the courage to do it, signed to the Chicken, with an aching heart, and away went the Joy, cleaving the water like an arrow.

The Joy was lying in a state of extraordinary splendour, at the garden steps, on the morning of Florence's departure. When she went downstairs to take leave, after her talk with Susan, she found Mr Toots awaiting her in the drawing-room.

'Oh, how de do, Miss Dombey?' said the stricken Toots, always dreadfully disconcerted when the desire of his heart was gained, and he was speaking to her; 'thank you, I'm very well indeed, I hope you're the same, so was Diogenes yesterday.'

'You are very kind,' said Florence.

'Thank you, it's of no consequence,' retorted Mr Toots. 'I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind, in this fine weather, coming home by water, Miss Dombey. There's plenty of room in the boat for your maid.'

'I am very much obliged to you,' said Florence, hesitating. 'I really am—but I would rather not.'

'Oh, it's of no consequence,' retorted Mr Toots. 'Good morning.'

'Won't you wait and see Lady Skettles?' asked Florence, kindly.

'Oh no, thank you,' returned Mr Toots, 'it's of no consequence at all.'

So shy was Mr Toots on such occasions, and so flurried! But Lady Skettles entering at the moment, Mr Toots was suddenly seized with a passion for asking her how she did, and hoping she was very well; nor could Mr Toots by any possibility leave off shaking hands with her, until Sir Barnet appeared: to whom he immediately clung with the tenacity of desperation.

'We are losing, today, Toots,' said Sir Barnet, turning towards Florence, 'the light of our house, I assure you'

'Oh, it's of no conseq—I mean yes, to be sure,' faltered the embarrassed Mr Toots. 'Good morning!'

Notwithstanding the emphatic nature of this farewell, Mr Toots, instead of going away, stood leering about him, vacantly. Florence, to relieve him, bade adieu, with many thanks, to Lady Skettles, and gave her arm to Sir Barnet.

'May I beg of you, my dear Miss Dombey,' said her host, as he conducted her to the carriage, 'to present my best compliments to your dear Papa?'

It was distressing to Florence to receive the commission, for she felt as if she were imposing on Sir Barnet by allowing him to believe that a kindness rendered to her, was rendered to her father. As she could not explain, however, she bowed her head and thanked him; and again she thought that the dull home, free from such embarrassments, and such reminders of her sorrow, was her natural and best retreat.

Such of her late friends and companions as were yet remaining at the villa, came running from within, and from the garden, to say good-bye. They were all attached to her, and very earnest in taking leave of her. Even the household were sorry for her going, and the servants came nodding and curtseying round the carriage door. As Florence looked round on the kind faces, and saw among them those of Sir Barnet and his lady, and of Mr Toots, who was chuckling and staring at her from a distance, she was reminded of the night when Paul and she had come from Doctor Blimber's: and when the carriage drove away, her face was wet with tears.

Sorrowful tears, but tears of consolation, too; for all the softer memories connected with the dull old house to which she was returning made it dear to her, as they rose up. How long it seemed since she had wandered through the silent rooms: since she had last crept, softly and afraid, into those her father occupied: since she had felt the solemn but yet soothing influence of the beloved dead in every action of her daily life! This new farewell reminded her, besides, of her parting with poor Walter: of his looks and words that night: and of the gracious blending she had noticed in him, of tenderness for those he left behind, with courage and high spirit. His little history was associated with the old house too, and gave it a new claim and hold upon her heart. Even Susan Nipper softened towards the home of so many years, as they were on their way towards it. Gloomy as it was, and rigid justice as she rendered to its gloom, she forgave it a great deal. 'I shall be glad to see it again, I don't deny, Miss,' said the Nipper. 'There ain't much in it to boast of, but I wouldn't have it burnt or pulled down, neither!'

'You'll be glad to go through the old rooms, won't you, Susan?' said Florence, smiling.

'Well, Miss,' returned the Nipper, softening more and more towards the house, as they approached it nearer, 'I won't deny but what I shall, though I shall hate 'em again, to-morrow, very likely.'

Florence felt that, for her, there was greater peace within it than elsewhere. It was better and easier to keep her secret shut up there, among the tall dark walls, than to carry it abroad into the light, and try to hide it from a crowd of happy eyes. It was better to pursue the study of her loving heart, alone, and find no new discouragements in loving hearts about her. It was easier to hope, and pray, and love on, all uncared for, yet with constancy and patience, in the tranquil sanctuary of such remembrances: although it mouldered, rusted, and decayed about her: than in a new scene, let its gaiety be what it would. She welcomed back her old enchanted dream of life, and longed for the old dark door to close upon her, once again.

Full of such thoughts, they turned into the long and sombre street. Florence was not on that side of the carriage which was nearest to her home, and as the distance lessened between them and it, she looked out of her window for the children over the way.

She was thus engaged, when an exclamation from Susan caused her to turn quickly round.

'Why, Gracious me!' cried Susan, breathless, 'where's our house!'

'Our house!' said Florence.

Susan, drawing in her head from the window, thrust it out again, drew it in again as the carriage stopped, and stared at her mistress in amazement.

There was a labyrinth of scaffolding raised all round the house, from the basement to the roof. Loads of bricks and stones, and heaps of mortar, and piles of wood, blocked up half the width and length of the broad street at the side. Ladders were raised against the walls; labourers were climbing up and down; men were at work upon the steps of the scaffolding; painters and decorators were busy inside; great rolls of ornamental paper were being delivered from a cart at the door; an upholsterer's waggon also stopped the way; no furniture was to be seen through the gaping and broken windows in any of the rooms; nothing but workmen, and the implements of their several trades, swarming from the kitchens to the garrets. Inside and outside alike: bricklayers, painters, carpenters, masons: hammer, hod, brush, pickaxe, saw, and trowel: all at work together, in full chorus!

Florence descended from the coach, half doubting if it were, or could be the right house, until she recognised Towlinson, with a sun-burnt face, standing at the door to receive her.

'There is nothing the matter?' inquired Florence.

'Oh no, Miss.'

'There are great alterations going on.'

'Yes, Miss, great alterations,' said Towlinson.

Florence passed him as if she were in a dream, and hurried upstairs. The garish light was in the long-darkened drawing-room and there were steps and platforms, and men In paper caps, in the high places. Her mother's picture was gone with the rest of the moveables, and on the mark where it had been, was scrawled in chalk, 'this room in panel. Green and gold.' The staircase was a labyrinth of posts and planks like the outside of the house, and a whole Olympus of plumbers and glaziers was reclining in various attitudes, on the skylight. Her own room was not yet touched within, but there were beams and boards raised against it without, baulking the daylight. She went up swiftly to that other bedroom, where the little bed was; and a dark giant of a man with a pipe in his mouth, and his head tied up in a pocket-handkerchief, was staring in at the window.

It was here that Susan Nipper, who had been in quest of Florence, found her, and said, would she go downstairs to her Papa, who wished to speak to her.

'At home! and wishing to speak to me!' cried Florence, trembling.

Susan, who was infinitely more distraught than Florence herself, repeated her errand; and Florence, pale and agitated, hurried down again, without a moment's hesitation. She thought upon the way down, would she dare to kiss him? The longing of her heart resolved her, and she thought she would.

Her father might have heard that heart beat, when it came into his presence. One instant, and it would have beat against his breast.

But he was not alone. There were two ladies there; and Florence stopped. Striving so hard with her emotion, that if her brute friend Di had not burst in and overwhelmed her with his caresses as a welcome home—at which one of the ladies gave a little scream, and that diverted her attention from herself—she would have swooned upon the floor.

'Florence,' said her father, putting out his hand: so stiffly that it held her off: 'how do you do?'

Florence took the hand between her own, and putting it timidly to her lips, yielded to its withdrawal. It touched the door in shutting it, with quite as much endearment as it had touched her.

'What dog is that?' said Mr Dombey, displeased.

'It is a dog, Papa—from Brighton.'

'Well!' said Mr Dombey; and a cloud passed over his face, for he understood her.

'He is very good-tempered,' said Florence, addressing herself with her natural grace and sweetness to the two lady strangers. 'He is only glad to see me. Pray forgive him.'

She saw in the glance they interchanged, that the lady who had screamed, and who was seated, was old; and that the other lady, who stood near her Papa, was very beautiful, and of an elegant figure.

'Mrs Skewton,' said her father, turning to the first, and holding out his hand, 'this is my daughter Florence.'

'Charming, I am sure,' observed the lady, putting up her glass. 'So natural! My darling Florence, you must kiss me, if you please.'

Florence having done so, turned towards the other lady, by whom her father stood waiting.

'Edith,' said Mr Dombey, 'this is my daughter Florence. Florence, this lady will soon be your Mama.'

Florence started, and looked up at the beautiful face in a conflict of emotions, among which the tears that name awakened, struggled for a moment with surprise, interest, admiration, and an indefinable sort of fear. Then she cried out, 'Oh, Papa, may you be happy! may you be very, very happy all your life!' and then fell weeping on the lady's bosom.

There was a short silence. The beautiful lady, who at first had seemed to hesitate whether or no she should advance to Florence, held her to her breast, and pressed the hand with which she clasped her, close about her waist, as if to reassure her and comfort her. Not one word passed the lady's lips. She bent her head down over Florence, and she kissed her on the cheek, but she said no word.

'Shall we go on through the rooms,' said Mr Dombey, 'and see how our workmen are doing? Pray allow me, my dear madam.'

He said this in offering his arm to Mrs Skewton, who had been looking at Florence through her glass, as though picturing to herself what she might be made, by the infusion—from her own copious storehouse, no doubt—of a little more Heart and Nature. Florence was still sobbing on the lady's breast, and holding to her, when Mr Dombey was heard to say from the Conservatory:

'Let us ask Edith. Dear me, where is she?'

'Edith, my dear!' cried Mrs Skewton, 'where are you? Looking for Mr Dombey somewhere, I know. We are here, my love.'

The beautiful lady released her hold of Florence, and pressing her lips once more upon her face, withdrew hurriedly, and joined them. Florence remained standing In the same place: happy, sorry, joyful, and in tears, she knew not how, or how long, but all at once: when her new Mama came back, and took her in her arms again.

'Florence,' said the lady, hurriedly, and looking into her face with great earnestness. 'You will not begin by hating me?'

'By hating you, Mama?' cried Florence, winding her arm round her neck, and returning the look.

'Hush! Begin by thinking well of me,' said the beautiful lady. 'Begin by believing that I will try to make you happy, and that I am prepared to love you, Florence. Good-bye. We shall meet again soon. Good-bye! Don't stay here, now.'

Again she pressed her to her breast she had spoken in a rapid manner, but firmly—and Florence saw her rejoin them in the other room. And now Florence began to hope that she would learn from her new and beautiful Mama, how to gain her father's love; and in her sleep that night, in her lost old home, her own Mama smiled radiantly upon the hope, and blessed it. Dreaming Florence!

CHAPTER 29. The Opening of the Eyes of Mrs Chick

Miss Tox, all unconscious of any such rare appearances in connexion with Mr Dombey's house, as scaffoldings and ladders, and men with their heads tied up in pocket-handkerchiefs, glaring in at the windows like flying genii or strange birds,—having breakfasted one morning at about this eventful period of time, on her customary viands; to wit, one French roll rasped, one egg new laid (or warranted to be), and one little pot of tea, wherein was infused one little silver scoopful of that herb on behalf of Miss Tox, and one little silver scoopful on behalf of the teapot—a flight of fancy in which good housekeepers delight; went upstairs to set forth the bird waltz on the harpsichord, to water and arrange the plants, to dust the nick-nacks, and, according to her daily custom, to make her little drawing-room the garland of Princess's Place.

Miss Tox endued herself with a pair of ancient gloves, like dead leaves, in which she was accustomed to perform these avocations—hidden from human sight at other times in a table drawer—and went methodically to work; beginning with the bird waltz; passing, by a natural association of ideas, to her bird—a very high-shouldered canary, stricken in years, and much rumpled, but a piercing singer, as Princess's Place well knew; taking, next in order, the little china ornaments, paper fly-cages, and so forth; and coming round, in good time, to the plants, which generally required to be snipped here and there with a pair of scissors, for some botanical reason that was very powerful with Miss Tox. Miss Tox was slow in coming to the plants, this morning. The weather was warm, the wind southerly; and there was a sigh of the summer-time In Princess's Place, that turned Miss Tox's thoughts upon the country. The pot-boy attached to the Princess's Arms had come out with a can and trickled water, in a flowering pattern, all over Princess's Place, and it gave the weedy ground a fresh scent—quite a growing scent, Miss Tox said. There was a tiny blink of sun peeping in from the great street round the corner, and the smoky sparrows hopped over it and back again, brightening as they passed: or bathed in it, like a stream, and became glorified sparrows, unconnected with chimneys. Legends in praise of Ginger-Beer, with pictorial representations of thirsty customers submerged in the effervescence, or stunned by the flying corks, were conspicuous in the window of the Princess's Arms. They were making late hay, somewhere out of town; and though the fragrance had a long way to come, and many counter fragrances to contend with among the dwellings of the poor (may God reward the worthy gentlemen who stickle for the Plague as part and parcel of the wisdom of our ancestors, and who do their little best to keep those dwellings miserable!), yet it was wafted faintly into Princess's Place, whispering of Nature and her wholesome air, as such things will, even unto prisoners and captives, and those who are desolate and oppressed, in very spite of aldermen and knights to boot: at whose sage nod—and how they nod!- -the rolling world stands still!

Miss Tox sat down upon the window-seat, and thought of her good Papa deceased—Mr Tox, of the Customs Department of the public service; and of her childhood, passed at a seaport, among a considerable quantity of cold tar, and some rusticity. She fell into a softened remembrance of meadows, in old time, gleaming with buttercups, like so many inverted firmaments of golden stars; and how she had made chains of dandelion-stalks for youthful vowers of eternal constancy, dressed chiefly in nankeen; and how soon those fetters had withered and broken.

Sitting on the window-seat, and looking out upon the sparrows and the blink of sun, Miss Tox thought likewise of her good Mama deceased—sister to the owner of the powdered head and pigtail—of her virtues and her rheumatism. And when a man with bulgy legs, and a rough voice, and a heavy basket on his head that crushed his hat into a mere black muffin, came crying flowers down Princess's Place, making his timid little roots of daisies shudder in the vibration of every yell he gave, as though he had been an ogre, hawking little children, summer recollections were so strong upon Miss Tox, that she shook her head, and murmured she would be comparatively old before she knew it—which seemed likely.

In her pensive mood, Miss Tox's thoughts went wandering on Mr Dombey's track; probably because the Major had returned home to his lodgings opposite, and had just bowed to her from his window. What other reason could Miss Tox have for connecting Mr Dombey with her summer days and dandelion fetters? Was he more cheerful? thought Miss Tox. Was he reconciled to the decrees of fate? Would he ever marry again? and if yes, whom? What sort of person now!

A flush—it was warm weather—overspread Miss Tox's face, as, while entertaining these meditations, she turned her head, and was surprised by the reflection of her thoughtful image In the chimney-glass. Another flush succeeded when she saw a little carriage drive into Princess's Place, and make straight for her own door. Miss Tox arose, took up her scissors hastily, and so coming, at last, to the plants, was very busy with them when Mrs Chick entered the room.

'How is my sweetest friend!' exclaimed Miss Tox, with open arms.

A little stateliness was mingled with Miss Tox's sweetest friend's demeanour, but she kissed Miss Tox, and said, 'Lucretia, thank you, I am pretty well. I hope you are the same. Hem!'

Mrs Chick was labouring under a peculiar little monosyllabic cough; a sort of primer, or easy introduction to the art of coughing.

'You call very early, and how kind that is, my dear!' pursued Miss Tox. 'Now, have you breakfasted?'

'Thank you, Lucretia,' said Mrs Chick, 'I have. I took an early breakfast'—the good lady seemed curious on the subject of Princess's Place, and looked all round it as she spoke—'with my brother, who has come home.'

'He is better, I trust, my love,' faltered Miss Tox.

'He is greatly better, thank you. Hem!'

'My dear Louisa must be careful of that cough' remarked Miss Tox.

'It's nothing,' returned Mrs Chic 'It's merely change of weather. We must expect change.'

'Of weather?' asked Miss Tox, in her simplicity.

'Of everything' returned Mrs Chick 'Of course we must. It's a world of change. Anyone would surprise me very much, Lucretia, and would greatly alter my opinion of their understanding, if they attempted to contradict or evade what is so perfectly evident. Change!' exclaimed Mrs Chick, with severe philosophy. 'Why, my gracious me, what is there that does not change! even the silkworm, who I am sure might be supposed not to trouble itself about such subjects, changes into all sorts of unexpected things continually.'

'My Louisa,' said the mild Miss Tox, 'is ever happy in her illustrations.'

'You are so kind, Lucretia,' returned Mrs Chick, a little softened, 'as to say so, and to think so, I believe. I hope neither of us may ever have any cause to lessen our opinion of the other, Lucretia.'

'I am sure of it,' returned Miss Tox.

Mrs Chick coughed as before, and drew lines on the carpet with the ivory end of her parasol. Miss Tox, who had experience of her fair friend, and knew that under the pressure of any slight fatigue or vexation she was prone to a discursive kind of irritability, availed herself of the pause, to change the subject.

'Pardon me, my dear Louisa,' said Miss Tox, 'but have I caught sight of the manly form of Mr Chick in the carriage?'

'He is there,' said Mrs Chick, 'but pray leave him there. He has his newspaper, and would be quite contented for the next two hours. Go on with your flowers, Lucretia, and allow me to sit here and rest.'

'My Louisa knows,' observed Miss Tox, 'that between friends like ourselves, any approach to ceremony would be out of the question. Therefore—' Therefore Miss Tox finished the sentence, not in words but action; and putting on her gloves again, which she had taken off, and arming herself once more with her scissors, began to snip and clip among the leaves with microscopic industry.

'Florence has returned home also,' said Mrs Chick, after sitting silent for some time, with her head on one side, and her parasol sketching on the floor; 'and really Florence is a great deal too old now, to continue to lead that solitary life to which she has been accustomed. Of course she is. There can be no doubt about it. I should have very little respect, indeed, for anybody who could advocate a different opinion. Whatever my wishes might be, I could not respect them. We cannot command our feelings to such an extent as that.'

Miss Tox assented, without being particular as to the intelligibility of the proposition.

'If she's a strange girl,' said Mrs Chick, 'and if my brother Paul cannot feel perfectly comfortable in her society, after all the sad things that have happened, and all the terrible disappointments that have been undergone, then, what is the reply? That he must make an effort. That he is bound to make an effort. We have always been a family remarkable for effort. Paul is at the head of the family; almost the only representative of it left— for what am I—I am of no consequence—'

'My dearest love,' remonstrated Miss Tox.

Mrs Chick dried her eyes, which were, for the moment, overflowing; and proceeded:

'And consequently he is more than ever bound to make an effort. And though his having done so, comes upon me with a sort of shock—for mine is a very weak and foolish nature; which is anything but a blessing I am sure; I often wish my heart was a marble slab, or a paving-stone—

'My sweet Louisa,' remonstrated Miss Tox again.

'Still, it is a triumph to me to know that he is so true to himself, and to his name of Dombey; although, of course, I always knew he would be. I only hope,' said Mrs Chick, after a pause, 'that she may be worthy of the name too.

Miss Tox filled a little green watering-pot from a jug, and happening to look up when she had done so, was so surprised by the amount of expression Mrs Chick had conveyed into her face, and was bestowing upon her, that she put the little watering-pot on the table for the present, and sat down near it.

'My dear Louisa,' said Miss Tox, 'will it be the least satisfaction to you, if I venture to observe in reference to that remark, that I, as a humble individual, think your sweet niece in every way most promising?' 'What do you mean, Lucretia?' returned Mrs Chick, with increased stateliness of manner. 'To what remark of mine, my dear, do you refer?'

'Her being worthy of her name, my love,' replied Miss Tox.

'If,' said Mrs Chick, with solemn patience, 'I have not expressed myself with clearness, Lucretia, the fault of course is mine. There is, perhaps, no reason why I should express myself at all, except the intimacy that has subsisted between us, and which I very much hope, Lucretia—confidently hope— nothing will occur to disturb. Because, why should I do anything else? There is no reason; it would be absurd. But I wish to express myself clearly, Lucretia; and therefore to go back to that remark, I must beg to say that it was not intended to relate to Florence, in any way.'

'Indeed!' returned Miss Tox.

'No,' said Mrs Chick shortly and decisively.

'Pardon me, my dear,' rejoined her meek friend; 'but I cannot have understood it. I fear I am dull.'

Mrs Chick looked round the room and over the way; at the plants, at the bird, at the watering-pot, at almost everything within view, except Miss Tox; and finally dropping her glance upon Miss Tox, for a moment, on its way to the ground, said, looking meanwhile with elevated eyebrows at the carpet:

'When I speak, Lucretia, of her being worthy of the name, I speak of my brother Paul's second wife. I believe I have already said, in effect, if not in the very words I now use, that it is his intention to marry a second wife.'

Miss Tox left her seat in a hurry, and returned to her plants; clipping among the stems and leaves, with as little favour as a barber working at so many pauper heads of hair.

'Whether she will be fully sensible of the distinction conferred upon her,' said Mrs Chick, in a lofty tone, 'is quite another question. I hope she may be. We are bound to think well of one another in this world, and I hope she may be. I have not been advised with myself If I had been advised with, I have no doubt my advice would have been cavalierly received, and therefore it is infinitely better as it is. I much prefer it as it is.'

Miss Tox, with head bent down, still clipped among the plants. Mrs Chick, with energetic shakings of her own head from time to time, continued to hold forth, as if in defiance of somebody. 'If my brother Paul had consulted with me, which he sometimes does—or rather, sometimes used to do; for he will naturally do that no more now, and this is a circumstance which I regard as a relief from responsibility,' said Mrs Chick, hysterically, 'for I thank Heaven I am not jealous—' here Mrs Chick again shed tears: 'if my brother Paul had come to me, and had said, "Louisa, what kind of qualities would you advise me to look out for, in a wife?" I should certainly have answered, "Paul, you must have family, you must have beauty, you must have dignity, you must have connexion." Those are the words I should have used. You might have led me to the block immediately afterwards,' said Mrs Chick, as if that consequence were highly probable, 'but I should have used them. I should have said, "Paul! You to marry a second time without family! You to marry without beauty! You to marry without dignity! You to marry without connexion! There is nobody in the world, not mad, who could dream of daring to entertain such a preposterous idea!"'

Miss Tox stopped clipping; and with her head among the plants, listened attentively. Perhaps Miss Tox thought there was hope in this exordium, and the warmth of Mrs Chick.

I should have adopted this course of argument,' pursued the discreet lady, 'because I trust I am not a fool. I make no claim to be considered a person of superior intellect—though I believe some people have been extraordinary enough to consider me so; one so little humoured as I am, would very soon be disabused of any such notion; but I trust I am not a downright fool. And to tell ME,' said Mrs Chick with ineffable disdain, 'that my brother Paul Dombey could ever contemplate the possibility of uniting himself to anybody—I don't care who'—she was more sharp and emphatic in that short clause than in any other part of her discourse—'not possessing these requisites, would be to insult what understanding I have got, as much as if I was to be told that I was born and bred an elephant, which I may be told next,' said Mrs Chick, with resignation. 'It wouldn't surprise me at all. I expect it.'

In the moment's silence that ensued, Miss Tox's scissors gave a feeble clip or two; but Miss Tox's face was still invisible, and Miss Tox's morning gown was agitated. Mrs Chick looked sideways at her, through the intervening plants, and went on to say, in a tone of bland conviction, and as one dwelling on a point of fact that hardly required to be stated:

'Therefore, of course my brother Paul has done what was to be expected of him, and what anybody might have foreseen he would do, if he entered the marriage state again. I confess it takes me rather by surprise, however gratifying; because when Paul went out of town I had no idea at all that he would form any attachment out of town, and he certainly had no attachment when he left here. However, it seems to be extremely desirable in every point of view. I have no doubt the mother is a most genteel and elegant creature, and I have no right whatever to dispute the policy of her living with them: which is Paul's affair, not mine—and as to Paul's choice, herself, I have only seen her picture yet, but that is beautiful indeed. Her name is beautiful too,' said Mrs Chick, shaking her head with energy, and arranging herself in her chair; 'Edith is at once uncommon, as it strikes me, and distinguished. Consequently, Lucretia, I have no doubt you will be happy to hear that the marriage is to take place immediately—of course, you will:' great emphasis again: 'and that you are delighted with this change in the condition of my brother, who has shown you a great deal of pleasant attention at various times.'

Miss Tox made no verbal answer, but took up the little watering-pot with a trembling hand, and looked vacantly round as if considering what article of furniture would be improved by the contents. The room door opening at this crisis of Miss Tox's feelings, she started, laughed aloud, and fell into the arms of the person entering; happily insensible alike of Mrs Chick's indignant countenance and of the Major at his window over the way, who had his double-barrelled eye-glass in full action, and whose face and figure were dilated with Mephistophelean joy.

Not so the expatriated Native, amazed supporter of Miss Tox's swooning form, who, coming straight upstairs, with a polite inquiry touching Miss Tox's health (in exact pursuance of the Major's malicious instructions), had accidentally arrived in the very nick of time to catch the delicate burden in his arms, and to receive the content' of the little watering-pot in his shoe; both of which circumstances, coupled with his consciousness of being closely watched by the wrathful Major, who had threatened the usual penalty in regard of every bone in his skin in case of any failure, combined to render him a moving spectacle of mental and bodily distress.

For some moments, this afflicted foreigner remained clasping Miss Tox to his heart, with an energy of action in remarkable opposition to his disconcerted face, while that poor lady trickled slowly down upon him the very last sprinklings of the little watering-pot, as if he were a delicate exotic (which indeed he was), and might be almost expected to blow while the gentle rain descended. Mrs Chick, at length recovering sufficient presence of mind to interpose, commanded him to drop Miss Tox upon the sofa and withdraw; and the exile promptly obeying, she applied herself to promote Miss Tox's recovery.

But none of that gentle concern which usually characterises the daughters of Eve in their tending of each other; none of that freemasonry in fainting, by which they are generally bound together In a mysterious bond of sisterhood; was visible in Mrs Chick's demeanour. Rather like the executioner who restores the victim to sensation previous to proceeding with the torture (or was wont to do so, in the good old times for which all true men wear perpetual mourning), did Mrs Chick administer the smelling-bottle, the slapping on the hands, the dashing of cold water on the face, and the other proved remedies. And when, at length, Miss Tox opened her eyes, and gradually became restored to animation and consciousness, Mrs Chick drew off as from a criminal, and reversing the precedent of the murdered king of Denmark, regarded her more in anger than In sorrow.'

'Lucretia!' said Mrs Chick 'I will not attempt to disguise what I feel. My eyes are opened, all at once. I wouldn't have believed this, if a Saint had told it to me.

'I am foolish to give way to faintness,' Miss Tox faltered. 'I shall be better presently.'

'You will be better presently, Lucretia!' repeated Mrs Chick, with exceeding scorn. 'Do you suppose I am blind? Do you imagine I am in my second childhood? No, Lucretia! I am obliged to you!'

Miss Tox directed an imploring, helpless kind of look towards her friend, and put her handkerchief before her face.

'If anyone had told me this yesterday,' said Mrs Chick, with majesty, 'or even half-an-hour ago, I should have been tempted, I almost believe, to strike them to the earth. Lucretia Tox, my eyes are opened to you all at once. The scales:' here Mrs Chick cast down an imaginary pair, such as are commonly used in grocers' shops: 'have fallen from my sight. The blindness of my confidence is past, Lucretia. It has been abused and played, upon, and evasion is quite out of the question now, I assure you.

'Oh! to what do you allude so cruelly, my love?' asked Miss Tox, through her tears.

'Lucretia,' said Mrs Chick, 'ask your own heart. I must entreat you not to address me by any such familiar term as you have just used, if you please. I have some self-respect left, though you may think otherwise.'

'Oh, Louisa!' cried Miss Tox. 'How can you speak to me like that?'

'How can I speak to you like that?' retorted Mrs Chick, who, in default of having any particular argument to sustain herself upon, relied principally on such repetitions for her most withering effects. 'Like that! You may well say like that, indeed!'

Miss Tox sobbed pitifully.

'The idea!' said Mrs Chick, 'of your having basked at my brother's fireside, like a serpent, and wound yourself, through me, almost into his confidence, Lucretia, that you might, in secret, entertain designs upon him, and dare to aspire to contemplate the possibility of his uniting himself to you! Why, it is an idea,' said Mrs Chick, with sarcastic dignity, 'the absurdity of which almost relieves its treachery.'

'Pray, Louisa,' urged Miss Tox, 'do not say such dreadful things.'

'Dreadful things!' repeated Mrs Chick. 'Dreadful things! Is it not a fact, Lucretia, that you have just now been unable to command your feelings even before me, whose eyes you had so completely closed?'

'I have made no complaint,' sobbed Miss Tox. 'I have said nothing. If I have been a little overpowered by your news, Louisa, and have ever had any lingering thought that Mr Dombey was inclined to be particular towards me, surely you will not condemn me.'

'She is going to say,' said Mrs Chick, addressing herself to the whole of the furniture, in a comprehensive glance of resignation and appeal, 'She is going to say—I know it—that I have encouraged her!'

'I don't wish to exchange reproaches, dear Louisa,' sobbed Miss Tox 'Nor do I wish to complain. But, in my own defence—'

'Yes,' cried Mrs Chick, looking round the room with a prophetic smile, 'that's what she's going to say. I knew it. You had better say it. Say it openly! Be open, Lucretia Tox,' said Mrs Chick, with desperate sternness, 'whatever you are.'

'In my own defence,' faltered Miss Tox, 'and only In my own defence against your unkind words, my dear Louisa, I would merely ask you if you haven't often favoured such a fancy, and even said it might happen, for anything we could tell?'

'There is a point,' said Mrs Chick, rising, not as if she were going to stop at the floor, but as if she were about to soar up, high, into her native skies, 'beyond which endurance becomes ridiculous, if not culpable. I can bear much; but not too much. What spell was on me when I came into this house this day, I don't know; but I had a presentiment—a dark presentiment,' said Mrs Chick, with a shiver, 'that something was going to happen. Well may I have had that foreboding, Lucretia, when my confidence of many years is destroyed in an instant, when my eyes are opened all at once, and when I find you revealed in your true colours. Lucretia, I have been mistaken in you. It is better for us both that this subject should end here. I wish you well, and I shall ever wish you well. But, as an individual who desires to be true to herself in her own poor position, whatever that position may be, or may not be—and as the sister of my brother—and as the sister-in-law of my brother's wife—and as a connexion by marriage of my brother's wife's mother—may I be permitted to add, as a Dombey?—I can wish you nothing else but good morning.'

These words, delivered with cutting suavity, tempered and chastened by a lofty air of moral rectitude, carried the speaker to the door. There she inclined her head in a ghostly and statue-like manner, and so withdrew to her carriage, to seek comfort and consolation in the arms of Mr Chick, her lord.

Figuratively speaking, that is to say; for the arms of Mr Chick were full of his newspaper. Neither did that gentleman address his eyes towards his wife otherwise than by stealth. Neither did he offer any consolation whatever. In short, he sat reading, and humming fag ends of tunes, and sometimes glancing furtively at her without delivering himself of a word, good, bad, or indifferent.

In the meantime Mrs Chick sat swelling and bridling, and tossing her head, as if she were still repeating that solemn formula of farewell to Lucretia Tox. At length, she said aloud, 'Oh the extent to which her eyes had been opened that day!'

'To which your eyes have been opened, my dear!' repeated Mr Chick.

'Oh, don't talk to me!' said Mrs Chic 'if you can bear to see me in this state, and not ask me what the matter is, you had better hold your tongue for ever.'

'What is the matter, my dear?' asked Mr Chick

'To think,' said Mrs Chick, in a state of soliloquy, 'that she should ever have conceived the base idea of connecting herself with our family by a marriage with Paul! To think that when she was playing at horses with that dear child who is now in his grave—I never liked it at the time—she should have been hiding such a double-faced design! I wonder she was never afraid that something would happen to her. She is fortunate if nothing does.'

'I really thought, my dear,' said Mr Chick slowly, after rubbing the bridge of his nose for some time with his newspaper, 'that you had gone on the same tack yourself, all along, until this morning; and had thought it would be a convenient thing enough, if it could have been brought about.'

Mrs Chick instantly burst into tears, and told Mr Chick that if he wished to trample upon her with his boots, he had better do It.

'But with Lucretia Tox I have done,' said Mrs Chick, after abandoning herself to her feelings for some minutes, to Mr Chick's great terror. 'I can bear to resign Paul's confidence in favour of one who, I hope and trust, may be deserving of it, and with whom he has a perfect right to replace poor Fanny if he chooses; I can bear to be informed, In Paul's cool manner, of such a change in his plans, and never to be consulted until all is settled and determined; but deceit I can not bear, and with Lucretia Tox I have done. It is better as it is,' said Mrs Chick, piously; 'much better. It would have been a long time before I could have accommodated myself comfortably with her, after this; and I really don't know, as Paul is going to be very grand, and these are people of condition, that she would have been quite presentable, and might not have compromised myself. There's a providence in everything; everything works for the best; I have been tried today but on the whole I do not regret it.'

In which Christian spirit, Mrs Chick dried her eyes and smoothed her lap, and sat as became a person calm under a great wrong. Mr Chick feeling his unworthiness no doubt, took an early opportunity of being set down at a street corner and walking away whistling, with his shoulders very much raised, and his hands in his pockets.

While poor excommunicated Miss Tox, who, if she were a fawner and toad-eater, was at least an honest and a constant one, and had ever borne a faithful friendship towards her impeacher and had been truly absorbed and swallowed up in devotion to the magnificence of Mr Dombey—while poor excommunicated Miss Tox watered her plants with her tears, and felt that it was winter in Princess's Place.

CHAPTER 30. The interval before the Marriage

Although the enchanted house was no more, and the working world had broken into it, and was hammering and crashing and tramping up and down stairs all day long keeping Diogenes in an incessant paroxysm of barking, from sunrise to sunset—evidently convinced that his enemy had got the better of him at last, and was then sacking the premises in triumphant defiance—there was, at first, no other great change in the method of Florence's life. At night, when the workpeople went away, the house was dreary and deserted again; and Florence, listening to their voices echoing through the hall and staircase as they departed, pictured to herself the cheerful homes to which the were returning, and the children who were waiting for them, and was glad to think that they were merry and well pleased to go.

She welcomed back the evening silence as an old friend, but it came now with an altered face, and looked more kindly on her. Fresh hope was in it. The beautiful lady who had soothed and carressed her, in the very room in which her heart had been so wrung, was a spirit of promise to her. Soft shadows of the bright life dawning, when her father's affection should be gradually won, and all, or much should be restored, of what she had lost on the dark day when a mother's love had faded with a mother's last breath on her cheek, moved about her in the twilight and were welcome company. Peeping at the rosy children her neighbours, it was a new and precious sensation to think that they might soon speak together and know each other; when she would not fear, as of old, to show herself before them, lest they should be grieved to see her in her black dress sitting there alone!

In her thoughts of her new mother, and in the love and trust overflowing her pure heart towards her, Florence loved her own dead mother more and more. She had no fear of setting up a rival in her breast. The new flower sprang from the deep-planted and long-cherished root, she knew. Every gentle word that had fallen from the lips of the beautiful lady, sounded to Florence like an echo of the voice long hushed and silent. How could she love that memory less for living tenderness, when it was her memory of all parental tenderness and love!

Florence was, one day, sitting reading in her room, and thinking of the lady and her promised visit soon—for her book turned on a kindred subject — when, raising her eyes, she saw her standing in the doorway.

'Mama!' cried Florence, joyfully meeting her. 'Come again!'

'Not Mama yet,' returned the lady, with a serious smile, as she encircled Florence's neck with her arm.

'But very soon to be,' cried Florence.

'Very soon now, Florence: very soon.

Edith bent her head a little, so as to press the blooming cheek of Florence against her own, and for some few moments remained thus silent. There was something so very tender in her manner, that Florence was even more sensible of it than on the first occasion of their meeting.

She led Florence to a chair beside her, and sat down: Florence looking in her face, quite wondering at its beauty, and willingly leaving her hand In hers.

'Have you been alone, Florence, since I was here last?'

'Oh yes!' smiled Florence, hastily.

She hesitated and cast down her eyes; for her new Mama was very earnest in her look, and the look was intently and thoughtfully fixed upon her face.

'I—I—am used to be alone,' said Florence. 'I don't mind it at all. Di and I pass whole days together, sometimes.' Florence might have said, whole weeks and months.

'Is Di your maid, love?'

'My dog, Mama,' said Florence, laughing. 'Susan is my maid.'

'And these are your rooms,' said Edith, looking round. 'I was not shown these rooms the other day. We must have them improved, Florence. They shall be made the prettiest in the house.'

'If I might change them, Mama,' returned Florence; 'there is one upstairs I should like much better.'

'Is this not high enough, dear girl?' asked Edith, smiling.

'The other was my brother's room,' said Florence, 'and I am very fond of it. I would have spoken to Papa about it when I came home, and found the workmen here, and everything changing; but—'

Florence dropped her eyes, lest the same look should make her falter again.

'but I was afraid it might distress him; and as you said you would be here again soon, Mama, and are the mistress of everything, I determined to take courage and ask you.'

Edith sat looking at her, with her brilliant eyes intent upon her face, until Florence raising her own, she, in her turn, withdrew her gaze, and turned it on the ground. It was then that Florence thought how different this lady's beauty was, from what she had supposed. She had thought it of a proud and lofty kind; yet her manner was so subdued and gentle, that if she had been of Florence's own age and character, it scarcely could have invited confidence more.

Except when a constrained and singular reserve crept over her; and then she seemed (but Florence hardly understood this, though she could not choose but notice it, and think about it) as if she were humbled before Florence, and ill at ease. When she had said that she was not her Mama yet, and when Florence had called her the mistress of everything there, this change in her was quick and startling; and now, while the eyes of Florence rested on her face, she sat as though she would have shrunk and hidden from her, rather than as one about to love and cherish her, in right of such a near connexion.

She gave Florence her ready promise, about her new room, and said she would give directions about it herself. She then asked some questions concerning poor Paul; and when they had sat in conversation for some time, told Florence she had come to take her to her own home.

'We have come to London now, my mother and I,' said Edith, 'and you shall stay with us until I am married. I wish that we should know and trust each other, Florence.'

'You are very kind to me,' said Florence, 'dear Mama. How much I thank you!'

'Let me say now, for it may be the best opportunity,' continued Edith, looking round to see that they were quite alone, and speaking in a lower voice, 'that when I am married, and have gone away for some weeks, I shall be easier at heart if you will come home here. No matter who invites you to stay elsewhere. Come home here. It is better to be alone than—what I would say is,' she added, checking herself, 'that I know well you are best at home, dear Florence.'

'I will come home on the very day, Mama'

'Do so. I rely on that promise. Now, prepare to come with me, dear girl. You will find me downstairs when you are ready.'

Slowly and thoughtfully did Edith wander alone through the mansion of which she was so soon to be the lady: and little heed took she of all the elegance and splendour it began to display. The same indomitable haughtiness of soul, the same proud scorn expressed in eye and lip, the same fierce beauty, only tamed by a sense of its own little worth, and of the little worth of everything around it, went through the grand saloons and halls, that had got loose among the shady trees, and raged and rent themselves. The mimic roses on the walls and floors were set round with sharp thorns, that tore her breast; in every scrap of gold so dazzling to the eye, she saw some hateful atom of her purchase-money; the broad high mirrors showed her, at full length, a woman with a noble quality yet dwelling in her nature, who was too false to her better self, and too debased and lost, to save herself. She believed that all this was so plain, more or less, to all eyes, that she had no resource or power of self-assertion but in pride: and with this pride, which tortured her own heart night and day, she fought her fate out, braved it, and defied it.

Was this the woman whom Florence—an innocent girl, strong only in her earnestness and simple truth—could so impress and quell, that by her side she was another creature, with her tempest of passion hushed, and her very pride itself subdued? Was this the woman who now sat beside her in a carriage, with her arms entwined, and who, while she courted and entreated her to love and trust her, drew her fair head to nestle on her breast, and would have laid down life to shield it from wrong or harm?

Oh, Edith! it were well to die, indeed, at such a time! Better and happier far, perhaps, to die so, Edith, than to live on to the end!

The Honourable Mrs Skewton, who was thinking of anything rather than of such sentiments—for, like many genteel persons who have existed at various times, she set her face against death altogether, and objected to the mention of any such low and levelling upstart—had borrowed a house in Brook Street, Grosvenor Square, from a stately relative (one of the Feenix brood), who was out of town, and who did not object to lending it, in the handsomest manner, for nuptial purposes, as the loan implied his final release and acquittance from all further loans and gifts to Mrs Skewton and her daughter. It being necessary for the credit of the family to make a handsome appearance at such a time, Mrs Skewton, with the assistance of an accommodating tradesman resident In the parish of Mary-le-bone, who lent out all sorts of articles to the nobility and gentry, from a service of plate to an army of footmen, clapped into this house a silver-headed butler (who was charged extra on that account, as having the appearance of an ancient family retainer), two very tall young men in livery, and a select staff of kitchen-servants; so that a legend arose, downstairs, that Withers the page, released at once from his numerous household duties, and from the propulsion of the wheeled-chair (inconsistent with the metropolis), had been several times observed to rub his eyes and pinch his limbs, as if he misdoubted his having overslept himself at the Leamington milkman's, and being still in a celestial dream. A variety of requisites in plate and china being also conveyed to the same establishment from the same convenient source, with several miscellaneous articles, including a neat chariot and a pair of bays, Mrs Skewton cushioned herself on the principal sofa, in the Cleopatra attitude, and held her court in fair state.

'And how,' said Mrs Skewton, on the entrance of her daughter and her charge, 'is my charming Florence? You must come and kiss me, Florence, if you please, my love.'

Florence was timidly stooping to pick out a place In the white part of Mrs Skewton's face, when that lady presented her ear, and relieved her of her difficulty.

'Edith, my dear,' said Mrs Skewton, 'positively, I—stand a little more in the light, my sweetest Florence, for a moment.

Florence blushingly complied.

'You don't remember, dearest Edith,' said her mother, 'what you were when you were about the same age as our exceedingly precious Florence, or a few years younger?'

'I have long forgotten, mother.'

'For positively, my dear,' said Mrs Skewton, 'I do think that I see a decided resemblance to what you were then, in our extremely fascinating young friend. And it shows,' said Mrs Skewton, in a lower voice, which conveyed her opinion that Florence was in a very unfinished state, 'what cultivation will do.'

'It does, indeed,' was Edith's stern reply.

Her mother eyed her sharply for a moment, and feeling herself on unsafe ground, said, as a diversion:

'My charming Florence, you must come and kiss me once more, if you please, my love.'

Florence complied, of course, and again imprinted her lips on Mrs Skewton's ear.

'And you have heard, no doubt, my darling pet,' said Mrs Skewton, detaining her hand, 'that your Papa, whom we all perfectly adore and dote upon, is to be married to my dearest Edith this day week.'

'I knew it would be very soon,' returned Florence, 'but not exactly when.'

'My darling Edith,' urged her mother, gaily, 'is it possible you have not told Florence?'

'Why should I tell Florence?' she returned, so suddenly and harshly, that Florence could scarcely believe it was the same voice.

Mrs Skewton then told Florence, as another and safer diversion, that her father was coming to dinner, and that he would no doubt be charmingly surprised to see her; as he had spoken last night of dressing in the City, and had known nothing of Edith's design, the execution of which, according to Mrs Skewton's expectation, would throw him into a perfect ecstasy. Florence was troubled to hear this; and her distress became so keen, as the dinner-hour approached, that if she had known how to frame an entreaty to be suffered to return home, without involving her father in her explanation, she would have hurried back on foot, bareheaded, breathless, and alone, rather than incur the risk of meeting his displeasure.

As the time drew nearer, she could hardly breathe. She dared not approach a window, lest he should see her from the street. She dared not go upstairs to hide her emotion, lest, in passing out at the door, she should meet him unexpectedly; besides which dread, she felt as though she never could come back again if she were summoned to his presence. In this conflict of fears; she was sitting by Cleopatra's couch, endeavouring to understand and to reply to the bald discourse of that lady, when she heard his foot upon the stair.

'I hear him now!' cried Florence, starting. 'He is coming!'

Cleopatra, who in her juvenility was always playfully disposed, and who in her self-engrossment did not trouble herself about the nature of this agitation, pushed Florence behind her couch, and dropped a shawl over her, preparatory to giving Mr Dombey a rapture of surprise. It was so quickly done, that in a moment Florence heard his awful step in the room.

He saluted his intended mother-in-law, and his intended bride. The strange sound of his voice thrilled through the whole frame of his child.

'My dear Dombey,' said Cleopatra, 'come here and tell me how your pretty Florence is.'

'Florence is very well,' said Mr Dombey, advancing towards the couch.

'At home?'

'At home,' said Mr Dombey.

'My dear Dombey,' returned Cleopatra, with bewitching vivacity; 'now are you sure you are not deceiving me? I don't know what my dearest Edith will say to me when I make such a declaration, but upon my honour I am afraid you are the falsest of men, my dear Dombey.'

Though he had been; and had been detected on the spot, in the most enormous falsehood that was ever said or done; he could hardly have been more disconcerted than he was, when Mrs Skewton plucked the shawl away, and Florence, pale and trembling, rose before him like a ghost. He had not yet recovered his presence of mind, when Florence had run up to him, clasped her hands round his neck, kissed his face, and hurried out of the room. He looked round as if to refer the matter to somebody else, but Edith had gone after Florence, instantly.

'Now, confess, my dear Dombey,' said Mrs Skewton, giving him her hand, 'that you never were more surprised and pleased in your life.'

'I never was more surprised,' said Mr Dombey.

'Nor pleased, my dearest Dombey?' returned Mrs Skewton, holding up her fan.

'I—yes, I am exceedingly glad to meet Florence here,' said Mr Dombey. He appeared to consider gravely about it for a moment, and then said, more decidedly, 'Yes, I really am very glad indeed to meet Florence here.'

'You wonder how she comes here?' said Mrs Skewton, 'don't you?'

'Edith, perhaps—' suggested Mr Dombey.

'Ah! wicked guesser!' replied Cleopatra, shaking her head. 'Ah! cunning, cunning man! One shouldn't tell these things; your sex, my dear Dombey, are so vain, and so apt to abuse our weakness; but you know my open soul—very well; immediately.'

This was addressed to one of the very tall young men who announced dinner.

'But Edith, my dear Dombey,' she continued in a whisper, when she cannot have you near her—and as I tell her, she cannot expect that always

—will at least have near her something or somebody belonging to you. Well, how extremely natural that is! And in this spirit, nothing would keep her from riding off to-day to fetch our darling Florence. Well, how excessively charming that is!'

As she waited for an answer, Mr Dombey answered, 'Eminently so.

'Bless you, my dear Dombey, for that proof of heart!' cried Cleopatra, squeezing his hand. 'But I am growing too serious! Take me downstairs, like an angel, and let us see what these people intend to give us for dinner. Bless you, dear Dombey!'

Cleopatra skipping off her couch with tolerable briskness, after the last benediction, Mr Dombey took her arm in his and led her ceremoniously downstairs; one of the very tall young men on hire, whose organ of veneration was imperfectly developed, thrusting his tongue into his cheek, for the entertainment of the other very tall young man on hire, as the couple turned into the dining-room.

Florence and Edith were already there, and sitting side by side. Florence would have risen when her father entered, to resign her chair to him; but Edith openly put her hand upon her arm, and Mr Dombey took an opposite place at the round table.

The conversation was almost entirely sustained by Mrs Skewton. Florence hardly dared to raise her eyes, lest they should reveal the traces of tears; far less dared to speak; and Edith never uttered one word, unless in answer to a question. Verily, Cleopatra worked hard, for the establishment that was so nearly clutched; and verily it should have been a rich one to reward her!

And so your preparations are nearly finished at last, my dear Dombey?' said Cleopatra, when the dessert was put upon the table, and the silver-headed butler had withdrawn. 'Even the lawyers' preparations!'

'Yes, madam,' replied Mr Dombey; 'the deed of settlement, the professional gentlemen inform me, is now ready, and as I was mentioning to you, Edith has only to do us the favour to suggest her own time for its execution.'

Edith sat like a handsome statue; as cold, as silent, and as still.

'My dearest love,' said Cleopatra, 'do you hear what Mr Dombey says? Ah, my dear Dombey!' aside to that gentleman, 'how her absence, as the time approaches, reminds me of the days, when that most agreeable of creatures, her Papa, was in your situation!'

'I have nothing to suggest. It shall be when you please,' said Edith, scarcely looking over the table at Mr Dombey.

'To-morrow?' suggested Mr Dombey.

'If you please.'

'Or would next day,' said Mr Dombey, 'suit your engagements better?'

'I have no engagements. I am always at your disposal. Let it be when you like.'

'No engagements, my dear Edith!' remonstrated her mother, 'when you are in a most terrible state of flurry all day long, and have a thousand and one appointments with all sorts of trades-people!'

'They are of your making,' returned Edith, turning on her with a slight contraction of her brow. 'You and Mr Dombey can arrange between you.'

'Very true indeed, my love, and most considerate of you!' said Cleopatra. 'My darling Florence, you must really come and kiss me once more, if you please, my dear!'

Singular coincidence, that these gushes of interest In Florence hurried Cleopatra away from almost every dialogue in which Edith had a share, however trifling! Florence had certainly never undergone so much embracing, and perhaps had never been, unconsciously, so useful in her life.

Mr Dombey was far from quarrelling, in his own breast, with the manner of his beautiful betrothed. He had that good reason for sympathy with haughtiness and coldness, which is found In a fellow-feeling. It flattered him to think how these deferred to him, in Edith's case, and seemed to have no will apart from his. It flattered him to picture to himself, this proud and stately woman doing the honours of his house, and chilling his guests after his own manner. The dignity of Dombey and Son would be heightened and maintained, indeed, in such hands.

So thought Mr Dombey, when he was left alone at the dining-table, and mused upon his past and future fortunes: finding no uncongeniality in an air of scant and gloomy state that pervaded the room, in colour a dark brown, with black hatchments of pictures blotching the walls, and twenty-four black chairs, with almost as many nails in them as so many coffins, waiting like mutes, upon the threshold of the Turkey carpet; and two exhausted negroes holding up two withered branches of candelabra on the sideboard, and a musty smell prevailing as if the ashes of ten thousand dinners were entombed in the sarcophagus below it. The owner of the house lived much abroad; the air of England seldom agreed long with a member of the Feenix family; and the room had gradually put itself into deeper and still deeper mourning for him, until it was become so funereal as to want nothing but a body in it to be quite complete.

No bad representation of the body, for the nonce, in his unbending form, if not in his attitude, Mr Dombey looked down into the cold depths of the dead sea of mahogany on which the fruit dishes and decanters lay at anchor: as if the subjects of his thoughts were rising towards the surface one by one, and plunging down again. Edith was there In all her majesty of brow and figure; and close to her came Florence, with her timid head turned to him, as it had been, for an instant, when she left the room; and Edith's eyes upon her, and Edith's hand put out protectingly. A little figure in a low arm-chair came springing next into the light, and looked upon him wonderingly, with its bright eyes and its old-young face, gleaming as in the flickering of an evening fire. Again came Florence close upon it, and absorbed his whole attention. Whether as a fore-doomed difficulty and disappointment to him; whether as a rival who had crossed him in his way, and might again; whether as his child, of whom, in his successful wooing, he could stoop to think as claiming, at such a time, to be no more estranged; or whether as a hint to him that the mere appearance of caring for his own blood should be maintained in his new relations; he best knew. Indifferently well, perhaps, at best; for marriage company and marriage altars, and ambitious scenes—still blotted here and there with Florence—always Florence—turned up so fast, and so confusedly, that he rose, and went upstairs to escape them.

It was quite late at night before candles were brought; for at present they made Mrs Skewton's head ache, she complained; and in the meantime Florence and Mrs Skewton talked together (Cleopatra being very anxious to keep her close to herself), or Florence touched the piano softly for Mrs Skewton's delight; to make no mention of a few occasions in the course of the evening, when that affectionate lady was impelled to solicit another kiss, and which always happened after Edith had said anything. They were not many, however, for Edith sat apart by an open window during the whole time (in spite of her mother's fears that she would take cold), and remained there until Mr Dombey took leave. He was serenely gracious to Florence when he did so; and Florence went to bed in a room within Edith's, so happy and hopeful, that she thought of her late self as if it were some other poor deserted girl who was to be pitied for her sorrow; and in her pity, sobbed herself to sleep.

The week fled fast. There were drives to milliners, dressmakers, jewellers, lawyers, florists, pastry-cooks; and Florence was always of the party. Florence was to go to the wedding. Florence was to cast off her mourning, and to wear a brilliant dress on the occasion. The milliner's intentions on the subject of this dress—the milliner was a Frenchwoman, and greatly resembled Mrs Skewton—were so chaste and elegant, that Mrs Skewton bespoke one like it for herself. The milliner said it would become her to admiration, and that all the world would take her for the young lady's sister.

The week fled faster. Edith looked at nothing and cared for nothing. Her rich dresses came home, and were tried on, and were loudly commended by Mrs Skewton and the milliners, and were put away without a word from her. Mrs Skewton made their plans for every day, and executed them. Sometimes Edith sat in the carriage when they went to make purchases; sometimes, when it was absolutely necessary, she went into the shops. But Mrs Skewton conducted the whole business, whatever it happened to be; and Edith looked on as uninterested and with as much apparent indifference as if she had no concern in it. Florence might perhaps have thought she was haughty and listless, but that she was never so to her. So Florence quenched her wonder in her gratitude whenever it broke out, and soon subdued it.

The week fled faster. It had nearly winged its flight away. The last night of the week, the night before the marriage, was come. In the dark room—for Mrs Skewton's head was no better yet, though she expected to recover permanently to-morrow—were that lady, Edith, and Mr Dombey. Edith was at her open window looking out into the street; Mr Dombey and Cleopatra were talking softly on the sofa. It was growing late; and Florence, being fatigued, had gone to bed.

'My dear Dombey,' said Cleopatra, 'you will leave me Florence to-morrow, when you deprive me of my sweetest Edith.'

Mr Dombey said he would, with pleasure.

'To have her about me, here, while you are both at Paris, and to think at her age, I am assisting in the formation of her mind, my dear Dombey,' said Cleopatra, 'will be a perfect balm to me in the extremely shattered state to which I shall be reduced.'

Edith turned her head suddenly. Her listless manner was exchanged, in a moment, to one of burning interest, and, unseen in the darkness, she attended closely to their conversation.

Mr Dombey would be delighted to leave Florence in such admirable guardianship.

'My dear Dombey,' returned Cleopatra, 'a thousand thanks for your good opinion. I feared you were going, with malice aforethought' as the dreadful lawyers say—those horrid proses!—to condemn me to utter solitude.'

'Why do me so great an injustice, my dear madam?' said Mr Dombey.

'Because my charming Florence tells me so positively she must go home tomorrow, returned Cleopatra, that I began to be afraid, my dearest Dombey, you were quite a Bashaw.'

'I assure you, madam!' said Mr Dombey, 'I have laid no commands on Florence; and if I had, there are no commands like your wish.'

'My dear Dombey,' replied Cleopatra, what a courtier you are! Though I'll not say so, either; for courtiers have no heart, and yours pervades your farming life and character. And are you really going so early, my dear Dombey!'

Oh, indeed! it was late, and Mr Dombey feared he must.

'Is this a fact, or is it all a dream!' lisped Cleopatra. 'Can I believe, my dearest Dombey, that you are coming back tomorrow morning to deprive me of my sweet companion; my own Edith!'

Mr Dombey, who was accustomed to take things literally, reminded Mrs Skewton that they were to meet first at the church.

'The pang,' said Mrs Skewton, 'of consigning a child, even to you, my dear Dombey, is one of the most excruciating imaginable, and combined with a naturally delicate constitution, and the extreme stupidity of the pastry-cook who has undertaken the breakfast, is almost too much for my poor strength. But I shall rally, my dear Dombey, In the morning; do not fear for me, or be uneasy on my account. Heaven bless you! My dearest Edith!' she cried archly. 'Somebody is going, pet.'

Edith, who had turned her head again towards the window, and whose interest in their conversation had ceased, rose up in her place, but made no advance towards him, and said nothing. Mr Dombey, with a lofty gallantry adapted to his dignity and the occasion, betook his creaking boots towards her, put her hand to his lips, said, 'Tomorrow morning I shall have the happiness of claiming this hand as Mrs Dombey's,' and bowed himself solemnly out.

Mrs Skewton rang for candles as soon as the house-door had closed upon him. With the candles appeared her maid, with the juvenile dress that was to delude the world to-morrow. The dress had savage retribution in it, as such dresses ever have, and made her infinitely older and more hideous than her greasy flannel gown. But Mrs Skewton tried it on with mincing satisfaction; smirked at her cadaverous self in the glass, as she thought of its killing effect upon the Major; and suffering her maid to take it off again, and to prepare her for repose, tumbled into ruins like a house of painted cards.

All this time, Edith remained at the dark window looking out into the street. When she and her mother were at last left alone, she moved from it for the first time that evening, and came opposite to her. The yawning, shaking, peevish figure of the mother, with her eyes raised to confront the proud erect form of the daughter, whose glance of fire was bent downward upon her, had a conscious air upon it, that no levity or temper could conceal.

'I am tired to death,' said she. 'You can't be trusted for a moment. You are worse than a child. Child! No child would be half so obstinate and undutiful.'

'Listen to me, mother,' returned Edith, passing these words by with a scorn that would not descend to trifle with them. 'You must remain alone here until I return.'

'Must remain alone here, Edith, until you return!' repeated her mother.

'Or in that name upon which I shall call to-morrow to witness what I do, so falsely: and so shamefully, I swear I will refuse the hand of this man in the church. If I do not, may I fall dead upon the pavement!'

The mother answered with a look of quick alarm, in no degree diminished by the look she met.

'It is enough,' said Edith, steadily, 'that we are what we are. I will have no youth and truth dragged down to my level. I will have no guileless nature undermined, corrupted, and perverted, to amuse the leisure of a world of mothers. You know my meaning. Florence must go home.'

'You are an idiot, Edith,' cried her angry mother. 'Do you expect there can ever be peace for you in that house, till she is married, and away?'

'Ask me, or ask yourself, if I ever expect peace in that house,' said her daughter, 'and you know the answer.

'And am I to be told to-night, after all my pains and labour, and when you are going, through me, to be rendered independent,' her mother almost shrieked in her passion, while her palsied head shook like a leaf, 'that there is corruption and contagion in me, and that I am not fit company for a girl! What are you, pray? What are you?'

'I have put the question to myself,' said Edith, ashy pale, and pointing to the window, 'more than once when I have been sitting there, and something in the faded likeness of my sex has wandered past outside; and God knows I have met with my reply. Oh mother, mother, if you had but left me to my natural heart when I too was a girl—a younger girl than Florence—how different I might have been!'

Sensible that any show of anger was useless here, her mother restrained herself, and fell a whimpering, and bewailed that she had lived too long, and that her only child had cast her off, and that duty towards parents was forgotten in these evil days, and that she had heard unnatural taunts, and cared for life no longer.

'If one is to go on living through continual scenes like this,' she whined,'I am sure it would be much better for me to think of some means of putting an end to my existence. Oh! The idea of your being my daughter, Edith, and addressing me in such a strain!'

'Between us, mother,' returned Edith, mournfully, 'the time for mutual reproaches is past.

'Then why do you revive it?' whimpered her mother. 'You know that you are lacerating me in the cruellest manner. You know how sensitive I am to unkindness. At such a moment, too, when I have so much to think of, and am naturally anxious to appear to the best advantage! I wonder at you, Edith. To make your mother a fright upon your wedding-day!'

Edith bent the same fixed look upon her, as she sobbed and rubbed her eyes; and said in the same low steady voice, which had neither risen nor fallen since she first addressed her, 'I have said that Florence must go home.'

'Let her go!' cried the afflicted and affrighted parent, hastily. 'I am sure I am willing she should go. What is the girl to me?'

'She is so much to me, that rather than communicate, or suffer to be communicated to her, one grain of the evil that is in my breast, mother, I would renounce you, as I would (if you gave me cause) renounce him in the church to-morrow,' replied Edith. 'Leave her alone. She shall not, while I can interpose, be tampered with and tainted by the lessons I have learned. This is no hard condition on this bitter night.'

'If you had proposed it in a filial manner, Edith,' whined her mother, 'perhaps not; very likely not. But such extremely cutting words—'

'They are past and at an end between us now,' said Edith. 'Take your own way, mother; share as you please in what you have gained; spend, enjoy, make much of it; and be as happy as you will. The object of our lives is won. Henceforth let us wear it silently. My lips are closed upon the past from this hour. I forgive you your part in to-morrow's wickedness. May God forgive my own!'

Without a tremor in her voice, or frame, and passing onward with a foot that set itself upon the neck of every soft emotion, she bade her mother good- night, and repaired to her own room.

But not to rest; for there was no rest in the tumult of her agitation when alone to and fro, and to and fro, and to and fro again, five hundred times, among the splendid preparations for her adornment on the morrow; with her dark hair shaken down, her dark eyes flashing with a raging light, her broad white bosom red with the cruel grasp of the relentless hand with which she spurned it from her, pacing up and down with an averted head, as if she would avoid the sight of her own fair person, and divorce herself from its companionship. Thus, In the dead time of the night before her bridal, Edith Granger wrestled with her unquiet spirit, tearless, friendless, silent, proud, and uncomplaining.

At length it happened that she touched the open door which led into the room where Florence lay.

She started, stopped, and looked in.

A light was burning there, and showed her Florence in her bloom of innocence and beauty, fast asleep. Edith held her breath, and felt herself drawn on towards her.

Drawn nearer, nearer, nearer yet; at last, drawn so near, that stooping down, she pressed her lips to the gentle hand that lay outside the bed, and put it softly to her neck. Its touch was like the prophet's rod of old upon the rock. Her tears sprung forth beneath it, as she sunk upon her knees, and laid her aching head and streaming hair upon the pillow by its side.

Thus Edith Granger passed the night before her bridal. Thus the sun found her on her bridal morning.

CHAPTER 31. The Wedding

Dawn with its passionless blank face, steals shivering to the church beneath which lies the dust of little Paul and his mother, and looks in at the windows. It is cold and dark. Night crouches yet, upon the pavement, and broods, sombre and heavy, in nooks and corners of the building. The steeple- clock, perched up above the houses, emerging from beneath another of the countless ripples in the tide of time that regularly roll and break on the eternal shore, is greyly visible, like a stone beacon, recording how the sea flows on; but within doors, dawn, at first, can only peep at night, and see that it is there.

Hovering feebly round the church, and looking in, dawn moans and weeps for its short reign, and its tears trickle on the window-glass, and the trees against the church-wall bow their heads, and wring their many hands in sympathy. Night, growing pale before it, gradually fades out of the church, but lingers in the vaults below, and sits upon the coffins. And now comes bright day, burnishing the steeple-clock, and reddening the spire, and drying up the tears of dawn, and stifling its complaining; and the dawn, following the night, and chasing it from its last refuge, shrinks into the vaults itself and hides, with a frightened face, among the dead, until night returns, refreshed, to drive it out.

And now, the mice, who have been busier with the prayer-books than their proper owners, and with the hassocks, more worn by their little teeth than by human knees, hide their bright eyes in their holes, and gather close together in affright at the resounding clashing of the church-door. For the beadle, that man of power, comes early this morning with the sexton; and Mrs Miff, the wheezy little pew-opener—a mighty dry old lady, sparely dressed, with not an inch of fulness anywhere about her—is also here, and has been waiting at the church-gate half-an-hour, as her place is, for the beadle.

A vinegary face has Mrs Miff, and a mortified bonnet, and eke a thirsty soul for sixpences and shillings. Beckoning to stray people to come into pews, has given Mrs Miff an air of mystery; and there is reservation in the eye of Mrs Miff, as always knowing of a softer seat, but having her suspicions of the fee. There is no such fact as Mr Miff, nor has there been, these twenty years, and Mrs Miff would rather not allude to him. He held some bad opinions, it would seem, about free seats; and though Mrs Miff hopes he may be gone upwards, she couldn't positively undertake to say so.

Busy is Mrs Miff this morning at the church-door, beating and dusting the altar-cloth, the carpet, and the cushions; and much has Mrs Miff to say, about the wedding they are going to have. Mrs Miff is told, that the new furniture and alterations in the house cost full five thousand pound if they cost a penny; and Mrs Miff has heard, upon the best authority, that the lady hasn't got a sixpence wherewithal to bless herself. Mrs Miff remembers, like wise, as if it had happened yesterday, the first wife's funeral, and then the christening, and then the other funeral; and Mrs Miff says, by-the- bye she'll soap-and-water that 'ere tablet presently, against the company arrive. Mr Sownds the Beadle, who is sitting in the sun upon the church steps all this time (and seldom does anything else, except, in cold weather, sitting by the fire), approves of Mrs Miff's discourse, and asks if Mrs Miff has heard it said, that the lady is uncommon handsome? The information Mrs Miff has received, being of this nature, Mr Sownds the Beadle, who, though orthodox and corpulent, is still an admirer of female beauty, observes, with unction, yes, he hears she is a spanker—an expression that seems somewhat forcible to Mrs Miff, or would, from any lips but those of Mr Sownds the Beadle.

In Mr Dombey's house, at this same time, there is great stir and bustle, more especially among the women: not one of whom has had a wink of sleep since four o'clock, and all of whom were fully dressed before six. Mr Towlinson is an object of greater consideration than usual to the housemaid, and the cook says at breakfast time that one wedding makes many, which the housemaid can't believe, and don't think true at all. Mr Towlinson reserves his sentiments on this question; being rendered something gloomy by the engagement of a foreigner with whiskers (Mr Towlinson is whiskerless himself), who has been hired to accompany the happy pair to Paris, and who is busy packing the new chariot. In respect of this personage, Mr Towlinson admits, presently, that he never knew of any good that ever come of foreigners; and being charged by the ladies with prejudice, says, look at Bonaparte who was at the head of 'em, and see what he was always up to! Which the housemaid says is very true.

The pastry-cook is hard at work in the funereal room in Brook Street, and the very tall young men are busy looking on. One of the very tall young men already smells of sherry, and his eyes have a tendency to become fixed in his head, and to stare at objects without seeing them. The very tall young man is conscious of this failing in himself; and informs his comrade that it's his 'exciseman.' The very tall young man would say excitement, but his speech is hazy.

The men who play the bells have got scent of the marriage; and the marrow-bones and cleavers too; and a brass band too. The first, are practising in a back settlement near Battlebridge; the second, put themselves in communication, through their chief, with Mr Towlinson, to whom they offer terms to be bought off; and the third, in the person of an artful trombone, lurks and dodges round the corner, waiting for some traitor tradesman to reveal the place and hour of breakfast, for a bribe. Expectation and excitement extend further yet, and take a wider range. From Balls Pond, Mr Perch brings Mrs Perch to spend the day with Mr Dombey's servants, and accompany them, surreptitiously, to see the wedding. In Mr Toots's lodgings, Mr Toots attires himself as if he were at least the Bridegroom; determined to behold the spectacle in splendour from a secret corner of the gallery, and thither to convey the Chicken: for it is Mr Toots's desperate intent to point out Florence to the Chicken, then and there, and openly to say, 'Now, Chicken, I will not deceive you any longer; the friend I have sometimes mentioned to you is myself; Miss Dombey is the object of my passion; what are your opinions, Chicken, in this state of things, and what, on the spot, do you advise? The so-much-to-be-astonished Chicken, in the meanwhile, dips his beak into a tankard of strong beer, in Mr Toots's kitchen, and pecks up two pounds of beefsteaks. In Princess's Place, Miss Tox is up and doing; for she too, though in sore distress, is resolved to put a shilling in the hands of Mrs Miff, and see the ceremony which has a cruel fascination for her, from some lonely corner. The quarters of the wooden Midshipman are all alive; for Captain Cuttle, in his ankle-jacks and with a huge shirt-collar, is seated at his breakfast, listening to Rob the Grinder as he reads the marriage service to him beforehand, under orders, to the end that the Captain may perfectly understand the solemnity he is about to witness: for which purpose, the Captain gravely lays injunctions on his chaplain, from time to time, to 'put about,' or to 'overhaul that 'ere article again,' or to stick to his own duty, and leave the Amens to him, the Captain; one of which he repeats, whenever a pause is made by Rob the Grinder, with sonorous satisfaction.

Besides all this, and much more, twenty nursery-maids in Mr Dombey's street alone, have promised twenty families of little women, whose instinctive interest in nuptials dates from their cradles, that they shall go and see the marriage. Truly, Mr Sownds the Beadle has good reason to feel himself in office, as he suns his portly figure on the church steps, waiting for the marriage hour. Truly, Mrs Miff has cause to pounce on an unlucky dwarf child, with a giant baby, who peeps in at the porch, and drive her forth with indignation!

Cousin Feenix has come over from abroad, expressly to attend the marriage. Cousin Feenix was a man about town, forty years ago; but he is still so juvenile in figure and in manner, and so well got up, that strangers are amazed when they discover latent wrinkles in his lordship's face, and crows' feet in his eyes: and first observe him, not exactly certain when he walks across a room, of going quite straight to where he wants to go. But Cousin Feenix, getting up at half-past seven o'clock or so, is quite another thing from Cousin Feenix got up; and very dim, indeed, he looks, while being shaved at Long's Hotel, in Bond Street.

Mr Dombey leaves his dressing-room, amidst a general whisking away of the women on the staircase, who disperse in all directions, with a great rustling of skirts, except Mrs Perch, who, being (but that she always is) in an interesting situation, is not nimble, and is obliged to face him, and is ready to sink with confusion as she curtesys;—may Heaven avert all evil consequences from the house of Perch! Mr Dombey walks up to the drawing- room, to bide his time. Gorgeous are Mr Dombey's new blue coat, fawn-coloured pantaloons, and lilac waistcoat; and a whisper goes about the house, that Mr Dombey's hair is curled.

A double knock announces the arrival of the Major, who is gorgeous too, and wears a whole geranium in his button-hole, and has his hair curled tight and crisp, as well the Native knows.

'Dombey!' says the Major, putting out both hands, 'how are you?'

'Major,' says Mr Dombey, 'how are You?'

'By Jove, Sir,' says the Major, 'Joey B. is in such case this morning, Sir,'—and here he hits himself hard upon the breast—'In such case this morning, Sir, that, damme, Dombey, he has half a mind to make a double marriage of it, Sir, and take the mother.'

Mr Dombey smiles; but faintly, even for him; for Mr Dombey feels that he is going to be related to the mother, and that, under those circumstances, she is not to be joked about.

'Dombey,' says the Major, seeing this, 'I give you joy. I congratulate you, Dombey. By the Lord, Sir,' says the Major, 'you are more to be envied, this day, than any man in England!'

Here again Mr Dombey's assent is qualified; because he is going to confer a great distinction on a lady; and, no doubt, she is to be envied most.

'As to Edith Granger, Sir,' pursues the Major, 'there is not a woman in all Europe but might—and would, Sir, you will allow Bagstock to add—and would—give her ears, and her earrings, too, to be in Edith Granger's place.'

'You are good enough to say so, Major,' says Mr Dombey.

'Dombey,' returns the Major, 'you know it. Let us have no false delicacy. You know it. Do you know it, or do you not, Dombey?' says the Major, almost in a passion.

'Oh, really, Major—'

'Damme, Sir,' retorts the Major, 'do you know that fact, or do you not? Dombey! Is old Joe your friend? Are we on that footing of unreserved intimacy, Dombey, that may justify a man—a blunt old Joseph B., Sir—in speaking out; or am I to take open order, Dombey, and to keep my distance, and to stand on forms?'

'My dear Major Bagstock,' says Mr Dombey, with a gratified air, 'you are quite warm.'

'By Gad, Sir,' says the Major, 'I am warm. Joseph B. does not deny it, Dombey. He is warm. This is an occasion, Sir, that calls forth all the honest sympathies remaining in an old, infernal, battered, used-up, invalided, J. B. carcase. And I tell you what, Dombey—at such a time a man must blurt out what he feels, or put a muzzle on; and Joseph Bagstock tells you to your face, Dombey, as he tells his club behind your back, that he never will be muzzled when Paul Dombey is in question. Now, damme, Sir,' concludes the Major, with great firmness, 'what do you make of that?'

'Major,' says Mr Dombey, 'I assure you that I am really obliged to you. I had no idea of checking your too partial friendship.'

'Not too partial, Sir!' exclaims the choleric Major. 'Dombey, I deny it.'

'Your friendship I will say then,' pursues Mr Dombey, 'on any account. Nor can I forget, Major, on such an occasion as the present, how much I am indebted to it.'

'Dombey,' says the Major, with appropriate action, 'that is the hand of Joseph Bagstock: of plain old Joey B., Sir, if you like that better! That is the hand, of which His Royal Highness the late Duke of York, did me the honour to observe, Sir, to His Royal Highness the late Duke of Kent, that it was the hand of Josh: a rough and tough, and possibly an up-to-snuff, old vagabond. Dombey, may the present moment be the least unhappy of our lives. God bless you!'

Now enters Mr Carker, gorgeous likewise, and smiling like a wedding-guest indeed. He can scarcely let Mr Dombey's hand go, he is so congratulatory; and he shakes the Major's hand so heartily at the same time, that his voice shakes too, in accord with his arms, as it comes sliding from between his teeth.

'The very day is auspicious,' says Mr Carker. 'The brightest and most genial weather! I hope I am not a moment late?'

'Punctual to your time, Sir,' says the Major.

'I am rejoiced, I am sure,' says Mr Carker. 'I was afraid I might be a few seconds after the appointed time, for I was delayed by a procession of waggons; and I took the liberty of riding round to Brook Street'—this to Mr Dombey—'to leave a few poor rarities of flowers for Mrs Dombey. A man in my position, and so distinguished as to be invited here, is proud to offer some homage in acknowledgment of his vassalage: and as I have no doubt Mrs Dombey is overwhelmed with what is costly and magnificent;' with a strange glance at his patron; 'I hope the very poverty of my offering, may find favour for it.'

'Mrs Dombey, that is to be,' returns Mr Dombey, condescendingly, 'will be very sensible of your attention, Carker, I am sure.'

'And if she is to be Mrs Dombey this morning, Sir,' says the Major, putting down his coffee-cup, and looking at his watch, 'it's high time we were off!'

Forth, in a barouche, ride Mr Dombey, Major Bagstock, and Mr Carker, to the church. Mr Sownds the Beadle has long risen from the steps, and is in waiting with his cocked hat in his hand. Mrs Miff curtseys and proposes chairs in the vestry. Mr Dombey prefers remaining in the church. As he looks up at the organ, Miss Tox in the gallery shrinks behind the fat leg of a cherubim on a monument, with cheeks like a young Wind. Captain Cuttle, on the contrary, stands up and waves his hook, in token of welcome and encouragement. Mr Toots informs the Chicken, behind his hand, that the middle gentleman, he in the fawn-coloured pantaloons, is the father of his love. The Chicken hoarsely whispers Mr Toots that he's as stiff a cove as ever he see, but that it is within the resources of Science to double him up, with one blow in the waistcoat.

Mr Sownds and Mrs Miff are eyeing Mr Dombey from a little distance, when the noise of approaching wheels is heard, and Mr Sownds goes out. Mrs Miff, meeting Mr Dombey's eye as it is withdrawn from the presumptuous maniac upstairs, who salutes him with so much urbanity, drops a curtsey, and informs him that she believes his 'good lady' is come. Then there is a crowding and a whispering at the door, and the good lady enters, with a haughty step.

There is no sign upon her face, of last night's suffering; there is no trace in her manner, of the woman on the bended knees, reposing her wild head, in beautiful abandonment, upon the pillow of the sleeping girl. That girl, all gentle and lovely, is at her side—a striking contrast to her own disdainful and defiant figure, standing there, composed, erect, inscrutable of will, resplendent and majestic in the zenith of its charms, yet beating down, and treading on, the admiration that it challenges.

There is a pause while Mr Sownds the Beadle glides into the vestry for the clergyman and clerk. At this juncture, Mrs Skewton speaks to Mr Dombey: more distinctly and emphatically than her custom is, and moving at the same time, close to Edith.

'My dear Dombey,' said the good Mama, 'I fear I must relinquish darling Florence after all, and suffer her to go home, as she herself proposed. After my loss of to-day, my dear Dombey, I feel I shall not have spirits, even for her society.'

'Had she not better stay with you?' returns the Bridegroom.

'I think not, my dear Dombey. No, I think not. I shall be better alone. Besides, my dearest Edith will be her natural and constant guardian when you return, and I had better not encroach upon her trust, perhaps. She might be jealous. Eh, dear Edith?'

The affectionate Mama presses her daughter's arm, as she says this; perhaps entreating her attention earnestly.

'To be serious, my dear Dombey,' she resumes, 'I will relinquish our dear child, and not inflict my gloom upon her. We have settled that, just now. She fully understands, dear Dombey. Edith, my dear,—she fully understands.'

Again, the good mother presses her daughter's arm. Mr Dombey offers no additional remonstrance; for the clergyman and clerk appear; and Mrs

Miff, and Mr Sownds the Beadle, group the party in their proper places at the altar rails.

The sun is shining down, upon the golden letters of the ten commandments. Why does the Bride's eye read them, one by one? Which one of all the ten appears the plainest to her in the glare of light? False Gods; murder; theft; the honour that she owes her mother;—which is it that appears to leave the wall, and printing itself in glowing letters, on her book!

"Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?"'

Cousin Feenix does that. He has come from Baden-Baden on purpose. 'Confound it,' Cousin Feenix says—good-natured creature, Cousin Feenix—'when we do get a rich City fellow into the family, let us show him some attention; let us do something for him.' I give this woman to be married to this man,' saith Cousin Feenix therefore. Cousin Feenix, meaning to go in a straight line, but turning off sideways by reason of his wilful legs, gives the wrong woman to be married to this man, at first—to wit, a brides—maid of some condition, distantly connected with the family, and ten years Mrs Skewton's junior—but Mrs Miff, interposing her mortified bonnet, dexterously turns him back, and runs him, as on castors, full at the 'good lady:' whom Cousin Feenix giveth to married to this man accordingly. And will they in the sight of heaven—? Ay, that they will: Mr Dombey says he will. And what says Edith? She will. So, from that day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do them part, they plight their troth to one another, and are married. In a firm, free hand, the Bride subscribes her name in the register, when they adjourn to the vestry. 'There ain't a many ladies come here,' Mrs Miff says with a curtsey—to look at Mrs Miff, at such a season, is to make her mortified bonnet go down with a dip—writes their names like this good lady!' Mr Sownds the Beadle thinks it is a truly spanking signature, and worthy of the writer—this, however, between himself and conscience. Florence signs too, but unapplauded, for her hand shakes. All the party sign; Cousin Feenix last; who puts his noble name into a wrong place, and enrols himself as having been born that morning. The Major now salutes the Bride right gallantly, and carries out that branch of military tactics in reference to all the ladies: notwithstanding Mrs Skewton's being extremely hard to kiss, and squeaking shrilly in the sacred edifice. The example is followed by Cousin. Feenix and even by Mr Dombey. Lastly, Mr

Carker, with his white teeth glistening, approaches Edith, more as if he meant to bite her, than to taste the sweets that linger on her lips.

There is a glow upon her proud cheek, and a flashing in her eyes, that may be meant to stay him; but it does not, for he salutes her as the rest have done, and wishes her all happiness.

'If wishes,' says he in a low voice, 'are not superfluous, applied to such a union.'

'I thank you, Sir,' she answers, with a curled lip, and a heaving bosom.

But, does Edith feel still, as on the night when she knew that Mr Dombey would return to offer his alliance, that Carker knows her thoroughly, and reads her right, and that she is more degraded by his knowledge of her, than by aught else? Is it for this reason that her haughtiness shrinks beneath his smile, like snow within the hands that grasps it firmly, and that her imperious glance droops In meeting his, and seeks the ground?

'I am proud to see,' said Mr Carker, with a servile stooping of his neck, which the revelations making by his eyes and teeth proclaim to be a lie, 'I am proud to see that my humble offering is graced by Mrs Dombey's hand, and permitted to hold so favoured a place in so joyful an occasion.'

Though she bends her head, in answer, there is something in the momentary action of her hand, as if she would crush the flowers it holds, and fling them, with contempt, upon the ground. But, she puts the hand through the arm of her new husband, who has been standing near, conversing with the Major, and is proud again, and motionless, and silent.

The carriages are once more at the church door. Mr Dombey, with his bride upon his arm, conducts her through the twenty families of little women who are on the steps, and every one of whom remembers the fashion and the colour of her every article of dress from that moment, and reproduces it on her doll, who is for ever being married. Cleopatra and Cousin Feenix enter the same carriage. The Major hands into a second carriage, Florence, and the bridesmaid who so narrowly escaped being given away by mistake, and then enters it himself, and is followed by Mr Carker. Horses prance and caper; coachmen and footmen shine in fluttering favours, flowers, and new-made liveries. Away they dash and rattle through the streets; and as they pass along, a thousand heads are turned to look at them, and a thousand sober moralists revenge themselves for not being married too, that morning, by reflecting that these people little think such happiness can't last.

Miss Tox emerges from behind the cherubim's leg, when all is quiet, and comes slowly down from the gallery. Miss Tox's eyes are red, and her pocket- handkerchief is damp. She is wounded, but not exasperated, and she hopes they may be happy. She quite admits to herself the beauty of the bride, and her own comparatively feeble and faded attractions; but the stately image of Mr Dombey in his lilac waistcoat, and his fawn-coloured pantaloons, is present to her mind, and Miss Tox weeps afresh, behind her veil, on her way home to Princess's Place. Captain Cuttle, having joined in all the amens and responses, with a devout growl, feels much improved by his religious exercises; and in a peaceful frame of mind pervades the body of the church, glazed hat in hand, and reads the tablet to the memory of little Paul. The gallant Mr Toots, attended by the faithful Chicken, leaves the building in torments of love. The Chicken is as yet unable to elaborate a scheme for winning Florence, but his first idea has gained possession of him, and he thinks the doubling up of Mr Dombey would be a move in the right direction. Mr Dombey's servants come out of their hiding-places, and prepare to rush to Brook Street, when they are delayed by symptoms of indisposition on the part of Mrs Perch, who entreats a glass of water, and becomes alarming; Mrs Perch gets better soon, however, and is borne away; and Mrs Miff, and Mr Sownds the Beadle, sit upon the steps to count what they have gained by the affair, and talk it over, while the sexton tolls a funeral.

Now, the carriages arrive at the Bride's residence, and the players on the bells begin to jingle, and the band strikes up, and Mr Punch, that model of connubial bliss, salutes his wife. Now, the people run, and push, and press round in a gaping throng, while Mr Dombey, leading Mrs Dombey by the hand, advances solemnly into the Feenix Halls. Now, the rest of the wedding party alight, and enter after them. And why does Mr Carker, passing through the people to the hall-door, think of the old woman who called to him in the Grove that morning? Or why does Florence, as she passes, think, with a tremble, of her childhood, when she was lost, and of the visage of Good Mrs Brown?

Now, there are more congratulations on this happiest of days, and more company, though not much; and now they leave the drawing-room, and range themselves at table in the dark-brown dining-room, which no confectioner can brighten up, let him garnish the exhausted negroes with as many flowers and love-knots as he will.

The pastry-cook has done his duty like a man, though, and a rich breakfast is set forth. Mr and Mrs Chick have joined the party, among others. Mrs Chick admires that Edith should be, by nature, such a perfect Dombey; and is affable and confidential to Mrs Skewton, whose mind is relieved of a great load, and who takes her share of the champagne. The very tall young man who suffered from excitement early, is better; but a vague sentiment of repentance has seized upon him, and he hates the other very tall young man, and wrests dishes from him by violence, and takes a grim delight in disobliging the company. The company are cool and calm, and do not outrage the black hatchments of pictures looking down upon them, by any excess of mirth. Cousin Feenix and the Major are the gayest there; but Mr Carker has a smile for the whole table. He has an especial smile for the Bride, who very, very seldom meets it.

Cousin Feenix rises, when the company have breakfasted, and the servants have left the room; and wonderfully young he looks, with his white wristbands almost covering his hands (otherwise rather bony), and the bloom of the champagne in his cheeks.

'Upon my honour,' says Cousin Feenix, 'although it's an unusual sort of thing in a private gentleman's house, I must beg leave to call upon you to drink what is usually called a—in fact a toast.

The Major very hoarsely indicates his approval. Mr Carker, bending his head forward over the table in the direction of Cousin Feenix, smiles and nods a great many times.

'A—in fact it's not a—' Cousin Feenix beginning again, thus, comes to a dead stop.

'Hear, hear!' says the Major, in a tone of conviction.

Mr Carker softly claps his hands, and bending forward over the table again, smiles and nods a great many more times than before, as if he were particularly struck by this last observation, and desired personally to express his sense of the good it has done.

'It is,' says Cousin Feenix, 'an occasion in fact, when the general usages of life may be a little departed from, without impropriety; and although I never was an orator in my life, and when I was in the House of Commons, and had the honour of seconding the address, was—in fact, was laid up for a fortnight with the consciousness of failure—'

The Major and Mr Carker are so much delighted by this fragment of personal history, that Cousin Feenix laughs, and addressing them individually, goes on to say:

'And in point of fact, when I was devilish ill—still, you know, I feel that a duty devolves upon me. And when a duty devolves upon an Englishman, he is bound to get out of it, in my opinion, in the best way he can. Well! our family has had the gratification, to-day, of connecting itself, in the person of my lovely and accomplished relative, whom I now see—in point of fact, present—'

Here there is general applause.

'Present,' repeats Cousin Feenix, feeling that it is a neat point which will bear repetition,—'with one who—that is to say, with a man, at whom the finger of scorn can never—in fact, with my honourable friend Dombey, if he will allow me to call him so.'

Cousin Feenix bows to Mr Dombey; Mr Dombey solemnly returns the bow; everybody is more or less gratified and affected by this extraordinary, and perhaps unprecedented, appeal to the feelings.

'I have not,' says Cousin Feenix, 'enjoyed those opportunities which I could have desired, of cultivating the acquaintance of my friend Dombey, and studying those qualities which do equal honour to his head, and, in point of fact, to his heart; for it has been my misfortune to be, as we used to say in my time in the House of Commons, when it was not the custom to allude to the Lords, and when the order of parliamentary proceedings was perhaps better observed than it is now—to be in—in point of fact,' says Cousin Feenix, cherishing his joke, with great slyness, and finally bringing it out with a jerk, '"in another place!"'

The Major falls into convulsions, and is recovered with difficulty.

'But I know sufficient of my friend Dombey,' resumes Cousin Feenix in a graver tone, as if he had suddenly become a sadder and wiser man' 'to know that he is, in point of fact, what may be emphatically called a—a merchant—a British merchant—and a—and a man. And although I have been resident abroad, for some years (it would give me great pleasure to receive my friend Dombey, and everybody here, at Baden-Baden, and to have an opportunity of making 'em known to the Grand Duke), still I know enough, I flatter myself, of my lovely and accomplished relative, to know that she possesses every requisite to make a man happy, and that her marriage with my friend Dombey is one of inclination and affection on both sides.'

Many smiles and nods from Mr Carker.

'Therefore,' says Cousin Feenix, 'I congratulate the family of which I am a member, on the acquisition of my friend Dombey. I congratulate my friend Dombey on his union with my lovely and accomplished relative who possesses every requisite to make a man happy; and I take the liberty of calling on you all, in point of fact, to congratulate both my friend Dombey and my lovely and accomplished relative, on the present occasion.'

The speech of Cousin Feenix is received with great applause, and Mr Dombey returns thanks on behalf of himself and Mrs Dombey. J. B. shortly afterwards proposes Mrs Skewton. The breakfast languishes when that is done, the violated hatchments are avenged, and Edith rises to assume her travelling dress.

All the servants in the meantime, have been breakfasting below. Champagne has grown too common among them to be mentioned, and roast fowls, raised pies, and lobster-salad, have become mere drugs. The very tall young man has recovered his spirits, and again alludes to the exciseman. His comrade's eye begins to emulate his own, and he, too, stares at objects without taking cognizance thereof. There is a general redness in the faces of the ladies; in the face of Mrs Perch particularly, who is joyous and beaming, and lifted so far above the cares of life, that if she were asked just now to direct a wayfarer to Ball's Pond, where her own cares lodge, she would have some difficulty in recalling the way. Mr Towlinson has proposed the happy pair; to which the silver-headed butler has responded neatly, and with emotion; for he half begins to think he is an old retainer of the family, and that he is bound to be affected by these changes. The whole party, and especially the ladies, are very frolicsome. Mr Dombey's cook, who generally takes the lead in society, has said, it is impossible to settle down after this, and why not go, in a party, to the play? Everybody (Mrs Perch included) has agreed to this; even the Native, who is tigerish in his drink, and who alarms the ladies (Mrs Perch particularly) by the rolling of his eyes. One of the very tall young men has even proposed a ball after the play, and it presents itself to no one (Mrs Perch included) in the light of an impossibility. Words have arisen between the housemaid and Mr Towlinson; she, on the authority of an old saw, asserting marriages to be made in Heaven: he, affecting to trace the manufacture elsewhere; he, supposing that she says so, because she thinks of being married her own self: she, saying, Lord forbid, at any rate, that she should ever marry him. To calm these flying taunts, the silver-headed butler rises to propose the health of Mr Towlinson, whom to know is to esteem, and to esteem is to wish well settled in life with the object of his choice, wherever (here the silver-headed butler eyes the housemaid) she may be. Mr Towlinson returns thanks in a speech replete with feeling, of which the peroration turns on foreigners, regarding whom he says they may find favour, sometimes, with weak and inconstant intellects that can be led away by hair, but all he hopes, is, he may never hear of no foreigner never boning nothing out of no travelling chariot. The eye of Mr Towlinson is so severe and so expressive here, that the housemaid is turning hysterical, when she and all the rest, roused by the intelligence that the Bride is going away, hurry upstairs to witness her departure.

The chariot is at the door; the Bride is descending to the hall, where Mr Dombey waits for her. Florence is ready on the staircase to depart too; and Miss Nipper, who has held a middle state between the parlour and the kitchen, is prepared to accompany her. As Edith appears, Florence hastens towards her, to bid her farewell.

Is Edith cold, that she should tremble! Is there anything unnatural or unwholesome in the touch of Florence, that the beautiful form recedes and contracts, as if it could not bear it! Is there so much hurry in this going away, that Edith, with a wave of her hand, sweeps on, and is gone!

Mrs Skewton, overpowered by her feelings as a mother, sinks on her sofa in the Cleopatra attitude, when the clatter of the chariot wheels is lost, and sheds several tears. The Major, coming with the rest of the company from table, endeavours to comfort her; but she will not be comforted on any terms, and so the Major takes his leave. Cousin Feenix takes his leave, and Mr Carker takes his leave. The guests all go away. Cleopatra, left alone, feels a little giddy from her strong emotion, and falls asleep.

Giddiness prevails below stairs too. The very tall young man whose excitement came on so soon, appears to have his head glued to the table in the pantry, and cannot be detached from—it. A violent revulsion has taken place in the spirits of Mrs Perch, who is low on account of Mr Perch, and tells cook that she fears he is not so much attached to his home, as he used to be, when they were only nine in family. Mr Towlinson has a singing in his ears and a large wheel going round and round inside his head. The housemaid wishes it wasn't wicked to wish that one was dead.

There is a general delusion likewise, in these lower regions, on the subject of time; everybody conceiving that it ought to be, at the earliest, ten o'clock at night, whereas it is not yet three in the afternoon. A shadowy idea of wickedness committed, haunts every individual in the party; and each one secretly thinks the other a companion in guilt, whom it would be agreeable to avoid. No man or woman has the hardihood to hint at the projected visit to the play. Anyone reviving the notion of the ball, would be scouted as a malignant idiot.

Mrs Skewton sleeps upstairs, two hours afterwards, and naps are not yet over in the kitchen. The hatchments in the dining-room look down on crumbs, dirty plates, spillings of wine, half-thawed ice, stale discoloured heel-taps, scraps of lobster, drumsticks of fowls, and pensive jellies, gradually resolving themselves into a lukewarm gummy soup. The marriage is, by this time, almost as denuded of its show and garnish as the breakfast. Mr Dombey's servants moralise so much about it, and are so repentant over their early tea, at home, that by eight o'clock or so, they settle down into confirmed seriousness; and Mr Perch, arriving at that time from the City, fresh and jocular, with a white waistcoat and a comic song, ready to spend the evening, and prepared for any amount of dissipation, is amazed to find himself coldly received, and Mrs Perch but poorly, and to have the pleasing duty of escorting that lady home by the next omnibus.

Night closes in. Florence, having rambled through the handsome house, from room to room, seeks her own chamber, where the care of Edith has surrounded her with luxuries and comforts; and divesting herself of her handsome dress, puts on her old simple mourning for dear Paul, and sits down to read, with Diogenes winking and blinking on the ground beside her. But Florence cannot read tonight. The house seems strange and new, and there are loud echoes in it. There is a shadow on her heart: she knows not why or what: but it is heavy. Florence shuts her book, and gruff Diogenes, who takes that for a signal, puts his paws upon her lap, and rubs his ears against her caressing hands. But Florence cannot see him plainly, in a little time, for there is a mist between her eyes and him, and her dead brother and dead mother shine in it like angels. Walter, too, poor wandering shipwrecked boy, oh, where is he?

The Major don't know; that's for certain; and don't care. The Major, having choked and slumbered, all the afternoon, has taken a late dinner at his club, and now sits over his pint of wine, driving a modest young man, with a fresh-coloured face, at the next table (who would give a handsome sum to be able to rise and go away, but cannot do it) to the verge of madness, by anecdotes of Bagstock, Sir, at Dombey's wedding, and Old Joe's devilish gentle manly friend, Lord Feenix. While Cousin Feenix, who ought to be at Long's, and in bed, finds himself, instead, at a gaming-table, where his wilful legs have taken him, perhaps, in his own despite.

Night, like a giant, fills the church, from pavement to roof, and holds dominion through the silent hours. Pale dawn again comes peeping through the windows: and, giving place to day, sees night withdraw into the vaults, and follows it, and drives it out, and hides among the dead. The timid mice again cower close together, when the great door clashes, and Mr Sownds and Mrs Miff treading the circle of their daily lives, unbroken as a marriage ring, come in. Again, the cocked hat and the mortified bonnet stand in the background at the marriage hour; and again this man taketh this woman, and this woman taketh this man, on the solemn terms:

'To have and to hold, from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until death do them part.'

The very words that Mr Carker rides into town repeating, with his mouth stretched to the utmost, as he picks his dainty way.

CHAPTER 32. The Wooden Midshipman goes to Pieces

Honest Captain Cuttle, as the weeks flew over him in his fortified retreat, by no means abated any of his prudent provisions against surprise, because of the non-appearance of the enemy. The Captain argued that his present security was too profound and wonderful to endure much longer; he knew that when the wind stood in a fair quarter, the weathercock was seldom nailed there; and he was too well acquainted with the determined and dauntless character of Mrs MacStinger, to doubt that that heroic woman had devoted herself to the task of his discovery and capture. Trembling beneath the weight of these reasons, Captain Cuttle lived a very close and retired life; seldom stirring abroad until after dark; venturing even then only into the obscurest streets; never going forth at all on Sundays; and both within and without the walls of his retreat, avoiding bonnets, as if they were worn by raging lions.

The Captain never dreamed that in the event of his being pounced upon by Mrs MacStinger, in his walks, it would be possible to offer resistance. He felt that it could not be done. He saw himself, in his mind's eye, put meekly in a hackney-coach, and carried off to his old lodgings. He foresaw that, once immured there, he was a lost man: his hat gone; Mrs MacStinger watchful of him day and night; reproaches heaped upon his head, before the infant family; himself the guilty object of suspicion and distrust; an ogre in the children's eyes, and in their mother's a detected traitor.

A violent perspiration, and a lowness of spirits, always came over the Captain as this gloomy picture presented itself to his imagination. It generally did so previous to his stealing out of doors at night for air and exercise. Sensible of the risk he ran, the Captain took leave of Rob, at those times, with the solemnity which became a man who might never return: exhorting him, in the event of his (the Captain's) being lost sight of, for a time, to tread in the paths of virtue, and keep the brazen instruments well polished.

But not to throw away a chance; and to secure to himself a means, in case of the worst, of holding communication with the external world;

Captain Cuttle soon conceived the happy idea of teaching Rob the Grinder some secret signal, by which that adherent might make his presence and fidelity known to his commander, in the hour of adversity. After much cogitation, the Captain decided in favour of instructing him to whistle the marine melody, 'Oh cheerily, cheerily!' and Rob the Grinder attaining a point as near perfection in that accomplishment as a landsman could hope to reach, the Captain impressed these mysterious instructions on his mind:

'Now, my lad, stand by! If ever I'm took—'

'Took, Captain!' interposed Rob, with his round eyes wide open.

'Ah!' said Captain Cuttle darkly, 'if ever I goes away, meaning to come back to supper, and don't come within hail again, twenty-four hours arter my loss, go you to Brig Place and whistle that 'ere tune near my old moorings—not as if you was a meaning of it, you understand, but as if you'd drifted there, promiscuous. If I answer in that tune, you sheer off, my lad, and come back four-and-twenty hours arterwards; if I answer in another tune, do you stand off and on, and wait till I throw out further signals. Do you understand them orders, now?'

'What am I to stand off and on of, Captain?' inquired Rob. 'The horse-road?'

'Here's a smart lad for you!' cried the Captain eyeing him sternly, 'as don't know his own native alphabet! Go away a bit and come back again alternate—d'ye understand that?'

'Yes, Captain,' said Rob.

'Very good my lad, then,' said the Captain, relenting. 'Do it!'

That he might do it the better, Captain Cuttle sometimes condescended, of an evening after the shop was shut, to rehearse this scene: retiring into the parlour for the purpose, as into the lodgings of a supposititious MacStinger, and carefully observing the behaviour of his ally, from the hole of espial he had cut in the wall. Rob the Grinder discharged himself of his duty with so much exactness and judgment, when thus put to the proof, that the Captain presented him, at divers times, with seven sixpences, in token of satisfaction; and gradually felt stealing over his spirit the resignation of a man who had made provision for the worst, and taken every reasonable precaution against an unrelenting fate.

Nevertheless, the Captain did not tempt ill-fortune, by being a whit more venturesome than before. Though he considered it a point of good breeding in himself, as a general friend of the family, to attend Mr

Dombey's wedding (of which he had heard from Mr Perch), and to show that gentleman a pleasant and approving countenance from the gallery, he had repaired to the church in a hackney cabriolet with both windows up; and might have scrupled even to make that venture, in his dread of Mrs MacStinger, but that the lady's attendance on the ministry of the Reverend Melchisedech rendered it peculiarly unlikely that she would be found in communion with the Establishment.

The Captain got safe home again, and fell into the ordinary routine of his new life, without encountering any more direct alarm from the enemy, than was suggested to him by the daily bonnets in the street. But other subjects began to lay heavy on the Captain's mind. Walter's ship was still unheard of. No news came of old Sol Gills. Florence did not even know of the old man's disappearance, and Captain Cuttle had not the heart to tell her. Indeed the Captain, as his own hopes of the generous, handsome, gallant-hearted youth, whom he had loved, according to his rough manner, from a child, began to fade, and faded more and more from day to day, shrunk with instinctive pain from the thought of exchanging a word with Florence. If he had had good news to carry to her, the honest Captain would have braved the newly decorated house and splendid furniture—though these, connected with the lady he had seen at church, were awful to him—and made his way into her presence. With a dark horizon gathering around their common hopes, however, that darkened every hour, the Captain almost felt as if he were a new misfortune and affliction to her; and was scarcely less afraid of a visit from Florence, than from Mrs MacStinger herself.

It was a chill dark autumn evening, and Captain Cuttle had ordered a fire to be kindled in the little back parlour, now more than ever like the cabin of a ship. The rain fell fast, and the wind blew hard; and straying out on the house-top by that stormy bedroom of his old friend, to take an observation of the weather, the Captain's heart died within him, when he saw how wild and desolate it was. Not that he associated the weather of that time with poor Walter's destiny, or doubted that if Providence had doomed him to be lost and shipwrecked, it was over, long ago; but that beneath an outward influence, quite distinct from the subject-matter of his thoughts, the Captain's spirits sank, and his hopes turned pale, as those of wiser men had often done before him, and will often do again.

Captain Cuttle, addressing his face to the sharp wind and slanting rain, looked up at the heavy scud that was flying fast over the wilderness of house-tops, and looked for something cheery there in vain. The prospect near at hand was no better. In sundry tea-chests and other rough boxes at his feet, the pigeons of Rob the Grinder were cooing like so many dismal breezes getting up. A crazy weathercock of a midshipman, with a telescope at his eye, once visible from the street, but long bricked out, creaked and complained upon his rusty pivot as the shrill blast spun him round and round, and sported with him cruelly. Upon the Captain's coarse blue vest the cold raindrops started like steel beads; and he could hardly maintain himself aslant against the stiff Nor'-Wester that came pressing against him, importunate to topple him over the parapet, and throw him on the pavement below. If there were any Hope alive that evening, the Captain thought, as he held his hat on, it certainly kept house, and wasn't out of doors; so the Captain, shaking his head in a despondent manner, went in to look for it.

Captain Cuttle descended slowly to the little back parlour, and, seated in his accustomed chair, looked for it in the fire; but it was not there, though the fire was bright. He took out his tobacco-box and pipe, and composing himself to smoke, looked for it in the red glow from the bowl, and in the wreaths of vapour that curled upward from his lips; but there was not so much as an atom of the rust of Hope's anchor in either. He tried a glass of grog; but melancholy truth was at the bottom of that well, and he couldn't finish it. He made a turn or two in the shop, and looked for Hope among the instruments; but they obstinately worked out reckonings for the missing ship, in spite of any opposition he could offer, that ended at the bottom of the lone sea.

The wind still rushing, and the rain still pattering, against the closed shutters, the Captain brought to before the wooden Midshipman upon the counter, and thought, as he dried the little officer's uniform with his sleeve, how many years the Midshipman had seen, during which few changes—hardly any—had transpired among his ship's company; how the changes had come all together, one day, as it might be; and of what a sweeping kind they web Here was the little society of the back parlour broken up, and scattered far and wide. Here was no audience for Lovely Peg, even if there had been anybody to sing it, which there was not; for the Captain was as morally certain that nobody but he could execute that ballad, he was that he had not the spirit, under existing circumstances, to attempt it. There was no bright face of 'Wal'r' In the house;—here the Captain transferred his sleeve for a moment from the Midshipman's uniform to his own cheek;—the familiar wig and buttons of Sol Gills were a vision of the past; Richard Whittington was knocked on the head; and every plan and project in connexion with the Midshipman, lay drifting, without mast or rudder, on the waste of waters.

As the Captain, with a dejected face, stood revolving these thoughts, and polishing the Midshipman, partly in the tenderness of old acquaintance, and partly in the absence of his mind, a knocking at the shop-door communicated a frightful start to the frame of Rob the Grinder, seated on the counter, whose large eyes had been intently fixed on the Captain's face, and who had been debating within himself, for the five hundredth time, whether the Captain could have done a murder, that he had such an evil conscience, and was always running away.

'What's that?' said Captain Cuttle, softly.

'Somebody's knuckles, Captain,' answered Rob the Grinder.

The Captain, with an abashed and guilty air, immediately walked on tiptoe to the little parlour and locked himself in. Rob, opening the door, would have parleyed with the visitor on the threshold if the visitor had come in female guise; but the figure being of the male sex, and Rob's orders only applying to women, Rob held the door open and allowed it to enter: which it did very quickly, glad to get out of the driving rain.

'A job for Burgess and Co. at any rate,' said the visitor, looking over his shoulder compassionately at his own legs, which were very wet and covered with splashes. 'Oh, how-de-do, Mr Gills?'

The salutation was addressed to the Captain, now emerging from the back parlour with a most transparent and utterly futile affectation of coming out by accidence.

'Thankee,' the gentleman went on to say in the same breath; 'I'm very well indeed, myself, I'm much obliged to you. My name is Toots,—Mister Toots.'

The Captain remembered to have seen this young gentleman at the wedding, and made him a bow. Mr Toots replied with a chuckle; and being embarrassed, as he generally was, breathed hard, shook hands with the Captain for a long time, and then falling on Rob the Grinder, in the absence of any other resource, shook hands with him in a most affectionate and cordial manner.

'I say! I should like to speak a word to you, Mr Gills, if you please,' said Toots at length, with surprising presence of mind. 'I say! Miss D.O.M. you know!'

The Captain, with responsive gravity and mystery, immediately waved his hook towards the little parlour, whither Mr Toots followed him.

'Oh! I beg your pardon though,' said Mr Toots, looking up In the Captain's face as he sat down in a chair by the fire, which the Captain placed for him; 'you don't happen to know the Chicken at all; do you, Mr Gills?'

'The Chicken?' said the Captain.

'The Game Chicken,' said Mr Toots.

The Captain shaking his head, Mr Toots explained that the man alluded to was the celebrated public character who had covered himself and his country with glory in his contest with the Nobby Shropshire One; but this piece of information did not appear to enlighten the Captain very much.

'Because he's outside: that's all,' said Mr Toots. 'But it's of no consequence; he won't get very wet, perhaps.'

'I can pass the word for him in a moment,' said the Captain.

'Well, if you would have the goodness to let him sit in the shop with your young man,' chuckled Mr Toots, 'I should be glad; because, you know, he's easily offended, and the damp's rather bad for his stamina. I'll call him in, Mr Gills.'

With that, Mr Toots repairing to the shop-door, sent a peculiar whistle into the night, which produced a stoical gentleman in a shaggy white great-coat and a flat-brimmed hat, with very short hair, a broken nose, and a considerable tract of bare and sterile country behind each ear.

'Sit down, Chicken,' said Mr Toots.

The compliant Chicken spat out some small pieces of straw on which he was regaling himself, and took in a fresh supply from a reserve he carried in his hand.

'There ain't no drain of nothing short handy, is there?' said the Chicken, generally. 'This here sluicing night is hard lines to a man as lives on his condition.

Captain Cuttle proffered a glass of rum, which the Chicken, throwing back his head, emptied into himself, as into a cask, after proposing the brief sentiment, 'Towards us!' Mr Toots and the Captain returning then to the parlour, and taking their seats before the fire, Mr Toots began:

'Mr Gills—'

'Awast!' said the Captain. 'My name's Cuttle.'

Mr Toots looked greatly disconcerted, while the Captain proceeded gravely.

'Cap'en Cuttle is my name, and England is my nation, this here is my dwelling-place, and blessed be creation—Job,' said the Captain, as an index to his authority.

'Oh! I couldn't see Mr Gills, could I?' said Mr Toots; 'because—'

'If you could see Sol Gills, young gen'l'm'n,' said the Captain, impressively, and laying his heavy hand on Mr Toots's knee, 'old Sol, mind you—with your own eyes—as you sit there—you'd be welcomer to me, than a wind astern, to a ship becalmed. But you can't see Sol Gills. And why can't you see Sol Gills?' said the Captain, apprised by the face of Mr Toots that he was making a profound impression on that gentleman's mind. 'Because he's inwisible.'

Mr Toots in his agitation was going to reply that it was of no consequence at all. But he corrected himself, and said, 'Lor bless me!'

'That there man,' said the Captain, 'has left me in charge here by a piece of writing, but though he was a'most as good as my sworn brother, I know no more where he's gone, or why he's gone; if so be to seek his nevy, or if so be along of being not quite settled in his mind; than you do. One morning at daybreak, he went over the side,' said the Captain, 'without a splash, without a ripple I have looked for that man high and low, and never set eyes, nor ears, nor nothing else, upon him from that hour.'

'But, good Gracious, Miss Dombey don't know—' Mr Toots began.

'Why, I ask you, as a feeling heart,' said the Captain, dropping his voice, 'why should she know? why should she be made to know, until such time as there wam't any help for it? She took to old Sol Gills, did that sweet creetur, with a kindness, with a affability, with a—what's the good of saying so? you know her.'

'I should hope so,' chuckled Mr Toots, with a conscious blush that suffused his whole countenance.

'And you come here from her?' said the Captain.

'I should think so,' chuckled Mr Toots.

'Then all I need observe, is,' said the Captain, 'that you know a angel, and are chartered a angel.'

Mr Toots instantly seized the Captain's hand, and requested the favour of his friendship.

'Upon my word and honour,' said Mr Toots, earnestly, 'I should be very much obliged to you if you'd improve my acquaintance I should like to know you, Captain, very much. I really am In want of a friend, I am. Little Dombey was my friend at old Blimber's, and would have been now, if he'd have lived. The Chicken,' said Mr Toots, in a forlorn whisper, 'is very well—admirable in his way—the sharpest man perhaps in the world; there's not a move he isn't up to, everybody says so—but I don't know—he's not everything. So she is an angel, Captain. If there is an angel anywhere, it's Miss Dombey. That's what I've always said. Really though, you know,' said Mr Toots, 'I should be very much obliged to you if you'd cultivate my acquaintance.'

Captain Cuttle received this proposal in a polite manner, but still without committing himself to its acceptance; merely observing, 'Ay, ay, my lad. We shall see, we shall see;' and reminding Mr Toots of his immediate mission, by inquiring to what he was indebted for the honour of that visit.

'Why the fact is,' replied Mr Toots, 'that it's the young woman I come from. Not Miss Dombey—Susan, you know.

The Captain nodded his head once, with a grave expression of face indicative of his regarding that young woman with serious respect.

'And I'll tell you how it happens,' said Mr Toots. 'You know, I go and call sometimes, on Miss Dombey. I don't go there on purpose, you know, but I happen to be in the neighbourhood very often; and when I find myself there, why—why I call.'

'Nat'rally,' observed the Captain.

'Yes,' said Mr Toots. 'I called this afternoon. Upon my word and honour, I don't think it's possible to form an idea of the angel Miss Dombey was this afternoon.'

The Captain answered with a jerk of his head, implying that it might not be easy to some people, but was quite so to him.

'As I was coming out,' said Mr Toots, 'the young woman, in the most unexpected manner, took me into the pantry.

The Captain seemed, for the moment, to object to this proceeding; and leaning back in his chair, looked at Mr Toots with a distrustful, if not threatening visage.

'Where she brought out,' said Mr Toots, 'this newspaper. She told me that she had kept it from Miss Dombey all day, on account of something that was in it, about somebody that she and Dombey used to know; and then she read the passage to me. Very well. Then she said—wait a minute; what was it she said, though!'

Mr Toots, endeavouring to concentrate his mental powers on this question, unintentionally fixed the Captain's eye, and was so much discomposed by its stern expression, that his difficulty in resuming the thread of his subject was enhanced to a painful extent.

'Oh!' said Mr Toots after long consideration. 'Oh, ah! Yes! She said that she hoped there was a bare possibility that it mightn't be true; and that as she couldn't very well come out herself, without surprising Miss Dombey, would I go down to Mr Solomon Gills the Instrument-maker's in this street, who was the party's Uncle, and ask whether he believed it was true, or had heard anything else in the City. She said, if he couldn't speak to me, no doubt Captain Cuttle could. By the bye!' said Mr Toots, as the discovery flashed upon him, 'you, you know!'

The Captain glanced at the newspaper in Mr Toots's hand, and breathed short and hurriedly.

'Well, pursued Mr Toots, 'the reason why I'm rather late is, because I went up as far as Finchley first, to get some uncommonly fine chickweed that grows there, for Miss Dombey's bird. But I came on here, directly afterwards. You've seen the paper, I suppose?'

The Captain, who had become cautious of reading the news, lest he should find himself advertised at full length by Mrs MacStinger, shook his head.

'Shall I read the passage to you?' inquired Mr Toots.

The Captain making a sign in the affirmative, Mr Toots read as follows, from the Shipping Intelligence:

'"Southampton. The barque Defiance, Henry James, Commander, arrived in this port to-day, with a cargo of sugar, coffee, and rum, reports that being becalmed on the sixth day of her passage home from Jamaica, in"—in such and such a latitude, you know,' said Mr Toots, after making a feeble dash at the figures, and tumbling over them.

'Ay!' cried the Captain, striking his clenched hand on the table. 'Heave ahead, my lad!'

'—latitude,' repeated Mr Toots, with a startled glance at the Captain, 'and longitude so-and-so,—"the look-out observed, half an hour before sunset, some fragments of a wreck, drifting at about the distance of a mile. The weather being clear, and the barque making no way, a boat was hoisted out, with orders to inspect the same, when they were found to consist of sundry large spars, and a part of the main rigging of an English brig, of about five hundred tons burden, together with a portion of the stem on which the words and letters 'Son and H-' were yet plainly legible. No vestige of any dead body was to be seen upon the floating fragments. Log of the Defiance states, that a breeze springing up in the night, the wreck was seen no more. There can be no doubt that all surmises as to the fate of the missing vessel, the Son and Heir, port of London, bound for Barbados, are now set at rest for ever; that she broke up in the last hurricane; and that every soul on board perished."'

Captain Cuttle, like all mankind, little knew how much hope had survived within him under discouragement, until he felt its death-shock. During the reading of the paragraph, and for a minute or two afterwards, he sat with his gaze fixed on the modest Mr Toots, like a man entranced; then, suddenly rising, and putting on his glazed hat, which, in his visitor's honour, he had laid upon the table, the Captain turned his back, and bent his head down on the little chimneypiece.

'Oh' upon my word and honour,' cried Mr Toots, whose tender heart was moved by the Captain's unexpected distress, 'this is a most wretched sort of affair this world is! Somebody's always dying, or going and doing something uncomfortable in it. I'm sure I never should have looked forward so much, to coming into my property, if I had known this. I never saw such a world. It's a great deal worse than Blimber's.'

Captain Cuttle, without altering his position, signed to Mr Toots not to mind him; and presently turned round, with his glazed hat thrust back upon his ears, and his hand composing and smoothing his brown face.

'Wal'r, my dear lad,' said the Captain, 'farewell! Wal'r my child, my boy, and man, I loved you! He warn't my flesh and blood,' said the Captain, looking at the fire—'I ain't got none—but something of what a father feels when he loses a son, I feel in losing Wal'r. For why?' said the Captain. 'Because it ain't one loss, but a round dozen. Where's that there young school-boy with the rosy face and curly hair, that used to be as merry in this here parlour, come round every week, as a piece of music? Gone down with Wal'r. Where's that there fresh lad, that nothing couldn't tire nor put out, and that sparkled up and blushed so, when we joked him about Heart's Delight, that he was beautiful to look at? Gone down with Wal'r. Where's that there man's spirit, all afire, that wouldn't see the old man hove down for a minute, and cared nothing for itself? Gone down with Wal'r. It ain't one Wal'r. There was a dozen Wal'rs that I know'd and loved, all holding round his neck when he went down, and they're a-holding round mine now!'

Mr Toots sat silent: folding and refolding the newspaper as small as possible upon his knee.

'And Sol Gills,' said the Captain, gazing at the fire, 'poor nevyless old Sol, where are you got to! you was left in charge of me; his last words was, "Take care of my Uncle!" What came over you, Sol, when you went and gave the go-bye to Ned Cuttle; and what am I to put In my accounts that he's a looking down upon, respecting you! Sol Gills, Sol Gills!' said the Captain, shaking his head slowly, 'catch sight of that there newspaper, away from home, with no one as know'd Wal'r by, to say a word; and broadside to you broach, and down you pitch, head foremost!'

Drawing a heavy sigh, the Captain turned to Mr Toots, and roused himself to a sustained consciousness of that gentleman's presence.

'My lad,' said the Captain, 'you must tell the young woman honestly that this here fatal news is too correct. They don't romance, you see, on such pints. It's entered on the ship's log, and that's the truest book as a man can write. To-morrow morning,' said the Captain, 'I'll step out and make inquiries; but they'll lead to no good. They can't do it. If you'll give me a look-in in the forenoon, you shall know what I have heerd; but tell the young woman from Cap'en Cuttle, that it's over. Over!' And the Captain, hooking off his glazed hat, pulled his handkerchief out of the crown, wiped his grizzled head despairingly, and tossed the handkerchief in again, with the indifference of deep dejection.

'Oh! I assure you,' said Mr Toots, 'really I am dreadfully sorry. Upon my word I am, though I wasn't acquainted with the party. Do you think Miss Dombey will be very much affected, Captain Gills—I mean Mr Cuttle?'

'Why, Lord love you,' returned the Captain, with something of compassion for Mr Toots's innocence. When she warn't no higher than that, they were as fond of one another as two young doves.'

'Were they though!' said Mr Toots, with a considerably lengthened face.

'They were made for one another,' said the Captain, mournfully; 'but what signifies that now!'

'Upon my word and honour,' cried Mr Toots, blurting out his words through a singular combination of awkward chuckles and emotion, 'I'm even more sorry than I was before. You know, Captain Gills, I—I positively adore Miss Dombey;—I—I am perfectly sore with loving her;' the burst with which this confession forced itself out of the unhappy Mr Toots, bespoke the vehemence of his feelings; 'but what would be the good of my regarding her in this manner, if I wasn't truly sorry for her feeling pain, whatever was the cause of it. Mine ain't a selfish affection, you know,' said Mr Toots, in the confidence engendered by his having been a witness of the Captain's tenderness. 'It's the sort of thing with me, Captain Gills, that if I could be run over—or—or trampled upon—or—or thrown off a very high place-or anything of that sort—for Miss Dombey's sake, it would be the most delightful thing that could happen to me.

All this, Mr Toots said in a suppressed voice, to prevent its reaching the jealous ears of the Chicken, who objected to the softer emotions; which effort of restraint, coupled with the intensity of his feelings, made him red to the tips of his ears, and caused him to present such an affecting spectacle of disinterested love to the eyes of Captain Cuttle, that the good Captain patted him consolingly on the back, and bade him cheer up.

'Thankee, Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, 'it's kind of you, in the midst of your own troubles, to say so. I'm very much obliged to you. As I said before, I really want a friend, and should be glad to have your acquaintance. Although I am very well off,' said Mr Toots, with energy, 'you can't think what a miserable Beast I am. The hollow crowd, you know, when they see me with the Chicken, and characters of distinction like that, suppose me to be happy; but I'm wretched. I suffer for Miss Dombey, Captain Gills. I can't get through my meals; I have no pleasure in my tailor; I often cry when I'm alone. I assure you it'll be a satisfaction to me to come back to-morrow, or to come back fifty times.'

Mr Toots, with these words, shook the Captain's hand; and disguising such traces of his agitation as could be disguised on so short a notice, before the Chicken's penetrating glance, rejoined that eminent gentleman in the shop. The Chicken, who was apt to be jealous of his ascendancy, eyed Captain Cuttle with anything but favour as he took leave of Mr Toots, but followed his patron without being otherwise demonstrative of his ill-will: leaving the Captain oppressed with sorrow; and Rob the Grinder elevated with joy, on account of having had the honour of staring for nearly half an hour at the conqueror of the Nobby Shropshire One.

Long after Rob was fast asleep in his bed under the counter, the Captain sat looking at the fire; and long after there was no fire to look at, the

Captain sat gazing on the rusty bars, with unavailing thoughts of Walter and old Sol crowding through his mind. Retirement to the stormy chamber at the top of the house brought no rest with it; and the Captain rose up in the morning, sorrowful and unrefreshed.

As soon as the City offices were opened, the Captain issued forth to the counting-house of Dombey and Son. But there was no opening of the Midshipman's windows that morning. Rob the Grinder, by the Captain's orders, left the shutters closed, and the house was as a house of death.

It chanced that Mr Carker was entering the office, as Captain Cuttle arrived at the door. Receiving the Manager's benison gravely and silently, Captain Cuttle made bold to accompany him into his own room.

'Well, Captain Cuttle,' said Mr Carker, taking up his usual position before the fireplace, and keeping on his hat, 'this is a bad business.'

'You have received the news as was in print yesterday, Sir?' said the Captain.

'Yes,' said Mr Carker, 'we have received it! It was accurately stated. The underwriters suffer a considerable loss. We are very sorry. No help! Such is life!'

Mr Carker pared his nails delicately with a penknife, and smiled at the Captain, who was standing by the door looking at him.

'I excessively regret poor Gay,' said Carker, 'and the crew. I understand there were some of our very best men among 'em. It always happens so. Many men with families too. A comfort to reflect that poor Gay had no family, Captain Cuttle!'

The Captain stood rubbing his chin, and looking at the Manager. The Manager glanced at the unopened letters lying on his desk, and took up the newspaper.

'Is there anything I can do for you, Captain Cuttle?' he asked looking off it, with a smiling and expressive glance at the door.

'I wish you could set my mind at rest, Sir, on something it's uneasy about,' returned the Captain.

'Ay!' exclaimed the Manager, 'what's that? Come, Captain Cuttle, I must trouble you to be quick, if you please. I am much engaged.'

'Lookee here, Sir,' said the Captain, advancing a step. 'Afore my friend Wal'r went on this here disastrous voyage—

'Come, come, Captain Cuttle,' interposed the smiling Manager, 'don't talk about disastrous voyages in that way. We have nothing to do with disastrous voyages here, my good fellow. You must have begun very early on your day's allowance, Captain, if you don't remember that there are hazards in all voyages, whether by sea or land. You are not made uneasy by the supposition that young what's-his-name was lost in bad weather that was got up against him in these offices—are you? Fie, Captain! Sleep, and soda-water, are the best cures for such uneasiness as that.

'My lad,' returned the Captain, slowly—'you are a'most a lad to me, and so I don't ask your pardon for that slip of a word,—if you find any pleasure in this here sport, you ain't the gentleman I took you for. And if you ain't the gentleman I took you for, may be my mind has call to be uneasy. Now this is what it is, Mr Carker.—Afore that poor lad went away, according to orders, he told me that he warn't a going away for his own good, or for promotion, he know'd. It was my belief that he was wrong, and I told him so, and I come here, your head governor being absent, to ask a question or two of you in a civil way, for my own satisfaction. Them questions you answered—free. Now it'll ease my mind to know, when all is over, as it is, and when what can't be cured must be endoored—for which, as a scholar, you'll overhaul the book it's in, and thereof make a note—to know once more, in a word, that I warn't mistaken; that I warn't back'ard in my duty when I didn't tell the old man what Wal'r told me; and that the wind was truly in his sail, when he highsted of it for Barbados Harbour. Mr Carker,' said the Captain, in the goodness of his nature, 'when I was here last, we was very pleasant together. If I ain't been altogether so pleasant myself this morning, on account of this poor lad, and if I have chafed again any observation of yours that I might have fended off, my name is Ed'ard Cuttle, and I ask your pardon.'

'Captain Cuttle,' returned the Manager, with all possible politeness, 'I must ask you to do me a favour.'

'And what is it, Sir?' inquired the Captain.

'To have the goodness to walk off, if you please,' rejoined the Manager, stretching forth his arm, 'and to carry your jargon somewhere else.'

Every knob in the Captain's face turned white with astonishment and indignation; even the red rim on his forehead faded, like a rainbow among the gathering clouds.

'I tell you what, Captain Cuttle,' said the Manager, shaking his forefinger at him, and showing him all his teeth, but still amiably smiling, 'I was much too lenient with you when you came here before. You belong to an artful and audacious set of people. In my desire to save young what's-his-name from being kicked out of this place, neck and crop, my good Captain, I tolerated you; but for once, and only once. Now, go, my friend!'

The Captain was absolutely rooted to the ground, and speechless—

'Go,' said the good-humoured Manager, gathering up his skirts, and standing astride upon the hearth-rug, 'like a sensible fellow, and let us have no turning out, or any such violent measures. If Mr Dombey were here, Captain, you might be obliged to leave in a more ignominious manner, possibly. I merely say, Go!'

The Captain, laying his ponderous hand upon his chest, to assist himself in fetching a deep breath, looked at Mr Carker from head to foot, and looked round the little room, as if he did not clearly understand where he was, or in what company.

'You are deep, Captain Cuttle,' pursued Carker, with the easy and vivacious frankness of a man of the world who knew the world too well to be ruffled by any discovery of misdoing, when it did not immediately concern himself, 'but you are not quite out of soundings, either—neither you nor your absent friend, Captain. What have you done with your absent friend, hey?'

Again the Captain laid his hand upon his chest. After drawing another deep breath, he conjured himself to 'stand by!' But In a whisper.

'You hatch nice little plots, and hold nice little councils, and make nice little appointments, and receive nice little visitors, too, Captain, hey?' said Carker, bending his brows upon him, without showing his teeth any the less: 'but it's a bold measure to come here afterwards. Not like your discretion! You conspirators, and hiders, and runners-away, should know better than that. Will you oblige me by going?'

'My lad,' gasped the Captain, in a choked and trembling voice, and with a curious action going on in the ponderous fist; 'there's a many words I could wish to say to you, but I don't rightly know where they're stowed just at present. My young friend, Wal'r, was drownded only last night, according to my reckoning, and it puts me out, you see. But you and me will come alongside o'one another again, my lad,' said the Captain, holding up his hook, if we live.'

'It will be anything but shrewd in you, my good fellow, if we do,' returned the Manager, with the same frankness; 'for you may rely, I give you fair warning, upon my detecting and exposing you. I don't pretend to be a more moral man than my neighbours, my good Captain; but the confidence of this House, or of any member of this House, is not to be abused and undermined while I have eyes and ears. Good day!' said Mr Carker, nodding his head.

Captain Cuttle, looking at him steadily (Mr Carker looked full as steadily at the Captain), went out of the office and left him standing astride before the fire, as calm and pleasant as if there were no more spots upon his soul than on his pure white linen, and his smooth sleek skin.

The Captain glanced, in passing through the outer counting-house, at the desk where he knew poor Walter had been used to sit, now occupied by another young boy, with a face almost as fresh and hopeful as his on the day when they tapped the famous last bottle but one of the old Madeira, in the little back parlour. The nation of ideas, thus awakened, did the Captain a great deal of good; it softened him in the very height of his anger, and brought the tears into his eyes.

Arrived at the wooden Midshipman's again, and sitting down in a corner of the dark shop, the Captain's indignation, strong as it was, could make no head against his grief. Passion seemed not only to do wrong and violence to the memory of the dead, but to be infected by death, and to droop and decline beside it. All the living knaves and liars in the world, were nothing to the honesty and truth of one dead friend.

The only thing the honest Captain made out clearly, in this state of mind, besides the loss of Walter, was, that with him almost the whole world of Captain Cuttle had been drowned. If he reproached himself sometimes, and keenly too, for having ever connived at Walter's innocent deceit, he thought at least as often of the Mr Carker whom no sea could ever render up; and the Mr Dombey, whom he now began to perceive was as far beyond human recall; and the 'Heart's Delight,' with whom he must never foregather again; and the Lovely Peg, that teak-built and trim ballad, that had gone ashore upon a rock, and split into mere planks and beams of rhyme. The Captain sat in the dark shop, thinking of these things, to the entire exclusion of his own injury; and looking with as sad an eye upon the ground, as if in contemplation of their actual fragments, as they floated past.

But the Captain was not unmindful, for all that, of such decent and rest observances in memory of poor Walter, as he felt within his power. Rousing himself, and rousing Rob the Grinder (who in the unnatural twilight was fast asleep), the Captain sallied forth with his attendant at his heels, and the door-key in his pocket, and repairing to one of those convenient slop-selling establishments of which there is abundant choice at the eastern end of London, purchased on the spot two suits of mourning—one for Rob the Grinder, which was immensely too small, and one for himself, which was immensely too large. He also provided Rob with a species of hat, greatly to be admired for its symmetry and usefulness, as well as for a happy blending of the mariner with the coal-heaver; which is usually termed a sou'wester; and which was something of a novelty in connexion with the instrument business. In their several garments, which the vendor declared to be such a miracle in point of fit as nothing but a rare combination of fortuitous circumstances ever brought about, and the fashion of which was unparalleled within the memory of the oldest inhabitant, the Captain and Grinder immediately arrayed themselves: presenting a spectacle fraught with wonder to all who beheld it.

In this altered form, the Captain received Mr Toots. 'I'm took aback, my lad, at present,' said the Captain, 'and will only confirm that there ill news. Tell the young woman to break it gentle to the young lady, and for neither of 'em never to think of me no more—'special, mind you, that is— though I will think of them, when night comes on a hurricane and seas is mountains rowling, for which overhaul your Doctor Watts, brother, and when found make a note on.'

The Captain reserved, until some fitter time, the consideration of Mr Toots's offer of friendship, and thus dismissed him. Captain Cuttle's spirits were so low, in truth, that he half determined, that day, to take no further precautions against surprise from Mrs MacStinger, but to abandon himself recklessly to chance, and be indifferent to what might happen. As evening came on, he fell into a better frame of mind, however; and spoke much of Walter to Rob the Grinder, whose attention and fidelity he likewise incidentally commended. Rob did not blush to hear the Captain earnest in his praises, but sat staring at him, and affecting to snivel with sympathy, and making a feint of being virtuous, and treasuring up every word he said (like a young spy as he was) with very promising deceit.

When Rob had turned in, and was fast asleep, the Captain trimmed the candle, put on his spectacles—he had felt it appropriate to take to spectacles on entering into the Instrument Trade, though his eyes were like a hawk's—and opened the prayer-book at the Burial Service. And reading softly to himself, in the little back parlour, and stopping now and then to wipe his eyes, the Captain, In a true and simple spirit, committed Walter's body to the deep.

CHAPTER 33. Contrasts

Turn we our eyes upon two homes; not lying side by side, but wide apart, though both within easy range and reach of the great city of London.

The first is situated in the green and wooded country near Norwood. It is not a mansion; it is of no pretensions as to size; but it is beautifully arranged, and tastefully kept. The lawn, the soft, smooth slope, the flower-garden, the clumps of trees where graceful forms of ash and willow are not wanting, the conservatory, the rustic verandah with sweet-smelling creeping plants entwined about the pillars, the simple exterior of the house, the well-ordered offices, though all upon the diminutive scale proper to a mere cottage, bespeak an amount of elegant comfort within, that might serve for a palace. This indication is not without warrant; for, within, it is a house of refinement and luxury. Rich colours, excellently blended, meet the eye at every turn; in the furniture—its proportions admirably devised to suit the shapes and sizes of the small rooms; on the walls; upon the floors; tingeing and subduing the light that comes in through the odd glass doors and windows here and there. There are a few choice prints and pictures too; in quaint nooks and recesses there is no want of books; and there are games of skill and chance set forth on tables—fantastic chessmen, dice, backgammon, cards, and billiards.

And yet amidst this opulence of comfort, there is something in the general air that is not well. Is it that the carpets and the cushions are too soft and noiseless, so that those who move or repose among them seem to act by stealth? Is it that the prints and pictures do not commemorate great thoughts or deeds, or render nature in the Poetry of landscape, hall, or hut, but are of one voluptuous cast—mere shows of form and colour—and no more? Is it that the books have all their gold outside, and that the titles of the greater part qualify them to be companions of the prints and pictures? Is it that the completeness and the beauty of the place are here and there belied by an affectation of humility, in some unimportant and inexpensive regard, which is as false as the face of the too truly painted portrait hanging yonder, or its original at breakfast in his easy chair below it? Or is it that, with the daily breath of that original and master of all here, there issues forth some subtle portion of himself, which gives a vague expression of himself to everything about him?

It is Mr Carker the Manager who sits in the easy chair. A gaudy parrot in a burnished cage upon the table tears at the wires with her beak, and goes walking, upside down, in its dome-top, shaking her house and screeching; but Mr Carker is indifferent to the bird, and looks with a musing smile at a picture on the opposite wall.

'A most extraordinary accidental likeness, certainly,' says he.

Perhaps it is a Juno; perhaps a Potiphar's Wife'; perhaps some scornful Nymph—according as the Picture Dealers found the market, when they christened it. It is the figure of a woman, supremely handsome, who, turning away, but with her face addressed to the spectator, flashes her proud glance upon him.

It is like Edith.

With a passing gesture of his hand at the picture—what! a menace? No; yet something like it. A wave as of triumph? No; yet more like that. An insolent salute wafted from his lips? No; yet like that too—he resumes his breakfast, and calls to the chafing and imprisoned bird, who coming down into a pendant gilded hoop within the cage, like a great wedding-ring, swings in it, for his delight.

The second home is on the other side of London, near to where the busy great north road of bygone days is silent and almost deserted, except by wayfarers who toil along on foot. It is a poor small house, barely and sparely furnished, but very clean; and there is even an attempt to decorate it, shown in the homely flowers trained about the porch and in the narrow garden. The neighbourhood in which it stands has as little of the country to recommend it, as it has of the town. It is neither of the town nor country. The former, like the giant in his travelling boots, has made a stride and passed it, and has set his brick-and-mortar heel a long way in advance; but the intermediate space between the giant's feet, as yet, is only blighted country, and not town; and, here, among a few tall chimneys belching smoke all day and night, and among the brick-fields and the lanes where turf is cut, and where the fences tumble down, and where the dusty nettles grow, and where a scrap or two of hedge may yet be seen, and where the bird-catcher still comes occasionally, though he swears every time to come no more—this second home is to be found.'

She who inhabits it, is she who left the first in her devotion to an outcast brother. She withdrew from that home its redeeming spirit, and from its master's breast his solitary angel: but though his liking for her is gone, after this ungrateful slight as he considers it; and though he abandons her altogether in return, an old idea of her is not quite forgotten even by him. Let her flower-garden, in which he never sets his foot, but which is yet maintained, among all his costly alterations, as if she had quitted it but yesterday, bear witness!

Harriet Carker has changed since then, and on her beauty there has fallen a heavier shade than Time of his unassisted self can cast, all-potent as he is—the shadow of anxiety and sorrow, and the daily struggle of a poor existence. But it is beauty still; and still a gentle, quiet, and retiring beauty that must be sought out, for it cannot vaunt itself; if it could, it would be what it is, no more.

Yes. This slight, small, patient figure, neatly dressed in homely stuffs, and indicating nothing but the dull, household virtues, that have so little in common with the received idea of heroism and greatness, unless, indeed, any ray of them should shine through the lives of the great ones of the earth, when it becomes a constellation and is tracked in Heaven straightway—this slight, small, patient figure, leaning on the man still young but worn and grey, is she, his sister, who, of all the world, went over to him in his shame and put her hand in his, and with a sweet composure and determination, led him hopefully upon his barren way.

'It is early, John,' she said. 'Why do you go so early?'

'Not many minutes earlier than usual, Harriet. If I have the time to spare, I should like, I think—it's a fancy—to walk once by the house where I took leave of him.'

'I wish I had ever seen or known him, John.'

'It is better as it is, my dear, remembering his fate.'

'But I could not regret it more, though I had known him. Is not your sorrow mine? And if I had, perhaps you would feel that I was a better companion to you in speaking about him, than I may seem now.

'My dearest sister! Is there anything within the range of rejoicing or regret, in which I am not sure of your companionship?'

'I hope you think not, John, for surely there is nothing!'

'How could you be better to me, or nearer to me then, than you are in this, or anything?' said her brother. 'I feel that you did know him, Harriet, and that you shared my feelings towards him.'

She drew the hand which had been resting on his shoulder, round his neck, and answered, with some hesitation:

'No, not quite.'

'True, true!' he said; 'you think I might have done him no harm if I had allowed myself to know him better?'

'Think! I know it.'

'Designedly, Heaven knows I would not,' he replied, shaking his head mournfully; 'but his reputation was too precious to be perilled by such association. Whether you share that knowledge, or do not, my dear—'

'I do not,' she said quietly.

'It is still the truth, Harriet, and my mind is lighter when I think of him for that which made it so much heavier then.' He checked himself in his tone of melancholy, and smiled upon her as he said 'Good-bye!'

'Good-bye, dear John! In the evening, at the old time and place, I shall meet you as usual on your way home. Good-bye.'

The cordial face she lifted up to his to kiss him, was his home, his life, his universe, and yet it was a portion of his punishment and grief; for in the cloud he saw upon it—though serene and calm as any radiant cloud at sunset—and in the constancy and devotion of her life, and in the sacrifice she had made of ease, enjoyment, and hope, he saw the bitter fruits of his old crime, for ever ripe and fresh.

She stood at the door looking after him, with her hands loosely clasped in each other, as he made his way over the frowzy and uneven patch of ground which lay before their house, which had once (and not long ago) been a pleasant meadow, and was now a very waste, with a disorderly crop of beginnings of mean houses, rising out of the rubbish, as if they had been unskilfully sown there. Whenever he looked back—as once or twice he did—her cordial face shone like a light upon his heart; but when he plodded on his way, and saw her not, the tears were in her eyes as she stood watching him.

Her pensive form was not long idle at the door. There was daily duty to discharge, and daily work to do—for such commonplace spirits that are not heroic, often work hard with their hands—and Harriet was soon busy with her household tasks. These discharged, and the poor house made quite neat and orderly, she counted her little stock of money, with an anxious face, and went out thoughtfully to buy some necessaries for their table, planning and conniving, as she went, how to save. So sordid are the lives of such lo natures, who are not only not heroic to their valets and waiting-women, but have neither valets nor waiting-women to be heroic to withal!

While she was absent, and there was no one in the house, there approached it by a different way from that the brother had taken, a gentleman, a very little past his prime of life perhaps, but of a healthy florid hue, an upright presence, and a bright clear aspect, that was gracious and good- humoured. His eyebrows were still black, and so was much of his hair; the sprinkling of grey observable among the latter, graced the former very much, and showed his broad frank brow and honest eyes to great advantage.

After knocking once at the door, and obtaining no response, this gentleman sat down on a bench in the little porch to wait. A certain skilful action of his fingers as he hummed some bars, and beat time on the seat beside him, seemed to denote the musician; and the extraordinary satisfaction he derived from humming something very slow and long, which had no recognisable tune, seemed to denote that he was a scientific one.

The gentleman was still twirling a theme, which seemed to go round and round and round, and in and in and in, and to involve itself like a corkscrew twirled upon a table, without getting any nearer to anything, when Harriet appeared returning. He rose up as she advanced, and stood with his head uncovered.

'You are come again, Sir!' she said, faltering.

'I take that liberty,' he answered. 'May I ask for five minutes of your leisure?'

After a moment's hesitation, she opened the door, and gave him admission to the little parlour. The gentleman sat down there, drew his chair to the table over against her, and said, in a voice that perfectly corresponded to his appearance, and with a simplicity that was very engaging:

'Miss Harriet, you cannot be proud. You signified to me, when I called t'other morning, that you were. Pardon me if I say that I looked into your face while you spoke, and that it contradicted you. I look into it again,' he added, laying his hand gently on her arm, for an instant, 'and it contradicts you more and more.'

She was somewhat confused and agitated, and could make no ready answer.

'It is the mirror of truth,' said her visitor, 'and gentleness. Excuse my trusting to it, and returning.'

His manner of saying these words, divested them entirely of the character of compliments. It was so plain, grave, unaffected, and sincere, that she bent her head, as if at once to thank him, and acknowledge his sincerity.

'The disparity between our ages,' said the gentleman, 'and the plainness of my purpose, empower me, I am glad to think, to speak my mind. That is my mind; and so you see me for the second time.'

'There is a kind of pride, Sir,' she returned, after a moment's silence, 'or what may be supposed to be pride, which is mere duty. I hope I cherish no other.'

'For yourself,' he said.

'For myself.'

'But—pardon me—' suggested the gentleman. 'For your brother John?'

'Proud of his love, I am,' said Harriet, looking full upon her visitor, and changing her manner on the instant—not that it was less composed and quiet, but that there was a deep impassioned earnestness in it that made the very tremble in her voice a part of her firmness, 'and proud of him. Sir, you who strangely know the story of his life, and repeated it to me when you were here last—'

'Merely to make my way into your confidence,' interposed the gentleman. 'For heaven's sake, don't suppose—'

'I am sure,' she said, 'you revived it, in my hearing, with a kind and good purpose. I am quite sure of it.'

'I thank you,' returned her visitor, pressing her hand hastily. 'I am much obliged to you. You do me justice, I assure you. You were going to say, that I, who know the story of John Carker's life—'

'May think it pride in me,' she continued, 'when I say that I am proud of him! I am. You know the time was, when I was not—when I could not be—but that is past. The humility of many years, the uncomplaining expiation, the true repentance, the terrible regret, the pain I know he has even in my affection, which he thinks has cost me dear, though Heaven knows I am happy, but for his sorrow I—oh, Sir, after what I have seen, let me conjure you, if you are in any place of power, and are ever wronged, never, for any wrong, inflict a punishment that cannot be recalled; while there is a GOD above us to work changes in the hearts He made.'

'Your brother is an altered man,' returned the gentleman, compassionately. 'I assure you I don't doubt it.'

'He was an altered man when he did wrong,' said Harriet. 'He is an altered man again, and is his true self now, believe me, Sir.'

'But we go on, said her visitor, rubbing his forehead, in an absent manner, with his hand, and then drumming thoughtfully on the table, 'we go on in our clockwork routine, from day to day, and can't make out, or follow, these changes. They—they're a metaphysical sort of thing. We—we haven't leisure for it. We—we haven't courage. They're not taught at schools or colleges, and we don't know how to set about it. In short, we are so d ———- d business-like,' said the gentleman, walking to the window, and back, and sitting down again, in a state of extreme dissatisfaction and vexation.

'I am sure,' said the gentleman, rubbing his forehead again; and drumming on the table as before, 'I have good reason to believe that a jog-trot life, the same from day to day, would reconcile one to anything. One don't see anything, one don't hear anything, one don't know anything; that's the fact. We go on taking everything for granted, and so we go on, until whatever we do, good, bad, or indifferent, we do from habit. Habit is all I shall have to report, when I am called upon to plead to my conscience, on my death-bed. "Habit," says I; "I was deaf, dumb, blind, and paralytic, to a million things, from habit." "Very business-like indeed, Mr What's-your-name,' says Conscience, "but it won't do here!"'

The gentleman got up and walked to the window again and back: seriously uneasy, though giving his uneasiness this peculiar expression.

'Miss Harriet,' he said, resuming his chair, 'I wish you would let me serve you. Look at me; I ought to look honest, for I know I am so, at present. Do I?'

'Yes,' she answered with a smile.

'I believe every word you have said,' he returned. 'I am full of self-reproach that I might have known this and seen this, and known you and seen you, any time these dozen years, and that I never have. I hardly know how I ever got here—creature that I am, not only of my own habit, but of other people's! But having done so, let me do something. I ask it in all honour and respect. You inspire me with both, in the highest degree. Let me do something.'

'We are contented, Sir.'

'No, no, not quite,' returned the gentleman. 'I think not quite. There are some little comforts that might smooth your life, and his. And his!' he repeated, fancying that had made some impression on her. 'I have been in the habit of thinking that there was nothing wanting to be done for him; that it was all settled and over; in short, of not thinking at all about it. I am different now. Let me do something for him. You too,' said the visitor, with careful delicacy, 'have need to watch your health closely, for his sake, and I fear it fails.'

'Whoever you may be, Sir,' answered Harriet, raising her eyes to his face, 'I am deeply grateful to you. I feel certain that in all you say, you have no object in the world but kindness to us. But years have passed since we began this life; and to take from my brother any part of what has so endeared him to me, and so proved his better resolution—any fragment of the merit of his unassisted, obscure, and forgotten reparation—would be to diminish the comfort it will be to him and me, when that time comes to each of us, of which you spoke just now. I thank you better with these tears than any words. Believe it, pray.

The gentleman was moved, and put the hand she held out, to his lips, much as a tender father might kiss the hand of a dutiful child. But more reverently.

'If the day should ever come, said Harriet, 'when he is restored, in part, to the position he lost—'

'Restored!' cried the gentleman, quickly. 'How can that be hoped for? In whose hands does the power of any restoration lie? It is no mistake of mine, surely, to suppose that his having gained the priceless blessing of his life, is one cause of the animosity shown to him by his brother.'

'You touch upon a subject that is never breathed between us; not even between us,' said Harriet.

'I beg your forgiveness,' said the visitor. 'I should have known it. I entreat you to forget that I have done so, inadvertently. And now, as I dare urge no more—as I am not sure that I have a right to do so—though Heaven knows, even that doubt may be habit,' said the gentleman, rubbing his head, as despondently as before, 'let me; though a stranger, yet no stranger; ask two favours.'

'What are they?' she inquired.

'The first, that if you should see cause to change your resolution, you will suffer me to be as your right hand. My name shall then be at your service; it is useless now, and always insignificant.'

'Our choice of friends,' she answered, smiling faintly, 'is not so great, that I need any time for consideration. I can promise that.'

'The second, that you will allow me sometimes, say every Monday morning, at nine o'clock—habit again—I must be businesslike,' said the gentleman, with a whimsical inclination to quarrel with himself on that head, 'in walking past, to see you at the door or window. I don't ask to come in, as your brother will be gone out at that hour. I don't ask to speak to you. I merely ask to see, for the satisfaction of my own mind, that you are well, and without intrusion to remind you, by the sight of me, that you have a friend—an elderly friend, grey-haired already, and fast growing greyer—whom you may ever command.'

The cordial face looked up in his; confided in it; and promised.

'I understand, as before,' said the gentleman, rising, 'that you purpose not to mention my visit to John Carker, lest he should be at all distressed by my acquaintance with his history. I am glad of it, for it is out of the ordinary course of things, and—habit again!' said the gentleman, checking himself impatiently, 'as if there were no better course than the ordinary course!'

With that he turned to go, and walking, bareheaded, to the outside of the little porch, took leave of her with such a happy mixture of unconstrained respect and unaffected interest, as no breeding could have taught, no truth mistrusted, and nothing but a pure and single heart expressed.

Many half-forgotten emotions were awakened in the sister's mind by this visit. It was so very long since any other visitor had crossed their threshold; it was so very long since any voice of apathy had made sad music in her ears; that the stranger's figure remained present to her, hours afterwards, when she sat at the window, plying her needle; and his words seemed newly spoken, again and again. He had touched the spring that opened her whole life; and if she lost him for a short space, it was only among the many shapes of the one great recollection of which that life was made.

Musing and working by turns; now constraining herself to be steady at her needle for a long time together, and now letting her work fall, unregarded, on her lap, and straying wheresoever her busier thoughts led, Harriet Carker found the hours glide by her, and the day steal on. The morning, which had been bright and clear, gradually became overcast; a sharp wind set in; the rain fell heavily; and a dark mist drooping over the distant town, hid it from the view.

She often looked with compassion, at such a time, upon the stragglers who came wandering into London, by the great highway hard by, and who, footsore and weary, and gazing fearfully at the huge town before them, as if foreboding that their misery there would be but as a drop of water in the sea, or as a grain of sea-sand on the shore, went shrinking on, cowering before the angry weather, and looking as if the very elements rejected them. Day after day, such travellers crept past, but always, as she thought, In one direction—always towards the town. Swallowed up in one phase or other of its immensity, towards which they seemed impelled by a desperate fascination, they never returned. Food for the hospitals, the churchyards, the prisons, the river, fever, madness, vice, and death,—they passed on to the monster, roaring in the distance, and were lost.

The chill wind was howling, and the rain was falling, and the day was darkening moodily, when Harriet, raising her eyes from the work on which she had long since been engaged with unremitting constancy, saw one of these travellers approaching.

A woman. A solitary woman of some thirty years of age; tall; well-formed; handsome; miserably dressed; the soil of many country roads in varied weather—dust, chalk, clay, gravel—clotted on her grey cloak by the streaming wet; no bonnet on her head, nothing to defend her rich black hair from the rain, but a torn handkerchief; with the fluttering ends of which, and with her hair, the wind blinded her so that she often stopped to push them back, and look upon the way she was going.

She was in the act of doing so, when Harriet observed her. As her hands, parting on her sunburnt forehead, swept across her face, and threw aside the hindrances that encroached upon it, there was a reckless and regardless beauty in it: a dauntless and depraved indifference to more than weather: a carelessness of what was cast upon her bare head from Heaven or earth: that, coupled with her misery and loneliness, touched the heart of her fellow- woman. She thought of all that was perverted and debased within her, no less than without: of modest graces of the mind, hardened and steeled, like these attractions of the person; of the many gifts of the Creator flung to the winds like the wild hair; of all the beautiful ruin upon which the storm was beating and the night was coming.

Thinking of this, she did not turn away with a delicate indignation—too many of her own compassionate and tender sex too often do—but pitied her.

Her fallen sister came on, looking far before her, trying with her eager eyes to pierce the mist in which the city was enshrouded, and glancing, now and then, from side to side, with the bewildered—and uncertain aspect of a stranger. Though her tread was bold and courageous, she was fatigued, and after a moment of irresolution,—sat down upon a heap of stones; seeking no shelter from the rain, but letting it rain on her as it would.

She was now opposite the house; raising her head after resting it for a moment on both hands, her eyes met those of Harriet.

In a moment, Harriet was at the door; and the other, rising from her seat at her beck, came slowly, and with no conciliatory look, towards her.

'Why do you rest in the rain?' said Harriet, gently.

'Because I have no other resting-place,' was the reply.

'But there are many places of shelter near here. This,' referring to the little porch, 'is better than where you were. You are very welcome to rest here.'

The wanderer looked at her, in doubt and surprise, but without any expression of thankfulness; and sitting down, and taking off one of her worn shoes to beat out the fragments of stone and dust that were inside, showed that her foot was cut and bleeding.

Harriet uttering an expression of pity, the traveller looked up with a contemptuous and incredulous smile.

'Why, what's a torn foot to such as me?' she said. 'And what's a torn foot in such as me, to such as you?'

'Come in and wash it,' answered Harriet, mildly, 'and let me give you something to bind it up.'

The woman caught her arm, and drawing it before her own eyes, hid them against it, and wept. Not like a woman, but like a stern man surprised into that weakness; with a violent heaving of her breast, and struggle for recovery, that showed how unusual the emotion was with her.

She submitted to be led into the house, and, evidently more in gratitude than in any care for herself, washed and bound the injured place. Harriet then put before her fragments of her own frugal dinner, and when she had eaten of them, though sparingly, besought her, before resuming her road (which she showed her anxiety to do), to dry her clothes before the fire.

Again, more in gratitude than with any evidence of concern in her own behalf, she sat down in front of it, and unbinding the handkerchief about her head, and letting her thick wet hair fall down below her waist, sat drying it with the palms of her hands, and looking at the blaze.

'I daresay you are thinking,' she said, lifting her head suddenly, 'that I used to be handsome, once. I believe I was—I know I was—Look here!' She held up her hair roughly with both hands; seizing it as if she would have torn it out; then, threw it down again, and flung it back as though it were a heap of serpents.

'Are you a stranger in this place?' asked Harriet.

'A stranger!' she returned, stopping between each short reply, and looking at the fire. 'Yes. Ten or a dozen years a stranger. I have had no almanack where I have been. Ten or a dozen years. I don't know this part. It's much altered since I went away.'

'Have you been far?'

'Very far. Months upon months over the sea, and far away even then. I have been where convicts go,' she added, looking full upon her entertainer. 'I have been one myself.'

'Heaven help you and forgive you!' was the gentle answer.

'Ah! Heaven help me and forgive me!' she returned, nodding her head at the fire. 'If man would help some of us a little more, God would forgive us all the sooner perhaps.'

But she was softened by the earnest manner, and the cordial face so full of mildness and so free from judgment, of her, and said, less hardily:

'We may be about the same age, you and me. If I am older, it is not above a year or two. Oh think of that!'

She opened her arms, as though the exhibition of her outward form would show the moral wretch she was; and letting them drop at her sides, hung down her head.

'There is nothing we may not hope to repair; it is never too late to amend,' said Harriet. 'You are penitent?'

'No,' she answered. 'I am not! I can't be. I am no such thing. Why should I be penitent, and all the world go free? They talk to me of my penitence. Who's penitent for the wrongs that have been done to me?'

She rose up, bound her handkerchief about her head, and turned to move away.

'Where are you going?' said Harriet.

'Yonder,' she answered, pointing with her hand. 'To London.'

'Have you any home to go to?'

'I think I have a mother. She's as much a mother, as her dwelling is a home,' she answered with a bitter laugh.

'Take this,' cried Harriet, putting money in her hand. 'Try to do well. It is very little, but for one day it may keep you from harm.'

'Are you married?' said the other, faintly, as she took it.

'No. I live here with my brother. We have not much to spare, or I would give you more.'

'Will you let me kiss you?'

Seeing no scorn or repugnance in her face, the object of her charity bent over her as she asked the question, and pressed her lips against her cheek. Once more she caught her arm, and covered her eyes with it; and then was gone.

Gone into the deepening night, and howling wind, and pelting rain; urging her way on towards the mist-enshrouded city where the blurred lights gleamed; and with her black hair, and disordered head-gear, fluttering round her reckless face.

CHAPTER 34. Another Mother and Daughter

In an ugly and dark room, an old woman, ugly and dark too, sat listening to the wind and rain, and crouching over a meagre fire. More constant to the last-named occupation than the first, she never changed her attitude, unless, when any stray drops of rain fell hissing on the smouldering embers, to raise her head with an awakened attention to the whistling and pattering outside, and gradually to let it fall again lower and lower and lower as she sunk into a brooding state of thought, in which the noises of the night were as indistinctly regarded as is the monotonous rolling of a sea by one who sits in contemplation on its shore.

There was no light in the room save that which the fire afforded. Glaring sullenly from time to time like the eye of a fierce beast half asleep, it revealed no objects that needed to be jealous of a better display. A heap of rags, a heap of bones, a wretched bed, two or three mutilated chairs or stools, the black walls and blacker ceiling, were all its winking brightness shone upon. As the old woman, with a gigantic and distorted image of herself thrown half upon the wall behind her, half upon the roof above, sat bending over the few loose bricks within which it was pent, on the damp hearth of the chimney—for there was no stove—she looked as if she were watching at some witch's altar for a favourable token; and but that the movement of her chattering jaws and trembling chin was too frequent and too fast for the slow flickering of the fire, it would have seemed an illusion wrought by the light, as it came and went, upon a face as motionless as the form to which it belonged.

If Florence could have stood within the room and looked upon the original of the shadow thrown upon the wall and roof as it cowered thus over the fire, a glance might have sufficed to recall the figure of Good Mrs Brown; notwithstanding that her childish recollection of that terrible old woman was as grotesque and exaggerated a presentment of the truth, perhaps, as the shadow on the wall. But Florence was not there to look on; and Good Mrs Brown remained unrecognised, and sat staring at her fire, unobserved.

Attracted by a louder sputtering than usual, as the rain came hissing down the chimney in a little stream, the old woman raised her head, impatiently, to listen afresh. And this time she did not drop it again; for there was a hand upon the door, and a footstep in the room.

'Who's that?' she said, looking over her shoulder.

'One who brings you news, was the answer, in a woman's voice.

'News? Where from?'

'From abroad.'

'From beyond seas?' cried the old woman, starting up.

'Ay, from beyond seas.'

The old woman raked the fire together, hurriedly, and going close to her visitor who had entered, and shut the door, and who now stood in the middle of the room, put her hand upon the drenched cloak, and turned the unresisting figure, so as to have it in the full light of the fire. She did not find what she had expected, whatever that might be; for she let the cloak go again, and uttered a querulous cry of disappointment and misery.

'What is the matter?' asked her visitor.

'Oho! Oho!' cried the old woman, turning her face upward, with a terrible howl.

'What is the matter?' asked the visitor again.

'It's not my gal!' cried the old woman, tossing up her arms, and clasping her hands above her head. 'Where's my Alice? Where's my handsome daughter? They've been the death of her!'

'They've not been the death of her yet, if your name's Marwood,' said the visitor.

'Have you seen my gal, then?' cried the old woman. 'Has she wrote to me?'

'She said you couldn't read,' returned the other.

'No more I can!' exclaimed the old woman, wringing her hands.

'Have you no light here?' said the other, looking round the room.

The old woman, mumbling and shaking her head, and muttering to herself about her handsome daughter, brought a candle from a cupboard in the corner, and thrusting it into the fire with a trembling hand, lighted it with some difficulty and set it on the table. Its dirty wick burnt dimly at first, being choked in its own grease; and when the bleared eyes and failing sight of the old woman could distinguish anything by its light, her visitor was sitting with her arms folded, her eyes turned downwards, and a handkerchief she had worn upon her head lying on the table by her side.

'She sent to me by word of mouth then, my gal, Alice?' mumbled the old woman, after waiting for some moments. 'What did she say?'

'Look,' returned the visitor.

The old woman repeated the word in a scared uncertain way; and, shading her eyes, looked at the speaker, round the room, and at the speaker once again.

'Alice said look again, mother;' and the speaker fixed her eyes upon her.

Again the old woman looked round the room, and at her visitor, and round the room once more. Hastily seizing the candle, and rising from her seat, she held it to the visitor's face, uttered a loud cry, set down the light, and fell upon her neck!

'It's my gal! It's my Alice! It's my handsome daughter, living and come back!' screamed the old woman, rocking herself to and fro upon the breast that coldly suffered her embrace. 'It's my gal! It's my Alice! It's my handsome daughter, living and come back!' she screamed again, dropping on the floor before her, clasping her knees, laying her head against them, and still rocking herself to and fro with every frantic demonstration of which her vitality was capable.

'Yes, mother,' returned Alice, stooping forward for a moment and kissing her, but endeavouring, even in the act, to disengage herself from her embrace. 'I am here, at last. Let go, mother; let go. Get up, and sit in your chair. What good does this do?'

'She's come back harder than she went!' cried the mother, looking up in her face, and still holding to her knees. 'She don't care for me! after all these years, and all the wretched life I've led!'

'Why> mother!' said Alice, shaking her ragged skirts to detach the old woman from them: 'there are two sides to that. There have been years for me as well as you, and there has been wretchedness for me as well as you. Get up, get up!'

Her mother rose, and cried, and wrung her hands, and stood at a little distance gazing on her. Then she took the candle again, and going round her, surveyed her from head to foot, making a low moaning all the time. Then she put the candle down, resumed her chair, and beating her hands together to a kind of weary tune, and rolling herself from side to side, continued moaning and wailing to herself.

Alice got up, took off her wet cloak, and laid it aside. That done, she sat down as before, and with her arms folded, and her eyes gazing at the fire, remained silently listening with a contemptuous face to her old mother's inarticulate complainings.

'Did you expect to see me return as youthful as I went away, mother?' she said at length, turning her eyes upon the old woman. 'Did you think a foreign life, like mine, was good for good looks? One would believe so, to hear you!'

'It ain't that!' cried the mother. 'She knows it!'

'What is it then?' returned the daughter. 'It had best be something that don't last, mother, or my way out is easier than my way in.

'Hear that!' exclaimed the mother. 'After all these years she threatens to desert me in the moment of her coming back again!'

'I tell you, mother, for the second time, there have been years for me as well as you,' said Alice. 'Come back harder? Of course I have come back harder. What else did you expect?'

'Harder to me! To her own dear mother!' cried the old woman

'I don't know who began to harden me, if my own dear mother didn't,' she returned, sitting with her folded arms, and knitted brows, and compressed lips as if she were bent on excluding, by force, every softer feeling from her breast. 'Listen, mother, to a word or two. If we understand each other now, we shall not fall out any more, perhaps. I went away a girl, and have come back a woman. I went away undutiful enough, and have come back no better, you may swear. But have you been very dutiful to me?'

'I!' cried the old woman. 'To my gal! A mother dutiful to her own child!'

'It sounds unnatural, don't it?' returned the daughter, looking coldly on her with her stern, regardless, hardy, beautiful face; 'but I have thought of it sometimes, in the course of my lone years, till I have got used to it. I have heard some talk about duty first and last; but it has always been of my duty to other people. I have wondered now and then—to pass away the time—whether no one ever owed any duty to me.

Her mother sat mowing, and mumbling, and shaking her head, but whether angrily or remorsefully, or in denial, or only in her physical infirmity, did not appear.

'There was a child called Alice Marwood,' said the daughter, with a laugh, and looking down at herself in terrible derision of herself, 'born, among poverty and neglect, and nursed in it. Nobody taught her, nobody stepped forward to help her, nobody cared for her.'

'Nobody!' echoed the mother, pointing to herself, and striking her breast.

'The only care she knew,' returned the daughter, 'was to be beaten, and stinted, and abused sometimes; and she might have done better without that. She lived in homes like this, and in the streets, with a crowd of little wretches like herself; and yet she brought good looks out of this childhood. So much the worse for her. She had better have been hunted and worried to death for ugliness.'

'Go on! go on!' exclaimed the mother.

'I am going on,' returned the daughter. 'There was a girl called Alice Marwood. She was handsome. She was taught too late, and taught all wrong. She was too well cared for, too well trained, too well helped on, too much looked after. You were very fond of her—you were better off then. What came to that girl comes to thousands every year. It was only ruin, and she was born to it.'

'After all these years!' whined the old woman. 'My gal begins with this.'

'She'll soon have ended,' said the daughter. 'There was a criminal called Alice Marwood—a girl still, but deserted and an outcast. And she was tried, and she was sentenced. And lord, how the gentlemen in the Court talked about it! and how grave the judge was on her duty, and on her having perverted the gifts of nature—as if he didn't know better than anybody there, that they had been made curses to her!—and how he preached about the strong arm of the Law—so very strong to save her, when she was an innocent and helpless little wretch!—and how solemn and religious it all was! I have thought of that, many times since, to be sure!'

She folded her arms tightly on her breast, and laughed in a tone that made the howl of the old woman musical.

'So Alice Marwood was transported, mother,' she pursued, 'and was sent to learn her duty, where there was twenty times less duty, and more wickedness, and wrong, and infamy, than here. And Alice Marwood is come back a woman. Such a woman as she ought to be, after all this. In good time, there will be more solemnity, and more fine talk, and more strong arm, most likely, and there will be an end of her; but the gentlemen needn't be afraid of being thrown out of work. There's crowds of little wretches, boy and girl, growing up in any of the streets they live in, that'll keep them to it till they've made their fortunes.'

The old woman leaned her elbows on the table, and resting her face upon her two hands, made a show of being in great distress—or really was, perhaps.

'There! I have done, mother,' said the daughter, with a motion of her head, as if in dismissal of the subject. 'I have said enough. Don't let you and I talk of being dutiful, whatever we do. Your childhood was like mine, I suppose. So much the worse for both of us. I don't want to blame you, or to defend myself; why should I? That's all over long ago. But I am a woman—not a girl, now—and you and I needn't make a show of our history, like the gentlemen in the Court. We know all about it, well enough.'

Lost and degraded as she was, there was a beauty in her, both of face and form, which, even in its worst expression, could not but be recognised as such by anyone regarding her with the least attention. As she subsided into silence, and her face which had been harshly agitated, quieted down; while her dark eyes, fixed upon the fire, exchanged the reckless light that had animated them, for one that was softened by something like sorrow; there shone through all her wayworn misery and fatigue, a ray of the departed radiance of the fallen angel.'

Her mother, after watching her for some time without speaking, ventured to steal her withered hand a little nearer to her across the table; and finding that she permitted this, to touch her face, and smooth her hair. With the feeling, as it seemed, that the old woman was at least sincere in this show of interest, Alice made no movement to check her; so, advancing by degrees, she bound up her daughter's hair afresh, took off her wet shoes, if they deserved the name, spread something dry upon her shoulders, and hovered humbly about her, muttering to herself, as she recognised her old features and expression more and more.

'You are very poor, mother, I see,' said Alice, looking round, when she had sat thus for some time.

'Bitter poor, my deary,' replied the old woman.

She admired her daughter, and was afraid of her. Perhaps her admiration, such as it was, had originated long ago, when she first found anything that was beautiful appearing in the midst of the squalid fight of her existence. Perhaps her fear was referable, in some sort, to the retrospect she had so lately heard. Be this as it might, she stood, submissively and deferentially, before her child, and inclined her head, as if in a pitiful entreaty to be spared any further reproach.

'How have you lived?'

'By begging, my deary.

'And pilfering, mother?'

'Sometimes, Ally—in a very small way. I am old and timid. I have taken trifles from children now and then, my deary, but not often. I have tramped about the country, pet, and I know what I know. I have watched.'

'Watched?' returned the daughter, looking at her.

'I have hung about a family, my deary,' said the mother, even more humbly and submissively than before.

'What family?'

'Hush, darling. Don't be angry with me. I did it for the love of you. In memory of my poor gal beyond seas.' She put out her hand deprecatingly, and drawing it back again, laid it on her lips.

'Years ago, my deary,' she pursued, glancing timidly at the attentive and stem face opposed to her, 'I came across his little child, by chance.'

'Whose child?'

'Not his, Alice deary; don't look at me like that; not his. How could it be his? You know he has none.'

'Whose then?' returned the daughter. 'You said his.'

'Hush, Ally; you frighten me, deary. Mr Dombey's—only Mr Dombey's. Since then, darling, I have seen them often. I have seen him.'

In uttering this last word, the old woman shrunk and recoiled, as if with sudden fear that her daughter would strike her. But though the daughter's face was fixed upon her, and expressed the most vehement passion, she remained still: except that she clenched her arms tighter and tighter within each other, on her bosom, as if to restrain them by that means from doing an injury to herself, or someone else, in the blind fury of the wrath that suddenly possessed her.

'Little he thought who I was!' said the old woman, shaking her clenched hand.

'And little he cared!' muttered her daughter, between her teeth.

'But there we were, said the old woman, 'face to face. I spoke to him, and he spoke to me. I sat and watched him as he went away down a long grove of trees: and at every step he took, I cursed him soul and body.'

'He will thrive in spite of that,' returned the daughter disdainfully.

'Ay, he is thriving,' said the mother.

She held her peace; for the face and form before her were unshaped by rage. It seemed as if the bosom would burst with the emotions that strove within it. The effort that constrained and held it pent up, was no less formidable than the rage itself: no less bespeaking the violent and dangerous character of the woman who made it. But it succeeded, and she asked, after a silence:

'Is he married?'

'No, deary,' said the mother.

'Going to be?'

'Not that I know of, deary. But his master and friend is married. Oh, we may give him joy! We may give 'em all joy!' cried the old woman, hugging herself with her lean arms in her exultation. 'Nothing but joy to us will come of that marriage. Mind me!'

The daughter looked at her for an explanation.

'But you are wet and tired; hungry and thirsty,' said the old woman, hobbling to the cupboard; 'and there's little here, and little'—diving down into her pocket, and jingling a few half—pence on the table—'little here. Have you any money, Alice, deary?'

The covetous, sharp, eager face, with which she 'asked the question and looked on, as her daughter took out of her bosom the little gift she had so lately received, told almost as much of the history of this parent and child as the child herself had told in words.

'Is that all?' said the mother.

'I have no more. I should not have this, but for charity.'

'But for charity, eh, deary?' said the old woman, bending greedily over the table to look at the money, which she appeared distrustful of her daughter's still retaining in her hand, and gazing on. 'Humph! six and six is twelve, and six eighteen—so—we must make the most of it. I'll go buy something to eat and drink.'

With greater alacrity than might have been expected in one of her appearance—for age and misery seemed to have made her as decrepit as ugly—she began to occupy her trembling hands in tying an old bonnet on her head, and folding a torn shawl about herself: still eyeing the money in her daughter's hand, with the same sharp desire.

'What joy is to come to us of this marriage, mother?' asked the daughter. 'You have not told me that.'

'The joy,' she replied, attiring herself, with fumbling fingers, 'of no love at all, and much pride and hate, my deary. The joy of confusion and strife among 'em, proud as they are, and of danger—danger, Alice!'

'What danger?'

'I have seen what I have seen. I know what I know!' chuckled the mother. 'Let some look to it. Let some be upon their guard. My gal may keep good company yet!'

Then, seeing that in the wondering earnestness with which her daughter regarded her, her hand involuntarily closed upon the money, the old woman made more speed to secure it, and hurriedly added, 'but I'll go buy something; I'll go buy something.'

As she stood with her hand stretched out before her daughter, her daughter, glancing again at the money, put it to her lips before parting with it.

'What, Ally! Do you kiss it?' chuckled the old woman. 'That's like me—I often do. Oh, it's so good to us!' squeezing her own tarnished halfpence up to her bag of a throat, 'so good to us in everything but not coming in heaps!'

'I kiss it, mother,' said the daughter, 'or I did then—I don't know that I ever did before—for the giver's sake.'

'The giver, eh, deary?' retorted the old woman, whose dimmed eyes glistened as she took it. 'Ay! I'll kiss it for the giver's sake, too, when the giver can make it go farther. But I'll go spend it, deary. I'll be back directly.'

'You seem to say you know a great deal, mother,' said the daughter, following her to the door with her eyes. 'You have grown very wise since we parted.'

'Know!' croaked the old woman, coming back a step or two, 'I know more than you think I know more than he thinks, deary, as I'll tell you by and bye. I know all.'

The daughter smiled incredulously.

'I know of his brother, Alice,' said the old woman, stretching out her neck with a leer of malice absolutely frightful, 'who might have been where you have been—for stealing money—and who lives with his sister, over yonder, by the north road out of London.'

'Where?'

'By the north road out of London, deary. You shall see the house if you like. It ain't much to boast of, genteel as his own is. No, no, no,' cried the old woman, shaking her head and laughing; for her daughter had started up, 'not now; it's too far off; it's by the milestone, where the stones are heaped;—to-morrow, deary, if it's fine, and you are in the humour. But I'll go spend—'

'Stop!' and the daughter flung herself upon her, with her former passion raging like a fire. 'The sister is a fair-faced Devil, with brown hair?'

The old woman, amazed and terrified, nodded her head.

'I see the shadow of him in her face! It's a red house standing by itself. Before the door there is a small green porch.'

Again the old woman nodded.

'In which I sat to-day! Give me back the money.'

'Alice! Deary!'

'Give me back the money, or you'll be hurt.'

She forced it from the old woman's hand as she spoke, and utterly indifferent to her complainings and entreaties, threw on the garments she had taken off, and hurried out, with headlong speed.

The mother followed, limping after her as she could, and expostulating with no more effect upon her than upon the wind and rain and darkness that encompassed them. Obdurate and fierce in her own purpose, and indifferent to all besides, the daughter defied the weather and the distance, as if she had known no travel or fatigue, and made for the house where she had been relieved. After some quarter of an hour's walking, the old woman, spent and out of breath, ventured to hold by her skirts; but she ventured no more, and they travelled on in silence through the wet and gloom. If the mother now and then uttered a word of complaint, she stifled it lest her daughter should break away from her and leave her behind; and the daughter was dumb.

It was within an hour or so of midnight, when they left the regular streets behind them, and entered on the deeper gloom of that neutral ground where the house was situated. The town lay in the distance, lurid and lowering; the bleak wind howled over the open space; all around was black, wild, desolate.

'This is a fit place for me!' said the daughter, stopping to look back. 'I thought so, when I was here before, to-day.'

'Alice, my deary,' cried the mother, pulling her gently by the skirt. 'Alice!'

'What now, mother?'

'Don't give the money back, my darling; please don't. We can't afford it. We want supper, deary. Money is money, whoever gives it. Say what you will, but keep the money.'

'See there!' was all the daughter's answer. 'That is the house I mean. Is that it?'

The old woman nodded in the affirmative; and a few more paces brought them to the threshold. There was the light of fire and candle in the room where Alice had sat to dry her clothes; and on her knocking at the door, John Carker appeared from that room.

He was surprised to see such visitors at such an hour, and asked Alice what she wanted.

'I want your sister,' she said. 'The woman who gave me money to-day.'

At the sound of her raised voice, Harriet came out.

'Oh!' said Alice. 'You are here! Do you remember me?'

'Yes,' she answered, wondering.

The face that had humbled itself before her, looked on her now with such invincible hatred and defiance; and the hand that had gently touched her arm, was clenched with such a show of evil purpose, as if it would gladly strangle her; that she drew close to her brother for protection.

'That I could speak with you, and not know you! That I could come near you, and not feel what blood was running in your veins, by the tingling of my own!' said Alice, with a menacing gesture.

'What do you mean? What have I done?'

'Done!' returned the other. 'You have sat me by your fire; you have given me food and money; you have bestowed your compassion on me! You! whose name I spit upon!'

The old woman, with a malevolence that made her ugliness quite awful, shook her withered hand at the brother and sister in confirmation of her daughter, but plucked her by the skirts again, nevertheless, imploring her to keep the money.

'If I dropped a tear upon your hand, may it wither it up! If I spoke a gentle word in your hearing, may it deafen you! If I touched you with my lips, may the touch be poison to you! A curse upon this roof that gave me shelter! Sorrow and shame upon your head! Ruin upon all belonging to you!'

As she said the words, she threw the money down upon the ground, and spurned it with her foot.

'I tread it in the dust: I wouldn't take it if it paved my way to Heaven! I would the bleeding foot that brought me here to-day, had rotted off, before it led me to your house!'

Harriet, pale and trembling, restrained her brother, and suffered her to go on uninterrupted.

'It was well that I should be pitied and forgiven by you, or anyone of your name, in the first hour of my return! It was well that you should act the kind good lady to me! I'll thank you when I die; I'll pray for you, and all your race, you may be sure!'

With a fierce action of her hand, as if she sprinkled hatred on the ground, and with it devoted those who were standing there to destruction, she looked up once at the black sky, and strode out into the wild night.

The mother, who had plucked at her skirts again and again in vain, and had eyed the money lying on the threshold with an absorbing greed that seemed to concentrate her faculties upon it, would have prowled about, until the house was dark, and then groped in the mire on the chance of repossessing herself of it. But the daughter drew her away, and they set forth, straight, on their return to their dwelling; the old woman whimpering and bemoaning their loss upon the road, and fretfully bewailing, as openly as she dared, the undutiful conduct of her handsome girl in depriving her of a supper, on the very first night of their reunion.

Supperless to bed she went, saving for a few coarse fragments; and those she sat mumbling and munching over a scrap of fire, long after her undutiful daughter lay asleep.

Were this miserable mother, and this miserable daughter, only the reduction to their lowest grade, of certain social vices sometimes prevailing higher up? In this round world of many circles within circles, do we make a weary journey from the high grade to the low, to find at last that they lie close together, that the two extremes touch, and that our journey's end is but our starting-place? Allowing for great difference of stuff and texture, was the pattern of this woof repeated among gentle blood at all?

Say, Edith Dombey! And Cleopatra, best of mothers, let us have your testimony!

CHAPTER 35. The Happy Pair

The dark blot on the street is gone. Mr Dombey's mansion, if it be a gap among the other houses any longer, is only so because it is not to be vied with in its brightness, and haughtily casts them off. The saying is, that home is home, be it never so homely. If it hold good in the opposite contingency, and home is home be it never so stately, what an altar to the Household Gods is raised up here!

Lights are sparkling in the windows this evening, and the ruddy glow of fires is warm and bright upon the hangings and soft carpets, and the dinner waits to be served, and the dinner-table is handsomely set forth, though only for four persons, and the side board is cumbrous with plate. It is the first time that the house has been arranged for occupation since its late changes, and the happy pair are looked for every minute.

Only second to the wedding morning, in the interest and expectation it engenders among the household, is this evening of the coming home. Mrs Perch is in the kitchen taking tea; and has made the tour of the establishment, and priced the silks and damasks by the yard, and exhausted every interjection in the dictionary and out of it expressive of admiration and wonder. The upholsterer's foreman, who has left his hat, with a pocket-handkerchief in it, both smelling strongly of varnish, under a chair in the hall, lurks about the house, gazing upwards at the cornices, and downward at the carpets, and occasionally, in a silent transport of enjoyment, taking a rule out of his pocket, and skirmishingly measuring expensive objects, with unutterable feelings. Cook is in high spirits, and says give her a place where there's plenty of company (as she'll bet you sixpence there will be now), for she is of a lively disposition, and she always was from a child, and she don't mind who knows it; which sentiment elicits from the breast of Mrs Perch a responsive murmur of support and approbation. All the housemaid hopes is, happiness for 'em—but marriage is a lottery, and the more she thinks about it, the more she feels the independence and the safety of a single life. Mr Towlinson is saturnine and grim' and says that's his opinion too, and give him War besides, and down with the French—for this young man has a general impression that every foreigner is a Frenchman, and must be by the laws of nature.

At each new sound of wheels, they all stop> whatever they are saying, and listen; and more than once there is a general starting up and a cry of 'Here they are!' But here they are not yet; and Cook begins to mourn over the dinner, which has been put back twice, and the upholsterer's foreman still goes lurking about the rooms, undisturbed in his blissful reverie!

Florence is ready to receive her father and her new Mama Whether the emotions that are throbbing in her breast originate In pleasure or in pain, she hardly knows. But the fluttering heart sends added colour to her cheeks, and brightness to her eyes; and they say downstairs, drawing their heads together—for they always speak softly when they speak of her—how beautiful Miss Florence looks to-night, and what a sweet young lady she has grown, poor dear! A pause succeeds; and then Cook, feeling, as president, that her sentiments are waited for, wonders whether—and there stops. The housemaid wonders too, and so does Mrs Perch, who has the happy social faculty of always wondering when other people wonder, without being at all particular what she wonders at. Mr Towlinson, who now descries an opportunity of bringing down the spirits of the ladies to his own level, says wait and see; he wishes some people were well out of this. Cook leads a sigh then, and a murmur of 'Ah, it's a strange world, it is indeed!' and when it has gone round the table, adds persuasively, 'but Miss Florence can't well be the worse for any change, Tom.' Mr Towlinson's rejoinder, pregnant with frightful meaning, is 'Oh, can't she though!' and sensible that a mere man can scarcely be more prophetic, or improve upon that, he holds his peace.

Mrs Skewton, prepared to greet her darling daughter and dear son-in-law with open arms, is appropriately attired for that purpose in a very youthful costume, with short sleeves. At present, however, her ripe charms are blooming in the shade of her own apartments, whence she had not emerged since she took possession of them a few hours ago, and where she is fast growing fretful, on account of the postponement of dinner. The maid who ought to be a skeleton, but is in truth a buxom damsel, is, on the other hand, In a most amiable state: considering her quarterly stipend much safer than heretofore, and foreseeing a great improvement in her board and lodging.

Where are the happy pair, for whom this brave home is waiting? Do steam, tide, wind, and horses, all abate their speed, to linger on such happiness? Does the swarm of loves and graces hovering about them retard their progress by its numbers? Are there so many flowers in their happy path, that they can scarcely move along, without entanglement in thornless roses, and sweetest briar?

They are here at last! The noise of wheels is heard, grows louder, and a carriage drives up to the door! A thundering knock from the obnoxious foreigner anticipates the rush of Mr Towlinson and party to open it; and Mr Dombey and his bride alight, and walk in arm in arm.

'My sweetest Edith!' cries an agitated voice upon the stairs. 'My dearest Dombey!' and the short sleeves wreath themselves about the happy couple in turn, and embrace them.

Florence had come down to the hall too, but did not advance: reserving her timid welcome until these nearer and dearer transports should subside. But the eyes of Edith sought her out, upon the threshold; and dismissing her sensitive parent with a slight kiss on the cheek, she hurried on to Florence and embraced her.

'How do you do, Florence?' said Mr Dombey, putting out his hand.

As Florence, trembling, raised it to her lips, she met his glance. The look was cold and distant enough, but it stirred her heart to think that she observed in it something more of interest than he had ever shown before. It even expressed a kind of faint surprise, and not a disagreeable surprise, at sight of her. She dared not raise her eyes to his any more; but she felt that he looked at her once again, and not less favourably. Oh what a thrill of joy shot through her, awakened by even this intangible and baseless confirmation of her hope that she would learn to win him, through her new and beautiful Mama!

'You will not be long dressing, Mrs Dombey, I presume?' said Mr Dombey.

'I shall be ready immediately.'

'Let them send up dinner in a quarter of an hour.'

With that Mr Dombey stalked away to his own dressing-room, and Mrs Dombey went upstairs to hers. Mrs Skewton and Florence repaired to the drawing- room, where that excellent mother considered it incumbent on her to shed a few irrepressible tears, supposed to be forced from her by her daughter's felicity; and which she was still drying, very gingerly, with a laced corner of her pocket-handkerchief, when her son-in-law appeared.

'And how, my dearest Dombey, did you find that delightfullest of cities, Paris?' she asked, subduing her emotion.

'It was cold,' returned Mr Dombey.

'Gay as ever,' said Mrs Skewton, 'of course.

'Not particularly. I thought it dull,' said Mr Dombey.

'Fie, my dearest Dombey!' archly; 'dull!'

'It made that impression upon me, Madam,' said Mr Dombey, with grave politeness. 'I believe Mrs Dombey found it dull too. She mentioned once or twice that she thought it so.'

'Why, you naughty girl!' cried Mrs Skewton, rallying her dear child, who now entered, 'what dreadfully heretical things have you been saying about Paris?'

Edith raised her eyebrows with an air of weariness; and passing the folding-doors which were thrown open to display the suite of rooms in their new and handsome garniture, and barely glancing at them as she passed, sat down by Florence.

'My dear Dombey,' said Mrs Skewton, 'how charmingly these people have carried out every idea that we hinted. They have made a perfect palace of the house, positively.'

'It is handsome,' said Mr Dombey, looking round. 'I directed that no expense should be spared; and all that money could do, has been done, I believe.'

'And what can it not do, dear Dombey?' observed Cleopatra.

'It is powerful, Madam,' said Mr Dombey.

He looked in his solemn way towards his wife, but not a word said she.

'I hope, Mrs Dombey,' addressing her after a moment's silence, with especial distinctness; 'that these alterations meet with your approval?'

'They are as handsome as they can be,' she returned, with haughty carelessness. 'They should be so, of' course. And I suppose they are.'

An expression of scorn was habitual to the proud face, and seemed inseparable from it; but the contempt with which it received any appeal to admiration, respect, or consideration on the ground of his riches, no matter how slight or ordinary in itself, was a new and different expression, unequalled in intensity by any other of which it was capable. Whether Mr Dombey, wrapped in his own greatness, was at all aware of this, or no, there had not been wanting opportunities already for his complete enlightenment; and at that moment it might have been effected by the one glance of the dark eye that lighted on him, after it had rapidly and scornfully surveyed the theme of his self-glorification. He might have read in that one glance that nothing that his wealth could do, though it were increased ten thousand fold, could win him for its own sake, one look of softened recognition from the defiant woman, linked to him, but arrayed with her whole soul against him. He might have read in that one glance that even for its sordid and mercenary influence upon herself, she spurned it, while she claimed its utmost power as her right, her bargain—as the base and worthless recompense for which she had become his wife. He might have read in it that, ever baring her own head for the lightning of her own contempt and pride to strike, the most innocent allusion to the power of his riches degraded her anew, sunk her deeper in her own respect, and made the blight and waste within her more complete.

But dinner was announced, and Mr Dombey led down Cleopatra; Edith and his daughter following. Sweeping past the gold and silver demonstration on the sideboard as if it were heaped-up dirt, and deigning to bestow no look upon the elegancies around her, she took her place at his board for the first time, and sat, like a statue, at the feast.

Mr Dombey, being a good deal in the statue way himself, was well enough pleased to see his handsome wife immovable and proud and cold. Her deportment being always elegant and graceful, this as a general behaviour was agreeable and congenial to him. Presiding, therefore, with his accustomed dignity, and not at all reflecting on his wife by any warmth or hilarity of his own, he performed his share of the honours of the table with a cool satisfaction; and the installation dinner, though not regarded downstairs as a great success, or very promising beginning, passed oil, above, in a sufficiently polite, genteel, and frosty manner.

Soon after tea' Mrs Skewton, who affected to be quite overcome and worn Out by her emotions of happiness, arising in the contemplation of her dear child united to the man of her heart, but who, there is reason to suppose, found this family party somewhat dull, as she yawned for one hour continually behind her fan, retired to bed. Edith, also, silently withdrew and came back' no more. Thus, it happened that Florence, who had been upstairs to have some conversation with Diogenes, returning to the drawing-room with her little work-basket, found no one there but her father, who was walking to and fro, in dreary magnificence.

'I beg your pardon. Shall I go away, Papa?' said Florence faintly, hesitating at the door.

'No,' returned Mr Dombey, looking round over his shoulder; you can come and go here, Florence, as you please. This is not my private room.

Florence entered, and sat down at a distant little table with her work: finding herself for the first time in her life—for the very first time within her memory from her infancy to that hour—alone with her father, as his companion. She, his natural companion, his only child, who in her lonely life and grief had known the suffering of a breaking heart; who, in her rejected love, had never breathed his name to God at night, but with a tearful blessing, heavier on him than a curse; who had prayed to die young, so she might only die in his arms; who had, all through, repaid the agony of slight and coldness, and dislike, with patient unexacting love, excusing him, and pleading for him, like his better angel!

She trembled, and her eyes were dim. His figure seemed to grow in height and bulk before her as he paced the room: now it was all blurred and indistinct; now clear again, and plain; and now she seemed to think that this had happened, just the same, a multitude of years ago. She yearned towards him, and yet shrunk from his approach. Unnatural emotion in a child, innocent of wrong! Unnatural the hand that had directed the sharp plough, which furrowed up her gentle nature for the sowing of its seeds!

Bent upon not distressing or offending him by her distress, Florence controlled herself, and sat quietly at her work. After a few more turns across and across the room, he left off pacing it; and withdrawing into a shadowy corner at some distance, where there was an easy chair, covered his head with a handkerchief, and composed himself to sleep.

It was enough for Florence to sit there watching him; turning her eyes towards his chair from time to time; watching him with her thoughts, when her face was intent upon her work; and sorrowfully glad to think that he could sleep, while she was there, and that he was not made restless by her strange and long-forbidden presence.

What would have been her thoughts if she had known that he was steadily regarding her; that the veil upon his face, by accident or by design, was so adjusted that his sight was free, and that it never wandered from her face face an instant That when she looked towards him' In the obscure dark corner, her speaking eyes, more earnest and pathetic in their voiceless speech than all the orators of all the world, and impeaching him more nearly in their mute address, met his, and did not know it! That when she bent her head again over her work, he drew his breath more easily, but with the same attention looked upon her still—upon her white brow and her falling hair, and busy hands; and once attracted, seemed to have no power to turn his eyes away!

And what were his thoughts meanwhile? With what emotions did he prolong the attentive gaze covertly directed on his unknown daughter? Was there reproach to him in the quiet figure and the mild eyes? Had he begun to her disregarded claims and did they touch him home at last, and waken him to some sense of his cruel injustice?

There are yielding moments in the lives of the sternest and harshest men, though such men often keep their secret well. The sight of her in her beauty, almost changed into a woman without his knowledge, may have struck out some such moments even In his life of pride. Some passing thought that he had had a happy home within his reach-had had a household spirit bending at has feet—had overlooked it in his stiffnecked sullen arrogance, and wandered away and lost himself, may have engendered them. Some simple eloquence distinctly heard, though only uttered in her eyes, unconscious that he read them as 'By the death-beds I have tended, by the childhood I have suffered, by our meeting in this dreary house at midnight, by the cry wrung from me in the anguish of my heart, oh, father, turn to me and seek a refuge in my love before it is too late!' may have arrested them. Meaner and lower thoughts, as that his dead boy was now superseded by new ties, and he could forgive the having been supplanted in his affection, may have occasioned them. The mere association of her as an ornament, with all the ornament and pomp about him, may have been sufficient. But as he looked, he softened to her, more and more. As he looked, she became blended with the child he had loved, and he could hardly separate the two. As he looked, he saw her for an instant by a clearer and a brighter light, not bending over that child's pillow as his rival—monstrous thought—but as the spirit of his home, and in the action tending himself no less, as he sat once more with his bowed-down head upon his hand at the foot of the little bed. He felt inclined to speak to her, and call her to him. The words 'Florence, come here!' were rising to his lips—but slowly and with difficulty, they were so very strange—when they were checked and stifled by a footstep on the stair.

It was his wife's. She had exchanged her dinner dress for a loose robe, and unbound her hair, which fell freely about her neck. But this was not the change in her that startled him.

'Florence, dear,' she said, 'I have been looking for you everywhere.'

As she sat down by the side of Florence, she stooped and kissed her hand. He hardly knew his wife. She was so changed. It was not merely that her smile was new to him—though that he had never seen; but her manner, the tone of her voice, the light of her eyes, the interest, and confidence, and winning wish to please, expressed in all-this was not Edith.

'Softly, dear Mama. Papa is asleep.'

It was Edith now. She looked towards the corner where he was, and he knew that face and manner very well.

'I scarcely thought you could be here, Florence.'

Again, how altered and how softened, in an instant!

'I left here early,' pursued Edith, 'purposely to sit upstairs and talk with you. But, going to your room, I found my bird was flown, and I have been waiting there ever since, expecting its return.

If it had been a bird, indeed, she could not have taken it more tenderly and gently to her breast, than she did Florence.

'Come, dear!'

'Papa will not expect to find me, I suppose, when he wakes,' hesitated Florence.

'Do you think he will, Florence?' said Edith, looking full upon her.

Florence drooped her head, and rose, and put up her work-basket Edith drew her hand through her arm, and they went out of the room like sisters. Her very step was different and new to him' Mr Dombey thought, as his eyes followed her to the door.

He sat in his shadowy corner so long, that the church clocks struck the hour three times before he moved that night. All that while his face was still intent upon the spot where Florence had been seated. The room grew darker, as the candles waned and went out; but a darkness gathered on his face, exceeding any that the night could cast, and rested there.

Florence and Edith, seated before the fire in the remote room where little Paul had died, talked together for a long time. Diogenes, who was of the party, had at first objected to the admission of Edith, and, even In deference to his mistress's wish, had only permitted it under growling protest. But, emerging by little and little from the ante-room, whither he had retired in dudgeon, he soon appeared to comprehend, that with the most amiable intentions he had made one of those mistakes which will occasionally arise in the best-regulated dogs' minds; as a friendly apology for which he stuck himself up on end between the two, in a very hot place in front of the fire, and sat panting at it, with his tongue out, and a most imbecile expression of countenance, listening to the conversation.

It turned, at first, on Florence's books and favourite pursuits, and on the manner in which she had beguiled the interval since the marriage. The last theme opened up to her a subject which lay very near her heart, and she said, with the tears starting to her eyes:

'Oh, Mama! I have had a great sorrow since that day.'

'You a great sorrow, Florence!'

'Yes. Poor Walter is drowned.'

Florence spread her hands before her face, and wept with all her heart. Many as were the secret tears which Walter's fate had cost her, they flowed yet, when she thought or spoke of him.

'But tell me, dear,' said Edith, soothing her. 'Who was Walter? What was he to you?'

'He was my brother, Mama. After dear Paul died, we said we would be brother and sister. I had known him a long time—from a little child. He knew Paul, who liked him very much; Paul said, almost at the last, "Take care of Walter, dear Papa! I was fond of him!" Walter had been brought in to see him, and was there then—in this room.

'And did he take care of Walter?' inquired Edith, sternly.

'Papa? He appointed him to go abroad. He was drowned in shipwreck on his voyage,' said Florence, sobbing.

'Does he know that he is dead?' asked Edith.

'I cannot tell, Mama. I have no means of knowing. Dear Mama!' cried Florence, clinging to her as for help, and hiding her face upon her bosom, 'I know that you have seen—'

'Stay! Stop, Florence.' Edith turned so pale, and spoke so earnestly, that Florence did not need her restraining hand upon her lips. 'Tell me all about Walter first; let me understand this history all through.'

Florence related it, and everything belonging to it, even down to the friendship of Mr Toots, of whom she could hardly speak in her distress without a tearful smile, although she was deeply grateful to him. When she had concluded her account, to the whole of which Edith, holding her hand, listened with close attention, and when a silence had succeeded, Edith said:

'What is it that you know I have seen, Florence?'

'That I am not,' said Florence, with the same mute appeal, and the same quick concealment of her face as before, 'that I am not a favourite child, Mama. I never have been. I have never known how to be. I have missed the way, and had no one to show it to me. Oh, let me learn from you how to become dearer to Papa Teach me! you, who can so well!' and clinging closer to her, with some broken fervent words of gratitude and endearment, Florence, relieved of her sad secret, wept long, but not as painfully as of yore, within the encircling arms of her new mother.

Pale even to her lips, and with a face that strove for composure until its proud beauty was as fixed as death, Edith looked down upon the weeping girl, and once kissed her. Then gradually disengaging herself, and putting Florence away, she said, stately, and quiet as a marble image, and in a voice that deepened as she spoke, but had no other token of emotion in it:

'Florence, you do not know me! Heaven forbid that you should learn from me!'

'Not learn from you?' repeated Florence, in surprise.

'That I should teach you how to love, or be loved, Heaven forbid!' said Edith. 'If you could teach me, that were better; but it is too late. You are dear to me, Florence. I did not think that anything could ever be so dear to me, as you are in this little time.'

She saw that Florence would have spoken here, so checked her with her hand, and went on.

'I will be your true friend always. I will cherish you, as much, if not as well as anyone in this world could. You may trust in me—I know it and I say it, dear,—with the whole confidence even of your pure heart. There are hosts of women whom he might have married, better and truer in all other respects than I am, Florence; but there is not one who could come here, his wife, whose heart could beat with greater truth to you than mine does.'

'I know it, dear Mama!' cried Florence. 'From that first most happy day I have known it.'

'Most happy day!' Edith seemed to repeat the words involuntarily, and went on. 'Though the merit is not mine, for I thought little of you until I saw you, let the undeserved reward be mine in your trust and love. And in this—in this, Florence; on the first night of my taking up my abode here; I am led on as it is best I should be, to say it for the first and last time.'

Florence, without knowing why, felt almost afraid to hear her proceed, but kept her eyes riveted on the beautiful face so fixed upon her own.

'Never seek to find in me,' said Edith, laying her hand upon her breast, 'what is not here. Never if you can help it, Florence, fall off from me because it is not here. Little by little you will know me better, and the time will come when you will know me, as I know myself. Then, be as lenient to me as you can, and do not turn to bitterness the only sweet remembrance I shall have.

The tears that were visible in her eyes as she kept them fixed on Florence, showed that the composed face was but as a handsome mask; but she preserved it, and continued:

'I have seen what you say, and know how true it is. But believe me—you will soon, if you cannot now—there is no one on this earth less qualified to set it right or help you, Florence, than I. Never ask me why, or speak to me about it or of my husband, more. There should be, so far, a division, and a silence between us two, like the grave itself.'

She sat for some time silent; Florence scarcely venturing to breathe meanwhile, as dim and imperfect shadows of the truth, and all its daily consequences, chased each other through her terrified, yet incredulous imagination. Almost as soon as she had ceased to speak, Edith's face began to subside from its set composure to that quieter and more relenting aspect, which it usually wore when she and Florence were alone together. She shaded it, after this change, with her hands; and when she arose, and with an affectionate embrace bade Florence good-night, went quickly, and without looking round.

But when Florence was in bed, and the room was dark except for the glow of the fire, Edith returned, and saying that she could not sleep, and that her dressing-room was lonely, drew a chair upon the hearth, and watched the embers as they died away. Florence watched them too from her bed, until they, and the noble figure before them, crowned with its flowing hair, and in its thoughtful eyes reflecting back their light, became confused and indistinct, and finally were lost in slumber.

In her sleep, however, Florence could not lose an undefined impression of what had so recently passed. It formed the subject of her dreams, and haunted her; now in one shape, now in another; but always oppressively; and with a sense of fear. She dreamed of seeking her father in wildernesses, of following his track up fearful heights, and down into deep mines and caverns; of being charged with something that would release him from extraordinary suffering—she knew not what, or why—yet never being able to attain the goal and set him free. Then she saw him dead, upon that very bed, and in that very room, and knew that he had never loved her to the last, and fell upon his cold breast, passionately weeping. Then a prospect opened, and a river flowed, and a plaintive voice she knew, cried, 'It is running on, Floy! It has never stopped! You are moving with it!' And she saw him at a distance stretching out his arms towards her, while a figure such as Walter's used to be, stood near him, awfully serene and still. In every vision, Edith came and went, sometimes to her joy, sometimes to her sorrow, until they were alone upon the brink of a dark grave, and Edith pointing down, she looked and saw—what!—another Edith lying at the bottom.

In the terror of this dream, she cried out and awoke, she thought. A soft voice seemed to whisper in her ear, 'Florence, dear Florence, it is nothing but a dream!' and stretching out her arms, she returned the caress of her new Mama, who then went out at the door in the light of the grey morning. In a moment, Florence sat up wondering whether this had really taken place or not; but she was only certain that it was grey morning indeed, and that the blackened ashes of the fire were on the hearth, and that she was alone.

So passed the night on which the happy pair came home.

CHAPTER 36. Housewarming

Many succeeding days passed in like manner; except that there were numerous visits received and paid, and that Mrs Skewton held little levees in her own apartments, at which Major Bagstock was a frequent attendant, and that Florence encountered no second look from her father, although she saw him every day. Nor had she much communication in words with her new Mama, who was imperious and proud to all the house but her—Florence could not but observe that—and who, although she always sent for her or went to her when she came home from visiting, and would always go into her room at night, before retiring to rest, however late the hour, and never lost an opportunity of being with her, was often her silent and thoughtful companion for a long time together.

Florence, who had hoped for so much from this marriage, could not help sometimes comparing the bright house with the faded dreary place out of which it had arisen, and wondering when, in any shape, it would begin to be a home; for that it was no home then, for anyone, though everything went on luxuriously and regularly, she had always a secret misgiving. Many an hour of sorrowful reflection by day and night, and many a tear of blighted hope, Florence bestowed upon the assurance her new Mama had given her so strongly, that there was no one on the earth more powerless than herself to teach her how to win her father's heart. And soon Florence began to think—resolved to think would be the truer phrase—that as no one knew so well, how hopeless of being subdued or changed her father's coldness to her was, so she had given her this warning, and forbidden the subject in very compassion. Unselfish here, as in her every act and fancy, Florence preferred to bear the pain of this new wound, rather than encourage any faint foreshadowings of the truth as it concerned her father; tender of him, even in her wandering thoughts. As for his home, she hoped it would become a better one, when its state of novelty and transition should be over; and for herself, thought little and lamented less.

If none of the new family were particularly at home in private, it was resolved that Mrs Dombey at least should be at home in public, without delay. A series of entertainments in celebration of the late nuptials, and in cultivation of society, were arranged, chiefly by Mr Dombey and Mrs

Skewton; and it was settled that the festive proceedings should commence by Mrs Dombey's being at home upon a certain evening, and by Mr and Mrs Dombey's requesting the honour of the company of a great many incongruous people to dinner on the same day.

Accordingly, Mr Dombey produced a list of sundry eastern magnates who were to be bidden to this feast on his behalf; to which Mrs Skewton, acting for her dearest child, who was haughtily careless on the subject, subjoined a western list, comprising Cousin Feenix, not yet returned to Baden-Baden, greatly to the detriment of his personal estate; and a variety of moths of various degrees and ages, who had, at various times, fluttered round the light of her fair daughter, or herself, without any lasting injury to their wings. Florence was enrolled as a member of the dinner-party, by Edith's command—elicited by a moment's doubt and hesitation on the part of Mrs Skewton; and Florence, with a wondering heart, and with a quick instinctive sense of everything that grated on her father in the least, took her silent share in the proceedings of the day.

The proceedings commenced by Mr Dombey, in a cravat of extraordinary height and stiffness, walking restlessly about the drawing-room until the hour appointed for dinner; punctual to which, an East India Director,' of immense wealth, in a waistcoat apparently constructed in serviceable deal by some plain carpenter, but really engendered in the tailor's art, and composed of the material called nankeen, arrived and was received by Mr Dombey alone. The next stage of the proceedings was Mr Dombey's sending his compliments to Mrs Dombey, with a correct statement of the time; and the next, the East India Director's falling prostrate, in a conversational point of view, and as Mr Dombey was not the man to pick him up, staring at the fire until rescue appeared in the shape of Mrs Skewton; whom the director, as a pleasant start in life for the evening, mistook for Mrs Dombey, and greeted with enthusiasm.

The next arrival was a Bank Director, reputed to be able to buy up anything—human Nature generally, if he should take it in his head to influence the money market in that direction—but who was a wonderfully modest-spoken man, almost boastfully so, and mentioned his 'little place' at Kingston-upon- Thames, and its just being barely equal to giving Dombey a bed and a chop, if he would come and visit it. Ladies, he said, it was not for a man who lived in his quiet way to take upon himself to invite—but if Mrs Skewton and her daughter, Mrs Dombey, should ever find themselves in that direction, and would do him the honour to look at a little bit of a shrubbery they would find there, and a poor little flower-bed or so, and a humble apology for a pinery, and two or three little attempts of that sort without any pretension, they would distinguish him very much. Carrying out his character, this gentleman was very plainly dressed, in a wisp of cambric for a neckcloth, big shoes, a coat that was too loose for him, and a pair of trousers that were too spare; and mention being made of the Opera by Mrs Skewton, he said he very seldom went there, for he couldn't afford it. It seemed greatly to delight and exhilarate him to say so: and he beamed on his audience afterwards, with his hands in his pockets, and excessive satisfaction twinkling in his eyes.

Now Mrs Dombey appeared, beautiful and proud, and as disdainful and defiant of them all as if the bridal wreath upon her head had been a garland of steel spikes put on to force concession from her which she would die sooner than yield. With her was Florence. When they entered together, the shadow of the night of the return again darkened Mr Dombey's face. But unobserved; for Florence did not venture to raise her eyes to his, and Edith's indifference was too supreme to take the least heed of him.

The arrivals quickly became numerous. More directors, chairmen of public companies, elderly ladies carrying burdens on their heads for full dress, Cousin Feenix, Major Bagstock, friends of Mrs Skewton, with the same bright bloom on their complexion, and very precious necklaces on very withered necks. Among these, a young lady of sixty-five, remarkably coolly dressed as to her back and shoulders, who spoke with an engaging lisp, and whose eyelids wouldn't keep up well, without a great deal of trouble on her part, and whose manners had that indefinable charm which so frequently attaches to the giddiness of youth. As the greater part of Mr Dombey's list were disposed to be taciturn, and the greater part of Mrs Dombey's list were disposed to be talkative, and there was no sympathy between them, Mrs Dombey's list, by magnetic agreement, entered into a bond of union against Mr Dombey's list, who, wandering about the rooms in a desolate manner, or seeking refuge in corners, entangled themselves with company coming in, and became barricaded behind sofas, and had doors opened smartly from without against their heads, and underwent every sort of discomfiture.

When dinner was announced, Mr Dombey took down an old lady like a crimson velvet pincushion stuffed with bank notes, who might have been the identical old lady of Threadneedle Street, she was so rich, and looked so unaccommodating; Cousin Feenix took down Mrs Dombey; Major Bagstock took down Mrs Skewton; the young thing with the shoulders was bestowed, as an extinguisher, upon the East India Director; and the remaining ladies were left on view in the drawing-room by the remaining gentlemen, until a forlorn hope volunteered to conduct them downstairs, and those brave spirits with their captives blocked up the dining-room door, shutting out seven mild men in the stony-hearted hall. When all the rest were got in and were seated, one of these mild men still appeared, in smiling confusion, totally destitute and unprovided for, and, escorted by the butler, made the complete circuit of the table twice before his chair could be found, which it finally was, on Mrs Dombey's left hand; after which the mild man never held up his head again.

Now, the spacious dining-room, with the company seated round the glittering table, busy with their glittering spoons, and knives and forks, and plates, might have been taken for a grown-up exposition of Tom Tiddler's ground, where children pick up gold and silver.' Mr Dombey, as Tiddler, looked his character to admiration; and the long plateau of precious metal frosted, separating him from Mrs Dombey, whereon frosted Cupids offered scentless flowers to each of them, was allegorical to see.

Cousin Feenix was in great force, and looked astonishingly young. But he was sometimes thoughtless in his good humour—his memory occasionally wandering like his legs—and on this occasion caused the company to shudder. It happened thus. The young lady with the back, who regarded Cousin Feenix with sentiments of tenderness, had entrapped the East India Director into leading her to the chair next him; in return for which good office, she immediately abandoned the Director, who, being shaded on the other side by a gloomy black velvet hat surmounting a bony and speechless female with a fan, yielded to a depression of spirits and withdrew into himself. Cousin Feenix and the young lady were very lively and humorous, and the young lady laughed so much at something Cousin Feenix related to her, that Major Bagstock begged leave to inquire on behalf of Mrs Skewton (they were sitting opposite, a little lower down), whether that might not be considered public property.

'Why, upon my life,' said Cousin Feenix, 'there's nothing in it; it really is not worth repeating: in point of fact, it's merely an anecdote of Jack Adams. I dare say my friend Dombey;' for the general attention was concentrated on

Cousin Feenix; 'may remember Jack Adams, Jack Adams, not Joe; that was his brother. Jack—little Jack—man with a cast in his eye, and slight impediment in his speech—man who sat for somebody's borough. We used to call him in my parliamentary time W. P. Adams, in consequence of his being Warming Pan for a young fellow who was in his minority. Perhaps my friend Dombey may have known the man?'

Mr Dombey, who was as likely to have known Guy Fawkes, replied in the negative. But one of the seven mild men unexpectedly leaped into distinction, by saying he had known him, and adding—'always wore Hessian boots!'

'Exactly,' said Cousin Feenix, bending forward to see the mild man, and smile encouragement at him down the table. 'That was Jack. Joe wore—'

'Tops!' cried the mild man, rising in public estimation every Instant.

'Of course,' said Cousin Feenix, 'you were intimate with em?'

'I knew them both,' said the mild man. With whom Mr Dombey immediately took wine.

'Devilish good fellow, Jack!' said Cousin Feenix, again bending forward, and smiling.

'Excellent,' returned the mild man, becoming bold on his success. 'One of the best fellows I ever knew.'

'No doubt you have heard the story?' said Cousin Feenix.

'I shall know,' replied the bold mild man, 'when I have heard your Ludship tell it.' With that, he leaned back in his chair and smiled at the ceiling, as knowing it by heart, and being already tickled.

'In point of fact, it's nothing of a story in itself,' said Cousin Feenix, addressing the table with a smile, and a gay shake of his head, 'and not worth a word of preface. But it's illustrative of the neatness of Jack's humour. The fact is, that Jack was invited down to a marriage—which I think took place in Berkshire?'

'Shropshire,' said the bold mild man, finding himself appealed to.

'Was it? Well! In point of fact it might have been in any shire,' said Cousin Feenix. 'So my friend being invited down to this marriage in Anyshire,' with a pleasant sense of the readiness of this joke, 'goes. Just as some of us, having had the honour of being invited to the marriage of my lovely and accomplished relative with my friend Dombey, didn't require to be asked twice, and were devilish glad to be present on so interesting an occasion.—Goes—Jack goes. Now, this marriage was, in point of fact, the marriage of an uncommonly fine girl with a man for whom she didn't care a button, but whom she accepted on account of his property, which was immense. When Jack returned to town, after the nuptials, a man he knew, meeting him in the lobby of the House of Commons, says, "Well, Jack, how are the ill-matched couple?" "Ill-matched," says Jack "Not at all. It's a perfectly and equal transaction. She is regularly bought, and you may take your oath he is as regularly sold!"'

In his full enjoyment of this culminating point of his story, the shudder, which had gone all round the table like an electric spark, struck Cousin Feenix, and he stopped. Not a smile occasioned by the only general topic of conversation broached that day, appeared on any face. A profound silence ensued; and the wretched mild man, who had been as innocent of any real foreknowledge of the story as the child unborn, had the exquisite misery of reading in every eye that he was regarded as the prime mover of the mischief.

Mr Dombey's face was not a changeful one, and being cast in its mould of state that day, showed little other apprehension of the story, if any, than that which he expressed when he said solemnly, amidst the silence, that it was 'Very good.' There was a rapid glance from Edith towards Florence, but otherwise she remained, externally, impassive and unconscious.

Through the various stages of rich meats and wines, continual gold and silver, dainties of earth, air, fire, and water, heaped-up fruits, and that unnecessary article in Mr Dombey's banquets—ice—the dinner slowly made its way: the later stages being achieved to the sonorous music of incessant double knocks, announcing the arrival of visitors, whose portion of the feast was limited to the smell thereof. When Mrs Dombey rose, it was a sight to see her lord, with stiff throat and erect head, hold the door open for the withdrawal of the ladies; and to see how she swept past him with his daughter on her arm.

Mr Dombey was a grave sight, behind the decanters, in a state of dignity; and the East India Director was a forlorn sight near the unoccupied end of the table, in a state of solitude; and the Major was a military sight, relating stories of the Duke of York to six of the seven mild men (the ambitious one was utterly quenched); and the Bank Director was a lowly sight, making a plan of his little attempt at a pinery, with dessert-knives, for a group of admirers; and Cousin Feenix was a thoughtful sight, as he smoothed his long wristbands and stealthily adjusted his wig. But all these sights were of short duration, being speedily broken up by coffee, and the desertion of the room.

There was a throng in the state-rooms upstairs, increasing every minute; but still Mr Dombey's list of visitors appeared to have some native impossibility of amalgamation with Mrs Dombey's list, and no one could have doubted which was which. The single exception to this rule perhaps was Mr Carker, who now smiled among the company, and who, as he stood in the circle that was gathered about Mrs Dombey—watchful of her, of them, his chief, Cleopatra and the Major, Florence, and everything around—appeared at ease with both divisions of guests, and not marked as exclusively belonging to either.

Florence had a dread of him, which made his presence in the room a nightmare to her. She could not avoid the recollection of it, for her eyes were drawn towards him every now and then, by an attraction of dislike and distrust that she could not resist. Yet her thoughts were busy with other things; for as she sat apart—not unadmired or unsought, but in the gentleness of her quiet spirit—she felt how little part her father had in what was going on, and saw, with pain, how ill at ease he seemed to be, and how little regarded he was as he lingered about near the door, for those visitors whom he wished to distinguish with particular attention, and took them up to introduce them to his wife, who received them with proud coldness, but showed no interest or wish to please, and never, after the bare ceremony of reception, in consultation of his wishes, or in welcome of his friends, opened her lips. It was not the less perplexing or painful to Florence, that she who acted thus, treated her so kindly and with such loving consideration, that it almost seemed an ungrateful return on her part even to know of what was passing before her eyes.

Happy Florence would have been, might she have ventured to bear her father company, by so much as a look; and happy Florence was, in little suspecting the main cause of his uneasiness. But afraid of seeming to know that he was placed at any did advantage, lest he should be resentful of that knowledge; and divided between her impulse towards him, and her grateful affection for Edith; she scarcely dared to raise her eyes towards either. Anxious and unhappy for them both, the thought stole on her through the crowd, that it might have been better for them if this noise of tongues and tread of feet had never come there,—if the old dulness and decay had never been replaced by novelty and splendour,—if the neglected child had found no friend in Edith, but had lived her solitary life, unpitied and forgotten.

Mrs Chick had some such thoughts too, but they were not so quietly developed in her mind. This good matron had been outraged in the first instance by not receiving an invitation to dinner. That blow partially recovered, she had gone to a vast expense to make such a figure before Mrs Dombey at home, as should dazzle the senses of that lady, and heap mortification, mountains high, on the head of Mrs Skewton.

'But I am made,' said Mrs Chick to Mr Chick, 'of no more account than Florence! Who takes the smallest notice of me? No one!'

'No one, my dear,' assented Mr Chick, who was seated by the side of Mrs Chick against the wall, and could console himself, even there, by softly whistling.

'Does it at all appear as if I was wanted here?' exclaimed Mrs Chick, with flashing eyes.

'No, my dear, I don't think it does,' said Mr Chic

'Paul's mad!' said Mrs Chic

Mr Chick whistled.

'Unless you are a monster, which I sometimes think you are,' said Mrs Chick with candour, 'don't sit there humming tunes. How anyone with the most distant feelings of a man, can see that mother-in-law of Paul's, dressed as she is, going on like that, with Major Bagstock, for whom, among other precious things, we are indebted to your Lucretia Tox.'

'My Lucretia Tox, my dear!' said Mr Chick, astounded.

'Yes,' retorted Mrs Chick, with great severity, 'your Lucretia Tox—I say how anybody can see that mother-in-law of Paul's, and that haughty wife of Paul's, and these indecent old frights with their backs and shoulders, and in short this at home generally, and hum—' on which word Mrs Chick laid a scornful emphasis that made Mr Chick start, 'is, I thank Heaven, a mystery to me!

Mr Chick screwed his mouth into a form irreconcilable with humming or whistling, and looked very contemplative.

'But I hope I know what is due to myself,' said Mrs Chick, swelling with indignation, 'though Paul has forgotten what is due to me. I am not going to sit here, a member of this family, to be taken no notice of. I am not the dirt under Mrs Dombey's feet, yet—not quite yet,' said Mrs Chick, as if she expected to become so, about the day after to-morrow. 'And I shall go. I will not say (whatever I may think) that this affair has been got up solely to degrade and insult me. I shall merely go. I shall not be missed!'

Mrs Chick rose erect with these words, and took the arm of Mr Chick, who escorted her from the room, after half an hour's shady sojourn there. And it is due to her penetration to observe that she certainly was not missed at all.

But she was not the only indignant guest; for Mr Dombey's list (still constantly in difficulties) were, as a body, indignant with Mrs Dombey's list, for looking at them through eyeglasses, and audibly wondering who all those people were; while Mrs Dombey's list complained of weariness, and the young thing with the shoulders, deprived of the attentions of that gay youth Cousin Feenix (who went away from the dinner-table), confidentially alleged to thirty or forty friends that she was bored to death. All the old ladies with the burdens on their heads, had greater or less cause of complaint against Mr Dombey; and the Directors and Chairmen coincided in thinking that if Dombey must marry, he had better have married somebody nearer his own age, not quite so handsome, and a little better off. The general opinion among this class of gentlemen was, that it was a weak thing in Dombey, and he'd live to repent it. Hardly anybody there, except the mild men, stayed, or went away, without considering himself or herself neglected and aggrieved by Mr Dombey or Mrs Dombey; and the speechless female in the black velvet hat was found to have been stricken mute, because the lady in the crimson velvet had been handed down before her. The nature even of the mild men got corrupted, either from their curdling it with too much lemonade, or from the general inoculation that prevailed; and they made sarcastic jokes to one another, and whispered disparagement on stairs and in bye-places. The general dissatisfaction and discomfort so diffused itself, that the assembled footmen in the hall were as well acquainted with it as the company above. Nay, the very linkmen outside got hold of it, and compared the party to a funeral out of mourning, with none of the company remembered in the will. At last, the guests were all gone, and the linkmen too; and the street, crowded so long with carriages, was clear; and the dying lights showed no one in the rooms, but Mr Dombey and Mr Carker, who were talking together apart, and Mrs Dombey and her mother: the former seated on an ottoman; the latter reclining in the Cleopatra attitude, awaiting the arrival of her maid. Mr

Dombey having finished his communication to Carker, the latter advanced obsequiously to take leave.

'I trust,' he said, 'that the fatigues of this delightful evening will not inconvenience Mrs Dombey to-morrow.'

'Mrs Dombey,' said Mr Dombey, advancing, 'has sufficiently spared herself fatigue, to relieve you from any anxiety of that kind. I regret to say, Mrs Dombey, that I could have wished you had fatigued yourself a little more on this occasion.

She looked at him with a supercilious glance, that it seemed not worth her while to protract, and turned away her eyes without speaking.

'I am sorry, Madam,' said Mr Dombey, 'that you should not have thought it your duty—

She looked at him again.

'Your duty, Madam,' pursued Mr Dombey, 'to have received my friends with a little more deference. Some of those whom you have been pleased to slight to-night in a very marked manner, Mrs Dombey, confer a distinction upon you, I must tell you, in any visit they pay you.

'Do you know that there is someone here?' she returned, now looking at him steadily.

'No! Carker! I beg that you do not. I insist that you do not,' cried Mr Dombey, stopping that noiseless gentleman in his withdrawal. 'Mr Carker, Madam, as you know, possesses my confidence. He is as well acquainted as myself with the subject on which I speak. I beg to tell you, for your information, Mrs Dombey, that I consider these wealthy and important persons confer a distinction upon me:' and Mr Dombey drew himself up, as having now rendered them of the highest possible importance.

'I ask you,' she repeated, bending her disdainful, steady gaze upon him, 'do you know that there is someone here, Sir?'

'I must entreat,' said Mr Carker, stepping forward, 'I must beg, I must demand, to be released. Slight and unimportant as this difference is—'

Mrs Skewton, who had been intent upon her daughter's face, took him up here.

'My sweetest Edith,' she said, 'and my dearest Dombey; our excellent friend Mr Carker, for so I am sure I ought to mention him—'

Mr Carker murmured, 'Too much honour.'

'—has used the very words that were in my mind, and that I have been dying, these ages, for an opportunity of introducing. Slight and unimportant! My sweetest Edith, and my dearest Dombey, do we not know that any difference between you two—No, Flowers; not now.

Flowers was the maid, who, finding gentlemen present, retreated with precipitation.

'That any difference between you two,' resumed Mrs Skewton, 'with the Heart you possess in common, and the excessively charming bond of feeling that there is between you, must be slight and unimportant? What words could better define the fact? None. Therefore I am glad to take this slight occasion- -this trifling occasion, that is so replete with Nature, and your individual characters, and all that—so truly calculated to bring the tears into a parent's eyes—to say that I attach no importance to them in the least, except as developing these minor elements of Soul; and that, unlike most Mamas-in-law (that odious phrase, dear Dombey!) as they have been represented to me to exist in this I fear too artificial world, I never shall attempt to interpose between you, at such a time, and never can much regret, after all, such little flashes of the torch of What's-his-name—not Cupid, but the other delightful creature.

There was a sharpness in the good mother's glance at both her children as she spoke, that may have been expressive of a direct and well-considered purpose hidden between these rambling words. That purpose, providently to detach herself in the beginning from all the clankings of their chain that were to come, and to shelter herself with the fiction of her innocent belief in their mutual affection, and their adaptation to each other.

'I have pointed out to Mrs Dombey,' said Mr Dombey, in his most stately manner, 'that in her conduct thus early in our married life, to which I object, and which, I request, may be corrected. Carker,' with a nod of dismissal, 'good-night to you!'

Mr Carker bowed to the imperious form of the Bride, whose sparkling eye was fixed upon her husband; and stopping at Cleopatra's couch on his way out, raised to his lips the hand she graciously extended to him, in lowly and admiring homage.

If his handsome wife had reproached him, or even changed countenance, or broken the silence in which she remained, by one word, now that they were alone (for Cleopatra made off with all speed), Mr Dombey would have been equal to some assertion of his case against her. But the intense, unutterable, withering scorn, with which, after looking upon him, she dropped her eyes, as if he were too worthless and indifferent to her to be challenged with a syllable—the ineffable disdain and haughtiness in which she sat before him—the cold inflexible resolve with which her every feature seemed to bear him down, and put him by—these, he had no resource against; and he left her, with her whole overbearing beauty concentrated on despising him.

Was he coward enough to watch her, an hour afterwards, on the old well staircase, where he had once seen Florence in the moonlight, toiling up with Paul? Or was he in the dark by accident, when, looking up, he saw her coming, with a light, from the room where Florence lay, and marked again the face so changed, which he could not subdue?

But it could never alter as his own did. It never, in its uttermost pride and passion, knew the shadow that had fallen on his, in the dark corner, on the night of the return; and often since; and which deepened on it now, as he looked up.

CHAPTER 37. More Warnings than One

Florence, Edith, and Mrs Skewton were together next day, and the carriage was waiting at the door to take them out. For Cleopatra had her galley again now, and Withers, no longer the-wan, stood upright in a pigeon-breasted jacket and military trousers, behind her wheel-less chair at dinner-time and butted no more. The hair of Withers was radiant with pomatum, in these days of down, and he wore kid gloves and smelt of the water of Cologne.

They were assembled in Cleopatra's room The Serpent of old Nile (not to mention her disrespectfully) was reposing on her sofa, sipping her morning chocolate at three o'clock in the afternoon, and Flowers the Maid was fastening on her youthful cuffs and frills, and performing a kind of private coronation ceremony on her, with a peach-coloured velvet bonnet; the artificial roses in which nodded to uncommon advantage, as the palsy trifled with them, like a breeze.

'I think I am a little nervous this morning, Flowers,' said Mrs Skewton. 'My hand quite shakes.'

'You were the life of the party last night, Ma'am, you know,' returned Flowers, 'and you suffer for it, to-day, you see.'

Edith, who had beckoned Florence to the window, and was looking out, with her back turned on the toilet of her esteemed mother, suddenly withdrew from it, as if it had lightened.

'My darling child,' cried Cleopatra, languidly, 'you are not nervous? Don't tell me, my dear Edith, that you, so enviably self-possessed, are beginning to be a martyr too, like your unfortunately constituted mother! Withers, someone at the door.'

'Card, Ma'am,' said Withers, taking it towards Mrs Dombey.

'I am going out,' she said without looking at it.

'My dear love,' drawled Mrs Skewton, 'how very odd to send that message without seeing the name! Bring it here, Withers. Dear me, my love; Mr Carker, too! That very sensible person!'

'I am going out,' repeated Edith, in so imperious a tone that Withers, going to the door, imperiously informed the servant who was waiting, 'Mrs Dombey is going out. Get along with you,' and shut it on him.'

But the servant came back after a short absence, and whispered to Withers again, who once more, and not very willingly, presented himself before Mrs Dombey.

'If you please, Ma'am, Mr Carker sends his respectful compliments, and begs you would spare him one minute, if you could—for business, Ma'am, if you please.'

'Really, my love,' said Mrs Skewton in her mildest manner; for her daughter's face was threatening; 'if you would allow me to offer a word, I should recommend—'

'Show him this way,' said Edith. As Withers disappeared to execute the command, she added, frowning on her mother, 'As he comes at your recommendation, let him come to your room.'

'May I—shall I go away?' asked Florence, hurriedly.

Edith nodded yes, but on her way to the door Florence met the visitor coming in. With the same disagreeable mixture of familiarity and forbearance, with which he had first addressed her, he addressed her now in his softest manner—hoped she was quite well—needed not to ask, with such looks to anticipate the answer—had scarcely had the honour to know her, last night, she was so greatly changed—and held the door open for her to pass out; with a secret sense of power in her shrinking from him, that all the deference and politeness of his manner could not quite conceal.

He then bowed himself for a moment over Mrs Skewton's condescending hand, and lastly bowed to Edith. Coldly returning his salute without looking at him, and neither seating herself nor inviting him to be seated, she waited for him to speak.

Entrenched in her pride and power, and with all the obduracy of her spirit summoned about her, still her old conviction that she and her mother had been known by this man in their worst colours, from their first acquaintance; that every degradation she had suffered in her own eyes was as plain to him as to herself; that he read her life as though it were a vile book, and fluttered the leaves before her in slight looks and tones of voice which no one else could detect; weakened and undermined her. Proudly as she opposed herself to him, with her commanding face exacting his humility, her disdainful lip repulsing him, her bosom angry at his intrusion, and the dark lashes of her eyes sullenly veiling their light, that no ray of it might shine upon him—and submissively as he stood before her, with an entreating injured manner, but with complete submission to her will—she knew, in her own soul, that the cases were reversed, and that the triumph and superiority were his, and that he knew it full well.

'I have presumed,' said Mr Carker, 'to solicit an interview, and I have ventured to describe it as being one of business, because—'

'Perhaps you are charged by Mr Dombey with some message of reproof,' said Edit 'You possess Mr Dombey's confidence in such an unusual degree, Sir, that you would scarcely surprise me if that were your business.'

'I have no message to the lady who sheds a lustre upon his name,' said Mr Carker. 'But I entreat that lady, on my own behalf to be just to a very humble claimant for justice at her hands—a mere dependant of Mr Dombey's—which is a position of humility; and to reflect upon my perfect helplessness last night, and the impossibility of my avoiding the share that was forced upon me in a very painful occasion.'

'My dearest Edith,' hinted Cleopatra in a low voice, as she held her eye-glass aside, 'really very charming of Mr What's-his-name. And full of heart!'

'For I do,' said Mr Carker, appealing to Mrs Skewton with a look of grateful deference,—'I do venture to call it a painful occasion, though merely because it was so to me, who had the misfortune to be present. So slight a difference, as between the principals—between those who love each other with disinterested devotion, and would make any sacrifice of self in such a cause—is nothing. As Mrs Skewton herself expressed, with so much truth and feeling last night, it is nothing.'

Edith could not look at him, but she said after a few moments.

'And your business, Sir—'

'Edith, my pet,' said Mrs Skewton, 'all this time Mr Carker is standing! My dear Mr Carker, take a seat, I beg.'

He offered no reply to the mother, but fixed his eyes on the proud daughter, as though he would only be bidden by her, and was resolved to be bidden by her. Edith, in spite of herself sat down, and slightly motioned with her hand to him to be seated too. No action could be colder, haughtier, more insolent in its air of supremacy and disrespect, but she had struggled against even that concession ineffectually, and it was wrested from her. That was enough! Mr Carker sat down.

'May I be allowed, Madam,' said Carker, turning his white teeth on Mrs Skewton like a light—'a lady of your excellent sense and quick feeling will give me credit, for good reason, I am sure—to address what I have to say, to

Mrs Dombey, and to leave her to impart it to you who are her best and dearest friend—next to Mr Dombey?'

Mrs Skewton would have retired, but Edith stopped her. Edith would have stopped him too, and indignantly ordered him to speak openly or not at all, but that he said, in a low Voice—'Miss Florence—the young lady who has just left the room—'

Edith suffered him to proceed. She looked at him now. As he bent forward, to be nearer, with the utmost show of delicacy and respect, and with his teeth persuasively arrayed, in a self-depreciating smile, she felt as if she could have struck him dead.

'Miss Florence's position,' he began, 'has been an unfortunate one. I have a difficulty in alluding to it to you, whose attachment to her father is naturally watchful and jealous of every word that applies to him.' Always distinct and soft in speech, no language could describe the extent of his distinctness and softness, when he said these words, or came to any others of a similar import. 'But, as one who is devoted to Mr Dombey in his different way, and whose life is passed in admiration of Mr Dombey's character, may I say, without offence to your tenderness as a wife, that Miss Florence has unhappily been neglected—by her father. May I say by her father?'

Edith replied, 'I know it.'

'You know it!' said Mr Carker, with a great appearance of relief. 'It removes a mountain from my breast. May I hope you know how the neglect originated; in what an amiable phase of Mr Dombey's pride—character I mean?'

'You may pass that by, Sir,' she returned, 'and come the sooner to the end of what you have to say.'

'Indeed, I am sensible, Madam,' replied Carker,—'trust me, I am deeply sensible, that Mr Dombey can require no justification in anything to you. But, kindly judge of my breast by your own, and you will forgive my interest in him, if in its excess, it goes at all astray.

What a stab to her proud heart, to sit there, face to face with him, and have him tendering her false oath at the altar again and again for her acceptance, and pressing it upon her like the dregs of a sickening cup she could not own her loathing of or turn away from'. How shame, remorse, and passion raged within her, when, upright and majestic in her beauty before him, she knew that in her spirit she was down at his feet!

'Miss Florence,' said Carker, 'left to the care—if one may call it care—of servants and mercenary people, in every way her inferiors, necessarily wanted some guide and compass in her younger days, and, naturally, for want of them, has been indiscreet, and has in some degree forgotten her station. There was some folly about one Walter, a common lad, who is fortunately dead now: and some very undesirable association, I regret to say, with certain coasting sailors, of anything but good repute, and a runaway old bankrupt.'

'I have heard the circumstances, Sir,' said Edith, flashing her disdainful glance upon him, 'and I know that you pervert them. You may not know it. I hope so.'

'Pardon me,' said Mr Carker, 'I believe that nobody knows them so well as I. Your generous and ardent nature, Madam—the same nature which is so nobly imperative in vindication of your beloved and honoured husband, and which has blessed him as even his merits deserve—I must respect, defer to, bow before. But, as regards the circumstances, which is indeed the business I presumed to solicit your attention to, I can have no doubt, since, in the execution of my trust as Mr Dombey's confidential—I presume to say—friend, I have fully ascertained them. In my execution of that trust; in my deep concern, which you can so well understand, for everything relating to him, intensified, if you will (for I fear I labour under your displeasure), by the lower motive of desire to prove my diligence, and make myself the more acceptable; I have long pursued these circumstances by myself and trustworthy instruments, and have innumerable and most minute proofs.'

She raised her eyes no higher than his mouth, but she saw the means of mischief vaunted in every tooth it contained.

'Pardon me, Madam,' he continued, 'if in my perplexity, I presume to take counsel with you, and to consult your pleasure. I think I have observed that you are greatly interested in Miss Florence?'

What was there in her he had not observed, and did not know? Humbled and yet maddened by the thought, in every new presentment of it, however faint, she pressed her teeth upon her quivering lip to force composure on it, and distantly inclined her head in reply.

'This interest, Madam—so touching an evidence of everything associated with Mr Dombey being dear to you—induces me to pause before I make him acquainted with these circumstances, which, as yet, he does not know. It so shakes me, if I may make the confession, in my allegiance, that on the intimation of the least desire to that effect from you, I would suppress them.'

Edith raised her head quickly, and starting back, bent her dark glance upon him. He met it with his blandest and most deferential smile, and went on.

'You say that as I describe them, they are perverted. I fear not—I fear not: but let us assume that they are. The uneasiness I have for some time felt on the subject, arises in this: that the mere circumstance of such association often repeated, on the part of Miss Florence, however innocently and confidingly, would be conclusive with Mr Dombey, already predisposed against her, and would lead him to take some step (I know he has occasionally contemplated it) of separation and alienation of her from his home. Madam, bear with me, and remember my intercourse with Mr Dombey, and my knowledge of him, and my reverence for him, almost from childhood, when I say that if he has a fault, it is a lofty stubbornness, rooted in that noble pride and sense of power which belong to him, and which we must all defer to; which is not assailable like the obstinacy of other characters; and which grows upon itself from day to day, and year to year.

She bent her glance upon him still; but, look as steadfast as she would, her haughty nostrils dilated, and her breath came somewhat deeper, and her lip would slightly curl, as he described that in his patron to which they must all bow down. He saw it; and though his expression did not change, she knew he saw it.

'Even so slight an incident as last night's,' he said, 'if I might refer to it once more, would serve to illustrate my meaning, better than a greater one. Dombey and Son know neither time, nor place, nor season, but bear them all down. But I rejoice in its occurrence, for it has opened the way for me to approach Mrs Dombey with this subject to-day, even if it has entailed upon me the penalty of her temporary displeasure. Madam, in the midst of my uneasiness and apprehension on this subject, I was summoned by Mr Dombey to Leamington. There I saw you. There I could not help knowing what relation you would shortly occupy towards him—to his enduring happiness and yours. There I resolved to await the time of your establishment at home here, and to do as I have now done. I have, at heart, no fear that I shall be wanting in my duty to Mr Dombey, if I bury what I know in your breast; for where there is but one heart and mind between two persons—as in such a marriage—one almost represents the other. I can acquit my conscience therefore, almost equally, by confidence, on such a theme, in you or him. For the reasons I have mentioned I would select you. May I aspire to the distinction of believing that my confidence is accepted, and that I am relieved from my responsibility?'

He long remembered the look she gave him—who could see it, and forget it?—and the struggle that ensued within her. At last she said:

'I accept it, Sir You will please to consider this matter at an end, and that it goes no farther.'

He bowed low, and rose. She rose too, and he took leave with all humility. But Withers, meeting him on the stairs, stood amazed at the beauty of his teeth, and at his brilliant smile; and as he rode away upon his white-legged horse, the people took him for a dentist, such was the dazzling show he made. The people took her, when she rode out in her carriage presently, for a great lady, as happy as she was rich and fine. But they had not seen her, just before, in her own room with no one by; and they had not heard her utterance of the three words, 'Oh Florence, Florence!'

Mrs Skewton, reposing on her sofa, and sipping her chocolate, had heard nothing but the low word business, for which she had a mortal aversion, insomuch that she had long banished it from her vocabulary, and had gone nigh, in a charming manner and with an immense amount of heart, to say nothing of soul, to ruin divers milliners and others in consequence. Therefore Mrs Skewton asked no questions, and showed no curiosity. Indeed, the peach-velvet bonnet gave her sufficient occupation out of doors; for being perched on the back of her head, and the day being rather windy, it was frantic to escape from Mrs Skewton's company, and would be coaxed into no sort of compromise. When the carriage was closed, and the wind shut out, the palsy played among the artificial roses again like an almshouse-full of superannuated zephyrs; and altogether Mrs Skewton had enough to do, and got on but indifferently.

She got on no better towards night; for when Mrs Dombey, in her dressing-room, had been dressed and waiting for her half an hour, and Mr Dombey, in the drawing-room, had paraded himself into a state of solemn fretfulness (they were all three going out to dinner), Flowers the Maid appeared with a pale face to Mrs Dombey, saying:

'If you please, Ma'am, I beg your pardon, but I can't do nothing with Missis!'

'What do you mean?' asked Edith.

'Well, Ma'am,' replied the frightened maid, 'I hardly know. She's making faces!'

Edith hurried with her to her mother's room. Cleopatra was arrayed in full dress, with the diamonds, short sleeves, rouge, curls, teeth, and other juvenility all complete; but Paralysis was not to be deceived, had known her for the object of its errand, and had struck her at her glass, where she lay like a horrible doll that had tumbled down.

They took her to pieces in very shame, and put the little of her that was real on a bed. Doctors were sent for, and soon came. Powerful remedies were resorted to; opinions given that she would rally from this shock, but would not survive another; and there she lay speechless, and staring at the ceiling, for days; sometimes making inarticulate sounds in answer to such questions as did she know who were present, and the like: sometimes giving no reply either by sign or gesture, or in her unwinking eyes.

At length she began to recover consciousness, and in some degree the power of motion, though not yet of speech. One day the use of her right hand returned; and showing it to her maid who was in attendance on her, and appearing very uneasy in her mind, she made signs for a pencil and some paper. This the maid immediately provided, thinking she was going to make a will, or write some last request; and Mrs Dombey being from home, the maid awaited the result with solemn feelings.

After much painful scrawling and erasing, and putting in of wrong characters, which seemed to tumble out of the pencil of their own accord, the old woman produced this document:

'Rose-coloured curtains.'

The maid being perfectly transfixed, and with tolerable reason, Cleopatra amended the manuscript by adding two words more, when it stood thus:

'Rose-coloured curtains for doctors.'

The maid now perceived remotely that she wished these articles to be provided for the better presentation of her complexion to the faculty; and as those in the house who knew her best, had no doubt of the correctness of this opinion, which she was soon able to establish for herself the rose-coloured curtains were added to her bed, and she mended with increased rapidity from that hour. She was soon able to sit up, in curls and a laced cap and nightgown, and to have a little artificial bloom dropped into the hollow caverns of her cheeks.

It was a tremendous sight to see this old woman in her finery leering and mincing at Death, and playing off her youthful tricks upon him as if he had been the Major; but an alteration in her mind that ensued on the paralytic stroke was fraught with as much matter for reflection, and was quite as ghastly.

Whether the weakening of her intellect made her more cunning and false than before, or whether it confused her between what she had assumed to be and what she really had been, or whether it had awakened any glimmering of remorse, which could neither struggle into light nor get back into total darkness, or whether, in the jumble of her faculties, a combination of these effects had been shaken up, which is perhaps the more likely supposition, the result was this:—That she became hugely exacting in respect of Edith's affection and gratitude and attention to her; highly laudatory of herself as a most inestimable parent; and very jealous of having any rival in Edith's regard. Further, in place of remembering that compact made between them for an avoidance of the subject, she constantly alluded to her daughter's marriage as a proof of her being an incomparable mother; and all this, with the weakness and peevishness of such a state, always serving for a sarcastic commentary on her levity and youthfulness.

'Where is Mrs Dombey? she would say to her maid.

'Gone out, Ma'am.'

'Gone out! Does she go out to shun her Mama, Flowers?'

'La bless you, no, Ma'am. Mrs Dombey has only gone out for a ride with Miss Florence.'

'Miss Florence. Who's Miss Florence? Don't tell me about Miss Florence. What's Miss Florence to her, compared to me?'

The apposite display of the diamonds, or the peach-velvet bonnet (she sat in the bonnet to receive visitors, weeks before she could stir out of doors), or the dressing of her up in some gaud or other, usually stopped the tears that began to flow hereabouts; and she would remain in a complacent state until Edith came to see her; when, at a glance of the proud face, she would relapse again.

'Well, I am sure, Edith!' she would cry, shaking her head.

'What is the matter, mother?'

'Matter! I really don't know what is the matter. The world is coming to such an artificial and ungrateful state, that I begin to think there's no Heart—or anything of that sort—left in it, positively. Withers is more a child to me than you are. He attends to me much more than my own daughter. I almost wish I didn't look so young—and all that kind of thing—and then perhaps I should be more considered.'

'What would you have, mother?'

'Oh, a great deal, Edith,' impatiently.

'Is there anything you want that you have not? It is your own fault if there be.'

'My own fault!' beginning to whimper. 'The parent I have been to you, Edith: making you a companion from your cradle! And when you neglect me, and have no more natural affection for me than if I was a stranger—not a twentieth part of the affection that you have for Florence—but I am only your mother, and should corrupt her in a day!—you reproach me with its being my own fault.'

'Mother, mother, I reproach you with nothing. Why will you always dwell on this?'

'Isn't it natural that I should dwell on this, when I am all affection and sensitiveness, and am wounded in the cruellest way, whenever you look at me?'

'I do not mean to wound you, mother. Have you no remembrance of what has been said between us? Let the Past rest.'

'Yes, rest! And let gratitude to me rest; and let affection for me rest; and let me rest in my out-of-the-way room, with no society and no attention, while you find new relations to make much of, who have no earthly claim upon you! Good gracious, Edith, do you know what an elegant establishment you are at the head of?'

'Yes. Hush!'

'And that gentlemanly creature, Dombey? Do you know that you are married to him, Edith, and that you have a settlement and a position, and a carriage, and I don't know what?'

'Indeed, I know it, mother; well.'

'As you would have had with that delightful good soul—what did they call him?—Granger—if he hadn't died. And who have you to thank for all this, Edith?'

'You, mother; you.'

'Then put your arms round my neck, and kiss me; and show me, Edith, that you know there never was a better Mama than I have been to you. And don't let me become a perfect fright with teasing and wearing myself at your ingratitude, or when I'm out again in society no soul will know me, not even that hateful animal, the Major.'

But, sometimes, when Edith went nearer to her, and bending down her stately head, Put her cold cheek to hers, the mother would draw back as If she were afraid of her, and would fall into a fit of trembling, and cry out that there was a wandering in her wits. And sometimes she would entreat her, with humility, to sit down on the chair beside her bed, and would look at her (as she sat there brooding) with a face that even the rose-coloured curtains could not make otherwise than scared and wild.

The rose-coloured curtains blushed, in course of time, on Cleopatra's bodily recovery, and on her dress—more juvenile than ever, to repair the ravages of illness—and on the rouge, and on the teeth, and on the curls, and on the diamonds, and the short sleeves, and the whole wardrobe of the doll that had tumbled down before the mirror. They blushed, too, now and then, upon an indistinctness in her speech which she turned off with a girlish giggle, and on an occasional failing In her memory, that had no rule in it, but came and went fantastically, as if in mockery of her fantastic self.

But they never blushed upon a change in the new manner of her thought and speech towards her daughter. And though that daughter often came within their influence, they never blushed upon her loveliness irradiated by a smile, or softened by the light of filial love, in its stem beauty.

CHAPTER 38. Miss Tox improves an Old Acquaintance

The forlorn Miss Tox, abandoned by her friend Louisa Chick, and bereft of Mr Dombey's countenance—for no delicate pair of wedding cards, united by a silver thread, graced the chimney-glass in Princess's Place, or the harpsichord, or any of those little posts of display which Lucretia reserved for holiday occupation—became depressed in her spirits, and suffered much from melancholy. For a time the Bird Waltz was unheard in Princess's Place, the plants were neglected, and dust collected on the miniature of Miss Tox's ancestor with the powdered head and pigtail.

Miss Tox, however, was not of an age or of a disposition long to abandon herself to unavailing regrets. Only two notes of the harpsichord were dumb from disuse when the Bird Waltz again warbled and trilled in the crooked drawing-room: only one slip of geranium fell a victim to imperfect nursing, before she was gardening at her green baskets again, regularly every morning; the powdered-headed ancestor had not been under a cloud for more than six weeks, when Miss Tox breathed on his benignant visage, and polished him up with a piece of wash-leather.

Still, Miss Tox was lonely, and at a loss. Her attachments, however ludicrously shown, were real and strong; and she was, as she expressed it, 'deeply hurt by the unmerited contumely she had met with from Louisa.' But there was no such thing as anger in Miss Tox's composition. If she had ambled on through life, in her soft spoken way, without any opinions, she had, at least, got so far without any harsh passions. The mere sight of Louisa Chick in the street one day, at a considerable distance, so overpowered her milky nature, that she was fain to seek immediate refuge in a pastrycook's, and there, in a musty little back room usually devoted to the consumption of soups, and pervaded by an ox-tail atmosphere, relieve her feelings by weeping plentifully.

Against Mr Dombey Miss Tox hardly felt that she had any reason of complaint. Her sense of that gentleman's magnificence was such, that once removed from him, she felt as if her distance always had been immeasurable, and as if he had greatly condescended in tolerating her at all.

No wife could be too handsome or too stately for him, according to Miss Tox's sincere opinion. It was perfectly natural that in looking for one, he should look high. Miss Tox with tears laid down this proposition, and fully admitted it, twenty times a day. She never recalled the lofty manner in which Mr Dombey had made her subservient to his convenience and caprices, and had graciously permitted her to be one of the nurses of his little son. She only thought, in her own words, 'that she had passed a great many happy hours in that house, which she must ever remember with gratification, and that she could never cease to regard Mr Dombey as one of the most impressive and dignified of men.'

Cut off, however, from the implacable Louisa, and being shy of the Major (whom she viewed with some distrust now), Miss Tox found it very irksome to know nothing of what was going on in Mr Dombey's establishment. And as she really had got into the habit of considering Dombey and Son as the pivot on which the world in general turned, she resolved, rather than be ignorant of intelligence which so strongly interested her, to cultivate her old acquaintance, Mrs Richards, who she knew, since her last memorable appearance before Mr Dombey, was in the habit of sometimes holding communication with his servants. Perhaps Miss Tox, in seeking out the Toodle family, had the tender motive hidden in her breast of having somebody to whom she could talk about Mr Dombey, no matter how humble that somebody might be.

At all events, towards the Toodle habitation Miss Tox directed her steps one evening, what time Mr Toodle, cindery and swart, was refreshing himself with tea, in the bosom of his family. Mr Toodle had only three stages of existence. He was either taking refreshment in the bosom just mentioned, or he was tearing through the country at from twenty-five to fifty miles an hour, or he was sleeping after his fatigues. He was always in a whirlwind or a calm, and a peaceable, contented, easy-going man Mr Toodle was in either state, who seemed to have made over all his own inheritance of fuming and fretting to the engines with which he was connected, which panted, and gasped, and chafed, and wore themselves out, in a most unsparing manner, while Mr Toodle led a mild and equable life.

'Polly, my gal,' said Mr Toodle, with a young Toodle on each knee, and two more making tea for him, and plenty more scattered about—Mr Toodle was never out of children, but always kept a good supply on hand—'you ain't seen our Biler lately, have you?'

'No,' replied Polly, 'but he's almost certain to look in tonight. It's his right evening, and he's very regular.'

'I suppose,' said Mr Toodle, relishing his meal infinitely, 'as our Biler is a doin' now about as well as a boy can do, eh, Polly?'

'Oh! he's a doing beautiful!' responded Polly.

'He ain't got to be at all secret-like—has he, Polly?' inquired Mr Toodle.

'No!' said Mrs Toodle, plumply.

'I'm glad he ain't got to be at all secret-like, Polly,' observed Mr Toodle in his slow and measured way, and shovelling in his bread and butter with a clasp knife, as if he were stoking himself, 'because that don't look well; do it, Polly?'

'Why, of course it don't, father. How can you ask!'

'You see, my boys and gals,' said Mr Toodle, looking round upon his family, 'wotever you're up to in a honest way, it's my opinion as you can't do better than be open. If you find yourselves in cuttings or in tunnels, don't you play no secret games. Keep your whistles going, and let's know where you are.

The rising Toodles set up a shrill murmur, expressive of their resolution to profit by the paternal advice.

'But what makes you say this along of Rob, father?' asked his wife, anxiously.

'Polly, old ooman,' said Mr Toodle, 'I don't know as I said it partickler along o' Rob, I'm sure. I starts light with Rob only; I comes to a branch; I takes on what I finds there; and a whole train of ideas gets coupled on to him, afore I knows where I am, or where they comes from. What a Junction a man's thoughts is,' said Mr Toodle, 'to-be-sure!'

This profound reflection Mr Toodle washed down with a pint mug of tea, and proceeded to solidify with a great weight of bread and butter; charging his young daughters meanwhile, to keep plenty of hot water in the pot, as he was uncommon dry, and should take the indefinite quantity of 'a sight of mugs,' before his thirst was appeased.

In satisfying himself, however, Mr Toodle was not regardless of the younger branches about him, who, although they had made their own evening repast, were on the look-out for irregular morsels, as possessing a relish. These he distributed now and then to the expectant circle, by holding out great wedges of bread and butter, to be bitten at by the family in lawful succession, and by serving out small doses of tea in like manner with a spoon; which snacks had such a relish in the mouths of these young Toodles, that, after partaking of the same, they performed private dances of ecstasy among themselves, and stood on one leg apiece, and hopped, and indulged in other saltatory tokens of gladness. These vents for their excitement found, they gradually closed about Mr Toodle again, and eyed him hard as he got through more bread and butter and tea; affecting, however, to have no further expectations of their own in reference to those viands, but to be conversing on foreign subjects, and whispering confidentially.

Mr Toodle, in the midst of this family group, and setting an awful example to his children in the way of appetite, was conveying the two young Toodles on his knees to Birmingham by special engine, and was contemplating the rest over a barrier of bread and butter, when Rob the Grinder, in his sou'wester hat and mourning slops, presented himself, and was received with a general rush of brothers and sisters.

'Well, mother!' said Rob, dutifully kissing her; 'how are you, mother?'

'There's my boy!' cried Polly, giving him a hug and a pat on the back. 'Secret! Bless you, father, not he!'

This was intended for Mr Toodle's private edification, but Rob the Grinder, whose withers were not unwrung, caught the words as they were spoken.

'What! father's been a saying something more again me, has he?' cried the injured innocent. 'Oh, what a hard thing it is that when a cove has once gone a little wrong, a cove's own father should be always a throwing it in his face behind his back! It's enough,' cried Rob, resorting to his coat- cuff in anguish of spirit, 'to make a cove go and do something, out of spite!'

'My poor boy!' cried Polly, 'father didn't mean anything.'

'If father didn't mean anything,' blubbered the injured Grinder, 'why did he go and say anything, mother? Nobody thinks half so bad of me as my own father does. What a unnatural thing! I wish somebody'd take and chop my head off. Father wouldn't mind doing it, I believe, and I'd much rather he did that than t'other.'

At these desperate words all the young Toodles shrieked; a pathetic effect, which the Grinder improved by ironically adjuring them not to cry for him, for they ought to hate him, they ought, if they was good boys and girls; and this so touched the youngest Toodle but one, who was easily moved, that it touched him not only in his spirit but in his wind too; making him so purple that Mr Toodle in consternation carried him out to the water-butt, and would have put him under the tap, but for his being recovered by the sight of that instrument.

Matters having reached this point, Mr Toodle explained, and the virtuous feelings of his son being thereby calmed, they shook hands, and harmony reigned again.

'Will you do as I do, Biler, my boy?' inquired his father, returning to his tea with new strength.

'No, thank'ee, father. Master and I had tea together.'

'And how is master, Rob?' said Polly.

'Well, I don't know, mother; not much to boast on. There ain't no bis'ness done, you see. He don't know anything about it—the Cap'en don't. There was a man come into the shop this very day, and says, "I want a so-and-so," he says—some hard name or another. "A which?" says the Cap'en. "A so-and-so," says the man. "Brother," says the Cap'en, "will you take a observation round the shop." "Well," says the man, "I've done." "Do you see wot you want?" says the Cap'en "No, I don't," says the man. "Do you know it wen you do see it?" says the Cap'en. "No, I don't," says the man. "Why, then I tell you wot, my lad," says the Cap'en, "you'd better go back and ask wot it's like, outside, for no more don't I!"'

'That ain't the way to make money, though, is it?' said Polly.

'Money, mother! He'll never make money. He has such ways as I never see. He ain't a bad master though, I'll say that for him. But that ain't much to me, for I don't think I shall stop with him long.'

'Not stop in your place, Rob!' cried his mother; while Mr Toodle opened his eyes.

'Not in that place, p'raps,' returned the Grinder, with a wink. 'I shouldn't wonder—friends at court you know—but never you mind, mother, just now; I'm all right, that's all.'

The indisputable proof afforded in these hints, and in the Grinder's mysterious manner, of his not being subject to that failing which Mr Toodle had, by implication, attributed to him, might have led to a renewal of his wrongs, and of the sensation in the family, but for the opportune arrival of another visitor, who, to Polly's great surprise, appeared at the door, smiling patronage and friendship on all there.

'How do you do, Mrs Richards?' said Miss Tox. 'I have come to see you. May I come in?'

The cheery face of Mrs Richards shone with a hospitable reply, and Miss Tox, accepting the proffered chair, and grab fully recognising Mr Toodle on her way to it, untied her bonnet strings, and said that in the first place she must beg the dear children, one and all, to come and kiss her.

The ill-starred youngest Toodle but one, who would appear, from the frequency of his domestic troubles, to have been born under an unlucky planet, was prevented from performing his part in this general salutation by having fixed the sou'wester hat (with which he had been previously trifling) deep on his head, hind side before, and being unable to get it off again; which accident presenting to his terrified imagination a dismal picture of his passing the rest of his days in darkness, and in hopeless seclusion from his friends and family, caused him to struggle with great violence, and to utter suffocating cries. Being released, his face was discovered to be very hot, and red, and damp; and Miss Tox took him on her lap, much exhausted.

'You have almost forgotten me, Sir, I daresay,' said Miss Tox to Mr Toodle.

'No, Ma'am, no,' said Toodle. 'But we've all on us got a little older since then.'

'And how do you find yourself, Sir?' inquired Miss Tox, blandly.

'Hearty, Ma'am, thank'ee,' replied Toodle. 'How do you find yourself, Ma'am? Do the rheumaticks keep off pretty well, Ma'am? We must all expect to grow into 'em, as we gets on.'

'Thank you,' said Miss Tox. 'I have not felt any inconvenience from that disorder yet.'

'You're wery fortunate, Ma'am,' returned Mr Toodle. 'Many people at your time of life, Ma'am, is martyrs to it. There was my mother—' But catching his wife's eye here, Mr Toodle judiciously buried the rest in another mug of tea.

'You never mean to say, Mrs Richards,' cried Miss Tox, looking at Rob, 'that that is your—'

'Eldest, Ma'am,' said Polly. 'Yes, indeed, it is. That's the little fellow, Ma'am, that was the innocent cause of so much.'

'This here, Ma'am,' said Toodle, 'is him with the short legs—and they was,' said Mr Toodle, with a touch of poetry in his tone, 'unusual short for leathers—as Mr Dombey made a Grinder on.'

The recollection almost overpowered Miss Tox. The subject of it had a peculiar interest for her directly. She asked him to shake hands, and congratulated his mother on his frank, ingenuous face. Rob, overhearing her, called up a look, to justify the eulogium, but it was hardly the right look.

'And now, Mrs Richards,' said Miss Tox,—'and you too, Sir,' addressing Toodle—'I'll tell you, plainly and truly, what I have come here for. You may be aware, Mrs Richards—and, possibly, you may be aware too, Sir—that a little distance has interposed itself between me and some of my friends, and that where I used to visit a good deal, I do not visit now.'

Polly, who, with a woman's tact, understood this at once, expressed as much in a little look. Mr Toodle, who had not the faintest idea of what Miss Tox was talking about, expressed that also, in a stare.

'Of course,' said Miss Tox, 'how our little coolness has arisen is of no moment, and does not require to be discussed. It is sufficient for me to say, that I have the greatest possible respect for, and interest in, Mr Dombey;' Miss Tox's voice faltered; 'and everything that relates to him.'

Mr Toodle, enlightened, shook his head, and said he had heerd it said, and, for his own part, he did think, as Mr Dombey was a difficult subject.

'Pray don't say so, Sir, if you please,' returned Miss Tox. 'Let me entreat you not to say so, Sir, either now, or at any future time. Such observations cannot but be very painful to me; and to a gentleman, whose mind is constituted as, I am quite sure, yours is, can afford no permanent satisfaction.'

Mr Toodle, who had not entertained the least doubt of offering a remark that would be received with acquiescence, was greatly confounded.

'All that I wish to say, Mrs Richards,' resumed Miss Tox,—'and I address myself to you too, Sir,—is this. That any intelligence of the proceedings of the family, of the welfare of the family, of the health of the family, that reaches you, will be always most acceptable to me. That I shall be always very glad to chat with Mrs Richards about the family, and about old time And as Mrs Richards and I never had the least difference (though I could wish now that we had been better acquainted, but I have no one but myself to blame for that), I hope she will not object to our being very good friends now, and to my coming backwards and forwards here, when I like, without being a stranger. Now, I really hope, Mrs Richards,' said Miss Tox — earnestly, 'that you will take this, as I mean it, like a good-humoured creature, as you always were.'

Polly was gratified, and showed it. Mr Toodle didn't know whether he was gratified or not, and preserved a stolid calmness.

'You see, Mrs Richards,' said Miss Tox—'and I hope you see too, Sir—there are many little ways in which I can be slightly useful to you, if you will make no stranger of me; and in which I shall be delighted to be so. For instance, I can teach your children something. I shall bring a few little books, if you'll allow me, and some work, and of an evening now and then, they'll learn—dear me, they'll learn a great deal, I trust, and be a credit to their teacher.'

Mr Toodle, who had a great respect for learning, jerked his head approvingly at his wife, and moistened his hands with dawning satisfaction.

'Then, not being a stranger, I shall be in nobody's way,' said Miss Tox, 'and everything will go on just as if I were not here. Mrs Richards will do her mending, or her ironing, or her nursing, whatever it is, without minding me: and you'll smoke your pipe, too, if you're so disposed, Sir, won't you?'

'Thank'ee, Mum,' said Mr Toodle. 'Yes; I'll take my bit of backer.'

'Very good of you to say so, Sir,' rejoined Miss Tox, 'and I really do assure you now, unfeignedly, that it will be a great comfort to me, and that whatever good I may be fortunate enough to do the children, you will more than pay back to me, if you'll enter into this little bargain comfortably, and easily, and good-naturedly, without another word about it.'

The bargain was ratified on the spot; and Miss Tox found herself so much at home already, that without delay she instituted a preliminary examination of the children all round—which Mr Toodle much admired—and booked their ages, names, and acquirements, on a piece of paper. This ceremony, and a little attendant gossip, prolonged the time until after their usual hour of going to bed, and detained Miss Tox at the Toodle fireside until it was too late for her to walk home alone. The gallant Grinder, however, being still there, politely offered to attend her to her own door; and as it was something to Miss Tox to be seen home by a youth whom Mr Dombey had first inducted into those manly garments which are rarely mentioned by name,' she very readily accepted the proposal.

After shaking hands with Mr Toodle and Polly, and kissing all the children, Miss Tox left the house, therefore, with unlimited popularity, and carrying away with her so light a heart that it might have given Mrs Chick offence if that good lady could have weighed it.

Rob the Grinder, in his modesty, would have walked behind, but Miss Tox desired him to keep beside her, for conversational purposes; and, as she afterwards expressed it to his mother, 'drew him out,' upon the road.

He drew out so bright, and clear, and shining, that Miss Tox was charmed with him. The more Miss Tox drew him out, the finer he came—like wire. There never was a better or more promising youth—a more affectionate, steady, prudent, sober, honest, meek, candid young man—than Rob drew out, that night.

'I am quite glad,' said Miss Tox, arrived at her own door, 'to know you. I hope you'll consider me your friend, and that you'll come and see me as often as you like. Do you keep a money-box?'

'Yes, Ma'am,' returned Rob; 'I'm saving up, against I've got enough to put in the Bank, Ma'am.

'Very laudable indeed,' said Miss Tox. 'I'm glad to hear it. Put this half-crown into it, if you please.'

'Oh thank you, Ma'am,' replied Rob, 'but really I couldn't think of depriving you.'

'I commend your independent spirit,' said Miss Tox, 'but it's no deprivation, I assure you. I shall be offended if you don't take it, as a mark of my good-will. Good-night, Robin.'

'Good-night, Ma'am,' said Rob, 'and thank you!'

Who ran sniggering off to get change, and tossed it away with a pieman. But they never taught honour at the Grinders' School, where the system that prevailed was particularly strong in the engendering of hypocrisy. Insomuch, that many of the friends and masters of past Grinders said, if this were what came of education for the common people, let us have none. Some more rational said, let us have a better one. But the governing powers of the Grinders' Company were always ready for them, by picking out a few boys who had turned out well in spite of the system, and roundly asserting that they could have only turned out well because of it. Which settled the business of those objectors out of hand, and established the glory of the Grinders' Institution.

CHAPTER 39. Further Adventures of Captain Edward Cuttle, Mariner

Time, sure of foot and strong of will, had so pressed onward, that the year enjoined by the old Instrument-maker, as the term during which his friend should refrain from opening the sealed packet accompanying the letter he had left for him, was now nearly expired, and Captain Cuttle began to look at it, of an evening, with feelings of mystery and uneasiness.

The Captain, in his honour, would as soon have thought of opening the parcel one hour before the expiration of the term, as he would have thought of opening himself, to study his own anatomy. He merely brought it out, at a certain stage of his first evening pipe, laid it on the table, and sat gazing at the outside of it, through the smoke, in silent gravity, for two or three hours at a spell. Sometimes, when he had contemplated it thus for a pretty long while, the Captain would hitch his chair, by degrees, farther and farther off, as if to get beyond the range of its fascination; but if this were his design, he never succeeded: for even when he was brought up by the parlour wall, the packet still attracted him; or if his eyes, in thoughtful wandering, roved to the ceiling or the fire, its image immediately followed, and posted itself conspicuously among the coals, or took up an advantageous position on the whitewash.

In respect of Heart's Delight, the Captain's parental and admiration knew no change. But since his last interview with Mr Carker, Captain Cuttle had come to entertain doubts whether his former intervention in behalf of that young lady and his dear boy Wal'r, had proved altogether so favourable as he could have wished, and as he at the time believed. The Captain was troubled with a serious misgiving that he had done more harm than good, in short; and in his remorse and modesty he made the best atonement he could think of, by putting himself out of the way of doing any harm to anyone, and, as it were, throwing himself overboard for a dangerous person.

Self-buried, therefore, among the instruments, the Captain never went near Mr Dombey's house, or reported himself in any way to Florence or Miss Nipper. He even severed himself from Mr Perch, on the occasion of his next visit, by dryly informing that gentleman, that he thanked him for his company, but had cut himself adrift from all such acquaintance, as he didn't know what magazine he mightn't blow up, without meaning of it. In this self-imposed retirement, the Captain passed whole days and weeks without interchanging a word with anyone but Rob the Grinder, whom he esteemed as a pattern of disinterested attachment and fidelity. In this retirement, the Captain, gazing at the packet of an evening, would sit smoking, and thinking of Florence and poor Walter, until they both seemed to his homely fancy to be dead, and to have passed away into eternal youth, the beautiful and innocent children of his first remembrance.

The Captain did not, however, in his musings, neglect his own improvement, or the mental culture of Rob the Grinder. That young man was generally required to read out of some book to the Captain, for one hour, every evening; and as the Captain implicitly believed that all books were true, he accumulated, by this means, many remarkable facts. On Sunday nights, the Captain always read for himself, before going to bed, a certain Divine Sermon once delivered on a Mount; and although he was accustomed to quote the text, without book, after his own manner, he appeared to read it with as reverent an understanding of its heavenly spirit, as if he had got it all by heart in Greek, and had been able to write any number of fierce theological disquisitions on its every phrase.

Rob the Grinder, whose reverence for the inspired writings, under the admirable system of the Grinders' School, had been developed by a perpetual bruising of his intellectual shins against all the proper names of all the tribes of Judah, and by the monotonous repetition of hard verses, especially by way of punishment, and by the parading of him at six years old in leather breeches, three times a Sunday, very high up, in a very hot church, with a great organ buzzing against his drowsy head, like an exceedingly busy bee—Rob the Grinder made a mighty show of being edified when the Captain ceased to read, and generally yawned and nodded while the reading was in progress. The latter fact being never so much as suspected by the good Captain.

Captain Cuttle, also, as a man of business; took to keeping books. In these he entered observations on the weather, and on the currents of the waggons and other vehicles: which he observed, in that quarter, to set westward in the morning and during the greater part of the day, and eastward towards the evening. Two or three stragglers appearing in one week, who 'spoke him'—so the Captain entered it—on the subject of spectacles, and who, without positively purchasing, said they would look in again, the Captain decided that the business was improving, and made an entry in the day-book to that effect: the wind then blowing (which he first recorded) pretty fresh, west and by north; having changed in the night.

One of the Captain's chief difficulties was Mr Toots, who called frequently, and who without saying much seemed to have an idea that the little back parlour was an eligible room to chuckle in, as he would sit and avail himself of its accommodations in that regard by the half-hour together, without at all advancing in intimacy with the Captain. The Captain, rendered cautious by his late experience, was unable quite to satisfy his mind whether Mr Toots was the mild subject he appeared to be, or was a profoundly artful and dissimulating hypocrite. His frequent reference to Miss Dombey was suspicious; but the Captain had a secret kindness for Mr Toots's apparent reliance on him, and forbore to decide against him for the present; merely eyeing him, with a sagacity not to be described, whenever he approached the subject that was nearest to his heart.

'Captain Gills,' blurted out Mr Toots, one day all at once, as his manner was, 'do you think you could think favourably of that proposition of mine, and give me the pleasure of your acquaintance?'

'Why, I tell you what it is, my lad,' replied the Captain, who had at length concluded on a course of action; 'I've been turning that there, over.'

'Captain Gills, it's very kind of you,' retorted Mr Toots. 'I'm much obliged to you. Upon my word and honour, Captain Gills, it would be a charity to give me the pleasure of your acquaintance. It really would.'

'You see, brother,' argued the Captain slowly, 'I don't know you.

'But you never can know me, Captain Gills,' replied Mr Toots, steadfast to his point, 'if you don't give me the pleasure of your acquaintance.

The Captain seemed struck by the originality and power of this remark, and looked at Mr Toots as if he thought there was a great deal more in him than he had expected.

'Well said, my lad,' observed the Captain, nodding his head thoughtfully; 'and true. Now look'ee here: You've made some observations to me, which gives me to understand as you admire a certain sweet creetur. Hey?'

'Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, gesticulating violently with the hand in which he held his hat, 'Admiration is not the word. Upon my honour, you have no conception what my feelings are. If I could be dyed black, and made Miss Dombey's slave, I should consider it a compliment. If, at the sacrifice of all my property, I could get transmigrated into Miss Dombey's dog—I—I really think I should never leave off wagging my tail. I should be so perfectly happy, Captain Gills!'

Mr Toots said it with watery eyes, and pressed his hat against his bosom with deep emotion.

'My lad,' returned the Captain, moved to compassion, 'if you're in arnest—

'Captain Gills,' cried Mr Toots, 'I'm in such a state of mind, and am so dreadfully in earnest, that if I could swear to it upon a hot piece of iron, or a live coal, or melted lead, or burning sealing-wax, Or anything of that sort, I should be glad to hurt myself, as a relief to my feelings.' And Mr Toots looked hurriedly about the room, as if for some sufficiently painful means of accomplishing his dread purpose.

The Captain pushed his glazed hat back upon his head, stroked his face down with his heavy hand—making his nose more mottled in the process—and planting himself before Mr Toots, and hooking him by the lapel of his coat, addressed him in these words, while Mr Toots looked up into his face, with much attention and some wonder.

'If you're in arnest, you see, my lad,' said the Captain, 'you're a object of clemency, and clemency is the brightest jewel in the crown of a Briton's head, for which you'll overhaul the constitution as laid down in Rule Britannia, and, when found, that is the charter as them garden angels was a singing of, so many times over. Stand by! This here proposal o' you'rn takes me a little aback. And why? Because I holds my own only, you understand, in these here waters, and haven't got no consort, and may be don't wish for none. Steady! You hailed me first, along of a certain young lady, as you was chartered by. Now if you and me is to keep one another's company at all, that there young creetur's name must never be named nor referred to. I don't know what harm mayn't have been done by naming of it too free, afore now, and thereby I brings up short. D'ye make me out pretty clear, brother?'

'Well, you'll excuse me, Captain Gills,' replied Mr Toots, 'if I don't quite follow you sometimes. But upon my word I—it's a hard thing, Captain Gills, not to be able to mention Miss Dombey. I really have got such a dreadful load here!'—Mr Toots pathetically touched his shirt-front with both hands—'that I feel night and day, exactly as if somebody was sitting upon me.

'Them,' said the Captain, 'is the terms I offer. If they're hard upon you, brother, as mayhap they are, give 'em a wide berth, sheer off, and part company cheerily!'

'Captain Gills,' returned Mr Toots, 'I hardly know how it is, but after what you told me when I came here, for the first time, I—I feel that I'd rather think about Miss Dombey in your society than talk about her in almost anybody else's. Therefore, Captain Gills, if you'll give me the pleasure of your acquaintance, I shall be very happy to accept it on your own conditions. I wish to be honourable, Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, holding back his extended hand for a moment, 'and therefore I am obliged to say that I can not help thinking about Miss Dombey. It's impossible for me to make a promise not to think about her.'

'My lad,' said the Captain, whose opinion of Mr Toots was much improved by this candid avowal, 'a man's thoughts is like the winds, and nobody can't answer for 'em for certain, any length of time together. Is it a treaty as to words?'

'As to words, Captain Gills,' returned Mr Toots, 'I think I can bind myself.'

Mr Toots gave Captain Cuttle his hand upon it, then and there; and the Captain with a pleasant and gracious show of condescension, bestowed his acquaintance upon him formally. Mr Toots seemed much relieved and gladdened by the acquisition, and chuckled rapturously during the remainder of his visit. The Captain, for his part, was not ill pleased to occupy that position of patronage, and was exceedingly well satisfied by his own prudence and foresight.

But rich as Captain Cuttle was in the latter quality, he received a surprise that same evening from a no less ingenuous and simple youth, than Rob the Grinder. That artless lad, drinking tea at the same table, and bending meekly over his cup and saucer, having taken sidelong observations of his master for some time, who was reading the newspaper with great difficulty, but much dignity, through his glasses, broke silence by saying—

'Oh! I beg your pardon, Captain, but you mayn't be in want of any pigeons, may you, Sir?'

'No, my lad,' replied the Captain.

'Because I was wishing to dispose of mine, Captain,' said Rob.

'Ay, ay?' cried the Captain, lifting up his bushy eyebrows a little.

'Yes; I'm going, Captain, if you please,' said Rob.

'Going? Where are you going?' asked the Captain, looking round at him over the glasses.

'What? didn't you know that I was going to leave you, Captain?' asked Rob, with a sneaking smile.

The Captain put down the paper, took off his spectacles, and brought his eyes to bear on the deserter.

'Oh yes, Captain, I am going to give you warning. I thought you'd have known that beforehand, perhaps,' said Rob, rubbing his hands, and getting up. 'If you could be so good as provide yourself soon, Captain, it would be a great convenience to me. You couldn't provide yourself by to-morrow morning, I am afraid, Captain: could you, do you think?'

'And you're a going to desert your colours, are you, my lad?' said the Captain, after a long examination of his face.

'Oh, it's very hard upon a cove, Captain,' cried the tender Rob, injured and indignant in a moment, 'that he can't give lawful warning, without being frowned at in that way, and called a deserter. You haven't any right to call a poor cove names, Captain. It ain't because I'm a servant and you're a master, that you're to go and libel me. What wrong have I done? Come, Captain, let me know what my crime is, will you?'

The stricken Grinder wept, and put his coat-cuff in his eye.

'Come, Captain,' cried the injured youth, 'give my crime a name! What have I been and done? Have I stolen any of the property? have I set the house a- fire? If I have, why don't you give me in charge, and try it? But to take away the character of a lad that's been a good servant to you, because he can't afford to stand in his own light for your good, what a injury it is, and what a bad return for faithful service! This is the way young coves is spiled and drove wrong. I wonder at you, Captain, I do.'

All of which the Grinder howled forth in a lachrymose whine, and backing carefully towards the door.

'And so you've got another berth, have you, my lad?' said the Captain, eyeing him intently.

'Yes, Captain, since you put it in that shape, I have got another berth,' cried Rob, backing more and more; 'a better berth than I've got here, and one where I don't so much as want your good word, Captain, which is fort'nate for me, after all the dirt you've throw'd at me, because I'm poor, and can't afford to stand in my own light for your good. Yes, I have got another berth; and if it wasn't for leaving you unprovided, Captain, I'd go to it now, sooner than I'd take them names from you, because I'm poor, and can't afford to stand in my own light for your good. Why do you reproach me for being poor, and not standing in my own light for your good, Captain? How can you so demean yourself?'

'Look ye here, my boy,' replied the peaceful Captain. 'Don't you pay out no more of them words.'

'Well, then, don't you pay in no more of your words, Captain,' retorted the roused innocent, getting louder in his whine, and backing into the shop. 'I'd sooner you took my blood than my character.'

'Because,' pursued the Captain calmly, 'you have heerd, may be, of such a thing as a rope's end.'

'Oh, have I though, Captain?' cried the taunting Grinder. 'No I haven't. I never heerd of any such a article!'

'Well,' said the Captain, 'it's my belief as you'll know more about it pretty soon, if you don't keep a bright look-out. I can read your signals, my lad. You may go.'

'Oh! I may go at once, may I, Captain?' cried Rob, exulting in his success. 'But mind! I never asked to go at once, Captain. You are not to take away my character again, because you send me off of your own accord. And you're not to stop any of my wages, Captain!'

His employer settled the last point by producing the tin canister and telling the Grinder's money out in full upon the table. Rob, snivelling and sobbing, and grievously wounded in his feelings, took up the pieces one by one, with a sob and a snivel for each, and tied them up separately in knots in his pockethandkerchief; then he ascended to the roof of the house and filled his hat and pockets with pigeons; then, came down to his bed under the counter and made up his bundle, snivelling and sobbing louder, as if he were cut to the heart by old associations; then he whined, 'Good-night, Captain. I leave you without malice!' and then, going out upon the door-step, pulled the little Midshipman's nose as a parting indignity, and went away down the street grinning triumphantly.

The Captain, left to himself, resumed his perusal of the news as if nothing unusual or unexpected had taken place, and went reading on with the greatest assiduity. But never a word did Captain Cuttle understand, though he read a vast number, for Rob the Grinder was scampering up one column and down another all through the newspaper.

It is doubtful whether the worthy Captain had ever felt himself quite abandoned until now; but now, old Sol Gills, Walter, and Heart's Delight were lost to him indeed, and now Mr Carker deceived and jeered him cruelly. They were all represented in the false Rob, to whom he had held forth many a time on the recollections that were warm within him; he had believed in the false Rob, and had been glad to believe in him; he had made a companion of him as the last of the old ship's company; he had taken the command of the little Midshipman with him at his right hand; he had meant to do his duty by him, and had felt almost as kindly towards the boy as if they had been shipwrecked and cast upon a desert place together. And now, that the false Rob had brought distrust, treachery, and meanness into the very parlour, which was a kind of sacred place, Captain Cuttle felt as if the parlour might have gone down next, and not surprised him much by its sinking, or given him any very great concern.

Therefore Captain Cuttle read the newspaper with profound attention and no comprehension, and therefore Captain Cuttle said nothing whatever about Rob to himself, or admitted to himself that he was thinking about him, or would recognise in the most distant manner that Rob had anything to do with his feeling as lonely as Robinson Crusoe.

In the same composed, business-like way, the Captain stepped over to Leadenhall Market in the dusk, and effected an arrangement with a private watchman on duty there, to come and put up and take down the shutters of the wooden Midshipman every night and morning. He then called in at the eating-house to diminish by one half the daily rations theretofore supplied to the Midshipman, and at the public-house to stop the traitor's beer. 'My young man,' said the Captain, in explanation to the young lady at the bar, 'my young man having bettered himself, Miss.' Lastly, the Captain resolved to take possession of the bed under the counter, and to turn in there o' nights instead of upstairs, as sole guardian of the property.

From this bed Captain Cuttle daily rose thenceforth, and clapped on his glazed hat at six o'clock in the morning, with the solitary air of Crusoe finishing his toilet with his goat-skin cap; and although his fears of a visitation from the savage tribe, MacStinger, were somewhat cooled, as similar apprehensions on the part of that lone mariner used to be by the lapse of a long interval without any symptoms of the cannibals, he still observed a regular routine of defensive operations, and never encountered a bonnet without previous survey from his castle of retreat. In the meantime (during which he received no call from Mr Toots, who wrote to say he was out of town) his own voice began to have a strange sound in his ears; and he acquired such habits of profound meditation from much polishing and stowing away of the stock, and from much sitting behind the counter reading, or looking out of window, that the red rim made on his forehead by the hard glazed hat, sometimes ached again with excess of reflection.

The year being now expired, Captain Cuttle deemed it expedient to open the packet; but as he had always designed doing this in the presence of Rob the Grinder, who had brought it to him, and as he had an idea that it would be regular and ship-shape to open it in the presence of somebody, he was sadly put to it for want of a witness. In this difficulty, he hailed one day with unusual delight the announcement in the Shipping Intelligence of the arrival of the Cautious Clara, Captain John Bunsby, from a coasting voyage; and to that philosopher immediately dispatched a letter by post, enjoining inviolable secrecy as to his place of residence, and requesting to be favoured with an early visit, in the evening season.

Bunsby, who was one of those sages who act upon conviction, took some days to get the conviction thoroughly into his mind, that he had received a letter to this effect. But when he had grappled with the fact, and mastered it, he promptly sent his boy with the message, 'He's a coming to-night.' Who being instructed to deliver those words and disappear, fulfilled his mission like a tarry spirit, charged with a mysterious warning.

The Captain, well pleased to receive it, made preparation of pipes and rum and water, and awaited his visitor in the back parlour. At the hour of eight, a deep lowing, as of a nautical Bull, outside the shop-door, succeeded by the knocking of a stick on the panel, announced to the listening ear of Captain Cuttle, that Bunsby was alongside; whom he instantly admitted, shaggy and loose, and with his stolid mahogany visage, as usual, appearing to have no consciousness of anything before it, but to be attentively observing something that was taking place in quite another part of the world.

'Bunsby,' said the Captain, grasping him by the hand, 'what cheer, my lad, what cheer?'

'Shipmet,' replied the voice within Bunsby, unaccompanied by any sign on the part of the Commander himself, 'hearty, hearty.'

'Bunsby!' said the Captain, rendering irrepressible homage to his genius, 'here you are! a man as can give an opinion as is brighter than di'monds—and give me the lad with the tarry trousers as shines to me like di'monds bright, for which you'll overhaul the Stanfell's Budget, and when found make a note.' Here you are, a man as gave an opinion in this here very place, that has come true, every letter on it,' which the Captain sincerely believed.

'Ay, ay?' growled Bunsby.

'Every letter,' said the Captain.

'For why?' growled Bunsby, looking at his friend for the first time. 'Which way? If so, why not? Therefore.' With these oracular words—they seemed almost to make the Captain giddy; they launched him upon such a sea of speculation and conjecture—the sage submitted to be helped off with his pilot- coat, and accompanied his friend into the back parlour, where his hand presently alighted on the rum-bottle, from which he brewed a stiff glass of grog; and presently afterwards on a pipe, which he filled, lighted, and began to smoke.

Captain Cuttle, imitating his visitor in the matter of these particulars, though the rapt and imperturbable manner of the great Commander was far above his powers, sat in the opposite corner of the fireside, observing him respectfully, and as if he waited for some encouragement or expression of curiosity on Bunsby's part which should lead him to his own affairs. But as the mahogany philosopher gave no evidence of being sentient of anything but warmth and tobacco, except once, when taking his pipe from his lips to make room for his glass, he incidentally remarked with exceeding gruffness, that his name was Jack Bunsby—a declaration that presented but small opening for conversation—the Captain bespeaking his attention in a short complimentary exordium, narrated the whole history of Uncle Sol's departure, with the change it had produced in his own life and fortunes; and concluded by placing the packet on the table.

After a long pause, Mr Bunsby nodded his head.

'Open?' said the Captain.

Bunsby nodded again.

The Captain accordingly broke the seal, and disclosed to view two folded papers, of which he severally read the endorsements, thus: 'Last Will and Testament of Solomon Gills.' 'Letter for Ned Cuttle.'

Bunsby, with his eye on the coast of Greenland, seemed to listen for the contents. The Captain therefore hemmed to clear his throat, and read the letter aloud.

'"My dear Ned Cuttle. When I left home for the West Indies"—'

Here the Captain stopped, and looked hard at Bunsby, who looked fixedly at the coast of Greenland.

'—"in forlorn search of intelligence of my dear boy, I knew that if you were acquainted with my design, you would thwart it, or accompany me; and therefore I kept it secret. If you ever read this letter, Ned, I am likely to be dead. You will easily forgive an old friend's folly then, and will feel for the restlessness and uncertainty in which he wandered away on such a wild voyage. So no more of that. I have little hope that my poor boy will ever read these words, or gladden your eyes with the sight of his frank face any more." No, no; no more,' said Captain Cuttle, sorrowfully meditating; 'no more. There he lays, all his days—'

Mr Bunsby, who had a musical ear, suddenly bellowed, 'In the Bays of Biscay, O!' which so affected the good Captain, as an appropriate tribute to departed worth, that he shook him by the hand in acknowledgment, and was fain to wipe his eyes.

'Well, well!' said the Captain with a sigh, as the Lament of Bunsby ceased to ring and vibrate in the skylight. 'Affliction sore, long time he bore, and let us overhaul the wollume, and there find it.'

'Physicians,' observed Bunsby, 'was in vain.'

'Ay, ay, to be sure,' said the Captain, 'what's the good o' them in two or three hundred fathoms o' water!' Then, returning to the letter, he read on: —'"But if he should be by, when it is opened;"' the Captain involuntarily looked round, and shook his head; '"or should know of it at any other time;"' the Captain shook his head again; '"my blessing on him! In case the accompanying paper is not legally written, it matters very little, for there is no one interested but you and he, and my plain wish is, that if he is living he should have what little there may be, and if (as I fear) otherwise, that you should have it, Ned. You will respect my wish, I know. God bless you for it, and for all your friendliness besides, to Solomon Gills." Bunsby!' said the Captain, appealing to him solemnly, 'what do you make of this? There you sit, a man as has had his head broke from infancy up'ards, and has got a new opinion into it at every seam as has been opened. Now, what do you make o' this?'

'If so be,' returned Bunsby, with unusual promptitude, 'as he's dead, my opinion is he won't come back no more. If so be as he's alive, my opinion is he will. Do I say he will? No. Why not? Because the bearings of this obserwation lays in the application on it.'

'Bunsby!' said Captain Cuttle, who would seem to have estimated the value of his distinguished friend's opinions in proportion to the immensity of the difficulty he experienced in making anything out of them; 'Bunsby,' said the Captain, quite confounded by admiration, 'you carry a weight of mind easy, as would swamp one of my tonnage soon. But in regard o' this here will, I don't mean to take no steps towards the property—Lord forbid!—except to keep it for a more rightful owner; and I hope yet as the rightful owner, Sol Gills, is living and'll come back, strange as it is that he ain't forwarded no dispatches. Now, what is your opinion, Bunsby, as to stowing of these here papers away again, and marking outside as they was opened, such a day, in the presence of John Bunsby and Ed'ard Cuttle?'

Bunsby, descrying no objection, on the coast of Greenland or elsewhere, to this proposal, it was carried into execution; and that great man, bringing his eye into the present for a moment, affixed his sign-manual to the cover, totally abstaining, with characteristic modesty, from the use of capital letters. Captain Cuttle, having attached his own left-handed signature, and locked up the packet in the iron safe, entreated his guest to mix another glass and smoke another pipe; and doing the like himself, fell a musing over the fire on the possible fortunes of the poor old Instrument-maker.

And now a surprise occurred, so overwhelming and terrific that Captain Cuttle, unsupported by the presence of Bunsby, must have sunk beneath it, and been a lost man from that fatal hour.

How the Captain, even in the satisfaction of admitting such a guest, could have only shut the door, and not locked it, of which negligence he was undoubtedly guilty, is one of those questions that must for ever remain mere points of speculation, or vague charges against destiny. But by that unlocked door, at this quiet moment, did the fell MacStinger dash into the parlour, bringing Alexander MacStinger in her parental arms, and confusion and vengeance (not to mention Juliana MacStinger, and the sweet child's brother, Charles MacStinger, popularly known about the scenes of his youthful sports, as Chowley) in her train. She came so swiftly and so silently, like a rushing air from the neighbourhood of the East India Docks, that Captain Cuttle found himself in the very act of sitting looking at her, before the calm face with which he had been meditating, changed to one of horror and dismay.

But the moment Captain Cuttle understood the full extent of his misfortune, self-preservation dictated an attempt at flight. Darting at the little door which opened from the parlour on the steep little range of cellar-steps, the Captain made a rush, head-foremost, at the latter, like a man indifferent to bruises and contusions, who only sought to hide himself in the bowels of the earth. In this gallant effort he would probably have succeeded, but for the affectionate dispositions of Juliana and Chowley, who pinning him by the legs—one of those dear children holding on to each — claimed him as their friend, with lamentable cries. In the meantime, Mrs MacStinger, who never entered upon any action of importance without previously inverting Alexander MacStinger, to bring him within the range of a brisk battery of slaps, and then sitting him down to cool as the reader first beheld him, performed that solemn rite, as if on this occasion it were a sacrifice to the Furies; and having deposited the victim on the floor, made at the Captain with a strength of purpose that appeared to threaten scratches to the interposing Bunsby.

The cries of the two elder MacStingers, and the wailing of young Alexander, who may be said to have passed a piebald childhood, forasmuch as he was black in the face during one half of that fairy period of existence, combined to make this visitation the more awful. But when silence reigned again, and the Captain, in a violent perspiration, stood meekly looking at Mrs MacStinger, its terrors were at their height.

'Oh, Cap'en Cuttle, Cap'en Cuttle!' said Mrs MacStinger, making her chin rigid, and shaking it in unison with what, but for the weakness of her sex, might be described as her fist. 'Oh, Cap'en Cuttle, Cap'en Cuttle, do you dare to look me in the face, and not be struck down in the berth!'

The Captain, who looked anything but daring, feebly muttered 'Standby!'

'Oh I was a weak and trusting Fool when I took you under my roof, Cap'en Cuttle, I was!' cried Mrs MacStinger. 'To think of the benefits I've showered on that man, and the way in which I brought my children up to love and honour him as if he was a father to 'em, when there ain't a housekeeper, no nor a lodger in our street, don't know that I lost money by that man, and by his guzzlings and his muzzlings'—Mrs MacStinger used the last word for the joint sake of alliteration and aggravation, rather than for the expression of any idea—'and when they cried out one and all, shame upon him for putting upon an industrious woman, up early and late for the good of her young family, and keeping her poor place so clean that a individual might have ate his dinner, yes, and his tea too, if he was so disposed, off any one of the floors or stairs, in spite of all his guzzlings and his muzzlings, such was the care and pains bestowed upon him!'

Mrs MacStinger stopped to fetch her breath; and her face flushed with triumph in this second happy introduction of Captain Cuttle's muzzlings.

'And he runs awa-a-a-y!'cried Mrs MacStinger, with a lengthening out of the last syllable that made the unfortunate Captain regard himself as the meanest of men; 'and keeps away a twelve-month! From a woman! Such is his conscience! He hasn't the courage to meet her hi-i-igh;' long syllable again; 'but steals away, like a fellon. Why, if that baby of mine,' said Mrs MacStinger, with sudden rapidity, 'was to offer to go and steal away, I'd do my duty as a mother by him, till he was covered with wales!'

The young Alexander, interpreting this into a positive promise, to be shortly redeemed, tumbled over with fear and grief, and lay upon the floor, exhibiting the soles of his shoes and making such a deafening outcry, that Mrs MacStinger found it necessary to take him up in her arms, where she quieted him, ever and anon, as he broke out again, by a shake that seemed enough to loosen his teeth.

'A pretty sort of a man is Cap'en Cuttle,' said Mrs MacStinger, with a sharp stress on the first syllable of the Captain's name, 'to take on for—and to lose sleep for—and to faint along of—and to think dead forsooth—and to go up and down the blessed town like a madwoman, asking questions after! Oh, a pretty sort of a man! Ha ha ha ha! He's worth all that trouble and distress of mind, and much more. That's nothing, bless you! Ha ha ha ha! Cap'en Cuttle,' said Mrs MacStinger, with severe reaction in her voice and manner, 'I wish to know if you're a-coming home.

The frightened Captain looked into his hat, as if he saw nothing for it but to put it on, and give himself up.

'Cap'en Cuttle,' repeated Mrs MacStinger, in the same determined manner, 'I wish to know if you're a-coming home, Sir.'

The Captain seemed quite ready to go, but faintly suggested something to the effect of 'not making so much noise about it.'

'Ay, ay, ay,' said Bunsby, in a soothing tone. 'Awast, my lass, awast!'

'And who may you be, if you please!' retorted Mrs MacStinger, with chaste loftiness. 'Did you ever lodge at Number Nine, Brig Place, Sir? My memory may be bad, but not with me, I think. There was a Mrs Jollson lived at Number Nine before me, and perhaps you're mistaking me for her. That is my only ways of accounting for your familiarity, Sir.'

'Come, come, my lass, awast, awast!' said Bunsby.

Captain Cuttle could hardly believe it, even of this great man, though he saw it done with his waking eyes; but Bunsby, advancing boldly, put his shaggy blue arm round Mrs MacStinger, and so softened her by his magic way of doing it, and by these few words—he said no more—that she melted into tears, after looking upon him for a few moments, and observed that a child might conquer her now, she was so low in her courage.

Speechless and utterly amazed, the Captain saw him gradually persuade this inexorable woman into the shop, return for rum and water and a candle, take them to her, and pacify her without appearing to utter one word. Presently he looked in with his pilot-coat on, and said, 'Cuttle, I'm a-going to act as convoy home;' and Captain Cuttle, more to his confusion than if he had been put in irons himself, for safe transport to Brig Place, saw the family pacifically filing off, with Mrs MacStinger at their head. He had scarcely time to take down his canister, and stealthily convey some money into the hands of Juliana MacStinger, his former favourite, and Chowley, who had the claim upon him that he was naturally of a maritime build, before the Midshipman was abandoned by them all; and Bunsby whispering that he'd carry on smart, and hail Ned Cuttle again before he went aboard, shut the door upon himself, as the last member of the party.

Some uneasy ideas that he must be walking in his sleep, or that he had been troubled with phantoms, and not a family of flesh and blood, beset the Captain at first, when he went back to the little parlour, and found himself alone. Illimitable faith in, and immeasurable admiration of, the Commander of the Cautious Clara, succeeded, and threw the Captain into a wondering trance.

Still, as time wore on, and Bunsby failed to reappear, the Captain began to entertain uncomfortable doubts of another kind. Whether Bunsby had been artfully decoyed to Brig Place, and was there detained in safe custody as hostage for his friend; in which case it would become the Captain, as a man of honour, to release him, by the sacrifice of his own liberty. Whether he had been attacked and defeated by Mrs MacStinger, and was ashamed to show himself after his discomfiture. Whether Mrs MacStinger, thinking better of it, in the uncertainty of her temper, had turned back to board the Midshipman again, and Bunsby, pretending to conduct her by a short cut, was endeavouring to lose the family amid the wilds and savage places of the City. Above all, what it would behove him, Captain Cuttle, to do, in case of his hearing no more, either of the MacStingers or of Bunsby, which, in these wonderful and unforeseen conjunctions of events, might possibly happen.

He debated all this until he was tired; and still no Bunsby. He made up his bed under the counter, all ready for turning in; and still no Bunsby. At length, when the Captain had given him up, for that night at least, and had begun to undress, the sound of approaching wheels was heard, and, stopping at the door, was succeeded by Bunsby's hail.

The Captain trembled to think that Mrs MacStinger was not to be got rid of, and had been brought back in a coach.

But no. Bunsby was accompanied by nothing but a large box, which he hauled into the shop with his own hands, and as soon as he had hauled in, sat upon. Captain Cuttle knew it for the chest he had left at Mrs MacStinger's house, and looking, candle in hand, at Bunsby more attentively, believed that he was three sheets in the wind, or, in plain words, drunk. It was difficult, however, to be sure of this; the Commander having no trace of expression in his face when sober.

'Cuttle,' said the Commander, getting off the chest, and opening the lid, 'are these here your traps?'

Captain Cuttle looked in and identified his property.

'Done pretty taut and trim, hey, shipmet?' said Bunsby.

The grateful and bewildered Captain grasped him by the hand, and was launching into a reply expressive of his astonished feelings, when Bunsby disengaged himself by a jerk of his wrist, and seemed to make an effort to wink with his revolving eye, the only effect of which attempt, in his condition, was nearly to over-balance him. He then abruptly opened the door, and shot away to rejoin the Cautious Clara with all speed—supposed to be his invariable custom, whenever he considered he had made a point.

As it was not his humour to be often sought, Captain Cuttle decided not to go or send to him next day, or until he should make his gracious pleasure known in such wise, or failing that, until some little time should have lapsed. The Captain, therefore, renewed his solitary life next morning, and thought profoundly, many mornings, noons, and nights, of old Sol Gills, and Bunsby's sentiments concerning him, and the hopes there were of his return. Much of such thinking strengthened Captain Cuttle's hopes; and he humoured them and himself by watching for the Instrument-maker at the door— as he ventured to do now, in his strange liberty—and setting his chair in its place, and arranging the little parlour as it used to be, in case he should come home unexpectedly. He likewise, in his thoughtfulness, took down a certain little miniature of Walter as a schoolboy, from its accustomed nail, lest it should shock the old man on his return. The Captain had his presentiments, too, sometimes, that he would come on such a day; and one particular Sunday, even ordered a double allowance of dinner, he was so sanguine. But come, old Solomon did not; and still the neighbours noticed how the seafaring man in the glazed hat, stood at the shop-door of an evening, looking up and down the street.

CHAPTER 40. Domestic Relations

It was not in the nature of things that a man of Mr Dombey's mood, opposed to such a spirit as he had raised against himself, should be softened in the imperious asperity of his temper; or that the cold hard armour of pride in which he lived encased, should be made more flexible by constant collision with haughty scorn and defiance. It is the curse of such a nature—it is a main part of the heavy retribution on itself it bears within itself—that while deference and concession swell its evil qualities, and are the food it grows upon, resistance and a questioning of its exacting claims, foster it too, no less. The evil that is in it finds equally its means of growth and propagation in opposites. It draws support and life from sweets and bitters; bowed down before, or unacknowledged, it still enslaves the breast in which it has its throne; and, worshipped or rejected, is as hard a master as the Devil in dark fables.

Towards his first wife, Mr Dombey, in his cold and lofty arrogance, had borne himself like the removed Being he almost conceived himself to be. He had been 'Mr Dombey' with her when she first saw him, and he was 'Mr Dombey' when she died. He had asserted his greatness during their whole married life, and she had meekly recognised it. He had kept his distant seat of state on the top of his throne, and she her humble station on its lowest step; and much good it had done him, so to live in solitary bondage to his one idea. He had imagined that the proud character of his second wife would have been added to his own—would have merged into it, and exalted his greatness. He had pictured himself haughtier than ever, with Edith's haughtiness subservient to his. He had never entertained the possibility of its arraying itself against him. And now, when he found it rising in his path at every step and turn of his daily life, fixing its cold, defiant, and contemptuous face upon him, this pride of his, instead of withering, or hanging down its head beneath the shock, put forth new shoots, became more concentrated and intense, more gloomy, sullen, irksome, and unyielding, than it had ever been before.

Who wears such armour, too, bears with him ever another heavy retribution. It is of proof against conciliation, love, and confidence; against all gentle sympathy from without, all trust, all tenderness, all soft emotion;

but to deep stabs in the self-love, it is as vulnerable as the bare breast to steel; and such tormenting festers rankle there, as follow on no other wounds, no, though dealt with the mailed hand of Pride itself, on weaker pride, disarmed and thrown down.

Such wounds were his. He felt them sharply, in the solitude of his old rooms; whither he now began often to retire again, and pass long solitary hours. It seemed his fate to be ever proud and powerful; ever humbled and powerless where he would be most strong. Who seemed fated to work out that doom?

Who? Who was it who could win his wife as she had won his boy? Who was it who had shown him that new victory, as he sat in the dark corner? Who was it whose least word did what his utmost means could not? Who was it who, unaided by his love, regard or notice, thrived and grew beautiful when those so aided died? Who could it be, but the same child at whom he had often glanced uneasily in her motherless infancy, with a kind of dread, lest he might come to hate her; and of whom his foreboding was fulfilled, for he DID hate her in his heart?

Yes, and he would have it hatred, and he made it hatred, though some sparkles of the light in which she had appeared before him on the memorable night of his return home with his Bride, occasionally hung about her still. He knew now that she was beautiful; he did not dispute that she was graceful and winning, and that in the bright dawn of her womanhood she had come upon him, a surprise. But he turned even this against her. In his sullen and unwholesome brooding, the unhappy man, with a dull perception of his alienation from all hearts, and a vague yearning for what he had all his life repelled, made a distorted picture of his rights and wrongs, and justified himself with it against her. The worthier she promised to be of him, the greater claim he was disposed to antedate upon her duty and submission. When had she ever shown him duty and submission? Did she grace his life—or Edith's? Had her attractions been manifested first to him—or Edith? Why, he and she had never been, from her birth, like father and child! They had always been estranged. She had crossed him every way and everywhere. She was leagued against him now. Her very beauty softened natures that were obdurate to him, and insulted him with an unnatural triumph.

It may have been that in all this there were mutterings of an awakened feeling in his breast, however selfishly aroused by his position of disadvantage, in comparison with what she might have made his life. But he silenced the distant thunder with the rolling of his sea of pride. He would bear nothing but his pride. And in his pride, a heap of inconsistency, and misery, and self-inflicted torment, he hated her.

To the moody, stubborn, sullen demon, that possessed him, his wife opposed her different pride in its full force. They never could have led a happy life together; but nothing could have made it more unhappy, than the wilful and determined warfare of such elements. His pride was set upon maintaining his magnificent supremacy, and forcing recognition of it from her. She would have been racked to death, and turned but her haughty glance of calm inflexible disdain upon him, to the last. Such recognition from Edith! He little knew through what a storm and struggle she had been driven onward to the crowning honour of his hand. He little knew how much she thought she had conceded, when she suffered him to call her wife.

Mr Dombey was resolved to show her that he was supreme. There must be no will but his. Proud he desired that she should be, but she must be proud for, not against him. As he sat alone, hardening, he would often hear her go out and come home, treading the round of London life with no more heed of his liking or disliking, pleasure or displeasure, than if he had been her groom. Her cold supreme indifference—his own unquestioned attribute usurped— stung him more than any other kind of treatment could have done; and he determined to bend her to his magnificent and stately will.

He had been long communing with these thoughts, when one night he sought her in her own apartment, after he had heard her return home late. She was alone, in her brilliant dress, and had but that moment come from her mother's room. Her face was melancholy and pensive, when he came upon her; but it marked him at the door; for, glancing at the mirror before it, he saw immediately, as in a picture-frame, the knitted brow, and darkened beauty that he knew so well.

'Mrs Dombey,' he said, entering, 'I must beg leave to have a few words with you.'

'To-morrow,' she replied.

'There is no time like the present, Madam,' he returned. 'You mistake your position. I am used to choose my own times; not to have them chosen for me. I think you scarcely understand who and what I am, Mrs Dombey.

'I think,' she answered, 'that I understand you very well.'

She looked upon him as she said so, and folding her white arms, sparkling with gold and gems, upon her swelling breast, turned away her eyes.

If she had been less handsome, and less stately in her cold composure, she might not have had the power of impressing him with the sense of disadvantage that penetrated through his utmost pride. But she had the power, and he felt it keenly. He glanced round the room: saw how the splendid means of personal adornment, and the luxuries of dress, were scattered here and there, and disregarded; not in mere caprice and carelessness (or so he thought), but in a steadfast haughty disregard of costly things: and felt it more and more. Chaplets of flowers, plumes of feathers, jewels, laces, silks and satins; look where he would, he saw riches, despised, poured out, and made of no account. The very diamonds—a marriage gift—that rose and fell impatiently upon her bosom, seemed to pant to break the chain that clasped them round her neck, and roll down on the floor where she might tread upon them.

He felt his disadvantage, and he showed it. Solemn and strange among this wealth of colour and voluptuous glitter, strange and constrained towards its haughty mistress, whose repellent beauty it repeated, and presented all around him, as in so many fragments of a mirror, he was conscious of embarrassment and awkwardness. Nothing that ministered to her disdainful self-possession could fail to gall him. Galled and irritated with himself, he sat down, and went on, in no improved humour:

'Mrs Dombey, it is very necessary that there should be some understanding arrived at between us. Your conduct does not please me, Madam.'

She merely glanced at him again, and again averted her eyes; but she might have spoken for an hour, and expressed less.

'I repeat, Mrs Dombey, does not please me. I have already taken occasion to request that it may be corrected. I now insist upon it.'

'You chose a fitting occasion for your first remonstrance, Sir, and you adopt a fitting manner, and a fitting word for your second. You insist! To me!'

'Madam,' said Mr Dombey, with his most offensive air of state, 'I have made you my wife. You bear my name. You are associated with my position and my reputation. I will not say that the world in general may be disposed to think you honoured by that association; but I will say that I am accustomed to "insist," to my connexions and dependents.'

'Which may you be pleased to consider me? she asked.

'Possibly I may think that my wife should partake—or does partake, and cannot help herself—of both characters, Mrs Dombey.'

She bent her eyes upon him steadily, and set her trembling lips. He saw her bosom throb, and saw her face flush and turn white. All this he could know, and did: but he could not know that one word was whispering in the deep recesses of her heart, to keep her quiet; and that the word was Florence.

Blind idiot, rushing to a precipice! He thought she stood in awe of him.

'You are too expensive, Madam,' said Mr Dombey. 'You are extravagant. You waste a great deal of money—or what would be a great deal in the pockets of most gentlemen—in cultivating a kind of society that is useless to me, and, indeed, that upon the whole is disagreeable to me. I have to insist upon a total change in all these respects. I know that in the novelty of possessing a tithe of such means as Fortune has placed at your disposal, ladies are apt to run into a sudden extreme. There has been more than enough of that extreme. I beg that Mrs Granger's very different experiences may now come to the instruction of Mrs Dombey.'

Still the fixed look, the trembling lips, the throbbing breast, the face now crimson and now white; and still the deep whisper Florence, Florence, speaking to her in the beating of her heart.

His insolence of self-importance dilated as he saw this alteration in her. Swollen no less by her past scorn of him, and his so recent feeling of disadvantage, than by her present submission (as he took it to be), it became too mighty for his breast, and burst all bounds. Why, who could long resist his lofty will and pleasure! He had resolved to conquer her, and look here!

'You will further please, Madam,' said Mr Dombey, in a tone of sovereign command, 'to understand distinctly, that I am to be deferred to and obeyed. That I must have a positive show and confession of deference before the world, Madam. I am used to this. I require it as my right. In short I will have it. I consider it no unreasonable return for the worldly advancement that has befallen you; and I believe nobody will be surprised, either at its being required from you, or at your making it.—To Me—To Me!' he added, with emphasis.

No word from her. No change in her. Her eyes upon him.

'I have learnt from your mother, Mrs Dombey,' said Mr Dombey, with magisterial importance, 'what no doubt you know, namely, that Brighton is recommended for her health. Mr Carker has been so good.'

She changed suddenly. Her face and bosom glowed as if the red light of an angry sunset had been flung upon them. Not unobservant of the change, and putting his own interpretation upon it, Mr Dombey resumed:

'Mr Carker has been so good as to go down and secure a house there, for a time. On the return of the establishment to London, I shall take such steps for its better management as I consider necessary. One of these, will be the engagement at Brighton (if it is to be effected), of a very respectable reduced person there, a Mrs Pipchin, formerly employed in a situation of trust in my family, to act as housekeeper. An establishment like this, presided over but nominally, Mrs Dombey, requires a competent head.'

She had changed her attitude before he arrived at these words, and now sat—still looking at him fixedly—turning a bracelet round and round upon her arm; not winding it about with a light, womanly touch, but pressing and dragging it over the smooth skin, until the white limb showed a bar of red.

'I observed,' said Mr Dombey—'and this concludes what I deem it necessary to say to you at present, Mrs Dombey—I observed a moment ago, Madam, that my allusion to Mr Carker was received in a peculiar manner. On the occasion of my happening to point out to you, before that confidential agent, the objection I had to your mode of receiving my visitors, you were pleased to object to his presence. You will have to get the better of that objection, Madam, and to accustom yourself to it very probably on many similar occasions; unless you adopt the remedy which is in your own hands, of giving me no cause of complaint. Mr Carker,' said Mr Dombey, who, after the emotion he had just seen, set great store by this means of reducing his proud wife, and who was perhaps sufficiently willing to exhibit his power to that gentleman in a new and triumphant aspect, 'Mr Carker being in my confidence, Mrs Dombey, may very well be in yours to such an extent. I hope, Mrs Dombey,' he continued, after a few moments, during which, in his increasing haughtiness, he had improved on his idea, 'I may not find it necessary ever to entrust Mr Carker with any message of objection or remonstrance to you; but as it would be derogatory to my position and reputation to be frequently holding trivial disputes with a lady upon whom I have conferred the highest distinction that it is in my power to bestow, I shall not scruple to avail myself of his services if I see occasion.'

'And now,' he thought, rising in his moral magnificence, and rising a stiffer and more impenetrable man than ever, 'she knows me and my resolution.'

The hand that had so pressed the bracelet was laid heavily upon her breast, but she looked at him still, with an unaltered face, and said in a low voice:

'Wait! For God's sake! I must speak to you.'

Why did she not, and what was the inward struggle that rendered her incapable of doing so, for minutes, while, in the strong constraint she put upon her face, it was as fixed as any statue's—looking upon him with neither yielding nor unyielding, liking nor hatred, pride not humility: nothing but a searching gaze?

'Did I ever tempt you to seek my hand? Did I ever use any art to win you? Was I ever more conciliating to you when you pursued me, than I have been since our marriage? Was I ever other to you than I am?'

'It is wholly unnecessary, Madam,' said Mr Dombey, 'to enter upon such discussions.'

'Did you think I loved you? Did you know I did not? Did you ever care, Man! for my heart, or propose to yourself to win the worthless thing? Was there any poor pretence of any in our bargain? Upon your side, or on mine?'

'These questions,' said Mr Dombey, 'are all wide of the purpose, Madam.'

She moved between him and the door to prevent his going away, and drawing her majestic figure to its height, looked steadily upon him still.

'You answer each of them. You answer me before I speak, I see. How can you help it; you who know the miserable truth as well as I? Now, tell me. If I loved you to devotion, could I do more than render up my whole will and being to you, as you have just demanded? If my heart were pure and all untried, and you its idol, could you ask more; could you have more?'

'Possibly not, Madam,' he returned coolly.

'You know how different I am. You see me looking on you now, and you can read the warmth of passion for you that is breathing in my face.' Not a curl of the proud lip, not a flash of the dark eye, nothing but the same intent and searching look, accompanied these words. 'You know my general history. You have spoken of my mother. Do you think you can degrade, or bend or break, me to submission and obedience?'

Mr Dombey smiled, as he might have smiled at an inquiry whether he thought he could raise ten thousand pounds.

'If there is anything unusual here,' she said, with a slight motion of her hand before her brow, which did not for a moment flinch from its immovable and otherwise expressionless gaze, 'as I know there are unusual feelings here,' raising the hand she pressed upon her bosom, and heavily returning it, 'consider that there is no common meaning in the appeal I am going to make you. Yes, for I am going;' she said it as in prompt reply to something in his face; 'to appeal to you.'

Mr Dombey, with a slightly condescending bend of his chin that rustled and crackled his stiff cravat, sat down on a sofa that was near him, to hear the appeal.

'If you can believe that I am of such a nature now,'—he fancied he saw tears glistening in her eyes, and he thought, complacently, that he had forced them from her, though none fell on her cheek, and she regarded him as steadily as ever,—'as would make what I now say almost incredible to myself, said to any man who had become my husband, but, above all, said to you, you may, perhaps, attach the greater weight to it. In the dark end to which we are tending, and may come, we shall not involve ourselves alone (that might not be much) but others.'

Others! He knew at whom that word pointed, and frowned heavily.

'I speak to you for the sake of others. Also your own sake; and for mine. Since our marriage, you have been arrogant to me; and I have repaid you in kind. You have shown to me and everyone around us, every day and hour, that you think I am graced and distinguished by your alliance. I do not think so, and have shown that too. It seems you do not understand, or (so far as your power can go) intend that each of us shall take a separate course; and you expect from me instead, a homage you will never have.'

Although her face was still the same, there was emphatic confirmation of this 'Never' in the very breath she drew.

'I feel no tenderness towards you; that you know. You would care nothing for it, if I did or could. I know as well that you feel none towards me. But we are linked together; and in the knot that ties us, as I have said, others are bound up. We must both die; we are both connected with the dead already, each by a little child. Let us forbear.'

Mr Dombey took a long respiration, as if he would have said, Oh! was this all!

'There is no wealth,' she went on, turning paler as she watched him, while her eyes grew yet more lustrous in their earnestness, 'that could buy these words of me, and the meaning that belongs to them. Once cast away as idle breath, no wealth or power can bring them back. I mean them; I have weighed them; and I will be true to what I undertake. If you will promise to forbear on your part, I will promise to forbear on mine. We are a most unhappy pair, in whom, from different causes, every sentiment that blesses marriage, or justifies it, is rooted out; but in the course of time, some friendship, or some fitness for each other, may arise between us. I will try to hope so, if you will make the endeavour too; and I will look forward to a better and a happier use of age than I have made of youth or prime.

Throughout she had spoken in a low plain voice, that neither rose nor fell; ceasing, she dropped the hand with which she had enforced herself to be so passionless and distinct, but not the eyes with which she had so steadily observed him.

'Madam,' said Mr Dombey, with his utmost dignity, 'I cannot entertain any proposal of this extraordinary nature.

She looked at him yet, without the least change.

'I cannot,' said Mr Dombey, rising as he spoke, 'consent to temporise or treat with you, Mrs Dombey, upon a subject as to which you are in possession of my opinions and expectations. I have stated my ultimatum, Madam, and have only to request your very serious attention to it.'

To see the face change to its old expression, deepened in intensity! To see the eyes droop as from some mean and odious object! To see the lighting of the haughty brow! To see scorn, anger, indignation, and abhorrence starting into sight, and the pale blank earnestness vanish like a mist! He could not choose but look, although he looked to his dismay.

'Go, Sir!' she said, pointing with an imperious hand towards the door. 'Our first and last confidence is at an end. Nothing can make us stranger to each other than we are henceforth.'

'I shall take my rightful course, Madam,' said Mr Dombey, 'undeterred, you may be sure, by any general declamation.'

She turned her back upon him, and, without reply, sat down before her glass.

'I place my reliance on your improved sense of duty, and more correct feeling, and better reflection, Madam,' said Mr Dombey.

She answered not one word. He saw no more expression of any heed of him, in the mirror, than if he had been an unseen spider on the wall, or beetle on the floor, or rather, than if he had been the one or other, seen and crushed when she last turned from him, and forgotten among the ignominious and dead vermin of the ground.

He looked back, as he went out at the door, upon the well-lighted and luxurious room, the beautiful and glittering objects everywhere displayed, the shape of Edith in its rich dress seated before her glass, and the face of Edith as the glass presented it to him; and betook himself to his old chamber of cogitation, carrying away with him a vivid picture in his mind of all these things, and a rambling and unaccountable speculation (such as sometimes comes into a man's head) how they would all look when he saw them next.

For the rest, Mr Dombey was very taciturn, and very dignified, and very confident of carrying out his purpose; and remained so.

He did not design accompanying the family to Brighton; but he graciously informed Cleopatra at breakfast, on the morning of departure, which arrived a day or two afterwards, that he might be expected down, soon. There was no time to be lost in getting Cleopatra to any place recommended as being salutary; for, indeed, she seemed upon the wane, and turning of the earth, earthy.

Without having undergone any decided second attack of her malady, the old woman seemed to have crawled backward in her recovery from the first. She was more lean and shrunken, more uncertain in her imbecility, and made stranger confusions in her mind and memory. Among other symptoms of this last affliction, she fell into the habit of confounding the names of her two sons-in-law, the living and the deceased; and in general called Mr Dombey, either 'Grangeby,' or 'Domber,' or indifferently, both.

But she was youthful, very youthful still; and in her youthfulness appeared at breakfast, before going away, in a new bonnet made express, and a travelling robe that was embroidered and braided like an old baby's. It was not easy to put her into a fly-away bonnet now, or to keep the bonnet in its place on the back of her poor nodding head, when it was got on. In this instance, it had not only the extraneous effect of being always on one side, but of being perpetually tapped on the crown by Flowers the maid, who attended in the background during breakfast to perform that duty.

'Now, my dearest Grangeby,' said Mrs Skewton, 'you must posively prom,' she cut some of her words short, and cut out others altogether, 'come down very soon.'

'I said just now, Madam,' returned Mr Dombey, loudly and laboriously, 'that I am coming in a day or two.'

'Bless you, Domber!'

Here the Major, who was come to take leave of the ladies, and who was staring through his apoplectic eyes at Mrs Skewton's face with the disinterested composure of an immortal being, said:

'Begad, Ma'am, you don't ask old Joe to come!'

'Sterious wretch, who's he?' lisped Cleopatra. But a tap on the bonnet from Flowers seeming to jog her memory, she added, 'Oh! You mean yourself, you naughty creature!'

'Devilish queer, Sir,' whispered the Major to Mr Dombey. 'Bad case. Never did wrap up enough;' the Major being buttoned to the chin. 'Why who should J. B. mean by Joe, but old Joe Bagstock—Joseph—your slave—Joe, Ma'am? Here! Here's the man! Here are the Bagstock bellows, Ma'am!' cried the Major, striking himself a sounding blow on the chest.

'My dearest Edith—Grangeby—it's most trordinry thing,' said Cleopatra, pettishly, 'that Major—'

'Bagstock! J. B.!' cried the Major, seeing that she faltered for his name.

'Well, it don't matter,' said Cleopatra. 'Edith, my love, you know I never could remember names—what was it? oh!—most trordinry thing that so many people want to come down to see me. I'm not going for long. I'm coming back. Surely they can wait, till I come back!'

Cleopatra looked all round the table as she said it, and appeared very uneasy.

'I won't have Vistors—really don't want visitors,' she said; 'little repose—and all that sort of thing—is what I quire. No odious brutes must proach me till I've shaken off this numbness;' and in a grisly resumption of her coquettish ways, she made a dab at the Major with her fan, but overset Mr Dombey's breakfast cup instead, which was in quite a different direction.

Then she called for Withers, and charged him to see particularly that word was left about some trivial alterations in her room, which must be all made before she came back, and which must be set about immediately, as there was no saying how soon she might come back; for she had a great many engagements, and all sorts of people to call upon. Withers received these directions with becoming deference, and gave his guarantee for their execution; but when he withdrew a pace or two behind her, it appeared as if he couldn't help looking strangely at the Major, who couldn't help looking strangely at Mr Dombey, who couldn't help looking strangely at Cleopatra, who couldn't help nodding her bonnet over one eye, and rattling her knife and fork upon her plate in using them, as if she were playing castanets.

Edith alone never lifted her eyes to any face at the table, and never seemed dismayed by anything her mother said or did. She listened to her disjointed talk, or at least, turned her head towards her when addressed; replied in a few low words when necessary; and sometimes stopped her when she was rambling, or brought her thoughts back with a monosyllable, to the point from which they had strayed. The mother, however unsteady in other things, was constant in this—that she was always observant of her. She would look at the beautiful face, in its marble stillness and severity, now with a kind of fearful admiration; now in a giggling foolish effort to move it to a smile; now with capricious tears and jealous shakings of her head, as imagining herself neglected by it; always with an attraction towards it, that never fluctuated like her other ideas, but had constant possession of her. From Edith she would sometimes look at Florence, and back again at Edith, in a manner that was wild enough; and sometimes she would try to look elsewhere, as if to escape from her daughter's face; but back to it she seemed forced to come, although it never sought hers unless sought, or troubled her with one single glance.

The best concluded, Mrs Skewton, affecting to lean girlishly upon the Major's arm, but heavily supported on the other side by Flowers the maid, and propped up behind by Withers the page, was conducted to the carriage, which was to take her, Florence, and Edith to Brighton.

'And is Joseph absolutely banished?' said the Major, thrusting in his purple face over the steps. 'Damme, Ma'am, is Cleopatra so hard-hearted as to forbid her faithful Antony Bagstock to approach the presence?'

'Go along!' said Cleopatra, 'I can't bear you. You shall see me when I come back, if you are very good.'

'Tell Joseph, he may live in hope, Ma'am,' said the Major; 'or he'll die in despair.'

Cleopatra shuddered, and leaned back. 'Edith, my dear,' she said. 'Tell him—'

'What?'

'Such dreadful words,' said Cleopatra. 'He uses such dreadful words!'

Edith signed to him to retire, gave the word to go on, and left the objectionable Major to Mr Dombey. To whom he returned, whistling.

'I'll tell you what, Sir,' said the Major, with his hands behind him, and his legs very wide asunder, 'a fair friend of ours has removed to Queer Street.'

'What do you mean, Major?' inquired Mr Dombey.

'I mean to say, Dombey,' returned the Major, 'that you'll soon be an orphan-in-law.'

Mr Dombey appeared to relish this waggish description of himself so very little, that the Major wound up with the horse's cough, as an expression of gravity.

'Damme, Sir,' said the Major, 'there is no use in disguising a fact. Joe is blunt, Sir. That's his nature. If you take old Josh at all, you take him as you find him; and a devilish rusty, old rasper, of a close-toothed, J. B. file, you do find him. Dombey,' said the Major, 'your wife's mother is on the move, Sir.'

'I fear,' returned Mr Dombey, with much philosophy, 'that Mrs Skewton is shaken.'

'Shaken, Dombey!' said the Major. 'Smashed!'

'Change, however,' pursued Mr Dombey, 'and attention, may do much yet.'

'Don't believe it, Sir,' returned the Major. 'Damme, Sir, she never wrapped up enough. If a man don't wrap up,' said the Major, taking in another button of his buff waistcoat, 'he has nothing to fall back upon. But some people will die. They will do it. Damme, they will. They're obstinate. I tell you what, Dombey, it may not be ornamental; it may not be refined; it may be rough and tough; but a little of the genuine old English Bagstock stamina, Sir, would do all the good in the world to the human breed.'

After imparting this precious piece of information, the Major, who was certainly true-blue, whatever other endowments he may have had or wanted, coming within the 'genuine old English' classification, which has never been exactly ascertained, took his lobster-eyes and his apoplexy to the club, and choked there all day.

Cleopatra, at one time fretful, at another self-complacent, sometimes awake, sometimes asleep, and at all times juvenile, reached Brighton the same night, fell to pieces as usual, and was put away in bed; where a gloomy fancy might have pictured a more potent skeleton than the maid, who should have been one, watching at the rose-coloured curtains, which were carried down to shed their bloom upon her.

It was settled in high council of medical authority that she should take a carriage airing every day, and that it was important she should get out every day, and walk if she could. Edith was ready to attend her—always ready to attend her, with the same mechanical attention and immovable beauty—and they drove out alone; for Edith had an uneasiness in the presence of Florence, now that her mother was worse, and told Florence, with a kiss, that she would rather they two went alone.

Mrs Skewton, on one particular day, was in the irresolute, exacting, jealous temper that had developed itself on her recovery from her first attack. After sitting silent in the carriage watching Edith for some time, she took her hand and kissed it passionately. The hand was neither given nor withdrawn, but simply yielded to her raising of it, and being released, dropped down again, almost as if it were insensible. At this she began to whimper and moan, and say what a mother she had been, and how she was forgotten! This she continued to do at capricious intervals, even when they had alighted: when she herself was halting along with the joint support of Withers and a stick, and Edith was walking by her side, and the carriage slowly following at a little distance.

It was a bleak, lowering, windy day, and they were out upon the Downs with nothing but a bare sweep of land between them and the sky. The mother, with a querulous satisfaction in the monotony of her complaint, was still repeating it in a low voice from time to time, and the proud form of her daughter moved beside her slowly, when there came advancing over a dark ridge before them, two other figures, which in the distance, were so like an exaggerated imitation of their own, that Edith stopped.

Almost as she stopped, the two figures stopped; and that one which to Edith's thinking was like a distorted shadow of her mother, spoke to the other, earnestly, and with a pointing hand towards them. That one seemed inclined to turn back, but the other, in which Edith recognised enough that was like herself to strike her with an unusual feeling, not quite free from fear, came on; and then they came on together.

The greater part of this observation, she made while walking towards them, for her stoppage had been momentary. Nearer observation showed her that they were poorly dressed, as wanderers about the country; that the younger woman carried knitted work or some such goods for sale; and that the old one toiled on empty-handed.

And yet, however far removed she was in dress, in dignity, in beauty, Edith could not but compare the younger woman with herself, still. It may have been that she saw upon her face some traces which she knew were lingering in her own soul, if not yet written on that index; but, as the woman came on, returning her gaze, fixing her shining eyes upon her, undoubtedly presenting something of her own air and stature, and appearing to reciprocate her own thoughts, she felt a chill creep over her, as if the day were darkening, and the wind were colder.

They had now come up. The old woman, holding out her hand importunately, stopped to beg of Mrs Skewton. The younger one stopped too, and she and Edith looked in one another's eyes.

'What is it that you have to sell?' said Edith.

'Only this,' returned the woman, holding out her wares, without looking at them. 'I sold myself long ago.'

'My Lady, don't believe her,' croaked the old woman to Mrs Skewton; 'don't believe what she says. She loves to talk like that. She's my handsome and undutiful daughter. She gives me nothing but reproaches, my Lady, for all I have done for her. Look at her now, my Lady, how she turns upon her poor old mother with her looks.'

As Mrs Skewton drew her purse out with a trembling hand, and eagerly fumbled for some money, which the other old woman greedily watched for—their heads all but touching, in their hurry and decrepitude—Edith interposed:

'I have seen you,' addressing the old woman, 'before.'

'Yes, my Lady,' with a curtsey. 'Down in Warwickshire. The morning among the trees. When you wouldn't give me nothing. But the gentleman, he give me something! Oh, bless him, bless him!' mumbled the old woman, holding up her skinny hand, and grinning frightfully at her daughter.

'It's of no use attempting to stay me, Edith!' said Mrs Skewton, angrily anticipating an objection from her. 'You know nothing about it. I won't be dissuaded. I am sure this is an excellent woman, and a good mother.'

'Yes, my Lady, yes,' chattered the old woman, holding out her avaricious hand. 'Thankee, my Lady. Lord bless you, my Lady. Sixpence more, my pretty Lady, as a good mother yourself.'

'And treated undutifully enough, too, my good old creature, sometimes, I assure you,' said Mrs Skewton, whimpering. 'There! Shake hands with me. You're a very good old creature—full of what's-his-name—and all that. You're all affection and et cetera, ain't you?'

'Oh, yes, my Lady!'

'Yes, I'm sure you are; and so's that gentlemanly creature Grangeby. I must really shake hands with you again. And now you can go, you know; and I hope,' addressing the daughter, 'that you'll show more gratitude, and natural what's-its-name, and all the rest of it—but I never remember names—for there never was a better mother than the good old creature's been to you. Come, Edith!'

As the ruin of Cleopatra tottered off whimpering, and wiping its eyes with a gingerly remembrance of rouge in their neighbourhood, the old woman hobbled another way, mumbling and counting her money. Not one word more, nor one other gesture, had been exchanged between Edith and the younger woman, but neither had removed her eyes from the other for a moment. They had remained confronted until now, when Edith, as awakening from a dream, passed slowly on.

'You're a handsome woman,' muttered her shadow, looking after her; 'but good looks won't save us. And you're a proud woman; but pride won't save us. We had need to know each other when we meet again!'

CHAPTER 41. New Voices in the Waves

All is going on as it was wont. The waves are hoarse with repetition of their mystery; the dust lies piled upon the shore; the sea-birds soar and hover; the winds and clouds go forth upon their trackless flight; the white arms beckon, in the moonlight, to the invisible country far away.

With a tender melancholy pleasure, Florence finds herself again on the old ground so sadly trodden, yet so happily, and thinks of him in the quiet place, where he and she have many and many a time conversed together, with the water welling up about his couch. And now, as she sits pensive there, she hears in the wild low murmur of the sea, his little story told again, his very words repeated; and finds that all her life and hopes, and griefs, since—in the solitary house, and in the pageant it has changed to—have a portion in the burden of the marvellous song.

And gentle Mr Toots, who wanders at a distance, looking wistfully towards the figure that he dotes upon, and has followed there, but cannot in his delicacy disturb at such a time, likewise hears the requiem of little Dombey on the waters, rising and falling in the lulls of their eternal madrigal in praise of Florence. Yes! and he faintly understands, poor Mr Toots, that they are saying something of a time when he was sensible of being brighter and not addle-brained; and the tears rising in his eyes when he fears that he is dull and stupid now, and good for little but to be laughed at, diminish his satisfaction in their soothing reminder that he is relieved from present responsibility to the Chicken, by the absence of that game head of poultry in the country, training (at Toots's cost) for his great mill with the Larkey Boy.

But Mr Toots takes courage, when they whisper a kind thought to him; and by slow degrees and with many indecisive stoppages on the way, approaches Florence. Stammering and blushing, Mr Toots affects amazement when he comes near her, and says (having followed close on the carriage in which she travelled, every inch of the way from London, loving even to be choked by the dust of its wheels) that he never was so surprised in all his life.

'And you've brought Diogenes, too, Miss Dombey!' says Mr Toots, thrilled through and through by the touch of the small hand so pleasantly and frankly given him.

No doubt Diogenes is there, and no doubt Mr Toots has reason to observe him, for he comes straightway at Mr Toots's legs, and tumbles over himself in the desperation with which he makes at him, like a very dog of Montargis. But he is checked by his sweet mistress.

'Down, Di, down. Don't you remember who first made us friends, Di? For shame!'

Oh! Well may Di lay his loving cheek against her hand, and run off, and run back, and run round her, barking, and run headlong at anybody coming by, to show his devotion. Mr Toots would run headlong at anybody, too. A military gentleman goes past, and Mr Toots would like nothing better than to run at him, full tilt.

'Diogenes is quite in his native air, isn't he, Miss Dombey?' says Mr Toots.

Florence assents, with a grateful smile.

'Miss Dombey,' says Mr Toots, 'beg your pardon, but if you would like to walk to Blimber's, I—I'm going there.'

Florence puts her arm in that of Mr Toots without a word, and they walk away together, with Diogenes going on before. Mr Toots's legs shake under him; and though he is splendidly dressed, he feels misfits, and sees wrinkles, in the masterpieces of Burgess and Co., and wishes he had put on that brightest pair of boots.

Doctor Blimber's house, outside, has as scholastic and studious an air as ever; and up there is the window where she used to look for the pale face, and where the pale face brightened when it saw her, and the wasted little hand waved kisses as she passed. The door is opened by the same weak-eyed young man, whose imbecility of grin at sight of Mr Toots is feebleness of character personified. They are shown into the Doctor's study, where blind Homer and Minerva give them audience as of yore, to the sober ticking of the great clock in the hall; and where the globes stand still in their accustomed places, as if the world were stationary too, and nothing in it ever perished in obedience to the universal law, that, while it keeps it on the roll, calls everything to earth.

And here is Doctor Blimber, with his learned legs; and here is Mrs Blimber, with her sky-blue cap; and here Cornelia, with her sandy little row of curls, and her bright spectacles, still working like a sexton in the graves of languages. Here is the table upon which he sat forlorn and strange, the 'new boy' of the school; and hither comes the distant cooing of the old boys, at their old lives in the old room on the old principle!

'Toots,' says Doctor Blimber, 'I am very glad to see you, Toots.'

Mr Toots chuckles in reply.

'Also to see you, Toots, in such good company,' says Doctor Blimber.

Mr Toots, with a scarlet visage, explains that he has met Miss Dombey by accident, and that Miss Dombey wishing, like himself, to see the old place, they have come together.

'You will like,' says Doctor Blimber, 'to step among our young friends, Miss Dombey, no doubt. All fellow-students of yours, Toots, once. I think we have no new disciples in our little portico, my dear,' says Doctor Blimber to Cornelia, 'since Mr Toots left us.'

'Except Bitherstone,' returns Cornelia.

'Ay, truly,' says the Doctor. 'Bitherstone is new to Mr Toots.'

New to Florence, too, almost; for, in the schoolroom, Bitherstone—no longer Master Bitherstone of Mrs Pipchin's—shows in collars and a neckcloth, and wears a watch. But Bitherstone, born beneath some Bengal star of ill-omen, is extremely inky; and his Lexicon has got so dropsical from constant reference, that it won't shut, and yawns as if it really could not bear to be so bothered. So does Bitherstone its master, forced at Doctor Blimber's highest pressure; but in the yawn of Bitherstone there is malice and snarl, and he has been heard to say that he wishes he could catch 'old Blimber' in India. He'd precious soon find himself carried up the country by a few of his (Bitherstone's) Coolies, and handed over to the Thugs; he can tell him that.

Briggs is still grinding in the mill of knowledge; and Tozer, too; and Johnson, too; and all the rest; the older pupils being principally engaged in forgetting, with prodigious labour, everything they knew when they were younger. All are as polite and as pale as ever; and among them, Mr Feeder, B.A., with his bony hand and bristly head, is still hard at it; with his Herodotus stop on just at present, and his other barrels on a shelf behind him.

A mighty sensation is created, even among these grave young gentlemen, by a visit from the emancipated Toots; who is regarded with a kind of awe, as one who has passed the Rubicon, and is pledged never to come back, and concerning the cut of whose clothes, and fashion of whose jewellery, whispers go about, behind hands; the bilious Bitherstone, who is not of Mr Toots's time, affecting to despise the latter to the smaller boys, and saying he knows better, and that he should like to see him coming that sort of thing in Bengal, where his mother had got an emerald belonging to him that was taken out of the footstool of a Rajah. Come now!

Bewildering emotions are awakened also by the sight of Florence, with whom every young gentleman immediately falls in love, again; except, as aforesaid, the bilious Bitherstone, who declines to do so, out of contradiction. Black jealousies of Mr Toots arise, and Briggs is of opinion that he ain't so very old after all. But this disparaging insinuation is speedily made nought by Mr Toots saying aloud to Mr Feeder, B.A., 'How are you, Feeder?' and asking him to come and dine with him to-day at the Bedford; in right of which feats he might set up as Old Parr, if he chose, unquestioned.

There is much shaking of hands, and much bowing, and a great desire on the part of each young gentleman to take Toots down in Miss Dombey's good graces; and then, Mr Toots having bestowed a chuckle on his old desk, Florence and he withdraw with Mrs Blimber and Cornelia; and Doctor Blimber is heard to observe behind them as he comes out last, and shuts the door, 'Gentlemen, we will now resume our studies,' For that and little else is what the Doctor hears the sea say, or has heard it saying all his life.

Florence then steals away and goes upstairs to the old bedroom with Mrs Blimber and Cornelia; Mr Toots, who feels that neither he nor anybody else is wanted there, stands talking to the Doctor at the study-door, or rather hearing the Doctor talk to him, and wondering how he ever thought the study a great sanctuary, and the Doctor, with his round turned legs, like a clerical pianoforte, an awful man. Florence soon comes down and takes leave; Mr Toots takes leave; and Diogenes, who has been worrying the weak-eyed young man pitilessly all the time, shoots out at the door, and barks a glad defiance down the cliff; while Melia, and another of the Doctor's female domestics, looks out of an upper window, laughing 'at that there Toots,' and saying of Miss Dombey, 'But really though, now—ain't she like her brother, only prettier?'

Mr Toots, who saw when Florence came down that there were tears upon her face, is desperately anxious and uneasy, and at first fears that he did wrong in proposing the visit. But he is soon relieved by her saying she is very glad to have been there again, and by her talking quite cheerfully about it all, as they walked on by the sea. What with the voices there, and her sweet voice, when they come near Mr Dombey's house, and Mr Toots must leave her, he is so enslaved that he has not a scrap of free-will left; when she gives him her hand at parting, he cannot let it go.

'Miss Dombey, I beg your pardon,' says Mr Toots, in a sad fluster, 'but if you would allow me to—to—

The smiling and unconscious look of Florence brings him to a dead stop.

'If you would allow me to—if you would not consider it a liberty, Miss Dombey, if I was to—without any encouragement at all, if I was to hope, you know,' says Mr Toots.

Florence looks at him inquiringly.

'Miss Dombey,' says Mr Toots, who feels that he is in for it now, 'I really am in that state of adoration of you that I don't know what to do with myself. I am the most deplorable wretch. If it wasn't at the corner of the Square at present, I should go down on my knees, and beg and entreat of you, without any encouragement at all, just to let me hope that I may—may think it possible that you—

'Oh, if you please, don't!' cries Florence, for the moment quite alarmed and distressed. 'Oh, pray don't, Mr Toots. Stop, if you please. Don't say any more. As a kindness and a favour to me, don't.'

Mr Toots is dreadfully abashed, and his mouth opens.

'You have been so good to me,' says Florence, 'I am so grateful to you, I have such reason to like you for being a kind friend to me, and I do like you so much;' and here the ingenuous face smiles upon him with the pleasantest look of honesty in the world; 'that I am sure you are only going to say good-bye!'

'Certainly, Miss Dombey,' says Mr Toots, 'I—I—that's exactly what I mean. It's of no consequence.'

'Good-bye!' cries Florence.

'Good-bye, Miss Dombey!' stammers Mr Toots. 'I hope you won't think anything about it. It's—it's of no consequence, thank you. It's not of the least consequence in the world.'

Poor Mr Toots goes home to his hotel in a state of desperation, locks himself into his bedroom, flings himself upon his bed, and lies there for a long time; as if it were of the greatest consequence, nevertheless. But Mr Feeder, B.A., is coming to dinner, which happens well for Mr Toots, or there is no knowing when he might get up again. Mr Toots is obliged to get up to receive him, and to give him hospitable entertainment.

And the generous influence of that social virtue, hospitality (to make no mention of wine and good cheer), opens Mr Toots's heart, and warms him to conversation. He does not tell Mr Feeder, B.A., what passed at the corner of the Square; but when Mr Feeder asks him 'When it is to come off?' Mr Toots replies, 'that there are certain subjects'—which brings Mr Feeder down a peg or two immediately. Mr Toots adds, that he don't know what right Blimber had to notice his being in Miss Dombey's company, and that if he thought he meant impudence by it, he'd have him out, Doctor or no Doctor; but he supposes its only his ignorance. Mr Feeder says he has no doubt of it.

Mr Feeder, however, as an intimate friend, is not excluded from the subject. Mr Toots merely requires that it should be mentioned mysteriously, and with feeling. After a few glasses of wine, he gives Miss Dombey's health, observing, 'Feeder, you have no idea of the sentiments with which I propose that toast.' Mr Feeder replies, 'Oh, yes, I have, my dear Toots; and greatly they redound to your honour, old boy.' Mr Feeder is then agitated by friendship, and shakes hands; and says, if ever Toots wants a brother, he knows where to find him, either by post or parcel. Mr Feeder like-wise says, that if he may advise, he would recommend Mr Toots to learn the guitar, or, at least the flute; for women like music, when you are paying your addresses to 'em, and he has found the advantage of it himself.

This brings Mr Feeder, B.A., to the confession that he has his eye upon Cornelia Blimber. He informs Mr Toots that he don't object to spectacles, and that if the Doctor were to do the handsome thing and give up the business, why, there they are—provided for. He says it's his opinion that when a man has made a handsome sum by his business, he is bound to give it up; and that Cornelia would be an assistance in it which any man might be proud of. Mr Toots replies by launching wildly out into Miss Dombey's praises, and by insinuations that sometimes he thinks he should like to blow his brains out. Mr Feeder strongly urges that it would be a rash attempt, and shows him, as a reconcilement to existence, Cornelia's portrait, spectacles and all.

Thus these quiet spirits pass the evening; and when it has yielded place to night, Mr Toots walks home with Mr Feeder, and parts with him at Doctor Blimber's door. But Mr Feeder only goes up the steps, and when Mr

Toots is gone, comes down again, to stroll upon the beach alone, and think about his prospects. Mr Feeder plainly hears the waves informing him, as he loiters along, that Doctor Blimber will give up the business; and he feels a soft romantic pleasure in looking at the outside of the house, and thinking that the Doctor will first paint it, and put it into thorough repair.

Mr Toots is likewise roaming up and down, outside the casket that contains his jewel; and in a deplorable condition of mind, and not unsuspected by the police, gazes at a window where he sees a light, and which he has no doubt is Florence's. But it is not, for that is Mrs Skewton's room; and while Florence, sleeping in another chamber, dreams lovingly, in the midst of the old scenes, and their old associations live again, the figure which in grim reality is substituted for the patient boy's on the same theatre, once more to connect it—but how differently!—with decay and death, is stretched there, wakeful and complaining. Ugly and haggard it lies upon its bed of unrest; and by it, in the terror of her unimpassioned loveliness— for it has terror in the sufferer's failing eyes—sits Edith. What do the waves say, in the stillness of the night, to them?

'Edith, what is that stone arm raised to strike me? Don't you see it?'

There is nothing, mother, but your fancy.'

'But my fancy! Everything is my fancy. Look! Is it possible that you don't see it?'

'Indeed, mother, there is nothing. Should I sit unmoved, if there were any such thing there?'

'Unmoved?' looking wildly at her—'it's gone now—and why are you so unmoved? That is not my fancy, Edith. It turns me cold to see you sitting at my side.'

'I am sorry, mother.'

'Sorry! You seem always sorry. But it is not for me!'

With that, she cries; and tossing her restless head from side to side upon her pillow, runs on about neglect, and the mother she has been, and the mother the good old creature was, whom they met, and the cold return the daughters of such mothers make. In the midst of her incoherence, she stops, looks at her daughter, cries out that her wits are going, and hides her face upon the bed.

Edith, in compassion, bends over her and speaks to her. The sick old woman clutches her round the neck, and says, with a look of horror, 'Edith! we are going home soon; going back. You mean that I shall go home again?'

'Yes, mother, yes.'

'And what he said—what's-his-name, I never could remember names—Major—that dreadful word, when we came away—it's not true? Edith!' with a shriek and a stare, 'it's not that that is the matter with me.'

Night after night, the lights burn in the window, and the figure lies upon the bed, and Edith sits beside it, and the restless waves are calling to them both the whole night long. Night after night, the waves are hoarse with repetition of their mystery; the dust lies piled upon the shore; the sea- birds soar and hover; the winds and clouds are on their trackless flight; the white arms beckon, in the moonlight, to the invisible country far away.

And still the sick old woman looks into the corner, where the stone arm—part of a figure of some tomb, she says—is raised to strike her. At last it falls; and then a dumb old woman lies upon the the bed, and she is crooked and shrunk up, and half of her is dead.

Such is the figure, painted and patched for the sun to mock, that is drawn slowly through the crowd from day to day; looking, as it goes, for the good old creature who was such a mother, and making mouths as it peers among the crowd in vain. Such is the figure that is often wheeled down to the margin of the sea, and stationed there; but on which no wind can blow freshness, and for which the murmur of the ocean has no soothing word. She lies and listens to it by the hour; but its speech is dark and gloomy to her, and a dread is on her face, and when her eyes wander over the expanse, they see but a broad stretch of desolation between earth and heaven.

Florence she seldom sees, and when she does, is angry with and mows at. Edith is beside her always, and keeps Florence away; and Florence, in her bed at night, trembles at the thought of death in such a shape, and often wakes and listens, thinking it has come. No one attends on her but Edith. It is better that few eyes should see her; and her daughter watches alone by the bedside.

A shadow even on that shadowed face, a sharpening even of the sharpened features, and a thickening of the veil before the eyes into a pall that shuts out the dim world, is come. Her wandering hands upon the coverlet join feebly palm to palm, and move towards her daughter; and a voice not like hers, not like any voice that speaks our mortal language—says, 'For I nursed you!'

Edith, without a tear, kneels down to bring her voice closer to the sinking head, and answers:

'Mother, can you hear me?'

Staring wide, she tries to nod in answer.

'Can you recollect the night before I married?'

The head is motionless, but it expresses somehow that she does.

'I told you then that I forgave your part in it, and prayed God to forgive my own. I told you that time past was at an end between us. I say so now, again. Kiss me, mother.'

Edith touches the white lips, and for a moment all is still. A moment afterwards, her mother, with her girlish laugh, and the skeleton of the Cleopatra manner, rises in her bed.

Draw the rose-coloured curtains. There is something else upon its flight besides the wind and clouds. Draw the rose-coloured curtains close!

Intelligence of the event is sent to Mr Dombey in town, who waits upon Cousin Feenix (not yet able to make up his mind for Baden-Baden), who has just received it too. A good-natured creature like Cousin Feenix is the very man for a marriage or a funeral, and his position in the family renders it right that he should be consulted.

'Dombey,' said Cousin Feenix, 'upon my soul, I am very much shocked to see you on such a melancholy occasion. My poor aunt! She was a devilish lively woman.'

Mr Dombey replies, 'Very much so.'

'And made up,' says Cousin Feenix, 'really young, you know, considering. I am sure, on the day of your marriage, I thought she was good for another twenty years. In point of fact, I said so to a man at Brooks's—little Billy Joper—you know him, no doubt—man with a glass in his eye?'

Mr Dombey bows a negative. 'In reference to the obsequies,' he hints, 'whether there is any suggestion—'

'Well, upon my life,' says Cousin Feenix, stroking his chin, which he has just enough of hand below his wristbands to do; 'I really don't know. There's a Mausoleum down at my place, in the park, but I'm afraid it's in bad repair, and, in point of fact, in a devil of a state. But for being a little out at elbows, I should have had it put to rights; but I believe the people come and make pic-nic parties there inside the iron railings.'

Mr Dombey is clear that this won't do.

'There's an uncommon good church in the village,' says Cousin Feenix, thoughtfully; 'pure specimen of the Anglo-Norman style, and admirably well sketched too by Lady Jane Finchbury—woman with tight stays—but they've spoilt it with whitewash, I understand, and it's a long journey.

'Perhaps Brighton itself,' Mr Dombey suggests.

'Upon my honour, Dombey, I don't think we could do better,' says Cousin Feenix. 'It's on the spot, you see, and a very cheerful place.'

'And when,' hints Mr Dombey, 'would it be convenient?'

'I shall make a point,' says Cousin Feenix, 'of pledging myself for any day you think best. I shall have great pleasure (melancholy pleasure, of course) in following my poor aunt to the confines of the—in point of fact, to the grave,' says Cousin Feenix, failing in the other turn of speech.

'Would Monday do for leaving town?' says Mr Dombey.

'Monday would suit me to perfection,' replies Cousin Feenix. Therefore Mr Dombey arranges to take Cousin Feenix down on that day, and presently takes his leave, attended to the stairs by Cousin Feenix, who says, at parting, 'I'm really excessively sorry, Dombey, that you should have so much trouble about it;' to which Mr Dombey answers, 'Not at all.'

At the appointed time, Cousin Feenix and Mr Dombey meet, and go down to Brighton, and representing, in their two selves, all the other mourners for the deceased lady's loss, attend her remains to their place of rest. Cousin Feenix, sitting in the mourning-coach, recognises innumerable acquaintances on the road, but takes no other notice of them, in decorum, than checking them off aloud, as they go by, for Mr Dombey's information, as 'Tom Johnson. Man with cork leg, from White's. What, are you here, Tommy? Foley on a blood mare. The Smalder girls'—and so forth. At the ceremony Cousin Feenix is depressed, observing, that these are the occasions to make a man think, in point of fact, that he is getting shaky; and his eyes are really moistened, when it is over. But he soon recovers; and so do the rest of Mrs Skewton's relatives and friends, of whom the Major continually tells the club that she never did wrap up enough; while the young lady with the back, who has so much trouble with her eyelids, says, with a little scream, that she must have been enormously old, and that she died of all kinds of horrors, and you mustn't mention it.

So Edith's mother lies unmentioned of her dear friends, who are deaf to the waves that are hoarse with repetition of their mystery, and blind to the dust that is piled upon the shore, and to the white arms that are beckoning, in the moonlight, to the invisible country far away. But all goes on, as it was wont, upon the margin of the unknown sea; and Edith standing there alone, and listening to its waves, has dank weed cast up at her feet, to strew her path in life withal.

CHAPTER 42. Confidential and Accidental

Attired no more in Captain Cuttle's sable slops and sou'-wester hat, but dressed in a substantial suit of brown livery, which, while it affected to be a very sober and demure livery indeed, was really as self-satisfied and confident a one as tailor need desire to make, Rob the Grinder, thus transformed as to his outer man, and all regardless within of the Captain and the Midshipman, except when he devoted a few minutes of his leisure time to crowing over those inseparable worthies, and recalling, with much applauding music from that brazen instrument, his conscience, the triumphant manner in which he had disembarrassed himself of their company, now served his patron, Mr Carker. Inmate of Mr Carker's house, and serving about his person, Rob kept his round eyes on the white teeth with fear and trembling, and felt that he had need to open them wider than ever.

He could not have quaked more, through his whole being, before the teeth, though he had come into the service of some powerful enchanter, and they had been his strongest spells. The boy had a sense of power and authority in this patron of his that engrossed his whole attention and exacted his most implicit submission and obedience. He hardly considered himself safe in thinking about him when he was absent, lest he should feel himself immediately taken by the throat again, as on the morning when he first became bound to him, and should see every one of the teeth finding him out, and taxing him with every fancy of his mind. Face to face with him, Rob had no more doubt that Mr Carker read his secret thoughts, or that he could read them by the least exertion of his will if he were so inclined, than he had that Mr Carker saw him when he looked at him. The ascendancy was so complete, and held him in such enthralment, that, hardly daring to think at all, but with his mind filled with a constantly dilating impression of his patron's irresistible command over him, and power of doing anything with him, he would stand watching his pleasure, and trying to anticipate his orders, in a state of mental suspension, as to all other things.

Rob had not informed himself perhaps—in his then state of mind it would have been an act of no common temerity to inquire—whether he yielded so completely to this influence in any part, because he had floating suspicions of his patron's being a master of certain treacherous arts in which he had himself been a poor scholar at the Grinders' School. But certainly Rob admired him, as well as feared him. Mr Carker, perhaps, was better acquainted with the sources of his power, which lost nothing by his management of it.

On the very night when he left the Captain's service, Rob, after disposing of his pigeons, and even making a bad bargain in his hurry, had gone straight down to Mr Carker's house, and hotly presented himself before his new master with a glowing face that seemed to expect commendation.

'What, scapegrace!' said Mr Carker, glancing at his bundle 'Have you left your situation and come to me?'

'Oh if you please, Sir,' faltered Rob, 'you said, you know, when I come here last—'

'I said,' returned Mr Carker, 'what did I say?'

'If you please, Sir, you didn't say nothing at all, Sir,' returned Rob, warned by the manner of this inquiry, and very much disconcerted.

His patron looked at him with a wide display of gums, and shaking his forefinger, observed:

'You'll come to an evil end, my vagabond friend, I foresee. There's ruin in store for you.

'Oh if you please, don't, Sir!' cried Rob, with his legs trembling under him. 'I'm sure, Sir, I only want to work for you, Sir, and to wait upon you, Sir, and to do faithful whatever I'm bid, Sir.'

'You had better do faithfully whatever you are bid,' returned his patron, 'if you have anything to do with me.'

'Yes, I know that, Sir,' pleaded the submissive Rob; 'I'm sure of that, SIr. If you'll only be so good as try me, Sir! And if ever you find me out, Sir, doing anything against your wishes, I give you leave to kill me.'

'You dog!' said Mr Carker, leaning back in his chair, and smiling at him serenely. 'That's nothing to what I'd do to you, if you tried to deceive me.'

'Yes, Sir,' replied the abject Grinder, 'I'm sure you would be down upon me dreadful, Sir. I wouldn't attempt for to go and do it, Sir, not if I was bribed with golden guineas.'

Thoroughly checked in his expectations of commendation, the crestfallen Grinder stood looking at his patron, and vainly endeavouring not to look at him, with the uneasiness which a cur will often manifest in a similar situation.

'So you have left your old service, and come here to ask me to take you into mine, eh?' said Mr Carker.

'Yes, if you please, Sir,' returned Rob, who, in doing so, had acted on his patron's own instructions, but dared not justify himself by the least insinuation to that effect.

'Well!' said Mr Carker. 'You know me, boy?'

'Please, Sir, yes, Sir,' returned Rob, tumbling with his hat, and still fixed by Mr Carker's eye, and fruitlessly endeavouring to unfix himself.

Mr Carker nodded. 'Take care, then!'

Rob expressed in a number of short bows his lively understanding of this caution, and was bowing himself back to the door, greatly relieved by the prospect of getting on the outside of it, when his patron stopped him.

'Halloa!' he cried, calling him roughly back. 'You have been—shut that door.'

Rob obeyed as if his life had depended on his alacrity.

'You have been used to eaves-dropping. Do you know what that means?'

'Listening, Sir?' Rob hazarded, after some embarrassed reflection.

His patron nodded. 'And watching, and so forth.'

'I wouldn't do such a thing here, Sir,' answered Rob; 'upon my word and honour, I wouldn't, Sir, I wish I may die if I would, Sir, for anything that could be promised to me. I should consider it is as much as all the world was worth, to offer to do such a thing, unless I was ordered, Sir.'

'You had better not' You have been used, too, to babbling and tattling,' said his patron with perfect coolness. 'Beware of that here, or you're a lost rascal,' and he smiled again, and again cautioned him with his forefinger.

The Grinder's breath came short and thick with consternation. He tried to protest the purity of his intentions, but could only stare at the smiling gentleman in a stupor of submission, with which the smiling gentleman seemed well enough satisfied, for he ordered him downstairs, after observing him for some moments in silence, and gave him to understand that he was retained in his employment. This was the manner of Rob the Grinder's engagement by Mr Carker, and his awe-stricken devotion to that gentleman had strengthened and increased, if possible, with every minute of his service.

It was a service of some months' duration, when early one morning, Rob opened the garden gate to Mr Dombey, who was come to breakfast with his master, by appointment. At the same moment his master himself came, hurrying forth to receive the distinguished guest, and give him welcome with all his teeth.

'I never thought,' said Carker, when he had assisted him to alight from his horse, 'to see you here, I'm sure. This is an extraordinary day in my calendar. No occasion is very special to a man like you, who may do anything; but to a man like me, the case is widely different.

'You have a tasteful place here, Carker,' said Mr Dombey, condescending to stop upon the lawn, to look about him.

'You can afford to say so,' returned Carker. 'Thank you.'

'Indeed,' said Mr Dombey, in his lofty patronage, 'anyone might say so. As far as it goes, it is a very commodious and well-arranged place—quite elegant.'

'As far as it goes, truly,' returned Carker, with an air of disparagement' 'It wants that qualification. Well! we have said enough about it; and though you can afford to praise it, I thank you nonetheless. Will you walk in?'

Mr Dombey, entering the house, noticed, as he had reason to do, the complete arrangement of the rooms, and the numerous contrivances for comfort and effect that abounded there. Mr Carker, in his ostentation of humility, received this notice with a deferential smile, and said he understood its delicate meaning, and appreciated it, but in truth the cottage was good enough for one in his position—better, perhaps, than such a man should occupy, poor as it was.

'But perhaps to you, who are so far removed, it really does look better than it is,' he said, with his false mouth distended to its fullest stretch. 'Just as monarchs imagine attractions in the lives of beggars.'

He directed a sharp glance and a sharp smile at Mr Dombey as he spoke, and a sharper glance, and a sharper smile yet, when Mr Dombey, drawing himself up before the fire, in the attitude so often copied by his second in command, looked round at the pictures on the walls. Cursorily as his cold eye wandered over them, Carker's keen glance accompanied his, and kept pace with his, marking exactly where it went, and what it saw. As it rested on one picture in particular, Carker hardly seemed to breathe, his sidelong scrutiny was so cat-like and vigilant, but the eye of his great chief passed from that, as from the others, and appeared no more impressed by it than by the rest.

Carker looked at it—it was the picture that resembled Edith—as if it were a living thing; and with a wicked, silent laugh upon his face, that seemed in part addressed to it, though it was all derisive of the great man standing so unconscious beside him. Breakfast was soon set upon the table; and, inviting Mr Dombey to a chair which had its back towards this picture, he took his own seat opposite to it as usual.

Mr Dombey was even graver than it was his custom to be, and quite silent. The parrot, swinging in the gilded hoop within her gaudy cage, attempted in vain to attract notice, for Carker was too observant of his visitor to heed her; and the visitor, abstracted in meditation, looked fixedly, not to say sullenly, over his stiff neckcloth, without raising his eyes from the table-cloth. As to Rob, who was in attendance, all his faculties and energies were so locked up in observation of his master, that he scarcely ventured to give shelter to the thought that the visitor was the great gentleman before whom he had been carried as a certificate of the family health, in his childhood, and to whom he had been indebted for his leather smalls.

'Allow me,' said Carker suddenly, 'to ask how Mrs Dombey is?'

He leaned forward obsequiously, as he made the inquiry, with his chin resting on his hand; and at the same time his eyes went up to the picture, as if he said to it, 'Now, see, how I will lead him on!'

Mr Dombey reddened as he answered:

'Mrs Dombey is quite well. You remind me, Carker, of some conversation that I wish to have with you.'

'Robin, you can leave us,' said his master, at whose mild tones Robin started and disappeared, with his eyes fixed on his patron to the last. 'You don't remember that boy, of course?' he added, when the enmeshed Grinder was gone.

'No,' said Mr Dombey, with magnificent indifference.

'Not likely that a man like you would. Hardly possible,' murmured Carker. 'But he is one of that family from whom you took a nurse. Perhaps you may remember having generously charged yourself with his education?'

'Is it that boy?' said Mr Dombey, with a frown. 'He does little credit to his education, I believe.'

'Why, he is a young rip, I am afraid,' returned Carker, with a shrug. 'He bears that character. But the truth is, I took him into my service because, being able to get no other employment, he conceived (had been taught at home, I daresay) that he had some sort of claim upon you, and was constantly trying to dog your heels with his petition. And although my defined and recognised connexion with your affairs is merely of a business character, still I have that spontaneous interest in everything belonging to you, that—'

He stopped again, as if to discover whether he had led Mr Dombey far enough yet. And again, with his chin resting on his hand, he leered at the picture.

'Carker,' said Mr Dombey, 'I am sensible that you do not limit your—'

'Service,' suggested his smiling entertainer.

'No; I prefer to say your regard,' observed Mr Dombey; very sensible, as he said so, that he was paying him a handsome and flattering compliment, 'to our mere business relations. Your consideration for my feelings, hopes, and disappointments, in the little instance you have just now mentioned, is an example in point. I I am obliged to you, Carker.'

Mr Carker bent his head slowly, and very softly rubbed his hands, as if he were afraid by any action to disturb the current of Mr Dombey's confidence.

'Your allusion to it is opportune,' said Mr Dombey, after a little hesitation; 'for it prepares the way to what I was beginning to say to you, and reminds me that that involves no absolutely new relations between us, although it may involve more personal confidence on my part than I have hitherto—'

'Distinguished me with,' suggested Carker, bending his head again: 'I will not say to you how honoured I am; for a man like you well knows how much honour he has in his power to bestow at pleasure.'

'Mrs Dombey and myself,' said Mr Dombey, passing this compliment with august self-denial, 'are not quite agreed upon some points. We do not appear to understand each other yet' Mrs Dombey has something to learn.'

'Mrs Dombey is distinguished by many rare attractions; and has been accustomed, no doubt, to receive much adulation,' said the smooth, sleek watcher of his slightest look and tone. 'But where there is affection, duty, and respect, any little mistakes engendered by such causes are soon set right.'

Mr Dombey's thoughts instinctively flew back to the face that had looked at him in his wife's dressing-room when an imperious hand was stretched towards the door; and remembering the affection, duty, and respect, expressed in it, he felt the blood rush to his own face quite as plainly as the watchful eyes upon him saw it there.

'Mrs Dombey and myself,' he went on to say, 'had some discussion, before Mrs Skewton's death, upon the causes of my dissatisfaction; of which you will have formed a general understanding from having been a witness of what passed between Mrs Dombey and myself on the evening when you were at our—at my house.'

'When I so much regretted being present,' said the smiling Carker. 'Proud as a man in my position nay must be of your familiar notice—though I give you no credit for it; you may do anything you please without losing caste—and honoured as I was by an early presentation to Mrs Dombey, before she was made eminent by bearing your name, I almost regretted that night, I assure you, that I had been the object of such especial good fortune.'

That any man could, under any possible circumstances, regret the being distinguished by his condescension and patronage, was a moral phenomenon which Mr Dombey could not comprehend. He therefore responded, with a considerable accession of dignity. 'Indeed! And why, Carker?'

'I fear,' returned the confidential agent, 'that Mrs Dombey, never very much disposed to regard me with favourable interest—one in my position could not expect that, from a lady naturally proud, and whose pride becomes her so well—may not easily forgive my innocent part in that conversation. Your displeasure is no light matter, you must remember; and to be visited with it before a third party—

'Carker,' said Mr Dombey, arrogantly; 'I presume that I am the first consideration?'

'Oh! Can there be a doubt about it?' replied the other, with the impatience of a man admitting a notorious and incontrovertible fact.

'Mrs Dombey becomes a secondary consideration, when we are both in question, I imagine,' said Mr Dombey. 'Is that so?'

'Is it so?' returned Carker. 'Do you know better than anyone, that you have no need to ask?'

'Then I hope, Carker,' said Mr Dombey, 'that your regret in the acquisition of Mrs Dombey's displeasure, may be almost counterbalanced by your satisfaction in retaining my confidence and good opinion.'

'I have the misfortune, I find,' returned Carker, 'to have incurred that displeasure. Mrs Dombey has expressed it to you?'

'Mrs Dombey has expressed various opinions,' said Mr Dombey, with majestic coldness and indifference, 'in which I do not participate, and which I am not inclined to discuss, or to recall. I made Mr Dombey acquainted, some time since, as I have already told you, with certain points of domestic deference and submission on which I felt it necessary to insist. I failed to convince Mrs Dombey of the expediency of her immediately altering her conduct in those respects, with a view to her own peace and welfare, and my dignity; and I informed Mrs Dombey that if I should find it necessary to object or remonstrate again, I should express my opinion to her through yourself, my confidential agent.'

Blended with the look that Carker bent upon him, was a devilish look at the picture over his head, that struck upon it like a flash of lightning.

'Now, Carker,' said Mr Dombey, 'I do not hesitate to say to you that I will carry my point. I am not to be trifled with. Mrs Dombey must understand that my will is law, and that I cannot allow of one exception to the whole rule of my life. You will have the goodness to undertake this charge, which, coming from me, is not unacceptable to you, I hope, whatever regret you may politely profess—for which I am obliged to you on behalf of Mrs Dombey; and you will have the goodness, I am persuaded, to discharge it as exactly as any other commission.'

'You know,' said Mr Carker, 'that you have only to command me.

'I know,' said Mr Dombey, with a majestic indication of assent, 'that I have only to command you. It is necessary that I should proceed in this. Mrs Dombey is a lady undoubtedly highly qualified, in many respects, to—

'To do credit even to your choice,' suggested Carker, with a yawning show of teeth.

'Yes; if you please to adopt that form of words,' said Mr Dombey, in his tone of state; 'and at present I do not conceive that Mrs Dombey does that credit to it, to which it is entitled. There is a principle of opposition in Mrs Dombey that must be eradicated; that must be overcome: Mrs Dombey does not appear to understand,' said Mr Dombey, forcibly, 'that the idea of opposition to Me is monstrous and absurd.'

'We, in the City, know you better,' replied Carker, with a smile from ear to ear.

'You know me better,' said Mr Dombey. 'I hope so. Though, indeed, I am bound to do Mrs Dombey the justice of saying, however inconsistent it may seem with her subsequent conduct (which remains unchanged), that on my expressing my disapprobation and determination to her, with some severity, on the occasion to which I have referred, my admonition appeared to produce a very powerful effect.' Mr Dombey delivered himself of those words with most portentous stateliness. 'I wish you to have the goodness, then, to inform Mrs Dombey, Carker, from me, that I must recall our former conversation to her remembrance, in some surprise that it has not yet had its effect. That I must insist upon her regulating her conduct by the injunctions laid upon her in that conversation. That I am not satisfied with her conduct. That I am greatly dissatisfied with it. And that I shall be under the very disagreeable necessity of making you the bearer of yet more unwelcome and explicit communications, if she has not the good sense and the proper feeling to adapt herself to my wishes, as the first Mrs Dombey did, and, I believe I may add, as any other lady in her place would.'

'The first Mrs Dombey lived very happily,' said Carker.

'The first Mrs Dombey had great good sense,' said Mr Dombey, in a gentlemanly toleration of the dead, 'and very correct feeling.'

'Is Miss Dombey like her mother, do you think?' said Carker.

Swiftly and darkly, Mr Dombey's face changed. His confidential agent eyed it keenly.

'I have approached a painful subject,' he said, in a soft regretful tone of voice, irreconcilable with his eager eye. 'Pray forgive me. I forget these chains of association in the interest I have. Pray forgive me.'

But for all he said, his eager eye scanned Mr Dombey's downcast face none the less closely; and then it shot a strange triumphant look at the picture, as appealing to it to bear witness how he led him on again, and what was coming.

Carker,' said Mr Dombey, looking here and there upon the table, and saying in a somewhat altered and more hurried voice, and with a paler lip, 'there is no occasion for apology. You mistake. The association is with the matter in hand, and not with any recollection, as you suppose. I do not approve of Mrs Dombey's behaviour towards my daughter.'

'Pardon me,' said Mr Carker, 'I don't quite understand.'

'Understand then,' returned Mr Dombey, 'that you may make that—that you will make that, if you please—matter of direct objection from me to

Mrs Dombey. You will please to tell her that her show of devotion for my daughter is disagreeable to me. It is likely to be noticed. It is likely to induce people to contrast Mrs Dombey in her relation towards my daughter, with Mrs Dombey in her relation towards myself. You will have the goodness to let Mrs Dombey know, plainly, that I object to it; and that I expect her to defer, immediately, to my objection. Mrs Dombey may be in earnest, or she may be pursuing a whim, or she may be opposing me; but I object to it in any case, and in every case. If Mrs Dombey is in earnest, so much the less reluctant should she be to desist; for she will not serve my daughter by any such display. If my wife has any superfluous gentleness, and duty over and above her proper submission to me, she may bestow them where she pleases, perhaps; but I will have submission first!—Carker,' said Mr Dombey, checking the unusual emotion with which he had spoken, and falling into a tone more like that in which he was accustomed to assert his greatness, 'you will have the goodness not to omit or slur this point, but to consider it a very important part of your instructions.'

Mr Carker bowed his head, and rising from the table, and standing thoughtfully before the fire, with his hand to his smooth chin, looked down at Mr Dombey with the evil slyness of some monkish carving, half human and half brute; or like a leering face on an old water-spout. Mr Dombey, recovering his composure by degrees, or cooling his emotion in his sense of having taken a high position, sat gradually stiffening again, and looking at the parrot as she swung to and fro, in her great wedding ring.

'I beg your pardon,' said Carker, after a silence, suddenly resuming his chair, and drawing it opposite to Mr Dombey's, 'but let me understand. Mrs Dombey is aware of the probability of your making me the organ of your displeasure?'

'Yes,' replied Mr Dombey. 'I have said so.'

'Yes,' rejoined Carker, quickly; 'but why?'

'Why!' Mr Dombey repeated, not without hesitation. 'Because I told her.'

'Ay,' replied Carker. 'But why did you tell her? You see,' he continued with a smile, and softly laying his velvet hand, as a cat might have laid its sheathed claws, on Mr Dombey's arm; 'if I perfectly understand what is in your mind, I am so much more likely to be useful, and to have the happiness of being effectually employed. I think I do understand. I have not the honour of Mrs Dombey's good opinion. In my position, I have no reason to expect it; but I take the fact to be, that I have not got it?'

'Possibly not,' said Mr Dombey.

'Consequently,' pursued Carker, 'your making the communications to Mrs Dombey through me, is sure to be particularly unpalatable to that lady?'

'It appears to me,' said Mr Dombey, with haughty reserve, and yet with some embarrassment, 'that Mrs Dombey's views upon the subject form no part of it as it presents itself to you and me, Carker. But it may be so.'

'And—pardon me—do I misconceive you,' said Carker, 'when I think you descry in this, a likely means of humbling Mrs Dombey's pride—I use the word as expressive of a quality which, kept within due bounds, adorns and graces a lady so distinguished for her beauty and accomplishments—and, not to say of punishing her, but of reducing her to the submission you so naturally and justly require?'

'I am not accustomed, Carker, as you know,' said Mr Dombey, 'to give such close reasons for any course of conduct I think proper to adopt, but I will gainsay nothing of this. If you have any objection to found upon it, that is indeed another thing, and the mere statement that you have one will be sufficient. But I have not supposed, I confess, that any confidence I could entrust to you, would be likely to degrade you—'

'Oh! I degraded!' exclaimed Carker. 'In your service!'

'or to place you,' pursued Mr Dombey, 'in a false position.'

'I in a false position!' exclaimed Carker. 'I shall be proud—delighted—to execute your trust. I could have wished, I own, to have given the lady at whose feet I would lay my humble duty and devotion—for is she not your wife!—no new cause of dislike; but a wish from you is, of course, paramount to every other consideration on earth. Besides, when Mrs Dombey is converted from these little errors of judgment, incidental, I would presume to say, to the novelty of her situation, I shall hope that she will perceive in the slight part I take, only a grain—my removed and different sphere gives room for little more—of the respect for you, and sacrifice of all considerations to you, of which it will be her pleasure and privilege to garner up a great store every day.'

Mr Dombey seemed, at the moment, again to see her with her hand stretched out towards the door, and again to hear through the mild speech of his confidential agent an echo of the words, 'Nothing can make us stranger to each other than we are henceforth!' But he shook off the fancy, and did not shake in his resolution, and said, 'Certainly, no doubt.'

'There is nothing more,' quoth Carker, drawing his chair back to its old place—for they had taken little breakfast as yet—and pausing for an answer before he sat down.

'Nothing,' said Mr Dombey, 'but this. You will be good enough to observe, Carker, that no message to Mrs Dombey with which you are or may be charged, admits of reply. You will be good enough to bring me no reply. Mrs Dombey is informed that it does not become me to temporise or treat upon any matter that is at issue between us, and that what I say is final.'

Mr Carker signified his understanding of these credentials, and they fell to breakfast with what appetite they might. The Grinder also, in due time reappeared, keeping his eyes upon his master without a moment's respite, and passing the time in a reverie of worshipful tenor. Breakfast concluded, Mr Dombey's horse was ordered out again, and Mr Carker mounting his own, they rode off for the City together.

Mr Carker was in capital spirits, and talked much. Mr Dombey received his conversation with the sovereign air of a man who had a right to be talked to, and occasionally condescended to throw in a few words to carry on the conversation. So they rode on characteristically enough. But Mr Dombey, in his dignity, rode with very long stirrups, and a very loose rein, and very rarely deigned to look down to see where his horse went. In consequence of which it happened that Mr Dombey's horse, while going at a round trot, stumbled on some loose stones, threw him, rolled over him, and lashing out with his iron-shod feet, in his struggles to get up, kicked him.

Mr Carker, quick of eye, steady of hand, and a good horseman, was afoot, and had the struggling animal upon his legs and by the bridle, in a moment. Otherwise that morning's confidence would have been Mr Dombey's last. Yet even with the flush and hurry of this action red upon him, he bent over his prostrate chief with every tooth disclosed, and muttered as he stooped down, 'I have given good cause of offence to Mrs Dombey now, if she knew it!'

Mr Dombey being insensible, and bleeding from the head and face, was carried by certain menders of the road, under Carker's direction, to the nearest public-house, which was not far off, and where he was soon attended by divers surgeons, who arrived in quick succession from all parts, and who seemed to come by some mysterious instinct, as vultures are said to gather about a camel who dies in the desert. After being at some pains to restore him to consciousness, these gentlemen examined into the nature of his injuries.

One surgeon who lived hard by was strong for a compound fracture of the leg, which was the landlord's opinion also; but two surgeons who lived at a distance, and were only in that neighbourhood by accident, combated this opinion so disinterestedly, that it was decided at last that the patient, though severely cut and bruised, had broken no bones but a lesser rib or so, and might be carefully taken home before night. His injuries being dressed and bandaged, which was a long operation, and he at length left to repose, Mr Carker mounted his horse again, and rode away to carry the intelligence home.

Crafty and cruel as his face was at the best of times, though it was a sufficiently fair face as to form and regularity of feature, it was at its worst when he set forth on this errand; animated by the craft and cruelty of thoughts within him, suggestions of remote possibility rather than of design or plot, that made him ride as if he hunted men and women. Drawing rein at length, and slackening in his speed, as he came into the more public roads, he checked his white-legged horse into picking his way along as usual, and hid himself beneath his sleek, hushed, crouched manner, and his ivory smile, as he best could.

He rode direct to Mr Dombey's house, alighted at the door, and begged to see Mrs Dombey on an affair of importance. The servant who showed him to Mr Dombey's own room, soon returned to say that it was not Mrs Dombey's hour for receiving visitors, and that he begged pardon for not having mentioned it before.

Mr Carker, who was quite prepared for a cold reception, wrote upon a card that he must take the liberty of pressing for an interview, and that he would not be so bold as to do so, for the second time (this he underlined), if he were not equally sure of the occasion being sufficient for his justification. After a trifling delay, Mrs Dombey's maid appeared, and conducted him to a morning room upstairs, where Edith and Florence were together.

He had never thought Edith half so beautiful before. Much as he admired the graces of her face and form, and freshly as they dwelt within his sensual remembrance, he had never thought her half so beautiful.

Her glance fell haughtily upon him in the doorway; but he looked at Florence—though only in the act of bending his head, as he came in—with some irrepressible expression of the new power he held; and it was his triumph to see the glance droop and falter, and to see that Edith half rose up to receive him.

He was very sorry, he was deeply grieved; he couldn't say with what unwillingness he came to prepare her for the intelligence of a very slight accident. He entreated Mrs Dombey to compose herself. Upon his sacred word of honour, there was no cause of alarm. But Mr Dombey—

Florence uttered a sudden cry. He did not look at her, but at Edith. Edith composed and reassured her. She uttered no cry of distress. No, no.

Mr Dombey had met with an accident in riding. His horse had slipped, and he had been thrown.

Florence wildly exclaimed that he was badly hurt; that he was killed!

No. Upon his honour, Mr Dombey, though stunned at first, was soon recovered, and though certainly hurt was in no kind of danger. If this were not the truth, he, the distressed intruder, never could have had the courage to present himself before Mrs Dombey. It was the truth indeed, he solemnly assured her.

All this he said as if he were answering Edith, and not Florence, and with his eyes and his smile fastened on Edith.

He then went on to tell her where Mr Dombey was lying, and to request that a carriage might be placed at his disposal to bring him home.

'Mama,' faltered Florence in tears, 'if I might venture to go!'

Mr Carker, having his eyes on Edith when he heard these words, gave her a secret look and slightly shook his head. He saw how she battled with herself before she answered him with her handsome eyes, but he wrested the answer from her—he showed her that he would have it, or that he would speak and cut Florence to the heart—and she gave it to him. As he had looked at the picture in the morning, so he looked at her afterwards, when she turned her eyes away.

'I am directed to request,' he said, 'that the new housekeeper—Mrs Pipchin, I think, is the name—'

Nothing escaped him. He saw in an instant, that she was another slight of Mr Dombey's on his wife.

'—may be informed that Mr Dombey wishes to have his bed prepared in his own apartments downstairs, as he prefers those rooms to any other. I shall return to Mr Dombey almost immediately. That every possible attention has been paid to his comfort, and that he is the object of every possible solicitude, I need not assure you, Madam. Let me again say, there is no cause for the least alarm. Even you may be quite at ease, believe me.'

He bowed himself out, with his extremest show of deference and conciliation; and having returned to Mr Dombey's room, and there arranged for a carriage being sent after him to the City, mounted his horse again, and rode slowly thither. He was very thoughtful as he went along, and very thoughtful there, and very thoughtful in the carriage on his way back to the place where Mr Dombey had been left. It was only when sitting by that gentleman's couch that he was quite himself again, and conscious of his teeth.

About the time of twilight, Mr Dombey, grievously afflicted with aches and pains, was helped into his carriage, and propped with cloaks and pillows on one side of it, while his confidential agent bore him company upon the other. As he was not to be shaken, they moved at little more than a foot pace; and hence it was quite dark when he was brought home. Mrs Pipchin, bitter and grim, and not oblivious of the Peruvian mines, as the establishment in general had good reason to know, received him at the door, and freshened the domestics with several little sprinklings of wordy vinegar, while they assisted in conveying him to his room. Mr Carker remained in attendance until he was safe in bed, and then, as he declined to receive any female visitor, but the excellent Ogress who presided over his household, waited on Mrs Dombey once more, with his report on her lord's condition.

He again found Edith alone with Florence, and he again addressed the whole of his soothing speech to Edith, as if she were a prey to the liveliest and most affectionate anxieties. So earnest he was in his respectful sympathy, that on taking leave, he ventured—with one more glance towards Florence at the moment—to take her hand, and bending over it, to touch it with his lips.

Edith did not withdraw the hand, nor did she strike his fair face with it, despite the flush upon her cheek, the bright light in her eyes, and the dilation of her whole form. But when she was alone in her own room, she struck it on the marble chimney-shelf, so that, at one blow, it was bruised, and bled; and held it from her, near the shining fire, as if she could have thrust it in and burned it.'

Far into the night she sat alone, by the sinking blaze, in dark and threatening beauty, watching the murky shadows looming on the wall, as if her thoughts were tangible, and cast them there. Whatever shapes of outrage and affront, and black foreshadowings of things that might happen, flickered, indistinct and giant-like, before her, one resented figure marshalled them against her. And that figure was her husband.

CHAPTER 43. The Watches of the Night

Florence, long since awakened from her dream, mournfully observed the estrangement between her father and Edith, and saw it widen more and more, and knew that there was greater bitterness between them every day. Each day's added knowledge deepened the shade upon her love and hope, roused up the old sorrow that had slumbered for a little time, and made it even heavier to bear than it had been before.

It had been hard—how hard may none but Florence ever know!—to have the natural affection of a true and earnest nature turned to agony; and slight, or stern repulse, substituted for the tenderest protection and the dearest care. It had been hard to feel in her deep heart what she had felt, and never know the happiness of one touch of response. But it was much more hard to be compelled to doubt either her father or Edith, so affectionate and dear to her, and to think of her love for each of them, by turns, with fear, distrust, and wonder.

Yet Florence now began to do so; and the doing of it was a task imposed upon her by the very purity of her soul, as one she could not fly from. She saw her father cold and obdurate to Edith, as to her; hard, inflexible, unyielding. Could it be, she asked herself with starting tears, that her own dear mother had been made unhappy by such treatment, and had pined away and died? Then she would think how proud and stately Edith was to everyone but her, with what disdain she treated him, how distantly she kept apart from him, and what she had said on the night when they came home; and quickly it would come on Florence, almost as a crime, that she loved one who was set in opposition to her father, and that her father knowing of it, must think of her in his solitary room as the unnatural child who added this wrong to the old fault, so much wept for, of never having won his fatherly affection from her birth. The next kind word from Edith, the next kind glance, would shake these thoughts again, and make them seem like black ingratitude; for who but she had cheered the drooping heart of Florence, so lonely and so hurt, and been its best of comforters! Thus, with her gentle nature yearning to them both, feeling for the misery of both, and whispering doubts of her own duty to both, Florence in her wider and expanded love, and by the side of Edith, endured more than when she had hoarded up her undivided secret in the mournful house, and her beautiful Mama had never dawned upon it.

One exquisite unhappiness that would have far outweighed this, Florence was spared. She never had the least suspicion that Edith by her tenderness for her widened the separation from her father, or gave him new cause of dislike. If Florence had conceived the possibility of such an effect being wrought by such a cause, what grief she would have felt, what sacrifice she would have tried to make, poor loving girl, how fast and sure her quiet passage might have been beneath it to the presence of that higher Father who does not reject his children's love, or spurn their tried and broken hearts, Heaven knows! But it was otherwise, and that was well.

No word was ever spoken between Florence and Edith now, on these subjects. Edith had said there ought to be between them, in that wise, a division and a silence like the grave itself: and Florence felt she was right.

In this state of affairs her father was brought home, suffering and disabled; and gloomily retired to his own rooms, where he was tended by servants, not approached by Edith, and had no friend or companion but Mr Carker, who withdrew near midnight.

'And nice company he is, Miss Floy,' said Susan Nipper. 'Oh, he's a precious piece of goods! If ever he wants a character don't let him come to me whatever he does, that's all I tell him.'

'Dear Susan,' urged Florence, 'don't!'

'Oh, it's very well to say "don't" Miss Floy,' returned the Nipper, much exasperated; 'but raly begging your pardon we're coming to such passes that it turns all the blood in a person's body into pins and needles, with their pints all ways. Don't mistake me, Miss Floy, I don't mean nothing again your ma-in-law who has always treated me as a lady should though she is rather high I must say not that I have any right to object to that particular, but when we come to Mrs Pipchinses and having them put over us and keeping guard at your Pa's door like crocodiles (only make us thankful that they lay no eggs!) we are a growing too outrageous!'

'Papa thinks well of Mrs Pipchin, Susan,' returned Florence, 'and has a right to choose his housekeeper, you know. Pray don't!'

'Well Miss Floy,' returned the Nipper, 'when you say don't, I never do I hope but Mrs Pipchin acts like early gooseberries upon me Miss, and nothing less.'

Susan was unusually emphatic and destitute of punctuation in her discourse on this night, which was the night of Mr Dombey's being brought home, because, having been sent downstairs by Florence to inquire after him, she had been obliged to deliver her message to her mortal enemy Mrs Pipchin; who, without carrying it in to Mr Dombey, had taken upon herself to return what Miss Nipper called a huffish answer, on her own responsibility. This, Susan Nipper construed into presumption on the part of that exemplary sufferer by the Peruvian mines, and a deed of disparagement upon her young lady, that was not to be forgiven; and so far her emphatic state was special. But she had been in a condition of greatly increased suspicion and distrust, ever since the marriage; for, like most persons of her quality of mind, who form a strong and sincere attachment to one in the different station which Florence occupied, Susan was very jealous, and her jealousy naturally attached to Edith, who divided her old empire, and came between them. Proud and glad as Susan Nipper truly was, that her young mistress should be advanced towards her proper place in the scene of her old neglect, and that she should have her father's handsome wife for her companion and protectress, she could not relinquish any part of her own dominion to the handsome wife, without a grudge and a vague feeling of ill-will, for which she did not fail to find a disinterested justification in her sharp perception of the pride and passion of the lady's character. From the background to which she had necessarily retired somewhat, since the marriage, Miss Nipper looked on, therefore, at domestic affairs in general, with a resolute conviction that no good would come of Mrs Dombey: always being very careful to publish on all possible occasions, that she had nothing to say against her.

'Susan,' said Florence, who was sitting thoughtfully at her table, 'it is very late. I shall want nothing more to-night.'

'Ah, Miss Floy!' returned the Nipper, 'I'm sure I often wish for them old times when I sat up with you hours later than this and fell asleep through being tired out when you was as broad awake as spectacles, but you've ma's-in-law to come and sit with you now Miss Floy and I'm thankful for it I'm sure. I've not a word to say against 'em.'

'I shall not forget who was my old companion when I had none, Susan,' returned Florence, gently, 'never!' And looking up, she put her arm round the neck of her humble friend, drew her face down to hers, and bidding her good-night, kissed it; which so mollified Miss Nipper, that she fell a sobbing.

'Now my dear Miss Floy, said Susan, 'let me go downstairs again and see how your Pa is, I know you're wretched about him, do let me go downstairs again and knock at his door my own self.'

'No,' said Florence, 'go to bed. We shall hear more in the morning. I will inquire myself in the morning. Mama has been down, I daresay;' Florence blushed, for she had no such hope; 'or is there now, perhaps. Good-night!'

Susan was too much softened to express her private opinion on the probability of Mrs Dombey's being in attendance on her husband, and silently withdrew. Florence left alone, soon hid her head upon her hands as she had often done in other days, and did not restrain the tears from coursing down her face. The misery of this domestic discord and unhappiness; the withered hope she cherished now, if hope it could be called, of ever being taken to her father's heart; her doubts and fears between the two; the yearning of her innocent breast to both; the heavy disappointment and regret of such an end as this, to what had been a vision of bright hope and promise to her; all crowded on her mind and made her tears flow fast. Her mother and her brother dead, her father unmoved towards her, Edith opposed to him and casting him away, but loving her, and loved by her, it seemed as if her affection could never prosper, rest where it would. That weak thought was soon hushed, but the thoughts in which it had arisen were too true and strong to be dismissed with it; and they made the night desolate.

Among such reflections there rose up, as there had risen up all day, the image of her father, wounded and in pain, alone in his own room, untended by those who should be nearest to him, and passing the tardy hours in lonely suffering. A frightened thought which made her start and clasp her hands— though it was not a new one in her mind—that he might die, and never see her or pronounce her name, thrilled her whole frame. In her agitation she thought, and trembled while she thought, of once more stealing downstairs, and venturing to his door.

She listened at her own. The house was quiet, and all the lights were out. It was a long, long time, she thought, since she used to make her nightly pilgrimages to his door! It was a long, long time, she tried to think, since she had entered his room at midnight, and he had led her back to the stair-foot!

With the same child's heart within her, as of old: even with the child's sweet timid eyes and clustering hair: Florence, as strange to her father in her early maiden bloom, as in her nursery time, crept down the staircase listening as she went, and drew near to his room. No one was stirring in the house. The door was partly open to admit air; and all was so still within, that she could hear the burning of the fire, and count the ticking of the clock that stood upon the chimney-piece.

She looked in. In that room, the housekeeper wrapped in a blanket was fast asleep in an easy chair before the fire. The doors between it and the next were partly closed, and a screen was drawn before them; but there was a light there, and it shone upon the cornice of his bed. All was so very still that she could hear from his breathing that he was asleep. This gave her courage to pass round the screen, and look into his chamber.

It was as great a start to come upon his sleeping face as if she had not expected to see it. Florence stood arrested on the spot, and if he had awakened then, must have remained there.

There was a cut upon his forehead, and they had been wetting his hair, which lay bedabbled and entangled on the pillow. One of his arms, resting outside the bed, was bandaged up, and he was very white. But it was not this, that after the first quick glance, and first assurance of his sleeping quietly, held Florence rooted to the ground. It was something very different from this, and more than this, that made him look so solemn in her eye.

She had never seen his face in all her life, but there had been upon it—or she fancied so—some disturbing consciousness of her. She had never seen his face in all her life, but hope had sunk within her, and her timid glance had dropped before its stern, unloving, and repelling harshness. As she looked upon it now, she saw it, for the first time, free from the cloud that had darkened her childhood. Calm, tranquil night was reigning in its stead. He might have gone to sleep, for anything she saw there, blessing her.

Awake, unkind father! Awake, now, sullen man! The time is flitting by; the hour is coming with an angry tread. Awake!

There was no change upon his face; and as she watched it, awfully, its motionless response recalled the faces that were gone. So they looked, so would he; so she, his weeping child, who should say when! so all the world of love and hatred and indifference around them! When that time should come, it would not be the heavier to him, for this that she was going to do; and it might fall something lighter upon her.

She stole close to the bed, and drawing in her breath, bent down, and softly kissed him on the face, and laid her own for one brief moment by its side, and put the arm, with which she dared not touch him, round about him on the pillow.

Awake, doomed man, while she is near! The time is flitting by; the hour is coming with an angry tread; its foot is in the house. Awake!

In her mind, she prayed to God to bless her father, and to soften him towards her, if it might be so; and if not, to forgive him if he was wrong, and pardon her the prayer which almost seemed impiety. And doing so, and looking back at him with blinded eyes, and stealing timidly away, passed out of his room, and crossed the other, and was gone.

He may sleep on now. He may sleep on while he may. But let him look for that slight figure when he wakes, and find it near him when the hour is come!

Sad and grieving was the heart of Florence, as she crept upstairs. The quiet house had grown more dismal since she came down. The sleep she had been looking on, in the dead of night, had the solemnity to her of death and life in one. The secrecy and silence of her own proceeding made the night secret, silent, and oppressive. She felt unwilling, almost unable, to go on to her own chamber; and turning into the drawing-rooms, where the clouded moon was shining through the blinds, looked out into the empty streets.

The wind was blowing drearily. The lamps looked pale, and shook as if they were cold. There was a distant glimmer of something that was not quite darkness, rather than of light, in the sky; and foreboding night was shivering and restless, as the dying are who make a troubled end. Florence remembered how, as a watcher, by a sick-bed, she had noted this bleak time, and felt its influence, as if in some hidden natural antipathy to it; and now it was very, very gloomy.

Her Mama had not come to her room that night, which was one cause of her having sat late out of her bed. In her general uneasiness, no less than in her ardent longing to have somebody to speak to, and to break the spell of gloom and silence, Florence directed her steps towards the chamber where she slept.

The door was not fastened within, and yielded smoothly to her hesitating hand. She was surprised to find a bright light burning; still more surprised, on looking in, to see that her Mama, but partially undressed, was sitting near the ashes of the fire, which had crumbled and dropped away. Her eyes were intently bent upon the air; and in their light, and in her face, and in her form, and in the grasp with which she held the elbows of her chair as if about to start up, Florence saw such fierce emotion that it terrified her.

'Mama!' she cried, 'what is the matter?'

Edith started; looking at her with such a strange dread in her face, that Florence was more frightened than before.

'Mama!' said Florence, hurriedly advancing. 'Dear Mama! what is the matter?'

'I have not been well,' said Edith, shaking, and still looking at her in the same strange way. 'I have had had dreams, my love.'

'And not yet been to bed, Mama?'

'No,' she returned. 'Half-waking dreams.'

Her features gradually softened; and suffering Florence to come closer to her, within her embrace, she said in a tender manner, 'But what does my bird do here? What does my bird do here?'

'I have been uneasy, Mama, in not seeing you to-night, and in not knowing how Papa was; and I—'

Florence stopped there, and said no more.

'Is it late?' asked Edith, fondly putting back the curls that mingled with her own dark hair, and strayed upon her face.

'Very late. Near day.'

'Near day!' she repeated in surprise.

'Dear Mama, what have you done to your hand?' said Florence.

Edith drew it suddenly away, and, for a moment, looked at her with the same strange dread (there was a sort of wild avoidance in it) as before; but she presently said, 'Nothing, nothing. A blow.' And then she said, 'My Florence!' and then her bosom heaved, and she was weeping passionately.

'Mama!' said Florence. 'Oh Mama, what can I do, what should I do, to make us happier? Is there anything?'

'Nothing,' she replied.

'Are you sure of that? Can it never be? If I speak now of what is in my thoughts, in spite of what we have agreed,' said Florence, 'you will not blame me, will you?'

'It is useless,' she replied, 'useless. I have told you, dear, that I have had bad dreams. Nothing can change them, or prevent them coming back.'

'I do not understand,' said Florence, gazing on her agitated face which seemed to darken as she looked.

'I have dreamed,' said Edith in a low voice, 'of a pride that is all powerless for good, all powerful for evil; of a pride that has been galled and goaded, through many shameful years, and has never recoiled except upon itself; a pride that has debased its owner with the consciousness of deep humiliation, and never helped its owner boldly to resent it or avoid it, or to say, "This shall not be!" a pride that, rightly guided, might have led perhaps to better things, but which, misdirected and perverted, like all else belonging to the same possessor, has been self-contempt, mere hardihood and ruin.'

She neither looked nor spoke to Florence now, but went on as if she were alone.

'I have dreamed,' she said, 'of such indifference and callousness, arising from this self-contempt; this wretched, inefficient, miserable pride; that it has gone on with listless steps even to the altar, yielding to the old, familiar, beckoning finger,—oh mother, oh mother!—while it spurned it; and willing to be hateful to itself for once and for all, rather than to be stung daily in some new form. Mean, poor thing!'

And now with gathering and darkening emotion, she looked as she had looked when Florence entered.

'And I have dreamed,' she said, 'that in a first late effort to achieve a purpose, it has been trodden on, and trodden down by a base foot, but turns and looks upon him. I have dreamed that it is wounded, hunted, set upon by dogs, but that it stands at bay, and will not yield; no, that it cannot if it would; but that it is urged on to hate.'

Her clenched hand tightened on the trembling arm she had in hers, and as she looked down on the alarmed and wondering face, frown subsided. 'Oh Florence!' she said, 'I think I have been nearly mad to-night!' and humbled her proud head upon her neck and wept again.

'Don't leave me! be near me! I have no hope but in you! These words she said a score of times.

Soon she grew calmer, and was full of pity for the tears of Florence, and for her waking at such untimely hours. And the day now dawning, with folded her in her arms and laid her down upon her bed, and, not lying down herself, sat by her, and bade her try to sleep.

'For you are weary, dearest, and unhappy, and should rest.'

'I am indeed unhappy, dear Mama, tonight,' said Florence. 'But you are weary and unhappy, too.'

'Not when you lie asleep so near me, sweet.'

They kissed each other, and Florence, worn out, gradually fell into a gentle slumber; but as her eyes closed on the face beside her, it was so sad to think upon the face downstairs, that her hand drew closer to Edith for some comfort; yet, even in the act, it faltered, lest it should be deserting him. So, in her sleep, she tried to reconcile the two together, and to show them that she loved them both, but could not do it, and her waking grief was part of her dreams.

Edith, sitting by, looked down at the dark eyelashes lying wet on the flushed cheeks, and looked with gentleness and pity, for she knew the truth. But no sleep hung upon her own eyes. As the day came on she still sat watching and waking, with the placid hand in hers, and sometimes whispered, as she looked at the hushed face, 'Be near me, Florence. I have no hope but in you!'

CHAPTER 44. A Separation

With the day, though not so early as the sun, uprose Miss Susan Nipper. There was a heaviness in this young maiden's exceedingly sharp black eyes, that abated somewhat of their sparkling, and suggested—which was not their usual character—the possibility of their being sometimes shut. There was likewise a swollen look about them, as if they had been crying overnight. But the Nipper, so far from being cast down, was singularly brisk and bold, and all her energies appeared to be braced up for some great feat. This was noticeable even in her dress, which was much more tight and trim than usual; and in occasional twitches of her head as she went about the house, which were mightily expressive of determination.

In a word, she had formed a determination, and an aspiring one: it being nothing less than this—to penetrate to Mr Dombey's presence, and have speech of that gentleman alone. 'I have often said I would,' she remarked, in a threatening manner, to herself, that morning, with many twitches of her head, 'and now I will!'

Spurring herself on to the accomplishment of this desperate design, with a sharpness that was peculiar to herself, Susan Nipper haunted the hall and staircase during the whole forenoon, without finding a favourable opportunity for the assault. Not at all baffled by this discomfiture, which indeed had a stimulating effect, and put her on her mettle, she diminished nothing of her vigilance; and at last discovered, towards evening, that her sworn foe Mrs Pipchin, under pretence of having sat up all night, was dozing in her own room, and that Mr Dombey was lying on his sofa, unattended.

With a twitch—not of her head merely, this time, but of her whole self—the Nipper went on tiptoe to Mr Dombey's door, and knocked. 'Come in!' said Mr Dombey. Susan encouraged herself with a final twitch, and went in.

Mr Dombey, who was eyeing the fire, gave an amazed look at his visitor, and raised himself a little on his arm. The Nipper dropped a curtsey.

'What do you want?' said Mr Dombey.

'If you please, Sir, I wish to speak to you,' said Susan.

Mr Dombey moved his lips as if he were repeating the words, but he seemed so lost in astonishment at the presumption of the young woman as to be incapable of giving them utterance.

'I have been in your service, Sir,' said Susan Nipper, with her usual rapidity, 'now twelve 'year a waiting on Miss Floy my own young lady who couldn't speak plain when I first come here and I was old in this house when Mrs Richards was new, I may not be Meethosalem, but I am not a child in arms.'

Mr Dombey, raised upon his arm and looking at her, offered no comment on this preparatory statement of fact.

'There never was a dearer or a blesseder young lady than is my young lady, Sir,' said Susan, 'and I ought to know a great deal better than some for I have seen her in her grief and I have seen her in her joy (there's not been much of it) and I have seen her with her brother and I have seen her in her loneliness and some have never seen her, and I say to some and all—I do!' and here the black-eyed shook her head, and slightly stamped her foot; 'that she's the blessedest and dearest angel is Miss Floy that ever drew the breath of life, the more that I was torn to pieces Sir the more I'd say it though I may not be a Fox's Martyr..'

Mr Dombey turned yet paler than his fall had made him, with indignation and astonishment; and kept his eyes upon the speaker as if he accused them, and his ears too, of playing him false.

'No one could be anything but true and faithful to Miss Floy, Sir,' pursued Susan, 'and I take no merit for my service of twelve year, for I love her- -yes, I say to some and all I do!'—and here the black-eyed shook her head again, and slightly stamped her foot again, and checked a sob; 'but true and faithful service gives me right to speak I hope, and speak I must and will now, right or wrong.

'What do you mean, woman?' said Mr Dombey, glaring at her. 'How do you dare?'

'What I mean, Sir, is to speak respectful and without offence, but out, and how I dare I know not but I do!'said Susan. 'Oh! you don't know my young lady Sir you don't indeed, you'd never know so little of her, if you did.'

Mr Dombey, in a fury, put his hand out for the bell-rope; but there was no bell-rope on that side of the fire, and he could not rise and cross to the other without assistance. The quick eye of the Nipper detected his helplessness immediately, and now, as she afterwards observed, she felt she had got him.

'Miss Floy,' said Susan Nipper, 'is the most devoted and most patient and most dutiful and beautiful of daughters, there ain't no gentleman, no Sir, though as great and rich as all the greatest and richest of England put together, but might be proud of her and would and ought. If he knew her value right, he'd rather lose his greatness and his fortune piece by piece and beg his way in rags from door to door, I say to some and all, he would!' cried Susan Nipper, bursting into tears, 'than bring the sorrow on her tender heart that I have seen it suffer in this house!'

'Woman,' cried Mr Dombey, 'leave the room.

'Begging your pardon, not even if I am to leave the situation, Sir,' replied the steadfast Nipper, 'in which I have been so many years and seen so much—although I hope you'd never have the heart to send me from Miss Floy for such a cause—will I go now till I have said the rest, I may not be a Indian widow Sir and I am not and I would not so become but if I once made up my mind to burn myself alive, I'd do it! And I've made my mind up to go on.'

Which was rendered no less clear by the expression of Susan Nipper's countenance, than by her words.

'There ain't a person in your service, Sir,' pursued the black-eyed, 'that has always stood more in awe of you than me and you may think how true it is when I make so bold as say that I have hundreds and hundreds of times thought of speaking to you and never been able to make my mind up to it till last night, but last night decided of me.'

Mr Dombey, in a paroxysm of rage, made another grasp at the bell-rope that was not there, and, in its absence, pulled his hair rather than nothing.

'I have seen,' said Susan Nipper, 'Miss Floy strive and strive when nothing but a child so sweet and patient that the best of women might have copied from her, I've seen her sitting nights together half the night through to help her delicate brother with his learning, I've seen her helping him and watching him at other times—some well know when—I've seen her, with no encouragement and no help, grow up to be a lady, thank God! that is the grace and pride of every company she goes in, and I've always seen her cruelly neglected and keenly feeling of it—I say to some and all, I have!—and never said one word, but ordering one's self lowly and reverently towards one's betters, is not to be a worshipper of graven images, and I will and must speak!'

'Is there anybody there?' cried Mr Dombey, calling out. 'Where are the men? where are the women? Is there no one there?'

'I left my dear young lady out of bed late last night,' said Susan, nothing checked, 'and I knew why, for you was ill Sir and she didn't know how ill and that was enough to make her wretched as I saw it did. I may not be a Peacock; but I have my eyes—and I sat up a little in my own room thinking she might be lonesome and might want me, and I saw her steal downstairs and come to this door as if it was a guilty thing to look at her own Pa, and then steal back again and go into them lonely drawing-rooms, a-crying so, that I could hardly bear to hear it. I can not bear to hear it,' said Susan Nipper, wiping her black eyes, and fixing them undauntingly on Mr Dombey's infuriated face. 'It's not the first time I have heard it, not by many and many a time you don't know your own daughter, Sir, you don't know what you're doing, Sir, I say to some and all,' cried Susan Nipper, in a final burst, 'that it's a sinful shame!'

'Why, hoity toity!' cried the voice of Mrs Pipchin, as the black bombazeen garments of that fair Peruvian Miner swept into the room. 'What's this, indeed?'

Susan favoured Mrs Pipchin with a look she had invented expressly for her when they first became acquainted, and resigned the reply to Mr Dombey.

'What's this?' repeated Mr Dombey, almost foaming. 'What's this, Madam? You who are at the head of this household, and bound to keep it in order, have reason to inquire. Do you know this woman?'

'I know very little good of her, Sir,' croaked Mrs Pipchin. 'How dare you come here, you hussy? Go along with you!'

But the inflexible Nipper, merely honouring Mrs Pipchin with another look, remained.

'Do you call it managing this establishment, Madam,' said Mr Dombey, 'to leave a person like this at liberty to come and talk to me! A gentleman—in his own house—in his own room—assailed with the impertinences of women-servants!'

'Well, Sir,' returned Mrs Pipchin, with vengeance in her hard grey eye, 'I exceedingly deplore it; nothing can be more irregular; nothing can be more out of all bounds and reason; but I regret to say, Sir, that this young woman is quite beyond control. She has been spoiled by Miss Dombey, and is amenable to nobody. You know you're not,' said Mrs Pipchin, sharply, and shaking her head at Susan Nipper. 'For shame, you hussy! Go along with you!'

'If you find people in my service who are not to be controlled, Mrs Pipchin,' said Mr Dombey, turning back towards the fire, 'you know what to do with them, I presume. You know what you are here for? Take her away!'

'Sir, I know what to do,' retorted Mrs Pipchin, 'and of course shall do it' Susan Nipper,' snapping her up particularly short, 'a month's warning from this hour.'

'Oh indeed!' cried Susan, loftily.

'Yes,' returned Mrs Pipchin, 'and don't smile at me, you minx, or I'll know the reason why! Go along with you this minute!'

'I intend to go this minute, you may rely upon it,' said the voluble Nipper. 'I have been in this house waiting on my young lady a dozen year and I won't stop in it one hour under notice from a person owning to the name of Pipchin trust me, Mrs P.'

'A good riddance of bad rubbish!' said that wrathful old lady. 'Get along with you, or I'll have you carried out!'

'My comfort is,' said Susan, looking back at Mr Dombey, 'that I have told a piece of truth this day which ought to have been told long before and can't be told too often or too plain and that no amount of Pipchinses—I hope the number of 'em mayn't be great' (here Mrs Pipchin uttered a very sharp 'Go along with you!' and Miss Nipper repeated the look) 'can unsay what I have said, though they gave a whole year full of warnings beginning at ten o'clock in the forenoon and never leaving off till twelve at night and died of the exhaustion which would be a Jubilee!'

With these words, Miss Nipper preceded her foe out of the room; and walking upstairs to her own apartments in great state, to the choking exasperation of the ireful Pipchin, sat down among her boxes and began to cry.

From this soft mood she was soon aroused, with a very wholesome and refreshing effect, by the voice of Mrs Pipchin outside the door.

'Does that bold-faced slut,' said the fell Pipchin, 'intend to take her warning, or does she not?'

Miss Nipper replied from within that the person described did not inhabit that part of the house, but that her name was Pipchin, and she was to be found in the housekeeper's room.

'You saucy baggage!' retorted Mrs Pipchin, rattling at the handle of the door. 'Go along with you this minute. Pack up your things directly! How dare you talk in this way to a gentle-woman who has seen better days?'

To which Miss Nipper rejoined from her castle, that she pitied the better days that had seen Mrs Pipchin; and that for her part she considered the worst days in the year to be about that lady's mark, except that they were much too good for her.

'But you needn't trouble yourself to make a noise at my door,' said Susan Nipper, 'nor to contaminate the key-hole with your eye, I'm packing up and going you may take your affidavit.'

The Dowager expressed her lively satisfaction at this intelligence, and with some general opinions upon young hussies as a race, and especially upon their demerits after being spoiled by Miss Dombey, withdrew to prepare the Nipper's wages. Susan then bestirred herself to get her trunks in order, that she might take an immediate and dignified departure; sobbing heartily all the time, as she thought of Florence.

The object of her regret was not long in coming to her, for the news soon spread over the house that Susan Nipper had had a disturbance with Mrs Pipchin, and that they had both appealed to Mr Dombey, and that there had been an unprecedented piece of work in Mr Dombey's room, and that Susan was going. The latter part of this confused rumour, Florence found to be so correct, that Susan had locked the last trunk and was sitting upon it with her bonnet on, when she came into her room.

'Susan!' cried Florence. 'Going to leave me! You!'

'Oh for goodness gracious sake, Miss Floy,' said Susan, sobbing, 'don't speak a word to me or I shall demean myself before them' Pipchinses, and I wouldn't have 'em see me cry Miss Floy for worlds!'

'Susan!' said Florence. 'My dear girl, my old friend! What shall I do without you! Can you bear to go away so?'

'No-n-o-o, my darling dear Miss Floy, I can't indeed,' sobbed Susan. 'But it can't be helped, I've done my duty' Miss, I have indeed. It's no fault of mine. I am quite resigned. I couldn't stay my month or I could never leave you then my darling and I must at last as well as at first, don't speak to me Miss Floy, for though I'm pretty firm I'm not a marble doorpost, my own dear.'

'What is it? Why is it?' said Florence, 'Won't you tell me?' For Susan was shaking her head.

'No-n-no, my darling,' returned Susan. 'Don't ask me, for I mustn't, and whatever you do don't put in a word for me to stop, for it couldn't be and you'd only wrong yourself, and so God bless you my own precious and forgive me any harm I have done, or any temper I have showed in all these many years!'

With which entreaty, very heartily delivered, Susan hugged her mistress in her arms.

'My darling there's a many that may come to serve you and be glad to serve you and who'll serve you well and true,' said Susan, 'but there can't be one who'll serve you so affectionate as me or love you half as dearly, that's my comfort' Good-bye, sweet Miss Floy!'

'Where will you go, Susan?' asked her weeping mistress.

'I've got a brother down in the country Miss—a farmer in Essex said the heart-broken Nipper, 'that keeps ever so many co-o-ows and pigs and I shall go down there by the coach and sto-op with him, and don't mind me, for I've got money in the Savings Banks my dear, and needn't take another service just yet, which I couldn't, couldn't, couldn't do, my heart's own mistress!' Susan finished with a burst of sorrow, which was opportunely broken by the voice of Mrs Pipchin talking downstairs; on hearing which, she dried her red and swollen eyes, and made a melancholy feint of calling jauntily to Mr Towlinson to fetch a cab and carry down her boxes.

Florence, pale and hurried and distressed, but withheld from useless interference even here, by her dread of causing any new division between her father and his wife (whose stern, indignant face had been a warning to her a few moments since), and by her apprehension of being in some way unconsciously connected already with the dismissal of her old servant and friend, followed, weeping, downstairs to Edith's dressing-room, whither Susan betook herself to make her parting curtsey.

'Now, here's the cab, and here's the boxes, get along with you, do!' said Mrs Pipchin, presenting herself at the same moment. 'I beg your pardon, Ma'am, but Mr Dombey's orders are imperative.'

Edith, sitting under the hands of her maid—she was going out to dinner—preserved her haughty face, and took not the least notice.

'There's your money,' said Mrs Pipchin, who in pursuance of her system, and in recollection of the Mines, was accustomed to rout the servants about, as she had routed her young Brighton boarders; to the everlasting acidulation of Master Bitherstone, 'and the sooner this house sees your back the better.

Susan had no spirits even for the look that belonged to Ma Pipchin by right; so she dropped her curtsey to Mrs Dombey (who inclined her head without one word, and whose eye avoided everyone but Florence), and gave one last parting hug to her young mistress, and received her parting embrace in return. Poor Susan's face at this crisis, in the intensity of her feelings and the determined suffocation of her sobs, lest one should become audible and be a triumph to Mrs Pipchin, presented a series of the most extraordinary physiognomical phenomena ever witnessed.

'I beg your pardon, Miss, I'm sure,' said Towlinson, outside the door with the boxes, addressing Florence, 'but Mr Toots is in the drawing-room, and sends his compliments, and begs to know how Diogenes and Master is.'

Quick as thought, Florence glided out and hastened downstairs, where Mr Toots, in the most splendid vestments, was breathing very hard with doubt and agitation on the subject of her coming.

'Oh, how de do, Miss Dombey,' said Mr Toots, 'God bless my soul!'

This last ejaculation was occasioned by Mr Toots's deep concern at the distress he saw in Florence's face; which caused him to stop short in a fit of chuckles, and become an image of despair.

'Dear Mr Toots,' said Florence, 'you are so friendly to me, and so honest, that I am sure I may ask a favour of you.

'Miss Dombey,' returned Mr Toots, 'if you'll only name one, you'll—you'll give me an appetite. To which,' said Mr Toots, with some sentiment, 'I have long been a stranger.

'Susan, who is an old friend of mine, the oldest friend I have,' said Florence, 'is about to leave here suddenly, and quite alone, poor girl. She is going home, a little way into the country. Might I ask you to take care of her until she is in the coach?'

'Miss Dombey,' returned Mr Toots, 'you really do me an honour and a kindness. This proof of your confidence, after the manner in which I was Beast enough to conduct myself at Brighton—'

'Yes,' said Florence, hurriedly—'no—don't think of that. Then would you have the kindness to—to go? and to be ready to meet her when she comes out? Thank you a thousand times! You ease my mind so much. She doesn't seem so desolate. You cannot think how grateful I feel to you, or what a good friend I am sure you are!' and Florence in her earnestness thanked him again and again; and Mr Toots, in his earnestness, hurried away—but backwards, that he might lose no glimpse of her.

Florence had not the courage to go out, when she saw poor Susan in the hall, with Mrs Pipchin driving her forth, and Diogenes jumping about her, and terrifying Mrs Pipchin to the last degree by making snaps at her bombazeen skirts, and howling with anguish at the sound of her voice—for the good duenna was the dearest and most cherished aversion of his breast. But she saw Susan shake hands with the servants all round, and turn once to look at her old home; and she saw Diogenes bound out after the cab, and want to follow it, and testify an impossibility of conviction that he had no longer any property in the fare; and the door was shut, and the hurry over, and her tears flowed fast for the loss of an old friend, whom no one could replace. No one. No one.

Mr Toots, like the leal and trusty soul he was, stopped the cabriolet in a twinkling, and told Susan Nipper of his commission, at which she cried more than before.

'Upon my soul and body!' said Mr Toots, taking his seat beside her. 'I feel for you. Upon my word and honour I think you can hardly know your own feelings better than I imagine them. I can conceive nothing more dreadful than to have to leave Miss Dombey.'

Susan abandoned herself to her grief now, and it really was touching to see her.

'I say,' said Mr Toots, 'now, don't! at least I mean now do, you know!'

'Do what, Mr Toots!' cried Susan.

'Why, come home to my place, and have some dinner before you start,' said Mr Toots. 'My cook's a most respectable woman—one of the most motherly people I ever saw—and she'll be delighted to make you comfortable. Her son,' said Mr Toots, as an additional recommendation, 'was educated in the Bluecoat School,' and blown up in a powder-mill.'

Susan accepting this kind offer, Mr Toots conducted her to his dwelling, where they were received by the Matron in question who fully justified his character of her, and by the Chicken who at first supposed, on seeing a lady in the vehicle, that Mr Dombey had been doubled up, ably to his old recommendation, and Miss Dombey abducted. This gentleman awakened in Miss Nipper some considerable astonishment; for, having been defeated by the Larkey Boy, his visage was in a state of such great dilapidation, as to be hardly presentable in society with comfort to the beholders. The Chicken himself attributed this punishment to his having had the misfortune to get into Chancery early in the proceedings, when he was severely fibbed by the Larkey one, and heavily grassed. But it appeared from the published records of that great contest that the Larkey Boy had had it all his own way from the beginning, and that the Chicken had been tapped, and bunged, and had received pepper, and had been made groggy, and had come up piping, and had endured a complication of similar strange inconveniences, until he had been gone into and finished.

After a good repast, and much hospitality, Susan set out for the coach-office in another cabriolet, with Mr Toots inside, as before, and the Chicken on the box, who, whatever distinction he conferred on the little party by the moral weight and heroism of his character, was scarcely ornamental to it, physically speaking, on account of his plasters; which were numerous. But the Chicken had registered a vow, in secret, that he would never leave Mr Toots (who was secretly pining to get rid of him), for any less consideration than the good-will and fixtures of a public-house; and being ambitious to go into that line, and drink himself to death as soon as possible, he felt it his cue to make his company unacceptable.

The night-coach by which Susan was to go, was on the point of departure. Mr Toots having put her inside, lingered by the window, irresolutely, until the driver was about to mount; when, standing on the step, and putting in a face that by the light of the lamp was anxious and confused, he said abruptly:

'I say, Susan! Miss Dombey, you know—'

'Yes, Sir.'

'Do you think she could—you know—eh?'

'I beg your pardon, Mr Toots,' said Susan, 'but I don't hear you.

'Do you think she could be brought, you know—not exactly at once, but in time—in a long time—to—to love me, you know? There!' said poor Mr Toots.

'Oh dear no!' returned Susan, shaking her head. 'I should say, never. Never!'

'Thank'ee!' said Mr Toots. 'It's of no consequence. Good-night. It's of no consequence, thank'ee!'

CHAPTER 45. The Trusty Agent

Edith went out alone that day, and returned home early. It was but a few minutes after ten o'clock, when her carriage rolled along the street in which she lived.

There was the same enforced composure on her face, that there had been when she was dressing; and the wreath upon her head encircled the same cold and steady brow. But it would have been better to have seen its leaves and flowers reft into fragments by her passionate hand, or rendered shapeless by the fitful searches of a throbbing and bewildered brain for any resting-place, than adorning such tranquillity. So obdurate, so unapproachable, so unrelenting, one would have thought that nothing could soften such a woman's nature, and that everything in life had hardened it.

Arrived at her own door, she was alighting, when some one coming quietly from the hall, and standing bareheaded, offered her his arm. The servant being thrust aside, she had no choice but to touch it; and she then knew whose arm it was.

'How is your patient, Sir?' she asked, with a curled lip.

'He is better,' returned Carker. 'He is doing very well. I have left him for the night.'

She bent her head, and was passing up the staircase, when he followed and said, speaking at the bottom:

'Madam! May I beg the favour of a minute's audience?'

She stopped and turned her eyes back 'It is an unseasonable time, Sir, and I am fatigued. Is your business urgent?'

'It is very urgent, returned Carker. 'As I am so fortunate as to have met you, let me press my petition.'

She looked down for a moment at his glistening mouth; and he looked up at her, standing above him in her stately dress, and thought, again, how beautiful she was.

'Where is Miss Dombey?' she asked the servant, aloud.

'In the morning room, Ma'am.'

'Show the way there!' Turning her eyes again on the attentive gentleman at the bottom of the stairs, and informing him with a slight motion of her head, that he was at liberty to follow, she passed on.

'I beg your pardon! Madam! Mrs Dombey!' cried the soft and nimble Carker, at her side in a moment. 'May I be permitted to entreat that Miss Dombey is not present?'

She confronted him, with a quick look, but with the same self-possession and steadiness.

'I would spare Miss Dombey,' said Carker, in a low voice, 'the knowledge of what I have to say. At least, Madam, I would leave it to you to decide whether she shall know of it or not. I owe that to you. It is my bounden duty to you. After our former interview, it would be monstrous in me if I did otherwise.'

She slowly withdrew her eyes from his face, and turning to the servant, said, 'Some other room.' He led the way to a drawing-room, which he speedily lighted up and then left them. While he remained, not a word was spoken. Edith enthroned herself upon a couch by the fire; and Mr Carker, with his hat in his hand and his eyes bent upon the carpet, stood before her, at some little distance.

'Before I hear you, Sir,' said Edith, when the door was closed, 'I wish you to hear me.'

'To be addressed by Mrs Dombey,' he returned, 'even in accents of unmerited reproach, is an honour I so greatly esteem, that although I were not her servant in all things, I should defer to such a wish, most readily.'

'If you are charged by the man whom you have just now left, Sir;' Mr Carker raised his eyes, as if he were going to counterfeit surprise, but she met them, and stopped him, if such were his intention; 'with any message to me, do not attempt to deliver it, for I will not receive it. I need scarcely ask you if you are come on such an errand. I have expected you some time.

'It is my misfortune,' he replied, 'to be here, wholly against my will, for such a purpose. Allow me to say that I am here for two purposes. That is one.'

'That one, Sir,' she returned, 'is ended. Or, if you return to it—'

'Can Mrs Dombey believe,' said Carker, coming nearer, 'that I would return to it in the face of her prohibition? Is it possible that Mrs Dombey, having no regard to my unfortunate position, is so determined to consider me inseparable from my instructor as to do me great and wilful injustice?'

'Sir,' returned Edith, bending her dark gaze full upon him, and speaking with a rising passion that inflated her proud nostril and her swelling neck, and stirred the delicate white down upon a robe she wore, thrown loosely over shoulders that could hear its snowy neighbourhood. 'Why do you present yourself to me, as you have done, and speak to me of love and duty to my husband, and pretend to think that I am happily married, and that I honour him? How dare you venture so to affront me, when you know—I do not know better, Sir: I have seen it in your every glance, and heard it in your every word—that in place of affection between us there is aversion and contempt, and that I despise him hardly less than I despise myself for being his! Injustice! If I had done justice to the torment you have made me feel, and to my sense of the insult you have put upon me, I should have slain you!'

She had asked him why he did this. Had she not been blinded by her pride and wrath, and self-humiliation,—which she was, fiercely as she bent her gaze upon him,—she would have seen the answer in his face. To bring her to this declaration.

She saw it not, and cared not whether it was there or no. She saw only the indignities and struggles she had undergone and had to undergo, and was writhing under them. As she sat looking fixedly at them, rather than at him, she plucked the feathers from a pinion of some rare and beautiful bird, which hung from her wrist by a golden thread, to serve her as a fan, and rained them on the ground.

He did not shrink beneath her gaze, but stood, until such outward signs of her anger as had escaped her control subsided, with the air of a man who had his sufficient reply in reserve and would presently deliver it. And he then spoke, looking straight into her kindling eyes.

'Madam,' he said, 'I know, and knew before to-day, that I have found no favour with you; and I knew why. Yes. I knew why. You have spoken so openly to me; I am so relieved by the possession of your confidence—'

'Confidence!' she repeated, with disdain.

He passed it over.

'—that I will make no pretence of concealment. I did see from the first, that there was no affection on your part for Mr Dombey—how could it possibly exist between such different subjects? And I have seen, since, that stronger feelings than indifference have been engendered in your breast—how could that possibly be otherwise, either, circumstanced as you have been? But was it for me to presume to avow this knowledge to you in so many words?'

'Was it for you, Sir,' she replied, 'to feign that other belief, and audaciously to thrust it on me day by day?'

'Madam, it was,' he eagerly retorted. 'If I had done less, if I had done anything but that, I should not be speaking to you thus; and I foresaw—who could better foresee, for who has had greater experience of Mr Dombey than myself?—that unless your character should prove to be as yielding and obedient as that of his first submissive lady, which I did not believe—'

A haughty smile gave him reason to observe that he might repeat this.

'I say, which I did not believe,—the time was likely to come, when such an understanding as we have now arrived at, would be serviceable.'

'Serviceable to whom, Sir?' she demanded scornfully.

'To you. I will not add to myself, as warning me to refrain even from that limited commendation of Mr Dombey, in which I can honestly indulge, in order that I may not have the misfortune of saying anything distasteful to one whose aversion and contempt,' with great expression, 'are so keen.'

'Is it honest in you, Sir,' said Edith, 'to confess to your "limited commendation," and to speak in that tone of disparagement, even of him: being his chief counsellor and flatterer!'

'Counsellor,—yes,' said Carker. 'Flatterer,—no. A little reservation I fear I must confess to. But our interest and convenience commonly oblige many of us to make professions that we cannot feel. We have partnerships of interest and convenience, friendships of interest and convenience, dealings of interest and convenience, marriages of interest and convenience, every day.'

She bit her blood-red lip; but without wavering in the dark, stern watch she kept upon him.

'Madam,' said Mr Carker, sitting down in a chair that was near her, with an air of the most profound and most considerate respect, 'why should I hesitate now, being altogether devoted to your service, to speak plainly? It was natural that a lady, endowed as you are, should think it feasible to change her husband's character in some respects, and mould him to a better form.'

'It was not natural to me, Sir,' she rejoined. 'I had never any expectation or intention of that kind.'

The proud undaunted face showed him it was resolute to wear no mask he offered, but was set upon a reckless disclosure of itself, indifferent to any aspect in which it might present itself to such as he.

'At least it was natural,' he resumed, 'that you should deem it quite possible to live with Mr Dombey as his wife, at once without submitting to him, and without coming into such violent collision with him. But, Madam, you did not know Mr Dombey (as you have since ascertained), when you thought that. You did not know how exacting and how proud he is, or how he is, if I may say so, the slave of his own greatness, and goes yoked to his own triumphal car like a beast of burden, with no idea on earth but that it is behind him and is to be drawn on, over everything and through everything.'

His teeth gleamed through his malicious relish of this conceit, as he went on talking:

'Mr Dombey is really capable of no more true consideration for you, Madam, than for me. The comparison is an extreme one; I intend it to be so; but quite just. Mr Dombey, in the plenitude of his power, asked me—I had it from his own lips yesterday morning—to be his go-between to you, because he knows I am not agreeable to you, and because he intends that I shall be a punishment for your contumacy; and besides that, because he really does consider, that I, his paid servant, am an ambassador whom it is derogatory to the dignity—not of the lady to whom I have the happiness of speaking; she has no existence in his mind—but of his wife, a part of himself, to receive. You may imagine how regardless of me, how obtuse to the possibility of my having any individual sentiment or opinion he is, when he tells me, openly, that I am so employed. You know how perfectly indifferent to your feelings he is, when he threatens you with such a messenger. As you, of course, have not forgotten that he did.'

She watched him still attentively. But he watched her too; and he saw that this indication of a knowledge on his part, of something that had passed between herself and her husband, rankled and smarted in her haughty breast, like a poisoned arrow.

'I do not recall all this to widen the breach between yourself and Mr Dombey, Madam—Heaven forbid! what would it profit me?—but as an example of the hopelessness of impressing Mr Dombey with a sense that anybody is to be considered when he is in question. We who are about him, have, in our various positions, done our part, I daresay, to confirm him in his way of thinking; but if we had not done so, others would—or they would not have been about him; and it has always been, from the beginning, the very staple of his life. Mr Dombey has had to deal, in short, with none but submissive and dependent persons, who have bowed the knee, and bent the neck, before him. He has never known what it is to have angry pride and strong resentment opposed to him.'

'But he will know it now!' she seemed to say; though her lips did not part, nor her eyes falter. He saw the soft down tremble once again, and he saw her lay the plumage of the beautiful bird against her bosom for a moment; and he unfolded one more ring of the coil into which he had gathered himself.

'Mr Dombey, though a most honourable gentleman,' he said, 'is so prone to pervert even facts to his own view, when he is at all opposed, in consequence of the warp in his mind, that he—can I give a better instance than this!—he sincerely believes (you will excuse the folly of what I am about to say; it not being mine) that his severe expression of opinion to his present wife, on a certain special occasion she may remember, before the lamented death of Mrs Skewton, produced a withering effect, and for the moment quite subdued her!'

Edith laughed. How harshly and unmusically need not be described. It is enough that he was glad to hear her.

'Madam,' he resumed, 'I have done with this. Your own opinions are so strong, and, I am persuaded, so unalterable,' he repeated those words slowly and with great emphasis, 'that I am almost afraid to incur your displeasure anew, when I say that in spite of these defects and my full knowledge of them, I have become habituated to Mr Dombey, and esteem him. But when I say so, it is not, believe me, for the mere sake of vaunting a feeling that is so utterly at variance with your own, and for which you can have no sympathy'—oh how distinct and plain and emphasized this was!—'but to give you an assurance of the zeal with which, in this unhappy matter, I am yours, and the indignation with which I regard the part I am to fill!'

She sat as if she were afraid to take her eyes from his face.

And now to unwind the last ring of the coil!

'It is growing late,' said Carker, after a pause, 'and you are, as you said, fatigued. But the second object of this interview, I must not forget. I must recommend you, I must entreat you in the most earnest manner, for sufficient reasons that I have, to be cautious in your demonstrations of regard for Miss Dombey.'

'Cautious! What do you mean?'

'To be careful how you exhibit too much affection for that young lady.'

'Too much affection, Sir!' said Edith, knitting her broad brow and rising. 'Who judges my affection, or measures it out? You?'

'It is not I who do so.' He was, or feigned to be, perplexed.

'Who then?'

'Can you not guess who then?'

'I do not choose to guess,' she answered.

'Madam,' he said after a little hesitation; meantime they had been, and still were, regarding each other as before; 'I am in a difficulty here. You have told me you will receive no message, and you have forbidden me to return to that subject; but the two subjects are so closely entwined, I find, that unless you will accept this vague caution from one who has now the honour to possess your confidence, though the way to it has been through your displeasure, I must violate the injunction you have laid upon me.'

'You know that you are free to do so, Sir,' said Edith. 'Do it.'

So pale, so trembling, so impassioned! He had not miscalculated the effect then!

'His instructions were,' he said, in a low voice, 'that I should inform you that your demeanour towards Miss Dombey is not agreeable to him. That it suggests comparisons to him which are not favourable to himself. That he desires it may be wholly changed; and that if you are in earnest, he is confident it will be; for your continued show of affection will not benefit its object.'

'That is a threat,' she said.

'That is a threat,' he answered, in his voiceless manner of assent: adding aloud, 'but not directed against you.'

Proud, erect, and dignified, as she stood confronting him; and looking through him as she did, with her full bright flashing eye; and smiling, as she was, with scorn and bitterness; she sunk as if the ground had dropped beneath her, and in an instant would have fallen on the floor, but that he caught her in his arms. As instantaneously she threw him off, the moment that he touched her, and, drawing back, confronted him again, immoveable, with her hand stretched out.

'Please to leave me. Say no more to-night.'

'I feel the urgency of this,' said Mr Carker, 'because it is impossible to say what unforeseen consequences might arise, or how soon, from your being unacquainted with his state of mind. I understand Miss Dombey is concerned, now, at the dismissal of her old servant, which is likely to have been a minor consequence in itself. You don't blame me for requesting that Miss Dombey might not be present. May I hope so?'

'I do not. Please to leave me, Sir.'

'I knew that your regard for the young lady, which is very sincere and strong, I am well persuaded, would render it a great unhappiness to you, ever to be a prey to the reflection that you had injured her position and ruined her future hopes,' said Carker hurriedly, but eagerly.

'No more to-night. Leave me, if you please.'

'I shall be here constantly in my attendance upon him, and in the transaction of business matters. You will allow me to see you again, and to consult what should be done, and learn your wishes?'

She motioned him towards the door.

'I cannot even decide whether to tell him I have spoken to you yet; or to lead him to suppose that I have deferred doing so, for want of opportunity, or for any other reason. It will be necessary that you should enable me to consult with you very soon.

'At any time but now,' she answered.

'You will understand, when I wish to see you, that Miss Dombey is not to be present; and that I seek an interview as one who has the happiness to possess your confidence, and who comes to render you every assistance in his power, and, perhaps, on many occasions, to ward off evil from her?'

Looking at him still with the same apparent dread of releasing him for a moment from the influence of her steady gaze, whatever that might be, she answered, 'Yes!' and once more bade him go.

He bowed, as if in compliance; but turning back, when he had nearly reached the door, said:

'I am forgiven, and have explained my fault. May I—for Miss Dombey's sake, and for my own—take your hand before I go?'

She gave him the gloved hand she had maimed last night. He took it in one of his, and kissed it, and withdrew. And when he had closed the door, he waved the hand with which he had taken hers, and thrust it in his breast.

Edith saw no one that night, but locked her door, and kept herself alone.

She did not weep; she showed no greater agitation, outwardly, than when she was riding home. She laid as proud a head upon her pillow as she had borne in her carriage; and her prayer ran thus:

'May this man be a liar! For if he has spoken truth, she is lost to me, and I have no hope left!'

This man, meanwhile, went home musing to bed, thinking, with a dainty pleasure, how imperious her passion was, how she had sat before him in her beauty, with the dark eyes that had never turned away but once; how the white down had fluttered; how the bird's feathers had been strewn upon the ground.

CHAPTER 46. Recognizant and Reflective

Among sundry minor alterations in Mr Carker's life and habits that began to take place at this time, none was more remarkable than the extraordinary diligence with which he applied himself to business, and the closeness with which he investigated every detail that the affairs of the House laid open to him. Always active and penetrating in such matters, his lynx-eyed vigilance now increased twenty-fold. Not only did his weary watch keep pace with every present point that every day presented to him in some new form, but in the midst of these engrossing occupations he found leisure—that is, he made it—to review the past transactions of the Firm, and his share in them, during a long series of years. Frequently when the clerks were all gone, the offices dark and empty, and all similar places of business shut up, Mr Carker, with the whole anatomy of the iron room laid bare before him, would explore the mysteries of books and papers, with the patient progress of a man who was dissecting the minutest nerves and fibres of his subject. Perch, the messenger, who usually remained on these occasions, to entertain himself with the perusal of the Price Current by the light of one candle, or to doze over the fire in the outer office, at the imminent risk every moment of diving head foremost into the coal-box, could not withhold the tribute of his admiration from this zealous conduct, although it much contracted his domestic enjoyments; and again, and again, expatiated to Mrs Perch (now nursing twins) on the industry and acuteness of their managing gentleman in the City.

The same increased and sharp attention that Mr Carker bestowed on the business of the House, he applied to his own personal affairs. Though not a partner in the concern—a distinction hitherto reserved solely to inheritors of the great name of Dombey—he was in the receipt of some percentage on its dealings; and, participating in all its facilities for the employment of money to advantage, was considered, by the minnows among the tritons of the East, a rich man. It began to be said, among these shrewd observers, that Jem Carker, of Dombey's, was looking about him to see what he was worth; and that he was calling in his money at a good time, like the long-headed fellow he was; and bets were even offered on the Stock Exchange that Jem was going to marry a rich widow.

Yet these cares did not in the least interfere with Mr Carker's watching of his chief, or with his cleanness, neatness, sleekness, or any cat-like quality he possessed. It was not so much that there was a change in him, in reference to any of his habits, as that the whole man was intensified. Everything that had been observable in him before, was observable now, but with a greater amount of concentration. He did each single thing, as if he did nothing else—a pretty certain indication in a man of that range of ability and purpose, that he is doing something which sharpens and keeps alive his keenest powers.

The only decided alteration in him was, that as he rode to and fro along the streets, he would fall into deep fits of musing, like that in which he had come away from Mr Dombey's house, on the morning of that gentleman's disaster. At such times, he would keep clear of the obstacles in his way, mechanically; and would appear to see and hear nothing until arrival at his destination, or some sudden chance or effort roused him.

Walking his white-legged horse thus, to the counting-house of Dombey and Son one day, he was as unconscious of the observation of two pairs of women's eyes, as of the fascinated orbs of Rob the Grinder, who, in waiting a street's length from the appointed place, as a demonstration of punctuality, vainly touched and retouched his hat to attract attention, and trotted along on foot, by his master's side, prepared to hold his stirrup when he should alight.

'See where he goes!' cried one of these two women, an old creature, who stretched out her shrivelled arm to point him out to her companion, a young woman, who stood close beside her, withdrawn like herself into a gateway.

Mrs Brown's daughter looked out, at this bidding on the part of Mrs Brown; and there were wrath and vengeance in her face.

'I never thought to look at him again,' she said, in a low voice; 'but it's well I should, perhaps. I see. I see!'

'Not changed!' said the old woman, with a look of eager malice.

'He changed!' returned the other. 'What for? What has he suffered? There is change enough for twenty in me. Isn't that enough?'

'See where he goes!' muttered the old woman, watching her daughter with her red eyes; 'so easy and so trim a-horseback, while we are in the mud.'

'And of it,' said her daughter impatiently. 'We are mud, underneath his horse's feet. What should we be?'

In the intentness with which she looked after him again, she made a hasty gesture with her hand when the old woman began to reply, as if her view could be obstructed by mere sound. Her mother watching her, and not him, remained silent; until her kindling glance subsided, and she drew a long breath, as if in the relief of his being gone.

'Deary!' said the old woman then. 'Alice! Handsome gall Ally!' She gently shook her sleeve to arouse her attention. 'Will you let him go like that, when you can wring money from him? Why, it's a wickedness, my daughter.'

'Haven't I told you, that I will not have money from him?' she returned. 'And don't you yet believe me? Did I take his sister's money? Would I touch a penny, if I knew it, that had gone through his white hands—unless it was, indeed, that I could poison it, and send it back to him? Peace, mother, and come away.

'And him so rich?' murmured the old woman. 'And us so poor!'

'Poor in not being able to pay him any of the harm we owe him,' returned her daughter. 'Let him give me that sort of riches, and I'll take them from him, and use them. Come away. Its no good looking at his horse. Come away, mother!'

But the old woman, for whom the spectacle of Rob the Grinder returning down the street, leading the riderless horse, appeared to have some extraneous interest that it did not possess in itself, surveyed that young man with the utmost earnestness; and seeming to have whatever doubts she entertained, resolved as he drew nearer, glanced at her daughter with brightened eyes and with her finger on her lip, and emerging from the gateway at the moment of his passing, touched him on the shoulder.

'Why, where's my sprightly Rob been, all this time!' she said, as he turned round.

The sprightly Rob, whose sprightliness was very much diminished by the salutation, looked exceedingly dismayed, and said, with the water rising in his eyes:

'Oh! why can't you leave a poor cove alone, Misses Brown, when he's getting an honest livelihood and conducting himself respectable? What do you come and deprive a cove of his character for, by talking to him in the streets, when he's taking his master's horse to a honest stable—a horse you'd go and sell for cats' and dogs' meat if you had your way! Why, I thought,' said the Grinder, producing his concluding remark as if it were the climax of all his injuries, 'that you was dead long ago!'

'This is the way,' cried the old woman, appealing to her daughter, 'that he talks to me, who knew him weeks and months together, my deary, and have stood his friend many and many a time among the pigeon-fancying tramps and bird-catchers.'

'Let the birds be, will you, Misses Brown?' retorted Rob, in a tone of the acutest anguish. 'I think a cove had better have to do with lions than them little creeturs, for they're always flying back in your face when you least expect it. Well, how d'ye do and what do you want?' These polite inquiries the Grinder uttered, as it were under protest, and with great exasperation and vindictiveness.

'Hark how he speaks to an old friend, my deary!' said Mrs Brown, again appealing to her daughter. 'But there's some of his old friends not so patient as me. If I was to tell some that he knows, and has spotted and cheated with, where to find him—'

'Will you hold your tongue, Misses Brown?' interrupted the miserable Grinder, glancing quickly round, as though he expected to see his master's teeth shining at his elbow. 'What do you take a pleasure in ruining a cove for? At your time of life too! when you ought to be thinking of a variety of things!'

'What a gallant horse!' said the old woman, patting the animal's neck.

'Let him alone, will you, Misses Brown?' cried Rob, pushing away her hand. 'You're enough to drive a penitent cove mad!'

'Why, what hurt do I do him, child?' returned the old woman.

'Hurt?' said Rob. 'He's got a master that would find it out if he was touched with a straw.' And he blew upon the place where the old woman's hand had rested for a moment, and smoothed it gently with his finger, as if he seriously believed what he said.

The old woman looking back to mumble and mouth at her daughter, who followed, kept close to Rob's heels as he walked on with the bridle in his hand; and pursued the conversation.

'A good place, Rob, eh?' said she. 'You're in luck, my child.'

'Oh don't talk about luck, Misses Brown,' returned the wretched Grinder, facing round and stopping. 'If you'd never come, or if you'd go away, then indeed a cove might be considered tolerable lucky. Can't you go along, Misses Brown, and not foller me!' blubbered Rob, with sudden defiance. 'If the young woman's a friend of yours, why don't she take you away, instead of letting you make yourself so disgraceful!'

'What!' croaked the old woman, putting her face close to his, with a malevolent grin upon it that puckered up the loose skin down in her very throat. 'Do you deny your old chum! Have you lurked to my house fifty times, and slept sound in a corner when you had no other bed but the paving-stones, and do you talk to me like this! Have I bought and sold with you, and helped you in my way of business, schoolboy, sneak, and what not, and do you tell me to go along? Could I raise a crowd of old company about you to-morrow morning, that would follow you to ruin like copies of your own shadow, and do you turn on me with your bold looks! I'll go. Come, Alice.'

'Stop, Misses Brown!' cried the distracted Grinder. 'What are you doing of? Don't put yourself in a passion! Don't let her go, if you please. I haven't meant any offence. I said "how d'ye do," at first, didn't I? But you wouldn't answer. How you do? Besides,' said Rob piteously, 'look here! How can a cove stand talking in the street with his master's prad a wanting to be took to be rubbed down, and his master up to every individgle thing that happens!'

The old woman made a show of being partially appeased, but shook her head, and mouthed and muttered still.

'Come along to the stables, and have a glass of something that's good for you, Misses Brown, can't you?' said Rob, 'instead of going on, like that, which is no good to you, nor anybody else. Come along with her, will you be so kind?' said Rob. 'I'm sure I'm delighted to see her, if it wasn't for the horse!'

With this apology, Rob turned away, a rueful picture of despair, and walked his charge down a bye street' The old woman, mouthing at her daughter, followed close upon him. The daughter followed.

Turning into a silent little square or court-yard that had a great church tower rising above it, and a packer's warehouse, and a bottle-maker's warehouse, for its places of business, Rob the Grinder delivered the white-legged horse to the hostler of a quaint stable at the corner; and inviting Mrs Brown and her daughter to seat themselves upon a stone bench at the gate of that establishment, soon reappeared from a neighbouring public-house with a pewter measure and a glass.

'Here's master—Mr Carker, child!' said the old woman, slowly, as her sentiment before drinking. 'Lord bless him!'

'Why, I didn't tell you who he was,' observed Rob, with staring eyes.

'We know him by sight,' said Mrs Brown, whose working mouth and nodding head stopped for the moment, in the fixedness of her attention. 'We saw him pass this morning, afore he got off his horse; when you were ready to take it.'

'Ay, ay,' returned Rob, appearing to wish that his readiness had carried him to any other place.—'What's the matter with her? Won't she drink?'

This inquiry had reference to Alice, who, folded in her cloak, sat a little apart, profoundly inattentive to his offer of the replenished glass.

The old woman shook her head. 'Don't mind her,' she said; 'she's a strange creetur, if you know'd her, Rob. But Mr Carker—'

'Hush!' said Rob, glancing cautiously up at the packer's, and at the bottle-maker's, as if, from any one of the tiers of warehouses, Mr Carker might be looking down. 'Softly.'

'Why, he ain't here!' cried Mrs Brown.

'I don't know that,' muttered Rob, whose glance even wandered to the church tower, as if he might be there, with a supernatural power of hearing.

'Good master?' inquired Mrs Brown.

Rob nodded; and added, in a low voice, 'precious sharp.'

'Lives out of town, don't he, lovey?' said the old woman.

'When he's at home,' returned Rob; 'but we don't live at home just now.'

'Where then?' asked the old woman.

'Lodgings; up near Mr Dombey's,' returned Rob.

The younger woman fixed her eyes so searchingly upon him, and so suddenly, that Rob was quite confounded, and offered the glass again, but with no more effect upon her than before.

'Mr Dombey—you and I used to talk about him, sometimes, you know,' said Rob to Mrs Brown. 'You used to get me to talk about him.'

The old woman nodded.

'Well, Mr Dombey, he's had a fall from his horse,' said Rob, unwillingly; 'and my master has to be up there, more than usual, either with him, or Mrs Dombey, or some of 'em; and so we've come to town.'

'Are they good friends, lovey?'asked the old woman.

'Who?' retorted Rob.

'He and she?'

'What, Mr and Mrs Dombey?' said Rob. 'How should I know!'

'Not them—Master and Mrs Dombey, chick,' replied the old woman, coaxingly.

'I don't know,' said Rob, looking round him again. 'I suppose so. How curious you are, Misses Brown! Least said, soonest mended.'

'Why there's no harm in it!' exclaimed the old woman, with a laugh, and a clap of her hands. 'Sprightly Rob, has grown tame since he has been well off! There's no harm in It.

'No, there's no harm in it, I know,' returned Rob, with the same distrustful glance at the packer's and the bottle-maker's, and the church; 'but blabbing, if it's only about the number of buttons on my master's coat, won't do. I tell you it won't do with him. A cove had better drown himself. He says so. I shouldn't have so much as told you what his name was, if you hadn't known it. Talk about somebody else.'

As Rob took another cautious survey of the yard, the old woman made a secret motion to her daughter. It was momentary, but the daughter, with a slight look of intelligence, withdrew her eyes from the boy's face, and sat folded in her cloak as before.

'Rob, lovey!' said the old woman, beckoning him to the other end of the bench. 'You were always a pet and favourite of mine. Now, weren't you? Don't you know you were?'

'Yes, Misses Brown,' replied the Grinder, with a very bad grace.

'And you could leave me!' said the old woman, flinging her arms about his neck. 'You could go away, and grow almost out of knowledge, and never come to tell your poor old friend how fortunate you were, proud lad! Oho, Oho!'

'Oh here's a dreadful go for a cove that's got a master wide awake in the neighbourhood!' exclaimed the wretched Grinder. 'To be howled over like this here!'

'Won't you come and see me, Robby?' cried Mrs Brown. 'Oho, won't you ever come and see me?'

'Yes, I tell you! Yes, I will!' returned the Grinder.

'That's my own Rob! That's my lovey!' said Mrs Brown, drying the tears upon her shrivelled face, and giving him a tender squeeze. 'At the old place, Rob?'

'Yes,' replied the Grinder.

'Soon, Robby dear?' cried Mrs Brown; 'and often?'

'Yes. Yes. Yes,' replied Rob. 'I will indeed, upon my soul and body.'

'And then,' said Mrs Brown, with her arms uplifted towards the sky, and her head thrown back and shaking, 'if he's true to his word, I'll never come a-near him though I know where he is, and never breathe a syllable about him! Never!'

This ejaculation seemed a drop of comfort to the miserable Grinder, who shook Mrs Brown by the hand upon it, and implored her with tears in his eyes, to leave a cove and not destroy his prospects. Mrs Brown, with another fond embrace, assented; but in the act of following her daughter, turned back, with her finger stealthily raised, and asked in a hoarse whisper for some money.

'A shilling, dear!' she said, with her eager avaricious face, 'or sixpence! For old acquaintance sake. I'm so poor. And my handsome gal'—looking over her shoulder—'she's my gal, Rob—half starves me.

But as the reluctant Grinder put it in her hand, her daughter, coming quietly back, caught the hand in hen, and twisted out the coin.

'What,' she said, 'mother! always money! money from the first, and to the last' Do you mind so little what I said but now? Here. Take it!'

The old woman uttered a moan as the money was restored, but without in any other way opposing its restoration, hobbled at her daughter's side out of the yard, and along the bye street upon which it opened. The astonished and dismayed Rob staring after them, saw that they stopped, and fell to earnest conversation very soon; and more than once observed a darkly threatening action of the younger woman's hand (obviously having reference to someone of whom they spoke), and a crooning feeble imitation of it on the part of Mrs Brown, that made him earnestly hope he might not be the subject of their discourse.

With the present consolation that they were gone, and with the prospective comfort that Mrs Brown could not live for ever, and was not likely to live long to trouble him, the Grinder, not otherwise regretting his misdeeds than as they were attended with such disagreeable incidental consequences, composed his ruffled features to a more serene expression by thinking of the admirable manner in which he had disposed of Captain Cuttle (a reflection that seldom failed to put him in a flow of spirits), and went to the Dombey Counting House to receive his master's orders.

There his master, so subtle and vigilant of eye, that Rob quaked before him, more than half expecting to be taxed with Mrs Brown, gave him the usual morning's box of papers for Mr Dombey, and a note for Mrs Dombey: merely nodding his head as an enjoinder to be careful, and to use dispatch—a mysterious admonition, fraught in the Grinder's imagination with dismal warnings and threats; and more powerful with him than any words.

Alone again, in his own room, Mr Carker applied himself to work, and worked all day. He saw many visitors; overlooked a number of documents; went in and out, to and from, sundry places of mercantile resort; and indulged in no more abstraction until the day's business was done. But, when the usual clearance of papers from his table was made at last, he fell into his thoughtful mood once more.

He was standing in his accustomed place and attitude, with his eyes intently fixed upon the ground, when his brother entered to bring back some letters that had been taken out in the course of the day. He put them quietly on the table, and was going immediately, when Mr Carker the Manager, whose eyes had rested on him, on his entrance, as if they had all this time had him for the subject of their contemplation, instead of the office- floor, said:

'Well, John Carker, and what brings you here?'

His brother pointed to the letters, and was again withdrawing.

'I wonder,' said the Manager, 'that you can come and go, without inquiring how our master is'.

'We had word this morning in the Counting House, that Mr Dombey was doing well,' replied his brother.

'You are such a meek fellow,' said the Manager, with a smile,—'but you have grown so, in the course of years—that if any harm came to him, you'd be miserable, I dare swear now.'

'I should be truly sorry, James,' returned the other.

'He would be sorry!' said the Manager, pointing at him, as if there were some other person present to whom he was appealing. 'He would be truly sorry! This brother of mine! This junior of the place, this slighted piece of lumber, pushed aside with his face to the wall, like a rotten picture, and left so, for Heaven knows how many years he's all gratitude and respect, and devotion too, he would have me believe!'

'I would have you believe nothing, James,' returned the other. 'Be as just to me as you would to any other man below you. You ask a question, and I answer it.'

'And have you nothing, Spaniel,' said the Manager, with unusual irascibility, 'to complain of in him? No proud treatment to resent, no insolence, no foolery of state, no exaction of any sort! What the devil! are you man or mouse?'

'It would be strange if any two persons could be together for so many years, especially as superior and inferior, without each having something to complain of in the other—as he thought, at all events, replied John Carker. 'But apart from my history here—'

'His history here!' exclaimed the Manager. 'Why, there it is. The very fact that makes him an extreme case, puts him out of the whole chapter! Well?'

'Apart from that, which, as you hint, gives me a reason to be thankful that I alone (happily for all the rest) possess, surely there is no one in the House who would not say and feel at least as much. You do not think that anybody here would be indifferent to a mischance or misfortune happening to the head of the House, or anything than truly sorry for it?'

'You have good reason to be bound to him too!' said the Manager, contemptuously. 'Why, don't you believe that you are kept here, as a cheap example, and a famous instance of the clemency of Dombey and Son, redounding to the credit of the illustrious House?'

'No,' replied his brother, mildly, 'I have long believed that I am kept here for more kind and disinterested reasons.

'But you were going,' said the Manager, with the snarl of a tiger-cat, 'to recite some Christian precept, I observed.'

'Nay, James,' returned the other, 'though the tie of brotherhood between us has been long broken and thrown away—'

'Who broke it, good Sir?' said the Manager.

'I, by my misconduct. I do not charge it upon you.'

The Manager replied, with that mute action of his bristling mouth, 'Oh, you don't charge it upon me!' and bade him go on.

'I say, though there is not that tie between us, do not, I entreat, assail me with unnecessary taunts, or misinterpret what I say, or would say. I was only going to suggest to you that it would be a mistake to suppose that it is only you, who have been selected here, above all others, for advancement, confidence and distinction (selected, in the beginning, I know, for your great ability and trustfulness), and who communicate more freely with Mr Dombey than anyone, and stand, it may be said, on equal terms with him, and have been favoured and enriched by him—that it would be a mistake to suppose that it is only you who are tender of his welfare and reputation. There is no one in the House, from yourself down to the lowest, I sincerely believe, who does not participate in that feeling.'

'You lie!' said the Manager, red with sudden anger. 'You're a hypocrite, John Carker, and you lie.'

'James!' cried the other, flushing in his turn. 'What do you mean by these insulting words? Why do you so basely use them to me, unprovoked?'

'I tell you,' said the Manager, 'that your hypocrisy and meekness—that all the hypocrisy and meekness of this place—is not worth that to me,' snapping his thumb and finger, 'and that I see through it as if it were air! There is not a man employed here, standing between myself and the lowest in place (of whom you are very considerate, and with reason, for he is not far off), who wouldn't be glad at heart to see his master humbled: who does not hate him, secretly: who does not wish him evil rather than good: and who would not turn upon him, if he had the power and boldness. The nearer to his favour, the nearer to his insolence; the closer to him, the farther from him. That's the creed here!'

'I don't know,' said his brother, whose roused feelings had soon yielded to surprise, 'who may have abused your ear with such representations; or why you have chosen to try me, rather than another. But that you have been trying me, and tampering with me, I am now sure. You have a different manner and a different aspect from any that I ever saw m you. I will only say to you, once more, you are deceived.'

'I know I am,' said the Manager. 'I have told you so.'

'Not by me,' returned his brother. 'By your informant, if you have one. If not, by your own thoughts and suspicions.'

'I have no suspicions,' said the Manager. 'Mine are certainties. You pusillanimous, abject, cringing dogs! All making the same show, all canting the same story, all whining the same professions, all harbouring the same transparent secret.'

His brother withdrew, without saying more, and shut the door as he concluded. Mr Carker the Manager drew a chair close before the fire, and fell to beating the coals softly with the poker.

'The faint-hearted, fawning knaves,' he muttered, with his two shining rows of teeth laid bare. 'There's not one among them, who wouldn't feign to be so shocked and outraged—! Bah! There's not one among them, but if he had at once the power, and the wit and daring to use it, would scatter Dombey's pride and lay it low, as ruthlessly as I rake out these ashes.'

As he broke them up and strewed them in the grate, he looked on with a thoughtful smile at what he was doing. 'Without the same queen beckoner too!' he added presently; 'and there is pride there, not to be forgotten—witness our own acquaintance!' With that he fell into a deeper reverie, and sat pondering over the blackening grate, until he rose up like a man who had been absorbed in a book, and looking round him took his hat and gloves, went to where his horse was waiting, mounted, and rode away through the lighted streets, for it was evening.

He rode near Mr Dombey's house; and falling into a walk as he approached it, looked up at the windows The window where he had once seen Florence sitting with her dog attracted his attention first, though there was no light in it; but he smiled as he carried his eyes up the tall front of the house, and seemed to leave that object superciliously behind.

'Time was,' he said, 'when it was well to watch even your rising little star, and know in what quarter there were clouds, to shadow you if needful. But a planet has arisen, and you are lost in its light.'

He turned the white-legged horse round the street corner, and sought one shining window from among those at the back of the house. Associated with it was a certain stately presence, a gloved hand, the remembrance how the feathers of a beautiful bird's wing had been showered down upon the floor, and how the light white down upon a robe had stirred and rustled, as in the rising of a distant storm. These were the things he carried with him as he turned away again, and rode through the darkening and deserted Parks at a quick rate.

In fatal truth, these were associated with a woman, a proud woman, who hated him, but who by slow and sure degrees had been led on by his craft, and her pride and resentment, to endure his company, and little by little to receive him as one who had the privilege to talk to her of her own defiant disregard of her own husband, and her abandonment of high consideration for herself. They were associated with a woman who hated him deeply, and who knew him, and who mistrusted him because she knew him, and because he knew her; but who fed her fierce resentment by suffering him to draw nearer and yet nearer to her every day, in spite of the hate she cherished for him. In spite of it! For that very reason; since in its depths, too far down for her threatening eye to pierce, though she could see into them dimly, lay the dark retaliation, whose faintest shadow seen once and shuddered at, and never seen again, would have been sufficient stain upon her soul.

Did the phantom of such a woman flit about him on his ride; true to the reality, and obvious to him?

Yes. He saw her in his mind, exactly as she was. She bore him company with her pride, resentment, hatred, all as plain to him as her beauty; with nothing plainer to him than her hatred of him. He saw her sometimes haughty and repellent at his side, and some times down among his horse's feet, fallen and in the dust. But he always saw her as she was, without disguise, and watched her on the dangerous way that she was going.

And when his ride was over, and he was newly dressed, and came into the light of her bright room with his bent head, soft voice, and soothing smile, he saw her yet as plainly. He even suspected the mystery of the gloved hand, and held it all the longer in his own for that suspicion. Upon the dangerous way that she was going, he was, still; and not a footprint did she mark upon it, but he set his own there, straight.

CHAPTER 47. The Thunderbolt

The barrier between Mr Dombey and his wife was not weakened by time. Ill-assorted couple, unhappy in themselves and in each other, bound together by no tie but the manacle that joined their fettered hands, and straining that so harshly, in their shrinking asunder, that it wore and chafed to the bone, Time, consoler of affliction and softener of anger, could do nothing to help them. Their pride, however different in kind and object, was equal in degree; and, in their flinty opposition, struck out fire between them which might smoulder or might blaze, as circumstances were, but burned up everything within their mutual reach, and made their marriage way a road of ashes.

Let us be just to him. In the monstrous delusion of his life, swelling with every grain of sand that shifted in its glass, he urged her on, he little thought to what, or considered how; but still his feeling towards her, such as it was, remained as at first. She had the grand demerit of unaccountably putting herself in opposition to the recognition of his vast importance, and to the acknowledgment of her complete submission to it, and so far it was necessary to correct and reduce her; but otherwise he still considered her, in his cold way, a lady capable of doing honour, if she would, to his choice and name, and of reflecting credit on his proprietorship.

Now, she, with all her might of passionate and proud resentment, bent her dark glance from day to day, and hour to hour—from that night in her own chamber, when she had sat gazing at the shadows on the wall, to the deeper night fast coming—upon one figure directing a crowd of humiliations and exasperations against her; and that figure, still her husband's.

Was Mr Dombey's master-vice, that ruled him so inexorably, an unnatural characteristic? It might be worthwhile, sometimes, to inquire what Nature is, and how men work to change her, and whether, in the enforced distortions so produced, it is not natural to be unnatural. Coop any son or daughter of our mighty mother within narrow range, and bind the prisoner to one idea, and foster it by servile worship of it on the part of the few timid or designing people standing round, and what is Nature to the willing captive who has never risen up upon the wings of a free mind—drooping and useless soon—to see her in her comprehensive truth!

Alas! are there so few things in the world, about us, most unnatural, and yet most natural in being so? Hear the magistrate or judge admonish the unnatural outcasts of society; unnatural in brutal habits, unnatural in want of decency, unnatural in losing and confounding all distinctions between good and evil; unnatural in ignorance, in vice, in recklessness, in contumacy, in mind, in looks, in everything. But follow the good clergyman or doctor, who, with his life imperilled at every breath he draws, goes down into their dens, lying within the echoes of our carriage wheels and daily tread upon the pavement stones. Look round upon the world of odious sights—millions of immortal creatures have no other world on earth—at the lightest mention of which humanity revolts, and dainty delicacy living in the next street, stops her ears, and lisps 'I don't believe it!' Breathe the polluted air, foul with every impurity that is poisonous to health and life; and have every sense, conferred upon our race for its delight and happiness, offended, sickened and disgusted, and made a channel by which misery and death alone can enter. Vainly attempt to think of any simple plant, or flower, or wholesome weed, that, set in this foetid bed, could have its natural growth, or put its little leaves off to the sun as GOD designed it. And then, calling up some ghastly child, with stunted form and wicked face, hold forth on its unnatural sinfulness, and lament its being, so early, far away from Heaven—but think a little of its having been conceived, and born and bred, in Hell!

Those who study the physical sciences, and bring them to bear upon the health of Man, tell us that if the noxious particles that rise from vitiated air were palpable to the sight, we should see them lowering in a dense black cloud above such haunts, and rolling slowly on to corrupt the better portions of a town. But if the moral pestilence that rises with them, and in the eternal laws of our Nature, is inseparable from them, could be made discernible too, how terrible the revelation! Then should we see depravity, impiety, drunkenness, theft, murder, and a long train of nameless sins against the natural affections and repulsions of mankind, overhanging the devoted spots, and creeping on, to blight the innocent and spread contagion among the pure. Then should we see how the same poisoned fountains that flow into our hospitals and lazar-houses, inundate the jails, and make the convict-ships swim deep, and roll across the seas, and over-run vast continents with crime. Then should we stand appalled to know, that where we generate disease to strike our children down and entail itself on unborn generations, there also we breed, by the same certain process, infancy that knows no innocence, youth without modesty or shame, maturity that is mature in nothing but in suffering and guilt, blasted old age that is a scandal on the form we bear, unnatural humanity! When we shall gather grapes from thorns, and figs from thistles; when fields of grain shall spring up from the offal in the bye-ways of our wicked cities, and roses bloom in the fat churchyards that they cherish; then we may look for natural humanity, and find it growing from such seed.

Oh for a good spirit who would take the house-tops off, with a more potent and benignant hand than the lame demon in the tale, and show a Christian people what dark shapes issue from amidst their homes, to swell the retinue of the Destroying Angel as he moves forth among them! For only one night's view of the pale phantoms rising from the scenes of our too-long neglect; and from the thick and sullen air where Vice and Fever propagate together, raining the tremendous social retributions which are ever pouring down, and ever coming thicker! Bright and blest the morning that should rise on such a night: for men, delayed no more by stumbling-blocks of their own making, which are but specks of dust upon the path between them and eternity, would then apply themselves, like creatures of one common origin, owing one duty to the Father of one family, and tending to one common end, to make the world a better place!

Not the less bright and blest would that day be for rousing some who never have looked out upon the world of human life around them, to a knowledge of their own relation to it, and for making them acquainted with a perversion of nature in their own contracted sympathies and estimates; as great, and yet as natural in its development when once begun, as the lowest degradation known.'

But no such day had ever dawned on Mr Dombey, or his wife; and the course of each was taken.

Through six months that ensued upon his accident, they held the same relations one towards the other. A marble rock could not have stood more obdurately in his way than she; and no chilled spring, lying uncheered by any ray of light in the depths of a deep cave, could be more sullen or more cold than he.

The hope that had fluttered within her when the promise of her new home dawned, was quite gone from the heart of Florence now. That home was nearly two years old; and even the patient trust that was in her, could not survive the daily blight of such experience. If she had any lingering fancy in the nature of hope left, that Edith and her father might be happier together, in some distant time, she had none, now, that her father would ever love her. The little interval in which she had imagined that she saw some small relenting in him, was forgotten in the long remembrance of his coldness since and before, or only remembered as a sorrowful delusion.

Florence loved him still, but, by degrees, had come to love him rather as some dear one who had been, or who might have been, than as the hard reality before her eyes. Something of the softened sadness with which she loved the memory of little Paul, or of her mother, seemed to enter now into her thoughts of him, and to make them, as it were, a dear remembrance. Whether it was that he was dead to her, and that partly for this reason, partly for his share in those old objects of her affection, and partly for the long association of him with hopes that were withered and tendernesses he had frozen, she could not have told; but the father whom she loved began to be a vague and dreamy idea to her: hardly more substantially connected with her real life, than the image she would sometimes conjure up, of her dear brother yet alive, and growing to be a man, who would protect and cherish her.

The change, if it may be called one, had stolen on her like the change from childhood to womanhood, and had come with it. Florence was almost seventeen, when, in her lonely musings, she was conscious of these thoughts.'

She was often alone now, for the old association between her and her Mama was greatly changed. At the time of her father's accident, and when he was lying in his room downstairs, Florence had first observed that Edith avoided her. Wounded and shocked, and yet unable to reconcile this with her affection when they did meet, she sought her in her own room at night, once more.

'Mama,' said Florence, stealing softly to her side, 'have I offended you?'

Edith answered 'No.'

'I must have done something,' said Florence. 'Tell me what it is. You have changed your manner to me, dear Mama. I cannot say how instantly I feel the least change; for I love you with my whole heart.'

'As I do you,' said Edith. 'Ah, Florence, believe me never more than now!'

'Why do you go away from me so often, and keep away?' asked Florence. 'And why do you sometimes look so strangely on me, dear Mama? You do so, do you not?'

Edith signified assent with her dark eyes.

'Why?' returned Florence imploringly. 'Tell me why, that I may know how to please you better; and tell me this shall not be so any more.

'My Florence,' answered Edith, taking the hand that embraced her neck, and looking into the eyes that looked into hers so lovingly, as Florence knelt upon the ground before her; 'why it is, I cannot tell you. It is neither for me to say, nor you to hear; but that it is, and that it must be, I know. Should I do it if I did not?'

'Are we to be estranged, Mama?' asked Florence, gazing at her like one frightened.

Edith's silent lips formed 'Yes.'

Florence looked at her with increasing fear and wonder, until she could see her no more through the blinding tears that ran down her face.

'Florence! my life!' said Edith, hurriedly, 'listen to me. I cannot bear to see this grief. Be calmer. You see that I am composed, and is it nothing to me?'

She resumed her steady voice and manner as she said the latter words, and added presently:

'Not wholly estranged. Partially: and only that, in appearance, Florence, for in my own breast I am still the same to you, and ever will be. But what I do is not done for myself.'

'Is it for me, Mama?' asked Florence.

'It is enough,' said Edith, after a pause, 'to know what it is; why, matters little. Dear Florence, it is better—it is necessary—it must be—that our association should be less frequent. The confidence there has been between us must be broken off.'

'When?' cried Florence. 'Oh, Mama, when?'

'Now,' said Edith.

'For all time to come?' asked Florence.

'I do not say that,' answered Edith. 'I do not know that. Nor will I say that companionship between us is, at the best, an ill-assorted and unholy union, of which I might have known no good could come. My way here has been through paths that you will never tread, and my way henceforth may lie— God knows—I do not see it—'

Her voice died away into silence; and she sat, looking at Florence, and almost shrinking from her, with the same strange dread and wild avoidance that Florence had noticed once before. The same dark pride and rage succeeded, sweeping over her form and features like an angry chord across the strings of a wild harp. But no softness or humility ensued on that. She did not lay her head down now, and weep, and say that she had no hope but in Florence. She held it up as if she were a beautiful Medusa, looking on him, face to face, to strike him dead. Yes, and she would have done it, if she had had the charm.

'Mama,' said Florence, anxiously, 'there is a change in you, in more than what you say to me, which alarms me. Let me stay with you a little.'

'No,' said Edith, 'no, dearest. I am best left alone now, and I do best to keep apart from you, of all else. Ask me no questions, but believe that what I am when I seem fickle or capricious to you, I am not of my own will, or for myself. Believe, though we are stranger to each other than we have been, that I am unchanged to you within. Forgive me for having ever darkened your dark home—I am a shadow on it, I know well—and let us never speak of this again.'

'Mama,' sobbed Florence, 'we are not to part?'

'We do this that we may not part,' said Edith. 'Ask no more. Go, Florence! My love and my remorse go with you!'

She embraced her, and dismissed her; and as Florence passed out of her room, Edith looked on the retiring figure, as if her good angel went out in that form, and left her to the haughty and indignant passions that now claimed her for their own, and set their seal upon her brow.

From that hour, Florence and she were, as they had been, no more. For days together, they would seldom meet, except at table, and when Mr Dombey was present. Then Edith, imperious, inflexible, and silent, never looked at her. Whenever Mr Carker was of the party, as he often was, during the progress of Mr Dombey's recovery, and afterwards, Edith held herself more removed from her, and was more distant towards her, than at other times. Yet she and Florence never encountered, when there was no one by, but she would embrace her as affectionately as of old, though not with the same relenting of her proud aspect; and often, when she had been out late, she would steal up to Florence's room, as she had been used to do, in the dark, and whisper 'Good-night,' on her pillow. When unconscious, in her slumber, of such visits, Florence would sometimes awake, as from a dream of those words, softly spoken, and would seem to feel the touch of lips upon her face. But less and less often as the months went on.

And now the void in Florence's own heart began again, indeed, to make a solitude around her. As the image of the father whom she loved had insensibly become a mere abstraction, so Edith, following the fate of all the rest about whom her affections had entwined themselves, was fleeting, fading, growing paler in the distance, every day. Little by little, she receded from Florence, like the retiring ghost of what she had been; little by little, the chasm between them widened and seemed deeper; little by little, all the power of earnestness and tenderness she had shown, was frozen up in the bold, angry hardihood with which she stood, upon the brink of a deep precipice unseen by Florence, daring to look down.

There was but one consideration to set against the heavy loss of Edith, and though it was slight comfort to her burdened heart, she tried to think it some relief. No longer divided between her affection and duty to the two, Florence could love both and do no injustice to either. As shadows of her fond imagination, she could give them equal place in her own bosom, and wrong them with no doubts.

So she tried to do. At times, and often too, wondering speculations on the cause of this change in Edith, would obtrude themselves upon her mind and frighten her; but in the calm of its abandonment once more to silent grief and loneliness, it was not a curious mind. Florence had only to remember that her star of promise was clouded in the general gloom that hung upon the house, and to weep and be resigned.

Thus living, in a dream wherein the overflowing love of her young heart expended itself on airy forms, and in a real world where she had experienced little but the rolling back of that strong tide upon itself, Florence grew to be seventeen. Timid and retiring as her solitary life had made her, it had not embittered her sweet temper, or her earnest nature. A child in innocent simplicity; a woman m her modest self-reliance, and her deep intensity of feeling; both child and woman seemed at once expressed in her face and fragile delicacy of shape, and gracefully to mingle there;—as if the spring should be unwilling to depart when summer came, and sought to blend the earlier beauties of the flowers with their bloom. But in her thrilling voice, in her calm eyes, sometimes in a sage ethereal light that seemed to rest upon her head, and always in a certain pensive air upon her beauty, there was an expression, such as had been seen in the dead boy; and the council in the Servants' Hall whispered so among themselves, and shook their heads, and ate and drank the more, in a closer bond of good-fellowship.

This observant body had plenty to say of Mr and Mrs Dombey, and of Mr Carker, who appeared to be a mediator between them, and who came and went as if he were trying to make peace, but never could. They all deplored the uncomfortable state of affairs, and all agreed that Mrs Pipchin (whose unpopularity was not to be surpassed) had some hand in it; but, upon the whole, it was agreeable to have so good a subject for a rallying point, and they made a great deal of it, and enjoyed themselves very much.

The general visitors who came to the house, and those among whom Mr and Mrs Dombey visited, thought it a pretty equal match, as to haughtiness, at all events, and thought nothing more about it. The young lady with the back did not appear for some time after Mrs Skewton's death; observing to some particular friends, with her usual engaging little scream, that she couldn't separate the family from a notion of tombstones, and horrors of that sort; but when she did come, she saw nothing wrong, except Mr Dombey's wearing a bunch of gold seals to his watch, which shocked her very much, as an exploded superstition. This youthful fascinator considered a daughter-in-law objectionable in principle; otherwise, she had nothing to say against Florence, but that she sadly wanted 'style'—which might mean back, perhaps. Many, who only came to the house on state occasions, hardly knew who Florence was, and said, going home, 'Indeed, was that Miss Dombey, in the corner? Very pretty, but a little delicate and thoughtful in appearance!'

None the less so, certainly, for her life of the last six months. Florence took her seat at the dinner-table, on the day before the second anniversary of her father's marriage to Edith (Mrs Skewton had been lying stricken with paralysis when the first came round), with an uneasiness, amounting to dread. She had no other warrant for it, than the occasion, the expression of her father's face, in the hasty glance she caught of it, and the presence of Mr Carker, which, always unpleasant to her, was more so on this day, than she had ever felt it before.

Edith was richly dressed, for she and Mr Dombey were engaged in the evening to some large assembly, and the dinner-hour that day was late. She did not appear until they were seated at table, when Mr Carker rose and led her to her chair. Beautiful and lustrous as she was, there was that in her face and air which seemed to separate her hopelessly from Florence, and from everyone, for ever more. And yet, for an instant, Florence saw a beam of kindness in her eyes, when they were turned on her, that made the distance to which she had withdrawn herself, a greater cause of sorrow and regret than ever.

There was very little said at dinner. Florence heard her father speak to Mr Carker sometimes on business matters, and heard him softly reply, but she paid little attention to what they said, and only wished the dinner at an end. When the dessert was placed upon the table, and they were left alone, with no servant in attendance, Mr Dombey, who had been several times clearing his throat in a manner that augured no good, said:

'Mrs Dombey, you know, I suppose, that I have instructed the housekeeper that there will be some company to dinner here to-morrow.

'I do not dine at home,' she answered.

'Not a large party,' pursued Mr Dombey, with an indifferent assumption of not having heard her; 'merely some twelve or fourteen. My sister, Major Bagstock, and some others whom you know but slightly.'

I do not dine at home,' she repeated.

'However doubtful reason I may have, Mrs Dombey,' said Mr Dombey, still going majestically on, as if she had not spoken, 'to hold the occasion in very pleasant remembrance just now, there are appearances in these things which must be maintained before the world. If you have no respect for yourself, Mrs Dombey—'

'I have none,' she said.

'Madam,' cried Mr Dombey, striking his hand upon the table, 'hear me if you please. I say, if you have no respect for yourself—'

'And I say I have none,' she answered.

He looked at her; but the face she showed him in return would not have changed, if death itself had looked.

'Carker,' said Mr Dombey, turning more quietly to that gentleman, 'as you have been my medium of communication with Mrs Dombey on former occasions, and as I choose to preserve the decencies of life, so far as I am individually concerned, I will trouble you to have the goodness to inform Mrs Dombey that if she has no respect for herself, I have some respect for myself, and therefore insist on my arrangements for to-morrow.

'Tell your sovereign master, Sir,' said Edith, 'that I will take leave to speak to him on this subject by-and-bye, and that I will speak to him alone.'

'Mr Carker, Madam,' said her husband, 'being in possession of the reason which obliges me to refuse you that privilege, shall be absolved from the delivery of any such message.' He saw her eyes move, while he spoke, and followed them with his own.

'Your daughter is present, Sir,' said Edith.

'My daughter will remain present,' said Mr Dombey.

Florence, who had risen, sat down again, hiding her face in her hands, and trembling.

'My daughter, Madam'—began Mr Dombey.

But Edith stopped him, in a voice which, although not raised in the least, was so clear, emphatic, and distinct, that it might have been heard in a whirlwind.

'I tell you I will speak to you alone,' she said. 'If you are not mad, heed what I say.'

'I have authority to speak to you, Madam,' returned her husband, 'when and where I please; and it is my pleasure to speak here and now.'

She rose up as if to leave the room; but sat down again, and looking at him with all outward composure, said, in the same voice:

'You shall!'

'I must tell you first, that there is a threatening appearance in your manner, Madam,' said Mr Dombey, 'which does not become you.

She laughed. The shaken diamonds in her hair started and trembled. There are fables of precious stones that would turn pale, their wearer being in danger. Had these been such, their imprisoned rays of light would have taken flight that moment, and they would have been as dull as lead.

Carker listened, with his eyes cast down.

'As to my daughter, Madam,' said Mr Dombey, resuming the thread of his discourse, 'it is by no means inconsistent with her duty to me, that she should know what conduct to avoid. At present you are a very strong example to her of this kind, and I hope she may profit by it.'

'I would not stop you now,' returned his wife, immoveable in eye, and voice, and attitude; 'I would not rise and go away, and save you the utterance of one word, if the room were burning.'

Mr Dombey moved his head, as if in a sarcastic acknowledgment of the attention, and resumed. But not with so much self-possession as before; for

Edith's quick uneasiness in reference to Florence, and Edith's indifference to him and his censure, chafed and galled him like a stiffening wound.

'Mrs Dombey,' said he, 'it may not be inconsistent with my daughter's improvement to know how very much to be lamented, and how necessary to be corrected, a stubborn disposition is, especially when it is indulged in—unthankfully indulged in, I will add—after the gratification of ambition and interest. Both of which, I believe, had some share in inducing you to occupy your present station at this board.'

'No! I would not rise, and go away, and save you the utterance of one word,' she repeated, exactly as before, 'if the room were burning.'

'It may be natural enough, Mrs Dombey,' he pursued, 'that you should be uneasy in the presence of any auditors of these disagreeable truths; though why'—he could not hide his real feeling here, or keep his eyes from glancing gloomily at Florence—'why anyone can give them greater force and point than myself, whom they so nearly concern, I do not pretend to understand. It may be natural enough that you should object to hear, in anybody's presence, that there is a rebellious principle within you which you cannot curb too soon; which you must curb, Mrs Dombey; and which, I regret to say, I remember to have seen manifested—with some doubt and displeasure, on more than one occasion before our marriage—towards your deceased mother. But you have the remedy in your own hands. I by no means forgot, when I began, that my daughter was present, Mrs Dombey. I beg you will not forget, to- morrow, that there are several persons present; and that, with some regard to appearances, you will receive your company in a becoming manner.

'So it is not enough,' said Edith, 'that you know what has passed between yourself and me; it is not enough that you can look here,' pointing at Carker, who still listened, with his eyes cast down, 'and be reminded of the affronts you have put upon me; it is not enough that you can look here,' pointing to Florence with a hand that slightly trembled for the first and only time, 'and think of what you have done, and of the ingenious agony, daily, hourly, constant, you have made me feel in doing it; it is not enough that this day, of all others in the year, is memorable to me for a struggle (well-deserved, but not conceivable by such as you) in which I wish I had died! You add to all this, do you, the last crowning meanness of making her a witness of the depth to which I have fallen; when you know that you have made me sacrifice to her peace, the only gentle feeling and interest of my life, when you know that for her sake, I would now if I could—but I can not, my soul recoils from you too much—submit myself wholly to your will, and be the meekest vassal that you have!'

This was not the way to minister to Mr Dombey's greatness. The old feeling was roused by what she said, into a stronger and fiercer existence than it had ever had. Again, his neglected child, at this rough passage of his life, put forth by even this rebellious woman, as powerful where he was powerless, and everything where he was nothing!

He turned on Florence, as if it were she who had spoken, and bade her leave the room. Florence with her covered face obeyed, trembling and weeping as she went.

'I understand, Madam,' said Mr Dombey, with an angry flush of triumph, 'the spirit of opposition that turned your affections in that channel, but they have been met, Mrs Dombey; they have been met, and turned back!'

'The worse for you!' she answered, with her voice and manner still unchanged. 'Ay!' for he turned sharply when she said so, 'what is the worse for me, is twenty million times the worse for you. Heed that, if you heed nothing else.'

The arch of diamonds spanning her dark hair, flashed and glittered like a starry bridge. There was no warning in them, or they would have turned as dull and dim as tarnished honour. Carker still sat and listened, with his eyes cast down.

'Mrs Dombey,' said Mr Dombey, resuming as much as he could of his arrogant composure, 'you will not conciliate me, or turn me from any purpose, by this course of conduct.'

'It is the only true although it is a faint expression of what is within me,' she replied. 'But if I thought it would conciliate you, I would repress it, if it were repressible by any human effort. I will do nothing that you ask.'

'I am not accustomed to ask, Mrs Dombey,' he observed; 'I direct.'

'I will hold no place in your house to-morrow, or on any recurrence of to-morrow. I will be exhibited to no one, as the refractory slave you purchased, such a time. If I kept my marriage day, I would keep it as a day of shame. Self-respect! appearances before the world! what are these to me? You have done all you can to make them nothing to me, and they are nothing.'

'Carker,' said Mr Dombey, speaking with knitted brows, and after a moment's consideration, 'Mrs Dombey is so forgetful of herself and me in all this, and places me in a position so unsuited to my character, that I must bring this state of matters to a close.'

'Release me, then,' said Edith, immoveable in voice, in look, and bearing, as she had been throughout, 'from the chain by which I am bound. Let me go.'

'Madam?' exclaimed Mr Dombey.

'Loose me. Set me free!'

'Madam?' he repeated, 'Mrs Dombey?'

'Tell him,' said Edith, addressing her proud face to Carker, 'that I wish for a separation between us, That there had better be one. That I recommend it to him, Tell him it may take place on his own terms—his wealth is nothing to me—but that it cannot be too soon.'

'Good Heaven, Mrs Dombey!' said her husband, with supreme amazement, 'do you imagine it possible that I could ever listen to such a proposition? Do you know who I am, Madam? Do you know what I represent? Did you ever hear of Dombey and Son? People to say that Mr Dombey—Mr Dombey!—was separated from his wife! Common people to talk of Mr Dombey and his domestic affairs! Do you seriously think, Mrs Dombey, that I would permit my name to be banded about in such connexion? Pooh, pooh, Madam! Fie for shame! You're absurd.' Mr Dombey absolutely laughed.

But not as she did. She had better have been dead than laugh as she did, in reply, with her intent look fixed upon him. He had better have been dead, than sitting there, in his magnificence, to hear her.

'No, Mrs Dombey,' he resumed. 'No, Madam. There is no possibility of separation between you and me, and therefore I the more advise you to be awakened to a sense of duty. And, Carker, as I was about to say to you—

Mr Carker, who had sat and listened all this time, now raised his eyes, in which there was a bright unusual light.

As I was about to say to you, resumed Mr Dombey, 'I must beg you, now that matters have come to this, to inform Mrs Dombey, that it is not the rule of my life to allow myself to be thwarted by anybody—anybody, Carker—or to suffer anybody to be paraded as a stronger motive for obedience in those who owe obedience to me than I am my self. The mention that has been made of my daughter, and the use that is made of my daughter, in opposition to me, are unnatural. Whether my daughter is in actual concert with Mrs Dombey, I do not know, and do not care; but after what Mrs Dombey has said today, and my daughter has heard to-day, I beg you to make known to Mrs Dombey, that if she continues to make this house the scene of contention it has become, I shall consider my daughter responsible in some degree, on that lady's own avowal, and shall visit her with my severe displeasure. Mrs Dombey has asked "whether it is not enough," that she had done this and that. You will please to answer no, it is not enough.'

'A moment!' cried Carker, interposing, 'permit me! painful as my position is, at the best, and unusually painful in seeming to entertain a different opinion from you,' addressing Mr Dombey, 'I must ask, had you not better reconsider the question of a separation. I know how incompatible it appears with your high public position, and I know how determined you are when you give Mrs Dombey to understand'—the light in his eyes fell upon her as he separated his words each from each, with the distinctness of so many bells—'that nothing but death can ever part you. Nothing else. But when you consider that Mrs Dombey, by living in this house, and making it as you have said, a scene of contention, not only has her part in that contention, but compromises Miss Dombey every day (for I know how determined you are), will you not relieve her from a continual irritation of spirit, and a continual sense of being unjust to another, almost intolerable? Does this not seem like—I do not say it is—sacrificing Mrs Dombey to the preservation of your preeminent and unassailable position?'

Again the light in his eyes fell upon her, as she stood looking at her husband: now with an extraordinary and awful smile upon her face.

'Carker,' returned Mr Dombey, with a supercilious frown, and in a tone that was intended to be final, 'you mistake your position in offering advice to me on such a point, and you mistake me (I am surprised to find) in the character of your advice. I have no more to say.

'Perhaps,' said Carker, with an unusual and indefinable taunt in his air, 'you mistook my position, when you honoured me with the negotiations in which I have been engaged here'—with a motion of his hand towards Mrs Dombey.

'Not at all, Sir, not at all,' returned the other haughtily. 'You were employed—'

'Being an inferior person, for the humiliation of Mrs Dombey. I forgot' Oh, yes, it was expressly understood!' said Carker. 'I beg your pardon!'

As he bent his head to Mr Dombey, with an air of deference that accorded ill with his words, though they were humbly spoken, he moved it round towards her, and kept his watching eyes that way.

She had better have turned hideous and dropped dead, than have stood up with such a smile upon her face, in such a fallen spirit's majesty of scorn and beauty. She lifted her hand to the tiara of bright jewels radiant on her head, and, plucking it off with a force that dragged and strained her rich black hair with heedless cruelty, and brought it tumbling wildly on her shoulders, cast the gems upon the ground. From each arm, she unclasped a diamond bracelet, flung it down, and trod upon the glittering heap. Without a word, without a shadow on the fire of her bright eye, without abatement of her awful smile, she looked on Mr Dombey to the last, in moving to the door; and left him.

Florence had heard enough before quitting the room, to know that Edith loved her yet; that she had suffered for her sake; and that she had kept her sacrifices quiet, lest they should trouble her peace. She did not want to speak to her of this—she could not, remembering to whom she was opposed — but she wished, in one silent and affectionate embrace, to assure her that she felt it all, and thanked her.

Her father went out alone, that evening, and Florence issuing from her own chamber soon afterwards, went about the house in search of. Edith, but unavailingly. She was in her own rooms, where Florence had long ceased to go, and did not dare to venture now, lest she should unconsciously engender new trouble. Still Florence hoping to meet her before going to bed, changed from room to room, and wandered through the house so splendid and so dreary, without remaining anywhere.

She was crossing a gallery of communication that opened at some little distance on the staircase, and was only lighted on great occasions, when she saw, through the opening, which was an arch, the figure of a man coming down some few stairs opposite. Instinctively apprehensive of her father, whom she supposed it was, she stopped, in the dark, gazing through the arch into the light. But it was Mr Carker coming down alone, and looking over the railing into the hall. No bell was rung to announce his departure, and no servant was in attendance. He went down quietly, opened the door for himself, glided out, and shut it softly after him.

Her invincible repugnance to this man, and perhaps the stealthy act of watching anyone, which, even under such innocent circumstances, is in a manner guilty and oppressive, made Florence shake from head to foot. Her blood seemed to run cold. As soon as she could—for at first she felt an insurmountable dread of moving—she went quickly to her own room and locked her door; but even then, shut in with her dog beside her, felt a chill sensation of horror, as if there were danger brooding somewhere near her.

It invaded her dreams and disturbed the whole night. Rising in the morning, unrefreshed, and with a heavy recollection of the domestic unhappiness of the preceding day, she sought Edith again in all the rooms, and did so, from time to time, all the morning. But she remained in her own chamber, and Florence saw nothing of her. Learning, however, that the projected dinner at home was put off, Florence thought it likely that she would go out in the evening to fulfil the engagement she had spoken of; and resolved to try and meet her, then, upon the staircase.

When the evening had set in, she heard, from the room in which she sat on purpose, a footstep on the stairs that she thought to be Edith's. Hurrying out, and up towards her room, Florence met her immediately, coming down alone.

What was Florence's affright and wonder when, at sight of her, with her tearful face, and outstretched arms, Edith recoiled and shrieked!

'Don't come near me!' she cried. 'Keep away! Let me go by!'

'Mama!' said Florence.

'Don't call me by that name! Don't speak to me! Don't look at me!—Florence!' shrinking back, as Florence moved a step towards her, 'don't touch me!'

As Florence stood transfixed before the haggard face and staring eyes, she noted, as in a dream, that Edith spread her hands over them, and shuddering through all her form, and crouching down against the wall, crawled by her like some lower animal, sprang up, and fled away.

Florence dropped upon the stairs in a swoon; and was found there by Mrs Pipchin, she supposed. She knew nothing more, until she found herself lying on her own bed, with Mrs Pipchin and some servants standing round her.

'Where is Mama?' was her first question.

'Gone out to dinner,' said Mrs Pipchin.

'And Papa?'

'Mr Dombey is in his own room, Miss Dombey,' said Mrs Pipchin, 'and the best thing you can do, is to take off your things and go to bed this minute.' This was the sagacious woman's remedy for all complaints, particularly lowness of spirits, and inability to sleep; for which offences, many young victims in the days of the Brighton Castle had been committed to bed at ten o'clock in the morning.

Without promising obedience, but on the plea of desiring to be very quiet, Florence disengaged herself, as soon as she could, from the ministration of Mrs Pipchin and her attendants. Left alone, she thought of what had happened on the staircase, at first in doubt of its reality; then with tears; then with an indescribable and terrible alarm, like that she had felt the night before.

She determined not to go to bed until Edith returned, and if she could not speak to her, at least to be sure that she was safe at home. What indistinct and shadowy dread moved Florence to this resolution, she did not know, and did not dare to think. She only knew that until Edith came back, there was no repose for her aching head or throbbing heart.

The evening deepened into night; midnight came; no Edith.

Florence could not read, or rest a moment. She paced her own room, opened the door and paced the staircase-gallery outside, looked out of window on the night, listened to the wind blowing and the rain falling, sat down and watched the faces in the fire, got up and watched the moon flying like a storm-driven ship through the sea of clouds.

All the house was gone to bed, except two servants who were waiting the return of their mistress, downstairs.

One o'clock. The carriages that rumbled in the distance, turned away, or stopped short, or went past; the silence gradually deepened, and was more and more rarely broken, save by a rush of wind or sweep of rain. Two o'clock. No Edith!

Florence, more agitated, paced her room; and paced the gallery outside; and looked out at the night, blurred and wavy with the raindrops on the glass, and the tears in her own eyes; and looked up at the hurry in the sky, so different from the repose below, and yet so tranquil and solitary. Three o'clock! There was a terror in every ash that dropped out of the fire. No Edith yet.

More and more agitated, Florence paced her room, and paced the gallery, and looked out at the moon with a new fancy of her likeness to a pale fugitive hurrying away and hiding her guilty face. Four struck! Five! No Edith yet.

But now there was some cautious stir in the house; and Florence found that Mrs Pipchin had been awakened by one of those who sat up, had risen and had gone down to her father's door. Stealing lower down the stairs, and observing what passed, she saw her father come out in his morning gown, and start when he was told his wife had not come home. He dispatched a messenger to the stables to inquire whether the coachman was there; and while the man was gone, dressed himself very hurriedly.

The man came back, in great haste, bringing the coachman with him, who said he had been at home and in bed, since ten o'clock. He had driven his mistress to her old house in Brook Street, where she had been met by Mr Carker—

Florence stood upon the very spot where she had seen him coming down. Again she shivered with the nameless terror of that sight, and had hardly steadiness enough to hear and understand what followed.—Who had told him, the man went on to say, that his mistress would not want the carriage to go home in; and had dismissed him.

She saw her father turn white in the face, and heard him ask in a quick, trembling voice, for Mrs Dombey's maid. The whole house was roused; for she was there, in a moment, very pale too, and speaking incoherently.

She said she had dressed her mistress early—full two hours before she went out—and had been told, as she often was, that she would not be wanted at night. She had just come from her mistress's rooms, but—

'But what! what was it?' Florence heard her father demand like a madman.

'But the inner dressing-room was locked and the key gone.'

Her father seized a candle that was flaming on the ground—someone had put it down there, and forgotten it—and came running upstairs with such fury, that Florence, in her fear, had hardly time to fly before him. She heard him striking in the door, as she ran on, with her hands widely spread, and her hair streaming, and her face like a distracted person's, back to her own room.

When the door yielded, and he rushed in, what did he see there? No one knew. But thrown down in a costly mass upon the ground, was every ornament she had had, since she had been his wife; every dress she had worn; and everything she had possessed. This was the room in which he had seen, in yonder mirror, the proud face discard him. This was the room in which he had wondered, idly, how these things would look when he should see them next!

Heaping them back into the drawers, and locking them up in a rage of haste, he saw some papers on the table. The deed of settlement he had executed on their marriage, and a letter. He read that she was gone. He read that he was dishonoured. He read that she had fled, upon her shameful wedding-day, with the man whom he had chosen for her humiliation; and he tore out of the room, and out of the house, with a frantic idea of finding her yet, at the place to which she had been taken, and beating all trace of beauty out of the triumphant face with his bare hand.

Florence, not knowing what she did, put on a shawl and bonnet, in a dream of running through the streets until she found Edith, and then clasping her in her arms, to save and bring her back. But when she hurried out upon the staircase, and saw the frightened servants going up and down with lights, and whispering together, and falling away from her father as he passed down, she awoke to a sense of her own powerlessness; and hiding in one of the great rooms that had been made gorgeous for this, felt as if her heart would burst with grief.

Compassion for her father was the first distinct emotion that made head against the flood of sorrow which overwhelmed her. Her constant nature turned to him in his distress, as fervently and faithfully, as if, in his prosperity, he had been the embodiment of that idea which had gradually become so faint and dim. Although she did not know, otherwise than through the suggestions of a shapeless fear, the full extent of his calamity, he stood before her, wronged and deserted; and again her yearning love impelled her to his side.

He was not long away; for Florence was yet weeping in the great room and nourishing these thoughts, when she heard him come back. He ordered the servants to set about their ordinary occupations, and went into his own apartment, where he trod so heavily that she could hear him walking up and down from end to end.

Yielding at once to the impulse of her affection, timid at all other times, but bold in its truth to him in his adversity, and undaunted by past repulse, Florence, dressed as she was, hurried downstairs. As she set her light foot in the hall, he came out of his room. She hastened towards him unchecked, with her arms stretched out, and crying 'Oh dear, dear Papa!' as if she would have clasped him round the neck.

And so she would have done. But in his frenzy, he lifted up his cruel arm, and struck her, crosswise, with that heaviness, that she tottered on the marble floor; and as he dealt the blow, he told her what Edith was, and bade her follow her, since they had always been in league.

She did not sink down at his feet; she did not shut out the sight of him with her trembling hands; she did not weep; she did not utter one word of reproach. But she looked at him, and a cry of desolation issued from her heart. For as she looked, she saw him murdering that fond idea to which she had held in spite of him. She saw his cruelty, neglect, and hatred dominant above it, and stamping it down. She saw she had no father upon earth, and ran out, orphaned, from his house.

Ran out of his house. A moment, and her hand was on the lock, the cry was on her lips, his face was there, made paler by the yellow candles hastily put down and guttering away, and by the daylight coming in above the door. Another moment, and the close darkness of the shut-up house (forgotten to be opened, though it was long since day) yielded to the unexpected glare and freedom of the morning; and Florence, with her head bent down to hide her agony of tears, was in the streets.

CHAPTER 48. The Flight of Florence

In the wildness of her sorrow, shame, and terror, the forlorn girl hurried through the sunshine of a bright morning, as if it were the darkness of a winter night. Wringing her hands and weeping bitterly, insensible to everything but the deep wound in her breast, stunned by the loss of all she loved, left like the sole survivor on a lonely shore from the wreck of a great vessel, she fled without a thought, without a hope, without a purpose, but to fly somewhere anywhere.

The cheerful vista of the long street, burnished by the morning light, the sight of the blue sky and airy clouds, the vigorous freshness of the day, so flushed and rosy in its conquest of the night, awakened no responsive feelings in her so hurt bosom. Somewhere, anywhere, to hide her head! somewhere, anywhere, for refuge, never more to look upon the place from which she fled!

But there were people going to and fro; there were opening shops, and servants at the doors of houses; there was the rising clash and roar of the day's struggle. Florence saw surprise and curiosity in the faces flitting past her; saw long shadows coming back upon the pavement; and heard voices that were strange to her asking her where she went, and what the matter was; and though these frightened her the more at first, and made her hurry on the faster, they did her the good service of recalling her in some degree to herself, and reminding her of the necessity of greater composure.

Where to go? Still somewhere, anywhere! still going on; but where! She thought of the only other time she had been lost in the wild wilderness of London—though not lost as now—and went that way. To the home of Walter's Uncle.

Checking her sobs, and drying her swollen eyes, and endeavouring to calm the agitation of her manner, so as to avoid attracting notice, Florence, resolving to keep to the more quiet streets as long as she could, was going on more quietly herself, when a familiar little shadow darted past upon the sunny pavement, stopped short, wheeled about, came close to her, made off again, bounded round and round her, and Diogenes, panting for breath, and yet making the street ring with his glad bark, was at her feet.

'Oh, Di! oh, dear, true, faithful Di, how did you come here? How could I ever leave you, Di, who would never leave me?'

Florence bent down on the pavement, and laid his rough, old, loving, foolish head against her breast, and they got up together, and went on together; Di more off the ground than on it, endeavouring to kiss his mistress flying, tumbling over and getting up again without the least concern, dashing at big dogs in a jocose defiance of his species, terrifying with touches of his nose young housemaids who were cleaning doorsteps, and continually stopping, in the midst of a thousand extravagances, to look back at Florence, and bark until all the dogs within hearing answered, and all the dogs who could come out, came out to stare at him.

With this last adherent, Florence hurried away in the advancing morning, and the strengthening sunshine, to the City. The roar soon grew more loud, the passengers more numerous, the shops more busy, until she was carried onward in a stream of life setting that way, and flowing, indifferently, past marts and mansions, prisons, churches, market-places, wealth, poverty, good, and evil, like the broad river side by side with it, awakened from its dreams of rushes, willows, and green moss, and rolling on, turbid and troubled, among the works and cares of men, to the deep sea.

At length the quarters of the little Midshipman arose in view. Nearer yet, and the little Midshipman himself was seen upon his post, intent as ever on his observations. Nearer yet, and the door stood open, inviting her to enter. Florence, who had again quickened her pace, as she approached the end of her journey, ran across the road (closely followed by Diogenes, whom the bustle had somewhat confused), ran in, and sank upon the threshold of the well-remembered little parlour.

The Captain, in his glazed hat, was standing over the fire, making his morning's cocoa, with that elegant trifle, his watch, upon the chimney-piece, for easy reference during the progress of the cookery. Hearing a footstep and the rustle of a dress, the Captain turned with a palpitating remembrance of the dreadful Mrs MacStinger, at the instant when Florence made a motion with her hand towards him, reeled, and fell upon the floor.

The Captain, pale as Florence, pale in the very knobs upon his face raised her like a baby, and laid her on the same old sofa upon which she had slumbered long ago.

'It's Heart's Delight!' said the Captain, looking intently in her face. 'It's the sweet creetur grow'd a woman!'

Captain Cuttle was so respectful of her, and had such a reverence for her, in this new character, that he would not have held her in his arms, while she was unconscious, for a thousand pounds.

'My Heart's Delight!' said the Captain, withdrawing to a little distance, with the greatest alarm and sympathy depicted on his countenance. 'If you can hail Ned Cuttle with a finger, do it!'

But Florence did not stir.

'My Heart's Delight!' said the trembling Captain. 'For the sake of Wal'r drownded in the briny deep, turn to, and histe up something or another, if able!'

Finding her insensible to this impressive adjuration also, Captain Cuttle snatched from his breakfast-table a basin of cold water, and sprinkled some upon her face. Yielding to the urgency of the case, the Captain then, using his immense hand with extraordinary gentleness, relieved her of her bonnet, moistened her lips and forehead, put back her hair, covered her feet with his own coat which he pulled off for the purpose, patted her hand— so small in his, that he was struck with wonder when he touched it—and seeing that her eyelids quivered, and that her lips began to move, continued these restorative applications with a better heart.

'Cheerily,' said the Captain. 'Cheerily! Stand by, my pretty one, stand by! There! You're better now. Steady's the word, and steady it is. Keep her so! Drink a little drop o' this here,' said the Captain. 'There you are! What cheer now, my pretty, what cheer now?'

At this stage of her recovery, Captain Cuttle, with an imperfect association of a Watch with a Physician's treatment of a patient, took his own down from the mantel-shelf, and holding it out on his hook, and taking Florence's hand in his, looked steadily from one to the other, as expecting the dial to do something.

'What cheer, my pretty?' said the Captain. 'What cheer now? You've done her some good, my lad, I believe,' said the Captain, under his breath, and throwing an approving glance upon his watch. 'Put you back half-an-hour every morning, and about another quarter towards the arternoon, and you're a watch as can be ekalled by few and excelled by none. What cheer, my lady lass!'

'Captain Cuttle! Is it you?' exclaimed Florence, raising herself a little.

'Yes, yes, my lady lass,' said the Captain, hastily deciding in his own mind upon the superior elegance of that form of address, as the most courtly he could think of.

'Is Walter's Uncle here?' asked Florence.

'Here, pretty?' returned the Captain. 'He ain't been here this many a long day. He ain't been heerd on, since he sheered off arter poor Wal'r. But,' said the Captain, as a quotation, 'Though lost to sight, to memory dear, and England, Home, and Beauty!'

'Do you live here?' asked Florence.

'Yes, my lady lass,' returned the Captain.

'Oh, Captain Cuttle!' cried Florence, putting her hands together, and speaking wildly. 'Save me! keep me here! Let no one know where I am! I'll tell you what has happened by-and-by, when I can. I have no one in the world to go to. Do not send me away!'

'Send you away, my lady lass!' exclaimed the Captain. 'You, my Heart's Delight! Stay a bit! We'll put up this here deadlight, and take a double turn on the key!'

With these words, the Captain, using his one hand and his hook with the greatest dexterity, got out the shutter of the door, put it up, made it all fast, and locked the door itself.

When he came back to the side of Florence, she took his hand, and kissed it. The helplessness of the action, the appeal it made to him, the confidence it expressed, the unspeakable sorrow in her face, the pain of mind she had too plainly suffered, and was suffering then, his knowledge of her past history, her present lonely, worn, and unprotected appearance, all so rushed upon the good Captain together, that he fairly overflowed with compassion and gentleness.

'My lady lass,' said the Captain, polishing the bridge of his nose with his arm until it shone like burnished copper, 'don't you say a word to Ed'ard Cuttle, until such times as you finds yourself a riding smooth and easy; which won't be to-day, nor yet to-morrow. And as to giving of you up, or reporting where you are, yes verily, and by God's help, so I won't, Church catechism, make a note on!'

This the Captain said, reference and all, in one breath, and with much solemnity; taking off his hat at 'yes verily,' and putting it on again, when he had quite concluded.

Florence could do but one thing more to thank him, and to show him how she trusted in him; and she did it' Clinging to this rough creature as the last asylum of her bleeding heart, she laid her head upon his honest shoulder, and clasped him round his neck, and would have kneeled down to bless him, but that he divined her purpose, and held her up like a true man.

'Steady!' said the Captain. 'Steady! You're too weak to stand, you see, my pretty, and must lie down here again. There, there!' To see the Captain lift her on the sofa, and cover her with his coat, would have been worth a hundred state sights. 'And now,' said the Captain, 'you must take some breakfast, lady lass, and the dog shall have some too. And arter that you shall go aloft to old Sol Gills's room, and fall asleep there, like a angel.'

Captain Cuttle patted Diogenes when he made allusion to him, and Diogenes met that overture graciously, half-way. During the administration of the restoratives he had clearly been in two minds whether to fly at the Captain or to offer him his friendship; and he had expressed that conflict of feeling by alternate waggings of his tail, and displays of his teeth, with now and then a growl or so. But by this time, his doubts were all removed. It was plain that he considered the Captain one of the most amiable of men, and a man whom it was an honour to a dog to know.

In evidence of these convictions, Diogenes attended on the Captain while he made some tea and toast, and showed a lively interest in his housekeeping. But it was in vain for the kind Captain to make such preparations for Florence, who sorely tried to do some honour to them, but could touch nothing, and could only weep and weep again.

'Well, well!' said the compassionate Captain, 'arter turning in, my Heart's Delight, you'll get more way upon you. Now, I'll serve out your allowance, my lad.' To Diogenes. 'And you shall keep guard on your mistress aloft.'

Diogenes, however, although he had been eyeing his intended breakfast with a watering mouth and glistening eyes, instead of falling to, ravenously, when it was put before him, pricked up his ears, darted to the shop-door, and barked there furiously: burrowing with his head at the bottom, as if he were bent on mining his way out.

'Can there be anybody there!' asked Florence, in alarm.

'No, my lady lass,' returned the Captain. 'Who'd stay there, without making any noise! Keep up a good heart, pretty. It's only people going by.'

But for all that, Diogenes barked and barked, and burrowed and burrowed, with pertinacious fury; and whenever he stopped to listen, appeared to receive some new conviction into his mind, for he set to, barking and burrowing again, a dozen times. Even when he was persuaded to return to his breakfast, he came jogging back to it, with a very doubtful air; and was off again, in another paroxysm, before touching a morsel.

'If there should be someone listening and watching,' whispered Florence. 'Someone who saw me come—who followed me, perhaps.'

'It ain't the young woman, lady lass, is it?' said the Captain, taken with a bright idea.

'Susan?' said Florence, shaking her head. 'Ah no! Susan has been gone from me a long time.'

'Not deserted, I hope?' said the Captain. 'Don't say that that there young woman's run, my pretty!'

'Oh, no, no!' cried Florence. 'She is one of the truest hearts in the world!'

The Captain was greatly relieved by this reply, and expressed his satisfaction by taking off his hard glazed hat, and dabbing his head all over with his handkerchief, rolled up like a ball, observing several times, with infinite complacency, and with a beaming countenance, that he know'd it.

'So you're quiet now, are you, brother?' said the Captain to Diogenes. 'There warn't nobody there, my lady lass, bless you!'

Diogenes was not so sure of that. The door still had an attraction for him at intervals; and he went snuffing about it, and growling to himself, unable to forget the subject. This incident, coupled with the Captain's observation of Florence's fatigue and faintness, decided him to prepare Sol Gills's chamber as a place of retirement for her immediately. He therefore hastily betook himself to the top of the house, and made the best arrangement of it that his imagination and his means suggested.

It was very clean already; and the Captain being an orderly man, and accustomed to make things ship-shape, converted the bed into a couch, by covering it all over with a clean white drapery. By a similar contrivance, the Captain converted the little dressing-table into a species of altar, on which he set forth two silver teaspoons, a flower-pot, a telescope, his celebrated watch, a pocket-comb, and a song-book, as a small collection of rarities, that made a choice appearance. Having darkened the window, and straightened the pieces of carpet on the floor, the Captain surveyed these preparations with great delight, and descended to the little parlour again, to bring Florence to her bower.

Nothing would induce the Captain to believe that it was possible for Florence to walk upstairs. If he could have got the idea into his head, he would have considered it an outrageous breach of hospitality to allow her to do so. Florence was too weak to dispute the point, and the Captain carried her up out of hand, laid her down, and covered her with a great watch-coat.

'My lady lass!' said the Captain, 'you're as safe here as if you was at the top of St Paul's Cathedral, with the ladder cast off. Sleep is what you want, afore all other things, and may you be able to show yourself smart with that there balsam for the still small woice of a wounded mind! When there's anything you want, my Heart's Delight, as this here humble house or town can offer, pass the word to Ed'ard Cuttle, as'll stand off and on outside that door, and that there man will wibrate with joy.' The Captain concluded by kissing the hand that Florence stretched out to him, with the chivalry of any old knight-errant, and walking on tiptoe out of the room.

Descending to the little parlour, Captain Cuttle, after holding a hasty council with himself, decided to open the shop-door for a few minutes, and satisfy himself that now, at all events, there was no one loitering about it. Accordingly he set it open, and stood upon the threshold, keeping a bright look-out, and sweeping the whole street with his spectacles.

'How de do, Captain Gills?' said a voice beside him. The Captain, looking down, found that he had been boarded by Mr Toots while sweeping the horizon.

'How are, you, my lad?' replied the Captain.

'Well, I m pretty well, thank'ee, Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots. 'You know I'm never quite what I could wish to be, now. I don't expect that I ever shall be any more.'

Mr Toots never approached any nearer than this to the great theme of his life, when in conversation with Captain Cuttle, on account of the agreement between them.

'Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, 'if I could have the pleasure of a word with you, it's—it's rather particular.'

'Why, you see, my lad,' replied the Captain, leading the way into the parlour, 'I ain't what you may call exactly free this morning; and therefore if you can clap on a bit, I should take it kindly.'

'Certainly, Captain Gills,' replied Mr Toots, who seldom had any notion of the Captain's meaning. 'To clap on, is exactly what I could wish to do. Naturally.'

'If so be, my lad,' returned the Captain. 'Do it!'

The Captain was so impressed by the possession of his tremendous secret—by the fact of Miss Dombey being at that moment under his roof, while the innocent and unconscious Toots sat opposite to him—that a perspiration broke out on his forehead, and he found it impossible, while slowly drying the same, glazed hat in hand, to keep his eyes off Mr Toots's face. Mr Toots, who himself appeared to have some secret reasons for being in a nervous state, was so unspeakably disconcerted by the Captain's stare, that after looking at him vacantly for some time in silence, and shifting uneasily on his chair, he said:

'I beg your pardon, Captain Gills, but you don't happen to see anything particular in me, do you?'

'No, my lad,' returned the Captain. 'No.'

'Because you know,' said Mr Toots with a chuckle, 'I know I'm wasting away. You needn't at all mind alluding to that. I—I should like it. Burgess and Co. have altered my measure, I'm in that state of thinness. It's a gratification to me. I—I'm glad of it. I—I'd a great deal rather go into a decline, if I could. I'm a mere brute you know, grazing upon the surface of the earth, Captain Gills.'

The more Mr Toots went on in this way, the more the Captain was weighed down by his secret, and stared at him. What with this cause of uneasiness, and his desire to get rid of Mr Toots, the Captain was in such a scared and strange condition, indeed, that if he had been in conversation with a ghost, he could hardly have evinced greater discomposure.

'But I was going to say, Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots. 'Happening to be this way early this morning—to tell you the truth, I was coming to breakfast with you. As to sleep, you know, I never sleep now. I might be a Watchman, except that I don't get any pay, and he's got nothing on his mind.'

'Carry on, my lad!' said the Captain, in an admonitory voice.

'Certainly, Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots. 'Perfectly true! Happening to be this way early this morning (an hour or so ago), and finding the door shut—'

'What! were you waiting there, brother?' demanded the Captain.

'Not at all, Captain Gills,' returned Mr Toots. 'I didn't stop a moment. I thought you were out. But the person said—by the bye, you don't keep a dog, you, Captain Gills?'

The Captain shook his head.

'To be sure,' said Mr Toots, 'that's exactly what I said. I knew you didn't. There is a dog, Captain Gills, connected with—but excuse me. That's forbidden ground.'

The Captain stared at Mr Toots until he seemed to swell to twice his natural size; and again the perspiration broke out on the Captain's forehead, when he thought of Diogenes taking it into his head to come down and make a third in the parlour.

'The person said,' continued Mr Toots, 'that he had heard a dog barking in the shop: which I knew couldn't be, and I told him so. But he was as positive as if he had seen the dog.'

'What person, my lad?' inquired the Captain.

'Why, you see there it is, Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, with a perceptible increase in the nervousness of his manner. 'It's not for me to say what may have taken place, or what may not have taken place. Indeed, I don't know. I get mixed up with all sorts of things that I don't quite understand, and I think there's something rather weak in my—in my head, in short.'

The Captain nodded his own, as a mark of assent.

'But the person said, as we were walking away,' continued Mr Toots, 'that you knew what, under existing circumstances, might occur—he said "might," very strongly—and that if you were requested to prepare yourself, you would, no doubt, come prepared.'

'Person, my lad' the Captain repeated.

'I don't know what person, I'm sure, Captain Gills,' replied Mr Toots, 'I haven't the least idea. But coming to the door, I found him waiting there; and he said was I coming back again, and I said yes; and he said did I know you, and I said, yes, I had the pleasure of your acquaintance—you had given me the pleasure of your acquaintance, after some persuasion; and he said, if that was the case, would I say to you what I have said, about existing circumstances and coming prepared, and as soon as ever I saw you, would I ask you to step round the corner, if it was only for one minute, on most important business, to Mr Brogley's the Broker's. Now, I tell you what, Captain Gills—whatever it is, I am convinced it's very important; and if you like to step round, now, I'll wait here till you come back.'

The Captain, divided between his fear of compromising Florence in some way by not going, and his horror of leaving Mr Toots in possession of the house with a chance of finding out the secret, was a spectacle of mental disturbance that even Mr Toots could not be blind to. But that young gentleman, considering his nautical friend as merely in a state of preparation for the interview he was going to have, was quite satisfied, and did not review his own discreet conduct without chuckle.

At length the Captain decided, as the lesser of two evils, to run round to Brogley's the Broker's: previously locking the door that communicated with the upper part of the house, and putting the key in his pocket. 'If so be,' said the Captain to Mr Toots, with not a little shame and hesitation, 'as you'll excuse my doing of it, brother.'

'Captain Gills,' returned Mr Toots, 'whatever you do, is satisfactory to me.

The Captain thanked him heartily, and promising to come back in less than five minutes, went out in quest of the person who had entrusted Mr Toots with this mysterious message. Poor Mr Toots, left to himself, lay down upon the sofa, little thinking who had reclined there last, and, gazing up at the skylight and resigning himself to visions of Miss Dombey, lost all heed of time and place.

It was as well that he did so; for although the Captain was not gone long, he was gone much longer than he had proposed. When he came back, he was very pale indeed, and greatly agitated, and even looked as if he had been shedding tears. He seemed to have lost the faculty of speech, until he had been to the cupboard and taken a dram of rum from the case-bottle, when he fetched a deep breath, and sat down in a chair with his hand before his face.

'Captain Gills,' said Toots, kindly, 'I hope and trust there's nothing wrong?'

'Thank'ee, my lad, not a bit,' said the Captain. 'Quite contrairy.'

'You have the appearance of being overcome, Captain Gills,' observed Mr Toots.

'Why, my lad, I am took aback,' the Captain admitted. 'I am.'

'Is there anything I can do, Captain Gills?' inquired Mr Toots. 'If there is, make use of me.'

The Captain removed his hand from his face, looked at him with a remarkable expression of pity and tenderness, and took him by the hand, and shook it hard.

'No, thank'ee,' said the Captain. 'Nothing. Only I'll take it as a favour if you'll part company for the present. I believe, brother,' wringing his hand again, 'that, after Wal'r, and on a different model, you're as good a lad as ever stepped.'

'Upon my word and honour, Captain Gills,' returned Mr Toots, giving the Captain's hand a preliminary slap before shaking it again, 'it's delightful to me to possess your good opinion. Thank'ee.

'And bear a hand and cheer up,' said the Captain, patting him on the back. 'What! There's more than one sweet creetur in the world!'

'Not to me, Captain Gills,' replied Mr Toots gravely. 'Not to me, I assure you. The state of my feelings towards Miss Dombey is of that unspeakable description, that my heart is a desert island, and she lives in it alone. I'm getting more used up every day, and I'm proud to be so. If you could see my legs when I take my boots off, you'd form some idea of what unrequited affection is. I have been prescribed bark, but I don't take it, for I don't wish to have any tone whatever given to my constitution. I'd rather not. This, however, is forbidden ground. Captain Gills, goodbye!'

Captain Cuttle cordially reciprocating the warmth of Mr Toots's farewell, locked the door behind him, and shaking his head with the same remarkable expression of pity and tenderness as he had regarded him with before, went up to see if Florence wanted him.

There was an entire change in the Captain's face as he went upstairs. He wiped his eyes with his handkerchief, and he polished the bridge of his nose with his sleeve as he had done already that morning, but his face was absolutely changed. Now, he might have been thought supremely happy; now, he might have been thought sad; but the kind of gravity that sat upon his features was quite new to them, and was as great an improvement to them as if they had undergone some sublimating process.

He knocked softly, with his hook, at Florence's door, twice or thrice; but, receiving no answer, ventured first to peep in, and then to enter: emboldened to take the latter step, perhaps, by the familiar recognition of Diogenes, who, stretched upon the ground by the side of her couch, wagged his tail, and winked his eyes at the Captain, without being at the trouble of getting up.

She was sleeping heavily, and moaning in her sleep; and Captain Cuttle, with a perfect awe of her youth, and beauty, and her sorrow, raised her head, and adjusted the coat that covered her, where it had fallen off, and darkened the window a little more that she might sleep on, and crept out again, and took his post of watch upon the stairs. All this, with a touch and tread as light as Florence's own.

Long may it remain in this mixed world a point not easy of decision, which is the more beautiful evidence of the Almighty's goodness—the delicate fingers that are formed for sensitiveness and sympathy of touch, and made to minister to pain and grief, or the rough hard Captain Cuttle hand, that the heart teaches, guides, and softens in a moment!

Florence slept upon her couch, forgetful of her homelessness and orphanage, and Captain Cuttle watched upon the stairs. A louder sob or moan than usual, brought him sometimes to her door; but by degrees she slept more peacefully, and the Captain's watch was undisturbed.

CHAPTER 49. The Midshipman makes a Discovery

It was long before Florence awoke. The day was in its prime, the day was in its wane, and still, uneasy in mind and body, she slept on; unconscious of her strange bed, of the noise and turmoil in the street, and of the light that shone outside the shaded window. Perfect unconsciousness of what had happened in the home that existed no more, even the deep slumber of exhaustion could not produce. Some undefined and mournful recollection of it, dozing uneasily but never sleeping, pervaded all her rest. A dull sorrow, like a half-lulled sense of pain, was always present to her; and her pale cheek was oftener wet with tears than the honest Captain, softly putting in his head from time to time at the half-closed door, could have desired to see it.

The sun was getting low in the west, and, glancing out of a red mist, pierced with its rays opposite loopholes and pieces of fretwork in the spires of city churches, as if with golden arrows that struck through and through them—and far away athwart the river and its flat banks, it was gleaming like a path of fire—and out at sea it was irradiating sails of ships—and, looked towards, from quiet churchyards, upon hill-tops in the country, it was steeping distant prospects in a flush and glow that seemed to mingle earth and sky together in one glorious suffusion—when Florence, opening her heavy eyes, lay at first, looking without interest or recognition at the unfamiliar walls around her, and listening in the same regardless manner to the noises in the street. But presently she started up upon her couch, gazed round with a surprised and vacant look, and recollected all.

'My pretty,' said the Captain, knocking at the door, 'what cheer?'

'Dear friend,' cried Florence, hurrying to him, 'is it you?'

The Captain felt so much pride in the name, and was so pleased by the gleam of pleasure in her face, when she saw him, that he kissed his hook, by way of reply, in speechless gratification.

'What cheer, bright di'mond?' said the Captain.

'I have surely slept very long,' returned Florence. 'When did I come here? Yesterday?'

'This here blessed day, my lady lass,' replied the Captain.

'Has there been no night? Is it still day?' asked Florence.

'Getting on for evening now, my pretty,' said the Captain, drawing back the curtain of the window. 'See!'

Florence, with her hand upon the Captain's arm, so sorrowful and timid, and the Captain with his rough face and burly figure, so quietly protective of her, stood in the rosy light of the bright evening sky, without saying a word. However strange the form of speech into which he might have fashioned the feeling, if he had had to give it utterance, the Captain felt, as sensibly as the most eloquent of men could have done, that there was something in the tranquil time and in its softened beauty that would make the wounded heart of Florence overflow; and that it was better that such tears should have their way. So not a word spake Captain Cuttle. But when he felt his arm clasped closer, and when he felt the lonely head come nearer to it, and lay itself against his homely coarse blue sleeve, he pressed it gently with his rugged hand, and understood it, and was understood.

'Better now, my pretty!' said the Captain. 'Cheerily, cheerily, I'll go down below, and get some dinner ready. Will you come down of your own self, arterwards, pretty, or shall Ed'ard Cuttle come and fetch you?'

As Florence assured him that she was quite able to walk downstairs, the Captain, though evidently doubtful of his own hospitality in permitting it, left her to do so, and immediately set about roasting a fowl at the fire in the little parlour. To achieve his cookery with the greater skill, he pulled off his coat, tucked up his wristbands, and put on his glazed hat, without which assistant he never applied himself to any nice or difficult undertaking.

After cooling her aching head and burning face in the fresh water which the Captain's care had provided for her while she slept, Florence went to the little mirror to bind up her disordered hair. Then she knew—in a moment, for she shunned it instantly, that on her breast there was the darkening mark of an angry hand.

Her tears burst forth afresh at the sight; she was ashamed and afraid of it; but it moved her to no anger against him. Homeless and fatherless, she forgave him everything; hardly thought that she had need to forgive him, or that she did; but she fled from the idea of him as she had fled from the reality, and he was utterly gone and lost. There was no such Being in the world.

What to do, or where to live, Florence—poor, inexperienced girl!—could not yet consider. She had indistinct dreams of finding, a long way off, some little sisters to instruct, who would be gentle with her, and to whom, under some feigned name, she might attach herself, and who would grow up in their happy home, and marry, and be good to their old governess, and perhaps entrust her, in time, with the education of their own daughters. And she thought how strange and sorrowful it would be, thus to become a grey-haired woman, carrying her secret to the grave, when Florence Dombey was forgotten. But it was all dim and clouded to her now. She only knew that she had no Father upon earth, and she said so, many times, with her suppliant head hidden from all, but her Father who was in Heaven.

Her little stock of money amounted to but a few guineas. With a part of this, it would be necessary to buy some clothes, for she had none but those she wore. She was too desolate to think how soon her money would be gone—too much a child in worldly matters to be greatly troubled on that score yet, even if her other trouble had been less. She tried to calm her thoughts and stay her tears; to quiet the hurry in her throbbing head, and bring herself to believe that what had happened were but the events of a few hours ago, instead of weeks or months, as they appeared; and went down to her kind protector.

The Captain had spread the cloth with great care, and was making some egg-sauce in a little saucepan: basting the fowl from time to time during the process with a strong interest, as it turned and browned on a string before the fire. Having propped Florence up with cushions on the sofa, which was already wheeled into a warm corner for her greater comfort, the Captain pursued his cooking with extraordinary skill, making hot gravy in a second little saucepan, boiling a handful of potatoes in a third, never forgetting the egg-sauce in the first, and making an impartial round of basting and stirring with the most useful of spoons every minute. Besides these cares, the Captain had to keep his eye on a diminutive frying-pan, in which some sausages were hissing and bubbling in a most musical manner; and there was never such a radiant cook as the Captain looked, in the height and heat of these functions: it being impossible to say whether his face or his glazed hat shone the brighter.

The dinner being at length quite ready, Captain Cuttle dished and served it up, with no less dexterity than he had cooked it. He then dressed for dinner, by taking off his glazed hat and putting on his coat. That done, he wheeled the table close against Florence on the sofa, said grace, unscrewed his hook, screwed his fork into its place, and did the honours of the table.

'My lady lass,' said the Captain, 'cheer up, and try to eat a deal. Stand by, my deary! Liver wing it is. Sarse it is. Sassage it is. And potato!' all which the Captain ranged symmetrically on a plate, and pouring hot gravy on the whole with the useful spoon, set before his cherished guest.

'The whole row o' dead lights is up, for'ard, lady lass,' observed the Captain, encouragingly, 'and everythink is made snug. Try and pick a bit, my pretty. If Wal'r was here—'

'Ah! If I had him for my brother now!' cried Florence.

'Don't! don't take on, my pretty!' said the Captain, 'awast, to obleege me! He was your nat'ral born friend like, warn't he, Pet?'

Florence had no words to answer with. She only said, 'Oh, dear, dear Paul! oh, Walter!'

'The wery planks she walked on,' murmured the Captain, looking at her drooping face, 'was as high esteemed by Wal'r, as the water brooks is by the hart which never rejices! I see him now, the wery day as he was rated on them Dombey books, a speaking of her with his face a glistening with doo — leastways with his modest sentiments—like a new blowed rose, at dinner. Well, well! If our poor Wal'r was here, my lady lass—or if he could be—for he's drownded, ain't he?'

Florence shook her head.

'Yes, yes; drownded,' said the Captain, soothingly; 'as I was saying, if he could be here he'd beg and pray of you, my precious, to pick a leetle bit, with a look-out for your own sweet health. Whereby, hold your own, my lady lass, as if it was for Wal'r's sake, and lay your pretty head to the wind.'

Florence essayed to eat a morsel, for the Captain's pleasure. The Captain, meanwhile, who seemed to have quite forgotten his own dinner, laid down his knife and fork, and drew his chair to the sofa.

'Wal'r was a trim lad, warn't he, precious?' said the Captain, after sitting for some time silently rubbing his chin, with his eyes fixed upon her, 'and a brave lad, and a good lad?'

Florence tearfully assented.

'And he's drownded, Beauty, ain't he?' said the Captain, in a soothing voice.

Florence could not but assent again.

'He was older than you, my lady lass,' pursued the Captain, 'but you was like two children together, at first; wam't you?'

Florence answered 'Yes.'

'And Wal'r's drownded,' said the Captain. 'Ain't he?'

The repetition of this inquiry was a curious source of consolation, but it seemed to be one to Captain Cuttle, for he came back to it again and again. Florence, fain to push from her her untasted dinner, and to lie back on her sofa, gave him her hand, feeling that she had disappointed him, though truly wishing to have pleased him after all his trouble, but he held it in his own (which shook as he held it), and appearing to have quite forgotten all about the dinner and her want of appetite, went on growling at intervals, in a ruminating tone of sympathy, 'Poor Wal'r. Ay, ay! Drownded. Ain't he?' And always waited for her answer, in which the great point of these singular reflections appeared to consist.

The fowl and sausages were cold, and the gravy and the egg-sauce stagnant, before the Captain remembered that they were on the board, and fell to with the assistance of Diogenes, whose united efforts quickly dispatched the banquet. The Captain's delight and wonder at the quiet housewifery of Florence in assisting to clear the table, arrange the parlour, and sweep up the hearth—only to be equalled by the fervency of his protest when she began to assist him—were gradually raised to that degree, that at last he could not choose but do nothing himself, and stand looking at her as if she were some Fairy, daintily performing these offices for him; the red rim on his forehead glowing again, in his unspeakable admiration.

But when Florence, taking down his pipe from the mantel-shelf gave it into his hand, and entreated him to smoke it, the good Captain was so bewildered by her attention that he held it as if he had never held a pipe, in all his life. Likewise, when Florence, looking into the little cupboard, took out the case-bottle and mixed a perfect glass of grog for him, unasked, and set it at his elbow, his ruddy nose turned pale, he felt himself so graced and honoured. When he had filled his pipe in an absolute reverie of satisfaction, Florence lighted it for him—the Captain having no power to object, or to prevent her—and resuming her place on the old sofa, looked at him with a smile so loving and so grateful, a smile that showed him so plainly how her forlorn heart turned to him, as her face did, through grief, that the smoke of the pipe got into the Captain's throat and made him cough, and got into the Captain's eyes, and made them blink and water.

The manner in which the Captain tried to make believe that the cause of these effects lay hidden in the pipe itself, and the way in which he looked into the bowl for it, and not finding it there, pretended to blow it out of the stem, was wonderfully pleasant. The pipe soon getting into better condition, he fell into that state of repose becoming a good smoker; but sat with his eyes fixed on Florence, and, with a beaming placidity not to be described, and stopping every now and then to discharge a little cloud from his lips, slowly puffed it forth, as if it were a scroll coming out of his mouth, bearing the legend 'Poor Wal'r, ay, ay. Drownded, ain't he?' after which he would resume his smoking with infinite gentleness.

Unlike as they were externally—and there could scarcely be a more decided contrast than between Florence in her delicate youth and beauty, and Captain Cuttle with his knobby face, his great broad weather-beaten person, and his gruff voice—in simple innocence of the world's ways and the world's perplexities and dangers, they were nearly on a level. No child could have surpassed Captain Cuttle in inexperience of everything but wind and weather; in simplicity, credulity, and generous trustfulness. Faith, hope, and charity, shared his whole nature among them. An odd sort of romance, perfectly unimaginative, yet perfectly unreal, and subject to no considerations of worldly prudence or practicability, was the only partner they had in his character. As the Captain sat, and smoked, and looked at Florence, God knows what impossible pictures, in which she was the principal figure, presented themselves to his mind. Equally vague and uncertain, though not so sanguine, were her own thoughts of the life before her; and even as her tears made prismatic colours in the light she gazed at, so, through her new and heavy grief, she already saw a rainbow faintly shining in the far-off sky. A wandering princess and a good monster in a storybook might have sat by the fireside, and talked as Captain Cuttle and poor Florence talked—and not have looked very much unlike them.

The Captain was not troubled with the faintest idea of any difficulty in retaining Florence, or of any responsibility thereby incurred. Having put up the shutters and locked the door, he was quite satisfied on this head. If she had been a Ward in Chancery, it would have made no difference at all to Captain Cuttle. He was the last man in the world to be troubled by any such considerations.

So the Captain smoked his pipe very comfortably, and Florence and he meditated after their own manner. When the pipe was out, they had some tea; and then Florence entreated him to take her to some neighbouring shop, where she could buy the few necessaries she immediately wanted. It being quite dark, the Captain consented: peeping carefully out first, as he had been wont to do in his time of hiding from Mrs MacStinger; and arming himself with his large stick, in case of an appeal to arms being rendered necessary by any unforeseen circumstance.

The pride Captain Cuttle had, in giving his arm to Florence, and escorting her some two or three hundred yards, keeping a bright look-out all the time, and attracting the attention of everyone who passed them, by his great vigilance and numerous precautions, was extreme. Arrived at the shop, the Captain felt it a point of delicacy to retire during the making of the purchases, as they were to consist of wearing apparel; but he previously deposited his tin canister on the counter, and informing the young lady of the establishment that it contained fourteen pound two, requested her, in case that amount of property should not be sufficient to defray the expenses of his niece's little outfit—at the word 'niece,' he bestowed a most significant look on Florence, accompanied with pantomime, expressive of sagacity and mystery—to have the goodness to 'sing out,' and he would make up the difference from his pocket. Casually consulting his big watch, as a deep means of dazzling the establishment, and impressing it with a sense of property, the Captain then kissed his hook to his niece, and retired outside the window, where it was a choice sight to see his great face looking in from time to time, among the silks and ribbons, with an obvious misgiving that Florence had been spirited away by a back door.

'Dear Captain Cuttle,' said Florence, when she came out with a parcel, the size of which greatly disappointed the Captain, who had expected to see a porter following with a bale of goods, 'I don't want this money, indeed. I have not spent any of it. I have money of my own.'

'My lady lass,' returned the baffled Captain, looking straight down the street before them, 'take care on it for me, will you be so good, till such time as I ask ye for it?'

'May I put it back in its usual place,' said Florence, 'and keep it there?'

The Captain was not at all gratified by this proposal, but he answered, 'Ay, ay, put it anywheres, my lady lass, so long as you know where to find it again. It ain't o' no use to me,' said the Captain. 'I wonder I haven't chucked it away afore now.

The Captain was quite disheartened for the moment, but he revived at the first touch of Florence's arm, and they returned with the same precautions as they had come; the Captain opening the door of the little Midshipman's berth, and diving in, with a suddenness which his great practice only could have taught him. During Florence's slumber in the morning, he had engaged the daughter of an elderly lady who usually sat under a blue umbrella in Leadenhall Market, selling poultry, to come and put her room in order, and render her any little services she required; and this damsel now appearing, Florence found everything about her as convenient and orderly, if not as handsome, as in the terrible dream she had once called Home.

When they were alone again, the Captain insisted on her eating a slice of dry toast' and drinking a glass of spiced negus (which he made to perfection); and, encouraging her with every kind word and inconsequential quotation he could possibly think of, led her upstairs to her bedroom. But he too had something on his mind, and was not easy in his manner.

'Good-night, dear heart,' said Captain Cuttle to her at her chamber-door.

Florence raised her lips to his face, and kissed him.

At any other time the Captain would have been overbalanced by such a token of her affection and gratitude; but now, although he was very sensible of it, he looked in her face with even more uneasiness than he had testified before, and seemed unwilling to leave her.

'Poor Wal'r!' said the Captain.

'Poor, poor Walter!' sighed Florence.

'Drownded, ain't he?' said the Captain.

Florence shook her head, and sighed.

'Good-night, my lady lass!' said Captain Cuttle, putting out his hand.

'God bless you, dear, kind friend!'

But the Captain lingered still.

'Is anything the matter, dear Captain Cuttle?' said Florence, easily alarmed in her then state of mind. 'Have you anything to tell me?'

'To tell you, lady lass!' replied the Captain, meeting her eyes in confusion. 'No, no; what should I have to tell you, pretty! You don't expect as I've got anything good to tell you, sure?'

'No!' said Florence, shaking her head.

The Captain looked at her wistfully, and repeated 'No,'—' still lingering, and still showing embarrassment.

'Poor Wal'r!' said the Captain. 'My Wal'r, as I used to call you! Old Sol Gills's nevy! Welcome to all as knowed you, as the flowers in May! Where are you got to, brave boy? Drownded, ain't he?'

Concluding his apostrophe with this abrupt appeal to Florence, the Captain bade her good-night, and descended the stairs, while Florence remained at the top, holding the candle out to light him down. He was lost in the obscurity, and, judging from the sound of his receding footsteps, was in the act of turning into the little parlour, when his head and shoulders unexpectedly emerged again, as from the deep, apparently for no other purpose than to repeat, 'Drownded, ain't he, pretty?' For when he had said that in a tone of tender condolence, he disappeared.

Florence was very sorry that she should unwittingly, though naturally, have awakened these associations in the mind of her protector, by taking refuge there; and sitting down before the little table where the Captain had arranged the telescope and song-book, and those other rarities, thought of Walter, and of all that was connected with him in the past, until she could have almost wished to lie down on her bed and fade away. But in her lonely yearning to the dead whom she had loved, no thought of home—no possibility of going back—no presentation of it as yet existing, or as sheltering her father—once entered her thoughts. She had seen the murder done. In the last lingering natural aspect in which she had cherished him through so much, he had been torn out of her heart, defaced, and slain. The thought of it was so appalling to her, that she covered her eyes, and shrunk trembling from the least remembrance of the deed, or of the cruel hand that did it. If her fond heart could have held his image after that, it must have broken; but it could not; and the void was filled with a wild dread that fled from all confronting with its shattered fragments—with such a dread as could have risen out of nothing but the depths of such a love, so wronged.

She dared not look into the glass; for the sight of the darkening mark upon her bosom made her afraid of herself, as if she bore about her something wicked. She covered it up, with a hasty, faltering hand, and in the dark; and laid her weary head down, weeping.

The Captain did not go to bed for a long time. He walked to and fro in the shop and in the little parlour, for a full hour, and, appearing to have composed himself by that exercise, sat down with a grave and thoughtful face, and read out of a Prayer-book the forms of prayer appointed to be used at sea. These were not easily disposed of; the good Captain being a mighty slow, gruff reader, and frequently stopping at a hard word to give himself such encouragement as Now, my lad! With a will!' or, 'Steady, Ed'ard Cuttle, steady!' which had a great effect in helping him out of any difficulty. Moreover, his spectacles greatly interfered with his powers of vision. But notwithstanding these drawbacks, the Captain, being heartily in earnest, read the service to the very last line, and with genuine feeling too; and approving of it very much when he had done, turned in, under the counter (but not before he had been upstairs, and listened at Florence's door), with a serene breast, and a most benevolent visage.

The Captain turned out several times in the course of the night, to assure himself that his charge was resting quietly; and once, at daybreak, found that she was awake: for she called to know if it were he, on hearing footsteps near her door.

'Yes' my lady lass,' replied the Captain, in a growling whisper. 'Are you all right, di'mond?'

Florence thanked him, and said 'Yes.'

The Captain could not lose so favourable an opportunity of applying his mouth to the keyhole, and calling through it, like a hoarse breeze, 'Poor Wal'r! Drownded, ain't he?' after which he withdrew, and turning in again, slept till seven o'clock.

Nor was he free from his uneasy and embarrassed manner all that day; though Florence, being busy with her needle in the little parlour, was more calm and tranquil than she had been on the day preceding. Almost always when she raised her eyes from her work, she observed the captain looking at her, and thoughtfully stroking his chin; and he so often hitched his arm-chair close to her, as if he were going to say something very confidential, and hitched it away again, as not being able to make up his mind how to begin, that in the course of the day he cruised completely round the parlour in that frail bark, and more than once went ashore against the wainscot or the closet door, in a very distressed condition.

It was not until the twilight that Captain Cuttle, fairly dropping anchor, at last, by the side of Florence, began to talk at all connectedly. But when the light of the fire was shining on the walls and ceiling of the little room, and on the tea-board and the cups and saucers that were ranged upon the table, and on her calm face turned towards the flame, and reflecting it in the tears that filled her eyes, the Captain broke a long silence thus:

'You never was at sea, my own?'

'No,' replied Florence.

'Ay,' said the Captain, reverentially; 'it's a almighty element. There's wonders in the deep, my pretty. Think on it when the winds is roaring and the waves is rowling. Think on it when the stormy nights is so pitch dark,' said the Captain, solemnly holding up his hook, 'as you can't see your hand afore you, excepting when the wiwid lightning reweals the same; and when you drive, drive, drive through the storm and dark, as if you was a driving, head on, to the world without end, evermore, amen, and when found making a note of. Them's the times, my beauty, when a man may say to his messmate (previously a overhauling of the wollume), "A stiff nor'wester's blowing, Bill; hark, don't you hear it roar now! Lord help 'em, how I pitys all unhappy folks ashore now!"' Which quotation, as particularly applicable to the terrors of the ocean, the Captain delivered in a most impressive manner, concluding with a sonorous 'Stand by!'

'Were you ever in a dreadful storm?' asked Florence.

'Why ay, my lady lass, I've seen my share of bad weather,' said the Captain, tremulously wiping his head, 'and I've had my share of knocking about; but—but it ain't of myself as I was a meaning to speak. Our dear boy,' drawing closer to her, 'Wal'r, darling, as was drownded.'

The Captain spoke in such a trembling voice, and looked at Florence with a face so pale and agitated, that she clung to his hand in affright.

'Your face is changed,' cried Florence. 'You are altered in a moment. What is it? Dear Captain Cuttle, it turns me cold to see you!'

'What! Lady lass,' returned the Captain, supporting her with his hand, 'don't be took aback. No, no! All's well, all's well, my dear. As I was a saying—Wal'r—he's—he's drownded. Ain't he?'

Florence looked at him intently; her colour came and went; and she laid her hand upon her breast.

'There's perils and dangers on the deep, my beauty,' said the Captain; 'and over many a brave ship, and many and many a bould heart, the secret waters has closed up, and never told no tales. But there's escapes upon the deep, too, and sometimes one man out of a score,—ah! maybe out of a hundred, pretty,—has been saved by the mercy of God, and come home after being given over for dead, and told of all hands lost. I—I know a story, Heart's Delight,' stammered the Captain, 'o' this natur, as was told to me once; and being on this here tack, and you and me sitting alone by the fire, maybe you'd like to hear me tell it. Would you, deary?'

Florence, trembling with an agitation which she could not control or understand, involuntarily followed his glance, which went behind her into the shop, where a lamp was burning. The instant that she turned her head, the Captain sprung out of his chair, and interposed his hand.

'There's nothing there, my beauty,' said the Captain. 'Don't look there.'

'Why not?' asked Florence.

The Captain murmured something about its being dull that way, and about the fire being cheerful. He drew the door ajar, which had been standing open until now, and resumed his seat. Florence followed him with her eyes, and looked intently in his face.

'The story was about a ship, my lady lass,' began the Captain, 'as sailed out of the Port of London, with a fair wind and in fair weather, bound for—don't be took aback, my lady lass, she was only out'ard bound, pretty, only out'ard bound!'

The expression on Florence's face alarmed the Captain, who was himself very hot and flurried, and showed scarcely less agitation than she did.

'Shall I go on, Beauty?' said the Captain.

'Yes, yes, pray!' cried Florence.

The Captain made a gulp as if to get down something that was sticking in his throat, and nervously proceeded:

'That there unfort'nate ship met with such foul weather, out at sea, as don't blow once in twenty year, my darling. There was hurricanes ashore as tore up forests and blowed down towns, and there was gales at sea in them latitudes, as not the stoutest wessel ever launched could live in. Day arter day that there unfort'nate ship behaved noble, I'm told, and did her duty brave, my pretty, but at one blow a'most her bulwarks was stove in, her masts and rudder carved away, her best man swept overboard, and she left to the mercy of the storm as had no mercy but blowed harder and harder yet, while the waves dashed over her, and beat her in, and every time they come a thundering at her, broke her like a shell. Every black spot in every mountain of water that rolled away was a bit o' the ship's life or a living man, and so she went to pieces, Beauty, and no grass will never grow upon the graves of them as manned that ship.'

'They were not all lost!' cried Florence. 'Some were saved!—Was one?'

'Aboard o' that there unfort'nate wessel,' said the Captain, rising from his chair, and clenching his hand with prodigious energy and exultation, 'was a lad, a gallant lad—as I've heerd tell—that had loved, when he was a boy, to read and talk about brave actions in shipwrecks—I've heerd him! I've heerd him!—and he remembered of 'em in his hour of need; for when the stoutest and oldest hands was hove down, he was firm and cheery. It warn't the want of objects to like and love ashore that gave him courage, it was his nat'ral mind. I've seen it in his face, when he was no more than a child— ay, many a time!—and when I thought it nothing but his good looks, bless him!'

'And was he saved!' cried Florence. 'Was he saved!'

'That brave lad,' said the Captain,—'look at me, pretty! Don't look round—'

Florence had hardly power to repeat, 'Why not?'

'Because there's nothing there, my deary,' said the Captain. 'Don't be took aback, pretty creetur! Don't, for the sake of Wal'r, as was dear to all on us! That there lad,' said the Captain, 'arter working with the best, and standing by the faint-hearted, and never making no complaint nor sign of fear, and keeping up a spirit in all hands that made 'em honour him as if he'd been a admiral—that lad, along with the second-mate and one seaman, was left, of all the beatin' hearts that went aboard that ship, the only living creeturs—lashed to a fragment of the wreck, and driftin' on the stormy sea.

Were they saved?' cried Florence.

'Days and nights they drifted on them endless waters,' said the Captain, 'until at last—No! Don't look that way, pretty!—a sail bore down upon 'em, and they was, by the Lord's mercy, took aboard: two living and one dead.'

'Which of them was dead?' cried Florence.

'Not the lad I speak on,' said the Captain.

'Thank God! oh thank God!'

'Amen!' returned the Captain hurriedly. 'Don't be took aback! A minute more, my lady lass! with a good heart!—aboard that ship, they went a long voyage, right away across the chart (for there warn't no touching nowhere), and on that voyage the seaman as was picked up with him died. But he was spared, and—'

The Captain, without knowing what he did, had cut a slice of bread from the loaf, and put it on his hook (which was his usual toasting-fork), on which he now held it to the fire; looking behind Florence with great emotion in his face, and suffering the bread to blaze and burn like fuel.

'Was spared,' repeated Florence, 'and-?'

'And come home in that ship,' said the Captain, still looking in the same direction, 'and—don't be frightened, pretty—and landed; and one morning come cautiously to his own door to take a obserwation, knowing that his friends would think him drownded, when he sheered off at the unexpected —'

'At the unexpected barking of a dog?' cried Florence, quickly.

'Yes,' roared the Captain. 'Steady, darling! courage! Don't look round yet. See there! upon the wall!'

There was the shadow of a man upon the wall close to her. She started up, looked round, and with a piercing cry, saw Walter Gay behind her!

She had no thought of him but as a brother, a brother rescued from the grave; a shipwrecked brother saved and at her side; and rushed into his arms. In all the world, he seemed to be her hope, her comfort, refuge, natural protector. 'Take care of Walter, I was fond of Walter!' The dear remembrance of the plaintive voice that said so, rushed upon her soul, like music in the night. 'Oh welcome home, dear Walter! Welcome to this stricken breast!' She felt the words, although she could not utter them, and held him in her pure embrace.

Captain Cuttle, in a fit of delirium, attempted to wipe his head with the blackened toast upon his hook: and finding it an uncongenial substance for the purpose, put it into the crown of his glazed hat, put the glazed hat on with some difficulty, essayed to sing a verse of Lovely Peg, broke down at the first word, and retired into the shop, whence he presently came back express, with a face all flushed and besmeared, and the starch completely taken out of his shirt-collar, to say these words:

'Wal'r, my lad, here is a little bit of property as I should wish to make over, jintly!'

The Captain hastily produced the big watch, the teaspoons, the sugar-tongs, and the canister, and laying them on the table, swept them with his great hand into Walter's hat; but in handing that singular strong box to Walter, he was so overcome again, that he was fain to make another retreat into the shop, and absent himself for a longer space of time than on his first retirement.

But Walter sought him out, and brought him back; and then the Captain's great apprehension was, that Florence would suffer from this new shock. He felt it so earnestly, that he turned quite rational, and positively interdicted any further allusion to Walter's adventures for some days to come. Captain Cuttle then became sufficiently composed to relieve himself of the toast in his hat, and to take his place at the tea-board; but finding Walter's grasp upon his shoulder, on one side, and Florence whispering her tearful congratulations on the other, the Captain suddenly bolted again, and was missing for a good ten minutes.

But never in all his life had the Captain's face so shone and glistened, as when, at last, he sat stationary at the tea-board, looking from Florence to Walter, and from Walter to Florence. Nor was this effect produced or at all heightened by the immense quantity of polishing he had administered to his face with his coat-sleeve during the last half-hour. It was solely the effect of his internal emotions. There was a glory and delight within the Captain that spread itself over his whole visage, and made a perfect illumination there.

The pride with which the Captain looked upon the bronzed cheek and the courageous eyes of his recovered boy; with which he saw the generous fervour of his youth, and all its frank and hopeful qualities, shining once more, in the fresh, wholesome manner, and the ardent face, would have kindled something of this light in his countenance. The admiration and sympathy with which he turned his eyes on Florence, whose beauty, grace, and innocence could have won no truer or more zealous champion than himself, would have had an equal influence upon him. But the fulness of the glow he shed around him could only have been engendered in his contemplation of the two together, and in all the fancies springing out of that association, that came sparkling and beaming into his head, and danced about it.

How they talked of poor old Uncle Sol, and dwelt on every little circumstance relating to his disappearance; how their joy was moderated by the old man's absence and by the misfortunes of Florence; how they released Diogenes, whom the Captain had decoyed upstairs some time before, lest he should bark again; the Captain, though he was in one continual flutter, and made many more short plunges into the shop, fully comprehended. But he no more dreamed that Walter looked on Florence, as it were, from a new and far-off place; that while his eyes often sought the lovely face, they seldom met its open glance of sisterly affection, but withdrew themselves when hers were raised towards him; than he believed that it was Walter's ghost who sat beside him. He saw them together in their youth and beauty, and he knew the story of their younger days, and he had no inch of room beneath his great blue waistcoat for anything save admiration of such a pair, and gratitude for their being reunited.

They sat thus, until it grew late. The Captain would have been content to sit so for a week. But Walter rose, to take leave for the night.

'Going, Walter!' said Florence. 'Where?'

'He slings his hammock for the present, lady lass,' said Captain Cuttle, 'round at Brogley's. Within hail, Heart's Delight.'

'I am the cause of your going away, Walter,' said Florence. 'There is a houseless sister in your place.'

'Dear Miss Dombey,' replied Walter, hesitating—'if it is not too bold to call you so!

Walter!' she exclaimed, surprised.

'If anything could make me happier in being allowed to see and speak to you, would it not be the discovery that I had any means on earth of doing you a moment's service! Where would I not go, what would I not do, for your sake?'

She smiled, and called him brother.

'You are so changed,' said Walter—

'I changed!' she interrupted.

'To me,' said Walter, softly, as if he were thinking aloud, 'changed to me. I left you such a child, and find you—oh! something so different—'

'But your sister, Walter. You have not forgotten what we promised to each other, when we parted?'

'Forgotten!' But he said no more.

'And if you had—if suffering and danger had driven it from your thoughts—which it has not—you would remember it now, Walter, when you find me poor and abandoned, with no home but this, and no friends but the two who hear me speak!'

'I would! Heaven knows I would!' said Walter.

'Oh, Walter,' exclaimed Florence, through her sobs and tears. 'Dear brother! Show me some way through the world—some humble path that I may take alone, and labour in, and sometimes think of you as one who will protect and care for me as for a sister! Oh, help me, Walter, for I need help so much!'

'Miss Dombey! Florence! I would die to help you. But your friends are proud and rich. Your father—'

'No, no! Walter!' She shrieked, and put her hands up to her head, in an attitude of terror that transfixed him where he stood. 'Don't say that word!'

He never, from that hour, forgot the voice and look with which she stopped him at the name. He felt that if he were to live a hundred years, he never could forget it.

Somewhere—anywhere—but never home! All past, all gone, all lost, and broken up! The whole history of her untold slight and suffering was in the cry and look; and he felt he never could forget it, and he never did.

She laid her gentle face upon the Captain's shoulder, and related how and why she had fled. If every sorrowing tear she shed in doing so, had been a curse upon the head of him she never named or blamed, it would have been better for him, Walter thought, with awe, than to be renounced out of such a strength and might of love.

'There, precious!' said the Captain, when she ceased; and deep attention the Captain had paid to her while she spoke; listening, with his glazed hat all awry and his mouth wide open. 'Awast, awast, my eyes! Wal'r, dear lad, sheer off for to-night, and leave the pretty one to me!'

Walter took her hand in both of his, and put it to his lips, and kissed it. He knew now that she was, indeed, a homeless wandering fugitive; but, richer to him so, than in all the wealth and pride of her right station, she seemed farther off than even on the height that had made him giddy in his boyish dreams.

Captain Cuttle, perplexed by no such meditations, guarded Florence to her room, and watched at intervals upon the charmed ground outside her door—for such it truly was to him—until he felt sufficiently easy in his mind about her, to turn in under the counter. On abandoning his watch for that purpose, he could not help calling once, rapturously, through the keyhole, 'Drownded. Ain't he, pretty?'—or, when he got downstairs, making another trial at that verse of Lovely Peg. But it stuck in his throat somehow, and he could make nothing of it; so he went to bed, and dreamed that old Sol Gills was married to Mrs MacStinger, and kept prisoner by that lady in a secret chamber on a short allowance of victuals.

CHAPTER 50. Mr Toots's Complaint

There was an empty room above-stairs at the wooden Midshipman's, which, in days of yore, had been Walter's bedroom. Walter, rousing up the Captain betimes in the morning, proposed that they should carry thither such furniture out of the little parlour as would grace it best, so that Florence might take possession of it when she rose. As nothing could be more agreeable to Captain Cuttle than making himself very red and short of breath in such a cause, he turned to (as he himself said) with a will; and, in a couple of hours, this garret was transformed into a species of land-cabin, adorned with all the choicest moveables out of the parlour, inclusive even of the Tartar frigate, which the Captain hung up over the chimney-piece with such extreme delight, that he could do nothing for half-an-hour afterwards but walk backward from it, lost in admiration.

The Captain could be indueed by no persuasion of Walter's to wind up the big watch, or to take back the canister, or to touch the sugar-tongs and teaspoons. 'No, no, my lad;' was the Captain's invariable reply to any solicitation of the kind, 'I've made that there little property over, jintly.' These words he repeated with great unction and gravity, evidently believing that they had the virtue of an Act of Parliament, and that unless he committed himself by some new admission of ownership, no flaw could be found in such a form of conveyance.

It was an advantage of the new arrangement, that besides the greater seclusion it afforded Florence, it admitted of the Midshipman being restored to his usual post of observation, and also of the shop shutters being taken down. The latter ceremony, however little importance the unconscious Captain attached to it, was not wholly superfluous; for, on the previous day, so much excitement had been occasioned in the neighbourhood, by the shutters remaining unopened, that the Instrument-maker's house had been honoured with an unusual share of public observation, and had been intently stared at from the opposite side of the way, by groups of hungry gazers, at any time between sunrise and sunset. The idlers and vagabonds had been particularly interested in the Captain's fate; constantly grovelling in the mud to apply their eyes to the cellar-grating, under the shop-window, and delighting their imaginations with the fancy that they could see a piece of his coat as he hung in a corner; though this settlement of him was stoutly disputed by an opposite faction, who were of opinion that he lay murdered with a hammer, on the stairs. It was not without exciting some discontent, therefore, that the subject of these rumours was seen early in the morning standing at his shop-door as hale and hearty as if nothing had happened; and the beadle of that quarter, a man of an ambitious character, who had expected to have the distinction of being present at the breaking open of the door, and of giving evidence in full uniform before the coroner, went so far as to say to an opposite neighbour, that the chap in the glazed hat had better not try it on there—without more particularly mentioning what—and further, that he, the beadle, would keep his eye upon him.

'Captain Cuttle,' said Walter, musing, when they stood resting from their labours at the shop-door, looking down the old familiar street; it being still early in the morning; 'nothing at all of Uncle Sol, in all that time!'

'Nothing at all, my lad,' replied the Captain, shaking his head.

'Gone in search of me, dear, kind old man,' said Walter: 'yet never write to you! But why not? He says, in effect, in this packet that you gave me,' taking the paper from his pocket, which had been opened in the presence of the enlightened Bunsby, 'that if you never hear from him before opening it, you may believe him dead. Heaven forbid! But you would have heard of him, even if he were dead! Someone would have written, surely, by his desire, if he could not; and have said, "on such a day, there died in my house," or "under my care," or so forth, "Mr Solomon Gills of London, who left this last remembrance and this last request to you".'

The Captain, who had never climbed to such a clear height of probability before, was greatly impressed by the wide prospect it opened, and answered, with a thoughtful shake of his head, 'Well said, my lad; wery well said.'

'I have been thinking of this, or, at least,' said Walter, colouring, 'I have been thinking of one thing and another, all through a sleepless night, and I cannot believe, Captain Cuttle, but that my Uncle Sol (Lord bless him!) is alive, and will return. I don't so much wonder at his going away, because, leaving out of consideration that spice of the marvellous which was always in his character, and his great affection for me, before which every other consideration of his life became nothing, as no one ought to know so well as I who had the best of fathers in him,'—Walter's voice was indistinct and husky here, and he looked away, along the street,—'leaving that out of consideration, I say, I have often read and heard of people who, having some near and dear relative, who was supposed to be shipwrecked at sea, have gone down to live on that part of the sea-shore where any tidings of the missing ship might be expected to arrive, though only an hour or two sooner than elsewhere, or have even gone upon her track to the place whither she was bound, as if their going would create intelligence. I think I should do such a thing myself, as soon as another, or sooner than many, perhaps. But why my Uncle shouldn't write to you, when he so clearly intended to do so, or how he should die abroad, and you not know it through some other hand, I cannot make out.'

Captain Cuttle observed, with a shake of his head, that Jack Bunsby himself hadn't made it out, and that he was a man as could give a pretty taut opinion too.

'If my Uncle had been a heedless young man, likely to be entrapped by jovial company to some drinking-place, where he was to be got rid of for the sake of what money he might have about him,' said Walter; 'or if he had been a reckless sailor, going ashore with two or three months' pay in his pocket, I could understand his disappearing, and leaving no trace behind. But, being what he was—and is, I hope—I can't believe it.'

'Wal'r, my lad,' inquired the Captain, wistfully eyeing him as he pondered and pondered, 'what do you make of it, then?'

'Captain Cuttle,' returned Walter, 'I don't know what to make of it. I suppose he never has written! There is no doubt about that?'

'If so be as Sol Gills wrote, my lad,' replied the Captain, argumentatively, 'where's his dispatch?'

'Say that he entrusted it to some private hand,' suggested Walter, 'and that it has been forgotten, or carelessly thrown aside, or lost. Even that is more probable to me, than the other event. In short, I not only cannot bear to contemplate that other event, Captain Cuttle, but I can't, and won't.'

'Hope, you see, Wal'r,' said the Captain, sagely, 'Hope. It's that as animates you. Hope is a buoy, for which you overhaul your Little Warbler, sentimental diwision, but Lord, my lad, like any other buoy, it only floats; it can't be steered nowhere. Along with the figure-head of Hope,' said the Captain, 'there's a anchor; but what's the good of my having a anchor, if I can't find no bottom to let it go in?'

Captain Cuttle said this rather in his character of a sagacious citizen and householder, bound to impart a morsel from his stores of wisdom to an inexperienced youth, than in his own proper person. Indeed, his face was quite luminous as he spoke, with new hope, caught from Walter; and he appropriately concluded by slapping him on the back; and saying, with enthusiasm, 'Hooroar, my lad! Indiwidually, I'm o' your opinion.' Walter, with his cheerful laugh, returned the salutation, and said:

'Only one word more about my Uncle at present' Captain Cuttle. I suppose it is impossible that he can have written in the ordinary course—by mail packet, or ship letter, you understand—'

'Ay, ay, my lad,' said the Captain approvingly.

And that you have missed the letter, anyhow?'

'Why, Wal'r,' said the Captain, turning his eyes upon him with a faint approach to a severe expression, 'ain't I been on the look-out for any tidings of that man o' science, old Sol Gills, your Uncle, day and night, ever since I lost him? Ain't my heart been heavy and watchful always, along of him and you? Sleeping and waking, ain't I been upon my post, and wouldn't I scorn to quit it while this here Midshipman held together!'

'Yes, Captain Cuttle,' replied Walter, grasping his hand, 'I know you would, and I know how faithful and earnest all you say and feel is. I am sure of it. You don't doubt that I am as sure of it as I am that my foot is again upon this door-step, or that I again have hold of this true hand. Do you?'

'No, no, Wal'r,' returned the Captain, with his beaming

'I'll hazard no more conjectures,' said Walter, fervently shaking the hard hand of the Captain, who shook his with no less goodwill. 'All I will add is, Heaven forbid that I should touch my Uncle's possessions, Captain Cuttle! Everything that he left here, shall remain in the care of the truest of stewards and kindest of men—and if his name is not Cuttle, he has no name! Now, best of friends, about—Miss Dombey.'

There was a change in Walter's manner, as he came to these two words; and when he uttered them, all his confidence and cheerfulness appeared to have deserted him.

'I thought, before Miss Dombey stopped me when I spoke of her father last night,' said Walter, '—you remember how?'

The Captain well remembered, and shook his head.

'I thought,' said Walter, 'before that, that we had but one hard duty to perform, and that it was, to prevail upon her to communicate with her friends, and to return home.'

The Captain muttered a feeble 'Awast!' or a 'Stand by!' or something or other, equally pertinent to the occasion; but it was rendered so extremely feeble by the total discomfiture with which he received this announcement, that what it was, is mere matter of conjecture.

'But,' said Walter, 'that is over. I think so, no longer. I would sooner be put back again upon that piece of wreck, on which I have so often floated, since my preservation, in my dreams, and there left to drift, and drive, and die!'

'Hooroar, my lad!' exclaimed the Captain, in a burst of uncontrollable satisfaction. 'Hooroar! hooroar! hooroar!'

'To think that she, so young, so good, and beautiful,' said Walter, 'so delicately brought up, and born to such a different fortune, should strive with the rough world! But we have seen the gulf that cuts off all behind her, though no one but herself can know how deep it is; and there is no return.

Captain Cuttle, without quite understanding this, greatly approved of it, and observed in a tone of strong corroboration, that the wind was quite abaft.

'She ought not to be alone here; ought she, Captain Cuttle?' said Walter, anxiously.

'Well, my lad,' replied the Captain, after a little sagacious consideration. 'I don't know. You being here to keep her company, you see, and you two being jintly—'

'Dear Captain Cuttle!' remonstrated Walter. 'I being here! Miss Dombey, in her guileless innocent heart, regards me as her adopted brother; but what would the guile and guilt of my heart be, if I pretended to believe that I had any right to approach her, familiarly, in that character—if I pretended to forget that I am bound, in honour, not to do it?'

'Wal'r, my lad,' hinted the Captain, with some revival of his discomfiture, 'ain't there no other character as—'

'Oh!' returned Walter, 'would you have me die in her esteem—in such esteem as hers—and put a veil between myself and her angel's face for ever, by taking advantage of her being here for refuge, so trusting and so unprotected, to endeavour to exalt myself into her lover? What do I say? There is no one in the world who would be more opposed to me if I could do so, than you.'

'Wal'r, my lad,' said the Captain, drooping more and more, 'prowiding as there is any just cause or impediment why two persons should not be jined together in the house of bondage, for which you'll overhaul the place and make a note, I hope I should declare it as promised and wowed in the banns. So there ain't no other character; ain't there, my lad?'

Walter briskly waved his hand in the negative.

'Well, my lad,' growled the Captain slowly, 'I won't deny but what I find myself wery much down by the head, along o' this here, or but what I've gone clean about. But as to Lady lass, Wal'r, mind you, wot's respect and duty to her, is respect and duty in my articles, howsumever disapinting; and therefore I follows in your wake, my lad, and feel as you are, no doubt, acting up to yourself. And there ain't no other character, ain't there?' said the Captain, musing over the ruins of his fallen castle, with a very despondent face.

'Now, Captain Cuttle,' said Walter, starting a fresh point with a gayer air, to cheer the Captain up—but nothing could do that; he was too much concerned—'I think we should exert ourselves to find someone who would be a proper attendant for Miss Dombey while she remains here, and who may be trusted. None of her relations may. It's clear Miss Dombey feels that they are all subservient to her father. What has become of Susan?'

'The young woman?' returned the Captain. 'It's my belief as she was sent away again the will of Heart's Delight. I made a signal for her when Lady lass first come, and she rated of her wery high, and said she had been gone a long time.'

'Then,' said Walter, 'do you ask Miss Dombey where she's gone, and we'll try to find her. The morning's getting on, and Miss Dombey will soon be rising. You are her best friend. Wait for her upstairs, and leave me to take care of all down here.'

The Captain, very crest-fallen indeed, echoed the sigh with which Walter said this, and complied. Florence was delighted with her new room, anxious to see Walter, and overjoyed at the prospect of greeting her old friend Susan. But Florence could not say where Susan was gone, except that it was in Essex, and no one could say, she remembered, unless it were Mr Toots.

With this information the melancholy Captain returned to Walter, and gave him to understand that Mr Toots was the young gentleman whom he had encountered on the door-step, and that he was a friend of his, and that he was a young gentleman of property, and that he hopelessly adored Miss Dombey. The Captain also related how the intelligence of Walter's supposed fate had first made him acquainted with Mr Toots, and how there was solemn treaty and compact between them, that Mr Toots should be mute upon the subject of his love.

The question then was, whether Florence could trust Mr Toots; and Florence saying, with a smile, 'Oh, yes, with her whole heart!' it became important to find out where Mr Toots lived. This, Florence didn't know, and the Captain had forgotten; and the Captain was telling Walter, in the little parlour, that Mr Toots was sure to be there soon, when in came Mr Toots himself.

'Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, rushing into the parlour without any ceremony, 'I'm in a state of mind bordering on distraction!'

Mr Toots had discharged those words, as from a mortar, before he observed Walter, whom he recognised with what may be described as a chuckle of misery.

'You'll excuse me, Sir,' said Mr Toots, holding his forehead, 'but I'm at present in that state that my brain is going, if not gone, and anything approaching to politeness in an individual so situated would be a hollow mockery. Captain Gills, I beg to request the favour of a private interview.'

'Why, Brother,' returned the Captain, taking him by the hand, 'you are the man as we was on the look-out for.'

'Oh, Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, 'what a look-out that must be, of which I am the object! I haven't dared to shave, I'm in that rash state. I haven't had my clothes brushed. My hair is matted together. I told the Chicken that if he offered to clean my boots, I'd stretch him a Corpse before me!'

All these indications of a disordered mind were verified in Mr Toots's appearance, which was wild and savage.

'See here, Brother,' said the Captain. 'This here's old Sol Gills's nevy Wal'r. Him as was supposed to have perished at sea.'

Mr Toots took his hand from his forehead, and stared at Walter.

'Good gracious me!' stammered Mr Toots. 'What a complication of misery! How-de-do? I—I—I'm afraid you must have got very wet. Captain Gills, will you allow me a word in the shop?'

He took the Captain by the coat, and going out with him whispered:

'That then, Captain Gills, is the party you spoke of, when you said that he and Miss Dombey were made for one another?'

'Why, ay, my lad,' replied the disconsolate Captain; 'I was of that mind once.'

'And at this time!' exclaimed Mr Toots, with his hand to his forehead again. 'Of all others!—a hated rival! At least, he ain't a hated rival,' said Mr Toots, stopping short, on second thoughts, and taking away his hand; 'what should I hate him for? No. If my affection has been truly disinterested, Captain Gills, let me prove it now!'

Mr Toots shot back abruptly into the parlour, and said, wringing Walter by the hand:

'How-de-do? I hope you didn't take any cold. I—I shall be very glad if you'll give me the pleasure of your acquaintance. I wish you many happy returns of the day. Upon my word and honour,' said Mr Toots, warming as he became better acquainted with Walter's face and figure, 'I'm very glad to see you!'

'Thank you, heartily,' said Walter. 'I couldn't desire a more genuine and genial welcome.'

'Couldn't you, though?' said Mr Toots, still shaking his hand. 'It's very kind of you. I'm much obliged to you. How-de-do? I hope you left everybody quite well over the—that is, upon the—I mean wherever you came from last, you know.'

All these good wishes, and better intentions, Walter responded to manfully.

'Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, 'I should wish to be strictly honourable; but I trust I may be allowed now, to allude to a certain subject that—'

'Ay, ay, my lad,' returned the Captain. 'Freely, freely.'

'Then, Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, 'and Lieutenant Walters—are you aware that the most dreadful circumstances have been happening at Mr Dombey's house, and that Miss Dombey herself has left her father, who, in my opinion,' said Mr Toots, with great excitement, 'is a Brute, that it would be a flattery to call a—a marble monument, or a bird of prey,—and that she is not to be found, and has gone no one knows where?'

'May I ask how you heard this?' inquired Walter.

'Lieutenant Walters,' said Mr Toots, who had arrived at that appellation by a process peculiar to himself; probably by jumbling up his Christian name with the seafaring profession, and supposing some relationship between him and the Captain, which would extend, as a matter of course, to their titles; 'Lieutenant Walters, I can have no objection to make a straightforward reply. The fact is, that feeling extremely interested in everything that relates to Miss Dombey—not for any selfish reason, Lieutenant Walters, for I am well aware that the most able thing I could do for all parties would be to put an end to my existence, which can only be regarded as an inconvenience—I have been in the habit of bestowing a trifle now and then upon a footman; a most respectable young man, of the name of Towlinson, who has lived in the family some time; and Towlinson informed me, yesterday evening, that this was the state of things. Since which, Captain Gills—and Lieutenant Walters—I have been perfectly frantic, and have been lying down on the sofa all night, the Ruin you behold.'

'Mr Toots,' said Walter, 'I am happy to be able to relieve your mind. Pray calm yourself. Miss Dombey is safe and well.'

'Sir!' cried Mr Toots, starting from his chair and shaking hands with him anew, 'the relief is so excessive, and unspeakable, that if you were to tell me now that Miss Dombey was married even, I could smile. Yes, Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, appealing to him, 'upon my soul and body, I really think, whatever I might do to myself immediately afterwards, that I could smile, I am so relieved.'

'It will be a greater relief and delight still, to such a generous mind as yours,' said Walter, not at all slow in returning his greeting, 'to find that you can render service to Miss Dombey. Captain Cuttle, will you have the kindness to take Mr Toots upstairs?'

The Captain beckoned to Mr Toots, who followed him with a bewildered countenance, and, ascending to the top of the house, was introduced, without a word of preparation from his conductor, into Florence's new retreat.

Poor Mr Toots's amazement and pleasure at sight of her were such, that they could find a vent in nothing but extravagance. He ran up to her, seized her hand, kissed it, dropped it, seized it again, fell upon one knee, shed tears, chuckled, and was quite regardless of his danger of being pinned by Diogenes, who, inspired by the belief that there was something hostile to his mistress in these demonstrations, worked round and round him, as if only undecided at what particular point to go in for the assault, but quite resolved to do him a fearful mischief.

'Oh Di, you bad, forgetful dog! Dear Mr Toots, I am so rejoiced to see you!'

'Thankee,' said Mr Toots, 'I am pretty well, I'm much obliged to you, Miss Dombey. I hope all the family are the same.'

Mr Toots said this without the least notion of what he was talking about, and sat down on a chair, staring at Florence with the liveliest contention of delight and despair going on in his face that any face could exhibit.

'Captain Gills and Lieutenant Walters have mentioned, Miss Dombey,' gasped Mr Toots, 'that I can do you some service. If I could by any means wash out the remembrance of that day at Brighton, when I conducted myself—much more like a Parricide than a person of independent property,' said Mr Toots, with severe self-accusation, 'I should sink into the silent tomb with a gleam of joy.'

'Pray, Mr Toots,' said Florence, 'do not wish me to forget anything in our acquaintance. I never can, believe me. You have been far too kind and good to me always.'

'Miss Dombey,' returned Mr Toots, 'your consideration for my feelings is a part of your angelic character. Thank you a thousand times. It's of no consequence at all.'

'What we thought of asking you,' said Florence, 'is, whether you remember where Susan, whom you were so kind as to accompany to the coach-office when she left me, is to be found.'

'Why I do not certainly, Miss Dombey,' said Mr Toots, after a little consideration, 'remember the exact name of the place that was on the coach; and I do recollect that she said she was not going to stop there, but was going farther on. But, Miss Dombey, if your object is to find her, and to have her here, myself and the Chicken will produce her with every dispatch that devotion on my part, and great intelligence on the Chicken's, can ensure.

Mr Toots was so manifestly delighted and revived by the prospect of being useful, and the disinterested sincerity of his devotion was so unquestionable, that it would have been cruel to refuse him. Florence, with an instinctive delicacy, forbore to urge the least obstacle, though she did not forbear to overpower him with thanks; and Mr Toots proudly took the commission upon himself for immediate execution.

'Miss Dombey,' said Mr Toots, touching her proffered hand, with a pang of hopeless love visibly shooting through him, and flashing out in his face, 'Good-bye! Allow me to take the liberty of saying, that your misfortunes make me perfectly wretched, and that you may trust me, next to Captain

Gills himself. I am quite aware, Miss Dombey, of my own deficiencies—they're not of the least consequence, thank you—but I am entirely to be relied upon, I do assure you, Miss Dombey.'

With that Mr Toots came out of the room, again accompanied by the Captain, who, standing at a little distance, holding his hat under his arm and arranging his scattered locks with his hook, had been a not uninterested witness of what passed. And when the door closed behind them, the light of Mr Toots's life was darkly clouded again.

'Captain Gills,' said that gentleman, stopping near the bottom of the stairs, and turning round, 'to tell you the truth, I am not in a frame of mind at the present moment, in which I could see Lieutenant Walters with that entirely friendly feeling towards him that I should wish to harbour in my breast. We cannot always command our feelings, Captain Gills, and I should take it as a particular favour if you'd let me out at the private door.'

'Brother,' returned the Captain, 'you shall shape your own course. Wotever course you take, is plain and seamanlike, I'm wery sure.

'Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, 'you're extremely kind. Your good opinion is a consolation to me. There is one thing,' said Mr Toots, standing in the passage, behind the half-opened door, 'that I hope you'll bear in mind, Captain Gills, and that I should wish Lieutenant Walters to be made acquainted with. I have quite come into my property now, you know, and—and I don't know what to do with it. If I could be at all useful in a pecuniary point of view, I should glide into the silent tomb with ease and smoothness.'

Mr Toots said no more, but slipped out quietly and shut the door upon himself, to cut the Captain off from any reply.

Florence thought of this good creature, long after he had left her, with mingled emotions of pain and pleasure. He was so honest and warm-hearted, that to see him again and be assured of his truth to her in her distress, was a joy and comfort beyond all price; but for that very reason, it was so affecting to think that she caused him a moment's unhappiness, or ruffled, by a breath, the harmless current of his life, that her eyes filled with tears, and her bosom overflowed with pity. Captain Cuttle, in his different way, thought much of Mr Toots too; and so did Walter; and when the evening came, and they were all sitting together in Florence's new room, Walter praised him in a most impassioned manner, and told Florence what he had said on leaving the house, with every graceful setting-off in the way of comment and appreciation that his own honesty and sympathy could surround it with.

Mr Toots did not return upon the next day, or the next, or for several days; and in the meanwhile Florence, without any new alarm, lived like a quiet bird in a cage, at the top of the old Instrument-maker's house. But Florence drooped and hung her head more and more plainly, as the days went on; and the expression that had been seen in the face of the dead child, was often turned to the sky from her high window, as if it sought his angel out, on the bright shore of which he had spoken: lying on his little bed.

Florence had been weak and delicate of late, and the agitation she had undergone was not without its influences on her health. But it was no bodily illness that affected her now. She was distressed in mind; and the cause of her distress was Walter.

Interested in her, anxious for her, proud and glad to serve her, and showing all this with the enthusiasm and ardour of his character, Florence saw that he avoided her. All the long day through, he seldom approached her room. If she asked for him, he came, again for the moment as earnest and as bright as she remembered him when she was a lost child in the staring streets; but he soon became constrained—her quick affection was too watchful not to know it—and uneasy, and soon left her. Unsought, he never came, all day, between the morning and the night. When the evening closed in, he was always there, and that was her happiest time, for then she half believed that the old Walter of her childhood was not changed. But, even then, some trivial word, look, or circumstance would show her that there was an indefinable division between them which could not be passed.

And she could not but see that these revealings of a great alteration in Walter manifested themselves in despite of his utmost efforts to hide them. In his consideration for her, she thought, and in the earnestness of his desire to spare her any wound from his kind hand, he resorted to innumerable little artifices and disguises. So much the more did Florence feel the greatness of the alteration in him; so much the oftener did she weep at this estrangement of her brother.

The good Captain—her untiring, tender, ever zealous friend—saw it, too, Florence thought, and it pained him. He was less cheerful and hopeful than he had been at first, and would steal looks at her and Walter, by turns, when they were all three together of an evening, with quite a sad face.

Florence resolved, at last, to speak to Walter. She believed she knew now what the cause of his estrangement was, and she thought it would be a relief to her full heart, and would set him more at ease, if she told him she had found it out, and quite submitted to it, and did not reproach him.

It was on a certain Sunday afternoon, that Florence took this resolution. The faithful Captain, in an amazing shirt-collar, was sitting by her, reading with his spectacles on, and she asked him where Walter was.

'I think he's down below, my lady lass,' returned the Captain.

'I should like to speak to him,' said Florence, rising hurriedly as if to go downstairs.

'I'll rouse him up here, Beauty,' said the Captain, 'in a trice.'

Thereupon the Captain, with much alacrity, shouldered his book—for he made it a point of duty to read none but very large books on a Sunday, as having a more staid appearance: and had bargained, years ago, for a prodigious volume at a book-stall, five lines of which utterly confounded him at any time, insomuch that he had not yet ascertained of what subject it treated—and withdrew. Walter soon appeared.

'Captain Cuttle tells me, Miss Dombey,' he eagerly began on coming in—but stopped when he saw her face.

'You are not so well to-day. You look distressed. You have been weeping.'

He spoke so kindly, and with such a fervent tremor in his voice, that the tears gushed into her eyes at the sound of his words.

'Walter,' said Florence, gently, 'I am not quite well, and I have been weeping. I want to speak to you.'

He sat down opposite to her, looking at her beautiful and innocent face; and his own turned pale, and his lips trembled.

'You said, upon the night when I knew that you were saved—and oh! dear Walter, what I felt that night, and what I hoped!'—'

He put his trembling hand upon the table between them, and sat looking at her.—'that I was changed. I was surprised to hear you say so, but I understand, now, that I am. Don't be angry with me, Walter. I was too much overjoyed to think of it, then.'

She seemed a child to him again. It was the ingenuous, confiding, loving child he saw and heard. Not the dear woman, at whose feet he would have laid the riches of the earth.

'You remember the last time I saw you, Walter, before you went away?'

He put his hand into his breast, and took out a little purse.

'I have always worn it round my neck! If I had gone down in the deep, it would have been with me at the bottom of the sea.'

'And you will wear it still, Walter, for my old sake?'

'Until I die!'

She laid her hand on his, as fearlessly and simply, as if not a day had intervened since she gave him the little token of remembrance.

'I am glad of that. I shall be always glad to think so, Walter. Do you recollect that a thought of this change seemed to come into our minds at the same time that evening, when we were talking together?'

'No!' he answered, in a wondering tone.

'Yes, Walter. I had been the means of injuring your hopes and prospects even then. I feared to think so, then, but I know it now. If you were able, then, in your generosity, to hide from me that you knew it too, you cannot do so now, although you try as generously as before. You do. I thank you for it, Walter, deeply, truly; but you cannot succeed. You have suffered too much in your own hardships, and in those of your dearest relation, quite to overlook the innocent cause of all the peril and affliction that has befallen you. You cannot quite forget me in that character, and we can be brother and sister no longer. But, dear Walter, do not think that I complain of you in this. I might have known it—ought to have known it—but forgot it in my joy. All I hope is that you may think of me less irksomely when this feeling is no more a secret one; and all I ask is, Walter, in the name of the poor child who was your sister once, that you will not struggle with yourself, and pain yourself, for my sake, now that I know all!'

Walter had looked upon her while she said this, with a face so full of wonder and amazement, that it had room for nothing else. Now he caught up the hand that touched his, so entreatingly, and held it between his own.

'Oh, Miss Dombey,' he said, 'is it possible that while I have been suffering so much, in striving with my sense of what is due to you, and must be rendered to you, I have made you suffer what your words disclose to me? Never, never, before Heaven, have I thought of you but as the single, bright, pure, blessed recollection of my boyhood and my youth. Never have I from the first, and never shall I to the last, regard your part in my life, but as something sacred, never to be lightly thought of, never to be esteemed enough, never, until death, to be forgotten. Again to see you look, and hear you speak, as you did on that night when we parted, is happiness to me that there are no words to utter; and to be loved and trusted as your brother, is the next gift I could receive and prize!'

'Walter,' said Florence, looking at him earnestly, but with a changing face, 'what is that which is due to me, and must be rendered to me, at the sacrifice of all this?'

'Respect,' said Walter, in a low tone. 'Reverence.

The colour dawned in her face, and she timidly and thoughtfully withdrew her hand; still looking at him with unabated earnestness.

'I have not a brother's right,' said Walter. 'I have not a brother's claim. I left a child. I find a woman.'

The colour overspread her face. She made a gesture as if of entreaty that he would say no more, and her face dropped upon her hands.

They were both silent for a time; she weeping.

'I owe it to a heart so trusting, pure, and good,' said Walter, 'even to tear myself from it, though I rend my own. How dare I say it is my sister's!'

She was weeping still.

'If you had been happy; surrounded as you should be by loving and admiring friends, and by all that makes the station you were born to enviable,' said Walter; 'and if you had called me brother, then, in your affectionate remembrance of the past, I could have answered to the name from my distant place, with no inward assurance that I wronged your spotless truth by doing so. But here—and now!'

'Oh thank you, thank you, Walter! Forgive my having wronged you so much. I had no one to advise me. I am quite alone.'

'Florence!' said Walter, passionately. 'I am hurried on to say, what I thought, but a few moments ago, nothing could have forced from my lips. If I had been prosperous; if I had any means or hope of being one day able to restore you to a station near your own; I would have told you that there was one name you might bestow upon—me—a right above all others, to protect and cherish you—that I was worthy of in nothing but the love and honour that I bore you, and in my whole heart being yours. I would have told you that it was the only claim that you could give me to defend and guard you, which I dare accept and dare assert; but that if I had that right, I would regard it as a trust so precious and so priceless, that the undivided truth and fervour of my life would poorly acknowledge its worth.'

The head was still bent down, the tears still falling, and the bosom swelling with its sobs.

'Dear Florence! Dearest Florence! whom I called so in my thoughts before I could consider how presumptuous and wild it was. One last time let me call you by your own dear name, and touch this gentle hand in token of your sisterly forgetfulness of what I have said.'

She raised her head, and spoke to him with such a solemn sweetness in her eyes; with such a calm, bright, placid smile shining on him through her tears; with such a low, soft tremble in her frame and voice; that the innermost chords of his heart were touched, and his sight was dim as he listened.

'No, Walter, I cannot forget it. I would not forget it, for the world. Are you—are you very poor?'

'I am but a wanderer,' said Walter, 'making voyages to live, across the sea. That is my calling now.

'Are you soon going away again, Walter?'

'Very soon.

She sat looking at him for a moment; then timidly put her trembling hand in his.

'If you will take me for your wife, Walter, I will love you dearly. If you will let me go with you, Walter, I will go to the world's end without fear. I can give up nothing for you—I have nothing to resign, and no one to forsake; but all my love and life shall be devoted to you, and with my last breath I will breathe your name to God if I have sense and memory left.'

He caught her to his heart, and laid her cheek against his own, and now, no more repulsed, no more forlorn, she wept indeed, upon the breast of her dear lover.

Blessed Sunday Bells, ringing so tranquilly in their entranced and happy ears! Blessed Sunday peace and quiet, harmonising with the calmness in their souls, and making holy air around them! Blessed twilight stealing on, and shading her so soothingly and gravely, as she falls asleep, like a hushed child, upon the bosom she has clung to!

Oh load of love and trustfulness that lies to lightly there! Ay, look down on the closed eyes, Walter, with a proudly tender gaze; for in all the wide wide world they seek but thee now—only thee!

The Captain remained in the little parlour until it was quite dark. He took the chair on which Walter had been sitting, and looked up at the skylight, until the day, by little and little, faded away, and the stars peeped down. He lighted a candle, lighted a pipe, smoked it out, and wondered what on earth was going on upstairs, and why they didn't call him to tea.

Florence came to his side while he was in the height of his wonderment.

'Ay! lady lass!' cried the Captain. 'Why, you and Wal'r have had a long spell o' talk, my beauty.'

Florence put her little hand round one of the great buttons of his coat, and said, looking down into his face:

'Dear Captain, I want to tell you something, if you please.

The Captain raised his head pretty smartly, to hear what it was. Catching by this means a more distinct view of Florence, he pushed back his chair, and himself with it, as far as they could go.

'What! Heart's Delight!' cried the Captain, suddenly elated, 'Is it that?'

'Yes!' said Florence, eagerly.

'Wal'r! Husband! THAT?' roared the Captain, tossing up his glazed hat into the skylight.

'Yes!' cried Florence, laughing and crying together.

The Captain immediately hugged her; and then, picking up the glazed hat and putting it on, drew her arm through his, and conducted her upstairs again; where he felt that the great joke of his life was now to be made.

'What, Wal'r my lad!' said the Captain, looking in at the door, with his face like an amiable warming-pan. 'So there ain't NO other character, ain't there?'

He had like to have suffocated himself with this pleasantry, which he repeated at least forty times during tea; polishing his radiant face with the sleeve of his coat, and dabbing his head all over with his pocket-handkerchief, in the intervals. But he was not without a graver source of enjoyment to fall back upon, when so disposed, for he was repeatedly heard to say in an undertone, as he looked with ineffable delight at Walter and Florence:

'Ed'ard Cuttle, my lad, you never shaped a better course in your life, than when you made that there little property over, jintly!'

CHAPTER 51. Mr Dombey and the World

What is the proud man doing, while the days go by? Does he ever think of his daughter, or wonder where she is gone? Does he suppose she has come home, and is leading her old life in the weary house? No one can answer for him. He has never uttered her name, since. His household dread him too much to approach a subject on which he is resolutely dumb; and the only person who dares question him, he silences immediately.

'My dear Paul!' murmurs his sister, sidling into the room, on the day of Florence's departure, 'your wife! that upstart woman! Is it possible that what I hear confusedly, is true, and that this is her return for your unparalleled devotion to her; extending, I am sure, even to the sacrifice of your own relations, to her caprices and haughtiness? My poor brother!'

With this speech feelingly reminiscent of her not having been asked to dinner on the day of the first party, Mrs Chick makes great use of her pocket- handkerchief, and falls on Mr Dombey's neck. But Mr Dombey frigidly lifts her off, and hands her to a chair.

'I thank you, Louisa,' he says, 'for this mark of your affection; but desire that our conversation may refer to any other subject. When I bewail my fate, Louisa, or express myself as being in want of consolation, you can offer it, if you will have the goodness.'

'My dear Paul,' rejoins his sister, with her handkerchief to her face, and shaking her head, 'I know your great spirit, and will say no more upon a theme so painful and revolting;' on the heads of which two adjectives, Mrs Chick visits scathing indignation; 'but pray let me ask you—though I dread to hear something that will shock and distress me—that unfortunate child Florence—

'Louisa!' says her brother, sternly, 'silence! Not another word of this!'

Mrs Chick can only shake her head, and use her handkerchief, and moan over degenerate Dombeys, who are no Dombeys. But whether Florence has been inculpated in the flight of Edith, or has followed her, or has done too much, or too little, or anything, or nothing, she has not the least idea.

He goes on, without deviation, keeping his thoughts and feelings close within his own breast, and imparting them to no one. He makes no search for his daughter. He may think that she is with his sister, or that she is under his own roof. He may think of her constantly, or he may never think about her. It is all one for any sign he makes.

But this is sure; he does not think that he has lost her. He has no suspicion of the truth. He has lived too long shut up in his towering supremacy, seeing her, a patient gentle creature, in the path below it, to have any fear of that. Shaken as he is by his disgrace, he is not yet humbled to the level earth. The root is broad and deep, and in the course of years its fibres have spread out and gathered nourishment from everything around it. The tree is struck, but not down.

Though he hide the world within him from the world without—which he believes has but one purpose for the time, and that, to watch him eagerly wherever he goes—he cannot hide those rebel traces of it, which escape in hollow eyes and cheeks, a haggard forehead, and a moody, brooding air. Impenetrable as before, he is still an altered man; and, proud as ever, he is humbled, or those marks would not be there.

The world. What the world thinks of him, how it looks at him, what it sees in him, and what it says—this is the haunting demon of his mind. It is everywhere where he is; and, worse than that, it is everywhere where he is not. It comes out with him among his servants, and yet he leaves it whispering behind; he sees it pointing after him in the street; it is waiting for him in his counting-house; it leers over the shoulders of rich men among the merchants; it goes beckoning and babbling among the crowd; it always anticipates him, in every place; and is always busiest, he knows, when he has gone away. When he is shut up in his room at night, it is in his house, outside it, audible in footsteps on the pavement, visible in print upon the table, steaming to and fro on railroads and in ships; restless and busy everywhere, with nothing else but him.

It is not a phantom of his imagination. It is as active in other people's minds as in his. Witness Cousin Feenix, who comes from Baden-Baden, purposely to talk to him. Witness Major Bagstock, who accompanies Cousin Feenix on that friendly mission.

Mr Dombey receives them with his usual dignity, and stands erect, in his old attitude, before the fire. He feels that the world is looking at him out of their eyes. That it is in the stare of the pictures. That Mr Pitt, upon the bookcase, represents it. That there are eyes in its own map, hanging on the wall.

'An unusually cold spring,' says Mr Dombey—to deceive the world.

'Damme, Sir,' says the Major, in the warmth of friendship, 'Joseph Bagstock is a bad hand at a counterfeit. If you want to hold your friends off, Dombey, and to give them the cold shoulder, J. B. is not the man for your purpose. Joe is rough and tough, Sir; blunt, Sir, blunt, is Joe. His Royal Highness the late Duke of York did me the honour to say, deservedly or undeservedly—never mind that—"If there is a man in the service on whom I can depend for coming to the point, that man is Joe—Joe Bagstock."'

Mr Dombey intimates his acquiescence.

'Now, Dombey,' says the Major, 'I am a man of the world. Our friend Feenix—if I may presume to—'

'Honoured, I am sure,' says Cousin Feenix.

'—is,' proceeds the Major, with a wag of his head, 'also a man of the world. Dombey, you are a man of the world. Now, when three men of the world meet together, and are friends—as I believe—' again appealing to Cousin Feenix.

'I am sure,' says Cousin Feenix, 'most friendly.'

'—and are friends,' resumes the Major, 'Old Joe's opinion is (I may be wrong), that the opinion of the world on any particular subject, is very easily got at.

'Undoubtedly,' says Cousin Feenix. 'In point of fact, it's quite a self-evident sort of thing. I am extremely anxious, Major, that my friend Dombey should hear me express my very great astonishment and regret, that my lovely and accomplished relative, who was possessed of every qualification to make a man happy, should have so far forgotten what was due to—in point of fact, to the world—as to commit herself in such a very extraordinary manner. I have been in a devilish state of depression ever since; and said indeed to Long Saxby last night—man of six foot ten, with whom my friend Dombey is probably acquainted—that it had upset me in a confounded way, and made me bilious. It induces a man to reflect, this kind of fatal catastrophe,' says Cousin Feenix, 'that events do occur in quite a providential manner; for if my Aunt had been living at the time, I think the effect upon a devilish lively woman like herself, would have been prostration, and that she would have fallen, in point of fact, a victim.'

'Now, Dombey!—' says the Major, resuming his discourse with great energy.

'I beg your pardon,' interposes Cousin Feenix. 'Allow me another word. My friend Dombey will permit me to say, that if any circumstance could have added to the most infernal state of pain in which I find myself on this occasion, it would be the natural amazement of the world at my lovely and accomplished relative (as I must still beg leave to call her) being supposed to have so committed herself with a person—man with white teeth, in point of fact—of very inferior station to her husband. But while I must, rather peremptorily, request my friend Dombey not to criminate my lovely and accomplished relative until her criminality is perfectly established, I beg to assure my friend Dombey that the family I represent, and which is now almost extinct (devilish sad reflection for a man), will interpose no obstacle in his way, and will be happy to assent to any honourable course of proceeding, with a view to the future, that he may point out. I trust my friend Dombey will give me credit for the intentions by which I am animated in this very melancholy affair, and—a—in point of fact, I am not aware that I need trouble my friend Dombey with any further observations.'

Mr Dombey bows, without raising his eyes, and is silent.

'Now, Dombey,' says the Major, 'our friend Feenix having, with an amount of eloquence that Old Joe B. has never heard surpassed—no, by the Lord, Sir! never!'—says the Major, very blue, indeed, and grasping his cane in the middle—'stated the case as regards the lady, I shall presume upon our friendship, Dombey, to offer a word on another aspect of it. Sir,' says the Major, with the horse's cough, 'the world in these things has opinions, which must be satisfied.'

'I know it,' rejoins Mr Dombey.

'Of course you know it, Dombey,' says the Major, 'Damme, Sir, I know you know it. A man of your calibre is not likely to be ignorant of it.'

'I hope not,' replies Mr Dombey.

'Dombey!' says the Major, 'you will guess the rest. I speak out—prematurely, perhaps—because the Bagstock breed have always spoke out. Little, Sir, have they ever got by doing it; but it's in the Bagstock blood. A shot is to be taken at this man. You have J. B. at your elbow. He claims the name of friend. God bless you!'

'Major,' returns Mr Dombey, 'I am obliged. I shall put myself in your hands when the time comes. The time not being come, I have forborne to speak to you.'

'Where is the fellow, Dombey?' inquires the Major, after gasping and looking at him, for a minute.

'I don't know.'

'Any intelligence of him?' asks the Major.

'Yes.'

'Dombey, I am rejoiced to hear it,' says the Major. 'I congratulate you.'

'You will excuse—even you, Major,' replies Mr Dombey, 'my entering into any further detail at present. The intelligence is of a singular kind, and singularly obtained. It may turn out to be valueless; it may turn out to be true; I cannot say at present. My explanation must stop here.'

Although this is but a dry reply to the Major's purple enthusiasm, the Major receives it graciously, and is delighted to think that the world has such a fair prospect of soon receiving its due. Cousin Feenix is then presented with his meed of acknowledgment by the husband of his lovely and accomplished relative, and Cousin Feenix and Major Bagstock retire, leaving that husband to the world again, and to ponder at leisure on their representation of its state of mind concerning his affairs, and on its just and reasonable expectations.

But who sits in the housekeeper's room, shedding tears, and talking to Mrs Pipchin in a low tone, with uplifted hands? It is a lady with her face concealed in a very close black bonnet, which appears not to belong to her. It is Miss Tox, who has borrowed this disguise from her servant, and comes from Princess's Place, thus secretly, to revive her old acquaintance with Mrs Pipchin, in order to get certain information of the state of Mr Dombey.

'How does he bear it, my dear creature?' asks Miss Tox.

'Well,' says Mrs Pipchin, in her snappish way, 'he's pretty much as usual.'

'Externally,' suggests Miss Tox 'But what he feels within!'

Mrs Pipchin's hard grey eye looks doubtful as she answers, in three distinct jerks, 'Ah! Perhaps. I suppose so.'

'To tell you my mind, Lucretia,' says Mrs Pipchin; she still calls Miss Tox Lucretia, on account of having made her first experiments in the child-quelling line of business on that lady, when an unfortunate and weazen little girl of tender years; 'to tell you my mind, Lucretia, I think it's a good riddance. I don't want any of your brazen faces here, myself!'

'Brazen indeed! Well may you say brazen, Mrs Pipchin!' returned Miss Tox. 'To leave him! Such a noble figure of a man!' And here Miss Tox is overcome.

'I don't know about noble, I'm sure,' observes Mrs Pipchin; irascibly rubbing her nose. 'But I know this—that when people meet with trials, they must bear 'em. Hoity, toity! I have had enough to bear myself, in my time! What a fuss there is! She's gone, and well got rid of. Nobody wants her back, I should think!' This hint of the Peruvian Mines, causes Miss Tox to rise to go away; when Mrs Pipchin rings the bell for Towlinson to show her out, Mr Towlinson, not having seen Miss Tox for ages, grins, and hopes she's well; observing that he didn't know her at first, in that bonnet.

'Pretty well, Towlinson, I thank you,' says Miss Tox. 'I beg you'll have the goodness, when you happen to see me here, not to mention it. My visits are merely to Mrs Pipchin.'

'Very good, Miss,' says Towlinson.

'Shocking circumstances occur, Towlinson,' says Miss Tox.

'Very much so indeed, Miss,' rejoins Towlinson.

'I hope, Towlinson,' says Miss Tox, who, in her instruction of the Toodle family, has acquired an admonitorial tone, and a habit of improving passing occasions, 'that what has happened here, will be a warning to you, Towlinson.'

'Thank you, Miss, I'm sure,' says Towlinson.

He appears to be falling into a consideration of the manner in which this warning ought to operate in his particular case, when the vinegary Mrs Pipchin, suddenly stirring him up with a 'What are you doing? Why don't you show the lady to the door?' he ushers Miss Tox forth. As she passes Mr Dombey's room, she shrinks into the inmost depths of the black bonnet, and walks, on tip-toe; and there is not another atom in the world which haunts him so, that feels such sorrow and solicitude about him, as Miss Tox takes out under the black bonnet into the street, and tries to carry home shadowed it from the newly-lighted lamps.

But Miss Tox is not a part of Mr Dombey's world. She comes back every evening at dusk; adding clogs and an umbrella to the bonnet on wet nights; and bears the grins of Towlinson, and the huffs and rebuffs of Mrs Pipchin, and all to ask how he does, and how he bears his misfortune: but she has nothing to do with Mr Dombey's world. Exacting and harassing as ever, it goes on without her; and she, a by no means bright or particular star, moves in her little orbit in the corner of another system, and knows it quite well, and comes, and cries, and goes away, and is satisfied. Verily Miss Tox is easier of satisfaction than the world that troubles Mr Dombey so much!

At the Counting House, the clerks discuss the great disaster in all its lights and shades, but chiefly wonder who will get Mr Carker's place. They are generally of opinion that it will be shorn of some of its emoluments, and made uncomfortable by newly-devised checks and restrictions; and those who are beyond all hope of it are quite sure they would rather not have it, and don't at all envy the person for whom it may prove to be reserved. Nothing like the prevailing sensation has existed in the Counting House since Mr Dombey's little son died; but all such excitements there take a social, not to say a jovial turn, and lead to the cultivation of good fellowship. A reconciliation is established on this propitious occasion between the acknowledged wit of the Counting House and an aspiring rival, with whom he has been at deadly feud for months; and a little dinner being proposed, in commemoration of their happily restored amity, takes place at a neighbouring tavern; the wit in the chair; the rival acting as Vice-President. The orations following the removal of the cloth are opened by the Chair, who says, Gentlemen, he can't disguise from himself that this is not a time for private dissensions. Recent occurrences to which he need not more particularly allude, but which have not been altogether without notice in some Sunday Papers,' and in a daily paper which he need not name (here every other member of the company names it in an audible murmur), have caused him to reflect; and he feels that for him and Robinson to have any personal differences at such a moment, would be for ever to deny that good feeling in the general cause, for which he has reason to think and hope that the gentlemen in Dombey's House have always been distinguished. Robinson replies to this like a man and a brother; and one gentleman who has been in the office three years, under continual notice to quit on account of lapses in his arithmetic, appears in a perfectly new light, suddenly bursting out with a thrilling speech, in which he says, May their respected chief never again know the desolation which has fallen on his hearth! and says a great variety of things, beginning with 'May he never again,' which are received with thunders of applause. In short, a most delightful evening is passed, only interrupted by a difference between two juniors, who, quarrelling about the probable amount of Mr Carker's late receipts per annum, defy each other with decanters, and are taken out greatly excited.

Soda water is in general request at the office next day, and most of the party deem the bill an imposition.

As to Perch, the messenger, he is in a fair way of being ruined for life. He finds himself again constantly in bars of public-houses, being treated and lying dreadfully. It appears that he met everybody concerned in the late transaction, everywhere, and said to them, 'Sir,' or 'Madam,' as the case was, 'why do you look so pale?' at which each shuddered from head to foot, and said, 'Oh, Perch!' and ran away. Either the consciousness of these enormities, or the reaction consequent on liquor, reduces Mr Perch to an extreme state of low spirits at that hour of the evening when he usually seeks consolation in the society of Mrs Perch at Balls Pond; and Mrs Perch frets a good deal, for she fears his confidence in woman is shaken now, and that he half expects on coming home at night to find her gone off with some Viscount—'which,' as she observes to an intimate female friend, 'is what these wretches in the form of woman have to answer for, Mrs P. It ain't the harm they do themselves so much as what they reflect upon us, Ma'am; and I see it in Perch's eye.

Mr Dombey's servants are becoming, at the same time, quite dissipated, and unfit for other service. They have hot suppers every night, and 'talk it over' with smoking drinks upon the board. Mr Towlinson is always maudlin after half-past ten, and frequently begs to know whether he didn't say that no good would ever come of living in a corner house? They whisper about Miss Florence, and wonder where she is; but agree that if Mr Dombey don't know, Mrs Dombey does. This brings them to the latter, of whom Cook says, She had a stately way though, hadn't she? But she was too high! They all agree that she was too high, and Mr Towlinson's old flame, the housemaid (who is very virtuous), entreats that you will never talk to her any more about people who hold their heads up, as if the ground wasn't good enough for 'em.

Everything that is said and done about it, except by Mr Dombey, is done in chorus. Mr Dombey and the world are alone together.

CHAPTER 52. Secret Intelligence

Good Mrs Brown and her daughter Alice kept silent company together, in their own dwelling. It was early in the evening, and late in the spring. But a few days had elapsed since Mr Dombey had told Major Bagstock of his singular intelligence, singularly obtained, which might turn out to be valueless, and might turn out to be true; and the world was not satisfied yet.

The mother and daughter sat for a long time without interchanging a word: almost without motion. The old woman's face was shrewdly anxious and expectant; that of her daughter was expectant too, but in a less sharp degree, and sometimes it darkened, as if with gathering disappointment and incredulity. The old woman, without heeding these changes in its expression, though her eyes were often turned towards it, sat mumbling and munching, and listening confidently.

Their abode, though poor and miserable, was not so utterly wretched as in the days when only Good Mrs Brown inhabited it. Some few attempts at cleanliness and order were manifest, though made in a reckless, gipsy way, that might have connected them, at a glance, with the younger woman. The shades of evening thickened and deepened as the two kept silence, until the blackened walls were nearly lost in the prevailing gloom.

Then Alice broke the silence which had lasted so long, and said:

'You may give him up, mother. He'll not come here.'

'Death give him up!' returned the old woman, impatiently. 'He will come here.'

'We shall see,' said Alice.

'We shall see him,' returned her mother.

'And doomsday,' said the daughter.

'You think I'm in my second childhood, I know!' croaked the old woman. 'That's the respect and duty that I get from my own gal, but I'm wiser than you take me for. He'll come. T'other day when I touched his coat in the street, he looked round as if I was a toad. But Lord, to see him when I said their names, and asked him if he'd like to find out where they was!'

'Was it so angry?' asked her daughter, roused to interest in a moment.

'Angry? ask if it was bloody. That's more like the word. Angry? Ha, ha! To call that only angry!' said the old woman, hobbling to the cupboard, and lighting a candle, which displayed the workings of her mouth to ugly advantage, as she brought it to the table. 'I might as well call your face only angry, when you think or talk about 'em.'

It was something different from that, truly, as she sat as still as a crouched tigress, with her kindling eyes.

'Hark!' said the old woman, triumphantly. 'I hear a step coming. It's not the tread of anyone that lives about here, or comes this way often. We don't walk like that. We should grow proud on such neighbours! Do you hear him?'

'I believe you are right, mother,' replied Alice, in a low voice. 'Peace! open the door.'

As she drew herself within her shawl, and gathered it about her, the old woman complied; and peering out, and beckoning, gave admission to Mr Dombey, who stopped when he had set his foot within the door, and looked distrustfully around.

'It's a poor place for a great gentleman like your worship,' said the old woman, curtseying and chattering. 'I told you so, but there's no harm in it.'

'Who is that?' asked Mr Dombey, looking at her companion.

'That's my handsome daughter,' said the old woman. 'Your worship won't mind her. She knows all about it.'

A shadow fell upon his face not less expressive than if he had groaned aloud, 'Who does not know all about it!' but he looked at her steadily, and she, without any acknowledgment of his presence, looked at him. The shadow on his face was darker when he turned his glance away from her; and even then it wandered back again, furtively, as if he were haunted by her bold eyes, and some remembrance they inspired.

'Woman,' said Mr Dombey to the old witch who was chuckling and leering close at his elbow, and who, when he turned to address her, pointed stealthily at her daughter, and rubbed her hands, and pointed again, 'Woman! I believe that I am weak and forgetful of my station in coming here, but you know why I come, and what you offered when you stopped me in the street the other day. What is it that you have to tell me concerning what I want to know; and how does it happen that I can find voluntary intelligence in a hovel like this,' with a disdainful glance about him, 'when I have exerted my power and means to obtain it in vain? I do not think,' he said, after a moment's pause, during which he had observed her, sternly, 'that you are so audacious as to mean to trifle with me, or endeavour to impose upon me. But if you have that purpose, you had better stop on the threshold of your scheme. My humour is not a trifling one, and my acknowledgment will be severe.'

'Oh a proud, hard gentleman!' chuckled the old woman, shaking her head, and rubbing her shrivelled hands, 'oh hard, hard, hard! But your worship shall see with your own eyes and hear with your own ears; not with ours—and if your worship's put upon their track, you won't mind paying something for it, will you, honourable deary?'

'Money,' returned Mr Dombey, apparently relieved, and assured by this inquiry, 'will bring about unlikely things, I know. It may turn even means as unexpected and unpromising as these, to account. Yes. For any reliable information I receive, I will pay. But I must have the information first, and judge for myself of its value.'

'Do you know nothing more powerful than money?' asked the younger woman, without rising, or altering her attitude.

'Not here, I should imagine,' said Mr Dombey.

'You should know of something that is more powerful elsewhere, as I judge,' she returned. 'Do you know nothing of a woman's anger?'

'You have a saucy tongue, Jade,' said Mr Dombey.

'Not usually,' she answered, without any show of emotion: 'I speak to you now, that you may understand us better, and rely more on us. A woman's anger is pretty much the same here, as in your fine house. I am angry. I have been so, many years. I have as good cause for my anger as you have for yours, and its object is the same man.'

He started, in spite of himself, and looked at her with astonishment.

'Yes,' she said, with a kind of laugh. 'Wide as the distance may seem between us, it is so. How it is so, is no matter; that is my story, and I keep my story to myself. I would bring you and him together, because I have a rage against him. My mother there, is avaricious and poor; and she would sell any tidings she could glean, or anything, or anybody, for money. It is fair enough, perhaps, that you should pay her some, if she can help you to what you want to know. But that is not my motive. I have told you what mine is, and it would be as strong and all-sufficient with me if you haggled and bargained with her for a sixpence. I have done. My saucy tongue says no more, if you wait here till sunrise tomorrow.'

The old woman, who had shown great uneasiness during this speech, which had a tendency to depreciate her expected gains, pulled Mr Dombey softly by the sleeve, and whispered to him not to mind her. He glared at them both, by turns, with a haggard look, and said, in a deeper voice than was usual with him:

'Go on—what do you know?'

'Oh, not so fast, your worship! we must wait for someone,' answered the old woman. 'It's to be got from someone else—wormed out—screwed and twisted from him.'

'What do you mean?' said Mr Dombey.

'Patience,' she croaked, laying her hand, like a claw, upon his arm. 'Patience. I'll get at it. I know I can! If he was to hold it back from me,' said Good Mrs Brown, crooking her ten fingers, 'I'd tear it out of him!'

Mr Dombey followed her with his eyes as she hobbled to the door, and looked out again: and then his glance sought her daughter; but she remained impassive, silent, and regardless of him.

'Do you tell me, woman,' he said, when the bent figure of Mrs Brown came back, shaking its head and chattering to itself, 'that there is another person expected here?'

'Yes!' said the old woman, looking up into his face, and nodding.

'From whom you are to exact the intelligence that is to be useful to me?'

'Yes,' said the old woman, nodding again.

'A stranger?'

'Chut!' said the old woman, with a shrill laugh. 'What signifies! Well, well; no. No stranger to your worship. But he won't see you. He'd be afraid of you, and wouldn't talk. You'll stand behind that door, and judge him for yourself. We don't ask to be believed on trust What! Your worship doubts the room behind the door? Oh the suspicion of you rich gentlefolks! Look at it, then.'

Her sharp eye had detected an involuntary expression of this feeling on his part, which was not unreasonable under the circumstances. In satisfaction of it she now took the candle to the door she spoke of. Mr Dombey looked in; assured himself that it was an empty, crazy room; and signed to her to put the light back in its place.

'How long,' he asked, 'before this person comes?'

'Not long,' she answered. 'Would your worship sit down for a few odd minutes?'

He made no answer; but began pacing the room with an irresolute air, as if he were undecided whether to remain or depart, and as if he had some quarrel with himself for being there at all. But soon his tread grew slower and heavier, and his face more sternly thoughtful; as the object with which he had come, fixed itself in his mind, and dilated there again.

While he thus walked up and down with his eyes on the ground, Mrs Brown, in the chair from which she had risen to receive him, sat listening anew. The monotony of his step, or the uncertainty of age, made her so slow of hearing, that a footfall without had sounded in her daughter's ears for some moments, and she had looked up hastily to warn her mother of its approach, before the old woman was roused by it. But then she started from her seat, and whispering 'Here he is!' hurried her visitor to his place of observation, and put a bottle and glass upon the table, with such alacrity, as to be ready to fling her arms round the neck of Rob the Grinder on his appearance at the door.

'And here's my bonny boy,' cried Mrs Brown, 'at last!—oho, oho! You're like my own son, Robby!'

'Oh! Misses Brown!' remonstrated the Grinder. 'Don't! Can't you be fond of a cove without squeedging and throttling of him? Take care of the birdcage in my hand, will you?'

'Thinks of a birdcage, afore me!' cried the old woman, apostrophizing the ceiling. 'Me that feels more than a mother for him!'

'Well, I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you, Misses Brown,' said the unfortunate youth, greatly aggravated; 'but you're so jealous of a cove. I'm very fond of you myself, and all that, of course; but I don't smother you, do I, Misses Brown?'

He looked and spoke as if he would have been far from objecting to do so, however, on a favourable occasion.

'And to talk about birdcages, too!' whimpered the Grinder. 'As If that was a crime! Why, look'ee here! Do you know who this belongs to?'

'To Master, dear?' said the old woman with a grin.

'Ah!' replied the Grinder, lifting a large cage tied up in a wrapper, on the table, and untying it with his teeth and hands. 'It's our parrot, this is.'

'Mr Carker's parrot, Rob?'

'Will you hold your tongue, Misses Brown?' returned the goaded Grinder. 'What do you go naming names for? I'm blest,' said Rob, pulling his hair with both hands in the exasperation of his feelings, 'if she ain't enough to make a cove run wild!'

'What! Do you snub me, thankless boy!' cried the old woman, with ready vehemence.

'Good gracious, Misses Brown, no!' returned the Grinder, with tears in his eyes. 'Was there ever such a—! Don't I dote upon you, Misses Brown?'

'Do you, sweet Rob? Do you truly, chickabiddy?' With that, Mrs Brown held him in her fond embrace once more; and did not release him until he had made several violent and ineffectual struggles with his legs, and his hair was standing on end all over his head.

'Oh!' returned the Grinder, 'what a thing it is to be perfectly pitched into with affection like this here. I wish she was—How have you been, Misses Brown?'

'Ah! Not here since this night week!' said the old woman, contemplating him with a look of reproach.

'Good gracious, Misses Brown,' returned the Grinder, 'I said tonight's a week, that I'd come tonight, didn't I? And here I am. How you do go on! I wish you'd be a little rational, Misses Brown. I'm hoarse with saying things in my defence, and my very face is shiny with being hugged!' He rubbed it hard with his sleeve, as if to remove the tender polish in question.

'Drink a little drop to comfort you, my Robin,' said the old woman, filling the glass from the bottle and giving it to him.

'Thank'ee, Misses Brown,' returned the Grinder. 'Here's your health. And long may you—et ceterer.' Which, to judge from the expression of his face, did not include any very choice blessings. 'And here's her health,' said the Grinder, glancing at Alice, who sat with her eyes fixed, as it seemed to him, on the wall behind him, but in reality on Mr Dombey's face at the door, 'and wishing her the same and many of 'em!'

He drained the glass to these two sentiments, and set it down.

'Well, I say, Misses Brown!' he proceeded. 'To go on a little rational now. You're a judge of birds, and up to their ways, as I know to my cost.'

'Cost!' repeated Mrs Brown.

'Satisfaction, I mean,' returned the Grinder. 'How you do take up a cove, Misses Brown! You've put it all out of my head again.'

'Judge of birds, Robby,' suggested the old woman.

'Ah!' said the Grinder. 'Well, I've got to take care of this parrot—certain things being sold, and a certain establishment broke up—and as I don't want no notice took at present, I wish you'd attend to her for a week or so, and give her board and lodging, will you? If I must come backwards and forwards,' mused the Grinder with a dejected face, 'I may as well have something to come for.'

'Something to come for?' screamed the old woman.

'Besides you, I mean, Misses Brown,' returned the craven Rob. 'Not that I want any inducement but yourself, Misses Brown, I'm sure. Don't begin again, for goodness' sake.'

'He don't care for me! He don't care for me, as I care for him!' cried Mrs Brown, lifting up her skinny hands. 'But I'll take care of his bird.'

'Take good care of it too, you know, Mrs Brown,' said Rob, shaking his head. 'If you was so much as to stroke its feathers once the wrong way, I believe it would be found out.'

'Ah, so sharp as that, Rob?' said Mrs Brown, quickly.

'Sharp, Misses Brown!' repeated Rob. 'But this is not to be talked about.'

Checking himself abruptly, and not without a fearful glance across the room, Rob filled the glass again, and having slowly emptied it, shook his head, and began to draw his fingers across and across the wires of the parrot's cage by way of a diversion from the dangerous theme that had just been broached.

The old woman eyed him slily, and hitching her chair nearer his, and looking in at the parrot, who came down from the gilded dome at her call, said:

'Out of place now, Robby?'

'Never you mind, Misses Brown,' returned the Grinder, shortly.

'Board wages, perhaps, Rob?' said Mrs Brown.

'Pretty Polly!' said the Grinder.

The old woman darted a glance at him that might have warned him to consider his ears in danger, but it was his turn to look in at the parrot now, and however expressive his imagination may have made her angry scowl, it was unseen by his bodily eyes.

'I wonder Master didn't take you with him, Rob,' said the old woman, in a wheedling voice, but with increased malignity of aspect.

Rob was so absorbed in contemplation of the parrot, and in trolling his forefinger on the wires, that he made no answer.

The old woman had her clutch within a hair's breadth of his shock of hair as it stooped over the table; but she restrained her fingers, and said, in a voice that choked with its efforts to be coaxing:

'Robby, my child.'

'Well, Misses Brown,' returned the Grinder.

'I say I wonder Master didn't take you with him, dear.'

'Never you mind, Misses Brown,' returned the Grinder.

Mrs Brown instantly directed the clutch of her right hand at his hair, and the clutch of her left hand at his throat, and held on to the object of her fond affection with such extraordinary fury, that his face began to blacken in a moment.

'Misses Brown!' exclaimed the Grinder, 'let go, will you? What are you doing of? Help, young woman! Misses Brow—Brow—!'

The young woman, however, equally unmoved by his direct appeal to her, and by his inarticulate utterance, remained quite neutral, until, after struggling with his assailant into a corner, Rob disengaged himself, and stood there panting and fenced in by his own elbows, while the old woman, panting too, and stamping with rage and eagerness, appeared to be collecting her energies for another swoop upon him. At this crisis Alice interposed her voice, but not in the Grinder's favour, by saying,

'Well done, mother. Tear him to pieces!'

'What, young woman!' blubbered Rob; 'are you against me too? What have I been and done? What am I to be tore to pieces for, I should like to know? Why do you take and choke a cove who has never done you any harm, neither of you? Call yourselves females, too!' said the frightened and afflicted Grinder, with his coat-cuff at his eye. 'I'm surprised at you! Where's your feminine tenderness?'

'You thankless dog!' gasped Mrs Brown. 'You impudent insulting dog!'

'What have I been and done to go and give you offence, Misses Brown?' retorted the fearful Rob. 'You was very much attached to me a minute ago.'

'To cut me off with his short answers and his sulky words,' said the old woman. 'Me! Because I happen to be curious to have a little bit of gossip about Master and the lady, to dare to play at fast and loose with me! But I'll talk to you no more, my lad. Now go!'

'I'm sure, Misses Brown,' returned the abject Grinder, 'I never Insiniwated that I wished to go. Don't talk like that, Misses Brown, if you please.'

'I won't talk at all,' said Mrs Brown, with an action of her crooked fingers that made him shrink into half his natural compass in the corner. 'Not another word with him shall pass my lips. He's an ungrateful hound. I cast him off. Now let him go! And I'll slip those after him that shall talk too much; that won't be shook away; that'll hang to him like leeches, and slink arter him like foxes. What! He knows 'em. He knows his old games and his old ways. If he's forgotten 'em, they'll soon remind him. Now let him go, and see how he'll do Master's business, and keep Master's secrets, with such company always following him up and down. Ha, ha, ha! He'll find 'em a different sort from you and me, Ally; Close as he is with you and me. Now let him go, now let him go!'

The old woman, to the unspeakable dismay of the Grinder, walked her twisted figure round and round, in a ring of some four feet in diameter, constantly repeating these words, and shaking her fist above her head, and working her mouth about.

'Misses Brown,' pleaded Rob, coming a little out of his corner, 'I'm sure you wouldn't injure a cove, on second thoughts, and in cold blood, would you?'

'Don't talk to me,' said Mrs Brown, still wrathfully pursuing her circle. 'Now let him go, now let him go!'

'Misses Brown,' urged the tormented Grinder, 'I didn't mean to—Oh, what a thing it is for a cove to get into such a line as this!—I was only careful of talking, Misses Brown, because I always am, on account of his being up to everything; but I might have known it wouldn't have gone any further. I'm sure I'm quite agreeable,' with a wretched face, 'for any little bit of gossip, Misses Brown. Don't go on like this, if you please. Oh, couldn't you have the goodness to put in a word for a miserable cove, here?' said the Grinder, appealing in desperation to the daughter.

'Come, mother, you hear what he says,' she interposed, in her stern voice, and with an impatient action of her head; 'try him once more, and if you fall out with him again, ruin him, if you like, and have done with him.'

Mrs Brown, moved as it seemed by this very tender exhortation, presently began to howl; and softening by degrees, took the apologetic Grinder to her arms, who embraced her with a face of unutterable woe, and like a victim as he was, resumed his former seat, close by the side of his venerable friend, whom he suffered, not without much constrained sweetness of countenance, combating very expressive physiognomical revelations of an opposite character to draw his arm through hers, and keep it there.

'And how's Master, deary dear?' said Mrs Brown, when, sitting in this amicable posture, they had pledged each other.

'Hush! If you'd be so good, Misses Brown, as to speak a little lower,' Rob implored. 'Why, he's pretty well, thank'ee, I suppose.'

'You're not out of place, Robby?' said Mrs Brown, in a wheedling tone.

'Why, I'm not exactly out of place, nor in,' faltered Rob. 'I—I'm still in pay, Misses Brown.'

'And nothing to do, Rob?'

'Nothing particular to do just now, Misses Brown, but to—keep my eyes open, said the Grinder, rolling them in a forlorn way.

'Master abroad, Rob?'

'Oh, for goodness' sake, Misses Brown, couldn't you gossip with a cove about anything else?' cried the Grinder, in a burst of despair.

The impetuous Mrs Brown rising directly, the tortured Grinder detained her, stammering 'Ye-es, Misses Brown, I believe he's abroad. What's she staring at?' he added, in allusion to the daughter, whose eyes were fixed upon the face that now again looked out behind.

'Don't mind her, lad,' said the old woman, holding him closer to prevent his turning round. 'It's her way—her way. Tell me, Rob. Did you ever see the lady, deary?'

'Oh, Misses Brown, what lady?' cried the Grinder in a tone of piteous supplication.

'What lady?' she retorted. 'The lady; Mrs Dombey.'

'Yes, I believe I see her once,' replied Rob.

'The night she went away, Robby, eh?' said the old woman in his ear, and taking note of every change in his face. 'Aha! I know it was that night.'

'Well, if you know it was that night, you know, Misses Brown,' replied Rob, 'it's no use putting pinchers into a cove to make him say so.

'Where did they go that night, Rob? Straight away? How did they go? Where did you see her? Did she laugh? Did she cry? Tell me all about it,' cried the old hag, holding him closer yet, patting the hand that was drawn through his arm against her other hand, and searching every line in his face with her bleared eyes. 'Come! Begin! I want to be told all about it. What, Rob, boy! You and me can keep a secret together, eh? We've done so before now. Where did they go first, Rob?'

The wretched Grinder made a gasp, and a pause.

'Are you dumb?' said the old woman, angrily.

'Lord, Misses Brown, no! You expect a cove to be a flash of lightning. I wish I was the electric fluency,' muttered the bewildered Grinder. 'I'd have a shock at somebody, that would settle their business.'

'What do you say?' asked the old woman, with a grin.

'I'm wishing my love to you, Misses Brown,' returned the false Rob, seeking consolation in the glass. 'Where did they go to first was it? Him and her, do you mean?'

'Ah!' said the old woman, eagerly. 'Them two.'

'Why, they didn't go nowhere—not together, I mean,' answered Rob.

The old woman looked at him, as though she had a strong impulse upon her to make another clutch at his head and throat, but was restrained by a certain dogged mystery in his face.

'That was the art of it,' said the reluctant Grinder; 'that's the way nobody saw 'em go, or has been able to say how they did go. They went different ways, I tell you Misses Brown.

'Ay, ay, ay! To meet at an appointed place,' chuckled the old woman, after a moment's silent and keen scrutiny of his face.

'Why, if they weren't a going to meet somewhere, I suppose they might as well have stayed at home, mightn't they, Brown?' returned the unwilling Grinder.

'Well, Rob? Well?' said the old woman, drawing his arm yet tighter through her own, as if, in her eagerness, she were afraid of his slipping away.

'What, haven't we talked enough yet, Misses Brown?' returned the Grinder, who, between his sense of injury, his sense of liquor, and his sense of being on the rack, had become so lachrymose, that at almost every answer he scooped his coats into one or other of his eyes, and uttered an unavailing whine of remonstrance. 'Did she laugh that night, was it? Didn't you ask if she laughed, Misses Brown?'

'Or cried?' added the old woman, nodding assent.

'Neither,' said the Grinder. 'She kept as steady when she and me—oh, I see you will have it out of me, Misses Brown! But take your solemn oath now, that you'll never tell anybody.'

This Mrs Brown very readily did: being naturally Jesuitical; and having no other intention in the matter than that her concealed visitor should hear for himself.

'She kept as steady, then, when she and me went down to Southampton,' said the Grinder, 'as a image. In the morning she was just the same, Misses Brown. And when she went away in the packet before daylight, by herself

—me pretending to be her servant, and seeing her safe aboard—she was just the same. Now, are you contented, Misses Brown?'

'No, Rob. Not yet,' answered Mrs Brown, decisively.

'Oh, here's a woman for you!' cried the unfortunate Rob, in an outburst of feeble lamentation over his own helplessness.

'What did you wish to know next, Misses Brown?'

'What became of Master? Where did he go?' she inquired, still holding him tight, and looking close into his face, with her sharp eyes.

'Upon my soul, I don't know, Misses Brown,' answered Rob.

'Upon my soul I don't know what he did, nor where he went, nor anything about him I only know what he said to me as a caution to hold my tongue, when we parted; and I tell you this, Misses Brown, as a friend, that sooner than ever repeat a word of what we're saying now, you had better take and shoot yourself, or shut yourself up in this house, and set it a-fire, for there's nothing he wouldn't do, to be revenged upon you. You don't know him half as well as I do, Misses Brown. You're never safe from him, I tell you.'

'Haven't I taken an oath,' retorted the old woman, 'and won't I keep it?'

'Well, I'm sure I hope you will, Misses Brown,' returned Rob, somewhat doubtfully, and not without a latent threatening in his manner. 'For your own sake, quite as much as mine.'

He looked at her as he gave her this friendly caution, and emphasized it with a nodding of his head; but finding it uncomfortable to encounter the yellow face with its grotesque action, and the ferret eyes with their keen old wintry gaze, so close to his own, he looked down uneasily and sat skulking in his chair, as if he were trying to bring hImself to a sullen declaration that he would answer no more questions. The old woman, still holding him as before, took this opportunity of raising the forefinger of her right hand, in the air, as a stealthy signal to the concealed observer to give particular attention to what was about to follow.

'Rob,' she said, in her most coaxing tone.

'Good gracious, Misses Brown, what's the matter now?' returned the exasperated Grinder.

'Rob! where did the lady and Master appoint to meet?'

Rob shuffled more and more, and looked up and looked down, and bit his thumb, and dried it on his waistcoat, and finally said, eyeing his tormentor askance, 'How should I know, Misses Brown?'

The old woman held up her finger again, as before, and replying, 'Come, lad! It's no use leading me to that, and there leaving me. I want to know' waited for his answer. Rob, after a discomfited pause, suddenly broke out with, 'How can I pronounce the names of foreign places, Mrs Brown? What an unreasonable woman you are!'

'But you have heard it said, Robby,' she retorted firmly, 'and you know what it sounded like. Come!'

'I never heard it said, Misses Brown,' returned the Grinder.

'Then,' retorted the old woman quickly, 'you have seen it written, and you can spell it.'

Rob, with a petulant exclamation between laughing and crying—for he was penetrated with some admiration of Mrs Brown's cunning, even through this persecution—after some reluctant fumbling in his waistcoat pocket, produced from it a little piece of chalk. The old woman's eyes sparkled when she saw it between his thumb and finger, and hastily clearing a space on the deal table, that he might write the word there, she once more made her signal with a shaking hand.

'Now I tell you beforehand what it is, Misses Brown,' said Rob, 'it's no use asking me anything else. I won't answer anything else; I can't. How long it was to be before they met, or whose plan it was that they was to go away alone, I don't know no more than you do. I don't know any more about it. If I was to tell you how I found out this word, you'd believe that. Shall I tell you, Misses Brown?'

'Yes, Rob.'

'Well then, Misses Brown. The way—now you won't ask any more, you know?' said Rob, turning his eyes, which were now fast getting drowsy and stupid, upon her.

'Not another word,' said Mrs Brown.

'Well then, the way was this. When a certain person left the lady with me, he put a piece of paper with a direction written on it in the lady's hand, saying it was in case she should forget. She wasn't afraid of forgetting, for she tore it up as soon as his back was turned, and when I put up the carriage steps, I shook out one of the pieces—she sprinkled the rest out of the window, I suppose, for there was none there afterwards, though I looked for 'em. There was only one word on it, and that was this, if you must and will know. But remember! You're upon your oath, Misses Brown!'

Mrs Brown knew that, she said. Rob, having nothing more to say, began to chalk, slowly and laboriously, on the table.

'"D,"' the old woman read aloud, when he had formed the letter.

'Will you hold your tongue, Misses Brown?' he exclaimed, covering it with his hand, and turning impatiently upon her. 'I won't have it read out. Be quiet, will you!'

'Then write large, Rob,' she returned, repeating her secret signal; 'for my eyes are not good, even at print.'

Muttering to himself, and returning to his work with an ill will, Rob went on with the word. As he bent his head down, the person for whose information he so unconsciously laboured, moved from the door behind him to within a short stride of his shoulder, and looked eagerly towards the creeping track of his hand upon the table. At the same time, Alice, from her opposite chair, watched it narrowly as it shaped the letters, and repeated each one on her lips as he made it, without articulating it aloud. At the end of every letter her eyes and Mr Dombey's met, as if each of them sought to be confirmed by the other; and thus they both spelt D.I.J.O.N.

'There!' said the Grinder, moistening the palm of his hand hastily, to obliterate the word; and not content with smearing it out, rubbing and planing all trace of it away with his coat-sleeve, until the very colour of the chalk was gone from the table. 'Now, I hope you're contented, Misses Brown!'

The old woman, in token of her being so, released his arm and patted his back; and the Grinder, overcome with mortification, cross-examination, and liquor, folded his arms on the table, laid his head upon them, and fell asleep.

Not until he had been heavily asleep some time, and was snoring roundly, did the old woman turn towards the door where Mr Dombey stood concealed, and beckon him to come through the room, and pass out. Even then, she hovered over Rob, ready to blind him with her hands, or strike his head down, if he should raise it while the secret step was crossing to the door. But though her glance took sharp cognizance of the sleeper, it was sharp too for the waking man; and when he touched her hand with his, and in spite of all his caution, made a chinking, golden sound, it was as bright and greedy as a raven's.

The daughter's dark gaze followed him to the door, and noted well how pale he was, and how his hurried tread indicated that the least delay was an insupportable restraint upon him, and how he was burning to be active and away. As he closed the door behind him, she looked round at her mother. The old woman trotted to her; opened her hand to show what was within; and, tightly closing it again in her jealousy and avarice, whispered:

'What will he do, Ally?'

'Mischief,' said the daughter.

'Murder?' asked the old woman.

'He's a madman, in his wounded pride, and may do that, for anything we can say, or he either.'

Her glance was brighter than her mother's, and the fire that shone in it was fiercer; but her face was colourless, even to her lips.

They said no more, but sat apart; the mother communing with her money; the daughter with her thoughts; the glance of each, shining in the gloom of the feebly lighted room. Rob slept and snored. The disregarded parrot only was in action. It twisted and pulled at the wires of its cage, with its crooked beak, and crawled up to the dome, and along its roof like a fly, and down again head foremost, and shook, and bit, and rattled at every slender bar, as if it knew its master's danger, and was wild to force a passage out, and fly away to warn him of it.

CHAPTER 53. More Intelligence

There were two of the traitor's own blood—his renounced brother and sister—on whom the weight of his guilt rested almost more heavily, at this time, than on the man whom he had so deeply injured. Prying and tormenting as the world was, it did Mr Dombey the service of nerving him to pursuit and revenge. It roused his passion, stung his pride, twisted the one idea of his life into a new shape, and made some gratification of his wrath, the object into which his whole intellectual existence resolved itself. All the stubbornness and implacability of his nature, all its hard impenetrable quality, all its gloom and moroseness, all its exaggerated sense of personal importance, all its jealous disposition to resent the least flaw in the ample recognition of his importance by others, set this way like many streams united into one, and bore him on upon their tide. The most impetuously passionate and violently impulsive of mankind would have been a milder enemy to encounter than the sullen Mr Dombey wrought to this. A wild beast would have been easier turned or soothed than the grave gentleman without a wrinkle in his starched cravat.

But the very intensity of his purpose became almost a substitute for action in it. While he was yet uninformed of the traitor's retreat, it served to divert his mind from his own calamity, and to entertain it with another prospect. The brother and sister of his false favourite had no such relief; everything in their history, past and present, gave his delinquency a more afflicting meaning to them.

The sister may have sometimes sadly thought that if she had remained with him, the companion and friend she had been once, he might have escaped the crime into which he had fallen. If she ever thought so, it was still without regret for what she had done, without the least doubt of her duty, without any pricing or enhancing of her self-devotion. But when this possibility presented itself to the erring and repentant brother, as it sometimes did, it smote upon his heart with such a keen, reproachful touch as he could hardly bear. No idea of retort upon his cruel brother came into his mind. New accusation of himself, fresh inward lamentings over his own unworthiness, and the ruin in which it was at once his consolation and his self- reproach that he did not stand alone, were the sole kind of reflections to which the discovery gave rise in him.

It was on the very same day whose evening set upon the last chapter, and when Mr Dombey's world was busiest with the elopement of his wife, that the window of the room in which the brother and sister sat at their early breakfast, was darkened by the unexpected shadow of a man coming to the little porch: which man was Perch the Messenger.

'I've stepped over from Balls Pond at a early hour,' said Mr Perch, confidentially looking in at the room door, and stopping on the mat to wipe his shoes all round, which had no mud upon them, 'agreeable to my instructions last night. They was, to be sure and bring a note to you, Mr Carker, before you went out in the morning. I should have been here a good hour and a half ago,' said Mr Perch, meekly, 'but for the state of health of Mrs P., who I thought I should have lost in the night, I do assure you, five distinct times.'

'Is your wife so ill?' asked Harriet.

'Why, you see,' said Mr Perch, first turning round to shut the door carefully, 'she takes what has happened in our House so much to heart, Miss. Her nerves is so very delicate, you see, and soon unstrung. Not but what the strongest nerves had good need to be shook, I'm sure. You feel it very much yourself, no doubts.

Harriet repressed a sigh, and glanced at her brother.

'I'm sure I feel it myself, in my humble way,' Mr Perch went on to say, with a shake of his head, 'in a manner I couldn't have believed if I hadn't been called upon to undergo. It has almost the effect of drink upon me. I literally feels every morning as if I had been taking more than was good for me over-night.'

Mr Perch's appearance corroborated this recital of his symptoms. There was an air of feverish lassitude about it, that seemed referable to drams; and, which, in fact, might no doubt have been traced to those numerous discoveries of himself in the bars of public-houses, being treated and questioned, which he was in the daily habit of making.

'Therefore I can judge,' said Mr Perch, shaking his head and speaking in a silvery murmur, 'of the feelings of such as is at all peculiarly sitiwated in this most painful rewelation.'

Here Mr Perch waited to be confided in; and receiving no confidence, coughed behind his hand. This leading to nothing, he coughed behind his hat; and that leading to nothing, he put his hat on the ground and sought in his breast pocket for the letter.

'If I rightly recollect, there was no answer,' said Mr Perch, with an affable smile; 'but perhaps you'll be so good as cast your eye over it, Sir.'

John Carker broke the seal, which was Mr Dombey's, and possessing himself of the contents, which were very brief, replied,

'No. No answer is expected.'

'Then I shall wish you good morning, Miss,' said Perch, taking a step toward the door, and hoping, I'm sure, that you'll not permit yourself to be more reduced in mind than you can help, by the late painful rewelation. The Papers,' said Mr Perch, taking two steps back again, and comprehensively addressing both the brother and sister in a whisper of increased mystery, 'is more eager for news of it than you'd suppose possible. One of the Sunday ones, in a blue cloak and a white hat, that had previously offered for to bribe me—need I say with what success?—was dodging about our court last night as late as twenty minutes after eight o'clock. I see him myself, with his eye at the counting-house keyhole, which being patent is impervious. Another one,' said Mr Perch, 'with military frogs, is in the parlour of the King's Arms all the blessed day. I happened, last week, to let a little observation fall there, and next morning, which was Sunday, I see it worked up in print, in a most surprising manner.'

Mr Perch resorted to his breast pocket, as if to produce the paragraph but receiving no encouragement, pulled out his beaver gloves, picked up his hat, and took his leave; and before it was high noon, Mr Perch had related to several select audiences at the King's Arms and elsewhere, how Miss Carker, bursting into tears, had caught him by both hands, and said, 'Oh! dear dear Perch, the sight of you is all the comfort I have left!' and how Mr John Carker had said, in an awful voice, 'Perch, I disown him. Never let me hear hIm mentioned as a brother more!'

'Dear John,' said Harriet, when they were left alone, and had remained silent for some few moments. 'There are bad tidings in that letter.'

'Yes. But nothing unexpected,' he replied. 'I saw the writer yesterday.'

'The writer?'

'Mr Dombey. He passed twice through the Counting House while I was there. I had been able to avoid him before, but of course could not hope to do that long. I know how natural it was that he should regard my presence as something offensive; I felt it must be so, myself.'

'He did not say so?'

'No; he said nothing: but I saw that his glance rested on me for a moment, and I was prepared for what would happen—for what has happened. I am dismissed!'

She looked as little shocked and as hopeful as she could, but it was distressing news, for many reasons.

'"I need not tell you,"' said John Carker, reading the letter, '"why your name would henceforth have an unnatural sound, in however remote a connexion with mine, or why the daily sight of anyone who bears it, would be unendurable to me. I have to notify the cessation of all engagements between us, from this date, and to request that no renewal of any communication with me, or my establishment, be ever attempted by you."—Enclosed is an equivalent in money to a generously long notice, and this is my discharge." Heaven knows, Harriet, it is a lenient and considerate one, when we remember all!'

'If it be lenient and considerate to punish you at all, John, for the misdeed of another,' she replied gently, 'yes.'

'We have been an ill-omened race to him,' said John Carker. 'He has reason to shrink from the sound of our name, and to think that there is something cursed and wicked in our blood. I should almost think it too, Harriet, but for you.'

'Brother, don't speak like this. If you have any special reason, as you say you have, and think you have—though I say, No!—to love me, spare me the hearing of such wild mad words!'

He covered his face with both his hands; but soon permitted her, coming near him, to take one in her own.

'After so many years, this parting is a melancholy thing, I know,' said his sister, 'and the cause of it is dreadful to us both. We have to live, too, and must look about us for the means. Well, well! We can do so, undismayed. It is our pride, not our trouble, to strive, John, and to strive together!'

A smile played on her lips, as she kissed his cheek, and entreated him to be of of good cheer.

'Oh, dearest sister! Tied, of your own noble will, to a ruined man! whose reputation is blighted; who has no friend himself, and has driven every friend of yours away!'

'John!' she laid her hand hastily upon his lips, 'for my sake! In remembrance of our long companionship!' He was silent 'Now, let me tell you, dear,' quietly sitting by his side, 'I have, as you have, expected this; and when I have been thinking of it, and fearing that it would happen, and preparing myself for it, as well as I could, I have resolved to tell you, if it should be so, that I have kept a secret from you, and that we have a friend.'

'What's our friend's name, Harriet?' he answered with a sorrowful smile.

'Indeed, I don't know, but he once made a very earnest protestation to me of his friendship and his wish to serve us: and to this day I believe 'him.'

'Harriet!' exclaimed her wondering brother, 'where does this friend live?'

'Neither do I know that,' she returned. 'But he knows us both, and our history—all our little history, John. That is the reason why, at his own suggestion, I have kept the secret of his coming, here, from you, lest his acquaintance with it should distress you.

'Here! Has he been here, Harriet?'

'Here, in this room. Once.'

'What kind of man?'

'Not young. "Grey-headed," as he said, "and fast growing greyer." But generous, and frank, and good, I am sure.'

'And only seen once, Harriet?'

'In this room only once,' said his sister, with the slightest and most transient glow upon her cheek; 'but when here, he entreated me to suffer him to see me once a week as he passed by, in token of our being well, and continuing to need nothing at his hands. For I told him, when he proffered us any service he could render—which was the object of his visit—that we needed nothing.'

'And once a week—'

'Once every week since then, and always on the same day, and at the same hour, he his gone past; always on foot; always going in the same direction— towards London; and never pausing longer than to bow to me, and wave his hand cheerfully, as a kind guardian might. He made that promise when he proposed these curious interviews, and has kept it so faithfully and pleasantly, that if I ever felt any trifling uneasiness about them in the beginning (which I don't think I did, John; his manner was so plain and true) It very soon vanished, and left me quite glad when the day was coming. Last Monday—the first since this terrible event—he did not go by; and I have wondered whether his absence can have been in any way connected with what has happened.'

'How?' inquired her brother.

'I don't know how. I have only speculated on the coincidence; I have not tried to account for it. I feel sure he will return. When he does, dear John, let me tell him that I have at last spoken to you, and let me bring you together. He will certainly help us to a new livelihood. His entreaty was that he might do something to smooth my life and yours; and I gave him my promise that if we ever wanted a friend, I would remember him.'

'Then his name was to be no secret, 'Harriet,' said her brother, who had listened with close attention, 'describe this gentleman to me. I surely ought to know one who knows me so well.'

His sister painted, as vividly as she could, the features, stature, and dress of her visitor; but John Carker, either from having no knowledge of the original, or from some fault in her description, or from some abstraction of his thoughts as he walked to and fro, pondering, could not recognise the portrait she presented to him.

However, it was agreed between them that he should see the original when he next appeared. This concluded, the sister applied herself, with a less anxious breast, to her domestic occupations; and the grey-haired man, late Junior of Dombey's, devoted the first day of his unwonted liberty to working in the garden.

It was quite late at night, and the brother was reading aloud while the sister plied her needle, when they were interrupted by a knocking at the door. In the atmosphere of vague anxiety and dread that lowered about them in connexion with their fugitive brother, this sound, unusual there, became almost alarming. The brother going to the door, the sister sat and listened timidly. Someone spoke to him, and he replied and seemed surprised; and after a few words, the two approached together.

'Harriet,' said her brother, lighting in their late visitor, and speaking in a low voice, 'Mr Morfin—the gentleman so long in Dombey's House with James.'

His sister started back, as if a ghost had entered. In the doorway stood the unknown friend, with the dark hair sprinkled with grey, the ruddy face, the broad clear brow, and hazel eyes, whose secret she had kept so long!

'John!' she said, half-breathless. 'It is the gentleman I told you of, today!'

'The gentleman, Miss Harriet,' said the visitor, coming in—for he had stopped a moment in the doorway—'is greatly relieved to hear you say that: he has been devising ways and means, all the way here, of explaining himself, and has been satisfied with none. Mr John, I am not quite a stranger here. You were stricken with astonishment when you saw me at your door just now. I observe you are more astonished at present. Well! That's reasonable enough under existing circumstances. If we were not such creatures of habit as we are, we shouldn't have reason to be astonished half so often.'

By this time, he had greeted Harriet with that able mingling of cordiality and respect which she recollected so well, and had sat down near her, pulled off his gloves, and thrown them into his hat upon the table.

'There's nothing astonishing,' he said, 'in my having conceived a desire to see your sister, Mr John, or in my having gratified it in my own way. As to the regularity of my visits since (which she may have mentioned to you), there is nothing extraordinary in that. They soon grew into a habit; and we are creatures of habit—creatures of habit!'

Putting his hands into his pockets, and leaning back in his chair, he looked at the brother and sister as if it were interesting to him to see them together; and went on to say, with a kind of irritable thoughtfulness:

'It's this same habit that confirms some of us, who are capable of better things, in Lucifer's own pride and stubbornness—that confirms and deepens others of us in villainy—more of us in indifference—that hardens us from day to day, according to the temper of our clay, like images, and leaves us as susceptible as images to new impressions and convictions. You shall judge of its influence on me, John. For more years than I need name, I had my small, and exactly defined share, in the management of Dombey's House, and saw your brother (who has proved himself a scoundrel! Your sister will forgive my being obliged to mention it) extending and extending his influence, until the business and its owner were his football; and saw you toiling at your obscure desk every day; and was quite content to be as little troubled as I might be, out of my own strip of duty, and to let everything about me go on, day by day, unquestioned, like a great machine—that was its habit and mine—and to take it all for granted, and consider it all right. My Wednesday nights came regularly round, our quartette parties came regularly off, my violoncello was in good tune, and there was nothing wrong in my world—or if anything not much—or little or much, it was no affair of mine.'

'I can answer for your being more respected and beloved during all that time than anybody in the House, Sir,' said John Carker.

'Pooh! Good-natured and easy enough, I daresay,'returned the other, 'a habit I had. It suited the Manager; it suited the man he managed: it suited me best of all. I did what was allotted to me to do, made no court to either of them, and was glad to occupy a station in which none was required. So I should have gone on till now, but that my room had a thin wall. You can tell your sister that it was divided from the Manager's room by a wainscot partition.'

'They were adjoining rooms; had been one, Perhaps, originally; and were separated, as Mr Morfin says,' said her brother, looking back to him for the resumption of his explanation.

'I have whistled, hummed tunes, gone accurately through the whole of Beethoven's Sonata in B,' to let him know that I was within hearing,' said Mr Morfin; 'but he never heeded me. It happened seldom enough that I was within hearing of anything of a private nature, certainly. But when I was, and couldn't otherwise avoid knowing something of it, I walked out. I walked out once, John, during a conversation between two brothers, to which, in the beginning, young Walter Gay was a party. But I overheard some of it before I left the room. You remember it sufficiently, perhaps, to tell your sister what its nature was?'

'It referred, Harriet,' said her brother in a low voice, 'to the past, and to our relative positions in the House.'

'Its matter was not new to me, but was presented in a new aspect. It shook me in my habit—the habit of nine-tenths of the world—of believing that all was right about me, because I was used to it,' said their visitor; 'and induced me to recall the history of the two brothers, and to ponder on it. I think it was almost the first time in my life when I fell into this train of reflection—how will many things that are familiar, and quite matters of course to us now, look, when we come to see them from that new and distant point of view which we must all take up, one day or other? I was something less good-natured, as the phrase goes, after that morning, less easy and complacent altogether.'

He sat for a minute or so, drumming with one hand on the table; and resumed in a hurry, as if he were anxious to get rid of his confession.

'Before I knew what to do, or whether I could do anything, there was a second conversation between the same two brothers, in which their sister was mentioned. I had no scruples of conscience in suffering all the waifs and strays of that conversation to float to me as freely as they would. I considered them mine by right. After that, I came here to see the sister for myself. The first time I stopped at the garden gate, I made a pretext of inquiring into the character of a poor neighbour; but I wandered out of that tract, and I think Miss Harriet mistrusted me. The second time I asked leave to come in; came in; and said what I wished to say. Your sister showed me reasons which I dared not dispute, for receiving no assistance from me then; but I established a means of communication between us, which remained unbroken until within these few days, when I was prevented, by important matters that have lately devolved upon me, from maintaining them.'

'How little I have suspected this,' said John Carker, 'when I have seen you every day, Sir! If Harriet could have guessed your name—'

'Why, to tell you the truth, John,' interposed the visitor, 'I kept it to myself for two reasons. I don't know that the first might have been binding alone; but one has no business to take credit for good intentions, and I made up my mind, at all events, not to disclose myself until I should be able to do you some real service or other. My second reason was, that I always hoped there might be some lingering possibility of your brother's relenting towards you both; and in that case, I felt that where there was the chance of a man of his suspicious, watchful character, discovering that you had been secretly befriended by me, there was the chance of a new and fatal cause of division. I resolved, to be sure, at the risk of turning his displeasure against myself—which would have been no matter—to watch my opportunity of serving you with the head of the House; but the distractions of death, courtship, marriage, and domestic unhappiness, have left us no head but your brother for this long, long time. And it would have been better for us,' said the visitor, dropping his voice, 'to have been a lifeless trunk.'

He seemed conscious that these latter words had escaped hIm against his will, and stretching out a hand to the brother, and a hand to the sister, continued: 'All I could desire to say, and more, I have now said. All I mean goes beyond words, as I hope you understand and believe. The time has come, John—though most unfortunately and unhappily come—when I may help you without interfering with that redeeming struggle, which has lasted through so many years; since you were discharged from it today by no act of your own. It is late; I need say no more to-night. You will guard the treasure you have here, without advice or reminder from me.'

With these words he rose to go.

'But go you first, John,' he said goodhumouredly, 'with a light, without saying what you want to say, whatever that maybe;' John Carker's heart was full, and he would have relieved it in speech,' if he could; 'and let me have a word with your sister. We have talked alone before, and in this room too; though it looks more natural with you here.'

Following him out with his eyes, he turned kindly to Harriet, and said in a lower voice, and with an altered and graver manner:

'You wish to ask me something of the man whose sister it is your misfortune to be.'

'I dread to ask,' said Harriet.

'You have looked so earnestly at me more than once,' rejoined the visitor, 'that I think I can divine your question. Has he taken money? Is it that?'

'Yes.'

'He has not.'

'I thank Heaven!' said Harriet. 'For the sake of John.'

'That he has abused his trust in many ways,' said Mr Morfin; 'that he has oftener dealt and speculated to advantage for himself, than for the House he represented; that he has led the House on, to prodigious ventures, often resulting in enormous losses; that he has always pampered the vanity and ambition of his employer, when it was his duty to have held them in check, and shown, as it was in his power to do, to what they tended here or there; will not, perhaps, surprise you now. Undertakings have been entered on, to swell the reputation of the House for vast resources, and to exhibit it in magnificent contrast to other merchants' Houses, of which it requires a steady head to contemplate the possibly—a few disastrous changes of affairs might render them the probably—ruinous consequences. In the midst of the many transactions of the House, in most parts of the world: a great labyrinth of which only he has held the clue: he has had the opportunity, and he seems to have used it, of keeping the various results afloat, when ascertained, and substituting estimates and generalities for facts. But latterly—you follow me, Miss Harriet?'

'Perfectly, perfectly,' she answered, with her frightened face fixed on his. 'Pray tell me all the worst at once.

'Latterly, he appears to have devoted the greatest pains to making these results so plain and clear, that reference to the private books enables one to grasp them, numerous and varying as they are, with extraordinary ease. As if he had resolved to show his employer at one broad view what has been brought upon him by ministration to his ruling passion! That it has been his constant practice to minister to that passion basely, and to flatter it corruptly, is indubitable. In that, his criminality, as it is connected with the affairs of the House, chiefly consists.'

'One other word before you leave me, dear Sir,' said Harriet. 'There is no danger in all this?'

'How danger?' he returned, with a little hesitation.

'To the credit of the House?'

'I cannot help answering you plainly, and trusting you completely,' said Mr Morfin, after a moment's survey of her face.

'You may. Indeed you may!'

'I am sure I may. Danger to the House's credit? No; none There may be difficulty, greater or less difficulty, but no danger, unless—unless, indeed—the head of the House, unable to bring his mind to the reduction of its enterprises, and positively refusing to believe that it is, or can be, in any position but the position in which he has always represented it to himself, should urge it beyond its strength. Then it would totter.'

'But there is no apprehension of that?' said Harriet.

'There shall be no half-confidence,' he replied, shaking her hand, 'between us. Mr Dombey is unapproachable by anyone, and his state of mind is haughty, rash, unreasonable, and ungovernable, now. But he is disturbed and agitated now beyond all common bounds, and it may pass. You now know all, both worst and best. No more to-night, and good-night!'

With that he kissed her hand, and, passing out to the door where her brother stood awaiting his coming, put him cheerfully aside when he essayed to speak; told him that, as they would see each other soon and often, he might speak at another time, if he would, but there was no leisure for it then; and went away at a round pace, in order that no word of gratitude might follow him.

The brother and sister sat conversing by the fireside, until it was almost day; made sleepless by this glimpse of the new world that opened before them, and feeling like two people shipwrecked long ago, upon a solitary coast, to whom a ship had come at last, when they were old in resignation, and had lost all thought of any other home. But another and different kind of disquietude kept them waking too. The darkness out of which this light had broken on them gathered around; and the shadow of their guilty brother was in the house where his foot had never trod.

Nor was it to be driven out, nor did it fade before the sun. Next morning it was there; at noon; at night Darkest and most distinct at night, as is now to be told.

John Carker had gone out, in pursuance of a letter of appointment from their friend, and Harriet was left in the house alone. She had been alone some hours. A dull, grave evening, and a deepening twilight, were not favourable to the removal of the oppression on her spirits. The idea of this brother, long unseen and unknown, flitted about her in frightful shapes He was dead, dying, calling to her, staring at her, frowning on her. The pictures in her mind were so obtrusive and exact that, as the twilight deepened, she dreaded to raise her head and look at the dark corners of the room, lest his wraith, the offspring of her excited imagination, should be waiting there, to startle her. Once she had such a fancy of his being in the next room, hiding—though she knew quite well what a distempered fancy it was, and had no belief in it—that she forced herself to go there, for her own conviction. But in vain. The room resumed its shadowy terrors, the moment she left it; and she had no more power to divest herself of these vague impressions of dread, than if they had been stone giants, rooted in the solid earth.

It was almost dark, and she was sitting near the window, with her head upon her hand, looking down, when, sensible of a sudden increase in the gloom of the apartment, she raised her eyes, and uttered an involuntary cry. Close to the glass, a pale scared face gazed in; vacantly, for an instant, as searching for an object; then the eyes rested on herself, and lighted up.

'Let me in! Let me in! I want to speak to you!' and the hand rattled on the glass.

She recognised immediately the woman with the long dark hair, to whom she had given warmth, food, and shelter, one wet night. Naturally afraid of her, remembering her violent behaviour, Harriet, retreating a little from the window, stood undecided and alarmed.

'Let me in! Let me speak to you! I am thankful—quiet—humble—anything you like. But let me speak to you.'

The vehement manner of the entreaty, the earnest expression of the face, the trembling of the two hands that were raised imploringly, a certain dread and terror in the voice akin to her own condition at the moment, prevailed with Harriet. She hastened to the door and opened it.

'May I come in, or shall I speak here?' said the woman, catching at her hand.

'What is it that you want? What is it that you have to say?'

'Not much, but let me say it out, or I shall never say it. I am tempted now to go away. There seem to be hands dragging me from the door. Let me come in, if you can trust me for this once!'

Her energy again prevailed, and they passed into the firelight of the little kitchen, where she had before sat, and ate, and dried her clothes.

'Sit there,' said Alice, kneeling down beside her, 'and look at me. You remember me?'

'I do.'

'You remember what I told you I had been, and where I came from, ragged and lame, with the fierce wind and weather beating on my head?'

'Yes.'

'You know how I came back that night, and threw your money in the dirt, and you and your race. Now, see me here, upon my knees. Am I less earnest now, than I was then?'

'If what you ask,' said Harriet, gently, 'is forgiveness—'

'But it's not!' returned the other, with a proud, fierce look 'What I ask is to be believed. Now you shall judge if I am worthy of belief, both as I was, and as I am.'

Still upon her knees, and with her eyes upon the fire, and the fire shining on her ruined beauty and her wild black hair, one long tress of which she pulled over her shoulder, and wound about her hand, and thoughtfully bit and tore while speaking, she went on:

'When I was young and pretty, and this,' plucking contemptuously at the hair she held, was only handled delicately, and couldn't be admired enough, my mother, who had not been very mindful of me as a child, found out my merits, and was fond of me, and proud of me. She was covetous and poor, and thought to make a sort of property of me. No great lady ever thought that of a daughter yet, I'm sure, or acted as if she did—it's never done, we all know—and that shows that the only instances of mothers bringing up their daughters wrong, and evil coming of it, are among such miserable folks as us.'

Looking at the fire, as if she were forgetful, for the moment, of having any auditor, she continued in a dreamy way, as she wound the long tress of hair tight round and round her hand.

'What came of that, I needn't say. Wretched marriages don't come of such things, in our degree; only wretchedness and ruin. Wretchedness and ruin came on me—came on me.

Raising her eyes swiftly from their moody gaze upon the fire, to Harriet's face, she said:

'I am wasting time, and there is none to spare; yet if I hadn't thought of all, I shouldn't be here now. Wretchedness and ruin came on me, I say. I was made a short-lived toy, and flung aside more cruelly and carelessly than even such things are. By whose hand do you think?'

'Why do you ask me?' said Harriet.

'Why do you tremble?' rejoined Alice, with an eager look. 'His usage made a Devil of me. I sunk in wretchedness and ruin, lower and lower yet. I was concerned in a robbery—in every part of it but the gains—and was found out, and sent to be tried, without a friend, without a penny. Though I was but a girl, I would have gone to Death, sooner than ask him for a word, if a word of his could have saved me. I would! To any death that could have been invented. But my mother, covetous always, sent to him in my name, told the true story of my case, and humbly prayed and petitioned for a small last gift—for not so many pounds as I have fingers on this hand. Who was it, do you think, who snapped his fingers at me in my misery, lying, as he believed, at his feet, and left me without even this poor sign of remembrance; well satisfied that I should be sent abroad, beyond the reach of farther trouble to him, and should die, and rot there? Who was this, do you think?'

'Why do you ask me?' repeated Harriet.

'Why do you tremble?' said Alice, laying her hand upon her arm' and looking in her face, 'but that the answer is on your lips! It was your brother James.

Harriet trembled more and more, but did not avert her eyes from the eager look that rested on them.

'When I knew you were his sister—which was on that night—I came back, weary and lame, to spurn your gift. I felt that night as if I could have travelled, weary and lame, over the whole world, to stab him, if I could have found him in a lonely place with no one near. Do you believe that I was earnest in all that?'

'I do! Good Heaven, why are you come again?'

'Since then,' said Alice, with the same grasp of her arm, and the same look in her face, 'I have seen him! I have followed him with my eyes, In the broad day. If any spark of my resentment slumbered in my bosom, it sprung into a blaze when my eyes rested on him. You know he has wronged a proud man, and made him his deadly enemy. What if I had given information of him to that man?'

'Information!' repeated Harriet.

'What if I had found out one who knew your brother's secret; who knew the manner of his flight, who knew where he and the companion of his flight were gone? What if I had made him utter all his knowledge, word by word, before his enemy, concealed to hear it? What if I had sat by at the time, looking into this enemy's face, and seeing it change till it was scarcely human? What if I had seen him rush away, mad, in pursuit? What if I knew, now, that he was on his road, more fiend than man, and must, in so many hours, come up with him?'

'Remove your hand!' said Harriet, recoiling. 'Go away! Your touch is dreadful to me!'

'I have done this,' pursued the other, with her eager look, regardless of the interruption. 'Do I speak and look as if I really had? Do you believe what I am saying?'

'I fear I must. Let my arm go!'

'Not yet. A moment more. You can think what my revengeful purpose must have been, to last so long, and urge me to do this?'

'Dreadful!' said Harriet.

'Then when you see me now,' said Alice hoarsely, 'here again, kneeling quietly on the ground, with my touch upon your arm, with my eyes upon your face, you may believe that there is no common earnestness in what I say, and that no common struggle has been battling in my breast. I am ashamed to speak the words, but I relent. I despise myself; I have fought with myself all day, and all last night; but I relent towards him without reason, and wish to repair what I have done, if it is possible. I wouldn't have them come together while his pursuer is so blind and headlong. If you had seen him as he went out last night, you would know the danger better.

'How can it be prevented? What can I do?' cried Harriet.

'All night long,' pursued the other, hurriedly, 'I had dreams of him—and yet I didn't sleep—in his blood. All day, I have had him near me.

'What can I do?' cried Harriet, shuddering at these words.

'If there is anyone who'll write, or send, or go to him, let them lose no time. He is at Dijon. Do you know the name, and where it is?'

'Yes.'

'Warn him that the man he has made his enemy is in a frenzy, and that he doesn't know him if he makes light of his approach. Tell him that he is on the road—I know he is!—and hurrying on. Urge him to get away while there is time—if there is time—and not to meet him yet. A month or so will make years of difference. Let them not encounter, through me. Anywhere but there! Any time but now! Let his foe follow him, and find him for himself, but not through me! There is enough upon my head without.'

The fire ceased to be reflected in her jet black hair, uplifted face, and eager eyes; her hand was gone from Harriet's arm; and the place where she had been was empty.

CHAPTER 54. The Fugitives

Tea-time, an hour short of midnight; the place, a French apartment, comprising some half-dozen rooms;—a dull cold hall or corridor, a dining-room, a drawing-room, a bed-room, and an inner drawingroom, or boudoir, smaller and more retired than the rest. All these shut in by one large pair of doors on the main staircase, but each room provided with two or three pairs of doors of its own, establishing several means of communication with the remaining portion of the apartment, or with certain small passages within the wall, leading, as is not unusual in such houses, to some back stairs with an obscure outlet below. The whole situated on the first floor of so large an Hotel, that it did not absorb one entire row of windows upon one side of the square court-yard in the centre, upon which the whole four sides of the mansion looked.

An air of splendour, sufficiently faded to be melancholy, and sufficiently dazzling to clog and embarrass the details of life with a show of state, reigned in these rooms The walls and ceilings were gilded and painted; the floors were waxed and polished; crimson drapery hung in festoons from window, door, and mirror; and candelabra, gnarled and intertwisted like the branches of trees, or horns of animals, stuck out from the panels of the wall. But in the day-time, when the lattice-blinds (now closely shut) were opened, and the light let in, traces were discernible among this finery, of wear and tear and dust, of sun and damp and smoke, and lengthened intervals of want of use and habitation, when such shows and toys of life seem sensitive like life, and waste as men shut up in prison do. Even night, and clusters of burning candles, could not wholly efface them, though the general glitter threw them in the shade.

The glitter of bright tapers, and their reflection in looking-glasses, scraps of gilding and gay colours, were confined, on this night, to one room — that smaller room within the rest, just now enumerated. Seen from the hall, where a lamp was feebly burning, through the dark perspective of open doors, it looked as shining and precious as a gem. In the heart of its radiance sat a beautiful woman—Edith.

She was alone. The same defiant, scornful woman still. The cheek a little worn, the eye a little larger in appearance, and more lustrous, but the haughty bearing just the same. No shame upon her brow; no late repentance bending her disdainful neck. Imperious and stately yet, and yet regardless of herself and of all else, she sat with her dark eyes cast down, waiting for someone.

No book, no work, no occupation of any kind but her own thought, beguiled the tardy time. Some purpose, strong enough to fill up any pause, possessed her. With her lips pressed together, and quivering if for a moment she released them from her control; with her nostril inflated; her hands clasped in one another; and her purpose swelling in her breast; she sat, and waited.

At the sound of a key in the outer door, and a footstep in the hall, she started up, and cried 'Who's that?' The answer was in French, and two men came in with jingling trays, to make preparation for supper.

'Who had bade them to do so?' she asked.

'Monsieur had commanded it, when it was his pleasure to take the apartment. Monsieur had said, when he stayed there for an hour, en route, and left the letter for Madame—Madame had received it surely?'

'Yes.'

'A thousand pardons! The sudden apprehension that it might have been forgotten had struck hIm;' a bald man, with a large beard from a neighbouring restaurant; 'with despair! Monsieur had said that supper was to be ready at that hour: also that he had forewarned Madame of the commands he had given, in his letter. Monsieur had done the Golden Head the honour to request that the supper should be choice and delicate. Monsieur would find that his confidence in the Golden Head was not misplaced.'

Edith said no more, but looked on thoughtfully while they prepared the table for two persons, and set the wine upon it. She arose before they had finished, and taking a lamp, passed into the bed-chamber and into the drawing-room, where she hurriedly but narrowly examined all the doors; particularly one in the former room that opened on the passage in the wall. From this she took the key, and put it on the outer side. She then came back.

The men—the second of whom was a dark, bilious subject, in a jacket, close shaved, and with a black head of hair close cropped—had completed their preparation of the table, and were standing looking at it. He who had spoken before, inquired whether Madame thought it would be long before Monsieur arrived?

'She couldn't say. It was all one.'

'Pardon! There was the supper! It should be eaten on the instant. Monsieur (who spoke French like an Angel—or a Frenchman—it was all the same) had spoken with great emphasis of his punctuality. But the English nation had so grand a genius for punctuality. Ah! what noise! Great Heaven, here was Monsieur. Behold him!'

In effect, Monsieur, admitted by the other of the two, came, with his gleaming teeth, through the dark rooms, like a mouth; and arriving in that sanctuary of light and colour, a figure at full length, embraced Madame, and addressed her in the French tongue as his charming wife.

'My God! Madame is going to faint. Madame is overcome with joy!' The bald man with the beard observed it, and cried out.

Madame had only shrunk and shivered. Before the words were spoken, she was standing with her hand upon the velvet back of a great chair; her figure drawn up to its full height, and her face immoveable.

'Francois has flown over to the Golden Head for supper. He flies on these occasions like an angel or a bird. The baggage of Monsieur is in his room. All is arranged. The supper will be here this moment.' These facts the bald man notified with bows and smiles, and presently the supper came.

The hot dishes were on a chafing-dish; the cold already set forth, with the change of service on a sideboard. Monsieur was satisfied with this arrangement. The supper table being small, it pleased him very well. Let them set the chafing-dish upon the floor, and go. He would remove the dishes with his own hands.

'Pardon!' said the bald man, politely. 'It was impossible!'

Monsieur was of another opinion. He required no further attendance that night.

'But Madame—' the bald man hinted.

'Madame,' replied Monsieur, 'had her own maid. It was enough.'

'A million pardons! No! Madame had no maid!'

'I came here alone,' said Edith 'It was my choice to do so. I am well used to travelling; I want no attendance. They need send nobody to me.

Monsieur accordingly, persevering in his first proposed impossibility, proceeded to follow the two attendants to the outer door, and secure it after them for the night. The bald man turning round to bow, as he went out, observed that Madame still stood with her hand upon the velvet back of the great chair, and that her face was quite regardless of him, though she was looking straight before her.

As the sound of Carker's fastening the door resounded through the intermediate rooms, and seemed to come hushed and stilled into that last distant one, the sound of the Cathedral clock striking twelve mingled with it, in Edith's ears She heard him pause, as if he heard it too and listened; and then came back towards her, laying a long train of footsteps through the silence, and shutting all the doors behind him as he came along. Her hand, for a moment, left the velvet chair to bring a knife within her reach upon the table; then she stood as she had stood before.

'How strange to come here by yourself, my love!' he said as he entered.

'What?' she returned.

Her tone was so harsh; the quick turn of her head so fierce; her attitude so repellent; and her frown so black; that he stood, with the lamp in his hand, looking at her, as if she had struck him motionless.

'I say,' he at length repeated, putting down the lamp, and smiling his most courtly smile, 'how strange to come here alone! It was unnecessarty caution surely, and might have defeated itself. You were to have engaged an attendant at Havre or Rouen, and have had abundance of time for the purpose, though you had been the most capricious and difficult (as you are the most beautiful, my love) of women.'

Her eyes gleamed strangely on him, but she stood with her hand resting on the chair, and said not a word.

'I have never,' resumed Carker, 'seen you look so handsome, as you do to-night. Even the picture I have carried in my mind during this cruel probation, and which I have contemplated night and day, is exceeded by the reality.'

Not a word. Not a look Her eyes completely hidden by their drooping lashes, but her head held up.

'Hard, unrelenting terms they were!' said Carker, with a smile, 'but they are all fulfilled and passed, and make the present more delicious and more safe. Sicily shall be the Place of our retreat. In the idlest and easiest part of the world, my soul, we'll both seek compensation for old slavery.'

He was coming gaily towards her, when, in an instant, she caught the knife up from the table, and started one pace back.

'Stand still!' she said, 'or I shall murder you!'

The sudden change in her, the towering fury and intense abhorrence sparkling in her eyes and lighting up her brow, made him stop as if a fire had stopped him.

'Stand still!' she said, 'come no nearer me, upon your life!'

They both stood looking at each other. Rage and astonishment were in his face, but he controlled them, and said lightly,

'Come, come! Tush, we are alone, and out of everybody's sight and hearing. Do you think to frighten me with these tricks of virtue?'

'Do you think to frighten me,' she answered fiercely, 'from any purpose that I have, and any course I am resolved upon, by reminding me of the solitude of this place, and there being no help near? Me, who am here alone, designedly? If I feared you, should I not have avoided you? If I feared you, should I be here, in the dead of night, telling you to your face what I am going to tell?'

'And what is that,' he said, 'you handsome shrew? Handsomer so, than any other woman in her best humour?'

'I tell you nothing,' she returned, until you go back to that chair—except this, once again—Don't come near me! Not a step nearer. I tell you, if you do, as Heaven sees us, I shall murder you!'

'Do you mistake me for your husband?' he retorted, with a grin.

Disdaining to reply, she stretched her arm out, pointing to the chair. He bit his lip, frowned, laughed, and sat down in it, with a baffled, irresolute, impatient air, he was unable to conceal; and biting his nail nervously, and looking at her sideways, with bitter discomfiture, even while he feigned to be amused by her caprice.

She put the knife down upon the table, and touching her bosom wIth her hand, said:

'I have something lying here that is no love trinket, and sooner than endure your touch once more, I would use it on you—and you know it, while I speak—with less reluctance than I would on any other creeping thing that lives.'

He affected to laugh jestingly, and entreated her to act her play out quickly, for the supper was growing cold. But the secret look with which he regarded her, was more sullen and lowering, and he struck his foot once upon the floor with a muttered oath.

'How many times,' said Edith, bending her darkest glance upon him' 'has your bold knavery assailed me with outrage and insult? How many times in your smooth manner, and mocking words and looks, have I been twitted with my courtship and my marriage? How many times have you laid bare my wound of love for that sweet, injured girl and lacerated it? How often have you fanned the fire on which, for two years, I have writhed; and tempted me to take a desperate revenge, when it has most tortured me?'

'I have no doubt, Ma'am,' he replied, 'that you have kept a good account, and that it's pretty accurate. Come, Edith. To your husband, poor wretch, this was well enough—'

'Why, if,' she said, surveying him with a haughty contempt and disgust, that he shrunk under, let him brave it as he would, 'if all my other reasons for despising him could have been blown away like feathers, his having you for his counsellor and favourite, would have almost been enough to hold their place.'

'Is that a reason why you have run away with me?' he asked her, tauntingly.

'Yes, and why we are face to face for the last time. Wretch! We meet tonight, and part tonight. For not one moment after I have ceased to speak, will I stay here!'

He turned upon her with his ugliest look, and gripped the table with his hand; but neither rose, nor otherwise answered or threatened her.

'I am a woman,' she said, confronting him steadfastly, 'who from her childhood has been shamed and steeled. I have been offered and rejected, put up and appraised, until my very soul has sickened. I have not had an accomplishment or grace that might have been a resource to me, but it has been paraded and vended to enhance my value, as if the common crier had called it through the streets. My poor, proud friends, have looked on and approved; and every tie between us has been deadened in my breast. There is not one of them for whom I care, as I could care for a pet dog. I stand alone in the world, remembering well what a hollow world it has been to me, and what a hollow part of it I have been myself. You know this, and you know that my fame with it is worthless to me.'

'Yes; I imagined that,' he said.

'And calculated on it,' she rejoined, 'and so pursued me. Grown too indifferent for any opposition but indifference, to the daily working of the hands that had moulded me to this; and knowing that my marriage would at least prevent their hawking of me up and down; I suffered myself to be sold, as infamously as any woman with a halter round her neck is sold in any market-place. You know that.'

'Yes,' he said, showing all his teeth 'I know that.'

'And calculated on it,' she rejoined once more, 'and so pursued me. From my marriage day, I found myself exposed to such new shame—to such solicitation and pursuit (expressed as clearly as if it had been written in the coarsest words, and thrust into my hand at every turn) from one mean villain, that I felt as if I had never known humiliation till that time. This shame my husband fixed upon me; hemmed me round with, himself; steeped me in, with his own hands, and of his own act, repeated hundreds of times. And thus—forced by the two from every point of rest I had—forced by the two to yield up the last retreat of love and gentleness within me, or to be a new misfortune on its innocent object—driven from each to each, and beset by one when I escaped the other—my anger rose almost to distraction against both I do not know against which it rose higher—the master or the man!'

He watched her closely, as she stood before him in the very triumph of her indignant beauty. She was resolute, he saw; undauntable; with no more fear of him than of a worm.

'What should I say of honour or of chastity to you!' she went on. 'What meaning would it have to you; what meaning would it have from me! But if I tell you that the lightest touch of your hand makes my blood cold with antipathy; that from the hour when I first saw and hated you, to now, when my instinctive repugnance is enhanced by every minute's knowledge of you I have since had, you have been a loathsome creature to me which has not its like on earth; how then?'

He answered with a faint laugh, 'Ay! How then, my queen?'

'On that night, when, emboldened by the scene you had assisted at, you dared come to my room and speak to me,' she said, 'what passed?'

He shrugged his shoulders, and laughed

'What passed?' she said.

'Your memory is so distinct,' he said, 'that I have no doubt you can recall it.'

'I can,' she said. 'Hear it! Proposing then, this flight—not this flight, but the flight you thought it—you told me that in the having given you that meeting, and leaving you to be discovered there, if you so thought fit; and in the having suffered you to be alone with me many times before,— and having made the opportunities, you said,—and in the having openly avowed to you that I had no feeling for my husband but aversion, and no care for myself—I was lost; I had given you the power to traduce my name; and I lived, in virtuous reputation, at the pleasure of your breath.'

'All stratagems in love—-' he interrupted, smiling. 'The old adage—'

'On that night,' said Edith, 'and then, the struggle that I long had had with something that was not respect for my good fame—that was I know not what—perhaps the clinging to that last retreat—was ended. On that night, and then, I turned from everything but passion and resentment. I struck a blow that laid your lofty master in the dust, and set you there, before me, looking at me now, and knowing what I mean.'

He sprung up from his chair with a great oath. She put her hand into her bosom, and not a finger trembled, not a hair upon her head was stirred. He stood still: she too: the table and chair between them.

'When I forget that this man put his lips to mine that night, and held me in his arms as he has done again to-night,' said Edith, pointing at him; 'when I forget the taint of his kiss upon my cheek—the cheek that Florence would have laid her guiltless face against—when I forget my meeting with her, while that taint was hot upon me, and in what a flood the knowledge rushed upon me when I saw her, that in releasing her from the persecution I had caused by my love, I brought a shame and degradation on her name through mine, and in all time to come should be the solitary figure representing in her mind her first avoidance of a guilty creature—then, Husband, from whom I stand divorced henceforth, I will forget these last two years, and undo what I have done, and undeceive you!'

Her flashing eyes, uplifted for a moment, lighted again on Carker, and she held some letters out in her left hand.

'See these!' she said, contemptuously. 'You have addressed these to me in the false name you go by; one here, some elsewhere on my road. The seals are unbroken. Take them back!'

She crunched them in her hand, and tossed them to his feet. And as she looked upon him now, a smile was on her face.

'We meet and part to-night,' she said. 'You have fallen on Sicilian days and sensual rest, too soon. You might have cajoled, and fawned, and played your traitor's part, a little longer, and grown richer. You purchase your voluptuous retirement dear!'

'Edith!' he retorted, menacing her with his hand. 'Sit down! Have done with this! What devil possesses you?'

'Their name is Legion,' she replied, uprearing her proud form as if she would have crushed him; 'you and your master have raised them in a fruitful house, and they shall tear you both. False to him, false to his innocent child, false every way and everywhere, go forth and boast of me, and gnash your teeth, for once, to know that you are lying!'

He stood before her, muttering and menacing, and scowling round as if for something that would help him to conquer her; but with the same indomitable spirit she opposed him, without faltering.

'In every vaunt you make,' she said, 'I have my triumph I single out in you the meanest man I know, the parasite and tool of the proud tyrant, that his wound may go the deeper, and may rankle more. Boast, and revenge me on him! You know how you came here to-night; you know how you stand cowering there; you see yourself in colours quite as despicable, if not as odious, as those in which I see you. Boast then, and revenge me on yourself.'

The foam was on his lips; the wet stood on his forehead. If she would have faltered once for only one half-moment, he would have pinioned her; but she was as firm as rock, and her searching eyes never left him.

'We don't part so,' he said. 'Do you think I am drivelling, to let you go in your mad temper?'

'Do you think,' she answered, 'that I am to be stayed?'

'I'll try, my dear,' he said with a ferocious gesture of his head.

'God's mercy on you, if you try by coming near me!' she replied.

'And what,' he said, 'if there are none of these same boasts and vaunts on my part? What if I were to turn too? Come!' and his teeth fairly shone again. 'We must make a treaty of this, or I may take some unexpected course. Sit down, sit down!'

'Too late!' she cried, with eyes that seemed to sparkle fire. 'I have thrown my fame and good name to the winds! I have resolved to bear the shame that will attach to me—resolved to know that it attaches falsely—that you know it too—and that he does not, never can, and never shall. I'll die, and make no sign. For this, I am here alone with you, at the dead of night. For this, I have met you here, in a false name, as your wife. For this, I have been seen here by those men, and left here. Nothing can save you now.

He would have sold his soul to root her, in her beauty, to the floor, and make her arms drop at her sides, and have her at his mercy. But he could not look at her, and not be afraid of her. He saw a strength within her that was resistless. He saw that she was desperate, and that her unquenchable hatred of him would stop at nothing. His eyes followed the hand that was put with such rugged uncongenial purpose into her white bosom, and he thought that if it struck at hIm, and failed, it would strike there, just as soon.

He did not venture, therefore, to advance towards her; but the door by which he had entered was behind him, and he stepped back to lock it.

'Lastly, take my warning! Look to yourself!' she said, and smiled again. 'You have been betrayed, as all betrayers are. It has been made known that you are in this place, or were to be, or have been. If I live, I saw my husband in a carriage in the street to-night!'

'Strumpet, it's false!' cried Carker.

At the moment, the bell rang loudly in the hall. He turned white, as she held her hand up like an enchantress, at whose invocation the sound had come.

'Hark! do you hear it?'

He set his back against the door; for he saw a change in her, and fancied she was coming on to pass him. But, in a moment, she was gone through the opposite doors communicating with the bed-chamber, and they shut upon her.

Once turned, once changed in her inflexible unyielding look, he felt that he could cope with her. He thought a sudden terror, occasioned by this night-alarm, had subdued her; not the less readily, for her overwrought condition. Throwing open the doors, he followed, almost instantly.

But the room was dark; and as she made no answer to his call, he was fain to go back for the lamp. He held it up, and looked round, everywhere, expecting to see her crouching in some corner; but the room was empty. So, into the drawing-room and dining-room he went, in succession, with the uncertain steps of a man in a strange place; looking fearfully about, and prying behind screens and couches; but she was not there. No, nor in the hall, which was so bare that he could see that, at a glance.

All this time, the ringing at the bell was constantly renewed, and those without were beating at the door. He put his lamp down at a distance, and going near it, listened. There were several voices talking together: at least two of them in English; and though the door was thick, and there was great confusion, he knew one of these too well to doubt whose voice it was.

He took up his lamp again, and came back quickly through all the rooms, stopping as he quitted each, and looking round for her, with the light raised above his head. He was standing thus in the bed-chamber, when the door, leading to the little passage in the wall, caught his eye. He went to it, and found it fastened on the other side; but she had dropped a veil in going through, and shut it in the door.

All this time the people on the stairs were ringing at the bell, and knocking with their hands and feet.

He was not a coward: but these sounds; what had gone before; the strangeness of the place, which had confused him, even in his return from the hall; the frustration of his schemes (for, strange to say, he would have been much bolder, if they had succeeded); the unseasonable time; the recollection of having no one near to whom he could appeal for any friendly office; above all, the sudden sense, which made even his heart beat like lead, that the man whose confidence he had outraged, and whom he had so treacherously deceived, was there to recognise and challenge him with his mask plucked off his face; struck a panic through him. He tried the door in which the veil was shut, but couldn't force it. He opened one of the windows, and looked down through the lattice of the blind, into the court-yard; but it was a high leap, and the stones were pitiless.

The ringing and knocking still continuing—his panic too—he went back to the door in the bed-chamber, and with some new efforts, each more stubborn than the last, wrenched it open. Seeing the little staircase not far off, and feeling the night-air coming up, he stole back for his hat and coat, made the door as secure after hIm as he could, crept down lamp in hand, extinguished it on seeing the street, and having put it in a corner, went out where the stars were shining.

CHAPTER 55. Rob the Grinder loses his Place

The Porter at the iron gate which shut the court-yard from the street, had left the little wicket of his house open, and was gone away; no doubt to mingle in the distant noise at the door of the great staircase. Lifting the latch softly, Carker crept out, and shutting the jangling gate after him with as little noise as possible, hurried off.

In the fever of his mortification and unavailing rage, the panic that had seized upon him mastered him completely. It rose to such a height that he would have blindly encountered almost any risk, rather than meet the man of whom, two hours ago, he had been utterly regardless. His fierce arrival, which he had never expected; the sound of his voice; their having been so near a meeting, face to face; he would have braved out this, after the first momentary shock of alarm, and would have put as bold a front upon his guilt as any villain. But the springing of his mine upon himself, seemed to have rent and shivered all his hardihood and self-reliance. Spurned like any reptile; entrapped and mocked; turned upon, and trodden down by the proud woman whose mind he had slowly poisoned, as he thought, until she had sunk into the mere creature of his pleasure; undeceived in his deceit, and with his fox's hide stripped off, he sneaked away, abashed, degraded, and afraid.

Some other terror came upon hIm quite removed from this of being pursued, suddenly, like an electric shock, as he was creeping through the streets Some visionary terror, unintelligible and inexplicable, asssociated with a trembling of the ground,—a rush and sweep of something through the air, like Death upon the wing. He shrunk, as if to let the thing go by. It was not gone, it never had been there, yet what a startling horror it had left behind.

He raised his wicked face so full of trouble, to the night sky, where the stars, so full of peace, were shining on him as they had been when he first stole out into the air; and stopped to think what he should do. The dread of being hunted in a strange remote place, where the laws might not protect him—the novelty of the feeling that it was strange and remote, originating in his being left alone so suddenly amid the ruins of his plans—his greater dread of seeking refuge now, in Italy or in Sicily, where men might be hired to assissinate him, he thought, at any dark street corner-the waywardness of guilt and fear—perhaps some sympathy of action with the turning back of all his schemes—impelled him to turn back too, and go to England.

'I am safer there, in any case. If I should not decide,' he thought, 'to give this fool a meeting, I am less likely to be traced there, than abroad here, now. And if I should (this cursed fit being over), at least I shall not be alone, with out a soul to speak to, or advise with, or stand by me. I shall not be run in upon and worried like a rat.'

He muttered Edith's name, and clenched his hand. As he crept along, in the shadow of the massive buildings, he set his teeth, and muttered dreadful imprecations on her head, and looked from side to side, as if in search of her. Thus, he stole on to the gate of an inn-yard. The people were a-bed; but his ringing at the bell soon produced a man with a lantern, in company with whom he was presently in a dim coach-house, bargaining for the hire of an old phaeton, to Paris.

The bargain was a short one; and the horses were soon sent for. Leaving word that the carriage was to follow him when they came, he stole away again, beyond the town, past the old ramparts, out on the open road, which seemed to glide away along the dark plain, like a stream.

Whither did it flow? What was the end of it? As he paused, with some such suggestion within him, looking over the gloomy flat where the slender trees marked out the way, again that flight of Death came rushing up, again went on, impetuous and resistless, again was nothing but a horror in his mind, dark as the scene and undefined as its remotest verge.

There was no wind; there was no passing shadow on the deep shade of the night; there was no noise. The city lay behind hIm, lighted here and there, and starry worlds were hidden by the masonry of spire and roof that hardly made out any shapes against the sky. Dark and lonely distance lay around him everywhere, and the clocks were faintly striking two.

He went forward for what appeared a long time, and a long way; often stopping to listen. At last the ringing of horses' bells greeted his anxious ears. Now softer, and now louder, now inaudible, now ringing very slowly over bad ground, now brisk and merry, it came on; until with a loud shouting and lashing, a shadowy postillion muffled to the eyes, checked his four struggling horses at his side.

'Who goes there! Monsieur?'

'Yes.'

'Monsieur has walked a long way in the dark midnight.'

'No matter. Everyone to his task. Were there any other horses ordered at the Post-house?'

'A thousand devils!—and pardons! other horses? at this hour? No.'

'Listen, my friend. I am much hurried. Let us see how fast we can travel! The faster, the more money there will be to drink. Off we go then! Quick!'

'Halloa! whoop! Halloa! Hi!' Away, at a gallop, over the black landscape, scattering the dust and dirt like spray!

The clatter and commotion echoed to the hurry and discordance of the fugitive's ideas. Nothing clear without, and nothing clear within. Objects flitting past, merging into one another, dimly descried, confusedly lost sight of, gone! Beyond the changing scraps of fence and cottage immediately upon the road, a lowering waste. Beyond the shifting images that rose up in his mind and vanished as they showed themselves, a black expanse of dread and rage and baffled villainy. Occasionally, a sigh of mountain air came from the distant Jura, fading along the plain. Sometimes that rush which was so furious and horrible, again came sweeping through his fancy, passed away, and left a chill upon his blood.

The lamps, gleaming on the medley of horses' heads, jumbled with the shadowy driver, and the fluttering of his cloak, made a thousand indistinct shapes, answering to his thoughts. Shadows of familiar people, stooping at their desks and books, in their remembered attitudes; strange apparitions of the man whom he was flying from, or of Edith; repetitions in the ringing bells and rolling wheels, of words that had been spoken; confusions of time and place, making last night a month ago, a month ago last night—home now distant beyond hope, now instantly accessible; commotion, discord, hurry, darkness, and confusion in his mind, and all around him.—Hallo! Hi! away at a gallop over the black landscape; dust and dirt flying like spray, the smoking horses snorting and plunging as if each of them were ridden by a demon, away in a frantic triumph on the dark road—whither?

Again the nameless shock comes speeding up, and as it passes, the bells ring in his ears 'whither?' The wheels roar in his ears 'whither?' All the noise and rattle shapes itself into that cry. The lights and shadows dance upon the horses' heads like imps. No stopping now: no slackening! On, on Away with him upon the dark road wildly!

He could not think to any purpose. He could not separate one subject of reflection from another, sufficiently to dwell upon it, by itself, for a minute at a time. The crash of his project for the gaining of a voluptuous compensation for past restraint; the overthrow of his treachery to one who had been true and generous to him, but whose least proud word and look he had treasured up, at interest, for years—for false and subtle men will always secretly despise and dislike the object upon which they fawn and always resent the payment and receipt of homage that they know to be worthless; these were the themes uppermost in his mind. A lurking rage against the woman who had so entrapped him and avenged herself was always there; crude and misshapen schemes of retaliation upon her, floated in his brain; but nothing was distinct. A hurry and contradiction pervaded all his thoughts. Even while he was so busy with this fevered, ineffectual thinking, his one constant idea was, that he would postpone reflection until some indefinite time.

Then, the old days before the second marriage rose up in his remembrance. He thought how jealous he had been of the boy, how jealous he had been of the girl, how artfully he had kept intruders at a distance, and drawn a circle round his dupe that none but himself should cross; and then he thought, had he done all this to be flying now, like a scared thief, from only the poor dupe?

He could have laid hands upon himself for his cowardice, but it was the very shadow of his defeat, and could not be separated from it. To have his confidence in his own knavery so shattered at a blow—to be within his own knowledge such a miserable tool—was like being paralysed. With an impotent ferocity he raged at Edith, and hated Mr Dombey and hated himself, but still he fled, and could do nothing else.

Again and again he listened for the sound of wheels behind. Again and again his fancy heard it, coming on louder and louder. At last he was so persuaded of this, that he cried out, 'Stop' preferring even the loss of ground to such uncertainty.

The word soon brought carriage, horses, driver, all in a heap together, across the road.

'The devil!' cried the driver, looking over his shoulder, 'what's the matter?'

'Hark! What's that?'

'What?'

'That noise?'

'Ah Heaven, be quiet, cursed brigand!' to a horse who shook his bells 'What noise?'

'Behind. Is it not another carriage at a gallop? There! what's that?' Miscreant with a Pig's head, stand still!' to another horse, who bit another, who frightened the other two, who plunged and backed. 'There is nothing coming.'

'Nothing.'

'No, nothing but the day yonder.'

'You are right, I think. I hear nothing now, indeed. Go on!'

The entangled equipage, half hidden in the reeking cloud from the horses, goes on slowly at first, for the driver, checked unnecessarily in his progress, sulkily takes out a pocket-knife, and puts a new lash to his whip. Then 'Hallo, whoop! Hallo, hi!' Away once more, savagely.

And now the stars faded, and the day glimmered, and standing in the carriage, looking back, he could discern the track by which he had come, and see that there was no traveller within view, on all the heavy expanse. And soon it was broad day, and the sun began to shine on cornfields and vineyards; and solitary labourers, risen from little temporary huts by heaps of stones upon the road, were, here and there, at work repairing the highway, or eating bread. By and by, there were peasants going to their daily labour, or to market, or lounging at the doors of poor cottages, gazing idly at him as he passed. And then there was a postyard, ankle-deep in mud, with steaming dunghills and vast outhouses half ruined; and looking on this dainty prospect, an immense, old, shadeless, glaring, stone chateau, with half its windows blinded, and green damp crawling lazily over it, from the balustraded terrace to the taper tips of the extinguishers upon the turrets.

Gathered up moodily in a corner of the carriage, and only intent on going fast—except when he stood up, for a mile together, and looked back; which he would do whenever there was a piece of open country—he went on, still postponing thought indefinitely, and still always tormented with thinking to no purpose.

Shame, disappointment, and discomfiture gnawed at his heart; a constant apprehension of being overtaken, or met—for he was groundlessly afraid even of travellers, who came towards him by the way he was going—

oppressed him heavily. The same intolerable awe and dread that had come upon him in the night, returned unweakened in the day. The monotonous ringing of the bells and tramping of the horses; the monotony of his anxiety, and useless rage; the monotonous wheel of fear, regret, and passion, he kept turning round and round; made the journey like a vision, in which nothing was quite real but his own torment.

It was a vision of long roads, that stretched away to an horizon, always receding and never gained; of ill-paved towns, up hill and down, where faces came to dark doors and ill-glazed windows, and where rows of mudbespattered cows and oxen were tied up for sale in the long narrow streets, butting and lowing, and receiving blows on their blunt heads from bludgeons that might have beaten them in; of bridges, crosses, churches, postyards, new horses being put in against their wills, and the horses of the last stage reeking, panting, and laying their drooping heads together dolefully at stable doors; of little cemeteries with black crosses settled sideways in the graves, and withered wreaths upon them dropping away; again of long, long roads, dragging themselves out, up hill and down, to the treacherous horizon.

Of morning, noon, and sunset; night, and the rising of an early moon. Of long roads temporarily left behind, and a rough pavement reached; of battering and clattering over it, and looking up, among house-roofs, at a great church-tower; of getting out and eating hastily, and drinking draughts of wine that had no cheering influence; of coming forth afoot, among a host of beggars—blind men with quivering eyelids, led by old women holding candles to their faces; idiot girls; the lame, the epileptic, and the palsied—of passing through the clamour, and looking from his seat at the upturned countenances and outstretched hands, with a hurried dread of recognising some pursuer pressing forward—of galloping away again, upon the long, long road, gathered up, dull and stunned, in his corner, or rising to see where the moon shone faintly on a patch of the same endless road miles away, or looking back to see who followed.

Of never sleeping, but sometimes dozing with unclosed eyes, and springing up with a start, and a reply aloud to an imaginary voice. Of cursing himself for being there, for having fled, for having let her go, for not having confronted and defied him. Of having a deadly quarrel with the whole world, but chiefly with himself. Of blighting everything with his black mood as he was carried on and away.

It was a fevered vision of things past and present all confounded together; of his life and journey blended into one. Of being madly hurried somewhere, whither he must go. Of old scenes starting up among the novelties through which he travelled. Of musing and brooding over what was past and distant, and seeming to take no notice of the actual objects he encountered, but with a wearisome exhausting consciousness of being bewildered by them, and having their images all crowded in his hot brain after they were gone.

A vision of change upon change, and still the same monotony of bells and wheels, and horses' feet, and no rest. Of town and country, postyards, horses, drivers, hill and valley, light and darkness, road and pavement, height and hollow, wet weather and dry, and still the same monotony of bells and wheels, and horses' feet, and no rest. A vision of tending on at last, towards the distant capital, by busier roads, and sweeping round, by old cathedrals, and dashing through small towns and villages, less thinly scattered on the road than formerly, and sitting shrouded in his corner, with his cloak up to his face, as people passing by looked at him.

Of rolling on and on, always postponing thought, and always racked with thinking; of being unable to reckon up the hours he had been upon the road, or to comprehend the points of time and place in his journey. Of being parched and giddy, and half mad. Of pressing on, in spite of all, as if he could not stop, and coming into Paris, where the turbid river held its swift course undisturbed, between two brawling streams of life and motion.

A troubled vision, then, of bridges, quays, interminable streets; of wine-shops, water-carriers, great crowds of people, soldiers, coaches, military drums, arcades. Of the monotony of bells and wheels and horses' feet being at length lost in the universal din and uproar. Of the gradual subsidence of that noise as he passed out in another carriage by a different barrier from that by which he had entered. Of the restoration, as he travelled on towards the seacoast, of the monotony of bells and wheels, and horses' feet, and no rest.

Of sunset once again, and nightfall. Of long roads again, and dead of night, and feeble lights in windows by the roadside; and still the old monotony of bells and wheels, and horses' feet, and no rest. Of dawn, and daybreak, and the rising of the sun. Of tolling slowly up a hill, and feeling on its top the fresh sea-breeze; and seeing the morning light upon the edges of the distant waves. Of coming down into a harbour when the tide was at its full, and seeing fishing-boats float on, and glad women and children waiting for them. Of nets and seamen's clothes spread out to dry upon the shore; of busy sailors, and their voices high among ships' masts and rigging; of the buoyancy and brightness of the water, and the universal sparkling.

Of receding from the coast, and looking back upon it from the deck when it was a haze upon the water, with here and there a little opening of bright land where the Sun struck. Of the swell, and flash, and murmur of the calm sea. Of another grey line on the ocean, on the vessel's track, fast growing clearer and higher. Of cliffs and buildings, and a windmill, and a church, becoming more and more visible upon it. Of steaming on at last into smooth water, and mooring to a pier whence groups of people looked down, greeting friends on board. Of disembarking, passing among them quickly, shunning every one; and of being at last again in England.

He had thought, in his dream, of going down into a remote country-place he knew, and lying quiet there, while he secretly informed himself of what transpired, and determined how to act, Still in the same stunned condition, he remembered a certain station on the railway, where he would have to branch off to his place of destination, and where there was a quiet Inn. Here, he indistinctly resolved to tarry and rest.

With this purpose he slunk into a railway carriage as quickly as he could, and lying there wrapped in his cloak as if he were asleep, was soon borne far away from the sea, and deep into the inland green. Arrived at his destination he looked out, and surveyed it carefully. He was not mistaken in his impression of the place. It was a retired spot, on the borders of a little wood. Only one house, newly-built or altered for the purpose, stood there, surrounded by its neat garden; the small town that was nearest, was some miles away. Here he alighted then; and going straight into the tavern, unobserved by anyone, secured two rooms upstairs communicating with each other, and sufficiently retired.

His object was to rest, and recover the command of himself, and the balance of his mind. Imbecile discomfiture and rage—so that, as he walked about his room, he ground his teeth—had complete possession of him. His thoughts, not to be stopped or directed, still wandered where they would, and dragged him after them. He was stupefied, and he was wearied to death.

But, as if there were a curse upon him that he should never rest again, his drowsy senses would not lose their consciousness. He had no more influence with them, in this regard, than if they had been another man's. It was not that they forced him to take note of present sounds and objects, but that they would not be diverted from the whole hurried vision of his journey. It was constantly before him all at once. She stood there, with her dark disdainful eyes again upon him; and he was riding on nevertheless, through town and country, light and darkness, wet weather and dry, over road and pavement, hill and valley, height and hollow, jaded and scared by the monotony of bells and wheels, and horses' feet, and no rest.

'What day is this?' he asked of the waiter, who was making preparations for his dinner.

'Day, Sir?'

'Is it Wednesday?'

'Wednesday, Sir? No, Sir. Thursday, Sir.'

'I forgot. How goes the time? My watch is unwound.'

'Wants a few minutes of five o'clock, Sir. Been travelling a long time, Sir, perhaps?'

'Yes'

'By rail, Sir?'

'Yes'

'Very confusing, Sir. Not much in the habit of travelling by rail myself, Sir, but gentlemen frequently say so.'

'Do many gentlemen come here?

'Pretty well, Sir, in general. Nobody here at present. Rather slack just now, Sir. Everything is slack, Sir.'

He made no answer; but had risen into a sitting posture on the sofa where he had been lying, and leaned forward with an arm on each knee, staring at the ground. He could not master his own attention for a minute together. It rushed away where it would, but it never, for an instant, lost itself in sleep.

He drank a quantity of wine after dinner, in vain. No such artificial means would bring sleep to his eyes. His thoughts, more incoherent, dragged him more unmercifully after them—as if a wretch, condemned to such expiation, were drawn at the heels of wild horses. No oblivion, and no rest.

How long he sat, drinking and brooding, and being dragged in imagination hither and thither, no one could have told less correctly than he. But he knew that he had been sitting a long time by candle-light, when he started up and listened, in a sudden terror.

For now, indeed, it was no fancy. The ground shook, the house rattled, the fierce impetuous rush was in the air! He felt it come up, and go darting by; and even when he had hurried to the window, and saw what it was, he stood, shrinking from it, as if it were not safe to look.

A curse upon the fiery devil, thundering along so smoothly, tracked through the distant valley by a glare of light and lurid smoke, and gone! He felt as if he had been plucked out of its path, and saved from being torn asunder. It made him shrink and shudder even now, when its faintest hum was hushed, and when the lines of iron road he could trace in the moonlight, running to a point, were as empty and as silent as a desert.

Unable to rest, and irresistibly attracted—or he thought so—to this road, he went out, and lounged on the brink of it, marking the way the train had gone, by the yet smoking cinders that were lying in its track. After a lounge of some half hour in the direction by which it had disappeared, he turned and walked the other way—still keeping to the brink of the road—past the inn garden, and a long way down; looking curiously at the bridges, signals, lamps, and wondering when another Devil would come by.

A trembling of the ground, and quick vibration in his ears; a distant shriek; a dull light advancing, quickly changed to two red eyes, and a fierce fire, dropping glowing coals; an irresistible bearing on of a great roaring and dilating mass; a high wind, and a rattle—another come and gone, and he holding to a gate, as if to save himself!

He waited for another, and for another. He walked back to his former point, and back again to that, and still, through the wearisome vision of his journey, looked for these approaching monsters. He loitered about the station, waiting until one should stay to call there; and when one did, and was detached for water, he stood parallel with it, watching its heavy wheels and brazen front, and thinking what a cruel power and might it had. Ugh! To see the great wheels slowly turning, and to think of being run down and crushed!

Disordered with wine and want of rest—that want which nothing, although he was so weary, would appease—these ideas and objects assumed a diseased importance in his thoughts. When he went back to his room, which was not until near midnight, they still haunted him, and he sat listening for the coming of another.

So in his bed, whither he repaired with no hope of sleep. He still lay listening; and when he felt the trembling and vibration, got up and went to the window, to watch (as he could from its position) the dull light changing to the two red eyes, and the fierce fire dropping glowing coals, and the rush of the giant as it fled past, and the track of glare and smoke along the valley. Then he would glance in the direction by which he intended to depart at sunrise, as there was no rest for him there; and would lie down again, to be troubled by the vision of his journey, and the old monotony of bells and wheels and horses' feet, until another came. This lasted all night. So far from resuming the mastery of himself, he seemed, if possible, to lose it more and more, as the night crept on. When the dawn appeared, he was still tormented with thinking, still postponing thought until he should be in a better state; the past, present, and future all floated confusedly before him, and he had lost all power of looking steadily at any one of them.

'At what time,' he asked the man who had waited on hIm over-night, now entering with a candle, 'do I leave here, did you say?'

'About a quarter after four, Sir. Express comes through at four, Sir.—It don't stop.

He passed his hand across his throbbing head, and looked at his watch. Nearly half-past three.

'Nobody going with you, Sir, probably,' observed the man. 'Two gentlemen here, Sir, but they're waiting for the train to London.'

'I thought you said there was nobody here,' said Carker, turning upon him with the ghost of his old smile, when he was angry or suspicious.

'Not then, sir. Two gentlemen came in the night by the short train that stops here, Sir. Warm water, Sir?'

'No; and take away the candle. There's day enough for me.'

Having thrown himself upon the bed, half-dressed he was at the window as the man left the room. The cold light of morning had succeeded to night and there was already, in the sky, the red suffusion of the coming sun. He bathed his head and face with water—there was no cooling influence in it for him—hurriedly put on his clothes, paid what he owed, and went out.

The air struck chill and comfortless as it breathed upon him. There was a heavy dew; and, hot as he was, it made him shiver. After a glance at the place where he had walked last night, and at the signal-lights burning in the morning, and bereft of their significance, he turned to where the sun was rising, and beheld it, in its glory, as it broke upon the scene.

So awful, so transcendent in its beauty, so divinely solemn. As he cast his faded eyes upon it, where it rose, tranquil and serene, unmoved by all the wrong and wickedness on which its beams had shone since the beginning of the world, who shall say that some weak sense of virtue upon Earth, and its in Heaven, did not manifest itself, even to him? If ever he remembered sister or brother with a touch of tenderness and remorse, who shall say it was not then?

He needed some such touch then. Death was on him. He was marked off—the living world, and going down into his grave.

He paid the money for his journey to the country-place he had thought of; and was walking to and fro, alone, looking along the lines of iron, across the valley in one direction, and towards a dark bridge near at hand in the other; when, turning in his walk, where it was bounded by one end of the wooden stage on which he paced up and down, he saw the man from whom he had fled, emerging from the door by which he himself had entered.

And their eyes met.

In the quick unsteadiness of the surprise, he staggered, and slipped on to the road below him. But recovering his feet immediately, he stepped back a pace or two upon that road, to interpose some wider space between them, and looked at his pursuer, breathing short and quick.

He heard a shout—another—saw the face change from its vindictive passion to a faint sickness and terror—felt the earth tremble—knew in a moment that the rush was come—uttered a shriek—looked round—saw the red eyes, bleared and dim, in the daylight, close upon him—was beaten down, caught up, and whirled away upon a jagged mill, that spun him round and round, and struck him limb from limb, and licked his stream of life up with its fiery heat, and cast his mutilated fragments in the air.

When the traveller, who had been recognised, recovered from a swoon, he saw them bringing from a distance something covered, that lay heavy and still, upon a board, between four men, and saw that others drove some dogs away that sniffed upon the road, and soaked his blood up, with a train of ashes.

CHAPTER 56. Several People delighted, and the Game Chicken disgusted

The Midshipman was all alive. Mr Toots and Susan had arrived at last. Susan had run upstairs like a young woman bereft of her senses, and Mr Toots and the Chicken had gone into the Parlour.

'Oh my own pretty darling sweet Miss Floy!' cried the Nipper, running into Florence's room, 'to think that it should come to this and I should find you here my own dear dove with nobody to wait upon you and no home to call your own but never never will I go away again Miss Floy for though I may not gather moss I'm not a rolling stone nor is my heart a stone or else it wouldn't bust as it is busting now oh dear oh dear!'

Pouring out these words, without the faintest indication of a stop, of any sort, Miss Nipper, on her knees beside her mistress, hugged her close.

'Oh love!' cried Susan, 'I know all that's past I know it all my tender pet and I'm a choking give me air!'

'Susan, dear good Susan!' said Florence. 'Oh bless her! I that was her little maid when she was a little child! and is she really, really truly going to be married?'exclaimed Susan, in a burst of pain and pleasure, pride and grief, and Heaven knows how many other conflicting feelings.

'Who told you so?' said Florence.

'Oh gracious me! that innocentest creetur Toots,' returned Susan hysterically. 'I knew he must be right my dear, because he took on so. He's the devotedest and innocentest infant! And is my darling,' pursued Susan, with another close embrace and burst of tears, 'really really going to be married!'

The mixture of compassion, pleasure, tenderness, protection, and regret with which the Nipper constantly recurred to this subject, and at every such once, raised her head to look in the young face and kiss it, and then laid her head again upon her mistress's shoulder, caressing her and sobbing, was as womanly and good a thing, in its way, as ever was seen in the world.

'There, there!' said the soothing voice of Florence presently. 'Now you're quite yourself, dear Susan!'

Miss Nipper, sitting down upon the floor, at her mistress's feet, laughing and sobbing, holding her pocket-handkerchief to her eyes with one hand, and patting Diogenes with the other as he licked her face, confessed to being more composed, and laughed and cried a little more in proof of it.

'I-I-I never did see such a creetur as that Toots,' said Susan, 'in all my born days never!'

'So kind,' suggested Florence.

'And so comic!' Susan sobbed. 'The way he's been going on inside with me with that disrespectable Chicken on the box!'

'About what, Susan?' inquired Florence, timidly.

'Oh about Lieutenant Walters, and Captain Gills, and you my dear Miss Floy, and the silent tomb,' said Susan.

'The silent tomb!' repeated Florence.

'He says,' here Susan burst into a violent hysterical laugh, 'that he'll go down into it now immediately and quite comfortable, but bless your heart my dear Miss Floy he won't, he's a great deal too happy in seeing other people happy for that, he may not be a Solomon,' pursued the Nipper, with her usual volubility, 'nor do I say he is but this I do say a less selfish human creature human nature never knew!' Miss Nipper being still hysterical, laughed immoderately after making this energetic declaration, and then informed Florence that he was waiting below to see her; which would be a rich repayment for the trouble he had had in his late expedition.

Florence entreated Susan to beg of Mr Toots as a favour that she might have the pleasure of thanking him for his kindness; and Susan, in a few moments, produced that young gentleman, still very much dishevelled in appearance, and stammering exceedingly.

'Miss Dombey,' said Mr Toots. 'To be again permitted to—to—gaze—at least, not to gaze, but—I don't exactly know what I was going to say, but it's of no consequence.

'I have to thank you so often,' returned Florence, giving him both her hands, with all her innocent gratitude beaming in her face, 'that I have no words left, and don't know how to do it.'

'Miss Dombey,' said Mr Toots, in an awful voice, 'if it was possible that you could, consistently with your angelic nature, Curse me, you would—if I may be allowed to say so—floor me infinitely less, than by these undeserved expressions of kindness Their effect upon me—is—but,' said Mr Toots, abruptly, 'this is a digression, and of no consequence at all.'

As there seemed to be no means of replying to this, but by thanking him again, Florence thanked him again.

'I could wish,' said Mr Toots, 'to take this opportunity, Miss Dombey, if I might, of entering into a word of explanation. I should have had the pleasure of—of returning with Susan at an earlier period; but, in the first place, we didn't know the name of the relation to whose house she had gone, and, in the second, as she had left that relation's and gone to another at a distance, I think that scarcely anything short of the sagacity of the Chicken, would have found her out in the time.'

Florence was sure of it.

'This, however,' said Mr Toots, 'is not the point. The company of Susan has been, I assure you, Miss Dombey, a consolation and satisfaction to me, in my state of mind, more easily conceived than described. The journey has been its own reward. That, however, still, is not the point. Miss Dombey, I have before observed that I know I am not what is considered a quick person. I am perfectly aware of that. I don't think anybody could be better acquainted with his own—if it was not too strong an expression, I should say with the thickness of his own head—than myself. But, Miss Dombey, I do, notwithstanding, perceive the state of—of things—with Lieutenant Walters. Whatever agony that state of things may have caused me (which is of no consequence at all), I am bound to say, that Lieutenant Walters is a person who appears to be worthy of the blessing that has fallen on his—on his brow. May he wear it long, and appreciate it, as a very different, and very unworthy individual, that it is of no consequence to name, would have done! That, however, still, is not the point. Miss Dombey, Captain Gills is a friend of mine; and during the interval that is now elapsing, I believe it would afford Captain Gills pleasure to see me occasionally coming backwards and forwards here. It would afford me pleasure so to come. But I cannot forget that I once committed myself, fatally, at the corner of the Square at Brighton; and if my presence will be, in the least degree, unpleasant to you, I only ask you to name it to me now, and assure you that I shall perfectly understand you. I shall not consider it at all unkind, and shall only be too delighted and happy to be honoured with your confidence.'

'Mr Toots,' returned Florence, 'if you, who are so old and true a friend of mine, were to stay away from this house now, you would make me very unhappy. It can never, never, give me any feeling but pleasure to see you.

'Miss Dombey,' said Mr Toots, taking out his pocket-handkerchief, 'if I shed a tear, it is a tear of joy. It is of no consequence, and I am very much obliged to you. I may be allowed to remark, after what you have so kindly said, that it is not my intention to neglect my person any longer.'

Florence received this intimation with the prettiest expression of perplexity possible.

'I mean,' said Mr Toots, 'that I shall consider it my duty as a fellow-creature generally, until I am claimed by the silent tomb, to make the best of myself, and to—to have my boots as brightly polished, as—as—circumstances will admit of. This is the last time, Miss Dombey, of my intruding any observation of a private and personal nature. I thank you very much indeed. If I am not, in a general way, as sensible as my friends could wish me to be, or as I could wish myself, I really am, upon my word and honour, particularly sensible of what is considerate and kind. I feel,' said Mr Toots, in an impassioned tone, 'as if I could express my feelings, at the present moment, in a most remarkable manner, if—if—I could only get a start.'

Appearing not to get it, after waiting a minute or two to see if it would come, Mr Toots took a hasty leave, and went below to seek the Captain, whom he found in the shop.

'Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, 'what is now to take place between us, takes place under the sacred seal of confidence. It is the sequel, Captain Gills, of what has taken place between myself and Miss Dombey, upstairs.'

'Alow and aloft, eh, my lad?' murmured the Captain.

'Exactly so, Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, whose fervour of acquiescence was greatly heightened by his entire ignorance of the Captain's meaning. 'Miss Dombey, I believe, Captain Gills, is to be shortly united to Lieutenant Walters?'

'Why, ay, my lad. We're all shipmets here,—Wal'r and sweet—heart will be jined together in the house of bondage, as soon as the askings is over,' whispered Captain Cuttle, in his ear.

'The askings, Captain Gills!' repeated Mr Toots.

'In the church, down yonder,' said the Captain, pointing his thumb over his shoulder.

'Oh! Yes!' returned Mr Toots.

'And then,' said the Captain, in his hoarse whisper, and tapping Mr Toots on the chest with the back of his hand, and falling from him with a look of infinite admiration, 'what follers? That there pretty creetur, as delicately brought up as a foreign bird, goes away upon the roaring main with Wal'r on a woyage to China!'

'Lord, Captain Gills!' said Mr Toots.

'Ay!' nodded the Captain. 'The ship as took him up, when he was wrecked in the hurricane that had drove her clean out of her course, was a China trader, and Wal'r made the woyage, and got into favour, aboard and ashore—being as smart and good a lad as ever stepped—and so, the supercargo dying at Canton, he got made (having acted as clerk afore), and now he's supercargo aboard another ship, same owners. And so, you see,' repeated the Captain, thoughtfully, 'the pretty creetur goes away upon the roaring main with Wal'r, on a woyage to China.'

Mr Toots and Captain Cuttle heaved a sigh in concert. 'What then?' said the Captain. 'She loves him true. He loves her true. Them as should have loved and tended of her, treated of her like the beasts as perish. When she, cast out of home, come here to me, and dropped upon them planks, her wownded heart was broke. I know it. I, Ed'ard Cuttle, see it. There's nowt but true, kind, steady love, as can ever piece it up again. If so be I didn't know that, and didn't know as Wal'r was her true love, brother, and she his, I'd have these here blue arms and legs chopped off, afore I'd let her go. But I know it, and what then! Why, then, I say, Heaven go with 'em both, and so it will! Amen!'

'Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, 'let me have the pleasure of shaking hands You've a way of saying things, that gives me an agreeable warmth, all up my back. I say Amen. You are aware, Captain Gills, that I, too, have adored Miss Dombey.'

'Cheer up!' said the Captain, laying his hand on Mr Toots's shoulder. 'Stand by, boy!'

'It is my intention, Captain Gills,' returned the spirited Mr Toots, 'to cheer up. Also to standby, as much as possible. When the silent tomb shall yawn, Captain Gills, I shall be ready for burial; not before. But not being certain, just at present, of my power over myself, what I wish to say to you, and what I shall take it as a particular favour if you will mention to Lieutenant Walters, is as follows.'

'Is as follers,' echoed the Captain. 'Steady!'

'Miss Dombey being so inexpressably kind,' continued Mr Toots with watery eyes, 'as to say that my presence is the reverse of disagreeable to her, and you and everybody here being no less forbearing and tolerant towards one who—who certainly,' said Mr Toots, with momentary dejection, 'would appear to have been born by mistake, I shall come backwards and forwards of an evening, during the short time we can all be together. But what I ask is this. If, at any moment, I find that I cannot endure the contemplation of Lieutenant Walters's bliss, and should rush out, I hope, Captain Gills, that you and he will both consider it as my misfortune and not my fault, or the want of inward conflict. That you'll feel convinced I bear no malice to any living creature-least of all to Lieutenant Walters himself—and that you'll casually remark that I have gone out for a walk, or probably to see what o'clock it is by the Royal Exchange. Captain Gills, if you could enter into this arrangement, and could answer for Lieutenant Walters, it would be a relief to my feelings that I should think cheap at the sacrifice of a considerable portion of my property.'

'My lad,' returned the Captain, 'say no more. There ain't a colour you can run up, as won't be made out, and answered to, by Wal'r and self.'

'Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots, 'my mind is greatly relieved. I wish to preserve the good opinion of all here. I—I—mean well, upon my honour, however badly I may show it. You know,' said Mr Toots, 'it's as exactly as Burgess and Co. wished to oblige a customer with a most extraordinary pair of trousers, and could not cut out what they had in their minds.'

With this apposite illustration, of which he seemed a little Proud, Mr Toots gave Captain Cuttle his blessing and departed.

The honest Captain, with his Heart's Delight in the house, and Susan tending her, was a beaming and a happy man. As the days flew by, he grew more beaming and more happy, every day. After some conferences with Susan (for whose wisdom the Captain had a profound respect, and whose valiant precipitation of herself on Mrs MacStinger he could never forget), he proposed to Florence that the daughter of the elderly lady who usually sat under the blue umbrella in Leadenhall Market, should, for prudential reasons and considerations of privacy, be superseded in the temporary discharge of the household duties, by someone who was not unknown to them, and in whom they could safely confide. Susan, being present, then named, in furtherance of a suggestion she had previously offered to the Captain, Mrs Richards. Florence brightened at the name. And Susan, setting off that very afternoon to the Toodle domicile, to sound Mrs Richards, returned in triumph the same evening, accompanied by the identical rosy-cheeked apple-faced Polly, whose demonstrations, when brought into Florence's presence, were hardly less affectionate than those of Susan Nipper herself.

This piece of generalship accomplished; from which the Captain derived uncommon satisfaction, as he did, indeed, from everything else that was done, whatever it happened to be; Florence had next to prepare Susan for their approaching separation. This was a much more difficult task, as Miss Nipper was of a resolute disposition, and had fully made up her mind that she had come back never to be parted from her old mistress any more.

'As to wages dear Miss Floy,' she said, 'you wouldn't hint and wrong me so as think of naming them, for I've put money by and wouldn't sell my love and duty at a time like this even if the Savings' Banks and me were total strangers or the Banks were broke to pieces, but you've never been without me darling from the time your poor dear Ma was took away, and though I'm nothing to be boasted of you're used to me and oh my own dear mistress through so many years don't think of going anywhere without me, for it mustn't and can't be!'

'Dear Susan, I am going on a long, long voyage.'

'Well Miss Floy, and what of that? the more you'll want me. Lengths of voyages ain't an object in my eyes, thank God!' said the impetuous Susan Nipper.

'But, Susan, I am going with Walter, and I would go with Walter anywhere—everywhere! Walter is poor, and I am very poor, and I must learn, now, both to help myself, and help him.'

'Dear Miss Floy!' cried Susan, bursting out afresh, and shaking her head violently, 'it's nothing new to you to help yourself and others too and be the patientest and truest of noble hearts, but let me talk to Mr Walter Gay and settle it with him, for suffer you to go away across the world alone I cannot, and I won't.'

'Alone, Susan?' returned Florence. 'Alone? and Walter taking me with him!' Ah, what a bright, amazed, enraptured smile was on her face!—He should have seen it. 'I am sure you will not speak to Walter if I ask you not,' she added tenderly; 'and pray don't, dear.'

Susan sobbed 'Why not, Miss Floy?'

'Because,' said Florence, 'I am going to be his wife, to give him up my whole heart, and to live with him and die with him. He might think, if you said to him what you have said to me, that I am afraid of what is before me, or that you have some cause to be afraid for me. Why, Susan, dear, I love him!'

Miss Nipper was so much affected by the quiet fervour of these words, and the simple, heartfelt, all-pervading earnestness expressed in them, and making the speaker's face more beautiful and pure than ever, that she could only cling to her again, crying. Was her little mistress really, really going to be married, and pitying, caressing, and protecting her, as she had done before. But the Nipper, though susceptible of womanly weaknesses, was almost as capable of putting constraint upon herself as of attacking the redoubtable MacStinger. From that time, she never returned to the subject, but was always cheerful, active, bustling, and hopeful. She did, indeed, inform Mr Toots privately, that she was only 'keeping up' for the time, and that when it was all over, and Miss Dombey was gone, she might be expected to become a spectacle distressful; and Mr Toots did also express that it was his case too, and that they would mingle their tears together; but she never otherwise indulged her private feelings in the presence of Florence or within the precincts of the Midshipman.

Limited and plain as Florence's wardrobe was—what a contrast to that prepared for the last marriage in which she had taken part!—there was a good deal to do in getting it ready, and Susan Nipper worked away at her side, all day, with the concentrated zeal of fifty sempstresses. The wonderful contributions Captain Cuttle would have made to this branch of the outfit, if he had been permitted—as pink parasols, tinted silk stockings, blue shoes, and other articles no less necessary on shipboard—would occupy some space in the recital. He was induced, however, by various fraudulent representations, to limit his contributions to a work-box and dressing case, of each of which he purchased the very largest specimen that could be got for money. For ten days or a fortnight afterwards, he generally sat, during the greater part of the day, gazing at these boxes; divided between extreme admiration of them, and dejected misgivings that they were not gorgeous enough, and frequently diving out into the street to purchase some wild article that he deemed necessary to their completeness. But his master-stroke was, the bearing of them both off, suddenly, one morning, and getting the two words FLORENCE GAY engraved upon a brass heart inlaid over the lid of each. After this, he smoked four pipes successively in the little parlour by himself, and was discovered chuckling, at the expiration of as many hours.

Walter was busy and away all day, but came there every morning early to see Florence, and always passed the evening with her. Florence never left her high rooms but to steal downstairs to wait for him when it was his time to come, or, sheltered by his proud, encircling arm, to bear him company to the door again, and sometimes peep into the street. In the twilight they were always together. Oh blessed time! Oh wandering heart at rest! Oh deep, exhaustless, mighty well of love, in which so much was sunk!

The cruel mark was on her bosom yet. It rose against her father with the breath she drew, it lay between her and her lover when he pressed her to his heart. But she forgot it. In the beating of that heart for her, and in the beating of her own for him, all harsher music was unheard, all stern unloving hearts forgotten. Fragile and delicate she was, but with a might of love within her that could, and did, create a world to fly to, and to rest in, out of his one image.

How often did the great house, and the old days, come before her in the twilight time, when she was sheltered by the arm, so proud, so fond, and, creeping closer to him, shrunk within it at the recollection! How often, from remembering the night when she went down to that room and met the never- to-be forgotten look, did she raise her eyes to those that watched her with such loving earnestness, and weep with happiness in such a refuge! The more she clung to it, the more the dear dead child was in her thoughts: but as if the last time she had seen her father, had been when he was sleeping and she kissed his face, she always left him so, and never, in her fancy, passed that hour.

'Walter, dear,' said Florence, one evening, when it was almost dark.'Do you know what I have been thinking to-day?'

'Thinking how the time is flying on, and how soon we shall be upon the sea, sweet Florence?'

'I don't mean that, Walter, though I think of that too. I have been thinking what a charge I am to you.

'A precious, sacred charge, dear heart! Why, I think that sometimes.'

'You are laughing, Walter. I know that's much more in your thoughts than mine. But I mean a cost.

'A cost, my own?'

'In money, dear. All these preparations that Susan and I are so busy with—I have been able to purchase very little for myself. You were poor before. But how much poorer I shall make you, Walter!'

'And how much richer, Florence!'

Florence laughed, and shook her head.

'Besides,' said Walter, 'long ago—before I went to sea—I had a little purse presented to me, dearest, which had money in it.'

'Ah!' returned Florence, laughing sorrowfully, 'very little! very little, Walter! But, you must not think,' and here she laid her light hand on his shoulder, and looked into his face, 'that I regret to be this burden on you. No, dear love, I am glad of it. I am happy in it. I wouldn't have it otherwise for all the world!'

'Nor I, indeed, dear Florence.'

'Ay! but, Walter, you can never feel it as I do. I am so proud of you! It makes my heart swell with such delight to know that those who speak of you must say you married a poor disowned girl, who had taken shelter here; who had no other home, no other friends; who had nothing—nothing! Oh, Walter, if I could have brought you millions, I never could have been so happy for your sake, as I am!'

'And you, dear Florence? are you nothing?' he returned.

'No, nothing, Walter. Nothing but your wife.' The light hand stole about his neck, and the voice came nearer—nearer. 'I am nothing any more, that is not you. I have no earthly hope any more, that is not you. I have nothing dear to me any more, that is not you.

Oh! well might Mr Toots leave the little company that evening, and twice go out to correct his watch by the Royal Exchange, and once to keep an appointment with a banker which he suddenly remembered, and once to take a little turn to Aldgate Pump and back!

But before he went upon these expeditions, or indeed before he came, and before lights were brought, Walter said:

'Florence, love, the lading of our ship is nearly finished, and probably on the very day of our marriage she will drop down the river. Shall we go away that morning, and stay in Kent until we go on board at Gravesend within a week?'

'If you please, Walter. I shall be happy anywhere. But—'

'Yes, my life?'

'You know,' said Florence, 'that we shall have no marriage party, and that nobody will distinguish us by our dress from other people. As we leave the same day, will you—will you take me somewhere that morning, Walter—early—before we go to church?'

Walter seemed to understand her, as so true a lover so truly loved should, and confirmed his ready promise with a kiss—with more than one perhaps, or two or threes or five or six; and in the grave, peaceful evening, Florence was very happy.

Then into the quiet room came Susan Nipper and the candles; shortly afterwards, the tea, the Captain, and the excursive Mr Toots, who, as above mentioned, was frequently on the move afterwards, and passed but a restless evening. This, however, was not his habit: for he generally got on very well, by dint of playing at cribbage with the Captain under the advice and guidance of Miss Nipper, and distracting his mind with the calculations incidental to the game; which he found to be a very effectual means of utterly confounding himself.

The Captain's visage on these occasions presented one of the finest examples of combination and succession of expression ever observed. His instinctive delicacy and his chivalrous feeling towards Florence, taught him that it was not a time for any boisterous jollity, or violent display of satisfaction; floating reminiscences of Lovely Peg, on the other hand, were constantly struggling for a vent, and urging the Captain to commit himself by some irreparable demonstration. Anon, his admiration of Florence and Walter—well-matched, truly, and full of grace and interest in their youth, and love, and good looks, as they sat apart—would take such complete possession of hIm, that he would lay down his cards, and beam upon them, dabbing his head all over with his pockethandkerchief; until warned, perhaps, by the sudden rushing forth of Mr Toots, that he had unconsciously been very instrumental, indeed, in making that gentleman miserable. This reflection would make the Captain profoundly melancholy, until the return of Mr Toots; when he would fall to his cards again, with many side winks and nods, and polite waves of his hook at Miss Nipper, importing that he wasn't going to do so any more. The state that ensued on this, was, perhaps, his best; for then, endeavouring to discharge all expression from his face, he would sit staring round the room, with all these expressions conveyed into it at once, and each wrestling with the other. Delighted admiration of Florence and Walter always overthrew the rest, and remained victorious and undisguised, unless Mr Toots made another rush into the air, and then the Captain would sit, like a remorseful culprit, until he came back again, occasionally calling upon himself, in a low reproachful voice, to 'Stand by!'

or growling some remonstrance to 'Ed'ard Cuttle, my lad,' on the want of caution observabl in his behaviour.

One of Mr Toots's hardest trials, however, was of his own seeking. On the approach of the Sunday which was to witness the last of those askings in church of which the Captain had spoken, Mr Toots thus stated his feelings to Susan Nipper.

'Susan,' said Mr Toots, 'I am drawn towards the building. The words which cut me off from Miss Dombey for ever, will strike upon my ears like a knell you know, but upon my word and honour, I feel that I must hear them. Therefore,' said Mr Toots, 'will you accompany me to-morrow, to the sacred edifice?'

Miss Nipper expressed her readiness to do so, if that would be any satisfaction to Mr Toots, but besought him to abandon his idea of going.

'Susan,' returned Mr Toots, with much solemnity, 'before my whiskers began to be observed by anybody but myself, I adored Miss Dombey. While yet a victim to the thraldom of Blimber, I adored Miss Dombey. When I could no longer be kept out of my property, in a legal point of view, and—and accordingly came into it—I adored Miss Dombey. The banns which consign her to Lieutenant Walters, and me to—to Gloom, you know,' said Mr Toots, after hesitating for a strong expression, 'may be dreadful, will be dreadful; but I feel that I should wish to hear them spoken. I feel that I should wish to know that the ground was certainly cut from under me, and that I hadn't a hope to cherish, or a—or a leg, in short, to—to go upon.'

Susan Nipper could only commiserate Mr Toots's unfortunate condition, and agree, under these circumstances, to accompany him; which she did next morning.

The church Walter had chosen for the purpose, was a mouldy old church in a yard, hemmed in by a labyrinth of back streets and courts, with a little burying-ground round it, and itself buried in a kind of vault, formed by the neighbouring houses, and paved with echoing stones It was a great dim, shabby pile, with high old oaken pews, among which about a score of people lost themselves every Sunday; while the clergyman's voice drowsily resounded through the emptiness, and the organ rumbled and rolled as if the church had got the colic, for want of a congregation to keep the wind and damp out. But so far was this city church from languishing for the company of other churches, that spires were clustered round it, as the masts of shipping cluster on the river. It would have been hard to count them from its steeple-top, they were so many. In almost every yard and blind-place near, there was a church. The confusion of bells when Susan and Mr Toots betook themselves towards it on the Sunday morning, was deafening. There were twenty churches close together, clamouring for people to come in.

The two stray sheep in question were penned by a beadle in a commodious pew, and, being early, sat for some time counting the congregation, listening to the disappointed bell high up in the tower, or looking at a shabby little old man in the porch behind the screen, who was ringing the same, like the Bull in Cock Robin,' with his foot in a stirrup. Mr Toots, after a lengthened survey of the large books on the reading-desk, whispered Miss Nipper that he wondered where the banns were kept, but that young lady merely shook her head and frowned; repelling for the time all approaches of a temporal nature.

Mr Toots, however, appearing unable to keep his thoughts from the banns, was evidently looking out for them during the whole preliminary portion of the service. As the time for reading them approached, the poor young gentleman manifested great anxiety and trepidation, which was not diminished by the unexpected apparition of the Captain in the front row of the gallery. When the clerk handed up a list to the clergyman, Mr Toots, being then seated, held on by the seat of the pew; but when the names of Walter Gay and Florence Dombey were read aloud as being in the third and last stage of that association, he was so entirley conquered by his feelings as to rush from the church without his hat, followed by the beadle and pew-opener, and two gentlemen of the medical profeesion, who happened to be present; of whom the first-named presently returned for that article, informing Miss Nipper in a whisper that she was not to make herself uneasy about the gentleman, as the gentleman said his indisposition was of no consequence.

Miss Nipper, feeling that the eyes of that integral portion of Europe which lost itself weekly among the high-backed pews, were upon her, would have been sufficient embarrassed by this incident, though it had terminated here; the more so, as the Captain in the front row of the gallery, was in a state of unmitigated consciousness which could hardly fail to express to the congregation that he had some mysterious connection with it. But the extreme restlessness of Mr Toots painfully increased and protracted the delicacy of her situation. That young gentleman, incapable, in his state of mind, of remaining alone in the churchyard, a prey to solitary meditation, and also desirous, no doubt, of testifying his respect for the offices he had in some measure interrupted, suddenly returned—not coming back to the pew, but stationing himself on a free seat in the aisle, between two elderly females who were in the habit of receiving their portion of a weekly dole of bread then set forth on a shelf in the porch. In this conjunction Mr Toots remained, greatly disturbing the congregation, who felt it impossible to avoid looking at him, until his feelings overcame him again, when he departed silently and suddenly. Not venturing to trust himself in the church any more, and yet wishing to have some social participation in what was going on there, Mr Toots was, after this, seen from time to time, looking in, with a lorn aspect, at one or other of the windows; and as there were several windows accessible to him from without, and as his restlessness was very great, it not only became difficult to conceive at which window he would appear next, but likewise became necessary, as it were, for the whole congregation to speculate upon the chances of the different windows, during the comparative leisure afforded them by the sermon. Mr Toots's movements in the churchyard were so eccentric, that he seemed generally to defeat all calculation, and to appear, like the conjuror's figure, where he was least expected; and the effect of these mysterious presentations was much increased by its being difficult to him to see in, and easy to everybody else to see out: which occasioned his remaining, every time, longer than might have been expected, with his face close to the glass, until he all at once became aware that all eyes were upon him, and vanished.

These proceedings on the part of Mr Toots, and the strong individual consciousness of them that was exhibited by the Captain, rendered Miss Nipper's position so responsible a one, that she was mightily relieved by the conclusion of the service; and was hardly so affable to Mr Toots as usual, when he informed her and the Captain, on the way back, that now he was sure he had no hope, you know, he felt more comfortable—at least not exactly more comfortable, but more comfortably and completely miserable.

Swiftly now, indeed, the time flew by until it was the evening before the day appointed for the marriage. They were all assembled in the upper room at the Midshipman's, and had no fear of interruption; for there were no lodgers in the house now, and the Midshipman had it all to himself. They were grave and quiet in the prospect of to-morrow, but moderately cheerful too. Florence, with Walter close beside her, was finishing a little piece of work intended as a parting gift to the Captain. The Captain was playing cribbage with Mr Toots. Mr Toots was taking counsel as to his hand, of Susan Nipper. Miss Nipper was giving it, with all due secrecy and circumspection. Diogenes was listening, and occasionally breaking out into a gruff half- smothered fragment of a bark, of which he afterwards seemed half-ashamed, as if he doubted having any reason for it.

'Steady, steady!' said the Captain to Diogenes, 'what's amiss with you? You don't seem easy in your mind to-night, my boy!'

Diogenes wagged his tail, but pricked up his ears immediately afterwards, and gave utterance to another fragment of a bark; for which he apologised to the Captain, by again wagging his tail.

'It's my opinion, Di,' said the Captain, looking thoughtfully at his cards, and stroking his chin with his hook, 'as you have your doubts of Mrs Richards; but if you're the animal I take you to be, you'll think better o' that; for her looks is her commission. Now, Brother:' to Mr Toots: 'if so be as you're ready, heave ahead.'

The Captain spoke with all composure and attention to the game, but suddenly his cards dropped out of his hand, his mouth and eyes opened wide, his legs drew themselves up and stuck out in front of his chair, and he sat staring at the door with blank amazement. Looking round upon the company, and seeing that none of them observed him or the cause of his astonishment, the Captain recovered himself with a great gasp, struck the table a tremendous blow, cried in a stentorian roar, 'Sol Gills ahoy!' and tumbled into the arms of a weather-beaten pea-coat that had come with Polly into the room.

In another moment, Walter was in the arms of the weather-beaten pea-coat. In another moment, Florence was in the arms of the weather-beaten pea-coat. In another moment, Captain Cuttle had embraced Mrs Richards and Miss Nipper, and was violently shaking hands with Mr Toots, exclaiming, as he waved his hook above his head, 'Hooroar, my lad, hooroar!' To which Mr Toots, wholly at a loss to account for these proceedings, replied with great politeness, 'Certainly, Captain Gills, whatever you think proper!'

The weather-beaten pea-coat, and a no less weather-beaten cap and comforter belonging to it, turned from the Captain and from Florence back to Walter, and sounds came from the weather-beaten pea-coat, cap, and comforter, as of an old man sobbing underneath them; while the shaggy sleeves clasped Walter tight. During this pause, there was an universal silence, and the Captain polished his nose with great diligence. But when the pea-coat, cap, and comforter lifted themselves up again, Florence gently moved towards them; and she and Walter taking them off, disclosed the old Instrument-maker, a little thinner and more careworn than of old, in his old Welsh wig and his old coffee-coloured coat and basket buttons, with his old infallible chronometer ticking away in his pocket.

'Chock full o' science,' said the radiant Captain, 'as ever he was! Sol Gills, Sol Gills, what have you been up to, for this many a long day, my ould boy?'

'I'm half blind, Ned,' said the old man, 'and almost deaf and dumb with joy.'

'His wery woice,' said the Captain, looking round with an exultation to which even his face could hardly render justice—'his wery woice as chock full o' science as ever it was! Sol Gills, lay to, my lad, upon your own wines and fig-trees like a taut ould patriark as you are, and overhaul them there adwentures o' yourn, in your own formilior woice. 'Tis the woice,' said the Captain, impressively, and announcing a quotation with his hook, 'of the sluggard, I heerd him complain, you have woke me too soon, I must slumber again. Scatter his ene-mies, and make 'em fall!'

The Captain sat down with the air of a man who had happily expressed the feeling of everybody present, and immediately rose again to present Mr Toots, who was much disconcerted by the arrival of anybody, appearing to prefer a claim to the name of Gills.

'Although,' stammered Mr Toots, 'I had not the pleasure of your acquaintance, Sir, before you were—you were—'

'Lost to sight, to memory dear,' suggested the Captain, in a low voice.

Exactly so, Captain Gills!' assented Mr Toots. 'Although I had not the pleasure of your acquaintance, Mr—Mr Sols,' said Toots, hitting on that name in the inspiration of a bright idea, 'before that happened, I have the greatest pleasure, I assure you, in—you know, in knowing you. I hope,' said Mr Toots, 'that you're as well as can be expected.'

With these courteous words, Mr Toots sat down blushing and chuckling.

The old Instrument-maker, seated in a corner between Walter and Florence, and nodding at Polly, who was looking on, all smiles and delight, answered the Captain thus:

'Ned Cuttle, my dear boy, although I have heard something of the changes of events here, from my pleasant friend there—what a pleasant face she has to be sure, to welcome a wanderer home!' said the old man, breaking off, and rubbing his hands in his old dreamy way.

'Hear him!' cried the Captain gravely. ''Tis woman as seduces all mankind. For which,' aside to Mr Toots, 'you'll overhaul your Adam and Eve, brother.'

'I shall make a point of doing so, Captain Gills,' said Mr Toots.

'Although I have heard something of the changes of events, from her,' resumed the Instrument-maker, taking his old spectacles from his pocket, and putting them on his forehead in his old manner, 'they are so great and unexpected, and I am so overpowered by the sight of my dear boy, and by the,'— glancing at the downcast eyes of Florence, and not attempting to finish the sentence—'that I—I can't say much to-night. But my dear Ned Cuttle, why didn't you write?'

The astonishment depicted in the Captain's features positively frightened Mr Toots, whose eyes were quite fixed by it, so that he could not withdraw them from his face.

'Write!' echoed the Captain. 'Write, Sol Gills?'

'Ay,' said the old man, 'either to Barbados, or Jamaica, or Demerara, That was what I asked.'

'What you asked, Sol Gills?' repeated the Captain.

'Ay,' said the old man. 'Don't you know, Ned? Sure you have not forgotten? Every time I wrote to you.'

The Captain took off his glazed hat, hung it on his hook, and smoothing his hair from behind with his hand, sat gazing at the group around him: a perfect image of wondering resignation.

'You don't appear to understand me, Ned!' observed old Sol.

'Sol Gills,' returned the Captain, after staring at him and the rest for a long time, without speaking, 'I'm gone about and adrift. Pay out a word or two respecting them adwenturs, will you! Can't I bring up, nohows? Nohows?' said the Captain, ruminating, and staring all round.

'You know, Ned,' said Sol Gills, 'why I left here. Did you open my packet, Ned?'

'Why, ay, ay,' said the Captain. 'To be sure, I opened the packet.'

'And read it?' said the old man.

'And read it,' answered the Captain, eyeing him attentively, and proceeding to quote it from memory. '"My dear Ned Cuttle, when I left home for the West Indies in forlorn search of intelligence of my dear-"

There he sits! There's Wal'r!' said the Captain, as if he were relieved by getting hold of anything that was real and indisputable.

'Well, Ned. Now attend a moment!' said the old man. 'When I wrote first—that was from Barbados—I said that though you would receive that letter long before the year was out, I should be glad if you would open the packet, as it explained the reason of my going away. Very good, Ned. When I wrote the second, third, and perhaps the fourth times—that was from Jamaica—I said I was in just the same state, couldn't rest, and couldn't come away from that part of the world, without knowing that my boy was lost or saved. When I wrote next—that, I think, was from Demerara, wasn't it?'

'That he thinks was from Demerara, warn't it!' said the Captain, looking hopelessly round.

'I said,' proceeded old Sol, 'that still there was no certain information got yet. That I found many captains and others, in that part of the world, who had known me for years, and who assisted me with a passage here and there, and for whom I was able, now and then, to do a little in return, in my own craft. That everyone was sorry for me, and seemed to take a sort of interest in my wanderings; and that I began to think it would be my fate to cruise about in search of tidings of my boy, until I died.'

'Began to think as how he was a scientific Flying Dutchman!' said the Captain, as before, and with great seriousness.

'But when the news come one day, Ned,—that was to Barbados, after I got back there,—that a China trader home'ard bound had been spoke, that had my boy aboard, then, Ned, I took passage in the next ship and came home; arrived at home to-night to find it true, thank God!' said the old man, devoutly.

The Captain, after bowing his head with great reverence, stared all round the circle, beginning with Mr Toots, and ending with the Instrument-maker; then gravely said:

'Sol Gills! The observation as I'm a-going to make is calc'lated to blow every stitch of sail as you can carry, clean out of the bolt-ropes, and bring you on your beam ends with a lurch. Not one of them letters was ever delivered to Ed'ard Cuttle. Not one o' them letters,' repeated the Captain, to make his declaration the more solemn and impressive, 'was ever delivered unto Ed'ard Cuttle, Mariner, of England, as lives at home at ease, and doth improve each shining hour!'

'And posted by my own hand! And directed by my own hand, Number nine Brig Place!' exclaimed old Sol.

The colour all went out of the Captain's face and all came back again in a glow.

'What do you mean, Sol Gills, my friend, by Number nine Brig Place?' inquired the Captain.

'Mean? Your lodgings, Ned,' returned the old man. 'Mrs What's-her-name! I shall forget my own name next, but I am behind the present time—I always was, you recollect—and very much confused. Mrs—'

'Sol Gills!' said the Captain, as if he were putting the most improbable case in the world, 'it ain't the name of MacStinger as you're a trying to remember?'

'Of course it is!' exclaimed the Instrument-maker. 'To be sure Ned. Mrs MacStinger!'

Captain Cuttle, whose eyes were now as wide open as they would be, and the knobs upon whose face were perfectly luminous, gave a long shrill whistle of a most melancholy sound, and stood gazing at everybody in a state of speechlessness.

'Overhaul that there again, Sol Gills, will you be so kind?' he said at last.

'All these letters,' returned Uncle Sol, beating time with the forefinger of his right hand upon the palm of his left, with a steadiness and distinctness that might have done honour, even to the infallible chronometer in his pocket, 'I posted with my own hand, and directed with my own hand, to Captain Cuttle, at Mrs MacStinger's, Number nine Brig Place.'

The Captain took his glazed hat off his hook, looked into it, put it on, and sat down.

'Why, friends all,' said the Captain, staring round in the last state of discomfiture, 'I cut and run from there!'

'And no one knew where you were gone, Captain Cuttle?' cried Walter hastily.

'Bless your heart, Wal'r,' said the Captain, shaking his head, 'she'd never have allowed o' my coming to take charge o' this here property. Nothing could be done but cut and run. Lord love you, Wal'r!' said the Captain, 'you've only seen her in a calm! But see her when her angry passions rise—and make a note on!'

'I'd give it her!' remarked the Nipper, softly.

'Would you, do you think, my dear?' returned the Captain, with feeble admiration. 'Well, my dear, it does you credit. But there ain't no wild animal I wouldn't sooner face myself. I only got my chest away by means of a friend as nobody's a match for. It was no good sending any letter there. She wouldn't take in any letter, bless you,' said the Captain, 'under them circumstances! Why, you could hardly make it worth a man's while to be the postman!'

'Then it's pretty clear, Captain Cuttle, that all of us, and you and Uncle Sol especially,' said Walter, 'may thank Mrs MacStinger for no small anxiety.'

The general obligation in this wise to the determined relict of the late Mr MacStinger, was so apparent, that the Captain did not contest the point; but being in some measure ashamed of his position, though nobody dwelt upon the subject, and Walter especially avoided it, remembering the last conversation he and the Captain had held together respecting it, he remained under a cloud for nearly five minutes—an extraordinary period for him when that sun, his face, broke out once more, shining on all beholders with extraordinary brilliancy; and he fell into a fit of shaking hands with everybody over and over again.

At an early hour, but not before Uncle Sol and Walter had questioned each other at some length about their voyages and dangers, they all, except Walter, vacated Florence's room, and went down to the parlour. Here they were soon afterwards joined by Walter, who told them Florence was a little sorrowful and heavy-hearted, and had gone to bed. Though they could not have disturbed her with their voices down there, they all spoke in a whisper after this: and each, in his different way, felt very lovingly and gently towards Walter's fair young bride: and a long explanation there was of everything relating to her, for the satisfaction of Uncle Sol; and very sensible Mr Toots was of the delicacy with which Walter made his name and services important, and his presence necessary to their little council.

'Mr Toots,' said Walter, on parting with him at the house door, 'we shall see each other to-morrow morning?'

'Lieutenant Walters,' returned Mr Toots, grasping his hand fervently, 'I shall certainly be present.

'This is the last night we shall meet for a long time—the last night we may ever meet,' said Walter. 'Such a noble heart as yours, must feel, I think, when another heart is bound to it. I hope you know that I am very grateful to you?'

'Walters,' replied Mr Toots, quite touched, 'I should be glad to feel that you had reason to be so.'

'Florence,' said Walter, 'on this last night of her bearing her own name, has made me promise—it was only just now, when you left us together—that I would tell you—with her dear love—'

Mr Toots laid his hand upon the doorpost, and his eyes upon his hand.—With her dear love,' said Walter, 'that she can never have a friend whom she will value above you. That the recollection of your true consideration for her always, can never be forgotten by her. That she remembers you in her prayers to-night, and hopes that you will think of her when she is far away. Shall I say anything for you?'

'Say, Walter,' replied Mr Toots indistinctly, 'that I shall think of her every day, but never without feeling happy to know that she is married to the man she loves, and who loves her. Say, if you please, that I am sure her husband deserves her—even her!—and that I am glad of her choice.'

Mr Toots got more distinct as he came to these last words, and raising his eyes from the doorpost, said them stoutly. He then shook Walter's hand again with a fervour that Walter was not slow to return and started homeward.

Mr Toots was accompanied by the Chicken, whom he had of late brought with him every evening, and left in the shop, with an idea that unforeseen circumstances might arise from without, in which the prowess of that distinguished character would be of service to the Midshipman. The Chicken did not appear to be in a particularly good humour on this occasion. Either the gas-lamps were treacherous, or he cocked his eye in a hideous manner, and likewise distorted his nose, when Mr Toots, crossing the road, looked back over his shoulder at the room where Florence slept. On the road home, he was more demonstrative of aggressive intentions against the other foot-passengers, than comported with a professor of the peaceful art of self- defence. Arrived at home, instead of leaving Mr Toots in his apartments when he had escorted him thither, he remained before him weighing his white hat in both hands by the brim, and twitching his head and nose (both of which had been many times broken, and but indifferently repaired), with an air of decided disrespect.

His patron being much engaged with his own thoughts, did not observe this for some time, nor indeed until the Chicken, determined not to be overlooked, had made divers clicking sounds with his tongue and teeth, to attract attention.

'Now, Master,' said the Chicken, doggedly, when he, at length, caught Mr Toots's eye, 'I want to know whether this here gammon is to finish it, or whether you're a going in to win?'

'Chicken,' returned Mr Toots, 'explain yourself.'

'Why then, here's all about it, Master,' said the Chicken. 'I ain't a cove to chuck a word away. Here's wot it is. Are any on 'em to be doubled up?'

When the Chicken put this question he dropped his hat, made a dodge and a feint with his left hand, hit a supposed enemy a violent blow with his right, shook his head smartly, and recovered himself.

'Come, Master,' said the Chicken. 'Is it to be gammon or pluck? Which?'

Chicken,' returned Mr Toots, 'your expressions are coarse, and your meaning is obscure.'

'Why, then, I tell you what, Master,' said the Chicken. 'This is where it is. It's mean.'

'What is mean, Chicken?' asked Mr Toots.

'It is,' said the Chicken, with a frightful corrugation of his broken nose. 'There! Now, Master! Wot! When you could go and blow on this here match to the stiff'un;' by which depreciatory appellation it has been since supposed that the Game One intended to signify Mr Dombey; 'and when you could knock the winner and all the kit of 'em dead out o' wind and time, are you going to give in? To give in? 'said the Chicken, with contemptuous emphasis. 'Wy, it's mean!'

'Chicken,' said Mr Toots, severely, 'you're a perfect Vulture! Your sentiments are atrocious.'

'My sentiments is Game and Fancy, Master,' returned the Chicken. 'That's wot my sentiments is. I can't abear a meanness. I'm afore the public, I'm to be heerd on at the bar of the Little Helephant, and no Gov'ner o' mine mustn't go and do what's mean. Wy, it's mean,' said the Chicken, with increased expression. 'That's where it is. It's mean.'

'Chicken,' said Mr Toots, 'you disgust me.'

'Master,' returned the Chicken, putting on his hat, 'there's a pair on us, then. Come! Here's a offer! You've spoke to me more than once't or twice't about the public line. Never mind! Give me a fi'typunnote to-morrow, and let me go.'

'Chicken,' returned Mr Toots, 'after the odious sentiments you have expressed, I shall be glad to part on such terms.'

'Done then,' said the Chicken. 'It's a bargain. This here conduct of yourn won't suit my book, Master. Wy, it's mean,' said the Chicken; who seemed equally unable to get beyond that point, and to stop short of it. 'That's where it is; it's mean!'

So Mr Toots and the Chicken agreed to part on this incompatibility of moral perception; and Mr Toots lying down to sleep, dreamed happily of Florence, who had thought of him as her friend upon the last night of her maiden life, and who had sent him her dear love.

CHAPTER 57. Another Wedding

Mr Sownds the beadle, and Mrs Miff the pew-opener, are early at their posts in the fine church where Mr Dombey was married. A yellow-faced old gentleman from India, is going to take unto himself a young wife this morning, and six carriages full of company are expected, and Mrs Miff has been informed that the yellow-faced old gentleman could pave the road to church with diamonds and hardly miss them. The nuptial benediction is to be a superior one, proceeding from a very reverend, a dean, and the lady is to be given away, as an extraordinary present, by somebody who comes express from the Horse Guards.

Mrs Miff is more intolerant of common people this morning, than she generally is; and she his always strong opinions on that subject, for it is associated with free sittings. Mrs Miff is not a student of political economy (she thinks the science is connected with dissenters; 'Baptists or Wesleyans, or some o' them,' she says), but she can never understand what business your common folks have to be married. 'Drat 'em,' says Mrs Miff 'you read the same things over 'em' and instead of sovereigns get sixpences!'

Mr Sownds the beadle is more liberal than Mrs Miff—but then he is not a pew-opener. 'It must be done, Ma'am,' he says. 'We must marry 'em. We must have our national schools to walk at the head of, and we must have our standing armies. We must marry 'em, Ma'am,' says Mr Sownds, 'and keep the country going.'

Mr Sownds is sitting on the steps and Mrs Miff is dusting in the church, when a young couple, plainly dressed, come in. The mortified bonnet of Mrs Miff is sharply turned towards them, for she espies in this early visit indications of a runaway match. But they don't want to be married—'Only,' says the gentleman, 'to walk round the church.' And as he slips a genteel compliment into the palm of Mrs Miff, her vinegary face relaxes, and her mortified bonnet and her spare dry figure dip and crackle.

Mrs Miff resumes her dusting and plumps up her cushions—for the yellow-faced old gentleman is reported to have tender knees—but keeps her glazed, pew-opening eye on the young couple who are walking round the church. 'Ahem,' coughs Mrs Miff whose cough is drier than the hay in any hassock in her charge, 'you'll come to us one of these mornings, my dears, unless I'm much mistaken!'

They are looking at a tablet on the wall, erected to the memory of someone dead. They are a long way off from Mrs Miff, but Mrs Miff can see with half an eye how she is leaning on his arm, and how his head is bent down over her. 'Well, well,' says Mrs Miff, 'you might do worse. For you're a tidy pair!'

There is nothing personal in Mrs Miff's remark. She merely speaks of stock-in-trade. She is hardly more curious in couples than in coffins. She is such a spare, straight, dry old lady—such a pew of a woman—that you should find as many individual sympathies in a chip. Mr Sownds, now, who is fleshy, and has scarlet in his coat, is of a different temperament. He says, as they stand upon the steps watching the young couple away, that she has a pretty figure, hasn't she, and as well as he could see (for she held her head down coming out), an uncommon pretty face. 'Altogether, Mrs Miff,' says Mr Sownds with a relish, 'she is what you may call a rose-bud.'

Mrs Miff assents with a spare nod of her mortified bonnet; but approves of this so little, that she inwardly resolves she wouldn't be the wife of Mr Sownds for any money he could give her, Beadle as he is.

And what are the young couple saying as they leave the church, and go out at the gate?

'Dear Walter, thank you! I can go away, now, happy.'

'And when we come back, Florence, we will come and see his grave again.'

Florence lifts her eyes, so bright with tears, to his kind face; and clasps her disengaged hand on that other modest little hand which clasps his arm.

'It is very early, Walter, and the streets are almost empty yet. Let us walk.'

'But you will be so tired, my love.'

'Oh no! I was very tired the first time that we ever walked together, but I shall not be so to-day.' And thus—not much changed—she, as innocent and earnest-hearted—he, as frank, as hopeful, and more proud of her—Florence and Walter, on their bridal morning, walk through the streets together.

Not even in that childish walk of long ago, were they so far removed from all the world about them as to-day. The childish feet of long ago, did not tread such enchanted ground as theirs do now. The confidence and love of children may be given many times, and will spring up in many places;

but the woman's heart of Florence, with its undivided treasure, can be yielded only once, and under slight or change, can only droop and die.

They take the streets that are the quietest, and do not go near that in which her old home stands. It is a fair, warm summer morning, and the sun shines on them, as they walk towards the darkening mist that overspreads the City. Riches are uncovering in shops; jewels, gold, and silver flash in the goldsmith's sunny windows; and great houses cast a stately shade upon them as they pass. But through the light, and through the shade, they go on lovingly together, lost to everything around; thinking of no other riches, and no prouder home, than they have now in one another.

Gradually they come into the darker, narrower streets, where the sun, now yellow, and now red, is seen through the mist, only at street corners, and in small open spaces where there is a tree, or one of the innumerable churches, or a paved way and a flight of steps, or a curious little patch of garden, or a burying-ground, where the few tombs and tombstones are almost black. Lovingly and trustfully, through all the narrow yards and alleys and the shady streets, Florence goes, clinging to his arm, to be his wife.

Her heart beats quicker now, for Walter tells her that their church is very near. They pass a few great stacks of warehouses, with waggons at the doors, and busy carmen stopping up the way—but Florence does not see or hear them—and then the air is quiet, and the day is darkened, and she is trembling in a church which has a strange smell like a cellar.

The shabby little old man, ringer of the disappointed bell, is standing in the porch, and has put his hat in the font—for he is quite at home there, being sexton. He ushers them into an old brown, panelled, dusty vestry, like a corner-cupboard with the shelves taken out; where the wormy registers diffuse a smell like faded snuff, which has set the tearful Nipper sneezing.

Youthful, and how beautiful, the young bride looks, in this old dusty place, with no kindred object near her but her husband. There is a dusty old clerk, who keeps a sort of evaporated news shop underneath an archway opposite, behind a perfect fortification of posts. There is a dusty old pew-opener who only keeps herself, and finds that quite enough to do. There is a dusty old beadle (these are Mr Toots's beadle and pew-opener of last Sunday), who has something to do with a Worshipful Company who have got a Hall in the next yard, with a stained-glass window in it that no mortal ever saw. There are dusty wooden ledges and cornices poked in and out over the altar, and over the screen and round the gallery, and over the inscription about what the Master and Wardens of the Worshipful Company did in one thousand six hundred and ninety-four. There are dusty old sounding-boards over the pulpit and reading-desk, looking like lids to be let down on the officiating ministers in case of their giving offence. There is every possible provision for the accommodation of dust, except in the churchyard, where the facilities in that respect are very limited. The Captain, Uncle Sol, and Mr Toots are come; the clergyman is putting on his surplice in the vestry, while the clerk walks round him, blowing the dust off it; and the bride and bridegroom stand before the altar. There is no bridesmaid, unless Susan Nipper is one; and no better father than Captain Cuttle. A man with a wooden leg, chewing a faint apple and carrying a blue bag in has hand, looks in to see what is going on; but finding it nothing entertaining, stumps off again, and pegs his way among the echoes out of doors.

No gracious ray of light is seen to fall on Florence, kneeling at the altar with her timid head bowed down. The morning luminary is built out, and don't shine there. There is a meagre tree outside, where the sparrows are chirping a little; and there is a blackbird in an eyelet-hole of sun in a dyer's garret, over against the window, who whistles loudly whilst the service is performing; and there is the man with the wooden leg stumping away. The amens of the dusty clerk appear, like Macbeth's, to stick in his throat a little'; but Captain Cuttle helps him out, and does it with so much goodwill that he interpolates three entirely new responses of that word, never introduced into the service before.

They are married, and have signed their names in one of the old sneezy registers, and the clergyman's surplice is restored to the dust, and the clergymam is gone home. In a dark corner of the dark church, Florence has turned to Susan Nipper, and is weeping in her arms. Mr Toots's eyes are red. The Captain lubricates his nose. Uncle Sol has pulled down his spectacles from his forehead, and walked out to the door.

'God bless you, Susan; dearest Susan! If you ever can bear witness to the love I have for Walter, and the reason that I have to love him, do it for his sake. Good-bye! Good-bye!'

They have thought it better not to go back to the Midshipman, but to part so; a coach is waiting for them, near at hand.

Miss Nipper cannot speak; she only sobs and chokes, and hugs her mistress. Mr Toots advances, urges her to cheer up, and takes charge of her. Florence gives him her hand—gives him, in the fulness of her heart, her lips—kisses Uncle Sol, and Captain Cuttle, and is borne away by her young husband.

But Susan cannot bear that Florence should go away with a mournful recollection of her. She had meant to be so different, that she reproaches herself bitterly. Intent on making one last effort to redeem her character, she breaks from Mr Toots and runs away to find the coach, and show a parting smile. The Captain, divining her object, sets off after her; for he feels it his duty also to dismiss them with a cheer, if possible. Uncle Sol and Mr Toots are left behind together, outside the church, to wait for them.

The coach is gone, but the street is steep, and narrow, and blocked up, and Susan can see it at a stand-still in the distance, she is sure. Captain Cuttle follows her as she flies down the hill, and waves his glazed hat as a general signal, which may attract the right coach and which may not.

Susan outstrips the Captain, and comes up with it. She looks in at the window, sees Walter, with the gentle face beside him, and claps her hands and screams:

'Miss Floy, my darling! look at me! We are all so happy now, dear! One more good-bye, my precious, one more!'

How Susan does it, she don't know, but she reaches to the window, kisses her, and has her arms about her neck, in a moment.

We are all so happy now, my dear Miss Floy!' says Susan, with a suspicious catching in her breath. 'You, you won't be angry with me now. Now will you?'

'Angry, Susan!'

'No, no; I am sure you won't. I say you won't, my pet, my dearest!' exclaims Susan; 'and here's the Captain too—your friend the Captain, you know—to say good-bye once more!'

'Hooroar, my Heart's Delight!' vociferates the Captain, with a countenance of strong emotion. 'Hooroar, Wal'r my lad. Hooroar! Hooroar!'

What with the young husband at one window, and the young wife at the other; the Captain hanging on at this door, and Susan Nipper holding fast by that; the coach obliged to go on whether it will or no, and all the other carts and coaches turbulent because it hesitates; there never was so much confusion on four wheels. But Susan Nipper gallantly maintains her point.

She keeps a smiling face upon her mistress, smiling through her tears, until the last. Even when she is left behind, the Captain continues to appear and disappear at the door, crying 'Hooroar, my lad! Hooroar, my Heart's Delight!' with his shirt-collar in a violent state of agitation, until it is hopeless to attempt to keep up with the coach any longer. Finally, when the coach is gone, Susan Nipper, being rejoined by the Captain, falls into a state of insensibility, and is taken into a baker's shop to recover.

Uncle Sol and Mr Toots wait patiently in the churchyard, sitting on the coping-stone of the railings, until Captain Cuttle and Susan come back, Neither being at all desirous to speak, or to be spoken to, they are excellent company, and quite satisfied. When they all arrive again at the little Midshipman, and sit down to breakfast, nobody can touch a morsel. Captain Cuttle makes a feint of being voracious about toast, but gives it up as a swindle. Mr Toots says, after breakfast, he will come back in the evening; and goes wandering about the town all day, with a vague sensation upon him as if he hadn't been to bed for a fortnight.

There is a strange charm in the house, and in the room, in which they have been used to be together, and out of which so much is gone. It aggravates, and yet it soothes, the sorrow of the separation. Mr Toots tells Susan Nipper when he comes at night, that he hasn't been so wretched all day long, and yet he likes it. He confides in Susan Nipper, being alone with her, and tells her what his feelings were when she gave him that candid opinion as to the probability of Miss Dombey's ever loving him. In the vein of confidence engendered by these common recollections, and their tears, Mr Toots proposes that they shall go out together, and buy something for supper. Miss Nipper assenting, they buy a good many little things; and, with the aid of Mrs Richards, set the supper out quite showily before the Captain and old Sol came home.

The Captain and old Sol have been on board the ship, and have established Di there, and have seen the chests put aboard. They have much to tell about the popularity of Walter, and the comforts he will have about him, and the quiet way in which it seems he has been working early and late, to make his cabin what the Captain calls 'a picter,' to surprise his little wife. 'A admiral's cabin, mind you,' says the Captain, 'ain't more trim.'

But one of the Captain's chief delights is, that he knows the big watch, and the sugar-tongs, and tea-spoons, are on board: and again and again he murmurs to himself, 'Ed'ard Cuttle, my lad, you never shaped a better course in your life than when you made that there little property over jintly. You see how the land bore, Ed'ard,' says the Captain, 'and it does you credit, my lad.'

The old Instrument-maker is more distraught and misty than he used to be, and takes the marriage and the parting very much to heart. But he is greatly comforted by having his old ally, Ned Cuttle, at his side; and he sits down to supper with a grateful and contented face.

'My boy has been preserved and thrives,' says old Sol Gills, rubbing his hands. 'What right have I to be otherwise than thankful and happy!'

The Captain, who has not yet taken his seat at the table, but who has been fidgeting about for some time, and now stands hesitating in his place, looks doubtfully at Mr Gills, and says:

'Sol! There's the last bottle of the old Madeira down below. Would you wish to have it up to-night, my boy, and drink to Wal'r and his wife?'

The Instrument-maker, looking wistfully at the Captain, puts his hand into the breast-pocket of his coffee-coloured coat, brings forth his pocket-book, and takes a letter out.

'To Mr Dombey,' says the old man. 'From Walter. To be sent in three weeks' time. I'll read it.'

'"Sir. I am married to your daughter. She is gone with me upon a distant voyage. To be devoted to her is to have no claim on her or you, but God knows that I am.

'"Why, loving her beyond all earthly things, I have yet, without remorse, united her to the uncertainties and dangers of my life, I will not say to you. You know why, and you are her father.

'"Do not reproach her. She has never reproached you.

'"I do not think or hope that you will ever forgive me. There is nothing I expect less. But if an hour should come when it will comfort you to believe that Florence has someone ever near her, the great charge of whose life is to cancel her remembrance of past sorrow, I solemnly assure you, you may, in that hour, rest in that belief."'

Solomon puts back the letter carefully in his pocket-book, and puts back his pocket-book in his coat.

'We won't drink the last bottle of the old Madeira yet, Ned,' says the old man thoughtfully. 'Not yet.

'Not yet,' assents the Captain. 'No. Not yet.'

Susan and Mr Toots are of the same opinion. After a silence they all sit down to supper, and drink to the young husband and wife in something else; and the last bottle of the old Madeira still remains among its dust and cobwebs, undisturbed.

A few days have elapsed, and a stately ship is out at sea, spreading its white wings to the favouring wind.

Upon the deck, image to the roughest man on board of something that is graceful, beautiful, and harmless—something that it is good and pleasant to have there, and that should make the voyage prosperous—is Florence. It is night, and she and Walter sit alone, watching the solemn path of light upon the sea between them and the moon.

At length she cannot see it plainly, for the tears that fill her eyes; and then she lays her head down on his breast, and puts her arms around his neck, saying, 'Oh Walter, dearest love, I am so happy!'

Her husband holds her to his heart, and they are very quiet, and the stately ship goes on serenely.

'As I hear the sea,' says Florence, 'and sit watching it, it brings so many days into my mind. It makes me think so much—'

'Of Paul, my love. I know it does.'

Of Paul and Walter. And the voices in the waves are always whispering to Florence, in their ceaseless murmuring, of love—of love, eternal and illimitable, not bounded by the confines of this world, or by the end of time, but ranging still, beyond the sea, beyond the sky, to the invisible country far away!

CHAPTER 58. After a Lapse

The sea had ebbed and flowed, through a whole year. Through a whole year, the winds and clouds had come and gone; the ceaseless work of Time had been performed, in storm and sunshine. Through a whole year, the tides of human chance and change had set in their allotted courses. Through a whole year, the famous House of Dombey and Son had fought a fight for life, against cross accidents, doubtful rumours, unsuccessful ventures, unpropitious times, and most of all, against the infatuation of its head, who would not contract its enterprises by a hair's breadth, and would not listen to a word of warning that the ship he strained so hard against the storm, was weak, and could not bear it. The year was out, and the great House was down.

One summer afternoon; a year, wanting some odd days, after the marriage in the City church; there was a buzz and whisper upon 'Change of a great failure. A certain cold proud man, well known there, was not there, nor was he represented there. Next day it was noised abroad that Dombey and Son had stopped, and next night there was a List of Bankrupts published, headed by that name.

The world was very busy now, in sooth, and had a deal to say. It was an innocently credulous and a much ill-used world. It was a world in which there was 'no other sort of bankruptcy whatever. There were no conspicuous people in it, trading far and wide on rotten banks of religion, patriotism, virtue, honour. There was no amount worth mentioning of mere paper in circulation, on which anybody lived pretty handsomely, promising to pay great sums of goodness with no effects. There were no shortcomings anywhere, in anything but money. The world was very angry indeed; and the people especially, who, in a worse world, might have been supposed to be apt traders themselves in shows and pretences, were observed to be mightily indignant.

Here was a new inducement to dissipation, presented to that sport of circumstances, Mr Perch the Messenger! It was apparently the fate of Mr Perch to be always waking up, and finding himself famous. He had but yesterday, as one might say, subsided into private life from the celebrity of the elopement and the events that followed it; and now he was made a more important man than ever, by the bankruptcy. Gliding from his bracket in the outer office where he now sat, watching the strange faces of accountants and others, who quickly superseded nearly all the old clerks, Mr Perch had but to show himself in the court outside, or, at farthest, in the bar of the King's Arms, to be asked a multitude of questions, almost certain to include that interesting question, what would he take to drink? Then would Mr Perch descant upon the hours of acute uneasiness he and Mrs Perch had suffered out at Balls Pond, when they first suspected 'things was going wrong.' Then would Mr Perch relate to gaping listeners, in a low voice, as if the corpse of the deceased House were lying unburied in the next room, how Mrs Perch had first come to surmise that things was going wrong by hearing him (Perch) moaning in his sleep, 'twelve and ninepence in the pound, twelve and ninepence in the pound!' Which act of somnambulism he supposed to have originated in the impression made upon him by the change in Mr Dombey's face. Then would he inform them how he had once said, 'Might I make so bold as ask, Sir, are you unhappy in your mind?' and how Mr Dombey had replied, 'My faithful Perch—but no, it cannot be!' and with that had struck his hand upon his forehead, and said, 'Leave me, Perch!' Then, in short, would Mr Perch, a victim to his position, tell all manner of lies; affecting himself to tears by those that were of a moving nature, and really believing that the inventions of yesterday had, on repetition, a sort of truth about them to-day.

Mr Perch always closed these conferences by meekly remarking, That, of course, whatever his suspicions might have been (as if he had ever had any!) it wasn't for him to betray his trust, was it? Which sentiment (there never being any creditors present) was received as doing great honour to his feelings. Thus, he generally brought away a soothed conscience and left an agreeable impression behind him, when he returned to his bracket: again to sit watching the strange faces of the accountants and others, making so free with the great mysteries, the Books; or now and then to go on tiptoe into Mr Dombey's empty room, and stir the fire; or to take an airing at the door, and have a little more doleful chat with any straggler whom he knew; or to propitiate, with various small attentions, the head accountant: from whom Mr Perch had expectations of a messengership in a Fire Office, when the affairs of the House should be wound up.

To Major Bagstock, the bankruptcy was quite a calamity. The Major was not a sympathetic character—his attention being wholly concentrated on J. B.— nor was he a man subject to lively emotions, except in the physical regards of gasping and choking. But he had so paraded his friend Dombey at the club; had so flourished him at the heads of the members in general, and so put them down by continual assertion of his riches; that the club, being but human, was delighted to retort upon the Major, by asking him, with a show of great concern, whether this tremendous smash had been at all expected, and how his friend Dombey bore it. To such questions, the Major, waxing very purple, would reply that it was a bad world, Sir, altogether; that Joey knew a thing or two, but had been done, Sir, done like an infant; that if you had foretold this, Sir, to J. Bagstock, when he went abroad with Dombey and was chasing that vagabond up and down France, J. Bagstock would have pooh-pooh'd you—would have pooh—pooh'd you, Sir, by the Lord! That Joe had been deceived, Sir, taken in, hoodwinked, blindfolded, but was broad awake again and staring; insomuch, Sir, that if Joe's father were to rise up from the grave to-morrow, he wouldn't trust the old blade with a penny piece, but would tell him that his son Josh was too old a soldier to be done again, Sir. That he was a suspicious, crabbed, cranky, used-up, J. B. infidel, Sir; and that if it were consistent with the dignity of a rough and tough old Major, of the old school, who had had the honour of being personally known to, and commended by, their late Royal Highnesses the Dukes of Kent and York, to retire to a tub and live in it, by Gad! Sir, he'd have a tub in Pall Mall to-morrow, to show his contempt for mankind!'

Of all this, and many variations of the same tune, the Major would deliver himself with so many apoplectic symptoms, such rollings of his head, and such violent growls of ill usage and resentment, that the younger members of the club surmised he had invested money in his friend Dombey's House, and lost it; though the older soldiers and deeper dogs, who knew Joe better, wouldn't hear of such a thing. The unfortunate Native, expressing no opinion, suffered dreadfully; not merely in his moral feelings, which were regularly fusilladed by the Major every hour in the day, and riddled through and through, but in his sensitiveness to bodily knocks and bumps, which was kept continually on the stretch. For six entire weeks after the bankruptcy, this miserable foreigner lived in a rainy season of boot-jacks and brushes.

Mrs Chick had three ideas upon the subject of the terrible reverse. The first was that she could not understand it. The second, that her brother had not made an effort. The third, that if she had been invited to dinner on the day of that first party, it never would have happened; and that she had said so, at the time.

Nobody's opinion stayed the misfortune, lightened it, or made it heavier. It was understood that the affairs of the House were to be wound up as they best could be; that Mr Dombey freely resigned everything he had, and asked for no favour from anyone. That any resumption of the business was out of the question, as he would listen to no friendly negotiation having that compromise in view; that he had relinquished every post of trust or distinction he had held, as a man respected among merchants; that he was dying, according to some; that he was going melancholy mad, according to others; that he was a broken man, according to all.

The clerks dispersed after holding a little dinner of condolence among themselves, which was enlivened by comic singing, and went off admirably. Some took places abroad, and some engaged in other Houses at home; some looked up relations in the country, for whom they suddenly remembered they had a particular affection; and some advertised for employment in the newspapers. Mr Perch alone remained of all the late establishment, sitting on his bracket looking at the accountants, or starting off it, to propitiate the head accountant, who was to get him into the Fire Office. The Counting House soon got to be dirty and neglected. The principal slipper and dogs' collar seller, at the corner of the court, would have doubted the propriety of throwing up his forefinger to the brim of his hat, any more, if Mr Dombey had appeared there now; and the ticket porter, with his hands under his white apron, moralised good sound morality about ambition, which (he observed) was not, in his opinion, made to rhyme to perdition, for nothing.

Mr Morfin, the hazel-eyed bachelor, with the hair and whiskers sprinkled with grey, was perhaps the only person within the atmosphere of the House— its head, of course, excepted—who was heartily and deeply affected by the disaster that had befallen it. He had treated Mr Dombey with due respect and deference through many years, but he had never disguised his natural character, or meanly truckled to him, or pampered his master passion for the advancement of his own purposes. He had, therefore, no self-disrespect to avenge; no long-tightened springs to release with a quick recoil. He worked early and late to unravel whatever was complicated or difficult in the records of the transactions of the House; was always in attendance to explain whatever required explanation; sat in his old room sometimes very late at night, studying points by his mastery of which he could spare Mr Dombey the pain of being personally referred to; and then would go home to Islington, and calm his mind by producing the most dismal and forlorn sounds out of his violoncello before going to bed.

He was solacing himself with this melodious grumbler one evening, and, having been much dispirited by the proceedings of the day, was scraping consolation out of its deepest notes, when his landlady (who was fortunately deaf, and had no other consciousness of these performances than a sensation of something rumbling in her bones) announced a lady.

'In mourning,' she said.

The violoncello stopped immediately; and the performer, laying it on the sofa with great tenderness and care, made a sign that the lady was to come in. He followed directly, and met Harriet Carker on the stair.

'Alone!' he said, 'and John here this morning! Is there anything the matter, my dear? But no,' he added, 'your face tells quite another story.'

'I am afraid it is a selfish revelation that you see there, then,' she answered.

'It is a very pleasant one,' said he; 'and, if selfish, a novelty too, worth seeing in you. But I don't believe that.'

He had placed a chair for her by this time, and sat down opposite; the violoncello lying snugly on the sofa between them.

'You will not be surprised at my coming alone, or at John's not having told you I was coming,' said Harriet; 'and you will believe that, when I tell you why I have come. May I do so now?'

'You can do nothing better.'

'You were not busy?'

He pointed to the violoncello lying on the sofa, and said 'I have been, all day. Here's my witness. I have been confiding all my cares to it. I wish I had none but my own to tell.'

'Is the House at an end?' said Harriet, earnestly.

'Completely at an end.'

'Will it never be resumed?'

'Never.'

The bright expression of her face was not overshadowed as her lips silently repeated the word. He seemed to observe this with some little involuntary surprise: and said again:

'Never. You remember what I told you. It has been, all along, impossible to convince him; impossible to reason with him; sometimes, impossible even to approach him. The worst has happened; and the House has fallen, never to be built up any more.'

'And Mr Dombey, is he personally ruined?'

'Ruined.'

'Will he have no private fortune left? Nothing?'

A certain eagerness in her voice, and something that was almost joyful in her look, seemed to surprise him more and more; to disappoint him too, and jar discordantly against his own emotions. He drummed with the fingers of one hand on the table, looking wistfully at her, and shaking his head, said, after a pause:

'The extent of Mr Dombey's resources is not accurately within my knowledge; but though they are doubtless very large, his obligations are enormous. He is a gentleman of high honour and integrity. Any man in his position could, and many a man in his position would, have saved himself, by making terms which would have very slightly, almost insensibly, increased the losses of those who had had dealings with him, and left him a remnant to live upon. But he is resolved on payment to the last farthing of his means. His own words are, that they will clear, or nearly clear, the House, and that no one can lose much. Ah, Miss Harriet, it would do us no harm to remember oftener than we do, that vices are sometimes only virtues carried to excess! His pride shows well in this.'

She heard him with little or no change in her expression, and with a divided attention that showed her to be busy with something in her own mind. When he was silent, she asked him hurriedly:

'Have you seen him lately?'

'No one sees him. When this crisis of his affairs renders it necessary for him to come out of his house, he comes out for the occasion, and again goes home, and shuts himself up, and will sea no one. He has written me a letter, acknowledging our past connexion in higher terms than it deserved, and parting from me. I am delicate of obtruding myself upon him now, never having had much intercourse with him in better times; but I have tried to do so. I have written, gone there, entreated. Quite in vain.'

He watched her, as in the hope that she would testify some greater concern than she had yet shown; and spoke gravely and feelingly, as if to impress her the more; but there was no change in her.

'Well, well, Miss Harriet,' he said, with a disappointed air, 'this is not to the purpose. You have not come here to hear this. Some other and pleasanter theme is in your mind. Let it be in mine, too, and we shall talk upon more equal terms. Come!'

'No, it is the same theme,' returned Harriet, with frank and quick surprise. 'Is it not likely that it should be? Is it not natural that John and I should have been thinking and speaking very much of late of these great changes? Mr Dombey, whom he served so many years—you know upon what terms— reduced, as you describe; and we quite rich!'

Good, true face, as that face of hers was, and pleasant as it had been to him, Mr Morfin, the hazel-eyed bachelor, since the first time he had ever looked upon it, it pleased him less at that moment, lighted with a ray of exultation, than it had ever pleased him before.

'I need not remind you,' said Harriet, casting down her eyes upon her black dress, 'through what means our circumstances changed. You have not forgotten that our brother James, upon that dreadful day, left no will, no relations but ourselves.'

The face was pleasanter to him now, though it was pale and melancholy, than it had been a moment since. He seemed to breathe more cheerily.

'You know,' she said, 'our history, the history of both my brothers, in connexion with the unfortunate, unhappy gentleman, of whom you have spoken so truly. You know how few our wants are—John's and mine—and what little use we have for money, after the life we have led together for so many years; and now that he is earning an income that is ample for us, through your kindness. You are not unprepared to hear what favour I have come to ask of you?'

'I hardly know. I was, a minute ago. Now, I think, I am not.'

'Of my dead brother I say nothing. If the dead know what we do—but you understand me. Of my living brother I could say much; but what need I say more, than that this act of duty, in which I have come to ask your indispensable assistance, is his own, and that he cannot rest until it is performed!'

She raised her eyes again; and the light of exultation in her face began to appear beautiful, in the observant eyes that watched her.

'Dear Sir,' she went on to say, 'it must be done very quietly and secretly. Your experience and knowledge will point out a way of doing it. Mr Dombey may, perhaps, be led to believe that it is something saved, unexpectedly, from the wreck of his fortunes; or that it is a voluntary tribute to his honourable and upright character, from some of those with whom he has had great dealings; or that it is some old lost debt repaid. There must be many ways of doing it. I know you will choose the best. The favour I have come to ask is, that you will do it for us in your own kind, generous, considerate manner. That you will never speak of it to John, whose chief happiness in this act of restitution is to do it secretly, unknown, and unapproved of: that only a very small part of the inheritance may be reserved to us, until Mr Dombey shall have possessed the interest of the rest for the remainder of his life; that you will keep our secret, faithfully—but that I am sure you will; and that, from this time, it may seldom be whispered, even between you and me, but may live in my thoughts only as a new reason for thankfulness to Heaven, and joy and pride in my brother.'

Such a look of exultation there may be on Angels' faces when the one repentant sinner enters Heaven, among ninety-nine just men. It was not dimmed or tarnished by the joyful tears that filled her eyes, but was the brighter for them.

'My dear Harriet,' said Mr Morfin, after a silence, 'I was not prepared for this. Do I understand you that you wish to make your own part in the inheritance available for your good purpose, as well as John's?'

'Oh, yes,' she returned 'When we have shared everything together for so long a time, and have had no care, hope, or purpose apart, could I bear to be excluded from my share in this? May I not urge a claim to be my brother's partner and companion to the last?'

'Heaven forbid that I should dispute it!' he replied.

'We may rely on your friendly help?' she said. 'I knew we might!'

'I should be a worse man than,—than I hope I am, or would willingly believe myself, if I could not give you that assurance from my heart and soul. You may, implicitly. Upon my honour, I will keep your secret. And if it should be found that Mr Dombey is so reduced as I fear he will be, acting on a determination that there seem to be no means of influencing, I will assist you to accomplish the design, on which you and John are jointly resolved.'

She gave him her hand, and thanked him with a cordial, happy face.

'Harriet,' he said, detaining it in his. 'To speak to you of the worth of any sacrifice that you can make now—above all, of any sacrifice of mere money—would be idle and presumptuous. To put before you any appeal to reconsider your purpose or to set narrow limits to it, would be, I feel, not less so. I have no right to mar the great end of a great history, by any obtrusion of my own weak self. I have every right to bend my head before what you confide to me, satisfied that it comes from a higher and better source of inspiration than my poor worldly knowledge. I will say only this: I am your faithful steward; and I would rather be so, and your chosen friend, than I would be anybody in the world, except yourself.'

She thanked him again, cordially, and wished him good-night. 'Are you going home?' he said. 'Let me go with you.'

'Not to-night. I am not going home now; I have a visit to make alone. Will you come to-morrow?'

'Well, well,' said he, 'I'll come to-morrow. In the meantime, I'll think of this, and how we can best proceed. And perhaps I'll think of it, dear Harriet, and—and—think of me a little in connexion with it.'

He handed her down to a coach she had in waiting at the door; and if his landlady had not been deaf, she would have heard him muttering as he went back upstairs, when the coach had driven off, that we were creatures of habit, and it was a sorrowful habit to be an old bachelor.

The violoncello lying on the sofa between the two chairs, he took it up, without putting away the vacant chair, and sat droning on it, and slowly shaking his head at the vacant chair, for a long, long time. The expression he communicated to the instrument at first, though monstrously pathetic and bland, was nothing to the expression he communicated to his own face, and bestowed upon the empty chair: which was so sincere, that he was obliged to have recourse to Captain Cuttle's remedy more than once, and to rub his face with his sleeve. By degrees, however, the violoncello, in unison with his own frame of mind, glided melodiously into the Harmonious Blacksmith, which he played over and over again, until his ruddy and serene face gleamed like true metal on the anvil of a veritable blacksmith. In fine, the violoncello and the empty chair were the companions of his bachelorhood until nearly midnight; and when he took his supper, the violoncello set up on end in the sofa corner, big with the latent harmony of a whole foundry full of harmonious blacksmiths, seemed to ogle the empty chair out of its crooked eyes, with unutterable intelligence.

When Harriet left the house, the driver of her hired coach, taking a course that was evidently no new one to him, went in and out by bye-ways, through that part of the suburbs, until he arrived at some open ground, where there were a few quiet little old houses standing among gardens. At the garden- gate of one of these he stopped, and Harriet alighted.

Her gentle ringing at the bell was responded to by a dolorous-looking woman, of light complexion, with raised eyebrows, and head drooping on one side, who curtseyed at sight of her, and conducted her across the garden to the house.

'How is your patient, nurse, to-night?' said Harriet.

'In a poor way, Miss, I am afraid. Oh how she do remind me, sometimes, of my Uncle's Betsey Jane!' returned the woman of the light complexion, in a sort of doleful rapture.

'In what respect?' asked Harriet.

'Miss, in all respects,' replied the other, 'except that she's grown up, and Betsey Jane, when at death's door, was but a child.'

'But you have told me she recovered,' observed Harriet mildly; 'so there is the more reason for hope, Mrs Wickam.'

'Ah, Miss, hope is an excellent thing for such as has the spirits to bear it!' said Mrs Wickam, shaking her head. 'My own spirits is not equal to it, but I don't owe it any grudge. I envys them that is so blest!'

'You should try to be more cheerful,' remarked Harriet.

'Thank you, Miss, I'm sure,' said Mrs Wickam grimly. 'If I was so inclined, the loneliness of this situation—you'll excuse my speaking so free—would put it out of my power, in four and twenty hours; but I ain't at all. I'd rather not. The little spirits that I ever had, I was bereaved of at Brighton some few years ago, and I think I feel myself the better for it.'

In truth, this was the very Mrs Wickam who had superseded Mrs Richards as the nurse of little Paul, and who considered herself to have gained the loss in question, under the roof of the amiable Pipchin. The excellent and thoughtful old system, hallowed by long prescription, which has usually picked out from the rest of mankind the most dreary and uncomfortable people that could possibly be laid hold of, to act as instructors of youth, finger- posts to the virtues, matrons, monitors, attendants on sick beds, and the like, had established Mrs Wickam in very good business as a nurse, and had led to her serious qualities being particularly commended by an admiring and numerous connexion.

Mrs Wickam, with her eyebrows elevated, and her head on one side, lighted the way upstairs to a clean, neat chamber, opening on another chamber dimly lighted, where there was a bed. In the first room, an old woman sat mechanically staring out at the open window, on the darkness. In the second, stretched upon the bed, lay the shadow of a figure that had spurned the wind and rain, one wintry night; hardly to be recognised now, but by the long black hair that showed so very black against the colourless face, and all the white things about it.

Oh, the strong eyes, and the weak frame! The eyes that turned so eagerly and brightly to the door when Harriet came in; the feeble head that could not raise itself, and moved so slowly round upon its pillow!

'Alice!' said the visitor's mild voice, 'am I late to-night?'

'You always seem late, but are always early.'

Harriet had sat down by the bedside now, and put her hand upon the thin hand lying there.

'You are better?'

Mrs Wickam, standing at the foot of the bed, like a disconsolate spectre, most decidedly and forcibly shook her head to negative this position.

'It matters very little!' said Alice, with a faint smile. 'Better or worse to-day, is but a day's difference—perhaps not so much.'

Mrs Wickam, as a serious character, expressed her approval with a groan; and having made some cold dabs at the bottom of the bedclothes, as feeling for the patient's feet and expecting to find them stony; went clinking among the medicine bottles on the table, as who should say, 'while we are here, let us repeat the mixture as before.'

'No,' said Alice, whispering to her visitor, 'evil courses, and remorse, travel, want, and weather, storm within, and storm without, have worn my life away. It will not last much longer.

She drew the hand up as she spoke, and laid her face against it.

'I lie here, sometimes, thinking I should like to live until I had had a little time to show you how grateful I could be! It is a weakness, and soon passes. Better for you as it is. Better for me!'

How different her hold upon the hand, from what it had been when she took it by the fireside on the bleak winter evening! Scorn, rage, defiance, recklessness, look here! This is the end.

Mrs Wickam having clinked sufficiently among the bottles, now produced the mixture. Mrs Wickam looked hard at her patient in the act of drinking, screwed her mouth up tight, her eyebrows also, and shook her head, expressing that tortures shouldn't make her say it was a hopeless case. Mrs Wickam then sprinkled a little cooling-stuff about the room, with the air of a female grave-digger, who was strewing ashes on ashes, dust on dust—for she was a serious character—and withdrew to partake of certain funeral baked meats downstairs.

'How long is it,' asked Alice, 'since I went to you and told you what I had done, and when you were advised it was too late for anyone to follow?'

'It is a year and more,' said Harriet.

'A year and more,' said Alice, thoughtfully intent upon her face. 'Months upon months since you brought me here!'

Harriet answered 'Yes.'

'Brought me here, by force of gentleness and kindness. Me!' said Alice, shrinking with her face behind her hand, 'and made me human by woman's looks and words, and angel's deeds!'

Harriet bending over her, composed and soothed her. By and bye, Alice lying as before, with the hand against her face, asked to have her mother called.

Harriet called to her more than once, but the old woman was so absorbed looking out at the open window on the darkness, that she did not hear. It was not until Harriet went to her and touched her, that she rose up, and came.

'Mother,' said Alice, taking the hand again, and fixing her lustrous eyes lovingly upon her visitor, while she merely addressed a motion of her finger to the old woman, 'tell her what you know.'

'To-night, my deary?'

'Ay, mother,' answered Alice, faintly and solemnly, 'to-night!'

The old woman, whose wits appeared disorderly by alarm, remorse, or grief, came creeping along the side of the bed, opposite to that on which Harriet sat; and kneeling down, so as to bring her withered face upon a level with the coverlet, and stretching out her hand, so as to touch her daughter's arm, began:

'My handsome gal—'

Heaven, what a cry was that, with which she stopped there, gazing at the poor form lying on the bed!

'Changed, long ago, mother! Withered, long ago,' said Alice, without looking at her. 'Don't grieve for that now.

'My daughter,' faltered the old woman, 'my gal who'll soon get better, and shame 'em all with her good looks.'

Alice smiled mournfully at Harriet, and fondled her hand a little closer, but said nothing.

'Who'll soon get better, I say,' repeated the old woman, menacing the vacant air with her shrivelled fist, 'and who'll shame 'em all with her good looks—she will. I say she will! she shall!'—as if she were in passionate contention with some unseen opponent at the bedside, who contradicted her — 'my daughter has been turned away from, and cast out, but she could boast relationship to proud folks too, if she chose. Ah! To proud folks! There's relationship without your clergy and your wedding rings—they may make it, but they can't break it—and my daughter's well related. Show me Mrs Dombey, and I'll show you my Alice's first cousin.'

Harriet glanced from the old woman to the lustrous eyes intent upon her face, and derived corroboration from them.

'What!' cried the old woman, her nodding head bridling with a ghastly vanity. 'Though I am old and ugly now,—much older by life and habit than years though,—I was once as young as any. Ah! as pretty too, as many! I was a fresh country wench in my time, darling,' stretching out her arm to Harriet, across the bed, 'and looked it, too. Down in my country, Mrs Dombey's father and his brother were the gayest gentlemen and the best-liked that came a visiting from London—they have long been dead, though! Lord, Lord, this long while! The brother, who was my Ally's father, longest of the two.'

She raised her head a little, and peered at her daughter's face; as if from the remembrance of her own youth, she had flown to the remembrance of her child's. Then, suddenly, she laid her face down on the bed, and shut her head up in her hands and arms.

'They were as like,' said the old woman, without looking up, as you could see two brothers, so near an age—there wasn't much more than a year between them, as I recollect—and if you could have seen my gal, as I have seen her once, side by side with the other's daughter, you'd have seen, for all the difference of dress and life, that they were like each other. Oh! is the likeness gone, and is it my gal—only my gal—that's to change so!'

'We shall all change, mother, in our turn,' said Alice.

'Turn!' cried the old woman, 'but why not hers as soon as my gal's! The mother must have changed—she looked as old as me, and full as wrinkled through her paint—but she was handsome. What have I done, I, what have I done worse than her, that only my gal is to lie there fading!' With another of those wild cries, she went running out into the room from which she had come; but immediately, in her uncertain mood, returned, and creeping up to Harriet, said:

'That's what Alice bade me tell you, deary. That's all. I found it out when I began to ask who she was, and all about her, away in Warwickshire there, one summer-time. Such relations was no good to me, then. They wouldn't have owned me, and had nothing to give me. I should have asked 'em, maybe, for a little money, afterwards, if it hadn't been for my Alice; she'd a'most have killed me, if I had, I think She was as proud as t'other in her way,' said the old woman, touching the face of her daughter fearfully, and withdrawing her hand, 'for all she's so quiet now; but she'll shame 'em with her good looks yet. Ha, ha! She'll shame 'em, will my handsome daughter!'

Her laugh, as she retreated, was worse than her cry; worse than the burst of imbecile lamentation in which it ended; worse than the doting air with which she sat down in her old seat, and stared out at the darkness.

The eyes of Alice had all this time been fixed on Harriet, whose hand she had never released. She said now:

'I have felt, lying here, that I should like you to know this. It might explain, I have thought, something that used to help to harden me. I had heard so much, in my wrongdoing, of my neglected duty, that I took up with the belief that duty had not been done to me, and that as the seed was sown, the harvest grew. I somehow made it out that when ladies had bad homes and mothers, they went wrong in their way, too; but that their way was not so foul a one as mine, and they had need to bless God for it.' That is all past. It is like a dream, now, which I cannot quite remember or understand. It has been more and more like a dream, every day, since you began to sit here, and to read to me. I only tell it you, as I can recollect it. Will you read to me a little more?'

Harriet was withdrawing her hand to open the book, when Alice detained it for a moment.

'You will not forget my mother? I forgive her, if I have any cause. I know that she forgives me, and is sorry in her heart. You will not forget her?'

'Never, Alice!'

'A moment yet. Lay your head so, dear, that as you read I may see the words in your kind face.'

Harriet complied and read—read the eternal book for all the weary, and the heavy-laden; for all the wretched, fallen, and neglected of this earth—read the blessed history, in which the blind lame palsied beggar, the criminal, the woman stained with shame, the shunned of all our dainty clay, has each a portion, that no human pride, indifference, or sophistry, through all the ages that this world shall last, can take away, or by the thousandth atom of a grain reduce—read the ministry of Him who, through the round of human life, and all its hopes and griefs, from birth to death, from infancy to age, had sweet compassion for, and interest in, its every scene and stage, its every suffering and sorrow.

'I shall come,' said Harriet, when she shut the book, 'very early in the morning.'

The lustrous eyes, yet fixed upon her face, closed for a moment, then opened; and Alice kissed and blest her.

The same eyes followed her to the door; and in their light, and on the tranquil face, there was a smile when it was closed.

They never turned away. She laid her hand upon her breast, murmuring the sacred name that had been read to her; and life passed from her face, like light removed.

Nothing lay there, any longer, but the ruin of the mortal house on which the rain had beaten, and the black hair that had fluttered in the wintry wind.

CHAPTER 59. Retribution

Changes have come again upon the great house in the long dull street, once the scene of Florence's childhood and loneliness. It is a great house still, proof against wind and weather, without breaches in the roof, or shattered windows, or dilapidated walls; but it is a ruin none the less, and the rats fly from it.

Mr Towlinson and company are, at first, incredulous in respect of the shapeless rumours that they hear. Cook says our people's credit ain't so easy shook as that comes to, thank God; and Mr Towlinson expects to hear it reported next, that the Bank of England's a-going to break, or the jewels in the Tower to be sold up. But, next come the Gazette, and Mr Perch; and Mr Perch brings Mrs Perch to talk it over in the kitchen, and to spend a pleasant evening.

As soon as there is no doubt about it, Mr Towlinson's main anxiety is that the failure should be a good round one—not less than a hundred thousand pound. Mr Perch don't think himself that a hundred thousand pound will nearly cover it. The women, led by Mrs Perch and Cook, often repeat 'a hun-dred thou-sand pound!' with awful satisfaction—as if handling the words were like handling the money; and the housemaid, who has her eye on Mr Towlinson, wishes she had only a hundredth part of the sum to bestow on the man of her choice. Mr Towlinson, still mindful of his old wrong, opines that a foreigner would hardly know what to do with so much money, unless he spent it on his whiskers; which bitter sarcasm causes the housemaid to withdraw in tears.

But not to remain long absent; for Cook, who has the reputation of being extremely good-hearted, says, whatever they do, let 'em stand by one another now, Towlinson, for there's no telling how soon they may be divided. They have been in that house (says Cook) through a funeral, a wedding, and a running-away; and let it not be said that they couldn't agree among themselves at such a time as the present. Mrs Perch is immensely affected by this moving address, and openly remarks that Cook is an angel. Mr Towlinson replies to Cook, far be it from him to stand in the way of that good feeling which he could wish to see; and adjourning in quest of the housemaid, and presently returning with that young lady on his arm, informs the kitchen that foreigners is only his fun, and that him and Anne have now resolved to take one another for better for worse, and to settle in Oxford Market in the general greengrocery and herb and leech line, where your kind favours is particular requested. This announcement is received with acclamation; and Mrs Perch, projecting her soul into futurity, says, 'girls,' in Cook's ear, in a solemn whisper.

Misfortune in the family without feasting, in these lower regions, couldn't be. Therefore Cook tosses up a hot dish or two for supper, and Mr Towlinson compounds a lobster salad to be devoted to the same hospitable purpose. Even Mrs Pipchin, agitated by the occasion, rings her bell, and sends down word that she requests to have that little bit of sweetbread that was left, warmed up for her supper, and sent to her on a tray with about a quarter of a tumbler-full of mulled sherry; for she feels poorly.

There is a little talk about Mr Dombey, but very little. It is chiefly speculation as to how long he has known that this was going to happen. Cook says shrewdly, 'Oh a long time, bless you! Take your oath of that.' And reference being made to Mr Perch, he confirms her view of the case. Somebody wonders what he'll do, and whether he'll go out in any situation. Mr Towlinson thinks not, and hints at a refuge in one of them genteel almshouses of the better kind. 'Ah, where he'll have his little garden, you know,' says Cook plaintively, 'and bring up sweet peas in the spring.' 'Exactly so,' says Mr Towlinson, 'and be one of the Brethren of something or another.' 'We are all brethren,' says Mrs Perch, in a pause of her drink. 'Except the sisters,' says Mr Perch. 'How are the mighty fallen!' remarks Cook. 'Pride shall have a fall, and it always was and will be so!' observes the housemaid.

It is wonderful how good they feel, in making these reflections; and what a Christian unanimity they are sensible of, in bearing the common shock with resignation. There is only one interruption to this excellent state of mind, which is occasioned by a young kitchen-maid of inferior rank—in black stockings—who, having sat with her mouth open for a long time, unexpectedly discharges from it words to this effect, 'Suppose the wages shouldn't be paid!' The company sit for a moment speechless; but Cook recovering first, turns upon the young woman, and requests to know how she dares insult the family, whose bread she eats, by such a dishonest supposition, and whether she thinks that anybody, with a scrap of honour left, could deprive poor servants of their pittance? 'Because if that is your religious feelings, Mary Daws,' says Cook warmly, 'I don't know where you mean to go to.

Mr Towlinson don't know either; nor anybody; and the young kitchen-maid, appearing not to know exactly, herself, and scouted by the general voice, is covered with confusion, as with a garment.

After a few days, strange people begin to call at the house, and to make appointments with one another in the dining-room, as if they lived there. Especially, there is a gentleman, of a Mosaic Arabian cast of countenance, with a very massive watch-guard, who whistles in the drawing-room, and, while he is waiting for the other gentleman, who always has pen and ink in his pocket, asks Mr Towlinson (by the easy name of 'Old Cock,') if he happens to know what the figure of them crimson and gold hangings might have been, when new bought. The callers and appointments in the dining-room become more numerous every day, and every gentleman seems to have pen and ink in his pocket, and to have some occasion to use it. At last it is said that there is going to be a Sale; and then more people arrive, with pen and ink in their pockets, commanding a detachment of men with carpet caps, who immediately begin to pull up the carpets, and knock the furniture about, and to print off thousands of impressions of their shoes upon the hall and staircase.

The council downstairs are in full conclave all this time, and, having nothing to do, perform perfect feats of eating. At length, they are one day summoned in a body to Mrs Pipchin's room, and thus addressed by the fair Peruvian:

'Your master's in difficulties,' says Mrs Pipchin, tartly. 'You know that, I suppose?'

Mr Towlinson, as spokesman, admits a general knowledge of the fact.

'And you're all on the look-out for yourselves, I warrant you, says Mrs Pipchin, shaking her head at them.

A shrill voice from the rear exclaims, 'No more than yourself!'

'That's your opinion, Mrs Impudence, is it?' says the ireful Pipchin, looking with a fiery eye over the intermediate heads.

'Yes, Mrs Pipchin, it is,' replies Cook, advancing. 'And what then, pray?'

'Why, then you may go as soon as you like,' says Mrs Pipchin. 'The sooner the better; and I hope I shall never see your face again.'

With this the doughty Pipchin produces a canvas bag; and tells her wages out to that day, and a month beyond it; and clutches the money tight, until a receipt for the same is duly signed, to the last upstroke; when she grudgingly lets it go. This form of proceeding Mrs Pipchin repeats with every member of the household, until all are paid.

'Now those that choose, can go about their business,' says Mrs Pipchin, 'and those that choose can stay here on board wages for a week or so, and make themselves useful. Except,' says the inflammable Pipchin, 'that slut of a cook, who'll go immediately.'

'That,' says Cook, 'she certainly will! I wish you good day, Mrs Pipchin, and sincerely wish I could compliment you on the sweetness of your appearance!'

'Get along with you,' says Mrs Pipchin, stamping her foot.

Cook sails off with an air of beneficent dignity, highly exasperating to Mrs Pipchin, and is shortly joined below stairs by the rest of the confederation.

Mr Towlinson then says that, in the first place, he would beg to propose a little snack of something to eat; and over that snack would desire to offer a suggestion which he thinks will meet the position in which they find themselves. The refreshment being produced, and very heartily partaken of, Mr Towlinson's suggestion is, in effect, that Cook is going, and that if we are not true to ourselves, nobody will be true to us. That they have lived in that house a long time, and exerted themselves very much to be sociable together. (At this, Cook says, with emotion, 'Hear, hear!' and Mrs Perch, who is there again, and full to the throat, sheds tears.) And that he thinks, at the present time, the feeling ought to be 'Go one, go all!' The housemaid is much affected by this generous sentiment, and warmly seconds it. Cook says she feels it's right, and only hopes it's not done as a compliment to her, but from a sense of duty. Mr Towlinson replies, from a sense of duty; and that now he is driven to express his opinions, he will openly say, that he does not think it over-respectable to remain in a house where Sales and such-like are carrying forwards. The housemaid is sure of it; and relates, in confirmation, that a strange man, in a carpet cap, offered, this very morning, to kiss her on the stairs. Hereupon, Mr Towlinson is starting from his chair, to seek and 'smash' the offender; when he is laid hold on by the ladies, who beseech him to calm himself, and to reflect that it is easier and wiser to leave the scene of such indecencies at once. Mrs Perch, presenting the case in a new light, even shows that delicacy towards Mr Dombey, shut up in his own rooms, imperatively demands precipitate retreat. 'For what,' says the good woman, 'must his feelings be, if he was to come upon any of the poor servants that he once deceived into thinking him immensely rich!' Cook is so struck by this moral consideration, that Mrs Perch improves it with several pious axioms, original and selected. It becomes a clear case that they must all go. Boxes are packed, cabs fetched, and at dusk that evening there is not one member of the party left.

The house stands, large and weather-proof, in the long dull street; but it is a ruin, and the rats fly from it.

The men in the carpet caps go on tumbling the furniture about; and the gentlemen with the pens and ink make out inventories of it, and sit upon pieces of furniture never made to be sat upon, and eat bread and cheese from the public-house on other pieces of furniture never made to be eaten on, and seem to have a delight in appropriating precious articles to strange uses. Chaotic combinations of furniture also take place. Mattresses and bedding appear in the dining-room; the glass and china get into the conservatory; the great dinner service is set out in heaps on the long divan in the large drawing-room; and the stair-wires, made into fasces, decorate the marble chimneypieces. Finally, a rug, with a printed bill upon it, is hung out from the balcony; and a similar appendage graces either side of the hall door.

Then, all day long, there is a retinue of mouldy gigs and chaise-carts in the street; and herds of shabby vampires, Jew and Christian, over-run the house, sounding the plate-glass minors with their knuckles, striking discordant octaves on the Grand Piano, drawing wet forefingers over the pictures, breathing on the blades of the best dinner-knives, punching the squabs of chairs and sofas with their dirty fists, touzling the feather beds, opening and shutting all the drawers, balancing the silver spoons and forks, looking into the very threads of the drapery and linen, and disparaging everything. There is not a secret place in the whole house. Fluffy and snuffy strangers stare into the kitchen-range as curiously as into the attic clothes-press. Stout men with napless hats on, look out of the bedroom windows, and cut jokes with friends in the street. Quiet, calculating spirits withdraw into the dressing-rooms with catalogues, and make marginal notes thereon, with stumps of pencils. Two brokers invade the very fire-escape, and take a panoramic survey of the neighbourhood from the top of the house. The swarm and buzz, and going up and down, endure for days. The Capital Modern Household Furniture, &c., is on view.

Then there is a palisade of tables made in the best drawing-room; and on the capital, french-polished, extending, telescopic range of Spanish mahogany dining-tables with turned legs, the pulpit of the Auctioneer is erected; and the herds of shabby vampires, Jew and Christian, the strangers fluffy and snuffy, and the stout men with the napless hats, congregate about it and sit upon everything within reach, mantel-pieces included, and begin to bid. Hot, humming, and dusty are the rooms all day; and—high above the heat, hum, and dust—the head and shoulders, voice and hammer, of the Auctioneer, are ever at work. The men in the carpet caps get flustered and vicious with tumbling the Lots about, and still the Lots are going, going, gone; still coming on. Sometimes there is joking and a general roar. This lasts all day and three days following. The Capital Modern Household Furniture, &c., is on sale.

Then the mouldy gigs and chaise-carts reappear; and with them come spring-vans and waggons, and an army of porters with knots. All day long, the men with carpet caps are screwing at screw-drivers and bed-winches, or staggering by the dozen together on the staircase under heavy burdens, or upheaving perfect rocks of Spanish mahogany, best rose-wood, or plate-glass, into the gigs and chaise-carts, vans and waggons. All sorts of vehicles of burden are in attendance, from a tilted waggon to a wheelbarrow. Poor Paul's little bedstead is carried off in a donkey-tandem. For nearly a whole week, the Capital Modern Household Furniture, & c., is in course of removal.

At last it is all gone. Nothing is left about the house but scattered leaves of catalogues, littered scraps of straw and hay, and a battery of pewter pots behind the hall-door. The men with the carpet-caps gather up their screw-drivers and bed-winches into bags, shoulder them, and walk off. One of the pen-and-ink gentlemen goes over the house as a last attention; sticking up bills in the windows respecting the lease of this desirable family mansion, and shutting the shutters. At length he follows the men with the carpet caps. None of the invaders remain. The house is a ruin, and the rats fly from it.

Mrs Pipchin's apartments, together with those locked rooms on the ground-floor where the window-blinds are drawn down close, have been spared the general devastation. Mrs Pipchin has remained austere and stony during the proceedings, in her own room; or has occasionally looked in at the sale to see what the goods are fetching, and to bid for one particular easy chair. Mrs Pipchin has been the highest bidder for the easy chair, and sits upon her property when Mrs Chick comes to see her.

'How is my brother, Mrs Pipchin?' says Mrs Chick.

'I don't know any more than the deuce,' says Mrs Pipchin. 'He never does me the honour to speak to me. He has his meat and drink put in the next room to his own; and what he takes, he comes out and takes when there's nobody there. It's no use asking me. I know no more about him than the man in the south who burnt his mouth by eating cold plum porridge.'

This the acrimonious Pipchin says with a flounce.

'But good gracious me!' cries Mrs Chick blandly. 'How long is this to last! If my brother will not make an effort, Mrs Pipchin, what is to become of him? I am sure I should have thought he had seen enough of the consequences of not making an effort, by this time, to be warned against that fatal error.'

'Hoity toity!' says Mrs Pipchin, rubbing her nose. 'There's a great fuss, I think, about it. It ain't so wonderful a case. People have had misfortunes before now, and been obliged to part with their furniture. I'm sure I have!'

'My brother,' pursues Mrs Chick profoundly, 'is so peculiar—so strange a man. He is the most peculiar man I ever saw. Would anyone believe that when he received news of the marriage and emigration of that unnatural child—it's a comfort to me, now, to remember that I always said there was something extraordinary about that child: but nobody minds me—would anybody believe, I say, that he should then turn round upon me and say he had supposed, from my manner, that she had come to my house? Why, my gracious! And would anybody believe that when I merely say to him, "Paul, I may be very foolish, and I have no doubt I am, but I cannot understand how your affairs can have got into this state," he should actually fly at me, and request that I will come to see him no more until he asks me! Why, my goodness!'

'Ah'!' says Mrs Pipchin. 'It's a pity he hadn't a little more to do with mines. They'd have tried his temper for him.'

'And what,' resumes Mrs Chick, quite regardless of Mrs Pipchin's observations, 'is it to end in? That's what I want to know. What does my brother mean to do? He must do something. It's of no use remaining shut up in his own rooms. Business won't come to him. No. He must go to it. Then why don't he go? He knows where to go, I suppose, having been a man of business all his life. Very good. Then why not go there?'

Mrs Chick, after forging this powerful chain of reasoning, remains silent for a minute to admire it.

'Besides,' says the discreet lady, with an argumentative air, 'who ever heard of such obstinacy as his staying shut up here through all these dreadful disagreeables? It's not as if there was no place for him to go to. Of course he could have come to our house. He knows he is at home there, I suppose? Mr Chick has perfectly bored about it, and I said with my own lips, "Why surely, Paul, you don't imagine that because your affairs have got into this state, you are the less at home to such near relatives as ourselves? You don't imagine that we are like the rest of the world?" But no; here he stays all through, and here he is. Why, good gracious me, suppose the house was to be let! What would he do then? He couldn't remain here then. If he attempted to do so, there would be an ejectment, an action for Doe, and all sorts of things; and then he must go. Then why not go at first instead of at last? And that brings me back to what I said just now, and I naturally ask what is to be the end of it?'

'I know what's to be the end of it, as far as I am concerned,' replies Mrs Pipchin, 'and that's enough for me. I'm going to take myself off in a jiffy.'

'In a which, Mrs Pipchin,' says Mrs Chick.

'In a jiffy,' retorts Mrs Pipchin sharply.

'Ah, well! really I can't blame you, Mrs Pipchin,' says Mrs Chick, with frankness.

'It would be pretty much the same to me, if you could,' replies the sardonic Pipchin. 'At any rate I'm going. I can't stop here. I should be dead in a week. I had to cook my own pork chop yesterday, and I'm not used to it. My constitution will be giving way next. Besides, I had a very fair connexion at Brighton when I came here—little Pankey's folks alone were worth a good eighty pounds a-year to me—and I can't afford to throw it away. I've written to my niece, and she expects me by this time.'

'Have you spoken to my brother?' inquires Mrs Chick

'Oh, yes, it's very easy to say speak to him,' retorts Mrs Pipchin. 'How is it done? I called out to him yesterday, that I was no use here, and that he had better let me send for Mrs Richards. He grunted something or other that meant yes, and I sent. Grunt indeed! If he had been Mr Pipchin, he'd have had some reason to grunt. Yah! I've no patience with it!'

Here this exemplary female, who has pumped up so much fortitude and virtue from the depths of the Peruvian mines, rises from her cushioned property to see Mrs Chick to the door. Mrs Chick, deploring to the last the peculiar character of her brother, noiselessly retires, much occupied with her own sagacity and clearness of head.

In the dusk of the evening Mr Toodle, being off duty, arrives with Polly and a box, and leaves them, with a sounding kiss, in the hall of the empty house, the retired character of which affects Mr Toodle's spirits strongly.

'I tell you what, Polly, me dear,' says Mr Toodle, 'being now an ingine-driver, and well to do in the world, I shouldn't allow of your coming here, to be made dull-like, if it warn't for favours past. But favours past, Polly, is never to be forgot. To them which is in adversity, besides, your face is a cord'l. So let's have another kiss on it, my dear. You wish no better than to do a right act, I know; and my views is, that it's right and dutiful to do this. Good-night, Polly!'

Mrs Pipchin by this time looms dark in her black bombazeen skirts, black bonnet, and shawl; and has her personal property packed up; and has her chair (late a favourite chair of Mr Dombey's and the dead bargain of the sale) ready near the street door; and is only waiting for a fly-van, going to-night to Brighton on private service, which is to call for her, by private contract, and convey her home.

Presently it comes. Mrs Pipchin's wardrobe being handed in and stowed away, Mrs Pipchin's chair is next handed in, and placed in a convenient corner among certain trusses of hay; it being the intention of the amiable woman to occupy the chair during her journey. Mrs Pipchin herself is next handed in, and grimly takes her seat. There is a snaky gleam in her hard grey eye, as of anticipated rounds of buttered toast, relays of hot chops, worryings and quellings of young children, sharp snappings at poor Berry, and all the other delights of her Ogress's castle. Mrs Pipchin almost laughs as the fly-van drives off, and she composes her black bombazeen skirts, and settles herself among the cushions of her easy chair.

The house is such a ruin that the rats have fled, and there is not one left.

But Polly, though alone in the deserted mansion—for there is no companionship in the shut-up rooms in which its late master hides his head—is not alone long. It is night; and she is sitting at work in the housekeeper's room, trying to forget what a lonely house it is, and what a history belongs to it; when there is a knock at the hall door, as loud sounding as any knock can be, striking into such an empty place. Opening it, she returns across the echoing hall, accompanied by a female figure in a close black bonnet. It is Miss Tox, and Miss Tox's eyes are red.

'Oh, Polly,' says Miss Tox, 'when I looked in to have a little lesson with the children just now, I got the message that you left for me; and as soon as I could recover my spirits at all, I came on after you. Is there no one here but you?'

'Ah! not a soul,' says Polly.

'Have you seen him?' whispers Miss Tox.

'Bless you,' returns Polly, 'no; he has not been seen this many a day. They tell me he never leaves his room.'

'Is he said to be ill?' inquires Miss Tox.

'No, Ma'am, not that I know of,' returns Polly, 'except in his mind. He must be very bad there, poor gentleman!'

Miss Tox's sympathy is such that she can scarcely speak. She is no chicken, but she has not grown tough with age and celibacy. Her heart is very tender, her compassion very genuine, her homage very real. Beneath the locket with the fishy eye in it, Miss Tox bears better qualities than many a less whimsical outside; such qualities as will outlive, by many courses of the sun, the best outsides and brightest husks that fall in the harvest of the great reaper.

It is long before Miss Tox goes away, and before Polly, with a candle flaring on the blank stairs, looks after her, for company, down the street, and feels unwilling to go back into the dreary house, and jar its emptiness with the heavy fastenings of the door, and glide away to bed. But all this Polly does; and in the morning sets in one of those darkened rooms such matters as she has been advised to prepare, and then retires and enters them no more until next morning at the same hour. There are bells there, but they never ring; and though she can sometimes hear a footfall going to and fro, it never comes out.

Miss Tox returns early in the day. It then begins to be Miss Tox's occupation to prepare little dainties—or what are such to her—to be carried into these rooms next morning. She derives so much satisfaction from the pursuit, that she enters on it regularly from that time; and brings daily in her little basket, various choice condiments selected from the scanty stores of the deceased owner of the powdered head and pigtail. She likewise brings, in sheets of curl-paper, morsels of cold meats, tongues of sheep, halves of fowls, for her own dinner; and sharing these collations with Polly, passes the greater part of her time in the ruined house that the rats have fled from: hiding, in a fright at every sound, stealing in and out like a criminal; only desiring to be true to the fallen object of her admiration, unknown to him, unknown to all the world but one poor simple woman.

The Major knows it; but no one is the wiser for that, though the Major is much the merrier. The Major, in a fit of curiosity, has charged the Native to watch the house sometimes, and find out what becomes of Dombey. The Native has reported Miss Tox's fidelity, and the Major has nearly choked himself dead with laughter. He is permanently bluer from that hour, and constantly wheezes to himself, his lobster eyes starting out of his head, 'Damme, Sir, the woman's a born idiot!'

And the ruined man. How does he pass the hours, alone?

'Let him remember it in that room, years to come!' He did remember it. It was heavy on his mind now; heavier than all the rest.

'Let him remember it in that room, years to come! The rain that falls upon the roof, the wind that mourns outside the door, may have foreknowledge in their melancholy sound. Let him remember it in that room, years to come!'

He did remember it. In the miserable night he thought of it; in the dreary day, the wretched dawn, the ghostly, memory-haunted twilight. He did remember it. In agony, in sorrow, in remorse, in despair! 'Papa! Papa! Speak to me, dear Papa!' He heard the words again, and saw the face. He saw it fall upon the trembling hands, and heard the one prolonged low cry go upward.

He was fallen, never to be raised up any more. For the night of his worldly ruin there was no to-morrow's sun; for the stain of his domestic shame there was no purification; nothing, thank Heaven, could bring his dead child back to life. But that which he might have made so different in all the Past—which might have made the Past itself so different, though this he hardly thought of now—that which was his own work, that which he could so easily have wrought into a blessing, and had set himself so steadily for years to form into a curse: that was the sharp grief of his soul.

Oh! He did remember it! The rain that fell upon the roof, the wind that mourned outside the door that night, had had foreknowledge in their melancholy sound. He knew, now, what he had done. He knew, now, that he had called down that upon his head, which bowed it lower than the heaviest stroke of fortune. He knew, now, what it was to be rejected and deserted;

now, when every loving blossom he had withered in his innocent daughter's heart was snowing down in ashes on him.

He thought of her, as she had been that night when he and his bride came home. He thought of her as she had been, in all the home-events of the abandoned house. He thought, now, that of all around him, she alone had never changed. His boy had faded into dust, his proud wife had sunk into a polluted creature, his flatterer and friend had been transformed into the worst of villains, his riches had melted away, the very walls that sheltered him looked on him as a stranger; she alone had turned the same mild gentle look upon him always. Yes, to the latest and the last. She had never changed to him—nor had he ever changed to her—and she was lost.

As, one by one, they fell away before his mind—his baby—hope, his wife, his friend, his fortune—oh how the mist, through which he had seen her, cleared, and showed him her true self! Oh, how much better than this that he had loved her as he had his boy, and lost her as he had his boy, and laid them in their early grave together!

In his pride—for he was proud yet—he let the world go from him freely. As it fell away, he shook it off. Whether he imagined its face as expressing pity for him, or indifference to him, he shunned it alike. It was in the same degree to be avoided, in either aspect. He had no idea of any one companion in his misery, but the one he had driven away. What he would have said to her, or what consolation submitted to receive from her, he never pictured to himself. But he always knew she would have been true to him, if he had suffered her. He always knew she would have loved him better now, than at any other time; he was as certain that it was in her nature, as he was that there was a sky above him; and he sat thinking so, in his loneliness, from hour to hour. Day after day uttered this speech; night after night showed him this knowledge.

It began, beyond all doubt (however slow it advanced for some time), in the receipt of her young husband's letter, and the certainty that she was gone. And yet—so proud he was in his ruin, or so reminiscent of her only as something that might have been his, but was lost beyond redemption—that if he could have heard her voice in an adjoining room, he would not have gone to her. If he could have seen her in the street, and she had done no more than look at him as she had been used to look, he would have passed on with his old cold unforgiving face, and not addressed her, or relaxed it, though his heart should have broken soon afterwards. However turbulent his thoughts, or harsh his anger had been, at first, concerning her marriage, or her husband, that was all past now. He chiefly thought of what might have been, and what was not. What was, was all summed up in this: that she was lost, and he bowed down with sorrow and remorse.

And now he felt that he had had two children born to him in that house, and that between him and the bare wide empty walls there was a tie, mournful, but hard to rend asunder, connected with a double childhood, and a double loss. He had thought to leave the house—knowing he must go, not knowing whither—upon the evening of the day on which this feeling first struck root in his breast; but he resolved to stay another night, and in the night to ramble through the rooms once more.

He came out of his solitude when it was the dead of night, and with a candle in his hand went softly up the stairs. Of all the footmarks there, making them as common as the common street, there was not one, he thought, but had seemed at the time to set itself upon his brain while he had kept close, listening. He looked at their number, and their hurry, and contention—foot treading foot out, and upward track and downward jostling one another—and thought, with absolute dread and wonder, how much he must have suffered during that trial, and what a changed man he had cause to be. He thought, besides, oh was there, somewhere in the world, a light footstep that might have worn out in a moment half those marks!—and bent his head, and wept as he went up.

He almost saw it, going on before. He stopped, looking up towards the skylight; and a figure, childish itself, but carrying a child, and singing as it went, seemed to be there again. Anon, it was the same figure, alone, stopping for an instant, with suspended breath; the bright hair clustering loosely round its tearful face; and looking back at him.

He wandered through the rooms: lately so luxurious; now so bare and dismal and so changed, apparently, even in their shape and size. The press of footsteps was as thick here; and the same consideration of the suffering he had had, perplexed and terrified him. He began to fear that all this intricacy in his brain would drive him mad; and that his thoughts already lost coherence as the footprints did, and were pieced on to one another, with the same trackless involutions, and varieties of indistinct shapes.

He did not so much as know in which of these rooms she had lived, when she was alone. He was glad to leave them, and go wandering higher up. Abundance of associations were here, connected with his false wife, his false friend and servant, his false grounds of pride; but he put them all by now, and only recalled miserably, weakly, fondly, his two children.

Everywhere, the footsteps! They had had no respect for the old room high up, where the little bed had been; he could hardly find a clear space there, to throw himself down, on the floor, against the wall, poor broken man, and let his tears flow as they would. He had shed so many tears here, long ago, that he was less ashamed of his weakness in this place than in any other—perhaps, with that consciousness, had made excuses to himself for coming here. Here, with stooping shoulders, and his chin dropped on his breast, he had come. Here, thrown upon the bare boards, in the dead of night, he wept, alone—a proud man, even then; who, if a kind hand could have been stretched out, or a kind face could have looked in, would have risen up, and turned away, and gone down to his cell.

When the day broke he was shut up in his rooms again. He had meant to go away to-day, but clung to this tie in the house as the last and only thing left to him. He would go to-morrow. To-morrow came. He would go to-morrow. Every night, within the knowledge of no human creature, he came forth, and wandered through the despoiled house like a ghost. Many a morning when the day broke, his altered face, drooping behind the closed blind in his window, imperfectly transparent to the light as yet, pondered on the loss of his two children. It was one child no more. He reunited them in his thoughts, and they were never asunder. Oh, that he could have united them in his past love, and in death, and that one had not been so much worse than dead!

Strong mental agitation and disturbance was no novelty to him, even before his late sufferings. It never is, to obstinate and sullen natures; for they struggle hard to be such. Ground, long undermined, will often fall down in a moment; what was undermined here in so many ways, weakened, and crumbled, little by little, more and more, as the hand moved on the dial.

At last he began to think he need not go at all. He might yet give up what his creditors had spared him (that they had not spared him more, was his own act), and only sever the tie between him and the ruined house, by severing that other link—

It was then that his footfall was audible in the late housekeeper's room, as he walked to and fro; but not audible in its true meaning, or it would have had an appalling sound.

The world was very busy and restless about him. He became aware of that again. It was whispering and babbling. It was never quiet. This, and the intricacy and complication of the footsteps, harassed him to death. Objects began to take a bleared and russet colour in his eyes. Dombey and Son was no more—his children no more. This must be thought of, well, to-morrow.

He thought of it to-morrow; and sitting thinking in his chair, saw in the glass, from time to time, this picture:

A spectral, haggard, wasted likeness of himself, brooded and brooded over the empty fireplace. Now it lifted up its head, examining the lines and hollows in its face; now hung it down again, and brooded afresh. Now it rose and walked about; now passed into the next room, and came back with something from the dressing-table in its breast. Now, it was looking at the bottom of the door, and thinking.

Hush! what? It was thinking that if blood were to trickle that way, and to leak out into the hall, it must be a long time going so far. It would move so stealthily and slowly, creeping on, with here a lazy little pool, and there a start, and then another little pool, that a desperately wounded man could only be discovered through its means, either dead or dying. When it had thought of this a long while, it got up again, and walked to and fro with its hand in its breast. He glanced at it occasionally, very curious to watch its motions, and he marked how wicked and murderous that hand looked.

Now it was thinking again! What was it thinking?

Whether they would tread in the blood when it crept so far, and carry it about the house among those many prints of feet, or even out into the street.

It sat down, with its eyes upon the empty fireplace, and as it lost itself in thought there shone into the room a gleam of light; a ray of sun. It was quite unmindful, and sat thinking. Suddenly it rose, with a terrible face, and that guilty hand grasping what was in its breast. Then it was arrested by a cry—a wild, loud, piercing, loving, rapturous cry—and he only saw his own reflection in the glass, and at his knees, his daughter!

Yes. His daughter! Look at her! Look here! Down upon the ground, clinging to him, calling to him, folding her hands, praying to him.

'Papa! Dearest Papa! Pardon me, forgive me! I have come back to ask forgiveness on my knees. I never can be happy more, without it!'

Unchanged still. Of all the world, unchanged. Raising the same face to his, as on that miserable night. Asking his forgiveness!

'Dear Papa, oh don't look strangely on me! I never meant to leave you. I never thought of it, before or afterwards. I was frightened when I went away, and could not think. Papa, dear, I am changed. I am penitent. I know my fault. I know my duty better now. Papa, don't cast me off, or I shall die!'

He tottered to his chair. He felt her draw his arms about her neck; he felt her put her own round his; he felt her kisses on his face; he felt her wet cheek laid against his own; he felt—oh, how deeply!—all that he had done.

Upon the breast that he had bruised, against the heart that he had almost broken, she laid his face, now covered with his hands, and said, sobbing:

'Papa, love, I am a mother. I have a child who will soon call Walter by the name by which I call you. When it was born, and when I knew how much I loved it, I knew what I had done in leaving you. Forgive me, dear Papa! oh say God bless me, and my little child!'

He would have said it, if he could. He would have raised his hands and besought her for pardon, but she caught them in her own, and put them down, hurriedly.

'My little child was born at sea, Papa I prayed to God (and so did Walter for me) to spare me, that I might come home. The moment I could land, I came back to you. Never let us be parted any more, Papa. Never let us be parted any more!'

His head, now grey, was encircled by her arm; and he groaned to think that never, never, had it rested so before.

'You will come home with me, Papa, and see my baby. A boy, Papa. His name is Paul. I think—I hope—he's like—'

Her tears stopped her.

'Dear Papa, for the sake of my child, for the sake of the name we have given him, for my sake, pardon Walter. He is so kind and tender to me. I am so happy with him. It was not his fault that we were married. It was mine. I loved him so much.'

She clung closer to him, more endearing and more earnest.

'He is the darling of my heart, Papa I would die for him. He will love and honour you as I will. We will teach our little child to love and honour you; and we will tell him, when he can understand, that you had a son of that name once, and that he died, and you were very sorry; but that he is gone to Heaven, where we all hope to see him when our time for resting comes. Kiss me, Papa, as a promise that you will be reconciled to Walter—

to my dearest husband—to the father of the little child who taught me to come back, Papa Who taught me to come back!'

As she clung closer to him, in another burst of tears, he kissed her on her lips, and, lifting up his eyes, said, 'Oh my God, forgive me, for I need it very much!'

With that he dropped his head again, lamenting over and caressing her, and there was not a sound in all the house for a long, long time; they remaining clasped in one another's arms, in the glorious sunshine that had crept in with Florence.

He dressed himself for going out, with a docile submission to her entreaty; and walking with a feeble gait, and looking back, with a tremble, at the room in which he had been so long shut up, and where he had seen the picture in the glass, passed out with her into the hall. Florence, hardly glancing round her, lest she should remind him freshly of their last parting—for their feet were on the very stones where he had struck her in his madness—and keeping close to him, with her eyes upon his face, and his arm about her, led him out to a coach that was waiting at the door, and carried him away.

Then, Miss Tox and Polly came out of their concealment, and exulted tearfully. And then they packed his clothes, and books, and so forth, with great care; and consigned them in due course to certain persons sent by Florence, in the evening, to fetch them. And then they took a last cup of tea in the lonely house.

'And so Dombey and Son, as I observed upon a certain sad occasion,' said Miss Tox, winding up a host of recollections, 'is indeed a daughter, Polly, after all.'

'And a good one!' exclaimed Polly.

'You are right,' said Miss Tox; 'and it's a credit to you, Polly, that you were always her friend when she was a little child. You were her friend long before I was, Polly,' said Miss Tox; 'and you're a good creature. Robin!'

Miss Tox addressed herself to a bullet-headed young man, who appeared to be in but indifferent circumstances, and in depressed spirits, and who was sitting in a remote corner. Rising, he disclosed to view the form and features of the Grinder.

'Robin,' said Miss Tox, 'I have just observed to your mother, as you may have heard, that she is a good creature.

'And so she is, Miss,' quoth the Grinder, with some feeling.

'Very well, Robin,' said Miss Tox, 'I am glad to hear you say so. Now, Robin, as I am going to give you a trial, at your urgent request, as my domestic, with a view to your restoration to respectability, I will take this impressive occasion of remarking that I hope you will never forget that you have, and have always had, a good mother, and that you will endeavour so to conduct yourself as to be a comfort to her.'

'Upon my soul I will, Miss,' returned the Grinder. 'I have come through a good deal, and my intentions is now as straightfor'ard, Miss, as a cove's—'

'I must get you to break yourself of that word, Robin, if you Please,' interposed Miss Tox, politely.

'If you please, Miss, as a chap's—'

'Thankee, Robin, no,' returned Miss Tox, 'I should prefer individual.'

'As a indiwiddle's,' said the Grinder.

'Much better,' remarked Miss Tox, complacently; 'infinitely more expressive!'

'—can be,' pursued Rob. 'If I hadn't been and got made a Grinder on, Miss and Mother, which was a most unfortunate circumstance for a young co— indiwiddle.'

'Very good indeed,' observed Miss Tox, approvingly.

'—and if I hadn't been led away by birds, and then fallen into a bad service,' said the Grinder, 'I hope I might have done better. But it's never too late for a—'

'Indi—' suggested Miss Tox.

'—widdle,' said the Grinder, 'to mend; and I hope to mend, Miss, with your kind trial; and wishing, Mother, my love to father, and brothers and sisters, and saying of it.'

'I am very glad indeed to hear it,' observed Miss Tox. 'Will you take a little bread and butter, and a cup of tea, before we go, Robin?'

'Thankee, Miss,' returned the Grinder; who immediately began to use his own personal grinders in a most remarkable manner, as if he had been on very short allowance for a considerable period.

Miss Tox, being, in good time, bonneted and shawled, and Polly too, Rob hugged his mother, and followed his new mistress away; so much to the hopeful admiration of Polly, that something in her eyes made luminous rings round the gas-lamps as she looked after him. Polly then put out her light, locked the house-door, delivered the key at an agent's hard by, and went home as fast as she could go; rejoicing in the shrill delight that her unexpected arrival would occasion there. The great house, dumb as to all that had been suffered in it, and the changes it had witnessed, stood frowning like a dark mute on the street; baulking any nearer inquiries with the staring announcement that the lease of this desirable Family Mansion was to be disposed of.

CHAPTER 60. Chiefly Matrimonial

The grand half-yearly festival holden by Doctor and Mrs Blimber, on which occasion they requested the pleasure of the company of every young gentleman pursuing his studies in that genteel establishment, at an early party, when the hour was half-past seven o'clock, and when the object was quadrilles, had duly taken place, about this time; and the young gentlemen, with no unbecoming demonstrations of levity, had betaken themselves, in a state of scholastic repletion, to their own homes. Mr Skettles had repaired abroad, permanently to grace the establishment of his father Sir Barnet Skettles, whose popular manners had obtained him a diplomatic appointment, the honours of which were discharged by himself and Lady Skettles, to the satisfaction even of their own countrymen and countrywomen: which was considered almost miraculous. Mr Tozer, now a young man of lofty stature, in Wellington boots, was so extremely full of antiquity as to be nearly on a par with a genuine ancient Roman in his knowledge of English: a triumph that affected his good parents with the tenderest emotions, and caused the father and mother of Mr Briggs (whose learning, like ill-arranged luggage, was so tightly packed that he couldn't get at anything he wanted) to hide their diminished heads. The fruit laboriously gathered from the tree of knowledge by this latter young gentleman, in fact, had been subjected to so much pressure, that it had become a kind of intellectual Norfolk Biffin, and had nothing of its original form or flavour remaining. Master Bitherstone now, on whom the forcing system had the happier and not uncommon effect of leaving no impression whatever, when the forcing apparatus ceased to work, was in a much more comfortable plight; and being then on shipboard, bound for Bengal, found himself forgetting, with such admirable rapidity, that it was doubtful whether his declensions of noun-substantives would hold out to the end of the voyage.

When Doctor Blimber, in pursuance of the usual course, would have said to the young gentlemen, on the morning of the party, 'Gentlemen, we will resume our studies on the twenty-fifth of next month,' he departed from the usual course, and said, 'Gentlemen, when our friend Cincinnatus retired to his farm, he did not present to the senate any Roman who he sought to nominate as his successor.' But there is a Roman here,' said Doctor Blimber, laying his hand on the shoulder of Mr Feeder, B.A., adolescens imprimis gravis et doctus, gentlemen, whom I, a retiring Cincinnatus, wish to present to my little senate, as their future Dictator. Gentlemen, we will resume our studies on the twenty-fifth of next month, under the auspices of Mr Feeder, B.A.' At this (which Doctor Blimber had previously called upon all the parents, and urbanely explained), the young gentlemen cheered; and Mr Tozer, on behalf of the rest, instantly presented the Doctor with a silver inkstand, in a speech containing very little of the mother-tongue, but fifteen quotations from the Latin, and seven from the Greek, which moved the younger of the young gentlemen to discontent and envy: they remarking, 'Oh, ah. It was all very well for old Tozer, but they didn't subscribe money for old Tozer to show off with, they supposed; did they? What business was it of old Tozer's more than anybody else's? It wasn't his inkstand. Why couldn't he leave the boys' property alone?' and murmuring other expressions of their dissatisfaction, which seemed to find a greater relief in calling him old Tozer, than in any other available vent.

Not a word had been said to the young gentlemen, nor a hint dropped, of anything like a contemplated marriage between Mr Feeder, B.A., and the fair Cornelia Blimber. Doctor Blimber, especially, seemed to take pains to look as if nothing would surprise him more; but it was perfectly well known to all the young gentlemen nevertheless, and when they departed for the society of their relations and friends, they took leave of Mr Feeder with awe.

Mr Feeder's most romantic visions were fulfilled. The Doctor had determined to paint the house outside, and put it in thorough repair; and to give up the business, and to give up Cornelia. The painting and repairing began upon the very day of the young gentlemen's departure, and now behold! the wedding morning was come, and Cornelia, in a new pair of spectacles, was waiting to be led to the hymeneal altar.

The Doctor with his learned legs, and Mrs Blimber in a lilac bonnet, and Mr Feeder, B.A., with his long knuckles and his bristly head of hair, and Mr Feeder's brother, the Reverend Alfred Feeder, M.A., who was to perform the ceremony, were all assembled in the drawing-room, and Cornelia with her orange-flowers and bridesmaids had just come down, and looked, as of old, a little squeezed in appearance, but very charming, when the door opened, and the weak-eyed young man, in a loud voice, made the following proclamation:

'MR AND MRS TOOTS!'

Upon which there entered Mr Toots, grown extremely stout, and on his arm a lady very handsomely and becomingly dressed, with very bright black eyes. 'Mrs Blimber,' said Mr Toots, 'allow me to present my wife.'

Mrs Blimber was delighted to receive her. Mrs Blimber was a little condescending, but extremely kind.

'And as you've known me for a long time, you know,' said Mr Toots, 'let me assure you that she is one of the most remarkable women that ever lived.'

'My dear!' remonstrated Mrs Toots.

'Upon my word and honour she is,' said Mr Toots. 'I—I assure you, Mrs Blimber, she's a most extraordinary woman.'

Mrs Toots laughed merrily, and Mrs Blimber led her to Cornelia. Mr Toots having paid his respects in that direction and having saluted his old preceptor, who said, in allusion to his conjugal state, 'Well, Toots, well, Toots! So you are one of us, are you, Toots?'—retired with Mr Feeder, B.A., into a window.

Mr Feeder, B.A., being in great spirits, made a spar at Mr Toots, and tapped him skilfully with the back of his hand on the breastbone.

'Well, old Buck!' said Mr Feeder with a laugh. 'Well! Here we are! Taken in and done for. Eh?'

'Feeder,' returned Mr Toots. 'I give you joy. If you're as—as—as perfectly blissful in a matrimonial life, as I am myself, you'll have nothing to desire.'

'I don't forget my old friends, you see,' said Mr Feeder. 'I ask em to my wedding, Toots.'

'Feeder,' replied Mr Toots gravely, 'the fact is, that there were several circumstances which prevented me from communicating with you until after my marriage had been solemnised. In the first place, I had made a perfect Brute of myself to you, on the subject of Miss Dombey; and I felt that if you were asked to any wedding of mine, you would naturally expect that it was with Miss Dombey, which involved explanations, that upon my word and honour, at that crisis, would have knocked me completely over. In the second place, our wedding was strictly private; there being nobody present but one friend of myself and Mrs Toots's, who is a Captain in—I don't exactly know in what,' said Mr Toots, 'but it's of no consequence. I hope, Feeder, that in writing a statement of what had occurred before Mrs Toots and myself went abroad upon our foreign tour, I fully discharged the offices of friendship.'

'Toots, my boy,' said Mr Feeder, shaking his hands, 'I was joking.'

'And now, Feeder,' said Mr Toots, 'I should be glad to know what you think of my union.'

'Capital!' returned Mr Feeder.

'You think it's capital, do you, Feeder?'said Mr Toots solemnly. 'Then how capital must it be to Me! For you can never know what an extraordinary woman that is.'

Mr Feeder was willing to take it for granted. But Mr Toots shook his head, and wouldn't hear of that being possible.

'You see,' said Mr Toots, 'what I wanted in a wife was—in short, was sense. Money, Feeder, I had. Sense I—I had not, particularly.'

Mr Feeder murmured, 'Oh, yes, you had, Toots!' But Mr Toots said:

'No, Feeder, I had not. Why should I disguise it? I had not. I knew that sense was There,' said Mr Toots, stretching out his hand towards his wife, 'in perfect heaps. I had no relation to object or be offended, on the score of station; for I had no relation. I have never had anybody belonging to me but my guardian, and him, Feeder, I have always considered as a Pirate and a Corsair. Therefore, you know it was not likely,' said Mr Toots, 'that I should take his opinion.'

'No,' said Mr Feeder.

'Accordingly,' resumed Mr Toots, 'I acted on my own. Bright was the day on which I did so! Feeder! Nobody but myself can tell what the capacity of that woman's mind is. If ever the Rights of Women, and all that kind of thing, are properly attended to, it will be through her powerful intellect— Susan, my dear!' said Mr Toots, looking abruptly out of the windows 'pray do not exert yourself!'

'My dear,' said Mrs Toots, 'I was only talking.'

'But, my love,' said Mr Toots, 'pray do not exert yourself. You really must be careful. Do not, my dear Susan, exert yourself. She's so easily excited,' said Mr Toots, apart to Mrs Blimber, 'and then she forgets the medical man altogether.'

Mrs Blimber was impressing on Mrs Toots the necessity of caution, when Mr Feeder, B.A., offered her his arm, and led her down to the carriages that were waiting to go to church. Doctor Blimber escorted Mrs Toots. Mr Toots escorted the fair bride, around whose lambent spectacles two gauzy little bridesmaids fluttered like moths. Mr Feeder's brother, Mr Alfred Feeder, M.A., had already gone on, in advance, to assume his official functions.

The ceremony was performed in an admirable manner. Cornelia, with her crisp little curls, 'went in,' as the Chicken might have said, with great composure; and Doctor Blimber gave her away, like a man who had quite made up his mind to it. The gauzy little bridesmaids appeared to suffer most. Mrs Blimber was affected, but gently so; and told the Reverend Mr Alfred Feeder, M.A., on the way home, that if she could only have seen Cicero in his retirement at Tusculum, she would not have had a wish, now, ungratified.

There was a breakfast afterwards, limited to the same small party; at which the spirits of Mr Feeder, B.A., were tremendous, and so communicated themselves to Mrs Toots that Mr Toots was several times heard to observe, across the table, 'My dear Susan, don't exert yourself!' The best of it was, that Mr Toots felt it incunbent on him to make a speech; and in spite of a whole code of telegraphic dissuasions from Mrs Toots, appeared on his legs for the first time in his life.

'I really,' said Mr Toots, 'in this house, where whatever was done to me in the way of—of any mental confusion sometimes—which is of no consequence and I impute to nobody—I was always treated like one of Doctor Blimber's family, and had a desk to myself for a considerable period—can—not—allow- -my friend Feeder to be—'

Mrs Toots suggested 'married.'

'It may not be inappropriate to the occasion, or altogether uninteresting,' said Mr Toots with a delighted face, 'to observe that my wife is a most extraordinary woman, and would do this much better than myself—allow my friend Feeder to be married—especially to—'

Mrs Toots suggested 'to Miss Blimber.'

'To Mrs Feeder, my love!' said Mr Toots, in a subdued tone of private discussion: "'whom God hath joined," you know, "let no man"—don't you know? I cannot allow my friend Feeder to be married—especially to Mrs Feeder—without proposing their—their—Toasts; and may,' said Mr Toots, fixing his eyes on his wife, as if for inspiration in a high flight, 'may the torch of Hymen be the beacon of joy, and may the flowers we have this day strewed in their path, be the—the banishers of—of gloom!'

Doctor Blimber, who had a taste for metaphor, was pleased with this, and said, 'Very good, Toots! Very well said, indeed, Toots!' and nodded his head and patted his hands. Mr Feeder made in reply, a comic speech chequered with sentiment. Mr Alfred Feeder, M.A., was afterwards very happy on Doctor and Mrs Blimber; Mr Feeder, B.A., scarcely less so, on the gauzy little bridesmaids. Doctor Blimber then, in a sonorous voice, delivered a few thoughts in the pastoral style, relative to the rushes among which it was the intention of himself and Mrs Blimber to dwell, and the bee that would hum around their cot. Shortly after which, as the Doctor's eyes were twinkling in a remarkable manner, and his son-in-law had already observed that time was made for slaves, and had inquired whether Mrs Toots sang, the discreet Mrs Blimber dissolved the sitting, and sent Cornelia away, very cool and comfortable, in a post-chaise, with the man of her heart.

Mr and Mrs Toots withdrew to the Bedford (Mrs Toots had been there before in old times, under her maiden name of Nipper), and there found a letter, which it took Mr Toots such an enormous time to read, that Mrs Toots was frightened.

'My dear Susan,' said Mr Toots, 'fright is worse than exertion. Pray be calm!'

'Who is it from?' asked Mrs Toots.

'Why, my love,' said Mr Toots, 'it's from Captain Gills. Do not excite yourself. Walters and Miss Dombey are expected home!'

'My dear,' said Mrs Toots, raising herself quickly from the sofa, very pale, 'don't try to deceive me, for it's no use, they're come home—I see it plainly in your face!'

'She's a most extraordinary woman!' exclaimed Mr Toots, in rapturous admiration. 'You're perfectly right, my love, they have come home. Miss Dombey has seen her father, and they are reconciled!'

'Reconciled!' cried Mrs Toots, clapping her hands.

'My dear,' said Mr Toots; 'pray do not exert yourself. Do remember the medical man! Captain Gills says—at least he don't say, but I imagine, from what I can make out, he means—that Miss Dombey has brought her unfortunate father away from his old house, to one where she and Walters are living; that he is lying very ill there—supposed to be dying; and that she attends upon him night and day.'

Mrs Toots began to cry quite bitterly.

'My dearest Susan,' replied Mr Toots, 'do, do, if you possibly can, remember the medical man! If you can't, it's of no consequence—but do endeavour to!'

His wife, with her old manner suddenly restored, so pathetically entreated him to take her to her precious pet, her little mistress, her own darling, and the like, that Mr Toots, whose sympathy and admiration were of the strongest kind, consented from his very heart of hearts; and they agreed to depart immediately, and present themselves in answer to the Captain's letter.

Now some hidden sympathies of things, or some coincidences, had that day brought the Captain himself (toward whom Mr and Mrs Toots were soon journeying) into the flowery train of wedlock; not as a principal, but as an accessory. It happened accidentally, and thus:

The Captain, having seen Florence and her baby for a moment, to his unbounded content, and having had a long talk with Walter, turned out for a walk; feeling it necessary to have some solitary meditation on the changes of human affairs, and to shake his glazed hat profoundly over the fall of Mr Dombey, for whom the generosity and simplicity of his nature were awakened in a lively manner. The Captain would have been very low, indeed, on the unhappy gentleman's account, but for the recollection of the baby; which afforded him such intense satisfaction whenever it arose, that he laughed aloud as he went along the street, and, indeed, more than once, in a sudden impulse of joy, threw up his glazed hat and caught it again; much to the amazement of the spectators. The rapid alternations of light and shade to which these two conflicting subjects of reflection exposed the Captain, were so very trying to his spirits, that he felt a long walk necessary to his composure; and as there is a great deal in the influence of harmonious associations, he chose, for the scene of this walk, his old neighbourhood, down among the mast, oar, and block makers, ship-biscuit bakers, coal-whippers, pitch-kettles, sailors, canals, docks, swing-bridges, and other soothing objects.

These peaceful scenes, and particularly the region of Limehouse Hole and thereabouts, were so influential in calming the Captain, that he walked on with restored tranquillity, and was, in fact, regaling himself, under his breath, with the ballad of Lovely Peg, when, on turning a corner, he was suddenly transfixed and rendered speechless by a triumphant procession that he beheld advancing towards him.

This awful demonstration was headed by that determined woman Mrs MacStinger, who, preserving a countenance of inexorable resolution, and wearing conspicuously attached to her obdurate bosom a stupendous watch and appendages, which the Captain recognised at a glance as the property of Bunsby, conducted under her arm no other than that sagacious mariner; he, with the distraught and melancholy visage of a captive borne into a foreign land, meekly resigning himself to her will. Behind them appeared the young MacStingers, in a body, exulting. Behind them, two ladies of a terrible and steadfast aspect, leading between them a short gentleman in a tall hat, who likewise exulted. In the wake, appeared Bunsby's boy, bearing umbrellas. The whole were in good marching order; and a dreadful smartness that pervaded the party would have sufficiently announced, if the intrepid countenances of the ladies had been wanting, that it was a procession of sacrifice, and that the victim was Bunsby.

The first impulse of the Captain was to run away. This also appeared to be the first impulse of Bunsby, hopeless as its execution must have proved. But a cry of recognition proceeding from the party, and Alexander MacStinger running up to the Captain with open arms, the Captain struck.

'Well, Cap'en Cuttle!' said Mrs MacStinger. 'This is indeed a meeting! I bear no malice now, Cap'en Cuttle—you needn't fear that I'm a going to cast any reflections. I hope to go to the altar in another spirit.' Here Mrs MacStinger paused, and drawing herself up, and inflating her bosom with a long breath, said, in allusion to the victim, 'My 'usband, Cap'en Cuttle!'

The abject Bunsby looked neither to the right nor to the left, nor at his bride, nor at his friend, but straight before him at nothing. The Captain putting out his hand, Bunsby put out his; but, in answer to the Captain's greeting, spake no word.

'Cap'en Cuttle,' said Mrs MacStinger, 'if you would wish to heal up past animosities, and to see the last of your friend, my 'usband, as a single person, we should be 'appy of your company to chapel. Here is a lady here,' said Mrs MacStinger, turning round to the more intrepid of the two, 'my bridesmaid, that will be glad of your protection, Cap'en Cuttle.'

The short gentleman in the tall hat, who it appeared was the husband of the other lady, and who evidently exulted at the reduction of a fellow creature to his own condition, gave place at this, and resigned the lady to Captain Cuttle. The lady immediately seized him, and, observing that there was no time to lose, gave the word, in a strong voice, to advance.

The Captain's concern for his friend, not unmingled, at first, with some concern for himself—for a shadowy terror that he might be married by violence, possessed him, until his knowledge of the service came to his relief, and remembering the legal obligation of saying, 'I will,' he felt himself personally safe so long as he resolved, if asked any question, distinctly to reply I won't'—threw him into a profuse perspiration; and rendered him, for a time, insensible to the movements of the procession, of which he now formed a feature, and to the conversation of his fair companion. But as he became less agitated, he learnt from this lady that she was the widow of a Mr Bokum, who had held an employment in the Custom House; that she was the dearest friend of Mrs MacStinger, whom she considered a pattern for her sex; that she had often heard of the Captain, and now hoped he had repented of his past life; that she trusted Mr Bunsby knew what a blessing he had gained, but that she feared men seldom did know what such blessings were, until they had lost them; with more to the same purpose.

All this time, the Captain could not but observe that Mrs Bokum kept her eyes steadily on the bridegroom, and that whenever they came near a court or other narrow turning which appeared favourable for flight, she was on the alert to cut him off if he attempted escape. The other lady, too, as well as her husband, the short gentleman with the tall hat, were plainly on guard, according to a preconcerted plan; and the wretched man was so secured by Mrs MacStinger, that any effort at self-preservation by flight was rendered futile. This, indeed, was apparent to the mere populace, who expressed their perception of the fact by jeers and cries; to all of which, the dread MacStinger was inflexibly indifferent, while Bunsby himself appeared in a state of unconsciousness.

The Captain made many attempts to accost the philosopher, if only in a monosyllable or a signal; but always failed, in consequence of the vigilance of the guard, and the difficulty, at all times peculiar to Bunsby's constitution, of having his attention aroused by any outward and visible sign whatever. Thus they approached the chapel, a neat whitewashed edifice, recently engaged by the Reverend Melchisedech Howler, who had consented, on very urgent solicitation, to give the world another two years of existence, but had informed his followers that, then, it must positively go.

While the Reverend Melchisedech was offering up some extemporary orisons, the Captain found an opportunity of growling in the bridegroom's ear:

'What cheer, my lad, what cheer?'

To which Bunsby replied, with a forgetfulness of the Reverend Melchisedech, which nothing but his desperate circumstances could have excused:

'D——-d bad,'

'Jack Bunsby,' whispered the Captain, 'do you do this here, of your own free will?'

Mr Bunsby answered 'No.'

'Why do you do it, then, my lad?' inquired the Captain, not unnaturally.

Bunsby, still looking, and always looking with an immovable countenance, at the opposite side of the world, made no reply.

'Why not sheer off?' said the Captain. 'Eh?' whispered Bunsby, with a momentary gleam of hope. 'Sheer off,' said the Captain.

'Where's the good?' retorted the forlorn sage. 'She'd capter me agen.

'Try!' replied the Captain. 'Cheer up! Come! Now's your time. Sheer off, Jack Bunsby!'

Jack Bunsby, however, instead of profiting by the advice, said in a doleful whisper:

'It all began in that there chest o' yourn. Why did I ever conwoy her into port that night?'

'My lad,' faltered the Captain, 'I thought as you had come over her; not as she had come over you. A man as has got such opinions as you have!'

Mr Bunsby merely uttered a suppressed groan.

'Come!' said the Captain, nudging him with his elbow, 'now's your time! Sheer off! I'll cover your retreat. The time's a flying. Bunsby! It's for liberty. Will you once?'

Bunsby was immovable. 'Bunsby!' whispered the Captain, 'will you twice?' Bunsby wouldn't twice.

'Bunsby!' urged the Captain, 'it's for liberty; will you three times? Now or never!'

Bunsby didn't then, and didn't ever; for Mrs MacStinger immediately afterwards married him.

One of the most frightful circumstances of the ceremony to the Captain, was the deadly interest exhibited therein by Juliana MacStinger; and the fatal concentration of her faculties, with which that promising child, already the image of her parent, observed the whole proceedings. The Captain saw in this a succession of man-traps stretching out infinitely; a series of ages of oppression and coercion, through which the seafaring line was doomed. It was a more memorable sight than the unflinching steadiness of Mrs Bokum and the other lady, the exultation of the short gentleman in the tall hat, or even the fell inflexibility of Mrs MacStinger. The Master MacStingers understood little of what was going on, and cared less; being chiefly engaged, during the ceremony, in treading on one another's half-boots; but the contrast afforded by those wretched infants only set off and adorned the precocious woman in Juliana. Another year or two, the Captain thought, and to lodge where that child was, would be destruction.

The ceremony was concluded by a general spring of the young family on Mr Bunsby, whom they hailed by the endearing name of father, and from whom they solicited half-pence. These gushes of affection over, the procession was about to issue forth again, when it was delayed for some little time by an unexpected transport on the part of Alexander MacStinger. That dear child, it seemed, connecting a chapel with tombstones, when it was entered for any purpose apart from the ordinary religious exercises, could not be persuaded but that his mother was now to be decently interred, and lost to him for ever. In the anguish of this conviction, he screamed with astonishing force, and turned black in the face. However touching these marks of a tender disposition were to his mother, it was not in the character of that remarkable woman to permit her recognition of them to degenerate into weakness. Therefore, after vainly endeavouring to convince his reason by shakes, pokes, bawlings-out, and similar applications to his head, she led him into the air, and tried another method; which was manifested to the marriage party by a quick succession of sharp sounds, resembling applause, and subsequently, by their seeing Alexander in contact with the coolest paving-stone in the court, greatly flushed, and loudly lamenting.

The procession being then in a condition to form itself once more, and repair to Brig Place, where a marriage feast was in readiness, returned as it had come; not without the receipt, by Bunsby, of many humorous congratulations from the populace on his recently-acquired happiness. The Captain accompanied it as far as the house-door, but, being made uneasy by the gentler manner of Mrs Bokum, who, now that she was relieved from her engrossing duty—for the watchfulness and alacrity of the ladies sensibly diminished when the bridegroom was safely married—had greater leisure to show an interest in his behalf, there left it and the captive; faintly pleading an appointment, and promising to return presently. The Captain had another cause for uneasiness, in remorsefully reflecting that he had been the first means of Bunsby's entrapment, though certainly without intending it, and through his unbounded faith in the resources of that philosopher.

To go back to old Sol Gills at the wooden Midshipman's, and not first go round to ask how Mr Dombey was—albeit the house where he lay was out of London, and away on the borders of a fresh heath—was quite out of the Captain's course. So he got a lift when he was tired, and made out the journey gaily.

The blinds were pulled down, and the house so quiet, that the Captain was almost afraid to knock; but listening at the door, he heard low voices within, very near it, and, knocking softly, was admitted by Mr Toots. Mr Toots and his wife had, in fact, just arrived there; having been at the Midshipman's to seek him, and having there obtained the address.

They were not so recently arrived, but that Mrs Toots had caught the baby from somebody, taken it in her arms, and sat down on the stairs, hugging and fondling it. Florence was stooping down beside her; and no one could have said which Mrs Toots was hugging and fondling most, the mother or the child, or which was the tenderer, Florence of Mrs Toots, or Mrs Toots of her, or both of the baby; it was such a little group of love and agitation.

'And is your Pa very ill, my darling dear Miss Floy?' asked Susan.

'He is very, very ill,' said Florence. 'But, Susan, dear, you must not speak to me as you used to speak. And what's this?' said Florence, touching her clothes, in amazement. 'Your old dress, dear? Your old cap, curls, and all?'

Susan burst into tears, and showered kisses on the little hand that had touched her so wonderingly.

'My dear Miss Dombey,' said Mr Toots, stepping forward, 'I'll explain. She's the most extraordinary woman. There are not many to equal her! She has always said—she said before we were married, and has said to this day—that whenever you came home, she'd come to you in no dress but the dress she used to serve you in, for fear she might seem strange to you, and you might like her less. I admire the dress myself,' said Mr Toots, 'of all things. I adore her in it! My dear Miss Dombey, she'll be your maid again, your nurse, all that she ever was, and more. There's no change in her. But, Susan, my dear,' said Mr Toots, who had spoken with great feeling and high admiration, 'all I ask is, that you'll remember the medical man, and not exert yourself too much!'

CHAPTER 61. Relenting

Florence had need of help. Her father's need of it was sore, and made the aid of her old friend invaluable. Death stood at his pillow. A shade, already, of what he had been, shattered in mind, and perilously sick in body, he laid his weary head down on the bed his daughter's hands prepared for him, and had never raised it since.

She was always with him. He knew her, generally; though, in the wandering of his brain, he often confused the circumstances under which he spoke to her. Thus he would address her, sometimes, as if his boy were newly dead; and would tell her, that although he had said nothing of her ministering at the little bedside, yet he had seen it—he had seen it; and then would hide his face and sob, and put out his worn hand. Sometimes he would ask her for herself. 'Where is Florence?' 'I am here, Papa, I am here.' 'I don't know her!' he would cry. 'We have been parted so long, that I don't know her!' and then a staring dread would be upon him, until she could soothe his perturbation; and recall the tears she tried so hard, at other times, to dry.

He rambled through the scenes of his old pursuits—through many where Florence lost him as she listened—sometimes for hours. He would repeat that childish question, 'What is money?' and ponder on it, and think about it, and reason with himself, more or less connectedly, for a good answer; as if it had never been proposed to him until that moment. He would go on with a musing repetition of the title of his old firm twenty thousand times, and at every one of them, would turn his head upon his pillow. He would count his children—one—two—stop, and go back, and begin again in the same way.

But this was when his mind was in its most distracted state. In all the other phases of its illness, and in those to which it was most constant, it always turned on Florence. What he would oftenest do was this: he would recall that night he had so recently remembered, the night on which she came down to his room, and would imagine that his heart smote him, and that he went out after her, and up the stairs to seek her. Then, confounding that time with the later days of the many footsteps, he would be amazed at their number, and begin to count them as he followed her. Here, of a sudden, was a bloody footstep going on among the others; and after it there began to be, at intervals, doors standing open, through which certain terrible pictures were seen, in mirrors, of haggard men, concealing something in their breasts. Still, among the many footsteps and the bloody footsteps here and there, was the step of Florence. Still she was going on before. Still the restless mind went, following and counting, ever farther, ever higher, as to the summit of a mighty tower that it took years to climb.

One day he inquired if that were not Susan who had spoken a long while ago.

Florence said 'Yes, dear Papa;' and asked him would he like to see her?

He said 'very much.' And Susan, with no little trepidation, showed herself at his bedside.

It seemed a great relief to him. He begged her not to go; to understand that he forgave her what she had said; and that she was to stay. Florence and he were very different now, he said, and very happy. Let her look at this! He meant his drawing the gentle head down to his pillow, and laying it beside him.

He remained like this for days and weeks. At length, lying, the faint feeble semblance of a man, upon his bed, and speaking in a voice so low that they could only hear him by listening very near to his lips, he became quiet. It was dimly pleasant to him now, to lie there, with the window open, looking out at the summer sky and the trees: and, in the evening, at the sunset. To watch the shadows of the clouds and leaves, and seem to feel a sympathy with shadows. It was natural that he should. To him, life and the world were nothing else.

He began to show now that he thought of Florence's fatigue: and often taxed his weakness to whisper to her, 'Go and walk, my dearest, in the sweet air. Go to your good husband!' One time when Walter was in his room, he beckoned him to come near, and to stoop down; and pressing his hand, whispered an assurance to him that he knew he could trust him with his child when he was dead.

It chanced one evening, towards sunset, when Florence and Walter were sitting in his room together, as he liked to see them, that Florence, having her baby in her arms, began in a low voice to sing to the little fellow, and sang the old tune she had so often sung to the dead child: He could not bear it at the time; he held up his trembling hand, imploring her to stop; but next day he asked her to repeat it, and to do so often of an evening: which she did. He listening, with his face turned away.

Florence was sitting on a certain time by his window, with her work-basket between her and her old attendant, who was still her faithful companion. He had fallen into a doze. It was a beautiful evening, with two hours of light to come yet; and the tranquillity and quiet made Florence very thoughtful. She was lost to everything for the moment, but the occasion when the so altered figure on the bed had first presented her to her beautiful Mama; when a touch from Walter leaning on the back of her chair, made her start.

'My dear,' said Walter, 'there is someone downstairs who wishes to speak to you.

She fancied Walter looked grave, and asked him if anything had happened.

'No, no, my love!' said Walter. 'I have seen the gentleman myself, and spoken with him. Nothing has happened. Will you come?'

Florence put her arm through his; and confiding her father to the black-eyed Mrs Toots, who sat as brisk and smart at her work as black-eyed woman could, accompanied her husband downstairs. In the pleasant little parlour opening on the garden, sat a gentleman, who rose to advance towards her when she came in, but turned off, by reason of some peculiarity in his legs, and was only stopped by the table.

Florence then remembered Cousin Feenix, whom she had not at first recognised in the shade of the leaves. Cousin Feenix took her hand, and congratulated her upon her marriage.

'I could have wished, I am sure,' said Cousin Feenix, sitting down as Florence sat, to have had an earlier opportunity of offering my congratulations; but, in point of fact, so many painful occurrences have happened, treading, as a man may say, on one another's heels, that I have been in a devil of a state myself, and perfectly unfit for every description of society. The only description of society I have kept, has been my own; and it certainly is anything but flattering to a man's good opinion of his own sources, to know that, in point of fact, he has the capacity of boring himself to a perfectly unlimited extent.'

Florence divined, from some indefinable constraint and anxiety in this gentleman's manner—which was always a gentleman's, in spite of the harmless little eccentricities that attached to it—and from Walter's manner no less, that something more immediately tending to some object was to follow this.

'I have been mentioning to my friend Mr Gay, if I may be allowed to have the honour of calling him so,' said Cousin Feenix, 'that I am rejoiced to hear that my friend Dombey is very decidedly mending. I trust my friend Dombey will not allow his mind to be too much preyed upon, by any mere loss of fortune. I cannot say that I have ever experienced any very great loss of fortune myself: never having had, in point of fact, any great amount of fortune to lose. But as much as I could lose, I have lost; and I don't find that I particularly care about it. I know my friend Dombey to be a devilish honourable man; and it's calculated to console my friend Dombey very much, to know, that this is the universal sentiment. Even Tommy Screwzer,—a man of an extremely bilious habit, with whom my friend Gay is probably acquainted—cannot say a syllable in disputation of the fact.'

Florence felt, more than ever, that there was something to come; and looked earnestly for it. So earnestly, that Cousin Feenix answered, as if she had spoken.

'The fact is,' said Cousin Feenix, 'that my friend Gay and myself have been discussing the propriety of entreating a favour at your hands; and that I have the consent of my friend Gay—who has met me in an exceedingly kind and open manner, for which I am very much indebted to him—to solicit it. I am sensible that so amiable a lady as the lovely and accomplished daughter of my friend Dombey will not require much urging; but I am happy to know, that I am supported by my friend Gay's influence and approval. As in my parliamentary time, when a man had a motion to make of any sort—which happened seldom in those days, for we were kept very tight in hand, the leaders on both sides being regular Martinets, which was a devilish good thing for the rank and file, like myself, and prevented our exposing ourselves continually, as a great many of us had a feverish anxiety to do—as' in my parliamentary time, I was about to say, when a man had leave to let off any little private popgun, it was always considered a great point for him to say that he had the happiness of believing that his sentiments were not without an echo in the breast of Mr Pitt; the pilot, in point of fact, who had weathered the storm. Upon which, a devilish large number of fellows immediately cheered, and put him in spirits. Though the fact is, that these fellows, being under orders to cheer most excessively whenever Mr Pitt's name was mentioned, became so proficient that it always woke 'em. And they were so entirely innocent of what was going on, otherwise, that it used to be commonly said by Conversation Brown—four-bottle man at the Treasury Board, with whom the father of my friend Gay was probably acquainted, for it was before my friend Gay's time—that if a man had risen in his place, and said that he regretted to inform the house that there was an Honourable Member in the last stage of convulsions in the Lobby, and that the Honourable Member's name was Pitt, the approbation would have been vociferous.'

This postponement of the point, put Florence in a flutter; and she looked from Cousin Feenix to Walter, in increasing agitation.

'My love,' said Walter, 'there is nothing the matter.

'There is nothing the matter, upon my honour,' said Cousin Feenix; 'and I am deeply distressed at being the means of causing you a moment's uneasiness. I beg to assure you that there is nothing the matter. The favour that I have to ask is, simply—but it really does seem so exceedingly singular, that I should be in the last degree obliged to my friend Gay if he would have the goodness to break the—in point of fact, the ice,' said Cousin Feenix.

Walter thus appealed to, and appealed to no less in the look that Florence turned towards him, said:

'My dearest, it is no more than this. That you will ride to London with this gentleman, whom you know.

'And my friend Gay, also—I beg your pardon!' interrupted Cousin Feenix.

And with me—and make a visit somewhere.'

'To whom?' asked Florence, looking from one to the other.

'If I might entreat,' said Cousin Feenix, 'that you would not press for an answer to that question, I would venture to take the liberty of making the request.'

'Do you know, Walter?'

'Yes.'

'And think it right?'

'Yes. Only because I am sure that you would too. Though there may be reasons I very well understand, which make it better that nothing more should be said beforehand.'

'If Papa is still asleep, or can spare me if he is awake, I will go immediately,' said Florence. And rising quietly, and glancing at them with a look that was a little alarmed but perfectly confiding, left the room.

When she came back, ready to bear them company, they were talking together, gravely, at the window; and Florence could not but wonder what the topic was, that had made them so well acquainted in so short a time. She did not wonder at the look of pride and love with which her husband broke off as she entered; for she never saw him, but that rested on her.

'I will leave,' said Cousin Feenix, 'a card for my friend Dombey, sincerely trusting that he will pick up health and strength with every returning hour. And I hope my friend Dombey will do me the favour to consider me a man who has a devilish warm admiration of his character, as, in point of fact, a British merchant and a devilish upright gentleman. My place in the country is in a most confounded state of dilapidation, but if my friend Dombey should require a change of air, and would take up his quarters there, he would find it a remarkably healthy spot—as it need be, for it's amazingly dull. If my friend Dombey suffers from bodily weakness, and would allow me to recommend what has frequently done myself good, as a man who has been extremely queer at times, and who lived pretty freely in the days when men lived very freely, I should say, let it be in point of fact the yolk of an egg, beat up with sugar and nutmeg, in a glass of sherry, and taken in the morning with a slice of dry toast. Jackson, who kept the boxing- rooms in Bond Street—man of very superior qualifications, with whose reputation my friend Gay is no doubt acquainted—used to mention that in training for the ring they substituted rum for sherry. I should recommend sherry in this case, on account of my friend Dombey being in an invalided condition; which might occasion rum to fly—in point of fact to his head—and throw him into a devil of a state.'

Of all this, Cousin Feenix delivered himself with an obviously nervous and discomposed air. Then, giving his arm to Florence, and putting the strongest possible constraint upon his wilful legs, which seemed determined to go out into the garden, he led her to the door, and handed her into a carriage that was ready for her reception.

Walter entered after him, and they drove away.

Their ride was six or eight miles long. When they drove through certain dull and stately streets, lying westward in London, it was growing dusk. Florence had, by this time, put her hand in Walter's; and was looking very earnestly, and with increasing agitation, into every new street into which they turned.

When the carriage stopped, at last, before that house in Brook Street, where her father's unhappy marriage had been celebrated, Florence said, 'Walter, what is this? Who is here?' Walter cheering her, and not replying, she glanced up at the house-front, and saw that all the windows were shut, as if it were uninhabited. Cousin Feenix had by this time alighted, and was offering his hand.

'Are you not coming, Walter?'

'No, I will remain here. Don't tremble there is nothing to fear, dearest Florence.'

'I know that, Walter, with you so near. I am sure of that, but—'

The door was softly opened, without any knock, and Cousin Feenix led her out of the summer evening air into the close dull house. More sombre and brown than ever, it seemed to have been shut up from the wedding-day, and to have hoarded darkness and sadness ever since.

Florence ascended the dusky staircase, trembling; and stopped, with her conductor, at the drawing-room door. He opened it, without speaking, and signed an entreaty to her to advance into the inner room, while he remained there. Florence, after hesitating an instant, complied.

Sitting by the window at a table, where she seemed to have been writing or drawing, was a lady, whose head, turned away towards the dying light, was resting on her hand. Florence advancing, doubtfully, all at once stood still, as if she had lost the power of motion. The lady turned her head.

'Great Heaven!' she said, 'what is this?'

'No, no!' cried Florence, shrinking back as she rose up and putting out her hands to keep her off. 'Mama!'

They stood looking at each other. Passion and pride had worn it, but it was the face of Edith, and beautiful and stately yet. It was the face of Florence, and through all the terrified avoidance it expressed, there was pity in it, sorrow, a grateful tender memory. On each face, wonder and fear were painted vividly; each so still and silent, looking at the other over the black gulf of the irrevocable past.

Florence was the first to change. Bursting into tears, she said from her full heart, 'Oh, Mama, Mama! why do we meet like this? Why were you ever kind to me when there was no one else, that we should meet like this?'

Edith stood before her, dumb and motionless. Her eyes were fixed upon her face.

'I dare not think of that,' said Florence, 'I am come from Papa's sick bed. We are never asunder now; we never shall be' any more. If you would have me ask his pardon, I will do it, Mama. I am almost sure he will grant it now, if I ask him. May Heaven grant it to you, too, and comfort you!'

She answered not a word.

'Walter—I am married to him, and we have a son,' said Florence, timidly—'is at the door, and has brought me here. I will tell him that you are repentant; that you are changed,' said Florence, looking mournfully upon her; 'and he will speak to Papa with me, I know. Is there anything but this that I can do?'

Edith, breaking her silence, without moving eye or limb, answered slowly:

'The stain upon your name, upon your husband's, on your child's. Will that ever be forgiven, Florence?'

'Will it ever be, Mama? It is! Freely, freely, both by Walter and by me. If that is any consolation to you, there is nothing that you may believe more certainly. You do not—you do not,' faltered Florence, 'speak of Papa; but I am sure you wish that I should ask him for his forgiveness. I am sure you do.'

She answered not a word.

'I will!' said Florence. 'I will bring it you, if you will let me; and then, perhaps, we may take leave of each other, more like what we used to be to one another. I have not,' said Florence very gently, and drawing nearer to her, 'I have not shrunk back from you, Mama, because I fear you, or because I dread to be disgraced by you. I only wish to do my duty to Papa. I am very dear to him, and he is very dear to me. But I never can forget that you were very good to me. Oh, pray to Heaven,' cried Florence, falling on her bosom, 'pray to Heaven, Mama, to forgive you all this sin and shame, and to forgive me if I cannot help doing this (if it is wrong), when I remember what you used to be!'

Edith, as if she fell beneath her touch, sunk down on her knees, and caught her round the neck.

'Florence!' she cried. 'My better angel! Before I am mad again, before my stubbornness comes back and strikes me dumb, believe me, upon my soul I am innocent!'

'Mama!'

'Guilty of much! Guilty of that which sets a waste between us evermore. Guilty of what must separate me, through the whole remainder of my life, from purity and innocence—from you, of all the earth. Guilty of a blind and passionate resentment, of which I do not, cannot, will not, even now, repent; but not guilty with that dead man. Before God!'

Upon her knees upon the ground, she held up both her hands, and swore it.

'Florence!' she said, 'purest and best of natures,—whom I love—who might have changed me long ago, and did for a time work some change even in the woman that I am,—believe me, I am innocent of that; and once more, on my desolate heart, let me lay this dear head, for the last time!'

She was moved and weeping. Had she been oftener thus in older days, she had been happier now.

'There is nothing else in all the world,' she said, 'that would have wrung denial from me. No love, no hatred, no hope, no threat. I said that I would die, and make no sign. I could have done so, and I would, if we had never met, Florence.

'I trust,' said Cousin Feenix, ambling in at the door, and speaking, half in the room, and half out of it, 'that my lovely and accomplished relative will excuse my having, by a little stratagem, effected this meeting. I cannot say that I was, at first, wholly incredulous as to the possibility of my lovely and accomplished relative having, very unfortunately, committed herself with the deceased person with white teeth; because in point of fact, one does see, in this world—which is remarkable for devilish strange arrangements, and for being decidedly the most unintelligible thing within a man's experience—very odd conjunctions of that sort. But as I mentioned to my friend Dombey, I could not admit the criminality of my lovely and accomplished relative until it was perfectly established. And feeling, when the deceased person was, in point of fact, destroyed in a devilish horrible manner, that her position was a very painful one—and feeling besides that our family had been a little to blame in not paying more attention to her, and that we are a careless family—and also that my aunt, though a devilish lively woman, had perhaps not been the very best of mothers—I took the liberty of seeking her in France, and offering her such protection as a man very much out at elbows could offer. Upon which occasion, my lovely and accomplished relative did me the honour to express that she believed I was, in my way, a devilish good sort of fellow; and that therefore she put herself under my protection. Which in point of fact I understood to be a kind thing on the part of my lovely and accomplished relative, as I am getting extremely shaky, and have derived great comfort from her solicitude.'

Edith, who had taken Florence to a sofa, made a gesture with her hand as if she would have begged him to say no more.

'My lovely and accomplished relative,' resumed Cousin Feenix, still ambling about at the door, 'will excuse me, if, for her satisfaction, and my own, and that of my friend Dombey, whose lovely and accomplished daughter we so much admire, I complete the thread of my observations. She will remember that, from the first, she and I never alluded to the subject of her elopement. My impression, certainly, has always been, that there was a mystery in the affair which she could explain if so inclined. But my lovely and accomplished relative being a devilish resolute woman, I knew that she was not, in point of fact, to be trifled with, and therefore did not involve myself in any discussions. But, observing lately, that her accessible point did appear to be a very strong description of tenderness for the daughter of my friend Dombey, it occurred to me that if I could bring about a meeting, unexpected on both sides, it might lead to beneficial results. Therefore, we being in London, in the present private way, before going to the South of Italy, there to establish ourselves, in point of fact, until we go to our long homes, which is a devilish disagreeable reflection for a man, I applied myself to the discovery of the residence of my friend Gay—handsome man of an uncommonly frank disposition, who is probably known to my lovely and accomplished relative—and had the happiness of bringing his amiable wife to the present place. And now,' said Cousin Feenix, with a real and genuine earnestness shining through the levity of his manner and his slipshod speech, 'I do conjure my relative, not to stop half way, but to set right, as far as she can, whatever she has done wrong—not for the honour of her family, not for her own fame, not for any of those considerations which unfortunate circumstances have induced her to regard as hollow, and in point of fact, as approaching to humbug—but because it is wrong, and not right.'

Cousin Feenix's legs consented to take him away after this; and leaving them alone together, he shut the door.

Edith remained silent for some minutes, with Florence sitting close beside her. Then she took from her bosom a sealed paper.

'I debated with myself a long time,' she said in a low voice, 'whether to write this at all, in case of dying suddenly or by accident, and feeling the want of it upon me. I have deliberated, ever since, when and how to destroy it. Take it, Florence. The truth is written in it.'

'Is it for Papa?' asked Florence.

'It is for whom you will,' she answered. 'It is given to you, and is obtained by you. He never could have had it otherwise.'

Again they sat silent, in the deepening darkness.

'Mama,' said Florence, 'he has lost his fortune; he has been at the point of death; he may not recover, even now. Is there any word that I shall say to him from you?'

'Did you tell me,' asked Edith, 'that you were very dear to him?'

'Yes!' said Florence, in a thrilling voice.

'Tell him I am sorry that we ever met.

'No more?' said Florence after a pause.

'Tell him, if he asks, that I do not repent of what I have done—not yet—for if it were to do again to-morrow, I should do it. But if he is a changed man—-'

She stopped. There was something in the silent touch of Florence's hand that stopped her.

'But that being a changed man, he knows, now, it would never be. Tell him I wish it never had been.'

'May I say,' said Florence, 'that you grieved to hear of the afflictions he has suffered?'

'Not,' she replied, 'if they have taught him that his daughter is very dear to him. He will not grieve for them himself, one day, if they have brought that lesson, Florence.'

'You wish well to him, and would have him happy. I am sure you would!' said Florence. 'Oh! let me be able, if I have the occasion at some future time, to say so?'

Edith sat with her dark eyes gazing steadfastly before her, and did not reply until Florence had repeated her entreaty; when she drew her hand within her arm, and said, with the same thoughtful gaze upon the night outside:

'Tell him that if, in his own present, he can find any reason to compassionate my past, I sent word that I asked him to do so. Tell him that if, in his own present, he can find a reason to think less bitterly of me, I asked him to do so. Tell him, that, dead as we are to one another, never more to meet on this side of eternity, he knows there is one feeling in common between us now, that there never was before.'

Her sternness seemed to yield, and there were tears in her dark eyes.

'I trust myself to that,' she said, 'for his better thoughts of me, and mine of him. When he loves his Florence most, he will hate me least. When he is most proud and happy in her and her children, he will be most repentant of his own part in the dark vision of our married life. At that time, I will be repentant too—let him know it then—and think that when I thought so much of all the causes that had made me what I was, I needed to have allowed more for the causes that had made him what he was. I will try, then, to forgive him his share of blame. Let him try to forgive me mine!'

'Oh Mama!' said Florence. 'How it lightens my heart, even in such a strange meeting and parting, to hear this!'

'Strange words in my own ears,' said Edith, 'and foreign to the sound of my own voice! But even if I had been the wretched creature I have given him occasion to believe me, I think I could have said them still, hearing that you and he were very dear to one another. Let him, when you are dearest, ever feel that he is most forbearing in his thoughts of me—that I am most forbearing in my thoughts of him! Those are the last words I send him! Now, goodbye, my life!'

She clasped her in her arms, and seemed to pour out all her woman's soul of love and tenderness at once.

'This kiss for your child! These kisses for a blessing on your head! My own dear Florence, my sweet girl, farewell!'

'To meet again!' cried Florence.

'Never again! Never again! When you leave me in this dark room, think that you have left me in the grave. Remember only that I was once, and that I loved you!'

And Florence left her, seeing her face no more, but accompanied by her embraces and caresses to the last.

Cousin Feenix met her at the door, and took her down to Walter in the dingy dining room, upon whose shoulder she laid her head weeping.

'I am devilish sorry,' said Cousin Feenix, lifting his wristbands to his eyes in the simplest manner possible, and without the least concealment, 'that the lovely and accomplished daughter of my friend Dombey and amiable wife of my friend Gay, should have had her sensitive nature so very much distressed and cut up by the interview which is just concluded. But I hope and trust I have acted for the best, and that my honourable friend Dombey will find his mind relieved by the disclosures which have taken place. I exceedingly lament that my friend Dombey should have got himself, in point of fact, into the devil's own state of conglomeration by an alliance with our family; but am strongly of opinion that if it hadn't been for the infernal scoundrel Barker—man with white teeth—everything would have gone on pretty smoothly. In regard to my relative who does me the honour to have formed an uncommonly good opinion of myself, I can assure the amiable wife of my friend Gay, that she may rely on my being, in point of fact, a father to her. And in regard to the changes of human life, and the extraordinary manner in which we are perpetually conducting ourselves, all I can say is, with my friend Shakespeare—man who wasn't for an age but for all time, and with whom my friend Gay is no doubt acquainted—that its like the shadow of a dream.'

CHAPTER 62. Final

A bottle that has been long excluded from the light of day, and is hoary with dust and cobwebs, has been brought into the sunshine; and the golden wine within it sheds a lustre on the table.

It is the last bottle of the old Madiera.

'You are quite right, Mr Gills,' says Mr Dombey. 'This is a very rare and most delicious wine.'

The Captain, who is of the party, beams with joy. There is a very halo of delight round his glowing forehead.

'We always promised ourselves, Sir,' observes Mr Gills,' Ned and myself, I mean—'

Mr Dombey nods at the Captain, who shines more and more with speechless gratification.

'—that we would drink this, one day or other, to Walter safe at home: though such a home we never thought of. If you don't object to our old whim, Sir, let us devote this first glass to Walter and his wife.'

'To Walter and his wife!' says Mr Dombey. 'Florence, my child'—and turns to kiss her.

'To Walter and his wife!' says Mr Toots.

'To Wal'r and his wife!' exclaims the Captain. 'Hooroar!' and the Captain exhibiting a strong desire to clink his glass against some other glass, Mr Dombey, with a ready hand, holds out his. The others follow; and there is a blithe and merry ringing, as of a little peal of marriage bells.

Other buried wine grows older, as the old Madeira did in its time; and dust and cobwebs thicken on the bottles.

Mr Dombey is a white-haired gentleman, whose face bears heavy marks of care and suffering; but they are traces of a storm that has passed on for ever, and left a clear evening in its track.

Ambitious projects trouble him no more. His only pride is in his daughter and her husband. He has a silent, thoughtful, quiet manner, and is always with his daughter. Miss Tox is not infrequently of the family party, and is quite devoted to it, and a great favourite. Her admiration of her once stately patron is, and has been ever since the morning of her shock in Princess's Place, platonic, but not weakened in the least.

Nothing has drifted to him from the wreck of his fortunes, but a certain annual sum that comes he knows not how, with an earnest entreaty that he will not seek to discover, and with the assurance that it is a debt, and an act of reparation. He has consulted with his old clerk about this, who is clear it may be honourably accepted, and has no doubt it arises out of some forgotten transaction in the times of the old House.

That hazel-eyed bachelor, a bachelor no more, is married now, and to the sister of the grey-haired Junior. He visits his old chief sometimes, but seldom. There is a reason in the greyhaired Junior's history, and yet a stronger reason in his name, why he should keep retired from his old employer; and as he lives with his sister and her husband, they participate in that retirement. Walter sees them sometimes—Florence too—and the pleasant house resounds with profound duets arranged for the Piano-Forte and Violoncello, and with the labours of Harmonious Blacksmiths.

And how goes the wooden Midshipman in these changed days? Why, here he still is, right leg foremost, hard at work upon the hackney coaches, and more on the alert than ever, being newly painted from his cocked hat to his buckled shoes; and up above him, in golden characters, these names shine refulgent, GILLS AND CUTTLE.

Not another stroke of business does the Midshipman achieve beyond his usual easy trade. But they do say, in a circuit of some half-mile round the blue umbrella in Leadenhall Market, that some of Mr Gills's old investments are coming out wonderfully well; and that instead of being behind the time in those respects, as he supposed, he was, in truth, a little before it, and had to wait the fulness of the time and the design. The whisper is that Mr Gills's money has begun to turn itself, and that it is turning itself over and over pretty briskly. Certain it is that, standing at his shop-door, in his coffee-coloured suit, with his chronometer in his pocket, and his spectacles on his forehead, he don't appear to break his heart at customers not coming, but looks very jovial and contented, though full as misty as of yore.

As to his partner, Captain Cuttle, there is a fiction of a business in the Captain's mind which is better than any reality. The Captain is as satisfied of the Midshipman's importance to the commerce and navigation of the country, as he could possibly be, if no ship left the Port of London without the Midshipman's assistance. His delight in his own name over the door, is inexhaustible. He crosses the street, twenty times a day, to look at it from the other side of the way; and invariably says, on these occasions, 'Ed'ard Cuttle, my lad, if your mother could ha' know'd as you would ever be a man o' science, the good old creetur would ha' been took aback in-deed!'

But here is Mr Toots descending on the Midshipman with violent rapidity, and Mr Toots's face is very red as he bursts into the little parlour.

'Captain Gills,' says Mr Toots, 'and Mr Sols, I am happy to inform you that Mrs Toots has had an increase to her family.

'And it does her credit!' cries the Captain.

'I give you joy, Mr Toots!' says old Sol.

'Thank'ee,' chuckles Mr Toots, 'I'm very much obliged to you. I knew that you'd be glad to hear, and so I came down myself. We're positively getting on, you know. There's Florence, and Susan, and now here's another little stranger.'

'A female stranger?' inquires the Captain.

'Yes, Captain Gills,' says Mr Toots, 'and I'm glad of it. The oftener we can repeat that most extraordinary woman, my opinion is, the better!'

'Stand by!' says the Captain, turning to the old case-bottle with no throat—for it is evening, and the Midshipman's usual moderate provision of pipes and glasses is on the board. 'Here's to her, and may she have ever so many more!'

'Thank'ee, Captain Gills,' says the delighted Mr Toots. 'I echo the sentiment. If you'll allow me, as my so doing cannot be unpleasant to anybody, under the circumstances, I think I'll take a pipe.'

Mr Toots begins to smoke, accordingly, and in the openness of his heart is very loquacious.

'Of all the remarkable instances that that delightful woman has given of her excellent sense, Captain Gills and Mr Sols,' said Mr Toots, 'I think none is more remarkable than the perfection with which she has understood my devotion to Miss Dombey.'

Both his auditors assent.

'Because you know,' says Mr Toots, 'I have never changed my sentiments towards Miss Dombey. They are the same as ever. She is the same bright vision to me, at present, that she was before I made Walters's acquaintance. When Mrs Toots and myself first began to talk of—in short, of the tender passion, you know, Captain Gills.'

'Ay, ay, my lad,' says the Captain, 'as makes us all slue round—for which you'll overhaul the book—'

'I shall certainly do so, Captain Gills,' says Mr Toots, with great earnestness; 'when we first began to mention such subjects, I explained that I was what you may call a Blighted Flower, you know.'

The Captain approves of this figure greatly; and murmurs that no flower as blows, is like the rose.

'But Lord bless me,' pursues Mr Toots, 'she was as entirely conscious of the state of my feelings as I was myself. There was nothing I could tell her. She was the only person who could have stood between me and the silent Tomb, and she did it, in a manner to command my everlasting admiration. She knows that there's nobody in the world I look up to, as I do to Miss Dombey. Knows that there's nothing on earth I wouldn't do for Miss Dombey. She knows that I consider Miss Dombey the most beautiful, the most amiable, the most angelic of her sex. What is her observation upon that? The perfection of sense. "My dear, you're right. I think so too."'

'And so do I!' says the Captain.

'So do I,' says Sol Gills.

'Then,' resumes Mr Toots, after some contemplative pulling at his pipe, during which his visage has expressed the most contented reflection, 'what an observant woman my wife is! What sagacity she possesses! What remarks she makes! It was only last night, when we were sitting in the enjoyment of connubial bliss—which, upon my word and honour, is a feeble term to express my feelings in the society of my wife—that she said how remarkable it was to consider the present position of our friend Walters. "Here," observes my wife, "he is, released from sea-going, after that first long voyage with his young bride"—as you know he was, Mr Sols.'

'Quite true,' says the old Instrument-maker, rubbing his hands.

'"Here he is," says my wife, "released from that, immediately; appointed by the same establishment to a post of great trust and confidence at home; showing himself again worthy; mounting up the ladder with the greatest expedition; beloved by everybody; assisted by his uncle at the very best possible time of his fortunes"—which I think is the case, Mr Sols? My wife is always correct.'

'Why yes, yes—some of our lost ships, freighted with gold, have come home, truly,' returns old Sol, laughing. 'Small craft, Mr Toots, but serviceable to my boy!'

'Exactly so,' says Mr Toots. 'You'll never find my wife wrong. "Here he is," says that most remarkable woman, "so situated,—and what follows? What follows?" observed Mrs Toots. Now pray remark, Captain Gills, and Mr Sols, the depth of my wife's penetration. "Why that, under the very eye of Mr Dombey, there is a foundation going on, upon which a—an Edifice;" that was Mrs Toots's word,' says Mr Toots exultingly, '"is gradually rising, perhaps to equal, perhaps excel, that of which he was once the head, and the small beginnings of which (a common fault, but a bad one, Mrs Toots said) escaped his memory. Thus," said my wife, "from his daughter, after all, another Dombey and Son will ascend"—no "rise;" that was Mrs Toots's word— "triumphant!"'

Mr Toots, with the assistance of his pipe—which he is extremely glad to devote to oratorical purposes, as its proper use affects him with a very uncomfortable sensation—does such grand justice to this prophetic sentence of his wife's, that the Captain, throwing away his glazed hat in a state of the greatest excitement, cries:

'Sol Gills, you man of science and my ould pardner, what did I tell Wal'r to overhaul on that there night when he first took to business? Was it this here quotation, "Turn again Whittington, Lord Mayor of London, and when you are old you will never depart from it." Was it them words, Sol Gills?'

'It certainly was, Ned,' replied the old Instrument-maker. 'I remember well.'

'Then I tell you what,' says the Captain, leaning back in his chair, and composing his chest for a prodigious roar. 'I'll give you Lovely Peg right through; and stand by, both on you, for the chorus!'

Buried wine grows older, as the old Madeira did, in its time; and dust and cobwebs thicken on the bottles.

Autumn days are shining, and on the sea-beach there are often a young lady, and a white-haired gentleman. With them, or near them, are two children: boy and girl. And an old dog is generally in their company.

The white-haired gentleman walks with the little boy, talks with him, helps him in his play, attends upon him, watches him as if he were the object of his life. If he be thoughtful, the white-haired gentleman is thoughtful too; and sometimes when the child is sitting by his side, and looks up in his face, asking him questions, he takes the tiny hand in his, and holding it, forgets to answer. Then the child says:

'What, grandpa! Am I so like my poor little Uncle again?'

'Yes, Paul. But he was weak, and you are very strong.'

'Oh yes, I am very strong.'

'And he lay on a little bed beside the sea, and you can run about.'

And so they range away again, busily, for the white-haired gentleman likes best to see the child free and stirring; and as they go about together, the story of the bond between them goes about, and follows them.

But no one, except Florence, knows the measure of the white-haired gentleman's affection for the girl. That story never goes about. The child herself almost wonders at a certain secrecy he keeps in it. He hoards her in his heart. He cannot bear to see a cloud upon her face. He cannot bear to see her sit apart. He fancies that she feels a slight, when there is none. He steals away to look at her, in her sleep. It pleases him to have her come, and wake him in the morning. He is fondest of her and most loving to her, when there is no creature by. The child says then, sometimes:

'Dear grandpapa, why do you cry when you kiss me?'

He only answers, 'Little Florence! little Florence!' and smooths away the curls that shade her earnest eyes.

The voices in the waves speak low to him of Florence, day and night—plainest when he, his blooming daughter, and her husband, beside them in the evening, or sit at an open window, listening to their roar. They speak to him of Florence and his altered heart; of Florence and their ceaseless murmuring to her of the love, eternal and illimitable, extending still, beyond the sea, beyond the sky, to the invisible country far away.

Never from the mighty sea may voices rise too late, to come between us and the unseen region on the other shore! Better, far better, that they whispered of that region in our childish ears, and the swift river hurried us away!

PREFACE OF 1848

Note: although the author called this section a ***preface****, it is clear that its place was meant at the end of the book.*

I cannot forego my usual opportunity of saying farewell to my readers in this greeting-place, though I have only to acknowledge the unbounded warmth and earnestness of their sympathy in every stage of the journey we have just concluded.

If any of them have felt a sorrow in one of the principal incidents on which this fiction turns, I hope it may be a sorrow of that sort which endears the sharers in it, one to another. This is not unselfish in me. I may claim to have felt it, at least as much as anybody else; and I would fain be remembered kindly for my part in the experience.

DEVONSHIRE TERRACE, Twenty-Fourth March, 1848.

PREFACE OF 1867

I make so bold as to believe that the faculty (or the habit) of correctly observing the characters of men, is a rare one. I have not even found, within my experience, that the faculty (or the habit) of correctly observing so much as the faces of men, is a general one by any means. The two commonest mistakes in judgement that I suppose to arise from the former default, are, the confounding of shyness with arrogance—a very common mistake indeed—and the not understanding that an obstinate nature exists in a perpetual struggle with itself.

Mr Dombey undergoes no violent change, either in this book, or in real life. A sense of his injustice is within him, all along. The more he represses it, the more unjust he necessarily is. Internal shame and external circumstances may bring the contest to a close in a week, or a day; but, it has been a contest for years, and is only fought out after a long balance of victory.

I began this book by the Lake of Geneva, and went on with it for some months in France, before pursuing it in England. The association between the writing and the place of writing is so curiously strong in my mind, that at this day, although I know, in my fancy, every stair in the little midshipman's house, and could swear to every pew in the church in which Florence was married, or to every young gentleman's bedstead in Doctor Blimber's establishment, I yet confusedly imagine Captain Cuttle as secluding himself from Mrs MacStinger among the mountains of Switzerland. Similarly, when I am reminded by any chance of what it was that the waves were always saying, my remembrance wanders for a whole winter night about the streets of Paris—as I restlessly did with a heavy heart, on the night when I had written the chapter in which my little friend and I parted company.

THE END OF
Dombey and Son

GEORGE SILVERMAN'S EXPLANATION

FIRST CHAPTER

IT happened in this wise -

But, sitting with my pen in my hand looking at those words again, without descrying any hint in them of the words that should follow, it comes into my mind that they have an abrupt appearance. They may serve, however, if I let them remain, to suggest how very difficult I find it to begin to explain my explanation. An uncouth phrase: and yet I do not see my way to a better.

SECOND CHAPTER

IT happened in THIS wise -

But, looking at those words, and comparing them with my former opening, I find they are the self-same words repeated. This is the more surprising to me, because I employ them in quite a new connection. For indeed I declare that my intention was to discard the commencement I first had in my thoughts, and to give the preference to another of an entirely different nature, dating my explanation from an anterior period of my life. I will make a third trial, without erasing this second failure, protesting that it is not my design to conceal any of my infirmities, whether they be of head or heart.

THIRD CHAPTER

NOT as yet directly aiming at how it came to pass, I will come upon it by degrees. The natural manner, after all, for God knows that is how it came upon me.

My parents were in a miserable condition of life, and my infant home was a cellar in Preston. I recollect the sound of father's Lancashire clogs on the street pavement above, as being different in my young hearing from the sound of all other clogs; and I recollect, that, when mother came down the cellar-steps, I used tremblingly to speculate on her feet having a good or an ill- tempered look, - on her knees, - on her waist, - until finally her face came into view, and settled the question. From this it will be seen that I was timid, and that the cellar-steps were steep, and that the doorway was very low.

Mother had the gripe and clutch of poverty upon her face, upon her figure, and not least of all upon her voice. Her sharp and high- pitched words were squeezed out of her, as by the compression of bony fingers on a leathern bag; and she had a way of rolling her eyes about and about the cellar, as she scolded, that was gaunt and hungry. Father, with his shoulders rounded, would sit quiet on a three-legged stool, looking at the empty grate, until she would pluck the stool from under him, and bid him go bring some money home. Then he would dismally ascend the steps; and I, holding my ragged shirt and trousers together with a hand (my only braces), would feint and dodge from mother's pursuing grasp at my hair.

A worldly little devil was mother's usual name for me. Whether I cried for that I was in the dark, or for that it was cold, or for that I was hungry, or whether I squeezed myself into a warm corner when there was a fire, or ate voraciously when there was food, she would still say, 'O, you worldly little devil!' And the sting of it was, that I quite well knew myself to be a worldly little devil. Worldly as to wanting to be housed and warmed, worldly as to wanting to be fed, worldly as to the greed with which I inwardly compared how much I got of those good things with how much father and mother got, when, rarely, those good things were going.

Sometimes they both went away seeking work; and then I would be locked up in the cellar for a day or two at a time. I was at my worldliest then. Left alone, I yielded myself up to a worldly yearning for enough of anything (except misery), and for the death of mother's father, who was a machine-maker at Birmingham, and on whose decease, I had heard mother say, she would come into a whole courtful of houses 'if she had her rights.' Worldly little devil, I would stand about, musingly fitting my cold bare feet into cracked bricks and crevices of the damp cellar-floor, - walking over my grandfather's body, so to speak, into the courtful of houses, and selling them for meat and drink, and clothes to wear.

At last a change came down into our cellar. The universal change came down even as low as that, - so will it mount to any height on which a human creature can perch, - and brought other changes with it.

We had a heap of I don't know what foul litter in the darkest corner, which we called 'the bed.' For three days mother lay upon it without getting up, and then began at times to laugh. If I had ever heard her laugh before, it had been so seldom that the strange sound frightened me. It frightened father too; and we took it by turns to give her water. Then she began to move her head from side to side, and sing. After that, she getting no better, father fell a-laughing and a-singing; and then there was only I to give them both water, and they both died.

FOURTH CHAPTER

WHEN I was lifted out of the cellar by two men, of whom one came peeping down alone first, and ran away and brought the other, I could hardly bear the light of the street. I was sitting in the road-way, blinking at it, and at a ring of people collected around me, but not close to me, when, true to my character of worldly little devil, I broke silence by saying, 'I am hungry and thirsty!'

'Does he know they are dead?' asked one of another.

'Do you know your father and mother are both dead of fever?' asked a third of me severely.

'I don't know what it is to be dead. I supposed it meant that, when the cup rattled against their teeth, and the water spilt over them. I am hungry and thirsty.' That was all I had to say about it.

The ring of people widened outward from the inner side as I looked around me; and I smelt vinegar, and what I know to be camphor, thrown in towards where I sat. Presently some one put a great vessel of smoking vinegar on the ground near me; and then they all looked at me in silent horror as I ate and drank of what was brought for me. I knew at the time they had a horror of me, but I couldn't help it.

I was still eating and drinking, and a murmur of discussion had begun to arise respecting what was to be done with me next, when I heard a cracked voice somewhere in the ring say, 'My name is Hawkyard, Mr. Verity Hawkyard, of West Bromwich.' Then the ring split in one place; and a yellow-faced, peak-nosed gentleman, clad all in iron-gray to his gaiters, pressed forward with a policeman and another official of some sort. He came forward close to the vessel of smoking vinegar; from which he sprinkled himself carefully, and me copiously.

'He had a grandfather at Birmingham, this young boy, who is just dead too,' said Mr. Hawkyard.

I turned my eyes upon the speaker, and said in a ravening manner,
'Where's his houses?'

'Hah! Horrible worldliness on the edge of the grave,' said Mr. Hawkyard, casting more of the vinegar over me, as if to get my devil out of me. 'I have undertaken a slight - a very slight - trust in behalf of this boy;

quite a voluntary trust: a matter of mere honour, if not of mere sentiment: still I have taken it upon myself, and it shall be (O, yes, it shall be!) discharged.'

The bystanders seemed to form an opinion of this gentleman much more favourable than their opinion of me.

'He shall be taught,' said Mr. Hawkyard, '(O, yes, he shall be taught!) but what is to be done with him for the present? He may be infected. He may disseminate infection.' The ring widened considerably. 'What is to be done with him?'

He held some talk with the two officials. I could distinguish no word save 'Farm-house.' There was another sound several times repeated, which was wholly meaningless in my ears then, but which I knew afterwards to be 'Hoghton Towers.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Hawkyard. 'I think that sounds promising; I think that sounds hopeful. And he can be put by himself in a ward, for a night or two, you say?'

It seemed to be the police-officer who had said so; for it was he who replied, Yes! It was he, too, who finally took me by the arm, and walked me before him through the streets, into a whitewashed room in a bare building, where I had a chair to sit in, a table to sit at, an iron bedstead and good mattress to lie upon, and a rug and blanket to cover me. Where I had enough to eat too, and was shown how to clean the tin porringer in which it was conveyed to me, until it was as good as a looking-glass. Here, likewise, I was put in a bath, and had new clothes brought to me; and my old rags were burnt, and I was camphored and vinegared and disinfected in a variety of ways.

When all this was done, - I don't know in how many days or how few, but it matters not, - Mr. Hawkyard stepped in at the door, remaining close to it, and said, 'Go and stand against the opposite wall, George Silverman. As far off as you can. That'll do. How do you feel?'

I told him that I didn't feel cold, and didn't feel hungry, and didn't feel thirsty. That was the whole round of human feelings, as far as I knew, except the pain of being beaten.

'Well,' said he, 'you are going, George, to a healthy farm-house to be purified. Keep in the air there as much as you can. Live an out-of-door life there, until you are fetched away. You had better not say much - in fact, you had better be very careful not to say anything - about what your parents died of, or they might not like to take you in. Behave well, and I'll put you to school; O, yes! I'll put you to school, though I'm not obligated to do it. I am a servant of the Lord, George; and I have been a good servant to him, I have, these five-and-thirty years. The Lord has had a good servant in me, and he knows it.'

What I then supposed him to mean by this, I cannot imagine. As little do I know when I began to comprehend that he was a prominent member of some obscure denomination or congregation, every member of which held forth to the rest when so inclined, and among whom he was called Brother Hawkyard. It was enough for me to know, on that day in the ward, that the farmer's cart was waiting for me at the street corner. I was not slow to get into it; for it was the first ride I ever had in my life.

It made me sleepy, and I slept. First, I stared at Preston streets as long as they lasted; and, meanwhile, I may have had some small dumb wondering within me whereabouts our cellar was; but I doubt it. Such a worldly little devil was I, that I took no thought who would bury father and mother, or where they would be buried, or when. The question whether the eating and drinking by day, and the covering by night, would be as good at the farm-house as at the ward superseded those questions.

The jolting of the cart on a loose stony road awoke me; and I found that we were mounting a steep hill, where the road was a rutty by- road through a field. And so, by fragments of an ancient terrace, and by some rugged outbuildings that had once been fortified, and passing under a ruined gateway we came to the old farm-house in the thick stone wall outside the old quadrangle of Hoghton Towers: which I looked at like a stupid savage, seeing no specially in, seeing no antiquity in; assuming all farm-houses to resemble it; assigning the decay I noticed to the one potent cause of all ruin that I knew, - poverty; eyeing the pigeons in their flights, the cattle in their stalls, the ducks in the pond, and the fowls pecking about the yard, with a hungry hope that plenty of them might be killed for dinner while I stayed there; wondering whether the scrubbed dairy vessels, drying in the sunlight, could be goodly porringers out of which the master ate his belly-filling food, and which he polished when he had done, according to my ward experience; shrinkingly doubtful whether the shadows, passing over that airy height on the bright spring day, were not something in the nature of frowns, - sordid, afraid, unadmiring, - a small brute to shudder at.

To that time I had never had the faintest impression of duty. I had had no knowledge whatever that there was anything lovely in this life. When I had occasionally slunk up the cellar-steps into the street, and glared in at shop-windows, I had done so with no higher feelings than we may suppose to animate a mangy young dog or wolf-cub. It is equally the fact that I had never been alone, in the sense of holding unselfish converse with myself. I had been solitary often enough, but nothing better.

Such was my condition when I sat down to my dinner that day, in the kitchen of the old farm-house. Such was my condition when I lay on my bed in the old farm-house that night, stretched out opposite the narrow mullioned window, in the cold light of the moon, like a young vampire.

FIFTH CHAPTER

WHAT do I know of Hoghton Towers? Very little; for I have been gratefully unwilling to disturb my first impressions. A house, centuries old, on high ground a mile or so removed from the road between Preston and Blackburn, where the first James of England, in his hurry to make money by making baronets, perhaps made some of those remunerative dignitaries. A house, centuries old, deserted and falling to pieces, its woods and gardens long since grass-land or ploughed up, the Rivers Ribble and Darwen glancing below it, and a vague haze of smoke, against which not even the supernatural prescience of the first Stuart could foresee a counter-blast, hinting at steam-power, powerful in two distances.

What did I know then of Hoghton Towers? When I first peeped in at the gate of the lifeless quadrangle, and started from the mouldering statue becoming visible to me like its guardian ghost; when I stole round by the back of the farm-house, and got in among the ancient rooms, many of them with their floors and ceilings falling, the beams and rafters hanging dangerously down, the plaster dropping as I trod, the oaken panels stripped away, the windows half walled up, half broken; when I discovered a gallery commanding the old kitchen, and looked down between balustrades upon a massive old table and benches, fearing to see I know not what dead-alive creatures come in and seat themselves, and look up with I know not what dreadful eyes, or lack of eyes, at me; when all over the house I was awed by gaps and chinks where the sky stared sorrowfully at me, where the birds passed, and the ivy rustled, and the stains of winter weather blotched the rotten floors; when down at the bottom of dark pits of staircase, into which the stairs had sunk, green leaves trembled, butterflies fluttered, and bees hummed in and out through the broken door-ways; when encircling the whole ruin were sweet scents, and sights of fresh green growth, and ever-renewing life, that I had never dreamed of, - I say, when I passed into such clouded perception of these things as my dark soul could compass, what did I know then of Hoghton Towers?

I have written that the sky stared sorrowfully at me. Therein have I anticipated the answer. I knew that all these things looked sorrowfully at me; that they seemed to sigh or whisper, not without pity for me, 'Alas! poor worldly little devil!'

There were two or three rats at the bottom of one of the smaller pits of broken staircase when I craned over and looked in. They were scuffling for some prey that was there; and, when they started and hid themselves close together in the dark, I thought of the old life (it had grown old already) in the cellar.

How not to be this worldly little devil? how not to have a repugnance towards myself as I had towards the rats? I hid in a corner of one of the smaller chambers, frightened at myself, and crying (it was the first time I had ever cried for any cause not purely physical), and I tried to think about it. One of the farm- ploughs came into my range of view just then; and it seemed to help me as it went on with its two horses up and down the field so peacefully and quietly.

There was a girl of about my own age in the farm-house family, and she sat opposite to me at the narrow table at meal-times. It had come into my mind, at our first dinner, that she might take the fever from me. The thought had not disquieted me then. I had only speculated how she would look under the altered circumstances, and whether she would die. But it came into my mind now, that I might try to prevent her taking the fever by keeping away from her. I knew I should have but scrambling board if I did; so much the less worldly and less devilish the deed would be, I thought.

From that hour, I withdrew myself at early morning into secret corners of the ruined house, and remained hidden there until she went to bed. At first, when meals were ready, I used to hear them calling me; and then my resolution weakened. But I strengthened it again by going farther off into the ruin, and getting out of hearing. I often watched for her at the dim windows; and, when I saw that she was fresh and rosy, felt much happier.

Out of this holding her in my thoughts, to the humanising of myself, I suppose some childish love arose within me. I felt, in some sort, dignified by the pride of protecting her, - by the pride of making the sacrifice for her. As my heart swelled with that new feeling, it insensibly softened about mother and father. It seemed to have been frozen before, and now to be thawed. The old ruin and all the lovely things that haunted it were not sorrowful for me only, but sorrowful for mother and father as well. Therefore did I cry again, and often too.

The farm-house family conceived me to be of a morose temper, and were very short with me; though they never stinted me in such broken fare as was to be got out of regular hours. One night when I lifted the kitchen latch at my usual time, Sylvia (that was her pretty name) had but just gone out of the room. Seeing her ascending the opposite stairs, I stood still at the door. She had heard the clink of the latch, and looked round.

'George,' she called to me in a pleased voice, 'to-morrow is my birthday; and we are to have a fiddler, and there's a party of boys and girls coming in a cart, and we shall dance. I invite you. Be sociable for once, George.'

'I am very sorry, miss,' I answered; 'but I - but, no; I can't come.'

'You are a disagreeable, ill-humoured lad,' she returned disdainfully; 'and I ought not to have asked you. I shall never speak to you again.'

As I stood with my eyes fixed on the fire, after she was gone, I felt that the farmer bent his brows upon me.

'Eh, lad!' said he; 'Sylvy's right. You're as moody and broody a lad as never I set eyes on yet.'

I tried to assure him that I meant no harm; but he only said coldly, 'Maybe not, maybe not! There, get thy supper, get thy supper; and then thou canst sulk to thy heart's content again.'

Ah! if they could have seen me next day, in the ruin, watching for the arrival of the cart full of merry young guests; if they could have seen me at night, gliding out from behind the ghostly statue, listening to the music and the fall of dancing feet, and watching the lighted farm-house windows from the quadrangle when all the ruin was dark; if they could have read my heart, as I crept up to bed by the back way, comforting myself with the reflection, 'They will take no hurt from me,' - they would not have thought mine a morose or an unsocial nature.

It was in these ways that I began to form a shy disposition; to be of a timidly silent character under misconstruction; to have an inexpressible, perhaps a morbid, dread of ever being sordid or worldly. It was in these ways that my nature came to shape itself to such a mould, even before it was affected by the influences of the studious and retired life of a poor scholar.

SIXTH CHAPTER

BROTHER HAWKYARD (as he insisted on my calling him) put me to school, and told me to work my way. 'You are all right, George,' he said. 'I have been the best servant the Lord has had in his service for this five-and-thirty year (O, I have!); and he knows the value of such a servant as I have been to him (O, yes, he does!); and he'll prosper your schooling as a part of my reward. That's what HE'll do, George. He'll do it for me.'

From the first I could not like this familiar knowledge of the ways of the sublime, inscrutable Almighty, on Brother Hawkyard's part. As I grew a little wiser, and still a little wiser, I liked it less and less. His manner, too, of confirming himself in a parenthesis, - as if, knowing himself, he doubted his own word, - I found distasteful. I cannot tell how much these dislikes cost me; for I had a dread that they were worldly.

As time went on, I became a Foundation-boy on a good foundation, and I cost Brother Hawkyard nothing. When I had worked my way so far, I worked yet harder, in the hope of ultimately getting a presentation to college and a fellowship. My health has never been strong (some vapour from the Preston cellar cleaves to me, I think); and what with much work and some weakness, I came again to be regarded - that is, by my fellow-students - as unsocial.

All through my time as a foundation-boy, I was within a few miles of Brother Hawkyard's congregation; and whenever I was what we called a leave-boy on a Sunday, I went over there at his desire. Before the knowledge became forced upon me that outside their place of meeting these brothers and sisters were no better than the rest of the human family, but on the whole were, to put the case mildly, as bad as most, in respect of giving short weight in their shops, and not speaking the truth, - I say, before this knowledge became forced upon me, their prolix addresses, their inordinate conceit, their daring ignorance, their investment of the Supreme Ruler of heaven and earth with their own miserable meannesses and littlenesses, greatly shocked me. Still, as their term for the frame of mind that could not perceive them to be in an exalted state of grace was the 'worldly' state, I did for a time suffer tortures under my inquiries of myself whether that young worldly- devilish spirit of mine could secretly be lingering at the bottom of my non-appreciation.

Brother Hawkyard was the popular expounder in this assembly, and generally occupied the platform (there was a little platform with a table on it, in lieu of a pulpit) first, on a Sunday afternoon. He was by trade a drysalter. Brother Gimblet, an elderly man with a crabbed face, a large dog's-eared shirt-collar, and a spotted blue neckerchief reaching up behind to the crown of his head, was also a drysalter and an expounder. Brother Gimblet professed the greatest admiration for Brother Hawkyard, but (I had thought more than once) bore him a jealous grudge.

Let whosoever may peruse these lines kindly take the pains here to read twice my solemn pledge, that what I write of the language and customs of the congregation in question I write scrupulously, literally, exactly, from the life and the truth.

On the first Sunday after I had won what I had so long tried for, and when it was certain that I was going up to college, Brother Hawkyard concluded a long exhortation thus:

'Well, my friends and fellow-sinners, now I told you when I began, that I didn't know a word of what I was going to say to you (and no, I did not!), but that it was all one to me, because I knew the Lord would put into my mouth the words I wanted.'

('That's it!' from Brother Gimblet.)

'And he did put into my mouth the words I wanted.'

('So he did!' from Brother Gimblet.)

'And why?'

('Ah, let's have that!' from Brother Gimblet.)

'Because I have been his faithful servant for five-and-thirty years, and because he knows it. For five-and-thirty years! And he knows it, mind you! I got those words that I wanted on account of my wages. I got 'em from the Lord, my fellow-sinners. Down! I said, "Here's a heap of wages due; let us have something down, on account." And I got it down, and I paid it over to you; and you won't wrap it up in a napkin, nor yet in a towel, nor yet pocketankercher, but you'll put it out at good interest. Very well. Now, my brothers and sisters and fellow-sinners, I am going to conclude with a question, and I'll make it so plain (with the help of the Lord, after five-and-thirty years, I should rather hope!) as that the Devil shall not be able to confuse it in your heads, - which he would be overjoyed to do.'

('Just his way. Crafty old blackguard!' from Brother Gimblet.)

'And the question is this, Are the angels learned?'

('Not they. Not a bit on it!' from Brother Gimblet, with the greatest confidence.)

'Not they. And where's the proof? sent ready-made by the hand of the Lord. Why, there's one among us here now, that has got all the learning that can be crammed into him. I got him all the learning that could be crammed into him. His grandfather' (this I had never heard before) 'was a brother of ours. He was Brother Parksop. That's what he was. Parksop; Brother Parksop. His worldly name was Parksop, and he was a brother of this brotherhood. Then wasn't he Brother Parksop?'

('Must be. Couldn't help hisself!' from Brother Gimblet.)

'Well, he left that one now here present among us to the care of a brother-sinner of his (and that brother-sinner, mind you, was a sinner of a bigger size in his time than any of you; praise the Lord!), Brother Hawkyard. Me. I got him without fee or reward, - without a morsel of myrrh, or frankincense, nor yet amber, letting alone the honeycomb, - all the learning that could be crammed into him. Has it brought him into our temple, in the spirit? No. Have we had any ignorant brothers and sisters that didn't know round O from crooked S, come in among us meanwhile? Many. Then the angels are NOT learned; then they don't so much as know their alphabet. And now, my friends and fellow-sinners, having brought it to that, perhaps some brother present - perhaps you, Brother Gimblet - will pray a bit for us?'

Brother Gimblet undertook the sacred function, after having drawn his sleeve across his mouth, and muttered, 'Well! I don't know as I see my way to hitting any of you quite in the right place neither.' He said this with a dark smile, and then began to bellow. What we were specially to be preserved from, according to his solicitations, was, despoilment of the orphan, suppression of testamentary intentions on the part of a father or (say) grandfather, appropriation of the orphan's house-property, feigning to give in charity to the wronged one from whom we withheld his due; and that class of sins. He ended with the petition, 'Give us peace!' which, speaking for myself, was very much needed after twenty minutes of his bellowing.

Even though I had not seen him when he rose from his knees, steaming with perspiration, glance at Brother Hawkyard, and even though I had not heard Brother Hawkyard's tone of congratulating him on the vigour with which he had roared, I should have detected a malicious application in this prayer. Unformed suspicions to a similar effect had sometimes passed through my mind in my earlier school-days, and had always caused me great distress; for they were worldly in their nature, and wide, very wide, of the spirit that had drawn me from Sylvia. They were sordid suspicions, without a shadow of proof. They were worthy to have originated in the unwholesome cellar. They were not only without proof, but against proof; for was I not myself a living proof of what Brother Hawkyard had done? and without him, how should I ever have seen the sky look sorrowfully down upon that wretched boy at Hoghton Towers?

Although the dread of a relapse into a stage of savage selfishness was less strong upon me as I approached manhood, and could act in an increased degree for myself, yet I was always on my guard against any tendency to such relapse. After getting these suspicions under my feet, I had been troubled by not being able to like Brother Hawkyard's manner, or his professed religion. So it came about, that, as I walked back that Sunday evening, I thought it would be an act of reparation for any such injury my struggling thoughts had unwillingly done him, if I wrote, and placed in his hands, before going to college, a full acknowledgment of his goodness to me, and an ample tribute of thanks. It might serve as an implied vindication of him against any dark scandal from a rival brother and expounder, or from any other quarter.

Accordingly, I wrote the document with much care. I may add with much feeling too; for it affected me as I went on. Having no set studies to pursue, in the brief interval between leaving the Foundation and going to Cambridge, I determined to walk out to his place of business, and give it into his own hands.

It was a winter afternoon, when I tapped at the door of his little counting-house, which was at the farther end of his long, low shop. As I did so (having entered by the back yard, where casks and boxes were taken in, and where there was the inscription, 'Private way to the counting-house'), a shopman called to me from the counter that he was engaged.

'Brother Gimblet' (said the shopman, who was one of the brotherhood) 'is with him.'

I thought this all the better for my purpose, and made bold to tap again. They were talking in a low tone, and money was passing; for I heard it being counted out.

'Who is it?' asked Brother Hawkyard, sharply.

'George Silverman,' I answered, holding the door open. 'May I come in?'

Both brothers seemed so astounded to see me that I felt shyer than usual. But they looked quite cadaverous in the early gaslight, and perhaps that accidental circumstance exaggerated the expression of their faces.

'What is the matter?' asked Brother Hawkyard.

'Ay! what is the matter?' asked Brother Gimblet.

'Nothing at all,' I said, diffidently producing my document: 'I am only the bearer of a letter from myself.'

'From yourself, George?' cried Brother Hawkyard.

'And to you,' said I.

'And to me, George?'

He turned paler, and opened it hurriedly; but looking over it, and seeing generally what it was, became less hurried, recovered his colour, and said, 'Praise the Lord!'

'That's it!' cried Brother Gimblet. 'Well put! Amen.'

Brother Hawkyard then said, in a livelier strain, 'You must know, George, that Brother Gimblet and I are going to make our two businesses one. We are going into partnership. We are settling it now. Brother Gimblet is to take one clear half of the profits (O, yes! he shall have it; he shall have it to the last farthing).'

'D.V.!' said Brother Gimblet, with his right fist firmly clinched on his right leg.

'There is no objection,' pursued Brother Hawkyard, 'to my reading this aloud, George?'

As it was what I expressly desired should be done, after yesterday's prayer, I more than readily begged him to read it aloud. He did so; and Brother Gimblet listened with a crabbed smile.

'It was in a good hour that I came here,' he said, wrinkling up his eyes. 'It was in a good hour, likewise, that I was moved yesterday to depict for the terror of evil-doers a character the direct opposite of Brother Hawkyard's. But it was the Lord that done it: I felt him at it while I was perspiring.'

After that it was proposed by both of them that I should attend the congregation once more before my final departure. What my shy reserve would undergo, from being expressly preached at and prayed at, I knew beforehand. But I reflected that it would be for the last time, and that it might add to the weight of my letter. It was well known to the brothers and sisters that there was no place taken for me in THEIR paradise; and if I showed this last token of deference to Brother Hawkyard, notoriously in despite of my own sinful inclinations, it might go some little way in aid of my statement that he had been good to me, and that I was grateful to him. Merely stipulating, therefore, that no express endeavour should be made for my conversion, - which would involve the rolling of several brothers and sisters on the floor, declaring that they felt all their sins in a heap on their left side, weighing so many pounds avoirdupois, as I knew from what I had seen of those repulsive mysteries, - I promised.

Since the reading of my letter, Brother Gimblet had been at intervals wiping one eye with an end of his spotted blue neckerchief, and grinning to himself. It was, however, a habit that brother had, to grin in an ugly manner even when expounding. I call to mind a delighted snarl with which he used to detail from the platform the torments reserved for the wicked (meaning all human creation except the brotherhood), as being remarkably hideous.

I left the two to settle their articles of partnership, and count money; and I never saw them again but on the following Sunday. Brother Hawkyard died within two or three years, leaving all he possessed to Brother Gimblet, in virtue of a will dated (as I have been told) that very day.

Now I was so far at rest with myself, when Sunday came, knowing that I had conquered my own mistrust, and righted Brother Hawkyard in the jaundiced vision of a rival, that I went, even to that coarse chapel, in a less sensitive state than usual. How could I foresee that the delicate, perhaps the diseased, corner of my mind, where I winced and shrunk when it was touched, or was even approached, would be handled as the theme of the whole proceedings?

On this occasion it was assigned to Brother Hawkyard to pray, and to Brother Gimblet to preach. The prayer was to open the ceremonies; the discourse was to come next. Brothers Hawkyard and Gimblet were both on the platform; Brother Hawkyard on his knees at the table, unmusically ready to pray; Brother Gimblet sitting against the wall, grinningly ready to preach.

'Let us offer up the sacrifice of prayer, my brothers and sisters and fellow-sinners.' Yes; but it was I who was the sacrifice. It was our poor, sinful, worldly-minded brother here present who was wrestled for. The now-opening career of this our unawakened brother might lead to his becoming a minister of what was called 'the church.' That was what HE looked to. The church. Not the chapel, Lord. The church. No rectors, no vicars, no archdeacons, no bishops, no archbishops, in the chapel, but, O Lord! many such in the church. Protect our sinful brother from his love of lucre. Cleanse from our unawakened brother's breast his sin of worldly-mindedness. The prayer said infinitely more in words, but nothing more to any intelligible effect.

Then Brother Gimblet came forward, and took (as I knew he would) the text, 'My kingdom is not of this world.' Ah! but whose was, my fellow-sinners? Whose? Why, our brother's here present was. The only kingdom he had an idea of was of this world. ('That's it!' from several of the congregation.) What did the woman do when she lost the piece of money? Went and looked for it. What should our brother do when he lost his way? ('Go and look for it,' from a sister.) Go and look for it, true. But must he look for it in the right direction, or in the wrong? ('In the right,' from a brother.) There spake the prophets! He must look for it in the right direction, or he couldn't find it. But he had turned his back upon the right direction, and he wouldn't find it. Now, my fellow-sinners, to show you the difference betwixt worldly- mindedness and unworldly-mindedness, betwixt kingdoms not of this world and kingdoms OF this world, here was a letter wrote by even our worldly-minded brother unto Brother Hawkyard. Judge, from hearing of it read, whether Brother Hawkyard was the faithful steward that the Lord had in his mind only t'other day, when, in this very place, he drew you the picter of the unfaithful one; for it was him that done it, not me. Don't doubt that!

Brother Gimblet then groaned and bellowed his way through my composition, and subsequently through an hour. The service closed with a hymn, in which the brothers unanimously roared, and the sisters unanimously shrieked at me, That I by wiles of worldly gain was mocked, and they on waters of sweet love were rocked; that I with mammon struggled in the dark, while they were floating in a second ark.

I went out from all this with an aching heart and a weary spirit: not because I was quite so weak as to consider these narrow creatures interpreters of the Divine Majesty and Wisdom, but because I was weak enough to feel as though it were my hard fortune to be misrepresented and misunderstood, when I most tried to subdue any risings of mere worldliness within me, and when I most hoped that, by dint of trying earnestly, I had succeeded.

SEVENTH CHAPTER

MY timidity and my obscurity occasioned me to live a secluded life at college, and to be little known. No relative ever came to visit me, for I had no relative. No intimate friends broke in upon my studies, for I made no intimate friends. I supported myself on my scholarship, and read much. My college time was otherwise not so very different from my time at Hoghton Towers.

Knowing myself to be unfit for the noisier stir of social existence, but believing myself qualified to do my duty in a moderate, though earnest way, if I could obtain some small preferment in the Church, I applied my mind to the clerical profession. In due sequence I took orders, was ordained, and began to look about me for employment. I must observe that I had taken a good degree, that I had succeeded in winning a good fellowship, and that my means were ample for my retired way of life. By this time I had read with several young men; and the occupation increased my income, while it was highly interesting to me. I once accidentally overheard our greatest don say, to my boundless joy, 'That he heard it reported of Silverman that his gift of quiet explanation, his patience, his amiable temper, and his conscientiousness made him the best of coaches.' May my 'gift of quiet explanation' come more seasonably and powerfully to my aid in this present explanation than I think it will!

It may be in a certain degree owing to the situation of my college-rooms (in a corner where the daylight was sobered), but it is in a much larger degree referable to the state of my own mind, that I seem to myself, on looking back to this time of my life, to have been always in the peaceful shade. I can see others in the sunlight; I can see our boats' crews and our athletic young men on the glistening water, or speckled with the moving lights of sunlit leaves; but I myself am always in the shadow looking on. Not unsympathetically, - God forbid! - but looking on alone, much as I looked at Sylvia from the shadows of the ruined house, or looked at the red gleam shining through the farmer's windows, and listened to the fall of dancing feet, when all the ruin was dark that night in the quadrangle.

I now come to the reason of my quoting that laudation of myself above given. Without such reason, to repeat it would have been mere boastfulness.

Among those who had read with me was Mr. Fareway, second son of Lady Fareway, widow of Sir Gaston Fareway, baronet. This young gentleman's abilities were much above the average; but he came of a rich family, and was idle and luxurious. He presented himself to me too late, and afterwards came to me too irregularly, to admit of my being of much service to him. In the end, I considered it my duty to dissuade him from going up for an examination which he could never pass; and he left college without a degree. After his departure, Lady Fareway wrote to me, representing the justice of my returning half my fee, as I had been of so little use to her son. Within my knowledge a similar demand had not been made in any other case; and I most freely admit that the justice of it had not occurred to me until it was pointed out. But I at once perceived it, yielded to it, and returned the money -

Mr. Fareway had been gone two years or more, and I had forgotten him, when he one day walked into my rooms as I was sitting at my books.

Said he, after the usual salutations had passed, 'Mr. Silverman, my mother is in town here, at the hotel, and wishes me to present you to her.'

I was not comfortable with strangers, and I dare say I betrayed that I was a little nervous or unwilling. 'For,' said he, without my having spoken, 'I think the interview may tend to the advancement of your prospects.'

It put me to the blush to think that I should be tempted by a worldly reason, and I rose immediately.

Said Mr. Fareway, as we went along, 'Are you a good hand at business?'

'I think not,' said I.

Said Mr. Fareway then, 'My mother is.'

'Truly?' said I.

'Yes: my mother is what is usually called a managing woman.
Doesn't make a bad thing, for instance, even out of the spendthrift
habits of my eldest brother abroad. In short, a managing woman.
This is in confidence.'

He had never spoken to me in confidence, and I was surprised by his doing so. I said I should respect his confidence, of course, and said no more on the delicate subject. We had but a little way to walk, and I was soon in his mother's company. He presented me, shook hands with me, and left us two (as he said) to business.

I saw in my Lady Fareway a handsome, well-preserved lady of somewhat large stature, with a steady glare in her great round dark eyes that embarrassed me.

Said my lady, 'I have heard from my son, Mr. Silverman, that you would be glad of some preferment in the church.' I gave my lady to understand that was so.

'I don't know whether you are aware,' my lady proceeded, 'that we have a presentation to a living? I say WE have; but, in point of fact, I have.'

I gave my lady to understand that I had not been aware of this.

Said my lady, 'So it is: indeed I have two presentations, - one to
two hundred a year, one to six. Both livings are in our county, -
North Devonshire, - as you probably know. The first is vacant.
Would you like it?'

What with my lady's eyes, and what with the suddenness of this proposed gift, I was much confused.

'I am sorry it is not the larger presentation,' said my lady, rather coldly; 'though I will not, Mr. Silverman, pay you the bad compliment of supposing that YOU are, because that would be mercenary, - and mercenary I am persuaded you are not.'

Said I, with my utmost earnestness, 'Thank you, Lady Fareway, thank you, thank you! I should be deeply hurt if I thought I bore the character.'

'Naturally,' said my lady. 'Always detestable, but particularly in a clergyman. You have not said whether you will like the living?'

With apologies for my remissness or indistinctness, I assured my lady that I accepted it most readily and gratefully. I added that I hoped she would not estimate my appreciation of the generosity of her choice by my flow of words; for I was not a ready man in that respect when taken by surprise or touched at heart.

'The affair is concluded,' said my lady; 'concluded. You will find the duties very light, Mr. Silverman. Charming house; charming little garden, orchard, and all that. You will be able to take pupils. By the bye! No: I will return to the word afterwards. What was I going to mention, when it put me out?'

My lady stared at me, as if I knew. And I didn't know. And that perplexed me afresh.

Said my lady, after some consideration, 'O, of course, how very dull of me! The last incumbent, - least mercenary man I ever saw, - in consideration of the duties being so light and the house so delicious, couldn't rest, he said, unless I permitted him to help me with my correspondence, accounts, and various little things of that kind; nothing in themselves, but which it worries a lady to cope with. Would Mr. Silverman also like to -? Or shall I -?'

I hastened to say that my poor help would be always at her ladyship's service.

'I am absolutely blessed,' said my lady, casting up her eyes (and so taking them off me for one moment), 'in having to do with gentlemen who cannot endure an approach to the idea of being mercenary!' She shivered at the word. 'And now as to the pupil.'

'The -?' I was quite at a loss.

'Mr. Silverman, you have no idea what she is. She is,' said my lady, laying her touch upon my coat-sleeve, 'I do verily believe, the most extraordinary girl in this world. Already knows more Greek and Latin than Lady Jane Grey. And taught herself! Has not yet, remember, derived a moment's advantage from Mr. Silverman's classical acquirements. To say nothing of mathematics, which she is bent upon becoming versed in, and in which (as I hear from my son and others) Mr. Silverman's reputation is so deservedly high!'

Under my lady's eyes I must have lost the clue, I felt persuaded; and yet I did not know where I could have dropped it.

'Adelina,' said my lady, 'is my only daughter. If I did not feel quite convinced that I am not blinded by a mother's partiality; unless I was absolutely sure that when you know her, Mr. Silverman, you will esteem it a high and unusual privilege to direct her studies, - I should introduce a mercenary element into this conversation, and ask you on what terms - '

I entreated my lady to go no further. My lady saw that I was troubled, and did me the honour to comply with my request.

EIGHTH CHAPTER

EVERYTHING in mental acquisition that her brother might have been, if he would, and everything in all gracious charms and admirable qualities that no one but herself could be, - this was Adelina.

I will not expatiate upon her beauty; I will not expatiate upon her intelligence, her quickness of perception, her powers of memory, her sweet consideration, from the first moment, for the slow-paced tutor who ministered to her wonderful gifts. I was thirty then; I am over sixty now: she is ever present to me in these hours as she was in those, bright and beautiful and young, wise and fanciful and good.

When I discovered that I loved her, how can I say? In the first day? in the first week? in the first month? Impossible to trace. If I be (as I am) unable to represent to myself any previous period of my life as quite separable from her attracting power, how can I answer for this one detail?

Whensoever I made the discovery, it laid a heavy burden on me. And yet, comparing it with the far heavier burden that I afterwards took up, it does not seem to me now to have been very hard to bear. In the knowledge that I did love her, and that I should love her while my life lasted, and that I was ever to hide my secret deep in my own breast, and she was never to find it, there was a kind of sustaining joy or pride, or comfort, mingled with my pain.

But later on, - say, a year later on, - when I made another discovery, then indeed my suffering and my struggle were strong. That other discovery was -

These words will never see the light, if ever, until my heart is dust; until her bright spirit has returned to the regions of which, when imprisoned here, it surely retained some unusual glimpse of remembrance; until all the pulses that ever beat around us shall have long been quiet; until all the fruits of all the tiny victories and defeats achieved in our little breasts shall have withered away. That discovery was that she loved me.

She may have enhanced my knowledge, and loved me for that; she may have over-valued my discharge of duty to her, and loved me for that; she may have refined upon a playful compassion which she would sometimes show for what she called my want of wisdom, according to the light of the world's dark lanterns, and loved me for that; she may - she must - have confused the borrowed light of what I had only learned, with its brightness in its pure, original rays; but she loved me at that time, and she made me know it.

Pride of family and pride of wealth put me as far off from her in my lady's eyes as if I had been some domesticated creature of another kind. But they could not put me farther from her than I put myself when I set my merits against hers. More than that. They could not put me, by millions of fathoms, half so low beneath her as I put myself when in imagination I took advantage of her noble trustfulness, took the fortune that I knew she must possess in her own right, and left her to find herself, in the zenith of her beauty and genius, bound to poor rusty, plodding me.

No! Worldliness should not enter here at any cost. If I had tried to keep it out of other ground, how much harder was I bound to try to keep it out from this sacred place!

But there was something daring in her broad, generous character, that demanded at so delicate a crisis to be delicately and patiently addressed. And many and many a bitter night (O, I found I could cry for reasons not purely physical, at this pass of my life!) I took my course.

My lady had, in our first interview, unconsciously overstated the accommodation of my pretty house. There was room in it for only one pupil. He was a young gentleman near coming of age, very well connected, but what is called a poor relation. His parents were dead. The charges of his living and reading with me were defrayed by an uncle; and he and I were to do our utmost together for three years towards qualifying him to make his way. At this time he had entered into his second year with me. He was well-looking, clever, energetic, enthusiastic; bold; in the best sense of the term, a thorough young Anglo-Saxon.

I resolved to bring these two together.

NINTH CHAPTER

SAID I, one night, when I had conquered myself, 'Mr. Granville,' - Mr. Granville Wharton his name was, - 'I doubt if you have ever yet so much as seen Miss Fareway.'

'Well, sir,' returned he, laughing, 'you see her so much yourself, that you hardly leave another fellow a chance of seeing her.'

'I am her tutor, you know,' said I.

And there the subject dropped for that time. But I so contrived as that they should come together shortly afterwards. I had previously so contrived as to keep them asunder; for while I loved her, - I mean before I had determined on my sacrifice, - a lurking jealousy of Mr. Granville lay within my unworthy breast.

It was quite an ordinary interview in the Fareway Park but they talked easily together for some time: like takes to like, and they had many points of resemblance. Said Mr. Granville to me, when he and I sat at our supper that night, 'Miss Fareway is remarkably beautiful, sir, remarkably engaging. Don't you think so?' 'I think so,' said I. And I stole a glance at him, and saw that he had reddened and was thoughtful. I remember it most vividly, because the mixed feeling of grave pleasure and acute pain that the slight circumstance caused me was the first of a long, long series of such mixed impressions under which my hair turned slowly gray.

I had not much need to feign to be subdued; but I counterfeited to be older than I was in all respects (Heaven knows! my heart being all too young the while), and feigned to be more of a recluse and bookworm than I had really become, and gradually set up more and more of a fatherly manner towards Adelina. Likewise I made my tuition less imaginative than before; separated myself from my poets and philosophers; was careful to present them in their own light, and me, their lowly servant, in my own shade. Moreover, in the matter of apparel I was equally mindful; not that I had ever been dapper that way; but that I was slovenly now.

As I depressed myself with one hand, so did I labour to raise Mr. Granville with the other; directing his attention to such subjects as I too well knew interested her, and fashioning him (do not deride or misconstrue the expression, unknown reader of this writing; for I have suffered!) into a greater resemblance to myself in my solitary one strong aspect. And gradually, gradually, as I saw him take more and more to these thrown-out lures of mine, then did I come to know better and better that love was drawing him on, and was drawing her from me.

So passed more than another year; every day a year in its number of my mixed impressions of grave pleasure and acute pain; and then these two, being of age and free to act legally for themselves, came before me hand in hand (my hair being now quite white), and entreated me that I would unite them together. 'And indeed, dear tutor,' said Adelina, 'it is but consistent in you that you should do this thing for us, seeing that we should never have spoken together that first time but for you, and that but for you we could never have met so often afterwards.' The whole of which was literally true; for I had availed myself of my many business attendances on, and conferences with, my lady, to take Mr. Granville to the house, and leave him in the outer room with Adelina.

I knew that my lady would object to such a marriage for her daughter, or to any marriage that was other than an exchange of her for stipulated lands, goods, and moneys. But looking on the two, and seeing with full eyes that they were both young and beautiful; and knowing that they were alike in the tastes and acquirements that will outlive youth and beauty; and considering that Adelina had a fortune now, in her own keeping; and considering further that Mr. Granville, though for the present poor, was of a good family that had never lived in a cellar in Preston; and believing that their love would endure, neither having any great discrepancy to find out in the other, - I told them of my readiness to do this thing which Adelina asked of her dear tutor, and to send them forth, husband and wife, into the shining world with golden gates that awaited them.

It was on a summer morning that I rose before the sun to compose myself for the crowning of my work with this end; and my dwelling being near to the sea, I walked down to the rocks on the shore, in order that I might behold the sun in his majesty.

The tranquillity upon the deep, and on the firmament, the orderly withdrawal of the stars, the calm promise of coming day, the rosy suffusion of the sky and waters, the ineffable splendour that then burst forth, attuned my mind afresh after the discords of the night. Methought that all I looked on said to me, and that all I heard in the sea and in the air said to me, 'Be comforted, mortal, that thy life is so short. Our preparation for what is to follow has endured, and shall endure, for unimaginable ages.'

I married them. I knew that my hand was cold when I placed it on their hands clasped together; but the words with which I had to accompany the action I could say without faltering, and I was at peace.

They being well away from my house and from the place after our simple breakfast, the time was come when I must do what I had pledged myself to them that I would do, - break the intelligence to my lady.

I went up to the house, and found my lady in her ordinary business-room. She happened to have an unusual amount of commissions to intrust to me that day; and she had filled my hands with papers before I could originate a word.

'My lady,' I then began, as I stood beside her table.

'Why, what's the matter?' she said quickly, looking up.

'Not much, I would fain hope, after you shall have prepared yourself, and considered a little.'

'Prepared myself; and considered a little! You appear to have prepared YOURSELF but indifferently, anyhow, Mr. Silverman.' This mighty scornfully, as I experienced my usual embarrassment under her stare.

Said I, in self-extenuation once for all, 'Lady Fareway, I have but to say for myself that I have tried to do my duty.'

'For yourself?' repeated my lady. 'Then there are others concerned, I see. Who are they?'

I was about to answer, when she made towards the bell with a dart that stopped me, and said, 'Why, where is Adelina?'

'Forbear! be calm, my lady. I married her this morning to Mr. Granville Wharton.'

She set her lips, looked more intently at me than ever, raised her right hand, and smote me hard upon the cheek.

'Give me back those papers! give me back those papers!' She tore them out of my hands, and tossed them on her table. Then seating herself defiantly in her great chair, and folding her arms, she stabbed me to the heart with the unlooked-for reproach, 'You worldly wretch!'

'Worldly?' I cried. 'Worldly?'

'This, if you please,' - she went on with supreme scorn, pointing me out as if there were some one there to see, - 'this, if you please, is the disinterested scholar, with not a design beyond his books! This, if you please, is the simple creature whom any one could overreach in a bargain! This, if you please, is Mr. Silverman! Not of this world; not he! He has too much simplicity for this world's cunning. He has too much singleness of purpose to be a match for this world's double-dealing. What did he give you for it?'

'For what? And who?'

'How much,' she asked, bending forward in her great chair, and insultingly tapping the fingers of her right hand on the palm of her left, - 'how much does Mr. Granville Wharton pay you for getting him Adelina's money? What is the amount of your percentage upon Adelina's fortune? What were the terms of the agreement that you proposed to this boy when you, the Rev. George Silverman, licensed to marry, engaged to put him in possession of this girl? You made good terms for yourself, whatever they were. He would stand a poor chance against your keenness.'

Bewildered, horrified, stunned by this cruel perversion, I could not speak. But I trust that I looked innocent, being so.

'Listen to me, shrewd hypocrite,' said my lady, whose anger increased as she gave it utterance; 'attend to my words, you cunning schemer, who have carried this plot through with such a practised double face that I have never suspected you. I had my projects for my daughter; projects for family connection; projects for fortune. You have thwarted them, and overreached me; but I am not one to be thwarted and overreached without retaliation. Do you mean to hold this living another month?'

'Do you deem it possible, Lady Fareway, that I can hold it another hour, under your injurious words?'

'Is it resigned, then?'

'It was mentally resigned, my lady, some minutes ago.'

Don't equivocate, sir. IS it resigned?'

'Unconditionally and entirely; and I would that I had never, never come near it!'

'A cordial response from me to THAT wish, Mr. Silverman! But take this with you, sir. If you had not resigned it, I would have had you deprived of it. And though you have resigned it, you will not get quit of me as easily as you think for. I will pursue you with this story. I will make this nefarious conspiracy of yours, for money, known. You have made money by it, but you have at the same time made an enemy by it. YOU will take good care that the money sticks to you; I will take good care that the enemy sticks to you.'

Then said I finally, 'Lady Fareway, I think my heart is broken. Until I came into this room just now, the possibility of such mean wickedness as you have imputed to me never dawned upon my thoughts. Your suspicions - '

'Suspicions! Pah!' said she indignantly. 'Certainties.'

'Your certainties, my lady, as you call them, your suspicions as I call them, are cruel, unjust, wholly devoid of foundation in fact. I can declare no more; except that I have not acted for my own profit or my own pleasure. I have not in this proceeding considered myself. Once again, I think my heart is broken. If I have unwittingly done any wrong with a righteous motive, that is some penalty to pay.'

She received this with another and more indignant 'Pah!' and I made my way out of her room (I think I felt my way out with my hands, although my eyes were open), almost suspecting that my voice had a repulsive sound, and that I was a repulsive object.

There was a great stir made, the bishop was appealed to, I received a severe reprimand, and narrowly escaped suspension. For years a cloud hung over me, and my name was tarnished.

But my heart did not break, if a broken heart involves death; for I lived through it.

They stood by me, Adelina and her husband, through it all. Those who had known me at college, and even most of those who had only known me there by reputation, stood by me too. Little by little, the belief widened that I was not capable of what was laid to my charge. At length I was presented to a college-living in a sequestered place, and there I now pen my explanation. I pen it at my open window in the summer-time, before me, lying in the churchyard, equal resting-place for sound hearts, wounded hearts, and broken hearts. I pen it for the relief of my own mind, not foreseeing whether or no it will ever have a reader.

THE END OF
George Silverman's Explanation

GOING INTO SOCIETY

At one period of its reverses, the House fell into the occupation of a Showman. He was found registered as its occupier, on the parish books of the time when he rented the House, and there was therefore no need of any clue to his name. But, he himself was less easy to be found; for, he had led a wandering life, and settled people had lost sight of him, and people who plumed themselves on being respectable were shy of admitting that they had ever known anything of him. At last, among the marsh lands near the river's level, that lie about Deptford and the neighbouring market-gardens, a Grizzled Personage in velveteen, with a face so cut up by varieties of weather that he looked as if he had been tattooed, was found smoking a pipe at the door of a wooden house on wheels. The wooden house was laid up in ordinary for the winter, near the mouth of a muddy creek; and everything near it, the foggy river, the misty marshes, and the steaming market-gardens, smoked in company with the grizzled man. In the midst of this smoking party, the funnel-chimney of the wooden house on wheels was not remiss, but took its pipe with the rest in a companionable manner.

On being asked if it were he who had once rented the House to Let, Grizzled Velveteen looked surprised, and said yes. Then his name was Magsman? That was it, Toby Magsman—which lawfully christened Robert; but called in the line, from a infant, Toby. There was nothing agin Toby Magsman, he believed? If there was suspicion of such—mention it!

There was no suspicion of such, he might rest assured. But, some inquiries were making about that House, and would he object to say why he left it?

Not at all; why should he? He left it, along of a Dwarf.

Along of a Dwarf?

Mr. Magsman repeated, deliberately and emphatically, Along of a Dwarf.

Might it be compatible with Mr. Magsman's inclination and convenience to enter, as a favour, into a few particulars?

Mr. Magsman entered into the following particulars.

It was a long time ago, to begin with;—afore lotteries and a deal more was done away with. Mr. Magsman was looking about for a good pitch, and he see that house, and he says to himself, "I'll have you, if you're to be had. If money'll get you, I'll have you."

The neighbours cut up rough, and made complaints; but Mr. Magsman don't know what they *would* have had. It was a lovely thing. First of all, there was the canvass, representin the picter of the Giant, in Spanish trunks and a ruff, who was himself half the heighth of the house, and was run up with a line and pulley to a pole on the roof, so that his Ed was coeval with the parapet. Then, there was the canvass, representin the picter of the Albina lady, showing her white air to the Army and Navy in correct uniform. Then, there was the canvass, representin the picter of the Wild Indian a scalpin a member of some foreign nation. Then, there was the canvass, representin the picter of a child of a British Planter, seized by two Boa Constrictors—not that *we* never had no child, nor no Constrictors neither. Similarly, there was the canvass, representin the picter of the Wild Ass of the Prairies—not that *we* never had no wild asses, nor wouldn't have had 'em at a gift. Last, there was the canvass, representin the picter of the Dwarf, and like him too (considerin), with George the Fourth in such a state of astonishment at him as His Majesty couldn't with his utmost politeness and stoutness express. The front of the House was so covered with canvasses, that there wasn't a spark of daylight ever visible on that side. "MAGSMAN'S AMUSEMENTS," fifteen foot long by two foot high, ran over the front door and parlour winders. The passage was a Arbour of green baize and gardenstuff. A barrel-organ performed there unceasing. And as to respectability,—if threepence ain't respectable, what is?

But, the Dwarf is the principal article at present, and he was worth the money. He was wrote up as MAJOR TPSCHOFFKI, OF THE IMPERIAL BULGRADERIAN BRIGADE. Nobody couldn't pronounce the name, and it never was intended anybody should. The public always turned it, as a regular rule, into Chopski. In the line he was called Chops; partly on that account, and partly because his real name, if he ever had any real name (which was very dubious), was Stakes.

He was a uncommon small man, he really was. Certainly not so small as he was made out to be, but where *is* your Dwarf as is? He was a most uncommon small man, with a most uncommon large Ed; and what he had inside that Ed, nobody ever knowed but himself: even supposin himself to have ever took stock of it, which it would have been a stiff job for even him to do.

The kindest little man as never growed! Spirited, but not proud. When he travelled with the Spotted Baby—though he knowed himself to be a nat’ral Dwarf, and knowed the Baby’s spots to be put upon him artificial, he nursed that Baby like a mother. You never heerd him give a ill-name to a Giant. He *did* allow himself to break out into strong language respectin the Fat Lady from Norfolk; but that was an affair of the ’art; and when a man’s ’art has been trifled with by a lady, and the preference giv to a Indian, he ain’t master of his actions.

He was always in love, of course; every human nat’ral phenomenon is. And he was always in love with a large woman; I never knowed the Dwarf as could be got to love a small one. Which helps to keep ’em the Curiosities they are.

One sing’ler idea he had in that Ed of his, which must have meant something, or it wouldn’t have been there. It was always his opinion that he was entitled to property. He never would put his name to anything. He had been taught to write, by the young man without arms, who got his living with his toes (quite a writing master *he* was, and taught scores in the line), but Chops would have starved to death, afore he’d have gained a bit of bread by putting his hand to a paper. This is the more curious to bear in mind, because HE had no property, nor hope of property, except his house and a sarser. When I say his house, I mean the box, painted and got up outside like a reg’lar six-roomer, that he used to creep into, with a diamond ring (or quite as good to look at) on his forefinger, and ring a little bell out of what the Public believed to be the Drawing-room winder. And when I say a sarser, I mean a Chaney sarser in which he made a collection for himself at the end of every Entertainment. His cue for that, he took from me: “Ladies and gentlemen, the little man will now walk three times round the Cairawan, and retire behind the curtain.” When he said anything important, in private life, he mostly wound it up with this form of words, and they was generally the last thing he said to me at night afore he went to bed.

He had what I consider a fine mind—a poetic mind. His ideas respectin his property never come upon him so strong as when he sat upon a barrel-organ and had the handle turned. Arter the wibration had run through him a little time, he would screech out, “Toby, I feel my property coming—grind away! I’m counting my guineas by thousands, Toby—grind away! Toby, I shall be a man of fortun! I feel the Mint a jingling in me, Toby, and I’m swelling out into the Bank of England!” Such is the influence of music on a poetic mind. Not that he was partial to any other music but a barrel-organ; on the contrary, hated it.

He had a kind of a everlasting grudge agin the Public: which is a thing you may notice in many phenomenons that get their living out of it. What riled him most in the nater of his occupation was, that it kep him out of Society. He was continiwally saying, “Toby, my ambition is, to go into Society. The curse of my position towards the Public is, that it keeps me hout of Society. This don’t signify to a low beast of a Indian; he an’t formed for Society. This don’t signify to a Spotted Baby; *he* an’t formed for Society.—I am.”

Nobody never could make out what Chops done with his money. He had a good salary, down on the drum every Saturday as the day came round, besides having the run of his teeth—and he was a Woodpecker to eat—but all Dwarfs are. The sarser was a little income, bringing him in so many halfpence that he’d carry ’em for a week together, tied up in a pocket-handkercher. And yet he never had money. And it couldn’t be the Fat Lady from Norfolk, as was once supposed; because it stands to reason that when you have a animosity towards a Indian, which makes you grind your teeth at him to his face, and which can hardly hold you from Goosing him audible when he’s going through his War-Dance—it stands to reason you wouldn’t under them circumstances deprive yourself, to support that Indian in the lap of luxury.

Most unexpected, the mystery come out one day at Egham Races. The Public was shy of bein pulled in, and Chops was ringin his little bell out of his drawing-room winder, and was snarlin to me over his shoulder as he kneeled down with his legs out at the back-door—for he couldn’t be shoved into his house without kneeling down, and the premises wouldn’t accommodate his legs—was snarlin, “Here’s a precious Public for you; why the Devil don’t they tumble up?” when a man in the crowd holds up a carrier-pigeon, and cries out, “If there’s any person here as has got a ticket, the Lottery’s just drawed, and the number as has come up for the great prize is three, seven, forty-two! Three, seven, forty-two!” I was givin the man to the Furies myself, for calling off the Public’s attention—for the Public will turn away, at any time, to look at anything in preference to the thing showed ’em; and if you doubt it, get ’em together for any indiwidual purpose on the face of the earth, and send only two people in late, and see if the whole company an't far more interested in takin particular notice of them two than of you—I say, I wasn't best pleased with the man for callin out, and wasn't blessin him in my own mind, when I see Chops's little bell fly out of winder at a old lady, and he gets up and kicks his box over, exposin the whole secret, and he catches hold of the calves of my legs and he says to me, "Carry me into the wan, Toby, and throw a pail of water over me or I'm a dead man, for I've come into my property!"

Twelve thousand odd hundred pound, was Chops's winnins. He had bought a half-ticket for the twenty-five thousand prize, and it had come up. The first use he made of his property, was, to offer to fight the Wild Indian for five hundred pound a side, him with a poisoned darnin-needle and the Indian with a club; but the Indian being in want of backers to that amount, it went no further.

Arter he had been mad for a week—in a state of mind, in short, in which, if I had let him sit on the organ for only two minutes, I believe he would have bust—but we kep the organ from him—Mr. Chops come round, and behaved liberal and beautiful to all. He then sent for a young man he knowed, as had a wery genteel appearance and was a Bonnet at a gaming-booth (most respectable brought up, father havin been imminent in the livery stable line but unfort'nate in a commercial crisis, through paintin a old gray, ginger-bay, and sellin him with a Pedigree), and Mr. Chops said to this Bonnet, who said his name was Normandy, which it wasn't:

"Normandy, I'm a goin into Society. Will you go with me?"

Says Normandy: "Do I understand you, Mr. Chops, to hintimate that the 'ole of the expenses of that move will be borne by yourself?"

"Correct," says Mr. Chops. "And you shall have a Princely allowance too."

The Bonnet lifted Mr. Chops upon a chair, to shake hands with him, and replied in poetry, with his eyes seemingly full of tears:

"My boat is on the shore,
And my bark is on the sea,
And I do not ask for more,
But I'll Go:—along with thee."

They went into Society, in a chay and four grays with silk jackets. They took lodgings in Pall Mall, London, and they blazed away.

In consequence of a note that was brought to Bartlemy Fair in the autumn of next year by a servant, most wonderful got up in milk-white cords and tops, I cleaned myself and went to Pall Mall, one evening appinted. The gentlemen was at their wine arter dinner, and Mr. Chops's eyes was more fixed in that Ed of his than I thought good for him. There was three of 'em (in company, I mean), and I knowed the third well. When last met, he had on a white Roman shirt, and a bishop's mitre covered with leopard-skin, and played the clarionet all wrong, in a band at a Wild Beast Show.

This gent took on not to know me, and Mr. Chops said: "Gentlemen, this is a old friend of former days:" and Normandy looked at me through a eye-glass, and said, "Magsman, glad to see you!"—which I'll take my oath he wasn't. Mr. Chops, to git him convenient to the table, had his chair on a throne (much of the form of George the Fourth's in the canvass), but he hardly appeared to me to be King there in any other pint of view, for his two gentlemen ordered about like Emperors. They was all dressed like May-Day—gorgeous!—And as to Wine, they swam in all sorts.

I made the round of the bottles, first separate (to say I had done it), and then mixed 'em all together (to say I had done it), and then tried two of 'em as half-and-half, and then t'other two. Altogether, I passed a pleasin evenin, but with a tendency to feel muddled, until I considered it good manners to get up and say, "Mr. Chops, the best of friends must part, I thank you for the wariety of foreign drains you have stood so 'ansome, I looks towards you in red wine, and I takes my leave." Mr. Chops replied, "If you'll just hitch me out of this over your right arm, Magsman, and carry me down-stairs, I'll see you out." I said I couldn't think of such a thing, but he would have it, so I lifted him off his throne. He smelt strong of Maideary, and I couldn't help thinking as I carried him down that it was like carrying a large bottle full of wine, with a rayther ugly stopper, a good deal out of proportion.

When I set him on the door-mat in the hall, he kep me close to him by holding on to my coat-collar, and he whispers:

"I ain't 'appy, Magsman."

"What's on your mind, Mr. Chops?"

"They don't use me well. They an't grateful to me. They puts me on the mantel-piece when I won't have in more Champagne-wine, and they locks me in the sideboard when I won't give up my property."

"Get rid of 'em, Mr. Chops."

"I can't. We're in Society together, and what would Society say?"

“Come out of Society!” says I.

“I can’t. You don’t know what you’re talking about. When you have once gone into Society, you mustn’t come out of it.”

“Then if you’ll excuse the freedom, Mr. Chops,” were my remark, shaking my head grave, “I think it’s a pity you ever went in.”

Mr. Chops shook that deep Ed of his, to a surprisin extent, and slapped it half a dozen times with his hand, and with more Wice than I thought were in him. Then, he says, “You’re a good fellow, but you don’t understand. Good-night, go along. Magsman, the little man will now walk three times round the Cairawan, and retire behind the curtain.” The last I see of him on that occasion was his tryin, on the extremest werge of insensibility, to climb up the stairs, one by one, with his hands and knees. They’d have been much too steep for him, if he had been sober; but he wouldn’t be helped.

It warn’t long after that, that I read in the newspaper of Mr. Chops’s being presented at court. It was printed, “It will be recollected”—and I’ve noticed in my life, that it is sure to be printed that it *will* be recollected, whenever it won’t—“that Mr. Chops is the individual of small stature, whose brilliant success in the last State Lottery attracted so much attention.” Well, I says to myself, Such is Life! He has been and done it in earnest at last. He has astonished George the Fourth!

(On account of which, I had that canvass new-painted, him with a bag of money in his hand, a presentin it to George the Fourth, and a lady in Ostrich Feathers fallin in love with him in a bag-wig, sword, and buckles correct.)

I took the House as is the subject of present inquiries—though not the honour of bein acquainted—and I run Magsman’s Amusements in it thirteen months—sometimes one thing, sometimes another, sometimes nothin particular, but always all the canvasses outside. One night, when we had played the last company out, which was a shy company, through its raining Heavens hard, I was takin a pipe in the one pair back along with the young man with the toes, which I had taken on for a month (though he never drawed—except on paper), and I heard a kickin at the street door. “Halloa!” I says to the young man, “what’s up!” He rubs his eyebrows with his toes, and he says, “I can’t imagine, Mr. Magsman”—which he never could imagine nothin, and was monotonous company.

The noise not leavin off, I laid down my pipe, and I took up a candle, and I went down and opened the door. I looked out into the street; but nothin could I see, and nothin was I aware of, until I turned round quick, because some creetur run between my legs into the passage. There was Mr. Chops!

"Magsman," he says, "take me, on the old terms, and you've got me; if it's done, say done!"

I was all of a maze, but I said, "Done, sir."

"Done to your done, and double done!" says he. "Have you got a bit of supper in the house?"

Bearin in mind them sparklin warieties of foreign drains as we'd guzzled away at in Pall Mall, I was ashamed to offer him cold sassages and gin-and-water; but he took 'em both and took 'em free; havin a chair for his table, and sittin down at it on a stool, like hold times. I, all of a maze all the while.

It was arter he had made a clean sweep of the sassages (beef, and to the best of my calculations two pound and a quarter), that the wisdom as was in that little man began to come out of him like prespiration.

"Magsman," he says, "look upon me! You see afore you, One as has both gone into Society and come out."

"O! You *are* out of it, Mr. Chops? How did you get out, sir?"

"SOLD OUT!" says he. You never saw the like of the wisdom as his Ed expressed, when he made use of them two words.

"My friend Magsman, I'll impart to you a discovery I've made. It's wallable; it's cost twelve thousand five hundred pound; it may do you good in life—The secret of this matter is, that it ain't so much that a person goes into Society, as that Society goes into a person."

Not exactly keepin up with his meanin, I shook my head, put on a deep look, and said, "You're right there, Mr. Chops."

"Magsman," he says, twitchin me by the leg, "Society has gone into me, to the tune of every penny of my property."

I felt that I went pale, and though nat'rally a bold speaker, I couldn't hardly say, "Where's Normandy?"

"Bolted. With the plate," said Mr. Chops.

"And t'other one?" meaning him as formerly wore the bishop's mitre.

"Bolted. With the jewels," said Mr. Chops.

I sat down and looked at him, and he stood up and looked at me.

"Magsman," he says, and he seemed to myself to get wiser as he got hoarser; "Society, taken in the lump, is all dwarfs. At the court of St.

James's, they was all a doing my old business—all a goin three times round the Cairawan, in the hold court-suits and properties. Elsewheres, they was most of 'em ringin their little bells out of make-believes. Everywheres, the sarser was a goin round. Magsman, the sarser is the uniwersal Institution!"

I perceived, you understand, that he was soured by his misfortunes, and I felt for Mr. Chops.

"As to Fat Ladies," he says, giving his head a tremendious one agin the wall, "there's lots of *them* in Society, and worse than the original. *Hers* was a outrage upon Taste—simply a outrage upon Taste—awakenin contempt—carryin its own punishment in the form of a Indian." Here he giv himself another tremendious one. "But *theirs*, Magsman, *theirs* is mercenary outrages. Lay in Cashmeer shawls, buy bracelets, strew 'em and a lot of 'andsome fans and things about your rooms, let it be known that you give away like water to all as come to admire, and the Fat Ladies that don't exhibit for so much down upon the drum, will come from all the pints of the compass to flock about you, whatever you are. They'll drill holes in your 'art, Magsman, like a Cullender. And when you've no more left to give, they'll laugh at you to your face, and leave you to have your bones picked dry by Wulturs, like the dead Wild Ass of the Prairies that you deserve to be!" Here he giv himself the most tremendious one of all, and dropped.

I thought he was gone. His Ed was so heavy, and he knocked it so hard, and he fell so stoney, and the sassagerial disturbance in him must have been so immense, that I thought he was gone. But, he soon come round with care, and he sat up on the floor, and he said to me, with wisdom comin out of his eyes, if ever it come:

"Magsman! The most material difference between the two states of existence through which your unhappy friend has passed;" he reached out his poor little hand, and his tears dropped down on the moustachio which it was a credit to him to have done his best to grow, but it is not in mortals to command success,—"the difference this. When I was out of Society, I was paid light for being seen. When I went into Society, I paid heavy for being seen. I prefer the former, even if I wasn't forced upon it. Give me out through the trumpet, in the hold way, to-morrow."

Arter that, he slid into the line again as easy as if he had been iled all over. But the organ was kep from him, and no allusions was ever made, when a company was in, to his property. He got wiser every day; his views of Society and the Public was luminous, bewilderin, awful; and his Ed got bigger and bigger as his Wisdom expanded it.

He took well, and pulled ’em in most excellent for nine weeks. At the expiration of that period, when his Ed was a sight, he expressed one evenin, the last Company havin been turned out, and the door shut, a wish to have a little music.

“Mr. Chops,” I said (I never dropped the “Mr.” with him; the world might do it, but not me); “Mr. Chops, are you sure as you are in a state of mind and body to sit upon the organ?”

His answer was this: “Toby, when next met with on the tramp, I forgive her and the Indian. And I am.”

It was with fear and trembling that I began to turn the handle; but he sat like a lamb. I will be my belief to my dying day, that I see his Ed expand as he sat; you may therefore judge how great his thoughts was. He sat out all the changes, and then he come off.

“Toby,” he says, with a quiet smile, “the little man will now walk three times round the Cairawan, and retire behind the curtain.”

When we called him in the morning, we found him gone into a much better Society than mine or Pall Mall’s. I giv Mr. Chops as comfortable a funeral as lay in my power, followed myself as Chief, and had the George the Fourth canvass carried first, in the form of a banner. But, the House was so dismal arterwards, that I giv it up, and took to the Wan again.

* * * * *

“I don’t triumph,” said Jarber, folding up the second manuscript, and looking hard at Trottle. “I don’t triumph over this worthy creature. I merely ask him if he is satisfied now?”

“How can he be anything else?” I said, answering for Trottle, who sat obstinately silent. “This time, Jarber, you have not only read us a delightfully amusing story, but you have also answered the question about the House. Of course it stands empty now. Who would think of taking it after it had been turned into a caravan?” I looked at Trottle, as I said those last words, and Jarber waved his hand indulgently in the same direction.

“Let this excellent person speak,” said Jarber. “You were about to say, my good man?”—

“I only wished to ask, sir,” said Trottle doggedly, “if you could kindly oblige me with a date or two in connection with that last story?”

“A date!” repeated Jarber. “What does the man want with dates!”

"I should be glad to know, with great respect," persisted Trottle, "if the person named Magsman was the last tenant who lived in the House. It's my opinion—if I may be excused for giving it—that he most decidedly was not."

With those words, Trottle made a low bow, and quietly left the room.

There is no denying that Jarber, when we were left together, looked sadly discomposed. He had evidently forgotten to inquire about dates; and, in spite of his magnificent talk about his series of discoveries, it was quite as plain that the two stories he had just read, had really and truly exhausted his present stock. I thought myself bound, in common gratitude, to help him out of his embarrassment by a timely suggestion. So I proposed that he should come to tea again, on the next Monday evening, the thirteenth, and should make such inquiries in the meantime, as might enable him to dispose triumphantly of Trottle's objection.

He gallantly kissed my hand, made a neat little speech of acknowledgment, and took his leave. For the rest of the week I would not encourage Trottle by allowing him to refer to the House at all. I suspected he was making his own inquiries about dates, but I put no questions to him.

On Monday evening, the thirteenth, that dear unfortunate Jarber came, punctual to the appointed time. He looked so terribly harassed, that he was really quite a spectacle of feebleness and fatigue. I saw, at a glance, that the question of dates had gone against him, that Mr. Magsman had not been the last tenant of the House, and that the reason of its emptiness was still to seek.

"What I have gone through," said Jarber, "words are not eloquent enough to tell. O Sophonisba, I have begun another series of discoveries! Accept the last two as stories laid on your shrine; and wait to blame me for leaving your curiosity unappeased, until you have heard Number Three."

Number Three looked like a very short manuscript, and I said as much. Jarber explained to me that we were to have some poetry this time. In the course of his investigations he had stepped into the Circulating Library, to seek for information on the one important subject. All the Library-people knew about the House was, that a female relative of the last tenant, as they believed, had, just after that tenant left, sent a little manuscript poem to them which she described as referring to events that had actually passed in the House; and which she wanted the proprietor of the Library to publish. She had written no address on her letter; and the proprietor had kept the manuscript ready to be given back to her (the publishing of poems not being in his line) when she might call for it. She had never called for it; and the poem had been lent to Jarber, at his express request, to read to me.

Before he began, I rang the bell for Trottle; being determined to have him present at the new reading, as a wholesome check on his obstinacy. To my surprise Peggy answered the bell, and told me, that Trottle had stepped out without saying where. I instantly felt the strongest possible conviction that he was at his old tricks: and that his stepping out in the evening, without leave, meant—Philandering.

Controlling myself on my visitor’s account, I dismissed Peggy, stifled my indignation, and prepared, as politely as might be, to listen to Jarber.

THE END OF
Going into Society

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

[1867 Edition]

by Charles Dickens

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Chapter LIX

Chapter I

My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip.

I give Pirrip as my father's family name, on the authority of his tombstone and my sister,—Mrs. Joe Gargery, who married the blacksmith. As I never saw my father or my mother, and never saw any likeness of either of them (for their days were long before the days of photographs), my first fancies regarding what they were like were unreasonably derived from their tombstones. The shape of the letters on my father's, gave me an odd idea that he was a square, stout, dark man, with curly black hair. From the character and turn of the inscription, "Also Georgiana Wife of the Above," I drew a childish conclusion that my mother was freckled and sickly. To five little stone lozenges, each about a foot and a half long, which were arranged in a neat row beside their grave, and were sacred to the memory of five little brothers of mine,—who gave up trying to get a living, exceedingly early in that universal struggle,—I am indebted for a belief I religiously entertained that they had all been born on their backs with their hands in their trousers-pockets, and had never taken them out in this state of existence.

Ours was the marsh country, down by the river, within, as the river wound, twenty miles of the sea. My first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things seems to me to have been gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening. At such a time I found out for certain that this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the churchyard; and that Philip Pirrip, late of this parish, and also Georgiana wife of the above, were dead and buried; and that Alexander, Bartholomew, Abraham, Tobias, and Roger, infant children of the aforesaid, were also dead and buried; and that the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with dikes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it, was the marshes; and that the low leaden line beyond was the river; and that the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing was the sea; and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip.

"Hold your noise!" cried a terrible voice, as a man started up from among the graves at the side of the church porch. "Keep still, you little devil, or I'll cut your throat!"

A fearful man, all in coarse gray, with a great iron on his leg. A man with no hat, and with broken shoes, and with an old rag tied round his head. A man who had been soaked in water, and smothered in mud, and lamed by stones, and cut by flints, and stung by nettles, and torn by briars; who limped, and shivered, and glared, and growled; and whose teeth chattered in his head as he seized me by the chin.

"Oh! Don't cut my throat, sir," I pleaded in terror. "Pray don't do it, sir."

"Tell us your name!" said the man. "Quick!"

"Pip, sir."

"Once more," said the man, staring at me. "Give it mouth!"

"Pip. Pip, sir."

"Show us where you live," said the man. "Pint out the place!"

I pointed to where our village lay, on the flat in-shore among the alder-trees and pollards, a mile or more from the church.

The man, after looking at me for a moment, turned me upside down, and emptied my pockets. There was nothing in them but a piece of bread. When the church came to itself,—for he was so sudden and strong that he made it go head over heels before me, and I saw the steeple under my feet,—when the church came to itself, I say, I was seated on a high tombstone, trembling while he ate the bread ravenously.

"You young dog," said the man, licking his lips, "what fat cheeks you ha' got."

I believe they were fat, though I was at that time undersized for my years, and not strong.

"Darn me if I couldn't eat em," said the man, with a threatening shake of his head, "and if I han't half a mind to't!"

I earnestly expressed my hope that he wouldn't, and held tighter to the tombstone on which he had put me; partly, to keep myself upon it; partly, to keep myself from crying.

"Now lookee here!" said the man. "Where's your mother?"

"There, sir!" said I.

He started, made a short run, and stopped and looked over his shoulder.

"There, sir!" I timidly explained. "Also Georgiana. That's my mother."

"Oh!" said he, coming back. "And is that your father alonger your mother?"

"Yes, sir," said I; "him too; late of this parish."

"Ha!" he muttered then, considering. "Who d'ye live with,—supposin' you're kindly let to live, which I han't made up my mind about?"

"My sister, sir,—Mrs. Joe Gargery,—wife of Joe Gargery, the blacksmith, sir."

"Blacksmith, eh?" said he. And looked down at his leg.

After darkly looking at his leg and me several times, he came closer to my tombstone, took me by both arms, and tilted me back as far as he could hold me; so that his eyes looked most powerfully down into mine, and mine looked most helplessly up into his.

"Now lookee here," he said, "the question being whether you're to be let to live. You know what a file is?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you know what wittles is?"

"Yes, sir."

After each question he tilted me over a little more, so as to give me a greater sense of helplessness and danger.

"You get me a file." He tilted me again. "And you get me wittles." He tilted me again. "You bring 'em both to me." He tilted me again. "Or I'll have your heart and liver out." He tilted me again.

I was dreadfully frightened, and so giddy that I clung to him with both hands, and said, "If you would kindly please to let me keep upright, sir, perhaps I shouldn't be sick, and perhaps I could attend more."

He gave me a most tremendous dip and roll, so that the church jumped over its own weathercock. Then, he held me by the arms, in an upright position on the top of the stone, and went on in these fearful terms:—

"You bring me, to-morrow morning early, that file and them wittles. You bring the lot to me, at that old Battery over yonder. You do it, and you never dare to say a word or dare to make a sign concerning your having seen such a person as me, or any person sumever, and you shall be let to live. You fail, or you go from my words in any partickler, no matter how small it is, and your heart and your liver shall be tore out, roasted, and ate. Now, I ain't alone, as you may think I am. There's a young man hid with me, in comparison with which young man I am a Angel. That young man hears the words I speak. That young man has a secret way pecooliar to himself, of getting at a boy, and at his heart, and at his liver. It is in wain for a boy to attempt to hide himself from that young man. A boy may lock his door, may be warm in bed, may tuck himself up, may draw the clothes over his head, may think himself comfortable and safe, but that young man will softly creep and creep his way to him and tear him open. I am a keeping that young man from harming of you at the present moment, with great difficulty. I find it wery hard to hold that young man off of your inside. Now, what do you say?"

I said that I would get him the file, and I would get him what broken bits of food I could, and I would come to him at the Battery, early in the morning.

"Say Lord strike you dead if you don't!" said the man.

I said so, and he took me down.

"Now," he pursued, "you remember what you've undertook, and you remember that young man, and you get home!"

"Goo-good night, sir," I faltered.

"Much of that!" said he, glancing about him over the cold wet flat. "I wish I was a frog. Or a eel!"

At the same time, he hugged his shuddering body in both his arms,—clasping himself, as if to hold himself together,—and limped towards the low church wall. As I saw him go, picking his way among the nettles, and among the brambles that bound the green mounds, he looked in my young eyes as if he were eluding the hands of the dead people, stretching up cautiously out of their graves, to get a twist upon his ankle and pull him in.

When he came to the low church wall, he got over it, like a man whose legs were numbed and stiff, and then turned round to look for me. When I saw him turning, I set my face towards home, and made the best use of my legs. But presently I looked over my shoulder, and saw him going on again towards the river, still hugging himself in both arms, and picking his way with his sore feet among the great stones dropped into the marshes here and there, for stepping-places when the rains were heavy or the tide was in.

The marshes were just a long black horizontal line then, as I stopped to look after him; and the river was just another horizontal line, not nearly so broad nor yet so black; and the sky was just a row of long angry red lines and dense black lines intermixed. On the edge of the river I could faintly make out the only two black things in all the prospect that seemed to be standing upright; one of these was the beacon by which the sailors steered,

—like an unhooped cask upon a pole,—an ugly thing when you were near it; the other, a gibbet, with some chains hanging to it which had once held a pirate. The man was limping on towards this latter, as if he were the pirate come to life, and come down, and going back to hook himself up again. It gave me a terrible turn when I thought so; and as I saw the cattle lifting their heads to gaze after him, I wondered whether they thought so too. I looked all round for the horrible young man, and could see no signs of him. But now I was frightened again, and ran home without stopping.

Chapter II

My sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery, was more than twenty years older than I, and had established a great reputation with herself and the neighbors because she had brought me up "by hand." Having at that time to find out for myself what the expression meant, and knowing her to have a hard and heavy hand, and to be much in the habit of laying it upon her husband as well as upon me, I supposed that Joe Gargery and I were both brought up by hand.

She was not a good-looking woman, my sister; and I had a general impression that she must have made Joe Gargery marry her by hand. Joe was a fair man, with curls of flaxen hair on each side of his smooth face, and with eyes of such a very undecided blue that they seemed to have somehow got mixed with their own whites. He was a mild, good-natured, sweet-tempered, easy-going, foolish, dear fellow,—a sort of Hercules in strength, and also in weakness.

My sister, Mrs. Joe, with black hair and eyes, had such a prevailing redness of skin that I sometimes used to wonder whether it was possible she washed herself with a nutmeg-grater instead of soap. She was tall and bony, and almost always wore a coarse apron, fastened over her figure behind with two loops, and having a square impregnable bib in front, that was stuck full of pins and needles. She made it a powerful merit in herself, and a strong reproach against Joe, that she wore this apron so much. Though I really see no reason why she should have worn it at all; or why, if she did wear it at all, she should not have taken it off, every day of her life.

Joe's forge adjoined our house, which was a wooden house, as many of the dwellings in our country were,—most of them, at that time. When I ran home from the churchyard, the forge was shut up, and Joe was sitting alone in the kitchen. Joe and I being fellow-sufferers, and having confidences as such, Joe imparted a confidence to me, the moment I raised the latch of the door and peeped in at him opposite to it, sitting in the chimney corner.

"Mrs. Joe has been out a dozen times, looking for you, Pip. And she's out now, making it a baker's dozen."

"Is she?"

"Yes, Pip," said Joe; "and what's worse, she's got Tickler with her."

At this dismal intelligence, I twisted the only button on my waistcoat round and round, and looked in great depression at the fire. Tickler was a wax-ended piece of cane, worn smooth by collision with my tickled frame.

"She sot down," said Joe, "and she got up, and she made a grab at Tickler, and she Ram-paged out. That's what she did," said Joe, slowly clearing the fire between the lower bars with the poker, and looking at it; "she Ram-paged out, Pip."

"Has she been gone long, Joe?" I always treated him as a larger species of child, and as no more than my equal.

"Well," said Joe, glancing up at the Dutch clock, "she's been on the Ram-page, this last spell, about five minutes, Pip. She's a coming! Get behind the door, old chap, and have the jack-towel betwixt you."

I took the advice. My sister, Mrs. Joe, throwing the door wide open, and finding an obstruction behind it, immediately divined the cause, and applied Tickler to its further investigation. She concluded by throwing me—I often served as a connubial missile—at Joe, who, glad to get hold of me on any terms, passed me on into the chimney and quietly fenced me up there with his great leg.

"Where have you been, you young monkey?" said Mrs. Joe, stamping her foot. "Tell me directly what you've been doing to wear me away with fret and fright and worrit, or I'd have you out of that corner if you was fifty Pips, and he was five hundred Gargerys."

"I have only been to the churchyard," said I, from my stool, crying and rubbing myself.

"Churchyard!" repeated my sister. "If it warn't for me you'd have been to the churchyard long ago, and stayed there. Who brought you up by hand?"

"You did," said I.

"And why did I do it, I should like to know?" exclaimed my sister.

I whimpered, "I don't know."

"I don't!" said my sister. "I'd never do it again! I know that. I may truly say I've never had this apron of mine off since born you were. It's bad enough to be a blacksmith's wife (and him a Gargery) without being your mother."

My thoughts strayed from that question as I looked disconsolately at the fire. For the fugitive out on the marshes with the ironed leg, the mysterious young man, the file, the food, and the dreadful pledge I was under to commit a larceny on those sheltering premises, rose before me in the avenging coals.

"Hah!" said Mrs. Joe, restoring Tickler to his station. "Churchyard, indeed! You may well say churchyard, you two." One of us, by the by, had not said it at all. "You'll drive me to the churchyard betwixt you, one of these days, and O, a pr-r-recious pair you'd be without me!"

As she applied herself to set the tea-things, Joe peeped down at me over his leg, as if he were mentally casting me and himself up, and calculating what kind of pair we practically should make, under the grievous circumstances foreshadowed. After that, he sat feeling his right-side flaxen curls and whisker, and following Mrs. Joe about with his blue eyes, as his manner always was at squally times.

My sister had a trenchant way of cutting our bread and butter for us, that never varied. First, with her left hand she jammed the loaf hard and fast against her bib,—where it sometimes got a pin into it, and sometimes a needle, which we afterwards got into our mouths. Then she took some butter (not too much) on a knife and spread it on the loaf, in an apothecary kind of way, as if she were making a plaster,—using both sides of the knife with a slapping dexterity, and trimming and moulding the butter off round the crust. Then, she gave the knife a final smart wipe on the edge of the plaster, and then sawed a very thick round off the loaf: which she finally, before separating from the loaf, hewed into two halves, of which Joe got one, and I the other.

On the present occasion, though I was hungry, I dared not eat my slice. I felt that I must have something in reserve for my dreadful acquaintance, and his ally the still more dreadful young man. I knew Mrs. Joe's housekeeping to be of the strictest kind, and that my larcenous researches might find nothing available in the safe. Therefore I resolved to put my hunk of bread and butter down the leg of my trousers.

The effort of resolution necessary to the achievement of this purpose I found to be quite awful. It was as if I had to make up my mind to leap from the top of a high house, or plunge into a great depth of water. And it was made the more difficult by the unconscious Joe. In our already-mentioned freemasonry as fellow-sufferers, and in his good-natured companionship with me, it was our evening habit to compare the way we bit through our slices, by silently holding them up to each other's admiration now and then,—which stimulated us to new exertions. To-night, Joe several times invited me, by the display of his fast diminishing slice, to enter upon our usual friendly competition; but he found me, each time, with my yellow mug of tea on one knee, and my untouched bread and butter on the other. At last, I desperately considered that the thing I contemplated must be done, and that it had best be done in the least improbable manner consistent with the circumstances. I took advantage of a moment when Joe had just looked at me, and got my bread and butter down my leg.

Joe was evidently made uncomfortable by what he supposed to be my loss of appetite, and took a thoughtful bite out of his slice, which he didn't seem to enjoy. He turned it about in his mouth much longer than usual, pondering over it a good deal, and after all gulped it down like a pill. He was about to take another bite, and had just got his head on one side for a good purchase on it, when his eye fell on me, and he saw that my bread and butter was gone.

The wonder and consternation with which Joe stopped on the threshold of his bite and stared at me, were too evident to escape my sister's observation.

"What's the matter now?" said she, smartly, as she put down her cup.

"I say, you know!" muttered Joe, shaking his head at me in very serious remonstrance. "Pip, old chap! You'll do yourself a mischief. It'll stick somewhere. You can't have chawed it, Pip."

"What's the matter now?" repeated my sister, more sharply than before.

"If you can cough any trifle on it up, Pip, I'd recommend you to do it," said Joe, all aghast. "Manners is manners, but still your elth's your elth."

By this time, my sister was quite desperate, so she pounced on Joe, and, taking him by the two whiskers, knocked his head for a little while against the wall behind him, while I sat in the corner, looking guiltily on.

"Now, perhaps you'll mention what's the matter," said my sister, out of breath, "you staring great stuck pig."

Joe looked at her in a helpless way, then took a helpless bite, and looked at me again.

"You know, Pip," said Joe, solemnly, with his last bite in his cheek, and speaking in a confidential voice, as if we two were quite alone, "you and me is always friends, and I'd be the last to tell upon you, any time. But such a —" he moved his chair and looked about the floor between us, and then again at me—"such a most oncommon Bolt as that!"

"Been bolting his food, has he?" cried my sister.

"You know, old chap," said Joe, looking at me, and not at Mrs. Joe, with his bite still in his cheek, "I Bolted, myself, when I was your age—frequent—and as a boy I've been among a many Bolters; but I never see your Bolting equal yet, Pip, and it's a mercy you ain't Bolted dead."

My sister made a dive at me, and fished me up by the hair, saying nothing more than the awful words, "You come along and be dosed."

Some medical beast had revived Tar-water in those days as a fine medicine, and Mrs. Joe always kept a supply of it in the cupboard; having a belief in its virtues correspondent to its nastiness. At the best of times, so much of this elixir was administered to me as a choice restorative, that I was conscious of going about, smelling like a new fence. On this particular evening the urgency of my case demanded a pint of this mixture, which was poured down my throat, for my greater comfort, while Mrs. Joe held my head under her arm, as a boot would be held in a bootjack. Joe got off with half a pint; but was made to swallow that (much to his disturbance, as he sat slowly munching and meditating before the fire), "because he had had a turn." Judging from myself, I should say he certainly had a turn afterwards, if he had had none before.

Conscience is a dreadful thing when it accuses man or boy; but when, in the case of a boy, that secret burden co-operates with another secret burden down the leg of his trousers, it is (as I can testify) a great punishment. The guilty knowledge that I was going to rob Mrs. Joe—I never thought I was going to rob Joe, for I never thought of any of the housekeeping property as his—united to the necessity of always keeping one hand on my bread and butter as I sat, or when I was ordered about the kitchen on any small errand, almost drove me out of my mind. Then, as the marsh winds made the fire glow and flare, I thought I heard the voice outside, of the man with the iron on his leg who had sworn me to secrecy, declaring that he couldn't and wouldn't starve until to-morrow, but must be fed now. At other times, I thought, What if the young man who was with so much difficulty restrained from imbruing his hands in me should yield to a constitutional impatience, or should mistake the time, and should think himself accredited to my heart and liver to-night, instead of to-morrow! If ever anybody's hair stood on end with terror, mine must have done so then. But, perhaps, nobody's ever did?

It was Christmas Eve, and I had to stir the pudding for next day, with a copper-stick, from seven to eight by the Dutch clock. I tried it with the load upon my leg (and that made me think afresh of the man with the load on his leg), and found the tendency of exercise to bring the bread and butter out at my ankle, quite unmanageable. Happily I slipped away, and deposited that part of my conscience in my garret bedroom.

"Hark!" said I, when I had done my stirring, and was taking a final warm in the chimney corner before being sent up to bed; "was that great guns, Joe?"

"Ah!" said Joe. "There's another conwict off."

"What does that mean, Joe?" said I.

Mrs. Joe, who always took explanations upon herself, said, snappishly, "Escaped. Escaped." Administering the definition like Tar-water.

While Mrs. Joe sat with her head bending over her needlework, I put my mouth into the forms of saying to Joe, "What's a convict?" Joe put his mouth into the forms of returning such a highly elaborate answer, that I could make out nothing of it but the single word "Pip."

"There was a conwict off last night," said Joe, aloud, "after sunset-gun. And they fired warning of him. And now it appears they're firing warning of another."

"Who's firing?" said I.

"Drat that boy," interposed my sister, frowning at me over her work, "what a questioner he is. Ask no questions, and you'll be told no lies."

It was not very polite to herself, I thought, to imply that I should be told lies by her even if I did ask questions. But she never was polite unless there was company.

At this point Joe greatly augmented my curiosity by taking the utmost pains to open his mouth very wide, and to put it into the form of a word that looked to me like "sulks." Therefore, I naturally pointed to Mrs. Joe, and put my mouth into the form of saying, "her?" But Joe wouldn't hear of that, at all, and again opened his mouth very wide, and shook the form of a most emphatic word out of it. But I could make nothing of the word.

"Mrs. Joe," said I, as a last resort, "I should like to know—if you wouldn't much mind—where the firing comes from?"

"Lord bless the boy!" exclaimed my sister, as if she didn't quite mean that but rather the contrary. "From the Hulks!"

"Oh-h!" said I, looking at Joe. "Hulks!"

Joe gave a reproachful cough, as much as to say, "Well, I told you so."

"And please, what's Hulks?" said I.

"That's the way with this boy!" exclaimed my sister, pointing me out with her needle and thread, and shaking her head at me. "Answer him one question, and he'll ask you a dozen directly. Hulks are prison-ships, right 'cross th' meshes." We always used that name for marshes, in our country.

"I wonder who's put into prison-ships, and why they're put there?" said I, in a general way, and with quiet desperation.

It was too much for Mrs. Joe, who immediately rose. "I tell you what, young fellow," said she, "I didn't bring you up by hand to badger people's lives out. It would be blame to me and not praise, if I had. People are put in the Hulks because they murder, and because they rob, and forge, and do all sorts of bad; and they always begin by asking questions. Now, you get along to bed!"

I was never allowed a candle to light me to bed, and, as I went up stairs in the dark, with my head tingling,—from Mrs. Joe's thimble having played the tambourine upon it, to accompany her last words,—I felt fearfully sensible of the great convenience that the hulks were handy for me. I was clearly on my way there. I had begun by asking questions, and I was going to rob Mrs. Joe.

Since that time, which is far enough away now, I have often thought that few people know what secrecy there is in the young under terror. No matter how unreasonable the terror, so that it be terror. I was in mortal terror of the young man who wanted my heart and liver; I was in mortal terror of my interlocutor with the iron leg; I was in mortal terror of myself, from whom an awful promise had been extracted; I had no hope of deliverance through my all-powerful sister, who repulsed me at every turn; I am afraid to think of what I might have done on requirement, in the secrecy of my terror.

If I slept at all that night, it was only to imagine myself drifting down the river on a strong spring-tide, to the Hulks; a ghostly pirate calling out to me through a speaking-trumpet, as I passed the gibbet-station, that I had better come ashore and be hanged there at once, and not put it off. I was afraid to sleep, even if I had been inclined, for I knew that at the first faint dawn of morning I must rob the pantry. There was no doing it in the night, for there was no getting a light by easy friction then; to have got one I must have struck it out of flint and steel, and have made a noise like the very pirate himself rattling his chains.

As soon as the great black velvet pall outside my little window was shot with gray, I got up and went down stairs; every board upon the way, and every crack in every board calling after me, "Stop thief!" and "Get up, Mrs. Joe!" In the pantry, which was far more abundantly supplied than usual, owing to the season, I was very much alarmed by a hare hanging up by the heels, whom I rather thought I caught when my back was half turned, winking. I had no time for verification, no time for selection, no time for anything, for I had no time to spare. I stole some bread, some rind of cheese, about half a jar of mincemeat (which I tied up in my pocket-handkerchief with my last night's slice), some brandy from a stone bottle (which I decanted into a glass bottle I had secretly used for making that intoxicating fluid, Spanish-liquorice-water, up in my room: diluting the stone bottle from a jug in the kitchen cupboard), a meat bone with very little on it, and a beautiful round compact pork pie. I was nearly going away without the pie, but I was tempted to mount upon a shelf, to look what it was that was put away so carefully in a covered earthen ware dish in a corner, and I found it was the pie, and I took it in the hope that it was not intended for early use, and would not be missed for some time.

There was a door in the kitchen, communicating with the forge; I unlocked and unbolted that door, and got a file from among Joe's tools. Then I put the fastenings as I had found them, opened the door at which I had entered when I ran home last night, shut it, and ran for the misty marshes.

Chapter III

It was a rimy morning, and very damp. I had seen the damp lying on the outside of my little window, as if some goblin had been crying there all night, and using the window for a pocket-handkerchief. Now, I saw the damp lying on the bare hedges and spare grass, like a coarser sort of spiders' webs; hanging itself from twig to twig and blade to blade. On every rail and gate, wet lay clammy, and the marsh mist was so thick, that the wooden finger on the post directing people to our village—a direction which they never accepted, for they never came there—was invisible to me until I was quite close under it. Then, as I looked up at it, while it dripped, it seemed to my oppressed conscience like a phantom devoting me to the Hulks.

The mist was heavier yet when I got out upon the marshes, so that instead of my running at everything, everything seemed to run at me. This was very disagreeable to a guilty mind. The gates and dikes and banks came bursting at me through the mist, as if they cried as plainly as could be, "A boy with Somebody's else's pork pie! Stop him!" The cattle came upon me with like suddenness, staring out of their eyes, and steaming out of their nostrils, "Halloa, young thief!" One black ox, with a white cravat on,—who even had to my awakened conscience something of a clerical air,—fixed me so obstinately with his eyes, and moved his blunt head round in such an accusatory manner as I moved round, that I blubbered out to him, "I couldn't help it, sir! It wasn't for myself I took it!" Upon which he put down his head, blew a cloud of smoke out of his nose, and vanished with a kick-up of his hind-legs and a flourish of his tail.

All this time, I was getting on towards the river; but however fast I went, I couldn't warm my feet, to which the damp cold seemed riveted, as the iron was riveted to the leg of the man I was running to meet. I knew my way to the Battery, pretty straight, for I had been down there on a Sunday with Joe, and Joe, sitting on an old gun, had told me that when I was 'prentice to him, regularly bound, we would have such Larks there! However, in the confusion of the mist, I found myself at last too far to the right, and consequently had to try back along the river-side, on the bank of loose stones above the mud and the stakes that staked the tide out. Making my way along here with all despatch, I had just crossed a ditch which I knew to be very near the Battery, and had just scrambled up the mound beyond the ditch, when I saw the man sitting before me. His back was towards me, and he had his arms folded, and was nodding forward, heavy with sleep.

I thought he would be more glad if I came upon him with his breakfast, in that unexpected manner, so I went forward softly and touched him on the shoulder. He instantly jumped up, and it was not the same man, but another man!

And yet this man was dressed in coarse gray, too, and had a great iron on his leg, and was lame, and hoarse, and cold, and was everything that the other man was; except that he had not the same face, and had a flat broad-brimmed low-crowned felt hat on. All this I saw in a moment, for I had only a moment to see it in: he swore an oath at me, made a hit at me,—it was a round weak blow that missed me and almost knocked himself down, for it made him stumble,—and then he ran into the mist, stumbling twice as he went, and I lost him.

"It's the young man!" I thought, feeling my heart shoot as I identified him. I dare say I should have felt a pain in my liver, too, if I had known where it was.

I was soon at the Battery after that, and there was the right Man,—hugging himself and limping to and fro, as if he had never all night left off hugging and limping,—waiting for me. He was awfully cold, to be sure. I half expected to see him drop down before my face and die of deadly cold. His eyes looked so awfully hungry too, that when I handed him the file and he laid it down on the grass, it occurred to me he would have tried to eat it, if he had not seen my bundle. He did not turn me upside down this time to get at what I had, but left me right side upwards while I opened the bundle and emptied my pockets.

"What's in the bottle, boy?" said he.

"Brandy," said I.

He was already handing mincemeat down his throat in the most curious manner,—more like a man who was putting it away somewhere in a violent hurry, than a man who was eating it,—but he left off to take some of the liquor. He shivered all the while so violently, that it was quite as much as he could do to keep the neck of the bottle between his teeth, without biting it off.

"I think you have got the ague," said I.

"I'm much of your opinion, boy," said he.

"It's bad about here," I told him. "You've been lying out on the meshes, and they're dreadful aguish. Rheumatic too."

"I'll eat my breakfast afore they're the death of me," said he. "I'd do that, if I was going to be strung up to that there gallows as there is over there, directly afterwards. I'll beat the shivers so far, I'll bet you."

He was gobbling mincemeat, meatbone, bread, cheese, and pork pie, all at once: staring distrustfully while he did so at the mist all round us, and often stopping—even stopping his jaws—to listen. Some real or fancied sound, some clink upon the river or breathing of beast upon the marsh, now gave him a start, and he said, suddenly,—

"You're not a deceiving imp? You brought no one with you?"

"No, sir! No!"

"Nor giv' no one the office to follow you?"

"No!"

"Well," said he, "I believe you. You'd be but a fierce young hound indeed, if at your time of life you could help to hunt a wretched warmint hunted as near death and dunghill as this poor wretched warmint is!"

Something clicked in his throat as if he had works in him like a clock, and was going to strike. And he smeared his ragged rough sleeve over his eyes.

Pitying his desolation, and watching him as he gradually settled down upon the pie, I made bold to say, "I am glad you enjoy it."

"Did you speak?"

"I said I was glad you enjoyed it."

"Thankee, my boy. I do."

I had often watched a large dog of ours eating his food; and I now noticed a decided similarity between the dog's way of eating, and the man's. The man took strong sharp sudden bites, just like the dog. He swallowed, or rather snapped up, every mouthful, too soon and too fast; and he looked sideways here and there while he ate, as if he thought there was danger in every direction of somebody's coming to take the pie away. He was altogether too unsettled in his mind over it, to appreciate it comfortably I thought, or to have anybody to dine with him, without making a chop with his jaws at the visitor. In all of which particulars he was very like the dog.

"I am afraid you won't leave any of it for him," said I, timidly; after a silence during which I had hesitated as to the politeness of making the remark. "There's no more to be got where that came from." It was the certainty of this fact that impelled me to offer the hint.

"Leave any for him? Who's him?" said my friend, stopping in his crunching of pie-crust.

"The young man. That you spoke of. That was hid with you."

"Oh ah!" he returned, with something like a gruff laugh. "Him? Yes, yes! He don't want no wittles."

"I thought he looked as if he did," said I.

The man stopped eating, and regarded me with the keenest scrutiny and the greatest surprise.

"Looked? When?"

"Just now."

"Where?"

"Yonder," said I, pointing; "over there, where I found him nodding asleep, and thought it was you."

He held me by the collar and stared at me so, that I began to think his first idea about cutting my throat had revived.

"Dressed like you, you know, only with a hat," I explained, trembling; "and—and"—I was very anxious to put this delicately—"and with—the same reason for wanting to borrow a file. Didn't you hear the cannon last night?"

"Then there was firing!" he said to himself.

"I wonder you shouldn't have been sure of that," I returned, "for we heard it up at home, and that's farther away, and we were shut in besides."

"Why, see now!" said he. "When a man's alone on these flats, with a light head and a light stomach, perishing of cold and want, he hears nothin' all night, but guns firing, and voices calling. Hears? He sees the soldiers, with their red coats lighted up by the torches carried afore, closing in round him. Hears his number called, hears himself challenged, hears the rattle of the muskets, hears the orders 'Make ready! Present! Cover him steady, men!' and is laid hands on—and there's nothin'! Why, if I see one pursuing party last night—coming up in order, Damn 'em, with their tramp, tramp—I see a hundred. And as to firing! Why, I see the mist shake with the cannon, arter it was broad day,—But this man"; he had said all the rest, as if he had forgotten my being there; "did you notice anything in him?"

"He had a badly bruised face," said I, recalling what I hardly knew I knew.

"Not here?" exclaimed the man, striking his left cheek mercilessly, with the flat of his hand.

"Yes, there!"

"Where is he?" He crammed what little food was left, into the breast of his gray jacket. "Show me the way he went. I'll pull him down, like a bloodhound. Curse this iron on my sore leg! Give us hold of the file, boy."

I indicated in what direction the mist had shrouded the other man, and he looked up at it for an instant. But he was down on the rank wet grass, filing at his iron like a madman, and not minding me or minding his own leg, which had an old chafe upon it and was bloody, but which he handled as roughly as if it had no more feeling in it than the file. I was very much afraid of him again, now that he had worked himself into this fierce hurry, and I was likewise very much afraid of keeping away from home any longer. I told him I must go, but he took no notice, so I thought the best thing I could do was to slip off. The last I saw of him, his head was bent over his knee and he was working hard at his fetter, muttering impatient imprecations at it and at his leg. The last I heard of him, I stopped in the mist to listen, and the file was still going.

Chapter IV

I fully expected to find a Constable in the kitchen, waiting to take me up. But not only was there no Constable there, but no discovery had yet been made of the robbery. Mrs. Joe was prodigiously busy in getting the house ready for the festivities of the day, and Joe had been put upon the kitchen doorstep to keep him out of the dust-pan,—an article into which his destiny always led him, sooner or later, when my sister was vigorously reaping the floors of her establishment.

"And where the deuce ha' you been?" was Mrs. Joe's Christmas salutation, when I and my conscience showed ourselves.

I said I had been down to hear the Carols. "Ah! well!" observed Mrs. Joe. "You might ha' done worse." Not a doubt of that I thought.

"Perhaps if I warn't a blacksmith's wife, and (what's the same thing) a slave with her apron never off, I should have been to hear the Carols," said Mrs. Joe. "I'm rather partial to Carols, myself, and that's the best of reasons for my never hearing any."

Joe, who had ventured into the kitchen after me as the dustpan had retired before us, drew the back of his hand across his nose with a conciliatory air, when Mrs. Joe darted a look at him, and, when her eyes were withdrawn, secretly crossed his two forefingers, and exhibited them to me, as our token that Mrs. Joe was in a cross temper. This was so much her normal state, that Joe and I would often, for weeks together, be, as to our fingers, like monumental Crusaders as to their legs.

We were to have a superb dinner, consisting of a leg of pickled pork and greens, and a pair of roast stuffed fowls. A handsome mince-pie had been made yesterday morning (which accounted for the mincemeat not being missed), and the pudding was already on the boil. These extensive arrangements occasioned us to be cut off unceremoniously in respect of breakfast; "for I ain't," said Mrs. Joe,—"I ain't a going to have no formal cramming and busting and washing up now, with what I've got before me, I promise you!"

So, we had our slices served out, as if we were two thousand troops on a forced march instead of a man and boy at home; and we took gulps of milk and water, with apologetic countenances, from a jug on the dresser. In the meantime, Mrs. Joe put clean white curtains up, and tacked a new flowered flounce across the wide chimney to replace the old one, and uncovered the little state parlor across the passage, which was never uncovered at any other time, but passed the rest of the year in a cool haze of silver paper, which even extended to the four little white crockery poodles on the mantel-shelf, each with a black nose and a basket of flowers in his mouth, and each the counterpart of the other. Mrs. Joe was a very clean housekeeper, but had an exquisite art of making her cleanliness more uncomfortable and unacceptable than dirt itself. Cleanliness is next to Godliness, and some people do the same by their religion.

My sister, having so much to do, was going to church vicariously, that is to say, Joe and I were going. In his working—clothes, Joe was a well-knit characteristic-looking blacksmith; in his holiday clothes, he was more like a scarecrow in good circumstances, than anything else. Nothing that he wore then fitted him or seemed to belong to him; and everything that he wore then grazed him. On the present festive occasion he emerged from his room, when the blithe bells were going, the picture of misery, in a full suit of Sunday penitentials. As to me, I think my sister must have had some general idea that I was a young offender whom an Accoucheur Policeman had taken up (on my birthday) and delivered over to her, to be dealt with according to the outraged majesty of the law. I was always treated as if I had insisted on being born in opposition to the dictates of reason, religion, and morality, and against the dissuading arguments of my best friends. Even when I was taken to have a new suit of clothes, the tailor had orders to make them like a kind of Reformatory, and on no account to let me have the free use of my limbs.

Joe and I going to church, therefore, must have been a moving spectacle for compassionate minds. Yet, what I suffered outside was nothing to what I underwent within. The terrors that had assailed me whenever Mrs. Joe had gone near the pantry, or out of the room, were only to be equalled by the remorse with which my mind dwelt on what my hands had done. Under the weight of my wicked secret, I pondered whether the Church would be powerful enough to shield me from the vengeance of the terrible young man, if I divulged to that establishment. I conceived the idea that the time when the banns were read and when the clergyman said, "Ye are now to declare it!" would be the time for me to rise and propose a private conference in the vestry. I am far from being sure that I might not have astonished our small congregation by resorting to this extreme measure, but for its being Christmas Day and no Sunday.

Mr. Wopsle, the clerk at church, was to dine with us; and Mr. Hubble the wheelwright and Mrs. Hubble; and Uncle Pumblechook (Joe's uncle, but Mrs. Joe appropriated him), who was a well-to-do cornchandler in the nearest town, and drove his own chaise-cart. The dinner hour was half-past one. When Joe and I got home, we found the table laid, and Mrs. Joe dressed, and the dinner dressing, and the front door unlocked (it never was at any other time) for the company to enter by, and everything most splendid. And still, not a word of the robbery.

The time came, without bringing with it any relief to my feelings, and the company came. Mr. Wopsle, united to a Roman nose and a large shining bald forehead, had a deep voice which he was uncommonly proud of; indeed it was understood among his acquaintance that if you could only give him his head, he would read the clergyman into fits; he himself confessed that if the Church was "thrown open," meaning to competition, he would not despair of making his mark in it. The Church not being "thrown open," he was, as I have said, our clerk. But he punished the Amens tremendously; and when he gave out the psalm,—always giving the whole verse,—he looked all round the congregation first, as much as to say, "You have heard my friend overhead; oblige me with your opinion of this style!"

I opened the door to the company,—making believe that it was a habit of ours to open that door,—and I opened it first to Mr. Wopsle, next to Mr. and Mrs. Hubble, and last of all to Uncle Pumblechook. N.B. I was not allowed to call him uncle, under the severest penalties.

"Mrs. Joe," said Uncle Pumblechook, a large hard-breathing middle-aged slow man, with a mouth like a fish, dull staring eyes, and sandy hair standing upright on his head, so that he looked as if he had just been all but choked, and had that moment come to, "I have brought you as the compliments of the season—I have brought you, Mum, a bottle of sherry wine—and I have brought you, Mum, a bottle of port wine."

Every Christmas Day he presented himself, as a profound novelty, with exactly the same words, and carrying the two bottles like dumb-bells. Every Christmas Day, Mrs. Joe replied, as she now replied, "O, Un—cle Pum-ble—chook! This is kind!" Every Christmas Day, he retorted, as he now retorted, "It's no more than your merits. And now are you all bobbish, and how's Sixpennorth of halfpence?" meaning me.

We dined on these occasions in the kitchen, and adjourned, for the nuts and oranges and apples to the parlor; which was a change very like Joe's change from his working-clothes to his Sunday dress. My sister was uncommonly lively on the present occasion, and indeed was generally more gracious in the society of Mrs. Hubble than in other company. I remember Mrs. Hubble as a little curly sharp-edged person in sky-blue, who held a conventionally juvenile position, because she had married Mr. Hubble,—I don't know at what remote period,—when she was much younger than he. I remember Mr Hubble as a tough, high-shouldered, stooping old man, of a sawdusty fragrance, with his legs extraordinarily wide apart: so that in my short days I always saw some miles of open country between them when I met him coming up the lane.

Among this good company I should have felt myself, even if I hadn't robbed the pantry, in a false position. Not because I was squeezed in at an acute angle of the tablecloth, with the table in my chest, and the Pumblechookian elbow in my eye, nor because I was not allowed to speak (I didn't want to speak), nor because I was regaled with the scaly tips of the drumsticks of the fowls, and with those obscure corners of pork of which the pig, when living, had had the least reason to be vain. No; I should not have minded that, if they would only have left me alone. But they wouldn't leave me alone. They seemed to think the opportunity lost, if they failed to point the conversation at me, every now and then, and stick the point into me. I might have been an unfortunate little bull in a Spanish arena, I got so smartingly touched up by these moral goads.

It began the moment we sat down to dinner. Mr. Wopsle said grace with theatrical declamation,—as it now appears to me, something like a religious cross of the Ghost in Hamlet with Richard the Third,—and ended with the very proper aspiration that we might be truly grateful. Upon which my sister fixed me with her eye, and said, in a low reproachful voice, "Do you hear that? Be grateful."

"Especially," said Mr. Pumblechook, "be grateful, boy, to them which brought you up by hand."

Mrs. Hubble shook her head, and contemplating me with a mournful presentiment that I should come to no good, asked, "Why is it that the young are never grateful?" This moral mystery seemed too much for the company until Mr. Hubble tersely solved it by saying, "Naterally wicious." Everybody then murmured "True!" and looked at me in a particularly unpleasant and personal manner.

Joe's station and influence were something feebler (if possible) when there was company than when there was none. But he always aided and comforted me when he could, in some way of his own, and he always did so at dinner-time by giving me gravy, if there were any. There being plenty of gravy to-day, Joe spooned into my plate, at this point, about half a pint.

A little later on in the dinner, Mr. Wopsle reviewed the sermon with some severity, and intimated—in the usual hypothetical case of the Church being "thrown open"—what kind of sermon he would have given them. After favoring them with some heads of that discourse, he remarked that he considered the subject of the day's homily, ill chosen; which was the less excusable, he added, when there were so many subjects "going about."

"True again," said Uncle Pumblechook. "You've hit it, sir! Plenty of subjects going about, for them that know how to put salt upon their tails. That's what's wanted. A man needn't go far to find a subject, if he's ready with his salt-box." Mr. Pumblechook added, after a short interval of reflection, "Look at Pork alone. There's a subject! If you want a subject, look at Pork!"

"True, sir. Many a moral for the young," returned Mr. Wopsle,—and I knew he was going to lug me in, before he said it; "might be deduced from that text."

("You listen to this," said my sister to me, in a severe parenthesis.)

Joe gave me some more gravy.

"Swine," pursued Mr. Wopsle, in his deepest voice, and pointing his fork at my blushes, as if he were mentioning my Christian name,—"swine were the companions of the prodigal. The gluttony of Swine is put before us, as an example to the young." (I thought this pretty well in him who had been praising up the pork for being so plump and juicy.) "What is detestable in a pig is more detestable in a boy."

"Or girl," suggested Mr. Hubble.

"Of course, or girl, Mr. Hubble," assented Mr. Wopsle, rather irritably, "but there is no girl present."

"Besides," said Mr. Pumblechook, turning sharp on me, "think what you've got to be grateful for. If you'd been born a Squeaker—"

"He was, if ever a child was," said my sister, most emphatically.

Joe gave me some more gravy.

"Well, but I mean a four-footed Squeaker," said Mr. Pumblechook. "If you had been born such, would you have been here now? Not you—"

"Unless in that form," said Mr. Wopsle, nodding towards the dish.

"But I don't mean in that form, sir," returned Mr. Pumblechook, who had an objection to being interrupted; "I mean, enjoying himself with his elders and betters, and improving himself with their conversation, and rolling in the lap of luxury. Would he have been doing that? No, he wouldn't. And what would have been your destination?" turning on me again. "You would have been disposed of for so many shillings according to the market price of the article, and Dunstable the butcher would have come up to you as you lay in your straw, and he would have whipped you under his left arm, and with his right he would have tucked up his frock to get a penknife from out of his waistcoat-pocket, and he would have shed your blood and had your life. No bringing up by hand then. Not a bit of it!"

Joe offered me more gravy, which I was afraid to take.

"He was a world of trouble to you, ma'am," said Mrs. Hubble, commiserating my sister.

"Trouble?" echoed my sister; "trouble?" and then entered on a fearful catalogue of all the illnesses I had been guilty of, and all the acts of sleeplessness I had committed, and all the high places I had tumbled from, and all the low places I had tumbled into, and all the injuries I had done myself, and all the times she had wished me in my grave, and I had contumaciously refused to go there.

I think the Romans must have aggravated one another very much, with their noses. Perhaps, they became the restless people they were, in consequence. Anyhow, Mr. Wopsle's Roman nose so aggravated me, during the recital of my misdemeanours, that I should have liked to pull it until he howled. But, all I had endured up to this time was nothing in comparison with the awful feelings that took possession of me when the pause was broken which ensued upon my sister's recital, and in which pause everybody had looked at me (as I felt painfully conscious) with indignation and abhorrence.

"Yet," said Mr. Pumblechook, leading the company gently back to the theme from which they had strayed, "Pork—regarded as biled—is rich, too; ain't it?"

"Have a little brandy, uncle," said my sister.

O Heavens, it had come at last! He would find it was weak, he would say it was weak, and I was lost! I held tight to the leg of the table under the cloth, with both hands, and awaited my fate.

My sister went for the stone bottle, came back with the stone bottle, and poured his brandy out: no one else taking any. The wretched man trifled with his glass,—took it up, looked at it through the light, put it down,—prolonged my misery. All this time Mrs. Joe and Joe were briskly clearing the table for the pie and pudding.

I couldn't keep my eyes off him. Always holding tight by the leg of the table with my hands and feet, I saw the miserable creature finger his glass playfully, take it up, smile, throw his head back, and drink the brandy off. Instantly afterwards, the company were seized with unspeakable consternation, owing to his springing to his feet, turning round several times in an appalling spasmodic whooping-cough dance, and rushing out at the door; he then became visible through the window, violently plunging and expectorating, making the most hideous faces, and apparently out of his mind.

I held on tight, while Mrs. Joe and Joe ran to him. I didn't know how I had done it, but I had no doubt I had murdered him somehow. In my dreadful situation, it was a relief when he was brought back, and surveying the company all round as if they had disagreed with him, sank down into his chair with the one significant gasp, "Tar!"

I had filled up the bottle from the tar-water jug. I knew he would be worse by and by. I moved the table, like a Medium of the present day, by the vigor of my unseen hold upon it.

"Tar!" cried my sister, in amazement. "Why, how ever could Tar come there?"

But, Uncle Pumblechook, who was omnipotent in that kitchen, wouldn't hear the word, wouldn't hear of the subject, imperiously waved it all away with his hand, and asked for hot gin and water. My sister, who had begun to be alarmingly meditative, had to employ herself actively in getting the gin the hot water, the sugar, and the lemon-peel, and mixing them. For the time being at least, I was saved. I still held on to the leg of the table, but clutched it now with the fervor of gratitude.

By degrees, I became calm enough to release my grasp and partake of pudding. Mr. Pumblechook partook of pudding. All partook of pudding. The course terminated, and Mr. Pumblechook had begun to beam under the genial influence of gin and water. I began to think I should get over the day, when my sister said to Joe, "Clean plates,—cold."

I clutched the leg of the table again immediately, and pressed it to my bosom as if it had been the companion of my youth and friend of my soul. I foresaw what was coming, and I felt that this time I really was gone.

"You must taste," said my sister, addressing the guests with her best grace—"you must taste, to finish with, such a delightful and delicious present of Uncle Pumblechook's!"

Must they! Let them not hope to taste it!

"You must know," said my sister, rising, "it's a pie; a savory pork pie."

The company murmured their compliments. Uncle Pumblechook, sensible of having deserved well of his fellow-creatures, said,—quite vivaciously, all things considered,—"Well, Mrs. Joe, we'll do our best endeavors; let us have a cut at this same pie."

My sister went out to get it. I heard her steps proceed to the pantry. I saw Mr. Pumblechook balance his knife. I saw reawakening appetite in the Roman nostrils of Mr. Wopsle. I heard Mr. Hubble remark that "a bit of savory pork pie would lay atop of anything you could mention, and do no harm," and I heard Joe say, "You shall have some, Pip." I have never been absolutely certain whether I uttered a shrill yell of terror, merely in spirit, or in the bodily hearing of the company. I felt that I could bear no more, and that I must run away. I released the leg of the table, and ran for my life.

But I ran no farther than the house door, for there I ran head-foremost into a party of soldiers with their muskets, one of whom held out a pair of handcuffs to me, saying, "Here you are, look sharp, come on!"

Chapter V

The apparition of a file of soldiers ringing down the but-ends of their loaded muskets on our door-step, caused the dinner-party to rise from table in confusion, and caused Mrs. Joe re-entering the kitchen empty-handed, to stop short and stare, in her wondering lament of "Gracious goodness gracious me, what's gone—with the—pie!"

The sergeant and I were in the kitchen when Mrs. Joe stood staring; at which crisis I partially recovered the use of my senses. It was the sergeant who had spoken to me, and he was now looking round at the company, with his handcuffs invitingly extended towards them in his right hand, and his left on my shoulder.

"Excuse me, ladies and gentleman," said the sergeant, "but as I have mentioned at the door to this smart young shaver," (which he hadn't), "I am on a chase in the name of the king, and I want the blacksmith."

"And pray what might you want with him?" retorted my sister, quick to resent his being wanted at all.

"Missis," returned the gallant sergeant, "speaking for myself, I should reply, the honor and pleasure of his fine wife's acquaintance; speaking for the king, I answer, a little job done."

This was received as rather neat in the sergeant; insomuch that Mr. Pumblechook cried audibly, "Good again!"

"You see, blacksmith," said the sergeant, who had by this time picked out Joe with his eye, "we have had an accident with these, and I find the lock of one of 'em goes wrong, and the coupling don't act pretty. As they are wanted for immediate service, will you throw your eye over them?"

Joe threw his eye over them, and pronounced that the job would necessitate the lighting of his forge fire, and would take nearer two hours than one, "Will it? Then will you set about it at once, blacksmith?" said the off-hand sergeant, "as it's on his Majesty's service. And if my men can bear a hand anywhere, they'll make themselves useful." With that, he called to his men, who came trooping into the kitchen one after another, and piled their arms in a corner. And then they stood about, as soldiers do; now, with their hands loosely clasped before them; now, resting a knee or a shoulder;

now, easing a belt or a pouch; now, opening the door to spit stiffly over their high stocks, out into the yard.

All these things I saw without then knowing that I saw them, for I was in an agony of apprehension. But beginning to perceive that the handcuffs were not for me, and that the military had so far got the better of the pie as to put it in the background, I collected a little more of my scattered wits.

"Would you give me the time?" said the sergeant, addressing himself to Mr. Pumblechook, as to a man whose appreciative powers justified the inference that he was equal to the time.

"It's just gone half past two."

"That's not so bad," said the sergeant, reflecting; "even if I was forced to halt here nigh two hours, that'll do. How far might you call yourselves from the marshes, hereabouts? Not above a mile, I reckon?"

"Just a mile," said Mrs. Joe.

"That'll do. We begin to close in upon 'em about dusk. A little before dusk, my orders are. That'll do."

"Convicts, sergeant?" asked Mr. Wopsle, in a matter-of-course way.

"Ay!" returned the sergeant, "two. They're pretty well known to be out on the marshes still, and they won't try to get clear of 'em before dusk. Anybody here seen anything of any such game?"

Everybody, myself excepted, said no, with confidence. Nobody thought of me.

"Well!" said the sergeant, "they'll find themselves trapped in a circle, I expect, sooner than they count on. Now, blacksmith! If you're ready, his Majesty the King is."

Joe had got his coat and waistcoat and cravat off, and his leather apron on, and passed into the forge. One of the soldiers opened its wooden windows, another lighted the fire, another turned to at the bellows, the rest stood round the blaze, which was soon roaring. Then Joe began to hammer and clink, hammer and clink, and we all looked on.

The interest of the impending pursuit not only absorbed the general attention, but even made my sister liberal. She drew a pitcher of beer from the cask for the soldiers, and invited the sergeant to take a glass of brandy. But Mr. Pumblechook said, sharply, "Give him wine, Mum. I'll engage there's no Tar in that:" so, the sergeant thanked him and said that as he preferred his drink without tar, he would take wine, if it was equally convenient. When it was given him, he drank his Majesty's health and compliments of the season, and took it all at a mouthful and smacked his lips.

"Good stuff, eh, sergeant?" said Mr. Pumblechook.

"I'll tell you something," returned the sergeant; "I suspect that stuff's of your providing."

Mr. Pumblechook, with a fat sort of laugh, said, "Ay, ay? Why?"

"Because," returned the sergeant, clapping him on the shoulder, "you're a man that knows what's what."

"D'ye think so?" said Mr. Pumblechook, with his former laugh. "Have another glass!"

"With you. Hob and nob," returned the sergeant. "The top of mine to the foot of yours,—the foot of yours to the top of mine,—Ring once, ring twice,—the best tune on the Musical Glasses! Your health. May you live a thousand years, and never be a worse judge of the right sort than you are at the present moment of your life!"

The sergeant tossed off his glass again and seemed quite ready for another glass. I noticed that Mr. Pumblechook in his hospitality appeared to forget that he had made a present of the wine, but took the bottle from Mrs. Joe and had all the credit of handing it about in a gush of joviality. Even I got some. And he was so very free of the wine that he even called for the other bottle, and handed that about with the same liberality, when the first was gone.

As I watched them while they all stood clustering about the forge, enjoying themselves so much, I thought what terrible good sauce for a dinner my fugitive friend on the marshes was. They had not enjoyed themselves a quarter so much, before the entertainment was brightened with the excitement he furnished. And now, when they were all in lively anticipation of "the two villains" being taken, and when the bellows seemed to roar for the fugitives, the fire to flare for them, the smoke to hurry away in pursuit of them, Joe to hammer and clink for them, and all the murky shadows on the wall to shake at them in menace as the blaze rose and sank, and the red-hot sparks dropped and died, the pale afternoon outside almost seemed in my pitying young fancy to have turned pale on their account, poor wretches.

At last, Joe's job was done, and the ringing and roaring stopped. As Joe got on his coat, he mustered courage to propose that some of us should go down with the soldiers and see what came of the hunt. Mr. Pumblechook and Mr. Hubble declined, on the plea of a pipe and ladies' society; but Mr. Wopsle said he would go, if Joe would. Joe said he was agreeable, and would take me, if Mrs. Joe approved. We never should have got leave to go, I am sure, but for Mrs. Joe's curiosity to know all about it and how it ended. As it was, she merely stipulated, "If you bring the boy back with his head blown to bits by a musket, don't look to me to put it together again."

The sergeant took a polite leave of the ladies, and parted from Mr. Pumblechook as from a comrade; though I doubt if he were quite as fully sensible of that gentleman's merits under arid conditions, as when something moist was going. His men resumed their muskets and fell in. Mr. Wopsle, Joe, and I, received strict charge to keep in the rear, and to speak no word after we reached the marshes. When we were all out in the raw air and were steadily moving towards our business, I treasonably whispered to Joe, "I hope, Joe, we shan't find them." and Joe whispered to me, "I'd give a shilling if they had cut and run, Pip."

We were joined by no stragglers from the village, for the weather was cold and threatening, the way dreary, the footing bad, darkness coming on, and the people had good fires in-doors and were keeping the day. A few faces hurried to glowing windows and looked after us, but none came out. We passed the finger-post, and held straight on to the churchyard. There we were stopped a few minutes by a signal from the sergeant's hand, while two or three of his men dispersed themselves among the graves, and also examined the porch. They came in again without finding anything, and then we struck out on the open marshes, through the gate at the side of the churchyard. A bitter sleet came rattling against us here on the east wind, and Joe took me on his back.

Now that we were out upon the dismal wilderness where they little thought I had been within eight or nine hours and had seen both men hiding, I considered for the first time, with great dread, if we should come upon them, would my particular convict suppose that it was I who had brought the soldiers there? He had asked me if I was a deceiving imp, and he had said I should be a fierce young hound if I joined the hunt against him. Would he believe that I was both imp and hound in treacherous earnest, and had betrayed him?

It was of no use asking myself this question now. There I was, on Joe's back, and there was Joe beneath me, charging at the ditches like a hunter, and stimulating Mr. Wopsle not to tumble on his Roman nose, and to keep up with us. The soldiers were in front of us, extending into a pretty wide line with an interval between man and man. We were taking the course I had begun with, and from which I had diverged in the mist. Either the mist was not out again yet, or the wind had dispelled it. Under the low red glare of sunset, the beacon, and the gibbet, and the mound of the Battery, and the opposite shore of the river, were plain, though all of a watery lead color.

With my heart thumping like a blacksmith at Joe's broad shoulder, I looked all about for any sign of the convicts. I could see none, I could hear none. Mr. Wopsle had greatly alarmed me more than once, by his blowing and hard breathing; but I knew the sounds by this time, and could dissociate them from the object of pursuit. I got a dreadful start, when I thought I heard the file still going; but it was only a sheep-bell. The sheep stopped in their eating and looked timidly at us; and the cattle, their heads turned from the wind and sleet, stared angrily as if they held us responsible for both annoyances; but, except these things, and the shudder of the dying day in every blade of grass, there was no break in the bleak stillness of the marshes.

The soldiers were moving on in the direction of the old Battery, and we were moving on a little way behind them, when, all of a sudden, we all stopped. For there had reached us on the wings of the wind and rain, a long shout. It was repeated. It was at a distance towards the east, but it was long and loud. Nay, there seemed to be two or more shouts raised together,—if one might judge from a confusion in the sound.

To this effect the sergeant and the nearest men were speaking under their breath, when Joe and I came up. After another moment's listening, Joe (who was a good judge) agreed, and Mr. Wopsle (who was a bad judge) agreed. The sergeant, a decisive man, ordered that the sound should not be answered, but that the course should be changed, and that his men should make towards it "at the double." So we slanted to the right (where the East was), and Joe pounded away so wonderfully, that I had to hold on tight to keep my seat.

It was a run indeed now, and what Joe called, in the only two words he spoke all the time, "a Winder." Down banks and up banks, and over gates, and splashing into dikes, and breaking among coarse rushes: no man cared where he went. As we came nearer to the shouting, it became more and more apparent that it was made by more than one voice. Sometimes, it seemed to stop altogether, and then the soldiers stopped. When it broke out again, the soldiers made for it at a greater rate than ever, and we after them. After a while, we had so run it down, that we could hear one voice calling "Murder!" and another voice, "Convicts! Runaways! Guard! This way for the runaway convicts!" Then both voices would seem to be stifled in a struggle, and then would break out again. And when it had come to this, the soldiers ran like deer, and Joe too.

The sergeant ran in first, when we had run the noise quite down, and two of his men ran in close upon him. Their pieces were cocked and levelled when we all ran in.

"Here are both men!" panted the sergeant, struggling at the bottom of a ditch. "Surrender, you two! and confound you for two wild beasts! Come asunder!"

Water was splashing, and mud was flying, and oaths were being sworn, and blows were being struck, when some more men went down into the ditch to help the sergeant, and dragged out, separately, my convict and the other one. Both were bleeding and panting and execrating and struggling; but of course I knew them both directly.

"Mind!" said my convict, wiping blood from his face with his ragged sleeves, and shaking torn hair from his fingers: "I took him! I give him up to you! Mind that!"

"It's not much to be particular about," said the sergeant; "it'll do you small good, my man, being in the same plight yourself. Handcuffs there!"

"I don't expect it to do me any good. I don't want it to do me more good than it does now," said my convict, with a greedy laugh. "I took him. He knows it. That's enough for me."

The other convict was livid to look at, and, in addition to the old bruised left side of his face, seemed to be bruised and torn all over. He could not so much as get his breath to speak, until they were both separately handcuffed, but leaned upon a soldier to keep himself from falling.

"Take notice, guard,—he tried to murder me," were his first words.

"Tried to murder him?" said my convict, disdainfully. "Try, and not do it? I took him, and giv' him up; that's what I done. I not only prevented him getting off the marshes, but I dragged him here,—dragged him this far on his way back. He's a gentleman, if you please, this villain. Now, the Hulks has got its gentleman again, through me. Murder him? Worth my while, too, to murder him, when I could do worse and drag him back!"

The other one still gasped, "He tried—he tried-to—murder me. Bear—bear witness."

"Lookee here!" said my convict to the sergeant. "Single-handed I got clear of the prison-ship; I made a dash and I done it. I could ha' got clear of these death-cold flats likewise—look at my leg: you won't find much iron on it—if I hadn't made the discovery that he was here. Let him go free? Let him profit by the means as I found out? Let him make a tool of me afresh and again? Once more? No, no, no. If I had died at the bottom there," and he made an emphatic swing at the ditch with his manacled hands, "I'd have held to him with that grip, that you should have been safe to find him in my hold."

The other fugitive, who was evidently in extreme horror of his companion, repeated, "He tried to murder me. I should have been a dead man if you had not come up."

"He lies!" said my convict, with fierce energy. "He's a liar born, and he'll die a liar. Look at his face; ain't it written there? Let him turn those eyes of his on me. I defy him to do it."

The other, with an effort at a scornful smile, which could not, however, collect the nervous working of his mouth into any set expression, looked at the soldiers, and looked about at the marshes and at the sky, but certainly did not look at the speaker.

"Do you see him?" pursued my convict. "Do you see what a villain he is? Do you see those grovelling and wandering eyes? That's how he looked when we were tried together. He never looked at me."

The other, always working and working his dry lips and turning his eyes restlessly about him far and near, did at last turn them for a moment on the speaker, with the words, "You are not much to look at," and with a half-taunting glance at the bound hands. At that point, my convict became so frantically exasperated, that he would have rushed upon him but for the interposition of the soldiers. "Didn't I tell you," said the other convict then, "that he would murder me, if he could?" And any one could see that he shook with fear, and that there broke out upon his lips curious white flakes, like thin snow.

"Enough of this parley," said the sergeant. "Light those torches."

As one of the soldiers, who carried a basket in lieu of a gun, went down on his knee to open it, my convict looked round him for the first time, and saw me. I had alighted from Joe's back on the brink of the ditch when we came up, and had not moved since. I looked at him eagerly when he looked at me, and slightly moved my hands and shook my head. I had been waiting for him to see me that I might try to assure him of my innocence. It was not at all expressed to me that he even comprehended my intention, for he gave me a look that I did not understand, and it all passed in a moment. But if he had looked at me for an hour or for a day, I could not have remembered his face ever afterwards, as having been more attentive.

The soldier with the basket soon got a light, and lighted three or four torches, and took one himself and distributed the others. It had been almost dark before, but now it seemed quite dark, and soon afterwards very dark. Before we departed from that spot, four soldiers standing in a ring, fired twice into the air. Presently we saw other torches kindled at some distance behind us, and others on the marshes on the opposite bank of the river. "All right," said the sergeant. "March."

We had not gone far when three cannon were fired ahead of us with a sound that seemed to burst something inside my ear. "You are expected on board," said the sergeant to my convict; "they know you are coming. Don't straggle, my man. Close up here."

The two were kept apart, and each walked surrounded by a separate guard. I had hold of Joe's hand now, and Joe carried one of the torches. Mr. Wopsle had been for going back, but Joe was resolved to see it out, so we went on with the party. There was a reasonably good path now, mostly on the edge of the river, with a divergence here and there where a dike came, with a miniature windmill on it and a muddy sluice-gate. When I looked round, I could see the other lights coming in after us. The torches we carried dropped great blotches of fire upon the track, and I could see those, too, lying smoking and flaring. I could see nothing else but black darkness. Our lights warmed the air about us with their pitchy blaze, and the two prisoners seemed rather to like that, as they limped along in the midst of the muskets. We could not go fast, because of their lameness; and they were so spent, that two or three times we had to halt while they rested.

After an hour or so of this travelling, we came to a rough wooden hut and a landing-place. There was a guard in the hut, and they challenged, and the sergeant answered. Then, we went into the hut, where there was a smell of tobacco and whitewash, and a bright fire, and a lamp, and a stand of muskets, and a drum, and a low wooden bedstead, like an overgrown mangle without the machinery, capable of holding about a dozen soldiers all at once. Three or four soldiers who lay upon it in their great-coats were not much interested in us, but just lifted their heads and took a sleepy stare, and then lay down again. The sergeant made some kind of report, and some entry in a book, and then the convict whom I call the other convict was drafted off with his guard, to go on board first.

My convict never looked at me, except that once. While we stood in the hut, he stood before the fire looking thoughtfully at it, or putting up his feet by turns upon the hob, and looking thoughtfully at them as if he pitied them for their recent adventures. Suddenly, he turned to the sergeant, and remarked,—

"I wish to say something respecting this escape. It may prevent some persons laying under suspicion alonger me."

"You can say what you like," returned the sergeant, standing coolly looking at him with his arms folded, "but you have no call to say it here. You'll have opportunity enough to say about it, and hear about it, before it's done with, you know."

"I know, but this is another pint, a separate matter. A man can't starve; at least I can't. I took some wittles, up at the willage over yonder,—where the church stands a'most out on the marshes."

"You mean stole," said the sergeant.

"And I'll tell you where from. From the blacksmith's."

"Halloa!" said the sergeant, staring at Joe.

"Halloa, Pip!" said Joe, staring at me.

"It was some broken wittles—that's what it was—and a dram of liquor, and a pie."

"Have you happened to miss such an article as a pie, blacksmith?" asked the sergeant, confidentially.

"My wife did, at the very moment when you came in. Don't you know, Pip?"

"So," said my convict, turning his eyes on Joe in a moody manner, and without the least glance at me,—"so you're the blacksmith, are you? Than I'm sorry to say, I've eat your pie."

"God knows you're welcome to it,—so far as it was ever mine," returned Joe, with a saving remembrance of Mrs. Joe. "We don't know what you have done, but we wouldn't have you starved to death for it, poor miserable fellow-creatur.—Would us, Pip?"

The something that I had noticed before, clicked in the man's throat again, and he turned his back. The boat had returned, and his guard were ready, so we followed him to the landing-place made of rough stakes and stones, and saw him put into the boat, which was rowed by a crew of convicts like himself. No one seemed surprised to see him, or interested in seeing him, or glad to see him, or sorry to see him, or spoke a word, except that somebody in the boat growled as if to dogs, "Give way, you!" which was the signal for the dip of the oars. By the light of the torches, we saw the black Hulk lying out a little way from the mud of the shore, like a wicked Noah's ark. Cribbed and barred and moored by massive rusty chains, the prison-ship seemed in my young eyes to be ironed like the prisoners. We saw the boat go alongside, and we saw him taken up the side and disappear. Then, the ends of the torches were flung hissing into the water, and went out, as if it were all over with him.

Chapter VI

My state of mind regarding the pilfering from which I had been so unexpectedly exonerated did not impel me to frank disclosure; but I hope it had some dregs of good at the bottom of it.

I do not recall that I felt any tenderness of conscience in reference to Mrs. Joe, when the fear of being found out was lifted off me. But I loved Joe,—perhaps for no better reason in those early days than because the dear fellow let me love him,—and, as to him, my inner self was not so easily composed. It was much upon my mind (particularly when I first saw him looking about for his file) that I ought to tell Joe the whole truth. Yet I did not, and for the reason that I mistrusted that if I did, he would think me worse than I was. The fear of losing Joe's confidence, and of thenceforth sitting in the chimney corner at night staring drearily at my forever lost companion and friend, tied up my tongue. I morbidly represented to myself that if Joe knew it, I never afterwards could see him at the fireside feeling his fair whisker, without thinking that he was meditating on it. That, if Joe knew it, I never afterwards could see him glance, however casually, at yesterday's meat or pudding when it came on to-day's table, without thinking that he was debating whether I had been in the pantry. That, if Joe knew it, and at any subsequent period of our joint domestic life remarked that his beer was flat or thick, the conviction that he suspected Tar in it, would bring a rush of blood to my face. In a word, I was too cowardly to do what I knew to be right, as I had been too cowardly to avoid doing what I knew to be wrong. I had had no intercourse with the world at that time, and I imitated none of its many inhabitants who act in this manner. Quite an untaught genius, I made the discovery of the line of action for myself.

As I was sleepy before we were far away from the prison-ship, Joe took me on his back again and carried me home. He must have had a tiresome journey of it, for Mr. Wopsle, being knocked up, was in such a very bad temper that if the Church had been thrown open, he would probably have excommunicated the whole expedition, beginning with Joe and myself. In his lay capacity, he persisted in sitting down in the damp to such an insane extent, that when his coat was taken off to be dried at the kitchen fire, the circumstantial evidence on his trousers would have hanged him, if it had been a capital offence.

By that time, I was staggering on the kitchen floor like a little drunkard, through having been newly set upon my feet, and through having been fast asleep, and through waking in the heat and lights and noise of tongues. As I came to myself (with the aid of a heavy thump between the shoulders, and the restorative exclamation "Yah! Was there ever such a boy as this!" from my sister,) I found Joe telling them about the convict's confession, and all the visitors suggesting different ways by which he had got into the pantry. Mr. Pumblechook made out, after carefully surveying the premises, that he had first got upon the roof of the forge, and had then got upon the roof of the house, and had then let himself down the kitchen chimney by a rope made of his bedding cut into strips; and as Mr. Pumblechook was very positive and drove his own chaise-cart—over Everybody—it was agreed that it must be so. Mr. Wopsle, indeed, wildly cried out, "No!" with the feeble malice of a tired man; but, as he had no theory, and no coat on, he was unanimously set at naught,—not to mention his smoking hard behind, as he stood with his back to the kitchen fire to draw the damp out: which was not calculated to inspire confidence.

This was all I heard that night before my sister clutched me, as a slumberous offence to the company's eyesight, and assisted me up to bed with such a strong hand that I seemed to have fifty boots on, and to be dangling them all against the edges of the stairs. My state of mind, as I have described it, began before I was up in the morning, and lasted long after the subject had died out, and had ceased to be mentioned saving on exceptional occasions.

Chapter VII

At the time when I stood in the churchyard reading the family tombstones, I had just enough learning to be able to spell them out. My construction even of their simple meaning was not very correct, for I read "wife of the Above" as a complimentary reference to my father's exaltation to a better world; and if any one of my deceased relations had been referred to as "Below," I have no doubt I should have formed the worst opinions of that member of the family. Neither were my notions of the theological positions to which my Catechism bound me, at all accurate; for, I have a lively remembrance that I supposed my declaration that I was to "walk in the same all the days of my life," laid me under an obligation always to go through the village from our house in one particular direction, and never to vary it by turning down by the wheelwright's or up by the mill.

When I was old enough, I was to be apprenticed to Joe, and until I could assume that dignity I was not to be what Mrs. Joe called "Pompeyed," or (as I render it) pampered. Therefore, I was not only odd-boy about the forge, but if any neighbor happened to want an extra boy to frighten birds, or pick up stones, or do any such job, I was favored with the employment. In order, however, that our superior position might not be compromised thereby, a money-box was kept on the kitchen mantel-shelf, in to which it was publicly made known that all my earnings were dropped. I have an impression that they were to be contributed eventually towards the liquidation of the National Debt, but I know I had no hope of any personal participation in the treasure.

Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt kept an evening school in the village; that is to say, she was a ridiculous old woman of limited means and unlimited infirmity, who used to go to sleep from six to seven every evening, in the society of youth who paid two pence per week each, for the improving opportunity of seeing her do it. She rented a small cottage, and Mr. Wopsle had the room up stairs, where we students used to overhear him reading aloud in a most dignified and terrific manner, and occasionally bumping on the ceiling. There was a fiction that Mr. Wopsle "examined" the scholars once a quarter. What he did on those occasions was to turn up his cuffs, stick up his hair, and give us Mark Antony's oration over the body of

Caesar. This was always followed by Collins's Ode on the Passions, wherein I particularly venerated Mr. Wopsle as Revenge throwing his blood-stained sword in thunder down, and taking the War-denouncing trumpet with a withering look. It was not with me then, as it was in later life, when I fell into the society of the Passions, and compared them with Collins and Wopsle, rather to the disadvantage of both gentlemen.

Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt, besides keeping this Educational Institution, kept in the same room—a little general shop. She had no idea what stock she had, or what the price of anything in it was; but there was a little greasy memorandum-book kept in a drawer, which served as a Catalogue of Prices, and by this oracle Biddy arranged all the shop transaction. Biddy was Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt's granddaughter; I confess myself quiet unequal to the working out of the problem, what relation she was to Mr. Wopsle. She was an orphan like myself; like me, too, had been brought up by hand. She was most noticeable, I thought, in respect of her extremities; for, her hair always wanted brushing, her hands always wanted washing, and her shoes always wanted mending and pulling up at heel. This description must be received with a week-day limitation. On Sundays, she went to church elaborated.

Much of my unassisted self, and more by the help of Biddy than of Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt, I struggled through the alphabet as if it had been a bramble-bush; getting considerably worried and scratched by every letter. After that I fell among those thieves, the nine figures, who seemed every evening to do something new to disguise themselves and baffle recognition. But, at last I began, in a purblind groping way, to read, write, and cipher, on the very smallest scale.

One night I was sitting in the chimney corner with my slate, expending great efforts on the production of a letter to Joe. I think it must have been a full year after our hunt upon the marshes, for it was a long time after, and it was winter and a hard frost. With an alphabet on the hearth at my feet for reference, I contrived in an hour or two to print and smear this epistle:—

"MI DEER JO i OPE U R KR WITE WELL i OPE i SHAL SON B HABELL 4 2 TEEDGE U JO AN THEN WE SHORL B SO GLODD AN WEN i M PRENGTD 2 U JO WOT LARX AN BLEVE ME INF XN PIP."

There was no indispensable necessity for my communicating with Joe by letter, inasmuch as he sat beside me and we were alone. But I delivered this written communication (slate and all) with my own hand, and Joe received it as a miracle of erudition.

"I say, Pip, old chap!" cried Joe, opening his blue eyes wide, "what a scholar you are! An't you?"

"I should like to be," said I, glancing at the slate as he held it; with a misgiving that the writing was rather hilly.

"Why, here's a J," said Joe, "and a O equal to anythink! Here's a J and a O, Pip, and a J-O, Joe."

I had never heard Joe read aloud to any greater extent than this monosyllable, and I had observed at church last Sunday, when I accidentally held our Prayer-Book upside down, that it seemed to suit his convenience quite as well as if it had been all right. Wishing to embrace the present occasion of finding out whether in teaching Joe, I should have to begin quite at the beginning, I said, "Ah! But read the rest, Jo."

"The rest, eh, Pip?" said Joe, looking at it with a slow, searching eye, "One, two, three. Why, here's three Js, and three Os, and three J-O, Joes in it, Pip!"

I leaned over Joe, and, with the aid of my forefinger read him the whole letter.

"Astonishing!" said Joe, when I had finished. "You ARE a scholar."

"How do you spell Gargery, Joe?" I asked him, with a modest patronage.

"I don't spell it at all," said Joe.

"But supposing you did?"

"It can't be supposed," said Joe. "Tho' I'm uncommon fond of reading, too."

"Are you, Joe?"

"On-common. Give me," said Joe, "a good book, or a good newspaper, and sit me down afore a good fire, and I ask no better. Lord!" he continued, after rubbing his knees a little, "when you do come to a J and a O, and says you, "Here, at last, is a J-O, Joe, how interesting reading is!"

I derived from this, that Joe's education, like Steam, was yet in its infancy, Pursuing the subject, I inquired,—

"Didn't you ever go to school, Joe, when you were as little as me?"

"No, Pip."

"Why didn't you ever go to school, Joe, when you were as little as me?"

"Well, Pip," said Joe, taking up the poker, and settling himself to his usual occupation when he was thoughtful, of slowly raking the fire between the lower bars; "I'll tell you. My father, Pip, he were given to drink, and when he were overtook with drink, he hammered away at my mother, most onmerciful. It were a'most the only hammering he did, indeed, 'xcepting at myself. And he hammered at me with a wigor only to be equalled by the wigor with which he didn't hammer at his anwil.—You're a listening and understanding, Pip?"

"Yes, Joe."

"'Consequence, my mother and me we ran away from my father several times; and then my mother she'd go out to work, and she'd say, "Joe," she'd say, "now, please God, you shall have some schooling, child," and she'd put me to school. But my father were that good in his hart that he couldn't abear to be without us. So, he'd come with a most tremenjous crowd and make such a row at the doors of the houses where we was, that they used to be obligated to have no more to do with us and to give us up to him. And then he took us home and hammered us. Which, you see, Pip," said Joe, pausing in his meditative raking of the fire, and looking at me, "were a drawback on my learning."

"Certainly, poor Joe!"

"Though mind you, Pip," said Joe, with a judicial touch or two of the poker on the top bar, "rendering unto all their doo, and maintaining equal justice betwixt man and man, my father were that good in his hart, don't you see?"

I didn't see; but I didn't say so.

"Well!" Joe pursued, "somebody must keep the pot a biling, Pip, or the pot won't bile, don't you know?"

I saw that, and said so.

"'Consequence, my father didn't make objections to my going to work; so I went to work to work at my present calling, which were his too, if he would have followed it, and I worked tolerable hard, I assure you, Pip. In time I were able to keep him, and I kep him till he went off in a purple leptic fit. And it were my intentions to have had put upon his tombstone that, Whatsume'er the failings on his part, Remember reader he were that good in his heart."

Joe recited this couplet with such manifest pride and careful perspicuity, that I asked him if he had made it himself.

"I made it," said Joe, "my own self. I made it in a moment. It was like striking out a horseshoe complete, in a single blow. I never was so much surprised in all my life,—couldn't credit my own ed,—to tell you the truth, hardly believed it were my own ed. As I was saying, Pip, it were my intentions to have had it cut over him; but poetry costs money, cut it how you will, small or large, and it were not done. Not to mention bearers, all the money that could be spared were wanted for my mother. She were in poor elth, and quite broke. She weren't long of following, poor soul, and her share of peace come round at last."

Joe's blue eyes turned a little watery; he rubbed first one of them, and then the other, in a most uncongenial and uncomfortable manner, with the round knob on the top of the poker.

"It were but lonesome then," said Joe, "living here alone, and I got acquainted with your sister. Now, Pip,"—Joe looked firmly at me as if he knew I was not going to agree with him;—"your sister is a fine figure of a woman."

I could not help looking at the fire, in an obvious state of doubt.

"Whatever family opinions, or whatever the world's opinions, on that subject may be, Pip, your sister is," Joe tapped the top bar with the poker after every word following, "a-fine-figure—of—a—woman!"

I could think of nothing better to say than "I am glad you think so, Joe."

"So am I," returned Joe, catching me up. "I am glad I think so, Pip. A little redness or a little matter of Bone, here or there, what does it signify to Me?"

I sagaciously observed, if it didn't signify to him, to whom did it signify?

"Certainly!" assented Joe. "That's it. You're right, old chap! When I got acquainted with your sister, it were the talk how she was bringing you up by hand. Very kind of her too, all the folks said, and I said, along with all the folks. As to you," Joe pursued with a countenance expressive of seeing something very nasty indeed, "if you could have been aware how small and flabby and mean you was, dear me, you'd have formed the most contemptible opinion of yourself!"

Not exactly relishing this, I said, "Never mind me, Joe."

"But I did mind you, Pip," he returned with tender simplicity. "When I offered to your sister to keep company, and to be asked in church at such times as she was willing and ready to come to the forge, I said to her, 'And bring the poor little child. God bless the poor little child,' I said to your sister, 'there's room for him at the forge!'"

I broke out crying and begging pardon, and hugged Joe round the neck: who dropped the poker to hug me, and to say, "Ever the best of friends; an't us, Pip? Don't cry, old chap!"

When this little interruption was over, Joe resumed:—

"Well, you see, Pip, and here we are! That's about where it lights; here we are! Now, when you take me in hand in my learning, Pip (and I tell you beforehand I am awful dull, most awful dull), Mrs. Joe mustn't see too much of what we're up to. It must be done, as I may say, on the sly. And why on the sly? I'll tell you why, Pip."

He had taken up the poker again; without which, I doubt if he could have proceeded in his demonstration.

"Your sister is given to government."

"Given to government, Joe?" I was startled, for I had some shadowy idea (and I am afraid I must add, hope) that Joe had divorced her in a favor of the Lords of the Admiralty, or Treasury.

"Given to government," said Joe. "Which I meantersay the government of you and myself."

"Oh!"

"And she an't over partial to having scholars on the premises," Joe continued, "and in partickler would not be over partial to my being a scholar, for fear as I might rise. Like a sort or rebel, don't you see?"

I was going to retort with an inquiry, and had got as far as "Why—" when Joe stopped me.

"Stay a bit. I know what you're a going to say, Pip; stay a bit! I don't deny that your sister comes the Mo-gul over us, now and again. I don't deny that she do throw us back-falls, and that she do drop down upon us heavy. At such times as when your sister is on the Ram-page, Pip," Joe sank his voice to a whisper and glanced at the door, "candor compels fur to admit that she is a Buster."

Joe pronounced this word, as if it began with at least twelve capital Bs.

"Why don't I rise? That were your observation when I broke it off, Pip?"

"Yes, Joe."

"Well," said Joe, passing the poker into his left hand, that he might feel his whisker; and I had no hope of him whenever he took to that placid occupation; "your sister's a master-mind. A master-mind."

"What's that?" I asked, in some hope of bringing him to a stand. But Joe was readier with his definition than I had expected, and completely stopped me by arguing circularly, and answering with a fixed look, "Her."

"And I ain't a master-mind," Joe resumed, when he had unfixed his look, and got back to his whisker. "And last of all, Pip,—and this I want to say very serious to you, old chap,—I see so much in my poor mother, of a woman drudging and slaving and breaking her honest hart and never getting no peace in her mortal days, that I'm dead afeerd of going wrong in the way of not doing what's right by a woman, and I'd fur rather of the two go wrong the t'other way, and be a little ill-conwenienced myself. I wish it was only me that got put out, Pip; I wish there warn't no Tickler for you, old chap; I wish I could take it all on myself; but this is the up-and-down-and-straight on it, Pip, and I hope you'll overlook shortcomings."

Young as I was, I believe that I dated a new admiration of Joe from that night. We were equals afterwards, as we had been before; but, afterwards at quiet times when I sat looking at Joe and thinking about him, I had a new sensation of feeling conscious that I was looking up to Joe in my heart.

"However," said Joe, rising to replenish the fire; "here's the Dutch-clock a working himself up to being equal to strike Eight of 'em, and she's not come home yet! I hope Uncle Pumblechook's mare mayn't have set a forefoot on a piece o' ice, and gone down."

Mrs. Joe made occasional trips with Uncle Pumblechook on market-days, to assist him in buying such household stuffs and goods as required a woman's judgment; Uncle Pumblechook being a bachelor and reposing no confidences in his domestic servant. This was market-day, and Mrs. Joe was out on one of these expeditions.

Joe made the fire and swept the hearth, and then we went to the door to listen for the chaise-cart. It was a dry cold night, and the wind blew keenly, and the frost was white and hard. A man would die to-night of lying out on the marshes, I thought. And then I looked at the stars, and considered how awful if would be for a man to turn his face up to them as he froze to death, and see no help or pity in all the glittering multitude.

"Here comes the mare," said Joe, "ringing like a peal of bells!"

The sound of her iron shoes upon the hard road was quite musical, as she came along at a much brisker trot than usual. We got a chair out, ready for Mrs. Joe's alighting, and stirred up the fire that they might see a bright window, and took a final survey of the kitchen that nothing might be out of its place. When we had completed these preparations, they drove up, wrapped to the eyes. Mrs. Joe was soon landed, and Uncle Pumblechook was soon down too, covering the mare with a cloth, and we were soon all in the kitchen, carrying so much cold air in with us that it seemed to drive all the heat out of the fire.

"Now," said Mrs. Joe, unwrapping herself with haste and excitement, and throwing her bonnet back on her shoulders where it hung by the strings, "if this boy ain't grateful this night, he never will be!"

I looked as grateful as any boy possibly could, who was wholly uninformed why he ought to assume that expression.

"It's only to be hoped," said my sister, "that he won't be Pompeyed. But I have my fears."

"She ain't in that line, Mum," said Mr. Pumblechook. "She knows better."

She? I looked at Joe, making the motion with my lips and eyebrows, "She?" Joe looked at me, making the motion with his lips and eyebrows, "She?" My sister catching him in the act, he drew the back of his hand across his nose with his usual conciliatory air on such occasions, and looked at her.

"Well?" said my sister, in her snappish way. "What are you staring at? Is the house afire?"

"—Which some individual," Joe politely hinted, "mentioned—she."

"And she is a she, I suppose?" said my sister. "Unless you call Miss Havisham a he. And I doubt if even you'll go so far as that."

"Miss Havisham, up town?" said Joe.

"Is there any Miss Havisham down town?" returned my sister.

"She wants this boy to go and play there. And of course he's going. And he had better play there," said my sister, shaking her head at me as an encouragement to be extremely light and sportive, "or I'll work him."

I had heard of Miss Havisham up town,—everybody for miles round had heard of Miss Havisham up town,—as an immensely rich and grim lady who lived in a large and dismal house barricaded against robbers, and who led a life of seclusion.

"Well to be sure!" said Joe, astounded. "I wonder how she come to know Pip!"

"Noodle!" cried my sister. "Who said she knew him?"

"—Which some individual," Joe again politely hinted, "mentioned that she wanted him to go and play there."

"And couldn't she ask Uncle Pumblechook if he knew of a boy to go and play there? Isn't it just barely possible that Uncle Pumblechook may be a tenant of hers, and that he may sometimes—we won't say quarterly or half-yearly, for that would be requiring too much of you—but sometimes—go there to pay his rent? And couldn't she then ask Uncle Pumblechook if he knew of a boy to go and play there? And couldn't Uncle Pumblechook, being always considerate and thoughtful for us—though you may not think it, Joseph," in a tone of the deepest reproach, as if he were the most callous of nephews, "then mention this boy, standing Prancing here"—which I solemnly declare I was not doing—"that I have for ever been a willing slave to?"

"Good again!" cried Uncle Pumblechook. "Well put! Prettily pointed! Good indeed! Now Joseph, you know the case."

"No, Joseph," said my sister, still in a reproachful manner, while Joe apologetically drew the back of his hand across and across his nose, "you do not yet—though you may not think it—know the case. You may consider that you do, but you do not, Joseph. For you do not know that Uncle Pumblechook, being sensible that for anything we can tell, this boy's fortune may be made by his going to Miss Havisham's, has offered to take him into town to-night in his own chaise-cart, and to keep him to-night, and to take him with his own hands to Miss Havisham's to-morrow morning. And Lor-a-mussy me!" cried my sister, casting off her bonnet in sudden desperation, "here I stand talking to mere Mooncalfs, with Uncle Pumblechook waiting, and the mare catching cold at the door, and the boy grimed with crock and dirt from the hair of his head to the sole of his foot!"

With that, she pounced upon me, like an eagle on a lamb, and my face was squeezed into wooden bowls in sinks, and my head was put under taps of water-butts, and I was soaped, and kneaded, and towelled, and thumped, and harrowed, and rasped, until I really was quite beside myself. (I may here remark that I suppose myself to be better acquainted than any living authority, with the ridgy effect of a wedding-ring, passing unsympathetically over the human countenance.)

When my ablutions were completed, I was put into clean linen of the stiffest character, like a young penitent into sackcloth, and was trussed up in my tightest and fearfullest suit. I was then delivered over to Mr. Pumblechook, who formally received me as if he were the Sheriff, and who let off upon me the speech that I knew he had been dying to make all along:

"Boy, be forever grateful to all friends, but especially unto them which brought you up by hand!"

"Good-bye, Joe!"

"God bless you, Pip, old chap!"

I had never parted from him before, and what with my feelings and what with soapsuds, I could at first see no stars from the chaise-cart. But they twinkled out one by one, without throwing any light on the questions why on earth I was going to play at Miss Havisham's, and what on earth I was expected to play at.

Chapter VIII

Mr. Pumblechook's premises in the High Street of the market town, were of a peppercorny and farinaceous character, as the premises of a cornchandler and seedsman should be. It appeared to me that he must be a very happy man indeed, to have so many little drawers in his shop; and I wondered when I peeped into one or two on the lower tiers, and saw the tied-up brown paper packets inside, whether the flower-seeds and bulbs ever wanted of a fine day to break out of those jails, and bloom.

It was in the early morning after my arrival that I entertained this speculation. On the previous night, I had been sent straight to bed in an attic with a sloping roof, which was so low in the corner where the bedstead was, that I calculated the tiles as being within a foot of my eyebrows. In the same early morning, I discovered a singular affinity between seeds and corduroys. Mr. Pumblechook wore corduroys, and so did his shopman; and somehow, there was a general air and flavor about the corduroys, so much in the nature of seeds, and a general air and flavor about the seeds, so much in the nature of corduroys, that I hardly knew which was which. The same opportunity served me for noticing that Mr. Pumblechook appeared to conduct his business by looking across the street at the saddler, who appeared to transact his business by keeping his eye on the coachmaker, who appeared to get on in life by putting his hands in his pockets and contemplating the baker, who in his turn folded his arms and stared at the grocer, who stood at his door and yawned at the chemist. The watchmaker, always poring over a little desk with a magnifying-glass at his eye, and always inspected by a group of smock-frocks poring over him through the glass of his shop-window, seemed to be about the only person in the High Street whose trade engaged his attention.

Mr. Pumblechook and I breakfasted at eight o'clock in the parlor behind the shop, while the shopman took his mug of tea and hunch of bread and butter on a sack of peas in the front premises. I considered Mr. Pumblechook wretched company. Besides being possessed by my sister's idea that a mortifying and penitential character ought to be imparted to my diet,—besides giving me as much crumb as possible in combination with as little butter, and putting such a quantity of warm water into my milk that it would have been more candid to have left the milk out altogether,—his conversation consisted of nothing but arithmetic. On my politely bidding him Good morning, he said, pompously, "Seven times nine, boy?" And how should I be able to answer, dodged in that way, in a strange place, on an empty stomach! I was hungry, but before I had swallowed a morsel, he began a running sum that lasted all through the breakfast. "Seven?" "And four?" "And eight?" "And six?" "And two?" "And ten?" And so on. And after each figure was disposed of, it was as much as I could do to get a bite or a sup, before the next came; while he sat at his ease guessing nothing, and eating bacon and hot roll, in (if I may be allowed the expression) a gorging and gormandizing manner.

For such reasons, I was very glad when ten o'clock came and we started for Miss Havisham's; though I was not at all at my ease regarding the manner in which I should acquit myself under that lady's roof. Within a quarter of an hour we came to Miss Havisham's house, which was of old brick, and dismal, and had a great many iron bars to it. Some of the windows had been walled up; of those that remained, all the lower were rustily barred. There was a courtyard in front, and that was barred; so we had to wait, after ringing the bell, until some one should come to open it. While we waited at the gate, I peeped in (even then Mr. Pumblechook said, "And fourteen?" but I pretended not to hear him), and saw that at the side of the house there was a large brewery. No brewing was going on in it, and none seemed to have gone on for a long long time.

A window was raised, and a clear voice demanded "What name?" To which my conductor replied, "Pumblechook." The voice returned, "Quite right," and the window was shut again, and a young lady came across the court-yard, with keys in her hand.

"This," said Mr. Pumblechook, "is Pip."

"This is Pip, is it?" returned the young lady, who was very pretty and seemed very proud; "come in, Pip."

Mr. Pumblechook was coming in also, when she stopped him with the gate.

"Oh!" she said. "Did you wish to see Miss Havisham?"

"If Miss Havisham wished to see me," returned Mr. Pumblechook, discomfited.

"Ah!" said the girl; "but you see she don't."

She said it so finally, and in such an undiscussible way, that Mr. Pumblechook, though in a condition of ruffled dignity, could not protest. But he eyed me severely,—as if I had done anything to him!—and departed with the words reproachfully delivered: "Boy! Let your behavior here be a credit unto them which brought you up by hand!" I was not free from apprehension that he would come back to propound through the gate, "And sixteen?" But he didn't.

My young conductress locked the gate, and we went across the courtyard. It was paved and clean, but grass was growing in every crevice. The brewery buildings had a little lane of communication with it, and the wooden gates of that lane stood open, and all the brewery beyond stood open, away to the high enclosing wall; and all was empty and disused. The cold wind seemed to blow colder there than outside the gate; and it made a shrill noise in howling in and out at the open sides of the brewery, like the noise of wind in the rigging of a ship at sea.

She saw me looking at it, and she said, "You could drink without hurt all the strong beer that's brewed there now, boy."

"I should think I could, miss," said I, in a shy way.

"Better not try to brew beer there now, or it would turn out sour, boy; don't you think so?"

"It looks like it, miss."

"Not that anybody means to try," she added, "for that's all done with, and the place will stand as idle as it is till it falls. As to strong beer, there's enough of it in the cellars already, to drown the Manor House."

"Is that the name of this house, miss?"

"One of its names, boy."

"It has more than one, then, miss?"

"One more. Its other name was Satis; which is Greek, or Latin, or Hebrew, or all three—or all one to me—for enough."

"Enough House," said I; "that's a curious name, miss."

"Yes," she replied; "but it meant more than it said. It meant, when it was given, that whoever had this house could want nothing else. They must have been easily satisfied in those days, I should think. But don't loiter, boy."

Though she called me "boy" so often, and with a carelessness that was far from complimentary, she was of about my own age. She seemed much older than I, of course, being a girl, and beautiful and self-possessed; and she was as scornful of me as if she had been one-and-twenty, and a queen.

We went into the house by a side door, the great front entrance had two chains across it outside,—and the first thing I noticed was, that the passages were all dark, and that she had left a candle burning there. She took it up, and we went through more passages and up a staircase, and still it was all dark, and only the candle lighted us.

At last we came to the door of a room, and she said, "Go in."

I answered, more in shyness than politeness, "After you, miss."

To this she returned: "Don't be ridiculous, boy; I am not going in." And scornfully walked away, and—what was worse—took the candle with her.

This was very uncomfortable, and I was half afraid. However, the only thing to be done being to knock at the door, I knocked, and was told from within to enter. I entered, therefore, and found myself in a pretty large room, well lighted with wax candles. No glimpse of daylight was to be seen in it. It was a dressing-room, as I supposed from the furniture, though much of it was of forms and uses then quite unknown to me. But prominent in it was a draped table with a gilded looking-glass, and that I made out at first sight to be a fine lady's dressing-table.

Whether I should have made out this object so soon if there had been no fine lady sitting at it, I cannot say. In an arm-chair, with an elbow resting on the table and her head leaning on that hand, sat the strangest lady I have ever seen, or shall ever see.

She was dressed in rich materials,—satins, and lace, and silks,—all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white. Some bright jewels sparkled on her neck and on her hands, and some other jewels lay sparkling on the table. Dresses, less splendid than the dress she wore, and half-packed trunks, were scattered about. She had not quite finished dressing, for she had but one shoe on,—the other was on the table near her hand,—her veil was but half arranged, her watch and chain were not put on, and some lace for her bosom lay with those trinkets, and with her handkerchief, and gloves, and some flowers, and a Prayer-Book all confusedly heaped about the looking-glass.

It was not in the first few moments that I saw all these things, though I saw more of them in the first moments than might be supposed. But I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung loose had shrunk to skin and bone. Once, I had been taken to see some ghastly waxwork at the Fair, representing I know not what impossible personage lying in state. Once, I had been taken to one of our old marsh churches to see a skeleton in the ashes of a rich dress that had been dug out of a vault under the church pavement. Now, waxwork and skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me. I should have cried out, if I could.

"Who is it?" said the lady at the table.

"Pip, ma'am."

"Pip?"

"Mr. Pumblechook's boy, ma'am. Come—to play."

"Come nearer; let me look at you. Come close."

It was when I stood before her, avoiding her eyes, that I took note of the surrounding objects in detail, and saw that her watch had stopped at twenty minutes to nine, and that a clock in the room had stopped at twenty minutes to nine.

"Look at me," said Miss Havisham. "You are not afraid of a woman who has never seen the sun since you were born?"

I regret to state that I was not afraid of telling the enormous lie comprehended in the answer "No."

"Do you know what I touch here?" she said, laying her hands, one upon the other, on her left side.

"Yes, ma'am." (It made me think of the young man.)

"What do I touch?"

"Your heart."

"Broken!"

She uttered the word with an eager look, and with strong emphasis, and with a weird smile that had a kind of boast in it. Afterwards she kept her hands there for a little while, and slowly took them away as if they were heavy.

"I am tired," said Miss Havisham. "I want diversion, and I have done with men and women. Play."

I think it will be conceded by my most disputatious reader, that she could hardly have directed an unfortunate boy to do anything in the wide world more difficult to be done under the circumstances.

"I sometimes have sick fancies," she went on, "and I have a sick fancy that I want to see some play. There, there!" with an impatient movement of the fingers of her right hand; "play, play, play!"

For a moment, with the fear of my sister's working me before my eyes, I had a desperate idea of starting round the room in the assumed character of Mr. Pumblechook's chaise-cart. But I felt myself so unequal to the performance that I gave it up, and stood looking at Miss Havisham in what I suppose she took for a dogged manner, inasmuch as she said, when we had taken a good look at each other,—

"Are you sullen and obstinate?"

"No, ma'am, I am very sorry for you, and very sorry I can't play just now. If you complain of me I shall get into trouble with my sister, so I would do it if I could; but it's so new here, and so strange, and so fine,—and melancholy—." I stopped, fearing I might say too much, or had already said it, and we took another look at each other.

Before she spoke again, she turned her eyes from me, and looked at the dress she wore, and at the dressing-table, and finally at herself in the looking-glass.

"So new to him," she muttered, "so old to me; so strange to him, so familiar to me; so melancholy to both of us! Call Estella."

As she was still looking at the reflection of herself, I thought she was still talking to herself, and kept quiet.

"Call Estella," she repeated, flashing a look at me. "You can do that. Call Estella. At the door."

To stand in the dark in a mysterious passage of an unknown house, bawling Estella to a scornful young lady neither visible nor responsive, and feeling it a dreadful liberty so to roar out her name, was almost as bad as playing to order. But she answered at last, and her light came along the dark passage like a star.

Miss Havisham beckoned her to come close, and took up a jewel from the table, and tried its effect upon her fair young bosom and against her pretty brown hair. "Your own, one day, my dear, and you will use it well. Let me see you play cards with this boy."

"With this boy? Why, he is a common laboring boy!"

I thought I overheard Miss Havisham answer,—only it seemed so Unlikely,—"Well? You can break his heart."

"What do you play, boy?" asked Estella of myself, with the greatest disdain.

"Nothing but beggar my neighbor, miss."

"Beggar him," said Miss Havisham to Estella. So we sat down to cards.

It was then I began to understand that everything in the room had stopped, like the watch and the clock, a long time ago. I noticed that Miss Havisham put down the jewel exactly on the spot from which she had taken it up. As Estella dealt the cards, I glanced at the dressing-table again, and saw that the shoe upon it, once white, now yellow, had never been worn. I glanced down at the foot from which the shoe was absent, and saw that the silk stocking on it, once white, now yellow, had been trodden ragged. Without this arrest of everything, this standing still of all the pale decayed objects, not even the withered bridal dress on the collapsed form could have looked so like grave-clothes, or the long veil so like a shroud.

So she sat, corpse-like, as we played at cards; the frillings and trimmings on her bridal dress, looking like earthy paper. I knew nothing then of the discoveries that are occasionally made of bodies buried in ancient times, which fall to powder in the moment of being distinctly seen; but, I have often thought since, that she must have looked as if the admission of the natural light of day would have struck her to dust.

"He calls the knaves Jacks, this boy!" said Estella with disdain, before our first game was out. "And what coarse hands he has! And what thick boots!"

I had never thought of being ashamed of my hands before; but I began to consider them a very indifferent pair. Her contempt for me was so strong, that it became infectious, and I caught it.

She won the game, and I dealt. I misdealt, as was only natural, when I knew she was lying in wait for me to do wrong; and she denounced me for a stupid, clumsy laboring-boy.

"You say nothing of her," remarked Miss Havisham to me, as she looked on. "She says many hard things of you, but you say nothing of her. What do you think of her?"

"I don't like to say," I stammered.

"Tell me in my ear," said Miss Havisham, bending down.

"I think she is very proud," I replied, in a whisper.

"Anything else?"

"I think she is very pretty."

"Anything else?"

"I think she is very insulting." (She was looking at me then with a look of supreme aversion.)

"Anything else?"

"I think I should like to go home."

"And never see her again, though she is so pretty?"

"I am not sure that I shouldn't like to see her again, but I should like to go home now."

"You shall go soon," said Miss Havisham, aloud. "Play the game out."

Saving for the one weird smile at first, I should have felt almost sure that Miss Havisham's face could not smile. It had dropped into a watchful and brooding expression,—most likely when all the things about her had become transfixed,—and it looked as if nothing could ever lift it up again. Her chest had dropped, so that she stooped; and her voice had dropped, so that she spoke low, and with a dead lull upon her; altogether, she had the appearance of having dropped body and soul, within and without, under the weight of a crushing blow.

I played the game to an end with Estella, and she beggared me. She threw the cards down on the table when she had won them all, as if she despised them for having been won of me.

"When shall I have you here again?" said Miss Havisham. "Let me think."

I was beginning to remind her that to-day was Wednesday, when she checked me with her former impatient movement of the fingers of her right hand.

"There, there! I know nothing of days of the week; I know nothing of weeks of the year. Come again after six days. You hear?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Estella, take him down. Let him have something to eat, and let him roam and look about him while he eats. Go, Pip."

I followed the candle down, as I had followed the candle up, and she stood it in the place where we had found it. Until she opened the side entrance, I had fancied, without thinking about it, that it must necessarily be night-time. The rush of the daylight quite confounded me, and made me feel as if I had been in the candlelight of the strange room many hours.

"You are to wait here, you boy," said Estella; and disappeared and closed the door.

I took the opportunity of being alone in the courtyard to look at my coarse hands and my common boots. My opinion of those accessories was not favorable. They had never troubled me before, but they troubled me now, as vulgar appendages. I determined to ask Joe why he had ever taught me to call those picture-cards Jacks, which ought to be called knaves. I wished Joe had been rather more genteelly brought up, and then I should have been so too.

She came back, with some bread and meat and a little mug of beer. She put the mug down on the stones of the yard, and gave me the bread and meat without looking at me, as insolently as if I were a dog in disgrace. I was so humiliated, hurt, spurned, offended, angry, sorry,—I cannot hit upon the right name for the smart—God knows what its name was,—that tears started to my eyes. The moment they sprang there, the girl looked at me with a quick delight in having been the cause of them. This gave me power to keep them back and to look at her: so, she gave a contemptuous toss—but with a sense, I thought, of having made too sure that I was so wounded—and left me.

But when she was gone, I looked about me for a place to hide my face in, and got behind one of the gates in the brewery-lane, and leaned my sleeve against the wall there, and leaned my forehead on it and cried. As I cried, I kicked the wall, and took a hard twist at my hair; so bitter were my feelings, and so sharp was the smart without a name, that needed counteraction.

My sister's bringing up had made me sensitive. In the little world in which children have their existence whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt as injustice. It may be only small injustice that the child can be exposed to; but the child is small, and its world is small, and its rocking-horse stands as many hands high, according to scale, as a big-boned Irish hunter. Within myself, I had sustained, from my babyhood, a perpetual conflict with injustice. I had known, from the time when I could speak, that my sister, in her capricious and violent coercion, was unjust to me. I had cherished a profound conviction that her bringing me up by hand gave her no right to bring me up by jerks. Through all my punishments, disgraces, fasts, and vigils, and other penitential performances, I had nursed this assurance; and to my communing so much with it, in a solitary and unprotected way, I in great part refer the fact that I was morally timid and very sensitive.

I got rid of my injured feelings for the time by kicking them into the brewery wall, and twisting them out of my hair, and then I smoothed my face with my sleeve, and came from behind the gate. The bread and meat were acceptable, and the beer was warming and tingling, and I was soon in spirits to look about me.

To be sure, it was a deserted place, down to the pigeon-house in the brewery-yard, which had been blown crooked on its pole by some high wind, and would have made the pigeons think themselves at sea, if there had been any pigeons there to be rocked by it. But there were no pigeons in the dove-cot, no horses in the stable, no pigs in the sty, no malt in the storehouse, no smells of grains and beer in the copper or the vat. All the uses and scents of the brewery might have evaporated with its last reek of smoke. In a by-yard, there was a wilderness of empty casks, which had a certain sour remembrance of better days lingering about them; but it was too sour to be accepted as a sample of the beer that was gone,—and in this respect I remember those recluses as being like most others.

Behind the furthest end of the brewery, was a rank garden with an old wall; not so high but that I could struggle up and hold on long enough to look over it, and see that the rank garden was the garden of the house, and that it was overgrown with tangled weeds, but that there was a track upon the green and yellow paths, as if some one sometimes walked there, and that Estella was walking away from me even then. But she seemed to be everywhere. For when I yielded to the temptation presented by the casks, and began to walk on them, I saw her walking on them at the end of the yard of casks. She had her back towards me, and held her pretty brown hair spread out in her two hands, and never looked round, and passed out of my view directly. So, in the brewery itself,—by which I mean the large paved lofty place in which they used to make the beer, and where the brewing utensils still were. When I first went into it, and, rather oppressed by its gloom, stood near the door looking about me, I saw her pass among the extinguished fires, and ascend some light iron stairs, and go out by a gallery high overhead, as if she were going out into the sky.

It was in this place, and at this moment, that a strange thing happened to my fancy. I thought it a strange thing then, and I thought it a stranger thing long afterwards. I turned my eyes—a little dimmed by looking up at the frosty light—towards a great wooden beam in a low nook of the building near me on my right hand, and I saw a figure hanging there by the neck. A figure all in yellow white, with but one shoe to the feet; and it hung so, that I could see that the faded trimmings of the dress were like earthy paper, and that the face was Miss Havisham's, with a movement going over the whole countenance as if she were trying to call to me. In the terror of seeing the figure, and in the terror of being certain that it had not been there a moment before, I at first ran from it, and then ran towards it. And my terror was greatest of all when I found no figure there.

Nothing less than the frosty light of the cheerful sky, the sight of people passing beyond the bars of the court-yard gate, and the reviving influence of the rest of the bread and meat and beer, would have brought me round. Even with those aids, I might not have come to myself as soon as I did, but that I saw Estella approaching with the keys, to let me out. She would have some fair reason for looking down upon me, I thought, if she saw me frightened; and she would have no fair reason.

She gave me a triumphant glance in passing me, as if she rejoiced that my hands were so coarse and my boots were so thick, and she opened the gate, and stood holding it. I was passing out without looking at her, when she touched me with a taunting hand.

"Why don't you cry?"

"Because I don't want to."

"You do," said she. "You have been crying till you are half blind, and you are near crying again now."

She laughed contemptuously, pushed me out, and locked the gate upon me. I went straight to Mr. Pumblechook's, and was immensely relieved to find him not at home. So, leaving word with the shopman on what day I was wanted at Miss Havisham's again, I set off on the four-mile walk to our forge; pondering, as I went along, on all I had seen, and deeply revolving that I was a common laboring-boy; that my hands were coarse; that my boots were thick; that I had fallen into a despicable habit of calling knaves Jacks; that I was much more ignorant than I had considered myself last night, and generally that I was in a low-lived bad way.

Chapter IX

When I reached home, my sister was very curious to know all about Miss Havisham's, and asked a number of questions. And I soon found myself getting heavily bumped from behind in the nape of the neck and the small of the back, and having my face ignominiously shoved against the kitchen wall, because I did not answer those questions at sufficient length.

If a dread of not being understood be hidden in the breasts of other young people to anything like the extent to which it used to be hidden in mine,—which I consider probable, as I have no particular reason to suspect myself of having been a monstrosity,—it is the key to many reservations. I felt convinced that if I described Miss Havisham's as my eyes had seen it, I should not be understood. Not only that, but I felt convinced that Miss Havisham too would not be understood; and although she was perfectly incomprehensible to me, I entertained an impression that there would be something coarse and treacherous in my dragging her as she really was (to say nothing of Miss Estella) before the contemplation of Mrs. Joe. Consequently, I said as little as I could, and had my face shoved against the kitchen wall.

The worst of it was that that bullying old Pumblechook, preyed upon by a devouring curiosity to be informed of all I had seen and heard, came gaping over in his chaise-cart at tea-time, to have the details divulged to him. And the mere sight of the torment, with his fishy eyes and mouth open, his sandy hair inquisitively on end, and his waistcoat heaving with windy arithmetic, made me vicious in my reticence.

"Well, boy," Uncle Pumblechook began, as soon as he was seated in the chair of honor by the fire. "How did you get on up town?"

I answered, "Pretty well, sir," and my sister shook her fist at me.

"Pretty well?" Mr. Pumblechook repeated. "Pretty well is no answer. Tell us what you mean by pretty well, boy?"

Whitewash on the forehead hardens the brain into a state of obstinacy perhaps. Anyhow, with whitewash from the wall on my forehead, my obstinacy was adamantine. I reflected for some time, and then answered as if I had discovered a new idea, "I mean pretty well."

My sister with an exclamation of impatience was going to fly at me,—I had no shadow of defence, for Joe was busy in the forge,—when Mr. Pumblechook interposed with "No! Don't lose your temper. Leave this lad to me, ma'am; leave this lad to me." Mr. Pumblechook then turned me towards him, as if he were going to cut my hair, and said,—

"First (to get our thoughts in order): Forty-three pence?"

I calculated the consequences of replying "Four Hundred Pound," and finding them against me, went as near the answer as I could—which was somewhere about eightpence off. Mr. Pumblechook then put me through my pence-table from "twelve pence make one shilling," up to "forty pence make three and fourpence," and then triumphantly demanded, as if he had done for me, "Now! How much is forty-three pence?" To which I replied, after a long interval of reflection, "I don't know." And I was so aggravated that I almost doubt if I did know.

Mr. Pumblechook worked his head like a screw to screw it out of me, and said, "Is forty-three pence seven and sixpence three fardens, for instance?"

"Yes!" said I. And although my sister instantly boxed my ears, it was highly gratifying to me to see that the answer spoilt his joke, and brought him to a dead stop.

"Boy! What like is Miss Havisham?" Mr. Pumblechook began again when he had recovered; folding his arms tight on his chest and applying the screw.

"Very tall and dark," I told him.

"Is she, uncle?" asked my sister.

Mr. Pumblechook winked assent; from which I at once inferred that he had never seen Miss Havisham, for she was nothing of the kind.

"Good!" said Mr. Pumblechook conceitedly. ("This is the way to have him! We are beginning to hold our own, I think, Mum?")

"I am sure, uncle," returned Mrs. Joe, "I wish you had him always; you know so well how to deal with him."

"Now, boy! What was she a doing of, when you went in today?" asked Mr. Pumblechook.

"She was sitting," I answered, "in a black velvet coach."

Mr. Pumblechook and Mrs. Joe stared at one another—as they well Might—and both repeated, "In a black velvet coach?"

"Yes," said I. "And Miss Estella—that's her niece, I think—handed her in cake and wine at the coach-window, on a gold plate. And we all had cake and wine on gold plates. And I got up behind the coach to eat mine, because she told me to."

"Was anybody else there?" asked Mr. Pumblechook.

"Four dogs," said I.

"Large or small?"

"Immense," said I. "And they fought for veal-cutlets out of a silver basket."

Mr. Pumblechook and Mrs. Joe stared at one another again, in utter amazement. I was perfectly frantic,—a reckless witness under the torture,—and would have told them anything.

"Where was this coach, in the name of gracious?" asked my sister.

"In Miss Havisham's room." They stared again. "But there weren't any horses to it." I added this saving clause, in the moment of rejecting four richly caparisoned coursers which I had had wild thoughts of harnessing.

"Can this be possible, uncle?" asked Mrs. Joe. "What can the boy mean?"

"I'll tell you, Mum," said Mr. Pumblechook. "My opinion is, it's a sedan-chair. She's flighty, you know,—very flighty,—quite flighty enough to pass her days in a sedan-chair."

"Did you ever see her in it, uncle?" asked Mrs. Joe.

"How could I," he returned, forced to the admission, "when I never see her in my life? Never clapped eyes upon her!"

"Goodness, uncle! And yet you have spoken to her?"

"Why, don't you know," said Mr. Pumblechook, testily, "that when I have been there, I have been took up to the outside of her door, and the door has stood ajar, and she has spoke to me that way. Don't say you don't know that, Mum. Howsever, the boy went there to play. What did you play at, boy?"

"We played with flags," I said. (I beg to observe that I think of myself with amazement, when I recall the lies I told on this occasion.)

"Flags!" echoed my sister.

"Yes," said I. "Estella waved a blue flag, and I waved a red one, and Miss Havisham waved one sprinkled all over with little gold stars, out at the coach-window. And then we all waved our swords and hurrahed."

"Swords!" repeated my sister. "Where did you get swords from?"

"Out of a cupboard," said I. "And I saw pistols in it,—and jam,—and pills. And there was no daylight in the room, but it was all lighted up with candles."

"That's true, Mum," said Mr. Pumblechook, with a grave nod. "That's the state of the case, for that much I've seen myself." And then they both stared at me, and I, with an obtrusive show of artlessness on my countenance, stared at them, and plaited the right leg of my trousers with my right hand.

If they had asked me any more questions, I should undoubtedly have betrayed myself, for I was even then on the point of mentioning that there was a balloon in the yard, and should have hazarded the statement but for my invention being divided between that phenomenon and a bear in the brewery. They were so much occupied, however, in discussing the marvels I had already presented for their consideration, that I escaped. The subject still held them when Joe came in from his work to have a cup of tea. To whom my sister, more for the relief of her own mind than for the gratification of his, related my pretended experiences.

Now, when I saw Joe open his blue eyes and roll them all round the kitchen in helpless amazement, I was overtaken by penitence; but only as regarded him,—not in the least as regarded the other two. Towards Joe, and Joe only, I considered myself a young monster, while they sat debating what results would come to me from Miss Havisham's acquaintance and favor. They had no doubt that Miss Havisham would "do something" for me; their doubts related to the form that something would take. My sister stood out for "property." Mr. Pumblechook was in favor of a handsome premium for binding me apprentice to some genteel trade,—say, the corn and seed trade, for instance. Joe fell into the deepest disgrace with both, for offering the bright suggestion that I might only be presented with one of the dogs who had fought for the veal-cutlets. "If a fool's head can't express better opinions than that," said my sister, "and you have got any work to do, you had better go and do it." So he went.

After Mr. Pumblechook had driven off, and when my sister was washing up, I stole into the forge to Joe, and remained by him until he had done for the night. Then I said, "Before the fire goes out, Joe, I should like to tell you something."

"Should you, Pip?" said Joe, drawing his shoeing-stool near the forge. "Then tell us. What is it, Pip?"

"Joe," said I, taking hold of his rolled-up shirt sleeve, and twisting it between my finger and thumb, "you remember all that about Miss Havisham's?"

"Remember?" said Joe. "I believe you! Wonderful!"

"It's a terrible thing, Joe; it ain't true."

"What are you telling of, Pip?" cried Joe, falling back in the greatest amazement. "You don't mean to say it's—"

"Yes I do; it's lies, Joe."

"But not all of it? Why sure you don't mean to say, Pip, that there was no black welwet co—ch?" For, I stood shaking my head. "But at least there was dogs, Pip? Come, Pip," said Joe, persuasively, "if there warn't no weal-cutlets, at least there was dogs?"

"No, Joe."

"A dog?" said Joe. "A puppy? Come?"

"No, Joe, there was nothing at all of the kind."

As I fixed my eyes hopelessly on Joe, Joe contemplated me in dismay. "Pip, old chap! This won't do, old fellow! I say! Where do you expect to go to?"

"It's terrible, Joe; ain't it?"

"Terrible?" cried Joe. "Awful! What possessed you?"

"I don't know what possessed me, Joe," I replied, letting his shirt sleeve go, and sitting down in the ashes at his feet, hanging my head; "but I wish you hadn't taught me to call Knaves at cards Jacks; and I wish my boots weren't so thick nor my hands so coarse."

And then I told Joe that I felt very miserable, and that I hadn't been able to explain myself to Mrs. Joe and Pumblechook, who were so rude to me, and that there had been a beautiful young lady at Miss Havisham's who was dreadfully proud, and that she had said I was common, and that I knew I was common, and that I wished I was not common, and that the lies had come of it somehow, though I didn't know how.

This was a case of metaphysics, at least as difficult for Joe to deal with as for me. But Joe took the case altogether out of the region of metaphysics, and by that means vanquished it.

"There's one thing you may be sure of, Pip," said Joe, after some rumination, "namely, that lies is lies. Howsever they come, they didn't ought to come, and they come from the father of lies, and work round to the same. Don't you tell no more of 'em, Pip. That ain't the way to get out of being common, old chap. And as to being common, I don't make it out at all clear. You are oncommon in some things. You're oncommon small. Likewise you're a oncommon scholar."

"No, I am ignorant and backward, Joe."

"Why, see what a letter you wrote last night! Wrote in print even! I've seen letters—Ah! and from gentlefolks!—that I'll swear weren't wrote in print," said Joe.

"I have learnt next to nothing, Joe. You think much of me. It's only that."

"Well, Pip," said Joe, "be it so or be it son't, you must be a common scholar afore you can be a oncommon one, I should hope! The king upon his throne, with his crown upon his ed, can't sit and write his acts of Parliament in print, without having begun, when he were a unpromoted Prince, with the alphabet.—Ah!" added Joe, with a shake of the head that was full of meaning, "and begun at A. too, and worked his way to Z. And I know what that is to do, though I can't say I've exactly done it."

There was some hope in this piece of wisdom, and it rather encouraged me.

"Whether common ones as to callings and earnings," pursued Joe, reflectively, "mightn't be the better of continuing for to keep company with common ones, instead of going out to play with oncommon ones,—which reminds me to hope that there were a flag, perhaps?"

"No, Joe."

"(I'm sorry there weren't a flag, Pip). Whether that might be or mightn't be, is a thing as can't be looked into now, without putting your sister on the Rampage; and that's a thing not to be thought of as being done intentional. Lookee here, Pip, at what is said to you by a true friend. Which this to you the true friend say. If you can't get to be oncommon through going straight, you'll never get to do it through going crooked. So don't tell no more on 'em, Pip, and live well and die happy."

"You are not angry with me, Joe?"

"No, old chap. But bearing in mind that them were which I meantersay of a stunning and outdacious sort,—alluding to them which bordered on weal-cutlets and dog-fighting,—a sincere well-wisher would adwise, Pip, their being dropped into your meditations, when you go up stairs to bed. That's all, old chap, and don't never do it no more."

When I got up to my little room and said my prayers, I did not forget Joe's recommendation, and yet my young mind was in that disturbed and unthankful state, that I thought long after I laid me down, how common Estella would consider Joe, a mere blacksmith; how thick his boots, and how coarse his hands. I thought how Joe and my sister were then sitting in the kitchen, and how I had come up to bed from the kitchen, and how Miss Havisham and Estella never sat in a kitchen, but were far above the level of such common doings. I fell asleep recalling what I "used to do" when I was at Miss Havisham's; as though I had been there weeks or months, instead of hours; and as though it were quite an old subject of remembrance, instead of one that had arisen only that day.

That was a memorable day to me, for it made great changes in me. But it is the same with any life. Imagine one selected day struck out of it, and think how different its course would have been. Pause you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day.

Chapter X

The felicitous idea occurred to me a morning or two later when I woke, that the best step I could take towards making myself uncommon was to get out of Biddy everything she knew. In pursuance of this luminous conception I mentioned to Biddy when I went to Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt's at night, that I had a particular reason for wishing to get on in life, and that I should feel very much obliged to her if she would impart all her learning to me. Biddy, who was the most obliging of girls, immediately said she would, and indeed began to carry out her promise within five minutes.

The Educational scheme or Course established by Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt may be resolved into the following synopsis. The pupils ate apples and put straws down one another's backs, until Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt collected her energies, and made an indiscriminate totter at them with a birch-rod. After receiving the charge with every mark of derision, the pupils formed in line and buzzingly passed a ragged book from hand to hand. The book had an alphabet in it, some figures and tables, and a little spelling,—that is to say, it had had once. As soon as this volume began to circulate, Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt fell into a state of coma, arising either from sleep or a rheumatic paroxysm. The pupils then entered among themselves upon a competitive examination on the subject of Boots, with the view of ascertaining who could tread the hardest upon whose toes. This mental exercise lasted until Biddy made a rush at them and distributed three defaced Bibles (shaped as if they had been unskilfully cut off the chump end of something), more illegibly printed at the best than any curiosities of literature I have since met with, speckled all over with ironmould, and having various specimens of the insect world smashed between their leaves. This part of the Course was usually lightened by several single combats between Biddy and refractory students. When the fights were over, Biddy gave out the number of a page, and then we all read aloud what we could,—or what we couldn't—in a frightful chorus; Biddy leading with a high, shrill, monotonous voice, and none of us having the least notion of, or reverence for, what we were reading about. When this horrible din had lasted a certain time, it mechanically awoke Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt, who staggered at a boy fortuitously, and pulled his ears. This was understood to terminate the Course for the evening, and we emerged into the air with shrieks of intellectual victory. It is fair to remark that there was no prohibition against any pupil's entertaining himself with a slate or even with the ink (when there was any), but that it was not easy to pursue that branch of study in the winter season, on account of the little general shop in which the classes were holden—and which was also Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt's sitting-room and bedchamber—being but faintly illuminated through the agency of one low-spirited dip-candle and no snuffers.

It appeared to me that it would take time to become uncommon, under these circumstances: nevertheless, I resolved to try it, and that very evening Biddy entered on our special agreement, by imparting some information from her little catalogue of Prices, under the head of moist sugar, and lending me, to copy at home, a large old English D which she had imitated from the heading of some newspaper, and which I supposed, until she told me what it was, to be a design for a buckle.

Of course there was a public-house in the village, and of course Joe liked sometimes to smoke his pipe there. I had received strict orders from my sister to call for him at the Three Jolly Bargemen, that evening, on my way from school, and bring him home at my peril. To the Three Jolly Bargemen, therefore, I directed my steps.

There was a bar at the Jolly Bargemen, with some alarmingly long chalk scores in it on the wall at the side of the door, which seemed to me to be never paid off. They had been there ever since I could remember, and had grown more than I had. But there was a quantity of chalk about our country, and perhaps the people neglected no opportunity of turning it to account.

It being Saturday night, I found the landlord looking rather grimly at these records; but as my business was with Joe and not with him, I merely wished him good evening, and passed into the common room at the end of the passage, where there was a bright large kitchen fire, and where Joe was smoking his pipe in company with Mr. Wopsle and a stranger. Joe greeted me as usual with "Halloa, Pip, old chap!" and the moment he said that, the stranger turned his head and looked at me.

He was a secret-looking man whom I had never seen before. His head was all on one side, and one of his eyes was half shut up, as if he were taking aim at something with an invisible gun. He had a pipe in his mouth, and he took it out, and, after slowly blowing all his smoke away and looking hard at me all the time, nodded. So, I nodded, and then he nodded again, and made room on the settle beside him that I might sit down there.

But as I was used to sit beside Joe whenever I entered that place of resort, I said "No, thank you, sir," and fell into the space Joe made for me on the opposite settle. The strange man, after glancing at Joe, and seeing that his attention was otherwise engaged, nodded to me again when I had taken my seat, and then rubbed his leg—in a very odd way, as it struck me.

"You was saying," said the strange man, turning to Joe, "that you was a blacksmith."

"Yes. I said it, you know," said Joe.

"What'll you drink, Mr.—? You didn't mention your name, by the bye."

Joe mentioned it now, and the strange man called him by it. "What'll you drink, Mr. Gargery? At my expense? To top up with?"

"Well," said Joe, "to tell you the truth, I ain't much in the habit of drinking at anybody's expense but my own."

"Habit? No," returned the stranger, "but once and away, and on a Saturday night too. Come! Put a name to it, Mr. Gargery."

"I wouldn't wish to be stiff company," said Joe. "Rum."

"Rum," repeated the stranger. "And will the other gentleman originate a sentiment."

"Rum," said Mr. Wopsle.

"Three Rums!" cried the stranger, calling to the landlord. "Glasses round!"

"This other gentleman," observed Joe, by way of introducing Mr. Wopsle, "is a gentleman that you would like to hear give it out. Our clerk at church."

"Aha!" said the stranger, quickly, and cocking his eye at me. "The lonely church, right out on the marshes, with graves round it!"

"That's it," said Joe.

The stranger, with a comfortable kind of grunt over his pipe, put his legs up on the settle that he had to himself. He wore a flapping broad-brimmed traveller's hat, and under it a handkerchief tied over his head in the manner of a cap: so that he showed no hair. As he looked at the fire, I thought I saw a cunning expression, followed by a half-laugh, come into his face.

"I am not acquainted with this country, gentlemen, but it seems a solitary country towards the river."

"Most marshes is solitary," said Joe.

"No doubt, no doubt. Do you find any gypsies, now, or tramps, or vagrants of any sort, out there?"

"No," said Joe; "none but a runaway convict now and then. And we don't find them, easy. Eh, Mr. Wopsle?"

Mr. Wopsle, with a majestic remembrance of old discomfiture, assented; but not warmly.

"Seems you have been out after such?" asked the stranger.

"Once," returned Joe. "Not that we wanted to take them, you understand; we went out as lookers on; me, and Mr. Wopsle, and Pip. Didn't us, Pip?"

"Yes, Joe."

The stranger looked at me again,—still cocking his eye, as if he were expressly taking aim at me with his invisible gun,—and said, "He's a likely young parcel of bones that. What is it you call him?"

"Pip," said Joe.

"Christened Pip?"

"No, not christened Pip."

"Surname Pip?"

"No," said Joe, "it's a kind of family name what he gave himself when a infant, and is called by."

"Son of yours?"

"Well," said Joe, meditatively, not, of course, that it could be in anywise necessary to consider about it, but because it was the way at the Jolly Bargemen to seem to consider deeply about everything that was discussed over pipes,—"well—no. No, he ain't."

"Nevvy?" said the strange man.

"Well," said Joe, with the same appearance of profound cogitation, "he is not—no, not to deceive you, he is not—my nevvy."

"What the Blue Blazes is he?" asked the stranger. Which appeared to me to be an inquiry of unnecessary strength.

Mr. Wopsle struck in upon that; as one who knew all about relationships, having professional occasion to bear in mind what female relations a man might not marry; and expounded the ties between me and Joe. Having his hand in, Mr. Wopsle finished off with a most terrifically snarling passage from Richard the Third, and seemed to think he had done quite enough to account for it when he added, "—as the poet says."

And here I may remark that when Mr. Wopsle referred to me, he considered it a necessary part of such reference to rumple my hair and poke it into my eyes. I cannot conceive why everybody of his standing who visited at our house should always have put me through the same inflammatory process under similar circumstances. Yet I do not call to mind that I was ever in my earlier youth the subject of remark in our social family circle, but some large-handed person took some such ophthalmic steps to patronize me.

All this while, the strange man looked at nobody but me, and looked at me as if he were determined to have a shot at me at last, and bring me down. But he said nothing after offering his Blue Blazes observation, until the glasses of rum and water were brought; and then he made his shot, and a most extraordinary shot it was.

It was not a verbal remark, but a proceeding in dumb-show, and was pointedly addressed to me. He stirred his rum and water pointedly at me, and he tasted his rum and water pointedly at me. And he stirred it and he tasted it; not with a spoon that was brought to him, but with a file.

He did this so that nobody but I saw the file; and when he had done it he wiped the file and put it in a breast-pocket. I knew it to be Joe's file, and I knew that he knew my convict, the moment I saw the instrument. I sat gazing at him, spell-bound. But he now reclined on his settle, taking very little notice of me, and talking principally about turnips.

There was a delicious sense of cleaning-up and making a quiet pause before going on in life afresh, in our village on Saturday nights, which stimulated Joe to dare to stay out half an hour longer on Saturdays than at other times. The half-hour and the rum and water running out together, Joe got up to go, and took me by the hand.

"Stop half a moment, Mr. Gargery," said the strange man. "I think I've got a bright new shilling somewhere in my pocket, and if I have, the boy shall have it."

He looked it out from a handful of small change, folded it in some crumpled paper, and gave it to me. "Yours!" said he. "Mind! Your own."

I thanked him, staring at him far beyond the bounds of good manners, and holding tight to Joe. He gave Joe good-night, and he gave Mr. Wopsle good-night (who went out with us), and he gave me only a look with his aiming eye,—no, not a look, for he shut it up, but wonders may be done with an eye by hiding it.

On the way home, if I had been in a humor for talking, the talk must have been all on my side, for Mr. Wopsle parted from us at the door of the Jolly Bargemen, and Joe went all the way home with his mouth wide open, to rinse the rum out with as much air as possible. But I was in a manner stupefied by this turning up of my old misdeed and old acquaintance, and could think of nothing else.

My sister was not in a very bad temper when we presented ourselves in the kitchen, and Joe was encouraged by that unusual circumstance to tell her about the bright shilling. "A bad un, I'll be bound," said Mrs. Joe triumphantly, "or he wouldn't have given it to the boy! Let's look at it."

I took it out of the paper, and it proved to be a good one. "But what's this?" said Mrs. Joe, throwing down the shilling and catching up the paper. "Two One-Pound notes?"

Nothing less than two fat sweltering one-pound notes that seemed to have been on terms of the warmest intimacy with all the cattle-markets in the county. Joe caught up his hat again, and ran with them to the Jolly Bargemen to restore them to their owner. While he was gone, I sat down on my usual stool and looked vacantly at my sister, feeling pretty sure that the man would not be there.

Presently, Joe came back, saying that the man was gone, but that he, Joe, had left word at the Three Jolly Bargemen concerning the notes. Then my sister sealed them up in a piece of paper, and put them under some dried rose-leaves in an ornamental teapot on the top of a press in the state parlor. There they remained, a nightmare to me, many and many a night and day.

I had sadly broken sleep when I got to bed, through thinking of the strange man taking aim at me with his invisible gun, and of the guiltily coarse and common thing it was, to be on secret terms of conspiracy with convicts,—a feature in my low career that I had previously forgotten. I was haunted by the file too. A dread possessed me that when I least expected it, the file would reappear. I coaxed myself to sleep by thinking of Miss Havisham's, next Wednesday; and in my sleep I saw the file coming at me out of a door, without seeing who held it, and I screamed myself awake.

Chapter XI

At the appointed time I returned to Miss Havisham's, and my hesitating ring at the gate brought out Estella. She locked it after admitting me, as she had done before, and again preceded me into the dark passage where her candle stood. She took no notice of me until she had the candle in her hand, when she looked over her shoulder, superciliously saying, "You are to come this way to-day," and took me to quite another part of the house.

The passage was a long one, and seemed to pervade the whole square basement of the Manor House. We traversed but one side of the square, however, and at the end of it she stopped, and put her candle down and opened a door. Here, the daylight reappeared, and I found myself in a small paved courtyard, the opposite side of which was formed by a detached dwelling-house, that looked as if it had once belonged to the manager or head clerk of the extinct brewery. There was a clock in the outer wall of this house. Like the clock in Miss Havisham's room, and like Miss Havisham's watch, it had stopped at twenty minutes to nine.

We went in at the door, which stood open, and into a gloomy room with a low ceiling, on the ground-floor at the back. There was some company in the room, and Estella said to me as she joined it, "You are to go and stand there boy, till you are wanted." "There", being the window, I crossed to it, and stood "there," in a very uncomfortable state of mind, looking out.

It opened to the ground, and looked into a most miserable corner of the neglected garden, upon a rank ruin of cabbage-stalks, and one box-tree that had been clipped round long ago, like a pudding, and had a new growth at the top of it, out of shape and of a different color, as if that part of the pudding had stuck to the saucepan and got burnt. This was my homely thought, as I contemplated the box-tree. There had been some light snow, overnight, and it lay nowhere else to my knowledge; but, it had not quite melted from the cold shadow of this bit of garden, and the wind caught it up in little eddies and threw it at the window, as if it pelted me for coming there.

I divined that my coming had stopped conversation in the room, and that its other occupants were looking at me. I could see nothing of the room except the shining of the fire in the window-glass, but I stiffened in all my joints with the consciousness that I was under close inspection.

There were three ladies in the room and one gentleman. Before I had been standing at the window five minutes, they somehow conveyed to me that they were all toadies and humbugs, but that each of them pretended not to know that the others were toadies and humbugs: because the admission that he or she did know it, would have made him or her out to be a toady and humbug.

They all had a listless and dreary air of waiting somebody's pleasure, and the most talkative of the ladies had to speak quite rigidly to repress a yawn. This lady, whose name was Camilla, very much reminded me of my sister, with the difference that she was older, and (as I found when I caught sight of her) of a blunter cast of features. Indeed, when I knew her better I began to think it was a Mercy she had any features at all, so very blank and high was the dead wall of her face.

"Poor dear soul!" said this lady, with an abruptness of manner quite my sister's. "Nobody's enemy but his own!"

"It would be much more commendable to be somebody else's enemy," said the gentleman; "far more natural."

"Cousin Raymond," observed another lady, "we are to love our neighbor."

"Sarah Pocket," returned Cousin Raymond, "if a man is not his own neighbor, who is?"

Miss Pocket laughed, and Camilla laughed and said (checking a yawn), "The idea!" But I thought they seemed to think it rather a good idea too. The other lady, who had not spoken yet, said gravely and emphatically, "Very true!"

"Poor soul!" Camilla presently went on (I knew they had all been looking at me in the mean time), "he is so very strange! Would anyone believe that when Tom's wife died, he actually could not be induced to see the importance of the children's having the deepest of trimmings to their mourning? 'Good Lord!' says he, 'Camilla, what can it signify so long as the poor bereaved little things are in black?' So like Matthew! The idea!"

"Good points in him, good points in him," said Cousin Raymond; "Heaven forbid I should deny good points in him; but he never had, and he never will have, any sense of the proprieties."

"You know I was obliged," said Camilla,—"I was obliged to be firm. I said, 'It WILL NOT DO, for the credit of the family.' I told him that, without deep trimmings, the family was disgraced. I cried about it from breakfast till dinner. I injured my digestion. And at last he flung out in his violent way, and said, with a D, 'Then do as you like.' Thank Goodness it will always be a consolation to me to know that I instantly went out in a pouring rain and bought the things."

"He paid for them, did he not?" asked Estella.

"It's not the question, my dear child, who paid for them," returned Camilla. "I bought them. And I shall often think of that with peace, when I wake up in the night."

The ringing of a distant bell, combined with the echoing of some cry or call along the passage by which I had come, interrupted the conversation and caused Estella to say to me, "Now, boy!" On my turning round, they all looked at me with the utmost contempt, and, as I went out, I heard Sarah Pocket say, "Well I am sure! What next!" and Camilla add, with indignation, "Was there ever such a fancy! The i-de-a!"

As we were going with our candle along the dark passage, Estella stopped all of a sudden, and, facing round, said in her taunting manner, with her face quite close to mine,—

"Well?"

"Well, miss?" I answered, almost falling over her and checking myself.

She stood looking at me, and, of course, I stood looking at her.

"Am I pretty?"

"Yes; I think you are very pretty."

"Am I insulting?"

"Not so much so as you were last time," said I.

"Not so much so?"

"No."

She fired when she asked the last question, and she slapped my face with such force as she had, when I answered it.

"Now?" said she. "You little coarse monster, what do you think of me now?"

"I shall not tell you."

"Because you are going to tell up stairs. Is that it?"

"No," said I, "that's not it."

"Why don't you cry again, you little wretch?"

"Because I'll never cry for you again," said I. Which was, I suppose, as false a declaration as ever was made; for I was inwardly crying for her then, and I know what I know of the pain she cost me afterwards.

We went on our way up stairs after this episode; and, as we were going up, we met a gentleman groping his way down.

"Whom have we here?" asked the gentleman, stopping and looking at me.

"A boy," said Estella.

He was a burly man of an exceedingly dark complexion, with an exceedingly large head, and a corresponding large hand. He took my chin in his large hand and turned up my face to have a look at me by the light of the candle. He was prematurely bald on the top of his head, and had bushy black eyebrows that wouldn't lie down but stood up bristling. His eyes were set very deep in his head, and were disagreeably sharp and suspicious. He had a large watch-chain, and strong black dots where his beard and whiskers would have been if he had let them. He was nothing to me, and I could have had no foresight then, that he ever would be anything to me, but it happened that I had this opportunity of observing him well.

"Boy of the neighborhood? Hey?" said he.

"Yes, sir," said I.

"How do you come here?"

"Miss Havisham sent for me, sir," I explained.

"Well! Behave yourself. I have a pretty large experience of boys, and you're a bad set of fellows. Now mind!" said he, biting the side of his great forefinger as he frowned at me, "you behave yourself!"

With those words, he released me—which I was glad of, for his hand smelt of scented soap—and went his way down stairs. I wondered whether he could be a doctor; but no, I thought; he couldn't be a doctor, or he would have a quieter and more persuasive manner. There was not much time to consider the subject, for we were soon in Miss Havisham's room, where she and everything else were just as I had left them. Estella left me standing near the door, and I stood there until Miss Havisham cast her eyes upon me from the dressing-table.

"So!" she said, without being startled or surprised: "the days have worn away, have they?"

"Yes, ma'am. To-day is—"

"There, there, there!" with the impatient movement of her fingers. "I don't want to know. Are you ready to play?"

I was obliged to answer in some confusion, "I don't think I am, ma'am."

"Not at cards again?" she demanded, with a searching look.

"Yes, ma'am; I could do that, if I was wanted."

"Since this house strikes you old and grave, boy," said Miss Havisham, impatiently, "and you are unwilling to play, are you willing to work?"

I could answer this inquiry with a better heart than I had been able to find for the other question, and I said I was quite willing.

"Then go into that opposite room," said she, pointing at the door behind me with her withered hand, "and wait there till I come."

I crossed the staircase landing, and entered the room she indicated. From that room, too, the daylight was completely excluded, and it had an airless smell that was oppressive. A fire had been lately kindled in the damp old-fashioned grate, and it was more disposed to go out than to burn up, and the reluctant smoke which hung in the room seemed colder than the clearer air,—like our own marsh mist. Certain wintry branches of candles on the high chimney-piece faintly lighted the chamber; or it would be more expressive to say, faintly troubled its darkness. It was spacious, and I dare say had once been handsome, but every discernible thing in it was covered with dust and mould, and dropping to pieces. The most prominent object was a long table with a tablecloth spread on it, as if a feast had been in preparation when the house and the clocks all stopped together. An epergne or centre-piece of some kind was in the middle of this cloth; it was so heavily overhung with cobwebs that its form was quite undistinguishable; and, as I looked along the yellow expanse out of which I remember its seeming to grow, like a black fungus, I saw speckle-legged spiders with blotchy bodies running home to it, and running out from it, as if some circumstances of the greatest public importance had just transpired in the spider community.

I heard the mice too, rattling behind the panels, as if the same occurrence were important to their interests. But the black beetles took no notice of the agitation, and groped about the hearth in a ponderous elderly way, as if they were short-sighted and hard of hearing, and not on terms with one another.

These crawling things had fascinated my attention, and I was watching them from a distance, when Miss Havisham laid a hand upon my shoulder.

In her other hand she had a crutch-headed stick on which she leaned, and she looked like the Witch of the place.

"This," said she, pointing to the long table with her stick, "is where I will be laid when I am dead. They shall come and look at me here."

With some vague misgiving that she might get upon the table then and there and die at once, the complete realization of the ghastly waxwork at the Fair, I shrank under her touch.

"What do you think that is?" she asked me, again pointing with her stick; "that, where those cobwebs are?"

"I can't guess what it is, ma'am."

"It's a great cake. A bride-cake. Mine!"

She looked all round the room in a glaring manner, and then said, leaning on me while her hand twitched my shoulder, "Come, come, come! Walk me, walk me!"

I made out from this, that the work I had to do, was to walk Miss Havisham round and round the room. Accordingly, I started at once, and she leaned upon my shoulder, and we went away at a pace that might have been an imitation (founded on my first impulse under that roof) of Mr. Pumblechook's chaise-cart.

She was not physically strong, and after a little time said, "Slower!" Still, we went at an impatient fitful speed, and as we went, she twitched the hand upon my shoulder, and worked her mouth, and led me to believe that we were going fast because her thoughts went fast. After a while she said, "Call Estella!" so I went out on the landing and roared that name as I had done on the previous occasion. When her light appeared, I returned to Miss Havisham, and we started away again round and round the room.

If only Estella had come to be a spectator of our proceedings, I should have felt sufficiently discontented; but as she brought with her the three ladies and the gentleman whom I had seen below, I didn't know what to do. In my politeness, I would have stopped; but Miss Havisham twitched my shoulder, and we posted on,—with a shame-faced consciousness on my part that they would think it was all my doing.

"Dear Miss Havisham," said Miss Sarah Pocket. "How well you look!"

"I do not," returned Miss Havisham. "I am yellow skin and bone."

Camilla brightened when Miss Pocket met with this rebuff; and she murmured, as she plaintively contemplated Miss Havisham, "Poor dear soul! Certainly not to be expected to look well, poor thing. The idea!"

"And how are you?" said Miss Havisham to Camilla. As we were close to Camilla then, I would have stopped as a matter of course, only Miss Havisham wouldn't stop. We swept on, and I felt that I was highly obnoxious to Camilla.

"Thank you, Miss Havisham," she returned, "I am as well as can be expected."

"Why, what's the matter with you?" asked Miss Havisham, with exceeding sharpness.

"Nothing worth mentioning," replied Camilla. "I don't wish to make a display of my feelings, but I have habitually thought of you more in the night than I am quite equal to."

"Then don't think of me," retorted Miss Havisham.

"Very easily said!" remarked Camilla, amiably repressing a sob, while a hitch came into her upper lip, and her tears overflowed. "Raymond is a witness what ginger and sal volatile I am obliged to take in the night. Raymond is a witness what nervous jerkings I have in my legs. Chokings and nervous jerkings, however, are nothing new to me when I think with anxiety of those I love. If I could be less affectionate and sensitive, I should have a better digestion and an iron set of nerves. I am sure I wish it could be so. But as to not thinking of you in the night—The idea!" Here, a burst of tears.

The Raymond referred to, I understood to be the gentleman present, and him I understood to be Mr. Camilla. He came to the rescue at this point, and said in a consolatory and complimentary voice, "Camilla, my dear, it is well known that your family feelings are gradually undermining you to the extent of making one of your legs shorter than the other."

"I am not aware," observed the grave lady whose voice I had heard but once, "that to think of any person is to make a great claim upon that person, my dear."

Miss Sarah Pocket, whom I now saw to be a little dry, brown, corrugated old woman, with a small face that might have been made of walnut-shells, and a large mouth like a cat's without the whiskers, supported this position by saying, "No, indeed, my dear. Hem!"

"Thinking is easy enough," said the grave lady.

"What is easier, you know?" assented Miss Sarah Pocket.

"Oh, yes, yes!" cried Camilla, whose fermenting feelings appeared to rise from her legs to her bosom. "It's all very true! It's a weakness to be so affectionate, but I can't help it. No doubt my health would be much better if it was otherwise, still I wouldn't change my disposition if I could. It's the cause of much suffering, but it's a consolation to know I posses it, when I wake up in the night." Here another burst of feeling.

Miss Havisham and I had never stopped all this time, but kept going round and round the room; now brushing against the skirts of the visitors, now giving them the whole length of the dismal chamber.

"There's Matthew!" said Camilla. "Never mixing with any natural ties, never coming here to see how Miss Havisham is! I have taken to the sofa with my staylace cut, and have lain there hours insensible, with my head over the side, and my hair all down, and my feet I don't know where—"

("Much higher than your head, my love," said Mr. Camilla.)

"I have gone off into that state, hours and hours, on account of Matthew's strange and inexplicable conduct, and nobody has thanked me."

"Really I must say I should think not!" interposed the grave lady.

"You see, my dear," added Miss Sarah Pocket (a blandly vicious personage), "the question to put to yourself is, who did you expect to thank you, my love?"

"Without expecting any thanks, or anything of the sort," resumed Camilla, "I have remained in that state, hours and hours, and Raymond is a witness of the extent to which I have choked, and what the total inefficacy of ginger has been, and I have been heard at the piano-forte tuner's across the street, where the poor mistaken children have even supposed it to be pigeons cooing at a distance,—and now to be told—" Here Camilla put her hand to her throat, and began to be quite chemical as to the formation of new combinations there.

When this same Matthew was mentioned, Miss Havisham stopped me and herself, and stood looking at the speaker. This change had a great influence in bringing Camilla's chemistry to a sudden end.

"Matthew will come and see me at last," said Miss Havisham, sternly, "when I am laid on that table. That will be his place,—there," striking the table with her stick, "at my head! And yours will be there! And your husband's there! And Sarah Pocket's there! And Georgiana's there! Now you all know where to take your stations when you come to feast upon me. And now go!"

At the mention of each name, she had struck the table with her stick in a new place. She now said, "Walk me, walk me!" and we went on again.

"I suppose there's nothing to be done," exclaimed Camilla, "but comply and depart. It's something to have seen the object of one's love and duty for even so short a time. I shall think of it with a melancholy satisfaction when I wake up in the night. I wish Matthew could have that comfort, but he sets it at defiance. I am determined not to make a display of my feelings, but it's very hard to be told one wants to feast on one's relations,—as if one was a Giant,—and to be told to go. The bare idea!"

Mr. Camilla interposing, as Mrs. Camilla laid her hand upon her heaving bosom, that lady assumed an unnatural fortitude of manner which I supposed to be expressive of an intention to drop and choke when out of view, and kissing her hand to Miss Havisham, was escorted forth. Sarah Pocket and Georgiana contended who should remain last; but Sarah was too knowing to be outdone, and ambled round Georgiana with that artful slipperiness that the latter was obliged to take precedence. Sarah Pocket then made her separate effect of departing with, "Bless you, Miss Havisham dear!" and with a smile of forgiving pity on her walnut-shell countenance for the weaknesses of the rest.

While Estella was away lighting them down, Miss Havisham still walked with her hand on my shoulder, but more and more slowly. At last she stopped before the fire, and said, after muttering and looking at it some seconds,—

"This is my birthday, Pip."

I was going to wish her many happy returns, when she lifted her stick.

"I don't suffer it to be spoken of. I don't suffer those who were here just now, or any one to speak of it. They come here on the day, but they dare not refer to it."

Of course I made no further effort to refer to it.

"On this day of the year, long before you were born, this heap of decay," stabbing with her crutched stick at the pile of cobwebs on the table, but not touching it, "was brought here. It and I have worn away together. The mice have gnawed at it, and sharper teeth than teeth of mice have gnawed at me."

She held the head of her stick against her heart as she stood looking at the table; she in her once white dress, all yellow and withered; the once white cloth all yellow and withered; everything around in a state to crumble under a touch.

"When the ruin is complete," said she, with a ghastly look, "and when they lay me dead, in my bride's dress on the bride's table,—which shall be done, and which will be the finished curse upon him,—so much the better if it is done on this day!"

She stood looking at the table as if she stood looking at her own figure lying there. I remained quiet. Estella returned, and she too remained quiet. It seemed to me that we continued thus for a long time. In the heavy air of the room, and the heavy darkness that brooded in its remoter corners, I even had an alarming fancy that Estella and I might presently begin to decay.

At length, not coming out of her distraught state by degrees, but in an instant, Miss Havisham said, "Let me see you two play cards; why have you not begun?" With that, we returned to her room, and sat down as before; I was beggared, as before; and again, as before, Miss Havisham watched us all the time, directed my attention to Estella's beauty, and made me notice it the more by trying her jewels on Estella's breast and hair.

Estella, for her part, likewise treated me as before, except that she did not condescend to speak. When we had played some half-dozen games, a day was appointed for my return, and I was taken down into the yard to be fed in the former dog-like manner. There, too, I was again left to wander about as I liked.

It is not much to the purpose whether a gate in that garden wall which I had scrambled up to peep over on the last occasion was, on that last occasion, open or shut. Enough that I saw no gate then, and that I saw one now. As it stood open, and as I knew that Estella had let the visitors out,—for she had returned with the keys in her hand,—I strolled into the garden, and strolled all over it. It was quite a wilderness, and there were old melon-frames and cucumber-frames in it, which seemed in their decline to have produced a spontaneous growth of weak attempts at pieces of old hats and boots, with now and then a weedy offshoot into the likeness of a battered saucepan.

When I had exhausted the garden and a greenhouse with nothing in it but a fallen-down grape-vine and some bottles, I found myself in the dismal corner upon which I had looked out of the window. Never questioning for a moment that the house was now empty, I looked in at another window, and found myself, to my great surprise, exchanging a broad stare with a pale young gentleman with red eyelids and light hair.

This pale young gentleman quickly disappeared, and reappeared beside me. He had been at his books when I had found myself staring at him, and I now saw that he was inky.

"Halloa!" said he, "young fellow!"

Halloa being a general observation which I had usually observed to be best answered by itself, I said, "Halloa!" politely omitting young fellow.

"Who let you in?" said he.

"Miss Estella."

"Who gave you leave to prowl about?"

"Miss Estella."

"Come and fight," said the pale young gentleman.

What could I do but follow him? I have often asked myself the question since; but what else could I do? His manner was so final, and I was so astonished, that I followed where he led, as if I had been under a spell.

"Stop a minute, though," he said, wheeling round before we had gone many paces. "I ought to give you a reason for fighting, too. There it is!" In a most irritating manner he instantly slapped his hands against one another, daintily flung one of his legs up behind him, pulled my hair, slapped his hands again, dipped his head, and butted it into my stomach.

The bull-like proceeding last mentioned, besides that it was unquestionably to be regarded in the light of a liberty, was particularly disagreeable just after bread and meat. I therefore hit out at him and was going to hit out again, when he said, "Aha! Would you?" and began dancing backwards and forwards in a manner quite unparalleled within my limited experience.

"Laws of the game!" said he. Here, he skipped from his left leg on to his right. "Regular rules!" Here, he skipped from his right leg on to his left. "Come to the ground, and go through the preliminaries!" Here, he dodged backwards and forwards, and did all sorts of things while I looked helplessly at him.

I was secretly afraid of him when I saw him so dexterous; but I felt morally and physically convinced that his light head of hair could have had no business in the pit of my stomach, and that I had a right to consider it irrelevant when so obtruded on my attention. Therefore, I followed him without a word, to a retired nook of the garden, formed by the junction of two walls and screened by some rubbish. On his asking me if I was satisfied with the ground, and on my replying Yes, he begged my leave to absent himself for a moment, and quickly returned with a bottle of water and a sponge dipped in vinegar. "Available for both," he said, placing these against the wall. And then fell to pulling off, not only his jacket and waistcoat, but his shirt too, in a manner at once light-hearted, business-like, and bloodthirsty.

Although he did not look very healthy,—having pimples on his face, and a breaking out at his mouth,—these dreadful preparations quite appalled me. I judged him to be about my own age, but he was much taller, and he had a way of spinning himself about that was full of appearance. For the rest, he was a young gentleman in a gray suit (when not denuded for battle), with his elbows, knees, wrists, and heels considerably in advance of the rest of him as to development.

My heart failed me when I saw him squaring at me with every demonstration of mechanical nicety, and eyeing my anatomy as if he were minutely choosing his bone. I never have been so surprised in my life, as I was when I let out the first blow, and saw him lying on his back, looking up at me with a bloody nose and his face exceedingly fore-shortened.

But, he was on his feet directly, and after sponging himself with a great show of dexterity began squaring again. The second greatest surprise I have ever had in my life was seeing him on his back again, looking up at me out of a black eye.

His spirit inspired me with great respect. He seemed to have no strength, and he never once hit me hard, and he was always knocked down; but he would be up again in a moment, sponging himself or drinking out of the water-bottle, with the greatest satisfaction in seconding himself according to form, and then came at me with an air and a show that made me believe he really was going to do for me at last. He got heavily bruised, for I am sorry to record that the more I hit him, the harder I hit him; but he came up again and again and again, until at last he got a bad fall with the back of his head against the wall. Even after that crisis in our affairs, he got up and turned round and round confusedly a few times, not knowing where I was; but finally went on his knees to his sponge and threw it up: at the same time panting out, "That means you have won."

He seemed so brave and innocent, that although I had not proposed the contest, I felt but a gloomy satisfaction in my victory. Indeed, I go so far as to hope that I regarded myself while dressing as a species of savage young wolf or other wild beast. However, I got dressed, darkly wiping my sanguinary face at intervals, and I said, "Can I help you?" and he said "No thankee," and I said "Good afternoon," and he said "Same to you."

When I got into the courtyard, I found Estella waiting with the keys. But she neither asked me where I had been, nor why I had kept her waiting; and there was a bright flush upon her face, as though something had happened to delight her. Instead of going straight to the gate, too, she stepped back into the passage, and beckoned me.

"Come here! You may kiss me, if you like."

I kissed her cheek as she turned it to me. I think I would have gone through a great deal to kiss her cheek. But I felt that the kiss was given to the coarse common boy as a piece of money might have been, and that it was worth nothing.

What with the birthday visitors, and what with the cards, and what with the fight, my stay had lasted so long, that when I neared home the light on the spit of sand off the point on the marshes was gleaming against a black night-sky, and Joe's furnace was flinging a path of fire across the road.

Chapter XII

My mind grew very uneasy on the subject of the pale young gentleman. The more I thought of the fight, and recalled the pale young gentleman on his back in various stages of puffy and incrimsoned countenance, the more certain it appeared that something would be done to me. I felt that the pale young gentleman's blood was on my head, and that the Law would avenge it. Without having any definite idea of the penalties I had incurred, it was clear to me that village boys could not go stalking about the country, ravaging the houses of gentlefolks and pitching into the studious youth of England, without laying themselves open to severe punishment. For some days, I even kept close at home, and looked out at the kitchen door with the greatest caution and trepidation before going on an errand, lest the officers of the County Jail should pounce upon me. The pale young gentleman's nose had stained my trousers, and I tried to wash out that evidence of my guilt in the dead of night. I had cut my knuckles against the pale young gentleman's teeth, and I twisted my imagination into a thousand tangles, as I devised incredible ways of accounting for that damnatory circumstance when I should be haled before the Judges.

When the day came round for my return to the scene of the deed of violence, my terrors reached their height. Whether myrmidons of Justice, specially sent down from London, would be lying in ambush behind the gate;—whether Miss Havisham, preferring to take personal vengeance for an outrage done to her house, might rise in those grave-clothes of hers, draw a pistol, and shoot me dead:—whether suborned boys—a numerous band of mercenaries—might be engaged to fall upon me in the brewery, and cuff me until I was no more;—it was high testimony to my confidence in the spirit of the pale young gentleman, that I never imagined him accessory to these retaliations; they always came into my mind as the acts of injudicious relatives of his, goaded on by the state of his visage and an indignant sympathy with the family features.

However, go to Miss Havisham's I must, and go I did. And behold! nothing came of the late struggle. It was not alluded to in any way, and no pale young gentleman was to be discovered on the premises. I found the same gate open, and I explored the garden, and even looked in at the windows of the detached house; but my view was suddenly stopped by the closed shutters within, and all was lifeless. Only in the corner where the combat had taken place could I detect any evidence of the young gentleman's existence. There were traces of his gore in that spot, and I covered them with garden-mould from the eye of man.

On the broad landing between Miss Havisham's own room and that other room in which the long table was laid out, I saw a garden-chair,—a light chair on wheels, that you pushed from behind. It had been placed there since my last visit, and I entered, that same day, on a regular occupation of pushing Miss Havisham in this chair (when she was tired of walking with her hand upon my shoulder) round her own room, and across the landing, and round the other room. Over and over and over again, we would make these journeys, and sometimes they would last as long as three hours at a stretch. I insensibly fall into a general mention of these journeys as numerous, because it was at once settled that I should return every alternate day at noon for these purposes, and because I am now going to sum up a period of at least eight or ten months.

As we began to be more used to one another, Miss Havisham talked more to me, and asked me such questions as what had I learnt and what was I going to be? I told her I was going to be apprenticed to Joe, I believed; and I enlarged upon my knowing nothing and wanting to know everything, in the hope that she might offer some help towards that desirable end. But she did not; on the contrary, she seemed to prefer my being ignorant. Neither did she ever give me any money,—or anything but my daily dinner,—nor ever stipulate that I should be paid for my services.

Estella was always about, and always let me in and out, but never told me I might kiss her again. Sometimes, she would coldly tolerate me; sometimes, she would condescend to me; sometimes, she would be quite familiar with me; sometimes, she would tell me energetically that she hated me. Miss Havisham would often ask me in a whisper, or when we were alone, "Does she grow prettier and prettier, Pip?" And when I said yes (for indeed she did), would seem to enjoy it greedily. Also, when we played at cards Miss Havisham would look on, with a miserly relish of Estella's moods, whatever they were. And sometimes, when her moods were so many and so contradictory of one another that I was puzzled what to say or do, Miss Havisham would embrace her with lavish fondness, murmuring something in her ear that sounded like "Break their hearts my pride and hope, break their hearts and have no mercy!"

There was a song Joe used to hum fragments of at the forge, of which the burden was Old Clem. This was not a very ceremonious way of rendering homage to a patron saint, but I believe Old Clem stood in that relation towards smiths. It was a song that imitated the measure of beating upon iron, and was a mere lyrical excuse for the introduction of Old Clem's respected name. Thus, you were to hammer boys round—Old Clem! With a thump and a sound—Old Clem! Beat it out, beat it out—Old Clem! With a clink for the stout—Old Clem! Blow the fire, blow the fire—Old Clem! Roaring dryer, soaring higher—Old Clem! One day soon after the appearance of the chair, Miss Havisham suddenly saying to me, with the impatient movement of her fingers, "There, there, there! Sing!" I was surprised into crooning this ditty as I pushed her over the floor. It happened so to catch her fancy that she took it up in a low brooding voice as if she were singing in her sleep. After that, it became customary with us to have it as we moved about, and Estella would often join in; though the whole strain was so subdued, even when there were three of us, that it made less noise in the grim old house than the lightest breath of wind.

What could I become with these surroundings? How could my character fail to be influenced by them? Is it to be wondered at if my thoughts were dazed, as my eyes were, when I came out into the natural light from the misty yellow rooms?

Perhaps I might have told Joe about the pale young gentleman, if I had not previously been betrayed into those enormous inventions to which I had confessed. Under the circumstances, I felt that Joe could hardly fail to discern in the pale young gentleman, an appropriate passenger to be put into the black velvet coach; therefore, I said nothing of him. Besides, that shrinking from having Miss Havisham and Estella discussed, which had come upon me in the beginning, grew much more potent as time went on. I reposed complete confidence in no one but Biddy; but I told poor Biddy everything. Why it came natural to me to do so, and why Biddy had a deep concern in everything I told her, I did not know then, though I think I know now.

Meanwhile, councils went on in the kitchen at home, fraught with almost insupportable aggravation to my exasperated spirit. That ass, Pumblechook, used often to come over of a night for the purpose of discussing my prospects with my sister; and I really do believe (to this hour with less penitence than I ought to feel), that if these hands could have taken a linchpin out of his chaise-cart, they would have done it. The miserable man was a man of that confined stolidity of mind, that he could not discuss my prospects without having me before him,—as it were, to operate upon,—and he would drag me up from my stool (usually by the collar) where I was quiet in a corner, and, putting me before the fire as if I were going to be cooked, would begin by saying, "Now, Mum, here is this boy! Here is this boy which you brought up by hand. Hold up your head, boy, and be forever grateful unto them which so did do. Now, Mum, with respections to this boy!" And then he would rumple my hair the wrong way,—which from my earliest remembrance, as already hinted, I have in my soul denied the right of any fellow-creature to do,—and would hold me before him by the sleeve,—a spectacle of imbecility only to be equalled by himself.

Then, he and my sister would pair off in such nonsensical speculations about Miss Havisham, and about what she would do with me and for me, that I used to want—quite painfully—to burst into spiteful tears, fly at Pumblechook, and pummel him all over. In these dialogues, my sister spoke to me as if she were morally wrenching one of my teeth out at every reference; while Pumblechook himself, self-constituted my patron, would sit supervising me with a depreciatory eye, like the architect of my fortunes who thought himself engaged on a very unremunerative job.

In these discussions, Joe bore no part. But he was often talked at, while they were in progress, by reason of Mrs. Joe's perceiving that he was not favorable to my being taken from the forge. I was fully old enough now to be apprenticed to Joe; and when Joe sat with the poker on his knees thoughtfully raking out the ashes between the lower bars, my sister would so distinctly construe that innocent action into opposition on his part, that she would dive at him, take the poker out of his hands, shake him, and put it away. There was a most irritating end to every one of these debates. All in a moment, with nothing to lead up to it, my sister would stop herself in a yawn, and catching sight of me as it were incidentally, would swoop upon me with, "Come! there's enough of you! You get along to bed; you've given trouble enough for one night, I hope!" As if I had besought them as a favor to bother my life out.

We went on in this way for a long time, and it seemed likely that we should continue to go on in this way for a long time, when one day Miss Havisham stopped short as she and I were walking, she leaning on my shoulder; and said with some displeasure,—

"You are growing tall, Pip!"

I thought it best to hint, through the medium of a meditative look, that this might be occasioned by circumstances over which I had no control.

She said no more at the time; but she presently stopped and looked at me again; and presently again; and after that, looked frowning and moody. On the next day of my attendance, when our usual exercise was over, and I had landed her at her dressing-table, she stayed me with a movement of her impatient fingers:—

"Tell me the name again of that blacksmith of yours."

"Joe Gargery, ma'am."

"Meaning the master you were to be apprenticed to?"

"Yes, Miss Havisham."

"You had better be apprenticed at once. Would Gargery come here with you, and bring your indentures, do you think?"

I signified that I had no doubt he would take it as an honor to be asked.

"Then let him come."

"At any particular time, Miss Havisham?"

"There, there! I know nothing about times. Let him come soon, and come along with you."

When I got home at night, and delivered this message for Joe, my sister "went on the Rampage," in a more alarming degree than at any previous period. She asked me and Joe whether we supposed she was door-mats under our feet, and how we dared to use her so, and what company we graciously thought she was fit for? When she had exhausted a torrent of such inquiries, she threw a candlestick at Joe, burst into a loud sobbing, got out the dustpan,—which was always a very bad sign,—put on her coarse apron, and began cleaning up to a terrible extent. Not satisfied with a dry cleaning, she took to a pail and scrubbing-brush, and cleaned us out of house and home, so that we stood shivering in the back-yard. It was ten o'clock at night before we ventured to creep in again, and then she asked Joe why he hadn't married a Negress Slave at once? Joe offered no answer, poor fellow, but stood feeling his whisker and looking dejectedly at me, as if he thought it really might have been a better speculation.

Chapter XIII

It was a trial to my feelings, on the next day but one, to see Joe arraying himself in his Sunday clothes to accompany me to Miss Havisham's. However, as he thought his court-suit necessary to the occasion, it was not for me tell him that he looked far better in his working-dress; the rather, because I knew he made himself so dreadfully uncomfortable, entirely on my account, and that it was for me he pulled up his shirt-collar so very high behind, that it made the hair on the crown of his head stand up like a tuft of feathers.

At breakfast-time my sister declared her intention of going to town with us, and being left at Uncle Pumblechook's and called for "when we had done with our fine ladies"—a way of putting the case, from which Joe appeared inclined to augur the worst. The forge was shut up for the day, and Joe inscribed in chalk upon the door (as it was his custom to do on the very rare occasions when he was not at work) the monosyllable HOUT, accompanied by a sketch of an arrow supposed to be flying in the direction he had taken.

We walked to town, my sister leading the way in a very large beaver bonnet, and carrying a basket like the Great Seal of England in plaited Straw, a pair of pattens, a spare shawl, and an umbrella, though it was a fine bright day. I am not quite clear whether these articles were carried penitentially or ostentatiously; but I rather think they were displayed as articles of property,—much as Cleopatra or any other sovereign lady on the Rampage might exhibit her wealth in a pageant or procession.

When we came to Pumblechook's, my sister bounced in and left us. As it was almost noon, Joe and I held straight on to Miss Havisham's house. Estella opened the gate as usual, and, the moment she appeared, Joe took his hat off and stood weighing it by the brim in both his hands; as if he had some urgent reason in his mind for being particular to half a quarter of an ounce.

Estella took no notice of either of us, but led us the way that I knew so well. I followed next to her, and Joe came last. When I looked back at Joe in the long passage, he was still weighing his hat with the greatest care, and was coming after us in long strides on the tips of his toes.

Estella told me we were both to go in, so I took Joe by the coat-cuff and conducted him into Miss Havisham's presence. She was seated at her dressing-table, and looked round at us immediately.

"Oh!" said she to Joe. "You are the husband of the sister of this boy?"

I could hardly have imagined dear old Joe looking so unlike himself or so like some extraordinary bird; standing as he did speechless, with his tuft of feathers ruffled, and his mouth open as if he wanted a worm.

"You are the husband," repeated Miss Havisham, "of the sister of this boy?"

It was very aggravating; but, throughout the interview, Joe persisted in addressing Me instead of Miss Havisham.

"Which I meantersay, Pip," Joe now observed in a manner that was at once expressive of forcible argumentation, strict confidence, and great politeness, "as I hup and married your sister, and I were at the time what you might call (if you was anyways inclined) a single man."

"Well!" said Miss Havisham. "And you have reared the boy, with the intention of taking him for your apprentice; is that so, Mr. Gargery?"

"You know, Pip," replied Joe, "as you and me were ever friends, and it were looked for'ard to betwixt us, as being calc'lated to lead to larks. Not but what, Pip, if you had ever made objections to the business,—such as its being open to black and sut, or such-like,—not but what they would have been attended to, don't you see?"

"Has the boy," said Miss Havisham, "ever made any objection? Does he like the trade?"

"Which it is well beknown to yourself, Pip," returned Joe, strengthening his former mixture of argumentation, confidence, and politeness, "that it were the wish of your own hart." (I saw the idea suddenly break upon him that he would adapt his epitaph to the occasion, before he went on to say) "And there weren't no objection on your part, and Pip it were the great wish of your hart!"

It was quite in vain for me to endeavor to make him sensible that he ought to speak to Miss Havisham. The more I made faces and gestures to him to do it, the more confidential, argumentative, and polite, he persisted in being to Me.

"Have you brought his indentures with you?" asked Miss Havisham.

"Well, Pip, you know," replied Joe, as if that were a little unreasonable, "you yourself see me put 'em in my 'at, and therefore you know as they are here." With which he took them out, and gave them, not to Miss Havisham, but to me. I am afraid I was ashamed of the dear good fellow,—I know I was ashamed of him,—when I saw that Estella stood at the back of Miss Havisham's chair, and that her eyes laughed mischievously. I took the indentures out of his hand and gave them to Miss Havisham.

"You expected," said Miss Havisham, as she looked them over, "no premium with the boy?"

"Joe!" I remonstrated, for he made no reply at all. "Why don't you answer—"

"Pip," returned Joe, cutting me short as if he were hurt, "which I meantersay that were not a question requiring a answer betwixt yourself and me, and which you know the answer to be full well No. You know it to be No, Pip, and wherefore should I say it?"

Miss Havisham glanced at him as if she understood what he really was better than I had thought possible, seeing what he was there; and took up a little bag from the table beside her.

"Pip has earned a premium here," she said, "and here it is. There are five-and-twenty guineas in this bag. Give it to your master, Pip."

As if he were absolutely out of his mind with the wonder awakened in him by her strange figure and the strange room, Joe, even at this pass, persisted in addressing me.

"This is wery liberal on your part, Pip," said Joe, "and it is as such received and grateful welcome, though never looked for, far nor near, nor nowheres. And now, old chap," said Joe, conveying to me a sensation, first of burning and then of freezing, for I felt as if that familiar expression were applied to Miss Havisham,—"and now, old chap, may we do our duty! May you and me do our duty, both on us, by one and another, and by them which your liberal present—have-conweyed—to be—for the satisfaction of mind-of—them as never—" here Joe showed that he felt he had fallen into frightful difficulties, until he triumphantly rescued himself with the words, "and from myself far be it!" These words had such a round and convincing sound for him that he said them twice.

"Good by, Pip!" said Miss Havisham. "Let them out, Estella."

"Am I to come again, Miss Havisham?" I asked.

"No. Gargery is your master now. Gargery! One word!"

Thus calling him back as I went out of the door, I heard her say to Joe in a distinct emphatic voice, "The boy has been a good boy here, and that is his reward. Of course, as an honest man, you will expect no other and no more."

How Joe got out of the room, I have never been able to determine; but I know that when he did get out he was steadily proceeding up stairs instead of coming down, and was deaf to all remonstrances until I went after him and laid hold of him. In another minute we were outside the gate, and it was locked, and Estella was gone. When we stood in the daylight alone again, Joe backed up against a wall, and said to me, "Astonishing!" And there he remained so long saying, "Astonishing" at intervals, so often, that I began to think his senses were never coming back. At length he prolonged his remark into "Pip, I do assure you this is as-TON-ishing!" and so, by degrees, became conversational and able to walk away.

I have reason to think that Joe's intellects were brightened by the encounter they had passed through, and that on our way to Pumblechook's he invented a subtle and deep design. My reason is to be found in what took place in Mr. Pumblechook's parlor: where, on our presenting ourselves, my sister sat in conference with that detested seedsman.

"Well?" cried my sister, addressing us both at once. "And what's happened to you? I wonder you condescend to come back to such poor society as this, I am sure I do!"

"Miss Havisham," said Joe, with a fixed look at me, like an effort of remembrance, "made it wery partick'ler that we should give her—were it compliments or respects, Pip?"

"Compliments," I said.

"Which that were my own belief," answered Joe; "her compliments to Mrs. J. Gargery—"

"Much good they'll do me!" observed my sister; but rather gratified too.

"And wishing," pursued Joe, with another fixed look at me, like another effort of remembrance, "that the state of Miss Havisham's elth were sitch as would have—allowed, were it, Pip?"

"Of her having the pleasure," I added.

"Of ladies' company," said Joe. And drew a long breath.

"Well!" cried my sister, with a mollified glance at Mr. Pumblechook. "She might have had the politeness to send that message at first, but it's better late than never. And what did she give young Rantipole here?"

"She giv' him," said Joe, "nothing."

Mrs. Joe was going to break out, but Joe went on.

"What she giv'," said Joe, "she giv' to his friends. 'And by his friends,' were her explanation, 'I mean into the hands of his sister Mrs. J. Gargery.' Them were her words; 'Mrs. J. Gargery.' She mayn't have know'd," added Joe, with an appearance of reflection, "whether it were Joe, or Jorge."

My sister looked at Pumblechook: who smoothed the elbows of his wooden arm-chair, and nodded at her and at the fire, as if he had known all about it beforehand.

"And how much have you got?" asked my sister, laughing. Positively laughing!

"What would present company say to ten pound?" demanded Joe.

"They'd say," returned my sister, curtly, "pretty well. Not too much, but pretty well."

"It's more than that, then," said Joe.

That fearful Impostor, Pumblechook, immediately nodded, and said, as he rubbed the arms of his chair, "It's more than that, Mum."

"Why, you don't mean to say—" began my sister.

"Yes I do, Mum," said Pumblechook; "but wait a bit. Go on, Joseph. Good in you! Go on!"

"What would present company say," proceeded Joe, "to twenty pound?"

"Handsome would be the word," returned my sister.

"Well, then," said Joe, "It's more than twenty pound."

That abject hypocrite, Pumblechook, nodded again, and said, with a patronizing laugh, "It's more than that, Mum. Good again! Follow her up, Joseph!"

"Then to make an end of it," said Joe, delightedly handing the bag to my sister; "it's five-and-twenty pound."

"It's five-and-twenty pound, Mum," echoed that basest of swindlers, Pumblechook, rising to shake hands with her; "and it's no more than your merits (as I said when my opinion was asked), and I wish you joy of the money!"

If the villain had stopped here, his case would have been sufficiently awful, but he blackened his guilt by proceeding to take me into custody, with a right of patronage that left all his former criminality far behind.

"Now you see, Joseph and wife," said Pumblechook, as he took me by the arm above the elbow, "I am one of them that always go right through with what they've begun. This boy must be bound, out of hand. That's my way. Bound out of hand."

"Goodness knows, Uncle Pumblechook," said my sister (grasping the money), "we're deeply beholden to you."

"Never mind me, Mum," returned that diabolical cornchandler. "A pleasure's a pleasure all the world over. But this boy, you know; we must have him bound. I said I'd see to it—to tell you the truth."

The Justices were sitting in the Town Hall near at hand, and we at once went over to have me bound apprentice to Joe in the Magisterial presence. I say we went over, but I was pushed over by Pumblechook, exactly as if I had that moment picked a pocket or fired a rick; indeed, it was the general impression in Court that I had been taken red-handed; for, as Pumblechook shoved me before him through the crowd, I heard some people say, "What's he done?" and others, "He's a young 'un, too, but looks bad, don't he?" One person of mild and benevolent aspect even gave me a tract ornamented with a woodcut of a malevolent young man fitted up with a perfect sausage-shop of fetters, and entitled TO BE READ IN MY CELL.

The Hall was a queer place, I thought, with higher pews in it than a church,—and with people hanging over the pews looking on,—and with mighty Justices (one with a powdered head) leaning back in chairs, with folded arms, or taking snuff, or going to sleep, or writing, or reading the newspapers,—and with some shining black portraits on the walls, which my unartistic eye regarded as a composition of hardbake and sticking-plaster. Here, in a corner my indentures were duly signed and attested, and I was "bound"; Mr. Pumblechook holding me all the while as if we had looked in on our way to the scaffold, to have those little preliminaries disposed of.

When we had come out again, and had got rid of the boys who had been put into great spirits by the expectation of seeing me publicly tortured, and who were much disappointed to find that my friends were merely rallying round me, we went back to Pumblechook's. And there my sister became so excited by the twenty-five guineas, that nothing would serve her but we must have a dinner out of that windfall at the Blue Boar, and that Pumblechook must go over in his chaise-cart, and bring the Hubbles and Mr. Wopsle.

It was agreed to be done; and a most melancholy day I passed. For, it inscrutably appeared to stand to reason, in the minds of the whole company, that I was an excrescence on the entertainment. And to make it worse, they all asked me from time to time,—in short, whenever they had nothing else to do,—why I didn't enjoy myself? And what could I possibly do then, but say I was enjoying myself,—when I wasn't!

However, they were grown up and had their own way, and they made the most of it. That swindling Pumblechook, exalted into the beneficent contriver of the whole occasion, actually took the top of the table; and, when he addressed them on the subject of my being bound, and had fiendishly congratulated them on my being liable to imprisonment if I played at cards, drank strong liquors, kept late hours or bad company, or indulged in other vagaries which the form of my indentures appeared to contemplate as next to inevitable, he placed me standing on a chair beside him to illustrate his remarks.

My only other remembrances of the great festival are, That they wouldn't let me go to sleep, but whenever they saw me dropping off, woke me up and told me to enjoy myself. That, rather late in the evening Mr. Wopsle gave us Collins's ode, and threw his bloodstained sword in thunder down, with such effect, that a waiter came in and said, "The Commercials underneath sent up their compliments, and it wasn't the Tumblers' Arms." That, they were all in excellent spirits on the road home, and sang, O Lady Fair! Mr. Wopsle taking the bass, and asserting with a tremendously strong voice (in reply to the inquisitive bore who leads that piece of music in a most impertinent manner, by wanting to know all about everybody's private affairs) that he was the man with his white locks flowing, and that he was upon the whole the weakest pilgrim going.

Finally, I remember that when I got into my little bedroom, I was truly wretched, and had a strong conviction on me that I should never like Joe's trade. I had liked it once, but once was not now.

Chapter XIV

It is a most miserable thing to feel ashamed of home. There may be black ingratitude in the thing, and the punishment may be retributive and well deserved; but that it is a miserable thing, I can testify.

Home had never been a very pleasant place to me, because of my sister's temper. But, Joe had sanctified it, and I had believed in it. I had believed in the best parlor as a most elegant saloon; I had believed in the front door, as a mysterious portal of the Temple of State whose solemn opening was attended with a sacrifice of roast fowls; I had believed in the kitchen as a chaste though not magnificent apartment; I had believed in the forge as the glowing road to manhood and independence. Within a single year all this was changed. Now it was all coarse and common, and I would not have had Miss Havisham and Estella see it on any account.

How much of my ungracious condition of mind may have been my own fault, how much Miss Havisham's, how much my sister's, is now of no moment to me or to any one. The change was made in me; the thing was done. Well or ill done, excusably or inexcusably, it was done.

Once, it had seemed to me that when I should at last roll up my shirt-sleeves and go into the forge, Joe's 'prentice, I should be distinguished and happy. Now the reality was in my hold, I only felt that I was dusty with the dust of small-coal, and that I had a weight upon my daily remembrance to which the anvil was a feather. There have been occasions in my later life (I suppose as in most lives) when I have felt for a time as if a thick curtain had fallen on all its interest and romance, to shut me out from anything save dull endurance any more. Never has that curtain dropped so heavy and blank, as when my way in life lay stretched out straight before me through the newly entered road of apprenticeship to Joe.

I remember that at a later period of my "time," I used to stand about the churchyard on Sunday evenings when night was falling, comparing my own perspective with the windy marsh view, and making out some likeness between them by thinking how flat and low both were, and how on both there came an unknown way and a dark mist and then the sea. I was quite as dejected on the first working-day of my apprenticeship as in that after-time; but I am glad to know that I never breathed a murmur to Joe while my indentures lasted. It is about the only thing I am glad to know of myself in that connection.

For, though it includes what I proceed to add, all the merit of what I proceed to add was Joe's. It was not because I was faithful, but because Joe was faithful, that I never ran away and went for a soldier or a sailor. It was not because I had a strong sense of the virtue of industry, but because Joe had a strong sense of the virtue of industry, that I worked with tolerable zeal against the grain. It is not possible to know how far the influence of any amiable honest-hearted duty-doing man flies out into the world; but it is very possible to know how it has touched one's self in going by, and I know right well that any good that intermixed itself with my apprenticeship came of plain contented Joe, and not of restlessly aspiring discontented me.

What I wanted, who can say? How can I say, when I never knew? What I dreaded was, that in some unlucky hour I, being at my grimiest and commonest, should lift up my eyes and see Estella looking in at one of the wooden windows of the forge. I was haunted by the fear that she would, sooner or later, find me out, with a black face and hands, doing the coarsest part of my work, and would exult over me and despise me. Often after dark, when I was pulling the bellows for Joe, and we were singing Old Clem, and when the thought how we used to sing it at Miss Havisham's would seem to show me Estella's face in the fire, with her pretty hair fluttering in the wind and her eyes scorning me,—often at such a time I would look towards those panels of black night in the wall which the wooden windows then were, and would fancy that I saw her just drawing her face away, and would believe that she had come at last.

After that, when we went in to supper, the place and the meal would have a more homely look than ever, and I would feel more ashamed of home than ever, in my own ungracious breast.

Chapter XV

As I was getting too big for Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt's room, my education under that preposterous female terminated. Not, however, until Biddy had imparted to me everything she knew, from the little catalogue of prices, to a comic song she had once bought for a half-penny. Although the only coherent part of the latter piece of literature were the opening lines,

When I went to Lunnon town sirs, Too rul loo rul Too rul loo rul Wasn't I done very brown sirs? Too rul loo rul Too rul loo rul—still, in my desire to be wiser, I got this composition by heart with the utmost gravity; nor do I recollect that I questioned its merit, except that I thought (as I still do) the amount of Too rul somewhat in excess of the poetry. In my hunger for information, I made proposals to Mr. Wopsle to bestow some intellectual crumbs upon me, with which he kindly complied. As it turned out, however, that he only wanted me for a dramatic lay-figure, to be contradicted and embraced and wept over and bullied and clutched and stabbed and knocked about in a variety of ways, I soon declined that course of instruction; though not until Mr. Wopsle in his poetic fury had severely mauled me.

Whatever I acquired, I tried to impart to Joe. This statement sounds so well, that I cannot in my conscience let it pass unexplained. I wanted to make Joe less ignorant and common, that he might be worthier of my society and less open to Estella's reproach.

The old Battery out on the marshes was our place of study, and a broken slate and a short piece of slate-pencil were our educational implements: to which Joe always added a pipe of tobacco. I never knew Joe to remember anything from one Sunday to another, or to acquire, under my tuition, any piece of information whatever. Yet he would smoke his pipe at the Battery with a far more sagacious air than anywhere else,—even with a learned air,—as if he considered himself to be advancing immensely. Dear fellow, I hope he did.

It was pleasant and quiet, out there with the sails on the river passing beyond the earthwork, and sometimes, when the tide was low, looking as if they belonged to sunken ships that were still sailing on at the bottom of the water. Whenever I watched the vessels standing out to sea with their white sails spread, I somehow thought of Miss Havisham and Estella; and whenever the light struck aslant, afar off, upon a cloud or sail or green hillside or water-line, it was just the same.—Miss Havisham and Estella and the strange house and the strange life appeared to have something to do with everything that was picturesque.

One Sunday when Joe, greatly enjoying his pipe, had so plumed himself on being "most awful dull," that I had given him up for the day, I lay on the earthwork for some time with my chin on my hand, descrying traces of Miss Havisham and Estella all over the prospect, in the sky and in the water, until at last I resolved to mention a thought concerning them that had been much in my head.

"Joe," said I; "don't you think I ought to make Miss Havisham a visit?"

"Well, Pip," returned Joe, slowly considering. "What for?"

"What for, Joe? What is any visit made for?"

"There is some wisits p'r'aps," said Joe, "as for ever remains open to the question, Pip. But in regard to wisiting Miss Havisham. She might think you wanted something,—expected something of her."

"Don't you think I might say that I did not, Joe?"

"You might, old chap," said Joe. "And she might credit it. Similarly she mightn't."

Joe felt, as I did, that he had made a point there, and he pulled hard at his pipe to keep himself from weakening it by repetition.

"You see, Pip," Joe pursued, as soon as he was past that danger, "Miss Havisham done the handsome thing by you. When Miss Havisham done the handsome thing by you, she called me back to say to me as that were all."

"Yes, Joe. I heard her."

"ALL," Joe repeated, very emphatically.

"Yes, Joe. I tell you, I heard her."

"Which I meantersay, Pip, it might be that her meaning were,—Make a end on it!—As you was!—Me to the North, and you to the South!—Keep in sunders!"

I had thought of that too, and it was very far from comforting to me to find that he had thought of it; for it seemed to render it more probable.

"But, Joe."

"Yes, old chap."

"Here am I, getting on in the first year of my time, and, since the day of my being bound, I have never thanked Miss Havisham, or asked after her, or shown that I remember her."

"That's true, Pip; and unless you was to turn her out a set of shoes all four round,—and which I meantersay as even a set of shoes all four round might not be acceptable as a present, in a total wacancy of hoofs—"

"I don't mean that sort of remembrance, Joe; I don't mean a present."

But Joe had got the idea of a present in his head and must harp upon it. "Or even," said he, "if you was helped to knocking her up a new chain for the front door,—or say a gross or two of shark-headed screws for general use,—or some light fancy article, such as a toasting-fork when she took her muffins,—or a gridiron when she took a sprat or such like—"

"I don't mean any present at all, Joe," I interposed.

"Well," said Joe, still harping on it as though I had particularly pressed it, "if I was yourself, Pip, I wouldn't. No, I would not. For what's a door-chain when she's got one always up? And shark-headers is open to misrepresentations. And if it was a toasting-fork, you'd go into brass and do yourself no credit. And the oncommonest workman can't show himself oncommon in a gridiron,—for a gridiron IS a gridiron," said Joe, steadfastly impressing it upon me, as if he were endeavouring to rouse me from a fixed delusion, "and you may haim at what you like, but a gridiron it will come out, either by your leave or again your leave, and you can't help yourself—"

"My dear Joe," I cried, in desperation, taking hold of his coat, "don't go on in that way. I never thought of making Miss Havisham any present."

"No, Pip," Joe assented, as if he had been contending for that, all along; "and what I say to you is, you are right, Pip."

"Yes, Joe; but what I wanted to say, was, that as we are rather slack just now, if you would give me a half-holiday to-morrow, I think I would go up-town and make a call on Miss Est—Havisham."

"Which her name," said Joe, gravely, "ain't Estavisham, Pip, unless she have been rechris'ened."

"I know, Joe, I know. It was a slip of mine. What do you think of it, Joe?"

In brief, Joe thought that if I thought well of it, he thought well of it. But, he was particular in stipulating that if I were not received with cordiality, or if I were not encouraged to repeat my visit as a visit which had no ulterior object but was simply one of gratitude for a favor received, then this experimental trip should have no successor. By these conditions I promised to abide.

Now, Joe kept a journeyman at weekly wages whose name was Orlick. He pretended that his Christian name was Dolge,—a clear Impossibility,—but he was a fellow of that obstinate disposition that I believe him to have been the prey of no delusion in this particular, but wilfully to have imposed that name upon the village as an affront to its understanding. He was a broadshouldered loose-limbed swarthy fellow of great strength, never in a hurry, and always slouching. He never even seemed to come to his work on purpose, but would slouch in as if by mere accident; and when he went to the Jolly Bargemen to eat his dinner, or went away at night, he would slouch out, like Cain or the Wandering Jew, as if he had no idea where he was going and no intention of ever coming back. He lodged at a sluice-keeper's out on the marshes, and on working-days would come slouching from his hermitage, with his hands in his pockets and his dinner loosely tied in a bundle round his neck and dangling on his back. On Sundays he mostly lay all day on the sluice-gates, or stood against ricks and barns. He always slouched, locomotively, with his eyes on the ground; and, when accosted or otherwise required to raise them, he looked up in a half-resentful, half-puzzled way, as though the only thought he ever had was, that it was rather an odd and injurious fact that he should never be thinking.

This morose journeyman had no liking for me. When I was very small and timid, he gave me to understand that the Devil lived in a black corner of the forge, and that he knew the fiend very well: also that it was necessary to make up the fire, once in seven years, with a live boy, and that I might consider myself fuel. When I became Joe's 'prentice, Orlick was perhaps confirmed in some suspicion that I should displace him; howbeit, he liked me still less. Not that he ever said anything, or did anything, openly importing hostility; I only noticed that he always beat his sparks in my direction, and that whenever I sang Old Clem, he came in out of time.

Dolge Orlick was at work and present, next day, when I reminded Joe of my half-holiday. He said nothing at the moment, for he and Joe had just got a piece of hot iron between them, and I was at the bellows; but by and by he said, leaning on his hammer,—

"Now, master! Sure you're not a going to favor only one of us. If Young Pip has a half-holiday, do as much for Old Orlick." I suppose he was about five-and-twenty, but he usually spoke of himself as an ancient person.

"Why, what'll you do with a half-holiday, if you get it?" said Joe.

"What'll I do with it! What'll he do with it? I'll do as much with it as him," said Orlick.

"As to Pip, he's going up town," said Joe.

"Well then, as to Old Orlick, he's a going up town," retorted that worthy. "Two can go up town. Tain't only one wot can go up town.

"Don't lose your temper," said Joe.

"Shall if I like," growled Orlick. "Some and their up-towning! Now, master! Come. No favoring in this shop. Be a man!"

The master refusing to entertain the subject until the journeyman was in a better temper, Orlick plunged at the furnace, drew out a red-hot bar, made at me with it as if he were going to run it through my body, whisked it round my head, laid it on the anvil, hammered it out,—as if it were I, I thought, and the sparks were my spirting blood,—and finally said, when he had hammered himself hot and the iron cold, and he again leaned on his hammer,—

"Now, master!"

"Are you all right now?" demanded Joe.

"Ah! I am all right," said gruff Old Orlick.

"Then, as in general you stick to your work as well as most men," said Joe, "let it be a half-holiday for all."

My sister had been standing silent in the yard, within hearing,—she was a most unscrupulous spy and listener,—and she instantly looked in at one of the windows.

"Like you, you fool!" said she to Joe, "giving holidays to great idle hulkers like that. You are a rich man, upon my life, to waste wages in that way. I wish I was his master!"

"You'd be everybody's master, if you durst," retorted Orlick, with an ill-favored grin.

("Let her alone," said Joe.)

"I'd be a match for all noodles and all rogues," returned my sister, beginning to work herself into a mighty rage. "And I couldn't be a match for the noodles, without being a match for your master, who's the dunder-headed king of the noodles. And I couldn't be a match for the rogues, without being a match for you, who are the blackest-looking and the worst rogue between this and France. Now!"

"You're a foul shrew, Mother Gargery," growled the journeyman. "If that makes a judge of rogues, you ought to be a good'un."

("Let her alone, will you?" said Joe.)

"What did you say?" cried my sister, beginning to scream. "What did you say? What did that fellow Orlick say to me, Pip? What did he call me, with my husband standing by? Oh! oh! oh!" Each of these exclamations was a shriek; and I must remark of my sister, what is equally true of all the violent women I have ever seen, that passion was no excuse for her, because it is undeniable that instead of lapsing into passion, she consciously and deliberately took extraordinary pains to force herself into it, and became blindly furious by regular stages; "what was the name he gave me before the base man who swore to defend me? Oh! Hold me! Oh!"

"Ah-h-h!" growled the journeyman, between his teeth, "I'd hold you, if you was my wife. I'd hold you under the pump, and choke it out of you."

("I tell you, let her alone," said Joe.)

"Oh! To hear him!" cried my sister, with a clap of her hands and a scream together,—which was her next stage. "To hear the names he's giving me! That Orlick! In my own house! Me, a married woman! With my husband standing by! Oh! Oh!" Here my sister, after a fit of clappings and screamings, beat her hands upon her bosom and upon her knees, and threw her cap off, and pulled her hair down,—which were the last stages on her road to frenzy. Being by this time a perfect Fury and a complete success, she made a dash at the door which I had fortunately locked.

What could the wretched Joe do now, after his disregarded parenthetical interruptions, but stand up to his journeyman, and ask him what he meant by interfering betwixt himself and Mrs. Joe; and further whether he was man enough to come on? Old Orlick felt that the situation admitted of nothing less than coming on, and was on his defence straightway; so, without so much as pulling off their singed and burnt aprons, they went at one another, like two giants. But, if any man in that neighborhood could stand uplong against Joe, I never saw the man. Orlick, as if he had been of no more account than the pale young gentleman, was very soon among the coal-dust, and in no hurry to come out of it. Then Joe unlocked the door and picked up my sister, who had dropped insensible at the window (but who had seen the fight first, I think), and who was carried into the house and laid down, and who was recommended to revive, and would do nothing but struggle and clench her hands in Joe's hair. Then, came that singular calm and silence which succeed all uproars; and then, with the vague sensation which I have always connected with such a lull,—namely, that it was Sunday, and somebody was dead,—I went up stairs to dress myself.

When I came down again, I found Joe and Orlick sweeping up, without any other traces of discomposure than a slit in one of Orlick's nostrils, which was neither expressive nor ornamental. A pot of beer had appeared from the Jolly Bargemen, and they were sharing it by turns in a peaceable manner. The lull had a sedative and philosophical influence on Joe, who followed me out into the road to say, as a parting observation that might do me good, "On the Rampage, Pip, and off the Rampage, Pip:—such is Life!"

With what absurd emotions (for we think the feelings that are very serious in a man quite comical in a boy) I found myself again going to Miss Havisham's, matters little here. Nor, how I passed and repassed the gate many times before I could make up my mind to ring. Nor, how I debated whether I should go away without ringing; nor, how I should undoubtedly have gone, if my time had been my own, to come back.

Miss Sarah Pocket came to the gate. No Estella.

"How, then? You here again?" said Miss Pocket. "What do you want?"

When I said that I only came to see how Miss Havisham was, Sarah evidently deliberated whether or no she should send me about my business. But unwilling to hazard the responsibility, she let me in, and presently brought the sharp message that I was to "come up."

Everything was unchanged, and Miss Havisham was alone.

"Well?" said she, fixing her eyes upon me. "I hope you want nothing? You'll get nothing."

"No indeed, Miss Havisham. I only wanted you to know that I am doing very well in my apprenticeship, and am always much obliged to you."

"There, there!" with the old restless fingers. "Come now and then; come on your birthday.—Ay!" she cried suddenly, turning herself and her chair towards me, "You are looking round for Estella? Hey?"

I had been looking round,—in fact, for Estella,—and I stammered that I hoped she was well.

"Abroad," said Miss Havisham; "educating for a lady; far out of reach; prettier than ever; admired by all who see her. Do you feel that you have lost her?"

There was such a malignant enjoyment in her utterance of the last words, and she broke into such a disagreeable laugh, that I was at a loss what to say. She spared me the trouble of considering, by dismissing me.

When the gate was closed upon me by Sarah of the walnut-shell countenance, I felt more than ever dissatisfied with my home and with my trade and with everything; and that was all I took by that motion.

As I was loitering along the High Street, looking in disconsolately at the shop windows, and thinking what I would buy if I were a gentleman, who should come out of the bookshop but Mr. Wopsle. Mr. Wopsle had in his hand the affecting tragedy of George Barnwell, in which he had that moment invested sixpence, with the view of heaping every word of it on the head of Pumblechook, with whom he was going to drink tea. No sooner did he see me, than he appeared to consider that a special Providence had put a 'prentice in his way to be read at; and he laid hold of me, and insisted on my accompanying him to the Pumblechookian parlor. As I knew it would be miserable at home, and as the nights were dark and the way was dreary, and almost any companionship on the road was better than none, I made no great resistance; consequently, we turned into Pumblechook's just as the street and the shops were lighting up.

As I never assisted at any other representation of George Barnwell, I don't know how long it may usually take; but I know very well that it took until half-past nine o' clock that night, and that when Mr. Wopsle got into Newgate, I thought he never would go to the scaffold, he became so much slower than at any former period of his disgraceful career. I thought it a little too much that he should complain of being cut short in his flower after all, as if he had not been running to seed, leaf after leaf, ever since his course began. This, however, was a mere question of length and wearisomeness. What stung me, was the identification of the whole affair with my unoffending self. When Barnwell began to go wrong, I declare that I felt positively apologetic, Pumblechook's indignant stare so taxed me with it. Wopsle, too, took pains to present me in the worst light. At once ferocious and maudlin, I was made to murder my uncle with no extenuating circumstances whatever; Millwood put me down in argument, on every occasion; it became sheer monomania in my master's daughter to care a button for me; and all I can say for my gasping and procrastinating conduct on the fatal morning, is, that it was worthy of the general feebleness of my character. Even after I was happily hanged and Wopsle had closed the book, Pumblechook sat staring at me, and shaking his head, and saying, "Take warning, boy, take warning!" as if it were a well-known fact that I contemplated murdering a near relation, provided I could only induce one to have the weakness to become my benefactor.

It was a very dark night when it was all over, and when I set out with Mr. Wopsle on the walk home. Beyond town, we found a heavy mist out, and it fell wet and thick. The turnpike lamp was a blur, quite out of the lamp's usual place apparently, and its rays looked solid substance on the fog. We were noticing this, and saying how that the mist rose with a change of wind from a certain quarter of our marshes, when we came upon a man, slouching under the lee of the turnpike house.

"Halloa!" we said, stopping. "Orlick there?"

"Ah!" he answered, slouching out. "I was standing by a minute, on the chance of company."

"You are late," I remarked.

Orlick not unnaturally answered, "Well? And you're late."

"We have been," said Mr. Wopsle, exalted with his late performance, —"we have been indulging, Mr. Orlick, in an intellectual evening."

Old Orlick growled, as if he had nothing to say about that, and we all went on together. I asked him presently whether he had been spending his half-holiday up and down town?

"Yes," said he, "all of it. I come in behind yourself. I didn't see you, but I must have been pretty close behind you. By the by, the guns is going again."

"At the Hulks?" said I.

"Ay! There's some of the birds flown from the cages. The guns have been going since dark, about. You'll hear one presently."

In effect, we had not walked many yards further, when the well-remembered boom came towards us, deadened by the mist, and heavily rolled away along the low grounds by the river, as if it were pursuing and threatening the fugitives.

"A good night for cutting off in," said Orlick. "We'd be puzzled how to bring down a jail-bird on the wing, to-night."

The subject was a suggestive one to me, and I thought about it in silence. Mr. Wopsle, as the ill-requited uncle of the evening's tragedy, fell to meditating aloud in his garden at Camberwell. Orlick, with his hands in his pockets, slouched heavily at my side. It was very dark, very wet, very muddy, and so we splashed along. Now and then, the sound of the signal cannon broke upon us again, and again rolled sulkily along the course of the river. I kept myself to myself and my thoughts. Mr. Wopsle died amiably at Camberwell, and exceedingly game on Bosworth Field, and in the greatest agonies at Glastonbury. Orlick sometimes growled, "Beat it out, beat it out,—Old Clem! With a clink for the stout,—Old Clem!" I thought he had been drinking, but he was not drunk.

Thus, we came to the village. The way by which we approached it took us past the Three Jolly Bargemen, which we were surprised to find—it being eleven o'clock—in a state of commotion, with the door wide open, and unwonted lights that had been hastily caught up and put down scattered about. Mr. Wopsle dropped in to ask what was the matter (surmising that a convict had been taken), but came running out in a great hurry.

"There's something wrong," said he, without stopping, "up at your place, Pip. Run all!"

"What is it?" I asked, keeping up with him. So did Orlick, at my side.

"I can't quite understand. The house seems to have been violently entered when Joe Gargery was out. Supposed by convicts. Somebody has been attacked and hurt."

We were running too fast to admit of more being said, and we made no stop until we got into our kitchen. It was full of people; the whole village was there, or in the yard; and there was a surgeon, and there was Joe, and there were a group of women, all on the floor in the midst of the kitchen. The unemployed bystanders drew back when they saw me, and so I became aware of my sister,—lying without sense or movement on the bare boards where she had been knocked down by a tremendous blow on the back of the head, dealt by some unknown hand when her face was turned towards the fire,—destined never to be on the Rampage again, while she was the wife of Joe.

Chapter XVI

With my head full of George Barnwell, I was at first disposed to believe that I must have had some hand in the attack upon my sister, or at all events that as her near relation, popularly known to be under obligations to her, I was a more legitimate object of suspicion than any one else. But when, in the clearer light of next morning, I began to reconsider the matter and to hear it discussed around me on all sides, I took another view of the case, which was more reasonable.

Joe had been at the Three Jolly Bargemen, smoking his pipe, from a quarter after eight o'clock to a quarter before ten. While he was there, my sister had been seen standing at the kitchen door, and had exchanged Good Night with a farm-laborer going home. The man could not be more particular as to the time at which he saw her (he got into dense confusion when he tried to be), than that it must have been before nine. When Joe went home at five minutes before ten, he found her struck down on the floor, and promptly called in assistance. The fire had not then burnt unusually low, nor was the snuff of the candle very long; the candle, however, had been blown out.

Nothing had been taken away from any part of the house. Neither, beyond the blowing out of the candle,—which stood on a table between the door and my sister, and was behind her when she stood facing the fire and was struck,—was there any disarrangement of the kitchen, excepting such as she herself had made, in falling and bleeding. But, there was one remarkable piece of evidence on the spot. She had been struck with something blunt and heavy, on the head and spine; after the blows were dealt, something heavy had been thrown down at her with considerable violence, as she lay on her face. And on the ground beside her, when Joe picked her up, was a convict's leg-iron which had been filed asunder.

Now, Joe, examining this iron with a smith's eye, declared it to have been filed asunder some time ago. The hue and cry going off to the Hulks, and people coming thence to examine the iron, Joe's opinion was corroborated. They did not undertake to say when it had left the prison-ships to which it undoubtedly had once belonged; but they claimed to know for certain that that particular manacle had not been worn by either of the two convicts who had escaped last night. Further, one of those two was already retaken, and had not freed himself of his iron.

Knowing what I knew, I set up an inference of my own here. I believed the iron to be my convict's iron,—the iron I had seen and heard him filing at, on the marshes,—but my mind did not accuse him of having put it to its latest use. For I believed one of two other persons to have become possessed of it, and to have turned it to this cruel account. Either Orlick, or the strange man who had shown me the file.

Now, as to Orlick; he had gone to town exactly as he told us when we picked him up at the turnpike, he had been seen about town all the evening, he had been in divers companies in several public-houses, and he had come back with myself and Mr. Wopsle. There was nothing against him, save the quarrel; and my sister had quarrelled with him, and with everybody else about her, ten thousand times. As to the strange man; if he had come back for his two bank-notes there could have been no dispute about them, because my sister was fully prepared to restore them. Besides, there had been no altercation; the assailant had come in so silently and suddenly, that she had been felled before she could look round.

It was horrible to think that I had provided the weapon, however undesignedly, but I could hardly think otherwise. I suffered unspeakable trouble while I considered and reconsidered whether I should at last dissolve that spell of my childhood and tell Joe all the story. For months afterwards, I every day settled the question finally in the negative, and reopened and reargued it next morning. The contention came, after all, to this;—the secret was such an old one now, had so grown into me and become a part of myself, that I could not tear it away. In addition to the dread that, having led up to so much mischief, it would be now more likely than ever to alienate Joe from me if he believed it, I had a further restraining dread that he would not believe it, but would assort it with the fabulous dogs and veal-cutlets as a monstrous invention. However, I temporized with myself, of course—for, was I not wavering between right and wrong, when the thing is always done?—and resolved to make a full disclosure if I should see any such new occasion as a new chance of helping in the discovery of the assailant.

The Constables and the Bow Street men from London—for, this happened in the days of the extinct red-waistcoated police—were about the house for a week or two, and did pretty much what I have heard and read of like authorities doing in other such cases. They took up several obviously wrong people, and they ran their heads very hard against wrong ideas, and persisted in trying to fit the circumstances to the ideas, instead of trying to extract ideas from the circumstances. Also, they stood about the door of the Jolly Bargemen, with knowing and reserved looks that filled the whole neighborhood with admiration; and they had a mysterious manner of taking their drink, that was almost as good as taking the culprit. But not quite, for they never did it.

Long after these constitutional powers had dispersed, my sister lay very ill in bed. Her sight was disturbed, so that she saw objects multiplied, and grasped at visionary teacups and wineglasses instead of the realities; her hearing was greatly impaired; her memory also; and her speech was unintelligible. When, at last, she came round so far as to be helped down stairs, it was still necessary to keep my slate always by her, that she might indicate in writing what she could not indicate in speech. As she was (very bad handwriting apart) a more than indifferent speller, and as Joe was a more than indifferent reader, extraordinary complications arose between them which I was always called in to solve. The administration of mutton instead of medicine, the substitution of Tea for Joe, and the baker for bacon, were among the mildest of my own mistakes.

However, her temper was greatly improved, and she was patient. A tremulous uncertainty of the action of all her limbs soon became a part of her regular state, and afterwards, at intervals of two or three months, she would often put her hands to her head, and would then remain for about a week at a time in some gloomy aberration of mind. We were at a loss to find a suitable attendant for her, until a circumstance happened conveniently to relieve us. Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt conquered a confirmed habit of living into which she had fallen, and Biddy became a part of our establishment.

It may have been about a month after my sister's reappearance in the kitchen, when Biddy came to us with a small speckled box containing the whole of her worldly effects, and became a blessing to the household. Above all, she was a blessing to Joe, for the dear old fellow was sadly cut up by the constant contemplation of the wreck of his wife, and had been accustomed, while attending on her of an evening, to turn to me every now and then and say, with his blue eyes moistened, "Such a fine figure of a woman as she once were, Pip!" Biddy instantly taking the cleverest charge of her as though she had studied her from infancy; Joe became able in some sort to appreciate the greater quiet of his life, and to get down to the Jolly Bargemen now and then for a change that did him good. It was characteristic of the police people that they had all more or less suspected poor Joe (though he never knew it), and that they had to a man concurred in regarding him as one of the deepest spirits they had ever encountered.

Biddy's first triumph in her new office, was to solve a difficulty that had completely vanquished me. I had tried hard at it, but had made nothing of it. Thus it was:—

Again and again and again, my sister had traced upon the slate, a character that looked like a curious T, and then with the utmost eagerness had called our attention to it as something she particularly wanted. I had in vain tried everything producible that began with a T, from tar to toast and tub. At length it had come into my head that the sign looked like a hammer, and on my lustily calling that word in my sister's ear, she had begun to hammer on the table and had expressed a qualified assent. Thereupon, I had brought in all our hammers, one after another, but without avail. Then I bethought me of a crutch, the shape being much the same, and I borrowed one in the village, and displayed it to my sister with considerable confidence. But she shook her head to that extent when she was shown it, that we were terrified lest in her weak and shattered state she should dislocate her neck.

When my sister found that Biddy was very quick to understand her, this mysterious sign reappeared on the slate. Biddy looked thoughtfully at it, heard my explanation, looked thoughtfully at my sister, looked thoughtfully at Joe (who was always represented on the slate by his initial letter), and ran into the forge, followed by Joe and me.

"Why, of course!" cried Biddy, with an exultant face. "Don't you see? It's him!"

Orlick, without a doubt! She had lost his name, and could only signify him by his hammer. We told him why we wanted him to come into the kitchen, and he slowly laid down his hammer, wiped his brow with his arm, took another wipe at it with his apron, and came slouching out, with a curious loose vagabond bend in the knees that strongly distinguished him.

I confess that I expected to see my sister denounce him, and that I was disappointed by the different result. She manifested the greatest anxiety to be on good terms with him, was evidently much pleased by his being at length produced, and motioned that she would have him given something to drink. She watched his countenance as if she were particularly wishful to be assured that he took kindly to his reception, she showed every possible desire to conciliate him, and there was an air of humble propitiation in all she did, such as I have seen pervade the bearing of a child towards a hard master. After that day, a day rarely passed without her drawing the hammer on her slate, and without Orlick's slouching in and standing doggedly before her, as if he knew no more than I did what to make of it.

Chapter XVII

I now fell into a regular routine of apprenticeship life, which was varied beyond the limits of the village and the marshes, by no more remarkable circumstance than the arrival of my birthday and my paying another visit to Miss Havisham. I found Miss Sarah Pocket still on duty at the gate; I found Miss Havisham just as I had left her, and she spoke of Estella in the very same way, if not in the very same words. The interview lasted but a few minutes, and she gave me a guinea when I was going, and told me to come again on my next birthday. I may mention at once that this became an annual custom. I tried to decline taking the guinea on the first occasion, but with no better effect than causing her to ask me very angrily, if I expected more? Then, and after that, I took it.

So unchanging was the dull old house, the yellow light in the darkened room, the faded spectre in the chair by the dressing-table glass, that I felt as if the stopping of the clocks had stopped Time in that mysterious place, and, while I and everything else outside it grew older, it stood still. Daylight never entered the house as to my thoughts and remembrances of it, any more than as to the actual fact. It bewildered me, and under its influence I continued at heart to hate my trade and to be ashamed of home.

Imperceptibly I became conscious of a change in Biddy, however. Her shoes came up at the heel, her hair grew bright and neat, her hands were always clean. She was not beautiful,—she was common, and could not be like Estella,—but she was pleasant and wholesome and sweet-tempered. She had not been with us more than a year (I remember her being newly out of mourning at the time it struck me), when I observed to myself one evening that she had curiously thoughtful and attentive eyes; eyes that were very pretty and very good.

It came of my lifting up my own eyes from a task I was poring at—writing some passages from a book, to improve myself in two ways at once by a sort of stratagem—and seeing Biddy observant of what I was about. I laid down my pen, and Biddy stopped in her needlework without laying it down.

"Biddy," said I, "how do you manage it? Either I am very stupid, or you are very clever."

"What is it that I manage? I don't know," returned Biddy, smiling.

She managed our whole domestic life, and wonderfully too; but I did not mean that, though that made what I did mean more surprising.

"How do you manage, Biddy," said I, "to learn everything that I learn, and always to keep up with me?" I was beginning to be rather vain of my knowledge, for I spent my birthday guineas on it, and set aside the greater part of my pocket-money for similar investment; though I have no doubt, now, that the little I knew was extremely dear at the price.

"I might as well ask you," said Biddy, "how you manage?"

"No; because when I come in from the forge of a night, any one can see me turning to at it. But you never turn to at it, Biddy."

"I suppose I must catch it like a cough," said Biddy, quietly; and went on with her sewing.

Pursuing my idea as I leaned back in my wooden chair, and looked at Biddy sewing away with her head on one side, I began to think her rather an extraordinary girl. For I called to mind now, that she was equally accomplished in the terms of our trade, and the names of our different sorts of work, and our various tools. In short, whatever I knew, Biddy knew. Theoretically, she was already as good a blacksmith as I, or better.

"You are one of those, Biddy," said I, "who make the most of every chance. You never had a chance before you came here, and see how improved you are!"

Biddy looked at me for an instant, and went on with her sewing. "I was your first teacher though; wasn't I?" said she, as she sewed.

"Biddy!" I exclaimed, in amazement. "Why, you are crying!"

"No I am not," said Biddy, looking up and laughing. "What put that in your head?"

What could have put it in my head but the glistening of a tear as it dropped on her work? I sat silent, recalling what a drudge she had been until Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt successfully overcame that bad habit of living, so highly desirable to be got rid of by some people. I recalled the hopeless circumstances by which she had been surrounded in the miserable little shop and the miserable little noisy evening school, with that miserable old bundle of incompetence always to be dragged and shouldered. I reflected that even in those untoward times there must have been latent in Biddy what was now developing, for, in my first uneasiness and discontent I had turned to her for help, as a matter of course. Biddy sat quietly sewing, shedding no more tears, and while I looked at her and thought about it all, it occurred to me that perhaps I had not been sufficiently grateful to Biddy. I might have been too reserved, and should have patronized her more (though I did not use that precise word in my meditations) with my confidence.

"Yes, Biddy," I observed, when I had done turning it over, "you were my first teacher, and that at a time when we little thought of ever being together like this, in this kitchen."

"Ah, poor thing!" replied Biddy. It was like her self-forgetfulness to transfer the remark to my sister, and to get up and be busy about her, making her more comfortable; "that's sadly true!"

"Well!" said I, "we must talk together a little more, as we used to do. And I must consult you a little more, as I used to do. Let us have a quiet walk on the marshes next Sunday, Biddy, and a long chat."

My sister was never left alone now; but Joe more than readily undertook the care of her on that Sunday afternoon, and Biddy and I went out together. It was summer-time, and lovely weather. When we had passed the village and the church and the churchyard, and were out on the marshes and began to see the sails of the ships as they sailed on, I began to combine Miss Havisham and Estella with the prospect, in my usual way. When we came to the river-side and sat down on the bank, with the water rippling at our feet, making it all more quiet than it would have been without that sound, I resolved that it was a good time and place for the admission of Biddy into my inner confidence.

"Biddy," said I, after binding her to secrecy, "I want to be a gentleman."

"O, I wouldn't, if I was you!" she returned. "I don't think it would answer."

"Biddy," said I, with some severity, "I have particular reasons for wanting to be a gentleman."

"You know best, Pip; but don't you think you are happier as you are?"

"Biddy," I exclaimed, impatiently, "I am not at all happy as I am. I am disgusted with my calling and with my life. I have never taken to either, since I was bound. Don't be absurd."

"Was I absurd?" said Biddy, quietly raising her eyebrows; "I am sorry for that; I didn't mean to be. I only want you to do well, and to be comfortable."

"Well, then, understand once for all that I never shall or can be comfortable—or anything but miserable—there, Biddy!—unless I can lead a very different sort of life from the life I lead now."

"That's a pity!" said Biddy, shaking her head with a sorrowful air.

Now, I too had so often thought it a pity, that, in the singular kind of quarrel with myself which I was always carrying on, I was half inclined to shed tears of vexation and distress when Biddy gave utterance to her sentiment and my own. I told her she was right, and I knew it was much to be regretted, but still it was not to be helped.

"If I could have settled down," I said to Biddy, plucking up the short grass within reach, much as I had once upon a time pulled my feelings out of my hair and kicked them into the brewery wall,—"if I could have settled down and been but half as fond of the forge as I was when I was little, I know it would have been much better for me. You and I and Joe would have wanted nothing then, and Joe and I would perhaps have gone partners when I was out of my time, and I might even have grown up to keep company with you, and we might have sat on this very bank on a fine Sunday, quite different people. I should have been good enough for you; shouldn't I, Biddy?"

Biddy sighed as she looked at the ships sailing on, and returned for answer, "Yes; I am not over-particular." It scarcely sounded flattering, but I knew she meant well.

"Instead of that," said I, plucking up more grass and chewing a blade or two, "see how I am going on. Dissatisfied, and uncomfortable, and—what would it signify to me, being coarse and common, if nobody had told me so!"

Biddy turned her face suddenly towards mine, and looked far more attentively at me than she had looked at the sailing ships.

"It was neither a very true nor a very polite thing to say," she remarked, directing her eyes to the ships again. "Who said it?"

I was disconcerted, for I had broken away without quite seeing where I was going to. It was not to be shuffled off now, however, and I answered, "The beautiful young lady at Miss Havisham's, and she's more beautiful than anybody ever was, and I admire her dreadfully, and I want to be a gentleman on her account." Having made this lunatic confession, I began to throw my torn-up grass into the river, as if I had some thoughts of following it.

"Do you want to be a gentleman, to spite her or to gain her over?" Biddy quietly asked me, after a pause.

"I don't know," I moodily answered.

"Because, if it is to spite her," Biddy pursued, "I should think—but you know best—that might be better and more independently done by caring nothing for her words. And if it is to gain her over, I should think—but you know best—she was not worth gaining over."

Exactly what I myself had thought, many times. Exactly what was perfectly manifest to me at the moment. But how could I, a poor dazed village lad, avoid that wonderful inconsistency into which the best and wisest of men fall every day?

"It may be all quite true," said I to Biddy, "but I admire her dreadfully."

In short, I turned over on my face when I came to that, and got a good grasp on the hair on each side of my head, and wrenched it well. All the while knowing the madness of my heart to be so very mad and misplaced, that I was quite conscious it would have served my face right, if I had lifted it up by my hair, and knocked it against the pebbles as a punishment for belonging to such an idiot.

Biddy was the wisest of girls, and she tried to reason no more with me. She put her hand, which was a comfortable hand though roughened by work, upon my hands, one after another, and gently took them out of my hair. Then she softly patted my shoulder in a soothing way, while with my face upon my sleeve I cried a little,—exactly as I had done in the brewery yard,—and felt vaguely convinced that I was very much ill-used by somebody, or by everybody; I can't say which.

"I am glad of one thing," said Biddy, "and that is, that you have felt you could give me your confidence, Pip. And I am glad of another thing, and that is, that of course you know you may depend upon my keeping it and always so far deserving it. If your first teacher (dear! such a poor one, and so much in need of being taught herself!) had been your teacher at the present time, she thinks she knows what lesson she would set. But it would be a hard one to learn, and you have got beyond her, and it's of no use now." So, with a quiet sigh for me, Biddy rose from the bank, and said, with a fresh and pleasant change of voice, "Shall we walk a little farther, or go home?"

"Biddy," I cried, getting up, putting my arm round her neck, and giving her a kiss, "I shall always tell you everything."

"Till you're a gentleman," said Biddy.

"You know I never shall be, so that's always. Not that I have any occasion to tell you anything, for you know everything I know,—as I told you at home the other night."

"Ah!" said Biddy, quite in a whisper, as she looked away at the ships. And then repeated, with her former pleasant change, "shall we walk a little farther, or go home?"

I said to Biddy we would walk a little farther, and we did so, and the summer afternoon toned down into the summer evening, and it was very beautiful. I began to consider whether I was not more naturally and wholesomely situated, after all, in these circumstances, than playing beggar my neighbor by candle-light in the room with the stopped clocks, and being despised by Estella. I thought it would be very good for me if I could get her out of my head, with all the rest of those remembrances and fancies, and could go to work determined to relish what I had to do, and stick to it, and make the best of it. I asked myself the question whether I did not surely know that if Estella were beside me at that moment instead of Biddy, she would make me miserable? I was obliged to admit that I did know it for a certainty, and I said to myself, "Pip, what a fool you are!"

We talked a good deal as we walked, and all that Biddy said seemed right. Biddy was never insulting, or capricious, or Biddy to-day and somebody else to-morrow; she would have derived only pain, and no pleasure, from giving me pain; she would far rather have wounded her own breast than mine. How could it be, then, that I did not like her much the better of the two?

"Biddy," said I, when we were walking homeward, "I wish you could put me right."

"I wish I could!" said Biddy.

"If I could only get myself to fall in love with you,—you don't mind my speaking so openly to such an old acquaintance?"

"Oh dear, not at all!" said Biddy. "Don't mind me."

"If I could only get myself to do it, that would be the thing for me."

"But you never will, you see," said Biddy.

It did not appear quite so unlikely to me that evening, as it would have done if we had discussed it a few hours before. I therefore observed I was not quite sure of that. But Biddy said she was, and she said it decisively. In my heart I believed her to be right; and yet I took it rather ill, too, that she should be so positive on the point.

When we came near the churchyard, we had to cross an embankment, and get over a stile near a sluice-gate. There started up, from the gate, or from the rushes, or from the ooze (which was quite in his stagnant way), Old Orlick.

"Halloa!" he growled, "where are you two going?"

"Where should we be going, but home?"

"Well, then," said he, "I'm jiggered if I don't see you home!"

This penalty of being jiggered was a favorite supposititious case of his. He attached no definite meaning to the word that I am aware of, but used it, like his own pretended Christian name, to affront mankind, and convey an idea of something savagely damaging. When I was younger, I had had a general belief that if he had jiggered me personally, he would have done it with a sharp and twisted hook.

Biddy was much against his going with us, and said to me in a whisper, "Don't let him come; I don't like him." As I did not like him either, I took the liberty of saying that we thanked him, but we didn't want seeing home. He received that piece of information with a yell of laughter, and dropped back, but came slouching after us at a little distance.

Curious to know whether Biddy suspected him of having had a hand in that murderous attack of which my sister had never been able to give any account, I asked her why she did not like him.

"Oh!" she replied, glancing over her shoulder as he slouched after us, "because I—I am afraid he likes me."

"Did he ever tell you he liked you?" I asked indignantly.

"No," said Biddy, glancing over her shoulder again, "he never told me so; but he dances at me, whenever he can catch my eye."

However novel and peculiar this testimony of attachment, I did not doubt the accuracy of the interpretation. I was very hot indeed upon Old Orlick's daring to admire her; as hot as if it were an outrage on myself.

"But it makes no difference to you, you know," said Biddy, calmly.

"No, Biddy, it makes no difference to me; only I don't like it; I don't approve of it."

"Nor I neither," said Biddy. "Though that makes no difference to you."

"Exactly," said I; "but I must tell you I should have no opinion of you, Biddy, if he danced at you with your own consent."

I kept an eye on Orlick after that night, and, whenever circumstances were favorable to his dancing at Biddy, got before him to obscure that demonstration. He had struck root in Joe's establishment, by reason of my sister's sudden fancy for him, or I should have tried to get him dismissed. He quite understood and reciprocated my good intentions, as I had reason to know thereafter.

And now, because my mind was not confused enough before, I complicated its confusion fifty thousand-fold, by having states and seasons when I was clear that Biddy was immeasurably better than Estella, and that the plain honest working life to which I was born had nothing in it to be ashamed of, but offered me sufficient means of self-respect and happiness. At those times, I would decide conclusively that my disaffection to dear old Joe and the forge was gone, and that I was growing up in a fair way to be partners with Joe and to keep company with Biddy,—when all in a moment some confounding remembrance of the Havisham days would fall upon me like a destructive missile, and scatter my wits again. Scattered wits take a long time picking up; and often before I had got them well together, they would be dispersed in all directions by one stray thought, that perhaps after all Miss Havisham was going to make my fortune when my time was out.

If my time had run out, it would have left me still at the height of my perplexities, I dare say. It never did run out, however, but was brought to a premature end, as I proceed to relate.

Chapter XVIII

It was in the fourth year of my apprenticeship to Joe, and it was a Saturday night. There was a group assembled round the fire at the Three Jolly Bargemen, attentive to Mr. Wopsle as he read the newspaper aloud. Of that group I was one.

A highly popular murder had been committed, and Mr. Wopsle was imbrued in blood to the eyebrows. He gloated over every abhorrent adjective in the description, and identified himself with every witness at the Inquest. He faintly moaned, "I am done for," as the victim, and he barbarously bellowed, "I'll serve you out," as the murderer. He gave the medical testimony, in pointed imitation of our local practitioner; and he piped and shook, as the aged turnpike-keeper who had heard blows, to an extent so very paralytic as to suggest a doubt regarding the mental competency of that witness. The coroner, in Mr. Wopsle's hands, became Timon of Athens; the beadle, Coriolanus. He enjoyed himself thoroughly, and we all enjoyed ourselves, and were delightfully comfortable. In this cosey state of mind we came to the verdict Wilful Murder.

Then, and not sooner, I became aware of a strange gentleman leaning over the back of the settle opposite me, looking on. There was an expression of contempt on his face, and he bit the side of a great forefinger as he watched the group of faces.

"Well!" said the stranger to Mr. Wopsle, when the reading was done, "you have settled it all to your own satisfaction, I have no doubt?"

Everybody started and looked up, as if it were the murderer. He looked at everybody coldly and sarcastically.

"Guilty, of course?" said he. "Out with it. Come!"

"Sir," returned Mr. Wopsle, "without having the honor of your acquaintance, I do say Guilty." Upon this we all took courage to unite in a confirmatory murmur.

"I know you do," said the stranger; "I knew you would. I told you so. But now I'll ask you a question. Do you know, or do you not know, that the law of England supposes every man to be innocent, until he is proved-proved—to be guilty?"

"Sir," Mr. Wopsle began to reply, "as an Englishman myself, I—"

"Come!" said the stranger, biting his forefinger at him. "Don't evade the question. Either you know it, or you don't know it. Which is it to be?"

He stood with his head on one side and himself on one side, in a Bullying, interrogative manner, and he threw his forefinger at Mr. Wopsle,—as it were to mark him out—before biting it again.

"Now!" said he. "Do you know it, or don't you know it?"

"Certainly I know it," replied Mr. Wopsle.

"Certainly you know it. Then why didn't you say so at first? Now, I'll ask you another question,"—taking possession of Mr. Wopsle, as if he had a right to him,—"do you know that none of these witnesses have yet been cross-examined?"

Mr. Wopsle was beginning, "I can only say—" when the stranger stopped him.

"What? You won't answer the question, yes or no? Now, I'll try you again." Throwing his finger at him again. "Attend to me. Are you aware, or are you not aware, that none of these witnesses have yet been cross-examined? Come, I only want one word from you. Yes, or no?"

Mr. Wopsle hesitated, and we all began to conceive rather a poor opinion of him.

"Come!" said the stranger, "I'll help you. You don't deserve help, but I'll help you. Look at that paper you hold in your hand. What is it?"

"What is it?" repeated Mr. Wopsle, eyeing it, much at a loss.

"Is it," pursued the stranger in his most sarcastic and suspicious manner, "the printed paper you have just been reading from?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Undoubtedly. Now, turn to that paper, and tell me whether it distinctly states that the prisoner expressly said that his legal advisers instructed him altogether to reserve his defence?"

"I read that just now," Mr. Wopsle pleaded.

"Never mind what you read just now, sir; I don't ask you what you read just now. You may read the Lord's Prayer backwards, if you like,—and, perhaps, have done it before to-day. Turn to the paper. No, no, no my friend; not to the top of the column; you know better than that; to the bottom, to the bottom." (We all began to think Mr. Wopsle full of subterfuge.) "Well? Have you found it?"

"Here it is," said Mr. Wopsle.

"Now, follow that passage with your eye, and tell me whether it distinctly states that the prisoner expressly said that he was instructed by his legal advisers wholly to reserve his defence? Come! Do you make that of it?"

Mr. Wopsle answered, "Those are not the exact words."

"Not the exact words!" repeated the gentleman bitterly. "Is that the exact substance?"

"Yes," said Mr. Wopsle.

"Yes," repeated the stranger, looking round at the rest of the company with his right hand extended towards the witness, Wopsle. "And now I ask you what you say to the conscience of that man who, with that passage before his eyes, can lay his head upon his pillow after having pronounced a fellow-creature guilty, unheard?"

We all began to suspect that Mr. Wopsle was not the man we had thought him, and that he was beginning to be found out.

"And that same man, remember," pursued the gentleman, throwing his finger at Mr. Wopsle heavily,—"that same man might be summoned as a juryman upon this very trial, and, having thus deeply committed himself, might return to the bosom of his family and lay his head upon his pillow, after deliberately swearing that he would well and truly try the issue joined between Our Sovereign Lord the King and the prisoner at the bar, and would a true verdict give according to the evidence, so help him God!"

We were all deeply persuaded that the unfortunate Wopsle had gone too far, and had better stop in his reckless career while there was yet time.

The strange gentleman, with an air of authority not to be disputed, and with a manner expressive of knowing something secret about every one of us that would effectually do for each individual if he chose to disclose it, left the back of the settle, and came into the space between the two settles, in front of the fire, where he remained standing, his left hand in his pocket, and he biting the forefinger of his right.

"From information I have received," said he, looking round at us as we all quailed before him, "I have reason to believe there is a blacksmith among you, by name Joseph—or Joe—Gargery. Which is the man?"

"Here is the man," said Joe.

The strange gentleman beckoned him out of his place, and Joe went.

"You have an apprentice," pursued the stranger, "commonly known as Pip? Is he here?"

"I am here!" I cried.

The stranger did not recognize me, but I recognized him as the gentleman I had met on the stairs, on the occasion of my second visit to Miss Havisham. I had known him the moment I saw him looking over the settle, and now that I stood confronting him with his hand upon my shoulder, I checked off again in detail his large head, his dark complexion, his deep-set eyes, his bushy black eyebrows, his large watch-chain, his strong black dots of beard and whisker, and even the smell of scented soap on his great hand.

"I wish to have a private conference with you two," said he, when he had surveyed me at his leisure. "It will take a little time. Perhaps we had better go to your place of residence. I prefer not to anticipate my communication here; you will impart as much or as little of it as you please to your friends afterwards; I have nothing to do with that."

Amidst a wondering silence, we three walked out of the Jolly Bargemen, and in a wondering silence walked home. While going along, the strange gentleman occasionally looked at me, and occasionally bit the side of his finger. As we neared home, Joe vaguely acknowledging the occasion as an impressive and ceremonious one, went on ahead to open the front door. Our conference was held in the state parlor, which was feebly lighted by one candle.

It began with the strange gentleman's sitting down at the table, drawing the candle to him, and looking over some entries in his pocket-book. He then put up the pocket-book and set the candle a little aside, after peering round it into the darkness at Joe and me, to ascertain which was which.

"My name," he said, "is Jaggers, and I am a lawyer in London. I am pretty well known. I have unusual business to transact with you, and I commence by explaining that it is not of my originating. If my advice had been asked, I should not have been here. It was not asked, and you see me here. What I have to do as the confidential agent of another, I do. No less, no more."

Finding that he could not see us very well from where he sat, he got up, and threw one leg over the back of a chair and leaned upon it; thus having one foot on the seat of the chair, and one foot on the ground.

"Now, Joseph Gargery, I am the bearer of an offer to relieve you of this young fellow your apprentice. You would not object to cancel his indentures at his request and for his good? You would want nothing for so doing?"

"Lord forbid that I should want anything for not standing in Pip's way," said Joe, staring.

"Lord forbidding is pious, but not to the purpose," returned Mr. Jaggers. "The question is, Would you want anything? Do you want anything?"

"The answer is," returned Joe, sternly, "No."

I thought Mr. Jaggers glanced at Joe, as if he considered him a fool for his disinterestedness. But I was too much bewildered between breathless curiosity and surprise, to be sure of it.

"Very well," said Mr. Jaggers. "Recollect the admission you have made, and don't try to go from it presently."

"Who's a going to try?" retorted Joe.

"I don't say anybody is. Do you keep a dog?"

"Yes, I do keep a dog."

"Bear in mind then, that Brag is a good dog, but Holdfast is a better. Bear that in mind, will you?" repeated Mr. Jaggers, shutting his eyes and nodding his head at Joe, as if he were forgiving him something. "Now, I return to this young fellow. And the communication I have got to make is, that he has Great Expectations."

Joe and I gasped, and looked at one another.

"I am instructed to communicate to him," said Mr. Jaggers, throwing his finger at me sideways, "that he will come into a handsome property. Further, that it is the desire of the present possessor of that property, that he be immediately removed from his present sphere of life and from this place, and be brought up as a gentleman,—in a word, as a young fellow of great expectations."

My dream was out; my wild fancy was surpassed by sober reality; Miss Havisham was going to make my fortune on a grand scale.

"Now, Mr. Pip," pursued the lawyer, "I address the rest of what I have to say, to you. You are to understand, first, that it is the request of the person from whom I take my instructions that you always bear the name of Pip. You will have no objection, I dare say, to your great expectations being encumbered with that easy condition. But if you have any objection, this is the time to mention it."

My heart was beating so fast, and there was such a singing in my ears, that I could scarcely stammer I had no objection.

"I should think not! Now you are to understand, secondly, Mr. Pip, that the name of the person who is your liberal benefactor remains a profound secret, until the person chooses to reveal it. I am empowered to mention that it is the intention of the person to reveal it at first hand by word of mouth to yourself. When or where that intention may be carried out, I cannot say; no one can say. It may be years hence. Now, you are distinctly to understand that you are most positively prohibited from making any inquiry on this head, or any allusion or reference, however distant, to any individual whomsoever as the individual, in all the communications you may have with me. If you have a suspicion in your own breast, keep that suspicion in your own breast. It is not the least to the purpose what the reasons of this prohibition are; they may be the strongest and gravest reasons, or they may be mere whim. This is not for you to inquire into. The condition is laid down. Your acceptance of it, and your observance of it as binding, is the only remaining condition that I am charged with, by the person from whom I take my instructions, and for whom I am not otherwise responsible. That person is the person from whom you derive your expectations, and the secret is solely held by that person and by me. Again, not a very difficult condition with which to encumber such a rise in fortune; but if you have any objection to it, this is the time to mention it. Speak out."

Once more, I stammered with difficulty that I had no objection.

"I should think not! Now, Mr. Pip, I have done with stipulations." Though he called me Mr. Pip, and began rather to make up to me, he still could not get rid of a certain air of bullying suspicion; and even now he occasionally shut his eyes and threw his finger at me while he spoke, as much as to express that he knew all kinds of things to my disparagement, if he only chose to mention them. "We come next, to mere details of arrangement. You must know that, although I have used the term 'expectations' more than once, you are not endowed with expectations only. There is already lodged in my hands a sum of money amply sufficient for your suitable education and maintenance. You will please consider me your guardian. Oh!" for I was going to thank him, "I tell you at once, I am paid for my services, or I shouldn't render them. It is considered that you must be better educated, in accordance with your altered position, and that you will be alive to the importance and necessity of at once entering on that advantage."

I said I had always longed for it.

"Never mind what you have always longed for, Mr. Pip," he retorted; "keep to the record. If you long for it now, that's enough. Am I answered that you are ready to be placed at once under some proper tutor? Is that it?"

I stammered yes, that was it.

"Good. Now, your inclinations are to be consulted. I don't think that wise, mind, but it's my trust. Have you ever heard of any tutor whom you would prefer to another?"

I had never heard of any tutor but Biddy and Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt; so, I replied in the negative.

"There is a certain tutor, of whom I have some knowledge, who I think might suit the purpose," said Mr. Jaggers. "I don't recommend him, observe; because I never recommend anybody. The gentleman I speak of is one Mr. Matthew Pocket."

Ah! I caught at the name directly. Miss Havisham's relation. The Matthew whom Mr. and Mrs. Camilla had spoken of. The Matthew whose place was to be at Miss Havisham's head, when she lay dead, in her bride's dress on the bride's table.

"You know the name?" said Mr. Jaggers, looking shrewdly at me, and then shutting up his eyes while he waited for my answer.

My answer was, that I had heard of the name.

"Oh!" said he. "You have heard of the name. But the question is, what do you say of it?"

I said, or tried to say, that I was much obliged to him for his recommendation—

"No, my young friend!" he interrupted, shaking his great head very slowly. "Recollect yourself!"

Not recollecting myself, I began again that I was much obliged to him for his recommendation—

"No, my young friend," he interrupted, shaking his head and frowning and smiling both at once,—"no, no, no; it's very well done, but it won't do; you are too young to fix me with it. Recommendation is not the word, Mr. Pip. Try another."

Correcting myself, I said that I was much obliged to him for his mention of Mr. Matthew Pocket—

"That's more like it!" cried Mr. Jaggers.—And (I added), I would gladly try that gentleman.

"Good. You had better try him in his own house. The way shall be prepared for you, and you can see his son first, who is in London. When will you come to London?"

I said (glancing at Joe, who stood looking on, motionless), that I supposed I could come directly.

"First," said Mr. Jaggers, "you should have some new clothes to come in, and they should not be working-clothes. Say this day week. You'll want some money. Shall I leave you twenty guineas?"

He produced a long purse, with the greatest coolness, and counted them out on the table and pushed them over to me. This was the first time he had taken his leg from the chair. He sat astride of the chair when he had pushed the money over, and sat swinging his purse and eyeing Joe.

"Well, Joseph Gargery? You look dumbfoundered?"

"I am!" said Joe, in a very decided manner.

"It was understood that you wanted nothing for yourself, remember?"

"It were understood," said Joe. "And it are understood. And it ever will be similar according."

"But what," said Mr. Jaggers, swinging his purse,—"what if it was in my instructions to make you a present, as compensation?"

"As compensation what for?" Joe demanded.

"For the loss of his services."

Joe laid his hand upon my shoulder with the touch of a woman. I have often thought him since, like the steam-hammer that can crush a man or pat an egg-shell, in his combination of strength with gentleness. "Pip is that hearty welcome," said Joe, "to go free with his services, to honor and fortun', as no words can tell him. But if you think as Money can make compensation to me for the loss of the little child—what come to the forge—and ever the best of friends!—"

O dear good Joe, whom I was so ready to leave and so unthankful to, I see you again, with your muscular blacksmith's arm before your eyes, and your broad chest heaving, and your voice dying away. O dear good faithful tender Joe, I feel the loving tremble of your hand upon my arm, as solemnly this day as if it had been the rustle of an angel's wing!

But I encouraged Joe at the time. I was lost in the mazes of my future fortunes, and could not retrace the by-paths we had trodden together. I begged Joe to be comforted, for (as he said) we had ever been the best of friends, and (as I said) we ever would be so. Joe scooped his eyes with his disengaged wrist, as if he were bent on gouging himself, but said not another word.

Mr. Jaggers had looked on at this, as one who recognized in Joe the village idiot, and in me his keeper. When it was over, he said, weighing in his hand the purse he had ceased to swing:—

"Now, Joseph Gargery, I warn you this is your last chance. No half measures with me. If you mean to take a present that I have it in charge to make you, speak out, and you shall have it. If on the contrary you mean to say—" Here, to his great amazement, he was stopped by Joe's suddenly working round him with every demonstration of a fell pugilistic purpose.

"Which I meantersay," cried Joe, "that if you come into my place bull-baiting and badgering me, come out! Which I meantersay as sech if you're a man, come on! Which I meantersay that what I say, I meantersay and stand or fall by!"

I drew Joe away, and he immediately became placable; merely stating to me, in an obliging manner and as a polite expostulatory notice to any one whom it might happen to concern, that he were not a going to be bull-baited and badgered in his own place. Mr. Jaggers had risen when Joe demonstrated, and had backed near the door. Without evincing any inclination to come in again, he there delivered his valedictory remarks. They were these.

"Well, Mr. Pip, I think the sooner you leave here—as you are to be a gentleman—the better. Let it stand for this day week, and you shall receive my printed address in the meantime. You can take a hackney-coach at the stage-coach office in London, and come straight to me. Understand, that I express no opinion, one way or other, on the trust I undertake. I am paid for undertaking it, and I do so. Now, understand that, finally. Understand that!"

He was throwing his finger at both of us, and I think would have gone on, but for his seeming to think Joe dangerous, and going off.

Something came into my head which induced me to run after him, as he was going down to the Jolly Bargemen, where he had left a hired carriage.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Jaggers."

"Halloa!" said he, facing round, "what's the matter?"

"I wish to be quite right, Mr. Jaggers, and to keep to your directions; so I thought I had better ask. Would there be any objection to my taking leave of any one I know, about here, before I go away?"

"No," said he, looking as if he hardly understood me.

"I don't mean in the village only, but up town?"

"No," said he. "No objection."

I thanked him and ran home again, and there I found that Joe had already locked the front door and vacated the state parlor, and was seated by the kitchen fire with a hand on each knee, gazing intently at the burning coals. I too sat down before the fire and gazed at the coals, and nothing was said for a long time.

My sister was in her cushioned chair in her corner, and Biddy sat at her needle-work before the fire, and Joe sat next Biddy, and I sat next Joe in the corner opposite my sister. The more I looked into the glowing coals, the more incapable I became of looking at Joe; the longer the silence lasted, the more unable I felt to speak.

At length I got out, "Joe, have you told Biddy?"

"No, Pip," returned Joe, still looking at the fire, and holding his knees tight, as if he had private information that they intended to make off somewhere, "which I left it to yourself, Pip."

"I would rather you told, Joe."

"Pip's a gentleman of fortun' then," said Joe, "and God bless him in it!"

Biddy dropped her work, and looked at me. Joe held his knees and looked at me. I looked at both of them. After a pause, they both heartily congratulated me; but there was a certain touch of sadness in their congratulations that I rather resented.

I took it upon myself to impress Biddy (and through Biddy, Joe) with the grave obligation I considered my friends under, to know nothing and say nothing about the maker of my fortune. It would all come out in good time, I observed, and in the meanwhile nothing was to be said, save that I had come into great expectations from a mysterious patron. Biddy nodded her head thoughtfully at the fire as she took up her work again, and said she would be very particular; and Joe, still detaining his knees, said, "Ay, ay, I'll be ekervally partickler, Pip;" and then they congratulated me again, and went on to express so much wonder at the notion of my being a gentleman that I didn't half like it.

Infinite pains were then taken by Biddy to convey to my sister some idea of what had happened. To the best of my belief, those efforts entirely failed. She laughed and nodded her head a great many times, and even repeated after Biddy, the words "Pip" and "Property." But I doubt if they had more meaning in them than an election cry, and I cannot suggest a darker picture of her state of mind.

I never could have believed it without experience, but as Joe and Biddy became more at their cheerful ease again, I became quite gloomy. Dissatisfied with my fortune, of course I could not be; but it is possible that I may have been, without quite knowing it, dissatisfied with myself.

Any how, I sat with my elbow on my knee and my face upon my hand, looking into the fire, as those two talked about my going away, and about what they should do without me, and all that. And whenever I caught one of them looking at me, though never so pleasantly (and they often looked at me,—particularly Biddy), I felt offended: as if they were expressing some mistrust of me. Though Heaven knows they never did by word or sign.

At those times I would get up and look out at the door; for our kitchen door opened at once upon the night, and stood open on summer evenings to air the room. The very stars to which I then raised my eyes, I am afraid I took to be but poor and humble stars for glittering on the rustic objects among which I had passed my life.

"Saturday night," said I, when we sat at our supper of bread and cheese and beer. "Five more days, and then the day before the day! They'll soon go."

"Yes, Pip," observed Joe, whose voice sounded hollow in his beer-mug. "They'll soon go."

"Soon, soon go," said Biddy.

"I have been thinking, Joe, that when I go down town on Monday, and order my new clothes, I shall tell the tailor that I'll come and put them on there, or that I'll have them sent to Mr. Pumblechook's. It would be very disagreeable to be stared at by all the people here."

"Mr. and Mrs. Hubble might like to see you in your new gen-teel figure too, Pip," said Joe, industriously cutting his bread, with his cheese on it, in the palm of his left hand, and glancing at my untasted supper as if he thought of the time when we used to compare slices. "So might Wopsle. And the Jolly Bargemen might take it as a compliment."

"That's just what I don't want, Joe. They would make such a business of it,—such a coarse and common business,—that I couldn't bear myself."

"Ah, that indeed, Pip!" said Joe. "If you couldn't abear yourself—"

Biddy asked me here, as she sat holding my sister's plate, "Have you thought about when you'll show yourself to Mr. Gargery, and your sister and me? You will show yourself to us; won't you?"

"Biddy," I returned with some resentment, "you are so exceedingly quick that it's difficult to keep up with you."

("She always were quick," observed Joe.)

"If you had waited another moment, Biddy, you would have heard me say that I shall bring my clothes here in a bundle one evening,—most likely on the evening before I go away."

Biddy said no more. Handsomely forgiving her, I soon exchanged an affectionate good night with her and Joe, and went up to bed. When I got into my little room, I sat down and took a long look at it, as a mean little room that I should soon be parted from and raised above, for ever. It was furnished with fresh young remembrances too, and even at the same moment I fell into much the same confused division of mind between it and the better rooms to which I was going, as I had been in so often between the forge and Miss Havisham's, and Biddy and Estella.

The sun had been shining brightly all day on the roof of my attic, and the room was warm. As I put the window open and stood looking out, I saw Joe come slowly forth at the dark door, below, and take a turn or two in the air; and then I saw Biddy come, and bring him a pipe and light it for him. He never smoked so late, and it seemed to hint to me that he wanted comforting, for some reason or other.

He presently stood at the door immediately beneath me, smoking his pipe, and Biddy stood there too, quietly talking to him, and I knew that they talked of me, for I heard my name mentioned in an endearing tone by both of them more than once. I would not have listened for more, if I could have heard more; so I drew away from the window, and sat down in my one chair by the bedside, feeling it very sorrowful and strange that this first night of my bright fortunes should be the loneliest I had ever known.

Looking towards the open window, I saw light wreaths from Joe's pipe floating there, and I fancied it was like a blessing from Joe,—not obtruded on me or paraded before me, but pervading the air we shared together. I put my light out, and crept into bed; and it was an uneasy bed now, and I never slept the old sound sleep in it any more.

Chapter XIX

Morning made a considerable difference in my general prospect of Life, and brightened it so much that it scarcely seemed the same. What lay heaviest on my mind was, the consideration that six days intervened between me and the day of departure; for I could not divest myself of a misgiving that something might happen to London in the meanwhile, and that, when I got there, it would be either greatly deteriorated or clean gone.

Joe and Biddy were very sympathetic and pleasant when I spoke of our approaching separation; but they only referred to it when I did. After breakfast, Joe brought out my indentures from the press in the best parlor, and we put them in the fire, and I felt that I was free. With all the novelty of my emancipation on me, I went to church with Joe, and thought perhaps the clergyman wouldn't have read that about the rich man and the kingdom of Heaven, if he had known all.

After our early dinner, I strolled out alone, purposing to finish off the marshes at once, and get them done with. As I passed the church, I felt (as I had felt during service in the morning) a sublime compassion for the poor creatures who were destined to go there, Sunday after Sunday, all their lives through, and to lie obscurely at last among the low green mounds. I promised myself that I would do something for them one of these days, and formed a plan in outline for bestowing a dinner of roast-beef and plum-pudding, a pint of ale, and a gallon of condescension, upon everybody in the village.

If I had often thought before, with something allied to shame, of my companionship with the fugitive whom I had once seen limping among those graves, what were my thoughts on this Sunday, when the place recalled the wretch, ragged and shivering, with his felon iron and badge! My comfort was, that it happened a long time ago, and that he had doubtless been transported a long way off, and that he was dead to me, and might be veritably dead into the bargain.

No more low, wet grounds, no more dikes and sluices, no more of these grazing cattle,—though they seemed, in their dull manner, to wear a more respectful air now, and to face round, in order that they might stare as long as possible at the possessor of such great expectations,—farewell, monotonous acquaintances of my childhood, henceforth I was for London and greatness; not for smith's work in general, and for you! I made my exultant way to the old Battery, and, lying down there to consider the question whether Miss Havisham intended me for Estella, fell asleep.

When I awoke, I was much surprised to find Joe sitting beside me, smoking his pipe. He greeted me with a cheerful smile on my opening my eyes, and said,—

"As being the last time, Pip, I thought I'd foller."

"And Joe, I am very glad you did so."

"Thankee, Pip."

"You may be sure, dear Joe," I went on, after we had shaken hands, "that I shall never forget you."

"No, no, Pip!" said Joe, in a comfortable tone, "I'm sure of that. Ay, ay, old chap! Bless you, it were only necessary to get it well round in a man's mind, to be certain on it. But it took a bit of time to get it well round, the change come so oncommon plump; didn't it?"

Somehow, I was not best pleased with Joe's being so mightily secure of me. I should have liked him to have betrayed emotion, or to have said, "It does you credit, Pip," or something of that sort. Therefore, I made no remark on Joe's first head; merely saying as to his second, that the tidings had indeed come suddenly, but that I had always wanted to be a gentleman, and had often and often speculated on what I would do, if I were one.

"Have you though?" said Joe. "Astonishing!"

"It's a pity now, Joe," said I, "that you did not get on a little more, when we had our lessons here; isn't it?"

"Well, I don't know," returned Joe. "I'm so awful dull. I'm only master of my own trade. It were always a pity as I was so awful dull; but it's no more of a pity now, than it was—this day twelvemonth—don't you see?"

What I had meant was, that when I came into my property and was able to do something for Joe, it would have been much more agreeable if he had been better qualified for a rise in station. He was so perfectly innocent of my meaning, however, that I thought I would mention it to Biddy in preference.

So, when we had walked home and had had tea, I took Biddy into our little garden by the side of the lane, and, after throwing out in a general way for the elevation of her spirits, that I should never forget her, said I had a favor to ask of her.

"And it is, Biddy," said I, "that you will not omit any opportunity of helping Joe on, a little."

"How helping him on?" asked Biddy, with a steady sort of glance.

"Well! Joe is a dear good fellow,—in fact, I think he is the dearest fellow that ever lived,—but he is rather backward in some things. For instance, Biddy, in his learning and his manners."

Although I was looking at Biddy as I spoke, and although she opened her eyes very wide when I had spoken, she did not look at me.

"O, his manners! won't his manners do then?" asked Biddy, plucking a black-currant leaf.

"My dear Biddy, they do very well here—"

"O! they do very well here?" interrupted Biddy, looking closely at the leaf in her hand.

"Hear me out,—but if I were to remove Joe into a higher sphere, as I shall hope to remove him when I fully come into my property, they would hardly do him justice."

"And don't you think he knows that?" asked Biddy.

It was such a very provoking question (for it had never in the most distant manner occurred to me), that I said, snappishly,—

"Biddy, what do you mean?"

Biddy, having rubbed the leaf to pieces between her hands,—and the smell of a black-currant bush has ever since recalled to me that evening in the little garden by the side of the lane,—said, "Have you never considered that he may be proud?"

"Proud?" I repeated, with disdainful emphasis.

"O! there are many kinds of pride," said Biddy, looking full at me and shaking her head; "pride is not all of one kind—"

"Well? What are you stopping for?" said I.

"Not all of one kind," resumed Biddy. "He may be too proud to let any one take him out of a place that he is competent to fill, and fills well and with respect. To tell you the truth, I think he is; though it sounds bold in me to say so, for you must know him far better than I do."

"Now, Biddy," said I, "I am very sorry to see this in you. I did not expect to see this in you. You are envious, Biddy, and grudging. You are dissatisfied on account of my rise in fortune, and you can't help showing it."

"If you have the heart to think so," returned Biddy, "say so. Say so over and over again, if you have the heart to think so."

"If you have the heart to be so, you mean, Biddy," said I, in a virtuous and superior tone; "don't put it off upon me. I am very sorry to see it, and it's a—it's a bad side of human nature. I did intend to ask you to use any little opportunities you might have after I was gone, of improving dear Joe. But after this I ask you nothing. I am extremely sorry to see this in you, Biddy," I repeated. "It's a—it's a bad side of human nature."

"Whether you scold me or approve of me," returned poor Biddy, "you may equally depend upon my trying to do all that lies in my power, here, at all times. And whatever opinion you take away of me, shall make no difference in my remembrance of you. Yet a gentleman should not be unjust neither," said Biddy, turning away her head.

I again warmly repeated that it was a bad side of human nature (in which sentiment, waiving its application, I have since seen reason to think I was right), and I walked down the little path away from Biddy, and Biddy went into the house, and I went out at the garden gate and took a dejected stroll until supper-time; again feeling it very sorrowful and strange that this, the second night of my bright fortunes, should be as lonely and unsatisfactory as the first.

But, morning once more brightened my view, and I extended my clemency to Biddy, and we dropped the subject. Putting on the best clothes I had, I went into town as early as I could hope to find the shops open, and presented myself before Mr. Trabb, the tailor, who was having his breakfast in the parlor behind his shop, and who did not think it worth his while to come out to me, but called me in to him.

"Well!" said Mr. Trabb, in a hail-fellow-well-met kind of way. "How are you, and what can I do for you?"

Mr. Trabb had sliced his hot roll into three feather-beds, and was slipping butter in between the blankets, and covering it up. He was a prosperous old bachelor, and his open window looked into a prosperous little garden and orchard, and there was a prosperous iron safe let into the wall at the side of his fireplace, and I did not doubt that heaps of his prosperity were put away in it in bags.

"Mr. Trabb," said I, "it's an unpleasant thing to have to mention, because it looks like boasting; but I have come into a handsome property."

A change passed over Mr. Trabb. He forgot the butter in bed, got up from the bedside, and wiped his fingers on the tablecloth, exclaiming, "Lord bless my soul!"

"I am going up to my guardian in London," said I, casually drawing some guineas out of my pocket and looking at them; "and I want a fashionable suit of clothes to go in. I wish to pay for them," I added—otherwise I thought he might only pretend to make them, "with ready money."

"My dear sir," said Mr. Trabb, as he respectfully bent his body, opened his arms, and took the liberty of touching me on the outside of each elbow, "don't hurt me by mentioning that. May I venture to congratulate you? Would you do me the favor of stepping into the shop?"

Mr. Trabb's boy was the most audacious boy in all that country-side. When I had entered he was sweeping the shop, and he had sweetened his labors by sweeping over me. He was still sweeping when I came out into the shop with Mr. Trabb, and he knocked the broom against all possible corners and obstacles, to express (as I understood it) equality with any blacksmith, alive or dead.

"Hold that noise," said Mr. Trabb, with the greatest sternness, "or I'll knock your head off!—Do me the favor to be seated, sir. Now, this," said Mr. Trabb, taking down a roll of cloth, and tiding it out in a flowing manner over the counter, preparatory to getting his hand under it to show the gloss, "is a very sweet article. I can recommend it for your purpose, sir, because it really is extra super. But you shall see some others. Give me Number Four, you!" (To the boy, and with a dreadfully severe stare; foreseeing the danger of that miscreant's brushing me with it, or making some other sign of familiarity.)

Mr. Trabb never removed his stern eye from the boy until he had deposited number four on the counter and was at a safe distance again. Then he commanded him to bring number five, and number eight. "And let me have none of your tricks here," said Mr. Trabb, "or you shall repent it, you young scoundrel, the longest day you have to live."

Mr. Trabb then bent over number four, and in a sort of deferential confidence recommended it to me as a light article for summer wear, an article much in vogue among the nobility and gentry, an article that it would ever be an honor to him to reflect upon a distinguished fellow-townsman's (if he might claim me for a fellow-townsman) having worn. "Are you bringing numbers five and eight, you vagabond," said Mr. Trabb to the boy after that, "or shall I kick you out of the shop and bring them myself?"

I selected the materials for a suit, with the assistance of Mr. Trabb's judgment, and re-entered the parlor to be measured. For although Mr. Trabb had my measure already, and had previously been quite contented with it, he said apologetically that it "wouldn't do under existing circumstances, sir,—wouldn't do at all." So, Mr. Trabb measured and calculated me in the parlor, as if I were an estate and he the finest species of surveyor, and gave himself such a world of trouble that I felt that no suit of clothes could possibly remunerate him for his pains. When he had at last done and had appointed to send the articles to Mr. Pumblechook's on the Thursday evening, he said, with his hand upon the parlor lock, "I know, sir, that London gentlemen cannot be expected to patronize local work, as a rule; but if you would give me a turn now and then in the quality of a townsman, I should greatly esteem it. Good morning, sir, much obliged.—Door!"

The last word was flung at the boy, who had not the least notion what it meant. But I saw him collapse as his master rubbed me out with his hands, and my first decided experience of the stupendous power of money was, that it had morally laid upon his back Trabb's boy.

After this memorable event, I went to the hatter's, and the bootmaker's, and the hosier's, and felt rather like Mother Hubbard's dog whose outfit required the services of so many trades. I also went to the coach-office and took my place for seven o'clock on Saturday morning. It was not necessary to explain everywhere that I had come into a handsome property; but whenever I said anything to that effect, it followed that the officiating tradesman ceased to have his attention diverted through the window by the High Street, and concentrated his mind upon me. When I had ordered everything I wanted, I directed my steps towards Pumblechook's, and, as I approached that gentleman's place of business, I saw him standing at his door.

He was waiting for me with great impatience. He had been out early with the chaise-cart, and had called at the forge and heard the news. He had prepared a collation for me in the Barnwell parlor, and he too ordered his shopman to "come out of the gangway" as my sacred person passed.

"My dear friend," said Mr. Pumblechook, taking me by both hands, when he and I and the collation were alone, "I give you joy of your good fortune. Well deserved, well deserved!"

This was coming to the point, and I thought it a sensible way of expressing himself.

"To think," said Mr. Pumblechook, after snorting admiration at me for some moments, "that I should have been the humble instrument of leading up to this, is a proud reward."

I begged Mr. Pumblechook to remember that nothing was to be ever said or hinted, on that point.

"My dear young friend," said Mr. Pumblechook; "if you will allow me to call you so—"

I murmured "Certainly," and Mr. Pumblechook took me by both hands again, and communicated a movement to his waistcoat, which had an emotional appearance, though it was rather low down, "My dear young friend, rely upon my doing my little all in your absence, by keeping the fact before the mind of Joseph.—Joseph!" said Mr. Pumblechook, in the way of a compassionate adjuration. "Joseph!! Joseph!!!" Thereupon he shook his head and tapped it, expressing his sense of deficiency in Joseph.

"But my dear young friend," said Mr. Pumblechook, "you must be hungry, you must be exhausted. Be seated. Here is a chicken had round from the Boar, here is a tongue had round from the Boar, here's one or two little things had round from the Boar, that I hope you may not despise. But do I," said Mr. Pumblechook, getting up again the moment after he had sat down, "see afore me, him as I ever sported with in his times of happy infancy? And may I—may I—?"

This May I, meant might he shake hands? I consented, and he was fervent, and then sat down again.

"Here is wine," said Mr. Pumblechook. "Let us drink, Thanks to Fortune, and may she ever pick out her favorites with equal judgment! And yet I cannot," said Mr. Pumblechook, getting up again, "see afore me One—and likewise drink to One—without again expressing—May I—may I—?"

I said he might, and he shook hands with me again, and emptied his glass and turned it upside down. I did the same; and if I had turned myself upside down before drinking, the wine could not have gone more direct to my head.

Mr. Pumblechook helped me to the liver wing, and to the best slice of tongue (none of those out-of-the-way No Thoroughfares of Pork now), and took, comparatively speaking, no care of himself at all. "Ah! poultry, poultry! You little thought," said Mr. Pumblechook, apostrophizing the fowl in the dish, "when you was a young fledgling, what was in store for you. You little thought you was to be refreshment beneath this humble roof for one as—Call it a weakness, if you will," said Mr. Pumblechook, getting up again, "but may I? may I—?"

It began to be unnecessary to repeat the form of saying he might, so he did it at once. How he ever did it so often without wounding himself with my knife, I don't know.

"And your sister," he resumed, after a little steady eating, "which had the honor of bringing you up by hand! It's a sad picter, to reflect that she's no longer equal to fully understanding the honor. May—"

I saw he was about to come at me again, and I stopped him.

"We'll drink her health," said I.

"Ah!" cried Mr. Pumblechook, leaning back in his chair, quite flaccid with admiration, "that's the way you know 'em, sir!" (I don't know who Sir was, but he certainly was not I, and there was no third person present); "that's the way you know the noble-minded, sir! Ever forgiving and ever affable. It might," said the servile Pumblechook, putting down his untasted glass in a hurry and getting up again, "to a common person, have the appearance of repeating—but may I—?"

When he had done it, he resumed his seat and drank to my sister. "Let us never be blind," said Mr. Pumblechook, "to her faults of temper, but it is to be hoped she meant well."

At about this time, I began to observe that he was getting flushed in the face; as to myself, I felt all face, steeped in wine and smarting.

I mentioned to Mr. Pumblechook that I wished to have my new clothes sent to his house, and he was ecstatic on my so distinguishing him. I mentioned my reason for desiring to avoid observation in the village, and he lauded it to the skies. There was nobody but himself, he intimated, worthy of my confidence, and—in short, might he? Then he asked me tenderly if I remembered our boyish games at sums, and how we had gone together to have me bound apprentice, and, in effect, how he had ever been my favorite fancy and my chosen friend? If I had taken ten times as many glasses of wine as I had, I should have known that he never had stood in that relation towards me, and should in my heart of hearts have repudiated the idea. Yet for all that, I remember feeling convinced that I had been much mistaken in him, and that he was a sensible, practical, good-hearted prime fellow.

By degrees he fell to reposing such great confidence in me, as to ask my advice in reference to his own affairs. He mentioned that there was an opportunity for a great amalgamation and monopoly of the corn and seed trade on those premises, if enlarged, such as had never occurred before in that or any other neighborhood. What alone was wanting to the realization of a vast fortune, he considered to be More Capital. Those were the two little words, more capital. Now it appeared to him (Pumblechook) that if that capital were got into the business, through a sleeping partner, sir,—which sleeping partner would have nothing to do but walk in, by self or deputy, whenever he pleased, and examine the books,—and walk in twice a year and take his profits away in his pocket, to the tune of fifty per cent,—it appeared to him that that might be an opening for a young gentleman of spirit combined with property, which would be worthy of his attention. But what did I think? He had great confidence in my opinion, and what did I think? I gave it as my opinion. "Wait a bit!" The united vastness and distinctness of this view so struck him, that he no longer asked if he might shake hands with me, but said he really must,—and did.

We drank all the wine, and Mr. Pumblechook pledged himself over and over again to keep Joseph up to the mark (I don't know what mark), and to render me efficient and constant service (I don't know what service). He also made known to me for the first time in my life, and certainly after having kept his secret wonderfully well, that he had always said of me, "That boy is no common boy, and mark me, his fortun' will be no common fortun'." He said with a tearful smile that it was a singular thing to think of now, and I said so too. Finally, I went out into the air, with a dim perception that there was something unwonted in the conduct of the sunshine, and found that I had slumberously got to the turnpike without having taken any account of the road.

There, I was roused by Mr. Pumblechook's hailing me. He was a long way down the sunny street, and was making expressive gestures for me to stop. I stopped, and he came up breathless.

"No, my dear friend," said he, when he had recovered wind for speech. "Not if I can help it. This occasion shall not entirely pass without that affability on your part.—May I, as an old friend and well-wisher? May I?"

We shook hands for the hundredth time at least, and he ordered a young carter out of my way with the greatest indignation. Then, he blessed me and stood waving his hand to me until I had passed the crook in the road; and then I turned into a field and had a long nap under a hedge before I pursued my way home.

I had scant luggage to take with me to London, for little of the little I possessed was adapted to my new station. But I began packing that same afternoon, and wildly packed up things that I knew I should want next morning, in a fiction that there was not a moment to be lost.

So, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, passed; and on Friday morning I went to Mr. Pumblechook's, to put on my new clothes and pay my visit to Miss Havisham. Mr. Pumblechook's own room was given up to me to dress in, and was decorated with clean towels expressly for the event. My clothes were rather a disappointment, of course. Probably every new and eagerly expected garment ever put on since clothes came in, fell a trifle short of the wearer's expectation. But after I had had my new suit on some half an hour, and had gone through an immensity of posturing with Mr. Pumblechook's very limited dressing-glass, in the futile endeavor to see my legs, it seemed to fit me better. It being market morning at a neighboring town some ten miles off, Mr. Pumblechook was not at home. I had not told him exactly when I meant to leave, and was not likely to shake hands with him again before departing. This was all as it should be, and I went out in my new array, fearfully ashamed of having to pass the shopman, and suspicious after all that I was at a personal disadvantage, something like Joe's in his Sunday suit.

I went circuitously to Miss Havisham's by all the back ways, and rang at the bell constrainedly, on account of the stiff long fingers of my gloves. Sarah Pocket came to the gate, and positively reeled back when she saw me so changed; her walnut-shell countenance likewise turned from brown to green and yellow.

"You?" said she. "You? Good gracious! What do you want?"

"I am going to London, Miss Pocket," said I, "and want to say good by to Miss Havisham."

I was not expected, for she left me locked in the yard, while she went to ask if I were to be admitted. After a very short delay, she returned and took me up, staring at me all the way.

Miss Havisham was taking exercise in the room with the long spread table, leaning on her crutch stick. The room was lighted as of yore, and at the sound of our entrance, she stopped and turned. She was then just abreast of the rotted bride-cake.

"Don't go, Sarah," she said. "Well, Pip?"

"I start for London, Miss Havisham, to-morrow," I was exceedingly careful what I said, "and I thought you would kindly not mind my taking leave of you."

"This is a gay figure, Pip," said she, making her crutch stick play round me, as if she, the fairy godmother who had changed me, were bestowing the finishing gift.

"I have come into such good fortune since I saw you last, Miss Havisham," I murmured. "And I am so grateful for it, Miss Havisham!"

"Ay, ay!" said she, looking at the discomfited and envious Sarah, with delight. "I have seen Mr. Jaggers. I have heard about it, Pip. So you go to-morrow?"

"Yes, Miss Havisham."

"And you are adopted by a rich person?"

"Yes, Miss Havisham."

"Not named?"

"No, Miss Havisham."

"And Mr. Jaggers is made your guardian?"

"Yes, Miss Havisham."

She quite gloated on these questions and answers, so keen was her enjoyment of Sarah Pocket's jealous dismay. "Well!" she went on; "you have a promising career before you. Be good—deserve it—and abide by Mr. Jaggers's instructions." She looked at me, and looked at Sarah, and Sarah's countenance wrung out of her watchful face a cruel smile. "Good by, Pip!—you will always keep the name of Pip, you know."

"Yes, Miss Havisham."

"Good by, Pip!"

She stretched out her hand, and I went down on my knee and put it to my lips. I had not considered how I should take leave of her; it came naturally to me at the moment to do this. She looked at Sarah Pocket with triumph in her weird eyes, and so I left my fairy godmother, with both her hands on her crutch stick, standing in the midst of the dimly lighted room beside the rotten bride-cake that was hidden in cobwebs.

Sarah Pocket conducted me down, as if I were a ghost who must be seen out. She could not get over my appearance, and was in the last degree confounded. I said "Good by, Miss Pocket;" but she merely stared, and did not seem collected enough to know that I had spoken. Clear of the house, I made the best of my way back to Pumblechook's, took off my new clothes, made them into a bundle, and went back home in my older dress, carrying it—to speak the truth—much more at my ease too, though I had the bundle to carry.

And now, those six days which were to have run out so slowly, had run out fast and were gone, and to-morrow looked me in the face more steadily than I could look at it. As the six evenings had dwindled away, to five, to four, to three, to two, I had become more and more appreciative of the society of Joe and Biddy. On this last evening, I dressed my self out in my new clothes for their delight, and sat in my splendor until bedtime. We had a hot supper on the occasion, graced by the inevitable roast fowl, and we had some flip to finish with. We were all very low, and none the higher for pretending to be in spirits.

I was to leave our village at five in the morning, carrying my little hand-portmanteau, and I had told Joe that I wished to walk away all alone. I am afraid—sore afraid—that this purpose originated in my sense of the contrast there would be between me and Joe, if we went to the coach together. I had pretended with myself that there was nothing of this taint in the arrangement; but when I went up to my little room on this last night, I felt compelled to admit that it might be so, and had an impulse upon me to go down again and entreat Joe to walk with me in the morning. I did not.

All night there were coaches in my broken sleep, going to wrong places instead of to London, and having in the traces, now dogs, now cats, now pigs, now men,—never horses. Fantastic failures of journeys occupied me until the day dawned and the birds were singing. Then, I got up and partly dressed, and sat at the window to take a last look out, and in taking it fell asleep.

Biddy was astir so early to get my breakfast, that, although I did not sleep at the window an hour, I smelt the smoke of the kitchen fire when I started up with a terrible idea that it must be late in the afternoon. But long after that, and long after I had heard the clinking of the teacups and was quite ready, I wanted the resolution to go down stairs. After all, I remained up there, repeatedly unlocking and unstrapping my small portmanteau and locking and strapping it up again, until Biddy called to me that I was late.

It was a hurried breakfast with no taste in it. I got up from the meal, saying with a sort of briskness, as if it had only just occurred to me, "Well! I suppose I must be off!" and then I kissed my sister who was laughing and nodding and shaking in her usual chair, and kissed Biddy, and threw my arms around Joe's neck. Then I took up my little portmanteau and walked out. The last I saw of them was, when I presently heard a scuffle behind me, and looking back, saw Joe throwing an old shoe after me and Biddy throwing another old shoe. I stopped then, to wave my hat, and dear old Joe waved his strong right arm above his head, crying huskily "Hooroar!" and Biddy put her apron to her face.

I walked away at a good pace, thinking it was easier to go than I had supposed it would be, and reflecting that it would never have done to have had an old shoe thrown after the coach, in sight of all the High Street. I whistled and made nothing of going. But the village was very peaceful and quiet, and the light mists were solemnly rising, as if to show me the world, and I had been so innocent and little there, and all beyond was so unknown and great, that in a moment with a strong heave and sob I broke into tears. It was by the finger-post at the end of the village, and I laid my hand upon it, and said, "Good by, O my dear, dear friend!"

Heaven knows we need never be ashamed of our tears, for they are rain upon the blinding dust of earth, overlying our hard hearts. I was better after I had cried than before,—more sorry, more aware of my own ingratitude, more gentle. If I had cried before, I should have had Joe with me then.

So subdued I was by those tears, and by their breaking out again in the course of the quiet walk, that when I was on the coach, and it was clear of the town, I deliberated with an aching heart whether I would not get down when we changed horses and walk back, and have another evening at home, and a better parting. We changed, and I had not made up my mind, and still reflected for my comfort that it would be quite practicable to get down and walk back, when we changed again. And while I was occupied with these deliberations, I would fancy an exact resemblance to Joe in some man coming along the road towards us, and my heart would beat high.—As if he could possibly be there!

We changed again, and yet again, and it was now too late and too far to go back, and I went on. And the mists had all solemnly risen now, and the world lay spread before me.

This is the end of the first stage of Pip's expectations.

Chapter XX

The journey from our town to the metropolis was a journey of about five hours. It was a little past midday when the four-horse stage-coach by which I was a passenger, got into the ravel of traffic frayed out about the Cross Keys, Wood Street, Cheapside, London.

We Britons had at that time particularly settled that it was treasonable to doubt our having and our being the best of everything: otherwise, while I was scared by the immensity of London, I think I might have had some faint doubts whether it was not rather ugly, crooked, narrow, and dirty.

Mr. Jaggers had duly sent me his address; it was, Little Britain, and he had written after it on his card, "just out of Smithfield, and close by the coach-office." Nevertheless, a hackney-coachman, who seemed to have as many capes to his greasy great-coat as he was years old, packed me up in his coach and hemmed me in with a folding and jingling barrier of steps, as if he were going to take me fifty miles. His getting on his box, which I remember to have been decorated with an old weather-stained pea-green hammercloth moth-eaten into rags, was quite a work of time. It was a wonderful equipage, with six great coronets outside, and ragged things behind for I don't know how many footmen to hold on by, and a harrow below them, to prevent amateur footmen from yielding to the temptation.

I had scarcely had time to enjoy the coach and to think how like a straw-yard it was, and yet how like a rag-shop, and to wonder why the horses' nose-bags were kept inside, when I observed the coachman beginning to get down, as if we were going to stop presently. And stop we presently did, in a gloomy street, at certain offices with an open door, whereon was painted MR. JAGGERS.

"How much?" I asked the coachman.

The coachman answered, "A shilling—unless you wish to make it more."

I naturally said I had no wish to make it more.

"Then it must be a shilling," observed the coachman. "I don't want to get into trouble. I know him!" He darkly closed an eye at Mr. Jaggers's name, and shook his head.

When he had got his shilling, and had in course of time completed the ascent to his box, and had got away (which appeared to relieve his mind), I went into the front office with my little portmanteau in my hand and asked, Was Mr. Jaggers at home?

"He is not," returned the clerk. "He is in Court at present. Am I addressing Mr. Pip?"

I signified that he was addressing Mr. Pip.

"Mr. Jaggers left word, would you wait in his room. He couldn't say how long he might be, having a case on. But it stands to reason, his time being valuable, that he won't be longer than he can help."

With those words, the clerk opened a door, and ushered me into an inner chamber at the back. Here, we found a gentleman with one eye, in a velveteen suit and knee-breeches, who wiped his nose with his sleeve on being interrupted in the perusal of the newspaper.

"Go and wait outside, Mike," said the clerk.

I began to say that I hoped I was not interrupting, when the clerk shoved this gentleman out with as little ceremony as I ever saw used, and tossing his fur cap out after him, left me alone.

Mr. Jaggers's room was lighted by a skylight only, and was a most dismal place; the skylight, eccentrically pitched like a broken head, and the distorted adjoining houses looking as if they had twisted themselves to peep down at me through it. There were not so many papers about, as I should have expected to see; and there were some odd objects about, that I should not have expected to see,—such as an old rusty pistol, a sword in a scabbard, several strange-looking boxes and packages, and two dreadful casts on a shelf, of faces peculiarly swollen, and twitchy about the nose. Mr. Jaggers's own high-backed chair was of deadly black horsehair, with rows of brass nails round it, like a coffin; and I fancied I could see how he leaned back in it, and bit his forefinger at the clients. The room was but small, and the clients seemed to have had a habit of backing up against the wall; the wall, especially opposite to Mr. Jaggers's chair, being greasy with shoulders. I recalled, too, that the one-eyed gentleman had shuffled forth against the wall when I was the innocent cause of his being turned out.

I sat down in the cliental chair placed over against Mr. Jaggers's chair, and became fascinated by the dismal atmosphere of the place. I called to mind that the clerk had the same air of knowing something to everybody else's disadvantage, as his master had. I wondered how many other clerks there were up-stairs, and whether they all claimed to have the same detrimental mastery of their fellow-creatures. I wondered what was the history of all the odd litter about the room, and how it came there. I wondered whether the two swollen faces were of Mr. Jaggers's family, and, if he were so unfortunate as to have had a pair of such ill-looking relations, why he stuck them on that dusty perch for the blacks and flies to settle on, instead of giving them a place at home. Of course I had no experience of a London summer day, and my spirits may have been oppressed by the hot exhausted air, and by the dust and grit that lay thick on everything. But I sat wondering and waiting in Mr. Jaggers's close room, until I really could not bear the two casts on the shelf above Mr. Jaggers's chair, and got up and went out.

When I told the clerk that I would take a turn in the air while I waited, he advised me to go round the corner and I should come into Smithfield. So I came into Smithfield; and the shameful place, being all asmear with filth and fat and blood and foam, seemed to stick to me. So, I rubbed it off with all possible speed by turning into a street where I saw the great black dome of Saint Paul's bulging at me from behind a grim stone building which a bystander said was Newgate Prison. Following the wall of the jail, I found the roadway covered with straw to deaden the noise of passing vehicles; and from this, and from the quantity of people standing about smelling strongly of spirits and beer, I inferred that the trials were on.

While I looked about me here, an exceedingly dirty and partially drunk minister of justice asked me if I would like to step in and hear a trial or so: informing me that he could give me a front place for half a crown, whence I should command a full view of the Lord Chief Justice in his wig and robes,—mentioning that awful personage like waxwork, and presently offering him at the reduced price of eighteen-pence. As I declined the proposal on the plea of an appointment, he was so good as to take me into a yard and show me where the gallows was kept, and also where people were publicly whipped, and then he showed me the Debtors' Door, out of which culprits came to be hanged; heightening the interest of that dreadful portal by giving me to understand that "four on 'em" would come out at that door the day after to-morrow at eight in the morning, to be killed in a row. This was horrible, and gave me a sickening idea of London; the more so as the Lord Chief Justice's proprietor wore (from his hat down to his boots and up again to his pocket-handkerchief inclusive) mildewed clothes which had evidently not belonged to him originally, and which I took it into my head he had bought cheap of the executioner. Under these circumstances I thought myself well rid of him for a shilling.

I dropped into the office to ask if Mr. Jaggers had come in yet, and I found he had not, and I strolled out again. This time, I made the tour of Little Britain, and turned into Bartholomew Close; and now I became aware that other people were waiting about for Mr. Jaggers, as well as I. There were two men of secret appearance lounging in Bartholomew Close, and thoughtfully fitting their feet into the cracks of the pavement as they talked together, one of whom said to the other when they first passed me, that "Jaggers would do it if it was to be done." There was a knot of three men and two women standing at a corner, and one of the women was crying on her dirty shawl, and the other comforted her by saying, as she pulled her own shawl over her shoulders, "Jaggers is for him, 'Melia, and what more could you have?" There was a red-eyed little Jew who came into the Close while I was loitering there, in company with a second little Jew whom he sent upon an errand; and while the messenger was gone, I remarked this Jew, who was of a highly excitable temperament, performing a jig of anxiety under a lamp-post and accompanying himself, in a kind of frenzy, with the words, "O Jaggerth, Jaggerth, Jaggerth! all otherth ith Cag-Maggerth, give me Jaggerth!" These testimonies to the popularity of my guardian made a deep impression on me, and I admired and wondered more than ever.

At length, as I was looking out at the iron gate of Bartholomew Close into Little Britain, I saw Mr. Jaggers coming across the road towards me. All the others who were waiting saw him at the same time, and there was quite a rush at him. Mr. Jaggers, putting a hand on my shoulder and walking me on at his side without saying anything to me, addressed himself to his followers.

First, he took the two secret men.

"Now, I have nothing to say to you," said Mr. Jaggers, throwing his finger at them. "I want to know no more than I know. As to the result, it's a toss-up. I told you from the first it was a toss-up. Have you paid Wemmick?"

"We made the money up this morning, sir," said one of the men, submissively, while the other perused Mr. Jaggers's face.

"I don't ask you when you made it up, or where, or whether you made it up at all. Has Wemmick got it?"

"Yes, sir," said both the men together.

"Very well; then you may go. Now, I won't have it!" said Mr Jaggers, waving his hand at them to put them behind him. "If you say a word to me, I'll throw up the case."

"We thought, Mr. Jaggers—" one of the men began, pulling off his hat.

"That's what I told you not to do," said Mr. Jaggers. "You thought! I think for you; that's enough for you. If I want you, I know where to find you; I don't want you to find me. Now I won't have it. I won't hear a word."

The two men looked at one another as Mr. Jaggers waved them behind again, and humbly fell back and were heard no more.

"And now you!" said Mr. Jaggers, suddenly stopping, and turning on the two women with the shawls, from whom the three men had meekly separated,—"Oh! Amelia, is it?"

"Yes, Mr. Jaggers."

"And do you remember," retorted Mr. Jaggers, "that but for me you wouldn't be here and couldn't be here?"

"O yes, sir!" exclaimed both women together. "Lord bless you, sir, well we knows that!"

"Then why," said Mr. Jaggers, "do you come here?"

"My Bill, sir!" the crying woman pleaded.

"Now, I tell you what!" said Mr. Jaggers. "Once for all. If you don't know that your Bill's in good hands, I know it. And if you come here bothering about your Bill, I'll make an example of both your Bill and you, and let him slip through my fingers. Have you paid Wemmick?"

"O yes, sir! Every farden."

"Very well. Then you have done all you have got to do. Say another word—one single word—and Wemmick shall give you your money back."

This terrible threat caused the two women to fall off immediately. No one remained now but the excitable Jew, who had already raised the skirts of Mr. Jaggers's coat to his lips several times.

"I don't know this man!" said Mr. Jaggers, in the same devastating strain: "What does this fellow want?"

"Ma thear Mithter Jaggerth. Hown brother to Habraham Latharuth?"

"Who's he?" said Mr. Jaggers. "Let go of my coat."

The suitor, kissing the hem of the garment again before relinquishing it, replied, "Habraham Latharuth, on thuthpithion of plate."

"You're too late," said Mr. Jaggers. "I am over the way."

"Holy father, Mithter Jaggerth!" cried my excitable acquaintance, turning white, "don't thay you're again Habraham Latharuth!"

"I am," said Mr. Jaggers, "and there's an end of it. Get out of the way."

"Mithter Jaggerth! Half a moment! My hown cuthen'th gone to Mithter Wemmick at thith prethent minute, to hoffer him hany termth. Mithter Jaggerth! Half a quarter of a moment! If you'd have the condethenthun to be bought off from the t'other thide—at hany thuperior prithe!—money no object!—Mithter Jaggerth—Mithter—!"

My guardian threw his supplicant off with supreme indifference, and left him dancing on the pavement as if it were red hot. Without further interruption, we reached the front office, where we found the clerk and the man in velveteen with the fur cap.

"Here's Mike," said the clerk, getting down from his stool, and approaching Mr. Jaggers confidentially.

"Oh!" said Mr. Jaggers, turning to the man, who was pulling a lock of hair in the middle of his forehead, like the Bull in Cock Robin pulling at the bell-rope; "your man comes on this afternoon. Well?"

"Well, Mas'r Jaggers," returned Mike, in the voice of a sufferer from a constitutional cold; "arter a deal o' trouble, I've found one, sir, as might do."

"What is he prepared to swear?"

"Well, Mas'r Jaggers," said Mike, wiping his nose on his fur cap this time; "in a general way, anythink."

Mr. Jaggers suddenly became most irate. "Now, I warned you before," said he, throwing his forefinger at the terrified client, "that if you ever presumed to talk in that way here, I'd make an example of you. You infernal scoundrel, how dare you tell ME that?"

The client looked scared, but bewildered too, as if he were unconscious what he had done.

"Spooney!" said the clerk, in a low voice, giving him a stir with his elbow. "Soft Head! Need you say it face to face?"

"Now, I ask you, you blundering booby," said my guardian, very sternly, "once more and for the last time, what the man you have brought here is prepared to swear?"

Mike looked hard at my guardian, as if he were trying to learn a lesson from his face, and slowly replied, "Ayther to character, or to having been in his company and never left him all the night in question."

"Now, be careful. In what station of life is this man?"

Mike looked at his cap, and looked at the floor, and looked at the ceiling, and looked at the clerk, and even looked at me, before beginning to reply in a nervous manner, "We've dressed him up like—" when my guardian blustered out,—

"What? You WILL, will you?"

("Spooney!" added the clerk again, with another stir.)

After some helpless casting about, Mike brightened and began again:—

"He is dressed like a 'spectable pieman. A sort of a pastry-cook."

"Is he here?" asked my guardian.

"I left him," said Mike, "a setting on some doorsteps round the corner."

"Take him past that window, and let me see him."

The window indicated was the office window. We all three went to it, behind the wire blind, and presently saw the client go by in an accidental manner, with a murderous-looking tall individual, in a short suit of white linen and a paper cap. This guileless confectioner was not by any means sober, and had a black eye in the green stage of recovery, which was painted over.

"Tell him to take his witness away directly," said my guardian to the clerk, in extreme disgust, "and ask him what he means by bringing such a fellow as that."

My guardian then took me into his own room, and while he lunched, standing, from a sandwich-box and a pocket-flask of sherry (he seemed to bully his very sandwich as he ate it), informed me what arrangements he had made for me. I was to go to "Barnard's Inn," to young Mr. Pocket's rooms, where a bed had been sent in for my accommodation; I was to remain with young Mr. Pocket until Monday; on Monday I was to go with him to his father's house on a visit, that I might try how I liked it. Also, I was told what my allowance was to be,—it was a very liberal one,—and had handed to me from one of my guardian's drawers, the cards of certain tradesmen with whom I was to deal for all kinds of clothes, and such other things as I could in reason want. "You will find your credit good, Mr. Pip," said my guardian, whose flask of sherry smelt like a whole caskful, as he hastily refreshed himself, "but I shall by this means be able to check your bills, and to pull you up if I find you outrunning the constable. Of course you'll go wrong somehow, but that's no fault of mine."

After I had pondered a little over this encouraging sentiment, I asked Mr. Jaggers if I could send for a coach? He said it was not worth while, I was so near my destination; Wemmick should walk round with me, if I pleased.

I then found that Wemmick was the clerk in the next room. Another clerk was rung down from up stairs to take his place while he was out, and I accompanied him into the street, after shaking hands with my guardian. We found a new set of people lingering outside, but Wemmick made a way among them by saying coolly yet decisively, "I tell you it's no use; he won't have a word to say to one of you;" and we soon got clear of them, and went on side by side.

Chapter XXI

Casting my eyes on Mr. Wemmick as we went along, to see what he was like in the light of day, I found him to be a dry man, rather short in stature, with a square wooden face, whose expression seemed to have been imperfectly chipped out with a dull-edged chisel. There were some marks in it that might have been dimples, if the material had been softer and the instrument finer, but which, as it was, were only dints. The chisel had made three or four of these attempts at embellishment over his nose, but had given them up without an effort to smooth them off. I judged him to be a bachelor from the frayed condition of his linen, and he appeared to have sustained a good many bereavements; for he wore at least four mourning rings, besides a brooch representing a lady and a weeping willow at a tomb with an urn on it. I noticed, too, that several rings and seals hung at his watch-chain, as if he were quite laden with remembrances of departed friends. He had glittering eyes,—small, keen, and black,—and thin wide mottled lips. He had had them, to the best of my belief, from forty to fifty years.

"So you were never in London before?" said Mr. Wemmick to me.

"No," said I.

"I was new here once," said Mr. Wemmick. "Rum to think of now!"

"You are well acquainted with it now?"

"Why, yes," said Mr. Wemmick. "I know the moves of it."

"Is it a very wicked place?" I asked, more for the sake of saying something than for information.

"You may get cheated, robbed, and murdered in London. But there are plenty of people anywhere, who'll do that for you."

"If there is bad blood between you and them," said I, to soften it off a little.

"O! I don't know about bad blood," returned Mr. Wemmick; "there's not much bad blood about. They'll do it, if there's anything to be got by it."

"That makes it worse."

"You think so?" returned Mr. Wemmick. "Much about the same, I should say."

He wore his hat on the back of his head, and looked straight before him: walking in a self-contained way as if there were nothing in the streets to claim his attention. His mouth was such a post-office of a mouth that he had a mechanical appearance of smiling. We had got to the top of Holborn Hill before I knew that it was merely a mechanical appearance, and that he was not smiling at all.

"Do you know where Mr. Matthew Pocket lives?" I asked Mr. Wemmick.

"Yes," said he, nodding in the direction. "At Hammersmith, west of London."

"Is that far?"

"Well! Say five miles."

"Do you know him?"

"Why, you're a regular cross-examiner!" said Mr. Wemmick, looking at me with an approving air. "Yes, I know him. I know him!"

There was an air of toleration or depreciation about his utterance of these words that rather depressed me; and I was still looking sideways at his block of a face in search of any encouraging note to the text, when he said here we were at Barnard's Inn. My depression was not alleviated by the announcement, for, I had supposed that establishment to be an hotel kept by Mr. Barnard, to which the Blue Boar in our town was a mere public-house. Whereas I now found Barnard to be a disembodied spirit, or a fiction, and his inn the dingiest collection of shabby buildings ever squeezed together in a rank corner as a club for Tom-cats.

We entered this haven through a wicket-gate, and were disgorged by an introductory passage into a melancholy little square that looked to me like a flat burying-ground. I thought it had the most dismal trees in it, and the most dismal sparrows, and the most dismal cats, and the most dismal houses (in number half a dozen or so), that I had ever seen. I thought the windows of the sets of chambers into which those houses were divided were in every stage of dilapidated blind and curtain, crippled flower-pot, cracked glass, dusty decay, and miserable makeshift; while To Let, To Let, To Let, glared at me from empty rooms, as if no new wretches ever came there, and the vengeance of the soul of Barnard were being slowly appeased by the gradual suicide of the present occupants and their unholy interment under the gravel. A frowzy mourning of soot and smoke attired this forlorn creation of Barnard, and it had strewn ashes on its head, and was undergoing penance and humiliation as a mere dust-hole. Thus far my sense of sight; while dry rot and wet rot and all the silent rots that rot in neglected roof and cellar,—rot of rat and mouse and bug and coaching-stables near at hand besides—addressed themselves faintly to my sense of smell, and moaned, "Try Barnard's Mixture."

So imperfect was this realization of the first of my great expectations, that I looked in dismay at Mr. Wemmick. "Ah!" said he, mistaking me; "the retirement reminds you of the country. So it does me."

He led me into a corner and conducted me up a flight of stairs,—which appeared to me to be slowly collapsing into sawdust, so that one of those days the upper lodgers would look out at their doors and find themselves without the means of coming down,—to a set of chambers on the top floor. MR. POCKET, JUN., was painted on the door, and there was a label on the letter-box, "Return shortly."

"He hardly thought you'd come so soon," Mr. Wemmick explained. "You don't want me any more?"

"No, thank you," said I.

"As I keep the cash," Mr. Wemmick observed, "we shall most likely meet pretty often. Good day."

"Good day."

I put out my hand, and Mr. Wemmick at first looked at it as if he thought I wanted something. Then he looked at me, and said, correcting himself,—

"To be sure! Yes. You're in the habit of shaking hands?"

I was rather confused, thinking it must be out of the London fashion, but said yes.

"I have got so out of it!" said Mr. Wemmick,—"except at last. Very glad, I'm sure, to make your acquaintance. Good day!"

When we had shaken hands and he was gone, I opened the staircase window and had nearly beheaded myself, for, the lines had rotted away, and it came down like the guillotine. Happily it was so quick that I had not put my head out. After this escape, I was content to take a foggy view of the Inn through the window's encrusting dirt, and to stand dolefully looking out, saying to myself that London was decidedly overrated.

Mr. Pocket, Junior's, idea of Shortly was not mine, for I had nearly maddened myself with looking out for half an hour, and had written my name with my finger several times in the dirt of every pane in the window, before I heard footsteps on the stairs. Gradually there arose before me the hat, head, neckcloth, waistcoat, trousers, boots, of a member of society of about my own standing. He had a paper-bag under each arm and a pottle of strawberries in one hand, and was out of breath.

"Mr. Pip?" said he.

"Mr. Pocket?" said I.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "I am extremely sorry; but I knew there was a coach from your part of the country at midday, and I thought you would come by that one. The fact is, I have been out on your account,—not that that is any excuse,—for I thought, coming from the country, you might like a little fruit after dinner, and I went to Covent Garden Market to get it good."

For a reason that I had, I felt as if my eyes would start out of my head. I acknowledged his attention incoherently, and began to think this was a dream.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Pocket, Junior. "This door sticks so!"

As he was fast making jam of his fruit by wrestling with the door while the paper-bags were under his arms, I begged him to allow me to hold them. He relinquished them with an agreeable smile, and combated with the door as if it were a wild beast. It yielded so suddenly at last, that he staggered back upon me, and I staggered back upon the opposite door, and we both laughed. But still I felt as if my eyes must start out of my head, and as if this must be a dream.

"Pray come in," said Mr. Pocket, Junior. "Allow me to lead the way. I am rather bare here, but I hope you'll be able to make out tolerably well till Monday. My father thought you would get on more agreeably through to-morrow with me than with him, and might like to take a walk about London. I am sure I shall be very happy to show London to you. As to our table, you won't find that bad, I hope, for it will be supplied from our coffee-house here, and (it is only right I should add) at your expense, such being Mr. Jaggers's directions. As to our lodging, it's not by any means splendid, because I have my own bread to earn, and my father hasn't anything to give me, and I shouldn't be willing to take it, if he had. This is our sitting-room,—just such chairs and tables and carpet and so forth, you see, as they could spare from home. You mustn't give me credit for the tablecloth and spoons and castors, because they come for you from the coffee-house. This is my little bedroom; rather musty, but Barnard's is musty. This is your bedroom; the furniture's hired for the occasion, but I trust it will answer the purpose; if you should want anything, I'll go and fetch it. The chambers are retired, and we shall be alone together, but we shan't fight, I dare say. But dear me, I beg your pardon, you're holding the fruit all this time. Pray let me take these bags from you. I am quite ashamed."

As I stood opposite to Mr. Pocket, Junior, delivering him the bags, One, Two, I saw the starting appearance come into his own eyes that I knew to be in mine, and he said, falling back,—

"Lord bless me, you're the prowling boy!"

"And you," said I, "are the pale young gentleman!"

Chapter XXII

The pale young gentleman and I stood contemplating one another in Barnard's Inn, until we both burst out laughing. "The idea of its being you!" said he. "The idea of its being you!" said I. And then we contemplated one another afresh, and laughed again. "Well!" said the pale young gentleman, reaching out his hand good-humoredly, "it's all over now, I hope, and it will be magnanimous in you if you'll forgive me for having knocked you about so."

I derived from this speech that Mr. Herbert Pocket (for Herbert was the pale young gentleman's name) still rather confounded his intention with his execution. But I made a modest reply, and we shook hands warmly.

"You hadn't come into your good fortune at that time?" said Herbert Pocket.

"No," said I.

"No," he acquiesced: "I heard it had happened very lately. I was rather on the lookout for good fortune then."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. Miss Havisham had sent for me, to see if she could take a fancy to me. But she couldn't,—at all events, she didn't."

I thought it polite to remark that I was surprised to hear that.

"Bad taste," said Herbert, laughing, "but a fact. Yes, she had sent for me on a trial visit, and if I had come out of it successfully, I suppose I should have been provided for; perhaps I should have been what-you-may-called it to Estella."

"What's that?" I asked, with sudden gravity.

He was arranging his fruit in plates while we talked, which divided his attention, and was the cause of his having made this lapse of a word. "Affianced," he explained, still busy with the fruit. "Betrothed. Engaged. What's-his-named. Any word of that sort."

"How did you bear your disappointment?" I asked.

"Pooh!" said he, "I didn't care much for it. She's a Tartar."

"Miss Havisham?"

"I don't say no to that, but I meant Estella. That girl's hard and haughty and capricious to the last degree, and has been brought up by Miss

Havisham to wreak revenge on all the male sex."

"What relation is she to Miss Havisham?"

"None," said he. "Only adopted."

"Why should she wreak revenge on all the male sex? What revenge?"

"Lord, Mr. Pip!" said he. "Don't you know?"

"No," said I.

"Dear me! It's quite a story, and shall be saved till dinner-time. And now let me take the liberty of asking you a question. How did you come there, that day?"

I told him, and he was attentive until I had finished, and then burst out laughing again, and asked me if I was sore afterwards? I didn't ask him if he was, for my conviction on that point was perfectly established.

"Mr. Jaggers is your guardian, I understand?" he went on.

"Yes."

"You know he is Miss Havisham's man of business and solicitor, and has her confidence when nobody else has?"

This was bringing me (I felt) towards dangerous ground. I answered with a constraint I made no attempt to disguise, that I had seen Mr. Jaggers in Miss Havisham's house on the very day of our combat, but never at any other time, and that I believed he had no recollection of having ever seen me there.

"He was so obliging as to suggest my father for your tutor, and he called on my father to propose it. Of course he knew about my father from his connection with Miss Havisham. My father is Miss Havisham's cousin; not that that implies familiar intercourse between them, for he is a bad courtier and will not propitiate her."

Herbert Pocket had a frank and easy way with him that was very taking. I had never seen any one then, and I have never seen any one since, who more strongly expressed to me, in every look and tone, a natural incapacity to do anything secret and mean. There was something wonderfully hopeful about his general air, and something that at the same time whispered to me he would never be very successful or rich. I don't know how this was. I became imbued with the notion on that first occasion before we sat down to dinner, but I cannot define by what means.

He was still a pale young gentleman, and had a certain conquered languor about him in the midst of his spirits and briskness, that did not seem indicative of natural strength. He had not a handsome face, but it was better than handsome: being extremely amiable and cheerful. His figure was a little ungainly, as in the days when my knuckles had taken such liberties with it, but it looked as if it would always be light and young. Whether Mr. Trabb's local work would have sat more gracefully on him than on me, may be a question; but I am conscious that he carried off his rather old clothes much better than I carried off my new suit.

As he was so communicative, I felt that reserve on my part would be a bad return unsuited to our years. I therefore told him my small story, and laid stress on my being forbidden to inquire who my benefactor was. I further mentioned that as I had been brought up a blacksmith in a country place, and knew very little of the ways of politeness, I would take it as a great kindness in him if he would give me a hint whenever he saw me at a loss or going wrong.

"With pleasure," said he, "though I venture to prophesy that you'll want very few hints. I dare say we shall be often together, and I should like to banish any needless restraint between us. Will you do me the favour to begin at once to call me by my Christian name, Herbert?"

I thanked him and said I would. I informed him in exchange that my Christian name was Philip.

"I don't take to Philip," said he, smiling, "for it sounds like a moral boy out of the spelling-book, who was so lazy that he fell into a pond, or so fat that he couldn't see out of his eyes, or so avaricious that he locked up his cake till the mice ate it, or so determined to go a bird's-nesting that he got himself eaten by bears who lived handy in the neighborhood. I tell you what I should like. We are so harmonious, and you have been a blacksmith,—-would you mind it?"

"I shouldn't mind anything that you propose," I answered, "but I don't understand you."

"Would you mind Handel for a familiar name? There's a charming piece of music by Handel, called the Harmonious Blacksmith."

"I should like it very much."

"Then, my dear Handel," said he, turning round as the door opened, "here is the dinner, and I must beg of you to take the top of the table, because the dinner is of your providing."

This I would not hear of, so he took the top, and I faced him. It was a nice little dinner,—seemed to me then a very Lord Mayor's Feast,—and it acquired additional relish from being eaten under those independent circumstances, with no old people by, and with London all around us. This again was heightened by a certain gypsy character that set the banquet off; for while the table was, as Mr. Pumblechook might have said, the lap of luxury,—being entirely furnished forth from the coffee-house,—the circumjacent region of sitting-room was of a comparatively pastureless and shifty character; imposing on the waiter the wandering habits of putting the covers on the floor (where he fell over them), the melted butter in the arm-chair, the bread on the bookshelves, the cheese in the coal-scuttle, and the boiled fowl into my bed in the next room,—where I found much of its parsley and butter in a state of congelation when I retired for the night. All this made the feast delightful, and when the waiter was not there to watch me, my pleasure was without alloy.

We had made some progress in the dinner, when I reminded Herbert of his promise to tell me about Miss Havisham.

"True," he replied. "I'll redeem it at once. Let me introduce the topic, Handel, by mentioning that in London it is not the custom to put the knife in the mouth,—for fear of accidents,—and that while the fork is reserved for that use, it is not put further in than necessary. It is scarcely worth mentioning, only it's as well to do as other people do. Also, the spoon is not generally used over-hand, but under. This has two advantages. You get at your mouth better (which after all is the object), and you save a good deal of the attitude of opening oysters, on the part of the right elbow."

He offered these friendly suggestions in such a lively way, that we both laughed and I scarcely blushed.

"Now," he pursued, "concerning Miss Havisham. Miss Havisham, you must know, was a spoilt child. Her mother died when she was a baby, and her father denied her nothing. Her father was a country gentleman down in your part of the world, and was a brewer. I don't know why it should be a crack thing to be a brewer; but it is indisputable that while you cannot possibly be genteel and bake, you may be as genteel as never was and brew. You see it every day."

"Yet a gentleman may not keep a public-house; may he?" said I.

"Not on any account," returned Herbert; "but a public-house may keep a gentleman. Well! Mr. Havisham was very rich and very proud. So was his daughter."

"Miss Havisham was an only child?" I hazarded.

"Stop a moment, I am coming to that. No, she was not an only child; she had a half-brother. Her father privately married again—his cook, I rather think."

"I thought he was proud," said I.

"My good Handel, so he was. He married his second wife privately, because he was proud, and in course of time she died. When she was dead, I apprehend he first told his daughter what he had done, and then the son became a part of the family, residing in the house you are acquainted with. As the son grew a young man, he turned out riotous, extravagant, undutiful,—altogether bad. At last his father disinherited him; but he softened when he was dying, and left him well off, though not nearly so well off as Miss Havisham.—Take another glass of wine, and excuse my mentioning that society as a body does not expect one to be so strictly conscientious in emptying one's glass, as to turn it bottom upwards with the rim on one's nose."

I had been doing this, in an excess of attention to his recital. I thanked him, and apologized. He said, "Not at all," and resumed.

"Miss Havisham was now an heiress, and you may suppose was looked after as a great match. Her half-brother had now ample means again, but what with debts and what with new madness wasted them most fearfully again. There were stronger differences between him and her than there had been between him and his father, and it is suspected that he cherished a deep and mortal grudge against her as having influenced the father's anger. Now, I come to the cruel part of the story,—merely breaking off, my dear Handel, to remark that a dinner-napkin will not go into a tumbler."

Why I was trying to pack mine into my tumbler, I am wholly unable to say. I only know that I found myself, with a perseverance worthy of a much better cause, making the most strenuous exertions to compress it within those limits. Again I thanked him and apologized, and again he said in the cheerfullest manner, "Not at all, I am sure!" and resumed.

"There appeared upon the scene—say at the races, or the public balls, or anywhere else you like—a certain man, who made love to Miss Havisham. I never saw him (for this happened five-and-twenty years ago, before you and I were, Handel), but I have heard my father mention that he was a showy man, and the kind of man for the purpose. But that he was not to be, without ignorance or prejudice, mistaken for a gentleman, my father most strongly asseverates; because it is a principle of his that no man who was not a true gentleman at heart ever was, since the world began, a true gentleman in manner. He says, no varnish can hide the grain of the wood; and that the more varnish you put on, the more the grain will express itself. Well! This man pursued Miss Havisham closely, and professed to be devoted to her. I believe she had not shown much susceptibility up to that time; but all the susceptibility she possessed certainly came out then, and she passionately loved him. There is no doubt that she perfectly idolized him. He practised on her affection in that systematic way, that he got great sums of money from her, and he induced her to buy her brother out of a share in the brewery (which had been weakly left him by his father) at an immense price, on the plea that when he was her husband he must hold and manage it all. Your guardian was not at that time in Miss Havisham's counsels, and she was too haughty and too much in love to be advised by any one. Her relations were poor and scheming, with the exception of my father; he was poor enough, but not time-serving or jealous. The only independent one among them, he warned her that she was doing too much for this man, and was placing herself too unreservedly in his power. She took the first opportunity of angrily ordering my father out of the house, in his presence, and my father has never seen her since."

I thought of her having said, "Matthew will come and see me at last when I am laid dead upon that table;" and I asked Herbert whether his father was so inveterate against her?

"It's not that," said he, "but she charged him, in the presence of her intended husband, with being disappointed in the hope of fawning upon her for his own advancement, and, if he were to go to her now, it would look true—even to him—and even to her. To return to the man and make an end of him. The marriage day was fixed, the wedding dresses were bought, the wedding tour was planned out, the wedding guests were invited. The day came, but not the bridegroom. He wrote her a letter—"

"Which she received," I struck in, "when she was dressing for her marriage? At twenty minutes to nine?"

"At the hour and minute," said Herbert, nodding, "at which she afterwards stopped all the clocks. What was in it, further than that it most heartlessly broke the marriage off, I can't tell you, because I don't know. When she recovered from a bad illness that she had, she laid the whole place waste, as you have seen it, and she has never since looked upon the light of day."

"Is that all the story?" I asked, after considering it.

"All I know of it; and indeed I only know so much, through piecing it out for myself; for my father always avoids it, and, even when Miss Havisham invited me to go there, told me no more of it than it was absolutely requisite I should understand. But I have forgotten one thing. It has been supposed that the man to whom she gave her misplaced confidence acted throughout in concert with her half-brother; that it was a conspiracy between them; and that they shared the profits."

"I wonder he didn't marry her and get all the property," said I.

"He may have been married already, and her cruel mortification may have been a part of her half-brother's scheme," said Herbert. "Mind! I don't know that."

"What became of the two men?" I asked, after again considering the subject.

"They fell into deeper shame and degradation—if there can be deeper—and ruin."

"Are they alive now?"

"I don't know."

"You said just now that Estella was not related to Miss Havisham, but adopted. When adopted?"

Herbert shrugged his shoulders. "There has always been an Estella, since I have heard of a Miss Havisham. I know no more. And now, Handel," said he, finally throwing off the story as it were, "there is a perfectly open understanding between us. All that I know about Miss Havisham, you know."

"And all that I know," I retorted, "you know."

"I fully believe it. So there can be no competition or perplexity between you and me. And as to the condition on which you hold your advancement in life,—namely, that you are not to inquire or discuss to whom you owe it,—you may be very sure that it will never be encroached upon, or even approached, by me, or by any one belonging to me."

In truth, he said this with so much delicacy, that I felt the subject done with, even though I should be under his father's roof for years and years to come. Yet he said it with so much meaning, too, that I felt he as perfectly understood Miss Havisham to be my benefactress, as I understood the fact myself.

It had not occurred to me before, that he had led up to the theme for the purpose of clearing it out of our way; but we were so much the lighter and easier for having broached it, that I now perceived this to be the case. We were very gay and sociable, and I asked him, in the course of conversation, what he was? He replied, "A capitalist,—an Insurer of Ships." I suppose he saw me glancing about the room in search of some tokens of Shipping, or capital, for he added, "In the City."

I had grand ideas of the wealth and importance of Insurers of Ships in the City, and I began to think with awe of having laid a young Insurer on his back, blackened his enterprising eye, and cut his responsible head open. But again there came upon me, for my relief, that odd impression that Herbert Pocket would never be very successful or rich.

"I shall not rest satisfied with merely employing my capital in insuring ships. I shall buy up some good Life Assurance shares, and cut into the Direction. I shall also do a little in the mining way. None of these things will interfere with my chartering a few thousand tons on my own account. I think I shall trade," said he, leaning back in his chair, "to the East Indies, for silks, shawls, spices, dyes, drugs, and precious woods. It's an interesting trade."

"And the profits are large?" said I.

"Tremendous!" said he.

I wavered again, and began to think here were greater expectations than my own.

"I think I shall trade, also," said he, putting his thumbs in his waist-coat pockets, "to the West Indies, for sugar, tobacco, and rum. Also to Ceylon, specially for elephants' tusks."

"You will want a good many ships," said I.

"A perfect fleet," said he.

Quite overpowered by the magnificence of these transactions, I asked him where the ships he insured mostly traded to at present?

"I haven't begun insuring yet," he replied. "I am looking about me."

Somehow, that pursuit seemed more in keeping with Barnard's Inn. I said (in a tone of conviction), "Ah-h!"

"Yes. I am in a counting-house, and looking about me."

"Is a counting-house profitable?" I asked.

"To—do you mean to the young fellow who's in it?" he asked, in reply.

"Yes; to you."

"Why, n-no; not to me." He said this with the air of one carefully reckoning up and striking a balance. "Not directly profitable. That is, it doesn't pay me anything, and I have to—keep myself."

This certainly had not a profitable appearance, and I shook my head as if I would imply that it would be difficult to lay by much accumulative capital from such a source of income.

"But the thing is," said Herbert Pocket, "that you look about you. That's the grand thing. You are in a counting-house, you know, and you look about you."

It struck me as a singular implication that you couldn't be out of a counting-house, you know, and look about you; but I silently deferred to his experience.

"Then the time comes," said Herbert, "when you see your opening. And you go in, and you swoop upon it and you make your capital, and then there you are! When you have once made your capital, you have nothing to do but employ it."

This was very like his way of conducting that encounter in the garden; very like. His manner of bearing his poverty, too, exactly corresponded to his manner of bearing that defeat. It seemed to me that he took all blows and buffets now with just the same air as he had taken mine then. It was evident that he had nothing around him but the simplest necessaries, for everything that I remarked upon turned out to have been sent in on my account from the coffee-house or somewhere else.

Yet, having already made his fortune in his own mind, he was so unassuming with it that I felt quite grateful to him for not being puffed up. It was a pleasant addition to his naturally pleasant ways, and we got on famously. In the evening we went out for a walk in the streets, and went half-price to the Theatre; and next day we went to church at Westminster Abbey, and in the afternoon we walked in the Parks; and I wondered who shod all the horses there, and wished Joe did.

On a moderate computation, it was many months, that Sunday, since I had left Joe and Biddy. The space interposed between myself and them partook of that expansion, and our marshes were any distance off. That I could have been at our old church in my old church-going clothes, on the very last Sunday that ever was, seemed a combination of impossibilities, geographical and social, solar and lunar. Yet in the London streets so crowded with people and so brilliantly lighted in the dusk of evening, there were depressing hints of reproaches for that I had put the poor old kitchen at home so far away; and in the dead of night, the footsteps of some incapable impostor of a porter mooning about Barnard's Inn, under pretence of watching it, fell hollow on my heart.

On the Monday morning at a quarter before nine, Herbert went to the counting-house to report himself,—to look about him, too, I suppose,—and I bore him company. He was to come away in an hour or two to attend me to Hammersmith, and I was to wait about for him. It appeared to me that the eggs from which young Insurers were hatched were incubated in dust and heat, like the eggs of ostriches, judging from the places to which those incipient giants repaired on a Monday morning. Nor did the counting-house where Herbert assisted, show in my eyes as at all a good Observatory; being a back second floor up a yard, of a grimy presence in all particulars, and with a look into another back second floor, rather than a look out.

I waited about until it was noon, and I went upon 'Change, and I saw fluey men sitting there under the bills about shipping, whom I took to be great merchants, though I couldn't understand why they should all be out of spirits. When Herbert came, we went and had lunch at a celebrated house which I then quite venerated, but now believe to have been the most abject superstition in Europe, and where I could not help noticing, even then, that there was much more gravy on the tablecloths and knives and waiters' clothes, than in the steaks. This collation disposed of at a moderate price (considering the grease, which was not charged for), we went back to Barnard's Inn and got my little portmanteau, and then took coach for Hammersmith. We arrived there at two or three o'clock in the afternoon, and had very little way to walk to Mr. Pocket's house. Lifting the latch of a gate, we passed direct into a little garden overlooking the river, where Mr. Pocket's children were playing about. And unless I deceive myself on a point where my interests or prepossessions are certainly not concerned, I saw that Mr. and Mrs. Pocket's children were not growing up or being brought up, but were tumbling up.

Mrs. Pocket was sitting on a garden chair under a tree, reading, with her legs upon another garden chair; and Mrs. Pocket's two nurse-maids were looking about them while the children played. "Mamma," said Herbert, "this is young Mr. Pip." Upon which Mrs. Pocket received me with an appearance of amiable dignity.

"Master Alick and Miss Jane," cried one of the nurses to two of the children, "if you go a bouncing up against them bushes you'll fall over into the river and be drownded, and what'll your pa say then?"

At the same time this nurse picked up Mrs. Pocket's handkerchief, and said, "If that don't make six times you've dropped it, Mum!" Upon which Mrs. Pocket laughed and said, "Thank you, Flopson," and settling herself in one chair only, resumed her book. Her countenance immediately assumed a knitted and intent expression as if she had been reading for a week, but before she could have read half a dozen lines, she fixed her eyes upon me, and said, "I hope your mamma is quite well?" This unexpected inquiry put me into such a difficulty that I began saying in the absurdest way that if there had been any such person I had no doubt she would have been quite well and would have been very much obliged and would have sent her compliments, when the nurse came to my rescue.

"Well!" she cried, picking up the pocket-handkerchief, "if that don't make seven times! What ARE you a doing of this afternoon, Mum!" Mrs. Pocket received her property, at first with a look of unutterable surprise as if she had never seen it before, and then with a laugh of recognition, and said, "Thank you, Flopson," and forgot me, and went on reading.

I found, now I had leisure to count them, that there were no fewer than six little Pockets present, in various stages of tumbling up. I had scarcely arrived at the total when a seventh was heard, as in the region of air, wailing dolefully.

"If there ain't Baby!" said Flopson, appearing to think it most surprising. "Make haste up, Millers."

Millers, who was the other nurse, retired into the house, and by degrees the child's wailing was hushed and stopped, as if it were a young ventriloquist with something in its mouth. Mrs. Pocket read all the time, and I was curious to know what the book could be.

We were waiting, I supposed, for Mr. Pocket to come out to us; at any rate we waited there, and so I had an opportunity of observing the remarkable family phenomenon that whenever any of the children strayed near Mrs. Pocket in their play, they always tripped themselves up and tumbled over her,—always very much to her momentary astonishment, and their own more enduring lamentation. I was at a loss to account for this surprising circumstance, and could not help giving my mind to speculations about it, until by and by Millers came down with the baby, which baby was handed to Flopson, which Flopson was handing it to Mrs. Pocket, when she too went fairly head foremost over Mrs. Pocket, baby and all, and was caught by Herbert and myself.

"Gracious me, Flopson!" said Mrs. Pocket, looking off her book for a moment, "everybody's tumbling!"

"Gracious you, indeed, Mum!" returned Flopson, very red in the face; "what have you got there?"

"I got here, Flopson?" asked Mrs. Pocket.

"Why, if it ain't your footstool!" cried Flopson. "And if you keep it under your skirts like that, who's to help tumbling? Here! Take the baby, Mum, and give me your book."

Mrs. Pocket acted on the advice, and inexpertly danced the infant a little in her lap, while the other children played about it. This had lasted but a very short time, when Mrs. Pocket issued summary orders that they were all to be taken into the house for a nap. Thus I made the second discovery on that first occasion, that the nurture of the little Pockets consisted of alternately tumbling up and lying down.

Under these circumstances, when Flopson and Millers had got the children into the house, like a little flock of sheep, and Mr. Pocket came out of it to make my acquaintance, I was not much surprised to find that Mr. Pocket was a gentleman with a rather perplexed expression of face, and with his very gray hair disordered on his head, as if he didn't quite see his way to putting anything straight.

Chapter XXIII

Mr. Pocket said he was glad to see me, and he hoped I was not sorry to see him. "For, I really am not," he added, with his son's smile, "an alarming personage." He was a young-looking man, in spite of his perplexities and his very gray hair, and his manner seemed quite natural. I use the word natural, in the sense of its being unaffected; there was something comic in his distraught way, as though it would have been downright ludicrous but for his own perception that it was very near being so. When he had talked with me a little, he said to Mrs. Pocket, with a rather anxious contraction of his eyebrows, which were black and handsome, "Belinda, I hope you have welcomed Mr. Pip?" And she looked up from her book, and said, "Yes." She then smiled upon me in an absent state of mind, and asked me if I liked the taste of orange-flower water? As the question had no bearing, near or remote, on any foregone or subsequent transaction, I consider it to have been thrown out, like her previous approaches, in general conversational condescension.

I found out within a few hours, and may mention at once, that Mrs. Pocket was the only daughter of a certain quite accidental deceased Knight, who had invented for himself a conviction that his deceased father would have been made a Baronet but for somebody's determined opposition arising out of entirely personal motives,—I forget whose, if I ever knew,—the Sovereign's, the Prime Minister's, the Lord Chancellor's, the Archbishop of Canterbury's, anybody's,—and had tacked himself on to the nobles of the earth in right of this quite supposititious fact. I believe he had been knighted himself for storming the English grammar at the point of the pen, in a desperate address engrossed on vellum, on the occasion of the laying of the first stone of some building or other, and for handing some Royal Personage either the trowel or the mortar. Be that as it may, he had directed Mrs. Pocket to be brought up from her cradle as one who in the nature of things must marry a title, and who was to be guarded from the acquisition of plebeian domestic knowledge.

So successful a watch and ward had been established over the young lady by this judicious parent, that she had grown up highly ornamental, but perfectly helpless and useless. With her character thus happily formed, in the first bloom of her youth she had encountered Mr. Pocket: who was also in the first bloom of youth, and not quite decided whether to mount to the Woolsack, or to roof himself in with a mitre. As his doing the one or the other was a mere question of time, he and Mrs. Pocket had taken Time by the forelock (when, to judge from its length, it would seem to have wanted cutting), and had married without the knowledge of the judicious parent. The judicious parent, having nothing to bestow or withhold but his blessing, had handsomely settled that dower upon them after a short struggle, and had informed Mr. Pocket that his wife was "a treasure for a Prince." Mr. Pocket had invested the Prince's treasure in the ways of the world ever since, and it was supposed to have brought him in but indifferent interest. Still, Mrs. Pocket was in general the object of a queer sort of respectful pity, because she had not married a title; while Mr. Pocket was the object of a queer sort of forgiving reproach, because he had never got one.

Mr. Pocket took me into the house and showed me my room: which was a pleasant one, and so furnished as that I could use it with comfort for my own private sitting-room. He then knocked at the doors of two other similar rooms, and introduced me to their occupants, by name Drummle and Startop. Drummle, an old-looking young man of a heavy order of architecture, was whistling. Startop, younger in years and appearance, was reading and holding his head, as if he thought himself in danger of exploding it with too strong a charge of knowledge.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Pocket had such a noticeable air of being in somebody else's hands, that I wondered who really was in possession of the house and let them live there, until I found this unknown power to be the servants. It was a smooth way of going on, perhaps, in respect of saving trouble; but it had the appearance of being expensive, for the servants felt it a duty they owed to themselves to be nice in their eating and drinking, and to keep a deal of company down stairs. They allowed a very liberal table to Mr. and Mrs. Pocket, yet it always appeared to me that by far the best part of the house to have boarded in would have been the kitchen,—always supposing the boarder capable of self-defence, for, before I had been there a week, a neighboring lady with whom the family were personally unacquainted, wrote in to say that she had seen Millers slapping the baby. This greatly distressed Mrs. Pocket, who burst into tears on receiving the note, and said that it was an extraordinary thing that the neighbors couldn't mind their own business.

By degrees I learnt, and chiefly from Herbert, that Mr. Pocket had been educated at Harrow and at Cambridge, where he had distinguished himself; but that when he had had the happiness of marrying Mrs. Pocket very early in life, he had impaired his prospects and taken up the calling of a Grinder. After grinding a number of dull blades,—of whom it was remarkable that their fathers, when influential, were always going to help him to preferment, but always forgot to do it when the blades had left the Grindstone,—he had wearied of that poor work and had come to London. Here, after gradually failing in loftier hopes, he had "read" with divers who had lacked opportunities or neglected them, and had refurbished divers others for special occasions, and had turned his acquirements to the account of literary compilation and correction, and on such means, added to some very moderate private resources, still maintained the house I saw.

Mr. and Mrs. Pocket had a toady neighbor; a widow lady of that highly sympathetic nature that she agreed with everybody, blessed everybody, and shed smiles and tears on everybody, according to circumstances. This lady's name was Mrs. Coiler, and I had the honor of taking her down to dinner on the day of my installation. She gave me to understand on the stairs, that it was a blow to dear Mrs. Pocket that dear Mr. Pocket should be under the necessity of receiving gentlemen to read with him. That did not extend to me, she told me in a gush of love and confidence (at that time, I had known her something less than five minutes); if they were all like Me, it would be quite another thing.

"But dear Mrs. Pocket," said Mrs. Coiler, "after her early disappointment (not that dear Mr. Pocket was to blame in that), requires so much luxury and elegance—"

"Yes, ma'am," I said, to stop her, for I was afraid she was going to cry.

"And she is of so aristocratic a disposition—"

"Yes, ma'am," I said again, with the same object as before.

"—That it is hard," said Mrs. Coiler, "to have dear Mr. Pocket's time and attention diverted from dear Mrs. Pocket."

I could not help thinking that it might be harder if the butcher's time and attention were diverted from dear Mrs. Pocket; but I said nothing, and indeed had enough to do in keeping a bashful watch upon my company manners.

It came to my knowledge, through what passed between Mrs. Pocket and Drummle while I was attentive to my knife and fork, spoon, glasses, and other instruments of self-destruction, that Drummle, whose Christian name was Bentley, was actually the next heir but one to a baronetcy. It further appeared that the book I had seen Mrs. Pocket reading in the garden was all about titles, and that she knew the exact date at which her grandpapa would have come into the book, if he ever had come at all. Drummle didn't say much, but in his limited way (he struck me as a sulky kind of fellow) he spoke as one of the elect, and recognized Mrs. Pocket as a woman and a sister. No one but themselves and Mrs. Coiler the toady neighbor showed any interest in this part of the conversation, and it appeared to me that it was painful to Herbert; but it promised to last a long time, when the page came in with the announcement of a domestic affliction. It was, in effect, that the cook had mislaid the beef. To my unutterable amazement, I now, for the first time, saw Mr. Pocket relieve his mind by going through a performance that struck me as very extraordinary, but which made no impression on anybody else, and with which I soon became as familiar as the rest. He laid down the carving-knife and fork,—being engaged in carving, at the moment,—put his two hands into his disturbed hair, and appeared to make an extraordinary effort to lift himself up by it. When he had done this, and had not lifted himself up at all, he quietly went on with what he was about.

Mrs. Coiler then changed the subject and began to flatter me. I liked it for a few moments, but she flattered me so very grossly that the pleasure was soon over. She had a serpentine way of coming close at me when she pretended to be vitally interested in the friends and localities I had left, which was altogether snaky and fork-tongued; and when she made an occasional bounce upon Startop (who said very little to her), or upon Drummle (who said less), I rather envied them for being on the opposite side of the table.

After dinner the children were introduced, and Mrs. Coiler made admiring comments on their eyes, noses, and legs,—a sagacious way of improving their minds. There were four little girls, and two little boys, besides the baby who might have been either, and the baby's next successor who was as yet neither. They were brought in by Flopson and Millers, much as though those two non-commissioned officers had been recruiting somewhere for children and had enlisted these, while Mrs. Pocket looked at the young Nobles that ought to have been as if she rather thought she had

had the pleasure of inspecting them before, but didn't quite know what to make of them.

"Here! Give me your fork, Mum, and take the baby," said Flopson. "Don't take it that way, or you'll get its head under the table."

Thus advised, Mrs. Pocket took it the other way, and got its head upon the table; which was announced to all present by a prodigious concussion.

"Dear, dear! Give it me back, Mum," said Flopson; "and Miss Jane, come and dance to baby, do!"

One of the little girls, a mere mite who seemed to have prematurely taken upon herself some charge of the others, stepped out of her place by me, and danced to and from the baby until it left off crying, and laughed. Then, all the children laughed, and Mr. Pocket (who in the meantime had twice endeavored to lift himself up by the hair) laughed, and we all laughed and were glad.

Flopson, by dint of doubling the baby at the joints like a Dutch doll, then got it safely into Mrs. Pocket's lap, and gave it the nut-crackers to play with; at the same time recommending Mrs. Pocket to take notice that the handles of that instrument were not likely to agree with its eyes, and sharply charging Miss Jane to look after the same. Then, the two nurses left the room, and had a lively scuffle on the staircase with a dissipated page who had waited at dinner, and who had clearly lost half his buttons at the gaming-table.

I was made very uneasy in my mind by Mrs. Pocket's falling into a discussion with Drummle respecting two baronetcies, while she ate a sliced orange steeped in sugar and wine, and, forgetting all about the baby on her lap, who did most appalling things with the nut-crackers. At length little Jane, perceiving its young brains to be imperilled, softly left her place, and with many small artifices coaxed the dangerous weapon away. Mrs. Pocket finishing her orange at about the same time, and not approving of this, said to Jane,—

"You naughty child, how dare you? Go and sit down this instant!"

"Mamma dear," lisped the little girl, "baby ood have put hith eyeth out."

"How dare you tell me so?" retorted Mrs. Pocket. "Go and sit down in your chair this moment!"

Mrs. Pocket's dignity was so crushing, that I felt quite abashed, as if I myself had done something to rouse it.

"Belinda," remonstrated Mr. Pocket, from the other end of the table, "how can you be so unreasonable? Jane only interfered for the protection of baby."

"I will not allow anybody to interfere," said Mrs. Pocket. "I am surprised, Matthew, that you should expose me to the affront of interference."

"Good God!" cried Mr. Pocket, in an outbreak of desolate desperation. "Are infants to be nut-crackered into their tombs, and is nobody to save them?"

"I will not be interfered with by Jane," said Mrs. Pocket, with a majestic glance at that innocent little offender. "I hope I know my poor grandpapa's position. Jane, indeed!"

Mr. Pocket got his hands in his hair again, and this time really did lift himself some inches out of his chair. "Hear this!" he helplessly exclaimed to the elements. "Babies are to be nut-crackered dead, for people's poor grandpapa's positions!" Then he let himself down again, and became silent.

We all looked awkwardly at the tablecloth while this was going on. A pause succeeded, during which the honest and irrepressible baby made a series of leaps and crows at little Jane, who appeared to me to be the only member of the family (irrespective of servants) with whom it had any decided acquaintance.

"Mr. Drummle," said Mrs. Pocket, "will you ring for Flopson? Jane, you undutiful little thing, go and lie down. Now, baby darling, come with ma!"

The baby was the soul of honor, and protested with all its might. It doubled itself up the wrong way over Mrs. Pocket's arm, exhibited a pair of knitted shoes and dimpled ankles to the company in lieu of its soft face, and was carried out in the highest state of mutiny. And it gained its point after all, for I saw it through the window within a few minutes, being nursed by little Jane.

It happened that the other five children were left behind at the dinner-table, through Flopson's having some private engagement, and their not being anybody else's business. I thus became aware of the mutual relations between them and Mr. Pocket, which were exemplified in the following manner. Mr. Pocket, with the normal perplexity of his face heightened and his hair rumpled, looked at them for some minutes, as if he couldn't make out how they came to be boarding and lodging in that establishment, and why they hadn't been billeted by Nature on somebody else. Then, in a distant Missionary way he asked them certain questions,—as why little Joe had that hole in his frill, who said, Pa, Flopson was going to mend it when she had time,—and how little Fanny came by that whitlow, who said, Pa, Millers was going to poultice it when she didn't forget. Then, he melted into parental tenderness, and gave them a shilling apiece and told them to go and play; and then as they went out, with one very strong effort to lift himself up by the hair he dismissed the hopeless subject.

In the evening there was rowing on the river. As Drummle and Startop had each a boat, I resolved to set up mine, and to cut them both out. I was pretty good at most exercises in which country boys are adepts, but as I was conscious of wanting elegance of style for the Thames,—not to say for other waters,—I at once engaged to place myself under the tuition of the winner of a prize-wherry who plied at our stairs, and to whom I was introduced by my new allies. This practical authority confused me very much by saying I had the arm of a blacksmith. If he could have known how nearly the compliment lost him his pupil, I doubt if he would have paid it.

There was a supper-tray after we got home at night, and I think we should all have enjoyed ourselves, but for a rather disagreeable domestic occurrence. Mr. Pocket was in good spirits, when a housemaid came in, and said, "If you please, sir, I should wish to speak to you."

"Speak to your master?" said Mrs. Pocket, whose dignity was roused again. "How can you think of such a thing? Go and speak to Flopson. Or speak to me—at some other time."

"Begging your pardon, ma'am," returned the housemaid, "I should wish to speak at once, and to speak to master."

Hereupon, Mr. Pocket went out of the room, and we made the best of ourselves until he came back.

"This is a pretty thing, Belinda!" said Mr. Pocket, returning with a countenance expressive of grief and despair. "Here's the cook lying insensibly drunk on the kitchen floor, with a large bundle of fresh butter made up in the cupboard ready to sell for grease!"

Mrs. Pocket instantly showed much amiable emotion, and said, "This is that odious Sophia's doing!"

"What do you mean, Belinda?" demanded Mr. Pocket.

"Sophia has told you," said Mrs. Pocket. "Did I not see her with my own eyes and hear her with my own ears, come into the room just now and ask to speak to you?"

"But has she not taken me down stairs, Belinda," returned Mr. Pocket, "and shown me the woman, and the bundle too?"

"And do you defend her, Matthew," said Mrs. Pocket, "for making mischief?"

Mr. Pocket uttered a dismal groan.

"Am I, grandpapa's granddaughter, to be nothing in the house?" said Mrs. Pocket. "Besides, the cook has always been a very nice respectful woman, and said in the most natural manner when she came to look after the situation, that she felt I was born to be a Duchess."

There was a sofa where Mr. Pocket stood, and he dropped upon it in the attitude of the Dying Gladiator. Still in that attitude he said, with a hollow voice, "Good night, Mr. Pip," when I deemed it advisable to go to bed and leave him.

Chapter XXIV

After two or three days, when I had established myself in my room and had gone backwards and forwards to London several times, and had ordered all I wanted of my tradesmen, Mr. Pocket and I had a long talk together. He knew more of my intended career than I knew myself, for he referred to his having been told by Mr. Jaggers that I was not designed for any profession, and that I should be well enough educated for my destiny if I could "hold my own" with the average of young men in prosperous circumstances. I acquiesced, of course, knowing nothing to the contrary.

He advised my attending certain places in London, for the acquisition of such mere rudiments as I wanted, and my investing him with the functions of explainer and director of all my studies. He hoped that with intelligent assistance I should meet with little to discourage me, and should soon be able to dispense with any aid but his. Through his way of saying this, and much more to similar purpose, he placed himself on confidential terms with me in an admirable manner; and I may state at once that he was always so zealous and honorable in fulfilling his compact with me, that he made me zealous and honorable in fulfilling mine with him. If he had shown indifference as a master, I have no doubt I should have returned the compliment as a pupil; he gave me no such excuse, and each of us did the other justice. Nor did I ever regard him as having anything ludicrous about him—or anything but what was serious, honest, and good—in his tutor communication with me.

When these points were settled, and so far carried out as that I had begun to work in earnest, it occurred to me that if I could retain my bedroom in Barnard's Inn, my life would be agreeably varied, while my manners would be none the worse for Herbert's society. Mr. Pocket did not object to this arrangement, but urged that before any step could possibly be taken in it, it must be submitted to my guardian. I felt that this delicacy arose out of the consideration that the plan would save Herbert some expense, so I went off to Little Britain and imparted my wish to Mr. Jaggers.

"If I could buy the furniture now hired for me," said I, "and one or two other little things, I should be quite at home there."

"Go it!" said Mr. Jaggers, with a short laugh. "I told you you'd get on. Well! How much do you want?"

I said I didn't know how much.

"Come!" retorted Mr. Jaggers. "How much? Fifty pounds?"

"O, not nearly so much."

"Five pounds?" said Mr. Jaggers.

This was such a great fall, that I said in discomfiture, "O, more than that."

"More than that, eh!" retorted Mr. Jaggers, lying in wait for me, with his hands in his pockets, his head on one side, and his eyes on the wall behind me; "how much more?"

"It is so difficult to fix a sum," said I, hesitating.

"Come!" said Mr. Jaggers. "Let's get at it. Twice five; will that do? Three times five; will that do? Four times five; will that do?"

I said I thought that would do handsomely.

"Four times five will do handsomely, will it?" said Mr. Jaggers, knitting his brows. "Now, what do you make of four times five?"

"What do I make of it?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Jaggers; "how much?"

"I suppose you make it twenty pounds," said I, smiling.

"Never mind what I make it, my friend," observed Mr. Jaggers, with a knowing and contradictory toss of his head. "I want to know what you make it."

"Twenty pounds, of course."

"Wemmick!" said Mr. Jaggers, opening his office door. "Take Mr. Pip's written order, and pay him twenty pounds."

This strongly marked way of doing business made a strongly marked impression on me, and that not of an agreeable kind. Mr. Jaggers never laughed; but he wore great bright creaking boots, and, in poising himself on these boots, with his large head bent down and his eyebrows joined together, awaiting an answer, he sometimes caused the boots to creak, as if they laughed in a dry and suspicious way. As he happened to go out now, and as Wemmick was brisk and talkative, I said to Wemmick that I hardly knew what to make of Mr. Jaggers's manner.

"Tell him that, and he'll take it as a compliment," answered Wemmick; "he don't mean that you should know what to make of it.—Oh!" for I looked surprised, "it's not personal; it's professional: only professional."

Wemmick was at his desk, lunching—and crunching—on a dry hard biscuit; pieces of which he threw from time to time into his slit of a mouth, as if he were posting them.

"Always seems to me," said Wemmick, "as if he had set a man-trap and was watching it. Suddenly-click—you're caught!"

Without remarking that man-traps were not among the amenities of life, I said I supposed he was very skilful?

"Deep," said Wemmick, "as Australia." Pointing with his pen at the office floor, to express that Australia was understood, for the purposes of the figure, to be symmetrically on the opposite spot of the globe. "If there was anything deeper," added Wemmick, bringing his pen to paper, "he'd be it."

Then, I said I supposed he had a fine business, and Wemmick said, "Ca-pi-tal!" Then I asked if there were many clerks? to which he replied,—

"We don't run much into clerks, because there's only one Jaggers, and people won't have him at second hand. There are only four of us. Would you like to see 'em? You are one of us, as I may say."

I accepted the offer. When Mr. Wemmick had put all the biscuit into the post, and had paid me my money from a cash-box in a safe, the key of which safe he kept somewhere down his back and produced from his coat-collar like an iron-pigtail, we went up stairs. The house was dark and shabby, and the greasy shoulders that had left their mark in Mr. Jaggers's room seemed to have been shuffling up and down the staircase for years. In the front first floor, a clerk who looked something between a publican and a rat-catcher—a large pale, puffed, swollen man—was attentively engaged with three or four people of shabby appearance, whom he treated as unceremoniously as everybody seemed to be treated who contributed to Mr. Jaggers's coffers. "Getting evidence together," said Mr. Wemmick, as we came out, "for the Bailey." In the room over that, a little flabby terrier of a clerk with dangling hair (his cropping seemed to have been forgotten when he was a puppy) was similarly engaged with a man with weak eyes, whom Mr. Wemmick presented to me as a smelter who kept his pot always boiling, and who would melt me anything I pleased,—and who was in an excessive white-perspiration, as if he had been trying his art on himself. In a back room, a high-shouldered man with a face-ache tied up in dirty flannel, who was dressed in old black clothes that bore the appearance of having been waxed, was stooping over his work of making fair copies of the notes of the other two gentlemen, for Mr. Jaggers's own use.

This was all the establishment. When we went down stairs again, Wemmick led me into my guardian's room, and said, "This you've seen already."

"Pray," said I, as the two odious casts with the twitchy leer upon them caught my sight again, "whose likenesses are those?"

"These?" said Wemmick, getting upon a chair, and blowing the dust off the horrible heads before bringing them down. "These are two celebrated ones. Famous clients of ours that got us a world of credit. This chap (why you must have come down in the night and been peeping into the inkstand, to get this blot upon your eyebrow, you old rascal!) murdered his master, and, considering that he wasn't brought up to evidence, didn't plan it badly."

"Is it like him?" I asked, recoiling from the brute, as Wemmick spat upon his eyebrow and gave it a rub with his sleeve.

"Like him? It's himself, you know. The cast was made in Newgate, directly after he was taken down. You had a particular fancy for me, hadn't you, Old Artful?" said Wemmick. He then explained this affectionate apostrophe, by touching his brooch representing the lady and the weeping willow at the tomb with the urn upon it, and saying, "Had it made for me, express!"

"Is the lady anybody?" said I.

"No," returned Wemmick. "Only his game. (You liked your bit of game, didn't you?) No; deuce a bit of a lady in the case, Mr. Pip, except one,—and she wasn't of this slender lady-like sort, and you wouldn't have caught her looking after this urn, unless there was something to drink in it." Wemmick's attention being thus directed to his brooch, he put down the cast, and polished the brooch with his pocket-handkerchief.

"Did that other creature come to the same end?" I asked. "He has the same look."

"You're right," said Wemmick; "it's the genuine look. Much as if one nostril was caught up with a horse-hair and a little fish-hook. Yes, he came to the same end; quite the natural end here, I assure you. He forged wills, this blade did, if he didn't also put the supposed testators to sleep too. You were a gentlemanly Cove, though" (Mr. Wemmick was again apostrophizing), "and you said you could write Greek. Yah, Bounceable! What a liar you were! I never met such a liar as you!" Before putting his late friend on his shelf again, Wemmick touched the largest of his mourning rings and said, "Sent out to buy it for me, only the day before."

While he was putting up the other cast and coming down from the chair, the thought crossed my mind that all his personal jewelry was derived from like sources. As he had shown no diffidence on the subject, I ventured on the liberty of asking him the question, when he stood before me, dusting his hands.

"O yes," he returned, "these are all gifts of that kind. One brings another, you see; that's the way of it. I always take 'em. They're curiosities. And they're property. They may not be worth much, but, after all, they're property and portable. It don't signify to you with your brilliant lookout, but as to myself, my guiding-star always is, 'Get hold of portable property'."

When I had rendered homage to this light, he went on to say, in a friendly manner:—

"If at any odd time when you have nothing better to do, you wouldn't mind coming over to see me at Walworth, I could offer you a bed, and I should consider it an honor. I have not much to show you; but such two or three curiosities as I have got you might like to look over; and I am fond of a bit of garden and a summer-house."

I said I should be delighted to accept his hospitality.

"Thankee," said he; "then we'll consider that it's to come off, when convenient to you. Have you dined with Mr. Jaggers yet?"

"Not yet."

"Well," said Wemmick, "he'll give you wine, and good wine. I'll give you punch, and not bad punch. And now I'll tell you something. When you go to dine with Mr. Jaggers, look at his housekeeper."

"Shall I see something very uncommon?"

"Well," said Wemmick, "you'll see a wild beast tamed. Not so very uncommon, you'll tell me. I reply, that depends on the original wildness of the beast, and the amount of taming. It won't lower your opinion of Mr. Jaggers's powers. Keep your eye on it."

I told him I would do so, with all the interest and curiosity that his preparation awakened. As I was taking my departure, he asked me if I would like to devote five minutes to seeing Mr. Jaggers "at it?"

For several reasons, and not least because I didn't clearly know what Mr. Jaggers would be found to be "at," I replied in the affirmative. We dived into the City, and came up in a crowded police-court, where a blood-relation (in the murderous sense) of the deceased, with the fanciful taste in brooches, was standing at the bar, uncomfortably chewing something; while my guardian had a woman under examination or cross-examination,—I don't know which,—and was striking her, and the bench, and everybody present, with awe. If anybody, of whatsoever degree, said a word that he didn't approve of, he instantly required to have it "taken down." If anybody wouldn't make an admission, he said, "I'll have it out of you!" and if anybody made an admission, he said, "Now I have got you!" The magistrates shivered under a single bite of his finger. Thieves and thief-takers hung in dread rapture on his words, and shrank when a hair of his eyebrows turned in their direction. Which side he was on I couldn't make out, for he seemed to me to be grinding the whole place in a mill; I only know that when I stole out on tiptoe, he was not on the side of the bench; for, he was making the legs of the old gentleman who presided, quite convulsive under the table, by his denunciations of his conduct as the representative of British law and justice in that chair that day.

Chapter XXV

Bentley Drummle, who was so sulky a fellow that he even took up a book as if its writer had done him an injury, did not take up an acquaintance in a more agreeable spirit. Heavy in figure, movement, and comprehension,—in the sluggish complexion of his face, and in the large, awkward tongue that seemed to loll about in his mouth as he himself lolled about in a room,—he was idle, proud, niggardly, reserved, and suspicious. He came of rich people down in Somersetshire, who had nursed this combination of qualities until they made the discovery that it was just of age and a blockhead. Thus, Bentley Drummle had come to Mr. Pocket when he was a head taller than that gentleman, and half a dozen heads thicker than most gentlemen.

Startop had been spoilt by a weak mother and kept at home when he ought to have been at school, but he was devotedly attached to her, and admired her beyond measure. He had a woman's delicacy of feature, and was—"as you may see, though you never saw her," said Herbert to me—"exactly like his mother." It was but natural that I should take to him much more kindly than to Drummle, and that, even in the earliest evenings of our boating, he and I should pull homeward abreast of one another, conversing from boat to boat, while Bentley Drummle came up in our wake alone, under the overhanging banks and among the rushes. He would always creep in-shore like some uncomfortable amphibious creature, even when the tide would have sent him fast upon his way; and I always think of him as coming after us in the dark or by the back-water, when our own two boats were breaking the sunset or the moonlight in mid-stream.

Herbert was my intimate companion and friend. I presented him with a half-share in my boat, which was the occasion of his often coming down to Hammersmith; and my possession of a half-share in his chambers often took me up to London. We used to walk between the two places at all hours. I have an affection for the road yet (though it is not so pleasant a road as it was then), formed in the impressibility of untried youth and hope.

When I had been in Mr. Pocket's family a month or two, Mr. and Mrs. Camilla turned up. Camilla was Mr. Pocket's sister. Georgiana, whom I had seen at Miss Havisham's on the same occasion, also turned up. She was a cousin,—an indigestive single woman, who called her rigidity religion, and her liver love. These people hated me with the hatred of cupidity and disappointment. As a matter of course, they fawned upon me in my prosperity with the basest meanness. Towards Mr. Pocket, as a grown-up infant with no notion of his own interests, they showed the complacent forbearance I had heard them express. Mrs. Pocket they held in contempt; but they allowed the poor soul to have been heavily disappointed in life, because that shed a feeble reflected light upon themselves.

These were the surroundings among which I settled down, and applied myself to my education. I soon contracted expensive habits, and began to spend an amount of money that within a few short months I should have thought almost fabulous; but through good and evil I stuck to my books. There was no other merit in this, than my having sense enough to feel my deficiencies. Between Mr. Pocket and Herbert I got on fast; and, with one or the other always at my elbow to give me the start I wanted, and clear obstructions out of my road, I must have been as great a dolt as Drummle if I had done less.

I had not seen Mr. Wemmick for some weeks, when I thought I would write him a note and propose to go home with him on a certain evening. He replied that it would give him much pleasure, and that he would expect me at the office at six o'clock. Thither I went, and there I found him, putting the key of his safe down his back as the clock struck.

"Did you think of walking down to Walworth?" said he.

"Certainly," said I, "if you approve."

"Very much," was Wemmick's reply, "for I have had my legs under the desk all day, and shall be glad to stretch them. Now, I'll tell you what I have got for supper, Mr. Pip. I have got a stewed steak,—which is of home preparation,—and a cold roast fowl,—which is from the cook's-shop. I think it's tender, because the master of the shop was a Juryman in some cases of ours the other day, and we let him down easy. I reminded him of it when I bought the fowl, and I said, "Pick us out a good one, old Briton, because if we had chosen to keep you in the box another day or two, we could easily have done it." He said to that, "Let me make you a present of the best fowl in the shop." I let him, of course. As far as it goes, it's property and portable. You don't object to an aged parent, I hope?"

I really thought he was still speaking of the fowl, until he added, "Because I have got an aged parent at my place." I then said what politeness required.

"So, you haven't dined with Mr. Jaggers yet?" he pursued, as we walked along.

"Not yet."

"He told me so this afternoon when he heard you were coming. I expect you'll have an invitation to-morrow. He's going to ask your pals, too. Three of 'em; ain't there?"

Although I was not in the habit of counting Drummle as one of my intimate associates, I answered, "Yes."

"Well, he's going to ask the whole gang,"—I hardly felt complimented by the word,—"and whatever he gives you, he'll give you good. Don't look forward to variety, but you'll have excellence. And there'sa nother rum thing in his house," proceeded Wemmick, after a moment's pause, as if the remark followed on the housekeeper understood; "he never lets a door or window be fastened at night."

"Is he never robbed?"

"That's it!" returned Wemmick. "He says, and gives it out publicly, "I want to see the man who'll rob me." Lord bless you, I have heard him, a hundred times, if I have heard him once, say to regular cracksmen in our front office, "You know where I live; now, no bolt is ever drawn there; why don't you do a stroke of business with me? Come; can't I tempt you?" Not a man of them, sir, would be bold enough to try it on, for love or money."

"They dread him so much?" said I.

"Dread him," said Wemmick. "I believe you they dread him. Not but what he's artful, even in his defiance of them. No silver, sir. Britannia metal, every spoon."

"So they wouldn't have much," I observed, "even if they—"

"Ah! But he would have much," said Wemmick, cutting me short, "and they know it. He'd have their lives, and the lives of scores of 'em. He'd have all he could get. And it's impossible to say what he couldn't get, if he gave his mind to it."

I was falling into meditation on my guardian's greatness, when Wemmick remarked:—

"As to the absence of plate, that's only his natural depth, you know. A river's its natural depth, and he's his natural depth. Look at his watch-chain. That's real enough."

"It's very massive," said I.

"Massive?" repeated Wemmick. "I think so. And his watch is a gold repeater, and worth a hundred pound if it's worth a penny. Mr. Pip, there are about seven hundred thieves in this town who know all about that watch; there's not a man, a woman, or a child, among them, who wouldn't identify the smallest link in that chain, and drop it as if it was red hot, if inveigled into touching it."

At first with such discourse, and afterwards with conversation of a more general nature, did Mr. Wemmick and I beguile the time and the road, until he gave me to understand that we had arrived in the district of Walworth.

It appeared to be a collection of back lanes, ditches, and little gardens, and to present the aspect of a rather dull retirement. Wemmick's house was a little wooden cottage in the midst of plots of garden, and the top of it was cut out and painted like a battery mounted with guns.

"My own doing," said Wemmick. "Looks pretty; don't it?"

I highly commended it, I think it was the smallest house I ever saw; with the queerest gothic windows (by far the greater part of them sham), and a gothic door almost too small to get in at.

"That's a real flagstaff, you see," said Wemmick, "and on Sundays I run up a real flag. Then look here. After I have crossed this bridge, I hoist it up-so—and cut off the communication."

The bridge was a plank, and it crossed a chasm about four feet wide and two deep. But it was very pleasant to see the pride with which he hoisted it up and made it fast; smiling as he did so, with a relish and not merely mechanically.

"At nine o'clock every night, Greenwich time," said Wemmick, "the gun fires. There he is, you see! And when you hear him go, I think you'll say he's a Stinger."

The piece of ordnance referred to, was mounted in a separate fortress, constructed of lattice-work. It was protected from the weather by an ingenious little tarpaulin contrivance in the nature of an umbrella.

"Then, at the back," said Wemmick, "out of sight, so as not to impede the idea of fortifications,—for it's a principle with me, if you have an idea, carry it out and keep it up,—I don't know whether that's your opinion—"

I said, decidedly.

"—At the back, there's a pig, and there are fowls and rabbits; then, I knock together my own little frame, you see, and grow cucumbers; and you'll judge at supper what sort of a salad I can raise. So, sir," said

Wemmick, smiling again, but seriously too, as he shook his head, "if you can suppose the little place besieged, it would hold out a devil of a time in point of provisions."

Then, he conducted me to a bower about a dozen yards off, but which was approached by such ingenious twists of path that it took quite a long time to get at; and in this retreat our glasses were already set forth. Our punch was cooling in an ornamental lake, on whose margin the bower was raised. This piece of water (with an island in the middle which might have been the salad for supper) was of a circular form, and he had constructed a fountain in it, which, when you set a little mill going and took a cork out of a pipe, played to that powerful extent that it made the back of your hand quite wet.

"I am my own engineer, and my own carpenter, and my own plumber, and my own gardener, and my own Jack of all Trades," said Wemmick, in acknowledging my compliments. "Well; it's a good thing, you know. It brushes the Newgate cobwebs away, and pleases the Aged. You wouldn't mind being at once introduced to the Aged, would you? It wouldn't put you out?"

I expressed the readiness I felt, and we went into the castle. There we found, sitting by a fire, a very old man in a flannel coat: clean, cheerful, comfortable, and well cared for, but intensely deaf.

"Well aged parent," said Wemmick, shaking hands with him in a cordial and jocose way, "how am you?"

"All right, John; all right!" replied the old man.

"Here's Mr. Pip, aged parent," said Wemmick, "and I wish you could hear his name. Nod away at him, Mr. Pip; that's what he likes. Nod away at him, if you please, like winking!"

"This is a fine place of my son's, sir," cried the old man, while I nodded as hard as I possibly could. "This is a pretty pleasure-ground, sir. This spot and these beautiful works upon it ought to be kept together by the Nation, after my son's time, for the people's enjoyment."

"You're as proud of it as Punch; ain't you, Aged?" said Wemmick, contemplating the old man, with his hard face really softened; "there's a nod for you;" giving him a tremendous one; "there's another for you;" giving him a still more tremendous one; "you like that, don't you? If you're not tired, Mr. Pip—though I know it's tiring to strangers—will you tip him one more? You can't think how it pleases him."

I tipped him several more, and he was in great spirits. We left him bestirring himself to feed the fowls, and we sat down to our punch in the arbor; where Wemmick told me, as he smoked a pipe, that it had taken him a good many years to bring the property up to its present pitch of perfection.

"Is it your own, Mr. Wemmick?"

"O yes," said Wemmick, "I have got hold of it, a bit at a time. It's a freehold, by George!"

"Is it indeed? I hope Mr. Jaggers admires it?"

"Never seen it," said Wemmick. "Never heard of it. Never seen the Aged. Never heard of him. No; the office is one thing, and private life is another. When I go into the office, I leave the Castle behind me, and when I come into the Castle, I leave the office behind me. If it's not in any way disagreeable to you, you'll oblige me by doing the same. I don't wish it professionally spoken about."

Of course I felt my good faith involved in the observance of his request. The punch being very nice, we sat there drinking it and talking, until it was almost nine o'clock. "Getting near gun-fire," said Wemmick then, as he laid down his pipe; "it's the Aged's treat."

Proceeding into the Castle again, we found the Aged heating the poker, with expectant eyes, as a preliminary to the performance of this great nightly ceremony. Wemmick stood with his watch in his hand until the moment was come for him to take the red-hot poker from the Aged, and repair to the battery. He took it, and went out, and presently the Stinger went off with a Bang that shook the crazy little box of a cottage as if it must fall to pieces, and made every glass and teacup in it ring. Upon this, the Aged—who I believe would have been blown out of his arm-chair but for holding on by the elbows—cried out exultingly, "He's fired! I heerd him!" and I nodded at the old gentleman until it is no figure of speech to declare that I absolutely could not see him.

The interval between that time and supper Wemmick devoted to showing me his collection of curiosities. They were mostly of a felonious character; comprising the pen with which a celebrated forgery had been committed, a distinguished razor or two, some locks of hair, and several manuscript confessions written under condemnation,—upon which Mr. Wemmick set particular value as being, to use his own words, "every one of 'em Lies, sir." These were agreeably dispersed among small specimens of china and glass, various neat trifles made by the proprietor of the museum, and some tobacco-stoppers carved by the Aged. They were all displayed in that chamber of the Castle into which I had been first inducted, and which served, not only as the general sitting-room but as the kitchen too, if I might judge from a saucepan on the hob, and a brazen bijou over the fireplace designed for the suspension of a roasting-jack.

There was a neat little girl in attendance, who looked after the Aged in the day. When she had laid the supper-cloth, the bridge was lowered to give her means of egress, and she withdrew for the night. The supper was excellent; and though the Castle was rather subject to dry-rot insomuch that it tasted like a bad nut, and though the pig might have been farther off, I was heartily pleased with my whole entertainment. Nor was there any drawback on my little turret bedroom, beyond there being such a very thin ceiling between me and the flagstaff, that when I lay down on my back in bed, it seemed as if I had to balance that pole on my forehead all night.

Wemmick was up early in the morning, and I am afraid I heard him cleaning my boots. After that, he fell to gardening, and I saw him from my gothic window pretending to employ the Aged, and nodding at him in a most devoted manner. Our breakfast was as good as the supper, and at half-past eight precisely we started for Little Britain. By degrees, Wemmick got dryer and harder as we went along, and his mouth tightened into a post-office again. At last, when we got to his place of business and he pulled out his key from his coat-collar, he looked as unconscious of his Walworth property as if the Castle and the drawbridge and the arbor and the lake and the fountain and the Aged, had all been blown into space together by the last discharge of the Stinger.

Chapter XXVI

It fell out as Wemmick had told me it would, that I had an early opportunity of comparing my guardian's establishment with that of his cashier and clerk. My guardian was in his room, washing his hands with his scented soap, when I went into the office from Walworth; and he called me to him, and gave me the invitation for myself and friends which Wemmick had prepared me to receive. "No ceremony," he stipulated, "and no dinner dress, and say to-morrow." I asked him where we should come to (for I had no idea where he lived), and I believe it was in his general objection to make anything like an admission, that he replied, "Come here, and I'll take you home with me." I embrace this opportunity of remarking that he washed his clients off, as if he were a surgeon or a dentist. He had a closet in his room, fitted up for the purpose, which smelt of the scented soap like a perfumer's shop. It had an unusually large jack-towel on a roller inside the door, and he would wash his hands, and wipe them and dry them all over this towel, whenever he came in from a police court or dismissed a client from his room. When I and my friends repaired to him at six o'clock next day, he seemed to have been engaged on a case of a darker complexion than usual, for we found him with his head butted into this closet, not only washing his hands, but laving his face and gargling his throat. And even when he had done all that, and had gone all round the jack-towel, he took out his penknife and scraped the case out of his nails before he put his coat on.

There were some people slinking about as usual when we passed out into the street, who were evidently anxious to speak with him; but there was something so conclusive in the halo of scented soap which encircled his presence, that they gave it up for that day. As we walked along westward, he was recognized ever and again by some face in the crowd of the streets, and whenever that happened he talked louder to me; but he never otherwise recognized anybody, or took notice that anybody recognized him.

He conducted us to Gerrard Street, Soho, to a house on the south side of that street. Rather a stately house of its kind, but dolefully in want of painting, and with dirty windows. He took out his key and opened the door, and we all went into a stone hall, bare, gloomy, and little used. So, up a dark brown staircase into a series of three dark brown rooms on the first floor. There were carved garlands on the panelled walls, and as he stood among them giving us welcome, I know what kind of loops I thought they looked like.

Dinner was laid in the best of these rooms; the second was his dressing-room; the third, his bedroom. He told us that he held the whole house, but rarely used more of it than we saw. The table was comfortably laid—no silver in the service, of course—and at the side of his chair was a capacious dumb-waiter, with a variety of bottles and decanters on it, and four dishes of fruit for dessert. I noticed throughout, that he kept everything under his own hand, and distributed everything himself.

There was a bookcase in the room; I saw from the backs of the books, that they were about evidence, criminal law, criminal biography, trials, acts of Parliament, and such things. The furniture was all very solid and good, like his watch-chain. It had an official look, however, and there was nothing merely ornamental to be seen. In a corner was a little table of papers with a shaded lamp: so that he seemed to bring the office home with him in that respect too, and to wheel it out of an evening and fall to work.

As he had scarcely seen my three companions until now,—for he and I had walked together,—he stood on the hearth-rug, after ringing the bell, and took a searching look at them. To my surprise, he seemed at once to be principally if not solely interested in Drummle.

"Pip," said he, putting his large hand on my shoulder and moving me to the window, "I don't know one from the other. Who's the Spider?"

"The spider?" said I.

"The blotchy, sprawly, sulky fellow."

"That's Bentley Drummle," I replied; "the one with the delicate face is Startop."

Not making the least account of "the one with the delicate face," he returned, "Bentley Drummle is his name, is it? I like the look of that fellow."

He immediately began to talk to Drummle: not at all deterred by his replying in his heavy reticent way, but apparently led on by it to screw discourse out of him. I was looking at the two, when there came between me and them the housekeeper, with the first dish for the table.

She was a woman of about forty, I supposed,—but I may have thought her younger than she was. Rather tall, of a lithe nimble figure, extremely pale, with large faded eyes, and a quantity of streaming hair. I cannot say whether any diseased affection of the heart caused her lips to be parted as if she were panting, and her face to bear a curious expression of suddenness and flutter; but I know that I had been to see Macbeth at the theatre, a night or two before, and that her face looked to me as if it were all disturbed by fiery air, like the faces I had seen rise out of the Witches' caldron.

She set the dish on, touched my guardian quietly on the arm with a finger to notify that dinner was ready, and vanished. We took our seats at the round table, and my guardian kept Drummle on one side of him, while Startop sat on the other. It was a noble dish of fish that the housekeeper had put on table, and we had a joint of equally choice mutton afterwards, and then an equally choice bird. Sauces, wines, all the accessories we wanted, and all of the best, were given out by our host from his dumb-waiter; and when they had made the circuit of the table, he always put them back again. Similarly, he dealt us clean plates and knives and forks, for each course, and dropped those just disused into two baskets on the ground by his chair. No other attendant than the housekeeper appeared. She set on every dish; and I always saw in her face, a face rising out of the caldron. Years afterwards, I made a dreadful likeness of that woman, by causing a face that had no other natural resemblance to it than it derived from flowing hair to pass behind a bowl of flaming spirits in a dark room.

Induced to take particular notice of the housekeeper, both by her own striking appearance and by Wemmick's preparation, I observed that whenever she was in the room she kept her eyes attentively on my guardian, and that she would remove her hands from any dish she put before him, hesitatingly, as if she dreaded his calling her back, and wanted him to speak when she was nigh, if he had anything to say. I fancied that I could detect in his manner a consciousness of this, and a purpose of always holding her in suspense.

Dinner went off gayly, and although my guardian seemed to follow rather than originate subjects, I knew that he wrenched the weakest part of our dispositions out of us. For myself, I found that I was expressing my tendency to lavish expenditure, and to patronize Herbert, and to boast of my great prospects, before I quite knew that I had opened my lips. It was so with all of us, but with no one more than Drummle: the development of whose inclination to gird in a grudging and suspicious way at the rest, was screwed out of him before the fish was taken off.

It was not then, but when we had got to the cheese, that our conversation turned upon our rowing feats, and that Drummle was rallied for coming up behind of a night in that slow amphibious way of his. Drummle upon this, informed our host that he much preferred our room to our company, and that as to skill he was more than our master, and that as to strength he could scatter us like chaff. By some invisible agency, my guardian wound him up to a pitch little short of ferocity about this trifle; and he fell to baring and spanning his arm to show how muscular it was, and we all fell to baring and spanning our arms in a ridiculous manner.

Now the housekeeper was at that time clearing the table; my guardian, taking no heed of her, but with the side of his face turned from her, was leaning back in his chair biting the side of his forefinger and showing an interest in Drummle, that, to me, was quite inexplicable. Suddenly, he clapped his large hand on the housekeeper's, like a trap, as she stretched it across the table. So suddenly and smartly did he do this, that we all stopped in our foolish contention.

"If you talk of strength," said Mr. Jaggers, "I'll show you a wrist. Molly, let them see your wrist."

Her entrapped hand was on the table, but she had already put her other hand behind her waist. "Master," she said, in a low voice, with her eyes attentively and entreatingly fixed upon him. "Don't."

"I'll show you a wrist," repeated Mr. Jaggers, with an immovable determination to show it. "Molly, let them see your wrist."

"Master," she again murmured. "Please!"

"Molly," said Mr. Jaggers, not looking at her, but obstinately looking at the opposite side of the room, "let them see both your wrists. Show them. Come!"

He took his hand from hers, and turned that wrist up on the table. She brought her other hand from behind her, and held the two out side by side. The last wrist was much disfigured,—deeply scarred and scarred across and across. When she held her hands out she took her eyes from Mr. Jaggers, and turned them watchfully on every one of the rest of us in succession.

"There's power here," said Mr. Jaggers, coolly tracing out the sinews with his forefinger. "Very few men have the power of wrist that this woman has. It's remarkable what mere force of grip there is in these hands. I have had occasion to notice many hands; but I never saw stronger in that respect, man's or woman's, than these."

While he said these words in a leisurely, critical style, she continued to look at every one of us in regular succession as we sat. The moment he ceased, she looked at him again. "That'll do, Molly," said Mr. Jaggers, giving her a slight nod; "you have been admired, and can go." She withdrew her hands and went out of the room, and Mr. Jaggers, putting the decanters on from his dumb-waiter, filled his glass and passed round the wine.

"At half-past nine, gentlemen," said he, "we must break up. Pray make the best use of your time. I am glad to see you all. Mr. Drummle, I drink to you."

If his object in singling out Drummle were to bring him out still more, it perfectly succeeded. In a sulky triumph, Drummle showed his morose depreciation of the rest of us, in a more and more offensive degree, until he became downright intolerable. Through all his stages, Mr. Jaggers followed him with the same strange interest. He actually seemed to serve as a zest to Mr. Jaggers's wine.

In our boyish want of discretion I dare say we took too much to drink, and I know we talked too much. We became particularly hot upon some boorish sneer of Drummle's, to the effect that we were too free with our money. It led to my remarking, with more zeal than discretion, that it came with a bad grace from him, to whom Startop had lent money in my presence but a week or so before.

"Well," retorted Drummle; "he'll be paid."

"I don't mean to imply that he won't," said I, "but it might make you hold your tongue about us and our money, I should think."

"You should think!" retorted Drummle. "Oh Lord!"

"I dare say," I went on, meaning to be very severe, "that you wouldn't lend money to any of us if we wanted it."

"You are right," said Drummle. "I wouldn't lend one of you a sixpence. I wouldn't lend anybody a sixpence."

"Rather mean to borrow under those circumstances, I should say."

"You should say," repeated Drummle. "Oh Lord!"

This was so very aggravating—the more especially as I found myself making no way against his surly obtuseness—that I said, disregarding Herbert's efforts to check me,—

"Come, Mr. Drummle, since we are on the subject, I'll tell you what passed between Herbert here and me, when you borrowed that money."

"I don't want to know what passed between Herbert there and you," growled Drummle. And I think he added in a lower growl, that we might both go to the devil and shake ourselves.

"I'll tell you, however," said I, "whether you want to know or not. We said that as you put it in your pocket very glad to get it, you seemed to be immensely amused at his being so weak as to lend it."

Drummle laughed outright, and sat laughing in our faces, with his hands in his pockets and his round shoulders raised; plainly signifying that it was quite true, and that he despised us as asses all.

Hereupon Startop took him in hand, though with a much better grace than I had shown, and exhorted him to be a little more agreeable. Startop, being a lively, bright young fellow, and Drummle being the exact opposite, the latter was always disposed to resent him as a direct personal affront. He now retorted in a coarse, lumpish way, and Startop tried to turn the discussion aside with some small pleasantry that made us all laugh. Resenting this little success more than anything, Drummle, without any threat or warning, pulled his hands out of his pockets, dropped his round shoulders, swore, took up a large glass, and would have flung it at his adversary's head, but for our entertainer's dexterously seizing it at the instant when it was raised for that purpose.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Jaggers, deliberately putting down the glass, and hauling out his gold repeater by its massive chain, "I am exceedingly sorry to announce that it's half past nine."

On this hint we all rose to depart. Before we got to the street door, Startop was cheerily calling Drummle "old boy," as if nothing had happened. But the old boy was so far from responding, that he would not even walk to Hammersmith on the same side of the way; so Herbert and I, who remained in town, saw them going down the street on opposite sides; Startop leading, and Drummle lagging behind in the shadow of the houses, much as he was wont to follow in his boat.

As the door was not yet shut, I thought I would leave Herbert there for a moment, and run up stairs again to say a word to my guardian. I found him in his dressing-room surrounded by his stock of boots, already hard at it, washing his hands of us.

I told him I had come up again to say how sorry I was that anything disagreeable should have occurred, and that I hoped he would not blame me much.

"Pooh!" said he, sluicing his face, and speaking through the water-drops; "it's nothing, Pip. I like that Spider though."

He had turned towards me now, and was shaking his head, and blowing, and towelling himself.

"I am glad you like him, sir," said I—"but I don't."

"No, no," my guardian assented; "don't have too much to do with him. Keep as clear of him as you can. But I like the fellow, Pip; he is one of the true sort. Why, if I was a fortune-teller—"

Looking out of the towel, he caught my eye.

"But I am not a fortune-teller," he said, letting his head drop into a festoon of towel, and towelling away at his two ears. "You know what I am, don't you? Good night, Pip."

"Good night, sir."

In about a month after that, the Spider's time with Mr. Pocket was up for good, and, to the great relief of all the house but Mrs. Pocket, he went home to the family hole.

Chapter XXVII

"MY DEAR MR PIP:—

"I write this by request of Mr. Gargery, for to let you know that he is going to London in company with Mr. Wopsle and would be glad if agreeable to be allowed to see you. He would call at Barnard's Hotel Tuesday morning at nine o'clock, when if not agreeable please leave word. Your poor sister is much the same as when you left. We talk of you in the kitchen every night, and wonder what you are saying and doing. If now considered in the light of a liberty, excuse it for the love of poor old days. No more, dear Mr. Pip, from your ever obliged, and affectionate servant,

"BIDDY."

"P.S. He wishes me most particular to write what larks. He says you will understand. I hope and do not doubt it will be agreeable to see him, even though a gentleman, for you had ever a good heart, and he is a worthy, worthy man. I have read him all, excepting only the last little sentence, and he wishes me most particular to write again what larks."

I received this letter by the post on Monday morning, and therefore its appointment was for next day. Let me confess exactly with what feelings I looked forward to Joe's coming.

Not with pleasure, though I was bound to him by so many ties; no; with considerable disturbance, some mortification, and a keen sense of incongruity. If I could have kept him away by paying money, I certainly would have paid money. My greatest reassurance was that he was coming to Barnard's Inn, not to Hammersmith, and consequently would not fall in Bentley Drummle's way. I had little objection to his being seen by Herbert or his father, for both of whom I had a respect; but I had the sharpest sensitiveness as to his being seen by Drummle, whom I held in contempt. So, throughout life, our worst weaknesses and meannesses are usually committed for the sake of the people whom we most despise.

I had begun to be always decorating the chambers in some quite unnecessary and inappropriate way or other, and very expensive those wrestles with Barnard proved to be. By this time, the rooms were vastly different from what I had found them, and I enjoyed the honor of occupying a few prominent pages in the books of a neighboring upholsterer. I had got on so fast of late, that I had even started a boy in boots,—top boots,—in bondage and slavery to whom I might have been said to pass my days. For, after I had made the monster (out of the refuse of my washerwoman's family), and had clothed him with a blue coat, canary waistcoat, white cravat, creamy breeches, and the boots already mentioned, I had to find him a little to do and a great deal to eat; and with both of those horrible requirements he haunted my existence.

This avenging phantom was ordered to be on duty at eight on Tuesday morning in the hall, (it was two feet square, as charged for floorcloth,) and Herbert suggested certain things for breakfast that he thought Joe would like. While I felt sincerely obliged to him for being so interested and considerate, I had an odd half-provoked sense of suspicion upon me, that if Joe had been coming to see him, he wouldn't have been quite so brisk about it.

However, I came into town on the Monday night to be ready for Joe, and I got up early in the morning, and caused the sitting-room and breakfast-table to assume their most splendid appearance. Unfortunately the morning was drizzly, and an angel could not have concealed the fact that Barnard was shedding sooty tears outside the window, like some weak giant of a Sweep.

As the time approached I should have liked to run away, but the Avenger pursuant to orders was in the hall, and presently I heard Joe on the staircase. I knew it was Joe, by his clumsy manner of coming up stairs,—his state boots being always too big for him,—and by the time it took him to read the names on the other floors in the course of his ascent. When at last he stopped outside our door, I could hear his finger tracing over the painted letters of my name, and I afterwards distinctly heard him breathing in at the keyhole. Finally he gave a faint single rap, and Pepper—such was the compromising name of the avenging boy—announced "Mr. Gargery!" I thought he never would have done wiping his feet, and that I must have gone out to lift him off the mat, but at last he came in.

"Joe, how are you, Joe?"

"Pip, how AIR you, Pip?"

With his good honest face all glowing and shining, and his hat put down on the floor between us, he caught both my hands and worked them straight up and down, as if I had been the last-patented Pump.

"I am glad to see you, Joe. Give me your hat."

But Joe, taking it up carefully with both hands, like a bird's-nest with eggs in it, wouldn't hear of parting with that piece of property, and persisted in standing talking over it in a most uncomfortable way.

"Which you have that growed," said Joe, "and that swelled, and that gentle-folked;" Joe considered a little before he discovered this word; "as to be sure you are a honor to your king and country."

"And you, Joe, look wonderfully well."

"Thank God," said Joe, "I'm ekerval to most. And your sister, she's no worse than she were. And Biddy, she's ever right and ready. And all friends is no backerder, if not no forarder. 'Ceptin Wopsle; he's had a drop."

All this time (still with both hands taking great care of the bird's-nest), Joe was rolling his eyes round and round the room, and round and round the flowered pattern of my dressing-gown.

"Had a drop, Joe?"

"Why yes," said Joe, lowering his voice, "he's left the Church and went into the playacting. Which the playacting have likeways brought him to London along with me. And his wish were," said Joe, getting the bird's-nest under his left arm for the moment, and groping in it for an egg with his right; "if no offence, as I would 'and you that."

I took what Joe gave me, and found it to be the crumpled play-bill of a small metropolitan theatre, announcing the first appearance, in that very week, of "the celebrated Provincial Amateur of Roscian renown, whose unique performance in the highest tragic walk of our National Bard has lately occasioned so great a sensation in local dramatic circles."

"Were you at his performance, Joe?" I inquired.

"I were," said Joe, with emphasis and solemnity.

"Was there a great sensation?"

"Why," said Joe, "yes, there certainly were a peck of orange-peel. Partickler when he see the ghost. Though I put it to yourself, sir, whether it were calc'lated to keep a man up to his work with a good hart, to be continiwally cutting in betwixt him and the Ghost with "Amen!" A man may have had a misfortun' and been in the Church," said Joe, lowering his voice to an argumentative and feeling tone, "but that is no reason why you should put him out at such a time. Which I meantersay, if the ghost of a man's own father cannot be allowed to claim his attention, what can, Sir?

Still more, when his mourning 'at is unfortunately made so small as that the weight of the black feathers brings it off, try to keep it on how you may."

A ghost-seeing effect in Joe's own countenance informed me that Herbert had entered the room. So, I presented Joe to Herbert, who held out his hand; but Joe backed from it, and held on by the bird's-nest.

"Your servant, Sir," said Joe, "which I hope as you and Pip"—here his eye fell on the Avenger, who was putting some toast on table, and so plainly denoted an intention to make that young gentleman one of the family, that I frowned it down and confused him more—"I meantersay, you two gentlemen,—which I hope as you get your elths in this close spot? For the present may be a werry good inn, according to London opinions," said Joe, confidentially, "and I believe its character do stand i; but I wouldn't keep a pig in it myself,—not in the case that I wished him to fatten wholesome and to eat with a meller flavor on him."

Having borne this flattering testimony to the merits of our dwelling-place, and having incidentally shown this tendency to call me "sir," Joe, being invited to sit down to table, looked all round the room for a suitable spot on which to deposit his hat,—as if it were only on some very few rare substances in nature that it could find a resting place,—and ultimately stood it on an extreme corner of the chimney-piece, from which it ever afterwards fell off at intervals.

"Do you take tea, or coffee, Mr. Gargery?" asked Herbert, who always presided of a morning.

"Thankee, Sir," said Joe, stiff from head to foot, "I'll take whichever is most agreeable to yourself."

"What do you say to coffee?"

"Thankee, Sir," returned Joe, evidently dispirited by the proposal, "since you are so kind as make chice of coffee, I will not run contrairy to your own opinions. But don't you never find it a little 'eating?"

"Say tea then," said Herbert, pouring it out.

Here Joe's hat tumbled off the mantel-piece, and he started out of his chair and picked it up, and fitted it to the same exact spot. As if it were an absolute point of good breeding that it should tumble off again soon.

"When did you come to town, Mr. Gargery?"

"Were it yesterday afternoon?" said Joe, after coughing behind his hand, as if he had had time to catch the whooping-cough since he came. "No it were not. Yes it were. Yes. It were yesterday afternoon" (with an appearance of mingled wisdom, relief, and strict impartiality).

"Have you seen anything of London yet?"

"Why, yes, Sir," said Joe, "me and Wopsle went off straight to look at the Blacking Ware'us. But we didn't find that it come up to its likeness in the red bills at the shop doors; which I meantersay," added Joe, in an explanatory manner, "as it is there drawd too architectooralooral."

I really believe Joe would have prolonged this word (mightily expressive to my mind of some architecture that I know) into a perfect Chorus, but for his attention being providentially attracted by his hat, which was toppling. Indeed, it demanded from him a constant attention, and a quickness of eye and hand, very like that exacted by wicket-keeping. He made extraordinary play with it, and showed the greatest skill; now, rushing at it and catching it neatly as it dropped; now, merely stopping it midway, beating it up, and humoring it in various parts of the room and against a good deal of the pattern of the paper on the wall, before he felt it safe to close with it; finally splashing it into the slop-basin, where I took the liberty of laying hands upon it.

As to his shirt-collar, and his coat-collar, they were perplexing to reflect upon,—insoluble mysteries both. Why should a man scrape himself to that extent, before he could consider himself full dressed? Why should he suppose it necessary to be purified by suffering for his holiday clothes? Then he fell into such unaccountable fits of meditation, with his fork midway between his plate and his mouth; had his eyes attracted in such strange directions; was afflicted with such remarkable coughs; sat so far from the table, and dropped so much more than he ate, and pretended that he hadn't dropped it; that I was heartily glad when Herbert left us for the City.

I had neither the good sense nor the good feeling to know that this was all my fault, and that if I had been easier with Joe, Joe would have been easier with me. I felt impatient of him and out of temper with him; in which condition he heaped coals of fire on my head.

"Us two being now alone, sir,"—began Joe.

"Joe," I interrupted, pettishly, "how can you call me, sir?"

Joe looked at me for a single instant with something faintly like reproach. Utterly preposterous as his cravat was, and as his collars were, I was conscious of a sort of dignity in the look.

"Us two being now alone," resumed Joe, "and me having the intentions and abilities to stay not many minutes more, I will now conclude—leastways begin—to mention what have led to my having had the present honor. For was it not," said Joe, with his old air of lucid exposition, "that my only wish were to be useful to you, I should not have had the honor of breaking wittles in the company and abode of gentlemen."

I was so unwilling to see the look again, that I made no remonstrance against this tone.

"Well, sir," pursued Joe, "this is how it were. I were at the Bargemen t'other night, Pip;"—whenever he subsided into affection, he called me Pip, and whenever he relapsed into politeness he called me sir; "when there come up in his shay-cart, Pumblechook. Which that same identical," said Joe, going down a new track, "do comb my 'air the wrong way sometimes, awful, by giving out up and down town as it were him which ever had your infant companionation and were looked upon as a playfellow by yourself."

"Nonsense. It was you, Joe."

"Which I fully believed it were, Pip," said Joe, slightly tossing his head, "though it signify little now, sir. Well, Pip; this same identical, which his manners is given to blusterous, come to me at the Bargemen (wot a pipe and a pint of beer do give refreshment to the workingman, sir, and do not over stimilate), and his word were, 'Joseph, Miss Havisham she wish to speak to you.'"

"Miss Havisham, Joe?"

"'She wish,' were Pumblechook's word, 'to speak to you.'" Joe sat and rolled his eyes at the ceiling.

"Yes, Joe? Go on, please."

"Next day, sir," said Joe, looking at me as if I were a long way off, "having cleaned myself, I go and I see Miss A."

"Miss A., Joe? Miss Havisham?"

"Which I say, sir," replied Joe, with an air of legal formality, as if he were making his will, "Miss A., or otherways Havisham. Her expression air then as follering: 'Mr. Gargery. You air in correspondence with Mr. Pip?' Having had a letter from you, I were able to say 'I am.' (When I married your sister, sir, I said 'I will;' and when I answered your friend, Pip, I said 'I am.') 'Would you tell him, then,' said she, 'that which Estella has come home and would be glad to see him.'"

I felt my face fire up as I looked at Joe. I hope one remote cause of its firing may have been my consciousness that if I had known his errand, I should have given him more encouragement.

"Biddy," pursued Joe, "when I got home and asked her fur to write the message to you, a little hung back. Biddy says, "I know he will be very glad to have it by word of mouth, it is holiday time, you want to see him, go!" I have now concluded, sir," said Joe, rising from his chair, "and, Pip, I wish you ever well and ever prospering to a greater and a greater height."

"But you are not going now, Joe?"

"Yes I am," said Joe.

"But you are coming back to dinner, Joe?"

"No I am not," said Joe.

Our eyes met, and all the "ir" melted out of that manly heart as he gave me his hand.

"Pip, dear old chap, life is made of ever so many partings welded together, as I may say, and one man's a blacksmith, and one's a whitesmith, and one's a goldsmith, and one's a coppersmith. Diwisions among such must come, and must be met as they come. If there's been any fault at all to-day, it's mine. You and me is not two figures to be together in London; nor yet anywheres else but what is private, and beknown, and understood among friends. It ain't that I am proud, but that I want to be right, as you shall never see me no more in these clothes. I'm wrong in these clothes. I'm wrong out of the forge, the kitchen, or off th' meshes. You won't find half so much fault in me if you think of me in my forge dress, with my hammer in my hand, or even my pipe. You won't find half so much fault in me if, supposing as you should ever wish to see me, you come and put your head in at the forge window and see Joe the blacksmith, there, at the old anvil, in the old burnt apron, sticking to the old work. I'm awful dull, but I hope I've beat out something nigh the rights of this at last. And so GOD bless you, dear old Pip, old chap, GOD bless you!"

I had not been mistaken in my fancy that there was a simple dignity in him. The fashion of his dress could no more come in its way when he spoke these words than it could come in its way in Heaven. He touched me gently on the forehead, and went out. As soon as I could recover myself sufficiently, I hurried out after him and looked for him in the neighboring streets; but he was gone.

Chapter XXVIII

It was clear that I must repair to our town next day, and in the first flow of my repentance, it was equally clear that I must stay at Joe's. But, when I had secured my box-place by to-morrow's coach, and had been down to Mr. Pocket's and back, I was not by any means convinced on the last point, and began to invent reasons and make excuses for putting up at the Blue Boar. I should be an inconvenience at Joe's; I was not expected, and my bed would not be ready; I should be too far from Miss Havisham's, and she was exacting and mightn't like it. All other swindlers upon earth are nothing to the self-swindlers, and with such pretences did I cheat myself. Surely a curious thing. That I should innocently take a bad half-crown of somebody else's manufacture is reasonable enough; but that I should knowingly reckon the spurious coin of my own make as good money! An obliging stranger, under pretence of compactly folding up my bank-notes for security's sake, abstracts the notes and gives me nutshells; but what is his sleight of hand to mine, when I fold up my own nutshells and pass them on myself as notes!

Having settled that I must go to the Blue Boar, my mind was much disturbed by indecision whether or not to take the Avenger. It was tempting to think of that expensive Mercenary publicly airing his boots in the archway of the Blue Boar's posting-yard; it was almost solemn to imagine him casually produced in the tailor's shop, and confounding the disrespectful senses of Trabb's boy. On the other hand, Trabb's boy might worm himself into his intimacy and tell him things; or, reckless and desperate wretch as I knew he could be, might hoot him in the High Street, My patroness, too, might hear of him, and not approve. On the whole, I resolved to leave the Avenger behind.

It was the afternoon coach by which I had taken my place, and, as winter had now come round, I should not arrive at my destination until two or three hours after dark. Our time of starting from the Cross Keys was two o'clock. I arrived on the ground with a quarter of an hour to spare, attended by the Avenger,—if I may connect that expression with one who never attended on me if he could possibly help it.

At that time it was customary to carry Convicts down to the dock-yards by stage-coach. As I had often heard of them in the capacity of outside passengers, and had more than once seen them on the high road dangling their ironed legs over the coach roof, I had no cause to be surprised when Herbert, meeting me in the yard, came up and told me there were two convicts going down with me. But I had a reason that was an old reason now for constitutionally faltering whenever I heard the word "convict."

"You don't mind them, Handel?" said Herbert.

"O no!"

"I thought you seemed as if you didn't like them?"

"I can't pretend that I do like them, and I suppose you don't particularly. But I don't mind them."

"See! There they are," said Herbert, "coming out of the Tap. What a degraded and vile sight it is!"

They had been treating their guard, I suppose, for they had a gaoler with them, and all three came out wiping their mouths on their hands. The two convicts were handcuffed together, and had irons on their legs,—irons of a pattern that I knew well. They wore the dress that I likewise knew well. Their keeper had a brace of pistols, and carried a thick-knobbed bludgeon under his arm; but he was on terms of good understanding with them, and stood with them beside him, looking on at the putting-to of the horses, rather with an air as if the convicts were an interesting Exhibition not formally open at the moment, and he the Curator. One was a taller and stouter man than the other, and appeared as a matter of course, according to the mysterious ways of the world, both convict and free, to have had allotted to him the smaller suit of clothes. His arms and legs were like great pincushions of those shapes, and his attire disguised him absurdly; but I knew his half-closed eye at one glance. There stood the man whom I had seen on the settle at the Three Jolly Bargemen on a Saturday night, and who had brought me down with his invisible gun!

It was easy to make sure that as yet he knew me no more than if he had never seen me in his life. He looked across at me, and his eye appraised my watch-chain, and then he incidentally spat and said something to the other convict, and they laughed and slued themselves round with a clink of their coupling manacle, and looked at something else. The great numbers on their backs, as if they were street doors; their coarse mangy ungainly outer surface, as if they were lower animals; their ironed legs, apologetically garlanded with pocket-handkerchiefs; and the way in which all present looked at them and kept from them; made them (as Herbert had said) a most disagreeable and degraded spectacle.

But this was not the worst of it. It came out that the whole of the back of the coach had been taken by a family removing from London, and that there were no places for the two prisoners but on the seat in front behind the coachman. Hereupon, a choleric gentleman, who had taken the fourth place on that seat, flew into a most violent passion, and said that it was a breach of contract to mix him up with such villainous company, and that it was poisonous, and pernicious, and infamous, and shameful, and I don't know what else. At this time the coach was ready and the coachman impatient, and we were all preparing to get up, and the prisoners had come over with their keeper,—bringing with them that curious flavor of bread-poultice, baize, rope-yarn, and hearthstone, which attends the convict presence.

"Don't take it so much amiss, sir," pleaded the keeper to the angry passenger; "I'll sit next you myself. I'll put 'em on the outside of the row. They won't interfere with you, sir. You needn't know they're there."

"And don't blame me," growled the convict I had recognized. "I don't want to go. I am quite ready to stay behind. As fur as I am concerned any one's welcome to my place."

"Or mine," said the other, gruffly. "I wouldn't have incommoded none of you, if I'd had my way." Then they both laughed, and began cracking nuts, and spitting the shells about.—As I really think I should have liked to do myself, if I had been in their place and so despised.

At length, it was voted that there was no help for the angry gentleman, and that he must either go in his chance company or remain behind. So he got into his place, still making complaints, and the keeper got into the place next him, and the convicts hauled themselves up as well as they could, and the convict I had recognized sat behind me with his breath on the hair of my head.

"Good by, Handel!" Herbert called out as we started. I thought what a blessed fortune it was, that he had found another name for me than Pip.

It is impossible to express with what acuteness I felt the convict's breathing, not only on the back of my head, but all along my spine. The sensation was like being touched in the marrow with some pungent and searching acid, it set my very teeth on edge. He seemed to have more breathing business to do than another man, and to make more noise in doing it; and I was conscious of growing high-shouldered on one side, in my shrinking endeavors to fend him off.

The weather was miserably raw, and the two cursed the cold. It made us all lethargic before we had gone far, and when we had left the Half-way House behind, we habitually dozed and shivered and were silent. I dozed off, myself, in considering the question whether I ought to restore a couple of pounds sterling to this creature before losing sight of him, and how it could best be done. In the act of dipping forward as if I were going to bathe among the horses, I woke in a fright and took the question up again.

But I must have lost it longer than I had thought, since, although I could recognize nothing in the darkness and the fitful lights and shadows of our lamps, I traced marsh country in the cold damp wind that blew at us. Cowering forward for warmth and to make me a screen against the wind, the convicts were closer to me than before. The very first words I heard them interchange as I became conscious, were the words of my own thought, "Two One Pound notes."

"How did he get 'em?" said the convict I had never seen.

"How should I know?" returned the other. "He had 'em stowed away somehows. Giv him by friends, I expect."

"I wish," said the other, with a bitter curse upon the cold, "that I had 'em here."

"Two one pound notes, or friends?"

"Two one pound notes. I'd sell all the friends I ever had for one, and think it a blessed good bargain. Well? So he says—?"

"So he says," resumed the convict I had recognized,—"it was all said and done in half a minute, behind a pile of timber in the Dock-yard,—'You're a going to be discharged?' Yes, I was. Would I find out that boy that had fed him and kep his secret, and give him them two one pound notes? Yes, I would. And I did."

"More fool you," growled the other. "I'd have spent 'em on a Man, in wittles and drink. He must have been a green one. Mean to say he knowed nothing of you?"

"Not a ha'porth. Different gangs and different ships. He was tried again for prison breaking, and got made a Lifer."

"And was that—Honor!—the only time you worked out, in this part of the country?"

"The only time."

"What might have been your opinion of the place?"

"A most beastly place. Mudbank, mist, swamp, and work; work, swamp, mist, and mudbank."

They both execrated the place in very strong language, and gradually growled themselves out, and had nothing left to say.

After overhearing this dialogue, I should assuredly have got down and been left in the solitude and darkness of the highway, but for feeling certain that the man had no suspicion of my identity. Indeed, I was not only so changed in the course of nature, but so differently dressed and so differently circumstanced, that it was not at all likely he could have known me without accidental help. Still, the coincidence of our being together on the coach, was sufficiently strange to fill me with a dread that some other coincidence might at any moment connect me, in his hearing, with my name. For this reason, I resolved to alight as soon as we touched the town, and put myself out of his hearing. This device I executed successfully. My little portmanteau was in the boot under my feet; I had but to turn a hinge to get it out; I threw it down before me, got down after it, and was left at the first lamp on the first stones of the town pavement. As to the convicts, they went their way with the coach, and I knew at what point they would be spirited off to the river. In my fancy, I saw the boat with its convict crew waiting for them at the slime-washed stairs,—again heard the gruff "Give way, you!" like and order to dogs,—again saw the wicked Noah's Ark lying out on the black water.

I could not have said what I was afraid of, for my fear was altogether undefined and vague, but there was great fear upon me. As I walked on to the hotel, I felt that a dread, much exceeding the mere apprehension of a painful or disagreeable recognition, made me tremble. I am confident that it took no distinctness of shape, and that it was the revival for a few minutes of the terror of childhood.

The coffee-room at the Blue Boar was empty, and I had not only ordered my dinner there, but had sat down to it, before the waiter knew me. As soon as he had apologized for the remissness of his memory, he asked me if he should send Boots for Mr. Pumblechook?

"No," said I, "certainly not."

The waiter (it was he who had brought up the Great Remonstrance from the Commercials, on the day when I was bound) appeared surprised, and took the earliest opportunity of putting a dirty old copy of a local newspaper so directly in my way, that I took it up and read this paragraph:—

Our readers will learn, not altogether without interest, in reference to the recent romantic rise in fortune of a young artificer in iron of this neighborhood (what a theme, by the way, for the magic pen of our as yet not universally acknowledged townsman TOOBY, the poet of our columns!) that the youth's earliest patron, companion, and friend, was a highly respected individual not entirely unconnected with the corn and seed trade, and whose eminently convenient and commodious business premises are situate within a hundred miles of the High Street. It is not wholly irrespective of our personal feelings that we record HIM as the Mentor of our young Telemachus, for it is good to know that our town produced the founder of the latter's fortunes. Does the thought-contracted brow of the local Sage or the lustrous eye of local Beauty inquire whose fortunes? We believe that Quintin Matsys was the BLACKSMITH of Antwerp. VERB. SAP.

I entertain a conviction, based upon large experience, that if in the days of my prosperity I had gone to the North Pole, I should have met somebody there, wandering Esquimaux or civilized man, who would have told me that Pumblechook was my earliest patron and the founder of my fortunes.

Chapter XXIX

Betimes in the morning I was up and out. It was too early yet to go to Miss Havisham's, so I loitered into the country on Miss Havisham's side of town,—which was not Joe's side; I could go there to-morrow,—thinking about my patroness, and painting brilliant pictures of her plans for me.

She had adopted Estella, she had as good as adopted me, and it could not fail to be her intention to bring us together. She reserved it for me to restore the desolate house, admit the sunshine into the dark rooms, set the clocks a-going and the cold hearths a-blazing, tear down the cobwebs, destroy the vermin,—in short, do all the shining deeds of the young Knight of romance, and marry the Princess. I had stopped to look at the house as I passed; and its seared red brick walls, blocked windows, and strong green ivy clasping even the stacks of chimneys with its twigs and tendons, as if with sinewy old arms, had made up a rich attractive mystery, of which I was the hero. Estella was the inspiration of it, and the heart of it, of course. But, though she had taken such strong possession of me, though my fancy and my hope were so set upon her, though her influence on my boyish life and character had been all-powerful, I did not, even that romantic morning, invest her with any attributes save those she possessed. I mention this in this place, of a fixed purpose, because it is the clew by which I am to be followed into my poor labyrinth. According to my experience, the conventional notion of a lover cannot be always true. The unqualified truth is, that when I loved Estella with the love of a man, I loved her simply because I found her irresistible. Once for all; I knew to my sorrow, often and often, if not always, that I loved her against reason, against promise, against peace, against hope, against happiness, against all discouragement that could be. Once for all; I loved her none the less because I knew it, and it had no more influence in restraining me than if I had devoutly believed her to be human perfection.

I so shaped out my walk as to arrive at the gate at my old time. When I had rung at the bell with an unsteady hand, I turned my back upon the gate, while I tried to get my breath and keep the beating of my heart moderately quiet. I heard the side-door open, and steps come across the courtyard; but I pretended not to hear, even when the gate swung on its rusty hinges.

Being at last touched on the shoulder, I started and turned. I started much more naturally then, to find myself confronted by a man in a sober gray dress. The last man I should have expected to see in that place of porter at Miss Havisham's door.

"Orlick!"

"Ah, young master, there's more changes than yours. But come in, come in. It's opposed to my orders to hold the gate open."

I entered and he swung it, and locked it, and took the key out. "Yes!" said he, facing round, after doggedly preceding me a few steps towards the house. "Here I am!"

"How did you come here?"

"I come her," he retorted, "on my legs. I had my box brought alongside me in a barrow."

"Are you here for good?"

"I ain't here for harm, young master, I suppose?"

I was not so sure of that. I had leisure to entertain the retort in my mind, while he slowly lifted his heavy glance from the pavement, up my legs and arms, to my face.

"Then you have left the forge?" I said.

"Do this look like a forge?" replied Orlick, sending his glance all round him with an air of injury. "Now, do it look like it?"

I asked him how long he had left Gargery's forge?

"One day is so like another here," he replied, "that I don't know without casting it up. However, I come here some time since you left."

"I could have told you that, Orlick."

"Ah!" said he, dryly. "But then you've got to be a scholar."

By this time we had come to the house, where I found his room to be one just within the side-door, with a little window in it looking on the courtyard. In its small proportions, it was not unlike the kind of place usually assigned to a gate-porter in Paris. Certain keys were hanging on the wall, to which he now added the gate key; and his patchwork-covered bed was in a little inner division or recess. The whole had a slovenly, confined, and sleepy look, like a cage for a human dormouse; while he, looming dark and heavy in the shadow of a corner by the window, looked like the human dormouse for whom it was fitted up,—as indeed he was.

"I never saw this room before," I remarked; "but there used to be no Porter here."

"No," said he; "not till it got about that there was no protection on the premises, and it come to be considered dangerous, with convicts and Tag and Rag and Bobtail going up and down. And then I was recommended to the place as a man who could give another man as good as he brought, and I took it. It's easier than bellowsing and hammering.—That's loaded, that is."

My eye had been caught by a gun with a brass-bound stock over the chimney-piece, and his eye had followed mine.

"Well," said I, not desirous of more conversation, "shall I go up to Miss Havisham?"

"Burn me, if I know!" he retorted, first stretching himself and then shaking himself; "my orders ends here, young master. I give this here bell a rap with this here hammer, and you go on along the passage till you meet somebody."

"I am expected, I believe?"

"Burn me twice over, if I can say!" said he.

Upon that, I turned down the long passage which I had first trodden in my thick boots, and he made his bell sound. At the end of the passage, while the bell was still reverberating, I found Sarah Pocket, who appeared to have now become constitutionally green and yellow by reason of me.

"Oh!" said she. "You, is it, Mr. Pip?"

"It is, Miss Pocket. I am glad to tell you that Mr. Pocket and family are all well."

"Are they any wiser?" said Sarah, with a dismal shake of the head; "they had better be wiser, than well. Ah, Matthew, Matthew! You know your way, sir?"

Tolerably, for I had gone up the staircase in the dark, many a time. I ascended it now, in lighter boots than of yore, and tapped in my old way at the door of Miss Havisham's room. "Pip's rap," I heard her say, immediately; "come in, Pip."

She was in her chair near the old table, in the old dress, with her two hands crossed on her stick, her chin resting on them, and her eyes on the fire. Sitting near her, with the white shoe, that had never been worn, in her hand, and her head bent as she looked at it, was an elegant lady whom I had never seen.

"Come in, Pip," Miss Havisham continued to mutter, without looking round or up; "come in, Pip, how do you do, Pip? so you kiss my hand as if I were a queen, eh?—Well?"

She looked up at me suddenly, only moving her eyes, and repeated in a grimly playful manner,—

"Well?"

"I heard, Miss Havisham," said I, rather at a loss, "that you were so kind as to wish me to come and see you, and I came directly."

"Well?"

The lady whom I had never seen before, lifted up her eyes and looked archly at me, and then I saw that the eyes were Estella's eyes. But she was so much changed, was so much more beautiful, so much more womanly, in all things winning admiration, had made such wonderful advance, that I seemed to have made none. I fancied, as I looked at her, that I slipped hopelessly back into the coarse and common boy again. O the sense of distance and disparity that came upon me, and the inaccessibility that came about her!

She gave me her hand. I stammered something about the pleasure I felt in seeing her again, and about my having looked forward to it, for a long, long time.

"Do you find her much changed, Pip?" asked Miss Havisham, with her greedy look, and striking her stick upon a chair that stood between them, as a sign to me to sit down there.

"When I came in, Miss Havisham, I thought there was nothing of Estella in the face or figure; but now it all settles down so curiously into the old—"

"What? You are not going to say into the old Estella?" Miss Havisham interrupted. "She was proud and insulting, and you wanted to go away from her. Don't you remember?"

I said confusedly that that was long ago, and that I knew no better then, and the like. Estella smiled with perfect composure, and said she had no doubt of my having been quite right, and of her having been very disagreeable.

"Is he changed?" Miss Havisham asked her.

"Very much," said Estella, looking at me.

"Less coarse and common?" said Miss Havisham, playing with Estella's hair.

Estella laughed, and looked at the shoe in her hand, and laughed again, and looked at me, and put the shoe down. She treated me as a boy still, but she lured me on.

We sat in the dreamy room among the old strange influences which had so wrought upon me, and I learnt that she had but just come home from France, and that she was going to London. Proud and wilful as of old, she had brought those qualities into such subjection to her beauty that it was impossible and out of nature—or I thought so—to separate them from her beauty. Truly it was impossible to dissociate her presence from all those wretched hankerings after money and gentility that had disturbed my boyhood,—from all those ill-regulated aspirations that had first made me ashamed of home and Joe,—from all those visions that had raised her face in the glowing fire, struck it out of the iron on the anvil, extracted it from the darkness of night to look in at the wooden window of the forge, and flit away. In a word, it was impossible for me to separate her, in the past or in the present, from the innermost life of my life.

It was settled that I should stay there all the rest of the day, and return to the hotel at night, and to London to-morrow. When we had conversed for a while, Miss Havisham sent us two out to walk in the neglected garden: on our coming in by and by, she said, I should wheel her about a little, as in times of yore.

So, Estella and I went out into the garden by the gate through which I had strayed to my encounter with the pale young gentleman, now Herbert; I, trembling in spirit and worshipping the very hem of her dress; she, quite composed and most decidedly not worshipping the hem of mine. As we drew near to the place of encounter, she stopped and said,—

"I must have been a singular little creature to hide and see that fight that day; but I did, and I enjoyed it very much."

"You rewarded me very much."

"Did I?" she replied, in an incidental and forgetful way. "I remember I entertained a great objection to your adversary, because I took it ill that he should be brought here to pester me with his company."

"He and I are great friends now."

"Are you? I think I recollect though, that you read with his father?"

"Yes."

I made the admission with reluctance, for it seemed to have a boyish look, and she already treated me more than enough like a boy.

"Since your change of fortune and prospects, you have changed your companions," said Estella.

"Naturally," said I.

"And necessarily," she added, in a haughty tone; "what was fit company for you once, would be quite unfit company for you now."

In my conscience, I doubt very much whether I had any lingering intention left of going to see Joe; but if I had, this observation put it to flight.

"You had no idea of your impending good fortune, in those times?" said Estella, with a slight wave of her hand, signifying in the fighting times.

"Not the least."

The air of completeness and superiority with which she walked at my side, and the air of youthfulness and submission with which I walked at hers, made a contrast that I strongly felt. It would have rankled in me more than it did, if I had not regarded myself as eliciting it by being so set apart for her and assigned to her.

The garden was too overgrown and rank for walking in with ease, and after we had made the round of it twice or thrice, we came out again into the brewery yard. I showed her to a nicety where I had seen her walking on the casks, that first old day, and she said, with a cold and careless look in that direction, "Did I?" I reminded her where she had come out of the house and given me my meat and drink, and she said, "I don't remember." "Not remember that you made me cry?" said I. "No," said she, and shook her head and looked about her. I verily believe that her not remembering and not minding in the least, made me cry again, inwardly,—and that is the sharpest crying of all.

"You must know," said Estella, condescending to me as a brilliant and beautiful woman might, "that I have no heart,—if that has anything to do with my memory."

I got through some jargon to the effect that I took the liberty of doubting that. That I knew better. That there could be no such beauty without it.

"Oh! I have a heart to be stabbed in or shot in, I have no doubt," said Estella, "and of course if it ceased to beat I should cease to be. But you know what I mean. I have no softness there, no—sympathy—sentiment—nonsense."

What was it that was borne in upon my mind when she stood still and looked attentively at me? Anything that I had seen in Miss Havisham? No. In some of her looks and gestures there was that tinge of resemblance to Miss Havisham which may often be noticed to have been acquired by children, from grown person with whom they have been much associated and secluded, and which, when childhood is passed, will produce a remarkable occasional likeness of expression between faces that are otherwise quite different. And yet I could not trace this to Miss Havisham. I looked again, and though she was still looking at me, the suggestion was gone.

What was it?

"I am serious," said Estella, not so much with a frown (for her brow was smooth) as with a darkening of her face; "if we are to be thrown much together, you had better believe it at once. No!" imperiously stopping me as I opened my lips. "I have not bestowed my tenderness anywhere. I have never had any such thing."

In another moment we were in the brewery, so long disused, and she pointed to the high gallery where I had seen her going out on that same first day, and told me she remembered to have been up there, and to have seen me standing scared below. As my eyes followed her white hand, again the same dim suggestion that I could not possibly grasp crossed me. My involuntary start occasioned her to lay her hand upon my arm. Instantly the ghost passed once more and was gone.

What was it?

"What is the matter?" asked Estella. "Are you scared again?"

"I should be, if I believed what you said just now," I replied, to turn it off.

"Then you don't? Very well. It is said, at any rate. Miss Havisham will soon be expecting you at your old post, though I think that might be laid aside now, with other old belongings. Let us make one more round of the garden, and then go in. Come! You shall not shed tears for my cruelty to-day; you shall be my Page, and give me your shoulder."

Her handsome dress had trailed upon the ground. She held it in one hand now, and with the other lightly touched my shoulder as we walked. We walked round the ruined garden twice or thrice more, and it was all in bloom for me. If the green and yellow growth of weed in the chinks of the old wall had been the most precious flowers that ever blew, it could not have been more cherished in my remembrance.

There was no discrepancy of years between us to remove her far from me; we were of nearly the same age, though of course the age told for more in her case than in mine; but the air of inaccessibility which her beauty and her manner gave her, tormented me in the midst of my delight, and at the height of the assurance I felt that our patroness had chosen us for one another. Wretched boy!

At last we went back into the house, and there I heard, with surprise, that my guardian had come down to see Miss Havisham on business, and would come back to dinner. The old wintry branches of chandeliers in the room where the mouldering table was spread had been lighted while we were out, and Miss Havisham was in her chair and waiting for me.

It was like pushing the chair itself back into the past, when we began the old slow circuit round about the ashes of the bridal feast. But, in the funereal room, with that figure of the grave fallen back in the chair fixing its eyes upon her, Estella looked more bright and beautiful than before, and I was under stronger enchantment.

The time so melted away, that our early dinner-hour drew close at hand, and Estella left us to prepare herself. We had stopped near the centre of the long table, and Miss Havisham, with one of her withered arms stretched out of the chair, rested that clenched hand upon the yellow cloth. As Estella looked back over her shoulder before going out at the door, Miss Havisham kissed that hand to her, with a ravenous intensity that was of its kind quite dreadful.

Then, Estella being gone and we two left alone, she turned to me, and said in a whisper,—

"Is she beautiful, graceful, well-grown? Do you admire her?"

"Everybody must who sees her, Miss Havisham."

She drew an arm round my neck, and drew my head close down to hers as she sat in the chair. "Love her, love her, love her! How does she use you?"

Before I could answer (if I could have answered so difficult a question at all) she repeated, "Love her, love her, love her! If she favors you, love her. If she wounds you, love her. If she tears your heart to pieces,—and as it gets older and stronger it will tear deeper,—love her, love her, love her!"

Never had I seen such passionate eagerness as was joined to her utterance of these words. I could feel the muscles of the thin arm round my neck swell with the vehemence that possessed her.

"Hear me, Pip! I adopted her, to be loved. I bred her and educated her, to be loved. I developed her into what she is, that she might be loved. Love her!"

She said the word often enough, and there could be no doubt that she meant to say it; but if the often repeated word had been hate instead of love—despair—revenge—dire death—it could not have sounded from her lips more like a curse.

"I'll tell you," said she, in the same hurried passionate whisper, "what real love is. It is blind devotion, unquestioning self-humiliation, utter submission, trust and belief against yourself and against the whole world, giving up your whole heart and soul to the smiter—as I did!"

When she came to that, and to a wild cry that followed that, I caught her round the waist. For she rose up in the chair, in her shroud of a dress, and struck at the air as if she would as soon have struck herself against the wall and fallen dead.

All this passed in a few seconds. As I drew her down into her chair, I was conscious of a scent that I knew, and turning, saw my guardian in the room.

He always carried (I have not yet mentioned it, I think) a pocket-handkerchief of rich silk and of imposing proportions, which was of great value to him in his profession. I have seen him so terrify a client or a witness by ceremoniously unfolding this pocket-handkerchief as if he were immediately going to blow his nose, and then pausing, as if he knew he should not have time to do it before such client or witness committed himself, that the self-committal has followed directly, quite as a matter of course. When I saw him in the room he had this expressive pocket-handkerchief in both hands, and was looking at us. On meeting my eye, he said plainly, by a momentary and silent pause in that attitude, "Indeed? Singular!" and then put the handkerchief to its right use with wonderful effect.

Miss Havisham had seen him as soon as I, and was (like everybody else) afraid of him. She made a strong attempt to compose herself, and stammered that he was as punctual as ever.

"As punctual as ever," he repeated, coming up to us. "(How do you do, Pip? Shall I give you a ride, Miss Havisham? Once round?) And so you are here, Pip?"

I told him when I had arrived, and how Miss Havisham had wished me to come and see Estella. To which he replied, "Ah! Very fine young lady!" Then he pushed Miss Havisham in her chair before him, with one of his large hands, and put the other in his trousers-pocket as if the pocket were full of secrets.

"Well, Pip! How often have you seen Miss Estella before?" said he, when he came to a stop.

"How often?"

"Ah! How many times? Ten thousand times?"

"Oh! Certainly not so many."

"Twice?"

"Jaggers," interposed Miss Havisham, much to my relief, "leave my Pip alone, and go with him to your dinner."

He complied, and we groped our way down the dark stairs together. While we were still on our way to those detached apartments across the paved yard at the back, he asked me how often I had seen Miss Havisham eat and drink; offering me a breadth of choice, as usual, between a hundred times and once.

I considered, and said, "Never."

"And never will, Pip," he retorted, with a frowning smile. "She has never allowed herself to be seen doing either, since she lived this present life of hers. She wanders about in the night, and then lays hands on such food as she takes."

"Pray, sir," said I, "may I ask you a question?"

"You may," said he, "and I may decline to answer it. Put your question."

"Estella's name. Is it Havisham or—?" I had nothing to add.

"Or what?" said he.

"Is it Havisham?"

"It is Havisham."

This brought us to the dinner-table, where she and Sarah Pocket awaited us. Mr. Jaggers presided, Estella sat opposite to him, I faced my green and yellow friend. We dined very well, and were waited on by a maid-servant whom I had never seen in all my comings and goings, but who, for anything I know, had been in that mysterious house the whole time. After dinner a bottle of choice old port was placed before my guardian (he was evidently well acquainted with the vintage), and the two ladies left us.

Anything to equal the determined reticence of Mr. Jaggers under that roof I never saw elsewhere, even in him. He kept his very looks to himself, and scarcely directed his eyes to Estella's face once during dinner. When she spoke to him, he listened, and in due course answered, but never looked at her, that I could see. On the other hand, she often looked at him, with interest and curiosity, if not distrust, but his face never, showed the least consciousness. Throughout dinner he took a dry delight in making Sarah Pocket greener and yellower, by often referring in conversation with me to my expectations; but here, again, he showed no consciousness, and even made it appear that he extorted—and even did extort, though I don't know how—those references out of my innocent self.

And when he and I were left alone together, he sat with an air upon him of general lying by in consequence of information he possessed, that really was too much for me. He cross-examined his very wine when he had nothing else in hand. He held it between himself and the candle, tasted the port, rolled it in his mouth, swallowed it, looked at his glass again, smelt the port, tried it, drank it, filled again, and cross-examined the glass again, until I was as nervous as if I had known the wine to be telling him something to my disadvantage. Three or four times I feebly thought I would start conversation; but whenever he saw me going to ask him anything, he looked at me with his glass in his hand, and rolling his wine about in his mouth, as if requesting me to take notice that it was of no use, for he couldn't answer.

I think Miss Pocket was conscious that the sight of me involved her in the danger of being goaded to madness, and perhaps tearing off her cap,—which was a very hideous one, in the nature of a muslin mop,—and strewing the ground with her hair,—which assuredly had never grown on her head. She did not appear when we afterwards went up to Miss Havisham's room, and we four played at whist. In the interval, Miss Havisham, in a fantastic way, had put some of the most beautiful jewels from her dressing-table into Estella's hair, and about her bosom and arms; and I saw even my guardian look at her from under his thick eyebrows, and raise them a little, when her loveliness was before him, with those rich flushes of glitter and color in it.

Of the manner and extent to which he took our trumps into custody, and came out with mean little cards at the ends of hands, before which the glory of our Kings and Queens was utterly abased, I say nothing; nor, of the feeling that I had, respecting his looking upon us personally in the light of three very obvious and poor riddles that he had found out long ago. What I suffered from, was the incompatibility between his cold presence and my feelings towards Estella. It was not that I knew I could never bear to speak to him about her, that I knew I could never bear to hear him creak his boots at her, that I knew I could never bear to see him wash his hands of her; it was, that my admiration should be within a foot or two of him,—it was, that my feelings should be in the same place with him,—that, was the agonizing circumstance.

We played until nine o'clock, and then it was arranged that when Estella came to London I should be forewarned of her coming and should meet her at the coach; and then I took leave of her, and touched her and left her.

My guardian lay at the Boar in the next room to mine. Far into the night, Miss Havisham's words, "Love her, love her, love her!" sounded in my ears. I adapted them for my own repetition, and said to my pillow, "I love her, I love her, I love her!" hundreds of times. Then, a burst of gratitude came upon me, that she should be destined for me, once the blacksmith's boy. Then I thought if she were, as I feared, by no means rapturously grateful for that destiny yet, when would she begin to be interested in me? When should I awaken the heart within her that was mute and sleeping now?

Ah me! I thought those were high and great emotions. But I never thought there was anything low and small in my keeping away from Joe, because I knew she would be contemptuous of him. It was but a day gone, and Joe had brought the tears into my eyes; they had soon dried, God forgive me! soon dried.

Chapter XXX

After well considering the matter while I was dressing at the Blue Boar in the morning, I resolved to tell my guardian that I doubted Orlick's being the right sort of man to fill a post of trust at Miss Havisham's. "Why of course he is not the right sort of man, Pip," said my guardian, comfortably satisfied beforehand on the general head, "because the man who fills the post of trust never is the right sort of man." It seemed quite to put him into spirits to find that this particular post was not exceptionally held by the right sort of man, and he listened in a satisfied manner while I told him what knowledge I had of Orlick. "Very good, Pip," he observed, when I had concluded, "I'll go round presently, and pay our friend off." Rather alarmed by this summary action, I was for a little delay, and even hinted that our friend himself might be difficult to deal with. "Oh no he won't," said my guardian, making his pocket-handkerchief-point, with perfect confidence; "I should like to see him argue the question with me."

As we were going back together to London by the midday coach, and as I breakfasted under such terrors of Pumblechook that I could scarcely hold my cup, this gave me an opportunity of saying that I wanted a walk, and that I would go on along the London road while Mr. Jaggers was occupied, if he would let the coachman know that I would get into my place when overtaken. I was thus enabled to fly from the Blue Boar immediately after breakfast. By then making a loop of about a couple of miles into the open country at the back of Pumblechook's premises, I got round into the High Street again, a little beyond that pitfall, and felt myself in comparative security.

It was interesting to be in the quiet old town once more, and it was not disagreeable to be here and there suddenly recognized and stared after. One or two of the tradespeople even darted out of their shops and went a little way down the street before me, that they might turn, as if they had forgotten something, and pass me face to face,—on which occasions I don't know whether they or I made the worse pretence; they of not doing it, or I of not seeing it. Still my position was a distinguished one, and I was not at all dissatisfied with it, until Fate threw me in the way of that unlimited miscreant, Trabb's boy.

Casting my eyes along the street at a certain point of my progress, I beheld Trabb's boy approaching, lashing himself with an empty blue bag. Deeming that a serene and unconscious contemplation of him would best beseem me, and would be most likely to quell his evil mind, I advanced with that expression of countenance, and was rather congratulating myself on my success, when suddenly the knees of Trabb's boy smote together, his hair uprose, his cap fell off, he trembled violently in every limb, staggered out into the road, and crying to the populace, "Hold me! I'm so frightened!" feigned to be in a paroxysm of terror and contrition, occasioned by the dignity of my appearance. As I passed him, his teeth loudly chattered in his head, and with every mark of extreme humiliation, he prostrated himself in the dust.

This was a hard thing to bear, but this was nothing. I had not advanced another two hundred yards when, to my inexpressible terror, amazement, and indignation, I again beheld Trabb's boy approaching. He was coming round a narrow corner. His blue bag was slung over his shoulder, honest industry beamed in his eyes, a determination to proceed to Trabb's with cheerful briskness was indicated in his gait. With a shock he became aware of me, and was severely visited as before; but this time his motion was rotatory, and he staggered round and round me with knees more afflicted, and with uplifted hands as if beseeching for mercy. His sufferings were hailed with the greatest joy by a knot of spectators, and I felt utterly confounded.

I had not got as much further down the street as the post-office, when I again beheld Trabb's boy shooting round by a back way. This time, he was entirely changed. He wore the blue bag in the manner of my great-coat, and was strutting along the pavement towards me on the opposite side of the street, attended by a company of delighted young friends to whom he from time to time exclaimed, with a wave of his hand, "Don't know yah!" Words cannot state the amount of aggravation and injury wreaked upon me by Trabb's boy, when passing abreast of me, he pulled up his shirt-collar, twined his side-hair, stuck an arm akimbo, and smirked extravagantly by, wriggling his elbows and body, and drawling to his attendants, "Don't know yah, don't know yah, 'pon my soul don't know yah!" The disgrace attendant on his immediately afterwards taking to crowing and pursuing me across the bridge with crows, as from an exceedingly dejected fowl who had known me when I was a blacksmith, culminated the disgrace with which I left the town, and was, so to speak, ejected by it into the open country.

But unless I had taken the life of Trabb's boy on that occasion, I really do not even now see what I could have done save endure. To have struggled with him in the street, or to have exacted any lower recompense from him than his heart's best blood, would have been futile and degrading. Moreover, he was a boy whom no man could hurt; an invulnerable and dodging serpent who, when chased into a corner, flew out again between his captor's legs, scornfully yelping. I wrote, however, to Mr. Trabb by next day's post, to say that Mr. Pip must decline to deal further with one who could so far forget what he owed to the best interests of society, as to employ a boy who excited Loathing in every respectable mind.

The coach, with Mr. Jaggers inside, came up in due time, and I took my box-seat again, and arrived in London safe,—but not sound, for my heart was gone. As soon as I arrived, I sent a penitential codfish and barrel of oysters to Joe (as reparation for not having gone myself), and then went on to Barnard's Inn.

I found Herbert dining on cold meat, and delighted to welcome me back. Having despatched The Avenger to the coffee-house for an addition to the dinner, I felt that I must open my breast that very evening to my friend and chum. As confidence was out of the question with The Avenger in the hall, which could merely be regarded in the light of an antechamber to the keyhole, I sent him to the Play. A better proof of the severity of my bondage to that taskmaster could scarcely be afforded, than the degrading shifts to which I was constantly driven to find him employment. So mean is extremity, that I sometimes sent him to Hyde Park corner to see what o'clock it was.

Dinner done and we sitting with our feet upon the fender, I said to Herbert, "My dear Herbert, I have something very particular to tell you."

"My dear Handel," he returned, "I shall esteem and respect your confidence."

"It concerns myself, Herbert," said I, "and one other person."

Herbert crossed his feet, looked at the fire with his head on one side, and having looked at it in vain for some time, looked at me because I didn't go on.

"Herbert," said I, laying my hand upon his knee, "I love—I adore—Estella."

Instead of being transfixed, Herbert replied in an easy matter-ofcourse way, "Exactly. Well?"

"Well, Herbert? Is that all you say? Well?"

"What next, I mean?" said Herbert. "Of course I know that."

"How do you know it?" said I.

"How do I know it, Handel? Why, from you."

"I never told you."

"Told me! You have never told me when you have got your hair cut, but I have had senses to perceive it. You have always adored her, ever since I have known you. You brought your adoration and your portmanteau here together. Told me! Why, you have always told me all day long. When you told me your own story, you told me plainly that you began adoring her the first time you saw her, when you were very young indeed."

"Very well, then," said I, to whom this was a new and not unwelcome light, "I have never left off adoring her. And she has come back, a most beautiful and most elegant creature. And I saw her yesterday. And if I adored her before, I now doubly adore her."

"Lucky for you then, Handel," said Herbert, "that you are picked out for her and allotted to her. Without encroaching on forbidden ground, we may venture to say that there can be no doubt between ourselves of that fact. Have you any idea yet, of Estella's views on the adoration question?"

I shook my head gloomily. "Oh! She is thousands of miles away, from me," said I.

"Patience, my dear Handel: time enough, time enough. But you have something more to say?"

"I am ashamed to say it," I returned, "and yet it's no worse to say it than to think it. You call me a lucky fellow. Of course, I am. I was a blacksmith's boy but yesterday; I am—what shall I say I am—to-day?"

"Say a good fellow, if you want a phrase," returned Herbert, smiling, and clapping his hand on the back of mine—"a good fellow, with impetuosity and hesitation, boldness and diffidence, action and dreaming, curiously mixed in him."

I stopped for a moment to consider whether there really was this mixture in my character. On the whole, I by no means recognized the analysis, but thought it not worth disputing.

"When I ask what I am to call myself to-day, Herbert," I went on, "I suggest what I have in my thoughts. You say I am lucky. I know I have done nothing to raise myself in life, and that Fortune alone has raised me; that is being very lucky. And yet, when I think of Estella—"

("And when don't you, you know?" Herbert threw in, with his eyes on the fire; which I thought kind and sympathetic of him.)

"—Then, my dear Herbert, I cannot tell you how dependent and uncertain I feel, and how exposed to hundreds of chances. Avoiding forbidden ground, as you did just now, I may still say that on the constancy of one person (naming no person) all my expectations depend. And at the best, how indefinite and unsatisfactory, only to know so vaguely what they are!" In saying this, I relieved my mind of what had always been there, more or less, though no doubt most since yesterday.

"Now, Handel," Herbert replied, in his gay, hopeful way, "it seems to me that in the despondency of the tender passion, we are looking into our gift-horse's mouth with a magnifying-glass. Likewise, it seems to me that, concentrating our attention on the examination, we altogether overlook one of the best points of the animal. Didn't you tell me that your guardian, Mr. Jaggers, told you in the beginning, that you were not endowed with expectations only? And even if he had not told you so,—though that is a very large If, I grant,—could you believe that of all men in London, Mr. Jaggers is the man to hold his present relations towards you unless he were sure of his ground?"

I said I could not deny that this was a strong point. I said it (people often do so, in such cases) like a rather reluctant concession to truth and justice;—as if I wanted to deny it!

"I should think it was a strong point," said Herbert, "and I should think you would be puzzled to imagine a stronger; as to the rest, you must bide your guardian's time, and he must bide his client's time. You'll be one-and-twenty before you know where you are, and then perhaps you'll get some further enlightenment. At all events, you'll be nearer getting it, for it must come at last."

"What a hopeful disposition you have!" said I, gratefully admiring his cheery ways.

"I ought to have," said Herbert, "for I have not much else. I must acknowledge, by the by, that the good sense of what I have just said is not my own, but my father's. The only remark I ever heard him make on your story, was the final one, "The thing is settled and done, or Mr. Jaggers would not be in it." And now before I say anything more about my father, or my father's son, and repay confidence with confidence, I want to make myself seriously disagreeable to you for a moment,—positively repulsive."

"You won't succeed," said I.

"O yes I shall!" said he. "One, two, three, and now I am in for it. Handel, my good fellow;"—though he spoke in this light tone, he was very much in earnest,—"I have been thinking since we have been talking with our feet on this fender, that Estella surely cannot be a condition of your inheritance, if she was never referred to by your guardian. Am I right in so understanding what you have told me, as that he never referred to her, directly or indirectly, in any way? Never even hinted, for instance, that your patron might have views as to your marriage ultimately?"

"Never."

"Now, Handel, I am quite free from the flavor of sour grapes, upon my soul and honor! Not being bound to her, can you not detach yourself from her?—I told you I should be disagreeable."

I turned my head aside, for, with a rush and a sweep, like the old marsh winds coming up from the sea, a feeling like that which had subdued me on the morning when I left the forge, when the mists were solemnly rising, and when I laid my hand upon the village finger-post, smote upon my heart again. There was silence between us for a little while.

"Yes; but my dear Handel," Herbert went on, as if we had been talking, instead of silent, "its having been so strongly rooted in the breast of a boy whom nature and circumstances made so romantic, renders it very serious. Think of her bringing-up, and think of Miss Havisham. Think of what she is herself (now I am repulsive and you abominate me). This may lead to miserable things."

"I know it, Herbert," said I, with my head still turned away, "but I can't help it."

"You can't detach yourself?"

"No. Impossible!"

"You can't try, Handel?"

"No. Impossible!"

"Well!" said Herbert, getting up with a lively shake as if he had been asleep, and stirring the fire, "now I'll endeavor to make myself agreeable again!"

So he went round the room and shook the curtains out, put the chairs in their places, tidied the books and so forth that were lying about, looked into the hall, peeped into the letter-box, shut the door, and came back to his chair by the fire: where he sat down, nursing his left leg in both arms.

"I was going to say a word or two, Handel, concerning my father and my father's son. I am afraid it is scarcely necessary for my father's son to remark that my father's establishment is not particularly brilliant in its housekeeping."

"There is always plenty, Herbert," said I, to say something encouraging.

"O yes! and so the dustman says, I believe, with the strongest approval, and so does the marine-store shop in the back street. Gravely, Handel, for the subject is grave enough, you know how it is as well as I do. I suppose there was a time once when my father had not given matters up; but if ever there was, the time is gone. May I ask you if you have ever had an opportunity of remarking, down in your part of the country, that the children of not exactly suitable marriages are always most particularly anxious to be married?"

This was such a singular question, that I asked him in return, "Is it so?"

"I don't know," said Herbert, "that's what I want to know. Because it is decidedly the case with us. My poor sister Charlotte, who was next me and died before she was fourteen, was a striking example. Little Jane is the same. In her desire to be matrimonially established, you might suppose her to have passed her short existence in the perpetual contemplation of domestic bliss. Little Alick in a frock has already made arrangements for his union with a suitable young person at Kew. And indeed, I think we are all engaged, except the baby."

"Then you are?" said I.

"I am," said Herbert; "but it's a secret."

I assured him of my keeping the secret, and begged to be favored with further particulars. He had spoken so sensibly and feelingly of my weakness that I wanted to know something about his strength.

"May I ask the name?" I said.

"Name of Clara," said Herbert.

"Live in London?"

"Yes, perhaps I ought to mention," said Herbert, who had become curiously crestfallen and meek, since we entered on the interesting theme, "that she is rather below my mother's nonsensical family notions. Her father had to do with the victualling of passenger-ships. I think he was a species of purser."

"What is he now?" said I.

"He's an invalid now," replied Herbert.

"Living on—?"

"On the first floor," said Herbert. Which was not at all what I meant, for I had intended my question to apply to his means. "I have never seen him, for he has always kept his room overhead, since I have known Clara. But I have heard him constantly. He makes tremendous rows,—roars, and pegs at the floor with some frightful instrument." In looking at me and then laughing heartily, Herbert for the time recovered his usual lively manner.

"Don't you expect to see him?" said I.

"O yes, I constantly expect to see him," returned Herbert, "because I never hear him, without expecting him to come tumbling through the ceiling. But I don't know how long the rafters may hold."

When he had once more laughed heartily, he became meek again, and told me that the moment he began to realize Capital, it was his intention to marry this young lady. He added as a self-evident proposition, engendering low spirits, "But you can't marry, you know, while you're looking about you."

As we contemplated the fire, and as I thought what a difficult vision to realize this same Capital sometimes was, I put my hands in my pockets. A folded piece of paper in one of them attracting my attention, I opened it and found it to be the play-bill I had received from Joe, relative to the celebrated provincial amateur of Roscian renown. "And bless my heart," I involuntarily added aloud, "it's to-night!"

This changed the subject in an instant, and made us hurriedly resolve to go to the play. So, when I had pledged myself to comfort and abet Herbert in the affair of his heart by all practicable and impracticable means, and when Herbert had told me that his affianced already knew me by reputation and that I should be presented to her, and when we had warmly shaken hands upon our mutual confidence, we blew out our candles, made up our fire, locked our door, and issued forth in quest of Mr. Wopsle and Denmark.

Chapter XXXI

On our arrival in Denmark, we found the king and queen of that country elevated in two arm-chairs on a kitchen-table, holding a Court. The whole of the Danish nobility were in attendance; consisting of a noble boy in the wash-leather boots of a gigantic ancestor, a venerable Peer with a dirty face who seemed to have risen from the people late in life, and the Danish chivalry with a comb in its hair and a pair of white silk legs, and presenting on the whole a feminine appearance. My gifted townsman stood gloomily apart, with folded arms, and I could have wished that his curls and forehead had been more probable.

Several curious little circumstances transpired as the action proceeded. The late king of the country not only appeared to have been troubled with a cough at the time of his decease, but to have taken it with him to the tomb, and to have brought it back. The royal phantom also carried a ghostly manuscript round its truncheon, to which it had the appearance of occasionally referring, and that too, with an air of anxiety and a tendency to lose the place of reference which were suggestive of a state of mortality. It was this, I conceive, which led to the Shade's being advised by the gallery to "turn over!"—a recommendation which it took extremely ill. It was likewise to be noted of this majestic spirit, that whereas it always appeared with an air of having been out a long time and walked an immense distance, it perceptibly came from a closely contiguous wall. This occasioned its terrors to be received derisively. The Queen of Denmark, a very buxom lady, though no doubt historically brazen, was considered by the public to have too much brass about her; her chin being attached to her diadem by a broad band of that metal (as if she had a gorgeous toothache), her waist being encircled by another, and each of her arms by another, so that she was openly mentioned as "the kettle-drum." The noble boy in the ancestral boots was inconsistent, representing himself, as it were in one breath, as an able seaman, a strolling actor, a grave-digger, a clergyman, and a person of the utmost importance at a Court fencing-match, on the authority of whose practised eye and nice discrimination the finest strokes were judged. This gradually led to a want of toleration for him, and even—on his being detected in holy orders, and declining to perform the funeral service—to the general indignation taking the form of nuts. Lastly, Ophelia was a prey to such slow musical madness, that when, in course of time, she had taken off her white muslin scarf, folded it up, and buried it, a sulky man who had been long cooling his impatient nose against an iron bar in the front row of the gallery, growled, "Now the baby's put to bed let's have supper!" Which, to say the least of it, was out of keeping.

Upon my unfortunate townsman all these incidents accumulated with playful effect. Whenever that undecided Prince had to ask a question or state a doubt, the public helped him out with it. As for example; on the question whether 'twas nobler in the mind to suffer, some roared yes, and some no, and some inclining to both opinions said "Toss up for it;" and quite a Debating Society arose. When he asked what should such fellows as he do crawling between earth and heaven, he was encouraged with loud cries of "Hear, hear!" When he appeared with his stocking disordered (its disorder expressed, according to usage, by one very neat fold in the top, which I suppose to be always got up with a flat iron), a conversation took place in the gallery respecting the paleness of his leg, and whether it was occasioned by the turn the ghost had given him. On his taking the recorders,—very like a little black flute that had just been played in the orchestra and handed out at the door,—he was called upon unanimously for Rule Britannia. When he recommended the player not to saw the air thus, the sulky man said, "And don't you do it, neither; you're a deal worse than him!" And I grieve to add that peals of laughter greeted Mr. Wopsle on every one of these occasions.

But his greatest trials were in the churchyard, which had the appearance of a primeval forest, with a kind of small ecclesiastical wash-house on one side, and a turnpike gate on the other. Mr. Wopsle in a comprehensive black cloak, being descried entering at the turnpike, the gravedigger was admonished in a friendly way, "Look out! Here's the undertaker a coming, to see how you're a getting on with your work!" I believe it is well known in a constitutional country that Mr. Wopsle could not possibly have returned the skull, after moralizing over it, without dusting his fingers on a white napkin taken from his breast; but even that innocent and indispensable action did not pass without the comment, "Wai-ter!" The arrival of the body for interment (in an empty black box with the lid tumbling open), was the signal for a general joy, which was much enhanced by the discovery, among the bearers, of an individual obnoxious to identification. The joy attended

Mr. Wopsle through his struggle with Laertes on the brink of the orchestra and the grave, and slackened no more until he had tumbled the king off the kitchen-table, and had died by inches from the ankles upward.

We had made some pale efforts in the beginning to applaud Mr. Wopsle; but they were too hopeless to be persisted in. Therefore we had sat, feeling keenly for him, but laughing, nevertheless, from ear to ear. I laughed in spite of myself all the time, the whole thing was so droll; and yet I had a latent impression that there was something decidedly fine in Mr. Wopsle's elocution,—not for old associations' sake, I am afraid, but because it was very slow, very dreary, very up-hill and down-hill, and very unlike any way in which any man in any natural circumstances of life or death ever expressed himself about anything. When the tragedy was over, and he had been called for and hooted, I said to Herbert, "Let us go at once, or perhaps we shall meet him."

We made all the haste we could down stairs, but we were not quick enough either. Standing at the door was a Jewish man with an unnatural heavy smear of eyebrow, who caught my eyes as we advanced, and said, when we came up with him,—

"Mr. Pip and friend?"

Identity of Mr. Pip and friend confessed.

"Mr. Waldengarver," said the man, "would be glad to have the honor."

"Waldengarver?" I repeated—when Herbert murmured in my ear, "Probably Wopsle."

"Oh!" said I. "Yes. Shall we follow you?"

"A few steps, please." When we were in a side alley, he turned and asked, "How did you think he looked?—I dressed him."

I don't know what he had looked like, except a funeral; with the addition of a large Danish sun or star hanging round his neck by a blue ribbon, that had given him the appearance of being insured in some extraordinary Fire Office. But I said he had looked very nice.

"When he come to the grave," said our conductor, "he showed his cloak beautiful. But, judging from the wing, it looked to me that when he see the ghost in the queen's apartment, he might have made more of his stockings."

I modestly assented, and we all fell through a little dirty swing door, into a sort of hot packing-case immediately behind it. Here Mr. Wopsle was divesting himself of his Danish garments, and here there was just room for us to look at him over one another's shoulders, by keeping the packing-case door, or lid, wide open.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Wopsle, "I am proud to see you. I hope, Mr. Pip, you will excuse my sending round. I had the happiness to know you in former times, and the Drama has ever had a claim which has ever been acknowledged, on the noble and the affluent."

Meanwhile, Mr. Waldengarver, in a frightful perspiration, was trying to get himself out of his princely sables.

"Skin the stockings off Mr. Waldengarver," said the owner of that property, "or you'll bust 'em. Bust 'em, and you'll bust five-and-thirty shillings. Shakspeare never was complimented with a finer pair. Keep quiet in your chair now, and leave 'em to me."

With that, he went upon his knees, and began to flay his victim; who, on the first stocking coming off, would certainly have fallen over backward with his chair, but for there being no room to fall anyhow.

I had been afraid until then to say a word about the play. But then, Mr. Waldengarver looked up at us complacently, and said,—

"Gentlemen, how did it seem to you, to go, in front?"

Herbert said from behind (at the same time poking me), "Capitally." So I said "Capitally."

"How did you like my reading of the character, gentlemen?" said Mr. Waldengarver, almost, if not quite, with patronage.

Herbert said from behind (again poking me), "Massive and concrete." So I said boldly, as if I had originated it, and must beg to insist upon it, "Massive and concrete."

"I am glad to have your approbation, gentlemen," said Mr. Waldengarver, with an air of dignity, in spite of his being ground against the wall at the time, and holding on by the seat of the chair.

"But I'll tell you one thing, Mr. Waldengarver," said the man who was on his knees, "in which you're out in your reading. Now mind! I don't care who says contrairy; I tell you so. You're out in your reading of Hamlet when you get your legs in profile. The last Hamlet as I dressed, made the same mistakes in his reading at rehearsal, till I got him to put a large red wafer on each of his shins, and then at that rehearsal (which was the last) I went in front, sir, to the back of the pit, and whenever his reading brought him into profile, I called out "I don't see no wafers!" And at night his reading was lovely."

Mr. Waldengarver smiled at me, as much as to say "a faithful Dependent—I overlook his folly;" and then said aloud, "My view is a little classic and thoughtful for them here; but they will improve, they will improve."

Herbert and I said together, O, no doubt they would improve.

"Did you observe, gentlemen," said Mr. Waldengarver, "that there was a man in the gallery who endeavored to cast derision on the service,—I mean, the representation?"

We basely replied that we rather thought we had noticed such a man. I added, "He was drunk, no doubt."

"O dear no, sir," said Mr. Wopsle, "not drunk. His employer would see to that, sir. His employer would not allow him to be drunk."

"You know his employer?" said I.

Mr. Wopsle shut his eyes, and opened them again; performing both ceremonies very slowly. "You must have observed, gentlemen," said he, "an ignorant and a blatant ass, with a rasping throat and a countenance expressive of low malignity, who went through—I will not say sustained—the rôle (if I may use a French expression) of Claudius, King of Denmark. That is his employer, gentlemen. Such is the profession!"

Without distinctly knowing whether I should have been more sorry for Mr. Wopsle if he had been in despair, I was so sorry for him as it was, that I took the opportunity of his turning round to have his braces put on,—which jostled us out at the doorway,—to ask Herbert what he thought of having him home to supper? Herbert said he thought it would be kind to do so; therefore I invited him, and he went to Barnard's with us, wrapped up to the eyes, and we did our best for him, and he sat until two o'clock in the morning, reviewing his success and developing his plans. I forget in detail what they were, but I have a general recollection that he was to begin with reviving the Drama, and to end with crushing it; inasmuch as his decease would leave it utterly bereft and without a chance or hope.

Miserably I went to bed after all, and miserably thought of Estella, and miserably dreamed that my expectations were all cancelled, and that I had to give my hand in marriage to Herbert's Clara, or play Hamlet to Miss Havisham's Ghost, before twenty thousand people, without knowing twenty words of it.

Chapter XXXII

One day when I was busy with my books and Mr. Pocket, I received a note by the post, the mere outside of which threw me into a great flutter; for, though I had never seen the handwriting in which it was addressed, I divined whose hand it was. It had no set beginning, as Dear Mr. Pip, or Dear Pip, or Dear Sir, or Dear Anything, but ran thus:—

"I am to come to London the day after to-morrow by the midday coach. I believe it was settled you should meet me? At all events Miss Havisham has that impression, and I write in obedience to it. She sends you her regard.

"Yours, ESTELLA."

If there had been time, I should probably have ordered several suits of clothes for this occasion; but as there was not, I was fain to be content with those I had. My appetite vanished instantly, and I knew no peace or rest until the day arrived. Not that its arrival brought me either; for, then I was worse than ever, and began haunting the coach-office in Wood Street, Cheapside, before the coach had left the Blue Boar in our town. For all that I knew this perfectly well, I still felt as if it were not safe to let the coach-office be out of my sight longer than five minutes at a time; and in this condition of unreason I had performed the first half-hour of a watch of four or five hours, when Wemmick ran against me.

"Halloa, Mr. Pip," said he; "how do you do? I should hardly have thought this was your beat."

I explained that I was waiting to meet somebody who was coming up by coach, and I inquired after the Castle and the Aged.

"Both flourishing thankye," said Wemmick, "and particularly the Aged. He's in wonderful feather. He'll be eighty-two next birthday. I have a notion of firing eighty-two times, if the neighborhood shouldn't complain, and that cannon of mine should prove equal to the pressure. However, this is not London talk. Where do you think I am going to?"

"To the office?" said I, for he was tending in that direction.

"Next thing to it," returned Wemmick, "I am going to Newgate. We are in a banker's-parcel case just at present, and I have been down the road taking a squint at the scene of action, and thereupon must have a word or two with our client."

"Did your client commit the robbery?" I asked.

"Bless your soul and body, no," answered Wemmick, very drily. "But he is accused of it. So might you or I be. Either of us might be accused of it, you know."

"Only neither of us is," I remarked.

"Yah!" said Wemmick, touching me on the breast with his forefinger; "you're a deep one, Mr. Pip! Would you like to have a look at Newgate? Have you time to spare?"

I had so much time to spare, that the proposal came as a relief, notwithstanding its irreconcilability with my latent desire to keep my eye on the coach-office. Muttering that I would make the inquiry whether I had time to walk with him, I went into the office, and ascertained from the clerk with the nicest precision and much to the trying of his temper, the earliest moment at which the coach could be expected,—which I knew beforehand, quite as well as he. I then rejoined Mr. Wemmick, and affecting to consult my watch, and to be surprised by the information I had received, accepted his offer.

We were at Newgate in a few minutes, and we passed through the lodge where some fetters were hanging up on the bare walls among the prison rules, into the interior of the jail. At that time jails were much neglected, and the period of exaggerated reaction consequent on all public wrongdoing—and which is always its heaviest and longest punishment—was still far off. So felons were not lodged and fed better than soldiers, (to say nothing of paupers,) and seldom set fire to their prisons with the excusable object of improving the flavor of their soup. It was visiting time when Wemmick took me in, and a potman was going his rounds with beer; and the prisoners, behind bars in yards, were buying beer, and talking to friends; and a frowzy, ugly, disorderly, depressing scene it was.

It struck me that Wemmick walked among the prisoners much as a gardener might walk among his plants. This was first put into my head by his seeing a shoot that had come up in the night, and saying, "What, Captain Tom? Are you there? Ah, indeed!" and also, "Is that Black Bill behind the cistern? Why I didn't look for you these two months; how do you find yourself?" Equally in his stopping at the bars and attending to anxious whisperers,—always singly,—Wemmick with his post-office in an immovable state, looked at them while in conference, as if he were taking particular notice of the advance they had made, since last observed, towards coming out in full blow at their trial.

He was highly popular, and I found that he took the familiar department of Mr. Jaggers's business; though something of the state of Mr. Jaggers hung about him too, forbidding approach beyond certain limits. His personal recognition of each successive client was comprised in a nod, and in his settling his hat a little easier on his head with both hands, and then tightening the post-office, and putting his hands in his pockets. In one or two instances there was a difficulty respecting the raising of fees, and then Mr. Wemmick, backing as far as possible from the insufficient money produced, said, "it's no use, my boy. I'm only a subordinate. I can't take it. Don't go on in that way with a subordinate. If you are unable to make up your quantum, my boy, you had better address yourself to a principal; there are plenty of principals in the profession, you know, and what is not worth the while of one, may be worth the while of another; that's my recommendation to you, speaking as a subordinate. Don't try on useless measures. Why should you? Now, who's next?"

Thus, we walked through Wemmick's greenhouse, until he turned to me and said, "Notice the man I shall shake hands with." I should have done so, without the preparation, as he had shaken hands with no one yet.

Almost as soon as he had spoken, a portly upright man (whom I can see now, as I write) in a well-worn olive-colored frock-coat, with a peculiar pallor overspreading the red in his complexion, and eyes that went wandering about when he tried to fix them, came up to a corner of the bars, and put his hand to his hat—which had a greasy and fatty surface like cold broth—with a half-serious and half-jocose military salute.

"Colonel, to you!" said Wemmick; "how are you, Colonel?"

"All right, Mr. Wemmick."

"Everything was done that could be done, but the evidence was too strong for us, Colonel."

"Yes, it was too strong, sir,—but I don't care."

"No, no," said Wemmick, coolly, "you don't care." Then, turning to me, "Served His Majesty this man. Was a soldier in the line and bought his discharge."

I said, "Indeed?" and the man's eyes looked at me, and then looked over my head, and then looked all round me, and then he drew his hand across his lips and laughed.

"I think I shall be out of this on Monday, sir," he said to Wemmick.

"Perhaps," returned my friend, "but there's no knowing."

"I am glad to have the chance of bidding you good by, Mr. Wemmick," said the man, stretching out his hand between two bars.

"Thankye," said Wemmick, shaking hands with him. "Same to you, Colonel."

"If what I had upon me when taken had been real, Mr. Wemmick," said the man, unwilling to let his hand go, "I should have asked the favor of your wearing another ring—in acknowledgment of your attentions."

"I'll accept the will for the deed," said Wemmick. "By the by; you were quite a pigeon-fancier." The man looked up at the sky. "I am told you had a remarkable breed of tumblers. Could you commission any friend of yours to bring me a pair, of you've no further use for 'em?"

"It shall be done, sir?"

"All right," said Wemmick, "they shall be taken care of. Good afternoon, Colonel. Good by!" They shook hands again, and as we walked away Wemmick said to me, "A Coiner, a very good workman. The Recorder's report is made to-day, and he is sure to be executed on Monday. Still you see, as far as it goes, a pair of pigeons are portable property all the same." With that, he looked back, and nodded at this dead plant, and then cast his eyes about him in walking out of the yard, as if he were considering what other pot would go best in its place.

As we came out of the prison through the lodge, I found that the great importance of my guardian was appreciated by the turnkeys, no less than by those whom they held in charge. "Well, Mr. Wemmick," said the turnkey, who kept us between the two studded and spiked lodge gates, and who carefully locked one before he unlocked the other, "what's Mr. Jaggers going to do with that water-side murder? Is he going to make it manslaughter, or what's he going to make of it?"

"Why don't you ask him?" returned Wemmick.

"O yes, I dare say!" said the turnkey.

"Now, that's the way with them here, Mr. Pip," remarked Wemmick, turning to me with his post-office elongated. "They don't mind what they ask of me, the subordinate; but you'll never catch 'em asking any questions of my principal."

"Is this young gentleman one of the 'prentices or articled ones of your office?" asked the turnkey, with a grin at Mr. Wemmick's humor.

"There he goes again, you see!" cried Wemmick, "I told you so! Asks another question of the subordinate before his first is dry! Well, supposing Mr. Pip is one of them?"

"Why then," said the turnkey, grinning again, "he knows what Mr. Jaggers is."

"Yah!" cried Wemmick, suddenly hitting out at the turnkey in a facetious way, "you're dumb as one of your own keys when you have to do with my principal, you know you are. Let us out, you old fox, or I'll get him to bring an action against you for false imprisonment."

The turnkey laughed, and gave us good day, and stood laughing at us over the spikes of the wicket when we descended the steps into the street.

"Mind you, Mr. Pip," said Wemmick, gravely in my ear, as he took my arm to be more confidential; "I don't know that Mr. Jaggers does a better thing than the way in which he keeps himself so high. He's always so high. His constant height is of a piece with his immense abilities. That Colonel durst no more take leave of him, than that turnkey durst ask him his intentions respecting a case. Then, between his height and them, he slips in his subordinate,—don't you see?—and so he has 'em, soul and body."

I was very much impressed, and not for the first time, by my guardian's subtlety. To confess the truth, I very heartily wished, and not for the first time, that I had had some other guardian of minor abilities.

Mr. Wemmick and I parted at the office in Little Britain, where suppliants for Mr. Jaggers's notice were lingering about as usual, and I returned to my watch in the street of the coach-office, with some three hours on hand. I consumed the whole time in thinking how strange it was that I should be encompassed by all this taint of prison and crime; that, in my childhood out on our lonely marshes on a winter evening, I should have first encountered it; that, it should have reappeared on two occasions, starting out like a stain that was faded but not gone; that, it should in this new way pervade my fortune and advancement. While my mind was thus engaged, I thought of the beautiful young Estella, proud and refined, coming towards me, and I thought with absolute abhorrence of the contrast between the jail and her. I wished that Wemmick had not met me, or that I had not yielded to him and gone with him, so that, of all days in the year on this day, I might not have had Newgate in my breath and on my clothes. I beat the prison dust off my feet as I sauntered to and fro, and I shook it out of my dress, and I exhaled its air from my lungs. So contaminated did I feel, remembering who was coming, that the coach came quickly after all, and I was not yet free from the soiling consciousness of Mr. Wemmick's conservatory, when I saw her face at the coach window and her hand waving to me.

What was the nameless shadow which again in that one instant had passed?

Chapter XXXIII

In her furred travelling-dress, Estella seemed more delicately beautiful than she had ever seemed yet, even in my eyes. Her manner was more winning than she had cared to let it be to me before, and I thought I saw Miss Havisham's influence in the change.

We stood in the Inn Yard while she pointed out her luggage to me, and when it was all collected I remembered—having forgotten everything but herself in the meanwhile—that I knew nothing of her destination.

"I am going to Richmond," she told me. "Our lesson is, that there are two Richmonds, one in Surrey and one in Yorkshire, and that mine is the Surrey Richmond. The distance is ten miles. I am to have a carriage, and you are to take me. This is my purse, and you are to pay my charges out of it. O, you must take the purse! We have no choice, you and I, but to obey our instructions. We are not free to follow our own devices, you and I."

As she looked at me in giving me the purse, I hoped there was an inner meaning in her words. She said them slightingly, but not with displeasure.

"A carriage will have to be sent for, Estella. Will you rest here a little?"

"Yes, I am to rest here a little, and I am to drink some tea, and you are to take care of me the while."

She drew her arm through mine, as if it must be done, and I requested a waiter who had been staring at the coach like a man who had never seen such a thing in his life, to show us a private sitting-room. Upon that, he pulled out a napkin, as if it were a magic clew without which he couldn't find the way up stairs, and led us to the black hole of the establishment, fitted up with a diminishing mirror (quite a superfluous article, considering the hole's proportions), an anchovy sauce-cruet, and somebody's pattens. On my objecting to this retreat, he took us into another room with a dinner-table for thirty, and in the grate a scorched leaf of a copy-book under a bushel of coal-dust. Having looked at this extinct conflagration and shaken his head, he took my order; which, proving to be merely, "Some tea for the lady," sent him out of the room in a very low state of mind.

I was, and I am, sensible that the air of this chamber, in its strong combination of stable with soup-stock, might have led one to infer that the coaching department was not doing well, and that the enterprising proprietor was boiling down the horses for the refreshment department. Yet the room was all in all to me, Estella being in it. I thought that with her I could have been happy there for life. (I was not at all happy there at the time, observe, and I knew it well.)

"Where are you going to, at Richmond?" I asked Estella.

"I am going to live," said she, "at a great expense, with a lady there, who has the power—or says she has—of taking me about, and introducing me, and showing people to me and showing me to people."

"I suppose you will be glad of variety and admiration?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

She answered so carelessly, that I said, "You speak of yourself as if you were some one else."

"Where did you learn how I speak of others? Come, come," said Estella, smiling delightfully, "you must not expect me to go to school to you; I must talk in my own way. How do you thrive with Mr. Pocket?"

"I live quite pleasantly there; at least—" It appeared to me that I was losing a chance.

"At least?" repeated Estella.

"As pleasantly as I could anywhere, away from you."

"You silly boy," said Estella, quite composedly, "how can you talk such nonsense? Your friend Mr. Matthew, I believe, is superior to the rest of his family?"

"Very superior indeed. He is nobody's enemy—" —"Don't add but his own," interposed Estella, "for I hate that class of man. But he really is disinterested, and above small jealousy and spite, I have heard?"

"I am sure I have every reason to say so."

"You have not every reason to say so of the rest of his people," said Estella, nodding at me with an expression of face that was at once grave and rallying, "for they beset Miss Havisham with reports and insinuations to your disadvantage. They watch you, misrepresent you, write letters about you (anonymous sometimes), and you are the torment and the occupation of their lives. You can scarcely realize to yourself the hatred those people feel for you."

"They do me no harm, I hope?"

Instead of answering, Estella burst out laughing. This was very singular to me, and I looked at her in considerable perplexity. When she left off—

and she had not laughed languidly, but with real enjoyment—I said, in my diffident way with her,—

"I hope I may suppose that you would not be amused if they did me any harm."

"No, no you may be sure of that," said Estella. "You may be certain that I laugh because they fail. O, those people with Miss Havisham, and the tortures they undergo!" She laughed again, and even now when she had told me why, her laughter was very singular to me, for I could not doubt its being genuine, and yet it seemed too much for the occasion. I thought there must really be something more here than I knew; she saw the thought in my mind, and answered it.

"It is not easy for even you." said Estella, "to know what satisfaction it gives me to see those people thwarted, or what an enjoyable sense of the ridiculous I have when they are made ridiculous. For you were not brought up in that strange house from a mere baby. I was. You had not your little wits sharpened by their intriguing against you, suppressed and defenceless, under the mask of sympathy and pity and what not that is soft and soothing. I had. You did not gradually open your round childish eyes wider and wider to the discovery of that impostor of a woman who calculates her stores of peace of mind for when she wakes up in the night. I did."

It was no laughing matter with Estella now, nor was she summoning these remembrances from any shallow place. I would not have been the cause of that look of hers for all my expectations in a heap.

"Two things I can tell you," said Estella. "First, notwithstanding the proverb that constant dropping will wear away a stone, you may set your mind at rest that these people never will—never would, in hundred years—impair your ground with Miss Havisham, in any particular, great or small. Second, I am beholden to you as the cause of their being so busy and so mean in vain, and there is my hand upon it."

As she gave it to me playfully,—for her darker mood had been but Momentary,—I held it and put it to my lips. "You ridiculous boy," said Estella, "will you never take warning? Or do you kiss my hand in the same spirit in which I once let you kiss my cheek?"

"What spirit was that?" said I.

"I must think a moment. A spirit of contempt for the fawners and plotters."

"If I say yes, may I kiss the cheek again?"

"You should have asked before you touched the hand. But, yes, if you like."

I leaned down, and her calm face was like a statue's. "Now," said Estella, gliding away the instant I touched her cheek, "you are to take care that I have some tea, and you are to take me to Richmond."

Her reverting to this tone as if our association were forced upon us, and we were mere puppets, gave me pain; but everything in our intercourse did give me pain. Whatever her tone with me happened to be, I could put no trust in it, and build no hope on it; and yet I went on against trust and against hope. Why repeat it a thousand times? So it always was.

I rang for the tea, and the waiter, reappearing with his magic clew, brought in by degrees some fifty adjuncts to that refreshment, but of tea not a glimpse. A teaboard, cups and saucers, plates, knives and forks (including carvers), spoons (various), saltcellars, a meek little muffin confined with the utmost precaution under a strong iron cover, Moses in the bulrushes typified by a soft bit of butter in a quantity of parsley, a pale loaf with a powdered head, two proof impressions of the bars of the kitchen fireplace on triangular bits of bread, and ultimately a fat family urn; which the waiter staggered in with, expressing in his countenance burden and suffering. After a prolonged absence at this stage of the entertainment, he at length came back with a casket of precious appearance containing twigs. These I steeped in hot water, and so from the whole of these appliances extracted one cup of I don't know what for Estella.

The bill paid, and the waiter remembered, and the ostler not forgotten, and the chambermaid taken into consideration,—in a word, the whole house bribed into a state of contempt and animosity, and Estella's purse much lightened,—we got into our post-coach and drove away. Turning into Cheapside and rattling up Newgate Street, we were soon under the walls of which I was so ashamed.

"What place is that?" Estella asked me.

I made a foolish pretence of not at first recognizing it, and then told her. As she looked at it, and drew in her head again, murmuring, "Wretches!" I would not have confessed to my visit for any consideration.

"Mr. Jaggers," said I, by way of putting it neatly on somebody else, "has the reputation of being more in the secrets of that dismal place than any man in London."

"He is more in the secrets of every place, I think," said Estella, in a low voice.

"You have been accustomed to see him often, I suppose?"

"I have been accustomed to see him at uncertain intervals, ever since I can remember. But I know him no better now, than I did before I could speak plainly. What is your own experience of him? Do you advance with him?"

"Once habituated to his distrustful manner," said I, "I have done very well."

"Are you intimate?"

"I have dined with him at his private house."

"I fancy," said Estella, shrinking "that must be a curious place."

"It is a curious place."

I should have been chary of discussing my guardian too freely even with her; but I should have gone on with the subject so far as to describe the dinner in Gerrard Street, if we had not then come into a sudden glare of gas. It seemed, while it lasted, to be all alight and alive with that inexplicable feeling I had had before; and when we were out of it, I was as much dazed for a few moments as if I had been in lightning.

So we fell into other talk, and it was principally about the way by which we were travelling, and about what parts of London lay on this side of it, and what on that. The great city was almost new to her, she told me, for she had never left Miss Havisham's neighborhood until she had gone to France, and she had merely passed through London then in going and returning. I asked her if my guardian had any charge of her while she remained here? To that she emphatically said "God forbid!" and no more.

It was impossible for me to avoid seeing that she cared to attract me; that she made herself winning, and would have won me even if the task had needed pains. Yet this made me none the happier, for even if she had not taken that tone of our being disposed of by others, I should have felt that she held my heart in her hand because she wilfully chose to do it, and not because it would have wrung any tenderness in her to crush it and throw it away.

When we passed through Hammersmith, I showed her where Mr. Matthew Pocket lived, and said it was no great way from Richmond, and that I hoped I should see her sometimes.

"O yes, you are to see me; you are to come when you think proper; you are to be mentioned to the family; indeed you are already mentioned."

I inquired was it a large household she was going to be a member of?

"No; there are only two; mother and daughter. The mother is a lady of some station, though not averse to increasing her income."

"I wonder Miss Havisham could part with you again so soon."

"It is a part of Miss Havisham's plans for me, Pip," said Estella, with a sigh, as if she were tired; "I am to write to her constantly and see her regularly and report how I go on,—I and the jewels,—for they are nearly all mine now."

It was the first time she had ever called me by my name. Of course she did so purposely, and knew that I should treasure it up.

We came to Richmond all too soon, and our destination there was a house by the green,—a staid old house, where hoops and powder and patches, embroidered coats, rolled stockings, ruffles and swords, had had their court days many a time. Some ancient trees before the house were still cut into fashions as formal and unnatural as the hoops and wigs and stiff skirts; but their own allotted places in the great procession of the dead were not far off, and they would soon drop into them and go the silent way of the rest.

A bell with an old voice—which I dare say in its time had often said to the house, Here is the green farthingale, Here is the diamond-hilted sword, Here are the shoes with red heels and the blue solitaire—sounded gravely in the moonlight, and two cherry-colored maids came fluttering out to receive Estella. The doorway soon absorbed her boxes, and she gave me her hand and a smile, and said good night, and was absorbed likewise. And still I stood looking at the house, thinking how happy I should be if I lived there with her, and knowing that I never was happy with her, but always miserable.

I got into the carriage to be taken back to Hammersmith, and I got in with a bad heart-ache, and I got out with a worse heart-ache. At our own door, I found little Jane Pocket coming home from a little party escorted by her little lover; and I envied her little lover, in spite of his being subject to Flopson.

Mr. Pocket was out lecturing; for, he was a most delightful lecturer on domestic economy, and his treatises on the management of children and servants were considered the very best text-books on those themes. But

Mrs. Pocket was at home, and was in a little difficulty, on account of the baby's having been accommodated with a needle-case to keep him quiet during the unaccountable absence (with a relative in the Foot Guards) of Millers. And more needles were missing than it could be regarded as quite wholesome for a patient of such tender years either to apply externally or to take as a tonic.

Mr. Pocket being justly celebrated for giving most excellent practical advice, and for having a clear and sound perception of things and a highly judicious mind, I had some notion in my heart-ache of begging him to accept my confidence. But happening to look up at Mrs. Pocket as she sat reading her book of dignities after prescribing Bed as a sovereign remedy for baby, I thought—Well—No, I wouldn't.

Chapter XXXIV

As I had grown accustomed to my expectations, I had insensibly begun to notice their effect upon myself and those around me. Their influence on my own character I disguised from my recognition as much as possible, but I knew very well that it was not all good. I lived in a state of chronic uneasiness respecting my behavior to Joe. My conscience was not by any means comfortable about Biddy. When I woke up in the night,—like Camilla,—I used to think, with a weariness on my spirits, that I should have been happier and better if I had never seen Miss Havisham's face, and had risen to manhood content to be partners with Joe in the honest old forge. Many a time of an evening, when I sat alone looking at the fire, I thought, after all there was no fire like the forge fire and the kitchen fire at home.

Yet Estella was so inseparable from all my restlessness and disquiet of mind, that I really fell into confusion as to the limits of my own part in its production. That is to say, supposing I had had no expectations, and yet had had Estella to think of, I could not make out to my satisfaction that I should have done much better. Now, concerning the influence of my position on others, I was in no such difficulty, and so I perceived—though dimly enough perhaps—that it was not beneficial to anybody, and, above all, that it was not beneficial to Herbert. My lavish habits led his easy nature into expenses that he could not afford, corrupted the simplicity of his life, and disturbed his peace with anxieties and regrets. I was not at all remorseful for having unwittingly set those other branches of the Pocket family to the poor arts they practised; because such littlenesses were their natural bent, and would have been evoked by anybody else, if I had left them slumbering. But Herbert's was a very different case, and it often caused me a twinge to think that I had done him evil service in crowding his sparely furnished chambers with incongruous upholstery work, and placing the Canary-breasted Avenger at his disposal.

So now, as an infallible way of making little ease great ease, I began to contract a quantity of debt. I could hardly begin but Herbert must begin too, so he soon followed. At Startop's suggestion, we put ourselves down for election into a club called The Finches of the Grove: the object of which institution I have never divined, if it were not that the members should dine expensively once a fortnight, to quarrel among themselves as much as possible after dinner, and to cause six waiters to get drunk on the stairs. I know that these gratifying social ends were so invariably accomplished, that Herbert and I understood nothing else to be referred to in the first standing toast of the society: which ran "Gentlemen, may the present promotion of good feeling ever reign predominant among the Finches of the Grove."

The Finches spent their money foolishly (the Hotel we dined at was in Covent Garden), and the first Finch I saw when I had the honor of joining the Grove was Bentley Drummle, at that time floundering about town in a cab of his own, and doing a great deal of damage to the posts at the street corners. Occasionally, he shot himself out of his equipage headforemost over the apron; and I saw him on one occasion deliver himself at the door of the Grove in this unintentional way—like coals. But here I anticipate a little, for I was not a Finch, and could not be, according to the sacred laws of the society, until I came of age.

In my confidence in my own resources, I would willingly have taken Herbert's expenses on myself; but Herbert was proud, and I could make no such proposal to him. So he got into difficulties in every direction, and continued to look about him. When we gradually fell into keeping late hours and late company, I noticed that he looked about him with a desponding eye at breakfast-time; that he began to look about him more hopefully about mid-day; that he drooped when he came into dinner; that he seemed to descry Capital in the distance, rather clearly, after dinner; that he all but realized Capital towards midnight; and that at about two o'clock in the morning, he became so deeply despondent again as to talk of buying a rifle and going to America, with a general purpose of compelling buffaloes to make his fortune.

I was usually at Hammersmith about half the week, and when I was at Hammersmith I haunted Richmond, whereof separately by and by. Herbert would often come to Hammersmith when I was there, and I think at those seasons his father would occasionally have some passing perception that the opening he was looking for, had not appeared yet. But in the general tumbling up of the family, his tumbling out in life somewhere, was a thing to transact itself somehow. In the meantime Mr. Pocket grew grayer, and tried oftener to lift himself out of his perplexities by the hair. While Mrs. Pocket tripped up the family with her footstool, read her book of dignities, lost her pocket-handkerchief, told us about her grandpapa, and taught the young idea how to shoot, by shooting it into bed whenever it attracted her notice.

As I am now generalizing a period of my life with the object of clearing my way before me, I can scarcely do so better than by at once completing the description of our usual manners and customs at Barnard's Inn.

We spent as much money as we could, and got as little for it as people could make up their minds to give us. We were always more or less miserable, and most of our acquaintance were in the same condition. There was a gay fiction among us that we were constantly enjoying ourselves, and a skeleton truth that we never did. To the best of my belief, our case was in the last aspect a rather common one.

Every morning, with an air ever new, Herbert went into the City to look about him. I often paid him a visit in the dark back-room in which he consorted with an ink-jar, a hat-peg, a coal-box, a string-box, an almanac, a desk and stool, and a ruler; and I do not remember that I ever saw him do anything else but look about him. If we all did what we undertake to do, as faithfully as Herbert did, we might live in a Republic of the Virtues. He had nothing else to do, poor fellow, except at a certain hour of every afternoon to "go to Lloyd's"—in observance of a ceremony of seeing his principal, I think. He never did anything else in connection with Lloyd's that I could find out, except come back again. When he felt his case unusually serious, and that he positively must find an opening, he would go on 'Change at a busy time, and walk in and out, in a kind of gloomy country dance figure, among the assembled magnates. "For," says Herbert to me, coming home to dinner on one of those special occasions, "I find the truth to be, Handel, that an opening won't come to one, but one must go to it,—so I have been."

If we had been less attached to one another, I think we must have hated one another regularly every morning. I detested the chambers beyond expression at that period of repentance, and could not endure the sight of the Avenger's livery; which had a more expensive and a less remunerative appearance then than at any other time in the four-and-twenty hours. As we got more and more into debt, breakfast became a hollower and hollower form, and, being on one occasion at breakfast-time threatened (by letter) with legal proceedings, "not unwholly unconnected," as my local paper might put it, "with jewelery," I went so far as to seize the Avenger by his blue collar and shake him off his feet,—so that he was actually in the air, like a booted Cupid,—for presuming to suppose that we wanted a roll.

At certain times—meaning at uncertain times, for they depended on our humor—I would say to Herbert, as if it were a remarkable discovery,—

"My dear Herbert, we are getting on badly."

"My dear Handel," Herbert would say to me, in all sincerity, if you will believe me, those very words were on my lips, by a strange coincidence."

"Then, Herbert," I would respond, "let us look into out affairs."

We always derived profound satisfaction from making an appointment for this purpose. I always thought this was business, this was the way to confront the thing, this was the way to take the foe by the throat. And I know Herbert thought so too.

We ordered something rather special for dinner, with a bottle of something similarly out of the common way, in order that our minds might be fortified for the occasion, and we might come well up to the mark. Dinner over, we produced a bundle of pens, a copious supply of ink, and a goodly show of writing and blotting paper. For there was something very comfortable in having plenty of stationery.

I would then take a sheet of paper, and write across the top of it, in a neat hand, the heading, "Memorandum of Pip's debts"; with Barnard's Inn and the date very carefully added. Herbert would also take a sheet of paper, and write across it with similar formalities, "Memorandum of Herbert's debts."

Each of us would then refer to a confused heap of papers at his side, which had been thrown into drawers, worn into holes in pockets, half burnt in lighting candles, stuck for weeks into the looking-glass, and otherwise damaged. The sound of our pens going refreshed us exceedingly, insomuch that I sometimes found it difficult to distinguish between this edifying business proceeding and actually paying the money. In point of meritorious character, the two things seemed about equal.

When we had written a little while, I would ask Herbert how he got on? Herbert probably would have been scratching his head in a most rueful manner at the sight of his accumulating figures.

"They are mounting up, Handel," Herbert would say; "upon my life, they are mounting up."

"Be firm, Herbert," I would retort, plying my own pen with great assiduity. "Look the thing in the face. Look into your affairs. Stare them out of countenance."

"So I would, Handel, only they are staring me out of countenance."

However, my determined manner would have its effect, and Herbert would fall to work again. After a time he would give up once more, on the plea that he had not got Cobbs's bill, or Lobbs's, or Nobbs's, as the case might be.

"Then, Herbert, estimate; estimate it in round numbers, and put it down."

"What a fellow of resource you are!" my friend would reply, with admiration. "Really your business powers are very remarkable."

I thought so too. I established with myself, on these occasions, the reputation of a first-rate man of business,—prompt, decisive, energetic, clear, cool-headed. When I had got all my responsibilities down upon my list, I compared each with the bill, and ticked it off. My self-approval when I ticked an entry was quite a luxurious sensation. When I had no more ticks to make, I folded all my bills up uniformly, docketed each on the back, and tied the whole into a symmetrical bundle. Then I did the same for Herbert (who modestly said he had not my administrative genius), and felt that I had brought his affairs into a focus for him.

My business habits had one other bright feature, which I called "leaving a Margin." For example; supposing Herbert's debts to be one hundred and sixty-four pounds four-and-twopence, I would say, "Leave a margin, and put them down at two hundred." Or, supposing my own to be four times as much, I would leave a margin, and put them down at seven hundred. I had the highest opinion of the wisdom of this same Margin, but I am bound to acknowledge that on looking back, I deem it to have been an expensive device. For, we always ran into new debt immediately, to the full extent of the margin, and sometimes, in the sense of freedom and solvency it imparted, got pretty far on into another margin.

But there was a calm, a rest, a virtuous hush, consequent on these examinations of our affairs that gave me, for the time, an admirable opinion of myself. Soothed by my exertions, my method, and Herbert's compliments, I would sit with his symmetrical bundle and my own on the table before me among the stationary, and feel like a Bank of some sort, rather than a private individual.

We shut our outer door on these solemn occasions, in order that we might not be interrupted. I had fallen into my serene state one evening, when we heard a letter dropped through the slit in the said door, and fall on the ground. "It's for you, Handel," said Herbert, going out and coming back with it, "and I hope there is nothing the matter." This was in allusion to its heavy black seal and border.

The letter was signed Trabb & Co., and its contents were simply, that I was an honored sir, and that they begged to inform me that Mrs. J. Gargery had departed this life on Monday last at twenty minutes past six in the evening, and that my attendance was requested at the interment on Monday next at three o'clock in the afternoon.

Chapter XXXV

It was the first time that a grave had opened in my road of life, and the gap it made in the smooth ground was wonderful. The figure of my sister in her chair by the kitchen fire, haunted me night and day. That the place could possibly be, without her, was something my mind seemed unable to compass; and whereas she had seldom or never been in my thoughts of late, I had now the strangest ideas that she was coming towards me in the street, or that she would presently knock at the door. In my rooms too, with which she had never been at all associated, there was at once the blankness of death and a perpetual suggestion of the sound of her voice or the turn of her face or figure, as if she were still alive and had been often there.

Whatever my fortunes might have been, I could scarcely have recalled my sister with much tenderness. But I suppose there is a shock of regret which may exist without much tenderness. Under its influence (and perhaps to make up for the want of the softer feeling) I was seized with a violent indignation against the assailant from whom she had suffered so much; and I felt that on sufficient proof I could have revengefully pursued Orlick, or any one else, to the last extremity.

Having written to Joe, to offer him consolation, and to assure him that I would come to the funeral, I passed the intermediate days in the curious state of mind I have glanced at. I went down early in the morning, and alighted at the Blue Boar in good time to walk over to the forge.

It was fine summer weather again, and, as I walked along, the times when I was a little helpless creature, and my sister did not spare me, vividly returned. But they returned with a gentle tone upon them that softened even the edge of Tickler. For now, the very breath of the beans and clover whispered to my heart that the day must come when it would be well for my memory that others walking in the sunshine should be softened as they thought of me.

At last I came within sight of the house, and saw that Trabb and Co. had put in a funereal execution and taken possession. Two dismally absurd persons, each ostentatiously exhibiting a crutch done up in a black bandage,—as if that instrument could possibly communicate any comfort to anybody,—were posted at the front door; and in one of them I recognized a postboy discharged from the Boar for turning a young couple into a sawpit on their bridal morning, in consequence of intoxication rendering it necessary for him to ride his horse clasped round the neck with both arms. All the children of the village, and most of the women, were admiring these sable warders and the closed windows of the house and forge; and as I came up, one of the two warders (the postboy) knocked at the door,—implying that I was far too much exhausted by grief to have strength remaining to knock for myself.

Another sable warder (a carpenter, who had once eaten two geese for a wager) opened the door, and showed me into the best parlor. Here, Mr. Trabb had taken unto himself the best table, and had got all the leaves up, and was holding a kind of black Bazaar, with the aid of a quantity of black pins. At the moment of my arrival, he had just finished putting somebody's hat into black long-clothes, like an African baby; so he held out his hand for mine. But I, misled by the action, and confused by the occasion, shook hands with him with every testimony of warm affection.

Poor dear Joe, entangled in a little black cloak tied in a large bow under his chin, was seated apart at the upper end of the room; where, as chief mourner, he had evidently been stationed by Trabb. When I bent down and said to him, "Dear Joe, how are you?" he said, "Pip, old chap, you knowed her when she were a fine figure of a—" and clasped my hand and said no more.

Biddy, looking very neat and modest in her black dress, went quietly here and there, and was very helpful. When I had spoken to Biddy, as I thought it not a time for talking I went and sat down near Joe, and there began to wonder in what part of the house it—she—my sister—was. The air of the parlor being faint with the smell of sweet-cake, I looked about for the table of refreshments; it was scarcely visible until one had got accustomed to the gloom, but there was a cut-up plum cake upon it, and there were cut-up oranges, and sandwiches, and biscuits, and two decanters that I knew very well as ornaments, but had never seen used in all my life; one full of port, and one of sherry. Standing at this table, I became conscious of the servile Pumblechook in a black cloak and several yards of hatband, who was alternately stuffing himself, and making obsequious movements to catch my attention. The moment he succeeded, he came over to me (breathing sherry and crumbs), and said in a subdued voice, "May I, dear sir?" and did. I then descried Mr. and Mrs. Hubble; the last-named in a decent speechless paroxysm in a corner. We were all going to "follow," and were all in course of being tied up separately (by Trabb) into ridiculous bundles.

"Which I meantersay, Pip," Joe whispered me, as we were being what Mr. Trabb called "formed" in the parlor, two and two,—and it was dreadfully like a preparation for some grim kind of dance; "which I meantersay, sir, as I would in preference have carried her to the church myself, along with three or four friendly ones wot come to it with willing harts and arms, but it were considered wot the neighbors would look down on such and would be of opinions as it were wanting in respect."

"Pocket-handkerchiefs out, all!" cried Mr. Trabb at this point, in a depressed business-like voice. "Pocket-handkerchiefs out! We are ready!"

So we all put our pocket-handkerchiefs to our faces, as if our noses were bleeding, and filed out two and two; Joe and I; Biddy and Pumblechook; Mr. and Mrs. Hubble. The remains of my poor sister had been brought round by the kitchen door, and, it being a point of Undertaking ceremony that the six bearers must be stifled and blinded under a horrible black velvet housing with a white border, the whole looked like a blind monster with twelve human legs, shuffling and blundering along, under the guidance of two keepers,—the postboy and his comrade.

The neighborhood, however, highly approved of these arrangements, and we were much admired as we went through the village; the more youthful and vigorous part of the community making dashes now and then to cut us off, and lying in wait to intercept us at points of vantage. At such times the more exuberant among them called out in an excited manner on our emergence round some corner of expectancy, "Here they come!" "Here they are!" and we were all but cheered. In this progress I was much annoyed by the abject Pumblechook, who, being behind me, persisted all the way as a delicate attention in arranging my streaming hatband, and smoothing my cloak. My thoughts were further distracted by the excessive pride of Mr. and Mrs. Hubble, who were surpassingly conceited and vainglorious in being members of so distinguished a procession.

And now the range of marshes lay clear before us, with the sails of the ships on the river growing out of it; and we went into the churchyard, close to the graves of my unknown parents, Philip Pirrip, late of this parish, and Also Georgiana, Wife of the Above. And there, my sister was laid quietly in the earth, while the larks sang high above it, and the light wind strewed it with beautiful shadows of clouds and trees.

Of the conduct of the worldly minded Pumblechook while this was doing, I desire to say no more than it was all addressed to me; and that even when those noble passages were read which remind humanity how it brought nothing into the world and can take nothing out, and how it fleeth like a shadow and never continueth long in one stay, I heard him cough a reservation of the case of a young gentleman who came unexpectedly into large property. When we got back, he had the hardihood to tell me that he wished my sister could have known I had done her so much honor, and to hint that she would have considered it reasonably purchased at the price of her death. After that, he drank all the rest of the sherry, and Mr. Hubble drank the port, and the two talked (which I have since observed to be customary in such cases) as if they were of quite another race from the deceased, and were notoriously immortal. Finally, he went away with Mr. and Mrs. Hubble,—to make an evening of it, I felt sure, and to tell the Jolly Bargemen that he was the founder of my fortunes and my earliest benefactor.

When they were all gone, and when Trabb and his men—but not his Boy; I looked for him—had crammed their mummery into bags, and were gone too, the house felt wholesomer. Soon afterwards, Biddy, Joe, and I, had a cold dinner together; but we dined in the best parlor, not in the old kitchen, and Joe was so exceedingly particular what he did with his knife and fork and the saltcellar and what not, that there was great restraint upon us. But after dinner, when I made him take his pipe, and when I had loitered with him about the forge, and when we sat down together on the great block of stone outside it, we got on better. I noticed that after the funeral Joe changed his clothes so far, as to make a compromise between his Sunday dress and working dress; in which the dear fellow looked natural, and like the Man he was.

He was very much pleased by my asking if I might sleep in my own little room, and I was pleased too; for I felt that I had done rather a great thing in making the request. When the shadows of evening were closing in, I took an opportunity of getting into the garden with Biddy for a little talk.

"Biddy," said I, "I think you might have written to me about these sad matters."

"Do you, Mr. Pip?" said Biddy. "I should have written if I had thought that."

"Don't suppose that I mean to be unkind, Biddy, when I say I consider that you ought to have thought that."

"Do you, Mr. Pip?"

She was so quiet, and had such an orderly, good, and pretty way with her, that I did not like the thought of making her cry again. After looking a little at her downcast eyes as she walked beside me, I gave up that point.

"I suppose it will be difficult for you to remain here now, Biddy dear?"

"Oh! I can't do so, Mr. Pip," said Biddy, in a tone of regret but still of quiet conviction. "I have been speaking to Mrs. Hubble, and I am going to her to-morrow. I hope we shall be able to take some care of Mr. Gargery, together, until he settles down."

"How are you going to live, Biddy? If you want any mo—"

"How am I going to live?" repeated Biddy, striking in, with a momentary flush upon her face. "I'll tell you, Mr. Pip. I am going to try to get the place of mistress in the new school nearly finished here. I can be well recommended by all the neighbors, and I hope I can be industrious and patient, and teach myself while I teach others. You know, Mr. Pip," pursued Biddy, with a smile, as she raised her eyes to my face, "the new schools are not like the old, but I learnt a good deal from you after that time, and have had time since then to improve."

"I think you would always improve, Biddy, under any circumstances."

"Ah! Except in my bad side of human nature," murmured Biddy.

It was not so much a reproach as an irresistible thinking aloud. Well! I thought I would give up that point too. So, I walked a little further with Biddy, looking silently at her downcast eyes.

"I have not heard the particulars of my sister's death, Biddy."

"They are very slight, poor thing. She had been in one of her bad states—though they had got better of late, rather than worse—for four days, when she came out of it in the evening, just at tea-time, and said quite plainly, 'Joe.' As she had never said any word for a long while, I ran and fetched in Mr. Gargery from the forge. She made signs to me that she wanted him to sit down close to her, and wanted me to put her arms round his neck. So I put them round his neck, and she laid her head down on his shoulder quite content and satisfied. And so she presently said 'Joe' again, and once 'Pardon,' and once 'Pip.' And so she never lifted her head up any more, and it was just an hour later when we laid it down on her own bed, because we found she was gone."

Biddy cried; the darkening garden, and the lane, and the stars that were coming out, were blurred in my own sight.

"Nothing was ever discovered, Biddy?"

"Nothing."

"Do you know what is become of Orlick?"

"I should think from the color of his clothes that he is working in the quarries."

"Of course you have seen him then?—Why are you looking at that dark tree in the lane?"

"I saw him there, on the night she died."

"That was not the last time either, Biddy?"

"No; I have seen him there, since we have been walking here.—It is of no use," said Biddy, laying her hand upon my arm, as I was for running out, "you know I would not deceive you; he was not there a minute, and he is gone."

It revived my utmost indignation to find that she was still pursued by this fellow, and I felt inveterate against him. I told her so, and told her that I would spend any money or take any pains to drive him out of that country. By degrees she led me into more temperate talk, and she told me how Joe loved me, and how Joe never complained of anything,—she didn't say, of me; she had no need; I knew what she meant,—but ever did his duty in his way of life, with a strong hand, a quiet tongue, and a gentle heart.

"Indeed, it would be hard to say too much for him," said I; "and Biddy, we must often speak of these things, for of course I shall be often down here now. I am not going to leave poor Joe alone."

Biddy said never a single word.

"Biddy, don't you hear me?"

"Yes, Mr. Pip."

"Not to mention your calling me Mr. Pip,—which appears to me to be in bad taste, Biddy,—what do you mean?"

"What do I mean?" asked Biddy, timidly.

"Biddy," said I, in a virtuously self-asserting manner, "I must request to know what you mean by this?"

"By this?" said Biddy.

"Now, don't echo," I retorted. "You used not to echo, Biddy."

"Used not!" said Biddy. "O Mr. Pip! Used!"

Well! I rather thought I would give up that point too. After another silent turn in the garden, I fell back on the main position.

"Biddy," said I, "I made a remark respecting my coming down here often, to see Joe, which you received with a marked silence. Have the goodness, Biddy, to tell me why."

"Are you quite sure, then, that you WILL come to see him often?" asked Biddy, stopping in the narrow garden walk, and looking at me under the stars with a clear and honest eye.

"O dear me!" said I, as if I found myself compelled to give up Biddy in despair. "This really is a very bad side of human nature! Don't say any more, if you please, Biddy. This shocks me very much."

For which cogent reason I kept Biddy at a distance during supper, and when I went up to my own old little room, took as stately a leave of her as I could, in my murmuring soul, deem reconcilable with the churchyard and the event of the day. As often as I was restless in the night, and that was every quarter of an hour, I reflected what an unkindness, what an injury, what an injustice, Biddy had done me.

Early in the morning I was to go. Early in the morning I was out, and looking in, unseen, at one of the wooden windows of the forge. There I stood, for minutes, looking at Joe, already at work with a glow of health and strength upon his face that made it show as if the bright sun of the life in store for him were shining on it.

"Good by, dear Joe!—No, don't wipe it off—for God's sake, give me your blackened hand!—I shall be down soon and often."

"Never too soon, sir," said Joe, "and never too often, Pip!"

Biddy was waiting for me at the kitchen door, with a mug of new milk and a crust of bread. "Biddy," said I, when I gave her my hand at parting, "I am not angry, but I am hurt."

"No, don't be hurt," she pleaded quite pathetically; "let only me be hurt, if I have been ungenerous."

Once more, the mists were rising as I walked away. If they disclosed to me, as I suspect they did, that I should not come back, and that Biddy was quite right, all I can say is,—they were quite right too.

Chapter XXXVI

Herbert and I went on from bad to worse, in the way of increasing our debts, looking into our affairs, leaving Margins, and the like exemplary transactions; and Time went on, whether or no, as he has a way of doing; and I came of age,—in fulfilment of Herbert's prediction, that I should do so before I knew where I was.

Herbert himself had come of age eight months before me. As he had nothing else than his majority to come into, the event did not make a profound sensation in Barnard's Inn. But we had looked forward to my one-and-twentieth birthday, with a crowd of speculations and anticipations, for we had both considered that my guardian could hardly help saying something definite on that occasion.

I had taken care to have it well understood in Little Britain when my birthday was. On the day before it, I received an official note from Wemmick, informing me that Mr. Jaggers would be glad if I would call upon him at five in the afternoon of the auspicious day. This convinced us that something great was to happen, and threw me into an unusual flutter when I repaired to my guardian's office, a model of punctuality.

In the outer office Wemmick offered me his congratulations, and incidentally rubbed the side of his nose with a folded piece of tissue-paper that I liked the look of. But he said nothing respecting it, and motioned me with a nod into my guardian's room. It was November, and my guardian was standing before his fire leaning his back against the chimney-piece, with his hands under his coattails.

"Well, Pip," said he, "I must call you Mr. Pip to-day. Congratulations, Mr. Pip."

We shook hands,—he was always a remarkably short shaker,—and I thanked him.

"Take a chair, Mr. Pip," said my guardian.

As I sat down, and he preserved his attitude and bent his brows at his boots, I felt at a disadvantage, which reminded me of that old time when I had been put upon a tombstone. The two ghastly casts on the shelf were not far from him, and their expression was as if they were making a stupid apoplectic attempt to attend to the conversation.

"Now my young friend," my guardian began, as if I were a witness in the box, "I am going to have a word or two with you."

"If you please, sir."

"What do you suppose," said Mr. Jaggers, bending forward to look at the ground, and then throwing his head back to look at the ceiling,—"what do you suppose you are living at the rate of?"

"At the rate of, sir?"

"At," repeated Mr. Jaggers, still looking at the ceiling, "the—rate—of?" And then looked all round the room, and paused with his pocket-handkerchief in his hand, half-way to his nose.

I had looked into my affairs so often, that I had thoroughly destroyed any slight notion I might ever have had of their bearings. Reluctantly, I confessed myself quite unable to answer the question. This reply seemed agreeable to Mr. Jaggers, who said, "I thought so!" and blew his nose with an air of satisfaction.

"Now, I have asked you a question, my friend," said Mr. Jaggers. "Have you anything to ask me?"

"Of course it would be a great relief to me to ask you several questions, sir; but I remember your prohibition."

"Ask one," said Mr. Jaggers.

"Is my benefactor to be made known to me to-day?"

"No. Ask another."

"Is that confidence to be imparted to me soon?"

"Waive that, a moment," said Mr. Jaggers, "and ask another."

I looked about me, but there appeared to be now no possible escape from the inquiry, "Have-I—anything to receive, sir?" On that, Mr. Jaggers said, triumphantly, "I thought we should come to it!" and called to Wemmick to give him that piece of paper. Wemmick appeared, handed it in, and disappeared.

"Now, Mr. Pip," said Mr. Jaggers, "attend, if you please. You have been drawing pretty freely here; your name occurs pretty often in Wemmick's cash-book; but you are in debt, of course?"

"I am afraid I must say yes, sir."

"You know you must say yes; don't you?" said Mr. Jaggers.

"Yes, sir."

"I don't ask you what you owe, because you don't know; and if you did know, you wouldn't tell me; you would say less. Yes, yes, my friend," cried

Mr. Jaggers, waving his forefinger to stop me as I made a show of protesting: "it's likely enough that you think you wouldn't, but you would. You'll excuse me, but I know better than you. Now, take this piece of paper in your hand. You have got it? Very good. Now, unfold it and tell me what it is."

"This is a bank-note," said I, "for five hundred pounds."

"That is a bank-note," repeated Mr. Jaggers, "for five hundred pounds. And a very handsome sum of money too, I think. You consider it so?"

"How could I do otherwise!"

"Ah! But answer the question," said Mr. Jaggers.

"Undoubtedly."

"You consider it, undoubtedly, a handsome sum of money. Now, that handsome sum of money, Pip, is your own. It is a present to you on this day, in earnest of your expectations. And at the rate of that handsome sum of money per annum, and at no higher rate, you are to live until the donor of the whole appears. That is to say, you will now take your money affairs entirely into your own hands, and you will draw from Wemmick one hundred and twenty-five pounds per quarter, until you are in communication with the fountain-head, and no longer with the mere agent. As I have told you before, I am the mere agent. I execute my instructions, and I am paid for doing so. I think them injudicious, but I am not paid for giving any opinion on their merits."

I was beginning to express my gratitude to my benefactor for the great liberality with which I was treated, when Mr. Jaggers stopped me. "I am not paid, Pip," said he, coolly, "to carry your words to any one;" and then gathered up his coat-tails, as he had gathered up the subject, and stood frowning at his boots as if he suspected them of designs against him.

After a pause, I hinted,—

"There was a question just now, Mr. Jaggers, which you desired me to waive for a moment. I hope I am doing nothing wrong in asking it again?"

"What is it?" said he.

I might have known that he would never help me out; but it took me aback to have to shape the question afresh, as if it were quite new. "Is it likely," I said, after hesitating, "that my patron, the fountain-head you have spoken of, Mr. Jaggers, will soon—" there I delicately stopped.

"Will soon what?" asked Mr. Jaggers. "That's no question as it stands, you know."

"Will soon come to London," said I, after casting about for a precise form of words, "or summon me anywhere else?"

"Now, here," replied Mr. Jaggers, fixing me for the first time with his dark deep-set eyes, "we must revert to the evening when we first encountered one another in your village. What did I tell you then, Pip?"

"You told me, Mr. Jaggers, that it might be years hence when that person appeared."

"Just so," said Mr. Jaggers, "that's my answer."

As we looked full at one another, I felt my breath come quicker in my strong desire to get something out of him. And as I felt that it came quicker, and as I felt that he saw that it came quicker, I felt that I had less chance than ever of getting anything out of him.

"Do you suppose it will still be years hence, Mr. Jaggers?"

Mr. Jaggers shook his head,—not in negativing the question, but in altogether negativing the notion that he could anyhow be got to answer it,—and the two horrible casts of the twitched faces looked, when my eyes strayed up to them, as if they had come to a crisis in their suspended attention, and were going to sneeze.

"Come!" said Mr. Jaggers, warming the backs of his legs with the backs of his warmed hands, "I'll be plain with you, my friend Pip. That's a question I must not be asked. You'll understand that better, when I tell you it's a question that might compromise me. Come! I'll go a little further with you; I'll say something more."

He bent down so low to frown at his boots, that he was able to rub the calves of his legs in the pause he made.

"When that person discloses," said Mr. Jaggers, straightening himself, "you and that person will settle your own affairs. When that person discloses, my part in this business will cease and determine. When that person discloses, it will not be necessary for me to know anything about it. And that's all I have got to say."

We looked at one another until I withdrew my eyes, and looked thoughtfully at the floor. From this last speech I derived the notion that Miss Havisham, for some reason or no reason, had not taken him into her confidence as to her designing me for Estella; that he resented this, and felt a jealousy about it; or that he really did object to that scheme, and would have nothing to do with it. When I raised my eyes again, I found that he had been shrewdly looking at me all the time, and was doing so still.

"If that is all you have to say, sir," I remarked, "there can be nothing left for me to say."

He nodded assent, and pulled out his thief-dreaded watch, and asked me where I was going to dine? I replied at my own chambers, with Herbert. As a necessary sequence, I asked him if he would favor us with his company, and he promptly accepted the invitation. But he insisted on walking home with me, in order that I might make no extra preparation for him, and first he had a letter or two to write, and (of course) had his hands to wash. So I said I would go into the outer office and talk to Wemmick.

The fact was, that when the five hundred pounds had come into my pocket, a thought had come into my head which had been often there before; and it appeared to me that Wemmick was a good person to advise with concerning such thought.

He had already locked up his safe, and made preparations for going home. He had left his desk, brought out his two greasy office candlesticks and stood them in line with the snuffers on a slab near the door, ready to be extinguished; he had raked his fire low, put his hat and great-coat ready, and was beating himself all over the chest with his safe-key, as an athletic exercise after business.

"Mr. Wemmick," said I, "I want to ask your opinion. I am very desirous to serve a friend."

Wemmick tightened his post-office and shook his head, as if his opinion were dead against any fatal weakness of that sort.

"This friend," I pursued, "is trying to get on in commercial life, but has no money, and finds it difficult and disheartening to make a beginning. Now I want somehow to help him to a beginning."

"With money down?" said Wemmick, in a tone drier than any sawdust.

"With some money down," I replied, for an uneasy remembrance shot across me of that symmetrical bundle of papers at home—"with some money down, and perhaps some anticipation of my expectations."

"Mr. Pip," said Wemmick, "I should like just to run over with you on my fingers, if you please, the names of the various bridges up as high as Chelsea Reach. Let's see; there's London, one; Southwark, two; Blackfriars, three; Waterloo, four; Westminster, five; Vauxhall, six." He had checked off each bridge in its turn, with the handle of his safe-key on the palm of his hand. "There's as many as six, you see, to choose from."

"I don't understand you," said I.

"Choose your bridge, Mr. Pip," returned Wemmick, "and take a walk upon your bridge, and pitch your money into the Thames over the centre arch of your bridge, and you know the end of it. Serve a friend with it, and you may know the end of it too,—but it's a less pleasant and profitable end."

I could have posted a newspaper in his mouth, he made it so wide after saying this.

"This is very discouraging," said I.

"Meant to be so," said Wemmick.

"Then is it your opinion," I inquired, with some little indignation, "that a man should never—"

"—Invest portable property in a friend?" said Wemmick. "Certainly he should not. Unless he wants to get rid of the friend,—and then it becomes a question how much portable property it may be worth to get rid of him."

"And that," said I, "is your deliberate opinion, Mr. Wemmick?"

"That," he returned, "is my deliberate opinion in this office."

"Ah!" said I, pressing him, for I thought I saw him near a loophole here; "but would that be your opinion at Walworth?"

"Mr. Pip," he replied, with gravity, "Walworth is one place, and this office is another. Much as the Aged is one person, and Mr. Jaggers is another. They must not be confounded together. My Walworth sentiments must be taken at Walworth; none but my official sentiments can be taken in this office."

"Very well," said I, much relieved, "then I shall look you up at Walworth, you may depend upon it."

"Mr. Pip," he returned, "you will be welcome there, in a private and personal capacity."

We had held this conversation in a low voice, well knowing my guardian's ears to be the sharpest of the sharp. As he now appeared in his doorway, towelling his hands, Wemmick got on his great-coat and stood by to snuff out the candles. We all three went into the street together, and from the door-step Wemmick turned his way, and Mr. Jaggers and I turned ours.

I could not help wishing more than once that evening, that Mr. Jaggers had had an Aged in Gerrard Street, or a Stinger, or a Something, or a Somebody, to unbend his brows a little. It was an uncomfortable consideration on a twenty-first birthday, that coming of age at all seemed hardly worth while in such a guarded and suspicious world as he made of it.

He was a thousand times better informed and cleverer than Wemmick, and yet I would a thousand times rather have had Wemmick to dinner. And Mr. Jaggers made not me alone intensely melancholy, because, after he was gone, Herbert said of himself, with his eyes fixed on the fire, that he thought he must have committed a felony and forgotten the details of it, he felt so dejected and guilty.

Chapter XXXVII

Deeming Sunday the best day for taking Mr. Wemmick's Walworth sentiments, I devoted the next ensuing Sunday afternoon to a pilgrimage to the Castle. On arriving before the battlements, I found the Union Jack flying and the drawbridge up; but undeterred by this show of defiance and resistance, I rang at the gate, and was admitted in a most pacific manner by the Aged.

"My son, sir," said the old man, after securing the drawbridge, "rather had it in his mind that you might happen to drop in, and he left word that he would soon be home from his afternoon's walk. He is very regular in his walks, is my son. Very regular in everything, is my son."

I nodded at the old gentleman as Wemmick himself might have nodded, and we went in and sat down by the fireside.

"You made acquaintance with my son, sir," said the old man, in his chirping way, while he warmed his hands at the blaze, "at his office, I expect?" I nodded. "Hah! I have heerd that my son is a wonderful hand at his business, sir?" I nodded hard. "Yes; so they tell me. His business is the Law?" I nodded harder. "Which makes it more surprising in my son," said the old man, "for he was not brought up to the Law, but to the Wine-Coopering."

Curious to know how the old gentleman stood informed concerning the reputation of Mr. Jaggers, I roared that name at him. He threw me into the greatest confusion by laughing heartily and replying in a very sprightly manner, "No, to be sure; you're right." And to this hour I have not the faintest notion what he meant, or what joke he thought I had made.

As I could not sit there nodding at him perpetually, without making some other attempt to interest him, I shouted at inquiry whether his own calling in life had been "the Wine-Coopering." By dint of straining that term out of myself several times and tapping the old gentleman on the chest to associate it with him, I at last succeeded in making my meaning understood.

"No," said the old gentleman; "the warehousing, the warehousing. First, over yonder;" he appeared to mean up the chimney, but I believe he intended to refer me to Liverpool; "and then in the City of London here. However, having an infirmity—for I am hard of hearing, sir—"

I expressed in pantomime the greatest astonishment.

"—Yes, hard of hearing; having that infirmity coming upon me, my son he went into the Law, and he took charge of me, and he by little and little made out this elegant and beautiful property. But returning to what you said, you know," pursued the old man, again laughing heartily, "what I say is, No to be sure; you're right."

I was modestly wondering whether my utmost ingenuity would have enabled me to say anything that would have amused him half as much as this imaginary pleasantry, when I was startled by a sudden click in the wall on one side of the chimney, and the ghostly tumbling open of a little wooden flap with "JOHN" upon it. The old man, following my eyes, cried with great triumph, "My son's come home!" and we both went out to the drawbridge.

It was worth any money to see Wemmick waving a salute to me from the other side of the moat, when we might have shaken hands across it with the greatest ease. The Aged was so delighted to work the drawbridge, that I made no offer to assist him, but stood quiet until Wemmick had come across, and had presented me to Miss Skiffins; a lady by whom he was accompanied.

Miss Skiffins was of a wooden appearance, and was, like her escort, in the post-office branch of the service. She might have been some two or three years younger than Wemmick, and I judged her to stand possessed of portable property. The cut of her dress from the waist upward, both before and behind, made her figure very like a boy's kite; and I might have pronounced her gown a little too decidedly orange, and her gloves a little too intensely green. But she seemed to be a good sort of fellow, and showed a high regard for the Aged. I was not long in discovering that she was a frequent visitor at the Castle; for, on our going in, and my complimenting Wemmick on his ingenious contrivance for announcing himself to the Aged, he begged me to give my attention for a moment to the other side of the chimney, and disappeared. Presently another click came, and another little door tumbled open with "Miss Skiffins" on it; then Miss Skiffins shut up and John tumbled open; then Miss Skiffins and John both tumbled open together, and finally shut up together. On Wemmick's return from working these mechanical appliances, I expressed the great admiration with which I regarded them, and he said, "Well, you know, they're both pleasant and useful to the Aged. And by George, sir, it's a thing worth mentioning, that of all the people who come to this gate, the secret of those pulls is only known to the Aged, Miss Skiffins, and me!"

"And Mr. Wemmick made them," added Miss Skiffins, "with his own hands out of his own head."

While Miss Skiffins was taking off her bonnet (she retained her green gloves during the evening as an outward and visible sign that there was company), Wemmick invited me to take a walk with him round the property, and see how the island looked in wintertime. Thinking that he did this to give me an opportunity of taking his Walworth sentiments, I seized the opportunity as soon as we were out of the Castle.

Having thought of the matter with care, I approached my subject as if I had never hinted at it before. I informed Wemmick that I was anxious in behalf of Herbert Pocket, and I told him how we had first met, and how we had fought. I glanced at Herbert's home, and at his character, and at his having no means but such as he was dependent on his father for; those, uncertain and unpunctual. I alluded to the advantages I had derived in my first rawness and ignorance from his society, and I confessed that I feared I had but ill repaid them, and that he might have done better without me and my expectations. Keeping Miss Havisham in the background at a great distance, I still hinted at the possibility of my having competed with him in his prospects, and at the certainty of his possessing a generous soul, and being far above any mean distrusts, retaliations, or designs. For all these reasons (I told Wemmick), and because he was my young companion and friend, and I had a great affection for him, I wished my own good fortune to reflect some rays upon him, and therefore I sought advice from Wemmick's experience and knowledge of men and affairs, how I could best try with my resources to help Herbert to some present income,—say of a hundred a year, to keep him in good hope and heart,—and gradually to buy him on to some small partnership. I begged Wemmick, in conclusion, to understand that my help must always be rendered without Herbert's knowledge or suspicion, and that there was no one else in the world with whom I could advise. I wound up by laying my hand upon his shoulder, and saying, "I can't help confiding in you, though I know it must be troublesome to you; but that is your fault, in having ever brought me here."

Wemmick was silent for a little while, and then said with a kind of start, "Well you know, Mr. Pip, I must tell you one thing. This is devilish good of you."

"Say you'll help me to be good then," said I.

"Ecod," replied Wemmick, shaking his head, "that's not my trade."

"Nor is this your trading-place," said I.

"You are right," he returned. "You hit the nail on the head. Mr. Pip, I'll put on my considering-cap, and I think all you want to do may be done by degrees. Skiffins (that's her brother) is an accountant and agent. I'll look him up and go to work for you."

"I thank you ten thousand times."

"On the contrary," said he, "I thank you, for though we are strictly in our private and personal capacity, still it may be mentioned that there are Newgate cobwebs about, and it brushes them away."

After a little further conversation to the same effect, we returned into the Castle where we found Miss Skiffins preparing tea. The responsible duty of making the toast was delegated to the Aged, and that excellent old gentleman was so intent upon it that he seemed to me in some danger of melting his eyes. It was no nominal meal that we were going to make, but a vigorous reality. The Aged prepared such a hay-stack of buttered toast, that I could scarcely see him over it as it simmered on an iron stand hooked on to the top-bar; while Miss Skiffins brewed such a jorum of tea, that the pig in the back premises became strongly excited, and repeatedly expressed his desire to participate in the entertainment.

The flag had been struck, and the gun had been fired, at the right moment of time, and I felt as snugly cut off from the rest of Walworth as if the moat were thirty feet wide by as many deep. Nothing disturbed the tranquillity of the Castle, but the occasional tumbling open of John and Miss Skiffins: which little doors were a prey to some spasmodic infirmity that made me sympathetically uncomfortable until I got used to it. I inferred from the methodical nature of Miss Skiffins's arrangements that she made tea there every Sunday night; and I rather suspected that a classic brooch she wore, representing the profile of an undesirable female with a very straight nose and a very new moon, was a piece of portable property that had been given her by Wemmick.

We ate the whole of the toast, and drank tea in proportion, and it was delightful to see how warm and greasy we all got after it. The Aged especially, might have passed for some clean old chief of a savage tribe, just oiled. After a short pause of repose, Miss Skiffins—in the absence of the little servant who, it seemed, retired to the bosom of her family on Sunday afternoons—washed up the tea-things, in a trifling lady-like amateur manner that compromised none of us. Then, she put on her gloves again, and we drew round the fire, and Wemmick said, "Now, Aged Parent, tip us the paper."

Wemmick explained to me while the Aged got his spectacles out, that this was according to custom, and that it gave the old gentleman infinite satisfaction to read the news aloud. "I won't offer an apology," said Wemmick, "for he isn't capable of many pleasures—are you, Aged P.?"

"All right, John, all right," returned the old man, seeing himself spoken to.

"Only tip him a nod every now and then when he looks off his paper," said Wemmick, "and he'll be as happy as a king. We are all attention, Aged One."

"All right, John, all right!" returned the cheerful old man, so busy and so pleased, that it really was quite charming.

The Aged's reading reminded me of the classes at Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt's, with the pleasanter peculiarity that it seemed to come through a keyhole. As he wanted the candles close to him, and as he was always on the verge of putting either his head or the newspaper into them, he required as much watching as a powder-mill. But Wemmick was equally untiring and gentle in his vigilance, and the Aged read on, quite unconscious of his many rescues. Whenever he looked at us, we all expressed the greatest interest and amazement, and nodded until he resumed again.

As Wemmick and Miss Skiffins sat side by side, and as I sat in a shadowy corner, I observed a slow and gradual elongation of Mr. Wemmick's mouth, powerfully suggestive of his slowly and gradually stealing his arm round Miss Skiffins's waist. In course of time I saw his hand appear on the other side of Miss Skiffins; but at that moment Miss Skiffins neatly stopped him with the green glove, unwound his arm again as if it were an article of dress, and with the greatest deliberation laid it on the table before her. Miss Skiffins's composure while she did this was one of the most remarkable sights I have ever seen, and if I could have thought the act consistent with abstraction of mind, I should have deemed that Miss Skiffins performed it mechanically.

By and by, I noticed Wemmick's arm beginning to disappear again, and gradually fading out of view. Shortly afterwards, his mouth began to widen again. After an interval of suspense on my part that was quite enthralling and almost painful, I saw his hand appear on the other side of Miss Skiffins. Instantly, Miss Skiffins stopped it with the neatness of a placid boxer, took off that girdle or cestus as before, and laid it on the table. Taking the table to represent the path of virtue, I am justified in stating that during the whole time of the Aged's reading, Wemmick's arm was straying from the path of virtue and being recalled to it by Miss Skiffins.

At last, the Aged read himself into a light slumber. This was the time for Wemmick to produce a little kettle, a tray of glasses, and a black bottle with a porcelain-topped cork, representing some clerical dignitary of a rubicund and social aspect. With the aid of these appliances we all had something warm to drink, including the Aged, who was soon awake again. Miss Skiffins mixed, and I observed that she and Wemmick drank out of one glass. Of course I knew better than to offer to see Miss Skiffins home, and under the circumstances I thought I had best go first; which I did, taking a cordial leave of the Aged, and having passed a pleasant evening.

Before a week was out, I received a note from Wemmick, dated Walworth, stating that he hoped he had made some advance in that matter appertaining to our private and personal capacities, and that he would be glad if I could come and see him again upon it. So, I went out to Walworth again, and yet again, and yet again, and I saw him by appointment in the City several times, but never held any communication with him on the subject in or near Little Britain. The upshot was, that we found a worthy young merchant or shipping-broker, not long established in business, who wanted intelligent help, and who wanted capital, and who in due course of time and receipt would want a partner. Between him and me, secret articles were signed of which Herbert was the subject, and I paid him half of my five hundred pounds down, and engaged for sundry other payments: some, to fall due at certain dates out of my income: some, contingent on my coming into my property. Miss Skiffins's brother conducted the negotiation. Wemmick pervaded it throughout, but never appeared in it.

The whole business was so cleverly managed, that Herbert had not the least suspicion of my hand being in it. I never shall forget the radiant face with which he came home one afternoon, and told me, as a mighty piece of news, of his having fallen in with one Clarriker (the young merchant's name), and of Clarriker's having shown an extraordinary inclination towards him, and of his belief that the opening had come at last. Day by day as his hopes grew stronger and his face brighter, he must have thought me a more and more affectionate friend, for I had the greatest difficulty in restraining my tears of triumph when I saw him so happy. At length, the thing being done, and he having that day entered Clarriker's House, and he having talked to me for a whole evening in a flush of pleasure and success, I did really cry in good earnest when I went to bed, to think that my expectations had done some good to somebody.

A great event in my life, the turning point of my life, now opens on my view. But, before I proceed to narrate it, and before I pass on to all the changes it involved, I must give one chapter to Estella. It is not much to give to the theme that so long filled my heart.

Chapter XXXVIII

If that staid old house near the Green at Richmond should ever come to be haunted when I am dead, it will be haunted, surely, by my ghost. O the many, many nights and days through which the unquiet spirit within me haunted that house when Estella lived there! Let my body be where it would, my spirit was always wandering, wandering, wandering, about that house.

The lady with whom Estella was placed, Mrs. Brandley by name, was a widow, with one daughter several years older than Estella. The mother looked young, and the daughter looked old; the mother's complexion was pink, and the daughter's was yellow; the mother set up for frivolity, and the daughter for theology. They were in what is called a good position, and visited, and were visited by, numbers of people. Little, if any, community of feeling subsisted between them and Estella, but the understanding was established that they were necessary to her, and that she was necessary to them. Mrs. Brandley had been a friend of Miss Havisham's before the time of her seclusion.

In Mrs. Brandley's house and out of Mrs. Brandley's house, I suffered every kind and degree of torture that Estella could cause me. The nature of my relations with her, which placed me on terms of familiarity without placing me on terms of favor, conduced to my distraction. She made use of me to tease other admirers, and she turned the very familiarity between herself and me to the account of putting a constant slight on my devotion to her. If I had been her secretary, steward, half-brother, poor relation,—if I had been a younger brother of her appointed husband,—I could not have seemed to myself further from my hopes when I was nearest to her. The privilege of calling her by her name and hearing her call me by mine became, under the circumstances an aggravation of my trials; and while I think it likely that it almost maddened her other lovers, I know too certainly that it almost maddened me.

She had admirers without end. No doubt my jealousy made an admirer of every one who went near her; but there were more than enough of them without that.

I saw her often at Richmond, I heard of her often in town, and I used often to take her and the Brandleys on the water; there were picnics, fête days, plays, operas, concerts, parties, all sorts of pleasures, through which I pursued her,—and they were all miseries to me. I never had one hour's happiness in her society, and yet my mind all round the four-and-twenty hours was harping on the happiness of having her with me unto death.

Throughout this part of our intercourse,—and it lasted, as will presently be seen, for what I then thought a long time,—she habitually reverted to that tone which expressed that our association was forced upon us. There were other times when she would come to a sudden check in this tone and in all her many tones, and would seem to pity me.

"Pip, Pip," she said one evening, coming to such a check, when we sat apart at a darkening window of the house in Richmond; "will you never take warning?"

"Of what?"

"Of me."

"Warning not to be attracted by you, do you mean, Estella?"

"Do I mean! If you don't know what I mean, you are blind."

I should have replied that Love was commonly reputed blind, but for the reason that I always was restrained—and this was not the least of my miseries—by a feeling that it was ungenerous to press myself upon her, when she knew that she could not choose but obey Miss Havisham. My dread always was, that this knowledge on her part laid me under a heavy disadvantage with her pride, and made me the subject of a rebellious struggle in her bosom.

"At any rate," said I, "I have no warning given me just now, for you wrote to me to come to you, this time."

"That's true," said Estella, with a cold careless smile that always chilled me.

After looking at the twilight without, for a little while, she went on to say:—

"The time has come round when Miss Havisham wishes to have me for a day at Satis. You are to take me there, and bring me back, if you will. She would rather I did not travel alone, and objects to receiving my maid, for she has a sensitive horror of being talked of by such people. Can you take me?"

"Can I take you, Estella!"

"You can then? The day after to-morrow, if you please. You are to pay all charges out of my purse, You hear the condition of your going?"

"And must obey," said I.

This was all the preparation I received for that visit, or for others like it; Miss Havisham never wrote to me, nor had I ever so much as seen her handwriting. We went down on the next day but one, and we found her in the room where I had first beheld her, and it is needless to add that there was no change in Satis House.

She was even more dreadfully fond of Estella than she had been when I last saw them together; I repeat the word advisedly, for there was something positively dreadful in the energy of her looks and embraces. She hung upon Estella's beauty, hung upon her words, hung upon her gestures, and sat mumbling her own trembling fingers while she looked at her, as though she were devouring the beautiful creature she had reared.

From Estella she looked at me, with a searching glance that seemed to pry into my heart and probe its wounds. "How does she use you, Pip; how does she use you?" she asked me again, with her witch-like eagerness, even in Estella's hearing. But, when we sat by her flickering fire at night, she was most weird; for then, keeping Estella's hand drawn through her arm and clutched in her own hand, she extorted from her, by dint of referring back to what Estella had told her in her regular letters, the names and conditions of the men whom she had fascinated; and as Miss Havisham dwelt upon this roll, with the intensity of a mind mortally hurt and diseased, she sat with her other hand on her crutch stick, and her chin on that, and her wan bright eyes glaring at me, a very spectre.

I saw in this, wretched though it made me, and bitter the sense of dependence and even of degradation that it awakened,—I saw in this that Estella was set to wreak Miss Havisham's revenge on men, and that she was not to be given to me until she had gratified it for a term. I saw in this, a reason for her being beforehand assigned to me. Sending her out to attract and torment and do mischief, Miss Havisham sent her with the malicious assurance that she was beyond the reach of all admirers, and that all who staked upon that cast were secured to lose. I saw in this that I, too, was tormented by a perversion of ingenuity, even while the prize was reserved for me. I saw in this the reason for my being staved off so long and the reason for my late guardian's declining to commit himself to the formal knowledge of such a scheme. In a word, I saw in this Miss Havisham as I had her then and there before my eyes, and always had had her before my eyes; and I saw in this, the distinct shadow of the darkened and unhealthy house in which her life was hidden from the sun.

The candles that lighted that room of hers were placed in sconces on the wall. They were high from the ground, and they burnt with the steady dulness of artificial light in air that is seldom renewed. As I looked round at them, and at the pale gloom they made, and at the stopped clock, and at the withered articles of bridal dress upon the table and the ground, and at her own awful figure with its ghostly reflection thrown large by the fire upon the ceiling and the wall, I saw in everything the construction that my mind had come to, repeated and thrown back to me. My thoughts passed into the great room across the landing where the table was spread, and I saw it written, as it were, in the falls of the cobwebs from the centre-piece, in the crawlings of the spiders on the cloth, in the tracks of the mice as they betook their little quickened hearts behind the panels, and in the gropings and pausings of the beetles on the floor.

It happened on the occasion of this visit that some sharp words arose between Estella and Miss Havisham. It was the first time I had ever seen them opposed.

We were seated by the fire, as just now described, and Miss Havisham still had Estella's arm drawn through her own, and still clutched Estella's hand in hers, when Estella gradually began to detach herself. She had shown a proud impatience more than once before, and had rather endured that fierce affection than accepted or returned it.

"What!" said Miss Havisham, flashing her eyes upon her, "are you tired of me?"

"Only a little tired of myself," replied Estella, disengaging her arm, and moving to the great chimney-piece, where she stood looking down at the fire.

"Speak the truth, you ingrate!" cried Miss Havisham, passionately striking her stick upon the floor; "you are tired of me."

Estella looked at her with perfect composure, and again looked down at the fire. Her graceful figure and her beautiful face expressed a self-possessed indifference to the wild heat of the other, that was almost cruel.

"You stock and stone!" exclaimed Miss Havisham. "You cold, cold heart!"

"What?" said Estella, preserving her attitude of indifference as she leaned against the great chimney-piece and only moving her eyes; "do you reproach me for being cold? You?"

"Are you not?" was the fierce retort.

"You should know," said Estella. "I am what you have made me. Take all the praise, take all the blame; take all the success, take all the failure; in short, take me."

"O, look at her, look at her!" cried Miss Havisham, bitterly; "Look at her so hard and thankless, on the hearth where she was reared! Where I took her into this wretched breast when it was first bleeding from its stabs, and where I have lavished years of tenderness upon her!"

"At least I was no party to the compact," said Estella, "for if I could walk and speak, when it was made, it was as much as I could do. But what would you have? You have been very good to me, and I owe everything to you. What would you have?"

"Love," replied the other.

"You have it."

"I have not," said Miss Havisham.

"Mother by adoption," retorted Estella, never departing from the easy grace of her attitude, never raising her voice as the other did, never yielding either to anger or tenderness,—"mother by adoption, I have said that I owe everything to you. All I possess is freely yours. All that you have given me, is at your command to have again. Beyond that, I have nothing. And if you ask me to give you, what you never gave me, my gratitude and duty cannot do impossibilities."

"Did I never give her love!" cried Miss Havisham, turning wildly to me. "Did I never give her a burning love, inseparable from jealousy at all times, and from sharp pain, while she speaks thus to me! Let her call me mad, let her call me mad!"

"Why should I call you mad," returned Estella, "I, of all people? Does any one live, who knows what set purposes you have, half as well as I do? Does any one live, who knows what a steady memory you have, half as well as I do? I who have sat on this same hearth on the little stool that is even now beside you there, learning your lessons and looking up into your face, when your face was strange and frightened me!"

"Soon forgotten!" moaned Miss Havisham. "Times soon forgotten!"

"No, not forgotten," retorted Estella,—"not forgotten, but treasured up in my memory. When have you found me false to your teaching? When have you found me unmindful of your lessons? When have you found me giving admission here," she touched her bosom with her hand, "to anything that you excluded? Be just to me."

"So proud, so proud!" moaned Miss Havisham, pushing away her gray hair with both her hands.

"Who taught me to be proud?" returned Estella. "Who praised me when I learnt my lesson?"

"So hard, so hard!" moaned Miss Havisham, with her former action.

"Who taught me to be hard?" returned Estella. "Who praised me when I learnt my lesson?"

"But to be proud and hard to me!" Miss Havisham quite shrieked, as she stretched out her arms. "Estella, Estella, Estella, to be proud and hard to me!"

Estella looked at her for a moment with a kind of calm wonder, but was not otherwise disturbed; when the moment was past, she looked down at the fire again.

"I cannot think," said Estella, raising her eyes after a silence "why you should be so unreasonable when I come to see you after a separation. I have never forgotten your wrongs and their causes. I have never been unfaithful to you or your schooling. I have never shown any weakness that I can charge myself with."

"Would it be weakness to return my love?" exclaimed Miss Havisham. "But yes, yes, she would call it so!"

"I begin to think," said Estella, in a musing way, after another moment of calm wonder, "that I almost understand how this comes about. If you had brought up your adopted daughter wholly in the dark confinement of these rooms, and had never let her know that there was such a thing as the daylight by which she had never once seen your face,—if you had done that, and then, for a purpose had wanted her to understand the daylight and know all about it, you would have been disappointed and angry?"

Miss Havisham, with her head in her hands, sat making a low moaning, and swaying herself on her chair, but gave no answer.

"Or," said Estella,—"which is a nearer case,—if you had taught her, from the dawn of her intelligence, with your utmost energy and might, that there was such a thing as daylight, but that it was made to be her enemy and destroyer, and she must always turn against it, for it had blighted you and would else blight her;—if you had done this, and then, for a purpose, had wanted her to take naturally to the daylight and she could not do it, you would have been disappointed and angry?"

Miss Havisham sat listening (or it seemed so, for I could not see her face), but still made no answer.

"So," said Estella, "I must be taken as I have been made. The success is not mine, the failure is not mine, but the two together make me."

Miss Havisham had settled down, I hardly knew how, upon the floor, among the faded bridal relics with which it was strewn. I took advantage of the moment—I had sought one from the first—to leave the room, after beseeching Estella's attention to her, with a movement of my hand. When I left, Estella was yet standing by the great chimney-piece, just as she had stood throughout. Miss Havisham's gray hair was all adrift upon the ground, among the other bridal wrecks, and was a miserable sight to see.

It was with a depressed heart that I walked in the starlight for an hour and more, about the courtyard, and about the brewery, and about the ruined garden. When I at last took courage to return to the room, I found Estella sitting at Miss Havisham's knee, taking up some stitches in one of those old articles of dress that were dropping to pieces, and of which I have often been reminded since by the faded tatters of old banners that I have seen hanging up in cathedrals. Afterwards, Estella and I played at cards, as of yore,—only we were skilful now, and played French games,—and so the evening wore away, and I went to bed.

I lay in that separate building across the courtyard. It was the first time I had ever lain down to rest in Satis House, and sleep refused to come near me. A thousand Miss Havishams haunted me. She was on this side of my pillow, on that, at the head of the bed, at the foot, behind the half-opened door of the dressing-room, in the dressing-room, in the room overhead, in the room beneath,—everywhere. At last, when the night was slow to creep on towards two o'clock, I felt that I absolutely could no longer bear the place as a place to lie down in, and that I must get up. I therefore got up and put on my clothes, and went out across the yard into the long stone passage, designing to gain the outer courtyard and walk there for the relief of my mind. But I was no sooner in the passage than I extinguished my candle; for I saw Miss Havisham going along it in a ghostly manner, making a low cry. I followed her at a distance, and saw her go up the staircase. She carried a bare candle in her hand, which she had probably taken from one of the sconces in her own room, and was a most unearthly object by its light. Standing at the bottom of the staircase, I felt the mildewed air of the feast-chamber, without seeing her open the door, and I heard her walking there, and so across into her own room, and so across again into that, never ceasing the low cry. After a time, I tried in the dark both to get out, and to go back, but I could do neither until some streaks of day strayed in and showed me where to lay my hands. During the whole interval, whenever I went to the bottom of the staircase, I heard her footstep, saw her light pass above, and heard her ceaseless low cry.

Before we left next day, there was no revival of the difference between her and Estella, nor was it ever revived on any similar occasion; and there were four similar occasions, to the best of my remembrance. Nor, did Miss Havisham's manner towards Estella in anywise change, except that I believed it to have something like fear infused among its former characteristics.

It is impossible to turn this leaf of my life, without putting Bentley Drummle's name upon it; or I would, very gladly.

On a certain occasion when the Finches were assembled in force, and when good feeling was being promoted in the usual manner by nobody's agreeing with anybody else, the presiding Finch called the Grove to order, forasmuch as Mr. Drummle had not yet toasted a lady; which, according to the solemn constitution of the society, it was the brute's turn to do that day. I thought I saw him leer in an ugly way at me while the decanters were going round, but as there was no love lost between us, that might easily be. What was my indignant surprise when he called upon the company to pledge him to "Estella!"

"Estella who?" said I.

"Never you mind," retorted Drummle.

"Estella of where?" said I. "You are bound to say of where." Which he was, as a Finch.

"Of Richmond, gentlemen," said Drummle, putting me out of the question, "and a peerless beauty."

Much he knew about peerless beauties, a mean, miserable idiot! I whispered Herbert.

"I know that lady," said Herbert, across the table, when the toast had been honored.

"Do you?" said Drummle.

"And so do I," I added, with a scarlet face.

"Do you?" said Drummle. "O, Lord!"

This was the only retort—except glass or crockery—that the heavy creature was capable of making; but, I became as highly incensed by it as if it had been barbed with wit, and I immediately rose in my place and said that I could not but regard it as being like the honorable Finch's impudence to come down to that Grove,—we always talked about coming down to that Grove, as a neat Parliamentary turn of expression,—down to that Grove, proposing a lady of whom he knew nothing. Mr. Drummle, upon this, starting up, demanded what I meant by that? Whereupon I made him the extreme reply that I believed he knew where I was to be found.

Whether it was possible in a Christian country to get on without blood, after this, was a question on which the Finches were divided. The debate upon it grew so lively, indeed, that at least six more honorable members told six more, during the discussion, that they believed they knew where they were to be found. However, it was decided at last (the Grove being a Court of Honor) that if Mr. Drummle would bring never so slight a certificate from the lady, importing that he had the honor of her acquaintance, Mr. Pip must express his regret, as a gentleman and a Finch, for "having been betrayed into a warmth which." Next day was appointed for the production (lest our honor should take cold from delay), and next day Drummle appeared with a polite little avowal in Estella's hand, that she had had the honor of dancing with him several times. This left me no course but to regret that I had been "betrayed into a warmth which," and on the whole to repudiate, as untenable, the idea that I was to be found anywhere. Drummle and I then sat snorting at one another for an hour, while the Grove engaged in indiscriminate contradiction, and finally the promotion of good feeling was declared to have gone ahead at an amazing rate.

I tell this lightly, but it was no light thing to me. For, I cannot adequately express what pain it gave me to think that Estella should show any favor to a contemptible, clumsy, sulky booby, so very far below the average. To the present moment, I believe it to have been referable to some pure fire of generosity and disinterestedness in my love for her, that I could not endure the thought of her stooping to that hound. No doubt I should have been miserable whomsoever she had favored; but a worthier object would have caused me a different kind and degree of distress.

It was easy for me to find out, and I did soon find out, that Drummle had begun to follow her closely, and that she allowed him to do it. A little while, and he was always in pursuit of her, and he and I crossed one another every day. He held on, in a dull persistent way, and Estella held him on; now with encouragement, now with discouragement, now almost flattering him, now openly despising him, now knowing him very well, now scarcely remembering who he was.

The Spider, as Mr. Jaggers had called him, was used to lying in wait, however, and had the patience of his tribe. Added to that, he had a blockhead confidence in his money and in his family greatness, which sometimes did him good service,—almost taking the place of concentration and determined purpose. So, the Spider, doggedly watching Estella, outwatched many brighter insects, and would often uncoil himself and drop at the right nick of time.

At a certain Assembly Ball at Richmond (there used to be Assembly Balls at most places then), where Estella had outshone all other beauties, this blundering Drummle so hung about her, and with so much toleration on her part, that I resolved to speak to her concerning him. I took the next opportunity; which was when she was waiting for Mrs. Blandley to take her home, and was sitting apart among some flowers, ready to go. I was with her, for I almost always accompanied them to and from such places.

"Are you tired, Estella?"

"Rather, Pip."

"You should be."

"Say rather, I should not be; for I have my letter to Satis House to write, before I go to sleep."

"Recounting to-night's triumph?" said I. "Surely a very poor one, Estella."

"What do you mean? I didn't know there had been any."

"Estella," said I, "do look at that fellow in the corner yonder, who is looking over here at us."

"Why should I look at him?" returned Estella, with her eyes on me instead. "What is there in that fellow in the corner yonder,—to use your words,—that I need look at?"

"Indeed, that is the very question I want to ask you," said I. "For he has been hovering about you all night."

"Moths, and all sorts of ugly creatures," replied Estella, with a glance towards him, "hover about a lighted candle. Can the candle help it?"

"No," I returned; "but cannot the Estella help it?"

"Well!" said she, laughing, after a moment, "perhaps. Yes. Anything you like."

"But, Estella, do hear me speak. It makes me wretched that you should encourage a man so generally despised as Drummle. You know he is despised."

"Well?" said she.

"You know he is as ungainly within as without. A deficient, ill-tempered, lowering, stupid fellow."

"Well?" said she.

"You know he has nothing to recommend him but money and a ridiculous roll of addle-headed predecessors; now, don't you?"

"Well?" said she again; and each time she said it, she opened her lovely eyes the wider.

To overcome the difficulty of getting past that monosyllable, I took it from her, and said, repeating it with emphasis, "Well! Then, that is why it makes me wretched."

Now, if I could have believed that she favored Drummle with any idea of making me-me—wretched, I should have been in better heart about it; but in that habitual way of hers, she put me so entirely out of the question, that I could believe nothing of the kind.

"Pip," said Estella, casting her glance over the room, "don't be foolish about its effect on you. It may have its effect on others, and may be meant to have. It's not worth discussing."

"Yes it is," said I, "because I cannot bear that people should say, 'she throws away her graces and attractions on a mere boor, the lowest in the crowd.'"

"I can bear it," said Estella.

"Oh! don't be so proud, Estella, and so inflexible."

"Calls me proud and inflexible in this breath!" said Estella, opening her hands. "And in his last breath reproached me for stooping to a boor!"

"There is no doubt you do," said I, something hurriedly, "for I have seen you give him looks and smiles this very night, such as you never give to—me."

"Do you want me then," said Estella, turning suddenly with a fixed and serious, if not angry, look, "to deceive and entrap you?"

"Do you deceive and entrap him, Estella?"

"Yes, and many others,—all of them but you. Here is Mrs. Brandley. I'll say no more."

And now that I have given the one chapter to the theme that so filled my heart, and so often made it ache and ache again, I pass on unhindered, to the event that had impended over me longer yet; the event that had begun to be prepared for, before I knew that the world held Estella, and in the days when her baby intelligence was receiving its first distortions from Miss Havisham's wasting hands.

In the Eastern story, the heavy slab that was to fall on the bed of state in the flush of conquest was slowly wrought out of the quarry, the tunnel for the rope to hold it in its place was slowly carried through the leagues of rock, the slab was slowly raised and fitted in the roof, the rope was rove to it and slowly taken through the miles of hollow to the great iron ring. All being made ready with much labor, and the hour come, the sultan was aroused in the dead of the night, and the sharpened axe that was to sever the rope from the great iron ring was put into his hand, and he struck with it, and the rope parted and rushed away, and the ceiling fell. So, in my case; all the work, near and afar, that tended to the end, had been accomplished; and in an instant the blow was struck, and the roof of my stronghold dropped upon me.

Chapter XXXIX

I was three-and-twenty years of age. Not another word had I heard to enlighten me on the subject of my expectations, and my twenty-third birthday was a week gone. We had left Barnard's Inn more than a year, and lived in the Temple. Our chambers were in Garden-court, down by the river.

Mr. Pocket and I had for some time parted company as to our original relations, though we continued on the best terms. Notwithstanding my inability to settle to anything,—which I hope arose out of the restless and incomplete tenure on which I held my means,—I had a taste for reading, and read regularly so many hours a day. That matter of Herbert's was still progressing, and everything with me was as I have brought it down to the close of the last preceding chapter.

Business had taken Herbert on a journey to Marseilles. I was alone, and had a dull sense of being alone. Dispirited and anxious, long hoping that to-morrow or next week would clear my way, and long disappointed, I sadly missed the cheerful face and ready response of my friend.

It was wretched weather; stormy and wet, stormy and wet; and mud, mud, mud, deep in all the streets. Day after day, a vast heavy veil had been driving over London from the East, and it drove still, as if in the East there were an Eternity of cloud and wind. So furious had been the gusts, that high buildings in town had had the lead stripped off their roofs; and in the country, trees had been torn up, and sails of windmills carried away; and gloomy accounts had come in from the coast, of shipwreck and death. Violent blasts of rain had accompanied these rages of wind, and the day just closed as I sat down to read had been the worst of all.

Alterations have been made in that part of the Temple since that time, and it has not now so lonely a character as it had then, nor is it so exposed to the river. We lived at the top of the last house, and the wind rushing up the river shook the house that night, like discharges of cannon, or breakings of a sea. When the rain came with it and dashed against the windows, I thought, raising my eyes to them as they rocked, that I might have fancied myself in a storm-beaten lighthouse. Occasionally, the smoke came rolling down the chimney as though it could not bear to go out into such a night; and when I set the doors open and looked down the staircase, the staircase lamps were blown out; and when I shaded my face with my hands and looked through the black windows (opening them ever so little was out of the question in the teeth of such wind and rain), I saw that the lamps in the court were blown out, and that the lamps on the bridges and the shore were shuddering, and that the coal-fires in barges on the river were being carried away before the wind like red-hot splashes in the rain.

I read with my watch upon the table, purposing to close my book at eleven o'clock. As I shut it, Saint Paul's, and all the many church-clocks in the City—some leading, some accompanying, some following—struck that hour. The sound was curiously flawed by the wind; and I was listening, and thinking how the wind assailed and tore it, when I heard a footstep on the stair.

What nervous folly made me start, and awfully connect it with the footstep of my dead sister, matters not. It was past in a moment, and I listened again, and heard the footstep stumble in coming on. Remembering then, that the staircase-lights were blown out, I took up my reading-lamp and went out to the stair-head. Whoever was below had stopped on seeing my lamp, for all was quiet.

"There is some one down there, is there not?" I called out, looking down.

"Yes," said a voice from the darkness beneath.

"What floor do you want?"

"The top. Mr. Pip."

"That is my name.—There is nothing the matter?"

"Nothing the matter," returned the voice. And the man came on.

I stood with my lamp held out over the stair-rail, and he came slowly within its light. It was a shaded lamp, to shine upon a book, and its circle of light was very contracted; so that he was in it for a mere instant, and then out of it. In the instant, I had seen a face that was strange to me, looking up with an incomprehensible air of being touched and pleased by the sight of me.

Moving the lamp as the man moved, I made out that he was substantially dressed, but roughly, like a voyager by sea. That he had long iron-gray hair. That his age was about sixty. That he was a muscular man, strong on his legs, and that he was browned and hardened by exposure to weather. As he ascended the last stair or two, and the light of my lamp included us both, I saw, with a stupid kind of amazement, that he was holding out both his hands to me.

"Pray what is your business?" I asked him.

"My business?" he repeated, pausing. "Ah! Yes. I will explain my business, by your leave."

"Do you wish to come in?"

"Yes," he replied; "I wish to come in, master."

I had asked him the question inhospitably enough, for I resented the sort of bright and gratified recognition that still shone in his face. I resented it, because it seemed to imply that he expected me to respond to it. But I took him into the room I had just left, and, having set the lamp on the table, asked him as civilly as I could to explain himself.

He looked about him with the strangest air,—an air of wondering pleasure, as if he had some part in the things he admired,—and he pulled off a rough outer coat, and his hat. Then, I saw that his head was furrowed and bald, and that the long iron-gray hair grew only on its sides. But, I saw nothing that in the least explained him. On the contrary, I saw him next moment, once more holding out both his hands to me.

"What do you mean?" said I, half suspecting him to be mad.

He stopped in his looking at me, and slowly rubbed his right hand over his head. "It's disapinting to a man," he said, in a coarse broken voice, "arter having looked for'ard so distant, and come so fur; but you're not to blame for that,—neither on us is to blame for that. I'll speak in half a minute. Give me half a minute, please."

He sat down on a chair that stood before the fire, and covered his forehead with his large brown veinous hands. I looked at him attentively then, and recoiled a little from him; but I did not know him.

"There's no one nigh," said he, looking over his shoulder; "is there?"

"Why do you, a stranger coming into my rooms at this time of the night, ask that question?" said I.

"You're a game one," he returned, shaking his head at me with a deliberate affection, at once most unintelligible and most exasperating; "I'm glad you've grow'd up, a game one! But don't catch hold of me. You'd be sorry arterwards to have done it."

I relinquished the intention he had detected, for I knew him! Even yet I could not recall a single feature, but I knew him! If the wind and the rain had driven away the intervening years, had scattered all the intervening objects, had swept us to the churchyard where we first stood face to face on such different levels, I could not have known my convict more distinctly than I knew him now as he sat in the chair before the fire. No need to take a file from his pocket and show it to me; no need to take the handkerchief from his neck and twist it round his head; no need to hug himself with both his arms, and take a shivering turn across the room, looking back at me for recognition. I knew him before he gave me one of those aids, though, a moment before, I had not been conscious of remotely suspecting his identity.

He came back to where I stood, and again held out both his hands. Not knowing what to do,—for, in my astonishment I had lost my self-possession,—I reluctantly gave him my hands. He grasped them heartily, raised them to his lips, kissed them, and still held them.

"You acted noble, my boy," said he. "Noble, Pip! And I have never forgot it!"

At a change in his manner as if he were even going to embrace me, I laid a hand upon his breast and put him away.

"Stay!" said I. "Keep off! If you are grateful to me for what I did when I was a little child, I hope you have shown your gratitude by mending your way of life. If you have come here to thank me, it was not necessary. Still, however you have found me out, there must be something good in the feeling that has brought you here, and I will not repulse you; but surely you must understand that—I—"

My attention was so attracted by the singularity of his fixed look at me, that the words died away on my tongue.

"You was a saying," he observed, when we had confronted one another in silence, "that surely I must understand. What, surely must I understand?"

"That I cannot wish to renew that chance intercourse with you of long ago, under these different circumstances. I am glad to believe you have repented and recovered yourself. I am glad to tell you so. I am glad that, thinking I deserve to be thanked, you have come to thank me. But our ways are different ways, none the less. You are wet, and you look weary. Will you drink something before you go?"

He had replaced his neckerchief loosely, and had stood, keenly observant of me, biting a long end of it. "I think," he answered, still with the end at his mouth and still observant of me, "that I will drink (I thank you) afore I go."

There was a tray ready on a side-table. I brought it to the table near the fire, and asked him what he would have? He touched one of the bottles without looking at it or speaking, and I made him some hot rum and water. I tried to keep my hand steady while I did so, but his look at me as he leaned back in his chair with the long draggled end of his neckerchief between his teeth—evidently forgotten—made my hand very difficult to master. When at last I put the glass to him, I saw with amazement that his eyes were full of tears.

Up to this time I had remained standing, not to disguise that I wished him gone. But I was softened by the softened aspect of the man, and felt a touch of reproach. "I hope," said I, hurriedly putting something into a glass for myself, and drawing a chair to the table, "that you will not think I spoke harshly to you just now. I had no intention of doing it, and I am sorry for it if I did. I wish you well and happy!"

As I put my glass to my lips, he glanced with surprise at the end of his neckerchief, dropping from his mouth when he opened it, and stretched out his hand. I gave him mine, and then he drank, and drew his sleeve across his eyes and forehead.

"How are you living?" I asked him.

"I've been a sheep-farmer, stock-breeder, other trades besides, away in the new world," said he; "many a thousand mile of stormy water off from this."

"I hope you have done well?"

"I've done wonderfully well. There's others went out alonger me as has done well too, but no man has done nigh as well as me. I'm famous for it."

"I am glad to hear it."

"I hope to hear you say so, my dear boy."

Without stopping to try to understand those words or the tone in which they were spoken, I turned off to a point that had just come into my mind.

"Have you ever seen a messenger you once sent to me," I inquired, "since he undertook that trust?"

"Never set eyes upon him. I warn't likely to it."

"He came faithfully, and he brought me the two one-pound notes. I was a poor boy then, as you know, and to a poor boy they were a little fortune. But, like you, I have done well since, and you must let me pay them back. You can put them to some other poor boy's use." I took out my purse.

He watched me as I laid my purse upon the table and opened it, and he watched me as I separated two one-pound notes from its contents. They were clean and new, and I spread them out and handed them over to him. Still watching me, he laid them one upon the other, folded them long-wise, gave them a twist, set fire to them at the lamp, and dropped the ashes into the tray.

"May I make so bold," he said then, with a smile that was like a frown, and with a frown that was like a smile, "as ask you how you have done well, since you and me was out on them lone shivering marshes?"

"How?"

"Ah!"

He emptied his glass, got up, and stood at the side of the fire, with his heavy brown hand on the mantel-shelf. He put a foot up to the bars, to dry and warm it, and the wet boot began to steam; but, he neither looked at it, nor at the fire, but steadily looked at me. It was only now that I began to tremble.

When my lips had parted, and had shaped some words that were without sound, I forced myself to tell him (though I could not do it distinctly), that I had been chosen to succeed to some property.

"Might a mere warmint ask what property?" said he.

I faltered, "I don't know."

"Might a mere warmint ask whose property?" said he.

I faltered again, "I don't know."

"Could I make a guess, I wonder," said the Convict, "at your income since you come of age! As to the first figure now. Five?"

With my heart beating like a heavy hammer of disordered action, I rose out of my chair, and stood with my hand upon the back of it, looking wildly at him.

"Concerning a guardian," he went on. "There ought to have been some guardian, or such-like, whiles you was a minor. Some lawyer, maybe. As to the first letter of that lawyer's name now. Would it be J?"

All the truth of my position came flashing on me; and its disappointments, dangers, disgraces, consequences of all kinds, rushed in in such a multitude that I was borne down by them and had to struggle for every breath I drew.

"Put it," he resumed, "as the employer of that lawyer whose name begun with a J, and might be Jaggers,—put it as he had come over sea to

Portsmouth, and had landed there, and had wanted to come on to you. 'However, you have found me out,' you says just now. Well! However, did I find you out? Why, I wrote from Portsmouth to a person in London, for particulars of your address. That person's name? Why, Wemmick."

I could not have spoken one word, though it had been to save my life. I stood, with a hand on the chair-back and a hand on my breast, where I seemed to be suffocating,—I stood so, looking wildly at him, until I grasped at the chair, when the room began to surge and turn. He caught me, drew me to the sofa, put me up against the cushions, and bent on one knee before me, bringing the face that I now well remembered, and that I shuddered at, very near to mine.

"Yes, Pip, dear boy, I've made a gentleman on you! It's me wot has done it! I swore that time, sure as ever I earned a guinea, that guinea should go to you. I swore arterwards, sure as ever I spec'lated and got rich, you should get rich. I lived rough, that you should live smooth; I worked hard, that you should be above work. What odds, dear boy? Do I tell it, fur you to feel a obligation? Not a bit. I tell it, fur you to know as that there hunted dunghill dog wot you kep life in, got his head so high that he could make a gentleman,—and, Pip, you're him!"

The abhorrence in which I held the man, the dread I had of him, the repugnance with which I shrank from him, could not have been exceeded if he had been some terrible beast.

"Look'ee here, Pip. I'm your second father. You're my son,—more to me nor any son. I've put away money, only for you to spend. When I was a hired-out shepherd in a solitary hut, not seeing no faces but faces of sheep till I half forgot wot men's and women's faces wos like, I see yourn. I drops my knife many a time in that hut when I was a-eating my dinner or my supper, and I says, 'Here's the boy again, a looking at me whiles I eats and drinks!' I see you there a many times, as plain as ever I see you on them misty marshes. 'Lord strike me dead!' I says each time,—and I goes out in the air to say it under the open heavens,—'but wot, if I gets liberty and money, I'll make that boy a gentleman!' And I done it. Why, look at you, dear boy! Look at these here lodgings o'yourn, fit for a lord! A lord? Ah! You shall show money with lords for wagers, and beat 'em!"

In his heat and triumph, and in his knowledge that I had been nearly fainting, he did not remark on my reception of all this. It was the one grain of relief I had.

"Look'ee here!" he went on, taking my watch out of my pocket, and turning towards him a ring on my finger, while I recoiled from his touch as if he had been a snake, "a gold 'un and a beauty: that's a gentleman's, I hope! A diamond all set round with rubies; that's a gentleman's, I hope! Look at your linen; fine and beautiful! Look at your clothes; better ain't to be got! And your books too," turning his eyes round the room, "mounting up, on their shelves, by hundreds! And you read 'em; don't you? I see you'd been a reading of 'em when I come in. Ha, ha, ha! You shall read 'em to me, dear boy! And if they're in foreign languages wot I don't understand, I shall be just as proud as if I did."

Again he took both my hands and put them to his lips, while my blood ran cold within me.

"Don't you mind talking, Pip," said he, after again drawing his sleeve over his eyes and forehead, as the click came in his throat which I well remembered,—and he was all the more horrible to me that he was so much in earnest; "you can't do better nor keep quiet, dear boy. You ain't looked slowly forward to this as I have; you wosn't prepared for this as I wos. But didn't you never think it might be me?"

"O no, no, no," I returned, "Never, never!"

"Well, you see it wos me, and single-handed. Never a soul in it but my own self and Mr. Jaggers."

"Was there no one else?" I asked.

"No," said he, with a glance of surprise: "who else should there be? And, dear boy, how good looking you have growed! There's bright eyes somewheres—eh? Isn't there bright eyes somewheres, wot you love the thoughts on?"

O Estella, Estella!

"They shall be yourn, dear boy, if money can buy 'em. Not that a gentleman like you, so well set up as you, can't win 'em off of his own game; but money shall back you! Let me finish wot I was a telling you, dear boy. From that there hut and that there hiring-out, I got money left me by my master (which died, and had been the same as me), and got my liberty and went for myself. In every single thing I went for, I went for you. 'Lord strike a blight upon it,' I says, wotever it was I went for, 'if it ain't for him!' It all prospered wonderful. As I giv' you to understand just now, I'm famous for it. It was the money left me, and the gains of the first few year wot I sent home to Mr. Jaggers—all for you—when he first come arter you, agreeable to my letter."

O that he had never come! That he had left me at the forge,—far from contented, yet, by comparison happy!

"And then, dear boy, it was a recompense to me, look'ee here, to know in secret that I was making a gentleman. The blood horses of them colonists might fling up the dust over me as I was walking; what do I say? I says to myself, 'I'm making a better gentleman nor ever you'll be!' When one of 'em says to another, 'He was a convict, a few year ago, and is a ignorant common fellow now, for all he's lucky,' what do I say? I says to myself, 'If I ain't a gentleman, nor yet ain't got no learning, I'm the owner of such. All on you owns stock and land; which on you owns a brought-up London gentleman?' This way I kep myself a going. And this way I held steady afore my mind that I would for certain come one day and see my boy, and make myself known to him, on his own ground."

He laid his hand on my shoulder. I shuddered at the thought that for anything I knew, his hand might be stained with blood.

"It warn't easy, Pip, for me to leave them parts, nor yet it warn't safe. But I held to it, and the harder it was, the stronger I held, for I was determined, and my mind firm made up. At last I done it. Dear boy, I done it!"

I tried to collect my thoughts, but I was stunned. Throughout, I had seemed to myself to attend more to the wind and the rain than to him; even now, I could not separate his voice from those voices, though those were loud and his was silent.

"Where will you put me?" he asked, presently. "I must be put somewheres, dear boy."

"To sleep?" said I.

"Yes. And to sleep long and sound," he answered; "for I've been sea-tossed and sea-washed, months and months."

"My friend and companion," said I, rising from the sofa, "is absent; you must have his room."

"He won't come back to-morrow; will he?"

"No," said I, answering almost mechanically, in spite of my utmost efforts; "not to-morrow."

"Because, look'ee here, dear boy," he said, dropping his voice, and laying a long finger on my breast in an impressive manner, "caution is necessary."

"How do you mean? Caution?"

"By G——, it's Death!"

"What's death?"

"I was sent for life. It's death to come back. There's been overmuch coming back of late years, and I should of a certainty be hanged if took."

Nothing was needed but this; the wretched man, after loading wretched me with his gold and silver chains for years, had risked his life to come to me, and I held it there in my keeping! If I had loved him instead of abhorring him; if I had been attracted to him by the strongest admiration and affection, instead of shrinking from him with the strongest repugnance; it could have been no worse. On the contrary, it would have been better, for his preservation would then have naturally and tenderly addressed my heart.

My first care was to close the shutters, so that no light might be seen from without, and then to close and make fast the doors. While I did so, he stood at the table drinking rum and eating biscuit; and when I saw him thus engaged, I saw my convict on the marshes at his meal again. It almost seemed to me as if he must stoop down presently, to file at his leg.

When I had gone into Herbert's room, and had shut off any other communication between it and the staircase than through the room in which our conversation had been held, I asked him if he would go to bed? He said yes, but asked me for some of my "gentleman's linen" to put on in the morning. I brought it out, and laid it ready for him, and my blood again ran cold when he again took me by both hands to give me good night.

I got away from him, without knowing how I did it, and mended the fire in the room where we had been together, and sat down by it, afraid to go to bed. For an hour or more, I remained too stunned to think; and it was not until I began to think, that I began fully to know how wrecked I was, and how the ship in which I had sailed was gone to pieces.

Miss Havisham's intentions towards me, all a mere dream; Estella not designed for me; I only suffered in Satis House as a convenience, a sting for the greedy relations, a model with a mechanical heart to practise on when no other practice was at hand; those were the first smarts I had. But, sharpest and deepest pain of all,—it was for the convict, guilty of I knew not what crimes, and liable to be taken out of those rooms where I sat thinking, and hanged at the Old Bailey door, that I had deserted Joe.

I would not have gone back to Joe now, I would not have gone back to Biddy now, for any consideration; simply, I suppose, because my sense of my own worthless conduct to them was greater than every consideration. No wisdom on earth could have given me the comfort that I should have derived from their simplicity and fidelity; but I could never, never, undo what I had done.

In every rage of wind and rush of rain, I heard pursuers. Twice, I could have sworn there was a knocking and whispering at the outer door. With these fears upon me, I began either to imagine or recall that I had had mysterious warnings of this man's approach. That, for weeks gone by, I had passed faces in the streets which I had thought like his. That these likenesses had grown more numerous, as he, coming over the sea, had drawn nearer. That his wicked spirit had somehow sent these messengers to mine, and that now on this stormy night he was as good as his word, and with me.

Crowding up with these reflections came the reflection that I had seen him with my childish eyes to be a desperately violent man; that I had heard that other convict reiterate that he had tried to murder him; that I had seen him down in the ditch tearing and fighting like a wild beast. Out of such remembrances I brought into the light of the fire a half-formed terror that it might not be safe to be shut up there with him in the dead of the wild solitary night. This dilated until it filled the room, and impelled me to take a candle and go in and look at my dreadful burden.

He had rolled a handkerchief round his head, and his face was set and lowering in his sleep. But he was asleep, and quietly too, though he had a pistol lying on the pillow. Assured of this, I softly removed the key to the outside of his door, and turned it on him before I again sat down by the fire. Gradually I slipped from the chair and lay on the floor. When I awoke without having parted in my sleep with the perception of my wretchedness, the clocks of the Eastward churches were striking five, the candles were wasted out, the fire was dead, and the wind and rain intensified the thick black darkness.

THIS IS THE END OF THE SECOND STAGE OF PIP'S EXPECTATIONS.

Chapter XL

It was fortunate for me that I had to take precautions to ensure (so far as I could) the safety of my dreaded visitor; for, this thought pressing on me when I awoke, held other thoughts in a confused concourse at a distance.

The impossibility of keeping him concealed in the chambers was self-evident. It could not be done, and the attempt to do it would inevitably engender suspicion. True, I had no Avenger in my service now, but I was looked after by an inflammatory old female, assisted by an animated rag-bag whom she called her niece, and to keep a room secret from them would be to invite curiosity and exaggeration. They both had weak eyes, which I had long attributed to their chronically looking in at keyholes, and they were always at hand when not wanted; indeed that was their only reliable quality besides larceny. Not to get up a mystery with these people, I resolved to announce in the morning that my uncle had unexpectedly come from the country.

This course I decided on while I was yet groping about in the darkness for the means of getting a light. Not stumbling on the means after all, I was fain to go out to the adjacent Lodge and get the watchman there to come with his lantern. Now, in groping my way down the black staircase I fell over something, and that something was a man crouching in a corner.

As the man made no answer when I asked him what he did there, but eluded my touch in silence, I ran to the Lodge and urged the watchman to come quickly; telling him of the incident on the way back. The wind being as fierce as ever, we did not care to endanger the light in the lantern by rekindling the extinguished lamps on the staircase, but we examined the staircase from the bottom to the top and found no one there. It then occurred to me as possible that the man might have slipped into my rooms; so, lighting my candle at the watchman's, and leaving him standing at the door, I examined them carefully, including the room in which my dreaded guest lay asleep. All was quiet, and assuredly no other man was in those chambers.

It troubled me that there should have been a lurker on the stairs, on that night of all nights in the year, and I asked the watchman, on the chance of eliciting some hopeful explanation as I handed him a dram at the door, whether he had admitted at his gate any gentleman who had perceptibly been dining out? Yes, he said; at different times of the night, three. One lived in Fountain Court, and the other two lived in the Lane, and he had seen them all go home. Again, the only other man who dwelt in the house of which my chambers formed a part had been in the country for some weeks, and he certainly had not returned in the night, because we had seen his door with his seal on it as we came up-stairs.

"The night being so bad, sir," said the watchman, as he gave me back my glass, "uncommon few have come in at my gate. Besides them three gentlemen that I have named, I don't call to mind another since about eleven o'clock, when a stranger asked for you."

"My uncle," I muttered. "Yes."

"You saw him, sir?"

"Yes. Oh yes."

"Likewise the person with him?"

"Person with him!" I repeated.

"I judged the person to be with him," returned the watchman. "The person stopped, when he stopped to make inquiry of me, and the person took this way when he took this way."

"What sort of person?"

The watchman had not particularly noticed; he should say a working person; to the best of his belief, he had a dust-colored kind of clothes on, under a dark coat. The watchman made more light of the matter than I did, and naturally; not having my reason for attaching weight to it.

When I had got rid of him, which I thought it well to do without prolonging explanations, my mind was much troubled by these two circumstances taken together. Whereas they were easy of innocent solution apart,—as, for instance, some diner out or diner at home, who had not gone near this watchman's gate, might have strayed to my staircase and dropped asleep there,—and my nameless visitor might have brought some one with him to show him the way,—still, joined, they had an ugly look to one as prone to distrust and fear as the changes of a few hours had made me.

I lighted my fire, which burnt with a raw pale flare at that time of the morning, and fell into a doze before it. I seemed to have been dozing a whole night when the clocks struck six. As there was full an hour and a half between me and daylight, I dozed again; now, waking up uneasily, with prolix conversations about nothing, in my ears; now, making thunder of the wind in the chimney; at length, falling off into a profound sleep from which the daylight woke me with a start.

All this time I had never been able to consider my own situation, nor could I do so yet. I had not the power to attend to it. I was greatly dejected and distressed, but in an incoherent wholesale sort of way. As to forming any plan for the future, I could as soon have formed an elephant. When I opened the shutters and looked out at the wet wild morning, all of a leaden hue; when I walked from room to room; when I sat down again shivering, before the fire, waiting for my laundress to appear; I thought how miserable I was, but hardly knew why, or how long I had been so, or on what day of the week I made the reflection, or even who I was that made it.

At last, the old woman and the niece came in,—the latter with a head not easily distinguishable from her dusty broom,—and testified surprise at sight of me and the fire. To whom I imparted how my uncle had come in the night and was then asleep, and how the breakfast preparations were to be modified accordingly. Then I washed and dressed while they knocked the furniture about and made a dust; and so, in a sort of dream or sleep-waking, I found myself sitting by the fire again, waiting for-Him—to come to breakfast.

By and by, his door opened and he came out. I could not bring myself to bear the sight of him, and I thought he had a worse look by daylight.

"I do not even know," said I, speaking low as he took his seat at the table, "by what name to call you. I have given out that you are my uncle."

"That's it, dear boy! Call me uncle."

"You assumed some name, I suppose, on board ship?"

"Yes, dear boy. I took the name of Provis."

"Do you mean to keep that name?"

"Why, yes, dear boy, it's as good as another,—unless you'd like another."

"What is your real name?" I asked him in a whisper.

"Magwitch," he answered, in the same tone; "chrisen'd Abel."

"What were you brought up to be?"

"A warmint, dear boy."

He answered quite seriously, and used the word as if it denoted some profession.

"When you came into the Temple last night—" said I, pausing to wonder whether that could really have been last night, which seemed so long ago.

"Yes, dear boy?"

"When you came in at the gate and asked the watchman the way here, had you any one with you?"

"With me? No, dear boy."

"But there was some one there?"

"I didn't take particular notice," he said, dubiously, "not knowing the ways of the place. But I think there was a person, too, come in alonger me."

"Are you known in London?"

"I hope not!" said he, giving his neck a jerk with his forefinger that made me turn hot and sick.

"Were you known in London, once?"

"Not over and above, dear boy. I was in the provinces mostly."

"Were you-tried—in London?"

"Which time?" said he, with a sharp look.

"The last time."

He nodded. "First knowed Mr. Jaggers that way. Jaggers was for me."

It was on my lips to ask him what he was tried for, but he took up a knife, gave it a flourish, and with the words, "And what I done is worked out and paid for!" fell to at his breakfast.

He ate in a ravenous way that was very disagreeable, and all his actions were uncouth, noisy, and greedy. Some of his teeth had failed him since I saw him eat on the marshes, and as he turned his food in his mouth, and turned his head sideways to bring his strongest fangs to bear upon it, he looked terribly like a hungry old dog. If I had begun with any appetite, he would have taken it away, and I should have sat much as I did,—repelled from him by an insurmountable aversion, and gloomily looking at the cloth.

"I'm a heavy grubber, dear boy," he said, as a polite kind of apology when he made an end of his meal, "but I always was. If it had been in my constitution to be a lighter grubber, I might ha' got into lighter trouble. Similarly, I must have my smoke. When I was first hired out as shepherd t'other side the world, it's my belief I should ha' turned into a molloncolly-mad sheep myself, if I hadn't a had my smoke."

As he said so, he got up from table, and putting his hand into the breast of the pea-coat he wore, brought out a short black pipe, and a handful of loose tobacco of the kind that is called Negro-head. Having filled his pipe, he put the surplus tobacco back again, as if his pocket were a drawer. Then, he took a live coal from the fire with the tongs, and lighted his pipe at it, and then turned round on the hearth-rug with his back to the fire, and went through his favorite action of holding out both his hands for mine.

"And this," said he, dandling my hands up and down in his, as he puffed at his pipe,—"and this is the gentleman what I made! The real genuine One! It does me good fur to look at you, Pip. All I stip'late, is, to stand by and look at you, dear boy!"

I released my hands as soon as I could, and found that I was beginning slowly to settle down to the contemplation of my condition. What I was chained to, and how heavily, became intelligible to me, as I heard his hoarse voice, and sat looking up at his furrowed bald head with its iron gray hair at the sides.

"I mustn't see my gentleman a footing it in the mire of the streets; there mustn't be no mud on his boots. My gentleman must have horses, Pip! Horses to ride, and horses to drive, and horses for his servant to ride and drive as well. Shall colonists have their horses (and blood 'uns, if you please, good Lord!) and not my London gentleman? No, no. We'll show 'em another pair of shoes than that, Pip; won't us?"

He took out of his pocket a great thick pocket-book, bursting with papers, and tossed it on the table.

"There's something worth spending in that there book, dear boy. It's yourn. All I've got ain't mine; it's yourn. Don't you be afeerd on it. There's more where that come from. I've come to the old country fur to see my gentleman spend his money like a gentleman. That'll be my pleasure. My pleasure 'ull be fur to see him do it. And blast you all!" he wound up, looking round the room and snapping his fingers once with a loud snap, "blast you every one, from the judge in his wig, to the colonist a stirring up the dust, I'll show a better gentleman than the whole kit on you put together!"

"Stop!" said I, almost in a frenzy of fear and dislike, "I want to speak to you. I want to know what is to be done. I want to know how you are to be kept out of danger, how long you are going to stay, what projects you have."

"Look'ee here, Pip," said he, laying his hand on my arm in a suddenly altered and subdued manner; "first of all, look'ee here. I forgot myself half a minute ago. What I said was low; that's what it was; low. Look'ee here, Pip. Look over it. I ain't a going to be low."

"First," I resumed, half groaning, "what precautions can be taken against your being recognized and seized?"

"No, dear boy," he said, in the same tone as before, "that don't go first. Lowness goes first. I ain't took so many year to make a gentleman, not without knowing what's due to him. Look'ee here, Pip. I was low; that's what I was; low. Look over it, dear boy."

Some sense of the grimly-ludicrous moved me to a fretful laugh, as I replied, "I have looked over it. In Heaven's name, don't harp upon it!"

"Yes, but look'ee here," he persisted. "Dear boy, I ain't come so fur, not fur to be low. Now, go on, dear boy. You was a saying—"

"How are you to be guarded from the danger you have incurred?"

"Well, dear boy, the danger ain't so great. Without I was informed agen, the danger ain't so much to signify. There's Jaggers, and there's Wemmick, and there's you. Who else is there to inform?"

"Is there no chance person who might identify you in the street?" said I.

"Well," he returned, "there ain't many. Nor yet I don't intend to advertise myself in the newspapers by the name of A.M. come back from Botany Bay; and years have rolled away, and who's to gain by it? Still, look'ee here, Pip. If the danger had been fifty times as great, I should ha' come to see you, mind you, just the same."

"And how long do you remain?"

"How long?" said he, taking his black pipe from his mouth, and dropping his jaw as he stared at me. "I'm not a going back. I've come for good."

"Where are you to live?" said I. "What is to be done with you? Where will you be safe?"

"Dear boy," he returned, "there's disguising wigs can be bought for money, and there's hair powder, and spectacles, and black clothes,—shorts and what not. Others has done it safe afore, and what others has done afore, others can do agen. As to the where and how of living, dear boy, give me your own opinions on it."

"You take it smoothly now," said I, "but you were very serious last night, when you swore it was Death."

"And so I swear it is Death," said he, putting his pipe back in his mouth, "and Death by the rope, in the open street not fur from this, and it's serious that you should fully understand it to be so. What then, when that's once done? Here I am. To go back now 'ud be as bad as to stand ground—worse.

Besides, Pip, I'm here, because I've meant it by you, years and years. As to what I dare, I'm a old bird now, as has dared all manner of traps since first he was fledged, and I'm not afeerd to perch upon a scarecrow. If there's Death hid inside of it, there is, and let him come out, and I'll face him, and then I'll believe in him and not afore. And now let me have a look at my gentleman agen."

Once more, he took me by both hands and surveyed me with an air of admiring proprietorship: smoking with great complacency all the while.

It appeared to me that I could do no better than secure him some quiet lodging hard by, of which he might take possession when Herbert returned: whom I expected in two or three days. That the secret must be confided to Herbert as a matter of unavoidable necessity, even if I could have put the immense relief I should derive from sharing it with him out of the question, was plain to me. But it was by no means so plain to Mr. Provis (I resolved to call him by that name), who reserved his consent to Herbert's participation until he should have seen him and formed a favorable judgment of his physiognomy. "And even then, dear boy," said he, pulling a greasy little clasped black Testament out of his pocket, "we'll have him on his oath."

To state that my terrible patron carried this little black book about the world solely to swear people on in cases of emergency, would be to state what I never quite established; but this I can say, that I never knew him put it to any other use. The book itself had the appearance of having been stolen from some court of justice, and perhaps his knowledge of its antecedents, combined with his own experience in that wise, gave him a reliance on its powers as a sort of legal spell or charm. On this first occasion of his producing it, I recalled how he had made me swear fidelity in the churchyard long ago, and how he had described himself last night as always swearing to his resolutions in his solitude.

As he was at present dressed in a seafaring slop suit, in which he looked as if he had some parrots and cigars to dispose of, I next discussed with him what dress he should wear. He cherished an extraordinary belief in the virtues of "shorts" as a disguise, and had in his own mind sketched a dress for himself that would have made him something between a dean and a dentist. It was with considerable difficulty that I won him over to the assumption of a dress more like a prosperous farmer's; and we arranged that he should cut his hair close, and wear a little powder. Lastly, as he had not yet been seen by the laundress or her niece, he was to keep himself out of their view until his change of dress was made.

It would seem a simple matter to decide on these precautions; but in my dazed, not to say distracted, state, it took so long, that I did not get out to further them until two or three in the afternoon. He was to remain shut up in the chambers while I was gone, and was on no account to open the door.

There being to my knowledge a respectable lodging-house in Essex Street, the back of which looked into the Temple, and was almost within hail of my windows, I first of all repaired to that house, and was so fortunate as to secure the second floor for my uncle, Mr. Provis. I then went from shop to shop, making such purchases as were necessary to the change in his appearance. This business transacted, I turned my face, on my own account, to Little Britain. Mr. Jaggers was at his desk, but, seeing me enter, got up immediately and stood before his fire.

"Now, Pip," said he, "be careful."

"I will, sir," I returned. For, coming along I had thought well of what I was going to say.

"Don't commit yourself," said Mr. Jaggers, "and don't commit any one. You understand—any one. Don't tell me anything: I don't want to know anything; I am not curious."

Of course I saw that he knew the man was come.

"I merely want, Mr. Jaggers," said I, "to assure myself that what I have been told is true. I have no hope of its being untrue, but at least I may verify it."

Mr. Jaggers nodded. "But did you say 'told' or 'informed'?" he asked me, with his head on one side, and not looking at me, but looking in a listening way at the floor. "Told would seem to imply verbal communication. You can't have verbal communication with a man in New South Wales, you know."

"I will say, informed, Mr. Jaggers."

"Good."

"I have been informed by a person named Abel Magwitch, that he is the benefactor so long unknown to me."

"That is the man," said Mr. Jaggers, "in New South Wales."

"And only he?" said I.

"And only he," said Mr. Jaggers.

"I am not so unreasonable, sir, as to think you at all responsible for my mistakes and wrong conclusions; but I always supposed it was Miss Havisham."

"As you say, Pip," returned Mr. Jaggers, turning his eyes upon me coolly, and taking a bite at his forefinger, "I am not at all responsible for that."

"And yet it looked so like it, sir," I pleaded with a downcast heart.

"Not a particle of evidence, Pip," said Mr. Jaggers, shaking his head and gathering up his skirts. "Take nothing on its looks; take everything on evidence. There's no better rule."

"I have no more to say," said I, with a sigh, after standing silent for a little while. "I have verified my information, and there's an end."

"And Magwitch—in New South Wales—having at last disclosed himself," said Mr. Jaggers, "you will comprehend, Pip, how rigidly throughout my communication with you, I have always adhered to the strict line of fact. There has never been the least departure from the strict line of fact. You are quite aware of that?"

"Quite, sir."

"I communicated to Magwitch—in New South Wales—when he first wrote to me—from New South Wales—the caution that he must not expect me ever to deviate from the strict line of fact. I also communicated to him another caution. He appeared to me to have obscurely hinted in his letter at some distant idea he had of seeing you in England here. I cautioned him that I must hear no more of that; that he was not at all likely to obtain a pardon; that he was expatriated for the term of his natural life; and that his presenting himself in this country would be an act of felony, rendering him liable to the extreme penalty of the law. I gave Magwitch that caution," said Mr. Jaggers, looking hard at me; "I wrote it to New South Wales. He guided himself by it, no doubt."

"No doubt," said I.

"I have been informed by Wemmick," pursued Mr. Jaggers, still looking hard at me, "that he has received a letter, under date Portsmouth, from a colonist of the name of Purvis, or—"

"Or Provis," I suggested.

"Or Provis—thank you, Pip. Perhaps it is Provis? Perhaps you know it's Provis?"

"Yes," said I.

"You know it's Provis. A letter, under date Portsmouth, from a colonist of the name of Provis, asking for the particulars of your address, on behalf of Magwitch. Wemmick sent him the particulars, I understand, by return of post. Probably it is through Provis that you have received the explanation of Magwitch—in New South Wales?"

"It came through Provis," I replied.

"Good day, Pip," said Mr. Jaggers, offering his hand; "glad to have seen you. In writing by post to Magwitch—in New South Wales—or in communicating with him through Provis, have the goodness to mention that the particulars and vouchers of our long account shall be sent to you, together with the balance; for there is still a balance remaining. Good day, Pip!"

We shook hands, and he looked hard at me as long as he could see me. I turned at the door, and he was still looking hard at me, while the two vile casts on the shelf seemed to be trying to get their eyelids open, and to force out of their swollen throats, "O, what a man he is!"

Wemmick was out, and though he had been at his desk he could have done nothing for me. I went straight back to the Temple, where I found the terrible Provis drinking rum and water and smoking negro-head, in safety.

Next day the clothes I had ordered all came home, and he put them on. Whatever he put on, became him less (it dismally seemed to me) than what he had worn before. To my thinking, there was something in him that made it hopeless to attempt to disguise him. The more I dressed him and the better I dressed him, the more he looked like the slouching fugitive on the marshes. This effect on my anxious fancy was partly referable, no doubt, to his old face and manner growing more familiar to me; but I believe too that he dragged one of his legs as if there were still a weight of iron on it, and that from head to foot there was Convict in the very grain of the man.

The influences of his solitary hut-life were upon him besides, and gave him a savage air that no dress could tame; added to these were the influences of his subsequent branded life among men, and, crowning all, his consciousness that he was dodging and hiding now. In all his ways of sitting and standing, and eating and drinking,—of brooding about in a high-shouldered reluctant style,—of taking out his great horn-handled jackknife and wiping it on his legs and cutting his food,—of lifting light glasses and cups to his lips, as if they were clumsy pannikins,—of chopping a wedge off his bread, and soaking up with it the last fragments of gravy round and round his plate, as if to make the most of an allowance, and then drying his finger-ends on it, and then swallowing it,—in these ways and a thousand other small nameless instances arising every minute in the day, there was Prisoner, Felon, Bondsman, plain as plain could be.

It had been his own idea to wear that touch of powder, and I had conceded the powder after overcoming the shorts. But I can compare the effect of it, when on, to nothing but the probable effect of rouge upon the dead; so awful was the manner in which everything in him that it was most desirable to repress, started through that thin layer of pretence, and seemed to come blazing out at the crown of his head. It was abandoned as soon as tried, and he wore his grizzled hair cut short.

Words cannot tell what a sense I had, at the same time, of the dreadful mystery that he was to me. When he fell asleep of an evening, with his knotted hands clenching the sides of the easy-chair, and his bald head tattooed with deep wrinkles falling forward on his breast, I would sit and look at him, wondering what he had done, and loading him with all the crimes in the Calendar, until the impulse was powerful on me to start up and fly from him. Every hour so increased my abhorrence of him, that I even think I might have yielded to this impulse in the first agonies of being so haunted, notwithstanding all he had done for me and the risk he ran, but for the knowledge that Herbert must soon come back. Once, I actually did start out of bed in the night, and begin to dress myself in my worst clothes, hurriedly intending to leave him there with everything else I possessed, and enlist for India as a private soldier.

I doubt if a ghost could have been more terrible to me, up in those lonely rooms in the long evenings and long nights, with the wind and the rain always rushing by. A ghost could not have been taken and hanged on my account, and the consideration that he could be, and the dread that he would be, were no small addition to my horrors. When he was not asleep, or playing a complicated kind of Patience with a ragged pack of cards of his own,—a game that I never saw before or since, and in which he recorded his winnings by sticking his jackknife into the table,—when he was not engaged in either of these pursuits, he would ask me to read to him,—"Foreign language, dear boy!" While I complied, he, not comprehending a single word, would stand before the fire surveying me with the air of an Exhibitor, and I would see him, between the fingers of the hand with which I shaded my face, appealing in dumb show to the furniture to take notice of my proficiency. The imaginary student pursued by the misshapen creature he had impiously made, was not more wretched than I, pursued by the creature who had made me, and recoiling from him with a stronger repulsion, the more he admired me and the fonder he was of me.

This is written of, I am sensible, as if it had lasted a year. It lasted about five days. Expecting Herbert all the time, I dared not go out, except when I took Provis for an airing after dark. At length, one evening when dinner was over and I had dropped into a slumber quite worn out,—for my nights had been agitated and my rest broken by fearful dreams,—I was roused by the welcome footstep on the staircase. Provis, who had been asleep too, staggered up at the noise I made, and in an instant I saw his jackknife shining in his hand.

"Quiet! It's Herbert!" I said; and Herbert came bursting in, with the airy freshness of six hundred miles of France upon him.

"Handel, my dear fellow, how are you, and again how are you, and again how are you? I seem to have been gone a twelvemonth! Why, so I must have been, for you have grown quite thin and pale! Handel, my—Halloa! I beg your pardon."

He was stopped in his running on and in his shaking hands with me, by seeing Provis. Provis, regarding him with a fixed attention, was slowly putting up his jackknife, and groping in another pocket for something else.

"Herbert, my dear friend," said I, shutting the double doors, while Herbert stood staring and wondering, "something very strange has happened. This is—a visitor of mine."

"It's all right, dear boy!" said Provis coming forward, with his little clasped black book, and then addressing himself to Herbert. "Take it in your right hand. Lord strike you dead on the spot, if ever you split in any way sumever! Kiss it!"

"Do so, as he wishes it," I said to Herbert. So, Herbert, looking at me with a friendly uneasiness and amazement, complied, and Provis immediately shaking hands with him, said, "Now you're on your oath, you know. And never believe me on mine, if Pip shan't make a gentleman on you!"

Chapter XLI

In vain should I attempt to describe the astonishment and disquiet of Herbert, when he and I and Provis sat down before the fire, and I recounted the whole of the secret. Enough, that I saw my own feelings reflected in Herbert's face, and not least among them, my repugnance towards the man who had done so much for me.

What would alone have set a division between that man and us, if there had been no other dividing circumstance, was his triumph in my story. Saving his troublesome sense of having been "low' on one occasion since his return,—on which point he began to hold forth to Herbert, the moment my revelation was finished,—he had no perception of the possibility of my finding any fault with my good fortune. His boast that he had made me a gentleman, and that he had come to see me support the character on his ample resources, was made for me quite as much as for himself. And that it was a highly agreeable boast to both of us, and that we must both be very proud of it, was a conclusion quite established in his own mind.

"Though, look'ee here, Pip's comrade," he said to Herbert, after having discoursed for some time, "I know very well that once since I come back—for half a minute—I've been low. I said to Pip, I knowed as I had been low. But don't you fret yourself on that score. I ain't made Pip a gentleman, and Pip ain't a going to make you a gentleman, not fur me not to know what's due to ye both. Dear boy, and Pip's comrade, you two may count upon me always having a gen-teel muzzle on. Muzzled I have been since that half a minute when I was betrayed into lowness, muzzled I am at the present time, muzzled I ever will be."

Herbert said, "Certainly," but looked as if there were no specific consolation in this, and remained perplexed and dismayed. We were anxious for the time when he would go to his lodging and leave us together, but he was evidently jealous of leaving us together, and sat late. It was midnight before I took him round to Essex Street, and saw him safely in at his own dark door. When it closed upon him, I experienced the first moment of relief I had known since the night of his arrival.

Never quite free from an uneasy remembrance of the man on the stairs, I had always looked about me in taking my guest out after dark, and in bringing him back; and I looked about me now. Difficult as it is in a large city to avoid the suspicion of being watched, when the mind is conscious of danger in that regard, I could not persuade myself that any of the people within sight cared about my movements. The few who were passing passed on their several ways, and the street was empty when I turned back into the Temple. Nobody had come out at the gate with us, nobody went in at the gate with me. As I crossed by the fountain, I saw his lighted back windows looking bright and quiet, and, when I stood for a few moments in the doorway of the building where I lived, before going up the stairs, Garden Court was as still and lifeless as the staircase was when I ascended it.

Herbert received me with open arms, and I had never felt before so blessedly what it is to have a friend. When he had spoken some sound words of sympathy and encouragement, we sat down to consider the question, What was to be done?

The chair that Provis had occupied still remaining where it had Stood,—for he had a barrack way with him of hanging about one spot, in one unsettled manner, and going through one round of observances with his pipe and his negro-head and his jackknife and his pack of cards, and what not, as if it were all put down for him on a slate,—I say his chair remaining where it had stood, Herbert unconsciously took it, but next moment started out of it, pushed it away, and took another. He had no occasion to say after that that he had conceived an aversion for my patron, neither had I occasion to confess my own. We interchanged that confidence without shaping a syllable.

"What," said I to Herbert, when he was safe in another chair,—"what is to be done?"

"My poor dear Handel," he replied, holding his head, "I am too stunned to think."

"So was I, Herbert, when the blow first fell. Still, something must be done. He is intent upon various new expenses,—horses, and carriages, and lavish appearances of all kinds. He must be stopped somehow."

"You mean that you can't accept—"

"How can I?" I interposed, as Herbert paused. "Think of him! Look at him!"

An involuntary shudder passed over both of us.

"Yet I am afraid the dreadful truth is, Herbert, that he is attached to me, strongly attached to me. Was there ever such a fate!"

"My poor dear Handel," Herbert repeated.

"Then," said I, "after all, stopping short here, never taking another penny from him, think what I owe him already! Then again: I am heavily in debt,—very heavily for me, who have now no expectations,—and I have been bred to no calling, and I am fit for nothing."

"Well, well, well!" Herbert remonstrated. "Don't say fit for nothing."

"What am I fit for? I know only one thing that I am fit for, and that is, to go for a soldier. And I might have gone, my dear Herbert, but for the prospect of taking counsel with your friendship and affection."

Of course I broke down there: and of course Herbert, beyond seizing a warm grip of my hand, pretended not to know it.

"Anyhow, my dear Handel," said he presently, "soldiering won't do. If you were to renounce this patronage and these favors, I suppose you would do so with some faint hope of one day repaying what you have already had. Not very strong, that hope, if you went soldiering! Besides, it's absurd. You would be infinitely better in Clarriker's house, small as it is. I am working up towards a partnership, you know."

Poor fellow! He little suspected with whose money.

"But there is another question," said Herbert. "This is an ignorant, determined man, who has long had one fixed idea. More than that, he seems to me (I may misjudge him) to be a man of a desperate and fierce character."

"I know he is," I returned. "Let me tell you what evidence I have seen of it." And I told him what I had not mentioned in my narrative, of that encounter with the other convict.

"See, then," said Herbert; "think of this! He comes here at the peril of his life, for the realization of his fixed idea. In the moment of realization, after all his toil and waiting, you cut the ground from under his feet, destroy his idea, and make his gains worthless to him. Do you see nothing that he might do, under the disappointment?"

"I have seen it, Herbert, and dreamed of it, ever since the fatal night of his arrival. Nothing has been in my thoughts so distinctly as his putting himself in the way of being taken."

"Then you may rely upon it," said Herbert, "that there would be great danger of his doing it. That is his power over you as long as he remains in England, and that would be his reckless course if you forsook him."

I was so struck by the horror of this idea, which had weighed upon me from the first, and the working out of which would make me regard myself, in some sort, as his murderer, that I could not rest in my chair, but began pacing to and fro. I said to Herbert, meanwhile, that even if Provis were recognized and taken, in spite of himself, I should be wretched as the cause, however innocently. Yes; even though I was so wretched in having him at large and near me, and even though I would far rather have worked at the forge all the days of my life than I would ever have come to this!

But there was no staving off the question, What was to be done?

"The first and the main thing to be done," said Herbert, "is to get him out of England. You will have to go with him, and then he may be induced to go."

"But get him where I will, could I prevent his coming back?"

"My good Handel, is it not obvious that with Newgate in the next street, there must be far greater hazard in your breaking your mind to him and making him reckless, here, than elsewhere. If a pretext to get him away could be made out of that other convict, or out of anything else in his life, now."

"There, again!" said I, stopping before Herbert, with my open hands held out, as if they contained the desperation of the case. "I know nothing of his life. It has almost made me mad to sit here of a night and see him before me, so bound up with my fortunes and misfortunes, and yet so unknown to me, except as the miserable wretch who terrified me two days in my childhood!"

Herbert got up, and linked his arm in mine, and we slowly walked to and fro together, studying the carpet.

"Handel," said Herbert, stopping, "you feel convinced that you can take no further benefits from him; do you?"

"Fully. Surely you would, too, if you were in my place?"

"And you feel convinced that you must break with him?"

"Herbert, can you ask me?"

"And you have, and are bound to have, that tenderness for the life he has risked on your account, that you must save him, if possible, from throwing it away. Then you must get him out of England before you stir a finger to extricate yourself. That done, extricate yourself, in Heaven's name, and we'll see it out together, dear old boy."

It was a comfort to shake hands upon it, and walk up and down again, with only that done.

"Now, Herbert," said I, "with reference to gaining some knowledge of his history. There is but one way that I know of. I must ask him point blank."

"Yes. Ask him," said Herbert, "when we sit at breakfast in the morning." For he had said, on taking leave of Herbert, that he would come to breakfast with us.

With this project formed, we went to bed. I had the wildest dreams concerning him, and woke unrefreshed; I woke, too, to recover the fear which I had lost in the night, of his being found out as a returned transport. Waking, I never lost that fear.

He came round at the appointed time, took out his jackknife, and sat down to his meal. He was full of plans "for his gentleman's coming out strong, and like a gentleman," and urged me to begin speedily upon the pocket-book which he had left in my possession. He considered the chambers and his own lodging as temporary residences, and advised me to look out at once for a "fashionable crib" near Hyde Park, in which he could have "a shake-down." When he had made an end of his breakfast, and was wiping his knife on his leg, I said to him, without a word of preface,—

"After you were gone last night, I told my friend of the struggle that the soldiers found you engaged in on the marshes, when we came up. You remember?"

"Remember!" said he. "I think so!"

"We want to know something about that man—and about you. It is strange to know no more about either, and particularly you, than I was able to tell last night. Is not this as good a time as another for our knowing more?"

"Well!" he said, after consideration. "You're on your oath, you know, Pip's comrade?"

"Assuredly," replied Herbert.

"As to anything I say, you know," he insisted. "The oath applies to all."

"I understand it to do so."

"And look'ee here! Wotever I done is worked out and paid for," he insisted again.

"So be it."

He took out his black pipe and was going to fill it with negro-head, when, looking at the tangle of tobacco in his hand, he seemed to think it might perplex the thread of his narrative. He put it back again, stuck his pipe in a button-hole of his coat, spread a hand on each knee, and after turning an angry eye on the fire for a few silent moments, looked round at us and said what follows.

Chapter XLII

"Dear boy and Pip's comrade. I am not a going fur to tell you my life like a song, or a story-book. But to give it you short and handy, I'll put it at once into a mouthful of English. In jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail. There, you've got it. That's my life pretty much, down to such times as I got shipped off, arter Pip stood my friend.

"I've been done everything to, pretty well—except hanged. I've been locked up as much as a silver tea-kittle. I've been carted here and carted there, and put out of this town, and put out of that town, and stuck in the stocks, and whipped and worried and drove. I've no more notion where I was born than you have—if so much. I first become aware of myself down in Essex, a thieving turnips for my living. Summun had run away from me—a man—a tinker—and he'd took the fire with him, and left me wery cold.

"I know'd my name to be Magwitch, chrisen'd Abel. How did I know it? Much as I know'd the birds' names in the hedges to be chaffinch, sparrer, thrush. I might have thought it was all lies together, only as the birds' names come out true, I supposed mine did.

"So fur as I could find, there warn't a soul that see young Abel Magwitch, with us little on him as in him, but wot caught fright at him, and either drove him off, or took him up. I was took up, took up, took up, to that extent that I reg'larly grow'd up took up.

"This is the way it was, that when I was a ragged little creetur as much to be pitied as ever I see (not that I looked in the glass, for there warn't many insides of furnished houses known to me), I got the name of being hardened. "This is a terrible hardened one," they says to prison wisitors, picking out me. "May be said to live in jails, this boy. "Then they looked at me, and I looked at them, and they measured my head, some on 'em,—they had better a measured my stomach,—and others on 'em giv me tracts what I couldn't read, and made me speeches what I couldn't understand. They always went on agen me about the Devil. But what the Devil was I to do? I must put something into my stomach, mustn't I?—Howsomever, I'm a getting low, and I know what's due. Dear boy and Pip's comrade, don't you be afeerd of me being low.

"Tramping, begging, thieving, working sometimes when I could,—though that warn't as often as you may think, till you put the question whether you would ha' been over-ready to give me work yourselves,—a bit of a poacher, a bit of a laborer, a bit of a wagoner, a bit of a haymaker, a bit of a hawker, a bit of most things that don't pay and lead to trouble, I got to be a man. A deserting soldier in a Traveller's Rest, what lay hid up to the chin under a lot of taturs, learnt me to read; and a travelling Giant what signed his name at a penny a time learnt me to write. I warn't locked up as often now as formerly, but I wore out my good share of key-metal still.

"At Epsom races, a matter of over twenty years ago, I got acquainted wi' a man whose skull I'd crack wi' this poker, like the claw of a lobster, if I'd got it on this hob. His right name was Compeyson; and that's the man, dear boy, what you see me a pounding in the ditch, according to what you truly told your comrade arter I was gone last night.

"He set up fur a gentleman, this Compeyson, and he'd been to a public boarding-school and had learning. He was a smooth one to talk, and was a dab at the ways of gentlefolks. He was good-looking too. It was the night afore the great race, when I found him on the heath, in a booth that I know'd on. Him and some more was a sitting among the tables when I went in, and the landlord (which had a knowledge of me, and was a sporting one) called him out, and said, 'I think this is a man that might suit you,'—meaning I was.

"Compeyson, he looks at me very noticing, and I look at him. He has a watch and a chain and a ring and a breast-pin and a handsome suit of clothes.

"'To judge from appearances, you're out of luck,' says Compeyson to me.

"'Yes, master, and I've never been in it much.' (I had come out of Kingston Jail last on a vagrancy committal. Not but what it might have been for something else; but it warn't.)

"'Luck changes,' says Compeyson; 'perhaps yours is going to change.'

"I says, 'I hope it may be so. There's room.'

"'What can you do?' says Compeyson.

"'Eat and drink,' I says; 'if you'll find the materials.'

"Compeyson laughed, looked at me again very noticing, giv me five shillings, and appointed me for next night. Same place.

"I went to Compeyson next night, same place, and Compeyson took me on to be his man and pardner. And what was Compeyson's business in which we was to go pardners? Compeyson's business was the swindling, handwriting forging, stolen bank-note passing, and such-like. All sorts of traps as Compeyson could set with his head, and keep his own legs out of and get the profits from and let another man in for, was Compeyson's business. He'd no more heart than a iron file, he was as cold as death, and he had the head of the Devil afore mentioned.

"There was another in with Compeyson, as was called Arthur,—not as being so chrisen'd, but as a surname. He was in a Decline, and was a shadow to look at. Him and Compeyson had been in a bad thing with a rich lady some years afore, and they'd made a pot of money by it; but Compeyson betted and gamed, and he'd have run through the king's taxes. So, Arthur was a dying, and a dying poor and with the horrors on him, and Compeyson's wife (which Compeyson kicked mostly) was a having pity on him when she could, and Compeyson was a having pity on nothing and nobody.

"I might a took warning by Arthur, but I didn't; and I won't pretend I was partick'ler—for where 'ud be the good on it, dear boy and comrade? So I begun wi' Compeyson, and a poor tool I was in his hands. Arthur lived at the top of Compeyson's house (over nigh Brentford it was), and Compeyson kept a careful account agen him for board and lodging, in case he should ever get better to work it out. But Arthur soon settled the account. The second or third time as ever I see him, he come a tearing down into Compeyson's parlor late at night, in only a flannel gown, with his hair all in a sweat, and he says to Compeyson's wife, 'Sally, she really is upstairs alonger me, now, and I can't get rid of her. She's all in white,' he says, 'wi' white flowers in her hair, and she's awful mad, and she's got a shroud hanging over her arm, and she says she'll put it on me at five in the morning.'

"Says Compeyson: 'Why, you fool, don't you know she's got a living body? And how should she be up there, without coming through the door, or in at the window, and up the stairs?'

"'I don't know how she's there,' says Arthur, shivering dreadful with the horrors, 'but she's standing in the corner at the foot of the bed, awful mad. And over where her heart's broke—you broke it!—there's drops of blood.'

"Compeyson spoke hardy, but he was always a coward. 'Go up alonger this drivelling sick man,' he says to his wife, 'and Magwitch, lend her a hand, will you?' But he never come nigh himself.

"Compeyson's wife and me took him up to bed agen, and he raved most dreadful. 'Why look at her!' he cries out. 'She's a shaking the shroud at me! Don't you see her? Look at her eyes! Ain't it awful to see her so mad?' Next he cries, 'She'll put it on me, and then I'm done for! Take it away from her, take it away!' And then he catched hold of us, and kep on a talking to her, and answering of her, till I half believed I see her myself.

"Compeyson's wife, being used to him, giv him some liquor to get the horrors off, and by and by he quieted. 'O, she's gone! Has her keeper been for her?' he says. 'Yes,' says Compeyson's wife. 'Did you tell him to lock her and bar her in?' 'Yes.' 'And to take that ugly thing away from her?' 'Yes, yes, all right.' 'You're a good creetur,' he says, 'don't leave me, whatever you do, and thank you!'

"He rested pretty quiet till it might want a few minutes of five, and then he starts up with a scream, and screams out, 'Here she is! She's got the shroud again. She's unfolding it. She's coming out of the corner. She's coming to the bed. Hold me, both on you—one of each side—don't let her touch me with it. Hah! she missed me that time. Don't let her throw it over my shoulders. Don't let her lift me up to get it round me. She's lifting me up. Keep me down!' Then he lifted himself up hard, and was dead.

"Compeyson took it easy as a good riddance for both sides. Him and me was soon busy, and first he swore me (being ever artful) on my own book,—this here little black book, dear boy, what I swore your comrade on.

"Not to go into the things that Compeyson planned, and I done—which 'ud take a week—I'll simply say to you, dear boy, and Pip's comrade, that that man got me into such nets as made me his black slave. I was always in debt to him, always under his thumb, always a working, always a getting into danger. He was younger than me, but he'd got craft, and he'd got learning, and he overmatched me five hundred times told and no mercy. My Missis as I had the hard time wi'—Stop though! I ain't brought her in—"

He looked about him in a confused way, as if he had lost his place in the book of his remembrance; and he turned his face to the fire, and spread his hands broader on his knees, and lifted them off and put them on again.

"There ain't no need to go into it," he said, looking round once more. "The time wi' Compeyson was a'most as hard a time as ever I had; that said, all's said. Did I tell you as I was tried, alone, for misdemeanor, while with Compeyson?"

I answered, No.

"Well!" he said, "I was, and got convicted. As to took up on suspicion, that was twice or three times in the four or five year that it lasted; but evidence was wanting. At last, me and Compeyson was both committed for felony,—on a charge of putting stolen notes in circulation,—and there was other charges behind. Compeyson says to me, 'Separate defences, no communication,' and that was all. And I was so miserable poor, that I sold all the clothes I had, except what hung on my back, afore I could get Jaggers.

"When we was put in the dock, I noticed first of all what a gentleman Compeyson looked, wi' his curly hair and his black clothes and his white pocket-handkercher, and what a common sort of a wretch I looked. When the prosecution opened and the evidence was put short, aforehand, I noticed how heavy it all bore on me, and how light on him. When the evidence was giv in the box, I noticed how it was always me that had come for'ard, and could be swore to, how it was always me that the money had been paid to, how it was always me that had seemed to work the thing and get the profit. But when the defence come on, then I see the plan plainer; for, says the counsellor for Compeyson, 'My lord and gentlemen, here you has afore you, side by side, two persons as your eyes can separate wide; one, the younger, well brought up, who will be spoke to as such; one, the elder, ill brought up, who will be spoke to as such; one, the younger, seldom if ever seen in these here transactions, and only suspected; t'other, the elder, always seen in 'em and always wi'his guilt brought home. Can you doubt, if there is but one in it, which is the one, and, if there is two in it, which is much the worst one?' And such-like. And when it come to character, warn't it Compeyson as had been to the school, and warn't it his schoolfellows as was in this position and in that, and warn't it him as had been know'd by witnesses in such clubs and societies, and nowt to his disadvantage? And warn't it me as had been tried afore, and as had been know'd up hill and down dale in Bridewells and Lock-Ups! And when it come to speech-making, warn't it Compeyson as could speak to 'em wi' his face dropping every now and then into his white pocket-handkercher,—ah! and wi' verses in his speech, too,—and warn't it me as could only say, 'Gentlemen, this man at my side is a most precious rascal'? And when the verdict come, warn't it Compeyson as was recommended to mercy on account of good character and bad company, and giving up all the information he could agen me, and warn't it me as got never a word but Guilty? And when I says to Compeyson, 'Once out of this court, I'll smash that face of yourn!' ain't it Compeyson as prays the Judge to be protected, and gets two turnkeys stood betwixt us? And when we're sentenced, ain't it him as gets seven year, and me fourteen, and ain't it him as the Judge is sorry for, because he might a done so well, and ain't it me as the Judge perceives to be a old offender of wiolent passion, likely to come to worse?"

He had worked himself into a state of great excitement, but he checked it, took two or three short breaths, swallowed as often, and stretching out his hand towards me said, in a reassuring manner, "I ain't a going to be low, dear boy!"

He had so heated himself that he took out his handkerchief and wiped his face and head and neck and hands, before he could go on.

"I had said to Compeyson that I'd smash that face of his, and I swore Lord smash mine! to do it. We was in the same prison-ship, but I couldn't get at him for long, though I tried. At last I come behind him and hit him on the cheek to turn him round and get a smashing one at him, when I was seen and seized. The black-hole of that ship warn't a strong one, to a judge of black-holes that could swim and dive. I escaped to the shore, and I was a hiding among the graves there, envying them as was in 'em and all over, when I first see my boy!"

He regarded me with a look of affection that made him almost abhorrent to me again, though I had felt great pity for him.

"By my boy, I was giv to understand as Compeyson was out on them marshes too. Upon my soul, I half believe he escaped in his terror, to get quit of me, not knowing it was me as had got ashore. I hunted him down. I smashed his face. 'And now,' says I 'as the worst thing I can do, caring nothing for myself, I'll drag you back.' And I'd have swum off, towing him by the hair, if it had come to that, and I'd a got him aboard without the soldiers.

"Of course he'd much the best of it to the last,—his character was so good. He had escaped when he was made half wild by me and my murderous intentions; and his punishment was light. I was put in irons, brought to trial again, and sent for life. I didn't stop for life, dear boy and Pip's comrade, being here."

"He wiped himself again, as he had done before, and then slowly took his tangle of tobacco from his pocket, and plucked his pipe from his button-hole, and slowly filled it, and began to smoke.

"Is he dead?" I asked, after a silence.

"Is who dead, dear boy?"

"Compeyson."

"He hopes I am, if he's alive, you may be sure," with a fierce look. "I never heerd no more of him."

Herbert had been writing with his pencil in the cover of a book. He softly pushed the book over to me, as Provis stood smoking with his eyes on the fire, and I read in it:—

"Young Havisham's name was Arthur. Compeyson is the man who professed to be Miss Havisham's lover."

I shut the book and nodded slightly to Herbert, and put the book by; but we neither of us said anything, and both looked at Provis as he stood smoking by the fire.

Chapter XLIII

Why should I pause to ask how much of my shrinking from Provis might be traced to Estella? Why should I loiter on my road, to compare the state of mind in which I had tried to rid myself of the stain of the prison before meeting her at the coach-office, with the state of mind in which I now reflected on the abyss between Estella in her pride and beauty, and the returned transport whom I harbored? The road would be none the smoother for it, the end would be none the better for it, he would not be helped, nor I extenuated.

A new fear had been engendered in my mind by his narrative; or rather, his narrative had given form and purpose to the fear that was already there. If Compeyson were alive and should discover his return, I could hardly doubt the consequence. That, Compeyson stood in mortal fear of him, neither of the two could know much better than I; and that any such man as that man had been described to be would hesitate to release himself for good from a dreaded enemy by the safe means of becoming an informer was scarcely to be imagined.

Never had I breathed, and never would I breathe—or so I resolved—a word of Estella to Provis. But, I said to Herbert that, before I could go abroad, I must see both Estella and Miss Havisham. This was when we were left alone on the night of the day when Provis told us his story. I resolved to go out to Richmond next day, and I went.

On my presenting myself at Mrs. Brandley's, Estella's maid was called to tell that Estella had gone into the country. Where? To Satis House, as usual. Not as usual, I said, for she had never yet gone there without me; when was she coming back? There was an air of reservation in the answer which increased my perplexity, and the answer was, that her maid believed she was only coming back at all for a little while. I could make nothing of this, except that it was meant that I should make nothing of it, and I went home again in complete discomfiture.

Another night consultation with Herbert after Provis was gone home (I always took him home, and always looked well about me), led us to the conclusion that nothing should be said about going abroad until I came back from Miss Havisham's. In the mean time, Herbert and I were to consider separately what it would be best to say; whether we should devise any pretence of being afraid that he was under suspicious observation; or whether I, who had never yet been abroad, should propose an expedition. We both knew that I had but to propose anything, and he would consent. We agreed that his remaining many days in his present hazard was not to be thought of.

Next day I had the meanness to feign that I was under a binding promise to go down to Joe; but I was capable of almost any meanness towards Joe or his name. Provis was to be strictly careful while I was gone, and Herbert was to take the charge of him that I had taken. I was to be absent only one night, and, on my return, the gratification of his impatience for my starting as a gentleman on a greater scale was to be begun. It occurred to me then, and as I afterwards found to Herbert also, that he might be best got away across the water, on that pretence,—as, to make purchases, or the like.

Having thus cleared the way for my expedition to Miss Havisham's, I set off by the early morning coach before it was yet light, and was out on the open country road when the day came creeping on, halting and whimpering and shivering, and wrapped in patches of cloud and rags of mist, like a beggar. When we drove up to the Blue Boar after a drizzly ride, whom should I see come out under the gateway, toothpick in hand, to look at the coach, but Bentley Drummle!

As he pretended not to see me, I pretended not to see him. It was a very lame pretence on both sides; the lamer, because we both went into the coffee-room, where he had just finished his breakfast, and where I ordered mine. It was poisonous to me to see him in the town, for I very well knew why he had come there.

Pretending to read a smeary newspaper long out of date, which had nothing half so legible in its local news, as the foreign matter of coffee, pickles, fish sauces, gravy, melted butter, and wine with which it was sprinkled all over, as if it had taken the measles in a highly irregular form, I sat at my table while he stood before the fire. By degrees it became an enormous injury to me that he stood before the fire. And I got up, determined to have my share of it. I had to put my hand behind his legs for the poker when I went up to the fireplace to stir the fire, but still pretended not to know him.

"Is this a cut?" said Mr. Drummle.

"Oh!" said I, poker in hand; "it's you, is it? How do you do? I was wondering who it was, who kept the fire off."

With that, I poked tremendously, and having done so, planted myself side by side with Mr. Drummle, my shoulders squared and my back to the fire.

"You have just come down?" said Mr. Drummle, edging me a little away with his shoulder.

"Yes," said I, edging him a little away with my shoulder.

"Beastly place," said Drummle. "Your part of the country, I think?"

"Yes," I assented. "I am told it's very like your Shropshire."

"Not in the least like it," said Drummle.

Here Mr. Drummle looked at his boots and I looked at mine, and then Mr. Drummle looked at my boots, and I looked at his.

"Have you been here long?" I asked, determined not to yield an inch of the fire.

"Long enough to be tired of it," returned Drummle, pretending to yawn, but equally determined.

"Do you stay here long?"

"Can't say," answered Mr. Drummle. "Do you?"

"Can't say," said I.

I felt here, through a tingling in my blood, that if Mr. Drummle's shoulder had claimed another hair's breadth of room, I should have jerked him into the window; equally, that if my own shoulder had urged a similar claim, Mr. Drummle would have jerked me into the nearest box. He whistled a little. So did I.

"Large tract of marshes about here, I believe?" said Drummle.

"Yes. What of that?" said I.

Mr. Drummle looked at me, and then at my boots, and then said, "Oh!" and laughed.

"Are you amused, Mr. Drummle?"

"No," said he, "not particularly. I am going out for a ride in the saddle. I mean to explore those marshes for amusement. Out-of-the-way villages there, they tell me. Curious little public-houses—and smithies—and that. Waiter!"

"Yes, sir."

"Is that horse of mine ready?"

"Brought round to the door, sir."

"I say. Look here, you sir. The lady won't ride to-day; the weather won't do."

"Very good, sir."

"And I don't dine, because I'm going to dine at the lady's."

"Very good, sir."

Then, Drummle glanced at me, with an insolent triumph on his great-jowled face that cut me to the heart, dull as he was, and so exasperated me, that I felt inclined to take him in my arms (as the robber in the story-book is said to have taken the old lady) and seat him on the fire.

One thing was manifest to both of us, and that was, that until relief came, neither of us could relinquish the fire. There we stood, well squared up before it, shoulder to shoulder and foot to foot, with our hands behind us, not budging an inch. The horse was visible outside in the drizzle at the door, my breakfast was put on the table, Drummle's was cleared away, the waiter invited me to begin, I nodded, we both stood our ground.

"Have you been to the Grove since?" said Drummle.

"No," said I, "I had quite enough of the Finches the last time I was there."

"Was that when we had a difference of opinion?"

"Yes," I replied, very shortly.

"Come, come! They let you off easily enough," sneered Drummle. "You shouldn't have lost your temper."

"Mr. Drummle," said I, "you are not competent to give advice on that subject. When I lose my temper (not that I admit having done so on that occasion), I don't throw glasses."

"I do," said Drummle.

After glancing at him once or twice, in an increased state of smouldering ferocity, I said,—

"Mr. Drummle, I did not seek this conversation, and I don't think it an agreeable one."

"I am sure it's not," said he, superciliously over his shoulder; "I don't think anything about it."

"And therefore," I went on, "with your leave, I will suggest that we hold no kind of communication in future."

"Quite my opinion," said Drummle, "and what I should have suggested myself, or done—more likely—without suggesting. But don't lose your temper. Haven't you lost enough without that?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Waiter!" said Drummle, by way of answering me.

The waiter reappeared.

"Look here, you sir. You quite understand that the young lady don't ride to-day, and that I dine at the young lady's?"

"Quite so, sir!"

When the waiter had felt my fast-cooling teapot with the palm of his hand, and had looked imploringly at me, and had gone out, Drummle, careful not to move the shoulder next me, took a cigar from his pocket and bit the end off, but showed no sign of stirring. Choking and boiling as I was, I felt that we could not go a word further, without introducing Estella's name, which I could not endure to hear him utter; and therefore I looked stonily at the opposite wall, as if there were no one present, and forced myself to silence. How long we might have remained in this ridiculous position it is impossible to say, but for the incursion of three thriving farmers—laid on by the waiter, I think—who came into the coffee-room unbuttoning their great-coats and rubbing their hands, and before whom, as they charged at the fire, we were obliged to give way.

I saw him through the window, seizing his horse's mane, and mounting in his blundering brutal manner, and sidling and backing away. I thought he was gone, when he came back, calling for a light for the cigar in his mouth, which he had forgotten. A man in a dust-colored dress appeared with what was wanted,—I could not have said from where: whether from the inn yard, or the street, or where not,—and as Drummle leaned down from the saddle and lighted his cigar and laughed, with a jerk of his head towards the coffee-room windows, the slouching shoulders and ragged hair of this man whose back was towards me reminded me of Orlick.

Too heavily out of sorts to care much at the time whether it were he or no, or after all to touch the breakfast, I washed the weather and the journey from my face and hands, and went out to the memorable old house that it would have been so much the better for me never to have entered, never to have seen.

Chapter XLIV

In the room where the dressing-table stood, and where the wax-candles burnt on the wall, I found Miss Havisham and Estella; Miss Havisham seated on a settee near the fire, and Estella on a cushion at her feet. Estella was knitting, and Miss Havisham was looking on. They both raised their eyes as I went in, and both saw an alteration in me. I derived that, from the look they interchanged.

"And what wind," said Miss Havisham, "blows you here, Pip?"

Though she looked steadily at me, I saw that she was rather confused. Estella, pausing a moment in her knitting with her eyes upon me, and then going on, I fancied that I read in the action of her fingers, as plainly as if she had told me in the dumb alphabet, that she perceived I had discovered my real benefactor.

"Miss Havisham," said I, "I went to Richmond yesterday, to speak to Estella; and finding that some wind had blown her here, I followed."

Miss Havisham motioning to me for the third or fourth time to sit down, I took the chair by the dressing-table, which I had often seen her occupy. With all that ruin at my feet and about me, it seemed a natural place for me, that day.

"What I had to say to Estella, Miss Havisham, I will say before you, presently—in a few moments. It will not surprise you, it will not displease you. I am as unhappy as you can ever have meant me to be."

Miss Havisham continued to look steadily at me. I could see in the action of Estella's fingers as they worked that she attended to what I said; but she did not look up.

"I have found out who my patron is. It is not a fortunate discovery, and is not likely ever to enrich me in reputation, station, fortune, anything. There are reasons why I must say no more of that. It is not my secret, but another's."

As I was silent for a while, looking at Estella and considering how to go on, Miss Havisham repeated, "It is not your secret, but another's. Well?"

"When you first caused me to be brought here, Miss Havisham, when I belonged to the village over yonder, that I wish I had never left, I suppose I did really come here, as any other chance boy might have come,—as a kind of servant, to gratify a want or a whim, and to be paid for it?"

"Ay, Pip," replied Miss Havisham, steadily nodding her head; "you did."

"And that Mr. Jaggers—"

"Mr. Jaggers," said Miss Havisham, taking me up in a firm tone, "had nothing to do with it, and knew nothing of it. His being my lawyer, and his being the lawyer of your patron is a coincidence. He holds the same relation towards numbers of people, and it might easily arise. Be that as it may, it did arise, and was not brought about by any one."

Any one might have seen in her haggard face that there was no suppression or evasion so far.

"But when I fell into the mistake I have so long remained in, at least you led me on?" said I.

"Yes," she returned, again nodding steadily, "I let you go on."

"Was that kind?"

"Who am I," cried Miss Havisham, striking her stick upon the floor and flashing into wrath so suddenly that Estella glanced up at her in surprise, —"who am I, for God's sake, that I should be kind?"

It was a weak complaint to have made, and I had not meant to make it. I told her so, as she sat brooding after this outburst.

"Well, well, well!" she said. "What else?"

"I was liberally paid for my old attendance here," I said, to soothe her, "in being apprenticed, and I have asked these questions only for my own information. What follows has another (and I hope more disinterested) purpose. In humoring my mistake, Miss Havisham, you punished—practised on—perhaps you will supply whatever term expresses your intention, without offence—your self-seeking relations?"

"I did. Why, they would have it so! So would you. What has been my history, that I should be at the pains of entreating either them or you not to have it so! You made your own snares. I never made them."

Waiting until she was quiet again,—for this, too, flashed out of her in a wild and sudden way,—I went on.

"I have been thrown among one family of your relations, Miss Havisham, and have been constantly among them since I went to London. I know them to have been as honestly under my delusion as I myself. And I should be false and base if I did not tell you, whether it is acceptable to you or no, and whether you are inclined to give credence to it or no, that you deeply wrong both Mr. Matthew Pocket and his son Herbert, if you suppose them to be otherwise than generous, upright, open, and incapable of anything designing or mean."

"They are your friends," said Miss Havisham.

"They made themselves my friends," said I, "when they supposed me to have superseded them; and when Sarah Pocket, Miss Georgiana, and Mistress Camilla were not my friends, I think."

This contrasting of them with the rest seemed, I was glad to see, to do them good with her. She looked at me keenly for a little while, and then said quietly,—

"What do you want for them?"

"Only," said I, "that you would not confound them with the others. They may be of the same blood, but, believe me, they are not of the same nature."

Still looking at me keenly, Miss Havisham repeated,—

"What do you want for them?"

"I am not so cunning, you see," I said, in answer, conscious that I reddened a little, "as that I could hide from you, even if I desired, that I do want something. Miss Havisham, if you would spare the money to do my friend Herbert a lasting service in life, but which from the nature of the case must be done without his knowledge, I could show you how."

"Why must it be done without his knowledge?" she asked, settling her hands upon her stick, that she might regard me the more attentively.

"Because," said I, "I began the service myself, more than two years ago, without his knowledge, and I don't want to be betrayed. Why I fail in my ability to finish it, I cannot explain. It is a part of the secret which is another person's and not mine."

She gradually withdrew her eyes from me, and turned them on the fire. After watching it for what appeared in the silence and by the light of the slowly wasting candles to be a long time, she was roused by the collapse of some of the red coals, and looked towards me again—at first, vacantly—then, with a gradually concentrating attention. All this time Estella knitted on. When Miss Havisham had fixed her attention on me, she said, speaking as if there had been no lapse in our dialogue,—

"What else?"

"Estella," said I, turning to her now, and trying to command my trembling voice, "you know I love you. You know that I have loved you long and dearly."

She raised her eyes to my face, on being thus addressed, and her fingers plied their work, and she looked at me with an unmoved countenance. I saw that Miss Havisham glanced from me to her, and from her to me.

"I should have said this sooner, but for my long mistake. It induced me to hope that Miss Havisham meant us for one another. While I thought you could not help yourself, as it were, I refrained from saying it. But I must say it now."

Preserving her unmoved countenance, and with her fingers still going, Estella shook her head.

"I know," said I, in answer to that action,—"I know. I have no hope that I shall ever call you mine, Estella. I am ignorant what may become of me very soon, how poor I may be, or where I may go. Still, I love you. I have loved you ever since I first saw you in this house."

Looking at me perfectly unmoved and with her fingers busy, she shook her head again.

"It would have been cruel in Miss Havisham, horribly cruel, to practise on the susceptibility of a poor boy, and to torture me through all these years with a vain hope and an idle pursuit, if she had reflected on the gravity of what she did. But I think she did not. I think that, in the endurance of her own trial, she forgot mine, Estella."

I saw Miss Havisham put her hand to her heart and hold it there, as she sat looking by turns at Estella and at me.

"It seems," said Estella, very calmly, "that there are sentiments, fancies, —I don't know how to call them,—which I am not able to comprehend. When you say you love me, I know what you mean, as a form of words; but nothing more. You address nothing in my breast, you touch nothing there. I don't care for what you say at all. I have tried to warn you of this; now, have I not?"

I said in a miserable manner, "Yes."

"Yes. But you would not be warned, for you thought I did not mean it. Now, did you not think so?"

"I thought and hoped you could not mean it. You, so young, untried, and beautiful, Estella! Surely it is not in Nature."

"It is in my nature," she returned. And then she added, with a stress upon the words, "It is in the nature formed within me. I make a great difference between you and all other people when I say so much. I can do no more."

"Is it not true," said I, "that Bentley Drummle is in town here, and pursuing you?"

"It is quite true," she replied, referring to him with the indifference of utter contempt.

"That you encourage him, and ride out with him, and that he dines with you this very day?"

She seemed a little surprised that I should know it, but again replied, "Quite true."

"You cannot love him, Estella!"

Her fingers stopped for the first time, as she retorted rather angrily, "What have I told you? Do you still think, in spite of it, that I do not mean what I say?"

"You would never marry him, Estella?"

She looked towards Miss Havisham, and considered for a moment with her work in her hands. Then she said, "Why not tell you the truth? I am going to be married to him."

I dropped my face into my hands, but was able to control myself better than I could have expected, considering what agony it gave me to hear her say those words. When I raised my face again, there was such a ghastly look upon Miss Havisham's, that it impressed me, even in my passionate hurry and grief.

"Estella, dearest Estella, do not let Miss Havisham lead you into this fatal step. Put me aside for ever,—you have done so, I well know,—but bestow yourself on some worthier person than Drummle. Miss Havisham gives you to him, as the greatest slight and injury that could be done to the many far better men who admire you, and to the few who truly love you. Among those few there may be one who loves you even as dearly, though he has not loved you as long, as I. Take him, and I can bear it better, for your sake!"

My earnestness awoke a wonder in her that seemed as if it would have been touched with compassion, if she could have rendered me at all intelligible to her own mind.

"I am going," she said again, in a gentler voice, "to be married to him. The preparations for my marriage are making, and I shall be married soon. Why do you injuriously introduce the name of my mother by adoption? It is my own act."

"Your own act, Estella, to fling yourself away upon a brute?"

"On whom should I fling myself away?" she retorted, with a smile. "Should I fling myself away upon the man who would the soonest feel (if people do feel such things) that I took nothing to him? There! It is done. I shall do well enough, and so will my husband. As to leading me into what you call this fatal step, Miss Havisham would have had me wait, and not marry yet; but I am tired of the life I have led, which has very few charms for me, and I am willing enough to change it. Say no more. We shall never understand each other."

"Such a mean brute, such a stupid brute!" I urged, in despair.

"Don't be afraid of my being a blessing to him," said Estella; "I shall not be that. Come! Here is my hand. Do we part on this, you visionary boy—or man?"

"O Estella!" I answered, as my bitter tears fell fast on her hand, do what I would to restrain them; "even if I remained in England and could hold my head up with the rest, how could I see you Drummle's wife?"

"Nonsense," she returned,—"nonsense. This will pass in no time."

"Never, Estella!"

"You will get me out of your thoughts in a week."

"Out of my thoughts! You are part of my existence, part of myself. You have been in every line I have ever read since I first came here, the rough common boy whose poor heart you wounded even then. You have been in every prospect I have ever seen since,—on the river, on the sails of the ships, on the marshes, in the clouds, in the light, in the darkness, in the wind, in the woods, in the sea, in the streets. You have been the embodiment of every graceful fancy that my mind has ever become acquainted with. The stones of which the strongest London buildings are made are not more real, or more impossible to be displaced by your hands, than your presence and influence have been to me, there and everywhere, and will be. Estella, to the last hour of my life, you cannot choose but remain part of my character, part of the little good in me, part of the evil. But, in this separation, I associate you only with the good; and I will faithfully hold you to that always, for you must have done me far more good than harm, let me feel now what sharp distress I may. O God bless you, God forgive you!"

In what ecstasy of unhappiness I got these broken words out of myself, I don't know. The rhapsody welled up within me, like blood from an inward wound, and gushed out. I held her hand to my lips some lingering moments, and so I left her. But ever afterwards, I remembered,—and soon afterwards with stronger reason,—that while Estella looked at me merely with incredulous wonder, the spectral figure of Miss Havisham, her hand still covering her heart, seemed all resolved into a ghastly stare of pity and remorse.

All done, all gone! So much was done and gone, that when I went out at the gate, the light of the day seemed of a darker color than when I went in. For a while, I hid myself among some lanes and by-paths, and then struck off to walk all the way to London. For, I had by that time come to myself so far as to consider that I could not go back to the inn and see Drummle there; that I could not bear to sit upon the coach and be spoken to; that I could do nothing half so good for myself as tire myself out.

It was past midnight when I crossed London Bridge. Pursuing the narrow intricacies of the streets which at that time tended westward near the Middlesex shore of the river, my readiest access to the Temple was close by the river-side, through Whitefriars. I was not expected till to-morrow; but I had my keys, and, if Herbert were gone to bed, could get to bed myself without disturbing him.

As it seldom happened that I came in at that Whitefriars gate after the Temple was closed, and as I was very muddy and weary, I did not take it ill that the night-porter examined me with much attention as he held the gate a little way open for me to pass in. To help his memory I mentioned my name.

"I was not quite sure, sir, but I thought so. Here's a note, sir. The messenger that brought it, said would you be so good as read it by my lantern?"

Much surprised by the request, I took the note. It was directed to Philip Pip, Esquire, and on the top of the superscription were the words, "PLEASE READ THIS, HERE." I opened it, the watchman holding up his light, and read inside, in Wemmick's writing,—

"DON'T GO HOME."

Chapter XLV

Turning from the Temple gate as soon as I had read the warning, I made the best of my way to Fleet Street, and there got a late hackney chariot and drove to the Hummums in Covent Garden. In those times a bed was always to be got there at any hour of the night, and the chamberlain, letting me in at his ready wicket, lighted the candle next in order on his shelf, and showed me straight into the bedroom next in order on his list. It was a sort of vault on the ground floor at the back, with a despotic monster of a four-post bedstead in it, straddling over the whole place, putting one of his arbitrary legs into the fireplace and another into the doorway, and squeezing the wretched little washing-stand in quite a Divinely Righteous manner.

As I had asked for a night-light, the chamberlain had brought me in, before he left me, the good old constitutional rushlight of those virtuous days.—an object like the ghost of a walking-cane, which instantly broke its back if it were touched, which nothing could ever be lighted at, and which was placed in solitary confinement at the bottom of a high tin tower, perforated with round holes that made a staringly wide-awake pattern on the walls. When I had got into bed, and lay there footsore, weary, and wretched, I found that I could no more close my own eyes than I could close the eyes of this foolish Argus. And thus, in the gloom and death of the night, we stared at one another.

What a doleful night! How anxious, how dismal, how long! There was an inhospitable smell in the room, of cold soot and hot dust; and, as I looked up into the corners of the tester over my head, I thought what a number of blue-bottle flies from the butchers', and earwigs from the market, and grubs from the country, must be holding on up there, lying by for next summer. This led me to speculate whether any of them ever tumbled down, and then I fancied that I felt light falls on my face,—a disagreeable turn of thought, suggesting other and more objectionable approaches up my back. When I had lain awake a little while, those extraordinary voices with which silence teems began to make themselves audible. The closet whispered, the fireplace sighed, the little washing-stand ticked, and one guitar-string played occasionally in the chest of drawers. At about the same time, the eyes on the wall acquired a new expression, and in every one of those staring rounds I saw written, DON'T GO HOME.

Whatever night-fancies and night-noises crowded on me, they never warded off this DON'T GO HOME. It plaited itself into whatever I thought of, as a bodily pain would have done. Not long before, I had read in the newspapers, how a gentleman unknown had come to the Hummums in the night, and had gone to bed, and had destroyed himself, and had been found in the morning weltering in blood. It came into my head that he must have occupied this very vault of mine, and I got out of bed to assure myself that there were no red marks about; then opened the door to look out into the passages, and cheer myself with the companionship of a distant light, near which I knew the chamberlain to be dozing. But all this time, why I was not to go home, and what had happened at home, and when I should go home, and whether Provis was safe at home, were questions occupying my mind so busily, that one might have supposed there could be no more room in it for any other theme. Even when I thought of Estella, and how we had parted that day forever, and when I recalled all the circumstances of our parting, and all her looks and tones, and the action of her fingers while she knitted,—even then I was pursuing, here and there and everywhere, the caution, Don't go home. When at last I dozed, in sheer exhaustion of mind and body, it became a vast shadowy verb which I had to conjugate. Imperative mood, present tense: Do not thou go home, let him not go home, let us not go home, do not ye or you go home, let not them go home. Then potentially: I may not and I cannot go home; and I might not, could not, would not, and should not go home; until I felt that I was going distracted, and rolled over on the pillow, and looked at the staring rounds upon the wall again.

I had left directions that I was to be called at seven; for it was plain that I must see Wemmick before seeing any one else, and equally plain that this was a case in which his Walworth sentiments only could be taken. It was a relief to get out of the room where the night had been so miserable, and I needed no second knocking at the door to startle me from my uneasy bed.

The Castle battlements arose upon my view at eight o'clock. The little servant happening to be entering the fortress with two hot rolls, I passed through the postern and crossed the drawbridge in her company, and so came without announcement into the presence of Wemmick as he was making tea for himself and the Aged. An open door afforded a perspective view of the Aged in bed.

"Halloa, Mr. Pip!" said Wemmick. "You did come home, then?"

"Yes," I returned; "but I didn't go home."

"That's all right," said he, rubbing his hands. "I left a note for you at each of the Temple gates, on the chance. Which gate did you come to?"

I told him.

"I'll go round to the others in the course of the day and destroy the notes," said Wemmick; "it's a good rule never to leave documentary evidence if you can help it, because you don't know when it may be put in. I'm going to take a liberty with you. Would you mind toasting this sausage for the Aged P.?"

I said I should be delighted to do it.

"Then you can go about your work, Mary Anne," said Wemmick to the little servant; "which leaves us to ourselves, don't you see, Mr. Pip?" he added, winking, as she disappeared.

I thanked him for his friendship and caution, and our discourse proceeded in a low tone, while I toasted the Aged's sausage and he buttered the crumb of the Aged's roll.

"Now, Mr. Pip, you know," said Wemmick, "you and I understand one another. We are in our private and personal capacities, and we have been engaged in a confidential transaction before to-day. Official sentiments are one thing. We are extra official."

I cordially assented. I was so very nervous, that I had already lighted the Aged's sausage like a torch, and been obliged to blow it out.

"I accidentally heard, yesterday morning," said Wemmick, "being in a certain place where I once took you,—even between you and me, it's as well not to mention names when avoidable—"

"Much better not," said I. "I understand you."

"I heard there by chance, yesterday morning," said Wemmick, "that a certain person not altogether of uncolonial pursuits, and not unpossessed of portable property,—I don't know who it may really be,—we won't name this person—"

"Not necessary," said I.

"—Had made some little stir in a certain part of the world where a good many people go, not always in gratification of their own inclinations, and not quite irrespective of the government expense—"

In watching his face, I made quite a firework of the Aged's sausage, and greatly discomposed both my own attention and Wemmick's; for which I apologized.

"—By disappearing from such place, and being no more heard of thereabouts. From which," said Wemmick, "conjectures had been raised and theories formed. I also heard that you at your chambers in Garden Court, Temple, had been watched, and might be watched again."

"By whom?" said I.

"I wouldn't go into that," said Wemmick, evasively, "it might clash with official responsibilities. I heard it, as I have in my time heard other curious things in the same place. I don't tell it you on information received. I heard it."

He took the toasting-fork and sausage from me as he spoke, and set forth the Aged's breakfast neatly on a little tray. Previous to placing it before him, he went into the Aged's room with a clean white cloth, and tied the same under the old gentleman's chin, and propped him up, and put his nightcap on one side, and gave him quite a rakish air. Then he placed his breakfast before him with great care, and said, "All right, ain't you, Aged P.?" To which the cheerful Aged replied, "All right, John, my boy, all right!" As there seemed to be a tacit understanding that the Aged was not in a presentable state, and was therefore to be considered invisible, I made a pretence of being in complete ignorance of these proceedings.

"This watching of me at my chambers (which I have once had reason to suspect)," I said to Wemmick when he came back, "is inseparable from the person to whom you have adverted; is it?"

Wemmick looked very serious. "I couldn't undertake to say that, of my own knowledge. I mean, I couldn't undertake to say it was at first. But it either is, or it will be, or it's in great danger of being."

As I saw that he was restrained by fealty to Little Britain from saying as much as he could, and as I knew with thankfulness to him how far out of his way he went to say what he did, I could not press him. But I told him, after a little meditation over the fire, that I would like to ask him a question, subject to his answering or not answering, as he deemed right, and sure that his course would be right. He paused in his breakfast, and crossing his arms, and pinching his shirt-sleeves (his notion of in-door comfort was to sit without any coat), he nodded to me once, to put my question.

"You have heard of a man of bad character, whose true name is Compeyson?"

He answered with one other nod.

"Is he living?"

One other nod.

"Is he in London?"

He gave me one other nod, compressed the post-office exceedingly, gave me one last nod, and went on with his breakfast.

"Now," said Wemmick, "questioning being over," which he emphasized and repeated for my guidance, "I come to what I did, after hearing what I heard. I went to Garden Court to find you; not finding you, I went to Clarriker's to find Mr. Herbert."

"And him you found?" said I, with great anxiety.

"And him I found. Without mentioning any names or going into any details, I gave him to understand that if he was aware of anybody—Tom, Jack, or Richard—being about the chambers, or about the immediate neighborhood, he had better get Tom, Jack, or Richard out of the way while you were out of the way."

"He would be greatly puzzled what to do?"

"He was puzzled what to do; not the less, because I gave him my opinion that it was not safe to try to get Tom, Jack, or Richard too far out of the way at present. Mr. Pip, I'll tell you something. Under existing circumstances, there is no place like a great city when you are once in it. Don't break cover too soon. Lie close. Wait till things slacken, before you try the open, even for foreign air."

I thanked him for his valuable advice, and asked him what Herbert had done?

"Mr. Herbert," said Wemmick, "after being all of a heap for half an hour, struck out a plan. He mentioned to me as a secret, that he is courting a young lady who has, as no doubt you are aware, a bedridden Pa. Which Pa, having been in the Purser line of life, lies a-bed in a bow-window where he can see the ships sail up and down the river. You are acquainted with the young lady, most probably?"

"Not personally," said I.

The truth was, that she had objected to me as an expensive companion who did Herbert no good, and that, when Herbert had first proposed to present me to her, she had received the proposal with such very moderate warmth, that Herbert had felt himself obliged to confide the state of the case to me, with a view to the lapse of a little time before I made her acquaintance. When I had begun to advance Herbert's prospects by stealth, I had been able to bear this with cheerful philosophy: he and his affianced, for their part, had naturally not been very anxious to introduce a third person into their interviews; and thus, although I was assured that I had risen in Clara's esteem, and although the young lady and I had long regularly interchanged messages and remembrances by Herbert, I had never seen her. However, I did not trouble Wemmick with these particulars.

"The house with the bow-window," said Wemmick, "being by the river-side, down the Pool there between Limehouse and Greenwich, and being kept, it seems, by a very respectable widow who has a furnished upper floor to let, Mr. Herbert put it to me, what did I think of that as a temporary tenement for Tom, Jack, or Richard? Now, I thought very well of it, for three reasons I'll give you. That is to say: Firstly. It's altogether out of all your beats, and is well away from the usual heap of streets great and small. Secondly. Without going near it yourself, you could always hear of the safety of Tom, Jack, or Richard, through Mr. Herbert. Thirdly. After a while and when it might be prudent, if you should want to slip Tom, Jack, or Richard on board a foreign packet-boat, there he is—ready."

Much comforted by these considerations, I thanked Wemmick again and again, and begged him to proceed.

"Well, sir! Mr. Herbert threw himself into the business with a will, and by nine o'clock last night he housed Tom, Jack, or Richard,—whichever it may be,—you and I don't want to know,—quite successfully. At the old lodgings it was understood that he was summoned to Dover, and, in fact, he was taken down the Dover road and cornered out of it. Now, another great advantage of all this is, that it was done without you, and when, if any one was concerning himself about your movements, you must be known to be ever so many miles off and quite otherwise engaged. This diverts suspicion and confuses it; and for the same reason I recommended that, even if you came back last night, you should not go home. It brings in more confusion, and you want confusion."

Wemmick, having finished his breakfast, here looked at his watch, and began to get his coat on.

"And now, Mr. Pip," said he, with his hands still in the sleeves, "I have probably done the most I can do; but if I can ever do more,—from a

Walworth point of view, and in a strictly private and personal capacity,—I shall be glad to do it. Here's the address. There can be no harm in your going here to-night, and seeing for yourself that all is well with Tom, Jack, or Richard, before you go home,—which is another reason for your not going home last night. But, after you have gone home, don't go back here. You are very welcome, I am sure, Mr. Pip"; his hands were now out of his sleeves, and I was shaking them; "and let me finally impress one important point upon you." He laid his hands upon my shoulders, and added in a solemn whisper: "Avail yourself of this evening to lay hold of his portable property. You don't know what may happen to him. Don't let anything happen to the portable property."

Quite despairing of making my mind clear to Wemmick on this point, I forbore to try.

"Time's up," said Wemmick, "and I must be off. If you had nothing more pressing to do than to keep here till dark, that's what I should advise. You look very much worried, and it would do you good to have a perfectly quiet day with the Aged,—he'll be up presently,—and a little bit of—you remember the pig?"

"Of course," said I.

"Well; and a little bit of him. That sausage you toasted was his, and he was in all respects a first-rater. Do try him, if it is only for old acquaintance sake. Good by, Aged Parent!" in a cheery shout.

"All right, John; all right, my boy!" piped the old man from within.

I soon fell asleep before Wemmick's fire, and the Aged and I enjoyed one another's society by falling asleep before it more or less all day. We had loin of pork for dinner, and greens grown on the estate; and I nodded at the Aged with a good intention whenever I failed to do it drowsily. When it was quite dark, I left the Aged preparing the fire for toast; and I inferred from the number of teacups, as well as from his glances at the two little doors in the wall, that Miss Skiffins was expected.

Chapter XLVI

Eight o'clock had struck before I got into the air, that was scented, not disagreeably, by the chips and shavings of the long-shore boat-builders, and mast, oar, and block makers. All that water-side region of the upper and lower Pool below Bridge was unknown ground to me; and when I struck down by the river, I found that the spot I wanted was not where I had supposed it to be, and was anything but easy to find. It was called Mill Pond Bank, Chinks's Basin; and I had no other guide to Chinks's Basin than the Old Green Copper Rope-walk.

It matters not what stranded ships repairing in dry docks I lost myself among, what old hulls of ships in course of being knocked to pieces, what ooze and slime and other dregs of tide, what yards of ship-builders and ship-breakers, what rusty anchors blindly biting into the ground, though for years off duty, what mountainous country of accumulated casks and timber, how many ropewalks that were not the Old Green Copper. After several times falling short of my destination and as often overshooting it, I came unexpectedly round a corner, upon Mill Pond Bank. It was a fresh kind of place, all circumstances considered, where the wind from the river had room to turn itself round; and there were two or three trees in it, and there was the stump of a ruined windmill, and there was the Old Green Copper Ropewalk,—whose long and narrow vista I could trace in the moonlight, along a series of wooden frames set in the ground, that looked like superannuated haymaking-rakes which had grown old and lost most of their teeth.

Selecting from the few queer houses upon Mill Pond Bank a house with a wooden front and three stories of bow-window (not bay-window, which is another thing), I looked at the plate upon the door, and read there, Mrs. Whimple. That being the name I wanted, I knocked, and an elderly woman of a pleasant and thriving appearance responded. She was immediately deposed, however, by Herbert, who silently led me into the parlor and shut the door. It was an odd sensation to see his very familiar face established quite at home in that very unfamiliar room and region; and I found myself looking at him, much as I looked at the corner-cupboard with the glass and china, the shells upon the chimney-piece, and the colored engravings on the wall, representing the death of Captain Cook, a ship-launch, and his Majesty King George the Third in a state coachman's wig, leather-breeches, and top-boots, on the terrace at Windsor.

"All is well, Handel," said Herbert, "and he is quite satisfied, though eager to see you. My dear girl is with her father; and if you'll wait till she comes down, I'll make you known to her, and then we'll go up stairs. That's her father."

I had become aware of an alarming growling overhead, and had probably expressed the fact in my countenance.

"I am afraid he is a sad old rascal," said Herbert, smiling, "but I have never seen him. Don't you smell rum? He is always at it."

"At rum?" said I.

"Yes," returned Herbert, "and you may suppose how mild it makes his gout. He persists, too, in keeping all the provisions up stairs in his room, and serving them out. He keeps them on shelves over his head, and will weigh them all. His room must be like a chandler's shop."

While he thus spoke, the growling noise became a prolonged roar, and then died away.

"What else can be the consequence," said Herbert, in explanation, "if he will cut the cheese? A man with the gout in his right hand—and everywhere else—can't expect to get through a Double Gloucester without hurting himself."

He seemed to have hurt himself very much, for he gave another furious roar.

"To have Provis for an upper lodger is quite a godsend to Mrs. Whimple," said Herbert, "for of course people in general won't stand that noise. A curious place, Handel; isn't it?"

It was a curious place, indeed; but remarkably well kept and clean.

"Mrs. Whimple," said Herbert, when I told him so, "is the best of housewives, and I really do not know what my Clara would do without her motherly help. For, Clara has no mother of her own, Handel, and no relation in the world but old Gruffandgrim."

"Surely that's not his name, Herbert?"

"No, no," said Herbert, "that's my name for him. His name is Mr. Barley. But what a blessing it is for the son of my father and mother to love a girl who has no relations, and who can never bother herself or anybody else about her family!"

Herbert had told me on former occasions, and now reminded me, that he first knew Miss Clara Barley when she was completing her education at an establishment at Hammersmith, and that on her being recalled home to nurse her father, he and she had confided their affection to the motherly Mrs. Whimple, by whom it had been fostered and regulated with equal kindness and discretion, ever since. It was understood that nothing of a tender nature could possibly be confided to old Barley, by reason of his being totally unequal to the consideration of any subject more psychological than Gout, Rum, and Purser's stores.

As we were thus conversing in a low tone while Old Barley's sustained growl vibrated in the beam that crossed the ceiling, the room door opened, and a very pretty, slight, dark-eyed girl of twenty or so came in with a basket in her hand: whom Herbert tenderly relieved of the basket, and presented, blushing, as "Clara." She really was a most charming girl, and might have passed for a captive fairy, whom that truculent Ogre, Old Barley, had pressed into his service.

"Look here," said Herbert, showing me the basket, with a compassionate and tender smile, after we had talked a little; "here's poor Clara's supper, served out every night. Here's her allowance of bread, and here's her slice of cheese, and here's her rum,—which I drink. This is Mr. Barley's breakfast for to-morrow, served out to be cooked. Two mutton-chops, three potatoes, some split peas, a little flour, two ounces of butter, a pinch of salt, and all this black pepper. It's stewed up together, and taken hot, and it's a nice thing for the gout, I should think!"

There was something so natural and winning in Clara's resigned way of looking at these stores in detail, as Herbert pointed them out; and something so confiding, loving, and innocent in her modest manner of yielding herself to Herbert's embracing arm; and something so gentle in her, so much needing protection on Mill Pond Bank, by Chinks's Basin, and the Old Green Copper Ropewalk, with Old Barley growling in the beam,—that I would not have undone the engagement between her and Herbert for all the money in the pocket-book I had never opened.

I was looking at her with pleasure and admiration, when suddenly the growl swelled into a roar again, and a frightful bumping noise was heard above, as if a giant with a wooden leg were trying to bore it through the ceiling to come at us. Upon this Clara said to Herbert, "Papa wants me, darling!" and ran away.

"There is an unconscionable old shark for you!" said Herbert. "What do you suppose he wants now, Handel?"

"I don't know," said I. "Something to drink?"

"That's it!" cried Herbert, as if I had made a guess of extraordinary merit. "He keeps his grog ready mixed in a little tub on the table. Wait a moment, and you'll hear Clara lift him up to take some. There he goes!" Another roar, with a prolonged shake at the end. "Now," said Herbert, as it was succeeded by silence, "he's drinking. Now," said Herbert, as the growl resounded in the beam once more, "he's down again on his back!"

Clara returned soon afterwards, and Herbert accompanied me up stairs to see our charge. As we passed Mr. Barley's door, he was heard hoarsely muttering within, in a strain that rose and fell like wind, the following Refrain, in which I substitute good wishes for something quite the reverse:—

"Ahoy! Bless your eyes, here's old Bill Barley. Here's old Bill Barley, bless your eyes. Here's old Bill Barley on the flat of his back, by the Lord. Lying on the flat of his back like a drifting old dead flounder, here's your old Bill Barley, bless your eyes. Ahoy! Bless you."

In this strain of consolation, Herbert informed me the invisible Barley would commune with himself by the day and night together; Often, while it was light, having, at the same time, one eye at a telescope which was fitted on his bed for the convenience of sweeping the river.

In his two cabin rooms at the top of the house, which were fresh and airy, and in which Mr. Barley was less audible than below, I found Provis comfortably settled. He expressed no alarm, and seemed to feel none that was worth mentioning; but it struck me that he was softened,—indefinably, for I could not have said how, and could never afterwards recall how when I tried, but certainly.

The opportunity that the day's rest had given me for reflection had resulted in my fully determining to say nothing to him respecting Compeyson. For anything I knew, his animosity towards the man might otherwise lead to his seeking him out and rushing on his own destruction. Therefore, when Herbert and I sat down with him by his fire, I asked him first of all whether he relied on Wemmick's judgment and sources of information?

"Ay, ay, dear boy!" he answered, with a grave nod, "Jaggers knows."

"Then, I have talked with Wemmick," said I, "and have come to tell you what caution he gave me and what advice."

This I did accurately, with the reservation just mentioned; and I told him how Wemmick had heard, in Newgate prison (whether from officers or prisoners I could not say), that he was under some suspicion, and that my chambers had been watched; how Wemmick had recommended his keeping close for a time, and my keeping away from him; and what Wemmick had said about getting him abroad. I added, that of course, when the time came, I should go with him, or should follow close upon him, as might be safest in Wemmick's judgment. What was to follow that I did not touch upon; neither, indeed, was I at all clear or comfortable about it in my own mind, now that I saw him in that softer condition, and in declared peril for my sake. As to altering my way of living by enlarging my expenses, I put it to him whether in our present unsettled and difficult circumstances, it would not be simply ridiculous, if it were no worse?

He could not deny this, and indeed was very reasonable throughout. His coming back was a venture, he said, and he had always known it to be a venture. He would do nothing to make it a desperate venture, and he had very little fear of his safety with such good help.

Herbert, who had been looking at the fire and pondering, here said that something had come into his thoughts arising out of Wemmick's suggestion, which it might be worth while to pursue. "We are both good watermen, Handel, and could take him down the river ourselves when the right time comes. No boat would then be hired for the purpose, and no boatmen; that would save at least a chance of suspicion, and any chance is worth saving. Never mind the season; don't you think it might be a good thing if you began at once to keep a boat at the Temple stairs, and were in the habit of rowing up and down the river? You fall into that habit, and then who notices or minds? Do it twenty or fifty times, and there is nothing special in your doing it the twenty-first or fifty-first."

I liked this scheme, and Provis was quite elated by it. We agreed that it should be carried into execution, and that Provis should never recognize us if we came below Bridge, and rowed past Mill Pond Bank. But we further agreed that he should pull down the blind in that part of his window which gave upon the east, whenever he saw us and all was right.

Our conference being now ended, and everything arranged, I rose to go; remarking to Herbert that he and I had better not go home together, and that

I would take half an hour's start of him. "I don't like to leave you here," I said to Provis, "though I cannot doubt your being safer here than near me. Good by!"

"Dear boy," he answered, clasping my hands, "I don't know when we may meet again, and I don't like good by. Say good night!"

"Good night! Herbert will go regularly between us, and when the time comes you may be certain I shall be ready. Good night, good night!"

We thought it best that he should stay in his own rooms; and we left him on the landing outside his door, holding a light over the stair-rail to light us down stairs. Looking back at him, I thought of the first night of his return, when our positions were reversed, and when I little supposed my heart could ever be as heavy and anxious at parting from him as it was now.

Old Barley was growling and swearing when we repassed his door, with no appearance of having ceased or of meaning to cease. When we got to the foot of the stairs, I asked Herbert whether he had preserved the name of Provis. He replied, certainly not, and that the lodger was Mr. Campbell. He also explained that the utmost known of Mr. Campbell there was, that he (Herbert) had Mr. Campbell consigned to him, and felt a strong personal interest in his being well cared for, and living a secluded life. So, when we went into the parlor where Mrs. Whimple and Clara were seated at work, I said nothing of my own interest in Mr. Campbell, but kept it to myself.

When I had taken leave of the pretty, gentle, dark-eyed girl, and of the motherly woman who had not outlived her honest sympathy with a little affair of true love, I felt as if the Old Green Copper Ropewalk had grown quite a different place. Old Barley might be as old as the hills, and might swear like a whole field of troopers, but there were redeeming youth and trust and hope enough in Chinks's Basin to fill it to overflowing. And then I thought of Estella, and of our parting, and went home very sadly.

All things were as quiet in the Temple as ever I had seen them. The windows of the rooms on that side, lately occupied by Provis, were dark and still, and there was no lounger in Garden Court. I walked past the fountain twice or thrice before I descended the steps that were between me and my rooms, but I was quite alone. Herbert, coming to my bedside when he came in,—for I went straight to bed, dispirited and fatigued,—made the same report. Opening one of the windows after that, he looked out into the moonlight, and told me that the pavement was a solemnly empty as the pavement of any cathedral at that same hour.

Next day I set myself to get the boat. It was soon done, and the boat was brought round to the Temple stairs, and lay where I could reach her within a minute or two. Then, I began to go out as for training and practice: sometimes alone, sometimes with Herbert. I was often out in cold, rain, and sleet, but nobody took much note of me after I had been out a few times. At first, I kept above Blackfriars Bridge; but as the hours of the tide changed, I took towards London Bridge. It was Old London Bridge in those days, and at certain states of the tide there was a race and fall of water there which gave it a bad reputation. But I knew well enough how to 'shoot' the bridge after seeing it done, and so began to row about among the shipping in the Pool, and down to Erith. The first time I passed Mill Pond Bank, Herbert and I were pulling a pair of oars; and, both in going and returning, we saw the blind towards the east come down. Herbert was rarely there less frequently than three times in a week, and he never brought me a single word of intelligence that was at all alarming. Still, I knew that there was cause for alarm, and I could not get rid of the notion of being watched. Once received, it is a haunting idea; how many undesigning persons I suspected of watching me, it would be hard to calculate.

In short, I was always full of fears for the rash man who was in hiding. Herbert had sometimes said to me that he found it pleasant to stand at one of our windows after dark, when the tide was running down, and to think that it was flowing, with everything it bore, towards Clara. But I thought with dread that it was flowing towards Magwitch, and that any black mark on its surface might be his pursuers, going swiftly, silently, and surely, to take him.

Chapter XLVII

Some weeks passed without bringing any change. We waited for Wemmick, and he made no sign. If I had never known him out of Little Britain, and had never enjoyed the privilege of being on a familiar footing at the Castle, I might have doubted him; not so for a moment, knowing him as I did.

My worldly affairs began to wear a gloomy appearance, and I was pressed for money by more than one creditor. Even I myself began to know the want of money (I mean of ready money in my own pocket), and to relieve it by converting some easily spared articles of jewelery into cash. But I had quite determined that it would be a heartless fraud to take more money from my patron in the existing state of my uncertain thoughts and plans. Therefore, I had sent him the unopened pocket-book by Herbert, to hold in his own keeping, and I felt a kind of satisfaction—whether it was a false kind or a true, I hardly know—in not having profited by his generosity since his revelation of himself.

As the time wore on, an impression settled heavily upon me that Estella was married. Fearful of having it confirmed, though it was all but a conviction, I avoided the newspapers, and begged Herbert (to whom I had confided the circumstances of our last interview) never to speak of her to me. Why I hoarded up this last wretched little rag of the robe of hope that was rent and given to the winds, how do I know? Why did you who read this, commit that not dissimilar inconsistency of your own last year, last month, last week?

It was an unhappy life that I lived; and its one dominant anxiety, towering over all its other anxieties, like a high mountain above a range of mountains, never disappeared from my view. Still, no new cause for fear arose. Let me start from my bed as I would, with the terror fresh upon me that he was discovered; let me sit listening, as I would with dread, for Herbert's returning step at night, lest it should be fleeter than ordinary, and winged with evil news,—for all that, and much more to like purpose, the round of things went on. Condemned to inaction and a state of constant restlessness and suspense, I rowed about in my boat, and waited, waited, waited, as I best could.

There were states of the tide when, having been down the river, I could not get back through the eddy-chafed arches and starlings of old London Bridge; then, I left my boat at a wharf near the Custom House, to be brought up afterwards to the Temple stairs. I was not averse to doing this, as it served to make me and my boat a commoner incident among the water-side people there. From this slight occasion sprang two meetings that I have now to tell of.

One afternoon, late in the month of February, I came ashore at the wharf at dusk. I had pulled down as far as Greenwich with the ebb tide, and had turned with the tide. It had been a fine bright day, but had become foggy as the sun dropped, and I had had to feel my way back among the shipping, pretty carefully. Both in going and returning, I had seen the signal in his window, All well.

As it was a raw evening, and I was cold, I thought I would comfort myself with dinner at once; and as I had hours of dejection and solitude before me if I went home to the Temple, I thought I would afterwards go to the play. The theatre where Mr. Wopsle had achieved his questionable triumph was in that water-side neighborhood (it is nowhere now), and to that theatre I resolved to go. I was aware that Mr. Wopsle had not succeeded in reviving the Drama, but, on the contrary, had rather partaken of its decline. He had been ominously heard of, through the play-bills, as a faithful Black, in connection with a little girl of noble birth, and a monkey. And Herbert had seen him as a predatory Tartar of comic propensities, with a face like a red brick, and an outrageous hat all over bells.

I dined at what Herbert and I used to call a geographical chop-house, where there were maps of the world in porter-pot rims on every half-yard of the tablecloths, and charts of gravy on every one of the knives,—to this day there is scarcely a single chop-house within the Lord Mayor's dominions which is not geographical,—and wore out the time in dozing over crumbs, staring at gas, and baking in a hot blast of dinners. By and by, I roused myself, and went to the play.

There, I found a virtuous boatswain in His Majesty's service,—a most excellent man, though I could have wished his trousers not quite so tight in some places, and not quite so loose in others,—who knocked all the little men's hats over their eyes, though he was very generous and brave, and who wouldn't hear of anybody's paying taxes, though he was very patriotic. He had a bag of money in his pocket, like a pudding in the cloth, and on that property married a young person in bed-furniture, with great rejoicings; the whole population of Portsmouth (nine in number at the last census) turning out on the beach to rub their own hands and shake everybody else's, and sing "Fill, fill!" A certain dark-complexioned Swab, however, who wouldn't fill, or do anything else that was proposed to him, and whose heart was openly stated (by the boatswain) to be as black as his figure-head, proposed to two other Swabs to get all mankind into difficulties; which was so effectually done (the Swab family having considerable political influence) that it took half the evening to set things right, and then it was only brought about through an honest little grocer with a white hat, black gaiters, and red nose, getting into a clock, with a gridiron, and listening, and coming out, and knocking everybody down from behind with the gridiron whom he couldn't confute with what he had overheard. This led to Mr. Wopsle's (who had never been heard of before) coming in with a star and garter on, as a plenipotentiary of great power direct from the Admiralty, to say that the Swabs were all to go to prison on the spot, and that he had brought the boatswain down the Union Jack, as a slight acknowledgment of his public services. The boatswain, unmanned for the first time, respectfully dried his eyes on the Jack, and then cheering up, and addressing Mr. Wopsle as Your Honor, solicited permission to take him by the fin. Mr. Wopsle, conceding his fin with a gracious dignity, was immediately shoved into a dusty corner, while everybody danced a hornpipe; and from that corner, surveying the public with a discontented eye, became aware of me.

The second piece was the last new grand comic Christmas pantomime, in the first scene of which, it pained me to suspect that I detected Mr. Wopsle with red worsted legs under a highly magnified phosphoric countenance and a shock of red curtain-fringe for his hair, engaged in the manufacture of thunderbolts in a mine, and displaying great cowardice when his gigantic master came home (very hoarse) to dinner. But he presently presented himself under worthier circumstances; for, the Genius of Youthful Love being in want of assistance,—on account of the parental brutality of an ignorant farmer who opposed the choice of his daughter's heart, by purposely falling upon the object, in a flour-sack, out of the first-floor window,—summoned a sententious Enchanter; and he, coming up from the antipodes rather unsteadily, after an apparently violent journey, proved to be Mr. Wopsle in a high-crowned hat, with a necromantic work in one volume under his arm. The business of this enchanter on earth being principally to be talked at, sung at, butted at, danced at, and flashed at with fires of various colors, he had a good deal of time on his hands. And I observed, with great surprise, that he devoted it to staring in my direction as if he were lost in amazement.

There was something so remarkable in the increasing glare of Mr. Wopsle's eye, and he seemed to be turning so many things over in his mind and to grow so confused, that I could not make it out. I sat thinking of it long after he had ascended to the clouds in a large watch-case, and still I could not make it out. I was still thinking of it when I came out of the theatre an hour afterwards, and found him waiting for me near the door.

"How do you do?" said I, shaking hands with him as we turned down the street together. "I saw that you saw me."

"Saw you, Mr. Pip!" he returned. "Yes, of course I saw you. But who else was there?"

"Who else?"

"It is the strangest thing," said Mr. Wopsle, drifting into his lost look again; "and yet I could swear to him."

Becoming alarmed, I entreated Mr. Wopsle to explain his meaning.

"Whether I should have noticed him at first but for your being there," said Mr. Wopsle, going on in the same lost way, "I can't be positive; yet I think I should."

Involuntarily I looked round me, as I was accustomed to look round me when I went home; for these mysterious words gave me a chill.

"Oh! He can't be in sight," said Mr. Wopsle. "He went out before I went off. I saw him go."

Having the reason that I had for being suspicious, I even suspected this poor actor. I mistrusted a design to entrap me into some admission. Therefore I glanced at him as we walked on together, but said nothing.

"I had a ridiculous fancy that he must be with you, Mr. Pip, till I saw that you were quite unconscious of him, sitting behind you there like a ghost."

My former chill crept over me again, but I was resolved not to speak yet, for it was quite consistent with his words that he might be set on to induce me to connect these references with Provis. Of course, I was perfectly sure and safe that Provis had not been there.

"I dare say you wonder at me, Mr. Pip; indeed, I see you do. But it is so very strange! You'll hardly believe what I am going to tell you. I could hardly believe it myself, if you told me."

"Indeed?" said I.

"No, indeed. Mr. Pip, you remember in old times a certain Christmas Day, when you were quite a child, and I dined at Gargery's, and some soldiers came to the door to get a pair of handcuffs mended?"

"I remember it very well."

"And you remember that there was a chase after two convicts, and that we joined in it, and that Gargery took you on his back, and that I took the lead, and you kept up with me as well as you could?"

"I remember it all very well." Better than he thought,—except the last clause.

"And you remember that we came up with the two in a ditch, and that there was a scuffle between them, and that one of them had been severely handled and much mauled about the face by the other?"

"I see it all before me."

"And that the soldiers lighted torches, and put the two in the centre, and that we went on to see the last of them, over the black marshes, with the torchlight shining on their faces,—I am particular about that,—with the torchlight shining on their faces, when there was an outer ring of dark night all about us?"

"Yes," said I. "I remember all that."

"Then, Mr. Pip, one of those two prisoners sat behind you tonight. I saw him over your shoulder."

"Steady!" I thought. I asked him then, "Which of the two do you suppose you saw?"

"The one who had been mauled," he answered readily, "and I'll swear I saw him! The more I think of him, the more certain I am of him."

"This is very curious!" said I, with the best assumption I could put on of its being nothing more to me. "Very curious indeed!"

I cannot exaggerate the enhanced disquiet into which this conversation threw me, or the special and peculiar terror I felt at Compeyson's having been behind me "like a ghost." For if he had ever been out of my thoughts for a few moments together since the hiding had begun, it was in those very moments when he was closest to me; and to think that I should be so unconscious and off my guard after all my care was as if I had shut an avenue of a hundred doors to keep him out, and then had found him at my elbow. I could not doubt, either, that he was there, because I was there, and that, however slight an appearance of danger there might be about us, danger was always near and active.

I put such questions to Mr. Wopsle as, When did the man come in? He could not tell me that; he saw me, and over my shoulder he saw the man. It was not until he had seen him for some time that he began to identify him; but he had from the first vaguely associated him with me, and known him as somehow belonging to me in the old village time. How was he dressed? Prosperously, but not noticeably otherwise; he thought, in black. Was his face at all disfigured? No, he believed not. I believed not too, for, although in my brooding state I had taken no especial notice of the people behind me, I thought it likely that a face at all disfigured would have attracted my attention.

When Mr. Wopsle had imparted to me all that he could recall or I extract, and when I had treated him to a little appropriate refreshment, after the fatigues of the evening, we parted. It was between twelve and one o'clock when I reached the Temple, and the gates were shut. No one was near me when I went in and went home.

Herbert had come in, and we held a very serious council by the fire. But there was nothing to be done, saving to communicate to Wemmick what I had that night found out, and to remind him that we waited for his hint. As I thought that I might compromise him if I went too often to the Castle, I made this communication by letter. I wrote it before I went to bed, and went out and posted it; and again no one was near me. Herbert and I agreed that we could do nothing else but be very cautious. And we were very cautious indeed,—more cautious than before, if that were possible,—and I for my part never went near Chinks's Basin, except when I rowed by, and then I only looked at Mill Pond Bank as I looked at anything else.

Chapter XLVIII

The second of the two meetings referred to in the last chapter occurred about a week after the first. I had again left my boat at the wharf below Bridge; the time was an hour earlier in the afternoon; and, undecided where to dine, I had strolled up into Cheapside, and was strolling along it, surely the most unsettled person in all the busy concourse, when a large hand was laid upon my shoulder by some one overtaking me. It was Mr. Jaggers's hand, and he passed it through my arm.

"As we are going in the same direction, Pip, we may walk together. Where are you bound for?"

"For the Temple, I think," said I.

"Don't you know?" said Mr. Jaggers.

"Well," I returned, glad for once to get the better of him in cross-examination, "I do not know, for I have not made up my mind."

"You are going to dine?" said Mr. Jaggers. "You don't mind admitting that, I suppose?"

"No," I returned, "I don't mind admitting that."

"And are not engaged?"

"I don't mind admitting also that I am not engaged."

"Then," said Mr. Jaggers, "come and dine with me."

I was going to excuse myself, when he added, "Wemmick's coming." So I changed my excuse into an acceptance,—the few words I had uttered, serving for the beginning of either,—and we went along Cheapside and slanted off to Little Britain, while the lights were springing up brilliantly in the shop windows, and the street lamp-lighters, scarcely finding ground enough to plant their ladders on in the midst of the afternoon's bustle, were skipping up and down and running in and out, opening more red eyes in the gathering fog than my rushlight tower at the Hummums had opened white eyes in the ghostly wall.

At the office in Little Britain there was the usual letter-writing, hand-washing, candle-snuffing, and safe-locking, that closed the business of the day. As I stood idle by Mr. Jaggers's fire, its rising and falling flame made the two casts on the shelf look as if they were playing a diabolical game at bo-peep with me; while the pair of coarse, fat office candles that dimly lighted Mr. Jaggers as he wrote in a corner were decorated with dirty winding-sheets, as if in remembrance of a host of hanged clients.

We went to Gerrard Street, all three together, in a hackney-coach: And, as soon as we got there, dinner was served. Although I should not have thought of making, in that place, the most distant reference by so much as a look to Wemmick's Walworth sentiments, yet I should have had no objection to catching his eye now and then in a friendly way. But it was not to be done. He turned his eyes on Mr. Jaggers whenever he raised them from the table, and was as dry and distant to me as if there were twin Wemmicks, and this was the wrong one.

"Did you send that note of Miss Havisham's to Mr. Pip, Wemmick?" Mr. Jaggers asked, soon after we began dinner.

"No, sir," returned Wemmick; "it was going by post, when you brought Mr. Pip into the office. Here it is." He handed it to his principal instead of to me.

"It's a note of two lines, Pip," said Mr. Jaggers, handing it on, "sent up to me by Miss Havisham on account of her not being sure of your address. She tells me that she wants to see you on a little matter of business you mentioned to her. You'll go down?"

"Yes," said I, casting my eyes over the note, which was exactly in those terms.

"When do you think of going down?"

"I have an impending engagement," said I, glancing at Wemmick, who was putting fish into the post-office, "that renders me rather uncertain of my time. At once, I think."

"If Mr. Pip has the intention of going at once," said Wemmick to Mr. Jaggers, "he needn't write an answer, you know."

Receiving this as an intimation that it was best not to delay, I settled that I would go to-morrow, and said so. Wemmick drank a glass of wine, and looked with a grimly satisfied air at Mr. Jaggers, but not at me.

"So, Pip! Our friend the Spider," said Mr. Jaggers, "has played his cards. He has won the pool."

It was as much as I could do to assent.

"Hah! He is a promising fellow—in his way—but he may not have it all his own way. The stronger will win in the end, but the stronger has to be found out first. If he should turn to, and beat her—"

"Surely," I interrupted, with a burning face and heart, "you do not seriously think that he is scoundrel enough for that, Mr. Jaggers?"

"I didn't say so, Pip. I am putting a case. If he should turn to and beat her, he may possibly get the strength on his side; if it should be a question of intellect, he certainly will not. It would be chance work to give an opinion how a fellow of that sort will turn out in such circumstances, because it's a toss-up between two results."

"May I ask what they are?"

"A fellow like our friend the Spider," answered Mr. Jaggers, "either beats or cringes. He may cringe and growl, or cringe and not growl; but he either beats or cringes. Ask Wemmick his opinion."

"Either beats or cringes," said Wemmick, not at all addressing himself to me.

"So here's to Mrs. Bentley Drummle," said Mr. Jaggers, taking a decanter of choicer wine from his dumb-waiter, and filling for each of us and for himself, "and may the question of supremacy be settled to the lady's satisfaction! To the satisfaction of the lady and the gentleman, it never will be. Now, Molly, Molly, Molly, Molly, how slow you are to-day!"

She was at his elbow when he addressed her, putting a dish upon the table. As she withdrew her hands from it, she fell back a step or two, nervously muttering some excuse. And a certain action of her fingers, as she spoke, arrested my attention.

"What's the matter?" said Mr. Jaggers.

"Nothing. Only the subject we were speaking of," said I, "was rather painful to me."

The action of her fingers was like the action of knitting. She stood looking at her master, not understanding whether she was free to go, or whether he had more to say to her and would call her back if she did go. Her look was very intent. Surely, I had seen exactly such eyes and such hands on a memorable occasion very lately!

He dismissed her, and she glided out of the room. But she remained before me as plainly as if she were still there. I looked at those hands, I looked at those eyes, I looked at that flowing hair; and I compared them with other hands, other eyes, other hair, that I knew of, and with what those might be after twenty years of a brutal husband and a stormy life. I looked again at those hands and eyes of the housekeeper, and thought of the inexplicable feeling that had come over me when I last walked—not alone

—in the ruined garden, and through the deserted brewery. I thought how the same feeling had come back when I saw a face looking at me, and a hand waving to me from a stage-coach window; and how it had come back again and had flashed about me like lightning, when I had passed in a carriage—not alone—through a sudden glare of light in a dark street. I thought how one link of association had helped that identification in the theatre, and how such a link, wanting before, had been riveted for me now, when I had passed by a chance swift from Estella's name to the fingers with their knitting action, and the attentive eyes. And I felt absolutely certain that this woman was Estella's mother.

Mr. Jaggers had seen me with Estella, and was not likely to have missed the sentiments I had been at no pains to conceal. He nodded when I said the subject was painful to me, clapped me on the back, put round the wine again, and went on with his dinner.

Only twice more did the housekeeper reappear, and then her stay in the room was very short, and Mr. Jaggers was sharp with her. But her hands were Estella's hands, and her eyes were Estella's eyes, and if she had reappeared a hundred times I could have been neither more sure nor less sure that my conviction was the truth.

It was a dull evening, for Wemmick drew his wine, when it came round, quite as a matter of business,—just as he might have drawn his salary when that came round,—and with his eyes on his chief, sat in a state of perpetual readiness for cross-examination. As to the quantity of wine, his post-office was as indifferent and ready as any other post-office for its quantity of letters. From my point of view, he was the wrong twin all the time, and only externally like the Wemmick of Walworth.

We took our leave early, and left together. Even when we were groping among Mr. Jaggers's stock of boots for our hats, I felt that the right twin was on his way back; and we had not gone half a dozen yards down Gerrard Street in the Walworth direction, before I found that I was walking arm in arm with the right twin, and that the wrong twin had evaporated into the evening air.

"Well!" said Wemmick, "that's over! He's a wonderful man, without his living likeness; but I feel that I have to screw myself up when I dine with him,—and I dine more comfortably unscrewed."

I felt that this was a good statement of the case, and told him so.

"Wouldn't say it to anybody but yourself," he answered. "I know that what is said between you and me goes no further."

I asked him if he had ever seen Miss Havisham's adopted daughter, Mrs. Bentley Drummle. He said no. To avoid being too abrupt, I then spoke of the Aged and of Miss Skiffins. He looked rather sly when I mentioned Miss Skiffins, and stopped in the street to blow his nose, with a roll of the head, and a flourish not quite free from latent boastfulness.

"Wemmick," said I, "do you remember telling me, before I first went to Mr. Jaggers's private house, to notice that housekeeper?"

"Did I?" he replied. "Ah, I dare say I did. Deuce take me," he added, suddenly, "I know I did. I find I am not quite unscrewed yet."

"A wild beast tamed, you called her."

"And what do you call her?"

"The same. How did Mr. Jaggers tame her, Wemmick?"

"That's his secret. She has been with him many a long year."

"I wish you would tell me her story. I feel a particular interest in being acquainted with it. You know that what is said between you and me goes no further."

"Well!" Wemmick replied, "I don't know her story,—that is, I don't know all of it. But what I do know I'll tell you. We are in our private and personal capacities, of course."

"Of course."

"A score or so of years ago, that woman was tried at the Old Bailey for murder, and was acquitted. She was a very handsome young woman, and I believe had some gypsy blood in her. Anyhow, it was hot enough when it was up, as you may suppose."

"But she was acquitted."

"Mr. Jaggers was for her," pursued Wemmick, with a look full of meaning, "and worked the case in a way quite astonishing. It was a desperate case, and it was comparatively early days with him then, and he worked it to general admiration; in fact, it may almost be said to have made him. He worked it himself at the police-office, day after day for many days, contending against even a committal; and at the trial where he couldn't work it himself, sat under counsel, and—every one knew—put in all the salt and pepper. The murdered person was a woman,—a woman a good ten years older, very much larger, and very much stronger. It was a case of jealousy. They both led tramping lives, and this woman in Gerrard Street here had been married very young, over the broomstick (as we say), to a tramping man, and was a perfect fury in point of jealousy. The murdered woman,—more a match for the man, certainly, in point of years—was found dead in a barn near Hounslow Heath. There had been a violent struggle, perhaps a fight. She was bruised and scratched and torn, and had been held by the throat, at last, and choked. Now, there was no reasonable evidence to implicate any person but this woman, and on the improbabilities of her having been able to do it Mr. Jaggers principally rested his case. You may be sure," said Wemmick, touching me on the sleeve, "that he never dwelt upon the strength of her hands then, though he sometimes does now."

I had told Wemmick of his showing us her wrists, that day of the dinner party.

"Well, sir!" Wemmick went on; "it happened—happened, don't you see?—that this woman was so very artfully dressed from the time of her apprehension, that she looked much slighter than she really was; in particular, her sleeves are always remembered to have been so skilfully contrived that her arms had quite a delicate look. She had only a bruise or two about her,—nothing for a tramp,—but the backs of her hands were lacerated, and the question was, Was it with finger-nails? Now, Mr. Jaggers showed that she had struggled through a great lot of brambles which were not as high as her face; but which she could not have got through and kept her hands out of; and bits of those brambles were actually found in her skin and put in evidence, as well as the fact that the brambles in question were found on examination to have been broken through, and to have little shreds of her dress and little spots of blood upon them here and there. But the boldest point he made was this: it was attempted to be set up, in proof of her jealousy, that she was under strong suspicion of having, at about the time of the murder, frantically destroyed her child by this man—some three years old—to revenge herself upon him. Mr. Jaggers worked that in this way: "We say these are not marks of finger-nails, but marks of brambles, and we show you the brambles. You say they are marks of finger-nails, and you set up the hypothesis that she destroyed her child. You must accept all consequences of that hypothesis. For anything we know, she may have destroyed her child, and the child in clinging to her may have scratched her hands. What then? You are not trying her for the murder of her child; why don't you? As to this case, if you will have scratches, we say that, for anything we know, you may have accounted for them, assuming for the sake of argument that you have not invented them?" To sum up, sir," said Wemmick, "Mr. Jaggers was altogether too many for the jury, and they gave in."

"Has she been in his service ever since?"

"Yes; but not only that," said Wemmick, "she went into his service immediately after her acquittal, tamed as she is now. She has since been taught one thing and another in the way of her duties, but she was tamed from the beginning."

"Do you remember the sex of the child?"

"Said to have been a girl."

"You have nothing more to say to me to-night?"

"Nothing. I got your letter and destroyed it. Nothing."

We exchanged a cordial good-night, and I went home, with new matter for my thoughts, though with no relief from the old.

Chapter XLIX

Putting Miss Havisham's note in my pocket, that it might serve as my credentials for so soon reappearing at Satis House, in case her waywardness should lead her to express any surprise at seeing me, I went down again by the coach next day. But I alighted at the Halfway House, and breakfasted there, and walked the rest of the distance; for I sought to get into the town quietly by the unfrequented ways, and to leave it in the same manner.

The best light of the day was gone when I passed along the quiet echoing courts behind the High Street. The nooks of ruin where the old monks had once had their refectories and gardens, and where the strong walls were now pressed into the service of humble sheds and stables, were almost as silent as the old monks in their graves. The cathedral chimes had at once a sadder and a more remote sound to me, as I hurried on avoiding observation, than they had ever had before; so, the swell of the old organ was borne to my ears like funeral music; and the rooks, as they hovered about the gray tower and swung in the bare high trees of the priory garden, seemed to call to me that the place was changed, and that Estella was gone out of it for ever.

An elderly woman, whom I had seen before as one of the servants who lived in the supplementary house across the back courtyard, opened the gate. The lighted candle stood in the dark passage within, as of old, and I took it up and ascended the staircase alone. Miss Havisham was not in her own room, but was in the larger room across the landing. Looking in at the door, after knocking in vain, I saw her sitting on the hearth in a ragged chair, close before, and lost in the contemplation of, the ashy fire.

Doing as I had often done, I went in, and stood touching the old chimney-piece, where she could see me when she raised her eyes. There was an air or utter loneliness upon her, that would have moved me to pity though she had wilfully done me a deeper injury than I could charge her with. As I stood compassionating her, and thinking how, in the progress of time, I too had come to be a part of the wrecked fortunes of that house, her eyes rested on me. She stared, and said in a low voice, "Is it real?"

"It is I, Pip. Mr. Jaggers gave me your note yesterday, and I have lost no time."

"Thank you. Thank you."

As I brought another of the ragged chairs to the hearth and sat down, I remarked a new expression on her face, as if she were afraid of me.

"I want," she said, "to pursue that subject you mentioned to me when you were last here, and to show you that I am not all stone. But perhaps you can never believe, now, that there is anything human in my heart?"

When I said some reassuring words, she stretched out her tremulous right hand, as though she was going to touch me; but she recalled it again before I understood the action, or knew how to receive it.

"You said, speaking for your friend, that you could tell me how to do something useful and good. Something that you would like done, is it not?"

"Something that I would like done very much."

"What is it?"

I began explaining to her that secret history of the partnership. I had not got far into it, when I judged from her looks that she was thinking in a discursive way of me, rather than of what I said. It seemed to be so; for, when I stopped speaking, many moments passed before she showed that she was conscious of the fact.

"Do you break off," she asked then, with her former air of being afraid of me, "because you hate me too much to bear to speak to me?"

"No, no," I answered, "how can you think so, Miss Havisham! I stopped because I thought you were not following what I said."

"Perhaps I was not," she answered, putting a hand to her head. "Begin again, and let me look at something else. Stay! Now tell me."

She set her hand upon her stick in the resolute way that sometimes was habitual to her, and looked at the fire with a strong expression of forcing herself to attend. I went on with my explanation, and told her how I had hoped to complete the transaction out of my means, but how in this I was disappointed. That part of the subject (I reminded her) involved matters which could form no part of my explanation, for they were the weighty secrets of another.

"So!" said she, assenting with her head, but not looking at me. "And how much money is wanting to complete the purchase?"

I was rather afraid of stating it, for it sounded a large sum. "Nine hundred pounds."

"If I give you the money for this purpose, will you keep my secret as you have kept your own?"

"Quite as faithfully."

"And your mind will be more at rest?"

"Much more at rest."

"Are you very unhappy now?"

She asked this question, still without looking at me, but in an unwonted tone of sympathy. I could not reply at the moment, for my voice failed me. She put her left arm across the head of her stick, and softly laid her forehead on it.

"I am far from happy, Miss Havisham; but I have other causes of disquiet than any you know of. They are the secrets I have mentioned."

After a little while, she raised her head, and looked at the fire Again.

"It is noble in you to tell me that you have other causes of unhappiness, Is it true?"

"Too true."

"Can I only serve you, Pip, by serving your friend? Regarding that as done, is there nothing I can do for you yourself?"

"Nothing. I thank you for the question. I thank you even more for the tone of the question. But there is nothing."

She presently rose from her seat, and looked about the blighted room for the means of writing. There were none there, and she took from her pocket a yellow set of ivory tablets, mounted in tarnished gold, and wrote upon them with a pencil in a case of tarnished gold that hung from her neck.

"You are still on friendly terms with Mr. Jaggers?"

"Quite. I dined with him yesterday."

"This is an authority to him to pay you that money, to lay out at your irresponsible discretion for your friend. I keep no money here; but if you would rather Mr. Jaggers knew nothing of the matter, I will send it to you."

"Thank you, Miss Havisham; I have not the least objection to receiving it from him."

She read me what she had written; and it was direct and clear, and evidently intended to absolve me from any suspicion of profiting by the receipt of the money. I took the tablets from her hand, and it trembled again, and it trembled more as she took off the chain to which the pencil was attached, and put it in mine. All this she did without looking at me.

"My name is on the first leaf. If you can ever write under my name, "I forgive her," though ever so long after my broken heart is dust pray do it!"

"O Miss Havisham," said I, "I can do it now. There have been sore mistakes; and my life has been a blind and thankless one; and I want forgiveness and direction far too much, to be bitter with you."

She turned her face to me for the first time since she had averted it, and, to my amazement, I may even add to my terror, dropped on her knees at my feet; with her folded hands raised to me in the manner in which, when her poor heart was young and fresh and whole, they must often have been raised to heaven from her mother's side.

To see her with her white hair and her worn face kneeling at my feet gave me a shock through all my frame. I entreated her to rise, and got my arms about her to help her up; but she only pressed that hand of mine which was nearest to her grasp, and hung her head over it and wept. I had never seen her shed a tear before, and, in the hope that the relief might do her good, I bent over her without speaking. She was not kneeling now, but was down upon the ground.

"O!" she cried, despairingly. "What have I done! What have I done!"

"If you mean, Miss Havisham, what have you done to injure me, let me answer. Very little. I should have loved her under any circumstances. Is she married?"

"Yes."

It was a needless question, for a new desolation in the desolate house had told me so.

"What have I done! What have I done!" She wrung her hands, and crushed her white hair, and returned to this cry over and over again. "What have I done!"

I knew not how to answer, or how to comfort her. That she had done a grievous thing in taking an impressionable child to mould into the form that her wild resentment, spurned affection, and wounded pride found vengeance in, I knew full well. But that, in shutting out the light of day, she had shut out infinitely more; that, in seclusion, she had secluded herself from a thousand natural and healing influences; that, her mind, brooding solitary, had grown diseased, as all minds do and must and will that reverse the appointed order of their Maker, I knew equally well. And could I look upon her without compassion, seeing her punishment in the ruin she was, in her profound unfitness for this earth on which she was placed, in the vanity of sorrow which had become a master mania, like the vanity of penitence, the vanity of remorse, the vanity of unworthiness, and other monstrous vanities that have been curses in this world?

"Until you spoke to her the other day, and until I saw in you a looking-glass that showed me what I once felt myself, I did not know what I had done. What have I done! What have I done!" And so again, twenty, fifty times over, What had she done!

"Miss Havisham," I said, when her cry had died away, "you may dismiss me from your mind and conscience. But Estella is a different case, and if you can ever undo any scrap of what you have done amiss in keeping a part of her right nature away from her, it will be better to do that than to bemoan the past through a hundred years."

"Yes, yes, I know it. But, Pip—my dear!" There was an earnest womanly compassion for me in her new affection. "My dear! Believe this: when she first came to me, I meant to save her from misery like my own. At first, I meant no more."

"Well, well!" said I. "I hope so."

"But as she grew, and promised to be very beautiful, I gradually did worse, and with my praises, and with my jewels, and with my teachings, and with this figure of myself always before her, a warning to back and point my lessons, I stole her heart away, and put ice in its place."

"Better," I could not help saying, "to have left her a natural heart, even to be bruised or broken."

With that, Miss Havisham looked distractedly at me for a while, and then burst out again, What had she done!

"If you knew all my story," she pleaded, "you would have some compassion for me and a better understanding of me."

"Miss Havisham," I answered, as delicately as I could, "I believe I may say that I do know your story, and have known it ever since I first left this neighborhood. It has inspired me with great commiseration, and I hope I understand it and its influences. Does what has passed between us give me any excuse for asking you a question relative to Estella? Not as she is, but as she was when she first came here?"

She was seated on the ground, with her arms on the ragged chair, and her head leaning on them. She looked full at me when I said this, and replied, "Go on."

"Whose child was Estella?"

She shook her head.

"You don't know?"

She shook her head again.

"But Mr. Jaggers brought her here, or sent her here?"

"Brought her here."

"Will you tell me how that came about?"

She answered in a low whisper and with caution: "I had been shut up in these rooms a long time (I don't know how long; you know what time the clocks keep here), when I told him that I wanted a little girl to rear and love, and save from my fate. I had first seen him when I sent for him to lay this place waste for me; having read of him in the newspapers, before I and the world parted. He told me that he would look about him for such an orphan child. One night he brought her here asleep, and I called her Estella."

"Might I ask her age then?"

"Two or three. She herself knows nothing, but that she was left an orphan and I adopted her."

So convinced I was of that woman's being her mother, that I wanted no evidence to establish the fact in my own mind. But, to any mind, I thought, the connection here was clear and straight.

What more could I hope to do by prolonging the interview? I had succeeded on behalf of Herbert, Miss Havisham had told me all she knew of Estella, I had said and done what I could to ease her mind. No matter with what other words we parted; we parted.

Twilight was closing in when I went down stairs into the natural air. I called to the woman who had opened the gate when I entered, that I would not trouble her just yet, but would walk round the place before leaving. For I had a presentiment that I should never be there again, and I felt that the dying light was suited to my last view of it.

By the wilderness of casks that I had walked on long ago, and on which the rain of years had fallen since, rotting them in many places, and leaving miniature swamps and pools of water upon those that stood on end, I made my way to the ruined garden. I went all round it; round by the corner where Herbert and I had fought our battle; round by the paths where Estella and I had walked. So cold, so lonely, so dreary all!

Taking the brewery on my way back, I raised the rusty latch of a little door at the garden end of it, and walked through. I was going out at the opposite door,—not easy to open now, for the damp wood had started and swelled, and the hinges were yielding, and the threshold was encumbered with a growth of fungus,—when I turned my head to look back. A childish association revived with wonderful force in the moment of the slight action, and I fancied that I saw Miss Havisham hanging to the beam. So strong was the impression, that I stood under the beam shuddering from head to foot before I knew it was a fancy,—though to be sure I was there in an instant.

The mournfulness of the place and time, and the great terror of this illusion, though it was but momentary, caused me to feel an indescribable awe as I came out between the open wooden gates where I had once wrung my hair after Estella had wrung my heart. Passing on into the front courtyard, I hesitated whether to call the woman to let me out at the locked gate of which she had the key, or first to go up stairs and assure myself that Miss Havisham was as safe and well as I had left her. I took the latter course and went up.

I looked into the room where I had left her, and I saw her seated in the ragged chair upon the hearth close to the fire, with her back towards me. In the moment when I was withdrawing my head to go quietly away, I saw a great flaming light spring up. In the same moment I saw her running at me, shrieking, with a whirl of fire blazing all about her, and soaring at least as many feet above her head as she was high.

I had a double-caped great-coat on, and over my arm another thick coat. That I got them off, closed with her, threw her down, and got them over her; that I dragged the great cloth from the table for the same purpose, and with it dragged down the heap of rottenness in the midst, and all the ugly things that sheltered there; that we were on the ground struggling like desperate enemies, and that the closer I covered her, the more wildly she shrieked and tried to free herself,—that this occurred I knew through the result, but not through anything I felt, or thought, or knew I did. I knew nothing until I knew that we were on the floor by the great table, and that patches of tinder yet alight were floating in the smoky air, which, a moment ago, had been her faded bridal dress.

Then, I looked round and saw the disturbed beetles and spiders running away over the floor, and the servants coming in with breathless cries at the door. I still held her forcibly down with all my strength, like a prisoner who might escape; and I doubt if I even knew who she was, or why we had struggled, or that she had been in flames, or that the flames were out, until I saw the patches of tinder that had been her garments no longer alight but falling in a black shower around us.

She was insensible, and I was afraid to have her moved, or even touched. Assistance was sent for, and I held her until it came, as if I unreasonably fancied (I think I did) that, if I let her go, the fire would break out again and consume her. When I got up, on the surgeon's coming to her with other aid, I was astonished to see that both my hands were burnt; for, I had no knowledge of it through the sense of feeling.

On examination it was pronounced that she had received serious hurts, but that they of themselves were far from hopeless; the danger lay mainly in the nervous shock. By the surgeon's directions, her bed was carried into that room and laid upon the great table, which happened to be well suited to the dressing of her injuries. When I saw her again, an hour afterwards, she lay, indeed, where I had seen her strike her stick, and had heard her say that she would lie one day.

Though every vestige of her dress was burnt, as they told me, she still had something of her old ghastly bridal appearance; for, they had covered her to the throat with white cotton-wool, and as she lay with a white sheet loosely overlying that, the phantom air of something that had been and was changed was still upon her.

I found, on questioning the servants, that Estella was in Paris, and I got a promise from the surgeon that he would write to her by the next post. Miss Havisham's family I took upon myself; intending to communicate with Mr. Matthew Pocket only, and leave him to do as he liked about informing the rest. This I did next day, through Herbert, as soon as I returned to town.

There was a stage, that evening, when she spoke collectedly of what had happened, though with a certain terrible vivacity. Towards midnight she began to wander in her speech; and after that it gradually set in that she said innumerable times in a low solemn voice, "What have I done!" And then, "When she first came, I meant to save her from misery like mine." And then, "Take the pencil and write under my name, 'I forgive her!'" She never changed the order of these three sentences, but she sometimes left out a word in one or other of them; never putting in another word, but always leaving a blank and going on to the next word.

As I could do no service there, and as I had, nearer home, that pressing reason for anxiety and fear which even her wanderings could not drive out of my mind, I decided, in the course of the night that I would return by the early morning coach, walking on a mile or so, and being taken up clear of the town. At about six o'clock of the morning, therefore, I leaned over her and touched her lips with mine, just as they said, not stopping for being touched, "Take the pencil and write under my name, 'I forgive her.'"

Chapter L

My hands had been dressed twice or thrice in the night, and again in the morning. My left arm was a good deal burned to the elbow, and, less severely, as high as the shoulder; it was very painful, but the flames had set in that direction, and I felt thankful it was no worse. My right hand was not so badly burnt but that I could move the fingers. It was bandaged, of course, but much less inconveniently than my left hand and arm; those I carried in a sling; and I could only wear my coat like a cloak, loose over my shoulders and fastened at the neck. My hair had been caught by the fire, but not my head or face.

When Herbert had been down to Hammersmith and seen his father, he came back to me at our chambers, and devoted the day to attending on me. He was the kindest of nurses, and at stated times took off the bandages, and steeped them in the cooling liquid that was kept ready, and put them on again, with a patient tenderness that I was deeply grateful for.

At first, as I lay quiet on the sofa, I found it painfully difficult, I might say impossible, to get rid of the impression of the glare of the flames, their hurry and noise, and the fierce burning smell. If I dozed for a minute, I was awakened by Miss Havisham's cries, and by her running at me with all that height of fire above her head. This pain of the mind was much harder to strive against than any bodily pain I suffered; and Herbert, seeing that, did his utmost to hold my attention engaged.

Neither of us spoke of the boat, but we both thought of it. That was made apparent by our avoidance of the subject, and by our agreeing—without agreement—to make my recovery of the use of my hands a question of so many hours, not of so many weeks.

My first question when I saw Herbert had been of course, whether all was well down the river? As he replied in the affirmative, with perfect confidence and cheerfulness, we did not resume the subject until the day was wearing away. But then, as Herbert changed the bandages, more by the light of the fire than by the outer light, he went back to it spontaneously.

"I sat with Provis last night, Handel, two good hours."

"Where was Clara?"

"Dear little thing!" said Herbert. "She was up and down with Gruffandgrim all the evening. He was perpetually pegging at the floor the moment she left his sight. I doubt if he can hold out long, though. What with rum and pepper,—and pepper and rum,—I should think his pegging must be nearly over."

"And then you will be married, Herbert?"

"How can I take care of the dear child otherwise?—Lay your arm out upon the back of the sofa, my dear boy, and I'll sit down here, and get the bandage off so gradually that you shall not know when it comes. I was speaking of Provis. Do you know, Handel, he improves?"

"I said to you I thought he was softened when I last saw him."

"So you did. And so he is. He was very communicative last night, and told me more of his life. You remember his breaking off here about some woman that he had had great trouble with.—Did I hurt you?"

I had started, but not under his touch. His words had given me a start.

"I had forgotten that, Herbert, but I remember it now you speak of it."

"Well! He went into that part of his life, and a dark wild part it is. Shall I tell you? Or would it worry you just now?"

"Tell me by all means. Every word."

Herbert bent forward to look at me more nearly, as if my reply had been rather more hurried or more eager than he could quite account for. "Your head is cool?" he said, touching it.

"Quite," said I. "Tell me what Provis said, my dear Herbert."

"It seems," said Herbert, "—there's a bandage off most charmingly, and now comes the cool one,—makes you shrink at first, my poor dear fellow, don't it? but it will be comfortable presently,—it seems that the woman was a young woman, and a jealous woman, and a revengeful woman; revengeful, Handel, to the last degree."

"To what last degree?"

"Murder.—Does it strike too cold on that sensitive place?"

"I don't feel it. How did she murder? Whom did she murder?" "Why, the deed may not have merited quite so terrible a name," said Herbert, "but, she was tried for it, and Mr. Jaggers defended her, and the reputation of that defence first made his name known to Provis. It was another and a stronger woman who was the victim, and there had been a struggle—in a barn. Who began it, or how fair it was, or how unfair, may be doubtful; but how it ended is certainly not doubtful, for the victim was found throttled."

"Was the woman brought in guilty?"

"No; she was acquitted.—My poor Handel, I hurt you!"

"It is impossible to be gentler, Herbert. Yes? What else?"

"This acquitted young woman and Provis had a little child; a little child of whom Provis was exceedingly fond. On the evening of the very night when the object of her jealousy was strangled as I tell you, the young woman presented herself before Provis for one moment, and swore that she would destroy the child (which was in her possession), and he should never see it again; then she vanished.—There's the worst arm comfortably in the sling once more, and now there remains but the right hand, which is a far easier job. I can do it better by this light than by a stronger, for my hand is steadiest when I don't see the poor blistered patches too distinctly.—You don't think your breathing is affected, my dear boy? You seem to breathe quickly."

"Perhaps I do, Herbert. Did the woman keep her oath?"

"There comes the darkest part of Provis's life. She did."

"That is, he says she did."

"Why, of course, my dear boy," returned Herbert, in a tone of surprise, and again bending forward to get a nearer look at me. "He says it all. I have no other information."

"No, to be sure."

"Now, whether," pursued Herbert, "he had used the child's mother ill, or whether he had used the child's mother well, Provis doesn't say; but she had shared some four or five years of the wretched life he described to us at this fireside, and he seems to have felt pity for her, and forbearance towards her. Therefore, fearing he should be called upon to depose about this destroyed child, and so be the cause of her death, he hid himself (much as he grieved for the child), kept himself dark, as he says, out of the way and out of the trial, and was only vaguely talked of as a certain man called Abel, out of whom the jealousy arose. After the acquittal she disappeared, and thus he lost the child and the child's mother."

"I want to ask—"

"A moment, my dear boy, and I have done. That evil genius, Compeyson, the worst of scoundrels among many scoundrels, knowing of his keeping out of the way at that time and of his reasons for doing so, of course afterwards held the knowledge over his head as a means of keeping him poorer and working him harder. It was clear last night that this barbed the point of Provis's animosity."

"I want to know," said I, "and particularly, Herbert, whether he told you when this happened?"

"Particularly? Let me remember, then, what he said as to that. His expression was, 'a round score o' year ago, and a'most directly after I took up wi' Compeyson.' How old were you when you came upon him in the little churchyard?"

"I think in my seventh year."

"Ay. It had happened some three or four years then, he said, and you brought into his mind the little girl so tragically lost, who would have been about your age."

"Herbert," said I, after a short silence, in a hurried way, "can you see me best by the light of the window, or the light of the fire?"

"By the firelight," answered Herbert, coming close again.

"Look at me."

"I do look at you, my dear boy."

"Touch me."

"I do touch you, my dear boy."

"You are not afraid that I am in any fever, or that my head is much disordered by the accident of last night?"

"N-no, my dear boy," said Herbert, after taking time to examine me. "You are rather excited, but you are quite yourself."

"I know I am quite myself. And the man we have in hiding down the river, is Estella's Father."

Chapter LI

What purpose I had in view when I was hot on tracing out and proving Estella's parentage, I cannot say. It will presently be seen that the question was not before me in a distinct shape until it was put before me by a wiser head than my own.

But when Herbert and I had held our momentous conversation, I was seized with a feverish conviction that I ought to hunt the matter down,—that I ought not to let it rest, but that I ought to see Mr. Jaggers, and come at the bare truth. I really do not know whether I felt that I did this for Estella's sake, or whether I was glad to transfer to the man in whose preservation I was so much concerned some rays of the romantic interest that had so long surrounded me. Perhaps the latter possibility may be the nearer to the truth.

Any way, I could scarcely be withheld from going out to Gerrard Street that night. Herbert's representations that, if I did, I should probably be laid up and stricken useless, when our fugitive's safety would depend upon me, alone restrained my impatience. On the understanding, again and again reiterated, that, come what would, I was to go to Mr. Jaggers to-morrow, I at length submitted to keep quiet, and to have my hurts looked after, and to stay at home. Early next morning we went out together, and at the corner of Giltspur Street by Smithfield, I left Herbert to go his way into the City, and took my way to Little Britain.

There were periodical occasions when Mr. Jaggers and Wemmick went over the office accounts, and checked off the vouchers, and put all things straight. On these occasions, Wemmick took his books and papers into Mr. Jaggers's room, and one of the up-stairs clerks came down into the outer office. Finding such clerk on Wemmick's post that morning, I knew what was going on; but I was not sorry to have Mr. Jaggers and Wemmick together, as Wemmick would then hear for himself that I said nothing to compromise him.

My appearance, with my arm bandaged and my coat loose over my shoulders, favored my object. Although I had sent Mr. Jaggers a brief account of the accident as soon as I had arrived in town, yet I had to give him all the details now; and the speciality of the occasion caused our talk to be less dry and hard, and less strictly regulated by the rules of evidence, than it had been before. While I described the disaster, Mr. Jaggers stood, according to his wont, before the fire. Wemmick leaned back in his chair, staring at me, with his hands in the pockets of his trousers, and his pen put horizontally into the post. The two brutal casts, always inseparable in my mind from the official proceedings, seemed to be congestively considering whether they didn't smell fire at the present moment.

My narrative finished, and their questions exhausted, I then produced Miss Havisham's authority to receive the nine hundred pounds for Herbert. Mr. Jaggers's eyes retired a little deeper into his head when I handed him the tablets, but he presently handed them over to Wemmick, with instructions to draw the check for his signature. While that was in course of being done, I looked on at Wemmick as he wrote, and Mr. Jaggers, poising and swaying himself on his well-polished boots, looked on at me. "I am sorry, Pip," said he, as I put the check in my pocket, when he had signed it, "that we do nothing for you."

"Miss Havisham was good enough to ask me," I returned, "whether she could do nothing for me, and I told her No."

"Everybody should know his own business," said Mr. Jaggers. And I saw Wemmick's lips form the words "portable property."

"I should not have told her No, if I had been you," said Mr Jaggers; "but every man ought to know his own business best."

"Every man's business," said Wemmick, rather reproachfully towards me, "is portable property."

As I thought the time was now come for pursuing the theme I had at heart, I said, turning on Mr. Jaggers:—

"I did ask something of Miss Havisham, however, sir. I asked her to give me some information relative to her adopted daughter, and she gave me all she possessed."

"Did she?" said Mr. Jaggers, bending forward to look at his boots and then straightening himself. "Hah! I don't think I should have done so, if I had been Miss Havisham. But she ought to know her own business best."

"I know more of the history of Miss Havisham's adopted child than Miss Havisham herself does, sir. I know her mother."

Mr. Jaggers looked at me inquiringly, and repeated "Mother?"

"I have seen her mother within these three days."

"Yes?" said Mr. Jaggers.

"And so have you, sir. And you have seen her still more recently."

"Yes?" said Mr. Jaggers.

"Perhaps I know more of Estella's history than even you do," said I. "I know her father too."

A certain stop that Mr. Jaggers came to in his manner—he was too self-possessed to change his manner, but he could not help its being brought to an indefinably attentive stop—assured me that he did not know who her father was. This I had strongly suspected from Provis's account (as Herbert had repeated it) of his having kept himself dark; which I pieced on to the fact that he himself was not Mr. Jaggers's client until some four years later, and when he could have no reason for claiming his identity. But, I could not be sure of this unconsciousness on Mr. Jaggers's part before, though I was quite sure of it now.

"So! You know the young lady's father, Pip?" said Mr. Jaggers.

"Yes," I replied, "and his name is Provis—from New South Wales."

Even Mr. Jaggers started when I said those words. It was the slightest start that could escape a man, the most carefully repressed and the sooner checked, but he did start, though he made it a part of the action of taking out his pocket-handkerchief. How Wemmick received the announcement I am unable to say; for I was afraid to look at him just then, lest Mr. Jaggers's sharpness should detect that there had been some communication unknown to him between us.

"And on what evidence, Pip," asked Mr. Jaggers, very coolly, as he paused with his handkerchief half way to his nose, "does Provis make this claim?"

"He does not make it," said I, "and has never made it, and has no knowledge or belief that his daughter is in existence."

For once, the powerful pocket-handkerchief failed. My reply was so Unexpected, that Mr. Jaggers put the handkerchief back into his pocket without completing the usual performance, folded his arms, and looked with stern attention at me, though with an immovable face.

Then I told him all I knew, and how I knew it; with the one reservation that I left him to infer that I knew from Miss Havisham what I in fact knew from Wemmick. I was very careful indeed as to that. Nor did I look towards Wemmick until I had finished all I had to tell, and had been for some time silently meeting Mr. Jaggers's look. When I did at last turn my eyes in Wemmick's direction, I found that he had unposted his pen, and was intent upon the table before him.

"Hah!" said Mr. Jaggers at last, as he moved towards the papers on the table. "What item was it you were at, Wemmick, when Mr. Pip came in?"

But I could not submit to be thrown off in that way, and I made a passionate, almost an indignant appeal, to him to be more frank and manly with me. I reminded him of the false hopes into which I had lapsed, the length of time they had lasted, and the discovery I had made: and I hinted at the danger that weighed upon my spirits. I represented myself as being surely worthy of some little confidence from him, in return for the confidence I had just now imparted. I said that I did not blame him, or suspect him, or mistrust him, but I wanted assurance of the truth from him. And if he asked me why I wanted it, and why I thought I had any right to it, I would tell him, little as he cared for such poor dreams, that I had loved Estella dearly and long, and that although I had lost her, and must live a bereaved life, whatever concerned her was still nearer and dearer to me than anything else in the world. And seeing that Mr. Jaggers stood quite still and silent, and apparently quite obdurate, under this appeal, I turned to Wemmick, and said, "Wemmick, I know you to be a man with a gentle heart. I have seen your pleasant home, and your old father, and all the innocent, cheerful playful ways with which you refresh your business life. And I entreat you to say a word for me to Mr. Jaggers, and to represent to him that, all circumstances considered, he ought to be more open with me!"

I have never seen two men look more oddly at one another than Mr. Jaggers and Wemmick did after this apostrophe. At first, a misgiving crossed me that Wemmick would be instantly dismissed from his employment; but it melted as I saw Mr. Jaggers relax into something like a smile, and Wemmick become bolder.

"What's all this?" said Mr. Jaggers. "You with an old father, and you with pleasant and playful ways?"

"Well!" returned Wemmick. "If I don't bring 'em here, what does it matter?"

"Pip," said Mr. Jaggers, laying his hand upon my arm, and smiling openly, "this man must be the most cunning impostor in all London."

"Not a bit of it," returned Wemmick, growing bolder and bolder. "I think you're another."

Again they exchanged their former odd looks, each apparently still distrustful that the other was taking him in.

"You with a pleasant home?" said Mr. Jaggers.

"Since it don't interfere with business," returned Wemmick, "let it be so. Now, I look at you, sir, I shouldn't wonder if you might be planning and contriving to have a pleasant home of your own one of these days, when you're tired of all this work."

Mr. Jaggers nodded his head retrospectively two or three times, and actually drew a sigh. "Pip," said he, "we won't talk about 'poor dreams;' you know more about such things than I, having much fresher experience of that kind. But now about this other matter. I'll put a case to you. Mind! I admit nothing."

He waited for me to declare that I quite understood that he expressly said that he admitted nothing.

"Now, Pip," said Mr. Jaggers, "put this case. Put the case that a woman, under such circumstances as you have mentioned, held her child concealed, and was obliged to communicate the fact to her legal adviser, on his representing to her that he must know, with an eye to the latitude of his defence, how the fact stood about that child. Put the case that, at the same time he held a trust to find a child for an eccentric rich lady to adopt and bring up."

"I follow you, sir."

"Put the case that he lived in an atmosphere of evil, and that all he saw of children was their being generated in great numbers for certain destruction. Put the case that he often saw children solemnly tried at a criminal bar, where they were held up to be seen; put the case that he habitually knew of their being imprisoned, whipped, transported, neglected, cast out, qualified in all ways for the hangman, and growing up to be hanged. Put the case that pretty nigh all the children he saw in his daily business life he had reason to look upon as so much spawn, to develop into the fish that were to come to his net,—to be prosecuted, defended, forsworn, made orphans, bedevilled somehow."

"I follow you, sir."

"Put the case, Pip, that here was one pretty little child out of the heap who could be saved; whom the father believed dead, and dared make no stir about; as to whom, over the mother, the legal adviser had this power: "I know what you did, and how you did it. You came so and so, you did such and such things to divert suspicion. I have tracked you through it all, and I tell it you all. Part with the child, unless it should be necessary to produce it to clear you, and then it shall be produced. Give the child into my hands, and I will do my best to bring you off. If you are saved, your child is saved too; if you are lost, your child is still saved." Put the case that this was done, and that the woman was cleared."

"I understand you perfectly."

"But that I make no admissions?"

"That you make no admissions." And Wemmick repeated, "No admissions."

"Put the case, Pip, that passion and the terror of death had a little shaken the woman's intellects, and that when she was set at liberty, she was scared out of the ways of the world, and went to him to be sheltered. Put the case that he took her in, and that he kept down the old, wild, violent nature whenever he saw an inkling of its breaking out, by asserting his power over her in the old way. Do you comprehend the imaginary case?"

"Quite."

"Put the case that the child grew up, and was married for money. That the mother was still living. That the father was still living. That the mother and father, unknown to one another, were dwelling within so many miles, furlongs, yards if you like, of one another. That the secret was still a secret, except that you had got wind of it. Put that last case to yourself very carefully."

"I do."

"I ask Wemmick to put it to himself very carefully."

And Wemmick said, "I do."

"For whose sake would you reveal the secret? For the father's? I think he would not be much the better for the mother. For the mother's? I think if she had done such a deed she would be safer where she was. For the daughter's? I think it would hardly serve her to establish her parentage for the information of her husband, and to drag her back to disgrace, after an escape of twenty years, pretty secure to last for life. But add the case that you had loved her, Pip, and had made her the subject of those 'poor dreams' which have, at one time or another, been in the heads of more men than you think likely, then I tell you that you had better—and would much sooner when you had thought well of it—chop off that bandaged left hand of yours with your bandaged right hand, and then pass the chopper on to Wemmick there, to cut that off too."

I looked at Wemmick, whose face was very grave. He gravely touched his lips with his forefinger. I did the same. Mr. Jaggers did the same. "Now, Wemmick," said the latter then, resuming his usual manner, "what item was it you were at when Mr. Pip came in?"

Standing by for a little, while they were at work, I observed that the odd looks they had cast at one another were repeated several times: with this difference now, that each of them seemed suspicious, not to say conscious, of having shown himself in a weak and unprofessional light to the other. For this reason, I suppose, they were now inflexible with one another; Mr. Jaggers being highly dictatorial, and Wemmick obstinately justifying himself whenever there was the smallest point in abeyance for a moment. I had never seen them on such ill terms; for generally they got on very well indeed together.

But they were both happily relieved by the opportune appearance of Mike, the client with the fur cap and the habit of wiping his nose on his sleeve, whom I had seen on the very first day of my appearance within those walls. This individual, who, either in his own person or in that of some member of his family, seemed to be always in trouble (which in that place meant Newgate), called to announce that his eldest daughter was taken up on suspicion of shoplifting. As he imparted this melancholy circumstance to Wemmick, Mr. Jaggers standing magisterially before the fire and taking no share in the proceedings, Mike's eye happened to twinkle with a tear.

"What are you about?" demanded Wemmick, with the utmost indignation. "What do you come snivelling here for?"

"I didn't go to do it, Mr. Wemmick."

"You did," said Wemmick. "How dare you? You're not in a fit state to come here, if you can't come here without spluttering like a bad pen. What do you mean by it?"

"A man can't help his feelings, Mr. Wemmick," pleaded Mike.

"His what?" demanded Wemmick, quite savagely. "Say that again!"

"Now look here my man," said Mr. Jaggers, advancing a step, and pointing to the door. "Get out of this office. I'll have no feelings here. Get out."

"It serves you right," said Wemmick, "Get out."

So, the unfortunate Mike very humbly withdrew, and Mr. Jaggers and Wemmick appeared to have re-established their good understanding, and went to work again with an air of refreshment upon them as if they had just had lunch.

Chapter LII

From Little Britain I went, with my check in my pocket, to Miss Skiffins's brother, the accountant; and Miss Skiffins's brother, the accountant, going straight to Clarriker's and bringing Clarriker to me, I had the great satisfaction of concluding that arrangement. It was the only good thing I had done, and the only completed thing I had done, since I was first apprised of my great expectations.

Clarriker informing me on that occasion that the affairs of the House were steadily progressing, that he would now be able to establish a small branch-house in the East which was much wanted for the extension of the business, and that Herbert in his new partnership capacity would go out and take charge of it, I found that I must have prepared for a separation from my friend, even though my own affairs had been more settled. And now, indeed, I felt as if my last anchor were loosening its hold, and I should soon be driving with the winds and waves.

But there was recompense in the joy with which Herbert would come home of a night and tell me of these changes, little imagining that he told me no news, and would sketch airy pictures of himself conducting Clara Barley to the land of the Arabian Nights, and of me going out to join them (with a caravan of camels, I believe), and of our all going up the Nile and seeing wonders. Without being sanguine as to my own part in those bright plans, I felt that Herbert's way was clearing fast, and that old Bill Barley had but to stick to his pepper and rum, and his daughter would soon be happily provided for.

We had now got into the month of March. My left arm, though it presented no bad symptoms, took, in the natural course, so long to heal that I was still unable to get a coat on. My right arm was tolerably restored; disfigured, but fairly serviceable.

On a Monday morning, when Herbert and I were at breakfast, I received the following letter from Wemmick by the post.

"Walworth. Burn this as soon as read. Early in the week, or say Wednesday, you might do what you know of, if you felt disposed to try it. Now burn."

When I had shown this to Herbert and had put it in the fire—but not before we had both got it by heart—we considered what to do. For, of course my being disabled could now be no longer kept out of view.

"I have thought it over again and again," said Herbert, "and I think I know a better course than taking a Thames waterman. Take Startop. A good fellow, a skilled hand, fond of us, and enthusiastic and honorable."

I had thought of him more than once.

"But how much would you tell him, Herbert?"

"It is necessary to tell him very little. Let him suppose it a mere freak, but a secret one, until the morning comes: then let him know that there is urgent reason for your getting Provis aboard and away. You go with him?"

"No doubt."

"Where?"

It had seemed to me, in the many anxious considerations I had given the point, almost indifferent what port we made for,—Hamburg, Rotterdam, Antwerp,—the place signified little, so that he was out of England. Any foreign steamer that fell in our way and would take us up would do. I had always proposed to myself to get him well down the river in the boat; certainly well beyond Gravesend, which was a critical place for search or inquiry if suspicion were afoot. As foreign steamers would leave London at about the time of high-water, our plan would be to get down the river by a previous ebb-tide, and lie by in some quiet spot until we could pull off to one. The time when one would be due where we lay, wherever that might be, could be calculated pretty nearly, if we made inquiries beforehand.

Herbert assented to all this, and we went out immediately after breakfast to pursue our investigations. We found that a steamer for Hamburg was likely to suit our purpose best, and we directed our thoughts chiefly to that vessel. But we noted down what other foreign steamers would leave London with the same tide, and we satisfied ourselves that we knew the build and color of each. We then separated for a few hours: I, to get at once such passports as were necessary; Herbert, to see Startop at his lodgings. We both did what we had to do without any hindrance, and when we met again at one o'clock reported it done. I, for my part, was prepared with passports; Herbert had seen Startop, and he was more than ready to join.

Those two should pull a pair of oars, we settled, and I would steer; our charge would be sitter, and keep quiet; as speed was not our object, we should make way enough. We arranged that Herbert should not come home to dinner before going to Mill Pond Bank that evening; that he should not go there at all to-morrow evening, Tuesday; that he should prepare Provis to come down to some stairs hard by the house, on Wednesday, when he saw us approach, and not sooner; that all the arrangements with him should be concluded that Monday night; and that he should be communicated with no more in any way, until we took him on board.

These precautions well understood by both of us, I went home.

On opening the outer door of our chambers with my key, I found a letter in the box, directed to me; a very dirty letter, though not ill-written. It had been delivered by hand (of course, since I left home), and its contents were these:—

"If you are not afraid to come to the old marshes to-night or tomorrow night at nine, and to come to the little sluice-house by the limekiln, you had better come. If you want information regarding your uncle Provis, you had much better come and tell no one, and lose no time. You must come alone. Bring this with you."

I had had load enough upon my mind before the receipt of this strange letter. What to do now, I could not tell. And the worst was, that I must decide quickly, or I should miss the afternoon coach, which would take me down in time for to-night. To-morrow night I could not think of going, for it would be too close upon the time of the flight. And again, for anything I knew, the proffered information might have some important bearing on the flight itself.

If I had had ample time for consideration, I believe I should still have gone. Having hardly any time for consideration,—my watch showing me that the coach started within half an hour,—I resolved to go. I should certainly not have gone, but for the reference to my Uncle Provis. That, coming on Wemmick's letter and the morning's busy preparation, turned the scale.

It is so difficult to become clearly possessed of the contents of almost any letter, in a violent hurry, that I had to read this mysterious epistle again twice, before its injunction to me to be secret got mechanically into my mind. Yielding to it in the same mechanical kind of way, I left a note in pencil for Herbert, telling him that as I should be so soon going away, I knew not for how long, I had decided to hurry down and back, to ascertain for myself how Miss Havisham was faring. I had then barely time to get my great-coat, lock up the chambers, and make for the coach-office by the short by-ways. If I had taken a hackney-chariot and gone by the streets, I should have missed my aim; going as I did, I caught the coach just as it came out of the yard. I was the only inside passenger, jolting away knee-deep in straw, when I came to myself.

For I really had not been myself since the receipt of the letter; it had so bewildered me, ensuing on the hurry of the morning. The morning hurry and flutter had been great; for, long and anxiously as I had waited for Wemmick, his hint had come like a surprise at last. And now I began to wonder at myself for being in the coach, and to doubt whether I had sufficient reason for being there, and to consider whether I should get out presently and go back, and to argue against ever heeding an anonymous communication, and, in short, to pass through all those phases of contradiction and indecision to which I suppose very few hurried people are strangers. Still, the reference to Provis by name mastered everything. I reasoned as I had reasoned already without knowing it,—if that be reasoning,—in case any harm should befall him through my not going, how could I ever forgive myself!

It was dark before we got down, and the journey seemed long and dreary to me, who could see little of it inside, and who could not go outside in my disabled state. Avoiding the Blue Boar, I put up at an inn of minor reputation down the town, and ordered some dinner. While it was preparing, I went to Satis House and inquired for Miss Havisham; she was still very ill, though considered something better.

My inn had once been a part of an ancient ecclesiastical house, and I dined in a little octagonal common-room, like a font. As I was not able to cut my dinner, the old landlord with a shining bald head did it for me. This bringing us into conversation, he was so good as to entertain me with my own story,—of course with the popular feature that Pumblechook was my earliest benefactor and the founder of my fortunes.

"Do you know the young man?" said I.

"Know him!" repeated the landlord. "Ever since he was—no height at all."

"Does he ever come back to this neighborhood?"

"Ay, he comes back," said the landlord, "to his great friends, now and again, and gives the cold shoulder to the man that made him."

"What man is that?"

"Him that I speak of," said the landlord. "Mr. Pumblechook."

"Is he ungrateful to no one else?"

"No doubt he would be, if he could," returned the landlord, "but he can't. And why? Because Pumblechook done everything for him."

"Does Pumblechook say so?"

"Say so!" replied the landlord. "He han't no call to say so."

"But does he say so?"

"It would turn a man's blood to white wine winegar to hear him tell of it, sir," said the landlord.

I thought, "Yet Joe, dear Joe, you never tell of it. Long-suffering and loving Joe, you never complain. Nor you, sweet-tempered Biddy!"

"Your appetite's been touched like by your accident," said the landlord, glancing at the bandaged arm under my coat. "Try a tenderer bit."

"No, thank you," I replied, turning from the table to brood over the fire. "I can eat no more. Please take it away."

I had never been struck at so keenly, for my thanklessness to Joe, as through the brazen impostor Pumblechook. The falser he, the truer Joe; the meaner he, the nobler Joe.

My heart was deeply and most deservedly humbled as I mused over the fire for an hour or more. The striking of the clock aroused me, but not from my dejection or remorse, and I got up and had my coat fastened round my neck, and went out. I had previously sought in my pockets for the letter, that I might refer to it again; but I could not find it, and was uneasy to think that it must have been dropped in the straw of the coach. I knew very well, however, that the appointed place was the little sluice-house by the limekiln on the marshes, and the hour nine. Towards the marshes I now went straight, having no time to spare.

Chapter LIII

It was a dark night, though the full moon rose as I left the enclosed lands, and passed out upon the marshes. Beyond their dark line there was a ribbon of clear sky, hardly broad enough to hold the red large moon. In a few minutes she had ascended out of that clear field, in among the piled mountains of cloud.

There was a melancholy wind, and the marshes were very dismal. A stranger would have found them insupportable, and even to me they were so oppressive that I hesitated, half inclined to go back. But I knew them well, and could have found my way on a far darker night, and had no excuse for returning, being there. So, having come there against my inclination, I went on against it.

The direction that I took was not that in which my old home lay, nor that in which we had pursued the convicts. My back was turned towards the distant Hulks as I walked on, and, though I could see the old lights away on the spits of sand, I saw them over my shoulder. I knew the limekiln as well as I knew the old Battery, but they were miles apart; so that, if a light had been burning at each point that night, there would have been a long strip of the blank horizon between the two bright specks.

At first, I had to shut some gates after me, and now and then to stand still while the cattle that were lying in the banked-up pathway arose and blundered down among the grass and reeds. But after a little while I seemed to have the whole flats to myself.

It was another half-hour before I drew near to the kiln. The lime was burning with a sluggish stifling smell, but the fires were made up and left, and no workmen were visible. Hard by was a small stone-quarry. It lay directly in my way, and had been worked that day, as I saw by the tools and barrows that were lying about.

Coming up again to the marsh level out of this excavation,—for the rude path lay through it,—I saw a light in the old sluice-house. I quickened my pace, and knocked at the door with my hand. Waiting for some reply, I looked about me, noticing how the sluice was abandoned and broken, and how the house—of wood with a tiled roof—would not be proof against the weather much longer, if it were so even now, and how the mud and ooze were coated with lime, and how the choking vapor of the kiln crept in a ghostly way towards me. Still there was no answer, and I knocked again. No answer still, and I tried the latch.

It rose under my hand, and the door yielded. Looking in, I saw a lighted candle on a table, a bench, and a mattress on a truckle bedstead. As there was a loft above, I called, "Is there any one here?" but no voice answered. Then I looked at my watch, and, finding that it was past nine, called again, "Is there any one here?" There being still no answer, I went out at the door, irresolute what to do.

It was beginning to rain fast. Seeing nothing save what I had seen already, I turned back into the house, and stood just within the shelter of the doorway, looking out into the night. While I was considering that some one must have been there lately and must soon be coming back, or the candle would not be burning, it came into my head to look if the wick were long. I turned round to do so, and had taken up the candle in my hand, when it was extinguished by some violent shock; and the next thing I comprehended was, that I had been caught in a strong running noose, thrown over my head from behind.

"Now," said a suppressed voice with an oath, "I've got you!"

"What is this?" I cried, struggling. "Who is it? Help, help, help!"

Not only were my arms pulled close to my sides, but the pressure on my bad arm caused me exquisite pain. Sometimes, a strong man's hand, sometimes a strong man's breast, was set against my mouth to deaden my cries, and with a hot breath always close to me, I struggled ineffectually in the dark, while I was fastened tight to the wall. "And now," said the suppressed voice with another oath, "call out again, and I'll make short work of you!"

Faint and sick with the pain of my injured arm, bewildered by the surprise, and yet conscious how easily this threat could be put in execution, I desisted, and tried to ease my arm were it ever so little. But, it was bound too tight for that. I felt as if, having been burnt before, it were now being boiled.

The sudden exclusion of the night, and the substitution of black darkness in its place, warned me that the man had closed a shutter. After groping about for a little, he found the flint and steel he wanted, and began to strike a light. I strained my sight upon the sparks that fell among the tinder, and upon which he breathed and breathed, match in hand, but I could only see his lips, and the blue point of the match; even those but fitfully. The tinder was damp,—no wonder there,—and one after another the sparks died out.

The man was in no hurry, and struck again with the flint and steel. As the sparks fell thick and bright about him, I could see his hands, and touches of his face, and could make out that he was seated and bending over the table; but nothing more. Presently I saw his blue lips again, breathing on the tinder, and then a flare of light flashed up, and showed me Orlick.

Whom I had looked for, I don't know. I had not looked for him. Seeing him, I felt that I was in a dangerous strait indeed, and I kept my eyes upon him.

He lighted the candle from the flaring match with great deliberation, and dropped the match, and trod it out. Then he put the candle away from him on the table, so that he could see me, and sat with his arms folded on the table and looked at me. I made out that I was fastened to a stout perpendicular ladder a few inches from the wall,—a fixture there,—the means of ascent to the loft above.

"Now," said he, when we had surveyed one another for some time, "I've got you."

"Unbind me. Let me go!"

"Ah!" he returned, "I'll let you go. I'll let you go to the moon, I'll let you go to the stars. All in good time."

"Why have you lured me here?"

"Don't you know?" said he, with a deadly look.

"Why have you set upon me in the dark?"

"Because I mean to do it all myself. One keeps a secret better than two. O you enemy, you enemy!"

His enjoyment of the spectacle I furnished, as he sat with his arms folded on the table, shaking his head at me and hugging himself, had a malignity in it that made me tremble. As I watched him in silence, he put his hand into the corner at his side, and took up a gun with a brass-bound stock.

"Do you know this?" said he, making as if he would take aim at me. "Do you know where you saw it afore? Speak, wolf!"

"Yes," I answered.

"You cost me that place. You did. Speak!"

"What else could I do?"

"You did that, and that would be enough, without more. How dared you to come betwixt me and a young woman I liked?"

"When did I?"

"When didn't you? It was you as always give Old Orlick a bad name to her."

"You gave it to yourself; you gained it for yourself. I could have done you no harm, if you had done yourself none."

"You're a liar. And you'll take any pains, and spend any money, to drive me out of this country, will you?" said he, repeating my words to Biddy in the last interview I had with her. "Now, I'll tell you a piece of information. It was never so well worth your while to get me out of this country as it is to-night. Ah! If it was all your money twenty times told, to the last brass farden!" As he shook his heavy hand at me, with his mouth snarling like a tiger's, I felt that it was true.

"What are you going to do to me?"

"I'm a going," said he, bringing his fist down upon the table with a heavy blow, and rising as the blow fell to give it greater force,—"I'm a going to have your life!"

He leaned forward staring at me, slowly unclenched his hand and drew it across his mouth as if his mouth watered for me, and sat down again.

"You was always in Old Orlick's way since ever you was a child. You goes out of his way this present night. He'll have no more on you. You're dead."

I felt that I had come to the brink of my grave. For a moment I looked wildly round my trap for any chance of escape; but there was none.

"More than that," said he, folding his arms on the table again, "I won't have a rag of you, I won't have a bone of you, left on earth. I'll put your body in the kiln,—I'd carry two such to it, on my Shoulders,—and, let people suppose what they may of you, they shall never know nothing."

My mind, with inconceivable rapidity followed out all the consequences of such a death. Estella's father would believe I had deserted him, would be taken, would die accusing me; even Herbert would doubt me, when he compared the letter I had left for him with the fact that I had called at Miss Havisham's gate for only a moment; Joe and Biddy would never know how sorry I had been that night, none would ever know what I had suffered, how true I had meant to be, what an agony I had passed through. The death close before me was terrible, but far more terrible than death was the dread of being misremembered after death. And so quick were my thoughts, that I saw myself despised by unborn generations,—Estella's children, and their children,—while the wretch's words were yet on his lips.

"Now, wolf," said he, "afore I kill you like any other beast,—which is wot I mean to do and wot I have tied you up for,—I'll have a good look at you and a good goad at you. O you enemy!"

It had passed through my thoughts to cry out for help again; though few could know better than I, the solitary nature of the spot, and the hopelessness of aid. But as he sat gloating over me, I was supported by a scornful detestation of him that sealed my lips. Above all things, I resolved that I would not entreat him, and that I would die making some last poor resistance to him. Softened as my thoughts of all the rest of men were in that dire extremity; humbly beseeching pardon, as I did, of Heaven; melted at heart, as I was, by the thought that I had taken no farewell, and never now could take farewell of those who were dear to me, or could explain myself to them, or ask for their compassion on my miserable errors,—still, if I could have killed him, even in dying, I would have done it.

He had been drinking, and his eyes were red and bloodshot. Around his neck was slung a tin bottle, as I had often seen his meat and drink slung about him in other days. He brought the bottle to his lips, and took a fiery drink from it; and I smelt the strong spirits that I saw flash into his face.

"Wolf!" said he, folding his arms again, "Old Orlick's a going to tell you somethink. It was you as did for your shrew sister."

Again my mind, with its former inconceivable rapidity, had exhausted the whole subject of the attack upon my sister, her illness, and her death, before his slow and hesitating speech had formed these words.

"It was you, villain," said I.

"I tell you it was your doing,—I tell you it was done through you," he retorted, catching up the gun, and making a blow with the stock at the vacant air between us. "I come upon her from behind, as I come upon you to-night. I giv' it her! I left her for dead, and if there had been a limekiln as nigh her as there is now nigh you, she shouldn't have come to life again. But it warn't Old Orlick as did it; it was you. You was favored, and he was bullied and beat. Old Orlick bullied and beat, eh? Now you pays for it. You done it; now you pays for it."

He drank again, and became more ferocious. I saw by his tilting of the bottle that there was no great quantity left in it. I distinctly understood that he was working himself up with its contents to make an end of me. I knew that every drop it held was a drop of my life. I knew that when I was changed into a part of the vapor that had crept towards me but a little while before, like my own warning ghost, he would do as he had done in my sister's case,—make all haste to the town, and be seen slouching about there drinking at the alehouses. My rapid mind pursued him to the town, made a picture of the street with him in it, and contrasted its lights and life with the lonely marsh and the white vapor creeping over it, into which I should have dissolved.

It was not only that I could have summed up years and years and years while he said a dozen words, but that what he did say presented pictures to me, and not mere words. In the excited and exalted state of my brain, I could not think of a place without seeing it, or of persons without seeing them. It is impossible to overstate the vividness of these images, and yet I was so intent, all the time, upon him himself,—who would not be intent on the tiger crouching to spring!—that I knew of the slightest action of his fingers.

When he had drunk this second time, he rose from the bench on which he sat, and pushed the table aside. Then, he took up the candle, and, shading it with his murderous hand so as to throw its light on me, stood before me, looking at me and enjoying the sight.

"Wolf, I'll tell you something more. It was Old Orlick as you tumbled over on your stairs that night."

I saw the staircase with its extinguished lamps. I saw the shadows of the heavy stair-rails, thrown by the watchman's lantern on the wall. I saw the rooms that I was never to see again; here, a door half open; there, a door closed; all the articles of furniture around.

"And why was Old Orlick there? I'll tell you something more, wolf. You and her have pretty well hunted me out of this country, so far as getting a easy living in it goes, and I've took up with new companions, and new masters. Some of 'em writes my letters when I wants 'em wrote,—do you mind?—writes my letters, wolf! They writes fifty hands; they're not like sneaking you, as writes but one. I've had a firm mind and a firm will to have your life, since you was down here at your sister's burying. I han't seen a way to get you safe, and I've looked arter you to know your ins and outs. For, says Old Orlick to himself, 'Somehow or another I'll have him!' What! When I looks for you, I finds your uncle Provis, eh?"

Mill Pond Bank, and Chinks's Basin, and the Old Green Copper Ropewalk, all so clear and plain! Provis in his rooms, the signal whose use was over, pretty Clara, the good motherly woman, old Bill Barley on his back, all drifting by, as on the swift stream of my life fast running out to sea!

"You with a uncle too! Why, I know'd you at Gargery's when you was so small a wolf that I could have took your weazen betwixt this finger and thumb and chucked you away dead (as I'd thoughts o' doing, odd times, when I see you loitering amongst the pollards on a Sunday), and you hadn't found no uncles then. No, not you! But when Old Orlick come for to hear that your uncle Provis had most like wore the leg-iron wot Old Orlick had picked up, filed asunder, on these meshes ever so many year ago, and wot he kep by him till he dropped your sister with it, like a bullock, as he means to drop you—hey?—when he come for to hear that—hey?"

In his savage taunting, he flared the candle so close at me that I turned my face aside to save it from the flame.

"Ah!" he cried, laughing, after doing it again, "the burnt child dreads the fire! Old Orlick knowed you was burnt, Old Orlick knowed you was smuggling your uncle Provis away, Old Orlick's a match for you and know'd you'd come to-night! Now I'll tell you something more, wolf, and this ends it. There's them that's as good a match for your uncle Provis as Old Orlick has been for you. Let him 'ware them, when he's lost his nevvy! Let him 'ware them, when no man can't find a rag of his dear relation's clothes, nor yet a bone of his body. There's them that can't and that won't have Magwitch,—yes, I know the name!—alive in the same land with them, and that's had such sure information of him when he was alive in another land, as that he couldn't and shouldn't leave it unbeknown and put them in danger. P'raps it's them that writes fifty hands, and that's not like sneaking you as writes but one. 'Ware Compeyson, Magwitch, and the gallows!"

He flared the candle at me again, smoking my face and hair, and for an instant blinding me, and turned his powerful back as he replaced the light on the table. I had thought a prayer, and had been with Joe and Biddy and Herbert, before he turned towards me again.

There was a clear space of a few feet between the table and the opposite wall. Within this space, he now slouched backwards and forwards. His great strength seemed to sit stronger upon him than ever before, as he did this with his hands hanging loose and heavy at his sides, and with his eyes scowling at me. I had no grain of hope left. Wild as my inward hurry was, and wonderful the force of the pictures that rushed by me instead of thoughts, I could yet clearly understand that, unless he had resolved that I was within a few moments of surely perishing out of all human knowledge, he would never have told me what he had told.

Of a sudden, he stopped, took the cork out of his bottle, and tossed it away. Light as it was, I heard it fall like a plummet. He swallowed slowly, tilting up the bottle by little and little, and now he looked at me no more. The last few drops of liquor he poured into the palm of his hand, and licked up. Then, with a sudden hurry of violence and swearing horribly, he threw the bottle from him, and stooped; and I saw in his hand a stone-hammer with a long heavy handle.

The resolution I had made did not desert me, for, without uttering one vain word of appeal to him, I shouted out with all my might, and struggled with all my might. It was only my head and my legs that I could move, but to that extent I struggled with all the force, until then unknown, that was within me. In the same instant I heard responsive shouts, saw figures and a gleam of light dash in at the door, heard voices and tumult, and saw Orlick emerge from a struggle of men, as if it were tumbling water, clear the table at a leap, and fly out into the night.

After a blank, I found that I was lying unbound, on the floor, in the same place, with my head on some one's knee. My eyes were fixed on the ladder against the wall, when I came to myself,—had opened on it before my mind saw it,—and thus as I recovered consciousness, I knew that I was in the place where I had lost it.

Too indifferent at first, even to look round and ascertain who supported me, I was lying looking at the ladder, when there came between me and it a face. The face of Trabb's boy!

"I think he's all right!" said Trabb's boy, in a sober voice; "but ain't he just pale though!"

At these words, the face of him who supported me looked over into mine, and I saw my supporter to be—

"Herbert! Great Heaven!"

"Softly," said Herbert. "Gently, Handel. Don't be too eager."

"And our old comrade, Startop!" I cried, as he too bent over me.

"Remember what he is going to assist us in," said Herbert, "and be calm."

The allusion made me spring up; though I dropped again from the pain in my arm. "The time has not gone by, Herbert, has it? What night is to-night? How long have I been here?" For, I had a strange and strong misgiving that I had been lying there a long time—a day and a night,—two days and nights,—more.

"The time has not gone by. It is still Monday night."

"Thank God!"

"And you have all to-morrow, Tuesday, to rest in," said Herbert. "But you can't help groaning, my dear Handel. What hurt have you got? Can you stand?"

"Yes, yes," said I, "I can walk. I have no hurt but in this throbbing arm."

They laid it bare, and did what they could. It was violently swollen and inflamed, and I could scarcely endure to have it touched. But, they tore up their handkerchiefs to make fresh bandages, and carefully replaced it in the sling, until we could get to the town and obtain some cooling lotion to put upon it. In a little while we had shut the door of the dark and empty sluice-house, and were passing through the quarry on our way back. Trabb's boy—Trabb's overgrown young man now—went before us with a lantern, which was the light I had seen come in at the door. But, the moon was a good two hours higher than when I had last seen the sky, and the night, though rainy, was much lighter. The white vapor of the kiln was passing from us as we went by, and as I had thought a prayer before, I thought a thanksgiving now.

Entreating Herbert to tell me how he had come to my rescue,—which at first he had flatly refused to do, but had insisted on my remaining quiet,—I learnt that I had in my hurry dropped the letter, open, in our chambers, where he, coming home to bring with him Startop whom he had met in the street on his way to me, found it, very soon after I was gone. Its tone made him uneasy, and the more so because of the inconsistency between it and the hasty letter I had left for him. His uneasiness increasing instead of subsiding, after a quarter of an hour's consideration, he set off for the coach-office with Startop, who volunteered his company, to make inquiry when the next coach went down. Finding that the afternoon coach was gone, and finding that his uneasiness grew into positive alarm, as obstacles came in his way, he resolved to follow in a post-chaise. So he and Startop arrived at the Blue Boar, fully expecting there to find me, or tidings of me; but, finding neither, went on to Miss Havisham's, where they lost me. Hereupon they went back to the hotel (doubtless at about the time when I was hearing the popular local version of my own story) to refresh themselves and to get some one to guide them out upon the marshes. Among the loungers under the Boar's archway happened to be Trabb's Boy,—true to his ancient habit of happening to be everywhere where he had no business,—and Trabb's boy had seen me passing from Miss Havisham's in the direction of my dining-place. Thus Trabb's boy became their guide, and with him they went out to the sluice-house, though by the town way to the marshes, which I had avoided. Now, as they went along, Herbert reflected, that I might, after all, have been brought there on some genuine and serviceable errand tending to Provis's safety, and, bethinking himself that in that case interruption must be mischievous, left his guide and Startop on the edge of the quarry, and went on by himself, and stole round the house two or three times, endeavouring to ascertain whether all was right within. As he could hear nothing but indistinct sounds of one deep rough voice (this was while my mind was so busy), he even at last began to doubt whether I was there, when suddenly I cried out loudly, and he answered the cries, and rushed in, closely followed by the other two.

When I told Herbert what had passed within the house, he was for our immediately going before a magistrate in the town, late at night as it was, and getting out a warrant. But, I had already considered that such a course, by detaining us there, or binding us to come back, might be fatal to Provis. There was no gainsaying this difficulty, and we relinquished all thoughts of pursuing Orlick at that time. For the present, under the circumstances, we deemed it prudent to make rather light of the matter to Trabb's boy; who, I am convinced, would have been much affected by disappointment, if he had known that his intervention saved me from the limekiln. Not that Trabb's boy was of a malignant nature, but that he had too much spare vivacity, and that it was in his constitution to want variety and excitement at anybody's expense. When we parted, I presented him with two guineas (which seemed to meet his views), and told him that I was sorry ever to have had an ill opinion of him (which made no impression on him at all).

Wednesday being so close upon us, we determined to go back to London that night, three in the post-chaise; the rather, as we should then be clear away before the night's adventure began to be talked of. Herbert got a large bottle of stuff for my arm; and by dint of having this stuff dropped over it all the night through, I was just able to bear its pain on the journey. It was daylight when we reached the Temple, and I went at once to bed, and lay in bed all day.

My terror, as I lay there, of falling ill, and being unfitted for tomorrow, was so besetting, that I wonder it did not disable me of itself. It would have done so, pretty surely, in conjunction with the mental wear and tear I had suffered, but for the unnatural strain upon me that to-morrow was. So anxiously looked forward to, charged with such consequences, its results so impenetrably hidden, though so near.

No precaution could have been more obvious than our refraining from communication with him that day; yet this again increased my restlessness. I started at every footstep and every sound, believing that he was discovered and taken, and this was the messenger to tell me so. I persuaded myself that I knew he was taken; that there was something more upon my mind than a fear or a presentiment; that the fact had occurred, and I had a mysterious knowledge of it. As the days wore on, and no ill news came, as the day closed in and darkness fell, my overshadowing dread of being disabled by illness before to-morrow morning altogether mastered me. My burning arm throbbed, and my burning head throbbed, and I fancied I was beginning to wander. I counted up to high numbers, to make sure of myself, and repeated passages that I knew in prose and verse. It happened sometimes that in the mere escape of a fatigued mind, I dozed for some moments or forgot; then I would say to myself with a start, "Now it has come, and I am turning delirious!"

They kept me very quiet all day, and kept my arm constantly dressed, and gave me cooling drinks. Whenever I fell asleep, I awoke with the notion I had had in the sluice-house, that a long time had elapsed and the opportunity to save him was gone. About midnight I got out of bed and went to Herbert, with the conviction that I had been asleep for four-and-twenty hours, and that Wednesday was past. It was the last self-exhausting effort of my fretfulness, for after that I slept soundly.

Wednesday morning was dawning when I looked out of window. The winking lights upon the bridges were already pale, the coming sun was like a marsh of fire on the horizon. The river, still dark and mysterious, was spanned by bridges that were turning coldly gray, with here and there at top a warm touch from the burning in the sky. As I looked along the clustered roofs, with church-towers and spires shooting into the unusually clear air, the sun rose up, and a veil seemed to be drawn from the river, and millions of sparkles burst out upon its waters. From me too, a veil seemed to be drawn, and I felt strong and well.

Herbert lay asleep in his bed, and our old fellow-student lay asleep on the sofa. I could not dress myself without help; but I made up the fire, which was still burning, and got some coffee ready for them. In good time they too started up strong and well, and we admitted the sharp morning air at the windows, and looked at the tide that was still flowing towards us.

"When it turns at nine o'clock," said Herbert, cheerfully, "look out for us, and stand ready, you over there at Mill Pond Bank!"

Chapter LIV

It was one of those March days when the sun shines hot and the wind blows cold: when it is summer in the light, and winter in the shade. We had out pea-coats with us, and I took a bag. Of all my worldly possessions I took no more than the few necessaries that filled the bag. Where I might go, what I might do, or when I might return, were questions utterly unknown to me; nor did I vex my mind with them, for it was wholly set on Provis's safety. I only wondered for the passing moment, as I stopped at the door and looked back, under what altered circumstances I should next see those rooms, if ever.

We loitered down to the Temple stairs, and stood loitering there, as if we were not quite decided to go upon the water at all. Of course, I had taken care that the boat should be ready and everything in order. After a little show of indecision, which there were none to see but the two or three amphibious creatures belonging to our Temple stairs, we went on board and cast off; Herbert in the bow, I steering. It was then about high-water,—half-past eight.

Our plan was this. The tide, beginning to run down at nine, and being with us until three, we intended still to creep on after it had turned, and row against it until dark. We should then be well in those long reaches below Gravesend, between Kent and Essex, where the river is broad and solitary, where the water-side inhabitants are very few, and where lone public-houses are scattered here and there, of which we could choose one for a resting-place. There, we meant to lie by all night. The steamer for Hamburg and the steamer for Rotterdam would start from London at about nine on Thursday morning. We should know at what time to expect them, according to where we were, and would hail the first; so that, if by any accident we were not taken abroad, we should have another chance. We knew the distinguishing marks of each vessel.

The relief of being at last engaged in the execution of the purpose was so great to me that I felt it difficult to realize the condition in which I had been a few hours before. The crisp air, the sunlight, the movement on the river, and the moving river itself,—the road that ran with us, seeming to sympathize with us, animate us, and encourage us on,—freshened me with new hope. I felt mortified to be of so little use in the boat; but, there were few better oarsmen than my two friends, and they rowed with a steady stroke that was to last all day.

At that time, the steam-traffic on the Thames was far below its present extent, and watermen's boats were far more numerous. Of barges, sailing colliers, and coasting-traders, there were perhaps, as many as now; but of steam-ships, great and small, not a tithe or a twentieth part so many. Early as it was, there were plenty of scullers going here and there that morning, and plenty of barges dropping down with the tide; the navigation of the river between bridges, in an open boat, was a much easier and commoner matter in those days than it is in these; and we went ahead among many skiffs and wherries briskly.

Old London Bridge was soon passed, and old Billingsgate Market with its oyster-boats and Dutchmen, and the White Tower and Traitor's Gate, and we were in among the tiers of shipping. Here were the Leith, Aberdeen, and Glasgow steamers, loading and unloading goods, and looking immensely high out of the water as we passed alongside; here, were colliers by the score and score, with the coal-whippers plunging off stages on deck, as counterweights to measures of coal swinging up, which were then rattled over the side into barges; here, at her moorings was to-morrow's steamer for Rotterdam, of which we took good notice; and here to-morrow's for Hamburg, under whose bowsprit we crossed. And now I, sitting in the stern, could see, with a faster beating heart, Mill Pond Bank and Mill Pond stairs.

"Is he there?" said Herbert.

"Not yet."

"Right! He was not to come down till he saw us. Can you see his signal?"

"Not well from here; but I think I see it.—Now I see him! Pull both. Easy, Herbert. Oars!"

We touched the stairs lightly for a single moment, and he was on board, and we were off again. He had a boat-cloak with him, and a black canvas bag; and he looked as like a river-pilot as my heart could have wished.

"Dear boy!" he said, putting his arm on my shoulder, as he took his seat. "Faithful dear boy, well done. Thankye, thankye!"

Again among the tiers of shipping, in and out, avoiding rusty chain-cables frayed hempen hawsers and bobbing buoys, sinking for the moment floating broken baskets, scattering floating chips of wood and shaving, cleaving floating scum of coal, in and out, under the figure-head of the John of Sunderland making a speech to the winds (as is done by many Johns), and the Betsy of Yarmouth with a firm formality of bosom and her knobby eyes starting two inches out of her head; in and out, hammers going in shipbuilders' yards, saws going at timber, clashing engines going at things unknown, pumps going in leaky ships, capstans going, ships going out to sea, and unintelligible sea-creatures roaring curses over the bulwarks at respondent lightermen, in and out,—out at last upon the clearer river, where the ships' boys might take their fenders in, no longer fishing in troubled waters with them over the side, and where the festooned sails might fly out to the wind.

At the Stairs where we had taken him abroad, and ever since, I had looked warily for any token of our being suspected. I had seen none. We certainly had not been, and at that time as certainly we were not either attended or followed by any boat. If we had been waited on by any boat, I should have run in to shore, and have obliged her to go on, or to make her purpose evident. But we held our own without any appearance of molestation.

He had his boat-cloak on him, and looked, as I have said, a natural part of the scene. It was remarkable (but perhaps the wretched life he had led accounted for it) that he was the least anxious of any of us. He was not indifferent, for he told me that he hoped to live to see his gentleman one of the best of gentlemen in a foreign country; he was not disposed to be passive or resigned, as I understood it; but he had no notion of meeting danger half way. When it came upon him, he confronted it, but it must come before he troubled himself.

"If you knowed, dear boy," he said to me, "what it is to sit here alonger my dear boy and have my smoke, arter having been day by day betwixt four walls, you'd envy me. But you don't know what it is."

"I think I know the delights of freedom," I answered.

"Ah," said he, shaking his head gravely. "But you don't know it equal to me. You must have been under lock and key, dear boy, to know it equal to me,—but I ain't a going to be low."

It occurred to me as inconsistent, that, for any mastering idea, he should have endangered his freedom, and even his life. But I reflected that perhaps freedom without danger was too much apart from all the habit of his existence to be to him what it would be to another man. I was not far out, since he said, after smoking a little:—

"You see, dear boy, when I was over yonder, t'other side the world, I was always a looking to this side; and it come flat to be there, for all I was a growing rich. Everybody knowed Magwitch, and Magwitch could come, and Magwitch could go, and nobody's head would be troubled about him. They ain't so easy concerning me here, dear boy,—wouldn't be, leastwise, if they knowed where I was."

"If all goes well," said I, "you will be perfectly free and safe again within a few hours."

"Well," he returned, drawing a long breath, "I hope so."

"And think so?"

He dipped his hand in the water over the boat's gunwale, and said, smiling with that softened air upon him which was not new to me:—

"Ay, I s'pose I think so, dear boy. We'd be puzzled to be more quiet and easy-going than we are at present. But—it's a flowing so soft and pleasant through the water, p'raps, as makes me think it—I was a thinking through my smoke just then, that we can no more see to the bottom of the next few hours than we can see to the bottom of this river what I catches hold of. Nor yet we can't no more hold their tide than I can hold this. And it's run through my fingers and gone, you see!" holding up his dripping hand.

"But for your face I should think you were a little despondent," said I.

"Not a bit on it, dear boy! It comes of flowing on so quiet, and of that there rippling at the boat's head making a sort of a Sunday tune. Maybe I'm a growing a trifle old besides."

He put his pipe back in his mouth with an undisturbed expression of face, and sat as composed and contented as if we were already out of England. Yet he was as submissive to a word of advice as if he had been in constant terror; for, when we ran ashore to get some bottles of beer into the boat, and he was stepping out, I hinted that I thought he would be safest where he was, and he said. "Do you, dear boy?" and quietly sat down again.

The air felt cold upon the river, but it was a bright day, and the sunshine was very cheering. The tide ran strong, I took care to lose none of it, and our steady stroke carried us on thoroughly well. By imperceptible degrees, as the tide ran out, we lost more and more of the nearer woods and hills, and dropped lower and lower between the muddy banks, but the tide was yet with us when we were off Gravesend. As our charge was wrapped in his cloak, I purposely passed within a boat or two's length of the floating Custom House, and so out to catch the stream, alongside of two emigrant ships, and under the bows of a large transport with troops on the forecastle looking down at us. And soon the tide began to slacken, and the craft lying at anchor to swing, and presently they had all swung round, and the ships that were taking advantage of the new tide to get up to the Pool began to crowd upon us in a fleet, and we kept under the shore, as much out of the strength of the tide now as we could, standing carefully off from low shallows and mudbanks.

Our oarsmen were so fresh, by dint of having occasionally let her drive with the tide for a minute or two, that a quarter of an hour's rest proved full as much as they wanted. We got ashore among some slippery stones while we ate and drank what we had with us, and looked about. It was like my own marsh country, flat and monotonous, and with a dim horizon; while the winding river turned and turned, and the great floating buoys upon it turned and turned, and everything else seemed stranded and still. For now the last of the fleet of ships was round the last low point we had headed; and the last green barge, straw-laden, with a brown sail, had followed; and some ballast-lighters, shaped like a child's first rude imitation of a boat, lay low in the mud; and a little squat shoal-lighthouse on open piles stood crippled in the mud on stilts and crutches; and slimy stakes stuck out of the mud, and slimy stones stuck out of the mud, and red landmarks and tidemarks stuck out of the mud, and an old landing-stage and an old roofless building slipped into the mud, and all about us was stagnation and mud.

We pushed off again, and made what way we could. It was much harder work now, but Herbert and Startop persevered, and rowed and rowed and rowed until the sun went down. By that time the river had lifted us a little, so that we could see above the bank. There was the red sun, on the low level of the shore, in a purple haze, fast deepening into black; and there was the solitary flat marsh; and far away there were the rising grounds, between which and us there seemed to be no life, save here and there in the foreground a melancholy gull.

As the night was fast falling, and as the moon, being past the full, would not rise early, we held a little council; a short one, for clearly our course was to lie by at the first lonely tavern we could find. So, they plied their oars once more, and I looked out for anything like a house. Thus we held on, speaking little, for four or five dull miles. It was very cold, and, a collier coming by us, with her galley-fire smoking and flaring, looked like a comfortable home. The night was as dark by this time as it would be until morning; and what light we had, seemed to come more from the river than the sky, as the oars in their dipping struck at a few reflected stars.

At this dismal time we were evidently all possessed by the idea that we were followed. As the tide made, it flapped heavily at irregular intervals against the shore; and whenever such a sound came, one or other of us was sure to start, and look in that direction. Here and there, the set of the current had worn down the bank into a little creek, and we were all suspicious of such places, and eyed them nervously. Sometimes, "What was that ripple?" one of us would say in a low voice. Or another, "Is that a boat yonder?" And afterwards we would fall into a dead silence, and I would sit impatiently thinking with what an unusual amount of noise the oars worked in the thowels.

At length we descried a light and a roof, and presently afterwards ran alongside a little causeway made of stones that had been picked up hard by. Leaving the rest in the boat, I stepped ashore, and found the light to be in a window of a public-house. It was a dirty place enough, and I dare say not unknown to smuggling adventurers; but there was a good fire in the kitchen, and there were eggs and bacon to eat, and various liquors to drink. Also, there were two double-bedded rooms,—"such as they were," the landlord said. No other company was in the house than the landlord, his wife, and a grizzled male creature, the "Jack" of the little causeway, who was as slimy and smeary as if he had been low-water mark too.

With this assistant, I went down to the boat again, and we all came ashore, and brought out the oars, and rudder and boat-hook, and all else, and hauled her up for the night. We made a very good meal by the kitchen fire, and then apportioned the bedrooms: Herbert and Startop were to occupy one; I and our charge the other. We found the air as carefully excluded from both, as if air were fatal to life; and there were more dirty clothes and bandboxes under the beds than I should have thought the family possessed. But we considered ourselves well off, notwithstanding, for a more solitary place we could not have found.

While we were comforting ourselves by the fire after our meal, the Jack—who was sitting in a corner, and who had a bloated pair of shoes on, which he had exhibited while we were eating our eggs and bacon, as interesting relics that he had taken a few days ago from the feet of a drowned seaman washed ashore—asked me if we had seen a four-oared galley going up with the tide? When I told him No, he said she must have gone down then, and yet she "took up too," when she left there.

"They must ha' thought better on't for some reason or another," said the Jack, "and gone down."

"A four-oared galley, did you say?" said I.

"A four," said the Jack, "and two sitters."

"Did they come ashore here?"

"They put in with a stone two-gallon jar for some beer. I'd ha' been glad to pison the beer myself," said the Jack, "or put some rattling physic in it."

"Why?"

"I know why," said the Jack. He spoke in a slushy voice, as if much mud had washed into his throat.

"He thinks," said the landlord, a weakly meditative man with a pale eye, who seemed to rely greatly on his Jack,—"he thinks they was, what they wasn't."

"I knows what I thinks," observed the Jack.

"You thinks Custum 'Us, Jack?" said the landlord.

"I do," said the Jack.

"Then you're wrong, Jack."

"AM I!"

In the infinite meaning of his reply and his boundless confidence in his views, the Jack took one of his bloated shoes off, looked into it, knocked a few stones out of it on the kitchen floor, and put it on again. He did this with the air of a Jack who was so right that he could afford to do anything.

"Why, what do you make out that they done with their buttons then, Jack?" asked the landlord, vacillating weakly.

"Done with their buttons?" returned the Jack. "Chucked 'em overboard. Swallered 'em. Sowed 'em, to come up small salad. Done with their buttons!"

"Don't be cheeky, Jack," remonstrated the landlord, in a melancholy and pathetic way.

"A Custum 'Us officer knows what to do with his Buttons," said the Jack, repeating the obnoxious word with the greatest contempt, "when they comes betwixt him and his own light. A four and two sitters don't go hanging and hovering, up with one tide and down with another, and both with and against another, without there being Custum 'Us at the bottom of it." Saying which he went out in disdain; and the landlord, having no one to reply upon, found it impracticable to pursue the subject.

This dialogue made us all uneasy, and me very uneasy. The dismal wind was muttering round the house, the tide was flapping at the shore, and I had a feeling that we were caged and threatened. A four-oared galley hovering about in so unusual a way as to attract this notice was an ugly circumstance that I could not get rid of. When I had induced Provis to go up to bed, I went outside with my two companions (Startop by this time knew the state of the case), and held another council. Whether we should remain at the house until near the steamer's time, which would be about one in the afternoon, or whether we should put off early in the morning, was the question we discussed. On the whole we deemed it the better course to lie where we were, until within an hour or so of the steamer's time, and then to get out in her track, and drift easily with the tide. Having settled to do this, we returned into the house and went to bed.

I lay down with the greater part of my clothes on, and slept well for a few hours. When I awoke, the wind had risen, and the sign of the house (the Ship) was creaking and banging about, with noises that startled me. Rising softly, for my charge lay fast asleep, I looked out of the window. It commanded the causeway where we had hauled up our boat, and, as my eyes adapted themselves to the light of the clouded moon, I saw two men looking into her. They passed by under the window, looking at nothing else, and they did not go down to the landing-place which I could discern to be empty, but struck across the marsh in the direction of the Nore.

My first impulse was to call up Herbert, and show him the two men going away. But reflecting, before I got into his room, which was at the back of the house and adjoined mine, that he and Startop had had a harder day than I, and were fatigued, I forbore. Going back to my window, I could see the two men moving over the marsh. In that light, however, I soon lost them, and, feeling very cold, lay down to think of the matter, and fell asleep again.

We were up early. As we walked to and fro, all four together, before breakfast, I deemed it right to recount what I had seen. Again our charge was the least anxious of the party. It was very likely that the men belonged to the Custom House, he said quietly, and that they had no thought of us. I tried to persuade myself that it was so,—as, indeed, it might easily be. However, I proposed that he and I should walk away together to a distant point we could see, and that the boat should take us aboard there, or as near there as might prove feasible, at about noon. This being considered a good precaution, soon after breakfast he and I set forth, without saying anything at the tavern.

He smoked his pipe as we went along, and sometimes stopped to clap me on the shoulder. One would have supposed that it was I who was in danger, not he, and that he was reassuring me. We spoke very little. As we approached the point, I begged him to remain in a sheltered place, while I went on to reconnoitre; for it was towards it that the men had passed in the night. He complied, and I went on alone. There was no boat off the point, nor any boat drawn up anywhere near it, nor were there any signs of the men having embarked there. But, to be sure, the tide was high, and there might have been some footpints under water.

When he looked out from his shelter in the distance, and saw that I waved my hat to him to come up, he rejoined me, and there we waited; sometimes lying on the bank, wrapped in our coats, and sometimes moving about to warm ourselves, until we saw our boat coming round. We got aboard easily, and rowed out into the track of the steamer. By that time it wanted but ten minutes of one o'clock, and we began to look out for her smoke.

But, it was half-past one before we saw her smoke, and soon afterwards we saw behind it the smoke of another steamer. As they were coming on at full speed, we got the two bags ready, and took that opportunity of saying good by to Herbert and Startop. We had all shaken hands cordially, and neither Herbert's eyes nor mine were quite dry, when I saw a four-oared galley shoot out from under the bank but a little way ahead of us, and row out into the same track.

A stretch of shore had been as yet between us and the steamer's smoke, by reason of the bend and wind of the river; but now she was visible, coming head on. I called to Herbert and Startop to keep before the tide, that she might see us lying by for her, and I adjured Provis to sit quite still, wrapped in his cloak. He answered cheerily, "Trust to me, dear boy," and sat like a statue. Meantime the galley, which was very skilfully handled, had crossed us, let us come up with her, and fallen alongside. Leaving just room enough for the play of the oars, she kept alongside, drifting when we drifted, and pulling a stroke or two when we pulled. Of the two sitters one held the rudder-lines, and looked at us attentively,—as did all the rowers;

the other sitter was wrapped up, much as Provis was, and seemed to shrink, and whisper some instruction to the steerer as he looked at us. Not a word was spoken in either boat.

Startop could make out, after a few minutes, which steamer was first, and gave me the word "Hamburg," in a low voice, as we sat face to face. She was nearing us very fast, and the beating of her peddles grew louder and louder. I felt as if her shadow were absolutely upon us, when the galley hailed us. I answered.

"You have a returned Transport there," said the man who held the lines. "That's the man, wrapped in the cloak. His name is Abel Magwitch, otherwise Provis. I apprehend that man, and call upon him to surrender, and you to assist."

At the same moment, without giving any audible direction to his crew, he ran the galley abroad of us. They had pulled one sudden stroke ahead, had got their oars in, had run athwart us, and were holding on to our gunwale, before we knew what they were doing. This caused great confusion on board the steamer, and I heard them calling to us, and heard the order given to stop the paddles, and heard them stop, but felt her driving down upon us irresistibly. In the same moment, I saw the steersman of the galley lay his hand on his prisoner's shoulder, and saw that both boats were swinging round with the force of the tide, and saw that all hands on board the steamer were running forward quite frantically. Still, in the same moment, I saw the prisoner start up, lean across his captor, and pull the cloak from the neck of the shrinking sitter in the galley. Still in the same moment, I saw that the face disclosed, was the face of the other convict of long ago. Still, in the same moment, I saw the face tilt backward with a white terror on it that I shall never forget, and heard a great cry on board the steamer, and a loud splash in the water, and felt the boat sink from under me.

It was but for an instant that I seemed to struggle with a thousand mill-weirs and a thousand flashes of light; that instant past, I was taken on board the galley. Herbert was there, and Startop was there; but our boat was gone, and the two convicts were gone.

What with the cries aboard the steamer, and the furious blowing off of her steam, and her driving on, and our driving on, I could not at first distinguish sky from water or shore from shore; but the crew of the galley righted her with great speed, and, pulling certain swift strong strokes ahead, lay upon their oars, every man looking silently and eagerly at the water astern. Presently a dark object was seen in it, bearing towards us on the tide. No man spoke, but the steersman held up his hand, and all softly backed water, and kept the boat straight and true before it. As it came nearer, I saw it to be Magwitch, swimming, but not swimming freely. He was taken on board, and instantly manacled at the wrists and ankles.

The galley was kept steady, and the silent, eager look-out at the water was resumed. But, the Rotterdam steamer now came up, and apparently not understanding what had happened, came on at speed. By the time she had been hailed and stopped, both steamers were drifting away from us, and we were rising and falling in a troubled wake of water. The look-out was kept, long after all was still again and the two steamers were gone; but everybody knew that it was hopeless now.

At length we gave it up, and pulled under the shore towards the tavern we had lately left, where we were received with no little surprise. Here I was able to get some comforts for Magwitch,—Provis no longer,—who had received some very severe injury in the Chest, and a deep cut in the head.

He told me that he believed himself to have gone under the keel of the steamer, and to have been struck on the head in rising. The injury to his chest (which rendered his breathing extremely painful) he thought he had received against the side of the galley. He added that he did not pretend to say what he might or might not have done to Compeyson, but that, in the moment of his laying his hand on his cloak to identify him, that villain had staggered up and staggered back, and they had both gone overboard together, when the sudden wrenching of him (Magwitch) out of our boat, and the endeavor of his captor to keep him in it, had capsized us. He told me in a whisper that they had gone down fiercely locked in each other's arms, and that there had been a struggle under water, and that he had disengaged himself, struck out, and swum away.

I never had any reason to doubt the exact truth of what he thus told me. The officer who steered the galley gave the same account of their going overboard.

When I asked this officer's permission to change the prisoner's wet clothes by purchasing any spare garments I could get at the public-house, he gave it readily: merely observing that he must take charge of everything his prisoner had about him. So the pocket-book which had once been in my hands passed into the officer's. He further gave me leave to accompany the prisoner to London; but declined to accord that grace to my two friends.

The Jack at the Ship was instructed where the drowned man had gone down, and undertook to search for the body in the places where it was likeliest to come ashore. His interest in its recovery seemed to me to be much heightened when he heard that it had stockings on. Probably, it took about a dozen drowned men to fit him out completely; and that may have been the reason why the different articles of his dress were in various stages of decay.

We remained at the public-house until the tide turned, and then Magwitch was carried down to the galley and put on board. Herbert and Startop were to get to London by land, as soon as they could. We had a doleful parting, and when I took my place by Magwitch's side, I felt that that was my place henceforth while he lived.

For now, my repugnance to him had all melted away; and in the Hunted, wounded, shackled creature who held my hand in his, I only saw a man who had meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously, towards me with great constancy through a series of years. I only saw in him a much better man than I had been to Joe.

His breathing became more difficult and painful as the night drew on, and often he could not repress a groan. I tried to rest him on the arm I could use, in any easy position; but it was dreadful to think that I could not be sorry at heart for his being badly hurt, since it was unquestionably best that he should die. That there were, still living, people enough who were able and willing to identify him, I could not doubt. That he would be leniently treated, I could not hope. He who had been presented in the worst light at his trial, who had since broken prison and had been tried again, who had returned from transportation under a life sentence, and who had occasioned the death of the man who was the cause of his arrest.

As we returned towards the setting sun we had yesterday left behind us, and as the stream of our hopes seemed all running back, I told him how grieved I was to think that he had come home for my sake.

"Dear boy," he answered, "I'm quite content to take my chance. I've seen my boy, and he can be a gentleman without me."

No. I had thought about that, while we had been there side by side. No. Apart from any inclinations of my own, I understood Wemmick's hint now.

I foresaw that, being convicted, his possessions would be forfeited to the Crown.

"Lookee here, dear boy," said he "It's best as a gentleman should not be knowed to belong to me now. Only come to see me as if you come by chance alonger Wemmick. Sit where I can see you when I am swore to, for the last o' many times, and I don't ask no more."

"I will never stir from your side," said I, "when I am suffered to be near you. Please God, I will be as true to you as you have been to me!"

I felt his hand tremble as it held mine, and he turned his face away as he lay in the bottom of the boat, and I heard that old sound in his throat,—softened now, like all the rest of him. It was a good thing that he had touched this point, for it put into my mind what I might not otherwise have thought of until too late,—that he need never know how his hopes of enriching me had perished.

Chapter LV

He was taken to the Police Court next day, and would have been immediately committed for trial, but that it was necessary to send down for an old officer of the prison-ship from which he had once escaped, to speak to his identity. Nobody doubted it; but Compeyson, who had meant to depose to it, was tumbling on the tides, dead, and it happened that there was not at that time any prison officer in London who could give the required evidence. I had gone direct to Mr. Jaggers at his private house, on my arrival over night, to retain his assistance, and Mr. Jaggers on the prisoner's behalf would admit nothing. It was the sole resource; for he told me that the case must be over in five minutes when the witness was there, and that no power on earth could prevent its going against us.

I imparted to Mr. Jaggers my design of keeping him in ignorance of the fate of his wealth. Mr. Jaggers was querulous and angry with me for having "let it slip through my fingers," and said we must memorialize by and by, and try at all events for some of it. But he did not conceal from me that, although there might be many cases in which the forfeiture would not be exacted, there were no circumstances in this case to make it one of them. I understood that very well. I was not related to the outlaw, or connected with him by any recognizable tie; he had put his hand to no writing or settlement in my favor before his apprehension, and to do so now would be idle. I had no claim, and I finally resolved, and ever afterwards abided by the resolution, that my heart should never be sickened with the hopeless task of attempting to establish one.

There appeared to be reason for supposing that the drowned informer had hoped for a reward out of this forfeiture, and had obtained some accurate knowledge of Magwitch's affairs. When his body was found, many miles from the scene of his death, and so horribly disfigured that he was only recognizable by the contents of his pockets, notes were still legible, folded in a case he carried. Among these were the name of a banking-house in New South Wales, where a sum of money was, and the designation of certain lands of considerable value. Both these heads of information were in a list that Magwitch, while in prison, gave to Mr. Jaggers, of the possessions he supposed I should inherit. His ignorance, poor fellow, at last served him;

he never mistrusted but that my inheritance was quite safe, with Mr. Jaggers's aid.

After three days' delay, during which the crown prosecution stood over for the production of the witness from the prison-ship, the witness came, and completed the easy case. He was committed to take his trial at the next Sessions, which would come on in a month.

It was at this dark time of my life that Herbert returned home one evening, a good deal cast down, and said,—

"My dear Handel, I fear I shall soon have to leave you."

His partner having prepared me for that, I was less surprised than he thought.

"We shall lose a fine opportunity if I put off going to Cairo, and I am very much afraid I must go, Handel, when you most need me."

"Herbert, I shall always need you, because I shall always love you; but my need is no greater now than at another time."

"You will be so lonely."

"I have not leisure to think of that," said I. "You know that I am always with him to the full extent of the time allowed, and that I should be with him all day long, if I could. And when I come away from him, you know that my thoughts are with him."

The dreadful condition to which he was brought, was so appalling to both of us, that we could not refer to it in plainer words.

"My dear fellow," said Herbert, "let the near prospect of our separation—for, it is very near—be my justification for troubling you about yourself. Have you thought of your future?"

"No, for I have been afraid to think of any future."

"But yours cannot be dismissed; indeed, my dear dear Handel, it must not be dismissed. I wish you would enter on it now, as far as a few friendly words go, with me."

"I will," said I.

"In this branch house of ours, Handel, we must have a—"

I saw that his delicacy was avoiding the right word, so I said, "A clerk."

"A clerk. And I hope it is not at all unlikely that he may expand (as a clerk of your acquaintance has expanded) into a partner. Now, Handel,—in short, my dear boy, will you come to me?"

There was something charmingly cordial and engaging in the manner in which after saying "Now, Handel," as if it were the grave beginning of a portentous business exordium, he had suddenly given up that tone, stretched out his honest hand, and spoken like a schoolboy.

"Clara and I have talked about it again and again," Herbert pursued, "and the dear little thing begged me only this evening, with tears in her eyes, to say to you that, if you will live with us when we come together, she will do her best to make you happy, and to convince her husband's friend that he is her friend too. We should get on so well, Handel!"

I thanked her heartily, and I thanked him heartily, but said I could not yet make sure of joining him as he so kindly offered. Firstly, my mind was too preoccupied to be able to take in the subject clearly. Secondly,—Yes! Secondly, there was a vague something lingering in my thoughts that will come out very near the end of this slight narrative.

"But if you thought, Herbert, that you could, without doing any injury to your business, leave the question open for a little while—"

"For any while," cried Herbert. "Six months, a year!"

"Not so long as that," said I. "Two or three months at most."

Herbert was highly delighted when we shook hands on this arrangement, and said he could now take courage to tell me that he believed he must go away at the end of the week.

"And Clara?" said I.

"The dear little thing," returned Herbert, "holds dutifully to her father as long as he lasts; but he won't last long. Mrs. Whimple confides to me that he is certainly going."

"Not to say an unfeeling thing," said I, "he cannot do better than go."

"I am afraid that must be admitted," said Herbert; "and then I shall come back for the dear little thing, and the dear little thing and I will walk quietly into the nearest church. Remember! The blessed darling comes of no family, my dear Handel, and never looked into the red book, and hasn't a notion about her grandpapa. What a fortune for the son of my mother!"

On the Saturday in that same week, I took my leave of Herbert,—full of bright hope, but sad and sorry to leave me,—as he sat on one of the seaport mail coaches. I went into a coffee-house to write a little note to Clara, telling her he had gone off, sending his love to her over and over again, and then went to my lonely home,—if it deserved the name; for it was now no home to me, and I had no home anywhere.

On the stairs I encountered Wemmick, who was coming down, after an unsuccessful application of his knuckles to my door. I had not seen him alone since the disastrous issue of the attempted flight; and he had come, in his private and personal capacity, to say a few words of explanation in reference to that failure.

"The late Compeyson," said Wemmick, "had by little and little got at the bottom of half of the regular business now transacted; and it was from the talk of some of his people in trouble (some of his people being always in trouble) that I heard what I did. I kept my ears open, seeming to have them shut, until I heard that he was absent, and I thought that would be the best time for making the attempt. I can only suppose now, that it was a part of his policy, as a very clever man, habitually to deceive his own instruments. You don't blame me, I hope, Mr. Pip? I am sure I tried to serve you, with all my heart."

"I am as sure of that, Wemmick, as you can be, and I thank you most earnestly for all your interest and friendship."

"Thank you, thank you very much. It's a bad job," said Wemmick, scratching his head, "and I assure you I haven't been so cut up for a long time. What I look at is the sacrifice of so much portable property. Dear me!"

"What I think of, Wemmick, is the poor owner of the property."

"Yes, to be sure," said Wemmick. "Of course, there can be no objection to your being sorry for him, and I'd put down a five-pound note myself to get him out of it. But what I look at is this. The late Compeyson having been beforehand with him in intelligence of his return, and being so determined to bring him to book, I do not think he could have been saved. Whereas, the portable property certainly could have been saved. That's the difference between the property and the owner, don't you see?"

I invited Wemmick to come up stairs, and refresh himself with a glass of grog before walking to Walworth. He accepted the invitation. While he was drinking his moderate allowance, he said, with nothing to lead up to it, and after having appeared rather fidgety,—

"What do you think of my meaning to take a holiday on Monday, Mr. Pip?"

"Why, I suppose you have not done such a thing these twelve months."

"These twelve years, more likely," said Wemmick. "Yes. I'm going to take a holiday. More than that; I'm going to take a walk. More than that; I'm going to ask you to take a walk with me."

I was about to excuse myself, as being but a bad companion just then, when Wemmick anticipated me.

"I know your engagements," said he, "and I know you are out of sorts, Mr. Pip. But if you could oblige me, I should take it as a kindness. It ain't a long walk, and it's an early one. Say it might occupy you (including breakfast on the walk) from eight to twelve. Couldn't you stretch a point and manage it?"

He had done so much for me at various times, that this was very little to do for him. I said I could manage it,—would manage it,—and he was so very much pleased by my acquiescence, that I was pleased too. At his particular request, I appointed to call for him at the Castle at half past eight on Monday morning, and so we parted for the time.

Punctual to my appointment, I rang at the Castle gate on the Monday morning, and was received by Wemmick himself, who struck me as looking tighter than usual, and having a sleeker hat on. Within, there were two glasses of rum and milk prepared, and two biscuits. The Aged must have been stirring with the lark, for, glancing into the perspective of his bedroom, I observed that his bed was empty.

When we had fortified ourselves with the rum and milk and biscuits, and were going out for the walk with that training preparation on us, I was considerably surprised to see Wemmick take up a fishing-rod, and put it over his shoulder. "Why, we are not going fishing!" said I. "No," returned Wemmick, "but I like to walk with one."

I thought this odd; however, I said nothing, and we set off. We went towards Camberwell Green, and when we were thereabouts, Wemmick said suddenly,—

"Halloa! Here's a church!"

There was nothing very surprising in that; but again, I was rather surprised, when he said, as if he were animated by a brilliant idea,—

"Let's go in!"

We went in, Wemmick leaving his fishing-rod in the porch, and looked all round. In the mean time, Wemmick was diving into his coat-pockets, and getting something out of paper there.

"Halloa!" said he. "Here's a couple of pair of gloves! Let's put 'em on!"

As the gloves were white kid gloves, and as the post-office was widened to its utmost extent, I now began to have my strong suspicions. They were strengthened into certainty when I beheld the Aged enter at a side door, escorting a lady.

"Halloa!" said Wemmick. "Here's Miss Skiffins! Let's have a wedding."

That discreet damsel was attired as usual, except that she was now engaged in substituting for her green kid gloves a pair of white. The Aged was likewise occupied in preparing a similar sacrifice for the altar of Hymen. The old gentleman, however, experienced so much difficulty in getting his gloves on, that Wemmick found it necessary to put him with his back against a pillar, and then to get behind the pillar himself and pull away at them, while I for my part held the old gentleman round the waist, that he might present and equal and safe resistance. By dint of this ingenious scheme, his gloves were got on to perfection.

The clerk and clergyman then appearing, we were ranged in order at those fatal rails. True to his notion of seeming to do it all without preparation, I heard Wemmick say to himself, as he took something out of his waistcoat-pocket before the service began, "Halloa! Here's a ring!"

I acted in the capacity of backer, or best-man, to the bridegroom; while a little limp pew-opener in a soft bonnet like a baby's, made a feint of being the bosom friend of Miss Skiffins. The responsibility of giving the lady away devolved upon the Aged, which led to the clergyman's being unintentionally scandalized, and it happened thus. When he said, "Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?" the old gentlemen, not in the least knowing what point of the ceremony we had arrived at, stood most amiably beaming at the ten commandments. Upon which, the clergyman said again, "WHO giveth this woman to be married to this man?" The old gentleman being still in a state of most estimable unconsciousness, the bridegroom cried out in his accustomed voice, "Now Aged P. you know; who giveth?" To which the Aged replied with great briskness, before saying that he gave, "All right, John, all right, my boy!" And the clergyman came to so gloomy a pause upon it, that I had doubts for the moment whether we should get completely married that day.

It was completely done, however, and when we were going out of church Wemmick took the cover off the font, and put his white gloves in it, and put the cover on again. Mrs. Wemmick, more heedful of the future, put her white gloves in her pocket and assumed her green. "Now, Mr. Pip," said Wemmick, triumphantly shouldering the fishing-rod as we came out, "let me ask you whether anybody would suppose this to be a wedding-party!"

Breakfast had been ordered at a pleasant little tavern, a mile or so away upon the rising ground beyond the green; and there was a bagatelle board in the room, in case we should desire to unbend our minds after the solemnity.

It was pleasant to observe that Mrs. Wemmick no longer unwound Wemmick's arm when it adapted itself to her figure, but sat in a high-backed chair against the wall, like a violoncello in its case, and submitted to be embraced as that melodious instrument might have done.

We had an excellent breakfast, and when any one declined anything on table, Wemmick said, "Provided by contract, you know; don't be afraid of it!" I drank to the new couple, drank to the Aged, drank to the Castle, saluted the bride at parting, and made myself as agreeable as I could.

Wemmick came down to the door with me, and I again shook hands with him, and wished him joy.

"Thankee!" said Wemmick, rubbing his hands. "She's such a manager of fowls, you have no idea. You shall have some eggs, and judge for yourself. I say, Mr. Pip!" calling me back, and speaking low. "This is altogether a Walworth sentiment, please."

"I understand. Not to be mentioned in Little Britain," said I.

Wemmick nodded. "After what you let out the other day, Mr. Jaggers may as well not know of it. He might think my brain was softening, or something of the kind."

Chapter LVI

He lay in prison very ill, during the whole interval between his committal for trial and the coming round of the Sessions. He had broken two ribs, they had wounded one of his lungs, and he breathed with great pain and difficulty, which increased daily. It was a consequence of his hurt that he spoke so low as to be scarcely audible; therefore he spoke very little. But he was ever ready to listen to me; and it became the first duty of my life to say to him, and read to him, what I knew he ought to hear.

Being far too ill to remain in the common prison, he was removed, after the first day or so, into the infirmary. This gave me opportunities of being with him that I could not otherwise have had. And but for his illness he would have been put in irons, for he was regarded as a determined prison-breaker, and I know not what else.

Although I saw him every day, it was for only a short time; hence, the regularly recurring spaces of our separation were long enough to record on his face any slight changes that occurred in his physical state. I do not recollect that I once saw any change in it for the better; he wasted, and became slowly weaker and worse, day by day, from the day when the prison door closed upon him.

The kind of submission or resignation that he showed was that of a man who was tired out. I sometimes derived an impression, from his manner or from a whispered word or two which escaped him, that he pondered over the question whether he might have been a better man under better circumstances. But he never justified himself by a hint tending that way, or tried to bend the past out of its eternal shape.

It happened on two or three occasions in my presence, that his desperate reputation was alluded to by one or other of the people in attendance on him. A smile crossed his face then, and he turned his eyes on me with a trustful look, as if he were confident that I had seen some small redeeming touch in him, even so long ago as when I was a little child. As to all the rest, he was humble and contrite, and I never knew him complain.

When the Sessions came round, Mr. Jaggers caused an application to be made for the postponement of his trial until the following Sessions. It was obviously made with the assurance that he could not live so long, and was refused. The trial came on at once, and, when he was put to the bar, he was seated in a chair. No objection was made to my getting close to the dock, on the outside of it, and holding the hand that he stretched forth to me.

The trial was very short and very clear. Such things as could be said for him were said,—how he had taken to industrious habits, and had thriven lawfully and reputably. But nothing could unsay the fact that he had returned, and was there in presence of the Judge and Jury. It was impossible to try him for that, and do otherwise than find him guilty.

At that time, it was the custom (as I learnt from my terrible experience of that Sessions) to devote a concluding day to the passing of Sentences, and to make a finishing effect with the Sentence of Death. But for the indelible picture that my remembrance now holds before me, I could scarcely believe, even as I write these words, that I saw two-and-thirty men and women put before the Judge to receive that sentence together. Foremost among the two-and-thirty was he; seated, that he might get breath enough to keep life in him.

The whole scene starts out again in the vivid colors of the moment, down to the drops of April rain on the windows of the court, glittering in the rays of April sun. Penned in the dock, as I again stood outside it at the corner with his hand in mine, were the two-and-thirty men and women; some defiant, some stricken with terror, some sobbing and weeping, some covering their faces, some staring gloomily about. There had been shrieks from among the women convicts; but they had been stilled, and a hush had succeeded. The sheriffs with their great chains and nosegays, other civic gewgaws and monsters, criers, ushers, a great gallery full of people,—a large theatrical audience,—looked on, as the two-and-thirty and the Judge were solemnly confronted. Then the Judge addressed them. Among the wretched creatures before him whom he must single out for special address was one who almost from his infancy had been an offender against the laws; who, after repeated imprisonments and punishments, had been at length sentenced to exile for a term of years; and who, under circumstances of great violence and daring, had made his escape and been re-sentenced to exile for life. That miserable man would seem for a time to have become convinced of his errors, when far removed from the scenes of his old offences, and to have lived a peaceable and honest life. But in a fatal moment, yielding to those propensities and passions, the indulgence of which had so long rendered him a scourge to society, he had quitted his haven of rest and repentance, and had come back to the country where he was proscribed. Being here presently denounced, he had for a time succeeded in evading the officers of Justice, but being at length seized while in the act of flight, he had resisted them, and had—he best knew whether by express design, or in the blindness of his hardihood—caused the death of his denouncer, to whom his whole career was known. The appointed punishment for his return to the land that had cast him out, being Death, and his case being this aggravated case, he must prepare himself to Die.

The sun was striking in at the great windows of the court, through the glittering drops of rain upon the glass, and it made a broad shaft of light between the two-and-thirty and the Judge, linking both together, and perhaps reminding some among the audience how both were passing on, with absolute equality, to the greater Judgment that knoweth all things, and cannot err. Rising for a moment, a distinct speck of face in this way of light, the prisoner said, "My Lord, I have received my sentence of Death from the Almighty, but I bow to yours," and sat down again. There was some hushing, and the Judge went on with what he had to say to the rest. Then they were all formally doomed, and some of them were supported out, and some of them sauntered out with a haggard look of bravery, and a few nodded to the gallery, and two or three shook hands, and others went out chewing the fragments of herb they had taken from the sweet herbs lying about. He went last of all, because of having to be helped from his chair, and to go very slowly; and he held my hand while all the others were removed, and while the audience got up (putting their dresses right, as they might at church or elsewhere), and pointed down at this criminal or at that, and most of all at him and me.

I earnestly hoped and prayed that he might die before the Recorder's Report was made; but, in the dread of his lingering on, I began that night to write out a petition to the Home Secretary of State, setting forth my knowledge of him, and how it was that he had come back for my sake. I wrote it as fervently and pathetically as I could; and when I had finished it and sent it in, I wrote out other petitions to such men in authority as I hoped were the most merciful, and drew up one to the Crown itself. For several days and nights after he was sentenced I took no rest except when I fell asleep in my chair, but was wholly absorbed in these appeals. And after I had sent them in, I could not keep away from the places where they were, but felt as if they were more hopeful and less desperate when I was near them. In this unreasonable restlessness and pain of mind I would roam the streets of an evening, wandering by those offices and houses where I had left the petitions. To the present hour, the weary western streets of London on a cold, dusty spring night, with their ranges of stern, shut-up mansions, and their long rows of lamps, are melancholy to me from this association.

The daily visits I could make him were shortened now, and he was more strictly kept. Seeing, or fancying, that I was suspected of an intention of carrying poison to him, I asked to be searched before I sat down at his bedside, and told the officer who was always there, that I was willing to do anything that would assure him of the singleness of my designs. Nobody was hard with him or with me. There was duty to be done, and it was done, but not harshly. The officer always gave me the assurance that he was worse, and some other sick prisoners in the room, and some other prisoners who attended on them as sick nurses, (malefactors, but not incapable of kindness, God be thanked!) always joined in the same report.

As the days went on, I noticed more and more that he would lie placidly looking at the white ceiling, with an absence of light in his face until some word of mine brightened it for an instant, and then it would subside again. Sometimes he was almost or quite unable to speak, then he would answer me with slight pressures on my hand, and I grew to understand his meaning very well.

The number of the days had risen to ten, when I saw a greater change in him than I had seen yet. His eyes were turned towards the door, and lighted up as I entered.

"Dear boy," he said, as I sat down by his bed: "I thought you was late. But I knowed you couldn't be that."

"It is just the time," said I. "I waited for it at the gate."

"You always waits at the gate; don't you, dear boy?"

"Yes. Not to lose a moment of the time."

"Thank'ee dear boy, thank'ee. God bless you! You've never deserted me, dear boy."

I pressed his hand in silence, for I could not forget that I had once meant to desert him.

"And what's the best of all," he said, "you've been more comfortable alonger me, since I was under a dark cloud, than when the sun shone. That's best of all."

He lay on his back, breathing with great difficulty. Do what he would, and love me though he did, the light left his face ever and again, and a film came over the placid look at the white ceiling.

"Are you in much pain to-day?"

"I don't complain of none, dear boy."

"You never do complain."

He had spoken his last words. He smiled, and I understood his touch to mean that he wished to lift my hand, and lay it on his breast. I laid it there, and he smiled again, and put both his hands upon it.

The allotted time ran out, while we were thus; but, looking round, I found the governor of the prison standing near me, and he whispered, "You needn't go yet." I thanked him gratefully, and asked, "Might I speak to him, if he can hear me?"

The governor stepped aside, and beckoned the officer away. The change, though it was made without noise, drew back the film from the placid look at the white ceiling, and he looked most affectionately at me.

"Dear Magwitch, I must tell you now, at last. You understand what I say?"

A gentle pressure on my hand.

"You had a child once, whom you loved and lost."

A stronger pressure on my hand.

"She lived, and found powerful friends. She is living now. She is a lady and very beautiful. And I love her!"

With a last faint effort, which would have been powerless but for my yielding to it and assisting it, he raised my hand to his lips. Then, he gently let it sink upon his breast again, with his own hands lying on it. The placid look at the white ceiling came back, and passed away, and his head dropped quietly on his breast.

Mindful, then, of what we had read together, I thought of the two men who went up into the Temple to pray, and I knew there were no better words that I could say beside his bed, than "O Lord, be merciful to him a sinner!"

Chapter LVII

Now that I was left wholly to myself, I gave notice of my intention to quit the chambers in the Temple as soon as my tenancy could legally determine, and in the meanwhile to underlet them. At once I put bills up in the windows; for, I was in debt, and had scarcely any money, and began to be seriously alarmed by the state of my affairs. I ought rather to write that I should have been alarmed if I had had energy and concentration enough to help me to the clear perception of any truth beyond the fact that I was falling very ill. The late stress upon me had enabled me to put off illness, but not to put it away; I knew that it was coming on me now, and I knew very little else, and was even careless as to that.

For a day or two, I lay on the sofa, or on the floor,—anywhere, according as I happened to sink down,—with a heavy head and aching limbs, and no purpose, and no power. Then there came, one night which appeared of great duration, and which teemed with anxiety and horror; and when in the morning I tried to sit up in my bed and think of it, I found I could not do so.

Whether I really had been down in Garden Court in the dead of the night, groping about for the boat that I supposed to be there; whether I had two or three times come to myself on the staircase with great terror, not knowing how I had got out of bed; whether I had found myself lighting the lamp, possessed by the idea that he was coming up the stairs, and that the lights were blown out; whether I had been inexpressibly harassed by the distracted talking, laughing, and groaning of some one, and had half suspected those sounds to be of my own making; whether there had been a closed iron furnace in a dark corner of the room, and a voice had called out, over and over again, that Miss Havisham was consuming within it,—these were things that I tried to settle with myself and get into some order, as I lay that morning on my bed. But the vapor of a limekiln would come between me and them, disordering them all, and it was through the vapor at last that I saw two men looking at me.

"What do you want?" I asked, starting; "I don't know you."

"Well, sir," returned one of them, bending down and touching me on the shoulder, "this is a matter that you'll soon arrange, I dare say, but you're arrested."

"What is the debt?"

"Hundred and twenty-three pound, fifteen, six. Jeweller's account, I think."

"What is to be done?"

"You had better come to my house," said the man. "I keep a very nice house."

I made some attempt to get up and dress myself. When I next attended to them, they were standing a little off from the bed, looking at me. I still lay there.

"You see my state," said I. "I would come with you if I could; but indeed I am quite unable. If you take me from here, I think I shall die by the way."

Perhaps they replied, or argued the point, or tried to encourage me to believe that I was better than I thought. Forasmuch as they hang in my memory by only this one slender thread, I don't know what they did, except that they forbore to remove me.

That I had a fever and was avoided, that I suffered greatly, that I often lost my reason, that the time seemed interminable, that I confounded impossible existences with my own identity; that I was a brick in the house-wall, and yet entreating to be released from the giddy place where the builders had set me; that I was a steel beam of a vast engine, clashing and whirling over a gulf, and yet that I implored in my own person to have the engine stopped, and my part in it hammered off; that I passed through these phases of disease, I know of my own remembrance, and did in some sort know at the time. That I sometimes struggled with real people, in the belief that they were murderers, and that I would all at once comprehend that they meant to do me good, and would then sink exhausted in their arms, and suffer them to lay me down, I also knew at the time. But, above all, I knew that there was a constant tendency in all these people,—who, when I was very ill, would present all kinds of extraordinary transformations of the human face, and would be much dilated in size,—above all, I say, I knew that there was an extraordinary tendency in all these people, sooner or later, to settle down into the likeness of Joe.

After I had turned the worst point of my illness, I began to notice that while all its other features changed, this one consistent feature did not change. Whoever came about me, still settled down into Joe. I opened my eyes in the night, and I saw, in the great chair at the bedside, Joe. I opened my eyes in the day, and, sitting on the window-seat, smoking his pipe in the shaded open window, still I saw Joe. I asked for cooling drink, and the dear hand that gave it me was Joe's. I sank back on my pillow after drinking, and the face that looked so hopefully and tenderly upon me was the face of Joe.

At last, one day, I took courage, and said, "Is it Joe?"

And the dear old home-voice answered, "Which it air, old chap."

"O Joe, you break my heart! Look angry at me, Joe. Strike me, Joe. Tell me of my ingratitude. Don't be so good to me!"

For Joe had actually laid his head down on the pillow at my side, and put his arm round my neck, in his joy that I knew him.

"Which dear old Pip, old chap," said Joe, "you and me was ever friends. And when you're well enough to go out for a ride—what larks!"

After which, Joe withdrew to the window, and stood with his back towards me, wiping his eyes. And as my extreme weakness prevented me from getting up and going to him, I lay there, penitently whispering, "O God bless him! O God bless this gentle Christian man!"

Joe's eyes were red when I next found him beside me; but I was holding his hand, and we both felt happy.

"How long, dear Joe?"

"Which you meantersay, Pip, how long have your illness lasted, dear old chap?"

"Yes, Joe."

"It's the end of May, Pip. To-morrow is the first of June."

"And have you been here all that time, dear Joe?"

"Pretty nigh, old chap. For, as I says to Biddy when the news of your being ill were brought by letter, which it were brought by the post, and being formerly single he is now married though underpaid for a deal of walking and shoe-leather, but wealth were not a object on his part, and marriage were the great wish of his hart—"

"It is so delightful to hear you, Joe! But I interrupt you in what you said to Biddy."

"Which it were," said Joe, "that how you might be amongst strangers, and that how you and me having been ever friends, a wisit at such a moment might not prove unacceptabobble. And Biddy, her word were, 'Go to him, without loss of time.' That," said Joe, summing up with his judicial air, "were the word of Biddy. 'Go to him,' Biddy say, 'without loss of time.'

In short, I shouldn't greatly deceive you," Joe added, after a little grave reflection, "if I represented to you that the word of that young woman were, 'without a minute's loss of time.'"

There Joe cut himself short, and informed me that I was to be talked to in great moderation, and that I was to take a little nourishment at stated frequent times, whether I felt inclined for it or not, and that I was to submit myself to all his orders. So I kissed his hand, and lay quiet, while he proceeded to indite a note to Biddy, with my love in it.

Evidently Biddy had taught Joe to write. As I lay in bed looking at him, it made me, in my weak state, cry again with pleasure to see the pride with which he set about his letter. My bedstead, divested of its curtains, had been removed, with me upon it, into the sitting-room, as the airiest and largest, and the carpet had been taken away, and the room kept always fresh and wholesome night and day. At my own writing-table, pushed into a corner and cumbered with little bottles, Joe now sat down to his great work, first choosing a pen from the pen-tray as if it were a chest of large tools, and tucking up his sleeves as if he were going to wield a crow-bar or sledgehammer. It was necessary for Joe to hold on heavily to the table with his left elbow, and to get his right leg well out behind him, before he could begin; and when he did begin he made every down-stroke so slowly that it might have been six feet long, while at every up-stroke I could hear his pen spluttering extensively. He had a curious idea that the inkstand was on the side of him where it was not, and constantly dipped his pen into space, and seemed quite satisfied with the result. Occasionally, he was tripped up by some orthographical stumbling-block; but on the whole he got on very well indeed; and when he had signed his name, and had removed a finishing blot from the paper to the crown of his head with his two forefingers, he got up and hovered about the table, trying the effect of his performance from various points of view, as it lay there, with unbounded satisfaction.

Not to make Joe uneasy by talking too much, even if I had been able to talk much, I deferred asking him about Miss Havisham until next day. He shook his head when I then asked him if she had recovered.

"Is she dead, Joe?"

"Why you see, old chap," said Joe, in a tone of remonstrance, and by way of getting at it by degrees, "I wouldn't go so far as to say that, for that's a deal to say; but she ain't—"

"Living, Joe?"

"That's nigher where it is," said Joe; "she ain't living."

"Did she linger long, Joe?"

"Arter you was took ill, pretty much about what you might call (if you was put to it) a week," said Joe; still determined, on my account, to come at everything by degrees.

"Dear Joe, have you heard what becomes of her property?"

"Well, old chap," said Joe, "it do appear that she had settled the most of it, which I meantersay tied it up, on Miss Estella. But she had wrote out a little coddleshell in her own hand a day or two afore the accident, leaving a cool four thousand to Mr. Matthew Pocket. And why, do you suppose, above all things, Pip, she left that cool four thousand unto him? 'Because of Pip's account of him, the said Matthew.' I am told by Biddy, that air the writing," said Joe, repeating the legal turn as if it did him infinite good, "'account of him the said Matthew.' And a cool four thousand, Pip!"

I never discovered from whom Joe derived the conventional temperature of the four thousand pounds; but it appeared to make the sum of money more to him, and he had a manifest relish in insisting on its being cool.

This account gave me great joy, as it perfected the only good thing I had done. I asked Joe whether he had heard if any of the other relations had any legacies?

"Miss Sarah," said Joe, "she have twenty-five pound perannium fur to buy pills, on account of being bilious. Miss Georgiana, she have twenty pound down. Mrs.—what's the name of them wild beasts with humps, old chap?"

"Camels?" said I, wondering why he could possibly want to know.

Joe nodded. "Mrs. Camels," by which I presently understood he meant Camilla, "she have five pound fur to buy rushlights to put her in spirits when she wake up in the night."

The accuracy of these recitals was sufficiently obvious to me, to give me great confidence in Joe's information. "And now," said Joe, "you ain't that strong yet, old chap, that you can take in more nor one additional shovelful to-day. Old Orlick he's been a bustin' open a dwelling-ouse."

"Whose?" said I.

"Not, I grant you, but what his manners is given to blusterous," said Joe, apologetically; "still, a Englishman's ouse is his Castle, and castles must not be busted 'cept when done in war time. And wotsume'er the failings on his part, he were a corn and seedsman in his hart."

"Is it Pumblechook's house that has been broken into, then?"

"That's it, Pip," said Joe; "and they took his till, and they took his cash-box, and they drinked his wine, and they partook of his wittles, and they slapped his face, and they pulled his nose, and they tied him up to his bedpust, and they giv' him a dozen, and they stuffed his mouth full of flowering annuals to prewent his crying out. But he knowed Orlick, and Orlick's in the county jail."

By these approaches we arrived at unrestricted conversation. I was slow to gain strength, but I did slowly and surely become less weak, and Joe stayed with me, and I fancied I was little Pip again.

For the tenderness of Joe was so beautifully proportioned to my need, that I was like a child in his hands. He would sit and talk to me in the old confidence, and with the old simplicity, and in the old unassertive protecting way, so that I would half believe that all my life since the days of the old kitchen was one of the mental troubles of the fever that was gone. He did everything for me except the household work, for which he had engaged a very decent woman, after paying off the laundress on his first arrival. "Which I do assure you, Pip," he would often say, in explanation of that liberty; "I found her a tapping the spare bed, like a cask of beer, and drawing off the feathers in a bucket, for sale. Which she would have tapped yourn next, and draw'd it off with you a laying on it, and was then a carrying away the coals gradiwally in the soup-tureen and wegetable-dishes, and the wine and spirits in your Wellington boots."

We looked forward to the day when I should go out for a ride, as we had once looked forward to the day of my apprenticeship. And when the day came, and an open carriage was got into the Lane, Joe wrapped me up, took me in his arms, carried me down to it, and put me in, as if I were still the small helpless creature to whom he had so abundantly given of the wealth of his great nature.

And Joe got in beside me, and we drove away together into the country, where the rich summer growth was already on the trees and on the grass, and sweet summer scents filled all the air. The day happened to be Sunday, and when I looked on the loveliness around me, and thought how it had grown and changed, and how the little wild-flowers had been forming, and the voices of the birds had been strengthening, by day and by night, under the sun and under the stars, while poor I lay burning and tossing on my bed, the mere remembrance of having burned and tossed there came like a check upon my peace. But when I heard the Sunday bells, and looked around a little more upon the outspread beauty, I felt that I was not nearly thankful enough,—that I was too weak yet to be even that,—and I laid my head on Joe's shoulder, as I had laid it long ago when he had taken me to the Fair or where not, and it was too much for my young senses.

More composure came to me after a while, and we talked as we used to talk, lying on the grass at the old Battery. There was no change whatever in Joe. Exactly what he had been in my eyes then, he was in my eyes still; just as simply faithful, and as simply right.

When we got back again, and he lifted me out, and carried me—so easily!—across the court and up the stairs, I thought of that eventful Christmas Day when he had carried me over the marshes. We had not yet made any allusion to my change of fortune, nor did I know how much of my late history he was acquainted with. I was so doubtful of myself now, and put so much trust in him, that I could not satisfy myself whether I ought to refer to it when he did not.

"Have you heard, Joe," I asked him that evening, upon further consideration, as he smoked his pipe at the window, "who my patron was?"

"I heerd," returned Joe, "as it were not Miss Havisham, old chap."

"Did you hear who it was, Joe?"

"Well! I heerd as it were a person what sent the person what giv' you the bank-notes at the Jolly Bargemen, Pip."

"So it was."

"Astonishing!" said Joe, in the placidest way.

"Did you hear that he was dead, Joe?" I presently asked, with increasing diffidence.

"Which? Him as sent the bank-notes, Pip?"

"Yes."

"I think," said Joe, after meditating a long time, and looking rather evasively at the window-seat, "as I did hear tell that how he were something or another in a general way in that direction."

"Did you hear anything of his circumstances, Joe?"

"Not partickler, Pip."

"If you would like to hear, Joe—" I was beginning, when Joe got up and came to my sofa.

"Lookee here, old chap," said Joe, bending over me. "Ever the best of friends; ain't us, Pip?"

I was ashamed to answer him.

"Wery good, then," said Joe, as if I had answered; "that's all right; that's agreed upon. Then why go into subjects, old chap, which as betwixt two sech must be for ever onnecessary? There's subjects enough as betwixt two sech, without onnecessary ones. Lord! To think of your poor sister and her Rampages! And don't you remember Tickler?"

"I do indeed, Joe."

"Lookee here, old chap," said Joe. "I done what I could to keep you and Tickler in sunders, but my power were not always fully equal to my inclinations. For when your poor sister had a mind to drop into you, it were not so much," said Joe, in his favorite argumentative way, "that she dropped into me too, if I put myself in opposition to her, but that she dropped into you always heavier for it. I noticed that. It ain't a grab at a man's whisker, not yet a shake or two of a man (to which your sister was quite welcome), that 'ud put a man off from getting a little child out of punishment. But when that little child is dropped into heavier for that grab of whisker or shaking, then that man naterally up and says to himself, 'Where is the good as you are a doing? I grant you I see the 'arm,' says the man, 'but I don't see the good. I call upon you, sir, therefore, to pint out the good.'"

"The man says?" I observed, as Joe waited for me to speak.

"The man says," Joe assented. "Is he right, that man?"

"Dear Joe, he is always right."

"Well, old chap," said Joe, "then abide by your words. If he's always right (which in general he's more likely wrong), he's right when he says this: Supposing ever you kep any little matter to yourself, when you was a little child, you kep it mostly because you know'd as J. Gargery's power to part you and Tickler in sunders were not fully equal to his inclinations. Theerfore, think no more of it as betwixt two sech, and do not let us pass remarks upon onnecessary subjects. Biddy giv' herself a deal o' trouble with me afore I left (for I am almost awful dull), as I should view it in this light, and, viewing it in this light, as I should so put it. Both of which," said Joe, quite charmed with his logical arrangement, "being done, now this to you a true friend, say. Namely. You mustn't go a overdoing on it, but you must have your supper and your wine and water, and you must be put betwixt the sheets."

The delicacy with which Joe dismissed this theme, and the sweet tact and kindness with which Biddy—who with her woman's wit had found me out so soon—had prepared him for it, made a deep impression on my mind. But whether Joe knew how poor I was, and how my great expectations had all dissolved, like our own marsh mists before the sun, I could not understand.

Another thing in Joe that I could not understand when it first began to develop itself, but which I soon arrived at a sorrowful comprehension of, was this: As I became stronger and better, Joe became a little less easy with me. In my weakness and entire dependence on him, the dear fellow had fallen into the old tone, and called me by the old names, the dear "old Pip, old chap," that now were music in my ears. I too had fallen into the old ways, only happy and thankful that he let me. But, imperceptibly, though I held by them fast, Joe's hold upon them began to slacken; and whereas I wondered at this, at first, I soon began to understand that the cause of it was in me, and that the fault of it was all mine.

Ah! Had I given Joe no reason to doubt my constancy, and to think that in prosperity I should grow cold to him and cast him off? Had I given Joe's innocent heart no cause to feel instinctively that as I got stronger, his hold upon me would be weaker, and that he had better loosen it in time and let me go, before I plucked myself away?

It was on the third or fourth occasion of my going out walking in the Temple Gardens leaning on Joe's arm, that I saw this change in him very plainly. We had been sitting in the bright warm sunlight, looking at the river, and I chanced to say as we got up,—

"See, Joe! I can walk quite strongly. Now, you shall see me walk back by myself."

"Which do not overdo it, Pip," said Joe; "but I shall be happy fur to see you able, sir."

The last word grated on me; but how could I remonstrate! I walked no further than the gate of the gardens, and then pretended to be weaker than I was, and asked Joe for his arm. Joe gave it me, but was thoughtful.

I, for my part, was thoughtful too; for, how best to check this growing change in Joe was a great perplexity to my remorseful thoughts. That I was ashamed to tell him exactly how I was placed, and what I had come down to, I do not seek to conceal; but I hope my reluctance was not quite an unworthy one. He would want to help me out of his little savings, I knew, and I knew that he ought not to help me, and that I must not suffer him to do it.

It was a thoughtful evening with both of us. But, before we went to bed, I had resolved that I would wait over to-morrow,—to-morrow being Sunday,—and would begin my new course with the new week. On Monday morning I would speak to Joe about this change, I would lay aside this last vestige of reserve, I would tell him what I had in my thoughts (that Secondly, not yet arrived at), and why I had not decided to go out to Herbert, and then the change would be conquered for ever. As I cleared, Joe cleared, and it seemed as though he had sympathetically arrived at a resolution too.

We had a quiet day on the Sunday, and we rode out into the country, and then walked in the fields.

"I feel thankful that I have been ill, Joe," I said.

"Dear old Pip, old chap, you're a'most come round, sir."

"It has been a memorable time for me, Joe."

"Likeways for myself, sir," Joe returned.

"We have had a time together, Joe, that I can never forget. There were days once, I know, that I did for a while forget; but I never shall forget these."

"Pip," said Joe, appearing a little hurried and troubled, "there has been larks. And, dear sir, what have been betwixt us—have been."

At night, when I had gone to bed, Joe came into my room, as he had done all through my recovery. He asked me if I felt sure that I was as well as in the morning?

"Yes, dear Joe, quite."

"And are always a getting stronger, old chap?"

"Yes, dear Joe, steadily."

Joe patted the coverlet on my shoulder with his great good hand, and said, in what I thought a husky voice, "Good night!"

When I got up in the morning, refreshed and stronger yet, I was full of my resolution to tell Joe all, without delay. I would tell him before breakfast. I would dress at once and go to his room and surprise him; for, it was the first day I had been up early. I went to his room, and he was not there. Not only was he not there, but his box was gone.

I hurried then to the breakfast-table, and on it found a letter. These were its brief contents:—

"Not wishful to intrude I have departured fur you are well again dear Pip and will do better without JO.

"P.S. Ever the best of friends."

Enclosed in the letter was a receipt for the debt and costs on which I had been arrested. Down to that moment, I had vainly supposed that my creditor had withdrawn, or suspended proceedings until I should be quite recovered. I had never dreamed of Joe's having paid the money; but Joe had paid it, and the receipt was in his name.

What remained for me now, but to follow him to the dear old forge, and there to have out my disclosure to him, and my penitent remonstrance with him, and there to relieve my mind and heart of that reserved Secondly, which had begun as a vague something lingering in my thoughts, and had formed into a settled purpose?

The purpose was, that I would go to Biddy, that I would show her how humbled and repentant I came back, that I would tell her how I had lost all I once hoped for, that I would remind her of our old confidences in my first unhappy time. Then I would say to her, "Biddy, I think you once liked me very well, when my errant heart, even while it strayed away from you, was quieter and better with you than it ever has been since. If you can like me only half as well once more, if you can take me with all my faults and disappointments on my head, if you can receive me like a forgiven child (and indeed I am as sorry, Biddy, and have as much need of a hushing voice and a soothing hand), I hope I am a little worthier of you that I was,—not much, but a little. And, Biddy, it shall rest with you to say whether I shall work at the forge with Joe, or whether I shall try for any different occupation down in this country, or whether we shall go away to a distant place where an opportunity awaits me which I set aside, when it was offered, until I knew your answer. And now, dear Biddy, if you can tell me that you will go through the world with me, you will surely make it a better world for me, and me a better man for it, and I will try hard to make it a better world for you."

Such was my purpose. After three days more of recovery, I went down to the old place to put it in execution. And how I sped in it is all I have left to tell.

Chapter LVIII

The tidings of my high fortunes having had a heavy fall had got down to my native place and its neighborhood before I got there. I found the Blue Boar in possession of the intelligence, and I found that it made a great change in the Boar's demeanour. Whereas the Boar had cultivated my good opinion with warm assiduity when I was coming into property, the Boar was exceedingly cool on the subject now that I was going out of property.

It was evening when I arrived, much fatigued by the journey I had so often made so easily. The Boar could not put me into my usual bedroom, which was engaged (probably by some one who had expectations), and could only assign me a very indifferent chamber among the pigeons and post-chaises up the yard. But I had as sound a sleep in that lodging as in the most superior accommodation the Boar could have given me, and the quality of my dreams was about the same as in the best bedroom.

Early in the morning, while my breakfast was getting ready, I strolled round by Satis House. There were printed bills on the gate and on bits of carpet hanging out of the windows, announcing a sale by auction of the Household Furniture and Effects, next week. The House itself was to be sold as old building materials, and pulled down. LOT 1 was marked in whitewashed knock-knee letters on the brew house; LOT 2 on that part of the main building which had been so long shut up. Other lots were marked off on other parts of the structure, and the ivy had been torn down to make room for the inscriptions, and much of it trailed low in the dust and was withered already. Stepping in for a moment at the open gate, and looking around me with the uncomfortable air of a stranger who had no business there, I saw the auctioneer's clerk walking on the casks and telling them off for the information of a catalogue-compiler, pen in hand, who made a temporary desk of the wheeled chair I had so often pushed along to the tune of Old Clem.

When I got back to my breakfast in the Boar's coffee-room, I found Mr. Pumblechook conversing with the landlord. Mr. Pumblechook (not improved in appearance by his late nocturnal adventure) was waiting for me, and addressed me in the following terms:—

"Young man, I am sorry to see you brought low. But what else could be expected! what else could be expected!"

As he extended his hand with a magnificently forgiving air, and as I was broken by illness and unfit to quarrel, I took it.

"William," said Mr. Pumblechook to the waiter, "put a muffin on table. And has it come to this! Has it come to this!"

I frowningly sat down to my breakfast. Mr. Pumblechook stood over me and poured out my tea—before I could touch the teapot—with the air of a benefactor who was resolved to be true to the last.

"William," said Mr. Pumblechook, mournfully, "put the salt on. In happier times," addressing me, "I think you took sugar? And did you take milk? You did. Sugar and milk. William, bring a watercress."

"Thank you," said I, shortly, "but I don't eat watercresses."

"You don't eat 'em," returned Mr. Pumblechook, sighing and nodding his head several times, as if he might have expected that, and as if abstinence from watercresses were consistent with my downfall. "True. The simple fruits of the earth. No. You needn't bring any, William."

I went on with my breakfast, and Mr. Pumblechook continued to stand over me, staring fishily and breathing noisily, as he always did.

"Little more than skin and bone!" mused Mr. Pumblechook, aloud. "And yet when he went from here (I may say with my blessing), and I spread afore him my humble store, like the Bee, he was as plump as a Peach!"

This reminded me of the wonderful difference between the servile manner in which he had offered his hand in my new prosperity, saying, "May I?" and the ostentatious clemency with which he had just now exhibited the same fat five fingers.

"Hah!" he went on, handing me the bread and butter. "And air you a going to Joseph?"

"In heaven's name," said I, firing in spite of myself, "what does it matter to you where I am going? Leave that teapot alone."

It was the worst course I could have taken, because it gave Pumblechook the opportunity he wanted.

"Yes, young man," said he, releasing the handle of the article in question, retiring a step or two from my table, and speaking for the behoof of the landlord and waiter at the door, "I will leave that teapot alone. You are right, young man. For once you are right. I forgit myself when I take such an interest in your breakfast, as to wish your frame, exhausted by the debilitating effects of prodigygality, to be stimilated by the 'olesome nourishment of your forefathers. And yet," said Pumblechook, turning to the landlord and waiter, and pointing me out at arm's length, "this is him as I ever sported with in his days of happy infancy! Tell me not it cannot be; I tell you this is him!"

A low murmur from the two replied. The waiter appeared to be particularly affected.

"This is him," said Pumblechook, "as I have rode in my shay-cart. This is him as I have seen brought up by hand. This is him untoe the sister of which I was uncle by marriage, as her name was Georgiana M'ria from her own mother, let him deny it if he can!"

The waiter seemed convinced that I could not deny it, and that it gave the case a black look.

"Young man," said Pumblechook, screwing his head at me in the old fashion, "you air a going to Joseph. What does it matter to me, you ask me, where you air a going? I say to you, Sir, you air a going to Joseph."

The waiter coughed, as if he modestly invited me to get over that.

"Now," said Pumblechook, and all this with a most exasperating air of saying in the cause of virtue what was perfectly convincing and conclusive, "I will tell you what to say to Joseph. Here is Squires of the Boar present, known and respected in this town, and here is William, which his father's name was Potkins if I do not deceive myself."

"You do not, sir," said William.

"In their presence," pursued Pumblechook, "I will tell you, young man, what to say to Joseph. Says you, "Joseph, I have this day seen my earliest benefactor and the founder of my fortun's. I will name no names, Joseph, but so they are pleased to call him up town, and I have seen that man."

"I swear I don't see him here," said I.

"Say that likewise," retorted Pumblechook. "Say you said that, and even Joseph will probably betray surprise."

"There you quite mistake him," said I. "I know better."

"Says you," Pumblechook went on, "'Joseph, I have seen that man, and that man bears you no malice and bears me no malice. He knows your character, Joseph, and is well acquainted with your pig-headedness and ignorance; and he knows my character, Joseph, and he knows my want of gratitoode. Yes, Joseph,' says you," here Pumblechook shook his head and hand at me, "'he knows my total deficiency of common human gratitoode.

He knows it, Joseph, as none can. You do not know it, Joseph, having no call to know it, but that man do.'"

Windy donkey as he was, it really amazed me that he could have the face to talk thus to mine.

"Says you, 'Joseph, he gave me a little message, which I will now repeat. It was that, in my being brought low, he saw the finger of Providence. He knowed that finger when he saw Joseph, and he saw it plain. It pinted out this writing, Joseph. Reward of ingratitoode to his earliest benefactor, and founder of fortun's. But that man said he did not repent of what he had done, Joseph. Not at all. It was right to do it, it was kind to do it, it was benevolent to do it, and he would do it again.'"

"It's pity," said I, scornfully, as I finished my interrupted breakfast, "that the man did not say what he had done and would do again."

"Squires of the Boar!" Pumblechook was now addressing the landlord, "and William! I have no objections to your mentioning, either up town or down town, if such should be your wishes, that it was right to do it, kind to do it, benevolent to do it, and that I would do it again."

With those words the Impostor shook them both by the hand, with an air, and left the house; leaving me much more astonished than delighted by the virtues of that same indefinite "it." I was not long after him in leaving the house too, and when I went down the High Street I saw him holding forth (no doubt to the same effect) at his shop door to a select group, who honored me with very unfavorable glances as I passed on the opposite side of the way.

But, it was only the pleasanter to turn to Biddy and to Joe, whose great forbearance shone more brightly than before, if that could be, contrasted with this brazen pretender. I went towards them slowly, for my limbs were weak, but with a sense of increasing relief as I drew nearer to them, and a sense of leaving arrogance and untruthfulness further and further behind.

The June weather was delicious. The sky was blue, the larks were soaring high over the green corn, I thought all that countryside more beautiful and peaceful by far than I had ever known it to be yet. Many pleasant pictures of the life that I would lead there, and of the change for the better that would come over my character when I had a guiding spirit at my side whose simple faith and clear home wisdom I had proved, beguiled my way. They awakened a tender emotion in me; for my heart was softened by my return, and such a change had come to pass, that I felt like one who was toiling home barefoot from distant travel, and whose wanderings had lasted many years.

The schoolhouse where Biddy was mistress I had never seen; but, the little roundabout lane by which I entered the village, for quietness' sake, took me past it. I was disappointed to find that the day was a holiday; no children were there, and Biddy's house was closed. Some hopeful notion of seeing her, busily engaged in her daily duties, before she saw me, had been in my mind and was defeated.

But the forge was a very short distance off, and I went towards it under the sweet green limes, listening for the clink of Joe's hammer. Long after I ought to have heard it, and long after I had fancied I heard it and found it but a fancy, all was still. The limes were there, and the white thorns were there, and the chestnut-trees were there, and their leaves rustled harmoniously when I stopped to listen; but, the clink of Joe's hammer was not in the midsummer wind.

Almost fearing, without knowing why, to come in view of the forge, I saw it at last, and saw that it was closed. No gleam of fire, no glittering shower of sparks, no roar of bellows; all shut up, and still.

But the house was not deserted, and the best parlor seemed to be in use, for there were white curtains fluttering in its window, and the window was open and gay with flowers. I went softly towards it, meaning to peep over the flowers, when Joe and Biddy stood before me, arm in arm.

At first Biddy gave a cry, as if she thought it was my apparition, but in another moment she was in my embrace. I wept to see her, and she wept to see me; I, because she looked so fresh and pleasant; she, because I looked so worn and white.

"But dear Biddy, how smart you are!"

"Yes, dear Pip."

"And Joe, how smart you are!"

"Yes, dear old Pip, old chap."

I looked at both of them, from one to the other, and then—

"It's my wedding-day!" cried Biddy, in a burst of happiness, "and I am married to Joe!"

They had taken me into the kitchen, and I had laid my head down on the old deal table. Biddy held one of my hands to her lips, and Joe's restoring touch was on my shoulder. "Which he warn't strong enough, my dear, fur to be surprised," said Joe. And Biddy said, "I ought to have thought of it, dear

Joe, but I was too happy." They were both so overjoyed to see me, so proud to see me, so touched by my coming to them, so delighted that I should have come by accident to make their day complete!

My first thought was one of great thankfulness that I had never breathed this last baffled hope to Joe. How often, while he was with me in my illness, had it risen to my lips! How irrevocable would have been his knowledge of it, if he had remained with me but another hour!

"Dear Biddy," said I, "you have the best husband in the whole world, and if you could have seen him by my bed you would have—But no, you couldn't love him better than you do."

"No, I couldn't indeed," said Biddy.

"And, dear Joe, you have the best wife in the whole world, and she will make you as happy as even you deserve to be, you dear, good, noble Joe!"

Joe looked at me with a quivering lip, and fairly put his sleeve before his eyes.

"And Joe and Biddy both, as you have been to church to-day, and are in charity and love with all mankind, receive my humble thanks for all you have done for me, and all I have so ill repaid! And when I say that I am going away within the hour, for I am soon going abroad, and that I shall never rest until I have worked for the money with which you have kept me out of prison, and have sent it to you, don't think, dear Joe and Biddy, that if I could repay it a thousand times over, I suppose I could cancel a farthing of the debt I owe you, or that I would do so if I could!"

They were both melted by these words, and both entreated me to say no more.

"But I must say more. Dear Joe, I hope you will have children to love, and that some little fellow will sit in this chimney-corner of a winter night, who may remind you of another little fellow gone out of it for ever. Don't tell him, Joe, that I was thankless; don't tell him, Biddy, that I was ungenerous and unjust; only tell him that I honored you both, because you were both so good and true, and that, as your child, I said it would be natural to him to grow up a much better man than I did."

"I ain't a going," said Joe, from behind his sleeve, "to tell him nothink o' that natur, Pip. Nor Biddy ain't. Nor yet no one ain't."

"And now, though I know you have already done it in your own kind hearts, pray tell me, both, that you forgive me! Pray let me hear you say the words, that I may carry the sound of them away with me, and then I shall be able to believe that you can trust me, and think better of me, in the time to come!"

"O dear old Pip, old chap," said Joe. "God knows as I forgive you, if I have anythink to forgive!"

"Amen! And God knows I do!" echoed Biddy.

"Now let me go up and look at my old little room, and rest there a few minutes by myself. And then, when I have eaten and drunk with you, go with me as far as the finger-post, dear Joe and Biddy, before we say good by!"

I sold all I had, and put aside as much as I could, for a composition with my creditors,—who gave me ample time to pay them in full,—and I went out and joined Herbert. Within a month, I had quitted England, and within two months I was clerk to Clarriker and Co., and within four months I assumed my first undivided responsibility. For the beam across the parlor ceiling at Mill Pond Bank had then ceased to tremble under old Bill Barley's growls and was at peace, and Herbert had gone away to marry Clara, and I was left in sole charge of the Eastern Branch until he brought her back.

Many a year went round before I was a partner in the House; but I lived happily with Herbert and his wife, and lived frugally, and paid my debts, and maintained a constant correspondence with Biddy and Joe. It was not until I became third in the Firm, that Clarriker betrayed me to Herbert; but he then declared that the secret of Herbert's partnership had been long enough upon his conscience, and he must tell it. So he told it, and Herbert was as much moved as amazed, and the dear fellow and I were not the worse friends for the long concealment. I must not leave it to be supposed that we were ever a great House, or that we made mints of money. We were not in a grand way of business, but we had a good name, and worked for our profits, and did very well. We owed so much to Herbert's ever cheerful industry and readiness, that I often wondered how I had conceived that old idea of his inaptitude, until I was one day enlightened by the reflection, that perhaps the inaptitude had never been in him at all, but had been in me.

Chapter LIX

For eleven years, I had not seen Joe nor Biddy with my bodily Eyes,—though they had both been often before my fancy in the East,—when, upon an evening in December, an hour or two after dark, I laid my hand softly on the latch of the old kitchen door. I touched it so softly that I was not heard, and looked in unseen. There, smoking his pipe in the old place by the kitchen firelight, as hale and as strong as ever, though a little gray, sat Joe; and there, fenced into the corner with Joe's leg, and sitting on my own little stool looking at the fire, was—I again!

"We giv' him the name of Pip for your sake, dear old chap," said Joe, delighted, when I took another stool by the child's side (but I did not rumple his hair), "and we hoped he might grow a little bit like you, and we think he do."

I thought so too, and I took him out for a walk next morning, and we talked immensely, understanding one another to perfection. And I took him down to the churchyard, and set him on a certain tombstone there, and he showed me from that elevation which stone was sacred to the memory of Philip Pirrip, late of this Parish, and Also Georgiana, Wife of the Above.

"Biddy," said I, when I talked with her after dinner, as her little girl lay sleeping in her lap, "you must give Pip to me one of these days; or lend him, at all events."

"No, no," said Biddy, gently. "You must marry."

"So Herbert and Clara say, but I don't think I shall, Biddy. I have so settled down in their home, that it's not at all likely. I am already quite an old bachelor."

Biddy looked down at her child, and put its little hand to her lips, and then put the good matronly hand with which she had touched it into mine. There was something in the action, and in the light pressure of Biddy's wedding-ring, that had a very pretty eloquence in it.

"Dear Pip," said Biddy, "you are sure you don't fret for her?"

"O no,—I think not, Biddy."

"Tell me as an old, old friend. Have you quite forgotten her?

"My dear Biddy, I have forgotten nothing in my life that ever had a foremost place there, and little that ever had any place there. But that poor dream, as I once used to call it, has all gone by, Biddy,—all gone by!"

Nevertheless, I knew, while I said those words, that I secretly intended to revisit the site of the old house that evening, alone, for her sake. Yes, even so. For Estella's sake.

I had heard of her as leading a most unhappy life, and as being separated from her husband, who had used her with great cruelty, and who had become quite renowned as a compound of pride, avarice, brutality, and meanness. And I had heard of the death of her husband, from an accident consequent on his ill-treatment of a horse. This release had befallen her some two years before; for anything I knew, she was married again.

The early dinner hour at Joe's, left me abundance of time, without hurrying my talk with Biddy, to walk over to the old spot before dark. But, what with loitering on the way to look at old objects and to think of old times, the day had quite declined when I came to the place.

There was no house now, no brewery, no building whatever left, but the wall of the old garden. The cleared space had been enclosed with a rough fence, and looking over it, I saw that some of the old ivy had struck root anew, and was growing green on low quiet mounds of ruin. A gate in the fence standing ajar, I pushed it open, and went in.

A cold silvery mist had veiled the afternoon, and the moon was not yet up to scatter it. But, the stars were shining beyond the mist, and the moon was coming, and the evening was not dark. I could trace out where every part of the old house had been, and where the brewery had been, and where the gates, and where the casks. I had done so, and was looking along the desolate garden walk, when I beheld a solitary figure in it.

The figure showed itself aware of me, as I advanced. It had been moving towards me, but it stood still. As I drew nearer, I saw it to be the figure of a woman. As I drew nearer yet, it was about to turn away, when it stopped, and let me come up with it. Then, it faltered, as if much surprised, and uttered my name, and I cried out,—

"Estella!"

"I am greatly changed. I wonder you know me."

The freshness of her beauty was indeed gone, but its indescribable majesty and its indescribable charm remained. Those attractions in it, I had seen before; what I had never seen before, was the saddened, softened light of the once proud eyes; what I had never felt before was the friendly touch of the once insensible hand.

We sat down on a bench that was near, and I said, "After so many years, it is strange that we should thus meet again, Estella, here where our first meeting was! Do you often come back?"

"I have never been here since."

"Nor I."

The moon began to rise, and I thought of the placid look at the white ceiling, which had passed away. The moon began to rise, and I thought of the pressure on my hand when I had spoken the last words he had heard on earth.

Estella was the next to break the silence that ensued between us.

"I have very often hoped and intended to come back, but have been prevented by many circumstances. Poor, poor old place!"

The silvery mist was touched with the first rays of the moonlight, and the same rays touched the tears that dropped from her eyes. Not knowing that I saw them, and setting herself to get the better of them, she said quietly,—

"Were you wondering, as you walked along, how it came to be left in this condition?"

"Yes, Estella."

"The ground belongs to me. It is the only possession I have not relinquished. Everything else has gone from me, little by little, but I have kept this. It was the subject of the only determined resistance I made in all the wretched years."

"Is it to be built on?"

"At last, it is. I came here to take leave of it before its change. And you," she said, in a voice of touching interest to a wanderer,—"you live abroad still?"

"Still."

"And do well, I am sure?"

"I work pretty hard for a sufficient living, and therefore—yes, I do well."

"I have often thought of you," said Estella.

"Have you?"

"Of late, very often. There was a long hard time when I kept far from me the remembrance of what I had thrown away when I was quite ignorant of its worth. But since my duty has not been incompatible with the admission of that remembrance, I have given it a place in my heart."

"You have always held your place in my heart," I answered.

And we were silent again until she spoke.

"I little thought," said Estella, "that I should take leave of you in taking leave of this spot. I am very glad to do so."

"Glad to part again, Estella? To me, parting is a painful thing. To me, the remembrance of our last parting has been ever mournful and painful."

"But you said to me," returned Estella, very earnestly, "'God bless you, God forgive you!' And if you could say that to me then, you will not hesitate to say that to me now,—now, when suffering has been stronger than all other teaching, and has taught me to understand what your heart used to be. I have been bent and broken, but—I hope—into a better shape. Be as considerate and good to me as you were, and tell me we are friends."

"We are friends," said I, rising and bending over her, as she rose from the bench.

"And will continue friends apart," said Estella.

I took her hand in mine, and we went out of the ruined place; and, as the morning mists had risen long ago when I first left the forge, so the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to me, I saw no shadow of another parting from her.

THE END OF
Great Expectations

Hard Times

by Charles Dickens

BOOK THE FIRST - SOWING

CHAPTER I - THE ONE THING NEEDFUL

'NOW, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!'

The scene was a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a school-room, and the speaker's square forefinger emphasized his observations by underscoring every sentence with a line on the schoolmaster's sleeve. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's square wall of a forehead, which had his eyebrows for its base, while his eyes found commodious cellarage in two dark caves, overshadowed by the wall. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's mouth, which was wide, thin, and hard set. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's voice, which was inflexible, dry, and dictatorial. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's hair, which bristled on the skirts of his bald head, a plantation of firs to keep the wind from its shining surface, all covered with knobs, like the crust of a plum pie, as if the head had scarcely warehouse-room for the hard facts stored inside. The speaker's obstinate carriage, square coat, square legs, square shoulders, - nay, his very neckcloth, trained to take him by the throat with an unaccommodating grasp, like a stubborn fact, as it was, - all helped the emphasis.

'In this life, we want nothing but Facts, sir; nothing but Facts!'

The speaker, and the schoolmaster, and the third grown person present, all backed a little, and swept with their eyes the inclined plane of little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim.

CHAPTER II - MURDERING THE INNOCENTS

THOMAS GRADGRIND, sir. A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over. Thomas Gradgrind, sir - peremptorily Thomas - Thomas Gradgrind. With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic. You might hope to get some other nonsensical belief into the head of George Gradgrind, or Augustus Gradgrind, or John Gradgrind, or Joseph Gradgrind (all supposititious, non-existent persons), but into the head of Thomas Gradgrind - no, sir!

In such terms Mr. Gradgrind always mentally introduced himself, whether to his private circle of acquaintance, or to the public in general. In such terms, no doubt, substituting the words 'boys and girls,' for 'sir,' Thomas Gradgrind now presented Thomas Gradgrind to the little pitchers before him, who were to be filled so full of facts.

Indeed, as he eagerly sparkled at them from the cellarage before mentioned, he seemed a kind of cannon loaded to the muzzle with facts, and prepared to blow them clean out of the regions of childhood at one discharge. He seemed a galvanizing apparatus, too, charged with a grim mechanical substitute for the tender young imaginations that were to be stormed away.

'Girl number twenty,' said Mr. Gradgrind, squarely pointing with his square forefinger, 'I don't know that girl. Who is that girl?'

'Sissy Jupe, sir,' explained number twenty, blushing, standing up, and curtseying.

'Sissy is not a name,' said Mr. Gradgrind. 'Don't call yourself
Sissy. Call yourself Cecilia.'

'It's father as calls me Sissy, sir,' returned the young girl in a trembling voice, and with another curtsey.

'Then he has no business to do it,' said Mr. Gradgrind. 'Tell him he mustn't. Cecilia Jupe. Let me see. What is your father?'

'He belongs to the horse-riding, if you please, sir.'

Mr. Gradgrind frowned, and waved off the objectionable calling with his hand.

'We don't want to know anything about that, here. You mustn't tell us about that, here. Your father breaks horses, don't he?'

'If you please, sir, when they can get any to break, they do break horses in the ring, sir.'

'You mustn't tell us about the ring, here. Very well, then. Describe your father as a horsebreaker. He doctors sick horses, I dare say?'

'Oh yes, sir.'

'Very well, then. He is a veterinary surgeon, a farrier, and horsebreaker. Give me your definition of a horse.'

(Sissy Jupe thrown into the greatest alarm by this demand.)

'Girl number twenty unable to define a horse!' said Mr. Gradgrind, for the general behoof of all the little pitchers. 'Girl number twenty possessed of no facts, in reference to one of the commonest of animals! Some boy's definition of a horse. Bitzer, yours.'

The square finger, moving here and there, lighted suddenly on Bitzer, perhaps because he chanced to sit in the same ray of sunlight which, darting in at one of the bare windows of the intensely white-washed room, irradiated Sissy. For, the boys and girls sat on the face of the inclined plane in two compact bodies, divided up the centre by a narrow interval; and Sissy, being at the corner of a row on the sunny side, came in for the beginning of a sunbeam, of which Bitzer, being at the corner of a row on the other side, a few rows in advance, caught the end. But, whereas the girl was so dark-eyed and dark-haired, that she seemed to receive a deeper and more lustrous colour from the sun, when it shone upon her, the boy was so light-eyed and light-haired that the self-same rays appeared to draw out of him what little colour he ever possessed. His cold eyes would hardly have been eyes, but for the short ends of lashes which, by bringing them into immediate contrast with something paler than themselves, expressed their form. His short-cropped hair might have been a mere continuation of the sandy freckles on his forehead and face. His skin was so unwholesomely deficient in the natural tinge, that he looked as though, if he were cut, he would bleed white.

'Bitzer,' said Thomas Gradgrind. 'Your definition of a horse.'

'Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth.' Thus (and much more) Bitzer.

'Now girl number twenty,' said Mr. Gradgrind. 'You know what a horse is.'

She curtseyed again, and would have blushed deeper, if she could have blushed deeper than she had blushed all this time. Bitzer, after rapidly blinking at Thomas Gradgrind with both eyes at once, and so catching the light upon his quivering ends of lashes that they looked like the antennae of busy insects, put his knuckles to his freckled forehead, and sat down again.

The third gentleman now stepped forth. A mighty man at cutting and drying, he was; a government officer; in his way (and in most other people's too), a professed pugilist; always in training, always with a system to force down the general throat like a bolus, always to be heard of at the bar of his little Public-office, ready to fight all England. To continue in fistic phraseology, he had a genius for coming up to the scratch, wherever and whatever it was, and proving himself an ugly customer. He would go in and damage any subject whatever with his right, follow up with his left, stop, exchange, counter, bore his opponent (he always fought All England) to the ropes, and fall upon him neatly. He was certain to knock the wind out of common sense, and render that unlucky adversary deaf to the call of time. And he had it in charge from high authority to bring about the great public-office Millennium, when Commissioners should reign upon earth.

'Very well,' said this gentleman, briskly smiling, and folding his arms. 'That's a horse. Now, let me ask you girls and boys, Would you paper a room with representations of horses?'

After a pause, one half of the children cried in chorus, 'Yes, sir!' Upon which the other half, seeing in the gentleman's face that Yes was wrong, cried out in chorus, 'No, sir!' - as the custom is, in these examinations.

'Of course, No. Why wouldn't you?'

A pause. One corpulent slow boy, with a wheezy manner of breathing, ventured the answer, Because he wouldn't paper a room at all, but would paint it.

'You must paper it,' said the gentleman, rather warmly.

'You must paper it,' said Thomas Gradgrind, 'whether you like it or not. Don't tell us you wouldn't paper it. What do you mean, boy?'

'I'll explain to you, then,' said the gentleman, after another and a dismal pause, 'why you wouldn't paper a room with representations of horses. Do you ever see horses walking up and down the sides of rooms in reality - in fact? Do you?'

'Yes, sir!' from one half. 'No, sir!' from the other.

'Of course no,' said the gentleman, with an indignant look at the wrong half. 'Why, then, you are not to see anywhere, what you don't see in fact; you are not to have anywhere, what you don't have in fact. What is called Taste, is only another name for Fact.' Thomas Gradgrind nodded his approbation.

'This is a new principle, a discovery, a great discovery,' said the gentleman. 'Now, I'll try you again. Suppose you were going to carpet a room. Would you use a carpet having a representation of flowers upon it?'

There being a general conviction by this time that 'No, sir!' was always the right answer to this gentleman, the chorus of NO was very strong. Only a few feeble stragglers said Yes: among them Sissy Jupe.

'Girl number twenty,' said the gentleman, smiling in the calm strength of knowledge.

Sissy blushed, and stood up.

'So you would carpet your room - or your husband's room, if you were a grown woman, and had a husband - with representations of flowers, would you?' said the gentleman. 'Why would you?'

'If you please, sir, I am very fond of flowers,' returned the girl.

'And is that why you would put tables and chairs upon them, and have people walking over them with heavy boots?'

'It wouldn't hurt them, sir. They wouldn't crush and wither, if you please, sir. They would be the pictures of what was very pretty and pleasant, and I would fancy - '

'Ay, ay, ay! But you mustn't fancy,' cried the gentleman, quite elated by coming so happily to his point. 'That's it! You are never to fancy.'

'You are not, Cecilia Jupe,' Thomas Gradgrind solemnly repeated, 'to do anything of that kind.'

'Fact, fact, fact!' said the gentleman. And 'Fact, fact, fact!' repeated Thomas Gradgrind.

'You are to be in all things regulated and governed,' said the gentleman, 'by fact. We hope to have, before long, a board of fact, composed of commissioners of fact, who will force the people to be a people of fact, and of nothing but fact. You must discard the word Fancy altogether. You have nothing to do with it. You are not to have, in any object of use or ornament, what would be a contradiction in fact. You don't walk upon flowers in fact; you cannot be allowed to walk upon flowers in carpets. You don't find that foreign birds and butterflies come and perch upon your crockery; you cannot be permitted to paint foreign birds and butterflies upon your crockery. You never meet with quadrupeds going up and down walls; you must not have quadrupeds represented upon walls. You must use,' said the gentleman, 'for all these purposes, combinations and modifications (in primary colours) of mathematical figures which are susceptible of proof and demonstration. This is the new discovery. This is fact. This is taste.'

The girl curtseyed, and sat down. She was very young, and she looked as if she were frightened by the matter-of-fact prospect the world afforded.

'Now, if Mr. M'Choakumchild,' said the gentleman, 'will proceed to give his first lesson here, Mr. Gradgrind, I shall be happy, at your request, to observe his mode of procedure.'

Mr. Gradgrind was much obliged. 'Mr. M'Choakumchild, we only wait for you.'

So, Mr. M'Choakumchild began in his best manner. He and some one hundred and forty other schoolmasters, had been lately turned at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs. He had been put through an immense variety of paces, and had answered volumes of head-breaking questions. Orthography, etymology, syntax, and prosody, biography, astronomy, geography, and general cosmography, the sciences of compound proportion, algebra, land-surveying and levelling, vocal music, and drawing from models, were all at the ends of his ten chilled fingers. He had worked his stony way into Her

Majesty's most Honourable Privy Council's Schedule B, and had taken the bloom off the higher branches of mathematics and physical science, French, German, Latin, and Greek. He knew all about all the Water Sheds of all the world (whatever they are), and all the histories of all the peoples, and all the names of all the rivers and mountains, and all the productions, manners, and customs of all the countries, and all their boundaries and bearings on the two and thirty points of the compass. Ah, rather overdone, M'Choakumchild. If he had only learnt a little less, how infinitely better he might have taught much more!

He went to work in this preparatory lesson, not unlike Morgiana in the Forty Thieves: looking into all the vessels ranged before him, one after another, to see what they contained. Say, good M'Choakumchild. When from thy boiling store, thou shalt fill each jar brim full by-and-by, dost thou think that thou wilt always kill outright the robber Fancy lurking within - or sometimes only maim him and distort him!

CHAPTER III - A LOOPHOLE

MR. GRADGRIND walked homeward from the school, in a state of considerable satisfaction. It was his school, and he intended it to be a model. He intended every child in it to be a model - just as the young Gradgrinds were all models.

There were five young Gradgrinds, and they were models every one. They had been lectured at, from their tenderest years; coursed, like little hares. Almost as soon as they could run alone, they had been made to run to the lecture-room. The first object with which they had an association, or of which they had a remembrance, was a large black board with a dry Ogre chalking ghastly white figures on it.

Not that they knew, by name or nature, anything about an Ogre Fact forbid! I only use the word to express a monster in a lecturing castle, with Heaven knows how many heads manipulated into one, taking childhood captive, and dragging it into gloomy statistical dens by the hair.

No little Gradgrind had ever seen a face in the moon; it was up in the moon before it could speak distinctly. No little Gradgrind had ever learnt the silly jingle, Twinkle, twinkle, little star; how I wonder what you are! No little Gradgrind had ever known wonder on the subject, each little Gradgrind having at five years old dissected the Great Bear like a Professor Owen, and driven Charles's Wain like a locomotive engine-driver. No little Gradgrind had ever associated a cow in a field with that famous cow with the crumpled horn who tossed the dog who worried the cat who killed the rat who ate the malt, or with that yet more famous cow who swallowed Tom Thumb: it had never heard of those celebrities, and had only been introduced to a cow as a graminivorous ruminating quadruped with several stomachs.

To his matter-of-fact home, which was called Stone Lodge, Mr. Gradgrind directed his steps. He had virtually retired from the wholesale hardware trade before he built Stone Lodge, and was now looking about for a suitable opportunity of making an arithmetical figure in Parliament. Stone Lodge was situated on a moor within a mile or two of a great town - called Coketown in the present faithful guide-book.

A very regular feature on the face of the country, Stone Lodge was. Not the least disguise toned down or shaded off that uncompromising fact in the landscape. A great square house, with a heavy portico darkening the principal windows, as its master's heavy brows overshadowed his eyes. A calculated, cast up, balanced, and proved house. Six windows on this side of the door, six on that side; a total of twelve in this wing, a total of twelve in the other wing; four-and-twenty carried over to the back wings. A lawn and garden and an infant avenue, all ruled straight like a botanical account-book. Gas and ventilation, drainage and water-service, all of the primest quality. Iron clamps and girders, fire-proof from top to bottom; mechanical lifts for the housemaids, with all their brushes and brooms; everything that heart could desire.

Everything? Well, I suppose so. The little Gradgrinds had cabinets in various departments of science too. They had a little conchological cabinet, and a little metallurgical cabinet, and a little mineralogical cabinet; and the specimens were all arranged and labelled, and the bits of stone and ore looked as though they might have been broken from the parent substances by those tremendously hard instruments their own names; and, to paraphrase the idle legend of Peter Piper, who had never found his way into their nursery, If the greedy little Gradgrinds grasped at more than this, what was it for good gracious goodness' sake, that the greedy little Gradgrinds grasped it!

Their father walked on in a hopeful and satisfied frame of mind. He was an affectionate father, after his manner; but he would probably have described himself (if he had been put, like Sissy Jupe, upon a definition) as 'an eminently practical' father. He had a particular pride in the phrase eminently practical, which was considered to have a special application to him. Whatsoever the public meeting held in Coketown, and whatsoever the subject of such meeting, some Coketowner was sure to seize the occasion of alluding to his eminently practical friend Gradgrind. This always pleased the eminently practical friend. He knew it to be his due, but his due was acceptable.

He had reached the neutral ground upon the outskirts of the town, which was neither town nor country, and yet was either spoiled, when his ears were invaded by the sound of music. The clashing and banging band attached to the horse-riding establishment, which had there set up its rest in a wooden pavilion, was in full bray. A flag, floating from the summit of the temple, proclaimed to mankind that it was 'Sleary's Horse-riding' which claimed their suffrages. Sleary himself, a stout modern statue with a money-box at its elbow, in an ecclesiastical niche of early Gothic architecture, took the money. Miss Josephine Sleary, as some very long and very narrow strips of printed bill announced, was then inaugurating the entertainments with her graceful equestrian Tyrolean flower-act. Among the other pleasing but always strictly moral wonders which must be seen to be believed, Signor Jupe was that afternoon to 'elucidate the diverting accomplishments of his highly trained performing dog Merrylegs.' He was also to exhibit 'his astounding feat of throwing seventy-five hundred-weight in rapid succession backhanded over his head, thus forming a fountain of solid iron in mid-air, a feat never before attempted in this or any other country, and which having elicited such rapturous plaudits from enthusiastic throngs it cannot be withdrawn.' The same Signor Jupe was to 'enliven the varied performances at frequent intervals with his chaste Shaksperean quips and retorts.' Lastly, he was to wind them up by appearing in his favourite character of Mr. William Button, of Tooley Street, in 'the highly novel and laughable hippo- comedietta of The Tailor's Journey to Brentford.'

Thomas Gradgrind took no heed of these trivialities of course, but passed on as a practical man ought to pass on, either brushing the noisy insects from his thoughts, or consigning them to the House of Correction. But, the turning of the road took him by the back of the booth, and at the back of the booth a number of children were congregated in a number of stealthy attitudes, striving to peep in at the hidden glories of the place.

This brought him to a stop. 'Now, to think of these vagabonds,' said he, 'attracting the young rabble from a model school.'

A space of stunted grass and dry rubbish being between him and the young rabble, he took his eyeglass out of his waistcoat to look for any child he knew by name, and might order off. Phenomenon almost incredible though distinctly seen, what did he then behold but his own metallurgical Louisa, peeping with all her might through a hole in a deal board, and his own mathematical Thomas abasing himself on the ground to catch but a hoof of the graceful equestrian Tyrolean flower-act!

Dumb with amazement, Mr. Gradgrind crossed to the spot where his family was thus disgraced, laid his hand upon each erring child, and said:

'Louisa!! Thomas!!'

Both rose, red and disconcerted. But, Louisa looked at her father with more boldness than Thomas did. Indeed, Thomas did not look at him, but gave himself up to be taken home like a machine.

'In the name of wonder, idleness, and folly!' said Mr. Gradgrind, leading each away by a hand; 'what do you do here?'

'Wanted to see what it was like,' returned Louisa, shortly.

'What it was like?'

'Yes, father.'

There was an air of jaded sullenness in them both, and particularly in the girl: yet, struggling through the dissatisfaction of her face, there was a light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn, a starved imagination keeping life in itself somehow, which brightened its expression. Not with the brightness natural to cheerful youth, but with uncertain, eager, doubtful flashes, which had something painful in them, analogous to the changes on a blind face groping its way.

She was a child now, of fifteen or sixteen; but at no distant day would seem to become a woman all at once. Her father thought so as he looked at her. She was pretty. Would have been self-willed (he thought in his eminently practical way) but for her bringing-up.

'Thomas, though I have the fact before me, I find it difficult to believe that you, with your education and resources, should have brought your sister to a scene like this.'

'I brought him, father,' said Louisa, quickly. 'I asked him to come.'

'I am sorry to hear it. I am very sorry indeed to hear it. It makes Thomas no better, and it makes you worse, Louisa.'

She looked at her father again, but no tear fell down her cheek.

'You! Thomas and you, to whom the circle of the sciences is open; Thomas and you, who may be said to be replete with facts; Thomas and you, who have been trained to mathematical exactness; Thomas and you, here!' cried Mr. Gradgrind. 'In this degraded position! I am amazed.'

'I was tired, father. I have been tired a long time,' said Louisa.

'Tired? Of what?' asked the astonished father.

'I don't know of what - of everything, I think.'

'Say not another word,' returned Mr. Gradgrind. 'You are childish. I will hear no more.' He did not speak again until they had walked some half-a-mile in silence, when he gravely broke out with: 'What would your best friends say, Louisa? Do you attach no value to their good opinion? What would Mr. Bounderby say?' At the mention of this name, his daughter stole a look at him, remarkable for its intense and searching character. He saw nothing of it, for before he looked at her, she had again cast down her eyes!

'What,' he repeated presently, 'would Mr. Bounderby say?' All the way to Stone Lodge, as with grave indignation he led the two delinquents home, he repeated at intervals 'What would Mr. Bounderby say?' - as if Mr. Bounderby had been Mrs. Grundy.

CHAPTER IV - MR. BOUNDERBY

NOT being Mrs. Grundy, who was Mr. Bounderby?

Why, Mr. Bounderby was as near being Mr. Gradgrind's bosom friend, as a man perfectly devoid of sentiment can approach that spiritual relationship towards another man perfectly devoid of sentiment. So near was Mr. Bounderby - or, if the reader should prefer it, so far off.

He was a rich man: banker, merchant, manufacturer, and what not. A big, loud man, with a stare, and a metallic laugh. A man made out of a coarse material, which seemed to have been stretched to make so much of him. A man with a great puffed head and forehead, swelled veins in his temples, and such a strained skin to his face that it seemed to hold his eyes open, and lift his eyebrows up. A man with a pervading appearance on him of being inflated like a balloon, and ready to start. A man who could never sufficiently vaunt himself a self-made man. A man who was always proclaiming, through that brassy speaking-trumpet of a voice of his, his old ignorance and his old poverty. A man who was the Bully of humility.

A year or two younger than his eminently practical friend, Mr. Bounderby looked older; his seven or eight and forty might have had the seven or eight added to it again, without surprising anybody. He had not much hair. One might have fancied he had talked it off; and that what was left, all standing up in disorder, was in that condition from being constantly blown about by his windy boastfulness.

In the formal drawing-room of Stone Lodge, standing on the hearthrug, warming himself before the fire, Mr. Bounderby delivered some observations to Mrs. Gradgrind on the circumstance of its being his birthday. He stood before the fire, partly because it was a cool spring afternoon, though the sun shone; partly because the shade of Stone Lodge was always haunted by the ghost of damp mortar; partly because he thus took up a commanding position, from which to subdue Mrs. Gradgrind.

'I hadn't a shoe to my foot. As to a stocking, I didn't know such a thing by name. I passed the day in a ditch, and the night in a pigsty. That's the way I spent my tenth birthday. Not that a ditch was new to me, for I was born in a ditch.'

Mrs. Gradgrind, a little, thin, white, pink-eyed bundle of shawls, of surpassing feebleness, mental and bodily; who was always taking physic without any effect, and who, whenever she showed a symptom of coming to life, was invariably stunned by some weighty piece of fact tumbling on her; Mrs. Gradgrind hoped it was a dry ditch?

'No! As wet as a sop. A foot of water in it,' said Mr. Bounderby.

'Enough to give a baby cold,' Mrs. Gradgrind considered.

'Cold? I was born with inflammation of the lungs, and of everything else, I believe, that was capable of inflammation,' returned Mr. Bounderby. 'For years, ma'am, I was one of the most miserable little wretches ever seen. I was so sickly, that I was always moaning and groaning. I was so ragged and dirty, that you wouldn't have touched me with a pair of tongs.'

Mrs. Gradgrind faintly looked at the tongs, as the most appropriate thing her imbecility could think of doing.

'How I fought through it, I don't know,' said Bounderby. 'I was determined, I suppose. I have been a determined character in later life, and I suppose I was then. Here I am, Mrs. Gradgrind, anyhow, and nobody to thank for my being here, but myself.'

Mrs. Gradgrind meekly and weakly hoped that his mother -

'My mother? Bolted, ma'am!' said Bounderby.

Mrs. Gradgrind, stunned as usual, collapsed and gave it up.

'My mother left me to my grandmother,' said Bounderby; 'and, according to the best of my remembrance, my grandmother was the wickedest and the worst old woman that ever lived. If I got a little pair of shoes by any chance, she would take 'em off and sell 'em for drink. Why, I have known that grandmother of mine lie in her bed and drink her four-teen glasses of liquor before breakfast!'

Mrs. Gradgrind, weakly smiling, and giving no other sign of vitality, looked (as she always did) like an indifferently executed transparency of a small female figure, without enough light behind it.

'She kept a chandler's shop,' pursued Bounderby, 'and kept me in an egg-box. That was the cot of my infancy; an old egg-box. As soon as I was big enough to run away, of course I ran away. Then I became a young vagabond; and instead of one old woman knocking me about and starving me, everybody of all ages knocked me about and starved me. They were right; they had no business to do anything else. I was a nuisance, an incumbrance, and a pest. I know that very well.'

His pride in having at any time of his life achieved such a great social distinction as to be a nuisance, an incumbrance, and a pest, was only to be satisfied by three sonorous repetitions of the boast.

'I was to pull through it, I suppose, Mrs. Gradgrind. Whether I was to do it or not, ma'am, I did it. I pulled through it, though nobody threw me out a rope. Vagabond, errand-boy, vagabond, labourer, porter, clerk, chief manager, small partner, Josiah Bounderby of Coketown. Those are the antecedents, and the culmination. Josiah Bounderby of Coketown learnt his letters from the outsides of the shops, Mrs. Gradgrind, and was first able to tell the time upon a dial-plate, from studying the steeple clock of St. Giles's Church, London, under the direction of a drunken cripple, who was a convicted thief, and an incorrigible vagrant. Tell Josiah Bounderby of Coketown, of your district schools and your model schools, and your training schools, and your whole kettle-of-fish of schools; and Josiah Bounderby of Coketown, tells you plainly, all right, all correct - he hadn't such advantages - but let us have hard-headed, solid-fisted people - the education that made him won't do for everybody, he knows well - such and such his education was, however, and you may force him to swallow boiling fat, but you shall never force him to suppress the facts of his life.'

Being heated when he arrived at this climax, Josiah Bounderby of Coketown stopped. He stopped just as his eminently practical friend, still accompanied by the two young culprits, entered the room. His eminently practical friend, on seeing him, stopped also, and gave Louisa a reproachful look that plainly said, 'Behold your Bounderby!'

'Well!' blustered Mr. Bounderby, 'what's the matter? What is young Thomas in the dumps about?'

He spoke of young Thomas, but he looked at Louisa.

'We were peeping at the circus,' muttered Louisa, haughtily, without lifting up her eyes, 'and father caught us.'

'And, Mrs. Gradgrind,' said her husband in a lofty manner, 'I should as soon have expected to find my children reading poetry.'

'Dear me,' whimpered Mrs. Gradgrind. 'How can you, Louisa and Thomas! I wonder at you. I declare you're enough to make one regret ever having had a family at all. I have a great mind to say I wish I hadn't. Then what would you have done, I should like to know?'

Mr. Gradgrind did not seem favourably impressed by these cogent remarks. He frowned impatiently.

'As if, with my head in its present throbbing state, you couldn't go and look at the shells and minerals and things provided for you, instead of circuses!' said Mrs. Gradgrind. 'You know, as well as I do, no young people have circus masters, or keep circuses in cabinets, or attend lectures about circuses. What can you possibly want to know of circuses then? I am sure you have enough to do, if that's what you want. With my head in its present state, I couldn't remember the mere names of half the facts you have got to attend to.'

'That's the reason!' pouted Louisa.

'Don't tell me that's the reason, because it can't be nothing of the sort,' said Mrs. Gradgrind. 'Go and be somethingological directly.' Mrs. Gradgrind was not a scientific character, and usually dismissed her children to their studies with this general injunction to choose their pursuit.

In truth, Mrs. Gradgrind's stock of facts in general was woefully defective; but Mr. Gradgrind in raising her to her high matrimonial position, had been influenced by two reasons. Firstly, she was most satisfactory as a question of figures; and, secondly, she had 'no nonsense' about her. By nonsense he meant fancy; and truly it is probable she was as free from any alloy of that nature, as any human being not arrived at the perfection of an absolute idiot, ever was.

The simple circumstance of being left alone with her husband and Mr. Bounderby, was sufficient to stun this admirable lady again without collision between herself and any other fact. So, she once more died away, and nobody minded her.

'Bounderby,' said Mr. Gradgrind, drawing a chair to the fireside, 'you are always so interested in my young people - particularly in Louisa - that I make no apology for saying to you, I am very much vexed by this discovery. I have systematically devoted myself (as you know) to the education of the reason of my family. The reason is (as you know) the only faculty to which education should be addressed. 'And yet, Bounderby, it would appear from this unexpected circumstance of to-day, though in itself a trifling one, as if something had crept into Thomas's and Louisa's minds which is - or rather, which is not - I don't know that I can express myself better than by saying - which has never been intended to be developed, and in which their reason has no part.'

'There certainly is no reason in looking with interest at a parcel of vagabonds,' returned Bounderby. 'When I was a vagabond myself, nobody looked with any interest at me; I know that.'

'Then comes the question; said the eminently practical father, with his eyes on the fire, 'in what has this vulgar curiosity its rise?'

'I'll tell you in what. In idle imagination.'

'I hope not,' said the eminently practical; 'I confess, however, that the misgiving has crossed me on my way home.'

'In idle imagination, Gradgrind,' repeated Bounderby. 'A very bad thing for anybody, but a cursed bad thing for a girl like Louisa. I should ask Mrs. Gradgrind's pardon for strong expressions, but that she knows very well I am not a refined character. Whoever expects refinement in me will be disappointed. I hadn't a refined bringing up.'

'Whether,' said Gradgrind, pondering with his hands in his pockets, and his cavernous eyes on the fire, 'whether any instructor or servant can have suggested anything? Whether Louisa or Thomas can have been reading anything? Whether, in spite of all precautions, any idle story-book can have got into the house? Because, in minds that have been practically formed by rule and line, from the cradle upwards, this is so curious, so incomprehensible.'

'Stop a bit!' cried Bounderby, who all this time had been standing, as before, on the hearth, bursting at the very furniture of the room with explosive humility. 'You have one of those strollers' children in the school.'

'Cecilia Jupe, by name,' said Mr. Gradgrind, with something of a stricken look at his friend.

'Now, stop a bit!' cried Bounderby again. 'How did she come there?'

'Why, the fact is, I saw the girl myself, for the first time, only just now. She specially applied here at the house to be admitted, as not regularly belonging to our town, and - yes, you are right, Bounderby, you are right.'

'Now, stop a bit!' cried Bounderby, once more. 'Louisa saw her when she came?'

'Louisa certainly did see her, for she mentioned the application to me. But Louisa saw her, I have no doubt, in Mrs. Gradgrind's presence.'

'Pray, Mrs. Gradgrind,' said Bounderby, 'what passed?'

'Oh, my poor health!' returned Mrs. Gradgrind. 'The girl wanted to come to the school, and Mr. Gradgrind wanted girls to come to the school, and Louisa and Thomas both said that the girl wanted to come, and that Mr. Gradgrind wanted girls to come, and how was it possible to contradict them when such was the fact!'

'Now I tell you what, Gradgrind!' said Mr. Bounderby. 'Turn this girl to the right about, and there's an end of it.'

'I am much of your opinion.'

'Do it at once,' said Bounderby, 'has always been my motto from a child. When I thought I would run away from my egg-box and my grandmother, I did it at once. Do you the same. Do this at once!'

'Are you walking?' asked his friend. 'I have the father's address. Perhaps you would not mind walking to town with me?'

'Not the least in the world,' said Mr. Bounderby, 'as long as you do it at once!'

So, Mr. Bounderby threw on his hat - he always threw it on, as expressing a man who had been far too busily employed in making himself, to acquire any fashion of wearing his hat - and with his hands in his pockets, sauntered out into the hall. 'I never wear gloves,' it was his custom to say. 'I didn't climb up the ladder in them. - Shouldn't be so high up, if I had.'

Being left to saunter in the hall a minute or two while Mr. Gradgrind went up-stairs for the address, he opened the door of the children's study and looked into that serene floor-clothed apartment, which, notwithstanding its book-cases and its cabinets and its variety of learned and philosophical appliances, had much of the genial aspect of a room devoted to hair-cutting. Louisa languidly leaned upon the window looking out, without looking at anything, while young Thomas stood sniffing revengefully at the fire. Adam Smith and Malthus, two younger Gradgrinds, were out at lecture in custody; and little Jane, after manufacturing a good deal of moist pipe-clay on her face with slate-pencil and tears, had fallen asleep over vulgar fractions.

'It's all right now, Louisa: it's all right, young Thomas,' said Mr. Bounderby; 'you won't do so any more. I'll answer for it's being all over with father. Well, Louisa, that's worth a kiss, isn't it?'

'You can take one, Mr. Bounderby,' returned Louisa, when she had coldly paused, and slowly walked across the room, and ungraciously raised her cheek towards him, with her face turned away.

'Always my pet; ain't you, Louisa?' said Mr. Bounderby. 'Good-bye, Louisa!'

He went his way, but she stood on the same spot, rubbing the cheek he had kissed, with her handkerchief, until it was burning red. She was still doing this, five minutes afterwards.

'What are you about, Loo?' her brother sulkily remonstrated. 'You'll rub a hole in your face.'

'You may cut the piece out with your penknife if you like, Tom. I wouldn't cry!'

CHAPTER V - THE KEYNOTE

COKETOWN, to which Messrs. Bounderby and Gradgrind now walked, was a triumph of fact; it had no greater taint of fancy in it than Mrs. Gradgrind herself. Let us strike the key-note, Coketown, before pursuing our tune.

It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood, it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and to-morrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next.

These attributes of Coketown were in the main inseparable from the work by which it was sustained; against them were to be set off, comforts of life which found their way all over the world, and elegancies of life which made, we will not ask how much of the fine lady, who could scarcely bear to hear the place mentioned. The rest of its features were voluntary, and they were these.

You saw nothing in Coketown but what was severely workful. If the members of a religious persuasion built a chapel there - as the members of eighteen religious persuasions had done - they made it a pious warehouse of red brick, with sometimes (but this is only in highly ornamental examples) a bell in a birdcage on the top of it. The solitary exception was the New Church; a stuccoed edifice with a square steeple over the door, terminating in four short pinnacles like florid wooden legs. All the public inscriptions in the town were painted alike, in severe characters of black and white. The jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town-hall might have been either, or both, or anything else, for anything that appeared to the contrary in the graces of their construction. Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town; fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial. The M'Choakumchild school was all fact, and the school of design was all fact, and the relations between master and man were all fact, and everything was fact between the lying-in hospital and the cemetery, and what you couldn't state in figures, or show to be purchaseable in the cheapest market and saleable in the dearest, was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen.

A town so sacred to fact, and so triumphant in its assertion, of course got on well? Why no, not quite well. No? Dear me!

No. Coketown did not come out of its own furnaces, in all respects like gold that had stood the fire. First, the perplexing mystery of the place was, Who belonged to the eighteen denominations? Because, whoever did, the labouring people did not. It was very strange to walk through the streets on a Sunday morning, and note how few of them the barbarous jangling of bells that was driving the sick and nervous mad, called away from their own quarter, from their own close rooms, from the corners of their own streets, where they lounged listlessly, gazing at all the church and chapel going, as at a thing with which they had no manner of concern. Nor was it merely the stranger who noticed this, because there was a native organization in Coketown itself, whose members were to be heard of in the House of Commons every session, indignantly petitioning for acts of parliament that should make these people religious by main force. Then came the Teetotal Society, who complained that these same people would get drunk, and showed in tabular statements that they did get drunk, and proved at tea parties that no inducement, human or Divine (except a medal), would induce them to forego their custom of getting drunk. Then came the chemist and druggist, with other tabular statements, showing that when they didn't get drunk, they took opium. Then came the experienced chaplain of the jail, with more tabular statements, outdoing all the previous tabular statements, and showing that the same people would resort to low haunts, hidden from the public eye, where they heard low singing and saw low dancing, and mayhap joined in it; and where A. B., aged twenty-four next birthday, and committed for eighteen months' solitary, had himself said (not that he had ever shown himself particularly worthy of belief) his ruin began, as he was perfectly sure and confident that otherwise he would have been a tip-top moral specimen. Then came Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby, the two gentlemen at this present moment walking through Coketown, and both eminently practical, who could, on occasion, furnish more tabular statements derived from their own personal experience, and illustrated by cases they had known and seen, from which it clearly appeared - in short, it was the only clear thing in the case - that these same people were a bad lot altogether, gentlemen; that do what you would for them they were never thankful for it, gentlemen; that they were restless, gentlemen; that they never knew what they wanted; that they lived upon the best, and bought fresh butter; and insisted on Mocha coffee, and rejected all but prime parts of meat, and yet were eternally dissatisfied and unmanageable. In short, it was the moral of the old nursery fable:

There was an old woman, and what do you think?
She lived upon nothing but victuals and drink;
Victuals and drink were the whole of her diet,
And yet this old woman would NEVER be quiet.

Is it possible, I wonder, that there was any analogy between the case of the Coketown population and the case of the little Gradgrinds? Surely, none of us in our sober senses and acquainted with figures, are to be told at this time of day, that one of the foremost elements in the existence of the Coketown working-people had been for scores of years, deliberately set at nought? That there was any Fancy in them demanding to be brought into healthy existence instead of struggling on in convulsions? That exactly in the ratio as they worked long and monotonously, the craving grew within them for some physical relief - some relaxation, encouraging good humour and good spirits, and giving them a vent - some recognized holiday, though it were but for an honest dance to a stirring band of music - some occasional light pie in which even M'Choakumchild had no finger - which craving must and would be satisfied aright, or must and would inevitably go wrong, until the laws of the Creation were repealed?

'This man lives at Pod's End, and I don't quite know Pod's End,' said Mr. Gradgrind. 'Which is it, Bounderby?'

Mr. Bounderby knew it was somewhere down town, but knew no more respecting it. So they stopped for a moment, looking about.

Almost as they did so, there came running round the corner of the street at a quick pace and with a frightened look, a girl whom Mr. Gradgrind recognized. 'Halloa!' said he. 'Stop! Where are you going! Stop!' Girl number twenty stopped then, palpitating, and made him a curtsey.

'Why are you tearing about the streets,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'in this improper manner?'

'I was - I was run after, sir,' the girl panted, 'and I wanted to get away.'

'Run after?' repeated Mr. Gradgrind. 'Who would run after you?'

The question was unexpectedly and suddenly answered for her, by the colourless boy, Bitzer, who came round the corner with such blind speed and so little anticipating a stoppage on the pavement, that he brought himself up against Mr. Gradgrind's waistcoat and rebounded into the road.

'What do you mean, boy?' said Mr. Gradgrind. 'What are you doing? How dare you dash against - everybody - in this manner?' Bitzer picked up his cap, which the concussion had knocked off; and backing, and knuckling his forehead, pleaded that it was an accident.

'Was this boy running after you, Jupe?' asked Mr. Gradgrind.

'Yes, sir,' said the girl reluctantly.

'No, I wasn't, sir!' cried Bitzer. 'Not till she run away from me. But the horse-riders never mind what they say, sir; they're famous for it. You know the horse-riders are famous for never minding what they say,' addressing Sissy. 'It's as well known in the town as - please, sir, as the multiplication table isn't known to the horse-riders.' Bitzer tried Mr. Bounderby with this.

'He frightened me so,' said the girl, 'with his cruel faces!'

'Oh!' cried Bitzer. 'Oh! An't you one of the rest! An't you a horse-rider! I never looked at her, sir. I asked her if she would know how to define a horse to-morrow, and offered to tell her again, and she ran away, and I ran after her, sir, that she might know how to answer when she was asked. You wouldn't have thought of saying such mischief if you hadn't been a horse-rider?'

'Her calling seems to be pretty well known among 'em,' observed Mr. Bounderby. 'You'd have had the whole school peeping in a row, in a week.'

'Truly, I think so,' returned his friend. 'Bitzer, turn you about and take yourself home. Jupe, stay here a moment. Let me hear of your running in this manner any more, boy, and you will hear of me through the master of the school. You understand what I mean. Go along.'

The boy stopped in his rapid blinking, knuckled his forehead again, glanced at Sissy, turned about, and retreated.

'Now, girl,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'take this gentleman and me to your father's; we are going there. What have you got in that bottle you are carrying?'

'Gin,' said Mr. Bounderby.

'Dear, no, sir! It's the nine oils.'

'The what?' cried Mr. Bounderby.

'The nine oils, sir, to rub father with.'

'Then,' said Mr. Bounderby, with a loud short laugh, 'what the devil do you rub your father with nine oils for?'

'It's what our people aways use, sir, when they get any hurts in the ring,' replied the girl, looking over her shoulder, to assure herself that her pursuer was gone. 'They bruise themselves very bad sometimes.'

'Serve 'em right,' said Mr. Bounderby, 'for being idle.' She glanced up at his face, with mingled astonishment and dread.

'By George!' said Mr. Bounderby, 'when I was four or five years younger than you, I had worse bruises upon me than ten oils, twenty oils, forty oils, would have rubbed off. I didn't get 'em by posture-making, but by being banged about. There was no rope- dancing for me; I danced on the bare ground and was larruped with the rope.'

Mr. Gradgrind, though hard enough, was by no means so rough a man as Mr. Bounderby. His character was not unkind, all things considered; it might have been a very kind one indeed, if he had only made some round mistake in the arithmetic that balanced it, years ago. He said, in what he meant for a reassuring tone, as they turned down a narrow road, 'And this is Pod's End; is it, Jupe?'

'This is it, sir, and - if you wouldn't mind, sir - this is the house.'

She stopped, at twilight, at the door of a mean little public- house, with dim red lights in it. As haggard and as shabby, as if, for want of custom, it had itself taken to drinking, and had gone the way all drunkards go, and was very near the end of it.

'It's only crossing the bar, sir, and up the stairs, if you wouldn't mind, and waiting there for a moment till I get a candle. If you should hear a dog, sir, it's only Merrylegs, and he only barks.'

'Merrylegs and nine oils, eh!' said Mr. Bounderby, entering last with his metallic laugh. 'Pretty well this, for a self-made man!'

CHAPTER VI - SLEARY'S HORSEMANSHIP

THE name of the public-house was the Pegasus's Arms. The Pegasus's legs might have been more to the purpose; but, underneath the winged horse upon the sign-board, the Pegasus's Arms was inscribed in Roman letters. Beneath that inscription again, in a flowing scroll, the painter had touched off the lines:

Good malt makes good beer,
Walk in, and they'll draw it here;
Good wine makes good brandy,
Give us a call, and you'll find it handy.

Framed and glazed upon the wall behind the dingy little bar, was another Pegasus - a theatrical one - with real gauze let in for his wings, golden stars stuck on all over him, and his ethereal harness made of red silk.

As it had grown too dusky without, to see the sign, and as it had not grown light enough within to see the picture, Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby received no offence from these idealities. They followed the girl up some steep corner-stairs without meeting any one, and stopped in the dark while she went on for a candle. They expected every moment to hear Merrylegs give tongue, but the highly trained performing dog had not barked when the girl and the candle appeared together.

'Father is not in our room, sir,' she said, with a face of great surprise. 'If you wouldn't mind walking in, I'll find him directly.' They walked in; and Sissy, having set two chairs for them, sped away with a quick light step. It was a mean, shabbily furnished room, with a bed in it. The white night-cap, embellished with two peacock's feathers and a pigtail bolt upright, in which

Signor Jupe had that very afternoon enlivened the varied performances with his chaste Shaksperean quips and retorts, hung upon a nail; but no other portion of his wardrobe, or other token of himself or his pursuits, was to be seen anywhere. As to Merrylegs, that respectable ancestor of the highly trained animal who went aboard the ark, might have been accidentally shut out of it, for any sign of a dog that was manifest to eye or ear in the Pegasus's Arms.

They heard the doors of rooms above, opening and shutting as Sissy went from one to another in quest of her father; and presently they heard voices expressing surprise. She came bounding down again in a great hurry, opened a battered and mangy old hair trunk, found it empty, and looked round with her hands clasped and her face full of terror.

'Father must have gone down to the Booth, sir. I don't know why he should go there, but he must be there; I'll bring him in a minute!' She was gone directly, without her bonnet; with her long, dark, childish hair streaming behind her.

'What does she mean!' said Mr. Gradgrind. 'Back in a minute? It's more than a mile off.'

Before Mr. Bounderby could reply, a young man appeared at the door, and introducing himself with the words, 'By your leaves, gentlemen!' walked in with his hands in his pockets. His face, close-shaven, thin, and sallow, was shaded by a great quantity of dark hair, brushed into a roll all round his head, and parted up the centre. His legs were very robust, but shorter than legs of good proportions should have been. His chest and back were as much too broad, as his legs were too short. He was dressed in a Newmarket coat and tight-fitting trousers; wore a shawl round his neck; smelt of lamp-oil, straw, orange-peel, horses' provender, and sawdust; and looked a most remarkable sort of Centaur, compounded of the stable and the play-house. Where the one began, and the other ended, nobody could have told with any precision. This gentleman was mentioned in the bills of the day as Mr. E. W. B. Childers, so justly celebrated for his daring vaulting act as the Wild Huntsman of the North American Prairies; in which popular performance, a diminutive boy with an old face, who now accompanied him, assisted as his infant son: being carried upside down over his father's shoulder, by one foot, and held by the crown of his head, heels upwards, in the palm of his father's hand, according to the violent paternal manner in which wild huntsmen may be observed to fondle their offspring. Made up with curls, wreaths, wings, white bismuth, and carmine, this hopeful young person soared into so pleasing a Cupid as to constitute the chief delight of the maternal part of the spectators; but in private, where his characteristics were a precocious cutaway coat and an extremely gruff voice, he became of the Turf, turfy.

'By your leaves, gentlemen,' said Mr. E. W. B. Childers, glancing round the room. 'It was you, I believe, that were wishing to see Jupe!'

'It was,' said Mr. Gradgrind. 'His daughter has gone to fetch him, but I can't wait; therefore, if you please, I will leave a message for him with you.'

'You see, my friend,' Mr. Bounderby put in, 'we are the kind of people who know the value of time, and you are the kind of people who don't know the value of time.'

'I have not,' retorted Mr. Childers, after surveying him from head to foot, 'the honour of knowing you, - but if you mean that you can make more money of your time than I can of mine, I should judge from your appearance, that you are about right.'

'And when you have made it, you can keep it too, I should think,' said Cupid.

'Kidderminster, stow that!' said Mr. Childers. (Master Kidderminster was Cupid's mortal name.)

'What does he come here cheeking us for, then?' cried Master Kidderminster, showing a very irascible temperament. 'If you want to cheek us, pay your ochre at the doors and take it out.'

'Kidderminster,' said Mr. Childers, raising his voice, 'stow that! - Sir,' to Mr. Gradgrind, 'I was addressing myself to you. You may or you may not be aware (for perhaps you have not been much in the audience), that Jupe has missed his tip very often, lately.'

'Has - what has he missed?' asked Mr. Gradgrind, glancing at the potent Bounderby for assistance.

'Missed his tip.'

'Offered at the Garters four times last night, and never done 'em once,' said Master Kidderminster. 'Missed his tip at the banners, too, and was loose in his ponging.'

'Didn't do what he ought to do. Was short in his leaps and bad in his tumbling,' Mr. Childers interpreted.

'Oh!' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'that is tip, is it?'

'In a general way that's missing his tip,' Mr. E. W. B. Childers answered.

'Nine oils, Merrylegs, missing tips, garters, banners, and Ponging, eh!' ejaculated Bounderby, with his laugh of laughs. 'Queer sort of company, too, for a man who has raised himself!'

'Lower yourself, then,' retorted Cupid. 'Oh Lord! if you've raised yourself so high as all that comes to, let yourself down a bit.'

'This is a very obtrusive lad!' said Mr. Gradgrind, turning, and knitting his brows on him.

'We'd have had a young gentleman to meet you, if we had known you were coming,' retorted Master Kidderminster, nothing abashed. 'It's a pity you don't have a bespeak, being so particular. You're on the Tight-Jeff, ain't you?'

'What does this unmannerly boy mean,' asked Mr. Gradgrind, eyeing him in a sort of desperation, 'by Tight-Jeff?'

'There! Get out, get out!' said Mr. Childers, thrusting his young friend from the room, rather in the prairie manner. 'Tight-Jeff or Slack-Jeff, it don't much signify: it's only tight-rope and slack- rope. You were going to give me a message for Jupe?'

'Yes, I was.'

'Then,' continued Mr. Childers, quickly, 'my opinion is, he will never receive it. Do you know much of him?'

'I never saw the man in my life.'

'I doubt if you ever will see him now. It's pretty plain to me, he's off.'

'Do you mean that he has deserted his daughter?'

'Ay! I mean,' said Mr. Childers, with a nod, 'that he has cut. He was goosed last night, he was goosed the night before last, he was goosed to-day. He has lately got in the way of being always goosed, and he can't stand it.'

'Why has he been - so very much - Goosed?' asked Mr. Gradgrind, forcing the word out of himself, with great solemnity and reluctance.

'His joints are turning stiff, and he is getting used up,' said Childers. 'He has his points as a Cackler still, but he can't get a living out of them.'

'A Cackler!' Bounderby repeated. 'Here we go again!'

'A speaker, if the gentleman likes it better,' said Mr. E. W. B. Childers, superciliously throwing the interpretation over his shoulder, and accompanying it with a shake of his long hair - which all shook at once. 'Now, it's a remarkable fact, sir, that it cut that man deeper, to know that his daughter knew of his being goosed, than to go through with it.'

'Good!' interrupted Mr. Bounderby. 'This is good, Gradgrind! A man so fond of his daughter, that he runs away from her! This is devilish good! Ha! ha! Now, I'll tell you what, young man. I haven't always occupied my present station of life. I know what these things are. You may be astonished to hear it, but my mother - ran away from me.'

E. W. B. Childers replied pointedly, that he was not at all astonished to hear it.

'Very well,' said Bounderby. 'I was born in a ditch, and my mother ran away from me. Do I excuse her for it? No. Have I ever excused her for it? Not I. What do I call her for it? I call her probably the very worst woman that ever lived in the world, except my drunken grandmother. There's no family pride about me, there's no imaginative sentimental humbug about me. I call a spade a spade; and I call the mother of Josiah Bounderby of Coketown, without any fear or any favour, what I should call her if she had been the mother of Dick Jones of Wapping. So, with this man. He is a runaway rogue and a vagabond, that's what he is, in English.'

'It's all the same to me what he is or what he is not, whether in English or whether in French,' retorted Mr. E. W. B. Childers, facing about. 'I am telling your friend what's the fact; if you don't like to hear it, you can avail yourself of the open air. You give it mouth enough, you do; but give it mouth in your own building at least,' remonstrated E. W. B. with stern irony. 'Don't give it mouth in this building, till you're called upon. You have got some building of your own I dare say, now?'

'Perhaps so,' replied Mr. Bounderby, rattling his money and laughing.

'Then give it mouth in your own building, will you, if you please?' said Childers. 'Because this isn't a strong building, and too much of you might bring it down!'

Eyeing Mr. Bounderby from head to foot again, he turned from him, as from a man finally disposed of, to Mr. Gradgrind.

'Jupe sent his daughter out on an errand not an hour ago, and then was seen to slip out himself, with his hat over his eyes, and a bundle tied up in a handkerchief under his arm. She will never believe it of him, but he has cut away and left her.'

'Pray,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'why will she never believe it of him?'

'Because those two were one. Because they were never asunder. Because, up to this time, he seemed to dote upon her,' said Childers, taking a step or two to look into the empty trunk. Both Mr. Childers and Master

Kidderminster walked in a curious manner; with their legs wider apart than the general run of men, and with a very knowing assumption of being stiff in the knees. This walk was common to all the male members of Sleary's company, and was understood to express, that they were always on horseback.

'Poor Sissy! He had better have apprenticed her,' said Childers, giving his hair another shake, as he looked up from the empty box. 'Now, he leaves her without anything to take to.'

'It is creditable to you, who have never been apprenticed, to express that opinion,' returned Mr. Gradgrind, approvingly.

'I never apprenticed? I was apprenticed when I was seven year old.'

'Oh! Indeed?' said Mr. Gradgrind, rather resentfully, as having been defrauded of his good opinion. 'I was not aware of its being the custom to apprentice young persons to - '

'Idleness,' Mr. Bounderby put in with a loud laugh. 'No, by the Lord Harry! Nor I!'

'Her father always had it in his head,' resumed Childers, feigning unconsciousness of Mr. Bounderby's existence, 'that she was to be taught the deuce-and-all of education. How it got into his head, I can't say; I can only say that it never got out. He has been picking up a bit of reading for her, here - and a bit of writing for her, there - and a bit of ciphering for her, somewhere else - these seven years.'

Mr. E. W. B. Childers took one of his hands out of his pockets, stroked his face and chin, and looked, with a good deal of doubt and a little hope, at Mr. Gradgrind. From the first he had sought to conciliate that gentleman, for the sake of the deserted girl.

'When Sissy got into the school here,' he pursued, 'her father was as pleased as Punch. I couldn't altogether make out why, myself, as we were not stationary here, being but comers and goers anywhere. I suppose, however, he had this move in his mind - he was always half-cracked - and then considered her provided for. If you should happen to have looked in to-night, for the purpose of telling him that you were going to do her any little service,' said Mr. Childers, stroking his face again, and repeating his look, 'it would be very fortunate and well-timed; very fortunate and well- timed.'

'On the contrary,' returned Mr. Gradgrind. 'I came to tell him that her connections made her not an object for the school, and that she must not attend any more. Still, if her father really has left her, without any connivance on her part - Bounderby, let me have a word with you.'

Upon this, Mr. Childers politely betook himself, with his equestrian walk, to the landing outside the door, and there stood stroking his face, and softly whistling. While thus engaged, he overheard such phrases in Mr. Bounderby's voice as 'No. I say no. I advise you not. I say by no means.' While, from Mr. Gradgrind, he heard in his much lower tone the words, 'But even as an example to Louisa, of what this pursuit which has been the subject of a vulgar curiosity, leads to and ends in. Think of it, Bounderby, in that point of view.'

Meanwhile, the various members of Sleary's company gradually gathered together from the upper regions, where they were quartered, and, from standing about, talking in low voices to one another and to Mr. Childers, gradually insinuated themselves and him into the room. There were two or three handsome young women among them, with their two or three husbands, and their two or three mothers, and their eight or nine little children, who did the fairy business when required. The father of one of the families was in the habit of balancing the father of another of the families on the top of a great pole; the father of a third family often made a pyramid of both those fathers, with Master Kidderminster for the apex, and himself for the base; all the fathers could dance upon rolling casks, stand upon bottles, catch knives and balls, twirl hand-basins, ride upon anything, jump over everything, and stick at nothing. All the mothers could (and did) dance, upon the slack wire and the tight-rope, and perform rapid acts on bare-backed steeds; none of them were at all particular in respect of showing their legs; and one of them, alone in a Greek chariot, drove six in hand into every town they came to. They all assumed to be mighty rakish and knowing, they were not very tidy in their private dresses, they were not at all orderly in their domestic arrangements, and the combined literature of the whole company would have produced but a poor letter on any subject. Yet there was a remarkable gentleness and childishness about these people, a special inaptitude for any kind of sharp practice, and an untiring readiness to help and pity one another, deserving often of as much respect, and always of as much generous construction, as the every- day virtues of any class of people in the world.

Last of all appeared Mr. Sleary: a stout man as already mentioned, with one fixed eye, and one loose eye, a voice (if it can be called so) like the efforts of a broken old pair of bellows, a flabby surface, and a muddled head which was never sober and never drunk.

'Thquire!' said Mr. Sleary, who was troubled with asthma, and whose breath came far too thick and heavy for the letter s, 'Your thervant! Thith ith a bad piethe of bithnith, thith ith. You've heard of my Clown and hith dog being thuppothed to have morrithed?'

He addressed Mr. Gradgrind, who answered 'Yes.'

'Well, Thquire,' he returned, taking off his hat, and rubbing the lining with his pocket-handkerchief, which he kept inside for the purpose. 'Ith it your intenthion to do anything for the poor girl, Thquire?'

'I shall have something to propose to her when she comes back,' said Mr. Gradgrind.

'Glad to hear it, Thquire. Not that I want to get rid of the child, any more than I want to thtand in her way. I'm willing to take her prentith, though at her age ith late. My voithe ith a little huthky, Thquire, and not eathy heard by them ath don't know me; but if you'd been chilled and heated, heated and chilled, chilled and heated in the ring when you wath young, ath often ath I have been, your voithe wouldn't have lathted out, Thquire, no more than mine.'

'I dare say not,' said Mr. Gradgrind.

'What thall it be, Thquire, while you wait? Thall it be Therry?
Give it a name, Thquire!' said Mr. Sleary, with hospitable ease.

'Nothing for me, I thank you,' said Mr. Gradgrind.

'Don't thay nothing, Thquire. What doth your friend thay? If you haven't took your feed yet, have a glath of bitterth.'

Here his daughter Josephine - a pretty fair-haired girl of eighteen, who had been tied on a horse at two years old, and had made a will at twelve, which she always carried about with her, expressive of her dying desire to be drawn to the grave by the two piebald ponies - cried, 'Father, hush! she has come back!' Then came Sissy Jupe, running into the room as she had run out of it. And when she saw them all assembled, and saw their looks, and saw no father there, she broke into a most deplorable cry, and took refuge on the bosom of the most accomplished tight-rope lady (herself in the family-way), who knelt down on the floor to nurse her, and to weep over her.

'Ith an internal thame, upon my thoul it ith,' said Sleary.

'O my dear father, my good kind father, where are you gone? You are gone to try to do me some good, I know! You are gone away for my sake, I am sure! And how miserable and helpless you will be without me, poor, poor father, until you come back!' It was so pathetic to hear her saying many things of this kind, with her face turned upward, and her arms stretched out as if she were trying to stop his departing shadow and embrace it, that no one spoke a word until Mr. Bounderby (growing impatient) took the case in hand.

'Now, good people all,' said he, 'this is wanton waste of time. Let the girl understand the fact. Let her take it from me, if you like, who have been run away from, myself. Here, what's your name! Your father has absconded - deserted you - and you mustn't expect to see him again as long as you live.'

They cared so little for plain Fact, these people, and were in that advanced state of degeneracy on the subject, that instead of being impressed by the speaker's strong common sense, they took it in extraordinary dudgeon. The men muttered 'Shame!' and the women 'Brute!' and Sleary, in some haste, communicated the following hint, apart to Mr. Bounderby.

'I tell you what, Thquire. To thpeak plain to you, my opinion ith that you had better cut it thort, and drop it. They're a very good natur'd people, my people, but they're accuthtomed to be quick in their movementh; and if you don't act upon my advithe, I'm damned if I don't believe they'll pith you out o' winder.'

Mr. Bounderby being restrained by this mild suggestion, Mr. Gradgrind found an opening for his eminently practical exposition of the subject.

'It is of no moment,' said he, 'whether this person is to be expected back at any time, or the contrary. He is gone away, and there is no present expectation of his return. That, I believe, is agreed on all hands.'

'Thath agreed, Thquire. Thick to that!' From Sleary.

'Well then. I, who came here to inform the father of the poor girl, Jupe, that she could not be received at the school any more, in consequence of there being practical objections, into which I need not enter, to the reception there of the children of persons so employed, am prepared in these altered circumstances to make a proposal. I am willing to take charge of you, Jupe, and to educate you, and provide for you. The only condition (over and above your good behaviour) I make is, that you decide now, at once, whether to accompany me or remain here. Also, that if you accompany me now, it is understood that you communicate no more with any of your friends who are here present. These observations comprise the whole of the case.'

'At the thame time,' said Sleary, 'I mutht put in my word, Thquire, tho that both thides of the banner may be equally theen. If you like, Thethilia, to be prentitht, you know the natur of the work and you know your companionth. Emma Gordon, in whothe lap you're a lying at prethent, would be a mother to you, and Joth'phine would be a thithter to you. I don't pretend to be of the angel breed myself, and I don't thay but what, when you mith'd your tip, you'd find me cut up rough, and thwear an oath or two at you. But what I thay, Thquire, ith, that good tempered or bad tempered, I never did a horthe a injury yet, no more than thwearing at him went, and that I don't expect I thall begin otherwithe at my time of life, with a rider. I never wath much of a Cackler, Thquire, and I have thed my thay.'

The latter part of this speech was addressed to Mr. Gradgrind, who received it with a grave inclination of his head, and then remarked:

'The only observation I will make to you, Jupe, in the way of influencing your decision, is, that it is highly desirable to have a sound practical education, and that even your father himself (from what I understand) appears, on your behalf, to have known and felt that much.'

The last words had a visible effect upon her. She stopped in her wild crying, a little detached herself from Emma Gordon, and turned her face full upon her patron. The whole company perceived the force of the change, and drew a long breath together, that plainly said, 'she will go!'

'Be sure you know your own mind, Jupe,' Mr. Gradgrind cautioned her; 'I say no more. Be sure you know your own mind!'

'When father comes back,' cried the girl, bursting into tears again after a minute's silence, 'how will he ever find me if I go away!'

'You may be quite at ease,' said Mr. Gradgrind, calmly; he worked out the whole matter like a sum: 'you may be quite at ease, Jupe, on that score. In such a case, your father, I apprehend, must find out Mr. - '

'Thleary. Thath my name, Thquire. Not athamed of it. Known all over England, and alwayth paythe ith way.'

'Must find out Mr. Sleary, who would then let him know where you went. I should have no power of keeping you against his wish, and he would have no difficulty, at any time, in finding Mr. Thomas Gradgrind of Coketown. I am well known.'

'Well known,' assented Mr. Sleary, rolling his loose eye. 'You're one of the thort, Thquire, that keepth a prethiouth thight of money out of the houthe. But never mind that at prethent.'

There was another silence; and then she exclaimed, sobbing with her hands before her face, 'Oh, give me my clothes, give me my clothes, and let me go away before I break my heart!'

The women sadly bestirred themselves to get the clothes together - it was soon done, for they were not many - and to pack them in a basket which had often travelled with them. Sissy sat all the time upon the ground, still sobbing, and covering her eyes. Mr. Gradgrind and his friend Bounderby stood near the door, ready to take her away. Mr. Sleary stood in the middle of the room, with the male members of the company about him, exactly as he would have stood in the centre of the ring during his daughter Josephine's performance. He wanted nothing but his whip.

The basket packed in silence, they brought her bonnet to her, and smoothed her disordered hair, and put it on. Then they pressed about her, and bent over her in very natural attitudes, kissing and embracing her: and brought the children to take leave of her; and were a tender-hearted, simple, foolish set of women altogether.

'Now, Jupe,' said Mr. Gradgrind. 'If you are quite determined, come!'

But she had to take her farewell of the male part of the company yet, and every one of them had to unfold his arms (for they all assumed the professional attitude when they found themselves near Sleary), and give her a parting kiss - Master Kidderminster excepted, in whose young nature there was an original flavour of the misanthrope, who was also known to have harboured matrimonial views, and who moodily withdrew. Mr. Sleary was reserved until the last. Opening his arms wide he took her by both her hands, and would have sprung her up and down, after the riding-master manner of congratulating young ladies on their dismounting from a rapid act; but there was no rebound in Sissy, and she only stood before him crying.

'Good-bye, my dear!' said Sleary. 'You'll make your fortun, I hope, and none of our poor folkth will ever trouble you, I'll pound it. I with your father hadn't taken hith dog with him; ith a ill- conwenienth to have the dog out of the billth. But on thecond thoughth, he wouldn't have performed without hith mathter, tho ith ath broad ath ith long!'

With that he regarded her attentively with his fixed eye, surveyed his company with his loose one, kissed her, shook his head, and handed her to Mr. Gradgrind as to a horse.

'There the ith, Thquire,' he said, sweeping her with a professional glance as if she were being adjusted in her seat, 'and the'll do you juthtithe. Good-bye, Thethilia!'

'Good-bye, Cecilia!' 'Good-bye, Sissy!' 'God bless you, dear!'
In a variety of voices from all the room.

But the riding-master eye had observed the bottle of the nine oils in her bosom, and he now interposed with 'Leave the bottle, my dear; ith large to carry; it will be of no uthe to you now. Give it to me!'

'No, no!' she said, in another burst of tears. 'Oh, no! Pray let me keep it for father till he comes back! He will want it when he comes back. He had never thought of going away, when he sent me for it. I must keep it for him, if you please!'

'Tho be it, my dear. (You thee how it ith, Thquire!) Farewell, Thethilia! My latht wordth to you ith thith, Thtick to the termth of your engagement, be obedient to the Thquire, and forget uth. But if, when you're grown up and married and well off, you come upon any horthe-riding ever, don't be hard upon it, don't be croth with it, give it a Bethpeak if you can, and think you might do wurth. People mutht be amuthed, Thquire, thomehow,' continued Sleary, rendered more pursy than ever, by so much talking; 'they can't be alwayth a working, nor yet they can't be alwayth a learning. Make the betht of uth; not the wurtht. I've got my living out of the horthe-riding all my life, I know; but I conthider that I lay down the philothophy of the thubject when I thay to you, Thquire, make the betht of uth: not the wurtht!'

The Sleary philosophy was propounded as they went downstairs and the fixed eye of Philosophy - and its rolling eye, too - soon lost the three figures and the basket in the darkness of the street.

CHAPTER VII - MRS. SPARSIT

MR. BOUNDERBY being a bachelor, an elderly lady presided over his establishment, in consideration of a certain annual stipend. Mrs. Sparsit was this lady's name; and she was a prominent figure in attendance on Mr. Bounderby's car, as it rolled along in triumph with the Bully of humility inside.

For, Mrs. Sparsit had not only seen different days, but was highly connected. She had a great aunt living in these very times called Lady Scadgers. Mr. Sparsit, deceased, of whom she was the relict, had been by the mother's side what Mrs. Sparsit still called 'a Powler.' Strangers of limited information and dull apprehension were sometimes observed not to know what a Powler was, and even to appear uncertain whether it might be a business, or a political party, or a profession of faith. The better class of minds, however, did not need to be informed that the Powlers were an ancient stock, who could trace themselves so exceedingly far back that it was not surprising if they sometimes lost themselves - which they had rather frequently done, as respected horse-flesh, blind-hookey, Hebrew monetary transactions, and the Insolvent Debtors' Court.

The late Mr. Sparsit, being by the mother's side a Powler, married this lady, being by the father's side a Scadgers. Lady Scadgers (an immensely fat old woman, with an inordinate appetite for butcher's meat, and a mysterious leg which had now refused to get out of bed for fourteen years) contrived the marriage, at a period when Sparsit was just of age, and chiefly noticeable for a slender body, weakly supported on two long slim props, and surmounted by no head worth mentioning. He inherited a fair fortune from his uncle, but owed it all before he came into it, and spent it twice over immediately afterwards. Thus, when he died, at twenty-four (the scene of his decease, Calais, and the cause, brandy), he did not leave his widow, from whom he had been separated soon after the honeymoon, in affluent circumstances. That bereaved lady, fifteen years older than he, fell presently at deadly feud with her only relative, Lady Scadgers; and, partly to spite her ladyship, and partly to maintain herself, went out at a salary. And here she was now, in her elderly days, with the Coriolanian style of nose and the dense black eyebrows which had captivated Sparsit, making Mr. Bounderby's tea as he took his breakfast.

If Bounderby had been a Conqueror, and Mrs. Sparsit a captive Princess whom he took about as a feature in his state-processions, he could not have made a greater flourish with her than he habitually did. Just as it belonged to his boastfulness to depreciate his own extraction, so it belonged to it to exalt Mrs. Sparsit's. In the measure that he would not allow his own youth to have been attended by a single favourable circumstance, he brightened Mrs. Sparsit's juvenile career with every possible advantage, and showered waggon-loads of early roses all over that lady's path. 'And yet, sir,' he would say, 'how does it turn out after all? Why here she is at a hundred a year (I give her a hundred, which she is pleased to term handsome), keeping the house of Josiah Bounderby of Coketown!'

Nay, he made this foil of his so very widely known, that third parties took it up, and handled it on some occasions with considerable briskness. It was one of the most exasperating attributes of Bounderby, that he not only sang his own praises but stimulated other men to sing them. There was a moral infection of clap-trap in him. Strangers, modest enough elsewhere, started up at dinners in Coketown, and boasted, in quite a rampant way, of Bounderby. They made him out to be the Royal arms, the Union-Jack, Magna Charta, John Bull, Habeas Corpus, the Bill of Rights, An Englishman's house is his castle, Church and State, and God save the Queen, all put together. And as often (and it was very often) as an orator of this kind brought into his peroration,

'Princes and lords may flourish or may fade,
A breath can make them, as a breath has made,'

- it was, for certain, more or less understood among the company that he had heard of Mrs. Sparsit.

'Mr. Bounderby,' said Mrs. Sparsit, 'you are unusually slow, sir, with your breakfast this morning.'

'Why, ma'am,' he returned, 'I am thinking about Tom Gradgrind's whim;' Tom Gradgrind, for a bluff independent manner of speaking - as if somebody were always endeavouring to bribe him with immense sums to say Thomas, and he wouldn't; 'Tom Gradgrind's whim, ma'am, of bringing up the tumbling-girl.'

'The girl is now waiting to know,' said Mrs. Sparsit, 'whether she is to go straight to the school, or up to the Lodge.'

'She must wait, ma'am,' answered Bounderby, 'till I know myself. We shall have Tom Gradgrind down here presently, I suppose. If he should wish her to remain here a day or two longer, of course she can, ma'am.'

'Of course she can if you wish it, Mr. Bounderby.'

'I told him I would give her a shake-down here, last night, in order that he might sleep on it before he decided to let her have any association with Louisa.'

'Indeed, Mr. Bounderby? Very thoughtful of you!' Mrs. Sparsit's Coriolanian nose underwent a slight expansion of the nostrils, and her black eyebrows contracted as she took a sip of tea.

'It's tolerably clear to me,' said Bounderby, 'that the little puss can get small good out of such companionship.'

'Are you speaking of young Miss Gradgrind, Mr. Bounderby?'

'Yes, ma'am, I'm speaking of Louisa.'

'Your observation being limited to "little puss,"' said Mrs. Sparsit, 'and there being two little girls in question, I did not know which might be indicated by that expression.'

'Louisa,' repeated Mr. Bounderby. 'Louisa, Louisa.'

'You are quite another father to Louisa, sir.' Mrs. Sparsit took a little more tea; and, as she bent her again contracted eyebrows over her steaming cup, rather looked as if her classical countenance were invoking the infernal gods.

'If you had said I was another father to Tom - young Tom, I mean, not my friend Tom Gradgrind - you might have been nearer the mark. I am going to take young Tom into my office. Going to have him under my wing, ma'am.'

'Indeed? Rather young for that, is he not, sir?' Mrs. Spirit's 'sir,' in addressing Mr. Bounderby, was a word of ceremony, rather exacting consideration for herself in the use, than honouring him.

'I'm not going to take him at once; he is to finish his educational cramming before then,' said Bounderby. 'By the Lord Harry, he'll have enough of it, first and last! He'd open his eyes, that boy would, if he knew how empty of learning my young maw was, at his time of life.' Which, by the by, he probably did know, for he had heard of it often enough. 'But it's extraordinary the difficulty I have on scores of such subjects, in speaking to any one on equal terms. Here, for example, I have been speaking to you this morning about tumblers. Why, what do you know about tumblers? At the time when, to have been a tumbler in the mud of the streets, would have been a godsend to me, a prize in the lottery to me, you were at the Italian

Opera. You were coming out of the Italian Opera, ma'am, in white satin and jewels, a blaze of splendour, when I hadn't a penny to buy a link to light you.'

'I certainly, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit, with a dignity serenely mournful, 'was familiar with the Italian Opera at a very early age.'

'Egad, ma'am, so was I,' said Bounderby, ' - with the wrong side of it. A hard bed the pavement of its Arcade used to make, I assure you. People like you, ma'am, accustomed from infancy to lie on Down feathers, have no idea how hard a paving-stone is, without trying it. No, no, it's of no use my talking to you about tumblers. I should speak of foreign dancers, and the West End of London, and May Fair, and lords and ladies and honourables.'

'I trust, sir,' rejoined Mrs. Sparsit, with decent resignation, 'it is not necessary that you should do anything of that kind. I hope I have learnt how to accommodate myself to the changes of life. If I have acquired an interest in hearing of your instructive experiences, and can scarcely hear enough of them, I claim no merit for that, since I believe it is a general sentiment.'

'Well, ma'am,' said her patron, 'perhaps some people may be pleased to say that they do like to hear, in his own unpolished way, what Josiah Bounderby, of Coketown, has gone through. But you must confess that you were born in the lap of luxury, yourself. Come, ma'am, you know you were born in the lap of luxury.'

'I do not, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit with a shake of her head, 'deny it.'

Mr. Bounderby was obliged to get up from table, and stand with his back to the fire, looking at her; she was such an enhancement of his position.

'And you were in crack society. Devilish high society,' he said, warming his legs.

'It is true, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit, with an affectation of humility the very opposite of his, and therefore in no danger of jostling it.

'You were in the tiptop fashion, and all the rest of it,' said Mr. Bounderby.

'Yes, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit, with a kind of social widowhood upon her. 'It is unquestionably true.'

Mr. Bounderby, bending himself at the knees, literally embraced his legs in his great satisfaction and laughed aloud. Mr. and Miss Gradgrind being then announced, he received the former with a shake of the hand, and the latter with a kiss.

'Can Jupe be sent here, Bounderby?' asked Mr. Gradgrind.

Certainly. So Jupe was sent there. On coming in, she curtseyed to Mr. Bounderby, and to his friend Tom Gradgrind, and also to Louisa; but in her confusion unluckily omitted Mrs. Sparsit. Observing this, the blustrous Bounderby had the following remarks to make:

'Now, I tell you what, my girl. The name of that lady by the teapot, is Mrs. Sparsit. That lady acts as mistress of this house, and she is a highly connected lady. Consequently, if ever you come again into any room in this house, you will make a short stay in it if you don't behave towards that lady in your most respectful manner. Now, I don't care a button what you do to me, because I don't affect to be anybody. So far from having high connections I have no connections at all, and I come of the scum of the earth. But towards that lady, I do care what you do; and you shall do what is deferential and respectful, or you shall not come here.'

'I hope, Bounderby,' said Mr. Gradgrind, in a conciliatory voice, 'that this was merely an oversight.'

'My friend Tom Gradgrind suggests, Mrs. Sparsit,' said Bounderby, 'that this was merely an oversight. Very likely. However, as you are aware, ma'am, I don't allow of even oversights towards you.'

'You are very good indeed, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit, shaking her head with her State humility. 'It is not worth speaking of.'

Sissy, who all this time had been faintly excusing herself with tears in her eyes, was now waved over by the master of the house to Mr. Gradgrind. She stood looking intently at him, and Louisa stood coldly by, with her eyes upon the ground, while he proceeded thus:

'Jupe, I have made up my mind to take you into my house; and, when you are not in attendance at the school, to employ you about Mrs. Gradgrind, who is rather an invalid. I have explained to Miss Louisa - this is Miss Louisa - the miserable but natural end of your late career; and you are to expressly understand that the whole of that subject is past, and is not to be referred to any more. From this time you begin your history. You are, at present, ignorant, I know.'

'Yes, sir, very,' she answered, curtseying.

'I shall have the satisfaction of causing you to be strictly educated; and you will be a living proof to all who come into communication with you, of the advantages of the training you will receive. You will be reclaimed and formed. You have been in the habit now of reading to your father, and those people I found you among, I dare say?' said Mr. Gradgrind, beckoning her nearer to him before he said so, and dropping his voice.

'Only to father and Merrylegs, sir. At least I mean to father, when Merrylegs was always there.'

'Never mind Merrylegs, Jupe,' said Mr. Gradgrind, with a passing frown. 'I don't ask about him. I understand you to have been in the habit of reading to your father?'

'O, yes, sir, thousands of times. They were the happiest - O, of all the happy times we had together, sir!'

It was only now when her sorrow broke out, that Louisa looked at her.

'And what,' asked Mr. Gradgrind, in a still lower voice, 'did you read to your father, Jupe?'

'About the Fairies, sir, and the Dwarf, and the Hunchback, and the Genies,' she sobbed out; 'and about - '

'Hush!' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'that is enough. Never breathe a word of such destructive nonsense any more. Bounderby, this is a case for rigid training, and I shall observe it with interest.'

'Well,' returned Mr. Bounderby, 'I have given you my opinion already, and I shouldn't do as you do. But, very well, very well. Since you are bent upon it, very well!'

So, Mr. Gradgrind and his daughter took Cecilia Jupe off with them to Stone Lodge, and on the way Louisa never spoke one word, good or bad. And Mr. Bounderby went about his daily pursuits. And Mrs. Sparsit got behind her eyebrows and meditated in the gloom of that retreat, all the evening.

CHAPTER VIII - NEVER WONDER

LET us strike the key-note again, before pursuing the tune.

When she was half a dozen years younger, Louisa had been overheard to begin a conversation with her brother one day, by saying 'Tom, I wonder'

- upon which Mr. Gradgrind, who was the person overhearing, stepped forth into the light and said, 'Louisa, never wonder!'

Herein lay the spring of the mechanical art and mystery of educating the reason without stooping to the cultivation of the sentiments and affections. Never wonder. By means of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, settle everything somehow, and never wonder. Bring to me, says M'Choakumchild, yonder baby just able to walk, and I will engage that it shall never wonder.

Now, besides very many babies just able to walk, there happened to be in Coketown a considerable population of babies who had been walking against time towards the infinite world, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years and more. These portentous infants being alarming creatures to stalk about in any human society, the eighteen denominations incessantly scratched one another's faces and pulled one another's hair by way of agreeing on the steps to be taken for their improvement - which they never did; a surprising circumstance, when the happy adaptation of the means to the end is considered. Still, although they differed in every other particular, conceivable and inconceivable (especially inconceivable), they were pretty well united on the point that these unlucky infants were never to wonder. Body number one, said they must take everything on trust. Body number two, said they must take everything on political economy. Body number three, wrote leaden little books for them, showing how the good grown-up baby invariably got to the Savings-bank, and the bad grown-up baby invariably got transported. Body number four, under dreary pretences of being droll (when it was very melancholy indeed), made the shallowest pretences of concealing pitfalls of knowledge, into which it was the duty of these babies to be smuggled and inveigled. But, all the bodies agreed that they were never to wonder.

There was a library in Coketown, to which general access was easy. Mr. Gradgrind greatly tormented his mind about what the people read in this library: a point whereon little rivers of tabular statements periodically flowed into the howling ocean of tabular statements, which no diver ever got to any depth in and came up sane. It was a disheartening circumstance, but a melancholy fact, that even these readers persisted in wondering. They wondered about human nature, human passions, human hopes and fears, the struggles, triumphs and defeats, the cares and joys and sorrows, the lives and deaths of common men and women! They sometimes, after fifteen hours' work, sat down to read mere fables about men and women, more or less like themselves, and about children, more or less like their own. They took De Foe to their bosoms, instead of Euclid, and seemed to be on the whole more comforted by Goldsmith than by Cocker. Mr. Gradgrind was for ever working, in print and out of print, at this eccentric sum, and he never could make out how it yielded this unaccountable product.

'I am sick of my life, Loo. I, hate it altogether, and I hate everybody except you,' said the unnatural young Thomas Gradgrind in the hair-cutting chamber at twilight.

'You don't hate Sissy, Tom?'

'I hate to be obliged to call her Jupe. And she hates me,' said
Tom, moodily.

'No, she does not, Tom, I am sure!'

'She must,' said Tom. 'She must just hate and detest the whole set-out of us. They'll bother her head off, I think, before they have done with her. Already she's getting as pale as wax, and as heavy as - I am.'

Young Thomas expressed these sentiments sitting astride of a chair before the fire, with his arms on the back, and his sulky face on his arms. His sister sat in the darker corner by the fireside, now looking at him, now looking at the bright sparks as they dropped upon the hearth.

'As to me,' said Tom, tumbling his hair all manner of ways with his sulky hands, 'I am a Donkey, that's what I am. I am as obstinate as one, I am more stupid than one, I get as much pleasure as one, and I should like to kick like one.'

'Not me, I hope, Tom?'

'No, Loo; I wouldn't hurt you. I made an exception of you at first. I don't know what this - jolly old - Jaundiced Jail,' Tom had paused to find a sufficiently complimentary and expressive name for the parental roof, and seemed to relieve his mind for a moment by the strong alliteration of this one, 'would be without you.'

'Indeed, Tom? Do you really and truly say so?'

'Why, of course I do. What's the use of talking about it!' returned Tom, chafing his face on his coat-sleeve, as if to mortify his flesh, and have it in unison with his spirit.

'Because, Tom,' said his sister, after silently watching the sparks awhile, 'as I get older, and nearer growing up, I often sit wondering here, and think how unfortunate it is for me that I can't reconcile you to home better than I am able to do. I don't know what other girls know. I can't play to you, or sing to you. I can't talk to you so as to lighten your mind, for I never see any amusing sights or read any amusing books that it would be a pleasure or a relief to you to talk about, when you are tired.'

'Well, no more do I. I am as bad as you in that respect; and I am a Mule too, which you're not. If father was determined to make me either a Prig or a Mule, and I am not a Prig, why, it stands to reason, I must be a Mule. And so I am,' said Tom, desperately.

'It's a great pity,' said Louisa, after another pause, and speaking thoughtfully out of her dark corner: 'it's a great pity, Tom. It's very unfortunate for both of us.'

'Oh! You,' said Tom; 'you are a girl, Loo, and a girl comes out of it better than a boy does. I don't miss anything in you. You are the only pleasure I have - you can brighten even this place - and you can always lead me as you like.'

'You are a dear brother, Tom; and while you think I can do such things, I don't so much mind knowing better. Though I do know better, Tom, and am very sorry for it.' She came and kissed him, and went back into her corner again.

'I wish I could collect all the Facts we hear so much about,' said Tom, spitefully setting his teeth, 'and all the Figures, and all the people who found them out: and I wish I could put a thousand barrels of gunpowder under them, and blow them all up together! However, when I go to live with old Bounderby, I'll have my revenge.'

'Your revenge, Tom?'

'I mean, I'll enjoy myself a little, and go about and see something, and hear something. I'll recompense myself for the way in which I have been brought up.'

'But don't disappoint yourself beforehand, Tom. Mr. Bounderby thinks as father thinks, and is a great deal rougher, and not half so kind.'

'Oh!' said Tom, laughing; 'I don't mind that. I shall very well know how to manage and smooth old Bounderby!'

Their shadows were defined upon the wall, but those of the high presses in the room were all blended together on the wall and on the ceiling, as if the brother and sister were overhung by a dark cavern. Or, a fanciful imagination - if such treason could have been there - might have made it out to be the shadow of their subject, and of its lowering association with their future.

'What is your great mode of smoothing and managing, Tom? Is it a secret?'

'Oh!' said Tom, 'if it is a secret, it's not far off. It's you. You are his little pet, you are his favourite; he'll do anything for you. When he says to me what I don't like, I shall say to him, "My sister Loo will be hurt and disappointed, Mr. Bounderby. She always used to tell me she was sure you would be easier with me than this." That'll bring him about, or nothing will.'

After waiting for some answering remark, and getting none, Tom wearily relapsed into the present time, and twined himself yawning round and about the rails of his chair, and rumpled his head more and more, until he suddenly looked up, and asked:

'Have you gone to sleep, Loo?'

'No, Tom. I am looking at the fire.'

'You seem to find more to look at in it than ever I could find,' said Tom. 'Another of the advantages, I suppose, of being a girl.'

'Tom,' enquired his sister, slowly, and in a curious tone, as if she were reading what she asked in the fire, and it was not quite plainly written there, 'do you look forward with any satisfaction to this change to Mr. Bounderby's?'

'Why, there's one thing to be said of it,' returned Tom, pushing his chair from him, and standing up; 'it will be getting away from home.'

'There is one thing to be said of it,' Louisa repeated in her former curious tone; 'it will be getting away from home. Yes.'

'Not but what I shall be very unwilling, both to leave you, Loo, and to leave you here. But I must go, you know, whether I like it or not; and I had better go where I can take with me some advantage of your influence, than where I should lose it altogether. Don't you see?'

'Yes, Tom.'

The answer was so long in coming, though there was no indecision in it, that Tom went and leaned on the back of her chair, to contemplate the fire which so engrossed her, from her point of view, and see what he could make of it.

'Except that it is a fire,' said Tom, 'it looks to me as stupid and blank as everything else looks. What do you see in it? Not a circus?'

'I don't see anything in it, Tom, particularly. But since I have been looking at it, I have been wondering about you and me, grown up.'

'Wondering again!' said Tom.

'I have such unmanageable thoughts,' returned his sister, 'that they will wonder.'

'Then I beg of you, Louisa,' said Mrs. Gradgrind, who had opened the door without being heard, 'to do nothing of that description, for goodness' sake, you inconsiderate girl, or I shall never hear the last of it from your father. And, Thomas, it is really shameful, with my poor head continually wearing me out, that a boy brought up as you have been, and whose education has cost what yours has, should be found encouraging his sister to wonder, when he knows his father has expressly said that she is not to do it.'

Louisa denied Tom's participation in the offence; but her mother stopped her with the conclusive answer, 'Louisa, don't tell me, in my state of health; for unless you had been encouraged, it is morally and physically impossible that you could have done it.'

'I was encouraged by nothing, mother, but by looking at the red sparks dropping out of the fire, and whitening and dying. It made me think, after all, how short my life would be, and how little I could hope to do in it.'

'Nonsense!' said Mrs. Gradgrind, rendered almost energetic. 'Nonsense! Don't stand there and tell me such stuff, Louisa, to my face, when you know very well that if it was ever to reach your father's ears I should never hear the last of it. After all the trouble that has been taken with you! After the lectures you have attended, and the experiments you have seen! After I have heard you myself, when the whole of my right side has been benumbed, going on with your master about combustion, and calcination, and calorification, and I may say every kind of ation that could drive a poor invalid distracted, to hear you talking in this absurd way about sparks and ashes! I wish,' whimpered Mrs. Gradgrind, taking a chair, and discharging her strongest point before succumbing under these mere shadows of facts, 'yes, I really do wish that I had never had a family, and then you would have known what it was to do without me!'

CHAPTER IX - SISSY'S PROGRESS

SISSY JUPE had not an easy time of it, between Mr. M'Choakumchild and Mrs. Gradgrind, and was not without strong impulses, in the first months of her probation, to run away. It hailed facts all day long so very hard, and life in general was opened to her as such a closely ruled ciphering-book, that assuredly she would have run away, but for only one restraint.

It is lamentable to think of; but this restraint was the result of no arithmetical process, was self-imposed in defiance of all calculation, and went dead against any table of probabilities that any Actuary would have drawn up from the premises. The girl believed that her father had not deserted her; she lived in the hope that he would come back, and in the faith that he would be made the happier by her remaining where she was.

The wretched ignorance with which Jupe clung to this consolation, rejecting the superior comfort of knowing, on a sound arithmetical basis, that her father was an unnatural vagabond, filled Mr. Gradgrind with pity. Yet, what was to be done? M'Choakumchild reported that she had a very dense head for figures; that, once possessed with a general idea of the globe, she took the smallest conceivable interest in its exact measurements; that she was extremely slow in the acquisition of dates, unless some pitiful incident happened to be connected therewith; that she would burst into tears on being required (by the mental process) immediately to name the cost of two hundred and forty-seven muslin caps at fourteen-pence halfpenny; that she was as low down, in the school, as low could be; that after eight weeks of induction into the elements of Political Economy, she had only yesterday been set right by a prattler three feet high, for returning to the question, 'What is the first principle of this science?' the absurd answer, 'To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me.'

Mr. Gradgrind observed, shaking his head, that all this was very bad; that it showed the necessity of infinite grinding at the mill of knowledge, as per system, schedule, blue book, report, and tabular statements A to Z; and that Jupe 'must be kept to it.' So Jupe was kept to it, and became low-spirited, but no wiser.

'It would be a fine thing to be you, Miss Louisa!' she said, one night, when Louisa had endeavoured to make her perplexities for next day something clearer to her.

'Do you think so?'

'I should know so much, Miss Louisa. All that is difficult to me now, would be so easy then.'

'You might not be the better for it, Sissy.'

Sissy submitted, after a little hesitation, 'I should not be the worse, Miss Louisa.' To which Miss Louisa answered, 'I don't know that.'

There had been so little communication between these two - both because life at Stone Lodge went monotonously round like a piece of machinery which discouraged human interference, and because of the prohibition relative to Sissy's past career - that they were still almost strangers. Sissy, with her dark eyes wonderingly directed to Louisa's face, was uncertain whether to say more or to remain silent.

'You are more useful to my mother, and more pleasant with her than I can ever be,' Louisa resumed. 'You are pleasanter to yourself, than I am to myself.'

'But, if you please, Miss Louisa,' Sissy pleaded, 'I am - O so stupid!'

Louisa, with a brighter laugh than usual, told her she would be wiser by-and-by.

'You don't know,' said Sissy, half crying, 'what a stupid girl I am. All through school hours I make mistakes. Mr. and Mrs. M'Choakumchild call me up, over and over again, regularly to make mistakes. I can't help them. They seem to come natural to me.'

'Mr. and Mrs. M'Choakumchild never make any mistakes themselves, I suppose, Sissy?'

'O no!' she eagerly returned. 'They know everything.'

'Tell me some of your mistakes.'

'I am almost ashamed,' said Sissy, with reluctance. 'But to-day, for instance, Mr. M'Choakumchild was explaining to us about Natural Prosperity.'

'National, I think it must have been,' observed Louisa.

'Yes, it was. - But isn't it the same?' she timidly asked.

'You had better say, National, as he said so,' returned Louisa, with her dry reserve.

'National Prosperity. And he said, Now, this schoolroom is a Nation. And in this nation, there are fifty millions of money. Isn't this a prosperous nation? Girl number twenty, isn't this a prosperous nation, and a'n't you in a thriving state?'

'What did you say?' asked Louisa.

'Miss Louisa, I said I didn't know. I thought I couldn't know whether it was a prosperous nation or not, and whether I was in a thriving state or not, unless I knew who had got the money, and whether any of it was mine. But that had nothing to do with it. It was not in the figures at all,' said Sissy, wiping her eyes.

'That was a great mistake of yours,' observed Louisa.

'Yes, Miss Louisa, I know it was, now. Then Mr. M'Choakumchild said he would try me again. And he said, This schoolroom is an immense town, and in it there are a million of inhabitants, and only five-and-twenty are starved to death in the streets, in the course of a year. What is your remark on that proportion? And my remark was - for I couldn't think of a better one - that I thought it must be just as hard upon those who were starved, whether the others were a million, or a million million. And that was wrong, too.'

'Of course it was.'

'Then Mr. M'Choakumchild said he would try me once more. And he said, Here are the stutterings - '

'Statistics,' said Louisa.

'Yes, Miss Louisa - they always remind me of stutterings, and that's another of my mistakes - of accidents upon the sea. And I find (Mr. M'Choakumchild said) that in a given time a hundred thousand persons went to sea on long voyages, and only five hundred of them were drowned or burnt to death. What is the percentage? And I said, Miss;' here Sissy fairly sobbed as confessing with extreme contrition to her greatest error; 'I said it was nothing.'

'Nothing, Sissy?'

'Nothing, Miss - to the relations and friends of the people who were killed. I shall never learn,' said Sissy. 'And the worst of all is, that although my poor father wished me so much to learn, and although I am so anxious to learn, because he wished me to, I am afraid I don't like it.'

Louisa stood looking at the pretty modest head, as it drooped abashed before her, until it was raised again to glance at her face. Then she asked:

'Did your father know so much himself, that he wished you to be well taught too, Sissy?'

Sissy hesitated before replying, and so plainly showed her sense that they were entering on forbidden ground, that Louisa added, 'No one hears us; and if any one did, I am sure no harm could be found in such an innocent question.'

'No, Miss Louisa,' answered Sissy, upon this encouragement, shaking her head; 'father knows very little indeed. It's as much as he can do to write; and it's more than people in general can do to read his writing. Though it's plain to me.'

'Your mother!'

'Father says she was quite a scholar. She died when I was born. She was;' Sissy made the terrible communication nervously; 'she was a dancer.'

'Did your father love her?' Louisa asked these questions with a strong, wild, wandering interest peculiar to her; an interest gone astray like a banished creature, and hiding in solitary places.

'O yes! As dearly as he loves me. Father loved me, first, for her sake. He carried me about with him when I was quite a baby. We have never been asunder from that time.'

'Yet he leaves you now, Sissy?'

'Only for my good. Nobody understands him as I do; nobody knows him as I do. When he left me for my good - he never would have left me for his own - I know he was almost broken-hearted with the trial. He will not be happy for a single minute, till he comes back.'

'Tell me more about him,' said Louisa, 'I will never ask you again. Where did you live?'

'We travelled about the country, and had no fixed place to live in. Father's a;' Sissy whispered the awful word, 'a clown.'

'To make the people laugh?' said Louisa, with a nod of intelligence.

'Yes. But they wouldn't laugh sometimes, and then father cried. Lately, they very often wouldn't laugh, and he used to come home despairing. Father's not like most. Those who didn't know him as well as I do, and didn't love him as dearly as I do, might believe he was not quite right. Sometimes they played tricks upon him; but they never knew how he felt them, and shrunk up, when he was alone with me. He was far, far timider than they thought!'

'And you were his comfort through everything?'

She nodded, with the tears rolling down her face. 'I hope so, and father said I was. It was because he grew so scared and trembling, and because he felt himself to be a poor, weak, ignorant, helpless man (those used to be his words), that he wanted me so much to know a great deal, and be different from him. I used to read to him to cheer his courage, and he was very fond of that. They were wrong books - I am never to speak of them here - but we didn't know there was any harm in them.'

'And he liked them?' said Louisa, with a searching gaze on Sissy all this time.

'O very much! They kept him, many times, from what did him real harm. And often and often of a night, he used to forget all his troubles in wondering whether the Sultan would let the lady go on with the story, or would have her head cut off before it was finished.'

'And your father was always kind? To the last?' asked Louisa contravening the great principle, and wondering very much.

'Always, always!' returned Sissy, clasping her hands. 'Kinder and kinder than I can tell. He was angry only one night, and that was not to me, but Merrylegs. Merrylegs;' she whispered the awful fact; 'is his performing dog.'

'Why was he angry with the dog?' Louisa demanded.

'Father, soon after they came home from performing, told Merrylegs to jump up on the backs of the two chairs and stand across them - which is one of his tricks. He looked at father, and didn't do it at once. Everything of father's had gone wrong that night, and he hadn't pleased the public at all. He cried out that the very dog knew he was failing, and had no compassion on him. Then he beat the dog, and I was frightened, and said, "Father, father! Pray don't hurt the creature who is so fond of you! O Heaven forgive you, father, stop!" And he stopped, and the dog was bloody, and father lay down crying on the floor with the dog in his arms, and the dog licked his face.'

Louisa saw that she was sobbing; and going to her, kissed her, took her hand, and sat down beside her.

'Finish by telling me how your father left you, Sissy. Now that I have asked you so much, tell me the end. The blame, if there is any blame, is mine, not yours.'

'Dear Miss Louisa,' said Sissy, covering her eyes, and sobbing yet; 'I came home from the school that afternoon, and found poor father just come home too, from the booth. And he sat rocking himself over the fire, as if he was in pain. And I said, "Have you hurt yourself, father?" (as he did sometimes, like they all did), and he said, "A little, my darling." And when I came to stoop down and look up at his face, I saw that he was crying. The more I spoke to him, the more he hid his face; and at first he shook all over, and said nothing but "My darling;" and "My love!"'

Here Tom came lounging in, and stared at the two with a coolness not particularly savouring of interest in anything but himself, and not much of that at present.

'I am asking Sissy a few questions, Tom,' observed his sister. 'You have no occasion to go away; but don't interrupt us for a moment, Tom dear.'

'Oh! very well!' returned Tom. 'Only father has brought old Bounderby home, and I want you to come into the drawing-room. Because if you come, there's a good chance of old Bounderby's asking me to dinner; and if you don't, there's none.'

'I'll come directly.'

'I'll wait for you,' said Tom, 'to make sure.'

Sissy resumed in a lower voice. 'At last poor father said that he had given no satisfaction again, and never did give any satisfaction now, and that he was a shame and disgrace, and I should have done better without him all along. I said all the affectionate things to him that came into my heart, and presently he was quiet and I sat down by him, and told him all about the school and everything that had been said and done there. When I had no more left to tell, he put his arms round my neck, and kissed me a great many times. Then he asked me to fetch some of the stuff he used, for the little hurt he had had, and to get it at the best place, which was at the other end of town from there; and then, after kissing me again, he let me go. When I had gone down-stairs, I turned back that I might be a little bit more company to him yet, and looked in at the door, and said, "Father dear, shall I take Merrylegs?" Father shook his head and said, "No, Sissy, no; take nothing that's known to be mine, my darling;" and I left him sitting by the fire. Then the thought must have come upon him, poor, poor father! of going away to try something for my sake; for when I came back, he was gone.'

'I say! Look sharp for old Bounderby, Loo!' Tom remonstrated.

'There's no more to tell, Miss Louisa. I keep the nine oils ready for him, and I know he will come back. Every letter that I see in Mr. Gradgrind's hand takes my breath away and blinds my eyes, for I think it comes from father, or from Mr. Sleary about father. Mr. Sleary promised to write as soon as ever father should be heard of, and I trust to him to keep his word.'

'Do look sharp for old Bounderby, Loo!' said Tom, with an impatient whistle. 'He'll be off if you don't look sharp!'

After this, whenever Sissy dropped a curtsey to Mr. Gradgrind in the presence of his family, and said in a faltering way, 'I beg your pardon, sir, for being troublesome - but - have you had any letter yet about me?' Louisa would suspend the occupation of the moment, whatever it was, and look for the reply as earnestly as Sissy did. And when Mr. Gradgrind regularly answered, 'No, Jupe, nothing of the sort,' the trembling of Sissy's lip would be repeated in Louisa's face, and her eyes would follow Sissy with compassion to the door. Mr. Gradgrind usually improved these occasions by remarking, when she was gone, that if Jupe had been properly trained from an early age she would have remonstrated to herself on sound principles the baselessness of these fantastic hopes. Yet it did seem (though not to him, for he saw nothing of it) as if fantastic hope could take as strong a hold as Fact.

This observation must be limited exclusively to his daughter. As to Tom, he was becoming that not unprecedented triumph of calculation which is usually at work on number one. As to Mrs. Gradgrind, if she said anything on the subject, she would come a little way out of her wrappers, like a feminine dormouse, and say:

'Good gracious bless me, how my poor head is vexed and worried by that girl Jupe's so perseveringly asking, over and over again, about her tiresome letters! Upon my word and honour I seem to be fated, and destined, and ordained, to live in the midst of things that I am never to hear the last of. It really is a most extraordinary circumstance that it appears as if I never was to hear the last of anything!'

At about this point, Mr. Gradgrind's eye would fall upon her; and under the influence of that wintry piece of fact, she would become torpid again.

CHAPTER X - STEPHEN BLACKPOOL

I ENTERTAIN a weak idea that the English people are as hard-worked as any people upon whom the sun shines. I acknowledge to this ridiculous idiosyncrasy, as a reason why I would give them a little more play.

In the hardest working part of Coketown; in the innermost fortifications of that ugly citadel, where Nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in; at the heart of the labyrinth of narrow courts upon courts, and close streets upon streets, which had come into existence piecemeal, every piece in a violent hurry for some one man's purpose, and the whole an unnatural family, shouldering, and trampling, and pressing one another to death; in the last close nook of this great exhausted receiver, where the chimneys, for want of air to make a draught, were built in an immense variety of stunted and crooked shapes, as though every house put out a sign of the kind of people who might be expected to be born in it; among the multitude of Coketown, generically called 'the Hands,' - a race who would have found more favour with some people, if Providence had seen fit to make them only hands, or, like the lower creatures of the seashore, only hands and stomachs - lived a certain Stephen Blackpool, forty years of age.

Stephen looked older, but he had had a hard life. It is said that every life has its roses and thorns; there seemed, however, to have been a misadventure or mistake in Stephen's case, whereby somebody else had become possessed of his roses, and he had become possessed of the same somebody else's thorns in addition to his own. He had known, to use his words, a peck of trouble. He was usually called Old Stephen, in a kind of rough homage to the fact.

A rather stooping man, with a knitted brow, a pondering expression of face, and a hard-looking head sufficiently capacious, on which his iron-grey hair lay long and thin, Old Stephen might have passed for a particularly intelligent man in his condition. Yet he was not. He took no place among those remarkable 'Hands,' who, piecing together their broken intervals of leisure through many years, had mastered difficult sciences, and acquired a knowledge of most unlikely things. He held no station among the Hands who could make speeches and carry on debates. Thousands of his compeers could talk much better than he, at any time. He was a good power-loom weaver, and a man of perfect integrity. What more he was, or what else he had in him, if anything, let him show for himself.

The lights in the great factories, which looked, when they were illuminated, like Fairy palaces - or the travellers by express- train said so - were all extinguished; and the bells had rung for knocking off for the night, and had ceased again; and the Hands, men and women, boy and girl, were clattering home. Old Stephen was standing in the street, with the old sensation upon him which the stoppage of the machinery always produced - the sensation of its having worked and stopped in his own head.

'Yet I don't see Rachael, still!' said he.

It was a wet night, and many groups of young women passed him, with their shawls drawn over their bare heads and held close under their chins to keep the rain out. He knew Rachael well, for a glance at any one of these groups was sufficient to show him that she was not there. At last, there were no more to come; and then he turned away, saying in a tone of disappointment, 'Why, then, ha' missed her!'

But, he had not gone the length of three streets, when he saw another of the shawled figures in advance of him, at which he looked so keenly that perhaps its mere shadow indistinctly reflected on the wet pavement - if he could have seen it without the figure itself moving along from lamp to lamp, brightening and fading as it went - would have been enough to tell him who was there. Making his pace at once much quicker and much softer, he darted on until he was very near this figure, then fell into his former walk, and called 'Rachael!'

She turned, being then in the brightness of a lamp; and raising her hood a little, showed a quiet oval face, dark and rather delicate, irradiated by a pair of very gentle eyes, and further set off by the perfect order of her shining black hair. It was not a face in its first bloom; she was a woman five and thirty years of age.

'Ah, lad! 'Tis thou?' When she had said this, with a smile which would have been quite expressed, though nothing of her had been seen but her pleasant eyes, she replaced her hood again, and they went on together.

'I thought thou wast ahind me, Rachael?'

'No.'

'Early t'night, lass?'

''Times I'm a little early, Stephen! 'times a little late. I'm never to be counted on, going home.'

'Nor going t'other way, neither, 't seems to me, Rachael?'

'No, Stephen.'

He looked at her with some disappointment in his face, but with a respectful and patient conviction that she must be right in whatever she did.

The expression was not lost upon her; she laid her hand lightly on his arm a moment as if to thank him for it.

'We are such true friends, lad, and such old friends, and getting to be such old folk, now.'

'No, Rachael, thou'rt as young as ever thou wast.'

'One of us would be puzzled how to get old, Stephen, without 't other getting so too, both being alive,' she answered, laughing; 'but, anyways, we're such old friends, and t' hide a word of honest truth fro' one another would be a sin and a pity. 'Tis better not to walk too much together. 'Times, yes! 'Twould be hard, indeed, if 'twas not to be at all,' she said, with a cheerfulness she sought to communicate to him.

''Tis hard, anyways, Rachael.'

'Try to think not; and 'twill seem better.'

'I've tried a long time, and 'ta'nt got better. But thou'rt right; 't might mak fok talk, even of thee. Thou hast been that to me, Rachael, through so many year: thou hast done me so much good, and heartened of me in that cheering way, that thy word is a law to me. Ah, lass, and a bright good law! Better than some real ones.'

'Never fret about them, Stephen,' she answered quickly, and not without an anxious glance at his face. 'Let the laws be.'

'Yes,' he said, with a slow nod or two. 'Let 'em be. Let everything be. Let all sorts alone. 'Tis a muddle, and that's aw.'

'Always a muddle?' said Rachael, with another gentle touch upon his arm, as if to recall him out of the thoughtfulness, in which he was biting the long ends of his loose neckerchief as he walked along. The touch had its instantaneous effect. He let them fall, turned a smiling face upon her, and said, as he broke into a good-humoured laugh, 'Ay, Rachael, lass, awlus a muddle. That's where I stick. I come to the muddle many times and agen, and I never get beyond it.'

They had walked some distance, and were near their own homes. The woman's was the first reached. It was in one of the many small streets for which the favourite undertaker (who turned a handsome sum out of the one poor ghastly pomp of the neighbourhood) kept a black ladder, in order that those who had done their daily groping up and down the narrow stairs might slide out of this working world by the windows. She stopped at the corner, and putting her hand in his, wished him good night.

'Good night, dear lass; good night!'

She went, with her neat figure and her sober womanly step, down the dark street, and he stood looking after her until she turned into one of the small houses. There was not a flutter of her coarse shawl, perhaps, but had its interest in this man's eyes; not a tone of her voice but had its echo in his innermost heart.

When she was lost to his view, he pursued his homeward way, glancing up sometimes at the sky, where the clouds were sailing fast and wildly. But, they were broken now, and the rain had ceased, and the moon shone, - looking down the high chimneys of Coketown on the deep furnaces below, and casting Titanic shadows of the steam-engines at rest, upon the walls where they were lodged. The man seemed to have brightened with the night, as he went on.

His home, in such another street as the first, saving that it was narrower, was over a little shop. How it came to pass that any people found it worth their while to sell or buy the wretched little toys, mixed up in its window with cheap newspapers and pork (there was a leg to be raffled for to-morrow-night), matters not here. He took his end of candle from a shelf, lighted it at another end of candle on the counter, without disturbing the mistress of the shop who was asleep in her little room, and went upstairs into his lodging.

It was a room, not unacquainted with the black ladder under various tenants; but as neat, at present, as such a room could be. A few books and writings were on an old bureau in a corner, the furniture was decent and sufficient, and, though the atmosphere was tainted, the room was clean.

Going to the hearth to set the candle down upon a round three- legged table standing there, he stumbled against something. As he recoiled, looking down at it, it raised itself up into the form of a woman in a sitting attitude.

'Heaven's mercy, woman!' he cried, falling farther off from the figure. 'Hast thou come back again!'

Such a woman! A disabled, drunken creature, barely able to preserve her sitting posture by steadying herself with one begrimed hand on the floor, while the other was so purposeless in trying to push away her tangled hair from her face, that it only blinded her the more with the dirt upon it. A creature so foul to look at, in her tatters, stains and splashes, but so much fouler than that in her moral infamy, that it was a shameful thing even to see her.

After an impatient oath or two, and some stupid clawing of herself with the hand not necessary to her support, she got her hair away from her eyes sufficiently to obtain a sight of him. Then she sat swaying her body to and fro, and making gestures with her unnerved arm, which seemed intended as the accompaniment to a fit of laughter, though her face was stolid and drowsy.

'Eigh, lad? What, yo'r there?' Some hoarse sounds meant for this, came mockingly out of her at last; and her head dropped forward on her breast.

'Back agen?' she screeched, after some minutes, as if he had that moment said it. 'Yes! And back agen. Back agen ever and ever so often. Back? Yes, back. Why not?'

Roused by the unmeaning violence with which she cried it out, she scrambled up, and stood supporting herself with her shoulders against the wall; dangling in one hand by the string, a dunghill- fragment of a bonnet, and trying to look scornfully at him.

'I'll sell thee off again, and I'll sell thee off again, and I'll sell thee off a score of times!' she cried, with something between a furious menace and an effort at a defiant dance. 'Come awa' from th' bed!' He was sitting on the side of it, with his face hidden in his hands. 'Come awa! from 't. 'Tis mine, and I've a right to t'!'

As she staggered to it, he avoided her with a shudder, and passed - his face still hidden - to the opposite end of the room. She threw herself upon the bed heavily, and soon was snoring hard. He sunk into a chair, and moved but once all that night. It was to throw a covering over her; as if his hands were not enough to hide her, even in the darkness.

CHAPTER XI - NO WAY OUT

THE Fairy palaces burst into illumination, before pale morning showed the monstrous serpents of smoke trailing themselves over Coketown. A clattering of clogs upon the pavement; a rapid ringing of bells; and all the melancholy mad elephants, polished and oiled up for the day's monotony, were at their heavy exercise again.

Stephen bent over his loom, quiet, watchful, and steady. A special contrast, as every man was in the forest of looms where Stephen worked, to the crashing, smashing, tearing piece of mechanism at which he laboured. Never fear, good people of an anxious turn of mind, that Art will consign Nature to oblivion. Set anywhere, side by side, the work of GOD and the work of man; and the former, even though it be a troop of Hands of very small account, will gain in dignity from the comparison.

So many hundred Hands in this Mill; so many hundred horse Steam Power. It is known, to the force of a single pound weight, what the engine will do; but, not all the calculators of the National Debt can tell me the capacity for good or evil, for love or hatred, for patriotism or discontent, for the decomposition of virtue into vice, or the reverse, at any single moment in the soul of one of these its quiet servants, with the composed faces and the regulated actions. There is no mystery in it; there is an unfathomable mystery in the meanest of them, for ever. - Supposing we were to reverse our arithmetic for material objects, and to govern these awful unknown quantities by other means!

The day grew strong, and showed itself outside, even against the flaming lights within. The lights were turned out, and the work went on. The rain fell, and the Smoke-serpents, submissive to the curse of all that tribe, trailed themselves upon the earth. In the waste-yard outside, the steam from the escape pipe, the litter of barrels and old iron, the shining heaps of coals, the ashes everywhere, were shrouded in a veil of mist and rain.

The work went on, until the noon-bell rang. More clattering upon the pavements. The looms, and wheels, and Hands all out of gear for an hour.

Stephen came out of the hot mill into the damp wind and cold wet streets, haggard and worn. He turned from his own class and his own quarter, taking nothing but a little bread as he walked along, towards the hill on which his principal employer lived, in a red house with black outside shutters, green inside blinds, a black street door, up two white steps, BOUNDERBY (in letters very like himself) upon a brazen plate, and a round brazen door-handle underneath it, like a brazen full-stop.

Mr. Bounderby was at his lunch. So Stephen had expected. Would his servant say that one of the Hands begged leave to speak to him? Message in return, requiring name of such Hand. Stephen Blackpool. There was nothing troublesome against Stephen Blackpool; yes, he might come in.

Stephen Blackpool in the parlour. Mr. Bounderby (whom he just knew by sight), at lunch on chop and sherry. Mrs. Sparsit netting at the fireside, in a side-saddle attitude, with one foot in a cotton stirrup. It was a part, at once of Mrs. Sparsit's dignity and service, not to lunch. She supervised the meal officially, but implied that in her own stately person she considered lunch a weakness.

'Now, Stephen,' said Mr. Bounderby, 'what's the matter with you?'

Stephen made a bow. Not a servile one - these Hands will never do that! Lord bless you, sir, you'll never catch them at that, if they have been with you twenty years! - and, as a complimentary toilet for Mrs. Sparsit, tucked his neckerchief ends into his waistcoat.

'Now, you know,' said Mr. Bounderby, taking some sherry, 'we have never had any difficulty with you, and you have never been one of the unreasonable ones. You don't expect to be set up in a coach and six, and to be fed on turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon, as a good many of 'em do!' Mr. Bounderby always represented this to be the sole, immediate, and direct object of any Hand who was not entirely satisfied; 'and therefore I know already that you have not come here to make a complaint. Now, you know, I am certain of that, beforehand.'

'No, sir, sure I ha' not coom for nowt o' th' kind.'

Mr. Bounderby seemed agreeably surprised, notwithstanding his previous strong conviction. 'Very well,' he returned. 'You're a steady Hand, and I was not mistaken. Now, let me hear what it's all about. As it's not that, let me hear what it is. What have you got to say? Out with it, lad!'

Stephen happened to glance towards Mrs. Sparsit. 'I can go, Mr. Bounderby, if you wish it,' said that self-sacrificing lady, making a feint of taking her foot out of the stirrup.

Mr. Bounderby stayed her, by holding a mouthful of chop in suspension before swallowing it, and putting out his left hand. Then, withdrawing his hand and swallowing his mouthful of chop, he said to Stephen:

'Now you know, this good lady is a born lady, a high lady. You are not to suppose because she keeps my house for me, that she hasn't been very high up the tree - ah, up at the top of the tree! Now, if you have got anything to say that can't be said before a born lady, this lady will leave the room. If what you have got to say can be said before a born lady, this lady will stay where she is.'

'Sir, I hope I never had nowt to say, not fitten for a born lady to year, sin' I were born mysen',' was the reply, accompanied with a slight flush.

'Very well,' said Mr. Bounderby, pushing away his plate, and leaning back. 'Fire away!'

'I ha' coom,' Stephen began, raising his eyes from the floor, after a moment's consideration, 'to ask yo yor advice. I need 't overmuch. I were married on Eas'r Monday nineteen year sin, long and dree. She were a young lass - pretty enow - wi' good accounts of herseln. Well! She went bad - soon. Not along of me. Gonnows I were not a unkind husband to her.'

'I have heard all this before,' said Mr. Bounderby. 'She took to drinking, left off working, sold the furniture, pawned the clothes, and played old Gooseberry.'

'I were patient wi' her.'

('The more fool you, I think,' said Mr. Bounderby, in confidence to his wine-glass.)

'I were very patient wi' her. I tried to wean her fra 't ower and ower agen. I tried this, I tried that, I tried t'other. I ha' gone home, many's the time, and found all vanished as I had in the world, and her without a sense left to bless herseln lying on bare ground. I ha' dun 't not once, not twice - twenty time!'

Every line in his face deepened as he said it, and put in its affecting evidence of the suffering he had undergone.

'From bad to worse, from worse to worsen. She left me. She disgraced herseln everyways, bitter and bad. She coom back, she coom back, she coom back. What could I do t' hinder her? I ha' walked the streets nights long, ere ever I'd go home. I ha' gone t' th' brigg, minded to fling myseln ower, and ha' no more on't. I ha' bore that much, that I were owd when I were young.'

Mrs. Sparsit, easily ambling along with her netting-needles, raised the Coriolanian eyebrows and shook her head, as much as to say, 'The great know trouble as well as the small. Please to turn your humble eye in My direction.'

'I ha' paid her to keep awa' fra' me. These five year I ha' paid her. I ha' gotten decent fewtrils about me agen. I ha' lived hard and sad, but not ashamed and fearfo' a' the minnits o' my life. Last night, I went home. There she lay upon my har-stone! There she is!'

In the strength of his misfortune, and the energy of his distress, he fired for the moment like a proud man. In another moment, he stood as he had stood all the time - his usual stoop upon him; his pondering face addressed to Mr. Bounderby, with a curious expression on it, half shrewd, half perplexed, as if his mind were set upon unravelling something very difficult; his hat held tight in his left hand, which rested on his hip; his right arm, with a rugged propriety and force of action, very earnestly emphasizing what he said: not least so when it always paused, a little bent, but not withdrawn, as he paused.

'I was acquainted with all this, you know,' said Mr. Bounderby, 'except the last clause, long ago. It's a bad job; that's what it is. You had better have been satisfied as you were, and not have got married. However, it's too late to say that.'

'Was it an unequal marriage, sir, in point of years?' asked Mrs. Sparsit.

'You hear what this lady asks. Was it an unequal marriage in point of years, this unlucky job of yours?' said Mr. Bounderby.

'Not e'en so. I were one-and-twenty myseln; she were twenty nighbut.'

'Indeed, sir?' said Mrs. Sparsit to her Chief, with great placidity. 'I inferred, from its being so miserable a marriage, that it was probably an unequal one in point of years.'

Mr. Bounderby looked very hard at the good lady in a side-long way that had an odd sheepishness about it. He fortified himself with a little more sherry.

'Well? Why don't you go on?' he then asked, turning rather irritably on Stephen Blackpool.

'I ha' coom to ask yo, sir, how I am to be ridded o' this woman.' Stephen infused a yet deeper gravity into the mixed expression of his attentive face. Mrs. Sparsit uttered a gentle ejaculation, as having received a moral shock.

'What do you mean?' said Bounderby, getting up to lean his back against the chimney-piece. 'What are you talking about? You took her for better for worse.'

'I mun' be ridden o' her. I cannot bear 't nommore. I ha' lived under 't so long, for that I ha' had'n the pity and comforting words o' th' best lass living or dead. Haply, but for her, I should ha' gone battering mad.'

'He wishes to be free, to marry the female of whom he speaks, I fear, sir,' observed Mrs. Sparsit in an undertone, and much dejected by the immorality of the people.

'I do. The lady says what's right. I do. I were a coming to 't. I ha' read i' th' papers that great folk (fair faw 'em a'! I wishes 'em no hurt!) are not bonded together for better for worst so fast, but that they can be set free fro' their misfortnet marriages, an' marry ower agen. When they dunnot agree, for that their tempers is ill-sorted, they has rooms o' one kind an' another in their houses, above a bit, and they can live asunders. We fok ha' only one room, and we can't. When that won't do, they ha' gowd an' other cash, an' they can say "This for yo' an' that for me," an' they can go their separate ways. We can't. Spite o' all that, they can be set free for smaller wrongs than mine. So, I mun be ridden o' this woman, and I want t' know how?'

'No how,' returned Mr. Bounderby.

'If I do her any hurt, sir, there's a law to punish me?'

'Of course there is.'

'If I flee from her, there's a law to punish me?'

'Of course there is.'

'If I marry t'oother dear lass, there's a law to punish me?'

'Of course there is.'

'If I was to live wi' her an' not marry her - saying such a thing could be, which it never could or would, an' her so good - there's a law to punish me, in every innocent child belonging to me?'

'Of course there is.'

'Now, a' God's name,' said Stephen Blackpool, 'show me the law to help me!'

'Hem! There's a sanctity in this relation of life,' said Mr. Bounderby, 'and - and - it must be kept up.'

'No no, dunnot say that, sir. 'Tan't kep' up that way. Not that way. 'Tis kep' down that way. I'm a weaver, I were in a fact'ry when a chilt, but I ha' gotten een to see wi' and eern to year wi'. I read in th' papers every 'Sizes, every Sessions - and you read too - I know it! - with dismay - how th' supposed unpossibility o' ever getting unchained from one another, at any price, on any terms, brings blood upon this land, and brings many common married fok to battle, murder, and sudden death. Let us ha' this, right understood. Mine's a grievous case, an' I want - if yo will be so good - t' know the law that helps me.'

'Now, I tell you what!' said Mr. Bounderby, putting his hands in his pockets. 'There is such a law.'

Stephen, subsiding into his quiet manner, and never wandering in his attention, gave a nod.

'But it's not for you at all. It costs money. It costs a mint of money.'

'How much might that be?' Stephen calmly asked.

'Why, you'd have to go to Doctors' Commons with a suit, and you'd have to go to a court of Common Law with a suit, and you'd have to go to the House of Lords with a suit, and you'd have to get an Act of Parliament to enable you to marry again, and it would cost you (if it was a case of very plain sailing), I suppose from a thousand to fifteen hundred pound,' said Mr. Bounderby. 'Perhaps twice the money.'

'There's no other law?'

'Certainly not.'

'Why then, sir,' said Stephen, turning white, and motioning with that right hand of his, as if he gave everything to the four winds, ''tis a muddle. 'Tis just a muddle a'toogether, an' the sooner I am dead, the better.'

(Mrs. Sparsit again dejected by the impiety of the people.)

'Pooh, pooh! Don't you talk nonsense, my good fellow,' said Mr. Bounderby, 'about things you don't understand; and don't you call the Institutions of your country a muddle, or you'll get yourself into a real muddle one of these fine mornings. The institutions of your country are not your piece-work, and the only thing you have got to do, is, to mind your piece-work. You didn't take your wife for fast and for loose; but for better for worse. If she has turned out worse - why, all we have got to say is, she might have turned out better.'

''Tis a muddle,' said Stephen, shaking his head as he moved to the door. ''Tis a' a muddle!'

'Now, I'll tell you what!' Mr. Bounderby resumed, as a valedictory address. 'With what I shall call your unhallowed opinions, you have been quite shocking this lady: who, as I have already told you, is a born lady, and who, as I have not already told you, has had her own marriage misfortunes to the tune of tens of thousands of pounds - tens of Thousands of Pounds!' (he repeated it with great relish). 'Now, you have always been a steady Hand hitherto; but my opinion is, and so I tell you plainly, that you are turning into the wrong road. You have been listening to some mischievous stranger or other - they're always about - and the best thing you can do is, to come out of that. Now you know;' here his countenance expressed marvellous acuteness; 'I can see as far into a grindstone as another man; farther than a good many, perhaps, because I had my nose well kept to it when I was young. I see traces of the turtle soup, and venison, and gold spoon in this. Yes, I do!' cried Mr. Bounderby, shaking his head with obstinate cunning. 'By the Lord Harry, I do!'

With a very different shake of the head and deep sigh, Stephen said, 'Thank you, sir, I wish you good day.' So he left Mr. Bounderby swelling at his own portrait on the wall, as if he were going to explode himself into it; and Mrs. Sparsit still ambling on with her foot in her stirrup, looking quite cast down by the popular vices.

CHAPTER XII - THE OLD WOMAN

OLD STEPHEN descended the two white steps, shutting the black door with the brazen door-plate, by the aid of the brazen full-stop, to which he gave a parting polish with the sleeve of his coat, observing that his hot hand clouded it. He crossed the street with his eyes bent upon the ground, and thus was walking sorrowfully away, when he felt a touch upon his arm.

It was not the touch he needed most at such a moment - the touch that could calm the wild waters of his soul, as the uplifted hand of the sublimest love and patience could abate the raging of the sea - yet it was a woman's hand too. It was an old woman, tall and shapely still, though withered by time, on whom his eyes fell when he stopped and turned. She was very cleanly and plainly dressed, had country mud upon her shoes, and was newly come from a journey. The flutter of her manner, in the unwonted noise of the streets; the spare shawl, carried unfolded on her arm; the heavy umbrella, and little basket; the loose long-fingered gloves, to which her hands were unused; all bespoke an old woman from the country, in her plain holiday clothes, come into Coketown on an expedition of rare occurrence. Remarking this at a glance, with the quick observation of his class, Stephen Blackpool bent his attentive face - his face, which, like the faces of many of his order, by dint of long working with eyes and hands in the midst of a prodigious noise, had acquired the concentrated look with which we are familiar in the countenances of the deaf - the better to hear what she asked him.

'Pray, sir,' said the old woman, 'didn't I see you come out of that gentleman's house?' pointing back to Mr. Bounderby's. 'I believe it was you, unless I have had the bad luck to mistake the person in following?'

'Yes, missus,' returned Stephen, 'it were me.'

'Have you - you'll excuse an old woman's curiosity - have you seen the gentleman?'

'Yes, missus.'

'And how did he look, sir? Was he portly, bold, outspoken, and hearty?' As she straightened her own figure, and held up her head in adapting her action to her words, the idea crossed Stephen that he had seen this old woman before, and had not quite liked her.

'O yes,' he returned, observing her more attentively, 'he were all that.'

'And healthy,' said the old woman, 'as the fresh wind?'

'Yes,' returned Stephen. 'He were ett'n and drinking - as large and as loud as a Hummobee.'

'Thank you!' said the old woman, with infinite content. 'Thank you!'

He certainly never had seen this old woman before. Yet there was a vague remembrance in his mind, as if he had more than once dreamed of some old woman like her.

She walked along at his side, and, gently accommodating himself to her humour, he said Coketown was a busy place, was it not? To which she answered 'Eigh sure! Dreadful busy!' Then he said, she came from the country, he saw? To which she answered in the affirmative.

'By Parliamentary, this morning. I came forty mile by Parliamentary this morning, and I'm going back the same forty mile this afternoon. I walked nine mile to the station this morning, and if I find nobody on the road to give me a lift, I shall walk the nine mile back to-night. That's pretty well, sir, at my age!' said the chatty old woman, her eye brightening with exultation.

''Deed 'tis. Don't do't too often, missus.'

'No, no. Once a year,' she answered, shaking her head. 'I spend my savings so, once every year. I come regular, to tramp about the streets, and see the gentlemen.'

'Only to see 'em?' returned Stephen.

'That's enough for me,' she replied, with great earnestness and interest of manner. 'I ask no more! I have been standing about, on this side of the way, to see that gentleman,' turning her head back towards Mr. Bounderby's again, 'come out. But, he's late this year, and I have not seen him. You came out instead. Now, if I am obliged to go back without a glimpse of him - I only want a glimpse - well! I have seen you, and you have seen him, and I must make that do.' Saying this, she looked at Stephen as if to fix his features in her mind, and her eye was not so bright as it had been.

With a large allowance for difference of tastes, and with all submission to the patricians of Coketown, this seemed so extraordinary a source of interest to take so much trouble about, that it perplexed him. But they were passing the church now, and as his eye caught the clock, he quickened his pace.

He was going to his work? the old woman said, quickening hers, too, quite easily. Yes, time was nearly out. On his telling her where he worked, the old woman became a more singular old woman than before.

'An't you happy?' she asked him.

'Why - there's awmost nobbody but has their troubles, missus.' He answered evasively, because the old woman appeared to take it for granted that he would be very happy indeed, and he had not the heart to disappoint her. He knew that there was trouble enough in the world; and if the old woman had lived so long, and could count upon his having so little, why so much the better for her, and none the worse for him.

'Ay, ay! You have your troubles at home, you mean?' she said.

'Times. Just now and then,' he answered, slightly.

'But, working under such a gentleman, they don't follow you to the Factory?'

No, no; they didn't follow him there, said Stephen. All correct there. Everything accordant there. (He did not go so far as to say, for her pleasure, that there was a sort of Divine Right there; but, I have heard claims almost as magnificent of late years.)

They were now in the black by-road near the place, and the Hands were crowding in. The bell was ringing, and the Serpent was a Serpent of many coils, and the Elephant was getting ready. The strange old woman was delighted with the very bell. It was the beautifullest bell she had ever heard, she said, and sounded grand!

She asked him, when he stopped good-naturedly to shake hands with her before going in, how long he had worked there?

'A dozen year,' he told her.

'I must kiss the hand,' said she, 'that has worked in this fine factory for a dozen year!' And she lifted it, though he would have prevented her, and put it to her lips. What harmony, besides her age and her simplicity, surrounded her, he did not know, but even in this fantastic action there was a something neither out of time nor place: a something which it seemed as if nobody else could have made as serious, or done with such a natural and touching air.

He had been at his loom full half an hour, thinking about this old woman, when, having occasion to move round the loom for its adjustment, he glanced through a window which was in his corner, and saw her still looking up at the pile of building, lost in admiration. Heedless of the smoke and mud and wet, and of her two long journeys, she was gazing at it, as if the heavy thrum that issued from its many stories were proud music to her.

She was gone by and by, and the day went after her, and the lights sprung up again, and the Express whirled in full sight of the Fairy Palace over the arches near: little felt amid the jarring of the machinery, and scarcely heard above its crash and rattle. Long before then his thoughts had gone back to the dreary room above the little shop, and to the shameful figure heavy on the bed, but heavier on his heart.

Machinery slackened; throbbing feebly like a fainting pulse; stopped. The bell again; the glare of light and heat dispelled; the factories, looming heavy in the black wet night - their tall chimneys rising up into the air like competing Towers of Babel.

He had spoken to Rachael only last night, it was true, and had walked with her a little way; but he had his new misfortune on him, in which no one else could give him a moment's relief, and, for the sake of it, and because he knew himself to want that softening of his anger which no voice but hers could effect, he felt he might so far disregard what she had said as to wait for her again. He waited, but she had eluded him. She was gone. On no other night in the year could he so ill have spared her patient face.

O! Better to have no home in which to lay his head, than to have a home and dread to go to it, through such a cause. He ate and drank, for he was exhausted - but he little knew or cared what; and he wandered about in the chill rain, thinking and thinking, and brooding and brooding.

No word of a new marriage had ever passed between them; but Rachael had taken great pity on him years ago, and to her alone he had opened his closed heart all this time, on the subject of his miseries; and he knew very well that if he were free to ask her, she would take him. He thought of the home he might at that moment have been seeking with pleasure and pride; of the different man he might have been that night; of the lightness then in his now heavy- laden breast; of the then restored honour, self-respect, and tranquillity all torn to pieces. He thought of the waste of the best part of his life, of the change it made in his character for the worse every day, of the dreadful nature of his existence, bound hand and foot, to a dead woman, and tormented by a demon in her shape. He thought of Rachael, how young when they were first brought together in these circumstances, how mature now, how soon to grow old. He thought of the number of girls and women she had seen marry, how many homes with children in them she had seen grow up around her, how she had contentedly pursued her own lone quiet path - for him - and how he had sometimes seen a shade of melancholy on her blessed face, that smote him with remorse and despair. He set the picture of her up, beside the infamous image of last night; and thought, Could it be, that the whole earthly course of one so gentle, good, and self-denying, was subjugate to such a wretch as that!

Filled with these thoughts - so filled that he had an unwholesome sense of growing larger, of being placed in some new and diseased relation towards the objects among which he passed, of seeing the iris round every misty light turn red - he went home for shelter.

CHAPTER XIII - RACHAEL

A CANDLE faintly burned in the window, to which the black ladder had often been raised for the sliding away of all that was most precious in this world to a striving wife and a brood of hungry babies; and Stephen added to his other thoughts the stern reflection, that of all the casualties of this existence upon earth, not one was dealt out with so unequal a hand as

Death. The inequality of Birth was nothing to it. For, say that the child of a King and the child of a Weaver were born to-night in the same moment, what was that disparity, to the death of any human creature who was serviceable to, or beloved by, another, while this abandoned woman lived on!

From the outside of his home he gloomily passed to the inside, with suspended breath and with a slow footstep. He went up to his door, opened it, and so into the room.

Quiet and peace were there. Rachael was there, sitting by the bed.

She turned her head, and the light of her face shone in upon the midnight of his mind. She sat by the bed, watching and tending his wife. That is to say, he saw that some one lay there, and he knew too well it must be she; but Rachael's hands had put a curtain up, so that she was screened from his eyes. Her disgraceful garments were removed, and some of Rachael's were in the room. Everything was in its place and order as he had always kept it, the little fire was newly trimmed, and the hearth was freshly swept. It appeared to him that he saw all this in Rachael's face, and looked at nothing besides. While looking at it, it was shut out from his view by the softened tears that filled his eyes; but not before he had seen how earnestly she looked at him, and how her own eyes were filled too.

She turned again towards the bed, and satisfying herself that all was quiet there, spoke in a low, calm, cheerful voice.

'I am glad you have come at last, Stephen. You are very late.'

'I ha' been walking up an' down.'

'I thought so. But 'tis too bad a night for that. The rain falls very heavy, and the wind has risen.'

The wind? True. It was blowing hard. Hark to the thundering in the chimney, and the surging noise! To have been out in such a wind, and not to have known it was blowing!

'I have been here once before, to-day, Stephen. Landlady came round for me at dinner-time. There was some one here that needed looking to, she said. And 'deed she was right. All wandering and lost, Stephen. Wounded too, and bruised.'

He slowly moved to a chair and sat down, drooping his head before her.

'I came to do what little I could, Stephen; first, for that she worked with me when we were girls both, and for that you courted her and married her when I was her friend - '

He laid his furrowed forehead on his hand, with a low groan.

'And next, for that I know your heart, and am right sure and certain that 'tis far too merciful to let her die, or even so much as suffer, for want of aid. Thou knowest who said, "Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone at her!" There have been plenty to do that. Thou art not the man to cast the last stone, Stephen, when she is brought so low.'

'O Rachael, Rachael!'

'Thou hast been a cruel sufferer, Heaven reward thee!' she said, in compassionate accents. 'I am thy poor friend, with all my heart and mind.'

The wounds of which she had spoken, seemed to be about the neck of the self-made outcast. She dressed them now, still without showing her. She steeped a piece of linen in a basin, into which she poured some liquid from a bottle, and laid it with a gentle hand upon the sore. The three-legged table had been drawn close to the bedside, and on it there were two bottles. This was one.

It was not so far off, but that Stephen, following her hands with his eyes, could read what was printed on it in large letters. He turned of a deadly hue, and a sudden horror seemed to fall upon him.

'I will stay here, Stephen,' said Rachael, quietly resuming her seat, 'till the bells go Three. 'Tis to be done again at three, and then she may be left till morning.'

'But thy rest agen to-morrow's work, my dear.'

'I slept sound last night. I can wake many nights, when I am put to it. 'Tis thou who art in need of rest - so white and tired. Try to sleep in the chair there, while I watch. Thou hadst no sleep last night, I can well believe. To-morrow's work is far harder for thee than for me.'

He heard the thundering and surging out of doors, and it seemed to him as if his late angry mood were going about trying to get at him. She had cast it out; she would keep it out; he trusted to her to defend him from himself.

'She don't know me, Stephen; she just drowsily mutters and stares. I have spoken to her times and again, but she don't notice! 'Tis as well so. When she comes to her right mind once more, I shall have done what I can, and she never the wiser.'

'How long, Rachael, is 't looked for, that she'll be so?'

'Doctor said she would haply come to her mind to-morrow.'

His eyes fell again on the bottle, and a tremble passed over him, causing him to shiver in every limb. She thought he was chilled with the wet. 'No,' he said, 'it was not that. He had had a fright.'

'A fright?'

'Ay, ay! coming in. When I were walking. When I were thinking. When I - ' It seized him again; and he stood up, holding by the mantel-shelf, as he pressed his dank cold hair down with a hand that shook as if it were palsied.

'Stephen!'

She was coming to him, but he stretched out his arm to stop her.

'No! Don't, please; don't. Let me see thee setten by the bed.
Let me see thee, a' so good, and so forgiving. Let me see thee as
I see thee when I coom in. I can never see thee better than so.
Never, never, never!'

He had a violent fit of trembling, and then sunk into his chair. After a time he controlled himself, and, resting with an elbow on one knee, and his head upon that hand, could look towards Rachael. Seen across the dim candle with his moistened eyes, she looked as if she had a glory shining round her head. He could have believed she had. He did believe it, as the noise without shook the window, rattled at the door below, and went about the house clamouring and lamenting.

'When she gets better, Stephen, 'tis to be hoped she'll leave thee to thyself again, and do thee no more hurt. Anyways we will hope so now. And now I shall keep silence, for I want thee to sleep.'

He closed his eyes, more to please her than to rest his weary head; but, by slow degrees as he listened to the great noise of the wind, he ceased to hear it, or it changed into the working of his loom, or even into the voices of the day (his own included) saying what had been really said. Even this imperfect consciousness faded away at last, and he dreamed a long, troubled dream.

He thought that he, and some one on whom his heart had long been set - but she was not Rachael, and that surprised him, even in the midst of his imaginary happiness - stood in the church being married. While the ceremony was performing, and while he recognized among the witnesses some whom he knew to be living, and many whom he knew to be dead, darkness came on, succeeded by the shining of a tremendous light. It broke from one line in the table of commandments at the altar, and illuminated the building with the words. They were sounded through the church, too, as if there were voices in the fiery letters. Upon this, the whole appearance before him and around him changed, and nothing was left as it had been, but himself and the clergyman. They stood in the daylight before a crowd so vast, that if all the people in the world could have been brought together into one space, they could not have looked, he thought, more numerous; and they all abhorred him, and there was not one pitying or friendly eye among the millions that were fastened on his face. He stood on a raised stage, under his own loom; and, looking up at the shape the loom took, and hearing the burial service distinctly read, he knew that he was there to suffer death. In an instant what he stood on fell below him, and he was gone.

- Out of what mystery he came back to his usual life, and to places that he knew, he was unable to consider; but he was back in those places by some means, and with this condemnation upon him, that he was never, in this world or the next, through all the unimaginable ages of eternity, to look on Rachael's face or hear her voice. Wandering to and fro, unceasingly, without hope, and in search of he knew not what (he only knew that he was doomed to seek it), he was the subject of a nameless, horrible dread, a mortal fear of one particular shape which everything took. Whatsoever he looked at, grew into that form sooner or later. The object of his miserable existence was to prevent its recognition by any one among the various people he encountered. Hopeless labour! If he led them out of rooms where it was, if he shut up drawers and closets where it stood, if he drew the curious from places where he knew it to be secreted, and got them out into the streets, the very chimneys of the mills assumed that shape, and round them was the printed word.

The wind was blowing again, the rain was beating on the house-tops, and the larger spaces through which he had strayed contracted to the four walls of his room. Saving that the fire had died out, it was as his eyes had closed upon it. Rachael seemed to have fallen into a doze, in the chair by the bed. She sat wrapped in her shawl, perfectly still. The table stood in the same place, close by the bedside, and on it, in its real proportions and appearance, was the shape so often repeated.

He thought he saw the curtain move. He looked again, and he was sure it moved. He saw a hand come forth and grope about a little. Then the curtain moved more perceptibly, and the woman in the bed put it back, and sat up.

With her woful eyes, so haggard and wild, so heavy and large, she looked all round the room, and passed the corner where he slept in his chair. Her eyes returned to that corner, and she put her hand over them as a shade, while she looked into it. Again they went all round the room, scarcely heeding Rachael if at all, and returned to that corner. He thought, as she once more shaded them - not so much looking at him, as looking for him with a brutish instinct that he was there - that no single trace was left in those debauched features, or in the mind that went along with them, of the woman he had married eighteen years before. But that he had seen her come to this by inches, he never could have believed her to be the same.

All this time, as if a spell were on him, he was motionless and powerless, except to watch her.

Stupidly dozing, or communing with her incapable self about nothing, she sat for a little while with her hands at her ears, and her head resting on them. Presently, she resumed her staring round the room. And now, for the first time, her eyes stopped at the table with the bottles on it.

Straightway she turned her eyes back to his corner, with the defiance of last night, and moving very cautiously and softly, stretched out her greedy hand. She drew a mug into the bed, and sat for a while considering which of the two bottles she should choose. Finally, she laid her insensate grasp upon the bottle that had swift and certain death in it, and, before his eyes, pulled out the cork with her teeth.

Dream or reality, he had no voice, nor had he power to stir. If this be real, and her allotted time be not yet come, wake, Rachael, wake!

She thought of that, too. She looked at Rachael, and very slowly, very cautiously, poured out the contents. The draught was at her lips. A moment and she would be past all help, let the whole world wake and come about her with its utmost power. But in that moment Rachael started up with a suppressed cry. The creature struggled, struck her, seized her by the hair; but Rachael had the cup.

Stephen broke out of his chair. 'Rachael, am I wakin' or dreamin' this dreadfo' night?'

''Tis all well, Stephen. I have been asleep, myself. 'Tis near three. Hush! I hear the bells.'

The wind brought the sounds of the church clock to the window. They listened, and it struck three. Stephen looked at her, saw how pale she was, noted the disorder of her hair, and the red marks of fingers on her forehead, and felt assured that his senses of sight and hearing had been awake. She held the cup in her hand even now.

'I thought it must be near three,' she said, calmly pouring from the cup into the basin, and steeping the linen as before. 'I am thankful I stayed! 'Tis done now, when I have put this on. There! And now she's quiet again. The few drops in the basin I'll pour away, for 'tis bad stuff to leave about, though ever so little of it.' As she spoke, she drained the basin into the ashes of the fire, and broke the bottle on the hearth.

She had nothing to do, then, but to cover herself with her shawl before going out into the wind and rain.

'Thou'lt let me walk wi' thee at this hour, Rachael?'

'No, Stephen. 'Tis but a minute, and I'm home.'

'Thou'rt not fearfo';' he said it in a low voice, as they went out at the door; 'to leave me alone wi' her!'

As she looked at him, saying, 'Stephen?' he went down on his knee before her, on the poor mean stairs, and put an end of her shawl to his lips.

'Thou art an Angel. Bless thee, bless thee!'

'I am, as I have told thee, Stephen, thy poor friend. Angels are not like me. Between them, and a working woman fu' of faults, there is a deep gulf set. My little sister is among them, but she is changed.'

She raised her eyes for a moment as she said the words; and then they fell again, in all their gentleness and mildness, on his face.

'Thou changest me from bad to good. Thou mak'st me humbly wishfo' to be more like thee, and fearfo' to lose thee when this life is ower, and a' the muddle cleared awa'. Thou'rt an Angel; it may be, thou hast saved my soul alive!'

She looked at him, on his knee at her feet, with her shawl still in his hand, and the reproof on her lips died away when she saw the working of his face.

'I coom home desp'rate. I coom home wi'out a hope, and mad wi' thinking that when I said a word o' complaint I was reckoned a unreasonable Hand. I told thee I had had a fright. It were the Poison-bottle on table. I never hurt a livin' creetur; but happenin' so suddenly upon 't, I thowt, "How can I say what I might ha' done to myseln, or her, or both!"'

She put her two hands on his mouth, with a face of terror, to stop him from saying more. He caught them in his unoccupied hand, and holding them, and still clasping the border of her shawl, said hurriedly:

'But I see thee, Rachael, setten by the bed. I ha' seen thee, aw this night. In my troublous sleep I ha' known thee still to be there. Evermore I will see thee there. I nevermore will see her or think o' her, but thou shalt be beside her. I nevermore will see or think o' anything that angers me, but thou, so much better than me, shalt be by th' side on't. And so I will try t' look t' th' time, and so I will try t' trust t' th' time, when thou and me at last shall walk together far awa', beyond the deep gulf, in th' country where thy little sister is.'

He kissed the border of her shawl again, and let her go. She bade him good night in a broken voice, and went out into the street.

The wind blew from the quarter where the day would soon appear, and still blew strongly. It had cleared the sky before it, and the rain had spent itself or travelled elsewhere, and the stars were bright. He stood bare-headed in the road, watching her quick disappearance. As the shining stars were to the heavy candle in the window, so was Rachael, in the rugged fancy of this man, to the common experiences of his life.

CHAPTER XIV - THE GREAT MANUFACTURER

TIME went on in Coketown like its own machinery: so much material wrought up, so much fuel consumed, so many powers worn out, so much money made. But, less inexorable than iron, steal, and brass, it brought its varying seasons even into that wilderness of smoke and brick, and made the only stand that ever was made in the place against its direful uniformity.

'Louisa is becoming,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'almost a young woman.'

Time, with his innumerable horse-power, worked away, not minding what anybody said, and presently turned out young Thomas a foot taller than when his father had last taken particular notice of him.

'Thomas is becoming,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'almost a young man.'

Time passed Thomas on in the mill, while his father was thinking about it, and there he stood in a long-tailed coat and a stiff shirt-collar.

'Really,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'the period has arrived when Thomas ought to go to Bounderby.'

Time, sticking to him, passed him on into Bounderby's Bank, made him an inmate of Bounderby's house, necessitated the purchase of his first razor, and exercised him diligently in his calculations relative to number one.

The same great manufacturer, always with an immense variety of work on hand, in every stage of development, passed Sissy onward in his mill, and worked her up into a very pretty article indeed.

'I fear, Jupe,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'that your continuance at the school any longer would be useless.'

'I am afraid it would, sir,' Sissy answered with a curtsey.

'I cannot disguise from you, Jupe,' said Mr. Gradgrind, knitting his brow, 'that the result of your probation there has disappointed me; has greatly disappointed me. You have not acquired, under Mr. and Mrs. M'Choakumchild, anything like that amount of exact knowledge which I looked for. You are extremely deficient in your facts. Your acquaintance with figures is very limited. You are altogether backward, and below the mark.'

'I am sorry, sir,' she returned; 'but I know it is quite true. Yet
I have tried hard, sir.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'yes, I believe you have tried hard; I have observed you, and I can find no fault in that respect.'

'Thank you, sir. I have thought sometimes;' Sissy very timid here; 'that perhaps I tried to learn too much, and that if I had asked to be allowed to try a little less, I might have - '

'No, Jupe, no,' said Mr. Gradgrind, shaking his head in his profoundest and most eminently practical way. 'No. The course you pursued, you pursued according to the system - the system - and there is no more to be said about it. I can only suppose that the circumstances of your early life were too unfavourable to the development of your reasoning powers, and that we began too late. Still, as I have said already, I am disappointed.'

'I wish I could have made a better acknowledgment, sir, of your kindness to a poor forlorn girl who had no claim upon you, and of your protection of her.'

'Don't shed tears,' said Mr. Gradgrind. 'Don't shed tears. I don't complain of you. You are an affectionate, earnest, good young woman - and - and we must make that do.'

'Thank you, sir, very much,' said Sissy, with a grateful curtsey.

'You are useful to Mrs. Gradgrind, and (in a generally pervading way) you are serviceable in the family also; so I understand from Miss Louisa, and, indeed, so I have observed myself. I therefore hope,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'that you can make yourself happy in those relations.'

'I should have nothing to wish, sir, if - '

'I understand you,' said Mr. Gradgrind; 'you still refer to your father. I have heard from Miss Louisa that you still preserve that bottle. Well! If your training in the science of arriving at exact results had been more successful, you would have been wiser on these points. I will say no more.'

He really liked Sissy too well to have a contempt for her; otherwise he held her calculating powers in such very slight estimation that he must have fallen upon that conclusion. Somehow or other, he had become possessed by an idea that there was something in this girl which could hardly be set forth in a tabular form. Her capacity of definition might be easily stated at a very low figure, her mathematical knowledge at nothing; yet he was not sure that if he had been required, for example, to tick her off into columns in a parliamentary return, he would have quite known how to divide her.

In some stages of his manufacture of the human fabric, the processes of Time are very rapid. Young Thomas and Sissy being both at such a stage of their working up, these changes were effected in a year or two; while Mr. Gradgrind himself seemed stationary in his course, and underwent no alteration.

Except one, which was apart from his necessary progress through the mill. Time hustled him into a little noisy and rather dirty machinery, in a by-comer, and made him Member of Parliament for Coketown: one of the respected members for ounce weights and measures, one of the representatives of the multiplication table, one of the deaf honourable gentlemen, dumb honourable gentlemen, blind honourable gentlemen, lame honourable gentlemen, dead honourable gentlemen, to every other consideration. Else wherefore live we in a Christian land, eighteen hundred and odd years after our Master?

All this while, Louisa had been passing on, so quiet and reserved, and so much given to watching the bright ashes at twilight as they fell into the grate, and became extinct, that from the period when her father had said she was almost a young woman - which seemed but yesterday - she had scarcely attracted his notice again, when he found her quite a young woman.

'Quite a young woman,' said Mr. Gradgrind, musing. 'Dear me!'

Soon after this discovery, he became more thoughtful than usual for several days, and seemed much engrossed by one subject. On a certain night, when he was going out, and Louisa came to bid him good-bye before his departure - as he was not to be home until late and she would not see him again until the morning - he held her in his arms, looking at her in his kindest manner, and said:

'My dear Louisa, you are a woman!'

She answered with the old, quick, searching look of the night when she was found at the Circus; then cast down her eyes. 'Yes, father.'

'My dear,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'I must speak with you alone and seriously. Come to me in my room after breakfast to-morrow, will you?'

'Yes, father.'

'Your hands are rather cold, Louisa. Are you not well?'

'Quite well, father.'

'And cheerful?'

She looked at him again, and smiled in her peculiar manner. 'I am as cheerful, father, as I usually am, or usually have been.'

'That's well,' said Mr. Gradgrind. So, he kissed her and went away; and Louisa returned to the serene apartment of the haircutting character, and leaning her elbow on her hand, looked again at the short-lived sparks that so soon subsided into ashes.

'Are you there, Loo?' said her brother, looking in at the door. He was quite a young gentleman of pleasure now, and not quite a prepossessing one.

'Dear Tom,' she answered, rising and embracing him, 'how long it is since you have been to see me!'

'Why, I have been otherwise engaged, Loo, in the evenings; and in the daytime old Bounderby has been keeping me at it rather. But I touch him up with you when he comes it too strong, and so we preserve an understanding. I say! Has father said anything particular to you to-day or yesterday, Loo?'

'No, Tom. But he told me to-night that he wished to do so in the morning.'

'Ah! That's what I mean,' said Tom. 'Do you know where he is to-night?' - with a very deep expression.

'No.'

'Then I'll tell you. He's with old Bounderby. They are having a regular confab together up at the Bank. Why at the Bank, do you think? Well, I'll tell you again. To keep Mrs. Sparsit's ears as far off as possible, I expect.'

With her hand upon her brother's shoulder, Louisa still stood looking at the fire. Her brother glanced at her face with greater interest than usual, and, encircling her waist with his arm, drew her coaxingly to him.

'You are very fond of me, an't you, Loo?'

'Indeed I am, Tom, though you do let such long intervals go by without coming to see me.'

'Well, sister of mine,' said Tom, 'when you say that, you are near my thoughts. We might be so much oftener together - mightn't we? Always together, almost - mightn't we? It would do me a great deal of good if you were to make up your mind to I know what, Loo. It would be a splendid thing for me. It would be uncommonly jolly!'

Her thoughtfulness baffled his cunning scrutiny. He could make nothing of her face. He pressed her in his arm, and kissed her cheek. She returned the kiss, but still looked at the fire.

'I say, Loo! I thought I'd come, and just hint to you what was going on: though I supposed you'd most likely guess, even if you didn't know. I can't stay, because I'm engaged to some fellows to- night. You won't forget how fond you are of me?'

'No, dear Tom, I won't forget.'

'That's a capital girl,' said Tom. 'Good-bye, Loo.'

She gave him an affectionate good-night, and went out with him to the door, whence the fires of Coketown could be seen, making the distance lurid. She stood there, looking steadfastly towards them, and listening to his departing steps. They retreated quickly, as glad to get away from Stone Lodge; and she stood there yet, when he was gone and all was quiet. It seemed as if, first in her own fire within the house, and then in the fiery haze without, she tried to discover what kind of woof Old Time, that greatest and longest- established Spinner of all, would weave from the threads he had already spun into a woman. But his factory is a secret place, his work is noiseless, and his Hands are mutes.

CHAPTER XV - FATHER AND DAUGHTER

ALTHOUGH Mr. Gradgrind did not take after Blue Beard, his room was quite a blue chamber in its abundance of blue books. Whatever they could prove (which is usually anything you like), they proved there, in an army constantly strengthening by the arrival of new recruits. In that charmed apartment, the most complicated social questions were cast up, got into exact totals, and finally settled - if those concerned could only have been brought to know it. As if an astronomical observatory should be made without any windows, and the astronomer within should arrange the starry universe solely by pen, ink, and paper, so Mr. Gradgrind, in his Observatory (and there are many like it), had no need to cast an eye upon the teeming myriads of human beings around him, but could settle all their destinies on a slate, and wipe out all their tears with one dirty little bit of sponge.

To this Observatory, then: a stern room, with a deadly statistical clock in it, which measured every second with a beat like a rap upon a coffin-lid; Louisa repaired on the appointed morning. A window looked towards Coketown; and when she sat down near her father's table, she saw the high chimneys and the long tracts of smoke looming in the heavy distance gloomily.

'My dear Louisa,' said her father, 'I prepared you last night to give me your serious attention in the conversation we are now going to have together. You have been so well trained, and you do, I am happy to say, so much justice to the education you have received, that I have perfect confidence in your good sense. You are not impulsive, you are not romantic, you are accustomed to view everything from the strong dispassionate ground of reason and calculation. From that ground alone, I know you will view and consider what I am going to communicate.'

He waited, as if he would have been glad that she said something.
But she said never a word.

'Louisa, my dear, you are the subject of a proposal of marriage that has been made to me.'

Again he waited, and again she answered not one word. This so far surprised him, as to induce him gently to repeat, 'a proposal of marriage, my dear.' To which she returned, without any visible emotion whatever:

'I hear you, father. I am attending, I assure you.'

'Well!' said Mr. Gradgrind, breaking into a smile, after being for the moment at a loss, 'you are even more dispassionate than I expected, Louisa. Or, perhaps, you are not unprepared for the announcement I have it in charge to make?'

'I cannot say that, father, until I hear it. Prepared or unprepared, I wish to hear it all from you. I wish to hear you state it to me, father.'

Strange to relate, Mr. Gradgrind was not so collected at this moment as his daughter was. He took a paper-knife in his hand, turned it over, laid it down, took it up again, and even then had to look along the blade of it, considering how to go on.

'What you say, my dear Louisa, is perfectly reasonable. I have undertaken then to let you know that - in short, that Mr. Bounderby has informed me that he has long watched your progress with particular interest and pleasure, and has long hoped that the time might ultimately arrive when he should offer you his hand in marriage. That time, to which he has so long, and certainly with great constancy, looked forward, is now come. Mr. Bounderby has made his proposal of marriage to me, and has entreated me to make it known to you, and to express his hope that you will take it into your favourable consideration.'

Silence between them. The deadly statistical clock very hollow.
The distant smoke very black and heavy.

'Father,' said Louisa, 'do you think I love Mr. Bounderby?'

Mr. Gradgrind was extremely discomfited by this unexpected question. 'Well, my child,' he returned, 'I - really - cannot take upon myself to say.'

'Father,' pursued Louisa in exactly the same voice as before, 'do you ask me to love Mr. Bounderby?'

'My dear Louisa, no. No. I ask nothing.'

'Father,' she still pursued, 'does Mr. Bounderby ask me to love him?'

'Really, my dear,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'it is difficult to answer your question - '

'Difficult to answer it, Yes or No, father?

'Certainly, my dear. Because;' here was something to demonstrate, and it set him up again; 'because the reply depends so materially, Louisa, on the sense in which we use the expression. Now, Mr. Bounderby does not do you the injustice, and does not do himself the injustice, of pretending to anything fanciful, fantastic, or (I am using synonymous terms) sentimental.

Mr. Bounderby would have seen you grow up under his eyes, to very little purpose, if he could so far forget what is due to your good sense, not to say to his, as to address you from any such ground. Therefore, perhaps the expression itself - I merely suggest this to you, my dear - may be a little misplaced.'

'What would you advise me to use in its stead, father?'

'Why, my dear Louisa,' said Mr. Gradgrind, completely recovered by this time, 'I would advise you (since you ask me) to consider this question, as you have been accustomed to consider every other question, simply as one of tangible Fact. The ignorant and the giddy may embarrass such subjects with irrelevant fancies, and other absurdities that have no existence, properly viewed - really no existence - but it is no compliment to you to say, that you know better. Now, what are the Facts of this case? You are, we will say in round numbers, twenty years of age; Mr. Bounderby is, we will say in round numbers, fifty. There is some disparity in your respective years, but in your means and positions there is none; on the contrary, there is a great suitability. Then the question arises, Is this one disparity sufficient to operate as a bar to such a marriage? In considering this question, it is not unimportant to take into account the statistics of marriage, so far as they have yet been obtained, in England and Wales. I find, on reference to the figures, that a large proportion of these marriages are contracted between parties of very unequal ages, and that the elder of these contracting parties is, in rather more than three-fourths of these instances, the bridegroom. It is remarkable as showing the wide prevalence of this law, that among the natives of the British possessions in India, also in a considerable part of China, and among the Calmucks of Tartary, the best means of computation yet furnished us by travellers, yield similar results. The disparity I have mentioned, therefore, almost ceases to be disparity, and (virtually) all but disappears.'

'What do you recommend, father,' asked Louisa, her reserved composure not in the least affected by these gratifying results, 'that I should substitute for the term I used just now? For the misplaced expression?'

'Louisa,' returned her father, 'it appears to me that nothing can be plainer. Confining yourself rigidly to Fact, the question of Fact you state to yourself is: Does Mr. Bounderby ask me to marry him? Yes, he does. The sole remaining question then is: Shall I marry him? I think nothing can be plainer than that?'

'Shall I marry him?' repeated Louisa, with great deliberation.

'Precisely. And it is satisfactory to me, as your father, my dear Louisa, to know that you do not come to the consideration of that question with the previous habits of mind, and habits of life, that belong to many young women.'

'No, father,' she returned, 'I do not.'

'I now leave you to judge for yourself,' said Mr. Gradgrind. 'I have stated the case, as such cases are usually stated among practical minds; I have stated it, as the case of your mother and myself was stated in its time. The rest, my dear Louisa, is for you to decide.'

From the beginning, she had sat looking at him fixedly. As he now leaned back in his chair, and bent his deep-set eyes upon her in his turn, perhaps he might have seen one wavering moment in her, when she was impelled to throw herself upon his breast, and give him the pent-up confidences of her heart. But, to see it, he must have overleaped at a bound the artificial barriers he had for many years been erecting, between himself and all those subtle essences of humanity which will elude the utmost cunning of algebra until the last trumpet ever to be sounded shall blow even algebra to wreck. The barriers were too many and too high for such a leap. With his unbending, utilitarian, matter-of-fact face, he hardened her again; and the moment shot away into the plumbless depths of the past, to mingle with all the lost opportunities that are drowned there.

Removing her eyes from him, she sat so long looking silently towards the town, that he said, at length: 'Are you consulting the chimneys of the Coketown works, Louisa?'

'There seems to be nothing there but languid and monotonous smoke. Yet when the night comes, Fire bursts out, father!' she answered, turning quickly.

'Of course I know that, Louisa. I do not see the application of the remark.' To do him justice he did not, at all.

She passed it away with a slight motion of her hand, and concentrating her attention upon him again, said, 'Father, I have often thought that life is very short.' - This was so distinctly one of his subjects that he interposed.

'It is short, no doubt, my dear. Still, the average duration of human life is proved to have increased of late years. The calculations of various life assurance and annuity offices, among other figures which cannot go wrong, have established the fact.'

'I speak of my own life, father.'

'O indeed? Still,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'I need not point out to you, Louisa, that it is governed by the laws which govern lives in the aggregate.'

'While it lasts, I would wish to do the little I can, and the little I am fit for. What does it matter?'

Mr. Gradgrind seemed rather at a loss to understand the last four words; replying, 'How, matter? What matter, my dear?'

'Mr. Bounderby,' she went on in a steady, straight way, without regarding this, 'asks me to marry him. The question I have to ask myself is, shall I marry him? That is so, father, is it not? You have told me so, father. Have you not?'

'Certainly, my dear.'

'Let it be so. Since Mr. Bounderby likes to take me thus, I am satisfied to accept his proposal. Tell him, father, as soon as you please, that this was my answer. Repeat it, word for word, if you can, because I should wish him to know what I said.'

'It is quite right, my dear,' retorted her father approvingly, 'to be exact. I will observe your very proper request. Have you any wish in reference to the period of your marriage, my child?'

'None, father. What does it matter!'

Mr. Gradgrind had drawn his chair a little nearer to her, and taken her hand. But, her repetition of these words seemed to strike with some little discord on his ear. He paused to look at her, and, still holding her hand, said:

'Louisa, I have not considered it essential to ask you one question, because the possibility implied in it appeared to me to be too remote. But perhaps I ought to do so. You have never entertained in secret any other proposal?'

'Father,' she returned, almost scornfully, 'what other proposal can have been made to me? Whom have I seen? Where have I been? What are my heart's experiences?'

'My dear Louisa,' returned Mr. Gradgrind, reassured and satisfied.
'You correct me justly. I merely wished to discharge my duty.'

'What do I know, father,' said Louisa in her quiet manner, 'of tastes and fancies; of aspirations and affections; of all that part of my nature in which such light things might have been nourished? What escape have I had from problems that could be demonstrated, and realities that could be grasped?'

As she said it, she unconsciously closed her hand, as if upon a solid object, and slowly opened it as though she were releasing dust or ash.

'My dear,' assented her eminently practical parent, 'quite true, quite true.'

'Why, father,' she pursued, 'what a strange question to ask me! The baby-preference that even I have heard of as common among children, has never had its innocent resting-place in my breast. You have been so careful of me, that I never had a child's heart. You have trained me so well, that I never dreamed a child's dream. You have dealt so wisely with me, father, from my cradle to this hour, that I never had a child's belief or a child's fear.'

Mr. Gradgrind was quite moved by his success, and by this testimony to it. 'My dear Louisa,' said he, 'you abundantly repay my care. Kiss me, my dear girl.'

So, his daughter kissed him. Detaining her in his embrace, he said, 'I may assure you now, my favourite child, that I am made happy by the sound decision at which you have arrived. Mr. Bounderby is a very remarkable man; and what little disparity can be said to exist between you - if any - is more than counterbalanced by the tone your mind has acquired. It has always been my object so to educate you, as that you might, while still in your early youth, be (if I may so express myself) almost any age. Kiss me once more, Louisa. Now, let us go and find your mother.'

Accordingly, they went down to the drawing-room, where the esteemed lady with no nonsense about her, was recumbent as usual, while Sissy worked beside her. She gave some feeble signs of returning animation when they entered, and presently the faint transparency was presented in a sitting attitude.

'Mrs. Gradgrind,' said her husband, who had waited for the achievement of this feat with some impatience, 'allow me to present to you Mrs. Bounderby.'

'Oh!' said Mrs. Gradgrind, 'so you have settled it! Well, I'm sure I hope your health may be good, Louisa; for if your head begins to split as soon as you are married, which was the case with mine, I cannot consider that you are to be envied, though I have no doubt you think you are, as all girls do. However, I give you joy, my dear - and I hope you may now turn all your ological studies to good account, I am sure I do! I must give you a kiss of congratulation, Louisa; but don't touch my right shoulder, for there's something running down it all day long. And now you see,' whimpered Mrs. Gradgrind, adjusting her shawls after the affectionate ceremony, 'I shall be worrying myself, morning, noon, and night, to know what I am to call him!'

'Mrs. Gradgrind,' said her husband, solemnly, 'what do you mean?'

'Whatever I am to call him, Mr. Gradgrind, when he is married to Louisa! I must call him something. It's impossible,' said Mrs. Gradgrind, with a mingled sense of politeness and injury, 'to be constantly addressing him and never giving him a name. I cannot call him Josiah, for the name is insupportable to me. You yourself wouldn't hear of Joe, you very well know. Am I to call my own son- in-law, Mister! Not, I believe, unless the time has arrived when, as an invalid, I am to be trampled upon by my relations. Then, what am I to call him!'

Nobody present having any suggestion to offer in the remarkable emergency, Mrs. Gradgrind departed this life for the time being, after delivering the following codicil to her remarks already executed:

'As to the wedding, all I ask, Louisa, is, - and I ask it with a fluttering in my chest, which actually extends to the soles of my feet, - that it may take place soon. Otherwise, I know it is one of those subjects I shall never hear the last of.'

When Mr. Gradgrind had presented Mrs. Bounderby, Sissy had suddenly turned her head, and looked, in wonder, in pity, in sorrow, in doubt, in a multitude of emotions, towards Louisa. Louisa had known it, and seen it, without looking at her. From that moment she was impassive, proud and cold - held Sissy at a distance - changed to her altogether.

CHAPTER XVI - HUSBAND AND WIFE

MR. BOUNDERBY'S first disquietude on hearing of his happiness, was occasioned by the necessity of imparting it to Mrs. Sparsit. He could not make up his mind how to do that, or what the consequences of the step might be. Whether she would instantly depart, bag and baggage, to Lady Scadgers, or would positively refuse to budge from the premises; whether she would be plaintive or abusive, tearful or tearing; whether she would break her heart, or break the looking- glass; Mr. Bounderby could not all foresee. However, as it must be done, he had no choice but to do it; so, after attempting several letters, and failing in them all, he resolved to do it by word of mouth.

On his way home, on the evening he set aside for this momentous purpose, he took the precaution of stepping into a chemist's shop and buying a bottle of the very strongest smelling-salts. 'By George!' said Mr. Bounderby, 'if she takes it in the fainting way, I'll have the skin off her nose, at all events!' But, in spite of being thus forearmed, he entered his own house with anything but a courageous air; and appeared before the object of his misgivings, like a dog who was conscious of coming direct from the pantry.

'Good evening, Mr. Bounderby!'

'Good evening, ma'am, good evening.' He drew up his chair, and Mrs. Sparsit drew back hers, as who should say, 'Your fireside, sir. I freely admit it. It is for you to occupy it all, if you think proper.'

'Don't go to the North Pole, ma'am!' said Mr. Bounderby.

'Thank you, sir,' said Mrs. Sparsit, and returned, though short of her former position.

Mr. Bounderby sat looking at her, as, with the points of a stiff, sharp pair of scissors, she picked out holes for some inscrutable ornamental purpose, in a piece of cambric. An operation which, taken in connexion with the bushy eyebrows and the Roman nose, suggested with some liveliness the idea of a hawk engaged upon the eyes of a tough little bird. She was so steadfastly occupied, that many minutes elapsed before she looked up from her work; when she did so Mr. Bounderby bespoke her attention with a hitch of his head.

'Mrs. Sparsit, ma'am,' said Mr. Bounderby, putting his hands in his pockets, and assuring himself with his right hand that the cork of the little bottle was ready for use, 'I have no occasion to say to you, that you are not only a lady born and bred, but a devilish sensible woman.'

'Sir,' returned the lady, 'this is indeed not the first time that you have honoured me with similar expressions of your good opinion.'

'Mrs. Sparsit, ma'am,' said Mr. Bounderby, 'I am going to astonish you.'

'Yes, sir?' returned Mrs. Sparsit, interrogatively, and in the most tranquil manner possible. She generally wore mittens, and she now laid down her work, and smoothed those mittens.

'I am going, ma'am,' said Bounderby, 'to marry Tom Gradgrind's daughter.'

'Yes, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit. 'I hope you may be happy, Mr. Bounderby. Oh, indeed I hope you may be happy, sir!' And she said it with such great condescension as well as with such great compassion for him, that Bounderby, - far more disconcerted than if she had thrown her workbox at the mirror, or swooned on the hearthrug, - corked up the smelling-salts tight in his pocket, and thought, 'Now confound this woman, who could have even guessed that she would take it in this way!'

'I wish with all my heart, sir,' said Mrs. Sparsit, in a highly superior manner; somehow she seemed, in a moment, to have established a right to pity him ever afterwards; 'that you may be in all respects very happy.'

'Well, ma'am,' returned Bounderby, with some resentment in his tone: which was clearly lowered, though in spite of himself, 'I am obliged to you. I hope I shall be.'

'Do you, sir!' said Mrs. Sparsit, with great affability. 'But naturally you do; of course you do.'

A very awkward pause on Mr. Bounderby's part, succeeded. Mrs. Sparsit sedately resumed her work and occasionally gave a small cough, which sounded like the cough of conscious strength and forbearance.

'Well, ma'am,' resumed Bounderby, 'under these circumstances, I imagine it would not be agreeable to a character like yours to remain here, though you would be very welcome here.'

'Oh, dear no, sir, I could on no account think of that!' Mrs. Sparsit shook her head, still in her highly superior manner, and a little changed the small cough - coughing now, as if the spirit of prophecy rose within her, but had better be coughed down.

'However, ma'am,' said Bounderby, 'there are apartments at the Bank, where a born and bred lady, as keeper of the place, would be rather a catch than otherwise; and if the same terms - '

'I beg your pardon, sir. You were so good as to promise that you would always substitute the phrase, annual compliment.'

'Well, ma'am, annual compliment. If the same annual compliment would be acceptable there, why, I see nothing to part us, unless you do.'

'Sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit. 'The proposal is like yourself, and if the position I shall assume at the Bank is one that I could occupy without descending lower in the social scale - '

'Why, of course it is,' said Bounderby. 'If it was not, ma'am, you don't suppose that I should offer it to a lady who has moved in the society you have moved in. Not that I care for such society, you know! But you do.'

'Mr. Bounderby, you are very considerate.'

'You'll have your own private apartments, and you'll have your coals and your candles, and all the rest of it, and you'll have your maid to attend upon you, and you'll have your light porter to protect you, and you'll be what I take the liberty of considering precious comfortable,' said Bounderby.

'Sir,' rejoined Mrs. Sparsit, 'say no more. In yielding up my trust here, I shall not be freed from the necessity of eating the bread of dependence:' she might have said the sweetbread, for that delicate article in a savoury brown sauce was her favourite supper: 'and I would rather receive it from your hand, than from any other. Therefore, sir, I accept your offer gratefully, and with many sincere acknowledgments for past favours. And I hope, sir,' said Mrs. Sparsit, concluding in an impressively compassionate manner, 'I fondly hope that Miss Gradgrind may be all you desire, and deserve!'

Nothing moved Mrs. Sparsit from that position any more. It was in vain for Bounderby to bluster or to assert himself in any of his explosive ways; Mrs. Sparsit was resolved to have compassion on him, as a Victim. She was polite, obliging, cheerful, hopeful; but, the more polite, the more obliging, the more cheerful, the more hopeful, the more exemplary altogether, she; the forlorner Sacrifice and Victim, he. She had that tenderness for his melancholy fate, that his great red countenance used to break out into cold perspirations when she looked at him.

Meanwhile the marriage was appointed to be solemnized in eight weeks' time, and Mr. Bounderby went every evening to Stone Lodge as an accepted wooer. Love was made on these occasions in the form of bracelets; and, on all occasions during the period of betrothal, took a manufacturing aspect. Dresses were made, jewellery was made, cakes and gloves were made, settlements were made, and an extensive assortment of Facts did appropriate honour to the contract. The business was all Fact, from first to last. The Hours did not go through any of those rosy performances, which foolish poets have ascribed to them at such times; neither did the clocks go any faster, or any slower, than at other seasons. The deadly statistical recorder in the Gradgrind observatory knocked every second on the head as it was born, and buried it with his accustomed regularity.

So the day came, as all other days come to people who will only stick to reason; and when it came, there were married in the church of the florid wooden legs - that popular order of architecture - Josiah Bounderby Esquire of Coketown, to Louisa eldest daughter of Thomas Gradgrind Esquire of Stone Lodge, M.P. for that borough. And when they were united in holy matrimony, they went home to breakfast at Stone Lodge aforesaid.

There was an improving party assembled on the auspicious occasion, who knew what everything they had to eat and drink was made of, and how it was imported or exported, and in what quantities, and in what bottoms, whether native or foreign, and all about it. The bridesmaids, down to little Jane Gradgrind, were, in an intellectual point of view, fit helpmates for the calculating boy; and there was no nonsense about any of the company.

After breakfast, the bridegroom addressed them in the following terms:

'Ladies and gentlemen, I am Josiah Bounderby of Coketown. Since you have done my wife and myself the honour of drinking our healths and happiness, I suppose I must acknowledge the same; though, as you all know me, and know what I am, and what my extraction was, you won't expect a speech from a man who, when he sees a Post, says "that's a Post," and when he sees a Pump, says "that's a Pump," and is not to be got to call a Post a Pump, or a Pump a Post, or either of them a Toothpick. If you want a speech this morning, my friend and father-in-law, Tom Gradgrind, is a Member of Parliament, and you know where to get it. I am not your man. However, if I feel a little independent when I look around this table to-day, and reflect how little I thought of marrying Tom Gradgrind's daughter when I was a ragged street-boy, who never washed his face unless it was at a pump, and that not oftener than once a fortnight, I hope I may be excused. So, I hope you like my feeling independent; if you don't, I can't help it. I do feel independent. Now I have mentioned, and you have mentioned, that I am this day married to Tom Gradgrind's daughter. I am very glad to be so. It has long been my wish to be so. I have watched her bringing-up, and I believe she is worthy of me. At the same time - not to deceive you - I believe I am worthy of her. So, I thank you, on both our parts, for the good-will you have shown towards us; and the best wish I can give the unmarried part of the present company, is this: I hope every bachelor may find as good a wife as I have found. And I hope every spinster may find as good a husband as my wife has found.'

Shortly after which oration, as they were going on a nuptial trip to Lyons, in order that Mr. Bounderby might take the opportunity of seeing how the Hands got on in those parts, and whether they, too, required to be fed with gold spoons; the happy pair departed for the railroad. The bride, in passing down-stairs, dressed for her journey, found Tom waiting for her - flushed, either with his feelings, or the vinous part of the breakfast.

'What a game girl you are, to be such a first-rate sister, Loo!' whispered Tom.

She clung to him as she should have clung to some far better nature that day, and was a little shaken in her reserved composure for the first time.

'Old Bounderby's quite ready,' said Tom. 'Time's up. Good-bye! I shall be on the look-out for you, when you come back. I say, my dear Loo! AN'T it uncommonly jolly now!'

END OF THE FIRST BOOK

BOOK THE SECOND - REAPING

CHAPTER I - EFFECTS IN THE BANK

A SUNNY midsummer day. There was such a thing sometimes, even in Coketown.

Seen from a distance in such weather, Coketown lay shrouded in a haze of its own, which appeared impervious to the sun's rays. You only knew the town was there, because you knew there could have been no such sulky blotch upon the prospect without a town. A blur of soot and smoke, now confusedly tending this way, now that way, now aspiring to the vault of Heaven, now murkily creeping along the earth, as the wind rose and fell, or changed its quarter: a dense formless jumble, with sheets of cross light in it, that showed nothing but masses of darkness:- Coketown in the distance was suggestive of itself, though not a brick of it could be seen.

The wonder was, it was there at all. It had been ruined so often, that it was amazing how it had borne so many shocks. Surely there never was such fragile china-ware as that of which the millers of Coketown were made. Handle them never so lightly, and they fell to pieces with such ease that you might suspect them of having been flawed before. They were ruined, when they were required to send labouring children to school; they were ruined when inspectors were appointed to look into their works; they were ruined, when such inspectors considered it doubtful whether they were quite justified in chopping people up with their machinery; they were utterly undone, when it was hinted that perhaps they need not always make quite so much smoke. Besides Mr. Bounderby's gold spoon which was generally received in Coketown, another prevalent fiction was very popular there. It took the form of a threat. Whenever a Coketowner felt he was ill-used - that is to say, whenever he was not left entirely alone, and it was proposed to hold him accountable for the consequences of any of his acts - he was sure to come out with the awful menace, that he would 'sooner pitch his property into the Atlantic.' This had terrified the Home Secretary within an inch of his life, on several occasions.

However, the Coketowners were so patriotic after all, that they never had pitched their property into the Atlantic yet, but, on the contrary, had been kind enough to take mighty good care of it. So there it was, in the haze yonder; and it increased and multiplied.

The streets were hot and dusty on the summer day, and the sun was so bright that it even shone through the heavy vapour drooping over Coketown, and could not be looked at steadily. Stokers emerged from low underground doorways into factory yards, and sat on steps, and posts, and palings, wiping their swarthy visages, and contemplating coals. The whole town seemed to be frying in oil. There was a stifling smell of hot oil everywhere. The steam- engines shone with it, the dresses of the Hands were soiled with it, the mills throughout their many stories oozed and trickled it. The atmosphere of those Fairy palaces was like the breath of the simoom: and their inhabitants, wasting with heat, toiled languidly in the desert. But no temperature made the melancholy mad elephants more mad or more sane. Their wearisome heads went up and down at the same rate, in hot weather and cold, wet weather and dry, fair weather and foul. The measured motion of their shadows on the walls, was the substitute Coketown had to show for the shadows of rustling woods; while, for the summer hum of insects, it could offer, all the year round, from the dawn of Monday to the night of Saturday, the whirr of shafts and wheels.

Drowsily they whirred all through this sunny day, making the passenger more sleepy and more hot as he passed the humming walls of the mills. Sun-blinds, and sprinklings of water, a little cooled the main streets and the shops; but the mills, and the courts and alleys, baked at a fierce heat. Down upon the river that was black and thick with dye, some Coketown boys who were at large - a rare sight there - rowed a crazy boat, which made a spumous track upon the water as it jogged along, while every dip of an oar stirred up vile smells. But the sun itself, however beneficent, generally, was less kind to Coketown than hard frost, and rarely looked intently into any of its closer regions without engendering more death than life. So does the eye of Heaven itself become an evil eye, when incapable or sordid hands are interposed between it and the things it looks upon to bless.

Mrs. Sparsit sat in her afternoon apartment at the Bank, on the shadier side of the frying street. Office-hours were over: and at that period of the day, in warm weather, she usually embellished with her genteel presence, a managerial board-room over the public office. Her own private sitting-room was a story higher, at the window of which post of observation she was ready, every morning, to greet Mr. Bounderby, as he came across the road, with the sympathizing recognition appropriate to a Victim. He had been married now a year; and Mrs. Sparsit had never released him from her determined pity a moment.

The Bank offered no violence to the wholesome monotony of the town. It was another red brick house, with black outside shutters, green inside blinds, a black street-door up two white steps, a brazen door-plate, and a brazen door-handle full stop. It was a size larger than Mr. Bounderby's house, as other houses were from a size to half-a-dozen sizes smaller; in all other particulars, it was strictly according to pattern.

Mrs. Sparsit was conscious that by coming in the evening-tide among the desks and writing implements, she shed a feminine, not to say also aristocratic, grace upon the office. Seated, with her needlework or netting apparatus, at the window, she had a self- laudatory sense of correcting, by her ladylike deportment, the rude business aspect of the place. With this impression of her interesting character upon her, Mrs. Sparsit considered herself, in some sort, the Bank Fairy. The townspeople who, in their passing and repassing, saw her there, regarded her as the Bank Dragon keeping watch over the treasures of the mine.

What those treasures were, Mrs. Sparsit knew as little as they did. Gold and silver coin, precious paper, secrets that if divulged would bring vague destruction upon vague persons (generally, however, people whom she disliked), were the chief items in her ideal catalogue thereof. For the rest, she knew that after office- hours, she reigned supreme over all the office furniture, and over a locked-up iron room with three locks, against the door of which strong chamber the light porter laid his head every night, on a truckle bed, that disappeared at cockcrow. Further, she was lady paramount over certain vaults in the basement, sharply spiked off from communication with the predatory world; and over the relics of the current day's work, consisting of blots of ink, worn-out pens, fragments of wafers, and scraps of paper torn so small, that nothing interesting could ever be deciphered on them when Mrs. Sparsit tried. Lastly, she was guardian over a little armoury of cutlasses and carbines, arrayed in vengeful order above one of the official chimney-pieces; and over that respectable tradition never to be separated from a place of business claiming to be wealthy - a row of fire-buckets - vessels calculated to be of no physical utility on any occasion, but observed to exercise a fine moral influence, almost equal to bullion, on most beholders.

A deaf serving-woman and the light porter completed Mrs. Sparsit's empire. The deaf serving-woman was rumoured to be wealthy; and a saying had for years gone about among the lower orders of Coketown, that she would be murdered some night when the Bank was shut, for the sake of her money. It was generally considered, indeed, that she had been due some time, and ought to have fallen long ago; but she had kept her life, and her situation, with an ill-conditioned tenacity that occasioned much offence and disappointment.

Mrs. Sparsit's tea was just set for her on a pert little table, with its tripod of legs in an attitude, which she insinuated after office-hours, into the company of the stern, leathern-topped, long board-table that bestrode the middle of the room. The light porter placed the tea-tray on it, knuckling his forehead as a form of homage.

'Thank you, Bitzer,' said Mrs. Sparsit.

'Thank you, ma'am,' returned the light porter. He was a very light porter indeed; as light as in the days when he blinkingly defined a horse, for girl number twenty.

'All is shut up, Bitzer?' said Mrs. Sparsit.

'All is shut up, ma'am.'

'And what,' said Mrs. Sparsit, pouring out her tea, 'is the news of the day? Anything?'

'Well, ma'am, I can't say that I have heard anything particular. Our people are a bad lot, ma'am; but that is no news, unfortunately.'

'What are the restless wretches doing now?' asked Mrs. Sparsit.

'Merely going on in the old way, ma'am. Uniting, and leaguing, and engaging to stand by one another.'

'It is much to be regretted,' said Mrs. Sparsit, making her nose more Roman and her eyebrows more Coriolanian in the strength of her severity, 'that the united masters allow of any such class- combinations.'

'Yes, ma'am,' said Bitzer.

'Being united themselves, they ought one and all to set their faces against employing any man who is united with any other man,' said Mrs. Sparsit.

'They have done that, ma'am,' returned Bitzer; 'but it rather fell through, ma'am.'

'I do not pretend to understand these things,' said Mrs. Sparsit, with dignity, 'my lot having been signally cast in a widely different sphere; and Mr. Sparsit, as a Powler, being also quite out of the pale of any such dissensions. I only know that these people must be conquered, and that it's high time it was done, once for all.'

'Yes, ma'am,' returned Bitzer, with a demonstration of great respect for Mrs. Sparsit's oracular authority. 'You couldn't put it clearer, I am sure, ma'am.'

As this was his usual hour for having a little confidential chat with Mrs. Sparsit, and as he had already caught her eye and seen that she was going to ask him something, he made a pretence of arranging the rulers, inkstands, and so forth, while that lady went on with her tea, glancing through the open window, down into the street.

'Has it been a busy day, Bitzer?' asked Mrs. Sparsit.

'Not a very busy day, my lady. About an average day.' He now and then slided into my lady, instead of ma'am, as an involuntary acknowledgment of Mrs. Sparsit's personal dignity and claims to reverence.

'The clerks,' said Mrs. Sparsit, carefully brushing an imperceptible crumb of bread and butter from her left-hand mitten, 'are trustworthy, punctual, and industrious, of course?'

'Yes, ma'am, pretty fair, ma'am. With the usual exception.'

He held the respectable office of general spy and informer in the establishment, for which volunteer service he received a present at Christmas, over and above his weekly wage. He had grown into an extremely clear-headed, cautious, prudent young man, who was safe to rise in the world. His mind was so exactly regulated, that he had no affections or passions. All his proceedings were the result of the nicest and coldest calculation; and it was not without cause that Mrs. Sparsit habitually observed of him, that he was a young man of the steadiest principle she had ever known. Having satisfied himself, on his father's death, that his mother had a right of settlement in Coketown, this excellent young economist had asserted that right for her with such a steadfast adherence to the principle of the case, that she had been shut up in the workhouse ever since. It must be admitted that he allowed her half a pound of tea a year, which was weak in him: first, because all gifts have an inevitable tendency to pauperise the recipient, and secondly, because his only reasonable transaction in that commodity would have been to buy it for as little as he could possibly give, and sell it for as much as he could possibly get; it having been clearly ascertained by philosophers that in this is comprised the whole duty of man - not a part of man's duty, but the whole.

'Pretty fair, ma'am. With the usual exception, ma'am,' repeated Bitzer.

'Ah - h!' said Mrs. Sparsit, shaking her head over her tea-cup, and taking a long gulp.

'Mr. Thomas, ma'am, I doubt Mr. Thomas very much, ma'am, I don't like his ways at all.'

'Bitzer,' said Mrs. Sparsit, in a very impressive manner, 'do you recollect my having said anything to you respecting names?'

'I beg your pardon, ma'am. It's quite true that you did object to names being used, and they're always best avoided.'

'Please to remember that I have a charge here,' said Mrs. Sparsit, with her air of state. 'I hold a trust here, Bitzer, under Mr. Bounderby. However improbable both Mr. Bounderby and myself might have deemed it years ago, that he would ever become my patron, making me an annual compliment, I cannot but regard him in that light. From Mr. Bounderby I have received every acknowledgment of my social station, and every recognition of my family descent, that I could possibly expect. More, far more. Therefore, to my patron I will be scrupulously true. And I do not consider, I will not consider, I cannot consider,' said Mrs. Sparsit, with a most extensive stock on hand of honour and morality, 'that I should be scrupulously true, if I allowed names to be mentioned under this roof, that are unfortunately - most unfortunately - no doubt of that - connected with his.'

Bitzer knuckled his forehead again, and again begged pardon.

'No, Bitzer,' continued Mrs. Sparsit, 'say an individual, and I will hear you; say Mr. Thomas, and you must excuse me.'

'With the usual exception, ma'am,' said Bitzer, trying back, 'of an individual.'

'Ah - h!' Mrs. Sparsit repeated the ejaculation, the shake of the head over her tea-cup, and the long gulp, as taking up the conversation again at the point where it had been interrupted.

'An individual, ma'am,' said Bitzer, 'has never been what he ought to have been, since he first came into the place. He is a dissipated, extravagant idler. He is not worth his salt, ma'am. He wouldn't get it either, if he hadn't a friend and relation at court, ma'am!'

'Ah - h!' said Mrs. Sparsit, with another melancholy shake of her head.

'I only hope, ma'am,' pursued Bitzer, 'that his friend and relation may not supply him with the means of carrying on. Otherwise, ma'am, we know out of whose pocket that money comes.'

'Ah - h!' sighed Mrs. Sparsit again, with another melancholy shake of her head.

'He is to be pitied, ma'am. The last party I have alluded to, is to be pitied, ma'am,' said Bitzer.

'Yes, Bitzer,' said Mrs. Sparsit. 'I have always pitied the delusion, always.'

'As to an individual, ma'am,' said Bitzer, dropping his voice and drawing nearer, 'he is as improvident as any of the people in this town. And you know what their improvidence is, ma'am. No one could wish to know it better than a lady of your eminence does.'

'They would do well,' returned Mrs. Sparsit, 'to take example by you, Bitzer.'

'Thank you, ma'am. But, since you do refer to me, now look at me, ma'am. I have put by a little, ma'am, already. That gratuity which I receive at Christmas, ma'am: I never touch it. I don't even go the length of my wages, though they're not high, ma'am. Why can't they do as I have done, ma'am? What one person can do, another can do.'

This, again, was among the fictions of Coketown. Any capitalist there, who had made sixty thousand pounds out of sixpence, always professed to wonder why the sixty thousand nearest Hands didn't each make sixty thousand pounds out of sixpence, and more or less reproached them every one for not accomplishing the little feat. What I did you can do. Why don't you go and do it?

'As to their wanting recreations, ma'am,' said Bitzer, 'it's stuff and nonsense. I don't want recreations. I never did, and I never shall; I don't like 'em. As to their combining together; there are many of them, I have no doubt, that by watching and informing upon one another could earn a trifle now and then, whether in money or good will, and improve their livelihood.

Then, why don't they improve it, ma'am! It's the first consideration of a rational creature, and it's what they pretend to want.'

'Pretend indeed!' said Mrs. Sparsit.

'I am sure we are constantly hearing, ma'am, till it becomes quite nauseous, concerning their wives and families,' said Bitzer. 'Why look at me, ma'am! I don't want a wife and family. Why should they?'

'Because they are improvident,' said Mrs. Sparsit.

'Yes, ma'am,' returned Bitzer, 'that's where it is. If they were more provident and less perverse, ma'am, what would they do? They would say, "While my hat covers my family," or "while my bonnet covers my family," - as the case might be, ma'am - "I have only one to feed, and that's the person I most like to feed."'

'To be sure,' assented Mrs. Sparsit, eating muffin.

'Thank you, ma'am,' said Bitzer, knuckling his forehead again, in return for the favour of Mrs. Sparsit's improving conversation. 'Would you wish a little more hot water, ma'am, or is there anything else that I could fetch you?'

'Nothing just now, Bitzer.'

'Thank you, ma'am. I shouldn't wish to disturb you at your meals, ma'am, particularly tea, knowing your partiality for it,' said Bitzer, craning a little to look over into the street from where he stood; 'but there's a gentleman been looking up here for a minute or so, ma'am, and he has come across as if he was going to knock. That is his knock, ma'am, no doubt.'

He stepped to the window; and looking out, and drawing in his head again, confirmed himself with, 'Yes, ma'am. Would you wish the gentleman to be shown in, ma'am?'

'I don't know who it can be,' said Mrs. Sparsit, wiping her mouth and arranging her mittens.

'A stranger, ma'am, evidently.'

'What a stranger can want at the Bank at this time of the evening, unless he comes upon some business for which he is too late, I don't know,' said Mrs. Sparsit, 'but I hold a charge in this establishment from Mr. Bounderby, and I will never shrink from it. If to see him is any part of the duty I have accepted, I will see him. Use your own discretion, Bitzer.'

Here the visitor, all unconscious of Mrs. Sparsit's magnanimous words, repeated his knock so loudly that the light porter hastened down to open the door; while Mrs. Sparsit took the precaution of concealing her little table, with all its appliances upon it, in a cupboard, and then decamped up-stairs, that she might appear, if needful, with the greater dignity.

'If you please, ma'am, the gentleman would wish to see you,' said Bitzer, with his light eye at Mrs. Sparsit's keyhole. So, Mrs. Sparsit, who had improved the interval by touching up her cap, took her classical features down-stairs again, and entered the board- room in the manner of a Roman matron going outside the city walls to treat with an invading general.

The visitor having strolled to the window, and being then engaged in looking carelessly out, was as unmoved by this impressive entry as man could possibly be. He stood whistling to himself with all imaginable coolness, with his hat still on, and a certain air of exhaustion upon him, in part arising from excessive summer, and in part from excessive gentility. For it was to be seen with half an eye that he was a thorough gentleman, made to the model of the time; weary of everything, and putting no more faith in anything than Lucifer.

'I believe, sir,' quoth Mrs. Sparsit, 'you wished to see me.'

'I beg your pardon,' he said, turning and removing his hat; 'pray excuse me.'

'Humph!' thought Mrs. Sparsit, as she made a stately bend. 'Five and thirty, good-looking, good figure, good teeth, good voice, good breeding, well-dressed, dark hair, bold eyes.' All which Mrs. Sparsit observed in her womanly way - like the Sultan who put his head in the pail of water - merely in dipping down and coming up again.

'Please to be seated, sir,' said Mrs. Sparsit.

'Thank you. Allow me.' He placed a chair for her, but remained himself carelessly lounging against the table. 'I left my servant at the railway looking after the luggage - very heavy train and vast quantity of it in the van - and strolled on, looking about me. Exceedingly odd place. Will you allow me to ask you if it's always as black as this?'

'In general much blacker,' returned Mrs. Sparsit, in her uncompromising way.

'Is it possible! Excuse me: you are not a native, I think?'

'No, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit. 'It was once my good or ill fortune, as it may be - before I became a widow - to move in a very different sphere. My husband was a Powler.'

'Beg your pardon, really!' said the stranger. 'Was - ?'

Mrs. Sparsit repeated, 'A Powler.'

'Powler Family,' said the stranger, after reflecting a few moments. Mrs. Sparsit signified assent. The stranger seemed a little more fatigued than before.

'You must be very much bored here?' was the inference he drew from the communication.

'I am the servant of circumstances, sir,' said Mrs. Sparsit, 'and I have long adapted myself to the governing power of my life.'

'Very philosophical,' returned the stranger, 'and very exemplary and laudable, and - ' It seemed to be scarcely worth his while to finish the sentence, so he played with his watch-chain wearily.

'May I be permitted to ask, sir,' said Mrs. Sparsit, 'to what I am indebted for the favour of - '

'Assuredly,' said the stranger. 'Much obliged to you for reminding me. I am the bearer of a letter of introduction to Mr. Bounderby, the banker. Walking through this extraordinarily black town, while they were getting dinner ready at the hotel, I asked a fellow whom I met; one of the working people; who appeared to have been taking a shower-bath of something fluffy, which I assume to be the raw material - '

Mrs. Sparsit inclined her head.

' - Raw material - where Mr. Bounderby, the banker, might reside. Upon which, misled no doubt by the word Banker, he directed me to the Bank. Fact being, I presume, that Mr. Bounderby the Banker does not reside in the edifice in which I have the honour of offering this explanation?'

'No, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit, 'he does not.'

'Thank you. I had no intention of delivering my letter at the present moment, nor have I. But strolling on to the Bank to kill time, and having the good fortune to observe at the window,' towards which he languidly waved his hand, then slightly bowed, 'a lady of a very superior and agreeable appearance, I considered that I could not do better than take the liberty of asking that lady where Mr. Bounderby the Banker does live. Which I accordingly venture, with all suitable apologies, to do.'

The inattention and indolence of his manner were sufficiently relieved, to Mrs. Sparsit's thinking, by a certain gallantry at ease, which offered her homage too. Here he was, for instance, at this moment, all but sitting on the table, and yet lazily bending over her, as if he acknowledged an attraction in her that made her charming - in her way.

'Banks, I know, are always suspicious, and officially must be,' said the stranger, whose lightness and smoothness of speech were pleasant likewise; suggesting matter far more sensible and humorous than it ever contained - which was perhaps a shrewd device of the founder of this numerous sect, whosoever may have been that great man: 'therefore I may observe that my letter - here it is - is from the member for this place - Gradgrind - whom I have had the pleasure of knowing in London.'

Mrs. Sparsit recognized the hand, intimated that such confirmation was quite unnecessary, and gave Mr. Bounderby's address, with all needful clues and directions in aid.

'Thousand thanks,' said the stranger. 'Of course you know the Banker well?'

'Yes, sir,' rejoined Mrs. Sparsit. 'In my dependent relation towards him, I have known him ten years.'

'Quite an eternity! I think he married Gradgrind's daughter?'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Sparsit, suddenly compressing her mouth, 'he had that - honour.'

'The lady is quite a philosopher, I am told?'

'Indeed, sir,' said Mrs. Sparsit. 'Is she?'

'Excuse my impertinent curiosity,' pursued the stranger, fluttering over Mrs. Sparsit's eyebrows, with a propitiatory air, 'but you know the family, and know the world. I am about to know the family, and may have much to do with them. Is the lady so very alarming? Her father gives her such a portentously hard-headed reputation, that I have a burning desire to know. Is she absolutely unapproachable? Repellently and stunningly clever? I see, by your meaning smile, you think not. You have poured balm into my anxious soul. As to age, now. Forty? Five and thirty?'

Mrs. Sparsit laughed outright. 'A chit,' said she. 'Not twenty when she was married.'

'I give you my honour, Mrs. Powler,' returned the stranger, detaching himself from the table, 'that I never was so astonished in my life!'

It really did seem to impress him, to the utmost extent of his capacity of being impressed. He looked at his informant for full a quarter of a minute, and appeared to have the surprise in his mind all the time. 'I assure you, Mrs. Powler,' he then said, much exhausted, 'that the father's manner prepared me for a grim and stony maturity. I am obliged to you, of all things, for correcting so absurd a mistake. Pray excuse my intrusion. Many thanks. Good day!'

He bowed himself out; and Mrs. Sparsit, hiding in the window curtain, saw him languishing down the street on the shady side of the way, observed of all the town.

'What do you think of the gentleman, Bitzer?' she asked the light porter, when he came to take away.

'Spends a deal of money on his dress, ma'am.'

'It must be admitted,' said Mrs. Sparsit, 'that it's very tasteful.'

'Yes, ma'am,' returned Bitzer, 'if that's worth the money.'

'Besides which, ma'am,' resumed Bitzer, while he was polishing the table, 'he looks to me as if he gamed.'

'It's immoral to game,' said Mrs. Sparsit.

'It's ridiculous, ma'am,' said Bitzer, 'because the chances are against the players.'

Whether it was that the heat prevented Mrs. Sparsit from working, or whether it was that her hand was out, she did no work that night. She sat at the window, when the sun began to sink behind the smoke; she sat there, when the smoke was burning red, when the colour faded from it, when darkness seemed to rise slowly out of the ground, and creep upward, upward, up to the house-tops, up the church steeple, up to the summits of the factory chimneys, up to the sky. Without a candle in the room, Mrs. Sparsit sat at the window, with her hands before her, not thinking much of the sounds of evening; the whooping of boys, the barking of dogs, the rumbling of wheels, the steps and voices of passengers, the shrill street cries, the clogs upon the pavement when it was their hour for going by, the shutting-up of shop-shutters. Not until the light porter announced that her nocturnal sweetbread was ready, did Mrs. Sparsit arouse herself from her reverie, and convey her dense black eyebrows - by that time creased with meditation, as if they needed ironing out-up-stairs.

'O, you Fool!' said Mrs. Sparsit, when she was alone at her supper. Whom she meant, she did not say; but she could scarcely have meant the sweetbread.

CHAPTER II - MR. JAMES HARTHOUSE

THE Gradgrind party wanted assistance in cutting the throats of the Graces. They went about recruiting; and where could they enlist recruits more hopefully, than among the fine gentlemen who, having found out everything to be worth nothing, were equally ready for anything?

Moreover, the healthy spirits who had mounted to this sublime height were attractive to many of the Gradgrind school. They liked fine gentlemen; they pretended that they did not, but they did. They became exhausted in imitation of them; and they yaw-yawed in their speech like them; and they served out, with an enervated air, the little mouldy rations of political economy, on which they regaled their disciples. There never before was seen on earth such a wonderful hybrid race as was thus produced.

Among the fine gentlemen not regularly belonging to the Gradgrind school, there was one of a good family and a better appearance, with a happy turn of humour which had told immensely with the House of Commons on the occasion of his entertaining it with his (and the Board of Directors) view of a railway accident, in which the most careful officers ever known, employed by the most liberal managers ever heard of, assisted by the finest mechanical contrivances ever devised, the whole in action on the best line ever constructed, had killed five people and wounded thirty-two, by a casualty without which the excellence of the whole system would have been positively incomplete. Among the slain was a cow, and among the scattered articles unowned, a widow's cap. And the honourable member had so tickled the House (which has a delicate sense of humour) by putting the cap on the cow, that it became impatient of any serious reference to the Coroner's Inquest, and brought the railway off with Cheers and Laughter.

Now, this gentleman had a younger brother of still better appearance than himself, who had tried life as a Cornet of Dragoons, and found it a bore; and had afterwards tried it in the train of an English minister abroad, and found it a bore; and had then strolled to Jerusalem, and got bored there; and had then gone yachting about the world, and got bored everywhere. To whom this honourable and jocular, member fraternally said one day, 'Jem, there's a good opening among the hard Fact fellows, and they want men. I wonder you don't go in for statistics.' Jem, rather taken by the novelty of the idea, and very hard up for a change, was as ready to 'go in' for statistics as for anything else. So, he went in. He coached himself up with a blue-book or two; and his brother put it about among the hard Fact fellows, and said, 'If you want to bring in, for any place, a handsome dog who can make you a devilish good speech, look after my brother Jem, for he's your man.' After a few dashes in the public meeting way, Mr. Gradgrind and a council of political sages approved of Jem, and it was resolved to send him down to Coketown, to become known there and in the neighbourhood. Hence the letter Jem had last night shown to Mrs. Sparsit, which Mr. Bounderby now held in his hand; superscribed, 'Josiah Bounderby, Esquire, Banker, Coketown. Specially to introduce James Harthouse, Esquire. Thomas Gradgrind.'

Within an hour of the receipt of this dispatch and Mr. James Harthouse's card, Mr. Bounderby put on his hat and went down to the Hotel. There he found Mr. James Harthouse looking out of window, in a state of mind so disconsolate, that he was already half- disposed to 'go in' for something else.

'My name, sir,' said his visitor, 'is Josiah Bounderby, of Coketown.'

Mr. James Harthouse was very happy indeed (though he scarcely looked so) to have a pleasure he had long expected.

'Coketown, sir,' said Bounderby, obstinately taking a chair, 'is not the kind of place you have been accustomed to. Therefore, if you will allow me - or whether you will or not, for I am a plain man - I'll tell you something about it before we go any further.'

Mr. Harthouse would be charmed.

'Don't be too sure of that,' said Bounderby. 'I don't promise it. First of all, you see our smoke. That's meat and drink to us. It's the healthiest thing in the world in all respects, and particularly for the lungs. If you are one of those who want us to consume it, I differ from you. We are not going to wear the bottoms of our boilers out any faster than we wear 'em out now, for all the humbugging sentiment in Great Britain and Ireland.'

By way of 'going in' to the fullest extent, Mr. Harthouse rejoined, 'Mr. Bounderby, I assure you I am entirely and completely of your way of thinking. On conviction.'

'I am glad to hear it,' said Bounderby. 'Now, you have heard a lot of talk about the work in our mills, no doubt. You have? Very good. I'll state the fact of it to you. It's the pleasantest work there is, and it's the lightest work there is, and it's the best- paid work there is. More than that, we couldn't improve the mills themselves, unless we laid down Turkey carpets on the floors. Which we're not a-going to do.'

'Mr. Bounderby, perfectly right.'

'Lastly,' said Bounderby, 'as to our Hands. There's not a Hand in this town, sir, man, woman, or child, but has one ultimate object in life. That object is, to be fed on turtle soup and venison with a gold spoon. Now, they're not a-going - none of 'em - ever to be fed on turtle soup and venison with a gold spoon. And now you know the place.'

Mr. Harthouse professed himself in the highest degree instructed and refreshed, by this condensed epitome of the whole Coketown question.

'Why, you see,' replied Mr. Bounderby, 'it suits my disposition to have a full understanding with a man, particularly with a public man, when I make his acquaintance. I have only one thing more to say to you, Mr. Harthouse, before assuring you of the pleasure with which I shall respond, to the utmost of my poor ability, to my friend Tom Gradgrind's letter of introduction. You are a man of family. Don't you deceive yourself by supposing for a moment that I am a man of family. I am a bit of dirty riff-raff, and a genuine scrap of tag, rag, and bobtail.'

If anything could have exalted Jem's interest in Mr. Bounderby, it would have been this very circumstance. Or, so he told him.

'So now,' said Bounderby, 'we may shake hands on equal terms. I say, equal terms, because although I know what I am, and the exact depth of the gutter I have lifted myself out of, better than any man does, I am as proud as you are. I am just as proud as you are. Having now asserted my independence in a proper manner, I may come to how do you find yourself, and I hope you're pretty well.'

The better, Mr. Harthouse gave him to understand as they shook hands, for the salubrious air of Coketown. Mr. Bounderby received the answer with favour.

'Perhaps you know,' said he, 'or perhaps you don't know, I married Tom Gradgrind's daughter. If you have nothing better to do than to walk up town with me, I shall be glad to introduce you to Tom Gradgrind's daughter.'

'Mr. Bounderby,' said Jem, 'you anticipate my dearest wishes.'

They went out without further discourse; and Mr. Bounderby piloted the new acquaintance who so strongly contrasted with him, to the private red brick dwelling, with the black outside shutters, the green inside blinds, and the black street door up the two white steps. In the drawing-room of which mansion, there presently entered to them the most remarkable girl Mr. James Harthouse had ever seen. She was so constrained, and yet so careless; so reserved, and yet so watchful; so cold and proud, and yet so sensitively ashamed of her husband's braggart humility - from which she shrunk as if every example of it were a cut or a blow; that it was quite a new sensation to observe her. In face she was no less remarkable than in manner. Her features were handsome; but their natural play was so locked up, that it seemed impossible to guess at their genuine expression. Utterly indifferent, perfectly self- reliant, never at a loss, and yet never at her ease, with her figure in company with them there, and her mind apparently quite alone - it was of no use 'going in' yet awhile to comprehend this girl, for she baffled all penetration.

From the mistress of the house, the visitor glanced to the house itself. There was no mute sign of a woman in the room. No graceful little adornment, no fanciful little device, however trivial, anywhere expressed her influence. Cheerless and comfortless, boastfully and doggedly rich, there the room stared at its present occupants, unsoftened and unrelieved by the least trace of any womanly occupation. As Mr. Bounderby stood in the midst of his household gods, so those unrelenting divinities occupied their places around Mr. Bounderby, and they were worthy of one another, and well matched.

'This, sir,' said Bounderby, 'is my wife, Mrs. Bounderby: Tom Gradgrind's eldest daughter. Loo, Mr. James Harthouse. Mr. Harthouse has joined your father's muster-roll. If he is not Torn Gradgrind's colleague before long, I believe we shall at least hear of him in connexion with one of our neighbouring towns. You observe, Mr. Harthouse, that my wife is my junior. I don't know what she saw in me to marry me, but she saw something in me, I suppose, or she wouldn't have married me. She has lots of expensive knowledge, sir, political and otherwise. If you want to cram for anything, I should be troubled to recommend you to a better adviser than Loo Bounderby.'

To a more agreeable adviser, or one from whom he would be more likely to learn, Mr. Harthouse could never be recommended.

'Come!' said his host. 'If you're in the complimentary line, you'll get on here, for you'll meet with no competition. I have never been in the way of learning compliments myself, and I don't profess to understand the art of paying 'em. In fact, despise 'em. But, your bringing-up was different from mine; mine was a real thing, by George! You're a gentleman, and I don't pretend to be one. I am Josiah Bounderby of Coketown, and that's enough for me. However, though I am not influenced by manners and station, Loo Bounderby may be. She hadn't my advantages - disadvantages you would call 'em, but I call 'em advantages - so you'll not waste your power, I dare say.'

'Mr. Bounderby,' said Jem, turning with a smile to Louisa, 'is a noble animal in a comparatively natural state, quite free from the harness in which a conventional hack like myself works.'

'You respect Mr. Bounderby very much,' she quietly returned. 'It is natural that you should.'

He was disgracefully thrown out, for a gentleman who had seen so much of the world, and thought, 'Now, how am I to take this?'

'You are going to devote yourself, as I gather from what Mr. Bounderby has said, to the service of your country. You have made up your mind,' said Louisa, still standing before him where she had first stopped - in all the singular contrariety of her self- possession, and her being obviously very ill at ease - 'to show the nation the way out of all its difficulties.'

'Mrs. Bounderby,' he returned, laughing, 'upon my honour, no. I will make no such pretence to you. I have seen a little, here and there, up and down; I have found it all to be very worthless, as everybody has, and as some confess they have, and some do not; and I am going in for your respected father's opinions - really because I have no choice of opinions, and may as well back them as anything else.'

'Have you none of your own?' asked Louisa.

'I have not so much as the slightest predilection left. I assure you I attach not the least importance to any opinions. The result of the varieties of boredom I have undergone, is a conviction (unless conviction is too industrious a word for the lazy sentiment I entertain on the subject), that any set of ideas will do just as much good as any other set, and just as much harm as any other set. There's an English family with a charming Italian motto. What will be, will be. It's the only truth going!'

This vicious assumption of honesty in dishonesty - a vice so dangerous, so deadly, and so common - seemed, he observed, a little to impress her in his favour. He followed up the advantage, by saying in his pleasantest manner: a manner to which she might attach as much or as little meaning as she pleased: 'The side that can prove anything in a line of units, tens, hundreds, and thousands, Mrs. Bounderby, seems to me to afford the most fun, and to give a man the best chance. I am quite as much attached to it as if I believed it. I am quite ready to go in for it, to the same extent as if I believed it. And what more could I possibly do, if I did believe it!'

'You are a singular politician,' said Louisa.

'Pardon me; I have not even that merit. We are the largest party in the state, I assure you, Mrs. Bounderby, if we all fell out of our adopted ranks and were reviewed together.'

Mr. Bounderby, who had been in danger of bursting in silence, interposed here with a project for postponing the family dinner till half-past six, and taking Mr. James Harthouse in the meantime on a round of visits to the voting and interesting notabilities of Coketown and its vicinity. The round of visits was made; and Mr. James Harthouse, with a discreet use of his blue coaching, came off triumphantly, though with a considerable accession of boredom.

In the evening, he found the dinner-table laid for four, but they sat down only three. It was an appropriate occasion for Mr. Bounderby to discuss the flavour of the hap'orth of stewed eels he had purchased in the streets at eight years old; and also of the inferior water, specially used for laying the dust, with which he had washed down that repast. He likewise entertained his guest over the soup and fish, with the calculation that he (Bounderby) had eaten in his youth at least three horses under the guise of polonies and saveloys. These recitals, Jem, in a languid manner, received with 'charming!' every now and then; and they probably would have decided him to 'go in' for Jerusalem again to-morrow morning, had he been less curious respecting Louisa.

'Is there nothing,' he thought, glancing at her as she sat at the head of the table, where her youthful figure, small and slight, but very graceful, looked as pretty as it looked misplaced; 'is there nothing that will move that face?'

Yes! By Jupiter, there was something, and here it was, in an unexpected shape. Tom appeared. She changed as the door opened, and broke into a beaming smile.

A beautiful smile. Mr. James Harthouse might not have thought so much of it, but that he had wondered so long at her impassive face. She put out her hand - a pretty little soft hand; and her fingers closed upon her brother's, as if she would have carried them to her lips.

'Ay, ay?' thought the visitor. 'This whelp is the only creature she cares for. So, so!'

The whelp was presented, and took his chair. The appellation was not flattering, but not unmerited.

'When I was your age, young Tom,' said Bounderby, 'I was punctual, or I got no dinner!'

'When you were my age,' resumed Tom, 'you hadn't a wrong balance to get right, and hadn't to dress afterwards.'

'Never mind that now,' said Bounderby.

'Well, then,' grumbled Tom. 'Don't begin with me.'

'Mrs. Bounderby,' said Harthouse, perfectly hearing this under- strain as it went on; 'your brother's face is quite familiar to me. Can I have seen him abroad? Or at some public school, perhaps?'

'No,' she resumed, quite interested, 'he has never been abroad yet, and was educated here, at home. Tom, love, I am telling Mr. Harthouse that he never saw you abroad.'

'No such luck, sir,' said Tom.

There was little enough in him to brighten her face, for he was a sullen young fellow, and ungracious in his manner even to her. So much the greater must have been the solitude of her heart, and her need of some one on whom to bestow it. 'So much the more is this whelp the only creature she has ever cared for,' thought Mr. James Harthouse, turning it over and over. 'So much the more. So much the more.'

Both in his sister's presence, and after she had left the room, the whelp took no pains to hide his contempt for Mr. Bounderby, whenever he could indulge it without the observation of that independent man, by making wry faces, or shutting one eye. Without responding to these telegraphic communications, Mr. Harthouse encouraged him much in the course of the evening, and showed an unusual liking for him. At last, when he rose to return to his hotel, and was a little doubtful whether he knew the way by night, the whelp immediately proffered his services as guide, and turned out with him to escort him thither.

CHAPTER III - THE WHELP

IT was very remarkable that a young gentleman who had been brought up under one continuous system of unnatural restraint, should be a hypocrite; but it was certainly the case with Tom. It was very strange that a young gentleman who had never been left to his own guidance for five consecutive minutes, should be incapable at last of governing himself; but so it was with Tom. It was altogether unaccountable that a young gentleman whose imagination had been strangled in his cradle, should be still inconvenienced by its ghost in the form of grovelling sensualities; but such a monster, beyond all doubt, was Tom.

'Do you smoke?' asked Mr. James Harthouse, when they came to the hotel.

'I believe you!' said Tom.

He could do no less than ask Tom up; and Tom could do no less than go up. What with a cooling drink adapted to the weather, but not so weak as cool; and what with a rarer tobacco than was to be bought in those parts; Tom was soon in a highly free and easy state at his end of the sofa, and more than ever disposed to admire his new friend at the other end.

Tom blew his smoke aside, after he had been smoking a little while, and took an observation of his friend. 'He don't seem to care about his dress,' thought Tom, 'and yet how capitally he does it. What an easy swell he is!'

Mr. James Harthouse, happening to catch Tom's eye, remarked that he drank nothing, and filled his glass with his own negligent hand.

'Thank'ee,' said Tom. 'Thank'ee. Well, Mr. Harthouse, I hope you have had about a dose of old Bounderby to-night.' Tom said this with one eye shut up again, and looking over his glass knowingly, at his entertainer.

'A very good fellow indeed!' returned Mr. James Harthouse.

'You think so, don't you?' said Tom. And shut up his eye again.

Mr. James Harthouse smiled; and rising from his end of the sofa, and lounging with his back against the chimney-piece, so that he stood before the empty fire-grate as he smoked, in front of Tom and looking down at him, observed:

'What a comical brother-in-law you are!'

'What a comical brother-in-law old Bounderby is, I think you mean,' said Tom.

'You are a piece of caustic, Tom,' retorted Mr. James Harthouse.

There was something so very agreeable in being so intimate with such a waistcoat; in being called Tom, in such an intimate way, by such a voice; in being on such off-hand terms so soon, with such a pair of whiskers; that Tom was uncommonly pleased with himself.

'Oh! I don't care for old Bounderby,' said he, 'if you mean that. I have always called old Bounderby by the same name when I have talked about him, and I have always thought of him in the same way. I am not going to begin to be polite now, about old Bounderby. It would be rather late in the day.'

'Don't mind me,' returned James; 'but take care when his wife is by, you know.'

'His wife?' said Tom. 'My sister Loo? O yes!' And he laughed, and took a little more of the cooling drink.

James Harthouse continued to lounge in the same place and attitude, smoking his cigar in his own easy way, and looking pleasantly at the whelp, as if he knew himself to be a kind of agreeable demon who had only to hover over him, and he must give up his whole soul if required. It certainly did seem that the whelp yielded to this influence. He looked at his companion sneakingly, he looked at him admiringly, he looked at him boldly, and put up one leg on the sofa.

'My sister Loo?' said Tom. 'She never cared for old Bounderby.'

'That's the past tense, Tom,' returned Mr. James Harthouse, striking the ash from his cigar with his little finger. 'We are in the present tense, now.'

'Verb neuter, not to care. Indicative mood, present tense. First person singular, I do not care; second person singular, thou dost not care; third person singular, she does not care,' returned Tom.

'Good! Very quaint!' said his friend. 'Though you don't mean it.'

'But I do mean it,' cried Tom. 'Upon my honour! Why, you won't tell me, Mr. Harthouse, that you really suppose my sister Loo does care for old Bounderby.'

'My dear fellow,' returned the other, 'what am I bound to suppose, when I find two married people living in harmony and happiness?'

Tom had by this time got both his legs on the sofa. If his second leg had not been already there when he was called a dear fellow, he would have put it up at that great stage of the conversation. Feeling it necessary to do something then, he stretched himself out at greater length, and, reclining with the back of his head on the end of the sofa, and smoking with an infinite assumption of negligence, turned his common face, and not too sober eyes, towards the face looking down upon him so carelessly yet so potently.

'You know our governor, Mr. Harthouse,' said Tom, 'and therefore, you needn't be surprised that Loo married old Bounderby. She never had a lover, and the governor proposed old Bounderby, and she took him.'

'Very dutiful in your interesting sister,' said Mr. James Harthouse.

'Yes, but she wouldn't have been as dutiful, and it would not have come off as easily,' returned the whelp, 'if it hadn't been for me.'

The tempter merely lifted his eyebrows; but the whelp was obliged to go on.

'I persuaded her,' he said, with an edifying air of superiority. 'I was stuck into old Bounderby's bank (where I never wanted to be), and I knew I should get into scrapes there, if she put old Bounderby's pipe out; so I told her my wishes, and she came into them. She would do anything for me. It was very game of her, wasn't it?'

'It was charming, Tom!'

'Not that it was altogether so important to her as it was to me,' continued Tom coolly, 'because my liberty and comfort, and perhaps my getting on, depended on it; and she had no other lover, and staying at home was like staying in jail - especially when I was gone. It wasn't as if she gave up another lover for old Bounderby; but still it was a good thing in her.'

'Perfectly delightful. And she gets on so placidly.'

'Oh,' returned Tom, with contemptuous patronage, 'she's a regular girl. A girl can get on anywhere. She has settled down to the life, and she don't mind. It does just as well as another. Besides, though Loo is a girl, she's not a common sort of girl. She can shut herself up within herself, and think - as I have often known her sit and watch the fire - for an hour at a stretch.'

'Ay, ay? Has resources of her own,' said Harthouse, smoking quietly.

'Not so much of that as you may suppose,' returned Tom; 'for our governor had her crammed with all sorts of dry bones and sawdust. It's his system.'

'Formed his daughter on his own model?' suggested Harthouse.

'His daughter? Ah! and everybody else. Why, he formed Me that way!' said Tom.

'Impossible!'

'He did, though,' said Tom, shaking his head. 'I mean to say, Mr. Harthouse, that when I first left home and went to old Bounderby's, I was as flat as a warming-pan, and knew no more about life, than any oyster does.'

'Come, Tom! I can hardly believe that. A joke's a joke.'

'Upon my soul!' said the whelp. 'I am serious; I am indeed!' He smoked with great gravity and dignity for a little while, and then added, in a highly complacent tone, 'Oh! I have picked up a little since. I don't deny that. But I have done it myself; no thanks to the governor.'

'And your intelligent sister?'

'My intelligent sister is about where she was. She used to complain to me that she had nothing to fall back upon, that girls usually fall back upon; and I don't see how she is to have got over that since. But she don't mind,' he sagaciously added, puffing at his cigar again. 'Girls can always get on, somehow.'

'Calling at the Bank yesterday evening, for Mr. Bounderby's address, I found an ancient lady there, who seems to entertain great admiration for your sister,' observed Mr. James Harthouse, throwing away the last small remnant of the cigar he had now smoked out.

'Mother Sparsit!' said Tom. 'What! you have seen her already, have you?'

His friend nodded. Tom took his cigar out of his mouth, to shut up his eye (which had grown rather unmanageable) with the greater expression, and to tap his nose several times with his finger.

'Mother Sparsit's feeling for Loo is more than admiration, I should think,' said Tom. 'Say affection and devotion. Mother Sparsit never set her cap at Bounderby when he was a bachelor. Oh no!'

These were the last words spoken by the whelp, before a giddy drowsiness came upon him, followed by complete oblivion. He was roused from the latter state by an uneasy dream of being stirred up with a boot, and also of a voice saying: 'Come, it's late. Be off!'

'Well!' he said, scrambling from the sofa. 'I must take my leave of you though. I say. Yours is very good tobacco. But it's too mild.'

'Yes, it's too mild,' returned his entertainer.

'It's - it's ridiculously mild,' said Tom. 'Where's the door!
Good night!'

'He had another odd dream of being taken by a waiter through a mist, which, after giving him some trouble and difficulty, resolved itself into the main street, in which he stood alone. He then walked home pretty easily, though not yet free from an impression of the presence and influence of his new friend - as if he were lounging somewhere in the air, in the same negligent attitude, regarding him with the same look.

The whelp went home, and went to bed. If he had had any sense of what he had done that night, and had been less of a whelp and more of a brother, he might have turned short on the road, might have gone down to the ill-smelling river that was dyed black, might have gone to bed in it for good and all, and have curtained his head for ever with its filthy waters.

CHAPTER IV - MEN AND BROTHERS

'OH, my friends, the down-trodden operatives of Coketown! Oh, my friends and fellow-countrymen, the slaves of an iron-handed and a grinding despotism! Oh, my friends and fellow-sufferers, and fellow-workmen, and fellow-men! I tell you that the hour is come, when we must rally round one another as One united power, and crumble into dust the oppressors that too long have battened upon the plunder of our families, upon the sweat of our brows, upon the labour of our hands, upon the strength of our sinews, upon the God- created glorious rights of Humanity, and upon the holy and eternal privileges of Brotherhood!'

'Good!' 'Hear, hear, hear!' 'Hurrah!' and other cries, arose in many voices from various parts of the densely crowded and suffocatingly close Hall, in which the orator, perched on a stage, delivered himself of this and what other froth and fume he had in him. He had declaimed himself into a violent heat, and was as hoarse as he was hot. By dint of roaring at the top of his voice under a flaring gaslight, clenching his fists, knitting his brows, setting his teeth, and pounding with his arms, he had taken so much out of himself by this time, that he was brought to a stop, and called for a glass of water.

As he stood there, trying to quench his fiery face with his drink of water, the comparison between the orator and the crowd of attentive faces turned towards him, was extremely to his disadvantage. Judging him by Nature's evidence, he was above the mass in very little but the stage on which he stood. In many great respects he was essentially below them. He was not so honest, he was not so manly, he was not so good-humoured; he substituted cunning for their simplicity, and passion for their safe solid sense. An ill-made, high-shouldered man, with lowering brows, and his features crushed into an habitually sour expression, he contrasted most unfavourably, even in his mongrel dress, with the great body of his hearers in their plain working clothes. Strange as it always is to consider any assembly in the act of submissively resigning itself to the dreariness of some complacent person, lord or commoner, whom three-fourths of it could, by no human means, raise out of the slough of inanity to their own intellectual level, it was particularly strange, and it was even particularly affecting, to see this crowd of earnest faces, whose honesty in the main no competent observer free from bias could doubt, so agitated by such a leader.

Good! Hear, hear! Hurrah! The eagerness both of attention and intention, exhibited in all the countenances, made them a most impressive sight. There was no carelessness, no languor, no idle curiosity; none of the many shades of indifference to be seen in all other assemblies, visible for one moment there. That every man felt his condition to be, somehow or other, worse than it might be; that every man considered it incumbent on him to join the rest, towards the making of it better; that every man felt his only hope to be in his allying himself to the comrades by whom he was surrounded; and that in this belief, right or wrong (unhappily wrong then), the whole of that crowd were gravely, deeply, faithfully in earnest; must have been as plain to any one who chose to see what was there, as the bare beams of the roof and the whitened brick walls. Nor could any such spectator fail to know in his own breast, that these men, through their very delusions, showed great qualities, susceptible of being turned to the happiest and best account; and that to pretend (on the strength of sweeping axioms, howsoever cut and dried) that they went astray wholly without cause, and of their own irrational wills, was to pretend that there could be smoke without fire, death without birth, harvest without seed, anything or everything produced from nothing.

The orator having refreshed himself, wiped his corrugated forehead from left to right several times with his handkerchief folded into a pad, and concentrated all his revived forces, in a sneer of great disdain and bitterness.

'But oh, my friends and brothers! Oh, men and Englishmen, the down-trodden operatives of Coketown! What shall we say of that man - that working-man, that I should find it necessary so to libel the glorious name - who, being practically and well acquainted with the grievances and wrongs of you, the injured pith and marrow of this land, and having heard you, with a noble and majestic unanimity that will make Tyrants tremble, resolve for to subscribe to the funds of the United Aggregate Tribunal, and to abide by the injunctions issued by that body for your benefit, whatever they may be - what, I ask you, will you say of that working-man, since such I must acknowledge him to be, who, at such a time, deserts his post, and sells his flag; who, at such a time, turns a traitor and a craven and a recreant, who, at such a time, is not ashamed to make to you the dastardly and humiliating avowal that he will hold himself aloof, and will not be one of those associated in the gallant stand for Freedom and for Right?'

The assembly was divided at this point. There were some groans and hisses, but the general sense of honour was much too strong for the condemnation of a man unheard. 'Be sure you're right, Slackbridge!' 'Put him up!' 'Let's hear him!' Such things were said on many sides. Finally, one strong voice called out, 'Is the man heer? If the man's heer, Slackbridge, let's hear the man himseln, 'stead o' yo.' Which was received with a round of applause.

Slackbridge, the orator, looked about him with a withering smile; and, holding out his right hand at arm's length (as the manner of all Slackbridges is), to still the thundering sea, waited until there was a profound silence.

'Oh, my friends and fellow-men!' said Slackbridge then, shaking his head with violent scorn, 'I do not wonder that you, the prostrate sons of labour, are incredulous of the existence of such a man. But he who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage existed, and Judas Iscariot existed, and Castlereagh existed, and this man exists!'

Here, a brief press and confusion near the stage, ended in the man himself standing at the orator's side before the concourse. He was pale and a little moved in the face - his lips especially showed it; but he stood quiet, with his left hand at his chin, waiting to be heard. There was a chairman to regulate the proceedings, and this functionary now took the case into his own hands.

'My friends,' said he, 'by virtue o' my office as your president, I askes o' our friend Slackbridge, who may be a little over hetter in this business, to take his seat, whiles this man Stephen Blackpool is heern. You all know this man Stephen Blackpool. You know him awlung o' his misfort'ns, and his good name.'

With that, the chairman shook him frankly by the hand, and sat down again. Slackbridge likewise sat down, wiping his hot forehead - always from left to right, and never the reverse way.

'My friends,' Stephen began, in the midst of a dead calm; 'I ha' hed what's been spok'n o' me, and 'tis lickly that I shan't mend it. But I'd liefer you'd hearn the truth concernin myseln, fro my lips than fro onny other man's, though I never cud'n speak afore so monny, wi'out bein moydert and muddled.'

Slackbridge shook his head as if he would shake it off, in his bitterness.

'I'm th' one single Hand in Bounderby's mill, o' a' the men theer, as don't coom in wi' th' proposed reg'lations. I canna coom in wi' 'em. My friends, I doubt their doin' yo onny good. Licker they'll do yo hurt.'

Slackbridge laughed, folded his arms, and frowned sarcastically.

'But 't an't sommuch for that as I stands out. If that were aw, I'd coom in wi' th' rest. But I ha' my reasons - mine, yo see - for being hindered; not on'y now, but awlus - awlus - life long!'

Slackbridge jumped up and stood beside him, gnashing and tearing. 'Oh, my friends, what but this did I tell you? Oh, my fellow- countrymen, what warning but this did I give you? And how shows this recreant conduct in a man on whom unequal laws are known to have fallen heavy? Oh, you Englishmen, I ask you how does this subornation show in one of yourselves, who is thus consenting to his own undoing and to yours, and to your children's and your children's children's?'

There was some applause, and some crying of Shame upon the man; but the greater part of the audience were quiet. They looked at Stephen's worn face, rendered more pathetic by the homely emotions it evinced; and, in the kindness of their nature, they were more sorry than indignant.

''Tis this Delegate's trade for t' speak,' said Stephen, 'an' he's paid for 't, an' he knows his work. Let him keep to 't. Let him give no heed to what I ha had'n to bear. That's not for him. That's not for nobbody but me.'

There was a propriety, not to say a dignity in these words, that made the hearers yet more quiet and attentive. The same strong voice called out, 'Slackbridge, let the man be heern, and howd thee tongue!' Then the place was wonderfully still.

'My brothers,' said Stephen, whose low voice was distinctly heard, 'and my fellow-workmen - for that yo are to me, though not, as I knows on, to this delegate here - I ha but a word to sen, and I could sen nommore if I was to speak till Strike o' day. I know weel, aw what's afore me. I know weel that yo aw resolve to ha nommore ado wi' a man who is not wi' yo in this matther. I know weel that if I was a lyin parisht i' th' road, yo'd feel it right to pass me by, as a forrenner and stranger. What I ha getn, I mun mak th' best on.'

'Stephen Blackpool,' said the chairman, rising, 'think on 't agen. Think on 't once agen, lad, afore thou'rt shunned by aw owd friends.'

There was an universal murmur to the same effect, though no man articulated a word. Every eye was fixed on Stephen's face. To repent of his determination, would be to take a load from all their minds. He looked around him, and knew that it was so. Not a grain of anger with them was in his heart; he knew them, far below their surface weaknesses and misconceptions, as no one but their fellow- labourer could.

'I ha thowt on 't, above a bit, sir. I simply canna coom in. I mun go th' way as lays afore me. I mun tak my leave o' aw heer.'

He made a sort of reverence to them by holding up his arms, and stood for the moment in that attitude; not speaking until they slowly dropped at his sides.

'Monny's the pleasant word as soom heer has spok'n wi' me; monny's the face I see heer, as I first seen when I were yoong and lighter heart'n than now. I ha' never had no fratch afore, sin ever I were born, wi' any o' my like; Gonnows I ha' none now that's o' my makin'. Yo'll ca' me traitor and that - yo I mean t' say,' addressing Slackbridge, 'but 'tis easier to ca' than mak' out. So let be.'

He had moved away a pace or two to come down from the platform, when he remembered something he had not said, and returned again.

'Haply,' he said, turning his furrowed face slowly about, that he might as it were individually address the whole audience, those both near and distant; 'haply, when this question has been tak'n up and discoosed, there'll be a threat to turn out if I'm let to work among yo. I hope I shall die ere ever such a time cooms, and I shall work solitary among yo unless it cooms - truly, I mun do 't, my friends; not to brave yo, but to live. I ha nobbut work to live by; and wheerever can I go, I who ha worked sin I were no heighth at aw, in Coketown heer? I mak' no complaints o' bein turned to the wa', o' bein outcasten and overlooken fro this time forrard, but hope I shall be let to work. If there is any right for me at aw, my friends, I think 'tis that.'

Not a word was spoken. Not a sound was audible in the building, but the slight rustle of men moving a little apart, all along the centre of the room, to open a means of passing out, to the man with whom they had all bound themselves to renounce companionship. Looking at no one, and going his way with a lowly steadiness upon him that asserted nothing and sought nothing, Old Stephen, with all his troubles on his head, left the scene.

Then Slackbridge, who had kept his oratorical arm extended during the going out, as if he were repressing with infinite solicitude and by a wonderful moral power the vehement passions of the multitude, applied himself to raising their spirits. Had not the Roman Brutus, oh, my British countrymen, condemned his son to death; and had not the Spartan mothers, oh my soon to be victorious friends, driven their flying children on the points of their enemies' swords? Then was it not the sacred duty of the men of Coketown, with forefathers before them, an admiring world in company with them, and a posterity to come after them, to hurl out traitors from the tents they had pitched in a sacred and a God-like cause? The winds of heaven answered Yes; and bore Yes, east, west, north, and south. And consequently three cheers for the United Aggregate Tribunal!

Slackbridge acted as fugleman, and gave the time. The multitude of doubtful faces (a little conscience-stricken) brightened at the sound, and took it up. Private feeling must yield to the common cause. Hurrah! The roof yet vibrated with the cheering, when the assembly dispersed.

Thus easily did Stephen Blackpool fall into the loneliest of lives, the life of solitude among a familiar crowd. The stranger in the land who looks into ten thousand faces for some answering look and never finds it, is in cheering society as compared with him who passes ten averted faces daily, that were once the countenances of friends. Such experience was to be Stephen's now, in every waking moment of his life; at his work, on his way to it and from it, at his door, at his window, everywhere. By general consent, they even avoided that side of the street on which he habitually walked; and left it, of all the working men, to him only.

He had been for many years, a quiet silent man, associating but little with other men, and used to companionship with his own thoughts. He had never known before the strength of the want in his heart for the frequent recognition of a nod, a look, a word; or the immense amount of relief that had been poured into it by drops through such small means. It was even harder than he could have believed possible, to separate in his own conscience his abandonment by all his fellows from a baseless sense of shame and disgrace.

The first four days of his endurance were days so long and heavy, that he began to be appalled by the prospect before him. Not only did he see no Rachael all the time, but he avoided every chance of seeing her; for, although he knew that the prohibition did not yet formally extend to the women working in the factories, he found that some of them with whom he was acquainted were changed to him, and he feared to try others, and dreaded that Rachael might be even singled out from the rest if she were seen in his company. So, he had been quite alone during the four days, and had spoken to no one, when, as he was leaving his work at night, a young man of a very light complexion accosted him in the street.

'Your name's Blackpool, ain't it?' said the young man.

Stephen coloured to find himself with his hat in his hand, in his gratitude for being spoken to, or in the suddenness of it, or both. He made a feint of adjusting the lining, and said, 'Yes.'

'You are the Hand they have sent to Coventry, I mean?' said Bitzer, the very light young man in question.

Stephen answered 'Yes,' again.

'I supposed so, from their all appearing to keep away from you. Mr. Bounderby wants to speak to you. You know his house, don't you?'

Stephen said 'Yes,' again.

'Then go straight up there, will you?' said Bitzer. 'You're expected, and have only to tell the servant it's you. I belong to the Bank; so, if you go straight up without me (I was sent to fetch you), you'll save me a walk.'

Stephen, whose way had been in the contrary direction, turned about, and betook himself as in duty bound, to the red brick castle of the giant Bounderby.

CHAPTER V - MEN AND MASTERS

'WELL, Stephen,' said Bounderby, in his windy manner, 'what's this I hear? What have these pests of the earth been doing to you? Come in, and speak up.'

It was into the drawing-room that he was thus bidden. A tea-table was set out; and Mr. Bounderby's young wife, and her brother, and a great gentleman from London, were present. To whom Stephen made his obeisance, closing the door and standing near it, with his hat in his hand.

'This is the man I was telling you about, Harthouse,' said Mr. Bounderby. The gentleman he addressed, who was talking to Mrs. Bounderby on the sofa, got up, saying in an indolent way, 'Oh really?' and dawdled to the hearthrug where Mr. Bounderby stood.

'Now,' said Bounderby, 'speak up!'

After the four days he had passed, this address fell rudely and discordantly on Stephen's ear. Besides being a rough handling of his wounded mind, it seemed to assume that he really was the self- interested deserter he had been called.

'What were it, sir,' said Stephen, 'as yo were pleased to want wi' me?'

'Why, I have told you,' returned Bounderby. 'Speak up like a man, since you are a man, and tell us about yourself and this Combination.'

'Wi' yor pardon, sir,' said Stephen Blackpool, 'I ha' nowt to sen about it.'

Mr. Bounderby, who was always more or less like a Wind, finding something in his way here, began to blow at it directly.

'Now, look here, Harthouse,' said he, 'here's a specimen of 'em. When this man was here once before, I warned this man against the mischievous strangers who are always about - and who ought to be hanged wherever they are found - and I told this man that he was going in the wrong direction. Now, would you believe it, that although they have put this mark upon him, he is such a slave to them still, that he's afraid to open his lips about them?'

'I sed as I had nowt to sen, sir; not as I was fearfo' o' openin' my lips.'

'You said! Ah! I know what you said; more than that, I know what you mean, you see. Not always the same thing, by the Lord Harry! Quite different things. You had better tell us at once, that that fellow Slackbridge is not in the town, stirring up the people to mutiny; and that he is not a regular qualified leader of the people: that is, a most confounded scoundrel. You had better tell us so at once; you can't deceive me. You want to tell us so. Why don't you?'

'I'm as sooary as yo, sir, when the people's leaders is bad,' said Stephen, shaking his head. 'They taks such as offers. Haply 'tis na' the sma'est o' their misfortuns when they can get no better.'

The wind began to get boisterous.

'Now, you'll think this pretty well, Harthouse,' said Mr. Bounderby. 'You'll think this tolerably strong. You'll say, upon my soul this is a tidy specimen of what my friends have to deal with; but this is nothing, sir! You shall hear me ask this man a question. Pray, Mr. Blackpool' - wind springing up very fast - 'may I take the liberty of asking you how it happens that you refused to be in this Combination?'

'How 't happens?'

'Ah!' said Mr. Bounderby, with his thumbs in the arms of his coat, and jerking his head and shutting his eyes in confidence with the opposite wall: 'how it happens.'

'I'd leefer not coom to 't, sir; but sin you put th' question - an' not want'n t' be ill-manner'n - I'll answer. I ha passed a promess.'

'Not to me, you know,' said Bounderby. (Gusty weather with deceitful calms. One now prevailing.)

'O no, sir. Not to yo.'

'As for me, any consideration for me has had just nothing at all to do with it,' said Bounderby, still in confidence with the wall. 'If only Josiah Bounderby of Coketown had been in question, you would have joined and made no bones about it?'

'Why yes, sir. 'Tis true.'

'Though he knows,' said Mr. Bounderby, now blowing a gale, 'that there are a set of rascals and rebels whom transportation is too good for! Now, Mr. Harthouse, you have been knocking about in the world some time. Did you ever meet with anything like that man out of this blessed country?' And Mr. Bounderby pointed him out for inspection, with an angry finger.

'Nay, ma'am,' said Stephen Blackpool, staunchly protesting against the words that had been used, and instinctively addressing himself to Louisa, after glancing at her face. 'Not rebels, nor yet rascals. Nowt o' th' kind, ma'am, nowt o' th' kind. They've not doon me a kindness, ma'am, as I know and feel. But there's not a dozen men amoong 'em, ma'am - a dozen? Not six - but what believes as he has doon his duty by the rest and by himseln. God forbid as I, that ha' known, and had'n experience o' these men aw my life - I, that ha' ett'n an' droonken wi' 'em, an' seet'n wi' 'em, and toil'n wi' 'em, and lov'n 'em, should fail fur to stan by 'em wi' the truth, let 'em ha' doon to me what they may!'

He spoke with the rugged earnestness of his place and character - deepened perhaps by a proud consciousness that he was faithful to his class under all their mistrust; but he fully remembered where he was, and did not even raise his voice.

'No, ma'am, no. They're true to one another, faithfo' to one another, 'fectionate to one another, e'en to death. Be poor amoong 'em, be sick amoong 'em, grieve amoong 'em for onny o' th' monny causes that carries grief to the poor man's door, an' they'll be tender wi' yo, gentle wi' yo, comfortable wi' yo, Chrisen wi' yo. Be sure o' that, ma'am. They'd be riven to bits, ere ever they'd be different.'

'In short,' said Mr. Bounderby, 'it's because they are so full of virtues that they have turned you adrift. Go through with it while you are about it. Out with it.'

'How 'tis, ma'am,' resumed Stephen, appearing still to find his natural refuge in Louisa's face, 'that what is best in us fok, seems to turn us most to trouble an' misfort'n an' mistake, I dunno. But 'tis so. I know 'tis, as I know the heavens is over me ahint the smoke. We're patient too, an' wants in general to do right. An' I canna think the fawt is aw wi' us.'

'Now, my friend,' said Mr. Bounderby, whom he could not have exasperated more, quite unconscious of it though he was, than by seeming to appeal to any one else, 'if you will favour me with your attention for half a minute, I should like to have a word or two with you. You said just now, that you had nothing to tell us about this business. You are quite sure of that before we go any further.'

'Sir, I am sure on 't.'

'Here's a gentleman from London present,' Mr. Bounderby made a backhanded point at Mr. James Harthouse with his thumb, 'a Parliament gentleman. I should like him to hear a short bit of dialogue between you and me, instead of taking the substance of it - for I know precious well, beforehand, what it will be; nobody knows better than I do, take notice! - instead of receiving it on trust from my mouth.'

Stephen bent his head to the gentleman from London, and showed a rather more troubled mind than usual. He turned his eyes involuntarily to his former refuge, but at a look from that quarter (expressive though instantaneous) he settled them on Mr. Bounderby's face.

'Now, what do you complain of?' asked Mr. Bounderby.

'I ha' not coom here, sir,' Stephen reminded him, 'to complain. I coom for that I were sent for.'

'What,' repeated Mr. Bounderby, folding his arms, 'do you people, in a general way, complain of?'

Stephen looked at him with some little irresolution for a moment, and then seemed to make up his mind.

'Sir, I were never good at showin o 't, though I ha had'n my share in feeling o 't. 'Deed we are in a muddle, sir. Look round town - so rich as 'tis - and see the numbers o' people as has been broughten into bein heer, fur to weave, an' to card, an' to piece out a livin', aw the same one way, somehows, 'twixt their cradles and their graves. Look how we live, an' wheer we live, an' in what numbers, an' by what chances, and wi' what sameness; and look how the mills is awlus a goin, and how they never works us no nigher to ony dis'ant object - ceptin awlus, Death. Look how you considers of us, and writes of us, and talks of us, and goes up wi' yor deputations to Secretaries o' State 'bout us, and how yo are awlus right, and how we are awlus wrong, and never had'n no reason in us sin ever we were born. Look how this ha growen an' growen, sir, bigger an' bigger, broader an' broader, harder an' harder, fro year to year, fro generation unto generation. Who can look on 't, sir, and fairly tell a man 'tis not a muddle?'

'Of course,' said Mr. Bounderby. 'Now perhaps you'll let the gentleman know, how you would set this muddle (as you're so fond of calling it) to rights.'

'I donno, sir. I canna be expecten to 't. 'Tis not me as should be looken to for that, sir. 'Tis them as is put ower me, and ower aw the rest of us. What do they tak upon themseln, sir, if not to do't?'

'I'll tell you something towards it, at any rate,' returned Mr. Bounderby. 'We will make an example of half a dozen Slackbridges. We'll indict the blackguards for felony, and get 'em shipped off to penal settlements.'

Stephen gravely shook his head.

'Don't tell me we won't, man,' said Mr. Bounderby, by this time blowing a hurricane, 'because we will, I tell you!'

'Sir,' returned Stephen, with the quiet confidence of absolute certainty, 'if yo was t' tak a hundred Slackbridges - aw as there is, and aw the number ten times towd - an' was t' sew 'em up in separate sacks, an' sink 'em in the deepest ocean as were made ere ever dry land coom to be, yo'd leave the muddle just wheer 'tis. Mischeevous strangers!' said Stephen, with an anxious smile; 'when ha we not heern, I am sure, sin ever we can call to mind, o' th' mischeevous strangers! 'Tis not by them the trouble's made, sir. 'Tis not wi' them 't commences. I ha no favour for 'em - I ha no reason to favour 'em - but 'tis hopeless and useless to dream o' takin them fro their trade, 'stead o' takin their trade fro them! Aw that's now about me in this room were heer afore I coom, an' will be heer when I am gone. Put that clock aboard a ship an' pack it off to Norfolk Island, an' the time will go on just the same. So 'tis wi' Slackbridge every bit.'

Reverting for a moment to his former refuge, he observed a cautionary movement of her eyes towards the door. Stepping back, he put his hand upon the lock. But he had not spoken out of his own will and desire; and he felt it in his heart a noble return for his late injurious treatment to be faithful to the last to those who had repudiated him. He stayed to finish what was in his mind.

'Sir, I canna, wi' my little learning an' my common way, tell the genelman what will better aw this - though some working men o' this town could, above my powers - but I can tell him what I know will never do 't. The strong hand will never do 't. Vict'ry and triumph will never do 't. Agreeing fur to mak one side unnat'rally awlus and for ever right, and toother side unnat'rally awlus and for ever wrong, will never, never do 't. Nor yet lettin alone will never do 't. Let thousands upon thousands alone, aw leading the like lives and aw faw'en into the like muddle, and they will be as one, and yo will be as anoother, wi' a black unpassable world betwixt yo, just as long or short a time as sich-like misery can last. Not drawin nigh to fok, wi' kindness and patience an' cheery ways, that so draws nigh to one another in their monny troubles, and so cherishes one another in their distresses wi' what they need themseln - like, I humbly believe, as no people the genelman ha seen in aw his travels can beat - will never do 't till th' Sun turns t' ice. Most o' aw, rating 'em as so much Power, and reg'latin 'em as if they was figures in a soom, or machines: wi'out loves and likens, wi'out memories and inclinations, wi'out souls to weary and souls to hope - when aw goes quiet, draggin on wi' 'em as if they'd nowt o' th' kind, and when aw goes onquiet, reproachin 'em for their want o' sitch humanly feelins in their dealins wi' yo - this will never do 't, sir, till God's work is onmade.'

Stephen stood with the open door in his hand, waiting to know if anything more were expected of him.

'Just stop a moment,' said Mr. Bounderby, excessively red in the face. 'I told you, the last time you were here with a grievance, that you had better turn about and come out of that. And I also told you, if you remember, that I was up to the gold spoon look- out.'

'I were not up to 't myseln, sir; I do assure yo.'

'Now it's clear to me,' said Mr. Bounderby, 'that you are one of those chaps who have always got a grievance. And you go about, sowing it and raising crops. That's the business of your life, my friend.'

Stephen shook his head, mutely protesting that indeed he had other business to do for his life.

'You are such a waspish, raspish, ill-conditioned chap, you see,' said Mr. Bounderby, 'that even your own Union, the men who know you best, will have nothing to do with you. I never thought those fellows could be right in anything; but I tell you what! I so far go along with them for a novelty, that I'll have nothing to do with you either.'

Stephen raised his eyes quickly to his face.

'You can finish off what you're at,' said Mr. Bounderby, with a meaning nod, 'and then go elsewhere.'

'Sir, yo know weel,' said Stephen expressively, 'that if I canna get work wi' yo, I canna get it elsewheer.'

The reply was, 'What I know, I know; and what you know, you know.
I have no more to say about it.'

Stephen glanced at Louisa again, but her eyes were raised to his no more; therefore, with a sigh, and saying, barely above his breath, 'Heaven help us aw in this world!' he departed.

CHAPTER VI - FADING AWAY

IT was falling dark when Stephen came out of Mr. Bounderby's house. The shadows of night had gathered so fast, that he did not look about him when he closed the door, but plodded straight along the street. Nothing was further from his thoughts than the curious old woman he had encountered on his previous visit to the same house, when he heard a step behind him that he knew, and turning, saw her in Rachael's company.

He saw Rachael first, as he had heard her only.

'Ah, Rachael, my dear! Missus, thou wi' her!'

'Well, and now you are surprised to be sure, and with reason I must say,' the old woman returned. 'Here I am again, you see.'

'But how wi' Rachael?' said Stephen, falling into their step, walking between them, and looking from the one to the other.

'Why, I come to be with this good lass pretty much as I came to be with you,' said the old woman, cheerfully, taking the reply upon herself. 'My visiting time is later this year than usual, for I have been rather troubled with shortness of breath, and so put it off till the weather was fine and warm. For the same reason I don't make all my journey in one day, but divide it into two days, and get a bed to-night at the Travellers' Coffee House down by the railroad (a nice clean house), and go back Parliamentary, at six in the morning. Well, but what has this to do with this good lass, says you? I'm going to tell you. I have heard of Mr. Bounderby being married. I read it in the paper, where it looked grand - oh, it looked fine!' the old woman dwelt on it with strange enthusiasm: 'and I want to see his wife. I have never seen her yet. Now, if you'll believe me, she hasn't come out of that house since noon to- day. So not to give her up too easily, I was waiting about, a little last bit more, when I passed close to this good lass two or three times; and her face being so friendly I spoke to her, and she spoke to me. There!' said the old woman to Stephen, 'you can make all the rest out for yourself now, a deal shorter than I can, I dare say!'

Once again, Stephen had to conquer an instinctive propensity to dislike this old woman, though her manner was as honest and simple as a manner possibly could be. With a gentleness that was as natural to him as he knew it to be to Rachael, he pursued the subject that interested her in her old age.

'Well, missus,' said he, 'I ha seen the lady, and she were young and hansom. Wi' fine dark thinkin eyes, and a still way, Rachael, as I ha never seen the like on.'

'Young and handsome. Yes!' cried the old woman, quite delighted. 'As bonny as a rose! And what a happy wife!'

'Aye, missus, I suppose she be,' said Stephen. But with a doubtful glance at Rachael.

'Suppose she be? She must be. She's your master's wife,' returned the old woman.

Stephen nodded assent. 'Though as to master,' said he, glancing again at Rachael, 'not master onny more. That's aw enden 'twixt him and me.'

'Have you left his work, Stephen?' asked Rachael, anxiously and quickly.

'Why, Rachael,' he replied, 'whether I ha lef'n his work, or whether his work ha lef'n me, cooms t' th' same. His work and me are parted. 'Tis as weel so - better, I were thinkin when yo coom up wi' me. It would ha brought'n trouble upon trouble if I had stayed theer. Haply 'tis a kindness to monny that I go; haply 'tis a kindness to myseln; anyways it mun be done. I mun turn my face fro Coketown fur th' time, and seek a fort'n, dear, by beginnin fresh.'

'Where will you go, Stephen?'

'I donno t'night,' said he, lifting off his hat, and smoothing his thin hair with the flat of his hand. 'But I'm not goin t'night, Rachael, nor yet t'morrow. 'Tan't easy overmuch t' know wheer t' turn, but a good heart will coom to me.'

Herein, too, the sense of even thinking unselfishly aided him. Before he had so much as closed Mr. Bounderby's door, he had reflected that at least his being obliged to go away was good for her, as it would save her from the chance of being brought into question for not withdrawing from him. Though it would cost him a hard pang to leave her, and though he could think of no similar place in which his condemnation would not pursue him, perhaps it was almost a relief to be forced away from the endurance of the last four days, even to unknown difficulties and distresses.

So he said, with truth, 'I'm more leetsome, Rachael, under 't, than I could'n ha believed.' It was not her part to make his burden heavier. She answered with her comforting smile, and the three walked on together.

Age, especially when it strives to be self-reliant and cheerful, finds much consideration among the poor. The old woman was so decent and contented, and made so light of her infirmities, though they had increased upon her since her former interview with Stephen, that they both took an interest in her. She was too sprightly to allow of their walking at a slow pace on her account, but she was very grateful to be talked to, and very willing to talk to any extent: so, when they came to their part of the town, she was more brisk and vivacious than ever.

'Come to my poor place, missus,' said Stephen, 'and tak a coop o' tea. Rachael will coom then; and arterwards I'll see thee safe t' thy Travellers' lodgin. 'T may be long, Rachael, ere ever I ha th' chance o' thy coompany agen.'

They complied, and the three went on to the house where he lodged. When they turned into a narrow street, Stephen glanced at his window with a dread that always haunted his desolate home; but it was open, as he had left it, and no one was there. The evil spirit of his life had flitted away again, months ago, and he had heard no more of her since. The only evidence of her last return now, were the scantier moveables in his room, and the grayer hair upon his head.

He lighted a candle, set out his little tea-board, got hot water from below, and brought in small portions of tea and sugar, a loaf, and some butter from the nearest shop. The bread was new and crusty, the butter fresh, and the sugar lump, of course - in fulfilment of the standard testimony of the Coketown magnates, that these people lived like princes, sir. Rachael made the tea (so large a party necessitated the borrowing of a cup), and the visitor enjoyed it mightily. It was the first glimpse of sociality the host had had for many days. He too, with the world a wide heath before him, enjoyed the meal - again in corroboration of the magnates, as exemplifying the utter want of calculation on the part of these people, sir.

'I ha never thowt yet, missus,' said Stephen, 'o' askin thy name.'

The old lady announced herself as 'Mrs. Pegler.'

'A widder, I think?' said Stephen.

'Oh, many long years!' Mrs. Pegler's husband (one of the best on record) was already dead, by Mrs. Pegler's calculation, when Stephen was born.

''Twere a bad job, too, to lose so good a one,' said Stephen.

'Onny children?'

Mrs. Pegler's cup, rattling against her saucer as she held it, denoted some nervousness on her part. 'No,' she said. 'Not now, not now.'

'Dead, Stephen,' Rachael softly hinted.

'I'm sooary I ha spok'n on 't,' said Stephen, 'I ought t' hadn in my mind as I might touch a sore place. I - I blame myseln.'

While he excused himself, the old lady's cup rattled more and more. 'I had a son,' she said, curiously distressed, and not by any of the usual appearances of sorrow; 'and he did well, wonderfully well. But he is not to be spoken of if you please. He is - ' Putting down her cup, she moved her hands as if she would have added, by her action, 'dead!' Then she said aloud, 'I have lost him.'

Stephen had not yet got the better of his having given the old lady pain, when his landlady came stumbling up the narrow stairs, and calling him to the door, whispered in his ear. Mrs. Pegler was by no means deaf, for she caught a word as it was uttered.

'Bounderby!' she cried, in a suppressed voice, starting up from the table. 'Oh hide me! Don't let me be seen for the world. Don't let him come up till I've got away. Pray, pray!' She trembled, and was excessively agitated; getting behind Rachael, when Rachael tried to reassure her; and not seeming to know what she was about.

'But hearken, missus, hearken,' said Stephen, astonished. ''Tisn't Mr. Bounderby; 'tis his wife. Yo'r not fearfo' o' her. Yo was hey-go-mad about her, but an hour sin.'

'But are you sure it's the lady, and not the gentleman?' she asked, still trembling.

'Certain sure!'

'Well then, pray don't speak to me, nor yet take any notice of me,' said the old woman. 'Let me be quite to myself in this corner.'

Stephen nodded; looking to Rachael for an explanation, which she was quite unable to give him; took the candle, went downstairs, and in a few moments returned, lighting Louisa into the room. She was followed by the whelp.

Rachael had risen, and stood apart with her shawl and bonnet in her hand, when Stephen, himself profoundly astonished by this visit, put the candle on the table. Then he too stood, with his doubled hand upon the table near it, waiting to be addressed.

For the first time in her life Louisa had come into one of the dwellings of the Coketown Hands; for the first time in her life she was face to face with anything like individuality in connection with them. She knew of their existence by hundreds and by thousands. She knew what results in work a given number of them would produce in a given space of time. She knew them in crowds passing to and from their nests, like ants or beetles. But she knew from her reading infinitely more of the ways of toiling insects than of these toiling men and women.

Something to be worked so much and paid so much, and there ended; something to be infallibly settled by laws of supply and demand; something that blundered against those laws, and floundered into difficulty; something that was a little pinched when wheat was dear, and over-ate itself when wheat was cheap; something that increased at such a rate of percentage, and yielded such another percentage of crime, and such another percentage of pauperism; something wholesale, of which vast fortunes were made; something that occasionally rose like a sea, and did some harm and waste (chiefly to itself), and fell again; this she knew the Coketown Hands to be. But, she had scarcely thought more of separating them into units, than of separating the sea itself into its component drops.

She stood for some moments looking round the room. From the few chairs, the few books, the common prints, and the bed, she glanced to the two women, and to Stephen.

'I have come to speak to you, in consequence of what passed just now. I should like to be serviceable to you, if you will let me. Is this your wife?'

Rachael raised her eyes, and they sufficiently answered no, and dropped again.

'I remember,' said Louisa, reddening at her mistake; 'I recollect, now, to have heard your domestic misfortunes spoken of, though I was not attending to the particulars at the time. It was not my meaning to ask a question that would give pain to any one here. If I should ask any other question that may happen to have that result, give me credit, if you please, for being in ignorance how to speak to you as I ought.'

As Stephen had but a little while ago instinctively addressed himself to her, so she now instinctively addressed herself to Rachael. Her manner was short and abrupt, yet faltering and timid.

'He has told you what has passed between himself and my husband? You would be his first resource, I think.'

'I have heard the end of it, young lady,' said Rachael.

'Did I understand, that, being rejected by one employer, he would probably be rejected by all? I thought he said as much?'

'The chances are very small, young lady - next to nothing - for a man who gets a bad name among them.'

'What shall I understand that you mean by a bad name?'

'The name of being troublesome.'

'Then, by the prejudices of his own class, and by the prejudices of the other, he is sacrificed alike? Are the two so deeply separated in this town, that there is no place whatever for an honest workman between them?'

Rachael shook her head in silence.

'He fell into suspicion,' said Louisa, 'with his fellow-weavers, because - he had made a promise not to be one of them. I think it must have been to you that he made that promise. Might I ask you why he made it?'

Rachael burst into tears. 'I didn't seek it of him, poor lad. I prayed him to avoid trouble for his own good, little thinking he'd come to it through me. But I know he'd die a hundred deaths, ere ever he'd break his word. I know that of him well.'

Stephen had remained quietly attentive, in his usual thoughtful attitude, with his hand at his chin. He now spoke in a voice rather less steady than usual.

'No one, excepting myseln, can ever know what honour, an' what love, an' respect, I bear to Rachael, or wi' what cause. When I passed that promess, I towd her true, she were th' Angel o' my life. 'Twere a solemn promess. 'Tis gone fro' me, for ever.'

Louisa turned her head to him, and bent it with a deference that was new in her. She looked from him to Rachael, and her features softened. 'What will you do?' she asked him. And her voice had softened too.

'Weel, ma'am,' said Stephen, making the best of it, with a smile; 'when I ha finished off, I mun quit this part, and try another. Fortnet or misfortnet, a man can but try; there's nowt to be done wi'out tryin' - cept laying down and dying.'

'How will you travel?'

'Afoot, my kind ledy, afoot.'

Louisa coloured, and a purse appeared in her hand. The rustling of a bank-note was audible, as she unfolded one and laid it on the table.

'Rachael, will you tell him - for you know how, without offence - that this is freely his, to help him on his way? Will you entreat him to take it?'

'I canna do that, young lady,' she answered, turning her head aside. 'Bless you for thinking o' the poor lad wi' such tenderness. But 'tis for him to know his heart, and what is right according to it.'

Louisa looked, in part incredulous, in part frightened, in part overcome with quick sympathy, when this man of so much self- command, who had been so plain and steady through the late interview, lost his composure in a moment, and now stood with his hand before his face. She stretched out hers, as if she would have touched him; then checked herself, and remained still.

'Not e'en Rachael,' said Stephen, when he stood again with his face uncovered, 'could mak sitch a kind offerin, by onny words, kinder. T' show that I'm not a man wi'out reason and gratitude, I'll tak two pound. I'll borrow 't for t' pay 't back. 'Twill be the sweetest work as ever I ha done, that puts it in my power t' acknowledge once more my lastin thankfulness for this present action.'

She was fain to take up the note again, and to substitute the much smaller sum he had named. He was neither courtly, nor handsome, nor picturesque, in any respect; and yet his manner of accepting it, and of expressing his thanks without more words, had a grace in it that Lord Chesterfield could not have taught his son in a century.

Tom had sat upon the bed, swinging one leg and sucking his walking-stick with sufficient unconcern, until the visit had attained this stage. Seeing his sister ready to depart, he got up, rather hurriedly, and put in a word.

'Just wait a moment, Loo! Before we go, I should like to speak to him a moment. Something comes into my head. If you'll step out on the stairs, Blackpool, I'll mention it. Never mind a light, man!' Tom was remarkably impatient of his moving towards the cupboard, to get one. 'It don't want a light.'

Stephen followed him out, and Tom closed the room door, and held the lock in his hand.

'I say!' he whispered. 'I think I can do you a good turn. Don't ask me what it is, because it may not come to anything. But there's no harm in my trying.'

His breath fell like a flame of fire on Stephen's ear, it was so hot.

'That was our light porter at the Bank,' said Tom, 'who brought you the message to-night. I call him our light porter, because I belong to the Bank too.'

Stephen thought, 'What a hurry he is in!' He spoke so confusedly.

'Well!' said Tom. 'Now look here! When are you off?'

'T' day's Monday,' replied Stephen, considering. 'Why, sir, Friday or Saturday, nigh 'bout.'

'Friday or Saturday,' said Tom. 'Now look here! I am not sure that I can do you the good turn I want to do you - that's my sister, you know, in your room - but I may be able to, and if I should not be able to, there's no harm done. So I tell you what. You'll know our light porter again?'

'Yes, sure,' said Stephen.

'Very well,' returned Tom. 'When you leave work of a night, between this and your going away, just hang about the Bank an hour or so, will you? Don't take on, as if you meant anything, if he should see you hanging about there; because I shan't put him up to speak to you, unless I find I can do you the service I want to do you. In that case he'll have a note or a message for you, but not else. Now look here! You are sure you understand.'

He had wormed a finger, in the darkness, through a button-hole of Stephen's coat, and was screwing that corner of the garment tight up round and round, in an extraordinary manner.

'I understand, sir,' said Stephen.

'Now look here!' repeated Tom. 'Be sure you don't make any mistake then, and don't forget. I shall tell my sister as we go home, what I have in view, and she'll approve, I know. Now look here! You're all right, are you? You understand all about it? Very well then. Come along, Loo!'

He pushed the door open as he called to her, but did not return into the room, or wait to be lighted down the narrow stairs. He was at the bottom when she began to descend, and was in the street before she could take his arm.

Mrs. Pegler remained in her corner until the brother and sister were gone, and until Stephen came back with the candle in his hand. She was in a state of inexpressible admiration of Mrs. Bounderby, and, like an unaccountable old woman, wept, 'because she was such a pretty dear.' Yet Mrs. Pegler was so flurried lest the object of her admiration should return by chance, or anybody else should come, that her cheerfulness was ended for that night. It was late too, to people who rose early and worked hard;

therefore the party broke up; and Stephen and Rachael escorted their mysterious acquaintance to the door of the Travellers' Coffee House, where they parted from her.

They walked back together to the corner of the street where Rachael lived, and as they drew nearer and nearer to it, silence crept upon them. When they came to the dark corner where their unfrequent meetings always ended, they stopped, still silent, as if both were afraid to speak.

'I shall strive t' see thee agen, Rachael, afore I go, but if not - '

'Thou wilt not, Stephen, I know. 'Tis better that we make up our minds to be open wi' one another.'

'Thou'rt awlus right. 'Tis bolder and better. I ha been thinkin then, Rachael, that as 'tis but a day or two that remains, 'twere better for thee, my dear, not t' be seen wi' me. 'T might bring thee into trouble, fur no good.'

''Tis not for that, Stephen, that I mind. But thou know'st our old agreement. 'Tis for that.'

'Well, well,' said he. ''Tis better, onnyways.'

'Thou'lt write to me, and tell me all that happens, Stephen?'

'Yes. What can I say now, but Heaven be wi' thee, Heaven bless thee, Heaven thank thee and reward thee!'

'May it bless thee, Stephen, too, in all thy wanderings, and send thee peace and rest at last!'

'I towd thee, my dear,' said Stephen Blackpool - 'that night - that I would never see or think o' onnything that angered me, but thou, so much better than me, should'st be beside it. Thou'rt beside it now. Thou mak'st me see it wi' a better eye. Bless thee. Good night. Good-bye!'

It was but a hurried parting in a common street, yet it was a sacred remembrance to these two common people. Utilitarian economists, skeletons of schoolmasters, Commissioners of Fact, genteel and used-up infidels, gabblers of many little dog's-eared creeds, the poor you will have always with you. Cultivate in them, while there is yet time, the utmost graces of the fancies and affections, to adorn their lives so much in need of ornament; or, in the day of your triumph, when romance is utterly driven out of their souls, and they and a bare existence stand face to face, Reality will take a wolfish turn, and make an end of you.

Stephen worked the next day, and the next, uncheered by a word from any one, and shunned in all his comings and goings as before. At the end of the second day, he saw land; at the end of the third, his loom stood empty.

He had overstayed his hour in the street outside the Bank, on each of the two first evenings; and nothing had happened there, good or bad. That he might not be remiss in his part of the engagement, he resolved to wait full two hours, on this third and last night.

There was the lady who had once kept Mr. Bounderby's house, sitting at the first-floor window as he had seen her before; and there was the light porter, sometimes talking with her there, and sometimes looking over the blind below which had BANK upon it, and sometimes coming to the door and standing on the steps for a breath of air. When he first came out, Stephen thought he might be looking for him, and passed near; but the light porter only cast his winking eyes upon him slightly, and said nothing.

Two hours were a long stretch of lounging about, after a long day's labour. Stephen sat upon the step of a door, leaned against a wall under an archway, strolled up and down, listened for the church clock, stopped and watched children playing in the street. Some purpose or other is so natural to every one, that a mere loiterer always looks and feels remarkable. When the first hour was out, Stephen even began to have an uncomfortable sensation upon him of being for the time a disreputable character.

Then came the lamplighter, and two lengthening lines of light all down the long perspective of the street, until they were blended and lost in the distance. Mrs. Sparsit closed the first-floor window, drew down the blind, and went up-stairs. Presently, a light went up-stairs after her, passing first the fanlight of the door, and afterwards the two staircase windows, on its way up. By and by, one corner of the second-floor blind was disturbed, as if Mrs. Sparsit's eye were there; also the other corner, as if the light porter's eye were on that side. Still, no communication was made to Stephen. Much relieved when the two hours were at last accomplished, he went away at a quick pace, as a recompense for so much loitering.

He had only to take leave of his landlady, and lie down on his temporary bed upon the floor; for his bundle was made up for to- morrow, and all was arranged for his departure. He meant to be clear of the town very early; before the Hands were in the streets.

It was barely daybreak, when, with a parting look round his room, mournfully wondering whether he should ever see it again, he went out. The town was as entirely deserted as if the inhabitants had abandoned it, rather than hold communication with him. Everything looked wan at that hour. Even the coming sun made but a pale waste in the sky, like a sad sea.

By the place where Rachael lived, though it was not in his way; by the red brick streets; by the great silent factories, not trembling yet; by the railway, where the danger-lights were waning in the strengthening day; by the railway's crazy neighbourhood, half pulled down and half built up; by scattered red brick villas, where the besmoked evergreens were sprinkled with a dirty powder, like untidy snuff-takers; by coal-dust paths and many varieties of ugliness; Stephen got to the top of the hill, and looked back.

Day was shining radiantly upon the town then, and the bells were going for the morning work. Domestic fires were not yet lighted, and the high chimneys had the sky to themselves. Puffing out their poisonous volumes, they would not be long in hiding it; but, for half an hour, some of the many windows were golden, which showed the Coketown people a sun eternally in eclipse, through a medium of smoked glass.

So strange to turn from the chimneys to the birds. So strange, to have the road-dust on his feet instead of the coal-grit. So strange to have lived to his time of life, and yet to be beginning like a boy this summer morning! With these musings in his mind, and his bundle under his arm, Stephen took his attentive face along the high road. And the trees arched over him, whispering that he left a true and loving heart behind.

CHAPTER VII - GUNPOWDER

MR. JAMES HARTHOUSE, 'going in' for his adopted party, soon began to score. With the aid of a little more coaching for the political sages, a little more genteel listlessness for the general society, and a tolerable management of the assumed honesty in dishonesty, most effective and most patronized of the polite deadly sins, he speedily came to be considered of much promise. The not being troubled with earnestness was a grand point in his favour, enabling him to take to the hard Fact fellows with as good a grace as if he had been born one of the tribe, and to throw all other tribes overboard, as conscious hypocrites.

'Whom none of us believe, my dear Mrs. Bounderby, and who do not believe themselves. The only difference between us and the professors of virtue or benevolence, or philanthropy - never mind the name - is, that we know it is all meaningless, and say so; while they know it equally and will never say so.'

Why should she be shocked or warned by this reiteration? It was not so unlike her father's principles, and her early training, that it need startle her. Where was the great difference between the two schools, when each chained her down to material realities, and inspired her with no faith in anything else? What was there in her soul for James Harthouse to destroy, which Thomas Gradgrind had nurtured there in its state of innocence!

It was even the worse for her at this pass, that in her mind - implanted there before her eminently practical father began to form it - a struggling disposition to believe in a wider and nobler humanity than she had ever heard of, constantly strove with doubts and resentments. With doubts, because the aspiration had been so laid waste in her youth. With resentments, because of the wrong that had been done her, if it were indeed a whisper of the truth. Upon a nature long accustomed to self-suppression, thus torn and divided, the Harthouse philosophy came as a relief and justification. Everything being hollow and worthless, she had missed nothing and sacrificed nothing. What did it matter, she had said to her father, when he proposed her husband. What did it matter, she said still. With a scornful self-reliance, she asked herself, What did anything matter - and went on.

Towards what? Step by step, onward and downward, towards some end, yet so gradually, that she believed herself to remain motionless. As to Mr. Harthouse, whither he tended, he neither considered nor cared. He had no particular design or plan before him: no energetic wickedness ruffled his lassitude. He was as much amused and interested, at present, as it became so fine a gentleman to be; perhaps even more than it would have been consistent with his reputation to confess. Soon after his arrival he languidly wrote to his brother, the honourable and jocular member, that the Bounderbys were 'great fun;' and further, that the female Bounderby, instead of being the Gorgon he had expected, was young, and remarkably pretty. After that, he wrote no more about them, and devoted his leisure chiefly to their house. He was very often in their house, in his flittings and visitings about the Coketown district; and was much encouraged by Mr. Bounderby.

It was quite in Mr. Bounderby's gusty way to boast to all his world that he didn't care about your highly connected people, but that if his wife Tom Gradgrind's daughter did, she was welcome to their company.

Mr. James Harthouse began to think it would be a new sensation, if the face which changed so beautifully for the whelp, would change for him.

He was quick enough to observe; he had a good memory, and did not forget a word of the brother's revelations. He interwove them with everything he saw of the sister, and he began to understand her. To be sure, the better and profounder part of her character was not within his scope of perception; for in natures, as in seas, depth answers unto depth; but he soon began to read the rest with a student's eye.

Mr. Bounderby had taken possession of a house and grounds, about fifteen miles from the town, and accessible within a mile or two, by a railway striding on many arches over a wild country, undermined by deserted coal-shafts, and spotted at night by fires and black shapes of stationary engines at pits' mouths. This country, gradually softening towards the neighbourhood of Mr. Bounderby's retreat, there mellowed into a rustic landscape, golden with heath, and snowy with hawthorn in the spring of the year, and tremulous with leaves and their shadows all the summer time. The bank had foreclosed a mortgage effected on the property thus pleasantly situated, by one of the Coketown magnates, who, in his determination to make a shorter cut than usual to an enormous fortune, overspeculated himself by about two hundred thousand pounds. These accidents did sometimes happen in the best regulated families of Coketown, but the bankrupts had no connexion whatever with the improvident classes.

It afforded Mr. Bounderby supreme satisfaction to instal himself in this snug little estate, and with demonstrative humility to grow cabbages in the flower-garden. He delighted to live, barrack- fashion, among the elegant furniture, and he bullied the very pictures with his origin. 'Why, sir,' he would say to a visitor, 'I am told that Nickits,' the late owner, 'gave seven hundred pound for that Seabeach. Now, to be plain with you, if I ever, in the whole course of my life, take seven looks at it, at a hundred pound a look, it will be as much as I shall do. No, by George! I don't forget that I am Josiah Bounderby of Coketown. For years upon years, the only pictures in my possession, or that I could have got into my possession, by any means, unless I stole 'em, were the engravings of a man shaving himself in a boot, on the blacking bottles that I was overjoyed to use in cleaning boots with, and that I sold when they were empty for a farthing a-piece, and glad to get it!'

Then he would address Mr. Harthouse in the same style.

'Harthouse, you have a couple of horses down here. Bring half a dozen more if you like, and we'll find room for 'em. There's stabling in this place for a dozen horses; and unless Nickits is belied, he kept the full number. A round dozen of 'em, sir. When that man was a boy, he went to Westminster School. Went to Westminster School as a King's Scholar, when I was principally living on garbage, and sleeping in market baskets. Why, if I wanted to keep a dozen horses - which I don't, for one's enough for me - I couldn't bear to see 'em in their stalls here, and think what my own lodging used to be. I couldn't look at 'em, sir, and not order 'em out. Yet so things come round. You see this place; you know what sort of a place it is; you are aware that there's not a completer place of its size in this kingdom or elsewhere - I don't care where - and here, got into the middle of it, like a maggot into a nut, is Josiah Bounderby. While Nickits (as a man came into my office, and told me yesterday), Nickits, who used to act in Latin, in the Westminster School plays, with the chief- justices and nobility of this country applauding him till they were black in the face, is drivelling at this minute - drivelling, sir! - in a fifth floor, up a narrow dark back street in Antwerp.'

It was among the leafy shadows of this retirement, in the long sultry summer days, that Mr. Harthouse began to prove the face which had set him wondering when he first saw it, and to try if it would change for him.

'Mrs. Bounderby, I esteem it a most fortunate accident that I find you alone here. I have for some time had a particular wish to speak to you.'

It was not by any wonderful accident that he found her, the time of day being that at which she was always alone, and the place being her favourite resort. It was an opening in a dark wood, where some felled trees lay, and where she would sit watching the fallen leaves of last year, as she had watched the falling ashes at home.

He sat down beside her, with a glance at her face.

'Your brother. My young friend Tom - '

Her colour brightened, and she turned to him with a look of interest. 'I never in my life,' he thought, 'saw anything so remarkable and so captivating as the lighting of those features!' His face betrayed his thoughts

- perhaps without betraying him, for it might have been according to its instructions so to do.

'Pardon me. The expression of your sisterly interest is so beautiful - Tom should be so proud of it - I know this is inexcusable, but I am so compelled to admire.'

'Being so impulsive,' she said composedly.

'Mrs. Bounderby, no: you know I make no pretence with you. You know I am a sordid piece of human nature, ready to sell myself at any time for any reasonable sum, and altogether incapable of any Arcadian proceeding whatever.'

'I am waiting,' she returned, 'for your further reference to my brother.'

'You are rigid with me, and I deserve it. I am as worthless a dog as you will find, except that I am not false - not false. But you surprised and started me from my subject, which was your brother. I have an interest in him.'

'Have you an interest in anything, Mr. Harthouse?' she asked, half incredulously and half gratefully.

'If you had asked me when I first came here, I should have said no. I must say now - even at the hazard of appearing to make a pretence, and of justly awakening your incredulity - yes.'

She made a slight movement, as if she were trying to speak, but could not find voice; at length she said, 'Mr. Harthouse, I give you credit for being interested in my brother.'

'Thank you. I claim to deserve it. You know how little I do claim, but I will go that length. You have done so much for him, you are so fond of him; your whole life, Mrs. Bounderby, expresses such charming self-forgetfulness on his account - pardon me again - I am running wide of the subject. I am interested in him for his own sake.'

She had made the slightest action possible, as if she would have risen in a hurry and gone away. He had turned the course of what he said at that instant, and she remained.

'Mrs. Bounderby,' he resumed, in a lighter manner, and yet with a show of effort in assuming it, which was even more expressive than the manner he dismissed; 'it is no irrevocable offence in a young fellow of your brother's years, if he is heedless, inconsiderate, and expensive - a little dissipated, in the common phrase. Is he?'

'Yes.'

'Allow me to be frank. Do you think he games at all?'

'I think he makes bets.' Mr. Harthouse waiting, as if that were not her whole answer, she added, 'I know he does.'

'Of course he loses?'

'Yes.'

'Everybody does lose who bets. May I hint at the probability of your sometimes supplying him with money for these purposes?'

She sat, looking down; but, at this question, raised her eyes searchingly and a little resentfully.

'Acquit me of impertinent curiosity, my dear Mrs. Bounderby. I think Tom may be gradually falling into trouble, and I wish to stretch out a helping hand to him from the depths of my wicked experience. - Shall I say again, for his sake? Is that necessary?'

She seemed to try to answer, but nothing came of it.

'Candidly to confess everything that has occurred to me,' said James Harthouse, again gliding with the same appearance of effort into his more airy manner; 'I will confide to you my doubt whether he has had many advantages. Whether - forgive my plainness - whether any great amount of confidence is likely to have been established between himself and his most worthy father.'

'I do not,' said Louisa, flushing with her own great remembrance in that wise, 'think it likely.'

'Or, between himself, and - I may trust to your perfect understanding of my meaning, I am sure - and his highly esteemed brother-in-law.'

She flushed deeper and deeper, and was burning red when she replied in a fainter voice, 'I do not think that likely, either.'

'Mrs. Bounderby,' said Harthouse, after a short silence, 'may there be a better confidence between yourself and me? Tom has borrowed a considerable sum of you?'

'You will understand, Mr. Harthouse,' she returned, after some indecision: she had been more or less uncertain, and troubled throughout the conversation, and yet had in the main preserved her self-contained manner; 'you will understand that if I tell you what you press to know, it is not by way of complaint or regret. I would never complain of anything, and what I have done I do not in the least regret.'

'So spirited, too!' thought James Harthouse.

'When I married, I found that my brother was even at that time heavily in debt. Heavily for him, I mean. Heavily enough to oblige me to sell some trinkets. They were no sacrifice. I sold them very willingly. I attached no value to them. They, were quite worthless to me.'

Either she saw in his face that he knew, or she only feared in her conscience that he knew, that she spoke of some of her husband's gifts. She stopped, and reddened again. If he had not known it before, he would have known it then, though he had been a much duller man than he was.

'Since then, I have given my brother, at various times, what money I could spare: in short, what money I have had. Confiding in you at all, on the faith of the interest you profess for him, I will not do so by halves. Since you have been in the habit of visiting here, he has wanted in one sum as much as a hundred pounds. I have not been able to give it to him. I have felt uneasy for the consequences of his being so involved, but I have kept these secrets until now, when I trust them to your honour. I have held no confidence with any one, because - you anticipated my reason just now.' She abruptly broke off.

He was a ready man, and he saw, and seized, an opportunity here of presenting her own image to her, slightly disguised as her brother.

'Mrs. Bounderby, though a graceless person, of the world worldly, I feel the utmost interest, I assure you, in what you tell me. I cannot possibly be hard upon your brother. I understand and share the wise consideration with which you regard his errors. With all possible respect both for Mr. Gradgrind and for Mr. Bounderby, I think I perceive that he has not been fortunate in his training. Bred at a disadvantage towards the society in which he has his part to play, he rushes into these extremes for himself, from opposite extremes that have long been forced - with the very best intentions we have no doubt - upon him. Mr. Bounderby's fine bluff English independence, though a most charming characteristic, does not - as we have agreed - invite confidence. If I might venture to remark that it is the least in the world deficient in that delicacy to which a youth mistaken, a character misconceived, and abilities misdirected, would turn for relief and guidance, I should express what it presents to my own view.'

As she sat looking straight before her, across the changing lights upon the grass into the darkness of the wood beyond, he saw in her face her application of his very distinctly uttered words.

'All allowance,' he continued, 'must be made. I have one great fault to find with Tom, however, which I cannot forgive, and for which I take him heavily to account.'

Louisa turned her eyes to his face, and asked him what fault was that?

'Perhaps,' he returned, 'I have said enough. Perhaps it would have been better, on the whole, if no allusion to it had escaped me.'

'You alarm me, Mr. Harthouse. Pray let me know it.'

'To relieve you from needless apprehension - and as this confidence regarding your brother, which I prize I am sure above all possible things, has been established between us - I obey. I cannot forgive him for not being more sensible in every word, look, and act of his life, of the affection of his best friend; of the devotion of his best friend; of her unselfishness; of her sacrifice. The return he makes her, within my observation, is a very poor one. What she has done for him demands his constant love and gratitude, not his ill- humour and caprice. Careless fellow as I am, I am not so indifferent, Mrs. Bounderby, as to be regardless of this vice in your brother, or inclined to consider it a venial offence.'

The wood floated before her, for her eyes were suffused with tears. They rose from a deep well, long concealed, and her heart was filled with acute pain that found no relief in them.

'In a word, it is to correct your brother in this, Mrs. Bounderby, that I must aspire. My better knowledge of his circumstances, and my direction and advice in extricating them - rather valuable, I hope, as coming from a scapegrace on a much larger scale - will give me some influence over him, and all I gain I shall certainly use towards this end. I have said enough, and more than enough. I seem to be protesting that I am a sort of good fellow, when, upon my honour, I have not the least intention to make any protestation to that effect, and openly announce that I am nothing of the sort. Yonder, among the trees,' he added, having lifted up his eyes and looked about; for he had watched her closely until now; 'is your brother himself; no doubt, just come down. As he seems to be loitering in this direction, it may be as well, perhaps, to walk towards him, and throw ourselves in his way. He has been very silent and doleful of late. Perhaps, his brotherly conscience is touched - if there are such things as consciences. Though, upon my honour, I hear of them much too often to believe in them.'

He assisted her to rise, and she took his arm, and they advanced to meet the whelp. He was idly beating the branches as he lounged along: or he stooped viciously to rip the moss from the trees with his stick. He was startled when they came upon him while he was engaged in this latter pastime, and his colour changed.

'Halloa!' he stammered; 'I didn't know you were here.'

'Whose name, Tom,' said Mr. Harthouse, putting his hand upon his shoulder and turning him, so that they all three walked towards the house together, 'have you been carving on the trees?'

'Whose name?' returned Tom. 'Oh! You mean what girl's name?'

'You have a suspicious appearance of inscribing some fair creature's on the bark, Tom.'

'Not much of that, Mr. Harthouse, unless some fair creature with a slashing fortune at her own disposal would take a fancy to me. Or she might be as ugly as she was rich, without any fear of losing me. I'd carve her name as often as she liked.'

'I am afraid you are mercenary, Tom.'

'Mercenary,' repeated Tom. 'Who is not mercenary? Ask my sister.'

'Have you so proved it to be a failing of mine, Tom?' said Louisa, showing no other sense of his discontent and ill-nature.

'You know whether the cap fits you, Loo,' returned her brother sulkily. 'If it does, you can wear it.'

'Tom is misanthropical to-day, as all bored people are now and then,' said Mr. Harthouse. 'Don't believe him, Mrs. Bounderby. He knows much better. I shall disclose some of his opinions of you, privately expressed to me, unless he relents a little.'

'At all events, Mr. Harthouse,' said Tom, softening in his admiration of his patron, but shaking his head sullenly too, 'you can't tell her that I ever praised her for being mercenary. I may have praised her for being the contrary, and I should do it again, if I had as good reason. However, never mind this now; it's not very interesting to you, and I am sick of the subject.'

They walked on to the house, where Louisa quitted her visitor's arm and went in. He stood looking after her, as she ascended the steps, and passed into the shadow of the door; then put his hand upon her brother's shoulder again, and invited him with a confidential nod to a walk in the garden.

'Tom, my fine fellow, I want to have a word with you.'

They had stopped among a disorder of roses - it was part of Mr. Bounderby's humility to keep Nickits's roses on a reduced scale - and Tom sat down on a terrace-parapet, plucking buds and picking them to pieces; while his powerful Familiar stood over him, with a foot upon the parapet, and his figure easily resting on the arm supported by that knee. They were just visible from her window. Perhaps she saw them.

'Tom, what's the matter?'

'Oh! Mr. Harthouse,' said Tom with a groan, 'I am hard up, and bothered out of my life.'

'My good fellow, so am I.'

'You!' returned Tom. 'You are the picture of independence. Mr. Harthouse, I am in a horrible mess. You have no idea what a state I have got myself into - what a state my sister might have got me out of, if she would only have done it.'

He took to biting the rosebuds now, and tearing them away from his teeth with a hand that trembled like an infirm old man's. After one exceedingly observant look at him, his companion relapsed into his lightest air.

'Tom, you are inconsiderate: you expect too much of your sister. You have had money of her, you dog, you know you have.'

'Well, Mr. Harthouse, I know I have. How else was I to get it? Here's old Bounderby always boasting that at my age he lived upon twopence a month, or something of that sort. Here's my father drawing what he calls a line, and tying me down to it from a baby, neck and heels. Here's my mother who never has anything of her own, except her complaints. What is a fellow to do for money, and where am I to look for it, if not to my sister?'

He was almost crying, and scattered the buds about by dozens. Mr. Harthouse took him persuasively by the coat.

'But, my dear Tom, if your sister has not got it - '

'Not got it, Mr. Harthouse? I don't say she has got it. I may have wanted more than she was likely to have got. But then she ought to get it. She could get it. It's of no use pretending to make a secret of matters now, after what I have told you already; you know she didn't marry old Bounderby for her own sake, or for his sake, but for my sake. Then why doesn't she get what I want, out of him, for my sake? She is not obliged to say what she is going to do with it; she is sharp enough; she could manage to coax it out of him, if she chose. Then why doesn't she choose, when I tell her of what consequence it is? But no. There she sits in his company like a stone, instead of making herself agreeable and getting it easily. I don't know what you may call this, but I call it unnatural conduct.'

There was a piece of ornamental water immediately below the parapet, on the other side, into which Mr. James Harthouse had a very strong inclination to pitch Mr. Thomas Gradgrind junior, as the injured men of

Coketown threatened to pitch their property into the Atlantic. But he preserved his easy attitude; and nothing more solid went over the stone balustrades than the accumulated rosebuds now floating about, a little surface-island.

'My dear Tom,' said Harthouse, 'let me try to be your banker.'

'For God's sake,' replied Tom, suddenly, 'don't talk about bankers!' And very white he looked, in contrast with the roses. Very white.

Mr. Harthouse, as a thoroughly well-bred man, accustomed to the best society, was not to be surprised - he could as soon have been affected - but he raised his eyelids a little more, as if they were lifted by a feeble touch of wonder. Albeit it was as much against the precepts of his school to wonder, as it was against the doctrines of the Gradgrind College.

'What is the present need, Tom? Three figures? Out with them.
Say what they are.'

'Mr. Harthouse,' returned Tom, now actually crying; and his tears were better than his injuries, however pitiful a figure he made: 'it's too late; the money is of no use to me at present. I should have had it before to be of use to me. But I am very much obliged to you; you're a true friend.'

A true friend! 'Whelp, whelp!' thought Mr. Harthouse, lazily; 'what an Ass you are!'

'And I take your offer as a great kindness,' said Tom, grasping his hand. 'As a great kindness, Mr. Harthouse.'

'Well,' returned the other, 'it may be of more use by and by. And, my good fellow, if you will open your bedevilments to me when they come thick upon you, I may show you better ways out of them than you can find for yourself.'

'Thank you,' said Tom, shaking his head dismally, and chewing rosebuds. 'I wish I had known you sooner, Mr. Harthouse.'

'Now, you see, Tom,' said Mr. Harthouse in conclusion, himself tossing over a rose or two, as a contribution to the island, which was always drifting to the wall as if it wanted to become a part of the mainland: 'every man is selfish in everything he does, and I am exactly like the rest of my fellow-creatures. I am desperately intent;' the languor of his desperation being quite tropical; 'on your softening towards your sister - which you ought to do; and on your being a more loving and agreeable sort of brother - which you ought to be.'

'I will be, Mr. Harthouse.'

'No time like the present, Tom. Begin at once.'

'Certainly I will. And my sister Loo shall say so.'

'Having made which bargain, Tom,' said Harthouse, clapping him on the shoulder again, with an air which left him at liberty to infer - as he did, poor fool - that this condition was imposed upon him in mere careless good nature to lessen his sense of obligation, 'we will tear ourselves asunder until dinner-time.'

When Tom appeared before dinner, though his mind seemed heavy enough, his body was on the alert; and he appeared before Mr. Bounderby came in. 'I didn't mean to be cross, Loo,' he said, giving her his hand, and kissing her. 'I know you are fond of me, and you know I am fond of you.'

After this, there was a smile upon Louisa's face that day, for some one else. Alas, for some one else!

'So much the less is the whelp the only creature that she cares for,' thought James Harthouse, reversing the reflection of his first day's knowledge of her pretty face. 'So much the less, so much the less.'

CHAPTER VIII - EXPLOSION

THE next morning was too bright a morning for sleep, and James Harthouse rose early, and sat in the pleasant bay window of his dressing-room, smoking the rare tobacco that had had so wholesome an influence on his young friend. Reposing in the sunlight, with the fragrance of his eastern pipe about him, and the dreamy smoke vanishing into the air, so rich and soft with summer odours, he reckoned up his advantages as an idle winner might count his gains. He was not at all bored for the time, and could give his mind to it.

He had established a confidence with her, from which her husband was excluded. He had established a confidence with her, that absolutely turned upon her indifference towards her husband, and the absence, now and at all times, of any congeniality between them. He had artfully, but plainly, assured her that he knew her heart in its last most delicate recesses; he had come so near to her through its tenderest sentiment; he had associated himself with that feeling; and the barrier behind which she lived, had melted away. All very odd, and very satisfactory!

And yet he had not, even now, any earnest wickedness of purpose in him. Publicly and privately, it were much better for the age in which he lived, that he and the legion of whom he was one were designedly bad, than indifferent and purposeless. It is the drifting icebergs setting with any current anywhere, that wreck the ships.

When the Devil goeth about like a roaring lion, he goeth about in a shape by which few but savages and hunters are attracted. But, when he is trimmed, smoothed, and varnished, according to the mode; when he is aweary of vice, and aweary of virtue, used up as to brimstone, and used up as to bliss; then, whether he take to the serving out of red tape, or to the kindling of red fire, he is the very Devil.

So James Harthouse reclined in the window, indolently smoking, and reckoning up the steps he had taken on the road by which he happened to be travelling. The end to which it led was before him, pretty plainly; but he troubled himself with no calculations about it. What will be, will be.

As he had rather a long ride to take that day - for there was a public occasion 'to do' at some distance, which afforded a tolerable opportunity of going in for the Gradgrind men - he dressed early and went down to breakfast. He was anxious to see if she had relapsed since the previous evening. No. He resumed where he had left off. There was a look of interest for him again.

He got through the day as much (or as little) to his own satisfaction, as was to be expected under the fatiguing circumstances; and came riding back at six o'clock. There was a sweep of some half-mile between the lodge and the house, and he was riding along at a foot pace over the smooth gravel, once Nickits's, when Mr. Bounderby burst out of the shrubbery, with such violence as to make his horse shy across the road.

'Harthouse!' cried Mr. Bounderby. 'Have you heard?'

'Heard what?' said Harthouse, soothing his horse, and inwardly favouring Mr. Bounderby with no good wishes.

'Then you haven't heard!'

'I have heard you, and so has this brute. I have heard nothing else.'

Mr. Bounderby, red and hot, planted himself in the centre of the path before the horse's head, to explode his bombshell with more effect.

'The Bank's robbed!'

'You don't mean it!'

'Robbed last night, sir. Robbed in an extraordinary manner. Robbed with a false key.'

'Of much?'

Mr. Bounderby, in his desire to make the most of it, really seemed mortified by being obliged to reply, 'Why, no; not of very much. But it might have been.'

'Of how much?'

'Oh! as a sum - if you stick to a sum - of not more than a hundred and fifty pound,' said Bounderby, with impatience. 'But it's not the sum; it's the fact. It's the fact of the Bank being robbed, that's the important circumstance. I am surprised you don't see it.'

'My dear Bounderby,' said James, dismounting, and giving his bridle to his servant, 'I do see it; and am as overcome as you can possibly desire me to be, by the spectacle afforded to my mental view. Nevertheless, I may be allowed, I hope, to congratulate you - which I do with all my soul, I assure you - on your not having sustained a greater loss.'

'Thank'ee,' replied Bounderby, in a short, ungracious manner. 'But I tell you what. It might have been twenty thousand pound.'

'I suppose it might.'

'Suppose it might! By the Lord, you may suppose so. By George!' said Mr. Bounderby, with sundry menacing nods and shakes of his head. 'It might have been twice twenty. There's no knowing what it would have been, or wouldn't have been, as it was, but for the fellows' being disturbed.'

Louisa had come up now, and Mrs. Sparsit, and Bitzer.

'Here's Tom Gradgrind's daughter knows pretty well what it might have been, if you don't,' blustered Bounderby. 'Dropped, sir, as if she was shot when I told her! Never knew her do such a thing before. Does her credit, under the circumstances, in my opinion!'

She still looked faint and pale. James Harthouse begged her to take his arm; and as they moved on very slowly, asked her how the robbery had been committed.

'Why, I am going to tell you,' said Bounderby, irritably giving his arm to Mrs. Sparsit. 'If you hadn't been so mighty particular about the sum, I should have begun to tell you before. You know this lady (for she is a lady), Mrs. Sparsit?'

'I have already had the honour - '

'Very well. And this young man, Bitzer, you saw him too on the same occasion?' Mr. Harthouse inclined his head in assent, and Bitzer knuckled his forehead.

'Very well. They live at the Bank. You know they live at the Bank, perhaps? Very well. Yesterday afternoon, at the close of business hours, everything was put away as usual. In the iron room that this young fellow sleeps outside of, there was never mind how much. In the little safe in young Tom's closet, the safe used for petty purposes, there was a hundred and fifty odd pound.'

'A hundred and fifty-four, seven, one,' said Bitzer.

'Come!' retorted Bounderby, stopping to wheel round upon him, 'let's have none of your interruptions. It's enough to be robbed while you're snoring because you're too comfortable, without being put right with your four seven ones. I didn't snore, myself, when I was your age, let me tell you. I hadn't victuals enough to snore. And I didn't four seven one. Not if I knew it.'

Bitzer knuckled his forehead again, in a sneaking manner, and seemed at once particularly impressed and depressed by the instance last given of Mr. Bounderby's moral abstinence.

'A hundred and fifty odd pound,' resumed Mr. Bounderby. 'That sum of money, young Tom locked in his safe, not a very strong safe, but that's no matter now. Everything was left, all right. Some time in the night, while this young fellow snored - Mrs. Sparsit, ma'am, you say you have heard him snore?'

'Sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit, 'I cannot say that I have heard him precisely snore, and therefore must not make that statement. But on winter evenings, when he has fallen asleep at his table, I have heard him, what I should prefer to describe as partially choke. I have heard him on such occasions produce sounds of a nature similar to what may be sometimes heard in Dutch clocks. Not,' said Mrs. Sparsit, with a lofty sense of giving strict evidence, 'that I would convey any imputation on his moral character. Far from it. I have always considered Bitzer a young man of the most upright principle; and to that I beg to bear my testimony.'

'Well!' said the exasperated Bounderby, 'while he was snoring, or choking, or Dutch-clocking, or something or other - being asleep - some fellows, somehow, whether previously concealed in the house or not remains to be seen, got to young Tom's safe, forced it, and abstracted the contents. Being then disturbed, they made off; letting themselves out at the main door, and double-locking it again (it was double-locked, and the key under Mrs. Sparsit's pillow) with a false key, which was picked up in the street near the Bank, about twelve o'clock to-day. No alarm takes place, till this chap, Bitzer, turns out this morning, and begins to open and prepare the offices for business. Then, looking at Tom's safe, he sees the door ajar, and finds the lock forced, and the money gone.'

'Where is Tom, by the by?' asked Harthouse, glancing round.

'He has been helping the police,' said Bounderby, 'and stays behind at the Bank. I wish these fellows had tried to rob me when I was at his time of life. They would have been out of pocket if they had invested eighteenpence in the job; I can tell 'em that.'

'Is anybody suspected?'

'Suspected? I should think there was somebody suspected. Egod!' said Bounderby, relinquishing Mrs. Sparsit's arm to wipe his heated head. 'Josiah Bounderby of Coketown is not to be plundered and nobody suspected. No, thank you!'

Might Mr. Harthouse inquire Who was suspected?

'Well,' said Bounderby, stopping and facing about to confront them all, 'I'll tell you. It's not to be mentioned everywhere; it's not to be mentioned anywhere: in order that the scoundrels concerned (there's a gang of 'em) may be thrown off their guard. So take this in confidence. Now wait a bit.' Mr. Bounderby wiped his head again. 'What should you say to;' here he violently exploded: 'to a Hand being in it?'

'I hope,' said Harthouse, lazily, 'not our friend Blackpot?'

'Say Pool instead of Pot, sir,' returned Bounderby, 'and that's the man.'

Louisa faintly uttered some word of incredulity and surprise.

'O yes! I know!' said Bounderby, immediately catching at the sound. 'I know! I am used to that. I know all about it. They are the finest people in the world, these fellows are. They have got the gift of the gab, they have. They only want to have their rights explained to them, they do. But I tell you what. Show me a dissatisfied Hand, and I'll show you a man that's fit for anything bad, I don't care what it is.'

Another of the popular fictions of Coketown, which some pains had been taken to disseminate - and which some people really believed.

'But I am acquainted with these chaps,' said Bounderby. 'I can read 'em off, like books. Mrs. Sparsit, ma'am, I appeal to you. What warning did I give that fellow, the first time he set foot in the house, when the express object of his visit was to know how he could knock Religion over, and floor the Established Church? Mrs. Sparsit, in point of high connexions, you are on a level with the aristocracy, - did I say, or did I not say, to that fellow, "you can't hide the truth from me: you are not the kind of fellow I like; you'll come to no good"?'

'Assuredly, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit, 'you did, in a highly impressive manner, give him such an admonition.'

'When he shocked you, ma'am,' said Bounderby; 'when he shocked your feelings?'

'Yes, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit, with a meek shake of her head, 'he certainly did so. Though I do not mean to say but that my feelings may be weaker on such points - more foolish if the term is preferred - than they might have been, if I had always occupied my present position.'

Mr. Bounderby stared with a bursting pride at Mr. Harthouse, as much as to say, 'I am the proprietor of this female, and she's worth your attention, I think.' Then, resumed his discourse.

'You can recall for yourself, Harthouse, what I said to him when you saw him. I didn't mince the matter with him. I am never mealy with 'em. I KNOW 'em. Very well, sir. Three days after that, he bolted. Went off, nobody knows where: as my mother did in my infancy - only with this difference, that he is a worse subject than my mother, if possible. What did he do before he went? What do you say;' Mr. Bounderby, with his hat in his hand, gave a beat upon the crown at every little division of his sentences, as if it were a tambourine; 'to his being seen - night after night - watching the Bank? - to his lurking about there - after dark? - To its striking Mrs. Sparsit - that he could be lurking for no good - To her calling Bitzer's attention to him, and their both taking notice of him - And to its appearing on inquiry to-day - that he was also noticed by the neighbours?' Having come to the climax, Mr. Bounderby, like an oriental dancer, put his tambourine on his head.

'Suspicious,' said James Harthouse, 'certainly.'

'I think so, sir,' said Bounderby, with a defiant nod. 'I think so. But there are more of 'em in it. There's an old woman. One never hears of these things till the mischief's done; all sorts of defects are found out in the stable door after the horse is stolen; there's an old woman turns up now. An old woman who seems to have been flying into town on a broomstick, every now and then. She watches the place a whole day before this fellow begins, and on the night when you saw him, she steals away with him and holds a council with him - I suppose, to make her report on going off duty, and be damned to her.'

There was such a person in the room that night, and she shrunk from observation, thought Louisa.

'This is not all of 'em, even as we already know 'em,' said Bounderby, with many nods of hidden meaning. 'But I have said enough for the present. You'll have the goodness to keep it quiet, and mention it to no one. It may take time, but we shall have 'em. It's policy to give 'em line enough, and there's no objection to that.'

'Of course, they will be punished with the utmost rigour of the law, as notice-boards observe,' replied James Harthouse, 'and serve them right. Fellows who go in for Banks must take the consequences. If there were no consequences, we should all go in for Banks.' He had gently taken Louisa's parasol from her hand, and had put it up for her; and she walked under its shade, though the sun did not shine there.

'For the present, Loo Bounderby,' said her husband, 'here's Mrs. Sparsit to look after. Mrs. Sparsit's nerves have been acted upon by this business, and she'll stay here a day or two. So make her comfortable.'

'Thank you very much, sir,' that discreet lady observed, 'but pray do not let My comfort be a consideration. Anything will do for Me.'

It soon appeared that if Mrs. Sparsit had a failing in her association with that domestic establishment, it was that she was so excessively regardless of herself and regardful of others, as to be a nuisance. On being shown her chamber, she was so dreadfully sensible of its comforts as to suggest the inference that she would have preferred to pass the night on the mangle in the laundry. True, the Powlers and the Scadgerses were accustomed to splendour, 'but it is my duty to remember,' Mrs. Sparsit was fond of observing with a lofty grace: particularly when any of the domestics were present, 'that what I was, I am no longer. Indeed,' said she, 'if I could altogether cancel the remembrance that Mr. Sparsit was a Powler, or that I myself am related to the Scadgers family; or if I could even revoke the fact, and make myself a person of common descent and ordinary connexions; I would gladly do so. I should think it, under existing circumstances, right to do so.' The same Hermitical state of mind led to her renunciation of made dishes and wines at dinner, until fairly commanded by Mr. Bounderby to take them; when she said, 'Indeed you are very good, sir;' and departed from a resolution of which she had made rather formal and public announcement, to 'wait for the simple mutton.' She was likewise deeply apologetic for wanting the salt; and, feeling amiably bound to bear out Mr. Bounderby to the fullest extent in the testimony he had borne to her nerves, occasionally sat back in her chair and silently wept; at which periods a tear of large dimensions, like a crystal ear-ring, might be observed (or rather, must be, for it insisted on public notice) sliding down her Roman nose.

But Mrs. Sparsit's greatest point, first and last, was her determination to pity Mr. Bounderby. There were occasions when in looking at him she was involuntarily moved to shake her head, as who would say, 'Alas, poor Yorick!' After allowing herself to be betrayed into these evidences of emotion, she would force a lambent brightness, and would be fitfully cheerful, and would say, 'You have still good spirits, sir, I am thankful to find;' and would appear to hail it as a blessed dispensation that Mr. Bounderby bore up as he did. One idiosyncrasy for which she often apologized, she found it excessively difficult to conquer. She had a curious propensity to call Mrs. Bounderby 'Miss Gradgrind,' and yielded to it some three or four score times in the course of the evening. Her repetition of this mistake covered Mrs. Sparsit with modest confusion; but indeed, she said, it seemed so natural to say Miss Gradgrind: whereas, to persuade herself that the young lady whom she had had the happiness of knowing from a child could be really and truly Mrs. Bounderby, she found almost impossible. It was a further singularity of this remarkable case, that the more she thought about it, the more impossible it appeared; 'the differences,' she observed, 'being such.'

In the drawing-room after dinner, Mr. Bounderby tried the case of the robbery, examined the witnesses, made notes of the evidence, found the suspected persons guilty, and sentenced them to the extreme punishment of the law. That done, Bitzer was dismissed to town with instructions to recommend Tom to come home by the mail- train.

When candles were brought, Mrs. Sparsit murmured, 'Don't be low, sir. Pray let me see you cheerful, sir, as I used to do.' Mr. Bounderby, upon whom these consolations had begun to produce the effect of making him, in a bull-headed blundering way, sentimental, sighed like some large sea-animal. 'I cannot bear to see you so, sir,' said Mrs. Sparsit. 'Try a hand at backgammon, sir, as you used to do when I had the honour of living under your roof.' 'I haven't played backgammon, ma'am,' said Mr. Bounderby, 'since that time.' 'No, sir,' said Mrs. Sparsit, soothingly, 'I am aware that you have not. I remember that Miss Gradgrind takes no interest in the game. But I shall be happy, sir, if you will condescend.'

They played near a window, opening on the garden. It was a fine night: not moonlight, but sultry and fragrant. Louisa and Mr. Harthouse strolled out into the garden, where their voices could be heard in the stillness, though not what they said. Mrs. Sparsit, from her place at the backgammon board, was constantly straining her eyes to pierce the shadows without. 'What's the matter, ma'am? ' said Mr. Bounderby; 'you don't see a Fire, do you?' 'Oh dear no, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit, 'I was thinking of the dew.' 'What have you got to do with the dew, ma'am?' said Mr. Bounderby. 'It's not myself, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit, 'I am fearful of Miss Gradgrind's taking cold.' 'She never takes cold,' said Mr. Bounderby. 'Really, sir?' said Mrs. Sparsit. And was affected with a cough in her throat.

When the time drew near for retiring, Mr. Bounderby took a glass of water. 'Oh, sir?' said Mrs. Sparsit. 'Not your sherry warm, with lemon-peel and nutmeg?' 'Why, I have got out of the habit of taking it now, ma'am,' said Mr. Bounderby. 'The more's the pity, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit; 'you are losing all your good old habits. Cheer up, sir! If Miss Gradgrind will permit me, I will offer to make it for you, as I have often done.'

Miss Gradgrind readily permitting Mrs. Sparsit to do anything she pleased, that considerate lady made the beverage, and handed it to Mr. Bounderby. 'It will do you good, sir. It will warm your heart. It is the sort of thing you want, and ought to take, sir.' And when Mr. Bounderby said, 'Your health, ma'am!' she answered with great feeling, 'Thank you, sir. The same to you, and happiness also.' Finally, she wished him good night, with great pathos; and Mr. Bounderby went to bed, with a maudlin persuasion that he had been crossed in something tender, though he could not, for his life, have mentioned what it was.

Long after Louisa had undressed and lain down, she watched and waited for her brother's coming home. That could hardly be, she knew, until an hour past midnight; but in the country silence, which did anything but calm the trouble of her thoughts, time lagged wearily. At last, when the darkness and stillness had seemed for hours to thicken one another, she heard the bell at the gate. She felt as though she would have been glad that it rang on until daylight; but it ceased, and the circles of its last sound spread out fainter and wider in the air, and all was dead again.

She waited yet some quarter of an hour, as she judged. Then she arose, put on a loose robe, and went out of her room in the dark, and up the staircase to her brother's room. His door being shut, she softly opened it and spoke to him, approaching his bed with a noiseless step.

She kneeled down beside it, passed her arm over his neck, and drew his face to hers. She knew that he only feigned to be asleep, but she said nothing to him.

He started by and by as if he were just then awakened, and asked who that was, and what was the matter?

'Tom, have you anything to tell me? If ever you loved me in your life, and have anything concealed from every one besides, tell it to me.'

'I don't know what you mean, Loo. You have been dreaming.'

'My dear brother:' she laid her head down on his pillow, and her hair flowed over him as if she would hide him from every one but herself: 'is there nothing that you have to tell me? Is there nothing you can tell me if you will? You can tell me nothing that will change me. O Tom, tell me the truth!'

'I don't know what you mean, Loo!'

'As you lie here alone, my dear, in the melancholy night, so you must lie somewhere one night, when even I, if I am living then, shall have left you. As I am here beside you, barefoot, unclothed, undistinguishable in darkness, so must I lie through all the night of my decay, until I am dust. In the name of that time, Tom, tell me the truth now!'

'What is it you want to know?'

'You may be certain;' in the energy of her love she took him to her bosom as if he were a child; 'that I will not reproach you. You may be certain that I will be compassionate and true to you. You may be certain that I will save you at whatever cost. O Tom, have you nothing to tell me? Whisper very softly. Say only "yes," and I shall understand you!'

She turned her ear to his lips, but he remained doggedly silent.

'Not a word, Tom?'

'How can I say Yes, or how can I say No, when I don't know what you mean? Loo, you are a brave, kind girl, worthy I begin to think of a better brother than I am. But I have nothing more to say. Go to bed, go to bed.'

'You are tired,' she whispered presently, more in her usual way.

'Yes, I am quite tired out.'

'You have been so hurried and disturbed to-day. Have any fresh discoveries been made?'

'Only those you have heard of, from - him.'

'Tom, have you said to any one that we made a visit to those people, and that we saw those three together?'

'No. Didn't you yourself particularly ask me to keep it quiet when you asked me to go there with you?'

'Yes. But I did not know then what was going to happen.'

'Nor I neither. How could I?'

He was very quick upon her with this retort.

'Ought I to say, after what has happened,' said his sister, standing by the bed - she had gradually withdrawn herself and risen, 'that I made that visit? Should I say so? Must I say so?'

'Good Heavens, Loo,' returned her brother, 'you are not in the habit of asking my advice. say what you like. If you keep it to yourself, I shall keep it to myself. If you disclose it, there's an end of it.'

It was too dark for either to see the other's face; but each seemed very attentive, and to consider before speaking.

'Tom, do you believe the man I gave the money to, is really implicated in this crime?'

'I don't know. I don't see why he shouldn't be.'

'He seemed to me an honest man.'

'Another person may seem to you dishonest, and yet not be so.'

There was a pause, for he had hesitated and stopped.

'In short,' resumed Tom, as if he had made up his mind, 'if you come to that, perhaps I was so far from being altogether in his favour, that I took him outside the door to tell him quietly, that I thought he might consider himself very well off to get such a windfall as he had got from my sister, and that I hoped he would make good use of it. You remember whether I took him out or not. I say nothing against the man; he may be a very good fellow, for anything I know; I hope he is.'

'Was he offended by what you said?'

'No, he took it pretty well; he was civil enough. Where are you, Loo?' He sat up in bed and kissed her. 'Good night, my dear, good night.'

'You have nothing more to tell me?'

'No. What should I have? You wouldn't have me tell you a lie!'

'I wouldn't have you do that to-night, Tom, of all the nights in your life; many and much happier as I hope they will be.'

'Thank you, my dear Loo. I am so tired, that I am sure I wonder I don't say anything to get to sleep. Go to bed, go to bed.'

Kissing her again, he turned round, drew the coverlet over his head, and lay as still as if that time had come by which she had adjured him. She stood for some time at the bedside before she slowly moved away. She stopped at the door, looked back when she had opened it, and asked him if he had called her? But he lay still, and she softly closed the door and returned to her room.

Then the wretched boy looked cautiously up and found her gone, crept out of bed, fastened his door, and threw himself upon his pillow again: tearing his hair, morosely crying, grudgingly loving her, hatefully but impenitently spurning himself, and no less hatefully and unprofitably spurning all the good in the world.

CHAPTER IX - HEARING THE LAST OF IT

MRS. SPARSIT, lying by to recover the tone of her nerves in Mr. Bounderby's retreat, kept such a sharp look-out, night and day, under her Coriolanian eyebrows, that her eyes, like a couple of lighthouses on an iron-bound coast, might have warned all prudent mariners from that bold rock her Roman nose and the dark and craggy region in its neighbourhood, but for the placidity of her manner. Although it was hard to believe that her retiring for the night could be anything but a form, so severely wide awake were those classical eyes of hers, and so impossible did it seem that her rigid nose could yield to any relaxing influence, yet her manner of sitting, smoothing her uncomfortable, not to say, gritty mittens (they were constructed of a cool fabric like a meat-safe), or of ambling to unknown places of destination with her foot in her cotton stirrup, was so perfectly serene, that most observers would have been constrained to suppose her a dove, embodied by some freak of nature, in the earthly tabernacle of a bird of the hook-beaked order.

She was a most wonderful woman for prowling about the house. How she got from story to story was a mystery beyond solution. A lady so decorous in herself, and so highly connected, was not to be suspected of dropping over the banisters or sliding down them, yet her extraordinary facility of locomotion suggested the wild idea. Another noticeable circumstance in Mrs. Sparsit was, that she was never hurried. She would shoot with consummate velocity from the roof to the hall, yet would be in full possession of her breath and dignity on the moment of her arrival there. Neither was she ever seen by human vision to go at a great pace.

She took very kindly to Mr. Harthouse, and had some pleasant conversation with him soon after her arrival. She made him her stately curtsey in the garden, one morning before breakfast.

'It appears but yesterday, sir,' said Mrs. Sparsit, 'that I had the honour of receiving you at the Bank, when you were so good as to wish to be made acquainted with Mr. Bounderby's address.'

'An occasion, I am sure, not to be forgotten by myself in the course of Ages,' said Mr. Harthouse, inclining his head to Mrs. Sparsit with the most indolent of all possible airs.

'We live in a singular world, sir,' said Mrs. Sparsit.

'I have had the honour, by a coincidence of which I am proud, to have made a remark, similar in effect, though not so epigrammatically expressed.'

'A singular world, I would say, sir,' pursued Mrs. Sparsit; after acknowledging the compliment with a drooping of her dark eyebrows, not altogether so mild in its expression as her voice was in its dulcet tones; 'as regards the intimacies we form at one time, with individuals we were quite ignorant of, at another. I recall, sir, that on that occasion you went so far as to say you were actually apprehensive of Miss Gradgrind.'

'Your memory does me more honour than my insignificance deserves. I availed myself of your obliging hints to correct my timidity, and it is unnecessary to add that they were perfectly accurate. Mrs. Sparsit's talent for - in fact for anything requiring accuracy - with a combination of strength of mind - and Family - is too habitually developed to admit of any question.' He was almost falling asleep over this compliment; it took him so long to get through, and his mind wandered so much in the course of its execution.

'You found Miss Gradgrind - I really cannot call her Mrs. Bounderby; it's very absurd of me - as youthful as I described her?' asked Mrs. Sparsit, sweetly.

'You drew her portrait perfectly,' said Mr. Harthouse. 'Presented her dead image.'

'Very engaging, sir,' said Mrs. Sparsit, causing her mittens slowly to revolve over one another.

'Highly so.'

'It used to be considered,' said Mrs. Sparsit, 'that Miss Gradgrind was wanting in animation, but I confess she appears to me considerably and strikingly improved in that respect. Ay, and indeed here is Mr. Bounderby!' cried Mrs. Sparsit, nodding her head a great many times, as if she had been talking and thinking of no one else. 'How do you find yourself this morning, sir? Pray let us see you cheerful, sir.'

Now, these persistent assuagements of his misery, and lightenings of his load, had by this time begun to have the effect of making Mr. Bounderby softer than usual towards Mrs. Sparsit, and harder than usual to most other people from his wife downward. So, when Mrs. Sparsit said with forced lightness of heart, 'You want your breakfast, sir, but I dare say Miss Gradgrind will soon be here to preside at the table,' Mr. Bounderby replied, 'If I waited to be taken care of by my wife, ma'am, I believe you know pretty well I should wait till Doomsday, so I'll trouble you to take charge of the teapot.' Mrs. Sparsit complied, and assumed her old position at table.

This again made the excellent woman vastly sentimental. She was so humble withal, that when Louisa appeared, she rose, protesting she never could think of sitting in that place under existing circumstances, often as she had had the honour of making Mr. Bounderby's breakfast, before Mrs. Gradgrind - she begged pardon, she meant to say Miss Bounderby - she hoped to be excused, but she really could not get it right yet, though she trusted to become familiar with it by and by - had assumed her present position. It was only (she observed) because Miss Gradgrind happened to be a little late, and Mr. Bounderby's time was so very precious, and she knew it of old to be so essential that he should breakfast to the moment, that she had taken the liberty of complying with his request; long as his will had been a law to her.

'There! Stop where you are, ma'am,' said Mr. Bounderby, 'stop where you are! Mrs. Bounderby will be very glad to be relieved of the trouble, I believe.'

'Don't say that, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit, almost with severity, 'because that is very unkind to Mrs. Bounderby. And to be unkind is not to be you, sir.'

'You may set your mind at rest, ma'am. - You can take it very quietly, can't you, Loo?' said Mr. Bounderby, in a blustering way to his wife.

'Of course. It is of no moment. Why should it be of any importance to me?'

'Why should it be of any importance to any one, Mrs. Sparsit, ma'am?' said Mr. Bounderby, swelling with a sense of slight. 'You attach too much importance to these things, ma'am. By George, you'll be corrupted in some of your notions here. You are old- fashioned, ma'am. You are behind Tom Gradgrind's children's time.'

'What is the matter with you?' asked Louisa, coldly surprised.
'What has given you offence?'

'Offence!' repeated Bounderby. 'Do you suppose if there was any offence given me, I shouldn't name it, and request to have it corrected? I am a straightforward man, I believe. I don't go beating about for side-winds.'

'I suppose no one ever had occasion to think you too diffident, or too delicate,' Louisa answered him composedly: 'I have never made that objection to you, either as a child or as a woman. I don't understand what you would have.'

'Have?' returned Mr. Bounderby. 'Nothing. Otherwise, don't you,
Loo Bounderby, know thoroughly well that I, Josiah Bounderby of
Coketown, would have it?'

She looked at him, as he struck the table and made the teacups ring, with a proud colour in her face that was a new change, Mr. Harthouse thought. 'You are incomprehensible this morning,' said Louisa. 'Pray take no further trouble to explain yourself. I am not curious to know your meaning. What does it matter?'

Nothing more was said on this theme, and Mr. Harthouse was soon idly gay on indifferent subjects. But from this day, the Sparsit action upon Mr. Bounderby threw Louisa and James Harthouse more together, and strengthened the dangerous alienation from her husband and confidence against him with another, into which she had fallen by degrees so fine that she could not retrace them if she tried. But whether she ever tried or no, lay hidden in her own closed heart.

Mrs. Sparsit was so much affected on this particular occasion, that, assisting Mr. Bounderby to his hat after breakfast, and being then alone with him in the hall, she imprinted a chaste kiss upon his hand, murmured 'My benefactor!' and retired, overwhelmed with grief. Yet it is an indubitable fact, within the cognizance of this history, that five minutes after he had left the house in the self-same hat, the same descendant of the Scadgerses and connexion by matrimony of the Powlers, shook her right-hand mitten at his portrait, made a contemptuous grimace at that work of art, and said 'Serve you right, you Noodle, and I am glad of it.'

Mr. Bounderby had not been long gone, when Bitzer appeared. Bitzer had come down by train, shrieking and rattling over the long line of arches that bestrode the wild country of past and present coal- pits, with an express from Stone Lodge. It was a hasty note to inform Louisa that Mrs. Gradgrind lay very ill. She had never been well within her daughter's knowledge; but, she had declined within the last few days, had continued sinking all through the night, and was now as nearly dead, as her limited capacity of being in any state that implied the ghost of an intention to get out of it, allowed.

Accompanied by the lightest of porters, fit colourless servitor at Death's door when Mrs. Gradgrind knocked, Louisa rumbled to Coketown, over the coal-pits past and present, and was whirled into its smoky jaws. She dismissed the messenger to his own devices, and rode away to her old home.

She had seldom been there since her marriage. Her father was usually sifting and sifting at his parliamentary cinder-heap in London (without being observed to turn up many precious articles among the rubbish), and was still hard at it in the national dust- yard. Her mother had taken it rather as a disturbance than otherwise, to be visited, as she reclined upon her sofa; young people, Louisa felt herself all unfit for; Sissy she had never softened to again, since the night when the stroller's child had raised her eyes to look at Mr. Bounderby's intended wife. She had no inducements to go back, and had rarely gone.

Neither, as she approached her old home now, did any of the best influences of old home descend upon her. The dreams of childhood - its airy fables; its graceful, beautiful, humane, impossible adornments of the world beyond: so good to be believed in once, so good to be remembered when outgrown, for then the least among them rises to the stature of a great Charity in the heart, suffering little children to come into the midst of it, and to keep with their pure hands a garden in the stony ways of this world, wherein it were better for all the children of Adam that they should oftener sun themselves, simple and trustful, and not worldly-wise - what had she to do with these? Remembrances of how she had journeyed to the little that she knew, by the enchanted roads of what she and millions of innocent creatures had hoped and imagined; of how, first coming upon Reason through the tender light of Fancy, she had seen it a beneficent god, deferring to gods as great as itself; not a grim Idol, cruel and cold, with its victims bound hand to foot, and its big dumb shape set up with a sightless stare, never to be moved by anything but so many calculated tons of leverage - what had she to do with these? Her remembrances of home and childhood were remembrances of the drying up of every spring and fountain in her young heart as it gushed out. The golden waters were not there. They were flowing for the fertilization of the land where grapes are gathered from thorns, and figs from thistles.

She went, with a heavy, hardened kind of sorrow upon her, into the house and into her mother's room. Since the time of her leaving home, Sissy had lived with the rest of the family on equal terms. Sissy was at her mother's side; and Jane, her sister, now ten or twelve years old, was in the room.

There was great trouble before it could be made known to Mrs. Gradgrind that her eldest child was there. She reclined, propped up, from mere habit, on a couch: as nearly in her old usual attitude, as anything so helpless could be kept in. She had positively refused to take to her bed; on the ground that if she did, she would never hear the last of it.

Her feeble voice sounded so far away in her bundle of shawls, and the sound of another voice addressing her seemed to take such a long time in getting down to her ears, that she might have been lying at the bottom of a well. The poor lady was nearer Truth than she ever had been: which had much to do with it.

On being told that Mrs. Bounderby was there, she replied, at cross-purposes, that she had never called him by that name since he married Louisa; that pending her choice of an objectionable name, she had called him J; and that she could not at present depart from that regulation, not being yet provided with a permanent substitute. Louisa had sat by her for some minutes, and had spoken to her often, before she arrived at a clear understanding who it was. She then seemed to come to it all at once.

'Well, my dear,' said Mrs. Gradgrind, 'and I hope you are going on satisfactorily to yourself. It was all your father's doing. He set his heart upon it. And he ought to know.'

'I want to hear of you, mother; not of myself.'

'You want to hear of me, my dear? That's something new, I am sure, when anybody wants to hear of me. Not at all well, Louisa. Very faint and giddy.'

'Are you in pain, dear mother?'

'I think there's a pain somewhere in the room,' said Mrs. Gradgrind, 'but I couldn't positively say that I have got it.'

After this strange speech, she lay silent for some time. Louisa, holding her hand, could feel no pulse; but kissing it, could see a slight thin thread of life in fluttering motion.

'You very seldom see your sister,' said Mrs. Gradgrind. 'She grows like you. I wish you would look at her. Sissy, bring her here.'

She was brought, and stood with her hand in her sister's. Louisa had observed her with her arm round Sissy's neck, and she felt the difference of this approach.

'Do you see the likeness, Louisa?'

'Yes, mother. I should think her like me. But - '

'Eh! Yes, I always say so,' Mrs. Gradgrind cried, with unexpected quickness. 'And that reminds me. I - I want to speak to you, my dear. Sissy, my good girl, leave us alone a minute.' Louisa had relinquished the hand: had thought that her sister's was a better and brighter face than hers had ever been: had seen in it, not without a rising feeling of resentment, even in that place and at that time, something of the gentleness of the other face in the room; the sweet face with the trusting eyes, made paler than watching and sympathy made it, by the rich dark hair.

Left alone with her mother, Louisa saw her lying with an awful lull upon her face, like one who was floating away upon some great water, all resistance over, content to be carried down the stream. She put the shadow of a hand to her lips again, and recalled her.

'You were going to speak to me, mother.'

'Eh? Yes, to be sure, my dear. You know your father is almost always away now, and therefore I must write to him about it.'

'About what, mother? Don't be troubled. About what?'

'You must remember, my dear, that whenever I have said anything, on any subject, I have never heard the last of it: and consequently, that I have long left off saying anything.'

'I can hear you, mother.' But, it was only by dint of bending down to her ear, and at the same time attentively watching the lips as they moved, that she could link such faint and broken sounds into any chain of connexion.

'You learnt a great deal, Louisa, and so did your brother. Ologies of all kinds from morning to night. If there is any Ology left, of any description, that has not been worn to rags in this house, all I can say is, I hope I shall never hear its name.'

'I can hear you, mother, when you have strength to go on.' This, to keep her from floating away.

'But there is something - not an Ology at all - that your father has missed, or forgotten, Louisa. I don't know what it is. I have often sat with Sissy near me, and thought about it. I shall never get its name now. But your father may. It makes me restless. I want to write to him, to find out for God's sake, what it is. Give me a pen, give me a pen.'

Even the power of restlessness was gone, except from the poor head, which could just turn from side to side.

She fancied, however, that her request had been complied with, and that the pen she could not have held was in her hand. It matters little what figures of wonderful no-meaning she began to trace upon her wrappers. The hand soon stopped in the midst of them; the light that had always been feeble and dim behind the weak transparency, went out; and even Mrs. Gradgrind, emerged from the shadow in which man walketh and disquieteth himself in vain, took upon her the dread solemnity of the sages and patriarchs.

CHAPTER X - MRS. SPARSIT'S STAIRCASE

MRS. SPARSIT'S nerves being slow to recover their tone, the worthy woman made a stay of some weeks in duration at Mr. Bounderby's retreat, where, notwithstanding her anchorite turn of mind based upon her becoming consciousness of her altered station, she resigned herself with noble fortitude to lodging, as one may say, in clover, and feeding on the fat of the land. During the whole term of this recess from the guardianship of the Bank, Mrs. Sparsit was a pattern of consistency; continuing to take such pity on Mr. Bounderby to his face, as is rarely taken on man, and to call his portrait a Noodle to its face, with the greatest acrimony and contempt.

Mr. Bounderby, having got it into his explosive composition that Mrs. Sparsit was a highly superior woman to perceive that he had that general cross upon him in his deserts (for he had not yet settled what it was), and further that Louisa would have objected to her as a frequent visitor if it had comported with his greatness that she should object to anything he chose to do, resolved not to lose sight of Mrs. Sparsit easily. So when her nerves were strung up to the pitch of again consuming sweetbreads in solitude, he said to her at the dinner-table, on the day before her departure, 'I tell you what, ma'am; you shall come down here of a Saturday, while the fine weather lasts, and stay till Monday.' To which Mrs. Sparsit returned, in effect, though not of the Mahomedan persuasion: 'To hear is to obey.'

Now, Mrs. Sparsit was not a poetical woman; but she took an idea in the nature of an allegorical fancy, into her head. Much watching of Louisa, and much consequent observation of her impenetrable demeanour, which keenly whetted and sharpened Mrs. Sparsit's edge, must have given her as it were a lift, in the way of inspiration. She erected in her mind a mighty Staircase, with a dark pit of shame and ruin at the bottom; and down those stairs, from day to day and hour to hour, she saw Louisa coming.

It became the business of Mrs. Sparsit's life, to look up at her staircase, and to watch Louisa coming down. Sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly, sometimes several steps at one bout, sometimes stopping, never turning back. If she had once turned back, it might have been the death of Mrs. Sparsit in spleen and grief.

She had been descending steadily, to the day, and on the day, when Mr. Bounderby issued the weekly invitation recorded above. Mrs. Sparsit was in good spirits, and inclined to be conversational.

'And pray, sir,' said she, 'if I may venture to ask a question appertaining to any subject on which you show reserve - which is indeed hardy in me, for I well know you have a reason for everything you do - have you received intelligence respecting the robbery?'

'Why, ma'am, no; not yet. Under the circumstances, I didn't expect it yet. Rome wasn't built in a day, ma'am.'

'Very true, sir,' said Mrs. Sparsit, shaking her head.

'Nor yet in a week, ma'am.'

'No, indeed, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit, with a gentle melancholy upon her.

'In a similar manner, ma'am,' said Bounderby, 'I can wait, you know. If Romulus and Remus could wait, Josiah Bounderby can wait. They were better off in their youth than I was, however. They had a she-wolf for a nurse; I had only a she-wolf for a grandmother. She didn't give any milk, ma'am; she gave bruises. She was a regular Alderney at that.'

'Ah!' Mrs. Sparsit sighed and shuddered.

'No, ma'am,' continued Bounderby, 'I have not heard anything more about it. It's in hand, though; and young Tom, who rather sticks to business at present - something new for him; he hadn't the schooling I had - is helping. My injunction is, Keep it quiet, and let it seem to blow over. Do what you like under the rose, but don't give a sign of what you're about; or half a hundred of 'em will combine together and get this fellow who has bolted, out of reach for good. Keep it quiet, and the thieves will grow in confidence by little and little, and we shall have 'em.'

'Very sagacious indeed, sir,' said Mrs. Sparsit. 'Very interesting. The old woman you mentioned, sir - '

'The old woman I mentioned, ma'am,' said Bounderby, cutting the matter short, as it was nothing to boast about, 'is not laid hold of; but, she may take her oath she will be, if that is any satisfaction to her villainous old mind. In the mean time, ma'am, I am of opinion, if you ask me my opinion, that the less she is talked about, the better.'

The same evening, Mrs. Sparsit, in her chamber window, resting from her packing operations, looked towards her great staircase and saw Louisa still descending.

She sat by Mr. Harthouse, in an alcove in the garden, talking very low; he stood leaning over her, as they whispered together, and his face almost touched her hair. 'If not quite!' said Mrs. Sparsit, straining her hawk's eyes to the utmost. Mrs. Sparsit was too distant to hear a word of their discourse, or even to know that they were speaking softly, otherwise than from the expression of their figures; but what they said was this:

'You recollect the man, Mr. Harthouse?'

'Oh, perfectly!'

'His face, and his manner, and what he said?'

'Perfectly. And an infinitely dreary person he appeared to me to be. Lengthy and prosy in the extreme. It was knowing to hold forth, in the humble-virtue school of eloquence; but, I assure you I thought at the time, "My good fellow, you are over-doing this!"'

'It has been very difficult to me to think ill of that man.'

'My dear Louisa - as Tom says.' Which he never did say. 'You know no good of the fellow?'

'No, certainly.'

'Nor of any other such person?'

'How can I,' she returned, with more of her first manner on her than he had lately seen, 'when I know nothing of them, men or women?'

'My dear Louisa, then consent to receive the submissive representation of your devoted friend, who knows something of several varieties of his excellent fellow-creatures - for excellent they are, I am quite ready to believe, in spite of such little foibles as always helping themselves to what they can get hold of. This fellow talks. Well; every fellow talks. He professes morality. Well; all sorts of humbugs profess morality. From the House of Commons to the House of Correction, there is a general profession of morality, except among our people; it really is that exception which makes our people quite reviving. You saw and heard the case. Here was one of the fluffy classes pulled up extremely short by my esteemed friend Mr. Bounderby - who, as we know, is not possessed of that delicacy which would soften so tight a hand. The member of the fluffy classes was injured, exasperated, left the house grumbling, met somebody who proposed to him to go in for some share in this Bank business, went in, put something in his pocket which had nothing in it before, and relieved his mind extremely. Really he would have been an uncommon, instead of a common, fellow, if he had not availed himself of such an opportunity. Or he may have originated it altogether, if he had the cleverness.'

'I almost feel as though it must be bad in me,' returned Louisa, after sitting thoughtful awhile, 'to be so ready to agree with you, and to be so lightened in my heart by what you say.'

'I only say what is reasonable; nothing worse. I have talked it over with my friend Tom more than once - of course I remain on terms of perfect confidence with Tom - and he is quite of my opinion, and I am quite of his. Will you walk?'

They strolled away, among the lanes beginning to be indistinct in the twilight - she leaning on his arm - and she little thought how she was going down, down, down, Mrs. Sparsit's staircase.

Night and day, Mrs. Sparsit kept it standing. When Louisa had arrived at the bottom and disappeared in the gulf, it might fall in upon her if it would; but, until then, there it was to be, a Building, before Mrs. Sparsit's eyes. And there Louisa always was, upon it.

And always gliding down, down, down!

Mrs. Sparsit saw James Harthouse come and go; she heard of him here and there; she saw the changes of the face he had studied; she, too, remarked to a nicety how and when it clouded, how and when it cleared; she kept her black eyes wide open, with no touch of pity, with no touch of compunction, all absorbed in interest. In the interest of seeing her, ever drawing, with no hand to stay her, nearer and nearer to the bottom of this new Giant's Staircase.

With all her deference for Mr. Bounderby as contradistinguished from his portrait, Mrs. Sparsit had not the smallest intention of interrupting the descent. Eager to see it accomplished, and yet patient, she waited for the last fall, as for the ripeness and fulness of the harvest of her hopes. Hushed in expectancy, she kept her wary gaze upon the stairs; and seldom so much as darkly shook her right mitten (with her fist in it), at the figure coming down.

CHAPTER XI - LOWER AND LOWER

THE figure descended the great stairs, steadily, steadily; always verging, like a weight in deep water, to the black gulf at the bottom.

Mr. Gradgrind, apprised of his wife's decease, made an expedition from London, and buried her in a business-like manner. He then returned with promptitude to the national cinder-heap, and resumed his sifting for the odds and ends he wanted, and his throwing of the dust about into the eyes of other people who wanted other odds and ends - in fact resumed his parliamentary duties.

In the meantime, Mrs. Sparsit kept unwinking watch and ward. Separated from her staircase, all the week, by the length of iron road dividing Coketown from the country house, she yet maintained her cat-like observation of Louisa, through her husband, through her brother, through James Harthouse, through the outsides of letters and packets, through everything animate and inanimate that at any time went near the stairs. 'Your foot on the last step, my lady,' said Mrs. Sparsit, apostrophizing the descending figure, with the aid of her threatening mitten, 'and all your art shall never blind me.'

Art or nature though, the original stock of Louisa's character or the graft of circumstances upon it, - her curious reserve did baffle, while it stimulated, one as sagacious as Mrs. Sparsit. There were times when Mr. James Harthouse was not sure of her. There were times when he could not read the face he had studied so long; and when this lonely girl was a greater mystery to him, than any woman of the world with a ring of satellites to help her.

So the time went on; until it happened that Mr. Bounderby was called away from home by business which required his presence elsewhere, for three or four days. It was on a Friday that he intimated this to Mrs. Sparsit at the Bank, adding: 'But you'll go down to-morrow, ma'am, all the same. You'll go down just as if I was there. It will make no difference to you.'

'Pray, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit, reproachfully, 'let me beg you not to say that. Your absence will make a vast difference to me, sir, as I think you very well know.'

'Well, ma'am, then you must get on in my absence as well as you can,' said Mr. Bounderby, not displeased.

'Mr. Bounderby,' retorted Mrs. Sparsit, 'your will is to me a law, sir; otherwise, it might be my inclination to dispute your kind commands, not feeling sure that it will be quite so agreeable to Miss Gradgrind to receive me, as it ever is to your own munificent hospitality. But you shall say no more, sir. I will go, upon your invitation.'

'Why, when I invite you to my house, ma'am,' said Bounderby, opening his eyes, 'I should hope you want no other invitation.'

'No, indeed, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit, 'I should hope not. Say no more, sir. I would, sir, I could see you gay again.'

'What do you mean, ma'am?' blustered Bounderby.

'Sir,' rejoined Mrs. Sparsit, 'there was wont to be an elasticity in you which I sadly miss. Be buoyant, sir!'

Mr. Bounderby, under the influence of this difficult adjuration, backed up by her compassionate eye, could only scratch his head in a feeble and ridiculous manner, and afterwards assert himself at a distance, by being heard to bully the small fry of business all the morning.

'Bitzer,' said Mrs. Sparsit that afternoon, when her patron was gone on his journey, and the Bank was closing, 'present my compliments to young Mr. Thomas, and ask him if he would step up and partake of a lamb chop and walnut ketchup, with a glass of India ale?' Young Mr. Thomas being usually ready for anything in that way, returned a gracious answer, and followed on its heels. 'Mr. Thomas,' said Mrs. Sparsit, 'these plain viands being on table, I thought you might be tempted.'

'Thank'ee, Mrs. Sparsit,' said the whelp. And gloomily fell to.

'How is Mr. Harthouse, Mr. Tom?' asked Mrs. Sparsit.

'Oh, he's all right,' said Tom.

'Where may he be at present?' Mrs. Sparsit asked in a light conversational manner, after mentally devoting the whelp to the Furies for being so uncommunicative.

'He is shooting in Yorkshire,' said Tom. 'Sent Loo a basket half as big as a church, yesterday.'

'The kind of gentleman, now,' said Mrs. Sparsit, sweetly, 'whom one might wager to be a good shot!'

'Crack,' said Tom.

He had long been a down-looking young fellow, but this characteristic had so increased of late, that he never raised his eyes to any face for three seconds together. Mrs. Sparsit consequently had ample means of watching his looks, if she were so inclined.

'Mr. Harthouse is a great favourite of mine,' said Mrs. Sparsit, 'as indeed he is of most people. May we expect to see him again shortly, Mr. Tom?'

'Why, I expect to see him to-morrow,' returned the whelp.

'Good news!' cried Mrs. Sparsit, blandly.

'I have got an appointment with him to meet him in the evening at the station here,' said Tom, 'and I am going to dine with him afterwards, I believe. He is not coming down to the country house for a week or so, being due somewhere else. At least, he says so; but I shouldn't wonder if he was to stop here over Sunday, and stray that way.'

'Which reminds me!' said Mrs. Sparsit. 'Would you remember a message to your sister, Mr. Tom, if I was to charge you with one?'

'Well? I'll try,' returned the reluctant whelp, 'if it isn't a long un.'

'It is merely my respectful compliments,' said Mrs. Sparsit, 'and I fear I may not trouble her with my society this week; being still a little nervous, and better perhaps by my poor self.'

'Oh! If that's all,' observed Tom, 'it wouldn't much matter, even if I was to forget it, for Loo's not likely to think of you unless she sees you.'

Having paid for his entertainment with this agreeable compliment, he relapsed into a hangdog silence until there was no more India ale left, when he said, 'Well, Mrs. Sparsit, I must be off!' and went off.

Next day, Saturday, Mrs. Sparsit sat at her window all day long looking at the customers coming in and out, watching the postmen, keeping an eye on the general traffic of the street, revolving many things in her mind, but, above all, keeping her attention on her staircase. The evening come, she put on her bonnet and shawl, and went quietly out: having her reasons for hovering in a furtive way about the station by which a passenger would arrive from Yorkshire, and for preferring to peep into it round pillars and corners, and out of ladies' waiting-room windows, to appearing in its precincts openly.

Tom was in attendance, and loitered about until the expected train came in. It brought no Mr. Harthouse. Tom waited until the crowd had dispersed, and the bustle was over; and then referred to a posted list of trains, and took counsel with porters. That done, he strolled away idly, stopping in the street and looking up it and down it, and lifting his hat off and putting it on again, and yawning and stretching himself, and exhibiting all the symptoms of mortal weariness to be expected in one who had still to wait until the next train should come in, an hour and forty minutes hence.

'This is a device to keep him out of the way,' said Mrs. Sparsit, starting from the dull office window whence she had watched him last. 'Harthouse is with his sister now!'

It was the conception of an inspired moment, and she shot off with her utmost swiftness to work it out. The station for the country house was at the opposite end of the town, the time was short, the road not easy; but she was so quick in pouncing on a disengaged coach, so quick in darting out of it, producing her money, seizing her ticket, and diving into the train, that she was borne along the arches spanning the land of coal-pits past and present, as if she had been caught up in a cloud and whirled away.

All the journey, immovable in the air though never left behind; plain to the dark eyes of her mind, as the electric wires which ruled a colossal strip of music-paper out of the evening sky, were plain to the dark eyes of her body; Mrs. Sparsit saw her staircase, with the figure coming down. Very near the bottom now. Upon the brink of the abyss.

An overcast September evening, just at nightfall, saw beneath its drooping eyelids Mrs. Sparsit glide out of her carriage, pass down the wooden steps of the little station into a stony road, cross it into a green lane, and become hidden in a summer-growth of leaves and branches. One or two late birds sleepily chirping in their nests, and a bat heavily crossing and recrossing her, and the reek of her own tread in the thick dust that felt like velvet, were all Mrs. Sparsit heard or saw until she very softly closed a gate.

She went up to the house, keeping within the shrubbery, and went round it, peeping between the leaves at the lower windows. Most of them were open, as they usually were in such warm weather, but there were no lights yet, and all was silent. She tried the garden with no better effect. She thought of the wood, and stole towards it, heedless of long grass and briers: of worms, snails, and slugs, and all the creeping things that be. With her dark eyes and her hook nose warily in advance of her, Mrs. Sparsit softly crushed her way through the thick undergrowth, so intent upon her object that she probably would have done no less, if the wood had been a wood of adders.

Hark!

The smaller birds might have tumbled out of their nests, fascinated by the glittering of Mrs. Sparsit's eyes in the gloom, as she stopped and listened.

Low voices close at hand. His voice and hers. The appointment was a device to keep the brother away! There they were yonder, by the felled tree.

Bending low among the dewy grass, Mrs. Sparsit advanced closer to them. She drew herself up, and stood behind a tree, like Robinson Crusoe in his ambuscade against the savages; so near to them that at a spring, and that no great one, she could have touched them both. He was there secretly, and had not shown himself at the house. He had come on horseback, and must have passed through the neighbouring fields; for his horse was tied to the meadow side of the fence, within a few paces.

'My dearest love,' said he, 'what could I do? Knowing you were alone, was it possible that I could stay away?'

'You may hang your head, to make yourself the more attractive; I don't know what they see in you when you hold it up,' thought Mrs. Sparsit; 'but you little think, my dearest love, whose eyes are on you!'

That she hung her head, was certain. She urged him to go away, she commanded him to go away; but she neither turned her face to him, nor raised it. Yet it was remarkable that she sat as still as ever the amiable woman in ambuscade had seen her sit, at any period in her life. Her hands rested in one another, like the hands of a statue; and even her manner of speaking was not hurried.

'My dear child,' said Harthouse; Mrs. Sparsit saw with delight that his arm embraced her; 'will you not bear with my society for a little while?'

'Not here.'

'Where, Louisa?

'Not here.'

'But we have so little time to make so much of, and I have come so far, and am altogether so devoted, and distracted. There never was a slave at once so devoted and ill-used by his mistress. To look for your sunny welcome that has warmed me into life, and to be received in your frozen manner, is heart-rending.'

'Am I to say again, that I must be left to myself here?'

'But we must meet, my dear Louisa. Where shall we meet?'

They both started. The listener started, guiltily, too; for she thought there was another listener among the trees. It was only rain, beginning to fall fast, in heavy drops.

'Shall I ride up to the house a few minutes hence, innocently supposing that its master is at home and will be charmed to receive me?'

'No!'

'Your cruel commands are implicitly to be obeyed; though I am the most unfortunate fellow in the world, I believe, to have been insensible to all other women, and to have fallen prostrate at last under the foot of the most beautiful, and the most engaging, and the most imperious. My dearest Louisa, I cannot go myself, or let you go, in this hard abuse of your power.'

Mrs. Sparsit saw him detain her with his encircling arm, and heard him then and there, within her (Mrs. Sparsit's) greedy hearing, tell her how he loved her, and how she was the stake for which he ardently desired to play away all that he had in life. The objects he had lately pursued, turned worthless beside her; such success as was almost in his grasp, he flung away from him like the dirt it was, compared with her. Its pursuit, nevertheless, if it kept him near her, or its renunciation if it took him from her, or flight if she shared it, or secrecy if she commanded it, or any fate, or every fate, all was alike to him, so that she was true to him, - the man who had seen how cast away she was, whom she had inspired at their first meeting with an admiration, an interest, of which he had thought himself incapable, whom she had received into her confidence, who was devoted to her and adored her. All this, and more, in his hurry, and in hers, in the whirl of her own gratified malice, in the dread of being discovered, in the rapidly increasing noise of heavy rain among the leaves, and a thunderstorm rolling up - Mrs. Sparsit received into her mind, set off with such an unavoidable halo of confusion and indistinctness, that when at length he climbed the fence and led his horse away, she was not sure where they were to meet, or when, except that they had said it was to be that night.

But one of them yet remained in the darkness before her; and while she tracked that one she must be right. 'Oh, my dearest love,' thought Mrs. Sparsit, 'you little think how well attended you are!'

Mrs. Sparsit saw her out of the wood, and saw her enter the house. What to do next? It rained now, in a sheet of water. Mrs. Sparsit's white stockings were of many colours, green predominating; prickly things were in her shoes; caterpillars slung themselves, in hammocks of their own making, from various parts of her dress; rills ran from her bonnet, and her Roman nose. In such condition, Mrs. Sparsit stood hidden in the density of the shrubbery, considering what next?

Lo, Louisa coming out of the house! Hastily cloaked and muffled, and stealing away. She elopes! She falls from the lowermost stair, and is swallowed up in the gulf.

Indifferent to the rain, and moving with a quick determined step, she struck into a side-path parallel with the ride. Mrs. Sparsit followed in the shadow of the trees, at but a short distance; for it was not easy to keep a figure in view going quickly through the umbrageous darkness.

When she stopped to close the side-gate without noise, Mrs. Sparsit stopped. When she went on, Mrs. Sparsit went on. She went by the way Mrs. Sparsit had come, emerged from the green lane, crossed the stony road, and ascended the wooden steps to the railroad. A train for Coketown would come through presently, Mrs. Sparsit knew; so she understood Coketown to be her first place of destination.

In Mrs. Sparsit's limp and streaming state, no extensive precautions were necessary to change her usual appearance; but, she stopped under the lee of the station wall, tumbled her shawl into a new shape, and put it on over her bonnet. So disguised she had no fear of being recognized when she followed up the railroad steps, and paid her money in the small office. Louisa sat waiting in a corner. Mrs. Sparsit sat waiting in another corner. Both listened to the thunder, which was loud, and to the rain, as it washed off the roof, and pattered on the parapets of the arches. Two or three lamps were rained out and blown out; so, both saw the lightning to advantage as it quivered and zigzagged on the iron tracks.

The seizure of the station with a fit of trembling, gradually deepening to a complaint of the heart, announced the train. Fire and steam, and smoke, and red light; a hiss, a crash, a bell, and a shriek; Louisa put into one carriage, Mrs. Sparsit put into another: the little station a desert speck in the thunderstorm.

Though her teeth chattered in her head from wet and cold, Mrs. Sparsit exulted hugely. The figure had plunged down the precipice, and she felt herself, as it were, attending on the body. Could she, who had been so active in the getting up of the funeral triumph, do less than exult? 'She will be at Coketown long before him,' thought Mrs. Sparsit, 'though his horse is never so good. Where will she wait for him? And where will they go together? Patience. We shall see.'

The tremendous rain occasioned infinite confusion, when the train stopped at its destination. Gutters and pipes had burst, drains had overflowed, and streets were under water. In the first instant of alighting, Mrs. Sparsit turned her distracted eyes towards the waiting coaches, which were in great request. 'She will get into one,' she considered, 'and will be away before I can follow in another. At all risks of being run over, I must see the number, and hear the order given to the coachman.'

But, Mrs. Sparsit was wrong in her calculation. Louisa got into no coach, and was already gone. The black eyes kept upon the railroad-carriage in which she had travelled, settled upon it a moment too late. The door not being opened after several minutes, Mrs. Sparsit passed it and repassed it, saw nothing, looked in, and found it empty. Wet through and through: with her feet squelching and squashing in her shoes whenever she moved; with a rash of rain upon her classical visage; with a bonnet like an over-ripe fig; with all her clothes spoiled; with damp impressions of every button, string, and hook-and-eye she wore, printed off upon her highly connected back; with a stagnant verdure on her general exterior, such as accumulates on an old park fence in a mouldy lane; Mrs. Sparsit had no resource but to burst into tears of bitterness and say, 'I have lost her!'

CHAPTER XII - DOWN

THE national dustmen, after entertaining one another with a great many noisy little fights among themselves, had dispersed for the present, and Mr. Gradgrind was at home for the vacation.

He sat writing in the room with the deadly statistical clock, proving something no doubt - probably, in the main, that the Good Samaritan was a Bad Economist. The noise of the rain did not disturb him much; but it attracted his attention sufficiently to make him raise his head sometimes, as if he were rather remonstrating with the elements. When it thundered very loudly, he glanced towards Coketown, having it in his mind that some of the tall chimneys might be struck by lightning.

The thunder was rolling into distance, and the rain was pouring down like a deluge, when the door of his room opened. He looked round the lamp upon his table, and saw, with amazement, his eldest daughter.

'Louisa!'

'Father, I want to speak to you.'

'What is the matter? How strange you look! And good Heaven,' said Mr. Gradgrind, wondering more and more, 'have you come here exposed to this storm?'

She put her hands to her dress, as if she hardly knew. 'Yes.' Then she uncovered her head, and letting her cloak and hood fall where they might, stood looking at him: so colourless, so dishevelled, so defiant and despairing, that he was afraid of her.

'What is it? I conjure you, Louisa, tell me what is the matter.'

She dropped into a chair before him, and put her cold hand on his arm.

'Father, you have trained me from my cradle?'

'Yes, Louisa.'

'I curse the hour in which I was born to such a destiny.'

He looked at her in doubt and dread, vacantly repeating: 'Curse the hour? Curse the hour?'

'How could you give me life, and take from me all the inappreciable things that raise it from the state of conscious death? Where are the graces of my soul? Where are the sentiments of my heart? What have you done, O father, what have you done, with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here!'

She struck herself with both her hands upon her bosom.

'If it had ever been here, its ashes alone would save me from the void in which my whole life sinks. I did not mean to say this; but, father, you remember the last time we conversed in this room?'

He had been so wholly unprepared for what he heard now, that it was with difficulty he answered, 'Yes, Louisa.'

'What has risen to my lips now, would have risen to my lips then, if you had given me a moment's help. I don't reproach you, father. What you have never nurtured in me, you have never nurtured in yourself; but O! if you had only done so long ago, or if you had only neglected me, what a much better and much happier creature I should have been this day!'

On hearing this, after all his care, he bowed his head upon his hand and groaned aloud.

'Father, if you had known, when we were last together here, what even I feared while I strove against it - as it has been my task from infancy to strive against every natural prompting that has arisen in my heart; if you had known that there lingered in my breast, sensibilities, affections, weaknesses capable of being cherished into strength, defying all the calculations ever made by man, and no more known to his arithmetic than his Creator is, - would you have given me to the husband whom I am now sure that I hate?'

He said, 'No. No, my poor child.'

'Would you have doomed me, at any time, to the frost and blight that have hardened and spoiled me? Would you have robbed me - for no one's enrichment - only for the greater desolation of this world - of the immaterial part of my life, the spring and summer of my belief, my refuge from what is sordid and bad in the real things around me, my school in which I should have learned to be more humble and more trusting with them, and to hope in my little sphere to make them better?'

'O no, no. No, Louisa.'

'Yet, father, if I had been stone blind; if I had groped my way by my sense of touch, and had been free, while I knew the shapes and surfaces of things, to exercise my fancy somewhat, in regard to them; I should have been a million times wiser, happier, more loving, more contented, more innocent and human in all good respects, than I am with the eyes I have. Now, hear what I have come to say.'

He moved, to support her with his arm. She rising as he did so, they stood close together: she, with a hand upon his shoulder, looking fixedly in his face.

'With a hunger and thirst upon me, father, which have never been for a moment appeased; with an ardent impulse towards some region where rules, and figures, and definitions were not quite absolute; I have grown up, battling every inch of my way.'

'I never knew you were unhappy, my child.'

'Father, I always knew it. In this strife I have almost repulsed and crushed my better angel into a demon. What I have learned has left me doubting, misbelieving, despising, regretting, what I have not learned; and my dismal resource has been to think that life would soon go by, and that nothing in it could be worth the pain and trouble of a contest.'

'And you so young, Louisa!' he said with pity.

'And I so young. In this condition, father - for I show you now, without fear or favour, the ordinary deadened state of my mind as I know it - you proposed my husband to me. I took him. I never made a pretence to him or you that I loved him. I knew, and, father, you knew, and he knew, that I never did. I was not wholly indifferent, for I had a hope of being pleasant and useful to Tom. I made that wild escape into something visionary, and have slowly found out how wild it was. But Tom had been the subject of all the little tenderness of my life; perhaps he became so because I knew so well how to pity him. It matters little now, except as it may dispose you to think more leniently of his errors.'

As her father held her in his arms, she put her other hand upon his other shoulder, and still looking fixedly in his face, went on.

'When I was irrevocably married, there rose up into rebellion against the tie, the old strife, made fiercer by all those causes of disparity which arise out of our two individual natures, and which no general laws shall ever rule or state for me, father, until they shall be able to direct the anatomist where to strike his knife into the secrets of my soul.'

'Louisa!' he said, and said imploringly; for he well remembered what had passed between them in their former interview.

'I do not reproach you, father, I make no complaint. I am here with another object.'

'What can I do, child? Ask me what you will.'

'I am coming to it. Father, chance then threw into my way a new acquaintance; a man such as I had had no experience of; used to the world; light, polished, easy; making no pretences; avowing the low estimate of everything, that I was half afraid to form in secret; conveying to me almost immediately, though I don't know how or by what degrees, that he understood me, and read my thoughts. I could not find that he was worse than I. There seemed to be a near affinity between us. I only wondered it should be worth his while, who cared for nothing else, to care so much for me.'

'For you, Louisa!'

Her father might instinctively have loosened his hold, but that he felt her strength departing from her, and saw a wild dilating fire in the eyes steadfastly regarding him.

'I say nothing of his plea for claiming my confidence. It matters very little how he gained it. Father, he did gain it. What you know of the story of my marriage, he soon knew, just as well.'

Her father's face was ashy white, and he held her in both his arms.

'I have done no worse, I have not disgraced you. But if you ask me whether I have loved him, or do love him, I tell you plainly, father, that it may be so. I don't know.'

She took her hands suddenly from his shoulders, and pressed them both upon her side; while in her face, not like itself - and in her figure, drawn up, resolute to finish by a last effort what she had to say - the feelings long suppressed broke loose.

'This night, my husband being away, he has been with me, declaring himself my lover. This minute he expects me, for I could release myself of his presence by no other means. I do not know that I am sorry, I do not know that I am ashamed, I do not know that I am degraded in my own esteem. All that I know is, your philosophy and your teaching will not save me. Now, father, you have brought me to this. Save me by some other means!'

He tightened his hold in time to prevent her sinking on the floor, but she cried out in a terrible voice, 'I shall die if you hold me! Let me fall upon the ground!' And he laid her down there, and saw the pride of his heart and the triumph of his system, lying, an insensible heap, at his feet.

END OF THE SECOND BOOK

BOOK THE THIRD - GARNERING

CHAPTER I - ANOTHER THING NEEDFUL

LOUISA awoke from a torpor, and her eyes languidly opened on her old bed at home, and her old room. It seemed, at first, as if all that had happened since the days when these objects were familiar to her were the shadows of a dream, but gradually, as the objects became more real to her sight, the events became more real to her mind.

She could scarcely move her head for pain and heaviness, her eyes were strained and sore, and she was very weak. A curious passive inattention had such possession of her, that the presence of her little sister in the room did not attract her notice for some time. Even when their eyes had met, and her sister had approached the bed, Louisa lay for minutes looking at her in silence, and suffering her timidly to hold her passive hand, before she asked:

'When was I brought to this room?'

'Last night, Louisa.'

'Who brought me here?'

'Sissy, I believe.'

'Why do you believe so?'

'Because I found her here this morning. She didn't come to my bedside to wake me, as she always does; and I went to look for her. She was not in her own room either; and I went looking for her all over the house, until I found her here taking care of you and cooling your head. Will you see father? Sissy said I was to tell him when you woke.'

'What a beaming face you have, Jane!' said Louisa, as her young sister - timidly still - bent down to kiss her.

'Have I? I am very glad you think so. I am sure it must be Sissy's doing.'

The arm Louisa had begun to twine around her neck, unbent itself. 'You can tell father if you will.' Then, staying her for a moment, she said, 'It was you who made my room so cheerful, and gave it this look of welcome?'

'Oh no, Louisa, it was done before I came. It was - '

Louisa turned upon her pillow, and heard no more. When her sister had withdrawn, she turned her head back again, and lay with her face towards the door, until it opened and her father entered.

He had a jaded anxious look upon him, and his hand, usually steady, trembled in hers. He sat down at the side of the bed, tenderly asking how she was, and dwelling on the necessity of her keeping very quiet after her agitation and exposure to the weather last night. He spoke in a subdued and troubled voice, very different from his usual dictatorial manner; and was often at a loss for words.

'My dear Louisa. My poor daughter.' He was so much at a loss at that place, that he stopped altogether. He tried again.

'My unfortunate child.' The place was so difficult to get over, that he tried again.

'It would be hopeless for me, Louisa, to endeavour to tell you how overwhelmed I have been, and still am, by what broke upon me last night. The ground on which I stand has ceased to be solid under my feet. The only support on which I leaned, and the strength of which it seemed, and still does seem, impossible to question, has given way in an instant. I am stunned by these discoveries. I have no selfish meaning in what I say; but I find the shock of what broke upon me last night, to be very heavy indeed.'

She could give him no comfort herein. She had suffered the wreck of her whole life upon the rock.

'I will not say, Louisa, that if you had by any happy chance undeceived me some time ago, it would have been better for us both; better for your peace, and better for mine. For I am sensible that it may not have been a part of my system to invite any confidence of that kind. I had proved my - my system to myself, and I have rigidly administered it; and I must bear the responsibility of its failures. I only entreat you to believe, my favourite child, that I have meant to do right.'

He said it earnestly, and to do him justice he had. In gauging fathomless deeps with his little mean excise-rod, and in staggering over the universe with his rusty stiff-legged compasses, he had meant to do great things. Within the limits of his short tether he had tumbled about, annihilating the flowers of existence with greater singleness of purpose than many of the blatant personages whose company he kept.

'I am well assured of what you say, father. I know I have been your favourite child. I know you have intended to make me happy. I have never blamed you, and I never shall.'

He took her outstretched hand, and retained it in his.

'My dear, I have remained all night at my table, pondering again and again on what has so painfully passed between us. When I consider your character; when I consider that what has been known to me for hours, has been concealed by you for years; when I consider under what immediate pressure it has been forced from you at last; I come to the conclusion that I cannot but mistrust myself.'

He might have added more than all, when he saw the face now looking at him. He did add it in effect, perhaps, as he softly moved her scattered hair from her forehead with his hand. Such little actions, slight in another man, were very noticeable in him; and his daughter received them as if they had been words of contrition.

'But,' said Mr. Gradgrind, slowly, and with hesitation, as well as with a wretched sense of happiness, 'if I see reason to mistrust myself for the past, Louisa, I should also mistrust myself for the present and the future. To speak unreservedly to you, I do. I am far from feeling convinced now, however differently I might have felt only this time yesterday, that I am fit for the trust you repose in me; that I know how to respond to the appeal you have come home to make to me; that I have the right instinct - supposing it for the moment to be some quality of that nature - how to help you, and to set you right, my child.'

She had turned upon her pillow, and lay with her face upon her arm, so that he could not see it. All her wildness and passion had subsided; but, though softened, she was not in tears. Her father was changed in nothing so much as in the respect that he would have been glad to see her in tears.

'Some persons hold,' he pursued, still hesitating, 'that there is a wisdom of the Head, and that there is a wisdom of the Heart. I have not supposed so; but, as I have said, I mistrust myself now. I have supposed the head to be all-sufficient. It may not be all- sufficient; how can I venture this morning to say it is! If that other kind of wisdom should be what I have neglected, and should be the instinct that is wanted, Louisa - '

He suggested it very doubtfully, as if he were half unwilling to admit it even now. She made him no answer, lying before him on her bed, still half-dressed, much as he had seen her lying on the floor of his room last night.

'Louisa,' and his hand rested on her hair again, 'I have been absent from here, my dear, a good deal of late; and though your sister's training has been pursued according to - the system,' he appeared to come to that word with great reluctance always, 'it has necessarily been modified by daily associations begun, in her case, at an early age. I ask you - ignorantly and humbly, my daughter - for the better, do you think?'

'Father,' she replied, without stirring, 'if any harmony has been awakened in her young breast that was mute in mine until it turned to discord, let her thank Heaven for it, and go upon her happier way, taking it as her greatest blessing that she has avoided my way.'

'O my child, my child!' he said, in a forlorn manner, 'I am an unhappy man to see you thus! What avails it to me that you do not reproach me, if I so bitterly reproach myself!' He bent his head, and spoke low to her. 'Louisa, I have a misgiving that some change may have been slowly working about me in this house, by mere love and gratitude: that what the Head had left undone and could not do, the Heart may have been doing silently. Can it be so?'

She made him no reply.

'I am not too proud to believe it, Louisa. How could I be arrogant, and you before me! Can it be so? Is it so, my dear?' He looked upon her once more, lying cast away there; and without another word went out of the room. He had not been long gone, when she heard a light tread near the door, and knew that some one stood beside her.

She did not raise her head. A dull anger that she should be seen in her distress, and that the involuntary look she had so resented should come to this fulfilment, smouldered within her like an unwholesome fire. All closely imprisoned forces rend and destroy. The air that would be healthful to the earth, the water that would enrich it, the heat that would ripen it, tear it when caged up. So in her bosom even now; the strongest qualities she possessed, long turned upon themselves, became a heap of obduracy, that rose against a friend.

It was well that soft touch came upon her neck, and that she understood herself to be supposed to have fallen asleep. The sympathetic hand did not claim her resentment. Let it lie there, let it lie.

It lay there, warming into life a crowd of gentler thoughts; and she rested. As she softened with the quiet, and the consciousness of being so watched, some tears made their way into her eyes. The face touched hers, and she knew that there were tears upon it too, and she the cause of them.

As Louisa feigned to rouse herself, and sat up, Sissy retired, so that she stood placidly near the bedside.

'I hope I have not disturbed you. I have come to ask if you would let me stay with you?'

'Why should you stay with me? My sister will miss you. You are everything to her.'

'Am I?' returned Sissy, shaking her head. 'I would be something to you, if I might.'

'What?' said Louisa, almost sternly.

'Whatever you want most, if I could be that. At all events, I would like to try to be as near it as I can. And however far off that may be, I will never tire of trying. Will you let me?'

'My father sent you to ask me.'

'No indeed,' replied Sissy. 'He told me that I might come in now, but he sent me away from the room this morning - or at least - '

She hesitated and stopped.

'At least, what?' said Louisa, with her searching eyes upon her.

'I thought it best myself that I should be sent away, for I felt very uncertain whether you would like to find me here.'

'Have I always hated you so much?'

'I hope not, for I have always loved you, and have always wished that you should know it. But you changed to me a little, shortly before you left home. Not that I wondered at it. You knew so much, and I knew so little, and it was so natural in many ways, going as you were among other friends, that I had nothing to complain of, and was not at all hurt.'

Her colour rose as she said it modestly and hurriedly. Louisa understood the loving pretence, and her heart smote her.

'May I try?' said Sissy, emboldened to raise her hand to the neck that was insensibly drooping towards her.

Louisa, taking down the hand that would have embraced her in another moment, held it in one of hers, and answered:

'First, Sissy, do you know what I am? I am so proud and so hardened, so confused and troubled, so resentful and unjust to every one and to myself, that everything is stormy, dark, and wicked to me. Does not that repel you?'

'No!'

'I am so unhappy, and all that should have made me otherwise is so laid waste, that if I had been bereft of sense to this hour, and instead of being as learned as you think me, had to begin to acquire the simplest truths, I could not want a guide to peace, contentment, honour, all the good of which I am quite devoid, more abjectly than I do. Does not that repel you?'

'No!'

In the innocence of her brave affection, and the brimming up of her old devoted spirit, the once deserted girl shone like a beautiful light upon the darkness of the other.

Louisa raised the hand that it might clasp her neck and join its fellow there. She fell upon her knees, and clinging to this stroller's child looked up at her almost with veneration.

'Forgive me, pity me, help me! Have compassion on my great need, and let me lay this head of mine upon a loving heart!'

'O lay it here!' cried Sissy. 'Lay it here, my dear.'

CHAPTER II - VERY RIDICULOUS

MR. JAMES HARTHOUSE passed a whole night and a day in a state of so much hurry, that the World, with its best glass in his eye, would scarcely have recognized him during that insane interval, as the brother Jem of the honourable and jocular member. He was positively agitated. He several times spoke with an emphasis, similar to the vulgar manner. He went in and went out in an unaccountable way, like a man without an object. He rode like a highwayman. In a word, he was so horribly bored by existing circumstances, that he forgot to go in for boredom in the manner prescribed by the authorities.

After putting his horse at Coketown through the storm, as if it were a leap, he waited up all night: from time to time ringing his bell with the greatest fury, charging the porter who kept watch with delinquency in withholding letters or messages that could not fail to have been entrusted to him, and demanding restitution on the spot. The dawn coming, the morning coming, and the day coming, and neither message nor letter coming with either, he went down to the country house. There, the report was, Mr. Bounderby away, and Mrs. Bounderby in town. Left for town suddenly last evening. Not even known to be gone until receipt of message, importing that her return was not to be expected for the present.

In these circumstances he had nothing for it but to follow her to town. He went to the house in town. Mrs. Bounderby not there. He looked in at the Bank. Mr. Bounderby away and Mrs. Sparsit away. Mrs. Sparsit away? Who could have been reduced to sudden extremity for the company of that griffin!

'Well! I don't know,' said Tom, who had his own reasons for being uneasy about it. 'She was off somewhere at daybreak this morning. She's always full of mystery; I hate her. So I do that white chap; he's always got his blinking eyes upon a fellow.'

'Where were you last night, Tom?'

'Where was I last night!' said Tom. 'Come! I like that. I was waiting for you, Mr. Harthouse, till it came down as I never saw it come down before. Where was I too! Where were you, you mean.'

'I was prevented from coming - detained.'

'Detained!' murmured Tom. 'Two of us were detained. I was detained looking for you, till I lost every train but the mail. It would have been a pleasant job to go down by that on such a night, and have to walk home through a pond. I was obliged to sleep in town after all.'

'Where?'

'Where? Why, in my own bed at Bounderby's.'

'Did you see your sister?'

'How the deuce,' returned Tom, staring, 'could I see my sister when she was fifteen miles off?'

Cursing these quick retorts of the young gentleman to whom he was so true a friend, Mr. Harthouse disembarrassed himself of that interview with the smallest conceivable amount of ceremony, and debated for the hundredth time what all this could mean? He made only one thing clear. It was, that whether she was in town or out of town, whether he had been premature with her who was so hard to comprehend, or she had lost courage, or they were discovered, or some mischance or mistake, at present incomprehensible, had occurred, he must remain to confront his fortune, whatever it was. The hotel where he was known to live when condemned to that region of blackness, was the stake to which he was tied. As to all the rest - What will be, will be.

'So, whether I am waiting for a hostile message, or an assignation, or a penitent remonstrance, or an impromptu wrestle with my friend Bounderby in the Lancashire manner - which would seem as likely as anything else in the present state of affairs - I'll dine,' said Mr. James Harthouse. 'Bounderby has the advantage in point of weight; and if anything of a British nature is to come off between us, it may be as well to be in training.'

Therefore he rang the bell, and tossing himself negligently on a sofa, ordered 'Some dinner at six - with a beefsteak in it,' and got through the intervening time as well as he could. That was not particularly well; for he remained in the greatest perplexity, and, as the hours went on, and no kind of explanation offered itself, his perplexity augmented at compound interest.

However, he took affairs as coolly as it was in human nature to do, and entertained himself with the facetious idea of the training more than once. 'It wouldn't be bad,' he yawned at one time, 'to give the waiter five shillings, and throw him.' At another time it occurred to him, 'Or a fellow of about thirteen or fourteen stone might be hired by the hour.' But these jests did not tell materially on the afternoon, or his suspense; and, sooth to say, they both lagged fearfully.

It was impossible, even before dinner, to avoid often walking about in the pattern of the carpet, looking out of the window, listening at the door for footsteps, and occasionally becoming rather hot when any steps approached that room. But, after dinner, when the day turned to twilight, and the twilight turned to night, and still no communication was made to him, it began to be as he expressed it, 'like the Holy Office and slow torture.' However, still true to his conviction that indifference was the genuine high-breeding (the only conviction he had), he seized this crisis as the opportunity for ordering candles and a newspaper.

He had been trying in vain, for half an hour, to read this newspaper, when the waiter appeared and said, at once mysteriously and apologetically:

'Beg your pardon, sir. You're wanted, sir, if you please.'

A general recollection that this was the kind of thing the Police said to the swell mob, caused Mr. Harthouse to ask the waiter in return, with bristling indignation, what the Devil he meant by 'wanted'?

'Beg your pardon, sir. Young lady outside, sir, wishes to see you.'

'Outside? Where?'

'Outside this door, sir.'

Giving the waiter to the personage before mentioned, as a block- head duly qualified for that consignment, Mr. Harthouse hurried into the gallery. A young woman whom he had never seen stood there. Plainly dressed, very quiet, very pretty. As he conducted her into the room and placed a chair for her, he observed, by the light of the candles, that she was even prettier than he had at first believed. Her face was innocent and youthful, and its expression remarkably pleasant. She was not afraid of him, or in any way disconcerted; she seemed to have her mind entirely preoccupied with the occasion of her visit, and to have substituted that consideration for herself.

'I speak to Mr. Harthouse?' she said, when they were alone.

'To Mr. Harthouse.' He added in his mind, 'And you speak to him with the most confiding eyes I ever saw, and the most earnest voice (though so quiet) I ever heard.'

'If I do not understand - and I do not, sir' - said Sissy, 'what your honour as a gentleman binds you to, in other matters:' the blood really rose in his face as she began in these words: 'I am sure I may rely upon it to keep my visit secret, and to keep secret what I am going to say. I will rely upon it, if you will tell me I may so far trust - '

'You may, I assure you.'

'I am young, as you see; I am alone, as you see. In coming to you, sir, I have no advice or encouragement beyond my own hope.' He thought, 'But that is very strong,' as he followed the momentary upward glance of her eyes. He thought besides, 'This is a very odd beginning. I don't see where we are going.'

'I think,' said Sissy, 'you have already guessed whom I left just now!'

'I have been in the greatest concern and uneasiness during the last four-and-twenty hours (which have appeared as many years),' he returned, 'on a lady's account. The hopes I have been encouraged to form that you come from that lady, do not deceive me, I trust.'

'I left her within an hour.'

'At - !'

'At her father's.'

Mr. Harthouse's face lengthened in spite of his coolness, and his perplexity increased. 'Then I certainly,' he thought, 'do not see where we are going.'

'She hurried there last night. She arrived there in great agitation, and was insensible all through the night. I live at her father's, and was with her. You may be sure, sir, you will never see her again as long as you live.'

Mr. Harthouse drew a long breath; and, if ever man found himself in the position of not knowing what to say, made the discovery beyond all question that he was so circumstanced. The child-like ingenuousness with which his visitor spoke, her modest fearlessness, her truthfulness which put all artifice aside, her entire forgetfulness of herself in her earnest quiet holding to the object with which she had come; all this, together with her reliance on his easily given promise - which in itself shamed him - presented something in which he was so inexperienced, and against which he knew any of his usual weapons would fall so powerless; that not a word could he rally to his relief.

At last he said:

'So startling an announcement, so confidently made, and by such lips, is really disconcerting in the last degree. May I be permitted to inquire, if you are charged to convey that information to me in those hopeless words, by the lady of whom we speak?'

'I have no charge from her.'

'The drowning man catches at the straw. With no disrespect for your judgment, and with no doubt of your sincerity, excuse my saying that I cling to the belief that there is yet hope that I am not condemned to perpetual exile from that lady's presence.'

'There is not the least hope. The first object of my coming here, sir, is to assure you that you must believe that there is no more hope of your ever speaking with her again, than there would be if she had died when she came home last night.'

'Must believe? But if I can't - or if I should, by infirmity of nature, be obstinate - and won't - '

'It is still true. There is no hope.'

James Harthouse looked at her with an incredulous smile upon his lips; but her mind looked over and beyond him, and the smile was quite thrown away.

He bit his lip, and took a little time for consideration.

'Well! If it should unhappily appear,' he said, 'after due pains and duty on my part, that I am brought to a position so desolate as this banishment, I shall not become the lady's persecutor. But you said you had no commission from her?'

'I have only the commission of my love for her, and her love for me. I have no other trust, than that I have been with her since she came home, and that she has given me her confidence. I have no further trust, than that I know something of her character and her marriage. O Mr. Harthouse, I think you had that trust too!'

He was touched in the cavity where his heart should have been - in that nest of addled eggs, where the birds of heaven would have lived if they had not been whistled away - by the fervour of this reproach.

'I am not a moral sort of fellow,' he said, 'and I never make any pretensions to the character of a moral sort of fellow. I am as immoral as need be. At the same time, in bringing any distress upon the lady who is the subject of the present conversation, or in unfortunately compromising her in any way, or in committing myself by any expression of sentiments towards her, not perfectly reconcilable with - in fact with - the domestic hearth; or in taking any advantage of her father's being a machine, or of her brother's being a whelp, or of her husband's being a bear; I beg to be allowed to assure you that I have had no particularly evil intentions, but have glided on from one step to another with a smoothness so perfectly diabolical, that I had not the slightest idea the catalogue was half so long until I began to turn it over. Whereas I find,' said Mr. James Harthouse, in conclusion, 'that it is really in several volumes.'

Though he said all this in his frivolous way, the way seemed, for that once, a conscious polishing of but an ugly surface. He was silent for a moment; and then proceeded with a more self-possessed air, though with traces of vexation and disappointment that would not be polished out.

'After what has been just now represented to me, in a manner I find it impossible to doubt - I know of hardly any other source from which I could have accepted it so readily - I feel bound to say to you, in whom the confidence you have mentioned has been reposed, that I cannot refuse to contemplate the possibility (however unexpected) of my seeing the lady no more. I am solely to blame for the thing having come to this - and - and, I cannot say,' he added, rather hard up for a general peroration, 'that I have any sanguine expectation of ever becoming a moral sort of fellow, or that I have any belief in any moral sort of fellow whatever.'

Sissy's face sufficiently showed that her appeal to him was not finished.

'You spoke,' he resumed, as she raised her eyes to him again, 'of your first object. I may assume that there is a second to be mentioned?'

'Yes.'

'Will you oblige me by confiding it?'

'Mr. Harthouse,' returned Sissy, with a blending of gentleness and steadiness that quite defeated him, and with a simple confidence in his being bound to do what she required, that held him at a singular disadvantage, 'the only reparation that remains with you, is to leave here immediately and finally. I am quite sure that you can mitigate in no other way the wrong and harm you have done. I am quite sure that it is the only compensation you have left it in your power to make. I do not say that it is much, or that it is enough; but it is something, and it is necessary. Therefore, though without any other authority than I have given you, and even without the knowledge of any other person than yourself and myself, I ask you to depart from this place to-night, under an obligation never to return to it.'

If she had asserted any influence over him beyond her plain faith in the truth and right of what she said; if she had concealed the least doubt or irresolution, or had harboured for the best purpose any reserve or pretence; if she had shown, or felt, the lightest trace of any sensitiveness to his ridicule or his astonishment, or any remonstrance he might offer; he would have carried it against her at this point. But he could as easily have changed a clear sky by looking at it in surprise, as affect her.

'But do you know,' he asked, quite at a loss, 'the extent of what you ask? You probably are not aware that I am here on a public kind of business, preposterous enough in itself, but which I have gone in for, and sworn by, and am supposed to be devoted to in quite a desperate manner? You probably are not aware of that, but I assure you it's the fact.'

It had no effect on Sissy, fact or no fact.

'Besides which,' said Mr. Harthouse, taking a turn or two across the room, dubiously, 'it's so alarmingly absurd. It would make a man so ridiculous, after going in for these fellows, to back out in such an incomprehensible way.'

'I am quite sure,' repeated Sissy, 'that it is the only reparation in your power, sir. I am quite sure, or I would not have come here.'

He glanced at her face, and walked about again. 'Upon my soul, I don't know what to say. So immensely absurd!'

It fell to his lot, now, to stipulate for secrecy.

'If I were to do such a very ridiculous thing,' he said, stopping again presently, and leaning against the chimney-piece, 'it could only be in the most inviolable confidence.'

'I will trust to you, sir,' returned Sissy, 'and you will trust to me.'

His leaning against the chimney-piece reminded him of the night with the whelp. It was the self-same chimney-piece, and somehow he felt as if he were the whelp to-night. He could make no way at all.

'I suppose a man never was placed in a more ridiculous position,' he said, after looking down, and looking up, and laughing, and frowning, and walking off, and walking back again. 'But I see no way out of it. What will be, will be. This will be, I suppose. I must take off myself, I imagine - in short, I engage to do it.'

Sissy rose. She was not surprised by the result, but she was happy in it, and her face beamed brightly.

'You will permit me to say,' continued Mr. James Harthouse, 'that I doubt if any other ambassador, or ambassadress, could have addressed me with the same success. I must not only regard myself as being in a very ridiculous position, but as being vanquished at all points. Will you allow me the privilege of remembering my enemy's name?'

'My name?' said the ambassadress.

'The only name I could possibly care to know, to-night.'

'Sissy Jupe.'

'Pardon my curiosity at parting. Related to the family?'

'I am only a poor girl,' returned Sissy. 'I was separated from my father - he was only a stroller - and taken pity on by Mr. Gradgrind. I have lived in the house ever since.'

She was gone.

'It wanted this to complete the defeat,' said Mr. James Harthouse, sinking, with a resigned air, on the sofa, after standing transfixed a little while. 'The defeat may now be considered perfectly accomplished. Only a poor girl - only a stroller - only James Harthouse made nothing of - only James Harthouse a Great Pyramid of failure.'

The Great Pyramid put it into his head to go up the Nile. He took a pen upon the instant, and wrote the following note (in appropriate hieroglyphics) to his brother:

Dear Jack, - All up at Coketown. Bored out of the place, and going in for camels. Affectionately, JEM,

He rang the bell.

'Send my fellow here.'

'Gone to bed, sir.'

'Tell him to get up, and pack up.'

He wrote two more notes. One, to Mr. Bounderby, announcing his retirement from that part of the country, and showing where he would be found for the next fortnight. The other, similar in effect, to Mr. Gradgrind. Almost as soon as the ink was dry upon their superscriptions, he had left the tall chimneys of Coketown behind, and was in a railway carriage, tearing and glaring over the dark landscape.

The moral sort of fellows might suppose that Mr. James Harthouse derived some comfortable reflections afterwards, from this prompt retreat, as one of his few actions that made any amends for anything, and as a token to himself that he had escaped the climax of a very bad business. But it was not so, at all. A secret sense of having failed and been ridiculous - a dread of what other fellows who went in for similar sorts of things, would say at his expense if they knew it - so oppressed him, that what was about the very best passage in his life was the one of all others he would not have owned to on any account, and the only one that made him ashamed of himself.

CHAPTER III - VERY DECIDED

THE indefatigable Mrs. Sparsit, with a violent cold upon her, her voice reduced to a whisper, and her stately frame so racked by continual sneezes that it seemed in danger of dismemberment, gave chase to her patron until she found him in the metropolis; and there, majestically sweeping in upon him at his hotel in St. James's Street, exploded the combustibles with which she was charged, and blew up. Having executed her mission with infinite relish, this high-minded woman then fainted away on Mr. Bounderby's coat-collar.

Mr. Bounderby's first procedure was to shake Mrs. Sparsit off, and leave her to progress as she might through various stages of suffering on the floor. He next had recourse to the administration of potent restoratives, such as screwing the patient's thumbs, smiting her hands, abundantly watering her face, and inserting salt in her mouth. When these attentions had recovered her (which they speedily did), he hustled her into a fast train without offering any other refreshment, and carried her back to Coketown more dead than alive.

Regarded as a classical ruin, Mrs. Sparsit was an interesting spectacle on her arrival at her journey's end; but considered in any other light, the amount of damage she had by that time sustained was excessive, and impaired her claims to admiration. Utterly heedless of the wear and tear of her clothes and constitution, and adamant to her pathetic sneezes, Mr. Bounderby immediately crammed her into a coach, and bore her off to Stone Lodge.

'Now, Tom Gradgrind,' said Bounderby, bursting into his father-in- law's room late at night; 'here's a lady here - Mrs. Sparsit - you know Mrs. Sparsit - who has something to say to you that will strike you dumb.'

'You have missed my letter!' exclaimed Mr. Gradgrind, surprised by the apparition.

'Missed your letter, sir!' bawled Bounderby. 'The present time is no time for letters. No man shall talk to Josiah Bounderby of Coketown about letters, with his mind in the state it's in now.'

'Bounderby,' said Mr. Gradgrind, in a tone of temperate remonstrance, 'I speak of a very special letter I have written to you, in reference to Louisa.'

'Tom Gradgrind,' replied Bounderby, knocking the flat of his hand several times with great vehemence on the table, 'I speak of a very special messenger that has come to me, in reference to Louisa. Mrs. Sparsit, ma'am, stand forward!'

That unfortunate lady hereupon essaying to offer testimony, without any voice and with painful gestures expressive of an inflamed throat, became so aggravating and underwent so many facial contortions, that Mr. Bounderby, unable to bear it, seized her by the arm and shook her.

'If you can't get it out, ma'am,' said Bounderby, 'leave me to get it out. This is not a time for a lady, however highly connected, to be totally inaudible, and seemingly swallowing marbles. Tom Gradgrind, Mrs. Sparsit latterly found herself, by accident, in a situation to overhear a conversation out of doors between your daughter and your precious gentleman-friend, Mr. James Harthouse.'

'Indeed!' said Mr. Gradgrind.

'Ah! Indeed!' cried Bounderby. 'And in that conversation - '

'It is not necessary to repeat its tenor, Bounderby. I know what passed.'

'You do? Perhaps,' said Bounderby, staring with all his might at his so quiet and assuasive father-in-law, 'you know where your daughter is at the present time!'

'Undoubtedly. She is here.'

'Here?'

'My dear Bounderby, let me beg you to restrain these loud out- breaks, on all accounts. Louisa is here. The moment she could detach herself from that interview with the person of whom you speak, and whom I deeply regret to have been the means of introducing to you, Louisa hurried here, for protection. I myself had not been at home many hours, when I received her - here, in this room. She hurried by the train to town, she ran from town to this house, through a raging storm, and presented herself before me in a state of distraction. Of course, she has remained here ever since. Let me entreat you, for your own sake and for hers, to be more quiet.'

Mr. Bounderby silently gazed about him for some moments, in every direction except Mrs. Sparsit's direction; and then, abruptly turning upon the niece of Lady Scadgers, said to that wretched woman:

'Now, ma'am! We shall be happy to hear any little apology you may think proper to offer, for going about the country at express pace, with no other luggage than a Cock-and-a-Bull, ma'am!'

'Sir,' whispered Mrs. Sparsit, 'my nerves are at present too much shaken, and my health is at present too much impaired, in your service, to admit of my doing more than taking refuge in tears.' (Which she did.)

'Well, ma'am,' said Bounderby, 'without making any observation to you that may not be made with propriety to a woman of good family, what I have got to add to that, is that there is something else in which it appears to me you may take refuge, namely, a coach. And the coach in which we came here being at the door, you'll allow me to hand you down to it, and pack you home to the Bank: where the best course for you to pursue, will be to put your feet into the hottest water you can bear, and take a glass of scalding rum and butter after you get into bed.' With these words, Mr. Bounderby extended his right hand to the weeping lady, and escorted her to the conveyance in question, shedding many plaintive sneezes by the way. He soon returned alone.

'Now, as you showed me in your face, Tom Gradgrind, that you wanted to speak to me,' he resumed, 'here I am. But, I am not in a very agreeable state, I tell you plainly: not relishing this business, even as it is, and not considering that I am at any time as dutifully and submissively treated by your daughter, as Josiah Bounderby of Coketown ought to be treated by his wife. You have your opinion, I dare say; and I have mine, I know. If you mean to say anything to me to-night, that goes against this candid remark, you had better let it alone.'

Mr. Gradgrind, it will be observed, being much softened, Mr.
Bounderby took particular pains to harden himself at all points.
It was his amiable nature.

'My dear Bounderby,' Mr. Gradgrind began in reply.

'Now, you'll excuse me,' said Bounderby, 'but I don't want to be too dear. That, to start with. When I begin to be dear to a man, I generally find that his intention is to come over me. I am not speaking to you politely; but, as you are aware, I am not polite. If you like politeness, you know where to get it. You have your gentleman-friends, you know, and they'll serve you with as much of the article as you want. I don't keep it myself.'

'Bounderby,' urged Mr. Gradgrind, 'we are all liable to mistakes - '

'I thought you couldn't make 'em,' interrupted Bounderby.

'Perhaps I thought so. But, I say we are all liable to mistakes and I should feel sensible of your delicacy, and grateful for it, if you would spare me these references to Harthouse. I shall not associate him in our conversation with your intimacy and encouragement; pray do not persist in connecting him with mine.'

'I never mentioned his name!' said Bounderby.

'Well, well!' returned Mr. Gradgrind, with a patient, even a submissive, air. And he sat for a little while pondering. 'Bounderby, I see reason to doubt whether we have ever quite understood Louisa.'

'Who do you mean by We?'

'Let me say I, then,' he returned, in answer to the coarsely blurted question; 'I doubt whether I have understood Louisa. I doubt whether I have been quite right in the manner of her education.'

'There you hit it,' returned Bounderby. 'There I agree with you. You have found it out at last, have you? Education! I'll tell you what education is - To be tumbled out of doors, neck and crop, and put upon the shortest allowance of everything except blows. That's what I call education.'

'I think your good sense will perceive,' Mr. Gradgrind remonstrated in all humility, 'that whatever the merits of such a system may be, it would be difficult of general application to girls.'

'I don't see it at all, sir,' returned the obstinate Bounderby.

'Well,' sighed Mr. Gradgrind, 'we will not enter into the question. I assure you I have no desire to be controversial. I seek to repair what is amiss, if I possibly can; and I hope you will assist me in a good spirit, Bounderby, for I have been very much distressed.'

'I don't understand you, yet,' said Bounderby, with determined obstinacy, 'and therefore I won't make any promises.'

'In the course of a few hours, my dear Bounderby,' Mr. Gradgrind proceeded, in the same depressed and propitiatory manner, 'I appear to myself to have become better informed as to Louisa's character, than in previous years. The enlightenment has been painfully forced upon me, and the discovery is not mine. I think there are - Bounderby, you will be surprised to hear me say this - I think there are qualities in Louisa, which - which have been harshly neglected, and - and a little perverted. And - and I would suggest to you, that - that if you would kindly meet me in a timely endeavour to leave her to her better nature for a while - and to encourage it to develop itself by tenderness and consideration - it - it would be the better for the happiness of all of us. Louisa,' said Mr. Gradgrind, shading his face with his hand, 'has always been my favourite child.'

The blustrous Bounderby crimsoned and swelled to such an extent on hearing these words, that he seemed to be, and probably was, on the brink of a fit. With his very ears a bright purple shot with crimson, he pent up his indignation, however, and said:

'You'd like to keep her here for a time?'

'I - I had intended to recommend, my dear Bounderby, that you should allow Louisa to remain here on a visit, and be attended by Sissy (I mean of course Cecilia Jupe), who understands her, and in whom she trusts.'

'I gather from all this, Tom Gradgrind,' said Bounderby, standing up with his hands in his pockets, 'that you are of opinion that there's what people call some incompatibility between Loo Bounderby and myself.'

'I fear there is at present a general incompatibility between Louisa, and - and - and almost all the relations in which I have placed her,' was her father's sorrowful reply.

'Now, look you here, Tom Gradgrind,' said Bounderby the flushed, confronting him with his legs wide apart, his hands deeper in his pockets, and his hair like a hayfield wherein his windy anger was boisterous. 'You have said your say; I am going to say mine. I am a Coketown man. I am Josiah Bounderby of Coketown. I know the bricks of this town, and I know the works of this town, and I know the chimneys of this town, and I know the smoke of this town, and I know the Hands of this town. I know 'em all pretty well. They're real. When a man tells me anything about imaginative qualities, I always tell that man, whoever he is, that I know what he means. He means turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon, and that he wants to be set up with a coach and six. That's what your daughter wants. Since you are of opinion that she ought to have what she wants, I recommend you to provide it for her. Because, Tom Gradgrind, she will never have it from me.'

'Bounderby,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'I hoped, after my entreaty, you would have taken a different tone.'

'Just wait a bit,' retorted Bounderby; 'you have said your say, I believe. I heard you out; hear me out, if you please. Don't make yourself a spectacle of unfairness as well as inconsistency, because, although I am sorry to see Tom Gradgrind reduced to his present position, I should be doubly sorry to see him brought so low as that. Now, there's an incompatibility of some sort or another, I am given to understand by you, between your daughter and me. I'll give you to understand, in reply to that, that there unquestionably is an incompatibility of the first magnitude - to be summed up in this - that your daughter don't properly know her husband's merits, and is not impressed with such a sense as would become her, by George! of the honour of his alliance. That's plain speaking, I hope.'

'Bounderby,' urged Mr. Gradgrind, 'this is unreasonable.'

'Is it?' said Bounderby. 'I am glad to hear you say so. Because when Tom Gradgrind, with his new lights, tells me that what I say is unreasonable, I am convinced at once it must be devilish sensible. With your permission I am going on. You know my origin; and you know that for a good many years of my life I didn't want a shoeing-horn, in consequence of not having a shoe. Yet you may believe or not, as you think proper, that there are ladies - born ladies - belonging to families - Families! - who next to worship the ground I walk on.'

He discharged this like a Rocket, at his father-in-law's head.

'Whereas your daughter,' proceeded Bounderby, 'is far from being a born lady. That you know, yourself. Not that I care a pinch of candle-snuff about such things, for you are very well aware I don't; but that such is the fact, and you, Tom Gradgrind, can't change it. Why do I say this?'

'Not, I fear,' observed Mr. Gradgrind, in a low voice, 'to spare me.'

'Hear me out,' said Bounderby, 'and refrain from cutting in till your turn comes round. I say this, because highly connected females have been astonished to see the way in which your daughter has conducted herself, and to witness her insensibility. They have wondered how I have suffered it. And I wonder myself now, and I won't suffer it.'

'Bounderby,' returned Mr. Gradgrind, rising, 'the less we say to- night the better, I think.'

'On the contrary, Tom Gradgrind, the more we say to-night, the better, I think. That is,' the consideration checked him, 'till I have said all I mean to say, and then I don't care how soon we stop. I come to a question that may shorten the business. What do you mean by the proposal you made just now?'

'What do I mean, Bounderby?'

'By your visiting proposition,' said Bounderby, with an inflexible jerk of the hayfield.

'I mean that I hope you may be induced to arrange in a friendly manner, for allowing Louisa a period of repose and reflection here, which may tend to a gradual alteration for the better in many respects.'

'To a softening down of your ideas of the incompatibility?' said Bounderby.

'If you put it in those terms.'

'What made you think of this?' said Bounderby.

'I have already said, I fear Louisa has not been understood. Is it asking too much, Bounderby, that you, so far her elder, should aid in trying to set her right? You have accepted a great charge of her; for better for worse, for - '

Mr. Bounderby may have been annoyed by the repetition of his own words to Stephen Blackpool, but he cut the quotation short with an angry start.

'Come!' said he, 'I don't want to be told about that. I know what I took her for, as well as you do. Never you mind what I took her for; that's my look out.'

'I was merely going on to remark, Bounderby, that we may all be more or less in the wrong, not even excepting you; and that some yielding on your part, remembering the trust you have accepted, may not only be an act of true kindness, but perhaps a debt incurred towards Louisa.'

'I think differently,' blustered Bounderby. 'I am going to finish this business according to my own opinions. Now, I don't want to make a quarrel of it with you, Tom Gradgrind. To tell you the truth, I don't think it would be worthy of my reputation to quarrel on such a subject. As to your gentleman-friend, he may take himself off, wherever he likes best. If he falls in my way, I shall tell him my mind; if he don't fall in my way, I shan't, for it won't be worth my while to do it. As to your daughter, whom I made Loo Bounderby, and might have done better by leaving Loo Gradgrind, if she don't come home to-morrow, by twelve o'clock at noon, I shall understand that she prefers to stay away, and I shall send her wearing apparel and so forth over here, and you'll take charge of her for the future. What I shall say to people in general, of the incompatibility that led to my so laying down the law, will be this. I am Josiah Bounderby, and I had my bringing- up; she's the daughter of Tom Gradgrind, and she had her bringing- up; and the two horses wouldn't pull together. I am pretty well known to be rather an uncommon man, I believe; and most people will understand fast enough that it must be a woman rather out of the common, also, who, in the long run, would come up to my mark.'

'Let me seriously entreat you to reconsider this, Bounderby,' urged Mr. Gradgrind, 'before you commit yourself to such a decision.'

'I always come to a decision,' said Bounderby, tossing his hat on: 'and whatever I do, I do at once. I should be surprised at Tom Gradgrind's addressing such a remark to Josiah Bounderby of Coketown, knowing what he knows of him, if I could be surprised by anything Tom Gradgrind did, after his making himself a party to sentimental humbug. I have given you my decision, and I have got no more to say. Good night!'

So Mr. Bounderby went home to his town house to bed. At five minutes past twelve o'clock next day, he directed Mrs. Bounderby's property to be carefully packed up and sent to Tom Gradgrind's; advertised his country retreat for sale by private contract; and resumed a bachelor life.

CHAPTER IV - LOST

THE robbery at the Bank had not languished before, and did not cease to occupy a front place in the attention of the principal of that establishment now. In boastful proof of his promptitude and activity, as a remarkable man, and a self-made man, and a commercial wonder more admirable than Venus, who had risen out of the mud instead of the sea, he liked to show how little his domestic affairs abated his business ardour. Consequently, in the first few weeks of his resumed bachelorhood, he even advanced upon his usual display of bustle, and every day made such a rout in renewing his investigations into the robbery, that the officers who had it in hand almost wished it had never been committed.

They were at fault too, and off the scent. Although they had been so quiet since the first outbreak of the matter, that most people really did suppose it to have been abandoned as hopeless, nothing new occurred. No implicated man or woman took untimely courage, or made a self-betraying step. More remarkable yet, Stephen Blackpool could not be heard of, and the mysterious old woman remained a mystery.

Things having come to this pass, and showing no latent signs of stirring beyond it, the upshot of Mr. Bounderby's investigations was, that he resolved to hazard a bold burst. He drew up a placard, offering Twenty Pounds reward for the apprehension of Stephen Blackpool, suspected of complicity in the robbery of Coketown Bank on such a night; he described the said Stephen Blackpool by dress, complexion, estimated height, and manner, as minutely as he could; he recited how he had left the town, and in what direction he had been last seen going; he had the whole printed in great black letters on a staring broadsheet; and he caused the walls to be posted with it in the dead of night, so that it should strike upon the sight of the whole population at one blow.

The factory-bells had need to ring their loudest that morning to disperse the groups of workers who stood in the tardy daybreak, collected round the placards, devouring them with eager eyes. Not the least eager of the eyes assembled, were the eyes of those who could not read. These people, as they listened to the friendly voice that read aloud - there was always some such ready to help them - stared at the characters which meant so much with a vague awe and respect that would have been half ludicrous, if any aspect of public ignorance could ever be otherwise than threatening and full of evil. Many ears and eyes were busy with a vision of the matter of these placards, among turning spindles, rattling looms, and whirling wheels, for hours afterwards; and when the Hands cleared out again into the streets, there were still as many readers as before.

Slackbridge, the delegate, had to address his audience too that night; and Slackbridge had obtained a clean bill from the printer, and had brought it in his pocket. Oh, my friends and fellow- countrymen, the down-trodden operatives of Coketown, oh, my fellow- brothers and fellow-workmen and fellow-citizens and fellowmen, what a to-do was there, when Slackbridge unfolded what he called 'that damning document,' and held it up to the gaze, and for the execration of the working-man community! 'Oh, my fellow-men, behold of what a traitor in the camp of those great spirits who are enrolled upon the holy scroll of Justice and of Union, is appropriately capable! Oh, my prostrate friends, with the galling yoke of tyrants on your necks and the iron foot of despotism treading down your fallen forms into the dust of the earth, upon which right glad would your oppressors be to see you creeping on your bellies all the days of your lives, like the serpent in the garden - oh, my brothers, and shall I as a man not add, my sisters too, what do you say, now, of Stephen Blackpool, with a slight stoop in his shoulders and about five foot seven in height, as set forth in this degrading and disgusting document, this blighting bill, this pernicious placard, this abominable advertisement; and with what majesty of denouncement will you crush the viper, who would bring this stain and shame upon the God-like race that happily has cast him out for ever! Yes, my compatriots, happily cast him out and sent him forth! For you remember how he stood here before you on this platform; you remember how, face to face and foot to foot, I pursued him through all his intricate windings; you remember how he sneaked and slunk, and sidled, and splitted of straws, until, with not an inch of ground to which to cling, I hurled him out from amongst us: an object for the undying finger of scorn to point at, and for the avenging fire of every free and thinking mind to scorch and scar! And now, my friends - my labouring friends, for I rejoice and triumph in that stigma - my friends whose hard but honest beds are made in toil, and whose scanty but independent pots are boiled in hardship; and now, I say, my friends, what appellation has that dastard craven taken to himself, when, with the mask torn from his features, he stands before us in all his native deformity, a What? A thief! A plunderer! A proscribed fugitive, with a price upon his head; a fester and a wound upon the noble character of the Coketown operative! Therefore, my band of brothers in a sacred bond, to which your children and your children's children yet unborn have set their infant hands and seals, I propose to you on the part of the United Aggregate Tribunal, ever watchful for your welfare, ever zealous for your benefit, that this meeting does Resolve: That Stephen Blackpool, weaver, referred to in this placard, having been already solemnly disowned by the community of Coketown Hands, the same are free from the shame of his misdeeds, and cannot as a class be reproached with his dishonest actions!'

Thus Slackbridge; gnashing and perspiring after a prodigious sort. A few stern voices called out 'No!' and a score or two hailed, with assenting cries of 'Hear, hear!' the caution from one man, 'Slackbridge, y'or over hetter in't; y'or a goen too fast!' But these were pigmies against an army; the general assemblage subscribed to the gospel according to Slackbridge, and gave three cheers for him, as he sat demonstratively panting at them.

These men and women were yet in the streets, passing quietly to their homes, when Sissy, who had been called away from Louisa some minutes before, returned.

'Who is it?' asked Louisa.

'It is Mr. Bounderby,' said Sissy, timid of the name, 'and your brother Mr. Tom, and a young woman who says her name is Rachael, and that you know her.'

'What do they want, Sissy dear?'

'They want to see you. Rachael has been crying, and seems angry.'

'Father,' said Louisa, for he was present, 'I cannot refuse to see them, for a reason that will explain itself. Shall they come in here?'

As he answered in the affirmative, Sissy went away to bring them. She reappeared with them directly. Tom was last; and remained standing in the obscurest part of the room, near the door.

'Mrs. Bounderby,' said her husband, entering with a cool nod, 'I don't disturb you, I hope. This is an unseasonable hour, but here is a young woman who has been making statements which render my visit necessary. Tom Gradgrind, as your son, young Tom, refuses for some obstinate reason or other to say anything at all about those statements, good or bad, I am obliged to confront her with your daughter.'

'You have seen me once before, young lady,' said Rachael, standing in front of Louisa.

Tom coughed.

'You have seen me, young lady,' repeated Rachael, as she did not answer, 'once before.'

Tom coughed again.

'I have.'

Rachael cast her eyes proudly towards Mr. Bounderby, and said,
'Will you make it known, young lady, where, and who was there?'

'I went to the house where Stephen Blackpool lodged, on the night of his discharge from his work, and I saw you there. He was there too; and an old woman who did not speak, and whom I could scarcely see, stood in a dark corner. My brother was with me.'

'Why couldn't you say so, young Tom?' demanded Bounderby.

'I promised my sister I wouldn't.' Which Louisa hastily confirmed. 'And besides,' said the whelp bitterly, 'she tells her own story so precious well - and so full - that what business had I to take it out of her mouth!'

'Say, young lady, if you please,' pursued Rachael, 'why, in an evil hour, you ever came to Stephen's that night.'

'I felt compassion for him,' said Louisa, her colour deepening, 'and I wished to know what he was going to do, and wished to offer him assistance.'

'Thank you, ma'am,' said Bounderby. 'Much flattered and obliged.'

'Did you offer him,' asked Rachael, 'a bank-note?'

'Yes; but he refused it, and would only take two pounds in gold.'

Rachael cast her eyes towards Mr. Bounderby again.

'Oh, certainly!' said Bounderby. 'If you put the question whether your ridiculous and improbable account was true or not, I am bound to say it's confirmed.'

'Young lady,' said Rachael, 'Stephen Blackpool is now named as a thief in public print all over this town, and where else! There have been a meeting to-night where he have been spoken of in the same shameful way. Stephen! The honestest lad, the truest lad, the best!' Her indignation failed her, and she broke off sobbing.

'I am very, very sorry,' said Louisa.

'Oh, young lady, young lady,' returned Rachael, 'I hope you may be, but I don't know! I can't say what you may ha' done! The like of you don't know us, don't care for us, don't belong to us. I am not sure why you may ha' come that night. I can't tell but what you may ha' come wi' some aim of your own, not mindin to what trouble you brought such as the poor lad. I said then, Bless you for coming; and I said it of my heart, you seemed to take so pitifully to him; but I don't know now, I don't know!'

Louisa could not reproach her for her unjust suspicions; she was so faithful to her idea of the man, and so afflicted.

'And when I think,' said Rachael through her sobs, 'that the poor lad was so grateful, thinkin you so good to him - when I mind that he put his hand over his hard-worken face to hide the tears that you brought up there - Oh, I hope you may be sorry, and ha' no bad cause to be it; but I don't know, I don't know!'

'You're a pretty article,' growled the whelp, moving uneasily in his dark corner, 'to come here with these precious imputations! You ought to be bundled out for not knowing how to behave yourself, and you would be by rights.'

She said nothing in reply; and her low weeping was the only sound that was heard, until Mr. Bounderby spoke.

'Come!' said he, 'you know what you have engaged to do. You had better give your mind to that; not this.'

''Deed, I am loath,' returned Rachael, drying her eyes, 'that any here should see me like this; but I won't be seen so again. Young lady, when I had read what's put in print of Stephen - and what has just as much truth in it as if it had been put in print of you - I went straight to the Bank to say I knew where Stephen was, and to give a sure and certain promise that he should be here in two days. I couldn't meet wi' Mr. Bounderby then, and your brother sent me away, and I tried to find you, but you was not to be found, and I went back to work. Soon as I come out of the Mill to-night, I hastened to hear what was said of Stephen - for I know wi' pride he will come back to shame it! - and then I went again to seek Mr. Bounderby, and I found him, and I told him every word I knew; and he believed no word I said, and brought me here.'

'So far, that's true enough,' assented Mr. Bounderby, with his hands in his pockets and his hat on. 'But I have known you people before to-day, you'll observe, and I know you never die for want of talking. Now, I recommend you not so much to mind talking just now, as doing. You have undertaken to do something; all I remark upon that at present is, do it!'

'I have written to Stephen by the post that went out this afternoon, as I have written to him once before sin' he went away,' said Rachael; 'and he will be here, at furthest, in two days.'

'Then, I'll tell you something. You are not aware perhaps,' retorted Mr. Bounderby, 'that you yourself have been looked after now and then, not being considered quite free from suspicion in this business, on account of most people being judged according to the company they keep. The post-office hasn't been forgotten either. What I'll tell you is, that no letter to Stephen Blackpool has ever got into it. Therefore, what has become of yours, I leave you to guess. Perhaps you're mistaken, and never wrote any.'

'He hadn't been gone from here, young lady,' said Rachael, turning appealingly to Louisa, 'as much as a week, when he sent me the only letter I have had from him, saying that he was forced to seek work in another name.'

'Oh, by George!' cried Bounderby, shaking his head, with a whistle, 'he changes his name, does he! That's rather unlucky, too, for such an immaculate chap. It's considered a little suspicious in Courts of Justice, I believe, when an Innocent happens to have many names.'

'What,' said Rachael, with the tears in her eyes again, 'what, young lady, in the name of Mercy, was left the poor lad to do! The masters against him on one hand, the men against him on the other, he only wantin to work hard in peace, and do what he felt right. Can a man have no soul of his own, no mind of his own? Must he go wrong all through wi' this side, or must he go wrong all through wi' that, or else be hunted like a hare?'

'Indeed, indeed, I pity him from my heart,' returned Louisa; 'and I hope that he will clear himself.'

'You need have no fear of that, young lady. He is sure!'

'All the surer, I suppose,' said Mr. Bounderby, 'for your refusing to tell where he is? Eh?'

'He shall not, through any act of mine, come back wi' the unmerited reproach of being brought back. He shall come back of his own accord to clear himself, and put all those that have injured his good character, and he not here for its defence, to shame. I have told him what has been done against him,' said Rachael, throwing off all distrust as a rock throws of the sea, 'and he will be here, at furthest, in two days.'

'Notwithstanding which,' added Mr. Bounderby, 'if he can be laid hold of any sooner, he shall have an earlier opportunity of clearing himself. As to you, I have nothing against you; what you came and told me turns out to be true, and I have given you the means of proving it to be true, and there's an end of it. I wish you good night all! I must be off to look a little further into this.'

Tom came out of his corner when Mr. Bounderby moved, moved with him, kept close to him, and went away with him. The only parting salutation of which he delivered himself was a sulky 'Good night, father!' With a brief speech, and a scowl at his sister, he left the house.

Since his sheet-anchor had come home, Mr. Gradgrind had been sparing of speech. He still sat silent, when Louisa mildly said:

'Rachael, you will not distrust me one day, when you know me better.'

'It goes against me,' Rachael answered, in a gentler manner, 'to mistrust any one; but when I am so mistrusted - when we all are - I cannot keep such things quite out of my mind. I ask your pardon for having done you an injury. I don't think what I said now. Yet I might come to think it again, wi' the poor lad so wronged.'

'Did you tell him in your letter,' inquired Sissy, 'that suspicion seemed to have fallen upon him, because he had been seen about the Bank at night?

He would then know what he would have to explain on coming back, and would be ready.'

'Yes, dear,' she returned; 'but I can't guess what can have ever taken him there. He never used to go there. It was never in his way. His way was the same as mine, and not near it.'

Sissy had already been at her side asking her where she lived, and whether she might come to-morrow night, to inquire if there were news of him.

'I doubt,' said Rachael, 'if he can be here till next day.'

'Then I will come next night too,' said Sissy.

When Rachael, assenting to this, was gone, Mr. Gradgrind lifted up his head, and said to his daughter:

'Louisa, my dear, I have never, that I know of, seen this man. Do you believe him to be implicated?'

'I think I have believed it, father, though with great difficulty.
I do not believe it now.'

'That is to say, you once persuaded yourself to believe it, from knowing him to be suspected. His appearance and manner; are they so honest?'

'Very honest.'

'And her confidence not to be shaken! I ask myself,' said Mr. Gradgrind, musing, 'does the real culprit know of these accusations? Where is he? Who is he?'

His hair had latterly began to change its colour. As he leaned upon his hand again, looking gray and old, Louisa, with a face of fear and pity, hurriedly went over to him, and sat close at his side. Her eyes by accident met Sissy's at the moment. Sissy flushed and started, and Louisa put her finger on her lip.

Next night, when Sissy returned home and told Louisa that Stephen was not come, she told it in a whisper. Next night again, when she came home with the same account, and added that he had not been heard of, she spoke in the same low frightened tone. From the moment of that interchange of looks, they never uttered his name, or any reference to him, aloud; nor ever pursued the subject of the robbery, when Mr. Gradgrind spoke of it.

The two appointed days ran out, three days and nights ran out, and Stephen Blackpool was not come, and remained unheard of. On the fourth day, Rachael, with unabated confidence, but considering her despatch to have miscarried, went up to the Bank, and showed her letter from him with his address, at a working colony, one of many, not upon the main road, sixty miles away. Messengers were sent to that place, and the whole town looked for Stephen to be brought in next day.

During this whole time the whelp moved about with Mr. Bounderby like his shadow, assisting in all the proceedings. He was greatly excited, horribly fevered, bit his nails down to the quick, spoke in a hard rattling voice, and with lips that were black and burnt up. At the hour when the suspected man was looked for, the whelp was at the station; offering to wager that he had made off before the arrival of those who were sent in quest of him, and that he would not appear.

The whelp was right. The messengers returned alone. Rachael's letter had gone, Rachael's letter had been delivered. Stephen Blackpool had decamped in that same hour; and no soul knew more of him. The only doubt in Coketown was, whether Rachael had written in good faith, believing that he really would come back, or warning him to fly. On this point opinion was divided.

Six days, seven days, far on into another week. The wretched whelp plucked up a ghastly courage, and began to grow defiant. 'Was the suspected fellow the thief? A pretty question! If not, where was the man, and why did he not come back?'

Where was the man, and why did he not come back? In the dead of night the echoes of his own words, which had rolled Heaven knows how far away in the daytime, came back instead, and abided by him until morning.

CHAPTER V - FOUND

DAY and night again, day and night again. No Stephen Blackpool.
Where was the man, and why did he not come back?

Every night, Sissy went to Rachael's lodging, and sat with her in her small neat room. All day, Rachael toiled as such people must toil, whatever their anxieties. The smoke-serpents were indifferent who was lost or found, who turned out bad or good; the melancholy mad elephants, like the Hard

Fact men, abated nothing of their set routine, whatever happened. Day and night again, day and night again. The monotony was unbroken. Even Stephen Blackpool's disappearance was falling into the general way, and becoming as monotonous a wonder as any piece of machinery in Coketown.

'I misdoubt,' said Rachael, 'if there is as many as twenty left in all this place, who have any trust in the poor dear lad now.'

She said it to Sissy, as they sat in her lodging, lighted only by the lamp at the street corner. Sissy had come there when it was already dark, to await her return from work; and they had since sat at the window where Rachael had found her, wanting no brighter light to shine on their sorrowful talk.

'If it hadn't been mercifully brought about, that I was to have you to speak to,' pursued Rachael, 'times are, when I think my mind would not have kept right. But I get hope and strength through you; and you believe that though appearances may rise against him, he will be proved clear?'

'I do believe so,' returned Sissy, 'with my whole heart. I feel so certain, Rachael, that the confidence you hold in yours against all discouragement, is not like to be wrong, that I have no more doubt of him than if I had known him through as many years of trial as you have.'

'And I, my dear,' said Rachel, with a tremble in her voice, 'have known him through them all, to be, according to his quiet ways, so faithful to everything honest and good, that if he was never to be heard of more, and I was to live to be a hundred years old, I could say with my last breath, God knows my heart. I have never once left trusting Stephen Blackpool!'

'We all believe, up at the Lodge, Rachael, that he will be freed from suspicion, sooner or later.'

'The better I know it to be so believed there, my dear,' said Rachael, 'and the kinder I feel it that you come away from there, purposely to comfort me, and keep me company, and be seen wi' me when I am not yet free from all suspicion myself, the more grieved I am that I should ever have spoken those mistrusting words to the young lady. And yet I - '

'You don't mistrust her now, Rachael?'

'Now that you have brought us more together, no. But I can't at all times keep out of my mind - '

Her voice so sunk into a low and slow communing with herself, that Sissy, sitting by her side, was obliged to listen with attention.

'I can't at all times keep out of my mind, mistrustings of some one. I can't think who 'tis, I can't think how or why it may be done, but I mistrust that some one has put Stephen out of the way. I mistrust that by his coming back of his own accord, and showing himself innocent before them all, some one would be confounded, who - to prevent that - has stopped him, and put him out of the way.'

'That is a dreadful thought,' said Sissy, turning pale.

'It is a dreadful thought to think he may be murdered.'

Sissy shuddered, and turned paler yet.

'When it makes its way into my mind, dear,' said Rachael, 'and it will come sometimes, though I do all I can to keep it out, wi' counting on to high numbers as I work, and saying over and over again pieces that I knew when I were a child - I fall into such a wild, hot hurry, that, however tired I am, I want to walk fast, miles and miles. I must get the better of this before bed-time. I'll walk home wi' you.'

'He might fall ill upon the journey back,' said Sissy, faintly offering a worn-out scrap of hope; 'and in such a case, there are many places on the road where he might stop.'

'But he is in none of them. He has been sought for in all, and he's not there.'

'True,' was Sissy's reluctant admission.

'He'd walk the journey in two days. If he was footsore and couldn't walk, I sent him, in the letter he got, the money to ride, lest he should have none of his own to spare.'

'Let us hope that to-morrow will bring something better, Rachael.
Come into the air!'

Her gentle hand adjusted Rachael's shawl upon her shining black hair in the usual manner of her wearing it, and they went out. The night being fine, little knots of Hands were here and there lingering at street corners; but it was supper-time with the greater part of them, and there were but few people in the streets.

'You're not so hurried now, Rachael, and your hand is cooler.'

'I get better, dear, if I can only walk, and breathe a little fresh. 'Times when I can't, I turn weak and confused.'

'But you must not begin to fail, Rachael, for you may be wanted at any time to stand by Stephen. To-morrow is Saturday. If no news comes to-morrow, let us walk in the country on Sunday morning, and strengthen you for another week. Will you go?'

'Yes, dear.'

They were by this time in the street where Mr. Bounderby's house stood. The way to Sissy's destination led them past the door, and they were going straight towards it. Some train had newly arrived in Coketown, which had put a number of vehicles in motion, and scattered a considerable bustle about the town. Several coaches were rattling before them and behind them as they approached Mr. Bounderby's, and one of the latter drew up with such briskness as they were in the act of passing the house, that they looked round involuntarily. The bright gaslight over Mr. Bounderby's steps showed them Mrs. Sparsit in the coach, in an ecstasy of excitement, struggling to open the door; Mrs. Sparsit seeing them at the same moment, called to them to stop.

'It's a coincidence,' exclaimed Mrs. Sparsit, as she was released by the coachman. 'It's a Providence! Come out, ma'am!' then said Mrs. Sparsit, to some one inside, 'come out, or we'll have you dragged out!'

Hereupon, no other than the mysterious old woman descended. Whom Mrs. Sparsit incontinently collared.

'Leave her alone, everybody!' cried Mrs. Sparsit, with great energy. 'Let nobody touch her. She belongs to me. Come in, ma'am!' then said Mrs. Sparsit, reversing her former word of command. 'Come in, ma'am, or we'll have you dragged in!'

The spectacle of a matron of classical deportment, seizing an ancient woman by the throat, and hauling her into a dwelling-house, would have been under any circumstances, sufficient temptation to all true English stragglers so blest as to witness it, to force a way into that dwelling-house and see the matter out. But when the phenomenon was enhanced by the notoriety and mystery by this time associated all over the town with the Bank robbery, it would have lured the stragglers in, with an irresistible attraction, though the roof had been expected to fall upon their heads. Accordingly, the chance witnesses on the ground, consisting of the busiest of the neighbours to the number of some five-and-twenty, closed in after Sissy and Rachael, as they closed in after Mrs. Sparsit and her prize; and the whole body made a disorderly irruption into Mr. Bounderby's dining-room, where the people behind lost not a moment's time in mounting on the chairs, to get the better of the people in front.

'Fetch Mr. Bounderby down!' cried Mrs. Sparsit. 'Rachael, young woman; you know who this is?'

'It's Mrs. Pegler,' said Rachael.

'I should think it is!' cried Mrs. Sparsit, exulting. 'Fetch Mr. Bounderby. Stand away, everybody!' Here old Mrs. Pegler, muffling herself up, and shrinking from observation, whispered a word of entreaty. 'Don't tell me,' said Mrs. Sparsit, aloud. 'I have told you twenty times, coming along, that I will not leave you till I have handed you over to him myself.'

Mr. Bounderby now appeared, accompanied by Mr. Gradgrind and the whelp, with whom he had been holding conference up-stairs. Mr. Bounderby looked more astonished than hospitable, at sight of this uninvited party in his dining-room.

'Why, what's the matter now!' said he. 'Mrs. Sparsit, ma'am?'

'Sir,' explained that worthy woman, 'I trust it is my good fortune to produce a person you have much desired to find. Stimulated by my wish to relieve your mind, sir, and connecting together such imperfect clues to the part of the country in which that person might be supposed to reside, as have been afforded by the young woman, Rachael, fortunately now present to identify, I have had the happiness to succeed, and to bring that person with me - I need not say most unwillingly on her part. It has not been, sir, without some trouble that I have effected this; but trouble in your service is to me a pleasure, and hunger, thirst, and cold a real gratification.'

Here Mrs. Sparsit ceased; for Mr. Bounderby's visage exhibited an extraordinary combination of all possible colours and expressions of discomfiture, as old Mrs. Pegler was disclosed to his view.

'Why, what do you mean by this?' was his highly unexpected demand, in great warmth. 'I ask you, what do you mean by this, Mrs. Sparsit, ma'am?'

'Sir!' exclaimed Mrs. Sparsit, faintly.

'Why don't you mind your own business, ma'am?' roared Bounderby. 'How dare you go and poke your officious nose into my family affairs?'

This allusion to her favourite feature overpowered Mrs. Sparsit. She sat down stiffly in a chair, as if she were frozen; and with a fixed stare at Mr. Bounderby, slowly grated her mittens against one another, as if they were frozen too.

'My dear Josiah!' cried Mrs. Pegler, trembling. 'My darling boy! I am not to blame. It's not my fault, Josiah. I told this lady over and over again, that I knew she was doing what would not be agreeable to you, but she would do it.'

'What did you let her bring you for? Couldn't you knock her cap off, or her tooth out, or scratch her, or do something or other to her?' asked

Bounderby.

'My own boy! She threatened me that if I resisted her, I should be brought by constables, and it was better to come quietly than make that stir in such a' - Mrs. Pegler glanced timidly but proudly round the walls - 'such a fine house as this. Indeed, indeed, it is not my fault! My dear, noble, stately boy! I have always lived quiet, and secret, Josiah, my dear. I have never broken the condition once. I have never said I was your mother. I have admired you at a distance; and if I have come to town sometimes, with long times between, to take a proud peep at you, I have done it unbeknown, my love, and gone away again.'

Mr. Bounderby, with his hands in his pockets, walked in impatient mortification up and down at the side of the long dining-table, while the spectators greedily took in every syllable of Mrs. Pegler's appeal, and at each succeeding syllable became more and more round-eyed. Mr. Bounderby still walking up and down when Mrs. Pegler had done, Mr. Gradgrind addressed that maligned old lady:

'I am surprised, madam,' he observed with severity, 'that in your old age you have the face to claim Mr. Bounderby for your son, after your unnatural and inhuman treatment of him.'

'Me unnatural!' cried poor old Mrs. Pegler. 'Me inhuman! To my dear boy?'

'Dear!' repeated Mr. Gradgrind. 'Yes; dear in his self-made prosperity, madam, I dare say. Not very dear, however, when you deserted him in his infancy, and left him to the brutality of a drunken grandmother.'

'I deserted my Josiah!' cried Mrs. Pegler, clasping her hands. 'Now, Lord forgive you, sir, for your wicked imaginations, and for your scandal against the memory of my poor mother, who died in my arms before Josiah was born. May you repent of it, sir, and live to know better!'

She was so very earnest and injured, that Mr. Gradgrind, shocked by the possibility which dawned upon him, said in a gentler tone:

'Do you deny, then, madam, that you left your son to - to be brought up in the gutter?'

'Josiah in the gutter!' exclaimed Mrs. Pegler. 'No such a thing, sir. Never! For shame on you! My dear boy knows, and will give you to know, that though he come of humble parents, he come of parents that loved him as dear as the best could, and never thought it hardship on themselves to pinch a bit that he might write and cipher beautiful, and I've his books at home to show it! Aye, have I!' said Mrs. Pegler, with indignant pride. 'And my dear boy knows, and will give you to know, sir, that after his beloved father died, when he was eight years old, his mother, too, could pinch a bit, as it was her duty and her pleasure and her pride to do it, to help him out in life, and put him 'prentice. And a steady lad he was, and a kind master he had to lend him a hand, and well he worked his own way forward to be rich and thriving. And I'll give you to know, sir - for this my dear boy won't - that though his mother kept but a little village shop, he never forgot her, but pensioned me on thirty pound a year - more than I want, for I put by out of it - only making the condition that I was to keep down in my own part, and make no boasts about him, and not trouble him. And I never have, except with looking at him once a year, when he has never knowed it. And it's right,' said poor old Mrs. Pegler, in affectionate championship, 'that I should keep down in my own part, and I have no doubts that if I was here I should do a many unbefitting things, and I am well contented, and I can keep my pride in my Josiah to myself, and I can love for love's own sake! And I am ashamed of you, sir,' said Mrs. Pegler, lastly, 'for your slanders and suspicions. And I never stood here before, nor never wanted to stand here when my dear son said no. And I shouldn't be here now, if it hadn't been for being brought here. And for shame upon you, Oh, for shame, to accuse me of being a bad mother to my son, with my son standing here to tell you so different!'

The bystanders, on and off the dining-room chairs, raised a murmur of sympathy with Mrs. Pegler, and Mr. Gradgrind felt himself innocently placed in a very distressing predicament, when Mr. Bounderby, who had never ceased walking up and down, and had every moment swelled larger and larger, and grown redder and redder, stopped short.

'I don't exactly know,' said Mr. Bounderby, 'how I come to be favoured with the attendance of the present company, but I don't inquire. When they're quite satisfied, perhaps they'll be so good as to disperse; whether they're satisfied or not, perhaps they'll be so good as to disperse. I'm not bound to deliver a lecture on my family affairs, I have not undertaken to do it, and I'm not a going to do it. Therefore those who expect any explanation whatever upon that branch of the subject, will be disappointed - particularly Tom Gradgrind, and he can't know it too soon. In reference to the Bank robbery, there has been a mistake made, concerning my mother. If there hadn't been over-officiousness it wouldn't have been made, and I hate over-officiousness at all times, whether or no. Good evening!'

Although Mr. Bounderby carried it off in these terms, holding the door open for the company to depart, there was a blustering sheepishness upon him, at once extremely crestfallen and superlatively absurd. Detected as the Bully of humility, who had built his windy reputation upon lies, and in his boastfulness had put the honest truth as far away from him as if he had advanced the mean claim (there is no meaner) to tack himself on to a pedigree, he cut a most ridiculous figure. With the people filing off at the door he held, who he knew would carry what had passed to the whole town, to be given to the four winds, he could not have looked a Bully more shorn and forlorn, if he had had his ears cropped. Even that unlucky female, Mrs. Sparsit, fallen from her pinnacle of exultation into the Slough of Despond, was not in so bad a plight as that remarkable man and self-made Humbug, Josiah Bounderby of Coketown.

Rachael and Sissy, leaving Mrs. Pegler to occupy a bed at her son's for that night, walked together to the gate of Stone Lodge and there parted. Mr. Gradgrind joined them before they had gone very far, and spoke with much interest of Stephen Blackpool; for whom he thought this signal failure of the suspicions against Mrs. Pegler was likely to work well.

As to the whelp; throughout this scene as on all other late occasions, he had stuck close to Bounderby. He seemed to feel that as long as Bounderby could make no discovery without his knowledge, he was so far safe. He never visited his sister, and had only seen her once since she went home: that is to say on the night when he still stuck close to Bounderby, as already related.

There was one dim unformed fear lingering about his sister's mind, to which she never gave utterance, which surrounded the graceless and ungrateful boy with a dreadful mystery. The same dark possibility had presented itself in the same shapeless guise, this very day, to Sissy, when Rachael spoke of some one who would be confounded by Stephen's return, having put him out of the way. Louisa had never spoken of harbouring any suspicion of her brother in connexion with the robbery, she and Sissy had held no confidence on the subject, save in that one interchange of looks when the unconscious father rested his gray head on his hand; but it was understood between them, and they both knew it. This other fear was so awful, that it hovered about each of them like a ghostly shadow; neither daring to think of its being near herself, far less of its being near the other.

And still the forced spirit which the whelp had plucked up, throve with him. If Stephen Blackpool was not the thief, let him show himself. Why didn't he?

Another night. Another day and night. No Stephen Blackpool.
Where was the man, and why did he not come back?

CHAPTER VI - THE STARLIGHT

THE Sunday was a bright Sunday in autumn, clear and cool, when early in the morning Sissy and Rachael met, to walk in the country.

As Coketown cast ashes not only on its own head but on the neighbourhood's too - after the manner of those pious persons who do penance for their own sins by putting other people into sackcloth - it was customary for those who now and then thirsted for a draught of pure air, which is not absolutely the most wicked among the vanities of life, to get a few miles away by the railroad, and then begin their walk, or their lounge in the fields. Sissy and Rachael helped themselves out of the smoke by the usual means, and were put down at a station about midway between the town and Mr. Bounderby's retreat.

Though the green landscape was blotted here and there with heaps of coal, it was green elsewhere, and there were trees to see, and there were larks singing (though it was Sunday), and there were pleasant scents in the air, and all was over-arched by a bright blue sky. In the distance one way, Coketown showed as a black mist; in another distance hills began to rise; in a third, there was a faint change in the light of the horizon where it shone upon the far-off sea. Under their feet, the grass was fresh; beautiful shadows of branches flickered upon it, and speckled it; hedgerows were luxuriant; everything was at peace. Engines at pits' mouths, and lean old horses that had worn the circle of their daily labour into the ground, were alike quiet;

wheels had ceased for a short space to turn; and the great wheel of earth seemed to revolve without the shocks and noises of another time.

They walked on across the fields and down the shady lanes, sometimes getting over a fragment of a fence so rotten that it dropped at a touch of the foot, sometimes passing near a wreck of bricks and beams overgrown with grass, marking the site of deserted works. They followed paths and tracks, however slight. Mounds where the grass was rank and high, and where brambles, dock-weed, and such-like vegetation, were confusedly heaped together, they always avoided; for dismal stories were told in that country of the old pits hidden beneath such indications.

The sun was high when they sat down to rest. They had seen no one, near or distant, for a long time; and the solitude remained unbroken. 'It is so still here, Rachael, and the way is so untrodden, that I think we must be the first who have been here all the summer.'

As Sissy said it, her eyes were attracted by another of those rotten fragments of fence upon the ground. She got up to look at it. 'And yet I don't know. This has not been broken very long. The wood is quite fresh where it gave way. Here are footsteps too. - O Rachael!'

She ran back, and caught her round the neck. Rachael had already started up.

'What is the matter?'

'I don't know. There is a hat lying in the grass.' They went forward together. Rachael took it up, shaking from head to foot. She broke into a passion of tears and lamentations: Stephen Blackpool was written in his own hand on the inside.

'O the poor lad, the poor lad! He has been made away with. He is lying murdered here!'

'Is there - has the hat any blood upon it?' Sissy faltered.

They were afraid to look; but they did examine it, and found no mark of violence, inside or out. It had been lying there some days, for rain and dew had stained it, and the mark of its shape was on the grass where it had fallen. They looked fearfully about them, without moving, but could see nothing more. 'Rachael,' Sissy whispered, 'I will go on a little by myself.'

She had unclasped her hand, and was in the act of stepping forward, when Rachael caught her in both arms with a scream that resounded over the wide landscape. Before them, at their very feet, was the brink of a black ragged chasm hidden by the thick grass. They sprang back, and fell upon their knees, each hiding her face upon the other's neck.

'O, my good Lord! He's down there! Down there!' At first this, and her terrific screams, were all that could be got from Rachael, by any tears, by any prayers, by any representations, by any means. It was impossible to hush her; and it was deadly necessary to hold her, or she would have flung herself down the shaft.

'Rachael, dear Rachael, good Rachael, for the love of Heaven, not these dreadful cries! Think of Stephen, think of Stephen, think of Stephen!'

By an earnest repetition of this entreaty, poured out in all the agony of such a moment, Sissy at last brought her to be silent, and to look at her with a tearless face of stone.

'Rachael, Stephen may be living. You wouldn't leave him lying maimed at the bottom of this dreadful place, a moment, if you could bring help to him?'

'No, no, no!'

'Don't stir from here, for his sake! Let me go and listen.'

She shuddered to approach the pit; but she crept towards it on her hands and knees, and called to him as loud as she could call. She listened, but no sound replied. She called again and listened; still no answering sound. She did this, twenty, thirty times. She took a little clod of earth from the broken ground where he had stumbled, and threw it in. She could not hear it fall.

The wide prospect, so beautiful in its stillness but a few minutes ago, almost carried despair to her brave heart, as she rose and looked all round her, seeing no help. 'Rachael, we must lose not a moment. We must go in different directions, seeking aid. You shall go by the way we have come, and I will go forward by the path. Tell any one you see, and every one what has happened. Think of Stephen, think of Stephen!'

She knew by Rachael's face that she might trust her now. And after standing for a moment to see her running, wringing her hands as she ran, she turned and went upon her own search; she stopped at the hedge to tie her shawl there as a guide to the place, then threw her bonnet aside, and ran as she had never run before.

Run, Sissy, run, in Heaven's name! Don't stop for breath. Run, run! Quickening herself by carrying such entreaties in her thoughts, she ran from field to field, and lane to lane, and place to place, as she had never run before; until she came to a shed by an engine-house, where two men lay in the shade, asleep on straw.

First to wake them, and next to tell them, all so wild and breathless as she was, what had brought her there, were difficulties; but they no sooner understood her than their spirits were on fire like hers. One of the men was in a drunken slumber, but on his comrade's shouting to him that a man had fallen down the Old Hell Shaft, he started out to a pool of dirty water, put his head in it, and came back sober.

With these two men she ran to another half-a-mile further, and with that one to another, while they ran elsewhere. Then a horse was found; and she got another man to ride for life or death to the railroad, and send a message to Louisa, which she wrote and gave him. By this time a whole village was up: and windlasses, ropes, poles, candles, lanterns, all things necessary, were fast collecting and being brought into one place, to be carried to the Old Hell Shaft.

It seemed now hours and hours since she had left the lost man lying in the grave where he had been buried alive. She could not bear to remain away from it any longer - it was like deserting him - and she hurried swiftly back, accompanied by half-a-dozen labourers, including the drunken man whom the news had sobered, and who was the best man of all. When they came to the Old Hell Shaft, they found it as lonely as she had left it. The men called and listened as she had done, and examined the edge of the chasm, and settled how it had happened, and then sat down to wait until the implements they wanted should come up.

Every sound of insects in the air, every stirring of the leaves, every whisper among these men, made Sissy tremble, for she thought it was a cry at the bottom of the pit. But the wind blew idly over it, and no sound arose to the surface, and they sat upon the grass, waiting and waiting. After they had waited some time, straggling people who had heard of the accident began to come up; then the real help of implements began to arrive. In the midst of this, Rachael returned; and with her party there was a surgeon, who brought some wine and medicines. But, the expectation among the people that the man would be found alive was very slight indeed.

There being now people enough present to impede the work, the sobered man put himself at the head of the rest, or was put there by the general consent, and made a large ring round the Old Hell Shaft, and appointed men to keep it. Besides such volunteers as were accepted to work, only Sissy and Rachael were at first permitted within this ring; but, later in the day, when the message brought an express from Coketown, Mr. Gradgrind and Louisa, and Mr. Bounderby, and the whelp, were also there.

The sun was four hours lower than when Sissy and Rachael had first sat down upon the grass, before a means of enabling two men to descend securely was rigged with poles and ropes. Difficulties had arisen in the construction of this machine, simple as it was; requisites had been found wanting, and messages had had to go and return. It was five o'clock in the afternoon of the bright autumnal Sunday, before a candle was sent down to try the air, while three or four rough faces stood crowded close together, attentively watching it: the man at the windlass lowering as they were told. The candle was brought up again, feebly burning, and then some water was cast in. Then the bucket was hooked on; and the sobered man and another got in with lights, giving the word 'Lower away!'

As the rope went out, tight and strained, and the windlass creaked, there was not a breath among the one or two hundred men and women looking on, that came as it was wont to come. The signal was given and the windlass stopped, with abundant rope to spare. Apparently so long an interval ensued with the men at the windlass standing idle, that some women shrieked that another accident had happened! But the surgeon who held the watch, declared five minutes not to have elapsed yet, and sternly admonished them to keep silence. He had not well done speaking, when the windlass was reversed and worked again. Practised eyes knew that it did not go as heavily as it would if both workmen had been coming up, and that only one was returning.

The rope came in tight and strained; and ring after ring was coiled upon the barrel of the windlass, and all eyes were fastened on the pit. The sobered man was brought up and leaped out briskly on the grass. There was an universal cry of 'Alive or dead?' and then a deep, profound hush.

When he said 'Alive!' a great shout arose and many eyes had tears in them.

'But he's hurt very bad,' he added, as soon as he could make himself heard again. 'Where's doctor? He's hurt so very bad, sir, that we donno how to get him up.'

They all consulted together, and looked anxiously at the surgeon, as he asked some questions, and shook his head on receiving the replies. The sun was setting now; and the red light in the evening sky touched every face there, and caused it to be distinctly seen in all its rapt suspense.

The consultation ended in the men returning to the windlass, and the pitman going down again, carrying the wine and some other small matters with him. Then the other man came up. In the meantime, under the surgeon's directions, some men brought a hurdle, on which others made a thick bed of spare clothes covered with loose straw, while he himself contrived some bandages and slings from shawls and handkerchiefs. As these were made, they were hung upon an arm of the pitman who had last come up, with instructions how to use them: and as he stood, shown by the light he carried, leaning his powerful loose hand upon one of the poles, and sometimes glancing down the pit, and sometimes glancing round upon the people, he was not the least conspicuous figure in the scene. It was dark now, and torches were kindled.

It appeared from the little this man said to those about him, which was quickly repeated all over the circle, that the lost man had fallen upon a mass of crumbled rubbish with which the pit was half choked up, and that his fall had been further broken by some jagged earth at the side. He lay upon his back with one arm doubled under him, and according to his own belief had hardly stirred since he fell, except that he had moved his free hand to a side pocket, in which he remembered to have some bread and meat (of which he had swallowed crumbs), and had likewise scooped up a little water in it now and then. He had come straight away from his work, on being written to, and had walked the whole journey; and was on his way to Mr. Bounderby's country house after dark, when he fell. He was crossing that dangerous country at such a dangerous time, because he was innocent of what was laid to his charge, and couldn't rest from coming the nearest way to deliver himself up. The Old Hell Shaft, the pitman said, with a curse upon it, was worthy of its bad name to the last; for though Stephen could speak now, he believed it would soon be found to have mangled the life out of him.

When all was ready, this man, still taking his last hurried charges from his comrades and the surgeon after the windlass had begun to lower him, disappeared into the pit. The rope went out as before, the signal was made as before, and the windlass stopped. No man removed his hand from it now. Every one waited with his grasp set, and his body bent down to the work, ready to reverse and wind in. At length the signal was given, and all the ring leaned forward.

For, now, the rope came in, tightened and strained to its utmost as it appeared, and the men turned heavily, and the windlass complained. It was scarcely endurable to look at the rope, and think of its giving way. But, ring after ring was coiled upon the barrel of the windlass safely, and the connecting chains appeared, and finally the bucket with the two men holding on at the sides - a sight to make the head swim, and oppress the heart - and tenderly supporting between them, slung and tied within, the figure of a poor, crushed, human creature.

A low murmur of pity went round the throng, and the women wept aloud, as this form, almost without form, was moved very slowly from its iron deliverance, and laid upon the bed of straw. At first, none but the surgeon went close to it. He did what he could in its adjustment on the couch, but the best that he could do was to cover it. That gently done, he called to him Rachael and Sissy. And at that time the pale, worn, patient face was seen looking up at the sky, with the broken right hand lying bare on the outside of the covering garments, as if waiting to be taken by another hand.

They gave him drink, moistened his face with water, and administered some drops of cordial and wine. Though he lay quite motionless looking up at the sky, he smiled and said, 'Rachael.' She stooped down on the grass at his side, and bent over him until her eyes were between his and the sky, for he could not so much as turn them to look at her.

'Rachael, my dear.'

She took his hand. He smiled again and said, 'Don't let 't go.'

'Thou'rt in great pain, my own dear Stephen?'

'I ha' been, but not now. I ha' been - dreadful, and dree, and long, my dear - but 'tis ower now. Ah, Rachael, aw a muddle! Fro' first to last, a muddle!'

The spectre of his old look seemed to pass as he said the word.

'I ha' fell into th' pit, my dear, as have cost wi'in the knowledge o' old fok now livin, hundreds and hundreds o' men's lives - fathers, sons, brothers, dear to thousands an' thousands, an' keeping 'em fro' want and hunger. I ha' fell into a pit that ha' been wi' th' Firedamp crueller than battle. I ha' read on 't in the public petition, as onny one may read, fro' the men that works in pits, in which they ha' pray'n and pray'n the lawmakers for Christ's sake not to let their work be murder to 'em, but to spare 'em for th' wives and children that they loves as well as gentlefok loves theirs. When it were in work, it killed wi'out need; when 'tis let alone, it kills wi'out need. See how we die an' no need, one way an' another - in a muddle - every day!'

He faintly said it, without any anger against any one. Merely as the truth.

'Thy little sister, Rachael, thou hast not forgot her. Thou'rt not like to forget her now, and me so nigh her. Thou know'st - poor, patient, suff'rin, dear - how thou didst work for her, seet'n all day long in her little chair at thy winder, and how she died, young and misshapen, awlung o' sickly air as had'n no need to be, an' awlung o' working people's miserable homes. A muddle! Aw a muddle!'

Louisa approached him; but he could not see her, lying with his face turned up to the night sky.

'If aw th' things that tooches us, my dear, was not so muddled, I should'n ha' had'n need to coom heer. If we was not in a muddle among ourseln, I should'n ha' been, by my own fellow weavers and workin' brothers, so mistook. If Mr. Bounderby had ever know'd me right - if he'd ever know'd me at aw - he would'n ha' took'n offence wi' me. He would'n ha' suspect'n me. But look up yonder, Rachael! Look aboove!'

Following his eyes, she saw that he was gazing at a star.

'It ha' shined upon me,' he said reverently, 'in my pain and trouble down below. It ha' shined into my mind. I ha' look'n at 't and thowt o' thee, Rachael, till the muddle in my mind have cleared awa, above a bit, I hope. If soom ha' been wantin' in unnerstan'in me better, I, too, ha' been wantin' in unnerstan'in them better. When I got thy letter, I easily believen that what the yoong ledy sen and done to me, and what her brother sen and done to me, was one, and that there were a wicked plot betwixt 'em. When I fell, I were in anger wi' her, an' hurryin on t' be as onjust t' her as oothers was t' me. But in our judgments, like as in our doins, we mun bear and forbear. In my pain an' trouble, lookin up yonder, - wi' it shinin on me - I ha' seen more clear, and ha' made it my dyin prayer that aw th' world may on'y coom toogether more, an' get a better unnerstan'in o' one another, than when I were in 't my own weak seln.'

Louisa hearing what he said, bent over him on the opposite side to Rachael, so that he could see her.

'You ha' heard?' he said, after a few moments' silence. 'I ha' not forgot you, ledy.'

'Yes, Stephen, I have heard you. And your prayer is mine.'

'You ha' a father. Will yo tak' a message to him?'

'He is here,' said Louisa, with dread. 'Shall I bring him to you?'

'If yo please.'

Louisa returned with her father. Standing hand-in-hand, they both looked down upon the solemn countenance.

'Sir, yo will clear me an' mak my name good wi' aw men. This I leave to yo.'

Mr. Gradgrind was troubled and asked how?

'Sir,' was the reply: 'yor son will tell yo how. Ask him. I mak no charges: I leave none ahint me: not a single word. I ha' seen an' spok'n wi' yor son, one night. I ask no more o' yo than that yo clear me - an' I trust to yo to do 't.'

The bearers being now ready to carry him away, and the surgeon being anxious for his removal, those who had torches or lanterns, prepared to go in front of the litter. Before it was raised, and while they were arranging how to go, he said to Rachael, looking upward at the star:

'Often as I coom to myseln, and found it shinin' on me down there in my trouble, I thowt it were the star as guided to Our Saviour's home. I awmust think it be the very star!'

They lifted him up, and he was overjoyed to find that they were about to take him in the direction whither the star seemed to him to lead.

'Rachael, beloved lass! Don't let go my hand. We may walk toogether t'night, my dear!'

'I will hold thy hand, and keep beside thee, Stephen, all the way.'

'Bless thee! Will soombody be pleased to coover my face!'

They carried him very gently along the fields, and down the lanes, and over the wide landscape; Rachael always holding the hand in hers. Very few whispers broke the mournful silence. It was soon a funeral procession. The star had shown him where to find the God of the poor; and through humility, and sorrow, and forgiveness, he had gone to his Redeemer's rest.

CHAPTER VII - WHELP-HUNTING

BEFORE the ring formed round the Old Hell Shaft was broken, one figure had disappeared from within it. Mr. Bounderby and his shadow had not stood near Louisa, who held her father's arm, but in a retired place by themselves. When Mr. Gradgrind was summoned to the couch, Sissy, attentive to all that happened, slipped behind that wicked shadow - a sight in the horror of his face, if there had been eyes there for any sight but one - and whispered in his ear. Without turning his head, he conferred with her a few moments, and vanished. Thus the whelp had gone out of the circle before the people moved.

When the father reached home, he sent a message to Mr. Bounderby's, desiring his son to come to him directly. The reply was, that Mr. Bounderby having missed him in the crowd, and seeing nothing of him since, had supposed him to be at Stone Lodge.

'I believe, father,' said Louisa, 'he will not come back to town to-night.' Mr. Gradgrind turned away, and said no more.

In the morning, he went down to the Bank himself as soon as it was opened, and seeing his son's place empty (he had not the courage to look in at first) went back along the street to meet Mr. Bounderby on his way there. To whom he said that, for reasons he would soon explain, but entreated not then to be asked for, he had found it necessary to employ his son at a distance for a little while. Also, that he was charged with the duty of vindicating Stephen Blackpool's memory, and declaring the thief. Mr. Bounderby quite confounded, stood stock-still in the street after his father-in-law had left him, swelling like an immense soap-bubble, without its beauty.

Mr. Gradgrind went home, locked himself in his room, and kept it all that day. When Sissy and Louisa tapped at his door, he said, without opening it, 'Not now, my dears; in the evening.' On their return in the evening, he said, 'I am not able yet - to-morrow.' He ate nothing all day, and had no candle after dark; and they heard him walking to and fro late at night.

But, in the morning he appeared at breakfast at the usual hour, and took his usual place at the table. Aged and bent he looked, and quite bowed down; and yet he looked a wiser man, and a better man, than in the days when in this life he wanted nothing - but Facts. Before he left the room, he appointed a time for them to come to him; and so, with his gray head drooping, went away.

'Dear father,' said Louisa, when they kept their appointment, 'you have three young children left. They will be different, I will be different yet, with Heaven's help.'

She gave her hand to Sissy, as if she meant with her help too.

'Your wretched brother,' said Mr. Gradgrind. 'Do you think he had planned this robbery, when he went with you to the lodging?'

'I fear so, father. I know he had wanted money very much, and had spent a great deal.'

'The poor man being about to leave the town, it came into his evil brain to cast suspicion on him?'

'I think it must have flashed upon him while he sat there, father. For I asked him to go there with me. The visit did not originate with him.'

'He had some conversation with the poor man. Did he take him aside?'

'He took him out of the room. I asked him afterwards, why he had done so, and he made a plausible excuse; but since last night, father, and when I remember the circumstances by its light, I am afraid I can imagine too truly what passed between them.'

'Let me know,' said her father, 'if your thoughts present your guilty brother in the same dark view as mine.'

'I fear, father,' hesitated Louisa, 'that he must have made some representation to Stephen Blackpool - perhaps in my name, perhaps in his own - which induced him to do in good faith and honesty, what he had never done before, and to wait about the Bank those two or three nights before he left the town.'

'Too plain!' returned the father. 'Too plain!'

He shaded his face, and remained silent for some moments.
Recovering himself, he said:

'And now, how is he to be found? How is he to be saved from justice? In the few hours that I can possibly allow to elapse before I publish the truth, how is he to be found by us, and only by us? Ten thousand pounds could not effect it.'

'Sissy has effected it, father.'

He raised his eyes to where she stood, like a good fairy in his house, and said in a tone of softened gratitude and grateful kindness, 'It is always you, my child!'

'We had our fears,' Sissy explained, glancing at Louisa, 'before yesterday; and when I saw you brought to the side of the litter last night, and heard what passed (being close to Rachael all the time), I went to him when no one saw, and said to him, "Don't look at me. See where your father is. Escape at once, for his sake and your own!" He was in a tremble before I whispered to him, and he started and trembled more then, and said, "Where can I go? I have very little money, and I don't know who will hide me!" I thought of father's old circus. I have not forgotten where Mr. Sleary goes at this time of year, and I read of him in a paper only the other day. I told him to hurry there, and tell his name, and ask Mr. Sleary to hide him till I came. "I'll get to him before the morning," he said. And I saw him shrink away among the people.'

'Thank Heaven!' exclaimed his father. 'He may be got abroad yet.'

It was the more hopeful as the town to which Sissy had directed him was within three hours' journey of Liverpool, whence he could be swiftly dispatched to any part of the world. But, caution being necessary in communicating with him - for there was a greater danger every moment of his being suspected now, and nobody could be sure at heart but that Mr. Bounderby himself, in a bullying vein of public zeal, might play a Roman part - it was consented that Sissy and Louisa should repair to the place in question, by a circuitous course, alone; and that the unhappy father, setting forth in an opposite direction, should get round to the same bourne by another and wider route. It was further agreed that he should not present himself to Mr. Sleary, lest his intentions should be mistrusted, or the intelligence of his arrival should cause his son to take flight anew; but, that the communication should be left to Sissy and Louisa to open; and that they should inform the cause of so much misery and disgrace, of his father's being at hand and of the purpose for which they had come. When these arrangements had been well considered and were fully understood by all three, it was time to begin to carry them into execution. Early in the afternoon, Mr. Gradgrind walked direct from his own house into the country, to be taken up on the line by which he was to travel; and at night the remaining two set forth upon their different course, encouraged by not seeing any face they knew.

The two travelled all night, except when they were left, for odd numbers of minutes, at branch-places, up illimitable flights of steps, or down wells - which was the only variety of those branches - and, early in the morning, were turned out on a swamp, a mile or two from the town they sought. From this dismal spot they were rescued by a savage old postilion, who happened to be up early, kicking a horse in a fly: and so were smuggled into the town by all the back lanes where the pigs lived: which, although not a magnificent or even savoury approach, was, as is usual in such cases, the legitimate highway.

The first thing they saw on entering the town was the skeleton of Sleary's Circus. The company had departed for another town more than twenty miles off, and had opened there last night. The connection between the two places was by a hilly turnpike-road, and the travelling on that road was very slow. Though they took but a hasty breakfast, and no rest (which it would have been in vain to seek under such anxious circumstances), it was noon before they began to find the bills of Sleary's Horse-riding on barns and walls, and one o'clock when they stopped in the market-place.

A Grand Morning Performance by the Riders, commencing at that very hour, was in course of announcement by the bellman as they set their feet upon the stones of the street. Sissy recommended that, to avoid making inquiries and attracting attention in the town, they should present themselves to pay at the door. If Mr. Sleary were taking the money, he would be sure to know her, and would proceed with discretion. If he were not, he would be sure to see them inside; and, knowing what he had done with the fugitive, would proceed with discretion still.

Therefore, they repaired, with fluttering hearts, to the well- remembered booth. The flag with the inscription SLEARY'S HORSE- RIDING was there; and the Gothic niche was there; but Mr. Sleary was not there. Master Kidderminster, grown too maturely turfy to be received by the wildest credulity as Cupid any more, had yielded to the invincible force of circumstances (and his beard), and, in the capacity of a man who made himself generally useful, presided on this occasion over the exchequer - having also a drum in reserve, on which to expend his leisure moments and superfluous forces. In the extreme sharpness of his look out for base coin, Mr. Kidderminster, as at present situated, never saw anything but money; so Sissy passed him unrecognised, and they went in.

The Emperor of Japan, on a steady old white horse stencilled with black spots, was twirling five wash-hand basins at once, as it is the favourite recreation of that monarch to do. Sissy, though well acquainted with his Royal line, had no personal knowledge of the present Emperor, and his reign was peaceful. Miss Josephine Sleary, in her celebrated graceful Equestrian Tyrolean Flower Act, was then announced by a new clown (who humorously said Cauliflower Act), and Mr. Sleary appeared, leading her in.

Mr. Sleary had only made one cut at the Clown with his long whip-lash, and the Clown had only said, 'If you do it again, I'll throw the horse at you!' when Sissy was recognised both by father and daughter. But they got through the Act with great self-possession; and Mr. Sleary, saving for the first instant, conveyed no more expression into his locomotive eye than into his fixed one. The performance seemed a little long to Sissy and Louisa, particularly when it stopped to afford the Clown an opportunity of telling Mr. Sleary (who said 'Indeed, sir!' to all his observations in the calmest way, and with his eye on the house) about two legs sitting on three legs looking at one leg, when in came four legs, and laid hold of one leg, and up got two legs, caught hold of three legs, and threw 'em at four legs, who ran away with one leg. For, although an ingenious Allegory relating to a butcher, a three- legged stool, a dog, and a leg of mutton, this narrative consumed time; and they were in great suspense. At last, however, little fair-haired Josephine made her curtsey amid great applause; and the Clown, left alone in the ring, had just warmed himself, and said, 'Now I'll have a turn!' when Sissy was touched on the shoulder, and beckoned out.

She took Louisa with her; and they were received by Mr. Sleary in a very little private apartment, with canvas sides, a grass floor, and a wooden ceiling all aslant, on which the box company stamped their approbation, as if they were coming through. 'Thethilia,' said Mr. Sleary, who had brandy and water at hand, 'it doth me good to thee you. You wath alwayth a favourite with uth, and you've done uth credith thinth the old timeth I'm thure. You mutht thee our people, my dear, afore we thpeak of bithnith, or they'll break their hearth - ethpethially the women. Here'th Jothphine hath been and got married to E. W. B. Childerth, and thee hath got a boy, and though he'th only three yearth old, he thtickth on to any pony you can bring againtht him. He'th named The Little Wonder of Thcolathtic Equitation; and if you don't hear of that boy at Athley'th, you'll hear of him at Parith. And you recollect Kidderminthter, that wath thought to be rather thweet upon yourthelf? Well. He'th married too. Married a widder. Old enough to be hith mother. Thee wath Tightrope, thee wath, and now thee'th nothing - on accounth of fat. They've got two children, tho we're thtrong in the Fairy bithnith and the Nurthery dodge. If you wath to thee our Children in the Wood, with their father and mother both a dyin' on a horthe - their uncle a retheiving of 'em ath hith wardth, upon a horthe - themthelvth both a goin' a black- berryin' on a horthe - and the Robinth a coming in to cover 'em with leavth, upon a horthe - you'd thay it wath the completetht thing ath ever you thet your eyeth on! And you remember Emma Gordon, my dear, ath wath a'motht a mother to you? Of courthe you do; I needn't athk. Well! Emma, thee lotht her huthband. He wath throw'd a heavy back-fall off a Elephant in a thort of a Pagoda thing ath the Thultan of the Indieth, and he never got the better of it; and thee married a thecond time - married a Cheethemonger ath fell in love with her from the front - and he'th a Overtheer and makin' a fortun.'

These various changes, Mr. Sleary, very short of breath now, related with great heartiness, and with a wonderful kind of innocence, considering what a bleary and brandy-and-watery old veteran he was. Afterwards he brought in Josephine, and E. W. B. Childers (rather deeply lined in the jaws by daylight), and the Little Wonder of Scholastic Equitation, and in a word, all the company. Amazing creatures they were in Louisa's eyes, so white and pink of complexion, so scant of dress, and so demonstrative of leg; but it was very agreeable to see them crowding about Sissy, and very natural in Sissy to be unable to refrain from tears.

'There! Now Thethilia hath kithd all the children, and hugged all the women, and thaken handth all round with all the men, clear, every one of you, and ring in the band for the thecond part!'

As soon as they were gone, he continued in a low tone. 'Now, Thethilia, I don't athk to know any thecreth, but I thuppothe I may conthider thith to be Mith Thquire.'

'This is his sister. Yes.'

'And t'other on'th daughter. That'h what I mean. Hope I thee you well, mith. And I hope the Thquire'th well?'

'My father will be here soon,' said Louisa, anxious to bring him to the point. 'Is my brother safe?'

'Thafe and thound!' he replied. 'I want you jutht to take a peep at the Ring, mith, through here. Thethilia, you know the dodgeth; find a thpy-hole for yourthelf.'

They each looked through a chink in the boards.

'That'h Jack the Giant Killer - piethe of comic infant bithnith,' said Sleary. 'There'th a property-houthe, you thee, for Jack to hide in; there'th my Clown with a thauthepan-lid and a thpit, for Jack'th thervant; there'th little Jack himthelf in a thplendid thoot of armour; there'th two comic black thervanth twithe ath big ath the houthe, to thtand by it and to bring it in and clear it; and the Giant (a very ecthpenthive bathket one), he an't on yet. Now, do you thee 'em all?'

'Yes,' they both said.

'Look at 'em again,' said Sleary, 'look at 'em well. You thee em all? Very good. Now, mith;' he put a form for them to sit on; 'I have my opinionth, and the Thquire your father hath hith. I don't want to know what your brother'th been up to; ith better for me not to know. All I thay ith, the Thquire hath thtood by Thethilia, and I'll thtand by the Thquire. Your brother ith one them black thervanth.'

Louisa uttered an exclamation, partly of distress, partly of satisfaction.

'Ith a fact,' said Sleary, 'and even knowin' it, you couldn't put your finger on him. Let the Thquire come. I thall keep your brother here after the performanth. I thant undreth him, nor yet wath hith paint off. Let the Thquire come here after the performanth, or come here yourthelf after the performanth, and you thall find your brother, and have the whole plathe to talk to him in. Never mind the lookth of him, ath long ath he'th well hid.'

Louisa, with many thanks and with a lightened load, detained Mr. Sleary no longer then. She left her love for her brother, with her eyes full of tears; and she and Sissy went away until later in the afternoon.

Mr. Gradgrind arrived within an hour afterwards. He too had encountered no one whom he knew; and was now sanguine with Sleary's assistance, of getting his disgraced son to Liverpool in the night. As neither of the three could be his companion without almost identifying him under any disguise, he prepared a letter to a correspondent whom he could trust, beseeching him to ship the bearer off at any cost, to North or South America, or any distant part of the world to which he could be the most speedily and privately dispatched.

This done, they walked about, waiting for the Circus to be quite vacated; not only by the audience, but by the company and by the horses. After watching it a long time, they saw Mr. Sleary bring out a chair and sit down by the side-door, smoking; as if that were his signal that they might approach.

'Your thervant, Thquire,' was his cautious salutation as they passed in. 'If you want me you'll find me here. You muthn't mind your thon having a comic livery on.'

They all three went in; and Mr. Gradgrind sat down forlorn, on the Clown's performing chair in the middle of the ring. On one of the back benches, remote in the subdued light and the strangeness of the place, sat the villainous whelp, sulky to the last, whom he had the misery to call his son.

In a preposterous coat, like a beadle's, with cuffs and flaps exaggerated to an unspeakable extent; in an immense waistcoat, knee-breeches, buckled shoes, and a mad cocked hat; with nothing fitting him, and everything of coarse material, moth-eaten and full of holes; with seams in his black face, where fear and heat had started through the greasy composition daubed all over it; anything so grimly, detestably, ridiculously shameful as the whelp in his comic livery, Mr. Gradgrind never could by any other means have believed in, weighable and measurable fact though it was. And one of his model children had come to this!

At first the whelp would not draw any nearer, but persisted in remaining up there by himself. Yielding at length, if any concession so sullenly made can be called yielding, to the entreaties of Sissy - for Louisa he disowned altogether - he came down, bench by bench, until he stood in the sawdust, on the verge of the circle, as far as possible, within its limits from where his father sat.

'How was this done?' asked the father.

'How was what done?' moodily answered the son.

'This robbery,' said the father, raising his voice upon the word.

'I forced the safe myself over night, and shut it up ajar before I went away. I had had the key that was found, made long before. I dropped it that morning, that it might be supposed to have been used. I didn't take the money all at once. I pretended to put my balance away every night, but I didn't. Now you know all about it.'

'If a thunderbolt had fallen on me,' said the father, 'it would have shocked me less than this!'

'I don't see why,' grumbled the son. 'So many people are employed in situations of trust; so many people, out of so many, will be dishonest. I have heard you talk, a hundred times, of its being a law. How can I help laws? You have comforted others with such things, father. Comfort yourself!'

The father buried his face in his hands, and the son stood in his disgraceful grotesqueness, biting straw: his hands, with the black partly worn away inside, looking like the hands of a monkey. The evening was fast closing in; and from time to time, he turned the whites of his eyes restlessly and impatiently towards his father. They were the only parts of his face that showed any life or expression, the pigment upon it was so thick.

'You must be got to Liverpool, and sent abroad.'

'I suppose I must. I can't be more miserable anywhere,' whimpered the whelp, 'than I have been here, ever since I can remember. That's one thing.'

Mr. Gradgrind went to the door, and returned with Sleary, to whom he submitted the question, How to get this deplorable object away?

'Why, I've been thinking of it, Thquire. There'th not muth time to lothe, tho you muth thay yeth or no. Ith over twenty mileth to the rail. There'th a coath in half an hour, that goeth to the rail, 'purpothe to cath the mail train. That train will take him right to Liverpool.'

'But look at him,' groaned Mr. Gradgrind. 'Will any coach - '

'I don't mean that he thould go in the comic livery,' said Sleary. 'Thay the word, and I'll make a Jothkin of him, out of the wardrobe, in five minutes.'

'I don't understand,' said Mr. Gradgrind.

'A Jothkin - a Carter. Make up your mind quick, Thquire. There'll be beer to feth. I've never met with nothing but beer ath'll ever clean a comic blackamoor.'

Mr. Gradgrind rapidly assented; Mr. Sleary rapidly turned out from a box, a smock frock, a felt hat, and other essentials; the whelp rapidly changed clothes behind a screen of baize; Mr. Sleary rapidly brought beer, and washed him white again.

'Now,' said Sleary, 'come along to the coath, and jump up behind; I'll go with you there, and they'll thuppothe you one of my people. Thay farewell to your family, and tharp'th the word.' With which he delicately retired.

'Here is your letter,' said Mr. Gradgrind. 'All necessary means will be provided for you. Atone, by repentance and better conduct, for the shocking action you have committed, and the dreadful consequences to which it has led. Give me your hand, my poor boy, and may God forgive you as I do!'

The culprit was moved to a few abject tears by these words and their pathetic tone. But, when Louisa opened her arms, he repulsed her afresh.

'Not you. I don't want to have anything to say to you!'

'O Tom, Tom, do we end so, after all my love!'

'After all your love!' he returned, obdurately. 'Pretty love! Leaving old Bounderby to himself, and packing my best friend Mr. Harthouse off, and going home just when I was in the greatest danger. Pretty love that! Coming out with every word about our having gone to that place, when you saw the net was gathering round me. Pretty love that! You have regularly given me up. You never cared for me.'

'Tharp'th the word!' said Sleary, at the door.

They all confusedly went out: Louisa crying to him that she forgave him, and loved him still, and that he would one day be sorry to have left her so, and glad to think of these her last words, far away: when some one ran against them. Mr. Gradgrind and Sissy, who were both before him while his sister yet clung to his shoulder, stopped and recoiled.

For, there was Bitzer, out of breath, his thin lips parted, his thin nostrils distended, his white eyelashes quivering, his colourless face more colourless than ever, as if he ran himself into a white heat, when other people ran themselves into a glow. There he stood, panting and heaving, as if he had never stopped since the night, now long ago, when he had run them down before.

'I'm sorry to interfere with your plans,' said Bitzer, shaking his head, 'but I can't allow myself to be done by horse-riders. I must have young Mr. Tom; he mustn't be got away by horse-riders; here he is in a smock frock, and I must have him!'

By the collar, too, it seemed. For, so he took possession of him.

CHAPTER VIII - PHILOSOPHICAL

THEY went back into the booth, Sleary shutting the door to keep intruders out. Bitzer, still holding the paralysed culprit by the collar, stood in the Ring, blinking at his old patron through the darkness of the twilight.

'Bitzer,' said Mr. Gradgrind, broken down, and miserably submissive to him, 'have you a heart?'

'The circulation, sir,' returned Bitzer, smiling at the oddity of the question, 'couldn't be carried on without one. No man, sir, acquainted with the facts established by Harvey relating to the circulation of the blood, can doubt that I have a heart.'

'Is it accessible,' cried Mr. Gradgrind, 'to any compassionate influence?'

'It is accessible to Reason, sir,' returned the excellent young man. 'And to nothing else.'

They stood looking at each other; Mr. Gradgrind's face as white as the pursuer's.

'What motive - even what motive in reason - can you have for preventing the escape of this wretched youth,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'and crushing his miserable father? See his sister here. Pity us!'

'Sir,' returned Bitzer, in a very business-like and logical manner, 'since you ask me what motive I have in reason, for taking young Mr. Tom back to Coketown, it is only reasonable to let you know. I have suspected young Mr. Tom of this bank-robbery from the first. I had had my eye upon him before that time, for I knew his ways. I have kept my observations to myself, but I have made them; and I have got ample proofs against him now, besides his running away, and besides his own confession, which I was just in time to overhear. I had the pleasure of watching your house yesterday morning, and following you here. I am going to take young Mr. Tom back to Coketown, in order to deliver him over to Mr. Bounderby. Sir, I have no doubt whatever that Mr. Bounderby will then promote me to young Mr. Tom's situation. And I wish to have his situation, sir, for it will be a rise to me, and will do me good.'

'If this is solely a question of self-interest with you - ' Mr. Gradgrind began.

'I beg your pardon for interrupting you, sir,' returned Bitzer; 'but I am sure you know that the whole social system is a question of self-interest. What you must always appeal to, is a person's self-interest. It's your only hold. We are so constituted. I was brought up in that catechism when I was very young, sir, as you are aware.'

'What sum of money,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'will you set against your expected promotion?'

'Thank you, sir,' returned Bitzer, 'for hinting at the proposal; but I will not set any sum against it. Knowing that your clear head would propose that alternative, I have gone over the calculations in my mind; and I find that to compound a felony, even on very high terms indeed, would not be as safe and good for me as my improved prospects in the Bank.'

'Bitzer,' said Mr. Gradgrind, stretching out his hands as though he would have said, See how miserable I am! 'Bitzer, I have but one chance left to soften you. You were many years at my school. If, in remembrance of the pains bestowed upon you there, you can persuade yourself in any degree to disregard your present interest and release my son, I entreat and pray you to give him the benefit of that remembrance.'

'I really wonder, sir,' rejoined the old pupil in an argumentative manner, 'to find you taking a position so untenable. My schooling was paid for; it was a bargain; and when I came away, the bargain ended.'

It was a fundamental principle of the Gradgrind philosophy that everything was to be paid for. Nobody was ever on any account to give anybody anything, or render anybody help without purchase. Gratitude was to be abolished, and the virtues springing from it were not to be. Every inch of the existence of mankind, from birth to death, was to be a bargain across a counter. And if we didn't get to Heaven that way, it was not a politico-economical place, and we had no business there.

'I don't deny,' added Bitzer, 'that my schooling was cheap. But that comes right, sir. I was made in the cheapest market, and have to dispose of myself in the dearest.'

He was a little troubled here, by Louisa and Sissy crying.

'Pray don't do that,' said he, 'it's of no use doing that: it only worries. You seem to think that I have some animosity against young Mr. Tom; whereas I have none at all. I am only going, on the reasonable grounds I have mentioned, to take him back to Coketown. If he was to resist, I should set up the cry of Stop thief! But, he won't resist, you may depend upon it.'

Mr. Sleary, who with his mouth open and his rolling eye as immovably jammed in his head as his fixed one, had listened to these doctrines with profound attention, here stepped forward.

'Thquire, you know perfectly well, and your daughter knowth perfectly well (better than you, becauthe I thed it to her), that I didn't know what your thon had done, and that I didn't want to know - I thed it wath better not, though I only thought, then, it wath thome thkylarking. However, thith young man having made it known to be a robbery of a bank, why, that'h a theriouth thing; muth too theriouth a thing for me to compound, ath thith young man hath very properly called it. Conthequently, Thquire, you muthn't quarrel with me if I take thith young man'th thide, and thay he'th right and there'th no help for it. But I tell you what I'll do, Thquire; I'll drive your thon and thith young man over to the rail, and prevent expothure here. I can't conthent to do more, but I'll do that.'

Fresh lamentations from Louisa, and deeper affliction on Mr. Gradgrind's part, followed this desertion of them by their last friend. But, Sissy glanced at him with great attention; nor did she in her own breast misunderstand him. As they were all going out again, he favoured her with one slight roll of his movable eye, desiring her to linger behind. As he locked the door, he said excitedly:

'The Thquire thtood by you, Thethilia, and I'll thtand by the Thquire. More than that: thith ith a prethiouth rathcal, and belongth to that bluthtering Cove that my people nearly pitht out o' winder. It'll be a dark night; I've got a horthe that'll do anything but thpeak; I've got a pony that'll go fifteen mile an hour with Childerth driving of him; I've got a dog that'll keep a man to one plathe four-and-twenty hourth. Get a word with the young Thquire. Tell him, when he theeth our horthe begin to danthe, not to be afraid of being thpilt, but to look out for a pony-gig coming up. Tell him, when he theeth that gig clothe by, to jump down, and it'll take him off at a rattling pathe. If my dog leth thith young man thtir a peg on foot, I give him leave to go. And if my horthe ever thtirth from that thpot where he beginth a danthing, till the morning - I don't know him? - Tharp'th the word!'

The word was so sharp, that in ten minutes Mr. Childers, sauntering about the market-place in a pair of slippers, had his cue, and Mr. Sleary's equipage was ready. It was a fine sight, to behold the learned dog barking round it, and Mr. Sleary instructing him, with his one practicable eye, that Bitzer was the object of his particular attentions. Soon after dark they all three got in and started; the learned dog (a formidable creature) already pinning Bitzer with his eye, and sticking close to the wheel on his side, that he might be ready for him in the event of his showing the slightest disposition to alight.

The other three sat up at the inn all night in great suspense. At eight o'clock in the morning Mr. Sleary and the dog reappeared: both in high spirits.

'All right, Thquire!' said Mr. Sleary, 'your thon may be aboard-a- thip by thith time. Childerth took him off, an hour and a half after we left there latht night. The horthe danthed the polka till he wath dead beat (he would have walthed if he hadn't been in harneth), and then I gave him the word and he went to thleep comfortable. When that prethiouth young Rathcal thed he'd go for'ard afoot, the dog hung on to hith neck-hankercher with all four legth in the air and pulled him down and rolled him over. Tho he come back into the drag, and there he that, 'till I turned the horthe'th head, at half-patht thixth thith morning.'

Mr. Gradgrind overwhelmed him with thanks, of course; and hinted as delicately as he could, at a handsome remuneration in money.

'I don't want money mythelf, Thquire; but Childerth ith a family man, and if you wath to like to offer him a five-pound note, it mightn't be unactheptable. Likewithe if you wath to thtand a collar for the dog, or a thet of bellth for the horthe, I thould be very glad to take 'em. Brandy and water I alwayth take.' He had already called for a glass, and now called for another. 'If you wouldn't think it going too far, Thquire, to make a little thpread for the company at about three and thixth ahead, not reckoning Luth, it would make 'em happy.'

All these little tokens of his gratitude, Mr. Gradgrind very willingly undertook to render. Though he thought them far too slight, he said, for such a service.

'Very well, Thquire; then, if you'll only give a Horthe-riding, a bethpeak, whenever you can, you'll more than balanthe the account. Now, Thquire, if your daughter will ethcuthe me, I thould like one parting word with you.'

Louisa and Sissy withdrew into an adjoining room; Mr. Sleary, stirring and drinking his brandy and water as he stood, went on:

'Thquire, - you don't need to be told that dogth ith wonderful animalth.'

'Their instinct,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'is surprising.'

'Whatever you call it - and I'm bletht if I know what to call it' - said Sleary, 'it ith athtonithing. The way in whith a dog'll find you - the dithtanthe he'll come!'

'His scent,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'being so fine.'

'I'm bletht if I know what to call it,' repeated Sleary, shaking his head, 'but I have had dogth find me, Thquire, in a way that made me think whether that dog hadn't gone to another dog, and thed, "You don't happen to know a perthon of the name of Thleary, do you? Perthon of the name of Thleary, in the Horthe-Riding way - thtout man - game eye?" And whether that dog mightn't have thed, "Well, I can't thay I know him mythelf, but I know a dog that I think would be likely to be acquainted with him." And whether that dog mightn't have thought it over, and thed, "Thleary, Thleary! O yeth, to be thure! A friend of mine menthioned him to me at one time. I can get you hith addreth directly." In conthequenth of my being afore the public, and going about tho muth, you thee, there mutht be a number of dogth acquainted with me, Thquire, that I don't know!'

Mr. Gradgrind seemed to be quite confounded by this speculation.

'Any way,' said Sleary, after putting his lips to his brandy and water, 'ith fourteen month ago, Thquire, thinthe we wath at Chethter. We wath getting up our Children in the Wood one morning, when there cometh into our Ring, by the thtage door, a dog. He had travelled a long way, he wath in a very bad condithon, he wath lame, and pretty well blind. He went round to our children, one after another, as if he wath a theeking for a child he know'd; and then he come to me, and throwd hithelf up behind, and thtood on hith two forelegth, weak ath he wath, and then he wagged hith tail and died. Thquire, that dog wath Merrylegth.'

'Sissy's father's dog!'

'Thethilia'th father'th old dog. Now, Thquire, I can take my oath, from my knowledge of that dog, that that man wath dead - and buried - afore that dog come back to me. Joth'phine and Childerth and me talked it over a long time, whether I thould write or not. But we agreed, "No. There'th nothing comfortable to tell; why unthettle her mind, and make her unhappy?" Tho, whether her father bathely detherted her; or whether he broke hith own heart alone, rather than pull her down along with him; never will be known, now, Thquire, till - no, not till we know how the dogth findth uth out!'

'She keeps the bottle that he sent her for, to this hour; and she will believe in his affection to the last moment of her life,' said Mr. Gradgrind.

'It theemth to prethent two thingth to a perthon, don't it, Thquire?' said Mr. Sleary, musing as he looked down into the depths of his brandy and water: 'one, that there ith a love in the world, not all Thelf-intereth after all, but thomething very different; t'other, that it bath a way of ith own of calculating or not calculating, whith thomehow or another ith at leatht ath hard to give a name to, ath the wayth of the dogth ith!'

Mr. Gradgrind looked out of window, and made no reply. Mr. Sleary emptied his glass and recalled the ladies.

'Thethilia my dear, kith me and good-bye! Mith Thquire, to thee you treating of her like a thithter, and a thithter that you trutht and honour with all your heart and more, ith a very pretty thight to me. I hope your brother may live to be better detherving of you, and a greater comfort to you. Thquire, thake handth, firtht and latht! Don't be croth with uth poor vagabondth. People mutht be amuthed. They can't be alwayth a learning, nor yet they can't be alwayth a working, they an't made for it. You mutht have uth, Thquire. Do the withe thing and the kind thing too, and make the betht of uth; not the wurtht!'

'And I never thought before,' said Mr. Sleary, putting his head in at the door again to say it, 'that I wath tho muth of a Cackler!'

CHAPTER IX - FINAL

IT is a dangerous thing to see anything in the sphere of a vain blusterer, before the vain blusterer sees it himself. Mr. Bounderby felt that Mrs. Sparsit had audaciously anticipated him, and presumed to be wiser than he. Inappeasably indignant with her for her triumphant discovery of Mrs. Pegler, he turned this presumption, on the part of a woman in her dependent position, over and over in his mind, until it accumulated with turning like a great snowball. At last he made the discovery that to discharge this highly connected female - to have it in his power to say, 'She was a woman of family, and wanted to stick to me, but I wouldn't have it, and got rid of her' - would be to get the utmost possible amount of crowning glory out of the connection, and at the same time to punish Mrs. Sparsit according to her deserts.

Filled fuller than ever, with this great idea, Mr. Bounderby came in to lunch, and sat himself down in the dining-room of former days, where his portrait was. Mrs. Sparsit sat by the fire, with her foot in her cotton stirrup, little thinking whither she was posting.

Since the Pegler affair, this gentlewoman had covered her pity for Mr. Bounderby with a veil of quiet melancholy and contrition. In virtue thereof, it had become her habit to assume a woful look, which woful look she now bestowed upon her patron.

'What's the matter now, ma'am?' said Mr. Bounderby, in a very short, rough way.

'Pray, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit, 'do not bite my nose off.'

'Bite your nose off, ma'am?' repeated Mr. Bounderby. 'Your nose!' meaning, as Mrs. Sparsit conceived, that it was too developed a nose for the purpose. After which offensive implication, he cut himself a crust of bread, and threw the knife down with a noise.

Mrs. Sparsit took her foot out of her stirrup, and said, 'Mr. Bounderby, sir!'

'Well, ma'am?' retorted Mr. Bounderby. 'What are you staring at?'

'May I ask, sir,' said Mrs. Sparsit, 'have you been ruffled this morning?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'May I inquire, sir,' pursued the injured woman, 'whether I am the unfortunate cause of your having lost your temper?'

'Now, I'll tell you what, ma'am,' said Bounderby, 'I am not come here to be bullied. A female may be highly connected, but she can't be permitted to bother and badger a man in my position, and I am not going to put up with it.' (Mr. Bounderby felt it necessary to get on: foreseeing that if he allowed of details, he would be beaten.)

Mrs. Sparsit first elevated, then knitted, her Coriolanian eyebrows; gathered up her work into its proper basket; and rose.

'Sir,' said she, majestically. 'It is apparent to me that I am in your way at present. I will retire to my own apartment.'

'Allow me to open the door, ma'am.'

'Thank you, sir; I can do it for myself.'

'You had better allow me, ma'am,' said Bounderby, passing her, and getting his hand upon the lock; 'because I can take the opportunity of saying a word to you, before you go. Mrs. Sparsit, ma'am, I rather think you are cramped here, do you know? It appears to me, that, under my humble roof, there's hardly opening enough for a lady of your genius in other people's affairs.'

Mrs. Sparsit gave him a look of the darkest scorn, and said with great politeness, 'Really, sir?'

'I have been thinking it over, you see, since the late affairs have happened, ma'am,' said Bounderby; 'and it appears to my poor judgment - '

'Oh! Pray, sir,' Mrs. Sparsit interposed, with sprightly cheerfulness, 'don't disparage your judgment. Everybody knows how unerring Mr. Bounderby's judgment is. Everybody has had proofs of it. It must be the theme of general conversation. Disparage anything in yourself but your judgment, sir,' said Mrs. Sparsit, laughing.

Mr. Bounderby, very red and uncomfortable, resumed:

'It appears to me, ma'am, I say, that a different sort of establishment altogether would bring out a lady of your powers. Such an establishment as your relation, Lady Scadgers's, now. Don't you think you might find some affairs there, ma'am, to interfere with?'

'It never occurred to me before, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit; 'but now you mention it, should think it highly probable.'

'Then suppose you try, ma'am,' said Bounderby, laying an envelope with a cheque in it in her little basket. 'You can take your own time for going, ma'am; but perhaps in the meanwhile, it will be more agreeable to a lady of your powers of mind, to eat her meals by herself, and not to be intruded upon. I really ought to apologise to you - being only Josiah Bounderby of Coketown - for having stood in your light so long.'

'Pray don't name it, sir,' returned Mrs. Sparsit. 'If that portrait could speak, sir - but it has the advantage over the original of not possessing the power of committing itself and disgusting others, - it would testify, that a long period has elapsed since I first habitually addressed it as the picture of a Noodle. Nothing that a Noodle does, can awaken surprise or indignation; the proceedings of a Noodle can only inspire contempt.'

Thus saying, Mrs. Sparsit, with her Roman features like a medal struck to commemorate her scorn of Mr. Bounderby, surveyed him fixedly from head to foot, swept disdainfully past him, and ascended the staircase. Mr. Bounderby closed the door, and stood before the fire; projecting himself after his old explosive manner into his portrait - and into futurity.

Into how much of futurity? He saw Mrs. Sparsit fighting out a daily fight at the points of all the weapons in the female armoury, with the grudging, smarting, peevish, tormenting Lady Scadgers, still laid up in bed with her mysterious leg, and gobbling her insufficient income down by about the middle of every quarter, in a mean little airless lodging, a mere closet for one, a mere crib for two; but did he see more? Did he catch any glimpse of himself making a show of Bitzer to strangers, as the rising young man, so devoted to his master's great merits, who had won young Tom's place, and had almost captured young Tom himself, in the times when by various rascals he was spirited away? Did he see any faint reflection of his own image making a vain-glorious will, whereby five-and-twenty Humbugs, past five-and-fifty years of age, each taking upon himself the name, Josiah Bounderby of Coketown, should for ever dine in Bounderby Hall, for ever lodge in Bounderby buildings, for ever attend a Bounderby chapel, for ever go to sleep under a Bounderby chaplain, for ever be supported out of a Bounderby estate, and for ever nauseate all healthy stomachs, with a vast amount of Bounderby balderdash and bluster? Had he any prescience of the day, five years to come, when Josiah Bounderby of Coketown was to die of a fit in the Coketown street, and this same precious will was to begin its long career of quibble, plunder, false pretences, vile example, little service and much law? Probably not. Yet the portrait was to see it all out.

Here was Mr. Gradgrind on the same day, and in the same hour, sitting thoughtful in his own room. How much of futurity did he see? Did he see himself, a white-haired decrepit man, bending his hitherto inflexible theories to appointed circumstances; making his facts and figures subservient to Faith, Hope, and Charity; and no longer trying to grind that Heavenly trio in his dusty little mills? Did he catch sight of himself, therefore much despised by his late political associates? Did he see them, in the era of its being quite settled that the national dustmen have only to do with one another, and owe no duty to an abstraction called a People, 'taunting the honourable gentleman' with this and with that and with what not, five nights a-week, until the small hours of the morning? Probably he had that much foreknowledge, knowing his men.

Here was Louisa on the night of the same day, watching the fire as in days of yore, though with a gentler and a humbler face. How much of the future might arise before her vision? Broadsides in the streets, signed with her father's name, exonerating the late Stephen Blackpool, weaver, from misplaced suspicion, and publishing the guilt of his own son, with such extenuation as his years and temptation (he could not bring himself to add, his education) might beseech; were of the Present. So, Stephen Blackpool's tombstone, with her father's record of his death, was almost of the Present, for she knew it was to be. These things she could plainly see. But, how much of the Future?

A working woman, christened Rachael, after a long illness once again appearing at the ringing of the Factory bell, and passing to and fro at the set hours, among the Coketown Hands; a woman of pensive beauty, always dressed in black, but sweet-tempered and serene, and even cheerful; who, of all the people in the place, alone appeared to have compassion on a degraded, drunken wretch of her own sex, who was sometimes seen in the town secretly begging of her, and crying to her; a woman working, ever working, but content to do it, and preferring to do it as her natural lot, until she should be too old to labour any more? Did Louisa see this? Such a thing was to be.

A lonely brother, many thousands of miles away, writing, on paper blotted with tears, that her words had too soon come true, and that all the treasures in the world would be cheaply bartered for a sight of her dear face? At length this brother coming nearer home, with hope of seeing her, and being delayed by illness; and then a letter, in a strange hand, saying 'he died in hospital, of fever, such a day, and died in penitence and love of you: his last word being your name'? Did Louisa see these things? Such things were to be.

Herself again a wife - a mother - lovingly watchful of her children, ever careful that they should have a childhood of the mind no less than a childhood of the body, as knowing it to be even a more beautiful thing, and a possession, any hoarded scrap of which, is a blessing and happiness to the wisest? Did Louisa see this? Such a thing was never to be.

But, happy Sissy's happy children loving her; all children loving her; she, grown learned in childish lore; thinking no innocent and pretty fancy ever to be despised; trying hard to know her humbler fellow-creatures, and to beautify their lives of machinery and reality with those imaginative graces and delights, without which the heart of infancy will wither up, the sturdiest physical manhood will be morally stark death, and the plainest national prosperity figures can show, will be the Writing on the Wall, - she holding this course as part of no fantastic vow, or bond, or brotherhood, or sisterhood, or pledge, or covenant, or fancy dress, or fancy fair; but simply as a duty to be done, - did Louisa see these things of herself? These things were to be.

Dear reader! It rests with you and me, whether, in our two fields of action, similar things shall be or not. Let them be! We shall sit with lighter bosoms on the hearth, to see the ashes of our fires turn gray and cold.

THE END OF
Hard Times

THE HAUNTED MAN AND THE GHOST’S BARGAIN

CHAPTER I - The Gift Bestowed

Everybody said so.

Far be it from me to assert that what everybody says must be true. Everybody is, often, as likely to be wrong as right. In the general experience, everybody has been wrong so often, and it has taken, in most instances, such a weary while to find out how wrong, that the authority is proved to be fallible. Everybody may sometimes be right; “but *that’s* no rule,” as the ghost of Giles Scroggins says in the ballad.

The dread word, GHOST, recalls me.

Everybody said he looked like a haunted man. The extent of my present claim for everybody is, that they were so far right. He did.

Who could have seen his hollow cheek; his sunken brilliant eye; his black-attired figure, indefinably grim, although well-knit and well-proportioned; his grizzled hair hanging, like tangled sea-weed, about his face, - as if he had been, through his whole life, a lonely mark for the chafing and beating of the great deep of humanity, - but might have said he looked like a haunted man?

Who could have observed his manner, taciturn, thoughtful, gloomy, shadowed by habitual reserve, retiring always and jocund never, with a distraught air of reverting to a bygone place and time, or of listening to some old echoes in his mind, but might have said it was the manner of a haunted man?

Who could have heard his voice, slow-speaking, deep, and grave, with a natural fulness and melody in it which he seemed to set himself against and stop, but might have said it was the voice of a haunted man?

Who that had seen him in his inner chamber, part library and part laboratory, - for he was, as the world knew, far and wide, a learned man in chemistry, and a teacher on whose lips and hands a crowd of aspiring ears and eyes hung daily, - who that had seen him there, upon a winter night, alone, surrounded by his drugs and instruments and books; the shadow of his shaded lamp a monstrous beetle on the wall, motionless among a crowd of spectral shapes raised there by the flickering of the fire upon the quaint objects around him; some of these phantoms (the reflection of glass vessels that held liquids), trembling at heart like things that knew his power to uncombine them, and to give back their component parts to fire and vapour; - who that had seen him then, his work done, and he pondering in his chair before the rusted grate and red flame, moving his thin mouth as if in speech, but silent as the dead, would not have said that the man seemed haunted and the chamber too?

Who might not, by a very easy flight of fancy, have believed that everything about him took this haunted tone, and that he lived on haunted ground?

His dwelling was so solitary and vault-like, - an old, retired part of an ancient endowment for students, once a brave edifice, planted in an open place, but now the obsolete whim of forgotten architects; smoke-age-and-weather-darkened, squeezed on every side by the overgrowing of the great city, and choked, like an old well, with stones and bricks; its small quadrangles, lying down in very pits formed by the streets and buildings, which, in course of time, had been constructed above its heavy chimney stalks; its old trees, insulted by the neighbouring smoke, which deigned to droop so low when it was very feeble and the weather very moody; its grass-plots, struggling with the mildewed earth to be grass, or to win any show of compromise; its silent pavements, unaccustomed to the tread of feet, and even to the observation of eyes, except when a stray face looked down from the upper world, wondering what nook it was; its sun-dial in a little bricked-up corner, where no sun had straggled for a hundred years, but where, in compensation for the sun’s neglect, the snow would lie for weeks when it lay nowhere else, and the black east wind would spin like a huge humming-top, when in all other places it was silent and still.

His dwelling, at its heart and core - within doors - at his fireside - was so lowering and old, so crazy, yet so strong, with its worn-eaten beams of wood in the ceiling, and its sturdy floor shelving downward to the great oak chimney-piece; so environed and hemmed in by the pressure of the town yet so remote in fashion, age, and custom; so quiet, yet so thundering with echoes when a distant voice was raised or a door was shut, - echoes, not confined to the many low passages and empty rooms, but rumbling and grumbling till they were stifled in the heavy air of the forgotten Crypt where the Norman arches were half-buried in the earth.

You should have seen him in his dwelling about twilight, in the dead winter time.

When the wind was blowing, shrill and shrewd, with the going down of the blurred sun. When it was just so dark, as that the forms of things were indistinct and big - but not wholly lost. When sitters by the fire began to see wild faces and figures, mountains and abysses, ambuscades and armies, in the coals. When people in the streets bent down their heads and ran before the weather. When those who were obliged to meet it, were stopped at angry corners, stung by wandering snow-flakes alighting on the lashes of their eyes, - which fell too sparingly, and were blown away too quickly, to leave a trace upon the frozen ground. When windows of private houses closed up tight and warm. When lighted gas began to burst forth in the busy and the quiet streets, fast blackening otherwise. When stray pedestrians, shivering along the latter, looked down at the glowing fires in kitchens, and sharpened their sharp appetites by sniffing up the fragrance of whole miles of dinners.

When travellers by land were bitter cold, and looked wearily on gloomy landscapes, rustling and shuddering in the blast. When mariners at sea, outlying upon icy yards, were tossed and swung above the howling ocean dreadfully. When lighthouses, on rocks and headlands, showed solitary and watchful; and benighted sea-birds breasted on against their ponderous lanterns, and fell dead. When little readers of story-books, by the firelight, trembled to think of Cassim Baba cut into quarters, hanging in the Robbers' Cave, or had some small misgivings that the fierce little old woman, with the crutch, who used to start out of the box in the merchant Abudah's bedroom, might, one of these nights, be found upon the stairs, in the long, cold, dusky journey up to bed.

When, in rustic places, the last glimmering of daylight died away from the ends of avenues; and the trees, arching overhead, were sullen and black. When, in parks and woods, the high wet fern and sodden moss, and beds of fallen leaves, and trunks of trees, were lost to view, in masses of impenetrable shade. When mists arose from dyke, and fen, and river. When lights in old halls and in cottage windows, were a cheerful sight. When the mill stopped, the wheelwright and the blacksmith shut their workshops, the turnpike-gate closed, the plough and harrow were left lonely in the fields, the labourer and team went home, and the striking of the church clock had a deeper sound than at noon, and the churchyard wicket would be swung no more that night.

When twilight everywhere released the shadows, prisoned up all day, that now closed in and gathered like mustering swarms of ghosts. When they stood lowering, in corners of rooms, and frowned out from behind half-opened doors. When they had full possession of unoccupied apartments. When they danced upon the floors, and walls, and ceilings of inhabited chambers, while the fire was low, and withdrew like ebbing waters when it sprang into a blaze. When they fantastically mocked the shapes of household objects, making the nurse an ogress, the rocking-horse a monster, the wondering child, half-scared and half-amused, a stranger to itself, - the very tongs upon the hearth, a straddling giant with his arms a-kimbo, evidently smelling the blood of Englishmen, and wanting to grind people’s bones to make his bread.

When these shadows brought into the minds of older people, other thoughts, and showed them different images. When they stole from their retreats, in the likenesses of forms and faces from the past, from the grave, from the deep, deep gulf, where the things that might have been, and never were, are always wandering.

When he sat, as already mentioned, gazing at the fire. When, as it rose and fell, the shadows went and came. When he took no heed of them, with his bodily eyes; but, let them come or let them go, looked fixedly at the fire. You should have seen him, then.

When the sounds that had arisen with the shadows, and come out of their lurking-places at the twilight summons, seemed to make a deeper stillness all about him. When the wind was rumbling in the chimney, and sometimes crooning, sometimes howling, in the house. When the old trees outside were so shaken and beaten, that one querulous old rook, unable to sleep, protested now and then, in a feeble, dozy, high-up "Caw!" When, at intervals, the window trembled, the rusty vane upon the turret-top complained, the clock beneath it recorded that another quarter of an hour was gone, or the fire collapsed and fell in with a rattle.

- When a knock came at his door, in short, as he was sitting so, and roused him.

"Who's that?" said he. "Come in!"

Surely there had been no figure leaning on the back of his chair; no face looking over it. It is certain that no gliding footstep touched the floor, as he lifted up his head, with a start, and spoke. And yet there was no mirror in the room on whose surface his own form could have cast its shadow for a moment; and, Something had passed darkly and gone!

"I'm humbly fearful, sir," said a fresh-coloured busy man, holding the door open with his foot for the admission of himself and a wooden tray he carried, and letting it go again by very gentle and careful degrees, when he and the tray had got in, lest it should close noisily, "that it's a good bit past the time to-night. But Mrs. William has been taken off her legs so often" -

"By the wind? Ay! I have heard it rising."

" - By the wind, sir - that it's a mercy she got home at all. Oh dear, yes. Yes. It was by the wind, Mr. Redlaw. By the wind."

He had, by this time, put down the tray for dinner, and was employed in lighting the lamp, and spreading a cloth on the table. From this employment he desisted in a hurry, to stir and feed the fire, and then resumed it; the lamp he had lighted, and the blaze that rose under his hand, so quickly changing the appearance of the room, that it seemed as if the mere coming in of his fresh red face and active manner had made the pleasant alteration.

“Mrs. William is of course subject at any time, sir, to be taken off her balance by the elements. She is not formed superior to *that*.”

“No,” returned Mr. Redlaw good-naturedly, though abruptly.

“No, sir. Mrs. William may be taken off her balance by Earth; as for example, last Sunday week, when sloppy and greasy, and she going out to tea with her newest sister-in-law, and having a pride in herself, and wishing to appear perfectly spotless though pedestrian. Mrs. William may be taken off her balance by Air; as being once over-persuaded by a friend to try a swing at Peckham Fair, which acted on her constitution instantly like a steam-boat. Mrs. William may be taken off her balance by Fire; as on a false alarm of engines at her mother’s, when she went two miles in her nightcap. Mrs. William may be taken off her balance by Water; as at Battersea, when rowed into the piers by her young nephew, Charley Swidger junior, aged twelve, which had no idea of boats whatever. But these are elements. Mrs. William must be taken out of elements for the strength of *her* character to come into play.”

As he stopped for a reply, the reply was “Yes,” in the same tone as before.

“Yes, sir. Oh dear, yes!” said Mr. Swidger, still proceeding with his preparations, and checking them off as he made them. “That’s where it is, sir. That’s what I always say myself, sir. Such a many of us Swidgers! - Pepper. Why there’s my father, sir, superannuated keeper and custodian of this Institution, eighty-seven year old. He’s a Swidger! - Spoon.”

“True, William,” was the patient and abstracted answer, when he stopped again.

“Yes, sir,” said Mr. Swidger. “That’s what I always say, sir. You may call him the trunk of the tree! - Bread. Then you come to his successor, my unworthy self - Salt - and Mrs. William, Swidgers both. - Knife and fork. Then you come to all my brothers and their families, Swidgers, man and woman, boy and girl. Why, what with cousins, uncles, aunts, and relationships of this, that, and t’other degree, and whatnot degree, and marriages, and lyings-in, the Swidgers - Tumbler - might take hold of hands, and make a ring round England!”

Receiving no reply at all here, from the thoughtful man whom he addressed, Mr. William approached, him nearer, and made a feint of accidentally knocking the table with a decanter, to rouse him. The moment he succeeded, he went on, as if in great alacrity of acquiescence.

“Yes, sir! That’s just what I say myself, sir. Mrs. William and me have often said so. ‘There’s Swidgers enough,’ we say, ‘without *our* voluntary contributions,’ - Butter. In fact, sir, my father is a family in himself - Castors - to take care of; and it happens all for the best that we have no child of our own, though it’s made Mrs. William rather quiet-like, too. Quite ready for the fowl and mashed potatoes, sir? Mrs. William said she’d dish in ten minutes when I left the Lodge.”

“I am quite ready,” said the other, waking as from a dream, and walking slowly to and fro.

“Mrs. William has been at it again, sir!” said the keeper, as he stood warming a plate at the fire, and pleasantly shading his face with it. Mr. Redlaw stopped in his walking, and an expression of interest appeared in him.

“What I always say myself, sir. She *will* do it! There’s a motherly feeling in Mrs. William’s breast that must and will have went.”

“What has she done?”

“Why, sir, not satisfied with being a sort of mother to all the young gentlemen that come up from a variety of parts, to attend your courses of lectures at this ancient foundation - its surprising how stone-chaney catches the heat this frosty weather, to be sure!” Here he turned the plate, and cooled his fingers.

“Well?” said Mr. Redlaw.

“That’s just what I say myself, sir,” returned Mr. William, speaking over his shoulder, as if in ready and delighted assent. “That’s exactly where it is, sir! There ain’t one of our students but appears to regard Mrs. William in that light. Every day, right through the course, they puts their heads into the Lodge, one after another, and have all got something to tell her, or something to ask her. ‘Swidge’ is the appellation by which they speak of Mrs. William in general, among themselves, I’m told; but that’s what I say, sir. Better be called ever so far out of your name, if it’s done in real liking, than have it made ever so much of, and not cared about! What’s a name for? To know a person by. If Mrs. William is known by something better than her name - I allude to Mrs. William’s qualities and disposition - never mind her name, though it *is* Swidger, by rights. Let ’em call her Swidge, Widge, Bridge - Lord! London Bridge, Blackfriars, Chelsea, Putney, Waterloo, or Hammersmith Suspension - if they like.”

The close of this triumphant oration brought him and the plate to the table, upon which he half laid and half dropped it, with a lively sense of its being thoroughly heated, just as the subject of his praises entered the room, bearing another tray and a lantern, and followed by a venerable old man with long grey hair.

Mrs. William, like Mr. William, was a simple, innocent-looking person, in whose smooth cheeks the cheerful red of her husband’s official waistcoat was very pleasantly repeated. But whereas Mr. William’s light hair stood on end all over his head, and seemed to draw his eyes up with it in an excess of bustling readiness for anything, the dark brown hair of Mrs. William was carefully smoothed down, and waved away under a trim tidy cap, in the most exact and quiet manner imaginable. Whereas Mr. William’s very trousers hitched themselves up at the ankles, as if it were not in their iron-grey nature to rest without looking about them, Mrs. William’s neatly-flowered skirts - red and white, like her own pretty face - were as composed and orderly, as if the very wind that blew so hard out of doors could not disturb one of their folds. Whereas his coat had something of a fly-away and half-off appearance about the collar and breast, her little bodice was so placid and neat, that there should have been protection for her, in it, had she needed any, with the roughest people. Who could have had the heart to make so calm a bosom swell with grief, or throb with fear, or flutter with a thought of shame! To whom would its repose and peace have not appealed against disturbance, like the innocent slumber of a child!

“Punctual, of course, Milly,” said her husband, relieving her of the tray, “or it wouldn’t be you. Here’s Mrs. William, sir! - He looks lonelier than ever to-night,” whispering to his wife, as he was taking the tray, “and ghostlier altogether.”

Without any show of hurry or noise, or any show of herself even, she was so calm and quiet, Milly set the dishes she had brought upon the table, - Mr. William, after much clattering and running about, having only gained possession of a butter-boat of gravy, which he stood ready to serve.

“What is that the old man has in his arms?” asked Mr. Redlaw, as he sat down to his solitary meal.

“Holly, sir,” replied the quiet voice of Milly.

“That’s what I say myself, sir,” interposed Mr. William, striking in with the butter-boat. “Berries is so seasonable to the time of year! - Brown gravy!”

“Another Christmas come, another year gone!” murmured the Chemist, with a gloomy sigh. “More figures in the lengthening sum of recollection that we work and work at to our torment, till Death idly jumbles all together, and rubs all out. So, Philip!” breaking off, and raising his voice as he addressed the old man, standing apart, with his glistening burden in his arms, from which the quiet Mrs. William took small branches, which she noiselessly trimmed with her scissors, and decorated the room with, while her aged father-in-law looked on much interested in the ceremony.

“My duty to you, sir,” returned the old man. “Should have spoke before, sir, but know your ways, Mr. Redlaw - proud to say - and wait till spoke to! Merry Christmas, sir, and Happy New Year, and many of ’em. Have had a pretty many of ’em myself - ha, ha! - and may take the liberty of wishing ’em. I’m eighty-seven!”

“Have you had so many that were merry and happy?” asked the other.

“Ay, sir, ever so many,” returned the old man.

“Is his memory impaired with age? It is to be expected now,” said Mr. Redlaw, turning to the son, and speaking lower.

“Not a morsel of it, sir,” replied Mr. William. “That’s exactly what I say myself, sir. There never was such a memory as my father’s. He’s the most wonderful man in the world. He don’t know what forgetting means. It’s the very observation I’m always making to Mrs. William, sir, if you’ll believe me!”

Mr. Swidger, in his polite desire to seem to acquiesce at all events, delivered this as if there were no iota of contradiction in it, and it were all said in unbounded and unqualified assent.

The Chemist pushed his plate away, and, rising from the table, walked across the room to where the old man stood looking at a little sprig of holly in his hand.

“It recalls the time when many of those years were old and new, then?” he said, observing him attentively, and touching him on the shoulder. “Does it?”

“Oh many, many!” said Philip, half awaking from his reverie. “I’m eighty-seven!”

“Merry and happy, was it?” asked the Chemist in a low voice. “Merry and happy, old man?”

“Maybe as high as that, no higher,” said the old man, holding out his hand a little way above the level of his knee, and looking retrospectively at his questioner, “when I first remember ’em! Cold, sunshiny day it was, out a-walking, when some one - it was my mother as sure as you stand there, though I don’t know what her blessed face was like, for she took ill and died that Christmas-time - told me they were food for birds. The pretty little fellow thought - that’s me, you understand - that birds’ eyes were so bright, perhaps, because the berries that they lived on in the winter were so bright. I recollect that. And I’m eighty-seven!”

“Merry and happy!” mused the other, bending his dark eyes upon the stooping figure, with a smile of compassion. “Merry and happy - and remember well?”

“Ay, ay, ay!” resumed the old man, catching the last words. “I remember ’em well in my school time, year after year, and all the merry-making that used to come along with them. I was a strong chap then, Mr. Redlaw; and, if you’ll believe me, hadn’t my match at football within ten mile. Where’s my son William? Hadn’t my match at football, William, within ten mile!”

“That’s what I always say, father!” returned the son promptly, and with great respect. “You ARE a Swidger, if ever there was one of the family!”

“Dear!” said the old man, shaking his head as he again looked at the holly. “His mother - my son William’s my youngest son - and I, have sat among ’em all, boys and girls, little children and babies, many a year, when the berries like these were not shining half so bright all round us, as their bright faces. Many of ’em are gone; she’s gone; and my son George (our eldest, who was her pride more than all the rest!) is fallen very low: but I can see them, when I look here, alive and healthy, as they used to be in those days; and I can see him, thank God, in his innocence. It’s a blessed thing to me, at eighty-seven.”

The keen look that had been fixed upon him with so much earnestness, had gradually sought the ground.

“When my circumstances got to be not so good as formerly, through not being honestly dealt by, and I first come here to be custodian,” said the old man, “ - which was upwards of fifty years ago - where’s my son William? More than half a century ago, William!”

“That’s what I say, father,” replied the son, as promptly and dutifully as before, “that’s exactly where it is. Two times ought’s an ought, and twice five ten, and there’s a hundred of ’em.”

“It was quite a pleasure to know that one of our founders - or more correctly speaking,” said the old man, with a great glory in his subject and his knowledge of it, "one of the learned gentlemen that helped endow us in Queen Elizabeth's time, for we were founded afore her day - left in his will, among the other bequests he made us, so much to buy holly, for garnishing the walls and windows, come Christmas. There was something homely and friendly in it. Being but strange here, then, and coming at Christmas time, we took a liking for his very picter that hangs in what used to be, anciently, afore our ten poor gentlemen commuted for an annual stipend in money, our great Dinner Hall. - A sedate gentleman in a peaked beard, with a ruff round his neck, and a scroll below him, in old English letters, 'Lord! keep my memory green!' You know all about him, Mr. Redlaw?"

"I know the portrait hangs there, Philip."

"Yes, sure, it's the second on the right, above the panelling. I was going to say - he has helped to keep *my* memory green, I thank him; for going round the building every year, as I'm a doing now, and freshening up the bare rooms with these branches and berries, freshens up my bare old brain. One year brings back another, and that year another, and those others numbers! At last, it seems to me as if the birth-time of our Lord was the birth-time of all I have ever had affection for, or mourned for, or delighted in, - and they're a pretty many, for I'm eighty-seven!"

"Merry and happy," murmured Redlaw to himself.

The room began to darken strangely.

"So you see, sir," pursued old Philip, whose hale wintry cheek had warmed into a ruddier glow, and whose blue eyes had brightened while he spoke, "I have plenty to keep, when I keep this present season. Now, where's my quiet Mouse? Chattering's the sin of my time of life, and there's half the building to do yet, if the cold don't freeze us first, or the wind don't blow us away, or the darkness don't swallow us up."

The quiet Mouse had brought her calm face to his side, and silently taken his arm, before he finished speaking.

"Come away, my dear," said the old man. "Mr. Redlaw won't settle to his dinner, otherwise, till it's cold as the winter. I hope you'll excuse me rambling on, sir, and I wish you good night, and, once again, a merry - ”

“Stay!” said Mr. Redlaw, resuming his place at the table, more, it would have seemed from his manner, to reassure the old keeper, than in any remembrance of his own appetite. “Spare me another moment, Philip. William, you were going to tell me something to your excellent wife’s honour. It will not be disagreeable to her to hear you praise her. What was it?”

“Why, that’s where it is, you see, sir,” returned Mr. William Swidger, looking towards his wife in considerable embarrassment. “Mrs. William’s got her eye upon me.”

“But you’re not afraid of Mrs. William’s eye?”

“Why, no, sir,” returned Mr. Swidger, “that’s what I say myself. It wasn’t made to be afraid of. It wouldn’t have been made so mild, if that was the intention. But I wouldn’t like to - Milly! - him, you know. Down in the Buildings.”

Mr. William, standing behind the table, and rummaging disconcertedly among the objects upon it, directed persuasive glances at Mrs. William, and secret jerks of his head and thumb at Mr. Redlaw, as alluring her towards him.

“Him, you know, my love,” said Mr. William. “Down in the Buildings. Tell, my dear! You’re the works of Shakespeare in comparison with myself. Down in the Buildings, you know, my love. - Student.”

“Student?” repeated Mr. Redlaw, raising his head.

“That’s what I say, sir!” cried Mr. William, in the utmost animation of assent. “If it wasn’t the poor student down in the Buildings, why should you wish to hear it from Mrs. William’s lips? Mrs. William, my dear - Buildings.”

“I didn’t know,” said Milly, with a quiet frankness, free from any haste or confusion, “that William had said anything about it, or I wouldn’t have come. I asked him not to. It’s a sick young gentleman, sir - and very poor, I am afraid - who is too ill to go home this holiday-time, and lives, unknown to any one, in but a common kind of lodging for a gentleman, down in Jerusalem Buildings. That’s all, sir.”

“Why have I never heard of him?” said the Chemist, rising hurriedly. “Why has he not made his situation known to me? Sick! - give me my hat and cloak. Poor! - what house? - what number?”

“Oh, you mustn’t go there, sir,” said Milly, leaving her father-in-law, and calmly confronting him with her collected little face and folded hands.

“Not go there?”

“Oh dear, no!” said Milly, shaking her head as at a most manifest and self-evident impossibility. “It couldn’t be thought of!”

“What do you mean? Why not?”

“Why, you see, sir,” said Mr. William Swidger, persuasively and confidentially, “that’s what I say. Depend upon it, the young gentleman would never have made his situation known to one of his own sex. Mrs. Williams has got into his confidence, but that’s quite different. They all confide in Mrs. William; they all trust *her*. A man, sir, couldn’t have got a whisper out of him; but woman, sir, and Mrs. William combined - !”

“There is good sense and delicacy in what you say, William,” returned Mr. Redlaw, observant of the gentle and composed face at his shoulder. And laying his finger on his lip, he secretly put his purse into her hand.

“Oh dear no, sir!” cried Milly, giving it back again. “Worse and worse! Couldn’t be dreamed of!”

Such a staid matter-of-fact housewife she was, and so unruffled by the momentary haste of this rejection, that, an instant afterwards, she was tidily picking up a few leaves which had strayed from between her scissors and her apron, when she had arranged the holly.

Finding, when she rose from her stooping posture, that Mr. Redlaw was still regarding her with doubt and astonishment, she quietly repeated - looking about, the while, for any other fragments that might have escaped her observation:

“Oh dear no, sir! He said that of all the world he would not be known to you, or receive help from you - though he is a student in your class. I have made no terms of secrecy with you, but I trust to your honour completely.”

“Why did he say so?”

“Indeed I can’t tell, sir,” said Milly, after thinking a little, “because I am not at all clever, you know; and I wanted to be useful to him in making things neat and comfortable about him, and employed myself that way. But I know he is poor, and lonely, and I think he is somehow neglected too. - How dark it is!”

The room had darkened more and more. There was a very heavy gloom and shadow gathering behind the Chemist’s chair.

“What more about him?” he asked.

“He is engaged to be married when he can afford it,” said Milly, “and is studying, I think, to qualify himself to earn a living. I have seen, a long time, that he has studied hard and denied himself much. - How very dark it is!”

“It’s turned colder, too,” said the old man, rubbing his hands. “There’s a chill and dismal feeling in the room. Where’s my son William? William, my boy, turn the lamp, and rouse the fire!”

Milly’s voice resumed, like quiet music very softly played:

“He muttered in his broken sleep yesterday afternoon, after talking to me” (this was to herself) “about some one dead, and some great wrong done that could never be forgotten; but whether to him or to another person, I don’t know. Not *by* him, I am sure.”

“And, in short, Mrs. William, you see - which she wouldn’t say herself, Mr. Redlaw, if she was to stop here till the new year after this next one - ” said Mr. William, coming up to him to speak in his ear, “has done him worlds of good! Bless you, worlds of good! All at home just the same as ever - my father made as snug and comfortable - not a crumb of litter to be found in the house, if you were to offer fifty pound ready money for it - Mrs. William apparently never out of the way - yet Mrs. William backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, up and down, up and down, a mother to him!”

The room turned darker and colder, and the gloom and shadow gathering behind the chair was heavier.

“Not content with this, sir, Mrs. William goes and finds, this very night, when she was coming home (why it’s not above a couple of hours ago), a creature more like a young wild beast than a young child, shivering upon a door-step. What does Mrs. William do, but brings it home to dry it, and feed it, and keep it till our old Bounty of food and flannel is given away, on Christmas morning! If it ever felt a fire before, it’s as much as ever it did; for it’s sitting in the old Lodge chimney, staring at ours as if its ravenous eyes would never shut again. It’s sitting there, at least,” said Mr. William, correcting himself, on reflection, “unless it’s bolted!”

“Heaven keep her happy!” said the Chemist aloud, “and you too, Philip! and you, William! I must consider what to do in this. I may desire to see this student, I’ll not detain you any longer now. Good-night!”

“I thank’ee, sir, I thank’ee!” said the old man, “for Mouse, and for my son William, and for myself. Where’s my son William? William, you take the lantern and go on first, through them long dark passages, as you did last year and the year afore. Ha ha! *I* remember - though I’m eighty-seven! ‘Lord, keep my memory green!’ It’s a very good prayer, Mr. Redlaw, that of the learned gentleman in the peaked beard, with a ruff round his neck - hangs up, second on the right above the panelling, in what used to be, afore our ten poor gentlemen commuted, our great Dinner Hall. ‘Lord, keep my memory green!’ It’s very good and pious, sir. Amen! Amen!”

As they passed out and shut the heavy door, which, however carefully withheld, fired a long train of thundering reverberations when it shut at last, the room turned darker.

As he fell a musing in his chair alone, the healthy holly withered on the wall, and dropped - dead branches.

As the gloom and shadow thickened behind him, in that place where it had been gathering so darkly, it took, by slow degrees, - or out of it there came, by some unreal, unsubstantial process - not to be traced by any human sense, - an awful likeness of himself!

Ghastly and cold, colourless in its leaden face and hands, but with his features, and his bright eyes, and his grizzled hair, and dressed in the gloomy shadow of his dress, it came into his terrible appearance of existence, motionless, without a sound. As *he* leaned his arm upon the elbow of his chair, ruminating before the fire, *it* leaned upon the chair-back, close above him, with its appalling copy of his face looking where his face looked, and bearing the expression his face bore.

This, then, was the Something that had passed and gone already. This was the dread companion of the haunted man!

It took, for some moments, no more apparent heed of him, than he of it. The Christmas Waits were playing somewhere in the distance, and, through his thoughtfulness, he seemed to listen to the music. It seemed to listen too.

At length he spoke; without moving or lifting up his face.

“Here again!” he said.

“Here again,” replied the Phantom.

“I see you in the fire,” said the haunted man; “I hear you in music, in the wind, in the dead stillness of the night.”

The Phantom moved its head, assenting.

“Why do you come, to haunt me thus?”

“I come as I am called,” replied the Ghost.

“No. Unbidden,” exclaimed the Chemist.

“Unbidden be it,” said the Spectre. “It is enough. I am here.”

Hitherto the light of the fire had shone on the two faces - if the dread lineaments behind the chair might be called a face - both addressed towards it, as at first, and neither looking at the other. But, now, the haunted man turned, suddenly, and stared upon the Ghost. The Ghost, as sudden in its motion, passed to before the chair, and stared on him.

The living man, and the animated image of himself dead, might so have looked, the one upon the other. An awful survey, in a lonely and remote part of an empty old pile of building, on a winter night, with the loud wind going by upon its journey of mystery - whence or whither, no man knowing since the world began - and the stars, in unimaginable millions, glittering through it, from eternal space, where the world’s bulk is as a grain, and its hoary age is infancy.

“Look upon me!” said the Spectre. “I am he, neglected in my youth, and miserably poor, who strove and suffered, and still strove and suffered, until I hewed out knowledge from the mine where it was buried, and made rugged steps thereof, for my worn feet to rest and rise on.”

“I *am* that man,” returned the Chemist.

“No mother’s self-denying love,” pursued the Phantom, “no father’s counsel, aided *me*. A stranger came into my father’s place when I was but a child, and I was easily an alien from my mother’s heart. My parents, at the best, were of that sort whose care soon ends, and whose duty is soon done; who cast their offspring loose, early, as birds do theirs; and, if they do well, claim the merit; and, if ill, the pity.”

It paused, and seemed to tempt and goad him with its look, and with the manner of its speech, and with its smile.

“I am he,” pursued the Phantom, “who, in this struggle upward, found a friend. I made him - won him - bound him to me! We worked together, side by side. All the love and confidence that in my earlier youth had had no outlet, and found no expression, I bestowed on him.”

“Not all,” said Redlaw, hoarsely.

“No, not all,” returned the Phantom. “I had a sister.”

The haunted man, with his head resting on his hands, replied “I had!” The Phantom, with an evil smile, drew closer to the chair, and resting its chin upon its folded hands, its folded hands upon the back, and looking down into his face with searching eyes, that seemed instinct with fire, went on:

“Such glimpses of the light of home as I had ever known, had streamed from her. How young she was, how fair, how loving! I took her to the first poor roof that I was master of, and made it rich. She came into the darkness of my life, and made it bright. - She is before me!”

“I saw her, in the fire, but now. I hear her in music, in the wind, in the dead stillness of the night,” returned the haunted man.

“*Did* he love her?” said the Phantom, echoing his contemplative tone. “I think he did, once. I am sure he did. Better had she loved him less - less secretly, less dearly, from the shallower depths of a more divided heart!”

“Let me forget it!” said the Chemist, with an angry motion of his hand. “Let me blot it from my memory!”

The Spectre, without stirring, and with its unwinking, cruel eyes still fixed upon his face, went on:

“A dream, like hers, stole upon my own life.”

“It did,” said Redlaw.

“A love, as like hers,” pursued the Phantom, “as my inferior nature might cherish, arose in my own heart. I was too poor to bind its object to my fortune then, by any thread of promise or entreaty. I loved her far too well, to seek to do it. But, more than ever I had striven in my life, I strove to climb! Only an inch gained, brought me something nearer to the height. I toiled up! In the late pauses of my labour at that time, - my sister (sweet companion!) still sharing with me the expiring embers and the cooling hearth, - when day was breaking, what pictures of the future did I see!"

"I saw them, in the fire, but now," he murmured. "They come back to me in music, in the wind, in the dead stillness of the night, in the revolving years."

" - Pictures of my own domestic life, in aftertime, with her who was the inspiration of my toil. Pictures of my sister, made the wife of my dear friend, on equal terms - for he had some inheritance, we none - pictures of our sobered age and mellowed happiness, and of the golden links, extending back so far, that should bind us, and our children, in a radiant garland," said the Phantom.

"Pictures," said the haunted man, "that were delusions. Why is it my doom to remember them too well!"

"Delusions," echoed the Phantom in its changeless voice, and glaring on him with its changeless eyes. "For my friend (in whose breast my confidence was locked as in my own), passing between me and the centre of the system of my hopes and struggles, won her to himself, and shattered my frail universe. My sister, doubly dear, doubly devoted, doubly cheerful in my home, lived on to see me famous, and my old ambition so rewarded when its spring was broken, and then - "

"Then died," he interposed. "Died, gentle as ever; happy; and with no concern but for her brother. Peace!"

The Phantom watched him silently.

"Remembered!" said the haunted man, after a pause. "Yes. So well remembered, that even now, when years have passed, and nothing is more idle or more visionary to me than the boyish love so long outlived, I think of it with sympathy, as if it were a younger brother's or a son's. Sometimes I even wonder when her heart first inclined to him, and how it had been affected towards me. - Not lightly, once, I think. - But that is nothing. Early unhappiness, a wound from a hand I loved and trusted, and a loss that nothing can replace, outlive such fancies."

"Thus," said the Phantom, "I bear within me a Sorrow and a Wrong. Thus I prey upon myself. Thus, memory is my curse; and, if I could forget my sorrow and my wrong, I would!"

"Mocker!" said the Chemist, leaping up, and making, with a wrathful hand, at the throat of his other self. "Why have I always that taunt in my ears?"

"Forbear!" exclaimed the Spectre in an awful voice. "Lay a hand on Me, and die!"

He stopped midway, as if its words had paralysed him, and stood looking on it. It had glided from him; it had its arm raised high in warning; and a smile passed over its unearthly features, as it reared its dark figure in triumph.

"If I could forget my sorrow and wrong, I would," the Ghost repeated. "If I could forget my sorrow and my wrong, I would!"

"Evil spirit of myself," returned the haunted man, in a low, trembling tone, "my life is darkened by that incessant whisper."

"It is an echo," said the Phantom.

"If it be an echo of my thoughts - as now, indeed, I know it is," rejoined the haunted man, "why should I, therefore, be tormented? It is not a selfish thought. I suffer it to range beyond myself. All men and women have their sorrows, - most of them their wrongs; ingratitude, and sordid jealousy, and interest, besetting all degrees of life. Who would not forget their sorrows and their wrongs?"

"Who would not, truly, and be happier and better for it?" said the Phantom.

"These revolutions of years, which we commemorate," proceeded Redlaw, "what do *they* recall! Are there any minds in which they do not re-awaken some sorrow, or some trouble? What is the remembrance of the old man who was here to-night? A tissue of sorrow and trouble.”

“But common natures,” said the Phantom, with its evil smile upon its glassy face, “unenlightened minds and ordinary spirits, do not feel or reason on these things like men of higher cultivation and profounder thought.”

“Tempter,” answered Redlaw, “whose hollow look and voice I dread more than words can express, and from whom some dim foreshadowing of greater fear is stealing over me while I speak, I hear again an echo of my own mind.”

“Receive it as a proof that I am powerful,” returned the Ghost. “Hear what I offer! Forget the sorrow, wrong, and trouble you have known!”

“Forget them!” he repeated.

“I have the power to cancel their remembrance - to leave but very faint, confused traces of them, that will die out soon,” returned the Spectre. “Say! Is it done?”

“Stay!” cried the haunted man, arresting by a terrified gesture the uplifted hand. “I tremble with distrust and doubt of you; and the dim fear you cast upon me deepens into a nameless horror I can hardly bear. - I would not deprive myself of any kindly recollection, or any sympathy that is good for me, or others. What shall I lose, if I assent to this? What else will pass from my remembrance?”

“No knowledge; no result of study; nothing but the intertwisted chain of feelings and associations, each in its turn dependent on, and nourished by, the banished recollections. Those will go.”

“Are they so many?” said the haunted man, reflecting in alarm.

“They have been wont to show themselves in the fire, in music, in the wind, in the dead stillness of the night, in the revolving years,” returned the Phantom scornfully.

“In nothing else?”

The Phantom held its peace.

But having stood before him, silent, for a little while, it moved towards the fire; then stopped.

“Decide!” it said, “before the opportunity is lost!”

“A moment! I call Heaven to witness,” said the agitated man, “that I have never been a hater of any kind, - never morose, indifferent, or hard, to anything around me. If, living here alone, I have made too much of all that was and might have been, and too little of what is, the evil, I believe, has fallen on me, and not on others. But, if there were poison in my body, should I not, possessed of antidotes and knowledge how to use them, use them? If there be poison in my mind, and through this fearful shadow I can cast it out, shall I not cast it out?”

“Say,” said the Spectre, “is it done?”

“A moment longer!” he answered hurriedly. *“I would forget it if I could*! Have *I* thought that, alone, or has it been the thought of thousands upon thousands, generation after generation? All human memory is fraught with sorrow and trouble. My memory is as the memory of other men, but other men have not this choice. Yes, I close the bargain. Yes! I WILL forget my sorrow, wrong, and trouble!”

“Say,” said the Spectre, “is it done?”

“It is!”

“IT IS. And take this with you, man whom I here renounce! The gift that I have given, you shall give again, go where you will. Without recovering yourself the power that you have yielded up, you shall henceforth destroy its like in all whom you approach. Your wisdom has discovered that the memory of sorrow, wrong, and trouble is the lot of all mankind, and that mankind would be the happier, in its other memories, without it. Go! Be its benefactor! Freed from such remembrance, from this hour, carry involuntarily the blessing of such freedom with you. Its diffusion is inseparable and inalienable from you. Go! Be happy in the good you have won, and in the good you do!”

The Phantom, which had held its bloodless hand above him while it spoke, as if in some unholy invocation, or some ban; and which had gradually advanced its eyes so close to his, that he could see how they did not participate in the terrible smile upon its face, but were a fixed, unalterable, steady horror melted before him and was gone.

As he stood rooted to the spot, possessed by fear and wonder, and imagining he heard repeated in melancholy echoes, dying away fainter and fainter, the words, “Destroy its like in all whom you approach!” a shrill cry reached his ears. It came, not from the passages beyond the door, but from another part of the old building, and sounded like the cry of some one in the dark who had lost the way.

He looked confusedly upon his hands and limbs, as if to be assured of his identity, and then shouted in reply, loudly and wildly; for there was a strangeness and terror upon him, as if he too were lost.

The cry responding, and being nearer, he caught up the lamp, and raised a heavy curtain in the wall, by which he was accustomed to pass into and out of the theatre where he lectured, - which adjoined his room. Associated with youth and animation, and a high amphitheatre of faces which his entrance charmed to interest in a moment, it was a ghostly place when all this life was faded out of it, and stared upon him like an emblem of Death.

“Halloa!” he cried. “Halloa! This way! Come to the light!” When, as he held the curtain with one hand, and with the other raised the lamp and tried to pierce the gloom that filled the place, something rushed past him into the room like a wild-cat, and crouched down in a corner.

“What is it?” he said, hastily.

He might have asked “What is it?” even had he seen it well, as presently he did when he stood looking at it gathered up in its corner.

A bundle of tatters, held together by a hand, in size and form almost an infant's, but in its greedy, desperate little clutch, a bad old man's. A face rounded and smoothed by some half-dozen years, but pinched and twisted by the experiences of a life. Bright eyes, but not youthful. Naked feet, beautiful in their childish delicacy, - ugly in the blood and dirt that cracked upon them. A baby savage, a young monster, a child who had never been a child, a creature who might live to take the outward form of man, but who, within, would live and perish a mere beast.

Used, already, to be worried and hunted like a beast, the boy crouched down as he was looked at, and looked back again, and interposed his arm to ward off the expected blow.

“I'll bite,” he said, “if you hit me!”

The time had been, and not many minutes since, when such a sight as this would have wrung the Chemist's heart. He looked upon it now, coldly; but with a heavy effort to remember something - he did not know what - he asked the boy what he did there, and whence he came.

“Where's the woman?” he replied. “I want to find the woman.”

“Who?”

“The woman. Her that brought me here, and set me by the large fire. She was so long gone, that I went to look for her, and lost myself. I don't want you. I want the woman.”

He made a spring, so suddenly, to get away, that the dull sound of his naked feet upon the floor was near the curtain, when Redlaw caught him by his rags.

“Come! you let me go!” muttered the boy, struggling, and clenching his teeth. “I've done nothing to you. Let me go, will you, to the woman!”

“That is not the way. There is a nearer one,” said Redlaw, detaining him, in the same blank effort to remember some association that ought, of right, to bear upon this monstrous object. “What is your name?”

“Got none.”

“Where do you live?

“Live! What’s that?”

The boy shook his hair from his eyes to look at him for a moment, and then, twisting round his legs and wrestling with him, broke again into his repetition of “You let me go, will you? I want to find the woman.”

The Chemist led him to the door. “This way,” he said, looking at him still confusedly, but with repugnance and avoidance, growing out of his coldness. “I’ll take you to her.”

The sharp eyes in the child’s head, wandering round the room, lighted on the table where the remnants of the dinner were.

“Give me some of that!” he said, covetously.

“Has she not fed you?”

“I shall be hungry again to-morrow, sha’n’t I? Ain’t I hungry every day?”

Finding himself released, he bounded at the table like some small animal of prey, and hugging to his breast bread and meat, and his own rags, all together, said:

“There! Now take me to the woman!”

As the Chemist, with a new-born dislike to touch him, sternly motioned him to follow, and was going out of the door, he trembled and stopped.

“The gift that I have given, you shall give again, go where you will!”

The Phantom’s words were blowing in the wind, and the wind blew chill upon him.

“I’ll not go there, to-night,” he murmured faintly. “I’ll go nowhere to-night. Boy! straight down this long-arched passage, and past the great dark door into the yard, - you see the fire shining on the window there.”

“The woman’s fire?” inquired the boy.

He nodded, and the naked feet had sprung away. He came back with his lamp, locked his door hastily, and sat down in his chair, covering his face like one who was frightened at himself.

For now he was, indeed, alone. Alone, alone.

CHAPTER II - The Gift Diffused

A small man sat in a small parlour, partitioned off from a small shop by a small screen, pasted all over with small scraps of newspapers. In company with the small man, was almost any amount of small children you may please to name - at least it seemed so; they made, in that very limited sphere of action, such an imposing effect, in point of numbers.

Of these small fry, two had, by some strong machinery, been got into bed in a corner, where they might have reposed snugly enough in the sleep of innocence, but for a constitutional propensity to keep awake, and also to scuffle in and out of bed. The immediate occasion of these predatory dashes at the waking world, was the construction of an oyster-shell wall in a corner, by two other youths of tender age; on which fortification the two in bed made harassing descents (like those accursed Picts and Scots who beleaguer the early historical studies of most young Britons), and then withdrew to their own territory.

In addition to the stir attendant on these inroads, and the retorts of the invaded, who pursued hotly, and made lunges at the bed-clothes under which the marauders took refuge, another little boy, in another little bed, contributed his mite of confusion to the family stock, by casting his boots upon the waters; in other words, by launching these and several small objects, inoffensive in themselves, though of a hard substance considered as missiles, at the disturbers of his repose, - who were not slow to return these compliments.

Besides which, another little boy - the biggest there, but still little - was tottering to and fro, bent on one side, and considerably affected in his knees by the weight of a large baby, which he was supposed by a fiction that obtains sometimes in sanguine families, to be hushing to sleep. But oh! the inexhaustible regions of contemplation and watchfulness into which this baby’s eyes were then only beginning to compose themselves to stare, over his unconscious shoulder!

It was a very Moloch of a baby, on whose insatiate altar the whole existence of this particular young brother was offered up a daily sacrifice. Its personality may be said to have consisted in its never being quiet, in any one place, for five consecutive minutes, and never going to sleep when required. “Tetterby’s baby” was as well known in the neighbourhood as the postman or the pot-boy. It roved from door-step to door-step, in the arms of little Johnny Tetterby, and lagged heavily at the rear of troops of juveniles who followed the Tumblers or the Monkey, and came up, all on one side, a little too late for everything that was attractive, from Monday morning until Saturday night. Wherever childhood congregated to play, there was little Moloch making Johnny fag and toil. Wherever Johnny desired to stay, little Moloch became fractious, and would not remain. Whenever Johnny wanted to go out, Moloch was asleep, and must be watched. Whenever Johnny wanted to stay at home, Moloch was awake, and must be taken out. Yet Johnny was verily persuaded that it was a faultless baby, without its peer in the realm of England, and was quite content to catch meek glimpses of things in general from behind its skirts, or over its limp flapping bonnet, and to go staggering about with it like a very little porter with a very large parcel, which was not directed to anybody, and could never be delivered anywhere.

The small man who sat in the small parlour, making fruitless attempts to read his newspaper peaceably in the midst of this disturbance, was the father of the family, and the chief of the firm described in the inscription over the little shop front, by the name and title of A. TETTERBY AND CO., NEWSMEN. Indeed, strictly speaking, he was the only personage answering to that designation, as Co. was a mere poetical abstraction, altogether baseless and impersonal.

Tetterby’s was the corner shop in Jerusalem Buildings. There was a good show of literature in the window, chiefly consisting of picture-newspapers out of date, and serial pirates, and footpads. Walking-sticks, likewise, and marbles, were included in the stock in trade. It had once extended into the light confectionery line; but it would seem that those elegancies of life were not in demand about Jerusalem Buildings, for nothing connected with that branch of commerce remained in the window, except a sort of small glass lantern containing a languishing mass of bull's-eyes, which had melted in the summer and congealed in the winter until all hope of ever getting them out, or of eating them without eating the lantern too, was gone for ever. Tetterby's had tried its hand at several things. It had once made a feeble little dart at the toy business; for, in another lantern, there was a heap of minute wax dolls, all sticking together upside down, in the direst confusion, with their feet on one another's heads, and a precipitate of broken arms and legs at the bottom. It had made a move in the millinery direction, which a few dry, wiry bonnet-shapes remained in a corner of the window to attest. It had fancied that a living might lie hidden in the tobacco trade, and had stuck up a representation of a native of each of the three integral portions of the British Empire, in the act of consuming that fragrant weed; with a poetic legend attached, importing that united in one cause they sat and joked, one chewed tobacco, one took snuff, one smoked: but nothing seemed to have come of it - except flies. Time had been when it had put a forlorn trust in imitative jewellery, for in one pane of glass there was a card of cheap seals, and another of pencil-cases, and a mysterious black amulet of inscrutable intention, labelled ninepence. But, to that hour, Jerusalem Buildings had bought none of them. In short, Tetterby's had tried so hard to get a livelihood out of Jerusalem Buildings in one way or other, and appeared to have done so indifferently in all, that the best position in the firm was too evidently Co.'s; Co., as a bodiless creation, being untroubled with the vulgar inconveniences of hunger and thirst, being chargeable neither to the poor's-rates nor the assessed taxes, and having no young family to provide for.

Tetterby himself, however, in his little parlour, as already mentioned, having the presence of a young family impressed upon his mind in a manner too clamorous to be disregarded, or to comport with the quiet perusal of a newspaper, laid down his paper, wheeled, in his distraction, a few times round the parlour, like an undecided carrier-pigeon, made an ineffectual rush at one or two flying little figures in bed-gowns that skimmed past him, and then, bearing suddenly down upon the only unoffending member of the family, boxed the ears of little Moloch's nurse.

“You bad boy!” said Mr. Tetterby, “haven’t you any feeling for your poor father after the fatigues and anxieties of a hard winter’s day, since five o’clock in the morning, but must you wither his rest, and corrode his latest intelligence, with *your* wicious tricks? Isn’t it enough, sir, that your brother ’Dolphus is toiling and moiling in the fog and cold, and you rolling in the lap of luxury with a - with a baby, and everything you can wish for,” said Mr. Tetterby, heaping this up as a great climax of blessings, “but must you make a wilderness of home, and maniacs of your parents? Must you, Johnny? Hey?” At each interrogation, Mr. Tetterby made a feint of boxing his ears again, but thought better of it, and held his hand.

“Oh, father!” whimpered Johnny, “when I wasn’t doing anything, I’m sure, but taking such care of Sally, and getting her to sleep. Oh, father!”

“I wish my little woman would come home!” said Mr. Tetterby, relenting and repenting, “I only wish my little woman would come home! I ain’t fit to deal with ’em. They make my head go round, and get the better of me. Oh, Johnny! Isn’t it enough that your dear mother has provided you with that sweet sister?” indicating Moloch; “isn’t it enough that you were seven boys before without a ray of gal, and that your dear mother went through what she *did* go through, on purpose that you might all of you have a little sister, but must you so behave yourself as to make my head swim?”

Softening more and more, as his own tender feelings and those of his injured son were worked on, Mr. Tetterby concluded by embracing him, and immediately breaking away to catch one of the real delinquents. A reasonably good start occurring, he succeeded, after a short but smart run, and some rather severe cross-country work under and over the bedsteads, and in and out among the intricacies of the chairs, in capturing this infant, whom he condignly punished, and bore to bed. This example had a powerful, and apparently, mesmeric influence on him of the boots, who instantly fell into a deep sleep, though he had been, but a moment before, broad awake, and in the highest possible feather. Nor was it lost upon the two young architects, who retired to bed, in an adjoining closet, with great privacy and speed. The comrade of the Intercepted One also shrinking into his nest with similar discretion, Mr. Tetterby, when he paused for breath, found himself unexpectedly in a scene of peace.

“My little woman herself,” said Mr. Tetterby, wiping his flushed face, “could hardly have done it better! I only wish my little woman had had it to do, I do indeed!”

Mr. Tetterby sought upon his screen for a passage appropriate to be impressed upon his children’s minds on the occasion, and read the following.

“‘It is an undoubted fact that all remarkable men have had remarkable mothers, and have respected them in after life as their best friends.’ Think of your own remarkable mother, my boys,” said Mr. Tetterby, “and know her value while she is still among you!”

He sat down again in his chair by the fire, and composed himself, cross-legged, over his newspaper.

“Let anybody, I don’t care who it is, get out of bed again,” said Tetterby, as a general proclamation, delivered in a very soft-hearted manner, “and astonishment will be the portion of that respected contemporary!” - which expression Mr. Tetterby selected from his screen. “Johnny, my child, take care of your only sister, Sally; for she’s the brightest gem that ever sparkled on your early brow.”

Johnny sat down on a little stool, and devotedly crushed himself beneath the weight of Moloch.

“Ah, what a gift that baby is to you, Johnny!” said his father, “and how thankful you ought to be! ‘It is not generally known, Johnny,’” he was now referring to the screen again, “‘but it is a fact ascertained, by accurate calculations, that the following immense percentage of babies never attain to two years old; that is to say - ’”

“Oh, don’t, father, please!” cried Johnny. “I can’t bear it, when I think of Sally.”

Mr. Tetterby desisting, Johnny, with a profound sense of his trust, wiped his eyes, and hushed his sister.

“Your brother ’Dolphus,” said his father, poking the fire, “is late to-night, Johnny, and will come home like a lump of ice. What’s got your precious mother?”

“Here’s mother, and ’Dolphus too, father!” exclaimed Johnny, “I think.”

“You’re right!” returned his father, listening. “Yes, that’s the footstep of my little woman.”

The process of induction, by which Mr Tetterby had come to the conclusion that his wife was a little woman, was his own secret. She would have made two editions of himself, very easily. Considered as an individual, she was rather remarkable for being robust and portly; but considered with reference to her husband, her dimensions became magnificent. Nor did they assume a less imposing proportion, when studied with reference to the size of her seven sons, who were but diminutive. In the case of Sally, however, Mrs. Tetterby had asserted herself, at last; as nobody knew better than the victim Johnny, who weighed and measured that exacting idol every hour in the day.

Mrs. Tetterby, who had been marketing, and carried a basket, threw back her bonnet and shawl, and sitting down, fatigued, commanded Johnny to bring his sweet charge to her straightway, for a kiss. Johnny having complied, and gone back to his stool, and again crushed himself, Master Adolphus Tetterby, who had by this time unwound his torso out of a prismatic comforter, apparently interminable, requested the same favour. Johnny having again complied, and again gone back to his stool, and again crushed himself, Mr. Tetterby, struck by a sudden thought, preferred the same claim on his own parental part. The satisfaction of this third desire completely exhausted the sacrifice, who had hardly breath enough left to get back to his stool, crush himself again, and pant at his relations.

“Whatever you do, Johnny,” said Mrs. Tetterby, shaking her head, “take care of her, or never look your mother in the face again.”

“Nor your brother,” said Adolphus.

"Nor your father, Johnny," added Mr. Tetterby.

Johnny, much affected by this conditional renunciation of him, looked down at Moloch's eyes to see that they were all right, so far, and skilfully patted her back (which was uppermost), and rocked her with his foot.

"Are you wet, 'Dolphus, my boy?" said his father. "Come and take my chair, and dry yourself."

"No, father, thank'ee," said Adolphus, smoothing himself down with his hands. "I an't very wet, I don't think. Does my face shine much, father?"

"Well, it *does* look waxy, my boy," returned Mr. Tetterby.

"It's the weather, father," said Adolphus, polishing his cheeks on the worn sleeve of his jacket. "What with rain, and sleet, and wind, and snow, and fog, my face gets quite brought out into a rash sometimes. And shines, it does - oh, don't it, though!"

Master Adolphus was also in the newspaper line of life, being employed, by a more thriving firm than his father and Co., to vend newspapers at a railway station, where his chubby little person, like a shabbily-disguised Cupid, and his shrill little voice (he was not much more than ten years old), were as well known as the hoarse panting of the locomotives, running in and out. His juvenility might have been at some loss for a harmless outlet, in this early application to traffic, but for a fortunate discovery he made of a means of entertaining himself, and of dividing the long day into stages of interest, without neglecting business. This ingenious invention, remarkable, like many great discoveries, for its simplicity, consisted in varying the first vowel in the word "paper," and substituting, in its stead, at different periods of the day, all the other vowels in grammatical succession. Thus, before daylight in the winter-time, he went to and fro, in his little oilskin cap and cape, and his big comforter, piercing the heavy air with his cry of "Morn-ing Pa-per!" which, about an hour before noon, changed to "Morn-ing Pepper!" which, at about two, changed to "Morn-ing Pip-per!" which in a couple of hours changed to "Morn-ing Pop-per!" and so declined with the sun into "Eve-ning Pup-per!" to the great relief and comfort of this young gentleman's spirits.

Mrs. Tetterby, his lady-mother, who had been sitting with her bonnet and shawl thrown back, as aforesaid, thoughtfully turning her wedding-ring round and round upon her finger, now rose, and divesting herself of her out-of-door attire, began to lay the cloth for supper.

“Ah, dear me, dear me, dear me!” said Mrs. Tetterby. “That’s the way the world goes!”

“Which is the way the world goes, my dear?” asked Mr. Tetterby, looking round.

“Oh, nothing,” said Mrs. Tetterby.

Mr. Tetterby elevated his eyebrows, folded his newspaper afresh, and carried his eyes up it, and down it, and across it, but was wandering in his attention, and not reading it.

Mrs. Tetterby, at the same time, laid the cloth, but rather as if she were punishing the table than preparing the family supper; hitting it unnecessarily hard with the knives and forks, slapping it with the plates, dinting it with the salt-cellar, and coming heavily down upon it with the loaf.

“Ah, dear me, dear me, dear me!” said Mrs. Tetterby. “That’s the way the world goes!”

“My duck,” returned her husband, looking round again, “you said that before. Which is the way the world goes?”

“Oh, nothing!” said Mrs. Tetterby.

“Sophia!” remonstrated her husband, “you said *that* before, too.”

“Well, I’ll say it again if you like,” returned Mrs. Tetterby. “Oh nothing - there! And again if you like, oh nothing - there! And again if you like, oh nothing - now then!”

Mr. Tetterby brought his eye to bear upon the partner of his bosom, and said, in mild astonishment:

“My little woman, what has put you out?”

“I’m sure *I* don’t know,” she retorted. “Don’t ask me. Who said I was put out at all? *I* never did.”

Mr. Tetterby gave up the perusal of his newspaper as a bad job, and, taking a slow walk across the room, with his hands behind him, and his shoulders raised - his gait according perfectly with the resignation of his manner - addressed himself to his two eldest offspring.

“Your supper will be ready in a minute, ’Dolphus,” said Mr. Tetterby. “Your mother has been out in the wet, to the cook’s shop, to buy it. It was very good of your mother so to do. *You* shall get some supper too, very soon, Johnny. Your mother’s pleased with you, my man, for being so attentive to your precious sister.”

Mrs. Tetterby, without any remark, but with a decided subsidence of her animosity towards the table, finished her preparations, and took, from her ample basket, a substantial slab of hot pease pudding wrapped in paper, and a basin covered with a saucer, which, on being uncovered, sent forth an odour so agreeable, that the three pair of eyes in the two beds opened wide and fixed themselves upon the banquet. Mr. Tetterby, without regarding this tacit invitation to be seated, stood repeating slowly, “Yes, yes, your supper will be ready in a minute, ’Dolphus - your mother went out in the wet, to the cook’s shop, to buy it. It was very good of your mother so to do” - until Mrs. Tetterby, who had been exhibiting sundry tokens of contrition behind him, caught him round the neck, and wept.

“Oh, Dolphus!” said Mrs. Tetterby, “how could I go and behave so?”

This reconciliation affected Adolphus the younger and Johnny to that degree, that they both, as with one accord, raised a dismal cry, which had the effect of immediately shutting up the round eyes in the beds, and utterly routing the two remaining little Tetterbys, just then stealing in from the adjoining closet to see what was going on in the eating way.

“I am sure, ’Dolphus,” sobbed Mrs. Tetterby, “coming home, I had no more idea than a child unborn - ”

Mr. Tetterby seemed to dislike this figure of speech, and observed, “Say than the baby, my dear.”

“ - Had no more idea than the baby,” said Mrs. Tetterby. - “Johnny, don’t look at me, but look at her, or she’ll fall out of your lap and be killed, and then you’ll die in agonies of a broken heart, and serve you right. - No more idea I hadn’t than that darling, of being cross when I came home; but somehow, ’Dolphus - ” Mrs. Tetterby paused, and again turned her wedding-ring round and round upon her finger.

“I see!” said Mr. Tetterby. “I understand! My little woman was put out. Hard times, and hard weather, and hard work, make it trying now and then. I see, bless your soul! No wonder! Dolf, my man,” continued Mr. Tetterby, exploring the basin with a fork, “here’s your mother been and bought, at the cook’s shop, besides pease pudding, a whole knuckle of a lovely roast leg of pork, with lots of crackling left upon it, and with seasoning gravy and mustard quite unlimited. Hand in your plate, my boy, and begin while it’s simmering.”

Master Adolphus, needing no second summons, received his portion with eyes rendered moist by appetite, and withdrawing to his particular stool, fell upon his supper tooth and nail. Johnny was not forgotten, but received his rations on bread, lest he should, in a flush of gravy, trickle any on the baby. He was required, for similar reasons, to keep his pudding, when not on active service, in his pocket.

There might have been more pork on the knucklebone, - which knucklebone the carver at the cook’s shop had assuredly not forgotten in carving for previous customers - but there was no stint of seasoning, and that is an accessory dreamily suggesting pork, and pleasantly cheating the sense of taste. The pease pudding, too, the gravy and mustard, like the Eastern rose in respect of the nightingale, if they were not absolutely pork, had lived near it; so, upon the whole, there was the flavour of a middle-sized pig. It was irresistible to the Tetterbys in bed, who, though professing to slumber peacefully, crawled out when unseen by their parents, and silently appealed to their brothers for any gastronomic token of fraternal affection. They, not hard of heart, presenting scraps in return, it resulted that a party of light skirmishers in nightgowns were careering about the parlour all through supper, which harassed Mr. Tetterby exceedingly, and once or twice imposed upon him the necessity of a charge, before which these guerilla troops retired in all directions and in great confusion.

Mrs. Tetterby did not enjoy her supper. There seemed to be something on Mrs. Tetterby’s mind. At one time she laughed without reason, and at another time she cried without reason, and at last she laughed and cried together in a manner so very unreasonable that her husband was confounded.

“My little woman,” said Mr. Tetterby, “if the world goes that way, it appears to go the wrong way, and to choke you.”

“Give me a drop of water,” said Mrs. Tetterby, struggling with herself, “and don’t speak to me for the present, or take any notice of me. Don’t do it!”

Mr. Tetterby having administered the water, turned suddenly on the unlucky Johnny (who was full of sympathy), and demanded why he was wallowing there, in gluttony and idleness, instead of coming forward with the baby, that the sight of her might revive his mother. Johnny immediately approached, borne down by its weight; but Mrs. Tetterby holding out her hand to signify that she was not in a condition to bear that trying appeal to her feelings, he was interdicted from advancing another inch, on pain of perpetual hatred from all his dearest connections; and accordingly retired to his stool again, and crushed himself as before.

After a pause, Mrs. Tetterby said she was better now, and began to laugh.

“My little woman,” said her husband, dubiously, “are you quite sure you’re better? Or are you, Sophia, about to break out in a fresh direction?”

“No, ’Dolphus, no,” replied his wife. “I’m quite myself.” With that, settling her hair, and pressing the palms of her hands upon her eyes, she laughed again.

"What a wicked fool I was, to think so for a moment!" said Mrs. Tetterby. "Come nearer, 'Dolphus, and let me ease my mind, and tell you what I mean. Let me tell you all about it."

Mr. Tetterby bringing his chair closer, Mrs. Tetterby laughed again, gave him a hug, and wiped her eyes.

"You know, Dolphus, my dear," said Mrs. Tetterby, "that when I was single, I might have given myself away in several directions. At one time, four after me at once; two of them were sons of Mars."

"We're all sons of Ma's, my dear," said Mr. Tetterby, "jointly with Pa's."

"I don't mean that," replied his wife, "I mean soldiers - serjeants."

"Oh!" said Mr. Tetterby.

"Well, 'Dolphus, I'm sure I never think of such things now, to regret them; and I'm sure I've got as good a husband, and would do as much to prove that I was fond of him, as - "

"As any little woman in the world," said Mr. Tetterby. "Very good. *Very* good."

If Mr. Tetterby had been ten feet high, he could not have expressed a gentler consideration for Mrs. Tetterby's fairy-like stature; and if Mrs. Tetterby had been two feet high, she could not have felt it more appropriately her due.

"But you see, 'Dolphus," said Mrs. Tetterby, "this being Christmas-time, when all people who can, make holiday, and when all people who have got money, like to spend some, I did, somehow, get a little out of sorts when I was in the streets just now. There were so many things to be sold - such delicious things to eat, such fine things to look at, such delightful things to have - and there was so much calculating and calculating necessary, before I durst lay out a sixpence for the commonest thing; and the basket was so large, and wanted so much in it; and my stock of money was so small, and would go such a little way; - you hate me, don't you, 'Dolphus?"

“Not quite,” said Mr. Tetterby, “as yet.”

“Well! I’ll tell you the whole truth,” pursued his wife, penitently, “and then perhaps you will. I felt all this, so much, when I was trudging about in the cold, and when I saw a lot of other calculating faces and large baskets trudging about, too, that I began to think whether I mightn’t have done better, and been happier, if - I - hadn’t - ” the wedding-ring went round again, and Mrs. Tetterby shook her downcast head as she turned it.

“I see,” said her husband quietly; “if you hadn’t married at all, or if you had married somebody else?”

“Yes,” sobbed Mrs. Tetterby. “That’s really what I thought. Do you hate me now, ’Dolphus?”

“Why no,” said Mr. Tetterby. “I don’t find that I do, as yet.”

Mrs. Tetterby gave him a thankful kiss, and went on.

“I begin to hope you won’t, now, ’Dolphus, though I’m afraid I haven’t told you the worst. I can’t think what came over me. I don’t know whether I was ill, or mad, or what I was, but I couldn’t call up anything that seemed to bind us to each other, or to reconcile me to my fortune. All the pleasures and enjoyments we had ever had - *they* seemed so poor and insignificant, I hated them. I could have trodden on them. And I could think of nothing else, except our being poor, and the number of mouths there were at home.”

“Well, well, my dear,” said Mr. Tetterby, shaking her hand encouragingly, “that’s truth, after all. We *are* poor, and there *are* a number of mouths at home here.”

“Ah! but, Dolf, Dolf!” cried his wife, laying her hands upon his neck, “my good, kind, patient fellow, when I had been at home a very little while - how different! Oh, Dolf, dear, how different it was! I felt as if there was a rush of recollection on me, all at once, that softened my hard heart, and filled it up till it was bursting. All our struggles for a livelihood, all our cares and wants since we have been married, all the times of sickness, all the hours of watching, we have ever had, by one another, or by the children, seemed to speak to me, and say that they had made us one, and that I never might have been, or could have been, or would have been, any other than the wife and mother I am. Then, the cheap enjoyments that I could have trodden on so cruelly, got to be so precious to me - Oh so priceless, and dear! - that I couldn't bear to think how much I had wronged them; and I said, and say again a hundred times, how could I ever behave so, 'Dolphus, how could I ever have the heart to do it!"

The good woman, quite carried away by her honest tenderness and remorse, was weeping with all her heart, when she started up with a scream, and ran behind her husband. Her cry was so terrified, that the children started from their sleep and from their beds, and clung about her. Nor did her gaze belie her voice, as she pointed to a pale man in a black cloak who had come into the room.

"Look at that man! Look there! What does he want?"

"My dear," returned her husband, "I'll ask him if you'll let me go. What's the matter! How you shake!"

"I saw him in the street, when I was out just now. He looked at me, and stood near me. I am afraid of him."

"Afraid of him! Why?"

"I don't know why - I - stop! husband!" for he was going towards the stranger.

She had one hand pressed upon her forehead, and one upon her breast; and there was a peculiar fluttering all over her, and a hurried unsteady motion of her eyes, as if she had lost something.

"Are you ill, my dear?"

"What is it that is going from me again?" she muttered, in a low voice. "What *is* this that is going away?"

Then she abruptly answered: “Ill? No, I am quite well,” and stood looking vacantly at the floor.

Her husband, who had not been altogether free from the infection of her fear at first, and whom the present strangeness of her manner did not tend to reassure, addressed himself to the pale visitor in the black cloak, who stood still, and whose eyes were bent upon the ground.

“What may be your pleasure, sir,” he asked, “with us?”

“I fear that my coming in unperceived,” returned the visitor, “has alarmed you; but you were talking and did not hear me.”

“My little woman says - perhaps you heard her say it,” returned Mr. Tetterby, “that it’s not the first time you have alarmed her to-night.”

“I am sorry for it. I remember to have observed her, for a few moments only, in the street. I had no intention of frightening her.”

As he raised his eyes in speaking, she raised hers. It was extraordinary to see what dread she had of him, and with what dread he observed it - and yet how narrowly and closely.

“My name,” he said, “is Redlaw. I come from the old college hard by. A young gentleman who is a student there, lodges in your house, does he not?”

“Mr. Denham?” said Tetterby.

“Yes.”

It was a natural action, and so slight as to be hardly noticeable; but the little man, before speaking again, passed his hand across his forehead, and looked quickly round the room, as though he were sensible of some change in its atmosphere. The Chemist, instantly transferring to him the look of dread he had directed towards the wife, stepped back, and his face turned paler.

“The gentleman’s room,” said Tetterby, “is upstairs, sir. There’s a more convenient private entrance; but as you have come in here, it will save your going out into the cold, if you’ll take this little staircase,” showing one communicating directly with the parlour, “and go up to him that way, if you wish to see him.”

“Yes, I wish to see him,” said the Chemist. “Can you spare a light?”

The watchfulness of his haggard look, and the inexplicable distrust that darkened it, seemed to trouble Mr. Tetterby. He paused; and looking fixedly at him in return, stood for a minute or so, like a man stupefied, or fascinated.

At length he said, “I’ll light you, sir, if you’ll follow me.”

“No,” replied the Chemist, “I don’t wish to be attended, or announced to him. He does not expect me. I would rather go alone. Please to give me the light, if you can spare it, and I’ll find the way.”

In the quickness of his expression of this desire, and in taking the candle from the newsman, he touched him on the breast. Withdrawing his hand hastily, almost as though he had wounded him by accident (for he did not know in what part of himself his new power resided, or how it was communicated, or how the manner of its reception varied in different persons), he turned and ascended the stair.

But when he reached the top, he stopped and looked down. The wife was standing in the same place, twisting her ring round and round upon her finger. The husband, with his head bent forward on his breast, was musing heavily and sullenly. The children, still clustering about the mother, gazed timidly after the visitor, and nestled together when they saw him looking down.

“Come!” said the father, roughly. “There’s enough of this. Get to bed here!”

“The place is inconvenient and small enough,” the mother added, “without you. Get to bed!”

The whole brood, scared and sad, crept away; little Johnny and the baby lagging last. The mother, glancing contemptuously round the sordid room, and tossing from her the fragments of their meal, stopped on the threshold of her task of clearing the table, and sat down, pondering idly and dejectedly. The father betook himself to the chimney-corner, and impatiently raking the small fire together, bent over it as if he would monopolise it all. They did not interchange a word.

The Chemist, paler than before, stole upward like a thief; looking back upon the change below, and dreading equally to go on or return.

“What have I done!” he said, confusedly. “What am I going to do!”

“To be the benefactor of mankind,” he thought he heard a voice reply.

He looked round, but there was nothing there; and a passage now shutting out the little parlour from his view, he went on, directing his eyes before him at the way he went.

“It is only since last night,” he muttered gloomily, “that I have remained shut up, and yet all things are strange to me. I am strange to myself. I am here, as in a dream. What interest have I in this place, or in any place that I can bring to my remembrance? My mind is going blind!”

There was a door before him, and he knocked at it. Being invited, by a voice within, to enter, he complied.

“Is that my kind nurse?” said the voice. “But I need not ask her. There is no one else to come here.”

It spoke cheerfully, though in a languid tone, and attracted his attention to a young man lying on a couch, drawn before the chimney-piece, with the back towards the door. A meagre scanty stove, pinched and hollowed like a sick man’s cheeks, and bricked into the centre of a hearth that it could scarcely warm, contained the fire, to which his face was turned. Being so near the windy house-top, it wasted quickly, and with a busy sound, and the burning ashes dropped down fast.

“They chink when they shoot out here,” said the student, smiling, “so, according to the gossips, they are not coffins, but purses. I shall be well and rich yet, some day, if it please God, and shall live perhaps to love a daughter Milly, in remembrance of the kindest nature and the gentlest heart in the world.”

He put up his hand as if expecting her to take it, but, being weakened, he lay still, with his face resting on his other hand, and did not turn round.

The Chemist glanced about the room; - at the student’s books and papers, piled upon a table in a corner, where they, and his extinguished reading-lamp, now prohibited and put away, told of the attentive hours that had gone before this illness, and perhaps caused it; - at such signs of his old health and freedom, as the out-of-door attire that hung idle on the wall; - at those remembrances of other and less solitary scenes, the little miniatures upon the chimney-piece, and the drawing of home; - at that token of his emulation, perhaps, in some sort, of his personal attachment too, the framed engraving of himself, the looker-on. The time had been, only yesterday, when not one of these objects, in its remotest association of interest with the living figure before him, would have been lost on Redlaw. Now, they were but objects; or, if any gleam of such connexion shot upon him, it perplexed, and not enlightened him, as he stood looking round with a dull wonder.

The student, recalling the thin hand which had remained so long untouched, raised himself on the couch, and turned his head.

“Mr. Redlaw!” he exclaimed, and started up.

Redlaw put out his arm.

“Don’t come nearer to me. I will sit here. Remain you, where you are!”

He sat down on a chair near the door, and having glanced at the young man standing leaning with his hand upon the couch, spoke with his eyes averted towards the ground.

“I heard, by an accident, by what accident is no matter, that one of my class was ill and solitary. I received no other description of him, than that he lived in this street. Beginning my inquiries at the first house in it, I have found him.”

“I have been ill, sir,” returned the student, not merely with a modest hesitation, but with a kind of awe of him, “but am greatly better. An attack of fever - of the brain, I believe - has weakened me, but I am much better. I cannot say I have been solitary, in my illness, or I should forget the ministering hand that has been near me.”

“You are speaking of the keeper’s wife,” said Redlaw.

“Yes.” The student bent his head, as if he rendered her some silent homage.

The Chemist, in whom there was a cold, monotonous apathy, which rendered him more like a marble image on the tomb of the man who had started from his dinner yesterday at the first mention of this student’s case, than the breathing man himself, glanced again at the student leaning with his hand upon the couch, and looked upon the ground, and in the air, as if for light for his blinded mind.

“I remembered your name,” he said, “when it was mentioned to me down stairs, just now; and I recollect your face. We have held but very little personal communication together?”

“Very little.”

“You have retired and withdrawn from me, more than any of the rest, I think?”

The student signified assent.

“And why?” said the Chemist; not with the least expression of interest, but with a moody, wayward kind of curiosity. “Why? How comes it that you have sought to keep especially from me, the knowledge of your remaining here, at this season, when all the rest have dispersed, and of your being ill? I want to know why this is?”

The young man, who had heard him with increasing agitation, raised his downcast eyes to his face, and clasping his hands together, cried with sudden earnestness and with trembling lips:

"Mr. Redlaw! You have discovered me. You know my secret!"

"Secret?" said the Chemist, harshly. "I know?"

"Yes! Your manner, so different from the interest and sympathy which endear you to so many hearts, your altered voice, the constraint there is in everything you say, and in your looks," replied the student, "warn me that you know me. That you would conceal it, even now, is but a proof to me (God knows I need none!) of your natural kindness and of the bar there is between us."

A vacant and contemptuous laugh, was all his answer.

"But, Mr. Redlaw," said the student, "as a just man, and a good man, think how innocent I am, except in name and descent, of participation in any wrong inflicted on you or in any sorrow you have borne."

"Sorrow!" said Redlaw, laughing. "Wrong! What are those to me?"

"For Heaven's sake," entreated the shrinking student, "do not let the mere interchange of a few words with me change you like this, sir! Let me pass again from your knowledge and notice. Let me occupy my old reserved and distant place among those whom you instruct. Know me only by the name I have assumed, and not by that of Longford - "

"Longford!" exclaimed the other.

He clasped his head with both his hands, and for a moment turned upon the young man his own intelligent and thoughtful face. But the light passed from it, like the sun-beam of an instant, and it clouded as before.

"The name my mother bears, sir," faltered the young man, "the name she took, when she might, perhaps, have taken one more honoured. Mr. Redlaw," hesitating, "I believe I know that history. Where my information halts, my guesses at what is wanting may supply something not remote from the truth. I am the child of a marriage that has not proved itself a well-assorted or a happy one. From infancy, I have heard you spoken of with honour and respect - with something that was almost reverence. I have heard of such devotion, of such fortitude and tenderness, of such rising up against the obstacles which press men down, that my fancy, since I learnt my little lesson from my mother, has shed a lustre on your name. At last, a poor student myself, from whom could I learn but you?"

Redlaw, unmoved, unchanged, and looking at him with a staring frown, answered by no word or sign.

"I cannot say," pursued the other, "I should try in vain to say, how much it has impressed me, and affected me, to find the gracious traces of the past, in that certain power of winning gratitude and confidence which is associated among us students (among the humblest of us, most) with Mr. Redlaw's generous name. Our ages and positions are so different, sir, and I am so accustomed to regard you from a distance, that I wonder at my own presumption when I touch, however lightly, on that theme. But to one who - I may say, who felt no common interest in my mother once - it may be something to hear, now that all is past, with what indescribable feelings of affection I have, in my obscurity, regarded him; with what pain and reluctance I have kept aloof from his encouragement, when a word of it would have made me rich; yet how I have felt it fit that I should hold my course, content to know him, and to be unknown. Mr. Redlaw," said the student, faintly, "what I would have said, I have said ill, for my strength is strange to me as yet; but for anything unworthy in this fraud of mine, forgive me, and for all the rest forget me!"

The staring frown remained on Redlaw's face, and yielded to no other expression until the student, with these words, advanced towards him, as if to touch his hand, when he drew back and cried to him:

"Don't come nearer to me!"

The young man stopped, shocked by the eagerness of his recoil, and by the sternness of his repulsion; and he passed his hand, thoughtfully, across his forehead.

"The past is past," said the Chemist. "It dies like the brutes. Who talks to me of its traces in my life? He raves or lies! What have I to do with your distempered dreams? If you want money, here it is. I came to offer it; and that is all I came for. There can be nothing else that brings me here," he muttered, holding his head again, with both his hands. "There *can* be nothing else, and yet - "

He had tossed his purse upon the table. As he fell into this dim cogitation with himself, the student took it up, and held it out to him.

"Take it back, sir," he said proudly, though not angrily. "I wish you could take from me, with it, the remembrance of your words and offer."

"You do?" he retorted, with a wild light in his eyes. "You do?"

"I do!"

The Chemist went close to him, for the first time, and took the purse, and turned him by the arm, and looked him in the face.

"There is sorrow and trouble in sickness, is there not?" he demanded, with a laugh.

The wondering student answered, "Yes."

"In its unrest, in its anxiety, in its suspense, in all its train of physical and mental miseries?" said the Chemist, with a wild unearthly exultation. "All best forgotten, are they not?"

The student did not answer, but again passed his hand, confusedly, across his forehead. Redlaw still held him by the sleeve, when Milly's voice was heard outside.

"I can see very well now," she said, "thank you, Dolf. Don't cry, dear. Father and mother will be comfortable again, to-morrow, and home will be comfortable too. A gentleman with him, is there!"

Redlaw released his hold, as he listened.

"I have feared, from the first moment," he murmured to himself, "to meet her. There is a steady quality of goodness in her, that I dread to influence. I may be the murderer of what is tenderest and best within her bosom."

She was knocking at the door.

"Shall I dismiss it as an idle foreboding, or still avoid her?" he muttered, looking uneasily around.

She was knocking at the door again.

"Of all the visitors who could come here," he said, in a hoarse alarmed voice, turning to his companion, "this is the one I should desire most to avoid. Hide me!"

The student opened a frail door in the wall, communicating where the garret-roof began to slope towards the floor, with a small inner room. Redlaw passed in hastily, and shut it after him.

The student then resumed his place upon the couch, and called to her to enter.

"Dear Mr. Edmund," said Milly, looking round, "they told me there was a gentleman here."

"There is no one here but I."

"There has been some one?"

"Yes, yes, there has been some one."

She put her little basket on the table, and went up to the back of the couch, as if to take the extended hand - but it was not there. A little surprised, in her quiet way, she leaned over to look at his face, and gently touched him on the brow.

"Are you quite as well to-night? Your head is not so cool as in the afternoon."

“Tut!” said the student, petulantly, “very little ails me.”

A little more surprise, but no reproach, was expressed in her face, as she withdrew to the other side of the table, and took a small packet of needlework from her basket. But she laid it down again, on second thoughts, and going noiselessly about the room, set everything exactly in its place, and in the neatest order; even to the cushions on the couch, which she touched with so light a hand, that he hardly seemed to know it, as he lay looking at the fire. When all this was done, and she had swept the hearth, she sat down, in her modest little bonnet, to her work, and was quietly busy on it directly.

“It’s the new muslin curtain for the window, Mr. Edmund,” said Milly, stitching away as she talked. “It will look very clean and nice, though it costs very little, and will save your eyes, too, from the light. My William says the room should not be too light just now, when you are recovering so well, or the glare might make you giddy.”

He said nothing; but there was something so fretful and impatient in his change of position, that her quick fingers stopped, and she looked at him anxiously.

“The pillows are not comfortable,” she said, laying down her work and rising. “I will soon put them right.”

“They are very well,” he answered. “Leave them alone, pray. You make so much of everything.”

He raised his head to say this, and looked at her so thanklessly, that, after he had thrown himself down again, she stood timidly pausing. However, she resumed her seat, and her needle, without having directed even a murmuring look towards him, and was soon as busy as before.

“I have been thinking, Mr. Edmund, that *you* have been often thinking of late, when I have been sitting by, how true the saying is, that adversity is a good teacher. Health will be more precious to you, after this illness, than it has ever been. And years hence, when this time of year comes round, and you remember the days when you lay here sick, alone, that the knowledge of your illness might not afflict those who are dearest to you, your home will be doubly dear and doubly blest. Now, isn’t that a good, true thing?”

She was too intent upon her work, and too earnest in what she said, and too composed and quiet altogether, to be on the watch for any look he might direct towards her in reply; so the shaft of his ungrateful glance fell harmless, and did not wound her.

“Ah!” said Milly, with her pretty head inclining thoughtfully on one side, as she looked down, following her busy fingers with her eyes. “Even on me - and I am very different from you, Mr. Edmund, for I have no learning, and don’t know how to think properly - this view of such things has made a great impression, since you have been lying ill. When I have seen you so touched by the kindness and attention of the poor people down stairs, I have felt that you thought even that experience some repayment for the loss of health, and I have read in your face, as plain as if it was a book, that but for some trouble and sorrow we should never know half the good there is about us.”

His getting up from the couch, interrupted her, or she was going on to say more.

“We needn’t magnify the merit, Mrs. William,” he rejoined slightingly. “The people down stairs will be paid in good time I dare say, for any little extra service they may have rendered me; and perhaps they anticipate no less. I am much obliged to you, too.”

Her fingers stopped, and she looked at him.

“I can’t be made to feel the more obliged by your exaggerating the case,” he said. “I am sensible that you have been interested in me, and I say I am much obliged to you. What more would you have?”

Her work fell on her lap, as she still looked at him walking to and fro with an intolerant air, and stopping now and then.

"I say again, I am much obliged to you. Why weaken my sense of what is your due in obligation, by preferring enormous claims upon me? Trouble, sorrow, affliction, adversity! One might suppose I had been dying a score of deaths here!"

"Do you believe, Mr. Edmund," she asked, rising and going nearer to him, "that I spoke of the poor people of the house, with any reference to myself? To me?" laying her hand upon her bosom with a simple and innocent smile of astonishment.

"Oh! I think nothing about it, my good creature," he returned. "I have had an indisposition, which your solicitude - observe! I say solicitude - makes a great deal more of, than it merits; and it's over, and we can't perpetuate it."

He coldly took a book, and sat down at the table.

She watched him for a little while, until her smile was quite gone, and then, returning to where her basket was, said gently:

"Mr. Edmund, would you rather be alone?"

"There is no reason why I should detain you here," he replied.

"Except - " said Milly, hesitating, and showing her work.

"Oh! the curtain," he answered, with a supercilious laugh. "That's not worth staying for."

She made up the little packet again, and put it in her basket. Then, standing before him with such an air of patient entreaty that he could not choose but look at her, she said:

"If you should want me, I will come back willingly. When you did want me, I was quite happy to come; there was no merit in it. I think you must be afraid, that, now you are getting well, I may be troublesome to you; but I should not have been, indeed. I should have come no longer than your weakness and confinement lasted. You owe me nothing; but it is right that you should deal as justly by me as if I was a lady - even the very lady that you love; and if you suspect me of meanly making much of the little I have tried to do to comfort your sick room, you do yourself more wrong than ever you can do me. That is why I am sorry. That is why I am very sorry."

If she had been as passionate as she was quiet, as indignant as she was calm, as angry in her look as she was gentle, as loud of tone as she was low and clear, she might have left no sense of her departure in the room, compared with that which fell upon the lonely student when she went away.

He was gazing drearily upon the place where she had been, when Redlaw came out of his concealment, and came to the door.

"When sickness lays its hand on you again," he said, looking fiercely back at him, " - may it be soon! - Die here! Rot here!"

"What have you done?" returned the other, catching at his cloak. "What change have you wrought in me? What curse have you brought upon me? Give me back *my*self!"

"Give me back myself!" exclaimed Redlaw like a madman. "I am infected! I am infectious! I am charged with poison for my own mind, and the minds of all mankind. Where I felt interest, compassion, sympathy, I am turning into stone. Selfishness and ingratitude spring up in my blighting footsteps. I am only so much less base than the wretches whom I make so, that in the moment of their transformation I can hate them."

As he spoke - the young man still holding to his cloak - he cast him off, and struck him: then, wildly hurried out into the night air where the wind was blowing, the snow falling, the cloud-drift sweeping on, the moon dimly shining; and where, blowing in the wind, falling with the snow, drifting with the clouds, shining in the moonlight, and heavily looming in the darkness, were the Phantom's words, "The gift that I have given, you shall give again, go where you will!"

Whither he went, he neither knew nor cared, so that he avoided company. The change he felt within him made the busy streets a desert, and himself a desert, and the multitude around him, in their manifold endurances and ways of life, a mighty waste of sand, which the winds tossed into unintelligible heaps and made a ruinous confusion of. Those traces in his breast which the Phantom had told him would “die out soon,” were not, as yet, so far upon their way to death, but that he understood enough of what he was, and what he made of others, to desire to be alone.

This put it in his mind - he suddenly bethought himself, as he was going along, of the boy who had rushed into his room. And then he recollected, that of those with whom he had communicated since the Phantom’s disappearance, that boy alone had shown no sign of being changed.

Monstrous and odious as the wild thing was to him, he determined to seek it out, and prove if this were really so; and also to seek it with another intention, which came into his thoughts at the same time.

So, resolving with some difficulty where he was, he directed his steps back to the old college, and to that part of it where the general porch was, and where, alone, the pavement was worn by the tread of the students’ feet.

The keeper’s house stood just within the iron gates, forming a part of the chief quadrangle. There was a little cloister outside, and from that sheltered place he knew he could look in at the window of their ordinary room, and see who was within. The iron gates were shut, but his hand was familiar with the fastening, and drawing it back by thrusting in his wrist between the bars, he passed through softly, shut it again, and crept up to the window, crumbling the thin crust of snow with his feet.

The fire, to which he had directed the boy last night, shining brightly through the glass, made an illuminated place upon the ground. Instinctively avoiding this, and going round it, he looked in at the window. At first, he thought that there was no one there, and that the blaze was reddening only the old beams in the ceiling and the dark walls; but peering in more narrowly, he saw the object of his search coiled asleep before it on the floor. He passed quickly to the door, opened it, and went in.

The creature lay in such a fiery heat, that, as the Chemist stooped to rouse him, it scorched his head. So soon as he was touched, the boy, not half awake, clutching his rags together with the instinct of flight upon him, half rolled and half ran into a distant corner of the room, where, heaped upon the ground, he struck his foot out to defend himself.

“Get up!” said the Chemist. “You have not forgotten me?”

“You let me alone!” returned the boy. “This is the woman’s house - not yours.”

The Chemist’s steady eye controlled him somewhat, or inspired him with enough submission to be raised upon his feet, and looked at.

“Who washed them, and put those bandages where they were bruised and cracked?” asked the Chemist, pointing to their altered state.

“The woman did.”

“And is it she who has made you cleaner in the face, too?”

“Yes, the woman.”

Redlaw asked these questions to attract his eyes towards himself, and with the same intent now held him by the chin, and threw his wild hair back, though he loathed to touch him. The boy watched his eyes keenly, as if he thought it needful to his own defence, not knowing what he might do next; and Redlaw could see well that no change came over him.

“Where are they?” he inquired.

“The woman’s out.”

“I know she is. Where is the old man with the white hair, and his son?”

“The woman’s husband, d’ye mean?” inquired the boy.

“Ay. Where are those two?”

“Out. Something’s the matter, somewhere. They were fetched out in a hurry, and told me to stop here.”

“Come with me,” said the Chemist, “and I’ll give you money.”

“Come where? and how much will you give?”

“I’ll give you more shillings than you ever saw, and bring you back soon. Do you know your way to where you came from?”

“You let me go,” returned the boy, suddenly twisting out of his grasp. “I’m not a going to take you there. Let me be, or I’ll heave some fire at you!”

He was down before it, and ready, with his savage little hand, to pluck the burning coals out.

What the Chemist had felt, in observing the effect of his charmed influence stealing over those with whom he came in contact, was not nearly equal to the cold vague terror with which he saw this baby-monster put it at defiance. It chilled his blood to look on the immovable impenetrable thing, in the likeness of a child, with its sharp malignant face turned up to his, and its almost infant hand, ready at the bars.

“Listen, boy!” he said. “You shall take me where you please, so that you take me where the people are very miserable or very wicked. I want to do them good, and not to harm them. You shall have money, as I have told you, and I will bring you back. Get up! Come quickly!” He made a hasty step towards the door, afraid of her returning.

“Will you let me walk by myself, and never hold me, nor yet touch me?” said the boy, slowly withdrawing the hand with which he threatened, and beginning to get up.

“I will!”

“And let me go, before, behind, or anyways I like?”

“I will!”

“Give me some money first, then, and go.”

The Chemist laid a few shillings, one by one, in his extended hand. To count them was beyond the boy's knowledge, but he said "one," every time, and avariciously looked at each as it was given, and at the donor. He had nowhere to put them, out of his hand, but in his mouth; and he put them there.

Redlaw then wrote with his pencil on a leaf of his pocket-book, that the boy was with him; and laying it on the table, signed to him to follow. Keeping his rags together, as usual, the boy complied, and went out with his bare head and naked feet into the winter night.

Preferring not to depart by the iron gate by which he had entered, where they were in danger of meeting her whom he so anxiously avoided, the Chemist led the way, through some of those passages among which the boy had lost himself, and by that portion of the building where he lived, to a small door of which he had the key. When they got into the street, he stopped to ask his guide - who instantly retreated from him - if he knew where they were.

The savage thing looked here and there, and at length, nodding his head, pointed in the direction he designed to take. Redlaw going on at once, he followed, something less suspiciously; shifting his money from his mouth into his hand, and back again into his mouth, and stealthily rubbing it bright upon his shreds of dress, as he went along.

Three times, in their progress, they were side by side. Three times they stopped, being side by side. Three times the Chemist glanced down at his face, and shuddered as it forced upon him one reflection.

The first occasion was when they were crossing an old churchyard, and Redlaw stopped among the graves, utterly at a loss how to connect them with any tender, softening, or consolatory thought.

The second was, when the breaking forth of the moon induced him to look up at the Heavens, where he saw her in her glory, surrounded by a host of stars he still knew by the names and histories which human science has appended to them; but where he saw nothing else he had been wont to see, felt nothing he had been wont to feel, in looking up there, on a bright night.

The third was when he stopped to listen to a plaintive strain of music, but could only hear a tune, made manifest to him by the dry mechanism of the instruments and his own ears, with no address to any mystery within him, without a whisper in it of the past, or of the future, powerless upon him as the sound of last year's running water, or the rushing of last year's wind.

At each of these three times, he saw with horror that, in spite of the vast intellectual distance between them, and their being unlike each other in all physical respects, the expression on the boy's face was the expression on his own.

They journeyed on for some time - now through such crowded places, that he often looked over his shoulder thinking he had lost his guide, but generally finding him within his shadow on his other side; now by ways so quiet, that he could have counted his short, quick, naked footsteps coming on behind - until they arrived at a ruinous collection of houses, and the boy touched him and stopped.

"In there!" he said, pointing out one house where there were shattered lights in the windows, and a dim lantern in the doorway, with "Lodgings for Travellers" painted on it.

Redlaw looked about him; from the houses to the waste piece of ground on which the houses stood, or rather did not altogether tumble down, unfenced, undrained, unlighted, and bordered by a sluggish ditch; from that, to the sloping line of arches, part of some neighbouring viaduct or bridge with which it was surrounded, and which lessened gradually towards them, until the last but one was a mere kennel for a dog, the last a plundered little heap of bricks; from that, to the child, close to him, cowering and trembling with the cold, and limping on one little foot, while he coiled the other round his leg to warm it, yet staring at all these things with that frightful likeness of expression so apparent in his face, that Redlaw started from him.

"In there!" said the boy, pointing out the house again. "I'll wait."

"Will they let me in?" asked Redlaw.

“Say you’re a doctor,” he answered with a nod. “There’s plenty ill here.”

Looking back on his way to the house-door, Redlaw saw him trail himself upon the dust and crawl within the shelter of the smallest arch, as if he were a rat. He had no pity for the thing, but he was afraid of it; and when it looked out of its den at him, he hurried to the house as a retreat.

“Sorrow, wrong, and trouble,” said the Chemist, with a painful effort at some more distinct remembrance, “at least haunt this place darkly. He can do no harm, who brings forgetfulness of such things here!”

With these words, he pushed the yielding door, and went in.

There was a woman sitting on the stairs, either asleep or forlorn, whose head was bent down on her hands and knees. As it was not easy to pass without treading on her, and as she was perfectly regardless of his near approach, he stopped, and touched her on the shoulder. Looking up, she showed him quite a young face, but one whose bloom and promise were all swept away, as if the haggard winter should unnaturally kill the spring.

With little or no show of concern on his account, she moved nearer to the wall to leave him a wider passage.

“What are you?” said Redlaw, pausing, with his hand upon the broken stair-rail.

“What do you think I am?” she answered, showing him her face again.

He looked upon the ruined Temple of God, so lately made, so soon disfigured; and something, which was not compassion - for the springs in which a true compassion for such miseries has its rise, were dried up in his breast - but which was nearer to it, for the moment, than any feeling that had lately struggled into the darkening, but not yet wholly darkened, night of his mind - mingled a touch of softness with his next words.

“I am come here to give relief, if I can,” he said. “Are you thinking of any wrong?”

She frowned at him, and then laughed; and then her laugh prolonged itself into a shivering sigh, as she dropped her head again, and hid her fingers in her hair.

“Are you thinking of a wrong?” he asked once more.

“I am thinking of my life,” she said, with a monetary look at him.

He had a perception that she was one of many, and that he saw the type of thousands, when he saw her, drooping at his feet.

“What are your parents?” he demanded.

“I had a good home once. My father was a gardener, far away, in the country.”

“Is he dead?”

“He’s dead to me. All such things are dead to me. You a gentleman, and not know that!” She raised her eyes again, and laughed at him.

“Girl!” said Redlaw, sternly, “before this death, of all such things, was brought about, was there no wrong done to you? In spite of all that you can do, does no remembrance of wrong cleave to you? Are there not times upon times when it is misery to you?”

So little of what was womanly was left in her appearance, that now, when she burst into tears, he stood amazed. But he was more amazed, and much disquieted, to note that in her awakened recollection of this wrong, the first trace of her old humanity and frozen tenderness appeared to show itself.

He drew a little off, and in doing so, observed that her arms were black, her face cut, and her bosom bruised.

“What brutal hand has hurt you so?” he asked.

“My own. I did it myself!” she answered quickly.

“It is impossible.”

"I'll swear I did! He didn't touch me. I did it to myself in a passion, and threw myself down here. He wasn't near me. He never laid a hand upon me!"

In the white determination of her face, confronting him with this untruth, he saw enough of the last perversion and distortion of good surviving in that miserable breast, to be stricken with remorse that he had ever come near her.

"Sorrow, wrong, and trouble!" he muttered, turning his fearful gaze away. "All that connects her with the state from which she has fallen, has those roots! In the name of God, let me go by!"

Afraid to look at her again, afraid to touch her, afraid to think of having sundered the last thread by which she held upon the mercy of Heaven, he gathered his cloak about him, and glided swiftly up the stairs.

Opposite to him, on the landing, was a door, which stood partly open, and which, as he ascended, a man with a candle in his hand, came forward from within to shut. But this man, on seeing him, drew back, with much emotion in his manner, and, as if by a sudden impulse, mentioned his name aloud.

In the surprise of such a recognition there, he stopped, endeavouring to recollect the wan and startled face. He had no time to consider it, for, to his yet greater amazement, old Philip came out of the room, and took him by the hand.

"Mr. Redlaw," said the old man, "this is like you, this is like you, sir! you have heard of it, and have come after us to render any help you can. Ah, too late, too late!"

Redlaw, with a bewildered look, submitted to be led into the room. A man lay there, on a truckle-bed, and William Swidger stood at the bedside.

"Too late!" murmured the old man, looking wistfully into the Chemist's face; and the tears stole down his cheeks.

“That’s what I say, father,” interposed his son in a low voice. “That’s where it is, exactly. To keep as quiet as ever we can while he’s a dozing, is the only thing to do. You’re right, father!”

Redlaw paused at the bedside, and looked down on the figure that was stretched upon the mattress. It was that of a man, who should have been in the vigour of his life, but on whom it was not likely the sun would ever shine again. The vices of his forty or fifty years’ career had so branded him, that, in comparison with their effects upon his face, the heavy hand of Time upon the old man’s face who watched him had been merciful and beautifying.

“Who is this?” asked the Chemist, looking round.

“My son George, Mr. Redlaw,” said the old man, wringing his hands. “My eldest son, George, who was more his mother’s pride than all the rest!”

Redlaw’s eyes wandered from the old man’s grey head, as he laid it down upon the bed, to the person who had recognised him, and who had kept aloof, in the remotest corner of the room. He seemed to be about his own age; and although he knew no such hopeless decay and broken man as he appeared to be, there was something in the turn of his figure, as he stood with his back towards him, and now went out at the door, that made him pass his hand uneasily across his brow.

“William,” he said in a gloomy whisper, “who is that man?”

“Why you see, sir,” returned Mr. William, “that’s what I say, myself. Why should a man ever go and gamble, and the like of that, and let himself down inch by inch till he can’t let himself down any lower!”

“Has *he* done so?” asked Redlaw, glancing after him with the same uneasy action as before.

“Just exactly that, sir,” returned William Swidger, “as I’m told. He knows a little about medicine, sir, it seems; and having been wayfaring towards London with my unhappy brother that you see here,” Mr. William passed his coat-sleeve across his eyes, “and being lodging up stairs for the night -

what I say, you see, is that strange companions come together here sometimes - he looked in to attend upon him, and came for us at his request. What a mournful spectacle, sir! But that's where it is. It's enough to kill my father!"

Redlaw looked up, at these words, and, recalling where he was and with whom, and the spell he carried with him - which his surprise had obscured - retired a little, hurriedly, debating with himself whether to shun the house that moment, or remain.

Yielding to a certain sullen doggedness, which it seemed to be a part of his condition to struggle with, he argued for remaining.

"Was it only yesterday," he said, "when I observed the memory of this old man to be a tissue of sorrow and trouble, and shall I be afraid, to-night, to shake it? Are such remembrances as I can drive away, so precious to this dying man that I need fear for *him*? No! I'll stay here."

But he stayed in fear and trembling none the less for these words; and, shrouded in his black cloak with his face turned from them, stood away from the bedside, listening to what they said, as if he felt himself a demon in the place.

"Father!" murmured the sick man, rallying a little from stupor.

"My boy! My son George!" said old Philip.

"You spoke, just now, of my being mother's favourite, long ago. It's a dreadful thing to think now, of long ago!"

"No, no, no;" returned the old man. "Think of it. Don't say it's dreadful. It's not dreadful to me, my son."

"It cuts you to the heart, father." For the old man's tears were falling on him.

"Yes, yes," said Philip, "so it does; but it does me good. It's a heavy sorrow to think of that time, but it does me good, George. Oh, think of it too, think of it too, and your heart will be softened more and more! Where's my son William? William, my boy, your mother loved him dearly to the last, and with her latest breath said, 'Tell him I forgave him, blessed him, and prayed for him.' Those were her words to me. I have never forgotten them, and I'm eighty-seven!"

"Father!" said the man upon the bed, "I am dying, I know. I am so far gone, that I can hardly speak, even of what my mind most runs on. Is there any hope for me beyond this bed?"

"There is hope," returned the old man, "for all who are softened and penitent. There is hope for all such. Oh!" he exclaimed, clasping his hands and looking up, "I was thankful, only yesterday, that I could remember this unhappy son when he was an innocent child. But what a comfort it is, now, to think that even God himself has that remembrance of him!"

Redlaw spread his hands upon his face, and shrank, like a murderer.

"Ah!" feebly moaned the man upon the bed. "The waste since then, the waste of life since then!"

"But he was a child once," said the old man. "He played with children. Before he lay down on his bed at night, and fell into his guiltless rest, he said his prayers at his poor mother's knee. I have seen him do it, many a time; and seen her lay his head upon her breast, and kiss him. Sorrowful as it was to her and me, to think of this, when he went so wrong, and when our hopes and plans for him were all broken, this gave him still a hold upon us, that nothing else could have given. Oh, Father, so much better than the fathers upon earth! Oh, Father, so much more afflicted by the errors of Thy children! take this wanderer back! Not as he is, but as he was then, let him cry to Thee, as he has so often seemed to cry to us!"

As the old man lifted up his trembling hands, the son, for whom he made the supplication, laid his sinking head against him for support and comfort, as if he were indeed the child of whom he spoke.

When did man ever tremble, as Redlaw trembled, in the silence that ensued! He knew it must come upon them, knew that it was coming fast.

“My time is very short, my breath is shorter,” said the sick man, supporting himself on one arm, and with the other groping in the air, “and I remember there is something on my mind concerning the man who was here just now, Father and William - wait! - is there really anything in black, out there?”

“Yes, yes, it is real,” said his aged father.

“Is it a man?”

“What I say myself, George,” interposed his brother, bending kindly over him. “It’s Mr. Redlaw.”

“I thought I had dreamed of him. Ask him to come here.”

The Chemist, whiter than the dying man, appeared before him. Obedient to the motion of his hand, he sat upon the bed.

“It has been so ripped up, to-night, sir,” said the sick man, laying his hand upon his heart, with a look in which the mute, imploring agony of his condition was concentrated, “by the sight of my poor old father, and the thought of all the trouble I have been the cause of, and all the wrong and sorrow lying at my door, that - ”

Was it the extremity to which he had come, or was it the dawning of another change, that made him stop?

“ - that what I *can* do right, with my mind running on so much, so fast, I’ll try to do. There was another man here. Did you see him?”

Redlaw could not reply by any word; for when he saw that fatal sign he knew so well now, of the wandering hand upon the forehead, his voice died at his lips. But he made some indication of assent.

“He is penniless, hungry, and destitute. He is completely beaten down, and has no resource at all. Look after him! Lose no time! I know he has it in his mind to kill himself.”

It was working. It was on his face. His face was changing, hardening, deepening in all its shades, and losing all its sorrow.

“Don’t you remember? Don’t you know him?” he pursued.

He shut his face out for a moment, with the hand that again wandered over his forehead, and then it lowered on Redlaw, reckless, ruffianly, and callous.

“Why, d-n you!” he said, scowling round, “what have you been doing to me here! I have lived bold, and I mean to die bold. To the Devil with you!”

And so lay down upon his bed, and put his arms up, over his head and ears, as resolute from that time to keep out all access, and to die in his indifference.

If Redlaw had been struck by lightning, it could not have struck him from the bedside with a more tremendous shock. But the old man, who had left the bed while his son was speaking to him, now returning, avoided it quickly likewise, and with abhorrence.

“Where’s my boy William?” said the old man hurriedly. “William, come away from here. We’ll go home.”

“Home, father!” returned William. “Are you going to leave your own son?”

“Where’s my own son?” replied the old man.

“Where? why, there!”

“That’s no son of mine,” said Philip, trembling with resentment. “No such wretch as that, has any claim on me. My children are pleasant to look at, and they wait upon me, and get my meat and drink ready, and are useful to me. I’ve a right to it! I’m eighty-seven!”

“You’re old enough to be no older,” muttered William, looking at him grudgingly, with his hands in his pockets. “I don’t know what good you are, myself. We could have a deal more pleasure without you.”

"*My* son, Mr. Redlaw!" said the old man. "*My* son, too! The boy talking to me of *my* son! Why, what has he ever done to give me any pleasure, I should like to know?"

"I don't know what you have ever done to give *me* any pleasure," said William, sulkily.

"Let me think," said the old man. "For how many Christmas times running, have I sat in my warm place, and never had to come out in the cold night air; and have made good cheer, without being disturbed by any such uncomfortable, wretched sight as him there? Is it twenty, William?"

"Nigher forty, it seems," he muttered. "Why, when I look at my father, sir, and come to think of it," addressing Redlaw, with an impatience and irritation that were quite new, "I'm whipped if I can see anything in him but a calendar of ever so many years of eating and drinking, and making himself comfortable, over and over again."

"I - I'm eighty-seven," said the old man, rambling on, childishly and weakly, "and I don't know as I ever was much put out by anything. I'm not going to begin now, because of what he calls my son. He's not my son. I've had a power of pleasant times. I recollect once - no I don't - no, it's broken off. It was something about a game of cricket and a friend of mine, but it's somehow broken off. I wonder who he was - I suppose I liked him? And I wonder what became of him - I suppose he died? But I don't know. And I don't care, neither; I don't care a bit."

In his drowsy chuckling, and the shaking of his head, he put his hands into his waistcoat pockets. In one of them he found a bit of holly (left there, probably last night), which he now took out, and looked at.

"Berries, eh?" said the old man. "Ah! It's a pity they're not good to eat. I recollect, when I was a little chap about as high as that, and out a walking with - let me see - who was I out a walking with? - no, I don't remember how that was. I don't remember as I ever walked with any one particular, or cared for any one, or any one for me. Berries, eh? There's good cheer when there's berries. Well; I ought to have my share of it, and to be waited on, and kept warm and comfortable; for I’m eighty-seven, and a poor old man. I’m eigh-ty-seven. Eigh-ty-seven!”

The drivelling, pitiable manner in which, as he repeated this, he nibbled at the leaves, and spat the morsels out; the cold, uninterested eye with which his youngest son (so changed) regarded him; the determined apathy with which his eldest son lay hardened in his sin; impressed themselves no more on Redlaw’s observation, - for he broke his way from the spot to which his feet seemed to have been fixed, and ran out of the house.

His guide came crawling forth from his place of refuge, and was ready for him before he reached the arches.

“Back to the woman’s?” he inquired.

“Back, quickly!” answered Redlaw. “Stop nowhere on the way!”

For a short distance the boy went on before; but their return was more like a flight than a walk, and it was as much as his bare feet could do, to keep pace with the Chemist’s rapid strides. Shrinking from all who passed, shrouded in his cloak, and keeping it drawn closely about him, as though there were mortal contagion in any fluttering touch of his garments, he made no pause until they reached the door by which they had come out. He unlocked it with his key, went in, accompanied by the boy, and hastened through the dark passages to his own chamber.

The boy watched him as he made the door fast, and withdrew behind the table, when he looked round.

“Come!” he said. “Don’t you touch me! You’ve not brought me here to take my money away.”

Redlaw threw some more upon the ground. He flung his body on it immediately, as if to hide it from him, lest the sight of it should tempt him to reclaim it; and not until he saw him seated by his lamp, with his face hidden in his hands, began furtively to pick it up. When he had done so, he crept near the fire, and, sitting down in a great chair before it, took from his breast some broken scraps of food, and fell to munching, and to staring at the blaze, and now and then to glancing at his shillings, which he kept clenched up in a bunch, in one hand.

“And this,” said Redlaw, gazing on him with increased repugnance and fear, “is the only one companion I have left on earth!”

How long it was before he was aroused from his contemplation of this creature, whom he dreaded so - whether half-an-hour, or half the night - he knew not. But the stillness of the room was broken by the boy (whom he had seen listening) starting up, and running towards the door.

“Here’s the woman coming!” he exclaimed.

The Chemist stopped him on his way, at the moment when she knocked.

“Let me go to her, will you?” said the boy.

“Not now,” returned the Chemist. “Stay here. Nobody must pass in or out of the room now. Who’s that?”

“It’s I, sir,” cried Milly. “Pray, sir, let me in!”

“No! not for the world!” he said.

“Mr. Redlaw, Mr. Redlaw, pray, sir, let me in.”

“What is the matter?” he said, holding the boy.

“The miserable man you saw, is worse, and nothing I can say will wake him from his terrible infatuation. William’s father has turned childish in a moment, William himself is changed. The shock has been too sudden for him; I cannot understand him; he is not like himself. Oh, Mr. Redlaw, pray advise me, help me!”

“No! No! No!” he answered.

“Mr. Redlaw! Dear sir! George has been muttering, in his doze, about the man you saw there, who, he fears, will kill himself.”

“Better he should do it, than come near me!”

“He says, in his wandering, that you know him; that he was your friend once, long ago; that he is the ruined father of a student here - my mind misgives me, of the young gentleman who has been ill. What is to be done? How is he to be followed? How is he to be saved? Mr. Redlaw, pray, oh, pray, advise me! Help me!”

All this time he held the boy, who was half-mad to pass him, and let her in.

“Phantoms! Punishers of impious thoughts!” cried Redlaw, gazing round in anguish, “look upon me! From the darkness of my mind, let the glimmering of contrition that I know is there, shine up and show my misery! In the material world as I have long taught, nothing can be spared; no step or atom in the wondrous structure could be lost, without a blank being made in the great universe. I know, now, that it is the same with good and evil, happiness and sorrow, in the memories of men. Pity me! Relieve me!”

There was no response, but her “Help me, help me, let me in!” and the boy’s struggling to get to her.

“Shadow of myself! Spirit of my darker hours!” cried Redlaw, in distraction, “come back, and haunt me day and night, but take this gift away! Or, if it must still rest with me, deprive me of the dreadful power of giving it to others. Undo what I have done. Leave me benighted, but restore the day to those whom I have cursed. As I have spared this woman from the first, and as I never will go forth again, but will die here, with no hand to tend me, save this creature’s who is proof against me, - hear me!”

The only reply still was, the boy struggling to get to her, while he held him back; and the cry, increasing in its energy, “Help! let me in. He was your friend once, how shall he be followed, how shall he be saved? They are all changed, there is no one else to help me, pray, pray, let me in!”

CHAPTER III - The Gift Reversed

Night was still heavy in the sky. On open plains, from hill-tops, and from the decks of solitary ships at sea, a distant low-lying line, that promised by-and-by to change to light, was visible in the dim horizon; but its promise was remote and doubtful, and the moon was striving with the night-clouds busily.

The shadows upon Redlaw's mind succeeded thick and fast to one another, and obscured its light as the night-clouds hovered between the moon and earth, and kept the latter veiled in darkness. Fitful and uncertain as the shadows which the night-clouds cast, were their concealments from him, and imperfect revelations to him; and, like the night-clouds still, if the clear light broke forth for a moment, it was only that they might sweep over it, and make the darkness deeper than before.

Without, there was a profound and solemn hush upon the ancient pile of building, and its buttresses and angles made dark shapes of mystery upon the ground, which now seemed to retire into the smooth white snow and now seemed to come out of it, as the moon's path was more or less beset. Within, the Chemist's room was indistinct and murky, by the light of the expiring lamp; a ghostly silence had succeeded to the knocking and the voice outside; nothing was audible but, now and then, a low sound among the whitened ashes of the fire, as of its yielding up its last breath. Before it on the ground the boy lay fast asleep. In his chair, the Chemist sat, as he had sat there since the calling at his door had ceased - like a man turned to stone.

At such a time, the Christmas music he had heard before, began to play. He listened to it at first, as he had listened in the church-yard; but presently - it playing still, and being borne towards him on the night air, in a low, sweet, melancholy strain - he rose, and stood stretching his hands about him, as if there were some friend approaching within his reach, on whom his desolate touch might rest, yet do no harm. As he did this, his face became less fixed and wondering; a gentle trembling came upon him; and at last his eyes filled with tears, and he put his hands before them, and bowed down his head.

His memory of sorrow, wrong, and trouble, had not come back to him; he knew that it was not restored; he had no passing belief or hope that it was. But some dumb stir within him made him capable, again, of being moved by what was hidden, afar off, in the music. If it were only that it told him sorrowfully the value of what he had lost, he thanked Heaven for it with a fervent gratitude.

As the last chord died upon his ear, he raised his head to listen to its lingering vibration. Beyond the boy, so that his sleeping figure lay at its feet, the Phantom stood, immovable and silent, with its eyes upon him.

Ghastly it was, as it had ever been, but not so cruel and relentless in its aspect - or he thought or hoped so, as he looked upon it trembling. It was not alone, but in its shadowy hand it held another hand.

And whose was that? Was the form that stood beside it indeed Milly’s, or but her shade and picture? The quiet head was bent a little, as her manner was, and her eyes were looking down, as if in pity, on the sleeping child. A radiant light fell on her face, but did not touch the Phantom; for, though close beside her, it was dark and colourless as ever.

“Spectre!” said the Chemist, newly troubled as he looked, “I have not been stubborn or presumptuous in respect of her. Oh, do not bring her here. Spare me that!”

“This is but a shadow,” said the Phantom; “when the morning shines seek out the reality whose image I present before you.”

“Is it my inexorable doom to do so?” cried the Chemist.

“It is,” replied the Phantom.

“To destroy her peace, her goodness; to make her what I am myself, and what I have made of others!”

“I have said seek her out,” returned the Phantom. “I have said no more.”

“Oh, tell me,” exclaimed Redlaw, catching at the hope which he fancied might lie hidden in the words. “Can I undo what I have done?”

“No,” returned the Phantom.

“I do not ask for restoration to myself,” said Redlaw. “What I abandoned, I abandoned of my own free will, and have justly lost. But for those to whom I have transferred the fatal gift; who never sought it; who unknowingly received a curse of which they had no warning, and which they had no power to shun; can I do nothing?”

“Nothing,” said the Phantom.

“If I cannot, can any one?”

The Phantom, standing like a statue, kept its gaze upon him for a while; then turned its head suddenly, and looked upon the shadow at its side.

“Ah! Can she?” cried Redlaw, still looking upon the shade.

The Phantom released the hand it had retained till now, and softly raised its own with a gesture of dismissal. Upon that, her shadow, still preserving the same attitude, began to move or melt away.

“Stay,” cried Redlaw with an earnestness to which he could not give enough expression. “For a moment! As an act of mercy! I know that some change fell upon me, when those sounds were in the air just now. Tell me, have I lost the power of harming her? May I go near her without dread? Oh, let her give me any sign of hope!”

The Phantom looked upon the shade as he did - not at him - and gave no answer.

“At least, say this - has she, henceforth, the consciousness of any power to set right what I have done?”

“She has not,” the Phantom answered.

“Has she the power bestowed on her without the consciousness?”

The phantom answered: “Seek her out.”

And her shadow slowly vanished.

They were face to face again, and looking on each other, as intently and awfully as at the time of the bestowal of the gift, across the boy who still lay on the ground between them, at the Phantom’s feet.

“Terrible instructor,” said the Chemist, sinking on his knee before it, in an attitude of supplication, “by whom I was renounced, but by whom I am revisited (in which, and in whose milder aspect, I would fain believe I have a gleam of hope), I will obey without inquiry, praying that the cry I have sent up in the anguish of my soul has been, or will be, heard, in behalf of those whom I have injured beyond human reparation. But there is one thing - ”

“You speak to me of what is lying here,” the phantom interposed, and pointed with its finger to the boy.

“I do,” returned the Chemist. “You know what I would ask. Why has this child alone been proof against my influence, and why, why, have I detected in its thoughts a terrible companionship with mine?”

“This,” said the Phantom, pointing to the boy, “is the last, completest illustration of a human creature, utterly bereft of such remembrances as you have yielded up. No softening memory of sorrow, wrong, or trouble enters here, because this wretched mortal from his birth has been abandoned to a worse condition than the beasts, and has, within his knowledge, no one contrast, no humanising touch, to make a grain of such a memory spring up in his hardened breast. All within this desolate creature is barren wilderness. All within the man bereft of what you have resigned, is the same barren wilderness. Woe to such a man! Woe, tenfold, to the nation that shall count its monsters such as this, lying here, by hundreds and by thousands!”

Redlaw shrank, appalled, from what he heard.

“There is not,” said the Phantom, “one of these - not one - but sows a harvest that mankind MUST reap. From every seed of evil in this boy, a field of ruin is grown that shall be gathered in, and garnered up, and sown again in many places in the world, until regions are overspread with wickedness enough to raise the waters of another Deluge. Open and unpunished murder in a city’s streets would be less guilty in its daily toleration, than one such spectacle as this.”

It seemed to look down upon the boy in his sleep. Redlaw, too, looked down upon him with a new emotion.

“There is not a father,” said the Phantom, “by whose side in his daily or his nightly walk, these creatures pass; there is not a mother among all the ranks of loving mothers in this land; there is no one risen from the state of childhood, but shall be responsible in his or her degree for this enormity. There is not a country throughout the earth on which it would not bring a curse. There is no religion upon earth that it would not deny; there is no people upon earth it would not put to shame.”

The Chemist clasped his hands, and looked, with trembling fear and pity, from the sleeping boy to the Phantom, standing above him with his finger pointing down.

“Behold, I say,” pursued the Spectre, “the perfect type of what it was your choice to be. Your influence is powerless here, because from this child’s bosom you can banish nothing. His thoughts have been in ‘terrible companionship’ with yours, because you have gone down to his unnatural level. He is the growth of man’s indifference; you are the growth of man’s presumption. The beneficent design of Heaven is, in each case, overthrown, and from the two poles of the immaterial world you come together.”

The Chemist stooped upon the ground beside the boy, and, with the same kind of compassion for him that he now felt for himself, covered him as he slept, and no longer shrank from him with abhorrence or indifference.

Soon, now, the distant line on the horizon brightened, the darkness faded, the sun rose red and glorious, and the chimney stacks and gables of the ancient building gleamed in the clear air, which turned the smoke and vapour of the city into a cloud of gold. The very sun-dial in his shady corner, where the wind was used to spin with such unwindy constancy, shook off the finer particles of snow that had accumulated on his dull old face in the night, and looked out at the little white wreaths eddying round and round him. Doubtless some blind groping of the morning made its way down into the forgotten crypt so cold and earthy, where the Norman arches were half buried in the ground, and stirred the dull sap in the lazy vegetation hanging to the walls, and quickened the slow principle of life within the little world of wonderful and delicate creation which existed there, with some faint knowledge that the sun was up.

The Tetterbys were up, and doing. Mr. Tetterby took down the shutters of the shop, and, strip by strip, revealed the treasures of the window to the eyes, so proof against their seductions, of Jerusalem Buildings. Adolphus had been out so long already, that he was halfway on to "Morning Pepper." Five small Tetterbys, whose ten round eyes were much inflamed by soap and friction, were in the tortures of a cool wash in the back kitchen; Mrs. Tetterby presiding. Johnny, who was pushed and hustled through his toilet with great rapidity when Moloch chanced to be in an exacting frame of mind (which was always the case), staggered up and down with his charge before the shop door, under greater difficulties than usual; the weight of Moloch being much increased by a complication of defences against the cold, composed of knitted worsted-work, and forming a complete suit of chain-armour, with a head-piece and blue gaiters.

It was a peculiarity of this baby to be always cutting teeth. Whether they never came, or whether they came and went away again, is not in evidence; but it had certainly cut enough, on the showing of Mrs. Tetterby, to make a handsome dental provision for the sign of the Bull and Mouth. All sorts of objects were impressed for the rubbing of its gums, notwithstanding that it always carried, dangling at its waist (which was immediately under its chin), a bone ring, large enough to have represented the rosary of a young nun. Knife-handles, umbrella-tops, the heads of walking-sticks selected from the stock, the fingers of the family in general, but especially of Johnny, nutmeg-graters, crusts, the handles of doors, and the cool knobs on the tops of pokers, were among the commonest instruments indiscriminately applied for this baby's relief. The amount of electricity that must have been rubbed out of it in a week, is not to be calculated. Still Mrs. Tetterby always said "it was coming through, and then the child would be herself;" and still it never did come through, and the child continued to be somebody else.

The tempers of the little Tetterbys had sadly changed with a few hours. Mr. and Mrs. Tetterby themselves were not more altered than their offspring. Usually they were an unselfish, good-natured, yielding little race, sharing short commons when it happened (which was pretty often) contentedly and even generously, and taking a great deal of enjoyment out of a very little meat. But they were fighting now, not only for the soap and water, but even for the breakfast which was yet in perspective. The hand of every little Tetterby was against the other little Tetterbys; and even Johnny's hand - the patient, much-enduring, and devoted Johnny - rose against the baby! Yes, Mrs. Tetterby, going to the door by mere accident, saw him viciously pick out a weak place in the suit of armour where a slap would tell, and slap that blessed child.

Mrs. Tetterby had him into the parlour by the collar, in that same flash of time, and repaid him the assault with usury thereto.

"You brute, you murdering little boy," said Mrs. Tetterby. "Had you the heart to do it?"

"Why don't her teeth come through, then," retorted Johnny, in a loud rebellious voice, "instead of bothering me? How would you like it yourself?"

"Like it, sir!" said Mrs. Tetterby, relieving him of his dishonoured load.

“Yes, like it,” said Johnny. “How would you? Not at all. If you was me, you’d go for a soldier. I will, too. There an’t no babies in the Army.”

Mr. Tetterby, who had arrived upon the scene of action, rubbed his chin thoughtfully, instead of correcting the rebel, and seemed rather struck by this view of a military life.

“I wish I was in the Army myself, if the child’s in the right,” said Mrs. Tetterby, looking at her husband, “for I have no peace of my life here. I’m a slave - a Virginia slave:” some indistinct association with their weak descent on the tobacco trade perhaps suggested this aggravated expression to Mrs. Tetterby. “I never have a holiday, or any pleasure at all, from year’s end to year’s end! Why, Lord bless and save the child,” said Mrs. Tetterby, shaking the baby with an irritability hardly suited to so pious an aspiration, “what’s the matter with her now?”

Not being able to discover, and not rendering the subject much clearer by shaking it, Mrs. Tetterby put the baby away in a cradle, and, folding her arms, sat rocking it angrily with her foot.

“How you stand there, ’Dolphus,” said Mrs. Tetterby to her husband. “Why don’t you do something?”

“Because I don’t care about doing anything,” Mr. Tetterby replied.

“I am sure *I* don’t,” said Mrs. Tetterby.

“I’ll take my oath *I* don’t,” said Mr. Tetterby.

A diversion arose here among Johnny and his five younger brothers, who, in preparing the family breakfast table, had fallen to skirmishing for the temporary possession of the loaf, and were buffeting one another with great heartiness; the smallest boy of all, with precocious discretion, hovering outside the knot of combatants, and harassing their legs. Into the midst of this fray, Mr. and Mrs. Tetterby both precipitated themselves with great ardour, as if such ground were the only ground on which they could now agree; and having, with no visible remains of their late soft-heartedness, laid about them without any lenity, and done much execution, resumed their former relative positions.

“You had better read your paper than do nothing at all,” said Mrs. Tetterby.

“What’s there to read in a paper?” returned Mr. Tetterby, with excessive discontent.

“What?” said Mrs. Tetterby. “Police.”

“It’s nothing to me,” said Tetterby. “What do I care what people do, or are done to?”

“Suicides,” suggested Mrs. Tetterby.

“No business of mine,” replied her husband.

“Births, deaths, and marriages, are those nothing to you?” said Mrs. Tetterby.

“If the births were all over for good, and all to-day; and the deaths were all to begin to come off to-morrow; I don’t see why it should interest me, till I thought it was a coming to my turn,” grumbled Tetterby. “As to marriages, I’ve done it myself. I know quite enough about *them*.”

To judge from the dissatisfied expression of her face and manner, Mrs. Tetterby appeared to entertain the same opinions as her husband; but she opposed him, nevertheless, for the gratification of quarrelling with him.

“Oh, you’re a consistent man,” said Mrs. Tetterby, “an’t you? You, with the screen of your own making there, made of nothing else but bits of newspapers, which you sit and read to the children by the half-hour together!”

“Say used to, if you please,” returned her husband. “You won’t find me doing so any more. I’m wiser now.”

“Bah! wiser, indeed!” said Mrs. Tetterby. “Are you better?”

The question sounded some discordant note in Mr. Tetterby’s breast. He ruminated dejectedly, and passed his hand across and across his forehead.

“Better!” murmured Mr. Tetterby. “I don’t know as any of us are better, or happier either. Better, is it?”

He turned to the screen, and traced about it with his finger, until he found a certain paragraph of which he was in quest.

“This used to be one of the family favourites, I recollect,” said Tetterby, in a forlorn and stupid way, “and used to draw tears from the children, and make ’em good, if there was any little bickering or discontent among ’em, next to the story of the robin redbreasts in the wood. ‘Melancholy case of destitution. Yesterday a small man, with a baby in his arms, and surrounded by half-a-dozen ragged little ones, of various ages between ten and two, the whole of whom were evidently in a famishing condition, appeared before the worthy magistrate, and made the following recital:’ - Ha! I don’t understand it, I’m sure,” said Tetterby; “I don’t see what it has got to do with us.”

“How old and shabby he looks,” said Mrs. Tetterby, watching him. “I never saw such a change in a man. Ah! dear me, dear me, dear me, it was a sacrifice!”

“What was a sacrifice?” her husband sourly inquired.

Mrs. Tetterby shook her head; and without replying in words, raised a complete sea-storm about the baby, by her violent agitation of the cradle.

“If you mean your marriage was a sacrifice, my good woman - ” said her husband.

“I *do* mean it” said his wife.

“Why, then I mean to say,” pursued Mr. Tetterby, as sulkily and surlily as she, “that there are two sides to that affair; and that I was the sacrifice; and that I wish the sacrifice hadn’t been accepted.”

“I wish it hadn’t, Tetterby, with all my heart and soul I do assure you,” said his wife. “You can’t wish it more than I do, Tetterby.”

“I don’t know what I saw in her,” muttered the newsman, “I’m sure; - certainly, if I saw anything, it’s not there now. I was thinking so, last night, after supper, by the fire. She’s fat, she’s ageing, she won’t bear comparison with most other women.”

“He’s common-looking, he has no air with him, he’s small, he’s beginning to stoop and he’s getting bald,” muttered Mrs. Tetterby.

“I must have been half out of my mind when I did it,” muttered Mr. Tetterby.

“My senses must have forsook me. That’s the only way in which I can explain it to myself,” said Mrs. Tetterby with elaboration.

In this mood they sat down to breakfast. The little Tetterbys were not habituated to regard that meal in the light of a sedentary occupation, but discussed it as a dance or trot; rather resembling a savage ceremony, in the occasionally shrill whoops, and brandishings of bread and butter, with which it was accompanied, as well as in the intricate filings off into the street and back again, and the hoppings up and down the door-steps, which were incidental to the performance. In the present instance, the contentions between these Tetterby children for the milk-and-water jug, common to all, which stood upon the table, presented so lamentable an instance of angry passions risen very high indeed, that it was an outrage on the memory of Dr. Watts. It was not until Mr. Tetterby had driven the whole herd out at the front door, that a moment’s peace was secured; and even that was broken by the discovery that Johnny had surreptitiously come back, and was at that instant choking in the jug like a ventriloquist, in his indecent and rapacious haste.

“These children will be the death of me at last!” said Mrs. Tetterby, after banishing the culprit. “And the sooner the better, I think.”

“Poor people,” said Mr. Tetterby, “ought not to have children at all. They give *us* no pleasure.”

He was at that moment taking up the cup which Mrs. Tetterby had rudely pushed towards him, and Mrs. Tetterby was lifting her own cup to her lips, when they both stopped, as if they were transfixed.

“Here! Mother! Father!” cried Johnny, running into the room. “Here’s Mrs. William coming down the street!”

And if ever, since the world began, a young boy took a baby from a cradle with the care of an old nurse, and hushed and soothed it tenderly, and tottered away with it cheerfully, Johnny was that boy, and Moloch was that baby, as they went out together!

Mr. Tetterby put down his cup; Mrs. Tetterby put down her cup. Mr. Tetterby rubbed his forehead; Mrs. Tetterby rubbed hers. Mr. Tetterby’s face began to smooth and brighten; Mrs. Tetterby’s began to smooth and brighten.

“Why, Lord forgive me,” said Mr. Tetterby to himself, “what evil tempers have I been giving way to? What has been the matter here!”

“How could I ever treat him ill again, after all I said and felt last night!” sobbed Mrs. Tetterby, with her apron to her eyes.

“Am I a brute,” said Mr. Tetterby, “or is there any good in me at all? Sophia! My little woman!”

“‘Dolphus dear,” returned his wife.

“I - I’ve been in a state of mind,” said Mr. Tetterby, “that I can’t abear to think of, Sophy.”

“Oh! It’s nothing to what I’ve been in, Dolf,” cried his wife in a great burst of grief.

“My Sophia,” said Mr. Tetterby, “don’t take on. I never shall forgive myself. I must have nearly broke your heart, I know.”

“No, Dolf, no. It was me! Me!” cried Mrs. Tetterby.

“My little woman,” said her husband, “don’t. You make me reproach myself dreadful, when you show such a noble spirit. Sophia, my dear, you don’t know what I thought. I showed it bad enough, no doubt; but what I thought, my little woman! - ”

“Oh, dear Dolf, don’t! Don’t!” cried his wife.

“Sophia,” said Mr. Tetterby, “I must reveal it. I couldn’t rest in my conscience unless I mentioned it. My little woman - ”

“Mrs. William’s very nearly here!” screamed Johnny at the door.

“My little woman, I wondered how,” gasped Mr. Tetterby, supporting himself by his chair, “I wondered how I had ever admired you - I forgot the precious children you have brought about me, and thought you didn’t look as slim as I could wish. I - I never gave a recollection,” said Mr. Tetterby, with severe self-accusation, “to the cares you’ve had as my wife, and along of me and mine, when you might have had hardly any with another man, who got on better and was luckier than me (anybody might have found such a man easily I am sure); and I quarrelled with you for having aged a little in the rough years you have lightened for me. Can you believe it, my little woman? I hardly can myself.”

Mrs. Tetterby, in a whirlwind of laughing and crying, caught his face within her hands, and held it there.

“Oh, Dolf!” she cried. “I am so happy that you thought so; I am so grateful that you thought so! For I thought that you were common-looking, Dolf; and so you are, my dear, and may you be the commonest of all sights in my eyes, till you close them with your own good hands. I thought that you were small; and so you are, and I’ll make much of you because you are, and more of you because I love my husband. I thought that you began to stoop; and so you do, and you shall lean on me, and I’ll do all I can to keep you up. I thought there was no air about you; but there is, and it’s the air of home, and that’s the purest and the best there is, and God bless home once more, and all belonging to it, Dolf!”

“Hurrah! Here’s Mrs. William!” cried Johnny.

So she was, and all the children with her; and so she came in, they kissed her, and kissed one another, and kissed the baby, and kissed their father and mother, and then ran back and flocked and danced about her, trooping on with her in triumph.

Mr. and Mrs. Tetterby were not a bit behind-hand in the warmth of their reception. They were as much attracted to her as the children were; they ran towards her, kissed her hands, pressed round her, could not receive her ardently or enthusiastically enough. She came among them like the spirit of all goodness, affection, gentle consideration, love, and domesticity.

“What! are *you* all so glad to see me, too, this bright Christmas morning?” said Milly, clapping her hands in a pleasant wonder. “Oh dear, how delightful this is!”

More shouting from the children, more kissing, more trooping round her, more happiness, more love, more joy, more honour, on all sides, than she could bear.

“Oh dear!” said Milly, “what delicious tears you make me shed. How can I ever have deserved this! What have I done to be so loved?”

“Who can help it!” cried Mr. Tetterby.

“Who can help it!” cried Mrs. Tetterby.

“Who can help it!” echoed the children, in a joyful chorus. And they danced and trooped about her again, and clung to her, and laid their rosy faces against her dress, and kissed and fondled it, and could not fondle it, or her, enough.

“I never was so moved,” said Milly, drying her eyes, “as I have been this morning. I must tell you, as soon as I can speak. - Mr. Redlaw came to me at sunrise, and with a tenderness in his manner, more as if I had been his darling daughter than myself, implored me to go with him to where William’s brother George is lying ill. We went together, and all the way along he was so kind, and so subdued, and seemed to put such trust and hope in me, that I could not help trying with pleasure. When we got to the house, we met a woman at the door (somebody had bruised and hurt her, I am afraid), who caught me by the hand, and blessed me as I passed."

"She was right!" said Mr. Tetterby. Mrs. Tetterby said she was right. All the children cried out that she was right.

"Ah, but there's more than that," said Milly. "When we got up stairs, into the room, the sick man who had lain for hours in a state from which no effort could rouse him, rose up in his bed, and, bursting into tears, stretched out his arms to me, and said that he had led a mis-spent life, but that he was truly repentant now, in his sorrow for the past, which was all as plain to him as a great prospect, from which a dense black cloud had cleared away, and that he entreated me to ask his poor old father for his pardon and his blessing, and to say a prayer beside his bed. And when I did so, Mr. Redlaw joined in it so fervently, and then so thanked and thanked me, and thanked Heaven, that my heart quite overflowed, and I could have done nothing but sob and cry, if the sick man had not begged me to sit down by him, - which made me quiet of course. As I sat there, he held my hand in his until he sank in a doze; and even then, when I withdrew my hand to leave him to come here (which Mr. Redlaw was very earnest indeed in wishing me to do), his hand felt for mine, so that some one else was obliged to take my place and make believe to give him my hand back. Oh dear, oh dear," said Milly, sobbing. "How thankful and how happy I should feel, and do feel, for all this!"

While she was speaking, Redlaw had come in, and, after pausing for a moment to observe the group of which she was the centre, had silently ascended the stairs. Upon those stairs he now appeared again; remaining there, while the young student passed him, and came running down.

"Kind nurse, gentlest, best of creatures," he said, falling on his knee to her, and catching at her hand, "forgive my cruel ingratitude!"

"Oh dear, oh dear!" cried Milly innocently, "here's another of them! Oh dear, here's somebody else who likes me. What shall I ever do!"

The guileless, simple way in which she said it, and in which she put her hands before her eyes and wept for very happiness, was as touching as it was delightful.

“I was not myself,” he said. “I don’t know what it was - it was some consequence of my disorder perhaps - I was mad. But I am so no longer. Almost as I speak, I am restored. I heard the children crying out your name, and the shade passed from me at the very sound of it. Oh, don’t weep! Dear Milly, if you could read my heart, and only knew with what affection and what grateful homage it is glowing, you would not let me see you weep. It is such deep reproach.”

“No, no,” said Milly, “it’s not that. It’s not indeed. It’s joy. It’s wonder that you should think it necessary to ask me to forgive so little, and yet it’s pleasure that you do.”

“And will you come again? and will you finish the little curtain?”

“No,” said Milly, drying her eyes, and shaking her head. “You won’t care for my needlework now.”

“Is it forgiving me, to say that?”

She beckoned him aside, and whispered in his ear.

“There is news from your home, Mr. Edmund.”

“News? How?”

“Either your not writing when you were very ill, or the change in your handwriting when you began to be better, created some suspicion of the truth; however that is - but you’re sure you’ll not be the worse for any news, if it’s not bad news?”

“Sure.”

“Then there’s some one come!” said Milly.

"My mother?" asked the student, glancing round involuntarily towards Redlaw, who had come down from the stairs.

"Hush! No," said Milly.

"It can be no one else."

"Indeed?" said Milly, "are you sure?"

"It is not -" Before he could say more, she put her hand upon his mouth.

"Yes it is!" said Milly. "The young lady (she is very like the miniature, Mr. Edmund, but she is prettier) was too unhappy to rest without satisfying her doubts, and came up, last night, with a little servant-maid. As you always dated your letters from the college, she came there; and before I saw Mr. Redlaw this morning, I saw her. *She* likes me too!" said Milly. "Oh dear, that's another!"

"This morning! Where is she now?"

"Why, she is now," said Milly, advancing her lips to his ear, "in my little parlour in the Lodge, and waiting to see you."

He pressed her hand, and was darting off, but she detained him.

"Mr. Redlaw is much altered, and has told me this morning that his memory is impaired. Be very considerate to him, Mr. Edmund; he needs that from us all."

The young man assured her, by a look, that her caution was not ill-bestowed; and as he passed the Chemist on his way out, bent respectfully and with an obvious interest before him.

Redlaw returned the salutation courteously and even humbly, and looked after him as he passed on. He dropped his head upon his hand too, as trying to reawaken something he had lost. But it was gone.

The abiding change that had come upon him since the influence of the music, and the Phantom's reappearance, was, that now he truly felt how much he had lost, and could compassionate his own condition, and contrast it, clearly, with the natural state of those who were around him. In this, an interest in those who were around him was revived, and a meek, submissive sense of his calamity was bred, resembling that which sometimes obtains in age, when its mental powers are weakened, without insensibility or sullenness being added to the list of its infirmities.

He was conscious that, as he redeemed, through Milly, more and more of the evil he had done, and as he was more and more with her, this change ripened itself within him. Therefore, and because of the attachment she inspired him with (but without other hope), he felt that he was quite dependent on her, and that she was his staff in his affliction.

So, when she asked him whether they should go home now, to where the old man and her husband were, and he readily replied “yes” - being anxious in that regard - he put his arm through hers, and walked beside her; not as if he were the wise and learned man to whom the wonders of Nature were an open book, and hers were the uninstructed mind, but as if their two positions were reversed, and he knew nothing, and she all.

He saw the children throng about her, and caress her, as he and she went away together thus, out of the house; he heard the ringing of their laughter, and their merry voices; he saw their bright faces, clustering around him like flowers; he witnessed the renewed contentment and affection of their parents; he breathed the simple air of their poor home, restored to its tranquillity; he thought of the unwholesome blight he had shed upon it, and might, but for her, have been diffusing then; and perhaps it is no wonder that he walked submissively beside her, and drew her gentle bosom nearer to his own.

When they arrived at the Lodge, the old man was sitting in his chair in the chimney-corner, with his eyes fixed on the ground, and his son was leaning against the opposite side of the fire-place, looking at him. As she came in at the door, both started, and turned round towards her, and a radiant change came upon their faces.

“Oh dear, dear, dear, they are all pleased to see me like the rest!” cried Milly, clapping her hands in an ecstasy, and stopping short. “Here are two more!”

Pleased to see her! Pleasure was no word for it. She ran into her husband’s arms, thrown wide open to receive her, and he would have been glad to have her there, with her head lying on his shoulder, through the short winter’s day. But the old man couldn’t spare her. He had arms for her too, and he locked her in them.

“Why, where has my quiet Mouse been all this time?” said the old man. “She has been a long while away. I find that it’s impossible for me to get on without Mouse. I - where’s my son William? - I fancy I have been dreaming, William.”

“That’s what I say myself, father,” returned his son. “I have been in an ugly sort of dream, I think. - How are you, father? Are you pretty well?”

“Strong and brave, my boy,” returned the old man.

It was quite a sight to see Mr. William shaking hands with his father, and patting him on the back, and rubbing him gently down with his hand, as if he could not possibly do enough to show an interest in him.

“What a wonderful man you are, father! - How are you, father? Are you really pretty hearty, though?” said William, shaking hands with him again, and patting him again, and rubbing him gently down again.

“I never was fresher or stouter in my life, my boy.”

“What a wonderful man you are, father! But that’s exactly where it is,” said Mr. William, with enthusiasm. “When I think of all that my father’s gone through, and all the chances and changes, and sorrows and troubles, that have happened to him in the course of his long life, and under which his head has grown grey, and years upon years have gathered on it, I feel as if we couldn’t do enough to honour the old gentleman, and make his old age easy. - How are you, father? Are you really pretty well, though?”

Mr. William might never have left off repeating this inquiry, and shaking hands with him again, and patting him again, and rubbing him down again, if the old man had not espied the Chemist, whom until now he had not seen.

“I ask your pardon, Mr. Redlaw,” said Philip, “but didn’t know you were here, sir, or should have made less free. It reminds me, Mr. Redlaw, seeing you here on a Christmas morning, of the time when you was a student yourself, and worked so hard that you were backwards and forwards in our Library even at Christmas time. Ha! ha! I’m old enough to remember that; and I remember it right well, I do, though I am eight-seven. It was after you left here that my poor wife died. You remember my poor wife, Mr. Redlaw?”

The Chemist answered yes.

“Yes,” said the old man. “She was a dear creetur. - I recollect you come here one Christmas morning with a young lady - I ask your pardon, Mr. Redlaw, but I think it was a sister you was very much attached to?”

The Chemist looked at him, and shook his head. “I had a sister,” he said vacantly. He knew no more.

“One Christmas morning,” pursued the old man, “that you come here with her - and it began to snow, and my wife invited the lady to walk in, and sit by the fire that is always a burning on Christmas Day in what used to be, before our ten poor gentlemen commuted, our great Dinner Hall. I was there; and I recollect, as I was stirring up the blaze for the young lady to warm her pretty feet by, she read the scroll out loud, that is underneath that pictur, ‘Lord, keep my memory green!’ She and my poor wife fell a talking about it; and it’s a strange thing to think of, now, that they both said (both being so unlike to die) that it was a good prayer, and that it was one they would put up very earnestly, if they were called away young, with reference to those who were dearest to them. ‘My brother,’ says the young lady - ‘My husband,’ says my poor wife. - ‘Lord, keep his memory of me, green, and do not let me be forgotten!’”

Tears more painful, and more bitter than he had ever shed in all his life, coursed down Redlaw’s face. Philip, fully occupied in recalling his story, had not observed him until now, nor Milly’s anxiety that he should not proceed.

“Philip!” said Redlaw, laying his hand upon his arm, “I am a stricken man, on whom the hand of Providence has fallen heavily, although deservedly. You speak to me, my friend, of what I cannot follow; my memory is gone.”

“Merciful power!” cried the old man.

“I have lost my memory of sorrow, wrong, and trouble,” said the Chemist, “and with that I have lost all man would remember!”

To see old Philip’s pity for him, to see him wheel his own great chair for him to rest in, and look down upon him with a solemn sense of his bereavement, was to know, in some degree, how precious to old age such recollections are.

The boy came running in, and ran to Milly.

“Here’s the man,” he said, “in the other room. I don’t want *him*.”

“What man does he mean?” asked Mr. William.

“Hush!” said Milly.

Obedient to a sign from her, he and his old father softly withdrew. As they went out, unnoticed, Redlaw beckoned to the boy to come to him.

“I like the woman best,” he answered, holding to her skirts.

“You are right,” said Redlaw, with a faint smile. “But you needn’t fear to come to me. I am gentler than I was. Of all the world, to you, poor child!”

The boy still held back at first, but yielding little by little to her urging, he consented to approach, and even to sit down at his feet. As Redlaw laid his hand upon the shoulder of the child, looking on him with compassion and a fellow-feeling, he put out his other hand to Milly. She stooped down on that side of him, so that she could look into his face, and after silence, said:

“Mr. Redlaw, may I speak to you?”

"Yes," he answered, fixing his eyes upon her. "Your voice and music are the same to me."

"May I ask you something?"

"What you will."

"Do you remember what I said, when I knocked at your door last night? About one who was your friend once, and who stood on the verge of destruction?"

"Yes. I remember," he said, with some hesitation.

"Do you understand it?"

He smoothed the boy's hair - looking at her fixedly the while, and shook his head.

"This person," said Milly, in her clear, soft voice, which her mild eyes, looking at him, made clearer and softer, "I found soon afterwards. I went back to the house, and, with Heaven's help, traced him. I was not too soon. A very little and I should have been too late."

He took his hand from the boy, and laying it on the back of that hand of hers, whose timid and yet earnest touch addressed him no less appealingly than her voice and eyes, looked more intently on her.

"He *is* the father of Mr. Edmund, the young gentleman we saw just now. His real name is Longford. - You recollect the name?"

"I recollect the name."

"And the man?"

"No, not the man. Did he ever wrong me?"

"Yes!"

"Ah! Then it's hopeless - hopeless."

He shook his head, and softly beat upon the hand he held, as though mutely asking her commiseration.

“I did not go to Mr. Edmund last night,” said Milly, - “You will listen to me just the same as if you did remember all?”

“To every syllable you say.”

“Both, because I did not know, then, that this really was his father, and because I was fearful of the effect of such intelligence upon him, after his illness, if it should be. Since I have known who this person is, I have not gone either; but that is for another reason. He has long been separated from his wife and son - has been a stranger to his home almost from this son’s infancy, I learn from him - and has abandoned and deserted what he should have held most dear. In all that time he has been falling from the state of a gentleman, more and more, until - ” she rose up, hastily, and going out for a moment, returned, accompanied by the wreck that Redlaw had beheld last night.

“Do you know me?” asked the Chemist.

“I should be glad,” returned the other, “and that is an unwonted word for me to use, if I could answer no.”

The Chemist looked at the man, standing in self-abasement and degradation before him, and would have looked longer, in an ineffectual struggle for enlightenment, but that Milly resumed her late position by his side, and attracted his attentive gaze to her own face.

“See how low he is sunk, how lost he is!” she whispered, stretching out her arm towards him, without looking from the Chemist’s face. “If you could remember all that is connected with him, do you not think it would move your pity to reflect that one you ever loved (do not let us mind how long ago, or in what belief that he has forfeited), should come to this?”

“I hope it would,” he answered. “I believe it would.”

His eyes wandered to the figure standing near the door, but came back speedily to her, on whom he gazed intently, as if he strove to learn some lesson from every tone of her voice, and every beam of her eyes.

“I have no learning, and you have much,” said Milly; “I am not used to think, and you are always thinking. May I tell you why it seems to me a good thing for us, to remember wrong that has been done us?”

“Yes.”

“That we may forgive it.”

“Pardon me, great Heaven!” said Redlaw, lifting up his eyes, “for having thrown away thine own high attribute!”

“And if,” said Milly, “if your memory should one day be restored, as we will hope and pray it may be, would it not be a blessing to you to recall at once a wrong and its forgiveness?”

He looked at the figure by the door, and fastened his attentive eyes on her again; a ray of clearer light appeared to him to shine into his mind, from her bright face.

“He cannot go to his abandoned home. He does not seek to go there. He knows that he could only carry shame and trouble to those he has so cruelly neglected; and that the best reparation he can make them now, is to avoid them. A very little money carefully bestowed, would remove him to some distant place, where he might live and do no wrong, and make such atonement as is left within his power for the wrong he has done. To the unfortunate lady who is his wife, and to his son, this would be the best and kindest boon that their best friend could give them - one too that they need never know of; and to him, shattered in reputation, mind, and body, it might be salvation.”

He took her head between her hands, and kissed it, and said: “It shall be done. I trust to you to do it for me, now and secretly; and to tell him that I would forgive him, if I were so happy as to know for what.”

As she rose, and turned her beaming face towards the fallen man, implying that her mediation had been successful, he advanced a step, and without raising his eyes, addressed himself to Redlaw.

“You are so generous,” he said, “ - you ever were - that you will try to banish your rising sense of retribution in the spectacle that is before you. I do not try to banish it from myself, Redlaw. If you can, believe me.”

The Chemist entreated Milly, by a gesture, to come nearer to him; and, as he listened looked in her face, as if to find in it the clue to what he heard.

“I am too decayed a wretch to make professions; I recollect my own career too well, to array any such before you. But from the day on which I made my first step downward, in dealing falsely by you, I have gone down with a certain, steady, doomed progression. That, I say.”

Redlaw, keeping her close at his side, turned his face towards the speaker, and there was sorrow in it. Something like mournful recognition too.

“I might have been another man, my life might have been another life, if I had avoided that first fatal step. I don’t know that it would have been. I claim nothing for the possibility. Your sister is at rest, and better than she could have been with me, if I had continued even what you thought me: even what I once supposed myself to be.”

Redlaw made a hasty motion with his hand, as if he would have put that subject on one side.

“I speak,” the other went on, “like a man taken from the grave. I should have made my own grave, last night, had it not been for this blessed hand.”

“Oh dear, he likes me too!” sobbed Milly, under her breath. “That’s another!”

“I could not have put myself in your way, last night, even for bread. But, to-day, my recollection of what has been is so strongly stirred, and is presented to me, I don’t know how, so vividly, that I have dared to come at her suggestion, and to take your bounty, and to thank you for it, and to beg you, Redlaw, in your dying hour, to be as merciful to me in your thoughts, as you are in your deeds."

He turned towards the door, and stopped a moment on his way forth.

"I hope my son may interest you, for his mother's sake. I hope he may deserve to do so. Unless my life should be preserved a long time, and I should know that I have not misused your aid, I shall never look upon him more."

Going out, he raised his eyes to Redlaw for the first time. Redlaw, whose steadfast gaze was fixed upon him, dreamily held out his hand. He returned and touched it - little more - with both his own; and bending down his head, went slowly out.

In the few moments that elapsed, while Milly silently took him to the gate, the Chemist dropped into his chair, and covered his face with his hands. Seeing him thus, when she came back, accompanied by her husband and his father (who were both greatly concerned for him), she avoided disturbing him, or permitting him to be disturbed; and kneeled down near the chair to put some warm clothing on the boy.

"That's exactly where it is. That's what I always say, father!" exclaimed her admiring husband. "There's a motherly feeling in Mrs. William's breast that must and will have went!"

"Ay, ay," said the old man; "you're right. My son William's right!"

"It happens all for the best, Milly dear, no doubt," said Mr. William, tenderly, "that we have no children of our own; and yet I sometimes wish you had one to love and cherish. Our little dead child that you built such hopes upon, and that never breathed the breath of life - it has made you quiet-like, Milly."

"I am very happy in the recollection of it, William dear," she answered. "I think of it every day."

"I was afraid you thought of it a good deal."

“Don’t say, afraid; it is a comfort to me; it speaks to me in so many ways. The innocent thing that never lived on earth, is like an angel to me, William.”

“You are like an angel to father and me,” said Mr. William, softly. “I know that.”

“When I think of all those hopes I built upon it, and the many times I sat and pictured to myself the little smiling face upon my bosom that never lay there, and the sweet eyes turned up to mine that never opened to the light,” said Milly, “I can feel a greater tenderness, I think, for all the disappointed hopes in which there is no harm. When I see a beautiful child in its fond mother’s arms, I love it all the better, thinking that my child might have been like that, and might have made my heart as proud and happy.”

Redlaw raised his head, and looked towards her.

“All through life, it seems by me,” she continued, “to tell me something. For poor neglected children, my little child pleads as if it were alive, and had a voice I knew, with which to speak to me. When I hear of youth in suffering or shame, I think that my child might have come to that, perhaps, and that God took it from me in His mercy. Even in age and grey hair, such as father’s, it is present: saying that it too might have lived to be old, long and long after you and I were gone, and to have needed the respect and love of younger people.”

Her quiet voice was quieter than ever, as she took her husband’s arm, and laid her head against it.

“Children love me so, that sometimes I half fancy - it’s a silly fancy, William - they have some way I don’t know of, of feeling for my little child, and me, and understanding why their love is precious to me. If I have been quiet since, I have been more happy, William, in a hundred ways. Not least happy, dear, in this - that even when my little child was born and dead but a few days, and I was weak and sorrowful, and could not help grieving a little, the thought arose, that if I tried to lead a good life, I should meet in Heaven a bright creature, who would call me, Mother!”

Redlaw fell upon his knees, with a loud cry.

“O Thou, he said, “who through the teaching of pure love, hast graciously restored me to the memory which was the memory of Christ upon the Cross, and of all the good who perished in His cause, receive my thanks, and bless her!”

Then, he folded her to his heart; and Milly, sobbing more than ever, cried, as she laughed, “He is come back to himself! He likes me very much indeed, too! Oh, dear, dear, dear me, here’s another!”

Then, the student entered, leading by the hand a lovely girl, who was afraid to come. And Redlaw so changed towards him, seeing in him and his youthful choice, the softened shadow of that chastening passage in his own life, to which, as to a shady tree, the dove so long imprisoned in his solitary ark might fly for rest and company, fell upon his neck, entreating them to be his children.

Then, as Christmas is a time in which, of all times in the year, the memory of every remediable sorrow, wrong, and trouble in the world around us, should be active with us, not less than our own experiences, for all good, he laid his hand upon the boy, and, silently calling Him to witness who laid His hand on children in old time, rebuking, in the majesty of His prophetic knowledge, those who kept them from Him, vowed to protect him, teach him, and reclaim him.

Then, he gave his right hand cheerily to Philip, and said that they would that day hold a Christmas dinner in what used to be, before the ten poor gentlemen commuted, their great Dinner Hall; and that they would bid to it as many of that Swidger family, who, his son had told him, were so numerous that they might join hands and make a ring round England, as could be brought together on so short a notice.

And it was that day done. There were so many Swidgers there, grown up and children, that an attempt to state them in round numbers might engender doubts, in the distrustful, of the veracity of this history. Therefore the attempt shall not be made. But there they were, by dozens and scores -

and there was good news and good hope there, ready for them, of George, who had been visited again by his father and brother, and by Milly, and again left in a quiet sleep. There, present at the dinner, too, were the Tetterbys, including young Adolphus, who arrived in his prismatic comforter, in good time for the beef. Johnny and the baby were too late, of course, and came in all on one side, the one exhausted, the other in a supposed state of double-tooth; but that was customary, and not alarming.

It was sad to see the child who had no name or lineage, watching the other children as they played, not knowing how to talk with them, or sport with them, and more strange to the ways of childhood than a rough dog. It was sad, though in a different way, to see what an instinctive knowledge the youngest children there had of his being different from all the rest, and how they made timid approaches to him with soft words and touches, and with little presents, that he might not be unhappy. But he kept by Milly, and began to love her - that was another, as she said! - and, as they all liked her dearly, they were glad of that, and when they saw him peeping at them from behind her chair, they were pleased that he was so close to it.

All this, the Chemist, sitting with the student and his bride that was to be, Philip, and the rest, saw.

Some people have said since, that he only thought what has been herein set down; others, that he read it in the fire, one winter night about the twilight time; others, that the Ghost was but the representation of his gloomy thoughts, and Milly the embodiment of his better wisdom. *I* say nothing.

- Except this. That as they were assembled in the old Hall, by no other light than that of a great fire (having dined early), the shadows once more stole out of their hiding-places, and danced about the room, showing the children marvellous shapes and faces on the walls, and gradually changing what was real and familiar there, to what was wild and magical. But that there was one thing in the Hall, to which the eyes of Redlaw, and of Milly and her husband, and of the old man, and of the student, and his bride that was to be, were often turned, which the shadows did not obscure or change. Deepened in its gravity by the fire-light, and gazing from the darkness of the panelled wall like life, the sedate face in the portrait, with the beard and ruff, looked down at them from under its verdant wreath of holly, as they looked up at it; and, clear and plain below, as if a voice had uttered them, were the words:

Lord, keep my Memory green.

THE END OF
The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain

HOLIDAY ROMANCE - IN FOUR PARTS

PART I - INTRODUCTORY ROMANCE PROM THE PEN OF WILLIAM TINKLING, ESQ. (Aged eight.)

THIS beginning-part is not made out of anybody's head, you know. It's real. You must believe this beginning-part more than what comes after, else you won't understand how what comes after came to be written. You must believe it all; but you must believe this most, please. I am the editor of it. Bob Redforth (he's my cousin, and shaking the table on purpose) wanted to be the editor of it; but I said he shouldn't because he couldn't. HE has no idea of being an editor.

Nettie Ashford is my bride. We were married in the right-hand closet in the corner of the dancing-school, where first we met, with a ring (a green one) from Wilkingwater's toy-shop. I owed for it out of my pocket-money. When the rapturous ceremony was over, we all four went up the lane and let off a cannon (brought loaded in Bob Redforth's waistcoat-pocket) to announce our nuptials. It flew right up when it went off, and turned over. Next day, Lieut.- Col. Robin Redforth was united, with similar ceremonies, to Alice Rainbird. This time the cannon burst with a most terrific explosion, and made a puppy bark.

My peerless bride was, at the period of which we now treat, in captivity at Miss Grimmer's. Drowvey and Grimmer is the partnership, and opinion is divided which is the greatest beast. The lovely bride of the colonel was also immured in the dungeons of the same establishment. A vow was entered into, between the colonel and myself, that we would cut them out on the following Wednesday when walking two and two.

Under the desperate circumstances of the case, the active brain of the colonel, combining with his lawless pursuit (he is a pirate), suggested an attack with fireworks. This, however, from motives of humanity, was abandoned as too expensive.

Lightly armed with a paper-knife buttoned up under his jacket, and waving the dreaded black flag at the end of a cane, the colonel took command of me at two P.M. on the eventful and appointed day. He had drawn out the plan of attack on a piece of paper, which was rolled up round a hoop-stick. He showed it to me. My position and my full-length portrait (but my real ears don't stick out horizontal) was behind a corner lamp-post, with written orders to remain there till I should see Miss Drowvey fall. The Drowvey who was to fall was the one in spectacles, not the one with the large lavender bonnet. At that signal I was to rush forth, seize my bride, and fight my way to the lane. There a junction would be effected between myself and the colonel; and putting our brides behind us, between ourselves and the palings, we were to conquer or die.

The enemy appeared, - approached. Waving his black flag, the colonel attacked. Confusion ensued. Anxiously I awaited my signal; but my signal came not. So far from falling, the hated Drowvey in spectacles appeared to me to have muffled the colonel's head in his outlawed banner, and to be pitching into him with a parasol. The one in the lavender bonnet also performed prodigies of valour with her fists on his back. Seeing that all was for the moment lost, I fought my desperate way hand to hand to the lane. Through taking the back road, I was so fortunate as to meet nobody, and arrived there uninterrupted.

It seemed an age ere the colonel joined me. He had been to the jobbing tailor's to be sewn up in several places, and attributed our defeat to the refusal of the detested Drowvey to fall. Finding her so obstinate, he had said to her, 'Die, recreant!' but had found her no more open to reason on that point than the other.

My blooming bride appeared, accompanied by the colonel's bride, at the dancing-school next day. What? Was her face averted from me? Hah? Even so. With a look of scorn, she put into my hand a bit of paper, and took another partner. On the paper was pencilled, 'Heavens! Can I write the word? Is my husband a cow?'

In the first bewilderment of my heated brain, I tried to think what slanderer could have traced my family to the ignoble animal mentioned above. Vain were my endeavours. At the end of that dance I whispered the colonel to come into the cloak-room, and I showed him the note.

'There is a syllable wanting,' said he, with a gloomy brow.

'Hah! What syllable?' was my inquiry.

'She asks, can she write the word? And no; you see she couldn't,' said the colonel, pointing out the passage.

'And the word was?' said I.

'Cow - cow - coward,' hissed the pirate-colonel in my ear, and gave me back the note.

Feeling that I must for ever tread the earth a branded boy, - person I mean, - or that I must clear up my honour, I demanded to be tried by a court-martial. The colonel admitted my right to be tried. Some difficulty was found in composing the court, on account of the Emperor of France's aunt refusing to let him come out. He was to be the president. Ere yet we had appointed a substitute, he made his escape over the back-wall, and stood among us, a free monarch.

The court was held on the grass by the pond. I recognised, in a certain admiral among my judges, my deadliest foe. A cocoa-nut had given rise to language that I could not brook; but confiding in my innocence, and also in the knowledge that the President of the United States (who sat next him) owed me a knife, I braced myself for the ordeal.

It was a solemn spectacle, that court. Two executioners with pinafores reversed led me in. Under the shade of an umbrella I perceived my bride, supported by the bride of the pirate-colonel. The president, having reproved a little female ensign for tittering, on a matter of life or death, called upon me to plead, 'Coward or no coward, guilty or not guilty?' I pleaded in a firm tone, 'No coward and not guilty.' (The little female ensign being again reproved by the president for misconduct, mutinied, left the court, and threw stones.)

My implacable enemy, the admiral, conducted the case against me. The colonel's bride was called to prove that I had remained behind the corner lamp-post during the engagement. I might have been spared the anguish of my own bride's being also made a witness to the same point, but the admiral knew where to wound me. Be still, my soul, no matter. The colonel was then brought forward with his evidence.

It was for this point that I had saved myself up, as the turning- point of my case. Shaking myself free of my guards, - who had no business to hold me, the stupids, unless I was found guilty, - I asked the colonel what he considered the first duty of a soldier? Ere he could reply, the President of the United States rose and informed the court, that my foe, the admiral, had suggested 'Bravery,' and that prompting a witness wasn't fair. The president of the court immediately ordered the admiral's mouth to be filled with leaves, and tied up with string. I had the satisfaction of seeing the sentence carried into effect before the proceedings went further.

I then took a paper from my trousers-pocket, and asked, 'What do you consider, Col. Redford, the first duty of a soldier? Is it obedience?'

'It is,' said the colonel.

'Is that paper - please to look at it - in your hand?'

'It is,' said the colonel.

'Is it a military sketch?'

'It is,' said the colonel.

'Of an engagement?'

'Quite so,' said the colonel.

'Of the late engagement?'

'Of the late engagement.'

'Please to describe it, and then hand it to the president of the court.'

From that triumphant moment my sufferings and my dangers were at an end. The court rose up and jumped, on discovering that I had strictly obeyed orders. My foe, the admiral, who though muzzled was malignant yet, contrived to suggest that I was dishonoured by having quitted the field. But the colonel himself had done as much, and gave his opinion, upon his word and honour as a pirate, that when all was lost the field might be quitted without disgrace. I was going to be found 'No coward and not guilty,' and my blooming bride was going to be publicly restored to my arms in a procession, when an unlooked-for event disturbed the general rejoicing. This was no other than the Emperor of France's aunt catching hold of his hair. The proceedings abruptly terminated, and the court tumultuously dissolved.

It was when the shades of the next evening but one were beginning to fall, ere yet the silver beams of Luna touched the earth, that four forms might have been descried slowly advancing towards the weeping willow on the borders of the pond, the now deserted scene of the day before yesterday's agonies and triumphs. On a nearer approach, and by a practised eye, these might have been identified as the forms of the pirate-colonel with his bride, and of the day before yesterday's gallant prisoner with his bride.

On the beauteous faces of the Nymphs dejection sat enthroned. All four reclined under the willow for some minutes without speaking, till at length the bride of the colonel poutingly observed, 'It's of no use pretending any more, and we had better give it up.'

'Hah!' exclaimed the pirate. 'Pretending?'

'Don't go on like that; you worry me,' returned his bride.

The lovely bride of Tinkling echoed the incredible declaration.
The two warriors exchanged stony glances.

'If,' said the bride of the pirate-colonel, 'grown-up people WON'T do what they ought to do, and WILL put us out, what comes of our pretending?'

'We only get into scrapes,' said the bride of Tinkling.

'You know very well,' pursued the colonel's bride, 'that Miss Drowvey wouldn't fall. You complained of it yourself. And you know how disgracefully the court-martial ended. As to our marriage; would my people acknowledge it at home?'

'Or would my people acknowledge ours?' said the bride of Tinkling.

Again the two warriors exchanged stony glances.

'If you knocked at the door and claimed me, after you were told to go away,' said the colonel's bride, 'you would only have your hair pulled, or your ears, or your nose.'

'If you persisted in ringing at the bell and claiming me,' said the bride of Tinkling to that gentleman, 'you would have things dropped on your head from the window over the handle, or you would be played upon by the garden-engine.'

'And at your own homes,' resumed the bride of the colonel, 'it would be just as bad. You would be sent to bed, or something equally undignified. Again, how would you support us?'

The pirate-colonel replied in a courageous voice, 'By rapine!' But his bride retorted, 'Suppose the grown-up people wouldn't be rapined?' 'Then,' said the colonel, 'they should pay the penalty in blood.' - 'But suppose they should object,' retorted his bride, 'and wouldn't pay the penalty in blood or anything else?'

A mournful silence ensued.

'Then do you no longer love me, Alice?' asked the colonel.

'Redforth! I am ever thine,' returned his bride.

'Then do you no longer love me, Nettie?' asked the present writer.

'Tinkling! I am ever thine,' returned my bride.

We all four embraced. Let me not be misunderstood by the giddy. The colonel embraced his own bride, and I embraced mine. But two times two make four.

'Nettie and I,' said Alice mournfully, 'have been considering our position. The grown-up people are too strong for us. They make us ridiculous. Besides, they have changed the times. William Tinkling's baby brother was christened yesterday. What took place? Was any king present? Answer, William.'

I said No, unless disguised as Great-uncle Chopper.

'Any queen?'

There had been no queen that I knew of at our house. There might have been one in the kitchen: but I didn't think so, or the servants would have mentioned it.

'Any fairies?'

None that were visible.

'We had an idea among us, I think,' said Alice, with a melancholy smile, 'we four, that Miss Grimmer would prove to be the wicked fairy, and would come in at the christening with her crutch-stick, and give the child a bad gift. Was there anything of that sort? Answer, William.'

I said that ma had said afterwards (and so she had), that Great- uncle Chopper's gift was a shabby one; but she hadn't said a bad one. She had called it shabby, electrotyped, second-hand, and below his income.

'It must be the grown-up people who have changed all this,' said Alice. 'WE couldn't have changed it, if we had been so inclined, and we never should have been. Or perhaps Miss Grimmer IS a wicked fairy after all, and won't act up to it because the grown-up people have persuaded her not to. Either way, they would make us ridiculous if we told them what we expected.'

'Tyrants!' muttered the pirate-colonel.

'Nay, my Redforth,' said Alice, 'say not so. Call not names, my Redforth, or they will apply to pa.'

'Let 'em,' said the colonel. 'I do not care. Who's he?'

Tinkling here undertook the perilous task of remonstrating with his lawless friend, who consented to withdraw the moody expressions above quoted.

'What remains for us to do?' Alice went on in her mild, wise way. 'We must educate, we must pretend in a new manner, we must wait.'

The colonel clenched his teeth, - four out in front, and a piece of another, and he had been twice dragged to the door of a dentist- despot, but had escaped from his guards. 'How educate? How pretend in a new manner? How wait?'

'Educate the grown-up people,' replied Alice. 'We part to-night. Yes, Redforth,' - for the colonel tucked up his cuffs, - 'part to- night! Let us in these next holidays, now going to begin, throw our thoughts into something educational for the grown-up people, hinting to them how things ought to be. Let us veil our meaning under a mask of romance; you, I, and Nettie. William Tinkling being the plainest and quickest writer, shall copy out. Is it agreed?'

The colonel answered sulkily, 'I don't mind.' He then asked, 'How about pretending?'

'We will pretend,' said Alice, 'that we are children; not that we are those grown-up people who won't help us out as they ought, and who understand us so badly.'

The colonel, still much dissatisfied, growled, 'How about waiting?'

'We will wait,' answered little Alice, taking Nettie's hand in hers, and looking up to the sky, 'we will wait - ever constant and true - till the times have got so changed as that everything helps us out, and nothing makes us ridiculous, and the fairies have come back. We will wait - ever constant and true - till we are eighty, ninety, or one hundred. And then the fairies will send US children, and we will help them out, poor pretty little creatures, if they pretend ever so much.'

'So we will, dear,' said Nettie Ashford, taking her round the waist with both arms and kissing her. 'And now if my husband will go and buy some cherries for us, I have got some money.'

In the friendliest manner I invited the colonel to go with me; but he so far forgot himself as to acknowledge the invitation by kicking out behind, and then lying down on his stomach on the grass, pulling it up and chewing it. When I came back, however, Alice had nearly brought him out of his vexation, and was soothing him by telling him how soon we should all be ninety.

As we sat under the willow-tree and ate the cherries (fair, for Alice shared them out), we played at being ninety. Nettie complained that she had a bone in her old back, and it made her hobble; and Alice sang a song in an old woman's way, but it was very pretty, and we were all merry. At least, I don't know about merry exactly, but all comfortable.

There was a most tremendous lot of cherries; and Alice always had with her some neat little bag or box or case, to hold things. In it that night was a tiny wine-glass. So Alice and Nettie said they would make some cherry-wine to drink our love at parting.

Each of us had a glassful, and it was delicious; and each of us drank the toast, 'Our love at parting.' The colonel drank his wine last; and it got into my head directly that it got into his directly. Anyhow, his eyes rolled immediately after he had turned the glass upside down; and he took me on one side and proposed in a hoarse whisper, that we should 'Cut 'em out still.'

'How did he mean?' I asked my lawless friend.

'Cut our brides out,' said the colonel, 'and then cut our way, without going down a single turning, bang to the Spanish main!'

We might have tried it, though I didn't think it would answer; only we looked round and saw that there was nothing but moon-light under the willow-tree, and that our pretty, pretty wives were gone. We burst out crying. The colonel gave in second, and came to first; but he gave in strong.

We were ashamed of our red eyes, and hung about for half-an-hour to whiten them. Likewise a piece of chalk round the rims, I doing the colonel's, and he mine, but afterwards found in the bedroom looking-glass not natural, besides inflammation. Our conversation turned on being ninety. The colonel told me he had a pair of boots that wanted soling and heeling; but he thought it hardly worth while to mention it to his father, as he himself should so soon be ninety, when he thought shoes would be more convenient. The colonel also told me, with his hand upon his hip, that he felt himself already getting on in life, and turning rheumatic. And I told him the same. And when they said at our house at supper (they are always bothering about something) that I stooped, I felt so glad!

This is the end of the beginning-part that you were to believe most.

PART II. - ROMANCE. FROM THE PEN OF MISS ALICE RAINBIRD (Aged seven.)

THERE was once a king, and he had a queen; and he was the manliest of his sex, and she was the loveliest of hers. The king was, in his private profession, under government. The queen's father had been a medical man out of town.

They had nineteen children, and were always having more. Seventeen of these children took care of the baby; and Alicia, the eldest, took care of them all. Their ages varied from seven years to seven months.

Let us now resume our story.

One day the king was going to the office, when he stopped at the fishmonger's to buy a pound and a half of salmon not too near the tail, which the queen (who was a careful housekeeper) had requested him to send home. Mr. Pickles, the fishmonger, said, 'Certainly, sir; is there any other article? Good-morning.'

The king went on towards the office in a melancholy mood; for quarter-day was such a long way off, and several of the dear children were growing out of their clothes. He had not proceeded far, when Mr. Pickles's errand-boy came running after him, and said, 'Sir, you didn't notice the old lady in our shop.'

'What old lady?' inquired the king. 'I saw none.'

Now the king had not seen any old lady, because this old lady had been invisible to him, though visible to Mr. Pickles's boy. Probably because he messed and splashed the water about to that degree, and flopped the pairs of soles down in that violent manner, that, if she had not been visible to him, he would have spoilt her clothes.

Just then the old lady came trotting up. She was dressed in shot- silk of the richest quality, smelling of dried lavender.

'King Watkins the First, I believe?' said the old lady.

'Watkins,' replied the king, 'is my name.'

'Papa, if I am not mistaken, of the beautiful Princess Alicia?' said the old lady.

'And of eighteen other darlings,' replied the king.

'Listen. You are going to the office,' said the old lady.

It instantly flashed upon the king that she must be a fairy, or how could she know that?

'You are right,' said the old lady, answering his thoughts. 'I am the good Fairy Grandmarina. Attend! When you return home to dinner, politely invite the Princess Alicia to have some of the salmon you bought just now.'

'It may disagree with her,' said the king.

The old lady became so very angry at this absurd idea, that the king was quite alarmed, and humbly begged her pardon.

'We hear a great deal too much about this thing disagreeing, and that thing disagreeing,' said the old lady, with the greatest contempt it was possible to express. 'Don't be greedy. I think you want it all yourself.'

The king hung his head under this reproof, and said he wouldn't talk about things disagreeing any more.

'Be good, then,' said the Fairy Grandmarina, 'and don't. When the beautiful Princess Alicia consents to partake of the salmon, - as I think she will, - you will find she will leave a fish-bone on her plate. Tell her to dry it, and to rub it, and to polish it till it shines like mother-of-pearl, and to take care of it as a present from me.'

'Is that all?' asked the king.

'Don't be impatient, sir,' returned the Fairy Grandmarina, scolding him severely. 'Don't catch people short, before they have done speaking. Just the way with you grown-up persons. You are always doing it.'

The king again hung his head, and said he wouldn't do so any more.

'Be good, then,' said the Fairy Grandmarina, 'and don't! Tell the Princess Alicia, with my love, that the fish-bone is a magic present which can only be used once; but that it will bring her, that once, whatever she wishes for, PROVIDED SHE WISHES FOR IT AT THE RIGHT TIME. That is the message. Take care of it.'

The king was beginning, 'Might I ask the reason?' when the fairy became absolutely furious.

'WILL you be good, sir?' she exclaimed, stamping her foot on the ground. 'The reason for this, and the reason for that, indeed! You are always wanting the reason. No reason. There! Hoity toity me! I am sick of your grown-up reasons.'

The king was extremely frightened by the old lady's flying into such a passion, and said he was very sorry to have offended her, and he wouldn't ask for reasons any more.

'Be good, then,' said the old lady, 'and don't!'

With those words, Grandmarina vanished, and the king went on and on and on, till he came to the office. There he wrote and wrote and wrote, till it was time to go home again. Then he politely invited the Princess Alicia, as the fairy had directed him, to partake of the salmon. And when she had enjoyed it very much, he saw the fish-bone on her plate, as the fairy had told him he would, and he delivered the fairy's message, and the Princess Alicia took care to dry the bone, and to rub it, and to polish it, till it shone like mother-of-pearl.

And so, when the queen was going to get up in the morning, she said, 'O, dear me, dear me; my head, my head!' and then she fainted away.

The Princess Alicia, who happened to be looking in at the chamber-door, asking about breakfast, was very much alarmed when she saw her royal mamma in this state, and she rang the bell for Peggy, which was the name of the lord chamberlain. But remembering where the smelling-bottle was, she climbed on a chair and got it; and after that she climbed on another chair by the bedside, and held the smelling-bottle to the queen's nose; and after that she jumped down and got some water; and after that she jumped up again and wetted the queen's forehead; and, in short, when the lord chamberlain came in, that dear old woman said to the little princess, 'What a trot you are! I couldn't have done it better myself!'

But that was not the worst of the good queen's illness. O, no! She was very ill indeed, for a long time. The Princess Alicia kept the seventeen young princes and princesses quiet, and dressed and undressed and danced the baby, and made the kettle boil, and heated the soup, and swept the hearth, and poured out the medicine, and nursed the queen, and did all that ever she could, and was as busy, busy, busy as busy could be; for there were not many servants at that palace for three reasons: because the king was short of money, because a rise in his office never seemed to come, and because quarter-day was so far off that it looked almost as far off and as little as one of the stars.

But on the morning when the queen fainted away, where was the magic fish-bone? Why, there it was in the Princess Alicia's pocket! She had almost taken it out to bring the queen to life again, when she put it back, and looked for the smelling-bottle.

After the queen had come out of her swoon that morning, and was dozing, the Princess Alicia hurried up-stairs to tell a most particular secret to a most particularly confidential friend of hers, who was a duchess. People did suppose her to be a doll; but she was really a duchess, though nobody knew it except the princess.

This most particular secret was the secret about the magic fish- bone, the history of which was well known to the duchess, because the princess told her everything. The princess kneeled down by the bed on which the duchess was lying, full-dressed and wide awake, and whispered the secret to her. The duchess smiled and nodded. People might have supposed that she never smiled and nodded; but she often did, though nobody knew it except the princess.

Then the Princess Alicia hurried down-stairs again, to keep watch in the queen's room. She often kept watch by herself in the queen's room; but every evening, while the illness lasted, she sat there watching with the king. And every evening the king sat looking at her with a cross look, wondering why she never brought out the magic fish-bone. As often as she noticed this, she ran up- stairs, whispered the secret to the duchess over again, and said to the duchess besides, 'They think we children never have a reason or a meaning!' And the duchess, though the most fashionable duchess that ever was heard of, winked her eye.

'Alicia,' said the king, one evening, when she wished him good- night.

'Yes, papa.'

'What is become of the magic fish-bone?'

'In my pocket, papa!'

'I thought you had lost it?'

'O, no, papa!'

'Or forgotten it?'

'No, indeed, papa.'

And so another time the dreadful little snapping pug-dog, next door, made a rush at one of the young princes as he stood on the steps coming home from school, and terrified him out of his wits; and he put his hand through a pane of glass, and bled, bled, bled. When the seventeen other young princes and princesses saw him bleed, bleed, bleed, they were terrified out of their wits too, and screamed themselves black in their seventeen faces all at once. But the Princess Alicia put her hands over all their seventeen mouths, one after another, and persuaded them to be quiet because of the sick queen. And then she put the wounded prince's hand in a basin of fresh cold water, while they stared with their twice seventeen are thirty-four, put down four and carry three, eyes, and then she looked in the hand for bits of glass, and there were fortunately no bits of glass there. And then she said to two chubby-legged princes, who were sturdy though small, 'Bring me in the royal rag-bag: I must snip and stitch and cut and contrive.' So these two young princes tugged at the royal rag-bag, and lugged it in;

and the Princess Alicia sat down on the floor, with a large pair of scissors and a needle and thread, and snipped and stitched and cut and contrived, and made a bandage, and put it on, and it fitted beautifully; and so when it was all done, she saw the king her papa looking on by the door.

'Alicia.'

'Yes, papa.'

'What have you been doing?'

'Snipping, stitching, cutting, and contriving, papa.'

'Where is the magic fish-bone?'

'In my pocket, papa.'

'I thought you had lost it?'

'O, no, papa.'

'Or forgotten it?'

'No, indeed, papa.'

After that, she ran up-stairs to the duchess, and told her what had passed, and told her the secret over again; and the duchess shook her flaxen curls, and laughed with her rosy lips.

Well! and so another time the baby fell under the grate. The seventeen young princes and princesses were used to it; for they were almost always falling under the grate or down the stairs; but the baby was not used to it yet, and it gave him a swelled face and a black eye. The way the poor little darling came to tumble was, that he was out of the Princess Alicia's lap just as she was sitting, in a great coarse apron that quite smothered her, in front of the kitchen-fire, beginning to peel the turnips for the broth for dinner; and the way she came to be doing that was, that the king's cook had run away that morning with her own true love, who was a very tall but very tipsy soldier. Then the seventeen young princes and princesses, who cried at everything that happened, cried and roared. But the Princess Alicia (who couldn't help crying a little herself) quietly called to them to be still, on account of not throwing back the queen up-stairs, who was fast getting well, and said, 'Hold your tongues, you wicked little monkeys, every one of you, while I examine baby!' Then she examined baby, and found that he hadn't broken anything; and she held cold iron to his poor dear eye, and smoothed his poor dear face, and he presently fell asleep in her arms. Then she said to the seventeen princes and princesses, 'I am afraid to let him down yet, lest he should wake and feel pain; be good, and you shall all be cooks.' They jumped for joy when they heard that, and began making themselves cooks' caps out of old newspapers. So to one she gave the salt-box, and to one she gave the barley, and to one she gave the herbs, and to one she gave the turnips, and to one she gave the carrots, and to one she gave the onions, and to one she gave the spice-box, till they were all cooks, and all running about at work, she sitting in the middle, smothered in the great coarse apron, nursing baby. By and by the broth was done; and the baby woke up, smiling, like an angel, and was trusted to the sedatest princess to hold, while the other princes and princesses were squeezed into a far-off corner to look at the Princess Alicia turning out the saucepanful of broth, for fear (as they were always getting into trouble) they should get splashed and scalded. When the broth came tumbling out, steaming beautifully, and smelling like a nosegay good to eat, they clapped their hands. That made the baby clap his hands; and that, and his looking as if he had a comic toothache, made all the princes and princesses laugh. So the Princess Alicia said, 'Laugh and be good; and after dinner we will make him a nest on the floor in a corner, and he shall sit in his nest and see a dance of eighteen cooks.' That delighted the young princes and princesses, and they ate up all the broth, and washed up all the plates and dishes, and cleared away, and pushed the table into a corner; and then they in their cooks' caps, and the Princess Alicia in the smothering coarse apron that belonged to the cook that had run away with her own true love that was the very tall but very tipsy soldier, danced a dance of eighteen cooks before the angelic baby, who forgot his swelled face and his black eye, and crowed with joy.

And so then, once more the Princess Alicia saw King Watkins the First, her father, standing in the doorway looking on, and he said, 'What have you been doing, Alicia?'

'Cooking and contriving, papa.'

'What else have you been doing, Alicia?'

'Keeping the children light-hearted, papa.'

'Where is the magic fish-bone, Alicia?

'In my pocket, papa.'

'I thought you had lost it?'

'O, no, papa!'

'Or forgotten it?'

'No, indeed, papa.'

The king then sighed so heavily, and seemed so low-spirited, and sat down so miserably, leaning his head upon his hand, and his elbow upon the kitchen-table pushed away in the corner, that the seventeen princes and princesses crept softly out of the kitchen, and left him alone with the Princess Alicia and the angelic baby.

'What is the matter, papa?'

'I am dreadfully poor, my child.'

'Have you no money at all, papa?'

'None, my child.'

'Is there no way of getting any, papa?'

'No way,' said the king. 'I have tried very hard, and I have tried all ways.'

When she heard those last words, the Princess Alicia began to put her hand into the pocket where she kept the magic fish-bone.

'Papa,' said she, 'when we have tried very hard, and tried all ways, we must have done our very, very best?'

'No doubt, Alicia.'

'When we have done our very, very best, papa, and that is not enough, then I think the right time must have come for asking help of others.' This was the very secret connected with the magic fish-bone, which she had found out for herself from the good Fairy Grandmarina's words, and which she had so often whispered to her beautiful and fashionable friend, the duchess.

So she took out of her pocket the magic fish-bone, that had been dried and rubbed and polished till it shone like mother-of-pearl; and she gave it one little kiss, and wished it was quarter-day. And immediately it WAS quarter-day; and the king's quarter's salary came rattling down the chimney, and bounced into the middle of the floor.

But this was not half of what happened, - no, not a quarter; for immediately afterwards the good Fairy Grandmarina came riding in, in a carriage and four (peacocks), with Mr. Pickles's boy up behind, dressed in silver and gold, with a cocked-hat, powdered- hair, pink silk stockings, a jewelled cane, and a nosegay. Down jumped Mr. Pickles's boy, with his cocked-hat in his hand, and wonderfully polite (being entirely changed by enchantment), and handed Grandmarina out; and there she stood, in her rich shot-silk smelling of dried lavender, fanning herself with a sparkling fan.

'Alicia, my dear,' said this charming old fairy, 'how do you do? I hope I see you pretty well? Give me a kiss.'

The Princess Alicia embraced her; and then Grandmarina turned to the king, and said rather sharply, 'Are you good?' The king said he hoped so.

'I suppose you know the reason NOW, why my god-daughter here,' kissing the princess again, 'did not apply to the fish-bone sooner?' said the fairy.

The king made a shy bow.

'Ah! but you didn't THEN?' said the fairy.

The king made a shyer bow.

'Any more reasons to ask for?' said the fairy.

The king said, No, and he was very sorry.

'Be good, then,' said the fairy, 'and live happy ever afterwards.'

Then Grandmarina waved her fan, and the queen came in most splendidly dressed; and the seventeen young princes and princesses, no longer grown out of their clothes, came in, newly fitted out from top to toe, with tucks in everything to admit of its being let out. After that, the fairy tapped the Princess Alicia with her fan; and the smothering coarse apron flew away, and she appeared exquisitely dressed, like a little bride, with a wreath of orange- flowers and a silver veil. After that, the kitchen dresser changed of itself into a wardrobe, made of beautiful woods and gold and looking glass, which was full of dresses of all sorts, all for her and all exactly fitting her. After that, the angelic baby came in, running alone, with his face and eye not a bit the worse, but much the better. Then Grandmarina begged to be introduced to the duchess; and, when the duchess was brought down, many compliments passed between them.

A little whispering took place between the fairy and the duchess; and then the fairy said out loud, 'Yes, I thought she would have told you.' Grandmarina then turned to the king and queen, and said, 'We are going in search of Prince Certainpersonio. The pleasure of your company is requested at church in half an hour precisely.' So she and the Princess Alicia got into the carriage; and Mr. Pickles's boy handed in the duchess, who sat by herself on the opposite seat; and then Mr. Pickles's boy put up the steps and got up behind, and the peacocks flew away with their tails behind.

Prince Certainpersonio was sitting by himself, eating barley-sugar, and waiting to be ninety. When he saw the peacocks, followed by the carriage, coming in at the window it immediately occurred to him that something uncommon was going to happen.

'Prince,' said Grandmarina, 'I bring you your bride.' The moment the fairy said those words, Prince Certainpersonio's face left off being sticky, and his jacket and corduroys changed to peach-bloom velvet, and his hair curled, and a cap and feather flew in like a bird and settled on his head. He got into the carriage by the fairy's invitation; and there he renewed his acquaintance with the duchess, whom he had seen before.

In the church were the prince's relations and friends, and the Princess Alicia's relations and friends, and the seventeen princes and princesses, and the baby, and a crowd of the neighbours. The marriage was beautiful beyond expression. The duchess was bridesmaid, and beheld the ceremony from the pulpit, where she was supported by the cushion of the desk.

Grandmarina gave a magnificent wedding-feast afterwards, in which there was everything and more to eat, and everything and more to drink. The wedding-cake was delicately ornamented with white satin ribbons, frosted silver, and white lilies, and was forty-two yards round.

When Grandmarina had drunk her love to the young couple, and Prince Certainpersonio had made a speech, and everybody had cried, Hip, hip, hip, hurrah! Grandmarina announced to the king and queen that in future there would be eight quarter-days in every year, except in leap-year, when there would be ten. She then turned to Certainpersonio and Alicia, and said, 'My dears, you will have thirty-five children, and they will all be good and beautiful. Seventeen of your children will be boys, and eighteen will be girls. The hair of the whole of your children will curl naturally. They will never have the measles, and will have recovered from the whooping-cough before being born.'

On hearing such good news, everybody cried out 'Hip, hip, hip, hurrah!' again.

'It only remains,' said Grandmarina in conclusion, 'to make an end of the fish-bone.'

So she took it from the hand of the Princess Alicia, and it instantly flew down the throat of the dreadful little snapping pug- dog, next door, and choked him, and he expired in convulsions.

PART III. - ROMANCE. FROM THE PEN OF LIEUT.-COL. ROBIN REDFORTH (Aged nine.)

THE subject of our present narrative would appear to have devoted himself to the pirate profession at a comparatively early age. We find him in command of a splendid schooner of one hundred guns loaded to the muzzle, ere yet he had had a party in honour of his tenth birthday.

It seems that our hero, considering himself spited by a Latin- grammar master, demanded the satisfaction due from one man of honour to another. - Not getting it, he privately withdrew his haughty spirit from such low company, bought a second-hand pocket- pistol, folded up some sandwiches in a paper bag, made a bottle of Spanish liquorice-water, and entered on a career of valour.

It were tedious to follow Boldheart (for such was his name) through the commencing stages of his story. Suffice it, that we find him bearing the rank of Capt. Boldheart, reclining in full uniform on a crimson hearth-rug spread out upon the quarter-deck of his schooner 'The Beauty,' in the China seas. It was a lovely evening; and, as his crew lay grouped about him, he favoured them with the following melody:

O landsmen are folly!
O pirates are jolly!
O diddleum Dolly,
Di!
CHORUS. - Heave yo.

The soothing effect of these animated sounds floating over the waters, as the common sailors united their rough voices to take up the rich tones of Boldheart, may be more easily conceived than described.

It was under these circumstances that the look-out at the masthead gave the word, 'Whales!'

All was now activity.

'Where away?' cried Capt. Boldheart, starting up.

'On the larboard bow, sir,' replied the fellow at the masthead, touching his hat. For such was the height of discipline on board of 'The Beauty,' that, even at that height, he was obliged to mind it, or be shot through the head.

'This adventure belongs to me,' said Boldheart. 'Boy, my harpoon. Let no man follow;' and leaping alone into his boat, the captain rowed with admirable dexterity in the direction of the monster.

All was now excitement.

'He nears him!' said an elderly seaman, following the captain through his spy-glass.

'He strikes him!' said another seaman, a mere stripling, but also with a spy-glass.

'He tows him towards us!' said another seaman, a man in the full vigour of life, but also with a spy-glass.

In fact, the captain was seen approaching, with the huge bulk following. We will not dwell on the deafening cries of 'Boldheart! Boldheart!' with which he was received, when, carelessly leaping on the quarter-deck, he presented his prize to his men. They afterwards made two thousand four hundred and seventeen pound ten and sixpence by it.

Ordering the sail to be braced up, the captain now stood W.N.W. 'The Beauty' flew rather than floated over the dark blue waters. Nothing particular occurred for a fortnight, except taking, with considerable slaughter, four Spanish galleons, and a snow from South America, all richly laden. Inaction began to tell upon the spirits of the men. Capt. Boldheart called all hands aft, and said, 'My lads, I hear there are discontented ones among ye. Let any such stand forth.'

After some murmuring, in which the expressions, 'Ay, ay, sir!' 'Union Jack,' 'Avast,' 'Starboard,' 'Port,' 'Bowsprit,' and similar indications of a mutinous undercurrent, though subdued, were audible, Bill Boozey, captain of the foretop, came out from the rest. His form was that of a giant, but he quailed under the captain's eye.

'What are your wrongs?' said the captain.

'Why, d'ye see, Capt. Boldheart,' replied the towering manner, 'I've sailed, man and boy, for many a year, but I never yet know'd the milk served out for the ship's company's teas to be so sour as 'tis aboard this craft.'

At this moment the thrilling cry, 'Man overboard!' announced to the astonished crew that Boozey, in stepping back, as the captain (in mere thoughtfulness) laid his hand upon the faithful pocket-pistol which he wore in his belt, had lost his balance, and was struggling with the foaming tide.

All was now stupefaction.

But with Capt. Boldheart, to throw off his uniform coat, regardless of the various rich orders with which it was decorated, and to plunge into the sea after the drowning giant, was the work of a moment. Maddening was the excitement when boats were lowered; intense the joy when the captain was seen holding up the drowning man with his teeth; deafening the cheering when both were restored to the main deck of 'The Beauty.' And, from the instant of his changing his wet clothes for dry ones, Capt. Boldheart had no such devoted though humble friend as William Boozey.

Boldheart now pointed to the horizon, and called the attention of his crew to the taper spars of a ship lying snug in harbour under the guns of a fort.

'She shall be ours at sunrise,' said he. 'Serve out a double allowance of grog, and prepare for action.'

All was now preparation.

When morning dawned, after a sleepless night, it was seen that the stranger was crowding on all sail to come out of the harbour and offer battle. As the two ships came nearer to each other, the stranger fired a gun and hoisted Roman colours. Boldheart then perceived her to be the Latin-grammar master's bark. Such indeed she was, and had been tacking about the world in unavailing pursuit, from the time of his first taking to a roving life.

Boldheart now addressed his men, promising to blow them up if he should feel convinced that their reputation required it, and giving orders that the Latin-grammar master should be taken alive. He then dismissed them to their quarters, and the fight began with a broadside from 'The Beauty.' She then veered around, and poured in another. 'The Scorpion' (so was the bark of the Latin-grammar master appropriately called) was not slow to return her fire; and a terrific cannonading ensued, in which the guns of 'The Beauty' did tremendous execution.

The Latin-grammar master was seen upon the poop, in the midst of the smoke and fire, encouraging his men. To do him justice, he was no craven, though his white hat, his short gray trousers, and his long snuff-coloured surtout reaching to his heels (the self-same coat in which he had spited Boldheart), contrasted most unfavourably with the brilliant uniform of the latter. At this moment, Boldheart, seizing a pike and putting himself at the head of his men, gave the word to board.

A desperate conflict ensued in the hammock-nettings, - or somewhere in about that direction, - until the Latin-grammar master, having all his masts gone, his hull and rigging shot through, and seeing Boldheart slashing a path towards him, hauled down his flag himself, gave up his sword to Boldheart, and asked for quarter. Scarce had he been put into the captain's boat, ere 'The Scorpion' went down with all on board.

On Capt. Boldheart's now assembling his men, a circumstance occurred. He found it necessary with one blow of his cutlass to kill the cook, who, having lost his brother in the late action, was making at the Latin-grammar master in an infuriated state, intent on his destruction with a carving-knife.

Capt. Boldheart then turned to the Latin-grammar master, severely reproaching him with his perfidy, and put it to his crew what they considered that a master who spited a boy deserved.

They answered with one voice, 'Death.'

'It may be so,' said the captain; 'but it shall never be said that Boldheart stained his hour of triumph with the blood of his enemy. Prepare the cutter.'

The cutter was immediately prepared.

'Without taking your life,' said the captain, 'I must yet for ever deprive you of the power of spiting other boys. I shall turn you adrift in this boat. You will find in her two oars, a compass, a bottle of rum, a small cask of water, a piece of pork, a bag of biscuit, and my Latin grammar. Go! and spite the natives, if you can find any.'

Deeply conscious of this bitter sarcasm, the unhappy wretch was put into the cutter, and was soon left far behind. He made no effort to row, but was seen lying on his back with his legs up, when last made out by the ship's telescopes.

A stiff breeze now beginning to blow, Capt. Boldheart gave orders to keep her S.S.W., easing her a little during the night by falling off a point or two W. by W., or even by W.S., if she complained much. He then retired for the night, having in truth much need of repose. In addition to the fatigues he had undergone, this brave officer had received sixteen wounds in the engagement, but had not mentioned it.

In the morning a white squall came on, and was succeeded by other squalls of various colours. It thundered and lightened heavily for six weeks.

Hurricanes then set in for two months. Waterspouts and tornadoes followed. The oldest sailor on board - and he was a very old one - had never seen such weather. 'The Beauty' lost all idea where she was, and the carpenter reported six feet two of water in the hold. Everybody fell senseless at the pumps every day.

Provisions now ran very low. Our hero put the crew on short allowance, and put himself on shorter allowance than any man in the ship. But his spirit kept him fat. In this extremity, the gratitude of Boozey, the captain of the foretop, whom our readers may remember, was truly affecting. The loving though lowly William repeatedly requested to be killed, and preserved for the captain's table.

We now approach a change of affairs. One day during a gleam of sunshine, and when the weather had moderated, the man at the masthead - too weak now to touch his hat, besides its having been blown away - called out,

'Savages!'

All was now expectation.

Presently fifteen hundred canoes, each paddled by twenty savages, were seen advancing in excellent order. They were of a light green colour (the savages were), and sang, with great energy, the following strain:

Choo a choo a choo tooth.
Muntch, muntch. Nycey!
Choo a choo a choo tooth.
Muntch, muntch. Nycey!

As the shades of night were by this time closing in, these expressions were supposed to embody this simple people's views of the evening hymn. But it too soon appeared that the song was a translation of 'For what we are going to receive,' &c.

The chief, imposingly decorated with feathers of lively colours, and having the majestic appearance of a fighting parrot, no sooner understood (he understood English perfectly) that the ship was 'The Beauty,' Capt. Boldheart, than he fell upon his face on the deck, and could not be persuaded to rise until the captain had lifted him up, and told him he wouldn't hurt him. All the rest of the savages also fell on their faces with marks of terror, and had also to be lifted up one by one. Thus the fame of the great Boldheart had gone before him, even among these children of Nature.

Turtles and oysters were now produced in astonishing numbers; and on these and yams the people made a hearty meal. After dinner the chief told Capt. Boldheart that there was better feeding up at the village, and that he would be glad to take him and his officers there. Apprehensive of treachery, Boldheart ordered his boat's crew to attend him completely armed. And well were it for other commanders if their precautions - but let us not anticipate.

When the canoes arrived at the beach, the darkness of the night was illumined by the light of an immense fire. Ordering his boat's crew (with the intrepid though illiterate William at their head) to keep close and be upon their guard, Boldheart bravely went on, arm in arm with the chief.

But how to depict the captain's surprise when he found a ring of savages singing in chorus that barbarous translation of 'For what we are going to receive,' &c., which has been given above, and dancing hand in hand round the Latin-grammar master, in a hamper with his head shaved, while two savages floured him, before putting him to the fire to be cooked!

Boldheart now took counsel with his officers on the course to be adopted. In the mean time, the miserable captive never ceased begging pardon and imploring to be delivered. On the generous Boldheart's proposal, it was at length resolved that he should not be cooked, but should be allowed to remain raw, on two conditions, namely:

1. That he should never, under any circumstances, presume to teach any boy anything any more.

2. That, if taken back to England, he should pass his life in travelling to find out boys who wanted their exercises done, and should do their exercises for those boys for nothing, and never say a word about it.

Drawing the sword from its sheath, Boldheart swore him to these conditions on its shining blade. The prisoner wept bitterly, and appeared acutely to feel the errors of his past career.

The captain then ordered his boat's crew to make ready for a volley, and after firing to re-load quickly. 'And expect a score or two on ye to go head over heels,' murmured William Boozey; 'for I'm a-looking at ye.' With those words, the derisive though deadly William took a good aim.

'Fire!'

The ringing voice of Boldheart was lost in the report of the guns and the screeching of the savages. Volley after volley awakened the numerous echoes. Hundreds of savages were killed, hundreds wounded, and thousands ran howling into the woods. The Latin- grammar master had a spare night-cap lent him, and a long-tail coat, which he wore hind side before. He presented a ludicrous though pitiable appearance, and serve him right.

We now find Capt. Boldheart, with this rescued wretch on board, standing off for other islands. At one of these, not a cannibal island, but a pork and vegetable one, he married (only in fun on his part) the king's daughter. Here he rested some time, receiving from the natives great quantities of precious stones, gold dust, elephants' teeth, and sandal wood, and getting very rich. This, too, though he almost every day made presents of enormous value to his men.

The ship being at length as full as she could hold of all sorts of valuable things, Boldheart gave orders to weigh the anchor, and turn 'The Beauty's' head towards England. These orders were obeyed with three cheers; and ere the sun went down full many a hornpipe had been danced on deck by the uncouth though agile William.

We next find Capt. Boldheart about three leagues off Madeira, surveying through his spy-glass a stranger of suspicious appearance making sail towards him. On his firing a gun ahead of her to bring her to, she ran up a flag, which he instantly recognised as the flag from the mast in the back-garden at home.

Inferring from this, that his father had put to sea to seek his long-lost son, the captain sent his own boat on board the stranger to inquire if this was so, and, if so, whether his father's intentions were strictly honourable. The boat came back with a present of greens and fresh meat, and reported that the stranger was 'The Family,' of twelve hundred tons, and had not only the captain's father on board, but also his mother, with the majority of his aunts and uncles, and all his cousins. It was further reported to Boldheart that the whole of these relations had expressed themselves in a becoming manner, and were anxious to embrace him and thank him for the glorious credit he had done them. Boldheart at once invited them to breakfast next morning on board 'The Beauty,' and gave orders for a brilliant ball that should last all day.

It was in the course of the night that the captain discovered the hopelessness of reclaiming the Latin-grammar master. That thankless traitor was found out, as the two ships lay near each other, communicating with 'The Family' by signals, and offering to give up Boldheart. He was hanged at the yard-arm the first thing in the morning, after having it impressively pointed out to him by Boldheart that this was what spiters came to.

The meeting between the captain and his parents was attended with tears. His uncles and aunts would have attended their meeting with tears too, but he wasn't going to stand that. His cousins were very much astonished by the size of his ship and the discipline of his men, and were greatly overcome by the splendour of his uniform. He kindly conducted them round the vessel, and pointed out everything worthy of notice. He also fired his hundred guns, and found it amusing to witness their alarm.

The entertainment surpassed everything ever seen on board ship, and lasted from ten in the morning until seven the next morning. Only one disagreeable incident occurred. Capt. Boldheart found himself obliged to put his cousin Tom in irons, for being disrespectful. On the boy's promising amendment, however, he was humanely released after a few hours' close confinement.

Boldheart now took his mother down into the great cabin, and asked after the young lady with whom, it was well known to the world, he was in love. His mother replied that the object of his affections was then at school at Margate, for the benefit of sea-bathing (it was the month of September), but that she feared the young lady's friends were still opposed to the union. Boldheart at once resolved, if necessary, to bombard the town.

Taking the command of his ship with this intention, and putting all but fighting men on board 'The Family,' with orders to that vessel to keep in company, Boldheart soon anchored in Margate Roads. Here he went ashore well-armed, and attended by his boat's crew (at their head the faithful though ferocious William), and demanded to see the mayor, who came out of his office.

'Dost know the name of yon ship, mayor?' asked Boldheart fiercely.

'No,' said the mayor, rubbing his eyes, which he could scarce believe, when he saw the goodly vessel riding at anchor.

'She is named "The Beauty,"' said the captain.

'Hah!' exclaimed the mayor, with a start. 'And you, then, are Capt. Boldheart?'

'The same.'

A pause ensued. The mayor trembled.

'Now, mayor,' said the captain, 'choose! Help me to my bride, or be bombarded.'

The mayor begged for two hours' grace, in which to make inquiries respecting the young lady. Boldheart accorded him but one; and during that one placed William Boozey sentry over him, with a drawn sword, and instructions to accompany him wherever he went, and to run him through the body if he showed a sign of playing false.

At the end of the hour the mayor re-appeared more dead than alive, closely waited on by Boozey more alive than dead.

'Captain,' said the mayor, 'I have ascertained that the young lady is going to bathe. Even now she waits her turn for a machine. The tide is low, though rising. I, in one of our town-boats, shall not be suspected. When she comes forth in her bathing-dress into the shallow water from behind the hood of the machine, my boat shall intercept her and prevent her return. Do you the rest.'

'Mayor,' returned Capt. Boldheart, 'thou hast saved thy town.'

The captain then signalled his boat to take him off, and, steering her himself, ordered her crew to row towards the bathing-ground, and there to rest upon their oars. All happened as had been arranged. His lovely bride came forth, the mayor glided in behind her, she became confused, and had floated out of her depth, when, with one skilful touch of the rudder and one quivering stroke from the boat's crew, her adoring Boldheart held her in his strong arms. There her shrieks of terror were changed to cries of joy.

Before 'The Beauty' could get under way, the hoisting of all the flags in the town and harbour, and the ringing of all the bells, announced to the brave Boldheart that he had nothing to fear. He therefore determined to be married on the spot, and signalled for a clergyman and clerk, who came off promptly in a sailing-boat named 'The Skylark.' Another great entertainment was then given on board 'The Beauty,' in the midst of which the mayor was called out by a messenger. He returned with the news that government had sent down to know whether Capt. Boldheart, in acknowledgment of the great services he had done his country by being a pirate, would consent to be made a lieutenant-colonel. For himself he would have spurned the worthless boon; but his bride wished it, and he consented.

Only one thing further happened before the good ship 'Family' was dismissed, with rich presents to all on board. It is painful to record (but such is human nature in some cousins) that Capt. Boldheart's unmannerly Cousin Tom was actually tied up to receive three dozen with a rope's end 'for cheekiness and making game,' when Capt. Boldheart's lady begged for him, and he was spared. 'The Beauty' then refitted, and the captain and his bride departed for the Indian Ocean to enjoy themselves for evermore.

PART IV. - ROMANCE FROM THE PEN OF MISS NETTIE ASHFORD (Aged half- past six.)

THERE is a country, which I will show you when I get into maps, where the children have everything their own way. It is a most delightful country to live in. The grown-up people are obliged to obey the children, and are never allowed to sit up to supper, except on their birthdays. The children order them to make jam and jelly and marmalade, and tarts and pies and puddings, and all manner of pastry. If they say they won't, they are put in the corner till they do. They are sometimes allowed to have some; but when they have some, they generally have powders given them afterwards.

One of the inhabitants of this country, a truly sweet young creature of the name of Mrs. Orange, had the misfortune to be sadly plagued by her numerous family. Her parents required a great deal of looking after, and they had connections and companions who were scarcely ever out of mischief. So Mrs. Orange said to herself, 'I really cannot be troubled with these torments any longer: I must put them all to school.'

Mrs. Orange took off her pinafore, and dressed herself very nicely, and took up her baby, and went out to call upon another lady of the name of Mrs. Lemon, who kept a preparatory establishment. Mrs. Orange stood upon the scraper to pull at the bell, and give a ring- ting-ting.

Mrs. Lemon's neat little housemaid, pulling up her socks as she came along the passage, answered the ring-ting-ting.

'Good-morning,' said Mrs. Orange. 'Fine day. How do you do? Mrs. Lemon at home!'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'Will you say Mrs. Orange and baby?'

'Yes, ma'am. Walk in.'

Mrs. Orange's baby was a very fine one, and real wax all over. Mrs. Lemon's baby was leather and bran. However, when Mrs. Lemon came into the drawing-room with her baby in her arms, Mrs. Orange said politely, 'Good-morning. Fine day. How do you do? And how is little Tootleumboots?'

'Well, she is but poorly. Cutting her teeth, ma'am,' said Mrs. Lemon.

'O, indeed, ma'am!' said Mrs. Orange. 'No fits, I hope?'

'No, ma'am.'

'How many teeth has she, ma'am?'

'Five, ma'am.'

'My Emilia, ma'am, has eight,' said Mrs. Orange. 'Shall we lay them on the mantelpiece side by side, while we converse?'

'By all means, ma'am,' said Mrs. Lemon. 'Hem!'

'The first question is, ma'am,' said Mrs. Orange, 'I don't bore you?'

'Not in the least, ma'am,' said Mrs. Lemon. 'Far from it, I assure you.'

'Then pray HAVE you,' said Mrs. Orange, - 'HAVE you any vacancies?'

'Yes, ma'am. How many might you require?'

'Why, the truth is, ma'am,' said Mrs. Orange, 'I have come to the conclusion that my children,' - O, I forgot to say that they call the grown-up people children in that country! - 'that my children are getting positively too much for me. Let me see. Two parents, two intimate friends of theirs, one godfather, two godmothers, and an aunt. HAVE you as many as eight vacancies?'

'I have just eight, ma'am,' said Mrs. Lemon.

'Most fortunate! Terms moderate, I think?'

'Very moderate, ma'am.'

'Diet good, I believe?'

'Excellent, ma'am.'

'Unlimited?'

'Unlimited.'

'Most satisfactory! Corporal punishment dispensed with?'

'Why, we do occasionally shake,' said Mrs. Lemon, 'and we have slapped. But only in extreme cases.'

'COULD I, ma'am,' said Mrs. Orange, - 'COULD I see the establishment?'

'With the greatest of pleasure, ma'am,' said Mrs. Lemon.

Mrs. Lemon took Mrs. Orange into the schoolroom, where there were a number of pupils. 'Stand up, children,' said Mrs. Lemon; and they all stood up.

Mrs. Orange whispered to Mrs. Lemon, 'There is a pale, bald child, with red whiskers, in disgrace. Might I ask what he has done?'

'Come here, White,' said Mrs. Lemon, 'and tell this lady what you have been doing.'

'Betting on horses,' said White sulkily.

'Are you sorry for it, you naughty child?' said Mrs. Lemon.

'No,' said White. 'Sorry to lose, but shouldn't be sorry to win.'

'There's a vicious boy for you, ma'am,' said Mrs. Lemon. 'Go along with you, sir. This is Brown, Mrs. Orange. O, a sad case, Brown's! Never knows when he has had enough. Greedy. How is your gout, sir?'

'Bad,' said Brown.

'What else can you expect?' said Mrs. Lemon. 'Your stomach is the size of two. Go and take exercise directly. Mrs. Black, come here to me. Now, here is a child, Mrs. Orange, ma'am, who is always at play. She can't be kept at home a single day together; always gadding about and spoiling her clothes. Play, play, play, play, from morning to night, and to morning again. How can she expect to improve?'

'Don't expect to improve,' sulked Mrs. Black. 'Don't want to.'

'There is a specimen of her temper, ma'am,' said Mrs. Lemon. 'To see her when she is tearing about, neglecting everything else, you would suppose her to be at least good-humoured. But bless you! ma'am, she is as pert and flouncing a minx as ever you met with in all your days!'

'You must have a great deal of trouble with them, ma'am,' said Mrs. Orange.

'Ah, I have, indeed, ma'am!' said Mrs. Lemon. 'What with their tempers, what with their quarrels, what with their never knowing what's good for them, and what with their always wanting to domineer, deliver me from these unreasonable children!'

'Well, I wish you good-morning, ma'am,' said Mrs. Orange.

'Well, I wish you good-morning, ma'am,' said Mrs. Lemon.

So Mrs. Orange took up her baby and went home, and told the family that plagued her so that they were all going to be sent to school. They said they didn't want to go to school; but she packed up their boxes, and packed them off.

'O dear me, dear me! Rest and be thankful!' said Mrs. Orange, throwing herself back in her little arm-chair. 'Those troublesome troubles are got rid of, please the pigs!'

Just then another lady, named Mrs. Alicumpaine, came calling at the street-door with a ring-ting-ting.

'My dear Mrs. Alicumpaine,' said Mrs. Orange, 'how do you do? Pray stay to dinner. We have but a simple joint of sweet-stuff, followed by a plain dish of bread and treacle; but, if you will take us as you find us, it will be SO kind!'

'Don't mention it,' said Mrs. Alicumpaine. 'I shall be too glad.
But what do you think I have come for, ma'am? Guess, ma'am.'

'I really cannot guess, ma'am,' said Mrs. Orange.

'Why, I am going to have a small juvenile party to-night,' said Mrs. Alicumpaine; 'and if you and Mr. Orange and baby would but join us, we should be complete.'

'More than charmed, I am sure!' said Mrs. Orange.

'So kind of you!' said Mrs. Alicumpaine. 'But I hope the children won't bore you?'

'Dear things! Not at all,' said Mrs. Orange. 'I dote upon them.'

Mr. Orange here came home from the city; and he came, too, with a ring-ting-ting.

'James love,' said Mrs. Orange, 'you look tired. What has been doing in the city to-day?'

'Trap, bat, and ball, my dear,' said Mr. Orange, 'and it knocks a man up.'

'That dreadfully anxious city, ma'am,' said Mrs. Orange to Mrs.
Alicumpaine; 'so wearing, is it not?'

'O, so trying!' said Mrs. Alicumpaine. 'John has lately been speculating in the peg-top ring; and I often say to him at night, "John, IS the result worth the wear and tear?"'

Dinner was ready by this time: so they sat down to dinner; and while Mr. Orange carved the joint of sweet-stuff, he said, 'It's a poor heart that never rejoices. Jane, go down to the cellar, and fetch a bottle of the Upest ginger-beer.'

At tea-time, Mr. and Mrs. Orange, and baby, and Mrs. Alicumpaine went off to Mrs. Alicumpaine's house. The children had not come yet; but the ball-room was ready for them, decorated with paper flowers.

'How very sweet!' said Mrs. Orange. 'The dear things! How pleased they will be!'

'I don't care for children myself,' said Mr. Orange, gaping.

'Not for girls?' said Mrs. Alicumpaine. 'Come! you care for girls?'

Mr. Orange shook his head, and gaped again. 'Frivolous and vain, ma'am.'

'My dear James,' cried Mrs. Orange, who had been peeping about, 'do look here. Here's the supper for the darlings, ready laid in the room behind the folding-doors. Here's their little pickled salmon, I do declare! And here's their little salad, and their little roast beef and fowls, and their little pastry, and their wee, wee, wee champagne!'

'Yes, I thought it best, ma'am,' said Mrs. Alicumpaine, 'that they should have their supper by themselves. Our table is in the corner here, where the gentlemen can have their wineglass of negus, and their egg-sandwich, and their quiet game at beggar-my-neighbour, and look on. As for us, ma'am, we shall have quite enough to do to manage the company.'

'O, indeed, you may say so! Quite enough, ma'am,' said Mrs. Orange.

The company began to come. The first of them was a stout boy, with a white top-knot and spectacles. The housemaid brought him in and said, 'Compliments, and at what time was he to be fetched!' Mrs. Alicumpaine said, 'Not a moment later than ten. How do you do, sir? Go and sit down.' Then a number of other children came; boys by themselves, and girls by themselves, and boys and girls together. They didn't behave at all well. Some of them looked through quizzing-glasses at others, and said, 'Who are those? Don't know them.' Some of them looked through quizzing-glasses at others, and said, 'How do?' Some of them had cups of tea or coffee handed to them by others, and said, 'Thanks; much!' A good many boys stood about, and felt their shirt-collars. Four tiresome fat boys WOULD stand in the doorway, and talk about the newspapers, till Mrs. Alicumpaine went to them and said, 'My dears, I really cannot allow you to prevent people from coming in. I shall be truly sorry to do it; but, if you put yourself in everybody's way, I must positively send you home.' One boy, with a beard and a large white waistcoat, who stood straddling on the hearth-rug warming his coat-tails, WAS sent home. 'Highly incorrect, my dear,' said Mrs. Alicumpaine, handing him out of the room, 'and I cannot permit it.'

There was a children's band, - harp, cornet, and piano, - and Mrs. Alicumpaine and Mrs. Orange bustled among the children to persuade them to take partners and dance. But they were so obstinate! For quite a long time they would not be persuaded to take partners and dance. Most of the boys said, 'Thanks; much! But not at present.' And most of the rest of the boys said, 'Thanks; much! But never do.'

'O, these children are very wearing!' said Mrs. Alicumpaine to Mrs. Orange.

'Dear things! I dote upon them; but they ARE wearing,' said Mrs. Orange to Mrs. Alicumpaine.

At last they did begin in a slow and melancholy way to slide about to the music; though even then they wouldn't mind what they were told, but would have this partner, and wouldn't have that partner, and showed temper about it. And they wouldn't smile, - no, not on any account they wouldn't; but, when the music stopped, went round and round the room in dismal twos, as if everybody else was dead.

'O, it's very hard indeed to get these vexing children to be entertained!' said Mrs. Alicumpaine to Mrs. Orange.

'I dote upon the darlings; but it is hard,' said Mrs. Orange to Mrs. Alicumpaine.

They were trying children, that's the truth. First, they wouldn't sing when they were asked; and then, when everybody fully believed they wouldn't, they would. 'If you serve us so any more, my love,' said Mrs. Alicumpaine to a tall child, with a good deal of white back, in mauve silk trimmed with lace, 'it will be my painful privilege to offer you a bed, and to send you to it immediately.'

The girls were so ridiculously dressed, too, that they were in rags before supper. How could the boys help treading on their trains? And yet when their trains were trodden on, they often showed temper again, and looked as black, they did! However, they all seemed to be pleased when Mrs. Alicumpaine said, 'Supper is ready, children!' And they went crowding and pushing in, as if they had had dry bread for dinner.

'How are the children getting on?' said Mr. Orange to Mrs. Orange, when Mrs. Orange came to look after baby. Mrs. Orange had left baby on a shelf near Mr. Orange while he played at beggar-my- neighbour, and had asked him to keep his eye upon her now and then.

'Most charmingly, my dear!' said Mrs. Orange. 'So droll to see their little flirtations and jealousies! Do come and look!'

'Much obliged to you, my dear,' said Mr. Orange; 'but I don't care about children myself.'

So Mrs. Orange, having seen that baby was safe, went back without Mr. Orange to the room where the children were having supper.

'What are they doing now?' said Mrs. Orange to Mrs. Alicumpaine.

'They are making speeches, and playing at parliament,' said Mrs. Alicumpaine to Mrs. Orange.

On hearing this, Mrs. Orange set off once more back again to Mr. Orange, and said, 'James dear, do come. The children are playing at parliament.'

'Thank you, my dear,' said Mr. Orange, 'but I don't care about parliament myself.'

So Mrs. Orange went once again without Mr. Orange to the room where the children were having supper, to see them playing at parliament. And she found some of the boys crying, 'Hear, hear, hear!' while other boys cried 'No, no!' and others, 'Question!' 'Spoke!' and all sorts of nonsense that ever you heard. Then one of those tiresome fat boys who had stopped the doorway told them he was on his legs (as if they couldn't see that he wasn't on his head, or on his anything else) to explain, and that, with the permission of his honourable friend, if he would allow him to call him so (another tiresome boy bowed), he would proceed to explain. Then he went on for a long time in a sing-song (whatever he meant), did this troublesome fat boy, about that he held in his hand a glass; and about that he had come down to that house that night to discharge what he would call a public duty; and about that, on the present occasion, he would lay his hand (his other hand) upon his heart, and would tell honourable gentlemen that he was about to open the door to general approval. Then he opened the door by saying, 'To our hostess!' and everybody else said 'To our hostess!' and then there were cheers. Then another tiresome boy started up in sing- song, and then half a dozen noisy and nonsensical boys at once. But at last Mrs. Alicumpaine said, 'I cannot have this din. Now, children, you have played at parliament very nicely; but parliament gets tiresome after a little while, and it's time you left off, for you will soon be fetched.'

After another dance (with more tearing to rags than before supper), they began to be fetched; and you will be very glad to be told that the tiresome fat boy who had been on his legs was walked off first without any ceremony. When they were all gone, poor Mrs. Alicumpaine dropped upon a sofa, and said to Mrs. Orange, 'These children will be the death of me at last, ma'am, - they will indeed!'

'I quite adore them, ma'am,' said Mrs. Orange; 'but they DO want variety.'

Mr. Orange got his hat, and Mrs. Orange got her bonnet and her baby, and they set out to walk home. They had to pass Mrs. Lemon's preparatory establishment on their way.

'I wonder, James dear,' said Mrs. Orange, looking up at the window, 'whether the precious children are asleep!'

'I don't care much whether they are or not, myself,' said Mr. Orange.

'James dear!'

'You dote upon them, you know,' said Mr. Orange. 'That's another thing.'

'I do,' said Mrs. Orange rapturously. 'O, I DO!'

'I don't,' said Mr. Orange.

'But I was thinking, James love,' said Mrs. Orange, pressing his arm, 'whether our dear, good, kind Mrs. Lemon would like them to stay the holidays with her.'

'If she was paid for it, I daresay she would,' said Mr. Orange.

'I adore them, James,' said Mrs. Orange, 'but SUPPOSE we pay her, then!'

This was what brought that country to such perfection, and made it such a delightful place to live in. The grown-up people (that would be in other countries) soon left off being allowed any holidays after Mr. and Mrs. Orange tried the experiment; and the children (that would be in other countries) kept them at school as long as ever they lived, and made them do whatever they were told.

THE END OF
Holiday Romance

THE HOLLY-TREE—THREE BRANCHES

FIRST BRANCH—MYSELF

I have kept one secret in the course of my life. I am a bashful man. Nobody would suppose it, nobody ever does suppose it, nobody ever did suppose it, but I am naturally a bashful man. This is the secret which I have never breathed until now.

I might greatly move the reader by some account of the innumerable places I have not been to, the innumerable people I have not called upon or received, the innumerable social evasions I have been guilty of, solely because I am by original constitution and character a bashful man. But I will leave the reader unmoved, and proceed with the object before me.

That object is to give a plain account of my travels and discoveries in the Holly-Tree Inn; in which place of good entertainment for man and beast I was once snowed up.

It happened in the memorable year when I parted for ever from Angela Leath, whom I was shortly to have married, on making the discovery that she preferred my bosom friend. From our school-days I had freely admitted Edwin, in my own mind, to be far superior to myself; and, though I was grievously wounded at heart, I felt the preference to be natural, and tried to forgive them both. It was under these circumstances that I resolved to go to America—on my way to the Devil.

Communicating my discovery neither to Angela nor to Edwin, but resolving to write each of them an affecting letter conveying my blessing and forgiveness, which the steam-tender for shore should carry to the post when I myself should be bound for the New World, far beyond recall,—I say, locking up my grief in my own breast, and consoling myself as I could with the prospect of being generous, I quietly left all I held dear, and started on the desolate journey I have mentioned.

The dead winter-time was in full dreariness when I left my chambers for ever, at five o'clock in the morning. I had shaved by candle-light, of course, and was miserably cold, and experienced that general all-pervading sensation of getting up to be hanged which I have usually found inseparable from untimely rising under such circumstances.

How well I remember the forlorn aspect of Fleet Street when I came out of the Temple! The street-lamps flickering in the gusty north-east wind, as if the very gas were contorted with cold; the white-topped houses; the bleak, star-lighted sky; the market people and other early stragglers, trotting to circulate their almost frozen blood; the hospitable light and warmth of the few coffee-shops and public-houses that were open for such customers; the hard, dry, frosty rime with which the air was charged (the wind had already beaten it into every crevice), and which lashed my face like a steel whip.

It wanted nine days to the end of the month, and end of the year. The Post-office packet for the United States was to depart from Liverpool, weather permitting, on the first of the ensuing month, and I had the intervening time on my hands. I had taken this into consideration, and had resolved to make a visit to a certain spot (which I need not name) on the farther borders of Yorkshire. It was endeared to me by my having first seen Angela at a farmhouse in that place, and my melancholy was gratified by the idea of taking a wintry leave of it before my expatriation. I ought to explain, that, to avoid being sought out before my resolution should have been rendered irrevocable by being carried into full effect, I had written to Angela overnight, in my usual manner, lamenting that urgent business, of which she should know all particulars by-and-by—took me unexpectedly away from her for a week or ten days.

There was no Northern Railway at that time, and in its place there were stage-coaches; which I occasionally find myself, in common with some other people, affecting to lament now, but which everybody dreaded as a very serious penance then. I had secured the box-seat on the fastest of these, and my business in Fleet Street was to get into a cab with my portmanteau, so to make the best of my way to the Peacock at Islington, where I was to join this coach. But when one of our Temple watchmen, who carried my portmanteau into Fleet Street for me, told me about the huge blocks of ice that had for some days past been floating in the river, having closed up in the night, and made a walk from the Temple Gardens over to the Surrey shore, I began to ask myself the question, whether the box-seat would not be likely to put a sudden and a frosty end to my unhappiness. I was heart-broken, it is true, and yet I was not quite so far gone as to wish to be frozen to death.

When I got up to the Peacock,—where I found everybody drinking hot purl, in self-preservation,—I asked if there were an inside seat to spare. I then discovered that, inside or out, I was the only passenger. This gave me a still livelier idea of the great inclemency of the weather, since that coach always loaded particularly well. However, I took a little purl (which I found uncommonly good), and got into the coach. When I was seated, they built me up with straw to the waist, and, conscious of making a rather ridiculous appearance, I began my journey.

It was still dark when we left the Peacock. For a little while, pale, uncertain ghosts of houses and trees appeared and vanished, and then it was hard, black, frozen day. People were lighting their fires; smoke was mounting straight up high into the rarified air; and we were rattling for Highgate Archway over the hardest ground I have ever heard the ring of iron shoes on. As we got into the country, everything seemed to have grown old and gray. The roads, the trees, thatched roofs of cottages and homesteads, the ricks in farmers' yards. Out-door work was abandoned, horse-troughs at roadside inns were frozen hard, no stragglers lounged about, doors were close shut, little turnpike houses had blazing fires inside, and children (even turnpike people have children, and seem to like them) rubbed the frost from the little panes of glass with their chubby arms, that their bright eyes might catch a glimpse of the solitary coach going by. I don't know when the snow begin to set in; but I know that we were changing horses somewhere when I heard the guard remark, "That the old lady up in the sky was picking her geese pretty hard to-day." Then, indeed, I found the white down falling fast and thick.

The lonely day wore on, and I dozed it out, as a lonely traveller does. I was warm and valiant after eating and drinking,—particularly after dinner; cold and depressed at all other times. I was always bewildered as to time and place, and always more or less out of my senses. The coach and horses seemed to execute in chorus Auld Lang Syne, without a moment's intermission. They kept the time and tune with the greatest regularity, and rose into the swell at the beginning of the Refrain, with a precision that worried me to death. While we changed horses, the guard and coachman went stumping up and down the road, printing off their shoes in the snow, and poured so much liquid consolation into themselves without being any the worse for it, that I began to confound them, as it darkened again, with two great white casks standing on end. Our horses tumbled down in solitary places, and we got them up,—which was the pleasantest variety *I* had, for it warmed me. And it snowed and snowed, and still it snowed, and never left off snowing. All night long we went on in this manner. Thus we came round the clock, upon the Great North Road, to the performance of Auld Lang Syne by day again. And it snowed and snowed, and still it snowed, and never left off snowing.

I forget now where we were at noon on the second day, and where we ought to have been; but I know that we were scores of miles behindhand, and that our case was growing worse every hour. The drift was becoming prodigiously deep; landmarks were getting snowed out; the road and the fields were all one; instead of having fences and hedge-rows to guide us, we went crunching on over an unbroken surface of ghastly white that might sink beneath us at any moment and drop us down a whole hillside. Still the coachman and guard—who kept together on the box, always in council, and looking well about them—made out the track with astonishing sagacity.

When we came in sight of a town, it looked, to my fancy, like a large drawing on a slate, with abundance of slate-pencil expended on the churches and houses where the snow lay thickest. When we came within a town, and found the church clocks all stopped, the dial-faces choked with snow, and the inn-signs blotted out, it seemed as if the whole place were overgrown with white moss. As to the coach, it was a mere snowball; similarly, the men and boys who ran along beside us to the town's end, turning our clogged wheels and encouraging our horses, were men and boys of snow; and the bleak wild solitude to which they at last dismissed us was a snowy Sahara. One would have thought this enough: notwithstanding which, I pledge my word that it snowed and snowed, and still it snowed, and never left off snowing.

We performed Auld Lang Syne the whole day; seeing nothing, out of towns and villages, but the track of stoats, hares, and foxes, and sometimes of birds. At nine o'clock at night, on a Yorkshire moor, a cheerful burst from our horn, and a welcome sound of talking, with a glimmering and moving about of lanterns, roused me from my drowsy state. I found that we were going to change.

They helped me out, and I said to a waiter, whose bare head became as white as King Lear's in a single minute, "What Inn is this?"

"The Holly-Tree, sir," said he.

"Upon my word, I believe," said I, apologetically, to the guard and coachman, "that I must stop here."

Now the landlord, and the landlady, and the ostler, and the post-boy, and all the stable authorities, had already asked the coachman, to the wide-eyed interest of all the rest of the establishment, if he meant to go on. The coachman had already replied, “Yes, he’d take her through it,”—meaning by Her the coach,—“if so be as George would stand by him.” George was the guard, and he had already sworn that he would stand by him. So the helpers were already getting the horses out.

My declaring myself beaten, after this parley, was not an announcement without preparation. Indeed, but for the way to the announcement being smoothed by the parley, I more than doubt whether, as an innately bashful man, I should have had the confidence to make it. As it was, it received the approval even of the guard and coachman. Therefore, with many confirmations of my inclining, and many remarks from one bystander to another, that the gentleman could go for’ard by the mail to-morrow, whereas to-night he would only be froze, and where was the good of a gentleman being froze—ah, let alone buried alive (which latter clause was added by a humorous helper as a joke at my expense, and was extremely well received), I saw my portmanteau got out stiff, like a frozen body; did the handsome thing by the guard and coachman; wished them good-night and a prosperous journey; and, a little ashamed of myself, after all, for leaving them to fight it out alone, followed the landlord, landlady, and waiter of the Holly-Tree up-stairs.

I thought I had never seen such a large room as that into which they showed me. It had five windows, with dark red curtains that would have absorbed the light of a general illumination; and there were complications of drapery at the top of the curtains, that went wandering about the wall in a most extraordinary manner. I asked for a smaller room, and they told me there was no smaller room.

They could screen me in, however, the landlord said. They brought a great old japanned screen, with natives (Japanese, I suppose) engaged in a variety of idiotic pursuits all over it; and left me roasting whole before an immense fire.

My bedroom was some quarter of a mile off, up a great staircase at the end of a long gallery; and nobody knows what a misery this is to a bashful man who would rather not meet people on the stairs. It was the grimmest room I have ever had the nightmare in; and all the furniture, from the four posts of the bed to the two old silver candle-sticks, was tall, high-shouldered, and spindle-waisted. Below, in my sitting-room, if I looked round my screen, the wind rushed at me like a mad bull; if I stuck to my arm-chair, the fire scorched me to the colour of a new brick. The chimney-piece was very high, and there was a bad glass—what I may call a wavy glass—above it, which, when I stood up, just showed me my anterior phrenological developments,—and these never look well, in any subject, cut short off at the eyebrow. If I stood with my back to the fire, a gloomy vault of darkness above and beyond the screen insisted on being looked at; and, in its dim remoteness, the drapery of the ten curtains of the five windows went twisting and creeping about, like a nest of gigantic worms.

I suppose that what I observe in myself must be observed by some other men of similar character in *themselves*; therefore I am emboldened to mention, that, when I travel, I never arrive at a place but I immediately want to go away from it. Before I had finished my supper of broiled fowl and mulled port, I had impressed upon the waiter in detail my arrangements for departure in the morning. Breakfast and bill at eight. Fly at nine. Two horses, or, if needful, even four.

Tired though I was, the night appeared about a week long. In cases of nightmare, I thought of Angela, and felt more depressed than ever by the reflection that I was on the shortest road to Gretna Green. What had *I* to do with Gretna Green? I was not going *that* way to the Devil, but by the American route, I remarked in my bitterness.

In the morning I found that it was snowing still, that it had snowed all night, and that I was snowed up. Nothing could get out of that spot on the moor, or could come at it, until the road had been cut out by labourers from the market-town. When they might cut their way to the Holly-Tree nobody could tell me.

It was now Christmas-eve. I should have had a dismal Christmas-time of it anywhere, and consequently that did not so much matter; still, being snowed up was like dying of frost, a thing I had not bargained for. I felt very lonely. Yet I could no more have proposed to the landlord and landlady to admit me to their society (though I should have liked it—very much) than I could have asked them to present me with a piece of plate. Here my great secret, the real bashfulness of my character, is to be observed. Like most bashful men, I judge of other people as if they were bashful too. Besides being far too shamefaced to make the proposal myself, I really had a delicate misgiving that it would be in the last degree disconcerting to them.

Trying to settle down, therefore, in my solitude, I first of all asked what books there were in the house. The waiter brought me a *Book of Roads*, two or three old Newspapers, a little Song-Book, terminating in a collection of Toasts and Sentiments, a little Jest-Book, an odd volume of *Peregrine Pickle*, and the *Sentimental Journey*. I knew every word of the two last already, but I read them through again, then tried to hum all the songs (Auld Lang Syne was among them); went entirely through the jokes,—in which I found a fund of melancholy adapted to my state of mind; proposed all the toasts, enunciated all the sentiments, and mastered the papers. The latter had nothing in them but stock advertisements, a meeting about a county rate, and a highway robbery. As I am a greedy reader, I could not make this supply hold out until night; it was exhausted by tea-time. Being then entirely cast upon my own resources, I got through an hour in considering what to do next. Ultimately, it came into my head (from which I was anxious by any means to exclude Angela and Edwin), that I would endeavour to recall my experience of Inns, and would try how long it lasted me. I stirred the fire, moved my chair a little to one side of the screen,—not daring to go far, for I knew the wind was waiting to make a rush at me, I could hear it growling,—and began.

My first impressions of an Inn dated from the Nursery; consequently I went back to the Nursery for a starting-point, and found myself at the knee of a sallow woman with a fishy eye, an aquiline nose, and a green gown, whose specially was a dismal narrative of a landlord by the roadside, whose visitors unaccountably disappeared for many years, until it was discovered that the pursuit of his life had been to convert them into pies. For the better devotion of himself to this branch of industry, he had constructed a secret door behind the head of the bed; and when the visitor (oppressed with pie) had fallen asleep, this wicked landlord would look softly in with a lamp in one hand and a knife in the other, would cut his throat, and would make him into pies; for which purpose he had coppers, underneath a trap-door, always boiling; and rolled out his pastry in the dead of the night. Yet even he was not insensible to the stings of conscience, for he never went to sleep without being heard to mutter, “Too much pepper!” which was eventually the cause of his being brought to justice. I had no sooner disposed of this criminal than there started up another of the same period, whose profession was originally house-breaking; in the pursuit of which art he had had his right ear chopped off one night, as he was burglariously getting in at a window, by a brave and lovely servant-maid (whom the aquiline-nosed woman, though not at all answering the description, always mysteriously implied to be herself). After several years, this brave and lovely servant-maid was married to the landlord of a country Inn; which landlord had this remarkable characteristic, that he always wore a silk nightcap, and never would on any consideration take it off. At last, one night, when he was fast asleep, the brave and lovely woman lifted up his silk nightcap on the right side, and found that he had no ear there; upon which she sagaciously perceived that he was the clipped housebreaker, who had married her with the intention of putting her to death. She immediately heated the poker and terminated his career, for which she was taken to King George upon his throne, and received the compliments of royalty on her great discretion and valour. This same narrator, who had a Ghoulish pleasure, I have long been persuaded, in terrifying me to the utmost confines of my reason, had another authentic anecdote within her own experience, founded, I now believe, upon *Raymond and Agnes, or the Bleeding Nun*. She said it happened to her brother-in-law, who was immensely rich,—which my father was not; and immensely tall,—which my father was not. It was always a point with this Ghoul to present my clearest relations and friends to my youthful mind under circumstances of disparaging contrast. The brother-in-law was riding once through a forest on a magnificent horse (we had no magnificent horse at our house), attended by a favourite and valuable Newfoundland dog (we had no dog), when he found himself benighted, and came to an Inn. A dark woman opened the door, and he asked her if he could have a bed there. She answered yes, and put his horse in the stable, and took him into a room where there were two dark men. While he was at supper, a parrot in the room began to talk, saying, “Blood, blood! Wipe up the blood!” Upon which one of the dark men wrung the parrot’s neck, and said he was fond of roasted parrots, and he meant to have this one for breakfast in the morning. After eating and drinking heartily, the immensely rich, tall brother-in-law went up to bed; but he was rather vexed, because they had shut his dog in the stable, saying that they never allowed dogs in the house. He sat very quiet for more than an hour, thinking and thinking, when, just as his candle was burning out, he heard a scratch at the door. He opened the door, and there was the Newfoundland dog! The dog came softly in, smelt about him, went straight to some straw in the corner which the dark men had said covered apples, tore the straw away, and disclosed two sheets steeped in blood. Just at that moment the candle went out, and the brother-in-law, looking through a chink in the door, saw the two dark men stealing up-stairs; one armed with a dagger that long (about five feet); the other carrying a chopper, a sack, and a spade. Having no remembrance of the close of this adventure, I suppose my faculties to have been always so frozen with terror at this stage of it, that the power of listening stagnated within me for some quarter of an hour.

These barbarous stories carried me, sitting there on the Holly-Tree hearth, to the Roadside Inn, renowned in my time in a sixpenny book with a folding plate, representing in a central compartment of oval form the portrait of Jonathan Bradford, and in four corner compartments four incidents of the tragedy with which the name is associated,—coloured with a hand at once so free and economical, that the bloom of Jonathan's complexion passed without any pause into the breeches of the ostler, and, smearing itself off into the next division, became rum in a bottle. Then I remembered how the landlord was found at the murdered traveller's bedside, with his own knife at his feet, and blood upon his hand; how he was hanged for the murder, notwithstanding his protestation that he had indeed come there to kill the traveller for his saddle-bags, but had been stricken motionless on finding him already slain; and how the ostler, years afterwards, owned the deed. By this time I had made myself quite uncomfortable. I stirred the fire, and stood with my back to it as long as I could bear the heat, looking up at the darkness beyond the screen, and at the wormy curtains creeping in and creeping out, like the worms in the ballad of Alonzo the Brave and the Fair Imogene.

There was an Inn in the cathedral town where I went to school, which had pleasanter recollections about it than any of these. I took it next. It was the Inn where friends used to put up, and where we used to go to see parents, and to have salmon and fowls, and be tipped. It had an ecclesiastical sign,—the Mitre,—and a bar that seemed to be the next best thing to a bishopric, it was so snug. I loved the landlord's youngest daughter to distraction,—but let that pass. It was in this Inn that I was cried over by my rosy little sister, because I had acquired a black eye in a fight. And though she had been, that Holly-Tree night, for many a long year where all tears are dried, the Mitre softened me yet.

"To be continued to-morrow," said I, when I took my candle to go to bed. But my bed took it upon itself to continue the train of thought that night. It carried me away, like the enchanted carpet, to a distant place (though still in England), and there, alighting from a stage-coach at another Inn in the snow, as I had actually done some years before, I repeated in my sleep a curious experience I had really had there. More than a year before I made the journey in the course of which I put up at that Inn, I had lost a very near and dear friend by death. Every night since, at home or away from home, I had dreamed of that friend; sometimes as still living; sometimes as returning from the world of shadows to comfort me; always as being beautiful, placid, and happy, never in association with any approach to fear or distress. It was at a lonely Inn in a wide moorland place, that I halted to pass the night. When I had looked from my bedroom window over the waste of snow on which the moon was shining, I sat down by my fire to write a letter. I had always, until that hour, kept it within my own breast that I dreamed every night of the dear lost one. But in the letter that I wrote I recorded the circumstance, and added that I felt much interested in proving whether the subject of my dream would still be faithful to me, travel-tired, and in that remote place. No. I lost the beloved figure of my vision in parting with the secret. My sleep has never looked upon it since, in sixteen years, but once. I was in Italy, and awoke (or seemed to awake), the well-remembered voice distinctly in my ears, conversing with it. I entreated it, as it rose above my bed and soared up to the vaulted roof of the old room, to answer me a question I had asked touching the Future Life. My hands were still outstretched towards it as it vanished, when I heard a bell ringing by the garden wall, and a voice in the deep stillness of the night calling on all good Christians to pray for the souls of the dead; it being All Souls' Eve.

To return to the Holly-Tree. When I awoke next day, it was freezing hard, and the lowering sky threatened more snow. My breakfast cleared away, I drew my chair into its former place, and, with the fire getting so much the better of the landscape that I sat in twilight, resumed my Inn remembrances.

That was a good Inn down in Wiltshire where I put up once, in the days of the hard Wiltshire ale, and before all beer was bitterness. It was on the skirts of Salisbury Plain, and the midnight wind that rattled my lattice window came moaning at me from Stonehenge. There was a hanger-on at that establishment (a supernaturally preserved Druid I believe him to have been, and to be still), with long white hair, and a flinty blue eye always looking afar off; who claimed to have been a shepherd, and who seemed to be ever watching for the reappearance, on the verge of the horizon, of some ghostly flock of sheep that had been mutton for many ages. He was a man with a weird belief in him that no one could count the stones of Stonehenge twice, and make the same number of them; likewise, that any one who counted them three times nine times, and then stood in the centre and said, "I dare!" would behold a tremendous apparition, and be stricken dead. He pretended to have seen a bustard (I suspect him to have been familiar with the dodo), in manner following: He was out upon the plain at the close of a late autumn day, when he dimly discerned, going on before him at a curious fitfully bounding pace, what he at first supposed to be a gig-umbrella that had been blown from some conveyance, but what he presently believed to be a lean dwarf man upon a little pony. Having followed this object for some distance without gaining on it, and having called to it many times without receiving any answer, he pursued it for miles and miles, when, at length coming up with it, he discovered it to be the last bustard in Great Britain, degenerated into a wingless state, and running along the ground. Resolved to capture him or perish in the attempt, he closed with the bustard; but the bustard, who had formed a counter-resolution that he should do neither, threw him, stunned him, and was last seen making off due west. This weird main, at that stage of metempsychosis, may have been a sleep-walker or an enthusiast or a robber; but I awoke one night to find him in the dark at my bedside, repeating the Athanasian Creed in a terrific voice. I paid my bill next day, and retired from the county with all possible precipitation.

That was not a commonplace story which worked itself out at a little Inn in Switzerland, while I was staying there. It was a very homely place, in a village of one narrow zigzag street, among mountains, and you went in at the main door through the cow-house, and among the mules and the dogs and the fowls, before ascending a great bare staircase to the rooms; which were all of unpainted wood, without plastering or papering,—like rough packing-cases. Outside there was nothing but the straggling street, a little toy church with a copper-coloured steeple, a pine forest, a torrent, mists, and mountain-sides. A young man belonging to this Inn had disappeared eight weeks before (it was winter-time), and was supposed to have had some undiscovered love affair, and to have gone for a soldier. He had got up in the night, and dropped into the village street from the loft in which he slept with another man; and he had done it so quietly, that his companion and fellow-labourer had heard no movement when he was awakened in the morning, and they said, “Louis, where is Henri?” They looked for him high and low, in vain, and gave him up. Now, outside this Inn, there stood, as there stood outside every dwelling in the village, a stack of firewood; but the stack belonging to the Inn was higher than any of the rest, because the Inn was the richest house, and burnt the most fuel. It began to be noticed, while they were looking high and low, that a Bantam cock, part of the live stock of the Inn, put himself wonderfully out of his way to get to the top of this wood-stack; and that he would stay there for hours and hours, crowing, until he appeared in danger of splitting himself. Five weeks went on,—six weeks,—and still this terrible Bantam, neglecting his domestic affairs, was always on the top of the wood-stack, crowing the very eyes out of his head. By this time it was perceived that Louis had become inspired with a violent animosity towards the terrible Bantam, and one morning he was seen by a woman, who sat nursing her goître at a little window in a gleam of sun, to catch up a rough billet of wood, with a great oath, hurl it at the terrible Bantam crowing on the wood-stack, and bring him down dead. Hereupon the woman, with a sudden light in her mind, stole round to the back of the wood-stack, and, being a good climber, as all those women are, climbed up, and soon was seen upon the summit, screaming, looking down the hollow within, and crying, “Seize Louis, the murderer! Ring the church bell! Here is the body!” I saw the murderer that day, and I saw him as I sat by my fire at the Holly-Tree Inn, and I see him now, lying shackled with cords on the stable litter, among the mild eyes and the smoking breath of the cows, waiting to be taken away by the police, and stared at by the fearful village. A heavy animal,—the dullest animal in the stables,—with a stupid head, and a lumpish face devoid of any trace of insensibility, who had been, within the knowledge of the murdered youth, an embezzler of certain small moneys belonging to his master, and who had taken this hopeful mode of putting a possible accuser out of his way. All of which he confessed next day, like a sulky wretch who couldn’t be troubled any more, now that they had got hold of him, and meant to make an end of him. I saw him once again, on the day of my departure from the Inn. In that Canton the headsman still does his office with a sword; and I came upon this murderer sitting bound, to a chair, with his eyes bandaged, on a scaffold in a little market-place. In that instant, a great sword (loaded with quicksilver in the thick part of the blade) swept round him like a gust of wind or fire, and there was no such creature in the world. My wonder was, not that he was so suddenly dispatched, but that any head was left unreaped, within a radius of fifty yards of that tremendous sickle.

That was a good Inn, too, with the kind, cheerful landlady and the honest landlord, where I lived in the shadow of Mont Blanc, and where one of the apartments has a zoological papering on the walls, not so accurately joined but that the elephant occasionally rejoices in a tiger's hind legs and tail, while the lion puts on a trunk and tusks, and the bear, moulting as it were, appears as to portions of himself like a leopard. I made several American friends at that Inn, who all called Mont Blanc Mount Blank,—except one good-humoured gentleman, of a very sociable nature, who became on such intimate terms with it that he spoke of it familiarly as "Blank;" observing, at breakfast, "Blank looks pretty tall this morning;" or considerably doubting in the courtyard in the evening, whether there warn't some go-ahead naters in our country, sir, that would make out the top of Blank in a couple of hours from first start—now!

Once I passed a fortnight at an Inn in the North of England, where I was haunted by the ghost of a tremendous pie. It was a Yorkshire pie, like a fort,—an abandoned fort with nothing in it; but the waiter had a fixed idea that it was a point of ceremony at every meal to put the pie on the table. After some days I tried to hint, in several delicate ways, that I considered the pie done with; as, for example, by emptying fag-ends of glasses of wine into it; putting cheese-plates and spoons into it, as into a basket; putting wine-bottles into it, as into a cooler; but always in vain, the pie being invariably cleaned out again and brought up as before. At last, beginning to be doubtful whether I was not the victim of a spectral illusion, and whether my health and spirits might not sink under the horrors of an imaginary pie, I cut a triangle out of it, fully as large as the musical instrument of that name in a powerful orchestra. Human provision could not have foreseen the result—but the waiter mended the pie. With some effectual species of cement, he adroitly fitted the triangle in again, and I paid my reckoning and fled.

The Holly-Tree was getting rather dismal. I made an overland expedition beyond the screen, and penetrated as far as the fourth window. Here I was driven back by stress of weather. Arrived at my winter-quarters once more, I made up the fire, and took another Inn.

It was in the remotest part of Cornwall. A great annual Miners' Feast was being holden at the Inn, when I and my travelling companions presented ourselves at night among the wild crowd that were dancing before it by torchlight. We had had a break-down in the dark, on a stony morass some miles away; and I had the honour of leading one of the unharnessed post-horses. If any lady or gentleman, on perusal of the present lines, will take any very tall post-horse with his traces hanging about his legs, and will conduct him by the bearing-rein into the heart of a country dance of a hundred and fifty couples, that lady or gentleman will then, and only then, form an adequate idea of the extent to which that post-horse will tread on his conductor's toes. Over and above which, the post-horse, finding three hundred people whirling about him, will probably rear, and also lash out with his hind legs, in a manner incompatible with dignity or self-respect on his conductor's part. With such little drawbacks on my usually impressive aspect, I appeared at this Cornish Inn, to the unutterable wonder of the Cornish Miners. It was full, and twenty times full, and nobody could be received but the post-horse,—though to get rid of that noble animal was something. While my fellow-travellers and I were discussing how to pass the night and so much of the next day as must intervene before the jovial blacksmith and the jovial wheelwright would be in a condition to go out on the morass and mend the coach, an honest man stepped forth from the crowd and proposed his unlet floor of two rooms, with supper of eggs and bacon, ale and punch. We joyfully accompanied him home to the strangest of clean houses, where we were well entertained to the satisfaction of all parties. But the novel feature of the entertainment was, that our host was a chair-maker, and that the chairs assigned to us were mere frames, altogether without bottoms of any sort; so that we passed the evening on perches. Nor was this the absurdest consequence; for when we unbent at supper, and any one of us gave way to laughter, he forgot the peculiarity of his position, and instantly disappeared. I myself, doubled up into an attitude from which self-extrication was impossible, was taken out of my frame, like a clown in a comic pantomime who has tumbled into a tub, five times by the taper's light during the eggs and bacon.

The Holly-Tree was fast reviving within me a sense of loneliness. I began to feel conscious that my subject would never carry on until I was dug out. I might be a week here,—weeks!

There was a story with a singular idea in it, connected with an Inn I once passed a night at in a picturesque old town on the Welsh border. In a large double-bedded room of this Inn there had been a suicide committed by poison, in one bed, while a tired traveller slept unconscious in the other. After that time, the suicide bed was never used, but the other constantly was; the disused bedstead remaining in the room empty, though as to all other respects in its old state. The story ran, that whosoever slept in this room, though never so entire a stranger, from never so far off, was invariably observed to come down in the morning with an impression that he smelt Laudanum, and that his mind always turned upon the subject of suicide; to which, whatever kind of man he might be, he was certain to make some reference if he conversed with any one. This went on for years, until it at length induced the landlord to take the disused bedstead down, and bodily burn it,—bed, hangings, and all. The strange influence (this was the story) now changed to a fainter one, but never changed afterwards. The occupant of that room, with occasional but very rare exceptions, would come down in the morning, trying to recall a forgotten dream he had had in the night. The landlord, on his mentioning his perplexity, would suggest various commonplace subjects, not one of which, as he very well knew, was the true subject. But the moment the landlord suggested “Poison,” the traveller started, and cried, “Yes!” He never failed to accept that suggestion, and he never recalled any more of the dream.

This reminiscence brought the Welsh Inns in general before me; with the women in their round hats, and the harpers with their white beards (venerable, but humbugs, I am afraid), playing outside the door while I took my dinner. The transition was natural to the Highland Inns, with the oatmeal bannocks, the honey, the venison steaks, the trout from the loch, the whisky, and perhaps (having the materials so temptingly at hand) the Athol brose. Once was I coming south from the Scottish Highlands in hot haste, hoping to change quickly at the station at the bottom of a certain wild historical glen, when these eyes did with mortification see the landlord come out with a telescope and sweep the whole prospect for the horses; which horses were away picking up their own living, and did not heave in sight under four hours. Having thought of the loch-trout, I was taken by quick association to the Anglers’ Inns of England (I have assisted at innumerable feats of angling by lying in the bottom of the boat, whole summer days, doing nothing with the greatest perseverance; which I have generally found to be as effectual towards the taking of fish as the finest tackle and the utmost science), and to the pleasant white, clean, flower-pot-decorated bedrooms of those inns, overlooking the river, and the ferry, and the green ait, and the church-spire, and the country bridge; and to the pearless Emma with the bright eyes and the pretty smile, who waited, bless her! with a natural grace that would have converted Blue-Beard. Casting my eyes upon my Holly-Tree fire, I next discerned among the glowing coals the pictures of a score or more of those wonderful English posting-inns which we are all so sorry to have lost, which were so large and so comfortable, and which were such monuments of British submission to rapacity and extortion. He who would see these houses pining away, let him walk from Basingstoke, or even Windsor, to London, by way of Hounslow, and moralise on their perishing remains; the stables crumbling to dust; unsettled labourers and wanderers bivouacking in the outhouses; grass growing in the yards; the rooms, where erst so many hundred beds of down were made up, let off to Irish lodgers at eighteenpence a week; a little ill-looking beer-shop shrinking in the tap of former days, burning coach-house gates for firewood, having one of its two windows bunged up, as if it had received punishment in a fight with the Railroad; a low, bandy-legged, brick-making bulldog standing in the doorway. What could I next see in my fire so naturally as the new railway-house of these times near the dismal country station; with nothing particular on draught but cold air and damp, nothing worth mentioning in the larder but new mortar, and no business doing beyond a conceited affectation of luggage in the hall? Then I came to the Inns of Paris, with the pretty apartment of four pieces up one hundred and seventy-five waxed stairs, the privilege of ringing the bell all day long without influencing anybody’s mind or body but your own, and the not-too-much-for-dinner, considering the price. Next to the provincial Inns of France, with the great church-tower rising above the courtyard, the horse-bells jingling merrily up and down the street beyond, and the clocks of all descriptions in all the rooms, which are never right, unless taken at the precise minute when, by getting exactly twelve hours too fast or too slow, they unintentionally become so. Away I went, next, to the lesser roadside Inns of Italy; where all the dirty clothes in the house (not in wear) are always lying in your anteroom; where the mosquitoes make a raisin pudding of your face in summer, and the cold bites it blue in winter; where you get what you can, and forget what you can’t: where I should again like to be boiling my tea in a pocket-handkerchief dumpling, for want of a teapot. So to the old palace Inns and old monastery Inns, in towns and cities of the same bright country; with their massive quadrangular staircases, whence you may look from among clustering pillars high into the blue vault of heaven; with their stately banqueting-rooms, and vast refectories; with their labyrinths of ghostly bedchambers, and their glimpses into gorgeous streets that have no appearance of reality or possibility. So to the close little Inns of the Malaria districts, with their pale attendants, and their peculiar smell of never letting in the air. So to the immense fantastic Inns of Venice, with the cry of the gondolier below, as he skims the corner; the grip of the watery odours on one particular little bit of the bridge of your nose (which is never released while you stay there); and the great bell of St. Mark’s Cathedral tolling midnight. Next I put up for a minute at the restless Inns upon the Rhine, where your going to bed, no matter at what hour, appears to be the tocsin for everybody else’s getting up; and where, in the table-d’hôte room at the end of the long table (with several Towers of Babel on it at the other end, all made of white plates), one knot of stoutish men, entirely dressed in jewels and dirt, and having nothing else upon them, *will* remain all night, clinking glasses, and singing about the river that flows, and the grape that grows, and Rhine wine that beguiles, and Rhine woman that smiles and hi drink drink my friend and ho drink drink my brother, and all the rest of it. I departed thence, as a matter of course, to other German Inns, where all the eatables are soddened down to the same flavour, and where the mind is disturbed by the apparition of hot puddings, and boiled cherries, sweet and slab, at awfully unexpected periods of the repast. After a draught of sparkling beer from a foaming glass jug, and a glance of recognition through the windows of the student beer-houses at Heidelberg and elsewhere, I put out to sea for the Inns of America, with their four hundred beds apiece, and their eight or nine hundred ladies and gentlemen at dinner every day. Again I stood in the bar-rooms thereof, taking my evening cobbler, julep, sling, or cocktail. Again I listened to my friend the General,—whom I had known for five minutes, in the course of which period he had made me intimate for life with two Majors, who again had made me intimate for life with three Colonels, who again had made me brother to twenty-two civilians,—again, I say, I listened to my friend the General, leisurely expounding the resources of the establishment, as to gentlemen’s morning-room, sir; ladies’ morning-room, sir; gentlemen’s evening-room, sir; ladies' evening-room, sir; ladies' and gentlemen's evening reuniting-room, sir; music-room, sir; reading-room, sir; over four hundred sleeping-rooms, sir; and the entire planned and finited within twelve calendar months from the first clearing off of the old encumbrances on the plot, at a cost of five hundred thousand dollars, sir. Again I found, as to my individual way of thinking, that the greater, the more gorgeous, and the more dollarous the establishment was, the less desirable it was. Nevertheless, again I drank my cobbler, julep, sling, or cocktail, in all good-will, to my friend the General, and my friends the Majors, Colonels, and civilians all; full well knowing that, whatever little motes my beamy eyes may have descried in theirs, they belong to a kind, generous, large-hearted, and great people.

I had been going on lately at a quick pace to keep my solitude out of my mind; but here I broke down for good, and gave up the subject. What was I to do? What was to become of me? Into what extremity was I submissively to sink? Supposing that, like Baron Trenck, I looked out for a mouse or spider, and found one, and beguiled my imprisonment by training it? Even that might be dangerous with a view to the future. I might be so far gone when the road did come to be cut through the snow, that, on my way forth, I might burst into tears, and beseech, like the prisoner who was released in his old age from the Bastille, to be taken back again to the five windows, the ten curtains, and the sinuous drapery.

A desperate idea came into my head. Under any other circumstances I should have rejected it; but, in the strait at which I was, I held it fast. Could I so far overcome the inherent bashfulness which withheld me from the landlord's table and the company I might find there, as to call up the Boots, and ask him to take a chair,—and something in a liquid form,—and talk to me? I could, I would, I did.

SECOND BRANCH—THE BOOTS

Where had he been in his time? he repeated, when I asked him the question. Lord, he had been everywhere! And what had he been? Bless you, he had been everything you could mention a'most!

Seen a good deal? Why, of course he had. I should say so, he could assure me, if I only knew about a twentieth part of what had come in his way. Why, it would be easier for him, he expected, to tell what he hadn't seen than what he had. Ah! A deal, it would.

What was the curiousest thing he had seen? Well! He didn't know. He couldn't momently name what was the curiousest thing he had seen—unless it was a Unicorn, and he see *him* once at a Fair. But supposing a young gentleman not eight year old was to run away with a fine young woman of seven, might I think *that* a queer start? Certainly. Then that was a start as he himself had had his blessed eyes on, and he had cleaned the shoes they run away in—and they was so little that he couldn't get his hand into 'em.

Master Harry Walmers' father, you see, he lived at the Elmses, down away by Shooter's Hill there, six or seven miles from Lunnon. He was a gentleman of spirit, and good-looking, and held his head up when he walked, and had what you may call Fire about him. He wrote poetry, and he rode, and he ran, and he cricketed, and he danced, and he acted, and he done it all equally beautiful. He was uncommon proud of Master Harry as was his only child; but he didn't spoil him neither. He was a gentleman that had a will of his own and a eye of his own, and that would be minded. Consequently, though he made quite a companion of the fine bright boy, and was delighted to see him so fond of reading his fairy books, and was never tired of hearing him say my name is Norval, or hearing him sing his songs about Young May Moons is beaming love, and When he as adores thee has left but the name, and that; still he kept the command over the child, and the child *was* a child, and it's to be wished more of 'em was!

How did Boots happen to know all this? Why, through being under-gardener. Of course he couldn't be under-gardener, and be always about, in the summer-time, near the windows on the lawn, a mowing, and sweeping, and weeding, and pruning, and this and that, without getting acquainted with the ways of the family. Even supposing Master Harry hadn't come to him one morning early, and said, “Cobbs, how should you spell Norah, if you was asked?” and then began cutting it in print all over the fence.

He couldn’t say he had taken particular notice of children before that; but really it was pretty to see them two mites a going about the place together, deep in love. And the courage of the boy! Bless your soul, he’d have throwed off his little hat, and tucked up his little sleeves, and gone in at a Lion, he would, if they had happened to meet one, and she had been frightened of him. One day he stops, along with her, where Boots was hoeing weeds in the gravel, and says, speaking up, “Cobbs,” he says, “I like *you*.” “Do you, sir? I’m proud to hear it.” “Yes, I do, Cobbs. Why do I like you, do you think, Cobbs?” “Don’t know, Master Harry, I am sure.” “Because Norah likes you, Cobbs.” “Indeed, sir? That’s very gratifying.” “Gratifying, Cobbs? It’s better than millions of the brightest diamonds to be liked by Norah.” “Certainly, sir.” “You’re going away, ain’t you, Cobbs?” “Yes, sir.” “Would you like another situation, Cobbs?” “Well, sir, I shouldn’t object, if it was a good Inn.” “Then, Cobbs,” says he, “you shall be our Head Gardener when we are married.” And he tucks her, in her little sky-blue mantle, under his arm, and walks away.

Boots could assure me that it was better than a picter, and equal to a play, to see them babies, with their long, bright, curling hair, their sparkling eyes, and their beautiful light tread, a rambling about the garden, deep in love. Boots was of opinion that the birds believed they was birds, and kept up with ’em, singing to please ’em. Sometimes they would creep under the Tulip-tree, and would sit there with their arms round one another’s necks, and their soft cheeks touching, a reading about the Prince and the Dragon, and the good and bad enchanters, and the king’s fair daughter. Sometimes he would hear them planning about having a house in a forest, keeping bees and a cow, and living entirely on milk and honey. Once he came upon them by the pond, and heard Master Harry say, “Adorable Norah, kiss me, and say you love me to distraction, or I’ll jump in head-foremost.” And Boots made no question he would have done it if she hadn’t complied. On the whole, Boots said it had a tendency to make him feel as if he was in love himself—only he didn’t exactly know who with.

“Cobbs,” said Master Harry, one evening, when Cobbs was watering the flowers, “I am going on a visit, this present Midsummer, to my grandmamma’s at York.”

“Are you indeed, sir? I hope you’ll have a pleasant time. I am going into Yorkshire, myself, when I leave here.”

“Are you going to your grandmamma’s, Cobbs?”

“No, sir. I haven’t got such a thing.”

“Not as a grandmamma, Cobbs?”

“No, sir.”

The boy looked on at the watering of the flowers for a little while, and then said, “I shall be very glad indeed to go, Cobbs,—Norah’s going.”

“You’ll be all right then, sir,” says Cobbs, “with your beautiful sweetheart by your side.”

“Cobbs,” returned the boy, flushing, “I never let anybody joke about it, when I can prevent them.”

“It wasn’t a joke, sir,” says Cobbs, with humility,—“wasn’t so meant.”

“I am glad of that, Cobbs, because I like you, you know, and you’re going to live with us.—Cobbs!”

“Sir.”

“What do you think my grandmamma gives me when I go down there?”

“I couldn’t so much as make a guess, sir.”

“A Bank of England five-pound note, Cobbs.”

“Whew!” says Cobbs, “that’s a spanking sum of money, Master Harry.”

“A person could do a good deal with such a sum of money as that,—couldn’t a person, Cobbs?”

“I believe you, sir!”

“Cobbs,” said the boy, “I’ll tell you a secret. At Norah’s house, they have been joking her about me, and pretending to laugh at our being engaged,—pretending to make game of it, Cobbs!”

“Such, sir,” says Cobbs, “is the depravity of human natur.”

The boy, looking exactly like his father, stood for a few minutes with his glowing face towards the sunset, and then departed with, “Good-night, Cobbs. I’m going in.”

If I was to ask Boots how it happened that he was a-going to leave that place just at that present time, well, he couldn’t rightly answer me. He did suppose he might have stayed there till now if he had been anyways inclined. But, you see, he was younger then, and he wanted change. That’s what he wanted,—change. Mr. Walmers, he said to him when he gave him notice of his intentions to leave, “Cobbs,” he says, “have you anythink to complain of? I make the inquiry because if I find that any of my people really has anythink to complain of, I wish to make it right if I can." "No, sir," says Cobbs; "thanking you, sir, I find myself as well sitiwated here as I could hope to be anywheres. The truth is, sir, that I'm a-going to seek my fortun'." "O, indeed, Cobbs!" he says; "I hope you may find it." And Boots could assure me—which he did, touching his hair with his bootjack, as a salute in the way of his present calling—that he hadn't found it yet.

Well, sir! Boots left the Elmses when his time was up, and Master Harry, he went down to the old lady's at York, which old lady would have given that child the teeth out of her head (if she had had any), she was so wrapped up in him. What does that Infant do,—for Infant you may call him and be within the mark,—but cut away from that old lady's with his Norah, on a expedition to go to Gretna Green and be married!

Sir, Boots was at this identical Holly-Tree Inn (having left it several times since to better himself, but always come back through one thing or another), when, one summer afternoon, the coach drives up, and out of the coach gets them two children. The Guard says to our Governor, "I don't quite make out these little passengers, but the young gentleman's words was, that they was to be brought here." The young gentleman gets out; hands his lady out; gives the Guard something for himself; says to our Governor, "We're to stop here to-night, please. Sitting-room and two bedrooms will be required. Chops and cherry-pudding for two!" and tucks her, in her sky-blue mantle, under his arm, and walks into the house much bolder than Brass.

Boots leaves me to judge what the amazement of that establishment was, when these two tiny creatures all alone by themselves was marched into the Angel,—much more so, when he, who had seen them without their seeing him, give the Governor his views of the expedition they was upon. "Cobbs," says the Governor, "if this is so, I must set off myself to York, and quiet their friends' minds. In which case you must keep your eye upon 'em, and humour 'em, till I come back. But before I take these measures, Cobbs, I should wish you to find from themselves whether your opinion is correct." "Sir, to you," says Cobbs, "that shall be done directly."

So Boots goes up-stairs to the Angel, and there he finds Master Harry on a e-normous sofa,—immense at any time, but looking like the Great Bed of Ware, compared with him,—a drying the eyes of Miss Norah with his pocket-hankecher. Their little legs was entirely off the ground, of course, and it really is not possible for Boots to express to me how small them children looked.

"It's Cobbs! It's Cobbs!" cries Master Harry, and comes running to him, and catching hold of his hand. Miss Norah comes running to him on t'other side and catching hold of his t'other hand, and they both jump for joy.

"I see you a getting out, sir," says Cobbs. "I thought it was you. I thought I couldn't be mistaken in your height and figure. What's the object of your journey, sir?—Matrimonial?"

"We are going to be married, Cobbs, at Gretna Green," returned the boy. "We have run away on purpose. Norah has been in rather low spirits, Cobbs; but she'll be happy, now we have found you to be our friend."

"Thank you, sir, and thank you, miss," says Cobbs, "for your good opinion. *Did* you bring any luggage with you, sir?"

If I will believe Boots when he gives me his word and honour upon it, the lady had got a parasol, a smelling-bottle, a round and a half of cold buttered toast, eight peppermint drops, and a hair-brush,—seemingly a doll's. The gentleman had got about half a dozen yards of string, a knife, three or four sheets of writing-paper folded up surprising small, a orange, and a Chaney mug with his name upon it.

"What may be the exact natur of your plans, sir?" says Cobbs.

"To go on," replied the boy,—which the courage of that boy was something wonderful!—"in the morning, and be married to-morrow."

"Just so, sir," says Cobbs. "Would it meet your views, sir, if I was to accompany you?"

When Cobbs said this, they both jumped for joy again, and cried out, "Oh, yes, yes, Cobbs! Yes!"

"Well, sir," says Cobbs. "If you will excuse my having the freedom to give an opinion, what I should recommend would be this. I'm acquainted with a pony, sir, which, put in a pheayton that I could borrow, would take you and Mrs. Harry Walmers, Junior, (myself driving, if you approved,) to the end of your journey in a very short space of time. I am not altogether sure, sir, that this pony will be at liberty to-morrow, but even if you had to wait over to-morrow for him, it might be worth your while. As to the small account here, sir, in case you was to find yourself running at all short, that don't signify; because I'm a part proprietor of this inn, and it could stand over."

Boots assures me that when they clapped their hands, and jumped for joy again, and called him "Good Cobbs!" and "Dear Cobbs!" and bent across him to kiss one another in the delight of their confiding hearts, he felt himself the meanest rascal for deceiving 'em that ever was born.

"Is there anything you want just at present, sir?" says Cobbs, mortally ashamed of himself.

"We should like some cakes after dinner," answered Master Harry, folding his arms, putting out one leg, and looking straight at him, "and two apples,—and jam. With dinner we should like to have toast-and-water. But Norah has always been accustomed to half a glass of currant wine at dessert. And so have I."

"It shall be ordered at the bar, sir," says Cobbs; and away he went.

Boots has the feeling as fresh upon him at this minute of speaking as he had then, that he would far rather have had it out in half-a-dozen rounds with the Governor than have combined with him; and that he wished with all his heart there was any impossible place where those two babies could make an impossible marriage, and live impossibly happy ever afterwards. However, as it couldn't be, he went into the Governor's plans, and the Governor set off for York in half an hour.

The way in which the women of that house—without exception—every one of 'em—married *and* single—took to that boy when they heard the story, Boots considers surprising. It was as much as he could do to keep 'em from dashing into the room and kissing him. They climbed up all sorts of places, at the risk of their lives, to look at him through a pane of glass. They was seven deep at the keyhole. They was out of their minds about him and his bold spirit.

In the evening, Boots went into the room to see how the runaway couple was getting on. The gentleman was on the window-seat, supporting the lady in his arms. She had tears upon her face, and was lying, very tired and half asleep, with her head upon his shoulder.

"Mrs. Harry Walmers, Junior, fatigued, sir?" says Cobbs.

"Yes, she is tired, Cobbs; but she is not used to be away from home, and she has been in low spirits again. Cobbs, do you think you could bring a biffin, please?"

"I ask your pardon, sir," says Cobbs. "What was it you—?"

"I think a Norfolk biffin would rouse her, Cobbs. She is very fond of them."

Boots withdrew in search of the required restorative, and when he brought it in, the gentleman handed it to the lady, and fed her with a spoon, and took a little himself; the lady being heavy with sleep, and rather cross. "What should you think, sir," says Cobbs, "of a chamber candlestick?" The gentleman approved; the chambermaid went first, up the great staircase; the lady, in her sky-blue mantle, followed, gallantly escorted by the gentleman; the gentleman embraced her at her door, and retired to his own apartment, where Boots softly locked him up.

Boots couldn't but feel with increased acuteness what a base deceiver he was, when they consulted him at breakfast (they had ordered sweet milk-and-water, and toast and currant jelly, overnight) about the pony. It really was as much as he could do, he don't mind confessing to me, to look them two young things in the face, and think what a wicked old father of lies he had grown up to be. Howsomever, he went on a lying like a Trojan about the pony. He told 'em that it did so unfortunately happen that the pony was half clipped, you see, and that he couldn't be taken out in that state, for fear it should strike to his inside. But that he'd be finished clipping in the course of the day, and that to-morrow morning at eight o'clock the pheayton would be ready. Boots's view of the whole case, looking back on it in my room, is, that Mrs. Harry Walmers, Junior, was beginning to give in. She hadn't had her hair curled when she went to bed, and she didn't seem quite up to brushing it herself, and its getting in her eyes put her out. But nothing put out Master Harry. He sat behind his breakfast-cup, a tearing away at the jelly, as if he had been his own father.

After breakfast, Boots is inclined to consider that they drawed soldiers,—at least, he knows that many such was found in the fire-place, all on horseback. In the course of the morning, Master Harry rang the bell,—it was surprising how that there boy did carry on,—and said, in a sprightly way, "Cobbs, is there any good walks in this neighbourhood?"

"Yes, sir," says Cobbs. "There's Love Lane."

"Get out with you, Cobbs!"—that was that there boy's expression,—"you're joking."

"Begging your pardon, sir," says Cobbs, "there really is Love Lane. And a pleasant walk it is, and proud shall I be to show it to yourself and Mrs. Harry Walmers, Junior."

"Norah, dear," said Master Harry, "this is curious. We really ought to see Love Lane. Put on your bonnet, my sweetest darling, and we will go there with Cobbs."

Boots leaves me to judge what a Beast he felt himself to be, when that young pair told him, as they all three jogged along together, that they had made up their minds to give him two thousand guineas a year as head-gardener, on accounts of his being so true a friend to 'em. Boots could have wished at the moment that the earth would have opened and swallowed him up, he felt so mean, with their beaming eyes a looking at him, and believing him. Well, sir, he turned the conversation as well as he could, and he took 'em down Love Lane to the water-meadows, and there Master Harry would have drowned himself in half a moment more, a getting out a water-lily for her,—but nothing daunted that boy. Well, sir, they was tired out. All being so new and strange to 'em, they was tired as tired could be. And they laid down on a bank of daisies, like the children in the wood, leastways meadows, and fell asleep.

Boots don't know—perhaps I do,—but never mind, it don't signify either way—why it made a man fit to make a fool of himself to see them two pretty babies a lying there in the clear still sunny day, not dreaming half so hard when they was asleep as they done when they was awake. But, Lord! when you come to think of yourself, you know, and what a game you have been up to ever since you was in your own cradle, and what a poor sort of a chap you are, and how it's always either Yesterday with you, or else To-morrow, and never To-day, that's where it is!

Well, sir, they woke up at last, and then one thing was getting pretty clear to Boots, namely, that Mrs. Harry Walmerses, Junior's, temper was on the move. When Master Harry took her round the waist, she said he "teased her so;" and when he says, "Norah, my young May Moon, your Harry tease you?" she tells him, "Yes; and I want to go home!"

A biled fowl, and baked bread-and-butter pudding, brought Mrs. Walmers up a little; but Boots could have wished, he must privately own to me, to have seen her more sensible of the woice of love, and less abandoning of herself to currants. However, Master Harry, he kept up, and his noble heart was as fond as ever. Mrs. Walmers turned very sleepy about dusk, and began to cry. Therefore, Mrs. Walmers went off to bed as per yesterday; and Master Harry ditto repeated.

About eleven or twelve at night comes back the Governor in a chaise, along with Mr. Walmers and a elderly lady. Mr. Walmers looks amused and very serious, both at once, and says to our missis, "We are much indebted to you, ma'am, for your kind care of our little children, which we can never sufficiently acknowledge. Pray, ma'am, where is my boy?" Our missis says, "Cobbs has the dear child in charge, sir. Cobbs, show Forty!" Then he says to Cobbs, "Ah, Cobbs, I am glad to see *you*! I understood you was here!" And Cobbs says, "Yes, sir. Your most obedient, sir."

I may be surprised to hear Boots say it, perhaps; but Boots assures me that his heart beat like a hammer, going up-stairs. "I beg your pardon, sir," says he, while unlocking the door; "I hope you are not angry with Master Harry. For Master Harry is a fine boy, sir, and will do you credit and honour." And Boots signifies to me, that, if the fine boy's father had contradicted him in the daring state of mind in which he then was, he thinks he should have "fetched him a crack," and taken the consequences.

But Mr. Walmers only says, "No, Cobbs. No, my good fellow. Thank you!" And, the door being opened, goes in.

Boots goes in too, holding the light, and he sees Mr. Walmers go up to the bedside, bend gently down, and kiss the little sleeping face. Then he stands looking at it for a minute, looking wonderfully like it (they do say he ran away with Mrs. Walmers); and then he gently shakes the little shoulder.

"Harry, my dear boy! Harry!"

Master Harry starts up and looks at him. Looks at Cobbs too. Such is the honour of that mite, that he looks at Cobbs, to see whether he has brought him into trouble.

"I am not angry, my child. I only want you to dress yourself and come home."

"Yes, pa."

Master Harry dresses himself quickly. His breast begins to swell when he has nearly finished, and it swells more and more as he stands, at last, a looking at his father: his father standing a looking at him, the quiet image of him.

"Please may I"—the spirit of that little creatur, and the way he kept his rising tears down!—"please, dear pa—may I—kiss Norah before I go?"

"You may, my child."

So he takes Master Harry in his hand, and Boots leads the way with the candle, and they come to that other bedroom, where the elderly lady is seated by the bed, and poor little Mrs. Harry Walmers, Junior, is fast asleep. There the father lifts the child up to the pillow, and he lays his little face down for an instant by the little warm face of poor unconscious little

Mrs. Harry Walmers, Junior, and gently draws it to him,—a sight so touching to the chambermaids who are peeping through the door, that one of them calls out, “It’s a shame to part ’em!” But this chambermaid was always, as Boots informs me, a soft-hearted one. Not that there was any harm in that girl. Far from it.

Finally, Boots says, that’s all about it. Mr. Walmers drove away in the chaise, having hold of Master Harry’s hand. The elderly lady and Mrs. Harry Walmers, Junior, that was never to be (she married a Captain long afterwards, and died in India), went off next day. In conclusion, Boots put it to me whether I hold with him in two opinions: firstly, that there are not many couples on their way to be married who are half as innocent of guile as those two children; secondly, that it would be a jolly good thing for a great many couples on their way to be married, if they could only be stopped in time, and brought back separately.

THIRD BRANCH—THE BILL

I had been snowed up a whole week. The time had hung so lightly on my hands, that I should have been in great doubt of the fact but for a piece of documentary evidence that lay upon my table.

The road had been dug out of the snow on the previous day, and the document in question was my bill. It testified emphatically to my having eaten and drunk, and warmed myself, and slept among the sheltering branches of the Holly-Tree, seven days and nights.

I had yesterday allowed the road twenty-four hours to improve itself, finding that I required that additional margin of time for the completion of my task. I had ordered my Bill to be upon the table, and a chaise to be at the door, "at eight o'clock to-morrow evening." It was eight o'clock to-morrow evening when I buckled up my travelling writing-desk in its leather case, paid my Bill, and got on my warm coats and wrappers. Of course, no time now remained for my travelling on to add a frozen tear to the icicles which were doubtless hanging plentifully about the farmhouse where I had first seen Angela. What I had to do was to get across to Liverpool by the shortest open road, there to meet my heavy baggage and embark. It was quite enough to do, and I had not an hour too much time to do it in.

I had taken leave of all my Holly-Tree friends—almost, for the time being, of my bashfulness too—and was standing for half a minute at the Inn door watching the ostler as he took another turn at the cord which tied my portmanteau on the chaise, when I saw lamps coming down towards the Holly-Tree. The road was so padded with snow that no wheels were audible; but all of us who were standing at the Inn door saw lamps coming on, and at a lively rate too, between the walls of snow that had been heaped up on either side of the track. The chambermaid instantly divined how the case stood, and called to the ostler, "Tom, this is a Gretna job!" The ostler, knowing that her sex instinctively scented a marriage, or anything in that direction, rushed up the yard bawling, "Next four out!" and in a moment the whole establishment was thrown into commotion.

I had a melancholy interest in seeing the happy man who loved and was beloved; and therefore, instead of driving off at once, I remained at the Inn door when the fugitives drove up. A bright-eyed fellow, muffled in a mantle, jumped out so briskly that he almost overthrew me. He turned to apologise, and, by heaven, it was Edwin!

"Charley!" said he, recoiling. "Gracious powers, what do you do here?"

"Edwin," said I, recoiling, "gracious powers, what do *you* do here?" I struck my forehead as I said it, and an insupportable blaze of light seemed to shoot before my eyes.

He hurried me into the little parlour (always kept with a slow fire in it and no poker), where posting company waited while their horses were putting to, and, shutting the door, said:

"Charley, forgive me!"

"Edwin!" I returned. "Was this well? When I loved her so dearly! When I had garnered up my heart so long!" I could say no more.

He was shocked when he saw how moved I was, and made the cruel observation, that he had not thought I should have taken it so much to heart.

I looked at him. I reproached him no more. But I looked at him. "My dear, dear Charley," said he, "don't think ill of me, I beseech you! I know you have a right to my utmost confidence, and, believe me, you have ever had it until now. I abhor secrecy. Its meanness is intolerable to me. But I and my dear girl have observed it for your sake."

He and his dear girl! It steeled me.

"You have observed it for my sake, sir?" said I, wondering how his frank face could face it out so.

"Yes!—and Angela's," said he.

I found the room reeling round in an uncertain way, like a labouring, humming-top. "Explain yourself," said I, holding on by one hand to an arm-chair.

"Dear old darling Charley!" returned Edwin, in his cordial manner, "consider! When you were going on so happily with Angela, why should I compromise you with the old gentleman by making you a party to our engagement, and (after he had declined my proposals) to our secret intention? Surely it was better that you should be able honourably to say, 'He never took counsel with me, never told me, never breathed a word of it.' If Angela suspected it, and showed me all the favour and support she could—God bless her for a precious creature and a priceless wife!—I couldn't help that. Neither I nor Emmeline ever told her, any more than we told you. And for the same good reason, Charley; trust me, for the same good reason, and no other upon earth!"

Emmeline was Angela’s cousin. Lived with her. Had been brought up with her. Was her father’s ward. Had property.

“Emmeline is in the chaise, my dear Edwin!” said I, embracing him with the greatest affection.

“My good fellow!” said he, “do you suppose I should be going to Gretna Green without her?”

I ran out with Edwin, I opened the chaise door, I took Emmeline in my arms, I folded her to my heart. She was wrapped in soft white fur, like the snowy landscape: but was warm, and young, and lovely. I put their leaders to with my own hands, I gave the boys a five-pound note apiece, I cheered them as they drove away, I drove the other way myself as hard as I could pelt.

I never went to Liverpool, I never went to America, I went straight back to London, and I married Angela. I have never until this time, even to her, disclosed the secret of my character, and the mistrust and the mistaken journey into which it led me. When she, and they, and our eight children and their seven—I mean Edwin and Emmeline’s, whose oldest girl is old enough now to wear white for herself, and to look very like her mother in it—come to read these pages, as of course they will, I shall hardly fail to be found out at last. Never mind! I can bear it. I began at the Holly-Tree, by idle accident, to associate the Christmas time of year with human interest, and with some inquiry into, and some care for, the lives of those by whom I find myself surrounded. I hope that I am none the worse for it, and that no one near me or afar off is the worse for it. And I say, May the green Holly-Tree flourish, striking its roots deep into our English ground, and having its germinating qualities carried by the birds of Heaven all over the world!

THE END OF
The Holly-Tree

A HOUSE TO LET

(FULL TEXT)

by Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Elizabeth Gaskell, Adelaide Ann Procter

edited by Charles Dickens

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OVER THE WAY

I had been living at Tunbridge Wells and nowhere else, going on for ten years, when my medical man—very clever in his profession, and the prettiest player I ever saw in my life of a hand at Long Whist, which was a noble and a princely game before Short was heard of—said to me, one day, as he sat feeling my pulse on the actual sofa which my poor dear sister Jane worked before her spine came on, and laid her on a board for fifteen months at a stretch—the most upright woman that ever lived—said to me, "What we want, ma'am, is a fillip."

"Good gracious, goodness gracious, Doctor Towers!" says I, quite startled at the man, for he was so christened himself: "don't talk as if you were alluding to people's names; but say what you mean."

"I mean, my dear ma'am, that we want a little change of air and scene."

"Bless the man!" said I; "does he mean we or me!"

"I mean you, ma'am."

"Then Lard forgive you, Doctor Towers," I said; "why don't you get into a habit of expressing yourself in a straightforward manner, like a loyal subject of our gracious Queen Victoria, and a member of the Church of England?"

Towers laughed, as he generally does when he has fidgetted me into any of my impatient ways—one of my states, as I call them—and then he began,—

"Tone, ma'am, Tone, is all you require!" He appealed to Trottle, who just then came in with the coal-scuttle, looking, in his nice black suit, like an amiable man putting on coals from motives of benevolence.

Trottle (whom I always call my right hand) has been in my service two-and-thirty years. He entered my service, far away from England. He is the best of creatures, and the most respectable of men; but, opinionated.

"What you want, ma'am," says Trottle, making up the fire in his quiet and skilful way, "is Tone."

"Lard forgive you both!" says I, bursting out a-laughing; "I see you are in a conspiracy against me, so I suppose you must do what you like with me, and take me to London for a change."

For some weeks Towers had hinted at London, and consequently I was prepared for him. When we had got to this point, we got on so expeditiously, that Trottle was packed off to London next day but one, to find some sort of place for me to lay my troublesome old head in.

Trottle came back to me at the Wells after two days' absence, with accounts of a charming place that could be taken for six months certain, with liberty to renew on the same terms for another six, and which really did afford every accommodation that I wanted.

"Could you really find no fault at all in the rooms, Trottle?" I asked him.

"Not a single one, ma'am. They are exactly suitable to you. There is not a fault in them. There is but one fault outside of them."

"And what's that?"

"They are opposite a House to Let."

"O!" I said, considering of it. "But is that such a very great objection?"

"I think it my duty to mention it, ma'am. It is a dull object to look at. Otherwise, I was so greatly pleased with the lodging that I should have closed with the terms at once, as I had your authority to do."

Trottle thinking so highly of the place, in my interest, I wished not to disappoint him. Consequently I said:

"The empty House may let, perhaps."

"O, dear no, ma'am," said Trottle, shaking his head with decision; "it won't let. It never does let, ma'am."

"Mercy me! Why not?"

"Nobody knows, ma'am. All I have to mention is, ma'am, that the House won't let!"

"How long has this unfortunate House been to let, in the name of Fortune?" said I.

"Ever so long," said Trottle. "Years."

"Is it in ruins?"

"It's a good deal out of repair, ma'am, but it's not in ruins."

The long and the short of this business was, that next day I had a pair of post-horses put to my chariot—for, I never travel by railway: not that I have anything to say against railways, except that they came in when I was too old to take to them; and that they made ducks and drakes of a few turnpike-bonds I had—and so I went up myself, with Trottle in the rumble, to look at the inside of this same lodging, and at the outside of this same House.

As I say, I went and saw for myself. The lodging was perfect. That, I was sure it would be; because Trottle is the best judge of comfort I know. The empty house was an eyesore; and that I was sure it would be too, for the same reason. However, setting the one thing against the other, the good against the bad, the lodging very soon got the victory over the House. My lawyer, Mr. Squares, of Crown Office Row; Temple, drew up an agreement; which his young man jabbered over so dreadfully when he read it to me, that I didn't understand one word of it except my own name; and hardly that, and I signed it, and the other party signed it, and, in three weeks' time, I moved my old bones, bag and baggage, up to London.

For the first month or so, I arranged to leave Trottle at the Wells. I made this arrangement, not only because there was a good deal to take care of in the way of my school-children and pensioners, and also of a new stove in the hall to air the house in my absence, which appeared to me calculated to blow up and burst; but, likewise because I suspect Trottle (though the steadiest of men, and a widower between sixty and seventy) to be what I call rather a Philanderer. I mean, that when any friend comes down to see me and brings a maid, Trottle is always remarkably ready to show that maid the Wells of an evening; and that I have more than once noticed the shadow of his arm, outside the room door nearly opposite my chair, encircling that maid's waist on the landing, like a table-cloth brush.

Therefore, I thought it just as well, before any London Philandering took place, that I should have a little time to look round me, and to see what girls were in and about the place. So, nobody stayed with me in my new lodging at first after Trottle had established me there safe and sound, but Peggy Flobbins, my maid; a most affectionate and attached woman, who never was an object of Philandering since I have known her, and is not likely to begin to become so after nine-and-twenty years next March.

It was the fifth of November when I first breakfasted in my new rooms. The Guys were going about in the brown fog, like magnified monsters of insects in table-beer, and there was a Guy resting on the door-steps of the House to Let. I put on my glasses, partly to see how the boys were pleased with what I sent them out by Peggy, and partly to make sure that she didn't approach too near the ridiculous object, which of course was full of sky-rockets, and might go off into bangs at any moment. In this way it happened that the first time I ever looked at the House to Let, after I became its opposite neighbour, I had my glasses on. And this might not have happened once in fifty times, for my sight is uncommonly good for my time of life; and I wear glasses as little as I can, for fear of spoiling it.

I knew already that it was a ten-roomed house, very dirty, and much dilapidated; that the area-rails were rusty and peeling away, and that two or three of them were wanting, or half-wanting; that there were broken panes of glass in the windows, and blotches of mud on other panes, which the boys had thrown at them; that there was quite a collection of stones in the area, also proceeding from those Young Mischiefs; that there were games chalked on the pavement before the house, and likenesses of ghosts chalked on the street-door; that the windows were all darkened by rotting old blinds, or shutters, or both; that the bills "To Let," had curled up, as if the damp air of the place had given them cramps; or had dropped down into corners, as if they were no more. I had seen all this on my first visit, and I had remarked to Trottle, that the lower part of the black board about terms was split away; that the rest had become illegible, and that the very stone of the door-steps was broken across. Notwithstanding, I sat at my breakfast table on that Please to Remember the fifth of November morning, staring at the House through my glasses, as if I had never looked at it before.

All at once—in the first-floor window on my right—down in a low corner, at a hole in a blind or a shutter—I found that I was looking at a secret Eye. The reflection of my fire may have touched it and made it shine; but, I saw it shine and vanish.

The eye might have seen me, or it might not have seen me, sitting there in the glow of my fire—you can take which probability you prefer, without offence—but something struck through my frame, as if the sparkle of this eye had been electric, and had flashed straight at me. It had such an effect upon me, that I could not remain by myself, and I rang for Flobbins, and invented some little jobs for her, to keep her in the room. After my breakfast was cleared away, I sat in the same place with my glasses on, moving my head, now so, and now so, trying whether, with the shining of my fire and the flaws in the window-glass, I could reproduce any sparkle seeming to be up there, that was like the sparkle of an eye. But no; I could make nothing like it. I could make ripples and crooked lines in the front of the House to Let, and I could even twist one window up and loop it into another; but, I could make no eye, nor anything like an eye. So I convinced myself that I really had seen an eye.

Well, to be sure I could not get rid of the impression of this eye, and it troubled me and troubled me, until it was almost a torment. I don't think I was previously inclined to concern my head much about the opposite House; but, after this eye, my head was full of the house; and I thought of little else than the house, and I watched the house, and I talked about the house, and I dreamed of the house. In all this, I fully believe now, there was a good Providence. But, you will judge for yourself about that, bye-and-bye.

My landlord was a butler, who had married a cook, and set up housekeeping. They had not kept house longer than a couple of years, and they knew no more about the House to Let than I did. Neither could I find out anything concerning it among the trades-people or otherwise; further than what Trottle had told me at first. It had been empty, some said six years, some said eight, some said ten. It never did let, they all agreed, and it never would let.

I soon felt convinced that I should work myself into one of my states about the House; and I soon did. I lived for a whole month in a flurry, that was always getting worse. Towers's prescriptions, which I had brought to London with me, were of no more use than nothing. In the cold winter sunlight, in the thick winter fog, in the black winter rain, in the white winter snow, the House was equally on my mind. I have heard, as everybody else has, of a spirit's haunting a house; but I have had my own personal experience of a house's haunting a spirit; for that House haunted mine.

In all that month's time, I never saw anyone go into the House nor come out of the House. I supposed that such a thing must take place sometimes, in the dead of the night, or the glimmer of the morning; but, I never saw it done. I got no relief from having my curtains drawn when it came on dark, and shutting out the House. The Eye then began to shine in my fire.

I am a single old woman. I should say at once, without being at all afraid of the name, I am an old maid; only that I am older than the phrase would express. The time was when I had my love-trouble, but, it is long and long ago. He was killed at sea (Dear Heaven rest his blessed head!) when I was twenty-five. I have all my life, since ever I can remember, been deeply fond of children. I have always felt such a love for them, that I have had my sorrowful and sinful times when I have fancied something must have gone wrong in my life—something must have been turned aside from its original intention I mean—or I should have been the proud and happy mother of many children, and a fond old grandmother this day. I have soon known better in the cheerfulness and contentment that God has blessed me with and given me abundant reason for; and yet I have had to dry my eyes even then, when I have thought of my dear, brave, hopeful, handsome, bright-eyed Charley, and the trust meant to cheer me with. Charley was my youngest brother, and he went to India. He married there, and sent his gentle little wife home to me to be confined, and she was to go back to him, and the baby was to be left with me, and I was to bring it up. It never belonged to this life. It took its silent place among the other incidents in my story that might have been, but never were. I had hardly time to whisper to her "Dead my own!" or she to answer, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust! O lay it on my breast and comfort Charley!" when she had gone to seek her baby at Our Saviour's feet. I went to Charley, and I told him there was nothing left but me, poor me; and I lived with Charley, out there, several years. He was a man of fifty, when he fell asleep in my arms. His face had changed to be almost old and a little stern; but, it softened, and softened when I laid it down that I might cry and pray beside it; and, when I looked at it for the last time, it was my dear, untroubled, handsome, youthful Charley of long ago.

—I was going on to tell that the loneliness of the House to Let brought back all these recollections, and that they had quite pierced my heart one evening, when Flobbins, opening the door, and looking very much as if she wanted to laugh but thought better of it, said:

"Mr. Jabez Jarber, ma'am!"

Upon which Mr. Jarber ambled in, in his usual absurd way, saying:

"Sophonisba!"

Which I am obliged to confess is my name. A pretty one and proper one enough when it was given to me: but, a good many years out of date now, and always sounding particularly high-flown and comical from his lips. So I said, sharply:

"Though it is Sophonisba, Jarber, you are not obliged to mention it, that *I* see."

In reply to this observation, the ridiculous man put the tips of my five right-hand fingers to his lips, and said again, with an aggravating accent on the third syllable:

"Sophon*is*ba!"

I don't burn lamps, because I can't abide the smell of oil, and wax candles belonged to my day. I hope the convenient situation of one of my tall old candlesticks on the table at my elbow will be my excuse for saying, that if he did that again, I would chop his toes with it. (I am sorry to add that when I told him so, I knew his toes to be tender.) But, really, at my time of life and at Jarber's, it is too much of a good thing. There is an orchestra still standing in the open air at the Wells, before which, in the presence of a throng of fine company, I have walked a minuet with Jarber. But, there is a house still standing, in which I have worn a pinafore, and had a tooth drawn by fastening a thread to the tooth and the door-handle, and toddling away from the door. And how should I look now, at my years, in a pinafore, or having a door for my dentist?

Besides, Jarber always was more or less an absurd man. He was sweetly dressed, and beautifully perfumed, and many girls of my day would have given their ears for him; though I am bound to add that he never cared a fig for them, or their advances either, and that he was very constant to me. For, he not only proposed to me before my love-happiness ended in sorrow, but afterwards too: not once, nor yet twice: nor will we say how many times. However many they were, or however few they were, the last time he paid me that compliment was immediately after he had presented me with a digestive dinner-pill stuck on the point of a pin. And I said on that occasion, laughing heartily, "Now, Jarber, if you don't know that two people whose united ages would make about a hundred and fifty, have got to be old, I do; and I beg to swallow this nonsense in the form of this pill" (which I took on the spot), "and I request to, hear no more of it."

After that, he conducted himself pretty well. He was always a little squeezed man, was Jarber, in little sprigged waistcoats; and he had always little legs and a little smile, and a little voice, and little round-about ways. As long as I can remember him he was always going little errands for people, and carrying little gossip. At this present time when he called me "Sophonisba!" he had a little old-fashioned lodging in that new neighbourhood of mine. I had not seen him for two or three years, but I had heard that he still went out with a little perspective-glass and stood on door-steps in Saint James's Street, to see the nobility go to Court; and went in his little cloak and goloshes outside Willis's rooms to see them go to Almack's; and caught the frightfullest colds, and got himself trodden upon by coachmen and linkmen, until he went home to his landlady a mass of bruises, and had to be nursed for a month.

Jarber took off his little fur-collared cloak, and sat down opposite me, with his little cane and hat in his hand.

"Let us have no more Sophonisbaing, if *you* please, Jarber," I said. "Call me Sarah. How do you do? I hope you are pretty well."

"Thank you. And you?" said Jarber.

"I am as well as an old woman can expect to be."

Jarber was beginning:

"Say, not old, Sophon—" but I looked at the candlestick, and he left off; pretending not to have said anything.

"I am infirm, of course," I said, "and so are you. Let us both be thankful it's no worse."

"Is it possible that you look worried?" said Jarber.

"It is very possible. I have no doubt it is the fact."

"And what has worried my Soph-, soft-hearted friend," said Jarber.

"Something not easy, I suppose, to comprehend. I am worried to death by a House to Let, over the way."

Jarber went with his little tip-toe step to the window-curtains, peeped out, and looked round at me.

"Yes," said I, in answer: "that house."

After peeping out again, Jarber came back to his chair with a tender air, and asked: "How does it worry you, S-arah?"

"It is a mystery to me," said I. "Of course every house *is* a mystery, more or less; but, something that I don't care to mention" (for truly the Eye was so slight a thing to mention that I was more than half ashamed of it), "has made that House so mysterious to me, and has so fixed it in my mind, that I have had no peace for a month. I foresee that I shall have no peace, either, until Trottle comes to me, next Monday."

I might have mentioned before, that there is a lone-standing jealousy between Trottle and Jarber; and that there is never any love lost between those two.

"*Trottle*," petulantly repeated Jarber, with a little flourish of his cane; "how is *Trottle* to restore the lost peace of Sarah?"

"He will exert himself to find out something about the House. I have fallen into that state about it, that I really must discover by some means or other, good or bad, fair or foul, how and why it is that that House remains To Let."

"And why Trottle? Why not," putting his little hat to his heart; "why not, Jarber?

"To tell you the truth, I have never thought of Jarber in the matter. And now I do think of Jarber, through your having the kindness to suggest him—for which I am really and truly obliged to you—I don't think he could do it."

"Sarah!"

"I think it would be too much for you, Jarber."

"Sarah!"

"There would be coming and going, and fetching and carrying, Jarber, and you might catch cold."

"Sarah! What can be done by Trottle, can be done by me. I am on terms of acquaintance with every person of responsibility in this parish. I am intimate at the Circulating Library. I converse daily with the Assessed Taxes. I lodge with the Water Rate. I know the Medical Man. I lounge habitually at the House Agent's. I dine with the Churchwardens. I move to the Guardians. Trottle! A person in the sphere of a domestic, and totally unknown to society!"

"Don't be warm, Jarber. In mentioning Trottle, I have naturally relied on my Right-Hand, who would take any trouble to gratify even a whim of his old mistress's. But, if you can find out anything to help to unravel the mystery of this House to Let, I shall be fully as much obliged to you as if there was never a Trottle in the land."

Jarber rose and put on his little cloak. A couple of fierce brass lions held it tight round his little throat; but a couple of the mildest Hares might have done that, I am sure. "Sarah," he said, "I go. Expect me on Monday evening, the Sixth, when perhaps you will give me a cup of tea;—may I ask for no Green? Adieu!"

This was on a Thursday, the second of December. When I reflected that Trottle would come back on Monday, too, I had My misgivings as to the difficulty of keeping the two powers from open warfare, and indeed I was more uneasy than I quite like to confess. However, the empty House swallowed up that thought next morning, as it swallowed up most other thoughts now, and the House quite preyed upon me all that day, and all the Saturday.

It was a very wet Sunday: raining and blowing from morning to night. When the bells rang for afternoon church, they seemed to ring in the commotion of the puddles as well as in the wind, and they sounded very loud and dismal indeed, and the street looked very dismal indeed, and the House looked dismallest of all.

I was reading my prayers near the light, and my fire was growing in the darkening window-glass, when, looking up, as I prayed for the fatherless children and widows and all who were desolate and oppressed,—I saw the Eye again. It passed in a moment, as it had done before; but, this time, I was inwardly more convinced that I had seen it.

Well to be sure, I *had* a night that night! Whenever I closed my own eyes, it was to see eyes. Next morning, at an unreasonably, and I should have said (but for that railroad) an impossibly early hour, comes Trottle. As soon as he had told me all about the Wells, I told him all about the House. He listened with as great interest and attention as I could possibly wish, until I came to Jabez Jarber, when he cooled in an instant, and became opinionated.

"Now, Trottle," I said, pretending not to notice, "when Mr. Jarber comes back this evening, we must all lay our heads together."

"I should hardly think that would be wanted, ma'am; Mr. Jarber's head is surely equal to anything."

Being determined not to notice, I said again, that we must all lay our heads together.

"Whatever you order, ma'am, shall be obeyed. Still, it cannot be doubted, I should think, that Mr. Jarber's head is equal, if not superior, to any pressure that can be brought to bear upon it."

This was provoking; and his way, when he came in and out all through the day, of pretending not to see the House to Let, was more provoking still. However, being quite resolved not to notice, I gave no sign whatever that I did notice. But, when evening came, and he showed in Jarber, and, when Jarber wouldn't be helped off with his cloak, and poked his cane into cane chair-backs and china ornaments and his own eye, in trying to unclasp his brazen lions of himself (which he couldn't do, after all), I could have shaken them both.

As it was, I only shook the tea-pot, and made the tea. Jarber had brought from under his cloak, a roll of paper, with which he had triumphantly pointed over the way, like the Ghost of Hamlet's Father appearing to the late Mr. Kemble, and which he had laid on the table.

“A discovery?” said I, pointing to it, when he was seated, and had got his tea-cup.—“Don’t go, Trottle.”

“The first of a series of discoveries,” answered Jarber. “Account of a former tenant, compiled from the Water Rate, and Medical Man.”

“Don’t go, Trottle,” I repeated. For, I saw him making imperceptibly to the door.

“Begging your pardon, ma’am, I might be in Mr. Jarber’s way?”

Jarber looked that he decidedly thought he might be. I relieved myself with a good angry croak, and said—always determined not to notice:

“Have the goodness to sit down, if you please, Trottle. I wish you to hear this.”

Trottle bowed in the stiffest manner, and took the remotest chair he could find. Even that, he moved close to the draught from the keyhole of the door.

“Firstly,” Jarber began, after sipping his tea, “would my Sophon—”

“Begin again, Jarber,” said I.

“Would you be much surprised, if this House to Let should turn out to be the property of a relation of your own?”

“I should indeed be very much surprised.”

“Then it belongs to your first cousin (I learn, by the way, that he is ill at this time) George Forley.”

“Then that is a bad beginning. I cannot deny that George Forley stands in the relation of first cousin to me; but I hold no communication with him. George Forley has been a hard, bitter, stony father to a child now dead. George Forley was most implacable and unrelenting to one of his two daughters who made a poor marriage. George Forley brought all the weight of his band to bear as heavily against that crushed thing, as he brought it to bear lightly, favouringly, and advantageously upon her sister, who made a rich marriage. I hope that, with the measure George Forley meted, it may not be measured out to him again. I will give George Forley no worse wish.”

I was strong upon the subject, and I could not keep the tears out of my eyes; for, that young girl’s was a cruel story, and I had dropped many a tear over it before.

“The house being George Forley’s,” said I, “is almost enough to account for there being a Fate upon it, if Fate there is. Is there anything about George Forley in those sheets of paper?”

“Not a word.”

“I am glad to hear it. Please to read on. Trottle, why don’t you come nearer? Why do you sit mortifying yourself in those arctic regions? Come nearer.”

“Thank you, ma’am; I am quite near enough to Mr. Jarber.”

Jarber rounded his chair, to get his back full to my opinionated friend and servant, and, beginning to read, tossed the words at him over his (Jabez Jarber’s) own ear and shoulder.

He read what follows:

THE MANCHESTER MARRIAGE

Mr. and Mrs. Openshaw came from Manchester to London and took the House To Let. He had been, what is called in Lancashire, a Salesman for a large manufacturing firm, who were extending their business, and opening a warehouse in London; where Mr. Openshaw was now to superintend the business. He rather enjoyed the change of residence; having a kind of curiosity about London, which he had never yet been able to gratify in his brief visits to the metropolis. At the same time he had an odd, shrewd, contempt for the inhabitants; whom he had always pictured to himself as fine, lazy people; caring nothing but for fashion and aristocracy, and lounging away their days in Bond Street, and such places; ruining good English, and ready in their turn to despise him as a provincial. The hours that the men of business kept in the city scandalised him too; accustomed as he was to the early dinners of Manchester folk, and the consequently far longer evenings. Still, he was pleased to go to London; though he would not for the world have confessed it, even to himself, and always spoke of the step to his friends as one demanded of him by the interests of his employers, and sweetened to him by a considerable increase of salary. His salary indeed was so liberal that he might have been justified in taking a much larger House than this one, had he not thought himself bound to set an example to Londoners of how little a Manchester man of business cared for show. Inside, however, he furnished the House with an unusual degree of comfort, and, in the winter time, he insisted on keeping up as large fires as the grates would allow, in every room where the temperature was in the least chilly. Moreover, his northern sense of hospitality was such, that, if he were at home, he could hardly suffer a visitor to leave the house without forcing meat and drink upon him. Every servant in the house was well warmed, well fed, and kindly treated; for their master scorned all petty saving in aught that conduced to comfort; while he amused himself by following out all his accustomed habits and individual ways in defiance of what any of his new neighbours might think.

His wife was a pretty, gentle woman, of suitable age and character. He was forty-two, she thirty-five. He was loud and decided; she soft and yielding. They had two children or rather, I should say, she had two; for the elder, a girl of eleven, was Mrs. Openshaw's child by Frank Wilson her first husband. The younger was a little boy, Edwin, who could just prattle, and to whom his father delighted to speak in the broadest and most unintelligible Lancashire dialect, in order to keep up what he called the true Saxon accent.

Mrs. Openshaw's Christian-name was Alice, and her first husband had been her own cousin. She was the orphan niece of a sea-captain in Liverpool: a quiet, grave little creature, of great personal attraction when she was fifteen or sixteen, with regular features and a blooming complexion. But she was very shy, and believed herself to be very stupid and awkward; and was frequently scolded by her aunt, her own uncle's second wife. So when her cousin, Frank Wilson, came home from a long absence at sea, and first was kind and protective to her; secondly, attentive and thirdly, desperately in love with her, she hardly knew how to be grateful enough to him. It is true she would have preferred his remaining in the first or second stages of behaviour; for his violent love puzzled and frightened her. Her uncle neither helped nor hindered the love affair though it was going on under his own eyes. Frank's step-mother had such a variable temper, that there was no knowing whether what she liked one day she would like the next, or not. At length she went to such extremes of crossness, that Alice was only too glad to shut her eyes and rush blindly at the chance of escape from domestic tyranny offered her by a marriage with her cousin; and, liking him better than any one in the world except her uncle (who was at this time at sea) she went off one morning and was married to him; her only bridesmaid being the housemaid at her aunt's. The consequence was, that Frank and his wife went into lodgings, and Mrs. Wilson refused to see them, and turned away Norah, the warm-hearted housemaid; whom they accordingly took into their service. When Captain Wilson returned from his voyage, he was very cordial with the young couple, and spent many an evening at their lodgings; smoking his pipe, and sipping his grog; but he told them that, for quietness' sake, he could not ask them to his own house; for his wife was bitter against them. They were not very unhappy about this.

The seed of future unhappiness lay rather in Frank's vehement, passionate disposition; which led him to resent his wife's shyness and want of demonstration as failures in conjugal duty. He was already tormenting himself, and her too, in a slighter degree, by apprehensions and imaginations of what might befall her during his approaching absence at sea. At last he went to his father and urged him to insist upon Alice's being once more received under his roof; the more especially as there was now a prospect of her confinement while her husband was away on his voyage. Captain Wilson was, as he himself expressed it, "breaking up," and unwilling to undergo the excitement of a scene; yet he felt that what his son said was true. So he went to his wife. And before Frank went to sea, he had the comfort of seeing his wife installed in her old little garret in his father's house. To have placed her in the one best spare room was a step beyond Mrs. Wilson's powers of submission or generosity. The worst part about it, however, was that the faithful Norah had to be dismissed. Her place as housemaid had been filled up; and, even had it not, she had forfeited Mrs. Wilson's good opinion for ever. She comforted her young master and mistress by pleasant prophecies of the time when they would have a household of their own; of which, in whatever service she might be in the meantime, she should be sure to form part. Almost the last action Frank Wilson did, before setting sail, was going with Alice to see Norah once more at her mother's house. And then he went away.

Alice's father-in-law grew more and more feeble as winter advanced. She was of great use to her step-mother in nursing and amusing him; and, although there was anxiety enough in the household, there was perhaps more of peace than there had been for years; for Mrs. Wilson had not a bad heart, and was softened by the visible approach of death to one whom she loved, and touched by the lonely condition of the young creature, expecting her first confinement in her husband's absence. To this relenting mood Norah owed the permission to come and nurse Alice when her baby was born, and to remain to attend on Captain Wilson.

Before one letter had been received from Frank (who had sailed for the East Indies and China), his father died. Alice was always glad to remember that he had held her baby in his arms, and kissed and blessed it before his death. After that, and the consequent examination into the state of his affairs, it was found that he had left far less property than people had been led by his style of living to imagine; and, what money there was, was all settled upon his wife, and at her disposal after her death. This did not signify much to Alice, as Frank was now first mate of his ship, and, in another voyage or two, would be captain. Meanwhile he had left her some hundreds (all his savings) in the bank.

It became time for Alice to hear from her husband. One letter from the Cape she had already received. The next was to announce his arrival in India. As week after week passed over, and no intelligence of the ship's arrival reached the office of the owners, and the Captain's wife was in the same state of ignorant suspense as Alice herself, her fears grew most oppressive. At length the day came when, in reply to her inquiry at the Shipping Office, they told her that the owners had given up Hope of ever hearing more of the Betsy-Jane, and had sent in their claim upon the underwriters. Now that he was gone for ever, she first felt a yearning, longing love for the kind cousin, the dear friend, the sympathising protector, whom she should never see again,—first felt a passionate desire to show him his child, whom she had hitherto rather craved to have all to herself—her own sole possession. Her grief was, however, noiseless, and quiet—rather to the scandal of Mrs. Wilson; who bewailed her step-son as if he and she had always lived together in perfect harmony, and who evidently thought it her duty to burst into fresh tears at every strange face she saw; dwelling on his poor young widow's desolate state, and the helplessness of the fatherless child, with an unction, as if she liked the excitement of the sorrowful story.

So passed away the first days of Alice's widowhood. Bye-and-bye things subsided into their natural and tranquil course. But, as if this young creature was always to be in some heavy trouble, her ewe-lamb began to be ailing, pining and sickly. The child's mysterious illness turned out to be some affection of the spine likely to affect health; but not to shorten life—at least so the doctors said. But the long dreary suffering of one whom a mother loves as Alice loved her only child, is hard to look forward to. Only Norah guessed what Alice suffered; no one but God knew.

And so it fell out, that when Mrs. Wilson, the elder, came to her one day in violent distress, occasioned by a very material diminution in the value the property that her husband had left her,—a diminution which made her income barely enough to support herself, much less Alice—the latter could hardly understand how anything which did not touch health or life could cause such grief; and she received the intelligence with irritating composure. But when, that afternoon, the little sick child was brought in, and the grandmother—who after all loved it well—began a fresh moan over her losses to its unconscious ears—saying how she had planned to consult this or that doctor, and to give it this or that comfort or luxury in after yearn but that now all chance of this had passed away—Alice’s heart was touched, and she drew near to Mrs. Wilson with unwonted caresses, and, in a spirit not unlike to that of, Ruth, entreated, that come what would, they might remain together. After much discussion in succeeding days, it was arranged that Mrs. Wilson should take a house in Manchester, furnishing it partly with what furniture she had, and providing the rest with Alice’s remaining two hundred pounds. Mrs. Wilson was herself a Manchester woman, and naturally longed to return to her native town. Some connections of her own at that time required lodgings, for which they were willing to pay pretty handsomely. Alice undertook the active superintendence and superior work of the household. Norah, willing faithful Norah, offered to cook, scour, do anything in short, so that, she might but remain with them.

The plan succeeded. For some years their first lodgers remained with them, and all went smoothly,—with the one sad exception of the little girl’s increasing deformity. How that mother loved that child, is not for words to tell!

Then came a break of misfortune. Their lodgers left, and no one succeeded to them. After some months they had to remove to a smaller house; and Alice’s tender conscience was torn by the idea that she ought not to be a burden to her mother-in-law, but ought to go out and seek her own maintenance. And leave her child! The thought came like the sweeping boom of a funeral bell over her heart.

Bye-and-bye, Mr. Openshaw came to lodge with them. He had started in life as the errand-boy and sweeper-out of a warehouse; had struggled up through all the grades of employment in the place, fighting his way through the hard striving Manchester life with strong pushing energy of character. Every spare moment of time had been sternly given up to self-teaching. He was a capital accountant, a good French and German scholar, a keen, far-seeing tradesman; understanding markets, and the bearing of events, both near and distant, on trade: and yet, with such vivid attention to present details, that I do not think he ever saw a group of flowers in the fields without thinking whether their colours would, or would not, form harmonious contrasts in the coming spring muslins and prints. He went to debating societies, and threw himself with all his heart and soul into politics; esteeming, it must be owned, every man a fool or a knave who differed from him, and overthrowing his opponents rather by the loud strength of his language than the calm strength if his logic. There was something of the Yankee in all this. Indeed his theory ran parallel to the famous Yankee motto—“England flogs creation, and Manchester flogs England.” Such a man, as may be fancied, had had no time for falling in love, or any such nonsense. At the age when most young men go through their courting and matrimony, he had not the means of keeping a wife, and was far too practical to think of having one. And now that he was in easy circumstances, a rising man, he considered women almost as incumbrances to the world, with whom a man had better have as little to do as possible. His first impression of Alice was indistinct, and he did not care enough about her to make it distinct. “A pretty yea-nay kind of woman,” would have been his description of her, if he had been pushed into a corner. He was rather afraid, in the beginning, that her quiet ways arose from a listlessness and laziness of character which would have been exceedingly discordant to his active energetic nature. But, when he found out the punctuality with which his wishes were attended to, and her work was done; when he was called in the morning at the very stroke of the clock, his shaving-water scalding hot, his fire bright, his coffee made exactly as his peculiar fancy dictated, (for he was a man who had his theory about everything, based upon what he knew of science, and often perfectly original)—then he began to think: not that Alice had any peculiar merit; but that he had got into remarkably good lodgings: his restlessness wore away, and he began to consider himself as almost settled for life in them.

Mr. Openshaw had been too busy, all his life, to be introspective. He did not know that he had any tenderness in his nature; and if he had become conscious of its abstract existence, he would have considered it as a manifestation of disease in some part of his nature. But he was decoyed into pity unawares; and pity led on to tenderness. That little helpless child—always carried about by one of the three busy women of the house, or else patiently threading coloured beads in the chair from which, by no effort of its own, could it ever move; the great grave blue eyes, full of serious, not uncheerful, expression, giving to the small delicate face a look beyond its years; the soft plaintive voice dropping out but few words, so unlike the continual prattle of a child—caught Mr. Openshaw’s attention in spite of himself. One day—he half scorned himself for doing so—he cut short his dinner-hour to go in search of some toy which should take the place of those eternal beads. I forget what he bought; but, when he gave the present (which he took care to do in a short abrupt manner, and when no one was by to see him) he was almost thrilled by the flash of delight that came over that child's face, and could not help all through that afternoon going over and over again the picture left on his memory, by the bright effect of unexpected joy on the little girl's face. When he returned home, he found his slippers placed by his sitting-room fire; and even more careful attention paid to his fancies than was habitual in those model lodgings. When Alice had taken the last of his tea-things away—she had been silent as usual till then—she stood for an instant with the door in her hand. Mr. Openshaw looked as if he were deep in his book, though in fact he did not see a line; but was heartily wishing the woman would be gone, and not make any palaver of gratitude. But she only said:

"I am very much obliged to you, sir. Thank you very much," and was gone, even before he could send her away with a "There, my good woman, that's enough!"

For some time longer he took no apparent notice of the child. He even hardened his heart into disregarding her sudden flush of colour, and little timid smile of recognition, when he saw her by chance. But, after all, this could not last for ever; and, having a second time given way to tenderness, there was no relapse. The insidious enemy having thus entered his heart, in the guise of compassion to the child, soon assumed the more dangerous form of interest in the mother. He was aware of this change of feeling, despised himself for it, struggled with it nay, internally yielded to it and cherished it, long before he suffered the slightest expression of it, by word, action, or look, to escape him. He watched Alice's docile obedient ways to her stepmother; the love which she had inspired in the rough Norah (roughened by the wear and tear of sorrow and years); but above all, he saw the wild, deep, passionate affection existing between her and her child. They spoke little to any one else, or when any one else was by; but, when alone together, they talked, and murmured, and cooed, and chattered so continually, that Mr. Openshaw first wondered what they could find to say to each other, and next became irritated because they were always so grave and silent with him. All this time, he was perpetually devising small new pleasures for the child. His thoughts ran, in a pertinacious way, upon the desolate life before her; and often he came back from his day's work loaded with the very thing Alice had been longing for, but had not been able to procure. One time it was a little chair for drawing the little sufferer along the streets, and many an evening that ensuing summer Mr. Openshaw drew her along himself, regardless of the remarks of his acquaintances. One day in autumn he put down his newspaper, as Alice came in with the breakfast, and said, in as indifferent a voice as he could assume:

“Mrs. Frank, is there any reason why we two should not put up our horses together?”

Alice stood still in perplexed wonder. What did he mean? He had resumed the reading of his newspaper, as if he did not expect any answer; so she found silence her safest course, and went on quietly arranging his breakfast without another word passing between them. Just as he was leaving the house, to go to the warehouse as usual, he turned back and put his head into the bright, neat, tidy kitchen, where all the women breakfasted in the morning:

“You’ll think of what I said, Mrs. Frank” (this was her name with the lodgers), “and let me have your opinion upon it to-night.”

Alice was thankful that her mother and Norah were too busy talking together to attend much to this speech. She determined not to think about it at all through the day; and, of course, the effort not to think made her think all the more. At night she sent up Norah with his tea. But Mr. Openshaw almost knocked Norah down as she was going out at the door, by pushing past her and calling out “Mrs. Frank!” in an impatient voice, at the top of the stairs.

Alice went up, rather than seem to have affixed too much meaning to his words.

“Well, Mrs. Frank,” he said, “what answer? Don’t make it too long; for I have lots of office-work to get through to-night.”

“I hardly know what you meant, sir,” said truthful Alice.

“Well! I should have thought you might have guessed. You’re not new at this sort of work, and I am. However, I’ll make it plain this time. Will you have me to be thy wedded husband, and serve me, and love me, and honour me, and all that sort of thing? Because if you will, I will do as much by you, and be a father to your child—and that’s more than is put in the prayer-book. Now, I’m a man of my word; and what I say, I feel; and what I promise, I’ll do. Now, for your answer!”

Alice was silent. He began to make the tea, as if her reply was a matter of perfect indifference to him; but, as soon as that was done, he became impatient.

“Well?” said he.

“How long, sir, may I have to think over it?”

“Three minutes!” (looking at his watch). “You’ve had two already—that makes five. Be a sensible woman, say Yes, and sit down to tea with me, and we’ll talk it over together; for, after tea, I shall be busy; say No” (he hesitated a moment to try and keep his voice in the same tone), “and I shan’t say another word about it, but pay up a year’s rent for my rooms to-morrow, and be off. Time’s up! Yes or no?”

“If you please, sir,—you have been so good to little Ailsie—”

“There, sit down comfortably by me on the sofa, and let us have our tea together. I am glad to find you are as good and sensible as I took for.”

And this was Alice Wilson’s second wooing.

Mr. Openshaw’s will was too strong, and his circumstances too good, for him not to carry all before him. He settled Mrs. Wilson in a comfortable house of her own, and made her quite independent of lodgers. The little that Alice said with regard to future plans was in Norah’s behalf.

“No,” said Mr. Openshaw. “Norah shall take care of the old lady as long as she lives; and, after that, she shall either come and live with us, or, if she likes it better, she shall have a provision for life—for your sake, missus. No one who has been good to you or the child shall go unrewarded. But even the little one will be better for some fresh stuff about her. Get her a bright, sensible girl as a nurse: one who won’t go rubbing her with calf’s-foot jelly as Norah does; wasting good stuff outside that ought to go in, but will follow doctors’ directions; which, as you must see pretty clearly by this time, Norah won’t; because they give the poor little wench pain. Now, I’m not above being nesh for other folks myself. I can stand a good blow, and never change colour; but, set me in the operating-room in the infirmary, and I turn as sick as a girl. Yet, if need were, I would hold the little wench on my knees while she screeched with pain, if it were to do her poor back good. Nay, nay, wench! keep your white looks for the time when it comes—I don’t say it ever will. But this I know, Norah will spare the child and cheat the doctor if she can. Now, I say, give the bairn a year or two’s chance, and then, when the pack of doctors have done their best—and, maybe, the old lady has gone—we’ll have Norah back, or do better for her.”

The pack of doctors could do no good to little Ailsie. She was beyond their power. But her father (for so he insisted on being called, and also on

Alice's no longer retaining the appellation of Mama, but becoming henceforward Mother), by his healthy cheerfulness of manner, his clear decision of purpose, his odd turns and quirks of humour, added to his real strong love for the helpless little girl, infused a new element of brightness and confidence into her life; and, though her back remained the same, her general health was strengthened, and Alice—never going beyond a smile herself—had the pleasure of seeing her child taught to laugh.

As for Alice's own life, it was happier than it had ever been. Mr. Openshaw required no demonstration, no expressions of affection from her. Indeed, these would rather have disgusted him. Alice could love deeply, but could not talk about it. The perpetual requirement of loving words, looks, and caresses, and misconstruing their absence into absence of love, had been the great trial of her former married life. Now, all went on clear and straight, under the guidance of her husband's strong sense, warm heart, and powerful will. Year by year their worldly prosperity increased. At Mrs. Wilson's death, Norah came back to them, as nurse to the newly-born little Edwin; into which post she was not installed without a pretty strong oration on the part of the proud and happy father; who declared that if he found out that Norah ever tried to screen the boy by a falsehood, or to make him nesh either in body or mind, she should go that very day. Norah and Mr. Openshaw were not on the most thoroughly cordial terms; neither of them fully recognising or appreciating the other's best qualities.

This was the previous history of the Lancashire family who had now removed to London, and had come to occupy the House.

They had been there about a year, when Mr. Openshaw suddenly informed his wife that he had determined to heal long-standing feuds, and had asked his uncle and aunt Chadwick to come and pay them a visit and see London. Mrs. Openshaw had never seen this uncle and aunt of her husband's. Years before she had married him, there had been a quarrel. All she knew was, that Mr. Chadwick was a small manufacturer in a country town in South Lancashire. She was extremely pleased that the breach was to be healed, and began making preparations to render their visit pleasant.

They arrived at last. Going to see London was such an event to them, that Mrs. Chadwick had made all new linen fresh for the occasion-from night-caps downwards; and, as for gowns, ribbons, and collars, she might have been going into the wilds of Canada where never a shop is, so large was her stock. A fortnight before the day of her departure for London, she had formally called to take leave of all her acquaintance; saying she should need all the intermediate time for packing up. It was like a second wedding in her imagination; and, to complete the resemblance which an entirely new wardrobe made between the two events, her husband brought her back from Manchester, on the last market-day before they set off, a gorgeous pearl and amethyst brooch, saying, “Lunnon should see that Lancashire folks knew a handsome thing when they saw it.”

For some time after Mr. and Mrs. Chadwick arrived at the Openshaws’, there was no opportunity for wearing this brooch; but at length they obtained an order to see Buckingham Palace, and the spirit of loyalty demanded that Mrs. Chadwick should wear her best clothes in visiting the abode of her sovereign. On her return, she hastily changed her dress; for Mr. Openshaw had planned that they should go to Richmond, drink tea and return by moonlight. Accordingly, about five o’clock, Mr. and Mrs. Openshaw and Mr. and Mrs. Chadwick set off.

The housemaid and cook sate below, Norah hardly knew where. She was always engrossed in the nursery, in tending her two children, and in sitting by the restless, excitable Ailsie till she fell asleep. Bye-and-bye, the housemaid Bessy tapped gently at the door. Norah went to her, and they spoke in whispers.

“Nurse! there’s some one down-stairs wants you.”

“Wants me! Who is it?”

“A gentleman—”

“A gentleman? Nonsense!”

“Well! a man, then, and he asks for you, and he rung at the front door bell, and has walked into the dining-room.”

“You should never have let him,” exclaimed Norah, “master and missus out—”

“I did not want him to come in; but when he heard you lived here, he walked past me, and sat down on the first chair, and said, ‘Tell her to come and speak to me.’ There is no gas lighted in the room, and supper is all set out.”

“He’ll be off with the spoons!” exclaimed Norah, putting the housemaid’s fear into words, and preparing to leave the room, first, however, giving a look to Ailsie, sleeping soundly and calmly.

Down-stairs she went, uneasy fears stirring in her bosom. Before she entered the dining-room she provided herself with a candle, and, with it in her hand, she went in, looking round her in the darkness for her visitor.

He was standing up, holding by the table. Norah and he looked at each other; gradual recognition coming into their eyes.

"Norah?" at length he asked.

"Who are you?" asked Norah, with the sharp tones of alarm and incredulity. "I don't know you:" trying, by futile words of disbelief, to do away with the terrible fact before her.

"Am I so changed?" he said, pathetically. "I daresay I am. But, Norah, tell me!" he breathed hard, "where is my wife? Is she—is she alive?"

He came nearer to Norah, and would have taken her hand; but she backed away from him; looking at him all the time with staring eyes, as if he were some horrible object. Yet he was a handsome, bronzed, good-looking fellow, with beard and moustache, giving him a foreign-looking aspect; but his eyes! there was no mistaking those eager, beautiful eyes—the very same that Norah had watched not half-an-hour ago, till sleep stole softly over them.

"Tell me, Norah—I can bear it—I have feared it so often. Is she dead?" Norah still kept silence. "She is dead!" He hung on Norah's words and looks, as if for confirmation or contradiction.

"What shall I do?" groaned Norah. "O, sir! why did you come? how did you find me out? where have you been? We thought you dead, we did, indeed!" She poured out words and questions to gain time, as if time would help her.

"Norah! answer me this question, straight, by yes or no—Is my wife dead?"

"No, she is not!" said Norah, slowly and heavily.

"O what a relief! Did she receive my letters? But perhaps you don't know. Why did you leave her? Where is she? O Norah, tell me all quickly!"

"Mr. Frank!" said Norah at last, almost driven to bay by her terror lest her mistress should return at any moment, and find him there—unable to consider what was best to be done or said-rushing at something decisive, because she could not endure her present state: "Mr. Frank! we never heard a line from you, and the shipowners said you had gone down, you and every one else. We thought you were dead, if ever man was, and poor Miss Alice and her little sick, helpless child! O, sir, you must guess it," cried the poor creature at last, bursting out into a passionate fit of crying, "for indeed I cannot tell it. But it was no one's fault. God help us all this night!"

Norah had sate down. She trembled too much to stand. He took her hands in his. He squeezed them hard, as if by physical pressure, the truth could be wrung out.

"Norah!" This time his tone was calm, stagnant as despair. "She has married again!"

Norah shook her head sadly. The grasp slowly relaxed. The man had fainted.

There was brandy in the room. Norah forced some drops into Mr. Frank's mouth, chafed his hands, and—when mere animal life returned, before the mind poured in its flood of memories and thoughts—she lifted him up, and rested his head against her knees. Then she put a few crumbs of bread taken from the supper-table, soaked in brandy into his mouth. Suddenly he sprang to his feet.

"Where is she? Tell me this instant." He looked so wild, so mad, so desperate, that Norah felt herself to be in bodily danger; but her time of dread had gone by. She had been afraid to tell him the truth, and then she had been a coward. Now, her wits were sharpened by the sense of his desperate state. He must leave the house. She would pity him afterwards; but now she must rather command and upbraid; for he must leave the house before her mistress came home. That one necessity stood clear before her.

"She is not here; that is enough for you to know. Nor can I say exactly where she is" (which was true to the letter if not to the spirit). "Go away, and tell me where to find you to-morrow, and I will tell you all. My master and mistress may come back at any minute, and then what would become of me with a strange man in the house?"

Such an argument was too petty to touch his excited mind.

"I don't care for your master and mistress. If your master is a man, he must feel for me poor shipwrecked sailor that I am—kept for years a prisoner amongst savages, always, always, always thinking of my wife and my home—dreaming of her by night, talking to her, though she could not hear, by day. I loved her more than all heaven and earth put together. Tell me where she is, this instant, you wretched woman, who salved over her wickedness to her, as you do to me."

The clock struck ten. Desperate positions require desperate measures.

"If you will leave the house now, I will come to you to-morrow and tell you all. What is more, you shall see your child now. She lies sleeping up-stairs. O, sir, you have a child, you do not know that as yet—a little weakly girl—with just a heart and soul beyond her years. We have reared her up with such care: We watched her, for we thought for many a year she might die any day, and we tended her, and no hard thing has come near her, and no rough word has ever been said to her. And now you, come and will take her life into your hand, and will crush it. Strangers to her have been kind to her; but her own father—Mr. Frank, I am her nurse, and I love her, and I tend her, and I would do anything for her that I could. Her mother's heart beats as hers beats; and, if she suffers a pain, her mother trembles all over. If she is happy, it is her mother that smiles and is glad. If she is growing stronger, her mother is healthy: if she dwindles, her mother languishes. If she dies—well, I don't know: it is not every one can lie down and die when they wish it. Come up-stairs, Mr. Frank, and see your child. Seeing her will do good to your poor heart. Then go away, in God's name, just this one night-to-morrow, if need be, you can do anything—kill us all if you will, or show yourself—a great grand man, whom God will bless for ever and ever. Come, Mr. Frank, the look of a sleeping child is sure to give peace."

She led him up-stairs; at first almost helping his steps, till they came near the nursery door. She had almost forgotten the existence of little Edwin. It struck upon her with affright as the shaded light fell upon the other cot; but she skilfully threw that corner of the room into darkness, and let the light fall on the sleeping Ailsie. The child had thrown down the coverings, and her deformity, as she lay with her back to them, was plainly visible through her slight night-gown. Her little face, deprived of the lustre of her eyes, looked wan and pinched, and had a pathetic expression in it, even as she slept. The poor father looked and looked with hungry, wistful eyes, into which the big tears came swelling up slowly, and dropped heavily down, as he stood trembling and shaking all over. Norah was angry with herself for growing impatient of the length of time that long lingering gaze lasted. She thought that she waited for full half-an-hour before Frank stirred. And then—instead of going away—he sank down on his knees by the bedside, and buried his face in the clothes. Little Ailsie stirred uneasily. Norah pulled him up in terror. She could afford no more time even for prayer in her extremity of fear; for surely the next moment would bring her mistress home. She took him forcibly by the arm; but, as he was going, his eye lighted on the other bed: he stopped. Intelligence came back into his face. His hands clenched.

"His child?" he asked.

"Her child," replied Norah. "God watches over him," said she instinctively; for Frank's looks excited her fears, and she needed to remind herself of the Protector of the helpless.

"God has not watched over me," he said, in despair; his thoughts apparently recoiling on his own desolate, deserted state. But Norah had no time for pity. To-morrow she would be as compassionate as her heart prompted. At length she guided him downstairs and shut the outer door and bolted it—as if by bolts to keep out facts.

Then she went back into the dining-room and effaced all traces of his presence as far as she could. She went upstairs to the nursery and sate there, her head on her hand, thinking what was to come of all this misery. It seemed to her very long before they did return; yet it was hardly eleven o'clock. She so heard the loud, hearty Lancashire voices on the stairs; and, for the first time, she understood the contrast of the desolation of the poor man who had so lately gone forth in lonely despair.

It almost put her out of patience to see Mrs. Openshaw come in, calmly smiling, handsomely dressed, happy, easy, to inquire after her children.

"Did Ailsie go to sleep comfortably?" she whispered to Norah.

"Yes."

Her mother bent over her, looking at her slumbers with the soft eyes of love. How little she dreamed who had looked on her last! Then she went to Edwin, with perhaps less wistful anxiety in her countenance, but more of pride. She took off her things, to go down to supper. Norah saw her no more that night.

Beside the door into the passage, the sleeping-nursery opened out of Mr. and Mrs. Openshaw's room, in order that they might have the children more immediately under their own eyes. Early the next summer morning Mrs. Openshaw was awakened by Ailsie's startled call of "Mother! mother!" She sprang up, put on her dressing-gown, and went to her child. Ailsie was only half awake, and in a not uncommon state of terror.

"Who was he, mother? Tell me!"

"Who, my darling? No one is here. You have been dreaming love. Waken up quite. See, it is broad daylight."

"Yes," said Ailsie, looking round her; then clinging to her mother, said, "but a man was here in the night, mother."

"Nonsense, little goose. No man has ever come near you!"

"Yes, he did. He stood there. Just by Norah. A man with hair and a beard. And he knelt down and said his prayers. Norah knows he was here, mother" (half angrily, as Mrs. Openshaw shook her head in smiling incredulity).

"Well! we will ask Norah when she comes," said Mrs. Openshaw, soothingly. "But we won't talk any more about him now. It is not five o'clock; it is too early for you to get up. Shall I fetch you a book and read to you?"

"Don't leave me, mother," said the child, clinging to her. So Mrs. Openshaw sate on the bedside talking to Ailsie, and telling her of what they had done at Richmond the evening before, until the little girl's eyes slowly closed and she once more fell asleep.

"What was the matter?" asked Mr. Openshaw, as his wife returned to bed. "Ailsie wakened up in a fright, with some story of a man having been in the room to say his prayers,—a dream, I suppose." And no more was said at the time.

Mrs. Openshaw had almost forgotten the whole affair when she got up about seven o'clock. But, bye-and-bye, she heard a sharp altercation going on in the nursery. Norah speaking angrily to Ailsie, a most unusual thing. Both Mr. and Mrs. Openshaw listened in astonishment.

"Hold your tongue, Ailsie I let me hear none of your dreams; never let me hear you tell that story again!" Ailsie began to cry.

Mr. Openshaw opened the door of communication before his wife could say a word.

"Norah, come here!"

The nurse stood at the door, defiant. She perceived she had been heard, but she was desperate.

"Don't let me hear you speak in that manner to Ailsie again," he said sternly, and shut the door.

Norah was infinitely relieved; for she had dreaded some questioning; and a little blame for sharp speaking was what she could well bear, if cross-examination was let alone.

Down-stairs they went, Mr. Openshaw carrying Ailsie; the sturdy Edwin coming step by step, right foot foremost, always holding his mother's hand.

Each child was placed in a chair by the breakfast-table, and then Mr. and Mrs. Openshaw stood together at the window, awaiting their visitors' appearance and making plans for the day. There was a pause. Suddenly Mr. Openshaw turned to Ailsie, and said:

"What a little goosy somebody is with her dreams, waking up poor, tired mother in the middle of the night with a story of a man being in the room."

"Father! I'm sure I saw him," said Ailsie, half crying. "I don't want to make Norah angry; but I was not asleep, for all she says I was. I had been asleep,—and I awakened up quite wide awake though I was so frightened. I kept my eyes nearly shut, and I saw the man quite plain. A great brown man with a beard. He said his prayers. And then he looked at Edwin. And then Norah took him by the arm and led him away, after they had whispered a bit together."

"Now, my little woman must be reasonable," said Mr. Openshaw, who was always patient with Ailsie. "There was no man in the house last night at all. No man comes into the house as you know, if you think; much less goes up into the nursery. But sometimes we dream something has happened, and the dream is so like reality, that you are not the first person, little woman, who has stood out that the thing has really happened."

"But, indeed it was not a dream!" said Ailsie, beginning to cry.

Just then Mr. and Mrs. Chadwick came down, looking grave and discomposed. All during breakfast time they were silent and uncomfortable. As soon as the breakfast things were taken away, and the children had been carried up-stairs, Mr. Chadwick began in an evidently preconcerted manner to inquire if his nephew was certain that all his servants were honest; for, that Mrs. Chadwick had that morning missed a very valuable brooch, which she had worn the day before. She remembered taking it off when she came home from Buckingham Palace. Mr. Openshaw's face contracted into hard lines: grew like what it was before he had known his wife and her child. He rang the bell even before his uncle had done speaking. It was answered by the housemaid.

"Mary, was any one here last night while we were away?"

"A man, sir, came to speak to Norah."

"To speak to Norah! Who was he? How long did he stay?"

"I'm sure I can't tell, sir. He came—perhaps about nine. I went up to tell Norah in the nursery, and she came down to speak to him. She let him out, sir. She will know who he was, and how long he stayed."

She waited a moment to be asked any more questions, but she was not, so she went away.

A minute afterwards Openshaw made as though he were going out of the room; but his wife laid her hand on his arm:

"Do not speak to her before the children," she said, in her low, quiet voice. "I will go up and question her."

"No! I must speak to her. You must know," said he, turning to his uncle and aunt, "my missus has an old servant, as faithful as ever woman was, I do believe, as far as love goes,—but, at the same time, who does not always speak truth, as even the missus must allow. Now, my notion is, that this Norah of ours has been come over by some good-for-nothin chap (for she's at the time o' life when they say women pray for husbands—'any, good Lord, any,') and has let him into our house, and the chap has made off with your brooch, and m'appen many another thing beside. It's only saying that Norah is soft-hearted, and does not stick at a white lie—that's all, missus."

It was curious to notice how his tone, his eyes, his whole face changed as he spoke to his wife; but he was the resolute man through all. She knew better than to oppose him; so she went up-stairs, and told Norah her master wanted to speak to her, and that she would take care of the children in the meanwhile.

Norah rose to go without a word. Her thoughts were these:

"If they tear me to pieces they shall never know through me. He may come,—and then just Lord have mercy upon us all: for some of us are dead folk to a certainty. But he shall do it; not me."

You may fancy, now, her look of determination as she faced her master alone in the dining-room; Mr. and Mrs. Chadwick having left the affair in their nephew's hands, seeing that he took it up with such vehemence.

"Norah! Who was that man that came to my house last night?"

"Man, sir!" As if infinitely; surprised but it was only to gain time.

"Yes; the man whom Mary let in; whom she went up-stairs to the nursery to tell you about; whom you came down to speak to; the same chap, I make no doubt, whom you took into the nursery to have your talk out with; whom Ailsie saw, and afterwards dreamed about; thinking, poor wench! she saw him say his prayers, when nothing, I'll be bound, was farther from his thoughts; who took Mrs. Chadwick's brooch, value ten pounds. Now, Norah! Don't go off! I am as sure as that my name's

Thomas Openshaw, that you knew nothing of this robbery. But I do think you've been imposed on, and that's the truth. Some good-for-nothing chap has been making up to you, and you've been just like all other women, and have turned a soft place in your heart to him; and he came last night a-lovyering, and you had him up in the nursery, and he made use of his opportunities, and made off with a few things on his way down! Come, now, Norah: it's no blame to you, only you must not be such a fool again. Tell us," he continued, "what name he gave you, Norah? I'll be bound it was not the right one; but it will be a clue for the police."

Norah drew herself up. "You may ask that question, and taunt me with my being single, and with my credulity, as you will, Master Openshaw. You'll get no answer from me. As for the brooch, and the story of theft and burglary; if any friend ever came to see me (which I defy you to prove, and deny), he'd be just as much above doing such a thing as you yourself, Mr. Openshaw, and more so, too; for I'm not at all sure as everything you have is rightly come by, or would be yours long, if every man had his own." She meant, of course, his wife; but he understood her to refer to his property in goods and chattels.

"Now, my good woman," said he, "I'll just tell you truly, I never trusted you out and out; but my wife liked you, and I thought you had many a good point about you. If you once begin to sauce me, I'll have the police to you, and get out the truth in a court of justice, if you'll not tell it me quietly and civilly here. Now the best thing you can do is quietly to tell me who the fellow is. Look here! a man comes to my house; asks for you; you take him up-stairs, a valuable brooch is missing next day; we know that you, and Mary, and cook, are honest; but you refuse to tell us who the man is. Indeed you've told one lie already about him, saying no one was here last night. Now I just put it to you, what do you think a policeman would say to this, or a magistrate? A magistrate would soon make you tell the truth, my good woman."

"There's never the creature born that should get it out of me," said Norah. "Not unless I choose to tell."

"I've a great mind to see," said Mr. Openshaw, growing angry at the defiance. Then, checking himself, he thought before he spoke again:

"Norah, for your missus's sake I don't want to go to extremities. Be a sensible woman, if you can. It's no great disgrace, after all, to have been taken in. I ask you once more—as a friend—who was this man whom you let into my house last night?"

No answer. He repeated the question in an impatient tone. Still no answer. Norah's lips were set in determination not to speak.

"Then there is but one thing to be done. I shall send for a policeman."

"You will not," said Norah, starting forwards. "You shall not, sir! No policeman shall touch me. I know nothing of the brooch, but I know this: ever since I was four-and-twenty I have thought more of your wife than of myself: ever since I saw her, a poor motherless girl put upon in her uncle's house, I have thought more of serving her than of serving myself! I have cared for her and her child, as nobody ever cared for me. I don't cast blame on you, sir, but I say it's ill giving up one's life to any one; for, at the end, they will turn round upon you, and forsake you. Why does not my missus come herself to suspect me? Maybe she is gone for the police? But I don't stay here, either for police, or magistrate, or master. You're an unlucky lot. I believe there's a curse on you. I'll leave you this very day. Yes! I leave that poor Ailsie, too. I will! No good will ever come to you!"

Mr. Openshaw was utterly astonished at this speech; most of which was completely unintelligible to him, as may easily be supposed. Before he could make up his mind what to say, or what to do, Norah had left the room. I do not think he had ever really intended to send for the police to this old servant of his wife's; for he had never for a moment doubted her perfect honesty. But he had intended to compel her to tell him who the man was, and in this he was baffled. He was, consequently, much irritated. He returned to his uncle and aunt in a state of great annoyance and perplexity, and told them he could get nothing out of the woman; that some man had been in the house the night before; but that she refused to tell who he was. At this moment his wife came in, greatly agitated, and asked what had happened to Norah; for that she had put on her things in passionate haste, and had left the house.

"This looks suspicious," said Mr. Chadwick. "It is not the way in which an honest person would have acted."

Mr. Openshaw kept silence. He was sorely perplexed. But Mrs. Openshaw turned round on Mr. Chadwick with a sudden fierceness no one ever saw in her before.

"You don't know Norah, uncle! She is gone because she is deeply hurt at being suspected. O, I wish I had seen her—that I had spoken to her myself. She would have told me anything." Alice wrung her hands.

"I must confess," continued Mr. Chadwick to his nephew, in a lower voice, "I can't make you out. You used to be a word and a blow, and oftenest the blow first; and now, when there is every cause for suspicion, you just do nought. Your missus is a very good woman, I grant; but she may have been put upon as well as other folk, I suppose. If you don't send for the police, I shall."

"Very well," replied Mr. Openshaw, surlily. "I can't clear Norah. She won't clear herself, as I believe she might if she would. Only I wash my hands of it; for I am sure the woman herself is honest, and she's lived a long time with my wife, and I don't like her to come to shame."

"But she will then be forced to clear herself. That, at any rate, will be a good thing."

"Very well, very well! I am heart-sick of the whole business. Come, Alice, come up to the babies they'll be in a sore way. I tell you, uncle!" he said, turning round once more to Mr. Chadwick, suddenly and sharply, after his eye had fallen on Alice's wan, tearful, anxious face; "I'll have none sending for the police after all. I'll buy my aunt twice as handsome a brooch this very day; but I'll not have Norah suspected, and my missus plagued. There's for you."

He and his wife left the room. Mr. Chadwick quietly waited till he was out of hearing, and then aid to his wife; "For all Tom's heroics, I'm just quietly going for a detective, wench. Thou need'st know nought about it."

He went to the police-station, and made a statement of the case. He was gratified by the impression which the evidence against Norah seemed to make. The men all agreed in his opinion, and steps were to be immediately taken to find out where she was. Most probably, as they suggested, she had gone at once to the man, who, to all appearance, was her lover. When Mr. Chadwick asked how they would find her out? they smiled, shook their heads, and spoke of mysterious but infallible ways and means. He returned to his nephew's house with a very comfortable opinion of his own sagacity. He was met by his wife with a penitent face:

"O master, I've found my brooch! It was just sticking by its pin in the flounce of my brown silk, that I wore yesterday. I took it off in a hurry, and it must have caught in it; and I hung up my gown in the closet. Just now, when I was going to fold it up, there was the brooch! I'm very vexed, but I never dreamt but what it was lost!"

Her husband muttering something very like “Confound thee and thy brooch too! I wish I’d never given it thee,” snatched up his hat, and rushed back to the station; hoping to be in time to stop the police from searching for Norah. But a detective was already gone off on the errand.

Where was Norah? Half mad with the strain of the fearful secret, she had hardly slept through the night for thinking what must be done. Upon this terrible state of mind had come Ailsie’s questions, showing that she had seen the Man, as the unconscious child called her father. Lastly came the suspicion of her honesty. She was little less than crazy as she ran up-stairs and dashed on her bonnet and shawl; leaving all else, even her purse, behind her. In that house she would not stay. That was all she knew or was clear about. She would not even see the children again, for fear it should weaken her. She feared above everything Mr. Frank’s return to claim his wife. She could not tell what remedy there was for a sorrow so tremendous, for her to stay to witness. The desire of escaping from the coming event was a stronger motive for her departure than her soreness about the suspicions directed against her; although this last had been the final goad to the course she took. She walked away almost at headlong speed; sobbing as she went, as she had not dared to do during the past night for fear of exciting wonder in those who might hear her. Then she stopped. An idea came into her mind that she would leave London altogether, and betake herself to her native town of Liverpool. She felt in her pocket for her purse, as she drew near the Euston Square station with this intention. She had left it at home. Her poor head aching, her eyes swollen with crying, she had to stand still, and think, as well as she could, where next she should bend her steps. Suddenly the thought flashed into her mind that she would go and find out poor Mr. Frank. She had been hardly kind to him the night before, though her heart had bled for him ever since. She remembered his telling her as she inquired for his address, almost as she had pushed him out of the door, of some hotel in a street not far distant from Euston Square. Thither she went: with what intention she hardly knew, but to assuage her conscience by telling him how much she pitied him. In her present state she felt herself unfit to counsel, or restrain, or assist, or do ought else but sympathise and weep. The people of the inn said such a person had been there; had arrived only the day before; had gone out soon after his arrival, leaving his luggage in their care; but had never come back. Norah asked for leave to sit down, and await the gentleman’s return. The landlady—pretty secure in the deposit of luggage against any probable injury—showed her into a room, and quietly locked the door on the outside. Norah was utterly worn out, and fell asleep—a shivering, starting, uneasy slumber, which lasted for hours.

The detective, meanwhile, had come up with her some time before she entered the hotel, into which he followed her. Asking the landlady to detain her for an hour or so, without giving any reason beyond showing his authority (which made the landlady applaud herself a good deal for having locked her in), he went back to the police-station to report his proceedings. He could have taken her directly; but his object was, if possible, to trace out the man who was supposed to have committed the robbery. Then he heard of the discovery of the brooch; and consequently did not care to return.

Norah slept till even the summer evening began to close in. Then up. Some one was at the door. It would be Mr. Frank; and she dizzily pushed back her ruffled grey hair, which had fallen over her eyes, and stood looking to see him. Instead, there came in Mr. Openshaw and a policeman.

"This is Norah Kennedy," said Mr. Openshaw.

"O, sir," said Norah, "I did not touch the brooch; indeed I did not. O, sir, I cannot live to be thought so badly of;" and very sick and faint, she suddenly sank down on the ground. To her surprise, Mr. Openshaw raised her up very tenderly. Even the policeman helped to lay her on the sofa; and, at Mr. Openshaw's desire, he went for some wine and sandwiches; for the poor gaunt woman lay there almost as if dead with weariness and exhaustion.

"Norah!" said Mr. Openshaw, in his kindest voice, "the brooch is found. It was hanging to Mrs. Chadwick's gown. I beg your pardon. Most truly I beg your pardon, for having troubled you about it. My wife is almost broken-hearted. Eat, Norah,—or, stay, first drink this glass of wine," said he, lifting her head, pouring a little down her throat.

As she drank, she remembered where she was, and who she was waiting for. She suddenly pushed Mr. Openshaw away, saying, "O, sir, you must go. You must not stop a minute. If he comes back he will kill you."

"Alas, Norah! I do not know who 'he' is. But some one is gone away who will never come back: someone who knew you, and whom I am afraid you cared for."

"I don't understand you, sir," said Norah, her master's kind and sorrowful manner bewildering her yet more than his words. The policeman had left the room at Mr. Openshaw's desire, and they two were alone.

"You know what I mean, when I say some one is gone who will never come back. I mean that he is dead!"

"Who?" said Norah, trembling all over.

"A poor man has been found in the Thames this morning, drowned."

"Did he drown himself?" asked Norah, solemnly.

"God only knows," replied Mr. Openshaw, in the same tone. "Your name and address at our house, were found in his pocket: that, and his purse, were the only things, that were found upon him. I am sorry to say it, my poor Norah; but you are required to go and identify him."

"To what?" asked Norah.

"To say who it is. It is always done, in order that some reason may be discovered for the suicide—if suicide it was. I make no doubt he was the man who came to see you at our house last night. It is very sad, I know." He made pauses between each little clause, in order to try and bring back her senses; which he feared were wandering—so wild and sad was her look.

"Master Openshaw," said she, at last, "I've a dreadful secret to tell you—only you must never breathe it to any one, and you and I must hide it away for ever. I thought to have done it all by myself, but I see I cannot. Yon poor man—yes! the dead, drowned creature is, I fear, Mr. Frank, my mistress's first husband!"

Mr. Openshaw sate down, as if shot. He did not speak; but, after a while, he signed to Norah to go on.

"He came to me the other night—when—God be thanked—you were all away at Richmond. He asked me if his wife was dead or alive. I was a brute, and thought more of our all coming home than of his sore trial: spoke out sharp, and said she was married again, and very content and happy: I all but turned him away: and now he lies dead and cold!"

"God forgive me!" said Mr. Openshaw.

"God forgive us all!" said Norah. "Yon poor man needs forgiveness perhaps less than any one among us. He had been among the savages—shipwrecked—I know not what—and he had written letters which had never reached my poor missus."

"He saw his child!"

"He saw her—yes! I took him up, to give his thoughts another start; for I believed he was going mad on my hands. I came to seek him here, as I more than half promised. My mind misgave me when I heard he had never come in. O, sir I it must be him!”

Mr. Openshaw rang the bell. Norah was almost too much stunned to wonder at what he did. He asked for writing materials, wrote a letter, and then said to Norah:

“I am writing to Alice, to say I shall be unavoidably absent for a few days; that I have found you; that you are well, and send her your love, and will come home to-morrow. You must go with me to the Police Court; you must identify the body: I will pay high to keep name; and details out of the papers.

“But where are you going, sir?”

He did not answer her directly. Then he said:

“Norah! I must go with you, and look on the face of the man whom I have so injured,—unwittingly, it is true; but it seems to me as if I had killed him. I will lay his head in the grave, as if he were my only brother: and how he must have hated me! I cannot go home to my wife till all that I can do for him is done. Then I go with a dreadful secret on my mind. I shall never speak of it again, after these days are over. I know you will not, either.” He shook hands with her: and they never named the subject again, the one to the other.

Norah went home to Alice the next day. Not a word was said on the cause of her abrupt departure a day or two before. Alice had been charged by her husband in his letter not to allude to the supposed theft of the brooch; so she, implicitly obedient to those whom she loved both by nature and habit, was entirely silent on the subject, only treated Norah with the most tender respect, as if to make up for unjust suspicion.

Nor did Alice inquire into the reason why Mr. Openshaw had been absent during his uncle and aunt’s visit, after he had once said that it was unavoidable. He came back, grave and quiet; and, from that time forth, was curiously changed. More thoughtful, and perhaps less active; quite as decided in conduct, but with new and different rules for the guidance of that conduct. Towards Alice he could hardly be more kind than he had always been; but he now seemed to look upon her as some one sacred and to be treated with reverence, as well as tenderness. He throve in business, and made a large fortune, one half of which was settled upon her.

* * * * *

Long years after these events,—a few months after her mother died, Ailsie and her "father" (as she always called Mr. Openshaw) drove to a cemetery a little way out of town, and she was carried to a certain mound by her maid, who was then sent back to the carriage. There was a head-stone, with F. W. and a date. That was all. Sitting by the grave, Mr. Openshaw told her the story; and for the sad fate of that poor father whom she had never seen, he shed the only tears she ever saw fall from his eyes.

* * * * *

"A most interesting story, all through," I said, as Jarber folded up the first of his series of discoveries in triumph. "A story that goes straight to the heart—especially at the end. But"—I stopped, and looked at Trottle.

Trottle entered his protest directly in the shape of a cough.

"Well!" I said, beginning to lose my patience. "Don't you see that I want you to speak, and that I don't want you to cough?"

"Quite so, ma'am," said Trottle, in a state of respectful obstinacy which would have upset the temper of a saint. "Relative, I presume, to this story, ma'am?"

"Yes, Yes!" said Jarber. "By all means let us hear what this good man has to say."

"Well, sir," answered Trottle, "I want to know why the House over the way doesn't let, and I don't exactly see how your story answers the question. That's all I have to say, sir."

I should have liked to contradict my opinionated servant, at that moment. But, excellent as the story was in itself, I felt that he had hit on the weak point, so far as Jarber's particular purpose in reading it was concerned.

"And that is what you have to say, is it?" repeated Jarber. "I enter this room announcing that I have a series of discoveries, and you jump instantly to the conclusion that the first of the series exhausts my resources. Have I your permission, dear lady, to enlighten this obtuse person, if possible, by reading Number Two?"

"My work is behindhand, ma'am," said Trottle, moving to the door, the moment I gave Jarber leave to go on.

"Stop where you are," I said, in my most peremptory manner, "and give Mr. Jarber his fair opportunity of answering your objection now you have made it."

Trottle sat down with the look of a martyr, and Jarber began to read with his back turned on the enemy more decidedly than ever.

GOING INTO SOCIETY

At one period of its reverses, the House fell into the occupation of a Showman. He was found registered as its occupier, on the parish books of the time when he rented the House, and there was therefore no need of any clue to his name. But, he himself was less easy to be found; for, he had led a wandering life, and settled people had lost sight of him, and people who plumed themselves on being respectable were shy of admitting that they had ever known anything of him. At last, among the marsh lands near the river's level, that lie about Deptford and the neighbouring market-gardens, a Grizzled Personage in velveteen, with a face so cut up by varieties of weather that he looked as if he had been tattooed, was found smoking a pipe at the door of a wooden house on wheels. The wooden house was laid up in ordinary for the winter, near the mouth of a muddy creek; and everything near it, the foggy river, the misty marshes, and the steaming market-gardens, smoked in company with the grizzled man. In the midst of this smoking party, the funnel-chimney of the wooden house on wheels was not remiss, but took its pipe with the rest in a companionable manner.

On being asked if it were he who had once rented the House to Let, Grizzled Velveteen looked surprised, and said yes. Then his name was Magsman? That was it, Toby Magsman—which lawfully christened Robert; but called in the line, from a infant, Toby. There was nothing agin Toby Magsman, he believed? If there was suspicion of such—mention it!

There was no suspicion of such, he might rest assured. But, some inquiries were making about that House, and would he object to say why he left it?

Not at all; why should he? He left it, along of a Dwarf.

Along of a Dwarf?

Mr. Magsman repeated, deliberately and emphatically, Along of a Dwarf.

Might it be compatible with Mr. Magsman's inclination and convenience to enter, as a favour, into a few particulars?

Mr. Magsman entered into the following particulars.

It was a long time ago, to begin with;—afore lotteries and a deal more was done away with. Mr. Magsman was looking about for a good pitch, and he see that house, and he says to himself, “I’ll have you, if you’re to be had. If money’ll get you, I’ll have you.”

The neighbours cut up rough, and made complaints; but Mr. Magsman don’t know what they *would* have had. It was a lovely thing. First of all, there was the canvass, representin the picter of the Giant, in Spanish trunks and a ruff, who was himself half the heighth of the house, and was run up with a line and pulley to a pole on the roof, so that his Ed was coeval with the parapet. Then, there was the canvass, representin the picter of the Albina lady, showing her white air to the Army and Navy in correct uniform. Then, there was the canvass, representin the picter of the Wild Indian a scalpin a member of some foreign nation. Then, there was the canvass, representin the picter of a child of a British Planter, seized by two Boa Constrictors—not that *we* never had no child, nor no Constrictors neither. Similarly, there was the canvass, representin the picter of the Wild Ass of the Prairies—not that *we* never had no wild asses, nor wouldn’t have had ’em at a gift. Last, there was the canvass, representin the picter of the Dwarf, and like him too (considerin), with George the Fourth in such a state of astonishment at him as His Majesty couldn’t with his utmost politeness and stoutness express. The front of the House was so covered with canvasses, that there wasn’t a spark of daylight ever visible on that side. “MAGSMAN’S AMUSEMENTS,” fifteen foot long by two foot high, ran over the front door and parlour winders. The passage was a Arbour of green baize and gardenstuff. A barrel-organ performed there unceasing. And as to respectability,—if threepence ain’t respectable, what is?

But, the Dwarf is the principal article at present, and he was worth the money. He was wrote up as MAJOR TPSCHOFFKI, OF THE IMPERIAL BULGRADERIAN BRIGADE. Nobody couldn’t pronounce the name, and it never was intended anybody should. The public always turned it, as a regular rule, into Chopski. In the line he was called Chops; partly on that account, and partly because his real name, if he ever had any real name (which was very dubious), was Stakes.

He was a uncommon small man, he really was. Certainly not so small as he was made out to be, but where *is* your Dwarf as is? He was a most uncommon small man, with a most uncommon large Ed; and what he had inside that Ed, nobody ever knowed but himself: even supposin himself to have ever took stock of it, which it would have been a stiff job for even him to do.

The kindest little man as never growed! Spirited, but not proud. When he travelled with the Spotted Baby—though he knowed himself to be a nat’ral Dwarf, and knowed the Baby’s spots to be put upon him artificial, he nursed that Baby like a mother. You never heerd him give a ill-name to a Giant. He *did* allow himself to break out into strong language respectin the Fat Lady from Norfolk; but that was an affair of the ’art; and when a man’s ’art has been trifled with by a lady, and the preference giv to a Indian, he ain’t master of his actions.

He was always in love, of course; every human nat’ral phenomenon is. And he was always in love with a large woman; I never knowed the Dwarf as could be got to love a small one. Which helps to keep ’em the Curiosities they are.

One sing’ler idea he had in that Ed of his, which must have meant something, or it wouldn’t have been there. It was always his opinion that he was entitled to property. He never would put his name to anything. He had been taught to write, by the young man without arms, who got his living with his toes (quite a writing master *he* was, and taught scores in the line), but Chops would have starved to death, afore he’d have gained a bit of bread by putting his hand to a paper. This is the more curious to bear in mind, because HE had no property, nor hope of property, except his house and a sarser. When I say his house, I mean the box, painted and got up outside like a reg’lar six-roomer, that he used to creep into, with a diamond ring (or quite as good to look at) on his forefinger, and ring a little bell out of what the Public believed to be the Drawing-room winder. And when I say a sarser, I mean a Chaney sarser in which he made a collection for himself at the end of every Entertainment. His cue for that, he took from me: “Ladies and gentlemen, the little man will now walk three times round the Cairawan, and retire behind the curtain.” When he said anything important, in private life, he mostly wound it up with this form of words, and they was generally the last thing he said to me at night afore he went to bed.

He had what I consider a fine mind—a poetic mind. His ideas respectin his property never come upon him so strong as when he sat upon a barrel-organ and had the handle turned. Arter the wibration had run through him a little time, he would screech out, “Toby, I feel my property coming—grind away! I’m counting my guineas by thousands, Toby—grind away! Toby, I shall be a man of fortun! I feel the Mint a jingling in me, Toby, and I’m swelling out into the Bank of England!” Such is the influence of music on a poetic mind. Not that he was partial to any other music but a barrel-organ; on the contrary, hated it.

He had a kind of a everlasting grudge agin the Public: which is a thing you may notice in many phenomenons that get their living out of it. What riled him most in the nater of his occupation was, that it kep him out of Society. He was continiwally saying, “Toby, my ambition is, to go into Society. The curse of my position towards the Public is, that it keeps me hout of Society. This don’t signify to a low beast of a Indian; he an’t formed for Society. This don’t signify to a Spotted Baby; *he* an’t formed for Society.—I am.”

Nobody never could make out what Chops done with his money. He had a good salary, down on the drum every Saturday as the day came round, besides having the run of his teeth—and he was a Woodpecker to eat—but all Dwarfs are. The sarser was a little income, bringing him in so many halfpence that he’d carry ’em for a week together, tied up in a pocket-handkercher. And yet he never had money. And it couldn’t be the Fat Lady from Norfolk, as was once supposed; because it stands to reason that when you have a animosity towards a Indian, which makes you grind your teeth at him to his face, and which can hardly hold you from Goosing him audible when he’s going through his War-Dance—it stands to reason you wouldn’t under them circumstances deprive yourself, to support that Indian in the lap of luxury.

Most unexpected, the mystery come out one day at Egham Races. The Public was shy of bein pulled in, and Chops was ringin his little bell out of his drawing-room winder, and was snarlin to me over his shoulder as he kneeled down with his legs out at the back-door—for he couldn’t be shoved into his house without kneeling down, and the premises wouldn’t accommodate his legs—was snarlin, “Here’s a precious Public for you; why the Devil don’t they tumble up?” when a man in the crowd holds up a carrier-pigeon, and cries out, “If there’s any person here as has got a ticket, the Lottery’s just drawed, and the number as has come up for the great prize is three, seven, forty-two! Three, seven, forty-two!” I was givin the man to the Furies myself, for calling off the Public’s attention—for the Public will turn away, at any time, to look at anything in preference to the thing showed ’em; and if you doubt it, get ’em together for any indiwidual purpose on the face of the earth, and send only two people in late, and see if the whole company an't far more interested in takin particular notice of them two than of you—I say, I wasn't best pleased with the man for callin out, and wasn't blessin him in my own mind, when I see Chops's little bell fly out of winder at a old lady, and he gets up and kicks his box over, exposin the whole secret, and he catches hold of the calves of my legs and he says to me, "Carry me into the wan, Toby, and throw a pail of water over me or I'm a dead man, for I've come into my property!"

Twelve thousand odd hundred pound, was Chops's winnins. He had bought a half-ticket for the twenty-five thousand prize, and it had come up. The first use he made of his property, was, to offer to fight the Wild Indian for five hundred pound a side, him with a poisoned darnin-needle and the Indian with a club; but the Indian being in want of backers to that amount, it went no further.

Arter he had been mad for a week—in a state of mind, in short, in which, if I had let him sit on the organ for only two minutes, I believe he would have bust—but we kep the organ from him—Mr. Chops come round, and behaved liberal and beautiful to all. He then sent for a young man he knowed, as had a wery genteel appearance and was a Bonnet at a gaming-booth (most respectable brought up, father havin been imminent in the livery stable line but unfort'nate in a commercial crisis, through paintin a old gray, ginger-bay, and sellin him with a Pedigree), and Mr. Chops said to this Bonnet, who said his name was Normandy, which it wasn't:

"Normandy, I'm a goin into Society. Will you go with me?"

Says Normandy: "Do I understand you, Mr. Chops, to hintimate that the 'ole of the expenses of that move will be borne by yourself?"

"Correct," says Mr. Chops. "And you shall have a Princely allowance too."

The Bonnet lifted Mr. Chops upon a chair, to shake hands with him, and replied in poetry, with his eyes seemingly full of tears:

"My boat is on the shore,
And my bark is on the sea,
And I do not ask for more,
But I'll Go:—along with thee."

They went into Society, in a chay and four grays with silk jackets. They took lodgings in Pall Mall, London, and they blazed away.

In consequence of a note that was brought to Bartlemy Fair in the autumn of next year by a servant, most wonderful got up in milk-white cords and tops, I cleaned myself and went to Pall Mall, one evening appinted. The gentlemen was at their wine arter dinner, and Mr. Chops's eyes was more fixed in that Ed of his than I thought good for him. There was three of 'em (in company, I mean), and I knowed the third well. When last met, he had on a white Roman shirt, and a bishop's mitre covered with leopard-skin, and played the clarionet all wrong, in a band at a Wild Beast Show.

This gent took on not to know me, and Mr. Chops said: "Gentlemen, this is a old friend of former days:" and Normandy looked at me through a eye-glass, and said, "Magsman, glad to see you!"—which I'll take my oath he wasn't. Mr. Chops, to git him convenient to the table, had his chair on a throne (much of the form of George the Fourth's in the canvass), but he hardly appeared to me to be King there in any other pint of view, for his two gentlemen ordered about like Emperors. They was all dressed like May-Day—gorgeous!—And as to Wine, they swam in all sorts.

I made the round of the bottles, first separate (to say I had done it), and then mixed 'em all together (to say I had done it), and then tried two of 'em as half-and-half, and then t'other two. Altogether, I passed a pleasin evenin, but with a tendency to feel muddled, until I considered it good manners to get up and say, "Mr. Chops, the best of friends must part, I thank you for the wariety of foreign drains you have stood so 'ansome, I looks towards you in red wine, and I takes my leave." Mr. Chops replied, "If you'll just hitch me out of this over your right arm, Magsman, and carry me down-stairs, I'll see you out." I said I couldn't think of such a thing, but he would have it, so I lifted him off his throne. He smelt strong of Maideary, and I couldn't help thinking as I carried him down that it was like carrying a large bottle full of wine, with a rayther ugly stopper, a good deal out of proportion.

When I set him on the door-mat in the hall, he kep me close to him by holding on to my coat-collar, and he whispers:

"I ain't 'appy, Magsman."

"What's on your mind, Mr. Chops?"

"They don't use me well. They an't grateful to me. They puts me on the mantel-piece when I won't have in more Champagne-wine, and they locks me in the sideboard when I won't give up my property."

"Get rid of 'em, Mr. Chops."

"I can't. We're in Society together, and what would Society say?"

“Come out of Society!” says I.

“I can’t. You don’t know what you’re talking about. When you have once gone into Society, you mustn’t come out of it.”

“Then if you’ll excuse the freedom, Mr. Chops,” were my remark, shaking my head grave, “I think it’s a pity you ever went in.”

Mr. Chops shook that deep Ed of his, to a surprisin extent, and slapped it half a dozen times with his hand, and with more Wice than I thought were in him. Then, he says, “You’re a good fellow, but you don’t understand. Good-night, go along. Magsman, the little man will now walk three times round the Cairawan, and retire behind the curtain.” The last I see of him on that occasion was his tryin, on the extremest werge of insensibility, to climb up the stairs, one by one, with his hands and knees. They’d have been much too steep for him, if he had been sober; but he wouldn’t be helped.

It warn’t long after that, that I read in the newspaper of Mr. Chops’s being presented at court. It was printed, “It will be recollected”—and I’ve noticed in my life, that it is sure to be printed that it *will* be recollected, whenever it won’t—“that Mr. Chops is the individual of small stature, whose brilliant success in the last State Lottery attracted so much attention.” Well, I says to myself, Such is Life! He has been and done it in earnest at last. He has astonished George the Fourth!

(On account of which, I had that canvass new-painted, him with a bag of money in his hand, a presentin it to George the Fourth, and a lady in Ostrich Feathers fallin in love with him in a bag-wig, sword, and buckles correct.)

I took the House as is the subject of present inquiries—though not the honour of bein acquainted—and I run Magsman’s Amusements in it thirteen months—sometimes one thing, sometimes another, sometimes nothin particular, but always all the canvasses outside. One night, when we had played the last company out, which was a shy company, through its raining Heavens hard, I was takin a pipe in the one pair back along with the young man with the toes, which I had taken on for a month (though he never drawed—except on paper), and I heard a kickin at the street door. “Halloa!” I says to the young man, “what’s up!” He rubs his eyebrows with his toes, and he says, “I can’t imagine, Mr. Magsman”—which he never could imagine nothin, and was monotonous company.

The noise not leavin off, I laid down my pipe, and I took up a candle, and I went down and opened the door. I looked out into the street; but nothin could I see, and nothin was I aware of, until I turned round quick, because some creetur run between my legs into the passage. There was Mr. Chops!

“Magsman,” he says, “take me, on the old terms, and you’ve got me; if it’s done, say done!”

I was all of a maze, but I said, “Done, sir.”

“Done to your done, and double done!” says he. “Have you got a bit of supper in the house?”

Bearin in mind them sparklin warieties of foreign drains as we’d guzzled away at in Pall Mall, I was ashamed to offer him cold sassages and gin-and-water; but he took ’em both and took ’em free; havin a chair for his table, and sittin down at it on a stool, like hold times. I, all of a maze all the while.

It was arter he had made a clean sweep of the sassages (beef, and to the best of my calculations two pound and a quarter), that the wisdom as was in that little man began to come out of him like prespiration.

“Magsman,” he says, “look upon me! You see afore you, One as has both gone into Society and come out.”

“O! You *are* out of it, Mr. Chops? How did you get out, sir?”

“SOLD OUT!” says he. You never saw the like of the wisdom as his Ed expressed, when he made use of them two words.

“My friend Magsman, I’ll impart to you a discovery I’ve made. It’s wallable; it’s cost twelve thousand five hundred pound; it may do you good in life—The secret of this matter is, that it ain’t so much that a person goes into Society, as that Society goes into a person.”

Not exactly keepin up with his meanin, I shook my head, put on a deep look, and said, “You’re right there, Mr. Chops.”

“Magsman,” he says, twitchin me by the leg, “Society has gone into me, to the tune of every penny of my property.”

I felt that I went pale, and though nat’rally a bold speaker, I couldn’t hardly say, “Where’s Normandy?”

“Bolted. With the plate,” said Mr. Chops.

“And t’other one?” meaning him as formerly wore the bishop’s mitre.

“Bolted. With the jewels,” said Mr. Chops.

I sat down and looked at him, and he stood up and looked at me.

“Magsman,” he says, and he seemed to myself to get wiser as he got hoarser; “Society, taken in the lump, is all dwarfs. At the court of St.

James's, they was all a doing my old business—all a goin three times round the Cairawan, in the hold court-suits and properties. Elsewheres, they was most of 'em ringin their little bells out of make-believes. Everywheres, the sarser was a goin round. Magsman, the sarser is the uniwersal Institution!"

I perceived, you understand, that he was soured by his misfortunes, and I felt for Mr. Chops.

"As to Fat Ladies," he says, giving his head a tremendious one agin the wall, "there's lots of *them* in Society, and worse than the original. *Hers* was a outrage upon Taste—simply a outrage upon Taste—awakenin contempt—carryin its own punishment in the form of a Indian." Here he giv himself another tremendious one. "But *theirs*, Magsman, *theirs* is mercenary outrages. Lay in Cashmeer shawls, buy bracelets, strew 'em and a lot of 'andsome fans and things about your rooms, let it be known that you give away like water to all as come to admire, and the Fat Ladies that don't exhibit for so much down upon the drum, will come from all the pints of the compass to flock about you, whatever you are. They'll drill holes in your 'art, Magsman, like a Cullender. And when you've no more left to give, they'll laugh at you to your face, and leave you to have your bones picked dry by Wulturs, like the dead Wild Ass of the Prairies that you deserve to be!" Here he giv himself the most tremendious one of all, and dropped.

I thought he was gone. His Ed was so heavy, and he knocked it so hard, and he fell so stoney, and the sassagerial disturbance in him must have been so immense, that I thought he was gone. But, he soon come round with care, and he sat up on the floor, and he said to me, with wisdom comin out of his eyes, if ever it come:

"Magsman! The most material difference between the two states of existence through which your unhappy friend has passed;" he reached out his poor little hand, and his tears dropped down on the moustachio which it was a credit to him to have done his best to grow, but it is not in mortals to command success,—"the difference this. When I was out of Society, I was paid light for being seen. When I went into Society, I paid heavy for being seen. I prefer the former, even if I wasn't forced upon it. Give me out through the trumpet, in the hold way, to-morrow."

Arter that, he slid into the line again as easy as if he had been iled all over. But the organ was kep from him, and no allusions was ever made, when a company was in, to his property. He got wiser every day; his views of Society and the Public was luminous, bewilderin, awful; and his Ed got bigger and bigger as his Wisdom expanded it.

He took well, and pulled ’em in most excellent for nine weeks. At the expiration of that period, when his Ed was a sight, he expressed one evenin, the last Company havin been turned out, and the door shut, a wish to have a little music.

“Mr. Chops,” I said (I never dropped the “Mr.” with him; the world might do it, but not me); “Mr. Chops, are you sure as you are in a state of mind and body to sit upon the organ?”

His answer was this: “Toby, when next met with on the tramp, I forgive her and the Indian. And I am.”

It was with fear and trembling that I began to turn the handle; but he sat like a lamb. I will be my belief to my dying day, that I see his Ed expand as he sat; you may therefore judge how great his thoughts was. He sat out all the changes, and then he come off.

“Toby,” he says, with a quiet smile, “the little man will now walk three times round the Cairawan, and retire behind the curtain.”

When we called him in the morning, we found him gone into a much better Society than mine or Pall Mall’s. I giv Mr. Chops as comfortable a funeral as lay in my power, followed myself as Chief, and had the George the Fourth canvass carried first, in the form of a banner. But, the House was so dismal arterwards, that I giv it up, and took to the Wan again.

* * * * *

“I don’t triumph,” said Jarber, folding up the second manuscript, and looking hard at Trottle. “I don’t triumph over this worthy creature. I merely ask him if he is satisfied now?”

“How can he be anything else?” I said, answering for Trottle, who sat obstinately silent. “This time, Jarber, you have not only read us a delightfully amusing story, but you have also answered the question about the House. Of course it stands empty now. Who would think of taking it after it had been turned into a caravan?” I looked at Trottle, as I said those last words, and Jarber waved his hand indulgently in the same direction.

“Let this excellent person speak,” said Jarber. “You were about to say, my good man?”—

“I only wished to ask, sir,” said Trottle doggedly, “if you could kindly oblige me with a date or two in connection with that last story?”

“A date!” repeated Jarber. “What does the man want with dates!”

"I should be glad to know, with great respect," persisted Trottle, "if the person named Magsman was the last tenant who lived in the House. It's my opinion—if I may be excused for giving it—that he most decidedly was not."

With those words, Trottle made a low bow, and quietly left the room.

There is no denying that Jarber, when we were left together, looked sadly discomposed. He had evidently forgotten to inquire about dates; and, in spite of his magnificent talk about his series of discoveries, it was quite as plain that the two stories he had just read, had really and truly exhausted his present stock. I thought myself bound, in common gratitude, to help him out of his embarrassment by a timely suggestion. So I proposed that he should come to tea again, on the next Monday evening, the thirteenth, and should make such inquiries in the meantime, as might enable him to dispose triumphantly of Trottle's objection.

He gallantly kissed my hand, made a neat little speech of acknowledgment, and took his leave. For the rest of the week I would not encourage Trottle by allowing him to refer to the House at all. I suspected he was making his own inquiries about dates, but I put no questions to him.

On Monday evening, the thirteenth, that dear unfortunate Jarber came, punctual to the appointed time. He looked so terribly harassed, that he was really quite a spectacle of feebleness and fatigue. I saw, at a glance, that the question of dates had gone against him, that Mr. Magsman had not been the last tenant of the House, and that the reason of its emptiness was still to seek.

"What I have gone through," said Jarber, "words are not eloquent enough to tell. O Sophonisba, I have begun another series of discoveries! Accept the last two as stories laid on your shrine; and wait to blame me for leaving your curiosity unappeased, until you have heard Number Three."

Number Three looked like a very short manuscript, and I said as much. Jarber explained to me that we were to have some poetry this time. In the course of his investigations he had stepped into the Circulating Library, to seek for information on the one important subject. All the Library-people knew about the House was, that a female relative of the last tenant, as they believed, had, just after that tenant left, sent a little manuscript poem to them which she described as referring to events that had actually passed in the House; and which she wanted the proprietor of the Library to publish. She had written no address on her letter; and the proprietor had kept the manuscript ready to be given back to her (the publishing of poems not being in his line) when she might call for it. She had never called for it; and the poem had been lent to Jarber, at his express request, to read to me.

Before he began, I rang the bell for Trottle; being determined to have him present at the new reading, as a wholesome check on his obstinacy. To my surprise Peggy answered the bell, and told me, that Trottle had stepped out without saying where. I instantly felt the strongest possible conviction that he was at his old tricks: and that his stepping out in the evening, without leave, meant—Philandering.

Controlling myself on my visitor’s account, I dismissed Peggy, stifled my indignation, and prepared, as politely as might be, to listen to Jarber.

THREE EVENINGS IN THE HOUSE

NUMBER ONE.

I.
Yes, it look’d dark and dreary
That long and narrow street:
Only the sound of the rain,
And the tramp of passing feet,
The duller glow of the fire,
And gathering mists of night
To mark how slow and weary
The long day’s cheerless flight!
II.
Watching the sullen fire,
Hearing the dreary rain,
Drop after drop, run down
On the darkening window-pane;
Chill was the heart of Bertha,
Chill as that winter day,—
For the star of her life had risen
Only to fade away.
III.
The voice that had been so strong
To bid the snare depart,
The true and earnest will,
And the calm and steadfast heart,
Were now weigh’d down by sorrow,
Were quivering now with pain;
The clear path now seem’d clouded,
And all her grief in vain.
IV.
Duty, Right, Truth, who promised
To help and save their own,

Seem’d spreading wide their pinions
To leave her there alone.
So, turning from the Present
To well-known days of yore,
She call’d on them to strengthen
And guard her soul once more.

V.

She thought how in her girlhood
Her life was given away,
The solemn promise spoken
She kept so well to-day;
How to her brother Herbert
She had been help and guide,
And how his artist-nature
On her calm strength relied.

VI.

How through life’s fret and turmoil
The passion and fire of art
In him was soothed and quicken’d
By her true sister heart;
How future hopes had always
Been for his sake alone;
And now, what strange new feeling
Possess’d her as its own?

VII.

Her home; each flower that breathed there;
The wind’s sigh, soft and low;
Each trembling spray of ivy;
The river’s murmuring flow;
The shadow of the forest;
Sunset, or twilight dim;
Dear as they were, were dearer
By leaving them for him.

VIII.

And each year as it found her
In the dull, feverish town,
Saw self still more forgotten,

And selfish care kept down
By the calm joy of evening
That brought him to her side,
To warn him with wise counsel,
Or praise with tender pride.

IX.

Her heart, her life, her future,
Her genius, only meant
Another thing to give him,
And be therewith content.
To-day, what words had stirr'd her,
Her soul could not forget?
What dream had fill'd her spirit
With strange and wild regret?

X.

To leave him for another:
Could it indeed be so?
Could it have cost such anguish
To bid this vision go?
Was this her faith? Was Herbert
The second in her heart?
Did it need all this struggle
To bid a dream depart?

XI.

And yet, within her spirit
A far-off land was seen;
A home, which might have held her;
A love, which might have been;
And Life: not the mere being
Of daily ebb and flow,
But Life itself had claim'd her,
And she had let it go!

XII.

Within her heart there echo'd
Again the well-known tune
That promised this bright future,
And ask'd her for its own:

Then words of sorrow, broken
By half-reproachful pain;
And then a farewell, spoken
In words of cold disdain.

XIII.

Where now was the stern purpose
That nerved her soul so long?
Whence came the words she utter’d,
So hard, so cold, so strong?
What right had she to banish
A hope that God had given?
Why must she choose earth’s portion,
And turn aside from Heaven?

XIV.

To-day! Was it this morning?
If this long, fearful strife
Was but the work of hours,
What would be years of life?
Why did a cruel Heaven
For such great suffering call?
And why—O, still more cruel!—
Must her own words do all?

XV.

Did she repent? O Sorrow!
Why do we linger still
To take thy loving message,
And do thy gentle will?
See, her tears fall more slowly;
The passionate murmurs cease,
And back upon her spirit
Flow strength, and love, and peace.

XVI.

The fire burns more brightly,
The rain has passed away,
Herbert will see no shadow
Upon his home to-day;
Only that Bertha greets him

With doubly tender care,
Kissing a fonder blessing
Down on his golden hair.

NUMBER TWO.

I.

The studio is deserted,
Palette and brush laid by,
The sketch rests on the easel,
The paint is scarcely dry;
And Silence—who seems always
Within her depths to bear
The next sound that will utter—
Now holds a dumb despair.

II.

So Bertha feels it: listening
With breathless, stony fear,
Waiting the dreadful summons
Each minute brings more near:
When the young life, now ebbing,
Shall fail, and pass away
Into that mighty shadow
Who shrouds the house to-day.

III.

But why—when the sick chamber
Is on the upper floor—
Why dares not Bertha enter
Within the close-shut door?
If he—her all—her Brother,
Lies dying in that gloom,
What strange mysterious power
Has sent her from the room?

IV.

It is not one week’s anguish
That can have changed her so;

Joy has not died here lately,
Struck down by one quick blow;
But cruel months have needed
Their long relentless chain,
To teach that shrinking manner
Of helpless, hopeless pain.

V.

The struggle was scarce over
Last Christmas Eve had brought:
The fibres still were quivering
Of the one wounded thought,
When Herbert—who, unconscious,
Had guessed no inward strife—
Bade her, in pride and pleasure,
Welcome his fair young wife.

VI.

Bade her rejoice, and smiling,
Although his eyes were dim,
Thank'd God he thus could pay her
The care she gave to him.
This fresh bright life would bring her
A new and joyous fate—
O Bertha, check the murmur
That cries, Too late! too late!

VII.

Too late! Could she have known it
A few short weeks before,
That his life was completed,
And needing hers no more,
She might—O sad repining!
What "might have been," forget;
"It was not," should suffice us
To stifle vain regret.

VIII.

He needed her no longer,
Each day it grew more plain;
First with a startled wonder,

Then with a wondering pain.
Love: why, his wife best gave it;
Comfort: durst Bertha speak?
Counsel: when quick resentment
Flush’d on the young wife’s cheek.

IX.

No more long talks by firelight
Of childish times long past,
And dreams of future greatness
Which he must reach at last;
Dreams, where her purer instinct
With truth unerring told
Where was the worthless gilding,
And where refinèd gold.

X.

Slowly, but surely ever,
Dora’s poor jealous pride,
Which she call’d love for Herbert,
Drove Bertha from his side;
And, spite of nervous effort
To share their alter’d life,
She felt a check to Herbert,
A burden to his wife.

XI.

This was the least; for Bertha
Fear’d, dreaded, *knew* at length,
How much his nature owed her
Of truth, and power, and strength;
And watch’d the daily failing
Of all his nobler part:
Low aims, weak purpose, telling
In lower, weaker art.

XII.

And now, when he is dying,
The last words she could hear
Must not be hers, but given
The bride of one short year.

The last care is another’s;
The last prayer must not be
The one they learnt together
Beside their mother’s knee.

XIII.

Summon’d at last: she kisses
The clay-cold stiffening hand;
And, reading pleading efforts
To make her understand,
Answers, with solemn promise,
In clear but trembling tone,
To Dora’s life henceforward
She will devote her own.

XIV.

Now all is over. Bertha
Dares not remain to weep,
But soothes the frightened Dora
Into a sobbing sleep.
The poor weak child will need her:
O, who can dare complain,
When God sends a new Duty
To comfort each new Pain!

NUMBER THREE.

I.

The House is all deserted
In the dim evening gloom,
Only one figure passes
Slowly from room to room;
And, pausing at each doorway,
Seems gathering up again
Within her heart the relics
Of bygone joy and pain.

II.

There is an earnest longing
In those who onward gaze,
Looking with weary patience
Towards the coming days.
There is a deeper longing,
More sad, more strong, more keen:
Those know it who look backward,
And yearn for what has been.

III.

At every hearth she pauses,
Touches each well-known chair;
Gazes from every window,
Lingers on every stair.
What have these months brought Bertha
Now one more year is past?
This Christmas Eve shall tell us,
The third one and the last.

IV.

The wilful, wayward Dora,
In those first weeks of grief,
Could seek and find in Bertha
Strength, soothing, and relief.
And Bertha—last sad comfort
True woman-heart can take—
Had something still to suffer
And do for Herbert’s sake.

V.

Spring, with her western breezes,
From Indian islands bore
To Bertha news that Leonard
Would seek his home once more.
What was it—joy, or sorrow?
What were they—hopes, or fears?
That flush’d her cheeks with crimson,
And fill’d her eyes with tears?

VI.

He came. And who so kindly
Could ask and hear her tell
Herbert's last hours; for Leonard
Had known and loved him well.
Daily he came; and Bertha,
Poor wear heart, at length,
Weigh'd down by other's weakness,
Could rest upon his strength.

VII.

Yet not the voice of Leonard
Could her true care beguile,
That turn'd to watch, rejoicing,
Dora's reviving smile.
So, from that little household
The worst gloom pass'd away,
The one bright hour of evening
Lit up the livelong day.

VIII.

Days passed. The golden summer
In sudden heat bore down
Its blue, bright, glowing sweetness
Upon the scorching town.
And sights and sounds of country
Came in the warm soft tune
Sung by the honey'd breezes
Borne on the wings of June.

IX.

One twilight hour, but earlier
Than usual, Bertha thought
She knew the fresh sweet fragrance
Of flowers that Leonard brought;
Through open'd doors and windows
It stole up through the gloom,
And with appealing sweetness
Drew Bertha from her room.

X.

Yes, he was there; and pausing
Just near the open’d door,
To check her heart’s quick beating,
She heard—and paused still more—
His low voice Dora’s answers—
His pleading—Yes, she knew
The tone—the words—the accents:
She once had heard them too.

XI.

“Would Bertha blame her?” Leonard’s
Low, tender answer came:
“Bertha was far too noble
To think or dream of blame.”
“And was he sure he loved her?”
“Yes, with the one love given
Once in a lifetime only,
With one soul and one heaven!”

XII.

Then came a plaintive murmur,—
“Dora had once been told
That he and Bertha—” “Dearest,
Bertha is far too cold
To love; and I, my Dora,
If once I fancied so,
It was a brief delusion,
And over,—long ago.”

XIII.

Between the Past and Present,
On that bleak moment’s height,
She stood. As some lost traveller
By a quick flash of light
Seeing a gulf before him,
With dizzy, sick despair,
Reels to clutch backward, but to find
A deeper chasm there.

XIV.

The twilight grew still darker,
The fragrant flowers more sweet,
The stars shone out in heaven,
The lamps gleam’d down the street;
And hours pass’d in dreaming
Over their new-found fate,
Ere they could think of wondering
Why Bertha was so late.

XV.

She came, and calmly listen’d;
In vain they strove to trace
If Herbert’s memory shadow’d
In grief upon her face.
No blame, no wonder show’d there,
No feeling could be told;
Her voice was not less steady,
Her manner not more cold.

XVI.

They could not hear the anguish
That broke in words of pain
Through that calm summer midnight,—
“My Herbert—mine again!”
Yes, they have once been parted,
But this day shall restore
The long lost one: she claims him:
“My Herbert—mine once more!”

XVII.

Now Christmas Eve returning,
Saw Bertha stand beside
The altar, greeting Dora,
Again a smiling bride;
And now the gloomy evening
Sees Bertha pale and worn,
Leaving the house for ever,
To wander out forlorn.

XVIII.

Forlorn—nay, not so. Anguish
Shall do its work at length;
Her soul, pass'd through the fire,
Shall gain still purer strength.
Somewhere there waits for Bertha
An earnest noble part;
And, meanwhile, God is with her,—
God, and her own true heart!

* * * * *

I could warmly and sincerely praise the little poem, when Jarber had done reading it; but I could not say that it tended in any degree towards clearing up the mystery of the empty House.

Whether it was the absence of the irritating influence of Trottle, or whether it was simply fatigue, I cannot say, but Jarber did not strike me, that evening, as being in his usual spirits. And though he declared that he was not in the least daunted by his want of success thus far, and that he was resolutely determined to make more discoveries, he spoke in a languid absent manner, and shortly afterwards took his leave at rather an early hour.

When Trottle came back, and when I indignantly taxed him with Philandering, he not only denied the imputation, but asserted that he had been employed on my service, and, in consideration of that, boldly asked for leave of absence for two days, and for a morning to himself afterwards, to complete the business, in which he solemnly declared that I was interested. In remembrance of his long and faithful service to me, I did violence to myself, and granted his request. And he, on his side, engaged to explain himself to my satisfaction, in a week's time, on Monday evening the twentieth.

A day or two before, I sent to Jarber's lodgings to ask him to drop in to tea. His landlady sent back an apology for him that made my hair stand on end. His feet were in hot water; his head was in a flannel petticoat; a green shade was over his eyes; the rheumatism was in his legs; and a mustard-poultice was on his chest. He was also a little feverish, and rather distracted in his mind about Manchester Marriages, a Dwarf, and Three Evenings, or Evening Parties—his landlady was not sure which—in an empty House, with the Water Rate unpaid.

Under these distressing circumstances, I was necessarily left alone with Trottle. His promised explanation began, like Jarber's discoveries, with the reading of a written paper. The only difference was that Trottle introduced his manuscript under the name of a Report.

TROTTLE’S REPORT

The curious events related in these pages would, many of them, most likely never have happened, if a person named Trottle had not presumed, contrary to his usual custom, to think for himself.

The subject on which the person in question had ventured, for the first time in his life, to form an opinion purely and entirely his own, was one which had already excited the interest of his respected mistress in a very extraordinary degree. Or, to put it in plainer terms still, the subject was no other than the mystery of the empty House.

Feeling no sort of objection to set a success of his own, if possible, side by side with a failure of Mr. Jarber’s, Trottle made up his mind, one Monday evening, to try what he could do, on his own account, towards clearing up the mystery of the empty House. Carefully dismissing from his mind all nonsensical notions of former tenants and their histories, and keeping the one point in view steadily before him, he started to reach it in the shortest way, by walking straight up to the House, and bringing himself face to face with the first person in it who opened the door to him.

It was getting towards dark, on Monday evening, the thirteenth of the month, when Trottle first set foot on the steps of the House. When he knocked at the door, he knew nothing of the matter which he was about to investigate, except that the landlord was an elderly widower of good fortune, and that his name was Forley. A small beginning enough for a man to start from, certainly!

On dropping the knocker, his first proceeding was to look down cautiously out of the corner of his right eye, for any results which might show themselves at the kitchen-window. There appeared at it immediately the figure of a woman, who looked up inquisitively at the stranger on the steps, left the window in a hurry, and came back to it with an open letter in her hand, which she held up to the fading light. After looking over the letter hastily for a moment or so, the woman disappeared once more.

Trottle next heard footsteps shuffling and scraping along the bare hall of the house. On a sudden they ceased, and the sound of two voices—a shrill persuading voice and a gruff resisting voice—confusedly reached his ears. After a while, the voices left off speaking—a chain was undone, a bolt drawn back—the door opened—and Trottle stood face to face with two persons, a woman in advance, and a man behind her, leaning back flat against the wall.

“Wish you good evening, sir,” says the woman, in such a sudden way, and in such a cracked voice, that it was quite startling to hear her. “Chilly weather, ain’t it, sir? Please to walk in. You come from good Mr. Forley, don’t you, sir?”

“Don’t you, sir?” chimes in the man hoarsely, making a sort of gruff echo of himself, and chuckling after it, as if he thought he had made a joke.

If Trottle had said, “No,” the door would have been probably closed in his face. Therefore, he took circumstances as he found them, and boldly ran all the risk, whatever it might be, of saying, “Yes.”

“Quite right sir,” says the woman. “Good Mr. Forley’s letter told us his particular friend would be here to represent him, at dusk, on Monday the thirteenth—or, if not on Monday the thirteenth, then on Monday the twentieth, at the same time, without fail. And here you are on Monday the thirteenth, ain’t you, sir? Mr. Forley’s particular friend, and dressed all in black—quite right, sir! Please to step into the dining-room—it’s always kep scoured and clean against Mr. Forley comes here—and I’ll fetch a candle in half a minute. It gets so dark in the evenings, now, you hardly know where you are, do you, sir? And how is good Mr. Forley in his health? We trust he is better, Benjamin, don’t we? We are so sorry not to see him as usual, Benjamin, ain’t we? In half a minute, sir, if you don’t mind waiting, I’ll be back with the candle. Come along, Benjamin.”

“Come along, Benjamin,” chimes in the echo, and chuckles again as if he thought he had made another joke.

Left alone in the empty front-parlour, Trottle wondered what was coming next, as he heard the shuffling, scraping footsteps go slowly down the kitchen-stairs. The front-door had been carefully chained up and bolted behind him on his entrance; and there was not the least chance of his being able to open it to effect his escape, without betraying himself by making a noise.

Not being of the Jarber sort, luckily for himself, he took his situation quietly, as he found it, and turned his time, while alone, to account, by summing up in his own mind the few particulars which he had discovered thus far. He had found out, first, that Mr. Forley was in the habit of visiting the house regularly. Second, that Mr. Forley being prevented by illness from seeing the people put in charge as usual, had appointed a friend to represent him; and had written to say so. Third, that the friend had a choice of two Mondays, at a particular time in the evening, for doing his errand; and that Trottle had accidentally hit on this time, and on the first of the Mondays, for beginning his own investigations. Fourth, that the similarity between Trottle's black dress, as servant out of livery, and the dress of the messenger (whoever he might be), had helped the error by which Trottle was profiting. So far, so good. But what was the messenger's errand? and what chance was there that he might not come up and knock at the door himself, from minute to minute, on that very evening?

While Trottle was turning over this last consideration in his mind, he heard the shuffling footsteps come up the stairs again, with a flash of candle-light going before them. He waited for the woman's coming in with some little anxiety; for the twilight had been too dim on his getting into the house to allow him to see either her face or the man's face at all clearly.

The woman came in first, with the man she called Benjamin at her heels, and set the candle on the mantel-piece. Trottle takes leave to describe her as an offensively-cheerful old woman, awfully lean and wiry, and sharp all over, at eyes, nose, and chin—devilishly brisk, smiling, and restless, with a dirty false front and a dirty black cap, and short fidgetty arms, and long hooked finger-nails—an unnaturally lusty old woman, who walked with a spring in her wicked old feet, and spoke with a smirk on her wicked old face—the sort of old woman (as Trottle thinks) who ought to have lived in the dark ages, and been ducked in a horse-pond, instead of flourishing in the nineteenth century, and taking charge of a Christian house.

"You'll please to excuse my son, Benjamin, won't you, sir?" says this witch without a broomstick, pointing to the man behind her, propped against the bare wall of the dining-room, exactly as he had been propped against the bare wall of the passage. "He's got his inside dreadful bad again, has my son Benjamin. And he won't go to bed, and he will follow me about the house, up-stairs and downstairs, and in my lady's chamber, as the song says, you know. It's his indisgestion, poor dear, that sours his temper and makes him so agravating—and indisgestion is a wearing thing to the best of us, ain't it, sir?"

"Ain't it, sir?" chimes in agravating Benjamin, winking at the candle-light like an owl at the sunshine.

Trottle examined the man curiously, while his horrid old mother was speaking of him. He found "My son Benjamin" to be little and lean, and buttoned-up slovenly in a frowsy old great-coat that fell down to his ragged carpet-slippers. His eyes were very watery, his cheeks very pale, and his lips very red. His breathing was so uncommonly loud, that it sounded almost like a snore. His head rolled helplessly in the monstrous big collar of his great-coat; and his limp, lazy hands pottered about the wall on either side of him, as if they were groping for a imaginary bottle. In plain English, the complaint of "My son Benjamin" was drunkenness, of the stupid, pig-headed, sottish kind. Drawing this conclusion easily enough, after a moment's observation of the man, Trottle found himself, nevertheless, keeping his eyes fixed much longer than was necessary on the ugly drunken face rolling about in the monstrous big coat collar, and looking at it with a curiosity that he could hardly account for at first. Was there something familiar to him in the man's features? He turned away from them for an instant, and then turned back to him again. After that second look, the notion forced itself into his mind, that he had certainly seen a face somewhere, of which that sot's face appeared like a kind of slovenly copy. "Where?" thinks he to himself, "where did I last see the man whom this agravating Benjamin, here, so very strongly reminds me of?"

It was no time, just then—with the cheerful old woman's eye searching him all over, and the cheerful old woman's tongue talking at him, nineteen to the dozen—for Trottle to be ransacking his memory for small matters that had got into wrong corners of it. He put by in his mind that very curious circumstance respecting Benjamin's face, to be taken up again when a fit opportunity offered itself; and kept his wits about him in prime order for present necessities.

"You wouldn't like to go down into the kitchen, would you?" says the witch without the broomstick, as familiar as if she had been Trottle's mother, instead of Benjamin's. "There's a bit of fire in the grate, and the sink in the back kitchen don't smell to matter much to-day, and it's uncommon chilly up here when a person's flesh don't hardly cover a person's bones. But you don't look cold, sir, do you? And then, why, Lord bless my soul, our little bit of business is so very, very little, it's hardly worth while to go downstairs about it, after all. Quite a game at business, ain't it, sir? Give-and-take that's what I call it—give-and-take!"

With that, her wicked old eyes settled hungrily on the region round about Trottle's waistcoat-pocket, and she began to chuckle like her son, holding out one of her skinny hands, and tapping cheerfully in the palm with the knuckles of the other. Agravating Benjamin, seeing what she was about, roused up a little, chuckled and tapped in imitation of her, got an idea of his own into his muddled head all of a sudden, and bolted it out charitably for the benefit of Trottle.

"I say!" says Benjamin, settling himself against the wall and nodding his head viciously at his cheerful old mother. "I say! Look out. She'll skin you!"

Assisted by these signs and warnings, Trottle found no difficulty in understanding that the business referred to was the giving and taking of money, and that he was expected to be the giver. It was at this stage of the proceedings that he first felt decidedly uncomfortable, and more than half inclined to wish he was on the street-side of the house-door again.

He was still cudgelling his brains for an excuse to save his pocket, when the silence was suddenly interrupted by a sound in the upper part of the house.

It was not at all loud—it was a quiet, still, scraping sound—so faint that it could hardly have reached the quickest ears, except in an empty house.

"Do you hear that, Benjamin?" says the old woman. "He's at it again, even in the dark, ain't he? P'raps you'd like to see him, sir!" says she, turning on Trottle, and poking her grinning face close to him. "Only name it; only say if you'd like to see him before we do our little bit of business—and I'll show good Forley's friend up-stairs, just as if he was good Mr. Forley himself. *My* legs are all right, whatever Benjamin's may be. I get younger and younger, and stronger and stronger, and jollier and jollier, every day—that's what I do! Don't mind the stairs on my account, sir, if you'd like to see him."

"Him?" Trottle wondered whether "him" meant a man, or a boy, or a domestic animal of the male species. Whatever it meant, here was a chance of putting off that uncomfortable give-and-take-business, and, better still, a chance perhaps of finding out one of the secrets of the mysterious House. Trottle's spirits began to rise again and he said "Yes," directly, with the confidence of a man who knew all about it.

Benjamin's mother took the candle at once, and lighted Trottle briskly to the stairs; and Benjamin himself tried to follow as usual. But getting up several flights of stairs, even helped by the bannisters, was more, with his particular complaint, than he seemed to feel himself inclined to venture on. He sat down obstinately on the lowest step, with his head against the wall, and the tails of his big great-coat spreading out magnificently on the stairs behind him and above him, like a dirty imitation of a court lady's train.

"Don't sit there, dear," says his affectionate mother, stopping to snuff the candle on the first landing.

"I shall sit here," says Benjamin, agravating to the last, "till the milk comes in the morning."

The cheerful old woman went on nimbly up the stairs to the first floor, and Trottle followed, with his eyes and ears wide open. He had seen nothing out of the common in the front-parlour, or up the staircase, so far. The House was dirty and dreary and close-smelling—but there was nothing about it to excite the least curiosity, except the faint scraping sound, which was now beginning to get a little clearer—though still not at all loud—as Trottle followed his leader up the stairs to the second floor.

Nothing on the second-floor landing, but cobwebs above and bits of broken plaster below, cracked off from the ceiling. Benjamin's mother was not a bit out of breath, and looked all ready to go to the top of the monument if necessary. The faint scraping sound had got a little clearer still; but Trottle was no nearer to guessing what it might be, than when he first heard it in the parlour downstairs.

On the third, and last, floor, there were two doors; one, which was shut, leading into the front garret; and one, which was ajar, leading into the back garret. There was a loft in the ceiling above the landing; but the cobwebs all over it vouched sufficiently for its not having been opened for some little time. The scraping noise, plainer than ever here, sounded on the other side of the back garret door; and, to Trottle's great relief, that was precisely the door which the cheerful old woman now pushed open.

Trottle followed her in; and, for once in his life, at any rate, was struck dumb with amazement, at the sight which the inside of the room revealed to him.

The garret was absolutely empty of everything in the shape of furniture. It must have been used at one time or other, by somebody engaged in a profession or a trade which required for the practice of it a great deal of light; for the one window in the room, which looked out on a wide open space at the back of the house, was three or four times as large, every way, as a garret-window usually is. Close under this window, kneeling on the bare boards with his face to the door, there appeared, of all the creatures in the world to see alone at such a place and at such a time, a mere mite of a child—a little, lonely, wizen, strangely-clad boy, who could not at the most, have been more than five years old. He had a greasy old blue shawl crossed over his breast, and rolled up, to keep the ends from the ground, into a great big lump on his back. A strip of something which looked like the remains of a woman’s flannel petticoat, showed itself under the shawl, and, below that again, a pair of rusty black stockings, worlds too large for him, covered his legs and his shoeless feet. A pair of old clumsy muffetees, which had worked themselves up on his little frail red arms to the elbows, and a big cotton nightcap that had dropped down to his very eyebrows, finished off the strange dress which the poor little man seemed not half big enough to fill out, and not near strong enough to walk about in.

But there was something to see even more extraordinary than the clothes the child was swaddled up in, and that was the game which he was playing at, all by himself; and which, moreover, explained in the most unexpected manner the faint scraping noise that had found its way down-stairs, through the half-opened door, in the silence of the empty house.

It has been mentioned that the child was on his knees in the garret, when Trottle first saw him. He was not saying his prayers, and not crouching down in terror at being alone in the dark. He was, odd and unaccountable as it may appear, doing nothing more or less than playing at a charwoman’s or housemaid’s business of scouring the floor. Both his little hands had tight hold of a mangy old blacking-brush, with hardly any bristles left in it, which he was rubbing backwards and forwards on the boards, as gravely and steadily as if he had been at scouring-work for years, and had got a large family to keep by it. The coming-in of Trottle and the old woman did not startle or disturb him in the least. He just looked up for a minute at the candle, with a pair of very bright, sharp eyes, and then went on with his work again, as if nothing had happened. On one side of him was a battered pint saucepan without a handle, which was his make-believe pail; and on the other a morsel of slate-coloured cotton rag, which stood for his flannel to wipe up with. After scrubbing bravely for a minute or two, he took the bit of rag, and mopped up, and then squeezed make-believe water out into his make-believe pail, as grave as any judge that ever sat on a Bench. By the time he thought he had got the floor pretty dry, he raised himself upright on his knees, and blew out a good long breath, and set his little red arms akimbo, and nodded at Trottle.

"There!" says the child, knitting his little downy eyebrows into a frown. "Drat the dirt! I've cleaned up. Where's my beer?"

Benjamin's mother chuckled till Trottle thought she would have choked herself.

"Lord ha' mercy on us!" says she, "just hear the imp. You would never think he was only five years old, would you, sir? Please to tell good Mr. Forley you saw him going on as nicely as ever, playing at being me scouring the parlour floor, and calling for my beer afterwards. That's his regular game, morning, noon, and night—he's never tired of it. Only look how snug we've been and dressed him. That's my shawl a keepin his precious little body warm, and Benjamin's nightcap a keepin his precious little head warm, and Benjamin's stockings, drawed over his trowsers, a keepin his precious little legs warm. He's snug and happy if ever a imp was yet. 'Where's my beer!'—say it again, little dear, say it again!"

If Trottle had seen the boy, with a light and a fire in the room, clothed like other children, and playing naturally with a top, or a box of soldiers, or a bouncing big India-rubber ball, he might have been as cheerful under the circumstances as Benjamin's mother herself. But seeing the child reduced (as he could not help suspecting) for want of proper toys and proper child's company, to take up with the mocking of an old woman at her scouring-work, for something to stand in the place of a game, Trottle, though not a family man, nevertheless felt the sight before him to be, in its way, one of the saddest and the most pitiable that he had ever witnessed.

"Why, my man," says he, "you're the boldest little chap in all England. You don't seem a bit afraid of being up here all by yourself in the dark."

"The big winder," says the child, pointing up to it, "sees in the dark; and I see with the big winder." He stops a bit, and gets up on his legs, and looks hard at Benjamin's mother. "I'm a good 'un," says he, "ain't I? I save candle."

Trottle wondered what else the forlorn little creature had been brought up to do without, besides candle-light; and risked putting a question as to whether he ever got a run in the open air to cheer him up a bit. O, yes, he had a run now and then, out of doors (to say nothing of his runs about the house), the lively little cricket—a run according to good Mr. Forley's instructions, which were followed out carefully, as good Mr. Forley's friend would be glad to hear, to the very letter.

As Trottle could only have made one reply to this, namely, that good Mr. Forley's instructions were, in his opinion, the instructions of an infernal scamp; and as he felt that such an answer would naturally prove the death-blow to all further discoveries on his part, he gulped down his feelings before they got too many for him, and held his tongue, and looked round towards the window again to see what the forlorn little boy was going to amuse himself with next.

The child had gathered up his blacking-brush and bit of rag, and had put them into the old tin saucepan; and was now working his way, as well as his clothes would let him, with his make-believe pail hugged up in his arms, towards a door of communication which led from the back to the front garret.

"I say," says he, looking round sharply over his shoulder, "what are you two stopping here for? I'm going to bed now—and so I tell you!"

With that, he opened the door, and walked into the front room. Seeing Trottle take a step or two to follow him, Benjamin's mother opened her wicked old eyes in a state of great astonishment.

"Mercy on us!" says she, "haven't you seen enough of him yet?"

"No," says Trottle. "I should like to see him go to bed."

Benjamin's mother burst into such a fit of chuckling that the loose extinguisher in the candlestick clattered again with the shaking of her hand. To think of good Mr. Forley's friend taking ten times more trouble about the imp than good Mr. Forley himself! Such a joke as that, Benjamin's mother had not often met with in the course of her life, and she begged to be excused if she took the liberty of having a laugh at it.

Leaving her to laugh as much as she pleased, and coming to a pretty positive conclusion, after what he had just heard, that Mr. Forley's interest in the child was not of the fondest possible kind, Trottle walked into the front room, and Benjamin's mother, enjoying herself immensely, followed with the candle.

There were two pieces of furniture in the front garret. One, an old stool of the sort that is used to stand a cask of beer on; and the other a great big ricketty straddling old truckle bedstead. In the middle of this bedstead, surrounded by a dim brown waste of sacking, was a kind of little island of poor bedding—an old bolster, with nearly all the feathers out of it, doubled in three for a pillow; a mere shred of patchwork counter-pane, and a blanket; and under that, and peeping out a little on either side beyond the loose clothes, two faded chair cushions of horsehair, laid along together for a sort of makeshift mattress. When Trottle got into the room, the lonely little boy had scrambled up on the bedstead with the help of the beer-stool, and was kneeling on the outer rim of sacking with the shred of counterpane in his hands, just making ready to tuck it in for himself under the chair cushions.

"I'll tuck you up, my man," says Trottle. "Jump into bed, and let me try."

"I mean to tuck myself up," says the poor forlorn child, "and I don't mean to jump. I mean to crawl, I do—and so I tell you!"

With that, he set to work, tucking in the clothes tight all down the sides of the cushions, but leaving them open at the foot. Then, getting up on his knees, and looking hard at Trottle as much as to say, "What do you mean by offering to help such a handy little chap as me?" he began to untie the big shawl for himself, and did it, too, in less than half a minute. Then, doubling the shawl up loose over the foot of the bed, he says, "I say, look here," and ducks under the clothes, head first, worming his way up and up softly, under the blanket and counterpane, till Trottle saw the top of the large nightcap slowly peep out on the bolster. This over-sized head-gear of the child's had so shoved itself down in the course of his journey to the pillow, under the clothes, that when he got his face fairly out on the bolster, he was all nightcap down to his mouth. He soon freed himself, however, from this slight encumbrance by turning the ends of the cap up gravely to their old place over his eyebrows—looked at Trottle—said, "Snug, ain't it? Good-bye!"—popped his face under the clothes again—and left nothing to be seen of him but the empty peak of the big nightcap standing up sturdily on end in the middle of the bolster.

"What a young limb it is, ain't it?" says Benjamin's mother, giving Trottle a cheerful dig with her elbow. "Come on! you won't see no more of him to-night!"

"And so I tell you!" sings out a shrill, little voice under the bedclothes, chiming in with a playful finish to the old woman's last words.

If Trottle had not been, by this time, positively resolved to follow the wicked secret which accident had mixed him up with, through all its turnings and windings, right on to the end, he would have probably snatched the boy up then and there, and carried him off from his garret prison, bed-clothes and all. As it was, he put a strong check on himself, kept his eye on future possibilities, and allowed Benjamin’s mother to lead him down-stairs again.

“Mind them top bannisters,” says she, as Trottle laid his hand on them. “They are as rotten as medlars every one of ’em.”

“When people come to see the premises,” says Trottle, trying to feel his way a little farther into the mystery of the House, “you don’t bring many of them up here, do you?”

“Bless your heart alive!” says she, “nobody ever comes now. The outside of the house is quite enough to warn them off. Mores the pity, as I say. It used to keep me in spirits, staggering ’em all, one after another, with the frightful high rent—specially the women, drat ’em. ‘What’s the rent of this house?’—‘Hundred and twenty pound a-year!’—‘Hundred and twenty? why, there ain’t a house in the street as lets for more than eighty!’—Likely enough, ma’am; other landlords may lower their rents if they please; but this here landlord sticks to his rights, and means to have as much for his house as his father had before him!’—‘But the neighbourhood’s gone off since then!’—‘Hundred and twenty pound, ma’am.’—‘The landlord must be mad!’—‘Hundred and twenty pound, ma’am.’—‘Open the door you impertinent woman!’ Lord! what a happiness it was to see ’em bounce out, with that awful rent a-ringing in their ears all down the street!”

She stopped on the second-floor landing to treat herself to another chuckle, while Trottle privately posted up in his memory what he had just heard. “Two points made out,” he thought to himself: “the house is kept empty on purpose, and the way it’s done is to ask a rent that nobody will pay.”

“Ah, deary me!” says Benjamin’s mother, changing the subject on a sudden, and twisting back with a horrid, greedy quickness to those awkward money-matters which she had broached down in the parlour. “What we’ve done, one way and another for Mr. Forley, it isn’t in words to tell! That nice little bit of business of ours ought to be a bigger bit of business, considering the trouble we take, Benjamin and me, to make the imp upstairs as happy as the day is long. If good Mr. Forley would only please to think a little more of what a deal he owes to Benjamin and me—”

“That’s just it,” says Trottle, catching her up short in desperation, and seeing his way, by the help of those last words of hers, to slipping cleverly through her fingers. "What should you say, if I told you that Mr. Forley was nothing like so far from thinking about that little matter as you fancy? You would be disappointed, now, if I told you that I had come to-day without the money?"—(her lank old jaw fell, and her villainous old eyes glared, in a perfect state of panic, at that!)—"But what should you say, if I told you that Mr. Forley was only waiting for my report, to send me here next Monday, at dusk, with a bigger bit of business for us two to do together than ever you think for? What should you say to that?"

The old wretch came so near to Trottle, before she answered, and jammed him up confidentially so close into the corner of the landing, that his throat, in a manner, rose at her.

"Can you count it off, do you think, on more than that?" says she, holding up her four skinny fingers and her long crooked thumb, all of a tremble, right before his face.

"What do you say to two hands, instead of one?" says he, pushing past her, and getting down-stairs as fast as he could.

What she said Trottle thinks it best not to report, seeing that the old hypocrite, getting next door to light-headed at the golden prospect before her, took such liberties with unearthly names and persons which ought never to have approached her lips, and rained down such an awful shower of blessings on Trottle's head, that his hair almost stood on end to hear her. He went on down-stairs as fast as his feet would carry him, till he was brought up all standing, as the sailors say, on the last flight, by agravating Benjamin, lying right across the stair, and fallen off, as might have been expected, into a heavy drunken sleep.

The sight of him instantly reminded Trottle of the curious half likeness which he had already detected between the face of Benjamin and the face of another man, whom he had seen at a past time in very different circumstances. He determined, before leaving the House, to have one more look at the wretched muddled creature; and accordingly shook him up smartly, and propped him against the staircase wall, before his mother could interfere.

"Leave him to me; I'll freshen him up," says Trottle to the old woman, looking hard in Benjamin's face, while he spoke.

The fright and surprise of being suddenly woke up, seemed, for about a quarter of a minute, to sober the creature. When he first opened his eyes, there was a new look in them for a moment, which struck home to Trottle's memory as quick and as clear as a flash of light. The old maudlin sleepy expression came back again in another instant, and blurred out all further signs and tokens of the past. But Trottle had seen enough in the moment before it came; and he troubled Benjamin’s face with no more inquiries.

“Next Monday, at dusk,” says he, cutting short some more of the old woman’s palaver about Benjamin’s indisgestion. “I’ve got no more time to spare, ma’am, to-night: please to let me out.”

With a few last blessings, a few last dutiful messages to good Mr. Forley, and a few last friendly hints not to forget next Monday at dusk, Trottle contrived to struggle through the sickening business of leave-taking; to get the door opened; and to find himself, to his own indescribable relief, once more on the outer side of the House To Let.

LET AT LAST

"There, ma'am!" said Trottle, folding up the manuscript from which he had been reading, and setting it down with a smart tap of triumph on the table. "May I venture to ask what you think of that plain statement, as a guess on my part (and not on Mr. Jarber's) at the riddle of the empty House?"

For a minute or two I was unable to say a word. When I recovered a little, my first question referred to the poor forlorn little boy.

"To-day is Monday the twentieth," I said. "Surely you have not let a whole week go by without trying to find out something more?"

"Except at bed-time, and meals, ma'am," answered Trottle, "I have not let an hour go by. Please to understand that I have only come to an end of what I have written, and not to an end of what I have done. I wrote down those first particulars, ma'am, because they are of great importance, and also because I was determined to come forward with my written documents, seeing that Mr. Jarber chose to come forward, in the first instance, with his. I am now ready to go on with the second part of my story as shortly and plainly as possible, by word of mouth. The first thing I must clear up, if you please, is the matter of Mr. Forley's family affairs. I have heard you speak of them, ma'am, at various times; and I have understood that Mr. Forley had two children only by his deceased wife, both daughters. The eldest daughter married, to her father's entire satisfaction, one Mr. Bayne, a rich man, holding a high government situation in Canada. She is now living there with her husband, and her only child, a little girl of eight or nine years old. Right so far, I think, ma'am?"

"Quite right," I said.

"The second daughter," Trottle went on, "and Mr. Forley's favourite, set her father's wishes and the opinions of the world at flat defiance, by running away with a man of low origin—a mate of a merchant-vessel, named Kirkland. Mr. Forley not only never forgave that marriage, but vowed that he would visit the scandal of it heavily in the future on husband and wife. Both escaped his vengeance, whatever he meant it to be. The husband was drowned on his first voyage after his marriage, and the wife died in child-bed. Right again, I believe, ma'am?"

"Again quite right."

"Having got the family matter all right, we will now go back, ma'am, to me and my doings. Last Monday, I asked you for leave of absence for two days; I employed the time in clearing up the matter of Benjamin's face. Last Saturday I was out of the way when you wanted me. I played truant, ma'am, on that occasion, in company with a friend of mine, who is managing clerk in a lawyer's office; and we both spent the morning at Doctors' Commons, over the last will and testament of Mr. Forley's father. Leaving the will-business for a moment, please to follow me first, if you have no objection, into the ugly subject of Benjamin's face. About six or seven years ago (thanks to your kindness) I had a week's holiday with some friends of mine who live in the town of Pendlebury. One of those friends (the only one now left in the place) kept a chemist's shop, and in that shop I was made acquainted with one of the two doctors in the town, named Barsham. This Barsham was a first-rate surgeon, and might have got to the top of his profession, if he had not been a first-rate blackguard. As it was, he both drank and gambled; nobody would have anything to do with him in Pendlebury; and, at the time when I was made known to him in the chemist's shop, the other doctor, Mr. Dix, who was not to be compared with him for surgical skill, but who was a respectable man, had got all the practice; and Barsham and his old mother were living together in such a condition of utter poverty, that it was a marvel to everybody how they kept out of the parish workhouse."

"Benjamin and Benjamin's mother!"

"Exactly, ma'am. Last Thursday morning (thanks to your kindness, again) I went to Pendlebury to my friend the chemist, to ask a few questions about Barsham and his mother. I was told that they had both left the town about five years since. When I inquired into the circumstances, some strange particulars came out in the course of the chemist's answer. You know I have no doubt, ma'am, that poor Mrs. Kirkland was confined while her husband was at sea, in lodgings at a village called Flatfield, and that she died and was buried there. But what you may not know is, that Flatfield is only three miles from Pendlebury; that the doctor who attended on Mrs. Kirkland was Barsham; that the nurse who took care of her was Barsham's mother; and that the person who called them both in, was Mr. Forley. Whether his daughter wrote to him, or whether he heard of it in some other way, I don't know; but he was with her (though he had sworn never to see her again when she married) a month or more before her confinement, and was backwards and forwards a good deal between Flatfield and Pendlebury. How he managed matters with the Barshams cannot at present be discovered; but it is a fact that he contrived to keep the drunken doctor sober, to everybody's amazement. It is a fact that Barsham went to the poor woman with all his wits about him. It is a fact that he and his mother came back from Flatfield after Mrs. Kirkland's death, packed up what few things they had, and left the town mysteriously by night. And, lastly, it is also a fact that the other doctor, Mr. Dix, was not called in to help, till a week after the birth *and burial* of the child, when the mother was sinking from exhaustion—exhaustion (to give the vagabond, Barsham, his due) not produced, in Mr. Dix's opinion, by improper medical treatment, but by the bodily weakness of the poor woman herself—"

"Burial of the child?" I interrupted, trembling all over. "Trottle! you spoke that word 'burial' in a very strange way—you are fixing your eyes on me now with a very strange look—"

Trottle leaned over close to me, and pointed through the window to the empty house.

"The child's death is registered, at Pendlebury," he said, "on Barsham's certificate, under the head of Male Infant, Still-Born. The child's coffin lies in the mother's grave, in Flatfield churchyard. The child himself—as surely as I live and breathe, is living and breathing now—a castaway and a prisoner in that villainous house!"

I sank back in my chair.

"It's guess-work, so far, but it is borne in on my mind, for all that, as truth. Rouse yourself, ma'am, and think a little. The last I hear of Barsham, he is attending Mr. Forley's disobedient daughter. The next I see of Barsham, he is in Mr. Forley's house, trusted with a secret. He and his mother leave Pendlebury suddenly and suspiciously five years back; and he and his mother have got a child of five years old, hidden away in the house. Wait! please to wait—I have not done yet. The will left by Mr. Forley's father, strengthens the suspicion. The friend I took with me to Doctors' Commons, made himself master of the contents of that will; and when he had done so, I put these two questions to him. 'Can Mr. Forley leave his money at his own discretion to anybody he pleases?' 'No,' my friend says, 'his father has left him with only a life interest in it.' 'Suppose one of Mr. Forley's married daughters has a girl, and the other a boy, how would the money go?' 'It would all go,' my friend says, 'to the boy, and it would be charged with the payment of a certain annual income to his female cousin. After her death, it would go back to the male descendant, and to his heirs.' Consider that, ma'am! The child of the daughter whom Mr. Forley hates, whose husband has been snatched away from his vengeance by death, takes his whole property in defiance of him; and the child of the daughter whom he loves, is left a pensioner on her low-born boy-cousin for life! There was good—too good reason—why that child of Mrs. Kirkland's should be registered stillborn. And if, as I believe, the register is founded on a false certificate, there is better, still better reason, why the existence of the child should be hidden, and all trace of his parentage blotted out, in the garret of that empty house."

He stopped, and pointed for the second time to the dim, dust-covered garret-windows opposite. As he did so, I was startled—a very slight matter sufficed to frighten me now—by a knock at the door of the room in which we were sitting.

My maid came in, with a letter in her hand. I took it from her. The mourning card, which was all the envelope enclosed, dropped from my hands.

George Forley was no more. He had departed this life three days since, on the evening of Friday.

"Did our last chance of discovering the truth," I asked, "rest with *him*? Has it died with *his* death?"

"Courage, ma'am! I think not. Our chance rests on our power to make Barsham and his mother confess; and Mr. Forley's death, by leaving them helpless, seems to put that power into our hands. With your permission, I will not wait till dusk to-day, as I at first intended, but will make sure of those two people at once. With a policeman in plain clothes to watch the house, in case they try to leave it; with this card to vouch for the fact of Mr. Forley's death; and with a bold acknowledgment on my part of having got possession of their secret, and of being ready to use it against them in case of need, I think there is little doubt of bringing Barsham and his mother to terms. In case I find it impossible to get back here before dusk, please to sit near the window, ma'am, and watch the house, a little before they light the street-lamps. If you see the front-door open and close again, will you be good enough to put on your bonnet, and come across to me immediately? Mr. Forley's death may, or may not, prevent his messenger from coming as arranged. But, if the person does come, it is of importance that you, as a relative of Mr. Forley's should be present to see him, and to have that proper influence over him which I cannot pretend to exercise."

The only words I could say to Trottle as he opened the door and left me, were words charging him to take care that no harm happened to the poor forlorn little boy.

Left alone, I drew my chair to the window; and looked out with a beating heart at the guilty house. I waited and waited through what appeared to me to be an endless time, until I heard the wheels of a cab stop at the end of the street. I looked in that direction, and saw Trottle get out of the cab alone, walk up to the house, and knock at the door. He was let in by Barsham's mother. A minute or two later, a decently-dressed man sauntered past the house, looked up at it for a moment, and sauntered on to the corner of the street close by. Here he leant against the post, and lighted a cigar, and stopped there smoking in an idle way, but keeping his face always turned in the direction of the house-door.

I waited and waited still. I waited and waited, with my eyes riveted to the door of the house. At last I thought I saw it open in the dusk, and then felt sure I heard it shut again softly. Though I tried hard to compose myself, I trembled so that I was obliged to call for Peggy to help me on with my bonnet and cloak, and was forced to take her arm to lean on, in crossing the street.

Trottle opened the door to us, before we could knock. Peggy went back, and I went in. He had a lighted candle in his hand.

"It has happened, ma'am, as I thought it would," he whispered, leading me into the bare, comfortless, empty parlour. "Barsham and his mother have consulted their own interests, and have come to terms. My guess-work is guess-work no longer. It is now what I felt it was—Truth!"

Something strange to me—something which women who are mothers must often know—trembled suddenly in my heart, and brought the warm tears of my youthful days thronging back into my eyes. I took my faithful old servant by the hand, and asked him to let me see Mrs. Kirkland's child, for his mother's sake.

"If you desire it, ma'am," said Trottle, with a gentleness of manner that I had never noticed in him before. "But pray don't think me wanting in duty and right feeling, if I beg you to try and wait a little. You are agitated already, and a first meeting with the child will not help to make you so calm, as you would wish to be, if Mr. Forley's messenger comes. The little boy is safe up-stairs. Pray think first of trying to compose yourself for a meeting with a stranger; and believe me you shall not leave the house afterwards without the child."

I felt that Trottle was right, and sat down as patiently as I could in a chair he had thoughtfully placed ready for me. I was so horrified at the discovery of my own relation's wickedness that when Trottle proposed to make me acquainted with the confession wrung from Barsham and his mother, I begged him to spare me all details, and only to tell me what was necessary about George Forley.

"All that can be said for Mr. Forley, ma'am, is, that he was just scrupulous enough to hide the child's existence and blot out its parentage here, instead of consenting, at the first, to its death, or afterwards, when the boy grew up, to turning him adrift, absolutely helpless in the world. The fraud has been managed, ma'am, with the cunning of Satan himself. Mr. Forley had the hold over the Barshams, that they had helped him in his villany, and that they were dependent on him for the bread they eat. He brought them up to London to keep them securely under his own eye. He put them into this empty house (taking it out of the agent's hands previously, on pretence that he meant to manage the letting of it himself); and by keeping the house empty, made it the surest of all hiding places for the child. Here, Mr. Forley could come, whenever he pleased, to see that the poor lonely child was not absolutely starved; sure that his visits would only appear like looking after his own property. Here the child was to have been trained to believe himself Barsham's child, till he should be old enough to be provided for in some situation, as low and as poor as Mr. Forley's uneasy conscience would let him pick out. He may have thought of atonement on his death-bed; but not before—I am only too certain of it—not before!"

A low, double knock startled us.

"The messenger!" said Trottle, under his breath. He went out instantly to answer the knock; and returned, leading in a respectable-looking elderly man, dressed like Trottle, all in black, with a white cravat, but otherwise not at all resembling him.

"I am afraid I have made some mistake," said the stranger.

Trottle, considerately taking the office of explanation into his own hands, assured the gentleman that there was no mistake; mentioned to him who I was; and asked him if he had not come on business connected with the late Mr. Forley. Looking greatly astonished, the gentleman answered, “Yes.” There was an awkward moment of silence, after that. The stranger seemed to be not only startled and amazed, but rather distrustful and fearful of committing himself as well. Noticing this, I thought it best to request Trottle to put an end to further embarrassment, by stating all particulars truthfully, as he had stated them to me; and I begged the gentleman to listen patiently for the late Mr. Forley’s sake. He bowed to me very respectfully, and said he was prepared to listen with the greatest interest.

It was evident to me—and, I could see, to Trottle also—that we were not dealing, to say the least, with a dishonest man.

“Before I offer any opinion on what I have heard,” he said, earnestly and anxiously, after Trottle had done, “I must be allowed, in justice to myself, to explain my own apparent connection with this very strange and very shocking business. I was the confidential legal adviser of the late Mr. Forley, and I am left his executor. Rather more than a fortnight back, when Mr. Forley was confined to his room by illness, he sent for me, and charged me to call and pay a certain sum of money here, to a man and woman whom I should find taking charge of the house. He said he had reasons for wishing the affair to be kept a secret. He begged me so to arrange my engagements that I could call at this place either on Monday last, or to-day, at dusk; and he mentioned that he would write to warn the people of my coming, without mentioning my name (Dalcott is my name), as he did not wish to expose me to any future importunities on the part of the man and woman. I need hardly tell you that this commission struck me as being a strange one; but, in my position with Mr. Forley, I had no resource but to accept it without asking questions, or to break off my long and friendly connection with my client. I chose the first alternative. Business prevented me from doing my errand on Monday last—and if I am here to-day, notwithstanding Mr. Forley’s unexpected death, it is emphatically because I understood nothing of the matter, on knocking at this door; and therefore felt myself bound, as executor, to clear it up. That, on my word of honour, is the whole truth, so far as I am personally concerned.”

“I feel quite sure of it, sir,” I answered.

“You mentioned Mr. Forley’s death, just now, as unexpected. May I inquire if you were present, and if he has left any last instructions?”

"Three hours before Mr. Forley's death," said Mr. Dalcott, "his medical attendant left him apparently in a fair way of recovery. The change for the worse took place so suddenly, and was accompanied by such severe suffering, to prevent him from communicating his last wishes to any one. When I reached his house, he was insensible. I have since examined his papers. Not one of them refers to the present time or to the serious matter which now occupies us. In the absence of instructions I must act cautiously on what you have told me; but I will be rigidly fair and just at the same time. The first thing to be done," he continued, addressing himself to Trottle, "is to hear what the man and woman, down-stairs, have to say. If you can supply me with writing-materials, I will take their declarations separately on the spot, in your presence, and in the presence of the policeman who is watching the house. To-morrow I will send copies of those declarations, accompanied by a full statement of the case, to Mr. and Mrs. Bayne in Canada (both of whom know me well as the late Mr. Forley's legal adviser); and I will suspend all proceedings, on my part, until I hear from them, or from their solicitor in London. In the present posture of affairs this is all I can safely do."

We could do no less than agree with him, and thank him for his frank and honest manner of meeting us. It was arranged that I should send over the writing-materials from my lodgings; and, to my unutterable joy and relief, it was also readily acknowledged that the poor little orphan boy could find no fitter refuge than my old arms were longing to offer him, and no safer protection for the night than my roof could give. Trottle hastened away up-stairs, as actively as if he had been a young man, to fetch the child down.

And he brought him down to me without another moment of delay, and I went on my knees before the poor little Mite, and embraced him, and asked him if he would go with me to where I lived? He held me away for a moment, and his wan, shrewd little eyes looked sharp at me. Then he clung close to me all at once, and said:

"I'm a-going along with you, I am—and so I tell you!"

For inspiring the poor neglected child with this trust in my old self, I thanked Heaven, then, with all my heart and soul, and I thank it now!

I bundled the poor darling up in my own cloak, and I carried him in my own arms across the road. Peggy was lost in speechless amazement to behold me trudging out of breath up-stairs, with a strange pair of poor little legs under my arm; but, she began to cry over the child the moment she saw him, like a sensible woman as she always was, and she still cried her eyes out over him in a comfortable manner, when he at last lay fast asleep, tucked up by my hands in Trottle's bed.

"And Trottle, bless you, my dear man," said I, kissing his hand, as he looked on: "the forlorn baby came to this refuge through you, and he will help you on your way to Heaven."

Trottle answered that I was his dear mistress, and immediately went and put his head out at an open window on the landing, and looked into the back street for a quarter of an hour.

That very night, as I sat thinking of the poor child, and of another poor child who is never to be thought about enough at Christmas-time, the idea came into my mind which I have lived to execute, and in the realisation of which I am the happiest of women this day.

"The executor will sell that House, Trottle?" said I.

"Not a doubt of it, ma'am, if he can find a purchaser."

"I'll buy it."

I have often seen Trottle pleased; but, I never saw him so perfectly enchanted as he was when I confided to him, which I did, then and there, the purpose that I had in view.

To make short of a long story—and what story would not be long, coming from the lips of an old woman like me, unless it was made short by main force!—I bought the House. Mrs. Bayne had her father's blood in her; she evaded the opportunity of forgiving and generous reparation that was offered her, and disowned the child; but, I was prepared for that, and loved him all the more for having no one in the world to look to, but me.

I am getting into a flurry by being over-pleased, and I dare say I am as incoherent as need be. I bought the House, and I altered it from the basement to the roof, and I turned it into a Hospital for Sick Children.

Never mind by what degrees my little adopted boy came to the knowledge of all the sights and sounds in the streets, so familiar to other children and so strange to him; never mind by what degrees he came to be pretty, and childish, and winning, and companionable, and to have pictures and toys about him, and suitable playmates. As I write, I look across the road to my Hospital, and there is the darling (who has gone over to play) nodding at me out of one of the once lonely windows, with his dear chubby face backed up by Trottle’s waistcoat as he lifts my pet for “Grandma” to see.

Many an Eye I see in that House now, but it is never in solitude, never in neglect. Many an Eye I see in that House now, that is more and more radiant every day with the light of returning health. As my precious darling has changed beyond description for the brighter and the better, so do the not less precious darlings of poor women change in that House every day in the year. For which I humbly thank that Gracious Being whom the restorer of the Widow’s son and of the Ruler’s daughter, instructed all mankind to call their Father.

THE END OF
A House to Let

HUNTED DOWN

BY

CHARLES DICKENS

I.

MOST of us see some romances in life. In my capacity as Chief Manager of a Life Assurance Office, I think I have within the last thirty years seen more romances than the generality of men, however unpromising the opportunity may, at first sight, seem.

As I have retired, and live at my ease, I possess the means that I used to want, of considering what I have seen, at leisure. My experiences have a more remarkable aspect, so reviewed, than they had when they were in progress. I have come home from the Play now, and can recall the scenes of the Drama upon which the curtain has fallen, free from the glare, bewilderment, and bustle of the Theatre.

Let me recall one of these Romances of the real world.

There is nothing truer than physiognomy, taken in connection with manner. The art of reading that book of which Eternal Wisdom obliges every human creature to present his or her own page with the individual character written on it, is a difficult one, perhaps, and is little studied. It may require some natural aptitude, and it must require (for everything does) some patience and some pains. That these are not usually given to it,—that numbers of people accept a few stock commonplace expressions of the face as the whole list of characteristics, and neither seek nor know the refinements that are truest,—that You, for instance, give a great deal of time and attention to the reading of music, Greek, Latin, French, Italian, Hebrew, if you please, and do not qualify yourself to read the face of the master or mistress looking over your shoulder teaching it to you,—I assume to be five hundred times more probable than improbable. Perhaps a little self-sufficiency may be at the bottom of this; facial expression requires no study from you, you think; it comes by nature to you to know enough about it, and you are not to be taken in.

I confess, for my part, that I *have* been taken in, over and over again. I have been taken in by acquaintances, and I have been taken in (of course) by friends; far oftener by friends than by any other class of persons. How came I to be so deceived? Had I quite misread their faces?

No. Believe me, my first impression of those people, founded on face and manner alone, was invariably true. My mistake was in suffering them to come nearer to me and explain themselves away.

II.

The partition which separated my own office from our general outer office in the City was of thick plate-glass. I could see through it what passed in the outer office, without hearing a word. I had it put up in place of a wall that had been there for years,—ever since the house was built. It is no matter whether I did or did not make the change in order that I might derive my first impression of strangers, who came to us on business, from their faces alone, without being influenced by anything they said. Enough to mention that I turned my glass partition to that account, and that a Life Assurance Office is at all times exposed to be practised upon by the most crafty and cruel of the human race.

It was through my glass partition that I first saw the gentleman whose story I am going to tell.

He had come in without my observing it, and had put his hat and umbrella on the broad counter, and was bending over it to take some papers from one of the clerks. He was about forty or so, dark, exceedingly well dressed in black,—being in mourning,—and the hand he extended with a polite air, had a particularly well-fitting black-kid glove upon it. His hair, which was elaborately brushed and oiled, was parted straight up the middle; and he presented this parting to the clerk, exactly (to my thinking) as if he had said, in so many words: ‘You must take me, if you please, my friend, just as I show myself. Come straight up here, follow the gravel path, keep off the grass, I allow no trespassing.’

I conceived a very great aversion to that man the moment I thus saw him.

He had asked for some of our printed forms, and the clerk was giving them to him and explaining them. An obliged and agreeable smile was on his face, and his eyes met those of the clerk with a sprightly look. (I have known a vast quantity of nonsense talked about bad men not looking you in the face. Don’t trust that conventional idea. Dishonesty will stare honesty out of countenance, any day in the week, if there is anything to be got by it.)

I saw, in the corner of his eyelash, that he became aware of my looking at him. Immediately he turned the parting in his hair toward the glass partition, as if he said to me with a sweet smile, ‘Straight up here, if you please. Off the grass!’

In a few moments he had put on his hat and taken up his umbrella, and was gone.

I beckoned the clerk into my room, and asked, ‘Who was that?’

He had the gentleman’s card in his hand. ‘Mr. Julius Slinkton, Middle Temple.’

‘A barrister, Mr. Adams?’

‘I think not, sir.’

‘I should have thought him a clergyman, but for his having no Reverend here,’ said I.

‘Probably, from his appearance,’ Mr. Adams replied, ‘he is reading for orders.’

I should mention that he wore a dainty white cravat, and dainty linen altogether.

‘What did he want, Mr. Adams?’

‘Merely a form of proposal, sir, and form of reference.’

‘Recommended here? Did he say?’

‘Yes, he said he was recommended here by a friend of yours. He noticed you, but said that as he had not the pleasure of your personal acquaintance he would not trouble you.’

‘Did he know my name?’

‘O yes, sir! He said, "There *is* Mr. Sampson, I see!" ’

‘A well-spoken gentleman, apparently?’

‘Remarkably so, sir.’

‘Insinuating manners, apparently?’

‘Very much so, indeed, sir.’

‘Hah!’ said I. ‘I want nothing at present, Mr. Adams.’

Within a fortnight of that day I went to dine with a friend of mine, a merchant, a man of taste, who buys pictures and books, and the first man I saw among the company was Mr. Julius Slinkton. There he was, standing before the fire, with good large eyes and an open expression of face; but still (I thought) requiring everybody to come at him by the prepared way he offered, and by no other.

I noticed him ask my friend to introduce him to Mr. Sampson, and my friend did so. Mr. Slinkton was very happy to see me. Not too happy; there was no over-doing of the matter; happy in a thoroughly well-bred, perfectly unmeaning way.

‘I thought you had met,’ our host observed.

‘No,’ said Mr. Slinkton. ‘I did look in at Mr. Sampson’s office, on your recommendation; but I really did not feel justified in troubling Mr. Sampson himself, on a point in the everyday routine of an ordinary clerk.’

I said I should have been glad to show him any attention on our friend’s introduction.

‘I am sure of that,’ said he, ‘and am much obliged. At another time, perhaps, I may be less delicate. Only, however, if I have real business; for I know, Mr. Sampson, how precious business time is, and what a vast number of impertinent people there are in the world.’

I acknowledged his consideration with a slight bow. ‘You were thinking,’ said I, ‘of effecting a policy on your life.’

‘O dear no! I am afraid I am not so prudent as you pay me the compliment of supposing me to be, Mr. Sampson. I merely inquired for a friend. But you know what friends are in such matters. Nothing may ever come of it. I have the greatest reluctance to trouble men of business with inquiries for friends, knowing the probabilities to be a thousand to one that the friends will never follow them up. People are so fickle, so selfish, so inconsiderate. Don’t you, in your business, find them so every day, Mr. Sampson?’

I was going to give a qualified answer; but he turned his smooth, white parting on me with its ‘Straight up here, if you please!’ and I answered ‘Yes.’

‘I hear, Mr. Sampson,’ he resumed presently, for our friend had a new cook, and dinner was not so punctual as usual, ‘that your profession has recently suffered a great loss.’

‘In money?’ said I.

He laughed at my ready association of loss with money, and replied, ‘No, in talent and vigour.’

Not at once following out his allusion, I considered for a moment. ‘*Has* it sustained a loss of that kind?’ said I. ‘I was not aware of it.’

‘Understand me, Mr. Sampson. I don’t imagine that you have retired. It is not so bad as that. But Mr. Meltham—’

‘O, to be sure!’ said I. ‘Yes! Mr. Meltham, the young actuary of the "Inestimable." ’

‘Just so,’ he returned in a consoling way.

‘He is a great loss. He was at once the most profound, the most original, and the most energetic man I have ever known connected with Life Assurance.’

I spoke strongly; for I had a high esteem and admiration for Meltham; and my gentleman had indefinitely conveyed to me some suspicion that he wanted to sneer at him. He recalled me to my guard by presenting that trim pathway up his head, with its internal ‘Not on the grass, if you please—the gravel.’

‘You knew him, Mr. Slinkton.’

‘Only by reputation. To have known him as an acquaintance or as a friend, is an honour I should have sought if he had remained in society, though I might never have had the good fortune to attain it, being a man of far inferior mark. He was scarcely above thirty, I suppose?’

‘About thirty.’

‘Ah!’ he sighed in his former consoling way. ‘What creatures we are! To break up, Mr. Sampson, and become incapable of business at that time of life!—Any reason assigned for the melancholy fact?’

(‘Humph!’ thought I, as I looked at him. ‘But I *won’t* go up the track, and I *will* go on the grass.’)

‘What reason have you heard assigned, Mr. Slinkton?’ I asked, point-blank.

‘Most likely a false one. You know what Rumour is, Mr. Sampson. I never repeat what I hear; it is the only way of paring the nails and shaving the head of Rumour. But when *you* ask me what reason I have heard assigned for Mr. Meltham’s passing away from among men, it is another thing. I am not gratifying idle gossip then. I was told, Mr. Sampson, that Mr. Meltham had relinquished all his avocations and all his prospects, because he was, in fact, broken-hearted. A disappointed attachment I heard,—though it hardly seems probable, in the case of a man so distinguished and so attractive.’

‘Attractions and distinctions are no armour against death,’ said I.

‘O, she died? Pray pardon me. I did not hear that. That, indeed, makes it very, very sad. Poor Mr. Meltham! She died? Ah, dear me! Lamentable, lamentable!’

I still thought his pity was not quite genuine, and I still suspected an unaccountable sneer under all this, until he said, as we were parted, like the other knots of talkers, by the announcement of dinner:

‘Mr. Sampson, you are surprised to see me so moved on behalf of a man whom I have never known. I am not so disinterested as you may suppose. I have suffered, and recently too, from death myself. I have lost one of two charming nieces, who were my constant companions. She died young—barely three-and-twenty; and even her remaining sister is far from strong. The world is a grave!’

He said this with deep feeling, and I felt reproached for the coldness of my manner. Coldness and distrust had been engendered in me, I knew, by my bad experiences; they were not natural to me; and I often thought how much I had lost in life, losing trustfulness, and how little I had gained, gaining hard caution. This state of mind being habitual to me, I troubled myself more about this conversation than I might have troubled myself about a greater matter. I listened to his talk at dinner, and observed how readily other men responded to it, and with what a graceful instinct he adapted his subjects to the knowledge and habits of those he talked with. As, in talking with me, he had easily started the subject I might be supposed to understand best, and to be the most interested in, so, in talking with others, he guided himself by the same rule. The company was of a varied character; but he was not at fault, that I could discover, with any member of it. He knew just as much of each man’s pursuit as made him agreeable to that man in reference to it, and just as little as made it natural in him to seek modestly for information when the theme was broached.

As he talked and talked—but really not too much, for the rest of us seemed to force it upon him—I became quite angry with myself. I took his face to pieces in my mind, like a watch, and examined it in detail. I could not say much against any of his features separately; I could say even less against them when they were put together. ‘Then is it not monstrous,’ I asked myself, ‘that because a man happens to part his hair straight up the middle of his head, I should permit myself to suspect, and even to detest him?’

(I may stop to remark that this was no proof of my sense. An observer of men who finds himself steadily repelled by some apparently trifling thing in a stranger is right to give it great weight. It may be the clue to the whole mystery. A hair or two will show where a lion is hidden. A very little key will open a very heavy door.)

I took my part in the conversation with him after a time, and we got on remarkably well. In the drawing-room I asked the host how long he had known Mr. Slinkton. He answered, not many months; he had met him at the house of a celebrated painter then present, who had known him well when he was travelling with his nieces in Italy for their health. His plans in life being broken by the death of one of them, he was reading with the intention of going back to college as a matter of form, taking his degree, and going into orders. I could not but argue with myself that here was the true explanation of his interest in poor Meltham, and that I had been almost brutal in my distrust on that simple head.

III.

On the very next day but one I was sitting behind my glass partition, as before, when he came into the outer office, as before. The moment I saw him again without hearing him, I hated him worse than ever.

It was only for a moment that I had this opportunity; for he waved his tight-fitting black glove the instant I looked at him, and came straight in.

‘Mr. Sampson, good-day! I presume, you see, upon your kind permission to intrude upon you. I don’t keep my word in being justified by business, for my business here—if I may so abuse the word—is of the slightest nature.’

I asked, was it anything I could assist him in?

‘I thank you, no. I merely called to inquire outside whether my dilatory friend had been so false to himself as to be practical and sensible. But, of course, he has done nothing. I gave him your papers with my own hand, and he was hot upon the intention, but of course he has done nothing. Apart from the general human disinclination to do anything that ought to be done, I dare say there is especially about assuring one’s life. You find it like will-making. People are so superstitious, and take it for granted they will die soon afterwards.’

‘Up here, if you please; straight up here, Mr. Sampson. Neither to the right nor to the left.’ I almost fancied I could hear him breathe the words as he sat smiling at me, with that intolerable parting exactly opposite the bridge of my nose.

‘There is such a feeling sometimes, no doubt,’ I replied; ‘but I don’t think it obtains to any great extent.’

‘Well,’ said he, with a shrug and a smile, ‘I wish some good angel would influence my friend in the right direction. I rashly promised his mother and sister in Norfolk to see it done, and he promised them that he would do it. But I suppose he never will.’

He spoke for a minute or two on indifferent topics, and went away.

I had scarcely unlocked the drawers of my writing-table next morning, when he reappeared. I noticed that he came straight to the door in the glass partition, and did not pause a single moment outside.

‘Can you spare me two minutes, my dear Mr. Sampson?’

‘By all means.’

‘Much obliged,’ laying his hat and umbrella on the table; ‘I came early, not to interrupt you. The fact is, I am taken by surprise in reference to this proposal my friend has made.’

‘Has he made one?’ said I.

‘Ye-es,’ he answered, deliberately looking at me; and then a bright idea seemed to strike him—‘or he only tells me he has. Perhaps that may be a new way of evading the matter. By Jupiter, I never thought of that!’

Mr. Adams was opening the morning’s letters in the outer office. ‘What is the name, Mr. Slinkton?’ I asked.

‘Beckwith.’

I looked out at the door and requested Mr. Adams, if there were a proposal in that name, to bring it in. He had already laid it out of his hand on the counter. It was easily selected from the rest, and he gave it me.

Alfred Beckwith. Proposal to effect a policy with us for two thousand pounds. Dated yesterday.

‘From the Middle Temple, I see, Mr. Slinkton.’

‘Yes. He lives on the same staircase with me; his door is opposite. I never thought he would make me his reference though.’

‘It seems natural enough that he should.’

‘Quite so, Mr. Sampson; but I never thought of it. Let me see.’ He took the printed paper from his pocket. ‘How am I to answer all these questions?’

‘According to the truth, of course,’ said I.

‘O, of course!’ he answered, looking up from the paper with a smile; ‘I meant they were so many. But you do right to be particular. It stands to reason that you must be particular. Will you allow me to use your pen and ink?’

‘Certainly.’

‘And your desk?’

‘Certainly.’

He had been hovering about between his hat and his umbrella for a place to write on. He now sat down in my chair, at my blotting-paper and inkstand, with the long walk up his head in accurate perspective before me, as I stood with my back to the fire.

Before answering each question he ran over it aloud, and discussed it. How long had he known Mr. Alfred Beckwith? That he had to calculate by years upon his fingers. What were his habits? No difficulty about them; temperate in the last degree, and took a little too much exercise, if anything. All the answers were satisfactory. When he had written them all, he looked them over, and finally signed them in a very pretty hand. He supposed he had now done with the business. I told him he was not likely to be troubled any farther. Should he leave the papers there? If he pleased. Much obliged. Good-morning.

I had had one other visitor before him; not at the office, but at my own house. That visitor had come to my bedside when it was not yet daylight, and had been seen by no one else but by my faithful confidential servant.

A second reference paper (for we required always two) was sent down into Norfolk, and was duly received back by post. This, likewise, was satisfactorily answered in every respect. Our forms were all complied with;

we accepted the proposal, and the premium for one year was paid.

IV.

For six or seven months I saw no more of Mr. Slinkton. He called once at my house, but I was not at home; and he once asked me to dine with him in the Temple, but I was engaged. His friend’s assurance was effected in March. Late in September or early in October I was down at Scarborough for a breath of sea-air, where I met him on the beach. It was a hot evening; he came toward me with his hat in his hand; and there was the walk I had felt so strongly disinclined to take in perfect order again, exactly in front of the bridge of my nose.

He was not alone, but had a young lady on his arm.

She was dressed in mourning, and I looked at her with great interest. She had the appearance of being extremely delicate, and her face was remarkably pale and melancholy; but she was very pretty. He introduced her as his niece, Miss Niner.

‘Are you strolling, Mr. Sampson? Is it possible you can be idle?’

It *was* possible, and I *was* strolling.

‘Shall we stroll together?’

‘With pleasure.’

The young lady walked between us, and we walked on the cool sea sand, in the direction of Filey.

‘There have been wheels here,’ said Mr. Slinkton. ‘And now I look again, the wheels of a hand-carriage! Margaret, my love, your shadow without doubt!’

‘Miss Niner’s shadow?’ I repeated, looking down at it on the sand.

‘Not that one,’ Mr. Slinkton returned, laughing. ‘Margaret, my dear, tell Mr. Sampson.’

‘Indeed,’ said the young lady, turning to me, ‘there is nothing to tell—except that I constantly see the same invalid old gentleman at all times, wherever I go. I have mentioned it to my uncle, and he calls the gentleman my shadow.’

‘Does he live in Scarborough?’ I asked.

‘He is staying here.’

‘Do you live in Scarborough?’

‘No, I am staying here. My uncle has placed me with a family here, for my health.’

‘And your shadow?’ said I, smiling.

‘My shadow,’ she answered, smiling too, ‘is—like myself—not very robust, I fear; for I lose my shadow sometimes, as my shadow loses me at other times. We both seem liable to confinement to the house. I have not seen my shadow for days and days; but it does oddly happen, occasionally, that wherever I go, for many days together, this gentleman goes. We have come together in the most unfrequented nooks on this shore.’

‘Is this he?’ said I, pointing before us.

The wheels had swept down to the water’s edge, and described a great loop on the sand in turning. Bringing the loop back towards us, and spinning it out as it came, was a hand-carriage, drawn by a man.

‘Yes,’ said Miss Niner, ‘this really is my shadow, uncle.’

As the carriage approached us and we approached the carriage, I saw within it an old man, whose head was sunk on his breast, and who was enveloped in a variety of wrappers. He was drawn by a very quiet but very keen-looking man, with iron-gray hair, who was slightly lame. They had passed us, when the carriage stopped, and the old gentleman within, putting out his arm, called to me by my name. I went back, and was absent from Mr. Slinkton and his niece for about five minutes.

When I rejoined them, Mr. Slinkton was the first to speak. Indeed, he said to me in a raised voice before I came up with him:

‘It is well you have not been longer, or my niece might have died of curiosity to know who her shadow is, Mr. Sampson.’

‘An old East India Director,’ said I. ‘An intimate friend of our friend’s, at whose house I first had the pleasure of meeting you. A certain Major Banks. You have heard of him?’

‘Never.’

‘Very rich, Miss Niner; but very old, and very crippled. An amiable man, sensible—much interested in you. He has just been expatiating on the affection that he has observed to exist between you and your uncle.’

Mr. Slinkton was holding his hat again, and he passed his hand up the straight walk, as if he himself went up it serenely, after me.

‘Mr. Sampson,’ he said, tenderly pressing his niece’s arm in his, ‘our affection was always a strong one, for we have had but few near ties. We have still fewer now. We have associations to bring us together, that are not of this world, Margaret.’

‘Dear uncle!’ murmured the young lady, and turned her face aside to hide her tears.

‘My niece and I have such remembrances and regrets in common, Mr. Sampson,’ he feelingly pursued, ‘that it would be strange indeed if the relations between us were cold or indifferent. If I remember a conversation we once had together, you will understand the reference I make. Cheer up, dear Margaret. Don’t droop, don’t droop. My Margaret! I cannot bear to see you droop!’

The poor young lady was very much affected, but controlled herself. His feelings, too, were very acute. In a word, he found himself under such great need of a restorative, that he presently went away, to take a bath of sea-water, leaving the young lady and me sitting by a point of rock, and probably presuming—but that you will say was a pardonable indulgence in a luxury—that she would praise him with all her heart.

She did, poor thing! With all her confiding heart, she praised him to me, for his care of her dead sister, and for his untiring devotion in her last illness. The sister had wasted away very slowly, and wild and terrible fantasies had come over her toward the end, but he had never been impatient with her, or at a loss; had always been gentle, watchful, and self-possessed. The sister had known him, as she had known him, to be the best of men, the kindest of men, and yet a man of such admirable strength of character, as to be a very tower for the support of their weak natures while their poor lives endured.

‘I shall leave him, Mr. Sampson, very soon,’ said the young lady; ‘I know my life is drawing to an end; and when I am gone, I hope he will marry and be happy. I am sure he has lived single so long, only for my sake, and for my poor, poor sister’s.’

The little hand-carriage had made another great loop on the damp sand, and was coming back again, gradually spinning out a slim figure of eight, half a mile long.

‘Young lady,’ said I, looking around, laying my hand upon her arm, and speaking in a low voice, ‘time presses. You hear the gentle murmur of that sea?’

She looked at me with the utmost wonder and alarm, saying, ‘Yes!’

‘And you know what a voice is in it when the storm comes?’

‘Yes!’

‘You see how quiet and peaceful it lies before us, and you know what an awful sight of power without pity it might be, this very night!’

‘Yes!’

‘But if you had never heard or seen it, or heard of it in its cruelty, could you believe that it beats every inanimate thing in its way to pieces, without mercy, and destroys life without remorse?’

‘You terrify me, sir, by these questions!’

‘To save you, young lady, to save you! For God’s sake, collect your strength and collect your firmness! If you were here alone, and hemmed in by the rising tide on the flow to fifty feet above your head, you could not be in greater danger than the danger you are now to be saved from.’

The figure on the sand was spun out, and straggled off into a crooked little jerk that ended at the cliff very near us.

‘As I am, before Heaven and the Judge of all mankind, your friend, and your dead sister’s friend, I solemnly entreat you, Miss Niner, without one moment’s loss of time, to come to this gentleman with me!’

If the little carriage had been less near to us, I doubt if I could have got her away; but it was so near that we were there before she had recovered the hurry of being urged from the rock. I did not remain there with her two minutes. Certainly within five, I had the inexpressible satisfaction of seeing her—from the point we had sat on, and to which I had returned—half supported and half carried up some rude steps notched in the cliff, by the figure of an active man. With that figure beside her, I knew she was safe anywhere.

I sat alone on the rock, awaiting Mr. Slinkton’s return. The twilight was deepening and the shadows were heavy, when he came round the point, with his hat hanging at his button-hole, smoothing his wet hair with one of his hands, and picking out the old path with the other and a pocket-comb.

‘My niece not here, Mr. Sampson?’ he said, looking about.

‘Miss Niner seemed to feel a chill in the air after the sun was down, and has gone home.’

He looked surprised, as though she were not accustomed to do anything without him; even to originate so slight a proceeding.

‘I persuaded Miss Niner,’ I explained.

‘Ah!’ said he. ‘She is easily persuaded—for her good. Thank you, Mr. Sampson; she is better within doors. The bathing-place was farther than I thought, to say the truth.’

‘Miss Niner is very delicate,’ I observed.

He shook his head and drew a deep sigh. ‘Very, very, very. You may recollect my saying so. The time that has since intervened has not strengthened her. The gloomy shadow that fell upon her sister so early in life seems, in my anxious eyes, to gather over her, ever darker, ever darker. Dear Margaret, dear Margaret! But we must hope.’

The hand-carriage was spinning away before us at a most indecorous pace for an invalid vehicle, and was making most irregular curves upon the sand. Mr. Slinkton, noticing it after he had put his handkerchief to his eyes, said;

‘If I may judge from appearances, your friend will be upset, Mr. Sampson.’

‘It looks probable, certainly,’ said I.

‘The servant must be drunk.’

‘The servants of old gentlemen will get drunk sometimes,’ said I.

‘The major draws very light, Mr. Sampson.’

‘The major does draw light,’ said I.

By this time the carriage, much to my relief, was lost in the darkness. We walked on for a little, side by side over the sand, in silence. After a short while he said, in a voice still affected by the emotion that his niece’s state of health had awakened in him,

‘Do you stay here long, Mr. Sampson?’

‘Why, no. I am going away to-night.’

‘So soon? But business always holds you in request. Men like Mr. Sampson are too important to others, to be spared to their own need of relaxation and enjoyment.’

‘I don’t know about that,’ said I. ‘However, I am going back.’

‘To London?’

‘To London.’

‘I shall be there too, soon after you.’

I knew that as well as he did. But I did not tell him so. Any more than I told him what defensive weapon my right hand rested on in my pocket, as I walked by his side. Any more than I told him why I did not walk on the sea side of him with the night closing in.

We left the beach, and our ways diverged. We exchanged good-night, and had parted indeed, when he said, returning,

‘Mr. Sampson, *may* I ask? Poor Meltham, whom we spoke of,—dead yet?’

‘Not when I last heard of him; but too broken a man to live long, and hopelessly lost to his old calling.’

‘Dear, dear, dear!’ said he, with great feeling. ‘Sad, sad, sad! The world is a grave!’ And so went his way.

It was not his fault if the world were not a grave; but I did not call that observation after him, any more than I had mentioned those other things just now enumerated. He went his way, and I went mine with all expedition. This happened, as I have said, either at the end of September or beginning of October. The next time I saw him, and the last time, was late in November.

V.

I had a very particular engagement to breakfast in the Temple. It was a bitter north-easterly morning, and the sleet and slush lay inches deep in the streets. I could get no conveyance, and was soon wet to the knees; but I should have been true to that appointment, though I had to wade to it up to my neck in the same impediments.

The appointment took me to some chambers in the Temple. They were at the top of a lonely corner house overlooking the river. The name, MR. ALFRED BECKWITH, was painted on the outer door. On the door opposite, on the same landing, the name MR. JULIUS SLINKTON. The doors of both sets of chambers stood open, so that anything said aloud in one set could be heard in the other.

I had never been in those chambers before. They were dismal, close, unwholesome, and oppressive; the furniture, originally good, and not yet old, was faded and dirty,—the rooms were in great disorder; there was a strong prevailing smell of opium, brandy, and tobacco; the grate and fire-irons were splashed all over with unsightly blotches of rust; and on a sofa by the fire, in the room where breakfast had been prepared, lay the host, Mr. Beckwith, a man with all the appearances of the worst kind of drunkard, very far advanced upon his shameful way to death.

'Slinkton is not come yet,' said this creature, staggering up when I went in; 'I'll call him.—Halloa! Julius Caesar! Come and drink!' As he hoarsely roared this out, he beat the poker and tongs together in a mad way, as if that were his usual manner of summoning his associate.

The voice of Mr. Slinkton was heard through the clatter from the opposite side of the staircase, and he came in. He had not expected the pleasure of meeting me. I have seen several artful men brought to a stand, but I never saw a man so aghast as he was when his eyes rested on mine.

'Julius Caesar,' cried Beckwith, staggering between us, 'Mist' Sampson! Mist' Sampson, Julius Caesar! Julius, Mist' Sampson, is the friend of my soul. Julius keeps me plied with liquor, morning, noon, and night. Julius is a real benefactor. Julius threw the tea and coffee out of window when I used to have any. Julius empties all the water-jugs of their contents, and fills 'em with spirits. Julius winds me up and keeps me going.—Boil the brandy, Julius!'

There was a rusty and furred saucepan in the ashes,—the ashes looked like the accumulation of weeks,—and Beckwith, rolling and staggering between us as if he were going to plunge headlong into the fire, got the saucepan out, and tried to force it into Slinkton's hand.

'Boil the brandy, Julius Caesar! Come! Do your usual office. Boil the brandy!'

He became so fierce in his gesticulations with the saucepan, that I expected to see him lay open Slinkton's head with it. I therefore put out my hand to check him. He reeled back to the sofa, and sat there panting, shaking, and red-eyed, in his rags of dressing-gown, looking at us both. I noticed then that there was nothing to drink on the table but brandy, and nothing to eat but salted herrings, and a hot, sickly, highly-peppered stew.

'At all events, Mr. Sampson,' said Slinkton, offering me the smooth gravel path for the last time, 'I thank you for interfering between me and this unfortunate man’s violence. However you came here, Mr. Sampson, or with whatever motive you came here, at least I thank you for that.’

‘Boil the brandy,’ muttered Beckwith.

Without gratifying his desire to know how I came there, I said, quietly, ‘How is your niece, Mr. Slinkton?’

He looked hard at me, and I looked hard at him.

‘I am sorry to say, Mr. Sampson, that my niece has proved treacherous and ungrateful to her best friend. She left me without a word of notice or explanation. She was misled, no doubt, by some designing rascal. Perhaps you may have heard of it.’

‘I did hear that she was misled by a designing rascal. In fact, I have proof of it.’

‘Are you sure of that?’ said he.

‘Quite.’

‘Boil the brandy,’ muttered Beckwith. ‘Company to breakfast, Julius Caesar. Do your usual office,—provide the usual breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper. Boil the brandy!’

The eyes of Slinkton looked from him to me, and he said, after a moment’s consideration,

‘Mr. Sampson, you are a man of the world, and so am I. I will be plain with you.’

‘O no, you won’t,’ said I, shaking my head.

‘I tell you, sir, I will be plain with you.’

‘And I tell you you will not,’ said I. ‘I know all about you. *You* plain with any one? Nonsense, nonsense!’

‘I plainly tell you, Mr. Sampson,’ he went on, with a manner almost composed, ‘that I understand your object. You want to save your funds, and escape from your liabilities; these are old tricks of trade with you Office-gentlemen. But you will not do it, sir; you will not succeed. You have not an easy adversary to play against, when you play against me. We shall have to inquire, in due time, when and how Mr. Beckwith fell into his present habits. With that remark, sir, I put this poor creature, and his incoherent wanderings of speech, aside, and wish you a good morning and a better case next time.’

While he was saying this, Beckwith had filled a half-pint glass with brandy. At this moment, he threw the brandy at his face, and threw the glass after it. Slinkton put his hands up, half blinded with the spirit, and cut with the glass across the forehead. At the sound of the breakage, a fourth person came into the room, closed the door, and stood at it; he was a very quiet but very keen-looking man, with iron-gray hair, and slightly lame.

Slinkton pulled out his handkerchief, assuaged the pain in his smarting eyes, and dabbled the blood on his forehead. He was a long time about it, and I saw that in the doing of it, a tremendous change came over him, occasioned by the change in Beckwith,—who ceased to pant and tremble, sat upright, and never took his eyes off him. I never in my life saw a face in which abhorrence and determination were so forcibly painted as in Beckwith's then.

'Look at me, you villain,' said Beckwith, 'and see me as I really am. I took these rooms, to make them a trap for you. I came into them as a drunkard, to bait the trap for you. You fell into the trap, and you will never leave it alive. On the morning when you last went to Mr. Sampson's office, I had seen him first. Your plot has been known to both of us, all along, and you have been counter-plotted all along. What? Having been cajoled into putting that prize of two thousand pounds in your power, I was to be done to death with brandy, and, brandy not proving quick enough, with something quicker? Have I never seen you, when you thought my senses gone, pouring from your little bottle into my glass? Why, you Murderer and Forger, alone here with you in the dead of night, as I have so often been, I have had my hand upon the trigger of a pistol, twenty times, to blow your brains out!'

This sudden starting up of the thing that he had supposed to be his imbecile victim into a determined man, with a settled resolution to hunt him down and be the death of him, mercilessly expressed from head to foot, was, in the first shock, too much for him. Without any figure of speech, he staggered under it. But there is no greater mistake than to suppose that a man who is a calculating criminal, is, in any phase of his guilt, otherwise than true to himself, and perfectly consistent with his whole character. Such a man commits murder, and murder is the natural culmination of his course; such a man has to outface murder, and will do it with hardihood and effrontery. It is a sort of fashion to express surprise that any notorious criminal, having such crime upon his conscience, can so brave it out. Do you think that if he had it on his conscience at all, or had a conscience to have it upon, he would ever have committed the crime?

Perfectly consistent with himself, as I believe all such monsters to be, this Slinkton recovered himself, and showed a defiance that was sufficiently cold and quiet. He was white, he was haggard, he was changed; but only as a sharper who had played for a great stake and had been outwitted and had lost the game.

‘Listen to me, you villain,’ said Beckwith, ‘and let every word you hear me say be a stab in your wicked heart. When I took these rooms, to throw myself in your way and lead you on to the scheme that I knew my appearance and supposed character and habits would suggest to such a devil, how did I know that? Because you were no stranger to me. I knew you well. And I knew you to be the cruel wretch who, for so much money, had killed one innocent girl while she trusted him implicitly, and who was by inches killing another.’

Slinkton took out a snuff-box, took a pinch of snuff, and laughed.

‘But see here,’ said Beckwith, never looking away, never raising his voice, never relaxing his face, never unclenching his hand. ‘See what a dull wolf you have been, after all! The infatuated drunkard who never drank a fiftieth part of the liquor you plied him with, but poured it away, here, there, everywhere—almost before your eyes; who bought over the fellow you set to watch him and to ply him, by outbidding you in his bribe, before he had been at his work three days—with whom you have observed no caution, yet who was so bent on ridding the earth of you as a wild beast, that he would have defeated you if you had been ever so prudent—that drunkard whom you have, many a time, left on the floor of this room, and who has even let you go out of it, alive and undeceived, when you have turned him over with your foot—has, almost as often, on the same night, within an hour, within a few minutes, watched you awake, had his hand at your pillow when you were asleep, turned over your papers, taken samples from your bottles and packets of powder, changed their contents, rifled every secret of your life!’

He had had another pinch of snuff in his hand, but had gradually let it drop from between his fingers to the floor; where he now smoothed it out with his foot, looking down at it the while.

‘That drunkard,’ said Beckwith, ‘who had free access to your rooms at all times, that he might drink the strong drinks that you left in his way and be the sooner ended, holding no more terms with you than he would hold with a tiger, has had his master-key for all your locks, his test for all your poisons, his clue to your cipher-writing. He can tell you, as well as you can tell him, how long it took to complete that deed, what doses there were, what intervals, what signs of gradual decay upon mind and body; what distempered fancies were produced, what observable changes, what physical pain. He can tell you, as well as you can tell him, that all this was recorded day by day, as a lesson of experience for future service. He can tell you, better than you can tell him, where that journal is at this moment.'

Slinkton stopped the action of his foot, and looked at Beckwith.

'No,' said the latter, as if answering a question from him. 'Not in the drawer of the writing-desk that opens with a spring; it is not there, and it never will be there again.'

'Then you are a thief!' said Slinkton.

Without any change whatever in the inflexible purpose, which it was quite terrific even to me to contemplate, and from the power of which I had always felt convinced it was impossible for this wretch to escape, Beckwith returned,

'And I am your niece's shadow, too.'

With an imprecation Slinkton put his hand to his head, tore out some hair, and flung it to the ground. It was the end of the smooth walk; he destroyed it in the action, and it will soon be seen that his use for it was past.

Beckwith went on: 'Whenever you left here, I left here. Although I understood that you found it necessary to pause in the completion of that purpose, to avert suspicion, still I watched you close, with the poor confiding girl. When I had the diary, and could read it word by word,—it was only about the night before your last visit to Scarborough,—you remember the night? you slept with a small flat vial tied to your wrist,—I sent to Mr. Sampson, who was kept out of view. This is Mr. Sampson's trusty servant standing by the door. We three saved your niece among us.'

Slinkton looked at us all, took an uncertain step or two from the place where he had stood, returned to it, and glanced about him in a very curious way,—as one of the meaner reptiles might, looking for a hole to hide in. I noticed at the same time, that a singular change took place in the figure of the man,—as if it collapsed within his clothes, and they consequently became ill-shapen and ill-fitting.

'You shall know,' said Beckwith, 'for I hope the knowledge will be bitter and terrible to you, why you have been pursued by one man, and why, when the whole interest that Mr. Sampson represents would have expended any money in hunting you down, you have been tracked to death at a single individual’s charge. I hear you have had the name of Meltham on your lips sometimes?’

I saw, in addition to those other changes, a sudden stoppage come upon his breathing.

‘When you sent the sweet girl whom you murdered (you know with what artfully made-out surroundings and probabilities you sent her) to Meltham’s office, before taking her abroad to originate the transaction that doomed her to the grave, it fell to Meltham’s lot to see her and to speak with her. It did not fall to his lot to save her, though I know he would freely give his own life to have done it. He admired her;—I would say he loved her deeply, if I thought it possible that you could understand the word. When she was sacrificed, he was thoroughly assured of your guilt. Having lost her, he had but one object left in life, and that was to avenge her and destroy you.’

I saw the villain’s nostrils rise and fall convulsively; but I saw no moving at his mouth.

‘That man Meltham,’ Beckwith steadily pursued, ‘was as absolutely certain that you could never elude him in this world, if he devoted himself to your destruction with his utmost fidelity and earnestness, and if he divided the sacred duty with no other duty in life, as he was certain that in achieving it he would be a poor instrument in the hands of Providence, and would do well before Heaven in striking you out from among living men. I am that man, and I thank God that I have done my work!’

If Slinkton had been running for his life from swift-footed savages, a dozen miles, he could not have shown more emphatic signs of being oppressed at heart and labouring for breath, than he showed now, when he looked at the pursuer who had so relentlessly hunted him down.

‘You never saw me under my right name before; you see me under my right name now. You shall see me once again in the body, when you are tried for your life. You shall see me once again in the spirit, when the cord is round your neck, and the crowd are crying against you!’

When Meltham had spoken these last words, the miscreant suddenly turned away his face, and seemed to strike his mouth with his open hand. At the same instant, the room was filled with a new and powerful odour, and, almost at the same instant, he broke into a crooked run, leap, start,—I have no name for the spasm,—and fell, with a dull weight that shook the heavy old doors and windows in their frames.

That was the fitting end of him.

When we saw that he was dead, we drew away from the room, and Meltham, giving me his hand, said, with a weary air,

‘I have no more work on earth, my friend. But I shall see her again elsewhere.’

It was in vain that I tried to rally him. He might have saved her, he said; he had not saved her, and he reproached himself; he had lost her, and he was broken-hearted.

‘The purpose that sustained me is over, Sampson, and there is nothing now to hold me to life. I am not fit for life; I am weak and spiritless; I have no hope and no object; my day is done.’

In truth, I could hardly have believed that the broken man who then spoke to me was the man who had so strongly and so differently impressed me when his purpose was before him. I used such entreaties with him, as I could; but he still said, and always said, in a patient, undemonstrative way,—nothing could avail him,—he was broken-hearted.

He died early in the next spring. He was buried by the side of the poor young lady for whom he had cherished those tender and unhappy regrets; and he left all he had to her sister. She lived to be a happy wife and mother; she married my sister’s son, who succeeded poor Meltham; she is living now, and her children ride about the garden on my walking-stick when I go to see her.

THE END OF
Hunted Down

THE LAMPLIGHTER

by Charles Dickens

'If you talk of Murphy and Francis Moore, gentlemen,' said the lamplighter who was in the chair, 'I mean to say that neither of 'em ever had any more to do with the stars than Tom Grig had.'

'And what had HE to do with 'em?' asked the lamplighter who officiated as vice.

'Nothing at all,' replied the other; 'just exactly nothing at all.'

'Do you mean to say you don't believe in Murphy, then?' demanded the lamplighter who had opened the discussion.

'I mean to say I believe in Tom Grig,' replied the chairman. 'Whether I believe in Murphy, or not, is a matter between me and my conscience; and whether Murphy believes in himself, or not, is a matter between him and his conscience. Gentlemen, I drink your healths.'

The lamplighter who did the company this honour, was seated in the chimney-corner of a certain tavern, which has been, time out of mind, the Lamplighters' House of Call. He sat in the midst of a circle of lamplighters, and was the cacique, or chief of the tribe.

If any of our readers have had the good fortune to behold a lamplighter's funeral, they will not be surprised to learn that lamplighters are a strange and primitive people; that they rigidly adhere to old ceremonies and customs which have been handed down among them from father to son since the first public lamp was lighted out of doors; that they intermarry, and betroth their children in infancy; that they enter into no plots or conspiracies (for who ever heard of a traitorous lamplighter?); that they commit no crimes against the laws of their country (there being no instance of a murderous or burglarious lamplighter); that they are, in short, notwithstanding their apparently volatile and restless character, a highly moral and reflective people: having among themselves as many traditional observances as the Jews, and being, as a body, if not as old as the hills, at least as old as the streets. It is an article of their creed that the first faint glimmering of true civilisation shone in the first street-light maintained at the public expense. They trace their existence and high position in the public esteem, in a direct line to the heathen mythology; and hold that the history of Prometheus himself is but a pleasant fable, whereof the true hero is a lamplighter.

'Gentlemen,' said the lamplighter in the chair, 'I drink your healths.'

'And perhaps, Sir,' said the vice, holding up his glass, and rising a little way off his seat and sitting down again, in token that he recognised and returned the compliment, 'perhaps you will add to that condescension by telling us who Tom Grig was, and how he came to be connected in your mind with Francis Moore, Physician.'

'Hear, hear, hear!' cried the lamplighters generally.

'Tom Grig, gentlemen,' said the chairman, 'was one of us; and it happened to him, as it don't often happen to a public character in our line, that he had his what-you-may-call-it cast.'

'His head?' said the vice.

'No,' replied the chairman, 'not his head.'

'His face, perhaps?' said the vice. 'No, not his face.' 'His legs?' 'No, not his legs.' Nor yet his arms, nor his hands, nor his feet, nor his chest, all of which were severally suggested.

'His nativity, perhaps?'

'That's it,' said the chairman, awakening from his thoughtful attitude at the suggestion. 'His nativity. That's what Tom had cast, gentlemen.'

'In plaster?' asked the vice.

'I don't rightly know how it's done,' returned the chairman. 'But I suppose it was.'

And there he stopped as if that were all he had to say; whereupon there arose a murmur among the company, which at length resolved itself into a request, conveyed through the vice, that he would go on. This being exactly what the chairman wanted, he mused for a little time, performed that agreeable ceremony which is popularly termed wetting one's whistle, and went on thus:

'Tom Grig, gentlemen, was, as I have said, one of us; and I may go further, and say he was an ornament to us, and such a one as only the good old times of oil and cotton could have produced. Tom's family, gentlemen, were all lamplighters.'

'Not the ladies, I hope?' asked the vice.

'They had talent enough for it, Sir,' rejoined the chairman, 'and would have been, but for the prejudices of society. Let women have their rights, Sir, and the females of Tom's family would have been every one of 'em in office. But that emancipation hasn't come yet, and hadn't then, and consequently they confined themselves to the bosoms of their families, cooked the dinners, mended the clothes, minded the children, comforted their husbands, and attended to the house-keeping generally. It's a hard thing upon the women, gentlemen, that they are limited to such a sphere of action as this; very hard.

'I happen to know all about Tom, gentlemen, from the circumstance of his uncle by his mother's side, having been my particular friend. His (that's Tom's uncle's) fate was a melancholy one. Gas was the death of him. When it was first talked of, he laughed. He wasn't angry; he laughed at the credulity of human nature. "They might as well talk," he says, "of laying on an everlasting succession of glow-worms;" and then he laughed again, partly at his joke, and partly at poor humanity.

'In course of time, however, the thing got ground, the experiment was made, and they lighted up Pall Mall. Tom's uncle went to see it. I've heard that he fell off his ladder fourteen times that night, from weakness, and that he would certainly have gone on falling till he killed himself, if his last tumble hadn't been into a wheelbarrow which was going his way, and humanely took him home. "I foresee in this," says Tom's uncle faintly, and taking to his bed as he spoke - "I foresee in this," he says, "the breaking up of our profession. There's no more going the rounds to trim by daylight, no more dribbling down of the oil on the hats and bonnets of ladies and gentlemen when one feels in spirits. Any low fellow can light a gas-lamp. And it's all up." In this state of mind, he petitioned the government for - I want a word again, gentlemen - what do you call that which they give to people when it's found out, at last, that they've never been of any use, and have been paid too much for doing nothing?'

'Compensation?' suggested the vice.

'That's it,' said the chairman. 'Compensation. They didn't give it him, though, and then he got very fond of his country all at once, and went about saying that gas was a death-blow to his native land, and that it was a plot of the radicals to ruin the country and destroy the oil and cotton trade for ever, and that the whales would go and kill themselves privately, out of sheer spite and vexation at not being caught. At last he got right-down cracked; called his tobacco-pipe a gas-pipe; thought his tears were lamp- oil; and went on with all manner of nonsense of that sort, till one night he hung himself on a lamp-iron in Saint Martin's Lane, and there was an end of HIM.

'Tom loved him, gentlemen, but he survived it. He shed a tear over his grave, got very drunk, spoke a funeral oration that night in the watch-house, and was fined five shillings for it, in the morning. Some men are none the worse for this sort of thing. Tom was one of 'em. He went that very afternoon on a new beat: as clear in his head, and as free from fever as Father Mathew himself.

'Tom's new beat, gentlemen, was - I can't exactly say where, for that he'd never tell; but I know it was in a quiet part of town, where there were some queer old houses. I have always had it in my head that it must have been somewhere near Canonbury Tower in Islington, but that's a matter of opinion. Wherever it was, he went upon it, with a bran-new ladder, a white hat, a brown holland jacket and trousers, a blue neck-kerchief, and a sprig of full- blown double wall-flower in his button-hole. Tom was always genteel in his appearance, and I have heard from the best judges, that if he had left his ladder at home that afternoon, you might have took him for a lord.

'He was always merry, was Tom, and such a singer, that if there was any encouragement for native talent, he'd have been at the opera. He was on his ladder, lighting his first lamp, and singing to himself in a manner more easily to be conceived than described, when he hears the clock strike five, and suddenly sees an old gentleman with a telescope in his hand, throw up a window and look at him very hard.

'Tom didn't know what could be passing in this old gentleman's mind. He thought it likely enough that he might be saying within himself, "Here's a new lamplighter - a good-looking young fellow - shall I stand something to drink?" Thinking this possible, he keeps quite still, pretending to be very particular about the wick, and looks at the old gentleman sideways, seeming to take no notice of him.

'Gentlemen, he was one of the strangest and most mysterious-looking files that ever Tom clapped his eyes on. He was dressed all slovenly and untidy, in a great gown of a kind of bed-furniture pattern, with a cap of the same on his head; and a long old flapped waistcoat; with no braces, no strings, very few buttons - in short, with hardly any of those artificial contrivances that hold society together. Tom knew by these signs, and by his not being shaved, and by his not being over-clean, and by a sort of wisdom not quite awake, in his face, that he was a scientific old gentleman. He often told me that if he could have conceived the possibility of the whole Royal Society being boiled down into one man, he should have said the old gentleman's body was that Body.

'The old gentleman claps the telescope to his eye, looks all round, sees nobody else in sight, stares at Tom again, and cries out very loud:

'"Hal-loa!"

'"Halloa, Sir," says Tom from the ladder; "and halloa again, if you come to that."

'"Here's an extraordinary fulfilment," says the old gentleman, "of a prediction of the planets."

'"Is there?" says Tom. "I'm very glad to hear it."

'"Young man," says the old gentleman, "you don't know me."

'"Sir," says Tom, "I have not that honour; but I shall be happy to drink your health, notwithstanding."

'"I read," cries the old gentleman, without taking any notice of this politeness on Tom's part - "I read what's going to happen, in the stars."

'Tom thanked him for the information, and begged to know if anything particular was going to happen in the stars, in the course of a week or so; but the old gentleman, correcting him, explained that he read in the stars what was going to happen on dry land, and that he was acquainted with all the celestial bodies.

'"I hope they're all well, Sir," says Tom, - "everybody."

'"Hush!" cries the old gentleman. "I have consulted the book of Fate with rare and wonderful success. I am versed in the great sciences of astrology and astronomy. In my house here, I have every description of apparatus for observing the course and motion of the planets. Six months ago, I derived from this source, the knowledge that precisely as the clock struck five this afternoon a stranger would present himself - the destined husband of my young and lovely niece - in reality of illustrious and high descent, but whose birth would be enveloped in uncertainty and mystery. Don't tell me yours isn't," says the old gentleman, who was in such a hurry to speak that he couldn't get the words out fast enough, "for I know better."

'Gentlemen, Tom was so astonished when he heard him say this, that he could hardly keep his footing on the ladder, and found it necessary to hold on by the lamp-post. There WAS a mystery about his birth. His mother had always admitted it. Tom had never known who was his father, and some people had gone so far as to say that even SHE was in doubt.

'While he was in this state of amazement, the old gentleman leaves the window, bursts out of the house-door, shakes the ladder, and Tom, like a ripe pumpkin, comes sliding down into his arms.

'"Let me embrace you," he says, folding his arms about him, and nearly lighting up his old bed-furniture gown at Tom's link. "You're a man of noble aspect. Everything combines to prove the accuracy of my observations. You have had mysterious promptings within you," he says; "I know you have had whisperings of greatness, eh?" he says.

'"I think I have," says Tom - Tom was one of those who can persuade themselves to anything they like - "I've often thought I wasn't the small beer I was taken for."

'"You were right," cries the old gentleman, hugging him again.
"Come in. My niece awaits us."

'"Is the young lady tolerable good-looking, Sir?" says Tom, hanging fire rather, as he thought of her playing the piano, and knowing French, and being up to all manner of accomplishments.

'"She's beautiful!" cries the old gentleman, who was in such a terrible bustle that he was all in a perspiration. "She has a graceful carriage, an exquisite shape, a sweet voice, a countenance beaming with animation and expression; and the eye," he says, rubbing his hands, "of a startled fawn."

'Tom supposed this might mean, what was called among his circle of acquaintance, "a game eye;" and, with a view to this defect, inquired whether the young lady had any cash.

'"She has five thousand pounds," cries the old gentleman. "But what of that? what of that? A word in your ear. I'm in search of the philosopher's stone. I have very nearly found it - not quite. It turns everything to gold; that's its property."

'Tom naturally thought it must have a deal of property; and said that when the old gentleman did get it, he hoped he'd be careful to keep it in the family.

'"Certainly," he says, "of course. Five thousand pounds! What's five thousand pounds to us? What's five million?" he says. "What's five thousand million? Money will be nothing to us. We shall never be able to spend it fast enough."

'"We'll try what we can do, Sir," says Tom.

'"We will," says the old gentleman. "Your name?"

'"Grig," says Tom.

'The old gentleman embraced him again, very tight; and without speaking another word, dragged him into the house in such an excited manner, that it was as much as Tom could do to take his link and ladder with him, and put them down in the passage.

'Gentlemen, if Tom hadn't been always remarkable for his love of truth, I think you would still have believed him when he said that all this was like a dream. There is no better way for a man to find out whether he is really asleep or awake, than calling for something to eat. If he's in a dream, gentlemen, he'll find something wanting in flavour, depend upon it.

'Tom explained his doubts to the old gentleman, and said that if there was any cold meat in the house, it would ease his mind very much to test himself at once. The old gentleman ordered up a venison pie, a small ham, and a bottle of very old Madeira. At the first mouthful of pie and the first glass of wine, Tom smacks his lips and cries out, "I'm awake - wide awake;" and to prove that he was so, gentlemen, he made an end of 'em both.

'When Tom had finished his meal (which he never spoke of afterwards without tears in his eyes), the old gentleman hugs him again, and says, "Noble stranger! let us visit my young and lovely niece." Tom, who was a little elevated with the wine, replies, "The noble stranger is agreeable!" At which words the old gentleman took him by the hand, and led him to the parlour; crying as he opened the door, "Here is Mr. Grig, the favourite of the planets!"

'I will not attempt a description of female beauty, gentlemen, for every one of us has a model of his own that suits his own taste best. In this parlour that I'm speaking of, there were two young ladies; and if every gentleman present, will imagine two models of his own in their places, and will be kind enough to polish 'em up to the very highest pitch of perfection, he will then have a faint conception of their uncommon radiance.

'Besides these two young ladies, there was their waiting-woman, that under any other circumstances Tom would have looked upon as a Venus; and besides her, there was a tall, thin, dismal-faced young gentleman, half man and half boy, dressed in a childish suit of clothes very much too short in the legs and arms; and looking, according to Tom's comparison, like one of the wax juveniles from a tailor's door, grown up and run to seed. Now, this youngster stamped his foot upon the ground and looked very fierce at

Tom, and Tom looked fierce at him - for to tell the truth, gentlemen, Tom more than half suspected that when they entered the room he was kissing one of the young ladies; and for anything Tom knew, you observe, it might be HIS young lady - which was not pleasant.

'"Sir," says Tom, "before we proceed any further, will you have the goodness to inform me who this young Salamander" - Tom called him that for aggravation, you perceive, gentlemen - "who this young Salamander may be?"

'"That, Mr. Grig," says the old gentleman, "is my little boy. He was christened Galileo Isaac Newton Flamstead. Don't mind him. He's a mere child."

'"And a very fine child too," says Tom - still aggravating, you'll observe - "of his age, and as good as fine, I have no doubt. How do you do, my man?" with which kind and patronising expressions, Tom reached up to pat him on the head, and quoted two lines about little boys, from Doctor Watts's Hymns, which he had learnt at a Sunday School.

'It was very easy to see, gentlemen, by this youngster's frowning and by the waiting-maid's tossing her head and turning up her nose, and by the young ladies turning their backs and talking together at the other end of the room, that nobody but the old gentleman took very kindly to the noble stranger. Indeed, Tom plainly heard the waiting-woman say of her master, that so far from being able to read the stars as he pretended, she didn't believe he knew his letters in 'em, or at best that he had got further than words in one syllable; but Tom, not minding this (for he was in spirits after the Madeira), looks with an agreeable air towards the young ladies, and, kissing his hand to both, says to the old gentleman, "Which is which?"

'"This," says the old gentleman, leading out the handsomest, if one of 'em could possibly be said to be handsomer than the other - "this is my niece, Miss Fanny Barker."

'"If you'll permit me, Miss," says Tom, "being a noble stranger and a favourite of the planets, I will conduct myself as such." With these words, he kisses the young lady in a very affable way, turns to the old gentleman, slaps him on the back, and says, "When's it to come off, my buck?"

'The young lady coloured so deep, and her lip trembled so much, gentlemen, that Tom really thought she was going to cry. But she kept her feelings down, and turning to the old gentleman, says, "Dear uncle, though you have the absolute disposal of my hand and fortune, and though you mean well in disposing of 'em thus, I ask you whether you don't think this is a mistake? Don't you think, dear uncle," she says, "that the stars must be in error? Is it not possible that the comet may have put 'em out?"

'"The stars," says the old gentleman, "couldn't make a mistake if they tried. Emma," he says to the other young lady.

'"Yes, papa," says she.

'"The same day that makes your cousin Mrs. Grig will unite you to the gifted Mooney. No remonstrance - no tears. Now, Mr. Grig, let me conduct you to that hallowed ground, that philosophical retreat, where my friend and partner, the gifted Mooney of whom I have just now spoken, is even now pursuing those discoveries which shall enrich us with the precious metal, and make us masters of the world. Come, Mr. Grig," he says.

'"With all my heart, Sir," replies Tom; "and luck to the gifted Mooney, say I - not so much on his account as for our worthy selves!" With this sentiment, Tom kissed his hand to the ladies again, and followed him out; having the gratification to perceive, as he looked back, that they were all hanging on by the arms and legs of Galileo Isaac Newton Flamstead, to prevent him from following the noble stranger, and tearing him to pieces.

'Gentlemen, Tom's father-in-law that was to be, took him by the hand, and having lighted a little lamp, led him across a paved court-yard at the back of the house, into a very large, dark, gloomy room: filled with all manner of bottles, globes, books, telescopes, crocodiles, alligators, and other scientific instruments of every kind. In the centre of this room was a stove or furnace, with what Tom called a pot, but which in my opinion was a crucible, in full boil. In one corner was a sort of ladder leading through the roof; and up this ladder the old gentleman pointed, as he said in a whisper:

'"The observatory. Mr. Mooney is even now watching for the precise time at which we are to come into all the riches of the earth. It will be necessary for he and I, alone in that silent place, to cast your nativity before the hour arrives. Put the day and minute of your birth on this piece of paper, and leave the rest to me."

'"You don't mean to say," says Tom, doing as he was told and giving him back the paper, "that I'm to wait here long, do you? It's a precious dismal place."

'"Hush!" says the old gentleman. "It's hallowed ground.
Farewell!"

'"Stop a minute," says Tom. "What a hurry you're in! What's in that large bottle yonder?"

'"It's a child with three heads," says the old gentleman; "and everything else in proportion."

'"Why don't you throw him away?" says Tom. "What do you keep such unpleasant things here for?"

'"Throw him away!" cries the old gentleman. "We use him constantly in astrology. He's a charm."

'"I shouldn't have thought it," says Tom, "from his appearance.
MUST you go, I say?"

'The old gentleman makes him no answer, but climbs up the ladder in a greater bustle than ever. Tom looked after his legs till there was nothing of him left, and then sat down to wait; feeling (so he used to say) as comfortable as if he was going to be made a freemason, and they were heating the pokers.

'Tom waited so long, gentlemen, that he began to think it must be getting on for midnight at least, and felt more dismal and lonely than ever he had done in all his life. He tried every means of whiling away the time, but it never had seemed to move so slow. First, he took a nearer view of the child with three heads, and thought what a comfort it must have been to his parents. Then he looked up a long telescope which was pointed out of the window, but saw nothing particular, in consequence of the stopper being on at the other end. Then he came to a skeleton in a glass case, labelled, "Skeleton of a Gentleman - prepared by Mr. Mooney," - which made him hope that Mr. Mooney might not be in the habit of preparing gentlemen that way without their own consent. A hundred times, at least, he looked into the pot where they were boiling the philosopher's stone down to the proper consistency, and wondered whether it was nearly done. "When it is," thinks Tom, "I'll send out for six-penn'orth of sprats, and turn 'em into gold fish for a first experiment." Besides which, he made up his mind, gentlemen, to have a country-house and a park; and to plant a bit of it with a double row of gas-lamps a mile long, and go out every night with a French-polished mahogany ladder, and two servants in livery behind him, to light 'em for his own pleasure.

'At length and at last, the old gentleman's legs appeared upon the steps leading through the roof, and he came slowly down: bringing along with him, the gifted Mooney. This Mooney, gentlemen, was even more scientific in appearance than his friend; and had, as Tom often declared upon his word and honour, the dirtiest face we can possibly know of, in this imperfect state of existence.

'Gentlemen, you are all aware that if a scientific man isn't absent in his mind, he's of no good at all. Mr. Mooney was so absent, that when the old gentleman said to him, "Shake hands with Mr. Grig," he put out his leg. "Here's a mind, Mr. Grig!" cries the old gentleman in a rapture. "Here's philosophy! Here's rumination! Don't disturb him," he says, "for this is amazing!"

'Tom had no wish to disturb him, having nothing particular to say; but he was so uncommonly amazing, that the old gentleman got impatient, and determined to give him an electric shock to bring him to - "for you must know, Mr. Grig," he says, "that we always keep a strongly charged battery, ready for that purpose." These means being resorted to, gentlemen, the gifted Mooney revived with a loud roar, and he no sooner came to himself than both he and the old gentleman looked at Tom with compassion, and shed tears abundantly.

'"My dear friend," says the old gentleman to the Gifted, "prepare him."

'"I say," cries Tom, falling back, "none of that, you know. No preparing by Mr. Mooney if you please."

'"Alas!" replies the old gentleman, "you don't understand us. My friend, inform him of his fate. - I can't."

'The Gifted mustered up his voice, after many efforts, and informed Tom that his nativity had been carefully cast, and he would expire at exactly thirty-five minutes, twenty-seven seconds, and five- sixths of a second past nine o'clock, a.m., on that day two months.

'Gentlemen, I leave you to judge what were Tom's feelings at this announcement, on the eve of matrimony and endless riches. "I think," he says in a trembling voice, "there must be a mistake in the working of that sum. Will you do me the favour to cast it up again?" - "There is no mistake," replies the old gentleman, "it is confirmed by Francis Moore, Physician. Here is the prediction for to-morrow two months." And he showed him the page, where sure enough were these words - "The decease of a great person may be looked for, about this time."

'"Which," says the old gentleman, "is clearly you, Mr. Grig."

'"Too clearly," cries Tom, sinking into a chair, and giving one hand to the old gentleman, and one to the Gifted. "The orb of day has set on

Thomas Grig for ever!"

'At this affecting remark, the Gifted shed tears again, and the other two mingled their tears with his, in a kind - if I may use the expression - of Mooney and Co.'s entire. But the old gentleman recovering first, observed that this was only a reason for hastening the marriage, in order that Tom's distinguished race might be transmitted to posterity; and requesting the Gifted to console Mr. Grig during his temporary absence, he withdrew to settle the preliminaries with his niece immediately.

'And now, gentlemen, a very extraordinary and remarkable occurrence took place; for as Tom sat in a melancholy way in one chair, and the Gifted sat in a melancholy way in another, a couple of doors were thrown violently open, the two young ladies rushed in, and one knelt down in a loving attitude at Tom's feet, and the other at the Gifted's. So far, perhaps, as Tom was concerned - as he used to say - you will say there was nothing strange in this: but you will be of a different opinion when you understand that Tom's young lady was kneeling to the Gifted, and the Gifted's young lady was kneeling to Tom.

'"Halloa! stop a minute!" cries Tom; "here's a mistake. I need condoling with by sympathising woman, under my afflicting circumstances; but we're out in the figure. Change partners, Mooney."

'"Monster!" cries Tom's young lady, clinging to the Gifted.

'"Miss!" says Tom. "Is THAT your manners?"

'"I abjure thee!" cries Tom's young lady. "I renounce thee. I never will be thine. Thou," she says to the Gifted, "art the object of my first and all-engrossing passion. Wrapt in thy sublime visions, thou hast not perceived my love; but, driven to despair, I now shake off the woman and avow it. Oh, cruel, cruel man!" With which reproach she laid her head upon the Gifted's breast, and put her arms about him in the tenderest manner possible, gentlemen.

'"And I," says the other young lady, in a sort of ecstasy, that made Tom start - "I hereby abjure my chosen husband too. Hear me, Goblin!" - this was to the Gifted - "Hear me! I hold thee in the deepest detestation. The maddening interview of this one night has filled my soul with love - but not for thee. It is for thee, for thee, young man," she cries to Tom. "As Monk Lewis finely observes, Thomas, Thomas, I am thine, Thomas, Thomas, thou art mine: thine for ever, mine for ever!" with which words, she became very tender likewise.

'Tom and the Gifted, gentlemen, as you may believe, looked at each other in a very awkward manner, and with thoughts not at all complimentary to the two young ladies. As to the Gifted, I have heard Tom say often, that he was certain he was in a fit, and had it inwardly.

'"Speak to me! Oh, speak to me!" cries Tom's young lady to the Gifted.

'"I don't want to speak to anybody," he says, finding his voice at last, and trying to push her away. "I think I had better go. I'm - I'm frightened," he says, looking about as if he had lost something.

'"Not one look of love!" she cries. "Hear me while I declare - "

'"I don't know how to look a look of love," he says, all in a maze. "Don't declare anything. I don't want to hear anybody."

'"That's right!" cries the old gentleman (who it seems had been listening). "That's right! Don't hear her. Emma shall marry you to-morrow, my friend, whether she likes it or not, and SHE shall marry Mr. Grig."

'Gentlemen, these words were no sooner out of his mouth than Galileo Isaac Newton Flamstead (who it seems had been listening too) darts in, and spinning round and round, like a young giant's top, cries, "Let her. Let her. I'm fierce; I'm furious. I give her leave. I'll never marry anybody after this - never. It isn't safe. She is the falsest of the false," he cries, tearing his hair and gnashing his teeth; "and I'll live and die a bachelor!"

'"The little boy," observed the Gifted gravely, "albeit of tender years, has spoken wisdom. I have been led to the contemplation of woman-kind, and will not adventure on the troubled waters of matrimony."

'"What!" says the old gentleman, "not marry my daughter! Won't you, Mooney? Not if I make her? Won't you? Won't you?"

'"No," says Mooney, "I won't. And if anybody asks me any more, I'll run away, and never come back again."

'"Mr. Grig," says the old gentleman, "the stars must be obeyed. You have not changed your mind because of a little girlish folly - eh, Mr. Grig?"

'Tom, gentlemen, had had his eyes about him, and was pretty sure that all this was a device and trick of the waiting-maid, to put him off his inclination. He had seen her hiding and skipping about the two doors, and had observed that a very little whispering from her pacified the Salamander directly. "So," thinks Tom, "this is a plot - but it won't fit."

'"Eh, Mr. Grig?" says the old gentleman.

'"Why, Sir," says Tom, pointing to the crucible, "if the soup's nearly ready - "

'"Another hour beholds the consummation of our labours," returned the old gentleman.

'"Very good," says Tom, with a mournful air. "It's only for two months, but I may as well be the richest man in the world even for that time. I'm not particular, I'll take her, Sir. I'll take her."

'The old gentleman was in a rapture to find Tom still in the same mind, and drawing the young lady towards him by little and little, was joining their hands by main force, when all of a sudden, gentlemen, the crucible blows up, with a great crash; everybody screams; the room is filled with smoke; and Tom, not knowing what may happen next, throws himself into a Fancy attitude, and says, "Come on, if you're a man!" without addressing himself to anybody in particular.

'"The labours of fifteen years!" says the old gentleman, clasping his hands and looking down upon the Gifted, who was saving the pieces, "are destroyed in an instant!" - And I am told, gentlemen, by-the-bye, that this same philosopher's stone would have been discovered a hundred times at least, to speak within bounds, if it wasn't for the one unfortunate circumstance that the apparatus always blows up, when it's on the very point of succeeding.

'Tom turns pale when he hears the old gentleman expressing himself to this unpleasant effect, and stammers out that if it's quite agreeable to all parties, he would like to know exactly what has happened, and what change has really taken place in the prospects of that company.

'"We have failed for the present, Mr. Grig," says the old gentleman, wiping his forehead. "And I regret it the more, because I have in fact invested my niece's five thousand pounds in this glorious speculation. But don't be cast down," he says, anxiously - "in another fifteen years, Mr. Grig - "

"Oh!" cries Tom, letting the young lady's hand fall. "Were the stars very positive about this union, Sir?"

'"They were," says the old gentleman.

'"I'm sorry to hear it," Tom makes answer, "for it's no go, Sir."

'"No what!" cries the old gentleman.

'"Go, Sir," says Tom, fiercely. "I forbid the banns." And with these words - which are the very words he used - he sat himself down in a chair, and, laying his head upon the table, thought with a secret grief of what was to come to pass on that day two months.

'Tom always said, gentlemen, that that waiting-maid was the artfullest minx he had ever seen; and he left it in writing in this country when he went to colonize abroad, that he was certain in his own mind she and the Salamander had blown up the philosopher's stone on purpose, and to cut him out of his property. I believe Tom was in the right, gentlemen; but whether or no, she comes forward at this point, and says, "May I speak, Sir?" and the old gentleman answering, "Yes, you may," she goes on to say that "the stars are no doubt quite right in every respect, but Tom is not the man." And she says, "Don't you remember, Sir, that when the clock struck five this afternoon, you gave Master Galileo a rap on the head with your telescope, and told him to get out of the way?" "Yes, I do," says the old gentleman. "Then," says the waiting- maid, "I say he's the man, and the prophecy is fulfilled." The old gentleman staggers at this, as if somebody had hit him a blow on the chest, and cries, "He! why he's a boy!" Upon that, gentlemen, the Salamander cries out that he'll be twenty-one next Lady-day; and complains that his father has always been so busy with the sun round which the earth revolves, that he has never taken any notice of the son that revolves round him; and that he hasn't had a new suit of clothes since he was fourteen; and that he wasn't even taken out of nankeen frocks and trousers till he was quite unpleasant in 'em; and touches on a good many more family matters to the same purpose. To make short of a long story, gentlemen, they all talk together, and cry together, and remind the old gentleman that as to the noble family, his own grandfather would have been lord mayor if he hadn't died at a dinner the year before; and they show him by all kinds of arguments that if the cousins are married, the prediction comes true every way. At last, the old gentleman being quite convinced, gives in; and joins their hands; and leaves his daughter to marry anybody she likes; and they are all well pleased; and the Gifted as well as any of them.

'In the middle of this little family party, gentlemen, sits Tom all the while, as miserable as you like. But, when everything else is arranged, the old gentleman's daughter says, that their strange conduct was a little device of the waiting-maid's to disgust the lovers he had chosen for 'em, and will he forgive her? and if he will, perhaps he might even find her a husband - and when she says that, she looks uncommon hard at Tom. Then the waiting-maid says that, oh dear! she couldn't abear Mr. Grig should think she wanted him to marry her; and that she had even gone so far as to refuse the last lamplighter, who was now a literary character (having set up as a bill-sticker); and that she hoped Mr. Grig would not suppose she was on her last legs by any means, for the baker was very strong in his attentions at that moment, and as to the butcher, he was frantic. And I don't know how much more she might have said, gentlemen (for, as you know, this kind of young women are rare ones to talk), if the old gentleman hadn't cut in suddenly, and asked Tom if he'd have her, with ten pounds to recompense him for his loss of time and disappointment, and as a kind of bribe to keep the story secret.

'"It don't much matter, Sir," says Tom, "I ain't long for this world. Eight weeks of marriage, especially with this young woman, might reconcile me to my fate. I think," he says, "I could go off easy after that." With which he embraces her with a very dismal face, and groans in a way that might move a heart of stone - even of philosopher's stone.

'"Egad," says the old gentleman, "that reminds me - this bustle put it out of my head - there was a figure wrong. He'll live to a green old age - eighty-seven at least!"

'"How much, Sir?" cries Tom.

'"Eighty-seven!" says the old gentleman.

'Without another word, Tom flings himself on the old gentleman's neck; throws up his hat; cuts a caper; defies the waiting-maid; and refers her to the butcher.

'"You won't marry her!" says the old gentleman, angrily.

'"And live after it!" says Tom. "I'd sooner marry a mermaid with a small-tooth comb and looking-glass."

'"Then take the consequences," says the other.

'With those words - I beg your kind attention here, gentlemen, for it's worth your notice - the old gentleman wetted the forefinger of his right hand in some of the liquor from the crucible that was spilt on the floor, and drew a small triangle on Tom's forehead. The room swam before his eyes, and he found himself in the watch- house.'

'Found himself WHERE?' cried the vice, on behalf of the company generally.

'In the watch-house,' said the chairman. 'It was late at night, and he found himself in the very watch-house from which he had been let out that morning.'

'Did he go home?' asked the vice.

'The watch-house people rather objected to that,' said the chairman; 'so he stopped there that night, and went before the magistrate in the morning. "Why, you're here again, are you?" says the magistrate, adding insult to injury; "we'll trouble you for five shillings more, if you can conveniently spare the money." Tom told him he had been enchanted, but it was of no use. He told the contractors the same, but they wouldn't believe him. It was very hard upon him, gentlemen, as he often said, for was it likely he'd go and invent such a tale? They shook their heads and told him he'd say anything but his prayers - as indeed he would; there's no doubt about that. It was the only imputation on his moral character that ever I heard of.'

THE END OF
The Lamplighter

THE LAZY TOUR OF TWO IDLE APPRENTICES

CHAPTER I

In the autumn month of September, eighteen hundred and fifty-seven, wherein these presents bear date, two idle apprentices, exhausted by the long, hot summer, and the long, hot work it had brought with it, ran away from their employer. They were bound to a highly meritorious lady (named Literature), of fair credit and repute, though, it must be acknowledged, not quite so highly esteemed in the City as she might be. This is the more remarkable, as there is nothing against the respectable lady in that quarter, but quite the contrary; her family having rendered eminent service to many famous citizens of London. It may be sufficient to name Sir William Walworth, Lord Mayor under King Richard II., at the time of Wat Tyler’s insurrection, and Sir Richard Whittington: which latter distinguished man and magistrate was doubtless indebted to the lady’s family for the gift of his celebrated cat. There is also strong reason to suppose that they rang the Highgate bells for him with their own hands.

The misguided young men who thus shirked their duty to the mistress from whom they had received many favours, were actuated by the low idea of making a perfectly idle trip, in any direction. They had no intention of going anywhere in particular; they wanted to see nothing, they wanted to know nothing, they wanted to learn nothing, they wanted to do nothing. They wanted only to be idle. They took to themselves (after HOGARTH), the names of Mr. Thomas Idle and Mr. Francis Goodchild; but there was not a moral pin to choose between them, and they were both idle in the last degree.

Between Francis and Thomas, however, there was this difference of character: Goodchild was laboriously idle, and would take upon himself any amount of pains and labour to assure himself that he was idle; in short, had no better idea of idleness than that it was useless industry. Thomas Idle, on the other hand, was an idler of the unmixed Irish or Neapolitan type; a passive idler, a born-and-bred idler, a consistent idler, who practised what he would have preached if he had not been too idle to preach; a one entire and perfect chrysolite of idleness.

The two idle apprentices found themselves, within a few hours of their escape, walking down into the North of England, that is to say, Thomas was lying in a meadow, looking at the railway trains as they passed over a distant viaduct—which was *his* idea of walking down into the North; while Francis was walking a mile due South against time—which was *his* idea of walking down into the North. In the meantime the day waned, and the milestones remained unconquered.

'Tom,' said Goodchild, 'the sun is getting low. Up, and let us go forward!'

'Nay,' quoth Thomas Idle, 'I have not done with Annie Laurie yet.' And he proceeded with that idle but popular ballad, to the effect that for the bonnie young person of that name he would 'lay him doon and dee'—equivalent, in prose, to lay him down and die.

'What an ass that fellow was!' cried Goodchild, with the bitter emphasis of contempt.

'Which fellow?' asked Thomas Idle.

'The fellow in your song. Lay him doon and dee! Finely he'd show off before the girl by doing *that*. A sniveller! Why couldn't he get up, and punch somebody's head!'

'Whose?' asked Thomas Idle.

'Anybody's. Everybody's would be better than nobody's! If I fell into that state of mind about a girl, do you think I'd lay me doon and dee? No, sir,' proceeded Goodchild, with a disparaging assumption of the Scottish accent, 'I'd get me oop and peetch into somebody. Wouldn't you?'

'I wouldn't have anything to do with her,' yawned Thomas Idle. 'Why should I take the trouble?'

'It's no trouble, Tom, to fall in love,' said Goodchild, shaking his head.

'It's trouble enough to fall out of it, once you're in it,' retorted Tom. 'So I keep out of it altogether. It would be better for you, if you did the same.'

Mr. Goodchild, who is always in love with somebody, and not unfrequently with several objects at once, made no reply. He heaved a sigh of the kind which is termed by the lower orders 'a bellowser,' and then, heaving Mr. Idle on his feet (who was not half so heavy as the sigh), urged him northward.

These two had sent their personal baggage on by train: only retaining each a knapsack. Idle now applied himself to constantly regretting the train, to tracking it through the intricacies of Bradshaw's Guide, and finding out where it is now—and where now—and where now—and to asking what was the use of walking, when you could ride at such a pace as that. Was it to see the country? If that was the object, look at it out of the carriage windows. There was a great deal more of it to be seen there than here. Besides, who wanted to see the country? Nobody. And again, whoever did walk? Nobody. Fellows set off to walk, but they never did it. They came back and said they did, but they didn't. Then why should he walk? He wouldn't walk. He swore it by this milestone!

It was the fifth from London, so far had they penetrated into the North. Submitting to the powerful chain of argument, Goodchild proposed a return to the Metropolis, and a falling back upon Euston Square Terminus. Thomas assented with alacrity, and so they walked down into the North by the next morning's express, and carried their knapsacks in the luggage-van.

It was like all other expresses, as every express is and must be. It bore through the harvest country a smell like a large washing-day, and a sharp issue of steam as from a huge brazen tea-urn. The greatest power in nature and art combined, it yet glided over dangerous heights in the sight of people looking up from fields and roads, as smoothly and unreally as a light miniature plaything. Now, the engine shrieked in hysterics of such intensity, that it seemed desirable that the men who had her in charge should hold her feet, slap her hands, and bring her to; now, burrowed into tunnels with a stubborn and undemonstrative energy so confusing that the train seemed to be flying back into leagues of darkness. Here, were station after station, swallowed up by the express without stopping; here, stations where it fired itself in like a volley of cannon-balls, swooped away four country-people with nosegays, and three men of business with portmanteaus, and fired itself off again, bang, bang, bang! At long intervals were uncomfortable refreshment-rooms, made more uncomfortable by the scorn of Beauty towards Beast, the public (but to whom she never relented, as Beauty did in the story, towards the other Beast), and where sensitive stomachs were fed, with a contemptuous sharpness occasioning indigestion. Here, again, were stations with nothing going but a bell, and wonderful wooden razors set aloft on great posts, shaving the air. In these fields, the horses, sheep, and cattle were well used to the thundering meteor, and didn't mind; in those, they were all set scampering together, and a herd of pigs scoured after them. The pastoral country darkened, became coaly, became smoky, became infernal, got better, got worse, improved again, grew rugged, turned romantic; was a wood, a stream, a chain of hills, a gorge, a moor, a cathedral town, a fortified place, a waste. Now, miserable black dwellings, a black canal, and sick black towers of chimneys; now, a trim garden, where the flowers were bright and fair; now, a wilderness of hideous altars all a-blaze; now, the water meadows with their fairy rings; now, the mangy patch of unlet building ground outside the stagnant town, with the larger ring where the Circus was last week. The temperature changed, the dialect changed, the people changed, faces got sharper, manner got shorter, eyes got shrewder and harder; yet all so quickly, that the spruce guard in the London uniform and silver lace, had not yet rumpled his shirt-collar, delivered half the dispatches in his shiny little pouch, or read his newspaper.

Carlisle! Idle and Goodchild had got to Carlisle. It looked congenially and delightfully idle. Something in the way of public amusement had happened last month, and something else was going to happen before Christmas; and, in the meantime there was a lecture on India for those who liked it—which Idle and Goodchild did not. Likewise, by those who liked them, there were impressions to be bought of all the vapid prints, going and gone, and of nearly all the vapid books. For those who wanted to put anything in missionary boxes, here were the boxes. For those who wanted the Reverend Mr. Podgers (artist's proofs, thirty shillings), here was Mr. Podgers to any amount. Not less gracious and abundant, Mr. Codgers also of the vineyard, but opposed to Mr. Podgers, brotherly tooth and nail. Here, were guide-books to the neighbouring antiquities, and eke the Lake country, in several dry and husky sorts; here, many physically and morally impossible heads of both sexes, for young ladies to copy, in the exercise of the art of drawing; here, further, a large impression of MR. SPURGEON, solid as to the flesh, not to say even something gross. The working young men of Carlisle were drawn up, with their hands in their pockets, across the pavements, four and six abreast, and appeared (much to the satisfaction of Mr. Idle) to have nothing else to do. The working and growing young women of Carlisle, from the age of twelve upwards, promenaded the streets in the cool of the evening, and rallied the said young men. Sometimes the young men rallied the young women, as in the case of a group gathered round an accordion-player, from among whom a young man advanced behind a young woman for whom he appeared to have a tenderness, and hinted to her that he was there and playful, by giving her (he wore clogs) a kick.

On market morning, Carlisle woke up amazingly, and became (to the two Idle Apprentices) disagreeably and reproachfully busy. There were its cattle market, its sheep market, and its pig market down by the river, with raw-boned and shock-headed Rob Roys hiding their Lowland dresses beneath heavy plaids, prowling in and out among the animals, and flavouring the air with fumes of whiskey. There was its corn market down the main street, with hum of chaffering over open sacks. There was its general market in the street too, with heather brooms on which the purple flower still flourished, and heather baskets primitive and fresh to behold. With women trying on clogs and caps at open stalls, and 'Bible stalls' adjoining. With 'Doctor Mantle's Dispensary for the cure of all Human Maladies and no charge for advice,' and with Doctor Mantle's 'Laboratory of Medical, Chemical, and Botanical Science'—both healing institutions established on one pair of trestles, one board, and one sun-blind. With the renowned phrenologist from London, begging to be favoured (at sixpence each) with the company of clients of both sexes, to whom, on examination of their heads, he would make revelations 'enabling him or her to know themselves.' Through all these bargains and blessings, the recruiting-sergeant watchfully elbowed his way, a thread of War in the peaceful skein. Likewise on the walls were printed hints that the Oxford Blues might not be indisposed to hear of a few fine active young men; and that whereas the standard of that distinguished corps is full six feet, 'growing lads of five feet eleven' need not absolutely despair of being accepted.

Scenting the morning air more pleasantly than the buried majesty of Denmark did, Messrs. Idle and Goodchild rode away from Carlisle at eight o'clock one forenoon, bound for the village of Hesket, Newmarket, some fourteen miles distant. Goodchild (who had already begun to doubt whether he was idle: as his way always is when he has nothing to do) had read of a certain black old Cumberland hill or mountain, called Carrock, or Carrock Fell; and had arrived at the conclusion that it would be the culminating triumph of Idleness to ascend the same. Thomas Idle, dwelling on the pains inseparable from that achievement, had expressed the strongest doubts of the expediency, and even of the sanity, of the enterprise; but Goodchild had carried his point, and they rode away.

Up hill and down hill, and twisting to the right, and twisting to the left, and with old Skiddaw (who has vaunted himself a great deal more than his merits deserve; but that is rather the way of the Lake country), dodging the apprentices in a picturesque and pleasant manner. Good, weather-proof, warm, pleasant houses, well white-limed, scantily dotting the road. Clean children coming out to look, carrying other clean children as big as themselves. Harvest still lying out and much rained upon; here and there, harvest still unreaped. Well-cultivated gardens attached to the cottages, with plenty of produce forced out of their hard soil. Lonely nooks, and wild; but people can be born, and married, and buried in such nooks, and can live and love, and be loved, there as elsewhere, thank God! (Mr. Goodchild's remark.) By-and-by, the village. Black, coarse-stoned, rough-windowed houses; some with outer staircases, like Swiss houses; a sinuous and stony gutter winding up hill and round the corner, by way of street. All the children running out directly. Women pausing in washing, to peep from doorways and very little windows. Such were the observations of Messrs. Idle and Goodchild, as their conveyance stopped at the village shoemaker's. Old Carrock gloomed down upon it all in a very ill-tempered state; and rain was beginning.

The village shoemaker declined to have anything to do with Carrock. No visitors went up Carrock. No visitors came there at all. Aa' the world ganged awa' yon. The driver appealed to the Innkeeper. The Innkeeper had two men working in the fields, and one of them should be called in, to go up Carrock as guide. Messrs. Idle and Goodchild, highly approving, entered the Innkeeper's house, to drink whiskey and eat oatcake.

The Innkeeper was not idle enough—was not idle at all, which was a great fault in him—but was a fine specimen of a north-country man, or any kind of man. He had a ruddy cheek, a bright eye, a well-knit frame, an immense hand, a cheery, outspeaking voice, and a straight, bright, broad look. He had a drawing-room, too, upstairs, which was worth a visit to the Cumberland Fells. (This was Mr. Francis Goodchild's opinion, in which Mr. Thomas Idle did not concur.)

The ceiling of this drawing-room was so crossed and recrossed by beams of unequal lengths, radiating from a centre, in a corner, that it looked like a broken star-fish. The room was comfortably and solidly furnished with good mahogany and horsehair. It had a snug fireside, and a couple of well-curtained windows, looking out upon the wild country behind the house. What it most developed was, an unexpected taste for little ornaments and nick-nacks, of which it contained a most surprising number. They were not very various, consisting in great part of waxen babies with their limbs more or less mutilated, appealing on one leg to the parental affections from under little cupping glasses; but, Uncle Tom was there, in crockery, receiving theological instructions from Miss Eva, who grew out of his side like a wen, in an exceedingly rough state of profile propagandism. Engravings of Mr. Hunt's country boy, before and after his pie, were on the wall, divided by a highly-coloured nautical piece, the subject of which had all her colours (and more) flying, and was making great way through a sea of a regular pattern, like a lady's collar. A benevolent, elderly gentleman of the last century, with a powdered head, kept guard, in oil and varnish, over a most perplexing piece of furniture on a table; in appearance between a driving seat and an angular knife-box, but, when opened, a musical instrument of tinkling wires, exactly like David's harp packed for travelling. Everything became a nick-nack in this curious room. The copper tea-kettle, burnished up to the highest point of glory, took his station on a stand of his own at the greatest possible distance from the fireplace, and said: 'By your leave, not a kettle, but a bijou.' The Staffordshire-ware butter-dish with the cover on, got upon a little round occasional table in a window, with a worked top, and announced itself to the two chairs accidentally placed there, as an aid to polite conversation, a graceful trifle in china to be chatted over by callers, as they airily trifled away the visiting moments of a butterfly existence, in that rugged old village on the Cumberland Fells. The very footstool could not keep the floor, but got upon a sofa, and there-from proclaimed itself, in high relief of white and liver-coloured wool, a favourite spaniel coiled up for repose. Though, truly, in spite of its bright glass eyes, the spaniel was the least successful assumption in the collection: being perfectly flat, and dismally suggestive of a recent mistake in sitting down on the part of some corpulent member of the family.

There were books, too, in this room; books on the table, books on the chimney-piece, books in an open press in the corner. Fielding was there, and Smollett was there, and Steele and Addison were there, in dispersed volumes; and there were tales of those who go down to the sea in ships, for windy nights; and there was really a choice of good books for rainy days or fine. It was so very pleasant to see these things in such a lonesome by-place—so very agreeable to find these evidences of a taste, however homely, that went beyond the beautiful cleanliness and trimness of the house—so fanciful to imagine what a wonder a room must be to the little children born in the gloomy village—what grand impressions of it those of them who became wanderers over the earth would carry away; and how, at distant ends of the world, some old voyagers would die, cherishing the belief that the finest apartment known to men was once in the Hesket-Newmarket Inn, in rare old Cumberland—it was such a charmingly lazy pursuit to entertain these rambling thoughts over the choice oatcake and the genial whiskey, that Mr. Idle and Mr. Goodchild never asked themselves how it came to pass that the men in the fields were never heard of more, how the stalwart landlord replaced them without explanation, how his dog-cart came to be waiting at the door, and how everything was arranged without the least arrangement for climbing to old Carrock's shoulders, and standing on his head.

Without a word of inquiry, therefore, the Two Idle Apprentices drifted out resignedly into a fine, soft, close, drowsy, penetrating rain; got into the landlord's light dog-cart, and rattled off through the village for the foot of Carrock. The journey at the outset was not remarkable. The Cumberland road went up and down like all other roads; the Cumberland curs burst out from backs of cottages and barked like other curs, and the Cumberland peasantry stared after the dog-cart amazedly, as long as it was in sight, like the rest of their race. The approach to the foot of the mountain resembled the approaches to the feet of most other mountains all over the world. The cultivation gradually ceased, the trees grew gradually rare, the road became gradually rougher, and the sides of the mountain looked gradually more and more lofty, and more and more difficult to get up. The dog-cart was left at a lonely farm-house. The landlord borrowed a large umbrella, and, assuming in an instant the character of the most cheerful and adventurous of guides, led the way to the ascent. Mr. Goodchild looked eagerly at the top of the mountain, and, feeling apparently that he was now going to be very lazy indeed, shone all over wonderfully to the eye, under the influence of the contentment within and the moisture without. Only in the bosom of Mr. Thomas Idle did Despondency now hold her gloomy state. He kept it a secret; but he would have given a very handsome sum, when the ascent began, to have been back again at the inn. The sides of Carrock looked fearfully steep, and the top of Carrock was hidden in mist. The rain was falling faster and faster. The knees of Mr. Idle—always weak on walking excursions—shivered and shook with fear and damp. The wet was already penetrating through the young man's outer coat to a brand-new shooting-jacket, for which he had reluctantly paid the large sum of two guineas on leaving town; he had no stimulating refreshment about him but a small packet of clammy gingerbread nuts; he had nobody to give him an arm, nobody to push him gently behind, nobody to pull him up tenderly in front, nobody to speak to who really felt the difficulties of the ascent, the dampness of the rain, the denseness of the mist, and the unutterable folly of climbing, undriven, up any steep place in the world, when there is level ground within reach to walk on instead. Was it for this that Thomas had left London? London, where there are nice short walks in level public gardens, with benches of repose set up at convenient distances for weary travellers—London, where rugged stone is humanely pounded into little lumps for the road, and intelligently shaped into smooth slabs for the pavement! No! it was not for the laborious ascent of the crags of Carrock that Idle had left his native city, and travelled to Cumberland. Never did he feel more disastrously convinced that he had committed a very grave error in judgment than when he found himself standing in the rain at the bottom of a steep mountain, and knew that the responsibility rested on his weak shoulders of actually getting to the top of it.

The honest landlord went first, the beaming Goodchild followed, the mournful Idle brought up the rear. From time to time, the two foremost members of the expedition changed places in the order of march; but the rearguard never altered his position. Up the mountain or down the mountain, in the water or out of it, over the rocks, through the bogs, skirting the heather, Mr. Thomas Idle was always the last, and was always the man who had to be looked after and waited for. At first the ascent was delusively easy, the sides of the mountain sloped gradually, and the material of which they were composed was a soft spongy turf, very tender and pleasant to walk upon. After a hundred yards or so, however, the verdant scene and the easy slope disappeared, and the rocks began. Not noble, massive rocks, standing upright, keeping a certain regularity in their positions, and possessing, now and then, flat tops to sit upon, but little irritating, comfortless rocks, littered about anyhow, by Nature; treacherous, disheartening rocks of all sorts of small shapes and small sizes, bruisers of tender toes and trippers-up of wavering feet. When these impediments were passed, heather and slough followed. Here the steepness of the ascent was slightly mitigated; and here the exploring party of three turned round to look at the view below them. The scene of the moorland and the fields was like a feeble water-colour drawing half sponged out. The mist was darkening, the rain was thickening, the trees were dotted about like spots of faint shadow, the division-lines which mapped out the fields were all getting blurred together, and the lonely farm-house where the dog-cart had been left, loomed spectral in the grey light like the last human dwelling at the end of the habitable world. Was this a sight worth climbing to see? Surely—surely not!

Up again—for the top of Carrock is not reached yet. The land-lord, just as good-tempered and obliging as he was at the bottom of the mountain. Mr. Goodchild brighter in the eyes and rosier in the face than ever; full of cheerful remarks and apt quotations; and walking with a springiness of step wonderful to behold. Mr. Idle, farther and farther in the rear, with the water squeaking in the toes of his boots, with his two-guinea shooting-jacket clinging damply to his aching sides, with his overcoat so full of rain, and standing out so pyramidically stiff, in consequence, from his shoulders downwards, that he felt as if he was walking in a gigantic extinguisher—the despairing spirit within him representing but too aptly the candle that had just been put out. Up and up and up again, till a ridge is reached and the outer edge of the mist on the summit of Carrock is darkly and drizzingly near. Is this the top? No, nothing like the top. It is an aggravating peculiarity of all mountains, that, although they have only one top when they are seen (as they ought always to be seen) from below, they turn out to have a perfect eruption of false tops whenever the traveller is sufficiently ill-advised to go out of his way for the purpose of ascending them. Carrock is but a trumpery little mountain of fifteen hundred feet, and it presumes to have false tops, and even precipices, as if it were Mont Blanc. No matter; Goodchild enjoys it, and will go on; and Idle, who is afraid of being left behind by himself, must follow. On entering the edge of the mist, the landlord stops, and says he hopes that it will not get any thicker. It is twenty years since he last ascended Carrock, and it is barely possible, if the mist increases, that the party may be lost on the mountain. Goodchild hears this dreadful intimation, and is not in the least impressed by it. He marches for the top that is never to be found, as if he was the Wandering Jew, bound to go on for ever, in defiance of everything. The landlord faithfully accompanies him. The two, to the dim eye of Idle, far below, look in the exaggerative mist, like a pair of friendly giants, mounting the steps of some invisible castle together. Up and up, and then down a little, and then up, and then along a strip of level ground, and then up again. The wind, a wind unknown in the happy valley, blows keen and strong; the rain-mist gets impenetrable; a dreary little cairn of stones appears. The landlord adds one to the heap, first walking all round the cairn as if he were about to perform an incantation, then dropping the stone on to the top of the heap with the gesture of a magician adding an ingredient to a cauldron in full bubble. Goodchild sits down by the cairn as if it was his study-table at home; Idle, drenched and panting, stands up with his back to the wind, ascertains distinctly that this is the top at last, looks round with all the little curiosity that is left in him, and gets, in return, a magnificent view of—Nothing!

The effect of this sublime spectacle on the minds of the exploring party is a little injured by the nature of the direct conclusion to which the sight of it points—the said conclusion being that the mountain mist has actually gathered round them, as the landlord feared it would. It now becomes imperatively necessary to settle the exact situation of the farm-house in the valley at which the dog-cart has been left, before the travellers attempt to descend. While the landlord is endeavouring to make this discovery in his own way, Mr. Goodchild plunges his hand under his wet coat, draws out a little red morocco-case, opens it, and displays to the view of his companions a neat pocket-compass. The north is found, the point at which the farm-house is situated is settled, and the descent begins. After a little downward walking, Idle (behind as usual) sees his fellow-travellers turn aside sharply—tries to follow them—loses them in the mist—is shouted after, waited for, recovered—and then finds that a halt has been ordered, partly on his account, partly for the purpose of again consulting the compass.

The point in debate is settled as before between Goodchild and the landlord, and the expedition moves on, not down the mountain, but marching straight forward round the slope of it. The difficulty of following this new route is acutely felt by Thomas Idle. He finds the hardship of walking at all greatly increased by the fatigue of moving his feet straight forward along the side of a slope, when their natural tendency, at every step, is to turn off at a right angle, and go straight down the declivity. Let the reader imagine himself to be walking along the roof of a barn, instead of up or down it, and he will have an exact idea of the pedestrian difficulty in which the travellers had now involved themselves. In ten minutes more Idle was lost in the distance again, was shouted for, waited for, recovered as before; found Goodchild repeating his observation of the compass, and remonstrated warmly against the sideway route that his companions persisted in following. It appeared to the uninstructed mind of Thomas that when three men want to get to the bottom of a mountain, their business is to walk down it; and he put this view of the case, not only with emphasis, but even with some irritability. He was answered from the scientific eminence of the compass on which his companions were mounted, that there was a frightful chasm somewhere near the foot of Carrock, called The Black Arches, into which the travellers were sure to march in the mist, if they risked continuing the descent from the place where they had now halted. Idle received this answer with the silent respect which was due to the commanders of the expedition, and followed along the roof of the barn, or rather the side of the mountain, reflecting upon the assurance which he received on starting again, that the object of the party was only to gain 'a certain point,' and, this haven attained, to continue the descent afterwards until the foot of Carrock was reached. Though quite unexceptionable as an abstract form of expression, the phrase 'a certain point' has the disadvantage of sounding rather vaguely when it is pronounced on unknown ground, under a canopy of mist much thicker than a London fog. Nevertheless, after the compass, this phrase was all the clue the party had to hold by, and Idle clung to the extreme end of it as hopefully as he could.

More sideway walking, thicker and thicker mist, all sorts of points reached except the 'certain point;' third loss of Idle, third shouts for him, third recovery of him, third consultation of compass. Mr. Goodchild draws it tenderly from his pocket, and prepares to adjust it on a stone. Something falls on the turf—it is the glass. Something else drops immediately after—it is the needle. The compass is broken, and the exploring party is lost!

It is the practice of the English portion of the human race to receive all great disasters in dead silence. Mr. Goodchild restored the useless compass to his pocket without saying a word, Mr. Idle looked at the landlord, and the landlord looked at Mr. Idle. There was nothing for it now but to go on blindfold, and trust to the chapter of chances. Accordingly, the lost travellers moved forward, still walking round the slope of the mountain, still desperately resolved to avoid the Black Arches, and to succeed in reaching the ‘certain point.’

A quarter of an hour brought them to the brink of a ravine, at the bottom of which there flowed a muddy little stream. Here another halt was called, and another consultation took place. The landlord, still clinging pertinaciously to the idea of reaching the ‘point,’ voted for crossing the ravine, and going on round the slope of the mountain. Mr. Goodchild, to the great relief of his fellow-traveller, took another view of the case, and backed Mr. Idle’s proposal to descend Carrock at once, at any hazard—the rather as the running stream was a sure guide to follow from the mountain to the valley. Accordingly, the party descended to the rugged and stony banks of the stream; and here again Thomas lost ground sadly, and fell far behind his travelling companions. Not much more than six weeks had elapsed since he had sprained one of his ankles, and he began to feel this same ankle getting rather weak when he found himself among the stones that were strewn about the running water. Goodchild and the landlord were getting farther and farther ahead of him. He saw them cross the stream and disappear round a projection on its banks. He heard them shout the moment after as a signal that they had halted and were waiting for him. Answering the shout, he mended his pace, crossed the stream where they had crossed it, and was within one step of the opposite bank, when his foot slipped on a wet stone, his weak ankle gave a twist outwards, a hot, rending, tearing pain ran through it at the same moment, and down fell the idlest of the Two Idle Apprentices, crippled in an instant.

The situation was now, in plain terms, one of absolute danger. There lay Mr. Idle writhing with pain, there was the mist as thick as ever, there was the landlord as completely lost as the strangers whom he was conducting, and there was the compass broken in Goodchild’s pocket. To leave the wretched Thomas on unknown ground was plainly impossible; and to get him to walk with a badly sprained ankle seemed equally out of the question. However, Goodchild (brought back by his cry for help) bandaged the ankle with a pocket-handkerchief, and assisted by the landlord, raised the crippled Apprentice to his legs, offered him a shoulder to lean on, and exhorted him for the sake of the whole party to try if he could walk. Thomas, assisted by the shoulder on one side, and a stick on the other, did try, with what pain and difficulty those only can imagine who have sprained an ankle and have had to tread on it afterwards. At a pace adapted to the feeble hobbling of a newly-lamed man, the lost party moved on, perfectly ignorant whether they were on the right side of the mountain or the wrong, and equally uncertain how long Idle would be able to contend with the pain in his ankle, before he gave in altogether and fell down again, unable to stir another step.

Slowly and more slowly, as the clog of crippled Thomas weighed heavily and more heavily on the march of the expedition, the lost travellers followed the windings of the stream, till they came to a faintly-marked cart-track, branching off nearly at right angles, to the left. After a little consultation it was resolved to follow this dim vestige of a road in the hope that it might lead to some farm or cottage, at which Idle could be left in safety. It was now getting on towards the afternoon, and it was fast becoming more than doubtful whether the party, delayed in their progress as they now were, might not be overtaken by the darkness before the right route was found, and be condemned to pass the night on the mountain, without bit or drop to comfort them, in their wet clothes.

The cart-track grew fainter and fainter, until it was washed out altogether by another little stream, dark, turbulent, and rapid. The landlord suggested, judging by the colour of the water, that it must be flowing from one of the lead mines in the neighbourhood of Carrock; and the travellers accordingly kept by the stream for a little while, in the hope of possibly wandering towards help in that way. After walking forward about two hundred yards, they came upon a mine indeed, but a mine, exhausted and abandoned; a dismal, ruinous place, with nothing but the wreck of its works and buildings left to speak for it. Here, there were a few sheep feeding. The landlord looked at them earnestly, thought he recognised the marks on them—then thought he did not—finally gave up the sheep in despair—and walked on just as ignorant of the whereabouts of the party as ever.

The march in the dark, literally as well as metaphorically in the dark, had now been continued for three-quarters of an hour from the time when the crippled Apprentice had met with his accident. Mr. Idle, with all the will to conquer the pain in his ankle, and to hobble on, found the power rapidly failing him, and felt that another ten minutes at most would find him at the end of his last physical resources. He had just made up his mind on this point, and was about to communicate the dismal result of his reflections to his companions, when the mist suddenly brightened, and begun to lift straight ahead. In another minute, the landlord, who was in advance, proclaimed that he saw a tree. Before long, other trees appeared—then a cottage—then a house beyond the cottage, and a familiar line of road rising behind it. Last of all, Carrock itself loomed darkly into view, far away to the right hand. The party had not only got down the mountain without knowing how, but had wandered away from it in the mist, without knowing why—away, far down on the very moor by which they had approached the base of Carrock that morning.

The happy lifting of the mist, and the still happier discovery that the travellers had groped their way, though by a very roundabout direction, to within a mile or so of the part of the valley in which the farm-house was situated, restored Mr. Idle's sinking spirits and reanimated his failing strength. While the landlord ran off to get the dog-cart, Thomas was assisted by Goodchild to the cottage which had been the first building seen when the darkness brightened, and was propped up against the garden wall, like an artist's lay figure waiting to be forwarded, until the dog-cart should arrive from the farm-house below. In due time—and a very long time it seemed to Mr. Idle—the rattle of wheels was heard, and the crippled Apprentice was lifted into the seat. As the dog-cart was driven back to the inn, the landlord related an anecdote which he had just heard at the farm-house, of an unhappy man who had been lost, like his two guests and himself, on Carrock; who had passed the night there alone; who had been found the next morning, 'scared and starved;' and who never went out afterwards, except on his way to the grave. Mr. Idle heard this sad story, and derived at least one useful impression from it. Bad as the pain in his ankle was, he contrived to bear it patiently, for he felt grateful that a worse accident had not befallen him in the wilds of Carrock.

CHAPTER II

The dog-cart, with Mr. Thomas Idle and his ankle on the hanging seat behind, Mr. Francis Goodchild and the Innkeeper in front, and the rain in spouts and splashes everywhere, made the best of its way back to the little inn; the broken moor country looking like miles upon miles of Pre-Adamite sop, or the ruins of some enormous jorum of antediluvian toast-and-water. The trees dripped; the eaves of the scattered cottages dripped; the barren stone walls dividing the land, dripped; the yelping dogs dripped; carts and waggons under ill-roofed penthouses, dripped; melancholy cocks and hens perching on their shafts, or seeking shelter underneath them, dripped; Mr. Goodchild dripped; Thomas Idle dripped; the Inn-keeper dripped; the mare dripped; the vast curtains of mist and cloud passed before the shadowy forms of the hills, streamed water as they were drawn across the landscape. Down such steep pitches that the mare seemed to be trotting on her head, and up such steep pitches that she seemed to have a supplementary leg in her tail, the dog-cart jolted and tilted back to the village. It was too wet for the women to look out, it was too wet even for the children to look out; all the doors and windows were closed, and the only sign of life or motion was in the rain-punctured puddles.

Whiskey and oil to Thomas Idle's ankle, and whiskey without oil to Francis Goodchild's stomach, produced an agreeable change in the systems of both; soothing Mr. Idle's pain, which was sharp before, and sweetening Mr. Goodchild's temper, which was sweet before. Portmanteaus being then opened and clothes changed, Mr. Goodchild, through having no change of outer garments but broadcloth and velvet, suddenly became a magnificent portent in the Innkeeper's house, a shining frontispiece to the fashions for the month, and a frightful anomaly in the Cumberland village.

Greatly ashamed of his splendid appearance, the conscious Goodchild quenched it as much as possible, in the shadow of Thomas Idle's ankle, and in a corner of the little covered carriage that started with them for Wigton—a most desirable carriage for any country, except for its having a flat roof and no sides; which caused the plumps of rain accumulating on the roof to play vigorous games of bagatelle into the interior all the way, and to score immensely. It was comfortable to see how the people coming back in open carts from Wigton market made no more of the rain than if it were sunshine; how the Wigton policeman taking a country walk of half-a-dozen miles (apparently for pleasure), in resplendent uniform, accepted saturation as his normal state; how clerks and schoolmasters in black, loitered along the road without umbrellas, getting varnished at every step; how the Cumberland girls, coming out to look after the Cumberland cows, shook the rain from their eyelashes and laughed it away; and how the rain continued to fall upon all, as it only does fall in hill countries.

Wigton market was over, and its bare booths were smoking with rain all down the street. Mr. Thomas Idle, melodramatically carried to the inn's first floor, and laid upon three chairs (he should have had the sofa, if there had been one), Mr. Goodchild went to the window to take an observation of Wigton, and report what he saw to his disabled companion.

'Brother Francis, brother Francis,' cried Thomas Idle, 'What do you see from the turret?'

'I see,' said Brother Francis, 'what I hope and believe to be one of the most dismal places ever seen by eyes. I see the houses with their roofs of dull black, their stained fronts, and their dark-rimmed windows, looking as if they were all in mourning. As every little puff of wind comes down the street, I see a perfect train of rain let off along the wooden stalls in the market-place and exploded against me. I see a very big gas lamp in the centre which I know, by a secret instinct, will not be lighted to-night. I see a pump, with a trivet underneath its spout whereon to stand the vessels that are brought to be filled with water. I see a man come to pump, and he pumps very hard, but no water follows, and he strolls empty away.'

'Brother Francis, brother Francis,' cried Thomas Idle, 'what more do you see from the turret, besides the man and the pump, and the trivet and the houses all in mourning and the rain?'

'I see,' said Brother Francis, 'one, two, three, four, five, linen-drapers' shops in front of me. I see a linen-draper's shop next door to the right—and there are five more linen-drapers' shops down the corner to the left. Eleven homicidal linen-drapers' shops within a short stone's throw, each with its hands at the throats of all the rest! Over the small first-floor of one of these linen-drapers' shops appears the wonderful inscription, BANK.'

‘Brother Francis, brother Francis,’ cried Thomas Idle, ‘what more do you see from the turret, besides the eleven homicidal linen-drapers’ shops, and the wonderful inscription, “Bank,”—on the small first-floor, and the man and the pump and the trivet and the houses all in mourning and the rain?’

‘I see,’ said Brother Francis, ‘the depository for Christian Knowledge, and through the dark vapour I think I again make out Mr. Spurgeon looming heavily. Her Majesty the Queen, God bless her, printed in colours, I am sure I see. I see the *Illustrated London News* of several years ago, and I see a sweetmeat shop—which the proprietor calls a “Salt Warehouse”—with one small female child in a cotton bonnet looking in on tip-toe, oblivious of rain. And I see a watchmaker’s with only three great pale watches of a dull metal hanging in his window, each in a separate pane.’

‘Brother Francis, brother Francis,’ cried Thomas Idle, ‘what more do you see of Wigton, besides these objects, and the man and the pump and the trivet and the houses all in mourning and the rain?’

‘I see nothing more,’ said Brother Francis, ‘and there is nothing more to see, except the curlpaper bill of the theatre, which was opened and shut last week (the manager’s family played all the parts), and the short, square, chinky omnibus that goes to the railway, and leads too rattling a life over the stones to hold together long. O yes! Now, I see two men with their hands in their pockets and their backs towards me.’

‘Brother Francis, brother Francis,’ cried Thomas Idle, ‘what do you make out from the turret, of the expression of the two men with their hands in their pockets and their backs towards you?’

‘They are mysterious men,’ said Brother Francis, ‘with inscrutable backs. They keep their backs towards me with persistency. If one turns an inch in any direction, the other turns an inch in the same direction, and no more. They turn very stiffly, on a very little pivot, in the middle of the market-place. Their appearance is partly of a mining, partly of a ploughing, partly of a stable, character. They are looking at nothing—very hard. Their backs are slouched, and their legs are curved with much standing about. Their pockets are loose and dog’s-eared, on account of their hands being always in them. They stand to be rained upon, without any movement of impatience or dissatisfaction, and they keep so close together that an elbow of each jostles an elbow of the other, but they never speak. They spit at times, but speak not. I see it growing darker and darker, and still I see them, sole visible population of the place, standing to be rained upon with their backs towards me, and looking at nothing very hard.’

‘Brother Francis, brother Francis,’ cried Thomas Idle, ‘before you draw down the blind of the turret and come in to have your head scorched by the hot gas, see if you can, and impart to me, something of the expression of those two amazing men.’

‘The murky shadows,’ said Francis Goodchild, ‘are gathering fast; and the wings of evening, and the wings of coal, are folding over Wigton. Still, they look at nothing very hard, with their backs towards me. Ah! Now, they turn, and I see—’

‘Brother Francis, brother Francis,’ cried Thomas Idle, ‘tell me quickly what you see of the two men of Wigton!’

‘I see,’ said Francis Goodchild, ‘that they have no expression at all. And now the town goes to sleep, undazzled by the large unlighted lamp in the market-place; and let no man wake it.’

At the close of the next day’s journey, Mr. Thomas Idle’s ankle became much swollen and inflamed. There are reasons which will presently explain themselves for not publicly indicating the exact direction in which that journey lay, or the place in which it ended. It was a long day’s shaking of Thomas Idle over the rough roads, and a long day’s getting out and going on before the horses, and fagging up hills, and scouring down hills, on the part of Mr. Goodchild, who in the fatigues of such labours congratulated himself on attaining a high point of idleness. It was at a little town, still in Cumberland, that they halted for the night—a very little town, with the purple and brown moor close upon its one street; a curious little ancient market-cross set up in the midst of it; and the town itself looking much as if it were a collection of great stones piled on end by the Druids long ago, which a few recluse people had since hollowed out for habitations.

‘Is there a doctor here?’ asked Mr. Goodchild, on his knee, of the motherly landlady of the little Inn: stopping in his examination of Mr. Idle’s ankle, with the aid of a candle.

‘Ey, my word!’ said the landlady, glancing doubtfully at the ankle for herself; ‘there’s Doctor Speddie.’

‘Is he a good Doctor?’

‘Ey!’ said the landlady, ‘I ca’ him so. A’ cooms efther nae doctor that I ken. Mair nor which, a’s just THE doctor heer.’

‘Do you think he is at home?’

Her reply was, ‘Gang awa’, Jock, and bring him.’

Jock, a white-headed boy, who, under pretence of stirring up some bay salt in a basin of water for the laving of this unfortunate ankle, had greatly enjoyed himself for the last ten minutes in splashing the carpet, set off promptly. A very few minutes had elapsed when he showed the Doctor in, by tumbling against the door before him and bursting it open with his head.

‘Gently, Jock, gently,’ said the Doctor as he advanced with a quiet step. ‘Gentlemen, a good evening. I am sorry that my presence is required here. A slight accident, I hope? A slip and a fall? Yes, yes, yes. Carrock, indeed? Hah! Does that pain you, sir? No doubt, it does. It is the great connecting ligament here, you see, that has been badly strained. Time and rest, sir! They are often the recipe in greater cases,’ with a slight sigh, ‘and often the recipe in small. I can send a lotion to relieve you, but we must leave the cure to time and rest.’

This he said, holding Idle’s foot on his knee between his two hands, as he sat over against him. He had touched it tenderly and skilfully in explanation of what he said, and, when his careful examination was completed, softly returned it to its former horizontal position on a chair.

He spoke with a little irresolution whenever he began, but afterwards fluently. He was a tall, thin, large-boned, old gentleman, with an appearance at first sight of being hard-featured; but, at a second glance, the mild expression of his face and some particular touches of sweetness and patience about his mouth, corrected this impression and assigned his long professional rides, by day and night, in the bleak hill-weather, as the true cause of that appearance. He stooped very little, though past seventy and very grey. His dress was more like that of a clergyman than a country doctor, being a plain black suit, and a plain white neck-kerchief tied behind like a band. His black was the worse for wear, and there were darns in his coat, and his linen was a little frayed at the hems and edges. He might have been poor—it was likely enough in that out-of-the-way spot—or he might have been a little self-forgetful and eccentric. Any one could have seen directly, that he had neither wife nor child at home. He had a scholarly air with him, and that kind of considerate humanity towards others which claimed a gentle consideration for himself. Mr. Goodchild made this study of him while he was examining the limb, and as he laid it down. Mr. Goodchild wishes to add that he considers it a very good likeness.

It came out in the course of a little conversation, that Doctor Speddie was acquainted with some friends of Thomas Idle’s, and had, when a young man, passed some years in Thomas Idle’s birthplace on the other side of England. Certain idle labours, the fruit of Mr. Goodchild’s apprenticeship, also happened to be well known to him. The lazy travellers were thus placed on a more intimate footing with the Doctor than the casual circumstances of the meeting would of themselves have established; and when Doctor Speddie rose to go home, remarking that he would send his assistant with the lotion, Francis Goodchild said that was unnecessary, for, by the Doctor’s leave, he would accompany him, and bring it back. (Having done nothing to fatigue himself for a full quarter of an hour, Francis began to fear that he was not in a state of idleness.)

Doctor Speddie politely assented to the proposition of Francis Goodchild, ‘as it would give him the pleasure of enjoying a few more minutes of Mr. Goodchild’s society than he could otherwise have hoped for,’ and they went out together into the village street. The rain had nearly ceased, the clouds had broken before a cool wind from the north-east, and stars were shining from the peaceful heights beyond them.

Doctor Speddie’s house was the last house in the place. Beyond it, lay the moor, all dark and lonesome. The wind moaned in a low, dull, shivering manner round the little garden, like a houseless creature that knew the winter was coming. It was exceedingly wild and solitary. ‘Roses,’ said the Doctor, when Goodchild touched some wet leaves overhanging the stone porch; ‘but they get cut to pieces.’

The Doctor opened the door with a key he carried, and led the way into a low but pretty ample hall with rooms on either side. The door of one of these stood open, and the Doctor entered it, with a word of welcome to his guest. It, too, was a low room, half surgery and half parlour, with shelves of books and bottles against the walls, which were of a very dark hue. There was a fire in the grate, the night being damp and chill. Leaning against the chimney-piece looking down into it, stood the Doctor’s Assistant.

A man of a most remarkable appearance. Much older than Mr. Goodchild had expected, for he was at least two-and-fifty; but, that was nothing. What was startling in him was his remarkable paleness. His large black eyes, his sunken cheeks, his long and heavy iron-grey hair, his wasted hands, and even the attenuation of his figure, were at first forgotten in his extraordinary pallor. There was no vestige of colour in the man. When he turned his face, Francis Goodchild started as if a stone figure had looked round at him.

'Mr. Lorn,' said the Doctor. 'Mr. Goodchild.'

The Assistant, in a distraught way—as if he had forgotten something—as if he had forgotten everything, even to his own name and himself—acknowledged the visitor's presence, and stepped further back into the shadow of the wall behind him. But, he was so pale that his face stood out in relief again the dark wall, and really could not be hidden so.

'Mr. Goodchild's friend has met with accident, Lorn,' said Doctor Speddie. 'We want the lotion for a bad sprain.'

A pause.

'My dear fellow, you are more than usually absent to-night. The lotion for a bad sprain.'

'Ah! yes! Directly.'

He was evidently relieved to turn away, and to take his white face and his wild eyes to a table in a recess among the bottles. But, though he stood there, compounding the lotion with his back towards them, Goodchild could not, for many moments, withdraw his gaze from the man. When he at length did so, he found the Doctor observing him, with some trouble in his face. 'He is absent,' explained the Doctor, in a low voice. 'Always absent. Very absent.'

'Is he ill?'

'No, not ill.'

'Unhappy?'

'I have my suspicions that he was,' assented the Doctor, 'once.'

Francis Goodchild could not but observe that the Doctor accompanied these words with a benignant and protecting glance at their subject, in which there was much of the expression with which an attached father might have looked at a heavily afflicted son. Yet, that they were not father and son must have been plain to most eyes. The Assistant, on the other hand, turning presently to ask the Doctor some question, looked at him with a wan smile as if he were his whole reliance and sustainment in life.

It was in vain for the Doctor in his easy-chair, to try to lead the mind of Mr. Goodchild in the opposite easy-chair, away from what was before him. Let Mr. Goodchild do what he would to follow the Doctor, his eyes and thoughts reverted to the Assistant. The Doctor soon perceived it, and, after falling silent, and musing in a little perplexity, said:

‘Lorn!’

‘My dear Doctor.’

‘Would you go to the Inn, and apply that lotion? You will show the best way of applying it, far better than Mr. Goodchild can.’

‘With pleasure.’

The Assistant took his hat, and passed like a shadow to the door.

‘Lorn!’ said the Doctor, calling after him.

He returned.

‘Mr. Goodchild will keep me company till you come home. Don’t hurry. Excuse my calling you back.’

‘It is not,’ said the Assistant, with his former smile, ‘the first time you have called me back, dear Doctor.’ With those words he went away.

‘Mr. Goodchild,’ said Doctor Speddie, in a low voice, and with his former troubled expression of face, ‘I have seen that your attention has been concentrated on my friend.’

‘He fascinates me. I must apologise to you, but he has quite bewildered and mastered me.’

‘I find that a lonely existence and a long secret,’ said the Doctor, drawing his chair a little nearer to Mr. Goodchild’s, ‘become in the course of time very heavy. I will tell you something. You may make what use you will of it, under fictitious names. I know I may trust you. I am the more inclined to confidence to-night, through having been unexpectedly led back, by the current of our conversation at the Inn, to scenes in my early life. Will you please to draw a little nearer?’

Mr. Goodchild drew a little nearer, and the Doctor went on thus: speaking, for the most part, in so cautious a voice, that the wind, though it was far from high, occasionally got the better of him.

When this present nineteenth century was younger by a good many years than it is now, a certain friend of mine, named Arthur Holliday, happened to arrive in the town of Doncaster, exactly in the middle of a race-week, or, in other words, in the middle of the month of September. He was one of those reckless, rattle-pated, open-hearted, and open-mouthed young gentlemen, who possess the gift of familiarity in its highest perfection, and who scramble carelessly along the journey of life making friends, as the phrase is, wherever they go. His father was a rich manufacturer, and had bought landed property enough in one of the midland counties to make all the born squires in his neighbourhood thoroughly envious of him. Arthur was his only son, possessor in prospect of the great estate and the great business after his father's death; well supplied with money, and not too rigidly looked after, during his father's lifetime. Report, or scandal, whichever you please, said that the old gentleman had been rather wild in his youthful days, and that, unlike most parents, he was not disposed to be violently indignant when he found that his son took after him. This may be true or not. I myself only knew the elder Mr. Holliday when he was getting on in years; and then he was as quiet and as respectable a gentleman as ever I met with.

Well, one September, as I told you, young Arthur comes to Doncaster, having decided all of a sudden, in his harebrained way, that he would go to the races. He did not reach the town till towards the close of the evening, and he went at once to see about his dinner and bed at the principal hotel. Dinner they were ready enough to give him; but as for a bed, they laughed when he mentioned it. In the race-week at Doncaster, it is no uncommon thing for visitors who have not bespoken apartments, to pass the night in their carriages at the inn doors. As for the lower sort of strangers, I myself have often seen them, at that full time, sleeping out on the doorsteps for want of a covered place to creep under. Rich as he was, Arthur's chance of getting a night's lodging (seeing that he had not written beforehand to secure one) was more than doubtful. He tried the second hotel, and the third hotel, and two of the inferior inns after that; and was met everywhere by the same form of answer. No accommodation for the night of any sort was left. All the bright golden sovereigns in his pocket would not buy him a bed at Doncaster in the race-week.

To a young fellow of Arthur's temperament, the novelty of being turned away into the street, like a penniless vagabond, at every house where he asked for a lodging, presented itself in the light of a new and highly amusing piece of experience. He went on, with his carpet-bag in his hand, applying for a bed at every place of entertainment for travellers that he could find in Doncaster, until he wandered into the outskirts of the town. By this time, the last glimmer of twilight had faded out, the moon was rising dimly in a mist, the wind was getting cold, the clouds were gathering heavily, and there was every prospect that it was soon going to rain.

The look of the night had rather a lowering effect on young Holliday's good spirits. He began to contemplate the houseless situation in which he was placed, from the serious rather than the humorous point of view; and he looked about him, for another public-house to inquire at, with something very like downright anxiety in his mind on the subject of a lodging for the night. The suburban part of the town towards which he had now strayed was hardly lighted at all, and he could see nothing of the houses as he passed them, except that they got progressively smaller and dirtier, the farther he went. Down the winding road before him shone the dull gleam of an oil lamp, the one faint, lonely light that struggled ineffectually with the foggy darkness all round him. He resolved to go on as far as this lamp, and then, if it showed him nothing in the shape of an Inn, to return to the central part of the town and to try if he could not at least secure a chair to sit down on, through the night, at one of the principal Hotels.

As he got near the lamp, he heard voices; and, walking close under it, found that it lighted the entrance to a narrow court, on the wall of which was painted a long hand in faded flesh-colour, pointing with a lean forefinger, to this inscription:-

THE TWO ROBINS.

Arthur turned into the court without hesitation, to see what The Two Robins could do for him. Four or five men were standing together round the door of the house which was at the bottom of the court, facing the entrance from the street. The men were all listening to one other man, better dressed than the rest, who was telling his audience something, in a low voice, in which they were apparently very much interested.

On entering the passage, Arthur was passed by a stranger with a knapsack in his hand, who was evidently leaving the house.

'No,' said the traveller with the knapsack, turning round and addressing himself cheerfully to a fat, sly-looking, bald-headed man, with a dirty white apron on, who had followed him down the passage. 'No, Mr. landlord, I am not easily scared by trifles; but, I don't mind confessing that I can't quite stand *that*.'

It occurred to young Holliday, the moment he heard these words, that the stranger had been asked an exorbitant price for a bed at The Two Robins; and that he was unable or unwilling to pay it. The moment his back was turned, Arthur, comfortably conscious of his own well-filled pockets, addressed himself in a great hurry, for fear any other benighted traveller should slip in and forestall him, to the sly-looking landlord with the dirty apron and the bald head.

'If you have got a bed to let,' he said, 'and if that gentleman who has just gone out won't pay your price for it, I will.'

The sly landlord looked hard at Arthur.

'Will you, sir?' he asked, in a meditative, doubtful way.

'Name your price,' said young Holliday, thinking that the landlord's hesitation sprang from some boorish distrust of him. 'Name your price, and I'll give you the money at once if you like?'

'Are you game for five shillings?' inquired the landlord, rubbing his stubbly double chin, and looking up thoughtfully at the ceiling above him.

Arthur nearly laughed in the man's face; but thinking it prudent to control himself, offered the five shillings as seriously as he could. The sly landlord held out his hand, then suddenly drew it back again.

'You're acting all fair and above-board by me,' he said: 'and, before I take your money, I'll do the same by you. Look here, this is how it stands. You can have a bed all to yourself for five shillings; but you can't have more than a half-share of the room it stands in. Do you see what I mean, young gentleman?'

'Of course I do,' returned Arthur, a little irritably. 'You mean that it is a double-bedded room, and that one of the beds is occupied?'

The landlord nodded his head, and rubbed his double chin harder than ever. Arthur hesitated, and mechanically moved back a step or two towards the door. The idea of sleeping in the same room with a total stranger, did not present an attractive prospect to him. He felt more than half inclined to drop his five shillings into his pocket, and to go out into the street once more.

'Is it yes, or no?' asked the landlord. 'Settle it as quick as you can, because there's lots of people wanting a bed at Doncaster to-night, besides you.'

Arthur looked towards the court, and heard the rain falling heavily in the street outside. He thought he would ask a question or two before he rashly decided on leaving the shelter of The Two Robins.

'What sort of a man is it who has got the other bed?' he inquired. 'Is he a gentleman? I mean, is he a quiet, well-behaved person?'

‘The quietest man I ever came across,’ said the landlord, rubbing his fat hands stealthily one over the other. ‘As sober as a judge, and as regular as clock-work in his habits. It hasn’t struck nine, not ten minutes ago, and he’s in his bed already. I don’t know whether that comes up to your notion of a quiet man: it goes a long way ahead of mine, I can tell you.’

‘Is he asleep, do you think?’ asked Arthur.

‘I know he’s asleep,’ returned the landlord. ‘And what’s more, he’s gone off so fast, that I’ll warrant you don’t wake him. This way, sir,’ said the landlord, speaking over young Holliday’s shoulder, as if he was addressing some new guest who was approaching the house.

‘Here you are,’ said Arthur, determined to be beforehand with the stranger, whoever he might be. ‘I’ll take the bed.’ And he handed the five shillings to the landlord, who nodded, dropped the money carelessly into his waistcoat-pocket, and lighted the candle.

‘Come up and see the room,’ said the host of The Two Robins, leading the way to the staircase quite briskly, considering how fat he was.

They mounted to the second-floor of the house. The landlord half opened a door, fronting the landing, then stopped, and turned round to Arthur.

‘It’s a fair bargain, mind, on my side as well as on yours,’ he said. ‘You give me five shillings, I give you in return a clean, comfortable bed; and I warrant, beforehand, that you won’t be interfered with, or annoyed in any way, by the man who sleeps in the same room as you.’ Saying those words, he looked hard, for a moment, in young Holliday’s face, and then led the way into the room.

It was larger and cleaner than Arthur had expected it would be. The two beds stood parallel with each other—a space of about six feet intervening between them. They were both of the same medium size, and both had the same plain white curtains, made to draw, if necessary, all round them. The occupied bed was the bed nearest the window. The curtains were all drawn round this, except the half curtain at the bottom, on the side of the bed farthest from the window. Arthur saw the feet of the sleeping man raising the scanty clothes into a sharp little eminence, as if he was lying flat on his back. He took the candle, and advanced softly to draw the curtain—stopped half-way, and listened for a moment—then turned to the landlord.

‘He’s a very quiet sleeper,’ said Arthur.

‘Yes,’ said the landlord, ‘very quiet.’

Young Holliday advanced with the candle, and looked in at the man cautiously.

‘How pale he is!’ said Arthur.

‘Yes,’ returned the landlord, ‘pale enough, isn’t he?’

Arthur looked closer at the man. The bedclothes were drawn up to his chin, and they lay perfectly still over the region of his chest. Surprised and vaguely startled, as he noticed this, Arthur stooped down closer over the stranger; looked at his ashy, parted lips; listened breathlessly for an instant; looked again at the strangely still face, and the motionless lips and chest; and turned round suddenly on the landlord, with his own cheeks as pale for the moment as the hollow cheeks of the man on the bed.

‘Come here,’ he whispered, under his breath. ‘Come here, for God’s sake! The man’s not asleep—he is dead!’

‘You have found that out sooner than I thought you would,’ said the landlord, composedly. ‘Yes, he’s dead, sure enough. He died at five o’clock to-day.’

‘How did he die? Who is he?’ asked Arthur, staggered, for a moment, by the audacious coolness of the answer.

‘As to who is he,’ rejoined the landlord, ‘I know no more about him than you do. There are his books and letters and things, all sealed up in that brown-paper parcel, for the Coroner’s inquest to open to-morrow or next day. He’s been here a week, paying his way fairly enough, and stopping in-doors, for the most part, as if he was ailing. My girl brought him up his tea at five to-day; and as he was pouring of it out, he fell down in a faint, or a fit, or a compound of both, for anything I know. We could not bring him to—and I said he was dead. And the doctor couldn’t bring him to—and the doctor said he was dead. And there he is. And the Coroner’s inquest’s coming as soon as it can. And that’s as much as I know about it.’

Arthur held the candle close to the man’s lips. The flame still burnt straight up, as steadily as before. There was a moment of silence; and the rain pattered drearily through it against the panes of the window.

‘If you haven’t got nothing more to say to me,’ continued the landlord, ‘I suppose I may go. You don’t expect your five shillings back, do you? There’s the bed I promised you, clean and comfortable. There’s the man I warranted not to disturb you, quiet in this world for ever. If you’re frightened to stop alone with him, that’s not my look out. I’ve kept my part of the bargain, and I mean to keep the money. I’m not Yorkshire, myself, young gentleman; but I’ve lived long enough in these parts to have my wits sharpened; and I shouldn’t wonder if you found out the way to brighten up yours, next time you come amongst us.’ With these words, the landlord turned towards the door, and laughed to himself softly, in high satisfaction at his own sharpness.

Startled and shocked as he was, Arthur had by this time sufficiently recovered himself to feel indignant at the trick that had been played on him, and at the insolent manner in which the landlord exulted in it.

‘Don’t laugh,’ he said sharply, ‘till you are quite sure you have got the laugh against me. You shan’t have the five shillings for nothing, my man. I’ll keep the bed.’

‘Will you?’ said the landlord. ‘Then I wish you a goodnight’s rest.’ With that brief farewell, he went out, and shut the door after him.

A good night’s rest! The words had hardly been spoken, the door had hardly been closed, before Arthur half-repented the hasty words that had just escaped him. Though not naturally over-sensitive, and not wanting in courage of the moral as well as the physical sort, the presence of the dead man had an instantaneously chilling effect on his mind when he found himself alone in the room—alone, and bound by his own rash words to stay there till the next morning. An older man would have thought nothing of those words, and would have acted, without reference to them, as his calmer sense suggested. But Arthur was too young to treat the ridicule, even of his inferiors, with contempt—too young not to fear the momentary humiliation of falsifying his own foolish boast, more than he feared the trial of watching out the long night in the same chamber with the dead.

‘It is but a few hours,’ he thought to himself, ‘and I can get away the first thing in the morning.’

He was looking towards the occupied bed as that idea passed through his mind, and the sharp, angular eminence made in the clothes by the dead man’s upturned feet again caught his eye. He advanced and drew the curtains, purposely abstaining, as he did so, from looking at the face of the corpse, lest he might unnerve himself at the outset by fastening some ghastly impression of it on his mind. He drew the curtain very gently, and sighed involuntarily as he closed it. ‘Poor fellow,’ he said, almost as sadly as if he had known the man. ‘Ah, poor fellow!’

He went next to the window. The night was black, and he could see nothing from it. The rain still pattered heavily against the glass. He inferred, from hearing it, that the window was at the back of the house; remembering that the front was sheltered from the weather by the court and the buildings over it.

While he was still standing at the window—for even the dreary rain was a relief, because of the sound it made; a relief, also, because it moved, and had some faint suggestion, in consequence, of life and companionship in it—while he was standing at the window, and looking vacantly into the black darkness outside, he heard a distant church-clock strike ten. Only ten! How was he to pass the time till the house was astir the next morning?

Under any other circumstances, he would have gone down to the public-house parlour, would have called for his grog, and would have laughed and talked with the company assembled as familiarly as if he had known them all his life. But the very thought of whiling away the time in this manner was distasteful to him. The new situation in which he was placed seemed to have altered him to himself already. Thus far, his life had been the common, trifling, prosaic, surface-life of a prosperous young man, with no troubles to conquer, and no trials to face. He had lost no relation whom he loved, no friend whom he treasured. Till this night, what share he had of the immortal inheritance that is divided amongst us all, had laid dormant within him. Till this night, Death and he had not once met, even in thought.

He took a few turns up and down the room—then stopped. The noise made by his boots on the poorly carpeted floor, jarred on his ear. He hesitated a little, and ended by taking the boots off, and walking backwards and forwards noiselessly. All desire to sleep or to rest had left him. The bare thought of lying down on the unoccupied bed instantly drew the picture on his mind of a dreadful mimicry of the position of the dead man. Who was he? What was the story of his past life? Poor he must have been, or he would not have stopped at such a place as The Two Robins Inn—and weakened, probably, by long illness, or he could hardly have died in the manner in which the landlord had described. Poor, ill, lonely,—dead in a strange place; dead, with nobody but a stranger to pity him. A sad story: truly, on the mere face of it, a very sad story.

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, he had stopped insensibly at the window, close to which stood the foot of the bed with the closed curtains. At first he looked at it absently; then he became conscious that his eyes were fixed on it; and then, a perverse desire took possession of him to do the very thing which he had resolved not to do, up to this time—to look at the dead man.

He stretched out his hand towards the curtains; but checked himself in the very act of undrawing them, turned his back sharply on the bed, and walked towards the chimney-piece, to see what things were placed on it, and to try if he could keep the dead man out of his mind in that way.

There was a pewter inkstand on the chimney-piece, with some mildewed remains of ink in the bottle. There were two coarse china ornaments of the commonest kind; and there was a square of embossed card, dirty and fly-blown, with a collection of wretched riddles printed on it, in all sorts of zig-zag directions, and in variously coloured inks. He took the card, and went away, to read it, to the table on which the candle was placed; sitting down, with his back resolutely turned to the curtained bed.

He read the first riddle, the second, the third, all in one corner of the card—then turned it round impatiently to look at another. Before he could begin reading the riddles printed here, the sound of the church-clock stopped him. Eleven. He had got through an hour of the time, in the room with the dead man.

Once more he looked at the card. It was not easy to make out the letters printed on it, in consequence of the dimness of the light which the landlord had left him—a common tallow candle, furnished with a pair of heavy old-fashioned steel snuffers. Up to this time, his mind had been too much occupied to think of the light. He had left the wick of the candle unsnuffed, till it had risen higher than the flame, and had burnt into an odd pent-house shape at the top, from which morsels of the charred cotton fell off, from time to time, in little flakes. He took up the snuffers now, and trimmed the wick. The light brightened directly, and the room became less dismal.

Again he turned to the riddles; reading them doggedly and resolutely, now in one corner of the card, now in another. All his efforts, however, could not fix his attention on them. He pursued his occupation mechanically, deriving no sort of impression from what he was reading. It was as if a shadow from the curtained bed had got between his mind and the gaily printed letters—a shadow that nothing could dispel. At last, he gave up the struggle, and threw the card from him impatiently, and took to walking softly up and down the room again.

The dead man, the dead man, the *hidden* dead man on the bed! There was the one persistent idea still haunting him. Hidden? Was it only the body being there, or was it the body being there, concealed, that was preying on his mind? He stopped at the window, with that doubt in him; once more listening to the pattering rain, once more looking out into the black darkness.

Still the dead man! The darkness forced his mind back upon itself, and set his memory at work, reviving, with a painfully-vivid distinctness the momentary impression it had received from the first sight of the corpse. Before long the face seemed to be hovering out in the middle of the darkness, confronting him through the window, with the paleness whiter, with the dreadful dull line of light between the imperfectly-closed eyelids broader than he had seen it—with the parted lips slowly dropping farther and farther away from each other—with the features growing larger and moving closer, till they seemed to fill the window and to silence the rain, and to shut out the night.

The sound of a voice, shouting below-stairs, woke him suddenly from the dream of his own distempered fancy. He recognised it as the voice of the landlord. ‘Shut up at twelve, Ben,’ he heard it say. ‘I’m off to bed.’

He wiped away the damp that had gathered on his forehead, reasoned with himself for a little while, and resolved to shake his mind free of the ghastly counterfeit which still clung to it, by forcing himself to confront, if it was only for a moment, the solemn reality. Without allowing himself an instant to hesitate, he parted the curtains at the foot of the bed, and looked through.

There was a sad, peaceful, white face, with the awful mystery of stillness on it, laid back upon the pillow. No stir, no change there! He only looked at it for a moment before he closed the curtains again—but that moment steadied him, calmed him, restored him—mind and body—to himself.

He returned to his old occupation of walking up and down the room; persevering in it, this time, till the clock struck again. Twelve.

As the sound of the clock-bell died away, it was succeeded by the confused noise, down-stairs, of the drinkers in the tap-room leaving the house. The next sound, after an interval of silence, was caused by the barring of the door, and the closing of the shutters, at the back of the Inn. Then the silence followed again, and was disturbed no more.

He was alone now—absolutely, utterly, alone with the dead man, till the next morning.

The wick of the candle wanted trimming again. He took up the snuffers—but paused suddenly on the very point of using them, and looked attentively at the candle—then back, over his shoulder, at the curtained bed—then again at the candle. It had been lighted, for the first time, to show him the way up-stairs, and three parts of it, at least, were already consumed. In another hour it would be burnt out. In another hour—unless he called at once to the man who had shut up the Inn, for a fresh candle—he would be left in the dark.

Strongly as his mind had been affected since he had entered his room, his unreasonable dread of encountering ridicule, and of exposing his courage to suspicion, had not altogether lost its influence over him, even yet. He lingered irresolutely by the table, waiting till he could prevail on himself to open the door, and call, from the landing, to the man who had shut up the Inn. In his present hesitating frame of mind, it was a kind of relief to gain a few moments only by engaging in the trifling occupation of snuffing the candle. His hand trembled a little, and the snuffers were heavy and awkward to use. When he closed them on the wick, he closed them a hair’s breadth too low. In an instant the candle was out, and the room was plunged in pitch darkness.

The one impression which the absence of light immediately produced on his mind, was distrust of the curtained bed—distrust which shaped itself into no distinct idea, but which was powerful enough in its very vagueness, to bind him down to his chair, to make his heart beat fast, and to set him listening intently. No sound stirred in the room but the familiar sound of the rain against the window, louder and sharper now than he had heard it yet.

Still the vague distrust, the inexpressible dread possessed him, and kept him to his chair. He had put his carpet-bag on the table, when he first entered the room; and he now took the key from his pocket, reached out his hand softly, opened the bag, and groped in it for his travelling writing-case, in which he knew that there was a small store of matches. When he had got one of the matches, he waited before he struck it on the coarse wooden table, and listened intently again, without knowing why. Still there was no sound in the room but the steady, ceaseless, rattling sound of the rain.

He lighted the candle again, without another moment of delay and, on the instant of its burning up, the first object in the room that his eyes sought for was the curtained bed.

Just before the light had been put out, he had looked in that direction, and had seen no change, no disarrangement of any sort, in the folds of the closely-drawn curtains.

When he looked at the bed, now, he saw, hanging over the side of it, a long white hand.

It lay perfectly motionless, midway on the side of the bed, where the curtain at the head and the curtain at the foot met. Nothing more was visible. The clinging curtains hid everything but the long white hand.

He stood looking at it unable to stir, unable to call out; feeling nothing, knowing nothing, every faculty he possessed gathered up and lost in the one seeing faculty. How long that first panic held him he never could tell afterwards. It might have been only for a moment; it might have been for many minutes together. How he got to the bed—whether he ran to it headlong, or whether he approached it slowly—how he wrought himself up to unclose the curtains and look in, he never has remembered, and never will remember to his dying day. It is enough that he did go to the bed, and that he did look inside the curtains.

The man had moved. One of his arms was outside the clothes; his face was turned a little on the pillow; his eyelids were wide open. Changed as to position, and as to one of the features, the face was, otherwise, fearfully and wonderfully unaltered. The dead paleness and the dead quiet were on it still

One glance showed Arthur this—one glance, before he flew breathlessly to the door, and alarmed the house.

The man whom the landlord called ‘Ben,’ was the first to appear on the stairs. In three words, Arthur told him what had happened, and sent him for the nearest doctor.

I, who tell you this story, was then staying with a medical friend of mine, in practice at Doncaster, taking care of his patients for him, during his absence in London; and I, for the time being, was the nearest doctor. They had sent for me from the Inn, when the stranger was taken ill in the afternoon; but I was not at home, and medical assistance was sought for elsewhere. When the man from The Two Robins rang the night-bell, I was just thinking of going to bed. Naturally enough, I did not believe a word of his story about ‘a dead man who had come to life again.’ However, I put on my hat, armed myself with one or two bottles of restorative medicine, and ran to the Inn, expecting to find nothing more remarkable, when I got there, than a patient in a fit.

My surprise at finding that the man had spoken the literal truth was almost, if not quite, equalled by my astonishment at finding myself face to face with Arthur Holliday as soon as I entered the bedroom. It was no time then for giving or seeking explanations. We just shook hands amazedly; and then I ordered everybody but Arthur out of the room, and hurried to the man on the bed.

The kitchen fire had not been long out. There was plenty of hot water in the boiler, and plenty of flannel to be had. With these, with my medicines, and with such help as Arthur could render under my direction, I dragged the man, literally, out of the jaws of death. In less than an hour from the time when I had been called in, he was alive and talking in the bed on which he had been laid out to wait for the Coroner's inquest.

You will naturally ask me, what had been the matter with him; and I might treat you, in reply, to a long theory, plentifully sprinkled with, what the children call, hard words. I prefer telling you that, in this case, cause and effect could not be satisfactorily joined together by any theory whatever. There are mysteries in life, and the condition of it, which human science has not fathomed yet; and I candidly confess to you, that, in bringing that man back to existence, I was, morally speaking, groping haphazard in the dark. I know (from the testimony of the doctor who attended him in the afternoon) that the vital machinery, so far as its action is appreciable by our senses, had, in this case, unquestionably stopped; and I am equally certain (seeing that I recovered him) that the vital principle was not extinct. When I add, that he had suffered from a long and complicated illness, and that his whole nervous system was utterly deranged, I have told you all I really know of the physical condition of my dead-alive patient at The Two Robins Inn.

When he 'came to,' as the phrase goes, he was a startling object to look at, with his colourless face, his sunken cheeks, his wild black eyes, and his long black hair. The first question he asked me about himself, when he could speak, made me suspect that I had been called in to a man in my own profession. I mentioned to him my surmise; and he told me that I was right.

He said he had come last from Paris, where he had been attached to a hospital. That he had lately returned to England, on his way to Edinburgh, to continue his studies; that he had been taken ill on the journey; and that he had stopped to rest and recover himself at Doncaster. He did not add a word about his name, or who he was: and, of course, I did not question him on the subject. All I inquired, when he ceased speaking, was what branch of the profession he intended to follow.

‘Any branch,’ he said, bitterly, ‘which will put bread into the mouth of a poor man.’

At this, Arthur, who had been hitherto watching him in silent curiosity, burst out impetuously in his usual good-humoured way:-

‘My dear fellow!’ (everybody was ‘my dear fellow’ with Arthur) ‘now you have come to life again, don’t begin by being down-hearted about your prospects. I’ll answer for it, I can help you to some capital thing in the medical line—or, if I can’t, I know my father can.’

The medical student looked at him steadily.

‘Thank you,’ he said, coldly. Then added, ‘May I ask who your father is?’

‘He’s well enough known all about this part of the country,’ replied Arthur. ‘He is a great manufacturer, and his name is Holliday.’

My hand was on the man’s wrist during this brief conversation. The instant the name of Holliday was pronounced I felt the pulse under my fingers flutter, stop, go on suddenly with a bound, and beat afterwards, for a minute or two, at the fever rate.

‘How did you come here?’ asked the stranger, quickly, excitably, passionately almost.

Arthur related briefly what had happened from the time of his first taking the bed at the inn.

‘I am indebted to Mr. Holliday’s son then for the help that has saved my life,’ said the medical student, speaking to himself, with a singular sarcasm in his voice. ‘Come here!’

He held out, as he spoke, his long, white, bony, right hand.

‘With all my heart,’ said Arthur, taking the hand-cordially. ‘I may confess it now,’ he continued, laughing. ‘Upon my honour, you almost frightened me out of my wits.’

The stranger did not seem to listen. His wild black eyes were fixed with a look of eager interest on Arthur’s face, and his long bony fingers kept tight hold of Arthur’s hand. Young Holliday, on his side, returned the gaze, amazed and puzzled by the medical student’s odd language and manners. The two faces were close together; I looked at them; and, to my amazement, I was suddenly impressed by the sense of a likeness between them—not in features, or complexion, but solely in expression. It must have been a strong likeness, or I should certainly not have found it out, for I am naturally slow at detecting resemblances between faces.

‘You have saved my life,’ said the strange man, still looking hard in Arthur’s face, still holding tightly by his hand. ‘If you had been my own brother, you could not have done more for me than that.’

He laid a singularly strong emphasis on those three words ‘my own brother,’ and a change passed over his face as he pronounced them,—a change that no language of mine is competent to describe.

‘I hope I have not done being of service to you yet,’ said Arthur. ‘I’ll speak to my father, as soon as I get home.’

‘You seem to be fond and proud of your father,’ said the medical student. ‘I suppose, in return, he is fond and proud of you?’

‘Of course, he is!’ answered Arthur, laughing. ‘Is there anything wonderful in that? Isn’t *your* father fond—’

The stranger suddenly dropped young Holliday’s hand, and turned his face away.

‘I beg your pardon,’ said Arthur. ‘I hope I have not unintentionally pained you. I hope you have not lost your father.’

‘I can’t well lose what I have never had,’ retorted the medical student, with a harsh, mocking laugh.

‘What you have never had!’

The strange man suddenly caught Arthur’s hand again, suddenly looked once more hard in his face.

‘Yes,’ he said, with a repetition of the bitter laugh. ‘You have brought a poor devil back into the world, who has no business there. Do I astonish you? Well! I have a fancy of my own for telling you what men in my situation generally keep a secret. I have no name and no father. The merciful law of Society tells me I am Nobody’s Son! Ask your father if he will be my father too, and help me on in life with the family name.’

Arthur looked at me, more puzzled than ever. I signed to him to say nothing, and then laid my fingers again on the man’s wrist. No! In spite of the extraordinary speech that he had just made, he was not, as I had been disposed to suspect, beginning to get light-headed. His pulse, by this time, had fallen back to a quiet, slow beat, and his skin was moist and cool. Not a symptom of fever or agitation about him.

Finding that neither of us answered him, he turned to me, and began talking of the extraordinary nature of his case, and asking my advice about the future course of medical treatment to which he ought to subject himself. I said the matter required careful thinking over, and suggested that I should submit certain prescriptions to him the next morning. He told me to write them at once, as he would, most likely, be leaving Doncaster, in the morning, before I was up. It was quite useless to represent to him the folly and danger of such a proceeding as this. He heard me politely and patiently, but held to his resolution, without offering any reasons or any explanations, and repeated to me, that if I wished to give him a chance of seeing my prescription, I must write it at once. Hearing this, Arthur volunteered the loan of a travelling writing-case, which, he said, he had with him; and, bringing it to the bed, shook the note-paper out of the pocket of the case forthwith in his usual careless way. With the paper, there fell out on the counterpane of the bed a small packet of sticking-plaster, and a little water-colour drawing of a landscape.

The medical student took up the drawing and looked at it. His eye fell on some initials neatly written, in cypher, in one corner. He started and trembled; his pale face grew whiter than ever; his wild black eyes turned on Arthur, and looked through and through him.

‘A pretty drawing,’ he said in a remarkably quiet tone of voice.

‘Ah! and done by such a pretty girl,’ said Arthur. ‘Oh, such a pretty girl! I wish it was not a landscape—I wish it was a portrait of her!’

‘You admire her very much?’

Arthur, half in jest, half in earnest, kissed his hand for answer.

‘Love at first sight!’ he said, putting the drawing away again. ‘But the course of it doesn’t run smooth. It’s the old story. She’s monopolised as usual. Trammelled by a rash engagement to some poor man who is never likely to get money enough to marry her. It was lucky I heard of it in time, or I should certainly have risked a declaration when she gave me that drawing. Here, doctor! Here is pen, ink, and paper all ready for you.’

‘When she gave you that drawing? Gave it. Gave it.’ He repeated the words slowly to himself, and suddenly closed his eyes. A momentary distortion passed across his face, and I saw one of his hands clutch up the bedclothes and squeeze them hard. I thought he was going to be ill again, and begged that there might be no more talking. He opened his eyes when I spoke, fixed them once more searchingly on Arthur, and said, slowly and distinctly, ‘You like her, and she likes you. The poor man may die out of your way. Who can tell that she may not give you herself as well as her drawing, after all?'

Before young Holliday could answer, he turned to me, and said in a whisper, 'Now for the prescription.' From that time, though he spoke to Arthur again, he never looked at him more.

When I had written the prescription, he examined it, approved of it, and then astonished us both by abruptly wishing us good night. I offered to sit up with him, and he shook his head. Arthur offered to sit up with him, and he said, shortly, with his face turned away, 'No.' I insisted on having somebody left to watch him. He gave way when he found I was determined, and said he would accept the services of the waiter at the Inn.

'Thank you, both,' he said, as we rose to go. 'I have one last favour to ask—not of you, doctor, for I leave you to exercise your professional discretion—but of Mr. Holliday.' His eyes, while he spoke, still rested steadily on me, and never once turned towards Arthur. 'I beg that Mr. Holliday will not mention to any one—least of all to his father—the events that have occurred, and the words that have passed, in this room. I entreat him to bury me in his memory, as, but for him, I might have been buried in my grave. I cannot give my reasons for making this strange request. I can only implore him to grant it.'

His voice faltered for the first time, and he hid his face on the pillow. Arthur, completely bewildered, gave the required pledge. I took young Holliday away with me, immediately afterwards, to the house of my friend; determining to go back to the Inn, and to see the medical student again before he had left in the morning.

I returned to the Inn at eight o'clock, purposely abstaining from waking Arthur, who was sleeping off the past night's excitement on one of my friend's sofas. A suspicion had occurred to me as soon as I was alone in my bedroom, which made me resolve that Holliday and the stranger whose life he had saved should not meet again, if I could prevent it. I have already alluded to certain reports, or scandals, which I knew of, relating to the early life of Arthur's father. While I was thinking, in my bed, of what had passed at the Inn—of the change in the student's pulse when he heard the name of Holliday; of the resemblance of expression that I had discovered between his face and Arthur's; of the emphasis he had laid on those three words, 'my own brother;' and of his incomprehensible acknowledgment of his own illegitimacy—while I was thinking of these things, the reports I have mentioned suddenly flew into my mind, and linked themselves fast to the chain of my previous reflections. Something within me whispered, ‘It is best that those two young men should not meet again.’ I felt it before I slept; I felt it when I woke; and I went, as I told you, alone to the Inn the next morning.

I had missed my only opportunity of seeing my nameless patient again. He had been gone nearly an hour when I inquired for him.

I have now told you everything that I know for certain, in relation to the man whom I brought back to life in the double-bedded room of the Inn at Doncaster. What I have next to add is matter for inference and surmise, and is not, strictly speaking, matter of fact.

I have to tell you, first, that the medical student turned out to be strangely and unaccountably right in assuming it as more than probable that Arthur Holliday would marry the young lady who had given him the water-colour drawing of the landscape. That marriage took place a little more than a year after the events occurred which I have just been relating. The young couple came to live in the neighbourhood in which I was then established in practice. I was present at the wedding, and was rather surprised to find that Arthur was singularly reserved with me, both before and after his marriage, on the subject of the young lady’s prior engagement. He only referred to it once, when we were alone, merely telling me, on that occasion, that his wife had done all that honour and duty required of her in the matter, and that the engagement had been broken off with the full approval of her parents. I never heard more from him than this. For three years he and his wife lived together happily. At the expiration of that time, the symptoms of a serious illness first declared themselves in Mrs. Arthur Holliday. It turned out to be a long, lingering, hopeless malady. I attended her throughout. We had been great friends when she was well, and we became more attached to each other than ever when she was ill. I had many long and interesting conversations with her in the intervals when she suffered least. The result of one of these conversations I may briefly relate, leaving you to draw any inferences from it that you please.

The interview to which I refer, occurred shortly before her death. I called one evening, as usual, and found her alone, with a look in her eyes which told me that she had been crying. She only informed me at first, that she had been depressed in spirits; but, by little and little, she became more communicative, and confessed to me that she had been looking over some old letters, which had been addressed to her, before she had seen Arthur, by a man to whom she had been engaged to be married. I asked her how the engagement came to be broken off. She replied that it had not been broken off, but that it had died out in a very mysterious way. The person to whom she was engaged—her first love, she called him—was very poor, and there was no immediate prospect of their being married. He followed my profession, and went abroad to study. They had corresponded regularly, until the time when, as she believed, he had returned to England. From that period she heard no more of him. He was of a fretful, sensitive temperament; and she feared that she might have inadvertently done or said something that offended him. However that might be, he had never written to her again; and, after waiting a year, she had married Arthur. I asked when the first estrangement had begun, and found that the time at which she ceased to hear anything of her first lover exactly corresponded with the time at which I had been called in to my mysterious patient at The Two Robins Inn.

A fortnight after that conversation, she died. In course of time, Arthur married again. Of late years, he has lived principally in London, and I have seen little or nothing of him.

I have many years to pass over before I can approach to anything like a conclusion of this fragmentary narrative. And even when that later period is reached, the little that I have to say will not occupy your attention for more than a few minutes. Between six and seven years ago, the gentleman to whom I introduced you in this room, came to me, with good professional recommendations, to fill the position of my assistant. We met, not like strangers, but like friends—the only difference between us being, that I was very much surprised to see him, and that he did not appear to be at all surprised to see me. If he was my son or my brother, I believe he could not be fonder of me than he is; but he has never volunteered any confidences since he has been here, on the subject of his past life. I saw something that was familiar to me in his face when we first met; and yet it was also something that suggested the idea of change. I had a notion once that my patient at the Inn might be a natural son of Mr. Holliday's; I had another idea that he might also have been the man who was engaged to Arthur's first wife; and I have a third idea, still clinging to me, that Mr. Lorn is the only man in England who could really enlighten me, if he chose, on both those doubtful points. His hair is not black, now, and his eyes are dimmer than the piercing eyes that I remember, but, for all that, he is very like the nameless medical student of my young days—very like him. And, sometimes, when I come home late at night, and find him asleep, and wake him, he looks, in coming to, wonderfully like the stranger at Doncaster, as he raised himself in the bed on that memorable night!

The Doctor paused. Mr. Goodchild, who had been following every word that fell from his lips up to this time, leaned forward eagerly to ask a question. Before he could say a word, the latch of the door was raised, without any warning sound of footsteps in the passage outside. A long, white, bony hand appeared through the opening, gently pushing the door, which was prevented from working freely on its hinges by a fold in the carpet under it.

‘That hand! Look at that hand, Doctor!’ said Mr. Goodchild, touching him.

At the same moment, the Doctor looked at Mr. Goodchild, and whispered to him, significantly:

‘Hush! he has come back.’

CHAPTER III

The Cumberland Doctor’s mention of Doncaster Races, inspired Mr. Francis Goodchild with the idea of going down to Doncaster to see the races. Doncaster being a good way off, and quite out of the way of the Idle Apprentices (if anything could be out of their way, who had no way), it necessarily followed that Francis perceived Doncaster in the race-week to be, of all possible idleness, the particular idleness that would completely satisfy him.

Thomas, with an enforced idleness grafted on the natural and voluntary power of his disposition, was not of this mind; objecting that a man compelled to lie on his back on a floor, a sofa, a table, a line of chairs, or anything he could get to lie upon, was not in racing condition, and that he desired nothing better than to lie where he was, enjoying himself in looking at the flies on the ceiling. But, Francis Goodchild, who had been walking round his companion in a circuit of twelve miles for two days, and had begun to doubt whether it was reserved for him ever to be idle in his life, not only overpowered this objection, but even converted Thomas Idle to a scheme he formed (another idle inspiration), of conveying the said Thomas to the sea-coast, and putting his injured leg under a stream of salt-water.

Plunging into this happy conception headforemost, Mr. Goodchild immediately referred to the county-map, and ardently discovered that the most delicious piece of sea-coast to be found within the limits of England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man, and the Channel Islands, all summed up together, was Allonby on the coast of Cumberland. There was the coast of Scotland opposite to Allonby, said Mr. Goodchild with enthusiasm; there was a fine Scottish mountain on that Scottish coast; there were Scottish lights to be seen shining across the glorious Channel, and at Allonby itself there was every idle luxury (no doubt) that a watering-place could offer to the heart of idle man. Moreover, said Mr. Goodchild, with his finger on the map, this exquisite retreat was approached by a coach-road, from a railway-station called Aspatria—a name, in a manner, suggestive of the departed glories of Greece, associated with one of the most engaging and most famous of Greek women. On this point, Mr. Goodchild continued at intervals to breathe a vein of classic fancy and eloquence exceedingly irksome to Mr. Idle, until it appeared that the honest English pronunciation of that Cumberland country shortened Aspatria into 'Spatter.' After this supplementary discovery, Mr. Goodchild said no more about it.

By way of Spatter, the crippled Idle was carried, hoisted, pushed, poked, and packed, into and out of carriages, into and out of beds, into and out of tavern resting-places, until he was brought at length within sniff of the sea. And now, behold the apprentices gallantly riding into Allonby in a one-horse fly, bent upon staying in that peaceful marine valley until the turbulent Doncaster time shall come round upon the wheel, in its turn among what are in sporting registers called the 'Fixtures' for the month.

'Do you see Allonby!' asked Thomas Idle.

'I don't see it yet,' said Francis, looking out of window.

'It must be there,' said Thomas Idle.

'I don't see it,' returned Francis.

'It must be there,' repeated Thomas Idle, fretfully.

'Lord bless me!' exclaimed Francis, drawing in his head, 'I suppose this is it!'

'A watering-place,' retorted Thomas Idle, with the pardonable sharpness of an invalid, 'can't be five gentlemen in straw hats, on a form on one side of a door, and four ladies in hats and falls, on a form on another side of a door, and three geese in a dirty little brook before them, and a boy's legs hanging over a bridge (with a boy's body I suppose on the other side of the parapet), and a donkey running away. What are you talking about?'

'Allonby, gentlemen,' said the most comfortable of landladies as she opened one door of the carriage; 'Allonby, gentlemen,' said the most attentive of landlords, as he opened the other.

Thomas Idle yielded his arm to the ready Goodchild, and descended from the vehicle. Thomas, now just able to grope his way along, in a doubled-up condition, with the aid of two thick sticks, was no bad embodiment of Commodore Trunnion, or of one of those many gallant Admirals of the stage, who have all ample fortunes, gout, thick sticks, tempers, wards, and nephews. With this distinguished naval appearance upon him, Thomas made a crab-like progress up a clean little bulk-headed staircase, into a clean little bulk-headed room, where he slowly deposited himself on a sofa, with a stick on either hand of him, looking exceedingly grim.

‘Francis,’ said Thomas Idle, ‘what do you think of this place?’

‘I think,’ returned Mr. Goodchild, in a glowing way, ‘it is everything we expected.’

‘Hah!’ said Thomas Idle.

‘There is the sea,’ cried Mr. Goodchild, pointing out of window; ‘and here,’ pointing to the lunch on the table, ‘are shrimps. Let us—’ here Mr. Goodchild looked out of window, as if in search of something, and looked in again,—‘let us eat ’em.’

The shrimps eaten and the dinner ordered, Mr. Goodchild went out to survey the watering-place. As Chorus of the Drama, without whom Thomas could make nothing of the scenery, he by-and-by returned, to have the following report screwed out of him.

In brief, it was the most delightful place ever seen.

‘But,’ Thomas Idle asked, ‘where is it?’

‘It’s what you may call generally up and down the beach, here and there,’ said Mr. Goodchild, with a twist of his hand.

‘Proceed,’ said Thomas Idle.

It was, Mr. Goodchild went on to say, in cross-examination, what you might call a primitive place. Large? No, it was not large. Who ever expected it would be large? Shape? What a question to ask! No shape. What sort of a street? Why, no street. Shops? Yes, of course (quite indignant). How many? Who ever went into a place to count the shops? Ever so many. Six? Perhaps. A library? Why, of course (indignant again). Good collection of books? Most likely—couldn’t say—had seen nothing in it but a pair of scales. Any reading-room? Of course, there was a reading-room. Where? Where! why, over there. Where was over there? Why, *there*! Let Mr. Idle carry his eye to that bit of waste ground above high-water mark, where the rank grass and loose stones were most in a litter; and he would see a sort of long, ruinous brick loft, next door to a ruinous brick out-house, which loft had a ladder outside, to get up by. That was the reading-room, and if Mr. Idle didn’t like the idea of a weaver’s shuttle throbbing under a reading-room, that was his look out. *He* was not to dictate, Mr. Goodchild supposed (indignant again), to the company.

‘By-the-by,’ Thomas Idle observed; ‘the company?’

Well! (Mr. Goodchild went on to report) very nice company. Where were they? Why, there they were. Mr. Idle could see the tops of their hats, he supposed. What? Those nine straw hats again, five gentlemen's and four ladies'? Yes, to be sure. Mr. Goodchild hoped the company were not to be expected to wear helmets, to please Mr. Idle.

Beginning to recover his temper at about this point, Mr. Goodchild voluntarily reported that if you wanted to be primitive, you could be primitive here, and that if you wanted to be idle, you could be idle here. In the course of some days, he added, that there were three fishing-boats, but no rigging, and that there were plenty of fishermen who never fished. That they got their living entirely by looking at the ocean. What nourishment they looked out of it to support their strength, he couldn't say; but, he supposed it was some sort of Iodine. The place was full of their children, who were always upside down on the public buildings (two small bridges over the brook), and always hurting themselves or one another, so that their wailings made more continual noise in the air than could have been got in a busy place. The houses people lodged in, were nowhere in particular, and were in capital accordance with the beach; being all more or less cracked and damaged as its shells were, and all empty—as its shells were. Among them, was an edifice of destitute appearance, with a number of wall-eyed windows in it, looking desperately out to Scotland as if for help, which said it was a Bazaar (and it ought to know), and where you might buy anything you wanted—supposing what you wanted, was a little camp-stool or a child's wheelbarrow. The brook crawled or stopped between the houses and the sea, and the donkey was always running away, and when he got into the brook he was pelted out with stones, which never hit him, and which always hit some of the children who were upside down on the public buildings, and made their lamentations louder. This donkey was the public excitement of Allonby, and was probably supported at the public expense.

The foregoing descriptions, delivered in separate items, on separate days of adventurous discovery, Mr. Goodchild severally wound up, by looking out of window, looking in again, and saying, 'But there is the sea, and here are the shrimps—let us eat 'em.'

There were fine sunsets at Allonby when the low flat beach, with its pools of water and its dry patches, changed into long bars of silver and gold in various states of burnishing, and there were fine views—on fine days—of the Scottish coast. But, when it rained at Allonby, Allonby thrown back upon its ragged self, became a kind of place which the donkey seemed to have found out, and to have his highly sagacious reasons for wishing to bolt from. Thomas Idle observed, too, that Mr. Goodchild, with a noble show of disinterestedness, became every day more ready to walk to Maryport and back, for letters; and suspicions began to harbour in the mind of Thomas, that his friend deceived him, and that Maryport was a preferable place.

Therefore, Thomas said to Francis on a day when they had looked at the sea and eaten the shrimps, 'My mind misgives me, Goodchild, that you go to Maryport, like the boy in the story-book, to ask *it* to be idle with you.'

'Judge, then,' returned Francis, adopting the style of the story-book, 'with what success. I go to a region which is a bit of water-side Bristol, with a slice of Wapping, a seasoning of Wolverhampton, and a garnish of Portsmouth, and I say, "Will *you* come and be idle with me?" And it answers, "No; for I am a great deal too vaporous, and a great deal too rusty, and a great deal too muddy, and a great deal too dirty altogether; and I have ships to load, and pitch and tar to boil, and iron to hammer, and steam to get up, and smoke to make, and stone to quarry, and fifty other disagreeable things to do, and I can't be idle with you." Then I go into jagged up-hill and down-hill streets, where I am in the pastrycook's shop at one moment, and next moment in savage fastnesses of moor and morass, beyond the confines of civilisation, and I say to those murky and black-dusty streets, "Will *you* come and be idle with me?" To which they reply, "No, we can't, indeed, for we haven't the spirits, and we are startled by the echo of your feet on the sharp pavement, and we have so many goods in our shop-windows which nobody wants, and we have so much to do for a limited public which never comes to us to be done for, that we are altogether out of sorts and can't enjoy ourselves with any one." So I go to the Post-office, and knock at the shutter, and I say to the Post-master, "Will *you* come and be idle with me?" To which he rejoins, "No, I really can't, for I live, as you may see, in such a very little Post-office, and pass my life behind such a very little shutter, that my hand, when I put it out, is as the hand of a giant crammed through the window of a dwarf's house at a fair, and I am a mere Post-office anchorite in a cell much too small for him, and I can't get out, and I can't get in, and I have no space to be idle in, even if I would." So, the boy,' said Mr. Goodchild, concluding the tale, 'comes back with the letters after all, and lives happy never afterwards.'

But it may, not unreasonably, be asked—while Francis Goodchild was wandering hither and thither, storing his mind with perpetual observation of men and things, and sincerely believing himself to be the laziest creature in existence all the time—how did Thomas Idle, crippled and confined to the house, contrive to get through the hours of the day?

Prone on the sofa, Thomas made no attempt to get through the hours, but passively allowed the hours to get through *him*. Where other men in his situation would have read books and improved their minds, Thomas slept and rested his body. Where other men would have pondered anxiously over their future prospects, Thomas dreamed lazily of his past life. The one solitary thing he did, which most other people would have done in his place, was to resolve on making certain alterations and improvements in his mode of existence, as soon as the effects of the misfortune that had overtaken him had all passed away. Remembering that the current of his life had hitherto oozed along in one smooth stream of laziness, occasionally troubled on the surface by a slight passing ripple of industry, his present ideas on the subject of self-reform, inclined him—not as the reader may be disposed to imagine, to project schemes for a new existence of enterprise and exertion—but, on the contrary, to resolve that he would never, if he could possibly help it, be active or industrious again, throughout the whole of his future career.

It is due to Mr. Idle to relate that his mind sauntered towards this peculiar conclusion on distinct and logically-producible grounds. After reviewing, quite at his ease, and with many needful intervals of repose, the generally-placid spectacle of his past existence, he arrived at the discovery that all the great disasters which had tried his patience and equanimity in early life, had been caused by his having allowed himself to be deluded into imitating some pernicious example of activity and industry that had been set him by others. The trials to which he here alludes were three in number, and may be thus reckoned up: First, the disaster of being an unpopular and a thrashed boy at school; secondly, the disaster of falling seriously ill; thirdly, the disaster of becoming acquainted with a great bore.

The first disaster occurred after Thomas had been an idle and a popular boy at school, for some happy years. One Christmas-time, he was stimulated by the evil example of a companion, whom he had always trusted and liked, to be untrue to himself, and to try for a prize at the ensuing half-yearly examination. He did try, and he got a prize—how, he did not distinctly know at the moment, and cannot remember now. No sooner, however, had the book—Moral Hints to the Young on the Value of Time—been placed in his hands, than the first troubles of his life began. The idle boys deserted him, as a traitor to their cause. The industrious boys avoided him, as a dangerous interloper; one of their number, who had always won the prize on previous occasions, expressing just resentment at the invasion of his privileges by calling Thomas into the play-ground, and then and there administering to him the first sound and genuine thrashing that he had ever received in his life. Unpopular from that moment, as a beaten boy, who belonged to no side and was rejected by all parties, young Idle soon lost caste with his masters, as he had previously lost caste with his schoolfellows. He had forfeited the comfortable reputation of being the one lazy member of the youthful community whom it was quite hopeless to punish. Never again did he hear the headmaster say reproachfully to an industrious boy who had committed a fault, ‘I might have expected this in Thomas Idle, but it is inexcusable, sir, in you, who know better.’ Never more, after winning that fatal prize, did he escape the retributive imposition, or the avenging birch. From that time, the masters made him work, and the boys would not let him play. From that time his social position steadily declined, and his life at school became a perpetual burden to him.

So, again, with the second disaster. While Thomas was lazy, he was a model of health. His first attempt at active exertion and his first suffering from severe illness are connected together by the intimate relations of cause and effect. Shortly after leaving school, he accompanied a party of friends to a cricket-field, in his natural and appropriate character of spectator only. On the ground it was discovered that the players fell short of the required number, and facile Thomas was persuaded to assist in making up the complement. At a certain appointed time, he was roused from peaceful slumber in a dry ditch, and placed before three wickets with a bat in his hand. Opposite to him, behind three more wickets, stood one of his bosom friends, filling the situation (as he was informed) of bowler. No words can describe Mr. Idle’s horror and amazement, when he saw this young man—on ordinary occasions, the meekest and mildest of human beings—suddenly contract his eye-brows, compress his lips, assume the aspect of an infuriated savage, run back a few steps, then run forward, and, without the slightest previous provocation, hurl a detestably hard ball with all his might straight at Thomas’s legs. Stimulated to preternatural activity of body and sharpness of eye by the instinct of self-preservation, Mr. Idle contrived, by jumping deftly aside at the right moment, and by using his bat (ridiculously narrow as it was for the purpose) as a shield, to preserve his life and limbs from the dastardly attack that had been made on both, to leave the full force of the deadly missile to strike his wicket instead of his leg; and to end the innings, so far as his side was concerned, by being immediately bowled out. Grateful for his escape, he was about to return to the dry ditch, when he was peremptorily stopped, and told that the other side was 'going in,' and that he was expected to 'field.' His conception of the whole art and mystery of 'fielding,' may be summed up in the three words of serious advice which he privately administered to himself on that trying occasion—avoid the ball. Fortified by this sound and salutary principle, he took his own course, impervious alike to ridicule and abuse. Whenever the ball came near him, he thought of his shins, and got out of the way immediately. 'Catch it!' 'Stop it!' 'Pitch it up!' were cries that passed by him like the idle wind that he regarded not. He ducked under it, he jumped over it, he whisked himself away from it on either side. Never once, through the whole innings did he and the ball come together on anything approaching to intimate terms. The unnatural activity of body which was necessarily called forth for the accomplishment of this result threw Thomas Idle, for the first time in his life, into a perspiration. The perspiration, in consequence of his want of practice in the management of that particular result of bodily activity, was suddenly checked; the inevitable chill succeeded; and that, in its turn, was followed by a fever. For the first time since his birth, Mr. Idle found himself confined to his bed for many weeks together, wasted and worn by a long illness, of which his own disastrous muscular exertion had been the sole first cause.

The third occasion on which Thomas found reason to reproach himself bitterly for the mistake of having attempted to be industrious, was connected with his choice of a calling in life. Having no interest in the Church, he appropriately selected the next best profession for a lazy man in England—the Bar. Although the Benchers of the Inns of Court have lately abandoned their good old principles, and oblige their students to make some show of studying, in Mr. Idle's time no such innovation as this existed. Young men who aspired to the honourable title of barrister were, very properly, not asked to learn anything of the law, but were merely required to eat a certain number of dinners at the table of their Hall, and to pay a certain sum of money; and were called to the Bar as soon as they could prove that they had sufficiently complied with these extremely sensible regulations. Never did Thomas move more harmoniously in concert with his elders and betters than when he was qualifying himself for admission among the barristers of his native country. Never did he feel more deeply what real laziness was in all the serene majesty of its nature, than on the memorable day when he was called to the Bar, after having carefully abstained from opening his law-books during his period of probation, except to fall asleep over them. How he could ever again have become industrious, even for the shortest period, after that great reward conferred upon his idleness, quite passes his comprehension. The kind Benchers did everything they could to show him the folly of exerting himself. They wrote out his probationary exercise for him, and never expected him even to take the trouble of reading it through when it was written. They invited him, with seven other choice spirits as lazy as himself, to come and be called to the Bar, while they were sitting over their wine and fruit after dinner. They put his oaths of allegiance, and his dreadful official denunciations of the Pope and the Pretender, so gently into his mouth, that he hardly knew how the words got there. They wheeled all their chairs softly round from the table, and sat surveying the young barristers with their backs to their bottles, rather than stand up, or adjourn to hear the exercises read. And when Mr. Idle and the seven unlabouring neophytes, ranged in order, as a class, with their backs considerately placed against a screen, had begun, in rotation, to read the exercises which they had not written, even then, each Bencher, true to the great lazy principle of the whole proceeding, stopped each neophyte before he had stammered through his first line, and bowed to him, and told him politely that he was a barrister from that moment. This was all the ceremony. It was followed by a social supper, and by the presentation, in accordance with ancient custom, of a pound of sweetmeats and a bottle of Madeira, offered in the way of needful refreshment, by each grateful neophyte to each beneficent Bencher. It may seem inconceivable that Thomas should ever have forgotten the great do-nothing principle instilled by such a ceremony as this; but it is, nevertheless, true, that certain designing students of industrious habits found him out, took advantage of his easy humour, persuaded him that it was discreditable to be a barrister and to know nothing whatever about the law, and lured him, by the force of their own evil example, into a conveyancer’s chambers, to make up for lost time, and to qualify himself for practice at the Bar. After a fortnight of self-delusion, the curtain fell from his eyes; he resumed his natural character, and shut up his books. But the retribution which had hitherto always followed his little casual errors of industry followed them still. He could get away from the conveyancer's chambers, but he could not get away from one of the pupils, who had taken a fancy to him,—a tall, serious, raw-boned, hard-working, disputatious pupil, with ideas of his own about reforming the Law of Real Property, who has been the scourge of Mr. Idle's existence ever since the fatal day when he fell into the mistake of attempting to study the law. Before that time his friends were all sociable idlers like himself. Since that time the burden of bearing with a hard-working young man has become part of his lot in life. Go where he will now, he can never feel certain that the raw-boned pupil is not affectionately waiting for him round a corner, to tell him a little more about the Law of Real Property. Suffer as he may under the infliction, he can never complain, for he must always remember, with unavailing regret, that he has his own thoughtless industry to thank for first exposing him to the great social calamity of knowing a bore.

These events of his past life, with the significant results that they brought about, pass drowsily through Thomas Idle's memory, while he lies alone on the sofa at Allonby and elsewhere, dreaming away the time which his fellow-apprentice gets through so actively out of doors. Remembering the lesson of laziness which his past disasters teach, and bearing in mind also the fact that he is crippled in one leg because he exerted himself to go up a mountain, when he ought to have known that his proper course of conduct was to stop at the bottom of it, he holds now, and will for the future firmly continue to hold, by his new resolution never to be industrious again, on any pretence whatever, for the rest of his life. The physical results of his accident have been related in a previous chapter. The moral results now stand on record; and, with the enumeration of these, that part of the present narrative which is occupied by the Episode of The Sprained Ankle may now perhaps be considered, in all its aspects, as finished and complete.

'How do you propose that we get through this present afternoon and evening?' demanded Thomas Idle, after two or three hours of the foregoing reflections at Allonby.

Mr. Goodchild faltered, looked out of window, looked in again, and said, as he had so often said before, 'There is the sea, and here are the shrimps;—let us eat ’em’!’

But, the wise donkey was at that moment in the act of bolting: not with the irresolution of his previous efforts which had been wanting in sustained force of character, but with real vigour of purpose: shaking the dust off his mane and hind-feet at Allonby, and tearing away from it, as if he had nobly made up his mind that he never would be taken alive. At sight of this inspiring spectacle, which was visible from his sofa, Thomas Idle stretched his neck and dwelt upon it rapturously.

‘Francis Goodchild,’ he then said, turning to his companion with a solemn air, ‘this is a delightful little Inn, excellently kept by the most comfortable of landladies and the most attentive of landlords, but—the donkey’s right!’

The words, ‘There is the sea, and here are the—’ again trembled on the lips of Goodchild, unaccompanied however by any sound.

‘Let us instantly pack the portmanteaus,’ said Thomas Idle, ‘pay the bill, and order a fly out, with instructions to the driver to follow the donkey!’

Mr. Goodchild, who had only wanted encouragement to disclose the real state of his feelings, and who had been pining beneath his weary secret, now burst into tears, and confessed that he thought another day in the place would be the death of him.

So, the two idle apprentices followed the donkey until the night was far advanced. Whether he was recaptured by the town-council, or is bolting at this hour through the United Kingdom, they know not. They hope he may be still bolting; if so, their best wishes are with him.

It entered Mr. Idle’s head, on the borders of Cumberland, that there could be no idler place to stay at, except by snatches of a few minutes each, than a railway station. ‘An intermediate station on a line—a junction—anything of that sort,’ Thomas suggested. Mr. Goodchild approved of the idea as eccentric, and they journeyed on and on, until they came to such a station where there was an Inn.

‘Here,’ said Thomas, ‘we may be luxuriously lazy; other people will travel for us, as it were, and we shall laugh at their folly.’

It was a Junction-Station, where the wooden razors before mentioned shaved the air very often, and where the sharp electric-telegraph bell was in a very restless condition. All manner of cross-lines of rails came zig-zagging into it, like a Congress of iron vipers; and, a little way out of it, a pointsman in an elevated signal-box was constantly going through the motions of drawing immense quantities of beer at a public-house bar. In one direction, confused perspectives of embankments and arches were to be seen from the platform; in the other, the rails soon disentangled themselves into two tracks and shot away under a bridge, and curved round a corner. Sidings were there, in which empty luggage-vans and cattle-boxes often butted against each other as if they couldn't agree; and warehouses were there, in which great quantities of goods seemed to have taken the veil (of the consistency of tarpaulin), and to have retired from the world without any hope of getting back to it. Refreshment-rooms were there; one, for the hungry and thirsty Iron Locomotives where their coke and water were ready, and of good quality, for they were dangerous to play tricks with; the other, for the hungry and thirsty human Locomotives, who might take what they could get, and whose chief consolation was provided in the form of three terrific urns or vases of white metal, containing nothing, each forming a breastwork for a defiant and apparently much-injured woman.

Established at this Station, Mr. Thomas Idle and Mr. Francis Goodchild resolved to enjoy it. But, its contrasts were very violent, and there was also an infection in it.

First, as to its contrasts. They were only two, but they were Lethargy and Madness. The Station was either totally unconscious, or wildly raving. By day, in its unconscious state, it looked as if no life could come to it,—as if it were all rust, dust, and ashes—as if the last train for ever, had gone without issuing any Return-Tickets—as if the last Engine had uttered its last shriek and burst. One awkward shave of the air from the wooden razor, and everything changed. Tight office-doors flew open, panels yielded, books, newspapers, travelling-caps and wrappers broke out of brick walls, money chinked, conveyances oppressed by nightmares of luggage came careering into the yard, porters started up from secret places, ditto the much-injured women, the shining bell, who lived in a little tray on stilts by himself, flew into a man's hand and clamoured violently. The pointsman aloft in the signal-box made the motions of drawing, with some difficulty, hogsheads of beer. Down Train! More bear! Up Train! More beer. Cross junction Train! More beer! Cattle Train! More beer. Goods Train! Simmering, whistling, trembling, rumbling, thundering. Trains on the whole confusion of intersecting rails, crossing one another, bumping one another, hissing one another, backing to go forward, tearing into distance to come close. People frantic. Exiles seeking restoration to their native carriages, and banished to remoter climes. More beer and more bell. Then, in a minute, the Station relapsed into stupor as the stoker of the Cattle Train, the last to depart, went gliding out of it, wiping the long nose of his oil-can with a dirty pocket-handkerchief.

By night, in its unconscious state, the Station was not so much as visible. Something in the air, like an enterprising chemist's established in business on one of the boughs of Jack's beanstalk, was all that could be discerned of it under the stars. In a moment it would break out, a constellation of gas. In another moment, twenty rival chemists, on twenty rival beanstalks, came into existence. Then, the Furies would be seen, waving their lurid torches up and down the confused perspectives of embankments and arches—would be heard, too, wailing and shrieking. Then, the Station would be full of palpitating trains, as in the day; with the heightening difference that they were not so clearly seen as in the day, whereas the Station walls, starting forward under the gas, like a hippopotamus's eyes, dazzled the human locomotives with the sauce-bottle, the cheap music, the bedstead, the distorted range of buildings where the patent safes are made, the gentleman in the rain with the registered umbrella, the lady returning from the ball with the registered respirator, and all their other embellishments. And now, the human locomotives, creased as to their countenances and purblind as to their eyes, would swarm forth in a heap, addressing themselves to the mysterious urns and the much-injured women; while the iron locomotives, dripping fire and water, shed their steam about plentifully, making the dull oxen in their cages, with heads depressed, and foam hanging from their mouths as their red looks glanced fearfully at the surrounding terrors, seem as though they had been drinking at half-frozen waters and were hung with icicles. Through the same steam would be caught glimpses of their fellow-travellers, the sheep, getting their white kid faces together, away from the bars, and stuffing the interstices with trembling wool. Also, down among the wheels, of the man with the sledge-hammer, ringing the axles of the fast night-train; against whom the oxen have a misgiving that he is the man with the pole-axe who is to come by-and-by, and so the nearest of them try to get back, and get a purchase for a thrust at him through the bars. Suddenly, the bell would ring, the steam would stop with one hiss and a yell, the chemists on the beanstalks would be busy, the avenging Furies would bestir themselves, the fast night-train would melt from eye and ear, the other trains going their ways more slowly would be heard faintly rattling in the distance like old-fashioned watches running down, the sauce-bottle and cheap music retired from view, even the bedstead went to bed, and there was no such visible thing as the Station to vex the cool wind in its blowing, or perhaps the autumn lightning, as it found out the iron rails.

The infection of the Station was this:- When it was in its raving state, the Apprentices found it impossible to be there, without labouring under the delusion that they were in a hurry. To Mr. Goodchild, whose ideas of idleness were so imperfect, this was no unpleasant hallucination, and accordingly that gentleman went through great exertions in yielding to it, and running up and down the platform, jostling everybody, under the impression that he had a highly important mission somewhere, and had not a moment to lose. But, to Thomas Idle, this contagion was so very unacceptable an incident of the situation, that he struck on the fourth day, and requested to be moved.

‘This place fills me with a dreadful sensation,’ said Thomas, ‘of having something to do. Remove me, Francis.’

‘Where would you like to go next?’ was the question of the ever-engaging Goodchild.

‘I have heard there is a good old Inn at Lancaster, established in a fine old house: an Inn where they give you Bride-cake every day after dinner,’ said Thomas Idle. ‘Let us eat Bride-cake without the trouble of being married, or of knowing anybody in that ridiculous dilemma.’

Mr. Goodchild, with a lover’s sigh, assented. They departed from the Station in a violent hurry (for which, it is unnecessary to observe, there was not the least occasion), and were delivered at the fine old house at Lancaster, on the same night.

It is Mr. Goodchild’s opinion, that if a visitor on his arrival at Lancaster could be accommodated with a pole which would push the opposite side of the street some yards farther off, it would be better for all parties. Protesting against being required to live in a trench, and obliged to speculate all day upon what the people can possibly be doing within a mysterious opposite window, which is a shop-window to look at, but not a shop-window in respect of its offering nothing for sale and declining to give any account whatever of itself, Mr. Goodchild concedes Lancaster to be a pleasant place. A place dropped in the midst of a charming landscape, a place with a fine ancient fragment of castle, a place of lovely walks, a place possessing staid old houses richly fitted with old Honduras mahogany, which has grown so dark with time that it seems to have got something of a retrospective mirror-quality into itself, and to show the visitor, in the depth of its grain, through all its polish, the hue of the wretched slaves who groaned long ago under old Lancaster merchants. And Mr. Goodchild adds that the stones of Lancaster do sometimes whisper, even yet, of rich men passed away—upon whose great prosperity some of these old doorways frowned sullen in the brightest weather—that their slave-gain turned to curses, as the Arabian Wizard’s money turned to leaves, and that no good ever came of it, even unto the third and fourth generations, until it was wasted and gone.

It was a gallant sight to behold, the Sunday procession of the Lancaster elders to Church—all in black, and looking fearfully like a funeral without the Body—under the escort of Three Beadles.

‘Think,’ said Francis, as he stood at the Inn window, admiring, ‘of being taken to the sacred edifice by three Beadles! I have, in my early time, been taken out of it by one Beadle; but, to be taken into it by three, O Thomas, is a distinction I shall never enjoy!’

CHAPTER IV

When Mr. Goodchild had looked out of the Lancaster Inn window for two hours on end, with great perseverance, he begun to entertain a misgiving that he was growing industrious. He therefore set himself next, to explore the country from the tops of all the steep hills in the neighbourhood.

He came back at dinner-time, red and glowing, to tell Thomas Idle what he had seen. Thomas, on his back reading, listened with great composure, and asked him whether he really had gone up those hills, and bothered himself with those views, and walked all those miles?

‘Because I want to know,’ added Thomas, ‘what you would say of it, if you were obliged to do it?’

‘It would be different, then,’ said Francis. ‘It would be work, then; now, it’s play.’

‘Play!’ replied Thomas Idle, utterly repudiating the reply. ‘Play! Here is a man goes systematically tearing himself to pieces, and putting himself through an incessant course of training, as if he were always under articles to fight a match for the champion’s belt, and he calls it Play! Play!’ exclaimed Thomas Idle, scornfully contemplating his one boot in the air. ‘You *can’t* play. You don’t know what it is. You make work of everything.’

The bright Goodchild amiably smiled.

‘So you do,’ said Thomas. ‘I mean it. To me you are an absolutely terrible fellow. You do nothing like another man. Where another fellow would fall into a footbath of action or emotion, you fall into a mine. Where any other fellow would be a painted butterfly, you are a fiery dragon. Where another man would stake a sixpence, you stake your existence. If you were to go up in a balloon, you would make for Heaven; and if you were to dive into the depths of the earth, nothing short of the other place would content you. What a fellow you are, Francis!’ The cheerful Goodchild laughed.

‘It’s all very well to laugh, but I wonder you don’t feel it to be serious,’ said Idle. ‘A man who can do nothing by halves appears to me to be a fearful man.'

'Tom, Tom,' returned Goodchild, 'if I can do nothing by halves, and be nothing by halves, it's pretty clear that you must take me as a whole, and make the best of me.'

With this philosophical rejoinder, the airy Goodchild clapped Mr. Idle on the shoulder in a final manner, and they sat down to dinner.

'By-the-by,' said Goodchild, 'I have been over a lunatic asylum too, since I have been out.'

'He has been,' exclaimed Thomas Idle, casting up his eyes, 'over a lunatic asylum! Not content with being as great an Ass as Captain Barclay in the pedestrian way, he makes a Lunacy Commissioner of himself—for nothing!'

'An immense place,' said Goodchild, 'admirable offices, very good arrangements, very good attendants; altogether a remarkable place.'

'And what did you see there?' asked Mr. Idle, adapting Hamlet's advice to the occasion, and assuming the virtue of interest, though he had it not.

'The usual thing,' said Francis Goodchild, with a sigh. 'Long groves of blighted men-and-women-trees; interminable avenues of hopeless faces; numbers, without the slightest power of really combining for any earthly purpose; a society of human creatures who have nothing in common but that they have all lost the power of being humanly social with one another.'

'Take a glass of wine with me,' said Thomas Idle, 'and let *us* be social.'

'In one gallery, Tom,' pursued Francis Goodchild, 'which looked to me about the length of the Long Walk at Windsor, more or less—'

'Probably less,' observed Thomas Idle.

'In one gallery, which was otherwise clear of patients (for they were all out), there was a poor little dark-chinned, meagre man, with a perplexed brow and a pensive face, stooping low over the matting on the floor, and picking out with his thumb and forefinger the course of its fibres. The afternoon sun was slanting in at the large end-window, and there were cross patches of light and shade all down the vista, made by the unseen windows and the open doors of the little sleeping-cells on either side. In about the centre of the perspective, under an arch, regardless of the pleasant weather, regardless of the solitude, regardless of approaching footsteps, was the poor little dark-chinned, meagre man, poring over the matting. "What are you doing there?" said my conductor, when we came to him. He looked up, and pointed to the matting. "I wouldn't do that, I think," said my conductor, kindly; "if I were you, I would go and read, or I would lie down if I felt tired; but I wouldn't do that." The patient considered a moment, and vacantly answered, "No, sir, I won't; I'll—I'll go and read," and so he lamely shuffled away into one of the little rooms. I turned my head before we had gone many paces. He had already come out again, and was again poring over the matting, and tracking out its fibres with his thumb and forefinger. I stopped to look at him, and it came into my mind, that probably the course of those fibres as they plaited in and out, over and under, was the only course of things in the whole wide world that it was left to him to understand—that his darkening intellect had narrowed down to the small cleft of light which showed him, "This piece was twisted this way, went in here, passed under, came out there, was carried on away here to the right where I now put my finger on it, and in this progress of events, the thing was made and came to be here." Then, I wondered whether he looked into the matting, next, to see if it could show him anything of the process through which *he* came to be there, so strangely poring over it. Then, I thought how all of us, GOD help us! in our different ways are poring over our bits of matting, blindly enough, and what confusions and mysteries we make in the pattern. I had a sadder fellow-feeling with the little dark-chinned, meagre man, by that time, and I came away.'

Mr. Idle diverting the conversation to grouse, custards, and bride-cake, Mr. Goodchild followed in the same direction. The bride-cake was as bilious and indigestible as if a real Bride had cut it, and the dinner it completed was an admirable performance.

The house was a genuine old house of a very quaint description, teeming with old carvings, and beams, and panels, and having an excellent old staircase, with a gallery or upper staircase, cut off from it by a curious fence-work of old oak, or of the old Honduras Mahogany wood. It was, and is, and will be, for many a long year to come, a remarkably picturesque house; and a certain grave mystery lurking in the depth of the old mahogany panels, as if they were so many deep pools of dark water—such, indeed, as they had been much among when they were trees—gave it a very mysterious character after nightfall.

When Mr. Goodchild and Mr. Idle had first alighted at the door, and stepped into the sombre, handsome old hall, they had been received by half-a-dozen noiseless old men in black, all dressed exactly alike, who glided up the stairs with the obliging landlord and waiter—but without appearing to get into their way, or to mind whether they did or no—and who had filed off to the right and left on the old staircase, as the guests entered their sitting-room. It was then broad, bright day. But, Mr. Goodchild had said, when their door was shut, ‘Who on earth are those old men?’ And afterwards, both on going out and coming in, he had noticed that there were no old men to be seen.

Neither, had the old men, or any one of the old men, reappeared since. The two friends had passed a night in the house, but had seen nothing more of the old men. Mr. Goodchild, in rambling about it, had looked along passages, and glanced in at doorways, but had encountered no old men; neither did it appear that any old men were, by any member of the establishment, missed or expected.

Another odd circumstance impressed itself on their attention. It was, that the door of their sitting-room was never left untouched for a quarter of an hour. It was opened with hesitation, opened with confidence, opened a little way, opened a good way,—always clapped-to again without a word of explanation. They were reading, they were writing, they were eating, they were drinking, they were talking, they were dozing; the door was always opened at an unexpected moment, and they looked towards it, and it was clapped-to again, and nobody was to be seen. When this had happened fifty times or so, Mr. Goodchild had said to his companion, jestingly: ‘I begin to think, Tom, there was something wrong with those six old men.’

Night had come again, and they had been writing for two or three hours: writing, in short, a portion of the lazy notes from which these lazy sheets are taken. They had left off writing, and glasses were on the table between them. The house was closed and quiet. Around the head of Thomas Idle, as he lay upon his sofa, hovered light wreaths of fragrant smoke. The temples of Francis Goodchild, as he leaned back in his chair, with his two hands clasped behind his head, and his legs crossed, were similarly decorated.

They had been discussing several idle subjects of speculation, not omitting the strange old men, and were still so occupied, when Mr. Goodchild abruptly changed his attitude to wind up his watch. They were just becoming drowsy enough to be stopped in their talk by any such slight check. Thomas Idle, who was speaking at the moment, paused and said, ‘How goes it?’

‘One,’ said Goodchild.

As if he had ordered One old man, and the order were promptly executed (truly, all orders were so, in that excellent hotel), the door opened, and One old man stood there.

He did not come in, but stood with the door in his hand.

‘One of the six, Tom, at last!’ said Mr. Goodchild, in a surprised whisper.—‘Sir, your pleasure?’

‘Sir, *your* pleasure?’ said the One old man.

‘I didn’t ring.’

‘The bell did,’ said the One old man.

He said BELL, in a deep, strong way, that would have expressed the church Bell.

‘I had the pleasure, I believe, of seeing you, yesterday?’ said Goodchild.

‘I cannot undertake to say for certain,’ was the grim reply of the One old man.

‘I think you saw me? Did you not?’

‘Saw *you*?’ said the old man. ‘O yes, I saw you. But, I see many who never see me.’

A chilled, slow, earthy, fixed old man. A cadaverous old man of measured speech. An old man who seemed as unable to wink, as if his eyelids had been nailed to his forehead. An old man whose eyes—two spots of fire—had no more motion than if they had been connected with the back of his skull by screws driven through it, and rivetted and bolted outside, among his grey hair.

The night had turned so cold, to Mr. Goodchild’s sensations, that he shivered. He remarked lightly, and half apologetically, ‘I think somebody is walking over my grave.’

‘No,’ said the weird old man, ‘there is no one there.’

Mr. Goodchild looked at Idle, but Idle lay with his head enwreathed in smoke.

‘No one there?’ said Goodchild.

‘There is no one at your grave, I assure you,’ said the old man.

He had come in and shut the door, and he now sat down. He did not bend himself to sit, as other people do, but seemed to sink bolt upright, as if in water, until the chair stopped him.

‘My friend, Mr. Idle,’ said Goodchild, extremely anxious to introduce a third person into the conversation.

‘I am,’ said the old man, without looking at him, ‘at Mr. Idle’s service.’

‘If you are an old inhabitant of this place,’ Francis Goodchild resumed.

‘Yes.’

‘Perhaps you can decide a point my friend and I were in doubt upon, this morning. They hang condemned criminals at the Castle, I believe?’

‘*I* believe so,’ said the old man.

‘Are their faces turned towards that noble prospect?’

‘Your face is turned,’ replied the old man, ‘to the Castle wall. When you are tied up, you see its stones expanding and contracting violently, and a similar expansion and contraction seem to take place in your own head and breast. Then, there is a rush of fire and an earthquake, and the Castle springs into the air, and you tumble down a precipice.’

His cravat appeared to trouble him. He put his hand to his throat, and moved his neck from side to side. He was an old man of a swollen character of face, and his nose was immoveably hitched up on one side, as if by a little hook inserted in that nostril. Mr. Goodchild felt exceedingly uncomfortable, and began to think the night was hot, and not cold.

‘A strong description, sir,’ he observed.

‘A strong sensation,’ the old man rejoined.

Again, Mr. Goodchild looked to Mr. Thomas Idle; but Thomas lay on his back with his face attentively turned towards the One old man, and made no sign. At this time Mr. Goodchild believed that he saw threads of fire stretch from the old man’s eyes to his own, and there attach themselves. (Mr. Goodchild writes the present account of his experience, and, with the utmost solemnity, protests that he had the strongest sensation upon him of being forced to look at the old man along those two fiery films, from that moment.)

‘I must tell it to you,’ said the old man, with a ghastly and a stony stare.

‘What?’ asked Francis Goodchild.

‘You know where it took place. Yonder!’

Whether he pointed to the room above, or to the room below, or to any room in that old house, or to a room in some other old house in that old town, Mr. Goodchild was not, nor is, nor ever can be, sure. He was confused by the circumstance that the right forefinger of the One old man seemed to dip itself in one of the threads of fire, light itself, and make a fiery start in the air, as it pointed somewhere. Having pointed somewhere, it went out.

‘You know she was a Bride,’ said the old man.

‘I know they still send up Bride-cake,’ Mr. Goodchild faltered. ‘This is a very oppressive air.’

‘She was a Bride,’ said the old man. ‘She was a fair, flaxen-haired, large-eyed girl, who had no character, no purpose. A weak, credulous, incapable, helpless nothing. Not like her mother. No, no. It was her father whose character she reflected.

‘Her mother had taken care to secure everything to herself, for her own life, when the father of this girl (a child at that time) died—of sheer helplessness; no other disorder—and then He renewed the acquaintance that had once subsisted between the mother and Him. He had been put aside for the flaxen-haired, large-eyed man (or nonentity) with Money. He could overlook that for Money. He wanted compensation in Money.

‘So, he returned to the side of that woman the mother, made love to her again, danced attendance on her, and submitted himself to her whims. She wreaked upon him every whim she had, or could invent. He bore it. And the more he bore, the more he wanted compensation in Money, and the more he was resolved to have it.

‘But, lo! Before he got it, she cheated him. In one of her imperious states, she froze, and never thawed again. She put her hands to her head one night, uttered a cry, stiffened, lay in that attitude certain hours, and died. And he had got no compensation from her in Money, yet. Blight and Murrain on her! Not a penny.

‘He had hated her throughout that second pursuit, and had longed for retaliation on her. He now counterfeited her signature to an instrument, leaving all she had to leave, to her daughter—ten years old then—to whom the property passed absolutely, and appointing himself the daughter’s Guardian. When He slid it under the pillow of the bed on which she lay, He bent down in the deaf ear of Death, and whispered: “Mistress Pride, I have determined a long time that, dead or alive, you must make me compensation in Money.’

‘So, now there were only two left. Which two were, He, and the fair flaxen-haired, large-eyed foolish daughter, who afterwards became the Bride.

‘He put her to school. In a secret, dark, oppressive, ancient house, he put her to school with a watchful and unscrupulous woman. “My worthy lady,” he said, “here is a mind to be formed; will you help me to form it?”

She accepted the trust. For which she, too, wanted compensation in Money, and had it.

‘The girl was formed in the fear of him, and in the conviction, that there was no escape from him. She was taught, from the first, to regard him as her future husband—the man who must marry her—the destiny that overshadowed her—the appointed certainty that could never be evaded. The poor fool was soft white wax in their hands, and took the impression that they put upon her. It hardened with time. It became a part of herself. Inseparable from herself, and only to be torn away from her, by tearing life away from her.

‘Eleven years she had lived in the dark house and its gloomy garden. He was jealous of the very light and air getting to her, and they kept her close. He stopped the wide chimneys, shaded the little windows, left the strong-stemmed ivy to wander where it would over the house-front, the moss to accumulate on the untrimmed fruit-trees in the red-walled garden, the weeds to over-run its green and yellow walks. He surrounded her with images of sorrow and desolation. He caused her to be filled with fears of the place and of the stories that were told of it, and then on pretext of correcting them, to be left in it in solitude, or made to shrink about it in the dark. When her mind was most depressed and fullest of terrors, then, he would come out of one of the hiding-places from which he overlooked her, and present himself as her sole resource.

‘Thus, by being from her childhood the one embodiment her life presented to her of power to coerce and power to relieve, power to bind and power to loose, the ascendency over her weakness was secured. She was twenty-one years and twenty-one days old, when he brought her home to the gloomy house, his half-witted, frightened, and submissive Bride of three weeks.

‘He had dismissed the governess by that time—what he had left to do, he could best do alone—and they came back, upon a rain night, to the scene of her long preparation. She turned to him upon the threshold, as the rain was dripping from the porch, and said:

‘“O sir, it is the Death-watch ticking for me!”

‘“Well!” he answered. “And if it were?”

‘“O sir!” she returned to him, “look kindly on me, and be merciful to me! I beg your pardon. I will do anything you wish, if you will only forgive me!”

‘That had become the poor fool’s constant song: “I beg your pardon,” and “Forgive me!”

‘She was not worth hating; he felt nothing but contempt for her. But, she had long been in the way, and he had long been weary, and the work was near its end, and had to be worked out.

‘“You fool,” he said. “Go up the stairs!”

‘She obeyed very quickly, murmuring, “I will do anything you wish!” When he came into the Bride’s Chamber, having been a little retarded by the heavy fastenings of the great door (for they were alone in the house, and he had arranged that the people who attended on them should come and go in the day), he found her withdrawn to the furthest corner, and there standing pressed against the paneling as if she would have shrunk through it: her flaxen hair all wild about her face, and her large eyes staring at him in vague terror.

‘“What are you afraid of? Come and sit down by me.”

‘“I will do anything you wish. I beg your pardon, sir. Forgive me!” Her monotonous tune as usual.

‘“Ellen, here is a writing that you must write out to-morrow, in your own hand. You may as well be seen by others, busily engaged upon it. When you have written it all fairly, and corrected all mistakes, call in any two people there may be about the house, and sign your name to it before them. Then, put it in your bosom to keep it safe, and when I sit here again to-morrow night, give it to me.”

‘“I will do it all, with the greatest care. I will do anything you wish.”

‘“Don’t shake and tremble, then.”

‘“I will try my utmost not to do it—if you will only forgive me!”

‘Next day, she sat down at her desk, and did as she had been told. He often passed in and out of the room, to observe her, and always saw her slowly and laboriously writing: repeating to herself the words she copied, in appearance quite mechanically, and without caring or endeavouring to comprehend them, so that she did her task. He saw her follow the directions she had received, in all particulars; and at night, when they were alone again in the same Bride’s Chamber, and he drew his chair to the hearth, she timidly approached him from her distant seat, took the paper from her bosom, and gave it into his hand.

‘It secured all her possessions to him, in the event of her death. He put her before him, face to face, that he might look at her steadily; and he asked her, in so many plain words, neither fewer nor more, did she know that?

'There were spots of ink upon the bosom of her white dress, and they made her face look whiter and her eyes look larger as she nodded her head. There were spots of ink upon the hand with which she stood before him, nervously plaiting and folding her white skirts.

'He took her by the arm, and looked her, yet more closely and steadily, in the face. "Now, die! I have done with you."

'She shrunk, and uttered a low, suppressed cry.

'"I am not going to kill you. I will not endanger my life for yours. Die!"

'He sat before her in the gloomy Bride's Chamber, day after day, night after night, looking the word at her when he did not utter it. As often as her large unmeaning eyes were raised from the hands in which she rocked her head, to the stern figure, sitting with crossed arms and knitted forehead, in the chair, they read in it, "Die!" When she dropped asleep in exhaustion, she was called back to shuddering consciousness, by the whisper, "Die!" When she fell upon her old entreaty to be pardoned, she was answered "Die!" When she had out-watched and out-suffered the long night, and the rising sun flamed into the sombre room, she heard it hailed with, "Another day and not dead?—Die!"

'Shut up in the deserted mansion, aloof from all mankind, and engaged alone in such a struggle without any respite, it came to this—that either he must die, or she. He knew it very well, and concentrated his strength against her feebleness. Hours upon hours he held her by the arm when her arm was black where he held it, and bade her Die!

'It was done, upon a windy morning, before sunrise. He computed the time to be half-past four; but, his forgotten watch had run down, and he could not be sure. She had broken away from him in the night, with loud and sudden cries—the first of that kind to which she had given vent—and he had had to put his hands over her mouth. Since then, she had been quiet in the corner of the paneling where she had sunk down; and he had left her, and had gone back with his folded arms and his knitted forehead to his chair.

'Paler in the pale light, more colourless than ever in the leaden dawn, he saw her coming, trailing herself along the floor towards him—a white wreck of hair, and dress, and wild eyes, pushing itself on by an irresolute and bending hand.

'"O, forgive me! I will do anything. O, sir, pray tell me I may live!"

'"Die!"

'"Are you so resolved? Is there no hope for me?"

'"Die!"

'Her large eyes strained themselves with wonder and fear; wonder and fear changed to reproach; reproach to blank nothing. It was done. He was not at first so sure it was done, but that the morning sun was hanging jewels in her hair—he saw the diamond, emerald, and ruby, glittering among it in little points, as he stood looking down at her—when he lifted her and laid her on her bed.

'She was soon laid in the ground. And now they were all gone, and he had compensated himself well.

'He had a mind to travel. Not that he meant to waste his Money, for he was a pinching man and liked his Money dearly (liked nothing else, indeed), but, that he had grown tired of the desolate house and wished to turn his back upon it and have done with it. But, the house was worth Money, and Money must not be thrown away. He determined to sell it before he went. That it might look the less wretched and bring a better price, he hired some labourers to work in the overgrown garden; to cut out the dead wood, trim the ivy that drooped in heavy masses over the windows and gables, and clear the walks in which the weeds were growing mid-leg high.

'He worked, himself, along with them. He worked later than they did, and, one evening at dusk, was left working alone, with his bill-hook in his hand. One autumn evening, when the Bride was five weeks dead.

'"It grows too dark to work longer," he said to himself, "I must give over for the night."

'He detested the house, and was loath to enter it. He looked at the dark porch waiting for him like a tomb, and felt that it was an accursed house. Near to the porch, and near to where he stood, was a tree whose branches waved before the old bay-window of the Bride's Chamber, where it had been done. The tree swung suddenly, and made him start. It swung again, although the night was still. Looking up into it, he saw a figure among the branches.

'It was the figure of a young man. The face looked down, as his looked up; the branches cracked and swayed; the figure rapidly descended, and slid upon its feet before him. A slender youth of about her age, with long light brown hair.

'"What thief are you?" he said, seizing the youth by the collar.

'The young man, in shaking himself free, swung him a blow with his arm across the face and throat. They closed, but the young man got from him and stepped back, crying, with great eagerness and horror, "Don't touch me! I would as lieve be touched by the Devil!"

'He stood still, with his bill-hook in his hand, looking at the young man. For, the young man's look was the counterpart of her last look, and he had not expected ever to see that again.

'"I am no thief. Even if I were, I would not have a coin of your wealth, if it would buy me the Indies. You murderer!"

'"What!"

'"I climbed it," said the young man, pointing up into the tree, "for the first time, nigh four years ago. I climbed it, to look at her. I saw her. I spoke to her. I have climbed it, many a time, to watch and listen for her. I was a boy, hidden among its leaves, when from that bay-window she gave me this!"

'He showed a tress of flaxen hair, tied with a mourning ribbon.

'"Her life," said the young man, "was a life of mourning. She gave me this, as a token of it, and a sign that she was dead to every one but you. If I had been older, if I had seen her sooner, I might have saved her from you. But, she was fast in the web when I first climbed the tree, and what could I do then to break it!"

'In saying those words, he burst into a fit of sobbing and crying: weakly at first, then passionately.

'"Murderer! I climbed the tree on the night when you brought her back. I heard her, from the tree, speak of the Death-watch at the door. I was three times in the tree while you were shut up with her, slowly killing her. I saw her, from the tree, lie dead upon her bed. I have watched you, from the tree, for proofs and traces of your guilt. The manner of it, is a mystery to me yet, but I will pursue you until you have rendered up your life to the hangman. You shall never, until then, be rid of me. I loved her! I can know no relenting towards you. Murderer, I loved her!"

'The youth was bare-headed, his hat having fluttered away in his descent from the tree. He moved towards the gate. He had to pass—Him—to get to it. There was breadth for two old-fashioned carriages abreast; and the youth's abhorrence, openly expressed in every feature of his face and limb of his body, and very hard to bear, had verge enough to keep itself at a distance in. He (by which I mean the other) had not stirred hand or foot, since he had stood still to look at the boy. He faced round, now, to follow him with his eyes. As the back of the bare light-brown head was turned to him, he saw a red curve stretch from his hand to it. He knew, before he threw the bill-hook, where it had alighted—I say, had alighted, and not, would alight; for, to his clear perception the thing was done before he did it. It cleft the head, and it remained there, and the boy lay on his face.

'He buried the body in the night, at the foot of the tree. As soon as it was light in the morning, he worked at turning up all the ground near the tree, and hacking and hewing at the neighbouring bushes and undergrowth. When the labourers came, there was nothing suspicious, and nothing suspected.

'But, he had, in a moment, defeated all his precautions, and destroyed the triumph of the scheme he had so long concerted, and so successfully worked out. He had got rid of the Bride, and had acquired her fortune without endangering his life; but now, for a death by which he had gained nothing, he had evermore to live with a rope around his neck.

'Beyond this, he was chained to the house of gloom and horror, which he could not endure. Being afraid to sell it or to quit it, lest discovery should be made, he was forced to live in it. He hired two old people, man and wife, for his servants; and dwelt in it, and dreaded it. His great difficulty, for a long time, was the garden. Whether he should keep it trim, whether he should suffer it to fall into its former state of neglect, what would be the least likely way of attracting attention to it?

'He took the middle course of gardening, himself, in his evening leisure, and of then calling the old serving-man to help him; but, of never letting him work there alone. And he made himself an arbour over against the tree, where he could sit and see that it was safe.

'As the seasons changed, and the tree changed, his mind perceived dangers that were always changing. In the leafy time, he perceived that the upper boughs were growing into the form of the young man—that they made the shape of him exactly, sitting in a forked branch swinging in the wind. In the time of the falling leaves, he perceived that they came down from the tree, forming tell-tale letters on the path, or that they had a tendency to heap themselves into a churchyard mound above the grave. In the winter, when the tree was bare, he perceived that the boughs swung at him the ghost of the blow the young man had given, and that they threatened him openly. In the spring, when the sap was mounting in the trunk, he asked himself, were the dried-up particles of blood mounting with it: to make out more obviously this year than last, the leaf-screened figure of the young man, swinging in the wind?

'However, he turned his Money over and over, and still over. He was in the dark trade, the gold-dust trade, and most secret trades that yielded great returns. In ten years, he had turned his Money over, so many times, that the traders and shippers who had dealings with him, absolutely did not lie—for once—when they declared that he had increased his fortune, Twelve Hundred Per Cent.

'He possessed his riches one hundred years ago, when people could be lost easily. He had heard who the youth was, from hearing of the search that was made after him; but, it died away, and the youth was forgotten.

'The annual round of changes in the tree had been repeated ten times since the night of the burial at its foot, when there was a great thunder-storm over this place. It broke at midnight, and roared until morning. The first intelligence he heard from his old serving-man that morning, was, that the tree had been struck by Lightning.

'It had been riven down the stem, in a very surprising manner, and the stem lay in two blighted shafts: one resting against the house, and one against a portion of the old red garden-wall in which its fall had made a gap. The fissure went down the tree to a little above the earth, and there stopped. There was great curiosity to see the tree, and, with most of his former fears revived, he sat in his arbour—grown quite an old man—watching the people who came to see it.

'They quickly began to come, in such dangerous numbers, that he closed his garden-gate and refused to admit any more. But, there were certain men of science who travelled from a distance to examine the tree, and, in an evil hour, he let them in!—Blight and Murrain on them, let them in!

'They wanted to dig up the ruin by the roots, and closely examine it, and the earth about it. Never, while he lived! They offered money for it. They! Men of science, whom he could have bought by the gross, with a scratch of his pen! He showed them the garden-gate again, and locked and barred it.

‘But they were bent on doing what they wanted to do, and they bribed the old serving-man—a thankless wretch who regularly complained when he received his wages, of being underpaid—and they stole into the garden by night with their lanterns, picks, and shovels, and fell to at the tree. He was lying in a turret-room on the other side of the house (the Bride’s Chamber had been unoccupied ever since), but he soon dreamed of picks and shovels, and got up.

‘He came to an upper window on that side, whence he could see their lanterns, and them, and the loose earth in a heap which he had himself disturbed and put back, when it was last turned to the air. It was found! They had that minute lighted on it. They were all bending over it. One of them said, “The skull is fractured;” and another, “See here the bones;” and another, “See here the clothes;” and then the first struck in again, and said, “A rusty bill-hook!”

‘He became sensible, next day, that he was already put under a strict watch, and that he could go nowhere without being followed. Before a week was out, he was taken and laid in hold. The circumstances were gradually pieced together against him, with a desperate malignity, and an appalling ingenuity. But, see the justice of men, and how it was extended to him! He was further accused of having poisoned that girl in the Bride’s Chamber. He, who had carefully and expressly avoided imperilling a hair of his head for her, and who had seen her die of her own incapacity!

‘There was doubt for which of the two murders he should be first tried; but, the real one was chosen, and he was found Guilty, and cast for death. Bloodthirsty wretches! They would have made him Guilty of anything, so set they were upon having his life.

‘His money could do nothing to save him, and he was hanged. *I* am He, and I was hanged at Lancaster Castle with my face to the wall, a hundred years ago!’

At this terrific announcement, Mr. Goodchild tried to rise and cry out. But, the two fiery lines extending from the old man’s eyes to his own, kept him down, and he could not utter a sound. His sense of hearing, however, was acute, and he could hear the clock strike Two. No sooner had he heard the clock strike Two, than he saw before him Two old men!

TWO.

The eyes of each, connected with his eyes by two films of fire: each, exactly like the other: each, addressing him at precisely one and the same instant: each, gnashing the same teeth in the same head, with the same twitched nostril above them, and the same suffused expression around it. Two old men. Differing in nothing, equally distinct to the sight, the copy no fainter than the original, the second as real as the first.

‘At what time,’ said the Two old men, ‘did you arrive at the door below?’

‘At Six.’

‘And there were Six old men upon the stairs!’

Mr. Goodchild having wiped the perspiration from his brow, or tried to do it, the Two old men proceeded in one voice, and in the singular number:

‘I had been anatomised, but had not yet had my skeleton put together and re-hung on an iron hook, when it began to be whispered that the Bride’s Chamber was haunted. It *was* haunted, and I was there.

‘*We* were there. She and I were there. I, in the chair upon the hearth; she, a white wreck again, trailing itself towards me on the floor. But, I was the speaker no more, and the one word that she said to me from midnight until dawn was, ‘Live!’

‘The youth was there, likewise. In the tree outside the window. Coming and going in the moonlight, as the tree bent and gave. He has, ever since, been there, peeping in at me in my torment; revealing to me by snatches, in the pale lights and slatey shadows where he comes and goes, bare-headed—a bill-hook, standing edgewise in his hair.

‘In the Bride’s Chamber, every night from midnight until dawn—one month in the year excepted, as I am going to tell you—he hides in the tree, and she comes towards me on the floor; always approaching; never coming nearer; always visible as if by moon-light, whether the moon shines or no; always saying, from mid-night until dawn, her one word, “Live!”

‘But, in the month wherein I was forced out of this life—this present month of thirty days—the Bride’s Chamber is empty and quiet. Not so my old dungeon. Not so the rooms where I was restless and afraid, ten years. Both are fitfully haunted then. At One in the morning. I am what you saw me when the clock struck that hour—One old man. At Two in the morning, I am Two old men. At Three, I am Three. By Twelve at noon, I am Twelve old men, One for every hundred per cent. of old gain. Every one of the Twelve, with Twelve times my old power of suffering and agony. From that hour until Twelve at night, I, Twelve old men in anguish and fearful foreboding, wait for the coming of the executioner. At Twelve at night, I, Twelve old men turned off, swing invisible outside Lancaster Castle, with Twelve faces to the wall!

‘When the Bride’s Chamber was first haunted, it was known to me that this punishment would never cease, until I could make its nature, and my story, known to two living men together. I waited for the coming of two living men together into the Bride’s Chamber, years upon years. It was infused into my knowledge (of the means I am ignorant) that if two living men, with their eyes open, could be in the Bride’s Chamber at One in the morning, they would see me sitting in my chair.

‘At length, the whispers that the room was spiritually troubled, brought two men to try the adventure. I was scarcely struck upon the hearth at midnight (I come there as if the Lightning blasted me into being), when I heard them ascending the stairs. Next, I saw them enter. One of them was a bold, gay, active man, in the prime of life, some five and forty years of age; the other, a dozen years younger. They brought provisions with them in a basket, and bottles. A young woman accompanied them, with wood and coals for the lighting of the fire. When she had lighted it, the bold, gay, active man accompanied her along the gallery outside the room, to see her safely down the staircase, and came back laughing.

‘He locked the door, examined the chamber, put out the contents of the basket on the table before the fire—little recking of me, in my appointed station on the hearth, close to him—and filled the glasses, and ate and drank. His companion did the same, and was as cheerful and confident as he: though he was the leader. When they had supped, they laid pistols on the table, turned to the fire, and began to smoke their pipes of foreign make.

‘They had travelled together, and had been much together, and had an abundance of subjects in common. In the midst of their talking and laughing, the younger man made a reference to the leader’s being always ready for any adventure; that one, or any other. He replied in these words:

‘“Not quite so, Dick; if I am afraid of nothing else, I am afraid of myself.”

‘His companion seeming to grow a little dull, asked him, in what sense? How?

‘“Why, thus,” he returned. “Here is a Ghost to be disproved. Well! I cannot answer for what my fancy might do if I were alone here, or what tricks my senses might play with me if they had me to themselves. But, in company with another man, and especially with Dick, I would consent to outface all the Ghosts that were ever of in the universe.”

‘“I had not the vanity to suppose that I was of so much importance to-night,” said the other.

‘“Of so much,” rejoined the leader, more seriously than he had spoken yet, “that I would, for the reason I have given, on no account have undertaken to pass the night here alone.”

‘It was within a few minutes of One. The head of the younger man had drooped when he made his last remark, and it drooped lower now.

‘“Keep awake, Dick!” said the leader, gaily. “The small hours are the worst.”

‘He tried, but his head drooped again.

‘“Dick!” urged the leader. “Keep awake!”

‘“I can’t,” he indistinctly muttered. “I don’t know what strange influence is stealing over me. I can’t.”

‘His companion looked at him with a sudden horror, and I, in my different way, felt a new horror also; for, it was on the stroke of One, and I felt that the second watcher was yielding to me, and that the curse was upon me that I must send him to sleep.

‘“Get up and walk, Dick!” cried the leader. “Try!”

‘It was in vain to go behind the slumber’s chair and shake him. One o’clock sounded, and I was present to the elder man, and he stood transfixed before me.

‘To him alone, I was obliged to relate my story, without hope of benefit. To him alone, I was an awful phantom making a quite useless confession. I foresee it will ever be the same. The two living men together will never come to release me. When I appear, the senses of one of the two will be locked in sleep; he will neither see nor hear me; my communication will ever be made to a solitary listener, and will ever be unserviceable. Woe! Woe! Woe!’

As the Two old men, with these words, wrung their hands, it shot into Mr. Goodchild’s mind that he was in the terrible situation of being virtually alone with the spectre, and that Mr. Idle’s immoveability was explained by his having been charmed asleep at One o’clock. In the terror of this sudden discovery which produced an indescribable dread, he struggled so hard to get free from the four fiery threads, that he snapped them, after he had pulled them out to a great width. Being then out of bonds, he caught up Mr. Idle from the sofa and rushed down-stairs with him.

‘What are you about, Francis?’ demanded Mr. Idle. ‘My bedroom is not down here. What the deuce are you carrying me at all for? I can walk with a stick now. I don’t want to be carried. Put me down.’

Mr. Goodchild put him down in the old hall, and looked about him wildly.

‘What are you doing? Idiotically plunging at your own sex, and rescuing them or perishing in the attempt?’ asked Mr. Idle, in a highly petulant state.

‘The One old man!’ cried Mr. Goodchild, distractedly,—‘and the Two old men!’

Mr. Idle deigned no other reply than ‘The One old woman, I think you mean,’ as he began hobbling his way back up the staircase, with the assistance of its broad balustrade.

‘I assure you, Tom,’ began Mr. Goodchild, attending at his side, ‘that since you fell asleep—’

‘Come, I like that!’ said Thomas Idle, ‘I haven’t closed an eye!’

With the peculiar sensitiveness on the subject of the disgraceful action of going to sleep out of bed, which is the lot of all mankind, Mr. Idle persisted in this declaration. The same peculiar sensitiveness impelled Mr. Goodchild, on being taxed with the same crime, to repudiate it with honourable resentment. The settlement of the question of The One old man and The Two old men was thus presently complicated, and soon made quite impracticable. Mr. Idle said it was all Bride-cake, and fragments, newly arranged, of things seen and thought about in the day. Mr. Goodchild said how could that be, when he hadn’t been asleep, and what right could Mr. Idle have to say so, who had been asleep? Mr. Idle said he had never been asleep, and never did go to sleep, and that Mr. Goodchild, as a general rule, was always asleep. They consequently parted for the rest of the night, at their bedroom doors, a little ruffled. Mr. Goodchild’s last words were, that he had had, in that real and tangible old sitting-room of that real and tangible old Inn (he supposed Mr. Idle denied its existence?), every sensation and experience, the present record of which is now within a line or two of completion; and that he would write it out and print it every word. Mr. Idle returned that he might if he liked—and he did like, and has now done it.

CHAPTER V

Two of the many passengers by a certain late Sunday evening train, Mr. Thomas Idle and Mr. Francis Goodchild, yielded up their tickets at a little rotten platform (converted into artificial touchwood by smoke and ashes), deep in the manufacturing bosom of Yorkshire. A mysterious bosom it appeared, upon a damp, dark, Sunday night, dashed through in the train to the music of the whirling wheels, the panting of the engine, and the part-singing of hundreds of third-class excursionists, whose vocal efforts ‘bobbed arayound’ from sacred to profane, from hymns, to our transatlantic sisters the Yankee Gal and Mairy Anne, in a remarkable way. There seemed to have been some large vocal gathering near to every lonely station on the line. No town was visible, no village was visible, no light was visible; but, a multitude got out singing, and a multitude got in singing, and the second multitude took up the hymns, and adopted our transatlantic sisters, and sang of their own egregious wickedness, and of their bobbing arayound, and of how the ship it was ready and the wind it was fair, and they were bayound for the sea, Mairy Anne, until they in their turn became a getting-out multitude, and were replaced by another getting-in multitude, who did the same. And at every station, the getting-in multitude, with an artistic reference to the completeness of their chorus, incessantly cried, as with one voice while scuffling into the carriages, ‘We mun aa’ gang toogither!’

The singing and the multitudes had trailed off as the lonely places were left and the great towns were neared, and the way had lain as silently as a train’s way ever can, over the vague black streets of the great gulfs of towns, and among their branchless woods of vague black chimneys. These towns looked, in the cinderous wet, as though they had one and all been on fire and were just put out—a dreary and quenched panorama, many miles long.

Thus, Thomas and Francis got to Leeds; of which enterprising and important commercial centre it may be observed with delicacy, that you must either like it very much or not at all. Next day, the first of the Race-Week, they took train to Doncaster.

And instantly the character, both of travellers and of luggage, entirely changed, and no other business than race-business any longer existed on the face of the earth. The talk was all of horses and ‘John Scott.’ Guards whispered behind their hands to station-masters, of horses and John Scott. Men in cut-away coats and speckled cravats fastened with peculiar pins, and with the large bones of their legs developed under tight trousers, so that they should look as much as possible like horses’ legs, paced up and down by twos at junction-stations, speaking low and moodily of horses and John Scott. The young clergyman in the black strait-waistcoat, who occupied the middle seat of the carriage, expounded in his peculiar pulpit-accent to the young and lovely Reverend Mrs. Crinoline, who occupied the opposite middle-seat, a few passages of rumour relative to ‘Oartheth, my love, and Mithter John Eth-COTT.’ A bandy vagabond, with a head like a Dutch cheese, in a fustian stable-suit, attending on a horse-box and going about the platforms with a halter hanging round his neck like a Calais burgher of the ancient period much degenerated, was courted by the best society, by reason of what he had to hint, when not engaged in eating straw, concerning ‘t’harses and Joon Scott.’ The engine-driver himself, as he applied one eye to his large stationary double-eye-glass on the engine, seemed to keep the other open, sideways, upon horses and John Scott.

Breaks and barriers at Doncaster Station to keep the crowd off; temporary wooden avenues of ingress and egress, to help the crowd on. Forty extra porters sent down for this present blessed Race-Week, and all of them making up their betting-books in the lamp-room or somewhere else, and none of them to come and touch the luggage. Travellers disgorged into an open space, a howling wilderness of idle men. All work but race-work at a stand-still; all men at a stand-still. ‘Ey my word! Deant ask noon o’ us to help wi’ t’luggage. Bock your opinion loike a mon. Coom! Dang it, coom, t’harses and Joon Scott!’ In the midst of the idle men, all the fly horses and omnibus horses of Doncaster and parts adjacent, rampant, rearing, backing, plunging, shying—apparently the result of their hearing of nothing but their own order and John Scott.

Grand Dramatic Company from London for the Race-Week. Poses Plastiques in the Grand Assembly Room up the Stable-Yard at seven and nine each evening, for the Race-Week. Grand Alliance Circus in the field beyond the bridge, for the Race-Week. Grand Exhibition of Aztec Lilliputians, important to all who want to be horrified cheap, for the Race-Week. Lodgings, grand and not grand, but all at grand prices, ranging from ten pounds to twenty, for the Grand Race-Week!

Rendered giddy enough by these things, Messieurs Idle and Goodchild repaired to the quarters they had secured beforehand, and Mr. Goodchild looked down from the window into the surging street.

‘By Heaven, Tom!’ cried he, after contemplating it, ‘I am in the Lunatic Asylum again, and these are all mad people under the charge of a body of designing keepers!’

All through the Race-Week, Mr. Goodchild never divested himself of this idea. Every day he looked out of window, with something of the dread of Lemuel Gulliver looking down at men after he returned home from the horse-country; and every day he saw the Lunatics, horse-mad, betting-mad, drunken-mad, vice-mad, and the designing Keepers always after them. The idea pervaded, like the second colour in shot-silk, the whole of Mr. Goodchild’s impressions. They were much as follows:

Monday, mid-day. Races not to begin until to-morrow, but all the mob-Lunatics out, crowding the pavements of the one main street of pretty and pleasant Doncaster, crowding the road, particularly crowding the outside of the Betting Rooms, whooping and shouting loudly after all passing vehicles. Frightened lunatic horses occasionally running away, with infinite clatter. All degrees of men, from peers to paupers, betting incessantly. Keepers very watchful, and taking all good chances. An awful family likeness among the Keepers, to Mr. Palmer and Mr. Thurtell. With some knowledge of expression and some acquaintance with heads (thus writes Mr. Goodchild), I never have seen anywhere, so many repetitions of one class of countenance and one character of head (both evil) as in this street at this time. Cunning, covetousness, secrecy, cold calculation, hard callousness and dire insensibility, are the uniform Keeper characteristics. Mr. Palmer passes me five times in five minutes, and, so I go down the street, the back of Mr. Thurtell’s skull is always going on before me.

Monday evening. Town lighted up; more Lunatics out than ever; a complete choke and stoppage of the thoroughfare outside the Betting Rooms. Keepers, having dined, pervade the Betting Rooms, and sharply snap at the moneyed Lunatics. Some Keepers flushed with drink, and some not, but all close and calculating. A vague echoing roar of ‘t’harses’ and ‘t’races’ always rising in the air, until midnight, at about which period it dies away in occasional drunken songs and straggling yells. But, all night, some unmannerly drinking-house in the neighbourhood opens its mouth at intervals and spits out a man too drunk to be retained: who thereupon makes what uproarious protest may be left in him, and either falls asleep where he tumbles, or is carried off in custody.

Tuesday morning, at daybreak. A sudden rising, as it were out of the earth, of all the obscene creatures, who sell ‘correct cards of the races.’ They may have been coiled in corners, or sleeping on door-steps, and, having all passed the night under the same set of circumstances, may all want to circulate their blood at the same time; but, however that may be, they spring into existence all at once and together, as though a new Cadmus had sown a race-horse’s teeth. There is nobody up, to buy the cards; but, the cards are madly cried. There is no patronage to quarrel for; but, they madly quarrel and fight. Conspicuous among these hyaenas, as breakfast-time discloses, is a fearful creature in the general semblance of a man: shaken off his next-to-no legs by drink and devilry, bare-headed and bare-footed, with a great shock of hair like a horrible broom, and nothing on him but a ragged pair of trousers and a pink glazed-calico coat—made on him—so very tight that it is as evident that he could never take it off, as that he never does. This hideous apparition, inconceivably drunk, has a terrible power of making a gong-like imitation of the braying of an ass: which feat requires that he should lay his right jaw in his begrimed right paw, double himself up, and shake his bray out of himself, with much staggering on his next-to-no legs, and much twirling of his horrible broom, as if it were a mop. From the present minute, when he comes in sight holding up his cards to the windows, and hoarsely proposing purchase to My Lord, Your Excellency, Colonel, the Noble Captain, and Your Honourable Worship—from the present minute until the Grand Race-Week is finished, at all hours of the morning, evening, day, and night, shall the town reverberate, at capricious intervals, to the brays of this frightful animal the Gong-donkey.

No very great racing to-day, so no very great amount of vehicles: though there is a good sprinkling, too: from farmers’ carts and gigs, to carriages with post-horses and to fours-in-hand, mostly coming by the road from York, and passing on straight through the main street to the Course. A walk in the wrong direction may be a better thing for Mr. Goodchild to-day than the Course, so he walks in the wrong direction. Everybody gone to the races. Only children in the street. Grand Alliance Circus deserted; not one Star-Rider left; omnibus which forms the Pay-Place, having on separate panels Pay here for the Boxes, Pay here for the Pit, Pay here for the Gallery, hove down in a corner and locked up; nobody near the tent but the man on his knees on the grass, who is making the paper balloons for the Star young gentlemen to jump through to-night. A pleasant road, pleasantly wooded. No labourers working in the fields; all gone 't'races.' The few late wenders of their way 't'races,' who are yet left driving on the road, stare in amazement at the recluse who is not going 't'races.' Roadside innkeeper has gone 't'races.' Turnpike-man has gone 't'races.' His thrifty wife, washing clothes at the toll-house door, is going 't'races' to-morrow. Perhaps there may be no one left to take the toll to-morrow; who knows? Though assuredly that would be neither turnpike-like nor Yorkshire-like. The very wind and dust seem to be hurrying 't'races,' as they briskly pass the only wayfarer on the road. In the distance, the Railway Engine, waiting at the town-end, shrieks despairingly. Nothing but the difficulty of getting off the Line, restrains that Engine from going 't'races,' too, it is very clear.

At night, more Lunatics out than last night—and more Keepers. The latter very active at the Betting Rooms, the street in front of which is now impassable. Mr. Palmer as before. Mr. Thurtell as before. Roar and uproar as before. Gradual subsidence as before. Unmannerly drinking-house expectorates as before. Drunken negro-melodists, Gong-donkey, and correct cards, in the night.

On Wednesday morning, the morning of the great St. Leger, it becomes apparent that there has been a great influx since yesterday, both of Lunatics and Keepers. The families of the tradesmen over the way are no longer within human ken; their places know them no more; ten, fifteen, and twenty guinea-lodgers fill them. At the pastry-cook's second-floor window, a Keeper is brushing Mr. Thurtell's hair—thinking it his own. In the wax-chandler's attic, another Keeper is putting on Mr. Palmer's braces. In the gunsmith's nursery, a Lunatic is shaving himself. In the serious stationer's best sitting-room, three Lunatics are taking a combination-breakfast, praising the (cook's) devil, and drinking neat brandy in an atmosphere of last midnight's cigars. No family sanctuary is free from our Angelic messengers—we put up at the Angel—who in the guise of extra waiters for the grand Race-Week, rattle in and out of the most secret chambers of everybody's house, with dishes and tin covers, decanters, soda-water bottles, and glasses. An hour later. Down the street and up the street, as far as eyes can see and a good deal farther, there is a dense crowd; outside the Betting Rooms it is like a great struggle at a theatre door—in the days of theatres; or at the vestibule of the Spurgeon temple—in the days of Spurgeon. An hour later. Fusing into this crowd, and somehow getting through it, are all kinds of conveyances, and all kinds of foot-passengers; carts, with brick-makers and brick-makeresses jolting up and down on planks; drags, with the needful grooms behind, sitting cross-armed in the needful manner, and slanting themselves backward from the soles of their boots at the needful angle; postboys, in the shining hats and smart jackets of the olden time, when stokers were not; beautiful Yorkshire horses, gallantly driven by their own breeders and masters. Under every pole, and every shaft, and every horse, and every wheel as it would seem, the Gong-donkey—metallically braying, when not struggling for life, or whipped out of the way.

By one o'clock, all this stir has gone out of the streets, and there is no one left in them but Francis Goodchild. Francis Goodchild will not be left in them long; for, he too is on his way, 't'races.'

A most beautiful sight, Francis Goodchild finds 't'races' to be, when he has left fair Doncaster behind him, and comes out on the free course, with its agreeable prospect, its quaint Red House oddly changing and turning as Francis turns, its green grass, and fresh heath. A free course and an easy one, where Francis can roll smoothly where he will, and can choose between the start, or the coming-in, or the turn behind the brow of the hill, or any out-of-the-way point where he lists to see the throbbing horses straining every nerve, and making the sympathetic earth throb as they come by. Francis much delights to be, not in the Grand Stand, but where he can see it, rising against the sky with its vast tiers of little white dots of faces, and its last high rows and corners of people, looking like pins stuck into an enormous pincushion—not quite so symmetrically as his orderly eye could wish, when people change or go away. When the race is nearly run out, it is as good as the race to him to see the flutter among the pins, and the change in them from dark to light, as hats are taken off and waved. Not less full of interest, the loud anticipation of the winner's name, the swelling, and the final, roar; then, the quick dropping of all the pins out of their places, the revelation of the shape of the bare pincushion, and the closing-in of the whole host of Lunatics and Keepers, in the rear of the three horses with bright-coloured riders, who have not yet quite subdued their gallop though the contest is over.

Mr. Goodchild would appear to have been by no means free from lunacy himself at 't'races,' though not of the prevalent kind. He is suspected by Mr. Idle to have fallen into a dreadful state concerning a pair of little lilac gloves and a little bonnet that he saw there. Mr. Idle asserts, that he did afterwards repeat at the Angel, with an appearance of being lunatically seized, some rhapsody to the following effect: 'O little lilac gloves! And O winning little bonnet, making in conjunction with her golden hair quite a Glory in the sunlight round the pretty head, why anything in the world but you and me! Why may not this day's running-of horses, to all the rest: of precious sands of life to me—be prolonged through an everlasting autumn-sunshine, without a sunset! Slave of the Lamp, or Ring, strike me yonder gallant equestrian Clerk of the Course, in the scarlet coat, motionless on the green grass for ages! Friendly Devil on Two Sticks, for ten times ten thousands years, keep Blink-Bonny jibbing at the post, and let us have no start! Arab drums, powerful of old to summon Genii in the desert, sound of yourselves and raise a troop for me in the desert of my heart, which shall so enchant this dusty barouche (with a conspicuous excise-plate, resembling the Collector's door-plate at a turnpike), that I, within it, loving the little lilac gloves, the winning little bonnet, and the dear unknown-wearer with the golden hair, may wait by her side for ever, to see a Great St. Leger that shall never be run!'

Thursday morning. After a tremendous night of crowding, shouting, drinking-house expectoration, Gong-donkey, and correct cards. Symptoms of yesterday's gains in the way of drink, and of yesterday's losses in the way of money, abundant. Money-losses very great. As usual, nobody seems to have won; but, large losses and many losers are unquestionable facts. Both Lunatics and Keepers, in general very low. Several of both kinds look in at the chemist's while Mr. Goodchild is making a purchase there, to be 'picked up.' One red-eyed Lunatic, flushed, faded, and disordered, enters hurriedly and cries savagely, 'Hond us a gloss of sal volatile in wather, or soom dommed thing o' thot sart!' Faces at the Betting Rooms very long, and a tendency to bite nails observable. Keepers likewise given this morning to standing about solitary, with their hands in their pockets, looking down at their boots as they fit them into cracks of the pavement, and then looking up whistling and walking away. Grand

Alliance Circus out, in procession; buxom lady-member of Grand Alliance, in crimson riding-habit, fresher to look at, even in her paint under the day sky, than the cheeks of Lunatics or Keepers. Spanish Cavalier appears to have lost yesterday, and jingles his bossed bridle with disgust, as if he were paying. Reaction also apparent at the Guildhall opposite, whence certain pickpockets come out handcuffed together, with that peculiar walk which is never seen under any other circumstances—a walk expressive of going to jail, game, but still of jails being in bad taste and arbitrary, and how would *you* like it if it was you instead of me, as it ought to be! Mid-day. Town filled as yesterday, but not so full; and emptied as yesterday, but not so empty. In the evening, Angel ordinary where every Lunatic and Keeper has his modest daily meal of turtle, venison, and wine, not so crowded as yesterday, and not so noisy. At night, the theatre. More abstracted faces in it than one ever sees at public assemblies; such faces wearing an expression which strongly reminds Mr. Goodchild of the boys at school who were 'going up next,' with their arithmetic or mathematics. These boys are, no doubt, going up to-morrow with *their* sums and figures. Mr. Palmer and Mr. Thurtell in the boxes O. P. Mr. Thurtell and Mr. Palmer in the boxes P. S. The firm of Thurtell, Palmer, and Thurtell, in the boxes Centre. A most odious tendency observable in these distinguished gentlemen to put vile constructions on sufficiently innocent phrases in the play, and then to applaud them in a Satyr-like manner. Behind Mr. Goodchild, with a party of other Lunatics and one Keeper, the express incarnation of the thing called a 'gent.' A gentleman born; a gent manufactured. A something with a scarf round its neck, and a slipshod speech issuing from behind the scarf; more depraved, more foolish, more ignorant, more unable to believe in any noble or good thing of any kind, than the stupidest Bosjesman. The thing is but a boy in years, and is addled with drink. To do its company justice, even its company is ashamed of it, as it drawls its slang criticisms on the representation, and inflames Mr. Goodchild with a burning ardour to fling it into the pit. Its remarks are so horrible, that Mr. Goodchild, for the moment, even doubts whether that *is* a wholesome Art, which sets women apart on a high floor before such a thing as this, though as good as its own sisters, or its own mother—whom Heaven forgive for bringing it into the world! But, the consideration that a low nature must make a low world of its own to live in, whatever the real materials, or it could no more exist than any of us could without the sense of touch, brings Mr. Goodchild to reason:

the rather, because the thing soon drops its downy chin upon its scarf, and slobbers itself asleep.

Friday Morning. Early fights. Gong-donkey, and correct cards. Again, a great set towards the races, though not so great a set as on Wednesday. Much packing going on too, upstairs at the gun-smith's, the wax-chandler's, and the serious stationer's; for there will be a heavy drift of Lunatics and Keepers to London by the afternoon train. The course as pretty as ever; the great pincushion as like a pincushion, but not nearly so full of pins; whole rows of pins wanting. On the great event of the day, both Lunatics and Keepers become inspired with rage; and there is a violent scuffling, and a rushing at the losing jockey, and an emergence of the said jockey from a swaying and menacing crowd, protected by friends, and looking the worse for wear; which is a rough proceeding, though animating to see from a pleasant distance. After the great event, rills begin to flow from the pincushion towards the railroad; the rills swell into rivers; the rivers soon unite into a lake. The lake floats Mr. Goodchild into Doncaster, past the Itinerant personage in black, by the way-side telling him from the vantage ground of a legibly printed placard on a pole that for all these things the Lord will bring him to judgment. No turtle and venison ordinary this evening; that is all over. No Betting at the rooms; nothing there but the plants in pots, which have, all the week, been stood about the entry to give it an innocent appearance, and which have sorely sickened by this time.

Saturday. Mr. Idle wishes to know at breakfast, what were those dreadful groanings in his bedroom doorway in the night? Mr. Goodchild answers, Nightmare. Mr. Idle repels the calumny, and calls the waiter. The Angel is very sorry—had intended to explain; but you see, gentlemen, there was a gentleman dined down-stairs with two more, and he had lost a deal of money, and he would drink a deal of wine, and in the night he 'took the horrors,' and got up; and as his friends could do nothing with him he laid himself down and groaned at Mr. Idle's door. 'And he DID groan there,' Mr. Idle says; 'and you will please to imagine me inside, "taking the horrors" too!'

So far, the picture of Doncaster on the occasion of its great sporting anniversary, offers probably a general representation of the social condition of the town, in the past as well as in the present time. The sole local phenomenon of the current year, which may be considered as entirely unprecedented in its way, and which certainly claims, on that account, some slight share of notice, consists in the actual existence of one remarkable individual, who is sojourning in Doncaster, and who, neither directly nor indirectly, has anything at all to do, in any capacity whatever, with the racing amusements of the week. Ranging throughout the entire crowd that fills the town, and including the inhabitants as well as the visitors, nobody is to be found altogether disconnected with the business of the day, excepting this one unparalleled man. He does not bet on the races, like the sporting men. He does not assist the races, like the jockeys, starters, judges, and grooms. He does not look on at the races, like Mr. Goodchild and his fellow-spectators. He does not profit by the races, like the hotel-keepers and the tradespeople. He does not minister to the necessities of the races, like the booth-keepers, the postilions, the waiters, and the hawkers of Lists. He does not assist the attractions of the races, like the actors at the theatre, the riders at the circus, or the posturers at the Poses Plastiques. Absolutely and literally, he is the only individual in Doncaster who stands by the brink of the full-flowing race-stream, and is not swept away by it in common with all the rest of his species. Who is this modern hermit, this recluse of the St. Leger-week, this inscrutably ungregarious being, who lives apart from the amusements and activities of his fellow-creatures? Surely, there is little difficulty in guessing that clearest and easiest of all riddles. Who could he be, but Mr. Thomas Idle?

Thomas had suffered himself to be taken to Doncaster, just as he would have suffered himself to be taken to any other place in the habitable globe which would guarantee him the temporary possession of a comfortable sofa to rest his ankle on. Once established at the hotel, with his leg on one cushion and his back against another, he formally declined taking the slightest interest in any circumstance whatever connected with the races, or with the people who were assembled to see them. Francis Goodchild, anxious that the hours should pass by his crippled travelling-companion as lightly as possible, suggested that his sofa should be moved to the window, and that he should amuse himself by looking out at the moving panorama of humanity, which the view from it of the principal street presented. Thomas, however, steadily declined profiting by the suggestion.

‘The farther I am from the window,’ he said, ‘the better, Brother Francis, I shall be pleased. I have nothing in common with the one prevalent idea of all those people who are passing in the street. Why should I care to look at them?'

'I hope I have nothing in common with the prevalent idea of a great many of them, either,' answered Goodchild, thinking of the sporting gentlemen whom he had met in the course of his wanderings about Doncaster. 'But, surely, among all the people who are walking by the house, at this very moment, you may find—'

'Not one living creature,' interposed Thomas, 'who is not, in one way or another, interested in horses, and who is not, in a greater or less degree, an admirer of them. Now, I hold opinions in reference to these particular members of the quadruped creation, which may lay claim (as I believe) to the disastrous distinction of being unpartaken by any other human being, civilised or savage, over the whole surface of the earth. Taking the horse as an animal in the abstract, Francis, I cordially despise him from every point of view.'

'Thomas,' said Goodchild, 'confinement to the house has begun to affect your biliary secretions. I shall go to the chemist's and get you some physic.'

'I object,' continued Thomas, quietly possessing himself of his friend's hat, which stood on a table near him,—'I object, first, to the personal appearance of the horse. I protest against the conventional idea of beauty, as attached to that animal. I think his nose too long, his forehead too low, and his legs (except in the case of the cart-horse) ridiculously thin by comparison with the size of his body. Again, considering how big an animal he is, I object to the contemptible delicacy of his constitution. Is he not the sickliest creature in creation? Does any child catch cold as easily as a horse? Does he not sprain his fetlock, for all his appearance of superior strength, as easily as I sprained my ankle! Furthermore, to take him from another point of view, what a helpless wretch he is! No fine lady requires more constant waiting-on than a horse. Other animals can make their own toilette: he must have a groom. You will tell me that this is because we want to make his coat artificially glossy. Glossy! Come home with me, and see my cat,—my clever cat, who can groom herself! Look at your own dog! see how the intelligent creature curry-combs himself with his own honest teeth! Then, again, what a fool the horse is, what a poor, nervous fool! He will start at a piece of white paper in the road as if it was a lion. His one idea, when he hears a noise that he is not accustomed to, is to run away from it. What do you say to those two common instances of the sense and courage of this absurdly overpraised animal? I might multiply them to two hundred, if I chose to exert my mind and waste my breath, which I never do. I prefer coming at once to my last charge against the horse, which is the most serious of all, because it affects his moral character. I accuse him boldly, in his capacity of servant to man, of slyness and treachery. I brand him publicly, no matter how mild he may look about the eyes, or how sleek he may be about the coat, as a systematic betrayer, whenever he can get the chance, of the confidence reposed in him. What do you mean by laughing and shaking your head at me?'

'Oh, Thomas, Thomas!' said Goodchild. 'You had better give me my hat; you had better let me get you that physic.'

'I will let you get anything you like, including a composing draught for yourself,' said Thomas, irritably alluding to his fellow-apprentice's inexhaustible activity, 'if you will only sit quiet for five minutes longer, and hear me out. I say again the horse is a betrayer of the confidence reposed in him; and that opinion, let me add, is drawn from my own personal experience, and is not based on any fanciful theory whatever. You shall have two instances, two overwhelming instances. Let me start the first of these by asking, what is the distinguishing quality which the Shetland Pony has arrogated to himself, and is still perpetually trumpeting through the world by means of popular report and books on Natural History? I see the answer in your face: it is the quality of being Sure-Footed. He professes to have other virtues, such as hardiness and strength, which you may discover on trial; but the one thing which he insists on your believing, when you get on his back, is that he may be safely depended on not to tumble down with you. Very good. Some years ago, I was in Shetland with a party of friends. They insisted on taking me with them to the top of a precipice that overhung the sea. It was a great distance off, but they all determined to walk to it except me. I was wiser then than I was with you at Carrock, and I determined to be carried to the precipice. There was no carriage-road in the island, and nobody offered (in consequence, as I suppose, of the imperfectly-civilised state of the country) to bring me a sedan-chair, which is naturally what I should have liked best. A Shetland pony was produced instead. I remembered my Natural History, I recalled popular report, and I got on the little beast's back, as any other man would have done in my position, placing implicit confidence in the sureness of his feet. And how did he repay that confidence? Brother Francis, carry your mind on from morning to noon. Picture to yourself a howling wilderness of grass and bog, bounded by low stony hills. Pick out one particular spot in that imaginary scene, and sketch me in it, with outstretched arms, curved back, and heels in the air, plunging headforemost into a black patch of water and mud. Place just behind me the legs, the body, and the head of a sure-footed Shetland pony, all stretched flat on the ground, and you will have produced an accurate representation of a very lamentable fact. And the moral device, Francis, of this picture will be to testify that when gentlemen put confidence in the legs of Shetland ponies, they will find to their cost that they are leaning on nothing but broken reeds. There is my first instance—and what have you got to say to that?'

'Nothing, but that I want my hat,' answered Goodchild, starting up and walking restlessly about the room.

'You shall have it in a minute,' rejoined Thomas. 'My second instance'—(Goodchild groaned, and sat down again)—'My second instance is more appropriate to the present time and place, for it refers to a race-horse. Two years ago an excellent friend of mine, who was desirous of prevailing on me to take regular exercise, and who was well enough acquainted with the weakness of my legs to expect no very active compliance with his wishes on their part, offered to make me a present of one of his horses. Hearing that the animal in question had started in life on the turf, I declined accepting the gift with many thanks; adding, by way of explanation, that I looked on a race-horse as a kind of embodied hurricane, upon which no sane man of my character and habits could be expected to seat himself. My friend replied that, however appropriate my metaphor might be as applied to race-horses in general, it was singularly unsuitable as applied to the particular horse which he proposed to give me. From a foal upwards this remarkable animal had been the idlest and most sluggish of his race. Whatever capacities for speed he might possess he had kept so strictly to himself, that no amount of training had ever brought them out. He had been found hopelessly slow as a racer, and hopelessly lazy as a hunter, and was fit for nothing but a quiet, easy life of it with an old gentleman or an invalid. When I heard this account of the horse, I don't mind confessing that my heart warmed to him. Visions of Thomas Idle ambling serenely on the back of a steed as lazy as himself, presenting to a restless world the soothing and composite spectacle of a kind of sluggardly Centaur, too peaceable in his habits to alarm anybody, swam attractively before my eyes. I went to look at the horse in the stable. Nice fellow! he was fast asleep with a kitten on his back. I saw him taken out for an airing by the groom. If he had had trousers on his legs I should not have known them from my own, so deliberately were they lifted up, so gently were they put down, so slowly did they get over the ground. From that moment I gratefully accepted my friend's offer. I went home; the horse followed me—by a slow train. Oh, Francis, how devoutly I believed in that horse I how carefully I looked after all his little comforts! I had never gone the length of hiring a man-servant to wait on myself; but I went to the expense of hiring one to wait upon him. If I thought a little of myself when I bought the softest saddle that could be had for money, I thought also of my horse. When the man at the shop afterwards offered me spurs and a whip, I turned from him with horror. When I sallied out for my first ride, I went purposely unarmed with the means of hurrying my steed. He proceeded at his own pace every step of the way; and when he stopped, at last, and blew out both his sides with a heavy sigh, and turned his sleepy head and looked behind him, I took him home again, as I might take home an artless child who said to me, "If you please, sir, I am tired." For a week this complete harmony between me and my horse lasted undisturbed. At the end of that time, when he had made quite sure of my friendly confidence in his laziness, when he had thoroughly acquainted himself with all the little weaknesses of my seat (and their name is Legion), the smouldering treachery and ingratitude of the equine nature blazed out in an instant. Without the slightest provocation from me, with nothing passing him at the time but a pony-chaise driven by an old lady, he started in one instant from a state of sluggish depression to a state of frantic high spirits. He kicked, he plunged, he shied, he pranced, he capered fearfully. I sat on him as long as I could, and when I could sit no longer, I fell off. No, Francis! this is not a circumstance to be laughed at, but to be wept over. What would be said of a Man who had requited my kindness in that way? Range over all the rest of the animal creation, and where will you find me an instance of treachery so black as this? The cow that kicks down the milking-pail may have some reason for it; she may think herself taxed too heavily to contribute to the dilution of human tea and the greasing of human bread. The tiger who springs out on me unawares has the excuse of being hungry at the time, to say nothing of the further justification of being a total stranger to me. The very flea who surprises me in my sleep may defend his act of assassination on the ground that I, in my turn, am always ready to murder him when I am awake. I defy the whole body of Natural Historians to move me, logically, off the ground that I have taken in regard to the horse. Receive back your hat, Brother Francis, and go to the chemist's, if you please; for I have now done. Ask me to take anything you like, except an interest in the Doncaster races. Ask me to look at anything you like, except an assemblage of people all animated by feelings of a friendly and admiring nature towards the horse. You are a remarkably well-informed man, and you have heard of hermits. Look upon me as a member of that ancient fraternity, and you will sensibly add to the many obligations which Thomas Idle is proud to owe to Francis Goodchild.'

Here, fatigued by the effort of excessive talking, disputatious Thomas waved one hand languidly, laid his head back on the sofa-pillow, and calmly closed his eyes.

At a later period, Mr. Goodchild assailed his travelling companion boldly from the impregnable fortress of common sense. But Thomas, though tamed in body by drastic discipline, was still as mentally unapproachable as ever on the subject of his favourite delusion.

The view from the window after Saturday's breakfast is altogether changed. The tradesmen's families have all come back again. The serious stationer's young woman of all work is shaking a duster out of the window of the combination breakfast-room; a child is playing with a doll, where Mr. Thurtell's hair was brushed; a sanitary scrubbing is in progress on the spot where Mr. Palmer's braces were put on. No signs of the Races are in the streets, but the tramps and the tumble-down-carts and trucks laden with drinking-forms and tables and remnants of booths, that are making their way out of the town as fast as they can. The Angel, which has been cleared for action all the week, already begins restoring every neat and comfortable article of furniture to its own neat and comfortable place. The Angel's daughters (pleasanter angels Mr. Idle and Mr. Goodchild never saw, nor more quietly expert in their business, nor more superior to the common vice of being above it), have a little time to rest, and to air their cheerful faces among the flowers in the yard. It is market-day. The market looks unusually natural, comfortable, and wholesome; the market-people too.

The town seems quite restored, when, hark! a metallic bray—The Gong-donkey!

The wretched animal has not cleared off with the rest, but is here, under the window. How much more inconceivably drunk now, how much more begrimed of paw, how much more tight of calico hide, how much more stained and daubed and dirty and dunghilly, from his horrible broom to his tender toes, who shall say! He cannot even shake the bray out of himself now, without laying his cheek so near to the mud of the street, that he pitches over after delivering it. Now, prone in the mud, and now backing himself up against shop-windows, the owners of which come out in terror to remove him; now, in the drinking-shop, and now in the tobacconist's, where he goes to buy tobacco, and makes his way into the parlour, and where he gets a cigar, which in half-a-minute he forgets to smoke; now dancing, now dozing, now cursing, and now complimenting My Lord, the Colonel, the Noble Captain, and Your Honourable Worship, the Gong-donkey kicks up his heels, occasionally braying, until suddenly, he beholds the dearest friend he has in the world coming down the street.

The dearest friend the Gong-donkey has in the world, is a sort of Jackall, in a dull, mangy, black hide, of such small pieces that it looks as if it were made of blacking bottles turned inside out and cobbled together. The dearest friend in the world (inconceivably drunk too) advances at the Gong-donkey, with a hand on each thigh, in a series of humorous springs and stops, wagging his head as he comes. The Gong-donkey regarding him with attention and with the warmest affection, suddenly perceives that he is the greatest enemy he has in the world, and hits him hard in the countenance. The astonished Jackall closes with the Donkey, and they roll over and over in the mud, pummelling one another. A Police Inspector, supernaturally endowed with patience, who has long been looking on from the Guildhall-steps, says, to a myrmidon, 'Lock 'em up! Bring 'em in!'

Appropriate finish to the Grand Race-Week. The Gong-donkey, captive and last trace of it, conveyed into limbo, where they cannot do better than keep him until next Race-Week. The Jackall is wanted too, and is much looked for, over the way and up and down. But, having had the good fortune to be undermost at the time of the capture, he has vanished into air.

On Saturday afternoon, Mr. Goodchild walks out and looks at the Course. It is quite deserted; heaps of broken crockery and bottles are raised to its memory; and correct cards and other fragments of paper are blowing about it, as the regulation little paper-books, carried by the French soldiers in their breasts, were seen, soon after the battle was fought, blowing idly about the plains of Waterloo.

Where will these present idle leaves be blown by the idle winds, and where will the last of them be one day lost and forgotten? An idle question, and an idle thought.; and with it Mr. Idle fitly makes his bow, and Mr. Goodchild his, and thus ends the Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices.

THE END OF
The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices

LITTLE DORRIT

By Charles Dickens

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PREFACE TO THE 1857 EDITION

I have been occupied with this story, during many working hours of two years. I must have been very ill employed, if I could not leave its merits and demerits as a whole, to express themselves on its being read as a whole. But, as it is not unreasonable to suppose that I may have held its threads with a more continuous attention than anyone else can have given them during its desultory publication, it is not unreasonable to ask that the weaving may be looked at in its completed state, and with the pattern finished.

If I might offer any apology for so exaggerated a fiction as the Barnacles and the Circumlocution Office, I would seek it in the common experience of an Englishman, without presuming to mention the unimportant fact of my having done that violence to good manners, in the days of a Russian war, and of a Court of Inquiry at Chelsea. If I might make so bold as to defend that extravagant conception, Mr Merdle, I would hint that it originated after the Railroad-share epoch, in the times of a certain Irish bank, and of one or two other equally laudable enterprises. If I were to plead anything in mitigation of the preposterous fancy that a bad design will sometimes claim to be a good and an expressly religious design, it would be the curious coincidence that it has been brought to its climax in these pages, in the days of the public examination of late Directors of a Royal British Bank. But, I submit myself to suffer judgment to go by default on all these counts, if need be, and to accept the assurance (on good authority) that nothing like them was ever known in this land. Some of my readers may have an interest in being informed whether or no any portions of the Marshalsea Prison are yet standing. I did not know, myself, until the sixth of this present month, when I went to look. I found the outer front courtyard, often mentioned here, metamorphosed into a butter shop; and I then almost gave up every brick of the jail for lost. Wandering, however, down a certain adjacent 'Angel Court, leading to Bermondsey', I came to 'Marshalsea Place:' the houses in which I recognised, not only as the great block of the former prison, but as preserving the rooms that arose in my mind's-eye when I became Little Dorrit's biographer. The smallest boy I ever conversed with, carrying the largest baby I ever saw, offered a supernaturally intelligent explanation of the locality in its old uses, and was very nearly correct. How this young Newton (for such I judge him to be) came by his information, I don't know; he was a quarter of a century too young to know anything about it of himself. I pointed to the window of the room where Little Dorrit was born, and where her father lived so long, and asked him what was the name of the lodger who tenanted that apartment at present? He said, 'Tom Pythick.' I asked him who was Tom Pythick? and he said, 'Joe Pythick's uncle.'

A little further on, I found the older and smaller wall, which used to enclose the pent-up inner prison where nobody was put, except for ceremony. But, whosoever goes into Marshalsea Place, turning out of Angel Court, leading to Bermondsey, will find his feet on the very paving-stones of the extinct Marshalsea jail; will see its narrow yard to the right and to the left, very little altered if at all, except that the walls were lowered when the place got free; will look upon rooms in which the debtors lived; and will stand among the crowding ghosts of many miserable years.

In the Preface to Bleak House I remarked that I had never had so many readers. In the Preface to its next successor, Little Dorrit, I have still to repeat the same words. Deeply sensible of the affection and confidence that have grown up between us, I add to this Preface, as I added to that, May we meet again!

London May 1857

BOOK THE FIRST: POVERTY

CHAPTER 1. Sun and Shadow

Thirty years ago, Marseilles lay burning in the sun, one day.

A blazing sun upon a fierce August day was no greater rarity in southern France then, than at any other time, before or since. Everything in Marseilles, and about Marseilles, had stared at the fervid sky, and been stared at in return, until a staring habit had become universal there. Strangers were stared out of countenance by staring white houses, staring white walls, staring white streets, staring tracts of arid road, staring hills from which verdure was burnt away. The only things to be seen not fixedly staring and glaring were the vines drooping under their load of grapes. These did occasionally wink a little, as the hot air barely moved their faint leaves.

There was no wind to make a ripple on the foul water within the harbour, or on the beautiful sea without. The line of demarcation between the two colours, black and blue, showed the point which the pure sea would not pass; but it lay as quiet as the abominable pool, with which it never mixed. Boats without awnings were too hot to touch; ships blistered at their moorings; the stones of the quays had not cooled, night or day, for months. Hindoos, Russians, Chinese, Spaniards, Portuguese, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Genoese, Neapolitans, Venetians, Greeks, Turks, descendants from all the builders of Babel, come to trade at Marseilles, sought the shade alike—taking refuge in any hiding-place from a sea too intensely blue to be looked at, and a sky of purple, set with one great flaming jewel of fire.

The universal stare made the eyes ache. Towards the distant line of Italian coast, indeed, it was a little relieved by light clouds of mist, slowly rising from the evaporation of the sea, but it softened nowhere else. Far away the staring roads, deep in dust, stared from the hill-side, stared from the hollow, stared from the interminable plain. Far away the dusty vines overhanging wayside cottages, and the monotonous wayside avenues of parched trees without shade, drooped beneath the stare of earth and sky. So did the horses with drowsy bells, in long files of carts, creeping slowly towards the interior; so did their recumbent drivers, when they were awake, which rarely happened; so did the exhausted labourers in the fields. Everything that lived or grew, was oppressed by the glare; except the lizard, passing swiftly over rough stone walls, and the cicala, chirping his dry hot chirp, like a rattle. The very dust was scorched brown, and something quivered in the atmosphere as if the air itself were panting.

Blinds, shutters, curtains, awnings, were all closed and drawn to keep out the stare. Grant it but a chink or keyhole, and it shot in like a white-hot arrow. The churches were the freest from it. To come out of the twilight of pillars and arches—dreamily dotted with winking lamps, dreamily peopled with ugly old shadows piously dozing, spitting, and begging—was to plunge into a fiery river, and swim for life to the nearest strip of shade. So, with people lounging and lying wherever shade was, with but little hum of tongues or barking of dogs, with occasional jangling of discordant church bells and rattling of vicious drums, Marseilles, a fact to be strongly smelt and tasted, lay broiling in the sun one day. In Marseilles that day there was a villainous prison. In one of its chambers, so repulsive a place that even the obtrusive stare blinked at it, and left it to such refuse of reflected light as it could find for itself, were two men. Besides the two men, a notched and disfigured bench, immovable from the wall, with a draught-board rudely hacked upon it with a knife, a set of draughts, made of old buttons and soup bones, a set of dominoes, two mats, and two or three wine bottles. That was all the chamber held, exclusive of rats and other unseen vermin, in addition to the seen vermin, the two men.

It received such light as it got through a grating of iron bars fashioned like a pretty large window, by means of which it could be always inspected from the gloomy staircase on which the grating gave. There was a broad strong ledge of stone to this grating where the bottom of it was let into the masonry, three or four feet above the ground. Upon it, one of the two men lolled, half sitting and half lying, with his knees drawn up, and his feet and shoulders planted against the opposite sides of the aperture. The bars were wide enough apart to admit of his thrusting his arm through to the elbow; and so he held on negligently, for his greater ease.

A prison taint was on everything there. The imprisoned air, the imprisoned light, the imprisoned damps, the imprisoned men, were all deteriorated by confinement. As the captive men were faded and haggard, so the iron was rusty, the stone was slimy, the wood was rotten, the air was faint, the light was dim. Like a well, like a vault, like a tomb, the prison had no knowledge of the brightness outside, and would have kept its polluted atmosphere intact in one of the spice islands of the Indian ocean.

The man who lay on the ledge of the grating was even chilled. He jerked his great cloak more heavily upon him by an impatient movement of one shoulder, and growled, 'To the devil with this Brigand of a Sun that never shines in here!'

He was waiting to be fed, looking sideways through the bars that he might see the further down the stairs, with much of the expression of a wild beast in similar expectation. But his eyes, too close together, were not so nobly set in his head as those of the king of beasts are in his, and they were sharp rather than bright—pointed weapons with little surface to betray them. They had no depth or change; they glittered, and they opened and shut. So far, and waiving their use to himself, a clockmaker could have made a better pair. He had a hook nose, handsome after its kind, but too high between the eyes by probably just as much as his eyes were too near to one another. For the rest, he was large and tall in frame, had thin lips, where his thick moustache showed them at all, and a quantity of dry hair, of no definable colour, in its shaggy state, but shot with red. The hand with which he held the grating (seamed all over the back with ugly scratches newly healed), was unusually small and plump; would have been unusually white but for the prison grime. The other man was lying on the stone floor, covered with a coarse brown coat.

'Get up, pig!' growled the first. 'Don't sleep when I am hungry.'

'It's all one, master,' said the pig, in a submissive manner, and not without cheerfulness; 'I can wake when I will, I can sleep when I will. It's all the same.'

As he said it, he rose, shook himself, scratched himself, tied his brown coat loosely round his neck by the sleeves (he had previously used it as a coverlet), and sat down upon the pavement yawning, with his back against the wall opposite to the grating.

'Say what the hour is,' grumbled the first man.

'The mid-day bells will ring—in forty minutes.' When he made the little pause, he had looked round the prison-room, as if for certain information.

'You are a clock. How is it that you always know?'

'How can I say? I always know what the hour is, and where I am. I was brought in here at night, and out of a boat, but I know where I am. See here! Marseilles harbour;' on his knees on the pavement, mapping it all out with a swarthy forefinger; 'Toulon (where the galleys are), Spain over there, Algiers over there. Creeping away to the left here, Nice. Round by the

Cornice to Genoa. Genoa Mole and Harbour. Quarantine Ground. City there; terrace gardens blushing with the bella donna. Here, Porto Fino. Stand out for Leghorn. Out again for Civita Vecchia, so away to—hey! there's no room for Naples;' he had got to the wall by this time; 'but it's all one; it's in there!'

He remained on his knees, looking up at his fellow-prisoner with a lively look for a prison. A sunburnt, quick, lithe, little man, though rather thickset. Earrings in his brown ears, white teeth lighting up his grotesque brown face, intensely black hair clustering about his brown throat, a ragged red shirt open at his brown breast. Loose, seaman-like trousers, decent shoes, a long red cap, a red sash round his waist, and a knife in it.

'Judge if I come back from Naples as I went! See here, my master! Civita Vecchia, Leghorn, Porto Fino, Genoa, Cornice, Off Nice (which is in there), Marseilles, you and me. The apartment of the jailer and his keys is where I put this thumb; and here at my wrist they keep the national razor in its case—the guillotine locked up.'

The other man spat suddenly on the pavement, and gurgled in his throat.

Some lock below gurgled in its throat immediately afterwards, and then a door crashed. Slow steps began ascending the stairs; the prattle of a sweet little voice mingled with the noise they made; and the prison-keeper appeared carrying his daughter, three or four years old, and a basket.

'How goes the world this forenoon, gentlemen? My little one, you see, going round with me to have a peep at her father's birds. Fie, then! Look at the birds, my pretty, look at the birds.'

He looked sharply at the birds himself, as he held the child up at the grate, especially at the little bird, whose activity he seemed to mistrust. 'I have brought your bread, Signor John Baptist,' said he (they all spoke in French, but the little man was an Italian); 'and if I might recommend you not to game—'

'You don't recommend the master!' said John Baptist, showing his teeth as he smiled.

'Oh! but the master wins,' returned the jailer, with a passing look of no particular liking at the other man, 'and you lose. It's quite another thing. You get husky bread and sour drink by it; and he gets sausage of Lyons, veal in savoury jelly, white bread, strachino cheese, and good wine by it. Look at the birds, my pretty!'

'Poor birds!' said the child.

The fair little face, touched with divine compassion, as it peeped shrinkingly through the grate, was like an angel's in the prison. John Baptist rose and moved towards it, as if it had a good attraction for him. The other bird remained as before, except for an impatient glance at the basket.

'Stay!' said the jailer, putting his little daughter on the outer ledge of the grate, 'she shall feed the birds. This big loaf is for Signor John Baptist. We must break it to get it through into the cage. So, there's a tame bird to kiss the little hand! This sausage in a vine leaf is for Monsieur Rigaud. Again—this veal in savoury jelly is for Monsieur Rigaud. Again—these three white little loaves are for Monsieur Rigaud. Again, this cheese—again, this wine—again, this tobacco—all for Monsieur Rigaud. Lucky bird!'

The child put all these things between the bars into the soft, Smooth, well-shaped hand, with evident dread—more than once drawing back her own and looking at the man with her fair brow roughened into an expression half of fright and half of anger. Whereas she had put the lump of coarse bread into the swart, scaled, knotted hands of John Baptist (who had scarcely as much nail on his eight fingers and two thumbs as would have made out one for Monsieur Rigaud), with ready confidence; and, when he kissed her hand, had herself passed it caressingly over his face. Monsieur Rigaud, indifferent to this distinction, propitiated the father by laughing and nodding at the daughter as often as she gave him anything; and, so soon as he had all his viands about him in convenient nooks of the ledge on which he rested, began to eat with an appetite.

When Monsieur Rigaud laughed, a change took place in his face, that was more remarkable than prepossessing. His moustache went up under his nose, and his nose came down over his moustache, in a very sinister and cruel manner.

'There!' said the jailer, turning his basket upside down to beat the crumbs out, 'I have expended all the money I received; here is the note of it, and that's a thing accomplished. Monsieur Rigaud, as I expected yesterday, the President will look for the pleasure of your society at an hour after mid-day, to-day.'

'To try me, eh?' said Rigaud, pausing, knife in hand and morsel in mouth.

'You have said it. To try you.'

'There is no news for me?' asked John Baptist, who had begun, contentedly, to munch his bread.

The jailer shrugged his shoulders.

'Lady of mine! Am I to lie here all my life, my father?'

'What do I know!' cried the jailer, turning upon him with southern quickness, and gesticulating with both his hands and all his fingers, as if he were threatening to tear him to pieces. 'My friend, how is it possible for me to tell how long you are to lie here? What do I know, John Baptist Cavalletto? Death of my life! There are prisoners here sometimes, who are not in such a devil of a hurry to be tried.' He seemed to glance obliquely at Monsieur Rigaud in this remark; but Monsieur Rigaud had already resumed his meal, though not with quite so quick an appetite as before.

'Adieu, my birds!' said the keeper of the prison, taking his pretty child in his arms, and dictating the words with a kiss.

'Adieu, my birds!' the pretty child repeated.

Her innocent face looked back so brightly over his shoulder, as he walked away with her, singing her the song of the child's game:

'Who passes by this road so late?
Compagnon de la Majolaine!
Who passes by this road so late?
Always gay!'

that John Baptist felt it a point of honour to reply at the grate, and in good time and tune, though a little hoarsely:

'Of all the king's knights 'tis the flower,
Compagnon de la Majolaine!
Of all the king's knights 'tis the flower,
Always gay!'

which accompanied them so far down the few steep stairs, that the prison-keeper had to stop at last for his little daughter to hear the song out, and repeat the Refrain while they were yet in sight. Then the child's head disappeared, and the prison-keeper's head disappeared, but the little voice prolonged the strain until the door clashed.

Monsieur Rigaud, finding the listening John Baptist in his way before the echoes had ceased (even the echoes were the weaker for imprisonment, and seemed to lag), reminded him with a push of his foot that he had better resume his own darker place. The little man sat down again upon the pavement with the negligent ease of one who was thoroughly accustomed to pavements; and placing three hunks of coarse bread before himself, and falling to upon a fourth, began contentedly to work his way through them as if to clear them off were a sort of game.

Perhaps he glanced at the Lyons sausage, and perhaps he glanced at the veal in savoury jelly, but they were not there long, to make his mouth water; Monsieur Rigaud soon dispatched them, in spite of the president and tribunal, and proceeded to suck his fingers as clean as he could, and to wipe them on his vine leaves. Then, as he paused in his drink to contemplate his fellow-prisoner, his moustache went up, and his nose came down.

'How do you find the bread?'

'A little dry, but I have my old sauce here,' returned John Baptist, holding up his knife. 'How sauce?'

'I can cut my bread so—like a melon. Or so—like an omelette. Or so—like a fried fish. Or so—like Lyons sausage,' said John Baptist, demonstrating the various cuts on the bread he held, and soberly chewing what he had in his mouth.

'Here!' cried Monsieur Rigaud. 'You may drink. You may finish this.'

It was no great gift, for there was mighty little wine left; but Signor Cavalletto, jumping to his feet, received the bottle gratefully, turned it upside down at his mouth, and smacked his lips.

'Put the bottle by with the rest,' said Rigaud.

The little man obeyed his orders, and stood ready to give him a lighted match; for he was now rolling his tobacco into cigarettes by the aid of little squares of paper which had been brought in with it.

'Here! You may have one.'

'A thousand thanks, my master!' John Baptist said in his own language, and with the quick conciliatory manner of his own countrymen.

Monsieur Rigaud arose, lighted a cigarette, put the rest of his stock into a breast-pocket, and stretched himself out at full length upon the bench. Cavalletto sat down on the pavement, holding one of his ankles in each hand, and smoking peacefully. There seemed to be some uncomfortable attraction of Monsieur Rigaud's eyes to the immediate neighbourhood of that part of the pavement where the thumb had been in the plan. They were so drawn in that direction, that the Italian more than once followed them to and back from the pavement in some surprise.

'What an infernal hole this is!' said Monsieur Rigaud, breaking a long pause. 'Look at the light of day. Day? the light of yesterday week, the light of six months ago, the light of six years ago. So slack and dead!'

It came languishing down a square funnel that blinded a window in the staircase wall, through which the sky was never seen—nor anything else.

'Cavalletto,' said Monsieur Rigaud, suddenly withdrawing his gaze from this funnel to which they had both involuntarily turned their eyes, 'you know me for a gentleman?'

'Surely, surely!'

'How long have we been here?' 'I, eleven weeks, to-morrow night at midnight. You, nine weeks and three days, at five this afternoon.'

'Have I ever done anything here? Ever touched the broom, or spread the mats, or rolled them up, or found the draughts, or collected the dominoes, or put my hand to any kind of work?'

'Never!'

'Have you ever thought of looking to me to do any kind of work?'

John Baptist answered with that peculiar back-handed shake of the right forefinger which is the most expressive negative in the Italian language.

'No! You knew from the first moment when you saw me here, that I was a gentleman?'

'ALTRO!' returned John Baptist, closing his eyes and giving his head a most vehement toss. The word being, according to its Genoese emphasis, a confirmation, a contradiction, an assertion, a denial, a taunt, a compliment, a joke, and fifty other things, became in the present instance, with a significance beyond all power of written expression, our familiar English 'I believe you!'

'Haha! You are right! A gentleman I am! And a gentleman I'll live, and a gentleman I'll die! It's my intent to be a gentleman. It's my game. Death of my soul, I play it out wherever I go!'

He changed his posture to a sitting one, crying with a triumphant air:

'Here I am! See me! Shaken out of destiny's dice-box into the company of a mere smuggler;—shut up with a poor little contraband trader, whose papers are wrong, and whom the police lay hold of besides, for placing his boat (as a means of getting beyond the frontier) at the disposition of other little people whose papers are wrong; and he instinctively recognises my position, even by this light and in this place. It's well done! By Heaven! I win, however the game goes.'

Again his moustache went up, and his nose came down.

'What's the hour now?' he asked, with a dry hot pallor upon him, rather difficult of association with merriment.

'A little half-hour after mid-day.'

'Good! The President will have a gentleman before him soon. Come!

Shall I tell you on what accusation? It must be now, or never, for I shall not return here. Either I shall go free, or I shall go to be made ready for shaving. You know where they keep the razor.'

Signor Cavalletto took his cigarette from between his parted lips, and showed more momentary discomfiture than might have been expected.

'I am a'—Monsieur Rigaud stood up to say it—'I am a cosmopolitan gentleman. I own no particular country. My father was Swiss—Canton de Vaud. My mother was French by blood, English by birth. I myself was born in Belgium. I am a citizen of the world.'

His theatrical air, as he stood with one arm on his hip within the folds of his cloak, together with his manner of disregarding his companion and addressing the opposite wall instead, seemed to intimate that he was rehearsing for the President, whose examination he was shortly to undergo, rather than troubling himself merely to enlighten so small a person as John Baptist Cavalletto.

'Call me five-and-thirty years of age. I have seen the world. I have lived here, and lived there, and lived like a gentleman everywhere. I have been treated and respected as a gentleman universally. If you try to prejudice me by making out that I have lived by my wits—how do your lawyers live—your politicians—your intriguers—your men of the Exchange?'

He kept his small smooth hand in constant requisition, as if it were a witness to his gentility that had often done him good service before.

'Two years ago I came to Marseilles. I admit that I was poor; I had been ill. When your lawyers, your politicians, your intriguers, your men of the Exchange fall ill, and have not scraped money together, they become poor. I put up at the Cross of Gold,—kept then by Monsieur Henri Barronneau—sixty-five at least, and in a failing state of health. I had lived in the house some four months when Monsieur Henri Barronneau had the misfortune to die;—at any rate, not a rare misfortune, that. It happens without any aid of mine, pretty often.'

John Baptist having smoked his cigarette down to his fingers' ends, Monsieur Rigaud had the magnanimity to throw him another. He lighted the second at the ashes of the first, and smoked on, looking sideways at his companion, who, preoccupied with his own case, hardly looked at him.

'Monsieur Barronneau left a widow. She was two-and-twenty. She had gained a reputation for beauty, and (which is often another thing) was beautiful. I continued to live at the Cross of Gold. I married Madame Barronneau. It is not for me to say whether there was any great disparity in such a match. Here I stand, with the contamination of a jail upon me; but it is possible that you may think me better suited to her than her former husband was.'

He had a certain air of being a handsome man—which he was not; and a certain air of being a well-bred man—which he was not. It was mere swagger and challenge; but in this particular, as in many others, blustering assertion goes for proof, half over the world.

'Be it as it may, Madame Barronneau approved of me. That is not to prejudice me, I hope?'

His eye happening to light upon John Baptist with this inquiry, that little man briskly shook his head in the negative, and repeated in an argumentative tone under his breath, altro, altro, altro, altro—an infinite number of times.

'Now came the difficulties of our position. I am proud. I say nothing in defence of pride, but I am proud. It is also my character to govern. I can't submit; I must govern. Unfortunately, the property of Madame Rigaud was settled upon herself. Such was the insane act of her late husband. More unfortunately still, she had relations. When a wife's relations interpose against a husband who is a gentleman, who is proud, and who must govern, the consequences are inimical to peace. There was yet another source of difference between us. Madame Rigaud was unfortunately a little vulgar. I sought to improve her manners and ameliorate her general tone; she (supported in this likewise by her relations) resented my endeavours. Quarrels began to arise between us; and, propagated and exaggerated by the slanders of the relations of Madame Rigaud, to become notorious to the neighbours. It has been said that I treated Madame Rigaud with cruelty. I may have been seen to slap her face—nothing more. I have a light hand; and if I have been seen apparently to correct Madame Rigaud in that manner, I have done it almost playfully.'

If the playfulness of Monsieur Rigaud were at all expressed by his smile at this point, the relations of Madame Rigaud might have said that they would have much preferred his correcting that unfortunate woman seriously.

'I am sensitive and brave. I do not advance it as a merit to be sensitive and brave, but it is my character. If the male relations of Madame Rigaud had put themselves forward openly, I should have known how to deal with them. They knew that, and their machinations were conducted in secret; consequently, Madame Rigaud and I were brought into frequent and unfortunate collision. Even when I wanted any little sum of money for my personal expenses, I could not obtain it without collision—and I, too, a man whose character it is to govern! One night, Madame Rigaud and myself were walking amicably—I may say like lovers—on a height overhanging the sea. An evil star occasioned Madame Rigaud to advert to her relations; I reasoned with her on that subject, and remonstrated on the want of duty and devotion manifested in her allowing herself to be influenced by their jealous animosity towards her husband. Madame Rigaud retorted; I retorted; Madame Rigaud grew warm; I grew warm, and provoked her. I admit it. Frankness is a part of my character. At length, Madame Rigaud, in an access of fury that I must ever deplore, threw herself upon me with screams of passion (no doubt those that were overheard at some distance), tore my clothes, tore my hair, lacerated my hands, trampled and trod the dust, and finally leaped over, dashing herself to death upon the rocks below. Such is the train of incidents which malice has perverted into my endeavouring to force from Madame Rigaud a relinquishment of her rights; and, on her persistence in a refusal to make the concession I required, struggling with her—assassinating her!'

He stepped aside to the ledge where the vine leaves yet lay strewn about, collected two or three, and stood wiping his hands upon them, with his back to the light.

'Well,' he demanded after a silence, 'have you nothing to say to all that?'

'It's ugly,' returned the little man, who had risen, and was brightening his knife upon his shoe, as he leaned an arm against the wall.

'What do you mean?' John Baptist polished his knife in silence.

'Do you mean that I have not represented the case correctly?'

'Al-tro!' returned John Baptist. The word was an apology now, and stood for 'Oh, by no means!'

'What then?'

'Presidents and tribunals are so prejudiced.'

'Well,' cried the other, uneasily flinging the end of his cloak over his shoulder with an oath, 'let them do their worst!'

'Truly I think they will,' murmured John Baptist to himself, as he bent his head to put his knife in his sash.

Nothing more was said on either side, though they both began walking to and fro, and necessarily crossed at every turn. Monsieur Rigaud sometimes stopped, as if he were going to put his case in a new light, or make some irate remonstrance; but Signor Cavalletto continuing to go slowly to and fro at a grotesque kind of jog-trot pace with his eyes turned downward, nothing came of these inclinings.

By-and-by the noise of the key in the lock arrested them both. The sound of voices succeeded, and the tread of feet. The door clashed, the voices and the feet came on, and the prison-keeper slowly ascended the stairs, followed by a guard of soldiers.

'Now, Monsieur Rigaud,' said he, pausing for a moment at the grate, with his keys in his hands, 'have the goodness to come out.'

'I am to depart in state, I see?' 'Why, unless you did,' returned the jailer, 'you might depart in so many pieces that it would be difficult to get you together again. There's a crowd, Monsieur Rigaud, and it doesn't love you.'

He passed on out of sight, and unlocked and unbarred a low door in the corner of the chamber. 'Now,' said he, as he opened it and appeared within, 'come out.'

There is no sort of whiteness in all the hues under the sun at all like the whiteness of Monsieur Rigaud's face as it was then. Neither is there any expression of the human countenance at all like that expression in every little line of which the frightened heart is seen to beat. Both are conventionally compared with death; but the difference is the whole deep gulf between the struggle done, and the fight at its most desperate extremity.

He lighted another of his paper cigars at his companion's; put it tightly between his teeth; covered his head with a soft slouched hat; threw the end of his cloak over his shoulder again; and walked out into the side gallery on which the door opened, without taking any further notice of Signor Cavalletto. As to that little man himself, his whole attention had become absorbed in getting near the door and looking out at it. Precisely as a beast might approach the opened gate of his den and eye the freedom beyond, he passed those few moments in watching and peering, until the door was closed upon him.

There was an officer in command of the soldiers; a stout, serviceable, profoundly calm man, with his drawn sword in his hand, smoking a cigar. He very briefly directed the placing of Monsieur Rigaud in the midst of the party, put himself with consummate indifference at their head, gave the word 'march!' and so they all went jingling down the staircase. The door clashed—the key turned—and a ray of unusual light, and a breath of unusual air, seemed to have passed through the jail, vanishing in a tiny wreath of smoke from the cigar.

Still, in his captivity, like a lower animal—like some impatient ape, or roused bear of the smaller species—the prisoner, now left solitary, had jumped upon the ledge, to lose no glimpse of this departure. As he yet stood clasping the grate with both hands, an uproar broke upon his hearing; yells, shrieks, oaths, threats, execrations, all comprehended in it, though (as in a storm) nothing but a raging swell of sound distinctly heard.

Excited into a still greater resemblance to a caged wild animal by his anxiety to know more, the prisoner leaped nimbly down, ran round the chamber, leaped nimbly up again, clasped the grate and tried to shake it, leaped down and ran, leaped up and listened, and never rested until the noise, becoming more and more distant, had died away. How many better prisoners have worn their noble hearts out so; no man thinking of it; not even the beloved of their souls realising it; great kings and governors, who had made them captive, careering in the sunlight jauntily, and men cheering them on. Even the said great personages dying in bed, making exemplary ends and sounding speeches; and polite history, more servile than their instruments, embalming them!

At last, John Baptist, now able to choose his own spot within the compass of those walls for the exercise of his faculty of going to sleep when he would, lay down upon the bench, with his face turned over on his crossed arms, and slumbered. In his submission, in his lightness, in his good humour, in his short-lived passion, in his easy contentment with hard bread and hard stones, in his ready sleep, in his fits and starts, altogether a true son of the land that gave him birth.

The wide stare stared itself out for one while; the Sun went down in a red, green, golden glory; the stars came out in the heavens, and the fire-flies mimicked them in the lower air, as men may feebly imitate the goodness of a better order of beings; the long dusty roads and the interminable plains were in repose—and so deep a hush was on the sea, that it scarcely whispered of the time when it shall give up its dead.

CHAPTER 2 Fellow Travellers

'No more of yesterday's howling over yonder to-day, Sir; is there?'

'I have heard none.'

'Then you may be sure there is none. When these people howl, they howl to be heard.'

'Most people do, I suppose.'

'Ah! but these people are always howling. Never happy otherwise.'

'Do you mean the Marseilles people?'

'I mean the French people. They're always at it. As to Marseilles, we know what Marseilles is. It sent the most insurrectionary tune into the world that was ever composed. It couldn't exist without allonging and marshonging to something or other—victory or death, or blazes, or something.'

The speaker, with a whimsical good humour upon him all the time, looked over the parapet-wall with the greatest disparagement of Marseilles; and taking up a determined position by putting his hands in his pockets and rattling his money at it, apostrophised it with a short laugh.

'Allong and marshong, indeed. It would be more creditable to you, I think, to let other people allong and marshong about their lawful business, instead of shutting 'em up in quarantine!'

'Tiresome enough,' said the other. 'But we shall be out to-day.'

'Out to-day!' repeated the first. 'It's almost an aggravation of the enormity, that we shall be out to-day. Out! What have we ever been in for?'

'For no very strong reason, I must say. But as we come from the East, and as the East is the country of the plague—'

'The plague!' repeated the other. 'That's my grievance. I have had the plague continually, ever since I have been here. I am like a sane man shut up in a madhouse; I can't stand the suspicion of the thing. I came here as well as ever I was in my life; but to suspect me of the plague is to give me the plague. And I have had it—and I have got it.'

'You bear it very well, Mr Meagles,' said the second speaker, smiling.

'No. If you knew the real state of the case, that's the last observation you would think of making. I have been waking up night after night, and saying, NOW I have got it, NOW it has developed itself, NOW I am in for it, NOW these fellows are making out their case for their precautions. Why, I'd as soon have a spit put through me, and be stuck upon a card in a collection of beetles, as lead the life I have been leading here.'

'Well, Mr Meagles, say no more about it now it's over,' urged a cheerful feminine voice.

'Over!' repeated Mr Meagles, who appeared (though without any ill-nature) to be in that peculiar state of mind in which the last word spoken by anybody else is a new injury. 'Over! and why should I say no more about it because it's over?'

It was Mrs Meagles who had spoken to Mr Meagles; and Mrs Meagles was, like Mr Meagles, comely and healthy, with a pleasant English face which had been looking at homely things for five-and-fifty years or more, and shone with a bright reflection of them.

'There! Never mind, Father, never mind!' said Mrs Meagles. 'For goodness sake content yourself with Pet.'

'With Pet?' repeated Mr Meagles in his injured vein. Pet, however, being close behind him, touched him on the shoulder, and Mr Meagles immediately forgave Marseilles from the bottom of his heart.

Pet was about twenty. A fair girl with rich brown hair hanging free in natural ringlets. A lovely girl, with a frank face, and wonderful eyes; so large, so soft, so bright, set to such perfection in her kind good head. She was round and fresh and dimpled and spoilt, and there was in Pet an air of timidity and dependence which was the best weakness in the world, and gave her the only crowning charm a girl so pretty and pleasant could have been without.

'Now, I ask you,' said Mr Meagles in the blandest confidence, falling back a step himself, and handing his daughter a step forward to illustrate his question: 'I ask you simply, as between man and man, you know, DID you ever hear of such damned nonsense as putting Pet in quarantine?'

'It has had the result of making even quarantine enjoyable.' 'Come!' said Mr Meagles, 'that's something to be sure. I am obliged to you for that remark. Now, Pet, my darling, you had better go along with Mother and get ready for the boat. The officer of health, and a variety of humbugs in cocked hats, are coming off to let us out of this at last: and all we jail-birds are to breakfast together in something approaching to a Christian style again, before we take wing for our different destinations. Tattycoram, stick you close to your young mistress.'

He spoke to a handsome girl with lustrous dark hair and eyes, and very neatly dressed, who replied with a half curtsey as she passed off in the train of Mrs Meagles and Pet. They crossed the bare scorched terrace all three together, and disappeared through a staring white archway. Mr Meagles's companion, a grave dark man of forty, still stood looking towards this archway after they were gone; until Mr Meagles tapped him on the arm.

'I beg your pardon,' said he, starting.

'Not at all,' said Mr Meagles.

They took one silent turn backward and forward in the shade of the wall, getting, at the height on which the quarantine barracks are placed, what cool refreshment of sea breeze there was at seven in the morning. Mr Meagles's companion resumed the conversation.

'May I ask you,' he said, 'what is the name of—'

'Tattycoram?' Mr Meagles struck in. 'I have not the least idea.'

'I thought,' said the other, 'that—'

'Tattycoram?' suggested Mr Meagles again.

'Thank you—that Tattycoram was a name; and I have several times wondered at the oddity of it.'

'Why, the fact is,' said Mr Meagles, 'Mrs Meagles and myself are, you see, practical people.'

'That you have frequently mentioned in the course of the agreeable and interesting conversations we have had together, walking up and down on these stones,' said the other, with a half smile breaking through the gravity of his dark face.

'Practical people. So one day, five or six years ago now, when we took Pet to church at the Foundling—you have heard of the Foundling Hospital in London? Similar to the Institution for the Found Children in Paris?'

'I have seen it.'

'Well! One day when we took Pet to church there to hear the music—because, as practical people, it is the business of our lives to show her everything that we think can please her—Mother (my usual name for Mrs Meagles) began to cry so, that it was necessary to take her out. "What's the matter, Mother?" said I, when we had brought her a little round: "you are frightening Pet, my dear." "Yes, I know that, Father," says Mother, "but I think it's through my loving her so much, that it ever came into my head." "That ever what came into your head, Mother?" "O dear, dear!" cried Mother, breaking out again, "when I saw all those children ranged tier above tier, and appealing from the father none of them has ever known on earth, to the great Father of us all in Heaven, I thought, does any wretched mother ever come here, and look among those young faces, wondering which is the poor child she brought into this forlorn world, never through all its life to know her love, her kiss, her face, her voice, even her name!" Now that was practical in Mother, and I told her so. I said, "Mother, that's what I call practical in you, my dear."'

The other, not unmoved, assented.

'So I said next day: Now, Mother, I have a proposition to make that I think you'll approve of. Let us take one of those same little children to be a little maid to Pet. We are practical people. So if we should find her temper a little defective, or any of her ways a little wide of ours, we shall know what we have to take into account. We shall know what an immense deduction must be made from all the influences and experiences that have formed us—no parents, no child-brother or sister, no individuality of home, no Glass Slipper, or Fairy Godmother. And that's the way we came by Tattycoram.'

'And the name itself—'

'By George!' said Mr Meagles, 'I was forgetting the name itself. Why, she was called in the Institution, Harriet Beadle—an arbitrary name, of course. Now, Harriet we changed into Hattey, and then into Tatty, because, as practical people, we thought even a playful name might be a new thing to her, and might have a softening and affectionate kind of effect, don't you see? As to Beadle, that I needn't say was wholly out of the question. If there is anything that is not to be tolerated on any terms, anything that is a type of Jack-in-office insolence and absurdity, anything that represents in coats, waistcoats, and big sticks our English holding on by nonsense after every one has found it out, it is a beadle. You haven't seen a beadle lately?'

'As an Englishman who has been more than twenty years in China, no.'

'Then,' said Mr Meagles, laying his forefinger on his companion's breast with great animation, 'don't you see a beadle, now, if you can help it. Whenever I see a beadle in full fig, coming down a street on a Sunday at the head of a charity school, I am obliged to turn and run away, or I should hit him. The name of Beadle being out of the question, and the originator of the Institution for these poor foundlings having been a blessed creature of the name of Coram, we gave that name to Pet's little maid. At one time she was Tatty, and at one time she was Coram, until we got into a way of mixing the two names together, and now she is always Tattycoram.'

'Your daughter,' said the other, when they had taken another silent turn to and fro, and, after standing for a moment at the wall glancing down at the sea, had resumed their walk, 'is your only child, I know, Mr Meagles. May I ask you—in no impertinent curiosity, but because I have had so much pleasure in your society, may never in this labyrinth of a world exchange a quiet word with you again, and wish to preserve an accurate remembrance of you and yours—may I ask you, if I have not gathered from your good wife that you have had other children?'

'No. No,' said Mr Meagles. 'Not exactly other children. One other child.'

'I am afraid I have inadvertently touched upon a tender theme.'

'Never mind,' said Mr Meagles. 'If I am grave about it, I am not at all sorrowful. It quiets me for a moment, but does not make me unhappy. Pet had a twin sister who died when we could just see her eyes—exactly like Pet's—above the table, as she stood on tiptoe holding by it.'

'Ah! indeed, indeed!'

'Yes, and being practical people, a result has gradually sprung up in the minds of Mrs Meagles and myself which perhaps you may—or perhaps you may not—understand. Pet and her baby sister were so exactly alike, and so completely one, that in our thoughts we have never been able to separate them since. It would be of no use to tell us that our dead child was a mere infant. We have changed that child according to the changes in the child spared to us and always with us. As Pet has grown, that child has grown; as Pet has become more sensible and womanly, her sister has become more sensible and womanly by just the same degrees. It would be as hard to convince me that if I was to pass into the other world to-morrow, I should not, through the mercy of God, be received there by a daughter, just like Pet, as to persuade me that Pet herself is not a reality at my side.' 'I understand you,' said the other, gently.

'As to her,' pursued her father, 'the sudden loss of her little picture and playfellow, and her early association with that mystery in which we all have our equal share, but which is not often so forcibly presented to a child, has necessarily had some influence on her character. Then, her mother and I were not young when we married, and Pet has always had a sort of grown-up life with us, though we have tried to adapt ourselves to her. We have been advised more than once when she has been a little ailing, to change climate and air for her as often as we could—especially at about this time of her life—and to keep her amused. So, as I have no need to stick at a bank-desk now (though I have been poor enough in my time I assure you, or I should have married Mrs Meagles long before), we go trotting about the world. This is how you found us staring at the Nile, and the Pyramids, and the Sphinxes, and the Desert, and all the rest of it; and this is how Tattycoram will be a greater traveller in course of time than Captain Cook.'

'I thank you,' said the other, 'very heartily for your confidence.'

'Don't mention it,' returned Mr Meagles, 'I am sure you are quite welcome. And now, Mr Clennam, perhaps I may ask you whether you have yet come to a decision where to go next?'

'Indeed, no. I am such a waif and stray everywhere, that I am liable to be drifted where any current may set.'

'It's extraordinary to me—if you'll excuse my freedom in saying so—that you don't go straight to London,' said Mr Meagles, in the tone of a confidential adviser.

'Perhaps I shall.'

'Ay! But I mean with a will.'

'I have no will. That is to say,'—he coloured a little,—'next to none that I can put in action now. Trained by main force; broken, not bent; heavily ironed with an object on which I was never consulted and which was never mine; shipped away to the other end of the world before I was of age, and exiled there until my father's death there, a year ago; always grinding in a mill I always hated; what is to be expected from me in middle life? Will, purpose, hope? All those lights were extinguished before I could sound the words.'

'Light 'em up again!' said Mr Meagles.

'Ah! Easily said. I am the son, Mr Meagles, of a hard father and mother. I am the only child of parents who weighed, measured, and priced everything; for whom what could not be weighed, measured, and priced, had no existence. Strict people as the phrase is, professors of a stern religion, their very religion was a gloomy sacrifice of tastes and sympathies that were never their own, offered up as a part of a bargain for the security of their possessions. Austere faces, inexorable discipline, penance in this world and terror in the next—nothing graceful or gentle anywhere, and the void in my cowed heart everywhere—this was my childhood, if I may so misuse the word as to apply it to such a beginning of life.'

'Really though?' said Mr Meagles, made very uncomfortable by the picture offered to his imagination. 'That was a tough commencement. But come! You must now study, and profit by, all that lies beyond it, like a practical man.'

'If the people who are usually called practical, were practical in your direction—'

'Why, so they are!' said Mr Meagles.

'Are they indeed?'

'Well, I suppose so,' returned Mr Meagles, thinking about it. 'Eh?

One can but be practical, and Mrs Meagles and myself are nothing else.'

'My unknown course is easier and more helpful than I had expected to find it, then,' said Clennam, shaking his head with his grave smile. 'Enough of me. Here is the boat.'

The boat was filled with the cocked hats to which Mr Meagles entertained a national objection; and the wearers of those cocked hats landed and came up the steps, and all the impounded travellers congregated together. There was then a mighty production of papers on the part of the cocked hats, and a calling over of names, and great work of signing, sealing, stamping, inking, and sanding, with exceedingly blurred, gritty, and undecipherable results. Finally, everything was done according to rule, and the travellers were at liberty to depart whithersoever they would.

They made little account of stare and glare, in the new pleasure of recovering their freedom, but flitted across the harbour in gay boats, and reassembled at a great hotel, whence the sun was excluded by closed lattices, and where bare paved floors, lofty ceilings, and resounding corridors tempered the intense heat. There, a great table in a great room was soon profusely covered with a superb repast; and the quarantine quarters became bare indeed, remembered among dainty dishes, southern fruits, cooled wines, flowers from Genoa, snow from the mountain tops, and all the colours of the rainbow flashing in the mirrors.

'But I bear those monotonous walls no ill-will now,' said Mr Meagles. 'One always begins to forgive a place as soon as it's left behind; I dare say a prisoner begins to relent towards his prison, after he is let out.'

They were about thirty in company, and all talking; but necessarily in groups. Father and Mother Meagles sat with their daughter between them, the last three on one side of the table: on the opposite side sat Mr Clennam; a tall French gentleman with raven hair and beard, of a swart and terrible, not to say genteelly diabolical aspect, but who had shown himself the mildest of men; and a handsome young Englishwoman, travelling quite alone, who had a proud observant face, and had either withdrawn herself from the rest or been avoided by the rest—nobody, herself excepted perhaps, could have quite decided which. The rest of the party were of the usual materials: travellers on business, and travellers for pleasure; officers from India on leave; merchants in the Greek and Turkey trades; a clerical English husband in a meek strait-waistcoat, on a wedding trip with his young wife; a majestic English mama and papa, of the patrician order, with a family of three growing-up daughters, who were keeping a journal for the confusion of their fellow-creatures; and a deaf old English mother, tough in travel, with a very decidedly grown-up daughter indeed, which daughter went sketching about the universe in the expectation of ultimately toning herself off into the married state.

The reserved Englishwoman took up Mr Meagles in his last remark. 'Do you mean that a prisoner forgives his prison?' said she, slowly and with emphasis.

'That was my speculation, Miss Wade. I don't pretend to know positively how a prisoner might feel. I never was one before.'

'Mademoiselle doubts,' said the French gentleman in his own language, 'it's being so easy to forgive?'

'I do.'

Pet had to translate this passage to Mr Meagles, who never by any accident acquired any knowledge whatever of the language of any country into which he travelled. 'Oh!' said he. 'Dear me! But that's a pity, isn't it?'

'That I am not credulous?' said Miss Wade.

'Not exactly that. Put it another way. That you can't believe it easy to forgive.'

'My experience,' she quietly returned, 'has been correcting my belief in many respects, for some years. It is our natural progress, I have heard.'

'Well, well! But it's not natural to bear malice, I hope?' said Mr Meagles, cheerily.

'If I had been shut up in any place to pine and suffer, I should always hate that place and wish to burn it down, or raze it to the ground. I know no more.' 'Strong, sir?' said Mr Meagles to the Frenchman; it being another of his habits to address individuals of all nations in idiomatic English, with a perfect conviction that they were bound to understand it somehow. 'Rather forcible in our fair friend, you'll agree with me, I think?'

The French gentleman courteously replied, 'Plait-il?' To which Mr Meagles returned with much satisfaction, 'You are right. My opinion.'

The breakfast beginning by-and-by to languish, Mr Meagles made the company a speech. It was short enough and sensible enough, considering that it was a speech at all, and hearty. It merely went to the effect that as they had all been thrown together by chance, and had all preserved a good understanding together, and were now about to disperse, and were not likely ever to find themselves all together again, what could they do better than bid farewell to one another, and give one another good-speed in a simultaneous glass of cool champagne all round the table? It was done, and with a general shaking of hands the assembly broke up for ever.

The solitary young lady all this time had said no more. She rose with the rest, and silently withdrew to a remote corner of the great room, where she sat herself on a couch in a window, seeming to watch the reflection of the water as it made a silver quivering on the bars of the lattice. She sat, turned away from the whole length of the apartment, as if she were lonely of her own haughty choice. And yet it would have been as difficult as ever to say, positively, whether she avoided the rest, or was avoided.

The shadow in which she sat, falling like a gloomy veil across her forehead, accorded very well with the character of her beauty. One could hardly see the face, so still and scornful, set off by the arched dark eyebrows, and the folds of dark hair, without wondering what its expression would be if a change came over it. That it could soften or relent, appeared next to impossible. That it could deepen into anger or any extreme of defiance, and that it must change in that direction when it changed at all, would have been its peculiar impression upon most observers. It was dressed and trimmed into no ceremony of expression. Although not an open face, there was no pretence in it. 'I am self-contained and self-reliant; your opinion is nothing to me; I have no interest in you, care nothing for you, and see and hear you with indifference'—this it said plainly. It said so in the proud eyes, in the lifted nostril, in the handsome but compressed and even cruel mouth. Cover either two of those channels of expression, and the third would have said so still. Mask them all, and the mere turn of the head would have shown an unsubduable nature.

Pet had moved up to her (she had been the subject of remark among her family and Mr Clennam, who were now the only other occupants of the room), and was standing at her side.

'Are you'—she turned her eyes, and Pet faltered—'expecting any one to meet you here, Miss Wade?'

'I? No.'

'Father is sending to the Poste Restante. Shall he have the pleasure of directing the messenger to ask if there are any letters for you?'

'I thank him, but I know there can be none.'

'We are afraid,' said Pet, sitting down beside her, shyly and half tenderly, 'that you will feel quite deserted when we are all gone.'

'Indeed!'

'Not,' said Pet, apologetically and embarrassed by her eyes, 'not, of course, that we are any company to you, or that we have been able to be so, or that we thought you wished it.'

'I have not intended to make it understood that I did wish it.'

'No. Of course. But—in short,' said Pet, timidly touching her hand as it lay impassive on the sofa between them, 'will you not allow Father to tender you any slight assistance or service? He will be very glad.'

'Very glad,' said Mr Meagles, coming forward with his wife and Clennam. 'Anything short of speaking the language, I shall be delighted to undertake, I am sure.'

'I am obliged to you,' she returned, 'but my arrangements are made, and I prefer to go my own way in my own manner.'

'Do you?' said Mr Meagles to himself, as he surveyed her with a puzzled look. 'Well! There's character in that, too.'

'I am not much used to the society of young ladies, and I am afraid I may not show my appreciation of it as others might. A pleasant journey to you. Good-bye!'

She would not have put out her hand, it seemed, but that Mr Meagles put out his so straight before her that she could not pass it. She put hers in it, and it lay there just as it had lain upon the couch.

'Good-bye!' said Mr Meagles. 'This is the last good-bye upon the list, for Mother and I have just said it to Mr Clennam here, and he only waits to say it to Pet. Good-bye! We may never meet again.'

'In our course through life we shall meet the people who are coming to meet us, from many strange places and by many strange roads,' was the composed reply; 'and what it is set to us to do to them, and what it is set to them to do to us, will all be done.' There was something in the manner of these words that jarred upon Pet's ear. It implied that what was to be done was necessarily evil, and it caused her to say in a whisper, 'O Father!' and to shrink childishly, in her spoilt way, a little closer to him. This was not lost on the speaker.

'Your pretty daughter,' she said, 'starts to think of such things. Yet,' looking full upon her, 'you may be sure that there are men and women already on their road, who have their business to do with YOU, and who will do it. Of a certainty they will do it. They may be coming hundreds, thousands, of miles over the sea there; they may be close at hand now; they may be coming, for anything you know or anything you can do to prevent it, from the vilest sweepings of this very town.'

With the coldest of farewells, and with a certain worn expression on her beauty that gave it, though scarcely yet in its prime, a wasted look, she left the room.

Now, there were many stairs and passages that she had to traverse in passing from that part of the spacious house to the chamber she had secured for her own occupation. When she had almost completed the journey, and was passing along the gallery in which her room was, she heard an angry sound of muttering and sobbing. A door stood open, and within she saw the attendant upon the girl she had just left; the maid with the curious name.

She stood still, to look at this maid. A sullen, passionate girl! Her rich black hair was all about her face, her face was flushed and hot, and as she sobbed and raged, she plucked at her lips with an unsparing hand.

'Selfish brutes!' said the girl, sobbing and heaving between whiles. 'Not caring what becomes of me! Leaving me here hungry and thirsty and tired, to starve, for anything they care! Beasts! Devils! Wretches!'

'My poor girl, what is the matter?'

She looked up suddenly, with reddened eyes, and with her hands suspended, in the act of pinching her neck, freshly disfigured with great scarlet blots. 'It's nothing to you what's the matter. It don't signify to any one.'

'O yes it does; I am sorry to see you so.'

'You are not sorry,' said the girl. 'You are glad. You know you are glad. I never was like this but twice over in the quarantine yonder; and both times you found me. I am afraid of you.'

'Afraid of me?'

'Yes. You seem to come like my own anger, my own malice, my own—whatever it is—I don't know what it is. But I am ill-used, I am ill-used, I am ill-used!' Here the sobs and the tears, and the tearing hand, which had all been suspended together since the first surprise, went on together anew.

The visitor stood looking at her with a strange attentive smile. It was wonderful to see the fury of the contest in the girl, and the bodily struggle she made as if she were rent by the Demons of old.

'I am younger than she is by two or three years, and yet it's me that looks after her, as if I was old, and it's she that's always petted and called Baby! I detest the name. I hate her! They make a fool of her, they spoil her. She thinks of nothing but herself, she thinks no more of me than if I was a stock and a stone!' So the girl went on.

'You must have patience.'

'I WON'T have patience!'

'If they take much care of themselves, and little or none of you, you must not mind it.'

I WILL mind it.'

'Hush! Be more prudent. You forget your dependent position.'

'I don't care for that. I'll run away. I'll do some mischief. I won't bear it; I can't bear it; I shall die if I try to bear it!'

The observer stood with her hand upon her own bosom, looking at the girl, as one afflicted with a diseased part might curiously watch the dissection and exposition of an analogous case.

The girl raged and battled with all the force of her youth and fulness of life, until by little and little her passionate exclamations trailed off into broken murmurs as if she were in pain. By corresponding degrees she sank into a chair, then upon her knees, then upon the ground beside the bed, drawing the coverlet with her, half to hide her shamed head and wet hair in it, and half, as it seemed, to embrace it, rather than have nothing to take to her repentant breast.

'Go away from me, go away from me! When my temper comes upon me, I am mad. I know I might keep it off if I only tried hard enough, and sometimes I do try hard enough, and at other times I don't and won't. What have I said! I knew when I said it, it was all lies. They think I am being taken care of somewhere, and have all I want.

They are nothing but good to me. I love them dearly; no people could ever be kinder to a thankless creature than they always are to me. Do, do go away, for I am afraid of you. I am afraid of myself when I feel my temper coming, and I am as much afraid of you. Go away from me, and let me pray and cry myself better!' The day passed on; and again the wide stare stared itself out; and the hot night was on Marseilles; and through it the caravan of the morning, all dispersed, went their appointed ways. And thus ever by day and night, under the sun and under the stars, climbing the dusty hills and toiling along the weary plains, journeying by land and journeying by sea, coming and going so strangely, to meet and to act and react on one another, move all we restless travellers through the pilgrimage of life.

CHAPTER 3. Home

It was a Sunday evening in London, gloomy, close, and stale. Maddening church bells of all degrees of dissonance, sharp and flat, cracked and clear, fast and slow, made the brick-and-mortar echoes hideous. Melancholy streets, in a penitential garb of soot, steeped the souls of the people who were condemned to look at them out of windows, in dire despondency. In every thoroughfare, up almost every alley, and down almost every turning, some doleful bell was throbbing, jerking, tolling, as if the Plague were in the city and the dead-carts were going round. Everything was bolted and barred that could by possibility furnish relief to an overworked people. No pictures, no unfamiliar animals, no rare plants or flowers, no natural or artificial wonders of the ancient world—all TABOO with that enlightened strictness, that the ugly South Sea gods in the British Museum might have supposed themselves at home again. Nothing to see but streets, streets, streets. Nothing to breathe but streets, streets, streets. Nothing to change the brooding mind, or raise it up. Nothing for the spent toiler to do, but to compare the monotony of his seventh day with the monotony of his six days, think what a weary life he led, and make the best of it—or the worst, according to the probabilities.

At such a happy time, so propitious to the interests of religion and morality, Mr Arthur Clennam, newly arrived from Marseilles by way of Dover, and by Dover coach the Blue-eyed Maid, sat in the window of a coffee-house on Ludgate Hill. Ten thousand responsible houses surrounded him, frowning as heavily on the streets they composed, as if they were every one inhabited by the ten young men of the Calender's story, who blackened their faces and bemoaned their miseries every night. Fifty thousand lairs surrounded him where people lived so unwholesomely that fair water put into their crowded rooms on Saturday night, would be corrupt on Sunday morning; albeit my lord, their county member, was amazed that they failed to sleep in company with their butcher's meat. Miles of close wells and pits of houses, where the inhabitants gasped for air, stretched far away towards every point of the compass. Through the heart of the town a deadly sewer ebbed and flowed, in the place of a fine fresh river. What secular want could the million or so of human beings whose daily labour, six days in the week, lay among these Arcadian objects, from the sweet sameness of which they had no escape between the cradle and the grave—what secular want could they possibly have upon their seventh day? Clearly they could want nothing but a stringent policeman.

Mr Arthur Clennam sat in the window of the coffee-house on Ludgate Hill, counting one of the neighbouring bells, making sentences and burdens of songs out of it in spite of himself, and wondering how many sick people it might be the death of in the course of the year. As the hour approached, its changes of measure made it more and more exasperating. At the quarter, it went off into a condition of deadly-lively importunity, urging the populace in a voluble manner to Come to church, Come to church, Come to church! At the ten minutes, it became aware that the congregation would be scanty, and slowly hammered out in low spirits, They WON'T come, they WON'T come, they WON'T come! At the five minutes, it abandoned hope, and shook every house in the neighbourhood for three hundred seconds, with one dismal swing per second, as a groan of despair.

'Thank Heaven!' said Clennam, when the hour struck, and the bell stopped.

But its sound had revived a long train of miserable Sundays, and the procession would not stop with the bell, but continued to march on. 'Heaven forgive me,' said he, 'and those who trained me. How I have hated this day!'

There was the dreary Sunday of his childhood, when he sat with his hands before him, scared out of his senses by a horrible tract which commenced business with the poor child by asking him in its title, why he was going to Perdition?—a piece of curiosity that he really, in a frock and drawers, was not in a condition to satisfy—and which, for the further attraction of his infant mind, had a parenthesis in every other line with some such hiccupping reference as 2 Ep. Thess. c. iii, v. 6 & 7. There was the sleepy Sunday of his boyhood, when, like a military deserter, he was marched to chapel by a picquet of teachers three times a day, morally handcuffed to another boy; and when he would willingly have bartered two meals of indigestible sermon for another ounce or two of inferior mutton at his scanty dinner in the flesh. There was the interminable Sunday of his nonage; when his mother, stern of face and unrelenting of heart, would sit all day behind a Bible—bound, like her own construction of it, in the hardest, barest, and straitest boards, with one dinted ornament on the cover like the drag of a chain, and a wrathful sprinkling of red upon the edges of the leaves—as if it, of all books! were a fortification against sweetness of temper, natural affection, and gentle intercourse. There was the resentful Sunday of a little later, when he sat down glowering and glooming through the tardy length of the day, with a sullen sense of injury in his heart, and no more real knowledge of the beneficent history of the New Testament than if he had been bred among idolaters. There was a legion of Sundays, all days of unserviceable bitterness and mortification, slowly passing before him. 'Beg pardon, sir,' said a brisk waiter, rubbing the table. 'Wish see bed-room?'

'Yes. I have just made up my mind to do it.'

'Chaymaid!' cried the waiter. 'Gelen box num seven wish see room!'

'Stay!' said Clennam, rousing himself. 'I was not thinking of what I said; I answered mechanically. I am not going to sleep here. I am going home.'

'Deed, sir? Chaymaid! Gelen box num seven, not go sleep here, gome.'

He sat in the same place as the day died, looking at the dull houses opposite, and thinking, if the disembodied spirits of former inhabitants were ever conscious of them, how they must pity themselves for their old places of imprisonment. Sometimes a face would appear behind the dingy glass of a window, and would fade away into the gloom as if it had seen enough of life and had vanished out of it. Presently the rain began to fall in slanting lines between him and those houses, and people began to collect under cover of the public passage opposite, and to look out hopelessly at the sky as the rain dropped thicker and faster. Then wet umbrellas began to appear, draggled skirts, and mud. What the mud had been doing with itself, or where it came from, who could say? But it seemed to collect in a moment, as a crowd will, and in five minutes to have splashed all the sons and daughters of Adam. The lamplighter was going his rounds now; and as the fiery jets sprang up under his touch, one might have fancied them astonished at being suffered to introduce any show of brightness into such a dismal scene.

Mr Arthur Clennam took up his hat and buttoned his coat, and walked out. In the country, the rain would have developed a thousand fresh scents, and every drop would have had its bright association with some beautiful form of growth or life. In the city, it developed only foul stale smells, and was a sickly, lukewarm, dirt-stained, wretched addition to the gutters.

He crossed by St Paul's and went down, at a long angle, almost to the water's edge, through some of the crooked and descending streets which lie (and lay more crookedly and closely then) between the river and Cheapside. Passing, now the mouldy hall of some obsolete Worshipful Company, now the illuminated windows of a Congregationless Church that seemed to be waiting for some adventurous Belzoni to dig it out and discover its history; passing silent warehouses and wharves, and here and there a narrow alley leading to the river, where a wretched little bill, FOUND DROWNED, was weeping on the wet wall; he came at last to the house he sought. An old brick house, so dingy as to be all but black, standing by itself within a gateway. Before it, a square court-yard where a shrub or two and a patch of grass were as rank (which is saying much) as the iron railings enclosing them were rusty; behind it, a jumble of roots. It was a double house, with long, narrow, heavily-framed windows. Many years ago, it had had it in its mind to slide down sideways; it had been propped up, however, and was leaning on some half-dozen gigantic crutches: which gymnasium for the neighbouring cats, weather-stained, smoke-blackened, and overgrown with weeds, appeared in these latter days to be no very sure reliance.

'Nothing changed,' said the traveller, stopping to look round. 'Dark and miserable as ever. A light in my mother's window, which seems never to have been extinguished since I came home twice a year from school, and dragged my box over this pavement. Well, well, well!'

He went up to the door, which had a projecting canopy in carved work of festooned jack-towels and children's heads with water on the brain, designed after a once-popular monumental pattern, and knocked. A shuffling step was soon heard on the stone floor of the hall, and the door was opened by an old man, bent and dried, but with keen eyes.

He had a candle in his hand, and he held it up for a moment to assist his keen eyes. 'Ah, Mr Arthur?' he said, without any emotion, 'you are come at last? Step in.'

Mr Arthur stepped in and shut the door.

'Your figure is filled out, and set,' said the old man, turning to look at him with the light raised again, and shaking his head; 'but you don't come up to your father in my opinion. Nor yet your mother.'

'How is my mother?'

'She is as she always is now. Keeps her room when not actually bedridden, and hasn't been out of it fifteen times in as many years, Arthur.' They had walked into a spare, meagre dining-room. The old man had put the candlestick upon the table, and, supporting his right elbow with his left hand, was smoothing his leathern jaws while he looked at the visitor. The visitor offered his hand. The old man took it coldly enough, and seemed to prefer his jaws, to which he returned as soon as he could.

'I doubt if your mother will approve of your coming home on the Sabbath, Arthur,' he said, shaking his head warily.

'You wouldn't have me go away again?'

'Oh! I? I? I am not the master. It's not what *I* would have. I have stood between your father and mother for a number of years. I don't pretend to stand between your mother and you.'

'Will you tell her that I have come home?'

'Yes, Arthur, yes. Oh, to be sure! I'll tell her that you have come home. Please to wait here. You won't find the room changed.'

He took another candle from a cupboard, lighted it, left the first on the table, and went upon his errand. He was a short, bald old man, in a high-shouldered black coat and waistcoat, drab breeches, and long drab gaiters. He might, from his dress, have been either clerk or servant, and in fact had long been both. There was nothing about him in the way of decoration but a watch, which was lowered into the depths of its proper pocket by an old black ribbon, and had a tarnished copper key moored above it, to show where it was sunk. His head was awry, and he had a one-sided, crab-like way with him, as if his foundations had yielded at about the same time as those of the house, and he ought to have been propped up in a similar manner.

'How weak am I,' said Arthur Clennam, when he was gone, 'that I could shed tears at this reception! I, who have never experienced anything else; who have never expected anything else.' He not only could, but did. It was the momentary yielding of a nature that had been disappointed from the dawn of its perceptions, but had not quite given up all its hopeful yearnings yet. He subdued it, took up the candle, and examined the room. The old articles of furniture were in their old places; the Plagues of Egypt, much the dimmer for the fly and smoke plagues of London, were framed and glazed upon the walls. There was the old cellaret with nothing in it, lined with lead, like a sort of coffin in compartments; there was the old dark closet, also with nothing in it, of which he had been many a time the sole contents, in days of punishment, when he had regarded it as the veritable entrance to that bourne to which the tract had found him galloping. There was the large, hard-featured clock on the sideboard, which he used to see bending its figured brows upon him with a savage joy when he was behind-hand with his lessons, and which, when it was wound up once a week with an iron handle, used to sound as if it were growling in ferocious anticipation of the miseries into which it would bring him. But here was the old man come back, saying, 'Arthur, I'll go before and light you.'

Arthur followed him up the staircase, which was panelled off into spaces like so many mourning tablets, into a dim bed-chamber, the floor of which had gradually so sunk and settled, that the fire-place was in a dell. On a black bier-like sofa in this hollow, propped up behind with one great angular black bolster like the block at a state execution in the good old times, sat his mother in a widow's dress.

She and his father had been at variance from his earliest remembrance. To sit speechless himself in the midst of rigid silence, glancing in dread from the one averted face to the other, had been the peacefullest occupation of his childhood. She gave him one glassy kiss, and four stiff fingers muffled in worsted. This embrace concluded, he sat down on the opposite side of her little table. There was a fire in the grate, as there had been night and day for fifteen years. There was a kettle on the hob, as there had been night and day for fifteen years. There was a little mound of damped ashes on the top of the fire, and another little mound swept together under the grate, as there had been night and day for fifteen years. There was a smell of black dye in the airless room, which the fire had been drawing out of the crape and stuff of the widow's dress for fifteen months, and out of the bier-like sofa for fifteen years.

'Mother, this is a change from your old active habits.'

'The world has narrowed to these dimensions, Arthur,' she rep lied, glancing round the room. 'It is well for me that I never set my heart upon its hollow vanities.'

The old influence of her presence and her stern strong voice, so gathered about her son, that he felt conscious of a renewal of the timid chill and reserve of his childhood.

'Do you never leave your room, mother?'

'What with my rheumatic affection, and what with its attendant debility or nervous weakness—names are of no matter now—I have lost the use of my limbs. I never leave my room. I have not been outside this door for—tell him for how long,' she said, speaking over her shoulder.

'A dozen year next Christmas,' returned a cracked voice out of the dimness behind.

'Is that Affery?' said Arthur, looking towards it.

The cracked voice replied that it was Affery: and an old woman came forward into what doubtful light there was, and kissed her hand once; then subsided again into the dimness.

'I am able,' said Mrs Clennam, with a slight motion of her worsted-muffled right hand toward a chair on wheels, standing before a tall writing cabinet close shut up, 'I am able to attend to my business duties, and I am thankful for the privilege. It is a great privilege. But no more of business on this day. It is a bad night, is it not?'

'Yes, mother.'

'Does it snow?'

'Snow, mother? And we only yet in September?'

'All seasons are alike to me,' she returned, with a grim kind of luxuriousness. 'I know nothing of summer and winter, shut up here.

The Lord has been pleased to put me beyond all that.' With her cold grey eyes and her cold grey hair, and her immovable face, as stiff as the folds of her stony head-dress,—her being beyond the reach of the seasons seemed but a fit sequence to her being beyond the reach of all changing emotions.

On her little table lay two or three books, her handkerchief, a pair of steel spectacles newly taken off, and an old-fashioned gold watch in a heavy double case. Upon this last object her son's eyes and her own now rested together.

'I see that you received the packet I sent you on my father's death, safely, mother.'

'You see.'

'I never knew my father to show so much anxiety on any subject, as that his watch should be sent straight to you.'

'I keep it here as a remembrance of your father.'

'It was not until the last, that he expressed the wish; when he could only put his hand upon it, and very indistinctly say to me "your mother." A moment before, I thought him wandering in his mind, as he had been for many hours—I think he had no consciousness of pain in his short illness—when I saw him turn himself in his bed and try to open it.'

'Was your father, then, not wandering in his mind when he tried to open it?'

'No. He was quite sensible at that time.'

Mrs Clennam shook her head; whether in dismissal of the deceased or opposing herself to her son's opinion, was not clearly expressed.

'After my father's death I opened it myself, thinking there might be, for anything I knew, some memorandum there. However, as I need not tell you, mother, there was nothing but the old silk watch-paper worked in beads, which you found (no doubt) in its place between the cases, where I found and left it.'

Mrs Clennam signified assent; then added, 'No more of business on this day,' and then added, 'Affery, it is nine o'clock.'

Upon this, the old woman cleared the little table, went out of the room, and quickly returned with a tray on which was a dish of little rusks and a small precise pat of butter, cool, symmetrical, white, and plump. The old man who had been standing by the door in one attitude during the whole interview, looking at the mother up-stairs as he had looked at the son down-stairs, went out at the same time, and, after a longer absence, returned with another tray on which was the greater part of a bottle of port wine (which, to judge by his panting, he had brought from the cellar), a lemon, a sugar-basin, and a spice box. With these materials and the aid of the kettle, he filled a tumbler with a hot and odorous mixture, measured out and compounded with as much nicety as a physician's prescription. Into this mixture Mrs Clennam dipped certain of the rusks, and ate them; while the old woman buttered certain other of the rusks, which were to be eaten alone. When the invalid had eaten all the rusks and drunk all the mixture, the two trays were removed; and the books and the candle, watch, handkerchief, and spectacles were replaced upon the table. She then put on the spectacles and read certain passages aloud from a book—sternly, fiercely, wrathfully—praying that her enemies (she made them by her tone and manner expressly hers) might be put to the edge of the sword, consumed by fire, smitten by plagues and leprosy, that their bones might be ground to dust, and that they might be utterly exterminated. As she read on, years seemed to fall away from her son like the imaginings of a dream, and all the old dark horrors of his usual preparation for the sleep of an innocent child to overshadow him.

She shut the book and remained for a little time with her face shaded by her hand. So did the old man, otherwise still unchanged in attitude; so, probably, did the old woman in her dimmer part of the room. Then the sick woman was ready for bed.

'Good night, Arthur. Affery will see to your accommodation. Only touch me, for my hand is tender.' He touched the worsted muffling of her hand—that was nothing; if his mother had been sheathed in brass there would have been no new barrier between them—and followed the old man and woman down-stairs.

The latter asked him, when they were alone together among the heavy shadows of the dining-room, would he have some supper?

'No, Affery, no supper.'

'You shall if you like,' said Affery. 'There's her tomorrow's partridge in the larder—her first this year; say the word and I'll cook it.'

No, he had not long dined, and could eat nothing.

'Have something to drink, then,' said Affery; 'you shall have some of her bottle of port, if you like. I'll tell Jeremiah that you ordered me to bring it you.'

No; nor would he have that, either.

'It's no reason, Arthur,' said the old woman, bending over him to whisper, 'that because I am afeared of my life of 'em, you should be. You've got half the property, haven't you?'

'Yes, yes.'

'Well then, don't you be cowed. You're clever, Arthur, an't you?' He nodded, as she seemed to expect an answer in the affirmative. 'Then stand up against them! She's awful clever, and none but a clever one durst say a word to her. HE'S a clever one—oh, he's a clever one!—and he gives it her when he has a mind to't, he does!'

'Your husband does?'

'Does? It makes me shake from head to foot, to hear him give it her. My husband, Jeremiah Flintwinch, can conquer even your mother. What can he be but a clever one to do that!'

His shuffling footstep coming towards them caused her to retreat to the other end of the room. Though a tall, hard-favoured, sinewy old woman, who in her youth might have enlisted in the Foot Guards without much fear of discovery, she collapsed before the little keen-eyed crab-like old man.

'Now, Affery,' said he, 'now, woman, what are you doing? Can't you find Master Arthur something or another to pick at?'

Master Arthur repeated his recent refusal to pick at anything.

'Very well, then,' said the old man; 'make his bed. Stir yourself.' His neck was so twisted that the knotted ends of his white cravat usually dangled under one ear; his natural acerbity and energy, always contending with a second nature of habitual repression, gave his features a swollen and suffused look; and altogether, he had a weird appearance of having hanged himself at one time or other, and of having gone about ever since, halter and all, exactly as some timely hand had cut him down.

'You'll have bitter words together to-morrow, Arthur; you and your mother,' said Jeremiah. 'Your having given up the business on your father's death—which she suspects, though we have left it to you to tell her—won't go off smoothly.'

'I have given up everything in life for the business, and the time came for me to give up that.'

'Good!' cried Jeremiah, evidently meaning Bad. 'Very good! only don't expect me to stand between your mother and you, Arthur. I stood between your mother and your father, fending off this, and fending off that, and getting crushed and pounded betwixt em; and I've done with such work.'

'You will never be asked to begin it again for me, Jeremiah.'

'Good. I'm glad to hear it; because I should have had to decline it, if I had been. That's enough—as your mother says—and more than enough of such matters on a Sabbath night. Affery, woman, have you found what you want yet?'

She had been collecting sheets and blankets from a press, and hastened to gather them up, and to reply, 'Yes, Jeremiah.' Arthur Clennam helped her by carrying the load himself, wished the old man good night, and went upstairs with her to the top of the house.

They mounted up and up, through the musty smell of an old close house, little used, to a large garret bed-room. Meagre and spare, like all the other rooms, it was even uglier and grimmer than the rest, by being the place of banishment for the worn-out furniture. Its movables were ugly old chairs with worn-out seats, and ugly old chairs without any seats; a threadbare patternless carpet, a maimed table, a crippled wardrobe, a lean set of fire-irons like the skeleton of a set deceased, a washing-stand that looked as if it had stood for ages in a hail of dirty soapsuds, and a bedstead with four bare atomies of posts, each terminating in a spike, as if for the dismal accommodation of lodgers who might prefer to impale themselves. Arthur opened the long low window, and looked out upon the old blasted and blackened forest of chimneys, and the old red glare in the sky, which had seemed to him once upon a time but a nightly reflection of the fiery environment that was presented to his childish fancy in all directions, let it look where it would.

He drew in his head again, sat down at the bedside, and looked on at Affery Flintwinch making the bed.

'Affery, you were not married when I went away.'

She screwed her mouth into the form of saying 'No,' shook her head, and proceeded to get a pillow into its case.

'How did it happen?'

'Why, Jeremiah, o' course,' said Affery, with an end of the pillow-case between her teeth.

'Of course he proposed it, but how did it all come about? I should have thought that neither of you would have married; least of all should I have thought of your marrying each other.'

'No more should I,' said Mrs Flintwinch, tying the pillow tightly in its case.

'That's what I mean. When did you begin to think otherwise?'

'Never begun to think otherwise at all,' said Mrs Flintwinch.

Seeing, as she patted the pillow into its place on the bolster, that he was still looking at her as if waiting for the rest of her reply, she gave it a great poke in the middle, and asked, 'How could I help myself?'

'How could you help yourself from being married!'

'O' course,' said Mrs Flintwinch. 'It was no doing o' mine. I'D never thought of it. I'd got something to do, without thinking, indeed! She kept me to it (as well as he) when she could go about, and she could go about then.' 'Well?'

'Well?' echoed Mrs Flintwinch. 'That's what I said myself. Well! What's the use of considering? If them two clever ones have made up their minds to it, what's left for me to do? Nothing.'

'Was it my mother's project, then?'

'The Lord bless you, Arthur, and forgive me the wish!' cried Affery, speaking always in a low tone. 'If they hadn't been both of a mind in it, how could it ever have been? Jeremiah never courted me; t'ant likely that he would, after living in the house with me and ordering me about for as many years as he'd done. He said to me one day, he said, "Affery," he said, "now I am going to tell you something. What do you think of the name of Flintwinch?" "What do I think of it?" I says. "Yes," he said, "because you're going to take it," he said. "Take it?" I says. "Jere-MI-ah?" Oh! he's a clever one!'

Mrs Flintwinch went on to spread the upper sheet over the bed, and the blanket over that, and the counterpane over that, as if she had quite concluded her story. 'Well?' said Arthur again.

'Well?' echoed Mrs Flintwinch again. 'How could I help myself? He said to me, "Affery, you and me must be married, and I'll tell you why. She's failing in health, and she'll want pretty constant attendance up in her room, and we shall have to be much with her, and there'll be nobody about now but ourselves when we're away from her, and altogether it will be more convenient. She's of my opinion," he said, "so if you'll put your bonnet on next Monday morning at eight, we'll get it over."' Mrs Flintwinch tucked up the bed.

'Well?'

'Well?' repeated Mrs Flintwinch, 'I think so! I sits me down and says it. Well!—Jeremiah then says to me, "As to banns, next Sunday being the third time of asking (for I've put 'em up a fortnight), is my reason for naming Monday. She'll speak to you about it herself, and now she'll find you prepared, Affery." That same day she spoke to me, and she said, "So, Affery, I understand that you and Jeremiah are going to be married. I am glad of it, and so are you, with reason. It is a very good thing for you, and very welcome under the circumstances to me. He is a sensible man, and a trustworthy man, and a persevering man, and a pious man." What could I say when it had come to that? Why, if it had been—a smothering instead of a wedding,' Mrs Flintwinch cast about in her mind with great pains for this form of expression, 'I couldn't have said a word upon it, against them two clever ones.'

'In good faith, I believe so.' 'And so you may, Arthur.'

'Affery, what girl was that in my mother's room just now?'

'Girl?' said Mrs Flintwinch in a rather sharp key.

'It was a girl, surely, whom I saw near you—almost hidden in the dark corner?'

'Oh! She? Little Dorrit? She's nothing; she's a whim of—hers.' It was a peculiarity of Affery Flintwinch that she never spoke of Mrs Clennam by name. 'But there's another sort of girls than that about. Have you forgot your old sweetheart? Long and long ago, I'll be bound.'

'I suffered enough from my mother's separating us, to remember her.

I recollect her very well.'

'Have you got another?'

'No.'

'Here's news for you, then. She's well to do now, and a widow. And if you like to have her, why you can.'

'And how do you know that, Affery?'

'Them two clever ones have been speaking about it.—There's Jeremiah on the stairs!' She was gone in a moment.

Mrs Flintwinch had introduced into the web that his mind was busily weaving, in that old workshop where the loom of his youth had stood, the last thread wanting to the pattern. The airy folly of a boy's love had found its way even into that house, and he had been as wretched under its hopelessness as if the house had been a castle of romance. Little more than a week ago at Marseilles, the face of the pretty girl from whom he had parted with regret, had had an unusual interest for him, and a tender hold upon him, because of some resemblance, real or imagined, to this first face that had soared out of his gloomy life into the bright glories of fancy. He leaned upon the sill of the long low window, and looking out upon the blackened forest of chimneys again, began to dream; for it had been the uniform tendency of this man's life—so much was wanting in it to think about, so much that might have been better directed and happier to speculate upon—to make him a dreamer, after all.

CHAPTER 4. Mrs Flintwinch has a Dream

When Mrs Flintwinch dreamed, she usually dreamed, unlike the son of her old mistress, with her eyes shut. She had a curiously vivid dream that night, and before she had left the son of her old mistress many hours. In fact it was not at all like a dream; it was so very real in every respect. It happened in this wise.

The bed-chamber occupied by Mr and Mrs Flintwinch was within a few paces of that to which Mrs Clennam had been so long confined. It was not on the same floor, for it was a room at the side of the house, which was approached by a steep descent of a few odd steps, diverging from the main staircase nearly opposite to Mrs Clennam's door. It could scarcely be said to be within call, the walls, doors, and panelling of the old place were so cumbrous; but it was within easy reach, in any undress, at any hour of the night, in any temperature. At the head of the bed and within a foot of Mrs Flintwinch's ear, was a bell, the line of which hung ready to Mrs Clennam's hand. Whenever this bell rang, up started Affery, and was in the sick room before she was awake.

Having got her mistress into bed, lighted her lamp, and given her good night, Mrs Flintwinch went to roost as usual, saving that her lord had not yet appeared. It was her lord himself who became—unlike the last theme in the mind, according to the observation of most philosophers—the subject of Mrs Flintwinch's dream. It seemed to her that she awoke after sleeping some hours, and found Jeremiah not yet abed. That she looked at the candle she had left burning, and, measuring the time like King Alfred the Great, was confirmed by its wasted state in her belief that she had been asleep for some considerable period. That she arose thereupon, muffled herself up in a wrapper, put on her shoes, and went out on the staircase, much surprised, to look for Jeremiah.

The staircase was as wooden and solid as need be, and Affery went straight down it without any of those deviations peculiar to dreams. She did not skim over it, but walked down it, and guided herself by the banisters on account of her candle having died out. In one corner of the hall, behind the house-door, there was a little waiting-room, like a well-shaft, with a long narrow window in it as if it had been ripped up. In this room, which was never used, a light was burning.

Mrs Flintwinch crossed the hall, feeling its pavement cold to her stockingless feet, and peeped in between the rusty hinges on the door, which stood a little open. She expected to see Jeremiah fast asleep or in a fit, but he was calmly seated in a chair, awake, and in his usual health. But what—hey?—Lord forgive us!—Mrs Flintwinch muttered some ejaculation to this effect, and turned giddy.

For, Mr Flintwinch awake, was watching Mr Flintwinch asleep. He sat on one side of the small table, looking keenly at himself on the other side with his chin sunk on his breast, snoring. The waking Flintwinch had his full front face presented to his wife; the sleeping Flintwinch was in profile. The waking Flintwinch was the old original; the sleeping Flintwinch was the double, just as she might have distinguished between a tangible object and its reflection in a glass, Affery made out this difference with her head going round and round.

If she had had any doubt which was her own Jeremiah, it would have been resolved by his impatience. He looked about him for an offensive weapon, caught up the snuffers, and, before applying them to the cabbage-headed candle, lunged at the sleeper as though he would have run him through the body.

'Who's that? What's the matter?' cried the sleeper, starting.

Mr Flintwinch made a movement with the snuffers, as if he would have enforced silence on his companion by putting them down his throat; the companion, coming to himself, said, rubbing his eyes, 'I forgot where I was.'

'You have been asleep,' snarled Jeremiah, referring to his watch, 'two hours. You said you would be rested enough if you had a short nap.'

'I have had a short nap,' said Double.

'Half-past two o'clock in the morning,' muttered Jeremiah. 'Where's your hat? Where's your coat? Where's the box?'

'All here,' said Double, tying up his throat with sleepy carefulness in a shawl. 'Stop a minute. Now give me the sleeve—not that sleeve, the other one. Ha! I'm not as young as I was.' Mr Flintwinch had pulled him into his coat with vehement energy. 'You promised me a second glass after I was rested.'

'Drink it!' returned Jeremiah, 'and—choke yourself, I was going to say—but go, I mean.'At the same time he produced the identical port-wine bottle, and filled a wine-glass.

'Her port-wine, I believe?' said Double, tasting it as if he were in the Docks, with hours to spare. 'Her health.'

He took a sip.

'Your health!'

He took another sip.

'His health!'

He took another sip.

'And all friends round St Paul's.' He emptied and put down the wine-glass half-way through this ancient civic toast, and took up the box. It was an iron box some two feet square, which he carried under his arms pretty easily. Jeremiah watched his manner of adjusting it, with jealous eyes; tried it with his hands, to be sure that he had a firm hold of it; bade him for his life be careful what he was about; and then stole out on tiptoe to open the door for him. Affery, anticipating the last movement, was on the staircase. The sequence of things was so ordinary and natural, that, standing there, she could hear the door open, feel the night air, and see the stars outside.

But now came the most remarkable part of the dream. She felt so afraid of her husband, that being on the staircase, she had not the power to retreat to her room (which she might easily have done before he had fastened the door), but stood there staring. Consequently when he came up the staircase to bed, candle in hand, he came full upon her. He looked astonished, but said not a word. He kept his eyes upon her, and kept advancing; and she, completely under his influence, kept retiring before him. Thus, she walking backward and he walking forward, they came into their own room. They were no sooner shut in there, than Mr Flintwinch took her by the throat, and shook her until she was black in the face.

'Why, Affery, woman—Affery!' said Mr Flintwinch. 'What have you been dreaming of? Wake up, wake up! What's the matter?'

'The—the matter, Jeremiah?' gasped Mrs Flintwinch, rolling her eyes.

'Why, Affery, woman—Affery! You have been getting out of bed in your sleep, my dear! I come up, after having fallen asleep myself, below, and find you in your wrapper here, with the nightmare. Affery, woman,' said Mr Flintwinch, with a friendly grin on his expressive countenance, 'if you ever have a dream of this sort again, it'll be a sign of your being in want of physic. And I'll give you such a dose, old woman—such a dose!'

Mrs Flintwinch thanked him and crept into bed.

CHAPTER 5. Family Affairs

As the city clocks struck nine on Monday morning, Mrs Clennam was wheeled by Jeremiah Flintwinch of the cut-down aspect to her tall cabinet. When she had unlocked and opened it, and had settled herself at its desk, Jeremiah withdrew—as it might be, to hang himself more effectually—and her son appeared.

'Are you any better this morning, mother?'

She shook her head, with the same austere air of luxuriousness that she had shown over-night when speaking of the weather.

'I shall never be better any more. It is well for me, Arthur, that I know it and can bear it.'

Sitting with her hands laid separately upon the desk, and the tall cabinet towering before her, she looked as if she were performing on a dumb church organ. Her son thought so (it was an old thought with him), while he took his seat beside it.

She opened a drawer or two, looked over some business papers, and put them back again. Her severe face had no thread of relaxation in it, by which any explorer could have been guided to the gloomy labyrinth of her thoughts.

'Shall I speak of our affairs, mother? Are you inclined to enter upon business?'

'Am I inclined, Arthur? Rather, are you? Your father has been dead a year and more. I have been at your disposal, and waiting your pleasure, ever since.'

'There was much to arrange before I could leave; and when I did leave, I travelled a little for rest and relief.'

She turned her face towards him, as not having heard or understood his last words. 'For rest and relief.'

She glanced round the sombre room, and appeared from the motion of her lips to repeat the words to herself, as calling it to witness how little of either it afforded her.

'Besides, mother, you being sole executrix, and having the direction and management of the estate, there remained little business, or I might say none, that I could transact, until you had had time to arrange matters to your satisfaction.'

'The accounts are made out,' she returned. 'I have them here. The vouchers have all been examined and passed. You can inspect them when you like, Arthur; now, if you please.'

'It is quite enough, mother, to know that the business is completed. Shall I proceed then?'

'Why not?' she said, in her frozen way.

'Mother, our House has done less and less for some years past, and our dealings have been progressively on the decline. We have never shown much confidence, or invited much; we have attached no people to us; the track we have kept is not the track of the time; and we have been left far behind. I need not dwell on this to you, mother. You know it necessarily.'

'I know what you mean,' she answered, in a qualified tone. 'Even this old house in which we speak,' pursued her son, 'is an instance of what I say. In my father's earlier time, and in his uncle's time before him, it was a place of business—really a place of business, and business resort. Now, it is a mere anomaly and incongruity here, out of date and out of purpose. All our consignments have long been made to Rovinghams' the commission-merchants; and although, as a check upon them, and in the stewardship of my father's resources, your judgment and watchfulness have been actively exerted, still those qualities would have influenced my father's fortunes equally, if you had lived in any private dwelling: would they not?'

'Do you consider,' she returned, without answering his question, 'that a house serves no purpose, Arthur, in sheltering your infirm and afflicted—justly infirm and righteously afflicted—mother?'

'I was speaking only of business purposes.'

'With what object?'

'I am coming to it.'

'I foresee,' she returned, fixing her eyes upon him, 'what it is. But the Lord forbid that I should repine under any visitation. In my sinfulness I merit bitter disappointment, and I accept it.'

'Mother, I grieve to hear you speak like this, though I have had my apprehensions that you would—'

'You knew I would. You knew ME,' she interrupted.

Her son paused for a moment. He had struck fire out of her, and was surprised.

'Well!' she said, relapsing into stone. 'Go on. Let me hear.'

'You have anticipated, mother, that I decide for my part, to abandon the business. I have done with it. I will not take upon myself to advise you; you will continue it, I see. If I had any influence with you, I would simply use it to soften your judgment of me in causing you this disappointment: to represent to you that I have lived the half of a long term of life, and have never before set my own will against yours. I cannot say that I have been able to conform myself, in heart and spirit, to your rules; I cannot say that I believe my forty years have been profitable or pleasant to myself, or any one; but I have habitually submitted, and I only ask you to remember it.'

Woe to the suppliant, if such a one there were or ever had been, who had any concession to look for in the inexorable face at the cabinet. Woe to the defaulter whose appeal lay to the tribunal where those severe eyes presided. Great need had the rigid woman of her mystical religion, veiled in gloom and darkness, with lightnings of cursing, vengeance, and destruction, flashing through the sable clouds. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, was a prayer too poor in spirit for her. Smite Thou my debtors, Lord, wither them, crush them; do Thou as I would do, and Thou shalt have my worship: this was the impious tower of stone she built up to scale Heaven.

'Have you finished, Arthur, or have you anything more to say to me?

I think there can be nothing else. You have been short, but full of matter!'

'Mother, I have yet something more to say. It has been upon my mind, night and day, this long time. It is far more difficult to say than what I have said. That concerned myself; this concerns us all.'

'Us all! Who are us all?'

'Yourself, myself, my dead father.'

She took her hands from the desk; folded them in her lap; and sat looking towards the fire, with the impenetrability of an old Egyptian sculpture.

'You knew my father infinitely better than I ever knew him; and his reserve with me yielded to you. You were much the stronger, mother, and directed him. As a child, I knew it as well as I know it now. I knew that your ascendancy over him was the cause of his going to China to take care of the business there, while you took care of it here (though I do not even now know whether these were really terms of separation that you agreed upon); and that it was your will that I should remain with you until I was twenty, and then go to him as I did. You will not be offended by my recalling this, after twenty years?'

'I am waiting to hear why you recall it.'

He lowered his voice, and said, with manifest reluctance, and against his will:

'I want to ask you, mother, whether it ever occurred to you to suspect—'

At the word Suspect, she turned her eyes momentarily upon her son, with a dark frown. She then suffered them to seek the fire, as before; but with the frown fixed above them, as if the sculptor of old Egypt had indented it in the hard granite face, to frown for ages.

'—that he had any secret remembrance which caused him trouble of mind—remorse? Whether you ever observed anything in his conduct suggesting that; or ever spoke to him upon it, or ever heard him hint at such a thing?'

'I do not understand what kind of secret remembrance you mean to infer that your father was a prey to,' she returned, after a silence. 'You speak so mysteriously.'

'Is it possible, mother,' her son leaned forward to be the nearer to her while he whispered it, and laid his hand nervously upon her desk, 'is it possible, mother, that he had unhappily wronged any one, and made no reparation?'

Looking at him wrathfully, she bent herself back in her chair to keep him further off, but gave him no reply.

'I am deeply sensible, mother, that if this thought has never at any time flashed upon you, it must seem cruel and unnatural in me, even in this confidence, to breathe it. But I cannot shake it off.

Time and change (I have tried both before breaking silence) do nothing to wear it out. Remember, I was with my father. Remember, I saw his face when he gave the watch into my keeping, and struggled to express that he sent it as a token you would understand, to you. Remember, I saw him at the last with the pencil in his failing hand, trying to write some word for you to read, but to which he could give no shape. The more remote and cruel this vague suspicion that I have, the stronger the circumstances that could give it any semblance of probability to me. For Heaven's sake, let us examine sacredly whether there is any wrong entrusted to us to set right. No one can help towards it, mother, but you.'

Still so recoiling in her chair that her overpoised weight moved it, from time to time, a little on its wheels, and gave her the appearance of a phantom of fierce aspect gliding away from him, she interposed her left arm, bent at the elbow with the back of her hand towards her face, between herself and him, and looked at him in a fixed silence.

'In grasping at money and in driving hard bargains—I have begun, and I must speak of such things now, mother—some one may have been grievously deceived, injured, ruined. You were the moving power of all this machinery before my birth; your stronger spirit has been infused into all my father's dealings for more than two score years. You can set these doubts at rest, I think, if you will really help me to discover the truth. Will you, mother?'

He stopped in the hope that she would speak. But her grey hair was not more immovable in its two folds, than were her firm lips.

'If reparation can be made to any one, if restitution can be made to any one, let us know it and make it. Nay, mother, if within my means, let ME make it. I have seen so little happiness come of money; it has brought within my knowledge so little peace to this house, or to any one belonging to it, that it is worth less to me than to another. It can buy me nothing that will not be a reproach and misery to me, if I am haunted by a suspicion that it darkened my father's last hours with remorse, and that it is not honestly and justly mine.' There was a bell-rope hanging on the panelled wall, some two or three yards from the cabinet. By a swift and sudden action of her foot, she drove her wheeled chair rapidly back to it and pulled it violently—still holding her arm up in its shield-like posture, as if he were striking at her, and she warding off the blow.

A girl came hurrying in, frightened.

'Send Flintwinch here!'

In a moment the girl had withdrawn, and the old man stood within the door. 'What! You're hammer and tongs, already, you two?' he said, coolly stroking his face. 'I thought you would be. I was pretty sure of it.'

'Flintwinch!' said the mother, 'look at my son. Look at him!'

'Well, I AM looking at him,' said Flintwinch.

She stretched out the arm with which she had shielded herself, and as she went on, pointed at the object of her anger.

'In the very hour of his return almost—before the shoe upon his foot is dry—he asperses his father's memory to his mother! Asks his mother to become, with him, a spy upon his father's transactions through a lifetime! Has misgivings that the goods of this world which we have painfully got together early and late, with wear and tear and toil and self-denial, are so much plunder; and asks to whom they shall be given up, as reparation and restitution!'

Although she said this raging, she said it in a voice so far from being beyond her control that it was even lower than her usual tone. She also spoke with great distinctness.

'Reparation!' said she. 'Yes, truly! It is easy for him to talk of reparation, fresh from journeying and junketing in foreign lands, and living a life of vanity and pleasure. But let him look at me, in prison, and in bonds here. I endure without murmuring, because it is appointed that I shall so make reparation for my sins. Reparation! Is there none in this room? Has there been none here this fifteen years?'

Thus was she always balancing her bargains with the Majesty of heaven, posting up the entries to her credit, strictly keeping her set-off, and claiming her due. She was only remarkable in this, for the force and emphasis with which she did it. Thousands upon thousands do it, according to their varying manner, every day.

'Flintwinch, give me that book!'

The old man handed it to her from the table. She put two fingers between the leaves, closed the book upon them, and held it up to her son in a threatening way. 'In the days of old, Arthur, treated of in this commentary, there were pious men, beloved of the Lord, who would have cursed their sons for less than this: who would have sent them forth, and sent whole nations forth, if such had supported them, to be avoided of God and man, and perish, down to the baby at the breast. But I only tell you that if you ever renew that theme with me, I will renounce you; I will so dismiss you through that doorway, that you had better have been motherless from your cradle. I will never see or know you more. And if, after all, you were to come into this darkened room to look upon me lying dead, my body should bleed, if I could make it, when you came near me.'

In part relieved by the intensity of this threat, and in part (monstrous as the fact is) by a general impression that it was in some sort a religious proceeding, she handed back the book to the old man, and was silent.

'Now,' said Jeremiah; 'premising that I'm not going to stand between you two, will you let me ask (as I have been called in, and made a third) what is all this about?'

'Take your version of it,' returned Arthur, finding it left to him to speak, 'from my mother. Let it rest there. What I have said, was said to my mother only.' 'Oh!' returned the old man. 'From your mother? Take it from your mother? Well! But your mother mentioned that you had been suspecting your father. That's not dutiful, Mr Arthur. Who will you be suspecting next?'

'Enough,' said Mrs Clennam, turning her face so that it was addressed for the moment to the old man only. 'Let no more be said about this.'

'Yes, but stop a bit, stop a bit,' the old man persisted. 'Let us see how we stand. Have you told Mr Arthur that he mustn't lay offences at his father's door? That he has no right to do it? That he has no ground to go upon?'

'I tell him so now.'

'Ah! Exactly,' said the old man. 'You tell him so now. You hadn't told him so before, and you tell him so now. Ay, ay! That's right! You know I stood between you and his father so long, that it seems as if death had made no difference, and I was still standing between you. So I will, and so in fairness I require to have that plainly put forward. Arthur, you please to hear that you have no right to mistrust your father, and have no ground to go upon.'

He put his hands to the back of the wheeled chair, and muttering to himself, slowly wheeled his mistress back to her cabinet. 'Now,' he resumed, standing behind her: 'in case I should go away leaving things half done, and so should be wanted again when you come to the other half and get into one of your flights, has Arthur told you what he means to do about the business?'

'He has relinquished it.'

'In favour of nobody, I suppose?'

Mrs Clennam glanced at her son, leaning against one of the windows.

He observed the look and said, 'To my mother, of course. She does what she pleases.'

'And if any pleasure,' she said after a short pause, 'could arise for me out of the disappointment of my expectations that my son, in the prime of his life, would infuse new youth and strength into it, and make it of great profit and power, it would be in advancing an old and faithful servant. Jeremiah, the captain deserts the ship, but you and I will sink or float with it.'

Jeremiah, whose eyes glistened as if they saw money, darted a sudden look at the son, which seemed to say, 'I owe YOU no thanks for this; YOU have done nothing towards it!' and then told the mother that he thanked her, and that Affery thanked her, and that he would never desert her, and that Affery would never desert her. Finally, he hauled up his watch from its depths, and said, 'Eleven. Time for your oysters!' and with that change of subject, which involved no change of expression or manner, rang the bell.

But Mrs Clennam, resolved to treat herself with the greater rigour for having been supposed to be unacquainted with reparation, refused to eat her oysters when they were brought. They looked tempting; eight in number, circularly set out on a white plate on a tray covered with a white napkin, flanked by a slice of buttered French roll, and a little compact glass of cool wine and water; but she resisted all persuasions, and sent them down again —placing the act to her credit, no doubt, in her Eternal Day-Book.

This refection of oysters was not presided over by Affery, but by the girl who had appeared when the bell was rung; the same who had been in the dimly-lighted room last night. Now that he had an opportunity of observing her, Arthur found that her diminutive figure, small features, and slight spare dress, gave her the appearance of being much younger than she was. A woman, probably of not less than two-and-twenty, she might have been passed in the street for little more than half that age. Not that her face was very youthful, for in truth there was more consideration and care in it than naturally belonged to her utmost years; but she was so little and light, so noiseless and shy, and appeared so conscious of being out of place among the three hard elders, that she had all the manner and much of the appearance of a subdued child.

In a hard way, and in an uncertain way that fluctuated between patronage and putting down, the sprinkling from a watering-pot and hydraulic pressure, Mrs Clennam showed an interest in this dependent. Even in the moment of her entrance, upon the violent ringing of the bell, when the mother shielded herself with that singular action from the son, Mrs Clennam's eyes had had some individual recognition in them, which seemed reserved for her. As there are degrees of hardness in the hardest metal, and shades of colour in black itself, so, even in the asperity of Mrs Clennam's demeanour towards all the rest of humanity and towards Little Dorrit, there was a fine gradation.

Little Dorrit let herself out to do needlework. At so much a day—or at so little—from eight to eight, Little Dorrit was to be hired. Punctual to the moment, Little Dorrit appeared; punctual to the moment, Little Dorrit vanished. What became of Little Dorrit between the two eights was a mystery.

Another of the moral phenomena of Little Dorrit. Besides her consideration money, her daily contract included meals. She had an extraordinary repugnance to dining in company; would never do so, if it were possible to escape. Would always plead that she had this bit of work to begin first, or that bit of work to finish first; and would, of a certainty, scheme and plan—not very cunningly, it would seem, for she deceived no one—to dine alone. Successful in this, happy in carrying off her plate anywhere, to make a table of her lap, or a box, or the ground, or even as was supposed, to stand on tip-toe, dining moderately at a mantel-shelf; the great anxiety of Little Dorrit's day was set at rest.

It was not easy to make out Little Dorrit's face; she was so retiring, plied her needle in such removed corners, and started away so scared if encountered on the stairs. But it seemed to be a pale transparent face, quick in expression, though not beautiful in feature, its soft hazel eyes excepted. A delicately bent head, a tiny form, a quick little pair of busy hands, and a shabby dress—it must needs have been very shabby to look at all so, being so neat—were Little Dorrit as she sat at work.

For these particulars or generalities concerning Little Dorrit, Mr Arthur was indebted in the course of the day to his own eyes and to Mrs Affery's tongue. If Mrs Affery had had any will or way of her own, it would probably have been unfavourable to Little Dorrit. But as 'them two clever ones'—Mrs Affery's perpetual reference, in whom her personality was swallowed up—were agreed to accept Little Dorrit as a matter of course, she had nothing for it but to follow suit. Similarly, if the two clever ones had agreed to murder Little Dorrit by candlelight, Mrs Affery, being required to hold the candle, would no doubt have done it.

In the intervals of roasting the partridge for the invalid chamber, and preparing a baking-dish of beef and pudding for the dining-room, Mrs Affery made the communications above set forth; invariably putting her head in at the door again after she had taken it out, to enforce resistance to the two clever ones. It appeared to have become a perfect passion with Mrs Flintwinch, that the only son should be pitted against them.

In the course of the day, too, Arthur looked through the whole house. Dull and dark he found it. The gaunt rooms, deserted for years upon years, seemed to have settled down into a gloomy lethargy from which nothing could rouse them again. The furniture, at once spare and lumbering, hid in the rooms rather than furnished them, and there was no colour in all the house; such colour as had ever been there, had long ago started away on lost sunbeams—got itself absorbed, perhaps, into flowers, butterflies, plumage of birds, precious stones, what not. There was not one straight floor from the foundation to the roof; the ceilings were so fantastically clouded by smoke and dust, that old women might have told fortunes in them better than in grouts of tea; the dead-cold hearths showed no traces of having ever been warmed but in heaps of soot that had tumbled down the chimneys, and eddied about in little dusky whirlwinds when the doors were opened. In what had once been a drawing-room, there were a pair of meagre mirrors, with dismal processions of black figures carrying black garlands, walking round the frames; but even these were short of heads and legs, and one undertaker-like Cupid had swung round on its own axis and got upside down, and another had fallen off altogether. The room Arthur Clennam's deceased father had occupied for business purposes, when he first remembered him, was so unaltered that he might have been imagined still to keep it invisibly, as his visible relict kept her room up-stairs; Jeremiah Flintwinch still going between them negotiating. His picture, dark and gloomy, earnestly speechless on the wall, with the eyes intently looking at his son as they had looked when life departed from them, seemed to urge him awfully to the task he had attempted; but as to any yielding on the part of his mother, he had now no hope, and as to any other means of setting his distrust at rest, he had abandoned hope a long time.

Down in the cellars, as up in the bed-chambers, old objects that he well remembered were changed by age and decay, but were still in their old places; even to empty beer-casks hoary with cobwebs, and empty wine-bottles with fur and fungus choking up their throats. There, too, among unusual bottle-racks and pale slants of light from the yard above, was the strong room stored with old ledgers, which had as musty and corrupt a smell as if they were regularly balanced, in the dead small hours, by a nightly resurrection of old book-keepers.

The baking-dish was served up in a penitential manner on a shrunken cloth at an end of the dining-table, at two o'clock, when he dined with Mr

Flintwinch, the new partner. Mr Flintwinch informed him that his mother had recovered her equanimity now, and that he need not fear her again alluding to what had passed in the morning. 'And don't you lay offences at your father's door, Mr Arthur,' added Jeremiah, 'once for all, don't do it! Now, we have done with the subject.'

Mr Flintwinch had been already rearranging and dusting his own particular little office, as if to do honour to his accession to new dignity. He resumed this occupation when he was replete with beef, had sucked up all the gravy in the baking-dish with the flat of his knife, and had drawn liberally on a barrel of small beer in the scullery. Thus refreshed, he tucked up his shirt-sleeves and went to work again; and Mr Arthur, watching him as he set about it, plainly saw that his father's picture, or his father's grave, would be as communicative with him as this old man.

'Now, Affery, woman,' said Mr Flintwinch, as she crossed the hall. 'You hadn't made Mr Arthur's bed when I was up there last. Stir yourself. Bustle.'

But Mr Arthur found the house so blank and dreary, and was so unwilling to assist at another implacable consignment of his mother's enemies (perhaps himself among them) to mortal disfigurement and immortal ruin, that he announced his intention of lodging at the coffee-house where he had left his luggage. Mr Flintwinch taking kindly to the idea of getting rid of him, and his mother being indifferent, beyond considerations of saving, to most domestic arrangements that were not bounded by the walls of her own chamber, he easily carried this point without new offence. Daily business hours were agreed upon, which his mother, Mr Flintwinch, and he, were to devote together to a necessary checking of books and papers; and he left the home he had so lately found, with depressed heart.

But Little Dorrit?

The business hours, allowing for intervals of invalid regimen of oysters and partridges, during which Clennam refreshed himself with a walk, were from ten to six for about a fortnight. Sometimes Little Dorrit was employed at her needle, sometimes not, sometimes appeared as a humble visitor: which must have been her character on the occasion of his arrival. His original curiosity augmented every day, as he watched for her, saw or did not see her, and speculated about her. Influenced by his predominant idea, he even fell into a habit of discussing with himself the possibility of her being in some way associated with it. At last he resolved to watch Little Dorrit and know more of her story.

CHAPTER 6. The Father of the Marshalsea

Thirty years ago there stood, a few doors short of the church of Saint George, in the borough of Southwark, on the left-hand side of the way going southward, the Marshalsea Prison. It had stood there many years before, and it remained there some years afterwards; but it is gone now, and the world is none the worse without it.

It was an oblong pile of barrack building, partitioned into squalid houses standing back to back, so that there were no back rooms; environed by a narrow paved yard, hemmed in by high walls duly spiked at top. Itself a close and confined prison for debtors, it contained within it a much closer and more confined jail for smugglers. Offenders against the revenue laws, and defaulters to excise or customs who had incurred fines which they were unable to pay, were supposed to be incarcerated behind an iron-plated door closing up a second prison, consisting of a strong cell or two, and a blind alley some yard and a half wide, which formed the mysterious termination of the very limited skittle-ground in which the Marshalsea debtors bowled down their troubles.

Supposed to be incarcerated there, because the time had rather outgrown the strong cells and the blind alley. In practice they had come to be considered a little too bad, though in theory they were quite as good as ever; which may be observed to be the case at the present day with other cells that are not at all strong, and with other blind alleys that are stone-blind. Hence the smugglers habitually consorted with the debtors (who received them with open arms), except at certain constitutional moments when somebody came from some Office, to go through some form of overlooking something which neither he nor anybody else knew anything about. On these truly British occasions, the smugglers, if any, made a feint of walking into the strong cells and the blind alley, while this somebody pretended to do his something: and made a reality of walking out again as soon as he hadn't done it—neatly epitomising the administration of most of the public affairs in our right little, tight little, island.

There had been taken to the Marshalsea Prison, long before the day when the sun shone on Marseilles and on the opening of this narrative, a debtor with whom this narrative has some concern.

He was, at that time, a very amiable and very helpless middle-aged gentleman, who was going out again directly. Necessarily, he was going out again directly, because the Marshalsea lock never turned upon a debtor who was not. He brought in a portmanteau with him, which he doubted its being worth while to unpack; he was so perfectly clear—like all the rest of them, the turnkey on the lock said—that he was going out again directly.

He was a shy, retiring man; well-looking, though in an effeminate style; with a mild voice, curling hair, and irresolute hands—rings upon the fingers in those days—which nervously wandered to his trembling lip a hundred times in the first half-hour of his acquaintance with the jail. His principal anxiety was about his wife.

'Do you think, sir,' he asked the turnkey, 'that she will be very much shocked, if she should come to the gate to-morrow morning?'

The turnkey gave it as the result of his experience that some of 'em was and some of 'em wasn't. In general, more no than yes. 'What like is she, you see?' he philosophically asked: 'that's what it hinges on.'

'She is very delicate and inexperienced indeed.'

'That,' said the turnkey, 'is agen her.'

'She is so little used to go out alone,' said the debtor, 'that I am at a loss to think how she will ever make her way here, if she walks.'

'P'raps,' quoth the turnkey, 'she'll take a ackney coach.'

'Perhaps.' The irresolute fingers went to the trembling lip. 'I hope she will. She may not think of it.'

'Or p'raps,' said the turnkey, offering his suggestions from the the top of his well-worn wooden stool, as he might have offered them to a child for whose weakness he felt a compassion, 'p'raps she'll get her brother, or her sister, to come along with her.'

'She has no brother or sister.'

'Niece, nevy, cousin, serwant, young 'ooman, greengrocer.—Dash it!

One or another on 'em,' said the turnkey, repudiating beforehand the refusal of all his suggestions.

'I fear—I hope it is not against the rules—that she will bring the children.'

'The children?' said the turnkey. 'And the rules? Why, lord set you up like a corner pin, we've a reg'lar playground o' children here. Children! Why we swarm with 'em. How many a you got?'

'Two,' said the debtor, lifting his irresolute hand to his lip again, and turning into the prison.

The turnkey followed him with his eyes. 'And you another,' he observed to himself, 'which makes three on you. And your wife another, I'll lay a crown. Which makes four on you. And another coming, I'll lay half-a-crown. Which'll make five on you. And I'll go another seven and sixpence to name which is the helplessest, the unborn baby or you!'

He was right in all his particulars. She came next day with a little boy of three years old, and a little girl of two, and he stood entirely corroborated.

'Got a room now; haven't you?' the turnkey asked the debtor after a week or two.

'Yes, I have got a very good room.'

'Any little sticks a coming to furnish it?' said the turnkey.

'I expect a few necessary articles of furniture to be delivered by the carrier, this afternoon.'

'Missis and little 'uns a coming to keep you company?' asked the turnkey.

'Why, yes, we think it better that we should not be scattered, even for a few weeks.'

'Even for a few weeks, OF course,' replied the turnkey. And he followed him again with his eyes, and nodded his head seven times when he was gone.

The affairs of this debtor were perplexed by a partnership, of which he knew no more than that he had invested money in it; by legal matters of assignment and settlement, conveyance here and conveyance there, suspicion of unlawful preference of creditors in this direction, and of mysterious spiriting away of property in that; and as nobody on the face of the earth could be more incapable of explaining any single item in the heap of confusion than the debtor himself, nothing comprehensible could be made of his case. To question him in detail, and endeavour to reconcile his answers; to closet him with accountants and sharp practitioners, learned in the wiles of insolvency and bankruptcy; was only to put the case out at compound interest and incomprehensibility. The irresolute fingers fluttered more and more ineffectually about the trembling lip on every such occasion, and the sharpest practitioners gave him up as a hopeless job.

'Out?' said the turnkey, 'he'll never get out, unless his creditors take him by the shoulders and shove him out.'

He had been there five or six months, when he came running to this turnkey one forenoon to tell him, breathless and pale, that his wife was ill.

'As anybody might a known she would be,' said the turnkey.

'We intended,' he returned, 'that she should go to a country lodging only to-morrow. What am I to do! Oh, good heaven, what am I to do!'

'Don't waste your time in clasping your hands and biting your fingers,' responded the practical turnkey, taking him by the elbow, 'but come along with me.'

The turnkey conducted him—trembling from head to foot, and constantly crying under his breath, What was he to do! while his irresolute fingers bedabbled the tears upon his face—up one of the common staircases in the prison to a door on the garret story. Upon which door the turnkey knocked with the handle of his key.

'Come in!' cried a voice inside.

The turnkey, opening the door, disclosed in a wretched, ill-smelling little room, two hoarse, puffy, red-faced personages seated at a rickety table, playing at all-fours, smoking pipes, and drinking brandy. 'Doctor,' said the turnkey, 'here's a gentleman's wife in want of you without a minute's loss of time!'

The doctor's friend was in the positive degree of hoarseness, puffiness, red-facedness, all-fours, tobacco, dirt, and brandy; the doctor in the comparative—hoarser, puffier, more red-faced, more all-fourey, tobaccoer, dirtier, and brandier. The doctor was amazingly shabby, in a torn and darned rough-weather sea-jacket, out at elbows and eminently short of buttons (he had been in his time the experienced surgeon carried by a passenger ship), the dirtiest white trousers conceivable by mortal man, carpet slippers, and no visible linen. 'Childbed?' said the doctor. 'I'm the boy!' With that the doctor took a comb from the chimney-piece and stuck his hair upright—which appeared to be his way of washing himself—produced a professional chest or case, of most abject appearance, from the cupboard where his cup and saucer and coals were, settled his chin in the frowsy wrapper round his neck, and became a ghastly medical scarecrow.

The doctor and the debtor ran down-stairs, leaving the turnkey to return to the lock, and made for the debtor's room. All the ladies in the prison had got hold of the news, and were in the yard. Some of them had already taken possession of the two children, and were hospitably carrying them off; others were offering loans of little comforts from their own scanty store; others were sympathising with the greatest volubility. The gentlemen prisoners, feeling themselves at a disadvantage, had for the most part retired, not to say sneaked, to their rooms; from the open windows of which some of them now complimented the doctor with whistles as he passed below, while others, with several stories between them, interchanged sarcastic references to the prevalent excitement.

It was a hot summer day, and the prison rooms were baking between the high walls. In the debtor's confined chamber, Mrs Bangham, charwoman and messenger, who was not a prisoner (though she had been once), but was the popular medium of communication with the outer world, had volunteered her services as fly-catcher and general attendant. The walls and ceiling were blackened with flies. Mrs Bangham, expert in sudden device, with one hand fanned the patient with a cabbage leaf, and with the other set traps of vinegar and sugar in gallipots; at the same time enunciating sentiments of an encouraging and congratulatory nature, adapted to the occasion.

'The flies trouble you, don't they, my dear?' said Mrs Bangham. 'But p'raps they'll take your mind off of it, and do you good. What between the buryin ground, the grocer's, the waggon-stables, and the paunch trade, the Marshalsea flies gets very large. P'raps they're sent as a consolation, if we only know'd it. How are you now, my dear? No better? No, my dear, it ain't to be expected; you'll be worse before you're better, and you know it, don't you? Yes. That's right! And to think of a sweet little cherub being born inside the lock! Now ain't it pretty, ain't THAT something to carry you through it pleasant? Why, we ain't had such a thing happen here, my dear, not for I couldn't name the time when. And you a crying too?' said Mrs Bangham, to rally the patient more and more. 'You! Making yourself so famous! With the flies a falling into the gallipots by fifties! And everything a going on so well! And here if there ain't,' said Mrs Bangham as the door opened, 'if there ain't your dear gentleman along with Dr Haggage! And now indeed we ARE complete, I THINK!'

The doctor was scarcely the kind of apparition to inspire a patient with a sense of absolute completeness, but as he presently delivered the opinion, 'We are as right as we can be, Mrs Bangham, and we shall come out of this like a house afire;' and as he and Mrs Bangham took possession of the poor helpless pair, as everybody else and anybody else had always done, the means at hand were as good on the whole as better would have been. The special feature in Dr Haggage's treatment of the case, was his determination to keep Mrs Bangham up to the mark. As thus:

'Mrs Bangham,' said the doctor, before he had been there twenty minutes, 'go outside and fetch a little brandy, or we shall have you giving in.'

'Thank you, sir. But none on my accounts,' said Mrs Bangham.

'Mrs Bangham,' returned the doctor, 'I am in professional attendance on this lady, and don't choose to allow any discussion on your part. Go outside and fetch a little brandy, or I foresee that you'll break down.'

'You're to be obeyed, sir,' said Mrs Bangham, rising. 'If you was to put your own lips to it, I think you wouldn't be the worse, for you look but poorly, sir.'

'Mrs Bangham,' returned the doctor, 'I am not your business, thank you, but you are mine. Never you mind ME, if you please. What you have got to do, is, to do as you are told, and to go and get what I bid you.'

Mrs Bangham submitted; and the doctor, having administered her potion, took his own. He repeated the treatment every hour, being very determined with Mrs Bangham. Three or four hours passed; the flies fell into the traps by hundreds; and at length one little life, hardly stronger than theirs, appeared among the multitude of lesser deaths.

'A very nice little girl indeed,' said the doctor; 'little, but well-formed. Halloa, Mrs Bangham! You're looking queer! You be off, ma'am, this minute, and fetch a little more brandy, or we shall have you in hysterics.'

By this time, the rings had begun to fall from the debtor's irresolute hands, like leaves from a wintry tree. Not one was left upon them that night, when he put something that chinked into the doctor's greasy palm. In the meantime Mrs Bangham had been out on an errand to a neighbouring establishment decorated with three golden balls, where she was very well known.

'Thank you,' said the doctor, 'thank you. Your good lady is quite composed. Doing charmingly.'

'I am very happy and very thankful to know it,' said the debtor, 'though I little thought once, that—'

'That a child would be born to you in a place like this?' said the doctor. 'Bah, bah, sir, what does it signify? A little more elbow-room is all we want here. We are quiet here; we don't get badgered here; there's no knocker here, sir, to be hammered at by creditors and bring a man's heart into his mouth. Nobody comes here to ask if a man's at home, and to say he'll stand on the door mat till he is. Nobody writes threatening letters about money to this place. It's freedom, sir, it's freedom! I have had to-day's practice at home and abroad, on a march, and aboard ship, and I'll tell you this: I don't know that I have ever pursued it under such quiet circumstances as here this day. Elsewhere, people are restless, worried, hurried about, anxious respecting one thing, anxious respecting another. Nothing of the kind here, sir. We have done all that—we know the worst of it; we have got to the bottom, we can't fall, and what have we found? Peace. That's the word for it. Peace.' With this profession of faith, the doctor, who was an old jail-bird, and was more sodden than usual, and had the additional and unusual stimulus of money in his pocket, returned to his associate and chum in hoarseness, puffiness, red-facedness, all-fours, tobacco, dirt, and brandy.

Now, the debtor was a very different man from the doctor, but he had already begun to travel, by his opposite segment of the circle, to the same point. Crushed at first by his imprisonment, he had soon found a dull relief in it. He was under lock and key; but the lock and key that kept him in, kept numbers of his troubles out. If he had been a man with strength of purpose to face those troubles and fight them, he might have broken the net that held him, or broken his heart; but being what he was, he languidly slipped into this smooth descent, and never more took one step upward.

When he was relieved of the perplexed affairs that nothing would make plain, through having them returned upon his hands by a dozen agents in succession who could make neither beginning, middle, nor end of them or him, he found his miserable place of refuge a quieter refuge than it had been before. He had unpacked the portmanteau long ago; and his elder children now played regularly about the yard, and everybody knew the baby, and claimed a kind of proprietorship in her.

'Why, I'm getting proud of you,' said his friend the turnkey, one day. 'You'll be the oldest inhabitant soon. The Marshalsea wouldn't be like the Marshalsea now, without you and your family.'

The turnkey really was proud of him. He would mention him in laudatory terms to new-comers, when his back was turned. 'You took notice of him,' he would say, 'that went out of the lodge just now?'

New-comer would probably answer Yes.

'Brought up as a gentleman, he was, if ever a man was. Ed'cated at no end of expense. Went into the Marshal's house once to try a new piano for him. Played it, I understand, like one o'clock—beautiful! As to languages—speaks anything. We've had a Frenchman here in his time, and it's my opinion he knowed more French than the Frenchman did. We've had an Italian here in his time, and he shut him up in about half a minute. You'll find some characters behind other locks, I don't say you won't; but if you want the top sawyer in such respects as I've mentioned, you must come to the Marshalsea.'

When his youngest child was eight years old, his wife, who had long been languishing away—of her own inherent weakness, not that she retained any greater sensitiveness as to her place of abode than he did—went upon a visit to a poor friend and old nurse in the country, and died there. He remained shut up in his room for a fortnight afterwards; and an attorney's clerk, who was going through the Insolvent Court, engrossed an address of condolence to him, which looked like a Lease, and which all the prisoners signed.

When he appeared again he was greyer (he had soon begun to turn grey); and the turnkey noticed that his hands went often to his trembling lips again, as they had used to do when he first came in.

But he got pretty well over it in a month or two; and in the meantime the children played about the yard as regularly as ever, but in black.

Then Mrs Bangham, long popular medium of communication with the outer world, began to be infirm, and to be found oftener than usual comatose on pavements, with her basket of purchases spilt, and the change of her clients ninepence short. His son began to supersede Mrs Bangham, and to execute commissions in a knowing manner, and to be of the prison prisonous, of the streets streety.

Time went on, and the turnkey began to fail. His chest swelled, and his legs got weak, and he was short of breath. The well-worn wooden stool was 'beyond him,' he complained. He sat in an arm-chair with a cushion, and sometimes wheezed so, for minutes together, that he couldn't turn the key. When he was overpowered by these fits, the debtor often turned it for him.

'You and me,' said the turnkey, one snowy winter's night when the lodge, with a bright fire in it, was pretty full of company, 'is the oldest inhabitants. I wasn't here myself above seven year before you. I shan't last long. When I'm off the lock for good and all, you'll be the Father of the Marshalsea.'

The turnkey went off the lock of this world next day. His words were remembered and repeated; and tradition afterwards handed down from generation to generation—a Marshalsea generation might be calculated as about three months—that the shabby old debtor with the soft manner and the white hair, was the Father of the Marshalsea.

And he grew to be proud of the title. If any impostor had arisen to claim it, he would have shed tears in resentment of the attempt to deprive him of his rights. A disposition began to be perceived in him to exaggerate the number of years he had been there; it was generally understood that you must deduct a few from his account; he was vain, the fleeting generations of debtors said.

All new-comers were presented to him. He was punctilious in the exaction of this ceremony. The wits would perform the office of introduction with overcharged pomp and politeness, but they could not easily overstep his sense of its gravity. He received them in his poor room (he disliked an introduction in the mere yard, as informal—a thing that might happen to anybody), with a kind of bowed-down beneficence. They were welcome to the Marshalsea, he would tell them. Yes, he was the Father of the place. So the world was kind enough to call him; and so he was, if more than twenty years of residence gave him a claim to the title. It looked small at first, but there was very good company there—among a mixture—necessarily a mixture—and very good air.

It became a not unusual circumstance for letters to be put under his door at night, enclosing half-a-crown, two half-crowns, now and then at long intervals even half-a-sovereign, for the Father of the Marshalsea. 'With the compliments of a collegian taking leave.' He received the gifts as tributes, from admirers, to a public character. Sometimes these correspondents assumed facetious names, as the Brick, Bellows, Old Gooseberry, Wideawake, Snooks, Mops, Cutaway, the Dogs-meat Man; but he considered this in bad taste, and was always a little hurt by it.

In the fulness of time, this correspondence showing signs of wearing out, and seeming to require an effort on the part of the correspondents to which in the hurried circumstances of departure many of them might not be equal, he established the custom of attending collegians of a certain standing, to the gate, and taking leave of them there. The collegian under treatment, after shaking hands, would occasionally stop to wrap up something in a bit of paper, and would come back again calling 'Hi!'

He would look round surprised.'Me?' he would say, with a smile. By this time the collegian would be up with him, and he would paternally add,'What have you forgotten? What can I do for you?'

'I forgot to leave this,' the collegian would usually return, 'for the Father of the Marshalsea.'

'My good sir,' he would rejoin, 'he is infinitely obliged to you.' But, to the last, the irresolute hand of old would remain in the pocket into which he had slipped the money during two or three turns about the yard, lest the transaction should be too conspicuous to the general body of collegians.

One afternoon he had been doing the honours of the place to a rather large party of collegians, who happened to be going out, when, as he was coming back, he encountered one from the poor side who had been taken in execution for a small sum a week before, had 'settled' in the course of that afternoon, and was going out too. The man was a mere Plasterer in his working dress; had his wife with him, and a bundle; and was in high spirits.

'God bless you, sir,' he said in passing.

'And you,' benignantly returned the Father of the Marshalsea.

They were pretty far divided, going their several ways, when the Plasterer called out, 'I say!—sir!' and came back to him.

'It ain't much,' said the Plasterer, putting a little pile of halfpence in his hand, 'but it's well meant.'

The Father of the Marshalsea had never been offered tribute in copper yet. His children often had, and with his perfect acquiescence it had gone into the common purse to buy meat that he had eaten, and drink that he had drunk; but fustian splashed with white lime, bestowing halfpence on him, front to front, was new.

'How dare you!' he said to the man, and feebly burst into tears.

The Plasterer turned him towards the wall, that his face might not be seen; and the action was so delicate, and the man was so penetrated with repentance, and asked pardon so honestly, that he could make him no less acknowledgment than, 'I know you meant it kindly. Say no more.'

'Bless your soul, sir,' urged the Plasterer, 'I did indeed. I'd do more by you than the rest of 'em do, I fancy.'

'What would you do?' he asked.

'I'd come back to see you, after I was let out.'

'Give me the money again,' said the other, eagerly, 'and I'll keep it, and never spend it. Thank you for it, thank you! I shall see you again?' 'If I live a week you shall.'

They shook hands and parted. The collegians, assembled in Symposium in the Snuggery that night, marvelled what had happened to their Father; he walked so late in the shadows of the yard, and seemed so downcast.

CHAPTER 7. The Child of the Marshalsea

The baby whose first draught of air had been tinctured with Doctor Haggage's brandy, was handed down among the generations of collegians, like the tradition of their common parent. In the earlier stages of her existence, she was handed down in a literal and prosaic sense; it being almost a part of the entrance footing of every new collegian to nurse the child who had been born in the college.

'By rights,' remarked the turnkey when she was first shown to him, 'I ought to be her godfather.'

The debtor irresolutely thought of it for a minute, and said, 'Perhaps you wouldn't object to really being her godfather?'

'Oh! *I* don't object,' replied the turnkey, 'if you don't.'

Thus it came to pass that she was christened one Sunday afternoon, when the turnkey, being relieved, was off the lock; and that the turnkey went up to the font of Saint George's Church, and promised and vowed and renounced on her behalf, as he himself related when he came back, 'like a good 'un.'

This invested the turnkey with a new proprietary share in the child, over and above his former official one. When she began to walk and talk, he became fond of her; bought a little arm-chair and stood it by the high fender of the lodge fire-place; liked to have her company when he was on the lock; and used to bribe her with cheap toys to come and talk to him. The child, for her part, soon grew so fond of the turnkey that she would come climbing up the lodge-steps of her own accord at all hours of the day. When she fell asleep in the little armchair by the high fender, the turnkey would cover her with his pocket-handkerchief; and when she sat in it dressing and undressing a doll which soon came to be unlike dolls on the other side of the lock, and to bear a horrible family resemblance to Mrs Bangham—he would contemplate her from the top of his stool with exceeding gentleness. Witnessing these things, the collegians would express an opinion that the turnkey, who was a bachelor, had been cut out by nature for a family man. But the turnkey thanked them, and said, 'No, on the whole it was enough to see other people's children there.' At what period of her early life the little creature began to perceive that it was not the habit of all the world to live locked up in narrow yards surrounded by high walls with spikes at the top, would be a difficult question to settle. But she was a very, very little creature indeed, when she had somehow gained the knowledge that her clasp of her father's hand was to be always loosened at the door which the great key opened; and that while her own light steps were free to pass beyond it, his feet must never cross that line. A pitiful and plaintive look, with which she had begun to regard him when she was still extremely young, was perhaps a part of this discovery.

With a pitiful and plaintive look for everything, indeed, but with something in it for only him that was like protection, this Child of the Marshalsea and the child of the Father of the Marshalsea, sat by her friend the turnkey in the lodge, kept the family room, or wandered about the prison-yard, for the first eight years of her life. With a pitiful and plaintive look for her wayward sister; for her idle brother; for the high blank walls; for the faded crowd they shut in; for the games of the prison children as they whooped and ran, and played at hide-and-seek, and made the iron bars of the inner gateway 'Home.'

Wistful and wondering, she would sit in summer weather by the high fender in the lodge, looking up at the sky through the barred window, until, when she turned her eyes away, bars of light would arise between her and her friend, and she would see him through a grating, too. 'Thinking of the fields,' the turnkey said once, after watching her, 'ain't you?'

'Where are they?' she inquired.

'Why, they're—over there, my dear,' said the turnkey, with a vague flourish of his key. 'Just about there.'

'Does anybody open them, and shut them? Are they locked?'

The turnkey was discomfited. 'Well,' he said. 'Not in general.'

'Are they very pretty, Bob?' She called him Bob, by his own particular request and instruction.

'Lovely. Full of flowers. There's buttercups, and there's daisies, and there's'—the turnkey hesitated, being short of floral nomenclature—'there's dandelions, and all manner of games.'

'Is it very pleasant to be there, Bob?'

'Prime,' said the turnkey.

'Was father ever there?'

'Hem!' coughed the turnkey. 'O yes, he was there, sometimes.'

'Is he sorry not to be there now?'

'N-not particular,' said the turnkey.

'Nor any of the people?' she asked, glancing at the listless crowd within. 'O are you quite sure and certain, Bob?'

At this difficult point of the conversation Bob gave in, and changed the subject to hard-bake: always his last resource when he found his little friend getting him into a political, social, or theological corner. But this was the origin of a series of Sunday excursions that these two curious companions made together. They used to issue from the lodge on alternate Sunday afternoons with great gravity, bound for some meadows or green lanes that had been elaborately appointed by the turnkey in the course of the week; and there she picked grass and flowers to bring home, while he smoked his pipe. Afterwards, there were tea-gardens, shrimps, ale, and other delicacies; and then they would come back hand in hand, unless she was more than usually tired, and had fallen asleep on his shoulder.

In those early days, the turnkey first began profoundly to consider a question which cost him so much mental labour, that it remained undetermined on the day of his death. He decided to will and bequeath his little property of savings to his godchild, and the point arose how could it be so 'tied up' as that only she should have the benefit of it? His experience on the lock gave him such an acute perception of the enormous difficulty of 'tying up' money with any approach to tightness, and contrariwise of the remarkable ease with which it got loose, that through a series of years he regularly propounded this knotty point to every new insolvent agent and other professional gentleman who passed in and out.

'Supposing,' he would say, stating the case with his key on the professional gentleman's waistcoat; 'supposing a man wanted to leave his property to a young female, and wanted to tie it up so that nobody else should ever be able to make a grab at it; how would you tie up that property?'

'Settle it strictly on herself,' the professional gentleman would complacently answer.

'But look here,' quoth the turnkey. 'Supposing she had, say a brother, say a father, say a husband, who would be likely to make a grab at that property when she came into it—how about that?'

'It would be settled on herself, and they would have no more legal claim on it than you,' would be the professional answer.

'Stop a bit,' said the turnkey. 'Supposing she was tender-hearted, and they came over her. Where's your law for tying it up then?'

The deepest character whom the turnkey sounded, was unable to produce his law for tying such a knot as that. So, the turnkey thought about it all his life, and died intestate after all.

But that was long afterwards, when his god-daughter was past sixteen. The first half of that space of her life was only just accomplished, when her pitiful and plaintive look saw her father a widower. From that time the protection that her wondering eyes had expressed towards him, became embodied in action, and the Child of the Marshalsea took upon herself a new relation towards the Father.

At first, such a baby could do little more than sit with him, deserting her livelier place by the high fender, and quietly watching him. But this made her so far necessary to him that he became accustomed to her, and began to be sensible of missing her when she was not there. Through this little gate, she passed out of childhood into the care-laden world.

What her pitiful look saw, at that early time, in her father, in her sister, in her brother, in the jail; how much, or how little of the wretched truth it pleased God to make visible to her; lies hidden with many mysteries. It is enough that she was inspired to be something which was not what the rest were, and to be that something, different and laborious, for the sake of the rest. Inspired? Yes. Shall we speak of the inspiration of a poet or a priest, and not of the heart impelled by love and self-devotion to the lowliest work in the lowliest way of life!

With no earthly friend to help her, or so much as to see her, but the one so strangely assorted; with no knowledge even of the common daily tone and habits of the common members of the free community who are not shut up in prisons; born and bred in a social condition, false even with a reference to the falsest condition outside the walls; drinking from infancy of a well whose waters had their own peculiar stain, their own unwholesome and unnatural taste; the Child of the Marshalsea began her womanly life.

No matter through what mistakes and discouragements, what ridicule (not unkindly meant, but deeply felt) of her youth and little figure, what humble consciousness of her own babyhood and want of strength, even in the matter of lifting and carrying; through how much weariness and hopelessness, and how many secret tears; she drudged on, until recognised as useful, even indispensable. That time came. She took the place of eldest of the three, in all things but precedence; was the head of the fallen family; and bore, in her own heart, its anxieties and shames.

At thirteen, she could read and keep accounts, that is, could put down in words and figures how much the bare necessaries that they wanted would cost, and how much less they had to buy them with. She had been, by snatches of a few weeks at a time, to an evening school outside, and got her sister and brother sent to day-schools by desultory starts, during three or four years. There was no instruction for any of them at home; but she knew well—no one better—that a man so broken as to be the Father of the Marshalsea, could be no father to his own children.

To these scanty means of improvement, she added another of her own contriving. Once, among the heterogeneous crowd of inmates there appeared a dancing-master. Her sister had a great desire to learn the dancing-master's art, and seemed to have a taste that way. At thirteen years old, the Child of the Marshalsea presented herself to the dancing-master, with a little bag in her hand, and preferred her humble petition.

'If you please, I was born here, sir.'

'Oh! You are the young lady, are you?' said the dancing-master, surveying the small figure and uplifted face.

'Yes, sir.'

'And what can I do for you?' said the dancing-master.

'Nothing for me, sir, thank you,' anxiously undrawing the strings of the little bag; 'but if, while you stay here, you could be so kind as to teach my sister cheap—'

'My child, I'll teach her for nothing,' said the dancing-master, shutting up the bag. He was as good-natured a dancing-master as ever danced to the Insolvent Court, and he kept his word. The sister was so apt a pupil, and the dancing-master had such abundant leisure to bestow upon her (for it took him a matter of ten weeks to set to his creditors, lead off, turn the Commissioners, and right and left back to his professional pursuits), that wonderful progress was made. Indeed the dancing-master was so proud of it, and so wishful to display it before he left to a few select friends among the collegians, that at six o'clock on a certain fine morning, a minuet de la cour came off in the yard—the college-rooms being of too confined proportions for the purpose—in which so much ground was covered, and the steps were so conscientiously executed, that the dancing-master, having to play the kit besides, was thoroughly blown.

The success of this beginning, which led to the dancing-master's continuing his instruction after his release, emboldened the poor child to try again. She watched and waited months for a seamstress. In the fulness of time a milliner came in, and to her she repaired on her own behalf.

'I beg your pardon, ma'am,' she said, looking timidly round the door of the milliner, whom she found in tears and in bed: 'but I was born here.'

Everybody seemed to hear of her as soon as they arrived; for the milliner sat up in bed, drying her eyes, and said, just as the dancing-master had said:

'Oh! You are the child, are you?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'I am sorry I haven't got anything for you,' said the milliner, shaking her head.

'It's not that, ma'am. If you please I want to learn needle-work.'

'Why should you do that,' returned the milliner, 'with me before you? It has not done me much good.'

'Nothing—whatever it is—seems to have done anybody much good who comes here,' she returned in all simplicity; 'but I want to learn just the same.'

'I am afraid you are so weak, you see,' the milliner objected.

'I don't think I am weak, ma'am.'

'And you are so very, very little, you see,' the milliner objected.

'Yes, I am afraid I am very little indeed,' returned the Child of the Marshalsea; and so began to sob over that unfortunate defect of hers, which came so often in her way. The milliner—who was not morose or hard-hearted, only newly insolvent—was touched, took her in hand with goodwill, found her the most patient and earnest of pupils, and made her a cunning work-woman in course of time.

In course of time, and in the very self-same course of time, the Father of the Marshalsea gradually developed a new flower of character. The more Fatherly he grew as to the Marshalsea, and the more dependent he became on the contributions of his changing family, the greater stand he made by his forlorn gentility. With the same hand that he pocketed a collegian's half-crown half an hour ago, he would wipe away the tears that streamed over his cheeks if any reference were made to his daughters' earning their bread. So, over and above other daily cares, the Child of the Marshalsea had always upon her the care of preserving the genteel fiction that they were all idle beggars together.

The sister became a dancer. There was a ruined uncle in the family group—ruined by his brother, the Father of the Marshalsea, and knowing no more how than his ruiner did, but accepting the fact as an inevitable certainty—on whom her protection devolved. Naturally a retired and simple man, he had shown no particular sense of being ruined at the time when that calamity fell upon him, further than that he left off washing himself when the shock was announced, and never took to that luxury any more. He had been a very indifferent musical amateur in his better days; and when he fell with his brother, resorted for support to playing a clarionet as dirty as himself in a small Theatre Orchestra. It was the theatre in which his niece became a dancer; he had been a fixture there a long time when she took her poor station in it; and he accepted the task of serving as her escort and guardian, just as he would have accepted an illness, a legacy, a feast, starvation—anything but soap.

To enable this girl to earn her few weekly shillings, it was necessary for the Child of the Marshalsea to go through an elaborate form with the Father.

'Fanny is not going to live with us just now, father. She will be here a good deal in the day, but she is going to live outside with uncle.'

'You surprise me. Why?'

'I think uncle wants a companion, father. He should be attended to, and looked after.'

'A companion? He passes much of his time here. And you attend to him and look after him, Amy, a great deal more than ever your sister will. You all go out so much; you all go out so much.'

This was to keep up the ceremony and pretence of his having no idea that Amy herself went out by the day to work.

'But we are always glad to come home, father; now, are we not? And as to Fanny, perhaps besides keeping uncle company and taking care of him, it may be as well for her not quite to live here, always. She was not born here as I was, you know, father.'

'Well, Amy, well. I don't quite follow you, but it's natural I suppose that Fanny should prefer to be outside, and even that you often should, too. So, you and Fanny and your uncle, my dear, shall have your own way. Good, good. I'll not meddle; don't mind me.'

To get her brother out of the prison; out of the succession to Mrs Bangham in executing commissions, and out of the slang interchange with very doubtful companions consequent upon both; was her hardest task. At eighteen he would have dragged on from hand to mouth, from hour to hour, from penny to penny, until eighty. Nobody got into the prison from whom he derived anything useful or good, and she could find no patron for him but her old friend and godfather.

'Dear Bob,' said she, 'what is to become of poor Tip?' His name was Edward, and Ted had been transformed into Tip, within the walls.

The turnkey had strong private opinions as to what would become of poor Tip, and had even gone so far with the view of averting their fulfilment, as to sound Tip in reference to the expediency of running away and going to serve his country. But Tip had thanked him, and said he didn't seem to care for his country.

'Well, my dear,' said the turnkey, 'something ought to be done with him. Suppose I try and get him into the law?'

'That would be so good of you, Bob!'

The turnkey had now two points to put to the professional gentlemen as they passed in and out. He put this second one so perseveringly that a stool and twelve shillings a week were at last found for Tip in the office of an attorney in a great National Palladium called the Palace Court; at that time one of a considerable list of everlasting bulwarks to the dignity and safety of Albion, whose places know them no more.

Tip languished in Clifford's Inns for six months, and at the expiration of that term sauntered back one evening with his hands in his pockets, and incidentally observed to his sister that he was not going back again.

'Not going back again?' said the poor little anxious Child of the Marshalsea, always calculating and planning for Tip, in the front rank of her charges.

'I am so tired of it,' said Tip, 'that I have cut it.'

Tip tired of everything. With intervals of Marshalsea lounging, and Mrs Bangham succession, his small second mother, aided by her trusty friend, got him into a warehouse, into a market garden, into the hop trade, into the law again, into an auctioneers, into a brewery, into a stockbroker's, into the law again, into a coach office, into a waggon office, into the law again, into a general dealer's, into a distillery, into the law again, into a wool house, into a dry goods house, into the Billingsgate trade, into the foreign fruit trade, and into the docks. But whatever Tip went into, he came out of tired, announcing that he had cut it. Wherever he went, this foredoomed Tip appeared to take the prison walls with him, and to set them up in such trade or calling; and to prowl about within their narrow limits in the old slip-shod, purposeless, down-at-heel way; until the real immovable Marshalsea walls asserted their fascination over him, and brought him back.

Nevertheless, the brave little creature did so fix her heart on her brother's rescue, that while he was ringing out these doleful changes, she pinched and scraped enough together to ship him for Canada. When he was tired of nothing to do, and disposed in its turn to cut even that, he graciously consented to go to Canada. And there was grief in her bosom over parting with him, and joy in the hope of his being put in a straight course at last.

'God bless you, dear Tip. Don't be too proud to come and see us, when you have made your fortune.'

'All right!' said Tip, and went.

But not all the way to Canada; in fact, not further than Liverpool.

After making the voyage to that port from London, he found himself so strongly impelled to cut the vessel, that he resolved to walk back again. Carrying out which intention, he presented himself before her at the expiration of a month, in rags, without shoes, and much more tired than ever. At length, after another interval of successorship to Mrs Bangham, he found a pursuit for himself, and announced it.

'Amy, I have got a situation.'

'Have you really and truly, Tip?'

'All right. I shall do now. You needn't look anxious about me any more, old girl.'

'What is it, Tip?'

'Why, you know Slingo by sight?'

'Not the man they call the dealer?'

'That's the chap. He'll be out on Monday, and he's going to give me a berth.'

'What is he a dealer in, Tip?'

'Horses. All right! I shall do now, Amy.'

She lost sight of him for months afterwards, and only heard from him once. A whisper passed among the elder collegians that he had been seen at a mock auction in Moorfields, pretending to buy plated articles for massive silver, and paying for them with the greatest liberality in bank notes; but it never reached her ears. One evening she was alone at work—standing up at the window, to save the twilight lingering above the wall—when he opened the door and walked in.

She kissed and welcomed him; but was afraid to ask him any questions. He saw how anxious and timid she was, and appeared sorry.

'I am afraid, Amy, you'll be vexed this time. Upon my life I am!'

'I am very sorry to hear you say so, Tip. Have you come back?'

'Why—yes.'

'Not expecting this time that what you had found would answer very well, I am less surprised and sorry than I might have been, Tip.'

'Ah! But that's not the worst of it.'

'Not the worst of it?'

'Don't look so startled. No, Amy, not the worst of it. I have come back, you see; but—DON'T look so startled—I have come back in what I may call a new way. I am off the volunteer list altogether. I am in now, as one of the regulars.'

'Oh! Don't say you are a prisoner, Tip! Don't, don't!'

'Well, I don't want to say it,' he returned in a reluctant tone; 'but if you can't understand me without my saying it, what am I to do? I am in for forty pound odd.'

For the first time in all those years, she sunk under her cares. She cried, with her clasped hands lifted above her head, that it would kill their father if he ever knew it; and fell down at Tip's graceless feet.

It was easier for Tip to bring her to her senses than for her to bring him to understand that the Father of the Marshalsea would be beside himself if he knew the truth. The thing was incomprehensible to Tip, and altogether a fanciful notion. He yielded to it in that light only, when he submitted to her entreaties, backed by those of his uncle and sister. There was no want of precedent for his return; it was accounted for to the father in the usual way; and the collegians, with a better comprehension of the pious fraud than Tip, supported it loyally.

This was the life, and this the history, of the child of the Marshalsea at twenty-two. With a still surviving attachment to the one miserable yard and block of houses as her birthplace and home, she passed to and fro in it shrinkingly now, with a womanly consciousness that she was pointed out to every one. Since she had begun to work beyond the walls, she had found it necessary to conceal where she lived, and to come and go as secretly as she could, between the free city and the iron gates, outside of which she had never slept in her life. Her original timidity had grown with this concealment, and her light step and her little figure shunned the thronged streets while they passed along them.

Worldly wise in hard and poor necessities, she was innocent in all things else. Innocent, in the mist through which she saw her father, and the prison, and the turbid living river that flowed through it and flowed on.

This was the life, and this the history, of Little Dorrit; now going home upon a dull September evening, observed at a distance by Arthur Clennam. This was the life, and this the history, of Little Dorrit; turning at the end of London Bridge, recrossing it, going back again, passing on to Saint George's Church, turning back suddenly once more, and flitting in at the open outer gate and little court-yard of the Marshalsea.

CHAPTER 8. The Lock

Arthur Clennam stood in the street, waiting to ask some passer-by what place that was. He suffered a few people to pass him in whose face there was no encouragement to make the inquiry, and still stood pausing in the street, when an old man came up and turned into the courtyard.

He stooped a good deal, and plodded along in a slow pre-occupied manner, which made the bustling London thoroughfares no very safe resort for him. He was dirtily and meanly dressed, in a threadbare coat, once blue, reaching to his ankles and buttoned to his chin, where it vanished in the pale ghost of a velvet collar. A piece of red cloth with which that phantom had been stiffened in its lifetime was now laid bare, and poked itself up, at the back of the old man's neck, into a confusion of grey hair and rusty stock and buckle which altogether nearly poked his hat off. A greasy hat it was, and a napless; impending over his eyes, cracked and crumpled at the brim, and with a wisp of pocket-handkerchief dangling out below it. His trousers were so long and loose, and his shoes so clumsy and large, that he shuffled like an elephant; though how much of this was gait, and how much trailing cloth and leather, no one could have told. Under one arm he carried a limp and worn-out case, containing some wind instrument; in the same hand he had a pennyworth of snuff in a little packet of whitey-brown paper, from which he slowly comforted his poor blue old nose with a lengthened-out pinch, as Arthur Clennam looked at him. To this old man crossing the court-yard, he preferred his inquiry, touching him on the shoulder. The old man stopped and looked round, with the expression in his weak grey eyes of one whose thoughts had been far off, and who was a little dull of hearing also.

'Pray, sir,' said Arthur, repeating his question, 'what is this place?'

'Ay! This place?' returned the old man, staying his pinch of snuff on its road, and pointing at the place without looking at it. 'This is the Marshalsea, sir.'

'The debtors' prison?'

'Sir,' said the old man, with the air of deeming it not quite necessary to insist upon that designation, 'the debtors' prison.'

He turned himself about, and went on.

'I beg your pardon,' said Arthur, stopping him once more, 'but will you allow me to ask you another question? Can any one go in here?'

'Any one can go IN,' replied the old man; plainly adding by the significance of his emphasis, 'but it is not every one who can go out.'

'Pardon me once more. Are you familiar with the place?'

'Sir,' returned the old man, squeezing his little packet of snuff in his hand, and turning upon his interrogator as if such questions hurt him. 'I am.'

'I beg you to excuse me. I am not impertinently curious, but have a good object. Do you know the name of Dorrit here?'

'My name, sir,' replied the old man most unexpectedly, 'is Dorrit.'

Arthur pulled off his hat to him. 'Grant me the favour of half-a-dozen words. I was wholly unprepared for your announcement, and hope that assurance is my sufficient apology for having taken the liberty of addressing you. I have recently come home to England after a long absence. I have seen at my mother's—Mrs Clennam in the city—a young woman working at her needle, whom I have only heard addressed or spoken of as Little Dorrit. I have felt sincerely interested in her, and have had a great desire to know something more about her. I saw her, not a minute before you came up, pass in at that door.'

The old man looked at him attentively. 'Are you a sailor, sir?' he asked. He seemed a little disappointed by the shake of the head that replied to him. 'Not a sailor? I judged from your sunburnt face that you might be. Are you in earnest, sir?'

'I do assure you that I am, and do entreat you to believe that I am, in plain earnest.'

'I know very little of the world, sir,' returned the other, who had a weak and quavering voice. 'I am merely passing on, like the shadow over the sun-dial. It would be worth no man's while to mislead me; it would really be too easy—too poor a success, to yield any satisfaction. The young woman whom you saw go in here is my brother's child. My brother is William Dorrit; I am Frederick. You say you have seen her at your mother's (I know your mother befriends her), you have felt an interest in her, and you wish to know what she does here. Come and see.'

He went on again, and Arthur accompanied him.

'My brother,' said the old man, pausing on the step and slowly facing round again, 'has been here many years; and much that happens even among ourselves, out of doors, is kept from him for reasons that I needn't enter upon now. Be so good as to say nothing of my niece's working at her needle. Be so good as to say nothing that goes beyond what is said among us. If you keep within our bounds, you cannot well be wrong. Now! Come and see.'

Arthur followed him down a narrow entry, at the end of which a key was turned, and a strong door was opened from within. It admitted them into a lodge or lobby, across which they passed, and so through another door and a grating into the prison. The old man always plodding on before, turned round, in his slow, stiff, stooping manner, when they came to the turnkey on duty, as if to present his companion. The turnkey nodded; and the companion passed in without being asked whom he wanted.

The night was dark; and the prison lamps in the yard, and the candles in the prison windows faintly shining behind many sorts of wry old curtain and blind, had not the air of making it lighter. A few people loitered about, but the greater part of the population was within doors. The old man, taking the right-hand side of the yard, turned in at the third or fourth doorway, and began to ascend the stairs. 'They are rather dark, sir, but you will not find anything in the way.'

He paused for a moment before opening a door on the second story. He had no sooner turned the handle than the visitor saw Little Dorrit, and saw the reason of her setting so much store by dining alone.

She had brought the meat home that she should have eaten herself, and was already warming it on a gridiron over the fire for her father, clad in an old grey gown and a black cap, awaiting his supper at the table. A clean cloth was spread before him, with knife, fork, and spoon, salt-cellar, pepper-box, glass, and pewter ale-pot. Such zests as his particular little phial of cayenne pepper and his pennyworth of pickles in a saucer, were not wanting.

She started, coloured deeply, and turned white. The visitor, more with his eyes than by the slight impulsive motion of his hand, entreated her to be reassured and to trust him.

'I found this gentleman,' said the uncle—'Mr Clennam, William, son of Amy's friend—at the outer gate, wishful, as he was going by, of paying his respects, but hesitating whether to come in or not. This is my brother William, sir.'

'I hope,' said Arthur, very doubtful what to say, 'that my respect for your daughter may explain and justify my desire to be presented to you, sir.'

'Mr Clennam,' returned the other, rising, taking his cap off in the flat of his hand, and so holding it, ready to put on again, 'you do me honour. You are welcome, sir;' with a low bow. 'Frederick, a chair. Pray sit down, Mr Clennam.'

He put his black cap on again as he had taken it off, and resumed his own seat. There was a wonderful air of benignity and patronage in his manner. These were the ceremonies with which he received the collegians.

'You are welcome to the Marshalsea, sir. I have welcomed many gentlemen to these walls. Perhaps you are aware—my daughter Amy may have mentioned that I am the Father of this place.'

'I—so I have understood,' said Arthur, dashing at the assertion.

'You know, I dare say, that my daughter Amy was born here. A good girl, sir, a dear girl, and long a comfort and support to me. Amy, my dear, put this dish on; Mr Clennam will excuse the primitive customs to which we are reduced here. Is it a compliment to ask you if you would do me the honour, sir, to—'

'Thank you,' returned Arthur. 'Not a morsel.'

He felt himself quite lost in wonder at the manner of the man, and that the probability of his daughter's having had a reserve as to her family history, should be so far out of his mind.

She filled his glass, put all the little matters on the table ready to his hand, and then sat beside him while he ate his supper. Evidently in observance of their nightly custom, she put some bread before herself, and touched his glass with her lips; but Arthur saw she was troubled and took nothing. Her look at her father, half admiring him and proud of him, half ashamed for him, all devoted and loving, went to his inmost heart.

The Father of the Marshalsea condescended towards his brother as an amiable, well-meaning man; a private character, who had not arrived at distinction. 'Frederick,' said he, 'you and Fanny sup at your lodgings to-night, I know. What have you done with Fanny, Frederick?' 'She is walking with Tip.'

'Tip—as you may know—is my son, Mr Clennam. He has been a little wild, and difficult to settle, but his introduction to the world was rather'—he shrugged his shoulders with a faint sigh, and looked round the room—'a little adverse. Your first visit here, sir?'

'My first.'

'You could hardly have been here since your boyhood without my knowledge. It very seldom happens that anybody—of any pretensions-any pretensions—comes here without being presented to me.'

'As many as forty or fifty in a day have been introduced to my brother,' said Frederick, faintly lighting up with a ray of pride.

'Yes!' the Father of the Marshalsea assented. 'We have even exceeded that number. On a fine Sunday in term time, it is quite a Levee—quite a Levee. Amy, my dear, I have been trying half the day to remember the name of the gentleman from Camberwell who was introduced to me last Christmas week by that agreeable coal-merchant who was remanded for six months.'

'I don't remember his name, father.'

'Frederick, do you remember his name?' Frederick doubted if he had ever heard it. No one could doubt that Frederick was the last person upon earth to put such a question to, with any hope of information.

'I mean,' said his brother, 'the gentleman who did that handsome action with so much delicacy. Ha! Tush! The name has quite escaped me. Mr Clennam, as I have happened to mention handsome and delicate action, you may like, perhaps, to know what it was.'

'Very much,' said Arthur, withdrawing his eyes from the delicate head beginning to droop and the pale face with a new solicitude stealing over it.

'It is so generous, and shows so much fine feeling, that it is almost a duty to mention it. I said at the time that I always would mention it on every suitable occasion, without regard to personal sensitiveness. A—well—a—it's of no use to disguise the fact—you must know, Mr Clennam, that it does sometimes occur that people who come here desire to offer some little—Testimonial—to the Father of the place.'

To see her hand upon his arm in mute entreaty half-repressed, and her timid little shrinking figure turning away, was to see a sad, sad sight.

'Sometimes,' he went on in a low, soft voice, agitated, and clearing his throat every now and then; 'sometimes—hem—it takes one shape and sometimes another; but it is generally—ha—Money. And it is, I cannot but confess it, it is too often—hem—acceptable. This gentleman that I refer to, was presented to me, Mr Clennam, in a manner highly gratifying to my feelings, and conversed not only with great politeness, but with great—ahem—information.' All this time, though he had finished his supper, he was nervously going about his plate with his knife and fork, as if some of it were still before him. 'It appeared from his conversation that he had a garden, though he was delicate of mentioning it at first, as gardens are—hem—are not accessible to me. But it came out, through my admiring a very fine cluster of geranium—beautiful cluster of geranium to be sure—which he had brought from his conservatory. On my taking notice of its rich colour, he showed me a piece of paper round it, on which was written, "For the Father of the Marshalsea," and presented it to me. But this was—hem—not all. He made a particular request, on taking leave, that I would remove the paper in half an hour. I—ha—I did so; and I found that it contained—ahem—two guineas. I assure you, Mr Clennam, I have received—hem—Testimonials in many ways, and of many degrees of value, and they have always been—ha—unfortunately acceptable; but I never was more pleased than with this—ahem—this particular Testimonial.' Arthur was in the act of saying the little he could say on such a theme, when a bell began to ring, and footsteps approached the door. A pretty girl of a far better figure and much more developed than Little Dorrit, though looking much younger in the face when the two were observed together, stopped in the doorway on seeing a stranger; and a young man who was with her, stopped too.

'Mr Clennam, Fanny. My eldest daughter and my son, Mr Clennam. The bell is a signal for visitors to retire, and so they have come to say good night; but there is plenty of time, plenty of time. Girls, Mr Clennam will excuse any household business you may have together. He knows, I dare say, that I have but one room here.'

'I only want my clean dress from Amy, father,' said the second girl.

'And I my clothes,' said Tip.

Amy opened a drawer in an old piece of furniture that was a chest of drawers above and a bedstead below, and produced two little bundles, which she handed to her brother and sister. 'Mended and made up?' Clennam heard the sister ask in a whisper. To which Amy answered 'Yes.' He had risen now, and took the opportunity of glancing round the room. The bare walls had been coloured green, evidently by an unskilled hand, and were poorly decorated with a few prints. The window was curtained, and the floor carpeted; and there were shelves and pegs, and other such conveniences, that had accumulated in the course of years. It was a close, confined room, poorly furnished; and the chimney smoked to boot, or the tin screen at the top of the fireplace was superfluous; but constant pains and care had made it neat, and even, after its kind, comfortable. All the while the bell was ringing, and the uncle was anxious to go. 'Come, Fanny, come, Fanny,' he said, with his ragged clarionet case under his arm; 'the lock, child, the lock!'

Fanny bade her father good night, and whisked off airily. Tip had already clattered down-stairs. 'Now, Mr Clennam,' said the uncle, looking back as he shuffled out after them, 'the lock, sir, the lock.'

Mr Clennam had two things to do before he followed; one, to offer his testimonial to the Father of the Marshalsea, without giving pain to his child; the other to say something to that child, though it were but a word, in explanation of his having come there.

'Allow me,' said the Father, 'to see you down-stairs.'

She had slipped out after the rest, and they were alone. 'Not on any account,' said the visitor, hurriedly. 'Pray allow me to—' chink, chink, chink.

'Mr Clennam,' said the Father, 'I am deeply, deeply—' But his visitor had shut up his hand to stop the clinking, and had gone down-stairs with great speed.

He saw no Little Dorrit on his way down, or in the yard. The last two or three stragglers were hurrying to the lodge, and he was following, when he caught sight of her in the doorway of the first house from the entrance. He turned back hastily.

'Pray forgive me,' he said, 'for speaking to you here; pray forgive me for coming here at all! I followed you to-night. I did so, that I might endeavour to render you and your family some service. You know the terms on which I and my mother are, and may not be surprised that I have preserved our distant relations at her house, lest I should unintentionally make her jealous, or resentful, or do you any injury in her estimation. What I have seen here, in this short time, has greatly increased my heartfelt wish to be a friend to you. It would recompense me for much disappointment if I could hope to gain your confidence.'

She was scared at first, but seemed to take courage while he spoke to her.

'You are very good, sir. You speak very earnestly to me. But I—but I wish you had not watched me.'

He understood the emotion with which she said it, to arise in her father's behalf; and he respected it, and was silent.

'Mrs Clennam has been of great service to me; I don't know what we should have done without the employment she has given me; I am afraid it may not be a good return to become secret with her; I can say no more to-night, sir. I am sure you mean to be kind to us. Thank you, thank you.' 'Let me ask you one question before I leave. Have you known my mother long?'

'I think two years, sir,—The bell has stopped.'

'How did you know her first? Did she send here for you?'

'No. She does not even know that I live here. We have a friend, father and I—a poor labouring man, but the best of friends—and I wrote out that I wished to do needlework, and gave his address. And he got what I wrote out displayed at a few places where it cost nothing, and Mrs Clennam found me that way, and sent for me. The gate will be locked, sir!'

She was so tremulous and agitated, and he was so moved by compassion for her, and by deep interest in her story as it dawned upon him, that he could scarcely tear himself away. But the stoppage of the bell, and the quiet in the prison, were a warning to depart; and with a few hurried words of kindness he left her gliding back to her father.

But he remained too late. The inner gate was locked, and the lodge closed. After a little fruitless knocking with his hand, he was standing there with the disagreeable conviction upon him that he had got to get through the night, when a voice accosted him from behind.

'Caught, eh?' said the voice. 'You won't go home till morning. Oh! It's you, is it, Mr Clennam?'

The voice was Tip's; and they stood looking at one another in the prison-yard, as it began to rain.

'You've done it,' observed Tip; 'you must be sharper than that next time.'

'But you are locked in too,' said Arthur.

'I believe I am!' said Tip, sarcastically. 'About! But not in your way. I belong to the shop, only my sister has a theory that our governor must never know it. I don't see why, myself.'

'Can I get any shelter?' asked Arthur. 'What had I better do?'

'We had better get hold of Amy first of all,' said Tip, referring any difficulty to her as a matter of course.

'I would rather walk about all night—it's not much to do—than give that trouble.'

'You needn't do that, if you don't mind paying for a bed. If you don't mind paying, they'll make you up one on the Snuggery table, under the circumstances. If you'll come along, I'll introduce you there.'

As they passed down the yard, Arthur looked up at the window of the room he had lately left, where the light was still burning. 'Yes, sir,' said Tip, following his glance. 'That's the governor's. She'll sit with him for another hour reading yesterday's paper to him, or something of that sort; and then she'll come out like a little ghost, and vanish away without a sound.'

'I don't understand you.'

'The governor sleeps up in the room, and she has a lodging at the turnkey's. First house there,' said Tip, pointing out the doorway into which she had retired. 'First house, sky parlour. She pays twice as much for it as she would for one twice as good outside. But she stands by the governor, poor dear girl, day and night.'

This brought them to the tavern-establishment at the upper end of the prison, where the collegians had just vacated their social evening club. The apartment on the ground-floor in which it was held, was the Snuggery in question; the presidential tribune of the chairman, the pewter-pots, glasses, pipes, tobacco-ashes, and general flavour of members, were still as that convivial institution had left them on its adjournment. The Snuggery had two of the qualities popularly held to be essential to grog for ladies, in respect that it was hot and strong; but in the third point of analogy, requiring plenty of it, the Snuggery was defective; being but a cooped-up apartment.

The unaccustomed visitor from outside, naturally assumed everybody here to be prisoners—landlord, waiter, barmaid, potboy, and all. Whether they were or not, did not appear; but they all had a weedy look. The keeper of a chandler's shop in a front parlour, who took in gentlemen boarders, lent his assistance in making the bed. He had been a tailor in his time, and had kept a phaeton, he said. He boasted that he stood up litigiously for the interests of the college; and he had undefined and undefinable ideas that the marshal intercepted a 'Fund,' which ought to come to the collegians. He liked to believe this, and always impressed the shadowy grievance on new-comers and strangers; though he could not, for his life, have explained what Fund he meant, or how the notion had got rooted in his soul. He had fully convinced himself, notwithstanding, that his own proper share of the Fund was three and ninepence a week; and that in this amount he, as an individual collegian, was swindled by the marshal, regularly every Monday. Apparently, he helped to make the bed, that he might not lose an opportunity of stating this case; after which unloading of his mind, and after announcing (as it seemed he always did, without anything coming of it) that he was going to write a letter to the papers and show the marshal up, he fell into miscellaneous conversation with the rest. It was evident from the general tone of the whole party, that they had come to regard insolvency as the normal state of mankind, and the payment of debts as a disease that occasionally broke out. In this strange scene, and with these strange spectres flitting about him, Arthur Clennam looked on at the preparations as if they were part of a dream. Pending which, the long-initiated Tip, with an awful enjoyment of the Snuggery's resources, pointed out the common kitchen fire maintained by subscription of collegians, the boiler for hot water supported in like manner, and other premises generally tending to the deduction that the way to be healthy, wealthy, and wise, was to come to the Marshalsea.

The two tables put together in a corner, were, at length, converted into a very fair bed; and the stranger was left to the Windsor chairs, the presidential tribune, the beery atmosphere, sawdust, pipe-lights, spittoons and repose. But the last item was long, long, long, in linking itself to the rest. The novelty of the place, the coming upon it without preparation, the sense of being locked up, the remembrance of that room up-stairs, of the two brothers, and above all of the retiring childish form, and the face in which he now saw years of insufficient food, if not of want, kept him waking and unhappy.

Speculations, too, bearing the strangest relations towards the prison, but always concerning the prison, ran like nightmares through his mind while he lay awake. Whether coffins were kept ready for people who might die there, where they were kept, how they were kept, where people who died in the prison were buried, how they were taken out, what forms were observed, whether an implacable creditor could arrest the dead? As to escaping, what chances there were of escape? Whether a prisoner could scale the walls with a cord and grapple, how he would descend upon the other side? whether he could alight on a housetop, steal down a staircase, let himself out at a door, and get lost in the crowd? As to Fire in the prison, if one were to break out while he lay there?

And these involuntary starts of fancy were, after all, but the setting of a picture in which three people kept before him. His father, with the steadfast look with which he had died, prophetically darkened forth in the portrait;

his mother, with her arm up, warding off his suspicion; Little Dorrit, with her hand on the degraded arm, and her drooping head turned away.

What if his mother had an old reason she well knew for softening to this poor girl! What if the prisoner now sleeping quietly—Heaven grant it!—by the light of the great Day of judgment should trace back his fall to her. What if any act of hers and of his father's, should have even remotely brought the grey heads of those two brothers so low!

A swift thought shot into his mind. In that long imprisonment here, and in her own long confinement to her room, did his mother find a balance to be struck? 'I admit that I was accessory to that man's captivity. I have suffered for it in kind. He has decayed in his prison: I in mine. I have paid the penalty.'

When all the other thoughts had faded out, this one held possession of him. When he fell asleep, she came before him in her wheeled chair, warding him off with this justification. When he awoke, and sprang up causelessly frightened, the words were in his ears, as if her voice had slowly spoken them at his pillow, to break his rest: 'He withers away in his prison; I wither away in mine; inexorable justice is done; what do I owe on this score!'

CHAPTER 9. Little Mother

The morning light was in no hurry to climb the prison wall and look in at the Snuggery windows; and when it did come, it would have been more welcome if it had come alone, instead of bringing a rush of rain with it. But the equinoctial gales were blowing out at sea, and the impartial south-west wind, in its flight, would not neglect even the narrow Marshalsea. While it roared through the steeple of St George's Church, and twirled all the cowls in the neighbourhood, it made a swoop to beat the Southwark smoke into the jail; and, plunging down the chimneys of the few early collegians who were yet lighting their fires, half suffocated them. Arthur Clennam would have been little disposed to linger in bed, though his bed had been in a more private situation, and less affected by the raking out of yesterday's fire, the kindling of to-day's under the collegiate boiler, the filling of that Spartan vessel at the pump, the sweeping and sawdusting of the common room, and other such preparations. Heartily glad to see the morning, though little rested by the night, he turned out as soon as he could distinguish objects about him, and paced the yard for two heavy hours before the gate was opened.

The walls were so near to one another, and the wild clouds hurried over them so fast, that it gave him a sensation like the beginning of sea-sickness to look up at the gusty sky. The rain, carried aslant by flaws of wind, blackened that side of the central building which he had visited last night, but left a narrow dry trough under the lee of the wall, where he walked up and down among the waits of straw and dust and paper, the waste droppings of the pump, and the stray leaves of yesterday's greens. It was as haggard a view of life as a man need look upon.

Nor was it relieved by any glimpse of the little creature who had brought him there. Perhaps she glided out of her doorway and in at that where her father lived, while his face was turned from both; but he saw nothing of her. It was too early for her brother; to have seen him once, was to have seen enough of him to know that he would be sluggish to leave whatever frowsy bed he occupied at night; so, as Arthur Clennam walked up and down, waiting for the gate to open, he cast about in his mind for future rather than for present means of pursuing his discoveries.

At last the lodge-gate turned, and the turnkey, standing on the step, taking an early comb at his hair, was ready to let him out. With a joyful sense of release he passed through the lodge, and found himself again in the little outer court-yard where he had spoken to the brother last night.

There was a string of people already straggling in, whom it was not difficult to identify as the nondescript messengers, go-betweens, and errand-bearers of the place. Some of them had been lounging in the rain until the gate should open; others, who had timed their arrival with greater nicety, were coming up now, and passing in with damp whitey-brown paper bags from the grocers, loaves of bread, lumps of butter, eggs, milk, and the like. The shabbiness of these attendants upon shabbiness, the poverty of these insolvent waiters upon insolvency, was a sight to see. Such threadbare coats and trousers, such fusty gowns and shawls, such squashed hats and bonnets, such boots and shoes, such umbrellas and walking-sticks, never were seen in Rag Fair. All of them wore the cast-off clothes of other men and women, were made up of patches and pieces of other people's individuality, and had no sartorial existence of their own proper. Their walk was the walk of a race apart. They had a peculiar way of doggedly slinking round the corner, as if they were eternally going to the pawnbroker's. When they coughed, they coughed like people accustomed to be forgotten on doorsteps and in draughty passages, waiting for answers to letters in faded ink, which gave the recipients of those manuscripts great mental disturbance and no satisfaction. As they eyed the stranger in passing, they eyed him with borrowing eyes—hungry, sharp, speculative as to his softness if they were accredited to him, and the likelihood of his standing something handsome. Mendicity on commission stooped in their high shoulders, shambled in their unsteady legs, buttoned and pinned and darned and dragged their clothes, frayed their button-holes, leaked out of their figures in dirty little ends of tape, and issued from their mouths in alcoholic breathings.

As these people passed him standing still in the court-yard, and one of them turned back to inquire if he could assist him with his services, it came into Arthur Clennam's mind that he would speak to Little Dorrit again before he went away. She would have recovered her first surprise, and might feel easier with him. He asked this member of the fraternity (who had two red herrings in his hand, and a loaf and a blacking brush under his arm), where was the nearest place to get a cup of coffee at. The nondescript replied in encouraging terms, and brought him to a coffee-shop in the street within a stone's throw.

'Do you know Miss Dorrit?' asked the new client.

The nondescript knew two Miss Dorrits; one who was born inside—That was the one! That was the one? The nondescript had known her many years. In regard of the other Miss Dorrit, the nondescript lodged in the same house with herself and uncle.

This changed the client's half-formed design of remaining at the coffee-shop until the nondescript should bring him word that Dorrit had issued forth into the street. He entrusted the nondescript with a confidential message to her, importing that the visitor who had waited on her father last night, begged the favour of a few words with her at her uncle's lodging; he obtained from the same source full directions to the house, which was very near; dismissed the nondescript gratified with half-a-crown; and having hastily refreshed himself at the coffee-shop, repaired with all speed to the clarionet-player's dwelling.

There were so many lodgers in this house that the doorpost seemed to be as full of bell-handles as a cathedral organ is of stops. Doubtful which might be the clarionet-stop, he was considering the point, when a shuttlecock flew out of the parlour window, and alighted on his hat. He then observed that in the parlour window was a blind with the inscription, MR CRIPPLES's ACADEMY; also in another line, EVENING TUITION; and behind the blind was a little white-faced boy, with a slice of bread-and-butter and a battledore.

The window being accessible from the footway, he looked in over the blind, returned the shuttlecock, and put his question.

'Dorrit?' said the little white-faced boy (Master Cripples in fact). 'Mr Dorrit? Third bell and one knock.' The pupils of Mr Cripples appeared to have been making a copy-book of the street-door, it was so extensively scribbled over in pencil.

The frequency of the inscriptions, 'Old Dorrit,' and 'Dirty Dick,' in combination, suggested intentions of personality on the part Of Mr Cripples's pupils. There was ample time to make these observations before the door was opened by the poor old man himself.

'Ha!' said he, very slowly remembering Arthur, 'you were shut in last night?'

'Yes, Mr Dorrit. I hope to meet your niece here presently.'

'Oh!' said he, pondering. 'Out of my brother's way? True. Would you come up-stairs and wait for her?'

'Thank you.'

Turning himself as slowly as he turned in his mind whatever he heard or said, he led the way up the narrow stairs. The house was very close, and had an unwholesome smell. The little staircase windows looked in at the back windows of other houses as unwholesome as itself, with poles and lines thrust out of them, on which unsightly linen hung; as if the inhabitants were angling for clothes, and had had some wretched bites not worth attending to. In the back garret—a sickly room, with a turn-up bedstead in it, so hastily and recently turned up that the blankets were boiling over, as it were, and keeping the lid open—a half-finished breakfast of coffee and toast for two persons was jumbled down anyhow on a rickety table.

There was no one there. The old man mumbling to himself, after some consideration, that Fanny had run away, went to the next room to fetch her back. The visitor, observing that she held the door on the inside, and that, when the uncle tried to open it, there was a sharp adjuration of 'Don't, stupid!' and an appearance of loose stocking and flannel, concluded that the young lady was in an undress. The uncle, without appearing to come to any conclusion, shuffled in again, sat down in his chair, and began warming his hands at the fire; not that it was cold, or that he had any waking idea whether it was or not.

'What did you think of my brother, sir?' he asked, when he by-and-by discovered what he was doing, left off, reached over to the chimney-piece, and took his clarionet case down.

'I was glad,' said Arthur, very much at a loss, for his thoughts were on the brother before him; 'to find him so well and cheerful.' 'Ha!' muttered the old man, 'yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!'

Arthur wondered what he could possibly want with the clarionet case. He did not want it at all. He discovered, in due time, that it was not the little paper of snuff (which was also on the chimney-piece), put it back again, took down the snuff instead, and solaced himself with a pinch. He was as feeble, spare, and slow in his pinches as in everything else, but a certain little trickling of enjoyment of them played in the poor worn nerves about the corners of his eyes and mouth.

'Amy, Mr Clennam. What do you think of her?'

'I am much impressed, Mr Dorrit, by all that I have seen of her and thought of her.'

'My brother would have been quite lost without Amy,' he returned. 'We should all have been lost without Amy. She is a very good girl, Amy. She does her duty.'

Arthur fancied that he heard in these praises a certain tone of custom, which he had heard from the father last night with an inward protest and feeling of antagonism. It was not that they stinted her praises, or were insensible to what she did for them; but that they were lazily habituated to her, as they were to all the rest of their condition. He fancied that although they had before them, every day, the means of comparison between her and one another and themselves, they regarded her as being in her necessary place; as holding a position towards them all which belonged to her, like her name or her age. He fancied that they viewed her, not as having risen away from the prison atmosphere, but as appertaining to it; as being vaguely what they had a right to expect, and nothing more.

Her uncle resumed his breakfast, and was munching toast sopped in coffee, oblivious of his guest, when the third bell rang. That was Amy, he said, and went down to let her in; leaving the visitor with as vivid a picture on his mind of his begrimed hands, dirt-worn face, and decayed figure, as if he were still drooping in his chair.

She came up after him, in the usual plain dress, and with the usual timid manner. Her lips were a little parted, as if her heart beat faster than usual.

'Mr Clennam, Amy,' said her uncle, 'has been expecting you some time.'

'I took the liberty of sending you a message.'

'I received the message, sir.'

'Are you going to my mother's this morning? I think not, for it is past your usual hour.' 'Not to-day, sir. I am not wanted to-day.'

'Will you allow Me to walk a little way in whatever direction you may be going? I can then speak to you as we walk, both without detaining you here, and without intruding longer here myself.'

She looked embarrassed, but said, if he pleased. He made a pretence of having mislaid his walking-stick, to give her time to set the bedstead right, to answer her sister's impatient knock at the wall, and to say a word softly to her uncle. Then he found it, and they went down-stairs; she first, he following; the uncle standing at the stair-head, and probably forgetting them before they had reached the ground floor.

Mr Cripples's pupils, who were by this time coming to school, desisted from their morning recreation of cuffing one another with bags and books, to stare with all the eyes they had at a stranger who had been to see Dirty Dick. They bore the trying spectacle in silence, until the mysterious visitor was at a safe distance; when they burst into pebbles and yells, and likewise into reviling dances, and in all respects buried the pipe of peace with so many savage ceremonies, that, if Mr Cripples had been the chief of the Cripplewayboo tribe with his war-paint on, they could scarcely have done greater justice to their education.

In the midst of this homage, Mr Arthur Clennam offered his arm to Little Dorrit, and Little Dorrit took it. 'Will you go by the Iron Bridge,' said he, 'where there is an escape from the noise of the street?' Little Dorrit answered, if he pleased, and presently ventured to hope that he would 'not mind' Mr Cripples's boys, for she had herself received her education, such as it was, in Mr Cripples's evening academy. He returned, with the best will in the world, that Mr Cripples's boys were forgiven out of the bottom of his soul. Thus did Cripples unconsciously become a master of the ceremonies between them, and bring them more naturally together than Beau Nash might have done if they had lived in his golden days, and he had alighted from his coach and six for the purpose.

The morning remained squally, and the streets were miserably muddy, but no rain fell as they walked towards the Iron Bridge. The little creature seemed so young in his eyes, that there were moments when he found himself thinking of her, if not speaking to her, as if she were a child. Perhaps he seemed as old in her eyes as she seemed young in his.

'I am sorry to hear you were so inconvenienced last night, sir, as to be locked in. It was very unfortunate.'

It was nothing, he returned. He had had a very good bed.

'Oh yes!' she said quickly; 'she believed there were excellent beds at the coffee-house.' He noticed that the coffee-house was quite a majestic hotel to her, and that she treasured its reputation. 'I believe it is very expensive,' said Little Dorrit, 'but MY father has told me that quite beautiful dinners may be got there. And wine,' she added timidly. 'Were you ever there?'

'Oh no! Only into the kitchen to fetch hot water.'

To think of growing up with a kind of awe upon one as to the luxuries of that superb establishment, the Marshalsea Hotel!

'I asked you last night,' said Clennam, 'how you had become acquainted with my mother. Did you ever hear her name before she sent for you?'

'No, sir.'

'Do you think your father ever did?'

'No, sir.'

He met her eyes raised to his with so much wonder in them (she was scared when the encounter took place, and shrunk away again), that he felt it necessary to say:

'I have a reason for asking, which I cannot very well explain; but you must, on no account, suppose it to be of a nature to cause you the least alarm or anxiety. Quite the reverse. And you think that at no time of your father's life was my name of Clennam ever familiar to him?'

'No, sir.'

He felt, from the tone in which she spoke, that she was glancing up at him with those parted lips; therefore he looked before him, rather than make her heart beat quicker still by embarrassing her afresh.

Thus they emerged upon the Iron Bridge, which was as quiet after the roaring streets as though it had been open country. The wind blew roughly, the wet squalls came rattling past them, skimming the pools on the road and pavement, and raining them down into the river. The clouds raced on furiously in the lead-Coloured sky, the smoke and mist raced after them, the dark tide ran fierce and strong in the same direction. Little Dorrit seemed the least, the quietest, and weakest of Heaven's creatures.

'Let me put you in a coach,' said Clennam, very nearly adding 'my poor child.'

She hurriedly declined, saying that wet or dry made little difference to her; she was used to go about in all weathers. He knew it to be so, and was touched with more pity; thinking of the slight figure at his side, making its nightly way through the damp dark boisterous streets to such a place of rest.
'You spoke so feelingly to me last night, sir, and I found afterwards that you had been so generous to my father, that I could not resist your message, if it was only to thank you; especially as I wished very much to say to you—' she hesitated and trembled, and tears rose in her eyes, but did not fall.

'To say to me—?'

'That I hope you will not misunderstand my father. Don't judge him, sir, as you would judge others outside the gates. He has been there so long! I never saw him outside, but I can understand that he must have grown different in some things since.'

'My thoughts will never be unjust or harsh towards him, believe me.'

'Not,' she said, with a prouder air, as the misgiving evidently crept upon her that she might seem to be abandoning him, 'not that he has anything to be ashamed of for himself, or that I have anything to be ashamed of for him. He only requires to be understood. I only ask for him that his life may be fairly remembered. All that he said was quite true. It all happened just as he related it. He is very much respected. Everybody who comes in, is glad to know him. He is more courted than anyone else. He is far more thought of than the Marshal is.'

If ever pride were innocent, it was innocent in Little Dorrit when she grew boastful of her father.

'It is often said that his manners are a true gentleman's, and quite a study. I see none like them in that place, but he is admitted to be superior to all the rest. This is quite as much why they make him presents, as because they know him to be needy. He is not to be blamed for being in need, poor love. Who could be in prison a quarter of a century, and be prosperous!'

What affection in her words, what compassion in her repressed tears, what a great soul of fidelity within her, how true the light that shed false brightness round him!

'If I have found it best to conceal where my home is, it is not because I am ashamed of him. God forbid! Nor am I so much ashamed of the place itself as might be supposed. People are not bad because they come there. I have known numbers of good, persevering, honest people come there through misfortune. They are almost all kind-hearted to one another. And it would be ungrateful indeed in me, to forget that I have had many quiet, comfortable hours there; that I had an excellent friend there when I was quite a baby, who was very very fond of me; that I have been taught there, and have worked there, and have slept soundly there. I think it would be almost cowardly and cruel not to have some little attachment for it, after all this.'

She had relieved the faithful fulness of her heart, and modestly said, raising her eyes appealingly to her new friend's, 'I did not mean to say so much, nor have I ever but once spoken about this before. But it seems to set it more right than it was last night. I said I wished you had not followed me, sir. I don't wish it so much now, unless you should think—indeed I don't wish it at all, unless I should have spoken so confusedly, that—that you can scarcely understand me, which I am afraid may be the case.'

He told her with perfect truth that it was not the case; and putting himself between her and the sharp wind and rain, sheltered her as well as he could.

'I feel permitted now,' he said, 'to ask you a little more concerning your father. Has he many creditors?'

'Oh! a great number.'

'I mean detaining creditors, who keep him where he is?'

'Oh yes! a great number.'

'Can you tell me—I can get the information, no doubt, elsewhere, if you cannot—who is the most influential of them?'

Little Dorrit said, after considering a little, that she used to hear long ago of Mr Tite Barnacle as a man of great power. He was a commissioner, or a board, or a trustee, 'or something.' He lived in Grosvenor Square, she thought, or very near it. He was under Government—high in the Circumlocution Office. She appeared to have acquired, in her infancy, some awful impression of the might of this formidable Mr Tite Barnacle of Grosvenor Square, or very near it, and the Circumlocution Office, which quite crushed her when she mentioned him.

'It can do no harm,' thought Arthur, 'if I see this Mr Tite Barnacle.'

The thought did not present itself so quietly but that her quickness intercepted it. 'Ah!' said Little Dorrit, shaking her head with the mild despair of a lifetime. 'Many people used to think once of getting my poor father out, but you don't know how hopeless it is.'

She forgot to be shy at the moment, in honestly warning him away from the sunken wreck he had a dream of raising; and looked at him with eyes which assuredly, in association with her patient face, her fragile figure, her spare dress, and the wind and rain, did not turn him from his purpose of helping her.

'Even if it could be done,' said she—'and it never can be done now—where could father live, or how could he live? I have often thought that if such a change could come, it might be anything but a service to him now. People might not think so well of him outside as they do there. He might not be so gently dealt with outside as he is there. He might not be so fit himself for the life outside as he is for that.' Here for the first time she could not restrain her tears from falling; and the little thin hands he had watched when they were so busy, trembled as they clasped each other.

'It would be a new distress to him even to know that I earn a little money, and that Fanny earns a little money. He is so anxious about us, you see, feeling helplessly shut up there. Such a good, good father!'

He let the little burst of feeling go by before he spoke. It was soon gone. She was not accustomed to think of herself, or to trouble any one with her emotions. He had but glanced away at the piles of city roofs and chimneys among which the smoke was rolling heavily, and at the wilderness of masts on the river, and the wilderness of steeples on the shore, indistinctly mixed together in the stormy haze, when she was again as quiet as if she had been plying her needle in his mother's room.

'You would be glad to have your brother set at liberty?'

'Oh very, very glad, sir!'

'Well, we will hope for him at least. You told me last night of a friend you had?'

His name was Plornish, Little Dorrit said.

And where did Plornish live? Plornish lived in Bleeding Heart Yard. He was 'only a plasterer,' Little Dorrit said, as a caution to him not to form high social expectations of Plornish. He lived at the last house in Bleeding Heart Yard, and his name was over a little gateway. Arthur took down the address and gave her his. He had now done all he sought to do for the present, except that he wished to leave her with a reliance upon him, and to have something like a promise from her that she would cherish it.

'There is one friend!' he said, putting up his pocketbook. 'As I take you back—you are going back?'

'Oh yes! going straight home.'

'As I take you back,' the word home jarred upon him, 'let me ask you to persuade yourself that you have another friend. I make no professions, and say no more.'

'You are truly kind to me, sir. I am sure I need no more.'

They walked back through the miserable muddy streets, and among the poor, mean shops, and were jostled by the crowds of dirty hucksters usual to a poor neighbourhood. There was nothing, by the short way, that was pleasant to any of the five senses. Yet it was not a common passage through common rain, and mire, and noise, to Clennam, having this little, slender, careful creature on his arm. How young she seemed to him, or how old he to her; or what a secret either to the other, in that beginning of the destined interweaving of their stories, matters not here. He thought of her having been born and bred among these scenes, and shrinking through them now, familiar yet misplaced; he thought of her long acquaintance with the squalid needs of life, and of her innocence; of her solicitude for others, and her few years, and her childish aspect.

They were come into the High Street, where the prison stood, when a voice cried, 'Little mother, little mother!' Little Dorrit stopping and looking back, an excited figure of a strange kind bounced against them (still crying 'little mother'), fell down, and scattered the contents of a large basket, filled with potatoes, in the mud.

'Oh, Maggy,' said Little Dorrit, 'what a clumsy child you are!'

Maggy was not hurt, but picked herself up immediately, and then began to pick up the potatoes, in which both Little Dorrit and Arthur Clennam helped. Maggy picked up very few potatoes and a great quantity of mud; but they were all recovered, and deposited in the basket. Maggy then smeared her muddy face with her shawl, and presenting it to Mr Clennam as a type of purity, enabled him to see what she was like.

She was about eight-and-twenty, with large bones, large features, large feet and hands, large eyes and no hair. Her large eyes were limpid and almost colourless; they seemed to be very little affected by light, and to stand unnaturally still. There was also that attentive listening expression in her face, which is seen in the faces of the blind; but she was not blind, having one tolerably serviceable eye. Her face was not exceedingly ugly, though it was only redeemed from being so by a smile; a good-humoured smile, and pleasant in itself, but rendered pitiable by being constantly there. A great white cap, with a quantity of opaque frilling that was always flapping about, apologised for Maggy's baldness, and made it so very difficult for her old black bonnet to retain its place upon her head, that it held on round her neck like a gipsy's baby. A commission of haberdashers could alone have reported what the rest of her poor dress was made of, but it had a strong general resemblance to seaweed, with here and there a gigantic tea-leaf. Her shawl looked particularly like a tea-leaf after long infusion.

Arthur Clennam looked at Little Dorrit with the expression of one saying, 'May I ask who this is?' Little Dorrit, whose hand this Maggy, still calling her little mother, had begun to fondle, answered in words (they were under a gateway into which the majority of the potatoes had rolled).

'This is Maggy, sir.'

'Maggy, sir,' echoed the personage presented. 'Little mother!'

'She is the grand-daughter—' said Little Dorrit.

'Grand-daughter,' echoed Maggy.

'Of my old nurse, who has been dead a long time. Maggy, how old are you?'

'Ten, mother,' said Maggy.

'You can't think how good she is, sir,' said Little Dorrit, with infinite tenderness.

'Good SHE is,' echoed Maggy, transferring the pronoun in a most expressive way from herself to her little mother.

'Or how clever,' said Little Dorrit. 'She goes on errands as well as any one.' Maggy laughed. 'And is as trustworthy as the Bank of England.' Maggy laughed. 'She earns her own living entirely. Entirely, sir!' said Little Dorrit, in a lower and triumphant tone.

'Really does!'

'What is her history?' asked Clennam.

'Think of that, Maggy?' said Little Dorrit, taking her two large hands and clapping them together. 'A gentleman from thousands of miles away, wanting to know your history!'

'My history?' cried Maggy. 'Little mother.'

'She means me,' said Little Dorrit, rather confused; 'she is very much attached to me. Her old grandmother was not so kind to her as she should have been; was she, Maggy?' Maggy shook her head, made a drinking vessel of her clenched left hand, drank out of it, and said, 'Gin.' Then beat an imaginary child, and said, 'Broom-handles and pokers.'

'When Maggy was ten years old,' said Little Dorrit, watching her face while she spoke, 'she had a bad fever, sir, and she has never grown any older ever since.'

'Ten years old,' said Maggy, nodding her head. 'But what a nice hospital! So comfortable, wasn't it? Oh so nice it was. Such a Ev'nly place!'

'She had never been at peace before, sir,' said Little Dorrit, turning towards Arthur for an instant and speaking low, 'and she always runs off upon that.'

'Such beds there is there!' cried Maggy. 'Such lemonades! Such oranges! Such d'licious broth and wine! Such Chicking! Oh, AIN'T it a delightful place to go and stop at!'

'So Maggy stopped there as long as she could,' said Little Dorrit, in her former tone of telling a child's story; the tone designed for Maggy's ear, 'and at last, when she could stop there no longer, she came out. Then, because she was never to be more than ten years old, however long she lived—'

'However long she lived,' echoed Maggy.

'And because she was very weak; indeed was so weak that when she began to laugh she couldn't stop herself—which was a great pity—'

(Maggy mighty grave of a sudden.)

'Her grandmother did not know what to do with her, and for some years was very unkind to her indeed. At length, in course of time, Maggy began to take pains to improve herself, and to be very attentive and very industrious; and by degrees was allowed to come in and out as often as she liked, and got enough to do to support herself, and does support herself. And that,' said Little Dorrit, clapping the two great hands together again, 'is Maggy's history, as Maggy knows!'

Ah! But Arthur would have known what was wanting to its completeness, though he had never heard of the words Little mother; though he had never seen the fondling of the small spare hand; though he had had no sight for the tears now standing in the colourless eyes; though he had had no hearing for the sob that checked the clumsy laugh. The dirty gateway with the wind and rain whistling through it, and the basket of muddy potatoes waiting to be spilt again or taken up, never seemed the common hole it really was, when he looked back to it by these lights. Never, never!

They were very near the end of their walk, and they now came out of the gateway to finish it. Nothing would serve Maggy but that they must stop at a grocer's window, short of their destination, for her to show her learning. She could read after a sort; and picked out the fat figures in the tickets of prices, for the most part correctly. She also stumbled, with a large balance of success against her failures, through various philanthropic recommendations to Try our Mixture, Try our Family Black, Try our Orange-flavoured Pekoe, challenging competition at the head of Flowery Teas; and various cautions to the public against spurious establishments and adulterated articles. When he saw how pleasure brought a rosy tint into

Little Dorrit's face when Maggy made a hit, he felt that he could have stood there making a library of the grocer's window until the rain and wind were tired.

The court-yard received them at last, and there he said goodbye to Little Dorrit. Little as she had always looked, she looked less than ever when he saw her going into the Marshalsea lodge passage, the little mother attended by her big child. The cage door opened, and when the small bird, reared in captivity, had tamely fluttered in, he saw it shut again; and then he came away.

CHAPTER 10. Containing the whole Science of Government

The Circumlocution Office was (as everybody knows without being told) the most important Department under Government. No public business of any kind could possibly be done at any time without the acquiescence of the Circumlocution Office. Its finger was in the largest public pie, and in the smallest public tart. It was equally impossible to do the plainest right and to undo the plainest wrong without the express authority of the Circumlocution Office. If another Gunpowder Plot had been discovered half an hour before the lighting of the match, nobody would have been justified in saving the parliament until there had been half a score of boards, half a bushel of minutes, several sacks of official memoranda, and a family-vault full of ungrammatical correspondence, on the part of the Circumlocution Office.

This glorious establishment had been early in the field, when the one sublime principle involving the difficult art of governing a country, was first distinctly revealed to statesmen. It had been foremost to study that bright revelation and to carry its shining influence through the whole of the official proceedings. Whatever was required to be done, the Circumlocution Office was beforehand with all the public departments in the art of perceiving—HOW NOT TO DO IT.

Through this delicate perception, through the tact with which it invariably seized it, and through the genius with which it always acted on it, the Circumlocution Office had risen to overtop all the public departments; and the public condition had risen to be—what it was.

It is true that How not to do it was the great study and object of all public departments and professional politicians all round the Circumlocution Office. It is true that every new premier and every new government, coming in because they had upheld a certain thing as necessary to be done, were no sooner come in than they applied their utmost faculties to discovering How not to do it. It is true that from the moment when a general election was over, every returned man who had been raving on hustings because it hadn't been done, and who had been asking the friends of the honourable gentleman in the opposite interest on pain of impeachment to tell him why it hadn't been done, and who had been asserting that it must be done, and who had been pledging himself that it should be done, began to devise, How it was not to be done. It is true that the debates of both Houses of Parliament the whole session through, uniformly tended to the protracted deliberation, How not to do it. It is true that the royal speech at the opening of such session virtually said, My lords and gentlemen, you have a considerable stroke of work to do, and you will please to retire to your respective chambers, and discuss, How not to do it. It is true that the royal speech, at the close of such session, virtually said, My lords and gentlemen, you have through several laborious months been considering with great loyalty and patriotism, How not to do it, and you have found out; and with the blessing of Providence upon the harvest (natural, not political), I now dismiss you. All this is true, but the Circumlocution Office went beyond it.

Because the Circumlocution Office went on mechanically, every day, keeping this wonderful, all-sufficient wheel of statesmanship, How not to do it, in motion. Because the Circumlocution Office was down upon any ill-advised public servant who was going to do it, or who appeared to be by any surprising accident in remote danger of doing it, with a minute, and a memorandum, and a letter of instructions that extinguished him. It was this spirit of national efficiency in the Circumlocution Office that had gradually led to its having something to do with everything. Mechanicians, natural philosophers, soldiers, sailors, petitioners, memorialists, people with grievances, people who wanted to prevent grievances, people who wanted to redress grievances, jobbing people, jobbed people, people who couldn't get rewarded for merit, and people who couldn't get punished for demerit, were all indiscriminately tucked up under the foolscap paper of the Circumlocution Office.

Numbers of people were lost in the Circumlocution Office. Unfortunates with wrongs, or with projects for the general welfare (and they had better have had wrongs at first, than have taken that bitter English recipe for certainly getting them), who in slow lapse of time and agony had passed safely through other public departments; who, according to rule, had been bullied in this, over-reached by that, and evaded by the other; got referred at last to the Circumlocution Office, and never reappeared in the light of day. Boards sat upon them, secretaries minuted upon them, commissioners gabbled about them, clerks registered, entered, checked, and ticked them off, and they melted away. In short, all the business of the country went through the Circumlocution Office, except the business that never came out of it; and its name was Legion.

Sometimes, angry spirits attacked the Circumlocution Office. Sometimes, parliamentary questions were asked about it, and even parliamentary motions made or threatened about it by demagogues so low and ignorant as to hold that the real recipe of government was, How to do it. Then would the noble lord, or right honourable gentleman, in whose department it was to defend the Circumlocution Office, put an orange in his pocket, and make a regular field-day of the occasion. Then would he come down to that house with a slap upon the table, and meet the honourable gentleman foot to foot. Then would he be there to tell that honourable gentleman that the Circumlocution Office not only was blameless in this matter, but was commendable in this matter, was extollable to the skies in this matter. Then would he be there to tell that honourable gentleman that, although the Circumlocution Office was invariably right and wholly right, it never was so right as in this matter. Then would he be there to tell that honourable gentleman that it would have been more to his honour, more to his credit, more to his good taste, more to his good sense, more to half the dictionary of commonplaces, if he had left the Circumlocution Office alone, and never approached this matter. Then would he keep one eye upon a coach or crammer from the Circumlocution Office sitting below the bar, and smash the honourable gentleman with the Circumlocution Office account of this matter. And although one of two things always happened; namely, either that the Circumlocution Office had nothing to say and said it, or that it had something to say of which the noble lord, or right honourable gentleman, blundered one half and forgot the other; the Circumlocution Office was always voted immaculate by an accommodating majority.

Such a nursery of statesmen had the Department become in virtue of a long career of this nature, that several solemn lords had attained the reputation of being quite unearthly prodigies of business, solely from having practised, How not to do it, as the head of the Circumlocution Office. As to the minor priests and acolytes of that temple, the result of all this was that they stood divided into two classes, and, down to the junior messenger, either believed in the Circumlocution Office as a heaven-born institution that had an absolute right to do whatever it liked; or took refuge in total infidelity, and considered it a flagrant nuisance.

The Barnacle family had for some time helped to administer the Circumlocution Office. The Tite Barnacle Branch, indeed, considered themselves in a general way as having vested rights in that direction, and took it ill if any other family had much to say to it. The Barnacles were a very high family, and a very large family. They were dispersed all over the public offices, and held all sorts of public places. Either the nation was under a load of obligation to the Barnacles, or the Barnacles were under a load of obligation to the nation. It was not quite unanimously settled which; the Barnacles having their opinion, the nation theirs.

The Mr Tite Barnacle who at the period now in question usually coached or crammed the statesman at the head of the Circumlocution Office, when that noble or right honourable individual sat a little uneasily in his saddle by reason of some vagabond making a tilt at him in a newspaper, was more flush of blood than money. As a Barnacle he had his place, which was a snug thing enough; and as a Barnacle he had of course put in his son Barnacle Junior in the office. But he had intermarried with a branch of the Stiltstalkings, who were also better endowed in a sanguineous point of view than with real or personal property, and of this marriage there had been issue, Barnacle junior and three young ladies. What with the patrician requirements of Barnacle junior, the three young ladies, Mrs Tite Barnacle nee Stiltstalking, and himself, Mr Tite Barnacle found the intervals between quarter day and quarter day rather longer than he could have desired; a circumstance which he always attributed to the country's parsimony. For Mr Tite Barnacle, Mr Arthur Clennam made his fifth inquiry one day at the Circumlocution Office; having on previous occasions awaited that gentleman successively in a hall, a glass case, a waiting room, and a fire-proof passage where the Department seemed to keep its wind. On this occasion Mr Barnacle was not engaged, as he had been before, with the noble prodigy at the head of the Department; but was absent. Barnacle Junior, however, was announced as a lesser star, yet visible above the office horizon.

With Barnacle junior, he signified his desire to confer; and found that young gentleman singeing the calves of his legs at the parental fire, and supporting his spine against the mantel-shelf. It was a comfortable room, handsomely furnished in the higher official manner; an presenting stately suggestions of the absent Barnacle, in the thick carpet, the leather-covered desk to sit at, the leather-covered desk to stand at, the formidable easy-chair and hearth-rug, the interposed screen, the torn-up papers, the dispatch-boxes with little labels sticking out of them, like medicine bottles or dead game, the pervading smell of leather and mahogany, and a general bamboozling air of How not to do it.

The present Barnacle, holding Mr Clennam's card in his hand, had a youthful aspect, and the fluffiest little whisker, perhaps, that ever was seen. Such a downy tip was on his callow chin, that he seemed half fledged like a young bird; and a compassionate observer might have urged that, if he had not singed the calves of his legs, he would have died of cold. He had a superior eye-glass dangling round his neck, but unfortunately had such flat orbits to his eyes and such limp little eyelids that it wouldn't stick in when he put it up, but kept tumbling out against his waistcoat buttons with a click that discomposed him very much.

'Oh, I say. Look here! My father's not in the way, and won't be in the way to-day,' said Barnacle Junior. 'Is this anything that I can do?'

(Click! Eye-glass down. Barnacle Junior quite frightened and feeling all round himself, but not able to find it.)

'You are very good,' said Arthur Clennam. 'I wish however to see Mr Barnacle.'

'But I say. Look here! You haven't got any appointment, you know,' said Barnacle Junior.

(By this time he had found the eye-glass, and put it up again.)

'No,' said Arthur Clennam. 'That is what I wish to have.'

'But I say. Look here! Is this public business?' asked Barnacle junior.

(Click! Eye-glass down again. Barnacle Junior in that state of search after it that Mr Clennam felt it useless to reply at present.)

'Is it,' said Barnacle junior, taking heed of his visitor's brown face, 'anything about—Tonnage—or that sort of thing?'

(Pausing for a reply, he opened his right eye with his hand, and stuck his glass in it, in that inflammatory manner that his eye began watering dreadfully.)

'No,' said Arthur, 'it is nothing about tonnage.'

'Then look here. Is it private business?'

'I really am not sure. It relates to a Mr Dorrit.'

'Look here, I tell you what! You had better call at our house, if you are going that way. Twenty-four, Mews Street, Grosvenor Square. My father's got a slight touch of the gout, and is kept at home by it.'

(The misguided young Barnacle evidently going blind on his eye-glass side, but ashamed to make any further alteration in his painful arrangements.)

'Thank you. I will call there now. Good morning.' Young Barnacle seemed discomfited at this, as not having at all expected him to go.

'You are quite sure,' said Barnacle junior, calling after him when he got to the door, unwilling wholly to relinquish the bright business idea he had conceived; 'that it's nothing about Tonnage?'

'Quite sure.'

With such assurance, and rather wondering what might have taken place if it HAD been anything about tonnage, Mr Clennam withdrew to pursue his inquiries.

Mews Street, Grosvenor Square, was not absolutely Grosvenor Square itself, but it was very near it. It was a hideous little street of dead wall, stables, and dunghills, with lofts over coach-houses inhabited by coachmen's families, who had a passion for drying clothes and decorating their window-sills with miniature turnpike-gates. The principal chimney-sweep of that fashionable quarter lived at the blind end of Mews Street; and the same corner contained an establishment much frequented about early morning and twilight for the purchase of wine-bottles and kitchen-stuff. Punch's shows used to lean against the dead wall in Mews Street, while their proprietors were dining elsewhere; and the dogs of the neighbourhood made appointments to meet in the same locality. Yet there were two or three small airless houses at the entrance end of Mews Street, which went at enormous rents on account of their being abject hangers-on to a fashionable situation; and whenever one of these fearful little coops was to be let (which seldom happened, for they were in great request), the house agent advertised it as a gentlemanly residence in the most aristocratic part of town, inhabited solely by the elite of the beau monde.

If a gentlemanly residence coming strictly within this narrow margin had not been essential to the blood of the Barnacles, this particular branch would have had a pretty wide selection among, let us say, ten thousand houses, offering fifty times the accommodation for a third of the money. As it was, Mr Barnacle, finding his gentlemanly residence extremely inconvenient and extremely dear, always laid it, as a public servant, at the door of the country, and adduced it as another instance of the country's parsimony.

Arthur Clennam came to a squeezed house, with a ramshackle bowed front, little dingy windows, and a little dark area like a damp waistcoat-pocket, which he found to be number twenty-four, Mews Street, Grosvenor Square. To the sense of smell the house was like a sort of bottle filled with a strong distillation of Mews; and when the footman opened the door, he seemed to take the stopper out.

The footman was to the Grosvenor Square footmen, what the house was to the Grosvenor Square houses. Admirable in his way, his way was a back and a bye way. His gorgeousness was not unmixed with dirt; and both in complexion and consistency he had suffered from the closeness of his pantry. A sallow flabbiness was upon him when he took the stopper out, and presented the bottle to Mr Clennam's nose.

'Be so good as to give that card to Mr Tite Barnacle, and to say that I have just now seen the younger Mr Barnacle, who recommended me to call here.'

The footman (who had as many large buttons with the Barnacle crest upon them on the flaps of his pockets, as if he were the family strong box, and carried the plate and jewels about with him buttoned up) pondered over the card a little; then said, 'Walk in.'

It required some judgment to do it without butting the inner hall-door open, and in the consequent mental confusion and physical darkness slipping down the kitchen stairs. The visitor, however, brought himself up safely on the door-mat.

Still the footman said 'Walk in,' so the visitor followed him. At the inner hall-door, another bottle seemed to be presented and another stopper taken out. This second vial appeared to be filled with concentrated provisions and extract of Sink from the pantry. After a skirmish in the narrow passage, occasioned by the footman's opening the door of the dismal dining-room with confidence, finding some one there with consternation, and backing on the visitor with disorder, the visitor was shut up, pending his announcement, in a close back parlour. There he had an opportunity of refreshing himself with both the bottles at once, looking out at a low blinding wall three feet off, and speculating on the number of Barnacle families within the bills of mortality who lived in such hutches of their own free flunkey choice.

Mr Barnacle would see him. Would he walk up-stairs? He would, and he did; and in the drawing-room, with his leg on a rest, he found Mr Barnacle himself, the express image and presentment of How not to do it.

Mr Barnacle dated from a better time, when the country was not so parsimonious and the Circumlocution Office was not so badgered. He wound and wound folds of white cravat round his neck, as he wound and wound folds of tape and paper round the neck of the country. His wristbands and collar were oppressive; his voice and manner were oppressive. He had a large watch-chain and bunch of seals, a coat buttoned up to inconvenience, a waistcoat buttoned up to inconvenience, an unwrinkled pair of trousers, a stiff pair of boots. He was altogether splendid, massive, overpowering, and impracticable. He seemed to have been sitting for his portrait to Sir Thomas Lawrence all the days of his life.

'Mr Clennam?' said Mr Barnacle. 'Be seated.'

Mr Clennam became seated.

'You have called on me, I believe,' said Mr Barnacle, 'at the Circumlocution—' giving it the air of a word of about five-and-twenty syllables—'Office.'

'I have taken that liberty.'

Mr Barnacle solemnly bent his head as who should say, 'I do not deny that it is a liberty; proceed to take another liberty, and let me know your business.'

'Allow me to observe that I have been for some years in China, am quite a stranger at home, and have no personal motive or interest in the inquiry I am about to make.'

Mr Barnacle tapped his fingers on the table, and, as if he were now sitting for his portrait to a new and strange artist, appeared to say to his visitor, 'If you will be good enough to take me with my present lofty expression, I shall feel obliged.'

'I have found a debtor in the Marshalsea Prison of the name of Dorrit, who has been there many years. I wish to investigate his confused affairs so far as to ascertain whether it may not be possible, after this lapse of time, to ameliorate his unhappy condition. The name of Mr Tite Barnacle has been mentioned to me as representing some highly influential interest among his creditors. Am I correctly informed?'

It being one of the principles of the Circumlocution Office never, on any account whatever, to give a straightforward answer, Mr Barnacle said, 'Possibly.'

'On behalf of the Crown, may I ask, or as private individual?'

'The Circumlocution Department, sir,' Mr Barnacle replied, 'may have possibly recommended—possibly—I cannot say—that some public claim against the insolvent estate of a firm or copartnership to which this person may have belonged, should be enforced. The question may have been, in the course of official business, referred to the Circumlocution Department for its consideration. The Department may have either originated, or confirmed, a Minute making that recommendation.'

'I assume this to be the case, then.'

'The Circumlocution Department,' said Mr Barnacle, 'is not responsible for any gentleman's assumptions.'

'May I inquire how I can obtain official information as to the real state of the case?'

'It is competent,' said Mr Barnacle, 'to any member of the—Public,' mentioning that obscure body with reluctance, as his natural enemy, 'to memorialise the Circumlocution Department. Such formalities as are required to be observed in so doing, may be known on application to the proper branch of that Department.'

'Which is the proper branch?'

'I must refer you,' returned Mr Barnacle, ringing the bell, 'to the Department itself for a formal answer to that inquiry.'

'Excuse my mentioning—'

'The Department is accessible to the—Public,' Mr Barnacle was always checked a little by that word of impertinent signification, 'if the—Public approaches it according to the official forms; if the—Public does not approach it according to the official forms, the—Public has itself to blame.'

Mr Barnacle made him a severe bow, as a wounded man of family, a wounded man of place, and a wounded man of a gentlemanly residence, all rolled into one; and he made Mr Barnacle a bow, and was shut out into Mews Street by the flabby footman.

Having got to this pass, he resolved as an exercise in perseverance, to betake himself again to the Circumlocution Office, and try what satisfaction he could get there. So he went back to the Circumlocution Office, and once more sent up his card to Barnacle junior by a messenger who took it very ill indeed that he should come back again, and who was eating mashed potatoes and gravy behind a partition by the hall fire.

He was readmitted to the presence of Barnacle junior, and found that young gentleman singeing his knees now, and gaping his weary way on to four o'clock. 'I say. Look here. You stick to us in a devil of a manner,' Said Barnacle junior, looking over his shoulder.

'I want to know—'

'Look here. Upon my soul you mustn't come into the place saying you want to know, you know,' remonstrated Barnacle junior, turning about and putting up the eye-glass.

'I want to know,' said Arthur Clennam, who had made up his mind to persistence in one short form of words, 'the precise nature of the claim of the Crown against a prisoner for debt, named Dorrit.'

'I say. Look here. You really are going it at a great pace, you know. Egad, you haven't got an appointment,' said Barnacle junior, as if the thing were growing serious.

'I want to know,' said Arthur, and repeated his case.

Barnacle junior stared at him until his eye-glass fell out, and then put it in again and stared at him until it fell out again. 'You have no right to come this sort of move,' he then observed with the greatest weakness. 'Look here. What do you mean? You told me you didn't know whether it was public business or not.'

'I have now ascertained that it is public business,' returned the suitor, 'and I want to know'—and again repeated his monotonous inquiry.

Its effect upon young Barnacle was to make him repeat in a defenceless way, 'Look here! Upon my SOUL you mustn't come into the place saying you want to know, you know!' The effect of that upon Arthur Clennam was to make him repeat his inquiry in exactly the same words and tone as before. The effect of that upon young Barnacle was to make him a wonderful spectacle of failure and helplessness.

'Well, I tell you what. Look here. You had better try the Secretarial Department,' he said at last, sidling to the bell and ringing it. 'Jenkinson,' to the mashed potatoes messenger, 'Mr Wobbler!'

Arthur Clennam, who now felt that he had devoted himself to the storming of the Circumlocution Office, and must go through with it, accompanied the messenger to another floor of the building, where that functionary pointed out Mr Wobbler's room. He entered that apartment, and found two gentlemen sitting face to face at a large and easy desk, one of whom was polishing a gun-barrel on his pocket-handkerchief, while the other was spreading marmalade on bread with a paper-knife.

'Mr Wobbler?' inquired the suitor.

Both gentlemen glanced at him, and seemed surprised at his assurance.

'So he went,' said the gentleman with the gun-barrel, who was an extremely deliberate speaker, 'down to his cousin's place, and took the Dog with him by rail. Inestimable Dog. Flew at the porter fellow when he was put into the dog-box, and flew at the guard when he was taken out. He got half-a-dozen fellows into a Barn, and a good supply of Rats, and timed the Dog. Finding the Dog able to do it immensely, made the match, and heavily backed the Dog. When the match came off, some devil of a fellow was bought over, Sir, Dog was made drunk, Dog's master was cleaned out.'

'Mr Wobbler?' inquired the suitor.

The gentleman who was spreading the marmalade returned, without looking up from that occupation, 'What did he call the Dog?'

'Called him Lovely,' said the other gentleman. 'Said the Dog was the perfect picture of the old aunt from whom he had expectations. Found him particularly like her when hocussed.'

'Mr Wobbler?' said the suitor.

Both gentlemen laughed for some time. The gentleman with the gun-barrel, considering it, on inspection, in a satisfactory state, referred it to the other; receiving confirmation of his views, he fitted it into its place in the case before him, and took out the stock and polished that, softly whistling.

'Mr Wobbler?' said the suitor.

'What's the matter?' then said Mr Wobbler, with his mouth full.

'I want to know—' and Arthur Clennam again mechanically set forth what he wanted to know.

'Can't inform you,' observed Mr Wobbler, apparently to his lunch. 'Never heard of it. Nothing at all to do with it. Better try Mr Clive, second door on the left in the next passage.'

'Perhaps he will give me the same answer.'

'Very likely. Don't know anything about it,' said Mr Wobbler.

The suitor turned away and had left the room, when the gentleman with the gun called out 'Mister! Hallo!'

He looked in again.

'Shut the door after you. You're letting in a devil of a draught here!' A few steps brought him to the second door on the left in the next passage. In that room he found three gentlemen; number one doing nothing particular, number two doing nothing particular, number three doing nothing particular. They seemed, however, to be more directly concerned than the others had been in the effective execution of the great principle of the office, as there was an awful inner apartment with a double door, in which the Circumlocution Sages appeared to be assembled in council, and out of which there was an imposing coming of papers, and into which there was an imposing going of papers, almost constantly; wherein another gentleman, number four, was the active instrument.

'I want to know,' said Arthur Clennam,—and again stated his case in the same barrel-organ way. As number one referred him to number two, and as number two referred him to number three, he had occasion to state it three times before they all referred him to number four, to whom he stated it again.

Number four was a vivacious, well-looking, well-dressed, agreeable young fellow—he was a Barnacle, but on the more sprightly side of the family—and he said in an easy way, 'Oh! you had better not bother yourself about it, I think.'

'Not bother myself about it?'

'No! I recommend you not to bother yourself about it.'

This was such a new point of view that Arthur Clennam found himself at a loss how to receive it.

'You can if you like. I can give you plenty of forms to fill up. Lots of 'em here. You can have a dozen if you like. But you'll never go on with it,' said number four.

'Would it be such hopeless work? Excuse me; I am a stranger in England.' 'I don't say it would be hopeless,' returned number four, with a frank smile. 'I don't express an opinion about that; I only express an opinion about you. I don't think you'd go on with it. However, of course, you can do as you like. I suppose there was a failure in the performance of a contract, or something of that kind, was there?'

'I really don't know.'

'Well! That you can find out. Then you'll find out what Department the contract was in, and then you'll find out all about it there.'

'I beg your pardon. How shall I find out?'

'Why, you'll—you'll ask till they tell you. Then you'll memorialise that Department (according to regular forms which you'll find out) for leave to memorialise this Department. If you get it (which you may after a time), that memorial must be entered in that Department, sent to be registered in this Department, sent back to be signed by that Department, sent back to be countersigned by this Department, and then it will begin to be regularly before that Department. You'll find out when the business passes through each of these stages by asking at both Departments till they tell you.'

'But surely this is not the way to do the business,' Arthur Clennam could not help saying.

This airy young Barnacle was quite entertained by his simplicity in supposing for a moment that it was. This light in hand young Barnacle knew perfectly that it was not. This touch and go young Barnacle had 'got up' the Department in a private secretaryship, that he might be ready for any little bit of fat that came to hand; and he fully understood the Department to be a politico-diplomatic hocus pocus piece of machinery for the assistance of the nobs in keeping off the snobs. This dashing young Barnacle, in a word, was likely to become a statesman, and to make a figure.

'When the business is regularly before that Department, whatever it is,' pursued this bright young Barnacle, 'then you can watch it from time to time through that Department. When it comes regularly before this Department, then you must watch it from time to time through this Department. We shall have to refer it right and left; and when we refer it anywhere, then you'll have to look it up. When it comes back to us at any time, then you had better look US up. When it sticks anywhere, you'll have to try to give it a jog. When you write to another Department about it, and then to this Department about it, and don't hear anything satisfactory about it, why then you had better—keep on writing.'

Arthur Clennam looked very doubtful indeed. 'But I am obliged to you at any rate,' said he, 'for your politeness.'

'Not at all,' replied this engaging young Barnacle. 'Try the thing, and see how you like it. It will be in your power to give it up at any time, if you don't like it. You had better take a lot of forms away with you. Give him a lot of forms!' With which instruction to number two, this sparkling young Barnacle took a fresh handful of papers from numbers one and three, and carried them into the sanctuary to offer to the presiding Idol of the Circumlocution Office.

Arthur Clennam put his forms in his pocket gloomily enough, and went his way down the long stone passage and the long stone staircase. He had come to the swing doors leading into the street, and was waiting, not over patiently, for two people who were between him and them to pass out and let him follow, when the voice of one of them struck familiarly on his ear. He looked at the speaker and recognised Mr Meagles. Mr Meagles was very red in the face—redder than travel could have made him—and collaring a short man who was with him, said, 'come out, you rascal, come Out!'

It was such an unexpected hearing, and it was also such an unexpected sight to see Mr Meagles burst the swing doors open, and emerge into the street with the short man, who was of an unoffending appearance, that Clennam stood still for the moment exchanging looks of surprise with the porter. He followed, however, quickly; and saw Mr Meagles going down the street with his enemy at his side. He soon came up with his old travelling companion, and touched him on the back. The choleric face which Mr Meagles turned upon him smoothed when he saw who it was, and he put out his friendly hand.

'How are you?' said Mr Meagles. 'How d'ye do? I have only just come over from abroad. I am glad to see you.'

'And I am rejoiced to see you.'

'Thank'ee. Thank'ee!'

'Mrs Meagles and your daughter—?'

'Are as well as possible,' said Mr Meagles. 'I only wish you had come upon me in a more prepossessing condition as to coolness.'

Though it was anything but a hot day, Mr Meagles was in a heated state that attracted the attention of the passersby; more particularly as he leaned his back against a railing, took off his hat and cravat, and heartily rubbed his steaming head and face, and his reddened ears and neck, without the least regard for public opinion.

'Whew!' said Mr Meagles, dressing again. 'That's comfortable. Now I am cooler.'

'You have been ruffled, Mr Meagles. What is the matter?'

'Wait a bit, and I'll tell you. Have you leisure for a turn in the Park?'

'As much as you please.'

'Come along then. Ah! you may well look at him.' He happened to have turned his eyes towards the offender whom Mr Meagles had so angrily collared. 'He's something to look at, that fellow is.'

He was not much to look at, either in point of size or in point of dress; being merely a short, square, practical looking man, whose hair had turned grey, and in whose face and forehead there were deep lines of cogitation, which looked as though they were carved in hard wood. He was dressed in decent black, a little rusty, and had the appearance of a sagacious master in some handicraft. He had a spectacle-case in his hand, which he turned over and over while he was thus in question, with a certain free use of the thumb that is never seen but in a hand accustomed to tools.

'You keep with us,' said Mr Meagles, in a threatening kind of Way, 'and I'll introduce you presently. Now then!'

Clennam wondered within himself, as they took the nearest way to the Park, what this unknown (who complied in the gentlest manner) could have been doing. His appearance did not at all justify the suspicion that he had been detected in designs on Mr Meagles's pocket-handkerchief; nor had he any appearance of being quarrelsome or violent. He was a quiet, plain, steady man; made no attempt to escape; and seemed a little depressed, but neither ashamed nor repentant. If he were a criminal offender, he must surely be an incorrigible hypocrite; and if he were no offender, why should Mr Meagles have collared him in the Circumlocution Office? He perceived that the man was not a difficulty in his own mind alone, but in Mr Meagles's too; for such conversation as they had together on the short way to the Park was by no means well sustained, and Mr Meagles's eye always wandered back to the man, even when he spoke of something very different.

At length they being among the trees, Mr Meagles stopped short, and said:

'Mr Clennam, will you do me the favour to look at this man? His name is Doyce, Daniel Doyce. You wouldn't suppose this man to be a notorious rascal; would you?'

'I certainly should not.' It was really a disconcerting question, with the man there.

'No. You would not. I know you would not. You wouldn't suppose him to be a public offender; would you?'

'No.'

'No. But he is. He is a public offender. What has he been guilty of? Murder, manslaughter, arson, forgery, swindling, house-breaking, highway robbery, larceny, conspiracy, fraud? Which should you say, now?'

'I should say,' returned Arthur Clennam, observing a faint smile in Daniel Doyce's face, 'not one of them.'

'You are right,' said Mr Meagles. 'But he has been ingenious, and he has been trying to turn his ingenuity to his country's service. That makes him a public offender directly, sir.'

Arthur looked at the man himself, who only shook his head.

'This Doyce,' said Mr Meagles, 'is a smith and engineer. He is not in a large way, but he is well known as a very ingenious man. A dozen years ago, he perfects an invention (involving a very curious secret process) of great importance to his country and his fellow-creatures. I won't say how much money it cost him, or how many years of his life he had been about it, but he brought it to perfection a dozen years ago. Wasn't it a dozen?' said Mr Meagles, addressing Doyce. 'He is the most exasperating man in the world; he never complains!'

'Yes. Rather better than twelve years ago.'

'Rather better?' said Mr Meagles, 'you mean rather worse. Well, Mr Clennam, he addresses himself to the Government. The moment he addresses himself to the Government, he becomes a public offender! Sir,' said Mr Meagles, in danger of making himself excessively hot again, 'he ceases to be an innocent citizen, and becomes a culprit.

He is treated from that instant as a man who has done some infernal action. He is a man to be shirked, put off, brow-beaten, sneered at, handed over by this highly-connected young or old gentleman, to that highly-connected young or old gentleman, and dodged back again; he is a man with no rights in his own time, or his own property; a mere outlaw, whom it is justifiable to get rid of anyhow; a man to be worn out by all possible means.'

It was not so difficult to believe, after the morning's experience, as Mr Meagles supposed.

'Don't stand there, Doyce, turning your spectacle-case over and over,' cried Mr Meagles, 'but tell Mr Clennam what you confessed to me.'

'I undoubtedly was made to feel,' said the inventor, 'as if I had committed an offence. In dancing attendance at the various offices, I was always treated, more or less, as if it was a very bad offence. I have frequently found it necessary to reflect, for my own self-support, that I really had not done anything to bring myself into the Newgate Calendar, but only wanted to effect a great saving and a great improvement.'

'There!' said Mr Meagles. 'Judge whether I exaggerate. Now you'll be able to believe me when I tell you the rest of the case.'

With this prelude, Mr Meagles went through the narrative; the established narrative, which has become tiresome; the matter-of-course narrative which we all know by heart. How, after interminable attendance and correspondence, after infinite impertinences, ignorances, and insults, my lords made a Minute, number three thousand four hundred and seventy-two, allowing the culprit to make certain trials of his invention at his own expense.

How the trials were made in the presence of a board of six, of whom two ancient members were too blind to see it, two other ancient members were too deaf to hear it, one other ancient member was too lame to get near it, and the final ancient member was too pig-headed to look at it. How there were more years; more impertinences, ignorances, and insults. How my lords then made a Minute, number five thousand one hundred and three, whereby they resigned the business to the Circumlocution Office. How the Circumlocution Office, in course of time, took up the business as if it were a bran new thing of yesterday, which had never been heard of before; muddled the business, addled the business, tossed the business in a wet blanket. How the impertinences, ignorances, and insults went through the multiplication table. How there was a reference of the invention to three Barnacles and a Stiltstalking, who knew nothing about it; into whose heads nothing could be hammered about it; who got bored about it, and reported physical impossibilities about it. How the Circumlocution Office, in a Minute, number eight thousand seven hundred and forty, 'saw no reason to reverse the decision at which my lords had arrived.' How the Circumlocution Office, being reminded that my lords had arrived at no decision, shelved the business. How there had been a final interview with the head of the Circumlocution Office that very morning, and how the Brazen Head had spoken, and had been, upon the whole, and under all the circumstances, and looking at it from the various points of view, of opinion that one of two courses was to be pursued in respect of the business: that was to say, either to leave it alone for evermore, or to begin it all over again.

'Upon which,' said Mr Meagles, 'as a practical man, I then and there, in that presence, took Doyce by the collar, and told him it was plain to me that he was an infamous rascal and treasonable disturber of the government peace, and took him away. I brought him out of the office door by the collar, that the very porter might know I was a practical man who appreciated the official estimate of such characters; and here we are!'

If that airy young Barnacle had been there, he would have frankly told them perhaps that the Circumlocution Office had achieved its function. That what the Barnacles had to do, was to stick on to the national ship as long as they could. That to trim the ship, lighten the ship, clean the ship, would be to knock them off; that they could but be knocked off once; and that if the ship went down with them yet sticking to it, that was the ship's look out, and not theirs.

'There!' said Mr Meagles, 'now you know all about Doyce. Except, which I own does not improve my state of mind, that even now you don't hear him complain.'

'You must have great patience,' said Arthur Clennam, looking at him with some wonder, 'great forbearance.'

'No,' he returned, 'I don't know that I have more than another man.'

'By the Lord, you have more than I have, though!' cried Mr Meagles.

Doyce smiled, as he said to Clennam, 'You see, my experience of these things does not begin with myself. It has been in my way to know a little about them from time to time. Mine is not a particular case. I am not worse used than a hundred others who have put themselves in the same position—than all the others, I was going to say.'

'I don't know that I should find that a consolation, if it were my case; but I am very glad that you do.'

'Understand me! I don't say,' he replied in his steady, planning way, and looking into the distance before him as if his grey eye were measuring it, 'that it's recompense for a man's toil and hope; but it's a certain sort of relief to know that I might have counted on this.'

He spoke in that quiet deliberate manner, and in that undertone, which is often observable in mechanics who consider and adjust with great nicety. It belonged to him like his suppleness of thumb, or his peculiar way of tilting up his hat at the back every now and then, as if he were contemplating some half-finished work of his hand and thinking about it.

'Disappointed?' he went on, as he walked between them under the trees. 'Yes. No doubt I am disappointed. Hurt? Yes. No doubt I am hurt. That's only natural. But what I mean when I say that people who put themselves in the same position are mostly used in the same way—'

'In England,' said Mr Meagles.

'Oh! of course I mean in England. When they take their inventions into foreign countries, that's quite different. And that's the reason why so many go there.'

Mr Meagles very hot indeed again.

'What I mean is, that however this comes to be the regular way of our government, it is its regular way. Have you ever heard of any projector or inventor who failed to find it all but inaccessible, and whom it did not discourage and ill-treat?'

'I cannot say that I ever have.'

'Have you ever known it to be beforehand in the adoption of any useful thing? Ever known it to set an example of any useful kind?'

'I am a good deal older than my friend here,' said Mr Meagles, 'and I'll answer that. Never.'

'But we all three have known, I expect,' said the inventor, 'a pretty many cases of its fixed determination to be miles upon miles, and years upon years, behind the rest of us; and of its being found out persisting in the use of things long superseded, even after the better things were well known and generally taken up?'

They all agreed upon that.

'Well then,' said Doyce, with a sigh, 'as I know what such a metal will do at such a temperature, and such a body under such a pressure, so I may know (if I will only consider), how these great lords and gentlemen will certainly deal with such a matter as mine.

I have no right to be surprised, with a head upon my shoulders, and memory in it, that I fall into the ranks with all who came before me. I ought to have let it alone. I have had warning enough, I am sure.'

With that he put up his spectacle-case, and said to Arthur, 'If I don't complain, Mr Clennam, I can feel gratitude; and I assure you that I feel it towards our mutual friend. Many's the day, and many's the way in which he has backed me.'

'Stuff and nonsense,' said Mr Meagles.

Arthur could not but glance at Daniel Doyce in the ensuing silence.

Though it was evidently in the grain of his character, and of his respect for his own case, that he should abstain from idle murmuring, it was evident that he had grown the older, the sterner, and the poorer, for his long endeavour. He could not but think what a blessed thing it would have been for this man, if he had taken a lesson from the gentlemen who were so kind as to take a nation's affairs in charge, and had learnt How not to do it.

Mr Meagles was hot and despondent for about five minutes, and then began to cool and clear up.

'Come, come!' said he. 'We shall not make this the better by being grim. Where do you think of going, Dan?'

'I shall go back to the factory,' said Dan. 'Why then, we'll all go back to the factory, or walk in that direction,' returned Mr Meagles cheerfully. 'Mr Clennam won't be deterred by its being in Bleeding Heart Yard.'

'Bleeding Heart Yard?' said Clennam. 'I want to go there.'

'So much the better,' cried Mr Meagles. 'Come along!'

As they went along, certainly one of the party, and probably more than one, thought that Bleeding Heart Yard was no inappropriate destination for a man who had been in official correspondence with my lords and the Barnacles—and perhaps had a misgiving also that Britannia herself might come to look for lodgings in Bleeding Heart Yard some ugly day or other, if she over-did the Circumlocution Office.

CHAPTER 11. Let Loose

A late, dull autumn night was closing in upon the river Saone. The stream, like a sullied looking-glass in a gloomy place, reflected the clouds heavily; and the low banks leaned over here and there, as if they were half curious, and half afraid, to see their darkening pictures in the water. The flat expanse of country about Chalons lay a long heavy streak, occasionally made a little ragged by a row of poplar trees against the wrathful sunset. On the banks of the river Saone it was wet, depressing, solitary; and the night deepened fast.

One man slowly moving on towards Chalons was the only visible figure in the landscape. Cain might have looked as lonely and avoided. With an old sheepskin knapsack at his back, and a rough, unbarked stick cut out of some wood in his hand; miry, footsore, his shoes and gaiters trodden out, his hair and beard untrimmed; the cloak he carried over his shoulder, and the clothes he wore, sodden with wet; limping along in pain and difficulty; he looked as if the clouds were hurrying from him, as if the wail of the wind and the shuddering of the grass were directed against him, as if the low mysterious plashing of the water murmured at him, as if the fitful autumn night were disturbed by him.

He glanced here, and he glanced there, sullenly but shrinkingly; and sometimes stopped and turned about, and looked all round him. Then he limped on again, toiling and muttering.

'To the devil with this plain that has no end! To the devil with these stones that cut like knives! To the devil with this dismal darkness, wrapping itself about one with a chill! I hate you!'

And he would have visited his hatred upon it all with the scowl he threw about him, if he could. He trudged a little further; and looking into the distance before him, stopped again. 'I, hungry, thirsty, weary. You, imbeciles, where the lights are yonder, eating and drinking, and warming yourselves at fires! I wish I had the sacking of your town; I would repay you, my children!'

But the teeth he set at the town, and the hand he shook at the town, brought the town no nearer; and the man was yet hungrier, and thirstier, and wearier, when his feet were on its jagged pavement, and he stood looking about him.

There was the hotel with its gateway, and its savoury smell of cooking; there was the cafe with its bright windows, and its rattling of dominoes; there was the dyer's with its strips of red cloth on the doorposts; there was the silversmith's with its earrings, and its offerings for altars; there was the tobacco dealer's with its lively group of soldier customers coming out pipe in mouth; there were the bad odours of the town, and the rain and the refuse in the kennels, and the faint lamps slung across the road, and the huge Diligence, and its mountain of luggage, and its six grey horses with their tails tied up, getting under weigh at the coach office. But no small cabaret for a straitened traveller being within sight, he had to seek one round the dark corner, where the cabbage leaves lay thickest, trodden about the public cistern at which women had not yet left off drawing water. There, in the back street he found one, the Break of Day. The curtained windows clouded the Break of Day, but it seemed light and warm, and it announced in legible inscriptions with appropriate pictorial embellishment of billiard cue and ball, that at the Break of Day one could play billiards; that there one could find meat, drink, and lodgings, whether one came on horseback, or came on foot; and that it kept good wines, liqueurs, and brandy. The man turned the handle of the Break of Day door, and limped in.

He touched his discoloured slouched hat, as he came in at the door, to a few men who occupied the room. Two were playing dominoes at one of the little tables; three or four were seated round the stove, conversing as they smoked; the billiard-table in the centre was left alone for the time; the landlady of the Daybreak sat behind her little counter among her cloudy bottles of syrups, baskets of cakes, and leaden drainage for glasses, working at her needle.

Making his way to an empty little table in a corner of the room behind the stove, he put down his knapsack and his cloak upon the ground. As he raised his head from stooping to do so, he found the landlady beside him.

'One can lodge here to-night, madame?'

'Perfectly!' said the landlady in a high, sing-song, cheery voice.

'Good. One can dine—sup—what you please to call it?'

'Ah, perfectly!' cried the landlady as before. 'Dispatch then, madame, if you please. Something to eat, as quickly as you can; and some wine at once. I am exhausted.'

'It is very bad weather, monsieur,' said the landlady.

'Cursed weather.'

'And a very long road.'

'A cursed road.'

His hoarse voice failed him, and he rested his head upon his hands until a bottle of wine was brought from the counter. Having filled and emptied his little tumbler twice, and having broken off an end from the great loaf that was set before him with his cloth and napkin, soup-plate, salt, pepper, and oil, he rested his back against the corner of the wall, made a couch of the bench on which he sat, and began to chew crust, until such time as his repast should be ready. There had been that momentary interruption of the talk about the stove, and that temporary inattention to and distraction from one another, which is usually inseparable in such a company from the arrival of a stranger. It had passed over by this time; and the men had done glancing at him, and were talking again.

'That's the true reason,' said one of them, bringing a story he had been telling, to a close, 'that's the true reason why they said that the devil was let loose.' The speaker was the tall Swiss belonging to the church, and he brought something of the authority of the church into the discussion—especially as the devil was in question.

The landlady having given her directions for the new guest's entertainment to her husband, who acted as cook to the Break of Day, had resumed her needlework behind her counter. She was a smart, neat, bright little woman, with a good deal of cap and a good deal of stocking, and she struck into the conversation with several laughing nods of her head, but without looking up from her work.

'Ah Heaven, then,' said she. 'When the boat came up from Lyons, and brought the news that the devil was actually let loose at Marseilles, some fly-catchers swallowed it. But I? No, not I.'

'Madame, you are always right,' returned the tall Swiss. 'Doubtless you were enraged against that man, madame?'

'Ay, yes, then!' cried the landlady, raising her eyes from her work, opening them very wide, and tossing her head on one side. 'Naturally, yes.'

'He was a bad subject.'

'He was a wicked wretch,' said the landlady, 'and well merited what he had the good fortune to escape. So much the worse.'

'Stay, madame! Let us see,' returned the Swiss, argumentatively turning his cigar between his lips. 'It may have been his unfortunate destiny. He may have been the child of circumstances. It is always possible that he had, and has, good in him if one did but know how to find it out. Philosophical philanthropy teaches—'

The rest of the little knot about the stove murmured an objection to the introduction of that threatening expression. Even the two players at dominoes glanced up from their game, as if to protest against philosophical philanthropy being brought by name into the Break of Day.

'Hold there, you and your philanthropy,' cried the smiling landlady, nodding her head more than ever. 'Listen then. I am a woman, I. I know nothing of philosophical philanthropy. But I know what I have seen, and what I have looked in the face in this world here, where I find myself. And I tell you this, my friend, that there are people (men and women both, unfortunately) who have no good in them—none. That there are people whom it is necessary to detest without compromise. That there are people who must be dealt with as enemies of the human race. That there are people who have no human heart, and who must be crushed like savage beasts and cleared out of the way. They are but few, I hope; but I have seen (in this world here where I find myself, and even at the little Break of Day) that there are such people. And I do not doubt that this man—whatever they call him, I forget his name—is one of them.'

The landlady's lively speech was received with greater favour at the Break of Day, than it would have elicited from certain amiable whitewashers of the class she so unreasonably objected to, nearer Great Britain.

'My faith! If your philosophical philanthropy,' said the landlady, putting down her work, and rising to take the stranger's soup from her husband, who appeared with it at a side door, 'puts anybody at the mercy of such people by holding terms with them at all, in words or deeds, or both, take it away from the Break of Day, for it isn't worth a sou.'

As she placed the soup before the guest, who changed his attitude to a sitting one, he looked her full in the face, and his moustache went up under his nose, and his nose came down over his moustache.

'Well!' said the previous speaker, 'let us come back to our subject. Leaving all that aside, gentlemen, it was because the man was acquitted on his trial that people said at Marseilles that the devil was let loose. That was how the phrase began to circulate, and what it meant; nothing more.'

'How do they call him?' said the landlady. 'Biraud, is it not?'

'Rigaud, madame,' returned the tall Swiss.

'Rigaud! To be sure.'

The traveller's soup was succeeded by a dish of meat, and that by a dish of vegetables. He ate all that was placed before him, emptied his bottle of wine, called for a glass of rum, and smoked his cigarette with his cup of coffee. As he became refreshed, he became overbearing; and patronised the company at the Daybreak in certain small talk at which he assisted, as if his condition were far above his appearance.

The company might have had other engagements, or they might have felt their inferiority, but in any case they dispersed by degrees, and not being replaced by other company, left their new patron in possession of the Break of Day. The landlord was clinking about in his kitchen; the landlady was quiet at her work; and the refreshed traveller sat smoking by the stove, warming his ragged feet.

'Pardon me, madame—that Biraud.'

'Rigaud, monsieur.'

'Rigaud. Pardon me again—has contracted your displeasure, how?'

The landlady, who had been at one moment thinking within herself that this was a handsome man, at another moment that this was an ill-looking man, observed the nose coming down and the moustache going up, and strongly inclined to the latter decision. Rigaud was a criminal, she said, who had killed his wife.

'Ay, ay? Death of my life, that's a criminal indeed. But how do you know it?'

'All the world knows it.'

'Hah! And yet he escaped justice?'

'Monsieur, the law could not prove it against him to its satisfaction. So the law says. Nevertheless, all the world knows he did it. The people knew it so well, that they tried to tear him to pieces.'

'Being all in perfect accord with their own wives?' said the guest.

'Haha!'

The landlady of the Break of Day looked at him again, and felt almost confirmed in her last decision. He had a fine hand, though, and he turned it with a great show. She began once more to think that he was not ill-looking after all.

'Did you mention, madame—or was it mentioned among the gentlemen—what became of him?' The landlady shook her head; it being the first conversational stage at which her vivacious earnestness had ceased to nod it, keeping time to what she said. It had been mentioned at the Daybreak, she remarked, on the authority of the journals, that he had been kept in prison for his own safety. However that might be, he had escaped his deserts; so much the worse.

The guest sat looking at her as he smoked out his final cigarette, and as she sat with her head bent over her work, with an expression that might have resolved her doubts, and brought her to a lasting conclusion on the subject of his good or bad looks if she had seen it. When she did look up, the expression was not there. The hand was smoothing his shaggy moustache. 'May one ask to be shown to bed, madame?'

Very willingly, monsieur. Hola, my husband! My husband would conduct him up-stairs. There was one traveller there, asleep, who had gone to bed very early indeed, being overpowered by fatigue; but it was a large chamber with two beds in it, and space enough for twenty. This the landlady of the Break of Day chirpingly explained, calling between whiles, 'Hola, my husband!' out at the side door.

My husband answered at length, 'It is I, my wife!' and presenting himself in his cook's cap, lighted the traveller up a steep and narrow staircase; the traveller carrying his own cloak and knapsack, and bidding the landlady good night with a complimentary reference to the pleasure of seeing her again to-morrow. It was a large room, with a rough splintery floor, unplastered rafters overhead, and two bedsteads on opposite sides. Here 'my husband' put down the candle he carried, and with a sidelong look at his guest stooping over his knapsack, gruffly gave him the instruction, 'The bed to the right!' and left him to his repose. The landlord, whether he was a good or a bad physiognomist, had fully made up his mind that the guest was an ill-looking fellow.

The guest looked contemptuously at the clean coarse bedding prepared for him, and, sitting down on the rush chair at the bedside, drew his money out of his pocket, and told it over in his hand. 'One must eat,' he muttered to himself, 'but by Heaven I must eat at the cost of some other man to-morrow!'

As he sat pondering, and mechanically weighing his money in his palm, the deep breathing of the traveller in the other bed fell so regularly upon his hearing that it attracted his eyes in that direction. The man was covered up warm, and had drawn the white curtain at his head, so that he could be only heard, not seen. But the deep regular breathing, still going on while the other was taking off his worn shoes and gaiters, and still continuing when he had laid aside his coat and cravat, became at length a strong provocative to curiosity, and incentive to get a glimpse of the sleeper's face.

The waking traveller, therefore, stole a little nearer, and yet a little nearer, and a little nearer to the sleeping traveller's bed, until he stood close beside it. Even then he could not see his face, for he had drawn the sheet over it. The regular breathing still continuing, he put his smooth white hand (such a treacherous hand it looked, as it went creeping from him!) to the sheet, and gently lifted it away.

'Death of my soul!' he whispered, falling back, 'here's Cavalletto!'

The little Italian, previously influenced in his sleep, perhaps, by the stealthy presence at his bedside, stopped in his regular breathing, and with a long deep respiration opened his eyes. At first they were not awake, though open. He lay for some seconds looking placidly at his old prison companion, and then, all at once, with a cry of surprise and alarm, sprang out of bed.

'Hush! What's the matter? Keep quiet! It's I. You know me?' cried the other, in a suppressed voice.

But John Baptist, widely staring, muttering a number of invocations and ejaculations, tremblingly backing into a corner, slipping on his trousers, and tying his coat by the two sleeves round his neck, manifested an unmistakable desire to escape by the door rather than renew the acquaintance. Seeing this, his old prison comrade fell back upon the door, and set his shoulders against it.

'Cavalletto! Wake, boy! Rub your eyes and look at me. Not the name you used to call me—don't use that—Lagnier, say Lagnier!'

John Baptist, staring at him with eyes opened to their utmost width, made a number of those national, backhanded shakes of the right forefinger in the air, as if he were resolved on negativing beforehand everything that the other could possibly advance during the whole term of his life.

'Cavalletto! Give me your hand. You know Lagnier, the gentleman. Touch the hand of a gentleman!'

Submitting himself to the old tone of condescending authority, John Baptist, not at all steady on his legs as yet, advanced and put his hand in his patron's. Monsieur Lagnier laughed; and having given it a squeeze, tossed it up and let it go.

'Then you were—' faltered John Baptist.

'Not shaved? No. See here!' cried Lagnier, giving his head a twirl; 'as tight on as your own.'

John Baptist, with a slight shiver, looked all round the room as if to recall where he was. His patron took that opportunity of turning the key in the door, and then sat down upon his bed.

'Look!' he said, holding up his shoes and gaiters. 'That's a poor trim for a gentleman, you'll say. No matter, you shall see how Soon I'll mend it. Come and sit down. Take your old place!'

John Baptist, looking anything but reassured, sat down on the floor at the bedside, keeping his eyes upon his patron all the time.

'That's well!' cried Lagnier. 'Now we might be in the old infernal hole again, hey? How long have you been out?'

'Two days after you, my master.'

'How do you come here?'

'I was cautioned not to stay there, and so I left the town at once, and since then I have changed about. I have been doing odds and ends at Avignon, at Pont Esprit, at Lyons; upon the Rhone, upon the Saone.' As he spoke, he rapidly mapped the places out with his sunburnt hand upon the floor. 'And where are you going?'

'Going, my master?'

'Ay!'

John Baptist seemed to desire to evade the question without knowing how. 'By Bacchus!' he said at last, as if he were forced to the admission, 'I have sometimes had a thought of going to Paris, and perhaps to England.'

'Cavalletto. This is in confidence. I also am going to Paris and perhaps to England. We'll go together.'

The little man nodded his head, and showed his teeth; and yet seemed not quite convinced that it was a surpassingly desirable arrangement.

'We'll go together,' repeated Lagnier. 'You shall see how soon I will force myself to be recognised as a gentleman, and you shall profit by it. It is agreed? Are we one?'

'Oh, surely, surely!' said the little man.

'Then you shall hear before I sleep—and in six words, for I want sleep—how I appear before you, I, Lagnier. Remember that. Not the other.'

'Altro, altro! Not Ri—' Before John Baptist could finish the name, his comrade had got his hand under his chin and fiercely shut up his mouth.

'Death! what are you doing? Do you want me to be trampled upon and stoned? Do YOU want to be trampled upon and stoned? You would be. You don't imagine that they would set upon me, and let my prison chum go? Don't think it!' There was an expression in his face as he released his grip of his friend's jaw, from which his friend inferred that if the course of events really came to any stoning and trampling, Monsieur Lagnier would so distinguish him with his notice as to ensure his having his full share of it. He remembered what a cosmopolitan gentleman Monsieur Lagnier was, and how few weak distinctions he made.

'I am a man,' said Monsieur Lagnier, 'whom society has deeply wronged since you last saw me. You know that I am sensitive and brave, and that it is my character to govern. How has society respected those qualities in me? I have been shrieked at through the streets. I have been guarded through the streets against men, and especially women, running at me armed with any weapons they could lay their hands on. I have lain in prison for security, with the place of my confinement kept a secret, lest I should be torn out of it and felled by a hundred blows. I have been carted out of Marseilles in the dead of night, and carried leagues away from it packed in straw. It has not been safe for me to go near my house; and, with a beggar's pittance in my pocket, I have walked through vile mud and weather ever since, until my feet are crippled—look at them! Such are the humiliations that society has inflicted upon me, possessing the qualities I have mentioned, and which you know me to possess. But society shall pay for it.'

All this he said in his companion's ear, and with his hand before his lips.

'Even here,' he went on in the same way, 'even in this mean drinking-shop, society pursues me. Madame defames me, and her guests defame me. I, too, a gentleman with manners and accomplishments to strike them dead! But the wrongs society has heaped upon me are treasured in this breast.'

To all of which John Baptist, listening attentively to the suppressed hoarse voice, said from time to time, 'Surely, surely!' tossing his head and shutting his eyes, as if there were the clearest case against society that perfect candour could make out.

'Put my shoes there,' continued Lagnier. 'Hang my cloak to dry there by the door. Take my hat.' He obeyed each instruction, as it was given. 'And this is the bed to which society consigns me, is it? Hah. Very well!'

As he stretched out his length upon it, with a ragged handkerchief bound round his wicked head, and only his wicked head showing above the bedclothes, John Baptist was rather strongly reminded of what had so very nearly happened to prevent the moustache from any more going up as it did, and the nose from any more coming down as it did.

'Shaken out of destiny's dice-box again into your company, eh? By Heaven! So much the better for you. You'll profit by it. I shall need a long rest. Let me sleep in the morning.'

John Baptist replied that he should sleep as long as he would, and wishing him a happy night, put out the candle. One might have Supposed that the next proceeding of the Italian would have been to undress; but he did exactly the reverse, and dressed himself from head to foot, saving his shoes. When he had so done, he lay down upon his bed with some of its coverings over him, and his coat still tied round his neck, to get through the night.

When he started up, the Godfather Break of Day was peeping at its namesake. He rose, took his shoes in his hand, turned the key in the door with great caution, and crept downstairs. Nothing was astir there but the smell of coffee, wine, tobacco, and syrups; and madame's little counter looked ghastly enough. But he had paid madame his little note at it over night, and wanted to see nobody—wanted nothing but to get on his shoes and his knapsack, open the door, and run away.

He prospered in his object. No movement or voice was heard when he opened the door; no wicked head tied up in a ragged handkerchief looked out of the upper window. When the sun had raised his full disc above the flat line of the horizon, and was striking fire out of the long muddy vista of paved road with its weary avenue of little trees, a black speck moved along the road and splashed among the flaming pools of rain-water, which black speck was John Baptist Cavalletto running away from his patron.

CHAPTER 12. Bleeding Heart Yard

In London itself, though in the old rustic road towards a suburb of note where in the days of William Shakespeare, author and stage-player, there were Royal hunting-seats—howbeit no sport is left there now but for hunters of men—Bleeding Heart Yard was to be found; a place much changed in feature and in fortune, yet with some relish of ancient greatness about it. Two or three mighty stacks of chimneys, and a few large dark rooms which had escaped being walled and subdivided out of the recognition of their old proportions, gave the Yard a character. It was inhabited by poor people, who set up their rest among its faded glories, as Arabs of the desert pitch their tents among the fallen stones of the Pyramids; but there was a family sentimental feeling prevalent in the Yard, that it had a character.

As if the aspiring city had become puffed up in the very ground on which it stood, the ground had so risen about Bleeding Heart Yard that you got into it down a flight of steps which formed no part of the original approach, and got out of it by a low gateway into a maze of shabby streets, which went about and about, tortuously ascending to the level again. At this end of the Yard and over the gateway, was the factory of Daniel Doyce, often heavily beating like a bleeding heart of iron, with the clink of metal upon metal. The opinion of the Yard was divided respecting the derivation of its name. The more practical of its inmates abided by the tradition of a murder; the gentler and more imaginative inhabitants, including the whole of the tender sex, were loyal to the legend of a young lady of former times closely imprisoned in her chamber by a cruel father for remaining true to her own true love, and refusing to marry the suitor he chose for her. The legend related how that the young lady used to be seen up at her window behind the bars, murmuring a love-lorn song of which the burden was, 'Bleeding Heart, Bleeding Heart, bleeding away,' until she died. It was objected by the murderous party that this Refrain was notoriously the invention of a tambour-worker, a spinster and romantic, still lodging in the Yard. But, forasmuch as all favourite legends must be associated with the affections, and as many more people fall in love than commit murder—which it may be hoped, howsoever bad we are, will continue until the end of the world to be the dispensation under which we shall live—the Bleeding Heart, Bleeding Heart, bleeding away story, carried the day by a great majority. Neither party would listen to the antiquaries who delivered learned lectures in the neighbourhood, showing the Bleeding Heart to have been the heraldic cognisance of the old family to whom the property had once belonged. And, considering that the hour-glass they turned from year to year was filled with the earthiest and coarsest sand, the Bleeding Heart Yarders had reason enough for objecting to be despoiled of the one little golden grain of poetry that sparkled in it.

Down in to the Yard, by way of the steps, came Daniel Doyce, Mr Meagles, and Clennam. Passing along the Yard, and between the open doors on either hand, all abundantly garnished with light children nursing heavy ones, they arrived at its opposite boundary, the gateway. Here Arthur Clennam stopped to look about him for the domicile of Plornish, plasterer, whose name, according to the custom of Londoners, Daniel Doyce had never seen or heard of to that hour.

It was plain enough, nevertheless, as Little Dorrit had said; over a lime-splashed gateway in the corner, within which Plornish kept a ladder and a barrel or two. The last house in Bleeding Heart Yard which she had described as his place of habitation, was a large house, let off to various tenants; but Plornish ingeniously hinted that he lived in the parlour, by means of a painted hand under his name, the forefinger of which hand (on which the artist had depicted a ring and a most elaborate nail of the genteelest form) referred all inquirers to that apartment.

Parting from his companions, after arranging another meeting with Mr Meagles, Clennam went alone into the entry, and knocked with his knuckles at the parlour-door. It was opened presently by a woman with a child in her arms, whose unoccupied hand was hastily rearranging the upper part of her dress. This was Mrs Plornish, and this maternal action was the action of Mrs Plornish during a large part of her waking existence.

Was Mr Plornish at home? 'Well, sir,' said Mrs Plornish, a civil woman, 'not to deceive you, he's gone to look for a job.'

'Not to deceive you' was a method of speech with Mrs Plornish. She would deceive you, under any circumstances, as little as might be; but she had a trick of answering in this provisional form.

'Do you think he will be back soon, if I wait for him?'

'I have been expecting him,' said Mrs Plornish, 'this half an hour, at any minute of time. Walk in, sir.' Arthur entered the rather dark and close parlour (though it was lofty too), and sat down in the chair she placed for him.

'Not to deceive you, sir, I notice it,' said Mrs Plornish, 'and I take it kind of you.'

He was at a loss to understand what she meant; and by expressing as much in his looks, elicited her explanation.

'It ain't many that comes into a poor place, that deems it worth their while to move their hats,' said Mrs Plornish. 'But people think more of it than people think.'

Clennam returned, with an uncomfortable feeling in so very slight a courtesy being unusual, Was that all! And stooping down to pinch the cheek of another young child who was sitting on the floor, staring at him, asked Mrs Plornish how old that fine boy was?

'Four year just turned, sir,' said Mrs Plornish. 'He IS a fine little fellow, ain't he, sir? But this one is rather sickly.' She tenderly hushed the baby in her arms, as she said it. 'You wouldn't mind my asking if it happened to be a job as you was come about, sir, would you?' asked Mrs Plornish wistfully.

She asked it so anxiously, that if he had been in possession of any kind of tenement, he would have had it plastered a foot deep rather than answer No. But he was obliged to answer No; and he saw a shade of disappointment on her face, as she checked a sigh, and looked at the low fire. Then he saw, also, that Mrs Plornish was a young woman, made somewhat slatternly in herself and her belongings by poverty; and so dragged at by poverty and the children together, that their united forces had already dragged her face into wrinkles.

'All such things as jobs,' said Mrs Plornish, 'seems to me to have gone underground, they do indeed.' (Herein Mrs Plornish limited her remark to the plastering trade, and spoke without reference to the Circumlocution Office and the Barnacle Family.)

'Is it so difficult to get work?' asked Arthur Clennam.

'Plornish finds it so,' she returned. 'He is quite unfortunate. Really he is.' Really he was. He was one of those many wayfarers on the road of life, who seem to be afflicted with supernatural corns, rendering it impossible for them to keep up even with their lame competitors.

A willing, working, soft hearted, not hard-headed fellow, Plornish took his fortune as smoothly as could be expected; but it was a rough one. It so rarely happened that anybody seemed to want him, it was such an exceptional case when his powers were in any request, that his misty mind could not make out how it happened. He took it as it came, therefore; he tumbled into all kinds of difficulties, and tumbled out of them; and, by tumbling through life, got himself considerably bruised.

'It's not for want of looking after jobs, I am sure,' said Mrs Plornish, lifting up her eyebrows, and searching for a solution of the problem between the bars of the grate; 'nor yet for want of working at them when they are to be got. No one ever heard my husband complain of work.'

Somehow or other, this was the general misfortune of Bleeding Heart Yard. From time to time there were public complaints, pathetically going about, of labour being scarce—which certain people seemed to take extraordinarily ill, as though they had an absolute right to it on their own terms—but Bleeding Heart Yard, though as willing a Yard as any in Britain, was never the better for the demand. That high old family, the Barnacles, had long been too busy with their great principle to look into the matter; and indeed the matter had nothing to do with their watchfulness in out-generalling all other high old families except the Stiltstalkings.

While Mrs Plornish spoke in these words of her absent lord, her lord returned. A smooth-cheeked, fresh-coloured, sandy-whiskered man of thirty. Long in the legs, yielding at the knees, foolish in the face, flannel-jacketed, lime-whitened.

'This is Plornish, sir.'

'I came,' said Clennam, rising, 'to beg the favour of a little conversation with you on the subject of the Dorrit family.'

Plornish became suspicious. Seemed to scent a creditor. Said, 'Ah, yes. Well. He didn't know what satisfaction he could give any gentleman, respecting that family. What might it be about, now?'

'I know you better,' said Clennam, smiling, 'than you suppose.'

Plornish observed, not Smiling in return, And yet he hadn't the pleasure of being acquainted with the gentleman, neither.

'No,' said Arthur, 'I know your kind offices at second hand, but on the best authority; through Little Dorrit.—I mean,' he explained, 'Miss Dorrit.'

'Mr Clennam, is it? Oh! I've heard of you, Sir.'

'And I of you,' said Arthur.

'Please to sit down again, Sir, and consider yourself welcome.—Why, yes,' said Plornish, taking a chair, and lifting the elder child upon his knee, that he might have the moral support of speaking to a stranger over his head, 'I have been on the wrong side of the Lock myself, and in that way we come to know Miss Dorrit. Me and my wife, we are well acquainted with Miss Dorrit.' 'Intimate!' cried Mrs Plornish. Indeed, she was so proud of the acquaintance, that she had awakened some bitterness of spirit in the Yard by magnifying to an enormous amount the sum for which Miss Dorrit's father had become insolvent. The Bleeding Hearts resented her claiming to know people of such distinction.

'It was her father that I got acquainted with first. And through getting acquainted with him, you see—why—I got acquainted with her,' said Plornish tautologically.

'I see.'

'Ah! And there's manners! There's polish! There's a gentleman to have run to seed in the Marshalsea jail! Why, perhaps you are not aware,' said Plornish, lowering his voice, and speaking with a perverse admiration of what he ought to have pitied or despised, 'not aware that Miss Dorrit and her sister dursn't let him know that they work for a living. No!' said Plornish, looking with a ridiculous triumph first at his wife, and then all round the room. 'Dursn't let him know it, they dursn't!'

'Without admiring him for that,' Clennam quietly observed, 'I am very sorry for him.' The remark appeared to suggest to Plornish, for the first time, that it might not be a very fine trait of character after all. He pondered about it for a moment, and gave it up.

'As to me,' he resumed, 'certainly Mr Dorrit is as affable with me, I am sure, as I can possibly expect. Considering the differences and distances betwixt us, more so. But it's Miss Dorrit that we were speaking of.'

'True. Pray how did you introduce her at my mother's!'

Mr Plornish picked a bit of lime out of his whisker, put it between his lips, turned it with his tongue like a sugar-plum, considered, found himself unequal to the task of lucid explanation, and appealing to his wife, said, 'Sally, you may as well mention how it was, old woman.'

'Miss Dorrit,' said Sally, hushing the baby from side to side, and laying her chin upon the little hand as it tried to disarrange the gown again, 'came here one afternoon with a bit of writing, telling that how she wished for needlework, and asked if it would be considered any ill-conwenience in case she was to give her address here.' (Plornish repeated, her address here, in a low voice, as if he were making responses at church.) 'Me and Plornish says, No, Miss Dorrit, no ill-conwenience,' (Plornish repeated, no ill-conwenience,) 'and she wrote it in, according. Which then me and Plornish says, Ho Miss Dorrit!' (Plornish repeated, Ho Miss Dorrit.) 'Have you thought of copying it three or four times, as the way to make it known in more places than one? No, says Miss Dorrit, I have not, but I will. She copied it out according, on this table, in a sweet writing, and Plornish, he took it where he worked, having a job just then,' (Plornish repeated job just then,) 'and likewise to the landlord of the Yard; through which it was that Mrs Clennam first happened to employ Miss Dorrit.' Plornish repeated, employ Miss Dorrit; and Mrs Plornish having come to an end, feigned to bite the fingers of the little hand as she kissed it.

'The landlord of the Yard,' said Arthur Clennam, 'is—'

'He is Mr Casby, by name, he is,' said Plornish, 'and Pancks, he collects the rents. That,' added Mr Plornish, dwelling on the subject with a slow thoughtfulness that appeared to have no connection with any specific object, and to lead him nowhere, 'that is about what they are, you may believe me or not, as you think proper.'

'Ay?' returned Clennam, thoughtful in his turn. 'Mr Casby, too! An old acquaintance of mine, long ago!'

Mr Plornish did not see his road to any comment on this fact, and made none. As there truly was no reason why he should have the least interest in it, Arthur Clennam went on to the present purport of his visit; namely, to make Plornish the instrument of effecting Tip's release, with as little detriment as possible to the self-reliance and self-helpfulness of the young man, supposing him to possess any remnant of those qualities: without doubt a very wide stretch of supposition. Plornish, having been made acquainted with the cause of action from the Defendant's own mouth, gave Arthur to understand that the Plaintiff was a 'Chaunter'—meaning, not a singer of anthems, but a seller of horses—and that he (Plornish) considered that ten shillings in the pound 'would settle handsome,' and that more would be a waste of money. The Principal and instrument soon drove off together to a stable-yard in High Holborn, where a remarkably fine grey gelding, worth, at the lowest figure, seventy-five guineas (not taking into account the value of the shot he had been made to swallow for the improvement of his form), was to be parted with for a twenty-pound note, in consequence of his having run away last week with Mrs Captain Barbary of Cheltenham, who wasn't up to a horse of his courage, and who, in mere spite, insisted on selling him for that ridiculous sum: or, in other words, on giving him away. Plornish, going up this yard alone and leaving his Principal outside, found a gentleman with tight drab legs, a rather old hat, a little hooked stick, and a blue neckerchief (Captain Maroon of Gloucestershire, a private friend of Captain Barbary); who happened to be there, in a friendly way, to mention these little circumstances concerning the remarkably fine grey gelding to any real judge of a horse and quick snapper-up of a good thing, who might look in at that address as per advertisement. This gentleman, happening also to be the Plaintiff in the Tip case, referred Mr Plornish to his solicitor, and declined to treat with Mr Plornish, or even to endure his presence in the yard, unless he appeared there with a twenty-pound note: in which case only, the gentleman would augur from appearances that he meant business, and might be induced to talk to him. On this hint, Mr Plornish retired to communicate with his Principal, and presently came back with the required credentials. Then said Captain Maroon, 'Now, how much time do you want to make the other twenty in? Now, I'll give you a month.' Then said Captain Maroon, when that wouldn't suit, 'Now, I'll tell what I'll do with you. You shall get me a good bill at four months, made payable at a banking-house, for the other twenty!' Then said Captain Maroon, when THAT wouldn't suit, 'Now, come; Here's the last I've got to say to you. You shall give me another ten down, and I'll run my pen clean through it.' Then said Captain Maroon when THAT wouldn't suit, 'Now, I'll tell you what it is, and this shuts it up; he has used me bad, but I'll let him off for another five down and a bottle of wine; and if you mean done, say done, and if you don't like it, leave it.' Finally said Captain Maroon, when THAT wouldn't suit either, 'Hand over, then!'—And in consideration of the first offer, gave a receipt in full and discharged the prisoner.

'Mr Plornish,' said Arthur, 'I trust to you, if you please, to keep my secret. If you will undertake to let the young man know that he is free, and to tell him that you were employed to compound for the debt by some one whom you are not at liberty to name, you will not only do me a service, but may do him one, and his sister also.'

'The last reason, sir,' said Plornish, 'would be quite sufficient. Your wishes shall be attended to.'

'A Friend has obtained his discharge, you can say if you please. A Friend who hopes that for his sister's sake, if for no one else's, he will make good use of his liberty.'

'Your wishes, sir, shall be attended to.'

'And if you will be so good, in your better knowledge of the family, as to communicate freely with me, and to point out to me any means by which you think I may be delicately and really useful to Little Dorrit, I shall feel under an obligation to you.'

'Don't name it, sir,' returned Plornish, 'it'll be ekally a pleasure an a—it'l be ekally a pleasure and a—' Finding himself unable to balance his sentence after two efforts, Mr Plornish wisely dropped it. He took Clennam's card and appropriate pecuniary compliment.

He was earnest to finish his commission at once, and his Principal was in the same mind. So his Principal offered to set him down at the Marshalsea Gate, and they drove in that direction over Blackfriars Bridge. On the way, Arthur elicited from his new friend a confused summary of the interior life of Bleeding Heart Yard. They was all hard up there, Mr Plornish said, uncommon hard up, to be sure. Well, he couldn't say how it was; he didn't know as anybody could say how it was; all he know'd was, that so it was.

When a man felt, on his own back and in his own belly, that poor he was, that man (Mr Plornish gave it as his decided belief) know'd well that he was poor somehow or another, and you couldn't talk it out of him, no more than you could talk Beef into him. Then you see, some people as was better off said, and a good many such people lived pretty close up to the mark themselves if not beyond it so he'd heerd, that they was 'improvident' (that was the favourite word) down the Yard. For instance, if they see a man with his wife and children going to Hampton Court in a Wan, perhaps once in a year, they says, 'Hallo! I thought you was poor, my improvident friend!' Why, Lord, how hard it was upon a man! What was a man to do? He couldn't go mollancholy mad, and even if he did, you wouldn't be the better for it. In Mr Plornish's judgment you would be the worse for it. Yet you seemed to want to make a man mollancholy mad. You was always at it—if not with your right hand, with your left. What was they a doing in the Yard? Why, take a look at 'em and see. There was the girls and their mothers a working at their sewing, or their shoe-binding, or their trimming, or their waistcoat making, day and night and night and day, and not more than able to keep body and soul together after all—often not so much. There was people of pretty well all sorts of trades you could name, all wanting to work, and yet not able to get it. There was old people, after working all their lives, going and being shut up in the workhouse, much worse fed and lodged and treated altogether, than—Mr Plornish said manufacturers, but appeared to mean malefactors. Why, a man didn't know where to turn himself for a crumb of comfort. As to who was to blame for it, Mr Plornish didn't know who was to blame for it. He could tell you who suffered, but he couldn't tell you whose fault it was. It wasn't HIS place to find out, and who'd mind what he said, if he did find out? He only know'd that it wasn't put right by them what undertook that line of business, and that it didn't come right of itself. And, in brief, his illogical opinion was, that if you couldn't do nothing for him, you had better take nothing from him for doing of it; so far as he could make out, that was about what it come to. Thus, in a prolix, gently-growling, foolish way, did Plornish turn the tangled skein of his estate about and about, like a blind man who was trying to find some beginning or end to it; until they reached the prison gate. There, he left his Principal alone; to wonder, as he rode away, how many thousand Plornishes there might be within a day or two's journey of the Circumlocution Office, playing sundry curious variations on the same tune, which were not known by ear in that glorious institution.

CHAPTER 13. Patriarchal

The mention of Mr Casby again revived in Clennam's memory the smouldering embers of curiosity and interest which Mrs Flintwinch had fanned on the night of his arrival. Flora Casby had been the beloved of his boyhood; and Flora was the daughter and only child of wooden-headed old Christopher (so he was still occasionally spoken of by some irreverent spirits who had had dealings with him, and in whom familiarity had bred its proverbial result perhaps), who was reputed to be rich in weekly tenants, and to get a good quantity of blood out of the stones of several unpromising courts and alleys. After some days of inquiry and research, Arthur Clennam became convinced that the case of the Father of the Marshalsea was indeed a hopeless one, and sorrowfully resigned the idea of helping him to freedom again. He had no hopeful inquiry to make at present, concerning Little Dorrit either; but he argued with himself that it might—for anything he knew—it might be serviceable to the poor child, if he renewed this acquaintance. It is hardly necessary to add that beyond all doubt he would have presented himself at Mr Casby's door, if there had been no Little Dorrit in existence; for we all know how we all deceive ourselves—that is to say, how people in general, our profounder selves excepted, deceive themselves—as to motives of action.

With a comfortable impression upon him, and quite an honest one in its way, that he was still patronising Little Dorrit in doing what had no reference to her, he found himself one afternoon at the corner of Mr Casby's street. Mr Casby lived in a street in the Gray's Inn Road, which had set off from that thoroughfare with the intention of running at one heat down into the valley, and up again to the top of Pentonville Hill; but which had run itself out of breath in twenty yards, and had stood still ever since. There is no such place in that part now; but it remained there for many years, looking with a baulked countenance at the wilderness patched with unfruitful gardens and pimpled with eruptive summerhouses, that it had meant to run over in no time.

'The house,' thought Clennam, as he crossed to the door, 'is as little changed as my mother's, and looks almost as gloomy. But the likeness ends outside. I know its staid repose within. The smell of its jars of old rose-leaves and lavender seems to come upon me even here.'

When his knock at the bright brass knocker of obsolete shape brought a woman-servant to the door, those faded scents in truth saluted him like wintry breath that had a faint remembrance in it of the bygone spring. He stepped into the sober, silent, air-tight house—one might have fancied it to have been stifled by Mutes in the Eastern manner—and the door, closing again, seemed to shut out sound and motion. The furniture was formal, grave, and quaker-like, but well-kept; and had as prepossessing an aspect as anything, from a human creature to a wooden stool, that is meant for much use and is preserved for little, can ever wear. There was a grave clock, ticking somewhere up the staircase; and there was a songless bird in the same direction, pecking at his cage, as if he were ticking too. The parlour-fire ticked in the grate. There was only one person on the parlour-hearth, and the loud watch in his pocket ticked audibly.

The servant-maid had ticked the two words 'Mr Clennam' so softly that she had not been heard; and he consequently stood, within the door she had closed, unnoticed. The figure of a man advanced in life, whose smooth grey eyebrows seemed to move to the ticking as the fire-light flickered on them, sat in an arm-chair, with his list shoes on the rug, and his thumbs slowly revolving over one another. This was old Christopher Casby—recognisable at a glance—as unchanged in twenty years and upward as his own solid furniture—as little touched by the influence of the varying seasons as the old rose-leaves and old lavender in his porcelain jars.

Perhaps there never was a man, in this troublesome world, so troublesome for the imagination to picture as a boy. And yet he had changed very little in his progress through life. Confronting him, in the room in which he sat, was a boy's portrait, which anybody seeing him would have identified as Master Christopher Casby, aged ten: though disguised with a haymaking rake, for which he had had, at any time, as much taste or use as for a diving-bell; and sitting (on one of his own legs) upon a bank of violets, moved to precocious contemplation by the spire of a village church. There was the same smooth face and forehead, the same calm blue eye, the same placid air. The shining bald head, which looked so very large because it shone so much; and the long grey hair at its sides and back, like floss silk or spun glass, which looked so very benevolent because it was never cut; were not, of course, to be seen in the boy as in the old man. Nevertheless, in the Seraphic creature with the haymaking rake, were clearly to be discerned the rudiments of the Patriarch with the list shoes.

Patriarch was the name which many people delighted to give him. Various old ladies in the neighbourhood spoke of him as The Last of the Patriarchs. So grey, so slow, so quiet, so impassionate, so very bumpy in the head, Patriarch was the word for him. He had been accosted in the streets, and respectfully solicited to become a Patriarch for painters and for sculptors; with so much importunity, in sooth, that it would appear to be beyond the Fine Arts to remember the points of a Patriarch, or to invent one. Philanthropists of both sexes had asked who he was, and on being informed, 'Old Christopher Casby, formerly Town-agent to Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle,' had cried in a rapture of disappointment, 'Oh! why, with that head, is he not a benefactor to his species! Oh! why, with that head, is he not a father to the orphan and a friend to the friendless!' With that head, however, he remained old Christopher Casby, proclaimed by common report rich in house property; and with that head, he now sat in his silent parlour. Indeed it would be the height of unreason to expect him to be sitting there without that head.

Arthur Clennam moved to attract his attention, and the grey eyebrows turned towards him.

'I beg your pardon,' said Clennam, 'I fear you did not hear me announced?'

'No, sir, I did not. Did you wish to see me, sir?'

'I wished to pay my respects.'

Mr Casby seemed a feather's weight disappointed by the last words, having perhaps prepared himself for the visitor's wishing to pay something else. 'Have I the pleasure, sir,' he proceeded—'take a chair, if you please—have I the pleasure of knowing—? Ah! truly, yes, I think I have! I believe I am not mistaken in supposing that I am acquainted with those features? I think I address a gentleman of whose return to this country I was informed by Mr Flintwinch?'

'That is your present visitor.'

'Really! Mr Clennam?'

'No other, Mr Casby.'

'Mr Clennam, I am glad to see you. How have you been since we met?'

Without thinking it worth while to explain that in the course of some quarter of a century he had experienced occasional slight fluctuations in his health and spirits, Clennam answered generally that he had never been better, or something equally to the purpose; and shook hands with the possessor of 'that head' as it shed its patriarchal light upon him.

'We are older, Mr Clennam,' said Christopher Casby.

'We are—not younger,' said Clennam. After this wise remark he felt that he was scarcely shining with brilliancy, and became aware that he was nervous.

'And your respected father,' said Mr Casby, 'is no more! I was grieved to hear it, Mr Clennam, I was grieved.'

Arthur replied in the usual way that he felt infinitely obliged to him.

'There was a time,' said Mr Casby, 'when your parents and myself were not on friendly terms. There was a little family misunderstanding among us. Your respected mother was rather jealous of her son, maybe; when I say her son, I mean your worthy self, your worthy self.'

His smooth face had a bloom upon it like ripe wall-fruit. What with his blooming face, and that head, and his blue eyes, he seemed to be delivering sentiments of rare wisdom and virtue. In like manner, his physiognomical expression seemed to teem with benignity. Nobody could have said where the wisdom was, or where the virtue was, or where the benignity was; but they all seemed to be somewhere about him. 'Those times, however,' pursued Mr Casby, 'are past and gone, past and gone. I do myself the pleasure of making a visit to your respected mother occasionally, and of admiring the fortitude and strength of mind with which she bears her trials, bears her trials.' When he made one of these little repetitions, sitting with his hands crossed before him, he did it with his head on one side, and a gentle smile, as if he had something in his thoughts too sweetly profound to be put into words. As if he denied himself the pleasure of uttering it, lest he should soar too high; and his meekness therefore preferred to be unmeaning.

'I have heard that you were kind enough on one of those occasions,' said Arthur, catching at the opportunity as it drifted past him, 'to mention Little Dorrit to my mother.'

'Little—Dorrit? That's the seamstress who was mentioned to me by a small tenant of mine? Yes, yes. Dorrit? That's the name. Ah, yes, yes! You call her Little Dorrit?'

No road in that direction. Nothing came of the cross-cut. It led no further.

'My daughter Flora,' said Mr Casby, 'as you may have heard probably, Mr Clennam, was married and established in life, several years ago. She had the misfortune to lose her husband when she had been married a few months. She resides with me again. She will be glad to see you, if you will permit me to let her know that you are here.'

'By all means,' returned Clennam. 'I should have preferred the request, if your kindness had not anticipated me.'

Upon this Mr Casby rose up in his list shoes, and with a slow, heavy step (he was of an elephantine build), made for the door. He had a long wide-skirted bottle-green coat on, and a bottle-green pair of trousers, and a bottle-green waistcoat. The Patriarchs were not dressed in bottle-green broadcloth, and yet his clothes looked patriarchal.

He had scarcely left the room, and allowed the ticking to become audible again, when a quick hand turned a latchkey in the house-door, opened it, and shut it. Immediately afterwards, a quick and eager short dark man came into the room with so much way upon him that he was within a foot of Clennam before he could stop.

'Halloa!' he said.

Clennam saw no reason why he should not say 'Halloa!' too.

'What's the matter?' said the short dark man.

'I have not heard that anything is the matter,' returned Clennam.

'Where's Mr Casby?' asked the short dark man, looking about. 'He will be here directly, if you want him.'

'*I* want him?' said the short dark man. 'Don't you?' This elicited a word or two of explanation from Clennam, during the delivery of which the short dark man held his breath and looked at him. He was dressed in black and rusty iron grey; had jet black beads of eyes; a scrubby little black chin; wiry black hair striking out from his head in prongs, like forks or hair-pins; and a complexion that was very dingy by nature, or very dirty by art, or a compound of nature and art. He had dirty hands and dirty broken nails, and looked as if he had been in the coals; he was in a perspiration, and snorted and sniffed and puffed and blew, like a little labouring steam-engine.

'Oh!' said he, when Arthur told him how he came to be there. 'Very well. That's right. If he should ask for Pancks, will you be so good as to say that Pancks is come in?' And so, with a snort and a puff, he worked out by another door.

Now, in the old days at home, certain audacious doubts respecting the last of the Patriarchs, which were afloat in the air, had, by some forgotten means, come in contact with Arthur's sensorium. He was aware of motes and specks of suspicion in the atmosphere of that time; seen through which medium, Christopher Casby was a mere Inn signpost, without any Inn—an invitation to rest and be thankful, when there was no place to put up at, and nothing whatever to be thankful for. He knew that some of these specks even represented Christopher as capable of harbouring designs in 'that head,' and as being a crafty impostor. Other motes there were which showed him as a heavy, selfish, drifting Booby, who, having stumbled, in the course of his unwieldy jostlings against other men, on the discovery that to get through life with ease and credit, he had but to hold his tongue, keep the bald part of his head well polished, and leave his hair alone, had had just cunning enough to seize the idea and stick to it. It was said that his being town-agent to Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle was referable, not to his having the least business capacity, but to his looking so supremely benignant that nobody could suppose the property screwed or jobbed under such a man; also, that for similar reasons he now got more money out of his own wretched lettings, unquestioned, than anybody with a less nobby and less shining crown could possibly have done. In a word, it was represented (Clennam called to mind, alone in the ticking parlour) that many people select their models, much as the painters, just now mentioned, select theirs; and that, whereas in the Royal Academy some evil old ruffian of a Dog-stealer will annually be found embodying all the cardinal virtues, on account of his eyelashes, or his chin, or his legs (thereby planting thorns of confusion in the breasts of the more observant students of nature), so, in the great social Exhibition, accessories are often accepted in lieu of the internal character.

Calling these things to mind, and ranging Mr Pancks in a row with them, Arthur Clennam leaned this day to the opinion, without quite deciding on it, that the last of the Patriarchs was the drifting Booby aforesaid, with the one idea of keeping the bald part of his head highly polished: and that, much as an unwieldy ship in the Thames river may sometimes be seen heavily driving with the tide, broadside on, stern first, in its own way and in the way of everything else, though making a great show of navigation, when all of a sudden, a little coaly steam-tug will bear down upon it, take it in tow, and bustle off with it; similarly the cumbrous

Patriarch had been taken in tow by the snorting Pancks, and was now following in the wake of that dingy little craft.

The return of Mr Casby with his daughter Flora, put an end to these meditations. Clennam's eyes no sooner fell upon the subject of his old passion than it shivered and broke to pieces.

Most men will be found sufficiently true to themselves to be true to an old idea. It is no proof of an inconstant mind, but exactly the opposite, when the idea will not bear close comparison with the reality, and the contrast is a fatal shock to it. Such was Clennam's case. In his youth he had ardently loved this woman, and had heaped upon her all the locked-up wealth of his affection and imagination. That wealth had been, in his desert home, like Robinson Crusoe's money; exchangeable with no one, lying idle in the dark to rust, until he poured it out for her. Ever since that memorable time, though he had, until the night of his arrival, as completely dismissed her from any association with his Present or Future as if she had been dead (which she might easily have been for anything he knew), he had kept the old fancy of the Past unchanged, in its old sacred place. And now, after all, the last of the Patriarchs coolly walked into the parlour, saying in effect, 'Be good enough to throw it down and dance upon it. This is Flora.'

Flora, always tall, had grown to be very broad too, and short of breath; but that was not much. Flora, whom he had left a lily, had become a peony; but that was not much. Flora, who had seemed enchanting in all she said and thought, was diffuse and silly. That was much. Flora, who had been spoiled and artless long ago, was determined to be spoiled and artless now. That was a fatal blow.

This is Flora!

'I am sure,' giggled Flora, tossing her head with a caricature of her girlish manner, such as a mummer might have presented at her own funeral, if she had lived and died in classical antiquity, 'I am ashamed to see Mr Clennam, I am a mere fright, I know he'll find me fearfully changed, I am actually an old woman, it's shocking to be found out, it's really shocking!'

He assured her that she was just what he had expected and that time had not stood still with himself.

'Oh! But with a gentleman it's so different and really you look so amazingly well that you have no right to say anything of the kind, while, as to me, you know—oh!' cried Flora with a little scream, 'I am dreadful!'

The Patriarch, apparently not yet understanding his own part in the drama under representation, glowed with vacant serenity.

'But if we talk of not having changed,' said Flora, who, whatever she said, never once came to a full stop, 'look at Papa, is not Papa precisely what he was when you went away, isn't it cruel and unnatural of Papa to be such a reproach to his own child, if we go on in this way much longer people who don't know us will begin to suppose that I am Papa's Mama!'

That must be a long time hence, Arthur considered.

'Oh Mr Clennam you insincerest of creatures,' said Flora, 'I perceive already you have not lost your old way of paying compliments, your old way when you used to pretend to be so sentimentally struck you know—at least I don't mean that, I—oh I don't know what I mean!' Here Flora tittered confusedly, and gave him one of her old glances.

The Patriarch, as if he now began to perceive that his part in the piece was to get off the stage as soon as might be, rose, and went to the door by which Pancks had worked out, hailing that Tug by name. He received an answer from some little Dock beyond, and was towed out of sight directly.

'You mustn't think of going yet,' said Flora—Arthur had looked at his hat, being in a ludicrous dismay, and not knowing what to do: 'you could never be so unkind as to think of going, Arthur—I mean Mr Arthur—or I suppose Mr Clennam would be far more proper—but I am sure I don't know what I am saying—without a word about the dear old days gone for ever, when I come to think of it I dare say it would be much better not to speak of them and it's highly probable that you have some much more agreeable engagement and pray let Me be the last person in the world to interfere with it though there was a time, but I am running into nonsense again.'

Was it possible that Flora could have been such a chatterer in the days she referred to? Could there have been anything like her present disjointed volubility in the fascinations that had captivated him?

'Indeed I have little doubt,' said Flora, running on with astonishing speed, and pointing her conversation with nothing but commas, and very few of them, 'that you are married to some Chinese lady, being in China so long and being in business and naturally desirous to settle and extend your connection nothing was more likely than that you should propose to a Chinese lady and nothing was more natural I am sure than that the Chinese lady should accept you and think herself very well off too, I only hope she's not a Pagodian dissenter.'

'I am not,' returned Arthur, smiling in spite of himself, 'married to any lady, Flora.'

'Oh good gracious me I hope you never kept yourself a bachelor so long on my account!' tittered Flora; 'but of course you never did why should you, pray don't answer, I don't know where I'm running to, oh do tell me something about the Chinese ladies whether their eyes are really so long and narrow always putting me in mind of mother-of-pearl fish at cards and do they really wear tails down their back and plaited too or is it only the men, and when they pull their hair so very tight off their foreheads don't they hurt themselves, and why do they stick little bells all over their bridges and temples and hats and things or don't they really do it?' Flora gave him another of her old glances. Instantly she went on again, as if he had spoken in reply for some time.

'Then it's all true and they really do! good gracious Arthur!—pray excuse me—old habit—Mr Clennam far more proper—what a country to live in for so long a time, and with so many lanterns and umbrellas too how very dark and wet the climate ought to be and no doubt actually is, and the sums of money that must be made by those two trades where everybody carries them and hangs them everywhere, the little shoes too and the feet screwed back in infancy is quite surprising, what a traveller you are!'

In his ridiculous distress, Clennam received another of the old glances without in the least knowing what to do with it.

'Dear dear,' said Flora, 'only to think of the changes at home Arthur—cannot overcome it, and seems so natural, Mr Clennam far more proper—since you became familiar with the Chinese customs and language which I am persuaded you speak like a Native if not better for you were always quick and clever though immensely difficult no doubt, I am sure the tea chests alone would kill me if I tried, such changes Arthur—I am doing it again, seems so natural, most improper—as no one could have believed, who could have ever imagined Mrs Finching when I can't imagine it myself!'

'Is that your married name?' asked Arthur, struck, in the midst of all this, by a certain warmth of heart that expressed itself in her tone when she referred, however oddly, to the youthful relation in which they had stood to one another. 'Finching?'

'Finching oh yes isn't it a dreadful name, but as Mr F. said when he proposed to me which he did seven times and handsomely consented I must say to be what he used to call on liking twelve months, after all, he wasn't answerable for it and couldn't help it could he, Excellent man, not at all like you but excellent man!'

Flora had at last talked herself out of breath for one moment. One moment; for she recovered breath in the act of raising a minute corner of her pocket-handkerchief to her eye, as a tribute to the ghost of the departed Mr F., and began again.

'No one could dispute, Arthur—Mr Clennam—that it's quite right you should be formally friendly to me under the altered circumstances and indeed you couldn't be anything else, at least I suppose not you ought to know, but I can't help recalling that there was a time when things were very different.'

'My dear Mrs Finching,' Arthur began, struck by the good tone again.

'Oh not that nasty ugly name, say Flora!'

'Flora. I assure you, Flora, I am happy in seeing you once more, and in finding that, like me, you have not forgotten the old foolish dreams, when we saw all before us in the light of our youth and hope.'

'You don't seem so,' pouted Flora, 'you take it very coolly, but however I know you are disappointed in me, I suppose the Chinese ladies—Mandarinesses if you call them so—are the cause or perhaps I am the cause myself, it's just as likely.'

'No, no,' Clennam entreated, 'don't say that.'

'Oh I must you know,' said Flora, in a positive tone, 'what nonsense not to, I know I am not what you expected, I know that very well.'

In the midst of her rapidity, she had found that out with the quick perception of a cleverer woman. The inconsistent and profoundly unreasonable way in which she instantly went on, nevertheless, to interweave their long-abandoned boy and girl relations with their present interview, made Clennam feel as if he were light-headed.

'One remark,' said Flora, giving their conversation, without the slightest notice and to the great terror of Clennam, the tone of a love-quarrel, 'I wish to make, one explanation I wish to offer, when your Mama came and made a scene of it with my Papa and when I was called down into the little breakfast-room where they were looking at one another with your Mama's parasol between them seated on two chairs like mad bulls what was I to do?'

'My dear Mrs Finching,' urged Clennam—'all so long ago and so long concluded, is it worth while seriously to—'

'I can't Arthur,' returned Flora, 'be denounced as heartless by the whole society of China without setting myself right when I have the opportunity of doing so, and you must be very well aware that there was Paul and Virginia which had to be returned and which was returned without note or comment, not that I mean to say you could have written to me watched as I was but if it had only come back with a red wafer on the cover I should have known that it meant Come to Pekin Nankeen and What's the third place, barefoot.'

'My dear Mrs Finching, you were not to blame, and I never blamed you. We were both too young, too dependent and helpless, to do anything but accept our separation.—Pray think how long ago,' gently remonstrated Arthur. 'One more remark,' proceeded Flora with unslackened volubility, 'I wish to make, one more explanation I wish to offer, for five days I had a cold in the head from crying which I passed entirely in the back drawing-room—there is the back drawing-room still on the first floor and still at the back of the house to confirm my words—when that dreary period had passed a lull succeeded years rolled on and Mr F. became acquainted with us at a mutual friend's, he was all attention he called next day he soon began to call three evenings a week and to send in little things for supper it was not love on Mr F.'s part it was adoration, Mr F. proposed with the full approval of Papa and what could I do?'

'Nothing whatever,' said Arthur, with the cheerfulest readiness, 'but what you did. Let an old friend assure you of his full conviction that you did quite right.'

'One last remark,' proceeded Flora, rejecting commonplace life with a wave of her hand, 'I wish to make, one last explanation I wish to offer, there was a time ere Mr F. first paid attentions incapable of being mistaken, but that is past and was not to be, dear Mr Clennam you no longer wear a golden chain you are free I trust you may be happy, here is Papa who is always tiresome and putting in his nose everywhere where he is not wanted.'

With these words, and with a hasty gesture fraught with timid caution—such a gesture had Clennam's eyes been familiar with in the old time—poor Flora left herself at eighteen years of age, a long long way behind again; and came to a full stop at last.

Or rather, she left about half of herself at eighteen years of age behind, and grafted the rest on to the relict of the late Mr F.; thus making a moral mermaid of herself, which her once boy-lover contemplated with feelings wherein his sense of the sorrowful and his sense of the comical were curiously blended.

For example. As if there were a secret understanding between herself and Clennam of the most thrilling nature; as if the first of a train of post-chaises and four, extending all the way to Scotland, were at that moment round the corner; and as if she couldn't (and wouldn't) have walked into the Parish Church with him, under the shade of the family umbrella, with the Patriarchal blessing on her head, and the perfect concurrence of all mankind; Flora comforted her soul with agonies of mysterious signalling, expressing dread of discovery. With the sensation of becoming more and more light-headed every minute, Clennam saw the relict of the late Mr F. enjoying herself in the most wonderful manner, by putting herself and him in their old places, and going through all the old performances—now, when the stage was dusty, when the scenery was faded, when the youthful actors were dead, when the orchestra was empty, when the lights were out. And still, through all this grotesque revival of what he remembered as having once been prettily natural to her, he could not but feel that it revived at sight of him, and that there was a tender memory in it.

The Patriarch insisted on his staying to dinner, and Flora signalled 'Yes!' Clennam so wished he could have done more than stay to dinner—so heartily wished he could have found the Flora that had been, or that never had been—that he thought the least atonement he could make for the disappointment he almost felt ashamed of, was to give himself up to the family desire. Therefore, he stayed to dinner.

Pancks dined with them. Pancks steamed out of his little dock at a quarter before six, and bore straight down for the Patriarch, who happened to be then driving, in an inane manner, through a stagnant account of Bleeding Heart Yard. Pancks instantly made fast to him and hauled him out.

'Bleeding Heart Yard?' said Pancks, with a puff and a snort. 'It's a troublesome property. Don't pay you badly, but rents are very hard to get there. You have more trouble with that one place than with all the places belonging to you.'

Just as the big ship in tow gets the credit, with most spectators, of being the powerful object, so the Patriarch usually seemed to have said himself whatever Pancks said for him.

'Indeed?' returned Clennam, upon whom this impression was so efficiently made by a mere gleam of the polished head that he spoke the ship instead of the Tug. 'The people are so poor there?'

'You can't say, you know,' snorted Pancks, taking one of his dirty hands out of his rusty iron-grey pockets to bite his nails, if he could find any, and turning his beads of eyes upon his employer, 'whether they're poor or not. They say they are, but they all say that. When a man says he's rich, you're generally sure he isn't. Besides, if they ARE poor, you can't help it. You'd be poor yourself if you didn't get your rents.'

'True enough,' said Arthur.

'You're not going to keep open house for all the poor of London,' pursued Pancks. 'You're not going to lodge 'em for nothing. You're not going to open your gates wide and let 'em come free. Not if you know it, you ain't.'

Mr Casby shook his head, in Placid and benignant generality.

'If a man takes a room of you at half-a-crown a week, and when the week comes round hasn't got the half-crown, you say to that man, Why have you got the room, then? If you haven't got the one thing, why have you got the other? What have you been and done with your money? What do you mean by it? What are you up to? That's what YOU say to a man of that sort; and if you didn't say it, more shame for you!' Mr Pancks here made a singular and startling noise, produced by a strong blowing effort in the region of the nose, unattended by any result but that acoustic one.

'You have some extent of such property about the east and north-east here, I believe?' said Clennam, doubtful which of the two to address.

'Oh, pretty well,' said Pancks. 'You're not particular to east or north-east, any point of the compass will do for you. What you want is a good investment and a quick return. You take it where you can find it. You ain't nice as to situation—not you.'

There was a fourth and most original figure in the Patriarchal tent, who also appeared before dinner. This was an amazing little old woman, with a face like a staring wooden doll too cheap for expression, and a stiff yellow wig perched unevenly on the top of her head, as if the child who owned the doll had driven a tack through it anywhere, so that it only got fastened on. Another remarkable thing in this little old woman was, that the same child seemed to have damaged her face in two or three places with some blunt instrument in the nature of a spoon; her countenance, and particularly the tip of her nose, presenting the phenomena of several dints, generally answering to the bowl of that article. A further remarkable thing in this little old woman was, that she had no name but Mr F.'s Aunt.

She broke upon the visitor's view under the following circumstances: Flora said when the first dish was being put on the table, perhaps Mr Clennam might not have heard that Mr F. had left her a legacy? Clennam in return implied his hope that Mr F. had endowed the wife whom he adored, with the greater part of his worldly substance, if not with all. Flora said, oh yes, she didn't mean that, Mr F. had made a beautiful will, but he had left her as a separate legacy, his Aunt. She then went out of the room to fetch the legacy, and, on her return, rather triumphantly presented 'Mr F.'s Aunt.'

The major characteristics discoverable by the stranger in Mr F.'s Aunt, were extreme severity and grim taciturnity; sometimes interrupted by a propensity to offer remarks in a deep warning voice, which, being totally uncalled for by anything said by anybody, and traceable to no association of ideas, confounded and terrified the Mind. Mr F.'s Aunt may have thrown in these observations on some system of her own, and it may have been ingenious, or even subtle: but the key to it was wanted. The neatly-served and well-cooked dinner (for everything about the Patriarchal household promoted quiet digestion) began with some soup, some fried soles, a butter-boat of shrimp sauce, and a dish of potatoes. The conversation still turned on the receipt of rents. Mr F.'s Aunt, after regarding the company for ten minutes with a malevolent gaze, delivered the following fearful remark:

'When we lived at Henley, Barnes's gander was stole by tinkers.' Mr Pancks courageously nodded his head and said, 'All right, ma'am.' But the effect of this mysterious communication upon Clennam was absolutely to frighten him. And another circumstance invested this old lady with peculiar terrors. Though she was always staring, she never acknowledged that she saw any individual.

The polite and attentive stranger would desire, say, to consult her inclinations on the subject of potatoes. His expressive action would be hopelessly lost upon her, and what could he do? No man could say, 'Mr F.'s Aunt, will you permit me?' Every man retired from the spoon, as Clennam did, cowed and baffled.

There was mutton, a steak, and an apple-pie—nothing in the remotest way connected with ganders—and the dinner went on like a disenchanted feast, as it truly was. Once upon a time Clennam had sat at that table taking no heed of anything but Flora; now the principal heed he took of Flora was to observe, against his will, that she was very fond of porter, that she combined a great deal of sherry with sentiment, and that if she were a little overgrown, it was upon substantial grounds. The last of the Patriarchs had always been a mighty eater, and he disposed of an immense quantity of solid food with the benignity of a good soul who was feeding some one else. Mr Pancks, who was always in a hurry, and who referred at intervals to a little dirty notebook which he kept beside him (perhaps containing the names of the defaulters he meant to look up by way of dessert), took in his victuals much as if he were coaling; with a good deal of noise, a good deal of dropping about, and a puff and a snort occasionally, as if he were nearly ready to steam away.

All through dinner, Flora combined her present appetite for eating and drinking with her past appetite for romantic love, in a way that made Clennam afraid to lift his eyes from his plate; since he could not look towards her without receiving some glance of mysterious meaning or warning, as if they were engaged in a plot. Mr F.'s Aunt sat silently defying him with an aspect of the greatest bitterness, until the removal of the cloth and the appearance of the decanters, when she originated another observation—struck into the conversation like a clock, without consulting anybody.

Flora had just said, 'Mr Clennam, will you give me a glass of port for Mr F.'s Aunt?'

'The Monument near London Bridge,' that lady instantly proclaimed, 'was put up arter the Great Fire of London; and the Great Fire of London was not the fire in which your uncle George's workshops was burned down.'

Mr Pancks, with his former courage, said, 'Indeed, ma'am? All right!' But appearing to be incensed by imaginary contradiction, or other ill-usage, Mr F.'s Aunt, instead of relapsing into silence, made the following additional proclamation:

'I hate a fool!'

She imparted to this sentiment, in itself almost Solomonic, so extremely injurious and personal a character by levelling it straight at the visitor's head, that it became necessary to lead Mr F.'s Aunt from the room. This was quietly done by Flora; Mr F.'s Aunt offering no resistance, but inquiring on her way out, 'What he come there for, then?' with implacable animosity.

When Flora returned, she explained that her legacy was a clever old lady, but was sometimes a little singular, and 'took dislikes'—peculiarities of which Flora seemed to be proud rather than otherwise. As Flora's good nature shone in the case, Clennam had no fault to find with the old lady for eliciting it, now that he was relieved from the terrors of her presence; and they took a glass or two of wine in peace. Foreseeing then that the Pancks would shortly get under weigh, and that the Patriarch would go to sleep, he pleaded the necessity of visiting his mother, and asked Mr Pancks in which direction he was going?

'Citywards, sir,' said Pancks. 'Shall we walk together?' said Arthur.

'Quite agreeable,' said Pancks.

Meanwhile Flora was murmuring in rapid snatches for his ear, that there was a time and that the past was a yawning gulf however and that a golden chain no longer bound him and that she revered the memory of the late Mr F. and that she should be at home to-morrow at half-past one and that the decrees of Fate were beyond recall and that she considered nothing so improbable as that he ever walked on the north-west side of Gray's-Inn Gardens at exactly four o'clock in the afternoon. He tried at parting to give his hand in frankness to the existing Flora—not the vanished Flora, or the mermaid—but Flora wouldn't have it, couldn't have it, was wholly destitute of the power of separating herself and him from their bygone characters. He left the house miserably enough; and so much more light-headed than ever, that if it had not been his good fortune to be towed away, he might, for the first quarter of an hour, have drifted anywhere.

When he began to come to himself, in the cooler air and the absence of Flora, he found Pancks at full speed, cropping such scanty pasturage of nails as he could find, and snorting at intervals. These, in conjunction with one hand in his pocket and his roughened hat hind side before, were evidently the conditions under which he reflected.

'A fresh night!' said Arthur.

'Yes, it's pretty fresh,' assented Pancks. 'As a stranger you feel the climate more than I do, I dare say. Indeed I haven't got time to feel it.'

'You lead such a busy life?'

'Yes, I have always some of 'em to look up, or something to look after. But I like business,' said Pancks, getting on a little faster. 'What's a man made for?'

'For nothing else?' said Clennam.

Pancks put the counter question, 'What else?' It packed up, in the smallest compass, a weight that had rested on Clennam's life; and he made no answer.

'That's what I ask our weekly tenants,' said Pancks. 'Some of 'em will pull long faces to me, and say, Poor as you see us, master, we're always grinding, drudging, toiling, every minute we're awake.

I say to them, What else are you made for? It shuts them up. They haven't a word to answer. What else are you made for? That clinches it.'

'Ah dear, dear, dear!' sighed Clennam.

'Here am I,' said Pancks, pursuing his argument with the weekly tenant. 'What else do you suppose I think I am made for? Nothing.

Rattle me out of bed early, set me going, give me as short a time as you like to bolt my meals in, and keep me at it. Keep me always at it, and I'll keep you always at it, you keep somebody else always at it. There you are with the Whole Duty of Man in a commercial country.'

When they had walked a little further in silence, Clennam said: 'Have you no taste for anything, Mr Pancks?'

'What's taste?' drily retorted Pancks.

'Let us say inclination.'

'I have an inclination to get money, sir,' said Pancks, 'if you will show me how.' He blew off that sound again, and it occurred to his companion for the first time that it was his way of laughing. He was a singular man in all respects; he might not have been quite in earnest, but that the short, hard, rapid manner in which he shot out these cinders of principles, as if it were done by mechanical revolvency, seemed irreconcilable with banter.

'You are no great reader, I suppose?' said Clennam.

'Never read anything but letters and accounts. Never collect anything but advertisements relative to next of kin. If that's a taste, I have got that. You're not of the Clennams of Cornwall, Mr Clennam?'

'Not that I ever heard of.' 'I know you're not. I asked your mother, sir. She has too much character to let a chance escape her.'

'Supposing I had been of the Clennams of Cornwall?' 'You'd have heard of something to your advantage.'

'Indeed! I have heard of little enough to my advantage for some time.'

'There's a Cornish property going a begging, sir, and not a Cornish Clennam to have it for the asking,' said Pancks, taking his note-book from his breast pocket and putting it in again. 'I turn off here. I wish you good night.'

'Good night!' said Clennam. But the Tug, suddenly lightened, and untrammelled by having any weight in tow, was already puffing away into the distance.

They had crossed Smithfield together, and Clennam was left alone at the corner of Barbican. He had no intention of presenting himself in his mother's dismal room that night, and could not have felt more depressed and cast away if he had been in a wilderness. He turned slowly down Aldersgate Street, and was pondering his way along towards Saint Paul's, purposing to come into one of the great thoroughfares for the sake of their light and life, when a crowd of people flocked towards him on the same pavement, and he stood aside against a shop to let them pass. As they came up, he made out that they were gathered around a something that was carried on men's shoulders. He soon saw that it was a litter, hastily made of a shutter or some such thing; and a recumbent figure upon it, and the scraps of conversation in the crowd, and a muddy bundle carried by one man, and a muddy hat carried by another, informed him that an accident had occurred. The litter stopped under a lamp before it had passed him half-a-dozen paces, for some readjustment of the burden; and, the crowd stopping too, he found himself in the midst of the array.

'An accident going to the Hospital?' he asked an old man beside him, who stood shaking his head, inviting conversation.

'Yes,' said the man, 'along of them Mails. They ought to be prosecuted and fined, them Mails. They come a racing out of Lad Lane and Wood Street at twelve or fourteen mile a hour, them Mails do. The only wonder is, that people ain't killed oftener by them Mails.'

'This person is not killed, I hope?'

'I don't know!' said the man, 'it an't for the want of a will in them Mails, if he an't.' The speaker having folded his arms, and set in comfortably to address his depreciation of them Mails to any of the bystanders who would listen, several voices, out of pure sympathy with the sufferer, confirmed him; one voice saying to Clennam, 'They're a public nuisance, them Mails, sir;' another, 'I see one on 'em pull up within half a inch of a boy, last night;' another, 'I see one on 'em go over a cat, sir—and it might have been your own mother;' and all representing, by implication, that if he happened to possess any public influence, he could not use it better than against them Mails.

'Why, a native Englishman is put to it every night of his life, to save his life from them Mails,' argued the first old man; 'and he knows when they're a coming round the corner, to tear him limb from limb. What can you expect from a poor foreigner who don't know nothing about 'em!'

'Is this a foreigner?' said Clennam, leaning forward to look.

In the midst of such replies as 'Frenchman, sir,' 'Porteghee, sir,' 'Dutchman, sir,' 'Prooshan, sir,' and other conflicting testimony, he now heard a feeble voice asking, both in Italian and in French, for water. A general remark going round, in reply, of 'Ah, poor fellow, he says he'll never get over it; and no wonder!' Clennam begged to be allowed to pass, as he understood the poor creature. He was immediately handed to the front, to speak to him.

'First, he wants some water,' said he, looking round. (A dozen good fellows dispersed to get it.) 'Are you badly hurt, my friend?' he asked the man on the litter, in Italian.

'Yes, sir; yes, yes, yes. It's my leg, it's my leg. But it pleases me to hear the old music, though I am very bad.'

'You are a traveller! Stay! See, the water! Let me give you some.' They had rested the litter on a pile of paving stones. It was at a convenient height from the ground, and by stooping he could lightly raise the head with one hand and hold the glass to his lips with the other. A little, muscular, brown man, with black hair and white teeth. A lively face, apparently. Earrings in his ears.

'That's well. You are a traveller?'

'Surely, sir.'

'A stranger in this city?'

'Surely, surely, altogether. I am arrived this unhappy evening.'

'From what country?' 'Marseilles.'

'Why, see there! I also! Almost as much a stranger here as you, though born here, I came from Marseilles a little while ago. Don't be cast down.' The face looked up at him imploringly, as he rose from wiping it, and gently replaced the coat that covered the writhing figure. 'I won't leave you till you shall be well taken care of. Courage! You will be very much better half an hour hence.'

'Ah! Altro, Altro!' cried the poor little man, in a faintly incredulous tone; and as they took him up, hung out his right hand to give the forefinger a back-handed shake in the air.

Arthur Clennam turned; and walking beside the litter, and saying an encouraging word now and then, accompanied it to the neighbouring hospital of Saint Bartholomew. None of the crowd but the bearers and he being admitted, the disabled man was soon laid on a table in a cool, methodical way, and carefully examined by a surgeon who was as near at hand, and as ready to appear as Calamity herself. 'He hardly knows an English word,' said Clennam; 'is he badly hurt?'

'Let us know all about it first,' said the surgeon, continuing his examination with a businesslike delight in it, 'before we pronounce.'

After trying the leg with a finger, and two fingers, and one hand and two hands, and over and under, and up and down, and in this direction and in that, and approvingly remarking on the points of interest to another gentleman who joined him, the surgeon at last clapped the patient on the shoulder, and said, 'He won't hurt. He'll do very well. It's difficult enough, but we shall not want him to part with his leg this time.' Which Clennam interpreted to the patient, who was full of gratitude, and, in his demonstrative way, kissed both the interpreter's hand and the surgeon's several times.

'It's a serious injury, I suppose?' said Clennam.

'Ye-es,' replied the surgeon, with the thoughtful pleasure of an artist contemplating the work upon his easel. 'Yes, it's enough. There's a compound fracture above the knee, and a dislocation below. They are both of a beautiful kind.' He gave the patient a friendly clap on the shoulder again, as if he really felt that he was a very good fellow indeed, and worthy of all commendation for having broken his leg in a manner interesting to science.

'He speaks French?' said the surgeon.

'Oh yes, he speaks French.'

'He'll be at no loss here, then.—You have only to bear a little pain like a brave fellow, my friend, and to be thankful that all goes as well as it does,' he added, in that tongue, 'and you'll walk again to a marvel. Now, let us see whether there's anything else the matter, and how our ribs are?'

There was nothing else the matter, and our ribs were sound. Clennam remained until everything possible to be done had been skilfully and promptly done—the poor belated wanderer in a strange land movingly besought that favour of him—and lingered by the bed to which he was in due time removed, until he had fallen into a doze. Even then he wrote a few words for him on his card, with a promise to return to-morrow, and left it to be given to him when he should awake. All these proceedings occupied so long that it struck eleven o'clock at night as he came out at the Hospital Gate. He had hired a lodging for the present in Covent Garden, and he took the nearest way to that quarter, by Snow Hill and Holborn.

Left to himself again, after the solicitude and compassion of his last adventure, he was naturally in a thoughtful mood. As naturally, he could not walk on thinking for ten minutes without recalling Flora. She necessarily recalled to him his life, with all its misdirection and little happiness.

When he got to his lodging, he sat down before the dying fire, as he had stood at the window of his old room looking out upon the blackened forest of chimneys, and turned his gaze back upon the gloomy vista by which he had come to that stage in his existence. So long, so bare, so blank. No childhood; no youth, except for one remembrance; that one remembrance proved, only that day, to be a piece of folly.

It was a misfortune to him, trifle as it might have been to another. For, while all that was hard and stern in his recollection, remained Reality on being proved—was obdurate to the sight and touch, and relaxed nothing of its old indomitable grimness—the one tender recollection of his experience would not bear the same test, and melted away. He had foreseen this, on the former night, when he had dreamed with waking eyes, but he had not felt it then; and he had now.

He was a dreamer in such wise, because he was a man who had, deep-rooted in his nature, a belief in all the gentle and good things his life had been without. Bred in meanness and hard dealing, this had rescued him to be a man of honourable mind and open hand. Bred in coldness and severity, this had rescued him to have a warm and sympathetic heart. Bred in a creed too darkly audacious to pursue, through its process of reserving the making of man in the image of his Creator to the making of his Creator in the image of an erring man, this had rescued him to judge not, and in humility to be merciful, and have hope and charity.

And this saved him still from the whimpering weakness and cruel selfishness of holding that because such a happiness or such a virtue had not come into his little path, or worked well for him, therefore it was not in the great scheme, but was reducible, when found in appearance, to the basest elements. A disappointed mind he had, but a mind too firm and healthy for such unwholesome air. Leaving himself in the dark, it could rise into the light, seeing it shine on others and hailing it.

Therefore, he sat before his dying fire, sorrowful to think upon the way by which he had come to that night, yet not strewing poison on the way by which other men had come to it. That he should have missed so much, and at his time of life should look so far about him for any staff to bear him company upon his downward journey and cheer it, was a just regret. He looked at the fire from which the blaze departed, from which the afterglow subsided, in which the ashes turned grey, from which they dropped to dust, and thought, 'How soon I too shall pass through such changes, and be gone!'

To review his life was like descending a green tree in fruit and flower, and seeing all the branches wither and drop off, one by one, as he came down towards them.

'From the unhappy suppression of my youngest days, through the rigid and unloving home that followed them, through my departure, my long exile, my return, my mother's welcome, my intercourse with her since, down to the afternoon of this day with poor Flora,' said Arthur Clennam, 'what have I found!'

His door was softly opened, and these spoken words startled him, and came as if they were an answer:

'Little Dorrit.'

CHAPTER 14. Little Dorrit's Party

Arthur Clennam rose hastily, and saw her standing at the door. This history must sometimes see with Little Dorrit's eyes, and shall begin that course by seeing him.

Little Dorrit looked into a dim room, which seemed a spacious one to her, and grandly furnished. Courtly ideas of Covent Garden, as a place with famous coffee-houses, where gentlemen wearing gold-laced coats and swords had quarrelled and fought duels; costly ideas of Covent Garden, as a place where there were flowers in winter at guineas a-piece, pine-apples at guineas a pound, and peas at guineas a pint; picturesque ideas of Covent Garden, as a place where there was a mighty theatre, showing wonderful and beautiful sights to richly-dressed ladies and gentlemen, and which was for ever far beyond the reach of poor Fanny or poor uncle; desolate ideas of Covent Garden, as having all those arches in it, where the miserable children in rags among whom she had just now passed, like young rats, slunk and hid, fed on offal, huddled together for warmth, and were hunted about (look to the rats young and old, all ye Barnacles, for before God they are eating away our foundations, and will bring the roofs on our heads!); teeming ideas of Covent Garden, as a place of past and present mystery, romance, abundance, want, beauty, ugliness, fair country gardens, and foul street gutters; all confused together,—made the room dimmer than it was in Little Dorrit's eyes, as they timidly saw it from the door.

At first in the chair before the gone-out fire, and then turned round wondering to see her, was the gentleman whom she sought. The brown, grave gentleman, who smiled so pleasantly, who was so frank and considerate in his manner, and yet in whose earnestness there was something that reminded her of his mother, with the great difference that she was earnest in asperity and he in gentleness. Now he regarded her with that attentive and inquiring look before which Little Dorrit's eyes had always fallen, and before which they fell still.

'My poor child! Here at midnight?'

'I said Little Dorrit, sir, on purpose to prepare you. I knew you must be very much surprised.'

'Are you alone?'

'No sir, I have got Maggy with me.'

Considering her entrance sufficiently prepared for by this mention of her name, Maggy appeared from the landing outside, on the broad grin. She instantly suppressed that manifestation, however, and became fixedly solemn.

'And I have no fire,' said Clennam. 'And you are—' He was going to say so lightly clad, but stopped himself in what would have been a reference to her poverty, saying instead, 'And it is so cold.'

Putting the chair from which he had risen nearer to the grate, he made her sit down in it; and hurriedly bringing wood and coal, heaped them together and got a blaze.

'Your foot is like marble, my child;' he had happened to touch it, while stooping on one knee at his work of kindling the fire; 'put it nearer the warmth.' Little Dorrit thanked him hastily. It was quite warm, it was very warm! It smote upon his heart to feel that she hid her thin, worn shoe.

Little Dorrit was not ashamed of her poor shoes. He knew her story, and it was not that. Little Dorrit had a misgiving that he might blame her father, if he saw them; that he might think, 'why did he dine to-day, and leave this little creature to the mercy of the cold stones!' She had no belief that it would have been a just reflection; she simply knew, by experience, that such delusions did sometimes present themselves to people. It was a part of her father's misfortunes that they did.

'Before I say anything else,' Little Dorrit began, sitting before the pale fire, and raising her eyes again to the face which in its harmonious look of interest, and pity, and protection, she felt to be a mystery far above her in degree, and almost removed beyond her guessing at; 'may I tell you something, sir?'

'Yes, my child.' A slight shade of distress fell upon her, at his so often calling her a child. She was surprised that he should see it, or think of such a slight thing; but he said directly: 'I wanted a tender word, and could think of no other. As you just now gave yourself the name they give you at my mother's, and as that is the name by which I always think of you, let me call you Little Dorrit.'

'Thank you, sir, I should like it better than any name.'

'Little Dorrit.'

'Little mother,' Maggy (who had been falling asleep) put in, as a correction.

'It's all the same, Maggy,' returned Little Dorrit, 'all the same.'

'Is it all the same, mother?'

'Just the same.'

Maggy laughed, and immediately snored. In Little Dorrit's eyes and ears, the uncouth figure and the uncouth sound were as pleasant as could be. There was a glow of pride in her big child, overspreading her face, when it again met the eyes of the grave brown gentleman. She wondered what he was thinking of, as he looked at Maggy and her. She thought what a good father he would be. How, with some such look, he would counsel and cherish his daughter.

'What I was going to tell you, sir,' said Little Dorrit, 'is, that MY brother is at large.'

Arthur was rejoiced to hear it, and hoped he would do well.

'And what I was going to tell you, sir,' said Little Dorrit, trembling in all her little figure and in her voice, 'is, that I am not to know whose generosity released him—am never to ask, and am never to be told, and am never to thank that gentleman with all MY grateful heart!'

He would probably need no thanks, Clennam said. Very likely he would be thankful himself (and with reason), that he had had the means and chance of doing a little service to her, who well deserved a great one.

'And what I was going to say, sir, is,' said Little Dorrit, trembling more and more, 'that if I knew him, and I might, I would tell him that he can never, never know how I feel his goodness, and how my good father would feel it. And what I was going to say, sir, is, that if I knew him, and I might—but I don't know him and I must not—I know that!—I would tell him that I shall never any more lie down to sleep without having prayed to Heaven to bless him and reward him. And if I knew him, and I might, I would go down on my knees to him, and take his hand and kiss it and ask him not to draw it away, but to leave it—O to leave it for a moment—and let my thankful tears fall on it; for I have no other thanks to give him!'

Little Dorrit had put his hand to her lips, and would have kneeled to him, but he gently prevented her, and replaced her in her chair.

Her eyes, and the tones of her voice, had thanked him far better than she thought. He was not able to say, quite as composedly as usual, 'There, Little Dorrit, there, there, there! We will suppose that you did know this person, and that you might do all this, and that it was all done. And now tell me, Who am quite another person—who am nothing more than the friend who begged you to trust him—why you are out at midnight, and what it is that brings you so far through the streets at this late hour, my slight, delicate,' child was on his lips again, 'Little Dorrit!'

'Maggy and I have been to-night,' she answered, subduing herself with the quiet effort that had long been natural to her, 'to the theatre where my sister is engaged.'

'And oh ain't it a Ev'nly place,' suddenly interrupted Maggy, who seemed to have the power of going to sleep and waking up whenever she chose. 'Almost as good as a hospital. Only there ain't no Chicking in it.'

Here she shook herself, and fell asleep again.

'We went there,' said Little Dorrit, glancing at her charge, 'because I like sometimes to know, of my own knowledge, that my sister is doing well; and like to see her there, with my own eyes, when neither she nor Uncle is aware. It is very seldom indeed that I can do that, because when I am not out at work, I am with my father, and even when I am out at work, I hurry home to him. But I pretend to-night that I am at a party.'

As she made the confession, timidly hesitating, she raised her eyes to the face, and read its expression so plainly that she answered it. 'Oh no, certainly! I never was at a party in my life.' She paused a little under his attentive look, and then said, 'I hope there is no harm in it. I could never have been of any use, if I had not pretended a little.'

She feared that he was blaming her in his mind for so devising to contrive for them, think for them, and watch over them, without their knowledge or gratitude; perhaps even with their reproaches for supposed neglect. But what was really in his mind, was the weak figure with its strong purpose, the thin worn shoes, the insufficient dress, and the pretence of recreation and enjoyment. He asked where the suppositious party was? At a place where she worked, answered Little Dorrit, blushing. She had said very little about it; only a few words to make her father easy. Her father did not believe it to be a grand party—indeed he might suppose that. And she glanced for an instant at the shawl she wore.

'It is the first night,' said Little Dorrit, 'that I have ever been away from home. And London looks so large, so barren, and so wild.' In Little Dorrit's eyes, its vastness under the black sky was awful; a tremor passed over her as she said the words.

'But this is not,' she added, with the quiet effort again, 'what I have come to trouble you with, sir. My sister's having found a friend, a lady she has told me of and made me rather anxious about, was the first cause of my coming away from home. And being away, and coming (on purpose) round by where you lived and seeing a light in the window—'

Not for the first time. No, not for the first time. In Little Dorrit's eyes, the outside of that window had been a distant star on other nights than this. She had toiled out of her way, tired and troubled, to look up at it, and wonder about the grave, brown gentleman from so far off, who had spoken to her as a friend and protector.

'There were three things,' said Little Dorrit, 'that I thought I would like to say, if you were alone and I might come up-stairs. First, what I have tried to say, but never can—never shall—'

'Hush, hush! That is done with, and disposed of. Let us pass to the second,' said Clennam, smiling her agitation away, making the blaze shine upon her, and putting wine and cake and fruit towards her on the table.

'I think,' said Little Dorrit—'this is the second thing, sir—I think Mrs Clennam must have found out my secret, and must know where I come from and where I go to. Where I live, I mean.'

'Indeed!' returned Clennam quickly. He asked her, after short consideration, why she supposed so.

'I think,' replied Little Dorrit, 'that Mr Flintwinch must have watched me.'

And why, Clennam asked, as he turned his eyes upon the fire, bent his brows, and considered again; why did she suppose that?

'I have met him twice. Both times near home. Both times at night, when I was going back. Both times I thought (though that may easily be my mistake), that he hardly looked as if he had met me by accident.' 'Did he say anything?'

'No; he only nodded and put his head on one side.'

'The devil take his head!' mused Clennam, still looking at the fire; 'it's always on one side.' He roused himself to persuade her to put some wine to her lips, and to touch something to eat—it was very difficult, she was so timid and shy—and then said, musing again: 'Is my mother at all changed to you?'

'Oh, not at all. She is just the same. I wondered whether I had better tell her my history. I wondered whether I might—I mean, whether you would like me to tell her. I wondered,' said Little Dorrit, looking at him in a suppliant way, and gradually withdrawing her eyes as he looked at her, 'whether you would advise me what I ought to do.'

'Little Dorrit,' said Clennam; and the phrase had already begun, between these two, to stand for a hundred gentle phrases, according to the varying tone and connection in which it was used; 'do nothing. I will have some talk with my old friend, Mrs Affery. Do nothing, Little Dorrit—except refresh yourself with such means as there are here. I entreat you to do that.'

'Thank you, I am not hungry. Nor,' said Little Dorrit, as he softly put her glass towards her, 'nor thirsty.—I think Maggy might like something, perhaps.'

'We will make her find pockets presently for all there is here,' said Clennam: 'but before we awake her, there was a third thing to say.'

'Yes. You will not be offended, sir?'

'I promise that, unreservedly.'

'It will sound strange. I hardly know how to say it. Don't think it unreasonable or ungrateful in me,' said Little Dorrit, with returning and increasing agitation.

'No, no, no. I am sure it will be natural and right. I am not afraid that I shall put a wrong construction on it, whatever it is.'

'Thank you. You are coming back to see my father again?'

'Yes.'

'You have been so good and thoughtful as to write him a note, saying that you are coming to-morrow?'

'Oh, that was nothing! Yes.'

'Can you guess,' said Little Dorrit, folding her small hands tight in one another, and looking at him with all the earnestness of her soul looking steadily out of her eyes, 'what I am going to ask you not to do?'

'I think I can. But I may be wrong.' 'No, you are not wrong,' said Little Dorrit, shaking her head. 'If we should want it so very, very badly that we cannot do without it, let me ask you for it.'

'I Will,—I Will.'

'Don't encourage him to ask. Don't understand him if he does ask. Don't give it to him. Save him and spare him that, and you will be able to think better of him!'

Clennam said—not very plainly, seeing those tears glistening in her anxious eyes—that her wish should be sacred with him.

'You don't know what he is,' she said; 'you don't know what he really is. How can you, seeing him there all at once, dear love, and not gradually, as I have done! You have been so good to us, so delicately and truly good, that I want him to be better in your eyes than in anybody's. And I cannot bear to think,' cried Little Dorrit, covering her tears with her hands, 'I cannot bear to think that you of all the world should see him in his only moments of degradation.'

'Pray,' said Clennam, 'do not be so distressed. Pray, pray, Little Dorrit! This is quite understood now.'

'Thank you, sir. Thank you! I have tried very much to keep myself from saying this; I have thought about it, days and nights; but when I knew for certain you were coming again, I made up my mind to speak to you. Not because I am ashamed of him,' she dried her tears quickly, 'but because I know him better than any one does, and love him, and am proud of him.'

Relieved of this weight, Little Dorrit was nervously anxious to be gone. Maggy being broad awake, and in the act of distantly gloating over the fruit and cakes with chuckles of anticipation, Clennam made the best diversion in his power by pouring her out a glass of wine, which she drank in a series of loud smacks; putting her hand upon her windpipe after every one, and saying, breathless, with her eyes in a prominent state, 'Oh, ain't it d'licious! Ain't it hospitally!' When she had finished the wine and these encomiums, he charged her to load her basket (she was never without her basket) with every eatable thing upon the table, and to take especial care to leave no scrap behind. Maggy's pleasure in doing this and her little mother's pleasure in seeing Maggy pleased, was as good a turn as circumstances could have given to the late conversation.

'But the gates will have been locked long ago,' said Clennam, suddenly remembering it. 'Where are you going?'

'I am going to Maggy's lodging,' answered Little Dorrit. 'I shall be quite safe, quite well taken care of.'

'I must accompany you there,' said Clennam, 'I cannot let you go alone.'

'Yes, pray leave us to go there by ourselves. Pray do!' begged Little Dorrit.

She was so earnest in the petition, that Clennam felt a delicacy in obtruding himself upon her: the rather, because he could well understand that Maggy's lodging was of the obscurest sort. 'Come, Maggy,' said Little

Dorrit cheerily, 'we shall do very well; we know the way by this time, Maggy?'

'Yes, yes, little mother; we know the way,' chuckled Maggy. And away they went. Little Dorrit turned at the door to say, 'God bless you!' She said it very softly, but perhaps she may have been as audible above—who knows!—as a whole cathedral choir.

Arthur Clennam suffered them to pass the corner of the street before he followed at a distance; not with any idea of encroaching a second time on Little Dorrit's privacy, but to satisfy his mind by seeing her secure in the neighbourhood to which she was accustomed. So diminutive she looked, so fragile and defenceless against the bleak damp weather, flitting along in the shuffling shadow of her charge, that he felt, in his compassion, and in his habit of considering her a child apart from the rest of the rough world, as if he would have been glad to take her up in his arms and carry her to her journey's end.

In course of time she came into the leading thoroughfare where the Marshalsea was, and then he saw them slacken their pace, and soon turn down a by-street. He stopped, felt that he had no right to go further, and slowly left them. He had no suspicion that they ran any risk of being houseless until morning; had no idea of the truth until long, long afterwards.

But, said Little Dorrit, when they stopped at a poor dwelling all in darkness, and heard no sound on listening at the door, 'Now, this is a good lodging for you, Maggy, and we must not give offence. Consequently, we will only knock twice, and not very loud; and if we cannot wake them so, we must walk about till day.'

Once, Little Dorrit knocked with a careful hand, and listened. Twice, Little Dorrit knocked with a careful hand, and listened. All was close and still. 'Maggy, we must do the best we can, my dear. We must be patient, and wait for day.'

It was a chill dark night, with a damp wind blowing, when they came out into the leading street again, and heard the clocks strike half-past one. 'In only five hours and a half,' said Little Dorrit, 'we shall be able to go home.' To speak of home, and to go and look at it, it being so near, was a natural sequence. They went to the closed gate, and peeped through into the court-yard. 'I hope he is sound asleep,' said Little Dorrit, kissing one of the bars, 'and does not miss me.'

The gate was so familiar, and so like a companion, that they put down Maggy's basket in a corner to serve for a seat, and keeping close together, rested there for some time. While the street was empty and silent, Little Dorrit was not afraid; but when she heard a footstep at a distance, or saw a moving shadow among the street lamps, she was startled, and whispered, 'Maggy, I see some one. Come away!' Maggy would then wake up more or less fretfully, and they would wander about a little, and come back again.

As long as eating was a novelty and an amusement, Maggy kept up pretty well. But that period going by, she became querulous about the cold, and shivered and whimpered. 'It will soon be over, dear,' said Little Dorrit patiently. 'Oh it's all very fine for you, little mother,' returned Maggy, 'but I'm a poor thing, only ten years old.' At last, in the dead of the night, when the street was very still indeed, Little Dorrit laid the heavy head upon her bosom, and soothed her to sleep. And thus she sat at the gate, as it were alone; looking up at the stars, and seeing the clouds pass over them in their wild flight—which was the dance at Little Dorrit's party.

'If it really was a party!' she thought once, as she sat there. 'If it was light and warm and beautiful, and it was our house, and my poor dear was its master, and had never been inside these walls.

And if Mr Clennam was one of our visitors, and we were dancing to delightful music, and were all as gay and light-hearted as ever we could be! I wonder—' Such a vista of wonder opened out before her, that she sat looking up at the stars, quite lost, until Maggy was querulous again, and wanted to get up and walk.

Three o'clock, and half-past three, and they had passed over London Bridge. They had heard the rush of the tide against obstacles; and looked down, awed, through the dark vapour on the river; had seen little spots of lighted water where the bridge lamps were reflected, shining like demon eyes, with a terrible fascination in them for guilt and misery. They had shrunk past homeless people, lying coiled up in nooks. They had run from drunkards. They had started from slinking men, whistling and signing to one another at bye corners, or running away at full speed. Though everywhere the leader and the guide, Little Dorrit, happy for once in her youthful appearance, feigned to cling to and rely upon Maggy. And more than once some voice, from among a knot of brawling or prowling figures in their path, had called out to the rest to 'let the woman and the child go by!'

So, the woman and the child had gone by, and gone on, and five had sounded from the steeples. They were walking slowly towards the east, already looking for the first pale streak of day, when a woman came after them.

'What are you doing with the child?' she said to Maggy.

She was young—far too young to be there, Heaven knows!—and neither ugly nor wicked-looking. She spoke coarsely, but with no naturally coarse voice; there was even something musical in its sound. 'What are you doing with yourself?' retorted Maggy, for want Of a better answer.

'Can't you see, without my telling you?'

'I don't know as I can,' said Maggy.

'Killing myself! Now I have answered you, answer me. What are you doing with the child?'

The supposed child kept her head drooped down, and kept her form close at Maggy's side.

'Poor thing!' said the woman. 'Have you no feeling, that you keep her out in the cruel streets at such a time as this? Have you no eyes, that you don't see how delicate and slender she is? Have you no sense (you don't look as if you had much) that you don't take more pity on this cold and trembling little hand?'

She had stepped across to that side, and held the hand between her own two, chafing it. 'Kiss a poor lost creature, dear,' she said, bending her face, 'and tell me where's she taking you.'

Little Dorrit turned towards her.

'Why, my God!' she said, recoiling, 'you're a woman!'

'Don't mind that!' said Little Dorrit, clasping one of her hands that had suddenly released hers. 'I am not afraid of you.'

'Then you had better be,' she answered. 'Have you no mother?'

'No.'

'No father?'

'Yes, a very dear one.'

'Go home to him, and be afraid of me. Let me go. Good night!'

'I must thank you first; let me speak to you as if I really were a child.'

'You can't do it,' said the woman. 'You are kind and innocent; but you can't look at me out of a child's eyes. I never should have touched you, but I thought that you were a child.' And with a strange, wild cry, she went away.

No day yet in the sky, but there was day in the resounding stones of the streets; in the waggons, carts, and coaches; in the workers going to various occupations; in the opening of early shops; in the traffic at markets; in the stir of the riverside. There was coming day in the flaring lights, with a feebler colour in them than they would have had at another time; coming day in the increased sharpness of the air, and the ghastly dying of the night.

They went back again to the gate, intending to wait there now until it should be opened; but the air was so raw and cold that Little Dorrit, leading Maggy about in her sleep, kept in motion. Going round by the Church, she saw lights there, and the door open; and went up the steps and looked in.

'Who's that?' cried a stout old man, who was putting on a nightcap as if he were going to bed in a vault.

'It's no one particular, sir,' said Little Dorrit.

'Stop!' cried the man. 'Let's have a look at you!'

This caused her to turn back again in the act of going out, and to present herself and her charge before him.

'I thought so!' said he. 'I know YOU.'

'We have often seen each other,' said Little Dorrit, recognising the sexton, or the beadle, or the verger, or whatever he was, 'when I have been at church here.'

'More than that, we've got your birth in our Register, you know; you're one of our curiosities.'

'Indeed!' said Little Dorrit.

'To be sure. As the child of the—by-the-bye, how did you get out so early?'

'We were shut out last night, and are waiting to get in.'

'You don't mean it? And there's another hour good yet! Come into the vestry. You'll find a fire in the vestry, on account of the painters. I'm waiting for the painters, or I shouldn't be here, you may depend upon it. One of our curiosities mustn't be cold when we have it in our power to warm her up comfortable. Come along.'

He was a very good old fellow, in his familiar way; and having stirred the vestry fire, he looked round the shelves of registers for a particular volume. 'Here you are, you see,' he said, taking it down and turning the leaves. 'Here you'll find yourself, as large as life. Amy, daughter of William and Fanny Dorrit. Born, Marshalsea Prison, Parish of St George. And we tell people that you have lived there, without so much as a day's or a night's absence, ever since. Is it true?'

'Quite true, till last night.' 'Lord!' But his surveying her with an admiring gaze suggested Something else to him, to wit: 'I am sorry to see, though, that you are faint and tired. Stay a bit. I'll get some cushions out of the church, and you and your friend shall lie down before the fire.

Don't be afraid of not going in to join your father when the gate opens. I'll call you.'

He soon brought in the cushions, and strewed them on the ground.

'There you are, you see. Again as large as life. Oh, never mind thanking. I've daughters of my own. And though they weren't born in the Marshalsea Prison, they might have been, if I had been, in my ways of carrying on, of your father's breed. Stop a bit. I must put something under the cushion for your head. Here's a burial volume, just the thing! We have got Mrs Bangham in this book. But what makes these books interesting to most people is—not who's in 'em, but who isn't—who's coming, you know, and when. That's the interesting question.'

Commendingly looking back at the pillow he had improvised, he left them to their hour's repose. Maggy was snoring already, and Little Dorrit was soon fast asleep with her head resting on that sealed book of Fate, untroubled by its mysterious blank leaves.

This was Little Dorrit's party. The shame, desertion, wretchedness, and exposure of the great capital; the wet, the cold, the slow hours, and the swift clouds of the dismal night. This was the party from which Little Dorrit went home, jaded, in the first grey mist of a rainy morning.

CHAPTER 15. Mrs Flintwinch has another Dream

The debilitated old house in the city, wrapped in its mantle of soot, and leaning heavily on the crutches that had partaken of its decay and worn out with it, never knew a healthy or a cheerful interval, let what would betide. If the sun ever touched it, it was but with a ray, and that was gone in half an hour; if the moonlight ever fell upon it, it was only to put a few patches on its doleful cloak, and make it look more wretched. The stars, to be sure, coldly watched it when the nights and the smoke were clear enough; and all bad weather stood by it with a rare fidelity. You should alike find rain, hail, frost, and thaw lingering in that dismal enclosure when they had vanished from other places; and as to snow, you should see it there for weeks, long after it had changed from yellow to black, slowly weeping away its grimy life. The place had no other adherents. As to street noises, the rumbling of wheels in the lane merely rushed in at the gateway in going past, and rushed out again: making the listening Mistress Affery feel as if she were deaf, and recovered the sense of hearing by instantaneous flashes. So with whistling, singing, talking, laughing, and all pleasant human sounds. They leaped the gap in a moment, and went upon their way. The varying light of fire and candle in Mrs Clennam's room made the greatest change that ever broke the dead monotony of the spot. In her two long narrow windows, the fire shone sullenly all day, and sullenly all night. On rare occasions it flashed up passionately, as she did; but for the most part it was suppressed, like her, and preyed upon itself evenly and slowly. During many hours of the short winter days, however, when it was dusk there early in the afternoon, changing distortions of herself in her wheeled chair, of Mr Flintwinch with his wry neck, of Mistress Affery coming and going, would be thrown upon the house wall that was over the gateway, and would hover there like shadows from a great magic lantern. As the room-ridden invalid settled for the night, these would gradually disappear: Mistress Affery's magnified shadow always flitting about, last, until it finally glided away into the air, as though she were off upon a witch excursion. Then the solitary light would burn unchangingly, until it burned pale before the dawn, and at last died under the breath of Mrs Affery, as her shadow descended on it from the witch-region of sleep.

Strange, if the little sick-room fire were in effect a beacon fire, summoning some one, and that the most unlikely some one in the world, to the spot that MUST be come to. Strange, if the little sick-room light were in effect a watch-light, burning in that place every night until an appointed event should be watched out! Which of the vast multitude of travellers, under the sun and the stars, climbing the dusty hills and toiling along the weary plains, journeying by land and journeying by sea, coming and going so strangely, to meet and to act and react on one another; which of the host may, with no suspicion of the journey's end, be travelling surely hither?

Time shall show us. The post of honour and the post of shame, the general's station and the drummer's, a peer's statue in Westminster Abbey and a seaman's hammock in the bosom of the deep, the mitre and the workhouse, the woolsack and the gallows, the throne and the guillotine—the travellers to all are on the great high road, but it has wonderful divergencies, and only Time shall show us whither each traveller is bound.

On a wintry afternoon at twilight, Mrs Flintwinch, having been heavy all day, dreamed this dream:

She thought she was in the kitchen getting the kettle ready for tea, and was warming herself with her feet upon the fender and the skirt of her gown tucked up, before the collapsed fire in the middle of the grate, bordered on either hand by a deep cold black ravine. She thought that as she sat thus, musing upon the question whether life was not for some people a rather dull invention, she was frightened by a sudden noise behind her. She thought that she had been similarly frightened once last week, and that the noise was of a mysterious kind—a sound of rustling and of three or four quick beats like a rapid step; while a shock or tremble was communicated to her heart, as if the step had shaken the floor, or even as if she had been touched by some awful hand. She thought that this revived within her certain old fears of hers that the house was haunted; and that she flew up the kitchen stairs without knowing how she got up, to be nearer company.

Mistress Affery thought that on reaching the hall, she saw the door of her liege lord's office standing open, and the room empty. That she went to the ripped-up window in the little room by the street door to connect her palpitating heart, through the glass, with living things beyond and outside the haunted house. That she then saw, on the wall over the gateway, the shadows of the two clever ones in conversation above. That she then went upstairs with her shoes in her hand, partly to be near the clever ones as a match for most ghosts, and partly to hear what they were talking about.

'None of your nonsense with me,' said Mr Flintwinch. 'I won't take it from you.'

Mrs Flintwinch dreamed that she stood behind the door, which was just ajar, and most distinctly heard her husband say these bold words.

'Flintwinch,' returned Mrs Clennam, in her usual strong low voice, 'there is a demon of anger in you. Guard against it.'

'I don't care whether there's one or a dozen,' said Mr Flintwinch, forcibly suggesting in his tone that the higher number was nearer the mark. 'If there was fifty, they should all say, None of your nonsense with me, I won't take it from you—I'd make 'em say it, whether they liked it or not.'

'What have I done, you wrathful man?' her strong voice asked.

'Done?' said Mr Flintwinch. 'Dropped down upon me.'

'If you mean, remonstrated with you—'

'Don't put words into my mouth that I don't mean,' said Jeremiah, sticking to his figurative expression with tenacious and impenetrable obstinacy: 'I mean dropped down upon me.'

'I remonstrated with you,' she began again, 'because—'

'I won't have it!' cried Jeremiah. 'You dropped down upon me.'

'I dropped down upon you, then, you ill-conditioned man,' (Jeremiah chuckled at having forced her to adopt his phrase,) 'for having been needlessly significant to Arthur that morning. I have a right to complain of it as almost a breach of confidence. You did not mean it—'

'I won't have it!' interposed the contradictory Jeremiah, flinging back the concession. 'I did mean it.'

'I suppose I must leave you to speak in soliloquy if you choose,' she replied, after a pause that seemed an angry one. 'It is useless my addressing myself to a rash and headstrong old man who has a set purpose not to hear me.'

'Now, I won't take that from you either,' said Jeremiah. 'I have no such purpose. I have told you I did mean it. Do you wish to know why I meant it, you rash and headstrong old woman?'

'After all, you only restore me my own words,' she said, struggling with her indignation. 'Yes.'

'This is why, then. Because you hadn't cleared his father to him, and you ought to have done it. Because, before you went into any tantrum about yourself, who are—'

'Hold there, Flintwinch!' she cried out in a changed voice: 'you may go a word too far.'

The old man seemed to think so. There was another pause, and he had altered his position in the room, when he spoke again more mildly:

'I was going to tell you why it was. Because, before you took your own part, I thought you ought to have taken the part of Arthur's father. Arthur's father! I had no particular love for Arthur's father. I served Arthur's father's uncle, in this house, when Arthur's father was not much above me—was poorer as far as his pocket went—and when his uncle might as soon have left me his heir as have left him. He starved in the parlour, and I starved in the kitchen; that was the principal difference in our positions; there was not much more than a flight of breakneck stairs between us. I never took to him in those times; I don't know that I ever took to him greatly at any time. He was an undecided, irresolute chap, who had everything but his orphan life scared out of him when he was young. And when he brought you home here, the wife his uncle had named for him, I didn't need to look at you twice (you were a good-looking woman at that time) to know who'd be master. You have stood of your own strength ever since. Stand of your own strength now. Don't lean against the dead.'

'I do not—as you call it—lean against the dead.'

'But you had a mind to do it, if I had submitted,' growled Jeremiah, 'and that's why you drop down upon me. You can't forget that I didn't submit. I suppose you are astonished that I should consider it worth my while to have justice done to Arthur's father?

Hey? It doesn't matter whether you answer or not, because I know you are, and you know you are. Come, then, I'll tell you how it is. I may be a bit of an oddity in point of temper, but this is my temper—I can't let anybody have entirely their own way. You are a determined woman, and a clever woman; and when you see your purpose before you, nothing will turn you from it. Who knows that better than I do?'

'Nothing will turn me from it, Flintwinch, when I have justified it to myself. Add that.'

'Justified it to yourself? I said you were the most determined woman on the face of the earth (or I meant to say so), and if you are determined to justify any object you entertain, of course you'll do it.'

'Man! I justify myself by the authority of these Books,' she cried, with stern emphasis, and appearing from the sound that followed to strike the dead-weight of her arm upon the table.

'Never mind that,' returned Jeremiah calmly, 'we won't enter into that question at present. However that may be, you carry out your purposes, and you make everything go down before them. Now, I won't go down before them. I have been faithful to you, and useful to you, and I am attached to you. But I can't consent, and I won't consent, and I never did consent, and I never will consent to be lost in you. Swallow up everybody else, and welcome. The peculiarity of my temper is, ma'am, that I won't be swallowed up alive.'

Perhaps this had Originally been the mainspring of the understanding between them. Descrying thus much of force of character in Mr Flintwinch, perhaps Mrs Clennam had deemed alliance with him worth her while.

'Enough and more than enough of the subject,' said she gloomily.

'Unless you drop down upon me again,' returned the persistent Flintwinch, 'and then you must expect to hear of it again.'

Mistress Affery dreamed that the figure of her lord here began walking up and down the room, as if to cool his spleen, and that she ran away; but that, as he did not issue forth when she had stood listening and trembling in the shadowy hall a little time, she crept up-stairs again, impelled as before by ghosts and curiosity, and once more cowered outside the door.

'Please to light the candle, Flintwinch,' Mrs Clennam was saying, apparently wishing to draw him back into their usual tone. 'It is nearly time for tea. Little Dorrit is coming, and will find me in the dark.'

Mr Flintwinch lighted the candle briskly, and said as he put it down upon the table:

'What are you going to do with Little Dorrit? Is she to come to work here for ever? To come to tea here for ever? To come backwards and forwards here, in the same way, for ever?' 'How can you talk about "for ever" to a maimed creature like me? Are we not all cut down like the grass of the field, and was not I shorn by the scythe many years ago: since when I have been lying here, waiting to be gathered into the barn?'

'Ay, ay! But since you have been lying here—not near dead—nothing like it—numbers of children and young people, blooming women, strong men, and what not, have been cut down and carried; and still here are you,

you see, not much changed after all. Your time and mine may be a long one yet. When I say for ever, I mean (though I am not poetical) through all our time.' Mr Flintwinch gave this explanation with great calmness, and calmly waited for an answer.

'So long as Little Dorrit is quiet and industrious, and stands in need of the slight help I can give her, and deserves it; so long, I suppose, unless she withdraws of her own act, she will continue to come here, I being spared.'

'Nothing more than that?' said Flintwinch, stroking his mouth and chin.

'What should there be more than that! What could there be more than that!' she ejaculated in her sternly wondering way.

Mrs Flintwinch dreamed, that, for the space of a minute or two, they remained looking at each other with the candle between them, and that she somehow derived an impression that they looked at each other fixedly.

'Do you happen to know, Mrs Clennam,' Affery's liege lord then demanded in a much lower voice, and with an amount of expression that seemed quite out of proportion to the simple purpose of his words, 'where she lives?'

'No.'

'Would you—now, would you like to know?' said Jeremiah with a pounce as if he had sprung upon her.

'If I cared to know, I should know already. Could I not have asked her any day?'

'Then you don't care to know?'

'I do not.'

Mr Flintwinch, having expelled a long significant breath said, with his former emphasis, 'For I have accidentally—mind!—found out.'

'Wherever she lives,' said Mrs Clennam, speaking in one unmodulated hard voice, and separating her words as distinctly as if she were reading them off from separate bits of metal that she took up one by one, 'she has made a secret of it, and she shall always keep her secret from me.'

'After all, perhaps you would rather not have known the fact, any how?' said Jeremiah; and he said it with a twist, as if his words had come out of him in his own wry shape.

'Flintwinch,' said his mistress and partner, flashing into a sudden energy that made Affery start, 'why do you goad me? Look round this room. If it is any compensation for my long confinement within these narrow limits—not that I complain of being afflicted; you know I never complain of that—if it is any compensation to me for long confinement to this room, that while I am shut up from all pleasant change I am also shut up from the knowledge of some things that I may prefer to avoid knowing, why should you, of all men, grudge me that belief?'

'I don't grudge it to you,' returned Jeremiah.

'Then say no more. Say no more. Let Little Dorrit keep her secret from me, and do you keep it from me also. Let her come and go, unobserved and unquestioned. Let me suffer, and let me have what alleviation belongs to my condition. Is it so much, that you torment me like an evil spirit?'

'I asked you a question. That's all.'

'I have answered it. So, say no more. Say no more.' Here the sound of the wheeled chair was heard upon the floor, and Affery's bell rang with a hasty jerk.

More afraid of her husband at the moment than of the mysterious sound in the kitchen, Affery crept away as lightly and as quickly as she could, descended the kitchen stairs almost as rapidly as she had ascended them, resumed her seat before the fire, tucked up her skirt again, and finally threw her apron over her head. Then the bell rang once more, and then once more, and then kept on ringing; in despite of which importunate summons, Affery still sat behind her apron, recovering her breath.

At last Mr Flintwinch came shuffling down the staircase into the hall, muttering and calling 'Affery woman!' all the way. Affery still remaining behind her apron, he came stumbling down the kitchen stairs, candle in hand, sidled up to her, twitched her apron off, and roused her.

'Oh Jeremiah!' cried Affery, waking. 'What a start you gave me!'

'What have you been doing, woman?' inquired Jeremiah. 'You've been rung for fifty times.'

'Oh Jeremiah,' said Mistress Affery, 'I have been a-dreaming!'

Reminded of her former achievement in that way, Mr Flintwinch held the candle to her head, as if he had some idea of lighting her up for the illumination of the kitchen.

'Don't you know it's her tea-time?' he demanded with a vicious grin, and giving one of the legs of Mistress Affery's chair a kick.

'Jeremiah? Tea-time? I don't know what's come to me. But I got such a dreadful turn, Jeremiah, before I went—off a-dreaming, that I think it must be that.'

'Yoogh! Sleepy-Head!' said Mr Flintwinch, 'what are you talking about?'

'Such a strange noise, Jeremiah, and such a curious movement. In the kitchen here—just here.'

Jeremiah held up his light and looked at the blackened ceiling, held down his light and looked at the damp stone floor, turned round with his light and looked about at the spotted and blotched walls.

'Rats, cats, water, drains,' said Jeremiah.

Mistress Affery negatived each with a shake of her head. 'No, Jeremiah; I have felt it before. I have felt it up-stairs, and once on the staircase as I was going from her room to ours in the night—a rustle and a sort of trembling touch behind me.'

'Affery, my woman,' said Mr Flintwinch grimly, after advancing his nose to that lady's lips as a test for the detection of spirituous liquors, 'if you don't get tea pretty quick, old woman, you'll become sensible of a rustle and a touch that'll send you flying to the other end of the kitchen.'

This prediction stimulated Mrs Flintwinch to bestir herself, and to hasten up-stairs to Mrs Clennam's chamber. But, for all that, she now began to entertain a settled conviction that there was something wrong in the gloomy house. Henceforth, she was never at peace in it after daylight departed; and never went up or down stairs in the dark without having her apron over her head, lest she should see something.

What with these ghostly apprehensions and her singular dreams, Mrs Flintwinch fell that evening into a haunted state of mind, from which it may be long before this present narrative descries any trace of her recovery. In the vagueness and indistinctness of all her new experiences and perceptions, as everything about her was mysterious to herself she began to be mysterious to others: and became as difficult to be made out to anybody's satisfaction as she found the house and everything in it difficult to make out to her own.

She had not yet finished preparing Mrs Clennam's tea, when the soft knock came to the door which always announced Little Dorrit. Mistress Affery looked on at Little Dorrit taking off her homely bonnet in the hall, and at Mr Flintwinch scraping his jaws and contemplating her in silence, as expecting some wonderful consequence to ensue which would frighten her out of her five wits or blow them all three to pieces.

After tea there came another knock at the door, announcing Arthur. Mistress Affery went down to let him in, and he said on entering, 'Affery, I am glad it's you. I want to ask you a question.' Affery immediately replied, 'For goodness sake don't ask me nothing, Arthur! I am frightened out of one half of my life, and dreamed out of the other. Don't ask me nothing! I don't know which is which, or what is what!'—and immediately started away from him, and came near him no more.

Mistress Affery having no taste for reading, and no sufficient light for needlework in the subdued room, supposing her to have the inclination, now sat every night in the dimness from which she had momentarily emerged on the evening of Arthur Clennam's return, occupied with crowds of wild speculations and suspicions respecting her mistress and her husband and the noises in the house. When the ferocious devotional exercises were engaged in, these speculations would distract Mistress Affery's eyes towards the door, as if she expected some dark form to appear at those propitious moments, and make the party one too many.

Otherwise, Affery never said or did anything to attract the attention of the two clever ones towards her in any marked degree, except on certain occasions, generally at about the quiet hour towards bed-time, when she would suddenly dart out of her dim corner, and whisper with a face of terror to Mr Flintwinch, reading the paper near Mrs Clennam's little table: 'There, jeremiah! Now! What's that noise?'

Then the noise, if there were any, would have ceased, and Mr Flintwinch would snarl, turning upon her as if she had cut him down that moment against his will, 'Affery, old woman, you shall have a dose, old woman, such a dose! You have been dreaming again!'

CHAPTER 16. Nobody's Weakness

The time being come for the renewal of his acquaintance with the Meagles family, Clennam, pursuant to contract made between himself and Mr Meagles within the precincts of Bleeding Heart Yard, turned his face on a certain Saturday towards Twickenham, where Mr Meagles had a cottage-residence of his own. The weather being fine and dry, and any English road abounding in interest for him who had been so long away, he sent his valise on by the coach, and set out to walk. A walk was in itself a new enjoyment to him, and one that had rarely diversified his life afar off.

He went by Fulham and Putney, for the pleasure of strolling over the heath. It was bright and shining there; and when he found himself so far on his road to Twickenham, he found himself a long way on his road to a number of airier and less substantial destinations. They had risen before him fast, in the healthful exercise and the pleasant road. It is not easy to walk alone in the country without musing upon something. And he had plenty of unsettled subjects to meditate upon, though he had been walking to the Land's End.

First, there was the subject seldom absent from his mind, the question, what he was to do henceforth in life; to what occupation he should devote himself, and in what direction he had best seek it. He was far from rich, and every day of indecision and inaction made his inheritance a source of greater anxiety to him. As often as he began to consider how to increase this inheritance, or to lay it by, so often his misgiving that there was some one with an unsatisfied claim upon his justice, returned; and that alone was a subject to outlast the longest walk. Again, there was the subject of his relations with his mother, which were now upon an equable and peaceful but never confidential footing, and whom he saw several times a week. Little Dorrit was a leading and a constant subject: for the circumstances of his life, united to those of her own story, presented the little creature to him as the only person between whom and himself there were ties of innocent reliance on one hand, and affectionate protection on the other; ties of compassion, respect, unselfish interest, gratitude, and pity. Thinking of her, and of the possibility of her father's release from prison by the unbarring hand of death—the only change of circumstance he could foresee that might enable him to be such a friend to her as he wished to be, by altering her whole manner of life, smoothing her rough road, and giving her a home—he regarded her, in that perspective, as his adopted daughter, his poor child of the Marshalsea hushed to rest. If there were a last subject in his thoughts, and it lay towards Twickenham, its form was so indefinite that it was little more than the pervading atmosphere in which these other subjects floated before him.

He had crossed the heath and was leaving it behind when he gained upon a figure which had been in advance of him for some time, and which, as he gained upon it, he thought he knew. He derived this impression from something in the turn of the head, and in the figure's action of consideration, as it went on at a sufficiently sturdy walk. But when the man—for it was a man's figure—pushed his hat up at the back of his head, and stopped to consider some object before him, he knew it to be Daniel Doyce.

'How do you do, Mr Doyce?' said Clennam, overtaking him. 'I am glad to see you again, and in a healthier place than the Circumlocution Office.'

'Ha! Mr Meagles's friend!' exclaimed that public criminal, coming out of some mental combinations he had been making, and offering his hand. 'I am glad to see you, sir. Will you excuse me if I forget your name?'

'Readily. It's not a celebrated name. It's not Barnacle.' 'No, no,' said Daniel, laughing. 'And now I know what it is. It's Clennam. How do you do, Mr Clennam?'

'I have some hope,' said Arthur, as they walked on together, 'that we may be going to the same place, Mr Doyce.'

'Meaning Twickenham?' returned Daniel. 'I am glad to hear it.'

They were soon quite intimate, and lightened the way with a variety of conversation. The ingenious culprit was a man of great modesty and good sense; and, though a plain man, had been too much accustomed to combine what was original and daring in conception with what was patient and minute in execution, to be by any means an ordinary man. It was at first difficult to lead him to speak about himself, and he put off Arthur's advances in that direction by admitting slightly, oh yes, he had done this, and he had done that, and such a thing was of his making, and such another thing was his discovery, but it was his trade, you see, his trade; until, as he gradually became assured that his companion had a real interest in his account of himself, he frankly yielded to it. Then it appeared that he was the son of a north-country blacksmith, and had originally been apprenticed by his widowed mother to a lock-maker; that he had 'struck out a few little things' at the lock-maker's, which had led to his being released from his indentures with a present, which present had enabled him to gratify his ardent wish to bind himself to a working engineer, under whom he had laboured hard, learned hard, and lived hard, seven years. His time being out, he had 'worked in the shop' at weekly wages seven or eight years more; and had then betaken himself to the banks of the Clyde, where he had studied, and filed, and hammered, and improved his knowledge, theoretical and practical, for six or seven years more. There he had had an offer to go to Lyons, which he had accepted; and from Lyons had been engaged to go to Germany, and in Germany had had an offer to go to St Petersburg, and there had done very well indeed—never better. However, he had naturally felt a preference for his own country, and a wish to gain distinction there, and to do whatever service he could do, there rather than elsewhere. And so he had come home. And so at home he had established himself in business, and had invented and executed, and worked his way on, until, after a dozen years of constant suit and service, he had been enrolled in the Great British Legion of Honour, the Legion of the Rebuffed of the Circumlocution Office, and had been decorated with the Great British Order of Merit, the Order of the Disorder of the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings.

'It is much to be regretted,' said Clennam, 'that you ever turned your thoughts that way, Mr Doyce.'

'True, sir, true to a certain extent. But what is a man to do? if he has the misfortune to strike out something serviceable to the nation, he must follow where it leads him.' 'Hadn't he better let it go?' said Clennam.

'He can't do it,' said Doyce, shaking his head with a thoughtful smile. 'It's not put into his head to be buried. It's put into his head to be made useful. You hold your life on the condition that to the last you shall struggle hard for it. Every man holds a discovery on the same terms.'

'That is to say,' said Arthur, with a growing admiration of his quiet companion, 'you are not finally discouraged even now?'

'I have no right to be, if I am,' returned the other. 'The thing is as true as it ever was.'

When they had walked a little way in silence, Clennam, at once to change the direct point of their conversation and not to change it too abruptly, asked Mr Doyce if he had any partner in his business to relieve him of a portion of its anxieties?

'No,' he returned, 'not at present. I had when I first entered on it, and a good man he was. But he has been dead some years; and as I could not easily take to the notion of another when I lost him, I bought his share for myself and have gone on by myself ever since. And here's another thing,' he said, stopping for a moment with a good-humoured laugh in his eyes, and laying his closed right hand, with its peculiar suppleness of thumb, on Clennam's arm, 'no inventor can be a man of business, you know.'

'No?' said Clennam.

'Why, so the men of business say,' he answered, resuming the walk and laughing outright. 'I don't know why we unfortunate creatures should be supposed to want common sense, but it is generally taken for granted that we do. Even the best friend I have in the world, our excellent friend over yonder,' said Doyce, nodding towards Twickenham, 'extends a sort of protection to me, don't you know, as a man not quite able to take care of himself?'

Arthur Clennam could not help joining in the good-humoured laugh, for he recognised the truth of the description.

'So I find that I must have a partner who is a man of business and not guilty of any inventions,' said Daniel Doyce, taking off his hat to pass his hand over his forehead, 'if it's only in deference to the current opinion, and to uphold the credit of the Works. I don't think he'll find that I have been very remiss or confused in my way of conducting them; but that's for him to say—whoever he is—not for me.' 'You have not chosen him yet, then?'

'No, sir, no. I have only just come to a decision to take one. The fact is, there's more to do than there used to be, and the Works are enough for me as I grow older. What with the books and correspondence, and foreign journeys for which a Principal is necessary, I can't do all. I am going to talk over the best way of negotiating the matter, if I find a spare half-hour between this and Monday morning, with my—my Nurse and protector,' said Doyce, with laughing eyes again. 'He is a sagacious man in business, and has had a good apprenticeship to it.'

After this, they conversed on different subjects until they arrived at their journey's end. A composed and unobtrusive self-sustainment was noticeable in Daniel Doyce—a calm knowledge that what was true must remain true, in spite of all the Barnacles in the family ocean, and would be just the truth, and neither more nor less when even that sea had run dry—which had a kind of greatness in it, though not of the official quality.

As he knew the house well, he conducted Arthur to it by the way that showed it to the best advantage. It was a charming place (none the worse for being a little eccentric), on the road by the river, and just what the residence of the Meagles family ought to be. It stood in a garden, no doubt as fresh and beautiful in the May of the Year as Pet now was in the May of her life; and it was defended by a goodly show of handsome trees and spreading evergreens, as Pet was by Mr and Mrs Meagles. It was made out of an old brick house, of which a part had been altogether pulled down, and another part had been changed into the present cottage; so there was a hale elderly portion, to represent Mr and Mrs Meagles, and a young picturesque, very pretty portion to represent Pet. There was even the later addition of a conservatory sheltering itself against it, uncertain of hue in its deep-stained glass, and in its more transparent portions flashing to the sun's rays, now like fire and now like harmless water drops; which might have stood for Tattycoram. Within view was the peaceful river and the ferry-boat, to moralise to all the inmates saying: Young or old, passionate or tranquil, chafing or content, you, thus runs the current always. Let the heart swell into what discord it will, thus plays the rippling water on the prow of the ferry-boat ever the same tune. Year after year, so much allowance for the drifting of the boat, so many miles an hour the flowing of the stream, here the rushes, there the lilies, nothing uncertain or unquiet, upon this road that steadily runs away; while you, upon your flowing road of time, are so capricious and distracted.

The bell at the gate had scarcely sounded when Mr Meagles came out to receive them. Mr Meagles had scarcely come out, when Mrs Meagles came out. Mrs Meagles had scarcely come out, when Pet came out. Pet scarcely had come out, when Tattycoram came out. Never had visitors a more hospitable reception.

'Here we are, you see,' said Mr Meagles, 'boxed up, Mr Clennam, within our own home-limits, as if we were never going to expand—that is, travel—again. Not like Marseilles, eh? No allonging and marshonging here!'

'A different kind of beauty, indeed!' said Clennam, looking about him.

'But, Lord bless me!' cried Mr Meagles, rubbing his hands with a relish, 'it was an uncommonly pleasant thing being in quarantine, wasn't it? Do you know, I have often wished myself back again? We were a capital party.'

This was Mr Meagles's invariable habit. Always to object to everything while he was travelling, and always to want to get back to it when he was not travelling.

'If it was summer-time,' said Mr Meagles, 'which I wish it was on your account, and in order that you might see the place at its best, you would hardly be able to hear yourself speak for birds. Being practical people, we never allow anybody to scare the birds; and the birds, being practical people too, come about us in myriads. We are delighted to see you, Clennam (if you'll allow me, I shall drop the Mister); I heartily assure you, we are delighted.'

'I have not had so pleasant a greeting,' said Clennam—then he recalled what Little Dorrit had said to him in his own room, and faithfully added 'except once—since we last walked to and fro, looking down at the Mediterranean.'

'Ah!' returned Mr Meagles. 'Something like a look out, that was, wasn't it? I don't want a military government, but I shouldn't mind a little allonging and marshonging—just a dash of it—in this neighbourhood sometimes. It's Devilish still.'

Bestowing this eulogium on the retired character of his retreat with a dubious shake of the head, Mr Meagles led the way into the house. It was just large enough, and no more; was as pretty within as it was without, and was perfectly well-arranged and comfortable.

Some traces of the migratory habits of the family were to be observed in the covered frames and furniture, and wrapped-up hangings; but it was easy to see that it was one of Mr Meagles's whims to have the cottage always kept, in their absence, as if they were always coming back the day after to-morrow. Of articles collected on his various expeditions, there was such a vast miscellany that it was like the dwelling of an amiable Corsair. There were antiquities from Central Italy, made by the best modern houses in that department of industry; bits of mummy from Egypt (and perhaps Birmingham); model gondolas from Venice; model villages from Switzerland; morsels of tesselated pavement from Herculaneum and Pompeii, like petrified minced veal; ashes out of tombs, and lava out of Vesuvius; Spanish fans, Spezzian straw hats, Moorish slippers, Tuscan hairpins, Carrara sculpture, Trastaverini scarves, Genoese velvets and filigree, Neapolitan coral, Roman cameos, Geneva jewellery, Arab lanterns, rosaries blest all round by the Pope himself, and an infinite variety of lumber. There were views, like and unlike, of a multitude of places; and there was one little picture-room devoted to a few of the regular sticky old

Saints, with sinews like whipcord, hair like Neptune's, wrinkles like tattooing, and such coats of varnish that every holy personage served for a fly-trap, and became what is now called in the vulgar tongue a Catch-em-alive O. Of these pictorial acquisitions Mr Meagles spoke in the usual manner. He was no judge, he said, except of what pleased himself; he had picked them up, dirt-cheap, and people had considered them rather fine. One man, who at any rate ought to know something of the subject, had declared that 'Sage, Reading' (a specially oily old gentleman in a blanket, with a swan's-down tippet for a beard, and a web of cracks all over him like rich pie-crust), to be a fine Guercino. As for Sebastian del Piombo there, you would judge for yourself; if it were not his later manner, the question was, Who was it? Titian, that might or might not be—perhaps he had only touched it. Daniel Doyce said perhaps he hadn't touched it, but Mr Meagles rather declined to overhear the remark.

When he had shown all his spoils, Mr Meagles took them into his own snug room overlooking the lawn, which was fitted up in part like a dressing-room and in part like an office, and in which, upon a kind of counter-desk, were a pair of brass scales for weighing gold, and a scoop for shovelling out money.

'Here they are, you see,' said Mr Meagles. 'I stood behind these two articles five-and-thirty years running, when I no more thought of gadding about than I now think of—staying at home. When I left the Bank for good, I asked for them, and brought them away with me.

I mention it at once, or you might suppose that I sit in my counting-house (as Pet says I do), like the king in the poem of the four-and-twenty blackbirds, counting out my money.'

Clennam's eyes had strayed to a natural picture on the wall, of two pretty little girls with their arms entwined. 'Yes, Clennam,' said Mr Meagles, in a lower voice. 'There they both are. It was taken some seventeen years ago. As I often say to Mother, they were babies then.'

'Their names?' said Arthur.

'Ah, to be sure! You have never heard any name but Pet. Pet's name is Minnie; her sister's Lillie.'

'Should you have known, Mr Clennam, that one of them was meant for me?' asked Pet herself, now standing in the doorway.

'I might have thought that both of them were meant for you, both are still so like you. Indeed,' said Clennam, glancing from the fair original to the picture and back, 'I cannot even now say which is not your portrait.' 'D'ye hear that, Mother?' cried Mr Meagles to his wife, who had followed her daughter. 'It's always the same, Clennam; nobody can decide. The child to your left is Pet.'

The picture happened to be near a looking-glass. As Arthur looked at it again, he saw, by the reflection of the mirror, Tattycoram stop in passing outside the door, listen to what was going on, and pass away with an angry and contemptuous frown upon her face, that changed its beauty into ugliness.

'But come!' said Mr Meagles. 'You have had a long walk, and will be glad to get your boots off. As to Daniel here, I suppose he'd never think of taking his boots off, unless we showed him a boot-jack.'

'Why not?' asked Daniel, with a significant smile at Clennam.

'Oh! You have so many things to think about,' returned Mr Meagles, clapping him on the shoulder, as if his weakness must not be left to itself on any account. 'Figures, and wheels, and cogs, and levers, and screws, and cylinders, and a thousand things.'

'In my calling,' said Daniel, amused, 'the greater usually includes the less. But never mind, never mind! Whatever pleases you, pleases me.'

Clennam could not help speculating, as he seated himself in his room by the fire, whether there might be in the breast of this honest, affectionate, and cordial Mr Meagles, any microscopic portion of the mustard-seed that had sprung up into the great tree of the Circumlocution Office. His curious sense of a general superiority to Daniel Doyce, which seemed to be founded, not so much on anything in Doyce's personal character as on the mere fact of his being an originator and a man out of the beaten track of other men, suggested the idea. It might have occupied him until he went down to dinner an hour afterwards, if he had not had another question to consider, which had been in his mind so long ago as before he was in quarantine at Marseilles, and which had now returned to it, and was very urgent with it. No less a question than this: Whether he should allow himself to fall in love with Pet?

He was twice her age. (He changed the leg he had crossed over the other, and tried the calculation again, but could not bring out the total at less.) He was twice her age. Well! He was young in appearance, young in health and strength, young in heart. A man was certainly not old at forty; and many men were not in circumstances to marry, or did not marry, until they had attained that time of life. On the other hand, the question was, not what he thought of the point, but what she thought of it.

He believed that Mr Meagles was disposed to entertain a ripe regard for him, and he knew that he had a sincere regard for Mr Meagles and his good wife. He could foresee that to relinquish this beautiful only child, of whom they were so fond, to any husband, would be a trial of their love which perhaps they never yet had had the fortitude to contemplate. But the more beautiful and winning and charming she, the nearer they must always be to the necessity of approaching it. And why not in his favour, as well as in another's?

When he had got so far, it came again into his head that the question was, not what they thought of it, but what she thought of it.

Arthur Clennam was a retiring man, with a sense of many deficiencies; and he so exalted the merits of the beautiful Minnie in his mind, and depressed his own, that when he pinned himself to this point, his hopes began to fail him. He came to the final resolution, as he made himself ready for dinner, that he would not allow himself to fall in love with Pet.

There were only five, at a round table, and it was very pleasant indeed. They had so many places and people to recall, and they were all so easy and cheerful together (Daniel Doyce either sitting out like an amused spectator at cards, or coming in with some shrewd little experiences of his own, when it happened to be to the purpose), that they might have been together twenty times, and not have known so much of one another.

'And Miss Wade,' said Mr Meagles, after they had recalled a number of fellow-travellers. 'Has anybody seen Miss Wade?'

'I have,' said Tattycoram.

She had brought a little mantle which her young mistress had sent for, and was bending over her, putting it on, when she lifted up her dark eyes and made this unexpected answer.

'Tatty!' her young mistress exclaimed. 'You seen Miss Wade?—where?'

'Here, miss,' said Tattycoram.

'How?'

An impatient glance from Tattycoram seemed, as Clennam saw it, to answer 'With my eyes!' But her only answer in words was: 'I met her near the church.'

'What was she doing there I wonder!' said Mr Meagles. 'Not going to it, I should think.'

'She had written to me first,' said Tattycoram.

'Oh, Tatty!' murmured her mistress, 'take your hands away. I feel as if some one else was touching me!'

She said it in a quick involuntary way, but half playfully, and not more petulantly or disagreeably than a favourite child might have done, who laughed next moment. Tattycoram set her full red lips together, and crossed her arms upon her bosom. 'Did you wish to know, sir,' she said, looking at Mr Meagles, 'what Miss Wade wrote to me about?'

'Well, Tattycoram,' returned Mr Meagles, 'since you ask the question, and we are all friends here, perhaps you may as well mention it, if you are so inclined.'

'She knew, when we were travelling, where you lived,' said Tattycoram, 'and she had seen me not quite—not quite—'

'Not quite in a good temper, Tattycoram?' suggested Mr Meagles, shaking his head at the dark eyes with a quiet caution. 'Take a little time—count five-and-twenty, Tattycoram.'

She pressed her lips together again, and took a long deep breath.

'So she wrote to me to say that if I ever felt myself hurt,' she looked down at her young mistress, 'or found myself worried,' she looked down at her again, 'I might go to her, and be considerately treated. I was to think of it, and could speak to her by the church. So I went there to thank her.'

'Tatty,' said her young mistress, putting her hand up over her shoulder that the other might take it, 'Miss Wade almost frightened me when we parted, and I scarcely like to think of her just now as having been so near me without my knowing it. Tatty dear!'

Tatty stood for a moment, immovable.

'Hey?' cried Mr Meagles. 'Count another five-and-twenty, Tattycoram.'

She might have counted a dozen, when she bent and put her lips to the caressing hand. It patted her cheek, as it touched the owner's beautiful curls, and Tattycoram went away.

'Now there,' said Mr Meagles softly, as he gave a turn to the dumb-waiter on his right hand to twirl the sugar towards himself. 'There's a girl who might be lost and ruined, if she wasn't among practical people. Mother and I know, solely from being practical, that there are times when that girl's whole nature seems to roughen itself against seeing us so bound up in Pet. No father and mother were bound up in her, poor soul. I don't like to think of the way in which that unfortunate child, with all that passion and protest in her, feels when she hears the Fifth Commandment on a Sunday. I am always inclined to call out, Church, Count five-and-twenty, Tattycoram.'

Besides his dumb-waiter, Mr Meagles had two other not dumb waiters in the persons of two parlour-maids with rosy faces and bright eyes, who were a highly ornamental part of the table decoration. 'And why not, you see?' said Mr Meagles on this head. 'As I always say to Mother, why not have something pretty to look at, if you have anything at all?' A certain Mrs Tickit, who was Cook and Housekeeper when the family were at home, and Housekeeper only when the family were away, completed the establishment. Mr Meagles regretted that the nature of the duties in which she was engaged, rendered Mrs Tickit unpresentable at present, but hoped to introduce her to the new visitor to-morrow. She was an important part of the Cottage, he said, and all his friends knew her. That was her picture up in the corner. When they went away, she always put on the silk-gown and the jet-black row of curls represented in that portrait (her hair was reddish-grey in the kitchen), established herself in the breakfast-room, put her spectacles between two particular leaves of Doctor Buchan's Domestic Medicine, and sat looking over the blind all day until they came back again. It was supposed that no persuasion could be invented which would induce Mrs Tickit to abandon her post at the blind, however long their absence, or to dispense with the attendance of Dr Buchan; the lucubrations of which learned practitioner, Mr Meagles implicitly believed she had never yet consulted to the extent of one word in her life.

In the evening they played an old-fashioned rubber; and Pet sat looking over her father's hand, or singing to herself by fits and starts at the piano. She was a spoilt child; but how could she be otherwise? Who could be much with so pliable and beautiful a creature, and not yield to her endearing influence? Who could pass an evening in the house, and not love her for the grace and charm of her very presence in the room? This was Clennam's reflection, notwithstanding the final conclusion at which he had arrived up-stairs.

In making it, he revoked. 'Why, what are you thinking of, my good sir?' asked the astonished Mr Meagles, who was his partner.

'I beg your pardon. Nothing,' returned Clennam.

'Think of something, next time; that's a dear fellow,' said Mr Meagles.

Pet laughingly believed he had been thinking of Miss Wade.

'Why of Miss Wade, Pet?' asked her father.

'Why, indeed!' said Arthur Clennam.

Pet coloured a little, and went to the piano again.

As they broke up for the night, Arthur overheard Doyce ask his host if he could give him half an hour's conversation before breakfast in the morning? The host replying willingly, Arthur lingered behind a moment, having his own word to add to that topic.

'Mr Meagles,' he said, on their being left alone, 'do you remember when you advised me to go straight to London?'

'Perfectly well.' 'And when you gave me some other good advice which I needed at that time?'

'I won't say what it was worth,' answered Mr Meagles: 'but of course I remember our being very pleasant and confidential together.'

'I have acted on your advice; and having disembarrassed myself of an occupation that was painful to me for many reasons, wish to devote myself and what means I have, to another pursuit.'

'Right! You can't do it too soon,' said Mr Meagles.

'Now, as I came down to-day, I found that your friend, Mr Doyce, is looking for a partner in his business—not a partner in his mechanical knowledge, but in the ways and means of turning the business arising from it to the best account.'

'Just so,' said Mr Meagles, with his hands in his pockets, and with the old business expression of face that had belonged to the scales and scoop.

'Mr Doyce mentioned incidentally, in the course of our conversation, that he was going to take your valuable advice on the subject of finding such a partner. If you should think our views and opportunities at all likely to coincide, perhaps you will let him know my available position. I speak, of course, in ignorance of the details, and they may be unsuitable on both sides.'

'No doubt, no doubt,' said Mr Meagles, with the caution belonging to the scales and scoop.

'But they will be a question of figures and accounts—'

'Just so, just so,' said Mr Meagles, with arithmetical solidity belonging to the scales and scoop.

'—And I shall be glad to enter into the subject, provided Mr Doyce responds, and you think well of it. If you will at present, therefore, allow me to place it in your hands, you will much oblige me.'

'Clennam, I accept the trust with readiness,' said Mr Meagles. 'And without anticipating any of the points which you, as a man of business, have of course reserved, I am free to say to you that I think something may come of this. Of one thing you may be perfectly certain. Daniel is an honest man.'

'I am so sure of it that I have promptly made up my mind to speak to you.' 'You must guide him, you know; you must steer him; you must direct him; he is one of a crotchety sort,' said Mr Meagles, evidently meaning nothing more than that he did new things and went new ways; 'but he is as honest as the sun, and so good night!' Clennam went back to his room, sat down again before his fire, and made up his mind that he was glad he had resolved not to fall in love with Pet. She was so beautiful, so amiable, so apt to receive any true impression given to her gentle nature and her innocent heart, and make the man who should be so happy as to communicate it, the most fortunate and enviable of all men, that he was very glad indeed he had come to that conclusion.

But, as this might have been a reason for coming to the opposite conclusion, he followed out the theme again a little way in his mind; to justify himself, perhaps.

'Suppose that a man,' so his thoughts ran, 'who had been of age some twenty years or so; who was a diffident man, from the circumstances of his youth; who was rather a grave man, from the tenor of his life; who knew himself to be deficient in many little engaging qualities which he admired in others, from having been long in a distant region, with nothing softening near him; who had no kind sisters to present to her; who had no congenial home to make her known in; who was a stranger in the land; who had not a fortune to compensate, in any measure, for these defects; who had nothing in his favour but his honest love and his general wish to do right—suppose such a man were to come to this house, and were to yield to the captivation of this charming girl, and were to persuade himself that he could hope to win her; what a weakness it would be!'

He softly opened his window, and looked out upon the serene river. Year after year so much allowance for the drifting of the ferry-boat, so many miles an hour the flowing of the stream, here the rushes, there the lilies, nothing uncertain or unquiet.

Why should he be vexed or sore at heart? It was not his weakness that he had imagined. It was nobody's, nobody's within his knowledge; why should it trouble him? And yet it did trouble him. And he thought—who has not thought for a moment, sometimes?—that it might be better to flow away monotonously, like the river, and to compound for its insensibility to happiness with its insensibility to pain.

CHAPTER 17. Nobody's Rival

Before breakfast in the morning, Arthur walked out to look about him. As the morning was fine and he had an hour on his hands, he crossed the river by the ferry, and strolled along a footpath through some meadows. When he came back to the towing-path, he found the ferry-boat on the opposite side, and a gentleman hailing it and waiting to be taken over.

This gentleman looked barely thirty. He was well dressed, of a sprightly and gay appearance, a well-knit figure, and a rich dark complexion. As Arthur came over the stile and down to the water's edge, the lounger glanced at him for a moment, and then resumed his occupation of idly tossing stones into the water with his foot. There was something in his way of spurning them out of their places with his heel, and getting them into the required position, that Clennam thought had an air of cruelty in it. Most of us have more or less frequently derived a similar impression from a man's manner of doing some very little thing: plucking a flower, clearing away an obstacle, or even destroying an insentient object.

The gentleman's thoughts were preoccupied, as his face showed, and he took no notice of a fine Newfoundland dog, who watched him attentively, and watched every stone too, in its turn, eager to spring into the river on receiving his master's sign. The ferry-boat came over, however, without his receiving any sign, and when it grounded his master took him by the collar and walked him into it.

'Not this morning,' he said to the dog. 'You won't do for ladies' company, dripping wet. Lie down.'

Clennam followed the man and the dog into the boat, and took his seat. The dog did as he was ordered. The man remained standing, with his hands in his pockets, and towered between Clennam and the prospect. Man and dog both jumped lightly out as soon as they touched the other side, and went away. Clennam was glad to be rid of them.

The church clock struck the breakfast hour as he walked up the little lane by which the garden-gate was approached. The moment he pulled the bell a deep loud barking assailed him from within the wall.

'I heard no dog last night,' thought Clennam. The gate was opened by one of the rosy maids, and on the lawn were the Newfoundland dog and the man.

'Miss Minnie is not down yet, gentlemen,' said the blushing portress, as they all came together in the garden. Then she said to the master of the dog, 'Mr Clennam, sir,' and tripped away.

'Odd enough, Mr Clennam, that we should have met just now,' said the man. Upon which the dog became mute. 'Allow me to introduce myself—Henry Gowan. A pretty place this, and looks wonderfully well this morning!'

The manner was easy, and the voice agreeable; but still Clennam thought, that if he had not made that decided resolution to avoid falling in love with Pet, he would have taken a dislike to this Henry Gowan.

'It's new to you, I believe?' said this Gowan, when Arthur had extolled the place. 'Quite new. I made acquaintance with it only yesterday afternoon.'

'Ah! Of course this is not its best aspect. It used to look charming in the spring, before they went away last time. I should like you to have seen it then.'

But for that resolution so often recalled, Clennam might have wished him in the crater of Mount Etna, in return for this civility.

'I have had the pleasure of seeing it under many circumstances during the last three years, and it's—a Paradise.'

It was (at least it might have been, always excepting for that wise resolution) like his dexterous impudence to call it a Paradise. He only called it a Paradise because he first saw her coming, and so made her out within her hearing to be an angel, Confusion to him! And ah! how beaming she looked, and how glad! How she caressed the dog, and how the dog knew her! How expressive that heightened colour in her face, that fluttered manner, her downcast eyes, her irresolute happiness! When had Clennam seen her look like this? Not that there was any reason why he might, could, would, or should have ever seen her look like this, or that he had ever hoped for himself to see her look like this; but still—when had he ever known her do it!

He stood at a little distance from them. This Gowan when he had talked about a Paradise, had gone up to her and taken her hand. The dog had put his great paws on her arm and laid his head against her dear bosom. She had laughed and welcomed them, and made far too much of the dog, far, far, too much—that is to say, supposing there had been any third person looking on who loved her.

She disengaged herself now, and came to Clennam, and put her hand in his and wished him good morning, and gracefully made as if she would take his arm and be escorted into the house. To this Gowan had no objection. No, he knew he was too safe.

There was a passing cloud on Mr Meagles's good-humoured face when they all three (four, counting the dog, and he was the most objectionable but one of the party) came in to breakfast. Neither it, nor the touch of uneasiness on Mrs Meagles as she directed her eyes towards it, was unobserved by Clennam.

'Well, Gowan,' said Mr Meagles, even suppressing a sigh; 'how goes the world with you this morning?'

'Much as usual, sir. Lion and I being determined not to waste anything of our weekly visit, turned out early, and came over from Kingston, my present headquarters, where I am making a sketch or two.' Then he told how he had met Mr Clennam at the ferry, and they had come over together.

'Mrs Gowan is well, Henry?' said Mrs Meagles. (Clennam became attentive.)

'My mother is quite well, thank you.' (Clennam became inattentive.) 'I have taken the liberty of making an addition to your family dinner-party to-day, which I hope will not be inconvenient to you or to Mr Meagles. I couldn't very well get out of it,' he explained, turning to the latter. 'The young fellow wrote to propose himself to me; and as he is well connected, I thought you would not object to my transferring him here.'

'Who is the young fellow?' asked Mr Meagles with peculiar complacency.

'He is one of the Barnacles. Tite Barnacle's son, Clarence Barnacle, who is in his father's Department. I can at least guarantee that the river shall not suffer from his visit. He won't set it on fire.'

'Aye, aye?' said Meagles. 'A Barnacle is he? We know something of that family, eh, Dan? By George, they are at the top of the tree, though! Let me see. What relation will this young fellow be to Lord Decimus now? His Lordship married, in seventeen ninety-seven, Lady Jemima Bilberry, who was the second daughter by the third marriage—no! There I am wrong! That was Lady Seraphina—Lady Jemima was the first daughter by the second marriage of the fifteenth Earl of Stiltstalking with the Honourable Clementina Toozellem. Very well. Now this young fellow's father married a Stiltstalking and his father married his cousin who was a Barnacle.

The father of that father who married a Barnacle, married a Joddleby.—I am getting a little too far back, Gowan; I want to make out what relation this young fellow is to Lord Decimus.'

'That's easily stated. His father is nephew to Lord Decimus.'

'Nephew—to—Lord—Decimus,' Mr Meagles luxuriously repeated with his eyes shut, that he might have nothing to distract him from the full flavour of the genealogical tree. 'By George, you are right, Gowan. So he is.'

'Consequently, Lord Decimus is his great uncle.'

'But stop a bit!' said Mr Meagles, opening his eyes with a fresh discovery. 'Then on the mother's side, Lady Stiltstalking is his great aunt.'

'Of course she is.'

'Aye, aye, aye?' said Mr Meagles with much interest. 'Indeed, indeed? We shall be glad to see him. We'll entertain him as well as we can, in our humble way; and we shall not starve him, I hope, at all events.'

In the beginning of this dialogue, Clennam had expected some great harmless outburst from Mr Meagles, like that which had made him burst out of the Circumlocution Office, holding Doyce by the collar. But his good friend had a weakness which none of us need go into the next street to find, and which no amount of Circumlocution experience could long subdue in him. Clennam looked at Doyce; but Doyce knew all about it beforehand, and looked at his plate, and made no sign, and said no word.

'I am much obliged to you,' said Gowan, to conclude the subject. 'Clarence is a great ass, but he is one of the dearest and best fellows that ever lived!'

It appeared, before the breakfast was over, that everybody whom this Gowan knew was either more or less of an ass, or more or less of a knave; but was, notwithstanding, the most lovable, the most engaging, the simplest, truest, kindest, dearest, best fellow that ever lived. The process by which this unvarying result was attained, whatever the premises, might have been stated by Mr Henry Gowan thus: 'I claim to be always book-keeping, with a peculiar nicety, in every man's case, and posting up a careful little account of Good and Evil with him. I do this so conscientiously, that I am happy to tell you I find the most worthless of men to be the dearest old fellow too: and am in a condition to make the gratifying report, that there is much less difference than you are inclined to suppose between an honest man and a scoundrel.' The effect of this cheering discovery happened to be, that while he seemed to be scrupulously finding good in most men, he did in reality lower it where it was, and set it up where it was not; but that was its only disagreeable or dangerous feature.

It scarcely seemed, however, to afford Mr Meagles as much satisfaction as the Barnacle genealogy had done. The cloud that Clennam had never seen upon his face before that morning, frequently overcast it again; and there was the same shadow of uneasy observation of him on the comely face of his wife. More than once or twice when Pet caressed the dog, it appeared to Clennam that her father was unhappy in seeing her do it; and, in one particular instance when Gowan stood on the other side of the dog, and bent his head at the same time, Arthur fancied that he saw tears rise to Mr Meagles's eyes as he hurried out of the room. It was either the fact too, or he fancied further, that Pet herself was not insensible to these little incidents; that she tried, with a more delicate affection than usual, to express to her good father how much she loved him; that it was on this account that she fell behind the rest, both as they went to church and as they returned from it, and took his arm. He could not have sworn but that as he walked alone in the garden afterwards, he had an instantaneous glimpse of her in her father's room, clinging to both her parents with the greatest tenderness, and weeping on her father's shoulder.

The latter part of the day turning out wet, they were fain to keep the house, look over Mr Meagles's collection, and beguile the time with conversation. This Gowan had plenty to say for himself, and said it in an off-hand and amusing manner. He appeared to be an artist by profession, and to have been at Rome some time; yet he had a slight, careless, amateur way with him—a perceptible limp, both in his devotion to art and his attainments—which Clennam could scarcely understand.

He applied to Daniel Doyce for help, as they stood together, looking out of window.

'You know Mr Gowan?' he said in a low voice.

'I have seen him here. Comes here every Sunday when they are at home.'

'An artist, I infer from what he says?'

'A sort of a one,' said Daniel Doyce, in a surly tone.

'What sort of a one?' asked Clennam, with a smile.

'Why, he has sauntered into the Arts at a leisurely Pall-Mall pace,' said Doyce, 'and I doubt if they care to be taken quite so coolly.'

Pursuing his inquiries, Clennam found that the Gowan family were a very distant ramification of the Barnacles; and that the paternal Gowan, originally attached to a legation abroad, had been pensioned off as a Commissioner of nothing particular somewhere or other, and had died at his post with his drawn salary in his hand, nobly defending it to the last extremity. In consideration of this eminent public service, the Barnacle then in power had recommended the Crown to bestow a pension of two or three hundred a-year on his widow; to which the next Barnacle in power had added certain shady and sedate apartments in the Palaces at Hampton Court, where the old lady still lived, deploring the degeneracy of the times in company with several other old ladies of both sexes. Her son, Mr Henry Gowan, inheriting from his father, the Commissioner, that very questionable help in life, a very small independence, had been difficult to settle; the rather, as public appointments chanced to be scarce, and his genius, during his earlier manhood, was of that exclusively agricultural character which applies itself to the cultivation of wild oats. At last he had declared that he would become a Painter; partly because he had always had an idle knack that way, and partly to grieve the souls of the Barnacles-in-chief who had not provided for him. So it had come to pass successively, first, that several distinguished ladies had been frightfully shocked; then, that portfolios of his performances had been handed about o' nights, and declared with ecstasy to be perfect Claudes, perfect Cuyps, perfect phaenomena; then, that Lord Decimus had bought his picture, and had asked the President and Council to dinner at a blow, and had said, with his own magnificent gravity, 'Do you know, there appears to me to be really immense merit in that work?' and, in short, that people of condition had absolutely taken pains to bring him into fashion. But, somehow, it had all failed. The prejudiced public had stood out against it obstinately. They had determined not to admire Lord Decimus's picture. They had determined to believe that in every service, except their own, a man must qualify himself, by striving early and late, and by working heart and soul, might and main. So now Mr Gowan, like that worn-out old coffin which never was Mahomet's nor anybody else's, hung midway between two points: jaundiced and jealous as to the one he had left: jaundiced and jealous as to the other that he couldn't reach.

Such was the substance of Clennam's discoveries concerning him, made that rainy Sunday afternoon and afterwards.

About an hour or so after dinner time, Young Barnacle appeared, attended by his eye-glass; in honour of whose family connections, Mr Meagles had cashiered the pretty parlour-maids for the day, and had placed on duty in their stead two dingy men. Young Barnacle was in the last degree amazed and disconcerted at sight of Arthur, and had murmured involuntarily, 'Look here! upon my soul, you know!' before his presence of mind returned.

Even then, he was obliged to embrace the earliest opportunity of taking his friend into a window, and saying, in a nasal way that was a part of his general debility:

'I want to speak to you, Gowan. I say. Look here. Who is that fellow?'

'A friend of our host's. None of mine.'

'He's a most ferocious Radical, you know,' said Young Barnacle.

'Is he? How do you know?'

'Ecod, sir, he was Pitching into our people the other day in the most tremendous manner. Went up to our place and Pitched into my father to that extent that it was necessary to order him out. Came back to our Department, and Pitched into me. Look here. You never saw such a fellow.'

'What did he want?'

'Ecod, sir,' returned Young Barnacle, 'he said he wanted to know, you know! Pervaded our Department—without an appointment—and said he wanted to know!'

The stare of indignant wonder with which Young Barnacle accompanied this disclosure, would have strained his eyes injuriously but for the opportune relief of dinner. Mr Meagles (who had been extremely solicitous to know how his uncle and aunt were) begged him to conduct Mrs Meagles to the dining-room. And when he sat on Mrs Meagles's right hand, Mr Meagles looked as gratified as if his whole family were there.

All the natural charm of the previous day was gone. The eaters of the dinner, like the dinner itself, were lukewarm, insipid, overdone—and all owing to this poor little dull Young Barnacle. Conversationless at any time, he was now the victim of a weakness special to the occasion, and solely referable to Clennam. He was under a pressing and continual necessity of looking at that gentleman, which occasioned his eye-glass to get into his soup, into his wine-glass, into Mrs Meagles's plate, to hang down his back like a bell-rope, and be several times disgracefully restored to his bosom by one of the dingy men. Weakened in mind by his frequent losses of this instrument, and its determination not to stick in his eye, and more and more enfeebled in intellect every time he looked at the mysterious Clennam, he applied spoons to his eyes, forks, and other foreign matters connected with the furniture of the dinner-table. His discovery of these mistakes greatly increased his difficulties, but never released him from the necessity of looking at Clennam. And whenever Clennam spoke, this ill-starred young man was clearly seized with a dread that he was coming, by some artful device, round to that point of wanting to know, you know.

It may be questioned, therefore, whether any one but Mr Meagles had much enjoyment of the time. Mr Meagles, however, thoroughly enjoyed Young Barnacle. As a mere flask of the golden water in the tale became a full fountain when it was poured out, so Mr Meagles seemed to feel that this small spice of Barnacle imparted to his table the flavour of the whole family-tree. In its presence, his frank, fine, genuine qualities paled; he was not so easy, he was not so natural, he was striving after something that did not belong to him, he was not himself. What a strange peculiarity on the part of Mr Meagles, and where should we find another such case!

At last the wet Sunday wore itself out in a wet night; and Young Barnacle went home in a cab, feebly smoking; and the objectionable Gowan went away on foot, accompanied by the objectionable dog. Pet had taken the most amiable pains all day to be friendly with Clennam, but Clennam had been a little reserved since breakfast—that is to say, would have been, if he had loved her.

When he had gone to his own room, and had again thrown himself into the chair by the fire, Mr Doyce knocked at the door, candle in hand, to ask him how and at what hour he proposed returning on the morrow? After settling this question, he said a word to Mr Doyce about this Gowan—who would have run in his head a good deal, if he had been his rival.

'Those are not good prospects for a painter,' said Clennam.

'No,' returned Doyce.

Mr Doyce stood, chamber-candlestick in hand, the other hand in his pocket, looking hard at the flame of his candle, with a certain quiet perception in his face that they were going to say something more. 'I thought our good friend a little changed, and out of spirits, after he came this morning?' said Clennam.

'Yes,' returned Doyce.

'But not his daughter?' said Clennam.

'No,' said Doyce.

There was a pause on both sides. Mr Doyce, still looking at the flame of his candle, slowly resumed:

'The truth is, he has twice taken his daughter abroad in the hope of separating her from Mr Gowan. He rather thinks she is disposed to like him, and he has painful doubts (I quite agree with him, as I dare say you do) of the hopefulness of such a marriage.'

'There—' Clennam choked, and coughed, and stopped.

'Yes, you have taken cold,' said Daniel Doyce. But without looking at him.

'There is an engagement between them, of course?' said Clennam airily.

'No. As I am told, certainly not. It has been solicited on the gentleman's part, but none has been made. Since their recent return, our friend has yielded to a weekly visit, but that is the utmost. Minnie would not deceive her father and mother. You have travelled with them, and I believe you know what a bond there is among them, extending even beyond this present life. All that there is between Miss Minnie and Mr Gowan, I have no doubt we see.'

'Ah! We see enough!' cried Arthur.

Mr Doyce wished him Good Night in the tone of a man who had heard a mournful, not to say despairing, exclamation, and who sought to infuse some encouragement and hope into the mind of the person by whom it had been uttered. Such tone was probably a part of his oddity, as one of a crotchety band; for how could he have heard anything of that kind, without Clennam's hearing it too?

The rain fell heavily on the roof, and pattered on the ground, and dripped among the evergreens and the leafless branches of the trees. The rain fell heavily, drearily. It was a night of tears.

If Clennam had not decided against falling in love with Pet; if he had had the weakness to do it; if he had, little by little, persuaded himself to set all the earnestness of his nature, all the might of his hope, and all the wealth of his matured character, on that cast; if he had done this and found that all was lost; he would have been, that night, unutterably miserable. As it was—As it was, the rain fell heavily, drearily.

CHAPTER 18. Little Dorrit's Lover

Little Dorrit had not attained her twenty-second birthday without finding a lover. Even in the shallow Marshalsea, the ever young Archer shot off a few featherless arrows now and then from a mouldy bow, and winged a Collegian or two.

Little Dorrit's lover, however, was not a Collegian. He was the sentimental son of a turnkey. His father hoped, in the fulness of time, to leave him the inheritance of an unstained key; and had from his early youth familiarised him with the duties of his office, and with an ambition to retain the prison-lock in the family. While the succession was yet in abeyance, he assisted his mother in the conduct of a snug tobacco business round the corner of Horsemonger Lane (his father being a non-resident turnkey), which could usually command a neat connection within the College walls.

Years agone, when the object of his affections was wont to sit in her little arm-chair by the high Lodge-fender, Young John (family name, Chivery), a year older than herself, had eyed her with admiring wonder. When he had played with her in the yard, his favourite game had been to counterfeit locking her up in corners, and to counterfeit letting her out for real kisses. When he grew tall enough to peep through the keyhole of the great lock of the main door, he had divers times set down his father's dinner, or supper, to get on as it might on the outer side thereof, while he stood taking cold in one eye by dint of peeping at her through that airy perspective.

If Young John had ever slackened in his truth in the less penetrable days of his boyhood, when youth is prone to wear its boots unlaced and is happily unconscious of digestive organs, he had soon strung it up again and screwed it tight. At nineteen, his hand had inscribed in chalk on that part of the wall which fronted her lodgings, on the occasion of her birthday, 'Welcome sweet nursling of the Fairies!' At twenty-three, the same hand falteringly presented cigars on Sundays to the Father of the Marshalsea, and Father of the queen of his soul.

Young John was small of stature, with rather weak legs and very weak light hair. One of his eyes (perhaps the eye that used to peep through the keyhole) was also weak, and looked larger than the other, as if it couldn't collect itself. Young John was gentle likewise. But he was great of soul. Poetical, expansive, faithful.

Though too humble before the ruler of his heart to be sanguine, Young John had considered the object of his attachment in all its lights and shades. Following it out to blissful results, he had descried, without self-commendation, a fitness in it. Say things prospered, and they were united. She, the child of the Marshalsea; he, the lock-keeper. There was a fitness in that. Say he became a resident turnkey. She would officially succeed to the chamber she had rented so long. There was a beautiful propriety in that. It looked over the wall, if you stood on tip-toe; and, with a trellis-work of scarlet beans and a canary or so, would become a very Arbour. There was a charming idea in that. Then, being all in all to one another, there was even an appropriate grace in the lock. With the world shut out (except that part of it which would be shut in); with its troubles and disturbances only known to them by hearsay, as they would be described by the pilgrims tarrying with them on their way to the Insolvent Shrine; with the Arbour above, and the Lodge below; they would glide down the stream of time, in pastoral domestic happiness. Young John drew tears from his eyes by finishing the picture with a tombstone in the adjoining churchyard, close against the prison wall, bearing the following touching inscription: 'Sacred to the Memory Of JOHN CHIVERY, Sixty years Turnkey, and fifty years Head Turnkey, Of the neighbouring Marshalsea, Who departed this life, universally respected, on the thirty-first of December, One thousand eight hundred and eighty-six, Aged eighty-three years. Also of his truly beloved and truly loving wife, AMY, whose maiden name was DORRIT, Who survived his loss not quite forty-eight hours, And who breathed her last in the Marshalsea aforesaid. There she was born, There she lived, There she died.'

The Chivery parents were not ignorant of their son's attachment—indeed it had, on some exceptional occasions, thrown him into a state of mind that had impelled him to conduct himself with irascibility towards the customers, and damage the business—but they, in their turns, had worked it out to desirable conclusions. Mrs Chivery, a prudent woman, had desired her husband to take notice that their john's prospects of the Lock would certainly be strengthened by an alliance with Miss Dorrit, who had herself a kind of claim upon the College and was much respected there. Mrs Chivery had desired her husband to take notice that if, on the one hand, their John had means and a post of trust, on the other hand, Miss Dorrit had family; and that her (Mrs Chivery's) sentiment was, that two halves made a whole. Mrs Chivery, speaking as a mother and not as a diplomatist, had then, from a different point of view, desired her husband to recollect that their John had never been strong, and that his love had fretted and worrited him enough as it was, without his being driven to do himself a mischief, as nobody couldn't say he wouldn't be if he was crossed. These arguments had so powerfully influenced the mind of Mr Chivery, who was a man of few words, that he had on sundry Sunday mornings, given his boy what he termed 'a lucky touch,' signifying that he considered such commendation of him to Good Fortune, preparatory to his that day declaring his passion and becoming triumphant. But Young John had never taken courage to make the declaration; and it was principally on these occasions that he had returned excited to the tobacco shop, and flown at the customers. In this affair, as in every other, Little Dorrit herself was the last person considered. Her brother and sister were aware of it, and attained a sort of station by making a peg of it on which to air the miserably ragged old fiction of the family gentility. Her sister asserted the family gentility by flouting the poor swain as he loitered about the prison for glimpses of his dear. Tip asserted the family gentility, and his own, by coming out in the character of the aristocratic brother, and loftily swaggering in the little skittle ground respecting seizures by the scruff of the neck, which there were looming probabilities of some gentleman unknown executing on some little puppy not mentioned. These were not the only members of the Dorrit family who turned it to account.

No, no. The Father of the Marshalsea was supposed to know nothing about the matter, of course: his poor dignity could not see so low.

But he took the cigars, on Sundays, and was glad to get them; and sometimes even condescended to walk up and down the yard with the donor (who was proud and hopeful then), and benignantly to smoke one in his society. With no less readiness and condescension did he receive attentions from Chivery Senior, who always relinquished his arm-chair and newspaper to him, when he came into the Lodge during one of his spells of duty; and who had even mentioned to him, that, if he would like at any time after dusk quietly to step out into the fore-court and take a look at the street, there was not much to prevent him. If he did not avail himself of this latter civility, it was only because he had lost the relish for it; inasmuch as he took everything else he could get, and would say at times, 'Extremely civil person, Chivery; very attentive man and very respectful. Young Chivery, too; really almost with a delicate perception of one's position here. A very well conducted family indeed, the Chiveries. Their behaviour gratifies me.'

The devoted Young John all this time regarded the family with reverence. He never dreamed of disputing their pretensions, but did homage to the miserable Mumbo jumbo they paraded. As to resenting any affront from her brother, he would have felt, even if he had not naturally been of a most pacific disposition, that to wag his tongue or lift his hand against that sacred gentleman would be an unhallowed act. He was sorry that his noble mind should take offence; still, he felt the fact to be not incompatible with its nobility, and sought to propitiate and conciliate that gallant soul. Her father, a gentleman in misfortune—a gentleman of a fine spirit and courtly manners, who always bore with him—he deeply honoured. Her sister he considered somewhat vain and proud, but a young lady of infinite accomplishments, who could not forget the past. It was an instinctive testimony to Little Dorrit's worth and difference from all the rest, that the poor young fellow honoured and loved her for being simply what she was.

The tobacco business round the corner of Horsemonger Lane was carried out in a rural establishment one story high, which had the benefit of the air from the yards of Horsemonger Lane jail, and the advantage of a retired walk under the wall of that pleasant establishment. The business was of too modest a character to support a life-size Highlander, but it maintained a little one on a bracket on the door-post, who looked like a fallen Cherub that had found it necessary to take to a kilt. From the portal thus decorated, one Sunday after an early dinner of baked viands, Young John issued forth on his usual Sunday errand; not empty-handed, but with his offering of cigars. He was neatly attired in a plum-coloured coat, with as large a collar of black velvet as his figure could carry; a silken waistcoat, bedecked with golden sprigs; a chaste neckerchief much in vogue at that day, representing a preserve of lilac pheasants on a buff ground; pantaloons so highly decorated with side-stripes that each leg was a three-stringed lute; and a hat of state very high and hard. When the prudent Mrs Chivery perceived that in addition to these adornments her John carried a pair of white kid gloves, and a cane like a little finger-post, surmounted by an ivory hand marshalling him the way that he should go; and when she saw him, in this heavy marching order, turn the corner to the right; she remarked to Mr

Chivery, who was at home at the time, that she thought she knew which way the wind blew.

The Collegians were entertaining a considerable number of visitors that Sunday afternoon, and their Father kept his room for the purpose of receiving presentations. After making the tour of the yard, Little Dorrit's lover with a hurried heart went up-stairs, and knocked with his knuckles at the Father's door.

'Come in, come in!' said a gracious voice. The Father's voice, her father's, the Marshalsea's father's. He was seated in his black velvet cap, with his newspaper, three-and-sixpence accidentally left on the table, and two chairs arranged. Everything prepared for holding his Court.

'Ah, Young John! How do you do, how do you do!'

'Pretty well, I thank you, sir. I hope you are the same.'

'Yes, John Chivery; yes. Nothing to complain of.'

'I have taken the liberty, sir, of—'

'Eh?' The Father of the Marshalsea always lifted up his eyebrows at this point, and became amiably distraught and smilingly absent in mind.

'—A few cigars, sir.'

'Oh!' (For the moment, excessively surprised.) 'Thank you, Young John, thank you. But really, I am afraid I am too—No? Well then, I will say no more about it. Put them on the mantelshelf, if you please, Young John. And sit down, sit down. You are not a stranger, John.'

'Thank you, sir, I am sure—Miss;' here Young John turned the great hat round and round upon his left-hand, like a slowly twirling mouse-cage; 'Miss Amy quite well, sir?' 'Yes, John, yes; very well. She is out.' 'Indeed, sir?'

'Yes, John. Miss Amy is gone for an airing. My young people all go out a good deal. But at their time of life, it's natural, John.'

'Very much so, I am sure, sir.'

'An airing. An airing. Yes.' He was blandly tapping his fingers on the table, and casting his eyes up at the window. 'Amy has gone for an airing on the Iron Bridge. She has become quite partial to the Iron Bridge of late, and seems to like to walk there better than anywhere.' He returned to conversation. 'Your father is not on duty at present, I think, John?'

'No, sir, he comes on later in the afternoon.' Another twirl of the great hat, and then Young John said, rising, 'I am afraid I must wish you good day, sir.'

'So soon? Good day, Young John. Nay, nay,' with the utmost condescension, 'never mind your glove, John. Shake hands with it on. You are no stranger here, you know.'

Highly gratified by the kindness of his reception, Young John descended the staircase. On his way down he met some Collegians bringing up visitors to be presented, and at that moment Mr Dorrit happened to call over the banisters with particular distinctness, 'Much obliged to you for your little testimonial, John!'

Little Dorrit's lover very soon laid down his penny on the tollplate of the Iron Bridge, and came upon it looking about him for the well-known and well-beloved figure. At first he feared she was not there; but as he walked on towards the Middlesex side, he saw her standing still, looking at the water. She was absorbed in thought, and he wondered what she might be thinking about. There were the piles of city roofs and chimneys, more free from smoke than on week-days; and there were the distant masts and steeples. Perhaps she was thinking about them.

Little Dorrit mused so long, and was so entirely preoccupied, that although her lover stood quiet for what he thought was a long time, and twice or thrice retired and came back again to the former spot, still she did not move. So, in the end, he made up his mind to go on, and seem to come upon her casually in passing, and speak to her. The place was quiet, and now or never was the time to speak to her.

He walked on, and she did not appear to hear his steps until he was close upon her. When he said 'Miss Dorrit!' she started and fell back from him, with an expression in her face of fright and something like dislike that caused him unutterable dismay. She had often avoided him before—always, indeed, for a long, long while. She had turned away and glided off so often when she had seen him coming toward her, that the unfortunate Young John could not think it accidental. But he had hoped that it might be shyness, her retiring character, her foreknowledge of the state of his heart, anything short of aversion. Now, that momentary look had said, 'You, of all people! I would rather have seen any one on earth than you!'

It was but a momentary look, inasmuch as she checked it, and said in her soft little voice, 'Oh, Mr John! Is it you?' But she felt what it had been, as he felt what it had been; and they stood looking at one another equally confused.

'Miss Amy, I am afraid I disturbed you by speaking to you.'

'Yes, rather. I—I came here to be alone, and I thought I was.'

'Miss Amy, I took the liberty of walking this way, because Mr Dorrit chanced to mention, when I called upon him just now, that you—'

She caused him more dismay than before by suddenly murmuring, 'O father, father!' in a heartrending tone, and turning her face away.

'Miss Amy, I hope I don't give you any uneasiness by naming Mr Dorrit. I assure you I found him very well and in the best of Spirits, and he showed me even more than his usual kindness; being so very kind as to say that I was not a stranger there, and in all ways gratifying me very much.'

To the inexpressible consternation of her lover, Little Dorrit, with her hands to her averted face, and rocking herself where she stood as if she were in pain, murmured, 'O father, how can you! O dear, dear father, how can you, can you, do it!'

The poor fellow stood gazing at her, overflowing with sympathy, but not knowing what to make of this, until, having taken out her handkerchief and put it to her still averted face, she hurried away. At first he remained stock still; then hurried after her.

'Miss Amy, pray! Will you have the goodness to stop a moment? Miss Amy, if it comes to that, let ME go. I shall go out of my senses, if I have to think that I have driven you away like this.'

His trembling voice and unfeigned earnestness brought Little Dorrit to a stop. 'Oh, I don't know what to do,' she cried, 'I don't know what to do!'

To Young John, who had never seen her bereft of her quiet self-command, who had seen her from her infancy ever so reliable and self-suppressed, there was a shock in her distress, and in having to associate himself with it as its cause, that shook him from his great hat to the pavement. He felt it necessary to explain himself. He might be misunderstood—supposed to mean something, or to have done something, that had never entered into his imagination. He begged her to hear him explain himself, as the greatest favour she could show him.

'Miss Amy, I know very well that your family is far above mine. It were vain to conceal it. There never was a Chivery a gentleman that ever I heard of, and I will not commit the meanness of making a false representation on a subject so momentous. Miss Amy, I know very well that your high-souled brother, and likewise your spirited sister, spurn me from a height. What I have to do is to respect them, to wish to be admitted to their friendship, to look up at the eminence on which they are placed from my lowlier station—

for, whether viewed as tobacco or viewed as the lock, I well know it is lowly—and ever wish them well and happy.'

There really was a genuineness in the poor fellow, and a contrast between the hardness of his hat and the softness of his heart (albeit, perhaps, of his head, too), that was moving. Little Dorrit entreated him to disparage neither himself nor his station, and, above all things, to divest himself of any idea that she supposed hers to be superior. This gave him a little comfort.

'Miss Amy,' he then stammered, 'I have had for a long time—ages they seem to me—Revolving ages—a heart-cherished wish to say something to you. May I say it?'

Little Dorrit involuntarily started from his side again, with the faintest shadow of her former look; conquering that, she went on at great speed half across the Bridge without replying!

'May I—Miss Amy, I but ask the question humbly—may I say it? I have been so unlucky already in giving you pain without having any such intentions, before the holy Heavens! that there is no fear of my saying it unless I have your leave. I can be miserable alone, I can be cut up by myself, why should I also make miserable and cut up one that I would fling myself off that parapet to give half a moment's joy to! Not that that's much to do, for I'd do it for twopence.'

The mournfulness of his spirits, and the gorgeousness of his appearance, might have made him ridiculous, but that his delicacy made him respectable. Little Dorrit learnt from it what to do.

'If you please, John Chivery,' she returned, trembling, but in a quiet way, 'since you are so considerate as to ask me whether you shall say any more—if you please, no.'

'Never, Miss Amy?'

'No, if you please. Never.'

'O Lord!' gasped Young John.

'But perhaps you will let me, instead, say something to you. I want to say it earnestly, and with as plain a meaning as it is possible to express. When you think of us, John—I mean my brother, and sister, and me—don't think of us as being any different from the rest; for, whatever we once were (which I hardly know) we ceased to be long ago, and never can be any more. It will be much better for you, and much better for others, if you will do that instead of what you are doing now.'

Young John dolefully protested that he would try to bear it in mind, and would be heartily glad to do anything she wished.

'As to me,' said Little Dorrit, 'think as little of me as you can; the less, the better. When you think of me at all, John, let it only be as the child you have seen grow up in the prison with one set of duties always occupying her; as a weak, retired, contented, unprotected girl. I particularly want you to remember, that when I come outside the gate, I am unprotected and solitary.'

He would try to do anything she wished. But why did Miss Amy so much want him to remember that?

'Because,' returned Little Dorrit, 'I know I can then quite trust you not to forget to-day, and not to say any more to me. You are so generous that I know I can trust to you for that; and I do and I always will. I am going to show you, at once, that I fully trust you. I like this place where we are speaking better than any place I know;' her slight colour had faded, but her lover thought he saw it coming back just then; 'and I may be often here. I know it is only necessary for me to tell you so, to be quite sure that you will never come here again in search of me. And I am—quite sure!'

She might rely upon it, said Young John. He was a miserable wretch, but her word was more than a law for him.

'And good-bye, John,' said Little Dorrit. 'And I hope you will have a good wife one day, and be a happy man. I am sure you will deserve to be happy, and you will be, John.'

As she held out her hand to him with these words, the heart that was under the waistcoat of sprigs—mere slop-work, if the truth must be known—swelled to the size of the heart of a gentleman; and the poor common little fellow, having no room to hold it, burst into tears.

'Oh, don't cry,' said Little Dorrit piteously. 'Don't, don't! Good-bye, John. God bless you!'

'Good-bye, Miss Amy. Good-bye!'

And so he left her: first observing that she sat down on the corner of a seat, and not only rested her little hand upon the rough wall, but laid her face against it too, as if her head were heavy, and her mind were sad. It was an affecting illustration of the fallacy of human projects, to behold her lover, with the great hat pulled over his eyes, the velvet collar turned up as if it rained, the plum-coloured coat buttoned to conceal the silken waistcoat of golden sprigs, and the little direction-post pointing inexorably home, creeping along by the worst back-streets, and composing, as he went, the following new inscription for a tombstone in St George's Churchyard:

'Here lie the mortal remains Of JOHN CHIVERY, Never anything worth mentioning, Who died about the end of the year one thousand eight hundred and twenty-six, Of a broken heart, Requesting with his last breath that the word AMY might be inscribed over his ashes, which was accordingly directed to be done, By his afflicted Parents.'

CHAPTER 19. The Father of the Marshalsea in two or three Relations

The brothers William and Frederick Dorrit, walking up and down the College-yard—of course on the aristocratic or Pump side, for the Father made it a point of his state to be chary of going among his children on the Poor side, except on Sunday mornings, Christmas Days, and other occasions of ceremony, in the observance whereof he was very punctual, and at which times he laid his hand upon the heads of their infants, and blessed those young insolvents with a benignity that was highly edifying—the brothers, walking up and down the College-yard together, were a memorable sight. Frederick the free, was so humbled, bowed, withered, and faded; William the bond, was so courtly, condescending, and benevolently conscious of a position; that in this regard only, if in no other, the brothers were a spectacle to wonder at.

They walked up and down the yard on the evening of Little Dorrit's Sunday interview with her lover on the Iron Bridge. The cares of state were over for that day, the Drawing Room had been well attended, several new presentations had taken place, the three-and-sixpence accidentally left on the table had accidentally increased to twelve shillings, and the Father of the Marshalsea refreshed himself with a whiff of cigar. As he walked up and down, affably accommodating his step to the shuffle of his brother, not proud in his superiority, but considerate of that poor creature, bearing with him, and breathing toleration of his infirmities in every little puff of smoke that issued from his lips and aspired to get over the spiked wall, he was a sight to wonder at.

His brother Frederick of the dim eye, palsied hand, bent form, and groping mind, submissively shuffled at his side, accepting his patronage as he accepted every incident of the labyrinthian world in which he had got lost. He held the usual screwed bit of whitey-brown paper in his hand, from which he ever and again unscrewed a spare pinch of snuff. That falteringly taken, he would glance at his brother not unadmiringly, put his hands behind him, and shuffle on so at his side until he took another pinch, or stood still to look about him—perchance suddenly missing his clarionet.

The College visitors were melting away as the shades of night drew on, but the yard was still pretty full, the Collegians being mostly out, seeing their friends to the Lodge. As the brothers paced the yard, William the bond looked about him to receive salutes, returned them by graciously lifting off his hat, and, with an engaging air, prevented Frederick the free from running against the company, or being jostled against the wall. The Collegians as a body were not easily impressible, but even they, according to their various ways of wondering, appeared to find in the two brothers a sight to wonder at.

'You are a little low this evening, Frederick,' said the Father of the Marshalsea. 'Anything the matter?'

'The matter?' He stared for a moment, and then dropped his head and eyes again. 'No, William, no. Nothing is the matter.'

'If you could be persuaded to smarten yourself up a little, Frederick—'

'Aye, aye!' said the old man hurriedly. 'But I can't be. I can't be. Don't talk so. That's all over.'

The Father of the Marshalsea glanced at a passing Collegian with whom he was on friendly terms, as who should say, 'An enfeebled old man, this; but he is my brother, sir, my brother, and the voice of Nature is potent!' and steered his brother clear of the handle of the pump by the threadbare sleeve. Nothing would have been wanting to the perfection of his character as a fraternal guide, philosopher and friend, if he had only steered his brother clear of ruin, instead of bringing it upon him.

'I think, William,' said the object of his affectionate consideration, 'that I am tired, and will go home to bed.'

'My dear Frederick,' returned the other, 'don't let me detain you; don't sacrifice your inclination to me.'

'Late hours, and a heated atmosphere, and years, I suppose,' said Frederick, 'weaken me.'

'My dear Frederick,' returned the Father of the Marshalsea, 'do you think you are sufficiently careful of yourself? Do you think your habits are as precise and methodical as—shall I say as mine are? Not to revert again to that little eccentricity which I mentioned just now, I doubt if you take air and exercise enough, Frederick. Here is the parade, always at your service. Why not use it more regularly than you do?'

'Hah!' sighed the other. 'Yes, yes, yes, yes.'

'But it is of no use saying yes, yes, my dear Frederick,' the Father of the Marshalsea in his mild wisdom persisted, 'unless you act on that assent. Consider my case, Frederick. I am a kind of example. Necessity and time have taught me what to do. At certain stated hours of the day, you will find me on the parade, in my room, in the Lodge, reading the paper, receiving company, eating and drinking. I have impressed upon Amy during many years, that I must have my meals (for instance) punctually. Amy has grown up in a sense of the importance of these arrangements, and you know what a good girl she is.'

The brother only sighed again, as he plodded dreamily along, 'Hah! Yes, yes, yes, yes.'

'My dear fellow,' said the Father of the Marshalsea, laying his hand upon his shoulder, and mildly rallying him—mildly, because of his weakness, poor dear soul; 'you said that before, and it does not express much, Frederick, even if it means much. I wish I could rouse you, my good Frederick; you want to be roused.'

'Yes, William, yes. No doubt,' returned the other, lifting his dim eyes to his face. 'But I am not like you.'

The Father of the Marshalsea said, with a shrug of modest self-depreciation, 'Oh! You might be like me, my dear Frederick; you might be, if you chose!' and forbore, in the magnanimity of his strength, to press his fallen brother further.

There was a great deal of leave-taking going on in corners, as was usual on Sunday nights; and here and there in the dark, some poor woman, wife or mother, was weeping with a new Collegian. The time had been when the Father himself had wept, in the shades of that yard, as his own poor wife had wept. But it was many years ago; and now he was like a passenger aboard ship in a long voyage, who has recovered from sea-sickness, and is impatient of that weakness in the fresher passengers taken aboard at the last port. He was inclined to remonstrate, and to express his opinion that people who couldn't get on without crying, had no business there. In manner, if not in words, he always testified his displeasure at these interruptions of the general harmony; and it was so well understood, that delinquents usually withdrew if they were aware of him.

On this Sunday evening, he accompanied his brother to the gate with an air of endurance and clemency; being in a bland temper and graciously disposed to overlook the tears. In the flaring gaslight of the Lodge, several

Collegians were basking; some taking leave of visitors, and some who had no visitors, watching the frequent turning of the key, and conversing with one another and with Mr Chivery. The paternal entrance made a sensation of course; and Mr Chivery, touching his hat (in a short manner though) with his key, hoped he found himself tolerable.

'Thank you, Chivery, quite well. And you?'

Mr Chivery said in a low growl, 'Oh! he was all right.' Which was his general way of acknowledging inquiries after his health when a little sullen.

'I had a visit from Young John to-day, Chivery. And very smart he looked, I assure you.'

So Mr Chivery had heard. Mr Chivery must confess, however, that his wish was that the boy didn't lay out so much money upon it. For what did it bring him in? It only brought him in wexation. And he could get that anywhere for nothing.

'How vexation, Chivery?' asked the benignant father.

'No odds,' returned Mr Chivery. 'Never mind. Mr Frederick going out?'

'Yes, Chivery, my brother is going home to bed. He is tired, and not quite well. Take care, Frederick, take care. Good night, my dear Frederick!'

Shaking hands with his brother, and touching his greasy hat to the company in the Lodge, Frederick slowly shuffled out of the door which Mr Chivery unlocked for him. The Father of the Marshalsea showed the amiable solicitude of a superior being that he should come to no harm.

'Be so kind as to keep the door open a moment, Chivery, that I may see him go along the passage and down the steps. Take care, Frederick! (He is very infirm.) Mind the steps! (He is so very absent.) Be careful how you cross, Frederick. (I really don't like the notion of his going wandering at large, he is so extremely liable to be run over.)'

With these words, and with a face expressive of many uneasy doubts and much anxious guardianship, he turned his regards upon the assembled company in the Lodge: so plainly indicating that his brother was to be pitied for not being under lock and key, that an opinion to that effect went round among the Collegians assembled.

But he did not receive it with unqualified assent; on the contrary, he said, No, gentlemen, no; let them not misunderstand him. His brother Frederick was much broken, no doubt, and it might be more comfortable to himself (the Father of the Marshalsea) to know that he was safe within the walls. Still, it must be remembered that to support an existence there during many years, required a certain combination of qualities—he did not say high qualities, but qualities—moral qualities. Now, had his brother Frederick that peculiar union of qualities? Gentlemen, he was a most excellent man, a most gentle, tender, and estimable man, with the simplicity of a child; but would he, though unsuited for most other places, do for that place? No; he said confidently, no! And, he said, Heaven forbid that Frederick should be there in any other character than in his present voluntary character! Gentlemen, whoever came to that College, to remain there a length of time, must have strength of character to go through a good deal and to come out of a good deal. Was his beloved brother Frederick that man? No. They saw him, even as it was, crushed. Misfortune crushed him. He had not power of recoil enough, not elasticity enough, to be a long time in such a place, and yet preserve his self-respect and feel conscious that he was a gentleman. Frederick had not (if he might use the expression) Power enough to see in any delicate little attentions and—and—Testimonials that he might under such circumstances receive, the goodness of human nature, the fine spirit animating the Collegians as a community, and at the same time no degradation to himself, and no depreciation of his claims as a gentleman. Gentlemen, God bless you!

Such was the homily with which he improved and pointed the occasion to the company in the Lodge before turning into the sallow yard again, and going with his own poor shabby dignity past the Collegian in the dressing-gown who had no coat, and past the Collegian in the sea-side slippers who had no shoes, and past the stout greengrocer Collegian in the corduroy knee-breeches who had no cares, and past the lean clerk Collegian in buttonless black who had no hopes, up his own poor shabby staircase to his own poor shabby room.

There, the table was laid for his supper, and his old grey gown was ready for him on his chair-back at the fire. His daughter put her little prayer-book in her pocket—had she been praying for pity on all prisoners and captives!—and rose to welcome him.

Uncle had gone home, then? she asked @ as she changed his coat and gave him his black velvet cap. Yes, uncle had gone home. Had her father enjoyed his walk? Why, not much, Amy; not much. No! Did he not feel quite well?

As she stood behind him, leaning over his chair so lovingly, he looked with downcast eyes at the fire. An uneasiness stole over him that was like a touch of shame; and when he spoke, as he presently did, it was in an unconnected and embarrassed manner.

'Something, I—hem!—I don't know what, has gone wrong with Chivery. He is not—ha!—not nearly so obliging and attentive as usual to-night. It—hem!—it's a little thing, but it puts me out, my love. It's impossible to forget,' turning his hands over and over and looking closely at them, 'that—hem!—that in such a life as mine, I am unfortunately dependent on these men for something every hour in the day.'

Her arm was on his shoulder, but she did not look in his face while he spoke. Bending her head she looked another way.

'I—hem!—I can't think, Amy, what has given Chivery offence. He is generally so—so very attentive and respectful. And to-night he was quite—quite short with me. Other people there too! Why, good Heaven! if I was to lose the support and recognition of Chivery and his brother officers, I might starve to death here.' While he spoke, he was opening and shutting his hands like valves; so conscious all the time of that touch of shame, that he shrunk before his own knowledge of his meaning.

'I—ha!—I can't think what it's owing to. I am sure I cannot imagine what the cause of it is. There was a certain Jackson here once, a turnkey of the name of Jackson (I don't think you can remember him, my dear, you were very young), and—hem!—and he had a—brother, and this—young brother paid his addresses to—at least, did not go so far as to pay his addresses to—but admired—respectfully admired—the—not daughter, the sister—of one of us; a rather distinguished Collegian; I may say, very much so. His name was Captain Martin; and he consulted me on the question whether It was necessary that his daughter—sister—should hazard offending the turnkey brother by being too—ha!—too plain with the other brother. Captain Martin was a gentleman and a man of honour, and I put it to him first to give me his—his own opinion. Captain Martin (highly respected in the army) then unhesitatingly said that it appeared to him that his—hem!—sister was not called upon to understand the young man too distinctly, and that she might lead him on—I am doubtful whether "lead him on" was Captain Martin's exact expression: indeed I think he said tolerate him—on her father's—I should say, brother's—account. I hardly know how I have strayed into this story. I suppose it has been through being unable to account for Chivery; but as to the connection between the two, I don't see —'

His voice died away, as if she could not bear the pain of hearing him, and her hand had gradually crept to his lips. For a little while there was a dead silence and stillness; and he remained shrunk in his chair, and she remained with her arm round his neck and her head bowed down upon his shoulder.

His supper was cooking in a saucepan on the fire, and, when she moved, it was to make it ready for him on the table. He took his usual seat, she took hers, and he began his meal. They did not, as yet, look at one another. By little and little he began; laying down his knife and fork with a noise, taking things up sharply, biting at his bread as if he were offended with it, and in other similar ways showing that he was out of sorts. At length he pushed his plate from him, and spoke aloud; with the strangest inconsistency.

'What does it matter whether I eat or starve? What does it matter whether such a blighted life as mine comes to an end, now, next week, or next year? What am I worth to anyone? A poor prisoner, fed on alms and broken victuals; a squalid, disgraced wretch!'

'Father, father!' As he rose she went on her knees to him, and held up her hands to him.

'Amy,' he went on in a suppressed voice, trembling violently, and looking at her as wildly as if he had gone mad. 'I tell you, if you could see me as your mother saw me, you wouldn't believe it to be the creature you have only looked at through the bars of this cage. I was young, I was accomplished, I was good-looking, I was independent—by God I was, child!—and people sought me out, and envied me. Envied me!'

'Dear father!' She tried to take down the shaking arm that he flourished in the air, but he resisted, and put her hand away.

'If I had but a picture of myself in those days, though it was ever so ill done, you would be proud of it, you would be proud of it. But I have no such thing. Now, let me be a warning! Let no man,' he cried, looking haggardly about, 'fail to preserve at least that little of the times of his prosperity and respect. Let his children have that clue to what he was. Unless my face, when I am dead, subsides into the long departed look—they say such things happen, I don't know—my children will have never seen me.'

'Father, father!'

'O despise me, despise me! Look away from me, don't listen to me, stop me, blush for me, cry for me—even you, Amy! Do it, do it! I do it to myself! I am hardened now, I have sunk too low to care long even for that.'

'Dear father, loved father, darling of my heart!' She was clinging to him with her arms, and she got him to drop into his chair again, and caught at the raised arm, and tried to put it round her neck.

'Let it lie there, father. Look at me, father, kiss me, father! Only think of me, father, for one little moment!'

Still he went on in the same wild way, though it was gradually breaking down into a miserable whining.

'And yet I have some respect here. I have made some stand against it. I am not quite trodden down. Go out and ask who is the chief person in the place. They'll tell you it's your father. Go out and ask who is never trifled with, and who is always treated with some delicacy. They'll say, your father. Go out and ask what funeral here (it must be here, I know it can be nowhere else) will make more talk, and perhaps more grief, than any that has ever gone out at the gate. They'll say your father's. Well then. Amy! Amy! Is your father so universally despised? Is there nothing to redeem him? Will you have nothing to remember him by but his ruin and decay? Will you be able to have no affection for him when he is gone, poor castaway, gone?'

He burst into tears of maudlin pity for himself, and at length suffering her to embrace him and take charge of him, let his grey head rest against her cheek, and bewailed his wretchedness. Presently he changed the subject of his lamentations, and clasping his hands about her as she embraced him, cried, O Amy, his motherless, forlorn child! O the days that he had seen her careful and laborious for him! Then he reverted to himself, and weakly told her how much better she would have loved him if she had known him in his vanished character, and how he would have married her to a gentleman who should have been proud of her as his daughter, and how (at which he cried again) she should first have ridden at his fatherly side on her own horse, and how the crowd (by which he meant in effect the people who had given him the twelve shillings he then had in his pocket) should have trudged the dusty roads respectfully.

Thus, now boasting, now despairing, in either fit a captive with the jail-rot upon him, and the impurity of his prison worn into the grain of his soul, he revealed his degenerate state to his affectionate child. No one else ever beheld him in the details of his humiliation. Little recked the Collegians who were laughing in their rooms over his late address in the Lodge, what a serious picture they had in their obscure gallery of the Marshalsea that Sunday night.

There was a classical daughter once—perhaps—who ministered to her father in his prison as her mother had ministered to her. Little Dorrit, though of the unheroic modern stock and mere English, did much more, in comforting her father's wasted heart upon her innocent breast, and turning to it a fountain of love and fidelity that never ran dry or waned through all his years of famine.

She soothed him; asked him for his forgiveness if she had been, or seemed to have been, undutiful; told him, Heaven knows truly, that she could not honour him more if he were the favourite of Fortune and the whole world acknowledged him. When his tears were dried, and he sobbed in his weakness no longer, and was free from that touch of shame, and had recovered his usual bearing, she prepared the remains of his supper afresh, and, sitting by his side, rejoiced to see him eat and drink. For now he sat in his black velvet cap and old grey gown, magnanimous again; and would have comported himself towards any Collegian who might have looked in to ask his advice, like a great moral Lord Chesterfield, or Master of the ethical ceremonies of the Marshalsea.

To keep his attention engaged, she talked with him about his wardrobe; when he was pleased to say, that Yes, indeed, those shirts she proposed would be exceedingly acceptable, for those he had were worn out, and, being ready-made, had never fitted him. Being conversational, and in a reasonable flow of spirits, he then invited her attention to his coat as it hung behind the door: remarking that the Father of the place would set an indifferent example to his children, already disposed to be slovenly, if he went among them out at elbows. He was jocular, too, as to the heeling of his shoes; but became grave on the subject of his cravat, and promised her that, when she could afford it, she should buy him a new one.

While he smoked out his cigar in peace, she made his bed, and put the small room in order for his repose. Being weary then, owing to the advanced hour and his emotions, he came out of his chair to bless her and wish her Good night. All this time he had never once thought of HER dress, her shoes, her need of anything. No other person upon earth, save herself, could have been so unmindful of her wants.

He kissed her many times with 'Bless you, my love. Good night, MY dear!'

But her gentle breast had been so deeply wounded by what she had seen of him that she was unwilling to leave him alone, lest he should lament and despair again. 'Father, dear, I am not tired; let me come back presently, when you are in bed, and sit by you.'

He asked her, with an air of protection, if she felt solitary?

'Yes, father.'

'Then come back by all means, my love.'

'I shall be very quiet, father.'

'Don't think of me, my dear,' he said, giving her his kind permission fully. 'Come back by all means.'

He seemed to be dozing when she returned, and she put the low fire together very softly lest she should awake him. But he overheard her, and called out who was that?

'Only Amy, father.'

'Amy, my child, come here. I want to say a word to you.' He raised himself a little in his low bed, as she kneeled beside it to bring her face near him; and put his hand between hers. O! Both the private father and the Father of the Marshalsea were strong within him then.

'My love, you have had a life of hardship here. No companions, no recreations, many cares I am afraid?'

'Don't think of that, dear. I never do.'

'You know my position, Amy. I have not been able to do much for you; but all I have been able to do, I have done.'

'Yes, my dear father,' she rejoined, kissing him. 'I know, I know.'

'I am in the twenty-third year of my life here,' he said, with a catch in his breath that was not so much a sob as an irrepressible sound of self-approval, the momentary outburst of a noble consciousness. 'It is all I could do for my children—I have done it. Amy, my love, you are by far the best loved of the three; I have had you principally in my mind—whatever I have done for your sake, my dear child, I have done freely and without murmuring.'

Only the wisdom that holds the clue to all hearts and all mysteries, can surely know to what extent a man, especially a man brought down as this man had been, can impose upon himself. Enough, for the present place, that he lay down with wet eyelashes, serene, in a manner majestic, after bestowing his life of degradation as a sort of portion on the devoted child upon whom its miseries had fallen so heavily, and whose love alone had saved him to be even what he was.

That child had no doubts, asked herself no question, for she was but too content to see him with a lustre round his head. Poor dear, good dear, truest, kindest, dearest, were the only words she had for him, as she hushed him to rest.

She never left him all that night. As if she had done him a wrong which her tenderness could hardly repair, she sat by him in his sleep, at times softly kissing him with suspended breath, and calling him in a whisper by some endearing name. At times she stood aside so as not to intercept the low fire-light, and, watching him when it fell upon his sleeping face, wondered did he look now at all as he had looked when he was prosperous and happy; as he had so touched her by imagining that he might look once more in that awful time. At the thought of that time, she kneeled beside his bed again, and prayed, 'O spare his life! O save him to me! O look down upon my dear, long-suffering, unfortunate, much-changed, dear dear father!'

Not until the morning came to protect him and encourage him, did she give him a last kiss and leave the small room. When she had stolen downstairs, and along the empty yard, and had crept up to her own high garret, the smokeless housetops and the distant country hills were discernible over the wall in the clear morning. As she gently opened the window, and looked eastward down the prison yard, the spikes upon the wall were tipped with red, then made a sullen purple pattern on the sun as it came flaming up into the heavens. The spikes had never looked so sharp and cruel, nor the bars so heavy, nor the prison space so gloomy and contracted. She thought of the sunrise on rolling rivers, of the sunrise on wide seas, of the sunrise on rich landscapes, of the sunrise on great forests where the birds were waking and the trees were rustling; and she looked down into the living grave on which the sun had risen, with her father in it three-and-twenty years, and said, in a burst of sorrow and compassion, 'No, no, I have never seen him in my life!'

CHAPTER 20. Moving in Society

If Young John Chivery had had the inclination and the power to write a satire on family pride, he would have had no need to go for an avenging illustration out of the family of his beloved. He would have found it amply in that gallant brother and that dainty sister, so steeped in mean experiences, and so loftily conscious of the family name; so ready to beg or borrow from the poorest, to eat of anybody's bread, spend anybody's money, drink from anybody's cup and break it afterwards. To have painted the sordid facts of their lives, and they throughout invoking the death's head apparition of the family gentility to come and scare their benefactors, would have made Young John a satirist of the first water.

Tip had turned his liberty to hopeful account by becoming a billiard-marker. He had troubled himself so little as to the means of his release, that Clennam scarcely needed to have been at the pains of impressing the mind of Mr Plornish on that subject. Whoever had paid him the compliment, he very readily accepted the compliment with HIS compliments, and there was an end of it. Issuing forth from the gate on these easy terms, he became a billiard-marker; and now occasionally looked in at the little skittle-ground in a green Newmarket coat (second-hand), with a shining collar and bright buttons (new), and drank the beer of the Collegians.

One solid stationary point in the looseness of this gentleman's character was, that he respected and admired his sister Amy. The feeling had never induced him to spare her a moment's uneasiness, or to put himself to any restraint or inconvenience on her account; but with that Marshalsea taint upon his love, he loved her. The same rank Marshalsea flavour was to be recognised in his distinctly perceiving that she sacrificed her life to her father, and in his having no idea that she had done anything for himself.

When this spirited young man and his sister had begun systematically to produce the family skeleton for the overawing of the College, this narrative cannot precisely state. Probably at about the period when they began to dine on the College charity. It is certain that the more reduced and necessitous they were, the more pompously the skeleton emerged from its tomb; and that when there was anything particularly shabby in the wind, the skeleton always came out with the ghastliest flourish.

Little Dorrit was late on the Monday morning, for her father slept late, and afterwards there was his breakfast to prepare and his room to arrange. She had no engagement to go out to work, however, and therefore stayed with him until, with Maggy's help, she had put everything right about him, and had seen him off upon his morning walk (of twenty yards or so) to the coffee-house to read the paper.

She then got on her bonnet and went out, having been anxious to get out much sooner. There was, as usual, a cessation of the small-talk in the Lodge as she passed through it; and a Collegian who had come in on Saturday night, received the intimation from the elbow of a more seasoned Collegian, 'Look out. Here she is!' She wanted to see her sister, but when she got round to Mr Cripples's, she found that both her sister and her uncle had gone to the theatre where they were engaged. Having taken thought of this probability by the way, and having settled that in such case she would follow them, she set off afresh for the theatre, which was on that side of the river, and not very far away.

Little Dorrit was almost as ignorant of the ways of theatres as of the ways of gold mines, and when she was directed to a furtive sort of door, with a curious up-all-night air about it, that appeared to be ashamed of itself and to be hiding in an alley, she hesitated to approach it; being further deterred by the sight of some half-dozen close-shaved gentlemen with their hats very strangely on, who were lounging about the door, looking not at all unlike Collegians. On her applying to them, reassured by this resemblance, for a direction to Miss Dorrit, they made way for her to enter a dark hall—it was more like a great grim lamp gone out than anything else—where she could hear the distant playing of music and the sound of dancing feet. A man so much in want of airing that he had a blue mould upon him, sat watching this dark place from a hole in a corner, like a spider; and he told her that he would send a message up to Miss Dorrit by the first lady or gentleman who went through. The first lady who went through had a roll of music, half in her muff and half out of it, and was in such a tumbled condition altogether, that it seemed as if it would be an act of kindness to iron her. But as she was very good-natured, and said, 'Come with me; I'll soon find Miss Dorrit for you,' Miss Dorrit's sister went with her, drawing nearer and nearer at every step she took in the darkness to the sound of music and the sound of dancing feet.

At last they came into a maze of dust, where a quantity of people were tumbling over one another, and where there was such a confusion of unaccountable shapes of beams, bulkheads, brick walls, ropes, and rollers, and such a mixing of gaslight and daylight, that they seemed to have got on the wrong side of the pattern of the universe. Little Dorrit, left to herself, and knocked against by somebody every moment, was quite bewildered, when she heard her sister's voice.

'Why, good gracious, Amy, what ever brought you here?'

'I wanted to see you, Fanny dear; and as I am going out all day to-morrow, and knew you might be engaged all day to-day, I thought—'

'But the idea, Amy, of YOU coming behind! I never did!' As her sister said this in no very cordial tone of welcome, she conducted her to a more open part of the maze, where various golden chairs and tables were heaped together, and where a number of young ladies were sitting on anything they could find, chattering. All these young ladies wanted ironing, and all had a curious way of looking everywhere while they chattered.

Just as the sisters arrived here, a monotonous boy in a Scotch cap put his head round a beam on the left, and said, 'Less noise there, ladies!' and disappeared. Immediately after which, a sprightly gentleman with a quantity of long black hair looked round a beam on the right, and said, 'Less noise there, darlings!' and also disappeared.

'The notion of you among professionals, Amy, is really the last thing I could have conceived!' said her sister. 'Why, how did you ever get here?'

'I don't know. The lady who told you I was here, was so good as to bring me in.'

'Like you quiet little things! You can make your way anywhere, I believe. I couldn't have managed it, Amy, though I know so much more of the world.'

It was the family custom to lay it down as family law, that she was a plain domestic little creature, without the great and sage experience of the rest. This family fiction was the family assertion of itself against her services. Not to make too much of them.

'Well! And what have you got on your mind, Amy? Of course you have got something on your mind about me?' said Fanny. She spoke as if her sister, between two and three years her junior, were her prejudiced grandmother.

'It is not much; but since you told me of the lady who gave you the bracelet, Fanny—'

The monotonous boy put his head round the beam on the left, and said, 'Look out there, ladies!' and disappeared. The sprightly gentleman with the black hair as suddenly put his head round the beam on the right, and said, 'Look out there, darlings!' and also disappeared. Thereupon all the young ladies rose and began shaking their skirts out behind.

'Well, Amy?' said Fanny, doing as the rest did; 'what were you going to say?'

'Since you told me a lady had given you the bracelet you showed me, Fanny, I have not been quite easy on your account, and indeed want to know a little more if you will confide more to me.'

'Now, ladies!' said the boy in the Scotch cap. 'Now, darlings!' said the gentleman with the black hair. They were every one gone in a moment, and the music and the dancing feet were heard again.

Little Dorrit sat down in a golden chair, made quite giddy by these rapid interruptions. Her sister and the rest were a long time gone; and during their absence a voice (it appeared to be that of the gentleman with the black hair) was continually calling out through the music, 'One, two, three, four, five, six—go! One, two, three, four, five, six—go! Steady, darlings! One, two, three, four, five, six—go!' Ultimately the voice stopped, and they all came back again, more or less out of breath, folding themselves in their shawls, and making ready for the streets. 'Stop a moment, Amy, and let them get away before us,' whispered Fanny. They were soon left alone; nothing more important happening, in the meantime, than the boy looking round his old beam, and saying, 'Everybody at eleven to-morrow, ladies!' and the gentleman with the black hair looking round his old beam, and saying, 'Everybody at eleven to-morrow, darlings!' each in his own accustomed manner.

When they were alone, something was rolled up or by other means got out of the way, and there was a great empty well before them, looking down into the depths of which Fanny said, 'Now, uncle!' Little Dorrit, as her eyes became used to the darkness, faintly made him out at the bottom of the well, in an obscure corner by himself, with his instrument in its ragged case under his arm.

The old man looked as if the remote high gallery windows, with their little strip of sky, might have been the point of his better fortunes, from which he had descended, until he had gradually sunk down below there to the bottom. He had been in that place six nights a week for many years, but had never been observed to raise his eyes above his music-book, and was confidently believed to have never seen a play. There were legends in the place that he did not so much as know the popular heroes and heroines by sight, and that the low comedian had 'mugged' at him in his richest manner fifty nights for a wager, and he had shown no trace of consciousness. The carpenters had a joke to the effect that he was dead without being aware of it; and the frequenters of the pit supposed him to pass his whole life, night and day, and Sunday and all, in the orchestra. They had tried him a few times with pinches of snuff offered over the rails, and he had always responded to this attention with a momentary waking up of manner that had the pale phantom of a gentleman in it: beyond this he never, on any occasion, had any other part in what was going on than the part written out for the clarionet; in private life, where there was no part for the clarionet, he had no part at all. Some said he was poor, some said he was a wealthy miser; but he said nothing, never lifted up his bowed head, never varied his shuffling gait by getting his springless foot from the ground. Though expecting now to be summoned by his niece, he did not hear her until she had spoken to him three or four times; nor was he at all surprised by the presence of two nieces instead of one, but merely said in his tremulous voice, 'I am coming, I am coming!' and crept forth by some underground way which emitted a cellarous smell.

'And so, Amy,' said her sister, when the three together passed out at the door that had such a shame-faced consciousness of being different from other doors: the uncle instinctively taking Amy's arm as the arm to be relied on: 'so, Amy, you are curious about me?'

She was pretty, and conscious, and rather flaunting; and the condescension with which she put aside the superiority of her charms, and of her worldly experience, and addressed her sister on almost equal terms, had a vast deal of the family in it.

'I am interested, Fanny, and concerned in anything that concerns you.'

'So you are, so you are, and you are the best of Amys. If I am ever a little provoking, I am sure you'll consider what a thing it is to occupy my position and feel a consciousness of being superior to it. I shouldn't care,' said the Daughter of the Father of the Marshalsea, 'if the others were not so common. None of them have come down in the world as we have. They are all on their own level. Common.'

Little Dorrit mildly looked at the speaker, but did not interrupt her. Fanny took out her handkerchief, and rather angrily wiped her eyes. 'I was not born where you were, you know, Amy, and perhaps that makes a difference. My dear child, when we get rid of Uncle, you shall know all about it. We'll drop him at the cook's shop where he is going to dine.'

They walked on with him until they came to a dirty shop window in a dirty street, which was made almost opaque by the steam of hot meats, vegetables, and puddings. But glimpses were to be caught of a roast leg of pork bursting into tears of sage and onion in a metal reservoir full of gravy, of an unctuous piece of roast beef and blisterous Yorkshire pudding, bubbling hot in a similar receptacle, of a stuffed fillet of veal in rapid cut, of a ham in a perspiration with the pace it was going at, of a shallow tank of baked potatoes glued together by their own richness, of a truss or two of boiled greens, and other substantial delicacies. Within, were a few wooden partitions, behind which such customers as found it more convenient to take away their dinners in stomachs than in their hands, Packed their purchases in solitude. Fanny opening her reticule, as they surveyed these things, produced from that repository a shilling and handed it to Uncle. Uncle, after not looking at it a little while, divined its object, and muttering 'Dinner? Ha! Yes, yes, yes!' slowly vanished from them into the mist.

'Now, Amy,' said her sister, 'come with me, if you are not too tired to walk to Harley Street, Cavendish Square.'

The air with which she threw off this distinguished address and the toss she gave to her new bonnet (which was more gauzy than serviceable), made her sister wonder; however, she expressed her readiness to go to Harley Street, and thither they directed their steps. Arrived at that grand destination, Fanny singled out the handsomest house, and knocking at the door, inquired for Mrs Merdle. The footman who opened the door, although he had powder on his head and was backed up by two other footmen likewise powdered, not only admitted Mrs Merdle to be at home, but asked Fanny to walk in. Fanny walked in, taking her sister with her; and they went up-stairs with powder going before and powder stopping behind, and were left in a spacious semicircular drawing-room, one of several drawing-rooms, where there was a parrot on the outside of a golden cage holding on by its beak, with its scaly legs in the air, and putting itself into many strange upside-down postures. This peculiarity has been observed in birds of quite another feather, climbing upon golden wires.

The room was far more splendid than anything Little Dorrit had ever imagined, and would have been splendid and costly in any eyes. She looked in amazement at her sister and would have asked a question, but that Fanny with a warning frown pointed to a curtained doorway of communication with another room. The curtain shook next moment, and a lady, raising it with a heavily ringed hand, dropped it behind her again as she entered.

The lady was not young and fresh from the hand of Nature, but was young and fresh from the hand of her maid. She had large unfeeling handsome eyes, and dark unfeeling handsome hair, and a broad unfeeling handsome bosom, and was made the most of in every particular. Either because she had a cold, or because it suited her face, she wore a rich white fillet tied over her head and under her chin. And if ever there were an unfeeling handsome chin that looked as if, for certain, it had never been, in familiar parlance, 'chucked' by the hand of man, it was the chin curbed up so tight and close by that laced bridle.

'Mrs Merdle,' said Fanny. 'My sister, ma'am.'

'I am glad to see your sister, Miss Dorrit. I did not remember that you had a sister.'

'I did not mention that I had,' said Fanny.

'Ah!' Mrs Merdle curled the little finger of her left hand as who should say, 'I have caught you. I know you didn't!' All her action was usually with her left hand because her hands were not a pair; and left being much the whiter and plumper of the two. Then she added: 'Sit down,' and composed herself voluptuously, in a nest of crimson and gold cushions, on an ottoman near the parrot.

'Also professional?' said Mrs Merdle, looking at Little Dorrit through an eye-glass.

Fanny answered No. 'No,' said Mrs Merdle, dropping her glass. 'Has not a professional air. Very pleasant; but not professional.'

'My sister, ma'am,' said Fanny, in whom there was a singular mixture of deference and hardihood, 'has been asking me to tell her, as between sisters, how I came to have the honour of knowing you. And as I had engaged to call upon you once more, I thought I might take the liberty of bringing her with me, when perhaps you would tell her. I wish her to know, and perhaps you will tell her?' 'Do you think, at your sister's age—' hinted Mrs Merdle.

'She is much older than she looks,' said Fanny; 'almost as old as I am.'

'Society,' said Mrs Merdle, with another curve of her little finger, 'is so difficult to explain to young persons (indeed is so difficult to explain to most persons), that I am glad to hear that.

I wish Society was not so arbitrary, I wish it was not so exacting—Bird, be quiet!'

The parrot had given a most piercing shriek, as if its name were Society and it asserted its right to its exactions.

'But,' resumed Mrs Merdle, 'we must take it as we find it. We know it is hollow and conventional and worldly and very shocking, but unless we are Savages in the Tropical seas (I should have been charmed to be one myself—most delightful life and perfect climate, I am told), we must consult it. It is the common lot. Mr Merdle is a most extensive merchant, his transactions are on the vastest scale, his wealth and influence are very great, but even he—Bird, be quiet!'

The parrot had shrieked another shriek; and it filled up the sentence so expressively that Mrs Merdle was under no necessity to end it.

'Since your sister begs that I would terminate our personal acquaintance,' she began again, addressing Little Dorrit, 'by relating the circumstances that are much to her credit, I cannot object to comply with her request, I am sure. I have a son (I was first married extremely young) of two or three-and-twenty.'

Fanny set her lips, and her eyes looked half triumphantly at her sister.

'A son of two or three-and-twenty. He is a little gay, a thing Society is accustomed to in young men, and he is very impressible. Perhaps he inherits that misfortune. I am very impressible myself, by nature. The weakest of creatures—my feelings are touched in a moment.'

She said all this, and everything else, as coldly as a woman of snow; quite forgetting the sisters except at odd times, and apparently addressing some abstraction of Society; for whose behoof, too, she occasionally arranged her dress, or the composition of her figure upon the ottoman.

'So he is very impressible. Not a misfortune in our natural state I dare say, but we are not in a natural state. Much to be lamented, no doubt, particularly by myself, who am a child of nature if I could but show it; but so it is. Society suppresses us and dominates us—Bird, be quiet!' The parrot had broken into a violent fit of laughter, after twisting divers bars of his cage with his crooked bill, and licking them with his black tongue.

'It is quite unnecessary to say to a person of your good sense, wide range of experience, and cultivated feeling,' said Mrs Merdle from her nest of crimson and gold—and there put up her glass to refresh her memory as to whom she was addressing,—'that the stage sometimes has a fascination for young men of that class of character. In saying the stage, I mean the people on it of the female sex. Therefore, when I heard that my son was supposed to be fascinated by a dancer, I knew what that usually meant in Society, and confided in her being a dancer at the Opera, where young men moving in Society are usually fascinated.'

She passed her white hands over one another, observant of the sisters now; and the rings upon her fingers grated against each other with a hard sound.

'As your sister will tell you, when I found what the theatre was I was much surprised and much distressed. But when I found that your sister, by rejecting my son's advances (I must add, in an unexpected manner), had brought him to the point of proposing marriage, my feelings were of the profoundest anguish—acute.' She traced the outline of her left eyebrow, and put it right.

'In a distracted condition, which only a mother—moving in Society—can be susceptible of, I determined to go myself to the theatre, and represent my state of mind to the dancer. I made myself known to your sister. I found her, to my surprise, in many respects different from my expectations; and certainly in none more so, than in meeting me with—what shall I say—a sort of family assertion on her own part?' Mrs Merdle smiled.

'I told you, ma'am,' said Fanny, with a heightening colour, 'that although you found me in that situation, I was so far above the rest, that I considered my family as good as your son's; and that I had a brother who, knowing the circumstances, would be of the same opinion, and would not consider such a connection any honour.'

'Miss Dorrit,' said Mrs Merdle, after frostily looking at her through her glass, 'precisely what I was on the point of telling your sister, in pursuance of your request. Much obliged to you for recalling it so accurately and anticipating me. I immediately,' addressing Little Dorrit, '(for I am the creature of impulse), took a bracelet from my arm, and begged your sister to let me clasp it on hers, in token of the delight I had in our being able to approach the subject so far on a common footing.' (This was perfectly true, the lady having bought a cheap and showy article on her way to the interview, with a general eye to bribery.)

'And I told you, Mrs Merdle,' said Fanny, 'that we might be unfortunate, but we are not common.'

'I think, the very words, Miss Dorrit,' assented Mrs Merdle.

'And I told you, Mrs Merdle,' said Fanny, 'that if you spoke to me of the superiority of your son's standing in Society, it was barely possible that you rather deceived yourself in your suppositions about my origin; and that my father's standing, even in the Society in which he now moved (what that was, was best known to myself), was eminently superior, and was acknowledged by every one.'

'Quite accurate,' rejoined Mrs Merdle. 'A most admirable memory.'

'Thank you, ma'am. Perhaps you will be so kind as to tell my sister the rest.'

'There is very little to tell,' said Mrs Merdle, reviewing the breadth of bosom which seemed essential to her having room enough to be unfeeling in, 'but it is to your sister's credit. I pointed out to your sister the plain state of the case; the impossibility of the Society in which we moved recognising the Society in which she moved—though charming, I have no doubt; the immense disadvantage at which she would consequently place the family she had so high an opinion of, upon which we should find ourselves compelled to look down with contempt, and from which (socially speaking) we should feel obliged to recoil with abhorrence. In short, I made an appeal to that laudable pride in your sister.'

'Let my sister know, if you please, Mrs Merdle,' Fanny pouted, with a toss of her gauzy bonnet, 'that I had already had the honour of telling your son that I wished to have nothing whatever to say to him.'

'Well, Miss Dorrit,' assented Mrs Merdle, 'perhaps I might have mentioned that before. If I did not think of it, perhaps it was because my mind reverted to the apprehensions I had at the time that he might persevere and you might have something to say to him.

I also mentioned to your sister—I again address the non-professional Miss Dorrit—that my son would have nothing in the event of such a marriage, and would be an absolute beggar. (I mention that merely as a fact which is part of the narrative, and not as supposing it to have influenced your sister, except in the prudent and legitimate way in which, constituted as our artificial system is, we must all be influenced by such considerations.) Finally, after some high words and high spirit on the part of your sister, we came to the complete understanding that there was no danger; and your sister was so obliging as to allow me to present her with a mark or two of my appreciation at my dressmaker's.'

Little Dorrit looked sorry, and glanced at Fanny with a troubled face.

'Also,' said Mrs Merdle, 'as to promise to give me the present pleasure of a closing interview, and of parting with her on the best of terms. On which occasion,' added Mrs Merdle, quitting her nest, and putting something in Fanny's hand, 'Miss Dorrit will permit me to say Farewell with best wishes in my own dull manner.'

The sisters rose at the same time, and they all stood near the cage of the parrot, as he tore at a claw-full of biscuit and spat it out, seemed to mock them with a pompous dance of his body without moving his feet, and suddenly turned himself upside down and trailed himself all over the outside of his golden cage, with the aid of his cruel beak and black tongue.

'Adieu, Miss Dorrit, with best wishes,' said Mrs Merdle. 'If we could only come to a Millennium, or something of that sort, I for one might have the pleasure of knowing a number of charming and talented persons from whom I am at present excluded. A more primitive state of society would be delicious to me. There used to be a poem when I learnt lessons, something about Lo the poor Indians whose something mind! If a few thousand persons moving in Society, could only go and be Indians, I would put my name down directly; but as, moving in Society, we can't be Indians, unfortunately—Good morning!'

They came down-stairs with powder before them and powder behind, the elder sister haughty and the younger sister humbled, and were shut out into unpowdered Harley Street, Cavendish Square.

'Well?' said Fanny, when they had gone a little way without speaking. 'Have you nothing to say, Amy?'

'Oh, I don't know what to say!' she answered, distressed. 'You didn't like this young man, Fanny?'

'Like him? He is almost an idiot.'

'I am so sorry—don't be hurt—but, since you ask me what I have to say, I am so very sorry, Fanny, that you suffered this lady to give you anything.'

'You little Fool!' returned her sister, shaking her with the sharp pull she gave her arm. 'Have you no spirit at all? But that's just the way! You have no self-respect, you have no becoming pride, just as you allow yourself to be followed about by a contemptible little Chivery of a thing,' with the scornfullest emphasis, 'you would let your family be trodden on, and never turn.'

'Don't say that, dear Fanny. I do what I can for them.'

'You do what you can for them!' repeated Fanny, walking her on very fast. 'Would you let a woman like this, whom you could see, if you had any experience of anything, to be as false and insolent as a woman can be—would you let her put her foot upon your family, and thank her for it?'

'No, Fanny, I am sure.' 'Then make her pay for it, you mean little thing. What else can you make her do? Make her pay for it, you stupid child; and do your family some credit with the money!'

They spoke no more all the way back to the lodging where Fanny and her uncle lived. When they arrived there, they found the old man practising his clarionet in the dolefullest manner in a corner of the room. Fanny had a composite meal to make, of chops, and porter, and tea; and indignantly pretended to prepare it for herself, though her sister did all that in quiet reality. When at last Fanny sat down to eat and drink, she threw the table implements about and was angry with her bread, much as her father had been last night.

'If you despise me,' she said, bursting into vehement tears, 'because I am a dancer, why did you put me in the way of being one?

It was your doing. You would have me stoop as low as the ground before this Mrs Merdle, and let her say what she liked and do what she liked, and hold us all in contempt, and tell me so to my face. Because I am a dancer!'

'O Fanny!'

'And Tip, too, poor fellow. She is to disparage him just as much as she likes, without any check—I suppose because he has been in the law, and the docks, and different things. Why, it was your doing, Amy. You might at least approve of his being defended.'

All this time the uncle was dolefully blowing his clarionet in the corner, sometimes taking it an inch or so from his mouth for a moment while he stopped to gaze at them, with a vague impression that somebody had said something.

'And your father, your poor father, Amy. Because he is not free to show himself and to speak for himself, you would let such people insult him with impunity. If you don't feel for yourself because you go out to work, you might at least feel for him, I should think, knowing what he has undergone so long.'

Poor Little Dorrit felt the injustice of this taunt rather sharply.

The remembrance of last night added a barbed point to it. She said nothing in reply, but turned her chair from the table towards the fire. Uncle, after making one more pause, blew a dismal wail and went on again.

Fanny was passionate with the tea-cups and the bread as long as her passion lasted, and then protested that she was the wretchedest girl in the world, and she wished she was dead. After that, her crying became remorseful, and she got up and put her arms round her sister. Little Dorrit tried to stop her from saying anything, but she answered that she would, she must! Thereupon she said again, and again, 'I beg your pardon, Amy,' and 'Forgive me, Amy,' almost as passionately as she had said what she regretted.

'But indeed, indeed, Amy,' she resumed when they were seated in sisterly accord side by side, 'I hope and I think you would have seen this differently, if you had known a little more of Society.'

'Perhaps I might, Fanny,' said the mild Little Dorrit.

'You see, while you have been domestic and resignedly shut up there, Amy,' pursued her sister, gradually beginning to patronise, 'I have been out, moving more in Society, and may have been getting proud and spirited—more than I ought to be, perhaps?'

Little Dorrit answered 'Yes. O yes!'

'And while you have been thinking of the dinner or the clothes, I may have been thinking, you know, of the family. Now, may it not be so, Amy?'

Little Dorrit again nodded 'Yes,' with a more cheerful face than heart.

'Especially as we know,' said Fanny, 'that there certainly is a tone in the place to which you have been so true, which does belong to it, and which does make it different from other aspects of Society. So kiss me once again, Amy dear, and we will agree that we may both be right, and that you are a tranquil, domestic, home-loving, good girl.'

The clarionet had been lamenting most pathetically during this dialogue, but was cut short now by Fanny's announcement that it was time to go; which she conveyed to her uncle by shutting up his scrap of music, and taking the clarionet out of his mouth.

Little Dorrit parted from them at the door, and hastened back to the Marshalsea. It fell dark there sooner than elsewhere, and going into it that evening was like going into a deep trench. The shadow of the wall was on every object. Not least upon the figure in the old grey gown and the black velvet cap, as it turned towards her when she opened the door of the dim room.

'Why not upon me too!' thought Little Dorrit, with the door Yet in her hand. 'It was not unreasonable in Fanny.'

CHAPTER 21. Mr Merdle's Complaint

Upon that establishment of state, the Merdle establishment in Harley Street, Cavendish Square, there was the shadow of no more common wall than the fronts of other establishments of state on the opposite side of the street. Like unexceptionable Society, the opposing rows of houses in Harley Street were very grim with one another. Indeed, the mansions and their inhabitants were so much alike in that respect, that the people were often to be found drawn up on opposite sides of dinner-tables, in the shade of their own loftiness, staring at the other side of the way with the dullness of the houses.

Everybody knows how like the street the two dinner-rows of people who take their stand by the street will be. The expressionless uniform twenty houses, all to be knocked at and rung at in the same form, all approachable by the same dull steps, all fended off by the same pattern of railing, all with the same impracticable fire-escapes, the same inconvenient fixtures in their heads, and everything without exception to be taken at a high valuation—who has not dined with these? The house so drearily out of repair, the occasional bow-window, the stuccoed house, the newly-fronted house, the corner house with nothing but angular rooms, the house with the blinds always down, the house with the hatchment always up, the house where the collector has called for one quarter of an Idea, and found nobody at home—who has not dined with these? The house that nobody will take, and is to be had a bargain—who does not know her? The showy house that was taken for life by the disappointed gentleman, and which does not suit him at all—who is unacquainted with that haunted habitation?

Harley Street, Cavendish Square, was more than aware of Mr and Mrs Merdle. Intruders there were in Harley Street, of whom it was not aware; but Mr and Mrs Merdle it delighted to honour. Society was aware of Mr and Mrs Merdle. Society had said 'Let us license them; let us know them.'

Mr Merdle was immensely rich; a man of prodigious enterprise; a Midas without the ears, who turned all he touched to gold. He was in everything good, from banking to building. He was in Parliament, of course. He was in the City, necessarily. He was Chairman of this, Trustee of that, President of the other. The weightiest of men had said to projectors, 'Now, what name have you got? Have you got Merdle?' And, the reply being in the negative, had said, 'Then I won't look at you.'

This great and fortunate man had provided that extensive bosom which required so much room to be unfeeling enough in, with a nest of crimson and gold some fifteen years before. It was not a bosom to repose upon, but it was a capital bosom to hang jewels upon. Mr Merdle wanted something to hang jewels upon, and he bought it for the purpose. Storr and Mortimer might have married on the same speculation.

Like all his other speculations, it was sound and successful. The jewels showed to the richest advantage. The bosom moving in Society with the jewels displayed upon it, attracted general admiration. Society approving, Mr Merdle was satisfied. He was the most disinterested of men,—did everything for Society, and got as little for himself out of all his gain and care, as a man might.

That is to say, it may be supposed that he got all he wanted, otherwise with unlimited wealth he would have got it. But his desire was to the utmost to satisfy Society (whatever that was), and take up all its drafts upon him for tribute. He did not shine in company; he had not very much to say for himself; he was a reserved man, with a broad, overhanging, watchful head, that particular kind of dull red colour in his cheeks which is rather stale than fresh, and a somewhat uneasy expression about his coat-cuffs, as if they were in his confidence, and had reasons for being anxious to hide his hands. In the little he said, he was a pleasant man enough; plain, emphatic about public and private confidence, and tenacious of the utmost deference being shown by every one, in all things, to Society. In this same Society (if that were it which came to his dinners, and to Mrs Merdle's receptions and concerts), he hardly seemed to enjoy himself much, and was mostly to be found against walls and behind doors. Also when he went out to it, instead of its coming home to him, he seemed a little fatigued, and upon the whole rather more disposed for bed; but he was always cultivating it nevertheless, and always moving in it—and always laying out money on it with the greatest liberality.

Mrs Merdle's first husband had been a colonel, under whose auspices the bosom had entered into competition with the snows of North America, and had come off at little disadvantage in point of whiteness, and at none in point of coldness. The colonel's son was Mrs Merdle's only child. He was of a chuckle-headed, high-shouldered make, with a general appearance of being, not so much a young man as a swelled boy. He had given so few signs of reason, that a by-word went among his companions that his brain had been frozen up in a mighty frost which prevailed at St john's, New Brunswick, at the period of his birth there, and had never thawed from that hour. Another by-word represented him as having in his infancy, through the negligence of a nurse, fallen out of a high window on his head, which had been heard by responsible witnesses to crack. It is probable that both these representations were of ex post facto origin; the young gentleman (whose expressive name was Sparkler) being monomaniacal in offering marriage to all manner of undesirable young ladies, and in remarking of every successive young lady to whom he tendered a matrimonial proposal that she was 'a doosed fine gal—well educated too—with no biggodd nonsense about her.'

A son-in-law with these limited talents, might have been a clog upon another man; but Mr Merdle did not want a son-in-law for himself; he wanted a son-in-law for Society. Mr Sparkler having been in the Guards, and being in the habit of frequenting all the races, and all the lounges, and all the parties, and being well known, Society was satisfied with its son-in-law. This happy result Mr Merdle would have considered well attained, though Mr Sparkler had been a more expensive article. And he did not get Mr Sparkler by any means cheap for Society, even as it was. There was a dinner giving in the Harley Street establishment, while Little Dorrit was stitching at her father's new shirts by his side that night; and there were magnates from the Court and magnates from the City, magnates from the Commons and magnates from the Lords, magnates from the bench and magnates from the bar, Bishop magnates, Treasury magnates, Horse Guard magnates, Admiralty magnates,—all the magnates that keep us going, and sometimes trip us up.

'I am told,' said Bishop magnate to Horse Guards, 'that Mr Merdle has made another enormous hit. They say a hundred thousand pounds.'

Horse Guards had heard two.

Treasury had heard three.

Bar, handling his persuasive double eye-glass, was by no means clear but that it might be four. It was one of those happy strokes of calculation and combination, the result of which it was difficult to estimate. It was one of those instances of a comprehensive grasp, associated with habitual luck and characteristic boldness, of which an age presented us but few. But here was Brother Bellows, who had been in the great Bank case, and who could probably tell us more. What did Brother Bellows put this new success at?

Brother Bellows was on his way to make his bow to the bosom, and could only tell them in passing that he had heard it stated, with great appearance of truth, as being worth, from first to last, half-a-million of money.

Admiralty said Mr Merdle was a wonderful man, Treasury said he was a new power in the country, and would be able to buy up the whole House of Commons. Bishop said he was glad to think that this wealth flowed into the coffers of a gentleman who was always disposed to maintain the best interests of Society.

Mr Merdle himself was usually late on these occasions, as a man still detained in the clutch of giant enterprises when other men had shaken off their dwarfs for the day. On this occasion, he was the last arrival. Treasury said Merdle's work punished him a little. Bishop said he was glad to think that this wealth flowed into the coffers of a gentleman who accepted it with meekness.

Powder! There was so much Powder in waiting, that it flavoured the dinner. Pulverous particles got into the dishes, and Society's meats had a seasoning of first-rate footmen. Mr Merdle took down a countess who was secluded somewhere in the core of an immense dress, to which she was in the proportion of the heart to the overgrown cabbage. If so low a simile may be admitted, the dress went down the staircase like a richly brocaded Jack in the Green, and nobody knew what sort of small person carried it.

Society had everything it could want, and could not want, for dinner. It had everything to look at, and everything to eat, and everything to drink. It is to be hoped it enjoyed itself; for Mr Merdle's own share of the repast might have been paid for with eighteenpence. Mrs Merdle was magnificent. The chief butler was the next magnificent institution of the day. He was the stateliest man in the company. He did nothing, but he looked on as few other men could have done. He was Mr Merdle's last gift to Society. Mr Merdle didn't want him, and was put out of countenance when the great creature looked at him; but inappeasable Society would have him—and had got him.

The invisible countess carried out the Green at the usual stage of the entertainment, and the file of beauty was closed up by the bosom. Treasury said, Juno. Bishop said, Judith.

Bar fell into discussion with Horse Guards concerning courts-martial. Brothers Bellows and Bench struck in. Other magnates paired off. Mr Merdle sat silent, and looked at the table-cloth. Sometimes a magnate addressed him, to turn the stream of his own particular discussion towards him; but Mr Merdle seldom gave much attention to it, or did more than rouse himself from his calculations and pass the wine.

When they rose, so many of the magnates had something to say to Mr Merdle individually that he held little levees by the sideboard, and checked them off as they went out at the door.

Treasury hoped he might venture to congratulate one of England's world-famed capitalists and merchant-princes (he had turned that original sentiment in the house a few times, and it came easy to him) on a new achievement. To extend the triumphs of such men was to extend the triumphs and resources of the nation; and Treasury felt—he gave Mr Merdle to understand—patriotic on the subject.

'Thank you, my lord,' said Mr Merdle; 'thank you. I accept your congratulations with pride, and I am glad you approve.'

'Why, I don't unreservedly approve, my dear Mr Merdle. Because,' smiling Treasury turned him by the arm towards the sideboard and spoke banteringly, 'it never can be worth your while to come among us and help us.'

Mr Merdle felt honoured by the—

'No, no,' said Treasury, 'that is not the light in which one so distinguished for practical knowledge and great foresight, can be expected to regard it. If we should ever be happily enabled, by accidentally possessing the control over circumstances, to propose to one so eminent to—to come among us, and give us the weight of his influence, knowledge, and character, we could only propose it to him as a duty. In fact, as a duty that he owed to Society.'

Mr Merdle intimated that Society was the apple of his eye, and that its claims were paramount to every other consideration. Treasury moved on, and Bar came up. Bar, with his little insinuating jury droop, and fingering his persuasive double eye-glass, hoped he might be excused if he mentioned to one of the greatest converters of the root of all evil into the root of all good, who had for a long time reflected a shining lustre on the annals even of our commercial country—if he mentioned, disinterestedly, and as, what we lawyers called in our pedantic way, amicus curiae, a fact that had come by accident within his knowledge. He had been required to look over the title of a very considerable estate in one of the eastern counties—lying, in fact, for Mr Merdle knew we lawyers loved to be particular, on the borders of two of the eastern counties. Now, the title was perfectly sound, and the estate was to be purchased by one who had the command of—Money (jury droop and persuasive eye-glass), on remarkably advantageous terms. This had come to Bar's knowledge only that day, and it had occurred to him, 'I shall have the honour of dining with my esteemed friend Mr Merdle this evening, and, strictly between ourselves, I will mention the opportunity.' Such a purchase would involve not only a great legitimate political influence, but some half-dozen church presentations of considerable annual value. Now, that Mr Merdle was already at no loss to discover means of occupying even his capital, and of fully employing even his active and vigorous intellect, Bar well knew: but he would venture to suggest that the question arose in his mind, whether one who had deservedly gained so high a position and so European a reputation did not owe it—we would not say to himself, but we would say to Society, to possess himself of such influences as these; and to exercise them—we would not say for his own, or for his party's, but we would say for Society's—benefit.

Mr Merdle again expressed himself as wholly devoted to that object of his constant consideration, and Bar took his persuasive eye-glass up the grand staircase. Bishop then came undesignedly sidling in the direction of the sideboard.

Surely the goods of this world, it occurred in an accidental way to Bishop to remark, could scarcely be directed into happier channels than when they accumulated under the magic touch of the wise and sagacious, who, while they knew the just value of riches (Bishop tried here to look as if he were rather poor himself), were aware of their importance, judiciously governed and rightly distributed, to the welfare of our brethren at large.

Mr Merdle with humility expressed his conviction that Bishop couldn't mean him, and with inconsistency expressed his high gratification in Bishop's good opinion.

Bishop then—jauntily stepping out a little with his well-shaped right leg, as though he said to Mr Merdle 'don't mind the apron; a mere form!' put this case to his good friend:

Whether it had occurred to his good friend, that Society might not unreasonably hope that one so blest in his undertakings, and whose example on his pedestal was so influential with it, would shed a little money in the direction of a mission or so to Africa?

Mr Merdle signifying that the idea should have his best attention, Bishop put another case:

Whether his good friend had at all interested himself in the proceedings of our Combined Additional Endowed Dignitaries Committee, and whether it had occurred to him that to shed a little money in that direction might be a great conception finely executed?

Mr Merdle made a similar reply, and Bishop explained his reason for inquiring.

Society looked to such men as his good friend to do such things. It was not that HE looked to them, but that Society looked to them.

Just as it was not Our Committee who wanted the Additional Endowed Dignitaries, but it was Society that was in a state of the most agonising uneasiness of mind until it got them. He begged to assure his good friend that he was extremely sensible of his good friend's regard on all occasions for the best interests of Society; and he considered that he was at once consulting those interests and expressing the feeling of Society, when he wished him continued prosperity, continued increase of riches, and continued things in general.

Bishop then betook himself up-stairs, and the other magnates gradually floated up after him until there was no one left below but Mr Merdle. That gentleman, after looking at the table-cloth until the soul of the chief butler glowed with a noble resentment, went slowly up after the rest, and became of no account in the stream of people on the grand staircase. Mrs Merdle was at home, the best of the jewels were hung out to be seen, Society got what it came for, Mr Merdle drank twopennyworth of tea in a corner and got more than he wanted.

Among the evening magnates was a famous physician, who knew everybody, and whom everybody knew. On entering at the door, he came upon Mr Merdle drinking his tea in a corner, and touched him on the arm.

Mr Merdle started. 'Oh! It's you!'

'Any better to-day?'

'No,' said Mr Merdle, 'I am no better.'

'A pity I didn't see you this morning. Pray come to me to-morrow, or let me come to you.'

'Well!' he replied. 'I will come to-morrow as I drive by.' Bar and Bishop had both been bystanders during this short dialogue, and as Mr Merdle was swept away by the crowd, they made their remarks upon it to the Physician. Bar said, there was a certain point of mental strain beyond which no man could go; that the point varied with various textures of brain and peculiarities of constitution, as he had had occasion to notice in several of his learned brothers; but the point of endurance passed by a line's breadth, depression and dyspepsia ensued. Not to intrude on the sacred mysteries of medicine, he took it, now (with the jury droop and persuasive eye-glass), that this was Merdle's case? Bishop said that when he was a young man, and had fallen for a brief space into the habit of writing sermons on Saturdays, a habit which all young sons of the church should sedulously avoid, he had frequently been sensible of a depression, arising as he supposed from an over-taxed intellect, upon which the yolk of a new-laid egg, beaten up by the good woman in whose house he at that time lodged, with a glass of sound sherry, nutmeg, and powdered sugar acted like a charm. Without presuming to offer so simple a remedy to the consideration of so profound a professor of the great healing art, he would venture to inquire whether the strain, being by way of intricate calculations, the spirits might not (humanly speaking) be restored to their tone by a gentle and yet generous stimulant?

'Yes,' said the physician, 'yes, you are both right. But I may as well tell you that I can find nothing the matter with Mr Merdle. He has the constitution of a rhinoceros, the digestion of an ostrich, and the concentration of an oyster. As to nerves, Mr Merdle is of a cool temperament, and not a sensitive man: is about as invulnerable, I should say, as Achilles. How such a man should suppose himself unwell without reason, you may think strange. But I have found nothing the matter with him. He may have some deep-seated recondite complaint. I can't say. I only say, that at present I have not found it out.'

There was no shadow of Mr Merdle's complaint on the bosom now displaying precious stones in rivalry with many similar superb jewel-stands; there was no shadow of Mr Merdle's complaint on young Sparkler hovering about the rooms, monomaniacally seeking any sufficiently ineligible young lady with no nonsense about her; there was no shadow of Mr Merdle's complaint on the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings, of whom whole colonies were present; or on any of the company. Even on himself, its shadow was faint enough as he moved about among the throng, receiving homage.

Mr Merdle's complaint. Society and he had so much to do with one another in all things else, that it is hard to imagine his complaint, if he had one, being solely his own affair. Had he that deep-seated recondite complaint, and did any doctor find it out? Patience, in the meantime, the shadow of the Marshalsea wall was a real darkening influence, and could be seen on the Dorrit Family at any stage of the sun's course.

CHAPTER 22. A Puzzle

Mr Clennam did not increase in favour with the Father of the Marshalsea in the ratio of his increasing visits. His obtuseness on the great Testimonial question was not calculated to awaken admiration in the paternal breast, but had rather a tendency to give offence in that sensitive quarter, and to be regarded as a positive shortcoming in point of gentlemanly feeling. An impression of disappointment, occasioned by the discovery that Mr Clennam scarcely possessed that delicacy for which, in the confidence of his nature, he had been inclined to give him credit, began to darken the fatherly mind in connection with that gentleman. The father went so far as to say, in his private family circle, that he feared Mr Clennam was not a man of high instincts. He was happy, he observed, in his public capacity as leader and representative of the College, to receive Mr Clennam when he called to pay his respects; but he didn't find that he got on with him personally. There appeared to be something (he didn't know what it was) wanting in him. Howbeit, the father did not fail in any outward show of politeness, but, on the contrary, honoured him with much attention; perhaps cherishing the hope that, although not a man of a sufficiently brilliant and spontaneous turn of mind to repeat his former testimonial unsolicited, it might still be within the compass of his nature to bear the part of a responsive gentleman, in any correspondence that way tending.

In the threefold capacity, of the gentleman from outside who had been accidentally locked in on the night of his first appearance, of the gentleman from outside who had inquired into the affairs of the Father of the Marshalsea with the stupendous idea of getting him out, and of the gentleman from outside who took an interest in the child of the Marshalsea, Clennam soon became a visitor of mark.

He was not surprised by the attentions he received from Mr Chivery when that officer was on the lock, for he made little distinction between Mr Chivery's politeness and that of the other turnkeys. It was on one particular afternoon that Mr Chivery surprised him all at once, and stood forth from his companions in bold relief.

Mr Chivery, by some artful exercise of his power of clearing the Lodge, had contrived to rid it of all sauntering Collegians; so that Clennam, coming out of the prison, should find him on duty alone.

'(Private) I ask your pardon, sir,' said Mr Chivery in a secret manner; 'but which way might you be going?'

'I am going over the Bridge.' He saw in Mr Chivery, with some astonishment, quite an Allegory of Silence, as he stood with his key on his lips.

'(Private) I ask your pardon again,' said Mr Chivery, 'but could you go round by Horsemonger Lane? Could you by any means find time to look in at that address?' handing him a little card, printed for circulation among the connection of Chivery and Co., Tobacconists, Importers of pure Havannah Cigars, Bengal Cheroots, and fine-flavoured Cubas, Dealers in Fancy Snuffs, &C. &C.

'(Private) It an't tobacco business,' said Mr Chivery. 'The truth is, it's my wife. She's wishful to say a word to you, sir, upon a point respecting—yes,' said Mr Chivery, answering Clennam's look of apprehension with a nod, 'respecting her.'

'I will make a point of seeing your wife directly.'

'Thank you, sir. Much obliged. It an't above ten minutes out of your way. Please to ask for Mrs Chivery!' These instructions, Mr Chivery, who had already let him out, cautiously called through a little slide in the outer door, which he could draw back from within for the inspection of visitors when it pleased him.

Arthur Clennam, with the card in his hand, betook himself to the address set forth upon it, and speedily arrived there. It was a very small establishment, wherein a decent woman sat behind the counter working at her needle. Little jars of tobacco, little boxes of cigars, a little assortment of pipes, a little jar or two of snuff, and a little instrument like a shoeing horn for serving it out, composed the retail stock in trade.

Arthur mentioned his name, and his having promised to call, on the solicitation of Mr Chivery. About something relating to Miss Dorrit, he believed. Mrs Chivery at once laid aside her work, rose up from her seat behind the counter, and deploringly shook her head.

'You may see him now,' said she, 'if you'll condescend to take a peep.'

With these mysterious words, she preceded the visitor into a little parlour behind the shop, with a little window in it commanding a very little dull back-yard. In this yard a wash of sheets and table-cloths tried (in vain, for want of air) to get itself dried on a line or two; and among those flapping articles was sitting in a chair, like the last mariner left alive on the deck of a damp ship without the power of furling the sails, a little woe-begone young man.

'Our John,' said Mrs Chivery.

Not to be deficient in interest, Clennam asked what he might be doing there?

'It's the only change he takes,' said Mrs Chivery, shaking her head afresh. 'He won't go out, even in the back-yard, when there's no linen; but when there's linen to keep the neighbours' eyes off, he'll sit there, hours. Hours he will. Says he feels as if it was groves!' Mrs Chivery shook her head again, put her apron in a motherly way to her eyes, and reconducted her visitor into the regions of the business.

'Please to take a seat, sir,' said Mrs Chivery. 'Miss Dorrit is the matter with Our John, sir; he's a breaking his heart for her, and I would wish to take the liberty to ask how it's to be made good to his parents when bust?'

Mrs Chivery, who was a comfortable-looking woman much respected about Horsemonger Lane for her feelings and her conversation, uttered this speech with fell composure, and immediately afterwards began again to shake her head and dry her eyes.

'Sir,' said she in continuation, 'you are acquainted with the family, and have interested yourself with the family, and are influential with the family. If you can promote views calculated to make two young people happy, let me, for Our john's sake, and for both their sakes, implore you so to do!'

'I have been so habituated,' returned Arthur, at a loss, 'during the short time I have known her, to consider Little—I have been so habituated to consider Miss Dorrit in a light altogether removed from that in which you present her to me, that you quite take me by surprise. Does she know your son?'

'Brought up together, sir,' said Mrs Chivery. 'Played together.'

'Does she know your son as her admirer?'

'Oh! bless you, sir,' said Mrs Chivery, with a sort of triumphant shiver, 'she never could have seen him on a Sunday without knowing he was that. His cane alone would have told it long ago, if nothing else had. Young men like John don't take to ivory hands a pinting, for nothing. How did I first know it myself? Similarly.'

'Perhaps Miss Dorrit may not be so ready as you, you see.'

'Then she knows it, sir,' said Mrs Chivery, 'by word of mouth.'

'Are you sure?'

'Sir,' said Mrs Chivery, 'sure and certain as in this house I am. I see my son go out with my own eyes when in this house I was, and I see my son come in with my own eyes when in this house I was, and I know he done it!' Mrs Chivery derived a surprising force of emphasis from the foregoing circumstantiality and repetition.

'May I ask you how he came to fall into the desponding state which causes you so much uneasiness?'

'That,' said Mrs Chivery, 'took place on that same day when to this house I see that John with these eyes return. Never been himself in this house since. Never was like what he has been since, not from the hour when to this house seven year ago me and his father, as tenants by the quarter, came!' An effect in the nature of an affidavit was gained from this speech by Mrs Chivery's peculiar power of construction. 'May I venture to inquire what is your version of the matter?'

'You may,' said Mrs Chivery, 'and I will give it to you in honour and in word as true as in this shop I stand. Our John has every one's good word and every one's good wish. He played with her as a child when in that yard a child she played. He has known her ever since. He went out upon the Sunday afternoon when in this very parlour he had dined, and met her, with appointment or without appointment; which, I do not pretend to say. He made his offer to her. Her brother and sister is high in their views, and against Our John. Her father is all for himself in his views and against sharing her with any one. Under which circumstances she has answered Our John, "No, John, I cannot have you, I cannot have any husband, it is not my intentions ever to become a wife, it is my intentions to be always a sacrifice, farewell, find another worthy of you, and forget me!" This is the way in which she is doomed to be a constant slave to them that are not worthy that a constant slave she unto them should be. This is the way in which Our John has come to find no pleasure but in taking cold among the linen, and in showing in that yard, as in that yard I have myself shown you, a broken-down ruin that goes home to his mother's heart!' Here the good woman pointed to the little window, whence her son might be seen sitting disconsolate in the tuneless groves; and again shook her head and wiped her eyes, and besought him, for the united sakes of both the young people, to exercise his influence towards the bright reversal of these dismal events.

She was so confident in her exposition of the case, and it was so undeniably founded on correct premises in so far as the relative positions of Little Dorrit and her family were concerned, that Clennam could not feel positive on the other side. He had come to attach to Little Dorrit an interest so peculiar—an interest that removed her from, while it grew out of, the common and coarse things surrounding her—that he found it disappointing, disagreeable, almost painful, to suppose her in love with young Mr Chivery in the back-yard, or any such person. On the other hand, he reasoned with himself that she was just as good and just as true in love with him, as not in love with him; and that to make a kind of domesticated fairy of her, on the penalty of isolation at heart from the only people she knew, would be but a weakness of his own fancy, and not a kind one. Still, her youthful and ethereal appearance, her timid manner, the charm of her sensitive voice and eyes, the very many respects in which she had interested him out of her own individuality, and the strong difference between herself and those about her, were not in unison, and were determined not to be in unison, with this newly presented idea.

He told the worthy Mrs Chivery, after turning these things over in his mind—he did that, indeed, while she was yet speaking—that he might be relied upon to do his utmost at all times to promote the happiness of Miss Dorrit, and to further the wishes of her heart if it were in his power to do so, and if he could discover what they were. At the same time he cautioned her against assumptions and appearances; enjoined strict silence and secrecy, lest Miss Dorrit should be made unhappy; and particularly advised her to endeavour to win her son's confidence and so to make quite sure of the state of the case. Mrs Chivery considered the latter precaution superfluous, but said she would try. She shook her head as if she had not derived all the comfort she had fondly expected from this interview, but thanked him nevertheless for the trouble he had kindly taken. They then parted good friends, and Arthur walked away.

The crowd in the street jostling the crowd in his mind, and the two crowds making a confusion, he avoided London Bridge, and turned off in the quieter direction of the Iron Bridge. He had scarcely set foot upon it, when he saw Little Dorrit walking on before him. It was a pleasant day, with a light breeze blowing, and she seemed to have that minute come there for air. He had left her in her father's room within an hour.

It was a timely chance, favourable to his wish of observing her face and manner when no one else was by. He quickened his pace; but before he reached her, she turned her head.

'Have I startled you?' he asked.

'I thought I knew the step,' she answered, hesitating.

'And did you know it, Little Dorrit? You could hardly have expected mine.'

'I did not expect any. But when I heard a step, I thought it—sounded like yours.'

'Are you going further?'

'No, sir, I am only walking her for a little change.'

They walked together, and she recovered her confiding manner with him, and looked up in his face as she said, after glancing around:

'It is so strange. Perhaps you can hardly understand it. I sometimes have a sensation as if it was almost unfeeling to walk here.'

'Unfeeling?'

'To see the river, and so much sky, and so many objects, and such change and motion. Then to go back, you know, and find him in the same cramped place.'

'Ah yes! But going back, you must remember that you take with you the spirit and influence of such things to cheer him.'

'Do I? I hope I may! I am afraid you fancy too much, sir, and make me out too powerful. If you were in prison, could I bring such comfort to you?'

'Yes, Little Dorrit, I am sure of it.'

He gathered from a tremor on her lip, and a passing shadow of great agitation on her face, that her mind was with her father. He remained silent for a few moments, that she might regain her composure. The Little Dorrit, trembling on his arm, was less in unison than ever with Mrs Chivery's theory, and yet was not irreconcilable with a new fancy which sprung up within him, that there might be some one else in the hopeless—newer fancy still—in the hopeless unattainable distance.

They turned, and Clennam said, Here was Maggy coming! Little Dorrit looked up, surprised, and they confronted Maggy, who brought herself at sight of them to a dead stop. She had been trotting along, so preoccupied and busy that she had not recognised them until they turned upon her. She was now in a moment so conscience-stricken that her very basket partook of the change.

'Maggy, you promised me to stop near father.'

'So I would, Little Mother, only he wouldn't let me. If he takes and sends me out I must go. If he takes and says, "Maggy, you hurry away and back with that letter, and you shall have a sixpence if the answer's a good 'un," I must take it. Lor, Little Mother, what's a poor thing of ten year old to do? And if Mr Tip—if he happens to be a coming in as I come out, and if he says "Where are you going, Maggy?" and if I says, "I'm a going So and So," and if he says, "I'll have a Try too," and if he goes into the George and writes a letter and if he gives it me and says, "Take that one to the same place, and if the answer's a good 'un I'll give you a shilling," it ain't my fault, mother!'

Arthur read, in Little Dorrit's downcast eyes, to whom she foresaw that the letters were addressed.

'I'm a going So and So. There! That's where I am a going to,' said Maggy. 'I'm a going So and So. It ain't you, Little Mother, that's got anything to do with it—it's you, you know,' said Maggy, addressing Arthur. 'You'd better come, So and So, and let me take and give 'em to you.'

'We will not be so particular as that, Maggy. Give them me here,' said Clennam in a low voice.

'Well, then, come across the road,' answered Maggy in a very loud whisper. 'Little Mother wasn't to know nothing of it, and she would never have known nothing of it if you had only gone So and So, instead of bothering and loitering about. It ain't my fault. I must do what I am told. They ought to be ashamed of themselves for telling me.'

Clennam crossed to the other side, and hurriedly opened the letters. That from the father mentioned that most unexpectedly finding himself in the novel position of having been disappointed of a remittance from the City on which he had confidently counted, he took up his pen, being restrained by the unhappy circumstance of his incarceration during three-and-twenty years (doubly underlined), from coming himself, as he would otherwise certainly have done—took up his pen to entreat Mr Clennam to advance him the sum of Three Pounds Ten Shillings upon his I.O.U., which he begged to enclose. That from the son set forth that Mr Clennam would, he knew, be gratified to hear that he had at length obtained permanent employment of a highly satisfactory nature, accompanied with every prospect of complete success in life; but that the temporary inability of his employer to pay him his arrears of salary to that date (in which condition said employer had appealed to that generous forbearance in which he trusted he should never be wanting towards a fellow-creature), combined with the fraudulent conduct of a false friend and the present high price of provisions, had reduced him to the verge of ruin, unless he could by a quarter before six that evening raise the sum of eight pounds. This sum, Mr Clennam would be happy to learn, he had, through the promptitude of several friends who had a lively confidence in his probity, already raised, with the exception of a trifling balance of one pound seventeen and fourpence; the loan of which balance, for the period of one month, would be fraught with the usual beneficent consequences.

These letters Clennam answered with the aid of his pencil and pocket-book, on the spot; sending the father what he asked for, and excusing himself from compliance with the demand of the son. He then commissioned Maggy to return with his replies, and gave her the shilling of which the failure of her supplemental enterprise would have disappointed her otherwise.

When he rejoined Little Dorrit, and they had begun walking as before, she said all at once:

'I think I had better go. I had better go home.'

'Don't be distressed,' said Clennam, 'I have answered the letters. They were nothing. You know what they were. They were nothing.'

'But I am afraid,' she returned, 'to leave him, I am afraid to leave any of them. When I am gone, they pervert—but they don't mean it—even Maggy.'

'It was a very innocent commission that she undertook, poor thing. And in keeping it secret from you, she supposed, no doubt, that she was only saving you uneasiness.'

'Yes, I hope so, I hope so. But I had better go home! It was but the other day that my sister told me I had become so used to the prison that I had its tone and character. It must be so. I am sure it must be when I see these things. My place is there. I am better there, it is unfeeling in me to be here, when I can do the least thing there. Good-bye. I had far better stay at home!'

The agonised way in which she poured this out, as if it burst of itself from her suppressed heart, made it difficult for Clennam to keep the tears from his eyes as he saw and heard her.

'Don't call it home, my child!' he entreated. 'It is always painful to me to hear you call it home.'

'But it is home! What else can I call home? Why should I ever forget it for a single moment?'

'You never do, dear Little Dorrit, in any good and true service.'

'I hope not, O I hope not! But it is better for me to stay there; much better, much more dutiful, much happier. Please don't go with me, let me go by myself. Good-bye, God bless you. Thank you, thank you.'

He felt that it was better to respect her entreaty, and did not move while her slight form went quickly away from him. When it had fluttered out of sight, he turned his face towards the water and stood thinking.

She would have been distressed at any time by this discovery of the letters; but so much so, and in that unrestrainable way?

No.

When she had seen her father begging with his threadbare disguise on, when she had entreated him not to give her father money, she had been distressed, but not like this. Something had made her keenly and additionally sensitive just now. Now, was there some one in the hopeless unattainable distance? Or had the suspicion been brought into his mind, by his own associations of the troubled river running beneath the bridge with the same river higher up, its changeless tune upon the prow of the ferry-boat, so many miles an hour the peaceful flowing of the stream, here the rushes, there the lilies, nothing uncertain or unquiet?

He thought of his poor child, Little Dorrit, for a long time there; he thought of her going home; he thought of her in the night; he thought of her when the day came round again. And the poor child Little Dorrit thought of him—too faithfully, ah, too faithfully!—in the shadow of the Marshalsea wall.

CHAPTER 23. Machinery in Motion

Mr Meagles bestirred himself with such prompt activity in the matter of the negotiation with Daniel Doyce which Clennam had entrusted to him, that he soon brought it into business train, and called on Clennam at nine o'clock one morning to make his report. 'Doyce is highly gratified by your good opinion,' he opened the business by saying, 'and desires nothing so much as that you should examine the affairs of the Works for yourself, and entirely understand them. He has handed me the keys of all his books and papers—here they are jingling in this pocket—and the only charge he has given me is "Let Mr Clennam have the means of putting himself on a perfect equality with me as to knowing whatever I know. If it should come to nothing after all, he will respect my confidence. Unless I was sure of that to begin with, I should have nothing to do with him." And there, you see,' said Mr Meagles, 'you have Daniel Doyce all over.'

'A very honourable character.'

'Oh, yes, to be sure. Not a doubt of it. Odd, but very honourable. Very odd though. Now, would you believe, Clennam,' said Mr Meagles, with a hearty enjoyment of his friend's eccentricity, 'that I had a whole morning in What's-his-name Yard—'

'Bleeding Heart?'

'A whole morning in Bleeding Heart Yard, before I could induce him to pursue the subject at all?'

'How was that?'

'How was that, my friend? I no sooner mentioned your name in connection with it than he declared off.'

'Declared off on my account?'

'I no sooner mentioned your name, Clennam, than he said, "That will never do!" What did he mean by that? I asked him. No matter, Meagles; that would never do. Why would it never do? You'll hardly believe it, Clennam,' said Mr Meagles, laughing within himself, 'but it came out that it would never do, because you and he, walking down to Twickenham together, had glided into a friendly conversation in the course of which he had referred to his intention of taking a partner, supposing at the time that you were as firmly and finally settled as St Paul's Cathedral. "Whereas," says he, "Mr

Clennam might now believe, if I entertained his proposition, that I had a sinister and designing motive in what was open free speech. Which I can't bear," says he, "which I really am too proud to bear."'

'I should as soon suspect—'

'Of course you would,' interrupted Mr Meagles, 'and so I told him. But it took a morning to scale that wall; and I doubt if any other man than myself (he likes me of old) could have got his leg over it. Well, Clennam. This business-like obstacle surmounted, he then stipulated that before resuming with you I should look over the books and form my own opinion. I looked over the books, and formed my own opinion. "Is it, on the whole, for, or against?" says he. "For," says I. "Then," says he, "you may now, my good friend, give Mr Clennam the means of forming his opinion. To enable him to do which, without bias and with perfect freedom, I shall go out of town for a week." And he's gone,' said Mr Meagles; that's the rich conclusion of the thing.'

'Leaving me,' said Clennam, 'with a high sense, I must say, of his candour and his—'

'Oddity,' Mr Meagles struck in. 'I should think so!'

It was not exactly the word on Clennam's lips, but he forbore to interrupt his good-humoured friend.

'And now,' added Mr Meagles, 'you can begin to look into matters as soon as you think proper. I have undertaken to explain where you may want explanation, but to be strictly impartial, and to do nothing more.'

They began their perquisitions in Bleeding Heart Yard that same forenoon. Little peculiarities were easily to be detected by experienced eyes in Mr Doyce's way of managing his affairs, but they almost always involved some ingenious simplification of a difficulty, and some plain road to the desired end. That his papers were in arrear, and that he stood in need of assistance to develop the capacity of his business, was clear enough; but all the results of his undertakings during many years were distinctly set forth, and were ascertainable with ease. Nothing had been done for the purposes of the pending investigation; everything was in its genuine working dress, and in a certain honest rugged order. The calculations and entries, in his own hand, of which there were many, were bluntly written, and with no very neat precision; but were always plain and directed straight to the purpose. It occurred to Arthur that a far more elaborate and taking show of business—such as the records of the Circumlocution Office made perhaps—might be far less serviceable, as being meant to be far less intelligible.

Three or four days of steady application tendered him master of all the facts it was essential to become acquainted with. Mr Meagles was at hand the whole time, always ready to illuminate any dim place with the bright little safety-lamp belonging to the scales and scoop. Between them they agreed upon the sum it would be fair to offer for the purchase of a half-share in the business, and then Mr Meagles unsealed a paper in which Daniel Doyce had noted the amount at which he valued it; which was even something less. Thus, when Daniel came back, he found the affair as good as concluded.

'And I may now avow, Mr Clennam,' said he, with a cordial shake of the hand, 'that if I had looked high and low for a partner, I believe I could not have found one more to my mind.'

'I say the same,' said Clennam.

'And I say of both of you,' added Mr Meagles, 'that you are well matched. You keep him in check, Clennam, with your common sense, and you stick to the Works, Dan, with your—'

'Uncommon sense?' suggested Daniel, with his quiet smile.

'You may call it so, if you like—and each of you will be a right hand to the other. Here's my own right hand upon it, as a practical man, to both of you.'

The purchase was completed within a month. It left Arthur in possession of private personal means not exceeding a few hundred pounds; but it opened to him an active and promising career. The three friends dined together on the auspicious occasion; the factory and the factory wives and children made holiday and dined too; even Bleeding Heart Yard dined and was full of meat. Two months had barely gone by in all, when Bleeding Heart Yard had become so familiar with short-commons again, that the treat was forgotten there; when nothing seemed new in the partnership but the paint of the inscription on the door-posts, DOYCE AND CLENNAM; when it appeared even to Clennam himself, that he had had the affairs of the firm in his mind for years.

The little counting-house reserved for his own occupation, was a room of wood and glass at the end of a long low workshop, filled with benches, and vices, and tools, and straps, and wheels; which, when they were in gear with the steam-engine, went tearing round as though they had a suicidal mission to grind the business to dust and tear the factory to pieces. A communication of great trap-doors in the floor and roof with the workshop above and the workshop below, made a shaft of light in this perspective, which brought to Clennam's mind the child's old picture-book, where similar rays were the witnesses of Abel's murder. The noises were sufficiently removed and shut out from the counting-house to blend into a busy hum, interspersed with periodical clinks and thumps. The patient figures at work were swarthy with the filings of iron and steel that danced on every bench and bubbled up through every chink in the planking. The workshop was arrived at by a step-ladder from the outer yard below, where it served as a shelter for the large grindstone where tools were sharpened. The whole had at once a fanciful and practical air in Clennam's eyes, which was a welcome change; and, as often as he raised them from his first work of getting the array of business documents into perfect order, he glanced at these things with a feeling of pleasure in his pursuit that was new to him.

Raising his eyes thus one day, he was surprised to see a bonnet labouring up the step-ladder. The unusual apparition was followed by another bonnet. He then perceived that the first bonnet was on the head of Mr F.'s Aunt, and that the second bonnet was on the head of Flora, who seemed to have propelled her legacy up the steep ascent with considerable difficulty. Though not altogether enraptured at the sight of these visitors, Clennam lost no time in opening the counting-house door, and extricating them from the workshop; a rescue which was rendered the more necessary by Mr F.'s Aunt already stumbling over some impediment, and menacing steam power as an Institution with a stony reticule she carried.

'Good gracious, Arthur,—I should say Mr Clennam, far more proper—the climb we have had to get up here and how ever to get down again without a fire-escape and Mr F.'s Aunt slipping through the steps and bruised all over and you in the machinery and foundry way too only think, and never told us!'

Thus, Flora, out of breath. Meanwhile, Mr F.'s Aunt rubbed her esteemed insteps with her umbrella, and vindictively glared.

'Most unkind never to have come back to see us since that day, though naturally it was not to be expected that there should be any attraction at our house and you were much more pleasantly engaged, that's pretty certain, and is she fair or dark blue eyes or black I wonder, not that I expect that she should be anything but a perfect contrast to me in all particulars for I am a disappointment as I very well know and you are quite right to be devoted no doubt though what I am saying Arthur never mind I hardly know myself Good gracious!'

By this time he had placed chairs for them in the counting-house. As Flora dropped into hers, she bestowed the old look upon him.

'And to think of Doyce and Clennam, and who Doyce can be,' said Flora; 'delightful man no doubt and married perhaps or perhaps a daughter, now has he really? then one understands the partnership and sees it all, don't tell me anything about it for I know I have no claim to ask the question the golden chain that once was forged being snapped and very proper.'

Flora put her hand tenderly on his, and gave him another of the youthful glances.

'Dear Arthur—force of habit, Mr Clennam every way more delicate and adapted to existing circumstances—I must beg to be excused for taking the liberty of this intrusion but I thought I might so far presume upon old times for ever faded never more to bloom as to call with Mr F.'s Aunt to congratulate and offer best wishes, A great deal superior to China not to be denied and much nearer though higher up!'

'I am very happy to see you,' said Clennam, 'and I thank you, Flora, very much for your kind remembrance.'

'More than I can say myself at any rate,' returned Flora, 'for I might have been dead and buried twenty distinct times over and no doubt whatever should have been before you had genuinely remembered Me or anything like it in spite of which one last remark I wish to make, one last explanation I wish to offer—'

'My dear Mrs Finching,' Arthur remonstrated in alarm.

'Oh not that disagreeable name, say Flora!'

'Flora, is it worth troubling yourself afresh to enter into explanations? I assure you none are needed. I am satisfied—I am perfectly satisfied.'

A diversion was occasioned here, by Mr F.'s Aunt making the following inexorable and awful statement:

'There's mile-stones on the Dover road!'

With such mortal hostility towards the human race did she discharge this missile, that Clennam was quite at a loss how to defend himself; the rather as he had been already perplexed in his mind by the honour of a visit from this venerable lady, when it was plain she held him in the utmost abhorrence. He could not but look at her with disconcertment, as she sat breathing bitterness and scorn, and staring leagues away. Flora, however, received the remark as if it had been of a most apposite and agreeable nature; approvingly observing aloud that Mr F.'s Aunt had a great deal of spirit. Stimulated either by this compliment, or by her burning indignation, that illustrious woman then added, 'Let him meet it if he can!' And, with a rigid movement of her stony reticule (an appendage of great size and of a fossil appearance), indicated that Clennam was the unfortunate person at whom the challenge was hurled.

'One last remark,' resumed Flora, 'I was going to say I wish to make one last explanation I wish to offer, Mr F.'s Aunt and myself would not have intruded on business hours Mr F. having been in business and though the wine trade still business is equally business call it what you will and business habits are just the same as witness Mr F. himself who had his slippers always on the mat at ten minutes before six in the afternoon and his boots inside the fender at ten minutes before eight in the morning to the moment in all weathers light or dark—would not therefore have intruded without a motive which being kindly meant it may be hoped will be kindly taken Arthur, Mr Clennam far more proper, even Doyce and Clennam probably more business-like.'

'Pray say nothing in the way of apology,' Arthur entreated. 'You are always welcome.'

'Very polite of you to say so Arthur—cannot remember Mr Clennam until the word is out, such is the habit of times for ever fled, and so true it is that oft in the stilly night ere slumber's chain has bound people, fond memory brings the light of other days around people—very polite but more polite than true I am afraid, for to go into the machinery business without so much as sending a line or a card to papa—I don't say me though there was a time but that is past and stern reality has now my gracious never mind—does not look like it you must confess.'

Even Flora's commas seemed to have fled on this occasion; she was so much more disjointed and voluble than in the preceding interview.

'Though indeed,' she hurried on, 'nothing else is to be expected and why should it be expected and if it's not to be expected why should it be, and I am far from blaming you or any one, When your mama and my papa worried us to death and severed the golden bowl—I mean bond but I dare say you know what I mean and if you don't you don't lose much and care just as little I will venture to add—when they severed the golden bond that bound us and threw us into fits of crying on the sofa nearly choked at least myself everything was changed and in giving my hand to Mr F. I know I did so with my eyes open but he was so very unsettled and in such low spirits that he had distractedly alluded to the river if not oil of something from the chemist's and I did it for the best.'

'My good Flora, we settled that before. It was all quite right.'

'It's perfectly clear you think so,' returned Flora, 'for you take it very coolly, if I hadn't known it to be China I should have guessed myself the Polar regions, dear Mr Clennam you are right however and I cannot blame you but as to Doyce and Clennam papa's property being about here we heard it from Pancks and but for him we never should have heard one word about it I am satisfied.'

'No, no, don't say that.'

'What nonsense not to say it Arthur—Doyce and Clennam—easier and less trying to me than Mr Clennam—when I know it and you know it too and can't deny it.'

'But I do deny it, Flora. I should soon have made you a friendly visit.'

'Ah!' said Flora, tossing her head. 'I dare say!' and she gave him another of the old looks. 'However when Pancks told us I made up my mind that Mr F.'s Aunt and I would come and call because when papa—which was before that—happened to mention her name to me and to say that you were interested in her I said at the moment Good gracious why not have her here then when there's anything to do instead of putting it out.'

'When you say Her,' observed Clennam, by this time pretty well bewildered, 'do you mean Mr F.'s—'

'My goodness, Arthur—Doyce and Clennam really easier to me with old remembrances—who ever heard of Mr F.'s Aunt doing needlework and going out by the day?'

'Going out by the day! Do you speak of Little Dorrit?' 'Why yes of course,' returned Flora; 'and of all the strangest names I ever heard the strangest, like a place down in the country with a turnpike, or a favourite pony or a puppy or a bird or something from a seed-shop to be put in a garden or a flower-pot and come up speckled.'

'Then, Flora,' said Arthur, with a sudden interest in the conversation, 'Mr Casby was so kind as to mention Little Dorrit to you, was he? What did he say?'

'Oh you know what papa is,' rejoined Flora, 'and how aggravatingly he sits looking beautiful and turning his thumbs over and over one another till he makes one giddy if one keeps one's eyes upon him, he said when we were talking of you—I don't know who began the subject Arthur (Doyce and Clennam) but I am sure it wasn't me, at least I hope not but you really must excuse my confessing more on that point.'

'Certainly,' said Arthur. 'By all means.'

'You are very ready,' pouted Flora, coming to a sudden stop in a captivating bashfulness, 'that I must admit, Papa said you had spoken of her in an earnest way and I said what I have told you and that's all.'

'That's all?' said Arthur, a little disappointed.

'Except that when Pancks told us of your having embarked in this business and with difficulty persuaded us that it was really you I said to Mr F.'s Aunt then we would come and ask you if it would be agreeable to all parties that she should be engaged at our house when required for I know she often goes to your mama's and I know that your mama has a very touchy temper Arthur—Doyce and Clennam—or I never might have married Mr F. and might have been at this hour but I am running into nonsense.'

'It was very kind of you, Flora, to think of this.'

Poor Flora rejoined with a plain sincerity which became her better than her youngest glances, that she was glad he thought so. She said it with so much heart that Clennam would have given a great deal to buy his old character of her on the spot, and throw it and the mermaid away for ever.

'I think, Flora,' he said, 'that the employment you can give Little Dorrit, and the kindness you can show her—'

'Yes and I will,' said Flora, quickly.

'I am sure of it—will be a great assistance and support to her. I do not feel that I have the right to tell you what I know of her, for I acquired the knowledge confidentially, and under circumstances that bind me to silence. But I have an interest in the little creature, and a respect for her that I cannot express to you. Her life has been one of such trial and devotion, and such quiet goodness, as you can scarcely imagine. I can hardly think of her, far less speak of her, without feeling moved. Let that feeling represent what I could tell you, and commit her to your friendliness with my thanks.'

Once more he put out his hand frankly to poor Flora; once more poor Flora couldn't accept it frankly, found it worth nothing openly, must make the old intrigue and mystery of it. As much to her own enjoyment as to his dismay, she covered it with a corner of her shawl as she took it. Then, looking towards the glass front of the counting-house, and seeing two figures approaching, she cried with infinite relish, 'Papa! Hush, Arthur, for Mercy's sake!' and tottered back to her chair with an amazing imitation of being in danger of swooning, in the dread surprise and maidenly flutter of her spirits.

The Patriarch, meanwhile, came inanely beaming towards the counting-house in the wake of Pancks. Pancks opened the door for him, towed him in, and retired to his own moorings in a corner.

'I heard from Flora,' said the Patriarch with his benevolent smile, 'that she was coming to call, coming to call. And being out, I thought I'd come also, thought I'd come also.'

The benign wisdom he infused into this declaration (not of itself profound), by means of his blue eyes, his shining head, and his long white hair, was most impressive. It seemed worth putting down among the noblest sentiments enunciated by the best of men. Also, when he said to Clennam, seating himself in the proffered chair, 'And you are in a new business, Mr Clennam? I wish you well, sir, I wish you well!' he seemed to have done benevolent wonders.

'Mrs Finching has been telling me, sir,' said Arthur, after making his acknowledgments; the relict of the late Mr F. meanwhile protesting, with a gesture, against his use of that respectable name; 'that she hopes occasionally to employ the young needlewoman you recommended to my mother. For which I have been thanking her.'

The Patriarch turning his head in a lumbering way towards Pancks, that assistant put up the note-book in which he had been absorbed, and took him in tow.

'You didn't recommend her, you know,' said Pancks; 'how could you? You knew nothing about her, you didn't. The name was mentioned to you, and you passed it on. That's what YOU did.'

'Well!' said Clennam. 'As she justifies any recommendation, it is much the same thing.'

'You are glad she turns out well,' said Pancks, 'but it wouldn't have been your fault if she had turned out ill. The credit's not yours as it is, and the blame wouldn't have been yours as it might have been. You gave no guarantee. You knew nothing about her.' 'You are not acquainted, then,' said Arthur, hazarding a random question, 'with any of her family?'

'Acquainted with any of her family?' returned Pancks. 'How should you be acquainted with any of her family? You never heard of 'em. You can't be acquainted with people you never heard of, can you? You should think not!'

All this time the Patriarch sat serenely smiling; nodding or shaking his head benevolently, as the case required.

'As to being a reference,' said Pancks, 'you know, in a general way, what being a reference means. It's all your eye, that is! Look at your tenants down the Yard here. They'd all be references for one another, if you'd let 'em. What would be the good of letting 'em? It's no satisfaction to be done by two men instead of one. One's enough. A person who can't pay, gets another person who can't pay, to guarantee that he can pay. Like a person with two wooden legs getting another person with two wooden legs, to guarantee that he has got two natural legs. It don't make either of them able to do a walking match. And four wooden legs are more troublesome to you than two, when you don't want any.' Mr Pancks concluded by blowing off that steam of his.

A momentary silence that ensued was broken by Mr F.'s Aunt, who had been sitting upright in a cataleptic state since her last public remark. She now underwent a violent twitch, calculated to produce a startling effect on the nerves of the uninitiated, and with the deadliest animosity observed:

'You can't make a head and brains out of a brass knob with nothing in it. You couldn't do it when your Uncle George was living; much less when he's dead.'

Mr Pancks was not slow to reply, with his usual calmness, 'Indeed, ma'am! Bless my soul! I'm surprised to hear it.' Despite his presence of mind, however, the speech of Mr F.'s Aunt produced a depressing effect on the little assembly; firstly, because it was impossible to disguise that Clennam's unoffending head was the particular temple of reason depreciated; and secondly, because nobody ever knew on these occasions whose Uncle George was referred to, or what spectral presence might be invoked under that appellation.

Therefore Flora said, though still not without a certain boastfulness and triumph in her legacy, that Mr F.'s Aunt was 'very lively to-day, and she thought they had better go.' But Mr F.'s Aunt proved so lively as to take the suggestion in unexpected dudgeon and declare that she would not go;

adding, with several injurious expressions, that if 'He'—too evidently meaning Clennam—wanted to get rid of her, 'let him chuck her out of winder;' and urgently expressing her desire to see 'Him' perform that ceremony.

In this dilemma, Mr Pancks, whose resources appeared equal to any emergency in the Patriarchal waters, slipped on his hat, slipped out at the counting-house door, and slipped in again a moment afterwards with an artificial freshness upon him, as if he had been in the country for some weeks. 'Why, bless my heart, ma'am!' said Mr Pancks, rubbing up his hair in great astonishment, 'is that you?

How do you do, ma'am? You are looking charming to-day! I am delighted to see you. Favour me with your arm, ma'am; we'll have a little walk together, you and me, if you'll honour me with your company.' And so escorted Mr F.'s Aunt down the private staircase of the counting-house with great gallantry and success. The patriarchal Mr Casby then rose with the air of having done it himself, and blandly followed: leaving his daughter, as she followed in her turn, to remark to her former lover in a distracted whisper (which she very much enjoyed), that they had drained the cup of life to the dregs; and further to hint mysteriously that the late Mr F. was at the bottom of it.

Alone again, Clennam became a prey to his old doubts in reference to his mother and Little Dorrit, and revolved the old thoughts and suspicions. They were all in his mind, blending themselves with the duties he was mechanically discharging, when a shadow on his papers caused him to look up for the cause. The cause was Mr Pancks. With his hat thrown back upon his ears as if his wiry prongs of hair had darted up like springs and cast it off, with his jet-black beads of eyes inquisitively sharp, with the fingers of his right hand in his mouth that he might bite the nails, and with the fingers of his left hand in reserve in his pocket for another course, Mr Pancks cast his shadow through the glass upon the books and papers.

Mr Pancks asked, with a little inquiring twist of his head, if he might come in again? Clennam replied with a nod of his head in the affirmative. Mr Pancks worked his way in, came alongside the desk, made himself fast by leaning his arms upon it, and started conversation with a puff and a snort.

'Mr F.'s Aunt is appeased, I hope?' said Clennam.

'All right, sir,' said Pancks.

'I am so unfortunate as to have awakened a strong animosity in the breast of that lady,' said Clennam. 'Do you know why?'

'Does SHE know why?' said Pancks.

'I suppose not.'

'*I* suppose not,' said Pancks.

He took out his note-book, opened it, shut it, dropped it into his hat, which was beside him on the desk, and looked in at it as it lay at the bottom of the hat: all with a great appearance of consideration.

'Mr Clennam,' he then began, 'I am in want of information, sir.'

'Connected with this firm?' asked Clennam.

'No,' said Pancks.

'With what then, Mr Pancks? That is to say, assuming that you want it of me.'

'Yes, sir; yes, I want it of you,' said Pancks, 'if I can persuade you to furnish it. A, B, C, D. DA, DE, DI, DO. Dictionary order.

Dorrit. That's the name, sir?'

Mr Pancks blew off his peculiar noise again, and fell to at his right-hand nails. Arthur looked searchingly at him; he returned the look.

'I don't understand you, Mr Pancks.'

'That's the name that I want to know about.'

'And what do you want to know?'

'Whatever you can and will tell me.' This comprehensive summary of his desires was not discharged without some heavy labouring on the part of Mr Pancks's machinery.

'This is a singular visit, Mr Pancks. It strikes me as rather extraordinary that you should come, with such an object, to me.'

'It may be all extraordinary together,' returned Pancks. 'It may be out of the ordinary course, and yet be business. In short, it is business. I am a man of business. What business have I in this present world, except to stick to business? No business.'

With his former doubt whether this dry hard personage were quite in earnest, Clennam again turned his eyes attentively upon his face. It was as scrubby and dingy as ever, and as eager and quick as ever, and he could see nothing lurking in it that was at all expressive of a latent mockery that had seemed to strike upon his ear in the voice.

'Now,' said Pancks, 'to put this business on its own footing, it's not my proprietor's.'

'Do you refer to Mr Casby as your proprietor?'

Pancks nodded. 'My proprietor. Put a case. Say, at my proprietor's I hear name—name of young person Mr Clennam wants to serve. Say, name first mentioned to my proprietor by Plornish in the Yard. Say, I go to Plornish. Say, I ask Plornish as a matter of business for information. Say, Plornish, though six weeks in arrear to my proprietor, declines. Say, Mrs Plornish declines. Say, both refer to Mr Clennam. Put the case.' 'Well?'

'Well, sir,' returned Pancks, 'say, I come to him. Say, here I am.'

With those prongs of hair sticking up all over his head, and his breath coming and going very hard and short, the busy Pancks fell back a step (in Tug metaphor, took half a turn astern) as if to show his dingy hull complete, then forged a-head again, and directed his quick glance by turns into his hat where his note-book was, and into Clennam's face.

'Mr Pancks, not to trespass on your grounds of mystery, I will be as plain with you as I can. Let me ask two questions. First—'

'All right!' said Pancks, holding up his dirty forefinger with his broken nail. 'I see! "What's your motive?"'

'Exactly.'

'Motive,' said Pancks, 'good. Nothing to do with my proprietor; not stateable at present, ridiculous to state at present; but good.

Desiring to serve young person, name of Dorrit,' said Pancks, with his forefinger still up as a caution. 'Better admit motive to be good.'

'Secondly, and lastly, what do you want to know?'

Mr Pancks fished up his note-book before the question was put, and buttoning it with care in an inner breast-pocket, and looking straight at Clennam all the time, replied with a pause and a puff, 'I want supplementary information of any sort.'

Clennam could not withhold a smile, as the panting little steam-tug, so useful to that unwieldy ship, the Casby, waited on and watched him as if it were seeking an opportunity of running in and rifling him of all he wanted before he could resist its manoeuvres; though there was that in Mr Pancks's eagerness, too, which awakened many wondering speculations in his mind. After a little consideration, he resolved to supply Mr Pancks with such leading information as it was in his power to impart him; well knowing that Mr Pancks, if he failed in his present research, was pretty sure to find other means of getting it.

He, therefore, first requesting Mr Pancks to remember his voluntary declaration that his proprietor had no part in the disclosure, and that his own intentions were good (two declarations which that coaly little gentleman with the greatest ardour repeated), openly told him that as to the Dorrit lineage or former place of habitation, he had no information to communicate, and that his knowledge of the family did not extend beyond the fact that it appeared to be now reduced to five members; namely, to two brothers, of whom one was single, and one a widower with three children. The ages of the whole family he made known to Mr Pancks, as nearly as he could guess at them; and finally he described to him the position of the Father of the Marshalsea, and the course of time and events through which he had become invested with that character. To all this, Mr Pancks, snorting and blowing in a more and more portentous manner as he became more interested, listened with great attention; appearing to derive the most agreeable sensations from the painfullest parts of the narrative, and particularly to be quite charmed by the account of William Dorrit's long imprisonment.

'In conclusion, Mr Pancks,' said Arthur, 'I have but to say this. I have reasons beyond a personal regard for speaking as little as I can of the Dorrit family, particularly at my mother's house' (Mr Pancks nodded), 'and for knowing as much as I can. So devoted a man of business as you are—eh?'

For Mr Pancks had suddenly made that blowing effort with unusual force.

'It's nothing,' said Pancks.

'So devoted a man of business as yourself has a perfect understanding of a fair bargain. I wish to make a fair bargain with you, that you shall enlighten me concerning the Dorrit family when you have it in your power, as I have enlightened you. It may not give you a very flattering idea of my business habits, that I failed to make my terms beforehand,' continued Clennam; 'but I prefer to make them a point of honour. I have seen so much business done on sharp principles that, to tell you the truth, Mr Pancks, I am tired of them.'

Mr Pancks laughed. 'It's a bargain, sir,' said he. 'You shall find me stick to it.'

After that, he stood a little while looking at Clennam, and biting his ten nails all round; evidently while he fixed in his mind what he had been told, and went over it carefully, before the means of supplying a gap in his memory should be no longer at hand. 'It's all right,' he said at last, 'and now I'll wish you good day, as it's collecting day in the Yard. By-the-bye, though. A lame foreigner with a stick.'

'Ay, ay. You do take a reference sometimes, I see?' said Clennam.

'When he can pay, sir,' replied Pancks. 'Take all you can get, and keep back all you can't be forced to give up. That's business. The lame foreigner with the stick wants a top room down the Yard. Is he good for it?'

'I am,' said Clennam, 'and I will answer for him.'

'That's enough. What I must have of Bleeding Heart Yard,' said Pancks, making a note of the case in his book, 'is my bond. I want my bond, you see. Pay up, or produce your property! That's the watchword down the Yard. The lame foreigner with the stick represented that you sent him; but he could represent (as far as that goes) that the Great Mogul sent him. He has been in the hospital, I believe?'

'Yes. Through having met with an accident. He is only just now discharged.'

'It's pauperising a man, sir, I have been shown, to let him into a hospital?' said Pancks. And again blew off that remarkable sound.

'I have been shown so too,' said Clennam, coldly.

Mr Pancks, being by that time quite ready for a start, got under steam in a moment, and, without any other signal or ceremony, was snorting down the step-ladder and working into Bleeding Heart Yard, before he seemed to be well out of the counting-house.

Throughout the remainder of the day, Bleeding Heart Yard was in consternation, as the grim Pancks cruised in it; haranguing the inhabitants on their backslidings in respect of payment, demanding his bond, breathing notices to quit and executions, running down defaulters, sending a swell of terror on before him, and leaving it in his wake. Knots of people, impelled by a fatal attraction, lurked outside any house in which he was known to be, listening for fragments of his discourses to the inmates; and, when he was rumoured to be coming down the stairs, often could not disperse so quickly but that he would be prematurely in among them, demanding their own arrears, and rooting them to the spot. Throughout the remainder of the day, Mr Pancks's What were they up to? and What did they mean by it? sounded all over the Yard. Mr Pancks wouldn't hear of excuses, wouldn't hear of complaints, wouldn't hear of repairs, wouldn't hear of anything but unconditional money down. Perspiring and puffing and darting about in eccentric directions, and becoming hotter and dingier every moment, he lashed the tide of the yard into a most agitated and turbid state. It had not settled down into calm water again full two hours after he had been seen fuming away on the horizon at the top of the steps.

There were several small assemblages of the Bleeding Hearts at the popular points of meeting in the Yard that night, among whom it was universally agreed that Mr Pancks was a hard man to have to do with; and that it was much to be regretted, so it was, that a gentleman like Mr Casby should put his rents in his hands, and never know him in his true light. For (said the Bleeding Hearts), if a gentleman with that head of hair and them eyes took his rents into his own hands, ma'am, there would be none of this worriting and wearing, and things would be very different.

At which identical evening hour and minute, the Patriarch—who had floated serenely through the Yard in the forenoon before the harrying began, with the express design of getting up this trustfulness in his shining bumps and silken locks—at which identical hour and minute, that first-rate humbug of a thousand guns was heavily floundering in the little Dock of his exhausted Tug at home, and was saying, as he turned his thumbs:

'A very bad day's work, Pancks, very bad day's work. It seems to me, sir, and I must insist on making this observation forcibly in justice to myself, that you ought to have got much more money, much more money.'

CHAPTER 24. Fortune-Telling

Little Dorrit received a call that same evening from Mr Plornish, who, having intimated that he wished to speak to her privately, in a series of coughs so very noticeable as to favour the idea that her father, as regarded her seamstress occupation, was an illustration of the axiom that there are no such stone-blind men as those who will not see, obtained an audience with her on the common staircase outside the door.

'There's been a lady at our place to-day, Miss Dorrit,' Plornish growled, 'and another one along with her as is a old wixen if ever I met with such. The way she snapped a person's head off, dear me!'

The mild Plornish was at first quite unable to get his mind away from Mr F.'s Aunt. 'For,' said he, to excuse himself, 'she is, I do assure you, the winegariest party.'

At length, by a great effort, he detached himself from the subject sufficiently to observe:

'But she's neither here nor there just at present. The other lady, she's Mr Casby's daughter; and if Mr Casby an't well off, none better, it an't through any fault of Pancks. For, as to Pancks, he does, he really does, he does indeed!'

Mr Plornish, after his usual manner, was a little obscure, but conscientiously emphatic.

'And what she come to our place for,' he pursued, 'was to leave word that if Miss Dorrit would step up to that card—which it's Mr Casby's house that is, and Pancks he has a office at the back, where he really does, beyond belief—she would be glad for to engage her. She was a old and a dear friend, she said particular, of Mr Clennam, and hoped for to prove herself a useful friend to his friend. Them was her words. Wishing to know whether Miss Dorrit could come to-morrow morning, I said I would see you, Miss, and inquire, and look round there to-night, to say yes, or, if you was engaged to-morrow, when?'

'I can go to-morrow, thank you,' said Little Dorrit. 'This is very kind of you, but you are always kind.'

Mr Plornish, with a modest disavowal of his merits, opened the room door for her readmission, and followed her in with such an exceedingly bald pretence of not having been out at all, that her father might have observed it without being very suspicious. In his affable unconsciousness, however, he took no heed. Plornish, after a little conversation, in which he blended his former duty as a Collegian with his present privilege as a humble outside friend, qualified again by his low estate as a plasterer, took his leave; making the tour of the prison before he left, and looking on at a game of skittles with the mixed feelings of an old inhabitant who had his private reasons for believing that it might be his destiny to come back again.

Early in the morning, Little Dorrit, leaving Maggy in high domestic trust, set off for the Patriarchal tent. She went by the Iron Bridge, though it cost her a penny, and walked more slowly in that part of her journey than in any other. At five minutes before eight her hand was on the Patriarchal knocker, which was quite as high as she could reach.

She gave Mrs Finching's card to the young woman who opened the door, and the young woman told her that 'Miss Flora'—Flora having, on her return to the parental roof, reinvested herself with the title under which she had lived there—was not yet out of her bedroom, but she was to please to walk up into Miss Flora's sitting-room. She walked up into Miss Flora's sitting-room, as in duty bound, and there found a breakfast-table comfortably laid for two, with a supplementary tray upon it laid for one. The young woman, disappearing for a few moments, returned to say that she was to please to take a chair by the fire, and to take off her bonnet and make herself at home. But Little Dorrit, being bashful, and not used to make herself at home on such occasions, felt at a loss how to do it; so she was still sitting near the door with her bonnet on, when Flora came in in a hurry half an hour afterwards.

Flora was so sorry to have kept her waiting, and good gracious why did she sit out there in the cold when she had expected to find her by the fire reading the paper, and hadn't that heedless girl given her the message then, and had she really been in her bonnet all this time, and pray for goodness sake let Flora take it off! Flora taking it off in the best-natured manner in the world, was so struck with the face disclosed, that she said, 'Why, what a good little thing you are, my dear!' and pressed her face between her hands like the gentlest of women.

It was the word and the action of a moment. Little Dorrit had hardly time to think how kind it was, when Flora dashed at the breakfast-table full of business, and plunged over head and ears into loquacity.

'Really so sorry that I should happen to be late on this morning of all mornings because my intention and my wish was to be ready to meet you when you came in and to say that any one that interested Arthur Clennam half so much must interest me and that I gave you the heartiest welcome and was so glad, instead of which they never called me and there I still am snoring I dare say if the truth was known and if you don't like either cold fowl or hot boiled ham which many people don't I dare say besides Jews and theirs are scruples of conscience which we must all respect though I must say I wish they had them equally strong when they sell us false articles for real that certainly ain't worth the money I shall be quite vexed,' said Flora.

Little Dorrit thanked her, and said, shyly, bread-and-butter and tea was all she usually—

'Oh nonsense my dear child I can never hear of that,' said Flora, turning on the urn in the most reckless manner, and making herself wink by splashing hot water into her eyes as she bent down to look into the teapot. 'You are coming here on the footing of a friend and companion you know if you will let me take that liberty and I should be ashamed of myself indeed if you could come here upon any other, besides which Arthur Clennam spoke in such terms—you are tired my dear.'

'No, ma'am.'

'You turn so pale you have walked too far before breakfast and I dare say live a great way off and ought to have had a ride,' said Flora, 'dear dear is there anything that would do you good?'

'Indeed I am quite well, ma'am. I thank you again and again, but I am quite well.'

'Then take your tea at once I beg,' said Flora, 'and this wing of fowl and bit of ham, don't mind me or wait for me, because I always carry in this tray myself to Mr F.'s Aunt who breakfasts in bed and a charming old lady too and very clever, Portrait of Mr F. behind the door and very like though too much forehead and as to a pillar with a marble pavement and balustrades and a mountain, I never saw him near it nor not likely in the wine trade, excellent man but not at all in that way.'

Little Dorrit glanced at the portrait, very imperfectly following the references to that work of art.

'Mr F. was so devoted to me that he never could bear me out of his sight,' said Flora, 'though of course I am unable to say how long that might have lasted if he hadn't been cut short while I was a new broom, worthy man but not poetical manly prose but not romance.'

Little Dorrit glanced at the portrait again. The artist had given it a head that would have been, in an intellectual point of view, top-heavy for Shakespeare. 'Romance, however,' Flora went on, busily arranging Mr F.'s Aunt's toast, 'as I openly said to Mr F. when he proposed to me and you will be surprised to hear that he proposed seven times once in a hackney-coach once in a boat once in a pew once on a donkey at Tunbridge Wells and the rest on his knees, Romance was fled with the early days of Arthur Clennam, our parents tore us asunder we became marble and stern reality usurped the throne, Mr F. said very much to his credit that he was perfectly aware of it and even preferred that state of things accordingly the word was spoken the fiat went forth and such is life you see my dear and yet we do not break but bend, pray make a good breakfast while I go in with the tray.'

She disappeared, leaving Little Dorrit to ponder over the meaning of her scattered words. She soon came back again; and at last began to take her own breakfast, talking all the while.

'You see, my dear,' said Flora, measuring out a spoonful or two of some brown liquid that smelt like brandy, and putting it into her tea, 'I am obliged to be careful to follow the directions of my medical man though the flavour is anything but agreeable being a poor creature and it may be have never recovered the shock received in youth from too much giving way to crying in the next room when separated from Arthur, have you known him long?'

As soon as Little Dorrit comprehended that she had been asked this question—for which time was necessary, the galloping pace of her new patroness having left her far behind—she answered that she had known Mr Clennam ever since his return.

'To be sure you couldn't have known him before unless you had been in China or had corresponded neither of which is likely,' returned Flora, 'for travelling-people usually get more or less mahogany and you are not at all so and as to corresponding what about? that's very true unless tea, so it was at his mother's was it really that you knew him first, highly sensible and firm but dreadfully severe—ought to be the mother of the man in the iron mask.'

'Mrs Clennam has been kind to me,' said Little Dorrit.

'Really? I am sure I am glad to hear it because as Arthur's mother it's naturally pleasant to my feelings to have a better opinion of her than I had before, though what she thinks of me when I run on as I am certain to do and she sits glowering at me like Fate in a go-cart—shocking comparison really—invalid and not her fault—I never know or can imagine.'

'Shall I find my work anywhere, ma'am?' asked Little Dorrit, looking timidly about; 'can I get it?'

'You industrious little fairy,' returned Flora, taking, in another cup of tea, another of the doses prescribed by her medical man, 'there's not the slightest hurry and it's better that we should begin by being confidential about our mutual friend—too cold a word for me at least I don't mean that, very proper expression mutual friend—than become through mere formalities not you but me like the Spartan boy with the fox biting him, which I hope you'll excuse my bringing up for of all the tiresome boys that will go tumbling into every sort of company that boy's the tiresomest.'

Little Dorrit, her face very pale, sat down again to listen. 'Hadn't I better work the while?' she asked. 'I can work and attend too. I would rather, if I may.'

Her earnestness was so expressive of her being uneasy without her work, that Flora answered, 'Well my dear whatever you like best,' and produced a basket of white handkerchiefs. Little Dorrit gladly put it by her side, took out her little pocket-housewife, threaded the needle, and began to hem.

'What nimble fingers you have,' said Flora, 'but are you sure you are well?'

'Oh yes, indeed!'

Flora put her feet upon the fender, and settled herself for a thorough good romantic disclosure. She started off at score, tossing her head, sighing in the most demonstrative manner, making a great deal of use of her eyebrows, and occasionally, but not often, glancing at the quiet face that bent over the work.

'You must know my dear,' said Flora, 'but that I have no doubt you know already not only because I have already thrown it out in a general way but because I feel I carry it stamped in burning what's his names upon my brow that before I was introduced to the late Mr F. I had been engaged to Arthur Clennam—Mr Clennam in public where reserve is necessary Arthur here—we were all in all to one another it was the morning of life it was bliss it was frenzy it was everything else of that sort in the highest degree, when rent asunder we turned to stone in which capacity Arthur went to China and I became the statue bride of the late Mr F.'

Flora, uttering these words in a deep voice, enjoyed herself immensely.

'To paint,' said she, 'the emotions of that morning when all was marble within and Mr F.'s Aunt followed in a glass-coach which it stands to reason must have been in shameful repair or it never could have broken down two streets from the house and Mr F.'s Aunt brought home like the fifth of November in a rush-bottomed chair I will not attempt, suffice it to say that the hollow form of breakfast took place in the dining-room downstairs that papa partaking too freely of pickled salmon was ill for weeks and that Mr F. and myself went upon a continental tour to Calais where the people fought for us on the pier until they separated us though not for ever that was not yet to be.'

The statue bride, hardly pausing for breath, went on, with the greatest complacency, in a rambling manner sometimes incidental to flesh and blood.

'I will draw a veil over that dreamy life, Mr F. was in good spirits his appetite was good he liked the cookery he considered the wine weak but palatable and all was well, we returned to the immediate neighbourhood of Number Thirty Little Gosling Street London Docks and settled down, ere we had yet fully detected the housemaid in selling the feathers out of the spare bed Gout flying upwards soared with Mr F. to another sphere.'

His relict, with a glance at his portrait, shook her head and wiped her eyes.

'I revere the memory of Mr F. as an estimable man and most indulgent husband, only necessary to mention Asparagus and it appeared or to hint at any little delicate thing to drink and it came like magic in a pint bottle it was not ecstasy but it was comfort, I returned to papa's roof and lived secluded if not happy during some years until one day papa came smoothly blundering in and said that Arthur Clennam awaited me below, I went below and found him ask me not what I found him except that he was still unmarried still unchanged!'

The dark mystery with which Flora now enshrouded herself might have stopped other fingers than the nimble fingers that worked near her.

They worked on without pause, and the busy head bent over them watching the stitches.

'Ask me not,' said Flora, 'if I love him still or if he still loves me or what the end is to be or when, we are surrounded by watchful eyes and it may be that we are destined to pine asunder it may be never more to be reunited not a word not a breath not a look to betray us all must be secret as the tomb wonder not therefore that even if I should seem comparatively cold to Arthur or Arthur should seem comparatively cold to me we have fatal reasons it is enough if we understand them hush!'

All of which Flora said with so much headlong vehemence as if she really believed it. There is not much doubt that when she worked herself into full mermaid condition, she did actually believe whatever she said in it.

'Hush!' repeated Flora, 'I have now told you all, confidence is established between us hush, for Arthur's sake I will always be a friend to you my dear girl and in Arthur's name you may always rely upon me.'

The nimble fingers laid aside the work, and the little figure rose and kissed her hand. 'You are very cold,' said Flora, changing to her own natural kind-hearted manner, and gaining greatly by the change. 'Don't work to-day. I am sure you are not well I am sure you are not strong.'

'It is only that I feel a little overcome by your kindness, and by Mr Clennam's kindness in confiding me to one he has known and loved so long.'

'Well really my dear,' said Flora, who had a decided tendency to be always honest when she gave herself time to think about it, 'it's as well to leave that alone now, for I couldn't undertake to say after all, but it doesn't signify lie down a little!'

'I have always been strong enough to do what I want to do, and I shall be quite well directly,' returned Little Dorrit, with a faint smile. 'You have overpowered me with gratitude, that's all. If I keep near the window for a moment I shall be quite myself.'

Flora opened a window, sat her in a chair by it, and considerately retired to her former place. It was a windy day, and the air stirring on Little Dorrit's face soon brightened it. In a very few minutes she returned to her basket of work, and her nimble fingers were as nimble as ever.

Quietly pursuing her task, she asked Flora if Mr Clennam had told her where she lived? When Flora replied in the negative, Little Dorrit said that she understood why he had been so delicate, but that she felt sure he would approve of her confiding her secret to Flora, and that she would therefore do so now with Flora's permission. Receiving an encouraging answer, she condensed the narrative of her life into a few scanty words about herself and a glowing eulogy upon her father; and Flora took it all in with a natural tenderness that quite understood it, and in which there was no incoherence.

When dinner-time came, Flora drew the arm of her new charge through hers, and led her down-stairs, and presented her to the Patriarch and Mr Pancks, who were already in the dining-room waiting to begin. (Mr F.'s Aunt was, for the time, laid up in ordinary in her chamber.) By those gentlemen she was received according to their characters; the Patriarch appearing to do her some inestimable service in saying that he was glad to see her, glad to see her; and Mr Pancks blowing off his favourite sound as a salute.

In that new presence she would have been bashful enough under any circumstances, and particularly under Flora's insisting on her drinking a glass of wine and eating of the best that was there; but her constraint was greatly increased by Mr Pancks. The demeanour of that gentleman at first suggested to her mind that he might be a taker of likenesses, so intently did he look at her, and so frequently did he glance at the little note-book by his side. Observing that he made no sketch, however, and that he talked about business only, she began to have suspicions that he represented some creditor of her father's, the balance due to whom was noted in that pocket volume. Regarded from this point of view Mr Pancks's puffings expressed injury and impatience, and each of his louder snorts became a demand for payment.

But here again she was undeceived by anomalous and incongruous conduct on the part of Mr Pancks himself. She had left the table half an hour, and was at work alone. Flora had 'gone to lie down' in the next room, concurrently with which retirement a smell of something to drink had broken out in the house. The Patriarch was fast asleep, with his philanthropic mouth open under a yellow pocket-handkerchief in the dining-room. At this quiet time, Mr Pancks softly appeared before her, urbanely nodding.

'Find it a little dull, Miss Dorrit?' inquired Pancks in a low voice.

'No, thank you, sir,' said Little Dorrit.

'Busy, I see,' observed Mr Pancks, stealing into the room by inches. 'What are those now, Miss Dorrit?'

'Handkerchiefs.'

'Are they, though!' said Pancks. 'I shouldn't have thought it.' Not in the least looking at them, but looking at Little Dorrit. 'Perhaps you wonder who I am. Shall I tell you? I am a fortune-teller.'

Little Dorrit now began to think he was mad.

'I belong body and soul to my proprietor,' said Pancks; 'you saw my proprietor having his dinner below. But I do a little in the other way, sometimes; privately, very privately, Miss Dorrit.'

Little Dorrit looked at him doubtfully, and not without alarm.

'I wish you'd show me the palm of your hand,' said Pancks. 'I should like to have a look at it. Don't let me be troublesome.' He was so far troublesome that he was not at all wanted there, but she laid her work in her lap for a moment, and held out her left hand with her thimble on it.

'Years of toil, eh?' said Pancks, softly, touching it with his blunt forefinger. 'But what else are we made for? Nothing. Hallo!' looking into the lines. 'What's this with bars? It's a College! And what's this with a grey gown and a black velvet cap? it's a father! And what's this with a clarionet? It's an uncle! And what's this in dancing-shoes? It's a sister! And what's this straggling about in an idle sort of a way? It's a brother! And what's this thinking for 'em all? Why, this is you, Miss Dorrit!' Her eyes met his as she looked up wonderingly into his face, and she thought that although his were sharp eyes, he was a brighter and gentler-looking man than she had supposed at dinner. His eyes were on her hand again directly, and her opportunity of confirming or correcting the impression was gone.

'Now, the deuce is in it,' muttered Pancks, tracing out a line in her hand with his clumsy finger, 'if this isn't me in the corner here! What do I want here? What's behind me?'

He carried his finger slowly down to the wrist, and round the wrist, and affected to look at the back of the hand for what was behind him.

'Is it any harm?' asked Little Dorrit, smiling.

'Deuce a bit!' said Pancks. 'What do you think it's worth?'

'I ought to ask you that. I am not the fortune-teller.'

'True,' said Pancks. 'What's it worth? You shall live to see, Miss Dorrit.'

Releasing the hand by slow degrees, he drew all his fingers through his prongs of hair, so that they stood up in their most portentous manner; and repeated slowly, 'Remember what I say, Miss Dorrit. You shall live to see.'

She could not help showing that she was much surprised, if it were only by his knowing so much about her.

'Ah! That's it!' said Pancks, pointing at her. 'Miss Dorrit, not that, ever!'

More surprised than before, and a little more frightened, she looked to him for an explanation of his last words.

'Not that,' said Pancks, making, with great seriousness, an imitation of a surprised look and manner that appeared to be unintentionally grotesque. 'Don't do that. Never on seeing me, no matter when, no matter where. I am nobody. Don't take on to mind me. Don't mention me. Take no notice. Will you agree, Miss Dorrit?'

'I hardly know what to say,' returned Little Dorrit, quite astounded. 'Why?'

'Because I am a fortune-teller. Pancks the gipsy. I haven't told you so much of your fortune yet, Miss Dorrit, as to tell you what's behind me on that little hand. I have told you you shall live to see. Is it agreed, Miss Dorrit?'

'Agreed that I—am—to—'

'To take no notice of me away from here, unless I take on first. Not to mind me when I come and go. It's very easy. I am no loss, I am not handsome, I am not good company, I am only my proprietors grubber. You need do no more than think, "Ah! Pancks the gipsy at his fortune-telling—he'll tell the rest of my fortune one day—I shall live to know it." Is it agreed, Miss Dorrit?'

'Ye-es,' faltered Little Dorrit, whom he greatly confused, 'I suppose so, while you do no harm.'

'Good!' Mr Pancks glanced at the wall of the adjoining room, and stooped forward. 'Honest creature, woman of capital points, but heedless and a loose talker, Miss Dorrit.' With that he rubbed his hands as if the interview had been very satisfactory to him, panted away to the door, and urbanely nodded himself out again.

If Little Dorrit were beyond measure perplexed by this curious conduct on the part of her new acquaintance, and by finding herself involved in this singular treaty, her perplexity was not diminished by ensuing circumstances. Besides that Mr Pancks took every opportunity afforded him in Mr Casby's house of significantly glancing at her and snorting at her—which was not much, after what he had done already—he began to pervade her daily life. She saw him in the street, constantly. When she went to Mr Casby's, he was always there. When she went to Mrs Clennam's, he came there on any pretence, as if to keep her in his sight. A week had not gone by, when she found him to her astonishment in the Lodge one night, conversing with the turnkey on duty, and to all appearance one of his familiar companions. Her next surprise was to find him equally at his ease within the prison; to hear of his presenting himself among the visitors at her father's Sunday levee; to see him arm in arm with a Collegiate friend about the yard; to learn, from Fame, that he had greatly distinguished himself one evening at the social club that held its meetings in the Snuggery, by addressing a speech to the members of the institution, singing a song, and treating the company to five gallons of ale—report madly added a bushel of shrimps. The effect on Mr Plornish of such of these phenomena as he became an eye-witness of in his faithful visits, made an impression on Little Dorrit only second to that produced by the phenomena themselves. They seemed to gag and bind him. He could only stare, and sometimes weakly mutter that it wouldn't be believed down Bleeding Heart Yard that this was Pancks; but he never said a word more, or made a sign more, even to Little Dorrit.

Mr Pancks crowned his mysteries by making himself acquainted with Tip in some unknown manner, and taking a Sunday saunter into the College on that gentleman's arm. Throughout he never took any notice of Little Dorrit, save once or twice when he happened to come close to her and there was no one very near; on which occasions, he said in passing, with a friendly look and a puff of encouragement, 'Pancks the gipsy—fortune-telling.'

Little Dorrit worked and strove as usual, wondering at all this, but keeping her wonder, as she had from her earliest years kept many heavier loads, in her own breast. A change had stolen, and was stealing yet, over the patient heart. Every day found her something more retiring than the day before. To pass in and out of the prison unnoticed, and elsewhere to be overlooked and forgotten, were, for herself, her chief desires.

To her own room too, strangely assorted room for her delicate youth and character, she was glad to retreat as often as she could without desertion of any duty. There were afternoon times when she was unemployed, when visitors dropped in to play a hand at cards with her father, when she could be spared and was better away. Then she would flit along the yard, climb the scores of stairs that led to her room, and take her seat at the window. Many combinations did those spikes upon the wall assume, many light shapes did the strong iron weave itself into, many golden touches fell upon the rust, while Little Dorrit sat there musing. New zig-zags sprung into the cruel pattern sometimes, when she saw it through a burst of tears; but beautified or hardened still, always over it and under it and through it, she was fain to look in her solitude, seeing everything with that ineffaceable brand.

A garret, and a Marshalsea garret without compromise, was Little Dorrit's room. Beautifully kept, it was ugly in itself, and had little but cleanliness and air to set it off; for what embellishment she had ever been able to buy, had gone to her father's room. Howbeit, for this poor place she showed an increasing love; and to sit in it alone became her favourite rest.

Insomuch, that on a certain afternoon during the Pancks mysteries, when she was seated at her window, and heard Maggy's well-known step coming up the stairs, she was very much disturbed by the apprehension of being summoned away. As Maggy's step came higher up and nearer, she trembled and faltered; and it was as much as she could do to speak, when Maggy at length appeared.

'Please, Little Mother,' said Maggy, panting for breath, 'you must come down and see him. He's here.'

'Who, Maggy?'

'Who, o' course Mr Clennam. He's in your father's room, and he says to me, Maggy, will you be so kind and go and say it's only me.'

'I am not very well, Maggy. I had better not go. I am going to lie down. See! I lie down now, to ease my head. Say, with my grateful regard, that you left me so, or I would have come.'

'Well, it an't very polite though, Little Mother,' said the staring Maggy, 'to turn your face away, neither!'

Maggy was very susceptible to personal slights, and very ingenious in inventing them. 'Putting both your hands afore your face too!' she went on. 'If you can't bear the looks of a poor thing, it would be better to tell her so at once, and not go and shut her out like that, hurting her feelings and breaking her heart at ten year old, poor thing!'

'It's to ease my head, Maggy.'

'Well, and if you cry to ease your head, Little Mother, let me cry too. Don't go and have all the crying to yourself,' expostulated Maggy, 'that an't not being greedy.' And immediately began to blubber.

It was with some difficulty that she could be induced to go back with the excuse; but the promise of being told a story—of old her great delight—

on condition that she concentrated her faculties upon the errand and left her little mistress to herself for an hour longer, combined with a misgiving on Maggy's part that she had left her good temper at the bottom of the staircase, prevailed. So away she went, muttering her message all the way to keep it in her mind, and, at the appointed time, came back.

'He was very sorry, I can tell you,' she announced, 'and wanted to send a doctor. And he's coming again to-morrow he is and I don't think he'll have a good sleep to-night along o' hearing about your head, Little Mother. Oh my! Ain't you been a-crying!'

'I think I have, a little, Maggy.'

'A little! Oh!'

'But it's all over now—all over for good, Maggy. And my head is much better and cooler, and I am quite comfortable. I am very glad I did not go down.'

Her great staring child tenderly embraced her; and having smoothed her hair, and bathed her forehead and eyes with cold water (offices in which her awkward hands became skilful), hugged her again, exulted in her brighter looks, and stationed her in her chair by the window. Over against this chair, Maggy, with apoplectic exertions that were not at all required, dragged the box which was her seat on story-telling occasions, sat down upon it, hugged her own knees, and said, with a voracious appetite for stories, and with widely-opened eyes:

'Now, Little Mother, let's have a good 'un!'

'What shall it be about, Maggy?'

'Oh, let's have a princess,' said Maggy, 'and let her be a reg'lar one. Beyond all belief, you know!'

Little Dorrit considered for a moment; and with a rather sad smile upon her face, which was flushed by the sunset, began:

'Maggy, there was once upon a time a fine King, and he had everything he could wish for, and a great deal more. He had gold and silver, diamonds and rubies, riches of every kind. He had palaces, and he had—'

'Hospitals,' interposed Maggy, still nursing her knees. 'Let him have hospitals, because they're so comfortable. Hospitals with lots of Chicking.'

'Yes, he had plenty of them, and he had plenty of everything.'

'Plenty of baked potatoes, for instance?' said Maggy.

'Plenty of everything.'

'Lor!' chuckled Maggy, giving her knees a hug. 'Wasn't it prime!'

'This King had a daughter, who was the wisest and most beautiful Princess that ever was seen. When she was a child she understood all her lessons before her masters taught them to her; and when she was grown up, she was the wonder of the world. Now, near the Palace where this Princess lived, there was a cottage in which there was a poor little tiny woman, who lived all alone by herself.'

'An old woman,' said Maggy, with an unctuous smack of her lips.

'No, not an old woman. Quite a young one.'

'I wonder she warn't afraid,' said Maggy. 'Go on, please.'

'The Princess passed the cottage nearly every day, and whenever she went by in her beautiful carriage, she saw the poor tiny woman spinning at her wheel, and she looked at the tiny woman, and the tiny woman looked at her. So, one day she stopped the coachman a little way from the cottage, and got out and walked on and peeped in at the door, and there, as usual, was the tiny woman spinning at her wheel, and she looked at the Princess, and the Princess looked at her.'

'Like trying to stare one another out,' said Maggy. 'Please go on, Little Mother.'

'The Princess was such a wonderful Princess that she had the power of knowing secrets, and she said to the tiny woman, Why do you keep it there? This showed her directly that the Princess knew why she lived all alone by herself spinning at her wheel, and she kneeled down at the Princess's feet, and asked her never to betray her. So the Princess said, I never will betray you. Let me see it. So the tiny woman closed the shutter of the cottage window and fastened the door, and trembling from head to foot for fear that any one should suspect her, opened a very secret place and showed the Princess a shadow.'

'Lor!' said Maggy. 'It was the shadow of Some one who had gone by long before: of Some one who had gone on far away quite out of reach, never, never to come back. It was bright to look at; and when the tiny woman showed it to the Princess, she was proud of it with all her heart, as a great, great treasure. When the Princess had considered it a little while, she said to the tiny woman, And you keep watch over this every day? And she cast down her eyes, and whispered, Yes. Then the Princess said, Remind me why. To which the other replied, that no one so good and kind had ever passed that way, and that was why in the beginning. She said, too, that nobody missed it, that nobody was the worse for it, that Some one had gone on, to those who were expecting him—'

'Some one was a man then?' interposed Maggy.

Little Dorrit timidly said Yes, she believed so; and resumed:

'—Had gone on to those who were expecting him, and that this remembrance was stolen or kept back from nobody. The Princess made answer, Ah! But when the cottager died it would be discovered there. The tiny woman told her No; when that time came, it would sink quietly into her own grave, and would never be found.'

'Well, to be sure!' said Maggy. 'Go on, please.'

'The Princess was very much astonished to hear this, as you may suppose, Maggy.' ('And well she might be,' said Maggy.)

'So she resolved to watch the tiny woman, and see what came of it. Every day she drove in her beautiful carriage by the cottage-door, and there she saw the tiny woman always alone by herself spinning at her wheel, and she looked at the tiny woman, and the tiny woman looked at her. At last one day the wheel was still, and the tiny woman was not to be seen. When the Princess made inquiries why the wheel had stopped, and where the tiny woman was, she was informed that the wheel had stopped because there was nobody to turn it, the tiny woman being dead.'

('They ought to have took her to the Hospital,' said Maggy, and then she'd have got over it.')

'The Princess, after crying a very little for the loss of the tiny woman, dried her eyes and got out of her carriage at the place where she had stopped it before, and went to the cottage and peeped in at the door. There was nobody to look at her now, and nobody for her to look at, so she went in at once to search for the treasured shadow. But there was no sign of it to be found anywhere; and then she knew that the tiny woman had told her the truth, and that it would never give anybody any trouble, and that it had sunk quietly into her own grave, and that she and it were at rest together.

'That's all, Maggy.'

The sunset flush was so bright on Little Dorrit's face when she came thus to the end of her story, that she interposed her hand to shade it.

'Had she got to be old?' Maggy asked.

'The tiny woman?' 'Ah!'

'I don't know,' said Little Dorrit. 'But it would have been just the same if she had been ever so old.'

'Would it raly!' said Maggy. 'Well, I suppose it would though.' And sat staring and ruminating.

She sat so long with her eyes wide open, that at length Little Dorrit, to entice her from her box, rose and looked out of window. As she glanced down into the yard, she saw Pancks come in and leer up with the corner of his eye as he went by.

'Who's he, Little Mother?' said Maggy. She had joined her at the window and was leaning on her shoulder. 'I see him come in and out often.'

'I have heard him called a fortune-teller,' said Little Dorrit. 'But I doubt if he could tell many people even their past or present fortunes.'

'Couldn't have told the Princess hers?' said Maggy.

Little Dorrit, looking musingly down into the dark valley of the prison, shook her head.

'Nor the tiny woman hers?' said Maggy.

'No,' said Little Dorrit, with the sunset very bright upon her. 'But let us come away from the window.'

CHAPTER 25. Conspirators and Others

The private residence of Mr Pancks was in Pentonville, where he lodged on the second-floor of a professional gentleman in an extremely small way, who had an inner-door within the street door, poised on a spring and starting open with a click like a trap; and who wrote up in the fan-light, RUGG, GENERAL AGENT, ACCOUNTANT, DEBTS RECOVERED.

This scroll, majestic in its severe simplicity, illuminated a little slip of front garden abutting on the thirsty high-road, where a few of the dustiest of leaves hung their dismal heads and led a life of choking. A professor of writing occupied the first-floor, and enlivened the garden railings with glass-cases containing choice examples of what his pupils had been before six lessons and while the whole of his young family shook the table, and what they had become after six lessons when the young family was under restraint. The tenancy of Mr Pancks was limited to one airy bedroom; he covenanting and agreeing with Mr Rugg his landlord, that in consideration of a certain scale of payments accurately defined, and on certain verbal notice duly given, he should be at liberty to elect to share the Sunday breakfast, dinner, tea, or supper, or each or any or all of those repasts or meals of Mr and Miss Rugg (his daughter) in the back-parlour.

Miss Rugg was a lady of a little property which she had acquired, together with much distinction in the neighbourhood, by having her heart severely lacerated and her feelings mangled by a middle-aged baker resident in the vicinity, against whom she had, by the agency of Mr Rugg, found it necessary to proceed at law to recover damages for a breach of promise of marriage. The baker having been, by the counsel for Miss Rugg, witheringly denounced on that occasion up to the full amount of twenty guineas, at the rate of about eighteen-pence an epithet, and having been cast in corresponding damages, still suffered occasional persecution from the youth of Pentonville. But Miss Rugg, environed by the majesty of the law, and having her damages invested in the public securities, was regarded with consideration.

In the society of Mr Rugg, who had a round white visage, as if all his blushes had been drawn out of him long ago, and who had a ragged yellow head like a worn-out hearth broom; and in the society of Miss Rugg, who had little nankeen spots, like shirt buttons, all over her face, and whose own yellow tresses were rather scrubby than luxuriant; Mr Pancks had usually dined on Sundays for some few years, and had twice a week, or so, enjoyed an evening collation of bread, Dutch cheese, and porter. Mr Pancks was one of the very few marriageable men for whom Miss Rugg had no terrors, the argument with which he reassured himself being twofold; that is to say, firstly, 'that it wouldn't do twice,' and secondly, 'that he wasn't worth it.' Fortified within this double armour, Mr Pancks snorted at Miss Rugg on easy terms.

Up to this time, Mr Pancks had transacted little or no business at his quarters in Pentonville, except in the sleeping line; but now that he had become a fortune-teller, he was often closeted after midnight with Mr Rugg in his little front-parlour office, and even after those untimely hours, burnt tallow in his bed-room. Though his duties as his proprietor's grubber were in no wise lessened; and though that service bore no greater resemblance to a bed of roses than was to be discovered in its many thorns; some new branch of industry made a constant demand upon him. When he cast off the Patriarch at night, it was only to take an anonymous craft in tow, and labour away afresh in other waters.

The advance from a personal acquaintance with the elder Mr Chivery to an introduction to his amiable wife and disconsolate son, may have been easy; but easy or not, Mr Pancks soon made it. He nestled in the bosom of the tobacco business within a week or two after his first appearance in the College, and particularly addressed himself to the cultivation of a good understanding with Young John. In this endeavour he so prospered as to lure that pining shepherd forth from the groves, and tempt him to undertake mysterious missions; on which he began to disappear at uncertain intervals for as long a space as two or three days together. The prudent Mrs Chivery, who wondered greatly at this change, would have protested against it as detrimental to the Highland typification on the doorpost but for two forcible reasons; one, that her John was roused to take strong interest in the business which these starts were supposed to advance—and this she held to be good for his drooping spirits; the other, that Mr Pancks confidentially agreed to pay her, for the occupation of her son's time, at the handsome rate of seven and sixpence per day. The proposal originated with himself, and was couched in the pithy terms, 'If your John is weak enough, ma'am, not to take it, that is no reason why you should be, don't you see? So, quite between ourselves, ma'am, business being business, here it is!'

What Mr Chivery thought of these things, or how much or how little he knew about them, was never gathered from himself. It has been already remarked that he was a man of few words; and it may be here observed that he had imbibed a professional habit of locking everything up. He locked himself up as carefully as he locked up the Marshalsea debtors. Even his custom of bolting his meals may have been a part of an uniform whole; but there is no question, that, as to all other purposes, he kept his mouth as he kept the Marshalsea door. He never opened it without occasion. When it was necessary to let anything out, he opened it a little way, held it open just as long as sufficed for the purpose, and locked it again.

Even as he would be sparing of his trouble at the Marshalsea door, and would keep a visitor who wanted to go out, waiting for a few moments if he saw another visitor coming down the yard, so that one turn of the key should suffice for both, similarly he would often reserve a remark if he perceived another on its way to his lips, and would deliver himself of the two together. As to any key to his inner knowledge being to be found in his face, the Marshalsea key was as legible as an index to the individual characters and histories upon which it was turned.

That Mr Pancks should be moved to invite any one to dinner at Pentonville, was an unprecedented fact in his calendar. But he invited Young John to dinner, and even brought him within range of the dangerous (because expensive) fascinations of Miss Rugg. The banquet was appointed for a Sunday, and Miss Rugg with her own hands stuffed a leg of mutton with oysters on the occasion, and sent it to the baker's—not THE baker's but an opposition establishment. Provision of oranges, apples, and nuts was also made. And rum was brought home by Mr Pancks on Saturday night, to gladden the visitor's heart. The store of creature comforts was not the chief part of the visitor's reception. Its special feature was a foregone family confidence and sympathy. When Young John appeared at half-past one without the ivory hand and waistcoat of golden sprigs, the sun shorn of his beams by disastrous clouds, Mr Pancks presented him to the yellow-haired Ruggs as the young man he had so often mentioned who loved Miss Dorrit.
'I am glad,' said Mr Rugg, challenging him specially in that character, 'to have the distinguished gratification of making your acquaintance, sir. Your feelings do you honour. You are young; may you never outlive your

feelings! If I was to outlive my own feelings, sir,' said Mr Rugg, who was a man of many words, and was considered to possess a remarkably good address; 'if I was to outlive my own feelings, I'd leave fifty pound in my will to the man who would put me out of existence.'

Miss Rugg heaved a sigh.

'My daughter, sir,' said Mr Rugg. 'Anastatia, you are no stranger to the state of this young man's affections. My daughter has had her trials, sir'—Mr Rugg might have used the word more pointedly in the singular number—'and she can feel for you.'

Young John, almost overwhelmed by the touching nature of this greeting, professed himself to that effect.

'What I envy you, sir, is,' said Mr Rugg, 'allow me to take your hat—we are rather short of pegs—I'll put it in the corner, nobody will tread on it there—What I envy you, sir, is the luxury of your own feelings. I belong to a profession in which that luxury is sometimes denied us.'

Young John replied, with acknowledgments, that he only hoped he did what was right, and what showed how entirely he was devoted to Miss Dorrit. He wished to be unselfish; and he hoped he was. He wished to do anything as laid in his power to serve Miss Dorrit, altogether putting himself out of sight; and he hoped he did. It was but little that he could do, but he hoped he did it.

'Sir,' said Mr Rugg, taking him by the hand, 'you are a young man that it does one good to come across. You are a young man that I should like to put in the witness-box, to humanise the minds of the legal profession. I hope you have brought your appetite with you, and intend to play a good knife and fork?'

'Thank you, sir,' returned Young John, 'I don't eat much at present.'

Mr Rugg drew him a little apart. 'My daughter's case, sir,' said he, 'at the time when, in vindication of her outraged feelings and her sex, she became the plaintiff in Rugg and Bawkins. I suppose I could have put it in evidence, Mr Chivery, if I had thought it worth my while, that the amount of solid sustenance my daughter consumed at that period did not exceed ten ounces per week.' 'I think I go a little beyond that, sir,' returned the other, hesitating, as if he confessed it with some shame.

'But in your case there's no fiend in human form,' said Mr Rugg, with argumentative smile and action of hand. 'Observe, Mr Chivery!

No fiend in human form!' 'No, sir, certainly,' Young John added with simplicity, 'I should be very sorry if there was.'

'The sentiment,' said Mr Rugg, 'is what I should have expected from your known principles. It would affect my daughter greatly, sir, if she heard it. As I perceive the mutton, I am glad she didn't hear it. Mr Pancks, on this occasion, pray face me. My dear, face Mr Chivery. For what we are going to receive, may we (and Miss Dorrit) be truly thankful!'

But for a grave waggishness in Mr Rugg's manner of delivering this introduction to the feast, it might have appeared that Miss Dorrit was expected to be one of the company. Pancks recognised the sally in his usual way, and took in his provender in his usual way. Miss Rugg, perhaps making up some of her arrears, likewise took very kindly to the mutton, and it rapidly diminished to the bone. A bread-and-butter pudding entirely disappeared, and a considerable amount of cheese and radishes vanished by the same means. Then came the dessert.

Then also, and before the broaching of the rum and water, came Mr Pancks's note-book. The ensuing business proceedings were brief but curious, and rather in the nature of a conspiracy. Mr Pancks looked over his note-book, which was now getting full, studiously; and picked out little extracts, which he wrote on separate slips of paper on the table; Mr Rugg, in the meanwhile, looking at him with close attention, and Young John losing his uncollected eye in mists of meditation. When Mr Pancks, who supported the character of chief conspirator, had completed his extracts, he looked them over, corrected them, put up his note-book, and held them like a hand at cards.

'Now, there's a churchyard in Bedfordshire,' said Pancks. 'Who takes it?'

'I'll take it, sir,' returned Mr Rugg, 'if no one bids.'

Mr Pancks dealt him his card, and looked at his hand again.

'Now, there's an Enquiry in York,' said Pancks. 'Who takes it?'

'I'm not good for York,' said Mr Rugg.

'Then perhaps,' pursued Pancks, 'you'll be so obliging, John Chivery?' Young John assenting, Pancks dealt him his card, and consulted his hand again.

'There's a Church in London; I may as well take that. And a Family Bible; I may as well take that, too. That's two to me. Two to me,' repeated Pancks, breathing hard over his cards. 'Here's a Clerk at Durham for you, John, and an old seafaring gentleman at Dunstable for you, Mr Rugg. Two to me, was it? Yes, two to me. Here's a Stone; three to me. And a Still-born Baby; four to me. And all, for the present, told.' When he had thus disposed of his cards, all being done very quietly and in a suppressed tone, Mr Pancks puffed his way into his own breast-pocket and tugged out a canvas bag; from which, with a sparing hand, he told forth money for travelling expenses in two little portions. 'Cash goes out fast,' he said anxiously, as he pushed a portion to each of his male companions, 'very fast.'

'I can only assure you, Mr Pancks,' said Young John, 'that I deeply regret my circumstances being such that I can't afford to pay my own charges, or that it's not advisable to allow me the time necessary for my doing the distances on foot; because nothing would give me greater satisfaction than to walk myself off my legs without fee or reward.'

This young man's disinterestedness appeared so very ludicrous in the eyes of Miss Rugg, that she was obliged to effect a precipitate retirement from the company, and to sit upon the stairs until she had had her laugh out. Meanwhile Mr Pancks, looking, not without some pity, at Young John, slowly and thoughtfully twisted up his canvas bag as if he were wringing its neck. The lady, returning as he restored it to his pocket, mixed rum and water for the party, not forgetting her fair self, and handed to every one his glass. When all were supplied, Mr Rugg rose, and silently holding out his glass at arm's length above the centre of the table, by that gesture invited the other three to add theirs, and to unite in a general conspiratorial clink. The ceremony was effective up to a certain point, and would have been wholly so throughout, if Miss Rugg, as she raised her glass to her lips in completion of it, had not happened to look at Young John; when she was again so overcome by the contemptible comicality of his disinterestedness as to splutter some ambrosial drops of rum and water around, and withdraw in confusion.

Such was the dinner without precedent, given by Pancks at Pentonville; and such was the busy and strange life Pancks led. The only waking moments at which he appeared to relax from his cares, and to recreate himself by going anywhere or saying anything without a pervading object, were when he showed a dawning interest in the lame foreigner with the stick, down Bleeding Heart Yard.

The foreigner, by name John Baptist Cavalletto—they called him Mr Baptist in the Yard—was such a chirping, easy, hopeful little fellow, that his attraction for Pancks was probably in the force of contrast. Solitary, weak, and scantily acquainted with the most necessary words of the only language in which he could communicate with the people about him, he went with the stream of his fortunes, in a brisk way that was new in those parts. With little to eat, and less to drink, and nothing to wear but what he wore upon him, or had brought tied up in one of the smallest bundles that ever were seen, he put as bright a face upon it as if he were in the most flourishing circumstances when he first hobbled up and down the Yard, humbly propitiating the general good-will with his white teeth.

It was uphill work for a foreigner, lame or sound, to make his way with the Bleeding Hearts. In the first place, they were vaguely persuaded that every foreigner had a knife about him; in the second, they held it to be a sound constitutional national axiom that he ought to go home to his own country. They never thought of inquiring how many of their own countrymen would be returned upon their hands from divers parts of the world, if the principle were generally recognised; they considered it particularly and peculiarly British. In the third place, they had a notion that it was a sort of Divine visitation upon a foreigner that he was not an Englishman, and that all kinds of calamities happened to his country because it did things that England did not, and did not do things that England did. In this belief, to be sure, they had long been carefully trained by the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings, who were always proclaiming to them, officially, that no country which failed to submit itself to those two large families could possibly hope to be under the protection of Providence; and who, when they believed it, disparaged them in private as the most prejudiced people under the sun.

This, therefore, might be called a political position of the Bleeding Hearts; but they entertained other objections to having foreigners in the Yard. They believed that foreigners were always badly off; and though they were as ill off themselves as they could desire to be, that did not diminish the force of the objection. They believed that foreigners were dragooned and bayoneted; and though they certainly got their own skulls promptly fractured if they showed any ill-humour, still it was with a blunt instrument, and that didn't count. They believed that foreigners were always immoral; and though they had an occasional assize at home, and now and then a divorce case or so, that had nothing to do with it. They believed that foreigners had no independent spirit, as never being escorted to the poll in droves by Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle, with colours flying and the tune of

Rule Britannia playing. Not to be tedious, they had many other beliefs of a similar kind.

Against these obstacles, the lame foreigner with the stick had to make head as well as he could; not absolutely single-handed, because Mr Arthur Clennam had recommended him to the Plornishes (he lived at the top of the same house), but still at heavy odds. However, the Bleeding Hearts were kind hearts; and when they saw the little fellow cheerily limping about with a good-humoured face, doing no harm, drawing no knives, committing no outrageous immoralities, living chiefly on farinaceous and milk diet, and playing with Mrs Plornish's children of an evening, they began to think that although he could never hope to be an Englishman, still it would be hard to visit that affliction on his head. They began to accommodate themselves to his level, calling him 'Mr Baptist,' but treating him like a baby, and laughing immoderately at his lively gestures and his childish English—more, because he didn't mind it, and laughed too. They spoke to him in very loud voices as if he were stone deaf. They constructed sentences, by way of teaching him the language in its purity, such as were addressed by the savages to Captain Cook, or by Friday to Robinson Crusoe. Mrs Plornish was particularly ingenious in this art; and attained so much celebrity for saying 'Me ope you leg well soon,' that it was considered in the Yard but a very short remove indeed from speaking Italian. Even Mrs Plornish herself began to think that she had a natural call towards that language. As he became more popular, household objects were brought into requisition for his instruction in a copious vocabulary; and whenever he appeared in the Yard ladies would fly out at their doors crying 'Mr Baptist—tea-pot!' 'Mr Baptist—dust-pan!' 'Mr Baptist—flour-dredger!' 'Mr Baptist—coffee-biggin!' At the same time exhibiting those articles, and penetrating him with a sense of the appalling difficulties of the Anglo-Saxon tongue.

It was in this stage of his progress, and in about the third week of his occupation, that Mr Pancks's fancy became attracted by the little man. Mounting to his attic, attended by Mrs Plornish as interpreter, he found Mr Baptist with no furniture but his bed on the ground, a table, and a chair, carving with the aid of a few simple tools, in the blithest way possible.

'Now, old chap,' said Mr Pancks, 'pay up!'

He had his money ready, folded in a scrap of paper, and laughingly handed it in; then with a free action, threw out as many fingers of his right hand as there were shillings, and made a cut crosswise in the air for an odd sixpence.

'Oh!' said Mr Pancks, watching him, wonderingly. 'That's it, is it? You're a quick customer. It's all right. I didn't expect to receive it, though.'

Mrs Plornish here interposed with great condescension, and explained to Mr Baptist. 'E please. E glad get money.'

The little man smiled and nodded. His bright face seemed uncommonly attractive to Mr Pancks. 'How's he getting on in his limb?' he asked Mrs Plornish.

'Oh, he's a deal better, sir,' said Mrs Plornish. 'We expect next week he'll be able to leave off his stick entirely.' (The opportunity being too favourable to be lost, Mrs Plornish displayed her great accomplishment by explaining with pardonable pride to Mr Baptist, 'E ope you leg well soon.')

'He's a merry fellow, too,' said Mr Pancks, admiring him as if he were a mechanical toy. 'How does he live?'

'Why, sir,' rejoined Mrs Plornish, 'he turns out to have quite a power of carving them flowers that you see him at now.' (Mr Baptist, watching their faces as they spoke, held up his work. Mrs Plornish interpreted in her Italian manner, on behalf of Mr Pancks, 'E please. Double good!')

'Can he live by that?' asked Mr Pancks. 'He can live on very little, sir, and it is expected as he will be able, in time, to make a very good living. Mr Clennam got it him to do, and gives him odd jobs besides in at the Works next door—makes 'em for him, in short, when he knows he wants 'em.'

'And what does he do with himself, now, when he ain't hard at it?' said Mr Pancks.

'Why, not much as yet, sir, on accounts I suppose of not being able to walk much; but he goes about the Yard, and he chats without particular understanding or being understood, and he plays with the children, and he sits in the sun—he'll sit down anywhere, as if it was an arm-chair—and he'll sing, and he'll laugh!'

'Laugh!' echoed Mr Pancks. 'He looks to me as if every tooth in his head was always laughing.'

'But whenever he gets to the top of the steps at t'other end of the Yard,' said Mrs Plornish, 'he'll peep out in the curiousest way! So that some of us thinks he's peeping out towards where his own country is, and some of us thinks he's looking for somebody he don't want to see, and some of us don't know what to think.'

Mr Baptist seemed to have a general understanding of what she said; or perhaps his quickness caught and applied her slight action of peeping. In any case he closed his eyes and tossed his head with the air of a man who had sufficient reasons for what he did, and said in his own tongue, it didn't matter. Altro!

'What's Altro?' said Pancks.

'Hem! It's a sort of a general kind of expression, sir,' said Mrs Plornish.

'Is it?' said Pancks. 'Why, then Altro to you, old chap. Good afternoon. Altro!'

Mr Baptist in his vivacious way repeating the word several times, Mr Pancks in his duller way gave it him back once. From that time it became a frequent custom with Pancks the gipsy, as he went home jaded at night, to pass round by Bleeding Heart Yard, go quietly up the stairs, look in at Mr Baptist's door, and, finding him in his room, to say, 'Hallo, old chap! Altro!' To which Mr Baptist would reply with innumerable bright nods and smiles, 'Altro, signore, altro, altro, altro!' After this highly condensed conversation, Mr Pancks would go his way with an appearance of being lightened and refreshed.

CHAPTER 26. Nobody's State of Mind

If Arthur Clennam had not arrived at that wise decision firmly to restrain himself from loving Pet, he would have lived on in a state of much perplexity, involving difficult struggles with his own heart. Not the least of these would have been a contention, always waging within it, between a tendency to dislike Mr Henry Gowan, if not to regard him with positive repugnance, and a whisper that the inclination was unworthy. A generous nature is not prone to strong aversions, and is slow to admit them even dispassionately; but when it finds ill-will gaining upon it, and can discern between-whiles that its origin is not dispassionate, such a nature becomes distressed.

Therefore Mr Henry Gowan would have clouded Clennam's mind, and would have been far oftener present to it than more agreeable persons and subjects but for the great prudence of his decision aforesaid. As it was, Mr Gowan seemed transferred to Daniel Doyce's mind; at all events, it so happened that it usually fell to Mr Doyce's turn, rather than to Clennam's, to speak of him in the friendly conversations they held together. These were of frequent occurrence now; as the two partners shared a portion of a roomy house in one of the grave old-fashioned City streets, lying not far from the Bank of England, by London Wall.

Mr Doyce had been to Twickenham to pass the day. Clennam had excused himself. Mr Doyce was just come home. He put in his head at the door of Clennam's sitting-room to say Good night.

'Come in, come in!' said Clennam.

'I saw you were reading,' returned Doyce, as he entered, 'and thought you might not care to be disturbed.'

But for the notable resolution he had made, Clennam really might not have known what he had been reading; really might not have had his eyes upon the book for an hour past, though it lay open before him. He shut it up, rather quickly.

'Are they well?' he asked.

'Yes,' said Doyce; 'they are well. They are all well.'

Daniel had an old workmanlike habit of carrying his pocket-handkerchief in his hat. He took it out and wiped his forehead with it, slowly repeating, 'They are all well. Miss Minnie looking particularly well, I thought.'

'Any company at the cottage?'

'No, no company.' 'And how did you get on, you four?' asked Clennam gaily.

'There were five of us,' returned his partner. 'There was What's-his-name. He was there.' 'Who is he?' said Clennam.

'Mr Henry Gowan.'

'Ah, to be sure!' cried Clennam with unusual vivacity, 'Yes!—I forgot him.'

'As I mentioned, you may remember,' said Daniel Doyce, 'he is always there on Sunday.'

'Yes, yes,' returned Clennam; 'I remember now.'

Daniel Doyce, still wiping his forehead, ploddingly repeated. 'Yes. He was there, he was there. Oh yes, he was there. And his dog. He was there too.'

'Miss Meagles is quite attached to—the—dog,' observed Clennam.

'Quite so,' assented his partner. 'More attached to the dog than I am to the man.'

'You mean Mr—?'

'I mean Mr Gowan, most decidedly,' said Daniel Doyce.

There was a gap in the conversation, which Clennam devoted to winding up his watch.

'Perhaps you are a little hasty in your judgment,' he said. 'Our judgments—I am supposing a general case—'

'Of course,' said Doyce.

'Are so liable to be influenced by many considerations, which, almost without our knowing it, are unfair, that it is necessary to keep a guard upon them. For instance, Mr—'

'Gowan,' quietly said Doyce, upon whom the utterance of the name almost always devolved.

'Is young and handsome, easy and quick, has talent, and has seen a good deal of various kinds of life. It might be difficult to give an unselfish reason for being prepossessed against him.'

'Not difficult for me, I think, Clennam,' returned his partner. 'I see him bringing present anxiety, and, I fear, future sorrow, into my old friend's house. I see him wearing deeper lines into my old friend's face, the nearer he draws to, and the oftener he looks at, the face of his daughter. In short, I see him with a net about the pretty and affectionate creature whom he will never make happy.' 'We don't know,' said Clennam, almost in the tone of a man in pain, 'that he will not make her happy.'

'We don't know,' returned his partner, 'that the earth will last another hundred years, but we think it highly probable.'

'Well, well!' said Clennam, 'we must be hopeful, and we must at least try to be, if not generous (which, in this case, we have no opportunity of being), just. We will not disparage this gentleman, because he is successful in his addresses to the beautiful object of his ambition; and we will not question her natural right to bestow her love on one whom she finds worthy of it.'

'Maybe, my friend,' said Doyce. 'Maybe also, that she is too young and petted, too confiding and inexperienced, to discriminate well.'

'That,' said Clennam, 'would be far beyond our power of correction.'

Daniel Doyce shook his head gravely, and rejoined, 'I fear so.'

'Therefore, in a word,' said Clennam, 'we should make up our minds that it is not worthy of us to say any ill of Mr Gowan. It would be a poor thing to gratify a prejudice against him. And I resolve, for my part, not to depreciate him.'

'I am not quite so sure of myself, and therefore I reserve my privilege of objecting to him,' returned the other. 'But, if I am not sure of myself, I am sure of you, Clennam, and I know what an upright man you are, and how much to be respected. Good night, MY friend and partner!' He shook his hand in saying this, as if there had been something serious at the bottom of their conversation; and they separated.

By this time they had visited the family on several occasions, and had always observed that even a passing allusion to Mr Henry Gowan when he was not among them, brought back the cloud which had obscured Mr Meagles's sunshine on the morning of the chance encounter at the Ferry. If Clennam had ever admitted the forbidden passion into his breast, this period might have been a period of real trial; under the actual circumstances, doubtless it was nothing—nothing.

Equally, if his heart had given entertainment to that prohibited guest, his silent fighting of his way through the mental condition of this period might have been a little meritorious. In the constant effort not to be betrayed into a new phase of the besetting sin of his experience, the pursuit of selfish objects by low and small means, and to hold instead to some high principle of honour and generosity, there might have been a little merit. In the resolution not even to avoid Mr Meagles's house, lest, in the selfish sparing of himself, he should bring any slight distress upon the daughter through making her the cause of an estrangement which he believed the father would regret, there might have been a little merit. In the modest truthfulness of always keeping in view the greater equality of Mr Gowan's years and the greater attractions of his person and manner, there might have been a little merit. In doing all this and much more, in a perfectly unaffected way and with a manful and composed constancy, while the pain within him (peculiar as his life and history) was very sharp, there might have been some quiet strength of character. But, after the resolution he had made, of course he could have no such merits as these; and such a state of mind was nobody's—nobody's.

Mr Gowan made it no concern of his whether it was nobody's or somebody's. He preserved his perfect serenity of manner on all occasions, as if the possibility of Clennam's presuming to have debated the great question were too distant and ridiculous to be imagined. He had always an affability to bestow on Clennam and an ease to treat him with, which might of itself (in the supposititious case of his not having taken that sagacious course) have been a very uncomfortable element in his state of mind.

'I quite regret you were not with us yesterday,' said Mr Henry Gowan, calling on Clennam the next morning. 'We had an agreeable day up the river there.'

So he had heard, Arthur said.

'From your partner?' returned Henry Gowan. 'What a dear old fellow he is!'

'I have a great regard for him.'

'By Jove, he is the finest creature!' said Gowan. 'So fresh, so green, trusts in such wonderful things!'

Here was one of the many little rough points that had a tendency to grate on Clennam's hearing. He put it aside by merely repeating that he had a high regard for Mr Doyce.

'He is charming! To see him mooning along to that time of life, laying down nothing by the way and picking up nothing by the way, is delightful. It warms a man. So unspoilt, so simple, such a good soul! Upon my life Mr Clennam, one feels desperately worldly and wicked in comparison with such an innocent creature. I speak for myself, let me add, without including you. You are genuine also.'

'Thank you for the compliment,' said Clennam, ill at ease; 'you are too, I hope?'

'So so,' rejoined the other. 'To be candid with you, tolerably. I am not a great impostor. Buy one of my pictures, and I assure you, in confidence, it will not be worth the money. Buy one of another man's—any great professor who beats me hollow—and the chances are that the more you give him, the more he'll impose upon you. They all do it.' 'All painters?'

'Painters, writers, patriots, all the rest who have stands in the market. Give almost any man I know ten pounds, and he will impose upon you to a corresponding extent; a thousand pounds—to a corresponding extent; ten thousand pounds—to a corresponding extent. So great the success, so great the imposition. But what a capital world it is!' cried Gowan with warm enthusiasm. 'What a jolly, excellent, lovable world it is!'

'I had rather thought,' said Clennam, 'that the principle you mention was chiefly acted on by—'

'By the Barnacles?' interrupted Gowan, laughing.

'By the political gentlemen who condescend to keep the Circumlocution Office.'

'Ah! Don't be hard upon the Barnacles,' said Gowan, laughing afresh, 'they are darling fellows! Even poor little Clarence, the born idiot of the family, is the most agreeable and most endearing blockhead! And by Jupiter, with a kind of cleverness in him too that would astonish you!'

'It would. Very much,' said Clennam, drily.

'And after all,' cried Gowan, with that characteristic balancing of his which reduced everything in the wide world to the same light weight, 'though I can't deny that the Circumlocution Office may ultimately shipwreck everybody and everything, still, that will probably not be in our time—and it's a school for gentlemen.'

'It's a very dangerous, unsatisfactory, and expensive school to the people who pay to keep the pupils there, I am afraid,' said Clennam, shaking his head.

'Ah! You are a terrible fellow,' returned Gowan, airily. 'I can understand how you have frightened that little donkey, Clarence, the most estimable of moon-calves (I really love him) nearly out of his wits. But enough of him, and of all the rest of them. I want to present you to my mother, Mr Clennam. Pray do me the favour to give me the opportunity.'

In nobody's state of mind, there was nothing Clennam would have desired less, or would have been more at a loss how to avoid.

'My mother lives in a most primitive manner down in that dreary red-brick dungeon at Hampton Court,' said Gowan. 'If you would make your own appointment, suggest your own day for permitting me to take you there to dinner, you would be bored and she would be charmed. Really that's the state of the case.'

What could Clennam say after this? His retiring character included a great deal that was simple in the best sense, because unpractised and unused; and in his simplicity and modesty, he could only say that he was happy to place himself at Mr Gowan's disposal. Accordingly he said it, and the day was fixed. And a dreaded day it was on his part, and a very unwelcome day when it came and they went down to Hampton Court together.

The venerable inhabitants of that venerable pile seemed, in those times, to be encamped there like a sort of civilised gipsies. There was a temporary air about their establishments, as if they were going away the moment they could get anything better; there was also a dissatisfied air about themselves, as if they took it very ill that they had not already got something much better. Genteel blinds and makeshifts were more or less observable as soon as their doors were opened; screens not half high enough, which made dining-rooms out of arched passages, and warded off obscure corners where footboys slept at nights with their heads among the knives and forks; curtains which called upon you to believe that they didn't hide anything; panes of glass which requested you not to see them; many objects of various forms, feigning to have no connection with their guilty secret, a bed; disguised traps in walls, which were clearly coal-cellars; affectations of no thoroughfares, which were evidently doors to little kitchens. Mental reservations and artful mysteries grew out of these things. Callers looking steadily into the eyes of their receivers, pretended not to smell cooking three feet off; people, confronting closets accidentally left open, pretended not to see bottles; visitors with their heads against a partition of thin canvas, and a page and a young female at high words on the other side, made believe to be sitting in a primeval silence. There was no end to the small social accommodation-bills of this nature which the gipsies of gentility were constantly drawing upon, and accepting for, one another.

Some of these Bohemians were of an irritable temperament, as constantly soured and vexed by two mental trials: the first, the consciousness that they had never got enough out of the public; the second, the consciousness that the public were admitted into the building. Under the latter great wrong, a few suffered dreadfully—particularly on Sundays, when they had for some time expected the earth to open and swallow the public up; but which desirable event had not yet occurred, in consequence of some reprehensible laxity in the arrangements of the Universe.

Mrs Gowan's door was attended by a family servant of several years' standing, who had his own crow to pluck with the public concerning a situation in the Post-Office which he had been for some time expecting, and to which he was not yet appointed. He perfectly knew that the public could never have got him in, but he grimly gratified himself with the idea that the public kept him out. Under the influence of this injury (and perhaps of some little straitness and irregularity in the matter of wages), he had grown neglectful of his person and morose in mind; and now beholding in Clennam one of the degraded body of his oppressors, received him with ignominy. Mrs Gowan, however, received him with condescension. He found her a courtly old lady, formerly a Beauty, and still sufficiently well-favoured to have dispensed with the powder on her nose and a certain impossible bloom under each eye. She was a little lofty with him; so was another old lady, dark-browed and high-nosed, and who must have had something real about her or she could not have existed, but it was certainly not her hair or her teeth or her figure or her complexion; so was a grey old gentleman of dignified and sullen appearance; both of whom had come to dinner. But, as they had all been in the British Embassy way in sundry parts of the earth, and as a British Embassy cannot better establish a character with the Circumlocution Office than by treating its compatriots with illimitable contempt (else it would become like the Embassies of other countries), Clennam felt that on the whole they let him off lightly.

The dignified old gentleman turned out to be Lord Lancaster Stiltstalking, who had been maintained by the Circumlocution Office for many years as a representative of the Britannic Majesty abroad.

This noble Refrigerator had iced several European courts in his time, and had done it with such complete success that the very name of

Englishman yet struck cold to the stomachs of foreigners who had the distinguished honour of remembering him at a distance of a quarter of a century.

He was now in retirement, and hence (in a ponderous white cravat, like a stiff snow-drift) was so obliging as to shade the dinner. There was a whisper of the pervading Bohemian character in the nomadic nature of the service and its curious races of plates and dishes; but the noble Refrigerator, infinitely better than plate or porcelain, made it superb. He shaded the dinner, cooled the wines, chilled the gravy, and blighted the vegetables.

There was only one other person in the room: a microscopically small footboy, who waited on the malevolent man who hadn't got into the Post-Office. Even this youth, if his jacket could have been unbuttoned and his heart laid bare, would have been seen, as a distant adherent of the Barnacle family, already to aspire to a situation under Government.

Mrs Gowan with a gentle melancholy upon her, occasioned by her son's being reduced to court the swinish public as a follower of the low Arts, instead of asserting his birthright and putting a ring through its nose as an acknowledged Barnacle, headed the conversation at dinner on the evil days. It was then that Clennam learned for the first time what little pivots this great world goes round upon.

'If John Barnacle,' said Mrs Gowan, after the degeneracy of the times had been fully ascertained, 'if John Barnacle had but abandoned his most unfortunate idea of conciliating the mob, all would have been well, and I think the country would have been preserved.' The old lady with the high nose assented; but added that if Augustus Stiltstalking had in a general way ordered the cavalry out with instructions to charge, she thought the country would have been preserved.

The noble Refrigerator assented; but added that if William Barnacle and Tudor Stiltstalking, when they came over to one another and formed their ever-memorable coalition, had boldly muzzled the newspapers, and rendered it penal for any Editor-person to presume to discuss the conduct of any appointed authority abroad or at home, he thought the country would have been preserved.

It was agreed that the country (another word for the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings) wanted preserving, but how it came to want preserving was not so clear. It was only clear that the question was all about John Barnacle, Augustus Stiltstalking, William Barnacle and Tudor Stiltstalking, Tom, Dick, or Harry Barnacle or Stiltstalking, because there was nobody else but mob. And this was the feature of the conversation which impressed Clennam, as a man not used to it, very disagreeably: making him doubt if it were quite right to sit there, silently hearing a great nation narrowed to such little bounds. Remembering, however, that in the Parliamentary debates, whether on the life of that nation's body or the life of its soul, the question was usually all about and between John Barnacle, Augustus Stiltstalking, William Barnacle and Tudor Stiltstalking, Tom, Dick, or Harry Barnacle or Stiltstalking, and nobody else; he said nothing on the part of mob, bethinking himself that mob was used to it.

Mr Henry Gowan seemed to have a malicious pleasure in playing off the three talkers against each other, and in seeing Clennam startled by what they said. Having as supreme a contempt for the class that had thrown him off as for the class that had not taken him on, he had no personal disquiet in anything that passed. His healthy state of mind appeared even to derive a gratification from Clennam's position of embarrassment and isolation among the good company; and if Clennam had been in that condition with which Nobody was incessantly contending, he would have suspected it, and would have struggled with the suspicion as a meanness, even while he sat at the table.

In the course of a couple of hours the noble Refrigerator, at no time less than a hundred years behind the period, got about five centuries in arrears, and delivered solemn political oracles appropriate to that epoch. He finished by freezing a cup of tea for his own drinking, and retiring at his lowest temperature. Then Mrs Gowan, who had been accustomed in her days of a vacant arm-chair beside her to which to summon state to retain her devoted slaves, one by one, for short audiences as marks of her especial favour, invited Clennam with a turn of her fan to approach the presence. He obeyed, and took the tripod recently vacated by Lord Lancaster Stiltstalking.

'Mr Clennam,' said Mrs Gowan, 'apart from the happiness I have in becoming known to you, though in this odiously inconvenient place—a mere barrack—there is a subject on which I am dying to speak to you. It is the subject in connection with which my son first had, I believe, the pleasure of cultivating your acquaintance.'

Clennam inclined his head, as a generally suitable reply to what he did not yet quite understand.

'First,' said Mrs Gowan, 'now, is she really pretty?'

In nobody's difficulties, he would have found it very difficult to answer; very difficult indeed to smile, and say 'Who?'

'Oh! You know!' she returned. 'This flame of Henry's. This unfortunate fancy. There! If it is a point of honour that I should originate the name—Miss Mickles—Miggles.'

'Miss Meagles,' said Clennam, 'is very beautiful.'

'Men are so often mistaken on those points,' returned Mrs Gowan, shaking her head, 'that I candidly confess to you I feel anything but sure of it, even now; though it is something to have Henry corroborated with so much gravity and emphasis. He picked the people up at Rome, I think?'

The phrase would have given nobody mortal offence. Clennam replied, 'Excuse me, I doubt if I understand your expression.'

'Picked the people up,' said Mrs Gowan, tapping the sticks of her closed fan (a large green one, which she used as a hand-screen) on her little table. 'Came upon them. Found them out. Stumbled UP against them.'

'The people?'

'Yes. The Miggles people.'

'I really cannot say,' said Clennam, 'where my friend Mr Meagles first presented Mr Henry Gowan to his daughter.'

'I am pretty sure he picked her up at Rome; but never mind where—somewhere. Now (this is entirely between ourselves), is she very plebeian?'

'Really, ma'am,' returned Clennam, 'I am so undoubtedly plebeian myself, that I do not feel qualified to judge.'

'Very neat!' said Mrs Gowan, coolly unfurling her screen. 'Very happy! From which I infer that you secretly think her manner equal to her looks?'

Clennam, after a moment's stiffness, bowed.

'That's comforting, and I hope you may be right. Did Henry tell me you had travelled with them?' 'I travelled with my friend Mr Meagles, and his wife and daughter, during some months.' (Nobody's heart might have been wrung by the remembrance.)

'Really comforting, because you must have had a large experience of them. You see, Mr Clennam, this thing has been going on for a long time, and I find no improvement in it. Therefore to have the opportunity of speaking to one so well informed about it as yourself, is an immense relief to me. Quite a boon. Quite a blessing, I am sure.'

'Pardon me,' returned Clennam, 'but I am not in Mr Henry Gowan's confidence. I am far from being so well informed as you suppose me to be. Your mistake makes my position a very delicate one. No word on this topic has ever passed between Mr Henry Gowan and myself.'

Mrs Gowan glanced at the other end of the room, where her son was playing ecarte on a sofa, with the old lady who was for a charge of cavalry.

'Not in his confidence? No,' said Mrs Gowan. 'No word has passed between you? No. That I can imagine. But there are unexpressed confidences, Mr Clennam; and as you have been together intimately among these people, I cannot doubt that a confidence of that sort exists in the present case. Perhaps you have heard that I have suffered the keenest distress of mind from Henry's having taken to a pursuit which—well!' shrugging her shoulders, 'a very respectable pursuit, I dare say, and some artists are, as artists, quite superior persons; still, we never yet in our family have gone beyond an Amateur, and it is a pardonable weakness to feel a little—'

As Mrs Gowan broke off to heave a sigh, Clennam, however resolute to be magnanimous, could not keep down the thought that there was mighty little danger of the family's ever going beyond an Amateur, even as it was.

'Henry,' the mother resumed, 'is self-willed and resolute; and as these people naturally strain every nerve to catch him, I can entertain very little hope, Mr Clennam, that the thing will be broken off. I apprehend the girl's fortune will be very small; Henry might have done much better; there is scarcely anything to compensate for the connection: still, he acts for himself; and if I find no improvement within a short time, I see no other course than to resign myself and make the best of these people. I am infinitely obliged to you for what you have told me.' As she shrugged her shoulders, Clennam stiffly bowed again. With an uneasy flush upon his face, and hesitation in his manner, he then said in a still lower tone than he had adopted yet:

'Mrs Gowan, I scarcely know how to acquit myself of what I feel to be a duty, and yet I must ask you for your kind consideration in attempting to discharge it. A misconception on your part, a very great misconception if I may venture to call it so, seems to require setting right. You have supposed Mr Meagles and his family to strain every nerve, I think you said—'

'Every nerve,' repeated Mrs Gowan, looking at him in calm obstinacy, with her green fan between her face and the fire.

'To secure Mr Henry Gowan?'

The lady placidly assented.

'Now that is so far,' said Arthur, 'from being the case, that I know Mr Meagles to be unhappy in this matter; and to have interposed all reasonable obstacles with the hope of putting an end to it.'

Mrs Gowan shut up her great green fan, tapped him on the arm with it, and tapped her smiling lips. 'Why, of course,' said she. 'Just what I mean.'

Arthur watched her face for some explanation of what she did mean.

'Are you really serious, Mr Clennam? Don't you see?'

Arthur did not see; and said so.

'Why, don't I know my son, and don't I know that this is exactly the way to hold him?' said Mrs Gowan, contemptuously; 'and do not these Miggles people know it, at least as well as I? Oh, shrewd people, Mr Clennam: evidently people of business! I believe Miggles belonged to a Bank. It ought to have been a very profitable Bank, if he had much to do with its management. This is very well done, indeed.'

'I beg and entreat you, ma'am—' Arthur interposed.

'Oh, Mr Clennam, can you really be so credulous?'

It made such a painful impression upon him to hear her talking in this haughty tone, and to see her patting her contemptuous lips with her fan, that he said very earnestly, 'Believe me, ma'am, this is unjust, a perfectly groundless suspicion.'

'Suspicion?' repeated Mrs Gowan. 'Not suspicion, Mr Clennam, Certainty. It is very knowingly done indeed, and seems to have taken YOU in completely.' She laughed; and again sat tapping her lips with her fan, and tossing her head, as if she added, 'Don't tell me. I know such people will do anything for the honour of such an alliance.'

At this opportune moment, the cards were thrown up, and Mr Henry Gowan came across the room saying, 'Mother, if you can spare Mr Clennam for this time, we have a long way to go, and it's getting late.' Mr Clennam thereupon rose, as he had no choice but to do; and Mrs Gowan showed him, to the last, the same look and the same tapped contemptuous lips.

'You have had a portentously long audience of my mother,' said Gowan, as the door closed upon them. 'I fervently hope she has not bored you?'

'Not at all,' said Clennam.

They had a little open phaeton for the journey, and were soon in it on the road home. Gowan, driving, lighted a cigar; Clennam declined one. Do what he would, he fell into such a mood of abstraction that Gowan said again, 'I am very much afraid my mother has bored you?' To which he roused himself to answer, 'Not at all!' and soon relapsed again.

In that state of mind which rendered nobody uneasy, his thoughtfulness would have turned principally on the man at his side. He would have thought of the morning when he first saw him rooting out the stones with his heel, and would have asked himself, 'Does he jerk me out of the path in the same careless, cruel way?' He would have thought, had this introduction to his mother been brought about by him because he knew what she would say, and that he could thus place his position before a rival and loftily warn him off, without himself reposing a word of confidence in him? He would have thought, even if there were no such design as that, had he brought him there to play with his repressed emotions, and torment him? The current of these meditations would have been stayed sometimes by a rush of shame, bearing a remonstrance to himself from his own open nature, representing that to shelter such suspicions, even for the passing moment, was not to hold the high, unenvious course he had resolved to keep. At those times, the striving within him would have been hardest; and looking up and catching Gowan's eyes, he would have started as if he had done him an injury.

Then, looking at the dark road and its uncertain objects, he would have gradually trailed off again into thinking, 'Where are we driving, he and I, I wonder, on the darker road of life? How will it be with us, and with her, in the obscure distance?' Thinking of her, he would have been troubled anew with a reproachful misgiving that it was not even loyal to her to dislike him, and that in being so easily prejudiced against him he was less deserving of her than at first.

'You are evidently out of spirits,' said Gowan; 'I am very much afraid my mother must have bored you dreadfully.' 'Believe me, not at all,' said Clennam. 'It's nothing—nothing!'

CHAPTER 27. Five-and-Twenty

A frequently recurring doubt, whether Mr Pancks's desire to collect information relative to the Dorrit family could have any possible bearing on the misgivings he had imparted to his mother on his return from his long exile, caused Arthur Clennam much uneasiness at this period. What Mr Pancks already knew about the Dorrit family, what more he really wanted to find out, and why he should trouble his busy head about them at all, were questions that often perplexed him. Mr Pancks was not a man to waste his time and trouble in researches prompted by idle curiosity. That he had a specific object Clennam could not doubt. And whether the attainment of that object by Mr Pancks's industry might bring to light, in some untimely way, secret reasons which had induced his mother to take Little Dorrit by the hand, was a serious speculation.

Not that he ever wavered either in his desire or his determination to repair a wrong that had been done in his father's time, should a wrong come to light, and be reparable. The shadow of a supposed act of injustice, which had hung over him since his father's death, was so vague and formless that it might be the result of a reality widely remote from his idea of it. But, if his apprehensions should prove to be well founded, he was ready at any moment to lay down all he had, and begin the world anew. As the fierce dark teaching of his childhood had never sunk into his heart, so that first article in his code of morals was, that he must begin, in practical humility, with looking well to his feet on Earth, and that he could never mount on wings of words to Heaven. Duty on earth, restitution on earth, action on earth; these first, as the first steep steps upward. Strait was the gate and narrow was the way; far straiter and narrower than the broad high road paved with vain professions and vain repetitions, motes from other men's eyes and liberal delivery of others to the judgment—all cheap materials costing absolutely nothing.

No. It was not a selfish fear or hesitation that rendered him uneasy, but a mistrust lest Pancks might not observe his part of the understanding between them, and, making any discovery, might take some course upon it without imparting it to him. On the other hand, when he recalled his conversation with Pancks, and the little reason he had to suppose that there was any likelihood of that strange personage being on that track at all, there were times when he wondered that he made so much of it. Labouring in this sea, as all barks labour in cross seas, he tossed about and came to no haven.

The removal of Little Dorrit herself from their customary association, did not mend the matter. She was so much out, and so much in her own room, that he began to miss her and to find a blank in her place. He had written to her to inquire if she were better, and she had written back, very gratefully and earnestly telling him not to be uneasy on her behalf, for she was quite well; but he had not seen her, for what, in their intercourse, was a long time.

He returned home one evening from an interview with her father, who had mentioned that she was out visiting—which was what he always said when she was hard at work to buy his supper—and found Mr Meagles in an excited state walking up and down his room. On his opening the door, Mr Meagles stopped, faced round, and said:

'Clennam!—Tattycoram!'

'What's the matter?'

'Lost!'

'Why, bless my heart alive!' cried Clennam in amazement. 'What do you mean?'

'Wouldn't count five-and-twenty, sir; couldn't be got to do it; stopped at eight, and took herself off.'

'Left your house?'

'Never to come back,' said Mr Meagles, shaking his head. 'You don't know that girl's passionate and proud character. A team of horses couldn't draw her back now; the bolts and bars of the old Bastille couldn't keep her.'

'How did it happen? Pray sit down and tell me.'

'As to how it happened, it's not so easy to relate: because you must have the unfortunate temperament of the poor impetuous girl herself, before you can fully understand it. But it came about in this way. Pet and Mother and I have been having a good deal of talk together of late. I'll not disguise from you, Clennam, that those conversations have not been of as bright a kind as I could wish; they have referred to our going away again. In proposing to do which, I have had, in fact, an object.'

Nobody's heart beat quickly.

'An object,' said Mr Meagles, after a moment's pause, 'that I will not disguise from you, either, Clennam. There's an inclination on the part of my dear child which I am sorry for. Perhaps you guess the person. Henry Gowan.'

'I was not unprepared to hear it.'

'Well!' said Mr Meagles, with a heavy sigh, 'I wish to God you had never had to hear it. However, so it is. Mother and I have done all we could to get the better of it, Clennam. We have tried tender advice, we have tried time, we have tried absence. As yet, of no use. Our late conversations have been upon the subject of going away for another year at least, in order that there might be an entire separation and breaking off for that term. Upon that question, Pet has been unhappy, and therefore Mother and I have been unhappy.' Clennam said that he could easily believe it.

'Well!' continued Mr Meagles in an apologetic way, 'I admit as a practical man, and I am sure Mother would admit as a practical woman, that we do, in families, magnify our troubles and make mountains of our molehills in a way that is calculated to be rather trying to people who look on—to mere outsiders, you know, Clennam.

Still, Pet's happiness or unhappiness is quite a life or death question with us; and we may be excused, I hope, for making much of it. At all events, it might have been borne by Tattycoram. Now, don't you think so?'

'I do indeed think so,' returned Clennam, in most emphatic recognition of this very moderate expectation.

'No, sir,' said Mr Meagles, shaking his head ruefully. 'She couldn't stand it. The chafing and firing of that girl, the wearing and tearing of that girl within her own breast, has been such that I have softly said to her again and again in passing her, "Five-and-twenty, Tattycoram, five-and-twenty!" I heartily wish she could have gone on counting five-and-twenty day and night, and then it wouldn't have happened.'

Mr Meagles with a despondent countenance in which the goodness of his heart was even more expressed than in his times of cheerfulness and gaiety, stroked his face down from his forehead to his chin, and shook his head again.

'I said to Mother (not that it was necessary, for she would have thought it all for herself), we are practical people, my dear, and we know her story; we see in this unhappy girl some reflection of what was raging in her mother's heart before ever such a creature as this poor thing was in the world; we'll gloss her temper over, Mother, we won't notice it at present, my dear, we'll take advantage of some better disposition in her another time. So we said nothing. But, do what we would, it seems as if it was to be; she broke out violently one night.'

'How, and why?'

'If you ask me Why,' said Mr Meagles, a little disturbed by the question, for he was far more intent on softening her case than the family's, 'I can only refer you to what I have just repeated as having been pretty near my words to Mother. As to How, we had said Good night to Pet in her presence (very affectionately, I must allow), and she had attended Pet up-stairs—you remember she was her maid. Perhaps Pet, having been out of sorts, may have been a little more inconsiderate than usual in requiring services of her: but I don't know that I have any right to say so; she was always thoughtful and gentle.'

'The gentlest mistress in the world.'

'Thank you, Clennam,' said Mr Meagles, shaking him by the hand; 'you have often seen them together. Well! We presently heard this unfortunate Tattycoram loud and angry, and before we could ask what was the matter, Pet came back in a tremble, saying she was frightened of her. Close after her came Tattycoram in a flaming rage. "I hate you all three," says she, stamping her foot at us. "I am bursting with hate of the whole house."'

'Upon which you—?'

'I?' said Mr Meagles, with a plain good faith that might have commanded the belief of Mrs Gowan herself. 'I said, count five-and-twenty, Tattycoram.'

Mr Meagles again stroked his face and shook his head, with an air of profound regret.

'She was so used to do it, Clennam, that even then, such a picture of passion as you never saw, she stopped short, looked me full in the face, and counted (as I made out) to eight. But she couldn't control herself to go any further. There she broke down, poor thing, and gave the other seventeen to the four winds. Then it all burst out. She detested us, she was miserable with us, she couldn't bear it, she wouldn't bear it, she was determined to go away. She was younger than her young mistress, and would she remain to see her always held up as the only creature who was young and interesting, and to be cherished and loved? No. She wouldn't, she wouldn't, she wouldn't! What did we think she, Tattycoram, might have been if she had been caressed and cared for in her childhood, like her young mistress? As good as her? Ah! Perhaps fifty times as good. When we pretended to be so fond of one another, we exulted over her; that was what we did; we exulted over her and shamed her. And all in the house did the same. They talked about their fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters; they liked to drag them up before her face. There was Mrs Tickit, only yesterday, when her little grandchild was with her, had been amused by the child's trying to call her (Tattycoram) by the wretched name we gave her; and had laughed at the name. Why, who didn't; and who were we that we should have a right to name her like a dog or a cat? But she didn't care. She would take no more benefits from us; she would fling us her name back again, and she would go. She would leave us that minute, nobody should stop her, and we should never hear of her again.'

Mr Meagles had recited all this with such a vivid remembrance of his original, that he was almost as flushed and hot by this time as he described her to have been.

'Ah, well!' he said, wiping his face. 'It was of no use trying reason then, with that vehement panting creature (Heaven knows what her mother's story must have been); so I quietly told her that she should not go at that late hour of night, and I gave her MY hand and took her to her room, and locked the house doors. But she was gone this morning.' 'And you know no more of her?'

'No more,' returned Mr Meagles. 'I have been hunting about all day. She must have gone very early and very silently. I have found no trace of her down about us.'

'Stay! You want,' said Clennam, after a moment's reflection, 'to see her? I assume that?'

'Yes, assuredly; I want to give her another chance; Mother and Pet want to give her another chance; come! You yourself,' said Mr Meagles, persuasively, as if the provocation to be angry were not his own at all, 'want to give the poor passionate girl another chance, I know, Clennam.'

'It would be strange and hard indeed if I did not,' said Clennam, 'when you are all so forgiving. What I was going to ask you was, have you thought of that Miss Wade?'

'I have. I did not think of her until I had pervaded the whole of our neighbourhood, and I don't know that I should have done so then but for finding Mother and Pet, when I went home, full of the idea that Tattycoram must have gone to her. Then, of course, I recalled what she said that day at dinner when you were first with US.'

'Have you any idea where Miss Wade is to be found?'

'To tell you the truth,' returned Mr Meagles, 'it's because I have an addled jumble of a notion on that subject that you found me waiting here. There is one of those odd impressions in my house, which do mysteriously get into houses sometimes, which nobody seems to have picked up in a distinct form from anybody, and yet which everybody seems to have got hold of loosely from somebody and let go again, that she lives, or was living, thereabouts.' Mr Meagles handed him a slip of paper, on which was written the name of one of the dull by-streets in the Grosvenor region, near Park Lane.

'Here is no number,' said Arthur looking over it.

'No number, my dear Clennam?' returned his friend. 'No anything! The very name of the street may have been floating in the air; for, as I tell you, none of my people can say where they got it from. However, it's worth an inquiry; and as I would rather make it in company than alone, and as you too were a fellow-traveller of that immovable woman's, I thought perhaps—' Clennam finished the sentence for him by taking up his hat again, and saying he was ready.

It was now summer-time; a grey, hot, dusty evening. They rode to the top of Oxford Street, and there alighting, dived in among the great streets of melancholy stateliness, and the little streets that try to be as stately and succeed in being more melancholy, of which there is a labyrinth near Park Lane. Wildernesses of corner houses, with barbarous old porticoes and appurtenances; horrors that came into existence under some wrong-headed person in some wrong-headed time, still demanding the blind admiration of all ensuing generations and determined to do so until they tumbled down; frowned upon the twilight. Parasite little tenements, with the cramp in their whole frame, from the dwarf hall-door on the giant model of His Grace's in the Square to the squeezed window of the boudoir commanding the dunghills in the Mews, made the evening doleful. Rickety dwellings of undoubted fashion, but of a capacity to hold nothing comfortably except a dismal smell, looked like the last result of the great mansions' breeding in-and-in; and, where their little supplementary bows and balconies were supported on thin iron columns, seemed to be scrofulously resting upon crutches.

Here and there a Hatchment, with the whole science of Heraldry in it, loomed down upon the street, like an Archbishop discoursing on Vanity.

The shops, few in number, made no show; for popular opinion was as nothing to them. The pastrycook knew who was on his books, and in that knowledge could be calm, with a few glass cylinders of dowager peppermint-drops in his window, and half-a-dozen ancient specimens of currant-jelly. A few oranges formed the greengrocer's whole concession to the vulgar mind. A single basket made of moss, once containing plovers' eggs, held all that the poulterer had to say to the rabble. Everybody in those streets seemed (which is always the case at that hour and season) to be gone out to dinner, and nobody seemed to be giving the dinners they had gone to. On the doorsteps there were lounging footmen with bright parti-coloured plumage and white polls, like an extinct race of monstrous birds; and butlers, solitary men of recluse demeanour, each of whom appeared distrustful of all other butlers. The roll of carriages in the Park was done for the day; the street lamps were lighting; and wicked little grooms in the tightest fitting garments, with twists in their legs answering to the twists in their minds, hung about in pairs, chewing straws and exchanging fraudulent secrets. The spotted dogs who went out with the carriages, and who were so associated with splendid equipages that it looked like a condescension in those animals to come out without them, accompanied helpers to and fro on messages. Here and there was a retiring public-house which did not require to be supported on the shoulders of the people, and where gentlemen out of livery were not much wanted.

This last discovery was made by the two friends in pursuing their inquiries. Nothing was there, or anywhere, known of such a person as Miss Wade, in connection with the street they sought. It was one of the parasite streets; long, regular, narrow, dull and gloomy; like a brick and mortar funeral. They inquired at several little area gates, where a dejected youth stood spiking his chin on the summit of a precipitous little shoot of wooden steps, but could gain no information. They walked up the street on one side of the way, and down it on the other, what time two vociferous news-sellers, announcing an extraordinary event that had never happened and never would happen, pitched their hoarse voices into the secret chambers; but nothing came of it. At length they stood at the corner from which they had begun, and it had fallen quite dark, and they were no wiser.

It happened that in the street they had several times passed a dingy house, apparently empty, with bills in the windows, announcing that it was to let. The bills, as a variety in the funeral procession, almost amounted to a decoration. Perhaps because they kept the house separated in his mind, or perhaps because Mr Meagles and himself had twice agreed in passing, 'It is clear she don't live there,' Clennam now proposed that they should go back and try that house before finally going away. Mr Meagles agreed, and back they went.

They knocked once, and they rang once, without any response.

'Empty,' said Mr Meagles, listening. 'Once more,' said Clennam, and knocked again. After that knock they heard a movement below, and somebody shuffling up towards the door.

The confined entrance was so dark that it was impossible to make out distinctly what kind of person opened the door; but it appeared to be an old woman. 'Excuse our troubling you,' said Clennam. 'Pray can you tell us where Miss Wade lives?' The voice in the darkness unexpectedly replied, 'Lives here.'

'Is she at home?'

No answer coming, Mr Meagles asked again. 'Pray is she at home?'

After another delay, 'I suppose she is,' said the voice abruptly; 'you had better come in, and I'll ask.'

They 'were summarily shut into the close black house; and the figure rustling away, and speaking from a higher level, said, 'Come up, if you please; you can't tumble over anything.' They groped their way up-stairs towards a faint light, which proved to be the light of the street shining through a window; and the figure left them shut in an airless room.

'This is odd, Clennam,' said Mr Meagles, softly.

'Odd enough,' assented Clennam in the same tone, 'but we have succeeded; that's the main point. Here's a light coming!'

The light was a lamp, and the bearer was an old woman: very dirty, very wrinkled and dry. 'She's at home,' she said (and the voice was the same that had spoken before); 'she'll come directly.' Having set the lamp down on the table, the old woman dusted her hands on her apron, which she might have done for ever without cleaning them, looked at the visitors with a dim pair of eyes, and backed out.

The lady whom they had come to see, if she were the present occupant of the house, appeared to have taken up her quarters there as she might have established herself in an Eastern caravanserai. A small square of carpet in the middle of the room, a few articles of furniture that evidently did not belong to the room, and a disorder of trunks and travelling articles, formed the whole of her surroundings. Under some former regular inhabitant, the stifling little apartment had broken out into a pier-glass and a gilt table; but the gilding was as faded as last year's flowers, and the glass was so clouded that it seemed to hold in magic preservation all the fogs and bad weather it had ever reflected. The visitors had had a minute or two to look about them, when the door opened and Miss Wade came in.

She was exactly the same as when they had parted, just as handsome, just as scornful, just as repressed. She manifested no surprise in seeing them, nor any other emotion. She requested them to be seated; and declining to take a seat herself, at once anticipated any introduction of their business.

'I apprehend,' she said, 'that I know the cause of your favouring me with this visit. We may come to it at once.'

'The cause then, ma'am,' said Mr Meagles, 'is Tattycoram.'

'So I supposed.'

'Miss Wade,' said Mr Meagles, 'will you be so kind as to say whether you know anything of her?'

'Surely. I know she is here with me.'

'Then, ma'am,' said Mr Meagles, 'allow me to make known to you that I shall be happy to have her back, and that my wife and daughter will be happy to have her back. She has been with us a long time: we don't forget her claims upon us, and I hope we know how to make allowances.'

'You hope to know how to make allowances?' she returned, in a level, measured voice. 'For what?'

'I think my friend would say, Miss Wade,' Arthur Clennam interposed, seeing Mr Meagles rather at a loss, 'for the passionate sense that sometimes comes upon the poor girl, of being at a disadvantage. Which occasionally gets the better of better remembrances.'

The lady broke into a smile as she turned her eyes upon him. 'Indeed?' was all she answered.

She stood by the table so perfectly composed and still after this acknowledgment of his remark that Mr Meagles stared at her under a sort of fascination, and could not even look to Clennam to make another move. After waiting, awkwardly enough, for some moments, Arthur said: 'Perhaps it would be well if Mr Meagles could see her, Miss Wade?'

'That is easily done,' said she. 'Come here, child.' She had opened a door while saying this, and now led the girl in by the hand. It was very curious to see them standing together: the girl with her disengaged fingers plaiting the bosom of her dress, half irresolutely, half passionately; Miss Wade with her composed face attentively regarding her, and suggesting to an observer, with extraordinary force, in her composure itself (as a veil will suggest the form it covers), the unquenchable passion of her own nature.

'See here,' she said, in the same level way as before. 'Here is your patron, your master. He is willing to take you back, my dear, if you are sensible of the favour and choose to go. You can be, again, a foil to his pretty daughter, a slave to her pleasant wilfulness, and a toy in the house showing the goodness of the family. You can have your droll name again, playfully pointing you out and setting you apart, as it is right that you should be pointed out and set apart. (Your birth, you know; you must not forget your birth.) You can again be shown to this gentleman's daughter, Harriet, and kept before her, as a living reminder of her own superiority and her gracious condescension. You can recover all these advantages and many more of the same kind which I dare say start up in your memory while I speak, and which you lose in taking refuge with me—you can recover them all by telling these gentlemen how humbled and penitent you are, and by going back to them to be forgiven. What do you say, Harriet? Will you go?'

The girl who, under the influence of these words, had gradually risen in anger and heightened in colour, answered, raising her lustrous black eyes for the moment, and clenching her hand upon the folds it had been puckering up, 'I'd die sooner!'

Miss Wade, still standing at her side holding her hand, looked quietly round and said with a smile, 'Gentlemen! What do you do upon that?'

Poor Mr Meagles's inexpressible consternation in hearing his motives and actions so perverted, had prevented him from interposing any word until now; but now he regained the power of speech.

'Tattycoram,' said he, 'for I'll call you by that name still, my good girl, conscious that I meant nothing but kindness when I gave it to you, and conscious that you know it—'

'I don't!' said she, looking up again, and almost rending herself with the same busy hand.

'No, not now, perhaps,' said Mr Meagles; 'not with that lady's eyes so intent upon you, Tattycoram,' she glanced at them for a moment, 'and that power over you, which we see she exercises; not now, perhaps, but at another time. Tattycoram, I'll not ask that lady whether she believes what she has said, even in the anger and ill blood in which I and my friend here equally know she has spoken, though she subdues herself, with a determination that any one who has once seen her is not likely to forget. I'll not ask you, with your remembrance of my house and all belonging to it, whether you believe it. I'll only say that you have no profession to make to me or mine, and no forgiveness to entreat; and that all in the world that I ask you to do, is, to count five-and-twenty, Tattycoram.'

She looked at him for an instant, and then said frowningly, 'I won't. Miss Wade, take me away, please.'

The contention that raged within her had no softening in it now; it was wholly between passionate defiance and stubborn defiance. Her rich colour, her quick blood, her rapid breath, were all setting themselves against the opportunity of retracing their steps. 'I won't. I won't. I won't!' she repeated in a low, thick voice. 'I'd be torn to pieces first. I'd tear myself to pieces first!'

Miss Wade, who had released her hold, laid her hand protectingly on the girl's neck for a moment, and then said, looking round with her former smile and speaking exactly in her former tone, 'Gentlemen! What do you do upon that?'

'Oh, Tattycoram, Tattycoram!' cried Mr Meagles, adjuring her besides with an earnest hand. 'Hear that lady's voice, look at that lady's face, consider what is in that lady's heart, and think what a future lies before you. My child, whatever you may think, that lady's influence over you—astonishing to us, and I should hardly go too far in saying terrible to us to see—is founded in passion fiercer than yours, and temper more violent than yours. What can you two be together? What can come of it?'

'I am alone here, gentlemen,' observed Miss Wade, with no change of voice or manner. 'Say anything you will.'

'Politeness must yield to this misguided girl, ma'am,' said Mr Meagles, 'at her present pass; though I hope not altogether to dismiss it, even with the injury you do her so strongly before me. Excuse me for reminding you in her hearing—I must say it—that you were a mystery to all of us, and had nothing in common with any of us when she unfortunately fell in your way. I don't know what you are, but you don't hide, can't hide, what a dark spirit you have within you. If it should happen that you are a woman, who, from whatever cause, has a perverted delight in making a sister-woman as wretched as she is (I am old enough to have heard of such), I warn her against you, and I warn you against yourself.'

'Gentlemen!' said Miss Wade, calmly. 'When you have concluded—Mr Clennam, perhaps you will induce your friend—'

'Not without another effort,' said Mr Meagles, stoutly. 'Tattycoram, my poor dear girl, count five-and-twenty.' 'Do not reject the hope, the certainty, this kind man offers you,' said Clennam in a low emphatic voice. 'Turn to the friends you have not forgotten. Think once more!'

'I won't! Miss Wade,' said the girl, with her bosom swelling high, and speaking with her hand held to her throat, 'take me away!'

'Tattycoram,' said Mr Meagles. 'Once more yet! The only thing I ask of you in the world, my child! Count five-and-twenty!'

She put her hands tightly over her ears, confusedly tumbling down her bright black hair in the vehemence of the action, and turned her face resolutely to the wall. Miss Wade, who had watched her under this final appeal with that strange attentive smile, and that repressing hand upon her own bosom with which she had watched her in her struggle at Marseilles, then put her arm about her waist as if she took possession of her for evermore.

And there was a visible triumph in her face when she turned it to dismiss the visitors.

'As it is the last time I shall have the honour,' she said, 'and as you have spoken of not knowing what I am, and also of the foundation of my influence here, you may now know that it is founded in a common cause. What your broken plaything is as to birth, I am. She has no name, I have no name. Her wrong is my wrong. I have nothing more to say to you.'

This was addressed to Mr Meagles, who sorrowfully went out. As Clennam followed, she said to him, with the same external composure and in the same level voice, but with a smile that is only seen on cruel faces: a very faint smile, lifting the nostril, scarcely touching the lips, and not breaking away gradually, but instantly dismissed when done with:

'I hope the wife of your dear friend Mr Gowan, may be happy in the contrast of her extraction to this girl's and mine, and in the high good fortune that awaits her.'

CHAPTER 28. Nobody's Disappearance

Not resting satisfied with the endeavours he had made to recover his lost charge, Mr Meagles addressed a letter of remonstrance, breathing nothing but goodwill, not only to her, but to Miss Wade too. No answer coming to these epistles, or to another written to the stubborn girl by the hand of her late young mistress, which might have melted her if anything could (all three letters were returned weeks afterwards as having been refused at the house-door), he deputed Mrs Meagles to make the experiment of a personal interview. That worthy lady being unable to obtain one, and being steadfastly denied admission, Mr Meagles besought Arthur to essay once more what he could do. All that came of his compliance was, his discovery that the empty house was left in charge of the old woman, that Miss Wade was gone, that the waifs and strays of furniture were gone, and that the old woman would accept any number of half-crowns and thank the donor kindly, but had no information whatever to exchange for those coins, beyond constantly offering for perusal a memorandum relative to fixtures, which the house-agent's young man had left in the hall.

Unwilling, even under this discomfiture, to resign the ingrate and leave her hopeless, in case of her better dispositions obtaining the mastery over the darker side of her character, Mr Meagles, for six successive days, published a discreetly covert advertisement in the morning papers, to the effect that if a certain young person who had lately left home without reflection, would at any time apply to his address at Twickenham, everything would be as it had been before, and no reproaches need be apprehended. The unexpected consequences of this notification suggested to the dismayed Mr Meagles for the first time that some hundreds of young persons must be leaving their homes without reflection every day; for shoals of wrong young people came down to Twickenham, who, not finding themselves received with enthusiasm, generally demanded compensation by way of damages, in addition to coach-hire there and back. Nor were these the only uninvited clients whom the advertisement produced. The swarm of begging-letter writers, who would seem to be always watching eagerly for any hook, however small, to hang a letter upon, wrote to say that having seen the advertisement, they were induced to apply with confidence for various sums, ranging from ten shillings to fifty pounds: not because they knew anything about the young person, but because they felt that to part with those donations would greatly relieve the advertiser's mind. Several projectors, likewise, availed themselves of the same opportunity to correspond with Mr Meagles; as, for example, to apprise him that their attention having been called to the advertisement by a friend, they begged to state that if they should ever hear anything of the young person, they would not fail to make it known to him immediately, and that in the meantime if he would oblige them with the funds necessary for bringing to perfection a certain entirely novel description of Pump, the happiest results would ensue to mankind.

Mr Meagles and his family, under these combined discouragements, had begun reluctantly to give up Tattycoram as irrecoverable, when the new and active firm of Doyce and Clennam, in their private capacities, went down on a Saturday to stay at the cottage until Monday. The senior partner took the coach, and the junior partner took his walking-stick.

A tranquil summer sunset shone upon him as he approached the end of his walk, and passed through the meadows by the river side. He had that sense of peace, and of being lightened of a weight of care, which country quiet awakens in the breasts of dwellers in towns. Everything within his view was lovely and placid. The rich foliage of the trees, the luxuriant grass diversified with wild flowers, the little green islands in the river, the beds of rushes, the water-lilies floating on the surface of the stream, the distant voices in boats borne musically towards him on the ripple of the water and the evening air, were all expressive of rest. In the occasional leap of a fish, or dip of an oar, or twittering of a bird not yet at roost, or distant barking of a dog, or lowing of a cow—in all such sounds, there was the prevailing breath of rest, which seemed to encompass him in every scent that sweetened the fragrant air. The long lines of red and gold in the sky, and the glorious track of the descending sun, were all divinely calm. Upon the purple tree-tops far away, and on the green height near at hand up which the shades were slowly creeping, there was an equal hush. Between the real landscape and its shadow in the water, there was no division; both were so untroubled and clear, and, while so fraught with solemn mystery of life and death, so hopefully reassuring to the gazer's soothed heart, because so tenderly and mercifully beautiful.

Clennam had stopped, not for the first time by many times, to look about him and suffer what he saw to sink into his soul, as the shadows, looked at, seemed to sink deeper and deeper into the water. He was slowly resuming his way, when he saw a figure in the path before him which he had, perhaps, already associated with the evening and its impressions.

Minnie was there, alone. She had some roses in her hand, and seemed to have stood still on seeing him, waiting for him. Her face was towards him, and she appeared to have been coming from the opposite direction. There was a flutter in her manner, which Clennam had never seen in it before; and as he came near her, it entered his mind all at once that she was there of a set purpose to speak to him.

She gave him her hand, and said, 'You wonder to see me here by myself? But the evening is so lovely, I have strolled further than I meant at first. I thought it likely I might meet you, and that made me more confident. You always come this way, do you not?'

As Clennam said that it was his favourite way, he felt her hand falter on his arm, and saw the roses shake.

'Will you let me give you one, Mr Clennam? I gathered them as I came out of the garden. Indeed, I almost gathered them for you, thinking it so likely I might meet you. Mr Doyce arrived more than an hour ago, and told us you were walking down.'

His own hand shook, as he accepted a rose or two from hers and thanked her. They were now by an avenue of trees. Whether they turned into it on his movement or on hers matters little. He never knew how that was.

'It is very grave here,' said Clennam, 'but very pleasant at this hour. Passing along this deep shade, and out at that arch of light at the other end, we come upon the ferry and the cottage by the best approach, I think.' In her simple garden-hat and her light summer dress, with her rich brown hair naturally clustering about her, and her wonderful eyes raised to his for a moment with a look in which regard for him and trustfulness in him were strikingly blended with a kind of timid sorrow for him, she was so beautiful that it was well for his peace—or ill for his peace, he did not quite know which—that he had made that vigorous resolution he had so often thought about.

She broke a momentary silence by inquiring if he knew that papa had been thinking of another tour abroad? He said he had heard it mentioned.

She broke another momentary silence by adding, with some hesitation, that papa had abandoned the idea.

At this, he thought directly, 'they are to be married.'

'Mr Clennam,' she said, hesitating more timidly yet, and speaking so low that he bent his head to hear her. 'I should very much like to give you my confidence, if you would not mind having the goodness to receive it. I should have very much liked to have given it to you long ago, because—I felt that you were becoming so much our friend.'

'How can I be otherwise than proud of it at any time! Pray give it to me. Pray trust me.'

'I could never have been afraid of trusting you,' she returned, raising her eyes frankly to his face. 'I think I would have done so some time ago, if I had known how. But I scarcely know how, even now.'

'Mr Gowan,' said Arthur Clennam, 'has reason to be very happy. God bless his wife and him!'

She wept, as she tried to thank him. He reassured her, took her hand as it lay with the trembling roses in it on his arm, took the remaining roses from it, and put it to his lips. At that time, it seemed to him, he first finally resigned the dying hope that had flickered in nobody's heart so much to its pain and trouble; and from that time he became in his own eyes, as to any similar hope or prospect, a very much older man who had done with that part of life.

He put the roses in his breast and they walked on for a little while, slowly and silently, under the umbrageous trees. Then he asked her, in a voice of cheerful kindness, was there anything else that she would say to him as her friend and her father's friend, many years older than herself; was there any trust she would repose in him, any service she would ask of him, any little aid to her happiness that she could give him the lasting gratification of believing it was in his power to render?

She was going to answer, when she was so touched by some little hidden sorrow or sympathy—what could it have been?—that she said, bursting into tears again: 'O Mr Clennam! Good, generous, Mr Clennam, pray tell me you do not blame me.'

'I blame you?' said Clennam. 'My dearest girl! I blame you? No!'

After clasping both her hands upon his arm, and looking confidentially up into his face, with some hurried words to the effect that she thanked him from her heart (as she did, if it be the source of earnestness), she gradually composed herself, with now and then a word of encouragement from him, as they walked on slowly and almost silently under the darkening trees.

'And, now, Minnie Gowan,' at length said Clennam, smiling; 'will you ask me nothing?'

'Oh! I have very much to ask of you.'

'That's well! I hope so; I am not disappointed.'

'You know how I am loved at home, and how I love home. You can hardly think it perhaps, dear Mr Clennam,' she spoke with great agitation, 'seeing me going from it of my own free will and choice, but I do so dearly love it!'

'I am sure of that,' said Clennam. 'Can you suppose I doubt it?'

'No, no. But it is strange, even to me, that loving it so much and being so much beloved in it, I can bear to cast it away. It seems so neglectful of it, so unthankful.'

'My dear girl,' said Clennam, 'it is in the natural progress and change of time. All homes are left so.'

'Yes, I know; but all homes are not left with such a blank in them as there will be in mine when I am gone. Not that there is any scarcity of far better and more endearing and more accomplished girls than I am; not that I am much, but that they have made so much of me!'

Pet's affectionate heart was overcharged, and she sobbed while she pictured what would happen.

'I know what a change papa will feel at first, and I know that at first I cannot be to him anything like what I have been these many years. And it is then, Mr Clennam, then more than at any time, that I beg and entreat you to remember him, and sometimes to keep him company when you can spare a little while; and to tell him that you know I was fonder of him when I left him, than I ever was in all my life. For there is nobody—he told me so himself when he talked to me this very day—there is nobody he likes so well as you, or trusts so much.'

A clue to what had passed between the father and daughter dropped like a heavy stone into the well of Clennam's heart, and swelled the water to his eyes. He said, cheerily, but not quite so cheerily as he tried to say, that it should be done—that he gave her his faithful promise.

'If I do not speak of mama,' said Pet, more moved by, and more pretty in, her innocent grief, than Clennam could trust himself even to consider—for which reason he counted the trees between them and the fading light as they slowly diminished in number—'it is because mama will understand me better in this action, and will feel my loss in a different way, and will look forward in a different manner. But you know what a dear, devoted mother she is, and you will remember her too; will you not?'

Let Minnie trust him, Clennam said, let Minnie trust him to do all she wished.

'And, dear Mr Clennam,' said Minnie, 'because papa and one whom I need not name, do not fully appreciate and understand one another yet, as they will by-and-by; and because it will be the duty, and the pride, and pleasure of my new life, to draw them to a better knowledge of one another, and to be a happiness to one another, and to be proud of one another, and to love one another, both loving me so dearly; oh, as you are a kind, true man! when I am first separated from home (I am going a long distance away), try to reconcile papa to him a little more, and use your great influence to keep him before papa's mind free from prejudice and in his real form. Will you do this for me, as you are a noble-hearted friend?'

Poor Pet! Self-deceived, mistaken child! When were such changes ever made in men's natural relations to one another: when was such reconcilement of ingrain differences ever effected! It has been tried many times by other daughters, Minnie; it has never succeeded; nothing has ever come of it but failure.

So Clennam thought. So he did not say; it was too late. He bound himself to do all she asked, and she knew full well that he would do it.

They were now at the last tree in the avenue. She stopped, and withdrew her arm. Speaking to him with her eyes lifted up to his, and with the hand that had lately rested on his sleeve trembling by touching one of the roses in his breast as an additional appeal to him, she said:

'Dear Mr Clennam, in my happiness—for I am happy, though you have seen me crying—I cannot bear to leave any cloud between us. If you have anything to forgive me (not anything that I have wilfully done, but any trouble I may have caused you without meaning it, or having it in my power to help it), forgive me to-night out of your noble heart!'

He stooped to meet the guileless face that met his without shrinking. He kissed it, and answered, Heaven knew that he had nothing to forgive. As he stooped to meet the innocent face once again, she whispered, 'Good-bye!' and he repeated it. It was taking leave of all his old hopes—all nobody's old restless doubts. They came out of the avenue next moment, arm-in-arm as they had entered it: and the trees seemed to close up behind them in the darkness, like their own perspective of the past.

The voices of Mr and Mrs Meagles and Doyce were audible directly, speaking near the garden gate. Hearing Pet's name among them, Clennam called out, 'She is here, with me.' There was some little wondering and laughing until they came up; but as soon as they had all come together, it ceased, and Pet glided away.

Mr Meagles, Doyce, and Clennam, without speaking, walked up and down on the brink of the river, in the light of the rising moon, for a few minutes; and then Doyce lingered behind, and went into the house. Mr Meagles and Clennam walked up and down together for a few minutes more without speaking, until at length the former broke silence.

'Arthur,' said he, using that familiar address for the first time in their communication, 'do you remember my telling you, as we walked up and down one hot morning, looking over the harbour at Marseilles, that Pet's baby sister who was dead seemed to Mother and me to have grown as she had grown, and changed as she had changed?'

'Very well.'

'You remember my saying that our thoughts had never been able to separate those twin sisters, and that, in our fancy, whatever Pet was, the other was?'

'Yes, very well.'

'Arthur,' said Mr Meagles, much subdued, 'I carry that fancy further to-night. I feel to-night, my dear fellow, as if you had loved my dead child very tenderly, and had lost her when she was like what Pet is now.'

'Thank you!' murmured Clennam, 'thank you!' And pressed his hand.

'Will you come in?' said Mr Meagles, presently.

'In a little while.'

Mr Meagles fell away, and he was left alone. When he had walked on the river's brink in the peaceful moonlight for some half an hour, he put his hand in his breast and tenderly took out the handful of roses. Perhaps he put them to his heart, perhaps he put them to his lips, but certainly he bent down on the shore and gently launched them on the flowing river. Pale and unreal in the moonlight, the river floated them away. The lights were bright within doors when he entered, and the faces on which they shone, his own face not excepted, were soon quietly cheerful. They talked of many subjects (his partner never had had such a ready store to draw upon for the beguiling of the time), and so to bed, and to sleep. While the flowers, pale and unreal in the moonlight, floated away upon the river; and thus do greater things that once were in our breasts, and near our hearts, flow from us to the eternal seas.

CHAPTER 29. Mrs Flintwinch goes on Dreaming

The house in the city preserved its heavy dulness through all these transactions, and the invalid within it turned the same unvarying round of life. Morning, noon, and night, morning, noon, and night, each recurring with its accompanying monotony, always the same reluctant return of the same sequences of machinery, like a dragging piece of clockwork.

The wheeled chair had its associated remembrances and reveries, one may suppose, as every place that is made the station of a human being has. Pictures of demolished streets and altered houses, as they formerly were when the occupant of the chair was familiar with them, images of people as they too used to be, with little or no allowance made for the lapse of time since they were seen; of these, there must have been many in the long routine of gloomy days. To stop the clock of busy existence at the hour when we were personally sequestered from it, to suppose mankind stricken motionless when we were brought to a stand-still, to be unable to measure the changes beyond our view by any larger standard than the shrunken one of our own uniform and contracted existence, is the infirmity of many invalids, and the mental unhealthiness of almost all recluses.

What scenes and actors the stern woman most reviewed, as she sat from season to season in her one dark room, none knew but herself. Mr Flintwinch, with his wry presence brought to bear upon her daily like some eccentric mechanical force, would perhaps have screwed it out of her, if there had been less resistance in her; but she was too strong for him. So far as Mistress Affery was concerned, to regard her liege-lord and her disabled mistress with a face of blank wonder, to go about the house after dark with her apron over her head, always to listen for the strange noises and sometimes to hear them, and never to emerge from her ghostly, dreamy, sleep-waking state, was occupation enough for her.

There was a fair stroke of business doing, as Mistress Affery made out, for her husband had abundant occupation in his little office, and saw more people than had been used to come there for some years. This might easily be, the house having been long deserted; but he did receive letters, and comers, and keep books, and correspond. Moreover, he went about to other counting-houses, and to wharves, and docks, and to the Custom House,' and to Garraway's Coffee House, and the Jerusalem Coffee House, and on 'Change; so that he was much in and out. He began, too, sometimes of an evening, when Mrs Clennam expressed no particular wish for his society, to resort to a tavern in the neighbourhood to look at the shipping news and closing prices in the evening paper, and even to exchange Small socialities with mercantile Sea Captains who frequented that establishment. At some period of every day, he and Mrs Clennam held a council on matters of business; and it appeared to Affery, who was always groping about, listening and watching, that the two clever ones were making money.

The state of mind into which Mr Flintwinch's dazed lady had fallen, had now begun to be so expressed in all her looks and actions that she was held in very low account by the two clever ones, as a person, never of strong intellect, who was becoming foolish. Perhaps because her appearance was not of a commercial cast, or perhaps because it occurred to him that his having taken her to wife might expose his judgment to doubt in the minds of customers, Mr Flintwinch laid his commands upon her that she should hold her peace on the subject of her conjugal relations, and should no longer call him Jeremiah out of the domestic trio. Her frequent forgetfulness of this admonition intensified her startled manner, since Mr Flintwinch's habit of avenging himself on her remissness by making springs after her on the staircase, and shaking her, occasioned her to be always nervously uncertain when she might be thus waylaid next.

Little Dorrit had finished a long day's work in Mrs Clennam's room, and was neatly gathering up her shreds and odds and ends before going home. Mr Pancks, whom Affery had just shown in, was addressing an inquiry to Mrs Clennam on the subject of her health, coupled with the remark that, 'happening to find himself in that direction,' he had looked in to inquire, on behalf of his proprietor, how she found herself. Mrs Clennam, with a deep contraction of her brows, was looking at him.

'Mr Casby knows,' said she, 'that I am not subject to changes. The change that I await here is the great change.'

'Indeed, ma'am?' returned Mr Pancks, with a wandering eye towards the figure of the little seamstress on her knee picking threads and fraying of her work from the carpet. 'You look nicely, ma'am.'

'I bear what I have to bear,' she answered. 'Do you what you have to do.' 'Thank you, ma'am,' said Mr Pancks, 'such is my endeavour.'

'You are often in this direction, are you not?' asked Mrs Clennam.

'Why, yes, ma'am,' said Pancks, 'rather so lately; I have lately been round this way a good deal, owing to one thing and another.' 'Beg Mr Casby and his daughter not to trouble themselves, by deputy, about me. When they wish to see me, they know I am here to see them. They have no need to trouble themselves to send. You have no need to trouble yourself to come.' 'Not the least trouble, ma'am,' said Mr Pancks. 'You really are looking uncommonly nicely, ma'am.'

'Thank you. Good evening.'

The dismissal, and its accompanying finger pointed straight at the door, was so curt and direct that Mr Pancks did not see his way to prolong his visit. He stirred up his hair with his sprightliest expression, glanced at the little figure again, said 'Good evening, ma 'am; don't come down, Mrs Affery, I know the road to the door,' and steamed out. Mrs Clennam, her chin resting on her hand, followed him with attentive and darkly distrustful eyes; and Affery stood looking at her as if she were spell-bound.

Slowly and thoughtfully, Mrs Clennam's eyes turned from the door by which Pancks had gone out, to Little Dorrit, rising from the carpet. With her chin drooping more heavily on her hand, and her eyes vigilant and lowering, the sick woman sat looking at her until she attracted her attention. Little Dorrit coloured under such a gaze, and looked down. Mrs Clennam still sat intent.

'Little Dorrit,' she said, when she at last broke silence, 'what do you know of that man?'

'I don't know anything of him, ma'am, except that I have seen him about, and that he has spoken to me.'

'What has he said to you?'

'I don't understand what he has said, he is so strange. But nothing rough or disagreeable.'

'Why does he come here to see you?'

'I don't know, ma'am,' said Little Dorrit, with perfect frankness.

'You know that he does come here to see you?'

'I have fancied so,' said Little Dorrit. 'But why he should come here or anywhere for that, ma'am, I can't think.'

Mrs Clennam cast her eyes towards the ground, and with her strong, set face, as intent upon a subject in her mind as it had lately been upon the form that seemed to pass out of her view, sat absorbed. Some minutes elapsed before she came out of this thoughtfulness, and resumed her hard composure.

Little Dorrit in the meanwhile had been waiting to go, but afraid to disturb her by moving. She now ventured to leave the spot where she had been standing since she had risen, and to pass gently round by the wheeled chair. She stopped at its side to say 'Good night, ma'am.'

Mrs Clennam put out her hand, and laid it on her arm. Little Dorrit, confused under the touch, stood faltering. Perhaps some momentary recollection of the story of the Princess may have been in her mind.

'Tell me, Little Dorrit,' said Mrs Clennam, 'have you many friends now?'

'Very few, ma'am. Besides you, only Miss Flora and—one more.'

'Meaning,' said Mrs Clennam, with her unbent finger again pointing to the door, 'that man?'

'Oh no, ma'am!'

'Some friend of his, perhaps?'

'No ma'am.' Little Dorrit earnestly shook her head. 'Oh no! No one at all like him, or belonging to him.'

'Well!' said Mrs Clennam, almost smiling. 'It is no affair of mine. I ask, because I take an interest in you; and because I believe I was your friend when you had no other who could serve you. Is that so?'

'Yes, ma'am; indeed it is. I have been here many a time when, but for you and the work you gave me, we should have wanted everything.'

'We,' repeated Mrs Clennam, looking towards the watch, once her dead husband's, which always lay upon her table. 'Are there many of you?'

'Only father and I, now. I mean, only father and I to keep regularly out of what we get.'

'Have you undergone many privations? You and your father and who else there may be of you?' asked Mrs Clennam, speaking deliberately, and meditatively turning the watch over and over.

'Sometimes it has been rather hard to live,' said Little Dorrit, in her soft voice, and timid uncomplaining way; 'but I think not harder—as to that—than many people find it.'

'That's well said!' Mrs Clennam quickly returned. 'That's the truth! You are a good, thoughtful girl. You are a grateful girl too, or I much mistake you.'

'It is only natural to be that. There is no merit in being that,' said Little Dorrit. 'I am indeed.' Mrs Clennam, with a gentleness of which the dreaming Affery had never dreamed her to be capable, drew down the face of her little seamstress, and kissed her on the forehead. 'Now go, Little Dorrit,' said she,'or you will be late, poor child!'

In all the dreams Mistress Affery had been piling up since she first became devoted to the pursuit, she had dreamed nothing more astonishing than this. Her head ached with the idea that she would find the other clever one kissing Little Dorrit next, and then the two clever ones embracing each other and dissolving into tears of tenderness for all mankind. The idea quite stunned her, as she attended the light footsteps down the stairs, that the house door might be safely shut.

On opening it to let Little Dorrit out, she found Mr Pancks, instead of having gone his way, as in any less wonderful place and among less wonderful phenomena he might have been reasonably expected to do, fluttering up and down the court outside the house.

The moment he saw Little Dorrit, he passed her briskly, said with his finger to his nose (as Mrs Affery distinctly heard), 'Pancks the gipsy, fortune-telling,' and went away. 'Lord save us, here's a gipsy and a fortune-teller in it now!' cried Mistress Affery. 'What next! She stood at the open door, staggering herself with this enigma, on a rainy, thundery evening. The clouds were flying fast, and the wind was coming up in gusts, banging some neighbouring shutters that had broken loose, twirling the rusty chimney-cowls and weather-cocks, and rushing round and round a confined adjacent churchyard as if it had a mind to blow the dead citizens out of their graves. The low thunder, muttering in all quarters of the sky at once, seemed to threaten vengeance for this attempted desecration, and to mutter, 'Let them rest! Let them rest!'

Mistress Affery, whose fear of thunder and lightning was only to be equalled by her dread of the haunted house with a premature and preternatural darkness in it, stood undecided whether to go in or not, until the question was settled for her by the door blowing upon her in a violent gust of wind and shutting her out. 'What's to be done now, what's to be done now!' cried Mistress Affery, wringing her hands in this last uneasy dream of all; 'when she's all alone by herself inside, and can no more come down to open it than the churchyard dead themselves!'

In this dilemma, Mistress Affery, with her apron as a hood to keep the rain off, ran crying up and down the solitary paved enclosure several times. Why she should then stoop down and look in at the keyhole of the door as if an eye would open it, it would be difficult to say; but it is none the less what most people would have done in the same situation, and it is what she did.

From this posture she started up suddenly, with a half scream, feeling something on her shoulder. It was the touch of a hand; of a man's hand.

The man was dressed like a traveller, in a foraging cap with fur about it, and a heap of cloak. He looked like a foreigner. He had a quantity of hair and moustache—jet black, except at the shaggy ends, where it had a tinge of red—and a high hook nose. He laughed at Mistress Affery's start and cry; and as he laughed, his moustache went up under his nose, and his nose came down over his moustache.

'What's the matter?' he asked in plain English. 'What are you frightened at?'

'At you,' panted Affery.

'Me, madam?'

'And the dismal evening, and—and everything,' said Affery. 'And here! The wind has been and blown the door to, and I can't get in.'

'Hah!' said the gentleman, who took that very coolly. 'Indeed! Do you know such a name as Clennam about here?'

'Lord bless us, I should think I did, I should think I did!' cried Affery, exasperated into a new wringing of hands by the inquiry.

'Where about here?'

'Where!' cried Affery, goaded into another inspection of the keyhole. 'Where but here in this house? And she's all alone in her room, and lost the use of her limbs and can't stir to help herself or me, and t'other clever one's out, and Lord forgive me!' cried Affery, driven into a frantic dance by these accumulated considerations, 'if I ain't a-going headlong out of my mind!'

Taking a warmer view of the matter now that it concerned himself, the gentleman stepped back to glance at the house, and his eye soon rested on the long narrow window of the little room near the hall-door.

'Where may the lady be who has lost the use of her limbs, madam?' he inquired, with that peculiar smile which Mistress Affery could not choose but keep her eyes upon.

'Up there!' said Affery. 'Them two windows.'

'Hah! I am of a fair size, but could not have the honour of presenting myself in that room without a ladder. Now, madam, frankly—frankness is a part of my character—shall I open the door for you?'

'Yes, bless you, sir, for a dear creetur, and do it at once,' cried Affery, 'for she may be a-calling to me at this very present minute, or may be setting herself a fire and burning herself to death, or there's no knowing what may be happening to her, and me a-going out of my mind at thinking of it!'

'Stay, my good madam!' He restrained her impatience with a smooth white hand. 'Business-hours, I apprehend, are over for the day?' 'Yes, yes, yes,' cried Affery. 'Long ago.'

'Let me make, then, a fair proposal. Fairness is a part of my character. I am just landed from the packet-boat, as you may see.'

He showed her that his cloak was very wet, and that his boots were saturated with water; she had previously observed that he was dishevelled and sallow, as if from a rough voyage, and so chilled that he could not keep his teeth from chattering. 'I am just landed from the packet-boat, madam, and have been delayed by the weather: the infernal weather! In consequence of this, madam, some necessary business that I should otherwise have transacted here within the regular hours (necessary business because money-business), still remains to be done. Now, if you will fetch any authorised neighbouring somebody to do it in return for my opening the door, I'll open the door. If this arrangement should be objectionable, I'll—' and with the same smile he made a significant feint of backing away.

Mistress Affery, heartily glad to effect the proposed compromise, gave in her willing adhesion to it. The gentleman at once requested her to do him the favour of holding his cloak, took a short run at the narrow window, made a leap at the sill, clung his way up the bricks, and in a moment had his hand at the sash, raising it. His eyes looked so very sinister, as he put his leg into the room and glanced round at Mistress Affery, that she thought with a sudden coldness, if he were to go straight up-stairs to murder the invalid, what could she do to prevent him?

Happily he had no such purpose; for he reappeared, in a moment, at the house door. 'Now, my dear madam,' he said, as he took back his cloak and threw it on, 'if you have the goodness to—what the Devil's that!'

The strangest of sounds. Evidently close at hand from the peculiar shock it communicated to the air, yet subdued as if it were far off. A tremble, a rumble, and a fall of some light dry matter.

'What the Devil is it?'

'I don't know what it is, but I've heard the like of it over and over again,' said Affery, who had caught his arm. He could hardly be a very brave man, even she thought in her dreamy start and fright, for his trembling lips had turned colourless. After listening a few moments, he made light of it.

'Bah! Nothing! Now, my dear madam, I think you spoke of some clever personage. Will you be so good as to confront me with that genius?' He held the door in his hand, as though he were quite ready to shut her out again if she failed.

'Don't you say anything about the door and me, then,' whispered Affery.

'Not a word.'

'And don't you stir from here, or speak if she calls, while I run round the corner.'

'Madam, I am a statue.'

Affery had so vivid a fear of his going stealthily up-stairs the moment her back was turned, that after hurrying out of sight, she returned to the gateway to peep at him. Seeing him still on the threshold, more out of the house than in it, as if he had no love for darkness and no desire to probe its mysteries, she flew into the next street, and sent a message into the tavern to Mr Flintwinch, who came out directly. The two returning together—the lady in advance, and Mr Flintwinch coming up briskly behind, animated with the hope of shaking her before she could get housed—saw the gentleman standing in the same place in the dark, and heard the strong voice of Mrs Clennam calling from her room, 'Who is it? What is it? Why does no one answer? Who is that, down there?'

CHAPTER 30. The Word of a Gentleman

When Mr and Mrs Flintwinch panted up to the door of the old house in the twilight, Jeremiah within a second of Affery, the stranger started back. 'Death of my soul!' he exclaimed. 'Why, how did you get here?'

Mr Flintwinch, to whom these words were spoken, repaid the stranger's wonder in full. He gazed at him with blank astonishment; he looked over his own shoulder, as expecting to see some one he had not been aware of standing behind him; he gazed at the stranger again, speechlessly, at a loss to know what he meant; he looked to his wife for explanation; receiving none, he pounced upon her, and shook her with such heartiness that he shook her cap off her head, saying between his teeth, with grim raillery, as he did it, 'Affery, my woman, you must have a dose, my woman! This is some of your tricks! You have been dreaming again, mistress. What's it about? Who is it? What does it mean! Speak out or be choked! It's the only choice I'll give you.'

Supposing Mistress Affery to have any power of election at the moment, her choice was decidedly to be choked; for she answered not a syllable to this adjuration, but, with her bare head wagging violently backwards and forwards, resigned herself to her punishment. The stranger, however, picking up her cap with an air of gallantry, interposed.

'Permit me,' said he, laying his hand on the shoulder of Jeremiah, who stopped and released his victim. 'Thank you. Excuse me. Husband and wife I know, from this playfulness. Haha! Always agreeable to see that relation playfully maintained. Listen! May I suggest that somebody up-stairs, in the dark, is becoming energetically curious to know what is going on here?'

This reference to Mrs Clennam's voice reminded Mr Flintwinch to step into the hall and call up the staircase. 'It's all right, I am here, Affery is coming with your light.' Then he said to the latter flustered woman, who was putting her cap on, 'Get out with you, and get up-stairs!' and then turned to the stranger and said to him, 'Now, sir, what might you please to want?'

'I am afraid,' said the stranger, 'I must be so troublesome as to propose a candle.'

'True,' assented Jeremiah. 'I was going to do so. Please to stand where you are while I get one.'

The visitor was standing in the doorway, but turned a little into the gloom of the house as Mr Flintwinch turned, and pursued him with his eyes into the little room, where he groped about for a phosphorus box. When he found it, it was damp, or otherwise out of order; and match after match that he struck into it lighted sufficiently to throw a dull glare about his groping face, and to sprinkle his hands with pale little spots of fire, but not sufficiently to light the candle. The stranger, taking advantage of this fitful illumination of his visage, looked intently and wonderingly at him. Jeremiah, when he at last lighted the candle, knew he had been doing this, by seeing the last shade of a lowering watchfulness clear away from his face, as it broke into the doubtful smile that was a large ingredient in its expression.

'Be so good,' said Jeremiah, closing the house door, and taking a pretty sharp survey of the smiling visitor in his turn, 'as to step into my counting-house.—It's all right, I tell you!' petulantly breaking off to answer the voice up-stairs, still unsatisfied, though Affery was there, speaking in persuasive tones. 'Don't I tell you it's all right? Preserve the woman, has she no reason at all in her!'

'Timorous,' remarked the stranger.

'Timorous?' said Mr Flintwinch, turning his head to retort, as he went before with the candle. 'More courageous than ninety men in a hundred, sir, let me tell you.'

'Though an invalid?'

'Many years an invalid. Mrs Clennam. The only one of that name left in the House now. My partner.' Saying something apologetically as he crossed the hall, to the effect that at that time of night they were not in the habit of receiving any one, and were always shut up, Mr Flintwinch led the way into his own office, which presented a sufficiently business-like appearance. Here he put the light on his desk, and said to the stranger, with his wryest twist upon him, 'Your commands.'

'MY name is Blandois.'

'Blandois. I don't know it,' said Jeremiah.

'I thought it possible,' resumed the other, 'that you might have been advised from Paris—'

'We have had no advice from Paris respecting anybody of the name of Blandois,' said Jeremiah.

'No?'

'No.'

Jeremiah stood in his favourite attitude. The smiling Mr Blandois, opening his cloak to get his hand to a breast-pocket, paused to say, with a laugh in his glittering eyes, which it occurred to Mr Flintwinch were too near together:

'You are so like a friend of mine! Not so identically the same as I supposed when I really did for the moment take you to be the same in the dusk—for which I ought to apologise; permit me to do so; a readiness to confess my errors is, I hope, a part of the frankness of my character—still, however, uncommonly like.'

'Indeed?' said Jeremiah, perversely. 'But I have not received any letter of advice from anywhere respecting anybody of the name of Blandois.'

'Just so,' said the stranger.

'JUST so,' said Jeremiah.

Mr Blandois, not at all put out by this omission on the part of the correspondents of the house of Clennam and Co., took his pocket-book from his breast-pocket, selected a letter from that receptacle, and handed it to Mr Flintwinch. 'No doubt you are well acquainted with the writing. Perhaps the letter speaks for itself, and requires no advice. You are a far more competent judge of such affairs than I am. It is my misfortune to be, not so much a man of business, as what the world calls (arbitrarily) a gentleman.'

Mr Flintwinch took the letter, and read, under date of Paris, 'We have to present to you, on behalf of a highly esteemed correspondent of our Firm, M. Blandois, of this city,' &c. &c. 'Such facilities as he may require and such attentions as may lie in your power,' &c. &c. 'Also have to add that if you will honour M. Blandois' drafts at sight to the extent of, say Fifty Pounds sterling (150),' &c. &c.

'Very good, sir,' said Mr Flintwinch. 'Take a chair. To the extent of anything that our House can do—we are in a retired, old-fashioned, steady way of business, sir—we shall be happy to render you our best assistance. I observe, from the date of this, that we could not yet be advised of it. Probably you came over with the delayed mail that brings the advice.'

'That I came over with the delayed mail, sir,' returned Mr Blandois, passing his white hand down his high-hooked nose, 'I know to the cost of my head and stomach: the detestable and intolerable weather having racked them both. You see me in the plight in which I came out of the packet within this half-hour. I ought to have been here hours ago, and then I should not have to apologise—permit me to apologise—for presenting myself so unreasonably, and frightening—no, by-the-bye, you said not frightening; permit me to apologise again—the esteemed lady, Mrs Clennam, in her invalid chamber above stairs.'

Swagger and an air of authorised condescension do so much, that Mr Flintwinch had already begun to think this a highly gentlemanly personage. Not the less unyielding with him on that account, he scraped his chin and said, what could he have the honour of doing for Mr Blandois to-night, out of business hours?

'Faith!' returned that gentleman, shrugging his cloaked shoulders, 'I must change, and eat and drink, and be lodged somewhere. Have the kindness to advise me, a total stranger, where, and money is a matter of perfect indifference until to-morrow. The nearer the place, the better. Next door, if that's all.'

Mr Flintwinch was slowly beginning, 'For a gentleman of your habits, there is not in this immediate neighbourhood any hotel—' when Mr Blandois took him up.

'So much for my habits! my dear sir,' snapping his fingers. 'A citizen of the world has no habits. That I am, in my poor way, a gentleman, by Heaven! I will not deny, but I have no unaccommodating prejudiced habits. A clean room, a hot dish for dinner, and a bottle of not absolutely poisonous wine, are all I want tonight. But I want that much without the trouble of going one unnecessary inch to get it.'

'There is,' said Mr Flintwinch, with more than his usual deliberation, as he met, for a moment, Mr Blandois' shining eyes, which were restless; 'there is a coffee-house and tavern close here, which, so far, I can recommend; but there's no style about it.'

'I dispense with style!' said Mr Blandois, waving his hand. 'Do me the honour to show me the house, and introduce me there (if I am not too troublesome), and I shall be infinitely obliged.' Mr Flintwinch, upon this, looked up his hat, and lighted Mr Blandois across the hall again. As he put the candle on a bracket, where the dark old panelling almost served as an extinguisher for it, he bethought himself of going up to tell the invalid that he would not be absent five minutes. 'Oblige me,' said the visitor, on his saying so, 'by presenting my card of visit. Do me the favour to add that I shall be happy to wait on Mrs Clennam, to offer my personal compliments, and to apologise for having occasioned any agitation in this tranquil corner, if it should suit her convenience to endure the presence of a stranger for a few minutes, after he shall have changed his wet clothes and fortified himself with something to eat and drink.'

Jeremiah made all despatch, and said, on his return, 'She'll be glad to see you, sir; but, being conscious that her sick room has no attractions, wishes me to say that she won't hold you to your offer, in case you should think better of it.'

'To think better of it,' returned the gallant Blandois, 'would be to slight a lady; to slight a lady would be to be deficient in chivalry towards the sex; and chivalry towards the sex is a part of my character!' Thus expressing himself, he threw the draggled skirt of his cloak over his shoulder, and accompanied Mr Flintwinch to the tavern; taking up on the road a porter who was waiting with his portmanteau on the outer side of the gateway.

The house was kept in a homely manner, and the condescension of Mr Blandois was infinite. It seemed to fill to inconvenience the little bar in which the widow landlady and her two daughters received him; it was much too big for the narrow wainscoted room with a bagatelle-board in it, that was first proposed for his reception; it perfectly swamped the little private holiday sitting-room of the family, which was finally given up to him. Here, in dry clothes and scented linen, with sleeked hair, a great ring on each forefinger and a massive show of watch-chain, Mr Blandois waiting for his dinner, lolling on a window-seat with his knees drawn up, looked (for all the difference in the setting of the jewel) fearfully and wonderfully like a certain Monsieur Rigaud who had once so waited for his breakfast, lying on the stone ledge of the iron grating of a cell in a villainous dungeon at Marseilles.

His greed at dinner, too, was closely in keeping with the greed of Monsieur Rigaud at breakfast. His avaricious manner of collecting all the eatables about him, and devouring some with his eyes while devouring others with his jaws, was the same manner. His utter disregard of other people, as shown in his way of tossing the little womanly toys of furniture about, flinging favourite cushions under his boots for a softer rest, and crushing delicate coverings with his big body and his great black head, had the same brute selfishness at the bottom of it. The softly moving hands that were so busy among the dishes had the old wicked facility of the hands that had clung to the bars. And when he could eat no more, and sat sucking his delicate fingers one by one and wiping them on a cloth, there wanted nothing but the substitution of vine-leaves to finish the picture.

On this man, with his moustache going up and his nose coming down in that most evil of smiles, and with his surface eyes looking as if they belonged to his dyed hair, and had had their natural power of reflecting light stopped by some similar process, Nature, always true, and never working in vain, had set the mark, Beware! It was not her fault, if the warning were fruitless. She is never to blame in any such instance.

Mr Blandois, having finished his repast and cleaned his fingers, took a cigar from his pocket, and, lying on the window-seat again, smoked it out at his leisure, occasionally apostrophising the smoke as it parted from his thin lips in a thin stream:

'Blandois, you shall turn the tables on society, my little child. Haha! Holy blue, you have begun well, Blandois! At a pinch, an excellent master in English or French; a man for the bosom of families! You have a quick perception, you have humour, you have ease, you have insinuating manners, you have a good appearance; in effect, you are a gentleman! A gentleman you shall live, my small boy, and a gentleman you shall die. You shall win, however the game goes. They shall all confess your merit, Blandois. You shall subdue the society which has grievously wronged you, to your own high spirit. Death of my soul! You are high spirited by right and by nature, my Blandois!'

To such soothing murmurs did this gentleman smoke out his cigar and drink out his bottle of wine. Both being finished, he shook himself into a sitting attitude; and with the concluding serious apostrophe, 'Hold, then! Blandois, you ingenious one, have all your wits about you!' arose and went back to the house of Clennam and Co.

He was received at the door by Mistress Affery, who, under instructions from her lord, had lighted up two candles in the hall and a third on the staircase, and who conducted him to Mrs Clennam's room. Tea was prepared there, and such little company arrangements had been made as usually attended the reception of expected visitors. They were slight on the greatest occasion, never extending beyond the production of the China tea-service, and the covering of the bed with a sober and sad drapery. For the rest, there was the bier-like sofa with the block upon it, and the figure in the widow's dress, as if attired for execution; the fire topped by the mound of damped ashes; the grate with its second little mound of ashes; the kettle and the smell of black dye; all as they had been for fifteen years.

Mr Flintwinch presented the gentleman commended to the consideration of Clennam and Co. Mrs Clennam, who had the letter lying before her, bent her head and requested him to sit. They looked very closely at one another. That was but natural curiosity. 'I thank you, sir, for thinking of a disabled woman like me. Few who come here on business have any remembrance to bestow on one so removed from observation. It would be idle to expect that they should have. Out of sight, out of mind. While I am grateful for the exception, I don't complain of the rule.'

Mr Blandois, in his most gentlemanly manner, was afraid he had disturbed her by unhappily presenting himself at such an unconscionable time. For which he had already offered his best apologies to Mr—he begged pardon—but by name had not the distinguished honour—'Mr Flintwinch has been connected with the House many years.'

Mr Blandois was Mr Flintwinch's most obedient humble servant. He entreated Mr Flintwinch to receive the assurance of his profoundest consideration.

'My husband being dead,' said Mrs Clennam, 'and my son preferring another pursuit, our old House has no other representative in these days than Mr Flintwinch.'

'What do you call yourself?' was the surly demand of that gentleman. 'You have the head of two men.'

'My sex disqualifies me,' she proceeded with merely a slight turn of her eyes in jeremiah's direction, 'from taking a responsible part in the business, even if I had the ability; and therefore Mr Flintwinch combines my interest with his own, and conducts it. It is not what it used to be; but some of our old friends (principally the writers of this letter) have the kindness not to forget us, and we retain the power of doing what they entrust to us as efficiently as we ever did. This however is not interesting to you. You are English, sir?'

'Faith, madam, no; I am neither born nor bred in England. In effect, I am of no country,' said Mr Blandois, stretching out his leg and smiting it: 'I descend from half-a-dozen countries.'

'You have been much about the world?'

'It is true. By Heaven, madam, I have been here and there and everywhere!'

'You have no ties, probably. Are not married?'

'Madam,' said Mr Blandois, with an ugly fall of his eyebrows, 'I adore your sex, but I am not married—never was.'

Mistress Affery, who stood at the table near him, pouring out the tea, happened in her dreamy state to look at him as he said these words, and to fancy that she caught an expression in his eyes which attracted her own eyes so that she could not get them away. The effect of this fancy was to keep her staring at him with the tea-pot in her hand, not only to her own great uneasiness, but manifestly to his, too; and, through them both, to Mrs Clennam's and Mr Flintwinch's. Thus a few ghostly moments supervened, when they were all confusedly staring without knowing why.

'Affery,' her mistress was the first to say, 'what is the matter with you?'

'I don't know,' said Mistress Affery, with her disengaged left hand extended towards the visitor. 'It ain't me. It's him!'

'What does this good woman mean?' cried Mr Blandois, turning white, hot, and slowly rising with a look of such deadly wrath that it contrasted surprisingly with the slight force of his words. 'How is it possible to understand this good creature?'

'It's NOT possible,' said Mr Flintwinch, screwing himself rapidly in that direction. 'She don't know what she means. She's an idiot, a wanderer in her mind. She shall have a dose, she shall have such a dose! Get along with you, my woman,' he added in her ear, 'get along with you, while you know you're Affery, and before you're shaken to yeast.'

Mistress Affery, sensible of the danger in which her identity stood, relinquished the tea-pot as her husband seized it, put her apron over her head, and in a twinkling vanished. The visitor gradually broke into a smile, and sat down again.

'You'll excuse her, Mr Blandois,' said Jeremiah, pouring out the tea himself, 'she's failing and breaking up; that's what she's about. Do you take sugar, sir?'

'Thank you, no tea for me.—Pardon my observing it, but that's a very remarkable watch!'

The tea-table was drawn up near the sofa, with a small interval between it and Mrs Clennam's own particular table. Mr Blandois in his gallantry had risen to hand that lady her tea (her dish of toast was already there), and it was in placing the cup conveniently within her reach that the watch, lying before her as it always did, attracted his attention. Mrs Clennam looked suddenly up at him.

'May I be permitted? Thank you. A fine old-fashioned watch,' he said, taking it in his hand. 'Heavy for use, but massive and genuine. I have a partiality for everything genuine. Such as I am, I am genuine myself. Hah! A gentleman's watch with two cases in the old fashion. May I remove it from the outer case? Thank you. Aye? An old silk watch-lining, worked with beads! I have often seen these among old Dutch people and Belgians. Quaint things!'

'They are old-fashioned, too,' said Mrs Clennam. 'Very. But this is not so old as the watch, I think?'

'I think not.'

'Extraordinary how they used to complicate these cyphers!' remarked Mr Blandois, glancing up with his own smile again. 'Now is this D. N. F.? It might be almost anything.'

'Those are the letters.'

Mr Flintwinch, who had been observantly pausing all this time with a cup of tea in his hand, and his mouth open ready to swallow the contents, began to do so: always entirely filling his mouth before he emptied it at a gulp; and always deliberating again before he refilled it.

'D. N. F. was some tender, lovely, fascinating fair-creature, I make no doubt,' observed Mr Blandois, as he snapped on the case again. 'I adore her memory on the assumption. Unfortunately for my peace of mind, I adore but too readily. It may be a vice, it may be a virtue, but adoration of female beauty and merit constitutes three parts of my character, madam.'

Mr Flintwinch had by this time poured himself out another cup of tea, which he was swallowing in gulps as before, with his eyes directed to the invalid.

'You may be heart-free here, sir,' she returned to Mr Blandois. 'Those letters are not intended, I believe, for the initials of any name.'

'Of a motto, perhaps,' said Mr Blandois, casually.

'Of a sentence. They have always stood, I believe, for Do Not Forget!'

'And naturally,' said Mr Blandois, replacing the watch and stepping backward to his former chair, 'you do not forget.'

Mr Flintwinch, finishing his tea, not only took a longer gulp than he had taken yet, but made his succeeding pause under new circumstances: that is to say, with his head thrown back and his cup held still at his lips, while his eyes were still directed at the invalid. She had that force of face, and that concentrated air of collecting her firmness or obstinacy, which represented in her case what would have been gesture and action in another, as she replied with her deliberate strength of speech: 'No, sir, I do not forget. To lead a life as monotonous as mine has been during many years, is not the way to forget. To lead a life of self-correction is not the way to forget. To be sensible of having (as we all have, every one of us, all the children of Adam!) offences to expiate and peace to make, does not justify the desire to forget. Therefore I have long dismissed it, and I neither forget nor wish to forget.'

Mr Flintwinch, who had latterly been shaking the sediment at the bottom of his tea-cup, round and round, here gulped it down, and putting the cup in the tea-tray, as done with, turned his eyes upon Mr Blandois as if to ask him what he thought of that?

'All expressed, madam,' said Mr Blandois, with his smoothest bow and his white hand on his breast, 'by the word "naturally," which I am proud to have had sufficient apprehension and appreciation (but without appreciation I could not be Blandois) to employ.'

'Pardon me, sir,' she returned, 'if I doubt the likelihood of a gentleman of pleasure, and change, and politeness, accustomed to court and to be courted —'

'Oh madam! By Heaven!'

'—If I doubt the likelihood of such a character quite comprehending what belongs to mine in my circumstances. Not to obtrude doctrine upon you,' she looked at the rigid pile of hard pale books before her, '(for you go your own way, and the consequences are on your own head), I will say this much: that I shape my course by pilots, strictly by proved and tried pilots, under whom I cannot be shipwrecked—can not be—and that if I were unmindful of the admonition conveyed in those three letters, I should not be half as chastened as I am.'

It was curious how she seized the occasion to argue with some invisible opponent. Perhaps with her own better sense, always turning upon herself and her own deception.

'If I forgot my ignorances in my life of health and freedom, I might complain of the life to which I am now condemned. I never do; I never have done. If I forgot that this scene, the Earth, is expressly meant to be a scene of gloom, and hardship, and dark trial, for the creatures who are made out of its dust, I might have some tenderness for its vanities. But I have no such tenderness. If I did not know that we are, every one, the subject (most justly the subject) of a wrath that must be satisfied, and against which mere actions are nothing, I might repine at the difference between me, imprisoned here, and the people who pass that gateway yonder. But I take it as a grace and favour to be elected to make the satisfaction I am making here, to know what I know for certain here, and to work out what I have worked out here. My affliction might otherwise have had no meaning to me. Hence I would forget, and I do forget, nothing. Hence I am contented, and say it is better with me than with millions.' As she spoke these words, she put her hand upon the watch, and restored it to the precise spot on her little table which it always occupied. With her touch lingering upon it, she sat for some moments afterwards, looking at it steadily and half-defiantly.

Mr Blandois, during this exposition, had been strictly attentive, keeping his eyes fastened on the lady, and thoughtfully stroking his moustache with his two hands. Mr Flintwinch had been a little fidgety, and now struck in.

'There, there, there!' said he. 'That is quite understood, Mrs Clennam, and you have spoken piously and well. Mr Blandois, I suspect, is not of a pious cast.' 'On the contrary, sir!' that gentleman protested, snapping his fingers. 'Your pardon! It's a part of my character. I am sensitive, ardent, conscientious, and imaginative. A sensitive, ardent, conscientious, and imaginative man, Mr Flintwinch, must be that, or nothing!'

There was an inkling of suspicion in Mr Flintwinch's face that he might be nothing, as he swaggered out of his chair (it was characteristic of this man, as it is of all men similarly marked, that whatever he did, he overdid, though it were sometimes by only a hairsbreadth), and approached to take his leave of Mrs Clennam.

'With what will appear to you the egotism of a sick old woman, sir,' she then said, 'though really through your accidental allusion, I have been led away into the subject of myself and my infirmities. Being so considerate as to visit me, I hope you will be likewise so considerate as to overlook that. Don't compliment me, if you please.' For he was evidently going to do it.

'Mr Flintwinch will be happy to render you any service, and I hope your stay in this city may prove agreeable.'

Mr Blandois thanked her, and kissed his hand several times. 'This is an old room,' he remarked, with a sudden sprightliness of manner, looking round when he got near the door, 'I have been so interested that I have not observed it. But it's a genuine old room.'

'It is a genuine old house,' said Mrs Clennam, with her frozen smile. 'A place of no pretensions, but a piece of antiquity.'

'Faith!' cried the visitor. 'If Mr Flintwinch would do me the favour to take me through the rooms on my way out, he could hardly oblige me more. An old house is a weakness with me. I have many weaknesses, but none greater. I love and study the picturesque in all its varieties. I have been called picturesque myself. It is no merit to be picturesque—I have greater merits, perhaps—but I may be, by an accident. Sympathy, sympathy!'

'I tell you beforehand, Mr Blandois, that you'll find it very dingy and very bare,' said Jeremiah, taking up the candle. 'It's not worth your looking at.'But Mr Blandois, smiting him in a friendly manner on the back, only laughed; so the said Blandois kissed his hand again to Mrs Clennam, and they went out of the room together.

'You don't care to go up-stairs?' said Jeremiah, on the landing. 'On the contrary, Mr Flintwinch; if not tiresome to you, I shall be ravished!'

Mr Flintwinch, therefore, wormed himself up the staircase, and Mr Blandois followed close. They ascended to the great garret bed-room which Arthur had occupied on the night of his return. 'There, Mr Blandois!' said Jeremiah, showing it, 'I hope you may think that worth coming so high to see. I confess I don't.'

Mr Blandois being enraptured, they walked through other garrets and passages, and came down the staircase again. By this time Mr Flintwinch had remarked that he never found the visitor looking at any room, after throwing one quick glance around, but always found the visitor looking at him, Mr Flintwinch. With this discovery in his thoughts, he turned about on the staircase for another experiment. He met his eyes directly; and on the instant of their fixing one another, the visitor, with that ugly play of nose and moustache, laughed (as he had done at every similar moment since they left Mrs Clennam's chamber) a diabolically silent laugh.

As a much shorter man than the visitor, Mr Flintwinch was at the physical disadvantage of being thus disagreeably leered at from a height;

and as he went first down the staircase, and was usually a step or two lower than the other, this disadvantage was at the time increased. He postponed looking at Mr Blandois again until this accidental inequality was removed by their having entered the late Mr Clennam's room. But, then twisting himself suddenly round upon him, he found his look unchanged.

'A most admirable old house,' smiled Mr Blandois. 'So mysterious. Do you never hear any haunted noises here?'

'Noises,' returned Mr Flintwinch. 'No.'

'Nor see any devils?'

'Not,' said Mr Flintwinch, grimly screwing himself at his questioner, 'not any that introduce themselves under that name and in that capacity.'

'Haha! A portrait here, I see.'

(Still looking at Mr Flintwinch, as if he were the portrait.)

'It's a portrait, sir, as you observe.'

'May I ask the subject, Mr Flintwinch?'

'Mr Clennam, deceased. Her husband.' 'Former owner of the remarkable watch, perhaps?' said the visitor.

Mr Flintwinch, who had cast his eyes towards the portrait, twisted himself about again, and again found himself the subject of the same look and smile. 'Yes, Mr Blandois,' he replied tartly. 'It was his, and his uncle's before him, and Lord knows who before him; and that's all I can tell you of its pedigree.'

'That's a strongly marked character, Mr Flintwinch, our friend up-stairs.'

'Yes, sir,' said Jeremiah, twisting himself at the visitor again, as he did during the whole of this dialogue, like some screw-machine that fell short of its grip; for the other never changed, and he always felt obliged to retreat a little. 'She is a remarkable woman. Great fortitude—great strength of mind.'

'They must have been very happy,' said Blandois.

'Who?' demanded Mr Flintwinch, with another screw at him.

Mr Blandois shook his right forefinger towards the sick room, and his left forefinger towards the portrait, and then, putting his arms akimbo and striding his legs wide apart, stood smiling down at Mr Flintwinch with the advancing nose and the retreating moustache.

'As happy as most other married people, I suppose,' returned Mr Flintwinch. 'I can't say. I don't know. There are secrets in all families.'

'Secrets!' cried Mr Blandois, quickly. 'Say it again, my son.'

'I say,' replied Mr Flintwinch, upon whom he had swelled himself so suddenly that Mr Flintwinch found his face almost brushed by the dilated chest. 'I say there are secrets in all families.'

'So there are,' cried the other, clapping him on both shoulders, and rolling him backwards and forwards. 'Haha! you are right. So there are! Secrets! Holy Blue! There are the devil's own secrets in some families, Mr Flintwinch!' With that, after clapping Mr Flintwinch on both shoulders several times, as if in a friendly and humorous way he were rallying him on a joke he had made, he threw up his arms, threw back his head, hooked his hands together behind it, and burst into a roar of laughter. It was in vain for Mr Flintwinch to try another screw at him. He had his laugh out.

'But, favour me with the candle a moment,' he said, when he had done. 'Let us have a look at the husband of the remarkable lady. Hah!' holding up the light at arm's length. 'A decided expression of face here too, though not of the same character. Looks as if he were saying, what is it—Do Not Forget—does he not, Mr Flintwinch?

By Heaven, sir, he does!'

As he returned the candle, he looked at him once more; and then, leisurely strolling out with him into the hall, declared it to be a charming old house indeed, and one which had so greatly pleased him that he would not have missed inspecting it for a hundred pounds. Throughout these singular freedoms on the part of Mr Blandois, which involved a general alteration in his demeanour, making it much coarser and rougher, much more violent and audacious than before, Mr Flintwinch, whose leathern face was not liable to many changes, preserved its immobility intact. Beyond now appearing perhaps, to have been left hanging a trifle too long before that friendly operation of cutting down, he outwardly maintained an equable composure. They had brought their survey to a close in the little room at the side of the hall, and he stood there, eyeing Mr Blandois.

'I am glad you are so well satisfied, sir,' was his calm remark. 'I didn't expect it. You seem to be quite in good spirits.'

'In admirable spirits,' returned Blandois. 'Word of honour! never more refreshed in spirits. Do you ever have presentiments, Mr Flintwinch?'

'I am not sure that I know what you mean by the term, sir,' replied that gentleman.

'Say, in this case, Mr Flintwinch, undefined anticipations of pleasure to come.'

'I can't say I'm sensible of such a sensation at present,' returned Mr Flintwinch with the utmost gravity. 'If I should find it coming on, I'll mention it.'

'Now I,' said Blandois, 'I, my son, have a presentiment to-night that we shall be well acquainted. Do you find it coming on?'

'N-no,' returned Mr Flintwinch, deliberately inquiring of himself. 'I can't say I do.'

'I have a strong presentiment that we shall become intimately acquainted.—You have no feeling of that sort yet?'

'Not yet,' said Mr Flintwinch.

Mr Blandois, taking him by both shoulders again, rolled him about a little in his former merry way, then drew his arm through his own, and invited him to come off and drink a bottle of wine like a dear deep old dog as he was.

Without a moment's indecision, Mr Flintwinch accepted the invitation, and they went out to the quarters where the traveller was lodged, through a heavy rain which had rattled on the windows, roofs, and pavements, ever since nightfall. The thunder and lightning had long ago passed over, but the rain was furious. On their arrival at Mr Blandois' room, a bottle of port wine was ordered by that gallant gentleman; who (crushing every pretty thing he could collect, in the soft disposition of his dainty figure) coiled himself upon the window-seat, while Mr Flintwinch took a chair opposite to him, with the table between them. Mr Blandois proposed having the largest glasses in the house, to which Mr Flintwinch assented. The bumpers filled, Mr Blandois, with a roystering gaiety, clinked the top of his glass against the bottom of Mr Flintwinch's, and the bottom of his glass against the top of Mr Flintwinch's, and drank to the intimate acquaintance he foresaw.

Mr Flintwinch gravely pledged him, and drank all the wine he could get, and said nothing. As often as Mr Blandois clinked glasses (which was at every replenishment), Mr Flintwinch stolidly did his part of the clinking, and would have stolidly done his companion's part of the wine as well as his own: being, except in the article of palate, a mere cask.

In short, Mr Blandois found that to pour port wine into the reticent Flintwinch was, not to open him but to shut him up. Moreover, he had the appearance of a perfect ability to go on all night; or, if occasion were, all next day and all next night; whereas Mr Blandois soon grew indistinctly conscious of swaggering too fiercely and boastfully. He therefore terminated the entertainment at the end of the third bottle.

'You will draw upon us to-morrow, sir,' said Mr Flintwinch, with a business-like face at parting.

'My Cabbage,' returned the other, taking him by the collar with both hands, 'I'll draw upon you; have no fear. Adieu, my Flintwinch. Receive at parting;' here he gave him a southern embrace, and kissed him soundly on both cheeks; 'the word of a gentleman! By a thousand Thunders, you shall see me again!'

He did not present himself next day, though the letter of advice came duly to hand. Inquiring after him at night, Mr Flintwinch found, with surprise, that he had paid his bill and gone back to the Continent by way of Calais. Nevertheless, Jeremiah scraped out of his cogitating face a lively conviction that Mr Blandois would keep his word on this occasion, and would be seen again.

CHAPTER 31. Spirit

Anybody may pass, any day, in the thronged thoroughfares of the metropolis, some meagre, wrinkled, yellow old man (who might be supposed to have dropped from the stars, if there were any star in the Heavens dull enough to be suspected of casting off so feeble a spark), creeping along with a scared air, as though bewildered and a little frightened by the noise and bustle. This old man is always a little old man. If he were ever a big old man, he has shrunk into a little old man; if he were always a little old man, he has dwindled into a less old man. His coat is a colour, and cut, that never was the mode anywhere, at any period. Clearly, it was not made for him, or for any individual mortal. Some wholesale contractor measured Fate for five thousand coats of such quality, and Fate has lent this old coat to this old man, as one of a long unfinished line of many old men. It has always large dull metal buttons, similar to no other buttons. This old man wears a hat, a thumbed and napless and yet an obdurate hat, which has never adapted itself to the shape of his poor head. His coarse shirt and his coarse neckcloth have no more individuality than his coat and hat; they have the same character of not being his—of not being anybody's. Yet this old man wears these clothes with a certain unaccustomed air of being dressed and elaborated for the public ways; as though he passed the greater part of his time in a nightcap and gown. And so, like the country mouse in the second year of a famine, come to see the town mouse, and timidly threading his way to the town-mouse's lodging through a city of cats, this old man passes in the streets.

Sometimes, on holidays towards evening, he will be seen to walk with a slightly increased infirmity, and his old eyes will glimmer with a moist and marshy light. Then the little old man is drunk. A very small measure will overset him; he may be bowled off his unsteady legs with a half-pint pot. Some pitying acquaintance—chance acquaintance very often—has warmed up his weakness with a treat of beer, and the consequence will be the lapse of a longer time than usual before he shall pass again. For the little old man is going home to the Workhouse; and on his good behaviour they do not let him out often (though methinks they might, considering the few years he has before him to go out in, under the sun); and on his bad behaviour they shut him up closer than ever in a grove of two score and nineteen more old men, every one of whom smells of all the others.

Mrs Plornish's father,—a poor little reedy piping old gentleman, like a worn-out bird; who had been in what he called the music-binding business, and met with great misfortunes, and who had seldom been able to make his way, or to see it or to pay it, or to do anything at all with it but find it no thoroughfare,—had retired of his own accord to the Workhouse which was appointed by law to be the Good Samaritan of his district (without the twopence, which was bad political economy), on the settlement of that execution which had carried Mr Plornish to the Marshalsea College. Previous to his son-in-law's difficulties coming to that head, Old Nandy (he was always so called in his legal Retreat, but he was Old Mr Nandy among the Bleeding Hearts) had sat in a corner of the Plornish fireside, and taken his bite and sup out of the Plornish cupboard. He still hoped to resume that domestic position when Fortune should smile upon his son-in-law; in the meantime, while she preserved an immovable countenance, he was, and resolved to remain, one of these little old men in a grove of little old men with a community of flavour.

But no poverty in him, and no coat on him that never was the mode, and no Old Men's Ward for his dwelling-place, could quench his daughter's admiration. Mrs Plornish was as proud of her father's talents as she could possibly have been if they had made him Lord Chancellor. She had as firm a belief in the sweetness and propriety of his manners as she could possibly have had if he had been Lord Chamberlain. The poor little old man knew some pale and vapid little songs, long out of date, about Chloe, and Phyllis, and Strephon being wounded by the son of Venus; and for Mrs Plornish there was no such music at the Opera as the small internal flutterings and chirpings wherein he would discharge himself of these ditties, like a weak, little, broken barrel-organ, ground by a baby. On his 'days out,' those flecks of light in his flat vista of pollard old men,' it was at once Mrs Plornish's delight and sorrow, when he was strong with meat, and had taken his full halfpenny-worth of porter, to say, 'Sing us a song, Father.' Then he would give them Chloe, and if he were in pretty good spirits, Phyllis also—Strephon he had hardly been up to since he went into retirement—and then would Mrs Plornish declare she did believe there never was such a singer as Father, and wipe her eyes.

If he had come from Court on these occasions, nay, if he had been the noble Refrigerator come home triumphantly from a foreign court to be presented and promoted on his last tremendous failure, Mrs Plornish could not have handed him with greater elevation about Bleeding Heart Yard. 'Here's Father,' she would say, presenting him to a neighbour. 'Father will soon be home with us for good, now. Ain't Father looking well? Father's a sweeter singer than ever; you'd never have forgotten it, if you'd aheard him just now.'

As to Mr Plornish, he had married these articles of belief in marrying Mr Nandy's daughter, and only wondered how it was that so gifted an old gentleman had not made a fortune. This he attributed, after much reflection, to his musical genius not having been scientifically developed in his youth. 'For why,' argued Mr Plornish, 'why go a-binding music when you've got it in yourself? That's where it is, I consider.'

Old Nandy had a patron: one patron. He had a patron who in a certain sumptuous way—an apologetic way, as if he constantly took an admiring audience to witness that he really could not help being more free with this old fellow than they might have expected, on account of his simplicity and poverty—was mightily good to him. Old Nandy had been several times to the Marshalsea College, communicating with his son-in-law during his short durance there; and had happily acquired to himself, and had by degrees and in course of time much improved, the patronage of the Father of that national institution.

Mr Dorrit was in the habit of receiving this old man as if the old man held of him in vassalage under some feudal tenure. He made little treats and teas for him, as if he came in with his homage from some outlying district where the tenantry were in a primitive state.

It seemed as if there were moments when he could by no means have sworn but that the old man was an ancient retainer of his, who had been meritoriously faithful. When he mentioned him, he spoke of him casually as his old pensioner. He had a wonderful satisfaction in seeing him, and in commenting on his decayed condition after he was gone. It appeared to him amazing that he could hold up his head at all, poor creature. 'In the Workhouse, sir, the Union; no privacy, no visitors, no station, no respect, no speciality. Most deplorable!'

It was Old Nandy's birthday, and they let him out. He said nothing about its being his birthday, or they might have kept him in; for such old men should not be born. He passed along the streets as usual to Bleeding Heart Yard, and had his dinner with his daughter and son-in-law, and gave them Phyllis. He had hardly concluded, when Little Dorrit looked in to see how they all were.

'Miss Dorrit,' said Mrs Plornish, 'here's Father! Ain't he looking nice? And such voice he's in!'

Little Dorrit gave him her hand, and smilingly said she had not seen him this long time.

'No, they're rather hard on poor Father,' said Mrs Plornish with a lengthening face, 'and don't let him have half as much change and fresh air as would benefit him. But he'll soon be home for good, now. Won't you, Father?'

'Yes, my dear, I hope so. In good time, please God.'

Here Mr Plornish delivered himself of an oration which he invariably made, word for word the same, on all such opportunities.

It was couched in the following terms:

'John Edward Nandy. Sir. While there's a ounce of wittles or drink of any sort in this present roof, you're fully welcome to your share on it. While there's a handful of fire or a mouthful of bed in this present roof, you're fully welcome to your share on it.

If so be as there should be nothing in this present roof, you should be as welcome to your share on it as if it was something, much or little. And this is what I mean and so I don't deceive you, and consequently which is to stand out is to entreat of you, and therefore why not do it?'

To this lucid address, which Mr Plornish always delivered as if he had composed it (as no doubt he had) with enormous labour, Mrs Plornish's father pipingly replied:

'I thank you kindly, Thomas, and I know your intentions well, which is the same I thank you kindly for. But no, Thomas. Until such times as it's not to take it out of your children's mouths, which take it is, and call it by what name you will it do remain and equally deprive, though may they come, and too soon they can not come, no Thomas, no!'

Mrs Plornish, who had been turning her face a little away with a corner of her apron in her hand, brought herself back to the conversation again by telling Miss Dorrit that Father was going over the water to pay his respects, unless she knew of any reason why it might not be agreeable.

Her answer was, 'I am going straight home, and if he will come with me I shall be so glad to take care of him—so glad,' said Little Dorrit, always thoughtful of the feelings of the weak, 'of his company.'

'There, Father!' cried Mrs Plornish. 'Ain't you a gay young man to be going for a walk along with Miss Dorrit! Let me tie your neck-handkerchief into a regular good bow, for you're a regular beau yourself, Father, if ever there was one.'

With this filial joke his daughter smartened him up, and gave him a loving hug, and stood at the door with her weak child in her arms, and her strong child tumbling down the steps, looking after her little old father as he toddled away with his arm under Little Dorrit's.

They walked at a slow pace, and Little Dorrit took him by the Iron Bridge and sat him down there for a rest, and they looked over at the water and talked about the shipping, and the old man mentioned what he would do if he had a ship full of gold coming home to him (his plan was to take a noble lodging for the Plornishes and himself at a Tea Gardens, and live there all the rest of their lives, attended on by the waiter), and it was a special birthday of the old man. They were within five minutes of their destination, when, at the corner of her own street, they came upon Fanny in her new bonnet bound for the same port.

'Why, good gracious me, Amy!' cried that young lady starting. 'You never mean it!'

'Mean what, Fanny dear?'

'Well! I could have believed a great deal of you,' returned the young lady with burning indignation, 'but I don't think even I could have believed this, of even you!'

'Fanny!' cried Little Dorrit, wounded and astonished.

'Oh! Don't Fanny me, you mean little thing, don't! The idea of coming along the open streets, in the broad light of day, with a Pauper!' (firing off the last word as if it were a ball from an air-gun). 'O Fanny!'

'I tell you not to Fanny me, for I'll not submit to it! I never knew such a thing. The way in which you are resolved and determined to disgrace us on all occasions, is really infamous. You bad little thing!'

'Does it disgrace anybody,' said Little Dorrit, very gently, 'to take care of this poor old man?'

'Yes, miss,' returned her sister, 'and you ought to know it does. And you do know it does, and you do it because you know it does. The principal pleasure of your life is to remind your family of their misfortunes. And the next great pleasure of your existence is to keep low company. But, however, if you have no sense of decency, I have. You'll please to allow me to go on the other side of the way, unmolested.'

With this, she bounced across to the opposite pavement. The old disgrace, who had been deferentially bowing a pace or two off (for Little Dorrit had let his arm go in her wonder, when Fanny began), and who had been hustled and cursed by impatient passengers for stopping the way, rejoined his companion, rather giddy, and said, 'I hope nothing's wrong with your honoured father, Miss? I hope there's nothing the matter in the honoured family?'

'No, no,' returned Little Dorrit. 'No, thank you. Give me your arm again, Mr Nandy. We shall soon be there now.'

So she talked to him as she had talked before, and they came to the Lodge and found Mr Chivery on the lock, and went in. Now, it happened that the Father of the Marshalsea was sauntering towards the Lodge at the moment when they were coming out of it, entering the prison arm in arm. As the spectacle of their approach met his view, he displayed the utmost agitation and despondency of mind; and—altogether regardless of Old Nandy, who, making his reverence, stood with his hat in his hand, as he always did in that gracious presence—turned about, and hurried in at his own doorway and up the staircase.

Leaving the old unfortunate, whom in an evil hour she had taken under her protection, with a hurried promise to return to him directly, Little Dorrit hastened after her father, and, on the staircase, found Fanny following her, and flouncing up with offended dignity. The three came into the room almost together; and the Father sat down in his chair, buried his face in his hands, and uttered a groan.

'Of course,' said Fanny. 'Very proper. Poor, afflicted Pa! Now, I hope you believe me, Miss?'

'What is it, father?' cried Little Dorrit, bending over him. 'Have I made you unhappy, father? Not I, I hope!'

'You hope, indeed! I dare say! Oh, you'—Fanny paused for a sufficiently strong expression—'you Common-minded little Amy! You complete prison-child!'

He stopped these angry reproaches with a wave of his hand, and sobbed out, raising his face and shaking his melancholy head at his younger daughter, 'Amy, I know that you are innocent in intention. But you have cut me to the soul.' 'Innocent in intention!' the implacable Fanny struck in. 'Stuff in intention! Low in intention! Lowering of the family in intention!'

'Father!' cried Little Dorrit, pale and trembling. 'I am very sorry. Pray forgive me. Tell me how it is, that I may not do it again!'

'How it is, you prevaricating little piece of goods!' cried Fanny. 'You know how it is. I have told you already, so don't fly in the face of Providence by attempting to deny it!'

'Hush! Amy,' said the father, passing his pocket-handkerchief several times across his face, and then grasping it convulsively in the hand that dropped across his knee, 'I have done what I could to keep you select here; I have done what I could to retain you a position here. I may have succeeded; I may not. You may know it; you may not. I give no opinion. I have endured everything here but humiliation. That I have happily been spared—until this day.'

Here his convulsive grasp unclosed itself, and he put his pocket-handkerchief to his eyes again. Little Dorrit, on the ground beside him, with her imploring hand upon his arm, watched him remorsefully. Coming out of his fit of grief, he clenched his pocket-handkerchief once more.

'Humiliation I have happily been spared until this day. Through all my troubles there has been that—Spirit in myself, and that—that submission to it, if I may use the term, in those about me, which has spared me—ha—humiliation. But this day, this minute, I have keenly felt it.'

'Of course! How could it be otherwise?' exclaimed the irrepressible Fanny. 'Careering and prancing about with a Pauper!' (air-gun again).

'But, dear father,' cried Little Dorrit, 'I don't justify myself for having wounded your dear heart—no! Heaven knows I don't!' She clasped her hands in quite an agony of distress. 'I do nothing but beg and pray you to be comforted and overlook it. But if I had not known that you were kind to the old man yourself, and took much notice of him, and were always glad to see him, I would not have come here with him, father, I would not, indeed. What I have been so unhappy as to do, I have done in mistake. I would not wilfully bring a tear to your eyes, dear love!' said Little Dorrit, her heart well-nigh broken, 'for anything the world could give me, or anything it could take away.'

Fanny, with a partly angry and partly repentant sob, began to cry herself, and to say—as this young lady always said when she was half in passion and half out of it, half spiteful with herself and half spiteful with everybody else—that she wished she were dead.

The Father of the Marshalsea in the meantime took his younger daughter to his breast, and patted her head. 'There, there! Say no more, Amy, say no more, my child. I will forget it as soon as I can. I,' with hysterical cheerfulness, 'I—shall soon be able to dismiss it. It is perfectly true, my dear, that I am always glad to see my old pensioner—as such, as such—and that I do—ha—extend as much protection and kindness to the—hum—the bruised reed—I trust I may so call him without impropriety—as in my circumstances, I can. It is quite true that this is the case, my dear child. At the same time, I preserve in doing this, if I may—ha—if I may use the expression—Spirit. Becoming Spirit. And there are some things which are,' he stopped to sob, 'irreconcilable with that, and wound that—wound it deeply.

It is not that I have seen my good Amy attentive, and—ha—condescending to my old pensioner—it is not that that hurts me. It is, if I am to close the painful subject by being explicit, that I have seen my child, my own child, my own daughter, coming into this College out of the public streets—smiling! smiling!—arm in arm with—O my God, a livery!'

This reference to the coat of no cut and no time, the unfortunate gentleman gasped forth, in a scarcely audible voice, and with his clenched pocket-handkerchief raised in the air. His excited feelings might have found some further painful utterance, but for a knock at the door, which had been already twice repeated, and to which Fanny (still wishing herself dead, and indeed now going so far as to add, buried) cried 'Come in!'

'Ah, Young John!' said the Father, in an altered and calmed voice. 'What is it, Young John?'

'A letter for you, sir, being left in the Lodge just this minute, and a message with it, I thought, happening to be there myself, sir, I would bring it to your room.' The speaker's attention was much distracted by the piteous spectacle of Little Dorrit at her father's feet, with her head turned away.

'Indeed, John? Thank you.'

'The letter is from Mr Clennam, sir—it's the answer—and the message was, sir, that Mr Clennam also sent his compliments, and word that he would do himself the pleasure of calling this afternoon, hoping to see you, and likewise,' attention more distracted than before, 'Miss Amy.'

'Oh!' As the Father glanced into the letter (there was a bank-note in it), he reddened a little, and patted Amy on the head afresh. 'Thank you, Young John. Quite right. Much obliged to you for your attention. No one waiting?'

'No, sir, no one waiting.'

'Thank you, John. How is your mother, Young John?'

'Thank you, sir, she's not quite as well as we could wish—in fact, we none of us are, except father—but she's pretty well, sir.' 'Say we sent our remembrances, will you? Say kind remembrances, if you please, Young John.'

'Thank you, sir, I will.' And Mr Chivery junior went his way, having spontaneously composed on the spot an entirely new epitaph for himself, to the effect that Here lay the body of John Chivery, Who, Having at such a date, Beheld the idol of his life, In grief and tears, And feeling unable to bear the harrowing spectacle, Immediately repaired to the abode of his inconsolable parents, And terminated his existence by his own rash act.

'There, there, Amy!' said the Father, when Young John had closed the door, 'let us say no more about it.' The last few minutes had improved his spirits remarkably, and he was quite lightsome. 'Where is my old pensioner all this while? We must not leave him by himself any longer, or he will begin to suppose he is not welcome, and that would pain me. Will you fetch him, my child, or shall I?'

'If you wouldn't mind, father,' said Little Dorrit, trying to bring her sobbing to a close.

'Certainly I will go, my dear. I forgot; your eyes are rather red.

There! Cheer up, Amy. Don't be uneasy about me. I am quite myself again, my love, quite myself. Go to your room, Amy, and make yourself look comfortable and pleasant to receive Mr Clennam.'

'I would rather stay in my own room, Father,' returned Little Dorrit, finding it more difficult than before to regain her composure. 'I would far rather not see Mr Clennam.'

'Oh, fie, fie, my dear, that's folly. Mr Clennam is a very gentlemanly man—very gentlemanly. A little reserved at times; but I will say extremely gentlemanly. I couldn't think of your not being here to receive Mr Clennam, my dear, especially this afternoon. So go and freshen yourself up, Amy; go and freshen yourself up, like a good girl.'

Thus directed, Little Dorrit dutifully rose and obeyed: only pausing for a moment as she went out of the room, to give her sister a kiss of reconciliation. Upon which, that young lady, feeling much harassed in her mind, and having for the time worn out the wish with which she generally relieved it, conceived and executed the brilliant idea of wishing Old Nandy dead, rather than that he should come bothering there like a disgusting, tiresome, wicked wretch, and making mischief between two sisters.

The Father of the Marshalsea, even humming a tune, and wearing his black velvet cap a little on one side, so much improved were his spirits, went down into the yard, and found his old pensioner standing there hat in hand just within the gate, as he had stood all this time. 'Come, Nandy!' said he, with great suavity. 'Come up-stairs, Nandy; you know the way; why don't you come up-stairs?' He went the length, on this occasion, of giving him his hand and saying, 'How are you, Nandy? Are you pretty well?' To which that vocalist returned, 'I thank you, honoured sir, I am all the better for seeing your honour.' As they went along the yard, the Father of the Marshalsea presented him to a Collegian of recent date. 'An old acquaintance of mine, sir, an old pensioner.' And then said, 'Be covered, my good Nandy; put your hat on,' with great consideration.

His patronage did not stop here; for he charged Maggy to get the tea ready, and instructed her to buy certain tea-cakes, fresh butter, eggs, cold ham, and shrimps: to purchase which collation he gave her a bank-note for ten pounds, laying strict injunctions on her to be careful of the change. These preparations were in an advanced stage of progress, and his daughter Amy had come back with her work, when Clennam presented himself; whom he most graciously received, and besought to join their meal.

'Amy, my love, you know Mr Clennam even better than I have the happiness of doing. Fanny, my dear, you are acquainted with Mr Clennam.' Fanny acknowledged him haughtily; the position she tacitly took up in all such cases being that there was a vast conspiracy to insult the family by not understanding it, or sufficiently deferring to it, and here was one of the conspirators.

'This, Mr Clennam, you must know, is an old pensioner of mine, Old Nandy, a very faithful old man.' (He always spoke of him as an object of great antiquity, but he was two or three years younger than himself.) 'Let me see. You know Plornish, I think? I think my daughter Amy has mentioned to me that you know poor Plornish?'

'O yes!' said Arthur Clennam.

'Well, sir, this is Mrs Plornish's father.'

'Indeed? I am glad to see him.'

'You would be more glad if you knew his many good qualities, Mr Clennam.'

'I hope I shall come to know them through knowing him,' said Arthur, secretly pitying the bowed and submissive figure.

'It is a holiday with him, and he comes to see his old friends, who are always glad to see him,' observed the Father of the Marshalsea.

Then he added behind his hand, ('Union, poor old fellow. Out for the day.')

By this time Maggy, quietly assisted by her Little Mother, had spread the board, and the repast was ready. It being hot weather and the prison very close, the window was as wide open as it could be pushed. 'If Maggy will spread that newspaper on the window-sill, my dear,' remarked the Father complacently and in a half whisper to Little Dorrit, 'my old pensioner can have his tea there, while we are having ours.'

So, with a gulf between him and the good company of about a foot in width, standard measure, Mrs Plornish's father was handsomely regaled. Clennam had never seen anything like his magnanimous protection by that other Father, he of the Marshalsea; and was lost in the contemplation of its many wonders.

The most striking of these was perhaps the relishing manner in which he remarked on the pensioner's infirmities and failings, as if he were a gracious Keeper making a running commentary on the decline of the harmless animal he exhibited.

'Not ready for more ham yet, Nandy? Why, how slow you are! (His last teeth,' he explained to the company, 'are going, poor old boy.')

At another time, he said, 'No shrimps, Nandy?' and on his not instantly replying, observed, ('His hearing is becoming very defective. He'll be deaf directly.')

At another time he asked him, 'Do you walk much, Nandy, about the yard within the walls of that place of yours?'

'No, sir; no. I haven't any great liking for that.'

'No, to be sure,' he assented. 'Very natural.' Then he privately informed the circle ('Legs going.')

Once he asked the pensioner, in that general clemency which asked him anything to keep him afloat, how old his younger grandchild was?

'John Edward,' said the pensioner, slowly laying down his knife and fork to consider. 'How old, sir? Let me think now.'

The Father of the Marshalsea tapped his forehead ('Memory weak.')

'John Edward, sir? Well, I really forget. I couldn't say at this minute, sir, whether it's two and two months, or whether it's two and five months. It's one or the other.'

'Don't distress yourself by worrying your mind about it,' he returned, with infinite forbearance. ('Faculties evidently decaying—old man rusts in the life he leads!')

The more of these discoveries that he persuaded himself he made in the pensioner, the better he appeared to like him; and when he got out of his chair after tea to bid the pensioner good-bye, on his intimating that he feared, honoured sir, his time was running out, he made himself look as erect and strong as possible.

'We don't call this a shilling, Nandy, you know,' he said, putting one in his hand. 'We call it tobacco.'

'Honoured sir, I thank you. It shall buy tobacco. My thanks and duty to Miss Amy and Miss Fanny. I wish you good night, Mr Clennam.'

'And mind you don't forget us, you know, Nandy,' said the Father. 'You must come again, mind, whenever you have an afternoon. You must not come out without seeing us, or we shall be jealous. Good night, Nandy. Be very careful how you descend the stairs, Nandy; they are rather uneven and worn.' With that he stood on the landing, watching the old man down: and when he came into the room again, said, with a solemn satisfaction on him, 'A melancholy sight that, Mr Clennam, though one has the consolation of knowing that he doesn't feel it himself. The poor old fellow is a dismal wreck. Spirit broken and gone—pulverised—crushed out of him, sir, completely!'

As Clennam had a purpose in remaining, he said what he could responsive to these sentiments, and stood at the window with their enunciator, while Maggy and her Little Mother washed the tea-service and cleared it away. He noticed that his companion stood at the window with the air of an affable and accessible Sovereign, and that, when any of his people in the yard below looked up, his recognition of their salutes just stopped short of a blessing.

When Little Dorrit had her work on the table, and Maggy hers on the bedstead, Fanny fell to tying her bonnet as a preliminary to her departure.

Arthur, still having his purpose, still remained. At this time the door opened, without any notice, and Mr Tip came in. He kissed Amy as she started up to meet him, nodded to Fanny, nodded to his father, gloomed on the visitor without further recognition, and sat down.

'Tip, dear,' said Little Dorrit, mildly, shocked by this, 'don't you see—'

'Yes, I see, Amy. If you refer to the presence of any visitor you have here—I say, if you refer to that,' answered Tip, jerking his head with emphasis towards his shoulder nearest Clennam, 'I see!'

'Is that all you say?'

'That's all I say. And I suppose,' added the lofty young man, after a moment's pause, 'that visitor will understand me, when I say that's all I say. In short, I suppose the visitor will understand that he hasn't used me like a gentleman.'

'I do not understand that,' observed the obnoxious personage referred to with tranquillity.

'No? Why, then, to make it clearer to you, sir, I beg to let you know that when I address what I call a properly-worded appeal, and an urgent appeal, and a delicate appeal, to an individual, for a small temporary accommodation, easily within his power—easily within his power, mind!—and when that individual writes back word to me that he begs to be excused, I consider that he doesn't treat me like a gentleman.'

The Father of the Marshalsea, who had surveyed his son in silence, no sooner heard this sentiment, than he began in angry voice:—

'How dare you—' But his son stopped him.

'Now, don't ask me how I dare, father, because that's bosh. As to the fact of the line of conduct I choose to adopt towards the individual present, you ought to be proud of my showing a proper spirit.'

'I should think so!' cried Fanny.

'A proper spirit?' said the Father. 'Yes, a proper spirit; a becoming spirit. Is it come to this that my son teaches me—ME—spirit!'

'Now, don't let us bother about it, father, or have any row on the subject. I have fully made up my mind that the individual present has not treated me like a gentleman. And there's an end of it.'

'But there is not an end of it, sir,' returned the Father. 'But there shall not be an end of it. You have made up your mind? You have made up your mind?'

'Yes, I have. What's the good of keeping on like that?'

'Because,' returned the Father, in a great heat, 'you had no right to make up your mind to what is monstrous, to what is—ha—immoral, to what is—hum—parricidal. No, Mr Clennam, I beg, sir. Don't ask me to desist; there is a—hum—a general principle involved here, which rises even above considerations of—ha—hospitality. I object to the assertion made by my son. I—ha—I personally repel it.'

'Why, what is it to you, father?' returned the son, over his shoulder.

'What is it to me, sir? I have a—hum—a spirit, sir, that will not endure it. I,' he took out his pocket-handkerchief again and dabbed his face. 'I am outraged and insulted by it. Let me suppose the case that I myself may at a certain time—ha—or times, have made a—hum—an appeal, and a properly-worded appeal, and a delicate appeal, and an urgent appeal to some individual for a small temporary accommodation. Let me suppose that that accommodation could have been easily extended, and was not extended, and that that individual informed me that he begged to be excused. Am I to be told by my own son, that I therefore received treatment not due to a gentleman, and that I—ha—I submitted to it?'

His daughter Amy gently tried to calm him, but he would not on any account be calmed. He said his spirit was up, and wouldn't endure this.

Was he to be told that, he wished to know again, by his own son on his own hearth, to his own face? Was that humiliation to be put upon him by his own blood?

'You are putting it on yourself, father, and getting into all this injury of your own accord!' said the young gentleman morosely. 'What I have made up my mind about has nothing to do with you. What I said had nothing to do with you. Why need you go trying on other people's hats?'

'I reply it has everything to do with me,' returned the Father. 'I point out to you, sir, with indignation, that—hum—the—ha—delicacy and peculiarity of your father's position should strike you dumb, sir, if nothing else should, in laying down such—ha—such unnatural principles. Besides; if you are not filial, sir, if you discard that duty, you are at least—hum—not a Christian? Are you—ha—an Atheist? And is it Christian, let me ask you, to stigmatise and denounce an individual for begging to be excused this time, when the same individual may—ha—respond with the required accommodation next time? Is it the part of a Christian not to—hum—not to try him again?' He had worked himself into quite a religious glow and fervour.

'I see precious well,' said Mr Tip, rising, 'that I shall get no sensible or fair argument here to-night, and so the best thing I can do is to cut. Good night, Amy. Don't be vexed. I am very sorry it happens here, and you here, upon my soul I am; but I can't altogether part with my spirit, even for your sake, old girl.'

With those words he put on his hat and went out, accompanied by Miss Fanny; who did not consider it spirited on her part to take leave of Clennam with any less opposing demonstration than a stare, importing that she had always known him for one of the large body of conspirators.

When they were gone, the Father of the Marshalsea was at first inclined to sink into despondency again, and would have done so, but that a gentleman opportunely came up within a minute or two to attend him to the Snuggery. It was the gentleman Clennam had seen on the night of his own accidental detention there, who had that impalpable grievance about the misappropriated Fund on which the Marshal was supposed to batten. He presented himself as deputation to escort the Father to the Chair, it being an occasion on which he had promised to preside over the assembled Collegians in the enjoyment of a little Harmony.

'Such, you see, Mr Clennam,' said the Father, 'are the incongruities of my position here. But a public duty! No man, I am sure, would more readily recognise a public duty than yourself.'

Clennam besought him not to delay a moment. 'Amy, my dear, if you can persuade Mr Clennam to stay longer, I can leave the honours of our poor apology for an establishment with confidence in your hands, and perhaps you may do something towards erasing from Mr Clennam's mind the—ha—untoward and unpleasant circumstance which has occurred since tea-time.'

Clennam assured him that it had made no impression on his mind, and therefore required no erasure.

'My dear sir,' said the Father, with a removal of his black cap and a grasp of Clennam's hand, combining to express the safe receipt of his note and enclosure that afternoon, 'Heaven ever bless you!'

So, at last, Clennam's purpose in remaining was attained, and he could speak to Little Dorrit with nobody by. Maggy counted as nobody, and she was by.

CHAPTER 32. More Fortune-Telling

Maggy sat at her work in her great white cap with its quantity of opaque frilling hiding what profile she had (she had none to spare), and her serviceable eye brought to bear upon her occupation, on the window side of the room. What with her flapping cap, and what with her unserviceable eye, she was quite partitioned off from her Little Mother, whose seat was opposite the window. The tread and shuffle of feet on the pavement of the yard had much diminished since the taking of the Chair, the tide of Collegians having set strongly in the direction of Harmony. Some few who had no music in their souls, or no money in their pockets, dawdled about; and the old spectacle of the visitor-wife and the depressed unseasoned prisoner still lingered in corners, as broken cobwebs and such unsightly discomforts draggle in corners of other places. It was the quietest time the College knew, saving the night hours when the Collegians took the benefit of the act of sleep. The occasional rattle of applause upon the tables of the Snuggery, denoted the successful termination of a morsel of Harmony; or the responsive acceptance, by the united children, of some toast or sentiment offered to them by their Father. Occasionally, a vocal strain more sonorous than the generality informed the listener that some boastful bass was in blue water, or in the hunting field, or with the reindeer, or on the mountain, or among the heather; but the Marshal of the Marshalsea knew better, and had got him hard and fast.

As Arthur Clennam moved to sit down by the side of Little Dorrit, she trembled so that she had much ado to hold her needle. Clennam gently put his hand upon her work, and said, 'Dear Little Dorrit, let me lay it down.'

She yielded it to him, and he put it aside. Her hands were then nervously clasping together, but he took one of them. 'How seldom I have seen you lately, Little Dorrit!'

'I have been busy, sir.'

'But I heard only to-day,' said Clennam, 'by mere accident, of your having been with those good people close by me. Why not come to me, then?'

'I—I don't know. Or rather, I thought you might be busy too. You generally are now, are you not?'

He saw her trembling little form and her downcast face, and the eyes that drooped the moment they were raised to his—he saw them almost with as much concern as tenderness.

'My child, your manner is so changed!'

The trembling was now quite beyond her control. Softly withdrawing her hand, and laying it in her other hand, she sat before him with her head bent and her whole form trembling.

'My own Little Dorrit,' said Clennam, compassionately.

She burst into tears. Maggy looked round of a sudden, and stared for at least a minute; but did not interpose. Clennam waited some little while before he spoke again.

'I cannot bear,' he said then, 'to see you weep; but I hope this is a relief to an overcharged heart.'

'Yes it is, sir. Nothing but that.'

'Well, well! I feared you would think too much of what passed here just now. It is of no moment; not the least. I am only unfortunate to have come in the way. Let it go by with these tears. It is not worth one of them. One of them? Such an idle thing should be repeated, with my glad consent, fifty times a day, to save you a moment's heart-ache, Little Dorrit.'

She had taken courage now, and answered, far more in her usual manner, 'You are so good! But even if there was nothing else in it to be sorry for and ashamed of, it is such a bad return to you—'

'Hush!' said Clennam, smiling and touching her lips with his hand. 'Forgetfulness in you who remember so many and so much, would be new indeed. Shall I remind you that I am not, and that I never was, anything but the friend whom you agreed to trust? No. You remember it, don't you?'

'I try to do so, or I should have broken the promise just now, when my mistaken brother was here. You will consider his bringing-up in this place, and will not judge him hardly, poor fellow, I know!' In raising her eyes with these words, she observed his face more nearly than she had done yet, and said, with a quick change of tone, 'You have not been ill, Mr Clennam?'

'No.'

'Nor tried? Nor hurt?' she asked him, anxiously.

It fell to Clennam now, to be not quite certain how to answer. He said in reply:

'To speak the truth, I have been a little troubled, but it is over.

Do I show it so plainly? I ought to have more fortitude and self-command than that. I thought I had. I must learn them of you. Who could teach me better!'

He never thought that she saw in him what no one else could see. He never thought that in the whole world there were no other eyes that looked upon him with the same light and strength as hers.

'But it brings me to something that I wish to say,' he continued, 'and therefore I will not quarrel even with my own face for telling tales and being unfaithful to me. Besides, it is a privilege and pleasure to confide in my Little Dorrit. Let me confess then, that, forgetting how grave I was, and how old I was, and how the time for such things had gone by me with the many years of sameness and little happiness that made up my long life far away, without marking it—that, forgetting all this, I fancied I loved some one.'

'Do I know her, sir?' asked Little Dorrit.

'No, my child.'

'Not the lady who has been kind to me for your sake?'

'Flora. No, no. Do you think—'

'I never quite thought so,' said Little Dorrit, more to herself than him. 'I did wonder at it a little.'

'Well!' said Clennam, abiding by the feeling that had fallen on him in the avenue on the night of the roses, the feeling that he was an older man, who had done with that tender part of life, 'I found out my mistake, and I thought about it a little—in short, a good deal—and got wiser. Being wiser, I counted up my years and considered what I am, and looked back, and looked forward, and found that I should soon be grey. I found that I had climbed the hill, and passed the level ground upon the top, and was descending quickly.'

If he had known the sharpness of the pain he caused the patient heart, in speaking thus! While doing it, too, with the purpose of easing and serving her.

'I found that the day when any such thing would have been graceful in me, or good in me, or hopeful or happy for me or any one in connection with me, was gone, and would never shine again.'

O! If he had known, if he had known! If he could have seen the dagger in his hand, and the cruel wounds it struck in the faithful bleeding breast of his Little Dorrit!

'All that is over, and I have turned my face from it. Why do I speak of this to Little Dorrit? Why do I show you, my child, the space of years that there is between us, and recall to you that I have passed, by the amount of your whole life, the time that is present to you?'

'Because you trust me, I hope. Because you know that nothing can touch you without touching me; that nothing can make you happy or unhappy, but it must make me, who am so grateful to you, the same.'

He heard the thrill in her voice, he saw her earnest face, he saw her clear true eyes, he saw the quickened bosom that would have joyfully thrown itself before him to receive a mortal wound directed at his breast, with the dying cry, 'I love him!' and the remotest suspicion of the truth never dawned upon his mind. No. He saw the devoted little creature with her worn shoes, in her common dress, in her jail-home; a slender child in body, a strong heroine in soul; and the light of her domestic story made all else dark to him.

'For those reasons assuredly, Little Dorrit, but for another too. So far removed, so different, and so much older, I am the better fitted for your friend and adviser. I mean, I am the more easily to be trusted; and any little constraint that you might feel with another, may vanish before me. Why have you kept so retired from me? Tell me.'

'I am better here. My place and use are here. I am much better here,' said Little Dorrit, faintly.

'So you said that day upon the bridge. I thought of it much afterwards. Have you no secret you could entrust to me, with hope and comfort, if you would!'

'Secret? No, I have no secret,' said Little Dorrit in some trouble.

They had been speaking in low voices; more because it was natural to what they said to adopt that tone, than with any care to reserve it from Maggy at her work. All of a sudden Maggy stared again, and this time spoke:

'I say! Little Mother!'

'Yes, Maggy.'

'If you an't got no secret of your own to tell him, tell him that about the Princess. She had a secret, you know.'

'The Princess had a secret?' said Clennam, in some surprise. 'What Princess was that, Maggy?'

'Lor! How you do go and bother a gal of ten,' said Maggy, 'catching the poor thing up in that way. Whoever said the Princess had a secret? *I* never said so.'

'I beg your pardon. I thought you did.'

'No, I didn't. How could I, when it was her as wanted to find it out? It was the little woman as had the secret, and she was always a spinning at her wheel. And so she says to her, why do you keep it there? And so the t'other one says to her, no I don't; and so the t'other one says to her, yes you do; and then they both goes to the cupboard, and there it is. And she wouldn't go into the Hospital, and so she died. You know, Little Mother; tell him that.

For it was a reg'lar good secret, that was!' cried Maggy, hugging herself.

Arthur looked at Little Dorrit for help to comprehend this, and was struck by seeing her so timid and red. But, when she told him that it was only a Fairy Tale she had one day made up for Maggy, and that there was nothing in it which she wouldn't be ashamed to tell again to anybody else, even if she could remember it, he left the subject where it was.

However, he returned to his own subject by first entreating her to see him oftener, and to remember that it was impossible to have a stronger interest in her welfare than he had, or to be more set upon promoting it than he was. When she answered fervently, she well knew that, she never forgot it, he touched upon his second and more delicate point—the suspicion he had formed.

'Little Dorrit,' he said, taking her hand again, and speaking lower than he had spoken yet, so that even Maggy in the small room could not hear him, 'another word. I have wanted very much to say this to you; I have tried for opportunities. Don't mind me, who, for the matter of years, might be your father or your uncle. Always think of me as quite an old man. I know that all your devotion centres in this room, and that nothing to the last will ever tempt you away from the duties you discharge here. If I were not sure of it, I should, before now, have implored you, and implored your father, to let me make some provision for you in a more suitable place. But you may have an interest—I will not say, now, though even that might be—may have, at another time, an interest in some one else; an interest not incompatible with your affection here.'

She was very, very pale, and silently shook her head.

'It may be, dear Little Dorrit.'

'No. No. No.' She shook her head, after each slow repetition of the word, with an air of quiet desolation that he remembered long afterwards. The time came when he remembered it well, long afterwards, within those prison walls; within that very room.

'But, if it ever should be, tell me so, my dear child. Entrust the truth to me, point out the object of such an interest to me, and I will try with all the zeal, and honour, and friendship and respect that I feel for you, good Little Dorrit of my heart, to do you a lasting service.'

'O thank you, thank you! But, O no, O no, O no!' She said this, looking at him with her work-worn hands folded together, and in the same resigned accents as before.

'I press for no confidence now. I only ask you to repose unhesitating trust in me.'

'Can I do less than that, when you are so good!'

'Then you will trust me fully? Will have no secret unhappiness, or anxiety, concealed from me?'

'Almost none.'

'And you have none now?'

She shook her head. But she was very pale.

'When I lie down to-night, and my thoughts come back—as they will, for they do every night, even when I have not seen you—to this sad place, I may believe that there is no grief beyond this room, now, and its usual occupants, which preys on Little Dorrit's mind?'

She seemed to catch at these words—that he remembered, too, long afterwards—and said, more brightly, 'Yes, Mr Clennam; yes, you may!'

The crazy staircase, usually not slow to give notice when any one was coming up or down, here creaked under a quick tread, and a further sound was heard upon it, as if a little steam-engine with more steam than it knew what to do with, were working towards the room. As it approached, which it did very rapidly, it laboured with increased energy; and, after knocking at the door, it sounded as if it were stooping down and snorting in at the keyhole.

Before Maggy could open the door, Mr Pancks, opening it from without, stood without a hat and with his bare head in the wildest condition, looking at Clennam and Little Dorrit, over her shoulder.

He had a lighted cigar in his hand, and brought with him airs of ale and tobacco smoke.

'Pancks the gipsy,' he observed out of breath, 'fortune-telling.' He stood dingily smiling, and breathing hard at them, with a most curious air; as if, instead of being his proprietor's grubber, he were the triumphant proprietor of the Marshalsea, the Marshal, all the turnkeys, and all the Collegians. In his great self-satisfaction he put his cigar to his lips (being evidently no smoker), and took such a pull at it, with his right eye shut up tight for the purpose, that he underwent a convulsion of shuddering and choking. But even in the midst of that paroxysm, he still essayed to repeat his favourite introduction of himself, 'Pa-ancks the gi-ipsy, fortune-telling.'

'I am spending the evening with the rest of 'em,' said Pancks. 'I've been singing. I've been taking a part in White sand and grey sand. I don't know anything about it. Never mind. I'll take any part in anything. It's all the same, if you're loud enough.'

At first Clennam supposed him to be intoxicated. But he soon perceived that though he might be a little the worse (or better) for ale, the staple of his excitement was not brewed from malt, or distilled from any grain or berry.

'How d'ye do, Miss Dorrit?' said Pancks. 'I thought you wouldn't mind my running round, and looking in for a moment. Mr Clennam I heard was here, from Mr Dorrit. How are you, Sir?'

Clennam thanked him, and said he was glad to see him so gay.

'Gay!' said Pancks. 'I'm in wonderful feather, sir. I can't stop a minute, or I shall be missed, and I don't want 'em to miss me.—Eh, Miss Dorrit?'

He seemed to have an insatiate delight in appealing to her and looking at her; excitedly sticking his hair up at the same moment, like a dark species of cockatoo.

'I haven't been here half an hour. I knew Mr Dorrit was in the chair, and I said, "I'll go and support him!" I ought to be down in Bleeding Heart Yard by rights; but I can worry them to-morrow.—Eh, Miss Dorrit?'

His little black eyes sparkled electrically. His very hair seemed to sparkle as he roughened it. He was in that highly-charged state that one might have expected to draw sparks and snaps from him by presenting a knuckle to any part of his figure.

'Capital company here,' said Pancks.—'Eh, Miss Dorrit?'

She was half afraid of him, and irresolute what to say. He laughed, with a nod towards Clennam.

'Don't mind him, Miss Dorrit. He's one of us. We agreed that you shouldn't take on to mind me before people, but we didn't mean Mr

Clennam. He's one of us. He's in it. An't you, Mr Clennam?—Eh, Miss Dorrit?' The excitement of this strange creature was fast communicating itself to Clennam. Little Dorrit with amazement, saw this, and observed that they exchanged quick looks.

'I was making a remark,' said Pancks, 'but I declare I forget what it was. Oh, I know! Capital company here. I've been treating 'em all round.—Eh, Miss Dorrit?'

'Very generous of you,' she returned, noticing another of the quick looks between the two.

'Not at all,' said Pancks. 'Don't mention it. I'm coming into my property, that's the fact. I can afford to be liberal. I think I'll give 'em a treat here. Tables laid in the yard. Bread in stacks. Pipes in faggots. Tobacco in hayloads. Roast beef and plum-pudding for every one. Quart of double stout a head. Pint of wine too, if they like it, and the authorities give permission.—Eh, Miss Dorrit?'

She was thrown into such a confusion by his manner, or rather by Clennam's growing understanding of his manner (for she looked to him after every fresh appeal and cockatoo demonstration on the part of Mr Pancks), that she only moved her lips in answer, without forming any word.

'And oh, by-the-bye!' said Pancks, 'you were to live to know what was behind us on that little hand of yours. And so you shall, you shall, my darling.—Eh, Miss Dorrit?'

He had suddenly checked himself. Where he got all the additional black prongs from, that now flew up all over his head like the myriads of points that break out in the large change of a great firework, was a wonderful mystery.

'But I shall be missed;' he came back to that; 'and I don't want 'em to miss me. Mr Clennam, you and I made a bargain. I said you should find me stick to it. You shall find me stick to it now, sir, if you'll step out of the room a moment. Miss Dorrit, I wish you good night. Miss Dorrit, I wish you good fortune.'

He rapidly shook her by both hands, and puffed down stairs. Arthur followed him with such a hurried step, that he had very nearly tumbled over him on the last landing, and rolled him down into the yard.

'What is it, for Heaven's sake!' Arthur demanded, when they burst out there both together.

'Stop a moment, sir. Mr Rugg. Let me introduce him.' With those words he presented another man without a hat, and also with a cigar, and also surrounded with a halo of ale and tobacco smoke, which man, though not so excited as himself, was in a state which would have been akin to lunacy but for its fading into sober method when compared with the rampancy of Mr Pancks. 'Mr Clennam, Mr Rugg,' said Pancks. 'Stop a moment. Come to the pump.'

They adjourned to the pump. Mr Pancks, instantly putting his head under the spout, requested Mr Rugg to take a good strong turn at the handle. Mr Rugg complying to the letter, Mr Pancks came forth snorting and blowing to some purpose, and dried himself on his handkerchief.

'I am the clearer for that,' he gasped to Clennam standing astonished. 'But upon my soul, to hear her father making speeches in that chair, knowing what we know, and to see her up in that room in that dress, knowing what we know, is enough to—give me a back, Mr Rugg—a little higher, sir,—that'll do!'

Then and there, on that Marshalsea pavement, in the shades of evening, did Mr Pancks, of all mankind, fly over the head and shoulders of Mr Rugg of Pentonville, General Agent, Accountant, and Recoverer of Debts. Alighting on his feet, he took Clennam by the button-hole, led him behind the pump, and pantingly produced from his pocket a bundle of papers. Mr Rugg, also, pantingly produced from his pocket a bundle of papers.

'Stay!' said Clennam in a whisper.'You have made a discovery.'

Mr Pancks answered, with an unction which there is no language to convey, 'We rather think so.'

'Does it implicate any one?'

'How implicate, sir?'

'In any suppression or wrong dealing of any kind?'

'Not a bit of it.'

'Thank God!' said Clennam to himself. 'Now show me.' 'You are to understand'—snorted Pancks, feverishly unfolding papers, and speaking in short high-pressure blasts of sentences, 'Where's the Pedigree? Where's Schedule number four, Mr Rugg? Oh! all right! Here we are.—You are to understand that we are this very day virtually complete. We shan't be legally for a day or two. Call it at the outside a week. We've been at it night and day for I don't know how long. Mr Rugg, you know how long? Never mind. Don't say. You'll only confuse me. You shall tell her, Mr Clennam. Not till we give you leave. Where's that rough total, Mr Rugg? Oh! Here we are! There sir! That's what you'll have to break to her. That man's your Father of the Marshalsea!'

CHAPTER 33. Mrs Merdle's Complaint

Resigning herself to inevitable fate by making the best of those people, the Miggleses, and submitting her philosophy to the draught upon it, of which she had foreseen the likelihood in her interview with Arthur, Mrs Gowan handsomely resolved not to oppose her son's marriage. In her progress to, and happy arrival at, this resolution, she was possibly influenced, not only by her maternal affections but by three politic considerations.

Of these, the first may have been that her son had never signified the smallest intention to ask her consent, or any mistrust of his ability to dispense with it; the second, that the pension bestowed upon her by a grateful country (and a Barnacle) would be freed from any little filial inroads, when her Henry should be married to the darling only child of a man in very easy circumstances; the third, that Henry's debts must clearly be paid down upon the altar-railing by his father-in-law. When, to these three-fold points of prudence there is added the fact that Mrs Gowan yielded her consent the moment she knew of Mr Meagles having yielded his, and that Mr Meagles's objection to the marriage had been the sole obstacle in its way all along, it becomes the height of probability that the relict of the deceased Commissioner of nothing particular, turned these ideas in her sagacious mind.

Among her connections and acquaintances, however, she maintained her individual dignity and the dignity of the blood of the Barnacles, by diligently nursing the pretence that it was a most unfortunate business; that she was sadly cut up by it; that this was a perfect fascination under which Henry laboured; that she had opposed it for a long time, but what could a mother do; and the like. She had already called Arthur Clennam to bear witness to this fable, as a friend of the Meagles family; and she followed up the move by now impounding the family itself for the same purpose. In the first interview she accorded to Mr Meagles, she slided herself into the position of disconsolately but gracefully yielding to irresistible pressure. With the utmost politeness and good-breeding, she feigned that it was she—not he—who had made the difficulty, and who at length gave way; and that the sacrifice was hers—not his. The same feint, with the same polite dexterity, she foisted on Mrs Meagles, as a conjuror might have forced a card on that innocent lady; and, when her future daughter-in-law was presented to her by her son, she said on embracing her, 'My dear, what have you done to Henry that has bewitched him so!' at the same time allowing a few tears to carry before them, in little pills, the cosmetic powder on her nose; as a delicate but touching signal that she suffered much inwardly for the show of composure with which she bore her misfortune.

Among the friends of Mrs Gowan (who piqued herself at once on being Society, and on maintaining intimate and easy relations with that Power), Mrs Merdle occupied a front row. True, the Hampton Court Bohemians, without exception, turned up their noses at Merdle as an upstart; but they turned them down again, by falling flat on their faces to worship his wealth. In which compensating adjustment of their noses, they were pretty much like Treasury, Bar, and Bishop, and all the rest of them.

To Mrs Merdle, Mrs Gowan repaired on a visit of self-condolence, after having given the gracious consent aforesaid. She drove into town for the purpose in a one-horse carriage irreverently called at that period of English history, a pill-box. It belonged to a job-master in a small way, who drove it himself, and who jobbed it by the day, or hour, to most of the old ladies in Hampton Court Palace; but it was a point of ceremony, in that encampment, that the whole equipage should be tacitly regarded as the private property of the jobber for the time being, and that the job-master should betray personal knowledge of nobody but the jobber in possession. So the Circumlocution Barnacles, who were the largest job-masters in the universe, always pretended to know of no other job but the job immediately in hand.

Mrs Merdle was at home, and was in her nest of crimson and gold, with the parrot on a neighbouring stem watching her with his head on one side, as if he took her for another splendid parrot of a larger species. To whom entered Mrs Gowan, with her favourite green fan, which softened the light on the spots of bloom.

'My dear soul,' said Mrs Gowan, tapping the back of her friend's hand with this fan after a little indifferent conversation, 'you are my only comfort. That affair of Henry's that I told you of, is to take place. Now, how does it strike you? I am dying to know, because you represent and express Society so well.'

Mrs Merdle reviewed the bosom which Society was accustomed to review; and having ascertained that show-window of Mr Merdle's and the

London jewellers' to be in good order, replied:

'As to marriage on the part of a man, my dear, Society requires that he should retrieve his fortunes by marriage. Society requires that he should gain by marriage. Society requires that he should found a handsome establishment by marriage. Society does not see, otherwise, what he has to do with marriage. Bird, be quiet!'

For the parrot on his cage above them, presiding over the conference as if he were a judge (and indeed he looked rather like one), had wound up the exposition with a shriek.

'Cases there are,' said Mrs Merdle, delicately crooking the little finger of her favourite hand, and making her remarks neater by that neat action; 'cases there are where a man is not young or elegant, and is rich, and has a handsome establishment already. Those are of a different kind. In such cases—'

Mrs Merdle shrugged her snowy shoulders and put her hand upon the jewel-stand, checking a little cough, as though to add, 'why, a man looks out for this sort of thing, my dear.' Then the parrot shrieked again, and she put up her glass to look at him, and said, 'Bird! Do be quiet!' 'But, young men,' resumed Mrs Merdle, 'and by young men you know what I mean, my love—I mean people's sons who have the world before them—they must place themselves in a better position towards Society by marriage, or Society really will not have any patience with their making fools of themselves. Dreadfully worldly all this sounds,' said Mrs Merdle, leaning back in her nest and putting up her glass again, 'does it not?'

'But it is true,' said Mrs Gowan, with a highly moral air.

'My dear, it is not to be disputed for a moment,' returned Mrs Merdle; 'because Society has made up its mind on the subject, and there is nothing more to be said. If we were in a more primitive state, if we lived under roofs of leaves, and kept cows and sheep and creatures instead of banker's accounts (which would be delicious; my dear, I am pastoral to a degree, by nature), well and good. But we don't live under leaves, and keep cows and sheep and creatures. I perfectly exhaust myself sometimes, in pointing out the distinction to Edmund Sparkler.'

Mrs Gowan, looking over her green fan when this young gentleman's name was mentioned, replied as follows:

'My love, you know the wretched state of the country—those unfortunate concessions of John Barnacle's!—and you therefore know the reasons for my being as poor as Thingummy.'

'A church mouse?' Mrs Merdle suggested with a smile.

'I was thinking of the other proverbial church person—Job,' said Mrs Gowan. 'Either will do. It would be idle to disguise, consequently, that there is a wide difference between the position of your son and mine. I may add, too, that Henry has talent—'

'Which Edmund certainly has not,' said Mrs Merdle, with the greatest suavity.

'—and that his talent, combined with disappointment,' Mrs Gowan went on, 'has led him into a pursuit which—ah dear me! You know, my dear. Such being Henry's different position, the question is what is the most inferior class of marriage to which I can reconcile myself.'

Mrs Merdle was so much engaged with the contemplation of her arms (beautiful-formed arms, and the very thing for bracelets), that she omitted to reply for a while. Roused at length by the silence, she folded the arms, and with admirable presence of mind looked her friend full in the face, and said interrogatively, 'Ye-es? And then?'

'And then, my dear,' said Mrs Gowan not quite so sweetly as before, 'I should be glad to hear what you have to say to it.'

Here the parrot, who had been standing on one leg since he screamed last, burst into a fit of laughter, bobbed himself derisively up and down on both legs, and finished by standing on one leg again, and pausing for a reply, with his head as much awry as he could possibly twist it.

'Sounds mercenary to ask what the gentleman is to get with the lady,' said Mrs Merdle; 'but Society is perhaps a little mercenary, you know, my dear.'

'From what I can make out,' said Mrs Gowan, 'I believe I may say that Henry will be relieved from debt—'

'Much in debt?' asked Mrs Merdle through her eyeglass.

'Why tolerably, I should think,' said Mrs Gowan.

'Meaning the usual thing; I understand; just so,' Mrs Merdle observed in a comfortable sort of way.

'And that the father will make them an allowance of three hundred a-year, or perhaps altogether something more, which, in Italy-'

'Oh! Going to Italy?' said Mrs Merdle.

'For Henry to study. You need be at no loss to guess why, my dear.

That dreadful Art—'

True. Mrs Merdle hastened to spare the feelings of her afflicted friend. She understood. Say no more!

'And that,' said Mrs Gowan, shaking her despondent head, 'that's all. That,' repeated Mrs Gowan, furling her green fan for the moment, and tapping her chin with it (it was on the way to being a double chin; might be called a chin and a half at present), 'that's all! On the death of the old people, I suppose there will be more to come; but how it may be restricted or locked up, I don't know. And as to that, they may live for ever. My dear, they are just the kind of people to do it.'

Now, Mrs Merdle, who really knew her friend Society pretty well, and who knew what Society's mothers were, and what Society's daughters were, and what Society's matrimonial market was, and how prices ruled in it, and what scheming and counter-scheming took place for the high buyers, and what bargaining and huckstering went on, thought in the depths of her capacious bosom that this was a sufficiently good catch. Knowing, however, what was expected of her, and perceiving the exact nature of the fiction to be nursed, she took it delicately in her arms, and put her required contribution of gloss upon it.

'And that is all, my dear?' said she, heaving a friendly sigh. 'Well, well! The fault is not yours. You have nothing to reproach yourself with. You must exercise the strength of mind for which you are renowned, and make the best of it.' 'The girl's family have made,' said Mrs Gowan, 'of course, the most strenuous endeavours to—as the lawyers say—to have and to hold Henry.'

'Of course they have, my dear,' said Mrs Merdle.

'I have persisted in every possible objection, and have worried myself morning, noon, and night, for means to detach Henry from the connection.'

'No doubt you have, my dear,' said Mrs Merdle.

'And all of no use. All has broken down beneath me. Now tell me, my love. Am I justified in at last yielding my most reluctant consent to Henry's marrying among people not in Society; or, have I acted with inexcusable weakness?'

In answer to this direct appeal, Mrs Merdle assured Mrs Gowan (speaking as a Priestess of Society) that she was highly to be commended, that she was much to be sympathised with, that she had taken the highest of parts, and had come out of the furnace refined. And Mrs Gowan, who of course saw through her own threadbare blind perfectly, and who knew that

Mrs Merdle saw through it perfectly, and who knew that Society would see through it perfectly, came out of this form, notwithstanding, as she had gone into it, with immense complacency and gravity.

The conference was held at four or five o'clock in the afternoon, when all the region of Harley Street, Cavendish Square, was resonant of carriage-wheels and double-knocks. It had reached this point when Mr Merdle came home from his daily occupation of causing the British name to be more and more respected in all parts of the civilised globe capable of the appreciation of world-wide commercial enterprise and gigantic combinations of skill and capital. For, though nobody knew with the least precision what Mr Merdle's business was, except that it was to coin money, these were the terms in which everybody defined it on all ceremonious occasions, and which it was the last new polite reading of the parable of the camel and the needle's eye to accept without inquiry.

For a gentleman who had this splendid work cut out for him, Mr Merdle looked a little common, and rather as if, in the course of his vast transactions, he had accidentally made an interchange of heads with some inferior spirit. He presented himself before the two ladies in the course of a dismal stroll through his mansion, which had no apparent object but escape from the presence of the chief butler.

'I beg your pardon,' he said, stopping short in confusion; 'I didn't know there was anybody here but the parrot.'

However, as Mrs Merdle said, 'You can come in!' and as Mrs Gowan said she was just going, and had already risen to take her leave, he came in, and stood looking out at a distant window, with his hands crossed under his uneasy coat-cuffs, clasping his wrists as if he were taking himself into custody. In this attitude he fell directly into a reverie from which he was only aroused by his wife's calling to him from her ottoman, when they had been for some quarter of an hour alone.

'Eh? Yes?' said Mr Merdle, turning towards her. 'What is it?'

'What is it?' repeated Mrs Merdle. 'It is, I suppose, that you have not heard a word of my complaint.'

'Your complaint, Mrs Merdle?' said Mr Merdle. 'I didn't know that you were suffering from a complaint. What complaint?'

'A complaint of you,' said Mrs Merdle.

'Oh! A complaint of me,' said Mr Merdle. 'What is the—what have I—what may you have to complain of in me, Mrs Merdle?' In his withdrawing, abstracted, pondering way, it took him some time to shape this question. As a kind of faint attempt to convince himself that he was the master of the house, he concluded by presenting his forefinger to the parrot, who expressed his opinion on that subject by instantly driving his bill into it.

'You were saying, Mrs Merdle,' said Mr Merdle, with his wounded finger in his mouth, 'that you had a complaint against me?'

'A complaint which I could scarcely show the justice of more emphatically, than by having to repeat it,' said Mrs Merdle. 'I might as well have stated it to the wall. I had far better have stated it to the bird. He would at least have screamed.'

'You don't want me to scream, Mrs Merdle, I suppose,' said Mr Merdle, taking a chair.

'Indeed I don't know,' retorted Mrs Merdle, 'but that you had better do that, than be so moody and distraught. One would at least know that you were sensible of what was going on around you.'

'A man might scream, and yet not be that, Mrs Merdle,' said Mr Merdle, heavily.

'And might be dogged, as you are at present, without screaming,' returned Mrs Merdle. 'That's very true. If you wish to know the complaint I make against you, it is, in so many plain words, that you really ought not to go into Society unless you can accommodate yourself to Society.'

Mr Merdle, so twisting his hands into what hair he had upon his head that he seemed to lift himself up by it as he started out of his chair, cried: 'Why, in the name of all the infernal powers, Mrs Merdle, who does more for Society than I do? Do you see these premises, Mrs Merdle?

Do you see this furniture, Mrs Merdle? Do you look in the glass and see yourself, Mrs Merdle? Do you know the cost of all this, and who it's all provided for? And yet will you tell me that I oughtn't to go into Society? I, who shower money upon it in this way? I, who might always be said—to—to—to harness myself to a watering-cart full of money, and go about saturating Society every day of my life.'

'Pray, don't be violent, Mr Merdle,' said Mrs Merdle.

'Violent?' said Mr Merdle. 'You are enough to make me desperate. You don't know half of what I do to accommodate Society. You don't know anything of the sacrifices I make for it.'

'I know,' returned Mrs Merdle, 'that you receive the best in the land. I know that you move in the whole Society of the country. And I believe I know (indeed, not to make any ridiculous pretence about it, I know I know) who sustains you in it, Mr Merdle.'

'Mrs Merdle,' retorted that gentleman, wiping his dull red and yellow face, 'I know that as well as you do. If you were not an ornament to Society, and if I was not a benefactor to Society, you and I would never have come together. When I say a benefactor to it, I mean a person who provides it with all sorts of expensive things to eat and drink and look at. But, to tell me that I am not fit for it after all I have done for it—after all I have done for it,' repeated Mr Merdle, with a wild emphasis that made his wife lift up her eyelids, 'after all—all!—to tell me I have no right to mix with it after all, is a pretty reward.'

'I say,' answered Mrs Merdle composedly, 'that you ought to make yourself fit for it by being more degage, and less preoccupied. There is a positive vulgarity in carrying your business affairs about with you as you do.' 'How do I carry them about, Mrs Merdle?' asked Mr Merdle.

'How do you carry them about?' said Mrs Merdle. 'Look at yourself in the glass.'

Mr Merdle involuntarily turned his eyes in the direction of the nearest mirror, and asked, with a slow determination of his turbid blood to his temples, whether a man was to be called to account for his digestion?

'You have a physician,' said Mrs Merdle.

'He does me no good,' said Mr Merdle.

Mrs Merdle changed her ground.

'Besides,' said she, 'your digestion is nonsense. I don't speak of your digestion. I speak of your manner.' 'Mrs Merdle,' returned her husband, 'I look to you for that. You supply manner, and I supply money.'

'I don't expect you,' said Mrs Merdle, reposing easily among her cushions, 'to captivate people. I don't want you to take any trouble upon yourself, or to try to be fascinating. I simply request you to care about nothing—or seem to care about nothing—as everybody else does.'

'Do I ever say I care about anything?' asked Mr Merdle.

'Say? No! Nobody would attend to you if you did. But you show it.'

'Show what? What do I show?' demanded Mr Merdle hurriedly.

'I have already told you. You show that you carry your business cares an projects about, instead of leaving them in the City, or wherever else they belong to,' said Mrs Merdle. 'Or seeming to. Seeming would be quite enough: I ask no more. Whereas you couldn't be more occupied with your day's calculations and combinations than you habitually show yourself to be, if you were a carpenter.'

'A carpenter!' repeated Mr Merdle, checking something like a groan.

'I shouldn't so much mind being a carpenter, Mrs Merdle.'

'And my complaint is,' pursued the lady, disregarding the low remark, 'that it is not the tone of Society, and that you ought to correct it, Mr Merdle. If you have any doubt of my judgment, ask even Edmund Sparkler.' The door of the room had opened, and Mrs Merdle now surveyed the head of her son through her glass. 'Edmund; we want you here.'

Mr Sparkler, who had merely put in his head and looked round the room without entering (as if he were searching the house for that young lady with no nonsense about her), upon this followed up his head with his body, and stood before them. To whom, in a few easy words adapted to his capacity, Mrs Merdle stated the question at issue.

The young gentleman, after anxiously feeling his shirt-collar as if it were his pulse and he were hypochondriacal, observed, 'That he had heard it noticed by fellers.'

'Edmund Sparkler has heard it noticed,' said Mrs Merdle, with languid triumph. 'Why, no doubt everybody has heard it noticed!' Which in truth was no unreasonable inference; seeing that Mr Sparkler would probably be the last person, in any assemblage of the human species, to receive an impression from anything that passed in his presence.

'And Edmund Sparkler will tell you, I dare say,' said Mrs Merdle, waving her favourite hand towards her husband, 'how he has heard it noticed.' 'I couldn't,' said Mr Sparkler, after feeling his pulse as before, 'couldn't undertake to say what led to it—'cause memory desperate loose. But being in company with the brother of a doosed fine gal—well educated too—with no biggodd nonsense about her—at the period alluded to—'

'There! Never mind the sister,' remarked Mrs Merdle, a little impatiently. 'What did the brother say?'

'Didn't say a word, ma'am,' answered Mr Sparkler. 'As silent a feller as myself. Equally hard up for a remark.'

'Somebody said something,' returned Mrs Merdle. 'Never mind who it was.'

('Assure you I don't in the least,' said Mr Sparkler.)

'But tell us what it was.'

Mr Sparkler referred to his pulse again, and put himself through some severe mental discipline before he replied:

'Fellers referring to my Governor—expression not my own—occasionally compliment my Governor in a very handsome way on being immensely rich and knowing—perfect phenomenon of Buyer and Banker and that—but say the Shop sits heavily on him. Say he carried the Shop about, on his back rather—like Jew clothesmen with too much business.'

'Which,' said Mrs Merdle, rising, with her floating drapery about her, 'is exactly my complaint. Edmund, give me your arm up-stairs.'

Mr Merdle, left alone to meditate on a better conformation of himself to Society, looked out of nine windows in succession, and appeared to see nine wastes of space. When he had thus entertained himself he went down-stairs, and looked intently at all the carpets on the ground-floor; and then came up-stairs again, and looked intently at all the carpets on the first-floor; as if they were gloomy depths, in unison with his oppressed soul. Through all the rooms he wandered, as he always did, like the last person on earth who had any business to approach them. Let Mrs Merdle announce, with all her might, that she was at Home ever so many nights in a season, she could not announce more widely and unmistakably than Mr Merdle did that he was never at home.

At last he met the chief butler, the sight of which splendid retainer always finished him. Extinguished by this great creature, he sneaked to his dressing-room, and there remained shut up until he rode out to dinner, with Mrs Merdle, in her own handsome chariot. At dinner, he was envied and flattered as a being of might, was Treasuried, Barred, and Bishoped, as much as he would; and an hour after midnight came home alone, and being instantly put out again in his own hall, like a rushlight, by the chief butler, went sighing to bed.

CHAPTER 34. A Shoal of Barnacles

Mr Henry Gowan and the dog were established frequenters of the cottage, and the day was fixed for the wedding. There was to be a convocation of Barnacles on the occasion, in order that that very high and very large family might shed as much lustre on the marriage as so dim an event was capable of receiving.

To have got the whole Barnacle family together would have been impossible for two reasons. Firstly, because no building could have held all the members and connections of that illustrious house. Secondly, because wherever there was a square yard of ground in British occupation under the sun or moon, with a public post upon it, sticking to that post was a Barnacle. No intrepid navigator could plant a flag-staff upon any spot of earth, and take possession of it in the British name, but to that spot of earth, so soon as the discovery was known, the Circumlocution Office sent out a Barnacle and a despatch-box. Thus the Barnacles were all over the world, in every direction—despatch-boxing the compass.

But, while the so-potent art of Prospero himself would have failed in summoning the Barnacles from every speck of ocean and dry land on which there was nothing (except mischief) to be done and anything to be pocketed, it was perfectly feasible to assemble a good many Barnacles. This Mrs Gowan applied herself to do; calling on Mr Meagles frequently with new additions to the list, and holding conferences with that gentleman when he was not engaged (as he generally was at this period) in examining and paying the debts of his future son-in-law, in the apartment of scales and scoops.

One marriage guest there was, in reference to whose presence Mr Meagles felt a nearer interest and concern than in the attendance of the most elevated Barnacle expected; though he was far from insensible of the honour of having such company. This guest was Clennam. But Clennam had made a promise he held sacred, among the trees that summer night, and, in the chivalry of his heart, regarded it as binding him to many implied obligations. In forgetfulness of himself, and delicate service to her on all occasions, he was never to fail; to begin it, he answered Mr Meagles cheerfully, 'I shall come, of course.'

His partner, Daniel Doyce, was something of a stumbling-block in Mr Meagles's way, the worthy gentleman being not at all clear in his own anxious mind but that the mingling of Daniel with official Barnacleism might produce some explosive combination, even at a marriage breakfast. The national offender, however, lightened him of his uneasiness by coming down to Twickenham to represent that he begged, with the freedom of an old friend, and as a favour to one, that he might not be invited. 'For,' said he, 'as my business with this set of gentlemen was to do a public duty and a public service, and as their business with me was to prevent it by wearing my soul out, I think we had better not eat and drink together with a show of being of one mind.' Mr Meagles was much amused by his friend's oddity; and patronised him with a more protecting air of allowance than usual, when he rejoined: 'Well, well, Dan, you shall have your own crotchety way.'

To Mr Henry Gowan, as the time approached, Clennam tried to convey by all quiet and unpretending means, that he was frankly and disinterestedly desirous of tendering him any friendship he would accept. Mr Gowan treated him in return with his usual ease, and with his usual show of confidence, which was no confidence at all.

'You see, Clennam,' he happened to remark in the course of conversation one day, when they were walking near the Cottage within a week of the marriage, 'I am a disappointed man. That you know already.'

'Upon my word,' said Clennam, a little embarrassed, 'I scarcely know how.'

'Why,' returned Gowan, 'I belong to a clan, or a clique, or a family, or a connection, or whatever you like to call it, that might have provided for me in any one of fifty ways, and that took it into its head not to do it at all. So here I am, a poor devil of an artist.'

Clennam was beginning, 'But on the other hand—' when Gowan took him up.

'Yes, yes, I know. I have the good fortune of being beloved by a beautiful and charming girl whom I love with all my heart.' ('Is there much of it?' Clennam thought. And as he thought it, felt ashamed of himself.)

'And of finding a father-in-law who is a capital fellow and a liberal good old boy. Still, I had other prospects washed and combed into my childish head when it was washed and combed for me, and I took them to a public school when I washed and combed it for myself, and I am here without them, and thus I am a disappointed man.'

Clennam thought (and as he thought it, again felt ashamed of himself), was this notion of being disappointed in life, an assertion of station which the bridegroom brought into the family as his property, having already carried it detrimentally into his pursuit? And was it a hopeful or a promising thing anywhere?

'Not bitterly disappointed, I think,' he said aloud. 'Hang it, no; not bitterly,' laughed Gowan. 'My people are not worth that—though they are charming fellows, and I have the greatest affection for them. Besides, it's pleasant to show them that I can do without them, and that they may all go to the Devil. And besides, again, most men are disappointed in life, somehow or other, and influenced by their disappointment. But it's a dear good world, and I love it!'

'It lies fair before you now,' said Arthur.

'Fair as this summer river,' cried the other, with enthusiasm, 'and by Jove I glow with admiration of it, and with ardour to run a race in it. It's the best of old worlds! And my calling! The best of old callings, isn't it?'

'Full of interest and ambition, I conceive,' said Clennam.

'And imposition,' added Gowan, laughing; 'we won't leave out the imposition. I hope I may not break down in that; but there, my being a disappointed man may show itself. I may not be able to face it out gravely enough. Between you and me, I think there is some danger of my being just enough soured not to be able to do that.'

'To do what?' asked Clennam.

'To keep it up. To help myself in my turn, as the man before me helps himself in his, and pass the bottle of smoke. To keep up the pretence as to labour, and study, and patience, and being devoted to my art, and giving up many solitary days to it, and abandoning many pleasures for it, and living in it, and all the rest of it—in short, to pass the bottle of smoke according to rule.'

'But it is well for a man to respect his own vocation, whatever it is; and to think himself bound to uphold it, and to claim for it the respect it deserves; is it not?' Arthur reasoned. 'And your vocation, Gowan, may really demand this suit and service. I confess I should have thought that all Art did.'

'What a good fellow you are, Clennam!' exclaimed the other, stopping to look at him, as if with irrepressible admiration. 'What a capital fellow! You have never been disappointed. That's easy to see.'

It would have been so cruel if he had meant it, that Clennam firmly resolved to believe he did not mean it. Gowan, without pausing, laid his hand upon his shoulder, and laughingly and lightly went on:

'Clennam, I don't like to dispel your generous visions, and I would give any money (if I had any), to live in such a rose-coloured mist. But what I do in my trade, I do to sell. What all we fellows do, we do to sell. If we didn't want to sell it for the most we can get for it, we shouldn't do it. Being work, it has to be done; but it's easily enough done. All the rest is hocus-pocus.

Now here's one of the advantages, or disadvantages, of knowing a disappointed man. You hear the truth.'

Whatever he had heard, and whether it deserved that name or another, it sank into Clennam's mind. It so took root there, that he began to fear Henry Gowan would always be a trouble to him, and that so far he had gained little or nothing from the dismissal of Nobody, with all his inconsistencies, anxieties, and contradictions. He found a contest still always going on in his breast between his promise to keep Gowan in none but good aspects before the mind of Mr Meagles, and his enforced observation of Gowan in aspects that had no good in them. Nor could he quite support his own conscientious nature against misgivings that he distorted and discoloured himself, by reminding himself that he never sought those discoveries, and that he would have avoided them with willingness and great relief. For he never could forget what he had been; and he knew that he had once disliked Gowan for no better reason than that he had come in his way.

Harassed by these thoughts, he now began to wish the marriage over, Gowan and his young wife gone, and himself left to fulfil his promise, and discharge the generous function he had accepted. This last week was, in truth, an uneasy interval for the whole house. Before Pet, or before Gowan, Mr Meagles was radiant; but Clennam had more than once found him alone, with his view of the scales and scoop much blurred, and had often seen him look after the lovers, in the garden or elsewhere when he was not seen by them, with the old clouded face on which Gowan had fallen like a shadow. In the arrangement of the house for the great occasion, many little reminders of the old travels of the father and mother and daughter had to be disturbed and passed from hand to hand; and sometimes, in the midst of these mute witnesses, to the life they had had together, even Pet herself would yield to lamenting and weeping. Mrs Meagles, the blithest and busiest of mothers, went about singing and cheering everybody; but she, honest soul, had her flights into store rooms, where she would cry until her eyes were red, and would then come out, attributing that appearance to pickled onions and pepper, and singing clearer than ever. Mrs Tickit, finding no balsam for a wounded mind in Buchan's Domestic Medicine, suffered greatly from low spirits, and from moving recollections of Minnie's infancy. When the latter was powerful with her, she usually sent up secret messages importing that she was not in parlour condition as to her attire, and that she solicited a sight of 'her child' in the kitchen; there, she would bless her child's face, and bless her child's heart, and hug her child, in a medley of tears and congratulations, chopping-boards, rolling-pins, and pie-crust, with the tenderness of an old attached servant, which is a very pretty tenderness indeed.

But all days come that are to be; and the marriage-day was to be, and it came; and with it came all the Barnacles who were bidden to the feast. There was Mr Tite Barnacle, from the Circumlocution Office, and Mews Street, Grosvenor Square, with the expensive Mrs Tite Barnacle NEE Stiltstalking, who made the Quarter Days so long in coming, and the three expensive Miss Tite Barnacles, double-loaded with accomplishments and ready to go off, and yet not going off with the sharpness of flash and bang that might have been expected, but rather hanging fire. There was Barnacle junior, also from the Circumlocution Office, leaving the Tonnage of the country, which he was somehow supposed to take under his protection, to look after itself, and, sooth to say, not at all impairing the efficiency of its protection by leaving it alone. There was the engaging Young Barnacle, deriving from the sprightly side of the family, also from the Circumlocution Office, gaily and agreeably helping the occasion along, and treating it, in his sparkling way, as one of the official forms and fees of the Church Department of How not to do it. There were three other Young Barnacles from three other offices, insipid to all the senses, and terribly in want of seasoning, doing the marriage as they would have 'done' the Nile, Old Rome, the new singer, or Jerusalem.

But there was greater game than this. There was Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle himself, in the odour of Circumlocution—with the very smell of Despatch-Boxes upon him. Yes, there was Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle, who had risen to official heights on the wings of one indignant idea, and that was, My Lords, that I am yet to be told that it behoves a Minister of this free country to set bounds to the philanthropy, to cramp the charity, to fetter the public spirit, to contract the enterprise, to damp the independent self-reliance, of its people. That was, in other words, that this great statesman was always yet to be told that it behoved the Pilot of the ship to do anything but prosper in the private loaf and fish trade ashore, the crew being able, by dint of hard pumping, to keep the ship above water without him. On this sublime discovery in the great art How not to do it, Lord Decimus had long sustained the highest glory of the Barnacle family; and let any ill-advised member of either House but try How to do it by bringing in a Bill to do it, that Bill was as good as dead and buried when Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle rose up in his place and solemnly said, soaring into indignant majesty as the Circumlocution cheering soared around him, that he was yet to be told, My Lords, that it behoved him as the Minister of this free country, to set bounds to the philanthropy, to cramp the charity, to fetter the public spirit, to contract the enterprise, to damp the independent self-reliance, of its people. The discovery of this Behoving Machine was the discovery of the political perpetual motion. It never wore out, though it was always going round and round in all the State Departments.

And there, with his noble friend and relative Lord Decimus, was William Barnacle, who had made the ever-famous coalition with Tudor Stiltstalking, and who always kept ready his own particular recipe for How not to do it; sometimes tapping the Speaker, and drawing it fresh out of him, with a 'First, I will beg you, sir, to inform the House what Precedent we have for the course into which the honourable gentleman would precipitate us;' sometimes asking the honourable gentleman to favour him with his own version of the Precedent; sometimes telling the honourable gentleman that he (William Barnacle) would search for a Precedent; and oftentimes crushing the honourable gentleman flat on the spot by telling him there was no Precedent. But Precedent and Precipitate were, under all circumstances, the well-matched pair of battle-horses of this able Circumlocutionist. No matter that the unhappy honourable gentleman had been trying in vain, for twenty-five years, to precipitate William Barnacle into this—William Barnacle still put it to the House, and (at second-hand or so) to the country, whether he was to be precipitated into this. No matter that it was utterly irreconcilable with the nature of things and course of events that the wretched honourable gentleman could possibly produce a Precedent for this—William Barnacle would nevertheless thank the honourable gentleman for that ironical cheer, and would close with him upon that issue, and would tell him to his teeth that there Was NO Precedent for this. It might perhaps have been objected that the William Barnacle wisdom was not high wisdom or the earth it bamboozled would never have been made, or, if made in a rash mistake, would have remained blank mud. But Precedent and Precipitate together frightened all objection out of most people.

And there, too, was another Barnacle, a lively one, who had leaped through twenty places in quick succession, and was always in two or three at once, and who was the much-respected inventor of an art which he practised with great success and admiration in all Barnacle Governments. This was, when he was asked a Parliamentary question on any one topic, to return an answer on any other. It had done immense service, and brought him into high esteem with the Circumlocution Office.

And there, too, was a sprinkling of less distinguished Parliamentary Barnacles, who had not as yet got anything snug, and were going through their probation to prove their worthiness. These Barnacles perched upon staircases and hid in passages, waiting their orders to make houses or not to make houses; and they did all their hearing, and ohing, and cheering, and barking, under directions from the heads of the family; and they put dummy motions on the paper in the way of other men's motions; and they stalled disagreeable subjects off until late in the night and late in the session, and then with virtuous patriotism cried out that it was too late; and they went down into the country, whenever they were sent, and swore that Lord Decimus had revived trade from a swoon, and commerce from a fit, and had doubled the harvest of corn, quadrupled the harvest of hay, and prevented no end of gold from flying out of the Bank. Also these Barnacles were dealt, by the heads of the family, like so many cards below the court-cards, to public meetings and dinners; where they bore testimony to all sorts of services on the part of their noble and honourable relatives, and buttered the Barnacles on all sorts of toasts. And they stood, under similar orders, at all sorts of elections; and they turned out of their own seats, on the shortest notice and the most unreasonable terms, to let in other men; and they fetched and carried, and toadied and jobbed, and corrupted, and ate heaps of dirt, and were indefatigable in the public service. And there was not a list, in all the Circumlocution Office, of places that might fall vacant anywhere within half a century, from a lord of the Treasury to a Chinese consul, and up again to a governor-general of India, but as applicants for such places, the names of some or of every one of these hungry and adhesive Barnacles were down.

It was necessarily but a sprinkling of any class of Barnacles that attended the marriage, for there were not two score in all, and what is that subtracted from Legion! But the sprinkling was a swarm in the Twickenham cottage, and filled it. A Barnacle (assisted by a Barnacle) married the happy pair, and it behoved Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle himself to conduct Mrs Meagles to breakfast.

The entertainment was not as agreeable and natural as it might have been. Mr Meagles, hove down by his good company while he highly appreciated it, was not himself. Mrs Gowan was herself, and that did not improve him. The fiction that it was not Mr Meagles who had stood in the way, but that it was the Family greatness, and that the Family greatness had made a concession, and there was now a soothing unanimity, pervaded the affair, though it was never openly expressed. Then the Barnacles felt that they for their parts would have done with the Meagleses when the present patronising occasion was over; and the Meagleses felt the same for their parts. Then Gowan asserting his rights as a disappointed man who had his grudge against the family, and who, perhaps, had allowed his mother to have them there, as much in the hope it might give them some annoyance as with any other benevolent object, aired his pencil and his poverty ostentatiously before them, and told them he hoped in time to settle a crust of bread and cheese on his wife, and that he begged such of them as (more fortunate than himself) came in for any good thing, and could buy a picture, to please to remember the poor painter. Then Lord Decimus, who was a wonder on his own Parliamentary pedestal, turned out to be the windiest creature here: proposing happiness to the bride and bridegroom in a series of platitudes that would have made the hair of any sincere disciple and believer stand on end; and trotting, with the complacency of an idiotic elephant, among howling labyrinths of sentences which he seemed to take for high roads, and never so much as wanted to get out of. Then Mr Tite Barnacle could not but feel that there was a person in company, who would have disturbed his life-long sitting to Sir Thomas Lawrence in full official character, if such disturbance had been possible: while Barnacle junior did, with indignation, communicate to two vapid gentlemen, his relatives, that there was a feller here, look here, who had come to our Department without an appointment and said he wanted to know, you know; and that, look here, if he was to break out now, as he might you know (for you never could tell what an ungentlemanly Radical of that sort would be up to next), and was to say, look here, that he wanted to know this moment, you know, that would be jolly; wouldn't it?

The pleasantest part of the occasion by far, to Clennam, was the painfullest. When Mr and Mrs Meagles at last hung about Pet in the room with the two pictures (where the company were not), before going with her to the threshold which she could never recross to be the old Pet and the old delight, nothing could be more natural and simple than the three were. Gowan himself was touched, and answered Mr Meagles's 'O Gowan, take care of her, take care of her!' with an earnest 'Don't be so broken-hearted, sir. By Heaven I will!'

And so, with the last sobs and last loving words, and a last look to Clennam of confidence in his promise, Pet fell back in the carriage, and her husband waved his hand, and they were away for Dover; though not until the faithful Mrs Tickit, in her silk gown and jet black curls, had rushed out from some hiding-place, and thrown both her shoes after the carriage: an apparition which occasioned great surprise to the distinguished company at the windows.

The said company being now relieved from further attendance, and the chief Barnacles being rather hurried (for they had it in hand just then to send a mail or two which was in danger of going straight to its destination, beating about the seas like the Flying Dutchman, and to arrange with complexity for the stoppage of a good deal of important business otherwise in peril of being done), went their several ways; with all affability conveying to Mr and Mrs Meagles that general assurance that what they had been doing there, they had been doing at a sacrifice for Mr and Mrs Meagles's good, which they always conveyed to Mr John Bull in their official condescension to that most unfortunate creature.

A miserable blank remained in the house and in the hearts of the father and mother and Clennam. Mr Meagles called only one remembrance to his aid, that really did him good.

'It's very gratifying, Arthur,' he said, 'after all, to look back upon.'

'The past?' said Clennam.

'Yes—but I mean the company.'

It had made him much more low and unhappy at the time, but now it really did him good. 'It's very gratifying,' he said, often repeating the remark in the course of the evening. 'Such high company!'

CHAPTER 35. What was behind Mr Pancks on Little Dorrit's Hand

It was at this time that Mr Pancks, in discharge of his compact with Clennam, revealed to him the whole of his gipsy story, and told him Little Dorrit's fortune. Her father was heir-at-law to a great estate that had long lain unknown of, unclaimed, and accumulating. His right was now clear, nothing interposed in his way, the Marshalsea gates stood open, the Marshalsea walls were down, a few flourishes of his pen, and he was extremely rich.

In his tracking out of the claim to its complete establishment, Mr Pancks had shown a sagacity that nothing could baffle, and a patience and secrecy that nothing could tire. 'I little thought, sir,' said Pancks, 'when you and I crossed Smithfield that night, and I told you what sort of a Collector I was, that this would come of it. I little thought, sir, when I told you you were not of the Clennams of Cornwall, that I was ever going to tell you who were of the Dorrits of Dorsetshire.' He then went on to detail. How, having that name recorded in his note-book, he was first attracted by the name alone. How, having often found two exactly similar names, even belonging to the same place, to involve no traceable consanguinity, near or distant, he did not at first give much heed to this, except in the way of speculation as to what a surprising change would be made in the condition of a little seamstress, if she could be shown to have any interest in so large a property. How he rather supposed himself to have pursued the idea into its next degree, because there was something uncommon in the quiet little seamstress, which pleased him and provoked his curiosity.

How he had felt his way inch by inch, and 'Moled it out, sir' (that was Mr Pancks's expression), grain by grain. How, in the beginning of the labour described by this new verb, and to render which the more expressive Mr Pancks shut his eyes in pronouncing it and shook his hair over them, he had alternated from sudden lights and hopes to sudden darkness and no hopes, and back again, and back again. How he had made acquaintances in the Prison, expressly that he might come and go there as all other comers and goers did; and how his first ray of light was unconsciously given him by Mr Dorrit himself and by his son; to both of whom he easily became known; with both of whom he talked much, casually ('but always Moleing you'll observe,' said Mr Pancks): and from whom he derived, without being at all suspected, two or three little points of family history which, as he began to hold clues of his own, suggested others. How it had at length become plain to Mr Pancks that he had made a real discovery of the heir-at-law to a great fortune, and that his discovery had but to be ripened to legal fulness and perfection. How he had, thereupon, sworn his landlord, Mr Rugg, to secrecy in a solemn manner, and taken him into Moleing partnership.

How they had employed John Chivery as their sole clerk and agent, seeing to whom he was devoted. And how, until the present hour, when authorities mighty in the Bank and learned in the law declared their successful labours ended, they had confided in no other human being.

'So if the whole thing had broken down, sir,' concluded Pancks, 'at the very last, say the day before the other day when I showed you our papers in the Prison yard, or say that very day, nobody but ourselves would have been cruelly disappointed, or a penny the worse.'

Clennam, who had been almost incessantly shaking hands with him throughout the narrative, was reminded by this to say, in an amazement which even the preparation he had had for the main disclosure smoothed down, 'My dear Mr Pancks, this must have cost you a great sum of money.'

'Pretty well, sir,' said the triumphant Pancks. 'No trifle, though we did it as cheap as it could be done. And the outlay was a difficulty, let me tell you.'

'A difficulty!' repeated Clennam. 'But the difficulties you have so wonderfully conquered in the whole business!' shaking his hand again.

'I'll tell you how I did it,' said the delighted Pancks, putting his hair into a condition as elevated as himself. 'First, I spent all I had of my own. That wasn't much.'

'I am sorry for it,' said Clennam: 'not that it matters now, though. Then, what did you do?'

'Then,' answered Pancks, 'I borrowed a sum of my proprietor.'

'Of Mr Casby?' said Clennam. 'He's a fine old fellow.'

'Noble old boy; an't he?' said Mr Pancks, entering on a series of the dryest snorts. 'Generous old buck. Confiding old boy. Philanthropic old buck. Benevolent old boy! Twenty per cent. I engaged to pay him, sir. But we never do business for less at our shop.'

Arthur felt an awkward consciousness of having, in his exultant condition, been a little premature.

'I said to that boiling-over old Christian,' Mr Pancks pursued, appearing greatly to relish this descriptive epithet, 'that I had got a little project on hand; a hopeful one; I told him a hopeful one; which wanted a certain small capital. I proposed to him to lend me the money on my note. Which he did, at twenty; sticking the twenty on in a business-like way, and putting it into the note, to look like a part of the principal. If I had broken down after that, I should have been his grubber for the next seven years at half wages and double grind. But he's a perfect Patriarch; and it would do a man good to serve him on such terms—on any terms.'

Arthur for his life could not have said with confidence whether Pancks really thought so or not.

'When that was gone, sir,' resumed Pancks, 'and it did go, though I dribbled it out like so much blood, I had taken Mr Rugg into the secret. I proposed to borrow of Mr Rugg (or of Miss Rugg; it's the same thing; she made a little money by a speculation in the Common Pleas once). He lent it at ten, and thought that pretty high. But Mr Rugg's a red-haired man, sir, and gets his hair cut. And as to the crown of his hat, it's high. And as to the brim of his hat, it's narrow. And there's no more benevolence bubbling out of him, than out of a ninepin.'

'Your own recompense for all this, Mr Pancks,' said Clennam, 'ought to be a large one.'

'I don't mistrust getting it, sir,' said Pancks. 'I have made no bargain. I owed you one on that score; now I have paid it. Money out of pocket made good, time fairly allowed for, and Mr Rugg's bill settled, a thousand pounds would be a fortune to me. That matter I place in your hands. I authorize you now to break all this to the family in any way you think best. Miss Amy Dorrit will be with Mrs Finching this morning. The sooner done the better. Can't be done too soon.'

This conversation took place in Clennam's bed-room, while he was yet in bed. For Mr Pancks had knocked up the house and made his way in, very early in the morning; and, without once sitting down or standing still, had delivered himself of the whole of his details (illustrated with a variety of documents) at the bedside. He now said he would 'go and look up Mr

Rugg', from whom his excited state of mind appeared to require another back; and bundling up his papers, and exchanging one more hearty shake of the hand with Clennam, he went at full speed down-stairs, and steamed off.

Clennam, of course, resolved to go direct to Mr Casby's. He dressed and got out so quickly that he found himself at the corner of the patriarchal street nearly an hour before her time; but he was not sorry to have the opportunity of calming himself with a leisurely walk.

When he returned to the street, and had knocked at the bright brass knocker, he was informed that she had come, and was shown up-stairs to Flora's breakfast-room. Little Dorrit was not there herself, but Flora was, and testified the greatest amazement at seeing him.

'Good gracious, Arthur—Doyce and Clennam!' cried that lady, 'who would have ever thought of seeing such a sight as this and pray excuse a wrapper for upon my word I really never and a faded check too which is worse but our little friend is making me, not that I need mind mentioning it to you for you must know that there are such things a skirt, and having arranged that a trying on should take place after breakfast is the reason though I wish not so badly starched.'

'I ought to make an apology,' said Arthur, 'for so early and abrupt a visit; but you will excuse it when I tell you the cause.'

'In times for ever fled Arthur,' returned Mrs Finching, 'pray excuse me Doyce and Clennam infinitely more correct and though unquestionably distant still 'tis distance lends enchantment to the view, at least I don't mean that and if I did I suppose it would depend considerably on the nature of the view, but I'm running on again and you put it all out of my head.'

She glanced at him tenderly, and resumed:

'In times for ever fled I was going to say it would have sounded strange indeed for Arthur Clennam—Doyce and Clennam naturally quite different—to make apologies for coming here at any time, but that is past and what is past can never be recalled except in his own case as poor Mr F. said when he was in spirits Cucumber and therefore never ate it.'

She was making the tea when Arthur came in, and now hastily finished that operation.

'Papa,' she said, all mystery and whisper, as she shut down the tea-pot lid, 'is sitting prosingly breaking his new laid egg in the back parlour over the City article exactly like the Woodpecker Tapping and need never know that you are here, and our little friend you are well aware may be fully trusted when she comes down from cutting out on the large table overhead.'

Arthur then told her, in the fewest words, that it was their little friend he came to see; and what he had to announce to their little friend. At which astounding intelligence, Flora clasped her hands, fell into a tremble, and shed tears of sympathy and pleasure, like the good-natured creature she really was.

'For goodness sake let me get out of the way first,' said Flora, putting her hands to her ears and moving towards the door, 'or I know I shall go off dead and screaming and make everybody worse, and the dear little thing only this morning looking so nice and neat and good and yet so poor and now a fortune is she really and deserves it too! and might I mention it to Mr F.'s Aunt Arthur not Doyce and Clennam for this once or if objectionable not on any account.'

Arthur nodded his free permission, since Flora shut out all verbal communication. Flora nodded in return to thank him, and hurried out of the room.

Little Dorrit's step was already on the stairs, and in another moment she was at the door. Do what he could to compose his face, he could not convey so much of an ordinary expression into it, but that the moment she saw it she dropped her work, and cried, 'Mr Clennam! What's the matter?'

'Nothing, nothing. That is, no misfortune has happened. I have come to tell you something, but it is a piece of great good-fortune.' 'Good-fortune?'

'Wonderful fortune!'

They stood in a window, and her eyes, full of light, were fixed upon his face. He put an arm about her, seeing her likely to sink down. She put a hand upon that arm, partly to rest upon it, and partly so to preserve their relative positions as that her intent look at him should be shaken by no change of attitude in either of them. Her lips seemed to repeat 'Wonderful fortune?' He repeated it again, aloud.

'Dear Little Dorrit! Your father.'

The ice of the pale face broke at the word, and little lights and shoots of expression passed all over it. They were all expressions of pain. Her breath was faint and hurried. Her heart beat fast. He would have clasped the little figure closer, but he saw that the eyes appealed to him not to be moved.

'Your father can be free within this week. He does not know it; we must go to him from here, to tell him of it. Your father will be free within a few days. Your father will be free within a few hours. Remember we must go to him from here, to tell him of it!'

That brought her back. Her eyes were closing, but they opened again.

'This is not all the good-fortune. This is not all the wonderful good-fortune, my dear Little Dorrit. Shall I tell you more?'

Her lips shaped 'Yes.'

'Your father will be no beggar when he is free. He will want for nothing. Shall I tell you more? Remember! He knows nothing of it; we must go to him, from here, to tell him of it!'

She seemed to entreat him for a little time. He held her in his arm, and, after a pause, bent down his ear to listen.

'Did you ask me to go on?'

'Yes.'

'He will be a rich man. He is a rich man. A great sum of money is waiting to be paid over to him as his inheritance; you are all henceforth very wealthy. Bravest and best of children, I thank Heaven that you are rewarded!'

As he kissed her, she turned her head towards his shoulder, and raised her arm towards his neck; cried out 'Father! Father! Father!' and swooned away.

Upon which Flora returned to take care of her, and hovered about her on a sofa, intermingling kind offices and incoherent scraps of conversation in a manner so confounding, that whether she pressed the Marshalsea to take a spoonful of unclaimed dividends, for it would do her good; or whether she congratulated Little Dorrit's father on coming into possession of a hundred thousand smelling-bottles; or whether she explained that she put seventy-five thousand drops of spirits of lavender on fifty thousand pounds of lump sugar, and that she entreated Little Dorrit to take that gentle restorative; or whether she bathed the foreheads of Doyce and Clennam in vinegar, and gave the late Mr F. more air; no one with any sense of responsibility could have undertaken to decide. A tributary stream of confusion, moreover, poured in from an adjoining bedroom, where Mr F.'s Aunt appeared, from the sound of her voice, to be in a horizontal posture, awaiting her breakfast; and from which bower that inexorable lady snapped off short taunts, whenever she could get a hearing, as, 'Don't believe it's his doing!' and 'He needn't take no credit to himself for it!' and 'It'll be long enough, I expect, afore he'll give up any of his own money!' all designed to disparage

Clennam's share in the discovery, and to relieve those inveterate feelings with which Mr F.'s Aunt regarded him.

But Little Dorrit's solicitude to get to her father, and to carry the joyful tidings to him, and not to leave him in his jail a moment with this happiness in store for him and still unknown to him, did more for her speedy restoration than all the skill and attention on earth could have done. 'Come with me to my dear father. Pray come and tell my dear father!' were the first words she said. Her father, her father. She spoke of nothing but him, thought of nothing but him. Kneeling down and pouring out her thankfulness with uplifted hands, her thanks were for her father.

Flora's tenderness was quite overcome by this, and she launched out among the cups and saucers into a wonderful flow of tears and speech.

'I declare,' she sobbed, 'I never was so cut up since your mama and my papa not Doyce and Clennam for this once but give the precious little thing a cup of tea and make her put it to her lips at least pray Arthur do, not even Mr F.'s last illness for that was of another kind and gout is not a child's affection though very painful for all parties and Mr F. a martyr with his leg upon a rest and the wine trade in itself inflammatory for they will do it more or less among themselves and who can wonder, it seems like a dream I am sure to think of nothing at all this morning and now Mines of money is it really, but you must know my darling love because you never will be strong enough to tell him all about it upon teaspoons, mightn't it be even best to try the directions of my own medical man for though the flavour is anything but agreeable still I force myself to do it as a prescription and find the benefit, you'd rather not why no my dear I'd rather not but still I do it as a duty, everybody will congratulate you some in earnest and some not and many will congratulate you with all their hearts but none more so I do assure you from the bottom of my own I do myself though sensible of blundering and being stupid, and will be judged by Arthur not Doyce and Clennam for this once so good-bye darling and God bless you and may you be very happy and excuse the liberty, vowing that the dress shall never be finished by anybody else but shall be laid by for a keepsake just as it is and called Little Dorrit though why that strangest of denominations at any time I never did myself and now I never shall!'

Thus Flora, in taking leave of her favourite. Little Dorrit thanked her, and embraced her, over and over again; and finally came out of the house with Clennam, and took coach for the Marshalsea.

It was a strangely unreal ride through the old squalid streets, with a sensation of being raised out of them into an airy world of wealth and grandeur. When Arthur told her that she would soon ride in her own carriage through very different scenes, when all the familiar experiences would have vanished away, she looked frightened. But when he substituted her father for herself, and told her how he would ride in his carriage, and how great and grand he would be, her tears of joy and innocent pride fell fast. Seeing that the happiness her mind could realise was all shining upon him, Arthur kept that single figure before her; and so they rode brightly through the poor streets in the prison neighbourhood to carry him the great news.

When Mr Chivery, who was on duty, admitted them into the Lodge, he saw something in their faces which filled him with astonishment. He stood looking after them, when they hurried into the prison, as though he perceived that they had come back accompanied by a ghost a-piece. Two or three Collegians whom they passed, looked after them too, and presently joining Mr Chivery, formed a little group on the Lodge steps, in the midst of which there spontaneously originated a whisper that the Father was going to get his discharge. Within a few minutes, it was heard in the remotest room in the College.

Little Dorrit opened the door from without, and they both entered. He was sitting in his old grey gown and his old black cap, in the sunlight by the window, reading his newspaper. His glasses were in his hand, and he had just looked round; surprised at first, no doubt, by her step upon the stairs, not expecting her until night; surprised again, by seeing Arthur Clennam in her company. As they came in, the same unwonted look in both of them which had already caught attention in the yard below, struck him. He did not rise or speak, but laid down his glasses and his newspaper on the table beside him, and looked at them with his mouth a little open and his lips trembling. When Arthur put out his hand, he touched it, but not with his usual state; and then he turned to his daughter, who had sat down close beside him with her hands upon his shoulder, and looked attentively in her face.

'Father! I have been made so happy this morning!'

'You have been made so happy, my dear?'

'By Mr Clennam, father. He brought me such joyful and wonderful intelligence about you! If he had not with his great kindness and gentleness, prepared me for it, father—prepared me for it, father—I think I could not have borne it.'

Her agitation was exceedingly great, and the tears rolled down her face. He put his hand suddenly to his heart, and looked at Clennam.

'Compose yourself, sir,' said Clennam, 'and take a little time to think. To think of the brightest and most fortunate accidents of life. We have all heard of great surprises of joy. They are not at an end, sir. They are rare, but not at an end.'

'Mr Clennam? Not at an end? Not at an end for—' He touched himself upon the breast, instead of saying 'me.'

'No,' returned Clennam.

'What surprise,' he asked, keeping his left hand over his heart, and there stopping in his speech, while with his right hand he put his glasses exactly level on the table: 'what such surprise can be in store for me?'

'Let me answer with another question. Tell me, Mr Dorrit, what surprise would be the most unlooked for and the most acceptable to you. Do not be afraid to imagine it, or to say what it would be.'

He looked steadfastly at Clennam, and, so looking at him, seemed to change into a very old haggard man. The sun was bright upon the wall beyond the window, and on the spikes at top. He slowly stretched out the hand that had been upon his heart, and pointed at the wall.

'It is down,' said Clennam. 'Gone!'

He remained in the same attitude, looking steadfastly at him.

'And in its place,' said Clennam, slowly and distinctly, 'are the means to possess and enjoy the utmost that they have so long shut out. Mr Dorrit, there is not the smallest doubt that within a few days you will be free, and highly prosperous. I congratulate you with all my soul on this change of fortune, and on the happy future into which you are soon to carry the treasure you have been blest with here—the best of all the riches you can have elsewhere—the treasure at your side.'

With those words, he pressed his hand and released it; and his daughter, laying her face against his, encircled him in the hour of his prosperity with her arms, as she had in the long years of his adversity encircled him with her love and toil and truth; and poured out her full heart in gratitude, hope, joy, blissful ecstasy, and all for him.

'I shall see him as I never saw him yet. I shall see my dear love, with the dark cloud cleared away. I shall see him, as my poor mother saw him long ago. O my dear, my dear! O father, father! O thank God, thank God!'

He yielded himself to her kisses and caresses, but did not return them, except that he put an arm about her. Neither did he say one word. His steadfast look was now divided between her and Clennam, and he began to shake as if he were very cold. Explaining to Little Dorrit that he would run to the coffee-house for a bottle of wine, Arthur fetched it with all the haste he could use. While it was being brought from the cellar to the bar, a number of excited people asked him what had happened; when he hurriedly informed them that Mr Dorrit had succeeded to a fortune.

On coming back with the wine in his hand, he found that she had placed her father in his easy chair, and had loosened his shirt and neckcloth. They filled a tumbler with wine, and held it to his lips. When he had swallowed a little, he took the glass himself and emptied it. Soon after that, he leaned back in his chair and cried, with his handkerchief before his face.

After this had lasted a while Clennam thought it a good season for diverting his attention from the main surprise, by relating its details. Slowly, therefore, and in a quiet tone of voice, he explained them as best he could, and enlarged on the nature of Pancks's service.

'He shall be—ha—he shall be handsomely recompensed, sir,' said the Father, starting up and moving hurriedly about the room. 'Assure yourself, Mr Clennam, that everybody concerned shall be—ha—shall be nobly rewarded. No one, my dear sir, shall say that he has an unsatisfied claim against me. I shall repay the—hum—the advances I have had from you, sir, with peculiar pleasure. I beg to be informed at your earliest convenience, what advances you have made my son.'

He had no purpose in going about the room, but he was not still a moment.

'Everybody,' he said, 'shall be remembered. I will not go away from here in anybody's debt. All the people who have been—ha—well behaved towards myself and my family, shall be rewarded. Chivery shall be rewarded. Young John shall be rewarded. I particularly wish, and intend, to act munificently, Mr Clennam.'

'Will you allow me,' said Arthur, laying his purse on the table, 'to supply any present contingencies, Mr Dorrit? I thought it best to bring a sum of money for the purpose.'

'Thank you, sir, thank you. I accept with readiness, at the present moment, what I could not an hour ago have conscientiously taken. I am obliged to you for the temporary accommodation. Exceedingly temporary, but well timed—well timed.' His hand had closed upon the money, and he carried it about with him. 'Be so kind, sir, as to add the amount to those former advances to which I have already referred; being careful, if you please, not to omit advances made to my son. A mere verbal statement of the gross amount is all I shall—ha—all I shall require.'

His eye fell upon his daughter at this point, and he stopped for a moment to kiss her, and to pat her head.

'It will be necessary to find a milliner, my love, and to make a speedy and complete change in your very plain dress. Something must be done with Maggy too, who at present is—ha—barely respectable, barely respectable. And your sister, Amy, and your brother. And my brother, your uncle—poor soul, I trust this will rouse him—messengers must be despatched to fetch them. They must be informed of this. We must break it to them cautiously, but they must be informed directly. We owe it as a duty to them and to ourselves, from this moment, not to let them—hum—not to let them do anything.'

This was the first intimation he had ever given, that he was privy to the fact that they did something for a livelihood.

He was still jogging about the room, with the purse clutched in his hand, when a great cheering arose in the yard. 'The news has spread already,' said Clennam, looking down from the window. 'Will you show yourself to them, Mr Dorrit? They are very earnest, and they evidently wish it.'

'I—hum—ha—I confess I could have desired, Amy my dear,' he said, jogging about in a more feverish flutter than before, 'to have made some change in my dress first, and to have bought a—hum—a watch and chain. But if it must be done as it is, it—ha—it must be done. Fasten the collar of my shirt, my dear. Mr Clennam, would you oblige me—hum—with a blue neckcloth you will find in that drawer at your elbow. Button my coat across at the chest, my love. It looks—ha—it looks broader, buttoned.'

With his trembling hand he pushed his grey hair up, and then, taking Clennam and his daughter for supporters, appeared at the window leaning on an arm of each. The Collegians cheered him very heartily, and he kissed his hand to them with great urbanity and protection. When he withdrew into the room again, he said 'Poor creatures!' in a tone of much pity for their miserable condition.

Little Dorrit was deeply anxious that he should lie down to compose himself. On Arthur's speaking to her of his going to inform Pancks that he might now appear as soon as he would, and pursue the joyful business to its close, she entreated him in a whisper to stay with her until her father should be quite calm and at rest. He needed no second entreaty; and she prepared her father's bed, and begged him to lie down. For another half-hour or more he would be persuaded to do nothing but go about the room, discussing with himself the probabilities for and against the Marshal's allowing the whole of the prisoners to go to the windows of the official residence which commanded the street, to see himself and family depart for ever in a carriage—which, he said, he thought would be a Sight for them. But gradually he began to droop and tire, and at last stretched himself upon the bed.

She took her faithful place beside him, fanning him and cooling his forehead; and he seemed to be falling asleep (always with the money in his hand), when he unexpectedly sat up and said:

'Mr Clennam, I beg your pardon. Am I to understand, my dear sir, that I could—ha—could pass through the Lodge at this moment, and—hum—take a walk?'

'I think not, Mr Dorrit,' was the unwilling reply. 'There are certain forms to be completed; and although your detention here is now in itself a form, I fear it is one that for a little longer has to be observed too.'

At this he shed tears again.

'It is but a few hours, sir,' Clennam cheerfully urged upon him.

'A few hours, sir,' he returned in a sudden passion. 'You talk very easily of hours, sir! How long do you suppose, sir, that an hour is to a man who is choking for want of air?'

It was his last demonstration for that time; as, after shedding some more tears and querulously complaining that he couldn't breathe, he slowly fell into a slumber. Clennam had abundant occupation for his thoughts, as he sat in the quiet room watching the father on his bed, and the daughter fanning his face. Little Dorrit had been thinking too. After softly putting his grey hair aside, and touching his forehead with her lips, she looked towards Arthur, who came nearer to her, and pursued in a low whisper the subject of her thoughts.

'Mr Clennam, will he pay all his debts before he leaves here?'

'No doubt. All.'

'All the debts for which he had been imprisoned here, all my life and longer?'

'No doubt.'

There was something of uncertainty and remonstrance in her look; something that was not all satisfaction. He wondered to detect it, and said:

'You are glad that he should do so?'

'Are you?' asked Little Dorrit, wistfully.

'Am I? Most heartily glad!'

'Then I know I ought to be.'

'And are you not?'

'It seems to me hard,' said Little Dorrit, 'that he should have lost so many years and suffered so much, and at last pay all the debts as well. It seems to me hard that he should pay in life and money both.'

'My dear child—' Clennam was beginning.

'Yes, I know I am wrong,' she pleaded timidly, 'don't think any worse of me; it has grown up with me here.'

The prison, which could spoil so many things, had tainted Little Dorrit's mind no more than this. Engendered as the confusion was, in compassion for the poor prisoner, her father, it was the first speck Clennam had ever seen, it was the last speck Clennam ever saw, of the prison atmosphere upon her.

He thought this, and forebore to say another word. With the thought, her purity and goodness came before him in their brightest light. The little spot made them the more beautiful.

Worn out with her own emotions, and yielding to the silence of the room, her hand slowly slackened and failed in its fanning movement, and her head dropped down on the pillow at her father's side. Clennam rose softly, opened and closed the door without a sound, and passed from the prison, carrying the quiet with him into the turbulent streets.

CHAPTER 36. The Marshalsea becomes an Orphan

And now the day arrived when Mr Dorrit and his family were to leave the prison for ever, and the stones of its much-trodden pavement were to know them no more.

The interval had been short, but he had greatly complained of its length, and had been imperious with Mr Rugg touching the delay. He had been high with Mr Rugg, and had threatened to employ some one else. He had requested Mr Rugg not to presume upon the place in which he found him, but to do his duty, sir, and to do it with promptitude. He had told Mr Rugg that he knew what lawyers and agents were, and that he would not submit to imposition. On that gentleman's humbly representing that he exerted himself to the utmost, Miss Fanny was very short with him; desiring to know what less he could do, when he had been told a dozen times that money was no object, and expressing her suspicion that he forgot whom he talked to.

Towards the Marshal, who was a Marshal of many years' standing, and with whom he had never had any previous difference, Mr Dorrit comported himself with severity. That officer, on personally tendering his congratulations, offered the free use of two rooms in his house for Mr Dorrit's occupation until his departure. Mr Dorrit thanked him at the moment, and replied that he would think of it; but the Marshal was no sooner gone than he sat down and wrote him a cutting note, in which he remarked that he had never on any former occasion had the honour of receiving his congratulations (which was true, though indeed there had not been anything particular to congratulate him upon), and that he begged, on behalf of himself and family, to repudiate the Marshal's offer, with all those thanks which its disinterested character and its perfect independence of all worldly considerations demanded.

Although his brother showed so dim a glimmering of interest in their altered fortunes that it was very doubtful whether he understood them, Mr Dorrit caused him to be measured for new raiment by the hosiers, tailors, hatters, and bootmakers whom he called in for himself; and ordered that his old clothes should be taken from him and burned. Miss Fanny and Mr Tip required no direction in making an appearance of great fashion and elegance; and the three passed this interval together at the best hotel in the neighbourhood—though truly, as Miss Fanny said, the best was very indifferent. In connection with that establishment, Mr Tip hired a cabriolet, horse, and groom, a very neat turn out, which was usually to be observed for two or three hours at a time gracing the Borough High Street, outside the Marshalsea court-yard. A modest little hired chariot and pair was also frequently to be seen there; in alighting from and entering which vehicle, Miss Fanny fluttered the Marshal's daughters by the display of inaccessible bonnets.

A great deal of business was transacted in this short period. Among other items, Messrs Peddle and Pool, solicitors, of Monument Yard, were instructed by their client Edward Dorrit, Esquire, to address a letter to Mr Arthur Clennam, enclosing the sum of twenty-four pounds nine shillings and eightpence, being the amount of principal and interest computed at the rate of five per cent. per annum, in which their client believed himself to be indebted to Mr Clennam. In making this communication and remittance, Messrs Peddle and Pool were further instructed by their client to remind Mr Clennam that the favour of the advance now repaid (including gate-fees) had not been asked of him, and to inform him that it would not have been accepted if it had been openly proffered in his name. With which they requested a stamped receipt, and remained his obedient servants. A great deal of business had likewise to be done, within the so-soon-to-be-orphaned Marshalsea, by Mr Dorrit so long its Father, chiefly arising out of applications made to him by Collegians for small sums of money. To these he responded with the greatest liberality, and with no lack of formality; always first writing to appoint a time at which the applicant might wait upon him in his room, and then receiving him in the midst of a vast accumulation of documents, and accompanying his donation (for he said in every such case, 'it is a donation, not a loan') with a great deal of good counsel: to the effect that he, the expiring Father of the Marshalsea, hoped to be long remembered, as an example that a man might preserve his own and the general respect even there.

The Collegians were not envious. Besides that they had a personal and traditional regard for a Collegian of so many years' standing, the event was creditable to the College, and made it famous in the newspapers. Perhaps more of them thought, too, than were quite aware of it, that the thing might in the lottery of chances have happened to themselves, or that something of the sort might yet happen to themselves some day or other. They took it very well. A few were low at the thought of being left behind, and being left poor; but even these did not grudge the family their brilliant reverse. There might have been much more envy in politer places. It seems probable that mediocrity of fortune would have been disposed to be less magnanimous than the Collegians, who lived from hand to mouth—from the pawnbroker's hand to the day's dinner.

They got up an address to him, which they presented in a neat frame and glass (though it was not afterwards displayed in the family mansion or preserved among the family papers); and to which he returned a gracious answer. In that document he assured them, in a Royal manner, that he received the profession of their attachment with a full conviction of its sincerity; and again generally exhorted them to follow his example—which, at least in so far as coming into a great property was concerned, there is no doubt they would have gladly imitated. He took the same occasion of inviting them to a comprehensive entertainment, to be given to the whole College in the yard, and at which he signified he would have the honour of taking a parting glass to the health and happiness of all those whom he was about to leave behind.

He did not in person dine at this public repast (it took place at two in the afternoon, and his dinners now came in from the hotel at six), but his son was so good as to take the head of the principal table, and to be very free and engaging. He himself went about among the company, and took notice of individuals, and saw that the viands were of the quality he had ordered, and that all were served. On the whole, he was like a baron of the olden time in a rare good humour. At the conclusion of the repast, he pledged his guests in a bumper of old Madeira; and told them that he hoped they had enjoyed themselves, and what was more, that they would enjoy themselves for the rest of the evening; that he wished them well; and that he bade them welcome.

His health being drunk with acclamations, he was not so baronial after all but that in trying to return thanks he broke down, in the manner of a mere serf with a heart in his breast, and wept before them all. After this great success, which he supposed to be a failure, he gave them 'Mr Chivery and his brother officers;' whom he had beforehand presented with ten pounds each, and who were all in attendance. Mr Chivery spoke to the toast, saying, What you undertake to lock up, lock up; but remember that you are, in the words of the fettered African, a man and a brother ever. The list of toasts disposed of, Mr Dorrit urbanely went through the motions of playing a game of skittles with the Collegian who was the next oldest inhabitant to himself; and left the tenantry to their diversions.

But all these occurrences preceded the final day. And now the day arrived when he and his family were to leave the prison for ever, and when the stones of its much-trodden pavement were to know them no more.

Noon was the hour appointed for the departure. As it approached, there was not a Collegian within doors, nor a turnkey absent. The latter class of gentlemen appeared in their Sunday clothes, and the greater part of the Collegians were brightened up as much as circumstances allowed. Two or three flags were even displayed, and the children put on odds and ends of ribbon. Mr Dorrit himself, at this trying time, preserved a serious but graceful dignity. Much of his great attention was given to his brother, as to whose bearing on the great occasion he felt anxious.

'My dear Frederick,' said he, 'if you will give me your arm we will pass among our friends together. I think it is right that we should go out arm in arm, my dear Frederick.'

'Hah!' said Frederick. 'Yes, yes, yes, yes.'

'And if, my dear Frederick—if you could, without putting any great constraint upon yourself, throw a little (pray excuse me, Frederick), a little Polish into your usual demeanour—'

'William, William,' said the other, shaking his head, 'it's for you to do all that. I don't know how. All forgotten, forgotten!'

'But, my dear fellow,' returned William, 'for that very reason, if for no other, you must positively try to rouse yourself. What you have forgotten you must now begin to recall, my dear Frederick. Your position—'

'Eh?' said Frederick.

'Your position, my dear Frederick.'

'Mine?' He looked first at his own figure, and then at his brother's, and then, drawing a long breath, cried, 'Hah, to be sure! Yes, yes, yes.' 'Your position, my dear Frederick, is now a fine one. Your position, as my brother, is a very fine one. And I know that it belongs to your conscientious nature to try to become worthy of it, my dear Frederick, and to try to adorn it. To be no discredit to it, but to adorn it.'

'William,' said the other weakly, and with a sigh, 'I will do anything you wish, my brother, provided it lies in my power. Pray be so kind as to recollect what a limited power mine is. What would you wish me to do to-day, brother? Say what it is, only say what it is.'

'My dearest Frederick, nothing. It is not worth troubling so good a heart as yours with.'

'Pray trouble it,' returned the other. 'It finds it no trouble, William, to do anything it can for you.'

William passed his hand across his eyes, and murmured with august satisfaction, 'Blessings on your attachment, my poor dear fellow!' Then he said aloud, 'Well, my dear Frederick, if you will only try, as we walk out, to show that you are alive to the occasion—that you think about it—'

'What would you advise me to think about it?' returned his submissive brother.

'Oh! my dear Frederick, how can I answer you? I can only say what, in leaving these good people, I think myself.'

'That's it!' cried his brother. 'That will help me.'

'I find that I think, my dear Frederick, and with mixed emotions in which a softened compassion predominates, What will they do without me!'

'True,' returned his brother. 'Yes, yes, yes, yes. I'll think that as we go, What will they do without my brother! Poor things! What will they do without him!'

Twelve o'clock having just struck, and the carriage being reported ready in the outer court-yard, the brothers proceeded down-stairs arm-in-arm. Edward Dorrit, Esquire (once Tip), and his sister Fanny followed, also arm-in-arm; Mr Plornish and Maggy, to whom had been entrusted the removal of such of the family effects as were considered worth removing, followed, bearing bundles and burdens to be packed in a cart.

In the yard, were the Collegians and turnkeys. In the yard, were Mr Pancks and Mr Rugg, come to see the last touch given to their work. In the yard, was Young John making a new epitaph for himself, on the occasion of his dying of a broken heart. In the yard, was the Patriarchal Casby, looking so tremendously benevolent that many enthusiastic Collegians grasped him fervently by the hand, and the wives and female relatives of many more Collegians kissed his hand, nothing doubting that he had done it all. In the yard, was the man with the shadowy grievance respecting the Fund which the Marshal embezzled, who had got up at five in the morning to complete the copying of a perfectly unintelligible history of that transaction, which he had committed to Mr Dorrit's care, as a document of the last importance, calculated to stun the Government and effect the Marshal's downfall. In the yard, was the insolvent whose utmost energies were always set on getting into debt, who broke into prison with as much pains as other men have broken out of it, and who was always being cleared and complimented; while the insolvent at his elbow—a mere little, snivelling, striving tradesman, half dead of anxious efforts to keep out of debt—found it a hard matter, indeed, to get a Commissioner to release him with much reproof and reproach. In the yard, was the man of many children and many burdens, whose failure astonished everybody; in the yard, was the man of no children and large resources, whose failure astonished nobody. There, were the people who were always going out to-morrow, and always putting it off; there, were the people who had come in yesterday, and who were much more jealous and resentful of this freak of fortune than the seasoned birds. There, were some who, in pure meanness of spirit, cringed and bowed before the enriched Collegian and his family; there, were others who did so really because their eyes, accustomed to the gloom of their imprisonment and poverty, could not support the light of such bright sunshine. There, were many whose shillings had gone into his pocket to buy him meat and drink; but none who were now obtrusively Hail fellow well met! with him, on the strength of that assistance. It was rather to be remarked of the caged birds, that they were a little shy of the bird about to be so grandly free, and that they had a tendency to withdraw themselves towards the bars, and seem a little fluttered as he passed.

Through these spectators the little procession, headed by the two brothers, moved slowly to the gate. Mr Dorrit, yielding to the vast speculation how the poor creatures were to get on without him, was great, and sad, but not absorbed. He patted children on the head like Sir Roger de Coverley going to church, he spoke to people in the background by their Christian names, he condescended to all present, and seemed for their consolation to walk encircled by the legend in golden characters, 'Be comforted, my people! Bear it!'

At last three honest cheers announced that he had passed the gate, and that the Marshalsea was an orphan. Before they had ceased to ring in the echoes of the prison walls, the family had got into their carriage, and the attendant had the steps in his hand.

Then, and not before, 'Good Gracious!' cried Miss Fanny all at once, 'Where's Amy!'

Her father had thought she was with her sister. Her sister had thought she was 'somewhere or other.' They had all trusted to finding her, as they had always done, quietly in the right place at the right moment. This going away was perhaps the very first action of their joint lives that they had got through without her.

A minute might have been consumed in the ascertaining of these points, when Miss Fanny, who, from her seat in the carriage, commanded the long narrow passage leading to the Lodge, flushed indignantly.

'Now I do say, Pa,' cried she, 'that this is disgraceful!'

'What is disgraceful, Fanny?'

'I do say,' she repeated, 'this is perfectly infamous! Really almost enough, even at such a time as this, to make one wish one was dead! Here is that child Amy, in her ugly old shabby dress, which she was so obstinate about, Pa, which I over and over again begged and prayed her to change, and which she over and over again objected to, and promised to change to-day, saying she wished to wear it as long as ever she remained in there with you—which was absolutely romantic nonsense of the lowest kind—here is that child Amy disgracing us to the last moment and at the last moment, by being carried out in that dress after all. And by that Mr Clennam too!'

The offence was proved, as she delivered the indictment. Clennam appeared at the carriage-door, bearing the little insensible figure in his arms.

'She has been forgotten,' he said, in a tone of pity not free from reproach. 'I ran up to her room (which Mr Chivery showed me) and found the door open, and that she had fainted on the floor, dear child. She appeared to have gone to change her dress, and to have sunk down overpowered. It may have been the cheering, or it may have happened sooner. Take care of this poor cold hand, Miss Dorrit. Don't let it fall.'

'Thank you, sir,' returned Miss Dorrit, bursting into tears. 'I believe I know what to do, if you will give me leave. Dear Amy, open your eyes, that's a love! Oh, Amy, Amy, I really am so vexed and ashamed! Do rouse yourself, darling! Oh, why are they not driving on! Pray, Pa, do drive on!'

The attendant, getting between Clennam and the carriage-door, with a sharp 'By your leave, sir!' bundled up the steps, and they drove away.

BOOK THE SECOND: RICHES

CHAPTER 1. Fellow Travellers

In the autumn of the year, Darkness and Night were creeping up to the highest ridges of the Alps.

It was vintage time in the valleys on the Swiss side of the Pass of the Great Saint Bernard, and along the banks of the Lake of Geneva.

The air there was charged with the scent of gathered grapes. Baskets, troughs, and tubs of grapes stood in the dim village doorways, stopped the steep and narrow village streets, and had been carrying all day along the roads and lanes. Grapes, split and crushed under foot, lay about everywhere. The child carried in a sling by the laden peasant woman toiling home, was quieted with picked-up grapes; the idiot sunning his big goitre under the leaves of the wooden chalet by the way to the Waterfall, sat Munching grapes; the breath of the cows and goats was redolent of leaves and stalks of grapes; the company in every little cabaret were eating, drinking, talking grapes. A pity that no ripe touch of this generous abundance could be given to the thin, hard, stony wine, which after all was made from the grapes!

The air had been warm and transparent through the whole of the bright day. Shining metal spires and church-roofs, distant and rarely seen, had sparkled in the view; and the snowy mountain-tops had been so clear that unaccustomed eyes, cancelling the intervening country, and slighting their rugged heights for something fabulous, would have measured them as within a few hours easy reach. Mountain-peaks of great celebrity in the valleys, whence no trace of their existence was visible sometimes for months together, had been since morning plain and near in the blue sky. And now, when it was dark below, though they seemed solemnly to recede, like spectres who were going to vanish, as the red dye of the sunset faded out of them and left them coldly white, they were yet distinctly defined in their loneliness above the mists and shadows. Seen from these solitudes, and from the Pass of the Great Saint Bernard, which was one of them, the ascending Night came up the mountain like a rising water. When it at last rose to the walls of the convent of the Great Saint Bernard, it was as if that weather-beaten structure were another Ark, and floated on the shadowy waves.

Darkness, outstripping some visitors on mules, had risen thus to the rough convent walls, when those travellers were yet climbing the mountain. As the heat of the glowing day when they had stopped to drink at the streams of melted ice and snow, was changed to the searching cold of the frosty rarefied night air at a great height, so the fresh beauty of the lower journey had yielded to barrenness and desolation. A craggy track, up which the mules in single file scrambled and turned from block to block, as though they were ascending the broken staircase of a gigantic ruin, was their way now. No trees were to be seen, nor any vegetable growth save a poor brown scrubby moss, freezing in the chinks of rock. Blackened skeleton arms of wood by the wayside pointed upward to the convent as if the ghosts of former travellers overwhelmed by the snow haunted the scene of their distress. Icicle-hung caves and cellars built for refuges from sudden storms, were like so many whispers of the perils of the place; never-resting wreaths and mazes of mist wandered about, hunted by a moaning wind; and snow, the besetting danger of the mountain, against which all its defences were taken, drifted sharply down.

The file of mules, jaded by their day's work, turned and wound slowly up the deep ascent; the foremost led by a guide on foot, in his broad-brimmed hat and round jacket, carrying a mountain staff or two upon his shoulder, with whom another guide conversed. There was no speaking among the string of riders. The sharp cold, the fatigue of the journey, and a new sensation of a catching in the breath, partly as if they had just emerged from very clear crisp water, and partly as if they had been sobbing, kept them silent.

At length, a light on the summit of the rocky staircase gleamed through the snow and mist. The guides called to the mules, the mules pricked up their drooping heads, the travellers' tongues were loosened, and in a sudden burst of slipping, climbing, jingling, clinking, and talking, they arrived at the convent door.

Other mules had arrived not long before, some with peasant riders and some with goods, and had trodden the snow about the door into a pool of mud. Riding-saddles and bridles, pack-saddles and strings of bells, mules and men, lanterns, torches, sacks, provender, barrels, cheeses, kegs of honey and butter, straw bundles and packages of many shapes, were crowded confusedly together in this thawed quagmire and about the steps. Up here in the clouds, everything was seen through cloud, and seemed dissolving into cloud. The breath of the men was cloud, the breath of the mules was cloud, the lights were encircled by cloud, speakers close at hand were not seen for cloud, though their voices and all other sounds were surprisingly clear. Of the cloudy line of mules hastily tied to rings in the wall, one would bite another, or kick another, and then the whole mist would be disturbed: with men diving into it, and cries of men and beasts coming out of it, and no bystander discerning what was wrong. In the midst of this, the great stable of the convent, occupying the basement story and entered by the basement door, outside which all the disorder was, poured forth its contribution of cloud, as if the whole rugged edifice were filled with nothing else, and would collapse as soon as it had emptied itself, leaving the snow to fall upon the bare mountain summit.

While all this noise and hurry were rife among the living travellers, there, too, silently assembled in a grated house half-a-dozen paces removed, with the same cloud enfolding them and the same snow flakes drifting in upon them, were the dead travellers found upon the mountain. The mother, storm-belated many winters ago, still standing in the corner with her baby at her breast; the man who had frozen with his arm raised to his mouth in fear or hunger, still pressing it with his dry lips after years and years. An awful company, mysteriously come together! A wild destiny for that mother to have foreseen! 'Surrounded by so many and such companions upon whom I never looked, and never shall look, I and my child will dwell together inseparable, on the Great Saint Bernard, outlasting generations who will come to see us, and will never know our name, or one word of our story but the end.'

The living travellers thought little or nothing of the dead just then. They thought much more of alighting at the convent door, and warming themselves at the convent fire. Disengaged from the turmoil, which was already calming down as the crowd of mules began to be bestowed in the stable, they hurried shivering up the steps and into the building. There was a smell within, coming up from the floor, of tethered beasts, like the smell of a menagerie of wild animals. There were strong arched galleries within, huge stone piers, great staircases, and thick walls pierced with small sunken windows—fortifications against the mountain storms, as if they had been human enemies. There were gloomy vaulted sleeping-rooms within, intensely cold, but clean and hospitably prepared for guests. Finally, there was a parlour for guests to sit in and sup in, where a table was already laid, and where a blazing fire shone red and high.

In this room, after having had their quarters for the night allotted to them by two young Fathers, the travellers presently drew round the hearth. They were in three parties; of whom the first, as the most numerous and important, was the slowest, and had been overtaken by one of the others on the way up. It consisted of an elderly lady, two grey-haired gentlemen, two young ladies, and their brother. These were attended (not to mention four guides), by a courier, two footmen, and two waiting-maids: which strong body of inconvenience was accommodated elsewhere under the same roof. The party that had overtaken them, and followed in their train, consisted of only three members: one lady and two gentlemen. The third party, which had ascended from the valley on the Italian side of the Pass, and had arrived first, were four in number: a plethoric, hungry, and silent German tutor in spectacles, on a tour with three young men, his pupils, all plethoric, hungry, and silent, and all in spectacles.

These three groups sat round the fire eyeing each other drily, and waiting for supper. Only one among them, one of the gentlemen belonging to the party of three, made advances towards conversation. Throwing out his lines for the Chief of the important tribe, while addressing himself to his own companions, he remarked, in a tone of voice which included all the company if they chose to be included, that it had been a long day, and that he felt for the ladies. That he feared one of the young ladies was not a strong or accustomed traveller, and had been over-fatigued two or three hours ago. That he had observed, from his station in the rear, that she sat her mule as if she were exhausted. That he had, twice or thrice afterwards, done himself the honour of inquiring of one of the guides, when he fell behind, how the lady did. That he had been enchanted to learn that she had recovered her spirits, and that it had been but a passing discomfort. That he trusted (by this time he had secured the eyes of the Chief, and addressed him) he might be permitted to express his hope that she was now none the worse, and that she would not regret having made the journey.

'My daughter, I am obliged to you, sir,' returned the Chief, 'is quite restored, and has been greatly interested.'

'New to mountains, perhaps?' said the insinuating traveller.

'New to—ha—to mountains,' said the Chief.

'But you are familiar with them, sir?' the insinuating traveller assumed.

'I am—hum—tolerably familiar. Not of late years. Not of late years,' replied the Chief, with a flourish of his hand.

The insinuating traveller, acknowledging the flourish with an inclination of his head, passed from the Chief to the second young lady, who had not yet been referred to otherwise than as one of the ladies in whose behalf he felt so sensitive an interest.

He hoped she was not incommoded by the fatigues of the day.

'Incommoded, certainly,' returned the young lady, 'but not tired.'

The insinuating traveller complimented her on the justice of the distinction. It was what he had meant to say. Every lady must doubtless be incommoded by having to do with that proverbially unaccommodating animal, the mule.

'We have had, of course,' said the young lady, who was rather reserved and haughty, 'to leave the carriages and fourgon at Martigny. And the impossibility of bringing anything that one wants to this inaccessible place, and the necessity of leaving every comfort behind, is not convenient.'

'A savage place indeed,' said the insinuating traveller.

The elderly lady, who was a model of accurate dressing, and whose manner was perfect, considered as a piece of machinery, here interposed a remark in a low soft voice.

'But, like other inconvenient places,' she observed, 'it must be seen. As a place much spoken of, it is necessary to see it.'

'O! I have not the least objection to seeing it, I assure you, Mrs General,' returned the other, carelessly.

'You, madam,' said the insinuating traveller, 'have visited this spot before?' 'Yes,' returned Mrs General. 'I have been here before. Let me commend you, my dear,' to the former young lady, 'to shade your face from the hot wood, after exposure to the mountain air and snow. You, too, my dear,' to the other and younger lady, who immediately did so; while the former merely said, 'Thank you, Mrs General, I am Perfectly comfortable, and prefer remaining as I am.'

The brother, who had left his chair to open a piano that stood in the room, and who had whistled into it and shut it up again, now came strolling back to the fire with his glass in his eye. He was dressed in the very fullest and completest travelling trim. The world seemed hardly large enough to yield him an amount of travel proportionate to his equipment.

'These fellows are an immense time with supper,' he drawled. 'I wonder what they'll give us! Has anybody any idea?'

'Not roast man, I believe,' replied the voice of the second gentleman of the party of three.

'I suppose not. What d'ye mean?' he inquired.

'That, as you are not to be served for the general supper, perhaps you will do us the favour of not cooking yourself at the general fire,' returned the other.

The young gentleman who was standing in an easy attitude on the hearth, cocking his glass at the company, with his back to the blaze and his coat tucked under his arms, something as if he were Of the Poultry species and were trussed for roasting, lost countenance at this reply; he seemed about to demand further explanation, when it was discovered—through all eyes turning on the speaker—that the lady with him, who was young and beautiful, had not heard what had passed through having fainted with her head upon his shoulder.

'I think,' said the gentleman in a subdued tone, 'I had best carry her straight to her room. Will you call to some one to bring a light?' addressing his companion, 'and to show the way? In this strange rambling place I don't know that I could find it.'

'Pray, let me call my maid,' cried the taller of the young ladies.

'Pray, let me put this water to her lips,' said the shorter, who had not spoken yet.

Each doing what she suggested, there was no want of assistance. Indeed, when the two maids came in (escorted by the courier, lest any one should strike them dumb by addressing a foreign language to them on the road), there was a prospect of too much assistance. Seeing this, and saying as much in a few words to the slighter and younger of the two ladies, the gentleman put his wife's arm over his shoulder, lifted her up, and carried her away.

His friend, being left alone with the other visitors, walked slowly up and down the room without coming to the fire again, pulling his black moustache in a contemplative manner, as if he felt himself committed to the late retort. While the subject of it was breathing injury in a corner, the Chief loftily addressed this gentleman.

'Your friend, sir,' said he, 'is—ha—is a little impatient; and, in his impatience, is not perhaps fully sensible of what he owes to—hum—to—

but we will waive that, we will waive that. Your friend is a little impatient, sir.'

'It may be so, sir,' returned the other. 'But having had the honour of making that gentleman's acquaintance at the hotel at Geneva, where we and much good company met some time ago, and having had the honour of exchanging company and conversation with that gentleman on several subsequent excursions, I can hear nothing—no, not even from one of your appearance and station, sir—detrimental to that gentleman.'

'You are in no danger, sir, of hearing any such thing from me. In remarking that your friend has shown impatience, I say no such thing. I make that remark, because it is not to be doubted that my son, being by birth and by—ha—by education a—hum—a gentleman, would have readily adapted himself to any obligingly expressed wish on the subject of the fire being equally accessible to the whole of the present circle. Which, in principle, I—ha—for all are—hum—equal on these occasions—I consider right.'

'Good,' was the reply. 'And there it ends! I am your son's obedient servant. I beg your son to receive the assurance of my profound consideration. And now, sir, I may admit, freely admit, that my friend is sometimes of a sarcastic temper.'

'The lady is your friend's wife, sir?'

'The lady is my friend's wife, sir.' 'She is very handsome.'

'Sir, she is peerless. They are still in the first year of their marriage. They are still partly on a marriage, and partly on an artistic, tour.'

'Your friend is an artist, sir?'

The gentleman replied by kissing the fingers of his right hand, and wafting the kiss the length of his arm towards Heaven. As who should say, I devote him to the celestial Powers as an immortal artist!

'But he is a man of family,' he added. 'His connections are of the best. He is more than an artist: he is highly connected. He may, in effect, have repudiated his connections, proudly, impatiently, sarcastically (I make the concession of both words); but he has them. Sparks that have been struck out during our intercourse have shown me this.'

'Well! I hope,' said the lofty gentleman, with the air of finally disposing of the subject, 'that the lady's indisposition may be only temporary.'

'Sir, I hope so.'

'Mere fatigue, I dare say.'

'Not altogether mere fatigue, sir, for her mule stumbled to-day, and she fell from the saddle. She fell lightly, and was up again without assistance, and rode from us laughing; but she complained towards evening of a slight bruise in the side. She spoke of it more than once, as we followed your party up the mountain.'

The head of the large retinue, who was gracious but not familiar, appeared by this time to think that he had condescended more than enough. He said no more, and there was silence for some quarter of an hour until supper appeared.

With the supper came one of the young Fathers (there seemed to be no old Fathers) to take the head of the table. It was like the supper of an ordinary Swiss hotel, and good red wine grown by the convent in more genial air was not wanting. The artist traveller calmly came and took his place at table when the rest sat down, with no apparent sense upon him of his late skirmish with the completely dressed traveller.

'Pray,' he inquired of the host, over his soup, 'has your convent many of its famous dogs now?'

'Monsieur, it has three.'

'I saw three in the gallery below. Doubtless the three in question.' The host, a slender, bright-eyed, dark young man of polite manners, whose garment was a black gown with strips of white crossed over it like braces, and who no more resembled the conventional breed of Saint Bernard monks than he resembled the conventional breed of Saint Bernard dogs, replied, doubtless those were the three in question.

'And I think,' said the artist traveller, 'I have seen one of them before.'

It was possible. He was a dog sufficiently well known. Monsieur might have easily seen him in the valley or somewhere on the lake, when he (the dog) had gone down with one of the order to solicit aid for the convent.

'Which is done in its regular season of the year, I think?'

Monsieur was right.

'And never without a dog. The dog is very important.' Again Monsieur was right. The dog was very important. People were justly interested in the dog. As one of the dogs celebrated everywhere, Ma'amselle would observe.

Ma'amselle was a little slow to observe it, as though she were not yet well accustomed to the French tongue. Mrs General, however, observed it for her.

'Ask him if he has saved many lives?' said, in his native English, the young man who had been put out of countenance.

The host needed no translation of the question. He promptly replied in French, 'No. Not this one.'

'Why not?' the same gentleman asked.

'Pardon,' returned the host composedly, 'give him the opportunity and he will do it without doubt. For example, I am well convinced,' smiling sedately, as he cut up the dish of veal to be handed round, on the young man who had been put out of countenance, 'that if you, Monsieur, would give him the opportunity, he would hasten with great ardour to fulfil his duty.'

The artist traveller laughed. The insinuating traveller (who evinced a provident anxiety to get his full share of the supper), wiping some drops of wine from his moustache with a piece of bread, joined the conversation.

'It is becoming late in the year, my Father,' said he, 'for tourist-travellers, is it not?'

'Yes, it is late. Yet two or three weeks, at most, and we shall be left to the winter snows.' 'And then,' said the insinuating traveller, 'for the scratching dogs and the buried children, according to the pictures!'

'Pardon,' said the host, not quite understanding the allusion. 'How, then the scratching dogs and the buried children according to the pictures?'

The artist traveller struck in again before an answer could be given.

'Don't you know,' he coldly inquired across the table of his companion, 'that none but smugglers come this way in the winter or can have any possible business this way?'

'Holy blue! No; never heard of it.'

'So it is, I believe. And as they know the signs of the weather tolerably well, they don't give much employment to the dogs—who have consequently died out rather—though this house of entertainment is conveniently situated for themselves. Their young families, I am told, they usually leave at home. But it's a grand idea!' cried the artist traveller, unexpectedly rising into a tone of enthusiasm. 'It's a sublime idea. It's the finest idea in the world, and brings tears into a man's eyes, by Jupiter!' He then went on eating his veal with great composure.

There was enough of mocking inconsistency at the bottom of this speech to make it rather discordant, though the manner was refined and the person well-favoured, and though the depreciatory part of it was so skilfully thrown off as to be very difficult for one not perfectly acquainted with the

English language to understand, or, even understanding, to take offence at: so simple and dispassionate was its tone. After finishing his veal in the midst of silence, the speaker again addressed his friend.

'Look,' said he, in his former tone, 'at this gentleman our host, not yet in the prime of life, who in so graceful a way and with such courtly urbanity and modesty presides over us! Manners fit for a crown! Dine with the Lord Mayor of London (if you can get an invitation) and observe the contrast. This dear fellow, with the finest cut face I ever saw, a face in perfect drawing, leaves some laborious life and comes up here I don't know how many feet above the level of the sea, for no other purpose on earth (except enjoying himself, I hope, in a capital refectory) than to keep an hotel for idle poor devils like you and me, and leave the bill to our consciences! Why, isn't it a beautiful sacrifice? What do we want more to touch us? Because rescued people of interesting appearance are not, for eight or nine months out of every twelve, holding on here round the necks of the most sagacious of dogs carrying wooden bottles, shall we disparage the place? No! Bless the place. It's a great place, a glorious place!'

The chest of the grey-haired gentleman who was the Chief of the important party, had swelled as if with a protest against his being numbered among poor devils. No sooner had the artist traveller ceased speaking than he himself spoke with great dignity, as having it incumbent on him to take the lead in most places, and having deserted that duty for a little while.

He weightily communicated his opinion to their host, that his life must be a very dreary life here in the winter.

The host allowed to Monsieur that it was a little monotonous. The air was difficult to breathe for a length of time consecutively. The cold was very severe. One needed youth and strength to bear it. However, having them and the blessing of Heaven—

Yes, that was very good. 'But the confinement,' said the grey-haired gentleman.

There were many days, even in bad weather, when it was possible to walk about outside. It was the custom to beat a little track, and take exercise there.

'But the space,' urged the grey-haired gentleman. 'So small. So—ha—very limited.'

Monsieur would recall to himself that there were the refuges to visit, and that tracks had to be made to them also.

Monsieur still urged, on the other hand, that the space was so—ha—hum—so very contracted. More than that, it was always the same, always the same.

With a deprecating smile, the host gently raised and gently lowered his shoulders. That was true, he remarked, but permit him to say that almost all objects had their various points of view. Monsieur and he did not see this poor life of his from the same point of view. Monsieur was not used to confinement.

'I—ha—yes, very true,' said the grey-haired gentleman. He seemed to receive quite a shock from the force of the argument.

Monsieur, as an English traveller, surrounded by all means of travelling pleasantly; doubtless possessing fortune, carriages, and servants—

'Perfectly, perfectly. Without doubt,' said the gentleman.

Monsieur could not easily place himself in the position of a person who had not the power to choose, I will go here to-morrow, or there next day; I will pass these barriers, I will enlarge those bounds. Monsieur could not realise, perhaps, how the mind accommodated itself in such things to the force of necessity.

'It is true,' said Monsieur. 'We will—ha—not pursue the subject.

You are—hum—quite accurate, I have no doubt. We will say no more.'

The supper having come to a close, he drew his chair away as he spoke, and moved back to his former place by the fire. As it was very cold at the greater part of the table, the other guests also resumed their former seats by the fire, designing to toast themselves well before going to bed. The host, when they rose from the table, bowed to all present, wished them good night, and withdrew. But first the insinuating traveller had asked him if they could have some wine made hot; and as he had answered Yes, and had presently afterwards sent it in, that traveller, seated in the centre of the group, and in the full heat of the fire, was soon engaged in serving it out to the rest.

At this time, the younger of the two young ladies, who had been silently attentive in her dark corner (the fire-light was the chief light in the sombre room, the lamp being smoky and dull) to what had been said of the absent lady, glided out. She was at a loss which way to turn when she had softly closed the door; but, after a little hesitation among the sounding passages and the many ways, came to a room in a corner of the main gallery, where the servants were at their supper. From these she obtained a lamp, and a direction to the lady's room.

It was up the great staircase on the story above. Here and there, the bare white walls were broken by an iron grate, and she thought as she went along that the place was something like a prison. The arched door of the lady's room, or cell, was not quite shut. After knocking at it two or three times without receiving an answer, she pushed it gently open, and looked in.

The lady lay with closed eyes on the outside of the bed, protected from the cold by the blankets and wrappers with which she had been covered when she revived from her fainting fit. A dull light placed in the deep recess of the window, made little impression on the arched room. The visitor timidly stepped to the bed, and said, in a soft whisper, 'Are you better?'

The lady had fallen into a slumber, and the whisper was too low to awake her. Her visitor, standing quite still, looked at her attentively.

'She is very pretty,' she said to herself. 'I never saw so beautiful a face. O how unlike me!'

It was a curious thing to say, but it had some hidden meaning, for it filled her eyes with tears.

'I know I must be right. I know he spoke of her that evening. I could very easily be wrong on any other subject, but not on this, not on this!'

With a quiet and tender hand she put aside a straying fold of the sleeper's hair, and then touched the hand that lay outside the covering.

'I like to look at her,' she breathed to herself. 'I like to see what has affected him so much.'

She had not withdrawn her hand, when the sleeper opened her eyes and started.

'Pray don't be alarmed. I am only one of the travellers from down-stairs. I came to ask if you were better, and if I could do anything for you.'

'I think you have already been so kind as to send your servants to my assistance?'

'No, not I; that was my sister. Are you better?'

'Much better. It is only a slight bruise, and has been well looked to, and is almost easy now. It made me giddy and faint in a moment. It had hurt me before; but at last it overpowered me all at once.' 'May I stay with you until some one comes? Would you like it?'

'I should like it, for it is lonely here; but I am afraid you will feel the cold too much.'

'I don't mind cold. I am not delicate, if I look so.' She quickly moved one of the two rough chairs to the bedside, and sat down. The other as quickly moved a part of some travelling wrapper from herself, and drew it over her, so that her arm, in keeping it about her, rested on her shoulder.

'You have so much the air of a kind nurse,' said the lady, smiling on her, 'that you seem as if you had come to me from home.'

'I am very glad of it.'

'I was dreaming of home when I woke just now. Of my old home, I mean, before I was married.'

'And before you were so far away from it.'

'I have been much farther away from it than this; but then I took the best part of it with me, and missed nothing. I felt solitary as I dropped asleep here, and, missing it a little, wandered back to it.' There was a sorrowfully affectionate and regretful sound in her voice, which made her visitor refrain from looking at her for the moment.

'It is a curious chance which at last brings us together, under this covering in which you have wrapped me,' said the visitor after a pause;'for do you know, I think I have been looking for you some time.' 'Looking for me?'

'I believe I have a little note here, which I was to give to you whenever I found you. This is it. Unless I greatly mistake, it is addressed to you? Is it not?'

The lady took it, and said yes, and read it. Her visitor watched her as she did so. It was very short. She flushed a little as she put her lips to her visitor's cheek, and pressed her hand.

'The dear young friend to whom he presents me, may be a comfort to me at some time, he says. She is truly a comfort to me the first time I see her.'

'Perhaps you don't,' said the visitor, hesitating—'perhaps you don't know my story? Perhaps he never told you my story?'

'No.'

'Oh no, why should he! I have scarcely the right to tell it myself at present, because I have been entreated not to do so. There is not much in it, but it might account to you for my asking you not to say anything about the letter here. You saw my family with me, perhaps? Some of them—I only say this to you—are a little proud, a little prejudiced.'

'You shall take it back again,' said the other; 'and then my husband is sure not to see it. He might see it and speak of it, otherwise, by some accident. Will you put it in your bosom again, to be certain?'

She did so with great care. Her small, slight hand was still upon the letter, when they heard some one in the gallery outside.

'I promised,' said the visitor, rising, 'that I would write to him after seeing you (I could hardly fail to see you sooner or later), and tell him if you were well and happy. I had better say you were well and happy.'

'Yes, yes, yes! Say I was very well and very happy. And that I thanked him affectionately, and would never forget him.'

'I shall see you in the morning. After that we are sure to meet again before very long. Good night!'

'Good night. Thank you, thank you. Good night, my dear!'

Both of them were hurried and fluttered as they exchanged this parting, and as the visitor came out of the door. She had expected to meet the lady's husband approaching it; but the person in the gallery was not he: it was the traveller who had wiped the wine-drops from his moustache with the piece of bread. When he heard the step behind him, he turned round—for he was walking away in the dark. His politeness, which was extreme, would not allow of the young lady's lighting herself down-stairs, or going down alone. He took her lamp, held it so as to throw the best light on the stone steps, and followed her all the way to the supper-room. She went down, not easily hiding how much she was inclined to shrink and tremble; for the appearance of this traveller was particularly disagreeable to her. She had sat in her quiet corner before supper imagining what he would have been in the scenes and places within her experience, until he inspired her with an aversion that made him little less than terrific.

He followed her down with his smiling politeness, followed her in, and resumed his seat in the best place in the hearth. There with the wood-fire, which was beginning to burn low, rising and falling upon him in the dark room, he sat with his legs thrust out to warm, drinking the hot wine down to the lees, with a monstrous shadow imitating him on the wall and ceiling.

The tired company had broken up, and all the rest were gone to bed except the young lady's father, who dozed in his chair by the fire.

The traveller had been at the pains of going a long way up-stairs to his sleeping-room to fetch his pocket-flask of brandy. He told them so, as he poured its contents into what was left of the wine, and drank with a new relish.

'May I ask, sir, if you are on your way to Italy?'

The grey-haired gentleman had roused himself, and was preparing to withdraw. He answered in the affirmative.

'I also!' said the traveller. 'I shall hope to have the honour of offering my compliments in fairer scenes, and under softer circumstances, than on this dismal mountain.'

The gentleman bowed, distantly enough, and said he was obliged to him.

'We poor gentlemen, sir,' said the traveller, pulling his moustache dry with his hand, for he had dipped it in the wine and brandy; 'we poor gentlemen do not travel like princes, but the courtesies and graces of life are precious to us. To your health, sir!'

'Sir, I thank you.'

'To the health of your distinguished family—of the fair ladies, your daughters!'

'Sir, I thank you again, I wish you good night. My dear, are our—ha—our people in attendance?'

'They are close by, father.'

'Permit me!' said the traveller, rising and holding the door open, as the gentleman crossed the room towards it with his arm drawn through his daughter's. 'Good repose! To the pleasure of seeing you once more! To to-morrow!'

As he kissed his hand, with his best manner and his daintiest smile, the young lady drew a little nearer to her father, and passed him with a dread of touching him.

'Humph!' said the insinuating traveller, whose manner shrunk, and whose voice dropped when he was left alone. 'If they all go to bed, why I must go. They are in a devil of a hurry. One would think the night would be long enough, in this freezing silence and solitude, if one went to bed two hours hence.'

Throwing back his head in emptying his glass, he cast his eyes upon the travellers' book, which lay on the piano, open, with pens and ink beside it, as if the night's names had been registered when he was absent. Taking it in his hand, he read these entries.

William Dorrit, Esquire
Frederick Dorrit, Esquire
Edward Dorrit, Esquire
Miss Dorrit
Miss Amy Dorrit
Mrs General
and Suite.
From France to Italy.

Mr and Mrs Henry Gowan.
From France to Italy.

To which he added, in a small complicated hand, ending with a long lean flourish, not unlike a lasso thrown at all the rest of the names:

Blandois. Paris.
From France to Italy.

And then, with his nose coming down over his moustache and his moustache going up and under his nose, repaired to his allotted cell.

CHAPTER 2. Mrs General

It is indispensable to present the accomplished lady who was of sufficient importance in the suite of the Dorrit Family to have a line to herself in the Travellers' Book.

Mrs General was the daughter of a clerical dignitary in a cathedral town, where she had led the fashion until she was as near forty-five as a single lady can be. A stiff commissariat officer of sixty, famous as a martinet, had then become enamoured of the gravity with which she drove the proprieties four-in-hand through the cathedral town society, and had solicited to be taken beside her on the box of the cool coach of ceremony to which that team was harnessed. His proposal of marriage being accepted by the lady, the commissary took his seat behind the proprieties with great decorum, and Mrs General drove until the commissary died. In the course of their united journey, they ran over several people who came in the way of the proprieties; but always in a high style and with composure.

The commissary having been buried with all the decorations suitable to the service (the whole team of proprieties were harnessed to his hearse, and they all had feathers and black velvet housings with his coat of arms in the corner), Mrs General began to inquire what quantity of dust and ashes was deposited at the bankers'. It then transpired that the commissary had so far stolen a march on Mrs General as to have bought himself an annuity some years before his marriage, and to have reserved that circumstance in mentioning, at the period of his proposal, that his income was derived from the interest of his money. Mrs General consequently found her means so much diminished, that, but for the perfect regulation of her mind, she might have felt disposed to question the accuracy of that portion of the late service which had declared that the commissary could take nothing away with him.

In this state of affairs it occurred to Mrs General, that she might 'form the mind,' and eke the manners of some young lady of distinction. Or, that she might harness the proprieties to the carriage of some rich young heiress or widow, and become at once the driver and guard of such vehicle through the social mazes. Mrs General's communication of this idea to her clerical and commissariat connection was so warmly applauded that, but for the lady's undoubted merit, it might have appeared as though they wanted to get rid of her. Testimonials representing Mrs General as a prodigy of piety, learning, virtue, and gentility, were lavishly contributed from influential quarters; and one venerable archdeacon even shed tears in recording his testimony to her perfections (described to him by persons on whom he could rely), though he had never had the honour and moral gratification of setting eyes on Mrs General in all his life.

Thus delegated on her mission, as it were by Church and State, Mrs General, who had always occupied high ground, felt in a condition to keep it, and began by putting herself up at a very high figure. An interval of some duration elapsed, in which there was no bid for Mrs General. At length a county-widower, with a daughter of fourteen, opened negotiations with the lady; and as it was a part either of the native dignity or of the artificial policy of Mrs General (but certainly one or the other) to comport herself as if she were much more sought than seeking, the widower pursued Mrs General until he prevailed upon her to form his daughter's mind and manners.

The execution of this trust occupied Mrs General about seven years, in the course of which time she made the tour of Europe, and saw most of that extensive miscellany of objects which it is essential that all persons of polite cultivation should see with other people's eyes, and never with their own. When her charge was at length formed, the marriage, not only of the young lady, but likewise of her father, the widower, was resolved on. The widower then finding Mrs General both inconvenient and expensive, became of a sudden almost as much affected by her merits as the archdeacon had been, and circulated such praises of her surpassing worth, in all quarters where he thought an opportunity might arise of transferring the blessing to somebody else, that Mrs General was a name more honourable than ever.

The phoenix was to let, on this elevated perch, when Mr Dorrit, who had lately succeeded to his property, mentioned to his bankers that he wished to discover a lady, well-bred, accomplished, well connected, well accustomed to good society, who was qualified at once to complete the education of his daughters, and to be their matron or chaperon. Mr Dorrit's bankers, as bankers of the county-widower, instantly said, 'Mrs General.'

Pursuing the light so fortunately hit upon, and finding the concurrent testimony of the whole of Mrs General's acquaintance to be of the pathetic nature already recorded, Mr Dorrit took the trouble of going down to the county of the county-widower to see Mrs General, in whom he found a lady of a quality superior to his highest expectations.

'Might I be excused,' said Mr Dorrit, 'if I inquired—ha—what remune—'

'Why, indeed,' returned Mrs General, stopping the word, 'it is a subject on which I prefer to avoid entering. I have never entered on it with my friends here; and I cannot overcome the delicacy, Mr Dorrit, with which I have always regarded it. I am not, as I hope you are aware, a governess—'

'O dear no!' said Mr Dorrit. 'Pray, madam, do not imagine for a moment that I think so.' He really blushed to be suspected of it.

Mrs General gravely inclined her head. 'I cannot, therefore, put a price upon services which it is a pleasure to me to render if I can render them spontaneously, but which I could not render in mere return for any consideration. Neither do I know how, or where, to find a case parallel to my own. It is peculiar.'

No doubt. But how then (Mr Dorrit not unnaturally hinted) could the subject be approached. 'I cannot object,' said Mrs General—'though even that is disagreeable to me—to Mr Dorrit's inquiring, in confidence of my friends here, what amount they have been accustomed, at quarterly intervals, to pay to my credit at my bankers'.'

Mr Dorrit bowed his acknowledgements.

'Permit me to add,' said Mrs General, 'that beyond this, I can never resume the topic. Also that I can accept no second or inferior position. If the honour were proposed to me of becoming known to Mr Dorrit's family—I think two daughters were mentioned?—'

'Two daughters.'

'I could only accept it on terms of perfect equality, as a companion, protector, Mentor, and friend.'

Mr Dorrit, in spite of his sense of his importance, felt as if it would be quite a kindness in her to accept it on any conditions. He almost said as much.

'I think,' repeated Mrs General, 'two daughters were mentioned?'

'Two daughters,' said Mr Dorrit again.

'It would therefore,' said Mrs General, 'be necessary to add a third more to the payment (whatever its amount may prove to be), which my friends here have been accustomed to make to my bankers'.'

Mr Dorrit lost no time in referring the delicate question to the county-widower, and finding that he had been accustomed to pay three hundred pounds a-year to the credit of Mrs General, arrived, without any severe strain on his arithmetic, at the conclusion that he himself must pay four. Mrs General being an article of that lustrous surface which suggests that it is worth any money, he made a formal proposal to be allowed to have the honour and pleasure of regarding her as a member of his family. Mrs General conceded that high privilege, and here she was.

In person, Mrs General, including her skirts which had much to do with it, was of a dignified and imposing appearance; ample, rustling, gravely voluminous; always upright behind the proprieties. She might have been taken—had been taken—to the top of the Alps and the bottom of Herculaneum, without disarranging a fold in her dress, or displacing a pin. If her countenance and hair had rather a floury appearance, as though from living in some transcendently genteel Mill, it was rather because she was a chalky creation altogether, than because she mended her complexion with violet powder, or had turned grey. If her eyes had no expression, it was probably because they had nothing to express. If she had few wrinkles, it was because her mind had never traced its name or any other inscription on her face. A cool, waxy, blown-out woman, who had never lighted well. Mrs General had no opinions. Her way of forming a mind was to prevent it from forming opinions. She had a little circular set of mental grooves or rails on which she started little trains of other people's opinions, which never overtook one another, and never got anywhere. Even her propriety could not dispute that there was impropriety in the world; but Mrs General's way of getting rid of it was to put it out of sight, and make believe that there was no such thing. This was another of her ways of forming a mind—to cram all articles of difficulty into cupboards, lock them up, and say they had no existence. It was the easiest way, and, beyond all comparison, the properest.

Mrs General was not to be told of anything shocking. Accidents, miseries, and offences, were never to be mentioned before her. Passion was to go to sleep in the presence of Mrs General, and blood was to change to milk and water. The little that was left in the world, when all these deductions were made, it was Mrs General's province to varnish. In that formation process of hers, she dipped the smallest of brushes into the largest of pots, and varnished the surface of every object that came under consideration. The more cracked it was, the more Mrs General varnished it.

There was varnish in Mrs General's voice, varnish in Mrs General's touch, an atmosphere of varnish round Mrs General's figure. Mrs General's dreams ought to have been varnished—if she had any—lying asleep in the arms of the good Saint Bernard, with the feathery snow falling on his house-top.

CHAPTER 3. On the Road

The bright morning sun dazzled the eyes, the snow had ceased, the mists had vanished, the mountain air was so clear and light that the new sensation of breathing it was like the having entered on a new existence. To help the delusion, the solid ground itself seemed gone, and the mountain, a shining waste of immense white heaps and masses, to be a region of cloud floating between the blue sky above and the earth far below.

Some dark specks in the snow, like knots upon a little thread, beginning at the convent door and winding away down the descent in broken lengths which were not yet pieced together, showed where the Brethren were at work in several places clearing the track. Already the snow had begun to be foot-thawed again about the door. Mules were busily brought out, tied to the rings in the wall, and laden; strings of bells were buckled on, burdens were adjusted, the voices of drivers and riders sounded musically. Some of the earliest had even already resumed their journey; and, both on the level summit by the dark water near the convent, and on the downward way of yesterday's ascent, little moving figures of men and mules, reduced to miniatures by the immensity around, went with a clear tinkling of bells and a pleasant harmony of tongues.

In the supper-room of last night, a new fire, piled upon the feathery ashes of the old one, shone upon a homely breakfast of loaves, butter, and milk. It also shone on the courier of the Dorrit family, making tea for his party from a supply he had brought up with him, together with several other small stores which were chiefly laid in for the use of the strong body of inconvenience. Mr Gowan and Blandois of Paris had already breakfasted, and were walking up and down by the lake, smoking their cigars. 'Gowan, eh?' muttered Tip, otherwise Edward Dorrit, Esquire, turning over the leaves of the book, when the courier had left them to breakfast. 'Then Gowan is the name of a puppy, that's all I have got to say! If it was worth my while, I'd pull his nose. But it isn't worth my while—fortunately for him. How's his wife, Amy?

I suppose you know. You generally know things of that sort.'

'She is better, Edward. But they are not going to-day.'

'Oh! They are not going to-day! Fortunately for that fellow too,' said Tip, 'or he and I might have come into collision.'

'It is thought better here that she should lie quiet to-day, and not be fatigued and shaken by the ride down until to-morrow.'

'With all my heart. But you talk as if you had been nursing her. You haven't been relapsing into (Mrs General is not here) into old habits, have you, Amy?'

He asked her the question with a sly glance of observation at Miss Fanny, and at his father too.

'I have only been in to ask her if I could do anything for her, Tip,' said Little Dorrit.

'You needn't call me Tip, Amy child,' returned that young gentleman with a frown; 'because that's an old habit, and one you may as well lay aside.'

'I didn't mean to say so, Edward dear. I forgot. It was so natural once, that it seemed at the moment the right word.'

'Oh yes!' Miss Fanny struck in. 'Natural, and right word, and once, and all the rest of it! Nonsense, you little thing! I know perfectly well why you have been taking such an interest in this Mrs Gowan. You can't blind me.'

'I will not try to, Fanny. Don't be angry.'

'Oh! angry!' returned that young lady with a flounce. 'I have no patience' (which indeed was the truth). 'Pray, Fanny,' said Mr Dorrit, raising his eyebrows, 'what do you mean? Explain yourself.'

'Oh! Never mind, Pa,' replied Miss Fanny, 'it's no great matter. Amy will understand me. She knew, or knew of, this Mrs Gowan before yesterday, and she may as well admit that she did.'

'My child,' said Mr Dorrit, turning to his younger daughter, 'has your sister—any—ha—authority for this curious statement?'

'However meek we are,' Miss Fanny struck in before she could answer, 'we don't go creeping into people's rooms on the tops of cold mountains, and sitting perishing in the frost with people, unless we know something about them beforehand. It's not very hard to divine whose friend Mrs Gowan is.'

'Whose friend?' inquired her father.

'Pa, I am sorry to say,' returned Miss Fanny, who had by this time succeeded in goading herself into a state of much ill-usage and grievance, which she was often at great pains to do: 'that I believe her to be a friend of that very objectionable and unpleasant person, who, with a total absence of all delicacy, which our experience might have led us to expect from him, insulted us and outraged our feelings in so public and wilful a manner on an occasion to which it is understood among us that we will not more pointedly allude.'

'Amy, my child,' said Mr Dorrit, tempering a bland severity with a dignified affection, 'is this the case?'

Little Dorrit mildly answered, yes it was.

'Yes it is!' cried Miss Fanny. 'Of course! I said so! And now, Pa, I do declare once for all'—this young lady was in the habit of declaring the same thing once for all every day of her life, and even several times in a day—'that this is shameful! I do declare once for all that it ought to be put a stop to. Is it not enough that we have gone through what is only known to ourselves, but are we to have it thrown in our faces, perseveringly and systematically, by the very person who should spare our feelings most? Are we to be exposed to this unnatural conduct every moment of our lives? Are we never to be permitted to forget? I say again, it is absolutely infamous!'

'Well, Amy,' observed her brother, shaking his head, 'you know I stand by you whenever I can, and on most occasions. But I must say, that, upon my soul, I do consider it rather an unaccountable mode of showing your sisterly affection, that you should back up a man who treated me in the most ungentlemanly way in which one man can treat another. And who,' he added convincingly, must be a low-minded thief, you know, or he never could have conducted himself as he did.'

'And see,' said Miss Fanny, 'see what is involved in this! Can we ever hope to be respected by our servants? Never. Here are our two women, and Pa's valet, and a footman, and a courier, and all sorts of dependents, and yet in the midst of these, we are to have one of ourselves rushing about with tumblers of cold water, like a menial! Why, a policeman,' said Miss Fanny, 'if a beggar had a fit in the street, could but go plunging about with tumblers, as this very Amy did in this very room before our very eyes last night!'

'I don't so much mind that, once in a way,' remarked Mr Edward; 'but your Clennam, as he thinks proper to call himself, is another thing.' 'He is part of the same thing,' returned Miss Fanny, 'and of a piece with all the rest. He obtruded himself upon us in the first instance. We never wanted him. I always showed him, for one, that I could have dispensed with his company with the greatest pleasure.

He then commits that gross outrage upon our feelings, which he never could or would have committed but for the delight he took in exposing us; and then we are to be demeaned for the service of his friends! Why, I don't wonder at this Mr Gowan's conduct towards you. What else was to be expected when he was enjoying our past misfortunes—gloating over them at the moment!' 'Father—Edward—no indeed!' pleaded Little Dorrit. 'Neither Mr nor Mrs Gowan had ever heard our name. They were, and they are, quite ignorant of our history.'

'So much the worse,' retorted Fanny, determined not to admit anything in extenuation, 'for then you have no excuse. If they had known about us, you might have felt yourself called upon to conciliate them. That would have been a weak and ridiculous mistake, but I can respect a mistake, whereas I can't respect a wilful and deliberate abasing of those who should be nearest and dearest to us. No. I can't respect that. I can do nothing but denounce that.'

'I never offend you wilfully, Fanny,' said Little Dorrit, 'though you are so hard with me.'

'Then you should be more careful, Amy,' returned her sister. 'If you do such things by accident, you should be more careful. If I happened to have been born in a peculiar place, and under peculiar circumstances that blunted my knowledge of propriety, I fancy I should think myself bound to consider at every step, "Am I going, ignorantly, to compromise any near and dear relations?" That is what I fancy I should do, if it was my case.'

Mr Dorrit now interposed, at once to stop these painful subjects by his authority, and to point their moral by his wisdom.

'My dear,' said he to his younger daughter, 'I beg you to—ha—to say no more. Your sister Fanny expresses herself strongly, but not without considerable reason. You have now a—hum—a great position to support. That great position is not occupied by yourself alone, but by—ha—by me, and—ha hum—by us. Us. Now, it is incumbent upon all people in an exalted position, but it is particularly so on this family, for reasons which I—ha—will not dwell upon, to make themselves respected. To be vigilant in making themselves respected. Dependants, to respect us, must be—ha—kept at a distance and—hum—kept down. Down. Therefore, your not exposing yourself to the remarks of our attendants by appearing to have at any time dispensed with their services and performed them for yourself, is—ha—highly important.'

'Why, who can doubt it?' cried Miss Fanny. 'It's the essence of everything.' 'Fanny,' returned her father, grandiloquently, 'give me leave, my dear. We then come to—ha—to Mr Clennam. I am free to say that I do not, Amy, share your sister's sentiments—that is to say altogether—hum—altogether—in reference to Mr Clennam. I am content to regard that individual in the light of—ha—generally—a well-behaved person. Hum. A well-behaved person. Nor will I inquire whether Mr Clennam did, at any time, obtrude himself on—ha—my society. He knew my society to be—hum—sought, and his plea might be that he regarded me in the light of a public character. But there were circumstances attending my—ha—slight knowledge of Mr Clennam (it was very slight), which,' here Mr Dorrit became extremely grave and impressive, 'would render it highly indelicate in Mr Clennam to—ha—to seek to renew communication with me or with any member of my family under existing circumstances. If Mr Clennam has sufficient delicacy to perceive the impropriety of any such attempt, I am bound as a responsible gentleman to—ha—defer to that delicacy on his part. If, on the other hand, Mr Clennam has not that delicacy, I cannot for a moment—ha—hold any correspondence with so—hum—coarse a mind. In either case, it would appear that Mr Clennam is put altogether out of the question, and that we have nothing to do with him or he with us. Ha—Mrs General!'

The entrance of the lady whom he announced, to take her place at the breakfast-table, terminated the discussion. Shortly afterwards, the courier announced that the valet, and the footman, and the two maids, and the four guides, and the fourteen mules, were in readiness; so the breakfast party went out to the convent door to join the cavalcade.

Mr Gowan stood aloof with his cigar and pencil, but Mr Blandois was on the spot to pay his respects to the ladies. When he gallantly pulled off his slouched hat to Little Dorrit, she thought he had even a more sinister look, standing swart and cloaked in the snow, than he had in the fire-light overnight. But, as both her father and her sister received his homage with some favour, she refrained from expressing any distrust of him, lest it should prove to be a new blemish derived from her prison birth.

Nevertheless, as they wound down the rugged way while the convent was yet in sight, she more than once looked round, and descried Mr

Blandois, backed by the convent smoke which rose straight and high from the chimneys in a golden film, always standing on one jutting point looking down after them. Long after he was a mere black stick in the snow, she felt as though she could yet see that smile of his, that high nose, and those eyes that were too near it. And even after that, when the convent was gone and some light morning clouds veiled the pass below it, the ghastly skeleton arms by the wayside seemed to be all pointing up at him.

More treacherous than snow, perhaps, colder at heart, and harder to melt, Blandois of Paris by degrees passed out of her mind, as they came down into the softer regions. Again the sun was warm, again the streams descending from glaciers and snowy caverns were refreshing to drink at, again they came among the pine-trees, the rocky rivulets, the verdant heights and dales, the wooden chalets and rough zigzag fences of Swiss country. Sometimes the way so widened that she and her father could ride abreast. And then to look at him, handsomely clothed in his fur and broadcloths, rich, free, numerously served and attended, his eyes roving far away among the glories of the landscape, no miserable screen before them to darken his sight and cast its shadow on him, was enough.

Her uncle was so far rescued from that shadow of old, that he wore the clothes they gave him, and performed some ablutions as a sacrifice to the family credit, and went where he was taken, with a certain patient animal enjoyment, which seemed to express that the air and change did him good. In all other respects, save one, he shone with no light but such as was reflected from his brother. His brother's greatness, wealth, freedom, and grandeur, pleased him without any reference to himself. Silent and retiring, he had no use for speech when he could hear his brother speak; no desire to be waited on, so that the servants devoted themselves to his brother. The only noticeable change he originated in himself, was an alteration in his manner to his younger niece. Every day it refined more and more into a marked respect, very rarely shown by age to youth, and still more rarely susceptible, one would have said, of the fitness with which he invested it. On those occasions when Miss Fanny did declare once for all, he would take the next opportunity of baring his grey head before his younger niece, and of helping her to alight, or handing her to the carriage, or showing her any other attention, with the profoundest deference. Yet it never appeared misplaced or forced, being always heartily simple, spontaneous, and genuine. Neither would he ever consent, even at his brother's request, to be helped to any place before her, or to take precedence of her in anything. So jealous was he of her being respected, that, on this very journey down from the Great Saint Bernard, he took sudden and violent umbrage at the footman's being remiss to hold her stirrup, though standing near when she dismounted; and unspeakably astonished the whole retinue by charging at him on a hard-headed mule, riding him into a corner, and threatening to trample him to death.

They were a goodly company, and the Innkeepers all but worshipped them. Wherever they went, their importance preceded them in the person of the courier riding before, to see that the rooms of state were ready. He was the herald of the family procession. The great travelling-carriage came next: containing, inside, Mr Dorrit, Miss Dorrit, Miss Amy Dorrit, and Mrs General; outside, some of the retainers, and (in fine weather) Edward Dorrit, Esquire, for whom the box was reserved. Then came the chariot containing Frederick Dorrit, Esquire, and an empty place occupied by Edward Dorrit, Esquire, in wet weather. Then came the fourgon with the rest of the retainers, the heavy baggage, and as much as it could carry of the mud and dust which the other vehicles left behind.

These equipages adorned the yard of the hotel at Martigny, on the return of the family from their mountain excursion. Other vehicles were there, much company being on the road, from the patched Italian Vettura—like the body of a swing from an English fair put upon a wooden tray on wheels, and having another wooden tray without wheels put atop of it—to the trim English carriage. But there was another adornment of the hotel which Mr Dorrit had not bargained for. Two strange travellers embellished one of his rooms.

The Innkeeper, hat in hand in the yard, swore to the courier that he was blighted, that he was desolated, that he was profoundly afflicted, that he was the most miserable and unfortunate of beasts, that he had the head of a wooden pig. He ought never to have made the concession, he said, but the very genteel lady had so passionately prayed him for the accommodation of that room to dine in, only for a little half-hour, that he had been vanquished. The little half-hour was expired, the lady and gentleman were taking their little dessert and half-cup of coffee, the note was paid, the horses were ordered, they would depart immediately; but, owing to an unhappy destiny and the curse of Heaven, they were not yet gone.

Nothing could exceed Mr Dorrit's indignation, as he turned at the foot of the staircase on hearing these apologies. He felt that the family dignity was struck at by an assassin's hand. He had a sense of his dignity, which was of the most exquisite nature. He could detect a design upon it when nobody else had any perception of the fact. His life was made an agony by the number of fine scalpels that he felt to be incessantly engaged in dissecting his dignity.

'Is it possible, sir,' said Mr Dorrit, reddening excessively, 'that you have—ha—had the audacity to place one of my rooms at the disposition of any other person?'

Thousands of pardons! It was the host's profound misfortune to have been overcome by that too genteel lady. He besought Monseigneur not to enrage himself. He threw himself on Monseigneur for clemency. If Monseigneur would have the distinguished goodness to occupy the other salon especially reserved for him, for but five minutes, all would go well.

'No, sir,' said Mr Dorrit. 'I will not occupy any salon. I will leave your house without eating or drinking, or setting foot in it.

How do you dare to act like this? Who am I that you—ha—separate me from other gentlemen?'

Alas! The host called all the universe to witness that Monseigneur was the most amiable of the whole body of nobility, the most important, the most estimable, the most honoured. If he separated Monseigneur from others, it was only because he was more distinguished, more cherished, more generous, more renowned.

'Don't tell me so, sir,' returned Mr Dorrit, in a mighty heat. 'You have affronted me. You have heaped insults upon me. How dare you? Explain yourself.'

Ah, just Heaven, then, how could the host explain himself when he had nothing more to explain; when he had only to apologise, and confide himself to the so well-known magnanimity of Monseigneur!

'I tell you, sir,' said Mr Dorrit, panting with anger, 'that you separate me—ha—from other gentlemen; that you make distinctions between me and other gentlemen of fortune and station. I demand of you, why? I wish to know on—ha—what authority, on whose authority. Reply sir. Explain. Answer why.'

Permit the landlord humbly to submit to Monsieur the Courier then, that Monseigneur, ordinarily so gracious, enraged himself without cause. There was no why. Monsieur the Courier would represent to Monseigneur, that he deceived himself in suspecting that there was any why, but the why his devoted servant had already had the honour to present to him. The very genteel lady—

'Silence!' cried Mr Dorrit. 'Hold your tongue! I will hear no more of the very genteel lady; I will hear no more of you. Look at this family—my family—a family more genteel than any lady. You have treated this family with disrespect; you have been insolent to this family. I'll ruin you. Ha—send for the horses, pack the carriages, I'll not set foot in this man's house again!'

No one had interfered in the dispute, which was beyond the French colloquial powers of Edward Dorrit, Esquire, and scarcely within the province of the ladies. Miss Fanny, however, now supported her father with great bitterness; declaring, in her native tongue, that it was quite clear there was something special in this man's impertinence; and that she considered it important that he should be, by some means, forced to give up his authority for making distinctions between that family and other wealthy families. What the reasons of his presumption could be, she was at a loss to imagine; but reasons he must have, and they ought to be torn from him.

All the guides, mule-drivers, and idlers in the yard, had made themselves parties to the angry conference, and were much impressed by the courier's now bestirring himself to get the carriages out. With the aid of some dozen people to each wheel, this was done at a great cost of noise; and then the loading was proceeded with, pending the arrival of the horses from the post-house.

But the very genteel lady's English chariot being already horsed and at the inn-door, the landlord had slipped up-stairs to represent his hard case. This was notified to the yard by his now coming down the staircase in attendance on the gentleman and the lady, and by his pointing out the offended majesty of Mr Dorrit to them with a significant motion of his hand.

'Beg your pardon,' said the gentleman, detaching himself from the lady, and coming forward. 'I am a man of few words and a bad hand at an explanation—but lady here is extremely anxious that there should be no Row. Lady—a mother of mine, in point of fact—wishes me to say that she hopes no Row.'

Mr Dorrit, still panting under his injury, saluted the gentleman, and saluted the lady, in a distant, final, and invincible manner.

'No, but really—here, old feller; you!' This was the gentleman's way of appealing to Edward Dorrit, Esquire, on whom he pounced as a great and providential relief. 'Let you and I try to make this all right. Lady so very much wishes no Row.'

Edward Dorrit, Esquire, led a little apart by the button, assumed a diplomatic expression of countenance in replying, 'Why you must confess, that when you bespeak a lot of rooms beforehand, and they belong to you, it's not pleasant to find other people in 'em.'

'No,' said the other, 'I know it isn't. I admit it. Still, let you and I try to make it all right, and avoid Row. The fault is not this chap's at all, but my mother's. Being a remarkably fine woman with no bigodd nonsense about her—well educated, too—she was too many for this chap. Regularly pocketed him.'

'If that's the case—' Edward Dorrit, Esquire, began.

'Assure you 'pon my soul 'tis the case. Consequently,' said the other gentleman, retiring on his main position, 'why Row?'

'Edmund,' said the lady from the doorway, 'I hope you have explained, or are explaining, to the satisfaction of this gentleman and his family that the civil landlord is not to blame?'

'Assure you, ma'am,' returned Edmund, 'perfectly paralysing myself with trying it on.' He then looked steadfastly at Edward Dorrit, Esquire, for some seconds, and suddenly added, in a burst of confidence, 'Old feller! Is it all right?'

'I don't know, after all,' said the lady, gracefully advancing a step or two towards Mr Dorrit, 'but that I had better say myself, at once, that I assured this good man I took all the consequences on myself of occupying one of a stranger's suite of rooms during his absence, for just as much (or as little) time as I could dine in. I had no idea the rightful owner would come back so soon, nor had I any idea that he had come back, or I should have hastened to make restoration of my ill-gotten chamber, and to have offered my explanation and apology. I trust in saying this—'

For a moment the lady, with a glass at her eye, stood transfixed and speechless before the two Miss Dorrits. At the same moment, Miss Fanny, in the foreground of a grand pictorial composition, formed by the family, the family equipages, and the family servants, held her sister tight under one arm to detain her on the spot, and with the other arm fanned herself with a distinguished air, and negligently surveyed the lady from head to foot.

The lady, recovering herself quickly—for it was Mrs Merdle and she was not easily dashed—went on to add that she trusted in saying this, she apologised for her boldness, and restored this well-behaved landlord to the favour that was so very valuable to him. Mr Dorrit, on the altar of whose dignity all this was incense, made a gracious reply; and said that his people should—ha—countermand his horses, and he would—hum—overlook what he had at first supposed to be an affront, but now regarded as an honour. Upon this the bosom bent to him; and its owner, with a wonderful command of feature, addressed a winning smile of adieu to the two sisters, as young ladies of fortune in whose favour she was much prepossessed, and whom she had never had the gratification of seeing before.

Not so, however, Mr Sparkler. This gentleman, becoming transfixed at the same moment as his lady-mother, could not by any means unfix himself again, but stood stiffly staring at the whole composition with Miss Fanny in the Foreground. On his mother saying, 'Edmund, we are quite ready; will you give me your arm?' he seemed, by the motion of his lips, to reply with some remark comprehending the form of words in which his shining talents found the most frequent utterance, but he relaxed no muscle. So fixed was his figure, that it would have been matter of some difficulty to bend him sufficiently to get him in the carriage-door, if he had not received the timely assistance of a maternal pull from within. He was no sooner within than the pad of the little window in the back of the chariot disappeared, and his eye usurped its place. There it remained as long as so small an object was discernible, and probably much longer, staring (as though something inexpressibly surprising should happen to a codfish) like an ill-executed eye in a large locket.

This encounter was so highly agreeable to Miss Fanny, and gave her so much to think of with triumph afterwards, that it softened her asperities exceedingly. When the procession was again in motion next day, she occupied her place in it with a new gaiety; and showed such a flow of spirits indeed, that Mrs General looked rather surprised.

Little Dorrit was glad to be found no fault with, and to see that Fanny was pleased; but her part in the procession was a musing part, and a quiet one. Sitting opposite her father in the travelling-carriage, and recalling the old Marshalsea room, her present existence was a dream. All that she saw was new and wonderful, but it was not real; it seemed to her as if those visions of mountains and picturesque countries might melt away at any moment, and the carriage, turning some abrupt corner, bring up with a jolt at the old Marshalsea gate.

To have no work to do was strange, but not half so strange as having glided into a corner where she had no one to think for, nothing to plan and contrive, no cares of others to load herself with. Strange as that was, it was far stranger yet to find a space between herself and her father, where others occupied themselves in taking care of him, and where she was never expected to be. At first, this was so much more unlike her old experience than even the mountains themselves, that she had been unable to resign herself to it, and had tried to retain her old place about him. But he had spoken to her alone, and had said that people—ha—people in an exalted position, my dear, must scrupulously exact respect from their dependents; and that for her, his daughter, Miss Amy Dorrit, of the sole remaining branch of the Dorrits of Dorsetshire, to be known to—hum—to occupy herself in fulfilling the functions of—ha hum—a valet, would be incompatible with that respect. Therefore, my dear, he—ha—he laid his parental injunctions upon her, to remember that she was a lady, who had now to conduct herself with—hum—a proper pride, and to preserve the rank of a lady; and consequently he requested her to abstain from doing what would occasion—ha—unpleasant and derogatory remarks. She had obeyed without a murmur. Thus it had been brought about that she now sat in her corner of the luxurious carriage with her little patient hands folded before her, quite displaced even from the last point of the old standing ground in life on which her feet had lingered.

It was from this position that all she saw appeared unreal; the more surprising the scenes, the more they resembled the unreality of her own inner life as she went through its vacant places all day long. The gorges of the Simplon, its enormous depths and thundering waterfalls, the wonderful road, the points of danger where a loose wheel or a faltering horse would have been destruction, the descent into Italy, the opening of that beautiful land as the rugged mountain-chasm widened and let them out from a gloomy and dark imprisonment—all a dream—only the old mean Marshalsea a reality. Nay, even the old mean Marshalsea was shaken to its foundations when she pictured it without her father. She could scarcely believe that the prisoners were still lingering in the close yard, that the mean rooms were still every one tenanted, and that the turnkey still stood in the Lodge letting people in and out, all just as she well knew it to be.

With a remembrance of her father's old life in prison hanging about her like the burden of a sorrowful tune, Little Dorrit would wake from a dream of her birth-place into a whole day's dream. The painted room in which she awoke, often a humbled state-chamber in a dilapidated palace, would begin it; with its wild red autumnal vine-leaves overhanging the glass, its orange-trees on the cracked white terrace outside the window, a group of monks and peasants in the little street below, misery and magnificence wrestling with each other upon every rood of ground in the prospect, no matter how widely diversified, and misery throwing magnificence with the strength of fate. To this would succeed a labyrinth of bare passages and pillared galleries, with the family procession already preparing in the quadrangle below, through the carriages and luggage being brought together by the servants for the day's journey. Then breakfast in another painted chamber, damp-stained and of desolate proportions; and then the departure, which, to her timidity and sense of not being grand enough for her place in the ceremonies, was always an uneasy thing. For then the courier (who himself would have been a foreign gentleman of high mark in the Marshalsea) would present himself to report that all was ready; and then her father's valet would pompously induct him into his travelling-cloak; and then Fanny's maid, and her own maid (who was a weight on Little Dorrit's mind—absolutely made her cry at first, she knew so little what to do with her), would be in attendance; and then her brother's man would complete his master's equipment; and then her father would give his arm to Mrs General, and her uncle would give his to her, and, escorted by the landlord and Inn servants, they would swoop down-stairs. There, a crowd would be collected to see them enter their carriages, which, amidst much bowing, and begging, and prancing, and lashing, and clattering, they would do; and so they would be driven madly through narrow unsavoury streets, and jerked out at the town gate.

Among the day's unrealities would be roads where the bright red vines were looped and garlanded together on trees for many miles; woods of olives; white villages and towns on hill-sides, lovely without, but frightful in their dirt and poverty within; crosses by the way; deep blue lakes with fairy islands, and clustering boats with awnings of bright colours and sails of beautiful forms; vast piles of building mouldering to dust; hanging-gardens where the weeds had grown so strong that their stems, like wedges driven home, had split the arch and rent the wall; stone-terraced lanes, with the lizards running into and out of every chink; beggars of all sorts everywhere: pitiful, picturesque, hungry, merry; children beggars and aged beggars. Often at posting-houses and other halting places, these miserable creatures would appear to her the only realities of the day; and many a time, when the money she had brought to give them was all given away, she would sit with her folded hands, thoughtfully looking after some diminutive girl leading her grey father, as if the sight reminded her of something in the days that were gone.

Again, there would be places where they stayed the week together in splendid rooms, had banquets every day, rode out among heaps of wonders, walked through miles of palaces, and rested in dark corners of great churches; where there were winking lamps of gold and silver among pillars and arches, kneeling figures dotted about at confessionals and on the pavements; where there was the mist and scent of incense; where there were pictures, fantastic images, gaudy altars, great heights and distances, all softly lighted through stained glass, and the massive curtains that hung in the doorways. From these cities they would go on again, by the roads of vines and olives, through squalid villages, where there was not a hovel without a gap in its filthy walls, not a window with a whole inch of glass or paper; where there seemed to be nothing to support life, nothing to eat, nothing to make, nothing to grow, nothing to hope, nothing to do but die.

Again they would come to whole towns of palaces, whose proper inmates were all banished, and which were all changed into barracks: troops of idle soldiers leaning out of the state windows, where their accoutrements hung drying on the marble architecture, and showing to the mind like hosts of rats who were (happily) eating away the props of the edifices that supported them, and must soon, with them, be smashed on the heads of the other swarms of soldiers and the swarms of priests, and the swarms of spies, who were all the ill-looking population left to be ruined, in the streets below.

Through such scenes, the family procession moved on to Venice. And here it dispersed for a time, as they were to live in Venice some few months in a palace (itself six times as big as the whole Marshalsea) on the Grand Canal.

In this crowning unreality, where all the streets were paved with water, and where the deathlike stillness of the days and nights was broken by no sound but the softened ringing of church-bells, the rippling of the current, and the cry of the gondoliers turning the corners of the flowing streets, Little Dorrit, quite lost by her task being done, sat down to muse. The family began a gay life, went here and there, and turned night into day; but she was timid of joining in their gaieties, and only asked leave to be left alone.

Sometimes she would step into one of the gondolas that were always kept in waiting, moored to painted posts at the door—when she could escape from the attendance of that oppressive maid, who was her mistress, and a very hard one—and would be taken all over the strange city. Social people in other gondolas began to ask each other who the little solitary girl was whom they passed, sitting in her boat with folded hands, looking so pensively and wonderingly about her. Never thinking that it would be worth anybody's while to notice her or her doings, Little Dorrit, in her quiet, scared, lost manner, went about the city none the less.

But her favourite station was the balcony of her own room, overhanging the canal, with other balconies below, and none above. It was of massive stone darkened by ages, built in a wild fancy which came from the East to that collection of wild fancies; and Little Dorrit was little indeed, leaning on the broad-cushioned ledge, and looking over. As she liked no place of an evening half so well, she soon began to be watched for, and many eyes in passing gondolas were raised, and many people said, There was the little figure of the English girl who was always alone.

Such people were not realities to the little figure of the English girl; such people were all unknown to her. She would watch the sunset, in its long low lines of purple and red, and its burning flush high up into the sky: so glowing on the buildings, and so lightening their structure, that it made them look as if their strong walls were transparent, and they shone from within. She would watch those glories expire; and then, after looking at the black gondolas underneath, taking guests to music and dancing, would raise her eyes to the shining stars. Was there no party of her own, in other times, on which the stars had shone? To think of that old gate now! She would think of that old gate, and of herself sitting at it in the dead of the night, pillowing Maggy's head; and of other places and of other scenes associated with those different times. And then she would lean upon her balcony, and look over at the water, as though they all lay underneath it. When she got to that, she would musingly watch its running, as if, in the general vision, it might run dry, and show her the prison again, and herself, and the old room, and the old inmates, and the old visitors: all lasting realities that had never changed.

CHAPTER 4. A Letter from Little Dorrit

Dear Mr Clennam,

I write to you from my own room at Venice, thinking you will be glad to hear from me. But I know you cannot be so glad to hear from me as I am to write to you; for everything about you is as you have been accustomed to see it, and you miss nothing—unless it should be me, which can only be for a very little while together and very seldom—while everything in my life is so strange, and I miss so much.

When we were in Switzerland, which appears to have been years ago, though it was only weeks, I met young Mrs Gowan, who was on a mountain excursion like ourselves. She told me she was very well and very happy. She sent you the message, by me, that she thanked you affectionately and would never forget you. She was quite confiding with me, and I loved her almost as soon as I spoke to her. But there is nothing singular in that; who could help loving so beautiful and winning a creature! I could not wonder at any one loving her. No indeed.

It will not make you uneasy on Mrs Gowan's account, I hope—for I remember that you said you had the interest of a true friend in her—if I tell you that I wish she could have married some one better suited to her. Mr Gowan seems fond of her, and of course she is very fond of him, but I thought he was not earnest enough—I don't mean in that respect—I mean in anything. I could not keep it out of my mind that if I was Mrs Gowan (what a change that would be, and how I must alter to become like her!) I should feel that I was rather lonely and lost, for the want of some one who was steadfast and firm in purpose. I even thought she felt this want a little, almost without knowing it. But mind you are not made uneasy by this, for she was 'very well and very happy.' And she looked most beautiful.

I expect to meet her again before long, and indeed have been expecting for some days past to see her here. I will ever be as good a friend to her as I can for your sake. Dear Mr Clennam, I dare say you think little of having been a friend to me when I had no other (not that I have any other now, for I have made no new friends), but I think much of it, and I never can forget it.

I wish I knew—but it is best for no one to write to me—how Mr and Mrs Plornish prosper in the business which my dear father bought for them, and that old Mr Nandy lives happily with them and his two grandchildren, and sings all his songs over and over again. I cannot quite keep back the tears from my eyes when I think of my poor Maggy, and of the blank she must have felt at first, however kind they all are to her, without her Little Mother. Will you go and tell her, as a strict secret, with my love, that she never can have regretted our separation more than I have regretted it? And will you tell them all that I have thought of them every day, and that my heart is faithful to them everywhere? O, if you could know how faithful, you would almost pity me for being so far away and being so grand!

You will be glad, I am sure, to know that my dear father is very well in health, and that all these changes are highly beneficial to him, and that he is very different indeed from what he used to be when you used to see him. There is an improvement in my uncle too, I think, though he never complained of old, and never exults now. Fanny is very graceful, quick, and clever. It is natural to her to be a lady; she has adapted herself to our new fortunes with wonderful ease.

This reminds me that I have not been able to do so, and that I sometimes almost despair of ever being able to do so. I find that I cannot learn. Mrs General is always with us, and we speak French and speak Italian, and she takes pains to form us in many ways. When I say we speak French and Italian, I mean they do. As for me, I am so slow that I scarcely get on at all. As soon as I begin to plan, and think, and try, all my planning, thinking, and trying go in old directions, and I begin to feel careful again about the expenses of the day, and about my dear father, and about my work, and then I remember with a start that there are no such cares left, and that in itself is so new and improbable that it sets me wandering again. I should not have the courage to mention this to any one but you.

It is the same with all these new countries and wonderful sights. They are very beautiful, and they astonish me, but I am not collected enough—not familiar enough with myself, if you can quite understand what I mean—to have all the pleasure in them that I might have. What I knew before them, blends with them, too, so curiously. For instance, when we were among the mountains, I often felt (I hesitate to tell such an idle thing, dear Mr Clennam, even to you) as if the Marshalsea must be behind that great rock; or as if Mrs Clennam's room where I have worked so many days, and where I first saw you, must be just beyond that snow. Do you remember one night when I came with Maggy to your lodging in Covent Garden? That room I have often and often fancied I have seen before me, travelling along for miles by the side of our carriage, when I have looked out of the carriage-window after dark. We were shut out that night, and sat at the iron gate, and walked about till morning. I often look up at the stars, even from the balcony of this room, and believe that I am in the street again, shut out with Maggy. It is the same with people that I left in England.

When I go about here in a gondola, I surprise myself looking into other gondolas as if I hoped to see them. It would overcome me with joy to see them, but I don't think it would surprise me much, at first. In my fanciful times, I fancy that they might be anywhere; and I almost expect to see their dear faces on the bridges or the quays.

Another difficulty that I have will seem very strange to you. It must seem very strange to any one but me, and does even to me: I often feel the old sad pity for—I need not write the word—for him. Changed as he is, and inexpressibly blest and thankful as I always am to know it, the old sorrowful feeling of compassion comes upon me sometimes with such strength that I want to put my arms round his neck, tell him how I love him, and cry a little on his breast. I should be glad after that, and proud and happy. But I know that I must not do this; that he would not like it, that Fanny would be angry, that Mrs General would be amazed; and so I quiet myself. Yet in doing so, I struggle with the feeling that I have come to be at a distance from him; and that even in the midst of all the servants and attendants, he is deserted, and in want of me.

Dear Mr Clennam, I have written a great deal about myself, but I must write a little more still, or what I wanted most of all to say in this weak letter would be left out of it. In all these foolish thoughts of mine, which I have been so hardy as to confess to you because I know you will understand me if anybody can, and will make more allowance for me than anybody else would if you cannot—in all these thoughts, there is one thought scarcely ever—never—out of my memory, and that is that I hope you sometimes, in a quiet moment, have a thought for me. I must tell you that as to this, I have felt, ever since I have been away, an anxiety which I am very anxious to relieve. I have been afraid that you may think of me in a new light, or a new character. Don't do that, I could not bear that—it would make me more unhappy than you can suppose. It would break my heart to believe that you thought of me in any way that would make me stranger to you than I was when you were so good to me. What I have to pray and entreat of you is, that you will never think of me as the daughter of a rich person; that you will never think of me as dressing any better, or living any better, than when you first knew me. That you will remember me only as the little shabby girl you protected with so much tenderness, from whose threadbare dress you have kept away the rain, and whose wet feet you have dried at your fire. That you will think of me (when you think of me at all), and of my true affection and devoted gratitude, always without change, as of your poor child, LITTLE DORRIT.

P.S.—Particularly remember that you are not to be uneasy about Mrs Gowan. Her words were, 'Very well and very happy.' And she looked most beautiful.

CHAPTER 5. Something Wrong Somewhere

The family had been a month or two at Venice, when Mr Dorrit, who was much among Counts and Marquises, and had but scant leisure, set an hour of one day apart, beforehand, for the purpose of holding some conference with Mrs General.

The time he had reserved in his mind arriving, he sent Mr Tinkler, his valet, to Mrs General's apartment (which would have absorbed about a third of the area of the Marshalsea), to present his compliments to that lady, and represent him as desiring the favour of an interview. It being that period of the forenoon when the various members of the family had coffee in their own chambers, some couple of hours before assembling at breakfast in a faded hall which had once been sumptuous, but was now the prey of watery vapours and a settled melancholy, Mrs General was accessible to the valet. That envoy found her on a little square of carpet, so extremely diminutive in reference to the size of her stone and marble floor that she looked as if she might have had it spread for the trying on of a ready-made pair of shoes; or as if she had come into possession of the enchanted piece of carpet, bought for forty purses by one of the three princes in the Arabian Nights, and had that moment been transported on it, at a wish, into a palatial saloon with which it had no connection.

Mrs General, replying to the envoy, as she set down her empty coffee-cup, that she was willing at once to proceed to Mr Dorrit's apartment, and spare him the trouble of coming to her (which, in his gallantry, he had proposed), the envoy threw open the door, and escorted Mrs General to the presence. It was quite a walk, by mysterious staircases and corridors, from Mrs General's apartment,—hoodwinked by a narrow side street with a low gloomy bridge in it, and dungeon-like opposite tenements, their walls besmeared with a thousand downward stains and streaks, as if every crazy aperture in them had been weeping tears of rust into the Adriatic for centuries—to Mr Dorrit's apartment: with a whole English house-front of window, a prospect of beautiful church-domes rising into the blue sky sheer out of the water which reflected them, and a hushed murmur of the Grand

Canal laving the doorways below, where his gondolas and gondoliers attended his pleasure, drowsily swinging in a little forest of piles.

Mr Dorrit, in a resplendent dressing-gown and cap—the dormant grub that had so long bided its time among the Collegians had burst into a rare butterfly—rose to receive Mrs General. A chair to Mrs General. An easier chair, sir; what are you doing, what are you about, what do you mean? Now, leave us!

'Mrs General,' said Mr Dorrit, 'I took the liberty—'

'By no means,' Mrs General interposed. 'I was quite at your disposition. I had had my coffee.'

'—I took the liberty,' said Mr Dorrit again, with the magnificent placidity of one who was above correction, 'to solicit the favour of a little private conversation with you, because I feel rather worried respecting my —ha—my younger daughter. You will have observed a great difference of temperament, madam, between my two daughters?'

Said Mrs General in response, crossing her gloved hands (she was never without gloves, and they never creased and always fitted), 'There is a great difference.'

'May I ask to be favoured with your view of it?' said Mr Dorrit, with a deference not incompatible with majestic serenity.

'Fanny,' returned Mrs General, 'has force of character and self-reliance. Amy, none.'

None? O Mrs General, ask the Marshalsea stones and bars. O Mrs General, ask the milliner who taught her to work, and the dancing-master who taught her sister to dance. O Mrs General, Mrs General, ask me, her father, what I owe her; and hear my testimony touching the life of this slighted little creature from her childhood up!

No such adjuration entered Mr. Dorrit's head. He looked at Mrs General, seated in her usual erect attitude on her coach-box behind the proprieties, and he said in a thoughtful manner, 'True, madam.'

'I would not,' said Mrs General, 'be understood to say, observe, that there is nothing to improve in Fanny. But there is material there—perhaps, indeed, a little too much.'

'Will you be kind enough, madam,' said Mr Dorrit, 'to be—ha—more explicit? I do not quite understand my elder daughter's having—hum—too much material. What material?'

'Fanny,' returned Mrs General, 'at present forms too many opinions.

Perfect breeding forms none, and is never demonstrative.'

Lest he himself should be found deficient in perfect breeding, Mr Dorrit hastened to reply, 'Unquestionably, madam, you are right.' Mrs General returned, in her emotionless and expressionless manner, 'I believe so.'

'But you are aware, my dear madam,' said Mr Dorrit, 'that my daughters had the misfortune to lose their lamented mother when they were very young; and that, in consequence of my not having been until lately the recognised heir to my property, they have lived with me as a comparatively poor, though always proud, gentleman, in—ha hum—retirement!'

'I do not,' said Mrs General, 'lose sight of the circumstance.' 'Madam,'pursued Mr Dorrit, 'of my daughter Fanny, under her present guidance and with such an example constantly before her—'

(Mrs General shut her eyes.)—'I have no misgivings. There is adaptability of character in Fanny. But my younger daughter, Mrs General, rather worries and vexes my thoughts. I must inform you that she has always been my favourite.'

'There is no accounting,' said Mrs General, 'for these partialities.'

'Ha—no,' assented Mr Dorrit. 'No. Now, madam, I am troubled by noticing that Amy is not, so to speak, one of ourselves. She does not Care to go about with us; she is lost in the society we have here; our tastes are evidently not her tastes. Which,' said Mr Dorrit, summing up with judicial gravity, 'is to say, in other words, that there is something wrong in—ha—Amy.'

'May we incline to the supposition,' said Mrs General, with a little touch of varnish, 'that something is referable to the novelty of the position?'

'Excuse me, madam,' observed Mr Dorrit, rather quickly. 'The daughter of a gentleman, though—ha—himself at one time comparatively far from affluent—comparatively—and herself reared in—hum—retirement, need not of necessity find this position so very novel.'

'True,' said Mrs General, 'true.'

'Therefore, madam,' said Mr Dorrit, 'I took the liberty' (he laid an emphasis on the phrase and repeated it, as though he stipulated, with urbane firmness, that he must not be contradicted again), 'I took the liberty of requesting this interview, in order that I might mention the topic to you, and inquire how you would advise me?'

'Mr Dorrit,' returned Mrs General, 'I have conversed with Amy several times since we have been residing here, on the general subject of the formation of a demeanour. She has expressed herself to me as wondering exceedingly at Venice. I have mentioned to her that it is better not to wonder. I have pointed out to her that the celebrated Mr Eustace, the classical tourist, did not think much of it; and that he compared the Rialto, greatly to its disadvantage, with Westminster and Blackfriars Bridges. I need not add, after what you have said, that I have not yet found my arguments successful. You do me the honour to ask me what to advise. It always appears to me (if this should prove to be a baseless assumption, I shall be pardoned), that Mr Dorrit has been accustomed to exercise influence over the minds of others.'

'Hum—madam,' said Mr Dorrit, 'I have been at the head of—ha of a considerable community. You are right in supposing that I am not unaccustomed to—an influential position.'

'I am happy,' returned Mrs General, 'to be so corroborated. I would therefore the more confidently recommend that Mr Dorrit should speak to Amy himself, and make his observations and wishes known to her. Being his favourite, besides, and no doubt attached to him, she is all the more likely to yield to his influence.'

'I had anticipated your suggestion, madam,' said Mr Dorrit, 'but—ha—was not sure that I might—hum—not encroach on—'

'On my province, Mr Dorrit?' said Mrs General, graciously. 'Do not mention it.'

'Then, with your leave, madam,' resumed Mr Dorrit, ringing his little bell to summon his valet, 'I will send for her at once.'

'Does Mr Dorrit wish me to remain?'

'Perhaps, if you have no other engagement, you would not object for a minute or two—'

'Not at all.'

So, Tinkler the valet was instructed to find Miss Amy's maid, and to request that subordinate to inform Miss Amy that Mr Dorrit wished to see her in his own room. In delivering this charge to Tinkler, Mr Dorrit looked severely at him, and also kept a jealous eye upon him until he went out at the door, mistrusting that he might have something in his mind prejudicial to the family dignity; that he might have even got wind of some Collegiate joke before he came into the service, and might be derisively reviving its remembrance at the present moment. If Tinkler had happened to smile, however faintly and innocently, nothing would have persuaded Mr Dorrit, to the hour of his death, but that this was the case. As Tinkler happened, however, very fortunately for himself, to be of a serious and composed countenance, he escaped the secret danger that threatened him. And as on his return—when Mr Dorrit eyed him again—he announced Miss Amy as if she had come to a funeral, he left a vague impression on Mr Dorrit's mind that he was a well-conducted young fellow, who had been brought up in the study of his Catechism by a widowed mother.

'Amy,' said Mr Dorrit, 'you have just now been the subject of some conversation between myself and Mrs General. We agree that you scarcely seem at home here. Ha—how is this?'

A pause.

'I think, father, I require a little time.'

'Papa is a preferable mode of address,' observed Mrs General. 'Father is rather vulgar, my dear. The word Papa, besides, gives a pretty form to the lips. Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes, and prism are all very good words for the lips: especially prunes and prism. You will find it serviceable, in the formation of a demeanour, if you sometimes say to yourself in company—on entering a room, for instance—Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes and prism, prunes and prism.'

'Pray, my child,' said Mr Dorrit, 'attend to the—hum—precepts of Mrs General.'

Poor Little Dorrit, with a rather forlorn glance at that eminent varnisher, promised to try.

'You say, Amy,' pursued Mr Dorrit, 'that you think you require time. Time for what?'

Another pause.

'To become accustomed to the novelty of my life, was all I meant,' said Little Dorrit, with her loving eyes upon her father; whom she had very nearly addressed as poultry, if not prunes and prism too, in her desire to submit herself to Mrs General and please him.

Mr Dorrit frowned, and looked anything but pleased. 'Amy,' he returned, 'it appears to me, I must say, that you have had abundance of time for that. Ha—you surprise me. You disappoint me. Fanny has conquered any such little difficulties, and—hum—why not you?'

'I hope I shall do better soon,' said Little Dorrit.

'I hope so,' returned her father. 'I—ha—I most devoutly hope so, Amy. I sent for you, in order that I might say—hum—impressively say, in the presence of Mrs General, to whom we are all so much indebted for obligingly being present among us, on—ha—on this or any other occasion,' Mrs General shut her eyes, 'that I—ha hum—am not pleased with you. You make Mrs General's a thankless task. You—ha—embarrass me very much. You have always (as I have informed Mrs General) been my favourite child; I have always made you a—hum—a friend and companion; in return, I beg —I—ha—I do beg, that you accommodate yourself better to—hum—circumstances, and dutifully do what becomes your—your station.'

Mr Dorrit was even a little more fragmentary than usual, being excited on the subject and anxious to make himself particularly emphatic.

'I do beg,' he repeated, 'that this may be attended to, and that you will seriously take pains and try to conduct yourself in a manner both becoming your position as—ha—Miss Amy Dorrit, and satisfactory to myself and Mrs General.'

That lady shut her eyes again, on being again referred to; then, slowly opening them and rising, added these words: 'If Miss Amy Dorrit will direct her own attention to, and will accept of my poor assistance in, the formation of a surface, Mr. Dorrit will have no further cause of anxiety. May I take this opportunity of remarking, as an instance in point, that it is scarcely delicate to look at vagrants with the attention which I have seen bestowed upon them by a very dear young friend of mine? They should not be looked at. Nothing disagreeable should ever be looked at. Apart from such a habit standing in the way of that graceful equanimity of surface which is so expressive of good breeding, it hardly seems compatible with refinement of mind. A truly refined mind will seem to be ignorant of the existence of anything that is not perfectly proper, placid, and pleasant.' Having delivered this exalted sentiment, Mrs General made a sweeping obeisance, and retired with an expression of mouth indicative of Prunes and Prism.

Little Dorrit, whether speaking or silent, had preserved her quiet earnestness and her loving look. It had not been clouded, except for a passing moment, until now. But now that she was left alone with him the fingers of her lightly folded hands were agitated, and there was repressed emotion in her face.

Not for herself. She might feel a little wounded, but her care was not for herself. Her thoughts still turned, as they always had turned, to him. A faint misgiving, which had hung about her since their accession to fortune, that even now she could never see him as he used to be before the prison days, had gradually begun to assume form in her mind. She felt that, in what he had just now said to her and in his whole bearing towards her, there was the well-known shadow of the Marshalsea wall. It took a new shape, but it was the old sad shadow. She began with sorrowful unwillingness to acknowledge to herself that she was not strong enough to keep off the fear that no space in the life of man could overcome that quarter of a century behind the prison bars. She had no blame to bestow upon him, therefore: nothing to reproach him with, no emotions in her faithful heart but great compassion and unbounded tenderness.

This is why it was, that, even as he sat before her on his sofa, in the brilliant light of a bright Italian day, the wonderful city without and the splendours of an old palace within, she saw him at the moment in the long-familiar gloom of his Marshalsea lodging, and wished to take her seat beside him, and comfort him, and be again full of confidence with him, and of usefulness to him. If he divined what was in her thoughts, his own were not in tune with it.

After some uneasy moving in his seat, he got up and walked about, looking very much dissatisfied.

'Is there anything else you wish to say to me, dear father?'

'No, no. Nothing else.'

'I am sorry you have not been pleased with me, dear. I hope you will not think of me with displeasure now. I am going to try, more than ever, to adapt myself as you wish to what surrounds me—for indeed I have tried all along, though I have failed, I know.'

'Amy,' he returned, turning short upon her. 'You—ha—habitually hurt me.'

'Hurt you, father! I!'

'There is a—hum—a topic,' said Mr Dorrit, looking all about the ceiling of the room, and never at the attentive, uncomplainingly shocked face, 'a painful topic, a series of events which I wish—ha—altogether to obliterate. This is understood by your sister, who has already remonstrated with you in my presence; it is understood by your brother; it is understood by—ha hum—by every one of delicacy and sensitiveness except yourself—ha—I am sorry to say, except yourself. You, Amy—hum—you alone and only you—constantly revive the topic, though not in words.'

She laid her hand on his arm. She did nothing more. She gently touched him. The trembling hand may have said, with some expression, 'Think of me, think how I have worked, think of my many cares!' But she said not a syllable herself.

There was a reproach in the touch so addressed to him that she had not foreseen, or she would have withheld her hand. He began to justify himself in a heated, stumbling, angry manner, which made nothing of it.

'I was there all those years. I was—ha—universally acknowledged as the head of the place. I—hum—I caused you to be respected there, Amy. I—ha hum—I gave my family a position there. I deserve a return. I claim a return. I say, sweep it off the face of the earth and begin afresh. Is that much? I ask, is that much?' He did not once look at her, as he rambled on in this way; but gesticulated at, and appealed to, the empty air.

'I have suffered. Probably I know how much I have suffered better than any one—ha—I say than any one! If I can put that aside, if I can eradicate the marks of what I have endured, and can emerge before the world—a—ha—gentleman unspoiled, unspotted—is it a great deal to expect—I say again, is it a great deal to expect—that my children should—hum—do the same and sweep that accursed experience off the face of the earth?'

In spite of his flustered state, he made all these exclamations in a carefully suppressed voice, lest the valet should overhear anything.

'Accordingly, they do it. Your sister does it. Your brother does it. You alone, my favourite child, whom I made the friend and companion of my life when you were a mere—hum—Baby, do not do it.

You alone say you can't do it. I provide you with valuable assistance to do it. I attach an accomplished and highly bred lady—ha—Mrs General, to you, for the purpose of doing it. Is it surprising that I should be displeased? Is it necessary that I should defend myself for expressing my displeasure? No!'

Notwithstanding which, he continued to defend himself, without any abatement of his flushed mood.

'I am careful to appeal to that lady for confirmation, before I express any displeasure at all. I—hum—I necessarily make that appeal within limited bounds, or I—ha—should render legible, by that lady, what I desire to be blotted out. Am I selfish? Do I complain for my own sake? No. No. Principally for—ha hum—your sake, Amy.'

This last consideration plainly appeared, from his manner of pursuing it, to have just that instant come into his head.

'I said I was hurt. So I am. So I—ha—am determined to be, whatever is advanced to the contrary. I am hurt that my daughter, seated in the—hum—lap of fortune, should mope and retire and proclaim herself unequal to her destiny. I am hurt that she should—ha—systematically reproduce what the rest of us blot out; and seem—hum—I had almost said positively anxious—to announce to wealthy and distinguished society that she was born and bred in—ha hum—a place that I myself decline to name. But there is no inconsistency—ha—not the least, in my feeling hurt, and yet complaining principally for your sake, Amy. I do; I say again, I do. It is for your sake that I wish you, under the auspices of Mrs General, to form a—hum—a surface. It is for your sake that I wish you to have a—ha—truly refined mind, and (in the striking words of Mrs General) to be ignorant of everything that is not perfectly proper, placid, and pleasant.'

He had been running down by jerks, during his last speech, like a sort of ill-adjusted alarum. The touch was still upon his arm. He fell silent; and after looking about the ceiling again for a little while, looked down at her. Her head drooped, and he could not see her face; but her touch was tender and quiet, and in the expression of her dejected figure there was no blame—nothing but love. He began to whimper, just as he had done that night in the prison when she afterwards sat at his bedside till morning; exclaimed that he was a poor ruin and a poor wretch in the midst of his wealth; and clasped her in his arms. 'Hush, hush, my own dear! Kiss me!' was all she said to him. His tears were soon dried, much sooner than on the former occasion; and he was presently afterwards very high with his valet, as a way of righting himself for having shed any.

With one remarkable exception, to be recorded in its place, this was the only time, in his life of freedom and fortune, when he spoke to his daughter Amy of the old days.

But, now, the breakfast hour arrived; and with it Miss Fanny from her apartment, and Mr Edward from his apartment. Both these young persons of distinction were something the worse for late hours. As to Miss Fanny, she had become the victim of an insatiate mania for what she called 'going into society;'and would have gone into it head-foremost fifty times between sunset and sunrise, if so many opportunities had been at her disposal. As to Mr Edward, he, too, had a large acquaintance, and was generally engaged (for the most part, in diceing circles, or others of a kindred nature), during the greater part of every night. For this gentleman, when his fortunes changed, had stood at the great advantage of being already prepared for the highest associates, and having little to learn: so much was he indebted to the happy accidents which had made him acquainted with horse-dealing and billiard-marking.

At breakfast, Mr Frederick Dorrit likewise appeared. As the old gentleman inhabited the highest story of the palace, where he might have practised pistol-shooting without much chance of discovery by the other inmates, his younger niece had taken courage to propose the restoration to him of his clarionet, which Mr Dorrit had ordered to be confiscated, but which she had ventured to preserve. Notwithstanding some objections from Miss Fanny, that it was a low instrument, and that she detested the sound of it, the concession had been made. But it was then discovered that he had had enough of it, and never played it, now that it was no longer his means of getting bread. He had insensibly acquired a new habit of shuffling into the picture-galleries, always with his twisted paper of snuff in his hand (much to the indignation of Miss Fanny, who had proposed the purchase of a gold box for him that the family might not be discredited, which he had absolutely refused to carry when it was bought); and of passing hours and hours before the portraits of renowned Venetians. It was never made out what his dazed eyes saw in them; whether he had an interest in them merely as pictures, or whether he confusedly identified them with a glory that was departed, like the strength of his own mind. But he paid his court to them with great exactness, and clearly derived pleasure from the pursuit. After the first few days, Little Dorrit happened one morning to assist at these attentions. It so evidently heightened his gratification that she often accompanied him afterwards, and the greatest delight of which the old man had shown himself susceptible since his ruin, arose out of these excursions, when he would carry a chair about for her from picture to picture, and stand behind it, in spite of all her remonstrances, silently presenting her to the noble Venetians.

It fell out that, at this family breakfast, he referred to their having seen in a gallery, on the previous day, the lady and gentleman whom they had encountered on the Great Saint Bernard, 'I forget the name,' said he. 'I dare say you remember them, William?

I dare say you do, Edward?'

'*I* remember 'em well enough,' said the latter.

'I should think so,' observed Miss Fanny, with a toss of her head and a glance at her sister. 'But they would not have been recalled to our remembrance, I suspect, if Uncle hadn't tumbled over the subject.'

'My dear, what a curious phrase,' said Mrs General. 'Would not inadvertently lighted upon, or accidentally referred to, be better?'

'Thank you very much, Mrs General,' returned the young lady, 'no, I think not. On the whole I prefer my own expression.' This was always Miss Fanny's way of receiving a suggestion from Mrs General. But she always stored it up in her mind, and adopted it at another time.

'I should have mentioned our having met Mr and Mrs Gowan, Fanny,' said Little Dorrit, 'even if Uncle had not. I have scarcely seen you since, you know. I meant to have spoken of it at breakfast; because I should like to pay a visit to Mrs Gowan, and to become better acquainted with her, if Papa and Mrs General do not object.'

'Well, Amy,' said Fanny, 'I am sure I am glad to find you at last expressing a wish to become better acquainted with anybody in Venice. Though whether Mr and Mrs Gowan are desirable acquaintances, remains to be determined.'

'Mrs Gowan I spoke of, dear.'

'No doubt,' said Fanny. 'But you can't separate her from her husband, I believe, without an Act of Parliament.'

'Do you think, Papa,' inquired Little Dorrit, with diffidence and hesitation, 'there is any objection to my making this visit?'

'Really,' he replied, 'I—ha—what is Mrs General's view?'

Mrs General's view was, that not having the honour of any acquaintance with the lady and gentleman referred to, she was not in a position to varnish the present article. She could only remark, as a general principle observed in the varnishing trade, that much depended on the quarter from which the lady under consideration was accredited to a family so conspicuously niched in the social temple as the family of Dorrit.

At this remark the face of Mr Dorrit gloomed considerably. He was about (connecting the accrediting with an obtrusive person of the name of Clennam, whom he imperfectly remembered in some former state of existence) to black-ball the name of Gowan finally, when Edward Dorrit, Esquire, came into the conversation, with his glass in his eye, and the preliminary remark of 'I say—you there! Go out, will you!'—which was addressed to a couple of men who were handing the dishes round, as a courteous intimation that their services could be temporarily dispensed with.

Those menials having obeyed the mandate, Edward Dorrit, Esquire, proceeded.

'Perhaps it's a matter of policy to let you all know that these Gowans—in whose favour, or at least the gentleman's, I can't be supposed to be much prepossessed myself—are known to people of importance, if that makes any difference.'

'That, I would say,' observed the fair varnisher, 'Makes the greatest difference. The connection in question, being really people of importance and consideration—'

'As to that,' said Edward Dorrit, Esquire, 'I'll give you the means of judging for yourself. You are acquainted, perhaps, with the famous name of Merdle?'

'The great Merdle!' exclaimed Mrs General.

'THE Merdle,' said Edward Dorrit, Esquire. 'They are known to him.

Mrs Gowan—I mean the dowager, my polite friend's mother—is intimate with Mrs Merdle, and I know these two to be on their visiting list.'

'If so, a more undeniable guarantee could not be given,' said Mrs General to Mr Dorrit, raising her gloves and bowing her head, as if she were doing homage to some visible graven image.

'I beg to ask my son, from motives of—ah—curiosity,' Mr Dorrit observed, with a decided change in his manner, 'how he becomes possessed of this—hum—timely information?'

'It's not a long story, sir,' returned Edward Dorrit, Esquire, 'and you shall have it out of hand. To begin with, Mrs Merdle is the lady you had the parley with at what's-his-name place.'

'Martigny,' interposed Miss Fanny with an air of infinite languor.

'Martigny,' assented her brother, with a slight nod and a slight wink; in acknowledgment of which, Miss Fanny looked surprised, and laughed and reddened.

'How can that be, Edward?' said Mr Dorrit. 'You informed me that the name of the gentleman with whom you conferred was—ha—Sparkler. Indeed, you showed me his card. Hum. Sparkler.'

'No doubt of it, father; but it doesn't follow that his mother's name must be the same. Mrs Merdle was married before, and he is her son. She is in Rome now; where probably we shall know more of her, as you decide to winter there. Sparkler is just come here. I passed last evening in company with Sparkler. Sparkler is a very good fellow on the whole, though rather a bore on one subject, in consequence of being tremendously smitten with a certain young lady.' Here Edward Dorrit, Esquire, eyed Miss Fanny through his glass across the table. 'We happened last night to compare notes about our travels, and I had the information I have given you from Sparkler himself.' Here he ceased; continuing to eye Miss Fanny through his glass, with a face much twisted, and not ornamentally so, in part by the action of keeping his glass in his eye, and in part by the great subtlety of his smile. 'Under these circumstances,' said Mr Dorrit, 'I believe I express the sentiments of—ha—Mrs General, no less than my own, when I say that there is no objection, but—ha hum—quite the contrary—to your gratifying your desire, Amy. I trust I may—ha—hail—this desire,' said Mr Dorrit, in an encouraging and forgiving manner, 'as an auspicious omen. It is quite right to know these people. It is a very proper thing. Mr Merdle's is a name of—ha—world-wide repute. Mr Merdle's undertakings are immense. They bring him in such vast sums of money that they are regarded as—hum—national benefits. Mr Merdle is the man of this time. The name of Merdle is the name of the age. Pray do everything on my behalf that is civil to Mr and Mrs Gowan, for we will—ha—we will certainly notice them.'

This magnificent accordance of Mr Dorrit's recognition settled the matter. It was not observed that Uncle had pushed away his plate, and forgotten his breakfast; but he was not much observed at any time, except by Little Dorrit. The servants were recalled, and the meal proceeded to its conclusion. Mrs General rose and left the table. Little Dorrit rose and left the table. When Edward and Fanny remained whispering together across it, and when Mr Dorrit remained eating figs and reading a French newspaper, Uncle suddenly fixed the attention of all three by rising out of his chair, striking his hand upon the table, and saying, 'Brother! I protest against it!'

If he had made a proclamation in an unknown tongue, and given up the ghost immediately afterwards, he could not have astounded his audience more. The paper fell from Mr Dorrit's hand, and he sat petrified, with a fig half way to his mouth.

'Brother!' said the old man, conveying a surprising energy into his trembling voice, 'I protest against it! I love you; you know I love you dearly. In these many years I have never been untrue to you in a single thought. Weak as I am, I would at any time have struck any man who spoke ill of you. But, brother, brother, brother, I protest against it!'

It was extraordinary to see of what a burst of earnestness such a decrepit man was capable. His eyes became bright, his grey hair rose on his head, markings of purpose on his brow and face which had faded from them for five-and-twenty years, started out again, and there was an energy in his hand that made its action nervous once more.

'My dear Frederick!' exclaimed Mr Dorrit faintly. 'What is wrong? What is the matter?'

'How dare you,' said the old man, turning round on Fanny, 'how dare you do it? Have you no memory? Have you no heart?'

'Uncle?' cried Fanny, affrighted and bursting into tears, 'why do you attack me in this cruel manner? What have I done?'

'Done?' returned the old man, pointing to her sister's place, 'where's your affectionate invaluable friend? Where's your devoted guardian? Where's your more than mother? How dare you set up superiorities against all these characters combined in your sister?

For shame, you false girl, for shame!' 'I love Amy,' cried Miss Fanny, sobbing and weeping, 'as well as I love my life—better than I love my life. I don't deserve to be so treated. I am as grateful to Amy, and as fond of Amy, as it's possible for any human being to be. I wish I was dead. I never was so wickedly wronged. And only because I am anxious for the family credit.'

'To the winds with the family credit!' cried the old man, with great scorn and indignation. 'Brother, I protest against pride. I protest against ingratitude. I protest against any one of us here who have known what we have known, and have seen what we have seen, setting up any pretension that puts Amy at a moment's disadvantage, or to the cost of a moment's pain. We may know that it's a base pretension by its having that effect. It ought to bring a judgment on us. Brother, I protest against it in the sight of God!'

As his hand went up above his head and came down on the table, it might have been a blacksmith's. After a few moments' silence, it had relaxed into its usual weak condition. He went round to his brother with his ordinary shuffling step, put the hand on his shoulder, and said, in a softened voice, 'William, my dear, I felt obliged to say it; forgive me, for I felt obliged to say it!' and then went, in his bowed way, out of the palace hall, just as he might have gone out of the Marshalsea room.

All this time Fanny had been sobbing and crying, and still continued to do so. Edward, beyond opening his mouth in amazement, had not opened his lips, and had done nothing but stare. Mr Dorrit also had been utterly discomfited, and quite unable to assert himself in any way. Fanny was now the first to speak.

'I never, never, never was so used!' she sobbed. 'There never was anything so harsh and unjustifiable, so disgracefully violent and cruel! Dear, kind, quiet little Amy, too, what would she feel if she could know that she had been innocently the means of exposing me to such treatment! But I'll never tell her! No, good darling, I'll never tell her!'

This helped Mr Dorrit to break his silence.

'My dear,' said he, 'I—ha—approve of your resolution. It will be—ha hum—much better not to speak of this to Amy. It might—hum—it might distress her. Ha. No doubt it would distress her greatly. It is considerate and right to avoid doing so. We will—ha—keep this to ourselves.'

'But the cruelty of Uncle!' cried Miss Fanny. 'O, I never can forgive the wanton cruelty of Uncle!'

'My dear,' said Mr Dorrit, recovering his tone, though he remained unusually pale, 'I must request you not to say so. You must remember that your uncle is—ha—not what he formerly was. You must remember that your uncle's state requires—hum—great forbearance from us, great forbearance.'

'I am sure,' cried Fanny, piteously, 'it is only charitable to suppose that there Must be something wrong in him somewhere, or he never could have so attacked Me, of all the people in the world.'

'Fanny,' returned Mr Dorrit in a deeply fraternal tone, 'you know, with his innumerable good points, what a—hum—wreck your uncle is; and, I entreat you by the fondness that I have for him, and by the fidelity that you know I have always shown him, to—ha—to draw your own conclusions, and to spare my brotherly feelings.'

This ended the scene; Edward Dorrit, Esquire, saying nothing throughout, but looking, to the last, perplexed and doubtful. Miss Fanny awakened much affectionate uneasiness in her sister's mind that day by passing the greater part of it in violent fits of embracing her, and in alternately giving her brooches, and wishing herself dead.

CHAPTER 6. Something Right Somewhere

To be in the halting state of Mr Henry Gowan; to have left one of two powers in disgust; to want the necessary qualifications for finding promotion with another, and to be loitering moodily about on neutral ground, cursing both; is to be in a situation unwholesome for the mind, which time is not likely to improve. The worst class of sum worked in the every-day world is cyphered by the diseased arithmeticians who are always in the rule of Subtraction as to the merits and successes of others, and never in Addition as to their own.

The habit, too, of seeking some sort of recompense in the discontented boast of being disappointed, is a habit fraught with degeneracy. A certain idle carelessness and recklessness of consistency soon comes of it. To bring deserving things down by setting undeserving things up is one of its perverted delights; and there is no playing fast and loose with the truth, in any game, without growing the worse for it.

In his expressed opinions of all performances in the Art of painting that were completely destitute of merit, Gowan was the most liberal fellow on earth. He would declare such a man to have more power in his little finger (provided he had none), than such another had (provided he had much) in his whole mind and body. If the objection were taken that the thing commended was trash, he would reply, on behalf of his art, 'My good fellow, what do we all turn out but trash? I turn out nothing else, and I make you a present of the confession.'

To make a vaunt of being poor was another of the incidents of his splenetic state, though this may have had the design in it of showing that he ought to be rich; just as he would publicly laud and decry the Barnacles, lest it should be forgotten that he belonged to the family. Howbeit, these two subjects were very often on his lips; and he managed them so well that he might have praised himself by the month together, and not have made himself out half so important a man as he did by his light disparagement of his claims on anybody's consideration.

Out of this same airy talk of his, it always soon came to be understood, wherever he and his wife went, that he had married against the wishes of his exalted relations, and had had much ado to prevail on them to countenance her. He never made the representation, on the contrary seemed to laugh the idea to scorn; but it did happen that, with all his pains to depreciate himself, he was always in the superior position. From the days of their honeymoon, Minnie Gowan felt sensible of being usually regarded as the wife of a man who had made a descent in marrying her, but whose chivalrous love for her had cancelled that inequality.

To Venice they had been accompanied by Monsieur Blandois of Paris, and at Venice Monsieur Blandois of Paris was very much in the society of Gowan. When they had first met this gallant gentleman at Geneva, Gowan had been undecided whether to kick him or encourage him; and had remained for about four-and-twenty hours, so troubled to settle the point to his satisfaction, that he had thought of tossing up a five-franc piece on the terms, 'Tails, kick; heads, encourage,' and abiding by the voice of the oracle. It chanced, however, that his wife expressed a dislike to the engaging Blandois, and that the balance of feeling in the hotel was against him. Upon it, Gowan resolved to encourage him.

Why this perversity, if it were not in a generous fit?—which it was not. Why should Gowan, very much the superior of Blandois of Paris, and very well able to pull that prepossessing gentleman to pieces and find out the stuff he was made of, take up with such a man? In the first place, he opposed the first separate wish he observed in his wife, because her father had paid his debts and it was desirable to take an early opportunity of asserting his independence. In the second place, he opposed the prevalent feeling, because with many capacities of being otherwise, he was an ill-conditioned man. He found a pleasure in declaring that a courtier with the refined manners of Blandois ought to rise to the greatest distinction in any polished country. He found a pleasure in setting up Blandois as the type of elegance, and making him a satire upon others who piqued themselves on personal graces. He seriously protested that the bow of Blandois was perfect, that the address of Blandois was irresistible, and that the picturesque ease of Blandois would be cheaply purchased (if it were not a gift, and unpurchasable) for a hundred thousand francs. That exaggeration in the manner of the man which has been noticed as appertaining to him and to every such man, whatever his original breeding, as certainly as the sun belongs to this system, was acceptable to Gowan as a caricature, which he found it a humorous resource to have at hand for the ridiculing of numbers of people who necessarily did more or less of what Blandois overdid. Thus he had taken up with him; and thus, negligently strengthening these inclinations with habit, and idly deriving some amusement from his talk, he had glided into a way of having him for a companion. This, though he supposed him to live by his wits at play-tables and the like; though he suspected him to be a coward, while he himself was daring and courageous; though he thoroughly knew him to be disliked by Minnie; and though he cared so little for him, after all, that if he had given her any tangible personal cause to regard him with aversion, he would have had no compunction whatever in flinging him out of the highest window in Venice into the deepest water of the city.

Little Dorrit would have been glad to make her visit to Mrs Gowan, alone; but as Fanny, who had not yet recovered from her Uncle's protest, though it was four-and-twenty hours of age, pressingly offered her company, the two sisters stepped together into one of the gondolas under Mr Dorrit's window, and, with the courier in attendance, were taken in high state to Mrs Gowan's lodging. In truth, their state was rather too high for the lodging, which was, as Fanny complained, 'fearfully out of the way,' and which took them through a complexity of narrow streets of water, which the same lady disparaged as 'mere ditches.'

The house, on a little desert island, looked as if it had broken away from somewhere else, and had floated by chance into its present anchorage in company with a vine almost as much in want of training as the poor wretches who were lying under its leaves. The features of the surrounding picture were, a church with hoarding and scaffolding about it, which had been under suppositious repair so long that the means of repair looked a hundred years old, and had themselves fallen into decay; a quantity of washed linen, spread to dry in the sun; a number of houses at odds with one another and grotesquely out of the perpendicular, like rotten pre-Adamite cheeses cut into fantastic shapes and full of mites; and a feverish bewilderment of windows, with their lattice-blinds all hanging askew, and something draggled and dirty dangling out of most of them.

On the first-floor of the house was a Bank—a surprising experience for any gentleman of commercial pursuits bringing laws for all mankind from a British city—where two spare clerks, like dried dragoons, in green velvet caps adorned with golden tassels, stood, bearded, behind a small counter in a small room, containing no other visible objects than an empty iron-safe with the door open, a jug of water, and a papering of garland of roses; but who, on lawful requisition, by merely dipping their hands out of sight, could produce exhaustless mounds of five-franc pieces. Below the Bank was a suite of three or four rooms with barred windows, which had the appearance of a jail for criminal rats. Above the Bank was Mrs Gowan's residence.

Notwithstanding that its walls were blotched, as if missionary maps were bursting out of them to impart geographical knowledge; notwithstanding that its weird furniture was forlornly faded and musty, and that the prevailing Venetian odour of bilge water and an ebb tide on a weedy shore was very strong; the place was better within, than it promised. The door was opened by a smiling man like a reformed assassin—a temporary servant—who ushered them into the room where Mrs Gowan sat, with the announcement that two beautiful English ladies were come to see the mistress.

Mrs Gowan, who was engaged in needlework, put her work aside in a covered basket, and rose, a little hurriedly. Miss Fanny was excessively courteous to her, and said the usual nothings with the skill of a veteran.

'Papa was extremely sorry,' proceeded Fanny, 'to be engaged to-day (he is so much engaged here, our acquaintance being so wretchedly large!); and particularly requested me to bring his card for Mr Gowan. That I may be sure to acquit myself of a commission which he impressed upon me at least a dozen times, allow me to relieve my conscience by placing it on the table at once.'

Which she did with veteran ease.

'We have been,' said Fanny, 'charmed to understand that you know the Merdles. We hope it may be another means of bringing us together.'

'They are friends,' said Mrs Gowan, 'of Mr Gowan's family. I have not yet had the pleasure of a personal introduction to Mrs Merdle, but I suppose I shall be presented to her at Rome.'

'Indeed?' returned Fanny, with an appearance of amiably quenching her own superiority. 'I think you'll like her.'

'You know her very well?'

'Why, you see,' said Fanny, with a frank action of her pretty shoulders, 'in London one knows every one. We met her on our way here, and, to say the truth, papa was at first rather cross with her for taking one of the rooms that our people had ordered for us.

However, of course, that soon blew over, and we were all good friends again.'

Although the visit had as yet given Little Dorrit no opportunity of conversing with Mrs Gowan, there was a silent understanding between them, which did as well. She looked at Mrs Gowan with keen and unabated interest; the sound of her voice was thrilling to her; nothing that was near her, or about her, or at all concerned her, escaped Little Dorrit. She was quicker to perceive the slightest matter here, than in any other case—but one.

'You have been quite well,' she now said, 'since that night?'

'Quite, my dear. And you?' 'Oh! I am always well,' said Little Dorrit, timidly. 'I—yes, thank you.'

There was no reason for her faltering and breaking off, other than that Mrs Gowan had touched her hand in speaking to her, and their looks had met. Something thoughtfully apprehensive in the large, soft eyes, had checked Little Dorrit in an instant.

'You don't know that you are a favourite of my husband's, and that I am almost bound to be jealous of you?' said Mrs Gowan.

Little Dorrit, blushing, shook her head.

'He will tell you, if he tells you what he tells me, that you are quieter and quicker of resource than any one he ever saw.'

'He speaks far too well of me,' said Little Dorrit.

'I doubt that; but I don't at all doubt that I must tell him you are here. I should never be forgiven, if I were to let you—and Miss Dorrit—go, without doing so. May I? You can excuse the disorder and discomfort of a painter's studio?'

The inquiries were addressed to Miss Fanny, who graciously replied that she would be beyond anything interested and enchanted. Mrs Gowan went to a door, looked in beyond it, and came back. 'Do Henry the favour to come in,' said she, 'I knew he would be pleased!'

The first object that confronted Little Dorrit, entering first, was Blandois of Paris in a great cloak and a furtive slouched hat, standing on a throne platform in a corner, as he had stood on the Great Saint Bernard, when the warning arms seemed to be all pointing up at him. She recoiled from this figure, as it smiled at her.

'Don't be alarmed,' said Gowan, coming from his easel behind the door. 'It's only Blandois. He is doing duty as a model to-day. I am making a study of him. It saves me money to turn him to some use. We poor painters have none to spare.'

Blandois of Paris pulled off his slouched hat, and saluted the ladies without coming out of his corner.

'A thousand pardons!' said he. 'But the Professore here is so inexorable with me, that I am afraid to stir.'

'Don't stir, then,' said Gowan coolly, as the sisters approached the easel. 'Let the ladies at least see the original of the daub, that they may know what it's meant for. There he stands, you see. A bravo waiting for his prey, a distinguished noble waiting to save his country, the common enemy waiting to do somebody a bad turn, an angelic messenger waiting to do somebody a good turn—whatever you think he looks most like!' 'Say, Professore Mio, a poor gentleman waiting to do homage to elegance and beauty,' remarked Blandois.

'Or say, Cattivo Soggetto Mio,' returned Gowan, touching the painted face with his brush in the part where the real face had moved, 'a murderer after the fact. Show that white hand of yours, Blandois. Put it outside the cloak. Keep it still.'

Blandois' hand was unsteady; but he laughed, and that would naturally shake it.

'He was formerly in some scuffle with another murderer, or with a victim, you observe,' said Gowan, putting in the markings of the hand with a quick, impatient, unskilful touch, 'and these are the tokens of it. Outside the cloak, man!—Corpo di San Marco, what are you thinking of?'

Blandois of Paris shook with a laugh again, so that his hand shook more; now he raised it to twist his moustache, which had a damp appearance; and now he stood in the required position, with a little new swagger.

His face was so directed in reference to the spot where Little Dorrit stood by the easel, that throughout he looked at her. Once attracted by his peculiar eyes, she could not remove her own, and they had looked at each other all the time. She trembled now; Gowan, feeling it, and supposing her to be alarmed by the large dog beside him, whose head she caressed in her hand, and who had just uttered a low growl, glanced at her to say, 'He won't hurt you, Miss Dorrit.'

'I am not afraid of him,' she returned in the same breath; 'but will you look at him?'

In a moment Gowan had thrown down his brush, and seized the dog with both hands by the collar.

'Blandois! How can you be such a fool as to provoke him! By Heaven, and the other place too, he'll tear you to bits! Lie down!

Lion! Do you hear my voice, you rebel!

'The great dog, regardless of being half-choked by his collar, was obdurately pulling with his dead weight against his master, resolved to get across the room. He had been crouching for a spring at the moment when his master caught him.

'Lion! Lion!' He was up on his hind legs, and it was a wrestle between master and dog. 'Get back! Down, Lion! Get out of his sight, Blandois! What devil have you conjured into the dog?'

'I have done nothing to him.'

'Get out of his sight or I can't hold the wild beast! Get out of the room! By my soul, he'll kill you!'

The dog, with a ferocious bark, made one other struggle as Blandois vanished; then, in the moment of the dog's submission, the master, little less angry than the dog, felled him with a blow on the head, and standing over him, struck him many times severely with the heel of his boot, so that his mouth was presently bloody.

'Now get you into that corner and lie down,' said Gowan, 'or I'll take you out and shoot you.'

Lion did as he was ordered, and lay down licking his mouth and chest. Lion's master stopped for a moment to take breath, and then, recovering his usual coolness of manner, turned to speak to his frightened wife and her visitors. Probably the whole occurrence had not occupied two minutes.

'Come, come, Minnie! You know he is always good-humoured and tractable. Blandois must have irritated him,—made faces at him. The dog has his likings and dislikings, and Blandois is no great favourite of his; but I am sure you will give him a character, Minnie, for never having been like this before.'

Minnie was too much disturbed to say anything connected in reply; Little Dorrit was already occupied in soothing her; Fanny, who had cried out twice or thrice, held Gowan's arm for protection; Lion, deeply ashamed of having caused them this alarm, came trailing himself along the ground to the feet of his mistress.

'You furious brute,' said Gowan, striking him with his foot again. 'You shall do penance for this.' And he struck him again, and yet again.

'O, pray don't punish him any more,' cried Little Dorrit. 'Don't hurt him. See how gentle he is!' At her entreaty, Gowan spared him; and he deserved her intercession, for truly he was as submissive, and as sorry, and as wretched as a dog could be.

It was not easy to recover this shock and make the visit unrestrained, even though Fanny had not been, under the best of circumstances, the least trifle in the way. In such further communication as passed among them before the sisters took their departure, Little Dorrit fancied it was revealed to her that Mr Gowan treated his wife, even in his very fondness, too much like a beautiful child. He seemed so unsuspicious of the depths of feeling which she knew must lie below that surface, that she doubted if there could be any such depths in himself. She wondered whether his want of earnestness might be the natural result of his want of such qualities, and whether it was with people as with ships, that, in too shallow and rocky waters, their anchors had no hold, and they drifted anywhere.

He attended them down the staircase, jocosely apologising for the poor quarters to which such poor fellows as himself were limited, and remarking that when the high and mighty Barnacles, his relatives, who would be dreadfully ashamed of them, presented him with better, he would live in better to oblige them. At the water's edge they were saluted by Blandois, who looked white enough after his late adventure, but who made very light of it notwithstanding,—laughing at the mention of Lion.

Leaving the two together under the scrap of vine upon the causeway, Gowan idly scattering the leaves from it into the water, and Blandois lighting a cigarette, the sisters were paddled away in state as they had come. They had not glided on for many minutes, when Little Dorrit became aware that Fanny was more showy in manner than the occasion appeared to require, and, looking about for the cause through the window and through the open door, saw another gondola evidently in waiting on them.

As this gondola attended their progress in various artful ways; sometimes shooting on a-head, and stopping to let them pass; sometimes, when the way was broad enough, skimming along side by side with them; and sometimes following close astern; and as Fanny gradually made no disguise that she was playing off graces upon somebody within it, of whom she at the same time feigned to be unconscious; Little Dorrit at length asked who it was?

To which Fanny made the short answer, 'That gaby.'

'Who?' said Little Dorrit.

'My dear child,' returned Fanny (in a tone suggesting that before her Uncle's protest she might have said, You little fool, instead), 'how slow you are! Young Sparkler.'

She lowered the window on her side, and, leaning back and resting her elbow on it negligently, fanned herself with a rich Spanish fan of black and gold. The attendant gondola, having skimmed forward again, with some swift trace of an eye in the window, Fanny laughed coquettishly and said, 'Did you ever see such a fool, my love?'

'Do you think he means to follow you all the way?' asked Little Dorrit.

'My precious child,' returned Fanny, 'I can't possibly answer for what an idiot in a state of desperation may do, but I should think it highly probable. It's not such an enormous distance. All Venice would scarcely be that, I imagine, if he's dying for a glimpse of me.'

'And is he?' asked Little Dorrit in perfect simplicity.

'Well, my love, that really is an awkward question for me to answer,' said her sister. 'I believe he is. You had better ask Edward. He tells Edward he is, I believe. I understand he makes a perfect spectacle of himself at the Casino, and that sort of places, by going on about me. But you had better ask Edward if you want to know.'

'I wonder he doesn't call,' said Little Dorrit after thinking a moment.

'My dear Amy, your wonder will soon cease, if I am rightly informed. I should not be at all surprised if he called to-day. The creature has only been waiting to get his courage up, I suspect.'

'Will you see him?'

'Indeed, my darling,' said Fanny, 'that's just as it may happen. Here he is again. Look at him. O, you simpleton!'

Mr Sparkler had, undeniably, a weak appearance; with his eye in the window like a knot in the glass, and no reason on earth for stopping his bark suddenly, except the real reason.

'When you asked me if I will see him, my dear,' said Fanny, almost as well composed in the graceful indifference of her attitude as Mrs Merdle herself, 'what do you mean?' 'I mean,' said Little Dorrit—'I think I rather mean what do you mean, dear Fanny?'

Fanny laughed again, in a manner at once condescending, arch, and affable; and said, putting her arm round her sister in a playfully affectionate way:

'Now tell me, my little pet. When we saw that woman at Martigny, how did you think she carried it off? Did you see what she decided on in a moment?'

'No, Fanny.'

'Then I'll tell you, Amy. She settled with herself, now I'll never refer to that meeting under such different circumstances, and I'll never pretend to have any idea that these are the same girls. That's her way out of a difficulty. What did I tell you when we came away from Harley Street that time? She is as insolent and false as any woman in the world. But in the first capacity, my love, she may find people who can match her.'

A significant turn of the Spanish fan towards Fanny's bosom, indicated with great expression where one of these people was to be found.

'Not only that,' pursued Fanny, 'but she gives the same charge to Young Sparkler; and doesn't let him come after me until she has got it thoroughly into his most ridiculous of all ridiculous noddles (for one really can't call it a head), that he is to pretend to have been first struck with me in that Inn Yard.'

'Why?' asked Little Dorrit.

'Why? Good gracious, my love!' (again very much in the tone of You stupid little creature) 'how can you ask? Don't you see that I may have become a rather desirable match for a noddle? And don't you see that she puts the deception upon us, and makes a pretence, while she shifts it from her own shoulders (very good shoulders they are too, I must say),' observed Miss Fanny, glancing complacently at herself, 'of considering our feelings?'

'But we can always go back to the plain truth.'

'Yes, but if you please we won't,' retorted Fanny. 'No; I am not going to have that done, Amy. The pretext is none of mine; it's hers, and she shall have enough of it.'

In the triumphant exaltation of her feelings, Miss Fanny, using her Spanish fan with one hand, squeezed her sister's waist with the other, as if she were crushing Mrs Merdle.

'No,' repeated Fanny. 'She shall find me go her way. She took it, and I'll follow it. And, with the blessing of fate and fortune, I'll go on improving that woman's acquaintance until I have given her maid, before her eyes, things from my dressmaker's ten times as handsome and expensive as she once gave me from hers!'

Little Dorrit was silent; sensible that she was not to be heard on any question affecting the family dignity, and unwilling to lose to no purpose her sister's newly and unexpectedly restored favour. She could not concur, but she was silent. Fanny well knew what she was thinking of; so well, that she soon asked her.

Her reply was, 'Do you mean to encourage Mr Sparkler, Fanny?'

'Encourage him, my dear?' said her sister, smiling contemptuously, 'that depends upon what you call encourage. No, I don't mean to encourage him. But I'll make a slave of him.'

Little Dorrit glanced seriously and doubtfully in her face, but Fanny was not to be so brought to a check. She furled her fan of black and gold, and used it to tap her sister's nose; with the air of a proud beauty and a great spirit, who toyed with and playfully instructed a homely companion.

'I shall make him fetch and carry, my dear, and I shall make him subject to me. And if I don't make his mother subject to me, too, it shall not be my fault.'

'Do you think—dear Fanny, don't be offended, we are so comfortable together now—that you can quite see the end of that course?'

'I can't say I have so much as looked for it yet, my dear,' answered Fanny, with supreme indifference; 'all in good time. Such are my intentions. And really they have taken me so long to develop, that here we are at home. And Young Sparkler at the door, inquiring who is within. By the merest accident, of course!'

In effect, the swain was standing up in his gondola, card-case in hand, affecting to put the question to a servant. This conjunction of circumstances led to his immediately afterwards presenting himself before the young ladies in a posture, which in ancient times would not have been considered one of favourable augury for his suit; since the gondoliers of the young ladies, having been put to some inconvenience by the chase, so neatly brought their own boat in the gentlest collision with the bark of Mr Sparkler, as to tip that gentleman over like a larger species of ninepin, and cause him to exhibit the soles of his shoes to the object of his dearest wishes: while the nobler portions of his anatomy struggled at the bottom of his boat in the arms of one of his men.

However, as Miss Fanny called out with much concern, Was the gentleman hurt, Mr Sparkler rose more restored than might have been expected, and stammered for himself with blushes, 'Not at all so.' Miss Fanny had no recollection of having ever seen him before, and was passing on, with a distant inclination of her head, when he announced himself by name. Even then she was in a difficulty from being unable to call it to mind, until he explained that he had had the honour of seeing her at Martigny. Then she remembered him, and hoped his lady-mother was well.

'Thank you,' stammered Mr Sparkler, 'she's uncommonly well—at least, poorly.'

'In Venice?' said Miss Fanny.

'In Rome,' Mr Sparkler answered. 'I am here by myself, myself. I came to call upon Mr Edward Dorrit myself. Indeed, upon Mr Dorrit likewise. In fact, upon the family.'

Turning graciously to the attendants, Miss Fanny inquired whether her papa or brother was within? The reply being that they were both within, Mr Sparkler humbly offered his arm. Miss Fanny accepting it, was squired up the great staircase by Mr Sparkler, who, if he still believed (which there is not any reason to doubt) that she had no nonsense about her, rather deceived himself.

Arrived in a mouldering reception-room, where the faded hangings, of a sad sea-green, had worn and withered until they looked as if they might have claimed kindred with the waifs of seaweed drifting under the windows, or clinging to the walls and weeping for their imprisoned relations, Miss Fanny despatched emissaries for her father and brother. Pending whose appearance, she showed to great advantage on a sofa, completing Mr Sparkler's conquest with some remarks upon Dante—known to that gentleman as an eccentric man in the nature of an Old File, who used to put leaves round his head, and sit upon a stool for some unaccountable purpose, outside the cathedral at Florence.

Mr Dorrit welcomed the visitor with the highest urbanity, and most courtly manners. He inquired particularly after Mrs Merdle. He inquired particularly after Mr Merdle. Mr Sparkler said, or rather twitched out of himself in small pieces by the shirt-collar, that Mrs Merdle having completely used up her place in the country, and also her house at Brighton, and being, of course, unable, don't you see, to remain in London when there wasn't a soul there, and not feeling herself this year quite up to visiting about at people's places, had resolved to have a touch at Rome, where a woman like herself, with a proverbially fine appearance, and with no nonsense about her, couldn't fail to be a great acquisition. As to Mr Merdle, he was so much wanted by the men in the City and the rest of those places, and was such a doosed extraordinary phenomenon in Buying and Banking and that, that Mr Sparkler doubted if the monetary system of the country would be able to spare him; though that his work was occasionally one too many for him, and that he would be all the better for a temporary shy at an entirely new scene and climate, Mr Sparkler did not conceal. As to himself, Mr Sparkler conveyed to the Dorrit family that he was going, on rather particular business, wherever they were going.

This immense conversational achievement required time, but was effected. Being effected, Mr Dorrit expressed his hope that Mr Sparkler would shortly dine with them. Mr Sparkler received the idea so kindly that Mr Dorrit asked what he was going to do that day, for instance? As he was going to do nothing that day (his usual occupation, and one for which he was particularly qualified), he was secured without postponement; being further bound over to accompany the ladies to the Opera in the evening.

At dinner-time Mr Sparkler rose out of the sea, like Venus's son taking after his mother, and made a splendid appearance ascending the great staircase. If Fanny had been charming in the morning, she was now thrice charming, very becomingly dressed in her most suitable colours, and with an air of negligence upon her that doubled Mr Sparkler's fetters, and riveted them.

'I hear you are acquainted, Mr Sparkler,' said his host at dinner, 'with—ha—Mr Gowan. Mr Henry Gowan?'

'Perfectly, sir,' returned Mr Sparkler. 'His mother and my mother are cronies in fact.'

'If I had thought of it, Amy,' said Mr Dorrit, with a patronage as magnificent as that of Lord Decimus himself, 'you should have despatched a note to them, asking them to dine to-day. Some of our people could have—ha—fetched them, and taken them home. We could have spared a—hum—gondola for that purpose. I am sorry to have forgotten this. Pray remind me of them to-morrow.'

Little Dorrit was not without doubts how Mr Henry Gowan might take their patronage; but she promised not to fail in the reminder.

'Pray, does Mr Henry Gowan paint—ha—Portraits?' inquired Mr Dorrit.

Mr Sparkler opined that he painted anything, if he could get the job.

'He has no particular walk?' said Mr Dorrit.

Mr Sparkler, stimulated by Love to brilliancy, replied that for a particular walk a man ought to have a particular pair of shoes; as, for example, shooting, shooting-shoes; cricket, cricket-shoes. Whereas, he believed that Henry Gowan had no particular pair of shoes.

'No speciality?' said Mr Dorrit.

This being a very long word for Mr Sparkler, and his mind being exhausted by his late effort, he replied, 'No, thank you. I seldom take it.'

'Well!' said Mr Dorrit. 'It would be very agreeable to me to present a gentleman so connected, with some—ha—Testimonial of my desire to further his interests, and develop the—hum—germs of his genius. I think I must engage Mr Gowan to paint my picture. If the result should be—ha—mutually satisfactory, I might afterwards engage him to try his hand upon my family.'

The exquisitely bold and original thought presented itself to Mr Sparkler, that there was an opening here for saying there were some of the family (emphasising 'some' in a marked manner) to whom no painter could render justice. But, for want of a form of words in which to express the idea, it returned to the skies.

This was the more to be regretted as Miss Fanny greatly applauded the notion of the portrait, and urged her papa to act upon it. She surmised, she said, that Mr Gowan had lost better and higher opportunities by marrying his pretty wife; and Love in a cottage, painting pictures for dinner, was so delightfully interesting, that she begged her papa to give him the commission whether he could paint a likeness or not: though indeed both she and Amy knew he could, from having seen a speaking likeness on his easel that day, and having had the opportunity of comparing it with the original. These remarks made Mr Sparkler (as perhaps they were intended to do) nearly distracted; for while on the one hand they expressed Miss Fanny's susceptibility of the tender passion, she herself showed such an innocent unconsciousness of his admiration that his eyes goggled in his head with jealousy of an unknown rival.

Descending into the sea again after dinner, and ascending out of it at the Opera staircase, preceded by one of their gondoliers, like an attendant Merman, with a great linen lantern, they entered their box, and Mr Sparkler entered on an evening of agony. The theatre being dark, and the box light, several visitors lounged in during the representation; in whom Fanny was so interested, and in conversation with whom she fell into such charming attitudes, as she had little confidences with them, and little disputes concerning the identity of people in distant boxes, that the wretched Sparkler hated all mankind. But he had two consolations at the close of the performance. She gave him her fan to hold while she adjusted her cloak, and it was his blessed privilege to give her his arm down-stairs again. These crumbs of encouragement, Mr Sparkler thought, would just keep him going; and it is not impossible that Miss Dorrit thought so too.

The Merman with his light was ready at the box-door, and other Mermen with other lights were ready at many of the doors. The Dorrit Merman held his lantern low, to show the steps, and Mr Sparkler put on another heavy set of fetters over his former set, as he watched her radiant feet twinkling down the stairs beside him. Among the loiterers here, was Blandois of Paris. He spoke, and moved forward beside Fanny.

Little Dorrit was in front with her brother and Mrs General (Mr Dorrit had remained at home), but on the brink of the quay they all came together. She started again to find Blandois close to her, handing Fanny into the boat.

'Gowan has had a loss,' he said, 'since he was made happy to-day by a visit from fair ladies.'

'A loss?' repeated Fanny, relinquished by the bereaved Sparkler, and taking her seat.

'A loss,' said Blandois. 'His dog Lion.'

Little Dorrit's hand was in his, as he spoke.

'He is dead,' said Blandois.

'Dead?' echoed Little Dorrit. 'That noble dog?'

'Faith, dear ladies!' said Blandois, smiling and shrugging his shoulders, 'somebody has poisoned that noble dog. He is as dead as the Doges!'

CHAPTER 7. Mostly, Prunes and Prism

Mrs General, always on her coach-box keeping the proprieties well together, took pains to form a surface on her very dear young friend, and Mrs General's very dear young friend tried hard to receive it. Hard as she had tried in her laborious life to attain many ends, she had never tried harder than she did now, to be varnished by Mrs General. It made her anxious and ill at ease to be operated upon by that smoothing hand, it is true; but she submitted herself to the family want in its greatness as she had submitted herself to the family want in its littleness, and yielded to her own inclinations in this thing no more than she had yielded to her hunger itself, in the days when she had saved her dinner that her father might have his supper.

One comfort that she had under the Ordeal by General was more sustaining to her, and made her more grateful than to a less devoted and affectionate spirit, not habituated to her struggles and sacrifices, might appear quite reasonable; and, indeed, it may often be observed in life, that spirits like Little Dorrit do not appear to reason half as carefully as the folks who get the better of them. The continued kindness of her sister was this comfort to Little Dorrit. It was nothing to her that the kindness took the form of tolerant patronage; she was used to that. It was nothing to her that it kept her in a tributary position, and showed her in attendance on the flaming car in which Miss Fanny sat on an elevated seat, exacting homage; she sought no better place. Always admiring Fanny's beauty, and grace, and readiness, and not now asking herself how much of her disposition to be strongly attached to Fanny was due to her own heart, and how much to Fanny's, she gave her all the sisterly fondness her great heart contained.

The wholesale amount of Prunes and Prism which Mrs General infused into the family life, combined with the perpetual plunges made by Fanny into society, left but a very small residue of any natural deposit at the bottom of the mixture. This rendered confidences with Fanny doubly precious to Little Dorrit, and heightened the relief they afforded her.

'Amy,' said Fanny to her one night when they were alone, after a day so tiring that Little Dorrit was quite worn out, though Fanny would have taken another dip into society with the greatest pleasure in life, 'I am going to put something into your little head. You won't guess what it is, I suspect.'

'I don't think that's likely, dear,' said Little Dorrit.

'Come, I'll give you a clue, child,' said Fanny. 'Mrs General.'

Prunes and Prism, in a thousand combinations, having been wearily in the ascendant all day—everything having been surface and varnish and show without substance—Little Dorrit looked as if she had hoped that Mrs General was safely tucked up in bed for some hours.

'Now, can you guess, Amy?' said Fanny.

'No, dear. Unless I have done anything,' said Little Dorrit, rather alarmed, and meaning anything calculated to crack varnish and ruffle surface.

Fanny was so very much amused by the misgiving, that she took up her favourite fan (being then seated at her dressing-table with her armoury of cruel instruments about her, most of them reeking from the heart of Sparkler), and tapped her sister frequently on the nose with it, laughing all the time.

'Oh, our Amy, our Amy!' said Fanny. 'What a timid little goose our Amy is! But this is nothing to laugh at. On the contrary, I am very cross, my dear.'

'As it is not with me, Fanny, I don't mind,' returned her sister, smiling.

'Ah! But I do mind,' said Fanny, 'and so will you, Pet, when I enlighten you. Amy, has it never struck you that somebody is monstrously polite to Mrs General?'

'Everybody is polite to Mrs General,' said Little Dorrit. 'Because—'

'Because she freezes them into it?' interrupted Fanny. 'I don't mean that; quite different from that. Come! Has it never struck you, Amy, that Pa is monstrously polite to Mrs General.'

Amy, murmuring 'No,' looked quite confounded. 'No; I dare say not. But he is,' said Fanny. 'He is, Amy. And remember my words. Mrs General has designs on Pa!'

'Dear Fanny, do you think it possible that Mrs General has designs on any one?'

'Do I think it possible?' retorted Fanny. 'My love, I know it. I tell you she has designs on Pa. And more than that, I tell you Pa considers her such a wonder, such a paragon of accomplishment, and such an acquisition to our family, that he is ready to get himself into a state of perfect infatuation with her at any moment. And that opens a pretty picture of things, I hope? Think of me with Mrs General for a Mama!'

Little Dorrit did not reply, 'Think of me with Mrs General for a Mama;' but she looked anxious, and seriously inquired what had led Fanny to these conclusions.

'Lord, my darling,' said Fanny, tartly. 'You might as well ask me how I know when a man is struck with myself! But, of course I do know. It happens pretty often: but I always know it. I know this in much the same way, I suppose. At all events, I know it.'

'You never heard Papa say anything?'

'Say anything?' repeated Fanny. 'My dearest, darling child, what necessity has he had, yet awhile, to say anything?'

'And you have never heard Mrs General say anything?' 'My goodness me, Amy,' returned Fanny, 'is she the sort of woman to say anything? Isn't it perfectly plain and clear that she has nothing to do at present but to hold herself upright, keep her aggravating gloves on, and go sweeping about? Say anything! If she had the ace of trumps in her hand at whist, she wouldn't say anything, child. It would come out when she played it.'

'At least, you may be mistaken, Fanny. Now, may you not?'

'O yes, I MAY be,' said Fanny, 'but I am not. However, I am glad you can contemplate such an escape, my dear, and I am glad that you can take this for the present with sufficient coolness to think of such a chance. It makes me hope that you may be able to bear the connection. I should not be able to bear it, and I should not try.

I'd marry young Sparkler first.'

'O, you would never marry him, Fanny, under any circumstances.'

'Upon my word, my dear,' rejoined that young lady with exceeding indifference, 'I wouldn't positively answer even for that. There's no knowing what might happen. Especially as I should have many opportunities, afterwards, of treating that woman, his mother, in her own style. Which I most decidedly should not be slow to avail myself of, Amy.'

No more passed between the sisters then; but what had passed gave the two subjects of Mrs General and Mr Sparkler great prominence in Little Dorrit's mind, and thenceforth she thought very much of both.

Mrs General, having long ago formed her own surface to such perfection that it hid whatever was below it (if anything), no observation was to be made in that quarter. Mr Dorrit was undeniably very polite to her and had a high opinion of her; but Fanny, impetuous at most times, might easily be wrong for all that.

Whereas, the Sparkler question was on the different footing that any one could see what was going on there, and Little Dorrit saw it and pondered on it with many doubts and wonderings.

The devotion of Mr Sparkler was only to be equalled by the caprice and cruelty of his enslaver. Sometimes she would prefer him to such distinction of notice, that he would chuckle aloud with joy; next day, or next hour, she would overlook him so completely, and drop him into such an abyss of obscurity, that he would groan under a weak pretence of coughing. The constancy of his attendance never touched Fanny: though he was so inseparable from Edward, that, when that gentleman wished for a change of society, he was under the irksome necessity of gliding out like a conspirator in disguised boats and by secret doors and back ways; though he was so solicitous to know how Mr Dorrit was, that he called every other day to inquire, as if Mr Dorrit were the prey of an intermittent fever; though he was so constantly being paddled up and down before the principal windows, that he might have been supposed to have made a wager for a large stake to be paddled a thousand miles in a thousand hours; though whenever the gondola of his mistress left the gate, the gondola of Mr Sparkler shot out from some watery ambush and gave chase, as if she were a fair smuggler and he a custom-house officer. It was probably owing to this fortification of the natural strength of his constitution with so much exposure to the air, and the salt sea, that Mr Sparkler did not pine outwardly; but, whatever the cause, he was so far from having any prospect of moving his mistress by a languishing state of health, that he grew bluffer every day, and that peculiarity in his appearance of seeming rather a swelled boy than a young man, became developed to an extraordinary degree of ruddy puffiness.

Blandois calling to pay his respects, Mr Dorrit received him with affability as the friend of Mr Gowan, and mentioned to him his idea of commissioning Mr Gowan to transmit him to posterity. Blandois highly extolling it, it occurred to Mr Dorrit that it might be agreeable to Blandois to communicate to his friend the great opportunity reserved for him. Blandois accepted the commission with his own free elegance of manner, and swore he would discharge it before he was an hour older. On his imparting the news to Gowan, that Master gave Mr Dorrit to the Devil with great liberality some round dozen of times (for he resented patronage almost as much as he resented the want of it), and was inclined to quarrel with his friend for bringing him the message.

'It may be a defect in my mental vision, Blandois,' said he, 'but may I die if I see what you have to do with this.'

'Death of my life,' replied Blandois, 'nor I neither, except that I thought I was serving my friend.'

'By putting an upstart's hire in his pocket?' said Gowan, frowning.

'Do you mean that? Tell your other friend to get his head painted for the sign of some public-house, and to get it done by a sign-painter. Who am I, and who is he?'

'Professore,' returned the ambassador, 'and who is Blandois?'

Without appearing at all interested in the latter question, Gowan angrily whistled Mr Dorrit away. But, next day, he resumed the subject by saying in his off-hand manner and with a slighting laugh, 'Well, Blandois, when shall we go to this Maecenas of yours?

We journeymen must take jobs when we can get them. When shall we go and look after this job?' 'When you will,' said the injured Blandois, 'as you please. What have I to do with it? What is it to me?'

'I can tell you what it is to me,' said Gowan. 'Bread and cheese. One must eat! So come along, my Blandois.'

Mr Dorrit received them in the presence of his daughters and of Mr Sparkler, who happened, by some surprising accident, to be calling there. 'How are you, Sparkler?' said Gowan carelessly. 'When you have to live by your mother wit, old boy, I hope you may get on better than I do.'

Mr Dorrit then mentioned his proposal. 'Sir,' said Gowan, laughing, after receiving it gracefully enough, 'I am new to the trade, and not expert at its mysteries. I believe I ought to look at you in various lights, tell you you are a capital subject, and consider when I shall be sufficiently disengaged to devote myself with the necessary enthusiasm to the fine picture I mean to make of you. I assure you,' and he laughed again, 'I feel quite a traitor in the camp of those dear, gifted, good, noble fellows, my brother artists, by not doing the hocus-pocus better. But I have not been brought up to it, and it's too late to learn it. Now, the fact is, I am a very bad painter, but not much worse than the generality. If you are going to throw away a hundred guineas or so, I am as poor as a poor relation of great people usually is, and I shall be very much obliged to you, if you'll throw them away upon me. I'll do the best I can for the money; and if the best should be bad, why even then, you may probably have a bad picture with a small name to it, instead of a bad picture with a large name to it.'

This tone, though not what he had expected, on the whole suited Mr Dorrit remarkably well. It showed that the gentleman, highly connected, and not a mere workman, would be under an obligation to him. He expressed his satisfaction in placing himself in Mr Gowan's hands, and trusted that he would have the pleasure, in their characters of private gentlemen, of improving his acquaintance.

'You are very good,' said Gowan. 'I have not forsworn society since I joined the brotherhood of the brush (the most delightful fellows on the face of the earth), and am glad enough to smell the old fine gunpowder now and then, though it did blow me into mid-air and my present calling. You'll not think, Mr Dorrit,' and here he laughed again in the easiest way, 'that I am lapsing into the freemasonry of the craft—for it's not so; upon my life I can't help betraying it wherever I go, though, by Jupiter, I love and honour the craft with all my might—if I propose a stipulation as to time and place?'

Ha! Mr Dorrit could erect no—hum—suspicion of that kind on Mr Gowan's frankness.

'Again you are very good,' said Gowan. 'Mr Dorrit, I hear you are going to Rome. I am going to Rome, having friends there. Let me begin to do you the injustice I have conspired to do you, there—not here. We shall all be hurried during the rest of our stay here; and though there's not a poorer man with whole elbows in Venice, than myself, I have not quite got all the Amateur out of me yet—comprising the trade again, you see!—and can't fall on to order, in a hurry, for the mere sake of the sixpences.' These remarks were not less favourably received by Mr Dorrit than their predecessors. They were the prelude to the first reception of Mr and Mrs Gowan at dinner, and they skilfully placed Gowan on his usual ground in the new family.

His wife, too, they placed on her usual ground. Miss Fanny understood, with particular distinctness, that Mrs Gowan's good looks had cost her husband very dear; that there had been a great disturbance about her in the Barnacle family; and that the Dowager Mrs Gowan, nearly heart-broken, had resolutely set her face against the marriage until overpowered by her maternal feelings. Mrs General likewise clearly understood that the attachment had occasioned much family grief and dissension. Of honest Mr

Meagles no mention was made; except that it was natural enough that a person of that sort should wish to raise his daughter out of his own obscurity, and that no one could blame him for trying his best to do so.

Little Dorrit's interest in the fair subject of this easily accepted belief was too earnest and watchful to fail in accurate observation. She could see that it had its part in throwing upon Mrs Gowan the touch of a shadow under which she lived, and she even had an instinctive knowledge that there was not the least truth in it. But it had an influence in placing obstacles in the way of her association with Mrs Gowan by making the Prunes and Prism school excessively polite to her, but not very intimate with her; and Little Dorrit, as an enforced sizar of that college, was obliged to submit herself humbly to its ordinances.

Nevertheless, there was a sympathetic understanding already established between the two, which would have carried them over greater difficulties, and made a friendship out of a more restricted intercourse. As though accidents were determined to be favourable to it, they had a new assurance of congeniality in the aversion which each perceived that the other felt towards Blandois of Paris; an aversion amounting to the repugnance and horror of a natural antipathy towards an odious creature of the reptile kind.

And there was a passive congeniality between them, besides this active one. To both of them, Blandois behaved in exactly the same manner; and to both of them his manner had uniformly something in it, which they both knew to be different from his bearing towards others. The difference was too minute in its expression to be perceived by others, but they knew it to be there. A mere trick of his evil eyes, a mere turn of his smooth white hand, a mere hair's-breadth of addition to the fall of his nose and the rise of the moustache in the most frequent movement of his face, conveyed to both of them, equally, a swagger personal to themselves. It was as if he had said, 'I have a secret power in this quarter. I know what I know.'

This had never been felt by them both in so great a degree, and never by each so perfectly to the knowledge of the other, as on a day when he came to Mr Dorrit's to take his leave before quitting Venice. Mrs Gowan was herself there for the same purpose, and he came upon the two together; the rest of the family being out. The two had not been together five minutes, and the peculiar manner seemed to convey to them, 'You were going to talk about me. Ha! Behold me here to prevent it!'

'Gowan is coming here?' said Blandois, with a smile.

Mrs Gowan replied he was not coming.

'Not coming!' said Blandois. 'Permit your devoted servant, when you leave here, to escort you home.'

'Thank you: I am not going home.'

'Not going home!' said Blandois. 'Then I am forlorn.'

That he might be; but he was not so forlorn as to roam away and leave them together. He sat entertaining them with his finest compliments, and his choicest conversation; but he conveyed to them, all the time, 'No, no, no, dear ladies. Behold me here expressly to prevent it!'

He conveyed it to them with so much meaning, and he had such a diabolical persistency in him, that at length, Mrs Gowan rose to depart. On his offering his hand to Mrs Gowan to lead her down the staircase, she retained Little Dorrit's hand in hers, with a cautious pressure, and said, 'No, thank you. But, if you will please to see if my boatman is there, I shall be obliged to you.'

It left him no choice but to go down before them. As he did so, hat in hand, Mrs Gowan whispered:

'He killed the dog.'

'Does Mr Gowan know it?' Little Dorrit whispered.

'No one knows it. Don't look towards me; look towards him. He will turn his face in a moment. No one knows it, but I am sure he did. You are?'

'I—I think so,' Little Dorrit answered.

'Henry likes him, and he will not think ill of him; he is so generous and open himself. But you and I feel sure that we think of him as he deserves. He argued with Henry that the dog had been already poisoned when he changed so, and sprang at him. Henry believes it, but we do not. I see he is listening, but can't hear.

Good-bye, my love! Good-bye!'

The last words were spoken aloud, as the vigilant Blandois stopped, turned his head, and looked at them from the bottom of the staircase. Assuredly he did look then, though he looked his politest, as if any real philanthropist could have desired no better employment than to lash a great stone to his neck, and drop him into the water flowing beyond the dark arched gateway in which he stood. No such benefactor to mankind being on the spot, he handed Mrs Gowan to her boat, and stood there until it had shot out of the narrow view; when he handed himself into his own boat and followed.

Little Dorrit had sometimes thought, and now thought again as she retraced her steps up the staircase, that he had made his way too easily into her father's house. But so many and such varieties of people did the same, through Mr Dorrit's participation in his elder daughter's society mania, that it was hardly an exceptional case. A perfect fury for making acquaintances on whom to impress their riches and importance, had seized the House of Dorrit.

It appeared on the whole, to Little Dorrit herself, that this same society in which they lived, greatly resembled a superior sort of Marshalsea. Numbers of people seemed to come abroad, pretty much as people had come into the prison; through debt, through idleness, relationship, curiosity, and general unfitness for getting on at home. They were brought into these foreign towns in the custody of couriers and local followers, just as the debtors had been brought into the prison. They prowled about the churches and picture-galleries, much in the old, dreary, prison-yard manner. They were usually going away again to-morrow or next week, and rarely knew their own minds, and seldom did what they said they would do, or went where they said they would go: in all this again, very like the prison debtors. They paid high for poor accommodation, and disparaged a place while they pretended to like it: which was exactly the Marshalsea custom. They were envied when they went away by people left behind, feigning not to want to go: and that again was the Marshalsea habit invariably. A certain set of words and phrases, as much belonging to tourists as the College and the Snuggery belonged to the jail, was always in their mouths. They had precisely the same incapacity for settling down to anything, as the prisoners used to have; they rather deteriorated one another, as the prisoners used to do; and they wore untidy dresses, and fell into a slouching way of life: still, always like the people in the Marshalsea.

The period of the family's stay at Venice came, in its course, to an end, and they moved, with their retinue, to Rome. Through a repetition of the former Italian scenes, growing more dirty and more haggard as they went on, and bringing them at length to where the very air was diseased, they passed to their destination. A fine residence had been taken for them on the Corso, and there they took up their abode, in a city where everything seemed to be trying to stand still for ever on the ruins of something else—

except the water, which, following eternal laws, tumbled and rolled from its glorious multitude of fountains.

Here it seemed to Little Dorrit that a change came over the Marshalsea spirit of their society, and that Prunes and Prism got the upper hand. Everybody was walking about St Peter's and the Vatican on somebody else's cork legs, and straining every visible object through somebody else's sieve. Nobody said what anything was, but everybody said what the Mrs Generals, Mr Eustace, or somebody else said it was. The whole body of travellers seemed to be a collection of voluntary human sacrifices, bound hand and foot, and delivered over to Mr Eustace and his attendants, to have the entrails of their intellects arranged according to the taste of that sacred priesthood. Through the rugged remains of temples and tombs and palaces and senate halls and theatres and amphitheatres of ancient days, hosts of tongue-tied and blindfolded moderns were carefully feeling their way, incessantly repeating Prunes and Prism in the endeavour to set their lips according to the received form. Mrs General was in her pure element. Nobody had an opinion. There was a formation of surface going on around her on an amazing scale, and it had not a flaw of courage or honest free speech in it.

Another modification of Prunes and Prism insinuated itself on Little Dorrit's notice very shortly after their arrival. They received an early visit from Mrs Merdle, who led that extensive department of life in the Eternal City that winter; and the skilful manner in which she and Fanny fenced with one another on the occasion, almost made her quiet sister wink, like the glittering of small-swords.

'So delighted,' said Mrs Merdle, 'to resume an acquaintance so inauspiciously begun at Martigny.'

'At Martigny, of course,' said Fanny. 'Charmed, I am sure!'

'I understand,' said Mrs Merdle, 'from my son Edmund Sparkler, that he has already improved that chance occasion. He has returned quite transported with Venice.'

'Indeed?' returned the careless Fanny. 'Was he there long?'

'I might refer that question to Mr Dorrit,' said Mrs Merdle, turning the bosom towards that gentleman; 'Edmund having been so much indebted to him for rendering his stay agreeable.'

'Oh, pray don't speak of it,' returned Fanny. 'I believe Papa had the pleasure of inviting Mr Sparkler twice or thrice,—but it was nothing. We had so many people about us, and kept such open house, that if he had that pleasure, it was less than nothing.'

'Except, my dear,' said Mr Dorrit, 'except—ha—as it afforded me unusual gratification to—hum—show by any means, however slight and worthless, the—ha, hum—high estimation in which, in—ha—common with the rest of the world, I hold so distinguished and princely a character as Mr Merdle's.'

The bosom received this tribute in its most engaging manner. 'Mr Merdle,' observed Fanny, as a means of dismissing Mr Sparkler into the background, 'is quite a theme of Papa's, you must know, Mrs Merdle.'

'I have been—ha—disappointed, madam,' said Mr Dorrit, 'to understand from Mr Sparkler that there is no great—hum—probability of Mr Merdle's coming abroad.'

'Why, indeed,' said Mrs Merdle, 'he is so much engaged and in such request, that I fear not. He has not been able to get abroad for years. You, Miss Dorrit, I believe have been almost continually abroad for a long time.'

'Oh dear yes,' drawled Fanny, with the greatest hardihood. 'An immense number of years.'

'So I should have inferred,' said Mrs Merdle.

'Exactly,' said Fanny.

'I trust, however,' resumed Mr Dorrit, 'that if I have not the—hum—great advantage of becoming known to Mr Merdle on this side of the Alps or Mediterranean, I shall have that honour on returning to England. It is an honour I particularly desire and shall particularly esteem.' 'Mr Merdle,' said Mrs Merdle, who had been looking admiringly at Fanny through her eye-glass, 'will esteem it, I am sure, no less.'

Little Dorrit, still habitually thoughtful and solitary though no longer alone, at first supposed this to be mere Prunes and Prism. But as her father when they had been to a brilliant reception at Mrs Merdle's, harped at their own family breakfast-table on his wish to know Mr Merdle, with the contingent view of benefiting by the advice of that wonderful man in the disposal of his fortune, she began to think it had a real meaning, and to entertain a curiosity on her own part to see the shining light of the time.

CHAPTER 8. The Dowager Mrs Gowan is reminded that 'It Never Does'

While the waters of Venice and the ruins of Rome were sunning themselves for the pleasure of the Dorrit family, and were daily being sketched out of all earthly proportion, lineament, and likeness, by travelling pencils innumerable, the firm of Doyce and Clennam hammered away in Bleeding Heart Yard, and the vigorous clink of iron upon iron was heard there through the working hours.

The younger partner had, by this time, brought the business into sound trim; and the elder, left free to follow his own ingenious devices, had done much to enhance the character of the factory. As an ingenious man, he had necessarily to encounter every discouragement that the ruling powers for a length of time had been able by any means to put in the way of this class of culprits; but that was only reasonable self-defence in the powers, since How to do it must obviously be regarded as the natural and mortal enemy of How not to do it. In this was to be found the basis of the wise system, by tooth and nail upheld by the Circumlocution Office, of warning every ingenious British subject to be ingenious at his peril: of harassing him, obstructing him, inviting robbers (by making his remedy uncertain, and expensive) to plunder him, and at the best of confiscating his property after a short term of enjoyment, as though invention were on a par with felony. The system had uniformly found great favour with the Barnacles, and that was only reasonable, too; for one who worthily invents must be in earnest, and the Barnacles abhorred and dreaded nothing half so much. That again was very reasonable; since in a country suffering under the affliction of a great amount of earnestness, there might, in an exceeding short space of time, be not a single Barnacle left sticking to a post.

Daniel Doyce faced his condition with its pains and penalties attached to it, and soberly worked on for the work's sake. Clennam cheering him with a hearty co-operation, was a moral support to him, besides doing good service in his business relation. The concern prospered, and the partners were fast friends. But Daniel could not forget the old design of so many years. It was not in reason to be expected that he should; if he could have lightly forgotten it, he could never have conceived it, or had the patience and perseverance to work it out. So Clennam thought, when he sometimes observed him of an evening looking over the models and drawings, and consoling himself by muttering with a sigh as he put them away again, that the thing was as true as it ever was.

To show no sympathy with so much endeavour, and so much disappointment, would have been to fail in what Clennam regarded as among the implied obligations of his partnership. A revival of the passing interest in the subject which had been by chance awakened at the door of the Circumlocution Office, originated in this feeling. He asked his partner to explain the invention to him; 'having a lenient consideration,' he stipulated, 'for my being no workman, Doyce.'

'No workman?' said Doyce. 'You would have been a thorough workman if you had given yourself to it. You have as good a head for understanding such things as I have met with.'

'A totally uneducated one, I am sorry to add,' said Clennam.

'I don't know that,' returned Doyce, 'and I wouldn't have you say that. No man of sense who has been generally improved, and has improved himself, can be called quite uneducated as to anything. I don't particularly favour mysteries. I would as soon, on a fair and clear explanation, be judged by one class of man as another, provided he had the qualification I have named.'

'At all events,' said Clennam—'this sounds as if we were exchanging compliments, but we know we are not—I shall have the advantage of as plain an explanation as can be given.'

'Well!' said Daniel, in his steady even way,'I'll try to make it so.'

He had the power, often to be found in union with such a character, of explaining what he himself perceived, and meant, with the direct force and distinctness with which it struck his own mind. His manner of demonstration was so orderly and neat and simple, that it was not easy to mistake him. There was something almost ludicrous in the complete irreconcilability of a vague conventional notion that he must be a visionary man, with the precise, sagacious travelling of his eye and thumb over the plans, their patient stoppages at particular points, their careful returns to other points whence little channels of explanation had to be traced up, and his steady manner of making everything good and everything sound at each important stage, before taking his hearer on a line's-breadth further. His dismissal of himself from his description, was hardly less remarkable. He never said, I discovered this adaptation or invented that combination; but showed the whole thing as if the Divine artificer had made it, and he had happened to find it; so modest he was about it, such a pleasant touch of respect was mingled with his quiet admiration of it, and so calmly convinced he was that it was established on irrefragable laws.

Not only that evening, but for several succeeding evenings, Clennam was quite charmed by this investigation. The more he pursued it, and the oftener he glanced at the grey head bending over it, and the shrewd eye kindling with pleasure in it and love of it—instrument for probing his heart though it had been made for twelve long years—the less he could reconcile it to his younger energy to let it go without one effort more. At length he said:

'Doyce, it came to this at last—that the business was to be sunk with Heaven knows how many more wrecks, or begun all over again?'

'Yes,' returned Doyce, 'that's what the noblemen and gentlemen made of it after a dozen years.'

'And pretty fellows too!' said Clennam, bitterly.

'The usual thing!' observed Doyce. 'I must not make a martyr of myself, when I am one of so large a company.'

'Relinquish it, or begin it all over again?' mused Clennam.

'That was exactly the long and the short of it,' said Doyce.

'Then, my friend,' cried Clennam, starting up and taking his work-roughened hand, 'it shall be begun all over again!'

Doyce looked alarmed, and replied in a hurry—for him, 'No, no. Better put it by. Far better put it by. It will be heard of, one day. I can put it by. You forget, my good Clennam; I HAVE put it by. It's all at an end.'

'Yes, Doyce,' returned Clennam, 'at an end as far as your efforts and rebuffs are concerned, I admit, but not as far as mine are. I am younger than you: I have only once set foot in that precious office, and I am fresh game for them. Come! I'll try them. You shall do exactly as you have been doing since we have been together. I will add (as I easily can) to what I have been doing, the attempt to get public justice done to you; and, unless I have some success to report, you shall hear no more of it.'

Daniel Doyce was still reluctant to consent, and again and again urged that they had better put it by. But it was natural that he should gradually allow himself to be over-persuaded by Clennam, and should yield. Yield he did. So Arthur resumed the long and hopeless labour of striving to make way with the Circumlocution Office.

The waiting-rooms of that Department soon began to be familiar with his presence, and he was generally ushered into them by its janitors much as a pickpocket might be shown into a police-office; the principal difference being that the object of the latter class of public business is to keep the pickpocket, while the Circumlocution object was to get rid of Clennam. However, he was resolved to stick to the Great Department; and so the work of form-filling, corresponding, minuting, memorandum-making, signing, counter-signing, counter-counter-signing, referring backwards and forwards, and referring sideways, crosswise, and zig-zag, recommenced.

Here arises a feature of the Circumlocution Office, not previously mentioned in the present record. When that admirable Department got into trouble, and was, by some infuriated members of Parliament whom the smaller Barnacles almost suspected of labouring under diabolic possession, attacked on the merits of no individual case, but as an Institution wholly abominable and Bedlamite; then the noble or right honourable Barnacle who represented it in the House, would smite that member and cleave him asunder, with a statement of the quantity of business (for the prevention of business) done by the Circumlocution Office. Then would that noble or right honourable Barnacle hold in his hand a paper containing a few figures, to which, with the permission of the House, he would entreat its attention. Then would the inferior Barnacles exclaim, obeying orders,'Hear, Hear, Hear!' and 'Read!' Then would the noble or right honourable Barnacle perceive, sir, from this little document, which he thought might carry conviction even to the perversest mind (Derisive laughter and cheering from the Barnacle fry), that within the short compass of the last financial half-year, this much-maligned Department (Cheers) had written and received fifteen thousand letters (Loud cheers), had written twenty-four thousand minutes (Louder cheers), and thirty-two thousand five hundred and seventeen memoranda (Vehement cheering). Nay, an ingenious gentleman connected with the Department, and himself a valuable public servant, had done him the favour to make a curious calculation of the amount of stationery consumed in it during the same period. It formed a part of this same short document; and he derived from it the remarkable fact that the sheets of foolscap paper it had devoted to the public service would pave the footways on both sides of Oxford Street from end to end, and leave nearly a quarter of a mile to spare for the park (Immense cheering and laughter); while of tape—red tape—it had used enough to stretch, in graceful festoons, from Hyde Park Corner to the General Post Office. Then, amidst a burst of official exultation, would the noble or right honourable Barnacle sit down, leaving the mutilated fragments of the Member on the field. No one, after that exemplary demolition of him, would have the hardihood to hint that the more the Circumlocution Office did, the less was done, and that the greatest blessing it could confer on an unhappy public would be to do nothing.

With sufficient occupation on his hands, now that he had this additional task—such a task had many and many a serviceable man died of before his day—Arthur Clennam led a life of slight variety. Regular visits to his mother's dull sick room, and visits scarcely less regular to Mr Meagles at Twickenham, were its only changes during many months.

He sadly and sorely missed Little Dorrit. He had been prepared to miss her very much, but not so much. He knew to the full extent only through experience, what a large place in his life was left blank when her familiar little figure went out of it. He felt, too, that he must relinquish the hope of its return, understanding the family character sufficiently well to be assured that he and she were divided by a broad ground of separation. The old interest he had had in her, and her old trusting reliance on him, were tinged with melancholy in his mind: so soon had change stolen over them, and so soon had they glided into the past with other secret tendernesses.

When he received her letter he was greatly moved, but did not the less sensibly feel that she was far divided from him by more than distance. It helped him to a clearer and keener perception of the place assigned him by the family. He saw that he was cherished in her grateful remembrance secretly, and that they resented him with the jail and the rest of its belongings.

Through all these meditations which every day of his life crowded about her, he thought of her otherwise in the old way. She was his innocent friend, his delicate child, his dear Little Dorrit. This very change of circumstances fitted curiously in with the habit, begun on the night when the roses floated away, of considering himself as a much older man than his years really made him. He regarded her from a point of view which in its remoteness, tender as it was, he little thought would have been unspeakable agony to her. He speculated about her future destiny, and about the husband she might have, with an affection for her which would have drained her heart of its dearest drop of hope, and broken it.

Everything about him tended to confirm him in the custom of looking on himself as an elderly man, from whom such aspirations as he had combated in the case of Minnie Gowan (though that was not so long ago either, reckoning by months and seasons), were finally departed. His relations with her father and mother were like those on which a widower son-in-law might have stood. If the twin sister who was dead had lived to pass away in the bloom of womanhood, and he had been her husband, the nature of his intercourse with Mr and Mrs Meagles would probably have been just what it was. This imperceptibly helped to render habitual the impression within him, that he had done with, and dismissed that part of life.

He invariably heard of Minnie from them, as telling them in her letters how happy she was, and how she loved her husband; but inseparable from that subject, he invariably saw the old cloud on Mr Meagles's face. Mr Meagles had never been quite so radiant since the marriage as before. He had never quite recovered the separation from Pet. He was the same good-humoured, open creature; but as if his face, from being much turned towards the pictures of his two children which could show him only one look, unconsciously adopted a characteristic from them, it always had now, through all its changes of expression, a look of loss in it.

One wintry Saturday when Clennam was at the cottage, the Dowager Mrs Gowan drove up, in the Hampton Court equipage which pretended to be the exclusive equipage of so many individual proprietors. She descended, in her shady ambuscade of green fan, to favour Mr and Mrs Meagles with a call.

'And how do you both do, Papa and Mama Meagles?' said she, encouraging her humble connections. 'And when did you last hear from or about my poor fellow?'

My poor fellow was her son; and this mode of speaking of him politely kept alive, without any offence in the world, the pretence that he had fallen a victim to the Meagles' wiles.

'And the dear pretty one?' said Mrs Gowan. 'Have you later news of her than I have?'

Which also delicately implied that her son had been captured by mere beauty, and under its fascination had forgone all sorts of worldly advantages.

'I am sure,' said Mrs Gowan, without straining her attention on the answers she received, 'it's an unspeakable comfort to know they continue happy. My poor fellow is of such a restless disposition, and has been so used to roving about, and to being inconstant and popular among all manner of people, that it's the greatest comfort in life. I suppose they're as poor as mice, Papa Meagles?'

Mr Meagles, fidgety under the question, replied, 'I hope not, ma'am. I hope they will manage their little income.'

'Oh! my dearest Meagles!' returned the lady, tapping him on the arm with the green fan and then adroitly interposing it between a yawn and the company, 'how can you, as a man of the world and one of the most business-like of human beings—for you know you are business-like, and a great deal too much for us who are not—'

(Which went to the former purpose, by making Mr Meagles out to be an artful schemer.)

'—How can you talk about their managing their little means? My poor dear fellow! The idea of his managing hundreds! And the sweet pretty creature too. The notion of her managing! Papa Meagles! Don't!'

'Well, ma'am,' said Mr Meagles, gravely, 'I am sorry to admit, then, that Henry certainly does anticipate his means.'

'My dear good man—I use no ceremony with you, because we are a kind of relations;—positively, Mama Meagles,' exclaimed Mrs Gowan cheerfully, as if the absurd coincidence then flashed upon her for the first time, 'a kind of relations! My dear good man, in this world none of us can have everything our own way.'

This again went to the former point, and showed Mr Meagles with all good breeding that, so far, he had been brilliantly successful in his deep designs. Mrs Gowan thought the hit so good a one, that she dwelt upon it; repeating 'Not everything. No, no; in this world we must not expect everything, Papa Meagles.'

'And may I ask, ma'am,' retorted Mr Meagles, a little heightened in colour, 'who does expect everything?'

'Oh, nobody, nobody!' said Mrs Gowan. 'I was going to say—but you put me out. You interrupting Papa, what was I going to say?'

Drooping her large green fan, she looked musingly at Mr Meagles while she thought about it; a performance not tending to the cooling of that gentleman's rather heated spirits.

'Ah! Yes, to be sure!' said Mrs Gowan. 'You must remember that my poor fellow has always been accustomed to expectations. They may have been realised, or they may not have been realised—'

'Let us say, then, may not have been realised,' observed Mr Meagles.

The Dowager for a moment gave him an angry look; but tossed it off with her head and her fan, and pursued the tenor of her way in her former manner.

'It makes no difference. My poor fellow has been accustomed to that sort of thing, and of course you knew it, and were prepared for the consequences. I myself always clearly foresaw the consequences, and am not surprised. And you must not be surprised.

In fact, can't be surprised. Must have been prepared for it.'

Mr Meagles looked at his wife and at Clennam; bit his lip; and coughed.

'And now here's my poor fellow,' Mrs Gowan pursued, 'receiving notice that he is to hold himself in expectation of a baby, and all the expenses attendant on such an addition to his family! Poor Henry! But it can't be helped now; it's too late to help it now. Only don't talk of anticipating means, Papa Meagles, as a discovery; because that would be too much.'

'Too much, ma'am?' said Mr Meagles, as seeking an explanation.

'There, there!' said Mrs Gowan, putting him in his inferior place with an expressive action of her hand. 'Too much for my poor fellow's mother to bear at this time of day. They are fast married, and can't be unmarried. There, there! I know that! You needn't tell me that, Papa Meagles. I know it very well. What was it I said just now? That it was a great comfort they continued happy. It is to be hoped they will still continue happy. It is to be hoped Pretty One will do everything she can to make my poor fellow happy, and keep him contented. Papa and Mama Meagles, we had better say no more about it. We never did look at this subject from the same side, and we never shall. There, there! Now I am good.'

Truly, having by this time said everything she could say in maintenance of her wonderfully mythical position, and in admonition to Mr Meagles that he must not expect to bear his honours of alliance too cheaply, Mrs Gowan was disposed to forgo the rest. If Mr Meagles had submitted to a glance of entreaty from Mrs Meagles, and an expressive gesture from Clennam, he would have left her in the undisturbed enjoyment of this state of mind. But Pet was the darling and pride of his heart; and if he could ever have championed her more devotedly, or loved her better, than in the days when she was the sunlight of his house, it would have been now, when, as its daily grace and delight, she was lost to it.

'Mrs Gowan, ma'am,' said Mr Meagles, 'I have been a plain man all my life. If I was to try—no matter whether on myself, on somebody else, or both—any genteel mystifications, I should probably not succeed in them.'

'Papa Meagles,' returned the Dowager, with an affable smile, but with the bloom on her cheeks standing out a little more vividly than usual as the neighbouring surface became paler,'probably not.'

'Therefore, my good madam,' said Mr Meagles, at great pains to restrain himself, 'I hope I may, without offence, ask to have no such mystification played off upon me.' 'Mama Meagles,' observed Mrs Gowan, 'your good man is incomprehensible.'

Her turning to that worthy lady was an artifice to bring her into the discussion, quarrel with her, and vanquish her. Mr Meagles interposed to prevent that consummation.

'Mother,' said he, 'you are inexpert, my dear, and it is not a fair match. Let me beg of you to remain quiet. Come, Mrs Gowan, come! Let us try to be sensible; let us try to be good-natured; let us try to be fair. Don't you pity Henry, and I won't pity Pet. And don't be one-sided, my dear madam; it's not considerate, it's not kind. Don't let us say that we hope Pet will make Henry happy, or even that we hope Henry will make Pet happy,' (Mr Meagles himself did not look happy as he spoke the words,) 'but let us hope they will make each other happy.'

'Yes, sure, and there leave it, father,' said Mrs Meagles the kind-hearted and comfortable.

'Why, mother, no,' returned Mr Meagles, 'not exactly there. I can't quite leave it there; I must say just half-a-dozen words more. Mrs Gowan, I hope I am not over-sensitive. I believe I don't look it.'

'Indeed you do not,' said Mrs Gowan, shaking her head and the great green fan together, for emphasis.

'Thank you, ma'am; that's well. Notwithstanding which, I feel a little—I don't want to use a strong word—now shall I say hurt?' asked Mr Meagles at once with frankness and moderation, and with a conciliatory appeal in his tone.

'Say what you like,' answered Mrs Gowan. 'It is perfectly indifferent to me.'

'No, no, don't say that,' urged Mr Meagles, 'because that's not responding amiably. I feel a little hurt when I hear references made to consequences having been foreseen, and to its being too late now, and so forth.'

'Do you, Papa Meagles?' said Mrs Gowan. 'I am not surprised.'

'Well, ma'am,' reasoned Mr Meagles, 'I was in hopes you would have been at least surprised, because to hurt me wilfully on so tender a subject is surely not generous.' 'I am not responsible,' said Mrs Gowan, 'for your conscience, you know.'

Poor Mr Meagles looked aghast with astonishment.

'If I am unluckily obliged to carry a cap about with me, which is yours and fits you,' pursued Mrs Gowan, 'don't blame me for its pattern, Papa Meagles, I beg!' 'Why, good Lord, ma'am!' Mr Meagles broke out, 'that's as much as to state—'

'Now, Papa Meagles, Papa Meagles,' said Mrs Gowan, who became extremely deliberate and prepossessing in manner whenever that gentleman became at all warm, 'perhaps to prevent confusion, I had better speak for myself than trouble your kindness to speak for me.

It's as much as to state, you begin. If you please, I will finish the sentence. It is as much as to state—not that I wish to press it or even recall it, for it is of no use now, and my only wish is to make the best of existing circumstances—that from the first to the last I always objected to this match of yours, and at a very late period yielded a most unwilling consent to it.'

'Mother!' cried Mr Meagles. 'Do you hear this! Arthur! Do you hear this!'

'The room being of a convenient size,' said Mrs Gowan, looking about as she fanned herself, 'and quite charmingly adapted in all respects to conversation, I should imagine I am audible in any part of it.'

Some moments passed in silence, before Mr Meagles could hold himself in his chair with sufficient security to prevent his breaking out of it at the next word he spoke. At last he said: 'Ma'am, I am very unwilling to revive them, but I must remind you what my opinions and my course were, all along, on that unfortunate subject.'

'O, my dear sir!' said Mrs Gowan, smiling and shaking her head with accusatory intelligence, 'they were well understood by me, I assure you.'

'I never, ma'am,' said Mr Meagles, 'knew unhappiness before that time, I never knew anxiety before that time. It was a time of such distress to me that—' That Mr Meagles could really say no more about it, in short, but passed his handkerchief before his Face.

'I understood the whole affair,' said Mrs Gowan, composedly looking over her fan. 'As you have appealed to Mr Clennam, I may appeal to Mr Clennam, too. He knows whether I did or not.'

'I am very unwilling,' said Clennam, looked to by all parties, 'to take any share in this discussion, more especially because I wish to preserve the best understanding and the clearest relations with Mr Henry Gowan. I have very strong reasons indeed, for entertaining that wish. Mrs Gowan attributed certain views of furthering the marriage to my friend here, in conversation with me before it took place; and I endeavoured to undeceive her. I represented that I knew him (as I did and do) to be strenuously opposed to it, both in opinion and action.'

'You see?' said Mrs Gowan, turning the palms of her hands towards Mr Meagles, as if she were Justice herself, representing to him that he had better confess, for he had not a leg to stand on. 'You see? Very good! Now Papa and Mama Meagles both!' here she rose; 'allow me to take the liberty of putting an end to this rather formidable controversy. I will not say another word upon its merits. I will only say that it is an additional proof of what one knows from all experience; that this kind of thing never answers—as my poor fellow himself would say, that it never pays—in one word, that it never does.'

Mr Meagles asked, What kind of thing?

'It is in vain,' said Mrs Gowan, 'for people to attempt to get on together who have such extremely different antecedents; who are jumbled against each other in this accidental, matrimonial sort of way; and who cannot look at the untoward circumstance which has shaken them together in the same light. It never does.'

Mr Meagles was beginning, 'Permit me to say, ma'am—'

'No, don't,' returned Mrs Gowan. 'Why should you! It is an ascertained fact. It never does. I will therefore, if you please, go my way, leaving you to yours. I shall at all times be happy to receive my poor fellow's pretty wife, and I shall always make a point of being on the most affectionate terms with her. But as to these terms, semi-family and semi-stranger, semi-goring and semi-boring, they form a state of things quite amusing in its impracticability. I assure you it never does.'

The Dowager here made a smiling obeisance, rather to the room than to any one in it, and therewith took a final farewell of Papa and Mama Meagles. Clennam stepped forward to hand her to the Pill-Box which was at the service of all the Pills in Hampton Court Palace; and she got into that vehicle with distinguished serenity, and was driven away.

Thenceforth the Dowager, with a light and careless humour, often recounted to her particular acquaintance how, after a hard trial, she had found it impossible to know those people who belonged to Henry's wife, and who had made that desperate set to catch him. Whether she had come to the conclusion beforehand, that to get rid of them would give her favourite pretence a better air, might save her some occasional inconvenience, and could risk no loss (the pretty creature being fast married, and her father devoted to her), was best known to herself. Though this history has its opinion on that point too, and decidedly in the affirmative.

CHAPTER 9. Appearance and Disappearance

'Arthur, my dear boy,' said Mr Meagles, on the evening of the following day, 'Mother and I have been talking this over, and we don't feel comfortable in remaining as we are. That elegant connection of ours—that dear lady who was here yesterday—'

'I understand,' said Arthur.

'Even that affable and condescending ornament of society,' pursued Mr Meagles, 'may misrepresent us, we are afraid. We could bear a great deal, Arthur, for her sake; but we think we would rather not bear that, if it was all the same to her.'

'Good,' said Arthur. 'Go on.'

'You see,' proceeded Mr Meagles 'it might put us wrong with our son-in-law, it might even put us wrong with our daughter, and it might lead to a great deal of domestic trouble. You see, don't you?'

'Yes, indeed,' returned Arthur, 'there is much reason in what you say.' He had glanced at Mrs Meagles, who was always on the good and sensible side; and a petition had shone out of her honest face that he would support Mr Meagles in his present inclinings.

'So we are very much disposed, are Mother and I,' said Mr Meagles, 'to pack up bags and baggage and go among the Allongers and Marshongers once more. I mean, we are very much disposed to be off, strike right through France into Italy, and see our Pet.'

'And I don't think,' replied Arthur, touched by the motherly anticipation in the bright face of Mrs Meagles (she must have been very like her daughter, once), 'that you could do better. And if you ask me for my advice, it is that you set off to-morrow.'

'Is it really, though?' said Mr Meagles. 'Mother, this is being backed in an idea!'

Mother, with a look which thanked Clennam in a manner very agreeable to him, answered that it was indeed.

'The fact is, besides, Arthur,' said Mr Meagles, the old cloud coming over his face, 'that my son-in-law is already in debt again, and that I suppose I must clear him again. It may be as well, even on this account, that I should step over there, and look him up in a friendly way. Then again, here's Mother foolishly anxious (and yet naturally too) about Pet's state of health, and that she should not be left to feel lonesome at the present time. It's undeniably a long way off, Arthur, and a strange place for the poor love under all the circumstances. Let her be as well cared for as any lady in that land, still it is a long way off. just as Home is Home though it's never so Homely, why you see,' said Mr Meagles, adding a new version to the proverb, 'Rome is Rome, though it's never so Romely.'

'All perfectly true,' observed Arthur, 'and all sufficient reasons for going.'

'I am glad you think so; it decides me. Mother, my dear, you may get ready. We have lost our pleasant interpreter (she spoke three foreign languages beautifully, Arthur; you have heard her many a time), and you must pull me through it, Mother, as well as you can.

I require a deal of pulling through, Arthur,' said Mr Meagles, shaking his head, 'a deal of pulling through. I stick at everything beyond a noun-substantive—and I stick at him, if he's at all a tight one.'

'Now I think of it,' returned Clennam, 'there's Cavalletto. He shall go with you, if you like. I could not afford to lose him, but you will bring him safe back.'

'Well! I am much obliged to you, my boy,' said Mr Meagles, turning it over, 'but I think not. No, I think I'll be pulled through by Mother. Cavallooro (I stick at his very name to start with, and it sounds like the chorus to a comic song) is so necessary to you, that I don't like the thought of taking him away. More than that, there's no saying when we may come home again; and it would never do to take him away for an indefinite time. The cottage is not what it was. It only holds two little people less than it ever did, Pet, and her poor unfortunate maid Tattycoram; but it seems empty now. Once out of it, there's no knowing when we may come back to it. No, Arthur, I'll be pulled through by Mother.'

They would do best by themselves perhaps, after all, Clennam thought; therefore did not press his proposal.

'If you would come down and stay here for a change, when it wouldn't trouble you,' Mr Meagles resumed, 'I should be glad to think—and so would Mother too, I know—that you were brightening up the old place with a bit of life it was used to when it was full, and that the Babies on the wall there had a kind eye upon them sometimes. You so belong to the spot, and to them, Arthur, and we should every one of us have been so happy if it had fallen out—but, let us see—how's the weather for travelling now?' Mr Meagles broke off, cleared his throat, and got up to look out of the window.

They agreed that the weather was of high promise; and Clennam kept the talk in that safe direction until it had become easy again, when he gently diverted it to Henry Gowan and his quick sense and agreeable qualities when he was delicately dealt With; he likewise dwelt on the indisputable affection he entertained for his wife. Clennam did not fail of his effect upon good Mr Meagles, whom these commendations greatly cheered; and who took Mother to witness that the single and cordial desire of his heart in reference to their daughter's husband, was harmoniously to exchange friendship for friendship, and confidence for confidence. Within a few hours the cottage furniture began to be wrapped up for preservation in the family absence—or, as Mr Meagles expressed it, the house began to put its hair in papers—and within a few days Father and Mother were gone, Mrs Tickit and Dr Buchan were posted, as of yore, behind the parlour blind, and Arthur's solitary feet were rustling among the dry fallen leaves in the garden walks.

As he had a liking for the spot, he seldom let a week pass without paying a visit. Sometimes, he went down alone from Saturday to Monday; sometimes his partner accompanied him; sometimes, he merely strolled for an hour or two about the house and garden, saw that all was right, and returned to London again. At all times, and under all circumstances, Mrs Tickit, with her dark row of curls, and Dr Buchan, sat in the parlour window, looking out for the family return.

On one of his visits Mrs Tickit received him with the words, 'I have something to tell you, Mr Clennam, that will surprise you.' So surprising was the something in question, that it actually brought Mrs Tickit out of the parlour window and produced her in the garden walk, when Clennam went in at the gate on its being opened for him.

'What is it, Mrs Tickit?' said he.

'Sir,' returned that faithful housekeeper, having taken him into the parlour and closed the door; 'if ever I saw the led away and deluded child in my life, I saw her identically in the dusk of yesterday evening.'

'You don't mean Tatty—'

'Coram yes I do!' quoth Mrs Tickit, clearing the disclosure at a leap.

'Where?'

'Mr Clennam,' returned Mrs Tickit, 'I was a little heavy in my eyes, being that I was waiting longer than customary for my cup of tea which was then preparing by Mary Jane. I was not sleeping, nor what a person would term correctly, dozing. I was more what a person would strictly call watching with my eyes closed.'

Without entering upon an inquiry into this curious abnormal condition, Clennam said, 'Exactly. Well?'

'Well, sir,' proceeded Mrs Tickit, 'I was thinking of one thing and thinking of another, just as you yourself might. Just as anybody might.' 'Precisely so,' said Clennam. 'Well?'

'And when I do think of one thing and do think of another,' pursued Mrs Tickit, 'I hardly need to tell you, Mr Clennam, that I think of the family. Because, dear me! a person's thoughts,' Mrs Tickit said this with an argumentative and philosophic air, 'however they may stray, will go more or less on what is uppermost in their minds. They will do it, sir, and a person can't prevent them.'

Arthur subscribed to this discovery with a nod.

'You find it so yourself, sir, I'll be bold to say,' said Mrs Tickit, 'and we all find it so. It an't our stations in life that changes us, Mr Clennam; thoughts is free!—As I was saying, I was thinking of one thing and thinking of another, and thinking very much of the family. Not of the family in the present times only, but in the past times too. For when a person does begin thinking of one thing and thinking of another in that manner, as it's getting dark, what I say is, that all times seem to be present, and a person must get out of that state and consider before they can say which is which.'

He nodded again; afraid to utter a word, lest it should present any new opening to Mrs Tickit's conversational powers.

'In consequence of which,' said Mrs Tickit, 'when I quivered my eyes and saw her actual form and figure looking in at the gate, I let them close again without so much as starting, for that actual form and figure came so pat to the time when it belonged to the house as much as mine or your own, that I never thought at the moment of its having gone away. But, sir, when I quivered my eyes again, and saw that it wasn't there, then it all flooded upon me with a fright, and I jumped up.'

'You ran out directly?' said Clennam.

'I ran out,' assented Mrs Tickit, 'as fast as ever my feet would carry me; and if you'll credit it, Mr Clennam, there wasn't in the whole shining Heavens, no not so much as a finger of that young woman.'

Passing over the absence from the firmament of this novel constellation, Arthur inquired of Mrs Tickit if she herself went beyond the gate?

'Went to and fro, and high and low,' said Mrs Tickit, 'and saw no sign of her!'

He then asked Mrs Tickit how long a space of time she supposed there might have been between the two sets of ocular quiverings she had experienced? Mrs Tickit, though minutely circumstantial in her reply, had no settled opinion between five seconds and ten minutes.

She was so plainly at sea on this part of the case, and had so clearly been startled out of slumber, that Clennam was much disposed to regard the appearance as a dream. Without hurting Mrs Tickit's feelings with that infidel solution of her mystery, he took it away from the cottage with him; and probably would have retained it ever afterwards if a circumstance had not soon happened to change his opinion. He was passing at nightfall along the Strand, and the lamp-lighter was going on before him, under whose hand the street-lamps, blurred by the foggy air, burst out one after another, like so many blazing sunflowers coming into full-blow all at once,—when a stoppage on the pavement, caused by a train of coal-waggons toiling up from the wharves at the river-side, brought him to a stand-still. He had been walking quickly, and going with some current of thought, and the sudden check given to both operations caused him to look freshly about him, as people under such circumstances usually do.

Immediately, he saw in advance—a few people intervening, but still so near to him that he could have touched them by stretching out his arm—Tattycoram and a strange man of a remarkable appearance: a swaggering man, with a high nose, and a black moustache as false in its colour as his eyes were false in their expression, who wore his heavy cloak with the air of a foreigner. His dress and general appearance were those of a man on travel, and he seemed to have very recently joined the girl. In bending down (being much taller than she was), listening to whatever she said to him, he looked over his shoulder with the suspicious glance of one who was not unused to be mistrustful that his footsteps might be dogged. It was then that Clennam saw his face; as his eyes lowered on the people behind him in the aggregate, without particularly resting upon Clennam's face or any other.

He had scarcely turned his head about again, and it was still bent down, listening to the girl, when the stoppage ceased, and the obstructed stream of people flowed on. Still bending his head and listening to the girl, he went on at her side, and Clennam followed them, resolved to play this unexpected play out, and see where they went.

He had hardly made the determination (though he was not long about it), when he was again as suddenly brought up as he had been by the stoppage. They turned short into the Adelphi,—the girl evidently leading,—and went straight on, as if they were going to the Terrace which overhangs the river.

There is always, to this day, a sudden pause in that place to the roar of the great thoroughfare. The many sounds become so deadened that the change is like putting cotton in the ears, or having the head thickly muffled. At that time the contrast was far greater; there being no small steam-boats on the river, no landing places but slippery wooden stairs and foot-causeways, no railroad on the opposite bank, no hanging bridge or fish-market near at hand, no traffic on the nearest bridge of stone, nothing moving on the stream but watermen's wherries and coal-lighters. Long and broad black tiers of the latter, moored fast in the mud as if they were never to move again, made the shore funereal and silent after dark; and kept what little water-movement there was, far out towards mid-stream. At any hour later than sunset, and not least at that hour when most of the people who have anything to eat at home are going home to eat it, and when most of those who have nothing have hardly yet slunk out to beg or steal, it was a deserted place and looked on a deserted scene.

Such was the hour when Clennam stopped at the corner, observing the girl and the strange man as they went down the street. The man's footsteps were so noisy on the echoing stones that he was unwilling to add the sound of his own. But when they had passed the turning and were in the darkness of the dark corner leading to the terrace, he made after them with such indifferent appearance of being a casual passenger on his way, as he could assume.

When he rounded the dark corner, they were walking along the terrace towards a figure which was coming towards them. If he had seen it by itself, under such conditions of gas-lamp, mist, and distance, he might not have known it at first sight, but with the figure of the girl to prompt him, he at once recognised Miss Wade.

He stopped at the corner, seeming to look back expectantly up the street as if he had made an appointment with some one to meet him there; but he kept a careful eye on the three. When they came together, the man took off his hat, and made Miss Wade a bow. The girl appeared to say a few words as though she presented him, or accounted for his being late, or early, or what not; and then fell a pace or so behind, by herself. Miss Wade and the man then began to walk up and down; the man having the appearance of being extremely courteous and complimentary in manner; Miss Wade having the appearance of being extremely haughty.

When they came down to the corner and turned, she was saying,

'If I pinch myself for it, sir, that is my business. Confine yourself to yours, and ask me no question.'

'By Heaven, ma'am!' he replied, making her another bow. 'It was my profound respect for the strength of your character, and my admiration of your beauty.'

'I want neither the one nor the other from any one,' said she, 'and certainly not from you of all creatures. Go on with your report.'

'Am I pardoned?' he asked, with an air of half abashed gallantry.

'You are paid,' she said, 'and that is all you want.'

Whether the girl hung behind because she was not to hear the business, or as already knowing enough about it, Clennam could not determine. They turned and she turned. She looked away at the river, as she walked with her hands folded before her; and that was all he could make of her without showing his face. There happened, by good fortune, to be a lounger really waiting for some one; and he sometimes looked over the railing at the water, and sometimes came to the dark corner and looked up the street, rendering Arthur less conspicuous.

When Miss Wade and the man came back again, she was saying, 'You must wait until to-morrow.'

'A thousand pardons?' he returned. 'My faith! Then it's not convenient to-night?'

'No. I tell you I must get it before I can give it to you.'

She stopped in the roadway, as if to put an end to the conference. He of course stopped too. And the girl stopped.

'It's a little inconvenient,' said the man. 'A little. But, Holy Blue! that's nothing in such a service. I am without money to-night, by chance. I have a good banker in this city, but I would not wish to draw upon the house until the time when I shall draw for a round sum.'

'Harriet,' said Miss Wade, 'arrange with him—this gentleman here—for sending him some money to-morrow.' She said it with a slur of the word gentleman which was more contemptuous than any emphasis, and walked slowly on. The man bent his head again, and the girl spoke to him as they both followed her. Clennam ventured to look at the girl as they Moved away. He could note that her rich black eyes were fastened upon the man with a scrutinising expression, and that she kept at a little distance from him, as they walked side by side to the further end of the terrace.

A loud and altered clank upon the pavement warned him, before he could discern what was passing there, that the man was coming back alone. Clennam lounged into the road, towards the railing; and the man passed at a quick swing, with the end of his cloak thrown over his shoulder, singing a scrap of a French song.

The whole vista had no one in it now but himself. The lounger had lounged out of view, and Miss Wade and Tattycoram were gone. More than ever bent on seeing what became of them, and on having some information to give his good friend, Mr Meagles, he went out at the further end of the terrace, looking cautiously about him. He rightly judged that, at first at all events, they would go in a contrary direction from their late companion. He soon saw them in a neighbouring bye-street, which was not a thoroughfare, evidently allowing time for the man to get well out of their way. They walked leisurely arm-in-arm down one side of the street, and returned on the opposite side. When they came back to the street-corner, they changed their pace for the pace of people with an object and a distance before them, and walked steadily away. Clennam, no less steadily, kept them in sight.

They crossed the Strand, and passed through Covent Garden (under the windows of his old lodging where dear Little Dorrit had come that night), and slanted away north-east, until they passed the great building whence Tattycoram derived her name, and turned into the Gray's Inn Road. Clennam was quite at home here, in right of Flora, not to mention the Patriarch and Pancks, and kept them in view with ease. He was beginning to wonder where they might be going next, when that wonder was lost in the greater wonder with which he saw them turn into the Patriarchal street. That wonder was in its turn swallowed up on the greater wonder with which he saw them stop at the Patriarchal door. A low double knock at the bright brass knocker, a gleam of light into the road from the opened door, a brief pause for inquiry and answer and the door was shut, and they were housed.

After looking at the surrounding objects for assurance that he was not in an odd dream, and after pacing a little while before the house, Arthur knocked at the door. It was opened by the usual maid-servant, and she showed him up at once, with her usual alacrity, to Flora's sitting-room.

There was no one with Flora but Mr F.'s Aunt, which respectable gentlewoman, basking in a balmy atmosphere of tea and toast, was ensconced in an easy-chair by the fireside, with a little table at her elbow, and a clean white handkerchief spread over her lap on which two pieces of toast at that moment awaited consumption. Bending over a steaming vessel of tea, and looking through the steam, and breathing forth the steam, like a malignant Chinese enchantress engaged in the performance of unholy rites, Mr F.'s Aunt put down her great teacup and exclaimed, 'Drat him, if he an't come back again!'

It would seem from the foregoing exclamation that this uncompromising relative of the lamented Mr F., measuring time by the acuteness of her sensations and not by the clock, supposed Clennam to have lately gone away; whereas at least a quarter of a year had elapsed since he had had the temerity to present himself before her.

'My goodness Arthur!' cried Flora, rising to give him a cordial reception, 'Doyce and Clennam what a start and a surprise for though not far from the machinery and foundry business and surely might be taken sometimes if at no other time about mid-day when a glass of sherry and a humble sandwich of whatever cold meat in the larder might not come amiss nor taste the worse for being friendly for you know you buy it somewhere and wherever bought a profit must be made or they would never keep the place it stands to reason without a motive still never seen and learnt now not to be expected, for as Mr F. himself said if seeing is believing not seeing is believing too and when you don't see you may fully believe you're not remembered not that I expect you Arthur Doyce and Clennam to remember me why should I for the days are gone but bring another teacup here directly and tell her fresh toast and pray sit near the fire.'

Arthur was in the greatest anxiety to explain the object of his visit; but was put off for the moment, in spite of himself, by what he understood of the reproachful purport of these words, and by the genuine pleasure she testified in seeing him. 'And now pray tell me something all you know,' said

Flora, drawing her chair near to his, 'about the good dear quiet little thing and all the changes of her fortunes carriage people now no doubt and horses without number most romantic, a coat of arms of course and wild beasts on their hind legs showing it as if it was a copy they had done with mouths from ear to ear good gracious, and has she her health which is the first consideration after all for what is wealth without it Mr F. himself so often saying when his twinges came that sixpence a day and find yourself and no gout so much preferable, not that he could have lived on anything like it being the last man or that the previous little thing though far too familiar an expression now had any tendency of that sort much too slight and small but looked so fragile bless her?'

Mr F.'s Aunt, who had eaten a piece of toast down to the crust, here solemnly handed the crust to Flora, who ate it for her as a matter of business. Mr F.'s Aunt then moistened her ten fingers in slow succession at her lips, and wiped them in exactly the same order on the white handkerchief; then took the other piece of toast, and fell to work upon it. While pursuing this routine, she looked at Clennam with an expression of such intense severity that he felt obliged to look at her in return, against his personal inclinations.

'She is in Italy, with all her family, Flora,' he said, when the dreaded lady was occupied again.

'In Italy is she really?' said Flora, 'with the grapes growing everywhere and lava necklaces and bracelets too that land of poetry with burning mountains picturesque beyond belief though if the organ-boys come away from the neighbourhood not to be scorched nobody can wonder being so young and bringing their white mice with them most humane, and is she really in that favoured land with nothing but blue about her and dying gladiators and Belvederes though Mr F. himself did not believe for his objection when in spirits was that the images could not be true there being no medium between expensive quantities of linen badly got up and all in creases and none whatever, which certainly does not seem probable though perhaps in consequence of the extremes of rich and poor which may account for it.'

Arthur tried to edge a word in, but Flora hurried on again.

'Venice Preserved too,' said she, 'I think you have been there is it well or ill preserved for people differ so and Maccaroni if they really eat it like the conjurors why not cut it shorter, you are acquainted Arthur—dear Doyce and Clennam at least not dear and most assuredly not Doyce for I have not the pleasure but pray excuse me—acquainted I believe with Mantua what has it got to do with Mantua-making for I never have been able to conceive?'

'I believe there is no connection, Flora, between the two,' Arthur was beginning, when she caught him up again.

'Upon your word no isn't there I never did but that's like me I run away with an idea and having none to spare I keep it, alas there was a time dear Arthur that is to say decidedly not dear nor Arthur neither but you understand me when one bright idea gilded the what's-his-name horizon of et cetera but it is darkly clouded now and all is over.'

Arthur's increasing wish to speak of something very different was by this time so plainly written on his face, that Flora stopped in a tender look, and asked him what it was?

'I have the greatest desire, Flora, to speak to some one who is now in this house—with Mr Casby no doubt. Some one whom I saw come in, and who, in a misguided and deplorable way, has deserted the house of a friend of mine.'

'Papa sees so many and such odd people,' said Flora, rising, 'that I shouldn't venture to go down for any one but you Arthur but for you I would willingly go down in a diving-bell much more a dining-room and will come back directly if you'll mind and at the same time not mind Mr F.'s Aunt while I'm gone.'

With those words and a parting glance, Flora bustled out, leaving Clennam under dreadful apprehension of this terrible charge.

The first variation which manifested itself in Mr F.'s Aunt's demeanour when she had finished her piece of toast, was a loud and prolonged sniff. Finding it impossible to avoid construing this demonstration into a defiance of himself, its gloomy significance being unmistakable, Clennam looked plaintively at the excellent though prejudiced lady from whom it emanated, in the hope that she might be disarmed by a meek submission.

'None of your eyes at me,' said Mr F.'s Aunt, shivering with hostility. 'Take that.'

'That' was the crust of the piece of toast. Clennam accepted the boon with a look of gratitude, and held it in his hand under the pressure of a little embarrassment, which was not relieved when Mr F.'s Aunt, elevating her voice into a cry of considerable power, exclaimed, 'He has a proud stomach, this chap! He's too proud a chap to eat it!' and, coming out of her chair, shook her venerable fist so very close to his nose as to tickle the surface. But for the timely return of Flora, to find him in this difficult situation, further consequences might have ensued. Flora, without the least discomposure or surprise, but congratulating the old lady in an approving manner on being 'very lively to-night', handed her back to her chair.

'He has a proud stomach, this chap,' said Mr F.'s relation, on being reseated. 'Give him a meal of chaff!'

'Oh! I don't think he would like that, aunt,' returned Flora.

'Give him a meal of chaff, I tell you,' said Mr F.'s Aunt, glaring round Flora on her enemy. 'It's the only thing for a proud stomach. Let him eat up every morsel. Drat him, give him a meal of chaff!'

Under a general pretence of helping him to this refreshment, Flora got him out on the staircase; Mr F.'s Aunt even then constantly reiterating, with inexpressible bitterness, that he was 'a chap,' and had a 'proud stomach,' and over and over again insisting on that equine provision being made for him which she had already so strongly prescribed.

'Such an inconvenient staircase and so many corner-stairs Arthur,' whispered Flora, 'would you object to putting your arm round me under my pelerine?'

With a sense of going down-stairs in a highly-ridiculous manner, Clennam descended in the required attitude, and only released his fair burden at the dining-room door; indeed, even there she was rather difficult to be got rid of, remaining in his embrace to murmur, 'Arthur, for mercy's sake, don't breathe it to papa!'

She accompanied Arthur into the room, where the Patriarch sat alone, with his list shoes on the fender, twirling his thumbs as if he had never left off. The youthful Patriarch, aged ten, looked out of his picture-frame above him with no calmer air than he. Both smooth heads were alike beaming, blundering, and bumpy.

'Mr Clennam, I am glad to see you. I hope you are well, sir, I hope you are well. Please to sit down, please to sit down.'

'I had hoped, sir,' said Clennam, doing so, and looking round with a face of blank disappointment, 'not to find you alone.'

'Ah, indeed?' said the Patriarch, sweetly. 'Ah, indeed?'

'I told you so you know papa,' cried Flora.

'Ah, to be sure!' returned the Patriarch. 'Yes, just so. Ah, to be sure!'

'Pray, sir,'demanded Clennam, anxiously, 'is Miss Wade gone?'

'Miss—? Oh, you call her Wade,' returned Mr Casby. 'Highly proper.' Arthur quickly returned, 'What do you call her?'

'Wade,' said Mr Casby. 'Oh, always Wade.'

After looking at the philanthropic visage and the long silky white hair for a few seconds, during which Mr Casby twirled his thumbs, and smiled at the fire as if he were benevolently wishing it to burn him that he might forgive it, Arthur began:

'I beg your pardon, Mr Casby—'

'Not so, not so,' said the Patriarch, 'not so.'

'—But, Miss Wade had an attendant with her—a young woman brought up by friends of mine, over whom her influence is not considered very salutary, and to whom I should be glad to have the opportunity of giving the assurance that she has not yet forfeited the interest of those protectors.'

'Really, really?' returned the Patriarch.

'Will you therefore be so good as to give me the address of Miss Wade?'

'Dear, dear, dear!' said the Patriarch, 'how very unfortunate! If you had only sent in to me when they were here! I observed the young woman, Mr Clennam. A fine full-coloured young woman, Mr Clennam, with very dark hair and very dark eyes. If I mistake not, if I mistake not?'

Arthur assented, and said once more with new expression, 'If you would be so good as to give me the address.'

'Dear, dear, dear!' exclaimed the Patriarch in sweet regret. 'Tut, tut, tut! what a pity, what a pity! I have no address, sir. Miss Wade mostly lives abroad, Mr Clennam. She has done so for some years, and she is (if I may say so of a fellow-creature and a lady) fitful and uncertain to a fault, Mr Clennam. I may not see her again for a long, long time. I may never see her again. What a pity, what a pity!'

Clennam saw now, that he had as much hope of getting assistance out of the Portrait as out of the Patriarch; but he said nevertheless:

'Mr Casby, could you, for the satisfaction of the friends I have mentioned, and under any obligation of secrecy that you may consider it your duty to impose, give me any information at all touching Miss Wade? I have seen her abroad, and I have seen her at home, but I know nothing of her. Could you give me any account of her whatever?'

'None,' returned the Patriarch, shaking his big head with his utmost benevolence. 'None at all. Dear, dear, dear! What a real pity that she stayed so short a time, and you delayed! As confidential agency business, agency business, I have occasionally paid this lady money; but what satisfaction is it to you, sir, to know that?'

'Truly, none at all,' said Clennam.

'Truly,' assented the Patriarch, with a shining face as he philanthropically smiled at the fire, 'none at all, sir. You hit the wise answer, Mr Clennam. Truly, none at all, sir.' His turning of his smooth thumbs over one another as he sat there, was so typical to Clennam of the way in which he would make the subject revolve if it were pursued, never showing any new part of it nor allowing it to make the smallest advance, that it did much to help to convince him of his labour having been in vain. He might have taken any time to think about it, for Mr Casby, well accustomed to get on anywhere by leaving everything to his bumps and his white hair, knew his strength to lie in silence. So there Casby sat, twirling and twirling, and making his polished head and forehead look largely benevolent in every knob.

With this spectacle before him, Arthur had risen to go, when from the inner Dock where the good ship Pancks was hove down when out in no cruising ground, the noise was heard of that steamer labouring towards him. It struck Arthur that the noise began demonstratively far off, as though Mr Pancks sought to impress on any one who might happen to think about it, that he was working on from out of hearing. Mr Pancks and he shook hands, and the former brought his employer a letter or two to sign. Mr Pancks in shaking hands merely scratched his eyebrow with his left forefinger and snorted once, but Clennam, who understood him better now than of old, comprehended that he had almost done for the evening and wished to say a word to him outside. Therefore, when he had taken his leave of Mr Casby, and (which was a more difficult process) of Flora, he sauntered in the neighbourhood on Mr Pancks's line of road.

He had waited but a short time when Mr Pancks appeared. Mr Pancks shaking hands again with another expressive snort, and taking off his hat to put his hair up, Arthur thought he received his cue to speak to him as one who knew pretty well what had just now passed. Therefore he said, without any preface:

'I suppose they were really gone, Pancks?'

'Yes,' replied Pancks. 'They were really gone.'

'Does he know where to find that lady?'

'Can't say. I should think so.'

Mr Pancks did not? No, Mr Pancks did not. Did Mr Pancks know anything about her? 'I expect,' rejoined that worthy, 'I know as much about her as she knows about herself. She is somebody's child—anybody's, nobody's.

Put her in a room in London here with any six people old enough to be her parents, and her parents may be there for anything she knows. They may be in any house she sees, they may be in any churchyard she passes, she may run against 'em in any street, she may make chance acquaintance of 'em at any time; and never know it.

She knows nothing about 'em. She knows nothing about any relative whatever. Never did. Never will.' 'Mr Casby could enlighten her, perhaps?'

'May be,' said Pancks. 'I expect so, but don't know. He has long had money (not overmuch as I make out) in trust to dole out to her when she can't do without it. Sometimes she's proud and won't touch it for a length of time; sometimes she's so poor that she must have it. She writhes under her life. A woman more angry, passionate, reckless, and revengeful never lived. She came for money to-night. Said she had peculiar occasion for it.'

'I think,' observed Clennam musing, 'I by chance know what occasion—I mean into whose pocket the money is to go.'

'Indeed?' said Pancks. 'If it's a compact, I recommend that party to be exact in it. I wouldn't trust myself to that woman, young and handsome as she is, if I had wronged her; no, not for twice my proprietor's money! Unless,' Pancks added as a saving clause, 'I had a lingering illness on me, and wanted to get it over.'

Arthur, hurriedly reviewing his own observation of her, found it to tally pretty nearly with Mr Pancks's view.

'The wonder is to me,' pursued Pancks, 'that she has never done for my proprietor, as the only person connected with her story she can lay hold of. Mentioning that, I may tell you, between ourselves, that I am sometimes tempted to do for him myself.'

Arthur started and said, 'Dear me, Pancks, don't say that!'

'Understand me,' said Pancks, extending five cropped coaly finger-nails on Arthur's arm; 'I don't mean, cut his throat. But by all that's precious, if he goes too far, I'll cut his hair!'

Having exhibited himself in the new light of enunciating this tremendous threat, Mr Pancks, with a countenance of grave import, snorted several times and steamed away.

CHAPTER 10. The Dreams of Mrs Flintwinch thicken

The shady waiting-rooms of the Circumlocution Office, where he passed a good deal of time in company with various troublesome Convicts who were under sentence to be broken alive on that wheel, had afforded Arthur Clennam ample leisure, in three or four successive days, to exhaust the subject of his late glimpse of Miss Wade and Tattycoram. He had been able to make no more of it and no less of it, and in this unsatisfactory condition he was fain to leave it.

During this space he had not been to his mother's dismal old house.

One of his customary evenings for repairing thither now coming round, he left his dwelling and his partner at nearly nine o'clock, and slowly walked in the direction of that grim home of his youth.

It always affected his imagination as wrathful, mysterious, and sad; and his imagination was sufficiently impressible to see the whole neighbourhood under some tinge of its dark shadow. As he went along, upon a dreary night, the dim streets by which he went, seemed all depositories of oppressive secrets. The deserted counting-houses, with their secrets of books and papers locked up in chests and safes; the banking-houses, with their secrets of strong rooms and wells, the keys of which were in a very few secret pockets and a very few secret breasts; the secrets of all the dispersed grinders in the vast mill, among whom there were doubtless plunderers, forgers, and trust-betrayers of many sorts, whom the light of any day that dawned might reveal; he could have fancied that these things, in hiding, imparted a heaviness to the air. The shadow thickening and thickening as he approached its source, he thought of the secrets of the lonely church-vaults, where the people who had hoarded and secreted in iron coffers were in their turn similarly hoarded, not yet at rest from doing harm; and then of the secrets of the river, as it rolled its turbid tide between two frowning wildernesses of secrets, extending, thick and dense, for many miles, and warding off the free air and the free country swept by winds and wings of birds.

The shadow still darkening as he drew near the house, the melancholy room which his father had once occupied, haunted by the appealing face he had himself seen fade away with him when there was no other watcher by the bed, arose before his mind. Its close air was secret. The gloom, and must, and dust of the whole tenement, were secret. At the heart of it his mother presided, inflexible of face, indomitable of will, firmly holding all the secrets of her own and his father's life, and austerely opposing herself, front to front, to the great final secret of all life.

He had turned into the narrow and steep street from which the court of enclosure wherein the house stood opened, when another footstep turned into it behind him, and so close upon his own that he was jostled to the wall. As his mind was teeming with these thoughts, the encounter took him altogether unprepared, so that the other passenger had had time to say, boisterously, 'Pardon! Not my fault!' and to pass on before the instant had elapsed which was requisite to his recovery of the realities about him.

When that moment had flashed away, he saw that the man striding on before him was the man who had been so much in his mind during the last few days. It was no casual resemblance, helped out by the force of the impression the man made upon him. It was the man; the man he had followed in company with the girl, and whom he had overheard talking to Miss Wade.

The street was a sharp descent and was crooked too, and the man (who although not drunk had the air of being flushed with some strong drink) went down it so fast that Clennam lost him as he looked at him. With no defined intention of following him, but with an impulse to keep the figure in view a little longer, Clennam quickened his pace to pass the twist in the street which hid him from his sight. On turning it, he saw the man no more.

Standing now, close to the gateway of his mother's house, he looked down the street: but it was empty. There was no projecting shadow large enough to obscure the man; there was no turning near that he could have taken; nor had there been any audible sound of the opening and closing of a door. Nevertheless, he concluded that the man must have had a key in his hand, and must have opened one of the many house-doors and gone in.

Ruminating on this strange chance and strange glimpse, he turned into the court-yard. As he looked, by mere habit, towards the feebly lighted windows of his mother's room, his eyes encountered the figure he had just lost, standing against the iron railings of the little waste enclosure looking up at those windows and laughing to himself. Some of the many vagrant cats who were always prowling about there by night, and who had taken fright at him, appeared to have stopped when he had stopped, and were looking at him with eyes by no means unlike his own from tops of walls and porches, and other safe points of pause. He had only halted for a moment to entertain himself thus; he immediately went forward, throwing the end of his cloak off his shoulder as he went, ascended the unevenly sunken steps, and knocked a sounding knock at the door.

Clennam's surprise was not so absorbing but that he took his resolution without any incertitude. He went up to the door too, and ascended the steps too. His friend looked at him with a braggart air, and sang to himself.

'Who passes by this road so late?
     Compagnon de la Majolaine;
Who passes by this road so late?
     Always gay!'

After which he knocked again.

'You are impatient, sir,' said Arthur.

'I am, sir. Death of my life, sir,' returned the stranger, 'it's my character to be impatient!' The sound of Mistress Affery cautiously chaining the door before she opened it, caused them both to look that way. Affery opened it a very little, with a flaring candle in her hands and asked who was that, at that time of night, with that knock! 'Why, Arthur!' she added with astonishment, seeing him first. 'Not you sure? Ah, Lord save us! No,' she cried out, seeing the other. 'Him again!'

'It's true! Him again, dear Mrs Flintwinch,' cried the stranger. 'Open the door, and let me take my dear friend Jeremiah to my arms! Open the door, and let me hasten myself to embrace my Flintwinch!'

'He's not at home,' cried Affery.

'Fetch him!' cried the stranger. 'Fetch my Flintwinch! Tell him that it is his old Blandois, who comes from arriving in England; tell him that it is his little boy who is here, his cabbage, his well-beloved! Open the door, beautiful Mrs Flintwinch, and in the meantime let me to pass upstairs, to present my compliments—homage of Blandois—to my lady! My lady lives always? It is well.

Open then!'

To Arthur's increased surprise, Mistress Affery, stretching her eyes wide at himself, as if in warning that this was not a gentleman for him to interfere with, drew back the chain, and opened the door. The stranger, without ceremony, walked into the hall, leaving Arthur to follow him.

'Despatch then! Achieve then! Bring my Flintwinch! Announce me to my lady!' cried the stranger, clanking about the stone floor.

'Pray tell me, Affery,' said Arthur aloud and sternly, as he surveyed him from head to foot with indignation; 'who is this gentleman?'

'Pray tell me, Affery,' the stranger repeated in his turn, 'who—ha, ha, ha!—who is this gentleman?'

The voice of Mrs Clennam opportunely called from her chamber above, 'Affery, let them both come up. Arthur, come straight to me!'

'Arthur?' exclaimed Blandois, taking off his hat at arm's length, and bringing his heels together from a great stride in making him a flourishing bow. 'The son of my lady? I am the all-devoted of the son of my lady!'

Arthur looked at him again in no more flattering manner than before, and, turning on his heel without acknowledgment, went up-stairs. The visitor followed him up-stairs. Mistress Affery took the key from behind the door, and deftly slipped out to fetch her lord.

A bystander, informed of the previous appearance of Monsieur Blandois in that room, would have observed a difference in Mrs Clennam's present reception of him. Her face was not one to betray it; and her suppressed manner, and her set voice, were equally under her control. It wholly consisted in her never taking her eyes off his face from the moment of his entrance, and in her twice or thrice, when he was becoming noisy, swaying herself a very little forward in the chair in which she sat upright, with her hands immovable upon its elbows; as if she gave him the assurance that he should be presently heard at any length he would. Arthur did not fail to observe this; though the difference between the present occasion and the former was not within his power of observation.

'Madame,' said Blandois, 'do me the honour to present me to Monsieur, your son. It appears to me, madame, that Monsieur, your son, is disposed to complain of me. He is not polite.'

'Sir,' said Arthur, striking in expeditiously, 'whoever you are, and however you come to be here, if I were the master of this house I would lose no time in placing you on the outside of it.'

'But you are not,' said his mother, without looking at him. 'Unfortunately for the gratification of your unreasonable temper, you are not the master, Arthur.'

'I make no claim to be, mother. If I object to this person's manner of conducting himself here, and object to it so much, that if I had any authority here I certainly would not suffer him to remain a minute, I object on your account.'

'In the case of objection being necessary,' she returned, 'I could object for myself. And of course I should.'

The subject of their dispute, who had seated himself, laughed aloud, and rapped his legs with his hand.

'You have no right,' said Mrs Clennam, always intent on Blandois, however directly she addressed her son, 'to speak to the prejudice of any gentleman (least of all a gentleman from another country), because he does not conform to your standard, or square his behaviour by your rules. It is possible that the gentleman may, on similar grounds, object to you.'

'I hope so,' returned Arthur.

'The gentleman,' pursued Mrs Clennam, 'on a former occasion brought a letter of recommendation to us from highly esteemed and responsible correspondents. I am perfectly unacquainted with the gentleman's object in coming here at present. I am entirely ignorant of it, and cannot be supposed likely to be able to form the remotest guess at its nature;' her habitual frown became stronger, as she very slowly and weightily emphasised those words; 'but, when the gentleman proceeds to explain his object, as I shall beg him to have the goodness to do to myself and Flintwinch, when Flintwinch returns, it will prove, no doubt, to be one more or less in the usual way of our business, which it will be both our business and our pleasure to advance. It can be nothing else.'

'We shall see, madame!' said the man of business.

'We shall see,' she assented. 'The gentleman is acquainted with Flintwinch; and when the gentleman was in London last, I remember to have heard that he and Flintwinch had some entertainment or good-fellowship together. I am not in the way of knowing much that passes outside this room, and the jingle of little worldly things beyond it does not much interest me; but I remember to have heard that.'

'Right, madame. It is true.' He laughed again, and whistled the burden of the tune he had sung at the door.

'Therefore, Arthur,' said his mother, 'the gentleman comes here as an acquaintance, and no stranger; and it is much to be regretted that your unreasonable temper should have found offence in him. I regret it. I say so to the gentleman. You will not say so, I know; therefore I say it for myself and Flintwinch, since with us two the gentleman's business lies.'

The key of the door below was now heard in the lock, and the door was heard to open and close. In due sequence Mr Flintwinch appeared; on whose entrance the visitor rose from his chair, laughing loud, and folded him in a close embrace.

'How goes it, my cherished friend!' said he. 'How goes the world, my Flintwinch? Rose-coloured? So much the better, so much the better! Ah, but you look charming! Ah, but you look young and fresh as the flowers of Spring! Ah, good little boy! Brave child, brave child!'

While heaping these compliments on Mr Flintwinch, he rolled him about with a hand on each of his shoulders, until the staggerings of that gentleman, who under the circumstances was dryer and more twisted than ever, were like those of a teetotum nearly spent.

'I had a presentiment, last time, that we should be better and more intimately acquainted. Is it coming on you, Flintwinch? Is it yet coming on?'

'Why, no, sir,' retorted Mr Flintwinch. 'Not unusually. Hadn't you better be seated? You have been calling for some more of that port, sir, I guess?'

'Ah, Little joker! Little pig!' cried the visitor. 'Ha ha ha ha!' And throwing Mr Flintwinch away, as a closing piece of raillery, he sat down again.

The amazement, suspicion, resentment, and shame, with which Arthur looked on at all this, struck him dumb. Mr Flintwinch, who had spun backward some two or three yards under the impetus last given to him, brought himself up with a face completely unchanged in its stolidity except as it was affected by shortness of breath, and looked hard at Arthur. Not a whit less reticent and wooden was Mr Flintwinch outwardly, than in the usual course of things: the only perceptible difference in him being that the knot of cravat which was generally under his ear, had worked round to the back of his head: where it formed an ornamental appendage not unlike a bagwig, and gave him something of a courtly appearance. As Mrs Clennam never removed her eyes from Blandois (on whom they had some effect, as a steady look has on a lower sort of dog), so Jeremiah never removed his from Arthur. It was as if they had tacitly agreed to take their different provinces. Thus, in the ensuing silence, Jeremiah stood scraping his chin and looking at Arthur as though he were trying to screw his thoughts out of him with an instrument.

After a little, the visitor, as if he felt the silence irksome, rose, and impatiently put himself with his back to the sacred fire which had burned through so many years. Thereupon Mrs Clennam said, moving one of her hands for the first time, and moving it very slightly with an action of dismissal:

'Please to leave us to our business, Arthur.' 'Mother, I do so with reluctance.'

'Never mind with what,' she returned, 'or with what not. Please to leave us. Come back at any other time when you may consider it a duty to bury half an hour wearily here. Good night.'

She held up her muffled fingers that he might touch them with his, according to their usual custom, and he stood over her wheeled chair to touch her face with his lips. He thought, then, that her cheek was more strained than usual, and that it was colder. As he followed the direction of her eyes, in rising again, towards Mr Flintwinch's good friend, Mr Blandois, Mr Blandois snapped his finger and thumb with one loud contemptuous snap.

'I leave your—your business acquaintance in my mother's room, Mr Flintwinch,' said Clennam, 'with a great deal of surprise and a great deal of unwillingness.'

The person referred to snapped his finger and thumb again.

'Good night, mother.'

'Good night.'

'I had a friend once, my good comrade Flintwinch,' said Blandois, standing astride before the fire, and so evidently saying it to arrest Clennam's retreating steps, that he lingered near the door; 'I had a friend once, who had heard so much of the dark side of this city and its ways, that he wouldn't have confided himself alone by night with two people who had an interest in getting him under the ground—my faith! not even in a respectable house like this—unless he was bodily too strong for them. Bah! What a poltroon, my Flintwinch! Eh?'

'A cur, sir.'

'Agreed! A cur. But he wouldn't have done it, my Flintwinch, unless he had known them to have the will to silence him, without the power. He wouldn't have drunk from a glass of water under such circumstances—not even in a respectable house like this, my Flintwinch—unless he had seen one of them drink first, and swallow too!'

Disdaining to speak, and indeed not very well able, for he was half-choking, Clennam only glanced at the visitor as he passed out.

The visitor saluted him with another parting snap, and his nose came down over his moustache and his moustache went up under his nose, in an ominous and ugly smile.

'For Heaven's sake, Affery,' whispered Clennam, as she opened the door for him in the dark hall, and he groped his way to the sight of the night-sky, 'what is going on here?'

Her own appearance was sufficiently ghastly, standing in the dark with her apron thrown over her head, and speaking behind it in a low, deadened voice.

'Don't ask me anything, Arthur. I've been in a dream for ever so long. Go away!'

He went out, and she shut the door upon him. He looked up at the windows of his mother's room, and the dim light, deadened by the yellow blinds, seemed to say a response after Affery, and to mutter, 'Don't ask me anything. Go away!'

CHAPTER 11. A Letter from Little Dorrit

Dear Mr Clennam,

As I said in my last that it was best for nobody to write to me, and as my sending you another little letter can therefore give you no other trouble than the trouble of reading it (perhaps you may not find leisure for even that, though I hope you will some day), I am now going to devote an hour to writing to you again. This time, I write from Rome.

We left Venice before Mr and Mrs Gowan did, but they were not so long upon the road as we were, and did not travel by the same way, and so when we arrived we found them in a lodging here, in a place called the Via Gregoriana. I dare say you know it.

Now I am going to tell you all I can about them, because I know that is what you most want to hear. Theirs is not a very comfortable lodging, but perhaps I thought it less so when I first saw it than you would have done, because you have been in many different countries and have seen many different customs. Of course it is a far, far better place—millions of times—than any I have ever been used to until lately; and I fancy I don't look at it with my own eyes, but with hers. For it would be easy to see that she has always been brought up in a tender and happy home, even if she had not told me so with great love for it.

Well, it is a rather bare lodging up a rather dark common staircase, and it is nearly all a large dull room, where Mr Gowan paints. The windows are blocked up where any one could look out, and the walls have been all drawn over with chalk and charcoal by others who have lived there before—oh,—I should think, for years!

There is a curtain more dust-coloured than red, which divides it, and the part behind the curtain makes the private sitting-room.

When I first saw her there she was alone, and her work had fallen out of her hand, and she was looking up at the sky shining through the tops of the windows. Pray do not be uneasy when I tell you, but it was not quite so airy, nor so bright, nor so cheerful, nor so happy and youthful altogether as I should have liked it to be.

On account of Mr Gowan's painting Papa's picture (which I am not quite convinced I should have known from the likeness if I had not seen him doing it), I have had more opportunities of being with her since then than I might have had without this fortunate chance. She is very much alone. Very much alone indeed.

Shall I tell you about the second time I saw her? I went one day, when it happened that I could run round by myself, at four or five o'clock in the afternoon. She was then dining alone, and her solitary dinner had been brought in from somewhere, over a kind of brazier with a fire in it, and she had no company or prospect of company, that I could see, but the old man who had brought it. He was telling her a long story (of robbers outside the walls being taken up by a stone statue of a Saint), to entertain her—as he said to me when I came out, 'because he had a daughter of his own, though she was not so pretty.'

I ought now to mention Mr Gowan, before I say what little more I have to say about her. He must admire her beauty, and he must be proud of her, for everybody praises it, and he must be fond of her, and I do not doubt that he is—but in his way. You know his way, and if it appears as careless and discontented in your eyes as it does in mine, I am not wrong in thinking that it might be better suited to her. If it does not seem so to you, I am quite sure I am wholly mistaken; for your unchanged poor child confides in your knowledge and goodness more than she could ever tell you if she was to try. But don't be frightened, I am not going to try. Owing (as I think, if you think so too) to Mr Gowan's unsettled and dissatisfied way, he applies himself to his profession very little.

He does nothing steadily or patiently; but equally takes things up and throws them down, and does them, or leaves them undone, without caring about them. When I have heard him talking to Papa during the sittings for the picture, I have sat wondering whether it could be that he has no belief in anybody else, because he has no belief in himself. Is it so? I wonder what you will say when you come to this! I know how you will look, and I can almost hear the voice in which you would tell me on the Iron Bridge.

Mr Gowan goes out a good deal among what is considered the best company here—though he does not look as if he enjoyed it or liked it when he is with it—and she sometimes accompanies him, but lately she has gone out very little. I think I have noticed that they have an inconsistent way of speaking about her, as if she had made some great self-interested success in marrying Mr Gowan, though, at the same time, the very same people, would not have dreamed of taking him for themselves or their daughters.

Then he goes into the country besides, to think about making sketches; and in all places where there are visitors, he has a large acquaintance and is very well known. Besides all this, he has a friend who is much in his society both at home and away from home, though he treats this friend very coolly and is very uncertain in his behaviour to him. I am quite sure (because she has told me so), that she does not like this friend. He is so revolting to me, too, that his being away from here, at present, is quite a relief to my mind. How much more to hers!

But what I particularly want you to know, and why I have resolved to tell you so much while I am afraid it may make you a little uncomfortable without occasion, is this. She is so true and so devoted, and knows so completely that all her love and duty are his for ever, that you may be certain she will love him, admire him, praise him, and conceal all his faults, until she dies. I believe she conceals them, and always will conceal them, even from herself.

She has given him a heart that can never be taken back; and however much he may try it, he will never wear out its affection. You know the truth of this, as you know everything, far far better than I; but I cannot help telling you what a nature she shows, and that you can never think too well of her.

I have not yet called her by her name in this letter, but we are such friends now that I do so when we are quietly together, and she speaks to me by my name—I mean, not my Christian name, but the name you gave me. When she began to call me Amy, I told her my short story, and that you had always called me Little Dorrit. I told her that the name was much dearer to me than any other, and so she calls me Little Dorrit too.

Perhaps you have not heard from her father or mother yet, and may not know that she has a baby son. He was born only two days ago, and just a week after they came. It has made them very happy. However, I must tell you, as I am to tell you all, that I fancy they are under a constraint with Mr Gowan, and that they feel as if his mocking way with them was sometimes a slight given to their love for her. It was but yesterday, when I was there, that I saw Mr Meagles change colour, and get up and go out, as if he was afraid that he might say so, unless he prevented himself by that means. Yet I am sure they are both so considerate, good-humoured, and reasonable, that he might spare them. It is hard in him not to think of them a little more.

I stopped at the last full stop to read all this over. It looked at first as if I was taking on myself to understand and explain so much, that I was half inclined not to send it. But when I thought it over a little, I felt more hopeful for your knowing at once that I had only been watchful for you, and had only noticed what I think I have noticed, because I was quickened by your interest in it. Indeed, you may be sure that is the truth.

And now I have done with the subject in the present letter, and have little left to say.

We are all quite well, and Fanny improves every day. You can hardly think how kind she is to me, and what pains she takes with me. She has a lover, who has followed her, first all the way from Switzerland, and then all the way from Venice, and who has just confided to me that he means to follow her everywhere. I was much confused by his speaking to me about it, but he would. I did not know what to say, but at last I told him that I thought he had better not. For Fanny (but I did not tell him this) is much too spirited and clever to suit him. Still, he said he would, all the same. I have no lover, of course.

If you should ever get so far as this in this long letter, you will perhaps say, Surely Little Dorrit will not leave off without telling me something about her travels, and surely it is time she did. I think it is indeed, but I don't know what to tell you. Since we left Venice we have been in a great many wonderful places, Genoa and Florence among them, and have seen so many wonderful sights, that I am almost giddy when I think what a crowd they make.

But you can tell me so much more about them than I can tell you, that why should I tire you with my accounts and descriptions?

Dear Mr Clennam, as I had the courage to tell you what the familiar difficulties in my travelling mind were before, I will not be a coward now. One of my frequent thoughts is this:—Old as these cities are, their age itself is hardly so curious, to my reflections, as that they should have been in their places all through those days when I did not even know of the existence of more than two or three of them, and when I scarcely knew of anything outside our old walls. There is something melancholy in it, and I don't know why. When we went to see the famous leaning tower at Pisa, it was a bright sunny day, and it and the buildings near it looked so old, and the earth and the sky looked so young, and its shadow on the ground was so soft and retired! I could not at first think how beautiful it was, or how curious, but I thought, 'O how many times when the shadow of the wall was falling on our room, and when that weary tread of feet was going up and down the yard—O how many times this place was just as quiet and lovely as it is to-day!' It quite overpowered me. My heart was so full that tears burst out of my eyes, though I did what I could to restrain them. And I have the same feeling often—often.

Do you know that since the change in our fortunes, though I appear to myself to have dreamed more than before, I have always dreamed of myself as very young indeed! I am not very old, you may say. No, but that is not what I mean. I have always dreamed of myself as a child learning to do needlework. I have often dreamed of myself as back there, seeing faces in the yard little known, and which I should have thought I had quite forgotten; but, as often as not, I have been abroad here—in Switzerland, or France, or Italy—somewhere where we have been—yet always as that little child. I have dreamed of going down to Mrs General, with the patches on my clothes in which I can first remember myself. I have over and over again dreamed of taking my place at dinner at Venice when we have had a large company, in the mourning for my poor mother which I wore when I was eight years old, and wore long after it was threadbare and would mend no more. It has been a great distress to me to think how irreconcilable the company would consider it with my father's wealth, and how I should displease and disgrace him and Fanny and Edward by so plainly disclosing what they wished to keep secret. But I have not grown out of the little child in thinking of it; and at the self-same moment I have dreamed that I have sat with the heart-ache at table, calculating the expenses of the dinner, and quite distracting myself with thinking how they were ever to be made good. I have never dreamed of the change in our fortunes itself; I have never dreamed of your coming back with me that memorable morning to break it; I have never even dreamed of you.

Dear Mr Clennam, it is possible that I have thought of you—and others—so much by day, that I have no thoughts left to wander round you by night. For I must now confess to you that I suffer from home-sickness—that I long so ardently and earnestly for home, as sometimes, when no one sees me, to pine for it. I cannot bear to turn my face further away from it. My heart is a little lightened when we turn towards it, even for a few miles, and with the knowledge that we are soon to turn away again. So dearly do I love the scene of my poverty and your kindness. O so dearly, O so dearly!

Heaven knows when your poor child will see England again. We are all fond of the life here (except me), and there are no plans for our return. My dear father talks of a visit to London late in this next spring, on some affairs connected with the property, but I have no hope that he will bring me with him.

I have tried to get on a little better under Mrs General's instruction, and I hope I am not quite so dull as I used to be. I have begun to speak and understand, almost easily, the hard languages I told you about. I did not remember, at the moment when I wrote last, that you knew them both; but I remembered it afterwards, and it helped me on. God bless you, dear Mr Clennam. Do not forget your ever grateful and affectionate

LITTLE DORRIT.

P.S.—Particularly remember that Minnie Gowan deserves the best remembrance in which you can hold her. You cannot think too generously or too highly of her. I forgot Mr Pancks last time. Please, if you should see him, give him your Little Dorrit's kind regard. He was very good to Little D.

CHAPTER 12. In which a Great Patriotic Conference is holden

The famous name of Merdle became, every day, more famous in the land. Nobody knew that the Merdle of such high renown had ever done any good to any one, alive or dead, or to any earthly thing; nobody knew that he had any capacity or utterance of any sort in him, which had ever thrown, for any creature, the feeblest farthing-candle ray of light on any path of duty or diversion, pain or pleasure, toil or rest, fact or fancy, among the multiplicity of paths in the labyrinth trodden by the sons of Adam; nobody had the smallest reason for supposing the clay of which this object of worship was made, to be other than the commonest clay, with as clogged a wick smouldering inside of it as ever kept an image of humanity from tumbling to pieces. All people knew (or thought they knew) that he had made himself immensely rich; and, for that reason alone, prostrated themselves before him, more degradedly and less excusably than the darkest savage creeps out of his hole in the ground to propitiate, in some log or reptile, the Deity of his benighted soul.

Nay, the high priests of this worship had the man before them as a protest against their meanness. The multitude worshipped on trust—though always distinctly knowing why—but the officiators at the altar had the man habitually in their view. They sat at his feasts, and he sat at theirs. There was a spectre always attendant on him, saying to these high priests, 'Are such the signs you trust, and love to honour; this head, these eyes, this mode of speech, the tone and manner of this man? You are the levers of the Circumlocution Office, and the rulers of men. When half-a-dozen of you fall out by the ears, it seems that mother earth can give birth to no other rulers. Does your qualification lie in the superior knowledge of men which accepts, courts, and puffs this man? Or, if you are competent to judge aright the signs I never fail to show you when he appears among you, is your superior honesty your qualification?' Two rather ugly questions these, always going about town with Mr Merdle; and there was a tacit agreement that they must be stifled. In Mrs Merdle's absence abroad, Mr Merdle still kept the great house open for the passage through it of a stream Of visitors.

A few of these took affable possession of the establishment. Three or four ladies of distinction and liveliness used to say to one another, 'Let us dine at our dear Merdle's next Thursday. Whom shall we have?' Our dear Merdle would then receive his instructions; and would sit heavily among the company at table and wander lumpishly about his drawing-rooms afterwards, only remarkable for appearing to have nothing to do with the entertainment beyond being in its way.

The Chief Butler, the Avenging Spirit of this great man's life, relaxed nothing of his severity. He looked on at these dinners when the bosom was not there, as he looked on at other dinners when the bosom was there; and his eye was a basilisk to Mr Merdle. He was a hard man, and would never bate an ounce of plate or a bottle of wine. He would not allow a dinner to be given, unless it was up to his mark. He set forth the table for his own dignity. If the guests chose to partake of what was served, he saw no objection; but it was served for the maintenance of his rank. As he stood by the sideboard he seemed to announce, 'I have accepted office to look at this which is now before me, and to look at nothing less than this.' If he missed the presiding bosom, it was as a part of his own state of which he was, from unavoidable circumstances, temporarily deprived, just as he might have missed a centre-piece, or a choice wine-cooler, which had been sent to the Banker's.

Mr Merdle issued invitations for a Barnacle dinner. Lord Decimus was to be there, Mr Tite Barnacle was to be there, the pleasant young Barnacle was to be there; and the Chorus of Parliamentary Barnacles who went about the provinces when the House was up, warbling the praises of their Chief, were to be represented there. It was understood to be a great occasion. Mr Merdle was going to take up the Barnacles. Some delicate little negotiations had occurred between him and the noble Decimus—the young Barnacle of engaging manners acting as negotiator—and Mr Merdle had decided to cast the weight of his great probity and great riches into the Barnacle scale. Jobbery was suspected by the malicious; perhaps because it was indisputable that if the adherence of the immortal Enemy of Mankind could have been secured by a job, the Barnacles would have jobbed him—for the good of the country, for the good of the country.

Mrs Merdle had written to this magnificent spouse of hers, whom it was heresy to regard as anything less than all the British Merchants since the days of Whittington rolled into one, and gilded three feet deep all over—

had written to this spouse of hers, several letters from Rome, in quick succession, urging upon him with importunity that now or never was the time to provide for Edmund Sparkler. Mrs Merdle had shown him that the case of Edmund was urgent, and that infinite advantages might result from his having some good thing directly. In the grammar of Mrs Merdle's verbs on this momentous subject, there was only one mood, the Imperative; and that Mood had only one Tense, the Present. Mrs Merdle's verbs were so pressingly presented to Mr Merdle to conjugate, that his sluggish blood and his long coat-cuffs became quite agitated.

In which state of agitation, Mr Merdle, evasively rolling his eyes round the Chief Butler's shoes without raising them to the index of that stupendous creature's thoughts, had signified to him his intention of giving a special dinner: not a very large dinner, but a very special dinner. The Chief Butler had signified, in return, that he had no objection to look on at the most expensive thing in that way that could be done; and the day of the dinner was now come.

Mr Merdle stood in one of his drawing-rooms, with his back to the fire, waiting for the arrival of his important guests. He seldom or never took the liberty of standing with his back to the fire unless he was quite alone. In the presence of the Chief Butler, he could not have done such a deed. He would have clasped himself by the wrists in that constabulary manner of his, and have paced up and down the hearthrug, or gone creeping about among the rich objects of furniture, if his oppressive retainer had appeared in the room at that very moment. The sly shadows which seemed to dart out of hiding when the fire rose, and to dart back into it when the fire fell, were sufficient witnesses of his making himself so easy.

They were even more than sufficient, if his uncomfortable glances at them might be taken to mean anything.

Mr Merdle's right hand was filled with the evening paper, and the evening paper was full of Mr Merdle. His wonderful enterprise, his wonderful wealth, his wonderful Bank, were the fattening food of the evening paper that night. The wonderful Bank, of which he was the chief projector, establisher, and manager, was the latest of the many Merdle wonders. So modest was Mr Merdle withal, in the midst of these splendid achievements, that he looked far more like a man in possession of his house under a distraint, than a commercial Colossus bestriding his own hearthrug, while the little ships were sailing into dinner.

Behold the vessels coming into port! The engaging young Barnacle was the first arrival; but Bar overtook him on the staircase. Bar, strengthened as usual with his double eye-glass and his little jury droop, was overjoyed to see the engaging young Barnacle; and opined that we were going to sit in Banco, as we lawyers called it, to take a special argument?

'Indeed,' said the sprightly young Barnacle, whose name was Ferdinand; 'how so?'

'Nay,' smiled Bar. 'If you don't know, how can I know? You are in the innermost sanctuary of the temple; I am one of the admiring concourse on the plain without.'

Bar could be light in hand, or heavy in hand, according to the customer he had to deal with. With Ferdinand Barnacle he was gossamer. Bar was likewise always modest and self-depreciatory—in his way. Bar was a man of great variety; but one leading thread ran through the woof of all his patterns. Every man with whom he had to do was in his eyes a jury-man; and he must get that jury-man over, if he could.

'Our illustrious host and friend,' said Bar; 'our shining mercantile star;—going into politics?'

'Going? He has been in Parliament some time, you know,' returned the engaging young Barnacle.

'True,' said Bar, with his light-comedy laugh for special jury-men, which was a very different thing from his low-comedy laugh for comic tradesmen on common juries: 'he has been in Parliament for some time. Yet hitherto our star has been a vacillating and wavering star? Humph?'

An average witness would have been seduced by the Humph? into an affirmative answer, But Ferdinand Barnacle looked knowingly at Bar as he strolled up-stairs, and gave him no answer at all.

'Just so, just so,' said Bar, nodding his head, for he was not to be put off in that way, 'and therefore I spoke of our sitting in Banco to take a special argument—meaning this to be a high and solemn occasion, when, as Captain Macheath says, "the judges are met: a terrible show!" We lawyers are sufficiently liberal, you see, to quote the Captain, though the Captain is severe upon us. Nevertheless, I think I could put in evidence an admission of the Captain's,' said Bar, with a little jocose roll of his head; for, in his legal current of speech, he always assumed the air of rallying himself with the best grace in the world; 'an admission of the Captain's that Law, in the gross, is at least intended to be impartial. For what says the Captain, if I quote him correctly—and if not,' with a light-comedy touch of his double eye-glass on his companion's shoulder, 'my learned friend will set me right:

"Since laws were made for every degree,
To curb vice in others as well as in me,
I wonder we ha'n't better company
Upon Tyburn Tree!"'

These words brought them to the drawing-room, where Mr Merdle stood before the fire. So immensely astounded was Mr Merdle by the entrance of Bar with such a reference in his mouth, that Bar explained himself to have been quoting Gay. 'Assuredly not one of our Westminster Hall authorities,' said he, 'but still no despicable one to a man possessing the largely-practical Mr Merdle's knowledge of the world.'

Mr Merdle looked as if he thought he would say something, but subsequently looked as if he thought he wouldn't. The interval afforded time for Bishop to be announced. Bishop came in with meekness, and yet with a strong and rapid step as if he wanted to get his seven-league dress-shoes on, and go round the world to see that everybody was in a satisfactory state. Bishop had no idea that there was anything significant in the occasion. That was the most remarkable trait in his demeanour. He was crisp, fresh, cheerful, affable, bland; but so surprisingly innocent.

Bar sidled up to prefer his politest inquiries in reference to the health of Mrs Bishop. Mrs Bishop had been a little unfortunate in the article of taking cold at a Confirmation, but otherwise was well. Young Mr Bishop was also well. He was down, with his young wife and little family, at his Cure of Souls. The representatives of the Barnacle Chorus dropped in next, and Mr Merdle's physician dropped in next. Bar, who had a bit of one eye and a bit of his double eye-glass for every one who came in at the door, no matter with whom he was conversing or what he was talking about, got among them all by some skilful means, without being seen to get at them, and touched each individual gentleman of the jury on his own individual favourite spot. With some of the Chorus, he laughed about the sleepy member who had gone out into the lobby the other night, and voted the wrong way: with others, he deplored that innovating spirit in the time which could not even be prevented from taking an unnatural interest in the public service and the public money: with the physician he had a word to say about the general health; he had also a little information to ask him for, concerning a professional man of unquestioned erudition and polished manners—but those credentials in their highest development he believed were the possession of other professors of the healing art (jury droop)—whom he had happened to have in the witness-box the day before yesterday, and from whom he had elicited in cross-examination that he claimed to be one of the exponents of this new mode of treatment which appeared to Bar to—eh?—well, Bar thought so; Bar had thought, and hoped, Physician would tell him so. Without presuming to decide where doctors disagreed, it did appear to Bar, viewing it as a question of common sense and not of so-called legal penetration, that this new system was—might be, in the presence of so great an authority—say, Humbug? Ah! Fortified by such encouragement, he could venture to say Humbug; and now Bar's mind was relieved.

Mr Tite Barnacle, who, like Dr johnson's celebrated acquaintance, had only one idea in his head and that was a wrong one, had appeared by this time. This eminent gentleman and Mr Merdle, seated diverse ways and with ruminating aspects on a yellow ottoman in the light of the fire, holding no verbal communication with each other, bore a strong general resemblance to the two cows in the Cuyp picture over against them.

But now, Lord Decimus arrived. The Chief Butler, who up to this time had limited himself to a branch of his usual function by looking at the company as they entered (and that, with more of defiance than favour), put himself so far out of his way as to come up-stairs with him and announce him. Lord Decimus being an overpowering peer, a bashful young member of the Lower House who was the last fish but one caught by the Barnacles, and who had been invited on this occasion to commemorate his capture, shut his eyes when his Lordship came in.

Lord Decimus, nevertheless, was glad to see the Member. He was also glad to see Mr Merdle, glad to see Bishop, glad to see Bar, glad to see Physician, glad to see Tite Barnacle, glad to see Chorus, glad to see Ferdinand his private secretary. Lord Decimus, though one of the greatest of the earth, was not remarkable for ingratiatory manners, and Ferdinand had coached him up to the point of noticing all the fellows he might find there, and saying he was glad to see them. When he had achieved this rush of vivacity and condescension, his Lordship composed himself into the picture after Cuyp, and made a third cow in the group.

Bar, who felt that he had got all the rest of the jury and must now lay hold of the Foreman, soon came sidling up, double eye-glass in hand. Bar tendered the weather, as a subject neatly aloof from official reserve, for the Foreman's consideration. Bar said that he was told (as everybody always is told, though who tells them, and why, will ever remain a mystery), that there was to be no wall-fruit this year. Lord Decimus had not heard anything amiss of his peaches, but rather believed, if his people were correct, he was to have no apples. No apples? Bar was lost in astonishment and concern. It would have been all one to him, in reality, if there had not been a pippin on the surface of the earth, but his show of interest in this apple question was positively painful. Now, to what, Lord Decimus—for we troublesome lawyers loved to gather information, and could never tell how useful it might prove to us—to what, Lord Decimus, was this to be attributed? Lord Decimus could not undertake to propound any theory about it. This might have stopped another man; but Bar, sticking to him fresh as ever, said, 'As to pears, now?'

Long after Bar got made Attorney-General, this was told of him as a master-stroke. Lord Decimus had a reminiscence about a pear-tree formerly growing in a garden near the back of his dame's house at Eton, upon which pear-tree the only joke of his life perennially bloomed. It was a joke of a compact and portable nature, turning on the difference between Eton pears and Parliamentary pairs; but it was a joke, a refined relish of which would seem to have appeared to Lord Decimus impossible to be had without a thorough and intimate acquaintance with the tree. Therefore, the story at first had no idea of such a tree, sir, then gradually found it in winter, carried it through the changing season, saw it bud, saw it blossom, saw it bear fruit, saw the fruit ripen; in short, cultivated the tree in that diligent and minute manner before it got out of the bed-room window to steal the fruit, that many thanks had been offered up by belated listeners for the trees having been planted and grafted prior to Lord Decimus's time. Bar's interest in apples was so overtopped by the wrapt suspense in which he pursued the changes of these pears, from the moment when Lord Decimus solemnly opened with 'Your mentioning pears recalls to my remembrance a pear-tree,' down to the rich conclusion, 'And so we pass, through the various changes of life, from Eton pears to Parliamentary pairs,' that he had to go downstairs with Lord Decimus, and even then to be seated next to him at table in order that he might hear the anecdote out. By that time, Bar felt that he had secured the Foreman, and might go to dinner with a good appetite.

It was a dinner to provoke an appetite, though he had not had one. The rarest dishes, sumptuously cooked and sumptuously served; the choicest fruits; the most exquisite wines; marvels of workmanship in gold and silver, china and glass; innumerable things delicious to the senses of taste, smell, and sight, were insinuated into its composition. O, what a wonderful man this Merdle, what a great man, what a master man, how blessedly and enviably endowed—in one word, what a rich man!

He took his usual poor eighteenpennyworth of food in his usual indigestive way, and had as little to say for himself as ever a wonderful man had. Fortunately Lord Decimus was one of those sublimities who have no occasion to be talked to, for they can be at any time sufficiently occupied with the contemplation of their own greatness. This enabled the bashful young Member to keep his eyes open long enough at a time to see his dinner. But, whenever Lord Decimus spoke, he shut them again.

The agreeable young Barnacle, and Bar, were the talkers of the party. Bishop would have been exceedingly agreeable also, but that his innocence stood in his way. He was so soon left behind. When there was any little hint of anything being in the wind, he got lost directly. Worldly affairs were too much for him; he couldn't make them out at all.

This was observable when Bar said, incidentally, that he was happy to have heard that we were soon to have the advantage of enlisting on the good side, the sound and plain sagacity—not demonstrative or ostentatious, but thoroughly sound and practical—of our friend Mr Sparkler.

Ferdinand Barnacle laughed, and said oh yes, he believed so. A vote was a vote, and always acceptable.

Bar was sorry to miss our good friend Mr Sparkler to-day, Mr Merdle.

'He is away with Mrs Merdle,' returned that gentleman, slowly coming out of a long abstraction, in the course of which he had been fitting a tablespoon up his sleeve. 'It is not indispensable for him to be on the spot.'

'The magic name of Merdle,' said Bar, with the jury droop, 'no doubt will suffice for all.'

'Why—yes—I believe so,' assented Mr Merdle, putting the spoon aside, and clumsily hiding each of his hands in the coat-cuff of the other hand. 'I believe the people in my interest down there will not make any difficulty.'

'Model people!' said Bar. 'I am glad you approve of them,' said Mr Merdle.

'And the people of those other two places, now,' pursued Bar, with a bright twinkle in his keen eye, as it slightly turned in the direction of his magnificent neighbour; 'we lawyers are always curious, always inquisitive, always picking up odds and ends for our patchwork minds, since there is no knowing when and where they may fit into some corner;—the people of those other two places now? Do they yield so laudably to the vast and cumulative influence of such enterprise and such renown; do those little rills become absorbed so quietly and easily, and, as it were by the influence of natural laws, so beautifully, in the swoop of the majestic stream as it flows upon its wondrous way enriching the surrounding lands; that their course is perfectly to be calculated, and distinctly to be predicated?'

Mr Merdle, a little troubled by Bar's eloquence, looked fitfully about the nearest salt-cellar for some moments, and then said hesitating:

'They are perfectly aware, sir, of their duty to Society. They will return anybody I send to them for that purpose.'

'Cheering to know,' said Bar. 'Cheering to know.'

The three places in question were three little rotten holes in this Island, containing three little ignorant, drunken, guzzling, dirty, out-of-the-way constituencies, that had reeled into Mr Merdle's pocket. Ferdinand Barnacle laughed in his easy way, and airily said they were a nice set of fellows. Bishop, mentally perambulating among paths of peace, was altogether swallowed up in absence of mind.

'Pray,' asked Lord Decimus, casting his eyes around the table, 'what is this story I have heard of a gentleman long confined in a debtors' prison proving to be of a wealthy family, and having come into the inheritance of a large sum of money? I have met with a variety of allusions to it. Do you know anything of it, Ferdinand?'

'I only know this much,' said Ferdinand, 'that he has given the Department with which I have the honour to be associated;' this sparkling young Barnacle threw off the phrase sportively, as who should say, We know all about these forms of speech, but we must keep it up, we must keep the game alive; 'no end of trouble, and has put us into innumerable fixes.'

'Fixes?' repeated Lord Decimus, with a majestic pausing and pondering on the word that made the bashful Member shut his eyes quite tight. 'Fixes?'

'A very perplexing business indeed,' observed Mr Tite Barnacle, with an air of grave resentment.

'What,' said Lord Decimus, 'was the character of his business; what was the nature of these—a—Fixes, Ferdinand?'

'Oh, it's a good story, as a story,' returned that gentleman; 'as good a thing of its kind as need be. This Mr Dorrit (his name is Dorrit) had incurred a responsibility to us, ages before the fairy came out of the Bank and gave him his fortune, under a bond he had signed for the performance of a contract which was not at all performed. He was a partner in a house in some large way—spirits, or buttons, or wine, or blacking, or oatmeal, or woollen, or pork, or hooks and eyes, or iron, or treacle, or shoes, or something or other that was wanted for troops, or seamen, or somebody—and the house burst, and we being among the creditors, detainees were lodged on the part of the Crown in a scientific manner, and all the rest Of it. When the fairy had appeared and he wanted to pay us off, Egad we had got into such an exemplary state of checking and counter-checking, signing and counter-signing, that it was six months before we knew how to take the money, or how to give a receipt for it. It was a triumph of public business,' said this handsome young Barnacle, laughing heartily, 'You never saw such a lot of forms in your life. "Why," the attorney said to me one day, "if I wanted this office to give me two or three thousand pounds instead of take it, I couldn't have more trouble about it." "You are right, old fellow," I told him, "and in future you'll know that we have something to do here."' The pleasant young Barnacle finished by once more laughing heartily. He was a very easy, pleasant fellow indeed, and his manners were exceedingly winning.

Mr Tite Barnacle's view of the business was of a less airy character. He took it ill that Mr Dorrit had troubled the Department by wanting to pay the money, and considered it a grossly informal thing to do after so many years. But Mr Tite Barnacle was a buttoned-up man, and consequently a weighty one. All buttoned-up men are weighty. All buttoned-up men are believed in. Whether or no the reserved and never-exercised power of unbuttoning, fascinates mankind; whether or no wisdom is supposed to condense and augment when buttoned up, and to evaporate when unbuttoned; it is certain that the man to whom importance is accorded is the buttoned-up man. Mr Tite Barnacle never would have passed for half his current value, unless his coat had been always buttoned-up to his white cravat.

'May I ask,' said Lord Decimus, 'if Mr Darrit—or Dorrit—has any family?'

Nobody else replying, the host said, 'He has two daughters, my lord.'

'Oh! you are acquainted with him?' asked Lord Decimus.

'Mrs Merdle is. Mr Sparkler is, too. In fact,' said Mr Merdle, 'I rather believe that one of the young ladies has made an impression on Edmund Sparkler. He is susceptible, and—I—think—the conquest—' Here Mr Merdle stopped, and looked at the table-cloth, as he usually did when he found himself observed or listened to.

Bar was uncommonly pleased to find that the Merdle family, and this family, had already been brought into contact. He submitted, in a low voice across the table to Bishop, that it was a kind of analogical illustration of those physical laws, in virtue of which Like flies to Like. He regarded this power of attraction in wealth to draw wealth to it, as something remarkably interesting and curious—something indefinably allied to the loadstone and gravitation. Bishop, who had ambled back to earth again when the present theme was broached, acquiesced. He said it was indeed highly important to Society that one in the trying situation of unexpectedly finding himself invested with a power for good or for evil in Society, should become, as it were, merged in the superior power of a more legitimate and more gigantic growth, the influence of which (as in the case of our friend at whose board we sat) was habitually exercised in harmony with the best interests of Society.

Thus, instead of two rival and contending flames, a larger and a lesser, each burning with a lurid and uncertain glare, we had a blended and a softened light whose genial ray diffused an equable warmth throughout the land. Bishop seemed to like his own way of putting the case very much, and rather dwelt upon it; Bar, meanwhile (not to throw away a jury-man), making a show of sitting at his feet and feeding on his precepts.

The dinner and dessert being three hours long, the bashful Member cooled in the shadow of Lord Decimus faster than he warmed with food and drink, and had but a chilly time of it. Lord Decimus, like a tall tower in a flat country, seemed to project himself across the table-cloth, hide the light from the honourable Member, cool the honourable Member's marrow, and give him a woeful idea of distance. When he asked this unfortunate traveller to take wine, he encompassed his faltering steps with the gloomiest of shades; and when he said, 'Your health sir!' all around him was barrenness and desolation.

At length Lord Decimus, with a coffee-cup in his hand, began to hover about among the pictures, and to cause an interesting speculation to arise in all minds as to the probabilities of his ceasing to hover, and enabling the smaller birds to flutter up-stairs; which could not be done until he had urged his noble pinions in that direction. After some delay, and several stretches of his wings which came to nothing, he soared to the drawing-rooms.

And here a difficulty arose, which always does arise when two people are specially brought together at a dinner to confer with one another. Everybody (except Bishop, who had no suspicion of it) knew perfectly well that this dinner had been eaten and drunk, specifically to the end that Lord Decimus and Mr Merdle should have five minutes' conversation together. The opportunity so elaborately prepared was now arrived, and it seemed from that moment that no mere human ingenuity could so much as get the two chieftains into the same room. Mr Merdle and his noble guest persisted in prowling about at opposite ends of the perspective. It was in vain for the engaging Ferdinand to bring Lord Decimus to look at the bronze horses near Mr Merdle. Then Mr Merdle evaded, and wandered away. It was in vain for him to bring Mr Merdle to Lord Decimus to tell him the history of the unique Dresden vases. Then Lord Decimus evaded and wandered away, while he was getting his man up to the mark.

'Did you ever see such a thing as this?' said Ferdinand to Bar when he had been baffled twenty times.

'Often,' returned Bar.

'Unless I butt one of them into an appointed corner, and you butt the other,' said Ferdinand,'it will not come off after all.'

'Very good,' said Bar. 'I'll butt Merdle, if you like; but not my lord.'

Ferdinand laughed, in the midst of his vexation. 'Confound them both!' said he, looking at his watch. 'I want to get away. Why the deuce can't they come together! They both know what they want and mean to do. Look at them!'

They were still looming at opposite ends of the perspective, each with an absurd pretence of not having the other on his mind, which could not have been more transparently ridiculous though his real mind had been chalked on his back. Bishop, who had just now made a third with Bar and Ferdinand, but whose innocence had again cut him out of the subject and washed him in sweet oil, was seen to approach Lord Decimus and glide into conversation.

'I must get Merdle's doctor to catch and secure him, I suppose,' said Ferdinand; 'and then I must lay hold of my illustrious kinsman, and decoy him if I can—drag him if I can't—to the conference.'

'Since you do me the honour,' said Bar, with his slyest smile, to ask for my poor aid, it shall be yours with the greatest pleasure. I don't think this is to be done by one man. But if you will undertake to pen my lord into that furthest drawing-room where he is now so profoundly engaged, I will undertake to bring our dear Merdle into the presence, without the possibility of getting away.'

'Done!' said Ferdinand.

'Done!' said Bar.

Bar was a sight wondrous to behold, and full of matter, when, jauntily waving his double eye-glass by its ribbon, and jauntily drooping to an Universe of jurymen, he, in the most accidental manner ever seen, found himself at Mr Merdle's shoulder, and embraced that opportunity of mentioning a little point to him, on which he particularly wished to be guided by the light of his practical knowledge. (Here he took Mr Merdle's arm and walked him gently away.) A banker, whom we would call A. B., advanced a considerable sum of money, which we would call fifteen thousand pounds, to a client or customer of his, whom he would call P. q. (Here, as they were getting towards Lord Decimus, he held Mr Merdle tight.) As a security for the repayment of this advance to P. Q. whom we would call a widow lady, there were placed in A. B.'s hands the title-deeds of a freehold estate, which we would call Blinkiter Doddles. Now, the point was this. A limited right of felling and lopping in the woods of Blinkiter Doddles, lay in the son of P. Q. then past his majority, and whom we would call X. Y.—but really this was too bad! In the presence of Lord Decimus, to detain the host with chopping our dry chaff of law, was really too bad! Another time! Bar was truly repentant, and would not say another syllable. Would Bishop favour him with half-a-dozen words? (He had now set Mr Merdle down on a couch, side by side with Lord Decimus, and to it they must go, now or never.)

And now the rest of the company, highly excited and interested, always excepting Bishop, who had not the slightest idea that anything was going on, formed in one group round the fire in the next drawing-room, and pretended to be chatting easily on the infinite variety of small topics, while everybody's thoughts and eyes were secretly straying towards the secluded pair. The Chorus were excessively nervous, perhaps as labouring under the dreadful apprehension that some good thing was going to be diverted from them! Bishop alone talked steadily and evenly. He conversed with the great Physician on that relaxation of the throat with which young curates were too frequently afflicted, and on the means of lessening the great prevalence of that disorder in the church. Physician, as a general rule, was of opinion that the best way to avoid it was to know how to read, before you made a profession of reading. Bishop said dubiously, did he really think so? And Physician said, decidedly, yes he did.

Ferdinand, meanwhile, was the only one of the party who skirmished on the outside of the circle; he kept about mid-way between it and the two, as if some sort of surgical operation were being performed by Lord Decimus on Mr Merdle, or by Mr Merdle on Lord Decimus, and his services might at any moment be required as Dresser. In fact, within a quarter of an hour Lord Decimus called to him 'Ferdinand!' and he went, and took his place in the conference for some five minutes more. Then a half-suppressed gasp broke out among the Chorus; for Lord Decimus rose to take his leave. Again coached up by Ferdinand to the point of making himself popular, he shook hands in the most brilliant manner with the whole company, and even said to Bar, 'I hope you were not bored by my pears?' To which Bar retorted, 'Eton, my lord, or Parliamentary?' neatly showing that he had mastered the joke, and delicately insinuating that he could never forget it while his life remained.

All the grave importance that was buttoned up in Mr Tite Barnacle, took itself away next; and Ferdinand took himself away next, to the opera. Some of the rest lingered a little, marrying golden liqueur glasses to Buhl tables with sticky rings; on the desperate chance of Mr Merdle's saying something. But Merdle, as usual, oozed sluggishly and muddily about his drawing-room, saying never a word.

In a day or two it was announced to all the town, that Edmund Sparkler, Esquire, son-in-law of the eminent Mr Merdle of worldwide renown, was made one of the Lords of the Circumlocution Office; and proclamation was issued, to all true believers, that this admirable appointment was to be hailed as a graceful and gracious mark of homage, rendered by the graceful and gracious Decimus, to that commercial interest which must ever in a great commercial country—and all the rest of it, with blast of trumpet. So, bolstered by this mark of Government homage, the wonderful Bank and all the other wonderful undertakings went on and went up; and gapers came to Harley Street, Cavendish Square, only to look at the house where the golden wonder lived.

And when they saw the Chief Butler looking out at the hall-door in his moments of condescension, the gapers said how rich he looked, and wondered how much money he had in the wonderful Bank. But, if they had known that respectable Nemesis better, they would not have wondered about it, and might have stated the amount with the utmost precision.

CHAPTER 13. The Progress of an Epidemic

That it is at least as difficult to stay a moral infection as a physical one; that such a disease will spread with the malignity and rapidity of the Plague; that the contagion, when it has once made head, will spare no pursuit or condition, but will lay hold on people in the soundest health, and become developed in the most unlikely constitutions: is a fact as firmly established by experience as that we human creatures breathe an atmosphere. A blessing beyond appreciation would be conferred upon mankind, if the tainted, in whose weakness or wickedness these virulent disorders are bred, could be instantly seized and placed in close confinement (not to say summarily smothered) before the poison is communicable.

As a vast fire will fill the air to a great distance with its roar, so the sacred flame which the mighty Barnacles had fanned caused the air to resound more and more with the name of Merdle. It was deposited on every lip, and carried into every ear. There never was, there never had been, there never again should be, such a man as Mr Merdle. Nobody, as aforesaid, knew what he had done; but everybody knew him to be the greatest that had appeared.

Down in Bleeding Heart Yard, where there was not one unappropriated halfpenny, as lively an interest was taken in this paragon of men as on the Stock Exchange. Mrs Plornish, now established in the small grocery and general trade in a snug little shop at the crack end of the Yard, at the top of the steps, with her little old father and Maggy acting as assistants, habitually held forth about him over the counter in conversation with her customers. Mr Plornish, who had a small share in a small builder's business in the neighbourhood, said, trowel in hand, on the tops of scaffolds and on the tiles of houses, that people did tell him as Mr Merdle was the one, mind you, to put us all to rights in respects of that which all on us looked to, and to bring us all safe home as much as we needed, mind you, fur toe be brought. Mr Baptist, sole lodger of Mr and Mrs Plornish was reputed in whispers to lay by the savings which were the result of his simple and moderate life, for investment in one of Mr Merdle's certain enterprises. The female Bleeding Hearts, when they came for ounces of tea, and hundredweights of talk, gave Mrs Plornish to understand, That how, ma'am, they had heard from their cousin Mary Anne, which worked in the line, that his lady's dresses would fill three waggons. That how she was as handsome a lady, ma'am, as lived, no matter wheres, and a busk like marble itself. That how, according to what they was told, ma'am, it was her son by a former husband as was took into the Government; and a General he had been, and armies he had marched again and victory crowned, if all you heard was to be believed. That how it was reported that Mr Merdle's words had been, that if they could have made it worth his while to take the whole Government he would have took it without a profit, but that take it he could not and stand a loss. That how it was not to be expected, ma'am, that he should lose by it, his ways being, as you might say and utter no falsehood, paved with gold; but that how it was much to be regretted that something handsome hadn't been got up to make it worth his while; for it was such and only such that knowed the heighth to which the bread and butchers' meat had rose, and it was such and only such that both could and would bring that heighth down.

So rife and potent was the fever in Bleeding Heart Yard, that Mr Pancks's rent-days caused no interval in the patients. The disease took the singular form, on those occasions, of causing the infected to find an unfathomable excuse and consolation in allusions to the magic name.

'Now, then!' Mr Pancks would say, to a defaulting lodger. 'Pay up!

Come on!'

'I haven't got it, Mr Pancks,' Defaulter would reply. 'I tell you the truth, sir, when I say I haven't got so much as a single sixpence of it to bless myself with.'

'This won't do, you know,' Mr Pancks would retort. 'You don't expect it will do; do you?' Defaulter would admit, with a low-spirited 'No, sir,' having no such expectation.

'My proprietor isn't going to stand this, you know,' Mr Pancks would proceed. 'He don't send me here for this. Pay up! Come!'

The Defaulter would make answer, 'Ah, Mr Pancks. If I was the rich gentleman whose name is in everybody's mouth—if my name was Merdle, sir—I'd soon pay up, and be glad to do it.'

Dialogues on the rent-question usually took place at the house-doors or in the entries, and in the presence of several deeply interested Bleeding

Hearts. They always received a reference of this kind with a low murmur of response, as if it were convincing; and the Defaulter, however black and discomfited before, always cheered up a little in making it.

'If I was Mr Merdle, sir, you wouldn't have cause to complain of me then. No, believe me!' the Defaulter would proceed with a shake of the head. 'I'd pay up so quick then, Mr Pancks, that you shouldn't have to ask me.'

The response would be heard again here, implying that it was impossible to say anything fairer, and that this was the next thing to paying the money down.

Mr Pancks would be now reduced to saying as he booked the case, 'Well! You'll have the broker in, and be turned out; that's what'll happen to you. It's no use talking to me about Mr Merdle. You are not Mr Merdle, any more than I am.'

'No, sir,' the Defaulter would reply. 'I only wish you were him, sir.'

The response would take this up quickly; replying with great feeling, 'Only wish you were him, sir.'

'You'd be easier with us if you were Mr Merdle, sir,' the Defaulter would go on with rising spirits, 'and it would be better for all parties. Better for our sakes, and better for yours, too. You wouldn't have to worry no one, then, sir. You wouldn't have to worry us, and you wouldn't have to worry yourself. You'd be easier in your own mind, sir, and you'd leave others easier, too, you would, if you were Mr Merdle.'

Mr Pancks, in whom these impersonal compliments produced an irresistible sheepishness, never rallied after such a charge. He could only bite his nails and puff away to the next Defaulter. The responsive Bleeding Hearts would then gather round the Defaulter whom he had just abandoned, and the most extravagant rumours would circulate among them, to their great comfort, touching the amount of Mr Merdle's ready money.

From one of the many such defeats of one of many rent-days, Mr Pancks, having finished his day's collection, repaired with his note-book under his arm to Mrs Plornish's corner. Mr Pancks's object was not professional, but social. He had had a trying day, and wanted a little brightening. By this time he was on friendly terms with the Plornish family, having often looked in upon them at similar seasons, and borne his part in recollections of Miss Dorrit.

Mrs Plornish's shop-parlour had been decorated under her own eye, and presented, on the side towards the shop, a little fiction in which Mrs Plornish unspeakably rejoiced. This poetical heightening of the parlour consisted in the wall being painted to represent the exterior of a thatched cottage; the artist having introduced (in as effective a manner as he found compatible with their highly disproportionate dimensions) the real door and window. The modest sunflower and hollyhock were depicted as flourishing with great luxuriance on this rustic dwelling, while a quantity of dense smoke issuing from the chimney indicated good cheer within, and also, perhaps, that it had not been lately swept. A faithful dog was represented as flying at the legs of the friendly visitor, from the threshold; and a circular pigeon-house, enveloped in a cloud of pigeons, arose from behind the garden-paling. On the door (when it was shut), appeared the semblance of a brass-plate, presenting the inscription, Happy Cottage, T. and M. Plornish; the partnership expressing man and wife. No Poetry and no Art ever charmed the imagination more than the union of the two in this counterfeit cottage charmed Mrs Plornish. It was nothing to her that Plornish had a habit of leaning against it as he smoked his pipe after work, when his hat blotted out the pigeon-house and all the pigeons, when his back swallowed up the dwelling, when his hands in his pockets uprooted the blooming garden and laid waste the adjacent country. To Mrs Plornish, it was still a most beautiful cottage, a most wonderful deception; and it made no difference that Mr Plornish's eye was some inches above the level of the gable bed-room in the thatch. To come out into the shop after it was shut, and hear her father sing a song inside this cottage, was a perfect Pastoral to Mrs Plornish, the Golden Age revived. And truly if that famous period had been revived, or had ever been at all, it may be doubted whether it would have produced many more heartily admiring daughters than the poor woman.

Warned of a visitor by the tinkling bell at the shop-door, Mrs Plornish came out of Happy Cottage to see who it might be. 'I guessed it was you, Mr Pancks,' said she, 'for it's quite your regular night; ain't it? Here's father, you see, come out to serve at the sound of the bell, like a brisk young shopman. Ain't he looking well? Father's more pleased to see you than if you was a customer, for he dearly loves a gossip; and when it turns upon Miss Dorrit, he loves it all the more. You never heard father in such voice as he is at present,' said Mrs Plornish, her own voice quavering, she was so proud and pleased. 'He gave us Strephon last night to that degree that Plornish gets up and makes him this speech across the table. "John Edward Nandy," says Plornish to father, "I never heard you come the warbles as I have heard you come the warbles this night." An't it gratifying, Mr Pancks, though; really?'

Mr Pancks, who had snorted at the old man in his friendliest manner, replied in the affirmative, and casually asked whether that lively Altro chap had come in yet? Mrs Plornish answered no, not yet, though he had gone to the West-End with some work, and had said he should be back by tea-time. Mr Pancks was then hospitably pressed into Happy Cottage, where he encountered the elder Master Plornish just come home from school. Examining that young student, lightly, on the educational proceedings of the day, he found that the more advanced pupils who were in the large text and the letter M, had been set the copy 'Merdle, Millions.'

'And how are you getting on, Mrs Plornish,' said Pancks, 'since we're mentioning millions?'

'Very steady, indeed, sir,' returned Mrs Plornish. 'Father, dear, would you go into the shop and tidy the window a little bit before tea, your taste being so beautiful?'

John Edward Nandy trotted away, much gratified, to comply with his daughter's request. Mrs Plornish, who was always in mortal terror of mentioning pecuniary affairs before the old gentleman, lest any disclosure she made might rouse his spirit and induce him to run away to the workhouse, was thus left free to be confidential with Mr Pancks.

'It's quite true that the business is very steady indeed,' said Mrs Plornish, lowering her voice; 'and has a excellent connection. The only thing that stands in its way, sir, is the Credit.'

This drawback, rather severely felt by most people who engaged in commercial transactions with the inhabitants of Bleeding Heart Yard, was a large stumbling-block in Mrs Plornish's trade. When Mr Dorrit had established her in the business, the Bleeding Hearts had shown an amount of emotion and a determination to support her in it, that did honour to human nature. Recognising her claim upon their generous feelings as one who had long been a member of their community, they pledged themselves, with great feeling, to deal with Mrs Plornish, come what would and bestow their patronage on no other establishment. Influenced by these noble sentiments, they had even gone out of their way to purchase little luxuries in the grocery and butter line to which they were unaccustomed; saying to one another, that if they did stretch a point, was it not for a neighbour and a friend, and for whom ought a point to be stretched if not for such? So stimulated, the business was extremely brisk, and the articles in stock went off with the greatest celerity. In short, if the Bleeding Hearts had but paid, the undertaking would have been a complete success; whereas, by reason of their exclusively confining themselves to owing, the profits actually realised had not yet begun to appear in the books.

Mr Pancks was making a very porcupine of himself by sticking his hair up in the contemplation of this state of accounts, when old Mr Nandy, re-entering the cottage with an air of mystery, entreated them to come and look at the strange behaviour of Mr Baptist, who seemed to have met with something that had scared him. All three going into the shop, and watching through the window, then saw Mr Baptist, pale and agitated, go through the following extraordinary performances. First, he was observed hiding at the top of the steps leading down into the Yard, and peeping up and down the street with his head cautiously thrust out close to the side of the shop-door. After very anxious scrutiny, he came out of his retreat, and went briskly down the street as if he were going away altogether; then, suddenly turned about, and went, at the same pace, and with the same feint, up the street. He had gone no further up the street than he had gone down, when he crossed the road and disappeared. The object of this last manoeuvre was only apparent, when his entering the shop with a sudden twist, from the steps again, explained that he had made a wide and obscure circuit round to the other, or Doyce and Clennam, end of the Yard, and had come through the Yard and bolted in. He was out of breath by that time, as he might well be, and his heart seemed to jerk faster than the little shop-bell, as it quivered and jingled behind him with his hasty shutting of the door.

'Hallo, old chap!' said Mr Pancks. 'Altro, old boy! What's the matter?'

Mr Baptist, or Signor Cavalletto, understood English now almost as well as Mr Pancks himself, and could speak it very well too. Nevertheless, Mrs Plornish, with a pardonable vanity in that accomplishment of hers which made her all but Italian, stepped in as interpreter.

'E ask know,' said Mrs Plornish, 'What go wrong?'

'Come into the happy little cottage, Padrona,' returned Mr Baptist, imparting great stealthiness to his flurried back-handed shake of his right forefinger. 'Come there!'

Mrs Plornish was proud of the title Padrona, which she regarded as signifying: not so much Mistress of the house, as Mistress of the Italian tongue. She immediately complied with Mr Baptist's request, and they all went into the cottage.

'E ope you no fright,' said Mrs Plornish then, interpreting Mr Pancks in a new way with her usual fertility of resource. 'What appen? Peaka Padrona!'

'I have seen some one,' returned Baptist. 'I have rincontrato him.'

'Im? Oo him?' asked Mrs Plornish.

'A bad man. A baddest man. I have hoped that I should never see him again.' 'Ow you know him bad?' asked Mrs Plornish.

'It does not matter, Padrona. I know it too well.'

''E see you?' asked Mrs Plornish.

'No. I hope not. I believe not.'

'He says,' Mrs Plornish then interpreted, addressing her father and Pancks with mild condescension, 'that he has met a bad man, but he hopes the bad man didn't see him—Why,' inquired Mrs Plornish, reverting to the Italian language, 'why ope bad man no see?'

'Padrona, dearest,' returned the little foreigner whom she so considerately protected, 'do not ask, I pray. Once again I say it matters not. I have fear of this man. I do not wish to see him, I do not wish to be known of him—never again! Enough, most beautiful. Leave it.'

The topic was so disagreeable to him, and so put his usual liveliness to the rout, that Mrs Plornish forbore to press him further: the rather as the tea had been drawing for some time on the hob. But she was not the less surprised and curious for asking no more questions; neither was Mr Pancks, whose expressive breathing had been labouring hard since the entrance of the little man, like a locomotive engine with a great load getting up a steep incline. Maggy, now better dressed than of yore, though still faithful to the monstrous character of her cap, had been in the background from the first with open mouth and eyes, which staring and gaping features were not diminished in breadth by the untimely suppression of the subject. However, no more was said about it, though much appeared to be thought on all sides: by no means excepting the two young Plornishes, who partook of the evening meal as if their eating the bread and butter were rendered almost superfluous by the painful probability of the worst of men shortly presenting himself for the purpose of eating them. Mr Baptist, by degrees began to chirp a little; but never stirred from the seat he had taken behind the door and close to the window, though it was not his usual place. As often as the little bell rang, he started and peeped out secretly, with the end of the little curtain in his hand and the rest before his face; evidently not at all satisfied but that the man he dreaded had tracked him through all his doublings and turnings, with the certainty of a terrible bloodhound.

The entrance, at various times, of two or three customers and of Mr Plornish, gave Mr Baptist just enough of this employment to keep the attention of the company fixed upon him. Tea was over, and the children were abed, and Mrs Plornish was feeling her way to the dutiful proposal that her father should favour them with Chloe, when the bell rang again, and Mr Clennam came in.

Clennam had been poring late over his books and letters; for the waiting-rooms of the Circumlocution Office ravaged his time sorely.

Over and above that, he was depressed and made uneasy by the late occurrence at his mother's. He looked worn and solitary. He felt so, too; but, nevertheless, was returning home from his counting-house by that end of the Yard to give them the intelligence that he had received another letter from Miss Dorrit.

The news made a sensation in the cottage which drew off the general attention from Mr Baptist. Maggy, who pushed her way into the foreground immediately, would have seemed to draw in the tidings of her Little Mother equally at her ears, nose, mouth, and eyes, but that the last were obstructed by tears. She was particularly delighted when Clennam assured her that there were hospitals, and very kindly conducted hospitals, in Rome. Mr Pancks rose into new distinction in virtue of being specially remembered in the letter. Everybody was pleased and interested, and Clennam was well repaid for his trouble. 'But you are tired, sir. Let me make you a cup of tea,' said Mrs Plornish, 'if you'd condescend to take such a thing in the cottage; and many thanks to you, too, I am sure, for bearing us in mind so kindly.'

Mr Plornish deeming it incumbent on him, as host, to add his personal acknowledgments, tendered them in the form which always expressed his highest ideal of a combination of ceremony with sincerity.

'John Edward Nandy,' said Mr Plornish, addressing the old gentleman. 'Sir. It's not too often that you see unpretending actions without a spark of pride, and therefore when you see them give grateful honour unto the same, being that if you don't, and live to want 'em, it follows serve you right.'

To which Mr Nandy replied:

'I am heartily of your opinion, Thomas, and which your opinion is the same as mine, and therefore no more words and not being backwards with that opinion, which opinion giving it as yes, Thomas, yes, is the opinion in which yourself and me must ever be unanimously jined by all, and where there is not difference of opinion there can be none but one opinion, which fully no, Thomas, Thomas, no!'

Arthur, with less formality, expressed himself gratified by their high appreciation of so very slight an attention on his part; and explained as to the tea that he had not yet dined, and was going straight home to refresh after a long day's labour, or he would have readily accepted the hospitable offer. As Mr Pancks was somewhat noisily getting his steam up for departure, he concluded by asking that gentleman if he would walk with him? Mr Pancks said he desired no better engagement, and the two took leave of Happy Cottage.

'If you will come home with me, Pancks,' said Arthur, when they got into the street, 'and will share what dinner or supper there is, it will be next door to an act of charity; for I am weary and out of sorts to-night.'

'Ask me to do a greater thing than that,' said Pancks, 'when you want it done, and I'll do it.'

Between this eccentric personage and Clennam, a tacit understanding and accord had been always improving since Mr Pancks flew over Mr Rugg's back in the Marshalsea Yard. When the carriage drove away on the memorable day of the family's departure, these two had looked after it together, and had walked slowly away together. When the first letter came from little Dorrit, nobody was more interested in hearing of her than Mr Pancks. The second letter, at that moment in Clennam's breast-pocket, particularly remembered him by name. Though he had never before made any profession or protestation to Clennam, and though what he had just said was little enough as to the words in which it was expressed, Clennam had long had a growing belief that Mr Pancks, in his own odd way, was becoming attached to him. All these strings intertwining made Pancks a very cable of anchorage that night.

'I am quite alone,' Arthur explained as they walked on. 'My partner is away, busily engaged at a distance on his branch of our business, and you shall do just as you like.'

'Thank you. You didn't take particular notice of little Altro just now; did you?' said Pancks.

'No. Why?'

'He's a bright fellow, and I like him,' said Pancks. 'Something has gone amiss with him to-day. Have you any idea of any cause that can have overset him?'

'You surprise me! None whatever.'

Mr Pancks gave his reasons for the inquiry. Arthur was quite unprepared for them, and quite unable to suggest an explanation of them.

'Perhaps you'll ask him,' said Pancks, 'as he's a stranger?'

'Ask him what?' returned Clennam.

'What he has on his mind.'

'I ought first to see for myself that he has something on his mind, I think,' said Clennam. 'I have found him in every way so diligent, so grateful (for little enough), and so trustworthy, that it might look like suspecting him. And that would be very unjust.'

'True,' said Pancks. 'But, I say! You oughtn't to be anybody's proprietor, Mr Clennam. You're much too delicate.' 'For the matter of that,' returned Clennam laughing, 'I have not a large proprietary share in Cavalletto. His carving is his livelihood. He keeps the keys of the Factory, watches it every alternate night, and acts as a sort of housekeeper to it generally; but we have little work in the way of his ingenuity, though we give him what we have. No! I am rather his adviser than his proprietor. To call me his standing counsel and his banker would be nearer the fact. Speaking of being his banker, is it not curious, Pancks, that the ventures which run just now in so many people's heads, should run even in little Cavalletto's?'

'Ventures?' retorted Pancks, with a snort. 'What ventures?'

'These Merdle enterprises.'

'Oh! Investments,' said Pancks. 'Ay, ay! I didn't know you were speaking of investments.' His quick way of replying caused Clennam to look at him, with a doubt whether he meant more than he said. As it was accompanied, however, with a quickening of his pace and a corresponding increase in the labouring of his machinery, Arthur did not pursue the matter, and they soon arrived at his house.

A dinner of soup and a pigeon-pie, served on a little round table before the fire, and flavoured with a bottle of good wine, oiled Mr Pancks's works in a highly effective manner; so that when Clennam produced his Eastern pipe, and handed Mr Pancks another Eastern pipe, the latter gentleman was perfectly comfortable.

They puffed for a while in silence, Mr Pancks like a steam-vessel with wind, tide, calm water, and all other sea-going conditions in her favour. He was the first to speak, and he spoke thus:

'Yes. Investments is the word.'

Clennam, with his former look, said 'Ah!'

'I am going back to it, you see,' said Pancks.

'Yes. I see you are going back to it,' returned Clennam, wondering why.

'Wasn't it a curious thing that they should run in little Altro's head? Eh?' said Pancks as he smoked. 'Wasn't that how you put it?'

'That was what I said.'

'Ay! But think of the whole Yard having got it. Think of their all meeting me with it, on my collecting days, here and there and everywhere. Whether they pay, or whether they don't pay. Merdle, Merdle, Merdle. Always Merdle.'

'Very strange how these runs on an infatuation prevail,' said Arthur.

'An't it?' returned Pancks. After smoking for a minute or so, more drily than comported with his recent oiling, he added: 'Because you see these people don't understand the subject.'

'Not a bit,' assented Clennam.

'Not a bit,' cried Pancks. 'Know nothing of figures. Know nothing of money questions. Never made a calculation. Never worked it, sir!'

'If they had—' Clennam was going on to say; when Mr Pancks, without change of countenance, produced a sound so far surpassing all his usual efforts, nasal or bronchial, that he stopped.

'If they had?' repeated Pancks in an inquiring tone.

'I thought you—spoke,' said Arthur, hesitating what name to give the interruption.

'Not at all,' said Pancks. 'Not yet. I may in a minute. If they had?'

'If they had,' observed Clennam, who was a little at a loss how to take his friend, 'why, I suppose they would have known better.'

'How so, Mr Clennam?' Pancks asked quickly, and with an odd effect of having been from the commencement of the conversation loaded with the heavy charge he now fired off. 'They're right, you know. They don't mean to be, but they're right.'

'Right in sharing Cavalletto's inclination to speculate with Mr Merdle?'

'Per-fectly, sir,' said Pancks. 'I've gone into it. I've made the calculations. I've worked it. They're safe and genuine.' Relieved by having got to this, Mr Pancks took as long a pull as his lungs would permit at his Eastern pipe, and looked sagaciously and steadily at Clennam while inhaling and exhaling too.

In those moments, Mr Pancks began to give out the dangerous infection with which he was laden. It is the manner of communicating these diseases; it is the subtle way in which they go about.

'Do you mean, my good Pancks,' asked Clennam emphatically, 'that you would put that thousand pounds of yours, let us say, for instance, out at this kind of interest?'

'Certainly,' said Pancks. 'Already done it, sir.'

Mr Pancks took another long inhalation, another long exhalation, another long sagacious look at Clennam.

'I tell you, Mr Clennam, I've gone into it,' said Pancks. 'He's a man of immense resources—enormous capital—government influence. They're the best schemes afloat. They're safe. They're certain.'

'Well!' returned Clennam, looking first at him gravely and then at the fire gravely. 'You surprise me!'

'Bah!' Pancks retorted. 'Don't say that, sir. It's what you ought to do yourself! Why don't you do as I do?'

Of whom Mr Pancks had taken the prevalent disease, he could no more have told than if he had unconsciously taken a fever. Bred at first, as many physical diseases are, in the wickedness of men, and then disseminated in their ignorance, these epidemics, after a period, get communicated to many sufferers who are neither ignorant nor wicked. Mr Pancks might, or might not, have caught the illness himself from a subject of this class; but in this category he appeared before Clennam, and the infection he threw off was all the more virulent.

'And you have really invested,' Clennam had already passed to that word, 'your thousand pounds, Pancks?'

'To be sure, sir!' replied Pancks boldly, with a puff of smoke. 'And only wish it ten!'

Now, Clennam had two subjects lying heavy on his lonely mind that night; the one, his partner's long-deferred hope; the other, what he had seen and heard at his mother's. In the relief of having this companion, and of feeling that he could trust him, he passed on to both, and both brought him round again, with an increase and acceleration of force, to his point of departure.

It came about in the simplest manner. Quitting the investment subject, after an interval of silent looking at the fire through the smoke of his pipe, he told Pancks how and why he was occupied with the great National Department. 'A hard case it has been, and a hard case it is on Doyce,' he finished by saying, with all the honest feeling the topic roused in him.

'Hard indeed,' Pancks acquiesced. 'But you manage for him, Mr Clennam?'

'How do you mean?'

'Manage the money part of the business?'

'Yes. As well as I can.'

'Manage it better, sir,' said Pancks. 'Recompense him for his toils and disappointments. Give him the chances of the time. He'll never benefit himself in that way, patient and preoccupied workman. He looks to you, sir.'

'I do my best, Pancks,' returned Clennam, uneasily. 'As to duly weighing and considering these new enterprises of which I have had no experience, I doubt if I am fit for it, I am growing old.'

'Growing old?' cried Pancks. 'Ha, ha!'

There was something so indubitably genuine in the wonderful laugh, and series of snorts and puffs, engendered in Mr Pancks's astonishment at, and utter rejection of, the idea, that his being quite in earnest could not be questioned.

'Growing old?' cried Pancks. 'Hear, hear, hear! Old? Hear him, hear him!'

The positive refusal expressed in Mr Pancks's continued snorts, no less than in these exclamations, to entertain the sentiment for a single instant, drove Arthur away from it. Indeed, he was fearful of something happening to Mr Pancks in the violent conflict that took place between the breath he jerked out of himself and the smoke he jerked into himself. This abandonment of the second topic threw him on the third.

'Young, old, or middle-aged, Pancks,' he said, when there was a favourable pause, 'I am in a very anxious and uncertain state; a state that even leads me to doubt whether anything now seeming to belong to me, may be really mine. Shall I tell you how this is? Shall I put a great trust in you?'

'You shall, sir,' said Pancks, 'if you believe me worthy of it.'

'I do.'

'You may!' Mr Pancks's short and sharp rejoinder, confirmed by the sudden outstretching of his coaly hand, was most expressive and convincing. Arthur shook the hand warmly.

He then, softening the nature of his old apprehensions as much as was possible consistently with their being made intelligible and never alluding to his mother by name, but speaking vaguely of a relation of his, confided to Mr Pancks a broad outline of the misgivings he entertained, and of the interview he had witnessed. Mr Pancks listened with such interest that, regardless of the charms of the Eastern pipe, he put it in the grate among the fire-irons, and occupied his hands during the whole recital in so erecting the loops and hooks of hair all over his head, that he looked, when it came to a conclusion, like a journeyman Hamlet in conversation with his father's spirit.

'Brings me back, sir,' was his exclamation then, with a startling touch on Clennam's knee, 'brings me back, sir, to the Investments! I don't say anything of your making yourself poor to repair a wrong you never committed. That's you. A man must be himself. But I say this, fearing you may want money to save your own blood from exposure and disgrace—make as much as you can!'

Arthur shook his head, but looked at him thoughtfully too.

'Be as rich as you can, sir,' Pancks adjured him with a powerful concentration of all his energies on the advice. 'Be as rich as you honestly can. It's your duty. Not for your sake, but for the sake of others. Take time by the forelock. Poor Mr Doyce (who really is growing old) depends upon you. Your relative depends upon you. You don't know what depends upon you.'

'Well, well, well!' returned Arthur. 'Enough for to-night.'

'One word more, Mr Clennam,' retorted Pancks, 'and then enough for to-night. Why should you leave all the gains to the gluttons, knaves, and impostors? Why should you leave all the gains that are to be got to my proprietor and the like of him? Yet you're always doing it. When I say you, I mean such men as you. You know you are. Why, I see it every day of my life. I see nothing else. It's my business to see it. Therefore I say,' urged Pancks, 'Go in and win!'

'But what of Go in and lose?' said Arthur.

'Can't be done, sir,' returned Pancks. 'I have looked into it. Name up everywhere—immense resources—enormous capital—great position—high connection—government influence. Can't be done!'

Gradually, after this closing exposition, Mr Pancks subsided; allowed his hair to droop as much as it ever would droop on the utmost persuasion; reclaimed the pipe from the fire-irons, filled it anew, and smoked it out. They said little more; but were company to one another in silently pursuing the same subjects, and did not part until midnight. On taking his leave, Mr Pancks, when he had shaken hands with Clennam, worked completely round him before he steamed out at the door. This, Arthur received as an assurance that he might implicitly rely on Pancks, if he ever should come to need assistance; either in any of the matters of which they had spoken that night, or any other subject that could in any way affect himself.

At intervals all next day, and even while his attention was fixed on other things, he thought of Mr Pancks's investment of his thousand pounds, and of his having 'looked into it.' He thought of Mr Pancks's being so sanguine in this matter, and of his not being usually of a sanguine character. He thought of the great National Department, and of the delight it would be to him to see Doyce better off. He thought of the darkly threatening place that went by the name of Home in his remembrance, and of the gathering shadows which made it yet more darkly threatening than of old. He observed anew that wherever he went, he saw, or heard, or touched, the celebrated name of Merdle; he found it difficult even to remain at his desk a couple of hours, without having it presented to one of his bodily senses through some agency or other. He began to think it was curious too that it should be everywhere, and that nobody but he should seem to have any mistrust of it. Though indeed he began to remember, when he got to this, even he did not mistrust it; he had only happened to keep aloof from it.

Such symptoms, when a disease of the kind is rife, are usually the signs of sickening.

CHAPTER 14. Taking Advice

When it became known to the Britons on the shore of the yellow Tiber that their intelligent compatriot, Mr Sparkler, was made one of the Lords of their Circumlocution Office, they took it as a piece of news with which they had no nearer concern than with any other piece of news—any other Accident or Offence—in the English papers. Some laughed; some said, by way of complete excuse, that the post was virtually a sinecure, and any fool who could spell his name was good enough for it; some, and these the more solemn political oracles, said that Decimus did wisely to strengthen himself, and that the sole constitutional purpose of all places within the gift of Decimus, was, that Decimus should strengthen himself. A few bilious Britons there were who would not subscribe to this article of faith; but their objection was purely theoretical. In a practical point of view, they listlessly abandoned the matter, as being the business of some other Britons unknown, somewhere, or nowhere. In like manner, at home, great numbers of Britons maintained, for as long as four-and-twenty consecutive hours, that those invisible and anonymous Britons 'ought to take it up;' and that if they quietly acquiesced in it, they deserved it. But of what class the remiss Britons were composed, and where the unlucky creatures hid themselves, and why they hid themselves, and how it constantly happened that they neglected their interests, when so many other Britons were quite at a loss to account for their not looking after those interests, was not, either upon the shore of the yellow Tiber or the shore of the black Thames, made apparent to men.

Mrs Merdle circulated the news, as she received congratulations on it, with a careless grace that displayed it to advantage, as the setting displays the jewel. Yes, she said, Edmund had taken the place. Mr Merdle wished him to take it, and he had taken it. She hoped Edmund might like it, but really she didn't know. It would keep him in town a good deal, and he preferred the country. Still, it was not a disagreeable position—and it was a position. There was no denying that the thing was a compliment to Mr Merdle, and was not a bad thing for Edmund if he liked it. It was just as well that he should have something to do, and it was just as well that he should have something for doing it. Whether it would be more agreeable to Edmund than the army, remained to be seen.

Thus the Bosom; accomplished in the art of seeming to make things of small account, and really enhancing them in the process. While Henry Gowan, whom Decimus had thrown away, went through the whole round of his acquaintance between the Gate of the People and the town of Albano, vowing, almost (but not quite) with tears in his eyes, that Sparkler was the sweetest-tempered, simplest-hearted, altogether most lovable jackass that ever grazed on the public common; and that only one circumstance could have delighted him (Gowan) more, than his (the beloved jackass's) getting this post, and that would have been his (Gowan's) getting it himself. He said it was the very thing for Sparkler. There was nothing to do, and he would do it charmingly; there was a handsome salary to draw, and he would draw it charmingly; it was a delightful, appropriate, capital appointment; and he almost forgave the donor his slight of himself, in his joy that the dear donkey for whom he had so great an affection was so admirably stabled. Nor did his benevolence stop here. He took pains, on all social occasions, to draw Mr Sparkler out, and make him conspicuous before the company; and, although the considerate action always resulted in that young gentleman's making a dreary and forlorn mental spectacle of himself, the friendly intention was not to be doubted.

Unless, indeed, it chanced to be doubted by the object of Mr Sparkler's affections. Miss Fanny was now in the difficult situation of being universally known in that light, and of not having dismissed Mr Sparkler, however capriciously she used him. Hence, she was sufficiently identified with the gentleman to feel compromised by his being more than usually ridiculous; and hence, being by no means deficient in quickness, she sometimes came to his rescue against Gowan, and did him very good service. But, while doing this, she was ashamed of him, undetermined whether to get rid of him or more decidedly encourage him, distracted with apprehensions that she was every day becoming more and more immeshed in her uncertainties, and tortured by misgivings that Mrs Merdle triumphed in her distress. With this tumult in her mind, it is no subject for surprise that Miss Fanny came home one night in a state of agitation from a concert and ball at Mrs Merdle's house, and on her sister affectionately trying to soothe her, pushed that sister away from the toilette-table at which she sat angrily trying to cry, and declared with a heaving bosom that she detested everybody, and she wished she was dead.

'Dear Fanny, what is the matter? Tell me.'

'Matter, you little Mole,' said Fanny. 'If you were not the blindest of the blind, you would have no occasion to ask me. The idea of daring to pretend to assert that you have eyes in your head, and yet ask me what's the matter!'

'Is it Mr Sparkler, dear?' 'Mis-ter Spark-ler!' repeated Fanny, with unbounded scorn, as if he were the last subject in the Solar system that could possibly be near her mind. 'No, Miss Bat, it is not.'

Immediately afterwards, she became remorseful for having called her sister names; declaring with sobs that she knew she made herself hateful, but that everybody drove her to it.

'I don't think you are well to-night, dear Fanny.'

'Stuff and nonsense!' replied the young lady, turning angry again; 'I am as well as you are. Perhaps I might say better, and yet make no boast of it.'

Poor Little Dorrit, not seeing her way to the offering of any soothing words that would escape repudiation, deemed it best to remain quiet. At first, Fanny took this ill, too; protesting to her looking-glass, that of all the trying sisters a girl could have, she did think the most trying sister was a flat sister. That she knew she was at times a wretched temper; that she knew she made herself hateful; that when she made herself hateful, nothing would do her half the good as being told so; but that, being afflicted with a flat sister, she never WAS told so, and the consequence resulted that she was absolutely tempted and goaded into making herself disagreeable. Besides (she angrily told her looking-glass), she didn't want to be forgiven. It was not a right example, that she should be constantly stooping to be forgiven by a younger sister. And this was the Art of it—that she was always being placed in the position of being forgiven, whether she liked it or not. Finally she burst into violent weeping, and, when her sister came and sat close at her side to comfort her, said, 'Amy, you're an Angel!'

'But, I tell you what, my Pet,' said Fanny, when her sister's gentleness had calmed her, 'it now comes to this; that things cannot and shall not go on as they are at present going on, and that there must be an end of this, one way or another.'

As the announcement was vague, though very peremptory, Little Dorrit returned, 'Let us talk about it.'

'Quite so, my dear,' assented Fanny, as she dried her eyes. 'Let us talk about it. I am rational again now, and you shall advise me. Will you advise me, my sweet child?'

Even Amy smiled at this notion, but she said, 'I will, Fanny, as well as I can.'

'Thank you, dearest Amy,' returned Fanny, kissing her. 'You are my anchor.'

Having embraced her Anchor with great affection, Fanny took a bottle of sweet toilette water from the table, and called to her maid for a fine handkerchief. She then dismissed that attendant for the night, and went on to be advised; dabbing her eyes and forehead from time to time to cool them.

'My love,' Fanny began, 'our characters and points of view are sufficiently different (kiss me again, my darling), to make it very probable that I shall surprise you by what I am going to say. What I am going to say, my dear, is, that notwithstanding our property, we labour, socially speaking, under disadvantages. You don't quite understand what I mean, Amy?'

'I have no doubt I shall,' said Amy, mildly, 'after a few words more.'

'Well, my dear, what I mean is, that we are, after all, newcomers into fashionable life.'

'I am sure, Fanny,' Little Dorrit interposed in her zealous admiration, 'no one need find that out in you.'

'Well, my dear child, perhaps not,' said Fanny, 'though it's most kind and most affectionate in you, you precious girl, to say so.' Here she dabbed her sister's forehead, and blew upon it a little. 'But you are,' resumed Fanny, 'as is well known, the dearest little thing that ever was! To resume, my child. Pa is extremely gentlemanly and extremely well informed, but he is, in some trifling respects, a little different from other gentlemen of his fortune: partly on account of what he has gone through, poor dear: partly, I fancy, on account of its often running in his mind that other people are thinking about that, while he is talking to them. Uncle, my love, is altogether unpresentable. Though a dear creature to whom I am tenderly attached, he is, socially speaking, shocking. Edward is frightfully expensive and dissipated. I don't mean that there is anything ungenteel in that itself—far from it—but I do mean that he doesn't do it well, and that he doesn't, if I may so express myself, get the money's-worth in the sort of dissipated reputation that attaches to him.'

'Poor Edward!' sighed Little Dorrit, with the whole family history in the sigh.

'Yes. And poor you and me, too,' returned Fanny, rather sharply.

'Very true! Then, my dear, we have no mother, and we have a Mrs General. And I tell you again, darling, that Mrs General, if I may reverse a common proverb and adapt it to her, is a cat in gloves who WILL catch mice. That woman, I am quite sure and confident, will be our mother-in-law.'

'I can hardly think, Fanny-' Fanny stopped her.

'Now, don't argue with me about it, Amy,' said she, 'because I know better.' Feeling that she had been sharp again, she dabbed her sister's forehead again, and blew upon it again. 'To resume once more, my dear. It then becomes a question with me (I am proud and spirited, Amy, as you very well know: too much so, I dare say) whether I shall make up my mind to take it upon myself to carry the family through.' 'How?' asked her sister, anxiously.

'I will not,' said Fanny, without answering the question, 'submit to be mother-in-lawed by Mrs General; and I will not submit to be, in any respect whatever, either patronised or tormented by Mrs Merdle.'

Little Dorrit laid her hand upon the hand that held the bottle of sweet water, with a still more anxious look. Fanny, quite punishing her own forehead with the vehement dabs she now began to give it, fitfully went on.

'That he has somehow or other, and how is of no consequence, attained a very good position, no one can deny. That it is a very good connection, no one can deny. And as to the question of clever or not clever, I doubt very much whether a clever husband would be suitable to me. I cannot submit. I should not be able to defer to him enough.'

'O, my dear Fanny!' expostulated Little Dorrit, upon whom a kind of terror had been stealing as she perceived what her sister meant. 'If you loved any one, all this feeling would change. If you loved any one, you would no more be yourself, but you would quite lose and forget yourself in your devotion to him. If you loved him, Fanny—' Fanny had stopped the dabbing hand, and was looking at her fixedly.

'O, indeed!' cried Fanny. 'Really? Bless me, how much some people know of some subjects! They say every one has a subject, and I certainly seem to have hit upon yours, Amy. There, you little thing, I was only in fun,' dabbing her sister's forehead; 'but don't you be a silly puss, and don't you think flightily and eloquently about degenerate impossibilities. There! Now, I'll go back to myself.'

'Dear Fanny, let me say first, that I would far rather we worked for a scanty living again than I would see you rich and married to Mr Sparkler.'

'Let you say, my dear?' retorted Fanny. 'Why, of course, I will let you say anything. There is no constraint upon you, I hope. We are together to talk it over. And as to marrying Mr Sparkler, I have not the slightest intention of doing so to-night, my dear, or to-morrow morning either.'

'But at some time?'

'At no time, for anything I know at present,' answered Fanny, with indifference. Then, suddenly changing her indifference into a burning restlessness, she added, 'You talk about the clever men, you little thing! It's all very fine and easy to talk about the clever men; but where are they? I don't see them anywhere near me!'

'My dear Fanny, so short a time—'

'Short time or long time,' interrupted Fanny. 'I am impatient of our situation. I don't like our situation, and very little would induce me to change it. Other girls, differently reared and differently circumstanced altogether, might wonder at what I say or may do. Let them. They are driven by their lives and characters; I am driven by mine.'

'Fanny, my dear Fanny, you know that you have qualities to make you the wife of one very superior to Mr Sparkler.'

'Amy, my dear Amy,' retorted Fanny, parodying her words, 'I know that I wish to have a more defined and distinct position, in which I can assert myself with greater effect against that insolent woman.'

'Would you therefore—forgive my asking, Fanny—therefore marry her son?'

'Why, perhaps,' said Fanny, with a triumphant smile. 'There may be many less promising ways of arriving at an end than that, MY dear. That piece of insolence may think, now, that it would be a great success to get her son off upon me, and shelve me. But, perhaps, she little thinks how I would retort upon her if I married her son.

I would oppose her in everything, and compete with her. I would make it the business of my life.'

Fanny set down the bottle when she came to this, and walked about the room; always stopping and standing still while she spoke.

'One thing I could certainly do, my child: I could make her older. And I would!'

This was followed by another walk.

'I would talk of her as an old woman. I would pretend to know—if I didn't, but I should from her son—all about her age. And she should hear me say, Amy: affectionately, quite dutifully and affectionately: how well she looked, considering her time of life. I could make her seem older at once, by being myself so much younger. I may not be as handsome as she is; I am not a fair judge of that question, I suppose; but I know I am handsome enough to be a thorn in her side. And I would be!'

'My dear sister, would you condemn yourself to an unhappy life for this?'

'It wouldn't be an unhappy life, Amy. It would be the life I am fitted for. Whether by disposition, or whether by circumstances, is no matter; I am better fitted for such a life than for almost any other.'

There was something of a desolate tone in those words; but, with a short proud laugh she took another walk, and after passing a great looking-glass came to another stop.

'Figure! Figure, Amy! Well. The woman has a good figure. I will give her her due, and not deny it. But is it so far beyond all others that it is altogether unapproachable? Upon my word, I am not so sure of it. Give some much younger woman the latitude as to dress that she has, being married; and we would see about that, my dear!'

Something in the thought that was agreeable and flattering, brought her back to her seat in a gayer temper. She took her sister's hands in hers, and clapped all four hands above her head as she looked in her sister's face laughing:

'And the dancer, Amy, that she has quite forgotten—the dancer who bore no sort of resemblance to me, and of whom I never remind her, oh dear no!—should dance through her life, and dance in her way, to such a tune as would disturb her insolent placidity a little. Just a little, my dear Amy, just a little!'

Meeting an earnest and imploring look in Amy's face, she brought the four hands down, and laid only one on Amy's lips.

'Now, don't argue with me, child,' she said in a sterner way, 'because it is of no use. I understand these subjects much better than you do. I have not nearly made up my mind, but it may be. Now we have talked this over comfortably, and may go to bed. You best and dearest little mouse, Good night!' With those words Fanny weighed her Anchor, and—having taken so much advice—left off being advised for that occasion.

Thenceforward, Amy observed Mr Sparkler's treatment by his enslaver, with new reasons for attaching importance to all that passed between them. There were times when Fanny appeared quite unable to endure his mental feebleness, and when she became so sharply impatient of it that she would all but dismiss him for good. There were other times when she got on much better with him; when he amused her, and when her sense of superiority seemed to counterbalance that opposite side of the scale. If Mr Sparkler had been other than the faithfullest and most submissive of swains, he was sufficiently hard pressed to have fled from the scene of his trials, and have set at least the whole distance from Rome to London between himself and his enchantress. But he had no greater will of his own than a boat has when it is towed by a steam-ship; and he followed his cruel mistress through rough and smooth, on equally strong compulsion.

Mrs Merdle, during these passages, said little to Fanny, but said more about her. She was, as it were, forced to look at her through her eye-glass, and in general conversation to allow commendations of her beauty to be wrung from her by its irresistible demands. The defiant character it assumed when Fanny heard these extollings (as it generally happened that she did), was not expressive of concessions to the impartial bosom; but the utmost revenge the bosom took was, to say audibly, 'A spoilt beauty—but with that face and shape, who could wonder?'

It might have been about a month or six weeks after the night of the new advice, when Little Dorrit began to think she detected some new understanding between Mr Sparkler and Fanny. Mr Sparkler, as if in attendance to some compact, scarcely ever spoke without first looking towards Fanny for leave. That young lady was too discreet ever to look back again; but, if Mr Sparkler had permission to speak, she remained silent; if he had not, she herself spoke. Moreover, it became plain whenever Henry Gowan attempted to perform the friendly office of drawing him out, that he was not to be drawn. And not only that, but Fanny would presently, without any pointed application in the world, chance to say something with such a sting in it that Gowan would draw back as if he had put his hand into a bee-hive.

There was yet another circumstance which went a long way to confirm Little Dorrit in her fears, though it was not a great circumstance in itself. Mr Sparkler's demeanour towards herself changed. It became fraternal. Sometimes, when she was in the outer circle of assemblies—at their own residence, at Mrs Merdle's, or elsewhere—she would find herself stealthily supported round the waist by Mr Sparkler's arm. Mr Sparkler never offered the slightest explanation of this attention; but merely smiled with an air of blundering, contented, good-natured proprietorship, which, in so heavy a gentleman, was ominously expressive.

Little Dorrit was at home one day, thinking about Fanny with a heavy heart. They had a room at one end of their drawing-room suite, nearly all irregular bay-window, projecting over the street, and commanding all the picturesque life and variety of the Corso, both up and down. At three or four o'clock in the afternoon, English time, the view from this window was very bright and peculiar; and Little Dorrit used to sit and muse here, much as she had been used to while away the time in her balcony at Venice. Seated thus one day, she was softly touched on the shoulder, and Fanny said, 'Well, Amy dear,' and took her seat at her side. Their seat was a part of the window; when there was anything in the way of a procession going on, they used to have bright draperies hung out of the window, and used to kneel or sit on this seat, and look out at it, leaning on the brilliant colour. But there was no procession that day, and Little Dorrit was rather surprised by Fanny's being at home at that hour, as she was generally out on horseback then.

'Well, Amy,' said Fanny, 'what are you thinking of, little one?' 'I was thinking of you, Fanny.'

'No? What a coincidence! I declare here's some one else. You were not thinking of this some one else too; were you, Amy?'

Amy HAD been thinking of this some one else too; for it was Mr Sparkler. She did not say so, however, as she gave him her hand. Mr Sparkler came and sat down on the other side of her, and she felt the fraternal railing come behind her, and apparently stretch on to include Fanny.

'Well, my little sister,' said Fanny with a sigh, 'I suppose you know what this means?'

'She's as beautiful as she's doated on,' stammered Mr Sparkler—'and there's no nonsense about her—it's arranged—'

'You needn't explain, Edmund,' said Fanny.

'No, my love,' said Mr Sparkler.

'In short, pet,' proceeded Fanny, 'on the whole, we are engaged. We must tell papa about it either to-night or to-morrow, according to the opportunities. Then it's done, and very little more need be said.'

'My dear Fanny,' said Mr Sparkler, with deference, 'I should like to say a word to Amy.'

'Well, well! Say it for goodness' sake,' returned the young lady.

'I am convinced, my dear Amy,' said Mr Sparkler, 'that if ever there was a girl, next to your highly endowed and beautiful sister, who had no nonsense about her—'

'We know all about that, Edmund,' interposed Miss Fanny. 'Never mind that. Pray go on to something else besides our having no nonsense about us.'

'Yes, my love,' said Mr Sparkler. 'And I assure you, Amy, that nothing can be a greater happiness to myself, myself—next to the happiness of being so highly honoured with the choice of a glorious girl who hasn't an atom of—'

'Pray, Edmund, pray!' interrupted Fanny, with a slight pat of her pretty foot upon the floor.

'My love, you're quite right,' said Mr Sparkler, 'and I know I have a habit of it. What I wished to declare was, that nothing can be a greater happiness to myself, myself-next to the happiness of being united to pre-eminently the most glorious of girls—than to have the happiness of cultivating the affectionate acquaintance of Amy. I may not myself,' said Mr Sparkler manfully, 'be up to the mark on some other subjects at a short notice, and I am aware that if you were to poll Society the general opinion would be that I am not; but on the subject of Amy I am up to the mark!'

Mr Sparkler kissed her, in witness thereof.

'A knife and fork and an apartment,' proceeded Mr Sparkler, growing, in comparison with his oratorical antecedents, quite diffuse, 'will ever be at Amy's disposal. My Governor, I am sure, will always be proud to entertain one whom I so much esteem. And regarding my mother,' said Mr Sparkler, 'who is a remarkably fine woman, with—'

'Edmund, Edmund!' cried Miss Fanny, as before.

'With submission, my soul,' pleaded Mr Sparkler. 'I know I have a habit of it, and I thank you very much, my adorable girl, for taking the trouble to correct it; but my mother is admitted on all sides to be a remarkably fine woman, and she really hasn't any.'

'That may be, or may not be,' returned Fanny, 'but pray don't mention it any more.'

'I will not, my love,' said Mr Sparkler.

'Then, in fact, you have nothing more to say, Edmund; have you?' inquired Fanny.

'So far from it, my adorable girl,' answered Mr Sparkler, 'I apologise for having said so much.'

Mr Sparkler perceived, by a kind of inspiration, that the question implied had he not better go? He therefore withdrew the fraternal railing, and neatly said that he thought he would, with submission, take his leave. He did not go without being congratulated by Amy, as well as she could discharge that office in the flutter and distress of her spirits.

When he was gone, she said, 'O Fanny, Fanny!' and turned to her sister in the bright window, and fell upon her bosom and cried there. Fanny laughed at first; but soon laid her face against her sister's and cried too—a little. It was the last time Fanny ever showed that there was any hidden, suppressed, or conquered feeling in her on the matter. From that hour the way she had chosen lay before her, and she trod it with her own imperious self-willed step.

CHAPTER 15. No just Cause or Impediment why these Two Persons should not be joined together

Mr Dorrit, on being informed by his elder daughter that she had accepted matrimonial overtures from Mr Sparkler, to whom she had plighted her troth, received the communication at once with great dignity and with a large display of parental pride; his dignity dilating with the widened prospect of advantageous ground from which to make acquaintances, and his parental pride being developed by Miss Fanny's ready sympathy with that great object of his existence. He gave her to understand that her noble ambition found harmonious echoes in his heart; and bestowed his blessing on her, as a child brimful of duty and good principle, self-devoted to the aggrandisement of the family name.

To Mr Sparkler, when Miss Fanny permitted him to appear, Mr Dorrit said, he would not disguise that the alliance Mr Sparkler did him the honour to propose was highly congenial to his feelings; both as being in unison with the spontaneous affections of his daughter Fanny, and as opening a family connection of a gratifying nature with Mr Merdle, the master spirit of the age. Mrs Merdle also, as a leading lady rich in distinction, elegance, grace, and beauty, he mentioned in very laudatory terms. He felt it his duty to remark (he was sure a gentleman of Mr Sparkler's fine sense would interpret him with all delicacy), that he could not consider this proposal definitely determined on, until he should have had the privilege of holding some correspondence with Mr Merdle; and of ascertaining it to be so far accordant with the views of that eminent gentleman as that his (Mr Dorrit's) daughter would be received on that footing which her station in life and her dowry and expectations warranted him in requiring that she should maintain in what he trusted he might be allowed, without the appearance of being mercenary, to call the Eye of the Great World. While saying this, which his character as a gentleman of some little station, and his character as a father, equally demanded of him, he would not be so diplomatic as to conceal that the proposal remained in hopeful abeyance and under conditional acceptance, and that he thanked Mr Sparkler for the compliment rendered to himself and to his family. He concluded with some further and more general observations on the—ha—character of an independent gentleman, and the —hum—character of a possibly too partial and admiring parent. To sum the whole up shortly, he received Mr Sparkler's offer very much as he would have received three or four half-crowns from him in the days that were gone.

Mr Sparkler, finding himself stunned by the words thus heaped upon his inoffensive head, made a brief though pertinent rejoinder; the same being neither more nor less than that he had long perceived Miss Fanny to have no nonsense about her, and that he had no doubt of its being all right with his Governor. At that point the object of his affections shut him up like a box with a spring lid, and sent him away.

Proceeding shortly afterwards to pay his respects to the Bosom, Mr Dorrit was received by it with great consideration. Mrs Merdle had heard of this affair from Edmund. She had been surprised at first, because she had not thought Edmund a marrying man. Society had not thought Edmund a marrying man. Still, of course she had seen, as a woman (we women did instinctively see these things, Mr Dorrit!), that Edmund had been immensely captivated by Miss Dorrit, and she had openly said that Mr Dorrit had much to answer for in bringing so charming a girl abroad to turn the heads of his countrymen.

'Have I the honour to conclude, madam,' said Mr Dorrit, 'that the direction which Mr Sparkler's affections have taken, is—ha-approved of by you?'

'I assure you, Mr Dorrit,' returned the lady, 'that, personally, I am charmed.'

That was very gratifying to Mr Dorrit.

'Personally,' repeated Mrs Merdle, 'charmed.'

This casual repetition of the word 'personally,' moved Mr Dorrit to express his hope that Mr Merdle's approval, too, would not be wanting?

'I cannot,' said Mrs Merdle, 'take upon myself to answer positively for Mr Merdle; gentlemen, especially gentlemen who are what Society calls capitalists, having their own ideas of these matters. But I should think—merely giving an opinion, Mr Dorrit—I should think Mr Merdle would be upon the whole,' here she held a review of herself before adding at her leisure, 'quite charmed.'

At the mention of gentlemen whom Society called capitalists, Mr Dorrit had coughed, as if some internal demur were breaking out of him. Mrs Merdle had observed it, and went on to take up the cue.

'Though, indeed, Mr Dorrit, it is scarcely necessary for me to make that remark, except in the mere openness of saying what is uppermost to one whom I so highly regard, and with whom I hope I may have the pleasure of being brought into still more agreeable relations. For one cannot but see the great probability of your considering such things from Mr Merdle's own point of view, except indeed that circumstances have made it Mr Merdle's accidental fortune, or misfortune, to be engaged in business transactions, and that they, however vast, may a little cramp his horizons. I am a very child as to having any notion of business,' said Mrs Merdle; 'but I am afraid, Mr Dorrit, it may have that tendency.'

This skilful see-saw of Mr Dorrit and Mrs Merdle, so that each of them sent the other up, and each of them sent the other down, and neither had the advantage, acted as a sedative on Mr Dorrit's cough. He remarked with his utmost politeness, that he must beg to protest against its being supposed, even by Mrs Merdle, the accomplished and graceful (to which compliment she bent herself), that such enterprises as Mr Merdle's, apart as they were from the puny undertakings of the rest of men, had any lower tendency than to enlarge and expand the genius in which they were conceived. 'You are generosity itself,' said Mrs Merdle in return, smiling her best smile; 'let us hope so. But I confess I am almost superstitious in my ideas about business.'

Mr Dorrit threw in another compliment here, to the effect that business, like the time which was precious in it, was made for slaves; and that it was not for Mrs Merdle, who ruled all hearts at her supreme pleasure, to have anything to do with it. Mrs Merdle laughed, and conveyed to Mr Dorrit an idea that the Bosom flushed—which was one of her best effects.

'I say so much,' she then explained, 'merely because Mr Merdle has always taken the greatest interest in Edmund, and has always expressed the strongest desire to advance his prospects. Edmund's public position, I think you know. His private position rests solely with Mr Merdle. In my foolish incapacity for business, I assure you I know no more.'

Mr Dorrit again expressed, in his own way, the sentiment that business was below the ken of enslavers and enchantresses. He then mentioned his intention, as a gentleman and a parent, of writing to Mr Merdle. Mrs Merdle concurred with all her heart—or with all her art, which was exactly the same thing—and herself despatched a preparatory letter by the next post to the eighth wonder of the world.

In his epistolary communication, as in his dialogues and discourses on the great question to which it related, Mr Dorrit surrounded the subject with flourishes, as writing-masters embellish copy-books and ciphering-books: where the titles of the elementary rules of arithmetic diverge into swans, eagles, griffins, and other calligraphic recreations, and where the capital letters go out of their minds and bodies into ecstasies of pen and ink. Nevertheless, he did render the purport of his letter sufficiently clear, to enable Mr Merdle to make a decent pretence of having learnt it from that source. Mr Merdle replied to it accordingly. Mr Dorrit replied to Mr Merdle; Mr Merdle replied to Mr Dorrit; and it was soon announced that the corresponding powers had come to a satisfactory understanding.

Now, and not before, Miss Fanny burst upon the scene, completely arrayed for her new part. Now and not before, she wholly absorbed Mr Sparkler in her light, and shone for both, and twenty more. No longer feeling that want of a defined place and character which had caused her so much trouble, this fair ship began to steer steadily on a shaped course, and to swim with a weight and balance that developed her sailing qualities.

'The preliminaries being so satisfactorily arranged, I think I will now, my dear,' said Mr Dorrit, 'announce—ha—formally, to Mrs General—'

'Papa,' returned Fanny, taking him up short upon that name, 'I don't see what Mrs General has got to do with it.'

'My dear,' said Mr Dorrit, 'it will be an act of courtesy to—hum—a lady, well bred and refined—'

'Oh! I am sick of Mrs General's good breeding and refinement, papa,' said Fanny. 'I am tired of Mrs General.'

'Tired,' repeated Mr Dorrit in reproachful astonishment, 'of—ha—Mrs General.'

'Quite disgusted with her, papa,' said Fanny. 'I really don't see what she has to do with my marriage. Let her keep to her own matrimonial projects—if she has any.'

'Fanny,' returned Mr Dorrit, with a grave and weighty slowness upon him, contrasting strongly with his daughter's levity: 'I beg the favour of your explaining—ha—what it is you mean.' 'I mean, papa,' said Fanny, 'that if Mrs General should happen to have any matrimonial projects of her own, I dare say they are quite enough to occupy her spare time. And that if she has not, so much the better; but still I don't wish to have the honour of making announcements to her.'

'Permit me to ask you, Fanny,' said Mr Dorrit, 'why not?'

'Because she can find my engagement out for herself, papa,' retorted Fanny. 'She is watchful enough, I dare say. I think I have seen her so. Let her find it out for herself. If she should not find it out for herself, she will know it when I am married. And I hope you will not consider me wanting in affection for you, papa, if I say it strikes me that will be quite enough for Mrs General.'

'Fanny,' returned Mr Dorrit, 'I am amazed, I am displeased by this—hum—this capricious and unintelligible display of animosity towards—ha—Mrs General.'

'Do not, if you please, papa,' urged Fanny, 'call it animosity, because I assure you I do not consider Mrs General worth my animosity.'

At this, Mr Dorrit rose from his chair with a fixed look of severe reproof, and remained standing in his dignity before his daughter. His daughter, turning the bracelet on her arm, and now looking at him, and now looking from him, said, 'Very well, papa. I am truly sorry if you don't like it; but I can't help it. I am not a child, and I am not Amy, and I must speak.'

'Fanny,' gasped Mr Dorrit, after a majestic silence, 'if I request you to remain here, while I formally announce to Mrs General, as an exemplary lady, who is—hum—a trusted member of this family, the—ha—the change that is contemplated among us; if I—ha—not only request it, but—hum—insist upon it—'

'Oh, papa,' Fanny broke in with pointed significance, 'if you make so much of it as that, I have in duty nothing to do but comply. I hope I may have my thoughts upon the subject, however, for I really cannot help it under the circumstances.'So, Fanny sat down with a meekness which, in the junction of extremes, became defiance; and her father, either not deigning to answer, or not knowing what to answer, summoned Mr Tinkler into his presence.

'Mrs General.'

Mr Tinkler, unused to receive such short orders in connection with the fair varnisher, paused. Mr Dorrit, seeing the whole Marshalsea and all its testimonials in the pause, instantly flew at him with, 'How dare you, sir? What do you mean?'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' pleaded Mr Tinkler, 'I was wishful to know—' 'You wished to know nothing, sir,' cried Mr Dorrit, highly flushed.

'Don't tell me you did. Ha. You didn't. You are guilty of mockery, sir.'

'I assure you, sir—' Mr Tinkler began.

'Don't assure me!' said Mr Dorrit. 'I will not be assured by a domestic. You are guilty of mockery. You shall leave me—hum—the whole establishment shall leave me. What are you waiting for?'

'Only for my orders, sir.'

'It's false,' said Mr Dorrit, 'you have your orders. Ha—hum. MY compliments to Mrs General, and I beg the favour of her coming to me, if quite convenient, for a few minutes. Those are your orders.'

In his execution of this mission, Mr Tinkler perhaps expressed that Mr Dorrit was in a raging fume. However that was, Mrs General's skirts were very speedily heard outside, coming along—one might almost have said bouncing along—with unusual expedition. Albeit, they settled down at the door and swept into the room with their customary coolness.

'Mrs General,' said Mr Dorrit, 'take a chair.'

Mrs General, with a graceful curve of acknowledgment, descended into the chair which Mr Dorrit offered.

'Madam,' pursued that gentleman, 'as you have had the kindness to undertake the—hum—formation of my daughters, and as I am persuaded that nothing nearly affecting them can—ha—be indifferent to you—'

'Wholly impossible,' said Mrs General in the calmest of ways.

'—I therefore wish to announce to you, madam, that my daughter now present—'

Mrs General made a slight inclination of her head to Fanny, who made a very low inclination of her head to Mrs General, and came loftily upright again.

'—That my daughter Fanny is—ha—contracted to be married to Mr Sparkler, with whom you are acquainted. Hence, madam, you will be relieved of half your difficult charge—ha—difficult charge.' Mr Dorrit repeated it with his angry eye on Fanny. 'But not, I hope, to the—hum—diminution of any other portion, direct or indirect, of the footing you have at present the kindness to occupy in my family.'

'Mr Dorrit,' returned Mrs General, with her gloved hands resting on one another in exemplary repose, 'is ever considerate, and ever but too appreciative of my friendly services.'

(Miss Fanny coughed, as much as to say, 'You are right.')

'Miss Dorrit has no doubt exercised the soundest discretion of which the circumstances admitted, and I trust will allow me to offer her my sincere congratulations. When free from the trammels of passion,' Mrs General closed her eyes at the word, as if she could not utter it, and see anybody; 'when occurring with the approbation of near relatives; and when cementing the proud structure of a family edifice; these are usually auspicious events.

I trust Miss Dorrit will allow me to offer her my best congratulations.'

Here Mrs General stopped, and added internally, for the setting of her face, 'Papa, potatoes, poultry, Prunes, and prism.'

'Mr Dorrit,' she superadded aloud, 'is ever most obliging; and for the attention, and I will add distinction, of having this confidence imparted to me by himself and Miss Dorrit at this early time, I beg to offer the tribute of my thanks. My thanks, and my congratulations, are equally the meed of Mr Dorrit and of Miss Dorrit.'

'To me,' observed Miss Fanny, 'they are excessively gratifying—inexpressibly so. The relief of finding that you have no objection to make, Mrs General, quite takes a load off my mind, I am sure. I hardly know what I should have done,' said Fanny, 'if you had interposed any objection, Mrs General.'

Mrs General changed her gloves, as to the right glove being uppermost and the left undermost, with a Prunes and Prism smile.

'To preserve your approbation, Mrs General,' said Fanny, returning the smile with one in which there was no trace of those ingredients, 'will of course be the highest object of my married life; to lose it, would of course be perfect wretchedness. I am sure your great kindness will not object, and I hope papa will not object, to my correcting a small mistake you have made, however. The best of us are so liable to mistakes, that even you, Mrs General, have fallen into a little error. The attention and distinction you have so impressively mentioned, Mrs General, as attaching to this confidence, are, I have no doubt, of the most complimentary and gratifying description; but they don't at all proceed from me. The merit of having consulted you on the subject would have been so great in me, that I feel I must not lay claim to it when it really is not mine. It is wholly papa's. I am deeply obliged to you for your encouragement and patronage, but it was papa who asked for it. I have to thank you, Mrs General, for relieving my breast of a great weight by so handsomely giving your consent to my engagement, but you have really nothing to thank me for. I hope you will always approve of my proceedings after I have left home and that my sister also may long remain the favoured object of your condescension, Mrs General.'

With this address, which was delivered in her politest manner, Fanny left the room with an elegant and cheerful air—to tear up-stairs with a flushed face as soon as she was out of hearing, pounce in upon her sister, call her a little Dormouse, shake her for the better opening of her eyes, tell her what had passed below, and ask her what she thought of Pa now?

Towards Mrs Merdle, the young lady comported herself with great independence and self-possession; but not as yet with any more decided opening of hostilities. Occasionally they had a slight skirmish, as when Fanny considered herself patted on the back by that lady, or as when Mrs Merdle looked particularly young and well; but Mrs Merdle always soon terminated those passages of arms by sinking among her cushions with the gracefullest indifference, and finding her attention otherwise engaged. Society (for that mysterious creature sat upon the Seven Hills too) found Miss Fanny vastly improved by her engagement. She was much more accessible, much more free and engaging, much less exacting; insomuch that she now entertained a host of followers and admirers, to the bitter indignation of ladies with daughters to marry, who were to be regarded as Having revolted from Society on the Miss Dorrit grievance, and erected a rebellious standard. Enjoying the flutter she caused. Miss Dorrit not only haughtily moved through it in her own proper person, but haughtily, even Ostentatiously, led Mr Sparkler through it too: seeming to say to them all, 'If I think proper to march among you in triumphal procession attended by this weak captive in bonds, rather than a stronger one, that is my business. Enough that I choose to do it!' Mr Sparkler for his part, questioned nothing; but went wherever he was taken, did whatever he was told, felt that for his bride-elect to be distinguished was for him to be distinguished on the easiest terms, and was truly grateful for being so openly acknowledged.

The winter passing on towards the spring while this condition of affairs prevailed, it became necessary for Mr Sparkler to repair to England, and take his appointed part in the expression and direction of its genius, learning, commerce, spirit, and sense. The land of Shakespeare, Milton, Bacon, Newton, Watt, the land of a host of past and present abstract philosophers, natural philosophers, and subduers of Nature and Art in their myriad forms, called to Mr Sparkler to come and take care of it, lest it should perish. Mr Sparkler, unable to resist the agonised cry from the depths of his country's soul, declared that he must go.

It followed that the question was rendered pressing when, where, and how Mr Sparkler should be married to the foremost girl in all this world with no nonsense about her. Its solution, after some little mystery and secrecy, Miss Fanny herself announced to her sister.

'Now, my child,' said she, seeking her out one day, 'I am going to tell you something. It is only this moment broached; and naturally I hurry to you the moment it IS broached.'

'Your marriage, Fanny?'

'My precious child,' said Fanny, 'don't anticipate me. Let me impart my confidence to you, you flurried little thing, in my own way. As to your guess, if I answered it literally, I should answer no. For really it is not my marriage that is in question, half as much as it is Edmund's.'

Little Dorrit looked, and perhaps not altogether without cause, somewhat at a loss to understand this fine distinction.

'I am in no difficulty,' exclaimed Fanny, 'and in no hurry. I am not wanted at any public office, or to give any vote anywhere else.

But Edmund is. And Edmund is deeply dejected at the idea of going away by himself, and, indeed, I don't like that he should be trusted by himself. For, if it's possible—and it generally is—to do a foolish thing, he is sure to do it.'

As she concluded this impartial summary of the reliance that might be safely placed upon her future husband, she took off, with an air of business, the bonnet she wore, and dangled it by its strings upon the ground.

'It is far more Edmund's question, therefore, than mine. However, we need say no more about that. That is self-evident on the face of it. Well, my dearest Amy! The point arising, is he to go by himself, or is he not to go by himself, this other point arises, are we to be married here and shortly, or are we to be married at home months hence?'

'I see I am going to lose you, Fanny.'

'What a little thing you are,' cried Fanny, half tolerant and half impatient, 'for anticipating one! Pray, my darling, hear me out. That woman,' she spoke of Mrs Merdle, of course, 'remains here until after Easter; so, in the case of my being married here and going to London with Edmund, I should have the start of her. That is something. Further, Amy.

That woman being out of the way, I don't know that I greatly object to Mr Merdle's proposal to Pa that Edmund and I should take up our abode in that house—you know—where you once went with a dancer, my dear, until our own house can be chosen and fitted up. Further still, Amy. Papa having always intended to go to town himself, in the spring,—you see, if Edmund and I were married here, we might go off to Florence, where papa might join us, and we might all three travel home together. Mr Merdle has entreated Pa to stay with him in that same mansion I have mentioned, and I suppose he will. But he is master of his own actions; and upon that point (which is not at all material) I can't speak positively.' The difference between papa's being master of his own actions and Mr Sparkler's being nothing of the sort, was forcibly expressed by Fanny in her manner of stating the case. Not that her sister noticed it; for she was divided between regret at the coming separation, and a lingering wish that she had been included in the plans for visiting England.

'And these are the arrangements, Fanny dear?'

'Arrangements!' repeated Fanny. 'Now, really, child, you are a little trying. You know I particularly guarded myself against laying my words open to any such construction. What I said was, that certain questions present themselves; and these are the questions.'

Little Dorrit's thoughtful eyes met hers, tenderly and quietly.

'Now, my own sweet girl,' said Fanny, weighing her bonnet by the strings with considerable impatience, 'it's no use staring. A little owl could stare. I look to you for advice, Amy. What do you advise me to do?'

'Do you think,' asked Little Dorrit, persuasively, after a short hesitation, 'do you think, Fanny, that if you were to put it off for a few months, it might be, considering all things, best?'

'No, little Tortoise,' retorted Fanny, with exceeding sharpness. 'I don't think anything of the kind.'

Here, she threw her bonnet from her altogether, and flounced into a chair. But, becoming affectionate almost immediately, she flounced out of it again, and kneeled down on the floor to take her sister, chair and all, in her arms.

'Don't suppose I am hasty or unkind, darling, because I really am not. But you are such a little oddity! You make one bite your head off, when one wants to be soothing beyond everything. Didn't I tell you, you dearest baby, that Edmund can't be trusted by himself? And don't you know that he can't?'

'Yes, yes, Fanny. You said so, I know.'

'And you know it, I know,' retorted Fanny. 'Well, my precious child! If he is not to be trusted by himself, it follows, I suppose, that I should go with him?'

'It—seems so, love,' said Little Dorrit.

'Therefore, having heard the arrangements that are feasible to carry out that object, am I to understand, dearest Amy, that on the whole you advise me to make them?'

'It—seems so, love,' said Little Dorrit again.

'Very well,' cried Fanny with an air of resignation, 'then I suppose it must be done! I came to you, my sweet, the moment I saw the doubt, and the necessity of deciding. I have now decided. So let it be.'

After yielding herself up, in this pattern manner, to sisterly advice and the force of circumstances, Fanny became quite benignant: as one who had laid her own inclinations at the feet of her dearest friend, and felt a glow of conscience in having made the sacrifice. 'After all, my Amy,' she said to her sister, 'you are the best of small creatures, and full of good sense; and I don't know what I shall ever do without you!'

With which words she folded her in a closer embrace, and a really fond one.

'Not that I contemplate doing without You, Amy, by any means, for I hope we shall ever be next to inseparable. And now, my pet, I am going to give you a word of advice. When you are left alone here with Mrs General—'

'I am to be left alone here with Mrs General?' said Little Dorrit, quietly.

'Why, of course, my precious, till papa comes back! Unless you call Edward company, which he certainly is not, even when he is here, and still more certainly is not when he is away at Naples or in Sicily. I was going to say—but you are such a beloved little Marplot for putting one out—when you are left alone here with Mrs General, Amy, don't you let her slide into any sort of artful understanding with you that she is looking after Pa, or that Pa is looking after her. She will if she can. I know her sly manner of feeling her way with those gloves of hers. But don't you comprehend her on any account. And if Pa should tell you when he comes back, that he has it in contemplation to make Mrs General your mama (which is not the less likely because I am going away), my advice to you is, that you say at once, "Papa, I beg to object most strongly. Fanny cautioned me about this, and she objected, and I object." I don't mean to say that any objection from you, Amy, is likely to be of the smallest effect, or that I think you likely to make it with any degree of firmness. But there is a principle involved—a filial principle—and I implore you not to submit to be mother-in-lawed by Mrs General, without asserting it in making every one about you as uncomfortable as possible. I don't expect you to stand by it—indeed, I know you won't, Pa being concerned—but I wish to rouse you to a sense of duty. As to any help from me, or as to any opposition that I can offer to such a match, you shall not be left in the lurch, my love. Whatever weight I may derive from my position as a married girl not wholly devoid of attractions—used, as that position always shall be, to oppose that woman—I will bring to bear, you May depend upon it, on the head and false hair (for I am confident it's not all real, ugly as it is and unlikely as it appears that any One in their Senses would go to the expense of buying it) of Mrs General!' Little Dorrit received this counsel without venturing to oppose it but without giving Fanny any reason to believe that she intended to act upon it. Having now, as it were, formally wound up her single life and arranged her worldly affairs, Fanny proceeded with characteristic ardour to prepare for the serious change in her condition.

The preparation consisted in the despatch of her maid to Paris under the protection of the Courier, for the purchase of that outfit for a bride on which it would be extremely low, in the present narrative, to bestow an English name, but to which (on a vulgar principle it observes of adhering to the language in which it professes to be written) it declines to give a French one. The rich and beautiful wardrobe purchased by these agents, in the course of a few weeks made its way through the intervening country, bristling with custom-houses, garrisoned by an immense army of shabby mendicants in uniform who incessantly repeated the Beggar's Petition over it, as if every individual warrior among them were the ancient Belisarius: and of whom there were so many Legions, that unless the Courier had expended just one bushel and a half of silver money relieving their distresses, they would have worn the wardrobe out before it got to Rome, by turning it over and over. Through all such dangers, however, it was triumphantly brought, inch by inch, and arrived at its journey's end in fine condition.

There it was exhibited to select companies of female viewers, in whose gentle bosoms it awakened implacable feelings. Concurrently, active preparations were made for the day on which some of its treasures were to be publicly displayed. Cards of breakfast-invitation were sent out to half the English in the city of Romulus; the other half made arrangements to be under arms, as criticising volunteers, at various outer points of the solemnity. The most high and illustrious English Signor Edgardo Dorrit, came post through the deep mud and ruts (from forming a surface under the improving Neapolitan nobility), to grace the occasion. The best hotel and all its culinary myrmidons, were set to work to prepare the feast. The drafts of Mr Dorrit almost constituted a run on the Torlonia Bank. The British Consul hadn't had such a marriage in the whole of his Consularity.

The day came, and the She-Wolf in the Capitol might have snarled with envy to see how the Island Savages contrived these things now-a-days. The murderous-headed statues of the wicked Emperors of the Soldiery, whom sculptors had not been able to flatter out of their villainous hideousness, might have come off their pedestals to run away with the Bride. The choked old fountain, where erst the gladiators washed, might have leaped into life again to honour the ceremony. The Temple of Vesta might have sprung up anew from its ruins, expressly to lend its countenance to the occasion. Might have done; but did not. Like sentient things—even like the lords and ladies of creation sometimes—might have done much, but did nothing. The celebration went off with admirable pomp; monks in black robes, white robes, and russet robes stopped to look after the carriages; wandering peasants in fleeces of sheep, begged and piped under the house-windows; the English volunteers defiled; the day wore on to the hour of vespers; the festival wore away; the thousand churches rang their bells without any reference to it; and St Peter denied that he had anything to do with it.

But by that time the Bride was near the end of the first day's journey towards Florence. It was the peculiarity of the nuptials that they were all Bride. Nobody noticed the Bridegroom. Nobody noticed the first Bridesmaid. Few could have seen Little Dorrit (who held that post) for the glare, even supposing many to have sought her. So, the Bride had mounted into her handsome chariot, incidentally accompanied by the Bridegroom; and after rolling for a few minutes smoothly over a fair pavement, had begun to jolt through a Slough of Despond, and through a long, long avenue of wrack and ruin. Other nuptial carriages are said to have gone the same road, before and since.

If Little Dorrit found herself left a little lonely and a little low that night, nothing would have done so much against her feeling of depression as the being able to sit at work by her father, as in the old time, and help him to his supper and his rest. But that was not to be thought of now, when they sat in the state-equipage with Mrs General on the coach-box. And as to supper! If Mr Dorrit had wanted supper, there was an Italian cook and there was a Swiss confectioner, who must have put on caps as high as the Pope's Mitre, and have performed the mysteries of Alchemists in a copper-saucepaned laboratory below, before he could have got it.

He was sententious and didactic that night. If he had been simply loving, he would have done Little Dorrit more good; but she accepted him as he was—when had she not accepted him as he was!—and made the most and best of him. Mrs General at length retired. Her retirement for the night was always her frostiest ceremony, as if she felt it necessary that the human imagination should be chilled into stone to prevent its following her. When she had gone through her rigid preliminaries, amounting to a sort of genteel platoon-exercise, she withdrew. Little Dorrit then put her arm round her father's neck, to bid him good night.

'Amy, my dear,' said Mr Dorrit, taking her by the hand, 'this is the close of a day, that has—ha—greatly impressed and gratified me.' 'A little tired you, dear, too?'

'No,' said Mr Dorrit, 'no: I am not sensible of fatigue when it arises from an occasion so—hum—replete with gratification of the purest kind.'

Little Dorrit was glad to find him in such heart, and smiled from her own heart.

'My dear,' he continued, 'this is an occasion—ha—teeming with a good example. With a good example, my favourite and attached child—hum—to you.'

Little Dorrit, fluttered by his words, did not know what to say, though he stopped as if he expected her to say something.

'Amy,' he resumed; 'your dear sister, our Fanny, has contracted ha hum—a marriage, eminently calculated to extend the basis of our—ha—connection, and to—hum—consolidate our social relations. My love, I trust that the time is not far distant when some—ha—eligible partner may be found for you.'

'Oh no! Let me stay with you. I beg and pray that I may stay with you! I want nothing but to stay and take care of you!' She said it like one in sudden alarm.

'Nay, Amy, Amy,' said Mr Dorrit. 'This is weak and foolish, weak and foolish. You have a—ha—responsibility imposed upon you by your position. It is to develop that position, and be—hum—worthy of that position. As to taking care of me; I can—ha—take care of myself. Or,' he added after a moment, 'if I should need to be taken care of, I—hum—can, with the—ha—blessing of Providence, be taken care of, I—ha hum—I cannot, my dear child, think of engrossing, and—ha—as it were, sacrificing you.'

O what a time of day at which to begin that profession of self-denial; at which to make it, with an air of taking credit for it; at which to believe it, if such a thing could be!

'Don't speak, Amy. I positively say I cannot do it. I—ha—must not do it. My—hum—conscience would not allow it. I therefore, my love, take the opportunity afforded by this gratifying and impressive occasion of—ha—solemnly remarking, that it is now a cherished wish and purpose of mine to see you—ha—eligibly (I repeat eligibly) married.'

'Oh no, dear! Pray!'

'Amy,' said Mr Dorrit, 'I am well persuaded that if the topic were referred to any person of superior social knowledge, of superior delicacy and sense—let us say, for instance, to—ha—Mrs General—that there would not be two opinions as to the—hum—affectionate character and propriety of my sentiments. But, as I know your loving and dutiful nature from—hum—from experience, I am quite satisfied that it is necessary to say no more. I have—hum—no husband to propose at present, my dear: I have not even one in view. I merely wish that we should—ha—understand each other. Hum. Good night, my dear and sole remaining daughter. Good night.

God bless you!'

If the thought ever entered Little Dorrit's head that night, that he could give her up lightly now in his prosperity, and when he had it in his mind to replace her with a second wife, she drove it away. Faithful to him still, as in the worst times through which she had borne him single-handed, she drove the thought away; and entertained no harder reflection, in her tearful unrest, than that he now saw everything through their wealth, and through the care he always had upon him that they should continue rich, and grow richer.

They sat in their equipage of state, with Mrs General on the box, for three weeks longer, and then he started for Florence to join Fanny. Little

Dorrit would have been glad to bear him company so far, only for the sake of her own love, and then to have turned back alone, thinking of dear England. But, though the Courier had gone on with the Bride, the Valet was next in the line; and the succession would not have come to her, as long as any one could be got for money.

Mrs General took life easily—as easily, that is, as she could take anything—when the Roman establishment remained in their sole occupation; and Little Dorrit would often ride out in a hired carriage that was left them, and alight alone and wander among the ruins of old Rome. The ruins of the vast old Amphitheatre, of the old Temples, of the old commemorative Arches, of the old trodden highways, of the old tombs, besides being what they were, to her were ruins of the old Marshalsea—ruins of her own old life—ruins of the faces and forms that of old peopled it—ruins of its loves, hopes, cares, and joys. Two ruined spheres of action and suffering were before the solitary girl often sitting on some broken fragment; and in the lonely places, under the blue sky, she saw them both together.

Up, then, would come Mrs General; taking all the colour out of everything, as Nature and Art had taken it out of herself; writing Prunes and Prism, in Mr Eustace's text, wherever she could lay a hand; looking everywhere for Mr Eustace and company, and seeing nothing else; scratching up the driest little bones of antiquity, and bolting them whole without any human visitings—like a Ghoule in gloves.

CHAPTER 16. Getting on

The newly married pair, on their arrival in Harley Street, Cavendish Square, London, were received by the Chief Butler. That great man was not interested in them, but on the whole endured them. People must continue to be married and given in marriage, or Chief Butlers would not be wanted. As nations are made to be taxed, so families are made to be butlered. The Chief Butler, no doubt, reflected that the course of nature required the wealthy population to be kept up, on his account.

He therefore condescended to look at the carriage from the Hall-door without frowning at it, and said, in a very handsome way, to one of his men, 'Thomas, help with the luggage.' He even escorted the Bride up-stairs into Mr Merdle's presence; but this must be considered as an act of homage to the sex (of which he was an admirer, being notoriously captivated by the charms of a certain Duchess), and not as a committal of himself with the family.

Mr Merdle was slinking about the hearthrug, waiting to welcome Mrs Sparkler. His hand seemed to retreat up his sleeve as he advanced to do so, and he gave her such a superfluity of coat-cuff that it was like being received by the popular conception of Guy Fawkes. When he put his lips to hers, besides, he took himself into custody by the wrists, and backed himself among the ottomans and chairs and tables as if he were his own Police officer, saying to himself, 'Now, none of that! Come! I've got you, you know, and you go quietly along with me!'

Mrs Sparkler, installed in the rooms of state—the innermost sanctuary of down, silk, chintz, and fine linen—felt that so far her triumph was good, and her way made, step by step. On the day before her marriage, she had bestowed on Mrs Merdle's maid with an air of gracious indifference, in Mrs Merdle's presence, a trifling little keepsake (bracelet, bonnet, and two dresses, all new) about four times as valuable as the present formerly made by Mrs Merdle to her. She was now established in Mrs Merdle's own rooms, to which some extra touches had been given to render them more worthy of her occupation. In her mind's eye, as she lounged there, surrounded by every luxurious accessory that wealth could obtain or invention devise, she saw the fair bosom that beat in unison with the exultation of her thoughts, competing with the bosom that had been famous so long, outshining it, and deposing it. Happy? Fanny must have been happy. No more wishing one's self dead now.

The Courier had not approved of Mr Dorrit's staying in the house of a friend, and had preferred to take him to an hotel in Brook Street, Grosvenor Square. Mr Merdle ordered his carriage to be ready early in the morning that he might wait upon Mr Dorrit immediately after breakfast. Bright the carriage looked, sleek the horses looked, gleaming the harness looked, luscious and lasting the liveries looked. A rich, responsible turn-out. An equipage for a Merdle. Early people looked after it as it rattled along the streets, and said, with awe in their breath, 'There he goes!'

There he went, until Brook Street stopped him. Then, forth from its magnificent case came the jewel; not lustrous in itself, but quite the contrary.

Commotion in the office of the hotel. Merdle! The landlord, though a gentleman of a haughty spirit who had just driven a pair of thorough-bred horses into town, turned out to show him up-stairs. The clerks and servants cut him off by back-passages, and were found accidentally hovering in doorways and angles, that they might look upon him. Merdle! O ye sun, moon, and stars, the great man! The rich man, who had in a manner revised the New Testament, and already entered into the kingdom of Heaven. The man who could have any one he chose to dine with him, and who had made the money!

As he went up the stairs, people were already posted on the lower stairs, that his shadow might fall upon them when he came down. So were the sick brought out and laid in the track of the Apostle—who had NOT got into the good society, and had NOT made the money.

Mr Dorrit, dressing-gowned and newspapered, was at his breakfast. The Courier, with agitation in his voice, announced 'Miss Mairdale!' Mr Dorrit's overwrought heart bounded as he leaped up.

'Mr Merdle, this is—ha—indeed an honour. Permit me to express the—hum—sense, the high sense, I entertain of this—ha hum—highly gratifying act of attention. I am well aware, sir, of the many demands upon your time, and its—ha—enormous value,' Mr Dorrit could not say enormous roundly enough for his own satisfaction. 'That you should—ha—at this early hour, bestow any of your priceless time upon me, is—ha—a compliment that I acknowledge with the greatest esteem.' Mr Dorrit positively trembled in addressing the great man.

Mr Merdle uttered, in his subdued, inward, hesitating voice, a few sounds that were to no purpose whatever; and finally said, 'I am glad to see you, sir.'

'You are very kind,' said Mr Dorrit. 'Truly kind.' By this time the visitor was seated, and was passing his great hand over his exhausted forehead. 'You are well, I hope, Mr Merdle?'

'I am as well as I—yes, I am as well as I usually am,' said Mr Merdle.

'Your occupations must be immense.'

'Tolerably so. But—Oh dear no, there's not much the matter with me,' said Mr Merdle, looking round the room.

'A little dyspeptic?' Mr Dorrit hinted.

'Very likely. But I—Oh, I am well enough,' said Mr Merdle.

There were black traces on his lips where they met, as if a little train of gunpowder had been fired there; and he looked like a man who, if his natural temperament had been quicker, would have been very feverish that morning. This, and his heavy way of passing his hand over his forehead, had prompted Mr Dorrit's solicitous inquiries.

'Mrs Merdle,' Mr Dorrit insinuatingly pursued, 'I left, as you will be prepared to hear, the—ha—observed of all observers, the—hum—admired of all admirers, the leading fascination and charm of Society in Rome. She was looking wonderfully well when I quitted it.'

'Mrs Merdle,' said Mr Merdle, 'is generally considered a very attractive woman. And she is, no doubt. I am sensible of her being SO.'

'Who can be otherwise?' responded Mr Dorrit.

Mr Merdle turned his tongue in his closed mouth—it seemed rather a stiff and unmanageable tongue—moistened his lips, passed his hand over his forehead again, and looked all round the room again, principally under the chairs.

'But,' he said, looking Mr Dorrit in the face for the first time, and immediately afterwards dropping his eyes to the buttons of Mr Dorrit's waistcoat; 'if we speak of attractions, your daughter ought to be the subject of our conversation. She is extremely beautiful. Both in face and figure, she is quite uncommon. When the young people arrived last night, I was really surprised to see such charms.'

Mr Dorrit's gratification was such that he said—ha—he could not refrain from telling Mr Merdle verbally, as he had already done by letter, what honour and happiness he felt in this union of their families. And he offered his hand. Mr Merdle looked at the hand for a little while, took it on his for a moment as if his were a yellow salver or fish-slice, and then returned it to Mr Dorrit.

'I thought I would drive round the first thing,' said Mr Merdle, 'to offer my services, in case I can do anything for you; and to say that I hope you will at least do me the honour of dining with me to-day, and every day when you are not better engaged during your stay in town.'

Mr Dorrit was enraptured by these attentions.

'Do you stay long, sir?'

'I have not at present the intention,' said Mr Dorrit, 'of—ha—exceeding a fortnight.'

'That's a very short stay, after so long a journey,' returned Mr Merdle.

'Hum. Yes,' said Mr Dorrit. 'But the truth is—ha—my dear Mr Merdle, that I find a foreign life so well suited to my health and taste, that I—hum—have but two objects in my present visit to London. First, the—ha—the distinguished happiness and—ha—privilege which I now enjoy and appreciate; secondly, the arrangement—hum—the laying out, that is to say, in the best way, of—ha, hum—my money.'

'Well, sir,' said Mr Merdle, after turning his tongue again, 'if I can be of any use to you in that respect, you may command me.'

Mr Dorrit's speech had had more hesitation in it than usual, as he approached the ticklish topic, for he was not perfectly clear how so exalted a potentate might take it. He had doubts whether reference to any individual capital, or fortune, might not seem a wretchedly retail affair to so wholesale a dealer. Greatly relieved by Mr Merdle's affable offer of assistance, he caught at it directly, and heaped acknowledgments upon him.

'I scarcely—ha—dared,' said Mr Dorrit, 'I assure you, to hope for so—hum—vast an advantage as your direct advice and assistance. Though of course I should, under any circumstances, like the—ha, hum—rest of the civilised world, have followed in Mr Merdle's train.'

'You know we may almost say we are related, sir,' said Mr Merdle, curiously interested in the pattern of the carpet, 'and, therefore, you may consider me at your service.'

'Ha. Very handsome, indeed!' cried Mr Dorrit. 'Ha. Most handsome!'

'It would not,' said Mr Merdle, 'be at the present moment easy for what I may call a mere outsider to come into any of the good things—of course I speak of my own good things—'

'Of course, of course!' cried Mr Dorrit, in a tone implying that there were no other good things.

'—Unless at a high price. At what we are accustomed to term a very long figure.'

Mr Dorrit laughed in the buoyancy of his spirit. Ha, ha, ha! Long figure. Good. Ha. Very expressive to be sure!

'However,' said Mr Merdle, 'I do generally retain in my own hands the power of exercising some preference—people in general would be pleased to call it favour—as a sort of compliment for my care and trouble.' 'And public spirit and genius,' Mr Dorrit suggested.

Mr Merdle, with a dry, swallowing action, seemed to dispose of those qualities like a bolus; then added, 'As a sort of return for it. I will see, if you please, how I can exert this limited power (for people are jealous, and it is limited), to your advantage.' 'You are very good,' replied Mr Dorrit. 'You are very good.'

'Of course,' said Mr Merdle, 'there must be the strictest integrity and uprightness in these transactions; there must be the purest faith between man and man; there must be unimpeached and unimpeachable confidence; or business could not be carried on.'

Mr Dorrit hailed these generous sentiments with fervour.

'Therefore,' said Mr Merdle, 'I can only give you a preference to a certain extent.'

'I perceive. To a defined extent,' observed Mr Dorrit.

'Defined extent. And perfectly above-board. As to my advice, however,' said Mr Merdle, 'that is another matter. That, such as it is—'

Oh! Such as it was! (Mr Dorrit could not bear the faintest appearance of its being depreciated, even by Mr Merdle himself.)

'—That, there is nothing in the bonds of spotless honour between myself and my fellow-man to prevent my parting with, if I choose. And that,' said Mr Merdle, now deeply intent upon a dust-cart that was passing the windows, 'shall be at your command whenever you think proper.'

New acknowledgments from Mr Dorrit. New passages of Mr Merdle's hand over his forehead. Calm and silence. Contemplation of Mr Dorrit's waistcoat buttons by Mr Merdle.

'My time being rather precious,' said Mr Merdle, suddenly getting up, as if he had been waiting in the interval for his legs and they had just come, 'I must be moving towards the City. Can I take you anywhere, sir? I shall be happy to set you down, or send you on. My carriage is at your disposal.'

Mr Dorrit bethought himself that he had business at his banker's. His banker's was in the City. That was fortunate; Mr Merdle would take him into the City. But, surely, he might not detain Mr Merdle while he assumed his coat? Yes, he might and must; Mr Merdle insisted on it. So Mr Dorrit, retiring into the next room, put himself under the hands of his valet, and in five minutes came back glorious.

Then said Mr Merdle, 'Allow me, sir. Take my arm!' Then leaning on Mr Merdle's arm, did Mr Dorrit descend the staircase, seeing the worshippers on the steps, and feeling that the light of Mr Merdle shone by reflection in himself. Then the carriage, and the ride into the City; and the people who looked at them; and the hats that flew off grey heads; and the general bowing and crouching before this wonderful mortal the like of which prostration of spirit was not to be seen—no, by high Heaven, no! It may be worth thinking of by Fawners of all denominations—in Westminster Abbey and Saint Paul's Cathedral put together, on any Sunday in the year. It was a rapturous dream to Mr Dorrit to find himself set aloft in this public car of triumph, making a magnificent progress to that befitting destination, the golden Street of the Lombards.

There Mr Merdle insisted on alighting and going his way a-foot, and leaving his poor equipage at Mr Dorrit's disposition. So the dream increased in rapture when Mr Dorrit came out of the bank alone, and people looked at him in default of Mr Merdle, and when, with the ears of his mind, he heard the frequent exclamation as he rolled glibly along, 'A wonderful man to be Mr Merdle's friend!'

At dinner that day, although the occasion was not foreseen and provided for, a brilliant company of such as are not made of the dust of the earth, but of some superior article for the present unknown, shed their lustrous benediction upon Mr Dorrit's daughter's marriage. And Mr Dorrit's daughter that day began, in earnest, her competition with that woman not present; and began it so well that Mr Dorrit could all but have taken his affidavit, if required, that Mrs Sparkler had all her life been lying at full length in the lap of luxury, and had never heard of such a rough word in the English tongue as Marshalsea.

Next day, and the day after, and every day, all graced by more dinner company, cards descended on Mr Dorrit like theatrical snow. As the friend and relative by marriage of the illustrious Merdle, Bar, Bishop, Treasury, Chorus, Everybody, wanted to make or improve Mr Dorrit's acquaintance. In Mr Merdle's heap of offices in the City, when Mr Dorrit appeared at any of them on his business taking him Eastward (which it frequently did, for it throve amazingly), the name of Dorrit was always a passport to the great presence of Merdle. So the dream increased in rapture every hour, as Mr Dorrit felt increasingly sensible that this connection had brought him forward indeed.

Only one thing sat otherwise than auriferously, and at the same time lightly, on Mr Dorrit's mind. It was the Chief Butler. That stupendous character looked at him, in the course of his official looking at the dinners, in a manner that Mr Dorrit considered questionable. He looked at him, as he passed through the hall and up the staircase, going to dinner, with a glazed fixedness that Mr Dorrit did not like. Seated at table in the act of drinking, Mr Dorrit still saw him through his wine-glass, regarding him with a cold and ghostly eye. It misgave him that the Chief Butler must have known a Collegian, and must have seen him in the College—perhaps had been presented to him. He looked as closely at the Chief Butler as such a man could be looked at, and yet he did not recall that he had ever seen him elsewhere. Ultimately he was inclined to think that there was no reverence in the man, no sentiment in the great creature. But he was not relieved by that; for, let him think what he would, the Chief Butler had him in his supercilious eye, even when that eye was on the plate and other table-garniture; and he never let him out of it. To hint to him that this confinement in his eye was disagreeable, or to ask him what he meant, was an act too daring to venture upon; his severity with his employers and their visitors being terrific, and he never permitting himself to be approached with the slightest liberty.

CHAPTER 17. Missing

The term of Mr Dorrit's visit was within two days of being out, and he was about to dress for another inspection by the Chief Butler (whose victims were always dressed expressly for him), when one of the servants of the hotel presented himself bearing a card. Mr Dorrit, taking it, read:

'Mrs Finching.'

The servant waited in speechless deference.

'Man, man,' said Mr Dorrit, turning upon him with grievous indignation, 'explain your motive in bringing me this ridiculous name. I am wholly unacquainted with it. Finching, sir?' said Mr Dorrit, perhaps avenging himself on the Chief Butler by Substitute.

'Ha! What do you mean by Finching?'

The man, man, seemed to mean Flinching as much as anything else, for he backed away from Mr Dorrit's severe regard, as he replied, 'A lady, sir.'

'I know no such lady, sir,' said Mr Dorrit. 'Take this card away. I know no Finching of either sex.'

'Ask your pardon, sir. The lady said she was aware she might be unknown by name. But she begged me to say, sir, that she had formerly the honour of being acquainted with Miss Dorrit. The lady said, sir, the youngest Miss Dorrit.'

Mr Dorrit knitted his brows and rejoined, after a moment or two, 'Inform Mrs Finching, sir,' emphasising the name as if the innocent man were solely responsible for it, 'that she can come up.'

He had reflected, in his momentary pause, that unless she were admitted she might leave some message, or might say something below, having a disgraceful reference to that former state of existence. Hence the concession, and hence the appearance of Flora, piloted in by the man, man.

'I have not the pleasure,' said Mr Dorrit, standing with the card in his hand, and with an air which imported that it would scarcely have been a first-class pleasure if he had had it, 'of knowing either this name, or yourself, madam. Place a chair, sir.' The responsible man, with a start, obeyed, and went out on tiptoe. Flora, putting aside her veil with a bashful tremor upon her, proceeded to introduce herself. At the same time a singular combination of perfumes was diffused through the room, as if some brandy had been put by mistake in a lavender-water bottle, or as if some lavender-water had been put by mistake in a brandy-bottle.

'I beg Mr Dorrit to offer a thousand apologies and indeed they would be far too few for such an intrusion which I know must appear extremely bold in a lady and alone too, but I thought it best upon the whole however difficult and even apparently improper though Mr F.'s Aunt would have willingly accompanied me and as a character of great force and spirit would probably have struck one possessed of such a knowledge of life as no doubt with so many changes must have been acquired, for Mr F. himself said frequently that although well educated in the neighbourhood of Blackheath at as high as eighty guineas which is a good deal for parents and the plate kept back too on going away but that is more a meanness than its value that he had learnt more in his first years as a commercial traveller with a large commission on the sale of an article that nobody would hear of much less buy which preceded the wine trade a long time than in the whole six years in that academy conducted by a college Bachelor, though why a Bachelor more clever than a married man I do not see and never did but pray excuse me that is not the point.'

Mr Dorrit stood rooted to the carpet, a statue of mystification.

'I must openly admit that I have no pretensions,' said Flora, 'but having known the dear little thing which under altered circumstances appears a liberty but is not so intended and Goodness knows there was no favour in half-a-crown a-day to such a needle as herself but quite the other way and as to anything lowering in it far from it the labourer is worthy of his hire and I am sure I only wish he got it oftener and more animal food and less rheumatism in the back and legs poor soul.'

'Madam,' said Mr Dorrit, recovering his breath by a great effort, as the relict of the late Mr Finching stopped to take hers; 'madam,' said Mr Dorrit, very red in the face, 'if I understand you to refer to—ha—to anything in the antecedents of—hum—a daughter of mine, involving—ha hum—daily compensation, madam, I beg to observe that the—ha—fact, assuming it—ha—to be fact, never was within my knowledge. Hum. I should not have permitted it. Ha. Never! Never!'

'Unnecessary to pursue the subject,' returned Flora, 'and would not have mentioned it on any account except as supposing it a favourable and only letter of introduction but as to being fact no doubt whatever and you may set your mind at rest for the very dress I have on now can prove it and sweetly made though there is no denying that it would tell better on a better figure for my own is much too fat though how to bring it down I know not, pray excuse me I am roving off again.' Mr Dorrit backed to his chair in a stony way, and seated himself, as Flora gave him a softening look and played with her parasol.

'The dear little thing,' said Flora, 'having gone off perfectly limp and white and cold in my own house or at least papa's for though not a freehold still a long lease at a peppercorn on the morning when Arthur—foolish habit of our youthful days and Mr Clennam far more adapted to existing circumstances particularly addressing a stranger and that stranger a gentleman in an elevated station—communicated the glad tidings imparted by a person of name of Pancks emboldens me.'

At the mention of these two names, Mr Dorrit frowned, stared, frowned again, hesitated with his fingers at his lips, as he had hesitated long ago, and said, 'Do me the favour to—ha—state your pleasure, madam.'

'Mr Dorrit,' said Flora, 'you are very kind in giving me permission and highly natural it seems to me that you should be kind for though more stately I perceive a likeness filled out of course but a likeness still, the object of my intruding is my own without the slightest consultation with any human being and most decidedly not with Arthur—pray excuse me Doyce and Clennam I don't know what I am saying Mr Clennam solus—for to put that individual linked by a golden chain to a purple time when all was ethereal out of any anxiety would be worth to me the ransom of a monarch not that I have the least idea how much that would come to but using it as the total of all I have in the world and more.'

Mr Dorrit, without greatly regarding the earnestness of these latter words, repeated, 'State your pleasure, madam.'

'It's not likely I well know,' said Flora, 'but it's possible and being possible when I had the gratification of reading in the papers that you had arrived from Italy and were going back I made up my mind to try it for you might come across him or hear something of him and if so what a blessing and relief to all!'

'Allow me to ask, madam,' said Mr Dorrit, with his ideas in wild confusion, 'to whom—ha—To whom,' he repeated it with a raised voice in mere desperation, 'you at present allude?'

'To the foreigner from Italy who disappeared in the City as no doubt you have read in the papers equally with myself,' said Flora, 'not referring to private sources by the name of Pancks from which one gathers what dreadfully ill-natured things some people are wicked enough to whisper most likely judging others by themselves and what the uneasiness and indignation of Arthur—quite unable to overcome it Doyce and Clennam—cannot fail to be.'

It happened, fortunately for the elucidation of any intelligible result, that Mr Dorrit had heard or read nothing about the matter. This caused Mrs Finching, with many apologies for being in great practical difficulties as to finding the way to her pocket among the stripes of her dress at length to produce a police handbill, setting forth that a foreign gentleman of the name of Blandois, last from Venice, had unaccountably disappeared on such a night in such a part of the city of London; that he was known to have entered such a house, at such an hour; that he was stated by the inmates of that house to have left it, about so many minutes before midnight; and that he had never been beheld since. This, with exact particulars of time and locality, and with a good detailed description of the foreign gentleman who had so mysteriously vanished, Mr Dorrit read at large.

'Blandois!' said Mr Dorrit. 'Venice! And this description! I know this gentleman. He has been in my house. He is intimately acquainted with a gentleman of good family (but in indifferent circumstances), of whom I am a—hum—patron.'

'Then my humble and pressing entreaty is the more,' said Flora, 'that in travelling back you will have the kindness to look for this foreign gentleman along all the roads and up and down all the turnings and to make inquiries for him at all the hotels and orange-trees and vineyards and volcanoes and places for he must be somewhere and why doesn't he come forward and say he's there and clear all parties up?'

'Pray, madam,' said Mr Dorrit, referring to the handbill again, 'who is Clennam and Co.? Ha. I see the name mentioned here, in connection with the occupation of the house which Monsieur Blandois was seen to enter: who is Clennam and Co.? Is it the individual of whom I had formerly—hum—some—ha—slight transitory knowledge, and to whom I believe you have referred? Is it—ha—that person?'

'It's a very different person indeed,' replied Flora, 'with no limbs and wheels instead and the grimmest of women though his mother.'

'Clennam and Co. a—hum—a mother!' exclaimed Mr Dorrit.

'And an old man besides,' said Flora.

Mr Dorrit looked as if he must immediately be driven out of his mind by this account. Neither was it rendered more favourable to sanity by Flora's dashing into a rapid analysis of Mr Flintwinch's cravat, and describing him, without the lightest boundary line of separation between his identity and Mrs Clennam's, as a rusty screw in gaiters. Which compound of man and woman, no limbs, wheels, rusty screw, grimness, and gaiters, so completely stupefied Mr Dorrit, that he was a spectacle to be pitied. 'But I would not detain you one moment longer,' said Flora, upon whom his condition wrought its effect, though she was quite unconscious of having produced it, 'if you would have the goodness to give your promise as a gentleman that both in going back to Italy and in Italy too you would look for this Mr Blandois high and low and if you found or heard of him make him come forward for the clearing of all parties.' By that time Mr Dorrit had so far recovered from his bewilderment, as to be able to say, in a tolerably connected manner, that he should consider that his duty. Flora was delighted with her success, and rose to take her leave.

'With a million thanks,' said she, 'and my address upon my card in case of anything to be communicated personally, I will not send my love to the dear little thing for it might not be acceptable, and indeed there is no dear little thing left in the transformation so why do it but both myself and Mr F.'s Aunt ever wish her well and lay no claim to any favour on our side you may be sure of that but quite the other way for what she undertook to do she did and that is more than a great many of us do, not to say anything of her doing it as Well as it could be done and I myself am one of them for I have said ever since I began to recover the blow of Mr F's death that I would learn the Organ of which I am extremely fond but of which I am ashamed to say I do not yet know a note, good evening!'

When Mr Dorrit, who attended her to the room-door, had had a little time to collect his senses, he found that the interview had summoned back discarded reminiscences which jarred with the Merdle dinner-table. He wrote and sent off a brief note excusing himself for that day, and ordered dinner presently in his own rooms at the hotel. He had another reason for this. His time in London was very nearly out, and was anticipated by engagements; his plans were made for returning; and he thought it behoved his importance to pursue some direct inquiry into the Blandois disappearance, and be in a condition to carry back to Mr Henry Gowan the result of his own personal investigation. He therefore resolved that he would take advantage of that evening's freedom to go down to Clennam and Co.'s, easily to be found by the direction set forth in the handbill; and see the place, and ask a question or two there himself.

Having dined as plainly as the establishment and the Courier would let him, and having taken a short sleep by the fire for his better recovery from Mrs Finching, he set out in a hackney-cabriolet alone. The deep bell of St Paul's was striking nine as he passed under the shadow of Temple Bar, headless and forlorn in these degenerate days.

As he approached his destination through the by-streets and water-side ways, that part of London seemed to him an uglier spot at such an hour than he had ever supposed it to be. Many long years had passed since he had seen it; he had never known much of it; and it wore a mysterious and dismal aspect in his eyes. So powerfully was his imagination impressed by it, that when his driver stopped, after having asked the way more than once, and said to the best of his belief this was the gateway they wanted, Mr Dorrit stood hesitating, with the coach-door in his hand, half afraid of the dark look of the place.

Truly, it looked as gloomy that night as even it had ever looked. Two of the handbills were posted on the entrance wall, one on either side, and as the lamp flickered in the night air, shadows passed over them, not unlike the shadows of fingers following the lines. A watch was evidently kept upon the place. As Mr Dorrit paused, a man passed in from over the way, and another man passed out from some dark corner within; and both looked at him in passing, and both remained standing about.

As there was only one house in the enclosure, there was no room for uncertainty, so he went up the steps of that house and knocked. There was a dim light in two windows on the first-floor. The door gave back a dreary, vacant sound, as though the house were empty; but it was not, for a light was visible, and a step was audible, almost directly. They both came to the door, and a chain grated, and a woman with her apron thrown over her face and head stood in the aperture.

'Who is it?' said the woman.

Mr Dorrit, much amazed by this appearance, replied that he was from Italy, and that he wished to ask a question relative to the missing person, whom he knew.

'Hi!' cried the woman, raising a cracked voice. 'Jeremiah!'

Upon this, a dry old man appeared, whom Mr Dorrit thought he identified by his gaiters, as the rusty screw. The woman was Under apprehensions of the dry old man, for she whisked her apron away as he approached, and disclosed a pale affrighted face. 'Open the door, you fool,' said the old man; 'and let the gentleman in.'

Mr Dorrit, not without a glance over his shoulder towards his driver and the cabriolet, walked into the dim hall. 'Now, sir,' said Mr Flintwinch, 'you can ask anything here you think proper; there are no secrets here, sir.'

Before a reply could be made, a strong stern voice, though a woman's, called from above, 'Who is it?'

'Who is it?' returned Jeremiah. 'More inquiries. A gentleman from Italy.'

'Bring him up here!'

Mr Flintwinch muttered, as if he deemed that unnecessary; but, turning to Mr Dorrit, said, 'Mrs Clennam. She will do as she likes. I'll show you the way.' He then preceded Mr Dorrit up the blackened staircase; that gentleman, not unnaturally looking behind him on the road, saw the woman following, with her apron thrown over her head again in her former ghastly manner.

Mrs Clennam had her books open on her little table. 'Oh!' said she abruptly, as she eyed her visitor with a steady look. 'You are from Italy, sir, are you. Well?' Mr Dorrit was at a loss for any more distinct rejoinder at the moment than 'Ha—well?'

'Where is this missing man? Have you come to give us information where he is? I hope you have?'

'So far from it, I—hum—have come to seek information.' 'Unfortunately for us, there is none to be got here. Flintwinch, show the gentleman the handbill. Give him several to take away. Hold the light for him to read it.'

Mr Flintwinch did as he was directed, and Mr Dorrit read it through, as if he had not previously seen it; glad enough of the opportunity of collecting his presence of mind, which the air of the house and of the people in it had a little disturbed. While his eyes were on the paper, he felt that the eyes of Mr Flintwinch and of Mrs Clennam were on him. He found, when he looked up, that this sensation was not a fanciful one.

'Now you know as much,' said Mrs Clennam, 'as we know, sir. Is Mr Blandois a friend of yours?'

'No—a—hum—an acquaintance,' answered Mr Dorrit.

'You have no commission from him, perhaps?'

'I? Ha. Certainly not.'

The searching look turned gradually to the floor, after taking Mr Flintwinch's face in its way. Mr Dorrit, discomfited by finding that he was the questioned instead of the questioner, applied himself to the reversal of that unexpected order of things.

'I am—ha—a gentleman of property, at present residing in Italy with my family, my servants, and—hum—my rather large establishment. Being in London for a short time on affairs connected with—ha—my estate, and hearing of this strange disappearance, I wished to make myself acquainted with the circumstances at first-hand, because there is—ha hum—an English gentleman in Italy whom I shall no doubt see on my return, who has been in habits of close and daily intimacy with Monsieur Blandois. Mr Henry Gowan. You may know the name.'

'Never heard of it.' Mrs Clennam said it, and Mr Flintwinch echoed it.

'Wishing to—ha—make the narrative coherent and consecutive to him,' said Mr Dorrit, 'may I ask—say, three questions?'

'Thirty, if you choose.'

'Have you known Monsieur Blandois long?'

'Not a twelvemonth. Mr Flintwinch here, will refer to the books and tell you when, and by whom at Paris he was introduced to us. If that,' Mrs Clennam added, 'should be any satisfaction to you. It is poor satisfaction to us.'

'Have you seen him often?'

'No. Twice. Once before, and—' 'That once,' suggested Mr Flintwinch.

'And that once.'

'Pray, madam,' said Mr Dorrit, with a growing fancy upon him as he recovered his importance, that he was in some superior way in the Commission of the Peace; 'pray, madam, may I inquire, for the greater satisfaction of the gentleman whom I have the honour to—ha—retain, or protect or let me say to—hum—know—to know—Was Monsieur Blandois here on business on the night indicated in this present sheet?'

'On what he called business,' returned Mrs Clennam.

'Is—ha—excuse me—is its nature to be communicated?'

'No.'

It was evidently impracticable to pass the barrier of that reply.

'The question has been asked before,' said Mrs Clennam, 'and the answer has been, No. We don't choose to publish our transactions, however unimportant, to all the town. We say, No.'

'I mean, he took away no money with him, for example,' said Mr Dorrit.

'He took away none of ours, sir, and got none here.'

'I suppose,' observed Mr Dorrit, glancing from Mrs Clennam to Mr Flintwinch, and from Mr Flintwinch to Mrs Clennam, 'you have no way of accounting to yourself for this mystery?'

'Why do you suppose so?' rejoined Mrs Clennam.

Disconcerted by the cold and hard inquiry, Mr Dorrit was unable to assign any reason for his supposing so.

'I account for it, sir,' she pursued after an awkward silence on Mr Dorrit's part, 'by having no doubt that he is travelling somewhere, or hiding somewhere.'

'Do you know—ha—why he should hide anywhere?'

'No.'

It was exactly the same No as before, and put another barrier up. 'You asked me if I accounted for the disappearance to myself,' Mrs Clennam sternly reminded him, 'not if I accounted for it to you. I do not pretend to account for it to you, sir. I understand it to be no more my business to do that, than it is yours to require that.'

Mr Dorrit answered with an apologetic bend of his head. As he stepped back, preparatory to saying he had no more to ask, he could not but observe how gloomily and fixedly she sat with her eyes fastened on the ground, and a certain air upon her of resolute waiting; also, how exactly the self-same expression was reflected in Mr Flintwinch, standing at a little distance from her chair, with his eyes also on the ground, and his right hand softly rubbing his chin.

At that moment, Mistress Affery (of course, the woman with the apron) dropped the candlestick she held, and cried out, 'There! O good Lord! there it is again. Hark, Jeremiah! Now!'

If there were any sound at all, it was so slight that she must have fallen into a confirmed habit of listening for sounds; but Mr Dorrit believed he did hear a something, like the falling of dry leaves. The woman's terror, for a very short space, seemed to touch the three; and they all listened.

Mr Flintwinch was the first to stir. 'Affery, my woman,' said he, sidling at her with his fists clenched, and his elbows quivering with impatience to shake her, 'you are at your old tricks. You'll be walking in your sleep next, my woman, and playing the whole round of your distempered antics. You must have some physic. When I have shown this gentleman out, I'll make you up such a comfortable dose, my woman; such a comfortable dose!'

It did not appear altogether comfortable in expectation to Mistress Affery; but Jeremiah, without further reference to his healing medicine, took another candle from Mrs Clennam's table, and said, 'Now, sir; shall I light you down?'

Mr Dorrit professed himself obliged, and went down. Mr Flintwinch shut him out, and chained him out, without a moment's loss of time.

He was again passed by the two men, one going out and the other coming in; got into the vehicle he had left waiting, and was driven away.

Before he had gone far, the driver stopped to let him know that he had given his name, number, and address to the two men, on their joint requisition; and also the address at which he had taken Mr Dorrit up, the hour at which he had been called from his stand and the way by which he had come. This did not make the night's adventure run any less hotly in Mr Dorrit's mind, either when he sat down by his fire again, or when he went to bed. All night he haunted the dismal house, saw the two people resolutely waiting, heard the woman with her apron over her face cry out about the noise, and found the body of the missing Blandois, now buried in the cellar, and now bricked up in a wall.

CHAPTER 18. A Castle in the Air

Manifold are the cares of wealth and state. Mr Dorrit's satisfaction in remembering that it had not been necessary for him to announce himself to Clennam and Co., or to make an allusion to his having had any knowledge of the intrusive person of that name, had been damped over-night, while it was still fresh, by a debate that arose within him whether or no he should take the Marshalsea in his way back, and look at the old gate. He had decided not to do so; and had astonished the coachman by being very fierce with him for proposing to go over London Bridge and recross the river by Waterloo Bridge—a course which would have taken him almost within sight of his old quarters. Still, for all that, the question had raised a conflict in his breast; and, for some odd reason or no reason, he was vaguely dissatisfied. Even at the Merdle dinner-table next day, he was so out of sorts about it that he continued at intervals to turn it over and over, in a manner frightfully inconsistent with the good society surrounding him. It made him hot to think what the Chief Butler's opinion of him would have been, if that illustrious personage could have plumbed with that heavy eye of his the stream of his meditations.

The farewell banquet was of a gorgeous nature, and wound up his visit in a most brilliant manner. Fanny combined with the attractions of her youth and beauty, a certain weight of self-sustainment as if she had been married twenty years. He felt that he could leave her with a quiet mind to tread the paths of distinction, and wished—but without abatement of patronage, and without prejudice to the retiring virtues of his favourite child—that he had such another daughter.

'My dear,' he told her at parting, 'our family looks to you to—ha—assert its dignity and—hum—maintain its importance. I know you will never disappoint it.'

'No, papa,' said Fanny, 'you may rely upon that, I think. My best love to dearest Amy, and I will write to her very soon.'

'Shall I convey any message to—ha—anybody else?' asked Mr Dorrit, in an insinuating manner.

'Papa,' said Fanny, before whom Mrs General instantly loomed, 'no, I thank you. You are very kind, Pa, but I must beg to be excused. There is no other message to send, I thank you, dear papa, that it would be at all agreeable to you to take.'

They parted in an outer drawing-room, where only Mr Sparkler waited on his lady, and dutifully bided his time for shaking hands. When Mr Sparkler was admitted to this closing audience, Mr Merdle came creeping in with not much more appearance of arms in his sleeves than if he had been the twin brother of Miss Biffin, and insisted on escorting Mr Dorrit down-stairs. All Mr Dorrit's protestations being in vain, he enjoyed the honour of being accompanied to the hall-door by this distinguished man, who (as Mr Dorrit told him in shaking hands on the step) had really overwhelmed him with attentions and services during this memorable visit. Thus they parted; Mr Dorrit entering his carriage with a swelling breast, not at all sorry that his Courier, who had come to take leave in the lower regions, should have an opportunity of beholding the grandeur of his departure.

The aforesaid grandeur was yet full upon Mr Dorrit when he alighted at his hotel. Helped out by the Courier and some half-dozen of the hotel servants, he was passing through the hall with a serene magnificence, when lo! a sight presented itself that struck him dumb and motionless. John Chivery, in his best clothes, with his tall hat under his arm, his ivory-handled cane genteelly embarrassing his deportment, and a bundle of cigars in his hand!

'Now, young man,' said the porter. 'This is the gentleman. This young man has persisted in waiting, sir, saying you would be glad to see him.'

Mr Dorrit glared on the young man, choked, and said, in the mildest of tones, 'Ah! Young John! It is Young John, I think; is it not?'

'Yes, sir,' returned Young John.

'I—ha—thought it was Young john!' said Mr Dorrit. 'The young man may come up,' turning to the attendants, as he passed on: 'oh yes, he may come up. Let Young John follow. I will speak to him above.'

Young John followed, smiling and much gratified. Mr Dorrit's rooms were reached. Candles were lighted. The attendants withdrew.

'Now, sir,' said Mr Dorrit, turning round upon him and seizing him by the collar when they were safely alone. 'What do you mean by this?'

The amazement and horror depicted in the unfortunate john's face—for he had rather expected to be embraced next—were of that powerfully expressive nature that Mr Dorrit withdrew his hand and merely glared at him.

'How dare you do this?' said Mr Dorrit. 'How do you presume to come here? How dare you insult me?'

'I insult you, sir?' cried Young John. 'Oh!'

'Yes, sir,' returned Mr Dorrit. 'Insult me. Your coming here is an affront, an impertinence, an audacity. You are not wanted here.

Who sent you here? What—ha—the Devil do you do here?'

'I thought, sir,' said Young John, with as pale and shocked a face as ever had been turned to Mr Dorrit's in his life—even in his College life: 'I thought, sir, you mightn't object to have the goodness to accept a bundle—'

'Damn your bundle, sir!' cried Mr Dorrit, in irrepressible rage. 'I—hum—don't smoke.'

'I humbly beg your pardon, sir. You used to.'

'Tell me that again,' cried Mr Dorrit, quite beside himself, 'and I'll take the poker to you!'

John Chivery backed to the door.

'Stop, sir!' cried Mr Dorrit. 'Stop! Sit down. Confound you sit down!'

John Chivery dropped into the chair nearest the door, and Mr Dorrit walked up and down the room; rapidly at first; then, more slowly. Once, he went to the window, and stood there with his forehead against the glass. All of a sudden, he turned and said:

'What else did you come for, Sir?'

'Nothing else in the world, sir. Oh dear me! Only to say, Sir, that I hoped you was well, and only to ask if Miss Amy was Well?'

'What's that to you, sir?' retorted Mr Dorrit.

'It's nothing to me, sir, by rights. I never thought of lessening the distance betwixt us, I am sure. I know it's a liberty, sir, but I never thought you'd have taken it ill. Upon my word and honour, sir,' said Young John, with emotion, 'in my poor way, I am too proud to have come, I assure you, if I had thought so.'

Mr Dorrit was ashamed. He went back to the window, and leaned his forehead against the glass for some time. When he turned, he had his handkerchief in his hand, and he had been wiping his eyes with it, and he looked tired and ill.

'Young John, I am very sorry to have been hasty with you, but—ha—some remembrances are not happy remembrances, and—hum—you shouldn't have come.'

'I feel that now, sir,' returned John Chivery; 'but I didn't before, and Heaven knows I meant no harm, sir.'

'No. No,' said Mr Dorrit. 'I am—hum—sure of that. Ha. Give me your hand, Young John, give me your hand.'

Young John gave it; but Mr Dorrit had driven his heart out of it, and nothing could change his face now, from its white, shocked look.

'There!' said Mr Dorrit, slowly shaking hands with him. 'Sit down again, Young John.'

'Thank you, sir—but I'd rather stand.'

Mr Dorrit sat down instead. After painfully holding his head a little while, he turned it to his visitor, and said, with an effort to be easy:

'And how is your father, Young John? How—ha—how are they all, Young John?'

'Thank you, sir, They're all pretty well, sir. They're not any ways complaining.'

'Hum. You are in your—ha—old business I see, John?' said Mr Dorrit, with a glance at the offending bundle he had anathematised.

'Partly, sir. I am in my'—John hesitated a little—'father's business likewise.'

'Oh indeed!' said Mr Dorrit. 'Do you—ha hum—go upon the ha—'

'Lock, sir? Yes, sir.'

'Much to do, John?'

'Yes, sir; we're pretty heavy at present. I don't know how it is, but we generally ARE pretty heavy.'

'At this time of the year, Young John?'

'Mostly at all times of the year, sir. I don't know the time that makes much difference to us. I wish you good night, sir.'

'Stay a moment, John—ha—stay a moment. Hum. Leave me the cigars, John, I—ha—beg.'

'Certainly, sir.' John put them, with a trembling hand, on the table.

'Stay a moment, Young John; stay another moment. It would be a—ha—a gratification to me to send a little—hum—Testimonial, by such a trusty messenger, to be divided among—ha hum—them—them—according to their wants. Would you object to take it, John?'

'Not in any ways, sir. There's many of them, I'm sure, that would be the better for it.'

'Thank you, John. I—ha—I'll write it, John.'

His hand shook so that he was a long time writing it, and wrote it in a tremulous scrawl at last. It was a cheque for one hundred pounds. He folded it up, put it in Young john's hand, and pressed the hand in his.

'I hope you'll—ha—overlook—hum—what has passed, John.'

'Don't speak of it, sir, on any accounts. I don't in any ways bear malice, I'm sure.'

But nothing while John was there could change John's face to its natural colour and expression, or restore John's natural manner.

'And, John,' said Mr Dorrit, giving his hand a final pressure, and releasing it, 'I hope we—ha—agree that we have spoken together in confidence; and that you will abstain, in going out, from saying anything to any one that might—hum—suggest that—ha—once I—'

'Oh! I assure you, sir,' returned John Chivery, 'in my poor humble way, sir, I'm too proud and honourable to do it, sir.'

Mr Dorrit was not too proud and honourable to listen at the door that he might ascertain for himself whether John really went straight out, or lingered to have any talk with any one. There was no doubt that he went direct out at the door, and away down the street with a quick step. After remaining alone for an hour, Mr Dorrit rang for the Courier, who found him with his chair on the hearth-rug, sitting with his back towards him and his face to the fire. 'You can take that bundle of cigars to smoke on the journey, if you like,' said Mr Dorrit, with a careless wave of his hand. 'Ha—brought by—hum—little offering from—ha—son of old tenant of mine.'

Next morning's sun saw Mr Dorrit's equipage upon the Dover road, where every red-jacketed postilion was the sign of a cruel house, established for the unmerciful plundering of travellers. The whole business of the human race, between London and Dover, being spoliation, Mr Dorrit was waylaid at Dartford, pillaged at Gravesend, rifled at Rochester, fleeced at Sittingbourne, and sacked at Canterbury. However, it being the Courier's business to get him out of the hands of the banditti, the Courier brought him off at every stage; and so the red-jackets went gleaming merrily along the spring landscape, rising and falling to a regular measure, between Mr Dorrit in his snug corner and the next chalky rise in the dusty highway.

Another day's sun saw him at Calais. And having now got the Channel between himself and John Chivery, he began to feel safe, and to find that the foreign air was lighter to breathe than the air of England.

On again by the heavy French roads for Paris. Having now quite recovered his equanimity, Mr Dorrit, in his snug corner, fell to castle-building as he rode along. It was evident that he had a very large castle in hand. All day long he was running towers up, taking towers down, adding a wing here, putting on a battlement there, looking to the walls, strengthening the defences, giving ornamental touches to the interior, making in all respects a superb castle of it. His preoccupied face so clearly denoted the pursuit in which he was engaged, that every cripple at the post-houses, not blind, who shoved his little battered tin-box in at the carriage window for Charity in the name of Heaven, Charity in the name of our Lady, Charity in the name of all the Saints, knew as well what work he was at, as their countryman Le Brun could have known it himself, though he had made that English traveller the subject of a special physiognomical treatise.

Arrived at Paris, and resting there three days, Mr Dorrit strolled much about the streets alone, looking in at the shop-windows, and particularly the jewellers' windows. Ultimately, he went into the most famous jeweller's, and said he wanted to buy a little gift for a lady.

It was a charming little woman to whom he said it—a sprightly little woman, dressed in perfect taste, who came out of a green velvet bower to attend upon him, from posting up some dainty little books of account which one could hardly suppose to be ruled for the entry of any articles more commercial than kisses, at a dainty little shining desk which looked in itself like a sweetmeat.

For example, then, said the little woman, what species of gift did Monsieur desire? A love-gift?

Mr Dorrit smiled, and said, Eh, well! Perhaps. What did he know? It was always possible; the sex being so charming. Would she show him some?

Most willingly, said the little woman. Flattered and enchanted to show him many. But pardon! To begin with, he would have the great goodness to observe that there were love-gifts, and there were nuptial gifts. For example, these ravishing ear-rings and this necklace so superb to correspond, were what one called a love-gift. These brooches and these rings, of a beauty so gracious and celestial, were what one called, with the permission of Monsieur, nuptial gifts.

Perhaps it would be a good arrangement, Mr Dorrit hinted, smiling, to purchase both, and to present the love-gift first, and to finish with the nuptial offering?

Ah Heaven! said the little woman, laying the tips of the fingers of her two little hands against each other, that would be generous indeed, that would be a special gallantry! And without doubt the lady so crushed with gifts would find them irresistible.

Mr Dorrit was not sure of that. But, for example, the sprightly little woman was very sure of it, she said. So Mr Dorrit bought a gift of each sort, and paid handsomely for it. As he strolled back to his hotel afterwards, he carried his head high: having plainly got up his castle now to a much loftier altitude than the two square towers of Notre Dame.

Building away with all his might, but reserving the plans of his castle exclusively for his own eye, Mr Dorrit posted away for Marseilles. Building on, building on, busily, busily, from morning to night. Falling asleep, and leaving great blocks of building materials dangling in the air; waking again, to resume work and get them into their places. What time the Courier in the rumble, smoking Young john's best cigars, left a little thread of thin light smoke behind—perhaps as he built a castle or two with stray pieces of Mr Dorrit's money.

Not a fortified town that they passed in all their journey was as strong, not a Cathedral summit was as high, as Mr Dorrit's castle. Neither the Saone nor the Rhone sped with the swiftness of that peerless building; nor was the Mediterranean deeper than its foundations; nor were the distant landscapes on the Cornice road, nor the hills and bay of Genoa the Superb, more beautiful. Mr Dorrit and his matchless castle were disembarked among the dirty white houses and dirtier felons of Civita Vecchia, and thence scrambled on to Rome as they could, through the filth that festered on the way.

CHAPTER 19. The Storming of the Castle in the Air

The sun had gone down full four hours, and it was later than most travellers would like it to be for finding themselves outside the walls of Rome, when Mr Dorrit's carriage, still on its last wearisome stage, rattled over the solitary Campagna. The savage herdsmen and the fierce-looking peasants who had chequered the way while the light lasted, had all gone down with the sun, and left the wilderness blank. At some turns of the road, a pale flare on the horizon, like an exhalation from the ruin-sown land, showed that the city was yet far off; but this poor relief was rare and short-lived. The carriage dipped down again into a hollow of the black dry sea, and for a long time there was nothing visible save its petrified swell and the gloomy sky.

Mr Dorrit, though he had his castle-building to engage his mind, could not be quite easy in that desolate place. He was far more curious, in every swerve of the carriage, and every cry of the postilions, than he had been since he quitted London. The valet on the box evidently quaked. The Courier in the rumble was not altogether comfortable in his mind. As often as Mr Dorrit let down the glass and looked back at him (which was very often), he saw him smoking John Chivery out, it is true, but still generally standing up the while and looking about him, like a man who had his suspicions, and kept upon his guard. Then would Mr Dorrit, pulling up the glass again, reflect that those postilions were cut-throat looking fellows, and that he would have done better to have slept at Civita Vecchia, and have started betimes in the morning. But, for all this, he worked at his castle in the intervals.

And now, fragments of ruinous enclosure, yawning window-gap and crazy wall, deserted houses, leaking wells, broken water-tanks, spectral cypress-trees, patches of tangled vine, and the changing of the track to a long, irregular, disordered lane where everything was crumbling away, from the unsightly buildings to the jolting road—now, these objects showed that they were nearing Rome. And now, a sudden twist and stoppage of the carriage inspired Mr Dorrit with the mistrust that the brigand moment was come for twisting him into a ditch and robbing him; until, letting down the glass again and looking out, he perceived himself assailed by nothing worse than a funeral procession, which came mechanically chaunting by, with an indistinct show of dirty vestments, lurid torches, swinging censers, and a great cross borne before a priest. He was an ugly priest by torchlight; of a lowering aspect, with an overhanging brow; and as his eyes met those of Mr Dorrit, looking bareheaded out of the carriage, his lips, moving as they chaunted, seemed to threaten that important traveller; likewise the action of his hand, which was in fact his manner of returning the traveller's salutation, seemed to come in aid of that menace. So thought Mr Dorrit, made fanciful by the weariness of building and travelling, as the priest drifted past him, and the procession straggled away, taking its dead along with it. Upon their so-different way went Mr Dorrit's company too; and soon, with their coach load of luxuries from the two great capitals of Europe, they were (like the Goths reversed) beating at the gates of Rome.

Mr Dorrit was not expected by his own people that night. He had been; but they had given him up until to-morrow, not doubting that it was later than he would care, in those parts, to be out. Thus, when his equipage stopped at his own gate, no one but the porter appeared to receive him. Was Miss Dorrit from home? he asked. No. She was within. Good, said Mr Dorrit to the assembling servants; let them keep where they were; let them help to unload the carriage; he would find Miss Dorrit for himself. So he went up his grand staircase, slowly, and tired, and looked into various chambers which were empty, until he saw a light in a small ante-room. It was a curtained nook, like a tent, within two other rooms; and it looked warm and bright in colour, as he approached it through the dark avenue they made.

There was a draped doorway, but no door; and as he stopped here, looking in unseen, he felt a pang. Surely not like jealousy? For why like jealousy? There was only his daughter and his brother there: he, with his chair drawn to the hearth, enjoying the warmth of the evening wood fire; she seated at a little table, busied with some embroidery work. Allowing for the great difference in the still-life of the picture, the figures were much the same as of old; his brother being sufficiently like himself to represent himself, for a moment, in the composition. So had he sat many a night, over a coal fire far away; so had she sat, devoted to him. Yet surely there was nothing to be jealous of in the old miserable poverty. Whence, then, the pang in his heart?

'Do you know, uncle, I think you are growing young again?'

Her uncle shook his head and said, 'Since when, my dear; since when?'

'I think,' returned Little Dorrit, plying her needle, 'that you have been growing younger for weeks past. So cheerful, uncle, and so ready, and so interested.'

'My dear child—all you.'

'All me, uncle!'

'Yes, yes. You have done me a world of good. You have been so considerate of me, and so tender with me, and so delicate in trying to hide your attentions from me, that I—well, well, well! It's treasured up, my darling, treasured up.'

'There is nothing in it but your own fresh fancy, uncle,' said Little Dorrit, cheerfully.

'Well, well, well!' murmured the old man. 'Thank God!'

She paused for an instant in her work to look at him, and her look revived that former pain in her father's breast; in his poor weak breast, so full of contradictions, vacillations, inconsistencies, the little peevish perplexities of this ignorant life, mists which the morning without a night only can clear away.

'I have been freer with you, you see, my dove,' said the old man, 'since we have been alone. I say, alone, for I don't count Mrs General; I don't care for her; she has nothing to do with me. But I know Fanny was impatient of me. And I don't wonder at it, or complain of it, for I am sensible that I must be in the way, though I try to keep out of it as well as I can. I know I am not fit company for our company. My brother William,' said the old man admiringly, 'is fit company for monarchs; but not so your uncle, my dear. Frederick Dorrit is no credit to William Dorrit, and he knows it quite well. Ah! Why, here's your father, Amy! My dear William, welcome back! My beloved brother, I am rejoiced to see you!'

(Turning his head in speaking, he had caught sight of him as he stood in the doorway.)

Little Dorrit with a cry of pleasure put her arms about her father's neck, and kissed him again and again. Her father was a little impatient, and a little querulous. 'I am glad to find you at last, Amy,' he said. 'Ha. Really I am glad to find—hum—any one to receive me at last. I appear to have been—

ha—so little expected, that upon my word I began—ha hum—to think it might be right to offer an apology for—ha—taking the liberty of coming back at all.'

'It was so late, my dear William,' said his brother, 'that we had given you up for to-night.'

'I am stronger than you, dear Frederick,' returned his brother with an elaboration of fraternity in which there was severity; 'and I hope I can travel without detriment at—ha—any hour I choose.'

'Surely, surely,' returned the other, with a misgiving that he had given offence. 'Surely, William.'

'Thank you, Amy,' pursued Mr Dorrit, as she helped him to put off his wrappers. 'I can do it without assistance. I—ha—need not trouble you, Amy. Could I have a morsel of bread and a glass of wine, or—hum—would it cause too much inconvenience?'

'Dear father, you shall have supper in a very few minutes.'

'Thank you, my love,' said Mr Dorrit, with a reproachful frost upon him; 'I—ha—am afraid I am causing inconvenience. Hum. Mrs General pretty well?'

'Mrs General complained of a headache, and of being fatigued; and so, when we gave you up, she went to bed, dear.'

Perhaps Mr Dorrit thought that Mrs General had done well in being overcome by the disappointment of his not arriving. At any rate, his face relaxed, and he said with obvious satisfaction, 'Extremely sorry to hear that Mrs General is not well.'

During this short dialogue, his daughter had been observant of him, with something more than her usual interest. It would seem as though he had a changed or worn appearance in her eyes, and he perceived and resented it; for he said with renewed peevishness, when he had divested himself of his travelling-cloak, and had come to the fire: 'Amy, what are you looking at? What do you see in me that causes you to—ha—concentrate your solicitude on me in that—hum—very particular manner?'

'I did not know it, father; I beg your pardon. It gladdens my eyes to see you again; that's all.'

'Don't say that's all, because—ha—that's not all. You—hum—you think,' said Mr Dorrit, with an accusatory emphasis, 'that I am not looking well.' 'I thought you looked a little tired, love.'

'Then you are mistaken,' said Mr Dorrit. 'Ha, I am not tired. Ha, hum. I am very much fresher than I was when I went away.'

He was so inclined to be angry that she said nothing more in her justification, but remained quietly beside him embracing his arm. As he stood thus, with his brother on the other side, he fell into a heavy doze, of not a minute's duration, and awoke with a start.

'Frederick,' he said, turning to his brother: 'I recommend you to go to bed immediately.'

'No, William. I'll wait and see you sup.'

'Frederick,' he retorted, 'I beg you to go to bed. I—ha—make it a personal request that you go to bed. You ought to have been in bed long ago. You are very feeble.'

'Hah!' said the old man, who had no wish but to please him. 'Well, well, well! I dare say I am.'

'My dear Frederick,' returned Mr Dorrit, with an astonishing superiority to his brother's failing powers, 'there can be no doubt of it. It is painful to me to see you so weak. Ha. It distresses me. Hum. I don't find you looking at all well. You are not fit for this sort of thing. You should be more careful, you should be very careful.'

'Shall I go to bed?' asked Frederick.

'Dear Frederick,' said Mr Dorrit, 'do, I adjure you! Good night, brother. I hope you will be stronger to-morrow. I am not at all pleased with your looks. Good night, dear fellow.' After dismissing his brother in this gracious way, he fell into a doze again before the old man was well out of the room: and he would have stumbled forward upon the logs, but for his daughter's restraining hold.

'Your uncle wanders very much, Amy,' he said, when he was thus roused. 'He is less—ha—coherent, and his conversation is more—hum—broken, than I have—ha, hum—ever known. Has he had any illness since I have been gone?' 'No, father.'

'You—ha—see a great change in him, Amy?'

'I have not observed it, dear.'

'Greatly broken,' said Mr Dorrit. 'Greatly broken. My poor, affectionate, failing Frederick! Ha. Even taking into account what he was before, he is—hum—sadly broken!'

His supper, which was brought to him there, and spread upon the little table where he had seen her working, diverted his attention.

She sat at his side as in the days that were gone, for the first time since those days ended. They were alone, and she helped him to his meat and poured out his drink for him, as she had been used to do in the prison. All this happened now, for the first time since their accession to wealth. She was afraid to look at him much, after the offence he had taken; but she noticed two occasions in the course of his meal, when he all of a sudden looked at her, and looked about him, as if the association were so strong that he needed assurance from his sense of sight that they were not in the old prison-room. Both times, he put his hand to his head as if he missed his old black cap—though it had been ignominiously given away in the Marshalsea, and had never got free to that hour, but still hovered about the yards on the head of his successor.

He took very little supper, but was a long time over it, and often reverted to his brother's declining state. Though he expressed the greatest pity for him, he was almost bitter upon him. He said that poor Frederick—ha hum—drivelled. There was no other word to express it; drivelled. Poor fellow! It was melancholy to reflect what Amy must have undergone from the excessive tediousness of his Society—wandering and babbling on, poor dear estimable creature, wandering and babbling on—if it had not been for the relief she had had in Mrs General. Extremely sorry, he then repeated with his former satisfaction, that that—ha—superior woman was poorly.

Little Dorrit, in her watchful love, would have remembered the lightest thing he said or did that night, though she had had no subsequent reason to recall that night. She always remembered that, when he looked about him under the strong influence of the old association, he tried to keep it out of her mind, and perhaps out of his own too, by immediately expatiating on the great riches and great company that had encompassed him in his absence, and on the lofty position he and his family had to sustain. Nor did she fail to recall that there were two under-currents, side by side, pervading all his discourse and all his manner; one showing her how well he had got on without her, and how independent he was of her; the other, in a fitful and unintelligible way almost complaining of her, as if it had been possible that she had neglected him while he was away.

His telling her of the glorious state that Mr Merdle kept, and of the court that bowed before him, naturally brought him to Mrs Merdle. So naturally indeed, that although there was an unusual want of sequence in the greater part of his remarks, he passed to her at once, and asked how she was.

'She is very well. She is going away next week.'

'Home?' asked Mr Dorrit.

'After a few weeks' stay upon the road.'

'She will be a vast loss here,' said Mr Dorrit. 'A vast—ha—acquisition at home. To Fanny, and to—hum—the rest of the—ha—great world.'

Little Dorrit thought of the competition that was to be entered upon, and assented very softly.

'Mrs Merdle is going to have a great farewell Assembly, dear, and a dinner before it. She has been expressing her anxiety that you should return in time. She has invited both you and me to her dinner.'

'She is—ha—very kind. When is the day?'

'The day after to-morrow.'

'Write round in the morning, and say that I have returned, and shall—hum—be delighted.'

'May I walk with you up the stairs to your room, dear?'

'No!' he answered, looking angrily round; for he was moving away, as if forgetful of leave-taking. 'You may not, Amy. I want no help. I am your father, not your infirm uncle!' He checked himself, as abruptly as he had broken into this reply, and said, 'You have not kissed me, Amy. Good night, my dear! We must marry—ha—we must marry YOU, now.' With that he went, more slowly and more tired, up the staircase to his rooms, and, almost as soon as he got there, dismissed his valet. His next care was to look about him for his Paris purchases, and, after opening their cases and carefully surveying them, to put them away under lock and key. After that, what with dozing and what with castle-building, he lost himself for a long time, so that there was a touch of morning on the eastward rim of the desolate Campagna when he crept to bed.

Mrs General sent up her compliments in good time next day, and hoped he had rested well after this fatiguing journey. He sent down his compliments, and begged to inform Mrs General that he had rested very well indeed, and was in high condition. Nevertheless, he did not come forth from his own rooms until late in the afternoon; and, although he then caused himself to be magnificently arrayed for a drive with Mrs General and his daughter, his appearance was scarcely up to his description of himself. As the family had no visitors that day, its four members dined alone together. He conducted Mrs General to the seat at his right hand with immense ceremony; and Little Dorrit could not but notice as she followed with her uncle, both that he was again elaborately dressed, and that his manner towards Mrs General was very particular. The perfect formation of that accomplished lady's surface rendered it difficult to displace an atom of its genteel glaze, but Little Dorrit thought she descried a slight thaw of triumph in a corner of her frosty eye.

Notwithstanding what may be called in these pages the Pruney and Prismatic nature of the family banquet, Mr Dorrit several times fell asleep while it was in progress. His fits of dozing were as sudden as they had been overnight, and were as short and profound. When the first of these slumberings seized him, Mrs General looked almost amazed: but, on each recurrence of the symptoms, she told her polite beads, Papa, Potatoes, Poultry, Prunes, and Prism; and, by dint of going through that infallible performance very slowly, appeared to finish her rosary at about the same time as Mr Dorrit started from his sleep.

He was again painfully aware of a somnolent tendency in Frederick (which had no existence out of his own imagination), and after dinner, when Frederick had withdrawn, privately apologised to Mrs General for the poor man. 'The most estimable and affectionate of brothers,' he said, 'but—ha, hum—broken up altogether. Unhappily, declining fast.'

'Mr Frederick, sir,' quoth Mrs General, 'is habitually absent and drooping, but let us hope it is not so bad as that.'

Mr Dorrit, however, was determined not to let him off. 'Fast declining, madam. A wreck. A ruin. Mouldering away before our eyes. Hum. Good Frederick!'

'You left Mrs Sparkler quite well and happy, I trust?' said Mrs General, after heaving a cool sigh for Frederick.

'Surrounded,' replied Mr Dorrit, 'by—ha—all that can charm the taste, and—hum—elevate the mind. Happy, my dear madam, in a—hum—husband.'

Mrs General was a little fluttered; seeming delicately to put the word away with her gloves, as if there were no knowing what it might lead to.

'Fanny,' Mr Dorrit continued. 'Fanny, Mrs General, has high qualities. Ha. Ambition—hum—purpose, consciousness of—ha—position, determination to support that position—ha, hum—grace, beauty, and native nobility.'

'No doubt,' said Mrs General (with a little extra stiffness).

'Combined with these qualities, madam,' said Mr Dorrit, 'Fanny has—ha—manifested one blemish which has made me—hum—made me uneasy, and—ha—I must add, angry; but which I trust may now be considered at an end, even as to herself, and which is undoubtedly at an end as to—ha—others.'

'To what, Mr Dorrit,' returned Mrs General, with her gloves again somewhat excited, 'can you allude? I am at a loss to—'

'Do not say that, my dear madam,' interrupted Mr Dorrit.

Mrs General's voice, as it died away, pronounced the words, 'at a loss to imagine.'

After which Mr Dorrit was seized with a doze for about a minute, out of which he sprang with spasmodic nimbleness.

'I refer, Mrs General, to that—ha—strong spirit of opposition, or—hum—I might say—ha—jealousy in Fanny, which has occasionally risen against the—ha—sense I entertain of—hum—the claims of—ha—the lady with whom I have now the honour of communing.'

'Mr Dorrit,' returned Mrs General, 'is ever but too obliging, ever but too appreciative. If there have been moments when I have imagined that Miss Dorrit has indeed resented the favourable opinion Mr Dorrit has formed of my services, I have found, in that only too high opinion, my consolation and recompense.'

'Opinion of your services, madam?' said Mr Dorrit.

'Of,' Mrs General repeated, in an elegantly impressive manner, 'my services.'

'Of your services alone, dear madam?' said Mr Dorrit.

'I presume,' retorted Mrs General, in her former impressive manner, 'of my services alone. For, to what else,' said Mrs General, with a slightly interrogative action of her gloves, 'could I impute—'

'To—ha—yourself, Mrs General. Ha, hum. To yourself and your merits,' was Mr Dorrit's rejoinder.

'Mr Dorrit will pardon me,' said Mrs General, 'if I remark that this is not a time or place for the pursuit of the present conversation. Mr Dorrit will excuse me if I remind him that Miss Dorrit is in the adjoining room, and is visible to myself while I utter her name. Mr Dorrit will forgive me if I observe that I am agitated, and that I find there are moments when weaknesses I supposed myself to have subdued, return with redoubled power. Mr Dorrit will allow me to withdraw.'

'Hum. Perhaps we may resume this—ha—interesting conversation,' said Mr Dorrit, 'at another time; unless it should be, what I hope it is not—hum—in any way disagreeable to—ah—Mrs General.' 'Mr Dorrit,' said Mrs General, casting down her eyes as she rose with a bend, 'must ever claim my homage and obedience.'

Mrs General then took herself off in a stately way, and not with that amount of trepidation upon her which might have been expected in a less remarkable woman. Mr Dorrit, who had conducted his part of the dialogue with a certain majestic and admiring condescension—much as some people may be seen to conduct themselves in Church, and to perform their part in the service—appeared, on the whole, very well satisfied with himself and with Mrs General too. On the return of that lady to tea, she had touched herself up with a little powder and pomatum, and was not without moral enchantment likewise: the latter showing itself in much sweet patronage of manner towards Miss Dorrit, and in an air of as tender interest in Mr Dorrit as was consistent with rigid propriety. At the close of the evening, when she rose to retire, Mr Dorrit took her by the hand as if he were going to lead her out into the Piazza of the people to walk a minuet by moonlight, and with great solemnity conducted her to the room door, where he raised her knuckles to his lips. Having parted from her with what may be conjectured to have been a rather bony kiss of a cosmetic flavour, he gave his daughter his blessing, graciously. And having thus hinted that there was something remarkable in the wind, he again went to bed.

He remained in the seclusion of his own chamber next morning; but, early in the afternoon, sent down his best compliments to Mrs General, by Mr Tinkler, and begged she would accompany Miss Dorrit on an airing without him. His daughter was dressed for Mrs Merdle's dinner before he appeared. He then presented himself in a refulgent condition as to his attire, but looking indefinably shrunken and old. However, as he was plainly determined to be angry with her if she so much as asked him how he was, she only ventured to kiss his cheek, before accompanying him to Mrs Merdle's with an anxious heart.

The distance that they had to go was very short, but he was at his building work again before the carriage had half traversed it. Mrs Merdle received him with great distinction; the bosom was in admirable preservation, and on the best terms with itself; the dinner was very choice; and the company was very select.

It was principally English; saving that it comprised the usual French Count and the usual Italian Marchese—decorative social milestones, always to be found in certain places, and varying very little in appearance. The table was long, and the dinner was long; and Little Dorrit, overshadowed by a large pair of black whiskers and a large white cravat, lost sight of her father altogether, until a servant put a scrap of paper in her hand, with a whispered request from Mrs Merdle that she would read it directly. Mrs Merdle had written on it in pencil, 'Pray come and speak to Mr Dorrit, I doubt if he is well.'

She was hurrying to him, unobserved, when he got up out of his chair, and leaning over the table called to her, supposing her to be still in her place:

'Amy, Amy, my child!'

The action was so unusual, to say nothing of his strange eager appearance and strange eager voice, that it instantaneously caused a profound silence.

'Amy, my dear,' he repeated. 'Will you go and see if Bob is on the lock?'

She was at his side, and touching him, but he still perversely supposed her to be in her seat, and called out, still leaning over the table, 'Amy, Amy. I don't feel quite myself. Ha. I don't know what's the matter with me. I particularly wish to see Bob. Ha. Of all the turnkeys, he's as much my friend as yours. See if Bob is in the lodge, and beg him to come to me.'

All the guests were now in consternation, and everybody rose.

'Dear father, I am not there; I am here, by you.'

'Oh! You are here, Amy! Good. Hum. Good. Ha. Call Bob. If he has been relieved, and is not on the lock, tell Mrs Bangham to go and fetch him.'

She was gently trying to get him away; but he resisted, and would not go.

'I tell you, child,' he said petulantly, 'I can't be got up the narrow stairs without Bob. Ha. Send for Bob. Hum. Send for Bob—best of all the turnkeys—send for Bob!'

He looked confusedly about him, and, becoming conscious of the number of faces by which he was surrounded, addressed them:

'Ladies and gentlemen, the duty—ha—devolves upon me of—hum—welcoming you to the Marshalsea! Welcome to the Marshalsea! The space is—ha—limited—limited—the parade might be wider; but you will find it apparently grow larger after a time—a time, ladies and gentlemen—and the air is, all things considered, very good. It blows over the—ha—Surrey hills. Blows over the Surrey hills. This is the Snuggery. Hum. Supported by a small subscription of the—ha—Collegiate body. In return for which—hot water—general kitchen—and little domestic advantages. Those who are habituated to the—ha—Marshalsea, are pleased to call me its father. I am accustomed to be complimented by strangers as the—ha—Father of the Marshalsea. Certainly, if years of residence may establish a claim to so—ha—honourable a title, I may accept the—hum—conferred distinction. My child, ladies and gentlemen. My daughter. Born here!'

She was not ashamed of it, or ashamed of him. She was pale and frightened; but she had no other care than to soothe him and get him away, for his own dear sake. She was between him and the wondering faces, turned round upon his breast with her own face raised to his. He held her clasped in his left arm, and between whiles her low voice was heard tenderly imploring him to go away with her.

'Born here,' he repeated, shedding tears. 'Bred here. Ladies and gentlemen, my daughter. Child of an unfortunate father, but—ha—always a gentleman. Poor, no doubt, but—hum—proud. Always proud. It has become a—hum—not infrequent custom for my—ha—personal admirers—personal admirers solely—to be pleased to express their desire to acknowledge my semi-official position here, by offering—ha—little tributes, which usually take the form of—ha—voluntary recognitions of my humble endeavours to—hum—to uphold a Tone here—a Tone—I beg it to be understood that I do not consider myself compromised. Ha. Not compromised. Ha. Not a beggar. No; I repudiate the title! At the same time far be it from me to—hum—to put upon the fine feelings by which my partial friends are actuated, the slight of scrupling to admit that those offerings are—hum—highly acceptable. On the contrary, they are most acceptable. In my child's name, if not in my own, I make the admission in the fullest manner, at the same time reserving—ha—shall I say my personal dignity? Ladies and gentlemen, God bless you all!'

By this time, the exceeding mortification undergone by the Bosom had occasioned the withdrawal of the greater part of the company into other rooms. The few who had lingered thus long followed the rest, and Little Dorrit and her father were left to the servants and themselves. Dearest and most precious to her, he would come with her now, would he not? He replied to her fervid entreaties, that he would never be able to get up the narrow stairs without Bob; where was Bob, would nobody fetch Bob? Under pretence of looking for Bob, she got him out against the stream of gay company now pouring in for the evening assembly, and got him into a coach that had just set down its load, and got him home.

The broad stairs of his Roman palace were contracted in his failing sight to the narrow stairs of his London prison; and he would suffer no one but her to touch him, his brother excepted. They got him up to his room without help, and laid him down on his bed. And from that hour his poor maimed spirit, only remembering the place where it had broken its wings, cancelled the dream through which it had since groped, and knew of nothing beyond the Marshalsea. When he heard footsteps in the street, he took them for the old weary tread in the yards. When the hour came for locking up, he supposed all strangers to be excluded for the night. When the time for opening came again, he was so anxious to see Bob, that they were fain to patch up a narrative how that Bob—many a year dead then, gentle turnkey—had taken cold, but hoped to be out to-morrow, or the next day, or the next at furthest.

He fell away into a weakness so extreme that he could not raise his hand. But he still protected his brother according to his long usage; and would say with some complacency, fifty times a day, when he saw him standing by his bed, 'My good Frederick, sit down. You are very feeble indeed.'

They tried him with Mrs General, but he had not the faintest knowledge of her. Some injurious suspicion lodged itself in his brain, that she wanted to supplant Mrs Bangham, and that she was given to drinking. He charged her with it in no measured terms; and was so urgent with his daughter to go round to the Marshal and entreat him to turn her out, that she was never reproduced after the first failure. Saving that he once asked 'if Tip had gone outside?' the remembrance of his two children not present seemed to have departed from him. But the child who had done so much for him and had been so poorly repaid, was never out of his mind. Not that he spared her, or was fearful of her being spent by watching and fatigue; he was not more troubled on that score than he had usually been. No; he loved her in his old way. They were in the jail again, and she tended him, and he had constant need of her, and could not turn without her; and he even told her, sometimes, that he was content to have undergone a great deal for her sake.

As to her, she bent over his bed with her quiet face against his, and would have laid down her own life to restore him.

When he had been sinking in this painless way for two or three days, she observed him to be troubled by the ticking of his watch—a pompous gold watch that made as great a to-do about its going as if nothing else went but itself and Time. She suffered it to run down; but he was still uneasy, and showed that was not what he wanted. At length he roused himself to explain that he wanted money to be raised on this watch. He was quite pleased when she pretended to take it away for the purpose, and afterwards had a relish for his little tastes of wine and jelly, that he had not had before.

He soon made it plain that this was so; for, in another day or two he sent off his sleeve-buttons and finger-rings. He had an amazing satisfaction in entrusting her with these errands, and appeared to consider it equivalent to making the most methodical and provident arrangements. After his trinkets, or such of them as he had been able to see about him, were gone, his clothes engaged his attention; and it is as likely as not that he was kept alive for some days by the satisfaction of sending them, piece by piece, to an imaginary pawnbroker's.

Thus for ten days Little Dorrit bent over his pillow, laying her cheek against his. Sometimes she was so worn out that for a few minutes they would slumber together. Then she would awake; to recollect with fast-flowing silent tears what it was that touched her face, and to see, stealing over the cherished face upon the pillow, a deeper shadow than the shadow of the Marshalsea Wall.

Quietly, quietly, all the lines of the plan of the great Castle melted one after another. Quietly, quietly, the ruled and cross-ruled countenance on which they were traced, became fair and blank.

Quietly, quietly, the reflected marks of the prison bars and of the zig-zag iron on the wall-top, faded away. Quietly, quietly, the face subsided into a far younger likeness of her own than she had ever seen under the grey hair, and sank to rest.

At first her uncle was stark distracted. 'O my brother! O William, William! You to go before me; you to go alone; you to go, and I to remain! You, so far superior, so distinguished, so noble; I, a poor useless creature fit for nothing, and whom no one would have missed!'

It did her, for the time, the good of having him to think of and to succour.

'Uncle, dear uncle, spare yourself, spare me!'

The old man was not deaf to the last words. When he did begin to restrain himself, it was that he might spare her. He had no care for himself; but, with all the remaining power of the honest heart, stunned so long and now awaking to be broken, he honoured and blessed her.

'O God,' he cried, before they left the room, with his wrinkled hands clasped over her. 'Thou seest this daughter of my dear dead brother! All that I have looked upon, with my half-blind and sinful eyes, Thou hast discerned clearly, brightly. Not a hair of her head shall be harmed before Thee. Thou wilt uphold her here to her last hour. And I know Thou wilt reward her hereafter!'

They remained in a dim room near, until it was almost midnight, quiet and sad together. At times his grief would seek relief in a burst like that in which it had found its earliest expression; but, besides that his little strength would soon have been unequal to such strains, he never failed to recall her words, and to reproach himself and calm himself. The only utterance with which he indulged his sorrow, was the frequent exclamation that his brother was gone, alone; that they had been together in the outset of their lives, that they had fallen into misfortune together, that they had kept together through their many years of poverty, that they had remained together to that day; and that his brother was gone alone, alone!

They parted, heavy and sorrowful. She would not consent to leave him anywhere but in his own room, and she saw him lie down in his clothes upon his bed, and covered him with her own hands. Then she sank upon her own bed, and fell into a deep sleep: the sleep of exhaustion and rest, though not of complete release from a pervading consciousness of affliction. Sleep, good Little Dorrit. Sleep through the night!

It was a moonlight night; but the moon rose late, being long past the full. When it was high in the peaceful firmament, it shone through half-closed lattice blinds into the solemn room where the stumblings and wanderings of a life had so lately ended. Two quiet figures were within the room; two figures, equally still and impassive, equally removed by an untraversable distance from the teeming earth and all that it contains, though soon to lie in it.

One figure reposed upon the bed. The other, kneeling on the floor, drooped over it; the arms easily and peacefully resting on the coverlet; the face bowed down, so that the lips touched the hand over which with its last breath it had bent. The two brothers were before their Father; far beyond the twilight judgment of this world; high above its mists and obscurities.

CHAPTER 20. Introduces the next

The passengers were landing from the packet on the pier at Calais. A low-lying place and a low-spirited place Calais was, with the tide ebbing out towards low water-mark. There had been no more water on the bar than had sufficed to float the packet in; and now the bar itself, with a shallow break of sea over it, looked like a lazy marine monster just risen to the surface, whose form was indistinctly shown as it lay asleep. The meagre lighthouse all in white, haunting the seaboard as if it were the ghost of an edifice that had once had colour and rotundity, dropped melancholy tears after its late buffeting by the waves. The long rows of gaunt black piles, slimy and wet and weather-worn, with funeral garlands of seaweed twisted about them by the late tide, might have represented an unsightly marine cemetery. Every wave-dashed, storm-beaten object, was so low and so little, under the broad grey sky, in the noise of the wind and sea, and before the curling lines of surf, making at it ferociously, that the wonder was there was any Calais left, and that its low gates and low wall and low roofs and low ditches and low sand-hills and low ramparts and flat streets, had not yielded long ago to the undermining and besieging sea, like the fortifications children make on the sea-shore.

After slipping among oozy piles and planks, stumbling up wet steps and encountering many salt difficulties, the passengers entered on their comfortless peregrination along the pier; where all the French vagabonds and English outlaws in the town (half the population) attended to prevent their recovery from bewilderment. After being minutely inspected by all the English, and claimed and reclaimed and counter-claimed as prizes by all the French in a hand-to-hand scuffle three quarters of a mile long, they were at last free to enter the streets, and to make off in their various directions, hotly pursued.

Clennam, harassed by more anxieties than one, was among this devoted band. Having rescued the most defenceless of his compatriots from situations of great extremity, he now went his way alone, or as nearly alone as he could be, with a native gentleman in a suit of grease and a cap of the same material, giving chase at a distance of some fifty yards, and continually calling after him, 'Hi! Ice-say! You! Seer! Ice-say! Nice Oatel!'

Even this hospitable person, however, was left behind at last, and Clennam pursued his way, unmolested. There was a tranquil air in the town after the turbulence of the Channel and the beach, and its dulness in that comparison was agreeable. He met new groups of his countrymen, who had all a straggling air of having at one time overblown themselves, like certain uncomfortable kinds of flowers, and of being now mere weeds. They had all an air, too, of lounging out a limited round, day after day, which strongly reminded him of the Marshalsea. But, taking no further note of them than was sufficient to give birth to the reflection, he sought out a certain street and number which he kept in his mind.

'So Pancks said,' he murmured to himself, as he stopped before a dull house answering to the address. 'I suppose his information to be correct and his discovery, among Mr Casby's loose papers, indisputable; but, without it, I should hardly have supposed this to be a likely place.'

A dead sort of house, with a dead wall over the way and a dead gateway at the side, where a pendant bell-handle produced two dead tinkles, and a knocker produced a dead, flat, surface-tapping, that seemed not to have depth enough in it to penetrate even the cracked door. However, the door jarred open on a dead sort of spring; and he closed it behind him as he entered a dull yard, soon brought to a close by another dead wall, where an attempt had been made to train some creeping shrubs, which were dead; and to make a little fountain in a grotto, which was dry; and to decorate that with a little statue, which was gone.

The entry to the house was on the left, and it was garnished as the outer gateway was, with two printed bills in French and English, announcing Furnished Apartments to let, with immediate possession. A strong cheerful peasant woman, all stocking, petticoat, white cap, and ear-ring, stood here in a dark doorway, and said with a pleasant show of teeth, 'Ice-say! Seer! Who?'

Clennam, replying in French, said the English lady; he wished to see the English lady. 'Enter then and ascend, if you please,' returned the peasant woman, in French likewise. He did both, and followed her up a dark bare staircase to a back room on the first-floor. Hence, there was a gloomy view of the yard that was dull, and of the shrubs that were dead, and of the fountain that was dry, and of the pedestal of the statue that was gone.

'Monsieur Blandois,' said Clennam.

'With pleasure, Monsieur.'

Thereupon the woman withdrew and left him to look at the room. It was the pattern of room always to be found in such a house. Cool, dull, and dark. Waxed floor very slippery. A room not large enough to skate in; nor adapted to the easy pursuit of any other occupation. Red and white curtained windows, little straw mat, little round table with a tumultuous assemblage of legs underneath, clumsy rush-bottomed chairs, two great red velvet arm-chairs affording plenty of space to be uncomfortable in, bureau, chimney-glass in several pieces pretending to be in one piece, pair of gaudy vases of very artificial flowers; between them a Greek warrior with his helmet off, sacrificing a clock to the Genius of France.

After some pause, a door of communication with another room was opened, and a lady entered. She manifested great surprise on seeing Clennam, and her glance went round the room in search of some one else.

'Pardon me, Miss Wade. I am alone.'

'It was not your name that was brought to me.'

'No; I know that. Excuse me. I have already had experience that my name does not predispose you to an interview; and I ventured to mention the name of one I am in search of.'

'Pray,' she returned, motioning him to a chair so coldly that he remained standing, 'what name was it that you gave?'

'I mentioned the name of Blandois.'

'Blandois?'

'A name you are acquainted with.'

'It is strange,' she said, frowning, 'that you should still press an undesired interest in me and my acquaintances, in me and my affairs, Mr Clennam. I don't know what you mean.'

'Pardon me. You know the name?'

'What can you have to do with the name? What can I have to do with the name? What can you have to do with my knowing or not knowing any name? I know many names and I have forgotten many more. This may be in the one class, or it may be in the other, or I may never have heard it. I am acquainted with no reason for examining myself, or for being examined, about it.'

'If you will allow me,' said Clennam, 'I will tell you my reason for pressing the subject. I admit that I do press it, and I must beg you to forgive me if I do so, very earnestly. The reason is all mine, I do not insinuate that it is in any way yours.'

'Well, sir,' she returned, repeating a little less haughtily than before her former invitation to him to be seated: to which he now deferred, as she seated herself. 'I am at least glad to know that this is not another bondswoman of some friend of yours, who is bereft of free choice, and whom I have spirited away. I will hear your reason, if you please.'

'First, to identify the person of whom we speak,' said Clennam, 'let me observe that it is the person you met in London some time back. You will remember meeting him near the river—in the Adelphi!'

'You mix yourself most unaccountably with my business,' she replied, looking full at him with stern displeasure. 'How do you know that?'

'I entreat you not to take it ill. By mere accident.' 'What accident?'

'Solely the accident of coming upon you in the street and seeing the meeting.'

'Do you speak of yourself, or of some one else?'

'Of myself. I saw it.'

'To be sure it was in the open street,' she observed, after a few moments of less and less angry reflection. 'Fifty people might have seen it. It would have signified nothing if they had.'

'Nor do I make my having seen it of any moment, nor (otherwise than as an explanation of my coming here) do I connect my visit with it or the favour that I have to ask.'

'Oh! You have to ask a favour! It occurred to me,' and the handsome face looked bitterly at him, 'that your manner was softened, Mr Clennam.'

He was content to protest against this by a slight action without contesting it in words. He then referred to Blandois' disappearance, of which it was probable she had heard? However probable it was to him, she had heard of no such thing. Let him look round him (she said) and judge for himself what general intelligence was likely to reach the ears of a woman who had been shut up there while it was rife, devouring her own heart. When she had uttered this denial, which he believed to be true, she asked him what he meant by disappearance? That led to his narrating the circumstances in detail, and expressing something of his anxiety to discover what had really become of the man, and to repel the dark suspicions that clouded about his mother's house. She heard him with evident surprise, and with more marks of suppressed interest than he had seen in her; still they did not overcome her distant, proud, and self-secluded manner. When he had finished, she said nothing but these words:

'You have not yet told me, sir, what I have to do with it, or what the favour is? Will you be so good as come to that?'

'I assume,' said Arthur, persevering, in his endeavour to soften her scornful demeanour, 'that being in communication—may I say, confidential communication?—with this person—'

'You may say, of course, whatever you like,' she remarked; 'but I do not subscribe to your assumptions, Mr Clennam, or to any one's.'

'—that being, at least in personal communication with him,' said Clennam, changing the form of his position in the hope of making it unobjectionable, 'you can tell me something of his antecedents, pursuits, habits, usual place of residence. Can give me some little clue by which to seek him out in the likeliest manner, and either produce him, or establish what has become of him. This is the favour I ask, and I ask it in a distress of mind for which I hope you will feel some consideration. If you should have any reason for imposing conditions upon me, I will respect it without asking what it is.'

'You chanced to see me in the street with the man,' she observed, after being, to his mortification, evidently more occupied with her own reflections on the matter than with his appeal. 'Then you knew the man before?'

'Not before; afterwards. I never saw him before, but I saw him again on this very night of his disappearance. In my mother's room, in fact. I left him there. You will read in this paper all that is known of him.'

He handed her one of the printed bills, which she read with a steady and attentive face.

'This is more than I knew of him,' she said, giving it back.

Clennam's looks expressed his heavy disappointment, perhaps his incredulity; for she added in the same unsympathetic tone: 'You don't believe it. Still, it is so. As to personal communication: it seems that there was personal communication between him and your mother. And yet you say you believe her declaration that she knows no more of him!'

A sufficiently expressive hint of suspicion was conveyed in these words, and in the smile by which they were accompanied, to bring the blood into Clennam's cheeks.

'Come, sir,' she said, with a cruel pleasure in repeating the stab, 'I will be as open with you as you can desire. I will confess that if I cared for my credit (which I do not), or had a good name to preserve (which I have not, for I am utterly indifferent to its being considered good or bad), I should regard myself as heavily compromised by having had anything to do with this fellow. Yet he never passed in at MY door—never sat in colloquy with ME until midnight.'

She took her revenge for her old grudge in thus turning his subject against him. Hers was not the nature to spare him, and she had no compunction.

'That he is a low, mercenary wretch; that I first saw him prowling about Italy (where I was, not long ago), and that I hired him there, as the suitable instrument of a purpose I happened to have; I have no objection to tell you. In short, it was worth my while, for my own pleasure—the gratification of a strong feeling—to pay a spy who would fetch and carry for money. I paid this creature. And I dare say that if I had wanted to make such a bargain, and if I could have paid him enough, and if he could have done it in the dark, free from all risk, he would have taken any life with as little scruple as he took my money. That, at least, is my opinion of him; and I see it is not very far removed from yours. Your mother's opinion of him, I am to assume (following your example of assuming this and that), was vastly different.'

'My mother, let me remind you,' said Clennam, 'was first brought into communication with him in the unlucky course of business.'

'It appears to have been an unlucky course of business that last brought her into communication with him,' returned Miss Wade; 'and business hours on that occasion were late.'

'You imply,' said Arthur, smarting under these cool-handed thrusts, of which he had deeply felt the force already, 'that there was something—'

'Mr Clennam,' she composedly interrupted, 'recollect that I do not speak by implication about the man. He is, I say again without disguise, a low mercenary wretch. I suppose such a creature goes where there is occasion for him. If I had not had occasion for him, you would not have seen him and me together.'

Wrung by her persistence in keeping that dark side of the case before him, of which there was a half-hidden shadow in his own breast, Clennam was silent.

'I have spoken of him as still living,' she added, 'but he may have been put out of the way for anything I know. For anything I care, also. I have no further occasion for him.'

With a heavy sigh and a despondent air, Arthur Clennam slowly rose.

She did not rise also, but said, having looked at him in the meanwhile with a fixed look of suspicion, and lips angrily compressed:

'He was the chosen associate of your dear friend, Mr Gowan, was he not? Why don't you ask your dear friend to help you?'

The denial that he was a dear friend rose to Arthur's lips; but he repressed it, remembering his old struggles and resolutions, and said:

'Further than that he has never seen Blandois since Blandois set out for England, Mr Gowan knows nothing additional about him. He was a chance acquaintance, made abroad.'

'A chance acquaintance made abroad!' she repeated. 'Yes. Your dear friend has need to divert himself with all the acquaintances he can make, seeing what a wife he has. I hate his wife, sir.'

The anger with which she said it, the more remarkable for being so much under her restraint, fixed Clennam's attention, and kept him on the spot. It flashed out of her dark eyes as they regarded him, quivered in her nostrils, and fired the very breath she exhaled; but her face was otherwise composed into a disdainful serenity; and her attitude was as calmly and haughtily graceful as if she had been in a mood of complete indifference.

'All I will say is, Miss Wade,' he remarked, 'that you can have received no provocation to a feeling in which I believe you have no sharer.'

'You may ask your dear friend, if you choose,' she returned, 'for his opinion upon that subject.'

'I am scarcely on those intimate terms with my dear friend,' said Arthur, in spite of his resolutions, 'that would render my approaching the subject very probable, Miss Wade.'

'I hate him,' she returned. 'Worse than his wife, because I was once dupe enough, and false enough to myself, almost to love him. You have seen me, sir, only on common-place occasions, when I dare say you have thought me a common-place woman, a little more self-willed than the generality. You don't know what I mean by hating, if you know me no better than that; you can't know, without knowing with what care I have studied myself and people about me. For this reason I have for some time inclined to tell you what my life has been—not to propitiate your opinion, for I set no value on it; but that you may comprehend, when you think of your dear friend and his dear wife, what I mean by hating. Shall I give you something I have written and put by for your perusal, or shall I hold my hand?'

Arthur begged her to give it to him. She went to the bureau, unlocked it, and took from an inner drawer a few folded sheets of paper. Without any conciliation of him, scarcely addressing him, rather speaking as if she were speaking to her own looking-glass for the justification of her own stubbornness, she said, as she gave them to him:

'Now you may know what I mean by hating! No more of that. Sir, whether you find me temporarily and cheaply lodging in an empty London house, or in a Calais apartment, you find Harriet with me. You may like to see her before you leave. Harriet, come in!' She called Harriet again. The second call produced Harriet, once Tattycoram.

'Here is Mr Clennam,' said Miss Wade; 'not come for you; he has given you up,—I suppose you have, by this time?'

'Having no authority, or influence—yes,' assented Clennam.

'Not come in search of you, you see; but still seeking some one. He wants that Blandois man.'

'With whom I saw you in the Strand in London,' hinted Arthur. 'If you know anything of him, Harriet, except that he came from Venice—which we all know—tell it to Mr Clennam freely.' 'I know nothing more about him,' said the girl.

'Are you satisfied?' Miss Wade inquired of Arthur.

He had no reason to disbelieve them; the girl's manner being so natural as to be almost convincing, if he had had any previous doubts. He replied, 'I must seek for intelligence elsewhere.'

He was not going in the same breath; but he had risen before the girl entered, and she evidently thought he was. She looked quickly at him, and said:

'Are they well, sir?'

'Who?'

She stopped herself in saying what would have been 'all of them;' glanced at Miss Wade; and said 'Mr and Mrs Meagles.'

'They were, when I last heard of them. They are not at home. By the way, let me ask you. Is it true that you were seen there?'

'Where? Where does any one say I was seen?' returned the girl, sullenly casting down her eyes.

'Looking in at the garden gate of the cottage.'

'No,' said Miss Wade. 'She has never been near it.'

'You are wrong, then,' said the girl. 'I went down there the last time we were in London. I went one afternoon when you left me alone. And I did look in.'

'You poor-spirited girl,' returned Miss Wade with infinite contempt; 'does all our companionship, do all our conversations, do all your old complainings, tell for so little as that?'

'There was no harm in looking in at the gate for an instant,' said the girl. 'I saw by the windows that the family were not there.'

'Why should you go near the place?'

'Because I wanted to see it. Because I felt that I should like to look at it again.'

As each of the two handsome faces looked at the other, Clennam felt how each of the two natures must be constantly tearing the other to pieces.

'Oh!' said Miss Wade, coldly subduing and removing her glance; 'if you had any desire to see the place where you led the life from which I rescued you because you had found out what it was, that is another thing. But is that your truth to me? Is that your fidelity to me? Is that the common cause I make with you? You are not worth the confidence I have placed in you. You are not worth the favour I have shown you. You are no higher than a spaniel, and had better go back to the people who did worse than whip you.'

'If you speak so of them with any one else by to hear, you'll provoke me to take their part,' said the girl.

'Go back to them,' Miss Wade retorted. 'Go back to them.'

'You know very well,' retorted Harriet in her turn, 'that I won't go back to them. You know very well that I have thrown them off, and never can, never shall, never will, go back to them. Let them alone, then, Miss Wade.'

'You prefer their plenty to your less fat living here,' she rejoined. 'You exalt them, and slight me. What else should I have expected? I ought to have known it.'

'It's not so,' said the girl, flushing high, 'and you don't say what you mean. I know what you mean. You are reproaching me, underhanded, with having nobody but you to look to. And because I have nobody but you to look to, you think you are to make me do, or not do, everything you please, and are to put any affront upon me. You are as bad as they were, every bit. But I will not be quite tamed, and made submissive. I will say again that I went to look at the house, because I had often thought that I should like to see it once more. I will ask again how they are, because I once liked them and at times thought they were kind to me.'

Hereupon Clennam said that he was sure they would still receive her kindly, if she should ever desire to return.

'Never!' said the girl passionately. 'I shall never do that. Nobody knows that better than Miss Wade, though she taunts me because she has made me her dependent. And I know I am so; and I know she is overjoyed when she can bring it to my mind.'

'A good pretence!' said Miss Wade, with no less anger, haughtiness, and bitterness; 'but too threadbare to cover what I plainly see in this. My poverty will not bear competition with their money. Better go back at once, better go back at once, and have done with it!'

Arthur Clennam looked at them, standing a little distance asunder in the dull confined room, each proudly cherishing her own anger; each, with a fixed determination, torturing her own breast, and torturing the other's. He said a word or two of leave-taking; but Miss Wade barely inclined her head, and Harriet, with the assumed humiliation of an abject dependent and serf (but not without defiance for all that), made as if she were too low to notice or to be noticed.

He came down the dark winding stairs into the yard with an increased sense upon him of the gloom of the wall that was dead, and of the shrubs that were dead, and of the fountain that was dry, and of the statue that was gone. Pondering much on what he had seen and heard in that house, as well as on the failure of all his efforts to trace the suspicious character who was lost, he returned to London and to England by the packet that had taken him over. On the way he unfolded the sheets of paper, and read in them what is reproduced in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 21. The History of a Self-Tormentor

I have the misfortune of not being a fool. From a very early age I have detected what those about me thought they hid from me. If I could have been habitually imposed upon, instead of habitually discerning the truth, I might have lived as smoothly as most fools do.

My childhood was passed with a grandmother; that is to say, with a lady who represented that relative to me, and who took that title on herself. She had no claim to it, but I—being to that extent a little fool—had no suspicion of her. She had some children of her own family in her house, and some children of other people. All girls; ten in number, including me. We all lived together and were educated together.

I must have been about twelve years old when I began to see how determinedly those girls patronised me. I was told I was an orphan. There was no other orphan among us; and I perceived (here was the first disadvantage of not being a fool) that they conciliated me in an insolent pity, and in a sense of superiority. I did not set this down as a discovery, rashly. I tried them often. I could hardly make them quarrel with me. When I succeeded with any of them, they were sure to come after an hour or two, and begin a reconciliation. I tried them over and over again, and I never knew them wait for me to begin. They were always forgiving me, in their vanity and condescension. Little images of grown people!

One of them was my chosen friend. I loved that stupid mite in a passionate way that she could no more deserve than I can remember without feeling ashamed of, though I was but a child. She had what they called an amiable temper, an affectionate temper. She could distribute, and did distribute pretty looks and smiles to every one among them. I believe there was not a soul in the place, except myself, who knew that she did it purposely to wound and gall me!

Nevertheless, I so loved that unworthy girl that my life was made stormy by my fondness for her. I was constantly lectured and disgraced for what was called 'trying her;' in other words charging her with her little perfidy and throwing her into tears by showing her that I read her heart.

However, I loved her faithfully; and one time I went home with her for the holidays.

She was worse at home than she had been at school. She had a crowd of cousins and acquaintances, and we had dances at her house, and went out to dances at other houses, and, both at home and out, she tormented my love beyond endurance. Her plan was, to make them all fond of her—and so drive me wild with jealousy. To be familiar and endearing with them all—and so make me mad with envying them. When we were left alone in our bedroom at night, I would reproach her with my perfect knowledge of her baseness; and then she would cry and cry and say I was cruel, and then I would hold her in my arms till morning: loving her as much as ever, and often feeling as if, rather than suffer so, I could so hold her in my arms and plunge to the bottom of a river—where I would still hold her after we were both dead.

It came to an end, and I was relieved. In the family there was an aunt who was not fond of me. I doubt if any of the family liked me much; but I never wanted them to like me, being altogether bound up in the one girl. The aunt was a young woman, and she had a serious way with her eyes of watching me. She was an audacious woman, and openly looked compassionately at me. After one of the nights that I have spoken of, I came down into a greenhouse before breakfast. Charlotte (the name of my false young friend) had gone down before me, and I heard this aunt speaking to her about me as I entered. I stopped where I was, among the leaves, and listened.

The aunt said, 'Charlotte, Miss Wade is wearing you to death, and this must not continue.' I repeat the very words I heard.

Now, what did she answer? Did she say, 'It is I who am wearing her to death, I who am keeping her on a rack and am the executioner, yet she tells me every night that she loves me devotedly, though she knows what I make her undergo?' No; my first memorable experience was true to what I knew her to be, and to all my experience. She began sobbing and weeping (to secure the aunt's sympathy to herself), and said, 'Dear aunt, she has an unhappy temper; other girls at school, besides I, try hard to make it better; we all try hard.'

Upon that the aunt fondled her, as if she had said something noble instead of despicable and false, and kept up the infamous pretence by replying, 'But there are reasonable limits, my dear love, to everything, and I see that this poor miserable girl causes you more constant and useless distress than even so good an effort justifies.'

The poor miserable girl came out of her concealment, as you may be prepared to hear, and said, 'Send me home.' I never said another word to either of them, or to any of them, but 'Send me home, or I will walk home alone, night and day!' When I got home, I told my supposed grandmother that, unless I was sent away to finish my education somewhere else before that girl came back, or before any one of them came back, I would burn my sight away by throwing myself into the fire, rather than I would endure to look at their plotting faces.

I went among young women next, and I found them no better. Fair words and fair pretences; but I penetrated below those assertions of themselves and depreciations of me, and they were no better. Before I left them, I learned that I had no grandmother and no recognised relation. I carried the light of that information both into my past and into my future. It showed me many new occasions on which people triumphed over me, when they made a pretence of treating me with consideration, or doing me a service.

A man of business had a small property in trust for me. I was to be a governess; I became a governess; and went into the family of a poor nobleman, where there were two daughters—little children, but the parents wished them to grow up, if possible, under one instructress. The mother was young and pretty. From the first, she made a show of behaving to me with great delicacy. I kept my resentment to myself; but I knew very well that it was her way of petting the knowledge that she was my Mistress, and might have behaved differently to her servant if it had been her fancy.

I say I did not resent it, nor did I; but I showed her, by not gratifying her, that I understood her. When she pressed me to take wine, I took water. If there happened to be anything choice at table, she always sent it to me: but I always declined it, and ate of the rejected dishes. These disappointments of her patronage were a sharp retort, and made me feel independent.

I liked the children. They were timid, but on the whole disposed to attach themselves to me. There was a nurse, however, in the house, a rosy-faced woman always making an obtrusive pretence of being gay and good-humoured, who had nursed them both, and who had secured their affections before I saw them. I could almost have settled down to my fate but for this woman. Her artful devices for keeping herself before the children in constant competition with me, might have blinded many in my place; but I saw through them from the first. On the pretext of arranging my rooms and waiting on me and taking care of my wardrobe (all of which she did busily), she was never absent. The most crafty of her many subtleties was her feint of seeking to make the children fonder of me. She would lead them to me and coax them to me. 'Come to good Miss Wade, come to dear Miss Wade, come to pretty Miss Wade. She loves you very much. Miss Wade is a clever lady, who has read heaps of books, and can tell you far better and more interesting stories than I know. Come and hear Miss Wade!' How could I engage their attentions, when my heart was burning against these ignorant designs? How could I wonder, when I saw their innocent faces shrinking away, and their arms twining round her neck, instead of mine? Then she would look up at me, shaking their curls from her face, and say, 'They'll come round soon, Miss Wade; they're very simple and loving, ma'am; don't be at all cast down about it, ma'am'—exulting over me!

There was another thing the woman did. At times, when she saw that she had safely plunged me into a black despondent brooding by these means, she would call the attention of the children to it, and would show them the difference between herself and me. 'Hush! Poor Miss Wade is not well. Don't make a noise, my dears, her head aches. Come and comfort her. Come and ask her if she is better; come and ask her to lie down. I hope you have nothing on your mind, ma'am. Don't take on, ma'am, and be sorry!'

It became intolerable. Her ladyship, my Mistress, coming in one day when I was alone, and at the height of feeling that I could support it no longer, I told her I must go. I could not bear the presence of that woman Dawes.

'Miss Wade! Poor Dawes is devoted to you; would do anything for you!'

I knew beforehand she would say so; I was quite prepared for it; I only answered, it was not for me to contradict my Mistress; I must go.

'I hope, Miss Wade,' she returned, instantly assuming the tone of superiority she had always so thinly concealed, 'that nothing I have ever said or done since we have been together, has justified your use of that disagreeable word, "Mistress." It must have been wholly inadvertent on my part. Pray tell me what it is.'

I replied that I had no complaint to make, either of my Mistress or to my Mistress; but I must go.

She hesitated a moment, and then sat down beside me, and laid her hand on mine. As if that honour would obliterate any remembrance!

'Miss Wade, I fear you are unhappy, through causes over which I have no influence.'

I smiled, thinking of the experience the word awakened, and said, 'I have an unhappy temper, I suppose.' 'I did not say that.'

'It is an easy way of accounting for anything,' said I.

'It may be; but I did not say so. What I wish to approach is something very different. My husband and I have exchanged some remarks upon the subject, when we have observed with pain that you have not been easy with us.'

'Easy? Oh! You are such great people, my lady,' said I.

'I am unfortunate in using a word which may convey a meaning—and evidently does—quite opposite to my intention.' (She had not expected my reply, and it shamed her.) 'I only mean, not happy with us. It is a difficult topic to enter on; but, from one young woman to another, perhaps—in short, we have been apprehensive that you may allow some family circumstances of which no one can be more innocent than yourself, to prey upon your spirits. If so, let us entreat you not to make them a cause of grief. My husband himself, as is well known, formerly had a very dear sister who was not in law his sister, but who was universally beloved and respected.

I saw directly that they had taken me in for the sake of the dead woman, whoever she was, and to have that boast of me and advantage of me; I saw, in the nurse's knowledge of it, an encouragement to goad me as she had done; and I saw, in the children's shrinking away, a vague impression, that I was not like other people. I left that house that night.

After one or two short and very similar experiences, which are not to the present purpose, I entered another family where I had but one pupil: a girl of fifteen, who was the only daughter. The parents here were elderly people: people of station, and rich. A nephew whom they had brought up was a frequent visitor at the house, among many other visitors; and he began to pay me attention.

I was resolute in repulsing him; for I had determined when I went there, that no one should pity me or condescend to me. But he wrote me a letter. It led to our being engaged to be married.

He was a year younger than I, and young-looking even when that allowance was made. He was on absence from India, where he had a post that was soon to grow into a very good one. In six months we were to be married, and were to go to India. I was to stay in the house, and was to be married from the house. Nobody objected to any part of the plan.

I cannot avoid saying he admired me; but, if I could, I would. Vanity has nothing to do with the declaration, for his admiration worried me. He took no pains to hide it; and caused me to feel among the rich people as if he had bought me for my looks, and made a show of his purchase to justify himself. They appraised me in their own minds, I saw, and were curious to ascertain what my full value was. I resolved that they should not know. I was immovable and silent before them; and would have suffered any one of them to kill me sooner than I would have laid myself out to bespeak their approval.

He told me I did not do myself justice. I told him I did, and it was because I did and meant to do so to the last, that I would not stoop to propitiate any of them. He was concerned and even shocked, when I added that I wished he would not parade his attachment before them; but he said he would sacrifice even the honest impulses of his affection to my peace.

Under that pretence he began to retort upon me. By the hour together, he would keep at a distance from me, talking to any one rather than to me. I have sat alone and unnoticed, half an evening, while he conversed with his young cousin, my pupil. I have seen all the while, in people's eyes, that they thought the two looked nearer on an equality than he and I. I have sat, divining their thoughts, until I have felt that his young appearance made me ridiculous, and have raged against myself for ever loving him.

For I did love him once. Undeserving as he was, and little as he thought of all these agonies that it cost me—agonies which should have made him wholly and gratefully mine to his life's end—I loved him. I bore with his cousin's praising him to my face, and with her pretending to think that it pleased me, but full well knowing that it rankled in my breast; for his sake. While I have sat in his presence recalling all my slights and wrongs, and deliberating whether I should not fly from the house at once and never see him again—I have loved him.

His aunt (my Mistress you will please to remember) deliberately, wilfully, added to my trials and vexations. It was her delight to expatiate on the style in which we were to live in India, and on the establishment we should keep, and the company we should entertain when he got his advancement. My pride rose against this barefaced way of pointing out the contrast my married life was to present to my then dependent and inferior position. I suppressed my indignation; but I showed her that her intention was not lost upon me, and I repaid her annoyance by affecting humility. What she described would surely be a great deal too much honour for me, I would tell her. I was afraid I might not be able to support so great a change. Think of a mere governess, her daughter's governess, coming to that high distinction! It made her uneasy, and made them all uneasy, when I answered in this way. They knew that I fully understood her.

It was at the time when my troubles were at their highest, and when I was most incensed against my lover for his ingratitude in caring as little as he did for the innumerable distresses and mortifications I underwent on his account, that your dear friend, Mr Gowan, appeared at the house. He had been intimate there for a long time, but had been abroad. He understood the state of things at a glance, and he understood me.

He was the first person I had ever seen in my life who had understood me. He was not in the house three times before I knew that he accompanied every movement of my mind. In his coldly easy way with all of them, and with me, and with the whole subject, I saw it clearly. In his light protestations of admiration of my future husband, in his enthusiasm regarding our engagement and our prospects, in his hopeful congratulations on our future wealth and his despondent references to his own poverty—all equally hollow, and jesting, and full of mockery—I saw it clearly. He made me feel more and more resentful, and more and more contemptible, by always presenting to me everything that surrounded me with some new hateful light upon it, while he pretended to exhibit it in its best aspect for my admiration and his own. He was like the dressed-up Death in the Dutch series; whatever figure he took upon his arm, whether it was youth or age, beauty or ugliness, whether he danced with it, sang with it, played with it, or prayed with it, he made it ghastly.

You will understand, then, that when your dear friend complimented me, he really condoled with me; that when he soothed me under my vexations, he laid bare every smarting wound I had; that when he declared my 'faithful swain' to be 'the most loving young fellow in the world, with the tenderest heart that ever beat,' he touched my old misgiving that I was made ridiculous. These were not great services, you may say. They were acceptable to me, because they echoed my own mind, and confirmed my own knowledge. I soon began to like the society of your dear friend better than any other.

When I perceived (which I did, almost as soon) that jealousy was growing out of this, I liked this society still better. Had I not been subject to jealousy, and were the endurances to be all mine? No. Let him know what it was! I was delighted that he should know it; I was delighted that he should feel keenly, and I hoped he did.

More than that. He was tame in comparison with Mr Gowan, who knew how to address me on equal terms, and how to anatomise the wretched people around us.

This went on, until the aunt, my Mistress, took it upon herself to speak to me. It was scarcely worth alluding to; she knew I meant nothing; but she suggested from herself, knowing it was only necessary to suggest, that it might be better if I were a little less companionable with Mr Gowan.

I asked her how she could answer for what I meant? She could always answer, she replied, for my meaning nothing wrong. I thanked her, but said I would prefer to answer for myself and to myself. Her other servants would probably be grateful for good characters, but I wanted none.

Other conversation followed, and induced me to ask her how she knew that it was only necessary for her to make a suggestion to me, to have it obeyed? Did she presume on my birth, or on my hire? I was not bought, body and soul. She seemed to think that her distinguished nephew had gone into a slave-market and purchased a wife.

It would probably have come, sooner or later, to the end to which it did come, but she brought it to its issue at once. She told me, with assumed commiseration, that I had an unhappy temper. On this repetition of the old wicked injury, I withheld no longer, but exposed to her all I had known of her and seen in her, and all I had undergone within myself since I had occupied the despicable position of being engaged to her nephew. I told her that Mr Gowan was the only relief I had had in my degradation; that I had borne it too long, and that I shook it off too late; but that I would see none of them more. And I never did. Your dear friend followed me to my retreat, and was very droll on the severance of the connection; though he was sorry, too, for the excellent people (in their way the best he had ever met), and deplored the necessity of breaking mere house-flies on the wheel. He protested before long, and far more truly than I then supposed, that he was not worth acceptance by a woman of such endowments, and such power of character; but—well, well—!

Your dear friend amused me and amused himself as long as it suited his inclinations; and then reminded me that we were both people of the world, that we both understood mankind, that we both knew there was no such thing as romance, that we were both prepared for going different ways to seek our fortunes like people of sense, and that we both foresaw that whenever we encountered one another again we should meet as the best friends on earth. So he said, and I did not contradict him.

It was not very long before I found that he was courting his present wife, and that she had been taken away to be out of his reach. I hated her then, quite as much as I hate her now; and naturally, therefore, could desire nothing better than that she should marry him. But I was restlessly curious to look at her—so curious that I felt it to be one of the few sources of entertainment left to me. I travelled a little: travelled until I found myself in her society, and in yours. Your dear friend, I think, was not known to you then, and had not given you any of those signal marks of his friendship which he has bestowed upon you.

In that company I found a girl, in various circumstances of whose position there was a singular likeness to my own, and in whose character I was interested and pleased to see much of the rising against swollen patronage and selfishness, calling themselves kindness, protection, benevolence, and other fine names, which I have described as inherent in my nature. I often heard it said, too, that she had 'an unhappy temper.' Well understanding what was meant by the convenient phrase, and wanting a companion with a knowledge of what I knew, I thought I would try to release the girl from her bondage and sense of injustice. I have no occasion to relate that I succeeded.

We have been together ever since, sharing my small means.

CHAPTER 22. Who passes by this Road so late?

Arthur Clennam had made his unavailing expedition to Calais in the midst of a great pressure of business. A certain barbaric Power with valuable possessions on the map of the world, had occasion for the services of one or two engineers, quick in invention and determined in execution: practical men, who could make the men and means their ingenuity perceived to be wanted out of the best materials they could find at hand; and who were as bold and fertile in the adaptation of such materials to their purpose, as in the conception of their purpose itself. This Power, being a barbaric one, had no idea of stowing away a great national object in a Circumlocution Office, as strong wine is hidden from the light in a cellar until its fire and youth are gone, and the labourers who worked in the vineyard and pressed the grapes are dust. With characteristic ignorance, it acted on the most decided and energetic notions of How to do it; and never showed the least respect for, or gave any quarter to, the great political science, How not to do it. Indeed it had a barbarous way of striking the latter art and mystery dead, in the person of any enlightened subject who practised it.

Accordingly, the men who were wanted were sought out and found; which was in itself a most uncivilised and irregular way of proceeding. Being found, they were treated with great confidence and honour (which again showed dense political ignorance), and were invited to come at once and do what they had to do. In short, they were regarded as men who meant to do it, engaging with other men who meant it to be done.

Daniel Doyce was one of the chosen. There was no foreseeing at that time whether he would be absent months or years. The preparations for his departure, and the conscientious arrangement for him of all the details and results of their joint business, had necessitated labour within a short compass of time, which had occupied Clennam day and night. He had slipped across the water in his first leisure, and had slipped as quickly back again for his farewell interview with Doyce.

Him Arthur now showed, with pains and care, the state of their gains and losses, responsibilities and prospects. Daniel went through it all in his patient manner, and admired it all exceedingly. He audited the accounts, as if they were a far more ingenious piece of mechanism than he had ever constructed, and afterwards stood looking at them, weighing his hat over his head by the brims, as if he were absorbed in the contemplation of some wonderful engine.

'It's all beautiful, Clennam, in its regularity and order. Nothing can be plainer. Nothing can be better.'

'I am glad you approve, Doyce. Now, as to the management of your capital while you are away, and as to the conversion of so much of it as the business may need from time to time—' His partner stopped him.

'As to that, and as to everything else of that kind, all rests with you. You will continue in all such matters to act for both of us, as you have done hitherto, and to lighten my mind of a load it is much relieved from.'

'Though, as I often tell you,' returned Clennam, 'you unreasonably depreciate your business qualities.'

'Perhaps so,' said Doyce, smiling. 'And perhaps not. Anyhow, I have a calling that I have studied more than such matters, and that I am better fitted for. I have perfect confidence in my partner, and I am satisfied that he will do what is best. If I have a prejudice connected with money and money figures,' continued Doyce, laying that plastic workman's thumb of his on the lapel of his partner's coat, 'it is against speculating. I don't think I have any other. I dare say I entertain that prejudice, only because I have never given my mind fully to the subject.'

'But you shouldn't call it a prejudice,' said Clennam. 'My dear Doyce, it is the soundest sense.'

'I am glad you think so,' returned Doyce, with his grey eye looking kind and bright.

'It so happens,' said Clennam, 'that just now, not half an hour before you came down, I was saying the same thing to Pancks, who looked in here. We both agreed that to travel out of safe investments is one of the most dangerous, as it is one of the most common, of those follies which often deserve the name of vices.'

'Pancks?' said Doyce, tilting up his hat at the back, and nodding with an air of confidence. 'Aye, aye, aye! That's a cautious fellow.'

'He is a very cautious fellow indeed,' returned Arthur. 'Quite a specimen of caution.'

They both appeared to derive a larger amount of satisfaction from the cautious character of Mr Pancks, than was quite intelligible, judged by the surface of their conversation.

'And now,' said Daniel, looking at his watch, 'as time and tide wait for no man, my trusty partner, and as I am ready for starting, bag and baggage, at the gate below, let me say a last word. I want you to grant a request of mine.'

'Any request you can make—Except,' Clennam was quick with his exception, for his partner's face was quick in suggesting it, 'except that I will abandon your invention.'

'That's the request, and you know it is,' said Doyce.

'I say, No, then. I say positively, No. Now that I have begun, I will have some definite reason, some responsible statement, something in the nature of a real answer, from those people.'

'You will not,' returned Doyce, shaking his head. 'Take my word for it, you never will.'

'At least, I'll try,' said Clennam. 'It will do me no harm to try.'

'I am not certain of that,' rejoined Doyce, laying his hand persuasively on his shoulder. 'It has done me harm, my friend. It has aged me, tired me, vexed me, disappointed me. It does no man any good to have his patience worn out, and to think himself ill-used. I fancy, even already, that unavailing attendance on delays and evasions has made you something less elastic than you used to be.'

'Private anxieties may have done that for the moment,' said Clennam, 'but not official harrying. Not yet. I am not hurt yet.'

'Then you won't grant my request?'

'Decidedly, No,' said Clennam. 'I should be ashamed if I submitted to be so soon driven out of the field, where a much older and a much more sensitively interested man contended with fortitude so long.'

As there was no moving him, Daniel Doyce returned the grasp of his hand, and, casting a farewell look round the counting-house, went downstairs with him. Doyce was to go to Southampton to join the small staff of his fellow-travellers; and a coach was at the gate, well furnished and packed, and ready to take him there. The workmen were at the gate to see him off, and were mightily proud of him. 'Good luck to you, Mr Doyce!'

said one of the number. 'Wherever you go, they'll find as they've got a man among 'em, a man as knows his tools and as his tools knows, a man as is willing and a man as is able, and if that's not a man, where is a man!' This oration from a gruff volunteer in the back-ground, not previously suspected of any powers in that way, was received with three loud cheers; and the speaker became a distinguished character for ever afterwards. In the midst of the three loud cheers, Daniel gave them all a hearty 'Good Bye, Men!' and the coach disappeared from sight, as if the concussion of the air had blown it out of Bleeding Heart Yard.

Mr Baptist, as a grateful little fellow in a position of trust, was among the workmen, and had done as much towards the cheering as a mere foreigner could. In truth, no men on earth can cheer like Englishmen, who do so rally one another's blood and spirit when they cheer in earnest, that the stir is like the rush of their whole history, with all its standards waving at once, from Saxon Alfred's downwards. Mr Baptist had been in a manner whirled away before the onset, and was taking his breath in quite a scared condition when Clennam beckoned him to follow up-stairs, and return the books and papers to their places.

In the lull consequent on the departure—in that first vacuity which ensues on every separation, foreshadowing the great separation that is always overhanging all mankind—Arthur stood at his desk, looking dreamily out at a gleam of sun. But his liberated attention soon reverted to the theme that was foremost in his thoughts, and began, for the hundredth time, to dwell upon every circumstance that had impressed itself upon his mind on the mysterious night when he had seen the man at his mother's. Again the man jostled him in the crooked street, again he followed the man and lost him, again he came upon the man in the court-yard looking at the house, again he followed the man and stood beside him on the door-steps.

'Who passes by this road so late?
Compagnon de la Majolaine;
Who passes by this road so late?
Always gay!'

It was not the first time, by many, that he had recalled the song of the child's game, of which the fellow had hummed @ verse while they stood side by side; but he was so unconscious of having repeated it audibly, that he started to hear the next verse.

'Of all the king's knights 'tis the flower,
Compagnon de la Majolaine;
Of all the king's knights 'tis the flower,
Always gay!'

Cavalletto had deferentially suggested the words and tune, supposing him to have stopped short for want of more.

'Ah! You know the song, Cavalletto?'

'By Bacchus, yes, sir! They all know it in France. I have heard it many times, sung by the little children. The last time when it I have heard,' said Mr Baptist, formerly Cavalletto, who usually went back to his native construction of sentences when his memory went near home, 'is from a sweet little voice. A little voice, very pretty, very innocent. Altro!'

'The last time I heard it,' returned Arthur, 'was in a voice quite the reverse of pretty, and quite the reverse of innocent.' He said it more to himself than to his companion, and added to himself, repeating the man's next words. 'Death of my life, sir, it's my character to be impatient!'

'EH!' cried Cavalletto, astounded, and with all his colour gone in a moment.

'What is the matter?'

'Sir! You know where I have heard that song the last time?'

With his rapid native action, his hands made the outline of a high hook nose, pushed his eyes near together, dishevelled his hair, puffed out his upper lip to represent a thick moustache, and threw the heavy end of an ideal cloak over his shoulder. While doing this, with a swiftness incredible to one who has not watched an Italian peasant, he indicated a very remarkable and sinister smile.

The whole change passed over him like a flash of light, and he stood in the same instant, pale and astonished, before his patron.

'In the name of Fate and wonder,' said Clennam, 'what do you mean? Do you know a man of the name of Blandois?'

'No!' said Mr Baptist, shaking his head.

'You have just now described a man who was by when you heard that song; have you not?'

'Yes!' said Mr Baptist, nodding fifty times.

'And was he not called Blandois?'

'No!' said Mr Baptist. 'Altro, Altro, Altro, Altro!' He could not reject the name sufficiently, with his head and his right forefinger going at once.

'Stay!' cried Clennam, spreading out the handbill on his desk. 'Was this the man? You can understand what I read aloud?'

'Altogether. Perfectly.'

'But look at it, too. Come here and look over me, while I read.'

Mr Baptist approached, followed every word with his quick eyes, saw and heard it all out with the greatest impatience, then clapped his two hands flat upon the bill as if he had fiercely caught some noxious creature, and cried, looking eagerly at Clennam, 'It is the man! Behold him!'

'This is of far greater moment to me' said Clennam, in great agitation, 'than you can imagine. Tell me where you knew the man.'

Mr Baptist, releasing the paper very slowly and with much discomfiture, and drawing himself back two or three paces, and making as though he dusted his hands, returned, very much against his will:

'At Marsiglia—Marseilles.'

'What was he?'

'A prisoner, and—Altro! I believe yes!—an,' Mr Baptist crept closer again to whisper it, 'Assassin!'

Clennam fell back as if the word had struck him a blow: so terrible did it make his mother's communication with the man appear. Cavalletto dropped on one knee, and implored him, with a redundancy of gesticulation, to hear what had brought himself into such foul company.

He told with perfect truth how it had come of a little contraband trading, and how he had in time been released from prison, and how he had gone away from those antecedents. How, at the house of entertainment called the Break of Day at Chalons on the Saone, he had been awakened in his bed at night by the same assassin, then assuming the name of Lagnier, though his name had formerly been Rigaud; how the assassin had proposed that they should join their fortunes together; how he held the assassin in such dread and aversion that he had fled from him at daylight, and how he had ever since been haunted by the fear of seeing the assassin again and being claimed by him as an acquaintance. When he had related this, with an emphasis and poise on the word, 'assassin,' peculiarly belonging to his own language, and which did not serve to render it less terrible to Clennam, he suddenly sprang to his feet, pounced upon the bill again, and with a vehemence that would have been absolute madness in any man of Northern origin, cried 'Behold the same assassin! Here he is!'

In his passionate raptures, he at first forgot the fact that he had lately seen the assassin in London. On his remembering it, it suggested hope to Clennam that the recognition might be of later date than the night of the visit at his mother's; but Cavalletto was too exact and clear about time and place, to leave any opening for doubt that it had preceded that occasion.

'Listen,' said Arthur, very seriously. 'This man, as we have read here, has wholly disappeared.'

'Of it I am well content!' said Cavalletto, raising his eyes piously. 'A thousand thanks to Heaven! Accursed assassin!'

'Not so,' returned Clennam; 'for until something more is heard of him, I can never know an hour's peace.'

'Enough, Benefactor; that is quite another thing. A million of excuses!'

'Now, Cavalletto,' said Clennam, gently turning him by the arm, so that they looked into each other's eyes. 'I am certain that for the little I have been able to do for you, you are the most sincerely grateful of men.'

'I swear it!' cried the other.

'I know it. If you could find this man, or discover what has become of him, or gain any later intelligence whatever of him, you would render me a service above any other service I could receive in the world, and would make me (with far greater reason) as grateful to you as you are to me.' 'I know not where to look,' cried the little man, kissing Arthur's hand in a transport. 'I know not where to begin. I know not where to go. But, courage! Enough! It matters not! I go, in this instant of time!'

'Not a word to any one but me, Cavalletto.'

'Al-tro!' cried Cavalletto. And was gone with great speed.

CHAPTER 23. Mistress Affery makes a Conditional Promise,

respecting her Dreams

Left alone, with the expressive looks and gestures of Mr Baptist, otherwise Giovanni Baptista Cavalletto, vividly before him, Clennam entered on a weary day. It was in vain that he tried to control his attention by directing it to any business occupation or train of thought; it rode at anchor by the haunting topic, and would hold to no other idea. As though a criminal should be chained in a stationary boat on a deep clear river, condemned, whatever countless leagues of water flowed past him, always to see the body of the fellow-creature he had drowned lying at the bottom, immovable, and unchangeable, except as the eddies made it broad or long, now expanding, now contracting its terrible lineaments; so Arthur, below the shifting current of transparent thoughts and fancies which were gone and succeeded by others as soon as come, saw, steady and dark, and not to be stirred from its place, the one subject that he endeavoured with all his might to rid himself of, and that he could not fly from. The assurance he now had, that Blandois, whatever his right name, was one of the worst of characters, greatly augmented the burden of his anxieties. Though the disappearance should be accounted for to-morrow, the fact that his mother had been in communication with such a man, would remain unalterable. That the communication had been of a secret kind, and that she had been submissive to him and afraid of him, he hoped might be known to no one beyond himself; yet, knowing it, how could he separate it from his old vague fears, and how believe that there was nothing evil in such relations? Her resolution not to enter on the question with him, and his knowledge of her indomitable character, enhanced his sense of helplessness. It was like the oppression of a dream to believe that shame and exposure were impending over her and his father's memory, and to be shut out, as by a brazen wall, from the possibility of coming to their aid. The purpose he had brought home to his native country, and had ever since kept in view, was, with her greatest determination, defeated by his mother herself, at the time of all others when he feared that it pressed most. His advice, energy, activity, money, credit, all his resources whatsoever, were all made useless. If she had been possessed of the old fabled influence, and had turned those who looked upon her into stone, she could not have rendered him more completely powerless (so it seemed to him in his distress of mind) than she did, when she turned her unyielding face to his in her gloomy room.

But the light of that day's discovery, shining on these considerations, roused him to take a more decided course of action.

Confident in the rectitude of his purpose, and impelled by a sense of overhanging danger closing in around, he resolved, if his mother would still admit of no approach, to make a desperate appeal to Affery. If she could be brought to become communicative, and to do what lay in her to break the spell of secrecy that enshrouded the house, he might shake off the paralysis of which every hour that passed over his head made him more acutely sensible. This was the result of his day's anxiety, and this was the decision he put in practice when the day closed in.

His first disappointment, on arriving at the house, was to find the door open, and Mr Flintwinch smoking a pipe on the steps. If circumstances had been commonly favourable, Mistress Affery would have opened the door to his knock. Circumstances being uncommonly unfavourable, the door stood open, and Mr Flintwinch was smoking his pipe on the steps.

'Good evening,' said Arthur.

'Good evening,' said Mr Flintwinch.

The smoke came crookedly out of Mr Flintwinch's mouth, as if it circulated through the whole of his wry figure and came back by his wry throat, before coming forth to mingle with the smoke from the crooked chimneys and the mists from the crooked river.

'Have you any news?' said Arthur.

'We have no news,' said Jeremiah.

'I mean of the foreign man,' Arthur explained.

'*I* mean of the foreign man,' said Jeremiah.

He looked so grim, as he stood askew, with the knot of his cravat under his ear, that the thought passed into Clennam's mind, and not for the first time by many, could Flintwinch for a purpose of his own have got rid of Blandois? Could it have been his secret, and his safety, that were at issue? He was small and bent, and perhaps not actively strong; yet he was as tough as an old yew-tree, and as crusty as an old jackdaw. Such a man, coming behind a much younger and more vigorous man, and having the will to put an end to him and no relenting, might do it pretty surely in that solitary place at a late hour.

While, in the morbid condition of his thoughts, these thoughts drifted over the main one that was always in Clennam's mind, Mr Flintwinch, regarding the opposite house over the gateway with his neck twisted and one eye shut up, stood smoking with a vicious expression upon him; more as if he were trying to bite off the stem of his pipe, than as if he were enjoying it. Yet he was enjoying it in his own way.

'You'll be able to take my likeness, the next time you call, Arthur, I should think,' said Mr Flintwinch, drily, as he stooped to knock the ashes out.

Rather conscious and confused, Arthur asked his pardon, if he had stared at him unpolitely. 'But my mind runs so much upon this matter,' he said, 'that I lose myself.'

'Hah! Yet I don't see,' returned Mr Flintwinch, quite at his leisure, 'why it should trouble YOU, Arthur.'

'No?'

'No,' said Mr Flintwinch, very shortly and decidedly: much as if he were of the canine race, and snapped at Arthur's hand.

'Is it nothing to see those placards about? Is it nothing to me to see my mother's name and residence hawked up and down in such an association?'

'I don't see,' returned Mr Flintwinch, scraping his horny cheek, 'that it need signify much to you. But I'll tell you what I do see, Arthur,' glancing up at the windows; 'I see the light of fire and candle in your mother's room!'

'And what has that to do with it?'

'Why, sir, I read by it,' said Mr Flintwinch, screwing himself at him, 'that if it's advisable (as the proverb says it is) to let sleeping dogs lie, it's just as advisable, perhaps, to let missing dogs lie. Let 'em be. They generally turn up soon enough.'

Mr Flintwinch turned short round when he had made this remark, and went into the dark hall. Clennam stood there, following him with his eyes, as he dipped for a light in the phosphorus-box in the little room at the side, got one after three or four dips, and lighted the dim lamp against the wall. All the while, Clennam was pursuing the probabilities—rather as if they were being shown to him by an invisible hand than as if he himself were conjuring them up—of Mr Flintwinch's ways and means of doing that darker deed, and removing its traces by any of the black avenues of shadow that lay around them.

'Now, sir,' said the testy Jeremiah; 'will it be agreeable to walk upstairs?'

'My mother is alone, I suppose?'

'Not alone,' said Mr Flintwinch. 'Mr Casby and his daughter are with her. They came in while I was smoking, and I stayed behind to have my smoke out.'

This was the second disappointment. Arthur made no remark upon it, and repaired to his mother's room, where Mr Casby and Flora had been taking tea, anchovy paste, and hot buttered toast. The relics of those delicacies were not yet removed, either from the table or from the scorched countenance of Affery, who, with the kitchen toasting-fork still in her hand, looked like a sort of allegorical personage; except that she had a considerable advantage over the general run of such personages in point of significant emblematical purpose.

Flora had spread her bonnet and shawl upon the bed, with a care indicative of an intention to stay some time. Mr Casby, too, was beaming near the hob, with his benevolent knobs shining as if the warm butter of the toast were exuding through the patriarchal skull, and with his face as ruddy as if the colouring matter of the anchovy paste were mantling in the patriarchal visage. Seeing this, as he exchanged the usual salutations, Clennam decided to speak to his mother without postponement.

It had long been customary, as she never changed her room, for those who had anything to say to her apart, to wheel her to her desk; where she sat, usually with the back of her chair turned towards the rest of the room, and the person who talked with her seated in a corner, on a stool which was always set in that place for that purpose. Except that it was long since the mother and son had spoken together without the intervention of a third person, it was an ordinary matter of course within the experience of visitors for Mrs Clennam to be asked, with a word of apology for the interruption, if she could be spoken with on a matter of business, and, on her replying in the affirmative, to be wheeled into the position described.

Therefore, when Arthur now made such an apology, and such a request, and moved her to her desk and seated himself on the stool, Mrs Finching merely began to talk louder and faster, as a delicate hint that she could overhear nothing, and Mr Casby stroked his long white locks with sleepy calmness.

'Mother, I have heard something to-day which I feel persuaded you don't know, and which I think you should know, of the antecedents of that man I saw here.'

'I know nothing of the antecedents of the man you saw here, Arthur.'

She spoke aloud. He had lowered his own voice; but she rejected that advance towards confidence as she rejected every other, and spoke in her usual key and in her usual stern voice.

'I have received it on no circuitous information; it has come to me direct.' She asked him, exactly as before, if he were there to tell her what it was?

'I thought it right that you should know it.'

'And what is it?'

'He has been a prisoner in a French gaol.'

She answered with composure, 'I should think that very likely.'

'But in a gaol for criminals, mother. On an accusation of murder.'

She started at the word, and her looks expressed her natural horror. Yet she still spoke aloud, when she demanded:—

'Who told you so?'

'A man who was his fellow-prisoner.'

'That man's antecedents, I suppose, were not known to you, before he told you?'

'No.'

'Though the man himself was?'

'Yes.'

'My case and Flintwinch's, in respect of this other man! I dare say the resemblance is not so exact, though, as that your informant became known to you through a letter from a correspondent with whom he had deposited money? How does that part of the parallel stand?'

Arthur had no choice but to say that his informant had not become known to him through the agency of any such credentials, or indeed of any credentials at all. Mrs Clennam's attentive frown expanded by degrees into a severe look of triumph, and she retorted with emphasis, 'Take care how you judge others, then. I say to you, Arthur, for your good, take care how you judge!' Her emphasis had been derived from her eyes quite as much as from the stress she laid upon her words. She continued to look at him; and if, when he entered the house, he had had any latent hope of prevailing in the least with her, she now looked it out of his heart.

'Mother, shall I do nothing to assist you?'

'Nothing.'

'Will you entrust me with no confidence, no charge, no explanation?

Will you take no counsel with me? Will you not let me come near you?'

'How can you ask me? You separated yourself from my affairs. It was not my act; it was yours. How can you consistently ask me such a question? You know that you left me to Flintwinch, and that he occupies your place.'

Glancing at Jeremiah, Clennam saw in his very gaiters that his attention was closely directed to them, though he stood leaning against the wall scraping his jaw, and pretended to listen to Flora as she held forth in a most distracting manner on a chaos of subjects, in which mackerel, and Mr F.'s Aunt in a swing, had become entangled with cockchafers and the wine trade.

'A prisoner, in a French gaol, on an accusation of murder,' repeated Mrs Clennam, steadily going over what her son had said. 'That is all you know of him from the fellow-prisoner?'

'In substance, all.'

'And was the fellow-prisoner his accomplice and a murderer, too? But, of course, he gives a better account of himself than of his friend; it is needless to ask. This will supply the rest of them here with something new to talk about. Casby, Arthur tells me—'

'Stay, mother! Stay, stay!' He interrupted her hastily, for it had not entered his imagination that she would openly proclaim what he had told her.

'What now?' she said with displeasure. 'What more?'

'I beg you to excuse me, Mr Casby—and you, too, Mrs Finching—for one other moment with my mother—'

He had laid his hand upon her chair, or she would otherwise have wheeled it round with the touch of her foot upon the ground. They were still face to face. She looked at him, as he ran over the possibilities of some result he had not intended, and could not foresee, being influenced by Cavalletto's disclosure becoming a matter of notoriety, and hurriedly arrived at the conclusion that it had best not be talked about; though perhaps he was guided by no more distinct reason than that he had taken it for granted that his mother would reserve it to herself and her partner.

'What now?' she said again, impatiently. 'What is it?'

'I did not mean, mother, that you should repeat what I have communicated. I think you had better not repeat it.'

'Do you make that a condition with me?'

'Well! Yes.'

'Observe, then! It is you who make this a secret,' said she, holding up her hand, 'and not I. It is you, Arthur, who bring here doubts and suspicions and entreaties for explanations, and it is you, Arthur, who bring secrets here. What is it to me, do you think, where the man has been, or what he has been? What can it be to me? The whole world may know it, if they care to know it; it is nothing to me. Now, let me go.'

He yielded to her imperious but elated look, and turned her chair back to the place from which he had wheeled it. In doing so he saw elation in the face of Mr Flintwinch, which most assuredly was not inspired by Flora. This turning of his intelligence and of his whole attempt and design against himself, did even more than his mother's fixedness and firmness to convince him that his efforts with her were idle. Nothing remained but the appeal to his old friend Affery.

But even to get the very doubtful and preliminary stage of making the appeal, seemed one of the least promising of human undertakings. She was so completely under the thrall of the two clever ones, was so systematically kept in sight by one or other of them, and was so afraid to go about the house besides, that every opportunity of speaking to her alone appeared to be forestalled. Over and above that, Mistress Affery, by some means (it was not very difficult to guess, through the sharp arguments of her liege lord), had acquired such a lively conviction of the hazard of saying anything under any circumstances, that she had remained all this time in a corner guarding herself from approach with that symbolical instrument of hers; so that, when a word or two had been addressed to her by Flora, or even by the bottle-green patriarch himself, she had warded off conversation with the toasting-fork like a dumb woman.

After several abortive attempts to get Affery to look at him while she cleared the table and washed the tea-service, Arthur thought of an expedient which Flora might originate. To whom he therefore whispered, 'Could you say you would like to go through the house?'

Now, poor Flora, being always in fluctuating expectation of the time when Clennam would renew his boyhood and be madly in love with her again, received the whisper with the utmost delight; not only as rendered precious by its mysterious character, but as preparing the way for a tender interview in which he would declare the state of his affections. She immediately began to work out the hint.

'Ah dear me the poor old room,' said Flora, glancing round, 'looks just as ever Mrs Clennam I am touched to see except for being smokier which was to be expected with time and which we must all expect and reconcile ourselves to being whether we like it or not as I am sure I have had to do myself if not exactly smokier dreadfully stouter which is the same or worse, to think of the days when papa used to bring me here the least of girls a perfect mass of chilblains to be stuck upon a chair with my feet on the rails and stare at Arthur—pray excuse me—Mr Clennam—the least of boys in the frightfullest of frills and jackets ere yet Mr F. appeared a misty shadow on the horizon paying attentions like the well-known spectre of some place in Germany beginning with a B is a moral lesson inculcating that all the paths in life are similar to the paths down in the North of England where they get the coals and make the iron and things gravelled with ashes!'

Having paid the tribute of a sigh to the instability of human existence, Flora hurried on with her purpose.

'Not that at any time,' she proceeded, 'its worst enemy could have said it was a cheerful house for that it was never made to be but always highly impressive, fond memory recalls an occasion in youth ere yet the judgment was mature when Arthur—confirmed habit—Mr Clennam—took me down into an unused kitchen eminent for mouldiness and proposed to secrete me there for life and feed me on what he could hide from his meals when he was not at home for the holidays and on dry bread in disgrace which at that halcyon period too frequently occurred, would it be inconvenient or asking too much to beg to be permitted to revive those scenes and walk through the house?'

Mrs Clennam, who responded with a constrained grace to Mrs Finching's good nature in being there at all, though her visit (before Arthur's unexpected arrival) was undoubtedly an act of pure good nature and no self-gratification, intimated that all the house was open to her. Flora rose and looked to Arthur for his escort. 'Certainly,' said he, aloud; 'and Affery will light us, I dare say.'

Affery was excusing herself with 'Don't ask nothing of me, Arthur!' when Mr Flintwinch stopped her with 'Why not? Affery, what's the matter with you, woman? Why not, jade!' Thus expostulated with, she came unwillingly out of her corner, resigned the toasting-fork into one of her husband's hands, and took the candlestick he offered from the other.

'Go before, you fool!' said Jeremiah. 'Are you going up, or down, Mrs Finching?'

Flora answered, 'Down.'

'Then go before, and down, you Affery,' said Jeremiah. 'And do it properly, or I'll come rolling down the banisters, and tumbling over you!'

Affery headed the exploring party; Jeremiah closed it. He had no intention of leaving them. Clennam looking back, and seeing him following three stairs behind, in the coolest and most methodical manner exclaimed in a low voice, 'Is there no getting rid of him!' Flora reassured his mind by replying promptly, 'Why though not exactly proper Arthur and a thing I couldn't think of before a younger man or a stranger still I don't mind him if you so particularly wish it and provided you'll have the goodness not to take me too tight.'

Wanting the heart to explain that this was not at all what he meant, Arthur extended his supporting arm round Flora's figure. 'Oh my goodness me,' said she. 'You are very obedient indeed really and it's extremely honourable and gentlemanly in you I am sure but still at the same time if you would like to be a little tighter than that I shouldn't consider it intruding.'

In this preposterous attitude, unspeakably at variance with his anxious mind, Clennam descended to the basement of the house; finding that wherever it became darker than elsewhere, Flora became heavier, and that when the house was lightest she was too. Returning from the dismal kitchen regions, which were as dreary as they could be, Mistress Affery passed with the light into his father's old room, and then into the old dining-room; always passing on before like a phantom that was not to be overtaken, and neither turning nor answering when he whispered, 'Affery! I want to speak to you!'

In the dining-room, a sentimental desire came over Flora to look into the dragon closet which had so often swallowed Arthur in the days of his boyhood—not improbably because, as a very dark closet, it was a likely place to be heavy in. Arthur, fast subsiding into despair, had opened it, when a knock was heard at the outer door.

Mistress Affery, with a suppressed cry, threw her apron over her head.

'What? You want another dose!' said Mr Flintwinch. 'You shall have it, my woman, you shall have a good one! Oh! You shall have a sneezer, you shall have a teaser!'

'In the meantime is anybody going to the door?' said Arthur.

'In the meantime, I am going to the door, sir,' returned the old man so savagely, as to render it clear that in a choice of difficulties he felt he must go, though he would have preferred not to go. 'Stay here the while, all! Affery, my woman, move an inch, or speak a word in your foolishness, and I'll treble your dose!'

The moment he was gone, Arthur released Mrs Finching: with some difficulty, by reason of that lady misunderstanding his intentions, and making arrangements with a view to tightening instead of slackening.

'Affery, speak to me now!'

'Don't touch me, Arthur!' she cried, shrinking from him. 'Don't come near me. He'll see you. Jeremiah will. Don't.'

'He can't see me,' returned Arthur, suiting the action to the word, 'if I blow the candle out.'

'He'll hear you,' cried Affery.

'He can't hear me,' returned Arthur, suiting the action to the words again, 'if I draw you into this black closet, and speak here.

Why do you hide your face?'

'Because I am afraid of seeing something.'

'You can't be afraid of seeing anything in this darkness, Affery.'

'Yes I am. Much more than if it was light.'

'Why are you afraid?'

'Because the house is full of mysteries and secrets; because it's full of whisperings and counsellings; because it's full of noises. There never was such a house for noises. I shall die of 'em, if Jeremiah don't strangle me first. As I expect he will.'

'I have never heard any noises here, worth speaking of.'

'Ah! But you would, though, if you lived in the house, and was obliged to go about it as I am,' said Affery; 'and you'd feel that they was so well worth speaking of, that you'd feel you was nigh bursting through not being allowed to speak of 'em. Here's Jeremiah! You'll get me killed.'

'My good Affery, I solemnly declare to you that I can see the light of the open door on the pavement of the hall, and so could you if you would uncover your face and look.'

'I durstn't do it,' said Affery, 'I durstn't never, Arthur. I'm always blindfolded when Jeremiah an't a looking, and sometimes even when he is.'

'He cannot shut the door without my seeing him,' said Arthur. 'You are as safe with me as if he was fifty miles away.'

('I wish he was!' cried Affery.)

'Affery, I want to know what is amiss here; I want some light thrown on the secrets of this house.' 'I tell you, Arthur,' she interrupted, 'noises is the secrets, rustlings and stealings about, tremblings, treads overhead and treads underneath.'

'But those are not all the secrets.'

'I don't know,' said Affery. 'Don't ask me no more. Your old sweetheart an't far off, and she's a blabber.'

His old sweetheart, being in fact so near at hand that she was then reclining against him in a flutter, a very substantial angle of forty-five degrees, here interposed to assure Mistress Affery with greater earnestness than directness of asseveration, that what she heard should go no further, but should be kept inviolate, 'if on no other account on Arthur's—sensible of intruding in being too familiar Doyce and Clennam's.'

'I make an imploring appeal to you, Affery, to you, one of the few agreeable early remembrances I have, for my mother's sake, for your husband's sake, for my own, for all our sakes. I am sure you can tell me something connected with the coming here of this man, if you will.'

'Why, then I'll tell you, Arthur,' returned Affery—'Jeremiah's coming!'

'No, indeed he is not. The door is open, and he is standing outside, talking.'

'I'll tell you then,' said Affery, after listening, 'that the first time he ever come he heard the noises his own self. "What's that?" he said to me. "I don't know what it is," I says to him, catching hold of him, "but I have heard it over and over again." While I says it, he stands a looking at me, all of a shake, he do.'

'Has he been here often?'

'Only that night, and the last night.'

'What did you see of him on the last night, after I was gone?'

'Them two clever ones had him all alone to themselves. Jeremiah come a dancing at me sideways, after I had let you out (he always comes a dancing at me sideways when he's going to hurt me), and he said to me, "Now, Affery," he said, "I am a coming behind you, my woman, and a going to run you up." So he took and squeezed the back of my neck in his hand, till it made me open MY mouth, and then he pushed me before him to bed, squeezing all the way. That's what he calls running me up, he do. Oh, he's a wicked one!'

'And did you hear or see no more, Affery?'

'Don't I tell you I was sent to bed, Arthur! Here he is!'

'I assure you he is still at the door. Those whisperings and counsellings, Affery, that you have spoken of. What are they?'

'How should I know? Don't ask me nothing about 'em, Arthur. Get away!'

'But my dear Affery; unless I can gain some insight into these hidden things, in spite of your husband and in spite of my mother, ruin will come of it.'

'Don't ask me nothing,' repeated Affery. 'I have been in a dream for ever so long. Go away, go away!'

'You said that before,' returned Arthur. 'You used the same expression that night, at the door, when I asked you what was going on here. What do you mean by being in a dream?'

'I an't a going to tell you. Get away! I shouldn't tell you, if you was by yourself; much less with your old sweetheart here.'

It was equally vain for Arthur to entreat, and for Flora to protest. Affery, who had been trembling and struggling the whole time, turned a deaf ear to all adjuration, and was bent on forcing herself out of the closet.

'I'd sooner scream to Jeremiah than say another word! I'll call out to him, Arthur, if you don't give over speaking to me. Now here's the very last word I'll say afore I call to him—If ever you begin to get the better of them two clever ones your own self (you ought to it, as I told you when you first come home, for you haven't been a living here long years, to be made afeared of your life as I have), then do you get the better of 'em afore my face; and then do you say to me, Affery tell your dreams! Maybe, then I'll tell 'em!'

The shutting of the door stopped Arthur from replying. They glided into the places where Jeremiah had left them; and Clennam, stepping forward as that old gentleman returned, informed him that he had accidentally extinguished the candle. Mr Flintwinch looked on as he re-lighted it at the lamp in the hall, and preserved a profound taciturnity respecting the person who had been holding him in conversation. Perhaps his irascibility demanded compensation for some tediousness that the visitor had expended on him; however that was, he took such umbrage at seeing his wife with her apron over her head, that he charged at her, and taking her veiled nose between his thumb and finger, appeared to throw the whole screw-power of his person into the wring he gave it.

Flora, now permanently heavy, did not release Arthur from the survey of the house, until it had extended even to his old garret bedchamber. His thoughts were otherwise occupied than with the tour of inspection; yet he took particular notice at the time, as he afterwards had occasion to remember, of the airlessness and closeness of the house; that they left the track of their footsteps in the dust on the upper floors; and that there was a resistance to the opening of one room door, which occasioned Affery to cry out that somebody was hiding inside, and to continue to believe so, though somebody was sought and not discovered. When they at last returned to his mother's room, they found her shading her face with her muffled hand, and talking in a low voice to the Patriarch as he stood before the fire, whose blue eyes, polished head, and silken locks, turning towards them as they came in, imparted an inestimable value and inexhaustible love of his species to his remark:

'So you have been seeing the premises, seeing the premises—premises—seeing the premises!'

it was not in itself a jewel of benevolence or wisdom, yet he made it an exemplar of both that one would have liked to have a copy of.

CHAPTER 24. The Evening of a Long Day

That illustrious man and great national ornament, Mr Merdle, continued his shining course. It began to be widely understood that one who had done society the admirable service of making so much money out of it, could not be suffered to remain a commoner. A baronetcy was spoken of with confidence; a peerage was frequently mentioned. Rumour had it that Mr Merdle had set his golden face against a baronetcy; that he had plainly intimated to Lord Decimus that a baronetcy was not enough for him; that he had said, 'No—a Peerage, or plain Merdle.' This was reported to have plunged Lord Decimus as nigh to his noble chin in a slough of doubts as so lofty a person could be sunk. For the Barnacles, as a group of themselves in creation, had an idea that such distinctions belonged to them; and that when a soldier, sailor, or lawyer became ennobled, they let him in, as it were, by an act of condescension, at the family door, and immediately shut it again. Not only (said Rumour) had the troubled Decimus his own hereditary part in this impression, but he also knew of several Barnacle claims already on the file, which came into collision with that of the master spirit.

Right or wrong, Rumour was very busy; and Lord Decimus, while he was, or was supposed to be, in stately excogitation of the difficulty, lent her some countenance by taking, on several public occasions, one of those elephantine trots of his through a jungle of overgrown sentences, waving Mr Merdle about on his trunk as Gigantic Enterprise, The Wealth of England, Elasticity, Credit, Capital, Prosperity, and all manner of blessings.

So quietly did the mowing of the old scythe go on, that fully three months had passed unnoticed since the two English brothers had been laid in one tomb in the strangers' cemetery at Rome. Mr and Mrs Sparkler were established in their own house: a little mansion, rather of the Tite Barnacle class, quite a triumph of inconvenience, with a perpetual smell in it of the day before yesterday's soup and coach-horses, but extremely dear, as being exactly in the centre of the habitable globe. In this enviable abode (and envied it really was by many people), Mrs Sparkler had intended to proceed at once to the demolition of the Bosom, when active hostilities had been suspended by the arrival of the Courier with his tidings of death. Mrs Sparkler, who was not unfeeling, had received them with a violent burst of grief, which had lasted twelve hours; after which, she had arisen to see about her mourning, and to take every precaution that could ensure its being as becoming as Mrs Merdle's. A gloom was then cast over more than one distinguished family (according to the politest sources of intelligence), and the Courier went back again.

Mr and Mrs Sparkler had been dining alone, with their gloom cast over them, and Mrs Sparkler reclined on a drawing-room sofa. It was a hot summer Sunday evening. The residence in the centre of the habitable globe, at all times stuffed and close as if it had an incurable cold in its head, was that evening particularly stifling.

The bells of the churches had done their worst in the way of clanging among the unmelodious echoes of the streets, and the lighted windows of the churches had ceased to be yellow in the grey dusk, and had died out opaque black. Mrs Sparkler, lying on her sofa, looking through an open window at the opposite side of a narrow street over boxes of mignonette and flowers, was tired of the view. Mrs Sparkler, looking at another window where her husband stood in the balcony, was tired of that view. Mrs Sparkler, looking at herself in her mourning, was even tired of that view: though, naturally, not so tired of that as of the other two.

'It's like lying in a well,' said Mrs Sparkler, changing her position fretfully. 'Dear me, Edmund, if you have anything to say, why don't you say it?'

Mr Sparkler might have replied with ingenuousness, 'My life, I have nothing to say.' But, as the repartee did not occur to him, he contented himself with coming in from the balcony and standing at the side of his wife's couch.

'Good gracious, Edmund!' said Mrs Sparkler more fretfully still, you are absolutely putting mignonette up your nose! Pray don't!'

Mr Sparkler, in absence of mind—perhaps in a more literal absence of mind than is usually understood by the phrase—had smelt so hard at a sprig in his hand as to be on the verge of the offence in question. He smiled, said, 'I ask your pardon, my dear,' and threw it out of window.

'You make my head ache by remaining in that position, Edmund,' said Mrs Sparkler, raising her eyes to him after another minute; 'you look so aggravatingly large by this light. Do sit down.'

'Certainly, my dear,' said Mr Sparkler, and took a chair on the same spot.

'If I didn't know that the longest day was past,' said Fanny, yawning in a dreary manner, 'I should have felt certain this was the longest day. I never did experience such a day.'

'Is that your fan, my love?' asked Mr Sparkler, picking up one and presenting it.

'Edmund,' returned his wife, more wearily yet, 'don't ask weak questions, I entreat you not. Whose can it be but mine?'

'Yes, I thought it was yours,' said Mr Sparkler.

'Then you shouldn't ask,' retorted Fanny. After a little while she turned on her sofa and exclaimed, 'Dear me, dear me, there never was such a long day as this!' After another little while, she got up slowly, walked about, and came back again.

'My dear,' said Mr Sparkler, flashing with an original conception, 'I think you must have got the fidgets.'

'Oh, Fidgets!' repeated Mrs Sparkler. 'Don't.'

'My adorable girl,' urged Mr Sparkler, 'try your aromatic vinegar. I have often seen my mother try it, and it seemingly refreshed her.

And she is, as I believe you are aware, a remarkably fine woman, with no non—'

'Good Gracious!' exclaimed Fanny, starting up again. 'It's beyond all patience! This is the most wearisome day that ever did dawn upon the world, I am certain.'

Mr Sparkler looked meekly after her as she lounged about the room, and he appeared to be a little frightened. When she had tossed a few trifles about, and had looked down into the darkening street out of all the three windows, she returned to her sofa, and threw herself among its pillows.

'Now Edmund, come here! Come a little nearer, because I want to be able to touch you with my fan, that I may impress you very much with what I am going to say. That will do. Quite close enough. Oh, you do look so big!'

Mr Sparkler apologised for the circumstance, pleaded that he couldn't help it, and said that 'our fellows,' without more particularly indicating whose fellows, used to call him by the name of Quinbus Flestrin, Junior, or the Young Man Mountain.

'You ought to have told me so before,' Fanny complained.

'My dear,' returned Mr Sparkler, rather gratified, 'I didn't know It would interest you, or I would have made a point of telling you.' 'There! For goodness sake, don't talk,' said Fanny; 'I want to talk, myself. Edmund, we must not be alone any more. I must take such precautions as will prevent my being ever again reduced to the state of dreadful depression in which I am this evening.'

'My dear,' answered Mr Sparkler; 'being as you are well known to be, a remarkably fine woman with no—'

'Oh, good GRACIOUS!' cried Fanny.

Mr Sparkler was so discomposed by the energy of this exclamation, accompanied with a flouncing up from the sofa and a flouncing down again, that a minute or two elapsed before he felt himself equal to saying in explanation:

'I mean, my dear, that everybody knows you are calculated to shine in society.'

'Calculated to shine in society,' retorted Fanny with great irritability; 'yes, indeed! And then what happens? I no sooner recover, in a visiting point of view, the shock of poor dear papa's death, and my poor uncle's—though I do not disguise from myself that the last was a happy release, for, if you are not presentable you had much better die—'

'You are not referring to me, my love, I hope?' Mr Sparkler humbly interrupted.

'Edmund, Edmund, you would wear out a Saint. Am I not expressly speaking of my poor uncle?'

'You looked with so much expression at myself, my dear girl,' said Mr Sparkler, 'that I felt a little uncomfortable. Thank you, my love.'

'Now you have put me out,' observed Fanny with a resigned toss of her fan, 'and I had better go to bed.'

'Don't do that, my love,' urged Mr Sparkler. 'Take time.'

Fanny took a good deal of time: lying back with her eyes shut, and her eyebrows raised with a hopeless expression as if she had utterly given up all terrestrial affairs. At length, without the slightest notice, she opened her eyes again, and recommenced in a short, sharp manner:

'What happens then, I ask! What happens? Why, I find myself at the very period when I might shine most in society, and should most like for very momentous reasons to shine in society—I find myself in a situation which to a certain extent disqualifies me for going into society. It's too bad, really!'

'My dear,' said Mr Sparkler. 'I don't think it need keep you at home.' 'Edmund, you ridiculous creature,' returned Fanny, with great indignation; 'do you suppose that a woman in the bloom of youth and not wholly devoid of personal attractions, can put herself, at such a time, in competition as to figure with a woman in every other way her inferior? If you do suppose such a thing, your folly is boundless.'

Mr Sparkler submitted that he had thought 'it might be got over.' 'Got over!' repeated Fanny, with immeasurable scorn.

'For a time,' Mr Sparkler submitted.

Honouring the last feeble suggestion with no notice, Mrs Sparkler declared with bitterness that it really was too bad, and that positively it was enough to make one wish one was dead!

'However,' she said, when she had in some measure recovered from her sense of personal ill-usage; 'provoking as it is, and cruel as it seems, I suppose it must be submitted to.'

'Especially as it was to be expected,' said Mr Sparkler.

'Edmund,' returned his wife, 'if you have nothing more becoming to do than to attempt to insult the woman who has honoured you with her hand, when she finds herself in adversity, I think YOU had better go to bed!'

Mr Sparkler was much afflicted by the charge, and offered a most tender and earnest apology. His apology was accepted; but Mrs Sparkler requested him to go round to the other side of the sofa and sit in the window-curtain, to tone himself down.

'Now, Edmund,' she said, stretching out her fan, and touching him with it at arm's length, 'what I was going to say to you when you began as usual to prose and worry, is, that I shall guard against our being alone any more, and that when circumstances prevent my going out to my own satisfaction, I must arrange to have some people or other always here; for I really cannot, and will not, have another such day as this has been.'

Mr Sparkler's sentiments as to the plan were, in brief, that it had no nonsense about it. He added, 'And besides, you know it's likely that you'll soon have your sister—'

'Dearest Amy, yes!' cried Mrs Sparkler with a sigh of affection. 'Darling little thing! Not, however, that Amy would do here alone.'

Mr Sparkler was going to say 'No?' interrogatively, but he saw his danger and said it assentingly, 'No, Oh dear no; she wouldn't do here alone.'

'No, Edmund. For not only are the virtues of the precious child of that still character that they require a contrast—require life and movement around them to bring them out in their right colours and make one love them of all things; but she will require to be roused, on more accounts than one.'

'That's it,' said Mr Sparkler. 'Roused.'

'Pray don't, Edmund! Your habit of interrupting without having the least thing in the world to say, distracts one. You must be broken of it. Speaking of Amy;—my poor little pet was devotedly attached to poor papa, and no doubt will have lamented his loss exceedingly, and grieved very much. I have done so myself. I have felt it dreadfully. But Amy will no doubt have felt it even more, from having been on the spot the whole time, and having been with poor dear papa at the last; which I unhappily was not.'

Here Fanny stopped to weep, and to say, 'Dear, dear, beloved papa! How truly gentlemanly he was! What a contrast to poor uncle!'

'From the effects of that trying time,' she pursued, 'my good little Mouse will have to be roused. Also, from the effects of this long attendance upon Edward in his illness; an attendance which is not yet over, which may even go on for some time longer, and which in the meanwhile unsettles us all by keeping poor dear papa's affairs from being wound up. Fortunately, however, the papers with his agents here being all sealed up and locked up, as he left them when he providentially came to England, the affairs are in that state of order that they can wait until my brother Edward recovers his health in Sicily, sufficiently to come over, and administer, or execute, or whatever it may be that will have to be done.'

'He couldn't have a better nurse to bring him round,' Mr Sparkler made bold to opine.

'For a wonder, I can agree with you,' returned his wife, languidly turning her eyelids a little in his direction (she held forth, in general, as if to the drawing-room furniture), 'and can adopt your words. He couldn't have a better nurse to bring him round. There are times when my dear child is a little wearing to an active mind; but, as a nurse, she is Perfection. Best of Amys!'

Mr Sparkler, growing rash on his late success, observed that Edward had had, biggodd, a long bout of it, my dear girl.

'If Bout, Edmund,' returned Mrs Sparkler, 'is the slang term for indisposition, he has. If it is not, I am unable to give an opinion on the barbarous language you address to Edward's sister. That he contracted Malaria Fever somewhere, either by travelling day and night to Rome, where, after all, he arrived too late to see poor dear papa before his death—or under some other unwholesome circumstances—is indubitable, if that is what you mean. Likewise that his extremely careless life has made him a very bad subject for it indeed.'

Mr Sparkler considered it a parallel case to that of some of our fellows in the West Indies with Yellow Jack. Mrs Sparkler closed her eyes again, and refused to have any consciousness of our fellows of the West Indies, or of Yellow Jack.

'So, Amy,' she pursued, when she reopened her eyelids, 'will require to be roused from the effects of many tedious and anxious weeks. And lastly, she will require to be roused from a low tendency which I know very well to be at the bottom of her heart. Don't ask me what it is, Edmund, because I must decline to tell you.'

'I am not going to, my dear,' said Mr Sparkler.

'I shall thus have much improvement to effect in my sweet child,' Mrs Sparkler continued, 'and cannot have her near me too soon. Amiable and dear little Twoshoes! As to the settlement of poor papa's affairs, my interest in that is not very selfish. Papa behaved very generously to me when I was married, and I have little or nothing to expect. Provided he had made no will that can come into force, leaving a legacy to Mrs General, I am contented. Dear papa, dear papa.'

She wept again, but Mrs General was the best of restoratives. The name soon stimulated her to dry her eyes and say:

'It is a highly encouraging circumstance in Edward's illness, I am thankful to think, and gives one the greatest confidence in his sense not being impaired, or his proper spirit weakened—down to the time of poor dear papa's death at all events—that he paid off Mrs General instantly, and sent her out of the house. I applaud him for it. I could forgive him a great deal for doing, with such promptitude, so exactly what I would have done myself!'

Mrs Sparkler was in the full glow of her gratification, when a double knock was heard at the door. A very odd knock. Low, as if to avoid making a noise and attracting attention. Long, as if the person knocking were preoccupied in mind, and forgot to leave off.

'Halloa!' said Mr Sparkler. 'Who's this?'

'Not Amy and Edward without notice and without a carriage!' said Mrs Sparkler. 'Look out.'

The room was dark, but the street was lighter, because of its lamps. Mr Sparkler's head peeping over the balcony looked so very bulky and heavy that it seemed on the point of overbalancing him and flattening the unknown below.

'It's one fellow,' said Mr Sparkler. 'I can't see who—stop though!' On this second thought he went out into the balcony again and had another look. He came back as the door was opened, and announced that he believed he had identified 'his governor's tile.' He was not mistaken, for his governor, with his tile in his hand, was introduced immediately afterwards.

'Candles!' said Mrs Sparkler, with a word of excuse for the darkness.

'It's light enough for me,' said Mr Merdle.

When the candles were brought in, Mr Merdle was discovered standing behind the door, picking his lips. 'I thought I'd give you a call,' he said. 'I am rather particularly occupied just now; and, as I happened to be out for a stroll, I thought I'd give you a call.'

As he was in dinner dress, Fanny asked him where he had been dining?

'Well,' said Mr Merdle, 'I haven't been dining anywhere, particularly.'

'Of course you have dined?' said Fanny.

'Why—no, I haven't exactly dined,' said Mr Merdle.

He had passed his hand over his yellow forehead and considered, as if he were not sure about it. Something to eat was proposed. 'No, thank you,' said Mr Merdle, 'I don't feel inclined for it. I was to have dined out along with Mrs Merdle. But as I didn't feel inclined for dinner, I let Mrs Merdle go by herself just as we were getting into the carriage, and thought I'd take a stroll instead.'

Would he have tea or coffee? 'No, thank you,' said Mr Merdle. 'I looked in at the Club, and got a bottle of wine.'

At this period of his visit, Mr Merdle took the chair which Edmund Sparkler had offered him, and which he had hitherto been pushing slowly about before him, like a dull man with a pair of skates on for the first time, who could not make up his mind to start. He now put his hat upon another chair beside him, and, looking down into it as if it were some twenty feet deep, said again: 'You see I thought I'd give you a call.'

'Flattering to us,' said Fanny, 'for you are not a calling man.'

'No—no,' returned Mr Merdle, who was by this time taking himself into custody under both coat-sleeves. 'No, I am not a calling man.'

'You have too much to do for that,' said Fanny. 'Having so much to do, Mr Merdle, loss of appetite is a serious thing with you, and you must have it seen to. You must not be ill.' 'Oh! I am very well,' replied Mr Merdle, after deliberating about it. 'I am as well as I usually am. I am well enough. I am as well as I want to be.'

The master-mind of the age, true to its characteristic of being at all times a mind that had as little as possible to say for itself and great difficulty in saying it, became mute again. Mrs Sparkler began to wonder how long the master-mind meant to stay.

'I was speaking of poor papa when you came in, sir.'

'Aye! Quite a coincidence,' said Mr Merdle.

Fanny did not see that; but felt it incumbent on her to continue talking. 'I was saying,' she pursued, 'that my brother's illness has occasioned a delay in examining and arranging papa's property.'

'Yes,' said Mr Merdle; 'yes. There has been a delay.'

'Not that it is of consequence,' said Fanny.

'Not,' assented Mr Merdle, after having examined the cornice of all that part of the room which was within his range: 'not that it is of any consequence.'

'My only anxiety is,' said Fanny, 'that Mrs General should not get anything.'

'She won't get anything,' said Mr Merdle.

Fanny was delighted to hear him express the opinion. Mr Merdle, after taking another gaze into the depths of his hat as if he thought he saw something at the bottom, rubbed his hair and slowly appended to his last remark the confirmatory words, 'Oh dear no. No. Not she. Not likely.'

As the topic seemed exhausted, and Mr Merdle too, Fanny inquired if he were going to take up Mrs Merdle and the carriage in his way home?

'No,' he answered; 'I shall go by the shortest way, and leave Mrs Merdle to—' here he looked all over the palms of both his hands as if he were telling his own fortune—'to take care of herself. I dare say she'll manage to do it.'

'Probably,' said Fanny.

There was then a long silence; during which, Mrs Sparkler, lying back on her sofa again, shut her eyes and raised her eyebrows in her former retirement from mundane affairs.

'But, however,' said Mr Merdle, 'I am equally detaining you and myself. I thought I'd give you a call, you know.'

'Charmed, I am sure,' said Fanny.

'So I am off,' added Mr Merdle, getting up. 'Could you lend me a penknife?'

It was an odd thing, Fanny smilingly observed, for her who could seldom prevail upon herself even to write a letter, to lend to a man of such vast business as Mr Merdle. 'Isn't it?' Mr Merdle acquiesced; 'but I want one; and I know you have got several little wedding keepsakes about, with scissors and tweezers and such things in them. You shall have it back to-morrow.'

'Edmund,' said Mrs Sparkler, 'open (now, very carefully, I beg and beseech, for you are so very awkward) the mother of pearl box on my little table there, and give Mr Merdle the mother of pearl penknife.'

'Thank you,' said Mr Merdle; 'but if you have got one with a darker handle, I think I should prefer one with a darker handle.'

'Tortoise-shell?'

'Thank you,' said Mr Merdle; 'yes. I think I should prefer tortoise-shell.'

Edmund accordingly received instructions to open the tortoise-shell box, and give Mr Merdle the tortoise-shell knife. On his doing so, his wife said to the master-spirit graciously:

'I will forgive you, if you ink it.'

'I'll undertake not to ink it,' said Mr Merdle.

The illustrious visitor then put out his coat-cuff, and for a moment entombed Mrs Sparkler's hand: wrist, bracelet, and all. Where his own hand had shrunk to, was not made manifest, but it was as remote from Mrs Sparkler's sense of touch as if he had been a highly meritorious Chelsea Veteran or Greenwich Pensioner.

Thoroughly convinced, as he went out of the room, that it was the longest day that ever did come to an end at last, and that there never was a woman, not wholly devoid of personal attractions, so worn out by idiotic and lumpish people, Fanny passed into the balcony for a breath of air. Waters of vexation filled her eyes; and they had the effect of making the famous Mr Merdle, in going down the street, appear to leap, and waltz, and gyrate, as if he were possessed of several Devils.

CHAPTER 25. The Chief Butler Resigns the Seals of Office

The dinner-party was at the great Physician's. Bar was there, and in full force. Ferdinand Barnacle was there, and in his most engaging state. Few ways of life were hidden from Physician, and he was oftener in its darkest places than even Bishop. There were brilliant ladies about London who perfectly doted on him, my dear, as the most charming creature and the most delightful person, who would have been shocked to find themselves so close to him if they could have known on what sights those thoughtful eyes of his had rested within an hour or two, and near to whose beds, and under what roofs, his composed figure had stood. But Physician was a composed man, who performed neither on his own trumpet, nor on the trumpets of other people. Many wonderful things did he see and hear, and much irreconcilable moral contradiction did he pass his life among; yet his equality of compassion was no more disturbed than the Divine Master's of all healing was. He went, like the rain, among the just and unjust, doing all the good he could, and neither proclaiming it in the synagogues nor at the corner of streets.

As no man of large experience of humanity, however quietly carried it may be, can fail to be invested with an interest peculiar to the possession of such knowledge, Physician was an attractive man. Even the daintier gentlemen and ladies who had no idea of his secret, and who would have been startled out of more wits than they had, by the monstrous impropriety of his proposing to them 'Come and see what I see!' confessed his attraction. Where he was, something real was. And half a grain of reality, like the smallest portion of some other scarce natural productions, will flavour an enormous quantity of diluent.

It came to pass, therefore, that Physician's little dinners always presented people in their least conventional lights. The guests said to themselves, whether they were conscious of it or no, 'Here is a man who really has an acquaintance with us as we are, who is admitted to some of us every day with our wigs and paint off, who hears the wanderings of our minds, and sees the undisguised expression of our faces, when both are past our control; we may as well make an approach to reality with him, for the man has got the better of us and is too strong for us.' Therefore, Physician's guests came out so surprisingly at his round table that they were almost natural.

Bar's knowledge of that agglomeration of jurymen which is called humanity was as sharp as a razor; yet a razor is not a generally convenient instrument, and Physician's plain bright scalpel, though far less keen, was adaptable to far wider purposes. Bar knew all about the gullibility and knavery of people; but Physician could have given him a better insight into their tendernesses and affections, in one week of his rounds, than Westminster Hall and all the circuits put together, in threescore years and ten. Bar always had a suspicion of this, and perhaps was glad to encourage it (for, if the world were really a great Law Court, one would think that the last day of Term could not too soon arrive); and so he liked and respected Physician quite as much as any other kind of man did.

Mr Merdle's default left a Banquo's chair at the table; but, if he had been there, he would have merely made the difference of Banquo in it, and consequently he was no loss. Bar, who picked up all sorts of odds and ends about Westminster Hall, much as a raven would have done if he had passed as much of his time there, had been picking up a great many straws lately and tossing them about, to try which way the Merdle wind blew. He now had a little talk on the subject with Mrs Merdle herself; sidling up to that lady, of course, with his double eye-glass and his jury droop.

'A certain bird,' said Bar; and he looked as if it could have been no other bird than a magpie; 'has been whispering among us lawyers lately, that there is to be an addition to the titled personages of this realm.'

'Really?' said Mrs Merdle.

'Yes,' said Bar. 'Has not the bird been whispering in very different ears from ours—in lovely ears?' He looked expressively at Mrs Merdle's nearest ear-ring.

'Do you mean mine?' asked Mrs Merdle.

'When I say lovely,' said Bar, 'I always mean you.'

'You never mean anything, I think,' returned Mrs Merdle (not displeased).

'Oh, cruelly unjust!' said Bar. 'But, the bird.'

'I am the last person in the world to hear news,' observed Mrs Merdle, carelessly arranging her stronghold. 'Who is it?'

'What an admirable witness you would make!' said Bar. 'No jury (unless we could empanel one of blind men) could resist you, if you were ever so bad a one; but you would be such a good one!'

'Why, you ridiculous man?' asked Mrs Merdle, laughing.

Bar waved his double eye-glass three or four times between himself and the Bosom, as a rallying answer, and inquired in his most insinuating accents:

'What am I to call the most elegant, accomplished and charming of women, a few weeks, or it may be a few days, hence?'

'Didn't your bird tell you what to call her?' answered Mrs Merdle. 'Do ask it to-morrow, and tell me the next time you see me what it says.'

This led to further passages of similar pleasantry between the two; but Bar, with all his sharpness, got nothing out of them. Physician, on the other hand, taking Mrs Merdle down to her carriage and attending on her as she put on her cloak, inquired into the symptoms with his usual calm directness.

'May I ask,' he said, 'is this true about Merdle?'

'My dear doctor,' she returned, 'you ask me the very question that I was half disposed to ask you.' 'To ask me! Why me?'

'Upon my honour, I think Mr Merdle reposes greater confidence in you than in any one.'

'On the contrary, he tells me absolutely nothing, even professionally. You have heard the talk, of course?'

'Of course I have. But you know what Mr Merdle is; you know how taciturn and reserved he is. I assure you I have no idea what foundation for it there may be. I should like it to be true; why should I deny that to you? You would know better, if I did!'

'Just so,' said Physician.

'But whether it is all true, or partly true, or entirely false, I am wholly unable to say. It is a most provoking situation, a most absurd situation; but you know Mr Merdle, and are not surprised.'

Physician was not surprised, handed her into her carriage, and bade her Good Night. He stood for a moment at his own hall door, looking sedately at the elegant equipage as it rattled away. On his return up-stairs, the rest of the guests soon dispersed, and he was left alone. Being a great reader of all kinds of literature (and never at all apologetic for that weakness), he sat down comfortably to read.

The clock upon his study table pointed to a few minutes short of twelve, when his attention was called to it by a ringing at the door bell. A man of plain habits, he had sent his servants to bed and must needs go down to open the door. He went down, and there found a man without hat or coat, whose shirt sleeves were rolled up tight to his shoulders. For a moment, he thought the man had been fighting: the rather, as he was much agitated and out of breath. A second look, however, showed him that the man was particularly clean, and not otherwise discomposed as to his dress than as it answered this description.

'I come from the warm-baths, sir, round in the neighbouring street.'

'And what is the matter at the warm-baths?'

'Would you please to come directly, sir. We found that, lying on the table.'

He put into the physician's hand a scrap of paper. Physician looked at it, and read his own name and address written in pencil; nothing more. He looked closer at the writing, looked at the man, took his hat from its peg, put the key of his door in his pocket, and they hurried away together.

When they came to the warm-baths, all the other people belonging to that establishment were looking out for them at the door, and running up and down the passages. 'Request everybody else to keep back, if you please,' said the physician aloud to the master; 'and do you take me straight to the place, my friend,' to the messenger.

The messenger hurried before him, along a grove of little rooms, and turning into one at the end of the grove, looked round the door. Physician was close upon him, and looked round the door too.

There was a bath in that corner, from which the water had been hastily drained off. Lying in it, as in a grave or sarcophagus, with a hurried drapery of sheet and blanket thrown across it, was the body of a heavily-made man, with an obtuse head, and coarse, mean, common features. A sky-light had been opened to release the steam with which the room had been filled; but it hung, condensed into water-drops, heavily upon the walls, and heavily upon the face and figure in the bath. The room was still hot, and the marble of the bath still warm; but the face and figure were clammy to the touch. The white marble at the bottom of the bath was veined with a dreadful red. On the ledge at the side, were an empty laudanum-bottle and a tortoise-shell handled penknife—soiled, but not with ink.

'Separation of jugular vein—death rapid—been dead at least half an hour.' This echo of the physician's words ran through the passages and little rooms, and through the house while he was yet straightening himself from having bent down to reach to the bottom of the bath, and while he was yet dabbling his hands in water; redly veining it as the marble was veined, before it mingled into one tint.

He turned his eyes to the dress upon the sofa, and to the watch, money, and pocket-book on the table. A folded note half buckled up in the pocket-book, and half protruding from it, caught his observant glance. He looked at it, touched it, pulled it a little further out from among the leaves, said quietly, 'This is addressed to me,' and opened and read it.

There were no directions for him to give. The people of the house knew what to do; the proper authorities were soon brought; and they took an equable business-like possession of the deceased, and of what had been his property, with no greater disturbance of manner or countenance than usually attends the winding-up of a clock. Physician was glad to walk out into the night air—was even glad, in spite of his great experience, to sit down upon a door-step for a little while: feeling sick and faint.

Bar was a near neighbour of his, and, when he came to the house, he saw a light in the room where he knew his friend often sat late getting up his work. As the light was never there when Bar was not, it gave him assurance that Bar was not yet in bed. In fact, this busy bee had a verdict to get to-morrow, against evidence, and was improving the shining hours in setting snares for the gentlemen of the jury.

Physician's knock astonished Bar; but, as he immediately suspected that somebody had come to tell him that somebody else was robbing him, or otherwise trying to get the better of him, he came down promptly and softly. He had been clearing his head with a lotion of cold water, as a good preparative to providing hot water for the heads of the jury, and had been reading with the neck of his shirt thrown wide open that he might the more freely choke the opposite witnesses. In consequence, he came down, looking rather wild. Seeing Physician, the least expected of men, he looked wilder and said, 'What's the matter?'

'You asked me once what Merdle's complaint was.'

'Extraordinary answer! I know I did.'

'I told you I had not found out.'

'Yes. I know you did.'

'I have found it out.'

'My God!' said Bar, starting back, and clapping his hand upon the other's breast. 'And so have I! I see it in your face.'

They went into the nearest room, where Physician gave him the letter to read. He read it through half-a-dozen times. There was not much in it as to quantity; but it made a great demand on his close and continuous attention. He could not sufficiently give utterance to his regret that he had not himself found a clue to this. The smallest clue, he said, would have made him master of the case, and what a case it would have been to have got to the bottom of!

Physician had engaged to break the intelligence in Harley Street. Bar could not at once return to his inveiglements of the most enlightened and remarkable jury he had ever seen in that box, with whom, he could tell his learned friend, no shallow sophistry would go down, and no unhappily abused professional tact and skill prevail (this was the way he meant to begin with them); so he said he would go too, and would loiter to and fro near the house while his friend was inside. They walked there, the better to recover self-possession in the air; and the wings of day were fluttering the night when Physician knocked at the door.

A footman of rainbow hues, in the public eye, was sitting up for his master—that is to say, was fast asleep in the kitchen over a couple of candles and a newspaper, demonstrating the great accumulation of mathematical odds against the probabilities of a house being set on fire by accident When this serving man was roused, Physician had still to await the rousing of the Chief Butler. At last that noble creature came into the dining-room in a flannel gown and list shoes; but with his cravat on, and a Chief Butler all over. It was morning now. Physician had opened the shutters of one window while waiting, that he might see the light. 'Mrs Merdle's maid must be called, and told to get Mrs Merdle up, and prepare her as gently as she can to see me. I have dreadful news to break to her.'

Thus Physician to the Chief Butler. The latter, who had a candle in his hand, called his man to take it away. Then he approached the window with dignity; looking on at Physician's news exactly as he had looked on at the dinners in that very room.

'Mr Merdle is dead.'

'I should wish,' said the Chief Butler, 'to give a month's notice.'

'Mr Merdle has destroyed himself.'

'Sir,' said the Chief Butler, 'that is very unpleasant to the feelings of one in my position, as calculated to awaken prejudice; and I should wish to leave immediately.'

'If you are not shocked, are you not surprised, man?' demanded the Physician, warmly.

The Chief Butler, erect and calm, replied in these memorable words.

'Sir, Mr Merdle never was the gentleman, and no ungentlemanly act on Mr Merdle's part would surprise me. Is there anybody else I can send to you, or any other directions I can give before I leave, respecting what you would wish to be done?'

When Physician, after discharging himself of his trust up-stairs, rejoined Bar in the street, he said no more of his interview with Mrs Merdle than that he had not yet told her all, but that what he had told her she had borne pretty well. Bar had devoted his leisure in the street to the construction of a most ingenious man-trap for catching the whole of his jury at a blow; having got that matter settled in his mind, it was lucid on the late catastrophe, and they walked home slowly, discussing it in every bearing. Before parting at the Physician's door, they both looked up at the sunny morning sky, into which the smoke of a few early fires and the breath and voices of a few early stirrers were peacefully rising, and then looked round upon the immense city, and said, if all those hundreds and thousands of beggared people who were yet asleep could only know, as they two spoke, the ruin that impended over them, what a fearful cry against one miserable soul would go up to Heaven!

The report that the great man was dead, got about with astonishing rapidity. At first, he was dead of all the diseases that ever were known, and of several bran-new maladies invented with the speed of Light to meet the demand of the occasion. He had concealed a dropsy from infancy, he had inherited a large estate of water on the chest from his grandfather, he had had an operation performed upon him every morning of his life for eighteen years, he had been subject to the explosion of important veins in his body after the manner of fireworks, he had had something the matter with his lungs, he had had something the matter with his heart, he had had something the matter with his brain. Five hundred people who sat down to breakfast entirely uninformed on the whole subject, believed before they had done breakfast, that they privately and personally knew Physician to have said to Mr Merdle, 'You must expect to go out, some day, like the snuff of a candle;' and that they knew Mr Merdle to have said to Physician, 'A man can die but once.' By about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, something the matter with the brain, became the favourite theory against the field; and by twelve the something had been distinctly ascertained to be 'Pressure.'

Pressure was so entirely satisfactory to the public mind, and seemed to make everybody so comfortable, that it might have lasted all day but for Bar's having taken the real state of the case into Court at half-past nine. This led to its beginning to be currently whispered all over London by about one, that Mr Merdle had killed himself. Pressure, however, so far from being overthrown by the discovery, became a greater favourite than ever. There was a general moralising upon Pressure, in every street. All the people who had tried to make money and had not been able to do it, said, There you were! You no sooner began to devote yourself to the pursuit of wealth than you got Pressure. The idle people improved the occasion in a similar manner. See, said they, what you brought yourself to by work, work, work! You persisted in working, you overdid it. Pressure came on, and you were done for! This consideration was very potent in many quarters, but nowhere more so than among the young clerks and partners who had never been in the slightest danger of overdoing it. These, one and all, declared, quite piously, that they hoped they would never forget the warning as long as they lived, and that their conduct might be so regulated as to keep off Pressure, and preserve them, a comfort to their friends, for many years.

But, at about the time of High 'Change, Pressure began to wane, and appalling whispers to circulate, east, west, north, and south. At first they were faint, and went no further than a doubt whether Mr Merdle's wealth would be found to be as vast as had been supposed; whether there might not be a temporary difficulty in 'realising' it; whether there might not even be a temporary suspension (say a month or so), on the part of the wonderful Bank. As the whispers became louder, which they did from that time every minute, they became more threatening. He had sprung from nothing, by no natural growth or process that any one could account for; he had been, after all, a low, ignorant fellow; he had been a down-looking man, and no one had ever been able to catch his eye; he had been taken up by all sorts of people in quite an unaccountable manner; he had never had any money of his own, his ventures had been utterly reckless, and his expenditure had been most enormous. In steady progression, as the day declined, the talk rose in sound and purpose. He had left a letter at the Baths addressed to his physician, and his physician had got the letter, and the letter would be produced at the Inquest on the morrow, and it would fall like a thunderbolt upon the multitude he had deluded. Numbers of men in every profession and trade would be blighted by his insolvency; old people who had been in easy circumstances all their lives would have no place of repentance for their trust in him but the workhouse; legions of women and children would have their whole future desolated by the hand of this mighty scoundrel. Every partaker of his magnificent feasts would be seen to have been a sharer in the plunder of innumerable homes; every servile worshipper of riches who had helped to set him on his pedestal, would have done better to worship the Devil point-blank. So, the talk, lashed louder and higher by confirmation on confirmation, and by edition after edition of the evening papers, swelled into such a roar when night came, as might have brought one to believe that a solitary watcher on the gallery above the Dome of St Paul's would have perceived the night air to be laden with a heavy muttering of the name of Merdle, coupled with every form of execration.

For by that time it was known that the late Mr Merdle's complaint had been simply Forgery and Robbery. He, the uncouth object of such wide-spread adulation, the sitter at great men's feasts, the roc's egg of great ladies' assemblies, the subduer of exclusiveness, the leveller of pride, the patron of patrons, the bargain-driver with a Minister for Lordships of the Circumlocution Office, the recipient of more acknowledgment within some ten or fifteen years, at most, than had been bestowed in England upon all peaceful public benefactors, and upon all the leaders of all the Arts and Sciences, with all their works to testify for them, during two centuries at least—he, the shining wonder, the new constellation to be followed by the wise men bringing gifts, until it stopped over a certain carrion at the bottom of a bath and disappeared—was simply the greatest Forger and the greatest Thief that ever cheated the gallows.

CHAPTER 26. Reaping the Whirlwind

With a precursory sound of hurried breath and hurried feet, Mr Pancks rushed into Arthur Clennam's Counting-house. The Inquest was over, the letter was public, the Bank was broken, the other model structures of straw had taken fire and were turned to smoke. The admired piratical ship had blown up, in the midst of a vast fleet of ships of all rates, and boats of all sizes; and on the deep was nothing but ruin; nothing but burning hulls, bursting magazines, great guns self-exploded tearing friends and neighbours to pieces, drowning men clinging to unseaworthy spars and going down every minute, spent swimmers floating dead, and sharks.

The usual diligence and order of the Counting-house at the Works were overthrown. Unopened letters and unsorted papers lay strewn about the desk. In the midst of these tokens of prostrated energy and dismissed hope, the master of the Counting-house stood idle in his usual place, with his arms crossed on the desk, and his head bowed down upon them.

Mr Pancks rushed in and saw him, and stood still. In another minute, Mr Pancks's arms were on the desk, and Mr Pancks's head was bowed down upon them; and for some time they remained in these attitudes, idle and silent, with the width of the little room between them. Mr Pancks was the first to lift up his head and speak.

'I persuaded you to it, Mr Clennam. I know it. Say what you will.

You can't say more to me than I say to myself. You can't say more than I deserve.'

'O, Pancks, Pancks!' returned Clennam, 'don't speak of deserving. What do I myself deserve!'

'Better luck,' said Pancks.

'I,' pursued Clennam, without attending to him, 'who have ruined my partner! Pancks, Pancks, I have ruined Doyce! The honest, self-helpful, indefatigable old man who has worked his way all through his life; the man who has contended against so much disappointment, and who has brought out of it such a good and hopeful nature; the man I have felt so much for, and meant to be so true and useful to; I have ruined him—brought him to shame and disgrace—ruined him, ruined him!'

The agony into which the reflection wrought his mind was so distressing to see, that Mr Pancks took hold of himself by the hair of his head, and tore it in desperation at the spectacle.

'Reproach me!' cried Pancks. 'Reproach me, sir, or I'll do myself an injury. Say,—You fool, you villain. Say,—Ass, how could you do it; Beast, what did you mean by it! Catch hold of me somewhere.

Say something abusive to me!' All the time, Mr Pancks was tearing at his tough hair in a most pitiless and cruel manner.

'If you had never yielded to this fatal mania, Pancks,' said Clennam, more in commiseration than retaliation, 'it would have been how much better for you, and how much better for me!'

'At me again, sir!' cried Pancks, grinding his teeth in remorse. 'At me again!' 'If you had never gone into those accursed calculations, and brought out your results with such abominable clearness,' groaned Clennam, 'it would have been how much better for you, Pancks, and how much better for me!'

'At me again, sir!' exclaimed Pancks, loosening his hold of his hair; 'at me again, and again!'

Clennam, however, finding him already beginning to be pacified, had said all he wanted to say, and more. He wrung his hand, only adding, 'Blind leaders of the blind, Pancks! Blind leaders of the blind! But Doyce, Doyce, Doyce; my injured partner!' That brought his head down on the desk once more.

Their former attitudes and their former silence were once more first encroached upon by Pancks.

'Not been to bed, sir, since it began to get about. Been high and low, on the chance of finding some hope of saving any cinders from the fire. All in vain. All gone. All vanished.'

'I know it,' returned Clennam, 'too well.'

Mr Pancks filled up a pause with a groan that came out of the very depths of his soul.

'Only yesterday, Pancks,' said Arthur; 'only yesterday, Monday, I had the fixed intention of selling, realising, and making an end of it.'

'I can't say as much for myself, sir,' returned Pancks. 'Though it's wonderful how many people I've heard of, who were going to realise yesterday, of all days in the three hundred and sixty-five, if it hadn't been too late!'

His steam-like breathings, usually droll in their effect, were more tragic than so many groans: while from head to foot, he was in that begrimed, besmeared, neglected state, that he might have been an authentic portrait of Misfortune which could scarcely be discerned through its want of cleaning.

'Mr Clennam, had you laid out—everything?' He got over the break before the last word, and also brought out the last word itself with great difficulty.

'Everything.'

Mr Pancks took hold of his tough hair again, and gave it such a wrench that he pulled out several prongs of it. After looking at these with an eye of wild hatred, he put them in his pocket.

'My course,' said Clennam, brushing away some tears that had been silently dropping down his face, 'must be taken at once. What wretched amends I can make must be made. I must clear my unfortunate partner's reputation. I must retain nothing for myself. I must resign to our creditors the power of management I have so much abused, and I must work out as much of my fault—or crime—as is susceptible of being worked out in the rest of my days.'

'Is it impossible, sir, to tide over the present?'

'Out of the question. Nothing can be tided over now, Pancks. The sooner the business can pass out of my hands, the better for it. There are engagements to be met, this week, which would bring the catastrophe before many days were over, even if I would postpone it for a single day by going on for that space, secretly knowing what I know. All last night I thought of what I would do; what remains is to do it.'

'Not entirely of yourself?' said Pancks, whose face was as damp as if his steam were turning into water as fast as he dismally blew it off. 'Have some legal help.'

'Perhaps I had better.'

'Have Rugg.'

'There is not much to do. He will do it as well as another.'

'Shall I fetch Rugg, Mr Clennam?'

'If you could spare the time, I should be much obliged to you.'

Mr Pancks put on his hat that moment, and steamed away to Pentonville. While he was gone Arthur never raised his head from the desk, but remained in that one position.

Mr Pancks brought his friend and professional adviser, Mr Rugg, back with him. Mr Rugg had had such ample experience, on the road, of Mr Pancks's being at that present in an irrational state of mind, that he opened his professional mediation by requesting that gentleman to take himself out of the way. Mr Pancks, crushed and submissive, obeyed.

'He is not unlike what my daughter was, sir, when we began the Breach of Promise action of Rugg and Bawkins, in which she was Plaintiff,' said Mr Rugg. 'He takes too strong and direct an interest in the case. His feelings are worked upon. There is no getting on, in our profession, with feelings worked upon, sir.'

As he pulled off his gloves and put them in his hat, he saw, in a side glance or two, that a great change had come over his client.

'I am sorry to perceive, sir,' said Mr Rugg, 'that you have been allowing your own feelings to be worked upon. Now, pray don't, pray don't. These losses are much to be deplored, sir, but we must look 'em in the face.' 'If the money I have sacrificed had been all my own, Mr Rugg,' sighed Mr Clennam, 'I should have cared far less.'

'Indeed, sir?' said Mr Rugg, rubbing his hands with a cheerful air.

'You surprise me. That's singular, sir. I have generally found, in my experience, that it's their own money people are most particular about. I have seen people get rid of a good deal of other people's money, and bear it very well: very well indeed.'

With these comforting remarks, Mr Rugg seated himself on an office-stool at the desk and proceeded to business.

'Now, Mr Clennam, by your leave, let us go into the matter. Let us see the state of the case. The question is simple. The question is the usual plain, straightforward, common-sense question. What can we do for ourself? What can we do for ourself?'

'This is not the question with me, Mr Rugg,' said Arthur. 'You mistake it in the beginning. It is, what can I do for my partner, how can I best make reparation to him?'

'I am afraid, sir, do you know,' argued Mr Rugg persuasively, 'that you are still allowing your feeling to be worked upon. I don't like the term "reparation," sir, except as a lever in the hands of counsel. Will you excuse my saying that I feel it my duty to offer you the caution, that you really must not allow your feelings to be worked upon?'

'Mr Rugg,' said Clennam, nerving himself to go through with what he had resolved upon, and surprising that gentleman by appearing, in his despondency, to have a settled determination of purpose; 'you give me the impression that you will not be much disposed to adopt the course I have made up my mind to take. If your disapproval of it should render you unwilling to discharge such business as it necessitates, I am sorry for it, and must seek other aid. But I will represent to you at once, that to argue against it with me is useless.'

'Good, sir,' answered Mr Rugg, shrugging his shoulders.'Good, sir. Since the business is to be done by some hands, let it be done by mine. Such was my principle in the case of Rugg and Bawkins. Such is my principle in most cases.'

Clennam then proceeded to state to Mr Rugg his fixed resolution. He told Mr Rugg that his partner was a man of great simplicity and integrity, and that in all he meant to do, he was guided above all things by a knowledge of his partner's character, and a respect for his feelings. He explained that his partner was then absent on an enterprise of importance, and that it particularly behoved himself publicly to accept the blame of what he had rashly done, and publicly to exonerate his partner from all participation in the responsibility of it, lest the successful conduct of that enterprise should be endangered by the slightest suspicion wrongly attaching to his partner's honour and credit in another country. He told Mr Rugg that to clear his partner morally, to the fullest extent, and publicly and unreservedly to declare that he, Arthur Clennam, of that Firm, had of his own sole act, and even expressly against his partner's caution, embarked its resources in the swindles that had lately perished, was the only real atonement within his power; was a better atonement to the particular man than it would be to many men; and was therefore the atonement he had first to make. With this view, his intention was to print a declaration to the foregoing effect, which he had already drawn up; and, besides circulating it among all who had dealings with the House, to advertise it in the public papers. Concurrently with this measure (the description of which cost Mr Rugg innumerable wry faces and great uneasiness in his limbs), he would address a letter to all the creditors, exonerating his partner in a solemn manner, informing them of the stoppage of the House until their pleasure could be known and his partner communicated with, and humbly submitting himself to their direction. If, through their consideration for his partner's innocence, the affairs could ever be got into such train as that the business could be profitably resumed, and its present downfall overcome, then his own share in it should revert to his partner, as the only reparation he could make to him in money value for the distress and loss he had unhappily brought upon him, and he himself, at as mall a salary as he could live upon, would ask to be allowed to serve the business as a faithful clerk.

Though Mr Rugg saw plainly there was no preventing this from being done, still the wryness of his face and the uneasiness of his limbs so sorely required the propitiation of a Protest, that he made one.

'I offer no objection, sir,' said he, 'I argue no point with you. I will carry out your views, sir; but, under protest.' Mr Rugg then stated, not without prolixity, the heads of his protest. These were, in effect, because the whole town, or he might say the whole country, was in the first madness of the late discovery, and the resentment against the victims would be very strong: those who had not been deluded being certain to wax exceedingly wroth with them for not having been as wise as they were: and those who had been deluded being certain to find excuses and reasons for themselves, of which they were equally certain to see that other sufferers were wholly devoid: not to mention the great probability of every individual sufferer persuading himself, to his violent indignation, that but for the example of all the other sufferers he never would have put himself in the way of suffering. Because such a declaration as Clennam's, made at such a time, would certainly draw down upon him a storm of animosity, rendering it impossible to calculate on forbearance in the creditors, or on unanimity among them; and exposing him a solitary target to a straggling cross-fire, which might bring him down from half-a-dozen quarters at once.

To all this Clennam merely replied that, granting the whole protest, nothing in it lessened the force, or could lessen the force, of the voluntary and public exoneration of his partner. He therefore, once and for all, requested Mr Rugg's immediate aid in getting the business despatched. Upon that, Mr Rugg fell to work; and Arthur, retaining no property to himself but his clothes and books, and a little loose money, placed his small private banker's-account with the papers of the business.

The disclosure was made, and the storm raged fearfully. Thousands of people were wildly staring about for somebody alive to heap reproaches on; and this notable case, courting publicity, set the living somebody so much wanted, on a scaffold. When people who had nothing to do with the case were so sensible of its flagrancy, people who lost money by it could scarcely be expected to deal mildly with it. Letters of reproach and invective showered in from the creditors; and Mr Rugg, who sat upon the high stool every day and read them all, informed his client within a week that he feared there were writs out.

'I must take the consequences of what I have done,' said Clennam. 'The writs will find me here.'

On the very next morning, as he was turning in Bleeding Heart Yard by Mrs Plornish's corner, Mrs Plornish stood at the door waiting for him, and mysteriously besought him to step into Happy Cottage. There he found Mr Rugg.

'I thought I'd wait for you here. I wouldn't go on to the Counting-house this morning if I was you, sir.'

'Why not, Mr Rugg?'

'There are as many as five out, to my knowledge.'

'It cannot be too soon over,' said Clennam. 'Let them take me at once.'

'Yes, but,' said Mr Rugg, getting between him and the door, 'hear reason, hear reason. They'll take you soon enough, Mr Clennam, I don't doubt; but, hear reason. It almost always happens, in these cases, that some insignificant matter pushes itself in front and makes much of itself. Now, I find there's a little one out—a mere Palace Court jurisdiction—and I have reason to believe that a caption may be made upon that. I wouldn't be taken upon that.'

'Why not?' asked Clennam.

'I'd be taken on a full-grown one, sir,' said Mr Rugg. 'It's as well to keep up appearances. As your professional adviser, I should prefer your being taken on a writ from one of the Superior Courts, if you have no objection to do me that favour. It looks better.'

'Mr Rugg,' said Arthur, in his dejection, 'my only wish is, that it should be over. I will go on, and take my chance.'

'Another word of reason, sir!' cried Mr Rugg. 'Now, this is reason. The other may be taste; but this is reason. If you should be taken on a little one, sir, you would go to the Marshalsea. Now, you know what the Marshalsea is. Very close. Excessively confined. Whereas in the King's Bench—' Mr Rugg waved his right hand freely, as expressing abundance of space. 'I would rather,' said Clennam, 'be taken to the Marshalsea than to any other prison.'

'Do you say so indeed, sir?' returned Mr Rugg. 'Then this is taste, too, and we may be walking.'

He was a little offended at first, but he soon overlooked it. They walked through the Yard to the other end. The Bleeding Hearts were more interested in Arthur since his reverses than formerly; now regarding him as one who was true to the place and had taken up his freedom. Many of them came out to look after him, and to observe to one another, with great unctuousness, that he was 'pulled down by it.' Mrs Plornish and her father stood at the top of the steps at their own end, much depressed and shaking their heads.

There was nobody visibly in waiting when Arthur and Mr Rugg arrived at the Counting-house. But an elderly member of the Jewish persuasion, preserved in rum, followed them close, and looked in at the glass before Mr Rugg had opened one of the day's letters.

'Oh!' said Mr Rugg, looking up. 'How do you do? Step in—Mr Clennam, I think this is the gentleman I was mentioning.'

This gentleman explained the object of his visit to be 'a tyfling madder ob bithznithz,' and executed his legal function.

'Shall I accompany you, Mr Clennam?' asked Mr Rugg politely, rubbing his hands.

'I would rather go alone, thank you. Be so good as send me my clothes.' Mr Rugg in a light airy way replied in the affirmative, and shook hands with him. He and his attendant then went down-stairs, got into the first conveyance they found, and drove to the old gates.

'Where I little thought, Heaven forgive me,' said Clennam to himself, 'that I should ever enter thus!'

Mr Chivery was on the Lock, and Young John was in the Lodge: either newly released from it, or waiting to take his own spell of duty. Both were more astonished on seeing who the prisoner was, than one might have thought turnkeys would have been. The elder Mr Chivery shook hands with him in a shame-faced kind of way, and said, 'I don't call to mind, sir, as I was ever less glad to see you.' The younger Mr Chivery, more distant, did not shake hands with him at all; he stood looking at him in a state of indecision so observable that it even came within the observation of Clennam with his heavy eyes and heavy heart. Presently afterwards, Young John disappeared into the jail.

As Clennam knew enough of the place to know that he was required to remain in the Lodge a certain time, he took a seat in a corner, and feigned to be occupied with the perusal of letters from his pocket.

They did not so engross his attention, but that he saw, with gratitude, how the elder Mr Chivery kept the Lodge clear of prisoners; how he signed to some, with his keys, not to come in, how he nudged others with his elbows to go out, and how he made his misery as easy to him as he could.

Arthur was sitting with his eyes fixed on the floor, recalling the past, brooding over the present, and not attending to either, when he felt himself touched upon the shoulder. It was by Young John; and he said, 'You can come now.'

He got up and followed Young John. When they had gone a step or two within the inner iron-gate, Young John turned and said to him:

'You want a room. I have got you one.'

'I thank you heartily.'

Young John turned again, and took him in at the old doorway, up the old staircase, into the old room. Arthur stretched out his hand. Young John looked at it, looked at him—sternly—swelled, choked, and said:

'I don't know as I can. No, I find I can't. But I thought you'd like the room, and here it is for you.'

Surprise at this inconsistent behaviour yielded when he was gone (he went away directly) to the feelings which the empty room awakened in Clennam's wounded breast, and to the crowding associations with the one good and gentle creature who had sanctified it. Her absence in his altered fortunes made it, and him in it, so very desolate and so much in need of such a face of love and truth, that he turned against the wall to weep, sobbing out, as his heart relieved itself, 'O my Little Dorrit!'

CHAPTER 27. The Pupil of the Marshalsea

The day was sunny, and the Marshalsea, with the hot noon striking upon it, was unwontedly quiet. Arthur Clennam dropped into a solitary arm-chair, itself as faded as any debtor in the jail, and yielded himself to his thoughts.

In the unnatural peace of having gone through the dreaded arrest, and got there,—the first change of feeling which the prison most commonly induced, and from which dangerous resting-place so many men had slipped down to the depths of degradation and disgrace by so many ways,—he could think of some passages in his life, almost as if he were removed from them into another state of existence. Taking into account where he was, the interest that had first brought him there when he had been free to keep away, and the gentle presence that was equally inseparable from the walls and bars about him and from the impalpable remembrances of his later life which no walls or bars could imprison, it was not remarkable that everything his memory turned upon should bring him round again to Little Dorrit. Yet it was remarkable to him; not because of the fact itself, but because of the reminder it brought with it, how much the dear little creature had influenced his better resolutions.

None of us clearly know to whom or to what we are indebted in this wise, until some marked stop in the whirling wheel of life brings the right perception with it. It comes with sickness, it comes with sorrow, it comes with the loss of the dearly loved, it is one of the most frequent uses of adversity. It came to Clennam in his adversity, strongly and tenderly. 'When I first gathered myself together,' he thought, 'and set something like purpose before my jaded eyes, whom had I before me, toiling on, for a good object's sake, without encouragement, without notice, against ignoble obstacles that would have turned an army of received heroes and heroines? One weak girl! When I tried to conquer my misplaced love, and to be generous to the man who was more fortunate than I, though he should never know it or repay me with a gracious word, in whom had I watched patience, self-denial, self-subdual, charitable construction, the noblest generosity of the affections? In the same poor girl! If I, a man, with a man's advantages and means and energies, had slighted the whisper in my heart, that if my father had erred, it was my first duty to conceal the fault and to repair it, what youthful figure with tender feet going almost bare on the damp ground, with spare hands ever working, with its slight shape but half protected from the sharp weather, would have stood before me to put me to shame? Little Dorrit's.' So always as he sat alone in the faded chair, thinking. Always, Little Dorrit. Until it seemed to him as if he met the reward of having wandered away from her, and suffered anything to pass between him and his remembrance of her virtues.

His door was opened, and the head of the elder Chivery was put in a very little way, without being turned towards him.

'I am off the Lock, Mr Clennam, and going out. Can I do anything for you?'

'Many thanks. Nothing.'

'You'll excuse me opening the door,' said Mr Chivery; 'but I couldn't make you hear.'

'Did you knock?' 'Half-a-dozen times.'

Rousing himself, Clennam observed that the prison had awakened from its noontide doze, that the inmates were loitering about the shady yard, and that it was late in the afternoon. He had been thinking for hours. 'Your things is come,' said Mr Chivery, 'and my son is going to carry 'em up. I should have sent 'em up but for his wishing to carry 'em himself. Indeed he would have 'em himself, and so I couldn't send 'em up. Mr Clennam, could I say a word to you?'

'Pray come in,' said Arthur; for Mr Chivery's head was still put in at the door a very little way, and Mr Chivery had but one ear upon him, instead of both eyes. This was native delicacy in Mr Chivery—true politeness; though his exterior had very much of a turnkey about it, and not the least of a gentleman.

'Thank you, sir,' said Mr Chivery, without advancing; 'it's no odds me coming in. Mr Clennam, don't you take no notice of my son (if you'll be so good) in case you find him cut up anyways difficult. My son has a 'art, and my son's 'art is in the right place. Me and his mother knows where to find it, and we find it sitiwated correct.'

With this mysterious speech, Mr Chivery took his ear away and shut the door. He might have been gone ten minutes, when his son succeeded him.

'Here's your portmanteau,' he said to Arthur, putting it carefully down.

'It's very kind of you. I am ashamed that you should have the trouble.'

He was gone before it came to that; but soon returned, saying exactly as before, 'Here's your black box:' which he also put down with care.

'I am very sensible of this attention. I hope we may shake hands now, Mr John.'

Young John, however, drew back, turning his right wrist in a socket made of his left thumb and middle-finger and said as he had said at first, 'I don't know as I can. No; I find I can't!' He then stood regarding the prisoner sternly, though with a swelling humour in his eyes that looked like pity.

'Why are you angry with me,' said Clennam, 'and yet so ready to do me these kind services? There must be some mistake between us. If I have done anything to occasion it I am sorry.'

'No mistake, sir,' returned John, turning the wrist backwards and forwards in the socket, for which it was rather tight. 'No mistake, sir, in the feelings with which my eyes behold you at the present moment! If I was at all fairly equal to your weight, Mr Clennam—which I am not; and if you weren't under a cloud—which you are; and if it wasn't against all rules of the Marshalsea—which it is; those feelings are such, that they would stimulate me, more to having it out with you in a Round on the present spot than to anything else I could name.' Arthur looked at him for a moment in some wonder, and some little anger. 'Well, well!' he said. 'A mistake, a mistake!' Turning away, he sat down with a heavy sigh in the faded chair again.

Young John followed him with his eyes, and, after a short pause, cried out, 'I beg your pardon!'

'Freely granted,' said Clennam, waving his hand without raising his sunken head. 'Say no more. I am not worth it.'

'This furniture, sir,' said Young John in a voice of mild and soft explanation, 'belongs to me. I am in the habit of letting it out to parties without furniture, that have the room. It an't much, but it's at your service. Free, I mean. I could not think of letting you have it on any other terms. You're welcome to it for nothing.'

Arthur raised his head again to thank him, and to say he could not accept the favour. John was still turning his wrist, and still contending with himself in his former divided manner.

'What is the matter between us?' said Arthur.

'I decline to name it, sir,' returned Young John, suddenly turning loud and sharp. 'Nothing's the matter.'

Arthur looked at him again, in vain, for an explanation of his behaviour. After a while, Arthur turned away his head again. Young John said, presently afterwards, with the utmost mildness:

'The little round table, sir, that's nigh your elbow, was—you know whose—I needn't mention him—he died a great gentleman. I bought it of an individual that he gave it to, and that lived here after him. But the individual wasn't any ways equal to him. Most individuals would find it hard to come up to his level.'

Arthur drew the little table nearer, rested his arm upon it, and kept it there.

'Perhaps you may not be aware, sir,' said Young John, 'that I intruded upon him when he was over here in London. On the whole he was of opinion that it WAS an intrusion, though he was so good as to ask me to sit down and to inquire after father and all other old friends. Leastways humblest acquaintances. He looked, to me, a good deal changed, and I said so when I came back. I asked him if Miss Amy was well—'

'And she was?'

'I should have thought you would have known without putting the question to such as me,' returned Young John, after appearing to take a large invisible pill. 'Since you do put me the question, I am sorry I can't answer it. But the truth is, he looked upon the inquiry as a liberty, and said, "What was that to me?" It was then I became quite aware I was intruding: of which I had been fearful before. However, he spoke very handsome afterwards; very handsome.'

They were both silent for several minutes: except that Young John remarked, at about the middle of the pause, 'He both spoke and acted very handsome.'

It was again Young John who broke the silence by inquiring:

'If it's not a liberty, how long may it be your intentions, sir, to go without eating and drinking?'

'I have not felt the want of anything yet,' returned Clennam. 'I have no appetite just now.'

'The more reason why you should take some support, sir,' urged Young John. 'If you find yourself going on sitting here for hours and hours partaking of no refreshment because you have no appetite, why then you should and must partake of refreshment without an appetite. I'm going to have tea in my own apartment. If it's not a liberty, please to come and take a cup. Or I can bring a tray here in two minutes.'

Feeling that Young John would impose that trouble on himself if he refused, and also feeling anxious to show that he bore in mind both the elder Mr Chivery's entreaty, and the younger Mr Chivery's apology, Arthur rose and expressed his willingness to take a cup of tea in Mr john's apartment. Young John locked his door for him as they went out, slided the key into his pocket with great dexterity, and led the way to his own residence.

It was at the top of the house nearest to the gateway. It was the room to which Clennam had hurried on the day when the enriched family had left the prison for ever, and where he had lifted her insensible from the floor. He foresaw where they were going as soon as their feet touched the staircase. The room was so far changed that it was papered now, and had been repainted, and was far more comfortably furnished; but he could recall it just as he had seen it in that single glance, when he raised her from the ground and carried her down to the carriage.

Young John looked hard at him, biting his fingers.

'I see you recollect the room, Mr Clennam?' 'I recollect it well, Heaven bless her!'

Oblivious of the tea, Young John continued to bite his fingers and to look at his visitor, as long as his visitor continued to glance about the room. Finally, he made a start at the teapot, gustily rattled a quantity of tea into it from a canister, and set off for the common kitchen to fill it with hot water.

The room was so eloquent to Clennam in the changed circumstances of his return to the miserable Marshalsea; it spoke to him so mournfully of her, and of his loss of her; that it would have gone hard with him to resist it, even though he had not been alone. Alone, he did not try. He had his hand on the insensible wall as tenderly as if it had been herself that he touched, and pronounced her name in a low voice. He stood at the window, looking over the prison-parapet with its grim spiked border, and breathed a benediction through the summer haze towards the distant land where she was rich and prosperous.

Young John was some time absent, and, when he came back, showed that he had been outside by bringing with him fresh butter in a cabbage leaf, some thin slices of boiled ham in another cabbage leaf, and a little basket of water-cresses and salad herbs. When these were arranged upon the table to his satisfaction, they sat down to tea.

Clennam tried to do honour to the meal, but unavailingly. The ham sickened him, the bread seemed to turn to sand in his mouth. He could force nothing upon himself but a cup of tea.

'Try a little something green,' said Young John, handing him the basket.

He took a sprig or so of water-cress, and tried again; but the bread turned to a heavier sand than before, and the ham (though it was good enough of itself) seemed to blow a faint simoom of ham through the whole Marshalsea.

'Try a little more something green, sir,' said Young John; and again handed the basket.

It was so like handing green meat into the cage of a dull imprisoned bird, and John had so evidently brought the little basket as a handful of fresh relief from the stale hot paving-stones and bricks of the jail, that Clennam said, with a smile, 'It was very kind of you to think of putting this between the wires; but I cannot even get this down to-day.'

As if the difficulty were contagious, Young John soon pushed away his own plate, and fell to folding the cabbage-leaf that had contained the ham. When he had folded it into a number of layers, one over another, so that it was small in the palm of his hand, he began to flatten it between both his hands, and to eye Clennam attentively. 'I wonder,' he at length said, compressing his green packet with some force, 'that if it's not worth your while to take care of yourself for your own sake, it's not worth doing for some one else's.'

'Truly,' returned Arthur, with a sigh and a smile, 'I don't know for whose.'

'Mr Clennam,' said John, warmly, 'I am surprised that a gentleman who is capable of the straightforwardness that you are capable of, should be capable of the mean action of making me such an answer. Mr Clennam, I am surprised that a gentleman who is capable of having a heart of his own, should be capable of the heartlessness of treating mine in that way. I am astonished at it, sir. Really and truly I am astonished!'

Having got upon his feet to emphasise his concluding words, Young John sat down again, and fell to rolling his green packet on his right leg; never taking his eyes off Clennam, but surveying him with a fixed look of indignant reproach.

'I had got over it, sir,' said John. 'I had conquered it, knowing that it must be conquered, and had come to the resolution to think no more about it. I shouldn't have given my mind to it again, I hope, if to this prison you had not been brought, and in an hour unfortunate for me, this day!' (In his agitation Young John adopted his mother's powerful construction of sentences.) 'When you first came upon me, sir, in the Lodge, this day, more as if a Upas tree had been made a capture of than a private defendant, such mingled streams of feelings broke loose again within me, that everything was for the first few minutes swept away before them, and I was going round and round in a vortex. I got out of it. I struggled, and got out of it. If it was the last word I had to speak, against that vortex with my utmost powers I strove, and out of it I came. I argued that if I had been rude, apologies was due, and those apologies without a question of demeaning, I did make. And now, when I've been so wishful to show that one thought is next to being a holy one with me and goes before all others—now, after all, you dodge me when I ever so gently hint at it, and throw me back upon myself. For, do not, sir,' said Young John, 'do not be so base as to deny that dodge you do, and thrown me back upon myself you have!'

All amazement, Arthur gazed at him like one lost, only saying, 'What is it? What do you mean, John?' But, John, being in that state of mind in which nothing would seem to be more impossible to a certain class of people than the giving of an answer, went ahead blindly.

'I hadn't,' John declared, 'no, I hadn't, and I never had the audaciousness to think, I am sure, that all was anything but lost. I hadn't, no, why should I say I hadn't if I ever had, any hope that it was possible to be so blest, not after the words that passed, not even if barriers insurmountable had not been raised! But is that a reason why I am to have no memory, why I am to have no thoughts, why I am to have no sacred spots, nor anything?'

'What can you mean?' cried Arthur.

'It's all very well to trample on it, sir,' John went on, scouring a very prairie of wild words, 'if a person can make up his mind to be guilty of the action. It's all very well to trample on it, but it's there. It may be that it couldn't be trampled upon if it wasn't there. But that doesn't make it gentlemanly, that doesn't make it honourable, that doesn't justify throwing a person back upon himself after he has struggled and strived out of himself like a butterfly. The world may sneer at a turnkey, but he's a man—when he isn't a woman, which among female criminals he's expected to be.'

Ridiculous as the incoherence of his talk was, there was yet a truthfulness in Young john's simple, sentimental character, and a sense of being wounded in some very tender respect, expressed in his burning face and in the agitation of his voice and manner, which Arthur must have been cruel to disregard. He turned his thoughts back to the starting-point of this unknown injury; and in the meantime Young John, having rolled his green packet pretty round, cut it carefully into three pieces, and laid it on a plate as if it were some particular delicacy.

'It seems to me just possible,' said Arthur, when he had retraced the conversation to the water-cresses and back again, 'that you have made some reference to Miss Dorrit.'

'It is just possible, sir,' returned John Chivery.

'I don't understand it. I hope I may not be so unlucky as to make you think I mean to offend you again, for I never have meant to offend you yet, when I say I don't understand it.'

'Sir,' said Young John, 'will you have the perfidy to deny that you know and long have known that I felt towards Miss Dorrit, call it not the presumption of love, but adoration and sacrifice?'

'Indeed, John, I will not have any perfidy if I know it; why you should suspect me of it I am at a loss to think. Did you ever hear from Mrs Chivery, your mother, that I went to see her once?'

'No, sir,' returned John, shortly. 'Never heard of such a thing.'

'But I did. Can you imagine why?'

'No, sir,' returned John, shortly. 'I can't imagine why.'

'I will tell you. I was solicitous to promote Miss Dorrit's happiness; and if I could have supposed that Miss Dorrit returned your affection—'

Poor John Chivery turned crimson to the tips of his ears. 'Miss Dorrit never did, sir. I wish to be honourable and true, so far as in my humble way I can, and I would scorn to pretend for a moment that she ever did, or that she ever led me to believe she did; no, nor even that it was ever to be expected in any cool reason that she would or could. She was far above me in all respects at all times. As likewise,' added John, 'similarly was her genteel family.' His chivalrous feeling towards all that belonged to her made him so very respectable, in spite of his small stature and his rather weak legs, and his very weak hair, and his poetical temperament, that a Goliath might have sat in his place demanding less consideration at Arthur's hands.

'You speak, john,' he said, with cordial admiration, 'like a Man.'

'Well, sir,' returned John, brushing his hand across his eyes, 'then I wish you'd do the same.'

He was quick with this unexpected retort, and it again made Arthur regard him with a wondering expression of face.

'Leastways,' said John, stretching his hand across the tea-tray, 'if too strong a remark, withdrawn! But, why not, why not? When I say to you, Mr Clennam, take care of yourself for some one else's sake, why not be open, though a turnkey? Why did I get you the room which I knew you'd like best? Why did I carry up your things?

Not that I found 'em heavy; I don't mention 'em on that accounts; far from it. Why have I cultivated you in the manner I have done since the morning? On the ground of your own merits? No. They're very great, I've no doubt at all; but not on the ground of them. Another's merits have had their weight, and have had far more weight with Me. Then why not speak free?'

'Unaffectedly, John,' said Clennam, 'you are so good a fellow and I have so true a respect for your character, that if I have appeared to be less sensible than I really am of the fact that the kind services you have rendered me to-day are attributable to my having been trusted by Miss Dorrit as her friend—I confess it to be a fault, and I ask your forgiveness.'

'Oh! why not,' John repeated with returning scorn, 'why not speak free!'

'I declare to you,' returned Arthur, 'that I do not understand you.

Look at me. Consider the trouble I have been in. Is it likely that I would wilfully add to my other self-reproaches, that of being ungrateful or treacherous to you. I do not understand you.'

John's incredulous face slowly softened into a face of doubt. He rose, backed into the garret-window of the room, beckoned Arthur to come there, and stood looking at him thoughtfully. 'Mr Clennam, do you mean to say that you don't know?'

'What, John?'

'Lord,' said Young John, appealing with a gasp to the spikes on the wall. 'He says, What!'

Clennam looked at the spikes, and looked at John; and looked at the spikes, and looked at John.

'He says What! And what is more,' exclaimed Young John, surveying him in a doleful maze, 'he appears to mean it! Do you see this window, sir?'

'Of course I see this window.'

'See this room?'

'Why, of course I see this room.'

'That wall opposite, and that yard down below? They have all been witnesses of it, from day to day, from night to night, from week to week, from month to month. For how often have I seen Miss Dorrit here when she has not seen me!'

'Witnesses of what?' said Clennam.

'Of Miss Dorrit's love.'

'For whom?'

'You,' said John. And touched him with the back of his hand upon the breast, and backed to his chair, and sat down on it with a pale face, holding the arms, and shaking his head at him.

If he had dealt Clennam a heavy blow, instead of laying that light touch upon him, its effect could not have been to shake him more. He stood amazed; his eyes looking at John; his lips parted, and seeming now and then to form the word 'Me!' without uttering it; his hands dropped at his sides; his whole appearance that of a man who has been awakened from sleep, and stupefied by intelligence beyond his full comprehension.

'Me!' he at length said aloud.

'Ah!' groaned Young John. 'You!'

He did what he could to muster a smile, and returned, 'Your fancy. You are completely mistaken.'

'I mistaken, sir!' said Young John. '*I* completely mistaken on that subject! No, Mr Clennam, don't tell me so. On any other, if you like, for I don't set up to be a penetrating character, and am well aware of my own deficiencies. But, *I* mistaken on a point that has caused me more smart in my breast than a flight of savages' arrows could have done! *I* mistaken on a point that almost sent me into my grave, as I sometimes wished it would, if the grave could only have been made compatible with the tobacco-business and father and mother's feelings! I mistaken on a point that, even at the present moment, makes me take out my pocket-handkercher like a great girl, as people say: though I am sure I don't know why a great girl should be a term of reproach, for every rightly constituted male mind loves 'em great and small. Don't tell me so, don't tell me so!'

Still highly respectable at bottom, though absurd enough upon the surface, Young John took out his pocket-handkerchief with a genuine absence both of display and concealment, which is only to be seen in a man with a great deal of good in him, when he takes out his pocket-handkerchief for the purpose of wiping his eyes. Having dried them, and indulged in the harmless luxury of a sob and a sniff, he put it up again.

The touch was still in its influence so like a blow that Arthur could not get many words together to close the subject with. He assured John Chivery when he had returned his handkerchief to his pocket, that he did all honour to his disinterestedness and to the fidelity of his remembrance of Miss Dorrit. As to the impression on his mind, of which he had just relieved it—here John interposed, and said, 'No impression! Certainty!'—as to that, they might perhaps speak of it at another time, but would say no more now. Feeling low-spirited and weary, he would go back to his room, with john's leave, and come out no more that night. John assented, and he crept back in the shadow of the wall to his own lodging.

The feeling of the blow was still so strong upon him that, when the dirty old woman was gone whom he found sitting on the stairs outside his door, waiting to make his bed, and who gave him to understand while doing it, that she had received her instructions from Mr Chivery, 'not the old 'un but the young 'un,' he sat down in the faded arm-chair, pressing his head between his hands, as if he had been stunned. Little Dorrit love him! More bewildering to him than his misery, far.

Consider the improbability. He had been accustomed to call her his child, and his dear child, and to invite her confidence by dwelling upon the difference in their respective ages, and to speak of himself as one who was turning old. Yet she might not have thought him old. Something reminded him that he had not thought himself so, until the roses had floated away upon the river.

He had her two letters among other papers in his box, and he took them out and read them. There seemed to be a sound in them like the sound of her sweet voice. It fell upon his ear with many tones of tenderness, that were not insusceptible of the new meaning. Now it was that the quiet desolation of her answer,'No, No, No,' made to him that night in that very room—that night when he had been shown the dawn of her altered fortune, and when other words had passed between them which he had been destined to remember in humiliation and a prisoner, rushed into his mind.

Consider the improbability.

But it had a preponderating tendency, when considered, to become fainter. There was another and a curious inquiry of his own heart's that concurrently became stronger. In the reluctance he had felt to believe that she loved any one; in his desire to set that question at rest; in a half-formed consciousness he had had that there would be a kind of nobleness in his helping her love for any one, was there no suppressed something on his own side that he had hushed as it arose? Had he ever whispered to himself that he must not think of such a thing as her loving him, that he must not take advantage of her gratitude, that he must keep his experience in remembrance as a warning and reproof; that he must regard such youthful hopes as having passed away, as his friend's dead daughter had passed away; that he must be steady in saying to himself that the time had gone by him, and he was too saddened and old?

He had kissed her when he raised her from the ground on the day when she had been so consistently and expressively forgotten. Quite as he might have kissed her, if she had been conscious? No difference?

The darkness found him occupied with these thoughts. The darkness also found Mr and Mrs Plornish knocking at his door. They brought with them a basket, filled with choice selections from that stock in trade which met with such a quick sale and produced such a slow return. Mrs Plornish was affected to tears. Mr Plornish amiably growled, in his philosophical but not lucid manner, that there was ups you see, and there was downs. It was in vain to ask why ups, why downs; there they was, you know. He had heerd it given for a truth that accordin' as the world went round, which round it did rewolve undoubted, even the best of gentlemen must take his turn of standing with his ed upside down and all his air a flying the wrong way into what you might call Space. Wery well then. What Mr Plornish said was, wery well then. That gentleman's ed would come up-ards when his turn come, that gentleman's air would be a pleasure to look upon being all smooth again, and wery well then!

It has been already stated that Mrs Plornish, not being philosophical, wept. It further happened that Mrs Plornish, not being philosophical, was intelligible. It may have arisen out of her softened state of mind, out of her sex's wit, out of a woman's quick association of ideas, or out of a woman's no association of ideas, but it further happened somehow that Mrs Plornish's intelligibility displayed itself upon the very subject of Arthur's meditations.

'The way father has been talking about you, Mr Clennam,' said Mrs Plornish, 'you hardly would believe. It's made him quite poorly. As to his voice, this misfortune has took it away. You know what a sweet singer father is; but he couldn't get a note out for the children at tea, if you'll credit what I tell you.'

While speaking, Mrs Plornish shook her head, and wiped her eyes, and looked retrospectively about the room.

'As to Mr Baptist,' pursued Mrs Plornish, 'whatever he'll do when he comes to know of it, I can't conceive nor yet imagine. He'd have been here before now, you may be sure, but that he's away on confidential business of your own. The persevering manner in which he follows up that business, and gives himself no rest from it—it really do,' said Mrs Plornish, winding up in the Italian manner, 'as I say to him, Mooshattonisha padrona.'

Though not conceited, Mrs Plornish felt that she had turned this Tuscan sentence with peculiar elegance. Mr Plornish could not conceal his exultation in her accomplishments as a linguist.

'But what I say is, Mr Clennam,' the good woman went on, 'there's always something to be thankful for, as I am sure you will yourself admit. Speaking in this room, it's not hard to think what the present something is. It's a thing to be thankful for, indeed, that Miss Dorrit is not here to know it.'

Arthur thought she looked at him with particular expression.

'It's a thing,' reiterated Mrs Plornish, 'to be thankful for, indeed, that Miss Dorrit is far away. It's to be hoped she is not likely to hear of it. If she had been here to see it, sir, it's not to be doubted that the sight of you,' Mrs Plornish repeated those words—'not to be doubted, that the sight of you—in misfortune and trouble, would have been almost too much for her affectionate heart. There's nothing I can think of, that would have touched Miss Dorrit so bad as that.'

Of a certainty Mrs Plornish did look at him now, with a sort of quivering defiance in her friendly emotion.

'Yes!' said she. 'And it shows what notice father takes, though at his time of life, that he says to me this afternoon, which Happy Cottage knows I neither make it up nor any ways enlarge, "Mary, it's much to be rejoiced in that Miss Dorrit is not on the spot to behold it." Those were father's words. Father's own words was, "Much to be rejoiced in, Mary, that Miss Dorrit is not on the spot to behold it." I says to father then, I says to him, "Father, you are right!" That,' Mrs Plornish concluded, with the air of a very precise legal witness, 'is what passed betwixt father and me. And I tell you nothing but what did pass betwixt me and father.'

Mr Plornish, as being of a more laconic temperament, embraced this opportunity of interposing with the suggestion that she should now leave Mr Clennam to himself. 'For, you see,' said Mr Plornish, gravely, 'I know what it is, old gal;' repeating that valuable remark several times, as if it appeared to him to include some great moral secret. Finally, the worthy couple went away arm in arm.

Little Dorrit, Little Dorrit. Again, for hours. Always Little Dorrit!

Happily, if it ever had been so, it was over, and better over. Granted that she had loved him, and he had known it and had suffered himself to love her, what a road to have led her away upon—the road that would have brought her back to this miserable place! He ought to be much comforted by the reflection that she was quit of it forever; that she was, or would soon be, married (vague rumours of her father's projects in that direction had reached Bleeding Heart Yard, with the news of her sister's marriage); and that the Marshalsea gate had shut for ever on all those perplexed possibilities of a time that was gone.

Dear Little Dorrit.

Looking back upon his own poor story, she was its vanishing-point. Every thing in its perspective led to her innocent figure. He had travelled thousands of miles towards it; previous unquiet hopes and doubts had worked themselves out before it; it was the centre of the interest of his life; it was the termination of everything that was good and pleasant in it; beyond, there was nothing but mere waste and darkened sky.

As ill at ease as on the first night of his lying down to sleep within those dreary walls, he wore the night out with such thoughts. What time Young John lay wrapt in peaceful slumber, after composing and arranging the following monumental inscription on his pillow—

STRANGER!
RESPECT THE TOMB OF
JOHN CHIVERY, JUNIOR,
WHO DIED AT AN ADVANCED AGE
NOT NECESSARY TO MENTION.
HE ENCOUNTERED HIS RIVAL IN A DISTRESSED STATE,
AND FELT INCLINED
TO HAVE A ROUND WITH HIM;

BUT, FOR THE SAKE OF THE LOVED ONE, CONQUERED THOSE FEELINGS
OF BITTERNESS, AND BECAME
MAGNANIMOUS.

CHAPTER 28. An Appearance in the Marshalsea

The opinion of the community outside the prison gates bore hard on Clennam as time went on, and he made no friends among the community within. Too depressed to associate with the herd in the yard, who got together to forget their cares; too retiring and too unhappy to join in the poor socialities of the tavern; he kept his own room, and was held in distrust. Some said he was proud; some objected that he was sullen and reserved; some were contemptuous of him, for that he was a poor-spirited dog who pined under his debts. The whole population were shy of him on these various counts of indictment, but especially the last, which involved a species of domestic treason; and he soon became so confirmed in his seclusion, that his only time for walking up and down was when the evening Club were assembled at their songs and toasts and sentiments, and when the yard was nearly left to the women and children.

Imprisonment began to tell upon him. He knew that he idled and moped. After what he had known of the influences of imprisonment within the four small walls of the very room he occupied, this consciousness made him afraid of himself. Shrinking from the observation of other men, and shrinking from his own, he began to change very sensibly. Anybody might see that the shadow of the wall was dark upon him.

One day when he might have been some ten or twelve weeks in jail, and when he had been trying to read and had not been able to release even the imaginary people of the book from the Marshalsea, a footstep stopped at his door, and a hand tapped at it. He arose and opened it, and an agreeable voice accosted him with 'How do you do, Mr Clennam? I hope I am not unwelcome in calling to see you.'

It was the sprightly young Barnacle, Ferdinand. He looked very good-natured and prepossessing, though overpoweringly gay and free, in contrast with the squalid prison.

'You are surprised to see me, Mr Clennam,' he said, taking the seat which Clennam offered him.

'I must confess to being much surprised.'

'Not disagreeably, I hope?'

'By no means.'

'Thank you. Frankly,' said the engaging young Barnacle, 'I have been excessively sorry to hear that you were under the necessity of a temporary retirement here, and I hope (of course as between two private gentlemen) that our place has had nothing to do with it?'

'Your office?'

'Our Circumlocution place.'

'I cannot charge any part of my reverses upon that remarkable establishment.'

Upon my life,' said the vivacious young Barnacle, 'I am heartily glad to know it. It is quite a relief to me to hear you say it. I should have so exceedingly regretted our place having had anything to do with your difficulties.'

Clennam again assured him that he absolved it of the responsibility.

'That's right,' said Ferdinand. 'I am very happy to hear it. I was rather afraid in my own mind that we might have helped to floor you, because there is no doubt that it is our misfortune to do that kind of thing now and then. We don't want to do it; but if men will be gravelled, why—we can't help it.'

'Without giving an unqualified assent to what you say,' returned Arthur, gloomily, 'I am much obliged to you for your interest in me.'

'No, but really! Our place is,' said the easy young Barnacle, 'the most inoffensive place possible. You'll say we are a humbug. I won't say we are not; but all that sort of thing is intended to be, and must be. Don't you see?'

'I do not,' said Clennam.

'You don't regard it from the right point of view. It is the point of view that is the essential thing. Regard our place from the point of view that we only ask you to leave us alone, and we are as capital a Department as you'll find anywhere.'

'Is your place there to be left alone?' asked Clennam.

'You exactly hit it,' returned Ferdinand. 'It is there with the express intention that everything shall be left alone. That is what it means. That is what it's for. No doubt there's a certain form to be kept up that it's for something else, but it's only a form. Why, good Heaven, we are nothing but forms! Think what a lot of our forms you have gone through. And you have never got any nearer to an end?'

'Never,' said Clennam.

'Look at it from the right point of view, and there you have us—official and effectual. It's like a limited game of cricket. A field of outsiders are always going in to bowl at the Public Service, and we block the balls.'

Clennam asked what became of the bowlers? The airy young Barnacle replied that they grew tired, got dead beat, got lamed, got their backs broken, died off, gave it up, went in for other games.

'And this occasions me to congratulate myself again,' he pursued, 'on the circumstance that our place has had nothing to do with your temporary retirement. It very easily might have had a hand in it; because it is undeniable that we are sometimes a most unlucky place, in our effects upon people who will not leave us alone. Mr Clennam, I am quite unreserved with you. As between yourself and myself, I know I may be. I was so, when I first saw you making the mistake of not leaving us alone; because I perceived that you were inexperienced and sanguine, and had—I hope you'll not object to my saying—some simplicity.'

'Not at all.'

'Some simplicity. Therefore I felt what a pity it was, and I went out of my way to hint to you (which really was not official, but I never am official when I can help it) something to the effect that if I were you, I wouldn't bother myself. However, you did bother yourself, and you have since bothered yourself. Now, don't do it any more.'

'I am not likely to have the opportunity,' said Clennam.

'Oh yes, you are! You'll leave here. Everybody leaves here. There are no ends of ways of leaving here. Now, don't come back to us. That entreaty is the second object of my call. Pray, don't come back to us. Upon my honour,' said Ferdinand in a very friendly and confiding way, 'I shall be greatly vexed if you don't take warning by the past and keep away from us.'

'And the invention?' said Clennam.

'My good fellow,' returned Ferdinand, 'if you'll excuse the freedom of that form of address, nobody wants to know of the invention, and nobody cares twopence-halfpenny about it.'

'Nobody in the Office, that is to say?'

'Nor out of it. Everybody is ready to dislike and ridicule any invention. You have no idea how many people want to be left alone.

You have no idea how the Genius of the country (overlook the Parliamentary nature of the phrase, and don't be bored by it) tends to being left alone. Believe me, Mr Clennam,' said the sprightly young Barnacle in his pleasantest manner, 'our place is not a wicked Giant to be charged at full tilt; but only a windmill showing you, as it grinds immense quantities of chaff, which way the country wind blows.'

'If I could believe that,' said Clennam, 'it would be a dismal prospect for all of us.'

'Oh! Don't say so!' returned Ferdinand. 'It's all right. We must have humbug, we all like humbug, we couldn't get on without humbug.

A little humbug, and a groove, and everything goes on admirably, if you leave it alone.'

With this hopeful confession of his faith as the head of the rising Barnacles who were born of woman, to be followed under a variety of watchwords which they utterly repudiated and disbelieved, Ferdinand rose. Nothing could be more agreeable than his frank and courteous bearing, or adapted with a more gentlemanly instinct to the circumstances of his visit.

'Is it fair to ask,' he said, as Clennam gave him his hand with a real feeling of thankfulness for his candour and good-humour, 'whether it is true that our late lamented Merdle is the cause of this passing inconvenience?'

'I am one of the many he has ruined. Yes.'

'He must have been an exceedingly clever fellow,' said Ferdinand Barnacle.

Arthur, not being in the mood to extol the memory of the deceased, was silent.

'A consummate rascal, of course,' said Ferdinand, 'but remarkably clever! One cannot help admiring the fellow. Must have been such a master of humbug. Knew people so well—got over them so completely—did so much with them!' In his easy way, he was really moved to genuine admiration.

'I hope,' said Arthur, 'that he and his dupes may be a warning to people not to have so much done with them again.'

'My dear Mr Clennam,' returned Ferdinand, laughing, 'have you really such a verdant hope? The next man who has as large a capacity and as genuine a taste for swindling, will succeed as well. Pardon me, but I think you really have no idea how the human bees will swarm to the beating of any old tin kettle; in that fact lies the complete manual of governing them. When they can be got to believe that the kettle is made of the precious metals, in that fact lies the whole power of men like our late lamented. No doubt there are here and there,' said Ferdinand politely, 'exceptional cases, where people have been taken in for what appeared to them to be much better reasons; and I need not go far to find such a case; but they don't invalidate the rule. Good day! I hope that when I have the pleasure of seeing you, next, this passing cloud will have given place to sunshine. Don't come a step beyond the door. I know the way out perfectly. Good day!'

With those words, the best and brightest of the Barnacles went downstairs, hummed his way through the Lodge, mounted his horse in the front court-yard, and rode off to keep an appointment with his noble kinsman, who wanted a little coaching before he could triumphantly answer certain infidel Snobs who were going to question the Nobs about their statesmanship.

He must have passed Mr Rugg on his way out, for, a minute or two afterwards, that ruddy-headed gentleman shone in at the door, like an elderly Phoebus.

'How do you do to-day, sir?' said Mr Rugg. 'Is there any little thing I can do for you to-day, sir?'

'No, I thank you.'

Mr Rugg's enjoyment of embarrassed affairs was like a housekeeper's enjoyment in pickling and preserving, or a washerwoman's enjoyment of a heavy wash, or a dustman's enjoyment of an overflowing dust-bin, or any other professional enjoyment of a mess in the way of business.

'I still look round, from time to time, sir,' said Mr Rugg, cheerfully, 'to see whether any lingering Detainers are accumulating at the gate. They have fallen in pretty thick, sir; as thick as we could have expected.'

He remarked upon the circumstance as if it were matter of congratulation: rubbing his hands briskly, and rolling his head a little.

'As thick,' repeated Mr Rugg, 'as we could reasonably have expected. Quite a shower-bath of 'em. I don't often intrude upon you now, when I look round, because I know you are not inclined for company, and that if you wished to see me, you would leave word in the Lodge. But I am here pretty well every day, sir. Would this be an unseasonable time, sir,' asked Mr Rugg, coaxingly, 'for me to offer an observation?'

'As seasonable a time as any other.'

'Hum! Public opinion, sir,' said Mr Rugg, 'has been busy with you.'

'I don't doubt it.'

'Might it not be advisable, sir,' said Mr Rugg, more coaxingly yet, 'now to make, at last and after all, a trifling concession to public opinion? We all do it in one way or another. The fact is, we must do it.'

'I cannot set myself right with it, Mr Rugg, and have no business to expect that I ever shall.'

'Don't say that, sir, don't say that. The cost of being moved to the Bench is almost insignificant, and if the general feeling is strong that you ought to be there, why—really—'

'I thought you had settled, Mr Rugg,' said Arthur, 'that my determination to remain here was a matter of taste.'

'Well, sir, well! But is it good taste, is it good taste? That's the Question.' Mr Rugg was so soothingly persuasive as to be quite pathetic. 'I was almost going to say, is it good feeling? This is an extensive affair of yours; and your remaining here where a man can come for a pound or two, is remarked upon as not in keeping. It is not in keeping. I can't tell you, sir, in how many quarters I heard it mentioned. I heard comments made upon it last night in a Parlour frequented by what I should call, if I did not look in there now and then myself, the best legal company—I heard, there, comments on it that I was sorry to hear. They hurt me on your account. Again, only this morning at breakfast. My daughter (but a woman, you'll say: yet still with a feeling for these things, and even with some little personal experience, as the plaintiff in Rugg and Bawkins) was expressing her great surprise; her great surprise.

Now under these circumstances, and considering that none of us can quite set ourselves above public opinion, wouldn't a trifling concession to that opinion be—Come, sir,' said Rugg, 'I will put it on the lowest ground of argument, and say, amiable?'

Arthur's thoughts had once more wandered away to Little Dorrit, and the question remained unanswered.

'As to myself, sir,' said Mr Rugg, hoping that his eloquence had reduced him to a state of indecision, 'it is a principle of mine not to consider myself when a client's inclinations are in the scale. But, knowing your considerate character and general wish to oblige, I will repeat that I should prefer your being in the Bench.

Your case has made a noise; it is a creditable case to be professionally concerned in; I should feel on a better standing with my connection, if you went to the Bench. Don't let that influence you, sir. I merely state the fact.'

So errant had the prisoner's attention already grown in solitude and dejection, and so accustomed had it become to commune with only one silent figure within the ever-frowning walls, that Clennam had to shake off a kind of stupor before he could look at Mr Rugg, recall the thread of his talk, and hurriedly say, 'I am unchanged, and unchangeable, in my decision. Pray, let it be; let it be!' Mr Rugg, without concealing that he was nettled and mortified, replied:

'Oh! Beyond a doubt, sir. I have travelled out of the record, sir, I am aware, in putting the point to you. But really, when I herd it remarked in several companies, and in very good company, that however worthy of a foreigner, it is not worthy of the spirit of an Englishman to remain in the Marshalsea when the glorious liberties of his island home admit of his removal to the Bench, I thought I would depart from the narrow professional line marked out to me, and mention it. Personally,' said Mr Rugg, 'I have no opinion on the topic.'

'That's well,' returned Arthur.

'Oh! None at all, sir!' said Mr Rugg. 'If I had, I should have been unwilling, some minutes ago, to see a client of mine visited in this place by a gentleman of a high family riding a saddle-horse. But it was not my business. If I had, I might have wished to be now empowered to mention to another gentleman, a gentleman of military exterior at present waiting in the Lodge, that my client had never intended to remain here, and was on the eve of removal to a superior abode. But my course as a professional machine is clear; I have nothing to do with it. Is it your good pleasure to see the gentleman, sir?'

'Who is waiting to see me, did you say?'

'I did take that unprofessional liberty, sir. Hearing that I was your professional adviser, he declined to interpose before my very limited function was performed. Happily,' said Mr Rugg, with sarcasm, 'I did not so far travel out of the record as to ask the gentleman for his name.'

'I suppose I have no resource but to see him,' sighed Clennam, wearily.

'Then it IS your good pleasure, sir?' retorted Rugg. 'Am I honoured by your instructions to mention as much to the gentleman, as I pass out? I am? Thank you, sir. I take my leave.' His leave he took accordingly, in dudgeon.

The gentleman of military exterior had so imperfectly awakened Clennam's curiosity, in the existing state of his mind, that a half-forgetfulness of such a visitor's having been referred to, was already creeping over it as a part of the sombre veil which almost always dimmed it now, when a heavy footstep on the stairs aroused him. It appeared to ascend them, not very promptly or spontaneously, yet with a display of stride and clatter meant to be insulting. As it paused for a moment on the landing outside his door, he could not recall his association with the peculiarity of its sound, though he thought he had one. Only a moment was given him for consideration. His door was immediately swung open by a thump, and in the doorway stood the missing Blandois, the cause of many anxieties.

'Salve, fellow jail-bird!' said he. 'You want me, it seems. Here I am!'

Before Arthur could speak to him in his indignant wonder, Cavalletto followed him into the room. Mr Pancks followed Cavalletto. Neither of the two had been there since its present occupant had had possession of it. Mr Pancks, breathing hard, sidled near the window, put his hat on the ground, stirred his hair up with both hands, and folded his arms, like a man who had come to a pause in a hard day's work. Mr Baptist, never taking his eyes from his dreaded chum of old, softly sat down on the floor with his back against the door and one of his ankles in each hand: resuming the attitude (except that it was now expressive of unwinking watchfulness) in which he had sat before the same man in the deeper shade of another prison, one hot morning at Marseilles. 'I have it on the witnessing of these two madmen,' said Monsieur Blandois, otherwise Lagnier, otherwise Rigaud, 'that you want me, brother-bird. Here I am!' Glancing round contemptuously at the bedstead, which was turned up by day, he leaned his back against it as a resting-place, without removing his hat from his head, and stood defiantly lounging with his hands in his pockets.

'You villain of ill-omen!' said Arthur. 'You have purposely cast a dreadful suspicion upon my mother's house. Why have you done it?

What prompted you to the devilish invention?'

Monsieur Rigaud, after frowning at him for a moment, laughed. 'Hear this noble gentleman! Listen, all the world, to this creature of Virtue! But take care, take care. It is possible, my friend, that your ardour is a little compromising. Holy Blue! It is possible.'

'Signore!' interposed Cavalletto, also addressing Arthur: 'for to commence, hear me! I received your instructions to find him, Rigaud; is it not?'

'It is the truth.'

'I go, consequentementally,'—it would have given Mrs Plornish great concern if she could have been persuaded that his occasional lengthening of an adverb in this way, was the chief fault of his English,—'first among my countrymen. I ask them what news in Londra, of foreigners arrived. Then I go among the French. Then I go among the Germans. They all tell me. The great part of us know well the other, and they all tell me. But!—no person can tell me nothing of him, Rigaud. Fifteen times,' said Cavalletto, thrice throwing out his left hand with all its fingers spread, and doing it so rapidly that the sense of sight could hardly follow the action, 'I ask of him in every place where go the foreigners; and fifteen times,' repeating the same swift performance, 'they know nothing. But!—' At this significant Italian rest on the word 'But,' his backhanded shake of his right forefinger came into play; a very little, and very cautiously.

'But!—After a long time when I have not been able to find that he is here in Londra, some one tells me of a soldier with white hair—hey?—not hair like this that he carries—white—who lives retired secrettementally, in a certain place. But!—' with another rest upon the word, 'who sometimes in the after-dinner, walks, and smokes. It is necessary, as they say in Italy (and as they know, poor people), to have patience. I have patience. I ask where is this certain place. One. believes it is here, one believes it is there. Eh well! It is not here, it is not there. I wait patientissamentally. At last I find it. Then I watch; then I hide, until he walks and smokes. He is a soldier with grey hair—But!—' a very decided rest indeed, and a very vigorous play from side to side of the back-handed forefinger—'he is also this man that you see.'

It was noticeable, that, in his old habit of submission to one who had been at the trouble of asserting superiority over him, he even then bestowed upon Rigaud a confused bend of his head, after thus pointing him out.

'Eh well, Signore!' he cried in conclusion, addressing Arthur again. 'I waited for a good opportunity. I writed some words to Signor Panco,' an air of novelty came over Mr Pancks with this designation, 'to come and help. I showed him, Rigaud, at his window, to Signor Panco, who was often the spy in the day. I slept at night near the door of the house. At last we entered, only this to-day, and now you see him! As he would not come up in presence of the illustrious Advocate,' such was Mr Baptist's honourable mention of Mr Rugg, 'we waited down below there, together, and Signor Panco guarded the street.'

At the close of this recital, Arthur turned his eyes upon the impudent and wicked face. As it met his, the nose came down over the moustache and the moustache went up under the nose. When nose and moustache had settled into their places again, Monsieur Rigaud loudly snapped his fingers half-a-dozen times; bending forward to jerk the snaps at Arthur, as if they were palpable missiles which he jerked into his face.

'Now, Philosopher!' said Rigaud.'What do you want with me?'

'I want to know,' returned Arthur, without disguising his abhorrence, 'how you dare direct a suspicion of murder against my mother's house?'

'Dare!' cried Rigaud. 'Ho, ho! Hear him! Dare? Is it dare? By Heaven, my small boy, but you are a little imprudent!'

'I want that suspicion to be cleared away,' said Arthur. 'You shall be taken there, and be publicly seen. I want to know, moreover, what business you had there when I had a burning desire to fling you down-stairs. Don't frown at me, man! I have seen enough of you to know that you are a bully and coward. I need no revival of my spirits from the effects of this wretched place to tell you so plain a fact, and one that you know so well.'

White to the lips, Rigaud stroked his moustache, muttering, 'By Heaven, my small boy, but you are a little compromising of my lady, your respectable mother'—and seemed for a minute undecided how to act. His indecision was soon gone. He sat himself down with a threatening swagger, and said:

'Give me a bottle of wine. You can buy wine here. Send one of your madmen to get me a bottle of wine. I won't talk to you without wine. Come! Yes or no?'

'Fetch him what he wants, Cavalletto,' said Arthur, scornfully, producing the money.

'Contraband beast,' added Rigaud, 'bring Port wine! I'll drink nothing but Porto-Porto.'

The contraband beast, however, assuring all present, with his significant finger, that he peremptorily declined to leave his post at the door, Signor Panco offered his services. He soon returned with the bottle of wine: which, according to the custom of the place, originating in a scarcity of corkscrews among the Collegians (in common with a scarcity of much else), was already opened for use.

'Madman! A large glass,' said Rigaud.

Signor Panco put a tumbler before him; not without a visible conflict of feeling on the question of throwing it at his head.

'Haha!' boasted Rigaud. 'Once a gentleman, and always a gentleman.

A gentleman from the beginning, and a gentleman to the end. What the Devil! A gentleman must be waited on, I hope? It's a part of my character to be waited on!'

He half filled the tumbler as he said it, and drank off the contents when he had done saying it.

'Hah!' smacking his lips. 'Not a very old prisoner that! I judge by your looks, brave sir, that imprisonment will subdue your blood much sooner than it softens this hot wine. You are mellowing—losing body and colour already. I salute you!'

He tossed off another half glass: holding it up both before and afterwards, so as to display his small, white hand.

'To business,' he then continued. 'To conversation. You have shown yourself more free of speech than body, sir.'

'I have used the freedom of telling you what you know yourself to be. You know yourself, as we all know you, to be far worse than that.'

'Add, always a gentleman, and it's no matter. Except in that regard, we are all alike. For example: you couldn't for your life be a gentleman; I couldn't for my life be otherwise. How great the difference! Let us go on. Words, sir, never influence the course of the cards, or the course of the dice. Do you know that? You do? I also play a game, and words are without power over it.'

Now that he was confronted with Cavalletto, and knew that his story was known—whatever thin disguise he had worn, he dropped; and faced it out, with a bare face, as the infamous wretch he was.

'No, my son,' he resumed, with a snap of his fingers. 'I play my game to the end in spite of words; and Death of my Body and Death of my Soul! I'll win it. You want to know why I played this little trick that you have interrupted? Know then that I had, and that I have—do you understand me? have—a commodity to sell to my lady your respectable mother. I described my precious commodity, and fixed my price. Touching the bargain, your admirable mother was a little too calm, too stolid, too immovable and statue-like. In fine, your admirable mother vexed me. To make variety in my position, and to amuse myself—what! a gentleman must be amused at somebody's expense!—I conceived the happy idea of disappearing. An idea, see you, that your characteristic mother and my Flintwinch would have been well enough pleased to execute. Ah! Bah, bah, bah, don't look as from high to low at me! I repeat it. Well enough pleased, excessively enchanted, and with all their hearts ravished. How strongly will you have it?'

He threw out the lees of his glass on the ground, so that they nearly spattered Cavalletto. This seemed to draw his attention to him anew. He set down his glass and said:

'I'll not fill it. What! I am born to be served. Come then, you Cavalletto, and fill!'

The little man looked at Clennam, whose eyes were occupied with Rigaud, and, seeing no prohibition, got up from the ground, and poured out from the bottle into the glass. The blending, as he did so, of his old submission with a sense of something humorous; the striving of that with a certain smouldering ferocity, which might have flashed fire in an instant (as the born gentleman seemed to think, for he had a wary eye upon him); and the easy yielding of all to a good-natured, careless, predominant propensity to sit down on the ground again: formed a very remarkable combination of character.

'This happy idea, brave sir,' Rigaud resumed after drinking, 'was a happy idea for several reasons. It amused me, it worried your dear mama and my Flintwinch, it caused you agonies (my terms for a lesson in politeness towards a gentleman), and it suggested to all the amiable persons interested that your entirely devoted is a man to fear. By Heaven, he is a man to fear! Beyond this; it might have restored her wit to my lady your mother—might, under the pressing little suspicion your wisdom has recognised, have persuaded her at last to announce, covertly, in the journals, that the difficulties of a certain contract would be removed by the appearance of a certain important party to it. Perhaps yes, perhaps no. But that, you have interrupted. Now, what is it you say? What is it you want?'

Never had Clennam felt more acutely that he was a prisoner in bonds, than when he saw this man before him, and could not accompany him to his mother's house. All the undiscernible difficulties and dangers he had ever feared were closing in, when he could not stir hand or foot.

'Perhaps, my friend, philosopher, man of virtue, Imbecile, what you will; perhaps,' said Rigaud, pausing in his drink to look out of his glass with his horrible smile, 'you would have done better to leave me alone?'

'No! At least,' said Clennam, 'you are known to be alive and unharmed. At least you cannot escape from these two witnesses; and they can produce you before any public authorities, or before hundreds of people!'

'But will not produce me before one,' said Rigaud, snapping his fingers again with an air of triumphant menace. 'To the Devil with your witnesses! To the Devil with your produced! To the Devil with yourself! What! Do I know what I know, for that? Have I my commodity on sale, for that? Bah, poor debtor! You have interrupted my little project. Let it pass. How then? What remains? To you, nothing; to me, all. Produce me! Is that what you want? I will produce myself, only too quickly. Contrabandist!

Give me pen, ink, and paper.'

Cavalletto got up again as before, and laid them before him in his former manner. Rigaud, after some villainous thinking and smiling, wrote, and read aloud, as follows:

'To MRS CLENNAM.

'Wait answer.

'Prison of the Marshalsea. 'At the apartment of your son.

'Dear Madam,—I am in despair to be informed to-day by our prisoner here (who has had the goodness to employ spies to seek me, living for politic reasons in retirement), that you have had fears for my safety.

'Reassure yourself, dear madam. I am well, I am strong and constant.

'With the greatest impatience I should fly to your house, but that I foresee it to be possible, under the circumstances, that you will not yet have quite definitively arranged the little proposition I have had the honour to submit to you. I name one week from this day, for a last final visit on my part; when you will unconditionally accept it or reject it, with its train of consequences.

'I suppress my ardour to embrace you and achieve this interesting business, in order that you may have leisure to adjust its details to our perfect mutual satisfaction.

'In the meanwhile, it is not too much to propose (our prisoner having deranged my housekeeping), that my expenses of lodging and nourishment at an hotel shall be paid by you. 'Receive, dear madam, the assurance of my highest and most distinguished consideration,

'RIGAUD BLANDOIS.

'A thousand friendships to that dear Flintwinch.

'I kiss the hands of Madame F.'

When he had finished this epistle, Rigaud folded it and tossed it with a flourish at Clennam's feet. 'Hola you! Apropos of producing, let somebody produce that at its address, and produce the answer here.'

'Cavalletto,' said Arthur. 'Will you take this fellow's letter?'

But, Cavalletto's significant finger again expressing that his post was at the door to keep watch over Rigaud, now he had found him with so much trouble, and that the duty of his post was to sit on the floor backed up by the door, looking at Rigaud and holding his own ankles,—Signor Panco once more volunteered. His services being accepted, Cavalletto suffered the door to open barely wide enough to admit of his squeezing himself out, and immediately shut it on him.

'Touch me with a finger, touch me with an epithet, question my superiority as I sit here drinking my wine at my pleasure,' said Rigaud, 'and I follow the letter and cancel my week's grace. You wanted me? You have got me! How do you like me?'

'You know,' returned Clennam, with a bitter sense of his helplessness, 'that when I sought you, I was not a prisoner.'

'To the Devil with you and your prison,' retorted Rigaud, leisurely, as he took from his pocket a case containing the materials for making cigarettes, and employed his facile hands in folding a few for present use; 'I care for neither of you. Contrabandist! A light.'

Again Cavalletto got up, and gave him what he wanted. There had been something dreadful in the noiseless skill of his cold, white hands, with the fingers lithely twisting about and twining one over another like serpents. Clennam could not prevent himself from shuddering inwardly, as if he had been looking on at a nest of those creatures.

'Hola, Pig!' cried Rigaud, with a noisy stimulating cry, as if Cavalletto were an Italian horse or mule. 'What! The infernal old jail was a respectable one to this. There was dignity in the bars and stones of that place. It was a prison for men. But this? Bah! A hospital for imbeciles!'

He smoked his cigarette out, with his ugly smile so fixed upon his face that he looked as though he were smoking with his drooping beak of a nose, rather than with his mouth; like a fancy in a weird picture. When he had lighted a second cigarette at the still burning end of the first, he said to Clennam:

'One must pass the time in the madman's absence. One must talk. One can't drink strong wine all day long, or I would have another bottle. She's handsome, sir. Though not exactly to my taste, still, by the Thunder and the Lightning! handsome. I felicitate you on your admiration.'

'I neither know nor ask,' said Clennam, 'of whom you speak.'

'Della bella Gowana, sir, as they say in Italy. Of the Gowan, the fair Gowan.'

'Of whose husband you were the—follower, I think?'

'Sir? Follower? You are insolent. The friend.'

'Do you sell all your friends?'

Rigaud took his cigarette from his mouth, and eyed him with a momentary revelation of surprise. But he put it between his lips again, as he answered with coolness:

'I sell anything that commands a price. How do your lawyers live, your politicians, your intriguers, your men of the Exchange? How do you live? How do you come here? Have you sold no friend? Lady of mine! I rather think, yes!'

Clennam turned away from him towards the window, and sat looking out at the wall.

'Effectively, sir,' said Rigaud, 'Society sells itself and sells me: and I sell Society. I perceive you have acquaintance with another lady. Also handsome. A strong spirit. Let us see. How do they call her? Wade.'

He received no answer, but could easily discern that he had hit the mark.

'Yes,' he went on, 'that handsome lady and strong spirit addresses me in the street, and I am not insensible. I respond. That handsome lady and strong spirit does me the favour to remark, in full confidence, "I have my curiosity, and I have my chagrins. You are not more than ordinarily honourable, perhaps?" I announce myself, "Madame, a gentleman from the birth, and a gentleman to the death; but NOT more than ordinarily honourable. I despise such a weak fantasy." Thereupon she is pleased to compliment. "The difference between you and the rest is," she answers, "that you say so." For she knows Society. I accept her congratulations with gallantry and politeness. Politeness and little gallantries are inseparable from my character. She then makes a proposition, which is, in effect, that she has seen us much together; that it appears to her that I am for the passing time the cat of the house, the friend of the family; that her curiosity and her chagrins awaken the fancy to be acquainted with their movements, to know the manner of their life, how the fair Gowana is beloved, how the fair Gowana is cherished, and so on. She is not rich, but offers such and such little recompenses for the little cares and derangements of such services; and I graciously—to do everything graciously is a part of my character—consent to accept them. O yes! So goes the world. It is the mode.'

Though Clennam's back was turned while he spoke, and thenceforth to the end of the interview, he kept those glittering eyes of his that were too near together, upon him, and evidently saw in the very carriage of the head, as he passed with his braggart recklessness from clause to clause of what he said, that he was saying nothing which Clennam did not already know.

'Whoof! The fair Gowana!' he said, lighting a third cigarette with a sound as if his lightest breath could blow her away. 'Charming, but imprudent! For it was not well of the fair Gowana to make mysteries of letters from old lovers, in her bedchamber on the mountain, that her husband might not see them. No, no. That was not well. Whoof! The Gowana was mistaken there.'

'I earnestly hope,' cried Arthur aloud, 'that Pancks may not be long gone, for this man's presence pollutes the room.'

'Ah! But he'll flourish here, and everywhere,' said Rigaud, with an exulting look and snap of his fingers. 'He always has; he always will!' Stretching his body out on the only three chairs in the room besides that on which Clennam sat, he sang, smiting himself on the breast as the gallant personage of the song.

'Who passes by this road so late?
     Compagnon de la Majolaine!
Who passes by this road so late?
     Always gay!

'Sing the Refrain, pig! You could sing it once, in another jail. Sing it! Or, by every Saint who was stoned to death, I'll be affronted and compromising; and then some people who are not dead yet, had better have been stoned along with them!'

'Of all the king's knights 'tis the flower,
     Compagnon de la Majolaine!
Of all the king's knights 'tis the flower,

Always gay!'

Partly in his old habit of submission, partly because his not doing it might injure his benefactor, and partly because he would as soon do it as anything else, Cavalletto took up the Refrain this time. Rigaud laughed, and fell to smoking with his eyes shut.

Possibly another quarter of an hour elapsed before Mr Pancks's step was heard upon the stairs, but the interval seemed to Clennam insupportably long. His step was attended by another step; and when Cavalletto opened the door, he admitted Mr Pancks and Mr Flintwinch. The latter was no sooner visible, than Rigaud rushed at him and embraced him boisterously.

'How do you find yourself, sir?' said Mr Flintwinch, as soon as he could disengage himself, which he struggled to do with very little ceremony. 'Thank you, no; I don't want any more.' This was in reference to another menace of attention from his recovered friend.

'Well, Arthur. You remember what I said to you about sleeping dogs and missing ones. It's come true, you see.'

He was as imperturbable as ever, to all appearance, and nodded his head in a moralising way as he looked round the room.

'And this is the Marshalsea prison for debt!' said Mr Flintwinch. 'Hah! you have brought your pigs to a very indifferent market, Arthur.'

If Arthur had patience, Rigaud had not. He took his little Flintwinch, with fierce playfulness, by the two lapels of his coat, and cried:

'To the Devil with the Market, to the Devil with the Pigs, and to the Devil with the Pig-Driver! Now! Give me the answer to my letter.'

'If you can make it convenient to let go a moment, sir,' returned Mr Flintwinch, 'I'll first hand Mr Arthur a little note that I have for him.'

He did so. It was in his mother's maimed writing, on a slip of paper, and contained only these words:

'I hope it is enough that you have ruined yourself. Rest contented without more ruin. Jeremiah Flintwinch is my messenger and representative. Your affectionate M. C.'

Clennam read this twice, in silence, and then tore it to pieces. Rigaud in the meanwhile stepped into a chair, and sat himself on the back with his feet upon the seat.

'Now, Beau Flintwinch,' he said, when he had closely watched the note to its destruction, 'the answer to my letter?'

'Mrs Clennam did not write, Mr Blandois, her hands being cramped, and she thinking it as well to send it verbally by me.' Mr Flintwinch screwed this out of himself, unwillingly and rustily. 'She sends her compliments, and says she doesn't on the whole wish to term you unreasonable, and that she agrees. But without prejudicing the appointment that stands for this day week.'

Monsieur Rigaud, after indulging in a fit of laughter, descended from his throne, saying, 'Good! I go to seek an hotel!' But, there his eyes encountered Cavalletto, who was still at his post.

'Come, Pig,' he added, 'I have had you for a follower against my will; now, I'll have you against yours. I tell you, my little reptiles, I am born to be served. I demand the service of this contrabandist as my domestic until this day week.'

In answer to Cavalletto's look of inquiry, Clennam made him a sign to go; but he added aloud, 'unless you are afraid of him.' Cavalletto replied with a very emphatic finger-negative.'No, master, I am not afraid of him, when I no more keep it secrettementally that he was once my comrade.' Rigaud took no notice of either remark until he had lighted his last cigarette and was quite ready for walking.

'Afraid of him,' he said then, looking round upon them all. 'Whoof! My children, my babies, my little dolls, you are all afraid of him. You give him his bottle of wine here; you give him meat, drink, and lodging there; you dare not touch him with a finger or an epithet. No. It is his character to triumph! Whoof!

'Of all the king's knights he's the flower, And he's always gay!'

With this adaptation of the Refrain to himself, he stalked out of the room closely followed by Cavalletto, whom perhaps he had pressed into his service because he tolerably well knew it would not be easy to get rid of him. Mr Flintwinch, after scraping his chin, and looking about with caustic disparagement of the Pig-Market, nodded to Arthur, and followed. Mr Pancks, still penitent and depressed, followed too; after receiving with great attention a secret word or two of instructions from Arthur, and whispering back that he would see this affair out, and stand by it to the end.

The prisoner, with the feeling that he was more despised, more scorned and repudiated, more helpless, altogether more miserable and fallen than before, was left alone again.

CHAPTER 29. A Plea in the Marshalsea

Haggard anxiety and remorse are bad companions to be barred up with. Brooding all day, and resting very little indeed at night, t will not arm a man against misery. Next morning, Clennam felt that his health was sinking, as his spirits had already sunk and that the weight under which he bent was bearing him down.

Night after night he had risen from his bed of wretchedness at twelve or one o'clock, and had sat at his window watching the sickly lamps in the yard, and looking upward for the first wan trace of day, hours before it was possible that the sky could show it to him. Now when the night came, he could not even persuade himself to undress.

For a burning restlessness set in, an agonised impatience of the prison, and a conviction that he was going to break his heart and die there, which caused him indescribable suffering. His dread and hatred of the place became so intense that he felt it a labour to draw his breath in it. The sensation of being stifled sometimes so overpowered him, that he would stand at the window holding his throat and gasping. At the same time a longing for other air, and a yearning to be beyond the blind blank wall, made him feel as if he must go mad with the ardour of the desire.

Many other prisoners had had experience of this condition before him, and its violence and continuity had worn themselves out in their cases, as they did in his. Two nights and a day exhausted it. It came back by fits, but those grew fainter and returned at lengthening intervals. A desolate calm succeeded; and the middle of the week found him settled down in the despondency of low, slow fever.

With Cavalletto and Pancks away, he had no visitors to fear but Mr and Mrs Plornish. His anxiety, in reference to that worthy pair, was that they should not come near him; for, in the morbid state of his nerves, he sought to be left alone, and spared the being seen so subdued and weak. He wrote a note to Mrs Plornish representing himself as occupied with his affairs, and bound by the necessity of devoting himself to them, to remain for a time even without the pleasant interruption of a sight of her kind face. As to Young John, who looked in daily at a certain hour, when the turnkeys were relieved, to ask if he could do anything for him; he always made a pretence of being engaged in writing, and to answer cheerfully in the negative. The subject of their only long conversation had never been revived between them. Through all these changes of unhappiness, however, it had never lost its hold on Clennam's mind.

The sixth day of the appointed week was a moist, hot, misty day. It seemed as though the prison's poverty, and shabbiness, and dirt, were growing in the sultry atmosphere. With an aching head and a weary heart, Clennam had watched the miserable night out, listening to the fall of rain on the yard pavement, thinking of its softer fall upon the country earth. A blurred circle of yellow haze had risen up in the sky in lieu of sun, and he had watched the patch it put upon his wall, like a bit of the prison's raggedness. He had heard the gates open; and the badly shod feet that waited outside shuffle in; and the sweeping, and pumping, and moving about, begin, which commenced the prison morning. So ill and faint that he was obliged to rest many times in the process of getting himself washed, he had at length crept to his chair by the open window. In it he sat dozing, while the old woman who arranged his room went through her morning's work.

Light of head with want of sleep and want of food (his appetite, and even his sense of taste, having forsaken him), he had been two or three times conscious, in the night, of going astray. He had heard fragments of tunes and songs in the warm wind, which he knew had no existence. Now that he began to doze in exhaustion, he heard them again; and voices seemed to address him, and he answered, and started.

Dozing and dreaming, without the power of reckoning time, so that a minute might have been an hour and an hour a minute, some abiding impression of a garden stole over him—a garden of flowers, with a damp warm wind gently stirring their scents. It required such a painful effort to lift his head for the purpose of inquiring into this, or inquiring into anything, that the impression appeared to have become quite an old and importunate one when he looked round. Beside the tea-cup on his table he saw, then, a blooming nosegay: a wonderful handful of the choicest and most lovely flowers.

Nothing had ever appeared so beautiful in his sight. He took them up and inhaled their fragrance, and he lifted them to his hot head, and he put them down and opened his parched hands to them, as cold hands are opened to receive the cheering of a fire. It was not until he had delighted in them for some time, that he wondered who had sent them; and opened his door to ask the woman who must have put them there, how they had come into her hands. But she was gone, and seemed to have been long gone; for the tea she had left for him on the table was cold. He tried to drink some, but could not bear the odour of it: so he crept back to his chair by the open window, and put the flowers on the little round table of old.

When the first faintness consequent on having moved about had left him, he subsided into his former state. One of the night-tunes was playing in the wind, when the door of his room seemed to open to a light touch, and, after a moment's pause, a quiet figure seemed to stand there, with a black mantle on it. It seemed to draw the mantle off and drop it on the ground, and then it seemed to be his Little Dorrit in her old, worn dress. It seemed to tremble, and to clasp its hands, and to smile, and to burst into tears.

He roused himself, and cried out. And then he saw, in the loving, pitying, sorrowing, dear face, as in a mirror, how changed he was; and she came towards him; and with her hands laid on his breast to keep him in his chair, and with her knees upon the floor at his feet, and with her lips raised up to kiss him, and with her tears dropping on him as the rain from Heaven had dropped upon the flowers, Little Dorrit, a living presence, called him by his name.

'O, my best friend! Dear Mr Clennam, don't let me see you weep! Unless you weep with pleasure to see me. I hope you do. Your own poor child come back!' So faithful, tender, and unspoiled by Fortune. In the sound of her voice, in the light of her eyes, in the touch of her hands, so Angelically comforting and true!

As he embraced her, she said to him, 'They never told me you were ill,' and drawing an arm softly round his neck, laid his head upon her bosom, put a hand upon his head, and resting her cheek upon that hand, nursed him as lovingly, and GOD knows as innocently, as she had nursed her father in that room when she had been but a baby, needing all the care from others that she took of them.

When he could speak, he said, 'Is it possible that you have come to me? And in this dress?'

'I hoped you would like me better in this dress than any other. I have always kept it by me, to remind me: though I wanted no reminding. I am not alone, you see. I have brought an old friend with me.'

Looking round, he saw Maggy in her big cap which had been long abandoned, with a basket on her arm as in the bygone days, chuckling rapturously.

'It was only yesterday evening that I came to London with my brother. I sent round to Mrs Plornish almost as soon as we arrived, that I might hear of you and let you know I had come. Then I heard that you were here. Did you happen to think of me in the night? I almost believe you must have thought of me a little. I thought of you so anxiously, and it appeared so long to morning.'

'I have thought of you—' he hesitated what to call her. She perceived it in an instant.

'You have not spoken to me by my right name yet. You know what my right name always is with you.'

'I have thought of you, Little Dorrit, every day, every hour, every minute, since I have been here.'

'Have you? Have you?'

He saw the bright delight of her face, and the flush that kindled in it, with a feeling of shame. He, a broken, bankrupt, sick, dishonoured prisoner.

'I was here before the gates were opened, but I was afraid to come straight to you. I should have done you more harm than good, at first; for the prison was so familiar and yet so strange, and it brought back so many remembrances of my poor father, and of you too, that at first it overpowered me. But we went to Mr Chivery before we came to the gate, and he brought us in, and got john's room for us—my poor old room, you know—and we waited there a little. I brought the flowers to the door, but you didn't hear me.' She looked something more womanly than when she had gone away, and the ripening touch of the Italian sun was visible upon her face. But, otherwise, she was quite unchanged. The same deep, timid earnestness that he had always seen in her, and never without emotion, he saw still. If it had a new meaning that smote him to the heart, the change was in his perception, not in her.

She took off her old bonnet, hung it in the old place, and noiselessly began, with Maggy's help, to make his room as fresh and neat as it could be made, and to sprinkle it with a pleasant-smelling water. When that was done, the basket, which was filled with grapes and other fruit, was unpacked, and all its contents were quietly put away. When that was done, a moment's whisper despatched Maggy to despatch somebody else to fill the basket again; which soon came back replenished with new stores, from which a present provision of cooling drink and jelly, and a prospective supply of roast chicken and wine and water, were the first extracts. These various arrangements completed, she took out her old needle-case to make him a curtain for his window; and thus, with a quiet reigning in the room, that seemed to diffuse itself through the else noisy prison, he found himself composed in his chair, with Little Dorrit working at his side.

To see the modest head again bent down over its task, and the nimble fingers busy at their old work—though she was not so absorbed in it, but that her compassionate eyes were often raised to his face, and, when they drooped again had tears in them—to be so consoled and comforted, and to believe that all the devotion of this great nature was turned to him in his adversity to pour out its inexhaustible wealth of goodness upon him, did not steady Clennam's trembling voice or hand, or strengthen him in his weakness. Yet it inspired him with an inward fortitude, that rose with his love. And how dearly he loved her now, what words can tell!

As they sat side by side in the shadow of the wall, the shadow fell like light upon him. She would not let him speak much, and he lay back in his chair, looking at her. Now and again she would rise and give him the glass that he might drink, or would smooth the resting-place of his head; then she would gently resume her seat by him, and bend over her work again.

The shadow moved with the sun, but she never moved from his side, except to wait upon him. The sun went down and she was still there. She had done her work now, and her hand, faltering on the arm of his chair since its last tending of him, was hesitating there yet. He laid his hand upon it, and it clasped him with a trembling supplication.

'Dear Mr Clennam, I must say something to you before I go. I have put it off from hour to hour, but I must say it.'

'I too, dear Little Dorrit. I have put off what I must say.' She nervously moved her hand towards his lips as if to stop him; then it dropped, trembling, into its former place.

'I am not going abroad again. My brother is, but I am not. He was always attached to me, and he is so grateful to me now—so much too grateful, for it is only because I happened to be with him in his illness—that he says I shall be free to stay where I like best, and to do what I like best. He only wishes me to be happy, he says.'

There was one bright star shining in the sky. She looked up at it While she spoke, as if it were the fervent purpose of her own heart shining above her.

'You will understand, I dare say, without my telling you, that my brother has come home to find my dear father's will, and to take possession of his property. He says, if there is a will, he is sure I shall be left rich; and if there is none, that he will make me so.'

He would have spoken; but she put up her trembling hand again, and he stopped.

'I have no use for money, I have no wish for it. It would be of no value at all to me but for your sake. I could not be rich, and you here. I must always be much worse than poor, with you distressed. Will you let me lend you all I have? Will you let me give it you? Will you let me show you that I have never forgotten, that I never can forget, your protection of me when this was my home? Dear Mr Clennam, make me of all the world the happiest, by saying Yes. Make me as happy as I can be in leaving you here, by saying nothing to-night, and letting me go away with the hope that you will think of it kindly; and that for my sake—not for yours, for mine, for nobody's but mine!—you will give me the greatest joy I can experience on earth, the joy of knowing that I have been serviceable to you, and that I have paid some little of the great debt of my affection and gratitude. I can't say what I wish to say. I can't visit you here where I have lived so long, I can't think of you here where I have seen so much, and be as calm and comforting as I ought. My tears will make their way. I cannot keep them back. But pray, pray, pray, do not turn from your Little Dorrit, now, in your affliction! Pray, pray, pray, I beg you and implore you with all my grieving heart, my friend—my dear!—take all I have, and make it a Blessing to me!'

The star had shone on her face until now, when her face sank upon his hand and her own.

It had grown darker when he raised her in his encircling arm, and softly answered her.

'No, darling Little Dorrit. No, my child. I must not hear of such a sacrifice. Liberty and hope would be so dear, bought at such a price, that I could never support their weight, never bear the reproach of possessing them. But with what ardent thankfulness and love I say this, I may call Heaven to witness!'

'And yet you will not let me be faithful to you in your affliction?'

'Say, dearest Little Dorrit, and yet I will try to be faithful to you. If, in the bygone days when this was your home and when this was your dress, I had understood myself (I speak only of myself) better, and had read the secrets of my own breast more distinctly; if, through my reserve and self-mistrust, I had discerned a light that I see brightly now when it has passed far away, and my weak footsteps can never overtake it; if I had then known, and told you that I loved and honoured you, not as the poor child I used to call you, but as a woman whose true hand would raise me high above myself and make me a far happier and better man; if I had so used the opportunity there is no recalling—as I wish I had, O I wish I had!—and if something had kept us apart then, when I was moderately thriving, and when you were poor; I might have met your noble offer of your fortune, dearest girl, with other words than these, and still have blushed to touch it. But, as it is, I must never touch it, never!'

She besought him, more pathetically and earnestly, with her little supplicatory hand, than she could have done in any words.

'I am disgraced enough, my Little Dorrit. I must not descend so low as that, and carry you—so dear, so generous, so good—down with me. GOD bless you, GOD reward you! It is past.' He took her in his arms, as if she had been his daughter.

'Always so much older, so much rougher, and so much less worthy, even what I was must be dismissed by both of us, and you must see me only as I am. I put this parting kiss upon your cheek, my child—who might have been more near to me, who never could have been more dear—a ruined man far removed from you, for ever separated from you, whose course is run while yours is but beginning. I have not the courage to ask to be forgotten by you in my humiliation; but I ask to be remembered only as I am.'

The bell began to ring, warning visitors to depart. He took her mantle from the wall, and tenderly wrapped it round her.

'One other word, my Little Dorrit. A hard one to me, but it is a necessary one. The time when you and this prison had anything in common has long gone by. Do you understand?'

'O! you will never say to me,' she cried, weeping bitterly, and holding up her clasped hands in entreaty, 'that I am not to come back any more! You will surely not desert me so!'

'I would say it, if I could; but I have not the courage quite to shut out this dear face, and abandon all hope of its return. But do not come soon, do not come often! This is now a tainted place, and I well know the taint of it clings to me. You belong to much brighter and better scenes. You are not to look back here, my Little Dorrit; you are to look away to very different and much happier paths. Again, GOD bless you in them! GOD reward you!'

Maggy, who had fallen into very low spirits, here cried, 'Oh get him into a hospital; do get him into a hospital, Mother! He'll never look like hisself again, if he an't got into a hospital. And then the little woman as was always a spinning at her wheel, she can go to the cupboard with the Princess, and say, what do you keep the Chicking there for? and then they can take it out and give it to him, and then all be happy!'

The interruption was seasonable, for the bell had nearly rung itself out. Again tenderly wrapping her mantle about her, and taking her on his arm (though, but for her visit, he was almost too weak to walk), Arthur led Little Dorrit down-stairs. She was the last visitor to pass out at the Lodge, and the gate jarred heavily and hopelessly upon her.

With the funeral clang that it sounded into Arthur's heart, his sense of weakness returned. It was a toilsome journey up-stairs to his room, and he re-entered its dark solitary precincts in unutterable misery.

When it was almost midnight, and the prison had long been quiet, a cautious creak came up the stairs, and a cautious tap of a key was given at his door. It was Young John. He glided in, in his stockings, and held the door closed, while he spoke in a whisper.

'It's against all rules, but I don't mind. I was determined to come through, and come to you.'

'What is the matter?'

'Nothing's the matter, sir. I was waiting in the court-yard for Miss Dorrit when she came out. I thought you'd like some one to see that she was safe.'

'Thank you, thank you! You took her home, John?'

'I saw her to her hotel. The same that Mr Dorrit was at. Miss Dorrit walked all the way, and talked to me so kind, it quite knocked me over. Why do you think she walked instead of riding?'

'I don't know, John.'

'To talk about you. She said to me, "John, you was always honourable, and if you'll promise me that you will take care of him, and never let him want for help and comfort when I am not there, my mind will be at rest so far." I promised her. And I'll stand by you,' said John Chivery, 'for ever!'

Clennam, much affected, stretched out his hand to this honest spirit.

'Before I take it,' said John, looking at it, without coming from the door, 'guess what message Miss Dorrit gave me.'

Clennam shook his head.

'"Tell him,"' repeated John, in a distinct, though quavering voice, '"that his Little Dorrit sent him her undying love." Now it's delivered. Have I been honourable, sir?'

'Very, very!'

'Will you tell Miss Dorrit I've been honourable, sir?'

'I will indeed.'

'There's my hand, sir,' said john, 'and I'll stand by you forever!'

After a hearty squeeze, he disappeared with the same cautious creak upon the stair, crept shoeless over the pavement of the yard, and, locking the gates behind him, passed out into the front where he had left his shoes. If the same way had been paved with burning ploughshares, it is not at all improbable that John would have traversed it with the same devotion, for the same purpose.

CHAPTER 30. Closing in

The last day of the appointed week touched the bars of the Marshalsea gate. Black, all night, since the gate had clashed upon Little Dorrit, its iron stripes were turned by the early-glowing sun into stripes of gold. Far aslant across the city, over its jumbled roofs, and through the open tracery of its church towers, struck the long bright rays, bars of the prison of this lower world.

Throughout the day the old house within the gateway remained untroubled by any visitors. But, when the sun was low, three men turned in at the gateway and made for the dilapidated house.

Rigaud was the first, and walked by himself smoking. Mr Baptist was the second, and jogged close after him, looking at no other object. Mr Pancks was the third, and carried his hat under his arm for the liberation of his restive hair; the weather being extremely hot. They all came together at the door-steps.

'You pair of madmen!' said Rigaud, facing about. 'Don't go yet!'

'We don't mean to,' said Mr Pancks. Giving him a dark glance in acknowledgment of his answer, Rigaud knocked loudly. He had charged himself with drink, for the playing out of his game, and was impatient to begin. He had hardly finished one long resounding knock, when he turned to the knocker again and began another. That was not yet finished when Jeremiah Flintwinch opened the door, and they all clanked into the stone hall. Rigaud, thrusting Mr Flintwinch aside, proceeded straight up-stairs. His two attendants followed him, Mr Flintwinch followed them, and they all came trooping into Mrs Clennam's quiet room. It was in its usual state; except that one of the windows was wide open, and Affery sat on its old-fashioned window-seat, mending a stocking. The usual articles were on the little table; the usual deadened fire was in the grate; the bed had its usual pall upon it; and the mistress of all sat on her black bier-like sofa, propped up by her black angular bolster that was like the headsman's block.

Yet there was a nameless air of preparation in the room, as if it were strung up for an occasion. From what the room derived it—every one of its small variety of objects being in the fixed spot it had occupied for years—no one could have said without looking attentively at its mistress, and that, too, with a previous knowledge of her face. Although her unchanging black dress was in every plait precisely as of old, and her unchanging attitude was rigidly preserved, a very slight additional setting of her features and contraction of her gloomy forehead was so powerfully marked, that it marked everything about her.

'Who are these?' she said, wonderingly, as the two attendants entered. 'What do these people want here?'

'Who are these, dear madame, is it?' returned Rigaud. 'Faith, they are friends of your son the prisoner. And what do they want here, is it? Death, madame, I don't know. You will do well to ask them.'

'You know you told us at the door, not to go yet,' said Pancks.

'And you know you told me at the door, you didn't mean to go,' retorted Rigaud. 'In a word, madame, permit me to present two spies of the prisoner's—madmen, but spies. If you wish them to remain here during our little conversation, say the word. It is nothing to me.'

'Why should I wish them to remain here?' said Mrs Clennam. 'What have I to do with them?'

'Then, dearest madame,' said Rigaud, throwing himself into an arm-chair so heavily that the old room trembled, 'you will do well to dismiss them. It is your affair. They are not my spies, not my rascals.'

'Hark! You Pancks,' said Mrs Clennam, bending her brows upon him angrily, 'you Casby's clerk! Attend to your employer's business and your own. Go. And take that other man with you.' 'Thank you, ma'am,' returned Mr Pancks, 'I am glad to say I see no objection to our both retiring. We have done all we undertook to do for Mr Clennam. His constant anxiety has been (and it grew worse upon him when he became a prisoner), that this agreeable gentleman should be brought back here to the place from which he slipped away. Here he is—brought back. And I will say,' added Mr Pancks, 'to his ill-looking face, that in my opinion the world would be no worse for his slipping out of it altogether.'

'Your opinion is not asked,' answered Mrs Clennam. 'Go.'

'I am sorry not to leave you in better company, ma'am,' said Pancks; 'and sorry, too, that Mr Clennam can't be present. It's my fault, that is.'

'You mean his own,' she returned.

'No, I mean mine, ma'am,' said Pancks,'for it was my misfortune to lead him into a ruinous investment.' (Mr Pancks still clung to that word, and never said speculation.) 'Though I can prove by figures,' added Mr Pancks, with an anxious countenance, 'that it ought to have been a good investment. I have gone over it since it failed, every day of my life, and it comes out—regarded as a question of figures—triumphant. The present is not a time or place,' Mr Pancks pursued, with a longing glance into his hat, where he kept his calculations, 'for entering upon the figures; but the figures are not to be disputed. Mr Clennam ought to have been at this moment in his carriage and pair, and I ought to have been worth from three to five thousand pound.'

Mr Pancks put his hair erect with a general aspect of confidence that could hardly have been surpassed, if he had had the amount in his pocket. These incontrovertible figures had been the occupation of every moment of his leisure since he had lost his money, and were destined to afford him consolation to the end of his days.

'However,' said Mr Pancks, 'enough of that. Altro, old boy, you have seen the figures, and you know how they come out.' Mr Baptist, who had not the slightest arithmetical power of compensating himself in this way, nodded, with a fine display of bright teeth.

At whom Mr Flintwinch had been looking, and to whom he then said:

'Oh! it's you, is it? I thought I remembered your face, but I wasn't certain till I saw your teeth. Ah! yes, to be sure. It was this officious refugee,' said Jeremiah to Mrs Clennam, 'who came knocking at the door on the night when Arthur and Chatterbox were here, and who asked me a whole Catechism of questions about Mr Blandois.'

'It is true,' Mr Baptist cheerfully admitted. 'And behold him, padrone! I have found him consequentementally.'

'I shouldn't have objected,' returned Mr Flintwinch, 'to your having broken your neck consequentementally.'

'And now,' said Mr Pancks, whose eye had often stealthily wandered to the window-seat and the stocking that was being mended there, 'I've only one other word to say before I go. If Mr Clennam was here—but unfortunately, though he has so far got the better of this fine gentleman as to return him to this place against his will, he is ill and in prison—ill and in prison, poor fellow—if he was here,' said Mr Pancks, taking one step aside towards the window-seat, and laying his right hand upon the stocking; 'he would say, "Affery, tell your dreams!"'

Mr Pancks held up his right forefinger between his nose and the stocking with a ghostly air of warning, turned, steamed out and towed Mr Baptist after him. The house-door was heard to close upon them, their steps were heard passing over the dull pavement of the echoing court-yard, and still nobody had added a word. Mrs Clennam and Jeremiah had exchanged a look; and had then looked, and looked still, at Affery, who sat mending the stocking with great assiduity.

'Come!' said Mr Flintwinch at length, screwing himself a curve or two in the direction of the window-seat, and rubbing the palms of his hands on his coat-tail as if he were preparing them to do something: 'Whatever has to be said among us had better be begun to be said without more loss of time.—So, Affery, my woman, take yourself away!'

In a moment Affery had thrown the stocking down, started up, caught hold of the windowsill with her right hand, lodged herself upon the window-seat with her right knee, and was flourishing her left hand, beating expected assailants off.

'No, I won't, Jeremiah—no, I won't—no, I won't! I won't go! I'll stay here. I'll hear all I don't know, and say all I know. I will, at last, if I die for it. I will, I will, I will, I will!'

Mr Flintwinch, stiffening with indignation and amazement, moistened the fingers of one hand at his lips, softly described a circle with them in the palm of the other hand, and continued with a menacing grin to screw himself in the direction of his wife; gasping some remark as he advanced, of which, in his choking anger, only the words, 'Such a dose!' were audible.

'Not a bit nearer, Jeremiah!' cried Affery, never ceasing to beat the air. 'Don't come a bit nearer to me, or I'll rouse the neighbourhood! I'll throw myself out of window. I'll scream Fire and Murder! I'll wake the dead! Stop where you are, or I'll make shrieks enough to wake the dead!'

The determined voice of Mrs Clennam echoed 'Stop!' Jeremiah had stopped already. 'It is closing in, Flintwinch. Let her alone. Affery, do you turn against me after these many years?'

'I do, if it's turning against you to hear what I don't know, and say what I know. I have broke out now, and I can't go back. I am determined to do it. I will do it, I will, I will, I will! If that's turning against you, yes, I turn against both of you two clever ones. I told Arthur when he first come home to stand up against you. I told him it was no reason, because I was afeard of my life of you, that he should be. All manner of things have been a-going on since then, and I won't be run up by Jeremiah, nor yet I won't be dazed and scared, nor made a party to I don't know what, no more. I won't, I won't, I won't! I'll up for Arthur when he has nothing left, and is ill, and in prison, and can't up for himself. I will, I will, I will, I will!'

'How do you know, you heap of confusion,' asked Mrs Clennam sternly, 'that in doing what you are doing now, you are even serving Arthur?'

'I don't know nothing rightly about anything,' said Affery; 'and if ever you said a true word in your life, it's when you call me a heap of confusion, for you two clever ones have done your most to make me such. You married me whether I liked it or not, and you've led me, pretty well ever since, such a life of dreaming and frightening as never was known, and what do you expect me to be but a heap of confusion? You wanted to make me such, and I am such; but I won't submit no longer; no, I won't, I won't, I won't, I won't!' She was still beating the air against all comers.

After gazing at her in silence, Mrs Clennam turned to Rigaud. 'You see and hear this foolish creature. Do you object to such a piece of distraction remaining where she is?'

'I, madame,' he replied, 'do I? That's a question for you.'

'I do not,' she said, gloomily. 'There is little left to choose now. Flintwinch, it is closing in.'

Mr Flintwinch replied by directing a look of red vengeance at his wife, and then, as if to pinion himself from falling upon her, screwed his crossed arms into the breast of his waistcoat, and with his chin very near one of his elbows stood in a corner, watching Rigaud in the oddest attitude. Rigaud, for his part, arose from his chair, and seated himself on the table with his legs dangling. In this easy attitude, he met Mrs Clennam's set face, with his moustache going up and his nose coming down.

'Madame, I am a gentleman—'

'Of whom,' she interrupted in her steady tones, 'I have heard disparagement, in connection with a French jail and an accusation of murder.'

He kissed his hand to her with his exaggerated gallantry.

'Perfectly. Exactly. Of a lady too! What absurdity! How incredible! I had the honour of making a great success then; I hope to have the honour of making a great success now. I kiss your hands. Madame, I am a gentleman (I was going to observe), who when he says, "I will definitely finish this or that affair at the present sitting," does definitely finish it. I announce to you that we are arrived at our last sitting on our little business. You do me the favour to follow, and to comprehend?'

She kept her eyes fixed upon him with a frown. 'Yes.'

'Further, I am a gentleman to whom mere mercenary trade-bargains are unknown, but to whom money is always acceptable as the means of pursuing his pleasures. You do me the favour to follow, and to comprehend?'

'Scarcely necessary to ask, one would say. Yes.'

'Further, I am a gentleman of the softest and sweetest disposition, but who, if trifled with, becomes enraged. Noble natures under such circumstances become enraged. I possess a noble nature. When the lion is awakened—that is to say, when I enrage—the satisfaction of my animosity is as acceptable to me as money. You always do me the favour to follow, and to comprehend?'

'Yes,' she answered, somewhat louder than before.

'Do not let me derange you; pray be tranquil. I have said we are now arrived at our last sitting. Allow me to recall the two sittings we have held.'

'It is not necessary.'

'Death, madame,' he burst out, 'it's my fancy! Besides, it clears the way. The first sitting was limited. I had the honour of making your acquaintance—of presenting my letter; I am a Knight of Industry, at your service, madame, but my polished manners had won me so much of success, as a master of languages, among your compatriots who are as stiff as their own starch is to one another, but are ready to relax to a foreign gentleman of polished manners—and of observing one or two little things,' he glanced around the room and smiled, 'about this honourable house, to know which was necessary to assure me, and to convince me that I had the distinguished pleasure of making the acquaintance of the lady I sought. I achieved this. I gave my word of honour to our dear Flintwinch that I would return. I gracefully departed.'

Her face neither acquiesced nor demurred. The same when he paused, and when he spoke, it as yet showed him always the one attentive frown, and the dark revelation before mentioned of her being nerved for the occasion.

'I say, gracefully departed, because it was graceful to retire without alarming a lady. To be morally graceful, not less than physically, is a part of the character of Rigaud Blandois. It was also politic, as leaving you with something overhanging you, to expect me again with a little anxiety on a day not named. But your slave is politic. By Heaven, madame, politic! Let us return. On the day not named, I have again the honour to render myself at your house. I intimate that I have something to sell, which, if not bought, will compromise madame whom I highly esteem. I explain myself generally. I demand—I think it was a thousand pounds. Will you correct me?'

Thus forced to speak, she replied with constraint, 'You demanded as much as a thousand pounds.'

'I demand at present, Two. Such are the evils of delay. But to return once more. We are not accordant; we differ on that occasion. I am playful; playfulness is a part of my amiable character. Playfully, I become as one slain and hidden. For, it may alone be worth half the sum to madame, to be freed from the suspicions that my droll idea awakens. Accident and spies intermix themselves against my playfulness, and spoil the fruit, perhaps—who knows? only you and Flintwinch—when it is just ripe. Thus, madame, I am here for the last time. Listen! Definitely the last.'

As he struck his straggling boot-heels against the flap of the table, meeting her frown with an insolent gaze, he began to change his tone for a fierce one.

'Bah! Stop an instant! Let us advance by steps. Here is my Hotel-note to be paid, according to contract. Five minutes hence we may be at daggers' points. I'll not leave it till then, or you'll cheat me. Pay it! Count me the money!'

'Take it from his hand and pay it, Flintwinch,' said Mrs Clennam.

He spirted it into Mr Flintwinch's face when the old man advanced to take it, and held forth his hand, repeating noisily, 'Pay it! Count it out! Good money!' Jeremiah picked the bill up, looked at the total with a bloodshot eye, took a small canvas bag from his pocket, and told the amount into his hand.

Rigaud chinked the money, weighed it in his hand, threw it up a little way and caught it, chinked it again.

'The sound of it, to the bold Rigaud Blandois, is like the taste of fresh meat to the tiger. Say, then, madame. How much?'

He turned upon her suddenly with a menacing gesture of the weighted hand that clenched the money, as if he were going to strike her with it.

'I tell you again, as I told you before, that we are not rich here, as you suppose us to be, and that your demand is excessive. I have not the present means of complying with such a demand, if I had ever so great an inclination.'

'If!' cried Rigaud. 'Hear this lady with her If! Will you say that you have not the inclination?'

'I will say what presents itself to me, and not what presents itself to you.'

'Say it then. As to the inclination. Quick! Come to the inclination, and I know what to do.'

She was no quicker, and no slower, in her reply. 'It would seem that you have obtained possession of a paper—or of papers—which I assuredly have the inclination to recover.'

Rigaud, with a loud laugh, drummed his heels against the table, and chinked his money. 'I think so! I believe you there!'

'The paper might be worth, to me, a sum of money. I cannot say how much, or how little.'

'What the Devil!' he asked savagely.'Not after a week's grace to consider?'

'No! I will not out of my scanty means—for I tell you again, we are poor here, and not rich—I will not offer any price for a power that I do not know the worst and the fullest extent of. This is the third time of your hinting and threatening. You must speak explicitly, or you may go where you will, and do what you will. It is better to be torn to pieces at a spring, than to be a mouse at the caprice of such a cat.'

He looked at her so hard with those eyes too near together that the sinister sight of each, crossing that of the other, seemed to make the bridge of his hooked nose crooked. After a long survey, he said, with the further setting off of his internal smile:

'You are a bold woman!'

'I am a resolved woman.'

'You always were. What? She always was; is it not so, my little Flintwinch?'

'Flintwinch, say nothing to him. It is for him to say, here and now, all he can; or to go hence, and do all he can. You know this to be our determination. Leave him to his action on it.'

She did not shrink under his evil leer, or avoid it. He turned it upon her again, but she remained steady at the point to which she had fixed herself. He got off the table, placed a chair near the sofa, sat down in it, and leaned an arm upon the sofa close to her own, which he touched with his hand. Her face was ever frowning, attentive, and settled.

'It is your pleasure then, madame, that I shall relate a morsel of family history in this little family society,' said Rigaud, with a warning play of his lithe fingers on her arm. 'I am something of a doctor. Let me touch your pulse.'

She suffered him to take her wrist in his hand. Holding it, he proceeded to say:

'A history of a strange marriage, and a strange mother, and a revenge, and a suppression.—Aye, aye, aye? this pulse is beating curiously! It appears to me that it doubles while I touch it. Are these the usual changes of your malady, madame?'

There was a struggle in her maimed arm as she twisted it away, but there was none in her face. On his face there was his own smile.

'I have lived an adventurous life. I am an adventurous character. I have known many adventurers; interesting spirits—amiable society! To one of them I owe my knowledge and my proofs—I repeat it, estimable lady—proofs—of the ravishing little family history I go to commence. You will be charmed with it. But, bah! I forget. One should name a history. Shall I name it the history of a house? But, bah, again. There are so many houses. Shall I name it the history of this house?'

Leaning over the sofa, poised on two legs of his chair and his left elbow; that hand often tapping her arm to beat his words home; his legs crossed; his right hand sometimes arranging his hair, sometimes smoothing his moustache, sometimes striking his nose, always threatening her whatever it did; coarse, insolent, rapacious, cruel, and powerful, he pursued his narrative at his ease.

'In fine, then, I name it the history of this house. I commence it. There live here, let us suppose, an uncle and nephew. The uncle, a rigid old gentleman of strong force of character; the nephew, habitually timid, repressed, and under constraint.'

Mistress Affery, fixedly attentive in the window-seat, biting the rolled up end of her apron, and trembling from head to foot, here cried out,'Jeremiah, keep off from me! I've heerd, in my dreams, of Arthur's father and his uncle. He's a talking of them. It was before my time here; but I've heerd in my dreams that Arthur's father was a poor, irresolute, frightened chap, who had had everything but his orphan life scared out of him when he was young, and that he had no voice in the choice of his wife even, but his uncle chose her. There she sits! I heerd it in my dreams, and you said it to her own self.'

As Mr Flintwinch shook his fist at her, and as Mrs Clennam gazed upon her, Rigaud kissed his hand to her. 'Perfectly right, dear Madame Flintwinch. You have a genius for dreaming.'

'I don't want none of your praises,' returned Affery. 'I don't want to have nothing at all to say to you. But Jeremiah said they was dreams, and I'll tell 'em as such!' Here she put her apron in her mouth again, as if she were stopping somebody else's mouth—perhaps jeremiah's, which was chattering with threats as if he were grimly cold.

'Our beloved Madame Flintwinch,' said Rigaud, 'developing all of a sudden a fine susceptibility and spirituality, is right to a marvel. Yes. So runs the history. Monsieur, the uncle, commands the nephew to marry. Monsieur says to him in effect, "My nephew, I introduce to you a lady of strong force of character, like myself—a resolved lady, a stern lady, a lady who has a will that can break the weak to powder: a lady without pity, without love, implacable, revengeful, cold as the stone, but raging as the fire."

Ah! what fortitude! Ah, what superiority of intellectual strength! Truly, a proud and noble character that I describe in the supposed words of Monsieur, the uncle. Ha, ha, ha! Death of my soul, I love the sweet lady!'

Mrs Clennam's face had changed. There was a remarkable darkness of colour on it, and the brow was more contracted. 'Madame, madame,' said Rigaud, tapping her on the arm, as if his cruel hand were sounding a musical instrument, 'I perceive I interest you. I perceive I awaken your sympathy. Let us go on.'

The drooping nose and the ascending moustache had, however, to be hidden for a moment with the white hand, before he could go on; he enjoyed the effect he made so much.

'The nephew, being, as the lucid Madame Flintwinch has remarked, a poor devil who has had everything but his orphan life frightened and famished out of him—the nephew abases his head, and makes response: "My uncle, it is to you to command. Do as you will!" Monsieur, the uncle, does as he will. It is what he always does. The auspicious nuptials take place; the newly married come home to this charming mansion; the lady is received, let us suppose, by Flintwinch. Hey, old intriguer?'

Jeremiah, with his eyes upon his mistress, made no reply. Rigaud looked from one to the other, struck his ugly nose, and made a clucking with his tongue.

'Soon the lady makes a singular and exciting discovery. Thereupon, full of anger, full of jealousy, full of vengeance, she forms—see you, madame!—a scheme of retribution, the weight of which she ingeniously forces her crushed husband to bear himself, as well as execute upon her enemy. What superior intelligence!'

'Keep off, Jeremiah!' cried the palpitating Affery, taking her apron from her mouth again. 'But it was one of my dreams, that you told her, when you quarrelled with her one winter evening at dusk—there she sits and you looking at her—that she oughtn't to have let Arthur when he come home, suspect his father only; that she had always had the strength and the power; and that she ought to have stood up more to Arthur, for his father. It was in the same dream where you said to her that she was not—not something, but I don't know what, for she burst out tremendous and stopped you. You know the dream as well as I do. When you come down-stairs into the kitchen with the candle in your hand, and hitched my apron off my head. When you told me I had been dreaming. When you wouldn't believe the noises.' After this explosion Affery put her apron into her mouth again; always keeping her hand on the window-sill and her knee on the window-seat, ready to cry out or jump out if her lord and master approached.

Rigaud had not lost a word of this.

'Haha!' he cried, lifting his eyebrows, folding his arms, and leaning back in his chair. 'Assuredly, Madame Flintwinch is an oracle! How shall we interpret the oracle, you and I and the old intriguer? He said that you were not—? And you burst out and stopped him! What was it you were not? What is it you are not? Say then, madame!'

Under this ferocious banter, she sat breathing harder, and her mouth was disturbed. Her lips quivered and opened, in spite of her utmost efforts to keep them still.

'Come then, madame! Speak, then! Our old intriguer said that you were not—and you stopped him. He was going to say that you were not—what? I know already, but I want a little confidence from you. How, then? You are not what?'

She tried again to repress herself, but broke out vehemently, 'Not Arthur's mother!'

'Good,' said Rigaud. 'You are amenable.'

With the set expression of her face all torn away by the explosion of her passion, and with a bursting, from every rent feature, of the smouldering fire so long pent up, she cried out: 'I will tell it myself! I will not hear it from your lips, and with the taint of your wickedness upon it. Since it must be seen, I will have it seen by the light I stood in. Not another word. Hear me!'

'Unless you are a more obstinate and more persisting woman than even I know you to be,' Mr Flintwinch interposed, 'you had better leave Mr Rigaud, Mr Blandois, Mr Beelzebub, to tell it in his own way. What does it signify when he knows all about it?'

'He does not know all about it.'

'He knows all he cares about it,' Mr Flintwinch testily urged. 'He does not know me.'

'What do you suppose he cares for you, you conceited woman?' said Mr Flintwinch.

'I tell you, Flintwinch, I will speak. I tell you when it has come to this, I will tell it with my own lips, and will express myself throughout it. What! Have I suffered nothing in this room, no deprivation, no imprisonment, that I should condescend at last to contemplate myself in such a glass as that. Can you see him? Can you hear him? If your wife were a hundred times the ingrate that she is, and if I were a thousand times more hopeless than I am of inducing her to be silent if this man is silenced, I would tell it myself, before I would bear the torment of the hearing it from him.'

Rigaud pushed his chair a little back; pushed his legs out straight before him; and sat with his arms folded over against her.

'You do not know what it is,' she went on addressing him, 'to be brought up strictly and straitly. I was so brought up. Mine was no light youth of sinful gaiety and pleasure. Mine were days of wholesome repression, punishment, and fear. The corruption of our hearts, the evil of our ways, the curse that is upon us, the terrors that surround us—these were the themes of my childhood. They formed my character, and filled me with an abhorrence of evil-doers. When old Mr Gilbert Clennam proposed his orphan nephew to my father for my husband, my father impressed upon me that his bringing-up had been, like mine, one of severe restraint. He told me, that besides the discipline his spirit had undergone, he had lived in a starved house, where rioting and gaiety were unknown, and where every day was a day of toil and trial like the last. He told me that he had been a man in years long before his uncle had acknowledged him as one; and that from his school-days to that hour, his uncle's roof has been a sanctuary to him from the contagion of the irreligious and dissolute. When, within a twelvemonth of our marriage, I found my husband, at that time when my father spoke of him, to have sinned against the Lord and outraged me by holding a guilty creature in my place, was I to doubt that it had been appointed to me to make the discovery, and that it was appointed to me to lay the hand of punishment upon that creature of perdition? Was I to dismiss in a moment —not my own wrongs—what was I! but all the rejection of sin, and all the war against it, in which I had been bred?' She laid her wrathful hand upon the watch on the table.

'No! "Do not forget." The initials of those words are within here now, and were within here then. I was appointed to find the old letter that referred to them, and that told me what they meant, and whose work they were, and why they were worked, lying with this watch in his secret drawer. But for that appointment there would have been no discovery. "Do not forget." It spoke to me like a voice from an angry cloud. Do not forget the deadly sin, do not forget the appointed discovery, do not forget the appointed suffering. I did not forget. Was it my own wrong I remembered? Mine! I was but a servant and a minister. What power could I have over them, but that they were bound in the bonds of their sin, and delivered to me!'

More than forty years had passed over the grey head of this determined woman, since the time she recalled. More than forty years of strife and struggle with the whisper that, by whatever name she called her vindictive pride and rage, nothing through all eternity could change their nature. Yet, gone those more than forty years, and come this Nemesis now looking her in the face, she still abided by her old impiety—still reversed the order of Creation, and breathed her own breath into a clay image of her Creator. Verily, verily, travellers have seen many monstrous idols in many countries; but no human eyes have ever seen more daring, gross, and shocking images of the Divine nature than we creatures of the dust make in our own likenesses, of our own bad passions.

'When I forced him to give her up to me, by her name and place of abode,' she went on in her torrent of indignation and defence; 'when I accused her, and she fell hiding her face at my feet, was it my injury that I asserted, were they my reproaches that I poured upon her? Those who were appointed of old to go to wicked kings and accuse them—were they not ministers and servants? And had not I, unworthy and far-removed from them, sin to denounce? When she pleaded to me her youth, and his wretched and hard life (that was her phrase for the virtuous training he had belied), and the desecrated ceremony of marriage there had secretly been between them, and the terrors of want and shame that had overwhelmed them both when I was first appointed to be the instrument of their punishment, and the love (for she said the word to me, down at my feet) in which she had abandoned him and left him to me, was it my enemy that became my footstool, were they the words of my wrath that made her shrink and quiver! Not unto me the strength be ascribed; not unto me the wringing of the expiation!'

Many years had come and gone since she had had the free use even of her fingers; but it was noticeable that she had already more than once struck her clenched hand vigorously upon the table, and that when she said these words she raised her whole arm in the air, as though it had been a common action with her.

'And what was the repentance that was extorted from the hardness of her heart and the blackness of her depravity? I, vindictive and implacable? It may be so, to such as you who know no righteousness, and no appointment except Satan's. Laugh; but I will be known as I know myself, and as Flintwinch knows me, though it is only to you and this half-witted woman.'

'Add, to yourself, madame,' said Rigaud. 'I have my little suspicions that madame is rather solicitous to be justified to herself.'

'It is false. It is not so. I have no need to be,' she said, with great energy and anger.

'Truly?' retorted Rigaud. 'Hah!'

'I ask, what was the penitence, in works, that was demanded of her?

"'You have a child; I have none. You love that child. Give him to me. He shall believe himself to be my son, and he shall be believed by every one to be my son. To save you from exposure, his father shall swear never to see or communicate with you more; equally to save him from being stripped by his uncle, and to save your child from being a beggar, you shall swear never to see or communicate with either of them more. That done, and your present means, derived from my husband, renounced, I charge myself with your support. You may, with your place of retreat unknown, then leave, if you please, uncontradicted by me, the lie that when you passed out of all knowledge but mine, you merited a good name." That was all. She had to sacrifice her sinful and shameful affections; no more. She was then free to bear her load of guilt in secret, and to break her heart in secret; and through such present misery (light enough for her, I think!) to purchase her redemption from endless misery, if she could. If, in this, I punished her here, did I not open to her a way hereafter? If she knew herself to be surrounded by insatiable vengeance and unquenchable fires, were they mine? If I threatened her, then and afterwards, with the terrors that encompassed her, did I hold them in my right hand?'

She turned the watch upon the table, and opened it, and, with an unsoftening face, looked at the worked letters within.

'They did not forget. It is appointed against such offences that the offenders shall not be able to forget. If the presence of Arthur was a daily reproach to his father, and if the absence of Arthur was a daily agony to his mother, that was the just dispensation of Jehovah. As well might it be charged upon me, that the stings of an awakened conscience drove her mad, and that it was the will of the Disposer of all things that she should live so, many years. I devoted myself to reclaim the otherwise predestined and lost boy; to give him the reputation of an honest origin; to bring him up in fear and trembling, and in a life of practical contrition for the sins that were heavy on his head before his entrance into this condemned world. Was that a cruelty? Was I, too, not visited with consequences of the original offence in which I had no complicity? Arthur's father and I lived no further apart, with half the globe between us, than when we were together in this house. He died, and sent this watch back to me, with its Do not forget. I do NOT forget, though I do not read it as he did. I read in it, that I was appointed to do these things. I have so read these three letters since I have had them lying on this table, and I did so read them, with equal distinctness, when they were thousands of miles away.'

As she took the watch-case in her hand, with that new freedom in the use of her hand of which she showed no consciousness whatever, bending her eyes upon it as if she were defying it to move her, Rigaud cried with a loud and contemptuous snapping of his fingers. 'Come, madame! Time runs out. Come, lady of piety, it must be! You can tell nothing I don't know.

Come to the money stolen, or I will! Death of my soul, I have had enough of your other jargon. Come straight to the stolen money!'

'Wretch that you are,' she answered, and now her hands clasped her head: 'through what fatal error of Flintwinch's, through what incompleteness on his part, who was the only other person helping in these things and trusted with them, through whose and what bringing together of the ashes of a burnt paper, you have become possessed of that codicil, I know no more than how you acquired the rest of your power here—'

'And yet,' interrupted Rigaud, 'it is my odd fortune to have by me, in a convenient place that I know of, that same short little addition to the will of Monsieur Gilbert Clennam, written by a lady and witnessed by the same lady and our old intriguer! Ah, bah, old intriguer, crooked little puppet! Madame, let us go on. Time presses. You or I to finish?'

'I!' she answered, with increased determination, if it were possible. 'I, because I will not endure to be shown myself, and have myself shown to any one, with your horrible distortion upon me. You, with your practices of infamous foreign prisons and galleys would make it the money that impelled me. It was not the money.'

'Bah, bah, bah! I repudiate, for the moment, my politeness, and say, Lies, lies, lies. You know you suppressed the deed and kept the money.'

'Not for the money's sake, wretch!' She made a struggle as if she were starting up; even as if, in her vehemence, she had almost risen on her disabled feet. 'If Gilbert Clennam, reduced to imbecility, at the point of death, and labouring under the delusion of some imaginary relenting towards a girl of whom he had heard that his nephew had once had a fancy for her which he had crushed out of him, and that she afterwards drooped away into melancholy and withdrawal from all who knew her—if, in that state of weakness, he dictated to me, whose life she had darkened with her sin, and who had been appointed to know her wickedness from her own hand and her own lips, a bequest meant as a recompense to her for supposed unmerited suffering; was there no difference between my spurning that injustice, and coveting mere money—a thing which you, and your comrades in the prisons, may steal from anyone?'

'Time presses, madame. Take care!'

'If this house was blazing from the roof to the ground,' she returned, 'I would stay in it to justify myself against my righteous motives being classed with those of stabbers and thieves.'

Rigaud snapped his fingers tauntingly in her face. 'One thousand guineas to the little beauty you slowly hunted to death. One thousand guineas to the youngest daughter her patron might have at fifty, or (if he had none) brother's youngest daughter, on her coming of age, "as the remembrance his disinterestedness may like best, of his protection of a friendless young orphan girl." Two thousand guineas. What! You will never come to the money?'

'That patron,' she was vehemently proceeding, when he checked her.

'Names! Call him Mr Frederick Dorrit. No more evasions.'

'That Frederick Dorrit was the beginning of it all. If he had not been a player of music, and had not kept, in those days of his youth and prosperity, an idle house where singers, and players, and such-like children of Evil turned their backs on the Light and their faces to the Darkness, she might have remained in her lowly station, and might not have been raised out of it to be cast down. But, no. Satan entered into that Frederick Dorrit, and counselled him that he was a man of innocent and laudable tastes who did kind actions, and that here was a poor girl with a voice for singing music with. Then he is to have her taught. Then Arthur's father, who has all along been secretly pining in the ways of virtuous ruggedness for those accursed snares which are called the Arts, becomes acquainted with her. And so, a graceless orphan, training to be a singing girl, carries it, by that Frederick Dorrit's agency, against me, and I am humbled and deceived!—Not I, that is to say,' she added quickly, as colour flushed into her face; 'a greater than I. What am I?'

Jeremiah Flintwinch, who had been gradually screwing himself towards her, and who was now very near her elbow without her knowing it, made a specially wry face of objection when she said these words, and moreover twitched his gaiters, as if such pretensions were equivalent to little barbs in his legs.

'Lastly,' she continued, 'for I am at the end of these things, and I will say no more of them, and you shall say no more of them, and all that remains will be to determine whether the knowledge of them can be kept among us who are here present; lastly, when I suppressed that paper, with the knowledge of Arthur's father—'

'But not with his consent, you know,' said Mr Flintwinch.

'Who said with his consent?' She started to find Jeremiah so near her, and drew back her head, looking at him with some rising distrust. 'You were often enough between us when he would have had me produce it and I would not, to have contradicted me if I had said, with his consent. I say, when I suppressed that paper, I made no effort to destroy it, but kept it by me, here in this house, many years. The rest of the Gilbert property being left to Arthur's father, I could at any time, without unsettling more than the two sums, have made a pretence of finding it. But, besides that I must have supported such pretence by a direct falsehood (a great responsibility), I have seen no new reason, in all the time I have been tried here, to bring it to light. It was a rewarding of sin; the wrong result of a delusion. I did what I was appointed to do, and I have undergone, within these four walls, what I was appointed to undergo. When the paper was at last destroyed—as I thought—in my presence, she had long been dead, and her patron, Frederick Dorrit, had long been deservedly ruined and imbecile. He had no daughter. I had found the niece before then; and what I did for her, was better for her far than the money of which she would have had no good.' She added, after a moment, as though she addressed the watch: 'She herself was innocent, and I might not have forgotten to relinquish it to her at my death:' and sat looking at it.

'Shall I recall something to you, worthy madame?' said Rigaud. 'The little paper was in this house on the night when our friend the prisoner—jail-comrade of my soul—came home from foreign countries. Shall I recall yet something more to you? The little singing-bird that never was fledged, was long kept in a cage by a guardian of your appointing, well enough known to our old intriguer here. Shall we coax our old intriguer to tell us when he saw him last?'

'I'll tell you!' cried Affery, unstopping her mouth. 'I dreamed it, first of all my dreams. Jeremiah, if you come a-nigh me now, I'll scream to be heard at St Paul's! The person as this man has spoken of, was jeremiah's own twin brother; and he was here in the dead of the night, on the night when Arthur come home, and Jeremiah with his own hands give him this paper, along with I don't know what more, and he took it away in an iron box—Help! Murder! Save me from Jere-mi-ah!'

Mr Flintwinch had made a run at her, but Rigaud had caught him in his arms midway. After a moment's wrestle with him, Flintwinch gave up, and put his hands in his pockets.

'What!' cried Rigaud, rallying him as he poked and jerked him back with his elbows, 'assault a lady with such a genius for dreaming! Ha, ha, ha!

Why, she'll be a fortune to you as an exhibition. All that she dreams comes true. Ha, ha, ha! You're so like him, Little Flintwinch. So like him, as I knew him (when I first spoke English for him to the host) in the Cabaret of the Three Billiard Tables, in the little street of the high roofs, by the wharf at Antwerp! Ah, but he was a brave boy to drink. Ah, but he was a brave boy to smoke! Ah, but he lived in a sweet bachelor-apartment—furnished, on the fifth floor, above the wood and charcoal merchant's, and the dress-maker's, and the chair-maker's, and the maker of tubs—where I knew him too, and wherewith his cognac and tobacco, he had twelve sleeps a day and one fit, until he had a fit too much, and ascended to the skies. Ha, ha, ha! What does it matter how I took possession of the papers in his iron box? Perhaps he confided it to my hands for you, perhaps it was locked and my curiosity was piqued, perhaps I suppressed it. Ha, ha, ha! What does it matter, so that I have it safe? We are not particular here; hey, Flintwinch? We are not particular here; is it not so, madame?'

Retiring before him with vicious counter-jerks of his own elbows, Mr Flintwinch had got back into his corner, where he now stood with his hands in his pockets, taking breath, and returning Mrs Clennam's stare. 'Ha, ha, ha! But what's this?' cried Rigaud. 'It appears as if you don't know, one the other. Permit me, Madame Clennam who suppresses, to present Monsieur Flintwinch who intrigues.'

Mr Flintwinch, unpocketing one of his hands to scrape his jaw, advanced a step or so in that attitude, still returning Mrs Clennam's look, and thus addressed her:

'Now, I know what you mean by opening your eyes so wide at me, but you needn't take the trouble, because I don't care for it. I've been telling you for how many years that you're one of the most opinionated and obstinate of women. That's what YOU are. You call yourself humble and sinful, but you are the most Bumptious of your sex. That's what YOU are. I have told you, over and over again when we have had a tiff, that you wanted to make everything go down before you, but I wouldn't go down before you—that you wanted to swallow up everybody alive, but I wouldn't be swallowed up alive. Why didn't you destroy the paper when you first laid hands upon it?

I advised you to; but no, it's not your way to take advice. You must keep it forsooth. Perhaps you may carry it out at some other time, forsooth. As if I didn't know better than that! I think I see your pride carrying it out, with a chance of being suspected of having kept it by you. But that's the way you cheat yourself. Just as you cheat yourself into making out that you didn't do all this business because you were a rigorous woman, all slight, and spite, and power, and unforgiveness, but because you were a servant and a minister, and were appointed to do it. Who are you, that you should be appointed to do it? That may be your religion, but it's my gammon. And to tell you all the truth while I am about it,' said Mr Flintwinch, crossing his arms, and becoming the express image of irascible doggedness, 'I have been rasped—rasped these forty years—by your taking such high ground even with me, who knows better; the effect of it being coolly to put me on low ground. I admire you very much; you are a woman of strong head and great talent; but the strongest head, and the greatest talent, can't rasp a man for forty years without making him sore. So I don't care for your present eyes. Now, I am coming to the paper, and mark what I say. You put it away somewhere, and you kept your own counsel where. You're an active woman at that time, and if you want to get that paper, you can get it. But, mark. There comes a time when you are struck into what you are now, and then if you want to get that paper, you can't get it. So it lies, long years, in its hiding-place. At last, when we are expecting Arthur home every day, and when any day may bring him home, and it's impossible to say what rummaging he may make about the house, I recommend you five thousand times, if you can't get at it, to let me get at it, that it may be put in the fire. But no—no one but you knows where it is, and that's power; and, call yourself whatever humble names you will, I call you a female Lucifer in appetite for power! On a Sunday night, Arthur comes home. He has not been in this room ten minutes, when he speaks of his father's watch. You know very well that the Do Not Forget, at the time when his father sent that watch to you, could only mean, the rest of the story being then all dead and over, Do Not Forget the suppression. Make restitution! Arthur's ways have frightened you a bit, and the paper shall be burnt after all. So, before that jumping jade and Jezebel,' Mr Flintwinch grinned at his wife, 'has got you into bed, you at last tell me where you have put the paper, among the old ledgers in the cellars, where Arthur himself went prowling the very next morning. But it's not to be burnt on a Sunday night. No; you are strict, you are; we must wait over twelve o'clock, and get into Monday. Now, all this is a swallowing of me up alive that rasps me; so, feeling a little out of temper, and not being as strict as yourself, I take a look at the document before twelve o'clock to refresh my memory as to its appearance—fold up one of the many yellow old papers in the cellars like it—and afterwards, when we have got into Monday morning, and I have, by the light of your lamp, to walk from you, lying on that bed, to this grate, make a little exchange like the conjuror, and burn accordingly. My brother Ephraim, the lunatic-keeper (I wish he had had himself to keep in a strait-waistcoat), had had many jobs since the close of the long job he got from you, but had not done well. His wife died (not that that was much; mine might have died instead, and welcome), he speculated unsuccessfully in lunatics, he got into difficulty about over-roasting a patient to bring him to reason, and he got into debt. He was going out of the way, on what he had been able to scrape up, and a trifle from me. He was here that early Monday morning, waiting for the tide; in short, he was going to Antwerp, where (I am afraid you'll be shocked at my saying, And be damned to him!) he made the acquaintance of this gentleman. He had come a long way, and, I thought then, was only sleepy; but, I suppose now, was drunk. When Arthur's mother had been under the care of him and his wife, she had been always writing, incessantly writing,—mostly letters of confession to you, and Prayers for forgiveness. My brother had handed, from time to time, lots of these sheets to me. I thought I might as well keep them to myself as have them swallowed up alive too; so I kept them in a box, looking over them when I felt in the humour. Convinced that it was advisable to get the paper out of the place, with Arthur coming about it, I put it into this same box, and I locked the whole up with two locks, and I trusted it to my brother to take away and keep, till I should write about it. I did write about it, and never got an answer. I didn't know what to make of it, till this gentleman favoured us with his first visit. Of course, I began to suspect how it was, then; and I don't want his word for it now to understand how he gets his knowledge from my papers, and your paper, and my brother's cognac and tobacco talk (I wish he'd had to gag himself). Now, I have only one thing more to say, you hammer-headed woman, and that is, that I haven't altogether made up my mind whether I might, or might not, have ever given you any trouble about the codicil. I think not; and that I should have been quite satisfied with knowing I had got the better of you, and that I held the power over you. In the present state of circumstances, I have no more explanation to give you till this time to-morrow night. So you may as well,' said Mr Flintwinch, terminating his oration with a screw, 'keep your eyes open at somebody else, for it's no use keeping 'em open at me.'

She slowly withdrew them when he had ceased, and dropped her forehead on her hand. Her other hand pressed hard upon the table, and again the curious stir was observable in her, as if she were going to rise.

'This box can never bring, elsewhere, the price it will bring here.

This knowledge can never be of the same profit to you, sold to any other person, as sold to me. But I have not the present means of raising the sum you have demanded. I have not prospered. What will you take now, and what at another time, and how am I to be assured of your silence?'

'My angel,' said Rigaud, 'I have said what I will take, and time presses. Before coming here, I placed copies of the most important of these papers in another hand. Put off the time till the Marshalsea gate shall be shut for the night, and it will be too late to treat. The prisoner will have read them.'

She put her two hands to her head again, uttered a loud exclamation, and started to her feet. She staggered for a moment, as if she would have fallen; then stood firm.

'Say what you mean. Say what you mean, man!'

Before her ghostly figure, so long unused to its erect attitude, and so stiffened in it, Rigaud fell back and dropped his voice. It was, to all the three, almost as if a dead woman had risen.

'Miss Dorrit,' answered Rigaud, 'the little niece of Monsieur Frederick, whom I have known across the water, is attached to the prisoner. Miss Dorrit, little niece of Monsieur Frederick, watches at this moment over the prisoner, who is ill. For her I with my own hands left a packet at the prison, on my way here, with a letter of instructions, "FOR HIS SAKE"—she will do anything for his sake—to keep it without breaking the seal, in case of its being reclaimed before the hour of shutting up to-night—if it should not be reclaimed before the ringing of the prison bell, to give it to him; and it encloses a second copy for herself, which he must give to her. What! I don't trust myself among you, now we have got so far, without giving my secret a second life. And as to its not bringing me, elsewhere, the price it will bring here, say then, madame, have you limited and settled the price the little niece will give—for his sake—to hush it up? Once more I say, time presses. The packet not reclaimed before the ringing of the bell to-night, you cannot buy. I sell, then, to the little girl!'

Once more the stir and struggle in her, and she ran to a closet, tore the door open, took down a hood or shawl, and wrapped it over her head.

Affery, who had watched her in terror, darted to her in the middle of the room, caught hold of her dress, and went on her knees to her.

'Don't, don't, don't! What are you doing? Where are you going? You're a fearful woman, but I don't bear you no ill-will. I can do poor Arthur no good now, that I see; and you needn't be afraid of me. I'll keep your secret. Don't go out, you'll fall dead in the street. Only promise me, that, if it's the poor thing that's kept here secretly, you'll let me take charge of her and be her nurse. Only promise me that, and never be afraid of me.'

Mrs Clennam stood still for an instant, at the height of her rapid haste, saying in stern amazement:

'Kept here? She has been dead a score of years or more. Ask Flintwinch—ask HIM. They can both tell you that she died when Arthur went abroad.'

'So much the worse,' said Affery, with a shiver, 'for she haunts the house, then. Who else rustles about it, making signals by dropping dust so softly? Who else comes and goes, and marks the walls with long crooked touches when we are all a-bed? Who else holds the door sometimes? But don't go out—don't go out! Mistress, you'll die in the street!'

Her mistress only disengaged her dress from the beseeching hands, said to Rigaud, 'Wait here till I come back!' and ran out of the room. They saw her, from the window, run wildly through the court-yard and out at the gateway.

For a few moments they stood motionless. Affery was the first to move, and she, wringing her hands, pursued her mistress. Next, Jeremiah Flintwinch, slowly backing to the door, with one hand in a pocket, and the other rubbing his chin, twisted himself out in his reticent way, speechlessly. Rigaud, left alone, composed himself upon the window-seat of the open window, in the old Marseilles-jail attitude. He laid his cigarettes and fire-box ready to his hand, and fell to smoking.

'Whoof! Almost as dull as the infernal old jail. Warmer, but almost as dismal. Wait till she comes back? Yes, certainly; but where is she gone, and how long will she be gone? No matter! Rigaud Lagnier Blandois, my amiable subject, you will get your money. You will enrich yourself. You have lived a gentleman; you will die a gentleman. You triumph, my little boy; but it is your character to triumph. Whoof!' In the hour of his triumph, his moustache went up and his nose came down, as he ogled a great beam over his head with particular satisfaction.

CHAPTER 31. Closed

The sun had set, and the streets were dim in the dusty twilight, when the figure so long unused to them hurried on its way. In the immediate neighbourhood of the old house it attracted little attention, for there were only a few straggling people to notice it; but, ascending from the river by the crooked ways that led to London Bridge, and passing into the great main road, it became surrounded by astonishment.

Resolute and wild of look, rapid of foot and yet weak and uncertain, conspicuously dressed in its black garments and with its hurried head-covering, gaunt and of an unearthly paleness, it pressed forward, taking no more heed of the throng than a sleep-walker. More remarkable by being so removed from the crowd it was among than if it had been lifted on a pedestal to be seen, the figure attracted all eyes. Saunterers pricked up their attention to observe it; busy people, crossing it, slackened their pace and turned their heads; companions pausing and standing aside, whispered one another to look at this spectral woman who was coming by; and the sweep of the figure as it passed seemed to create a vortex, drawing the most idle and most curious after it.

Made giddy by the turbulent irruption of this multitude of staring faces into her cell of years, by the confusing sensation of being in the air, and the yet more confusing sensation of being afoot, by the unexpected changes in half-remembered objects, and the want of likeness between the controllable pictures her imagination had often drawn of the life from which she was secluded and the overwhelming rush of the reality, she held her way as if she were environed by distracting thoughts, rather than by external humanity and observation. But, having crossed the bridge and gone some distance straight onward, she remembered that she must ask for a direction; and it was only then, when she stopped and turned to look about her for a promising place of inquiry, that she found herself surrounded by an eager glare of faces.

'Why are you encircling me?' she asked, trembling.

None of those who were nearest answered; but from the outer ring there arose a shrill cry of "Cause you're mad!'

'I am sure as sane as any one here. I want to find the Marshalsea prison.'

The shrill outer circle again retorted, 'Then that 'ud show you was mad if nothing else did, 'cause it's right opposite!'

A short, mild, quiet-looking young man made his way through to her, as a whooping ensued on this reply, and said: 'Was it the Marshalsea you wanted? I'm going on duty there. Come across with me.'

She laid her hand upon his arm, and he took her over the way; the crowd, rather injured by the near prospect of losing her, pressing before and behind and on either side, and recommending an adjournment to Bedlam. After a momentary whirl in the outer court-yard, the prison-door opened, and shut upon them. In the Lodge, which seemed by contrast with the outer noise a place of refuge and peace, a yellow lamp was already striving with the prison shadows.

'Why, John!' said the turnkey who admitted them. 'What is it?'

'Nothing, father; only this lady not knowing her way, and being badgered by the boys. Who did you want, ma'am?'

'Miss Dorrit. Is she here?'

The young man became more interested. 'Yes, she is here. What might your name be?'

'Mrs Clennam.'

'Mr Clennam's mother?' asked the young man.

She pressed her lips together, and hesitated. 'Yes. She had better be told it is his mother.'

'You see,' said the young man,'the Marshal's family living in the country at present, the Marshal has given Miss Dorrit one of the rooms in his house to use when she likes. Don't you think you had better come up there, and let me bring Miss Dorrit?'

She signified her assent, and he unlocked a door and conducted her up a side staircase into a dwelling-house above. He showed her into a darkening room, and left her. The room looked down into the darkening prison-yard, with its inmates strolling here and there, leaning out of windows communing as much apart as they could with friends who were going away, and generally wearing out their imprisonment as they best might that summer evening. The air was heavy and hot; the closeness of the place, oppressive; and from without there arose a rush of free sounds, like the jarring memory of such things in a headache and heartache. She stood at the window, bewildered, looking down into this prison as it were out of her own different prison, when a soft word or two of surprise made her start, and Little Dorrit stood before her.

'Is it possible, Mrs Clennam, that you are so happily recovered as—'

Little Dorrit stopped, for there was neither happiness nor health in the face that turned to her. 'This is not recovery; it is not strength; I don't know what it is.' With an agitated wave of her hand, she put all that aside. 'You have a packet left with you which you were to give to Arthur, if it was not reclaimed before this place closed to-night.'

'Yes.'

'I reclaim it.'

Little Dorrit took it from her bosom, and gave it into her hand, which remained stretched out after receiving it.

'Have you any idea of its contents?'

Frightened by her being there with that new power Of Movement in her, which, as she said herself, was not strength, and which was unreal to look upon, as though a picture or statue had been animated, Little Dorrit answered 'No.'

'Read them.'

Little Dorrit took the packet from the still outstretched hand, and broke the seal. Mrs Clennam then gave her the inner packet that was addressed to herself, and held the other. The shadow of the wall and of the prison buildings, which made the room sombre at noon, made it too dark to read there, with the dusk deepening apace, save in the window. In the window, where a little of the bright summer evening sky could shine upon her, Little Dorrit stood, and read. After a broken exclamation or so of wonder and of terror, she read in silence. When she had finished, she looked round, and her old mistress bowed herself before her.

'You know, now, what I have done.'

'I think so. I am afraid so; though my mind is so hurried, and so sorry, and has so much to pity that it has not been able to follow all I have read,' said Little Dorrit tremulously.

'I will restore to you what I have withheld from you. Forgive me. Can you forgive me?'

'I can, and Heaven knows I do! Do not kiss my dress and kneel to me; you are too old to kneel to me; I forgive you freely without that.'

'I have more yet to ask.'

'Not in that posture,' said Little Dorrit. 'It is unnatural to see your grey hair lower than mine. Pray rise; let me help you.' With that she raised her up, and stood rather shrinking from her, but looking at her earnestly.

'The great petition that I make to you (there is another which grows out of it), the great supplication that I address to your merciful and gentle heart, is, that you will not disclose this to Arthur until I am dead. If you think, when you have had time for consideration, that it can do him any good to know it while I am yet alive, then tell him. But you will not think that; and in such case, will you promise me to spare me until I am dead?'

'I am so sorry, and what I have read has so confused my thoughts,' returned Little Dorrit, 'that I can scarcely give you a steady answer. If I should be quite sure that to be acquainted with it will do Mr Clennam no good—'

'I know you are attached to him, and will make him the first consideration. It is right that he should be the first consideration. I ask that. But, having regarded him, and still finding that you may spare me for the little time I shall remain on earth, will you do it?'

'I will.'

'GOD bless you!'

She stood in the shadow so that she was only a veiled form to Little Dorrit in the light; but the sound of her voice, in saying those three grateful words, was at once fervent and broken—broken by emotion as unfamiliar to her frozen eyes as action to her frozen limbs.

'You will wonder, perhaps,' she said in a stronger tone, 'that I can better bear to be known to you whom I have wronged, than to the son of my enemy who wronged me.—For she did wrong me! She not only sinned grievously against the Lord, but she wronged me. What Arthur's father was to me, she made him. From our marriage day I was his dread, and that she made me. I was the scourge of both, and that is referable to her. You love Arthur (I can see the blush upon your face; may it be the dawn of happier days to both of you!), and you will have thought already that he is as merciful and kind as you, and why do I not trust myself to him as soon as to you. Have you not thought so?'

'No thought,' said Little Dorrit, 'can be quite a stranger to my heart, that springs out of the knowledge that Mr Clennam is always to be relied upon for being kind and generous and good.'

'I do not doubt it. Yet Arthur is, of the whole world, the one person from whom I would conceal this, while I am in it. I kept over him as a child, in the days of his first remembrance, my restraining and correcting hand. I was stern with him, knowing that the transgressions of the parents are visited on their offspring, and that there was an angry mark upon him at his birth. I have sat with him and his father, seeing the weakness of his father yearning to unbend to him; and forcing it back, that the child might work out his release in bondage and hardship. I have seen him, with his mother's face, looking up at me in awe from his little books, and trying to soften me with his mother's ways that hardened me.'

The shrinking of her auditress stopped her for a moment in her flow of words, delivered in a retrospective gloomy voice.

'For his good. Not for the satisfaction of my injury. What was I, and what was the worth of that, before the curse of Heaven! I have seen that child grow up; not to be pious in a chosen way (his mother's influence lay too heavy on him for that), but still to be just and upright, and to be submissive to me. He never loved me, as I once half-hoped he might—so frail we are, and so do the corrupt affections of the flesh war with our trusts and tasks; but he always respected me and ordered himself dutifully to me. He does to this hour. With an empty place in his heart that he has never known the meaning of, he has turned away from me and gone his separate road; but even that he has done considerately and with deference. These have been his relations towards me. Yours have been of a much slighter kind, spread over a much shorter time. When you have sat at your needle in my room, you have been in fear of me, but you have supposed me to have been doing you a kindness; you are better informed now, and know me to have done you an injury. Your misconstruction and misunderstanding of the cause in which, and the motives with which, I have worked out this work, is lighter to endure than his would be. I would not, for any worldly recompense I can imagine, have him in a moment, however blindly, throw me down from the station I have held before him all his life, and change me altogether into something he would cast out of his respect, and think detected and exposed. Let him do it, if it must be done, when I am not here to see it. Let me never feel, while I am still alive, that I die before his face, and utterly perish away from him, like one consumed by lightning and swallowed by an earthquake.'

Her pride was very strong in her, the pain of it and of her old passions was very sharp with her, when she thus expressed herself. Not less so, when she added:

'Even now, I see YOU shrink from me, as if I had been cruel.'

Little Dorrit could not gainsay it. She tried not to show it, but she recoiled with dread from the state of mind that had burnt so fiercely and lasted so long. It presented itself to her, with no sophistry upon it, in its own plain nature.

'I have done,' said Mrs Clennam,'what it was given to me to do. I have set myself against evil; not against good. I have been an instrument of severity against sin. Have not mere sinners like myself been commissioned to lay it low in all time?'

'In all time?' repeated Little Dorrit.

'Even if my own wrong had prevailed with me, and my own vengeance had moved me, could I have found no justification? None in the old days when the innocent perished with the guilty 2 a thousand to one? When the wrath of the hater of the unrighteous was not slaked even in blood, and yet found favour?'

'O, Mrs Clennam, Mrs Clennam,' said Little Dorrit, 'angry feelings and unforgiving deeds are no comfort and no guide to you and me. My life has been passed in this poor prison, and my teaching has been very defective; but let me implore you to remember later and better days. Be guided only by the healer of the sick, the raiser of the dead, the friend of all who were afflicted and forlorn, the patient Master who shed tears of compassion for our infirmities. We cannot but be right if we put all the rest away, and do everything in remembrance of Him. There is no vengeance and no infliction of suffering in His life, I am sure. There can be no confusion in following Him, and seeking for no other footsteps, I am certain.'

In the softened light of the window, looking from the scene of her early trials to the shining sky, she was not in stronger opposition to the black figure in the shade than the life and doctrine on which she rested were to that figure's history. It bent its head low again, and said not a word. It remained thus, until the first warning bell began to ring.

'Hark!' cried Mrs Clennam starting, 'I said I had another petition.

It is one that does not admit of delay. The man who brought you this packet and possesses these proofs, is now waiting at my house to be bought off. I can keep this from Arthur, only by buying him off. He asks a large sum; more than I can get together to pay him without having time. He refuses to make any abatement, because his threat is, that if he fails with me, he will come to you. Will you return with me and show him that you already know it? Will you return with me and try to prevail with him? Will you come and help me with him? Do not refuse what I ask in Arthur's name, though I dare not ask it for Arthur's sake!'

Little Dorrit yielded willingly. She glided away into the prison for a few moments, returned, and said she was ready to go. They went out by another staircase, avoiding the lodge; and coming into the front court-yard, now all quiet and deserted, gained the street.

It was one of those summer evenings when there is no greater darkness than a long twilight. The vista of street and bridge was plain to see, and the sky was serene and beautiful. People stood and sat at their doors, playing with children and enjoying the evening; numbers were walking for air; the worry of the day had almost worried itself out, and few but themselves were hurried. As they crossed the bridge, the clear steeples of the many churches looked as if they had advanced out of the murk that usually enshrouded them, and come much nearer. The smoke that rose into the sky had lost its dingy hue and taken a brightness upon it. The beauties of the sunset had not faded from the long light films of cloud that lay at peace in the horizon. From a radiant centre, over the whole length and breadth of the tranquil firmament, great shoots of light streamed among the early stars, like signs of the blessed later covenant of peace and hope that changed the crown of thorns into a glory.

Less remarkable, now that she was not alone and it was darker, Mrs Clennam hurried on at Little Dorrit's side, unmolested. They left the great thoroughfare at the turning by which she had entered it, and wound their way down among the silent, empty, cross-streets. Their feet were at the gateway, when there was a sudden noise like thunder.

'What was that! Let us make haste in,' cried Mrs Clennam.

They were in the gateway. Little Dorrit, with a piercing cry, held her back.

In one swift instant the old house was before them, with the man lying smoking in the window; another thundering sound, and it heaved, surged outward, opened asunder in fifty places, collapsed, and fell. Deafened by the noise, stifled, choked, and blinded by the dust, they hid their faces and stood rooted to the spot. The dust storm, driving between them and the placid sky, parted for a moment and showed them the stars. As they looked up, wildly crying for help, the great pile of chimneys, which was then alone left standing like a tower in a whirlwind, rocked, broke, and hailed itself down upon the heap of ruin, as if every tumbling fragment were intent on burying the crushed wretch deeper.

So blackened by the flying particles of rubbish as to be unrecognisable, they ran back from the gateway into the street, crying and shrieking. There, Mrs Clennam dropped upon the stones; and she never from that hour moved so much as a finger again, or had the power to speak one word. For upwards of three years she reclined in a wheeled chair, looking attentively at those about her and appearing to understand what they said; but the rigid silence she had so long held was evermore enforced upon her, and except that she could move her eyes and faintly express a negative and affirmative with her head, she lived and died a statue.

Affery had been looking for them at the prison, and had caught sight of them at a distance on the bridge. She came up to receive her old mistress in her arms, to help to carry her into a neighbouring house, and to be faithful to her. The mystery of the noises was out now; Affery, like greater people, had always been right in her facts, and always wrong in the theories she deduced from them.

When the storm of dust had cleared away and the summer night was calm again, numbers of people choked up every avenue of access, and parties of diggers were formed to relieve one another in digging among the ruins. There had been a hundred people in the house at the time of its fall, there had been fifty, there had been fifteen, there had been two. Rumour finally settled the number at two; the foreigner and Mr Flintwinch. The diggers dug all through the short night by flaring pipes of gas, and on a level with the early sun, and deeper and deeper below it as it rose into its zenith, and aslant of it as it declined, and on a level with it again as it departed. Sturdy digging, and shovelling, and carrying away, in carts, barrows, and baskets, went on without intermission, by night and by day; but it was night for the second time when they found the dirty heap of rubbish that had been the foreigner before his head had been shivered to atoms, like so much glass, by the great beam that lay upon him, crushing him.

Still, they had not come upon Flintwinch yet; so the sturdy digging and shovelling and carrying away went on without intermission by night and by day. It got about that the old house had had famous cellarage (which indeed was true), and that Flintwinch had been in a cellar at the moment, or had had time to escape into one, and that he was safe under its strong arch, and even that he had been heard to cry, in hollow, subterranean, suffocated notes, 'Here I am!' At the opposite extremity of the town it was even known that the excavators had been able to open a communication with him through a pipe, and that he had received both soup and brandy by that channel, and that he had said with admirable fortitude that he was All right, my lads, with the exception of his collar-bone. But the digging and shovelling and carrying away went on without intermission, until the ruins were all dug out, and the cellars opened to the light; and still no Flintwinch, living or dead, all right or all wrong, had been turned up by pick or spade.

It began then to be perceived that Flintwinch had not been there at the time of the fall; and it began then to be perceived that he had been rather busy elsewhere, converting securities into as much money as could be got for them on the shortest notice, and turning to his own exclusive account his authority to act for the Firm. Affery, remembering that the clever one had said he would explain himself further in four-and-twenty hours' time, determined for her part that his taking himself off within that period with all he could get, was the final satisfactory sum and substance of his promised explanation; but she held her peace, devoutly thankful to be quit of him. As it seemed reasonable to conclude that a man who had never been buried could not be unburied, the diggers gave him up when their task was done, and did not dig down for him into the depths of the earth.

This was taken in ill part by a great many people, who persisted in believing that Flintwinch was lying somewhere among the London geological formation. Nor was their belief much shaken by repeated intelligence which came over in course of time, that an old man who wore the tie of his neckcloth under one ear, and who was very well known to be an Englishman, consorted with the Dutchmen on the quaint banks of the canals of the Hague and in the drinking-shops of Amsterdam, under the style and designation of Mynheer von Flyntevynge.

CHAPTER 32. Going

Arthur continuing to lie very ill in the Marshalsea, and Mr Rugg descrying no break in the legal sky affording a hope of his enlargement, Mr Pancks suffered desperately from self-reproaches. If it had not been for those infallible figures which proved that Arthur, instead of pining in imprisonment, ought to be promenading in a carriage and pair, and that Mr Pancks, instead of being restricted to his clerkly wages, ought to have from three to five thousand pounds of his own at his immediate disposal, that unhappy arithmetician would probably have taken to his bed, and there have made one of the many obscure persons who turned their faces to the wall and died, as a last sacrifice to the late Mr Merdle's greatness. Solely supported by his unimpugnable calculations, Mr Pancks led an unhappy and restless life; constantly carrying his figures about with him in his hat, and not only going over them himself on every possible occasion, but entreating every human being he could lay hold of to go over them with him, and observe what a clear case it was. Down in Bleeding Heart Yard there was scarcely an inhabitant of note to whom Mr Pancks had not imparted his demonstration, and, as figures are catching, a kind of cyphering measles broke out in that locality, under the influence of which the whole Yard was light-headed.

The more restless Mr Pancks grew in his mind, the more impatient he became of the Patriarch. In their later conferences his snorting assumed an irritable sound which boded the Patriarch no good; likewise, Mr Pancks had on several occasions looked harder at the Patriarchal bumps than was quite reconcilable with the fact of his not being a painter, or a peruke-maker in search of the living model.

However, he steamed in and out of his little back Dock according as he was wanted or not wanted in the Patriarchal presence, and business had gone on in its customary course. Bleeding Heart Yard had been harrowed by Mr Pancks, and cropped by Mr Casby, at the regular seasons; Mr Pancks had taken all the drudgery and all the dirt of the business as his share; Mr Casby had taken all the profits, all the ethereal vapour, and all the moonshine, as his share; and, in the form of words which that benevolent beamer generally employed on Saturday evenings, when he twirled his fat thumbs after striking the week's balance, 'everything had been satisfactory to all parties—all parties—satisfactory, sir, to all parties.'

The Dock of the Steam-Tug, Pancks, had a leaden roof, which, frying in the very hot sunshine, may have heated the vessel. Be that as it may, one glowing Saturday evening, on being hailed by the lumbering bottle-green ship, the Tug instantly came working out of the Dock in a highly heated condition. 'Mr Pancks,' was the Patriarchal remark, 'you have been remiss, you have been remiss, sir.'

'What do you mean by that?' was the short rejoinder.

The Patriarchal state, always a state of calmness and composure, was so particularly serene that evening as to be provoking. Everybody else within the bills of mortality was hot; but the Patriarch was perfectly cool. Everybody was thirsty, and the Patriarch was drinking. There was a fragrance of limes or lemons about him; and he made a drink of golden sherry, which shone in a large tumbler as if he were drinking the evening sunshine. This was bad, but not the worst. The worst was, that with his big blue eyes, and his polished head, and his long white hair, and his bottle-green legs stretched out before him, terminating in his easy shoes easily crossed at the instep, he had a radiant appearance of having in his extensive benevolence made the drink for the human species, while he himself wanted nothing but his own milk of human kindness.

Wherefore, Mr Pancks said, 'What do you mean by that?' and put his hair up with both hands, in a highly portentous manner.

'I mean, Mr Pancks, that you must be sharper with the people, sharper with the people, much sharper with the people, sir. You don't squeeze them. You don't squeeze them. Your receipts are not up to the mark. You must squeeze them, sir, or our connection will not continue to be as satisfactory as I could wish it to be to all parties. All parties.'

'Don't I squeeze 'em?' retorted Mr Pancks. 'What else am I made for?'

'You are made for nothing else, Mr Pancks. You are made to do your duty, but you don't do your duty. You are paid to squeeze, and you must squeeze to pay.' The Patriarch so much surprised himself by this brilliant turn, after Dr Johnson, which he had not in the least expected or intended, that he laughed aloud; and repeated with great satisfaction, as he twirled his thumbs and nodded at his youthful portrait, 'Paid to squeeze, sir, and must squeeze to pay.'

'Oh,' said Pancks. 'Anything more?'

'Yes, sir, yes, sir. Something more. You will please, Mr Pancks, to squeeze the Yard again, the first thing on Monday morning.'

'Oh!' said Pancks. 'Ain't that too soon? I squeezed it dry to-day.'

'Nonsense, sir. Not near the mark, not near the mark.'

'Oh!' said Pancks, watching him as he benevolently gulped down a good draught of his mixture. 'Anything more?'

'Yes, sir, yes, sir, something more. I am not at all pleased, Mr Pancks, with my daughter; not at all pleased. Besides calling much too often to inquire for Mrs Clennam, Mrs Clennam, who is not just now in circumstances that are by any means calculated to—to be satisfactory to all parties, she goes, Mr Pancks, unless I am much deceived, to inquire for Mr Clennam in jail. In jail.'

'He's laid up, you know,' said Pancks. 'Perhaps it's kind.'

'Pooh, pooh, Mr Pancks. She has nothing to do with that, nothing to do with that. I can't allow it. Let him pay his debts and come out, come out; pay his debts, and come out.'

Although Mr Pancks's hair was standing up like strong wire, he gave it another double-handed impulse in the perpendicular direction, and smiled at his proprietor in a most hideous manner.

'You will please to mention to my daughter, Mr Pancks, that I can't allow it, can't allow it,' said the Patriarch blandly.

'Oh!' said Pancks. 'You couldn't mention it yourself?'

'No, sir, no; you are paid to mention it,' the blundering old booby could not resist the temptation of trying it again, 'and you must mention it to pay, mention it to pay.'

'Oh!' said Pancks. 'Anything more?'

'Yes, sir. It appears to me, Mr Pancks, that you yourself are too often and too much in that direction, that direction. I recommend you, Mr Pancks, to dismiss from your attention both your own losses and other people's losses, and to mind your business, mind your business.'

Mr Pancks acknowledged this recommendation with such an extraordinarily abrupt, short, and loud utterance of the monosyllable 'Oh!' that even the unwieldy Patriarch moved his blue eyes in something of a hurry, to look at him. Mr Pancks, with a sniff of corresponding intensity, then added, 'Anything more?'

'Not at present, sir, not at present. I am going,' said the Patriarch, finishing his mixture, and rising with an amiable air, 'to take a little stroll, a little stroll. Perhaps I shall find you here when I come back. If not, sir, duty, duty; squeeze, squeeze, squeeze, on Monday; squeeze on Monday!'

Mr Pancks, after another stiffening of his hair, looked on at the Patriarchal assumption of the broad-brimmed hat, with a momentary appearance of indecision contending with a sense of injury. He was also hotter than at first, and breathed harder. But he suffered Mr Casby to go out, without offering any further remark, and then took a peep at him over the little green window-blinds. 'I thought so,' he observed. 'I knew where you were bound to. Good!' He then steamed back to his Dock, put it carefully in order, took down his hat, looked round the Dock, said 'Good-bye!' and puffed away on his own account. He steered straight for Mrs Plornish's end of Bleeding Heart Yard, and arrived there, at the top of the steps, hotter than ever.

At the top of the steps, resisting Mrs Plornish's invitations to come and sit along with father in Happy Cottage—which to his relief were not so numerous as they would have been on any other night than Saturday, when the connection who so gallantly supported the business with everything but money gave their orders freely—at the top of the steps Mr Pancks remained until he beheld the Patriarch, who always entered the Yard at the other end, slowly advancing, beaming, and surrounded by suitors. Then Mr Pancks descended and bore down upon him, with his utmost pressure of steam on.

The Patriarch, approaching with his usual benignity, was surprised to see Mr Pancks, but supposed him to have been stimulated to an immediate squeeze instead of postponing that operation until Monday. The population of the Yard were astonished at the meeting, for the two powers had never been seen there together, within the memory of the oldest Bleeding Heart. But they were overcome by unutterable amazement when Mr Pancks, going close up to the most venerable of men and halting in front of the bottle-green waistcoat, made a trigger of his right thumb and forefinger, applied the same to the brim of the broad-brimmed hat, and, with singular smartness and precision, shot it off the polished head as if it had been a large marble.

Having taken this little liberty with the Patriarchal person, Mr Pancks further astounded and attracted the Bleeding Hearts by saying in an audible voice, 'Now, you sugary swindler, I mean to have it out with you!'

Mr Pancks and the Patriarch were instantly the centre of a press, all eyes and ears; windows were thrown open, and door-steps were thronged.

'What do you pretend to be?' said Mr Pancks. 'What's your moral game? What do you go in for? Benevolence, an't it? You benevolent!' Here Mr Pancks, apparently without the intention of hitting him, but merely to relieve his mind and expend his superfluous power in wholesome exercise, aimed a blow at the bumpy head, which the bumpy head ducked to avoid. This singular performance was repeated, to the ever-increasing admiration of the spectators, at the end of every succeeding article of Mr Pancks's oration.

'I have discharged myself from your service,' said Pancks, 'that I may tell you what you are. You're one of a lot of impostors that are the worst lot of all the lots to be met with. Speaking as a sufferer by both, I don't know that I wouldn't as soon have the Merdle lot as your lot. You're a driver in disguise, a screwer by deputy, a wringer, and squeezer, and shaver by substitute. You're a philanthropic sneak. You're a shabby deceiver!' (The repetition of the performance at this point was received with a burst of laughter.)

'Ask these good people who's the hard man here. They'll tell you Pancks, I believe.'

This was confirmed with cries of 'Certainly,' and 'Hear!'

'But I tell you, good people—Casby! This mound of meekness, this lump of love, this bottle-green smiler, this is your driver!' said Pancks. 'If you want to see the man who would flay you alive—here he is! Don't look for him in me, at thirty shillings a week, but look for him in Casby, at I don't know how much a year!'

'Good!' cried several voices. 'Hear Mr Pancks!'

'Hear Mr Pancks?' cried that gentleman (after repeating the popular performance). 'Yes, I should think so! It's almost time to hear Mr Pancks. Mr Pancks has come down into the Yard to-night on purpose that you should hear him. Pancks is only the Works; but here's the Winder!'

The audience would have gone over to Mr Pancks, as one man, woman, and child, but for the long, grey, silken locks, and the broad-brimmed hat.

'Here's the Stop,' said Pancks, 'that sets the tune to be ground. And there is but one tune, and its name is Grind, Grind, Grind! Here's the Proprietor, and here's his Grubber. Why, good people, when he comes smoothly spinning through the Yard to-night, like a slow-going benevolent Humming-Top, and when you come about him with your complaints of the Grubber, you don't know what a cheat the Proprietor is! What do you think of his showing himself to-night, that I may have all the blame on Monday? What do you think of his having had me over the coals this very evening, because I don't squeeze you enough? What do you think of my being, at the present moment, under special orders to squeeze you dry on Monday?'

The reply was given in a murmur of 'Shame!' and 'Shabby!'

'Shabby?' snorted Pancks. 'Yes, I should think so! The lot that your Casby belongs to, is the shabbiest of all the lots. Setting their Grubbers on, at a wretched pittance, to do what they're ashamed and afraid to do and pretend not to do, but what they will have done, or give a man no rest! Imposing on you to give their Grubbers nothing but blame, and to give them nothing but credit! Why, the worst-looking cheat in all this town who gets the value of eighteenpence under false pretences, an't half such a cheat as this sign-post of The Casby's Head here!'

Cries of 'That's true!' and 'No more he an't!'

'And see what you get of these fellows, besides,' said Pancks' 'See what more you get of these precious Humming-Tops, revolving among you with such smoothness that you've no idea of the pattern painted on 'em, or the little window in 'em. I wish to call your attention to myself for a moment. I an't an agreeable style of chap, I know that very well.'

The auditory were divided on this point; its more uncompromising members crying, 'No, you are not,' and its politer materials, 'Yes, you are.'

'I am, in general,' said Mr Pancks, 'a dry, uncomfortable, dreary Plodder and Grubber. That's your humble servant. There's his full-length portrait, painted by himself and presented to you, warranted a likeness! But what's a man to be, with such a man as this for his Proprietor? What can be expected of him? Did anybody ever find boiled mutton and caper-sauce growing in a cocoa-nut?'

None of the Bleeding Hearts ever had, it was clear from the alacrity of their response.

'Well,' said Mr Pancks, 'and neither will you find in Grubbers like myself, under Proprietors like this, pleasant qualities. I've been a Grubber from a boy. What has my life been? Fag and grind, fag and grind, turn the wheel, turn the wheel! I haven't been agreeable to myself, and I haven't been likely to be agreeable to anybody else. If I was a shilling a week less useful in ten years' time, this impostor would give me a shilling a week less; if as useful a man could be got at sixpence cheaper, he would be taken in my place at sixpence cheaper. Bargain and sale, bless you! Fixed principles!

It's a mighty fine sign-post, is The Casby's Head,' said Mr Pancks, surveying it with anything rather than admiration; 'but the real name of the House is the Sham's Arms. Its motto is, Keep the Grubber always at it. Is any gentleman present,' said Mr Pancks, breaking off and looking round, 'acquainted with the English Grammar?'

Bleeding Heart Yard was shy of claiming that acquaintance.

'It's no matter,' said Mr Pancks, 'I merely wish to remark that the task this Proprietor has set me, has been never to leave off conjugating the Imperative Mood Present Tense of the verb To keep always at it. Keep thou always at it. Let him keep always at it. Keep we or do we keep always at it. Keep ye or do ye or you keep always at it. Let them keep always at it. Here is your benevolent Patriarch of a Casby, and there is his golden rule. He is uncommonly improving to look at, and I am not at all so. He is as sweet as honey, and I am as dull as ditch-water. He provides the pitch, and I handle it, and it sticks to me. Now,' said Mr Pancks, closing upon his late Proprietor again, from whom he had withdrawn a little for the better display of him to the Yard; 'as I am not accustomed to speak in public, and as I have made a rather lengthy speech, all circumstances considered, I shall bring my observations to a close by requesting you to get out of this.'

The Last of the Patriarchs had been so seized by assault, and required so much room to catch an idea in, an so much more room to turn it in, that he had not a word to offer in reply. He appeared to be meditating some Patriarchal way out of his delicate position, when Mr Pancks, once more suddenly applying the trigger to his hat, shot it off again with his former dexterity. On the preceding occasion, one or two of the Bleeding Heart Yarders had obsequiously picked it up and handed it to its owner; but Mr Pancks had now so far impressed his audience, that the Patriarch had to turn and stoop for it himself.

Quick as lightning, Mr Pancks, who, for some moments, had had his right hand in his coat pocket, whipped out a pair of shears, swooped upon the Patriarch behind, and snipped off short the sacred locks that flowed upon his shoulders. In a paroxysm of animosity and rapidity, Mr Pancks then caught the broad-brimmed hat out of the astounded Patriarch's hand, cut it down into a mere stewpan, and fixed it on the Patriarch's head.

Before the frightful results of this desperate action, Mr Pancks himself recoiled in consternation. A bare-polled, goggle-eyed, big-headed lumbering personage stood staring at him, not in the least impressive, not in the least venerable, who seemed to have started out of the earth to ask what was become of Casby. After staring at this phantom in return, in silent awe, Mr Pancks threw down his shears, and fled for a place of hiding, where he might lie sheltered from the consequences of his crime. Mr Pancks deemed it prudent to use all possible despatch in making off, though he was pursued by nothing but the sound of laughter in Bleeding Heart Yard, rippling through the air and making it ring again.

CHAPTER 33. Going!

The changes of a fevered room are slow and fluctuating; but the changes of the fevered world are rapid and irrevocable.

It was Little Dorrit's lot to wait upon both kinds of change. The Marshalsea walls, during a portion of every day, again embraced her in their shadows as their child, while she thought for Clennam, worked for him, watched him, and only left him, still to devote her utmost love and care to him. Her part in the life outside the gate urged its pressing claims upon her too, and her patience untiringly responded to them. Here was Fanny, proud, fitful, whimsical, further advanced in that disqualified state for going into society which had so much fretted her on the evening of the tortoise-shell knife, resolved always to want comfort, resolved not to be comforted, resolved to be deeply wronged, and resolved that nobody should have the audacity to think her so. Here was her brother, a weak, proud, tipsy, young old man, shaking from head to foot, talking as indistinctly as if some of the money he plumed himself upon had got into his mouth and couldn't be got out, unable to walk alone in any act of his life, and patronising the sister whom he selfishly loved (he always had that negative merit, ill-starred and ill-launched Tip!) because he suffered her to lead him. Here was Mrs Merdle in gauzy mourning—the original cap whereof had possibly been rent to pieces in a fit of grief, but had certainly yielded to a highly becoming article from the Parisian market—warring with Fanny foot to foot, and breasting her with her desolate bosom every hour in the day. Here was poor Mr Sparkler, not knowing how to keep the peace between them, but humbly inclining to the opinion that they could do no better than agree that they were both remarkably fine women, and that there was no nonsense about either of them—for which gentle recommendation they united in falling upon him frightfully. Then, too, here was Mrs General, got home from foreign parts, sending a Prune and a Prism by post every other day, demanding a new Testimonial by way of recommendation to some vacant appointment or other. Of which remarkable gentlewoman it may be finally observed, that there surely never was a gentlewoman of whose transcendent fitness for any vacant appointment on the face of this earth, so many people were (as the warmth of her Testimonials evinced) so perfectly satisfied—or who was so very unfortunate in having a large circle of ardent and distinguished admirers, who never themselves happened to want her in any capacity.

On the first crash of the eminent Mr Merdle's decease, many important persons had been unable to determine whether they should cut Mrs Merdle, or comfort her. As it seemed, however, essential to the strength of their own case that they should admit her to have been cruelly deceived, they graciously made the admission, and continued to know her. It followed that Mrs Merdle, as a woman of fashion and good breeding who had been sacrificed to the wiles of a vulgar barbarian (for Mr Merdle was found out from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, the moment he was found out in his pocket), must be actively championed by her order for her order's sake. She returned this fealty by causing it to be understood that she was even more incensed against the felonious shade of the deceased than anybody else was; thus, on the whole, she came out of her furnace like a wise woman, and did exceedingly well.

Mr Sparkler's lordship was fortunately one of those shelves on which a gentleman is considered to be put away for life, unless there should be reasons for hoisting him up with the Barnacle crane to a more lucrative height. That patriotic servant accordingly stuck to his colours (the Standard of four Quarterings), and was a perfect Nelson in respect of nailing them to the mast. On the profits of his intrepidity, Mrs Sparkler and Mrs Merdle, inhabiting different floors of the genteel little temple of inconvenience to which the smell of the day before yesterday's soup and coach-horses was as constant as Death to man, arrayed themselves to fight it out in the lists of Society, sworn rivals. And Little Dorrit, seeing all these things as they developed themselves, could not but wonder, anxiously, into what back corner of the genteel establishment Fanny's children would be poked by-and-by, and who would take care of those unborn little victims.

Arthur being far too ill to be spoken with on subjects of emotion or anxiety, and his recovery greatly depending on the repose into which his weakness could be hushed, Little Dorrit's sole reliance during this heavy period was on Mr Meagles. He was still abroad; but she had written to him through his daughter, immediately after first seeing Arthur in the Marshalsea and since, confiding her uneasiness to him on the points on which she was most anxious, but especially on one. To that one, the continued absence of Mr Meagles abroad, instead of his comforting presence in the Marshalsea, was referable.

Without disclosing the precise nature of the documents that had fallen into Rigaud's hands, Little Dorrit had confided the general outline of that story to Mr Meagles, to whom she had also recounted his fate. The old cautious habits of the scales and scoop at once showed Mr Meagles the importance of recovering the original papers; wherefore he wrote back to Little Dorrit, strongly confirming her in the solicitude she expressed on that head, and adding that he would not come over to England 'without making some attempt to trace them out.'

By this time Mr Henry Gowan had made up his mind that it would be agreeable to him not to know the Meagleses. He was so considerate as to lay no injunctions on his wife in that particular; but he mentioned to Mr Meagles that personally they did not appear to him to get on together, and that he thought it would be a good thing if—politely, and without any scene, or anything of that sort—they agreed that they were the best fellows in the world, but were best apart. Poor Mr Meagles, who was already sensible that he did not advance his daughter's happiness by being constantly slighted in her presence, said 'Good, Henry! You are my Pet's husband; you have displaced me, in the course of nature; if you wish it, good!' This arrangement involved the contingent advantage, which perhaps Henry Gowan had not foreseen, that both Mr and Mrs Meagles were more liberal than before to their daughter, when their communication was only with her and her young child: and that his high spirit found itself better provided with money, without being under the degrading necessity of knowing whence it came.

Mr Meagles, at such a period, naturally seized an occupation with great ardour. He knew from his daughter the various towns which Rigaud had been haunting, and the various hotels at which he had been living for some time back. The occupation he set himself was to visit these with all discretion and speed, and, in the event of finding anywhere that he had left a bill unpaid, and a box or parcel behind, to pay such bill, and bring away such box or parcel.

With no other attendant than Mother, Mr Meagles went upon his pilgrimage, and encountered a number of adventures. Not the least of his difficulties was, that he never knew what was said to him, and that he pursued his inquiries among people who never knew what he said to them.

Still, with an unshaken confidence that the English tongue was somehow the mother tongue of the whole world, only the people were too stupid to know it, Mr Meagles harangued innkeepers in the most voluble manner, entered into loud explanations of the most complicated sort, and utterly renounced replies in the native language of the respondents, on the ground that they were 'all bosh.' Sometimes interpreters were called in; whom Mr Meagles addressed in such idiomatic terms of speech, as instantly to extinguish and shut up—which made the matter worse. On a balance of the account, however, it may be doubted whether he lost much; for, although he found no property, he found so many debts and various associations of discredit with the proper name, which was the only word he made intelligible, that he was almost everywhere overwhelmed with injurious accusations. On no fewer than four occasions the police were called in to receive denunciations of Mr Meagles as a Knight of Industry, a good-for-nothing, and a thief, all of which opprobrious language he bore with the best temper (having no idea what it meant), and was in the most ignominious manner escorted to steam-boats and public carriages, to be got rid of, talking all the while, like a cheerful and fluent Briton as he was, with Mother under his arm.

But, in his own tongue, and in his own head, Mr Meagles was a clear, shrewd, persevering man. When he had 'worked round,' as he called it, to Paris in his pilgrimage, and had wholly failed in it so far, he was not disheartened. 'The nearer to England I follow him, you see, Mother,' argued Mr Meagles, 'the nearer I am likely to come to the papers, whether they turn up or no. Because it is only reasonable to conclude that he would deposit them somewhere where they would be safe from people over in England, and where they would yet be accessible to himself, don't you see?'

At Paris Mr Meagles found a letter from Little Dorrit, lying waiting for him; in which she mentioned that she had been able to talk for a minute or two with Mr Clennam about this man who was no more; and that when she told Mr Clennam that his friend Mr Meagles, who was on his way to see him, had an interest in ascertaining something about the man if he could, he had asked her to tell Mr Meagles that he had been known to Miss Wade, then living in such a street at Calais. 'Oho!' said Mr Meagles.

As soon afterwards as might be in those Diligence days, Mr Meagles rang the cracked bell at the cracked gate, and it jarred open, and the peasant-woman stood in the dark doorway, saying, 'Ice-say! Seer! Who?' In acknowledgment of whose address, Mr Meagles murmured to himself that there was some sense about these Calais people, who really did know something of what you and themselves were up to; and returned, 'Miss Wade, my dear.' He was then shown into the presence of Miss Wade.

'It's some time since we met,' said Mr Meagles, clearing his throat; 'I hope you have been pretty well, Miss Wade?'

Without hoping that he or anybody else had been pretty well, Miss Wade asked him to what she was indebted for the honour of seeing him again? Mr Meagles, in the meanwhile, glanced all round the room without observing anything in the shape of a box.

'Why, the truth is, Miss Wade,' said Mr Meagles, in a comfortable, managing, not to say coaxing voice, 'it is possible that you may be able to throw a light upon a little something that is at present dark. Any unpleasant bygones between us are bygones, I hope. Can't be helped now. You recollect my daughter? Time changes so! A mother!'

In his innocence, Mr Meagles could not have struck a worse key-note. He paused for any expression of interest, but paused in vain.

'That is not the subject you wished to enter on?' she said, after a cold silence.

'No, no,' returned Mr Meagles. 'No. I thought your good nature might—'

'I thought you knew,' she interrupted, with a smile, 'that my good nature is not to be calculated upon?'

'Don't say so,' said Mr Meagles; 'you do yourself an injustice. However, to come to the point.' For he was sensible of having gained nothing by approaching it in a roundabout way. 'I have heard from my friend Clennam, who, you will be sorry to hear, has been and still is very ill—'

He paused again, and again she was silent.

'—that you had some knowledge of one Blandois, lately killed in London by a violent accident. Now, don't mistake me! I know it was a slight knowledge,' said Mr Meagles, dexterously forestalling an angry interruption which he saw about to break. 'I am fully aware of that. It was a slight knowledge, I know. But the question is,' Mr Meagles's voice here became comfortable again, 'did he, on his way to England last time, leave a box of papers, or a bundle of papers, or some papers or other in some receptacle or other—any papers—with you: begging you to allow him to leave them here for a short time, until he wanted them?'

'The question is?' she repeated. 'Whose question is?'

'Mine,' said Mr Meagles. 'And not only mine but Clennam's question, and other people's question. Now, I am sure,' continued Mr Meagles, whose heart was overflowing with Pet, 'that you can't have any unkind feeling towards my daughter; it's impossible. Well! It's her question, too; being one in which a particular friend of hers is nearly interested. So here I am, frankly to say that is the question, and to ask, Now, did he?'

'Upon my word,' she returned, 'I seem to be a mark for everybody who knew anything of a man I once in my life hired, and paid, and dismissed, to aim their questions at!'

'Now, don't,' remonstrated Mr Meagles, 'don't! Don't take offence, because it's the plainest question in the world, and might be asked of any one. The documents I refer to were not his own, were wrongfully obtained, might at some time or other be troublesome to an innocent person to have in keeping, and are sought by the people to whom they really belong. He passed through Calais going to London, and there were reasons why he should not take them with him then, why he should wish to be able to put his hand upon them readily, and why he should distrust leaving them with people of his own sort. Did he leave them here? I declare if I knew how to avoid giving you offence, I would take any pains to do it. I put the question personally, but there's nothing personal in it. I might put it to any one; I have put it already to many people. Did he leave them here? Did he leave anything here?'

'No.'

'Then unfortunately, Miss Wade, you know nothing about them?'

'I know nothing about them. I have now answered your unaccountable question. He did not leave them here, and I know nothing about them.'

'There!' said Mr Meagles rising. 'I am sorry for it; that's over; and I hope there is not much harm done.—Tattycoram well, Miss Wade?'

'Harriet well? O yes!'

'I have put my foot in it again,' said Mr Meagles, thus corrected. 'I can't keep my foot out of it here, it seems. Perhaps, if I had thought twice about it, I might never have given her the jingling name. But, when one means to be good-natured and sportive with young people, one doesn't think twice. Her old friend leaves a kind word for her, Miss Wade, if you should think proper to deliver it.'

She said nothing as to that; and Mr Meagles, taking his honest face out of the dull room, where it shone like a sun, took it to the Hotel where he had left Mrs Meagles, and where he made the Report: 'Beaten, Mother; no effects!' He took it next to the London Steam Packet, which sailed in the night; and next to the Marshalsea.

The faithful John was on duty when Father and Mother Meagles presented themselves at the wicket towards nightfall. Miss Dorrit was not there then, he said; but she had been there in the morning, and invariably came in the evening. Mr Clennam was slowly mending; and Maggy and Mrs Plornish and Mr Baptist took care of him by turns. Miss Dorrit was sure to come back that evening before the bell rang. There was the room the Marshal had lent her, up-stairs, in which they could wait for her, if they pleased. Mistrustful that it might be hazardous to Arthur to see him without preparation, Mr Meagles accepted the offer; and they were left shut up in the room, looking down through its barred window into the jail.

The cramped area of the prison had such an effect on Mrs Meagles that she began to weep, and such an effect on Mr Meagles that he began to gasp for air. He was walking up and down the room, panting, and making himself worse by laboriously fanning himself with her handkerchief, when he turned towards the opening door.

'Eh? Good gracious!' said Mr Meagles, 'this is not Miss Dorrit! Why, Mother, look! Tattycoram!'

No other. And in Tattycoram's arms was an iron box some two feet square. Such a box had Affery Flintwinch seen, in the first of her dreams, going out of the old house in the dead of the night under Double's arm. This, Tattycoram put on the ground at her old master's feet: this, Tattycoram fell on her knees by, and beat her hands upon, crying half in exultation and half in despair, half in laughter and half in tears, 'Pardon, dear Master; take me back, dear Mistress; here it is!'

'Tatty!' exclaimed Mr Meagles.

'What you wanted!' said Tattycoram. 'Here it is! I was put in the next room not to see you. I heard you ask her about it, I heard her say she hadn't got it, I was there when he left it, and I took it at bedtime and brought it away. Here it is!'

'Why, my girl,' cried Mr Meagles, more breathless than before, 'how did you come over?'

'I came in the boat with you. I was sitting wrapped up at the other end. When you took a coach at the wharf, I took another coach and followed you here. She never would have given it up after what you had said to her about its being wanted; she would sooner have sunk it in the sea, or burnt it. But, here it is!'

The glow and rapture that the girl was in, with her 'Here it is!'

'She never wanted it to be left, I must say that for her; but he left it, and I knew well that after what you said, and after her denying it, she never would have given it up. But here it is! Dear Master, dear Mistress, take me back again, and give me back the dear old name! Let this intercede for me. Here it is!'

Father and Mother Meagles never deserved their names better than when they took the headstrong foundling-girl into their protection again.

'Oh! I have been so wretched,' cried Tattycoram, weeping much more, 'always so unhappy, and so repentant! I was afraid of her from the first time I saw her. I knew she had got a power over me through understanding what was bad in me so well. It was a madness in me, and she could raise it whenever she liked. I used to think, when I got into that state, that people were all against me because of my first beginning; and the kinder they were to me, the worse fault I found in them. I made it out that they triumphed above me, and that they wanted to make me envy them, when I know—when I even knew then—that they never thought of such a thing. And my beautiful young mistress not so happy as she ought to have been, and I gone away from her! Such a brute and a wretch as she must think me! But you'll say a word to her for me, and ask her to be as forgiving as you two are? For I am not so bad as I was,' pleaded Tattycoram; 'I am bad enough, but not so bad as I was, indeed. I have had Miss Wade before me all this time, as if it was my own self grown ripe—turning everything the wrong way, and twisting all good into evil. I have had her before me all this time, finding no pleasure in anything but keeping me as miserable, suspicious, and tormenting as herself. Not that she had much to do, to do that,' cried Tattycoram, in a closing great burst of distress, 'for I was as bad as bad could be. I only mean to say, that, after what I have gone through, I hope I shall never be quite so bad again, and that I shall get better by very slow degrees. I'll try very hard. I won't stop at five-and-twenty, sir, I'll count five-and-twenty hundred, five-and-twenty thousand!'

Another opening of the door, and Tattycoram subsided, and Little Dorrit came in, and Mr Meagles with pride and joy produced the box, and her gentle face was lighted up with grateful happiness and joy.

The secret was safe now! She could keep her own part of it from him; he should never know of her loss; in time to come he should know all that was of import to himself; but he should never know what concerned her only. That was all passed, all forgiven, all forgotten.

'Now, my dear Miss Dorrit,' said Mr Meagles; 'I am a man of business—or at least was—and I am going to take my measures promptly, in that character. Had I better see Arthur to-night?'

'I think not to-night. I will go to his room and ascertain how he is. But I think it will be better not to see him to-night.'

'I am much of your opinion, my dear,' said Mr Meagles, 'and therefore I have not been any nearer to him than this dismal room. Then I shall probably not see him for some little time to come. But I'll explain what I mean when you come back.'

She left the room. Mr Meagles, looking through the bars of the window, saw her pass out of the Lodge below him into the prison-yard. He said gently, 'Tattycoram, come to me a moment, my good girl.'

She went up to the window.

'You see that young lady who was here just now—that little, quiet, fragile figure passing along there, Tatty? Look. The people stand out of the way to let her go by. The men—see the poor, shabby fellows—pull off their hats to her quite politely, and now she glides in at that doorway. See her, Tattycoram?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I have heard tell, Tatty, that she was once regularly called the child of this place. She was born here, and lived here many years.

I can't breathe here. A doleful place to be born and bred in, Tattycoram?'

'Yes indeed, sir!'

'If she had constantly thought of herself, and settled with herself that everybody visited this place upon her, turned it against her, and cast it at her, she would have led an irritable and probably an useless existence. Yet I have heard tell, Tattycoram, that her young life has been one of active resignation, goodness, and noble service. Shall I tell you what I consider those eyes of hers, that were here just now, to have always looked at, to get that expression?'

'Yes, if you please, sir.'

'Duty, Tattycoram. Begin it early, and do it well; and there is no antecedent to it, in any origin or station, that will tell against us with the

Almighty, or with ourselves.'

They remained at the window, Mother joining them and pitying the prisoners, until she was seen coming back. She was soon in the room, and recommended that Arthur, whom she had left calm and composed, should not be visited that night.

'Good!' said Mr Meagles, cheerily. 'I have not a doubt that's best. I shall trust my remembrances then, my sweet nurse, in your hands, and I well know they couldn't be in better. I am off again to-morrow morning.'

Little Dorrit, surprised, asked him where?

'My dear,' said Mr Meagles, 'I can't live without breathing. This place has taken my breath away, and I shall never get it back again until Arthur is out of this place.'

'How is that a reason for going off again to-morrow morning?'

'You shall understand,' said Mr Meagles. 'To-night we three will put up at a City Hotel. To-morrow morning, Mother and Tattycoram will go down to Twickenham, where Mrs Tickit, sitting attended by Dr Buchan in the parlour-window, will think them a couple of ghosts; and I shall go abroad again for Doyce. We must have Dan here. Now, I tell you, my love, it's of no use writing and planning and conditionally speculating upon this and that and the other, at uncertain intervals and distances; we must have Doyce here. I devote myself at daybreak to-morrow morning, to bringing Doyce here. It's nothing to me to go and find him. I'm an old traveller, and all foreign languages and customs are alike to me—I never understand anything about any of 'em. Therefore I can't be put to any inconvenience. Go at once I must, it stands to reason; because I can't live without breathing freely; and I can't breathe freely until Arthur is out of this Marshalsea. I am stifled at the present moment, and have scarcely breath enough to say this much, and to carry this precious box down-stairs for you.'

They got into the street as the bell began to ring, Mr Meagles carrying the box. Little Dorrit had no conveyance there: which rather surprised him. He called a coach for her and she got into it, and he placed the box beside her when she was seated. In her joy and gratitude she kissed his hand.

'I don't like that, my dear,' said Mr Meagles. 'It goes against my feeling of what's right, that YOU should do homage to ME—at the Marshalsea Gate.'

She bent forward, and kissed his cheek.

'You remind me of the days,' said Mr Meagles, suddenly drooping—'but she's very fond of him, and hides his faults, and thinks that no one sees them—and he certainly is well connected and of a very good family!'

It was the only comfort he had in the loss of his daughter, and if he made the most of it, who could blame him?

CHAPTER 34. Gone

On a healthy autumn day, the Marshalsea prisoner, weak but otherwise restored, sat listening to a voice that read to him. On a healthy autumn day; when the golden fields had been reaped and ploughed again, when the summer fruits had ripened and waned, when the green perspectives of hops had been laid low by the busy pickers, when the apples clustering in the orchards were russet, and the berries of the mountain ash were crimson among the yellowing foliage. Already in the woods, glimpses of the hardy winter that was coming were to be caught through unaccustomed openings among the boughs where the prospect shone defined and clear, free from the bloom of the drowsy summer weather, which had rested on it as the bloom lies on the plum. So, from the seashore the ocean was no longer to be seen lying asleep in the heat, but its thousand sparkling eyes were open, and its whole breadth was in joyful animation, from the cool sand on the beach to the little sails on the horizon, drifting away like autumn-tinted leaves that had drifted from the trees. Changeless and barren, looking ignorantly at all the seasons with its fixed, pinched face of poverty and care, the prison had not a touch of any of these beauties on it. Blossom what would, its bricks and bars bore uniformly the same dead crop. Yet Clennam, listening to the voice as it read to him, heard in it all that great Nature was doing, heard in it all the soothing songs she sings to man. At no Mother's knee but hers had he ever dwelt in his youth on hopeful promises, on playful fancies, on the harvests of tenderness and humility that lie hidden in the early-fostered seeds of the imagination; on the oaks of retreat from blighting winds, that have the germs of their strong roots in nursery acorns.

But, in the tones of the voice that read to him, there were memories of an old feeling of such things, and echoes of every merciful and loving whisper that had ever stolen to him in his life.

When the voice stopped, he put his hand over his eyes, murmuring that the light was strong upon them.

Little Dorrit put the book by, and presently arose quietly to shade the window. Maggy sat at her needlework in her old place. The light softened, Little Dorrit brought her chair closer to his side.

'This will soon be over now, dear Mr Clennam. Not only are Mr Doyce's letters to you so full of friendship and encouragement, but Mr Rugg says his letters to him are so full of help, and that everybody (now a little anger is past) is so considerate, and speaks so well of you, that it will soon be over now.'

'Dear girl. Dear heart. Good angel!'

'You praise me far too much. And yet it is such an exquisite pleasure to me to hear you speak so feelingly, and to—and to see,' said Little Dorrit, raising her eyes to his, 'how deeply you mean it, that I cannot say Don't.'

He lifted her hand to his lips.

'You have been here many, many times, when I have not seen you, Little Dorrit?'

'Yes, I have been here sometimes when I have not come into the room.'

'Very often?'

'Rather often,' said Little Dorrit, timidly.

'Every day?'

'I think,' said Little Dorrit, after hesitating, 'that I have been here at least twice every day.' He might have released the little light hand after fervently kissing it again; but that, with a very gentle lingering where it was, it seemed to court being retained. He took it in both of his, and it lay softly on his breast.

'Dear Little Dorrit, it is not my imprisonment only that will soon be over. This sacrifice of you must be ended. We must learn to part again, and to take our different ways so wide asunder. You have not forgotten what we said together, when you came back?'

'O no, I have not forgotten it. But something has been—You feel quite strong to-day, don't you?'

'Quite strong.'

The hand he held crept up a little nearer his face.

'Do you feel quite strong enough to know what a great fortune I have got?'

'I shall be very glad to be told. No fortune can be too great or good for Little Dorrit.'

'I have been anxiously waiting to tell you. I have been longing and longing to tell you. You are sure you will not take it?'

'Never!'

'You are quite sure you will not take half of it?'

'Never, dear Little Dorrit!'

As she looked at him silently, there was something in her affectionate face that he did not quite comprehend: something that could have broken into tears in a moment, and yet that was happy and proud.

'You will be sorry to hear what I have to tell you about Fanny. Poor Fanny has lost everything. She has nothing left but her husband's income. All that papa gave her when she married was lost as your money was lost. It was in the same hands, and it is all gone.'

Arthur was more shocked than surprised to hear it. 'I had hoped it might not be so bad,' he said: 'but I had feared a heavy loss there, knowing the connection between her husband and the defaulter.'

'Yes. It is all gone. I am very sorry for Fanny; very, very, very sorry for poor Fanny. My poor brother too!' 'Had he property in the same hands?'

'Yes! And it's all gone.—How much do you think my own great fortune is?'

As Arthur looked at her inquiringly, with a new apprehension on him, she withdrew her hand, and laid her face down on the spot where it had rested.

'I have nothing in the world. I am as poor as when I lived here. When papa came over to England, he confided everything he had to the same hands, and it is all swept away. O my dearest and best, are you quite sure you will not share my fortune with me now?'

Locked in his arms, held to his heart, with his manly tears upon her own cheek, she drew the slight hand round his neck, and clasped it in its fellow-hand.

'Never to part, my dearest Arthur; never any more, until the last!

I never was rich before, I never was proud before, I never was happy before, I am rich in being taken by you, I am proud in having been resigned by you, I am happy in being with you in this prison, as I should be happy in coming back to it with you, if it should be the will of GOD, and comforting and serving you with all my love and truth. I am yours anywhere, everywhere! I love you dearly! I would rather pass my life here with you, and go out daily, working for our bread, than I would have the greatest fortune that ever was told, and be the greatest lady that ever was honoured. O, if poor papa may only know how blest at last my heart is, in this room where he suffered for so many years!'

Maggy had of course been staring from the first, and had of course been crying her eyes out long before this. Maggy was now so overjoyed that, after hugging her little mother with all her might, she went down-stairs like a clog-hornpipe to find somebody or other to whom to impart her gladness. Whom should Maggy meet but Flora and Mr F.'s Aunt opportunely coming in? And whom else, as a consequence of that meeting, should Little Dorrit find waiting for herself, when, a good two or three hours afterwards, she went out?

Flora's eyes were a little red, and she seemed rather out of spirits. Mr F.'s Aunt was so stiffened that she had the appearance of being past bending by any means short of powerful mechanical pressure. Her bonnet was cocked up behind in a terrific manner; and her stony reticule was as rigid as if it had been petrified by the Gorgon's head, and had got it at that moment inside. With these imposing attributes, Mr F.'s Aunt, publicly seated on the steps of the Marshal's official residence, had been for the two or three hours in question a great boon to the younger inhabitants of the Borough, whose sallies of humour she had considerably flushed herself by resenting at the point of her umbrella, from time to time.

'Painfully aware, Miss Dorrit, I am sure,' said Flora, 'that to propose an adjournment to any place to one so far removed by fortune and so courted and caressed by the best society must ever appear intruding even if not a pie-shop far below your present sphere and a back-parlour though a civil man but if for the sake of Arthur—cannot overcome it more improper now than ever late Doyce and Clennam—one last remark I might wish to make one last explanation I might wish to offer perhaps your good nature might excuse under pretence of three kidney ones the humble place of conversation.'

Rightly interpreting this rather obscure speech, Little Dorrit returned that she was quite at Flora's disposition. Flora accordingly led the way across the road to the pie-shop in question: Mr F.'s Aunt stalking across in the rear, and putting herself in the way of being run over, with a perseverance worthy of a better cause.

When the 'three kidney ones,' which were to be a blind to the conversation, were set before them on three little tin platters, each kidney one ornamented with a hole at the top, into which the civil man poured hot gravy out of a spouted can as if he were feeding three lamps, Flora took out her pocket-handkerchief.

'If Fancy's fair dreams,' she began, 'have ever pictured that when Arthur—cannot overcome it pray excuse me—was restored to freedom even a pie as far from flaky as the present and so deficient in kidney as to be in that respect like a minced nutmeg might not prove unacceptable if offered by the hand of true regard such visions have for ever fled and all is cancelled but being aware that tender relations are in contemplation beg to state that I heartily wish well to both and find no fault with either not the least, it may be withering to know that ere the hand of Time had made me much less slim than formerly and dreadfully red on the slightest exertion particularly after eating I well know when it takes the form of a rash, it might have been and was not through the interruption of parents and mental torpor succeeded until the mysterious clue was held by Mr F. still I would not be ungenerous to either and I heartily wish well to both.'

Little Dorrit took her hand, and thanked her for all her old kindness.

'Call it not kindness,' returned Flora, giving her an honest kiss, 'for you always were the best and dearest little thing that ever was if I may take the liberty and even in a money point of view a saving being Conscience itself though I must add much more agreeable than mine ever was to me for though not I hope more burdened than other people's yet I have always found it far readier to make one uncomfortable than comfortable and evidently taking a greater pleasure in doing it but I am wandering, one hope I wish to express ere yet the closing scene draws in and it is that I do trust for the sake of old times and old sincerity that Arthur will know that I didn't desert him in his misfortunes but that I came backwards and forwards constantly to ask if I could do anything for him and that I sat in the pie-shop where they very civilly fetched something warm in a tumbler from the hotel and really very nice hours after hours to keep him company over the way without his knowing it.'

Flora really had tears in her eyes now, and they showed her to great advantage.

'Over and above which,' said Flora, 'I earnestly beg you as the dearest thing that ever was if you'll still excuse the familiarity from one who moves in very different circles to let Arthur understand that I don't know after all whether it wasn't all nonsense between us though pleasant at the time and trying too and certainly Mr F. did work a change and the spell being broken nothing could be expected to take place without weaving it afresh which various circumstances have combined to prevent of which perhaps not the least powerful was that it was not to be, I am not prepared to say that if it had been agreeable to Arthur and had brought itself about naturally in the first instance I should not have been very glad being of a lively disposition and moped at home where papa undoubtedly is the most aggravating of his sex and not improved since having been cut down by the hand of the Incendiary into something of which I never saw the counterpart in all my life but jealousy is not my character nor ill-will though many faults.'

Without having been able closely to follow Mrs Finching through this labyrinth, Little Dorrit understood its purpose, and cordially accepted the trust.

'The withered chaplet my dear,' said Flora, with great enjoyment, 'is then perished the column is crumbled and the pyramid is standing upside down upon its what's-his-name call it not giddiness call it not weakness call it not folly I must now retire into privacy and look upon the ashes of departed joys no more but taking a further liberty of paying for the pastry which has formed the humble pretext of our interview will for ever say Adieu!'

Mr F.'s Aunt, who had eaten her pie with great solemnity, and who had been elaborating some grievous scheme of injury in her mind since her first assumption of that public position on the Marshal's steps, took the present opportunity of addressing the following Sibyllic apostrophe to the relict of her late nephew.

'Bring him for'ard, and I'll chuck him out o' winder!'

Flora tried in vain to soothe the excellent woman by explaining that they were going home to dinner. Mr F.'s Aunt persisted in replying, 'Bring him for'ard and I'll chuck him out o' winder!' Having reiterated this demand an immense number of times, with a sustained glare of defiance at Little Dorrit, Mr F.'s Aunt folded her arms, and sat down in the corner of the pie-shop parlour; steadfastly refusing to budge until such time as 'he' should have been 'brought for'ard,' and the chucking portion of his destiny accomplished.

In this condition of things, Flora confided to Little Dorrit that she had not seen Mr F.'s Aunt so full of life and character for weeks; that she would find it necessary to remain there 'hours perhaps,' until the inexorable old lady could be softened; and that she could manage her best alone. They parted, therefore, in the friendliest manner, and with the kindest feeling on both sides.

Mr F.'s Aunt holding out like a grim fortress, and Flora becoming in need of refreshment, a messenger was despatched to the hotel for the tumbler already glanced at, which was afterwards replenished. With the aid of its content, a newspaper, and some skimming of the cream of the pie-stock, Flora got through the remainder of the day in perfect good humour; though occasionally embarrassed by the consequences of an idle rumour which circulated among the credulous infants of the neighbourhood, to the effect that an old lady had sold herself to the pie-shop to be made up, and was then sitting in the pie-shop parlour, declining to complete her contract. This attracted so many young persons of both sexes, and, when the shades of evening began to fall, occasioned so much interruption to the business, that the merchant became very pressing in his proposals that Mr F.'s Aunt should be removed. A conveyance was accordingly brought to the door, which, by the joint efforts of the merchant and Flora, this remarkable woman was at last induced to enter; though not without even then putting her head out of the window, and demanding to have him 'brought for'ard' for the purpose originally mentioned. As she was observed at this time to direct baleful glances towards the Marshalsea, it has been supposed that this admirably consistent female intended by 'him,' Arthur Clennam.

This, however, is mere speculation; who the person was, who, for the satisfaction of Mr F.'s Aunt's mind, ought to have been brought forward and never was brought forward, will never be positively known.

The autumn days went on, and Little Dorrit never came to the Marshalsea now and went away without seeing him. No, no, no.

One morning, as Arthur listened for the light feet that every morning ascended winged to his heart, bringing the heavenly brightness of a new love into the room where the old love had wrought so hard and been so true; one morning, as he listened, he heard her coming, not alone.

'Dear Arthur,' said her delighted voice outside the door, 'I have some one here. May I bring some one in?'

He had thought from the tread there were two with her. He answered 'Yes,' and she came in with Mr Meagles. Sun-browned and jolly Mr Meagles looked, and he opened his arms and folded Arthur in them, like a sun-browned and jolly father.

'Now I am all right,' said Mr Meagles, after a minute or so. 'Now it's over. Arthur, my dear fellow, confess at once that you expected me before.'

'I did,' said Arthur; 'but Amy told me—' 'Little Dorrit. Never any other name.' (It was she who whispered it.)

'—But my Little Dorrit told me that, without asking for any further explanation, I was not to expect you until I saw you.'

'And now you see me, my boy,' said Mr Meagles, shaking him by the hand stoutly; 'and now you shall have any explanation and every explanation. The fact is, I was here—came straight to you from the Allongers and Marshongers, or I should be ashamed to look you in the face this day,—but you were not in company trim at the moment, and I had to start off again to catch Doyce.'

'Poor Doyce!' sighed Arthur.

'Don't call him names that he don't deserve,' said Mr Meagles.

'He's not poor; he's doing well enough. Doyce is a wonderful fellow over there. I assure you he is making out his case like a house a-fire. He has fallen on his legs, has Dan. Where they don't want things done and find a man to do 'em, that man's off his legs; but where they do want things done and find a man to do 'em, that man's on his legs. You won't have occasion to trouble the Circumlocution Office any more. Let me tell you, Dan has done without 'em!'

'What a load you take from my mind!' cried Arthur. 'What happiness you give me!'

'Happiness?' retorted Mr Meagles. 'Don't talk about happiness till you see Dan. I assure you Dan is directing works and executing labours over yonder, that it would make your hair stand on end to look at. He's no public offender, bless you, now! He's medalled and ribboned, and starred and crossed, and I don't-know-what all'd, like a born nobleman. But we mustn't talk about that over here.'

'Why not?'

'Oh, egad!' said Mr Meagles, shaking his head very seriously, 'he must hide all those things under lock and key when he comes over here. They won't do over here. In that particular, Britannia is a Britannia in the Manger—won't give her children such distinctions herself, and won't allow them to be seen when they are given by other countries. No, no, Dan!' said Mr Meagles, shaking his head again. 'That won't do here!'

'If you had brought me (except for Doyce's sake) twice what I have lost,' cried Arthur, 'you would not have given me the pleasure that you give me in this news.' 'Why, of course, of course,' assented Mr Meagles. 'Of course I know that, my good fellow, and therefore I come out with it in the first burst. Now, to go back, about catching Doyce. I caught Doyce. Ran against him among a lot of those dirty brown dogs in women's nightcaps a great deal too big for 'em, calling themselves Arabs and all sorts of incoherent races. YOU know 'em! Well! He was coming straight to me, and I was going to him, and so we came back together.'

'Doyce in England!' exclaimed Arthur.

'There!' said Mr Meagles, throwing open his arms. 'I am the worst man in the world to manage a thing of this sort. I don't know what I should have done if I had been in the diplomatic line—right, perhaps! The long and short of it is, Arthur, we have both been in England this fortnight. And if you go on to ask where Doyce is at the present moment, why, my plain answer is—here he is! And now I can breathe again at last!'

Doyce darted in from behind the door, caught Arthur by both hands, and said the rest for himself.

'There are only three branches of my subject, my dear Clennam,' said Doyce, proceeding to mould them severally, with his plastic thumb, on the palm of his hand, 'and they're soon disposed of. First, not a word more from you about the past. There was an error in your calculations. I know what that is. It affects the whole machine, and failure is the consequence. You will profit by the failure, and will avoid it another time. I have done a similar thing myself, in construction, often. Every failure teaches a man something, if he will learn; and you are too sensible a man not to learn from this failure. So much for firstly. Secondly. I was sorry you should have taken it so heavily to heart, and reproached yourself so severely; I was travelling home night and day to put matters right, with the assistance of our friend, when I fell in with our friend as he has informed you. Thirdly. We two agreed, that, after what you had undergone, after your distress of mind, and after your illness, it would be a pleasant surprise if we could so far keep quiet as to get things perfectly arranged without your knowledge, and then come and say that all the affairs were smooth, that everything was right, that the business stood in greater want of you than ever it did, and that a new and prosperous career was opened before you and me as partners. That's thirdly. But you know we always make an allowance for friction, and so I have reserved space to close in. My dear Clennam, I thoroughly confide in you; you have it in your power to be quite as useful to me as I have, or have had, it in my power to be useful to you; your old place awaits you, and wants you very much; there is nothing to detain you here one half-hour longer.'

There was silence, which was not broken until Arthur had stood for some time at the window with his back towards them, and until his little wife that was to be had gone to him and stayed by him.

'I made a remark a little while ago,' said Daniel Doyce then, 'which I am inclined to think was an incorrect one. I said there was nothing to detain you here, Clennam, half an hour longer. Am I mistaken in supposing that you would rather not leave here till to-morrow morning? Do I know, without being very wise, where you would like to go, direct from these walls and from this room?'

'You do,' returned Arthur. 'It has been our cherished purpose.'

'Very well!' said Doyce. 'Then, if this young lady will do me the honour of regarding me for four-and-twenty hours in the light of a father, and will take a ride with me now towards Saint Paul's Churchyard, I dare say I know what we want to get there.'

Little Dorrit and he went out together soon afterwards, and Mr Meagles lingered behind to say a word to his friend.

'I think, Arthur, you will not want Mother and me in the morning and we will keep away. It might set Mother thinking about Pet; she's a soft-hearted woman. She's best at the Cottage, and I'll stay there and keep her company.'

With that they parted for the time. And the day ended, and the night ended, and the morning came, and Little Dorrit, simply dressed as usual and having no one with her but Maggy, came into the prison with the sunshine. The poor room was a happy room that morning. Where in the world was there a room so full of quiet joy!

'My dear love,' said Arthur. 'Why does Maggy light the fire? We shall be gone directly.'

'I asked her to do it. I have taken such an odd fancy. I want you to burn something for me.'

'What?'

'Only this folded paper. If you will put it in the fire with your own hand, just as it is, my fancy will be gratified.'

'Superstitious, darling Little Dorrit? Is it a charm?'

'It is anything you like best, my own,' she answered, laughing with glistening eyes and standing on tiptoe to kiss him, 'if you will only humour me when the fire burns up.'

So they stood before the fire, waiting: Clennam with his arm about her waist, and the fire shining, as fire in that same place had often shone, in Little Dorrit's eyes. 'Is it bright enough now?' said Arthur. 'Quite bright enough now,' said Little Dorrit. 'Does the charm want any words to be said?' asked Arthur, as he held the paper over the flame. 'You can say (if you don't mind) "I love you!"' answered Little Dorrit. So he said it, and the paper burned away.

They passed very quietly along the yard; for no one was there, though many heads were stealthily peeping from the windows.

Only one face, familiar of old, was in the Lodge. When they had both accosted it, and spoken many kind words, Little Dorrit turned back one last time with her hand stretched out, saying, 'Good-bye, good John! I hope you will live very happy, dear!'

Then they went up the steps of the neighbouring Saint George's Church, and went up to the altar, where Daniel Doyce was waiting in his paternal character. And there was Little Dorrit's old friend who had given her the Burial Register for a pillow; full of admiration that she should come back to them to be married, after all.

And they were married with the sun shining on them through the painted figure of Our Saviour on the window. And they went into the very room where Little Dorrit had slumbered after her party, to sign the Marriage Register. And there, Mr Pancks, (destined to be chief clerk to Doyce and Clennam, and afterwards partner in the house), sinking the Incendiary in the peaceful friend, looked in at the door to see it done, with Flora gallantly supported on one arm and Maggy on the other, and a back-ground of John Chivery and father and other turnkeys who had run round for the moment, deserting the parent Marshalsea for its happy child. Nor had Flora the least signs of seclusion upon her, notwithstanding her recent declaration; but, on the contrary, was wonderfully smart, and enjoyed the ceremonies mightily, though in a fluttered way.

Little Dorrit's old friend held the inkstand as she signed her name, and the clerk paused in taking off the good clergyman's surplice, and all the witnesses looked on with special interest. 'For, you see,' said Little Dorrit's old friend, 'this young lady is one of our curiosities, and has come now to the third volume of our Registers. Her birth is in what I call the first volume; she lay asleep, on this very floor, with her pretty head on what I call the second volume; and she's now a-writing her little name as a bride in what I call the third volume.'

They all gave place when the signing was done, and Little Dorrit and her husband walked out of the church alone. They paused for a moment on the steps of the portico, looking at the fresh perspective of the street in the autumn morning sun's bright rays, and then went down.

Went down into a modest life of usefulness and happiness. Went down to give a mother's care, in the fulness of time, to Fanny's neglected children no less than to their own, and to leave that lady going into Society for ever and a day. Went down to give a tender nurse and friend to Tip for some few years, who was never vexed by the great exactions he made of her in return for the riches he might have given her if he had ever had them, and who lovingly closed his eyes upon the Marshalsea and all its blighted fruits. They went quietly down into the roaring streets, inseparable and blessed; and as they passed along in sunshine and shade, the noisy and the eager, and the arrogant and the froward and the vain, fretted and chafed, and made their usual uproar.

THE END OF
Little Dorrit

THE MAGIC FISHBONE

A HOLIDAY ROMANCE
FROM THE PEN OF
MISS ALICE RAINBIRD
AGED 7.

BY CHARLES DICKENS

FOREWORD

The story contained herein was written by Charles Dickens in 1867. It is the second of four stories entitled “Holiday Romance” and was published originally in a children’s magazine in America. It purports to be written by a child aged seven. It was republished in England in “All the Year Round” in 1868. For this and four other Christmas pieces Dickens received £1,000.

“Holiday Romance” was published in book form by Messrs Chapman & Hall in 1874, with “Edwin Drood” and other stories.

For this reprint the text of the story as it appeared in “All the Year Round” has been followed.

There was once a King, and he had a Queen; and he was the manliest of his sex, and she was the loveliest of hers. The King was, in his private profession, Under Government. The Queen’s father had been a medical man out of town.

They had nineteen children, and were always having more. Seventeen of these children took care of the baby; and Alicia, the eldest, took care of them all. Their ages varied from seven years to seven months.

Let us now resume our story.

One day the King was going to the office, when he stopped at the fishmonger’s to buy a pound and a half of salmon not too near the tail, which the Queen (who was a careful housekeeper) had requested him to send home. Mr Pickles, the fishmonger, said, “Certainly, sir, is there any other article, Good-morning.”

The King went on towards the office in a melancholy mood, for quarter day was such a long way off, and several of the dear children were growing out of their clothes. He had not proceeded far, when Mr Pickles’s errand-boy came running after him, and said, “Sir, you didn’t notice the old lady in our shop.”

“What old lady?” enquired the King. “I saw none.”

Now, the King had not seen any old lady, because this old lady had been invisible to him, though visible to Mr Pickles’s boy. Probably because he messed and splashed the water about to that degree, and flopped the pairs of soles down in that violent manner, that, if she had not been visible to him, he would have spoilt her clothes.

Just then the old lady came trotting up. She was dressed in shot-silk of the richest quality, smelling of dried lavender.

“King Watkins the First, I believe?” said the old lady.

“Watkins,” replied the King, “is my name.”

“Papa, if I am not mistaken, of the beautiful Princess Alicia?” said the old lady.

“And of eighteen other darlings,” replied the King.

“Listen. You are going to the office,” said the old lady.

It instantly flashed upon the King that she must be a Fairy, or how could she know that?

“You are right,” said the old lady, answering his thoughts, “I am the Good Fairy Grandmarina. Attend. When you return home to dinner, politely invite the Princess Alicia to have some of the salmon you bought just now.”

“It may disagree with her,” said the King.

The old lady became so very angry at this absurd idea, that the King was quite alarmed, and humbly begged her pardon.

“We hear a great deal too much about this thing disagreeing, and that thing disagreeing,” said the old lady, with the greatest contempt it was possible to express. “Don’t be greedy. I think you want it all yourself.”

The King hung his head under this reproof, and said he wouldn’t talk about things disagreeing, any more.

“Be good, then,” said the Fairy Grandmarina, “and don’t! When the beautiful Princess Alicia consents to partake of the salmon—as I think she will—you will find she will leave a fish-bone on her plate. Tell her to dry it, and to rub it, and to polish it till it shines like mother-of-pearl, and to take care of it as a present from me.”

“Is that all?” asked the King.

“Don’t be impatient, sir,” returned the Fairy Grandmarina, scolding him severely. “Don’t catch people short, before they have done speaking. Just the way with you grown-up persons. You are always doing it.”

The King again hung his head, and said he wouldn’t do so any more.

“Be good then,” said the Fairy Grandmarina, “and don’t! Tell the Princess Alicia, with my love, that the fish-bone is a magic present which can only be used once; but that it will bring her, that once, whatever she wishes for, provided she wishes for it at the right time. That is the message. Take care of it."

The King was beginning, "Might I ask the reason—?" when the Fairy became absolutely furious.

"*Will* you be good, sir?" she exclaimed, stamping her foot on the ground. "The reason for this, and the reason for that, indeed! You are always wanting the reason. No reason. There! Hoity toity me! I am sick of your grown-up reasons."

The King was extremely frightened by the old lady's flying into such a passion, and said he was very sorry to have offended her, and he wouldn't ask for reasons any more.

"Be good then," said the old lady, "and don't!"

With those words, Grandmarina vanished, and the King went on and on and on, till he came to the office. There he wrote and wrote and wrote, till it was time to go home again. Then he politely invited the Princess Alicia, as the Fairy had directed him, to partake of the salmon. And when she had enjoyed it very much, he saw the fish-bone on her plate, as the Fairy had told him he would, and he delivered the Fairy's message, and the Princess Alicia took care to dry the bone, and to rub it, and to polish it till it shone like mother-of-pearl.

And so when the Queen was going to get up in the morning, she said, "O, dear me, dear me; my head, my head!" and then she fainted away.

The Princess Alicia, who happened to be looking in at the chamber-door, asking about breakfast, was very much alarmed when she saw her Royal Mamma in this state, and she rang the bell for Peggy, which was the name of the Lord Chamberlain. But remembering where the smelling-bottle was, she climbed on a chair and got it, and after that she climbed on another chair by the bedside and held the smelling-bottle to the Queen's nose, and after that she jumped down and got some water, and after that she jumped up again and wetted the Queen's forehead, and, in short, when the Lord Chamberlain came in, that dear old woman said to the little Princess, "What a Trot you are! I couldn't have done it better myself!"

But that was not the worst of the good Queen's illness. O, no! She was very ill indeed, for a long time. The Princess Alicia kept the seventeen young Princes and Princesses quiet, and dressed and undressed and danced the baby, and made the kettle boil, and heated the soup, and swept the hearth, and poured out the medicine, and nursed the Queen, and did all that ever she could, and was as busy busy busy, as busy could be. For there were not many servants at that Palace, for three reasons; because the King was short of money, because a rise in his office never seemed to come, and because quarter day was so far off that it looked almost as far off and as little as one of the stars.

But on the morning when the Queen fainted away, where was the magic fish-bone? Why, there it was in the Princess Alicia's pocket. She had almost taken it out to bring the Queen to life again, when she put it back, and looked for the smelling-bottle.

After the Queen had come out of her swoon that morning, and was dozing, the Princess Alicia hurried up-stairs to tell a most particular secret to a most particularly confidential friend of hers, who was a Duchess. People did suppose her to be a Doll; but she was really a Duchess, though nobody knew it except the Princess.

This most particular secret was a secret about the magic fish-bone, the history of which was well known to the Duchess, because the Princess told her everything. The Princess kneeled down by the bed on which the Duchess was lying, full-dressed and wide awake, and whispered the secret to her. The Duchess smiled and nodded. People might have supposed that she never smiled and nodded, but she often did, though nobody knew it except the Princess.

Then the Princess Alicia hurried downstairs again, to keep watch in the Queen's room. She often kept watch by herself in the Queen's room; but every evening, while the illness lasted, she sat there watching with the King. And every evening the King sat looking at her with a cross look, wondering why she never brought out the magic fish-bone. As often as she noticed this, she ran up-stairs, whispered the secret to the Duchess over again, and said to the Duchess besides, "They think we children never have a reason or a meaning!" And the Duchess, though the most fashionable Duchess that ever was heard of, winked her eye.

"Alicia," said the King, one evening when she wished him Good Night.

"Yes, Papa."

"What is become of the magic fish-bone?"

"In my pocket, Papa."

"I thought you had lost it?"

"O, no, Papa."

"Or forgotten it?"

“No, indeed, Papa.”

And so another time the dreadful little snapping pug-dog next door made a rush at one of the young Princes as he stood on the steps coming home from school, and terrified him out of his wits and he put his hand through a pane of glass, and bled bled bled. When the seventeen other young Princes and Princesses saw him bleed bleed bleed, they were terrified out of their wits too, and screamed themselves black in their seventeen faces all at once. But the Princess Alicia put her hands over all their seventeen mouths, one after another, and persuaded them to be quiet because of the sick Queen. And then she put the wounded Prince’s hand in a basin of fresh cold water, while they stared with their twice seventeen are thirty-four put down four and carry three eyes, and then she looked in the hand for bits of glass, and there were fortunately no bits of glass there. And then she said to two chubby-legged Princes who were sturdy though small, “Bring me in the Royal rag-bag; I must snip and stitch and cut and contrive.” So those two young Princes tugged at the Royal rag-bag and lugged it in, and the Princess Alicia sat down on the floor with a large pair of scissors and a needle and thread, and snipped and stitched and cut and contrived, and made a bandage and put it on, and it fitted beautifully, and so when it was all done she saw the King her Papa looking on by the door.

“Alicia.”

“Yes, Papa.”

“What have you been doing?”

“Snipping stitching cutting and contriving, Papa.”

“Where is the magic fish-bone?”

“In my pocket, Papa.”

“I thought you had lost it?”

“O, no, Papa.”

“Or forgotten it?”

“No, indeed, Papa.”

After that, she ran up-stairs to the Duchess and told her what had passed, and told her the secret over again, and the Duchess shook her flaxen curls and laughed with her rosy lips.

Well! and so another time the baby fell under the grate. The seventeen young Princes and Princesses were used to it, for they were almost always falling under the grate or down the stairs, but the baby was not used to it yet, and it gave him a swelled face and a black eye. The way the poor little darling came to tumble was, that he slid out of the Princess Alicia's lap just as she was sitting in a great coarse apron that quite smothered her, in front of the kitchen-fire, beginning to peel the turnips for the broth for dinner; and the way she came to be doing that was, that the King's cook had run away that morning with her own true love who was a very tall but very tipsy soldier. Then, the seventeen young Princes and Princesses, who cried at everything that happened, cried and roared. But the Princess Alicia (who couldn't help crying a little herself) quietly called to them to be still, on account of not throwing back the Queen up-stairs, who was fast getting well, and said, "Hold your tongues, you wicked little monkeys, every one of you, while I examine baby!" Then she examined baby, and found that he hadn't broken anything, and she held cold iron to his poor dear eye, and smoothed his poor dear face, and he presently fell asleep in her arms. Then, she said to the seventeen Princes and Princesses, "I am afraid to lay him down yet, lest he should wake and feel pain, be good, and you shall all be cooks." They jumped for joy when they heard that, and began making themselves cooks' caps out of old newspapers. So to one she gave the salt-box, and to one she gave the barley, and to one she gave the herbs, and to one she gave the turnips, and to one she gave the carrots, and to one she gave the onions, and to one she gave the spice-box, till they were all cooks, and all running about at work, she sitting in the middle smothered in the great coarse apron, nursing baby. By and by the broth was done, and the baby woke up smiling like an angel, and was trusted to the sedatest Princess to hold, while the other Princes and Princesses were squeezed into a far-off corner to look at the Princess Alicia turning out the saucepan-full of broth, for fear (as they were always getting into trouble) they should get splashed and scalded. When the broth came tumbling out, steaming beautifully, and smelling like a nosegay good to eat, they clapped their hands. That made the baby clap his hands; and that, and his looking as if he had a comic toothache, made all the Princes and Princesses laugh. So the Princess Alicia said, "Laugh and be good, and after dinner we will make him a nest on the floor in a corner, and he shall sit in his nest and see a dance of eighteen cooks." That delighted the young Princes and Princesses, and they ate up all the broth, and washed up all the plates and dishes, and cleared away, and pushed the table into a corner, and then they in their cooks' caps, and the Princess Alicia in the smothering coarse apron that belonged to the cook that had run away with her own true love that was the very tall but very tipsy soldier, danced a dance of eighteen cooks before the angelic baby, who forgot his swelled face and his black eye, and crowed with joy.

And so then, once more the Princess Alicia saw King Watkins the First, her father, standing in the doorway looking on, and he said: “What have you been doing, Alicia?”

“Cooking and contriving, Papa.”

“What else have you been doing, Alicia?”

“Keeping the children light-hearted, Papa.”

“Where is the magic fish-bone, Alicia?”

“In my pocket, Papa.”

“I thought you had lost it?”

“O, no, Papa.”

“Or forgotten it?”

“No, indeed, Papa.”

The King then sighed so heavily, and seemed so low-spirited, and sat down so miserably, leaning his head upon his hand, and his elbow upon the kitchen table pushed away in the corner, that the seventeen Princes and Princesses crept softly out of the kitchen, and left him alone with the Princess Alicia and the angelic baby.

“What is the matter, Papa?”

“I am dreadfully poor, my child.”

“Have you no money at all, Papa?”

“None my child.”

“Is there no way left of getting any, Papa?”

“No way,” said the King. “I have tried very hard, and I have tried all ways.”

When she heard those last words, the Princess Alicia began to put her hand into the pocket where she kept the magic fish-bone.

“Papa,” said she, “when we have tried very hard, and tried all ways, we must have done our very very best?”

“No doubt, Alicia.”

“When we have done our very very best, Papa, and that is not enough, then I think the right time must have come for asking help of others.” This was the very secret connected with the magic fish-bone, which she had found out for herself from the good fairy Grandmarina’s words, and which she had so often whispered to her beautiful and fashionable friend the Duchess.

So she took out of her pocket the magic fish-bone that had been dried and rubbed and polished till it shone like mother-of-pearl; and she gave it one little kiss and wished it was quarter day. And immediately it *was* quarter day; and the King's quarter's salary came rattling down the chimney, and bounced into the middle of the floor.

But this was not half of what happened, no not a quarter, for immediately afterwards the good fairy Grandmarina came riding in, in a carriage and four (Peacocks), with Mr Pickles's boy up behind, dressed in silver and gold, with a cocked hat, powdered hair, pink silk stockings, a jewelled cane, and a nosegay. Down jumped Mr Pickles's boy with his cocked hat in his hand and wonderfully polite (being entirely changed by enchantment), and handed Grandmarina out, and there she stood in her rich shot silk smelling of dried lavender, fanning herself with a sparkling fan.

"Alicia, my dear," said this charming old Fairy, "how do you do, I hope I see you pretty well, give me a kiss."

The Princess Alicia embraced her, and then Grandmarina turned to the King, and said rather sharply:—"Are you good?"

The King said he hoped so.

"I suppose you know the reason, *now*, why my god-Daughter here," kissing the Princess again, "did not apply to the fish-bone sooner?" said the Fairy.

The King made her a shy bow.

"Ah! but you didn't *then*!" said the Fairy.

The King made her a shyer bow.

"Any more reasons to ask for?" said the Fairy.

The King said no, and he was very sorry.

"Be good then," said the Fairy, "and live happy ever afterwards."

Then, Grandmarina waved her fan, and the Queen came in most splendidly dressed, and the seventeen young Princes and Princesses, no longer grown out of their clothes, came in newly fitted out from top to toe, with tucks in everything to admit of its being let out. After that, the Fairy tapped the Princess Alicia with her fan, and the smothering coarse apron flew away, and she appeared exquisitely dressed, like a little Bride, with a wreath of orange-flowers and a silver veil. After that, the kitchen dresser changed of itself into a wardrobe, made of beautiful woods and gold and looking glass, which was full of dresses of all sorts, all for her and all exactly fitting her. After that, the angelic baby came in, running alone, with his face and eye not a bit the worse but much the better. Then, Grandmarina begged to be introduced to the Duchess, and, when the Duchess was brought down many compliments passed between them.

A little whispering took place between the Fairy and the Duchess, and then the Fairy said out loud, “Yes. I thought she would have told you.” Grandmarina then turned to the King and Queen, and said, “We are going in search of Prince Certainpersonio. The pleasure of your company is requested at church in half an hour precisely.” So she and the Princess Alicia got into the carriage, and Mr Pickles’s boy handed in the Duchess who sat by herself on the opposite seat, and then Mr Pickles’s boy put up the steps and got up behind, and the Peacocks flew away with their tails spread.

Prince Certainpersonio was sitting by himself, eating barley-sugar and waiting to be ninety. When he saw the Peacocks followed by the carriage, coming in at the window, it immediately occurred to him that something uncommon was going to happen.

“Prince,” said Grandmarina, “I bring you your Bride.”

The moment the Fairy said those words, Prince Certainpersonio’s face left off being stickey, and his jacket and corduroys changed to peach-bloom velvet, and his hair curled, and a cap and feather flew in like a bird and settled on his head. He got into the carriage by the Fairy’s invitation, and there he renewed his acquaintance with the Duchess, whom he had seen before.

In the church were the Prince’s relations and friends, and the Princess Alicia’s relations and friends, and the seventeen Princes and Princesses, and the baby, and a crowd of the neighbours. The marriage was beautiful beyond expression. The Duchess was bridesmaid, and beheld the ceremony from the pulpit where she was supported by the cushion of the desk.

Grandmarina gave a magnificent wedding feast afterwards, in which there was everything and more to eat, and everything and more to drink. The wedding cake was delicately ornamented with white satin ribbons, frosted silver and white lilies, and was forty-two yards round.

When Grandmarina had drunk her love to the young couple, and Prince Certainpersonio had made a speech, and everybody had cried Hip hip hip hurrah! Grandmarina announced to the King and Queen that in future there would be eight quarter days in every year, except in leap year, when there would be ten. She then turned to Certainpersonio and Alicia, and said, “My dears, you will have thirty-five children, and they will all be good and beautiful. Seventeen of your children will be boys, and eighteen will be girls. The hair of the whole of your children will curl naturally. They will never have the measles, and will have recovered from the whooping-cough before being born."

On hearing such good news, everybody cried out "Hip hip hip hurrah!" again.

"It only remains," said Grandmarina in conclusion, "to make an end of the fish-bone."

So she took it from the hand of the Princess Alicia, and it instantly flew down the throat of the dreadful little snapping pug-dog next door and choked him, and he expired in convulsions.

THE END OF
The Magic Fishbone

LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT

by Charles Dickens

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PREFACE

What is exaggeration to one class of minds and perceptions, is plain truth to another. That which is commonly called a long-sight, perceives in a prospect innumerable features and bearings non-existent to a short-sighted person. I sometimes ask myself whether there may occasionally be a difference of this kind between some writers and some readers; whether it is ALWAYS the writer who colours highly, or whether it is now and then the reader whose eye for colour is a little dull?

On this head of exaggeration I have a positive experience, more curious than the speculation I have just set down. It is this: I have never touched a character precisely from the life, but some counterpart of that character has incredulously asked me: "Now really, did I ever really, see one like it?"

All the Pecksniff family upon earth are quite agreed, I believe, that Mr Pecksniff is an exaggeration, and that no such character ever existed. I will not offer any plea on his behalf to so powerful and genteel a body, but will make a remark on the character of Jonas Chuzzlewit.

I conceive that the sordid coarseness and brutality of Jonas would be unnatural, if there had been nothing in his early education, and in the precept and example always before him, to engender and develop the vices that make him odious. But, so born and so bred, admired for that which made him hateful, and justified from his cradle in cunning, treachery, and avarice; I claim him as the legitimate issue of the father upon whom those vices are seen to recoil. And I submit that their recoil upon that old man, in his unhonoured age, is not a mere piece of poetical justice, but is the extreme exposition of a direct truth.

I make this comment, and solicit the reader's attention to it in his or her consideration of this tale, because nothing is more common in real life than a want of profitable reflection on the causes of many vices and crimes that awaken the general horror. What is substantially true of families in this respect, is true of a whole commonwealth. As we sow, we reap. Let the reader go into the children's side of any prison in England, or, I grieve to add, of many workhouses, and judge whether those are monsters who disgrace our streets, people our hulks and penitentiaries, and overcrowd our penal colonies, or are creatures whom we have deliberately suffered to be bred for misery and ruin.

The American portion of this story is in no other respect a caricature than as it is an exhibition, for the most part (Mr Bevan expected), of a ludicrous side, ONLY, of the American character—of that side which was, four-and-twenty years ago, from its nature, the most obtrusive, and the most likely to be seen by such travellers as Young Martin and Mark Tapley. As I had never, in writing fiction, had any disposition to soften what is ridiculous or wrong at home, so I then hoped that the good-humored people of the United States would not be generally disposed to quarrel with me for carrying the same usage abroad. I am happy to believe that my confidence in that great nation was not misplaced.

When this book was first published, I was given to understand, by some authorities, that the Watertoast Association and eloquence were beyond all bounds of belief. Therefore I record the fact that all that portion of Martin Chuzzlewit's experiences is a literal paraphrase of some reports of public proceedings in the United States (especially of the proceedings of a certain Brandywine Association), which were printed in the Times Newspaper in June and July, 1843—at about the time when I was engaged in writing those parts of the book; and which remain on the file of the Times Newspaper, of course.

In all my writings, I hope I have taken every available opportunity of showing the want of sanitary improvements in the neglected dwellings of the poor. Mrs Sarah Gamp was, four-and-twenty years ago, a fair representation of the hired attendant on the poor in sickness. The hospitals of London were, in many respects, noble Institutions; in others, very defective. I think it not the least among the instances of their mismanagement, that Mrs Betsey Prig was a fair specimen of a Hospital Nurse; and that the Hospitals, with their means and funds, should have left it to private humanity and enterprise, to enter on an attempt to improve that class of persons—since, greatly improved through the agency of good women.

POSTSCRIPT

At a Public Dinner given to me on Saturday the 18th of April, 1868, in the city of New York, by two hundred representatives of the Press of the United States of America, I made the following observations, among others:—

"So much of my voice has lately been heard in the land, that I might have been contented with troubling you no further from my present standing-point, were it not a duty with which I henceforth charge myself, not only here but on every suitable occasion, whatsoever and wheresoever, to express my high and grateful sense of my second reception in America, and to bear my honest testimony to the national generosity and magnanimity. Also, to declare how astounded I have been by the amazing changes I have seen around me on every side—changes moral, changes physical, changes in the amount of land subdued and peopled, changes in the rise of vast new cities, changes in the growth of older cities almost out of recognition, changes in the graces and amenities of life, changes in the Press, without whose advancement no advancement can take place anywhere. Nor am I, believe me, so arrogant as to suppose that in five-and-twenty years there have been no changes in me, and that I had nothing to learn and no extreme impressions to correct when I was here first. And this brings me to a point on which I have, ever since I landed in the United States last November, observed a strict silence, though sometimes tempted to break it, but in reference to which I will, with your good leave, take you into my confidence now. Even the Press, being human, may be sometimes mistaken or misinformed, and I rather think that I have in one or two rare instances observed its information to be not strictly accurate with reference to myself. Indeed, I have, now and again, been more surprised by printed news that I have read of myself, than by any printed news that I have ever read in my present state of existence. Thus, the vigour and perseverance with which I have for some months past been collecting materials for, and hammering away at, a new book on America has much astonished me; seeing that all that time my declaration has been perfectly well known to my publishers on both sides of the Atlantic, that no consideration on earth would induce me to write one. But what I have intended, what I have resolved upon (and this is the confidence I seek to place in you), is, on my return to England, in my own person, in my own Journal, to bear, for the behoof of my countrymen, such testimony to the gigantic changes in this country as I have hinted at to-night. Also, to record that wherever I have been, in the smallest places equally with the largest, I have been received with unsurpassable politeness, delicacy, sweet temper, hospitality, consideration, and with unsurpassable respect for the privacy daily enforced upon me by the nature of my avocation here and the state of my health. This testimony, so long as I live, and so long as my descendants have any legal right in my books, I shall cause to be republished, as an appendix to every copy of those two books of mine in which I have referred to America. And this I will do and cause to be done, not in mere love and thankfulness, but because I regard it as an act of plain justice and honour."

I said these words with the greatest earnestness that I could lay upon them, and I repeat them in print here with equal earnestness. So long as this book shall last, I hope that they will form a part of it, and will be fairly read as inseparable from my experiences and impressions of America.

CHARLES DICKENS.

May, 1868.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTORY, CONCERNING THE PEDIGREE OF THE CHUZZLEWIT FAMILY

As no lady or gentleman, with any claims to polite breeding, can possibly sympathize with the Chuzzlewit Family without being first assured of the extreme antiquity of the race, it is a great satisfaction to know that it undoubtedly descended in a direct line from Adam and Eve; and was, in the very earliest times, closely connected with the agricultural interest. If it should ever be urged by grudging and malicious persons, that a Chuzzlewit, in any period of the family history, displayed an overweening amount of family pride, surely the weakness will be considered not only pardonable but laudable, when the immense superiority of the house to the rest of mankind, in respect of this its ancient origin, is taken into account.

It is remarkable that as there was, in the oldest family of which we have any record, a murderer and a vagabond, so we never fail to meet, in the records of all old families, with innumerable repetitions of the same phase of character. Indeed, it may be laid down as a general principle, that the more extended the ancestry, the greater the amount of violence and vagabondism; for in ancient days those two amusements, combining a wholesome excitement with a promising means of repairing shattered fortunes, were at once the ennobling pursuit and the healthful recreation of the Quality of this land.

Consequently, it is a source of inexpressible comfort and happiness to find, that in various periods of our history, the Chuzzlewits were actively connected with divers slaughterous conspiracies and bloody frays. It is further recorded of them, that being clad from head to heel in steel of proof, they did on many occasions lead their leather-jerkined soldiers to the death with invincible courage, and afterwards return home gracefully to their relations and friends.

There can be no doubt that at least one Chuzzlewit came over with William the Conqueror. It does not appear that this illustrious ancestor 'came over' that monarch, to employ the vulgar phrase, at any subsequent period; inasmuch as the Family do not seem to have been ever greatly distinguished by the possession of landed estate. And it is well known that for the bestowal of that kind of property upon his favourites, the liberality and gratitude of the Norman were as remarkable as those virtues are usually found to be in great men when they give away what belongs to other people.

Perhaps in this place the history may pause to congratulate itself upon the enormous amount of bravery, wisdom, eloquence, virtue, gentle birth, and true nobility, that appears to have come into England with the Norman Invasion: an amount which the genealogy of every ancient family lends its aid to swell, and which would beyond all question have been found to be just as great, and to the full as prolific in giving birth to long lines of chivalrous descendants, boastful of their origin, even though William the Conqueror had been William the Conquered; a change of circumstances which, it is quite certain, would have made no manner of difference in this respect.

There was unquestionably a Chuzzlewit in the Gunpowder Plot, if indeed the arch-traitor, Fawkes himself, were not a scion of this remarkable stock; as he might easily have been, supposing another Chuzzlewit to have emigrated to Spain in the previous generation, and there intermarried with a Spanish lady, by whom he had issue, one olive-complexioned son. This probable conjecture is strengthened, if not absolutely confirmed, by a fact which cannot fail to be interesting to those who are curious in tracing the progress of hereditary tastes through the lives of their unconscious inheritors. It is a notable circumstance that in these later times, many Chuzzlewits, being unsuccessful in other pursuits, have, without the smallest rational hope of enriching themselves, or any conceivable reason, set up as coal-merchants; and have, month after month, continued gloomily to watch a small stock of coals, without in any one instance negotiating with a purchaser. The remarkable similarity between this course of proceeding and that adopted by their Great Ancestor beneath the vaults of the Parliament House at Westminster, is too obvious and too full of interest, to stand in need of comment.

It is also clearly proved by the oral traditions of the Family, that there existed, at some one period of its history which is not distinctly stated, a matron of such destructive principles, and so familiarized to the use and composition of inflammatory and combustible engines, that she was called

'The Match Maker;' by which nickname and byword she is recognized in the Family legends to this day. Surely there can be no reasonable doubt that this was the Spanish lady, the mother of Chuzzlewit Fawkes.

But there is one other piece of evidence, bearing immediate reference to their close connection with this memorable event in English History, which must carry conviction, even to a mind (if such a mind there be) remaining unconvinced by these presumptive proofs.

There was, within a few years, in the possession of a highly respectable and in every way credible and unimpeachable member of the Chuzzlewit Family (for his bitterest enemy never dared to hint at his being otherwise than a wealthy man), a dark lantern of undoubted antiquity; rendered still more interesting by being, in shape and pattern, extremely like such as are in use at the present day. Now this gentleman, since deceased, was at all times ready to make oath, and did again and again set forth upon his solemn asseveration, that he had frequently heard his grandmother say, when contemplating this venerable relic, 'Aye, aye! This was carried by my fourth son on the fifth of November, when he was a Guy Fawkes.' These remarkable words wrought (as well they might) a strong impression on his mind, and he was in the habit of repeating them very often. The just interpretation which they bear, and the conclusion to which they lead, are triumphant and irresistible. The old lady, naturally strong-minded, was nevertheless frail and fading; she was notoriously subject to that confusion of ideas, or, to say the least, of speech, to which age and garrulity are liable. The slight, the very slight, confusion apparent in these expressions is manifest, and is ludicrously easy of correction. 'Aye, aye,' quoth she, and it will be observed that no emendation whatever is necessary to be made in these two initiative remarks, 'Aye, aye! This lantern was carried by my forefather'—not fourth son, which is preposterous—'on the fifth of November. And HE was Guy Fawkes.' Here we have a remark at once consistent, clear, natural, and in strict accordance with the character of the speaker. Indeed the anecdote is so plainly susceptible of this meaning and no other, that it would be hardly worth recording in its original state, were it not a proof of what may be (and very often is) affected not only in historical prose but in imaginative poetry, by the exercise of a little ingenious labour on the part of a commentator.

It has been said that there is no instance, in modern times, of a Chuzzlewit having been found on terms of intimacy with the Great. But here again the sneering detractors who weave such miserable figments from their malicious brains, are stricken dumb by evidence. For letters are yet in the possession of various branches of the family, from which it distinctly appears, being stated in so many words, that one Diggory Chuzzlewit was in the habit of perpetually dining with Duke Humphrey. So constantly was he a guest at that nobleman's table, indeed; and so unceasingly were His Grace's hospitality and companionship forced, as it were, upon him; that we find him uneasy, and full of constraint and reluctance; writing his friends to the effect that if they fail to do so and so by bearer, he will have no choice but to dine again with Duke Humphrey; and expressing himself in a very marked and extraordinary manner as one surfeited of High Life and Gracious Company.

It has been rumoured, and it is needless to say the rumour originated in the same base quarters, that a certain male Chuzzlewit, whose birth must be admitted to be involved in some obscurity, was of very mean and low descent. How stands the proof? When the son of that individual, to whom the secret of his father's birth was supposed to have been communicated by his father in his lifetime, lay upon his deathbed, this question was put to him in a distinct, solemn, and formal way: 'Toby Chuzzlewit, who was your grandfather?' To which he, with his last breath, no less distinctly, solemnly, and formally replied: and his words were taken down at the time, and signed by six witnesses, each with his name and address in full: 'The Lord No Zoo.' It may be said—it HAS been said, for human wickedness has no limits—that there is no Lord of that name, and that among the titles which have become extinct, none at all resembling this, in sound even, is to be discovered. But what is the irresistible inference? Rejecting a theory broached by some well-meaning but mistaken persons, that this Mr Toby Chuzzlewit's grandfather, to judge from his name, must surely have been a Mandarin (which is wholly insupportable, for there is no pretence of his grandmother ever having been out of this country, or of any Mandarin having been in it within some years of his father's birth; except those in the tea-shops, which cannot for a moment be regarded as having any bearing on the question, one way or other), rejecting this hypothesis, is it not manifest that Mr Toby Chuzzlewit had either received the name imperfectly from his father, or that he had forgotten it, or that he had mispronounced it? and that even at the recent period in question, the Chuzzlewits were connected by a bend sinister, or kind of heraldic over-the-left, with some unknown noble and illustrious House?

From documentary evidence, yet preserved in the family, the fact is clearly established that in the comparatively modern days of the Diggory Chuzzlewit before mentioned, one of its members had attained to very great wealth and influence. Throughout such fragments of his correspondence as have escaped the ravages of the moths (who, in right of their extensive absorption of the contents of deeds and papers, may be called the general registers of the Insect World), we find him making constant reference to an uncle, in respect of whom he would seem to have entertained great expectations, as he was in the habit of seeking to propitiate his favour by presents of plate, jewels, books, watches, and other valuable articles. Thus, he writes on one occasion to his brother in reference to a gravy-spoon, the brother's property, which he (Diggory) would appear to have borrowed or otherwise possessed himself of: 'Do not be angry, I have parted with it—to my uncle.' On another occasion he expresses himself in a similar manner with regard to a child's mug which had been entrusted to him to get repaired. On another occasion he says, 'I have bestowed upon that irresistible uncle of mine everything I ever possessed.' And that he was in the habit of paying long and constant visits to this gentleman at his mansion, if, indeed, he did not wholly reside there, is manifest from the following sentence: 'With the exception of the suit of clothes I carry about with me, the whole of my wearing apparel is at present at my uncle's.' This gentleman's patronage and influence must have been very extensive, for his nephew writes, 'His interest is too high'—'It is too much'—'It is tremendous'—and the like. Still it does not appear (which is strange) to have procured for him any lucrative post at court or elsewhere, or to have conferred upon him any other distinction than that which was necessarily included in the countenance of so great a man, and the being invited by him to certain entertainment's, so splendid and costly in their nature, that he calls them 'Golden Balls.'

It is needless to multiply instances of the high and lofty station, and the vast importance of the Chuzzlewits, at different periods. If it came within the scope of reasonable probability that further proofs were required, they might be heaped upon each other until they formed an Alps of testimony, beneath which the boldest scepticism should be crushed and beaten flat. As a goodly tumulus is already collected, and decently battened up above the

Family grave, the present chapter is content to leave it as it is: merely adding, by way of a final spadeful, that many Chuzzlewits, both male and female, are proved to demonstration, on the faith of letters written by their own mothers, to have had chiselled noses, undeniable chins, forms that might have served the sculptor for a model, exquisitely-turned limbs and polished foreheads of so transparent a texture that the blue veins might be seen branching off in various directions, like so many roads on an ethereal map. This fact in itself, though it had been a solitary one, would have utterly settled and clenched the business in hand; for it is well known, on the authority of all the books which treat of such matters, that every one of these phenomena, but especially that of the chiselling, are invariably peculiar to, and only make themselves apparent in, persons of the very best condition.

This history having, to its own perfect satisfaction, (and, consequently, to the full contentment of all its readers,) proved the Chuzzlewits to have had an origin, and to have been at one time or other of an importance which cannot fail to render them highly improving and acceptable acquaintance to all right-minded individuals, may now proceed in earnest with its task. And having shown that they must have had, by reason of their ancient birth, a pretty large share in the foundation and increase of the human family, it will one day become its province to submit, that such of its members as shall be introduced in these pages, have still many counterparts and prototypes in the Great World about us. At present it contents itself with remarking, in a general way, on this head: Firstly, that it may be safely asserted, and yet without implying any direct participation in the Manboddo doctrine touching the probability of the human race having once been monkeys, that men do play very strange and extraordinary tricks. Secondly, and yet without trenching on the Blumenbach theory as to the descendants of Adam having a vast number of qualities which belong more particularly to swine than to any other class of animals in the creation, that some men certainly are remarkable for taking uncommon good care of themselves.

CHAPTER TWO

WHEREIN CERTAIN PERSONS ARE PRESENTED TO THE READER, WITH WHOM HE MAY, IF HE PLEASE, BECOME BETTER ACQUAINTED

It was pretty late in the autumn of the year, when the declining sun struggling through the mist which had obscured it all day, looked brightly down upon a little Wiltshire village, within an easy journey of the fair old town of Salisbury.

Like a sudden flash of memory or spirit kindling up the mind of an old man, it shed a glory upon the scene, in which its departed youth and freshness seemed to live again. The wet grass sparkled in the light; the scanty patches of verdure in the hedges—where a few green twigs yet stood together bravely, resisting to the last the tyranny of nipping winds and early frosts—took heart and brightened up; the stream which had been dull and sullen all day long, broke out into a cheerful smile; the birds began to chirp and twitter on the naked boughs, as though the hopeful creatures half believed that winter had gone by, and spring had come already. The vane upon the tapering spire of the old church glistened from its lofty station in sympathy with the general gladness; and from the ivy-shaded windows such gleams of light shone back upon the glowing sky, that it seemed as if the quiet buildings were the hoarding-place of twenty summers, and all their ruddiness and warmth were stored within.

Even those tokens of the season which emphatically whispered of the coming winter, graced the landscape, and, for the moment, tinged its livelier features with no oppressive air of sadness. The fallen leaves, with which the ground was strewn, gave forth a pleasant fragrance, and subduing all harsh sounds of distant feet and wheels created a repose in gentle unison with the light scattering of seed hither and thither by the distant husbandman, and with the noiseless passage of the plough as it turned up the rich brown earth, and wrought a graceful pattern in the stubbled fields. On the motionless branches of some trees, autumn berries hung like clusters of coral beads, as in those fabled orchards where the fruits were jewels; others stripped of all their garniture, stood, each the centre of its little heap of bright red leaves, watching their slow decay; others again, still wearing theirs, had them all crunched and crackled up, as though they had been burnt; about the stems of some were piled, in ruddy mounds, the apples they had borne that year; while others (hardy evergreens this class) showed somewhat stern and gloomy in their vigour, as charged by nature with the admonition that it is not to her more sensitive and joyous favourites she grants the longest term of life. Still athwart their darker boughs, the sunbeams struck out paths of deeper gold; and the red light, mantling in among their swarthy branches, used them as foils to set its brightness off, and aid the lustre of the dying day.

A moment, and its glory was no more. The sun went down beneath the long dark lines of hill and cloud which piled up in the west an airy city, wall heaped on wall, and battlement on battlement; the light was all withdrawn; the shining church turned cold and dark; the stream forgot to smile; the birds were silent; and the gloom of winter dwelt on everything.

An evening wind uprose too, and the slighter branches cracked and rattled as they moved, in skeleton dances, to its moaning music. The withering leaves no longer quiet, hurried to and fro in search of shelter from its chill pursuit; the labourer unyoked his horses, and with head bent down, trudged briskly home beside them; and from the cottage windows lights began to glance and wink upon the darkening fields.

Then the village forge came out in all its bright importance. The lusty bellows roared Ha ha! to the clear fire, which roared in turn, and bade the shining sparks dance gayly to the merry clinking of the hammers on the anvil. The gleaming iron, in its emulation, sparkled too, and shed its red-hot gems around profusely. The strong smith and his men dealt such strokes upon their work, as made even the melancholy night rejoice, and brought a glow into its dark face as it hovered about the door and windows, peeping curiously in above the shoulders of a dozen loungers. As to this idle company, there they stood, spellbound by the place, and, casting now and then a glance upon the darkness in their rear, settled their lazy elbows more at ease upon the sill, and leaned a little further in: no more disposed to tear themselves away than if they had been born to cluster round the blazing hearth like so many crickets.

Out upon the angry wind! how from sighing, it began to bluster round the merry forge, banging at the wicket, and grumbling in the chimney, as if it bullied the jolly bellows for doing anything to order. And what an impotent swaggerer it was too, for all its noise; for if it had any influence on that hoarse companion, it was but to make him roar his cheerful song the louder, and by consequence to make the fire burn the brighter, and the sparks to dance more gayly yet; at length, they whizzed so madly round and round, that it was too much for such a surly wind to bear; so off it flew with a howl giving the old sign before the ale-house door such a cuff as it went, that the Blue Dragon was more rampant than usual ever afterwards, and indeed, before Christmas, reared clean out of its crazy frame.

It was small tyranny for a respectable wind to go wreaking its vengeance on such poor creatures as the fallen leaves, but this wind happening to come up with a great heap of them just after venting its humour on the insulted Dragon, did so disperse and scatter them that they fled away, pell-mell, some here, some there, rolling over each other, whirling round and round upon their thin edges, taking frantic flights into the air, and playing all manner of extraordinary gambols in the extremity of their distress. Nor was this enough for its malicious fury; for not content with driving them abroad, it charged small parties of them and hunted them into the wheel wright's saw-pit, and below the planks and timbers in the yard, and, scattering the sawdust in the air, it looked for them underneath, and when it did meet with any, whew! how it drove them on and followed at their heels!

The scared leaves only flew the faster for all this, and a giddy chase it was; for they got into unfrequented places, where there was no outlet, and where their pursuer kept them eddying round and round at his pleasure; and they crept under the eaves of houses, and clung tightly to the sides of hay-ricks, like bats; and tore in at open chamber windows, and cowered close to hedges; and, in short, went anywhere for safety. But the oddest feat they achieved was, to take advantage of the sudden opening of Mr Pecksniff's front-door, to dash wildly into his passage; whither the wind following close upon them, and finding the back-door open, incontinently blew out the lighted candle held by Miss Pecksniff, and slammed the front-door against Mr Pecksniff who was at that moment entering, with such violence, that in the twinkling of an eye he lay on his back at the bottom of the steps. Being by this time weary of such trifling performances, the boisterous rover hurried away rejoicing, roaring over moor and meadow, hill and flat, until it got out to sea, where it met with other winds similarly disposed, and made a night of it.

In the meantime Mr Pecksniff, having received from a sharp angle in the bottom step but one, that sort of knock on the head which lights up, for the patient's entertainment, an imaginary general illumination of very bright short-sixes, lay placidly staring at his own street door. And it would seem to have been more suggestive in its aspect than street doors usually are; for he continued to lie there, rather a lengthy and unreasonable time, without so much as wondering whether he was hurt or no; neither, when Miss Pecksniff inquired through the key-hole in a shrill voice, which might have belonged to a wind in its teens, 'Who's there' did he make any reply; nor, when Miss Pecksniff opened the door again, and shading the candle with her hand, peered out, and looked provokingly round him, and about him, and over him, and everywhere but at him, did he offer any remark, or indicate in any manner the least hint of a desire to be picked up.

'I see you,' cried Miss Pecksniff, to the ideal inflicter of a runaway knock. 'You'll catch it, sir!'

Still Mr Pecksniff, perhaps from having caught it already, said nothing.

'You're round the corner now,' cried Miss Pecksniff. She said it at a venture, but there was appropriate matter in it too; for Mr Pecksniff, being in the act of extinguishing the candles before mentioned pretty rapidly, and of reducing the number of brass knobs on his street door from four or five hundred (which had previously been juggling of their own accord before his eyes in a very novel manner) to a dozen or so, might in one sense have been said to be coming round the corner, and just turning it.

With a sharply delivered warning relative to the cage and the constable, and the stocks and the gallows, Miss Pecksniff was about to close the door again, when Mr Pecksniff (being still at the bottom of the steps) raised himself on one elbow, and sneezed.

'That voice!' cried Miss Pecksniff. 'My parent!'

At this exclamation, another Miss Pecksniff bounced out of the parlour; and the two Miss Pecksniffs, with many incoherent expressions, dragged Mr Pecksniff into an upright posture.

'Pa!' they cried in concert. 'Pa! Speak, Pa! Do not look so wild my dearest Pa!'

But as a gentleman's looks, in such a case of all others, are by no means under his own control, Mr Pecksniff continued to keep his mouth and his eyes very wide open, and to drop his lower jaw, somewhat after the manner of a toy nut-cracker; and as his hat had fallen off, and his face was pale, and his hair erect, and his coat muddy, the spectacle he presented was so very doleful, that neither of the Miss Pecksniffs could repress an involuntary screech.

'That'll do,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'I'm better.'

'He's come to himself!' cried the youngest Miss Pecksniff.

'He speaks again!' exclaimed the eldest.

With these joyful words they kissed Mr Pecksniff on either cheek; and bore him into the house. Presently, the youngest Miss Pecksniff ran out again to pick up his hat, his brown paper parcel, his umbrella, his gloves, and other small articles; and that done, and the door closed, both young ladies applied themselves to tending Mr Pecksniff's wounds in the back parlour.

They were not very serious in their nature; being limited to abrasions on what the eldest Miss Pecksniff called 'the knobby parts' of her parent's anatomy, such as his knees and elbows, and to the development of an entirely new organ, unknown to phrenologists, on the back of his head. These injuries having been comforted externally, with patches of pickled brown paper, and Mr Pecksniff having been comforted internally, with some stiff brandy-and-water, the eldest Miss Pecksniff sat down to make the tea, which was all ready. In the meantime the youngest Miss Pecksniff brought from the kitchen a smoking dish of ham and eggs, and, setting the same before her father, took up her station on a low stool at his feet; thereby bringing her eyes on a level with the teaboard.

It must not be inferred from this position of humility, that the youngest Miss Pecksniff was so young as to be, as one may say, forced to sit upon a stool, by reason of the shortness of her legs. Miss Pecksniff sat upon a stool because of her simplicity and innocence, which were very great, very great. Miss Pecksniff sat upon a stool because she was all girlishness, and playfulness, and wildness, and kittenish buoyancy. She was the most arch and at the same time the most artless creature, was the youngest Miss Pecksniff, that you can possibly imagine. It was her great charm. She was too fresh and guileless, and too full of child-like vivacity, was the youngest Miss Pecksniff, to wear combs in her hair, or to turn it up, or to frizzle it, or braid it. She wore it in a crop, a loosely flowing crop, which had so many rows of curls in it, that the top row was only one curl. Moderately buxom was her shape, and quite womanly too; but sometimes—yes, sometimes—she even wore a pinafore; and how charming THAT was! Oh! she was indeed 'a gushing thing' (as a young gentleman had observed in verse, in the Poet's Corner of a provincial newspaper), was the youngest Miss Pecksniff!

Mr Pecksniff was a moral man—a grave man, a man of noble sentiments and speech—and he had had her christened Mercy. Mercy! oh, what a charming name for such a pure-souled Being as the youngest Miss Pecksniff! Her sister's name was Charity. There was a good thing! Mercy and Charity! And Charity, with her fine strong sense and her mild, yet not reproachful gravity, was so well named, and did so well set off and illustrate her sister! What a pleasant sight was that the contrast they presented; to see each loved and loving one sympathizing with, and devoted to, and leaning on, and yet correcting and counter-checking, and, as it were, antidoting, the other! To behold each damsel in her very admiration of her sister, setting up in business for herself on an entirely different principle, and announcing no connection with over-the-way, and if the quality of goods at that establishment don't please you, you are respectfully invited to favour ME with a call! And the crowning circumstance of the whole delightful catalogue was, that both the fair creatures were so utterly unconscious of all this! They had no idea of it. They no more thought or dreamed of it than Mr Pecksniff did. Nature played them off against each other; THEY had no hand in it, the two Miss Pecksniffs.

It has been remarked that Mr Pecksniff was a moral man. So he was. Perhaps there never was a more moral man than Mr Pecksniff, especially in his conversation and correspondence. It was once said of him by a homely admirer, that he had a Fortunatus's purse of good sentiments in his inside. In this particular he was like the girl in the fairy tale, except that if they were not actual diamonds which fell from his lips, they were the very brightest paste, and shone prodigiously. He was a most exemplary man; fuller of virtuous precept than a copy book. Some people likened him to a direction-post, which is always telling the way to a place, and never goes there; but these were his enemies, the shadows cast by his brightness; that was all. His very throat was moral. You saw a good deal of it. You looked over a very low fence of white cravat (whereof no man had ever beheld the tie for he fastened it behind), and there it lay, a valley between two jutting heights of collar, serene and whiskerless before you. It seemed to say, on the part of Mr Pecksniff, 'There is no deception, ladies and gentlemen, all is peace, a holy calm pervades me.' So did his hair, just grizzled with an iron-grey which was all brushed off his forehead, and stood bolt upright, or slightly drooped in kindred action with his heavy eyelids. So did his person, which was sleek though free from corpulency. So did his manner, which was soft and oily. In a word, even his plain black suit, and state of widower and dangling double eye-glass, all tended to the same purpose, and cried aloud, 'Behold the moral Pecksniff!'

The brazen plate upon the door (which being Mr Pecksniff's, could not lie) bore this inscription, 'PECKSNIFF, ARCHITECT,' to which Mr Pecksniff, on his cards of business, added, AND LAND SURVEYOR.' In one sense, and only one, he may be said to have been a Land Surveyor on a pretty large scale, as an extensive prospect lay stretched out before the windows of his house. Of his architectural doings, nothing was clearly known, except that he had never designed or built anything; but it was generally understood that his knowledge of the science was almost awful in its profundity.

Mr Pecksniff's professional engagements, indeed, were almost, if not entirely, confined to the reception of pupils; for the collection of rents, with which pursuit he occasionally varied and relieved his graver toils, can hardly be said to be a strictly architectural employment. His genius lay in ensnaring parents and guardians, and pocketing premiums. A young gentleman's premium being paid, and the young gentleman come to Mr Pecksniff's house, Mr Pecksniff borrowed his case of mathematical instruments (if silver-mounted or otherwise valuable); entreated him, from that moment, to consider himself one of the family; complimented him highly on his parents or guardians, as the case might be; and turned him loose in a spacious room on the two-pair front; where, in the company of certain drawing-boards, parallel rulers, very stiff-legged compasses, and two, or perhaps three, other young gentlemen, he improved himself, for three or five years, according to his articles, in making elevations of Salisbury Cathedral from every possible point of sight; and in constructing in the air a vast quantity of Castles, Houses of Parliament, and other Public Buildings. Perhaps in no place in the world were so many gorgeous edifices of this class erected as under Mr Pecksniff's auspices; and if but one-twentieth part of the churches which were built in that front room, with one or other of the Miss Pecksniffs at the altar in the act of marrying the architect, could only be made available by the parliamentary commissioners, no more churches would be wanted for at least five centuries.

'Even the worldly goods of which we have just disposed,' said Mr Pecksniff, glancing round the table when he had finished, 'even cream, sugar, tea, toast, ham—'

'And eggs,' suggested Charity in a low voice.

'And eggs,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'even they have their moral. See how they come and go! Every pleasure is transitory. We can't even eat, long. If we indulge in harmless fluids, we get the dropsy; if in exciting liquids, we get drunk. What a soothing reflection is that!'

'Don't say WE get drunk, Pa,' urged the eldest Miss Pecksniff.

'When I say we, my dear,' returned her father, 'I mean mankind in general; the human race, considered as a body, and not as individuals. There is nothing personal in morality, my love. Even such a thing as this,' said Mr Pecksniff, laying the fore-finger of his left hand upon the brown paper patch on the top of his head, 'slight casual baldness though it be, reminds us that we are but'—he was going to say 'worms,' but recollecting that worms were not remarkable for heads of hair, he substituted 'flesh and blood.'

'Which,' cried Mr Pecksniff after a pause, during which he seemed to have been casting about for a new moral, and not quite successfully, 'which is also very soothing. Mercy, my dear, stir the fire and throw up the cinders.'

The young lady obeyed, and having done so, resumed her stool, reposed one arm upon her father's knee, and laid her blooming cheek upon it. Miss Charity drew her chair nearer the fire, as one prepared for conversation, and looked towards her father.

'Yes,' said Mr Pecksniff, after a short pause, during which he had been silently smiling, and shaking his head at the fire—'I have again been fortunate in the attainment of my object. A new inmate will very shortly come among us.'

'A youth, papa?' asked Charity.

'Ye-es, a youth,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'He will avail himself of the eligible opportunity which now offers, for uniting the advantages of the best practical architectural education with the comforts of a home, and the constant association with some who (however humble their sphere, and limited their capacity) are not unmindful of their moral responsibilities.'

'Oh Pa!' cried Mercy, holding up her finger archly. 'See advertisement!'

'Playful—playful warbler,' said Mr Pecksniff. It may be observed in connection with his calling his daughter a 'warbler,' that she was not at all vocal, but that Mr Pecksniff was in the frequent habit of using any word that occurred to him as having a good sound, and rounding a sentence well without much care for its meaning. And he did this so boldly, and in such an imposing manner, that he would sometimes stagger the wisest people with his eloquence, and make them gasp again.

His enemies asserted, by the way, that a strong trustfulness in sounds and forms was the master-key to Mr Pecksniff's character.

'Is he handsome, Pa?' inquired the younger daughter.

'Silly Merry!' said the eldest: Merry being fond for Mercy. 'What is the premium, Pa? tell us that.'

'Oh, good gracious, Cherry!' cried Miss Mercy, holding up her hands with the most winning giggle in the world, 'what a mercenary girl you are! oh you naughty, thoughtful, prudent thing!'

It was perfectly charming, and worthy of the Pastoral age, to see how the two Miss Pecksniffs slapped each other after this, and then subsided into an embrace expressive of their different dispositions.

'He is well looking,' said Mr Pecksniff, slowly and distinctly; 'well looking enough. I do not positively expect any immediate premium with him.'

Notwithstanding their different natures, both Charity and Mercy concurred in opening their eyes uncommonly wide at this announcement, and in looking for the moment as blank as if their thoughts had actually had a direct bearing on the main chance.

'But what of that!' said Mr Pecksniff, still smiling at the fire. 'There is disinterestedness in the world, I hope? We are not all arrayed in two opposite ranks; the OFfensive and the DEfensive. Some few there are who walk between; who help the needy as they go; and take no part with either side. Umph!'

There was something in these morsels of philanthropy which reassured the sisters. They exchanged glances, and brightened very much.

'Oh! let us not be for ever calculating, devising, and plotting for the future,' said Mr Pecksniff, smiling more and more, and looking at the fire as a man might, who was cracking a joke with it: 'I am weary of such arts. If our inclinations are but good and open-hearted, let us gratify them boldly, though they bring upon us Loss instead of Profit. Eh, Charity?'

Glancing towards his daughters for the first time since he had begun these reflections, and seeing that they both smiled, Mr Pecksniff eyed them for an instant so jocosely (though still with a kind of saintly waggishness) that the younger one was moved to sit upon his knee forthwith, put her fair arms round his neck, and kiss him twenty times. During the whole of this affectionate display she laughed to a most immoderate extent: in which hilarious indulgence even the prudent Cherry joined.

'Tut, tut,' said Mr Pecksniff, pushing his latest-born away and running his fingers through his hair, as he resumed his tranquil face. 'What folly is this! Let us take heed how we laugh without reason lest we cry with it. What is the domestic news since yesterday? John Westlock is gone, I hope?'

'Indeed, no,' said Charity.

'And why not?' returned her father. 'His term expired yesterday. And his box was packed, I know; for I saw it, in the morning, standing in the hall.'

'He slept last night at the Dragon,' returned the young lady, 'and had Mr Pinch to dine with him. They spent the evening together, and Mr Pinch was not home till very late.'

'And when I saw him on the stairs this morning, Pa,' said Mercy with her usual sprightliness, 'he looked, oh goodness, SUCH a monster! with his face all manner of colours, and his eyes as dull as if they had been boiled, and his head aching dreadfully, I am sure from the look of it, and his clothes smelling, oh it's impossible to say how strong, oh'—here the young lady shuddered—'of smoke and punch.'

'Now I think,' said Mr Pecksniff with his accustomed gentleness, though still with the air of one who suffered under injury without complaint, 'I think Mr Pinch might have done better than choose for his companion one who, at the close of a long intercourse, had endeavoured, as he knew, to wound my feelings. I am not quite sure that this was delicate in Mr Pinch. I am not quite sure that this was kind in Mr Pinch. I will go further and say, I am not quite sure that this was even ordinarily grateful in Mr Pinch.'

'But what can anyone expect from Mr Pinch!' cried Charity, with as strong and scornful an emphasis on the name as if it would have given her unspeakable pleasure to express it, in an acted charade, on the calf of that gentleman's leg.

'Aye, aye,' returned her father, raising his hand mildly: 'it is very well to say what can we expect from Mr Pinch, but Mr Pinch is a fellow-creature, my dear; Mr Pinch is an item in the vast total of humanity, my love; and we have a right, it is our duty, to expect in Mr Pinch some development of those better qualities, the possession of which in our own persons inspires our humble self-respect. No,' continued Mr Pecksniff. 'No! Heaven forbid that I should say, nothing can be expected from Mr Pinch; or that I should say, nothing can be expected from any man alive (even the most degraded, which Mr Pinch is not, no, really); but Mr Pinch has disappointed me; he has hurt me; I think a little the worse of him on this account, but not if human nature. Oh, no, no!'

'Hark!' said Miss Charity, holding up her finger, as a gentle rap was heard at the street door. 'There is the creature! Now mark my words, he has come back with John Westlock for his box, and is going to help him to take it to the mail. Only mark my words, if that isn't his intention!'

Even as she spoke, the box appeared to be in progress of conveyance from the house, but after a brief murmuring of question and answer, it was put down again, and somebody knocked at the parlour door.

'Come in!' cried Mr Pecksniff—not severely; only virtuously. 'Come in!'

An ungainly, awkward-looking man, extremely short-sighted, and prematurely bald, availed himself of this permission; and seeing that Mr Pecksniff sat with his back towards him, gazing at the fire, stood hesitating, with the door in his hand. He was far from handsome certainly; and was drest in a snuff-coloured suit, of an uncouth make at the best, which, being shrunk with long wear, was twisted and tortured into all kinds of odd shapes; but notwithstanding his attire, and his clumsy figure, which a great stoop in his shoulders, and a ludicrous habit he had of thrusting his head forward, by no means redeemed, one would not have been disposed (unless Mr Pecksniff said so) to consider him a bad fellow by any means. He was perhaps about thirty, but he might have been almost any age between sixteen and sixty; being one of those strange creatures who never decline into an ancient appearance, but look their oldest when they are very young, and get it over at once.

Keeping his hand upon the lock of the door, he glanced from Mr Pecksniff to Mercy, from Mercy to Charity, and from Charity to Mr Pecksniff again, several times; but the young ladies being as intent upon the fire as their father was, and neither of the three taking any notice of him, he was fain to say, at last,

'Oh! I beg your pardon, Mr Pecksniff: I beg your pardon for intruding; but—'

'No intrusion, Mr Pinch,' said that gentleman very sweetly, but without looking round. 'Pray be seated, Mr Pinch. Have the goodness to shut the door, Mr Pinch, if you please.'

'Certainly, sir,' said Pinch; not doing so, however, but holding it rather wider open than before, and beckoning nervously to somebody without: 'Mr Westlock, sir, hearing that you were come home—'

'Mr Pinch, Mr Pinch!' said Pecksniff, wheeling his chair about, and looking at him with an aspect of the deepest melancholy, 'I did not expect this from you. I have not deserved this from you!'

'No, but upon my word, sir—' urged Pinch.

'The less you say, Mr Pinch,' interposed the other, 'the better. I utter no complaint. Make no defence.'

'No, but do have the goodness, sir,' cried Pinch, with great earnestness, 'if you please. Mr Westlock, sir, going away for good and all, wishes to leave none but friends behind him. Mr Westlock and you, sir, had a little difference the other day; you have had many little differences.'

'Little differences!' cried Charity.

'Little differences!' echoed Mercy.

'My loves!' said Mr Pecksniff, with the same serene upraising of his hand; 'My dears!' After a solemn pause he meekly bowed to Mr Pinch, as who should say, 'Proceed;' but Mr Pinch was so very much at a loss how to resume, and looked so helplessly at the two Miss Pecksniffs, that the conversation would most probably have terminated there, if a good-looking youth, newly arrived at man's estate, had not stepped forward from the doorway and taken up the thread of the discourse.

'Come, Mr Pecksniff,' he said, with a smile, 'don't let there be any ill-blood between us, pray. I am sorry we have ever differed, and extremely sorry I have ever given you offence. Bear me no ill-will at parting, sir.'

'I bear,' answered Mr Pecksniff, mildly, 'no ill-will to any man on earth.'

'I told you he didn't,' said Pinch, in an undertone; 'I knew he didn't! He always says he don't.'

'Then you will shake hands, sir?' cried Westlock, advancing a step or two, and bespeaking Mr Pinch's close attention by a glance.

'Umph!' said Mr Pecksniff, in his most winning tone.

'You will shake hands, sir.'

'No, John,' said Mr Pecksniff, with a calmness quite ethereal; 'no, I will not shake hands, John. I have forgiven you. I had already forgiven you, even before you ceased to reproach and taunt me. I have embraced you in the spirit, John, which is better than shaking hands.'

'Pinch,' said the youth, turning towards him, with a hearty disgust of his late master, 'what did I tell you?'

Poor Pinch looked down uneasily at Mr Pecksniff, whose eye was fixed upon him as it had been from the first; and looking up at the ceiling again, made no reply.

'As to your forgiveness, Mr Pecksniff,' said the youth, 'I'll not have it upon such terms. I won't be forgiven.'

'Won't you, John?' retorted Mr Pecksniff, with a smile. 'You must. You can't help it. Forgiveness is a high quality; an exalted virtue; far above YOUR control or influence, John. I WILL forgive you. You cannot move me to remember any wrong you have ever done me, John.'

'Wrong!' cried the other, with all the heat and impetuosity of his age. 'Here's a pretty fellow! Wrong! Wrong I have done him! He'll not even remember the five hundred pounds he had with me under false pretences; or the seventy pounds a year for board and lodging that would have been dear at seventeen! Here's a martyr!'

'Money, John,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'is the root of all evil. I grieve to see that it is already bearing evil fruit in you. But I will not remember its existence. I will not even remember the conduct of that misguided person'—and here, although he spoke like one at peace with all the world, he used an emphasis that plainly said "I have my eye upon the rascal now"—'that misguided person who has brought you here to-night, seeking to disturb (it is a happiness to say, in vain) the heart's repose and peace of one who would have shed his dearest blood to serve him.'

The voice of Mr Pecksniff trembled as he spoke, and sobs were heard from his daughters. Sounds floated on the air, moreover, as if two spirit voices had exclaimed: one, 'Beast!' the other, 'Savage!'

'Forgiveness,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'entire and pure forgiveness is not incompatible with a wounded heart; perchance when the heart is wounded, it becomes a greater virtue. With my breast still wrung and grieved to its inmost core by the ingratitude of that person, I am proud and glad to say that I forgive him. Nay! I beg,' cried Mr Pecksniff, raising his voice, as Pinch appeared about to speak, 'I beg that individual not to offer a remark; he will truly oblige me by not uttering one word, just now. I am not sure that I am equal to the trial. In a very short space of time, I shall have sufficient fortitude, I trust to converse with him as if these events had never happened. But not,' said Mr Pecksniff, turning round again towards the fire, and waving his hand in the direction of the door, 'not now.'

'Bah!' cried John Westlock, with the utmost disgust and disdain the monosyllable is capable of expressing. 'Ladies, good evening. Come, Pinch, it's not worth thinking of. I was right and you were wrong. That's small matter; you'll be wiser another time.'

So saying, he clapped that dejected companion on the shoulder, turned upon his heel, and walked out into the passage, whither poor Mr Pinch, after lingering irresolutely in the parlour for a few seconds, expressing in his countenance the deepest mental misery and gloom followed him. Then they took up the box between them, and sallied out to meet the mail.

That fleet conveyance passed, every night, the corner of a lane at some distance; towards which point they bent their steps. For some minutes they walked along in silence, until at length young Westlock burst into a loud laugh, and at intervals into another, and another. Still there was no response from his companion.

'I'll tell you what, Pinch!' he said abruptly, after another lengthened silence—'You haven't half enough of the devil in you. Half enough! You haven't any.'

'Well!' said Pinch with a sigh, 'I don't know, I'm sure. It's compliment to say so. If I haven't, I suppose, I'm all the better for it.'

'All the better!' repeated his companion tartly: 'All the worse, you mean to say.'

'And yet,' said Pinch, pursuing his own thoughts and not this last remark on the part of his friend, 'I must have a good deal of what you call the devil in me, too, or how could I make Pecksniff so uncomfortable? I wouldn't have occasioned him so much distress—don't laugh, please—for a mine of money; and Heaven knows I could find good use for it too, John. How grieved he was!'

'HE grieved!' returned the other.

'Why didn't you observe that the tears were almost starting out of his eyes!' cried Pinch. 'Bless my soul, John, is it nothing to see a man moved to that extent and know one's self to be the cause! And did you hear him say that he could have shed his blood for me?'

'Do you WANT any blood shed for you?' returned his friend, with considerable irritation. 'Does he shed anything for you that you DO want? Does he shed employment for you, instruction for you, pocket money for you? Does he shed even legs of mutton for you in any decent proportion to potatoes and garden stuff?'

'I am afraid,' said Pinch, sighing again, 'that I am a great eater; I can't disguise from myself that I'm a great eater. Now, you know that, John.'

'You a great eater!' retorted his companion, with no less indignation than before. 'How do you know you are?'

There appeared to be forcible matter in this inquiry, for Mr Pinch only repeated in an undertone that he had a strong misgiving on the subject, and that he greatly feared he was.

'Besides, whether I am or no,' he added, 'that has little or nothing to do with his thinking me ungrateful. John, there is scarcely a sin in the world that is in my eyes such a crying one as ingratitude; and when he taxes me with that, and believes me to be guilty of it, he makes me miserable and wretched.'

'Do you think he don't know that?' returned the other scornfully. 'But come, Pinch, before I say anything more to you, just run over the reasons you have for being grateful to him at all, will you? Change hands first, for the box is heavy. That'll do. Now, go on.'

'In the first place,' said Pinch, 'he took me as his pupil for much less than he asked.'

'Well,' rejoined his friend, perfectly unmoved by this instance of generosity. 'What in the second place?'

'What in the second place?' cried Pinch, in a sort of desperation, 'why, everything in the second place. My poor old grandmother died happy to think that she had put me with such an excellent man. I have grown up in his house, I am in his confidence, I am his assistant, he allows me a salary; when his business improves, my prospects are to improve too. All this, and a great deal more, is in the second place. And in the very prologue and preface to the first place, John, you must consider this, which nobody knows better than I: that I was born for much plainer and poorer things, that I am not a good hand for his kind of business, and have no talent for it, or indeed for anything else but odds and ends that are of no use or service to anybody.'

He said this with so much earnestness, and in a tone so full of feeling, that his companion instinctively changed his manner as he sat down on the box (they had by this time reached the finger-post at the end of the lane); motioned him to sit down beside him; and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

'I believe you are one of the best fellows in the world,' he said, 'Tom Pinch.'

'Not at all,' rejoined Tom. 'If you only knew Pecksniff as well as I do, you might say it of him, indeed, and say it truly.'

'I'll say anything of him, you like,' returned the other, 'and not another word to his disparagement.'

'It's for my sake, then; not his, I am afraid,' said Pinch, shaking his head gravely.

'For whose you please, Tom, so that it does please you. Oh! He's a famous fellow! HE never scraped and clawed into his pouch all your poor grandmother's hard savings—she was a housekeeper, wasn't she, Tom?'

'Yes,' said Mr Pinch, nursing one of his large knees, and nodding his head; 'a gentleman's housekeeper.'

'HE never scraped and clawed into his pouch all her hard savings; dazzling her with prospects of your happiness and advancement, which he knew (and no man better) never would be realised! HE never speculated and traded on her pride in you, and her having educated you, and on her desire that you at least should live to be a gentleman. Not he, Tom!'

'No,' said Tom, looking into his friend's face, as if he were a little doubtful of his meaning. 'Of course not.'

'So I say,' returned the youth, 'of course he never did. HE didn't take less than he had asked, because that less was all she had, and more than he expected; not he, Tom! He doesn't keep you as his assistant because you are of any use to him; because your wonderful faith in his pretensions is of inestimable service in all his mean disputes; because your honesty reflects honesty on him; because your wandering about this little place all your spare hours, reading in ancient books and foreign tongues, gets noised abroad, even as far as Salisbury, making of him, Pecksniff the master, a man of learning and of vast importance. HE gets no credit from you, Tom, not he.'

'Why, of course he don't,' said Pinch, gazing at his friend with a more troubled aspect than before. 'Pecksniff get credit from me! Well!'

'Don't I say that it's ridiculous,' rejoined the other, 'even to think of such a thing?'

'Why, it's madness,' said Tom.

'Madness!' returned young Westlock. 'Certainly it's madness. Who but a madman would suppose he cares to hear it said on Sundays, that the volunteer who plays the organ in the church, and practises on summer evenings in the dark, is Mr Pecksniff's young man, eh, Tom? Who but a madman would suppose it is the game of such a man as he, to have his name in everybody's mouth, connected with the thousand useless odds and ends you do (and which, of course, he taught you), eh, Tom? Who but a madman would suppose you advertised him hereabouts, much cheaper and much better than a chalker on the walls could, eh, Tom? As well might one suppose that he doesn't on all occasions pour out his whole heart and soul to you; that he doesn't make you a very liberal and indeed rather an extravagant allowance; or, to be more wild and monstrous still, if that be possible, as well might one suppose,' and here, at every word, he struck him lightly on the breast, 'that Pecksniff traded in your nature, and that your nature was to be timid and distrustful of yourself, and trustful of all other men, but most of all, of him who least deserves it. There would be madness, Tom!'

Mr Pinch had listened to all this with looks of bewilderment, which seemed to be in part occasioned by the matter of his companion's speech, and in part by his rapid and vehement manner. Now that he had come to a close, he drew a very long breath; and gazing wistfully in his face as if he were unable to settle in his own mind what expression it wore, and were desirous to draw from it as good a clue to his real meaning as it was possible to obtain in the dark, was about to answer, when the sound of the mail guard's horn came cheerily upon their ears, putting an immediate end to the conference; greatly as it seemed to the satisfaction of the younger man, who jumped up briskly, and gave his hand to his companion.

'Both hands, Tom. I shall write to you from London, mind!'

'Yes,' said Pinch. 'Yes. Do, please. Good-bye. Good-bye. I can hardly believe you're going. It seems, now, but yesterday that you came. Good-bye! my dear old fellow!'

John Westlock returned his parting words with no less heartiness of manner, and sprung up to his seat upon the roof. Off went the mail at a canter down the dark road; the lamps gleaming brightly, and the horn awakening all the echoes, far and wide.

'Go your ways,' said Pinch, apostrophizing the coach; 'I can hardly persuade myself but you're alive, and are some great monster who visits this place at certain intervals, to bear my friends away into the world. You're more exulting and rampant than usual tonight, I think; and you may well crow over your prize; for he is a fine lad, an ingenuous lad, and has but one fault that I know of; he don't mean it, but he is most cruelly unjust to Pecksniff!'

CHAPTER THREE

IN WHICH CERTAIN OTHER PERSONS ARE INTRODUCED; ON THE SAME TERMS AS IN THE LAST CHAPTER

Mention has been already made more than once, of a certain Dragon who swung and creaked complainingly before the village alehouse door. A faded, and an ancient dragon he was; and many a wintry storm of rain, snow, sleet, and hail, had changed his colour from a gaudy blue to a faint lack-lustre shade of grey. But there he hung; rearing, in a state of monstrous imbecility, on his hind legs; waxing, with every month that passed, so much more dim and shapeless, that as you gazed at him on one side of the sign-board it seemed as if he must be gradually melting through it, and coming out upon the other.

He was a courteous and considerate dragon, too; or had been in his distincter days; for in the midst of his rampant feebleness, he kept one of his forepaws near his nose, as though he would say, 'Don't mind me—it's only my fun;' while he held out the other in polite and hospitable entreaty. Indeed it must be conceded to the whole brood of dragons of modern times, that they have made a great advance in civilisation and refinement. They no longer demand a beautiful virgin for breakfast every morning, with as much regularity as any tame single gentleman expects his hot roll, but rest content with the society of idle bachelors and roving married men; and they are now remarkable rather for holding aloof from the softer sex and discouraging their visits (especially on Saturday nights), than for rudely insisting on their company without any reference to their inclinations, as they are known to have done in days of yore.

Nor is this tribute to the reclaimed animals in question so wide a digression into the realms of Natural History as it may, at first sight, appear to be; for the present business of these pages in with the dragon who had his retreat in Mr Pecksniff's neighbourhood, and that courteous animal being already on the carpet, there is nothing in the way of its immediate transaction.

For many years, then, he had swung and creaked, and flapped himself about, before the two windows of the best bedroom of that house of entertainment to which he lent his name; but never in all his swinging, creaking, and flapping, had there been such a stir within its dingy precincts, as on the evening next after that upon which the incidents, detailed in the last chapter occurred; when there was such a hurrying up and down stairs of feet, such a glancing of lights, such a whispering of voices, such a smoking and sputtering of wood newly lighted in a damp chimney, such an airing of linen, such a scorching smell of hot warming-pans, such a domestic bustle and to-do, in short, as never dragon, griffin, unicorn, or other animal of that species presided over, since they first began to interest themselves in household affairs.

An old gentleman and a young lady, travelling, unattended, in a rusty old chariot with post-horses; coming nobody knew whence and going nobody knew whither; had turned out of the high road, and driven unexpectedly to the Blue Dragon; and here was the old gentleman, who had taken this step by reason of his sudden illness in the carriage, suffering the most horrible cramps and spasms, yet protesting and vowing in the very midst of his pain, that he wouldn't have a doctor sent for, and wouldn't take any remedies but those which the young lady administered from a small medicine-chest, and wouldn't, in a word, do anything but terrify the landlady out of her five wits, and obstinately refuse compliance with every suggestion that was made to him.

Of all the five hundred proposals for his relief which the good woman poured out in less than half an hour, he would entertain but one. That was that he should go to bed. And it was in the preparation of his bed and the arrangement of his chamber, that all the stir was made in the room behind the Dragon.

He was, beyond all question, very ill, and suffered exceedingly; not the less, perhaps, because he was a strong and vigorous old man, with a will of iron, and a voice of brass. But neither the apprehensions which he plainly entertained, at times, for his life, nor the great pain he underwent, influenced his resolution in the least degree. He would have no person sent for. The worse he grew, the more rigid and inflexible he became in his determination. If they sent for any person to attend him, man, woman, or child, he would leave the house directly (so he told them), though he quitted it on foot, and died upon the threshold of the door.

Now, there being no medical practitioner actually resident in the village, but a poor apothecary who was also a grocer and general dealer, the landlady had, upon her own responsibility, sent for him, in the very first burst and outset of the disaster. Of course it followed, as a necessary result of his being wanted, that he was not at home. He had gone some miles away, and was not expected home until late at night; so the landlady, being by this time pretty well beside herself, dispatched the same messenger in all haste for Mr Pecksniff, as a learned man who could bear a deal of responsibility, and a moral man who could administer a world of comfort to a troubled mind. That her guest had need of some efficient services under the latter head was obvious enough from the restless expressions, importing, however, rather a worldly than a spiritual anxiety, to which he gave frequent utterance.

From this last-mentioned secret errand, the messenger returned with no better news than from the first; Mr Pecksniff was not at home. However, they got the patient into bed without him; and in the course of two hours, he gradually became so far better that there were much longer intervals than at first between his terms of suffering. By degrees, he ceased to suffer at all; though his exhaustion was occasionally so great that it suggested hardly less alarm than his actual endurance had done.

It was in one of his intervals of repose, when, looking round with great caution, and reaching uneasily out of his nest of pillows, he endeavoured, with a strange air of secrecy and distrust, to make use of the writing materials which he had ordered to be placed on a table beside him, that the young lady and the mistress of the Blue Dragon found themselves sitting side by side before the fire in the sick chamber.

The mistress of the Blue Dragon was in outward appearance just what a landlady should be: broad, buxom, comfortable, and good looking, with a face of clear red and white, which, by its jovial aspect, at once bore testimony to her hearty participation in the good things of the larder and cellar, and to their thriving and healthful influences. She was a widow, but years ago had passed through her state of weeds, and burst into flower again; and in full bloom she had continued ever since; and in full bloom she was now; with roses on her ample skirts, and roses on her bodice, roses in her cap, roses in her cheeks,—aye, and roses, worth the gathering too, on her lips, for that matter. She had still a bright black eye, and jet black hair; was comely, dimpled, plump, and tight as a gooseberry; and though she was not exactly what the world calls young, you may make an affidavit, on trust, before any mayor or magistrate in Christendom, that there are a great many young ladies in the world (blessings on them one and all!) whom you wouldn't like half as well, or admire half as much, as the beaming hostess of the Blue Dragon.

As this fair matron sat beside the fire, she glanced occasionally with all the pride of ownership, about the room; which was a large apartment, such as one may see in country places, with a low roof and a sunken flooring, all downhill from the door, and a descent of two steps on the inside so exquisitely unexpected, that strangers, despite the most elaborate cautioning, usually dived in head first, as into a plunging-bath. It was none of your frivolous and preposterously bright bedrooms, where nobody can close an eye with any kind of propriety or decent regard to the association of ideas; but it was a good, dull, leaden, drowsy place, where every article of furniture reminded you that you came there to sleep, and that you were expected to go to sleep. There was no wakeful reflection of the fire there, as in your modern chambers, which upon the darkest nights have a watchful consciousness of French polish; the old Spanish mahogany winked at it now and then, as a dozing cat or dog might, nothing more. The very size and shape, and hopeless immovability of the bedstead, and wardrobe, and in a minor degree of even the chairs and tables, provoked sleep; they were plainly apoplectic and disposed to snore. There were no staring portraits to remonstrate with you for being lazy; no round-eyed birds upon the curtains, disgustingly wide awake, and insufferably prying. The thick neutral hangings, and the dark blinds, and the heavy heap of bed-clothes, were all designed to hold in sleep, and act as nonconductors to the day and getting up. Even the old stuffed fox upon the top of the wardrobe was devoid of any spark of vigilance, for his glass eye had fallen out, and he slumbered as he stood.

The wandering attention of the mistress of the Blue Dragon roved to these things but twice or thrice, and then for but an instant at a time. It soon deserted them, and even the distant bed with its strange burden, for the young creature immediately before her, who, with her downcast eyes intently fixed upon the fire, sat wrapped in silent meditation.

She was very young; apparently no more than seventeen; timid and shrinking in her manner, and yet with a greater share of self possession and control over her emotions than usually belongs to a far more advanced period of female life. This she had abundantly shown, but now, in her tending of the sick gentleman. She was short in stature; and her figure was slight, as became her years; but all the charms of youth and maidenhood set it off, and clustered on her gentle brow. Her face was very pale, in part no doubt from recent agitation. Her dark brown hair, disordered from the same cause, had fallen negligently from its bonds, and hung upon her neck; for which instance of its waywardness no male observer would have had the heart to blame it.

Her attire was that of a lady, but extremely plain; and in her manner, even when she sat as still as she did then, there was an indefinable something which appeared to be in kindred with her scrupulously unpretending dress. She had sat, at first looking anxiously towards the bed; but seeing that the patient remained quiet, and was busy with his writing, she had softly moved her chair into its present place; partly, as it seemed, from an instinctive consciousness that he desired to avoid observation; and partly that she might, unseen by him, give some vent to the natural feelings she had hitherto suppressed.

Of all this, and much more, the rosy landlady of the Blue Dragon took as accurate note and observation as only woman can take of woman. And at length she said, in a voice too low, she knew, to reach the bed:

'You have seen the gentleman in this way before, miss? Is he used to these attacks?'

'I have seen him very ill before, but not so ill as he has been tonight.'

'What a Providence!' said the landlady of the Dragon, 'that you had the prescriptions and the medicines with you, miss!'

'They are intended for such an emergency. We never travel without them.'

'Oh!' thought the hostess, 'then we are in the habit of travelling, and of travelling together.'

She was so conscious of expressing this in her face, that meeting the young lady's eyes immediately afterwards, and being a very honest hostess, she was rather confused.

'The gentleman—your grandpapa'—she resumed, after a short pause, 'being so bent on having no assistance, must terrify you very much, miss?'

'I have been very much alarmed to-night. He—he is not my grandfather.'

'Father, I should have said,' returned the hostess, sensible of having made an awkward mistake.

'Nor my father' said the young lady. 'Nor,' she added, slightly smiling with a quick perception of what the landlady was going to add, 'Nor my uncle. We are not related.'

'Oh dear me!' returned the landlady, still more embarrassed than before; 'how could I be so very much mistaken; knowing, as anybody in their proper senses might that when a gentleman is ill, he looks so much older than he really is? That I should have called you "Miss," too, ma'am!' But when she had proceeded thus far, she glanced involuntarily at the third finger of the young lady's left hand, and faltered again; for there was no ring upon it.

'When I told you we were not related,' said the other mildly, but not without confusion on her own part, 'I meant not in any way. Not even by marriage. Did you call me, Martin?'

'Call you?' cried the old man, looking quickly up, and hurriedly drawing beneath the coverlet the paper on which he had been writing. 'No.'

She had moved a pace or two towards the bed, but stopped immediately, and went no farther.

'No,' he repeated, with a petulant emphasis. 'Why do you ask me? If I had called you, what need for such a question?'

'It was the creaking of the sign outside, sir, I dare say,' observed the landlady; a suggestion by the way (as she felt a moment after she had made it), not at all complimentary to the voice of the old gentleman.

'No matter what, ma'am,' he rejoined: 'it wasn't I. Why how you stand there, Mary, as if I had the plague! But they're all afraid of me,' he added, leaning helplessly backward on his pillow; 'even she! There is a curse upon me. What else have I to look for?'

'Oh dear, no. Oh no, I'm sure,' said the good-tempered landlady, rising, and going towards him. 'Be of better cheer, sir. These are only sick fancies.'

'What are only sick fancies?' he retorted. 'What do you know about fancies? Who told you about fancies? The old story! Fancies!'

'Only see again there, how you take one up!' said the mistress of the Blue Dragon, with unimpaired good humour. 'Dear heart alive, there is no harm in the word, sir, if it is an old one. Folks in good health have their fancies, too, and strange ones, every day.'

Harmless as this speech appeared to be, it acted on the traveller's distrust, like oil on fire. He raised his head up in the bed, and, fixing on her two dark eyes whose brightness was exaggerated by the paleness of his hollow cheeks, as they in turn, together with his straggling locks of long grey hair, were rendered whiter by the tight black velvet skullcap which he wore, he searched her face intently.

'Ah! you begin too soon,' he said, in so low a voice that he seemed to be thinking it, rather than addressing her. 'But you lose no time. You do your errand, and you earn your fee. Now, who may be your client?'

The landlady looked in great astonishment at her whom he called Mary, and finding no rejoinder in the drooping face, looked back again at him. At first she had recoiled involuntarily, supposing him disordered in his mind; but the slow composure of his manner, and the settled purpose announced in his strong features, and gathering, most of all, about his puckered mouth, forbade the supposition.

'Come,' he said, 'tell me who is it? Being here, it is not very hard for me to guess, you may suppose.'

'Martin,' interposed the young lady, laying her hand upon his arm; 'reflect how short a time we have been in this house, and that even your name is unknown here.'

'Unless,' he said, 'you—' He was evidently tempted to express a suspicion of her having broken his confidence in favour of the landlady, but either remembering her tender nursing, or being moved in some sort by her face, he checked himself, and changing his uneasy posture in the bed, was silent.

'There!' said Mrs Lupin; for in that name the Blue Dragon was licensed to furnish entertainment, both to man and beast. 'Now, you will be well again, sir. You forgot, for the moment, that there were none but friends here.'

'Oh!' cried the old man, moaning impatiently, as he tossed one restless arm upon the coverlet; 'why do you talk to me of friends! Can you or anybody teach me to know who are my friends, and who my enemies?'

'At least,' urged Mrs Lupin, gently, 'this young lady is your friend, I am sure.'

'She has no temptation to be otherwise,' cried the old man, like one whose hope and confidence were utterly exhausted. 'I suppose she is. Heaven knows. There, let me try to sleep. Leave the candle where it is.'

As they retired from the bed, he drew forth the writing which had occupied him so long, and holding it in the flame of the taper burnt it to ashes. That done, he extinguished the light, and turning his face away with a heavy sigh, drew the coverlet about his head, and lay quite still.

This destruction of the paper, both as being strangely inconsistent with the labour he had devoted to it, and as involving considerable danger of fire to the Dragon, occasioned Mrs Lupin not a little consternation. But the young lady evincing no surprise, curiosity, or alarm, whispered her, with many thanks for her solicitude and company, that she would remain there some time longer; and that she begged her not to share her watch, as she was well used to being alone, and would pass the time in reading.

Mrs Lupin had her full share and dividend of that large capital of curiosity which is inherited by her sex, and at another time it might have been difficult so to impress this hint upon her as to induce her to take it. But now, in sheer wonder and amazement at these mysteries, she withdrew at once, and repairing straightway to her own little parlour below stairs, sat down in her easy-chair with unnatural composure. At this very crisis, a step was heard in the entry, and Mr Pecksniff, looking sweetly over the half-door of the bar, and into the vista of snug privacy beyond, murmured:

'Good evening, Mrs Lupin!'

'Oh dear me, sir!' she cried, advancing to receive him, 'I am so very glad you have come.'

'And I am very glad I have come,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'if I can be of service. I am very glad I have come. What is the matter, Mrs Lupin?'

'A gentleman taken ill upon the road, has been so very bad upstairs, sir,' said the tearful hostess.

'A gentleman taken ill upon the road, has been so very bad upstairs, has he?' repeated Mr Pecksniff. 'Well, well!'

Now there was nothing that one may call decidedly original in this remark, nor can it be exactly said to have contained any wise precept theretofore unknown to mankind, or to have opened any hidden source of consolation; but Mr Pecksniff's manner was so bland, and he nodded his head so soothingly, and showed in everything such an affable sense of his own excellence, that anybody would have been, as Mrs Lupin was, comforted by the mere voice and presence of such a man; and, though he had merely said 'a verb must agree with its nominative case in number and person, my good friend,' or 'eight times eight are sixty-four, my worthy soul,' must have felt deeply grateful to him for his humanity and wisdom.

'And how,' asked Mr Pecksniff, drawing off his gloves and warming his hands before the fire, as benevolently as if they were somebody else's, not his; 'and how is he now?'

'He is better, and quite tranquil,' answered Mrs Lupin.

'He is better, and quite tranquil,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Very well! Ve-ry well!'

Here again, though the statement was Mrs Lupin's and not Mr Pecksniff's, Mr Pecksniff made it his own and consoled her with it. It was not much when Mrs Lupin said it, but it was a whole book when Mr Pecksniff said it. 'I observe,' he seemed to say, 'and through me, morality in general remarks, that he is better and quite tranquil.'

'There must be weighty matters on his mind, though,' said the hostess, shaking her head, 'for he talks, sir, in the strangest way you ever heard. He is far from easy in his thoughts, and wants some proper advice from those whose goodness makes it worth his having.'

'Then,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'he is the sort of customer for me.' But though he said this in the plainest language, he didn't speak a word. He only shook his head; disparagingly of himself too.

'I am afraid, sir,' continued the landlady, first looking round to assure herself that there was nobody within hearing, and then looking down upon the floor. 'I am very much afraid, sir, that his conscience is troubled by his not being related to—or—or even married to—a very young lady—'

'Mrs Lupin!' said Mr Pecksniff, holding up his hand with something in his manner as nearly approaching to severity as any expression of his, mild being that he was, could ever do. 'Person! young person?'

'A very young person,' said Mrs Lupin, curtseying and blushing; '—I beg your pardon, sir, but I have been so hurried to-night, that I don't know what I say—who is with him now.'

'Who is with him now,' ruminated Mr Pecksniff, warming his back (as he had warmed his hands) as if it were a widow's back, or an orphan's back, or an enemy's back, or a back that any less excellent man would have suffered to be cold. 'Oh dear me, dear me!'

'At the same time I am bound to say, and I do say with all my heart,' observed the hostess, earnestly, 'that her looks and manner almost disarm suspicion.'

'Your suspicion, Mrs Lupin,' said Mr Pecksniff gravely, 'is very natural.'

Touching which remark, let it be written down to their confusion, that the enemies of this worthy man unblushingly maintained that he always said of what was very bad, that it was very natural; and that he unconsciously betrayed his own nature in doing so.

'Your suspicion, Mrs Lupin,' he repeated, 'is very natural, and I have no doubt correct. I will wait upon these travellers.'

With that he took off his great-coat, and having run his fingers through his hair, thrust one hand gently in the bosom of his waist-coat and meekly signed to her to lead the way.

'Shall I knock?' asked Mrs Lupin, when they reached the chamber door.

'No,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'enter if you please.'

They went in on tiptoe; or rather the hostess took that precaution for Mr Pecksniff always walked softly. The old gentleman was still asleep, and his young companion still sat reading by the fire.

'I am afraid,' said Mr Pecksniff, pausing at the door, and giving his head a melancholy roll, 'I am afraid that this looks artful. I am afraid, Mrs Lupin, do you know, that this looks very artful!'

As he finished this whisper, he advanced before the hostess; and at the same time the young lady, hearing footsteps, rose. Mr Pecksniff glanced at the volume she held, and whispered Mrs Lupin again; if possible, with increased despondency.

'Yes, ma'am,' he said, 'it is a good book. I was fearful of that beforehand. I am apprehensive that this is a very deep thing indeed!'

'What gentleman is this?' inquired the object of his virtuous doubts.

'Hush! don't trouble yourself, ma'am,' said Mr Pecksniff, as the landlady was about to answer. 'This young'—in spite of himself he hesitated when "person" rose to his lips, and substituted another word: 'this young stranger, Mrs Lupin, will excuse me for replying briefly, that I reside in this village; it may be in an influential manner, however, undeserved; and that I have been summoned here by you. I am here, as I am everywhere, I hope, in sympathy for the sick and sorry.'

With these impressive words, Mr Pecksniff passed over to the bedside, where, after patting the counterpane once or twice in a very solemn manner, as if by that means he gained a clear insight into the patient's disorder, he took his seat in a large arm-chair, and in an attitude of some thoughtfulness and much comfort, waited for his waking. Whatever objection the young lady urged to Mrs Lupin went no further, for nothing more was said to Mr Pecksniff, and Mr Pecksniff said nothing more to anybody else.

Full half an hour elapsed before the old man stirred, but at length he turned himself in bed, and, though not yet awake, gave tokens that his sleep was drawing to an end. By little and little he removed the bed-clothes from about his head, and turned still more towards the side where Mr Pecksniff sat. In course of time his eyes opened; and he lay for a few moments as people newly roused sometimes will, gazing indolently at his visitor, without any distinct consciousness of his presence.

There was nothing remarkable in these proceedings, except the influence they worked on Mr Pecksniff, which could hardly have been surpassed by the most marvellous of natural phenomena. Gradually his hands became tightly clasped upon the elbows of the chair, his eyes dilated with surprise, his mouth opened, his hair stood more erect upon his forehead than its custom was, until, at length, when the old man rose in bed, and stared at him with scarcely less emotion than he showed himself, the Pecksniff doubts were all resolved, and he exclaimed aloud:

'You ARE Martin Chuzzlewit!'

His consternation of surprise was so genuine, that the old man, with all the disposition that he clearly entertained to believe it assumed, was convinced of its reality.

'I am Martin Chuzzlewit,' he said, bitterly: 'and Martin Chuzzlewit wishes you had been hanged, before you had come here to disturb him in his sleep. Why, I dreamed of this fellow!' he said, lying down again, and turning away his face, 'before I knew that he was near me!'

'My good cousin—' said Mr Pecksniff.

'There! His very first words!' cried the old man, shaking his grey head to and fro upon the pillow, and throwing up his hands. 'In his very first words he asserts his relationship! I knew he would; they all do it! Near or distant, blood or water, it's all one. Ugh! What a calendar of deceit, and lying, and false-witnessing, the sound of any word of kindred opens before me!'

'Pray do not be hasty, Mr Chuzzlewit,' said Pecksniff, in a tone that was at once in the sublimest degree compassionate and dispassionate; for he had by this time recovered from his surprise, and was in full possession of his virtuous self. 'You will regret being hasty, I know you will.'

'You know!' said Martin, contemptuously.

'Yes,' retorted Mr Pecksniff. 'Aye, aye, Mr Chuzzlewit; and don't imagine that I mean to court or flatter you; for nothing is further from my intention. Neither, sir, need you entertain the least misgiving that I shall repeat that obnoxious word which has given you so much offence already. Why should I? What do I expect or want from you? There is nothing in your possession that I know of, Mr Chuzzlewit, which is much to be coveted for the happiness it brings you.'

'That's true enough,' muttered the old man.

'Apart from that consideration,' said Mr Pecksniff, watchful of the effect he made, 'it must be plain to you (I am sure) by this time, that if I had wished to insinuate myself into your good opinion, I should have been, of all things, careful not to address you as a relative; knowing your humour, and being quite certain beforehand that I could not have a worse letter of recommendation.'

Martin made not any verbal answer; but he as clearly implied though only by a motion of his legs beneath the bed-clothes, that there was reason in this, and that he could not dispute it, as if he had said as much in good set terms.

'No,' said Mr Pecksniff, keeping his hand in his waistcoat as though he were ready, on the shortest notice, to produce his heart for Martin Chuzzlewit's inspection, 'I came here to offer my services to a stranger. I make no offer of them to you, because I know you would distrust me if I did. But lying on that bed, sir, I regard you as a stranger, and I have just that amount of interest in you which I hope I should feel in any stranger, circumstanced as you are. Beyond that, I am quite as indifferent to you, Mr Chuzzlewit, as you are to me.'

Having said which, Mr Pecksniff threw himself back in the easy-chair; so radiant with ingenuous honesty, that Mrs Lupin almost wondered not to see a stained-glass Glory, such as the Saint wore in the church, shining about his head.

A long pause succeeded. The old man, with increased restlessness, changed his posture several times. Mrs Lupin and the young lady gazed in silence at the counterpane. Mr Pecksniff toyed abstractedly with his eye-glass, and kept his eyes shut, that he might ruminate the better.

'Eh?' he said at last, opening them suddenly, and looking towards the bed. 'I beg your pardon. I thought you spoke. Mrs Lupin,' he continued, slowly rising 'I am not aware that I can be of any service to you here. The gentleman is better, and you are as good a nurse as he can have. Eh?'

This last note of interrogation bore reference to another change of posture on the old man's part, which brought his face towards Mr Pecksniff for the first time since he had turned away from him.

'If you desire to speak to me before I go, sir,' continued that gentleman, after another pause, 'you may command my leisure; but I must stipulate, in justice to myself, that you do so as to a stranger, strictly as to a stranger.'

Now if Mr Pecksniff knew, from anything Martin Chuzzlewit had expressed in gestures, that he wanted to speak to him, he could only have found it out on some such principle as prevails in melodramas, and in virtue of which the elderly farmer with the comic son always knows what the dumb girl means when she takes refuge in his garden, and relates her personal memoirs in incomprehensible pantomime. But without stopping to make any inquiry on this point, Martin Chuzzlewit signed to his young companion to withdraw, which she immediately did, along with the landlady leaving him and Mr Pecksniff alone together. For some time they looked at each other in silence; or rather the old man looked at Mr Pecksniff, and Mr Pecksniff again closing his eyes on all outward objects, took an inward survey of his own breast. That it amply repaid him for his trouble, and afforded a delicious and enchanting prospect, was clear from the expression of his face.

'You wish me to speak to you as to a total stranger,' said the old man, 'do you?'

Mr Pecksniff replied, by a shrug of his shoulders and an apparent turning round of his eyes in their sockets before he opened them, that he was still reduced to the necessity of entertaining that desire.

'You shall be gratified,' said Martin. 'Sir, I am a rich man. Not so rich as some suppose, perhaps, but yet wealthy. I am not a miser sir, though even that charge is made against me, as I hear, and currently believed. I have no pleasure in hoarding. I have no pleasure in the possession of money, The devil that we call by that name can give me nothing but unhappiness.'

It would be no description of Mr Pecksniff's gentleness of manner to adopt the common parlance, and say that he looked at this moment as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. He rather looked as if any quantity of butter might have been made out of him, by churning the milk of human kindness, as it spouted upwards from his heart.

'For the same reason that I am not a hoarder of money,' said the old man, 'I am not lavish of it. Some people find their gratification in storing it up; and others theirs in parting with it; but I have no gratification connected with the thing. Pain and bitterness are the only goods it ever could procure for me. I hate it. It is a spectre walking before me through the world, and making every social pleasure hideous.'

A thought arose in Pecksniff's mind, which must have instantly mounted to his face, or Martin Chuzzlewit would not have resumed as quickly and as sternly as he did:

'You would advise me for my peace of mind, to get rid of this source of misery, and transfer it to some one who could bear it better. Even you, perhaps, would rid me of a burden under which I suffer so grievously. But, kind stranger,' said the old man, whose every feature darkened as he spoke, 'good Christian stranger, that is a main part of my trouble. In other hands, I have known money do good; in other hands I have known it triumphed in, and boasted of with reason, as the master-key to all the brazen gates that close upon the paths to worldly honour, fortune, and enjoyment. To what man or woman; to what worthy, honest, incorruptible creature; shall I confide such a talisman, either now or when I die? Do you know any such person? YOUR virtues are of course inestimable, but can you tell me of any other living creature who will bear the test of contact with myself?'

'Of contact with yourself, sir?' echoed Mr Pecksniff.

'Aye,' returned the old man, 'the test of contact with me—with me. You have heard of him whose misery (the gratification of his own foolish wish) was, that he turned every thing he touched into gold. The curse of my existence, and the realisation of my own mad desire is that by the golden standard which I bear about me, I am doomed to try the metal of all other men, and find it false and hollow.'

Mr Pecksniff shook his head, and said, 'You think so.'

'Oh yes,' cried the old man, 'I think so! and in your telling me "I think so," I recognize the true unworldly ring of YOUR metal. I tell you, man,' he added, with increasing bitterness, 'that I have gone, a rich man, among people of all grades and kinds; relatives, friends, and strangers; among people in whom, when I was poor, I had confidence, and justly, for they never once deceived me then, or, to me, wronged each other. But I have never found one nature, no, not one, in which, being wealthy and alone, I was not forced to detect the latent corruption that lay hid within it waiting for such as I to bring it forth. Treachery, deceit, and low design; hatred of competitors, real or fancied, for my favour; meanness, falsehood, baseness, and servility; or,' and here he looked closely in his cousin's eyes, 'or an assumption of honest independence, almost worse than all; these are the beauties which my wealth has brought to light. Brother against brother, child against parent, friends treading on the faces of friends, this is the social company by whom my way has been attended. There are stories told —they may be true or false—of rich men who, in the garb of poverty, have found out virtue and rewarded it. They were dolts and idiots for their pains. They should have made the search in their own characters. They should have shown themselves fit objects to be robbed and preyed upon and plotted against and adulated by any knaves, who, but for joy, would have spat upon their coffins when they died their dupes; and then their search would have ended as mine has done, and they would be what I am.'

Mr Pecksniff, not at all knowing what it might be best to say in the momentary pause which ensued upon these remarks, made an elaborate demonstration of intending to deliver something very oracular indeed; trusting to the certainty of the old man interrupting him, before he should utter a word. Nor was he mistaken, for Martin Chuzzlewit having taken breath, went on to say:

'Hear me to an end; judge what profit you are like to gain from any repetition of this visit; and leave me. I have so corrupted and changed the nature of all those who have ever attended on me, by breeding avaricious plots and hopes within them; I have engendered such domestic strife and discord, by tarrying even with members of my own family; I have been such a lighted torch in peaceful homes, kindling up all the inflammable gases and vapours in their moral atmosphere, which, but for me, might have proved harmless to the end, that I have, I may say, fled from all who knew me, and taking refuge in secret places have lived, of late, the life of one who is hunted. The young girl whom you just now saw—what! your eye lightens when I talk of her! You hate her already, do you?'

'Upon my word, sir!' said Mr Pecksniff, laying his hand upon his breast, and dropping his eyelids.

'I forgot,' cried the old man, looking at him with a keenness which the other seemed to feel, although he did not raise his eyes so as to see it. 'I ask your pardon. I forgot you were a stranger. For the moment you reminded me of one Pecksniff, a cousin of mine. As I was saying—the young girl whom you just now saw, is an orphan child, whom, with one steady purpose, I have bred and educated, or, if you prefer the word, adopted. For a year or more she has been my constant companion, and she is my only one. I have taken, as she knows, a solemn oath never to leave her sixpence when

I die, but while I live I make her an annual allowance; not extravagant in its amount and yet not stinted. There is a compact between us that no term of affectionate cajolery shall ever be addressed by either to the other, but that she shall call me always by my Christian name; I her, by hers. She is bound to me in life by ties of interest, and losing by my death, and having no expectation disappointed, will mourn it, perhaps; though for that I care little. This is the only kind of friend I have or will have. Judge from such premises what a profitable hour you have spent in coming here, and leave me, to return no more.'

With these words, the old man fell slowly back upon his pillow. Mr Pecksniff as slowly rose, and, with a prefatory hem, began as follows:

'Mr Chuzzlewit.'

'There. Go!' interposed the other. 'Enough of this. I am weary of you.'

'I am sorry for that, sir,' rejoined Mr Pecksniff, 'because I have a duty to discharge, from which, depend upon it, I shall not shrink. No, sir, I shall not shrink.'

It is a lamentable fact, that as Mr Pecksniff stood erect beside the bed, in all the dignity of Goodness, and addressed him thus, the old man cast an angry glance towards the candlestick, as if he were possessed by a strong inclination to launch it at his cousin's head. But he constrained himself, and pointing with his finger to the door, informed him that his road lay there.

'Thank you,' said Mr Pecksniff; 'I am aware of that. I am going. But before I go, I crave your leave to speak, and more than that, Mr Chuzzlewit, I must and will—yes indeed, I repeat it, must and will—be heard. I am not surprised, sir, at anything you have told me tonight. It is natural, very natural, and the greater part of it was known to me before. I will not say,' continued Mr Pecksniff, drawing out his pocket-handkerchief, and winking with both eyes at once, as it were, against his will, 'I will not say that you are mistaken in me. While you are in your present mood I would not say so for the world. I almost wish, indeed, that I had a different nature, that I might repress even this slight confession of weakness; which I cannot disguise from you; which I feel is humiliating; but which you will have the goodness to excuse. We will say, if you please,' added Mr Pecksniff, with great tenderness of manner, 'that it arises from a cold in the head, or is attributable to snuff, or smelling-salts, or onions, or anything but the real cause.'

Here he paused for an instant, and concealed his face behind his pocket-handkerchief. Then, smiling faintly, and holding the bed furniture with one hand, he resumed:

'But, Mr Chuzzlewit, while I am forgetful of myself, I owe it to myself, and to my character—aye, sir, and I HAVE a character which is very dear to me, and will be the best inheritance of my two daughters—to tell you, on behalf of another, that your conduct is wrong, unnatural, indefensible, monstrous. And I tell you, sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, towering on tiptoe among the curtains, as if he were literally rising above all worldly considerations, and were fain to hold on tight, to keep himself from darting skyward like a rocket, 'I tell you without fear or favour, that it will not do for you to be unmindful of your grandson, young Martin, who has the strongest natural claim upon you. It will not do, sir,' repeated Mr Pecksniff, shaking his head. 'You may think it will do, but it won't. You must provide for that young man; you shall provide for him; you WILL provide for him. I believe,' said Mr Pecksniff, glancing at the pen-and-ink, 'that in secret you have already done so. Bless you for doing so. Bless you for doing right, sir. Bless you for hating me. And good night!'

So saying, Mr Pecksniff waved his right hand with much solemnity, and once more inserting it in his waistcoat, departed. There was emotion in his manner, but his step was firm. Subject to human weaknesses, he was upheld by conscience.

Martin lay for some time, with an expression on his face of silent wonder, not unmixed with rage; at length he muttered in a whisper:

'What does this mean? Can the false-hearted boy have chosen such a tool as yonder fellow who has just gone out? Why not! He has conspired against me, like the rest, and they are but birds of one feather. A new plot; a new plot! Oh self, self, self! At every turn nothing but self!'

He fell to trifling, as he ceased to speak, with the ashes of the burnt paper in the candlestick. He did so, at first, in pure abstraction, but they presently became the subject of his thoughts.

'Another will made and destroyed,' he said, 'nothing determined on, nothing done, and I might have died to-night! I plainly see to what foul uses all this money will be put at last,' he cried, almost writhing in the bed; 'after filling me with cares and miseries all my life, it will perpetuate discord and bad passions when I am dead. So it always is. What lawsuits grow out of the graves of rich men, every day; sowing perjury, hatred, and lies among near kindred, where there should be nothing but love! Heaven help us, we have much to answer for! Oh self, self, self! Every man for himself, and no creature for me!'

Universal self! Was there nothing of its shadow in these reflections, and in the history of Martin Chuzzlewit, on his own showing?

CHAPTER FOUR

FROM WHICH IT WILL APPEAR THAT IF UNION BE STRENGTH, AND FAMILY AFFECTION BE PLEASANT TO CONTEMPLATE, THE CHUZZLEWITS WERE THE STRONGEST AND MOST AGREEABLE FAMILY IN THE WORLD

That worthy man Mr Pecksniff having taken leave of his cousin in the solemn terms recited in the last chapter, withdrew to his own home, and remained there three whole days; not so much as going out for a walk beyond the boundaries of his own garden, lest he should be hastily summoned to the bedside of his penitent and remorseful relative, whom, in his ample benevolence, he had made up his mind to forgive unconditionally, and to love on any terms. But such was the obstinacy and such the bitter nature of that stern old man, that no repentant summons came; and the fourth day found Mr Pecksniff apparently much farther from his Christian object than the first.

During the whole of this interval, he haunted the Dragon at all times and seasons in the day and night, and, returning good for evil evinced the deepest solicitude in the progress of the obdurate invalid, in so much that Mrs Lupin was fairly melted by his disinterested anxiety (for he often particularly required her to take notice that he would do the same by any stranger or pauper in the like condition), and shed many tears of admiration and delight.

Meantime, old Martin Chuzzlewit remained shut up in his own chamber, and saw no person but his young companion, saving the hostess of the Blue Dragon, who was, at certain times, admitted to his presence. So surely as she came into the room, however, Martin feigned to fall asleep. It was only when he and the young lady were alone, that he would utter a word, even in answer to the simplest inquiry; though Mr Pecksniff could make out, by hard listening at the door, that they two being left together, he was talkative enough.

It happened on the fourth evening, that Mr Pecksniff walking, as usual, into the bar of the Dragon and finding no Mrs Lupin there, went straight upstairs; purposing, in the fervour of his affectionate zeal, to apply his ear once more to the keyhole, and quiet his mind by assuring himself that the hard-hearted patient was going on well. It happened that Mr Pecksniff, coming softly upon the dark passage into which a spiral ray of light usually darted through the same keyhole, was astonished to find no such ray visible; and it happened that Mr Pecksniff, when he had felt his way to the chamber-door, stooping hurriedly down to ascertain by personal inspection whether the jealousy of the old man had caused this keyhole to be stopped on the inside, brought his head into such violent contact with another head that he could not help uttering in an audible voice the monosyllable 'Oh!' which was, as it were, sharply unscrewed and jerked out of him by very anguish. It happened then, and lastly, that Mr Pecksniff found himself immediately collared by something which smelt like several damp umbrellas, a barrel of beer, a cask of warm brandy-and-water, and a small parlour-full of stale tobacco smoke, mixed; and was straightway led downstairs into the bar from which he had lately come, where he found himself standing opposite to, and in the grasp of, a perfectly strange gentleman of still stranger appearance who, with his disengaged hand, rubbed his own head very hard, and looked at him, Pecksniff, with an evil countenance.

The gentleman was of that order of appearance which is currently termed shabby-genteel, though in respect of his dress he can hardly be said to have been in any extremities, as his fingers were a long way out of his gloves, and the soles of his feet were at an inconvenient distance from the upper leather of his boots. His nether garments were of a bluish grey—violent in its colours once, but sobered now by age and dinginess—and were so stretched and strained in a tough conflict between his braces and his straps, that they appeared every moment in danger of flying asunder at the knees. His coat, in colour blue and of a military cut, was buttoned and frogged up to his chin. His cravat was, in hue and pattern, like one of those mantles which hairdressers are accustomed to wrap about their clients, during the progress of the professional mysteries. His hat had arrived at such a pass that it would have been hard to determine whether it was originally white or black. But he wore a moustache—a shaggy moustache too; nothing in the meek and merciful way, but quite in the fierce and scornful style; the regular Satanic sort of thing—and he wore, besides, a vast quantity of unbrushed hair. He was very dirty and very jaunty; very bold and very mean; very swaggering and very slinking; very much like a man who might have been something better, and unspeakably like a man who deserved to be something worse.

'You were eaves-dropping at that door, you vagabond!' said this gentleman.

Mr Pecksniff cast him off, as Saint George might have repudiated the Dragon in that animal's last moments, and said:

'Where is Mrs Lupin, I wonder! can the good woman possibly be aware that there is a person here who—'

'Stay!' said the gentleman. 'Wait a bit. She DOES know. What then?'

'What then, sir?' cried Mr Pecksniff. 'What then? Do you know, sir, that I am the friend and relative of that sick gentleman? That I am his protector, his guardian, his—'

'Not his niece's husband,' interposed the stranger, 'I'll be sworn; for he was there before you.'

'What do you mean?' said Mr Pecksniff, with indignant surprise. 'What do you tell me, sir?'

'Wait a bit!' cried the other, 'Perhaps you are a cousin—the cousin who lives in this place?'

'I AM the cousin who lives in this place,' replied the man of worth.

'Your name is Pecksniff?' said the gentleman.

'It is.'

'I am proud to know you, and I ask your pardon,' said the gentleman, touching his hat, and subsequently diving behind his cravat for a shirt-collar, which however he did not succeed in bringing to the surface. 'You behold in me, sir, one who has also an interest in that gentleman upstairs. Wait a bit.'

As he said this, he touched the tip of his high nose, by way of intimation that he would let Mr Pecksniff into a secret presently; and pulling off his hat, began to search inside the crown among a mass of crumpled documents and small pieces of what may be called the bark of broken cigars; whence he presently selected the cover of an old letter, begrimed with dirt and redolent of tobacco.

'Read that,' he cried, giving it to Mr Pecksniff.

'This is addressed to Chevy Slyme, Esquire,' said that gentleman.

'You know Chevy Slyme, Esquire, I believe?' returned the stranger.

Mr Pecksniff shrugged his shoulders as though he would say 'I know there is such a person, and I am sorry for it.'

'Very good,' remarked the gentleman. 'That is my interest and business here.' With that he made another dive for his shirt-collar and brought up a string.

'Now, this is very distressing, my friend,' said Mr Pecksniff, shaking his head and smiling composedly. 'It is very distressing to me, to be compelled to say that you are not the person you claim to be. I know Mr Slyme, my friend; this will not do; honesty is the best policy you had better not; you had indeed.'

'Stop' cried the gentleman, stretching forth his right arm, which was so tightly wedged into his threadbare sleeve that it looked like a cloth sausage. 'Wait a bit!'

He paused to establish himself immediately in front of the fire with his back towards it. Then gathering the skirts of his coat under his left arm, and smoothing his moustache with his right thumb and forefinger, he resumed:

'I understand your mistake, and I am not offended. Why? Because it's complimentary. You suppose I would set myself up for Chevy Slyme. Sir, if there is a man on earth whom a gentleman would feel proud and honoured to be mistaken for, that man is my friend Slyme. For he is, without an exception, the highest-minded, the most independent-spirited, most original, spiritual, classical, talented, the most thoroughly Shakspearian, if not Miltonic, and at the same time the most disgustingly-unappreciated dog I know. But, sir, I have not the vanity to attempt to pass for Slyme. Any other man in the wide world, I am equal to; but Slyme is, I frankly confess, a great many cuts above me. Therefore you are wrong.'

'I judged from this,' said Mr Pecksniff, holding out the cover of the letter.

'No doubt you did,' returned the gentleman. 'But, Mr Pecksniff, the whole thing resolves itself into an instance of the peculiarities of genius. Every man of true genius has his peculiarity. Sir, the peculiarity of my friend Slyme is, that he is always waiting round the corner. He is perpetually round the corner, sir. He is round the corner at this instant. Now,' said the gentleman, shaking his forefinger before his nose, and planting his legs wider apart as he looked attentively in Mr Pecksniff's face, 'that is a remarkably curious and interesting trait in Mr Slyme's character; and whenever Slyme's life comes to be written, that trait must be thoroughly worked out by his biographer or society will not be satisfied. Observe me, society will not be satisfied!'

Mr Pecksniff coughed.

'Slyme's biographer, sir, whoever he may be,' resumed the gentleman, 'must apply to me; or, if I am gone to that what's-his-name from which no thingumbob comes back, he must apply to my executors for leave to search among my papers. I have taken a few notes in my poor way, of some of that man's proceedings—my adopted brother, sir,—which would amaze you. He made use of an expression, sir, only on the fifteenth of last month when he couldn't meet a little bill and the other party wouldn't renew, which would have done honour to Napoleon Bonaparte in addressing the French army.'

'And pray,' asked Mr Pecksniff, obviously not quite at his ease, 'what may be Mr Slyme's business here, if I may be permitted to inquire, who am compelled by a regard for my own character to disavow all interest in his proceedings?'

'In the first place,' returned the gentleman, 'you will permit me to say, that I object to that remark, and that I strongly and indignantly protest against it on behalf of my friend Slyme. In the next place, you will give me leave to introduce myself. My name, sir, is Tigg. The name of Montague Tigg will perhaps be familiar to you, in connection with the most remarkable events of the Peninsular War?'

Mr Pecksniff gently shook his head.

'No matter,' said the gentleman. 'That man was my father, and I bear his name. I am consequently proud—proud as Lucifer. Excuse me one moment. I desire my friend Slyme to be present at the remainder of this conference.'

With this announcement he hurried away to the outer door of the Blue Dragon, and almost immediately returned with a companion shorter than himself, who was wrapped in an old blue camlet cloak with a lining of faded scarlet. His sharp features being much pinched and nipped by long waiting in the cold, and his straggling red whiskers and frowzy hair being more than usually dishevelled from the same cause, he certainly looked rather unwholesome and uncomfortable than Shakspearian or Miltonic.

'Now,' said Mr Tigg, clapping one hand on the shoulder of his prepossessing friend, and calling Mr Pecksniff's attention to him with the other, 'you two are related; and relations never did agree, and never will; which is a wise dispensation and an inevitable thing, or there would be none but family parties, and everybody in the world would bore everybody else to death. If you were on good terms, I should consider you a most confoundedly unnatural pair; but standing towards each other as you do, I took upon you as a couple of devilish deep-thoughted fellows, who may be reasoned with to any extent.'

Here Mr Chevy Slyme, whose great abilities seemed one and all to point towards the sneaking quarter of the moral compass, nudged his friend stealthily with his elbow, and whispered in his ear.

'Chiv,' said Mr Tigg aloud, in the high tone of one who was not to be tampered with. 'I shall come to that presently. I act upon my own responsibility, or not at all. To the extent of such a trifling loan as a crownpiece to a man of your talents, I look upon Mr Pecksniff as certain;' and seeing at this juncture that the expression of Mr Pecksniff's face by no means betokened that he shared this certainty, Mr Tigg laid his finger on his nose again for that gentleman's private and especial behoof; calling upon him thereby to take notice that the requisition of small loans was another instance of the peculiarities of genius as developed in his friend Slyme; that he, Tigg, winked at the same, because of the strong metaphysical interest which these weaknesses possessed; and that in reference to his own personal advocacy of such small advances, he merely consulted the humour of his friend, without the least regard to his own advantage or necessities.

'Oh, Chiv, Chiv!' added Mr Tigg, surveying his adopted brother with an air of profound contemplation after dismissing this piece of pantomime. 'You are, upon my life, a strange instance of the little frailties that beset a mighty mind. If there had never been a telescope in the world, I should have been quite certain from my observation of you, Chiv, that there were spots on the sun! I wish I may die, if this isn't the queerest state of existence that we find ourselves forced into without knowing why or wherefore, Mr Pecksniff! Well, never mind! Moralise as we will, the world goes on. As Hamlet says, Hercules may lay about him with his club in every possible direction, but he can't prevent the cats from making a most intolerable row on the roofs of the houses, or the dogs from being shot in the hot weather if they run about the streets unmuzzled. Life's a riddle; a most infernally hard riddle to guess, Mr Pecksniff. My own opinions, that like that celebrated conundrum, "Why's a man in jail like a man out of jail?" there's no answer to it. Upon my soul and body, it's the queerest sort of thing altogether—but there's no use in talking about it. Ha! Ha!'

With which consolatory deduction from the gloomy premises recited, Mr Tigg roused himself by a great effort, and proceeded in his former strain.

'Now I'll tell you what it is. I'm a most confoundedly soft-hearted kind of fellow in my way, and I cannot stand by, and see you two blades cutting each other's throats when there's nothing to be got by it. Mr Pecksniff, you're the cousin of the testator upstairs and we're the nephew—I say we, meaning Chiv. Perhaps in all essential points you are more nearly related to him than we are. Very good. If so, so be it. But you can't get at him, neither can we. I give you my brightest word of honour, sir, that I've been looking through that keyhole with short intervals of rest, ever since nine o'clock this morning, in expectation of receiving an answer to one of the most moderate and gentlemanly applications for a little temporary assistance—only fifteen pounds, and MY security—that the mind of man can conceive. In the meantime, sir, he is perpetually closeted with, and pouring his whole confidence into the bosom of, a stranger. Now I say decisively with regard to this state of circumstances, that it won't do; that it won't act; that it can't be; and that it must not be suffered to continue.'

'Every man,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'has a right, an undoubted right, (which I, for one, would not call in question for any earthly consideration; oh no!) to regulate his own proceedings by his own likings and dislikings, supposing they are not immoral and not irreligious. I may feel in my own breast, that Mr Chuzzlewit does not regard—me, for instance; say me—with exactly that amount of Christian love which should subsist between us. I may feel grieved and hurt at the circumstance; still I may not rush to the conclusion that Mr Chuzzlewit is wholly without a justification in all his coldnesses. Heaven forbid! Besides; how, Mr Tigg,' continued Pecksniff even more gravely and impressively than he had spoken yet, 'how could Mr Chuzzlewit be prevented from having these peculiar and most extraordinary confidences of which you speak; the existence of which I must admit; and which I cannot but deplore—for his sake? Consider, my good sir—' and here Mr Pecksniff eyed him wistfully—'how very much at random you are talking.'

'Why, as to that,' rejoined Tigg, 'it certainly is a difficult question.'

'Undoubtedly it is a difficult question,' Mr Pecksniff answered. As he spoke he drew himself aloft, and seemed to grow more mindful, suddenly, of the moral gulf between himself and the creature he addressed. 'Undoubtedly it is a very difficult question. And I am far from feeling sure that it is a question any one is authorized to discuss. Good evening to you.'

'You don't know that the Spottletoes are here, I suppose?' said Mr Tigg.

'What do you mean, sir? what Spottletoes?' asked Pecksniff, stopping abruptly on his way to the door.

'Mr and Mrs Spottletoe,' said Chevy Slyme, Esquire, speaking aloud for the first time, and speaking very sulkily; shambling with his legs the while. 'Spottletoe married my father's brother's child, didn't he? And Mrs Spottletoe is Chuzzlewit's own niece, isn't she? She was his favourite once. You may well ask what Spottletoes.'

'Now upon my sacred word!' cried Mr Pecksniff, looking upwards. 'This is dreadful. The rapacity of these people is absolutely frightful!'

'It's not only the Spottletoes either, Tigg,' said Slyme, looking at that gentleman and speaking at Mr Pecksniff. 'Anthony Chuzzlewit and his son have got wind of it, and have come down this afternoon. I saw 'em not five minutes ago, when I was waiting round the corner.'

'Oh, Mammon, Mammon!' cried Mr Pecksniff, smiting his forehead.

'So there,' said Slyme, regardless of the interruption, 'are his brother and another nephew for you, already.'

'This is the whole thing, sir,' said Mr Tigg; 'this is the point and purpose at which I was gradually arriving when my friend Slyme here, with six words, hit it full. Mr Pecksniff, now that your cousin (and Chiv's uncle) has turned up, some steps must be taken to prevent his disappearing again; and, if possible, to counteract the influence which is exercised over him now, by this designing favourite. Everybody who is interested feels it, sir. The whole family is pouring down to this place. The time has come when individual jealousies and interests must be forgotten for a time, sir, and union must be made against the common enemy. When the common enemy is routed, you will all set up for yourselves again; every lady and gentleman who has a part in the game, will go in on their own account and bowl away, to the best of their ability, at the testator's wicket, and nobody will be in a worse position than before. Think of it. Don't commit yourself now. You'll find us at the Half Moon and Seven Stars in this village, at any time, and open to any reasonable proposition. Hem! Chiv, my dear fellow, go out and see what sort of a night it is.'

Mr Slyme lost no time in disappearing, and it is to be presumed in going round the corner. Mr Tigg, planting his legs as wide apart as he could be reasonably expected by the most sanguine man to keep them, shook his head at Mr Pecksniff and smiled.

'We must not be too hard,' he said, 'upon the little eccentricities of our friend Slyme. You saw him whisper me?'

Mr Pecksniff had seen him.

'You heard my answer, I think?'

Mr Pecksniff had heard it.

'Five shillings, eh?' said Mr Tigg, thoughtfully. 'Ah! what an extraordinary fellow! Very moderate too!'

Mr Pecksniff made no answer.

'Five shillings!' pursued Mr Tigg, musing; 'and to be punctually repaid next week; that's the best of it. You heard that?'

Mr Pecksniff had not heard that.

'No! You surprise me!' cried Tigg. 'That's the cream of the thing sir. I never knew that man fail to redeem a promise, in my life. You're not in want of change, are you?'

'No,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'thank you. Not at all.'

'Just so,' returned Mr Tigg. 'If you had been, I'd have got it for you.' With that he began to whistle; but a dozen seconds had not elapsed when he stopped short, and looking earnestly at Mr Pecksniff, said:

'Perhaps you'd rather not lend Slyme five shillings?'

'I would much rather not,' Mr Pecksniff rejoined.

'Egad!' cried Tigg, gravely nodding his head as if some ground of objection occurred to him at that moment for the first time, 'it's very possible you may be right. Would you entertain the same sort of objection to lending me five shillings now?'

'Yes, I couldn't do it, indeed,' said Mr Pecksniff.

'Not even half-a-crown, perhaps?' urged Mr Tigg.

'Not even half-a-crown.'

'Why, then we come,' said Mr Tigg, 'to the ridiculously small amount of eighteen pence. Ha! ha!'

'And that,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'would be equally objectionable.'

On receipt of this assurance, Mr Tigg shook him heartily by both hands, protesting with much earnestness, that he was one of the most consistent and remarkable men he had ever met, and that he desired the honour of his better acquaintance. He moreover observed that there were many little characteristics about his friend Slyme, of which he could by no means, as a man of strict honour, approve; but that he was prepared to forgive him all these slight drawbacks, and much more, in consideration of the great pleasure he himself had that day enjoyed in his social intercourse with Mr Pecksniff, which had given him a far higher and more enduring delight than the successful negotiation of any small loan on the part of his friend could possibly have imparted. With which remarks he would beg leave, he said, to wish Mr Pecksniff a very good evening. And so he took himself off; as little abashed by his recent failure as any gentleman would desire to be.

The meditations of Mr Pecksniff that evening at the bar of the Dragon, and that night in his own house, were very serious and grave indeed; the more especially as the intelligence he had received from Messrs Tigg and Slyme touching the arrival of other members of the family, were fully confirmed on more particular inquiry. For the Spottletoes had actually gone straight to the Dragon, where they were at that moment housed and mounting guard, and where their appearance had occasioned such a vast sensation that Mrs Lupin, scenting their errand before they had been under her roof half an hour, carried the news herself with all possible secrecy straight to Mr Pecksniff's house; indeed it was her great caution in doing so which occasioned her to miss that gentleman, who entered at the front door of the Dragon just as she emerged from the back one. Moreover, Mr Anthony Chuzzlewit and his son Jonas were economically quartered at the Half Moon and Seven Stars, which was an obscure ale-house; and by the very next coach there came posting to the scene of action, so many other affectionate members of the family (who quarrelled with each other, inside and out, all the way down, to the utter distraction of the coachman), that in less than four-and-twenty hours the scanty tavern accommodation was at a premium, and all the private lodgings in the place, amounting to full four beds and sofa, rose cent per cent in the market.

In a word, things came to that pass that nearly the whole family sat down before the Blue Dragon, and formally invested it; and Martin Chuzzlewit was in a state of siege. But he resisted bravely; refusing to receive all letters, messages, and parcels; obstinately declining to treat with anybody; and holding out no hope or promise of capitulation. Meantime the family forces were perpetually encountering each other in divers parts of the neighbourhood; and, as no one branch of the Chuzzlewit tree had ever been known to agree with another within the memory of man, there was such a skirmishing, and flouting, and snapping off of heads, in the metaphorical sense of that expression; such a bandying of words and calling of names; such an upturning of noses and wrinkling of brows; such a formal interment of good feelings and violent resurrection of ancient grievances; as had never been known in those quiet parts since the earliest record of their civilized existence.

At length, in utter despair and hopelessness, some few of the belligerents began to speak to each other in only moderate terms of mutual aggravation; and nearly all addressed themselves with a show of tolerable decency to Mr Pecksniff, in recognition of his high character and influential position. Thus, by little and little, they made common cause of Martin Chuzzlewit's obduracy, until it was agreed (if such a word can be used in connection with the Chuzzlewits) that there should be a general council and conference held at Mr Pecksniff's house upon a certain day at noon; which all members of the family who had brought themselves within reach of the summons, were forthwith bidden and invited, solemnly, to attend.

If ever Mr Pecksniff wore an apostolic look, he wore it on this memorable day. If ever his unruffled smile proclaimed the words, 'I am a messenger of peace!' that was its mission now. If ever man combined within himself all the mild qualities of the lamb with a considerable touch of the dove, and not a dash of the crocodile, or the least possible suggestion of the very mildest seasoning of the serpent, that man was he. And, oh, the two Miss Pecksniffs! Oh, the serene expression on the face of Charity, which seemed to say, 'I know that all my family have injured me beyond the possibility of reparation, but I forgive them, for it is my duty so to do!' And, oh, the gay simplicity of Mercy; so charming, innocent, and infant-like, that if she had gone out walking by herself, and it had been a little earlier in the season, the robin-redbreasts might have covered her with leaves against her will, believing her to be one of the sweet children in the wood, come out of it, and issuing forth once more to look for blackberries in the young freshness of her heart! What words can paint the Pecksniffs in that trying hour? Oh, none; for words have naughty company among them, and the Pecksniffs were all goodness.

But when the company arrived! That was the time. When Mr Pecksniff, rising from his seat at the table's head, with a daughter on either hand, received his guests in the best parlour and motioned them to chairs, with eyes so overflowing and countenance so damp with gracious perspiration, that he may be said to have been in a kind of moist meekness! And the company; the jealous stony-hearted distrustful company, who were all shut up in themselves, and had no faith in anybody, and wouldn't believe anything, and would no more allow themselves to be softened or lulled asleep by the Pecksniffs than if they had been so many hedgehogs or porcupines!

First, there was Mr Spottletoe, who was so bald and had such big whiskers, that he seemed to have stopped his hair, by the sudden application of some powerful remedy, in the very act of falling off his head, and to have fastened it irrevocably on his face. Then there was Mrs Spottletoe, who being much too slim for her years, and of a poetical constitution, was accustomed to inform her more intimate friends that the said whiskers were 'the lodestar of her existence;' and who could now, by reason of her strong affection for her uncle Chuzzlewit, and the shock it gave her to be suspected of testamentary designs upon him, do nothing but cry—except moan. Then there were Anthony Chuzzlewit, and his son Jonas; the face of the old man so sharpened by the wariness and cunning of his life, that it seemed to cut him a passage through the crowded room, as he edged away behind the remotest chairs; while the son had so well profited by the precept and example of the father, that he looked a year or two the elder of the twain, as they stood winking their red eyes, side by side, and whispering to each other softly. Then there was the widow of a deceased brother of Mr Martin Chuzzlewit, who being almost supernaturally disagreeable, and having a dreary face and a bony figure and a masculine voice, was, in right of these qualities, what is commonly called a strong-minded woman; and who, if she could, would have established her claim to the title, and have shown herself, mentally speaking, a perfect Samson, by shutting up her brother-in-law in a private madhouse, until he proved his complete sanity by loving her very much. Beside her sat her spinster daughters, three in number, and of gentlemanly deportment, who had so mortified themselves with tight stays, that their tempers were reduced to something less than their waists, and sharp lacing was expressed in their very noses. Then there was a young gentleman, grandnephew of Mr Martin Chuzzlewit, very dark and very hairy, and apparently born for no particular purpose but to save looking-glasses the trouble of reflecting more than just the first idea and sketchy notion of a face, which had never been carried out. Then there was a solitary female cousin who was remarkable for nothing but being very deaf, and living by herself, and always having the toothache. Then there was George Chuzzlewit, a gay bachelor cousin, who claimed to be young but had been younger, and was inclined to corpulency, and rather overfed himself; to that extent, indeed, that his eyes were strained in their sockets, as if with constant surprise; and he had such an obvious disposition to pimples, that the bright spots on his cravat, the rich pattern on his waistcoat, and even his glittering trinkets, seemed to have broken out upon him, and not to have come into existence comfortably. Last of all there were present Mr Chevy Slyme and his friend Tigg. And it is worthy of remark, that although each person present disliked the other, mainly because he or she DID belong to the family, they one and all concurred in hating Mr Tigg because he didn't.

Such was the pleasant little family circle now assembled in Mr Pecksniff's best parlour, agreeably prepared to fall foul of Mr Pecksniff or anybody else who might venture to say anything whatever upon any subject.

'This,' said Mr Pecksniff, rising and looking round upon them with folded hands, 'does me good. It does my daughters good. We thank you for assembling here. We are grateful to you with our whole hearts. It is a blessed distinction that you have conferred upon us, and believe me'—it is impossible to conceive how he smiled here—'we shall not easily forget it.'

'I am sorry to interrupt you, Pecksniff,' remarked Mr Spottletoe, with his whiskers in a very portentous state; 'but you are assuming too much to yourself, sir. Who do you imagine has it in contemplation to confer a distinction upon YOU, sir?'

A general murmur echoed this inquiry, and applauded it.

'If you are about to pursue the course with which you have begun, sir,' pursued Mr Spottletoe in a great heat, and giving a violent rap on the table with his knuckles, 'the sooner you desist, and this assembly separates, the better. I am no stranger, sir, to your preposterous desire to be regarded as the head of this family, but I can tell YOU, sir—'

Oh yes, indeed! HE tell. HE! What? He was the head, was he? From the strong-minded woman downwards everybody fell, that instant, upon Mr Spottletoe, who after vainly attempting to be heard in silence was fain to sit down again, folding his arms and shaking his head most wrathfully, and giving Mrs Spottletoe to understand in dumb show, that that scoundrel Pecksniff might go on for the present, but he would cut in presently, and annihilate him.

'I am not sorry,' said Mr Pecksniff in resumption of his address, 'I am really not sorry that this little incident has happened. It is good to feel that we are met here without disguise. It is good to know that we have no reserve before each other, but are appearing freely in our own characters.'

Here, the eldest daughter of the strong-minded woman rose a little way from her seat, and trembling violently from head to foot, more as it seemed with passion than timidity, expressed a general hope that some people WOULD appear in their own characters, if it were only for such a proceeding having the attraction of novelty to recommend it; and that when they (meaning the some people before mentioned) talked about their relations, they would be careful to observe who was present in company at the time; otherwise it might come round to those relations' ears, in a way they little expected; and as to red noses (she observed) she had yet to learn that a red nose was any disgrace, inasmuch as people neither made nor coloured their own noses, but had that feature provided for them without being first consulted; though even upon that branch of the subject she had great doubts whether certain noses were redder than other noses, or indeed half as red as some. This remark being received with a shrill titter by the two sisters of the speaker, Miss Charity Pecksniff begged with much politeness to be informed whether any of those very low observations were levelled at her; and receiving no more explanatory answer than was conveyed in the adage 'Those the cap fits, let them wear it,' immediately commenced a somewhat acrimonious and personal retort, wherein she was much comforted and abetted by her sister Mercy, who laughed at the same with great heartiness; indeed far more naturally than life. And it being quite impossible that any difference of opinion can take place among women without every woman who is within hearing taking active part in it, the strong-minded lady and her two daughters, and Mrs Spottletoe, and the deaf cousin (who was not at all disqualified from joining in the dispute by reason of being perfectly unacquainted with its merits), one and all plunged into the quarrel directly.

The two Miss Pecksniffs being a pretty good match for the three Miss Chuzzlewits, and all five young ladies having, in the figurative language of the day, a great amount of steam to dispose of, the altercation would no doubt have been a long one but for the high valour and prowess of the strong-minded woman, who, in right of her reputation for powers of sarcasm, did so belabour and pummel Mrs Spottletoe with taunting words that the poor lady, before the engagement was two minutes old, had no refuge but in tears. These she shed so plentifully, and so much to the agitation and grief of Mr Spottletoe, that that gentleman, after holding his clenched fist close to Mr Pecksniff's eyes, as if it were some natural curiosity from the near inspection whereof he was likely to derive high gratification and improvement, and after offering (for no particular reason that anybody could discover) to kick Mr George Chuzzlewit for, and in consideration of, the trifling sum of sixpence, took his wife under his arm and indignantly withdrew. This diversion, by distracting the attention of the combatants, put an end to the strife, which, after breaking out afresh some twice or thrice in certain inconsiderable spurts and dashes, died away in silence.

It was then that Mr Pecksniff once more rose from his chair. It was then that the two Miss Pecksniffs composed themselves to look as if there were no such beings—not to say present, but in the whole compass of the world—as the three Miss Chuzzlewits; while the three Miss Chuzzlewits became equally unconscious of the existence of the two Miss Pecksniffs.

'It is to be lamented,' said Mr Pecksniff, with a forgiving recollection of Mr Spottletoe's fist, 'that our friend should have withdrawn himself so very hastily, though we have cause for mutual congratulation even in that, since we are assured that he is not distrustful of us in regard to anything we may say or do while he is absent. Now, that is very soothing, is it not?'

'Pecksniff,' said Anthony, who had been watching the whole party with peculiar keenness from the first—'don't you be a hypocrite.'

'A what, my good sir?' demanded Mr Pecksniff.

'A hypocrite.'

'Charity, my dear,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'when I take my chamber candlestick to-night, remind me to be more than usually particular in praying for Mr Anthony Chuzzlewit; who has done me an injustice.'

This was said in a very bland voice, and aside, as being addressed to his daughter's private ear. With a cheerfulness of conscience, prompting almost a sprightly demeanour, he then resumed:

'All our thoughts centring in our very dear but unkind relative, and he being as it were beyond our reach, we are met to-day, really as if we were a funeral party, except—a blessed exception—that there is no body in the house.'

The strong-minded lady was not at all sure that this was a blessed exception. Quite the contrary.

'Well, my dear madam!' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Be that as it may, here we are; and being here, we are to consider whether it is possible by any justifiable means—'

'Why, you know as well as I,' said the strong-minded lady, 'that any means are justifiable in such a case, don't you?'

'Very good, my dear madam, very good; whether it is possible by ANY means, we will say by ANY means, to open the eyes of our valued relative to his present infatuation. Whether it is possible to make him acquainted by any means with the real character and purpose of that young female whose strange, whose very strange position, in reference to himself'—here Mr Pecksniff sunk his voice to an impressive whisper—'really casts a shadow of disgrace and shame upon this family; and who, we know'—here he raised his voice again—'else why is she his companion? harbours the very basest designs upon his weakness and his property.'

In their strong feeling on this point, they, who agreed in nothing else, all concurred as one mind. Good Heaven, that she should harbour designs upon his property! The strong-minded lady was for poison, her three daughters were for Bridewell and bread-and-water, the cousin with the toothache advocated Botany Bay, the two Miss Pecksniffs suggested flogging. Nobody but Mr Tigg, who, notwithstanding his extreme shabbiness, was still understood to be in some sort a lady's man, in right of his upper lip and his frogs, indicated a doubt of the justifiable nature of these measures; and he only ogled the three Miss Chuzzlewits with the least admixture of banter in his admiration, as though he would observe, 'You are positively down upon her to too great an extent, my sweet creatures, upon my soul you are!'

'Now,' said Mr Pecksniff, crossing his two forefingers in a manner which was at once conciliatory and argumentative; 'I will not, upon the one hand, go so far as to say that she deserves all the inflictions which have been so very forcibly and hilariously suggested;' one of his ornamental sentences; 'nor will I, upon the other, on any account compromise my common understanding as a man, by making the assertion that she does not. What I would observe is, that I think some practical means might be devised of inducing our respected, shall I say our revered—?'

'No!' interposed the strong-minded woman in a loud voice.

'Then I will not,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'You are quite right, my dear madam, and I appreciate and thank you for your discriminating objection—

our respected relative, to dispose himself to listen to the promptings of nature, and not to the—'

'Go on, Pa!' cried Mercy.

'Why, the truth is, my dear,' said Mr Pecksniff, smiling upon his assembled kindred, 'that I am at a loss for a word. The name of those fabulous animals (pagan, I regret to say) who used to sing in the water, has quite escaped me.'

Mr George Chuzzlewit suggested 'swans.'

'No,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Not swans. Very like swans, too. Thank you.'

The nephew with the outline of a countenance, speaking for the first and last time on that occasion, propounded 'Oysters.'

'No,' said Mr Pecksniff, with his own peculiar urbanity, 'nor oysters. But by no means unlike oysters; a very excellent idea; thank you, my dear sir, very much. Wait! Sirens. Dear me! sirens, of course. I think, I say, that means might be devised of disposing our respected relative to listen to the promptings of nature, and not to the siren-like delusions of art. Now we must not lose sight of the fact that our esteemed friend has a grandson, to whom he was, until lately, very much attached, and whom I could have wished to see here to-day, for I have a real and deep regard for him. A fine young man, a very fine young man! I would submit to you, whether we might not remove Mr Chuzzlewit's distrust of us, and vindicate our own disinterestedness by—'

'If Mr George Chuzzlewit has anything to say to ME,' interposed the strong-minded woman, sternly, 'I beg him to speak out like a man; and not to look at me and my daughters as if he could eat us.'

'As to looking, I have heard it said, Mrs Ned,' returned Mr George, angrily, 'that a cat is free to contemplate a monarch; and therefore I hope I have some right, having been born a member of this family, to look at a person who only came into it by marriage. As to eating, I beg to say, whatever bitterness your jealousies and disappointed expectations may suggest to you, that I am not a cannibal, ma'am.'

'I don't know that!' cried the strong-minded woman.

'At all events, if I was a cannibal,' said Mr George Chuzzlewit, greatly stimulated by this retort, 'I think it would occur to me that a lady who had outlived three husbands, and suffered so very little from their loss, must be most uncommonly tough.'

The strong-minded woman immediately rose.

'And I will further add,' said Mr George, nodding his head violently at every second syllable; 'naming no names, and therefore hurting nobody but those whose consciences tell them they are alluded to, that I think it would be much more decent and becoming, if those who hooked and crooked themselves into this family by getting on the blind side of some of its members before marriage, and manslaughtering them afterwards by crowing over them to that strong pitch that they were glad to die, would refrain from acting the part of vultures in regard to other members of this family who are living. I think it would be full as well, if not better, if those individuals would keep at home, contenting themselves with what they have got (luckily for them) already; instead of hovering about, and thrusting their fingers into, a family pie, which they flavour much more than enough, I can tell them, when they are fifty miles away.'

'I might have been prepared for this!' cried the strong-minded woman, looking about her with a disdainful smile as she moved towards the door, followed by her three daughters. 'Indeed I was fully prepared for it from the first. What else could I expect in such an atmosphere as this!'

'Don't direct your halfpay-officers' gaze at me, ma'am, if you please,' interposed Miss Charity; 'for I won't bear it.'

This was a smart stab at a pension enjoyed by the strong-minded woman, during her second widowhood and before her last coverture. It told immensely.

'I passed from the memory of a grateful country, you very miserable minx,' said Mrs Ned, 'when I entered this family; and I feel now, though I did not feel then, that it served me right, and that I lost my claim upon the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland when I so degraded myself. Now, my dears, if you're quite ready, and have sufficiently improved yourselves by taking to heart the genteel example of these two young ladies, I think we'll go. Mr Pecksniff, we are very much obliged to you, really. We came to be entertained, and you have far surpassed our utmost expectations, in the amusement you have provided for us. Thank you. Good-bye!'

With such departing words, did this strong-minded female paralyse the Pecksniffian energies; and so she swept out of the room, and out of the house, attended by her daughters, who, as with one accord, elevated their three noses in the air, and joined in a contemptuous titter. As they passed the parlour window on the outside, they were seen to counterfeit a perfect transport of delight among themselves; and with this final blow and great discouragement for those within, they vanished.

Before Mr Pecksniff or any of his remaining visitors could offer a remark, another figure passed this window, coming, at a great rate in the opposite direction; and immediately afterwards, Mr Spottletoe burst into the chamber. Compared with his present state of heat, he had gone out a man of snow or ice. His head distilled such oil upon his whiskers, that they were rich and clogged with unctuous drops; his face was violently inflamed, his limbs trembled; and he gasped and strove for breath.

'My good sir!' cried Mr Pecksniff.

'Oh yes!' returned the other; 'oh yes, certainly! Oh to be sure! Oh, of course! You hear him? You hear him? all of you!'

'What's the matter?' cried several voices.

'Oh nothing!' cried Spottletoe, still gasping. 'Nothing at all! It's of no consequence! Ask him! HE'll tell you!'

'I do not understand our friend,' said Mr Pecksniff, looking about him in utter amazement. 'I assure you that he is quite unintelligible to me.'

'Unintelligible, sir!' cried the other. 'Unintelligible! Do you mean to say, sir, that you don't know what has happened! That you haven't decoyed us here, and laid a plot and a plan against us! Will you venture to say that you didn't know Mr Chuzzlewit was going, sir, and that you don't know he's gone, sir?'

'Gone!' was the general cry.

'Gone,' echoed Mr Spottletoe. 'Gone while we were sitting here. Gone. Nobody knows where he's gone. Oh, of course not! Nobody knew he was going. Oh, of course not! The landlady thought up to the very last moment that they were merely going for a ride; she had no other suspicion. Oh, of course not! She's not this fellow's creature. Oh, of course not!'

Adding to these exclamations a kind of ironical howl, and gazing upon the company for one brief instant afterwards, in a sudden silence, the irritated gentleman started off again at the same tremendous pace, and was seen no more.

It was in vain for Mr Pecksniff to assure them that this new and opportune evasion of the family was at least as great a shock and surprise to him as to anybody else. Of all the bullyings and denunciations that were ever heaped on one unlucky head, none can ever have exceeded in energy and heartiness those with which he was complimented by each of his remaining relatives, singly, upon bidding him farewell.

The moral position taken by Mr Tigg was something quite tremendous; and the deaf cousin, who had the complicated aggravation of seeing all the proceedings and hearing nothing but the catastrophe, actually scraped her shoes upon the scraper, and afterwards distributed impressions of them all over the top step, in token that she shook the dust from her feet before quitting that dissembling and perfidious mansion.

Mr Pecksniff had, in short, but one comfort, and that was the knowledge that all these his relations and friends had hated him to the very utmost extent before; and that he, for his part, had not distributed among them any more love than, with his ample capital in that respect, he could comfortably afford to part with. This view of his affairs yielded him great consolation; and the fact deserves to be noted, as showing with what ease a good man may be consoled under circumstances of failure and disappointment.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONTAINING A FULL ACCOUNT OF THE INSTALLATION OF MR PECKSNIFF'S NEW PUPIL INTO THE BOSOM OF MR PECKSNIFF'S FAMILY. WITH ALL THE FESTIVITIES HELD ON THAT OCCASION, AND THE GREAT ENJOYMENT OF MR PINCH

The best of architects and land surveyors kept a horse, in whom the enemies already mentioned more than once in these pages pretended to detect a fanciful resemblance to his master. Not in his outward person, for he was a raw-boned, haggard horse, always on a much shorter allowance of corn than Mr Pecksniff; but in his moral character, wherein, said they, he was full of promise, but of no performance. He was always in a manner, going to go, and never going. When at his slowest rate of travelling he would sometimes lift up his legs so high, and display such mighty action, that it was difficult to believe he was doing less than fourteen miles an hour; and he was for ever so perfectly satisfied with his own speed, and so little disconcerted by opportunities of comparing himself with the fastest trotters, that the illusion was the more difficult of resistance. He was a kind of animal who infused into the breasts of strangers a lively sense of hope, and possessed all those who knew him better with a grim despair. In what respect, having these points of character, he might be fairly likened to his master, that good man's slanderers only can explain. But it is a melancholy truth, and a deplorable instance of the uncharitableness of the world, that they made the comparison.

In this horse, and the hooded vehicle, whatever its proper name might be, to which he was usually harnessed—it was more like a gig with a tumour than anything else—all Mr Pinch's thoughts and wishes centred, one bright frosty morning; for with this gallant equipage he was about to drive to Salisbury alone, there to meet with the new pupil, and thence to bring him home in triumph.

Blessings on thy simple heart, Tom Pinch, how proudly dost thou button up that scanty coat, called by a sad misnomer, for these many years, a 'great' one; and how thoroughly, as with thy cheerful voice thou pleasantly adjurest Sam the hostler 'not to let him go yet,' dost thou believe that quadruped desires to go, and would go if he might! Who could repress a smile—of love for thee, Tom Pinch, and not in jest at thy expense, for thou art poor enough already, Heaven knows—to think that such a holiday as lies before thee should awaken that quick flow and hurry of the spirits, in which thou settest down again, almost untasted, on the kitchen window-sill, that great white mug (put by, by thy own hands, last night, that breakfast might not hold thee late), and layest yonder crust upon the seat beside thee, to be eaten on the road, when thou art calmer in thy high rejoicing! Who, as thou drivest off, a happy, man, and noddest with a grateful lovingness to Pecksniff in his nightcap at his chamber-window, would not cry, 'Heaven speed thee, Tom, and send that thou wert going off for ever to some quiet home where thou mightst live at peace, and sorrow should not touch thee!'

What better time for driving, riding, walking, moving through the air by any means, than a fresh, frosty morning, when hope runs cheerily through the veins with the brisk blood, and tingles in the frame from head to foot! This was the glad commencement of a bracing day in early winter, such as may put the languid summer season (speaking of it when it can't be had) to the blush, and shame the spring for being sometimes cold by halves. The sheep-bells rang as clearly in the vigorous air, as if they felt its wholesome influence like living creatures; the trees, in lieu of leaves or blossoms, shed upon the ground a frosty rime that sparkled as it fell, and might have been the dust of diamonds. So it was to Tom. From cottage chimneys, smoke went streaming up high, high, as if the earth had lost its grossness, being so fair, and must not be oppressed by heavy vapour. The crust of ice on the else rippling brook was so transparent, and so thin in texture, that the lively water might of its own free will have stopped—in Tom's glad mind it had—to look upon the lovely morning. And lest the sun should break this charm too eagerly, there moved between him and the ground, a mist like that which waits upon the moon on summer nights—the very same to Tom—and wooed him to dissolve it gently.

Tom Pinch went on; not fast, but with a sense of rapid motion, which did just as well; and as he went, all kinds of things occurred to keep him happy. Thus when he came within sight of the turnpike, and was—oh a long way off!—he saw the tollman's wife, who had that moment checked a waggon, run back into the little house again like mad, to say (she knew) that Mr Pinch was coming up. And she was right, for when he drew within hail of the gate, forth rushed the tollman's children, shrieking in tiny chorus, 'Mr Pinch!' to Tom's intense delight. The very tollman, though an ugly chap in general, and one whom folks were rather shy of handling, came out himself to take the toll, and give him rough good morning; and that with all this, and a glimpse of the family breakfast on a little round table before the fire, the crust Tom Pinch had brought away with him acquired as rich a flavour as though it had been cut from a fairy loaf.

But there was more than this. It was not only the married people and the children who gave Tom Pinch a welcome as he passed. No, no. Sparkling eyes and snowy breasts came hurriedly to many an upper casement as he clattered by, and gave him back his greeting: not stinted either, but sevenfold, good measure. They were all merry. They all laughed. And some of the wickedest among them even kissed their hands as Tom looked back. For who minded poor Mr Pinch? There was no harm in HIM.

And now the morning grew so fair, and all things were so wide awake and gay, that the sun seeming to say—Tom had no doubt he said—'I can't stand it any longer; I must have a look,' streamed out in radiant majesty. The mist, too shy and gentle for such lusty company, fled off, quite scared, before it; and as it swept away, the hills and mounds and distant pasture lands, teeming with placid sheep and noisy crows, came out as bright as though they were unrolled bran new for the occasion. In compliment to which discovery, the brook stood still no longer, but ran briskly off to bear the tidings to the water-mill, three miles away.

Mr Pinch was jogging along, full of pleasant thoughts and cheerful influences, when he saw, upon the path before him, going in the same direction with himself, a traveller on foot, who walked with a light quick step, and sang as he went—for certain in a very loud voice, but not unmusically. He was a young fellow, of some five or six-and-twenty perhaps, and was dressed in such a free and fly-away fashion, that the long ends of his loose red neckcloth were streaming out behind him quite as often as before; and the bunch of bright winter berries in the buttonhole of his velveteen coat was as visible to Mr Pinch's rearward observation, as if he had worn that garment wrong side foremost. He continued to sing with so much energy, that he did not hear the sound of wheels until it was close behind him; when he turned a whimsical face and a very merry pair of blue eyes on Mr Pinch, and checked himself directly.

'Why, Mark?' said Tom Pinch, stopping. 'Who'd have thought of seeing you here? Well! this is surprising!'

Mark touched his hat, and said, with a very sudden decrease of vivacity, that he was going to Salisbury.

'And how spruce you are, too!' said Mr Pinch, surveying him with great pleasure. 'Really, I didn't think you were half such a tight-made fellow, Mark!'

'Thankee, Mr Pinch. Pretty well for that, I believe. It's not my fault, you know. With regard to being spruce, sir, that's where it is, you see.' And here he looked particularly gloomy.

'Where what is?' Mr Pinch demanded.

'Where the aggravation of it is. Any man may be in good spirits and good temper when he's well dressed. There an't much credit in that. If I was very ragged and very jolly, then I should begin to feel I had gained a point, Mr Pinch.'

'So you were singing just now, to bear up, as it were, against being well dressed, eh, Mark?' said Pinch.

'Your conversation's always equal to print, sir,' rejoined Mark, with a broad grin. 'That was it.'

'Well!' cried Pinch, 'you are the strangest young man, Mark, I ever knew in my life. I always thought so; but now I am quite certain of it. I am going to Salisbury, too. Will you get in? I shall be very glad of your company.'

The young fellow made his acknowledgments and accepted the offer; stepping into the carriage directly, and seating himself on the very edge of the seat with his body half out of it, to express his being there on sufferance, and by the politeness of Mr Pinch. As they went along, the conversation proceeded after this manner.

'I more than half believed, just now, seeing you so very smart,' said Pinch, 'that you must be going to be married, Mark.'

'Well, sir, I've thought of that, too,' he replied. 'There might be some credit in being jolly with a wife, 'specially if the children had the measles and that, and was very fractious indeed. But I'm a'most afraid to try it. I don't see my way clear.'

'You're not very fond of anybody, perhaps?' said Pinch.

'Not particular, sir, I think.'

'But the way would be, you know, Mark, according to your views of things,' said Mr Pinch, 'to marry somebody you didn't like, and who was very disagreeable.'

'So it would, sir; but that might be carrying out a principle a little too far, mightn't it?'

'Perhaps it might,' said Mr Pinch. At which they both laughed gayly.

'Lord bless you, sir,' said Mark, 'you don't half know me, though. I don't believe there ever was a man as could come out so strong under circumstances that would make other men miserable, as I could, if I could only get a chance. But I can't get a chance. It's my opinion that nobody never will know half of what's in me, unless something very unexpected turns up. And I don't see any prospect of that. I'm a-going to leave the Dragon, sir.'

'Going to leave the Dragon!' cried Mr Pinch, looking at him with great astonishment. 'Why, Mark, you take my breath away!'

'Yes, sir,' he rejoined, looking straight before him and a long way off, as men do sometimes when they cogitate profoundly. 'What's the use of my stopping at the Dragon? It an't at all the sort of place for ME. When I left London (I'm a Kentish man by birth, though), and took that situation here, I quite made up my mind that it was the dullest little out-of-the-way corner in England, and that there would be some credit in being jolly under such circumstances. But, Lord, there's no dullness at the Dragon! Skittles, cricket, quoits, nine-pins, comic songs, choruses, company round the chimney corner every winter's evening. Any man could be jolly at the Dragon. There's no credit in THAT.'

'But if common report be true for once, Mark, as I think it is, being able to confirm it by what I know myself,' said Mr Pinch, 'you are the cause of half this merriment, and set it going.'

'There may be something in that, too, sir,' answered Mark. 'But that's no consolation.'

'Well!' said Mr Pinch, after a short silence, his usually subdued tone being even now more subdued than ever. 'I can hardly think enough of what you tell me. Why, what will become of Mrs Lupin, Mark?'

Mark looked more fixedly before him, and further off still, as he answered that he didn't suppose it would be much of an object to her. There were plenty of smart young fellows as would be glad of the place. He knew a dozen himself.

'That's probable enough,' said Mr Pinch, 'but I am not at all sure that Mrs Lupin would be glad of them. Why, I always supposed that Mrs Lupin and you would make a match of it, Mark; and so did every one, as far as I know.'

'I never,' Mark replied, in some confusion, 'said nothing as was in a direct way courting-like to her, nor she to me, but I don't know what I mightn't do one of these odd times, and what she mightn't say in answer. Well, sir, THAT wouldn't suit.'

'Not to be landlord of the Dragon, Mark?' cried Mr Pinch.

'No, sir, certainly not,' returned the other, withdrawing his gaze from the horizon, and looking at his fellow-traveller. 'Why that would be the ruin of a man like me. I go and sit down comfortably for life, and no man never finds me out. What would be the credit of the landlord of the Dragon's being jolly? Why, he couldn't help it, if he tried.'

'Does Mrs Lupin know you are going to leave her?' Mr Pinch inquired.

'I haven't broke it to her yet, sir, but I must. I'm looking out this morning for something new and suitable,' he said, nodding towards the city.

'What kind of thing now?' Mr Pinch demanded.

'I was thinking,' Mark replied, 'of something in the grave-digging. way.'

'Good gracious, Mark?' cried Mr Pinch.

'It's a good damp, wormy sort of business, sir,' said Mark, shaking his head argumentatively, 'and there might be some credit in being jolly, with one's mind in that pursuit, unless grave-diggers is usually given that way; which would be a drawback. You don't happen to know how that is in general, do you, sir?'

'No,' said Mr Pinch, 'I don't indeed. I never thought upon the subject.'

'In case of that not turning out as well as one could wish, you know,' said Mark, musing again, 'there's other businesses. Undertaking now. That's gloomy. There might be credit to be gained there. A broker's man in a poor neighbourhood wouldn't be bad perhaps. A jailor sees a deal of misery. A doctor's man is in the very midst of murder. A bailiff's an't a lively office nat'rally. Even a tax-gatherer must find his feelings rather worked upon, at times. There's lots of trades in which I should have an opportunity, I think.'

Mr Pinch was so perfectly overwhelmed by these remarks that he could do nothing but occasionally exchange a word or two on some indifferent subject, and cast sidelong glances at the bright face of his odd friend (who seemed quite unconscious of his observation), until they reached a certain corner of the road, close upon the outskirts of the city, when Mark said he would jump down there, if he pleased.

'But bless my soul, Mark,' said Mr Pinch, who in the progress of his observation just then made the discovery that the bosom of his companion's shirt was as much exposed as if it was Midsummer, and was ruffled by every breath of air, 'why don't you wear a waistcoat?'

'What's the good of one, sir?' asked Mark.

'Good of one?' said Mr Pinch. 'Why, to keep your chest warm.'

'Lord love you, sir!' cried Mark, 'you don't know me. My chest don't want no warming. Even if it did, what would no waistcoat bring it to? Inflammation of the lungs, perhaps? Well, there'd be some credit in being jolly, with a inflammation of the lungs.'

As Mr Pinch returned no other answer than such as was conveyed in his breathing very hard, and opening his eyes very wide, and nodding his head very much, Mark thanked him for his ride, and without troubling him to stop, jumped lightly down. And away he fluttered, with his red neckerchief, and his open coat, down a cross-lane; turning back from time to time to nod to Mr Pinch, and looking one of the most careless, good-humoured comical fellows in life. His late companion, with a thoughtful face pursued his way to Salisbury.

Mr Pinch had a shrewd notion that Salisbury was a very desperate sort of place; an exceeding wild and dissipated city; and when he had put up the horse, and given the hostler to understand that he would look in again in the course of an hour or two to see him take his corn, he set forth on a stroll about the streets with a vague and not unpleasant idea that they teemed with all kinds of mystery and bedevilment. To one of his quiet habits this little delusion was greatly assisted by the circumstance of its being market-day, and the thoroughfares about the market-place being filled with carts, horses, donkeys, baskets, waggons, garden-stuff, meat, tripe, pies, poultry and huckster's wares of every opposite description and possible variety of character. Then there were young farmers and old farmers with smock-frocks, brown great-coats, drab great-coats, red worsted comforters, leather-leggings, wonderful shaped hats, hunting-whips, and rough sticks, standing about in groups, or talking noisily together on the tavern steps, or paying and receiving huge amounts of greasy wealth, with the assistance of such bulky pocket-books that when they were in their pockets it was apoplexy to get them out, and when they were out it was spasms to get them in again. Also there were farmers' wives in beaver bonnets and red cloaks, riding shaggy horses purged of all earthly passions, who went soberly into all manner of places without desiring to know why, and who, if required, would have stood stock still in a china shop, with a complete dinner-service at each hoof. Also a great many dogs, who were strongly interested in the state of the market and the bargains of their masters; and a great confusion of tongues, both brute and human.

Mr Pinch regarded everything exposed for sale with great delight, and was particularly struck by the itinerant cutlery, which he considered of the very keenest kind, insomuch that he purchased a pocket knife with seven blades in it, and not a cut (as he afterwards found out) among them. When he had exhausted the market-place, and watched the farmers safe into the market dinner, he went back to look after the horse. Having seen him eat unto his heart's content he issued forth again, to wander round the town and regale himself with the shop windows; previously taking a long stare at the bank, and wondering in what direction underground the caverns might be where they kept the money; and turning to look back at one or two young men who passed him, whom he knew to be articled to solicitors in the town; and who had a sort of fearful interest in his eyes, as jolly dogs who knew a thing or two, and kept it up tremendously.

But the shops. First of all there were the jewellers' shops, with all the treasures of the earth displayed therein, and such large silver watches hanging up in every pane of glass, that if they were anything but first-rate goers it certainly was not because the works could decently complain of want of room. In good sooth they were big enough, and perhaps, as the saying is, ugly enough, to be the most correct of all mechanical performers; in Mr Pinch's eyes, however they were smaller than Geneva ware; and when he saw one very bloated watch announced as a repeater, gifted with the uncommon power of striking every quarter of an hour inside the pocket of its happy owner, he almost wished that he were rich enough to buy it.

But what were even gold and silver, precious stones and clockwork, to the bookshops, whence a pleasant smell of paper freshly pressed came issuing forth, awakening instant recollections of some new grammar had at school, long time ago, with 'Master Pinch, Grove House Academy,' inscribed in faultless writing on the fly-leaf! That whiff of russia leather, too, and all those rows on rows of volumes neatly ranged within—what happiness did they suggest! And in the window were the spick-and-span new works from London, with the title-pages, and sometimes even the first page of the first chapter, laid wide open; tempting unwary men to begin to read the book, and then, in the impossibility of turning over, to rush blindly in, and buy it! Here too were the dainty frontispiece and trim vignette, pointing like handposts on the outskirts of great cities, to the rich stock of incident beyond; and store of books, with many a grave portrait and time-honoured name, whose matter he knew well, and would have given mines to have, in any form, upon the narrow shell beside his bed at Mr Pecksniff's. What a heart-breaking shop it was!

There was another; not quite so bad at first, but still a trying shop; where children's books were sold, and where poor Robinson Crusoe stood alone in his might, with dog and hatchet, goat-skin cap and fowling-pieces; calmly surveying Philip Quarn and the host of imitators round him, and calling Mr Pinch to witness that he, of all the crowd, impressed one solitary footprint on the shore of boyish memory, whereof the tread of generations should not stir the lightest grain of sand. And there too were the Persian tales, with flying chests and students of enchanted books shut up for years in caverns; and there too was Abudah, the merchant, with the terrible little old woman hobbling out of the box in his bedroom; and there the mighty talisman, the rare Arabian Nights, with Cassim Baba, divided by four, like the ghost of a dreadful sum, hanging up, all gory, in the robbers' cave. Which matchless wonders, coming fast on Mr Pinch's mind, did so rub up and chafe that wonderful lamp within him, that when he turned his face towards the busy street, a crowd of phantoms waited on his pleasure, and he lived again, with new delight, the happy days before the Pecksniff era.

He had less interest now in the chemists' shops, with their great glowing bottles (with smaller repositories of brightness in their very stoppers); and in their agreeable compromises between medicine and perfumery, in the shape of toothsome lozenges and virgin honey. Neither had he the least regard (but he never had much) for the tailors', where the newest metropolitan waistcoat patterns were hanging up, which by some strange transformation always looked amazing there, and never appeared at all like the same thing anywhere else. But he stopped to read the playbill at the theatre and surveyed the doorway with a kind of awe, which was not diminished when a sallow gentleman with long dark hair came out, and told a boy to run home to his lodgings and bring down his broadsword. Mr Pinch stood rooted to the spot on hearing this, and might have stood there until dark, but that the old cathedral bell began to ring for vesper service, on which he tore himself away.

Now, the organist's assistant was a friend of Mr Pinch's, which was a good thing, for he too was a very quiet gentle soul, and had been, like Tom, a kind of old-fashioned boy at school, though well liked by the noisy fellow too. As good luck would have it (Tom always said he had great good luck) the assistant chanced that very afternoon to be on duty by himself, with no one in the dusty organ loft but Tom; so while he played, Tom helped him with the stops; and finally, the service being just over, Tom took the organ himself. It was then turning dark, and the yellow light that streamed in through the ancient windows in the choir was mingled with a murky red. As the grand tones resounded through the church, they seemed, to Tom, to find an echo in the depth of every ancient tomb, no less than in the deep mystery of his own heart. Great thoughts and hopes came crowding on his mind as the rich music rolled upon the air and yet among them—something more grave and solemn in their purpose, but the same—were all the images of that day, down to its very lightest recollection of childhood. The feeling that the sounds awakened, in the moment of their existence, seemed to include his whole life and being; and as the surrounding realities of stone and wood and glass grew dimmer in the darkness, these visions grew so much the brighter that Tom might have forgotten the new pupil and the expectant master, and have sat there pouring out his grateful heart till midnight, but for a very earthy old verger insisting on locking up the cathedral forthwith. So he took leave of his friend, with many thanks, groped his way out, as well as he could, into the now lamp-lighted streets, and hurried off to get his dinner.

All the farmers being by this time jogging homewards, there was nobody in the sanded parlour of the tavern where he had left the horse; so he had his little table drawn out close before the fire, and fell to work upon a well-cooked steak and smoking hot potatoes, with a strong appreciation of their excellence, and a very keen sense of enjoyment. Beside him, too, there stood a jug of most stupendous Wiltshire beer; and the effect of the whole was so transcendent, that he was obliged every now and then to lay down his knife and fork, rub his hands, and think about it. By the time the cheese and celery came, Mr Pinch had taken a book out of his pocket, and could afford to trifle with the viands; now eating a little, now drinking a little, now reading a little, and now stopping to wonder what sort of a young man the new pupil would turn out to be. He had passed from this latter theme and was deep in his book again, when the door opened, and another guest came in, bringing with him such a quantity of cold air, that he positively seemed at first to put the fire out.

'Very hard frost to-night, sir,' said the newcomer, courteously acknowledging Mr Pinch's withdrawal of the little table, that he might have place: 'Don't disturb yourself, I beg.'

Though he said this with a vast amount of consideration for Mr Pinch's comfort, he dragged one of the great leather-bottomed chairs to the very centre of the hearth, notwithstanding; and sat down in front of the fire, with a foot on each hob.

'My feet are quite numbed. Ah! Bitter cold to be sure.'

'You have been in the air some considerable time, I dare say?' said Mr Pinch.

'All day. Outside a coach, too.'

'That accounts for his making the room so cool,' thought Mr Pinch. 'Poor fellow! How thoroughly chilled he must be!'

The stranger became thoughtful likewise, and sat for five or ten minutes looking at the fire in silence. At length he rose and divested himself of his shawl and great-coat, which (far different from Mr Pinch's) was a very warm and thick one; but he was not a whit more conversational out of his great-coat than in it, for he sat down again in the same place and attitude, and leaning back in his chair, began to bite his nails. He was young—one-and-twenty, perhaps—and handsome; with a keen dark eye, and a quickness of look and manner which made Tom sensible of a great contrast in his own bearing, and caused him to feel even more shy than usual.

There was a clock in the room, which the stranger often turned to look at. Tom made frequent reference to it also; partly from a nervous sympathy with its taciturn companion; and partly because the new pupil was to inquire for him at half after six, and the hands were getting on towards that hour. Whenever the stranger caught him looking at this clock, a kind of confusion came upon Tom as if he had been found out in something; and it was a perception of his uneasiness which caused the younger man to say, perhaps, with a smile:

'We both appear to be rather particular about the time. The fact is, I have an engagement to meet a gentleman here.'

'So have I,' said Mr Pinch.

'At half-past six,' said the stranger.

'At half-past six,' said Tom in the very same breath; whereupon the other looked at him with some surprise.

'The young gentleman, I expect,' remarked Tom, timidly, 'was to inquire at that time for a person by the name of Pinch.'

'Dear me!' cried the other, jumping up. 'And I have been keeping the fire from you all this while! I had no idea you were Mr Pinch. I am the Mr Martin for whom you were to inquire. Pray excuse me. How do you do? Oh, do draw nearer, pray!'

'Thank you,' said Tom, 'thank you. I am not at all cold, and you are; and we have a cold ride before us. Well, if you wish it, I will. I—I am very glad,' said Tom, smiling with an embarrassed frankness peculiarly his, and which was as plainly a confession of his own imperfections, and an appeal to the kindness of the person he addressed, as if he had drawn one up in simple language and committed it to paper: 'I am very glad indeed that you turn out to be the party I expected. I was thinking, but a minute ago, that I could wish him to be like you.'

'I am very glad to hear it,' returned Martin, shaking hands with him again; 'for I assure you, I was thinking there could be no such luck as Mr Pinch's turning out like you.'

'No, really!' said Tom, with great pleasure. 'Are you serious?'

'Upon my word I am,' replied his new acquaintance. 'You and I will get on excellently well, I know; which it's no small relief to me to feel, for to tell you the truth, I am not at all the sort of fellow who could get on with everybody, and that's the point on which I had the greatest doubts. But they're quite relieved now.—Do me the favour to ring the bell, will you?'

Mr Pinch rose, and complied with great alacrity—the handle hung just over Martin's head, as he warmed himself—and listened with a smiling face to what his friend went on to say. It was:

'If you like punch, you'll allow me to order a glass apiece, as hot as it can be made, that we may usher in our friendship in a becoming manner. To let you into a secret, Mr Pinch, I never was so much in want of something warm and cheering in my life; but I didn't like to run the chance of being found drinking it, without knowing what kind of person you were; for first impressions, you know, often go a long way, and last a long time.'

Mr Pinch assented, and the punch was ordered. In due course it came; hot and strong. After drinking to each other in the steaming mixture, they became quite confidential.

'I'm a sort of relation of Pecksniff's, you know,' said the young man.

'Indeed!' cried Mr Pinch.

'Yes. My grandfather is his cousin, so he's kith and kin to me, somehow, if you can make that out. I can't.'

'Then Martin is your Christian name?' said Mr Pinch, thoughtfully. 'Oh!'

'Of course it is,' returned his friend: 'I wish it was my surname for my own is not a very pretty one, and it takes a long time to sign Chuzzlewit is my name.'

'Dear me!' cried Mr Pinch, with an involuntary start.

'You're not surprised at my having two names, I suppose?' returned the other, setting his glass to his lips. 'Most people have.'

'Oh, no,' said Mr Pinch, 'not at all. Oh dear no! Well!' And then remembering that Mr Pecksniff had privately cautioned him to say nothing in reference to the old gentleman of the same name who had lodged at the Dragon, but to reserve all mention of that person for him, he had no better means of hiding his confusion than by raising his own glass to his mouth. They looked at each other out of their respective tumblers for a few seconds, and then put them down empty.

'I told them in the stable to be ready for us ten minutes ago,' said Mr Pinch, glancing at the clock again. 'Shall we go?'

'If you please,' returned the other.

'Would you like to drive?' said Mr Pinch; his whole face beaming with a consciousness of the splendour of his offer. 'You shall, if you wish.'

'Why, that depends, Mr Pinch,' said Martin, laughing, 'upon what sort of a horse you have. Because if he's a bad one, I would rather keep my hands warm by holding them comfortably in my greatcoat pockets.'

He appeared to think this such a good joke, that Mr Pinch was quite sure it must be a capital one. Accordingly, he laughed too, and was fully persuaded that he enjoyed it very much. Then he settled his bill, and Mr Chuzzlewit paid for the punch; and having wrapped themselves up, to the extent of their respective means, they went out together to the front door, where Mr Pecksniff's property stopped the way.

'I won't drive, thank you, Mr Pinch,' said Martin, getting into the sitter's place. 'By the bye, there's a box of mine. Can we manage to take it?'

'Oh, certainly,' said Tom. 'Put it in, Dick, anywhere!'

It was not precisely of that convenient size which would admit of its being squeezed into any odd corner, but Dick the hostler got it in somehow, and Mr Chuzzlewit helped him. It was all on Mr Pinch's side, and Mr Chuzzlewit said he was very much afraid it would encumber him; to which Tom said, 'Not at all;' though it forced him into such an awkward position, that he had much ado to see anything but his own knees. But it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good; and the wisdom of the saying was verified in this instance; for the cold air came from Mr Pinch's side of the carriage, and by interposing a perfect wall of box and man between it and the new pupil, he shielded that young gentleman effectually; which was a great comfort.

It was a clear evening, with a bright moon. The whole landscape was silvered by its light and by the hoar-frost; and everything looked exquisitely beautiful. At first, the great serenity and peace through which they travelled, disposed them both to silence; but in a very short time the punch within them and the healthful air without, made them loquacious, and they talked incessantly. When they were halfway home, and stopped to give the horse some water, Martin (who was very generous with his money) ordered another glass of punch, which they drank between them, and which had not the effect of making them less conversational than before. Their principal topic of discourse was naturally Mr Pecksniff and his family; of whom, and of the great obligations they had heaped upon him, Tom Pinch, with the tears standing in his eyes, drew such a picture as would have inclined any one of common feeling almost to revere them; and of which Mr Pecksniff had not the slightest foresight or preconceived idea, or he certainly (being very humble) would not have sent Tom Pinch to bring the pupil home.

In this way they went on, and on, and on—in the language of the story-books—until at last the village lights appeared before them, and the church spire cast a long reflection on the graveyard grass; as if it were a dial (alas, the truest in the world!) marking, whatever light shone out of Heaven, the flight of days and weeks and years, by some new shadow on that solemn ground.

'A pretty church!' said Martin, observing that his companion slackened the slack pace of the horse, as they approached.

'Is it not?' cried Tom, with great pride. 'There's the sweetest little organ there you ever heard. I play it for them.'

'Indeed?' said Martin. 'It is hardly worth the trouble, I should think. What do you get for that, now?'

'Nothing,' answered Tom.

'Well,' returned his friend, 'you ARE a very strange fellow!'

To which remark there succeeded a brief silence.

'When I say nothing,' observed Mr Pinch, cheerfully, 'I am wrong, and don't say what I mean, because I get a great deal of pleasure from it, and the means of passing some of the happiest hours I know. It led to something else the other day; but you will not care to hear about that I dare say?'

'Oh yes I shall. What?'

'It led to my seeing,' said Tom, in a lower voice, 'one of the loveliest and most beautiful faces you can possibly picture to yourself.'

'And yet I am able to picture a beautiful one,' said his friend, thoughtfully, 'or should be, if I have any memory.'

'She came' said Tom, laying his hand upon the other's arm, 'for the first time very early in the morning, when it was hardly light; and when I saw her, over my shoulder, standing just within the porch, I turned quite cold, almost believing her to be a spirit. A moment's reflection got the better of that, of course, and fortunately it came to my relief so soon, that I didn't leave off playing.'

'Why fortunately?'

'Why? Because she stood there, listening. I had my spectacles on, and saw her through the chinks in the curtains as plainly as I see you; and she was beautiful. After a while she glided off, and I continued to play until she was out of hearing.'

'Why did you do that?'

'Don't you see?' responded Tom. 'Because she might suppose I hadn't seen her; and might return.'

'And did she?'

'Certainly she did. Next morning, and next evening too; but always when there were no people about, and always alone. I rose earlier and sat there later, that when she came, she might find the church door open, and the organ playing, and might not be disappointed. She strolled that way for some days, and always stayed to listen. But she is gone now, and of all unlikely things in this wide world, it is perhaps the most improbable that I shall ever look upon her face again.'

'You don't know anything more about her?'

'No.'

'And you never followed her when she went away?'

'Why should I distress her by doing that?' said Tom Pinch. 'Is it likely that she wanted my company? She came to hear the organ, not to see me;

and would you have had me scare her from a place she seemed to grow quite fond of? Now, Heaven bless her!' cried Tom, 'to have given her but a minute's pleasure every day, I would have gone on playing the organ at those times until I was an old man; quite contented if she sometimes thought of a poor fellow like me, as a part of the music; and more than recompensed if she ever mixed me up with anything she liked as well as she liked that!'

The new pupil was clearly very much amazed by Mr Pinch's weakness, and would probably have told him so, and given him some good advice, but for their opportune arrival at Mr Pecksniff's door; the front door this time, on account of the occasion being one of ceremony and rejoicing. The same man was in waiting for the horse who had been adjured by Mr Pinch in the morning not to yield to his rabid desire to start; and after delivering the animal into his charge, and beseeching Mr Chuzzlewit in a whisper never to reveal a syllable of what he had just told him in the fullness of his heart, Tom led the pupil in, for instant presentation.

Mr Pecksniff had clearly not expected them for hours to come; for he was surrounded by open books, and was glancing from volume to volume, with a black lead-pencil in his mouth, and a pair of compasses in his hand, at a vast number of mathematical diagrams, of such extraordinary shapes that they looked like designs for fireworks. Neither had Miss Charity expected them, for she was busied, with a capacious wicker basket before her, in making impracticable nightcaps for the poor. Neither had Miss Mercy expected them, for she was sitting upon her stool, tying on the—oh good gracious!—the petticoat of a large doll that she was dressing for a neighbour's child—really, quite a grown-up doll, which made it more confusing—and had its little bonnet dangling by the ribbon from one of her fair curls, to which she had fastened it lest it should be lost or sat upon. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to conceive a family so thoroughly taken by surprise as the Pecksniffs were, on this occasion.

Bless my life!' said Mr Pecksniff, looking up, and gradually exchanging his abstracted face for one of joyful recognition. 'Here already! Martin, my dear boy, I am delighted to welcome you to my poor house!'

With this kind greeting, Mr Pecksniff fairly took him to his arms, and patted him several times upon the back with his right hand the while, as if to express that his feelings during the embrace were too much for utterance.

'But here,' he said, recovering, 'are my daughters, Martin; my two only children, whom (if you ever saw them) you have not beheld—ah, these sad family divisions!—since you were infants together. Nay, my dears, why blush at being detected in your everyday pursuits? We had prepared to give you the reception of a visitor, Martin, in our little room of state,' said Mr Pecksniff, smiling, 'but I like this better, I like this better!'

Oh blessed star of Innocence, wherever you may be, how did you glitter in your home of ether, when the two Miss Pecksniffs put forth each her lily hand, and gave the same, with mantling cheeks, to Martin! How did you twinkle, as if fluttering with sympathy, when Mercy, reminded of the bonnet in her hair, hid her fair face and turned her head aside; the while her gentle sister plucked it out, and smote her with a sister's soft reproof, upon her buxom shoulder!

'And how,' said Mr Pecksniff, turning round after the contemplation of these passages, and taking Mr Pinch in a friendly manner by the elbow, 'how has our friend used you, Martin?'

'Very well indeed, sir. We are on the best terms, I assure you.'

'Old Tom Pinch!' said Mr Pecksniff, looking on him with affectionate sadness. 'Ah! It seems but yesterday that Thomas was a boy fresh from a scholastic course. Yet years have passed, I think, since Thomas Pinch and I first walked the world together!'

Mr Pinch could say nothing. He was too much moved. But he pressed his master's hand, and tried to thank him.

'And Thomas Pinch and I,' said Mr Pecksniff, in a deeper voice, 'will walk it yet, in mutual faithfulness and friendship! And if it comes to pass that either of us be run over in any of those busy crossings which divide the streets of life, the other will convey him to the hospital in Hope, and sit beside his bed in Bounty!'

'Well, well, well!' he added in a happier tone, as he shook Mr Pinch's elbow hard. 'No more of this! Martin, my dear friend, that you may be at home within these walls, let me show you how we live, and where. Come!'

With that he took up a lighted candle, and, attended by his young relative, prepared to leave the room. At the door, he stopped.

'You'll bear us company, Tom Pinch?'

Aye, cheerfully, though it had been to death, would Tom have followed him; glad to lay down his life for such a man!

'This,' said Mr Pecksniff, opening the door of an opposite parlour, 'is the little room of state, I mentioned to you. My girls have pride in it, Martin! This,' opening another door, 'is the little chamber in which my works (slight things at best) have been concocted. Portrait of myself by Spiller. Bust by Spoker. The latter is considered a good likeness. I seem to recognize something about the left-hand corner of the nose, myself.'

Martin thought it was very like, but scarcely intellectual enough. Mr Pecksniff observed that the same fault had been found with it before. It was remarkable it should have struck his young relation too. He was glad to see he had an eye for art.

'Various books you observe,' said Mr Pecksniff, waving his hand towards the wall, 'connected with our pursuit. I have scribbled myself, but have not yet published. Be careful how you come upstairs. This,' opening another door, 'is my chamber. I read here when the family suppose I have retired to rest. Sometimes I injure my health rather more than I can quite justify to myself, by doing so; but art is long and time is short. Every facility you see for jotting down crude notions, even here.'

These latter words were explained by his pointing to a small round table on which were a lamp, divers sheets of paper, a piece of India rubber, and a case of instruments; all put ready, in case an architectural idea should come into Mr Pecksniff's head in the night; in which event he would instantly leap out of bed, and fix it for ever.

Mr Pecksniff opened another door on the same floor, and shut it again, all at once, as if it were a Blue Chamber. But before he had well done so, he looked smilingly round, and said, 'Why not?'

Martin couldn't say why not, because he didn't know anything at all about it. So Mr Pecksniff answered himself, by throwing open the door, and saying:

'My daughters' room. A poor first-floor to us, but a bower to them. Very neat. Very airy. Plants you observe; hyacinths; books again; birds.' These birds, by the bye, comprised, in all, one staggering old sparrow without a tail, which had been borrowed expressly from the kitchen. 'Such trifles as girls love are here. Nothing more. Those who seek heartless splendour, would seek here in vain.'

With that he led them to the floor above.

'This,' said Mr Pecksniff, throwing wide the door of the memorable two-pair front; 'is a room where some talent has been developed I believe. This is a room in which an idea for a steeple occurred to me that I may one day give to the world. We work here, my dear Martin. Some architects have been bred in this room; a few, I think, Mr Pinch?'

Tom fully assented; and, what is more, fully believed it.

'You see,' said Mr Pecksniff, passing the candle rapidly from roll to roll of paper, 'some traces of our doings here. Salisbury Cathedral from the north. From the south. From the east. From the west. From the south-east. From the nor'west. A bridge. An almshouse. A jail. A church. A powder-magazine. A wine-cellar. A portico. A summer-house. An ice-house. Plans, elevations, sections, every kind of thing. And this,' he added, having by this time reached another large chamber on the same story, with four little beds in it, 'this is your room, of which Mr Pinch here is the quiet sharer. A southern aspect; a charming prospect; Mr Pinch's little library, you perceive; everything agreeable and appropriate. If there is any additional comfort you would desire to have here at anytime, pray mention it. Even to strangers, far less to you, my dear Martin, there is no restriction on that point.'

It was undoubtedly true, and may be stated in corroboration of Mr Pecksniff, that any pupil had the most liberal permission to mention anything in this way that suggested itself to his fancy. Some young gentlemen had gone on mentioning the very same thing for five years without ever being stopped.

'The domestic assistants,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'sleep above; and that is all.' After which, and listening complacently as he went, to the encomiums passed by his young friend on the arrangements generally, he led the way to the parlour again.

Here a great change had taken place; for festive preparations on a rather extensive scale were already completed, and the two Miss Pecksniffs were awaiting their return with hospitable looks. There were two bottles of currant wine, white and red; a dish of sandwiches (very long and very slim); another of apples; another of captain's biscuits (which are always a moist and jovial sort of viand); a plate of oranges cut up small and gritty; with powdered sugar, and a highly geological home-made cake. The magnitude of these preparations quite took away Tom Pinch's breath; for though the new pupils were usually let down softly, as one may say, particularly in the wine department, which had so many stages of declension, that sometimes a young gentleman was a whole fortnight in getting to the pump; still this was a banquet; a sort of Lord Mayor's feast in private life; a something to think of, and hold on by, afterwards.

To this entertainment, which apart from its own intrinsic merits, had the additional choice quality, that it was in strict keeping with the night, being both light and cool, Mr Pecksniff besought the company to do full justice.

'Martin,' he said, 'will seat himself between you two, my dears, and Mr Pinch will come by me. Let us drink to our new inmate, and may we be happy together! Martin, my dear friend, my love to you! Mr Pinch, if you spare the bottle we shall quarrel.'

And trying (in his regard for the feelings of the rest) to look as if the wine were not acid and didn't make him wink, Mr Pecksniff did honour to his own toast.

'This,' he said, in allusion to the party, not the wine, 'is a mingling that repays one for much disappointment and vexation. Let us be merry.' Here he took a captain's biscuit. 'It is a poor heart that never rejoices; and our hearts are not poor. No!'

With such stimulants to merriment did he beguile the time, and do the honours of the table; while Mr Pinch, perhaps to assure himself that what he saw and heard was holiday reality, and not a charming dream, ate of everything, and in particular disposed of the slim sandwiches to a surprising extent. Nor was he stinted in his draughts of wine; but on the contrary, remembering Mr Pecksniff's speech, attacked the bottle with such vigour, that every time he filled his glass anew, Miss Charity, despite her amiable resolves, could not repress a fixed and stony glare, as if her eyes had rested on a ghost. Mr Pecksniff also became thoughtful at those moments, not to say dejected; but as he knew the vintage, it is very likely he may have been speculating on the probable condition of Mr Pinch upon the morrow, and discussing within himself the best remedies for colic.

Martin and the young ladies were excellent friends already, and compared recollections of their childish days, to their mutual liveliness and entertainment. Miss Mercy laughed immensely at everything that was said; and sometimes, after glancing at the happy face of Mr Pinch, was seized with such fits of mirth as brought her to the very confines of hysterics. But for these bursts of gaiety, her sister, in her better sense, reproved her; observing, in an angry whisper, that it was far from being a theme for jest; and that she had no patience with the creature; though it generally ended in her laughing too—but much more moderately—and saying that indeed it was a little too ridiculous and intolerable to be serious about.

At length it became high time to remember the first clause of that great discovery made by the ancient philosopher, for securing health, riches, and wisdom; the infallibility of which has been for generations verified by the enormous fortunes constantly amassed by chimney-sweepers and other persons who get up early and go to bed betimes. The young ladies accordingly rose, and having taken leave of Mr Chuzzlewit with much sweetness, and of their father with much duty and of Mr Pinch with much condescension, retired to their bower. Mr Pecksniff insisted on accompanying his young friend upstairs for personal superintendence of his comforts; and taking him by the arm, conducted him once more to his bedroom, followed by Mr Pinch, who bore the light.

'Mr Pinch,' said Pecksniff, seating himself with folded arms on one of the spare beds. 'I don't see any snuffers in that candlestick. Will you oblige me by going down, and asking for a pair?'

Mr Pinch, only too happy to be useful, went off directly.

'You will excuse Thomas Pinch's want of polish, Martin,' said Mr Pecksniff, with a smile of patronage and pity, as soon as he had left the room. 'He means well.'

'He is a very good fellow, sir.'

'Oh, yes,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Yes. Thomas Pinch means well. He is very grateful. I have never regretted having befriended Thomas Pinch.'

'I should think you never would, sir.'

'No,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'No. I hope not. Poor fellow, he is always disposed to do his best; but he is not gifted. You will make him useful to you, Martin, if you please. If Thomas has a fault, it is that he is sometimes a little apt to forget his position. But that is soon checked. Worthy soul! You will find him easy to manage. Good night!'

'Good night, sir.'

By this time Mr Pinch had returned with the snuffers.

'And good night to YOU, Mr Pinch,' said Pecksniff. 'And sound sleep to you both. Bless you! Bless you!'

Invoking this benediction on the heads of his young friends with great fervour, he withdrew to his own room; while they, being tired, soon fell asleep. If Martin dreamed at all, some clue to the matter of his visions may possibly be gathered from the after-pages of this history. Those of Thomas

Pinch were all of holidays, church organs, and seraphic Pecksniffs. It was some time before Mr Pecksniff dreamed at all, or even sought his pillow, as he sat for full two hours before the fire in his own chamber, looking at the coals and thinking deeply. But he, too, slept and dreamed at last. Thus in the quiet hours of the night, one house shuts in as many incoherent and incongruous fancies as a madman's head.

CHAPTER SIX

COMPRISES, AMONG OTHER IMPORTANT MATTERS, PECKSNIFFIAN AND ARCHITECTURAL, AND EXACT RELATION OF THE PROGRESS MADE BY MR PINCH IN THE CONFIDENCE AND FRIENDSHIP OF THE NEW PUPIL

It was morning; and the beautiful Aurora, of whom so much hath been written, said, and sung, did, with her rosy fingers, nip and tweak Miss Pecksniff's nose. It was the frolicsome custom of the Goddess, in her intercourse with the fair Cherry, so to do; or in more prosaic phrase, the tip of that feature in the sweet girl's countenance was always very red at breakfast-time. For the most part, indeed, it wore, at that season of the day, a scraped and frosty look, as if it had been rasped; while a similar phenomenon developed itself in her humour, which was then observed to be of a sharp and acid quality, as though an extra lemon (figuratively speaking) had been squeezed into the nectar of her disposition, and had rather damaged its flavour.

This additional pungency on the part of the fair young creature led, on ordinary occasions, to such slight consequences as the copious dilution of Mr Pinch's tea, or to his coming off uncommonly short in respect of butter, or to other the like results. But on the morning after the Installation Banquet, she suffered him to wander to and fro among the eatables and drinkables, a perfectly free and unchecked man; so utterly to Mr Pinch's wonder and confusion, that like the wretched captive who recovered his liberty in his old age, he could make but little use of his enlargement, and fell into a strange kind of flutter for want of some kind hand to scrape his bread, and cut him off in the article of sugar with a lump, and pay him those other little attentions to which he was accustomed. There was something almost awful, too, about the self-possession of the new pupil; who 'troubled' Mr Pecksniff for the loaf, and helped himself to a rasher of that gentleman's own particular and private bacon, with all the coolness in life. He even seemed to think that he was doing quite a regular thing, and to expect that Mr Pinch would follow his example, since he took occasion to observe of that young man 'that he didn't get on'; a speech of so tremendous a character, that Tom cast down his eyes involuntarily, and felt as if he himself had committed some horrible deed and heinous breach of Mr Pecksniff's confidence. Indeed, the agony of having such an indiscreet remark addressed to him before the assembled family, was breakfast enough in itself, and would, without any other matter of reflection, have settled Mr Pinch's business and quenched his appetite, for one meal, though he had been never so hungry.

The young ladies, however, and Mr Pecksniff likewise, remained in the very best of spirits in spite of these severe trials, though with something of a mysterious understanding among themselves. When the meal was nearly over, Mr Pecksniff smilingly explained the cause of their common satisfaction.

'It is not often,' he said, 'Martin, that my daughters and I desert our quiet home to pursue the giddy round of pleasures that revolves abroad. But we think of doing so to-day.'

'Indeed, sir!' cried the new pupil.

'Yes,' said Mr Pecksniff, tapping his left hand with a letter which he held in his right. 'I have a summons here to repair to London; on professional business, my dear Martin; strictly on professional business; and I promised my girls, long ago, that whenever that happened again, they should accompany me. We shall go forth to-night by the heavy coach—like the dove of old, my dear Martin—and it will be a week before we again deposit our olive-branches in the passage. When I say olive-branches,' observed Mr Pecksniff, in explanation, 'I mean, our unpretending luggage.'

'I hope the young ladies will enjoy their trip,' said Martin.

'Oh! that I'm sure we shall!' cried Mercy, clapping her hands. 'Good gracious, Cherry, my darling, the idea of London!'

'Ardent child!' said Mr Pecksniff, gazing on her in a dreamy way. 'And yet there is a melancholy sweetness in these youthful hopes! It is pleasant to know that they never can be realised. I remember thinking once myself, in the days of my childhood, that pickled onions grew on trees, and that every elephant was born with an impregnable castle on his back. I have not found the fact to be so; far from it; and yet those visions have comforted me under circumstances of trial. Even when I have had the anguish of discovering that I have nourished in my breast on ostrich, and not a human pupil—even in that hour of agony, they have soothed me.'

At this dread allusion to John Westlock, Mr Pinch precipitately choked in his tea; for he had that very morning received a letter from him, as Mr

Pecksniff very well knew.

'You will take care, my dear Martin,' said Mr Pecksniff, resuming his former cheerfulness, 'that the house does not run away in our absence. We leave you in charge of everything. There is no mystery; all is free and open. Unlike the young man in the Eastern tale—who is described as a one-eyed almanac, if I am not mistaken, Mr Pinch?—'

'A one-eyed calender, I think, sir,' faltered Tom.

'They are pretty nearly the same thing, I believe,' said Mr Pecksniff, smiling compassionately; 'or they used to be in my time. Unlike that young man, my dear Martin, you are forbidden to enter no corner of this house; but are requested to make yourself perfectly at home in every part of it. You will be jovial, my dear Martin, and will kill the fatted calf if you please!'

There was not the least objection, doubtless, to the young man's slaughtering and appropriating to his own use any calf, fat or lean, that he might happen to find upon the premises; but as no such animal chanced at that time to be grazing on Mr Pecksniff's estate, this request must be considered rather as a polite compliment that a substantial hospitality. It was the finishing ornament of the conversation; for when he had delivered it, Mr Pecksniff rose and led the way to that hotbed of architectural genius, the two-pair front.

'Let me see,' he said, searching among the papers, 'how you can best employ yourself, Martin, while I am absent. Suppose you were to give me your idea of a monument to a Lord Mayor of London; or a tomb for a sheriff; or your notion of a cow-house to be erected in a nobleman's park. Do you know, now,' said Mr Pecksniff, folding his hands, and looking at his young relation with an air of pensive interest, 'that I should very much like to see your notion of a cow-house?'

But Martin by no means appeared to relish this suggestion.

'A pump,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'is very chaste practice. I have found that a lamp post is calculated to refine the mind and give it a classical tendency. An ornamental turnpike has a remarkable effect upon the imagination. What do you say to beginning with an ornamental turnpike?'

'Whatever Mr Pecksniff pleased,' said Martin, doubtfully.

'Stay,' said that gentleman. 'Come! as you're ambitious, and are a very neat draughtsman, you shall—ha ha!—you shall try your hand on these proposals for a grammar-school; regulating your plan, of course, by the printed particulars. Upon my word, now,' said Mr Pecksniff, merrily, 'I shall be very curious to see what you make of the grammar-school. Who knows but a young man of your taste might hit upon something, impracticable and unlikely in itself, but which I could put into shape? For it really is, my dear Martin, it really is in the finishing touches alone, that great experience and long study in these matters tell. Ha, ha, ha! Now it really will be,' continued Mr Pecksniff, clapping his young friend on the back in his droll humour, 'an amusement to me, to see what you make of the grammar-school.'

Martin readily undertook this task, and Mr Pecksniff forthwith proceeded to entrust him with the materials necessary for its execution; dwelling meanwhile on the magical effect of a few finishing touches from the hand of a master; which, indeed, as some people said (and these were the old enemies again!) was unquestionably very surprising, and almost miraculous; as there were cases on record in which the masterly introduction of an additional back window, or a kitchen door, or half-a-dozen steps, or even a water spout, had made the design of a pupil Mr Pecksniff's own work, and had brought substantial rewards into that gentleman's pocket. But such is the magic of genius, which changes all it handles into gold!

'When your mind requires to be refreshed by change of occupation,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'Thomas Pinch will instruct you in the art of surveying the back garden, or in ascertaining the dead level of the road between this house and the finger-post, or in any other practical and pleasing pursuit. There are a cart-load of loose bricks, and a score or two of old flower-pots, in the back yard. If you could pile them up my dear Martin, into any form which would remind me on my return say of St. Peter's at Rome, or the Mosque of St. Sophia at Constantinople, it would be at once improving to you and agreeable to my feelings. And now,' said Mr Pecksniff, in conclusion, 'to drop, for the present, our professional relations and advert to private matters, I shall be glad to talk with you in my own room, while I pack up my portmanteau.'

Martin attended him; and they remained in secret conference together for an hour or more; leaving Tom Pinch alone. When the young man returned, he was very taciturn and dull, in which state he remained all day; so that Tom, after trying him once or twice with indifferent conversation, felt a delicacy in obtruding himself upon his thoughts, and said no more.

He would not have had leisure to say much, had his new friend been ever so loquacious; for first of all Mr Pecksniff called him down to stand upon the top of his portmanteau and represent ancient statues there, until such time as it would consent to be locked; and then Miss Charity called him to come and cord her trunk; and then Miss Mercy sent for him to come and mend her box; and then he wrote the fullest possible cards for all the luggage; and then he volunteered to carry it all downstairs; and after that to see it safely carried on a couple of barrows to the old finger-post at the end of the lane; and then to mind it till the coach came up. In short, his day's work would have been a pretty heavy one for a porter, but his thorough good-will made nothing of it; and as he sat upon the luggage at last, waiting for the Pecksniffs, escorted by the new pupil, to come down the lane, his heart was light with the hope of having pleased his benefactor.

'I was almost afraid,' said Tom, taking a letter from his pocket and wiping his face, for he was hot with bustling about though it was a cold day, 'that I shouldn't have had time to write it, and that would have been a thousand pities; postage from such a distance being a serious consideration, when one's not rich. She will be glad to see my hand, poor girl, and to hear that Pecksniff is as kind as ever. I would have asked John Westlock to call and see her, and tell her all about me by word of mouth, but I was afraid he might speak against Pecksniff to her, and make her uneasy. Besides, they are particular people where she is, and it might have rendered her situation uncomfortable if she had had a visit from a young man like John. Poor Ruth!'

Tom Pinch seemed a little disposed to be melancholy for half a minute or so, but he found comfort very soon, and pursued his ruminations thus:

'I'm a nice man, I don't think, as John used to say (John was a kind, merry-hearted fellow; I wish he had liked Pecksniff better), to be feeling low, on account of the distance between us, when I ought to be thinking, instead, of my extraordinary good luck in having ever got here. I must have been born with a silver spoon in my mouth, I am sure, to have ever come across Pecksniff. And here have I fallen again into my usual good luck with the new pupil! Such an affable, generous, free fellow, as he is, I never saw. Why, we were companions directly! and he a relation of Pecksniff's too, and a clever, dashing youth who might cut his way through the world as if it were a cheese! Here he comes while the words are on my lips' said Tom; 'walking down the lane as if the lane belonged to him.'

In truth, the new pupil, not at all disconcerted by the honour of having Miss Mercy Pecksniff on his arm, or by the affectionate adieux of that young lady, approached as Mr Pinch spoke, followed by Miss Charity and Mr Pecksniff. As the coach appeared at the same moment, Tom lost no time in entreating the gentleman last mentioned, to undertake the delivery of his letter.

'Oh!' said Mr Pecksniff, glancing at the superscription. 'For your sister, Thomas. Yes, oh yes, it shall be delivered, Mr Pinch. Make your mind easy upon that score. She shall certainly have it, Mr Pinch.'

He made the promise with so much condescension and patronage, that Tom felt he had asked a great deal (this had not occurred to his mind before), and thanked him earnestly. The Miss Pecksniffs, according to a custom they had, were amused beyond description at the mention of Mr Pinch's sister. Oh the fright! The bare idea of a Miss Pinch! Good heavens!

Tom was greatly pleased to see them so merry, for he took it as a token of their favour, and good-humoured regard. Therefore he laughed too and rubbed his hands and wished them a pleasant journey and safe return, and was quite brisk. Even when the coach had rolled away with the olive-branches in the boot and the family of doves inside, he stood waving his hand and bowing; so much gratified by the unusually courteous demeanour of the young ladies, that he was quite regardless, for the moment, of Martin Chuzzlewit, who stood leaning thoughtfully against the finger-post, and who after disposing of his fair charge had hardly lifted his eyes from the ground.

The perfect silence which ensued upon the bustle and departure of the coach, together with the sharp air of the wintry afternoon, roused them both at the same time. They turned, as by mutual consent, and moved off arm-in-arm.

'How melancholy you are!' said Tom; 'what is the matter?'

'Nothing worth speaking of,' said Martin. 'Very little more than was the matter yesterday, and much more, I hope, than will be the matter to-morrow. I'm out of spirits, Pinch.'

'Well,' cried Tom, 'now do you know I am in capital spirits today, and scarcely ever felt more disposed to be good company. It was a very kind thing in your predecessor, John, to write to me, was it not?'

'Why, yes,' said Martin carelessly; 'I should have thought he would have had enough to do to enjoy himself, without thinking of you, Pinch.'

'Just what I felt to be so very likely,' Tom rejoined; 'but no, he keeps his word, and says, "My dear Pinch, I often think of you," and all sorts of kind and considerate things of that description.'

'He must be a devilish good-natured fellow,' said Martin, somewhat peevishly: 'because he can't mean that, you know.'

'I don't suppose he can, eh?' said Tom, looking wistfully in his companion's face. 'He says so to please me, you think?'

'Why, is it likely,' rejoined Martin, with greater earnestness, 'that a young man newly escaped from this kennel of a place, and fresh to all the delights of being his own master in London, can have much leisure or inclination to think favourably of anything or anybody he has left behind him here? I put it to you, Pinch, is it natural?'

After a short reflection, Mr Pinch replied, in a more subdued tone, that to be sure it was unreasonable to expect any such thing, and that he had no doubt Martin knew best.

'Of course I know best,' Martin observed.

'Yes, I feel that,' said Mr Pinch mildly. 'I said so.' And when he had made this rejoinder, they fell into a blank silence again, which lasted until they reached home; by which time it was dark.

Now, Miss Charity Pecksniff, in consideration of the inconvenience of carrying them with her in the coach, and the impossibility of preserving them by artificial means until the family's return, had set forth, in a couple of plates, the fragments of yesterday's feast. In virtue of which liberal arrangement, they had the happiness to find awaiting them in the parlour two chaotic heaps of the remains of last night's pleasure, consisting of certain filmy bits of oranges, some mummied sandwiches, various disrupted masses of the geological cake, and several entire captain's biscuits. That choice liquor in which to steep these dainties might not be wanting, the remains of the two bottles of currant wine had been poured together and corked with a curl-paper; so that every material was at hand for making quite a heavy night of it.

Martin Chuzzlewit beheld these roystering preparations with infinite contempt, and stirring the fire into a blaze (to the great destruction of Mr Pecksniff's coals), sat moodily down before it, in the most comfortable chair he could find. That he might the better squeeze himself into the small corner that was left for him, Mr Pinch took up his position on Miss Mercy Pecksniff's stool, and setting his glass down upon the hearthrug and putting his plate upon his knees, began to enjoy himself.

If Diogenes coming to life again could have rolled himself, tub and all, into Mr Pecksniff's parlour and could have seen Tom Pinch as he sat on Mercy Pecksniff's stool with his plate and glass before him he could not have faced it out, though in his surliest mood, but must have smiled good-temperedly. The perfect and entire satisfaction of Tom; his surpassing appreciation of the husky sandwiches, which crumbled in his mouth like saw-dust; the unspeakable relish with which he swallowed the thin wine by drops, and smacked his lips, as though it were so rich and generous that to lose an atom of its fruity flavour were a sin; the look with which he paused sometimes, with his glass in his hand, proposing silent toasts to himself; and the anxious shade that came upon his contented face when, after wandering round the room, exulting in its uninvaded snugness, his glance encountered the dull brow of his companion; no cynic in the world, though in his hatred of its men a very griffin, could have withstood these things in Thomas Pinch.

Some men would have slapped him on the back, and pledged him in a bumper of the currant wine, though it had been the sharpest vinegar—aye, and liked its flavour too; some would have seized him by his honest hand, and thanked him for the lesson that his simple nature taught them. Some would have laughed with, and others would have laughed at him; of which last class was Martin Chuzzlewit, who, unable to restrain himself, at last laughed loud and long.

'That's right,' said Tom, nodding approvingly. 'Cheer up! That's capital!'

At which encouragement young Martin laughed again; and said, as soon as he had breath and gravity enough:

'I never saw such a fellow as you are, Pinch.'

'Didn't you though?' said Tom. 'Well, it's very likely you do find me strange, because I have hardly seen anything of the world, and you have seen a good deal I dare say?'

'Pretty well for my time of life,' rejoined Martin, drawing his chair still nearer to the fire, and spreading his feet out on the fender. 'Deuce take it, I must talk openly to somebody. I'll talk openly to you, Pinch.'

'Do!' said Tom. 'I shall take it as being very friendly of you,'

'I'm not in your way, am I?' inquired Martin, glancing down at Mr Pinch, who was by this time looking at the fire over his leg.

'Not at all!' cried Tom.

'You must know then, to make short of a long story,' said Martin, beginning with a kind of effort, as if the revelation were not agreeable to him; 'that I have been bred up from childhood with great expectations, and have always been taught to believe that I should be, one day, very rich. So I should have been, but for certain brief reasons which I am going to tell you, and which have led to my being disinherited.'

'By your father?' inquired Mr Pinch, with open eyes.

'By my grandfather. I have had no parents these many years. Scarcely within my remembrance.'

'Neither have I,' said Tom, touching the young man's hand with his own and timidly withdrawing it again. 'Dear me!'

'Why, as to that, you know, Pinch,' pursued the other, stirring the fire again, and speaking in his rapid, off-hand way; 'it's all very right and proper to be fond of parents when we have them, and to bear them in remembrance after they're dead, if you have ever known anything of them. But as I never did know anything about mine personally, you know, why, I can't be expected to be very sentimental about 'em. And I am not; that's the truth.'

Mr Pinch was just then looking thoughtfully at the bars. But on his companion pausing in this place, he started, and said 'Oh! of course'—and composed himself to listen again.

'In a word,' said Martin, 'I have been bred and reared all my life by this grandfather of whom I have just spoken. Now, he has a great many good points—there is no doubt about that; I'll not disguise the fact from you—but he has two very great faults, which are the staple of his bad side. In the first place, he has the most confirmed obstinacy of character you ever met with in any human creature. In the second, he is most abominably selfish.'

'Is he indeed?' cried Tom.

'In those two respects,' returned the other, 'there never was such a man. I have often heard from those who know, that they have been, time out of mind, the failings of our family; and I believe there's some truth in it. But I can't say of my own knowledge. All I have to do, you know, is to be very thankful that they haven't descended to me, and, to be very careful that I don't contract 'em.'

'To be sure,' said Mr Pinch. 'Very proper.'

'Well, sir,' resumed Martin, stirring the fire once more, and drawing his chair still closer to it, 'his selfishness makes him exacting, you see; and his obstinacy makes him resolute in his exactions. The consequence is that he has always exacted a great deal from me in the way of respect, and submission, and self-denial when his wishes were in question, and so forth. I have borne a great deal from him, because I have been under obligations to him (if one can ever be said to be under obligations to one's own grandfather), and because I have been really attached to him; but we have had a great many quarrels for all that, for I could not accommodate myself to his ways very often—not out of the least reference to myself, you understand, but because—' he stammered here, and was rather at a loss.

Mr Pinch being about the worst man in the world to help anybody out of a difficulty of this sort, said nothing.

'Well! as you understand me,' resumed Martin, quickly, 'I needn't hunt for the precise expression I want. Now I come to the cream of my story, and the occasion of my being here. I am in love, Pinch.'

Mr Pinch looked up into his face with increased interest.

'I say I am in love. I am in love with one of the most beautiful girls the sun ever shone upon. But she is wholly and entirely dependent upon the pleasure of my grandfather; and if he were to know that she favoured my passion, she would lose her home and everything she possesses in the world. There is nothing very selfish in THAT love, I think?'

'Selfish!' cried Tom. 'You have acted nobly. To love her as I am sure you do, and yet in consideration for her state of dependence, not even to disclose—'

'What are you talking about, Pinch?' said Martin pettishly: 'don't make yourself ridiculous, my good fellow! What do you mean by not disclosing?'

'I beg your pardon,' answered Tom. 'I thought you meant that, or I wouldn't have said it.'

'If I didn't tell her I loved her, where would be the use of my being in love?' said Martin: 'unless to keep myself in a perpetual state of worry and vexation?'

'That's true,' Tom answered. 'Well! I can guess what SHE said when you told her,' he added, glancing at Martin's handsome face.

'Why, not exactly, Pinch,' he rejoined, with a slight frown; 'because she has some girlish notions about duty and gratitude, and all the rest of it, which are rather hard to fathom; but in the main you are right. Her heart was mine, I found.'

'Just what I supposed,' said Tom. 'Quite natural!' and, in his great satisfaction, he took a long sip out of his wine-glass.

'Although I had conducted myself from the first with the utmost circumspection,' pursued Martin, 'I had not managed matters so well but that my grandfather, who is full of jealousy and distrust, suspected me of loving her. He said nothing to her, but straightway attacked me in private, and charged me with designing to corrupt the fidelity to himself (there you observe his selfishness), of a young creature whom he had trained and educated to be his only disinterested and faithful companion, when he should have disposed of me in marriage to his heart's content. Upon that, I took fire immediately, and told him that with his good leave I would dispose of myself in marriage, and would rather not be knocked down by him or any other auctioneer to any bidder whomsoever.'

Mr Pinch opened his eyes wider, and looked at the fire harder than he had done yet.

'You may be sure,' said Martin, 'that this nettled him, and that he began to be the very reverse of complimentary to myself. Interview succeeded interview; words engendered words, as they always do; and the upshot of it was, that I was to renounce her, or be renounced by him. Now you must bear in mind, Pinch, that I am not only desperately fond of her (for though she is poor, her beauty and intellect would reflect great credit on anybody, I don't care of what pretensions who might become her husband), but that a chief ingredient in my composition is a most determined—'

'Obstinacy,' suggested Tom in perfect good faith. But the suggestion was not so well received as he had expected; for the young man immediately rejoined, with some irritation,

'What a fellow you are, Pinch!'

'I beg your pardon,' said Tom, 'I thought you wanted a word.'

'I didn't want that word,' he rejoined. 'I told you obstinacy was no part of my character, did I not? I was going to say, if you had given me leave, that a chief ingredient in my composition is a most determined firmness.'

'Oh!' cried Tom, screwing up his mouth, and nodding. 'Yes, yes; I see!'

'And being firm,' pursued Martin, 'of course I was not going to yield to him, or give way by so much as the thousandth part of an inch.'

'No, no,' said Tom.

'On the contrary, the more he urged, the more I was determined to oppose him.'

'To be sure!' said Tom.

'Very well,' rejoined Martin, throwing himself back in his chair, with a careless wave of both hands, as if the subject were quite settled, and nothing more could be said about it—'There is an end of the matter, and here am I!'

Mr Pinch sat staring at the fire for some minutes with a puzzled look, such as he might have assumed if some uncommonly difficult conundrum had been proposed, which he found it impossible to guess. At length he said:

'Pecksniff, of course, you had known before?'

'Only by name. No, I had never seen him, for my grandfather kept not only himself but me, aloof from all his relations. But our separation took place in a town in the adjoining country. From that place I came to Salisbury, and there I saw Pecksniff's advertisement, which I answered, having always had some natural taste, I believe, in the matters to which it referred, and thinking it might suit me. As soon as I found it to be his, I was doubly bent on coming to him if possible, on account of his being—'

'Such an excellent man,' interposed Tom, rubbing his hands: 'so he is. You were quite right.'

'Why, not so much on that account, if the truth must be spoken,' returned Martin, 'as because my grandfather has an inveterate dislike to him, and after the old man's arbitrary treatment of me, I had a natural desire to run as directly counter to all his opinions as I could. Well! As I said before, here I am. My engagement with the young lady I have been telling you about is likely to be a tolerably long one; for neither her prospects nor mine are very bright; and of course I shall not think of marrying until I am well able to do so. It would never do, you know, for me to be plunging myself into poverty and shabbiness and love in one room up three pair of stairs, and all that sort of thing.'

'To say nothing of her,' remarked Tom Pinch, in a low voice.

'Exactly so,' rejoined Martin, rising to warm his back, and leaning against the chimney-piece. 'To say nothing of her. At the same time, of course it's not very hard upon her to be obliged to yield to the necessity of the case; first, because she loves me very much; and secondly, because I have sacrificed a great deal on her account, and might have done much better, you know.'

It was a very long time before Tom said 'Certainly;' so long, that he might have taken a nap in the interval, but he did say it at last.

'Now, there is one odd coincidence connected with this love-story,' said Martin, 'which brings it to an end. You remember what you told me last night as we were coming here, about your pretty visitor in the church?'

'Surely I do,' said Tom, rising from his stool, and seating himself in the chair from which the other had lately risen, that he might see his face. 'Undoubtedly.'

'That was she.'

'I knew what you were going to say,' cried Tom, looking fixedly at him, and speaking very softly. 'You don't tell me so?'

'That was she,' repeated the young man. 'After what I have heard from Pecksniff, I have no doubt that she came and went with my grandfather.—Don't you drink too much of that sour wine, or you'll have a fit of some sort, Pinch, I see.'

'It is not very wholesome, I am afraid,' said Tom, setting down the empty glass he had for some time held. 'So that was she, was it?'

Martin nodded assent; and adding, with a restless impatience, that if he had been a few days earlier he would have seen her; and that now she might be, for anything he knew, hundreds of miles away; threw himself, after a few turns across the room, into a chair, and chafed like a spoilt child.

Tom Pinch's heart was very tender, and he could not bear to see the most indifferent person in distress; still less one who had awakened an interest in him, and who regarded him (either in fact, or as he supposed) with kindness, and in a spirit of lenient construction. Whatever his own thoughts had been a few moments before—and to judge from his face they must have been pretty serious—he dismissed them instantly, and gave his young friend the best counsel and comfort that occurred to him.

'All will be well in time,' said Tom, 'I have no doubt; and some trial and adversity just now will only serve to make you more attached to each other in better days. I have always read that the truth is so, and I have a feeling within me, which tells me how natural and right it is that it should be. That never ran smooth yet,' said Tom, with a smile which, despite the homeliness of his face, was pleasanter to see than many a proud beauty's brightest glance; 'what never ran smooth yet, can hardly be expected to change its character for us; so we must take it as we find it, and fashion it into the very best shape we can, by patience and good-humour. I have no power at all; I needn't tell you that; but I have an excellent will; and if I could ever be of use to you, in any way whatever, how very glad I should be!'

'Thank you,' said Martin, shaking his hand. 'You're a good fellow, upon my word, and speak very kindly. Of course you know,' he added, after a moment's pause, as he drew his chair towards the fire again, 'I should not hesitate to avail myself of your services if you could help me at all; but mercy on us!'—Here he rumpled his hair impatiently with his hand, and looked at Tom as if he took it rather ill that he was not somebody else—'you might as well be a toasting-fork or a frying-pan, Pinch, for any help you can render me.'

'Except in the inclination,' said Tom, gently.

'Oh! to be sure. I meant that, of course. If inclination went for anything, I shouldn't want help. I tell you what you may do, though, if you will, and at the present moment too.'

'What is that?' demanded Tom.

'Read to me.'

'I shall be delighted,' cried Tom, catching up the candle with enthusiasm. 'Excuse my leaving you in the dark a moment, and I'll fetch a book directly. What will you like? Shakespeare?'

'Aye!' replied his friend, yawning and stretching himself. 'He'll do. I am tired with the bustle of to-day, and the novelty of everything about me; and in such a case, there's no greater luxury in the world, I think, than being read to sleep. You won't mind my going to sleep, if I can?'

'Not at all!' cried Tom.

'Then begin as soon as you like. You needn't leave off when you see me getting drowsy (unless you feel tired), for it's pleasant to wake gradually to the sounds again. Did you ever try that?'

'No, I never tried that,' said Tom

'Well! You can, you know, one of these days when we're both in the right humour. Don't mind leaving me in the dark. Look sharp!'

Mr Pinch lost no time in moving away; and in a minute or two returned with one of the precious volumes from the shelf beside his bed. Martin had in the meantime made himself as comfortable as circumstances would permit, by constructing before the fire a temporary sofa of three chairs with Mercy's stool for a pillow, and lying down at full-length upon it.

'Don't be too loud, please,' he said to Pinch.

'No, no,' said Tom.

'You're sure you're not cold'

'Not at all!' cried Tom.

'I am quite ready, then.'

Mr Pinch accordingly, after turning over the leaves of his book with as much care as if they were living and highly cherished creatures, made his own selection, and began to read. Before he had completed fifty lines his friend was snoring.

'Poor fellow!' said Tom, softly, as he stretched out his head to peep at him over the backs of the chairs. 'He is very young to have so much trouble. How trustful and generous in him to bestow all this confidence in me. And that was she, was it?'

But suddenly remembering their compact, he took up the poem at the place where he had left off, and went on reading; always forgetting to snuff the candle, until its wick looked like a mushroom. He gradually became so much interested, that he quite forgot to replenish the fire; and was only reminded of his neglect by Martin Chuzzlewit starting up after the lapse of an hour or so, and crying with a shiver.

'Why, it's nearly out, I declare! No wonder I dreamed of being frozen. Do call for some coals. What a fellow you are, Pinch!'

CHAPTER SEVEN

IN WHICH MR CHEVY SLYME ASSERTS THE INDEPENDENCE OF HIS SPIRIT, AND THE BLUE DRAGON LOSES A LIMB

Martin began to work at the grammar-school next morning, with so much vigour and expedition, that Mr Pinch had new reason to do homage to the natural endowments of that young gentleman, and to acknowledge his infinite superiority to himself. The new pupil received Tom's compliments very graciously; and having by this time conceived a real regard for him, in his own peculiar way, predicted that they would always be the very best of friends, and that neither of them, he was certain (but particularly Tom), would ever have reason to regret the day on which they became acquainted. Mr Pinch was delighted to hear him say this, and felt so much flattered by his kind assurances of friendship and protection, that he was at a loss how to express the pleasure they afforded him. And indeed it may be observed of this friendship, such as it was, that it had within it more likely materials of endurance than many a sworn brotherhood that has been rich in promise; for so long as the one party found a pleasure in patronizing, and the other in being patronised (which was in the very essence of their respective characters), it was of all possible events among the least probable, that the twin demons, Envy and Pride, would ever arise between them. So in very many cases of friendship, or what passes for it, the old axiom is reversed, and like clings to unlike more than to like.

They were both very busy on the afternoon succeeding the family's departure—Martin with the grammar-school, and Tom in balancing certain receipts of rents, and deducting Mr Pecksniff's commission from the same; in which abstruse employment he was much distracted by a habit his new friend had of whistling aloud while he was drawing—when they were not a little startled by the unexpected obtrusion into that sanctuary of genius, of a human head which, although a shaggy and somewhat alarming head in appearance, smiled affably upon them from the doorway, in a manner that was at once waggish, conciliatory, and expressive of approbation.

'I am not industrious myself, gents both,' said the head, 'but I know how to appreciate that quality in others. I wish I may turn grey and ugly, if it isn't in my opinion, next to genius, one of the very charmingest qualities of the human mind. Upon my soul, I am grateful to my friend Pecksniff for helping me to the contemplation of such a delicious picture as you present. You remind me of Whittington, afterwards thrice Lord Mayor of London. I give you my unsullied word of honour, that you very strongly remind me of that historical character. You are a pair of Whittingtons, gents, without the cat; which is a most agreeable and blessed exception to me, for I am not attached to the feline species. My name is Tigg; how do you do?'

Martin looked to Mr Pinch for an explanation; and Tom, who had never in his life set eyes on Mr Tigg before, looked to that gentleman himself.

'Chevy Slyme?' said Mr Tigg, interrogatively, and kissing his left hand in token of friendship. 'You will understand me when I say that I am the accredited agent of Chevy Slyme; that I am the ambassador from the court of Chiv? Ha ha!'

'Heyday!' asked Martin, starting at the mention of a name he knew. 'Pray, what does he want with me?'

'If your name is Pinch'—Mr Tigg began.

'It is not' said Martin, checking himself. 'That is Mr Pinch.'

'If that is Mr Pinch,' cried Tigg, kissing his hand again, and beginning to follow his head into the room, 'he will permit me to say that I greatly esteem and respect his character, which has been most highly commended to me by my friend Pecksniff; and that I deeply appreciate his talent for the organ, notwithstanding that I do not, if I may use the expression, grind myself. If that is Mr Pinch, I will venture to express a hope that I see him well, and that he is suffering no inconvenience from the easterly wind?'

'Thank you,' said Tom. 'I am very well.'

'That is a comfort,' Mr Tigg rejoined. 'Then,' he added, shielding his lips with the palm of his hand, and applying them close to Mr Pinch's ear, 'I have come for the letter.'

'For the letter,' said Tom, aloud. 'What letter?'

'The letter,' whispered Tigg in the same cautious manner as before, 'which my friend Pecksniff addressed to Chevy Slyme, Esquire, and left with you.'

'He didn't leave any letter with me,' said Tom.

'Hush!' cried the other. 'It's all the same thing, though not so delicately done by my friend Pecksniff as I could have wished. The money.'

'The money!' cried Tom quite scared.

'Exactly so,' said Mr Tigg. With which he rapped Tom twice or thrice upon the breast and nodded several times, as though he would say that he saw they understood each other; that it was unnecessary to mention the circumstance before a third person; and that he would take it as a particular favour if Tom would slip the amount into his hand, as quietly as possible.

Mr Pinch, however, was so very much astounded by this (to him) inexplicable deportment, that he at once openly declared there must be some mistake, and that he had been entrusted with no commission whatever having any reference to Mr Tigg or to his friend, either. Mr Tigg received this declaration with a grave request that Mr Pinch would have the goodness to make it again; and on Tom's repeating it in a still more emphatic and unmistakable manner, checked it off, sentence for sentence, by nodding his head solemnly at the end of each. When it had come to a close for the second time, Mr Tigg sat himself down in a chair and addressed the young men as follows:

'Then I tell you what it is, gents both. There is at this present moment in this very place, a perfect constellation of talent and genius, who is involved, through what I cannot but designate as the culpable negligence of my friend Pecksniff, in a situation as tremendous, perhaps, as the social intercourse of the nineteenth century will readily admit of. There is actually at this instant, at the Blue Dragon in this village—an ale-house, observe; a common, paltry, low-minded, clodhopping, pipe-smoking ale-house—an individual, of whom it may be said, in the language of the Poet, that nobody but himself can in any way come up to him; who is detained there for his bill. Ha! ha! For his bill. I repeat it—for his bill. Now,' said Mr Tigg, 'we have heard of Fox's Book of Martyrs, I believe, and we have heard of the Court of Requests, and the Star Chamber; but I fear the contradiction of no man alive or dead, when I assert that my friend Chevy Slyme being held in pawn for a bill, beats any amount of cockfighting with which I am acquainted.'

Martin and Mr Pinch looked, first at each other, and afterwards at Mr Tigg, who with his arms folded on his breast surveyed them, half in despondency and half in bitterness.

'Don't mistake me, gents both,' he said, stretching forth his right hand. 'If it had been for anything but a bill, I could have borne it, and could still have looked upon mankind with some feeling of respect; but when such a man as my friend Slyme is detained for a score—a thing in itself essentially mean; a low performance on a slate, or possibly chalked upon the back of a door—I do feel that there is a screw of such magnitude loose somewhere, that the whole framework of society is shaken, and the very first principles of things can no longer be trusted. In short, gents both,' said Mr Tigg with a passionate flourish of his hands and head, 'when a man like Slyme is detained for such a thing as a bill, I reject the superstitions of ages, and believe nothing. I don't even believe that I DON'T believe, curse me if I do!'

'I am very sorry, I am sure,' said Tom after a pause, 'but Mr Pecksniff said nothing to me about it, and I couldn't act without his instructions. Wouldn't it be better, sir, if you were to go to—to wherever you came from—yourself, and remit the money to your friend?'

'How can that be done, when I am detained also?' said Mr Tigg; 'and when moreover, owing to the astounding, and I must add, guilty negligence of my friend Pecksniff, I have no money for coach-hire?'

Tom thought of reminding the gentleman (who, no doubt, in his agitation had forgotten it) that there was a post-office in the land; and that possibly if he wrote to some friend or agent for a remittance it might not be lost upon the road; or at all events that the chance, however desperate, was worth trusting to. But, as his good-nature presently suggested to him certain reasons for abstaining from this hint, he paused again, and then asked:

'Did you say, sir, that you were detained also?'

'Come here,' said Mr Tigg, rising. 'You have no objection to my opening this window for a moment?'

'Certainly not,' said Tom.

'Very good,' said Mr Tigg, lifting the sash. 'You see a fellow down there in a red neckcloth and no waistcoat?'

'Of course I do,' cried Tom. 'That's Mark Tapley.'

'Mark Tapley is it?' said the gentleman. 'Then Mark Tapley had not only the great politeness to follow me to this house, but is waiting now, to see me home again. And for that attention, sir,' added Mr Tigg, stroking his moustache, 'I can tell you, that Mark Tapley had better in his infancy have been fed to suffocation by Mrs Tapley, than preserved to this time.'

Mr Pinch was not so dismayed by this terrible threat, but that he had voice enough to call to Mark to come in, and upstairs; a summons which he so speedily obeyed, that almost as soon as Tom and Mr Tigg had drawn in their heads and closed the window again, he, the denounced, appeared before them.

'Come here, Mark!' said Mr Pinch. 'Good gracious me! what's the matter between Mrs Lupin and this gentleman?'

'What gentleman, sir?' said Mark. 'I don't see no gentleman here sir, excepting you and the new gentleman,' to whom he made a rough kind of bow—'and there's nothing wrong between Mrs Lupin and either of you, Mr Pinch, I am sure.'

'Nonsense, Mark!' cried Tom. 'You see Mr—'

'Tigg,' interposed that gentleman. 'Wait a bit. I shall crush him soon. All in good time!'

'Oh HIM!' rejoined Mark, with an air of careless defiance. 'Yes, I see HIM. I could see him a little better, if he'd shave himself, and get his hair cut.'

Mr Tigg shook his head with a ferocious look, and smote himself once upon the breast.

'It's no use,' said Mark. 'If you knock ever so much in that quarter, you'll get no answer. I know better. There's nothing there but padding; and a greasy sort it is.'

'Nay, Mark,' urged Mr Pinch, interposing to prevent hostilities, 'tell me what I ask you. You're not out of temper, I hope?'

'Out of temper, sir!' cried Mark, with a grin; 'why no, sir. There's a little credit—not much—in being jolly, when such fellows as him is a-going about like roaring lions; if there is any breed of lions, at least, as is all roar and mane. What is there between him and Mrs Lupin, sir? Why, there's a score between him and Mrs Lupin. And I think Mrs Lupin lets him and his friend off very easy in not charging 'em double prices for being a disgrace to the Dragon. That's my opinion. I wouldn't have any such Peter the Wild Boy as him in my house, sir, not if I was paid race-week prices for it. He's enough to turn the very beer in the casks sour with his looks; he is! So he would, if it had judgment enough.'

'You're not answering my question, you know, Mark,' observed Mr Pinch.

'Well, sir,' said Mark, 'I don't know as there's much to answer further than that. Him and his friend goes and stops at the Moon and Stars till they've run a bill there; and then comes and stops with us and does the same. The running of bills is common enough Mr Pinch; it an't that as we object to; it's the ways of this chap. Nothing's good enough for him; all the women is dying for him he thinks, and is overpaid if he winks at 'em; and all the men was made to be ordered about by him. This not being aggravation enough, he says this morning to me, in his usual captivating way, "We're going to-night, my man." "Are you, sir?" says I. "Perhaps you'd like the bill got ready, sir?" "Oh no, my man," he says; "you needn't mind that. I'll give Pecksniff orders to see to that." In reply to which, the Dragon makes answer, "Thankee, sir, you're very kind to honour us so far, but as we don't know any particular good of you, and you don't travel with luggage, and Mr Pecksniff an't at home (which perhaps you mayn't happen to be aware of, sir), we should prefer something more satisfactory;" and that's where the matter stands. And I ask,' said Mr Tapley, pointing, in conclusion, to Mr Tigg, with his hat, 'any lady or gentleman, possessing ordinary strength of mind, to say whether he's a disagreeable-looking chap or not!'

'Let me inquire,' said Martin, interposing between this candid speech and the delivery of some blighting anathema by Mr Tigg, 'what the amount of this debt may be?'

'In point of money, sir, very little,' answered Mark. 'Only just turned of three pounds. But it an't that; it's the—'

'Yes, yes, you told us so before,' said Martin. 'Pinch, a word with you.'

'What is it?' asked Tom, retiring with him to a corner of the room.

'Why, simply—I am ashamed to say—that this Mr Slyme is a relation of mine, of whom I never heard anything pleasant; and that I don't want him here just now, and think he would be cheaply got rid of, perhaps, for three or four pounds. You haven't enough money to pay this bill, I suppose?'

Tom shook his head to an extent that left no doubt of his entire sincerity.

'That's unfortunate, for I am poor too; and in case you had had it, I'd have borrowed it of you. But if we told this landlady we would see her paid, I suppose that would answer the same purpose?'

'Oh dear, yes!' said Tom. 'She knows me, bless you!'

'Then let us go down at once and tell her so; for the sooner we are rid of their company the better. As you have conducted the conversation with this gentleman hitherto, perhaps you'll tell him what we purpose doing; will you?'

Mr Pinch, complying, at once imparted the intelligence to Mr Tigg, who shook him warmly by the hand in return, assuring him that his faith in anything and everything was again restored. It was not so much, he said, for the temporary relief of this assistance that he prized it, as for its vindication of the high principle that Nature's Nobs felt with Nature's Nobs, and that true greatness of soul sympathized with true greatness of soul, all the world over. It proved to him, he said, that like him they admired genius, even when it was coupled with the alloy occasionally visible in the metal of his friend Slyme; and on behalf of that friend, he thanked them; as warmly and heartily as if the cause were his own. Being cut short in these speeches by a general move towards the stairs, he took possession at the street door of the lapel of Mr Pinch's coat, as a security against further interruption; and entertained that gentleman with some highly improving discourse until they reached the Dragon, whither they were closely followed by Mark and the new pupil.

The rosy hostess scarcely needed Mr Pinch's word as a preliminary to the release of her two visitors, of whom she was glad to be rid on any terms; indeed, their brief detention had originated mainly with Mr Tapley, who entertained a constitutional dislike to gentleman out-at-elbows who flourished on false pretences; and had conceived a particular aversion to Mr Tigg and his friend, as choice specimens of the species. The business in hand thus easily settled, Mr Pinch and Martin would have withdrawn immediately, but for the urgent entreaties of Mr Tigg that they would allow him the honour of presenting them to his friend Slyme, which were so very difficult of resistance that, yielding partly to these persuasions and partly to their own curiosity, they suffered themselves to be ushered into the presence of that distinguished gentleman.

He was brooding over the remains of yesterday's decanter of brandy, and was engaged in the thoughtful occupation of making a chain of rings on the top of the table with the wet foot of his drinking-glass. Wretched and forlorn as he looked, Mr Slyme had once been in his way, the choicest of swaggerers; putting forth his pretensions boldly, as a man of infinite taste and most undoubted promise. The stock-in-trade requisite to set up an amateur in this department of business is very slight, and easily got together; a trick of the nose and a curl of the lip sufficient to compound a tolerable sneer, being ample provision for any exigency. But, in an evil hour, this off-shoot of the Chuzzlewit trunk, being lazy, and ill qualified for any regular pursuit and having dissipated such means as he ever possessed, had formally established himself as a professor of Taste for a livelihood; and finding, too late, that something more than his old amount of qualifications was necessary to sustain him in this calling, had quickly fallen to his present level, where he retained nothing of his old self but his boastfulness and his bile, and seemed to have no existence separate or apart from his friend Tigg. And now so abject and so pitiful was he—at once so maudlin, insolent, beggarly, and proud—that even his friend and parasite, standing erect beside him, swelled into a Man by contrast.

'Chiv,' said Mr Tigg, clapping him on the back, 'my friend Pecksniff not being at home, I have arranged our trifling piece of business with Mr Pinch and friend. Mr Pinch and friend, Mr Chevy Slyme! Chiv, Mr Pinch and friend!'

'These are agreeable circumstances in which to be introduced to strangers,' said Chevy Slyme, turning his bloodshot eyes towards Tom Pinch. 'I am the most miserable man in the world, I believe!'

Tom begged he wouldn't mention it; and finding him in this condition, retired, after an awkward pause, followed by Martin. But Mr Tigg so urgently conjured them, by coughs and signs, to remain in the shadow of the door, that they stopped there.

'I swear,' cried Mr Slyme, giving the table an imbecile blow with his fist, and then feebly leaning his head upon his hand, while some drunken drops oozed from his eyes, 'that I am the wretchedest creature on record. Society is in a conspiracy against me. I'm the most literary man alive. I'm full of scholarship. I'm full of genius; I'm full of information; I'm full of novel views on every subject; yet look at my condition! I'm at this moment obliged to two strangers for a tavern bill!'

Mr Tigg replenished his friend's glass, pressed it into his hand, and nodded an intimation to the visitors that they would see him in a better aspect immediately.

'Obliged to two strangers for a tavern bill, eh!' repeated Mr Slyme, after a sulky application to his glass. 'Very pretty! And crowds of impostors, the while, becoming famous; men who are no more on a level with me than—Tigg, I take you to witness that I am the most persecuted hound on the face of the earth.'

With a whine, not unlike the cry of the animal he named, in its lowest state of humiliation, he raised his glass to his mouth again. He found some encouragement in it; for when he set it down he laughed scornfully. Upon that Mr Tigg gesticulated to the visitors once more, and with great expression, implying that now the time was come when they would see Chiv in his greatness.

'Ha, ha, ha,' laughed Mr Slyme. 'Obliged to two strangers for a tavern bill! Yet I think I've a rich uncle, Tigg, who could buy up the uncles of fifty strangers! Have I, or have I not? I come of a good family, I believe! Do I, or do I not? I'm not a man of common capacity or accomplishments, I think! Am I, or am I not?'

'You are the American aloe of the human race, my dear Chiv,' said Mr Tigg, 'which only blooms once in a hundred years!'

'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed Mr Slyme again. 'Obliged to two strangers for a tavern bill! I obliged to two architect's apprentices. Fellows who measure earth with iron chains, and build houses like bricklayers. Give me the names of those two apprentices. How dare they oblige me!'

Mr Tigg was quite lost in admiration of this noble trait in his friend's character; as he made known to Mr Pinch in a neat little ballet of action, spontaneously invented for the purpose.

'I'll let 'em know, and I'll let all men know,' cried Chevy Slyme, 'that I'm none of the mean, grovelling, tame characters they meet with commonly. I have an independent spirit. I have a heart that swells in my bosom. I have a soul that rises superior to base considerations.'

'Oh Chiv, Chiv,' murmured Mr Tigg, 'you have a nobly independent nature, Chiv!'

'You go and do your duty, sir,' said Mr Slyme, angrily, 'and borrow money for travelling expenses; and whoever you borrow it of, let 'em know that I possess a haughty spirit, and a proud spirit, and have infernally finely-touched chords in my nature, which won't brook patronage. Do you hear? Tell 'em I hate 'em, and that that's the way I preserve my self-respect; and tell 'em that no man ever respected himself more than I do!'

He might have added that he hated two sorts of men; all those who did him favours, and all those who were better off than himself; as in either case their position was an insult to a man of his stupendous merits. But he did not; for with the apt closing words above recited, Mr Slyme; of too haughty a stomach to work, to beg, to borrow, or to steal; yet mean enough to be worked or borrowed, begged or stolen for, by any catspaw that would serve his turn; too insolent to lick the hand that fed him in his need, yet cur enough to bite and tear it in the dark; with these apt closing words Mr Slyme fell forward with his head upon the table, and so declined into a sodden sleep.

'Was there ever,' cried Mr Tigg, joining the young men at the door, and shutting it carefully behind him, 'such an independent spirit as is possessed by that extraordinary creature? Was there ever such a Roman as our friend Chiv? Was there ever a man of such a purely classical turn of thought, and of such a toga-like simplicity of nature? Was there ever a man with such a flow of eloquence? Might he not, gents both, I ask, have sat upon a tripod in the ancient times, and prophesied to a perfectly unlimited extent, if previously supplied with gin-and-water at the public cost?'

Mr Pinch was about to contest this latter position with his usual mildness, when, observing that his companion had already gone downstairs, he prepared to follow him.

'You are not going, Mr Pinch?' said Tigg.

'Thank you,' answered Tom. 'Yes. Don't come down.'

'Do you know that I should like one little word in private with you Mr Pinch?' said Tigg, following him. 'One minute of your company in the skittle-ground would very much relieve my mind. Might I beseech that favour?'

'Oh, certainly,' replied Tom, 'if you really wish it.' So he accompanied Mr Tigg to the retreat in question; on arriving at which place that gentleman took from his hat what seemed to be the fossil remains of an antediluvian pocket-handkerchief, and wiped his eyes therewith.

'You have not beheld me this day,' said Mr Tigg, 'in a favourable light.'

'Don't mention that,' said Tom, 'I beg.'

'But you have NOT,' cried Tigg. 'I must persist in that opinion. If you could have seen me, Mr Pinch, at the head of my regiment on the coast of Africa, charging in the form of a hollow square, with the women and children and the regimental plate-chest in the centre, you would not have known me for the same man. You would have respected me, sir.'

Tom had certain ideas of his own upon the subject of glory; and consequently he was not quite so much excited by this picture as Mr Tigg could have desired.

'But no matter!' said that gentleman. 'The school-boy writing home to his parents and describing the milk-and-water, said "This is indeed weakness." I repeat that assertion in reference to myself at the present moment; and I ask your pardon. Sir, you have seen my friend Slyme?'

'No doubt,' said Mr Pinch.

'Sir, you have been impressed by my friend Slyme?'

'Not very pleasantly, I must say,' answered Tom, after a little hesitation.

'I am grieved but not surprised,' cried Mr Tigg, detaining him with both hands, 'to hear that you have come to that conclusion; for it is my own. But, Mr Pinch, though I am a rough and thoughtless man, I can honour Mind. I honour Mind in following my friend. To you of all men, Mr Pinch, I have a right to make appeal on Mind's behalf, when it has not the art to push its fortune in the world. And so, sir—not for myself, who have no claim upon you, but for my crushed, my sensitive and independent friend, who has—I ask the loan of three half-crowns. I ask you for the loan of three half-crowns, distinctly, and without a blush. I ask it, almost as a right. And when I add that they will be returned by post, this week, I feel that you will blame me for that sordid stipulation.'

Mr Pinch took from his pocket an old-fashioned red-leather purse with a steel clasp, which had probably once belonged to his deceased grandmother. It held one half-sovereign and no more. All Tom's worldly wealth until next quarter-day.

'Stay!' cried Mr Tigg, who had watched this proceeding keenly. 'I was just about to say, that for the convenience of posting you had better make it gold. Thank you. A general direction, I suppose, to Mr Pinch at Mr Pecksniff's—will that find you?'

'That'll find me,' said Tom. 'You had better put Esquire to Mr Pecksniff's name, if you please. Direct to me, you know, at Seth Pecksniff's, Esquire.'

'At Seth Pecksniff's, Esquire,' repeated Mr Tigg, taking an exact note of it with a stump of pencil. 'We said this week, I believe?'

'Yes; or Monday will do,' observed Tom.

'No, no, I beg your pardon. Monday will NOT do,' said Mr Tigg. 'If we stipulated for this week, Saturday is the latest day. Did we stipulate for this week?'

'Since you are so particular about it,' said Tom, 'I think we did.'

Mr Tigg added this condition to his memorandum; read the entry over to himself with a severe frown; and that the transaction might be the more correct and business-like, appended his initials to the whole. That done, he assured Mr Pinch that everything was now perfectly regular; and, after squeezing his hand with great fervour, departed.

Tom entertained enough suspicion that Martin might possibly turn this interview into a jest, to render him desirous to avoid the company of that young gentleman for the present. With this view he took a few turns up and down the skittle-ground, and did not re-enter the house until Mr Tigg and his friend had quitted it, and the new pupil and Mark were watching their departure from one of the windows.

'I was just a-saying, sir, that if one could live by it,' observed Mark, pointing after their late guests, 'that would be the sort of service for me. Waiting on such individuals as them would be better than grave-digging, sir.'

'And staying here would be better than either, Mark,' replied Tom. 'So take my advice, and continue to swim easily in smooth water.'

'It's too late to take it now, sir,' said Mark. 'I have broke it to her, sir. I am off to-morrow morning.'

'Off!' cried Mr Pinch, 'where to?'

'I shall go up to London, sir.'

'What to be?' asked Mr Pinch.

'Well! I don't know yet, sir. Nothing turned up that day I opened my mind to you, as was at all likely to suit me. All them trades I thought of was a deal too jolly; there was no credit at all to be got in any of 'em. I must look for a private service, I suppose, sir. I might be brought out strong, perhaps, in a serious family, Mr Pinch.'

'Perhaps you might come out rather too strong for a serious family's taste, Mark.'

'That's possible, sir. If I could get into a wicked family, I might do myself justice; but the difficulty is to make sure of one's ground, because a young man can't very well advertise that he wants a place, and wages an't so much an object as a wicked sitivation; can he, sir?'

'Why, no,' said Mr Pinch, 'I don't think he can.'

'An envious family,' pursued Mark, with a thoughtful face; 'or a quarrelsome family, or a malicious family, or even a good out-and-out mean family, would open a field of action as I might do something in. The man as would have suited me of all other men was that old gentleman as was took ill here, for he really was a trying customer. Howsever, I must wait and see what turns up, sir; and hope for the worst.'

'You are determined to go then?' said Mr Pinch.

'My box is gone already, sir, by the waggon, and I'm going to walk on to-morrow morning, and get a lift by the day coach when it overtakes me. So I wish you good-bye, Mr Pinch—and you too, sir—and all good luck and happiness!'

They both returned his greeting laughingly, and walked home arm-in-arm. Mr Pinch imparting to his new friend, as they went, such further particulars of Mark Tapley's whimsical restlessness as the reader is already acquainted with.

In the meantime Mark, having a shrewd notion that his mistress was in very low spirits, and that he could not exactly answer for the consequences of any lengthened TETE-A-TETE in the bar, kept himself obstinately out of her way all the afternoon and evening. In this piece of generalship he was very much assisted by the great influx of company into the taproom; for the news of his intention having gone abroad, there was a perfect throng there all the evening, and much drinking of healths and clinking of mugs. At length the house was closed for the night; and there being now no help for it, Mark put the best face he could upon the matter, and walked doggedly to the bar-door.

'If I look at her,' said Mark to himself, 'I'm done. I feel that I'm a-going fast.'

'You have come at last,' said Mrs Lupin.

Aye, Mark said: There he was.

'And you are determined to leave us, Mark?' cried Mrs Lupin.

'Why, yes; I am,' said Mark; keeping his eyes hard upon the floor.

'I thought,' pursued the landlady, with a most engaging hesitation, 'that you had been—fond—of the Dragon?'

'So I am,' said Mark.

'Then,' pursued the hostess—and it really was not an unnatural inquiry—'why do you desert it?'

But as he gave no manner of answer to this question; not even on its being repeated; Mrs Lupin put his money into his hand, and asked him—not unkindly, quite the contrary—what he would take?

It is proverbial that there are certain things which flesh and blood cannot bear. Such a question as this, propounded in such a manner, at such a time, and by such a person, proved (at least, as far as, Mark's flesh and blood were concerned) to be one of them. He looked up in spite of himself directly; and having once looked up, there was no looking down again; for of all the tight, plump, buxom, bright-eyed, dimple-faced landladies that ever shone on earth, there stood before him then, bodily in that bar, the very pink and pineapple.

'Why, I tell you what,' said Mark, throwing off all his constraint in an instant and seizing the hostess round the waist—at which she was not at all alarmed, for she knew what a good young man he was—'if I took what I liked most, I should take you. If I only thought what was best for me, I should take you. If I took what nineteen young fellows in twenty would be glad to take, and would take at any price, I should take you. Yes, I should,' cried Mr Tapley, shaking his head expressively enough, and looking (in a momentary state of forgetfulness) rather hard at the hostess's ripe lips. 'And no man wouldn't wonder if I did!'

Mrs Lupin said he amazed her. She was astonished how he could say such things. She had never thought it of him.

'Why, I never thought if of myself till now!' said Mark, raising his eyebrows with a look of the merriest possible surprise. 'I always expected we should part, and never have no explanation; I meant to do it when I come in here just now; but there's something about you, as makes a man sensible. Then let us have a word or two together; letting it be understood beforehand,' he added this in a grave tone, to prevent the possibility of any mistake, 'that I'm not a-going to make no love, you know.'

There was for just one second a shade, though not by any means a dark one, on the landlady's open brow. But it passed off instantly, in a laugh that came from her very heart.

'Oh, very good!' she said; 'if there is to be no love-making, you had better take your arm away.'

'Lord, why should I!' cried Mark. 'It's quite innocent.'

'Of course it's innocent,' returned the hostess, 'or I shouldn't allow it.'

'Very well!' said Mark. 'Then let it be.'

There was so much reason in this that the landlady laughed again, suffered it to remain, and bade him say what he had to say, and be quick about it. But he was an impudent fellow, she added.

'Ha ha! I almost think I am!' cried Mark, 'though I never thought so before. Why, I can say anything to-night!'

'Say what you're going to say if you please, and be quick,' returned the landlady, 'for I want to get to bed.'

'Why, then, my dear good soul,' said Mark, 'and a kinder woman than you are never drawed breath—let me see the man as says she did!—what would be the likely consequence of us two being—'

'Oh nonsense!' cried Mrs Lupin. 'Don't talk about that any more.'

'No, no, but it an't nonsense,' said Mark; 'and I wish you'd attend. What would be the likely consequence of us two being married? If I can't be content and comfortable in this here lively Dragon now, is it to be looked for as I should be then? By no means. Very good. Then you, even with your good humour, would be always on the fret and worrit, always uncomfortable in your own mind, always a-thinking as you was getting too old for my taste, always a-picturing me to yourself as being chained up to the Dragon door, and wanting to break away. I don't know that it would be so,' said Mark, 'but I don't know that it mightn't be. I am a roving sort of chap, I know. I'm fond of change. I'm always a-thinking that with my good health and spirits it would be more creditable in me to be jolly where there's things a-going on to make one dismal. It may be a mistake of mine you see, but nothing short of trying how it acts will set it right. Then an't it best that I should go; particular when your free way has helped me out to say all this, and we can part as good friends as we have ever been since first I entered this here noble Dragon, which,' said Mr Tapley in conclusion, 'has my good word and my good wish to the day of my death!'

The hostess sat quite silent for a little time, but she very soon put both her hands in Mark's and shook them heartily.

'For you are a good man,' she said; looking into his face with a smile, which was rather serious for her. 'And I do believe have been a better friend to me to-night than ever I have had in all my life.'

'Oh! as to that, you know,' said Mark, 'that's nonsense. But love my heart alive!' he added, looking at her in a sort of rapture, 'if you ARE that way disposed, what a lot of suitable husbands there is as you may drive distracted!'

She laughed again at this compliment; and, once more shaking him by both hands, and bidding him, if he should ever want a friend, to remember her, turned gayly from the little bar and up the Dragon staircase.

'Humming a tune as she goes,' said Mark, listening, 'in case I should think she's at all put out, and should be made down-hearted. Come, here's some credit in being jolly, at last!'

With that piece of comfort, very ruefully uttered, he went, in anything but a jolly manner, to bed.

He rose early next morning, and was a-foot soon after sunrise. But it was of no use; the whole place was up to see Mark Tapley off; the boys, the dogs, the children, the old men, the busy people and the idlers; there they were, all calling out 'Good-b'ye, Mark,' after their own manner, and all sorry he was going. Somehow he had a kind of sense that his old mistress was peeping from her chamber-window, but he couldn't make up his mind to look back.

'Good-b'ye one, good-b'ye all!' cried Mark, waving his hat on the top of his walking-stick, as he strode at a quick pace up the little street. 'Hearty chaps them wheelwrights—hurrah! Here's the butcher's dog a-coming out of the garden—down, old fellow! And Mr Pinch a-going to his organ—good-b'ye, sir! And the terrier-bitch from over the way—hie, then, lass! And children enough to hand down human natur to the latest posterity—good-b'ye, boys and girls! There's some credit in it now. I'm a-coming out strong at last. These are the circumstances that would try a ordinary mind; but I'm uncommon jolly. Not quite as jolly as I could wish to be, but very near. Good-b'ye! good-b'ye!'

CHAPTER EIGHT

ACCOMPANIES MR PECKSNIFF AND HIS CHARMING DAUGHTERS TO THE CITY OF LONDON; AND RELATES WHAT FELL OUT UPON THEIR WAY THITHER

When Mr Pecksniff and the two young ladies got into the heavy coach at the end of the lane, they found it empty, which was a great comfort; particularly as the outside was quite full and the passengers looked very frosty. For as Mr Pecksniff justly observed—when he and his daughters had burrowed their feet deep in the straw, wrapped themselves to the chin, and pulled up both windows—it is always satisfactory to feel, in keen weather, that many other people are not as warm as you are. And this, he said, was quite natural, and a very beautiful arrangement; not confined to coaches, but extending itself into many social ramifications. 'For' (he observed), 'if every one were warm and well-fed, we should lose the satisfaction of admiring the fortitude with which certain conditions of men bear cold and hunger. And if we were no better off than anybody else, what would become of our sense of gratitude; which,' said Mr Pecksniff with tears in his eyes, as he shook his fist at a beggar who wanted to get up behind, 'is one of the holiest feelings of our common nature.'

His children heard with becoming reverence these moral precepts from the lips of their father, and signified their acquiescence in the same, by smiles. That he might the better feed and cherish that sacred flame of gratitude in his breast, Mr Pecksniff remarked that he would trouble his eldest daughter, even in this early stage of their journey, for the brandy-bottle. And from the narrow neck of that stone vessel he imbibed a copious refreshment.

'What are we?' said Mr Pecksniff, 'but coaches? Some of us are slow coaches'—

'Goodness, Pa!' cried Charity.

'Some of us, I say,' resumed her parent with increased emphasis, 'are slow coaches; some of us are fast coaches. Our passions are the horses; and rampant animals too—!'

'Really, Pa,' cried both the daughters at once. 'How very unpleasant.'

'And rampant animals too' repeated Mr Pecksniff with so much determination, that he may be said to have exhibited, at the moment a sort of moral rampancy himself;'—and Virtue is the drag. We start from The Mother's Arms, and we run to The Dust Shovel.'

When he had said this, Mr Pecksniff, being exhausted, took some further refreshment. When he had done that, he corked the bottle tight, with the air of a man who had effectually corked the subject also; and went to sleep for three stages.

The tendency of mankind when it falls asleep in coaches, is to wake up cross; to find its legs in its way; and its corns an aggravation. Mr Pecksniff not being exempt from the common lot of humanity found himself, at the end of his nap, so decidedly the victim of these infirmities, that he had an irresistible inclination to visit them upon his daughters; which he had already begun to do in the shape of divers random kicks, and other unexpected motions of his shoes, when the coach stopped, and after a short delay the door was opened.

'Now mind,' said a thin sharp voice in the dark. 'I and my son go inside, because the roof is full, but you agree only to charge us outside prices. It's quite understood that we won't pay more. Is it?'

'All right, sir,' replied the guard.

'Is there anybody inside now?' inquired the voice.

'Three passengers,' returned the guard.

'Then I ask the three passengers to witness this bargain, if they will be so good,' said the voice. 'My boy, I think we may safely get in.'

In pursuance of which opinion, two people took their seats in the vehicle, which was solemnly licensed by Act of Parliament to carry any six persons who could be got in at the door.

'That was lucky!' whispered the old man, when they moved on again. 'And a great stroke of policy in you to observe it. He, he, he! We couldn't have gone outside. I should have died of the rheumatism!'

Whether it occurred to the dutiful son that he had in some degree over-reached himself by contributing to the prolongation of his father's days; or whether the cold had effected his temper; is doubtful. But he gave his father such a nudge in reply, that that good old gentleman was taken with a cough which lasted for full five minutes without intermission, and goaded Mr Pecksniff to that pitch of irritation, that he said at last—and very suddenly:

'There is no room! There is really no room in this coach for any gentleman with a cold in his head!'

'Mine,' said the old man, after a moment's pause, 'is upon my chest, Pecksniff.'

The voice and manner, together, now that he spoke out; the composure of the speaker; the presence of his son; and his knowledge of Mr Pecksniff; afforded a clue to his identity which it was impossible to mistake.

'Hem! I thought,' said Mr Pecksniff, returning to his usual mildness, 'that I addressed a stranger. I find that I address a relative, Mr Anthony Chuzzlewit and his son Mr Jonas—for they, my dear children, are our travelling companions—will excuse me for an apparently harsh remark. It is not MY desire to wound the feelings of any person with whom I am connected in family bonds. I may be a Hypocrite,' said Mr Pecksniff, cuttingly; 'but I am not a Brute.'

'Pooh, pooh!' said the old man. 'What signifies that word, Pecksniff? Hypocrite! why, we are all hypocrites. We were all hypocrites t'other day. I am sure I felt that to be agreed upon among us, or I shouldn't have called you one. We should not have been there at all, if we had not been hypocrites. The only difference between you and the rest was—shall I tell you the difference between you and the rest now, Pecksniff?'

'If you please, my good sir; if you please.'

'Why, the annoying quality in YOU, is,' said the old man, 'that you never have a confederate or partner in YOUR juggling; you would deceive everybody, even those who practise the same art; and have a way with you, as if you—he, he, he!—as if you really believed yourself. I'd lay a handsome wager now,' said the old man, 'if I laid wagers, which I don't and never did, that you keep up appearances by a tacit understanding, even before your own daughters here. Now I, when I have a business scheme in hand, tell Jonas what it is, and we discuss it openly. You're not offended, Pecksniff?'

'Offended, my good sir!' cried that gentleman, as if he had received the highest compliments that language could convey.

'Are you travelling to London, Mr Pecksniff?' asked the son.

'Yes, Mr Jonas, we are travelling to London. We shall have the pleasure of your company all the way, I trust?'

'Oh! ecod, you had better ask father that,' said Jonas. 'I am not a-going to commit myself.'

Mr Pecksniff was, as a matter of course, greatly entertained by this retort. His mirth having subsided, Mr Jonas gave him to understand that himself and parent were in fact travelling to their home in the metropolis; and that, since the memorable day of the great family gathering, they had been tarrying in that part of the country, watching the sale of certain eligible investments, which they had had in their copartnership eye when they came down; for it was their custom, Mr Jonas said, whenever such a thing was practicable, to kill two birds with one stone, and never to throw away sprats, but as bait for whales. When he had communicated to Mr Pecksniff these pithy scraps of intelligence, he said, 'That if it was all the same to him, he would turn him over to father, and have a chat with the gals;' and in furtherance of this polite scheme, he vacated his seat adjoining that gentleman, and established himself in the opposite corner, next to the fair Miss Mercy.

The education of Mr Jonas had been conducted from his cradle on the strictest principles of the main chance. The very first word he learnt to spell was 'gain,' and the second (when he got into two syllables), 'money.' But for two results, which were not clearly foreseen perhaps by his watchful parent in the beginning, his training may be said to have been unexceptionable. One of these flaws was, that having been long taught by his father to over-reach everybody, he had imperceptibly acquired a love of over-reaching that venerable monitor himself. The other, that from his early habits of considering everything as a question of property, he had gradually come to look, with impatience, on his parent as a certain amount of personal estate, which had no right whatever to be going at large, but ought to be secured in that particular description of iron safe which is commonly called a coffin, and banked in the grave.

'Well, cousin!' said Mr Jonas—'Because we ARE cousins, you know, a few times removed—so you're going to London?'

Miss Mercy replied in the affirmative, pinching her sister's arm at the same time, and giggling excessively.

'Lots of beaux in London, cousin!' said Mr Jonas, slightly advancing his elbow.

'Indeed, sir!' cried the young lady. 'They won't hurt us, sir, I dare say.' And having given him this answer with great demureness she was so overcome by her own humour, that she was fain to stifle her merriment in her sister's shawl.

'Merry,' cried that more prudent damsel, 'really I am ashamed of you. How can you go on so? You wild thing!' At which Miss Merry only laughed the more, of course.

'I saw a wildness in her eye, t'other day,' said Mr Jonas, addressing Charity. 'But you're the one to sit solemn! I say—You were regularly prim, cousin!'

'Oh! The old-fashioned fright!' cried Merry, in a whisper. 'Cherry my dear, upon my word you must sit next him. I shall die outright if he talks to me any more; I shall, positively!' To prevent which fatal consequence, the buoyant creature skipped out of her seat as she spoke, and squeezed her sister into the place from which she had risen.

'Don't mind crowding me,' cried Mr Jonas. 'I like to be crowded by gals. Come a little closer, cousin.'

'No, thank you, sir,' said Charity.

'There's that other one a-laughing again,' said Mr Jonas; 'she's a-laughing at my father, I shouldn't wonder. If he puts on that old flannel nightcap of his, I don't know what she'll do! Is that my father a-snoring, Pecksniff?'

'Yes, Mr Jonas.'

'Tread upon his foot, will you be so good?' said the young gentleman. 'The foot next you's the gouty one.'

Mr Pecksniff hesitating to perform this friendly office, Mr Jonas did it himself; at the same time crying:

'Come, wake up, father, or you'll be having the nightmare, and screeching out, I know.—Do you ever have the nightmare, cousin?' he asked his neighbour, with characteristic gallantry, as he dropped his voice again.

'Sometimes,' answered Charity. 'Not often.'

'The other one,' said Mr Jonas, after a pause. 'Does SHE ever have the nightmare?'

'I don't know,' replied Charity. 'You had better ask her.'

'She laughs so,' said Jonas; 'there's no talking to her. Only hark how she's a-going on now! You're the sensible one, cousin!'

'Tut, tut!' cried Charity.

'Oh! But you are! You know you are!'

'Mercy is a little giddy,' said Miss Charity. But she'll sober down in time.'

'It'll be a very long time, then, if she does at all,' rejoined her cousin. 'Take a little more room.'

'I am afraid of crowding you,' said Charity. But she took it notwithstanding; and after one or two remarks on the extreme heaviness of the coach, and the number of places it stopped at, they fell into a silence which remained unbroken by any member of the party until supper-time.

Although Mr Jonas conducted Charity to the hotel and sat himself beside her at the board, it was pretty clear that he had an eye to 'the other one' also, for he often glanced across at Mercy, and seemed to draw comparisons between the personal appearance of the two, which were not unfavourable to the superior plumpness of the younger sister. He allowed himself no great leisure for this kind of observation, however, being busily engaged with the supper, which, as he whispered in his fair companion's ear, was a contract business, and therefore the more she ate, the better the bargain was. His father and Mr Pecksniff, probably acting on the same wise principle, demolished everything that came within their reach, and by that means acquired a greasy expression of countenance, indicating contentment, if not repletion, which it was very pleasant to contemplate.

When they could eat no more, Mr Pecksniff and Mr Jonas subscribed for two sixpenny-worths of hot brandy-and-water, which the latter gentleman considered a more politic order than one shillingsworth; there being a chance of their getting more spirit out of the innkeeper under this arrangement than if it were all in one glass. Having swallowed his share of the enlivening fluid, Mr Pecksniff, under pretence of going to see if the coach were ready, went secretly to the bar, and had his own little bottle filled, in order that he might refresh himself at leisure in the dark coach without being observed.

These arrangements concluded, and the coach being ready, they got into their old places and jogged on again. But before he composed himself for a nap, Mr Pecksniff delivered a kind of grace after meat, in these words:

'The process of digestion, as I have been informed by anatomical friends, is one of the most wonderful works of nature. I do not know how it may be with others, but it is a great satisfaction to me to know, when regaling on my humble fare, that I am putting in motion the most beautiful machinery with which we have any acquaintance. I really feel at such times as if I was doing a public service. When I have wound myself up, if I may employ such a term,' said Mr Pecksniff with exquisite tenderness, 'and know that I am Going, I feel that in the lesson afforded by the works within me, I am a Benefactor to my Kind!'

As nothing could be added to this, nothing was said; and Mr Pecksniff, exulting, it may be presumed, in his moral utility, went to sleep again.

The rest of the night wore away in the usual manner. Mr Pecksniff and Old Anthony kept tumbling against each other and waking up much terrified, or crushed their heads in opposite corners of the coach and strangely tattooed the surface of their faces—Heaven knows how—in their sleep. The coach stopped and went on, and went on and stopped, times out of number. Passengers got up and passengers got down, and fresh horses came and went and came again, with scarcely any interval between each team as it seemed to those who were dozing, and with a gap of a whole night between every one as it seemed to those who were broad awake. At length they began to jolt and rumble over horribly uneven stones, and Mr Pecksniff looking out of window said it was to-morrow morning, and they were there.

Very soon afterwards the coach stopped at the office in the city; and the street in which it was situated was already in a bustle, that fully bore out Mr Pecksniff's words about its being morning, though for any signs of day yet appearing in the sky it might have been midnight. There was a dense fog too; as if it were a city in the clouds, which they had been travelling to all night up a magic beanstalk; and there was a thick crust upon the pavement like oilcake; which, one of the outsides (mad, no doubt) said to another (his keeper, of course), was Snow.

Taking a confused leave of Anthony and his son, and leaving the luggage of himself and daughters at the office to be called for afterwards, Mr Pecksniff, with one of the young ladies under each arm, dived across the street, and then across other streets, and so up the queerest courts, and down the strangest alleys and under the blindest archways, in a kind of frenzy; now skipping over a kennel, now running for his life from a coach and horses; now thinking he had lost his way, now thinking he had found it; now in a state of the highest confidence, now despondent to the last degree, but always in a great perspiration and flurry; until at length they stopped in a kind of paved yard near the Monument. That is to say, Mr Pecksniff told them so; for as to anything they could see of the Monument, or anything else but the buildings close at hand, they might as well have been playing blindman's buff at Salisbury.

Mr Pecksniff looked about him for a moment, and then knocked at the door of a very dingy edifice, even among the choice collection of dingy edifices at hand; on the front of which was a little oval board like a tea-tray, with this inscription—'Commercial Boarding-House: M. Todgers.'

It seemed that M. Todgers was not up yet, for Mr Pecksniff knocked twice and rang thrice, without making any impression on anything but a dog over the way. At last a chain and some bolts were withdrawn with a rusty noise, as if the weather had made the very fastenings hoarse, and a small boy with a large red head, and no nose to speak of, and a very dirty Wellington boot on his left arm, appeared; who (being surprised) rubbed the nose just mentioned with the back of a shoe-brush, and said nothing.

'Still a-bed my man?' asked Mr Pecksniff.

'Still a-bed!' replied the boy. 'I wish they wos still a-bed. They're very noisy a-bed; all calling for their boots at once. I thought you was the Paper, and wondered why you didn't shove yourself through the grating as usual. What do you want?'

Considering his years, which were tender, the youth may be said to have preferred this question sternly, and in something of a defiant manner. But Mr Pecksniff, without taking umbrage at his bearing put a card in his hand, and bade him take that upstairs, and show them in the meanwhile into a room where there was a fire.

'Or if there's one in the eating parlour,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'I can find it myself.' So he led his daughters, without waiting for any further introduction, into a room on the ground-floor, where a table-cloth (rather a tight and scanty fit in reference to the table it covered) was already spread for breakfast; displaying a mighty dish of pink boiled beef; an instance of that particular style of loaf which is known to housekeepers as a slack-baked, crummy quartern; a liberal provision of cups and saucers; and the usual appendages.

Inside the fender were some half-dozen pairs of shoes and boots, of various sizes, just cleaned and turned with the soles upwards to dry; and a pair of short black gaiters, on one of which was chalked—in sport, it would appear, by some gentleman who had slipped down for the purpose, pending his toilet, and gone up again—'Jinkins's Particular,' while the other exhibited a sketch in profile, claiming to be the portrait of Jinkins himself.

M. Todgers's Commercial Boarding-House was a house of that sort which is likely to be dark at any time; but that morning it was especially dark. There was an odd smell in the passage, as if the concentrated essence of all the dinners that had been cooked in the kitchen since the house was built, lingered at the top of the kitchen stairs to that hour, and like the Black Friar in Don Juan, 'wouldn't be driven away.' In particular, there was a sensation of cabbage; as if all the greens that had ever been boiled there, were evergreens, and flourished in immortal strength. The parlour was wainscoted, and communicated to strangers a magnetic and instinctive consciousness of rats and mice. The staircase was very gloomy and very broad, with balustrades so thick and heavy that they would have served for a bridge. In a sombre corner on the first landing, stood a gruff old giant of a clock, with a preposterous coronet of three brass balls on his head; whom few had ever seen—none ever looked in the face—and who seemed to continue his heavy tick for no other reason than to warn heedless people from running into him accidentally. It had not been papered or painted, hadn't Todgers's, within the memory of man. It was very black, begrimed, and mouldy. And, at the top of the staircase, was an old, disjointed, rickety, ill-favoured skylight, patched and mended in all kinds of ways, which looked distrustfully down at everything that passed below, and covered Todgers's up as if it were a sort of human cucumber-frame, and only people of a peculiar growth were reared there.

Mr Pecksniff and his fair daughters had not stood warming themselves at the fire ten minutes, when the sound of feet was heard upon the stairs, and the presiding deity of the establishment came hurrying in.

M. Todgers was a lady, rather a bony and hard-featured lady, with a row of curls in front of her head, shaped like little barrels of beer; and on the top of it something made of net—you couldn't call it a cap exactly—which looked like a black cobweb. She had a little basket on her arm, and in it a bunch of keys that jingled as she came. In her other hand she bore a flaming tallow candle, which, after surveying Mr Pecksniff for one instant by its light, she put down upon the table, to the end that she might receive him with the greater cordiality.

'Mr Pecksniff!' cried Mrs Todgers. 'Welcome to London! Who would have thought of such a visit as this, after so—dear, dear!—so many years! How do you DO, Mr Pecksniff?'

'As well as ever; and as glad to see you, as ever;' Mr Pecksniff made response. 'Why, you are younger than you used to be!'

'YOU are, I am sure!' said Mrs Todgers. 'You're not a bit changed.'

'What do you say to this?' cried Mr Pecksniff, stretching out his hand towards the young ladies. 'Does this make me no older?'

'Not your daughters!' exclaimed the lady, raising her hands and clasping them. 'Oh, no, Mr Pecksniff! Your second, and her bridesmaid!'

Mr Pecksniff smiled complacently; shook his head; and said, 'My daughters, Mrs Todgers. Merely my daughters.'

'Ah!' sighed the good lady, 'I must believe you, for now I look at 'em I think I should have known 'em anywhere. My dear Miss Pecksniffs, how happy your Pa has made me!'

She hugged them both; and being by this time overpowered by her feelings or the inclemency of the morning, jerked a little pocket handkerchief out of the little basket, and applied the same to her face.

'Now, my good madam,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'I know the rules of your establishment, and that you only receive gentlemen boarders. But it occurred to me, when I left home, that perhaps you would give my daughters house room, and make an exception in their favour.'

'Perhaps?' cried Mrs Todgers ecstatically. 'Perhaps?'

'I may say then, that I was sure you would,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'I know that you have a little room of your own, and that they can be comfortable there, without appearing at the general table.'

'Dear girls!' said Mrs Todgers. 'I must take that liberty once more.'

Mrs Todgers meant by this that she must embrace them once more, which she accordingly did with great ardour. But the truth was that the house being full with the exception of one bed, which would now be occupied by Mr Pecksniff, she wanted time for consideration; and so much time too (for it was a knotty point how to dispose of them), that even when this second embrace was over, she stood for some moments gazing at the sisters, with affection beaming in one eye, and calculation shining out of the other.

'I think I know how to arrange it,' said Mrs Todgers, at length. 'A sofa bedstead in the little third room which opens from my own parlour.—Oh, you dear girls!'

Thereupon she embraced them once more, observing that she could not decide which was most like their poor mother (which was highly probable, seeing that she had never beheld that lady), but that she rather thought the youngest was; and then she said that as the gentlemen would be down directly, and the ladies were fatigued with travelling, would they step into her room at once?

It was on the same floor; being, in fact, the back parlour; and had, as Mrs Todgers said, the great advantage (in London) of not being overlooked; as they would see when the fog cleared off. Nor was this a vainglorious boast, for it commanded at a perspective of two feet, a brown wall with a black cistern on the top. The sleeping apartment designed for the young ladies was approached from this chamber by a mightily convenient little door, which would only open when fallen against by a strong person. It commanded from a similar point of sight another angle of the wall, and another side of the cistern. 'Not the damp side,' said Mrs Todgers. 'THAT is Mr Jinkins's.'

In the first of these sanctuaries a fire was speedily kindled by the youthful porter, who, whistling at his work in the absence of Mrs Todgers (not to mention his sketching figures on his corduroys with burnt firewood), and being afterwards taken by that lady in the fact, was dismissed with a box on his ears. Having prepared breakfast for the young ladies with her own hands, she withdrew to preside in the other room; where the joke at Mr Jinkins's expense seemed to be proceeding rather noisily.

'I won't ask you yet, my dears,' said Mr Pecksniff, looking in at the door, 'how you like London. Shall I?'

'We haven't seen much of it, Pa!' cried Merry.

'Nothing, I hope,' said Cherry. (Both very miserably.)

'Indeed,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'that's true. We have our pleasure, and our business too, before us. All in good time. All in good time!'

Whether Mr Pecksniff's business in London was as strictly professional as he had given his new pupil to understand, we shall see, to adopt that worthy man's phraseology, 'all in good time.'

CHAPTER NINE

TOWN AND TODGER'S

Surely there never was, in any other borough, city, or hamlet in the world, such a singular sort of a place as Todgers's. And surely London, to judge from that part of it which hemmed Todgers's round and hustled it, and crushed it, and stuck its brick-and-mortar elbows into it, and kept the air from it, and stood perpetually between it and the light, was worthy of Todgers's, and qualified to be on terms of close relationship and alliance with hundreds and thousands of the odd family to which Todgers's belonged.

You couldn't walk about Todgers's neighbourhood, as you could in any other neighbourhood. You groped your way for an hour through lanes and byways, and court-yards, and passages; and you never once emerged upon anything that might be reasonably called a street. A kind of resigned distraction came over the stranger as he trod those devious mazes, and, giving himself up for lost, went in and out and round about and quietly turned back again when he came to a dead wall or was stopped by an iron railing, and felt that the means of escape might possibly present themselves in their own good time, but that to anticipate them was hopeless. Instances were known of people who, being asked to dine at Todgers's, had travelled round and round for a weary time, with its very chimney-pots in view; and finding it, at last, impossible of attainment, had gone home again with a gentle melancholy on their spirits, tranquil and uncomplaining. Nobody had ever found Todgers's on a verbal direction, though given within a few minutes' walk of it. Cautious emigrants from Scotland or the North of England had been known to reach it safely, by impressing a charity-boy, town-bred, and bringing him along with them; or by clinging tenaciously to the postman; but these were rare exceptions, and only went to prove the rule that Todgers's was in a labyrinth, whereof the mystery was known but to a chosen few.

Several fruit-brokers had their marts near Todgers's; and one of the first impressions wrought upon the stranger's senses was of oranges—of damaged oranges—with blue and green bruises on them, festering in boxes, or mouldering away in cellars. All day long, a stream of porters from the wharves beside the river, each bearing on his back a bursting chest of oranges, poured slowly through the narrow passages; while underneath the archway by the public-house, the knots of those who rested and regaled within, were piled from morning until night. Strange solitary pumps were found near Todgers's hiding themselves for the most part in blind alleys, and keeping company with fire-ladders. There were churches also by dozens, with many a ghostly little churchyard, all overgrown with such straggling vegetation as springs up spontaneously from damp, and graves, and rubbish. In some of these dingy resting-places which bore much the same analogy to green churchyards, as the pots of earth for mignonette and wall-flower in the windows overlooking them did to rustic gardens, there were trees; tall trees; still putting forth their leaves in each succeeding year, with such a languishing remembrance of their kind (so one might fancy, looking on their sickly boughs) as birds in cages have of theirs. Here, paralysed old watchmen guarded the bodies of the dead at night, year after year, until at last they joined that solemn brotherhood; and, saving that they slept below the ground a sounder sleep than even they had ever known above it, and were shut up in another kind of box, their condition can hardly be said to have undergone any material change when they, in turn, were watched themselves.

Among the narrow thoroughfares at hand, there lingered, here and there, an ancient doorway of carved oak, from which, of old, the sounds of revelry and feasting often came; but now these mansions, only used for storehouses, were dark and dull, and, being filled with wool, and cotton, and the like—such heavy merchandise as stifles sound and stops the throat of echo—had an air of palpable deadness about them which, added to their silence and desertion, made them very grim. In like manner, there were gloomy courtyards in these parts, into which few but belated wayfarers ever strayed, and where vast bags and packs of goods, upward or downward bound, were for ever dangling between heaven and earth from lofty cranes There were more trucks near Todgers's than you would suppose whole city could ever need; not active trucks, but a vagabond race, for ever lounging in the narrow lanes before their masters' doors and stopping up the pass; so that when a stray hackney-coach or lumbering waggon came that way, they were the cause of such an uproar as enlivened the whole neighbourhood, and made the bells in the next churchtower vibrate again. In the throats and maws of dark no-thoroughfares near Todgers's, individual wine-merchants and wholesale dealers in grocery-ware had perfect little towns of their own; and, deep among the foundations of these buildings, the ground was undermined and burrowed out into stables, where cart-horses, troubled by rats, might be heard on a quiet Sunday rattling their halters, as disturbed spirits in tales of haunted houses are said to clank their chains.

To tell of half the queer old taverns that had a drowsy and secret existence near Todgers's, would fill a goodly book; while a second volume no less capacious might be devoted to an account of the quaint old guests who frequented their dimly lighted parlours. These were, in general, ancient inhabitants of that region; born, and bred there from boyhood, who had long since become wheezy and asthmatical, and short of breath, except in the article of story-telling; in which respect they were still marvellously long-winded. These gentry were much opposed to steam and all new-fangled ways, and held ballooning to be sinful, and deplored the degeneracy of the times; which that particular member of each little club who kept the keys of the nearest church, professionally, always attributed to the prevalence of dissent and irreligion; though the major part of the company inclined to the belief that virtue went out with hair-powder, and that Old England's greatness had decayed amain with barbers.

As to Todgers's itself—speaking of it only as a house in that neighbourhood, and making no reference to its merits as a commercial boarding establishment—it was worthy to stand where it did. There was one staircase-window in it, at the side of the house, on the ground floor; which tradition said had not been opened for a hundred years at least, and which, abutting on an always dirty lane, was so begrimed and coated with a century's mud, that no one pane of glass could possibly fall out, though all were cracked and broken twenty times. But the grand mystery of Todgers's was the cellarage, approachable only by a little back door and a rusty grating; which cellarage within the memory of man had had no connection with the house, but had always been the freehold property of somebody else, and was reported to be full of wealth; though in what shape—whether in silver, brass, or gold, or butts of wine, or casks of gun-powder—was matter of profound uncertainty and supreme indifference to Todgers's and all its inmates.

The top of the house was worthy of notice. There was a sort of terrace on the roof, with posts and fragments of rotten lines, once intended to dry clothes upon; and there were two or three tea-chests out there, full of earth, with forgotten plants in them, like old walking-sticks. Whoever climbed to this observatory, was stunned at first from having knocked his head against the little door in coming out; and after that, was for the moment choked from having looked perforce, straight down the kitchen chimney; but these two stages over, there were things to gaze at from the top of Todgers's, well worth your seeing too. For first and foremost, if the day were bright, you observed upon the house-tops, stretching far away, a long dark path; the shadow of the Monument; and turning round, the tall original was close beside you, with every hair erect upon his golden head, as if the doings of the city frightened him. Then there were steeples, towers, belfries, shining vanes, and masts of ships; a very forest. Gables, housetops, garret-windows, wilderness upon wilderness. Smoke and noise enough for all the world at once.

After the first glance, there were slight features in the midst of this crowd of objects, which sprung out from the mass without any reason, as it were, and took hold of the attention whether the spectator would or no. Thus, the revolving chimney-pots on one great stack of buildings seemed to be turning gravely to each other every now and then, and whispering the result of their separate observation of what was going on below. Others, of a crook-backed shape, appeared to be maliciously holding themselves askew, that they might shut the prospect out and baffle Todgers's. The man who was mending a pen at an upper window over the way, became of paramount importance in the scene, and made a blank in it, ridiculously disproportionate in its extent, when he retired. The gambols of a piece of cloth upon the dyer's pole had far more interest for the moment than all the changing motion of the crowd. Yet even while the looker-on felt angry with himself for this, and wondered how it was, the tumult swelled into a roar; the hosts of objects seemed to thicken and expand a hundredfold, and after gazing round him, quite scared, he turned into Todgers's again, much more rapidly than he came out; and ten to one he told M. Todgers afterwards that if he hadn't done so, he would certainly have come into the street by the shortest cut; that is to say, head-foremost.

So said the two Miss Pecksniffs, when they retired with Mrs Todgers from this place of espial, leaving the youthful porter to close the door and follow them downstairs; who, being of a playful temperament, and contemplating with a delight peculiar to his sex and time of life, any chance of dashing himself into small fragments, lingered behind to walk upon the parapet.

It being the second day of their stay in London, the Miss Pecksniffs and Mrs Todgers were by this time highly confidential, insomuch that the last-named lady had already communicated the particulars of three early disappointments of a tender nature; and had furthermore possessed her young friends with a general summary of the life, conduct, and character of Mr Todgers. Who, it seemed, had cut his matrimonial career rather short, by unlawfully running away from his happiness, and establishing himself in foreign countries as a bachelor.

'Your pa was once a little particular in his attentions, my dears,' said Mrs Todgers, 'but to be your ma was too much happiness denied me. You'd hardly know who this was done for, perhaps?'

She called their attention to an oval miniature, like a little blister, which was tacked up over the kettle-holder, and in which there was a dreamy shadowing forth of her own visage.

'It's a speaking likeness!' cried the two Miss Pecksniffs.

'It was considered so once,' said Mrs Todgers, warming herself in a gentlemanly manner at the fire; 'but I hardly thought you would have known it, my loves.'

They would have known it anywhere. If they could have met with it in the street, or seen it in a shop window, they would have cried 'Good gracious! Mrs Todgers!'

'Presiding over an establishment like this, makes sad havoc with the features, my dear Miss Pecksniffs,' said Mrs Todgers. 'The gravy alone, is enough to add twenty years to one's age, I do assure you.'

'Lor'!' cried the two Miss Pecksniffs.

'The anxiety of that one item, my dears,' said Mrs Todgers, 'keeps the mind continually upon the stretch. There is no such passion in human nature, as the passion for gravy among commercial gentlemen. It's nothing to say a joint won't yield—a whole animal wouldn't yield—the amount of gravy they expect each day at dinner. And what I have undergone in consequence,' cried Mrs Todgers, raising her eyes and shaking her head, 'no one would believe!'

'Just like Mr Pinch, Merry!' said Charity. 'We have always noticed it in him, you remember?'

'Yes, my dear,' giggled Merry, 'but we have never given it him, you know.'

'You, my dears, having to deal with your pa's pupils who can't help themselves, are able to take your own way,' said Mrs Todgers; 'but in a commercial establishment, where any gentleman may say any Saturday evening, "Mrs Todgers, this day week we part, in consequence of the cheese," it is not so easy to preserve a pleasant understanding. Your pa was kind enough,' added the good lady, 'to invite me to take a ride with you to-day; and I think he mentioned that you were going to call upon Miss Pinch. Any relation to the gentleman you were speaking of just now, Miss Pecksniff?'

'For goodness sake, Mrs Todgers,' interposed the lively Merry, 'don't call him a gentleman. My dear Cherry, Pinch a gentleman! The idea!'

'What a wicked girl you are!' cried Mrs Todgers, embracing her with great affection. 'You are quite a quiz, I do declare! My dear Miss Pecksniff, what a happiness your sister's spirits must be to your pa and self!'

'He's the most hideous, goggle-eyed creature, Mrs Todgers, in existence,' resumed Merry: 'quite an ogre. The ugliest, awkwardest frightfullest being, you can imagine. This is his sister, so I leave you to suppose what SHE is. I shall be obliged to laugh outright, I know I shall!' cried the charming girl, 'I never shall be able to keep my countenance. The notion of a Miss Pinch presuming to exist at all is sufficient to kill one, but to see her—oh my stars!'

Mrs Todgers laughed immensely at the dear love's humour, and declared she was quite afraid of her, that she was. She was so very severe.

'Who is severe?' cried a voice at the door. 'There is no such thing as severity in our family, I hope!' And then Mr Pecksniff peeped smilingly into the room, and said, 'May I come in, Mrs Todgers?'

Mrs Todgers almost screamed, for the little door of communication between that room and the inner one being wide open, there was a full disclosure of the sofa bedstead in all its monstrous impropriety. But she had the presence of mind to close this portal in the twinkling of an eye; and having done so, said, though not without confusion, 'Oh yes, Mr Pecksniff, you can come in, if you please.'

'How are we to-day,' said Mr Pecksniff, jocosely, 'and what are our plans? Are we ready to go and see Tom Pinch's sister? Ha, ha, ha! Poor Thomas Pinch!'

'Are we ready,' returned Mrs Todgers, nodding her head with mysterious intelligence, 'to send a favourable reply to Mr Jinkins's round-robin? That's the first question, Mr Pecksniff.'

'Why Mr Jinkins's robin, my dear madam?' asked Mr Pecksniff, putting one arm round Mercy, and the other round Mrs Todgers, whom he seemed, in the abstraction of the moment, to mistake for Charity. 'Why Mr Jinkins's?'

'Because he began to get it up, and indeed always takes the lead in the house,' said Mrs Todgers, playfully. 'That's why, sir.'

'Jinkins is a man of superior talents,' observed Mr Pecksniff. 'I have conceived a great regard for Jinkins. I take Jinkins's desire to pay polite attention to my daughters, as an additional proof of the friendly feeling of Jinkins, Mrs Todgers.'

'Well now,' returned that lady, 'having said so much, you must say the rest, Mr Pecksniff; so tell the dear young ladies all about it.'

With these words she gently eluded Mr Pecksniff's grasp, and took Miss Charity into her own embrace; though whether she was impelled to this proceeding solely by the irrepressible affection she had conceived for that young lady, or whether it had any reference to a lowering, not to say distinctly spiteful expression which had been visible in her face for some moments, has never been exactly ascertained. Be this as it may, Mr Pecksniff went on to inform his daughters of the purport and history of the round-robin aforesaid, which was in brief, that the commercial gentlemen who helped to make up the sum and substance of that noun of multitude signifying many, called Todgers's, desired the honour of their presence at the general table, so long as they remained in the house, and besought that they would grace the board at dinner-time next day, the same being Sunday. He further said, that Mrs Todgers being a consenting party to this invitation, he was willing, for his part, to accept it; and so left them that he might write his gracious answer, the while they armed themselves with their best bonnets for the utter defeat and overthrow of Miss Pinch.

Tom Pinch's sister was governess in a family, a lofty family; perhaps the wealthiest brass and copper founders' family known to mankind. They lived at Camberwell; in a house so big and fierce, that its mere outside, like the outside of a giant's castle, struck terror into vulgar minds and made bold persons quail. There was a great front gate; with a great bell, whose handle was in itself a note of admiration; and a great lodge; which being close to the house, rather spoilt the look-out certainly but made the look-in tremendous. At this entry, a great porter kept constant watch and ward; and when he gave the visitor high leave to pass, he rang a second great bell, responsive to whose note a great footman appeared in due time at the great halldoor, with such great tags upon his liveried shoulder that he was perpetually entangling and hooking himself among the chairs and tables, and led a life of torment which could scarcely have been surpassed, if he had been a blue-bottle in a world of cobwebs.

To this mansion Mr Pecksniff, accompanied by his daughters and Mrs Todgers, drove gallantly in a one-horse fly. The foregoing ceremonies having been all performed, they were ushered into the house; and so, by degrees, they got at last into a small room with books in it, where Mr Pinch's sister was at that moment instructing her eldest pupil; to wit, a premature little woman of thirteen years old, who had already arrived at such a pitch of whalebone and education that she had nothing girlish about her, which was a source of great rejoicing to all her relations and friends.

'Visitors for Miss Pinch!' said the footman. He must have been an ingenious young man, for he said it very cleverly; with a nice discrimination between the cold respect with which he would have announced visitors to the family, and the warm personal interest with which he would have announced visitors to the cook.

'Visitors for Miss Pinch!'

Miss Pinch rose hastily; with such tokens of agitation as plainly declared that her list of callers was not numerous. At the same time, the little pupil became alarmingly upright, and prepared herself to take mental notes of all that might be said and done. For the lady of the establishment was curious in the natural history and habits of the animal called Governess, and encouraged her daughters to report thereon whenever occasion served; which was, in reference to all parties concerned, very laudable, improving, and pleasant.

It is a melancholy fact; but it must be related, that Mr Pinch's sister was not at all ugly. On the contrary, she had a good face; a very mild and prepossessing face; and a pretty little figure—slight and short, but remarkable for its neatness. There was something of her brother, much of him indeed, in a certain gentleness of manner, and in her look of timid trustfulness; but she was so far from being a fright, or a dowdy, or a horror, or anything else, predicted by the two Miss Pecksniffs, that those young ladies naturally regarded her with great indignation, feeling that this was by no means what they had come to see.

Miss Mercy, as having the larger share of gaiety, bore up the best against this disappointment, and carried it off, in outward show at least, with a titter; but her sister, not caring to hide her disdain, expressed it pretty openly in her looks. As to Mrs Todgers, she leaned on Mr Pecksniff's arm and preserved a kind of genteel grimness, suitable to any state of mind, and involving any shade of opinion.

'Don't be alarmed, Miss Pinch,' said Mr Pecksniff, taking her hand condescendingly in one of his, and patting it with the other. 'I have called to see you, in pursuance of a promise given to your brother, Thomas Pinch. My name—compose yourself, Miss Pinch—is Pecksniff.'

The good man emphasised these words as though he would have said, 'You see in me, young person, the benefactor of your race; the patron of your house; the preserver of your brother, who is fed with manna daily from my table; and in right of whom there is a considerable balance in my favour at present standing in the books beyond the sky. But I have no pride, for I can afford to do without it!'

The poor girl felt it all as if it had been Gospel truth. Her brother writing in the fullness of his simple heart, had often told her so, and how much more! As Mr Pecksniff ceased to speak, she hung her head, and dropped a tear upon his hand.

'Oh very well, Miss Pinch!' thought the sharp pupil, 'crying before strangers, as if you didn't like the situation!'

'Thomas is well,' said Mr Pecksniff; 'and sends his love and this letter. I cannot say, poor fellow, that he will ever be distinguished in our profession; but he has the will to do well, which is the next thing to having the power; and, therefore, we must bear with him. Eh?'

'I know he has the will, sir,' said Tom Pinch's sister, 'and I know how kindly and considerately you cherish it, for which neither he nor I can ever be grateful enough, as we very often say in writing to each other. The young ladies too,' she added, glancing gratefully at his two daughters, 'I know how much we owe to them.'

'My dears,' said Mr Pecksniff, turning to them with a smile: 'Thomas's sister is saying something you will be glad to hear, I think.'

'We can't take any merit to ourselves, papa!' cried Cherry, as they both apprised Tom Pinch's sister, with a curtsey, that they would feel obliged if she would keep her distance. 'Mr Pinch's being so well provided for is owing to you alone, and we can only say how glad we are to hear that he is as grateful as he ought to be.'

'Oh very well, Miss Pinch!' thought the pupil again. 'Got a grateful brother, living on other people's kindness!'

'It was very kind of you,' said Tom Pinch's sister, with Tom's own simplicity and Tom's own smile, 'to come here; very kind indeed; though how great a kindness you have done me in gratifying my wish to see you, and to thank you with my own lips, you, who make so light of benefits conferred, can scarcely think.'

'Very grateful; very pleasant; very proper,' murmured Mr Pecksniff.

'It makes me happy too,' said Ruth Pinch, who now that her first surprise was over, had a chatty, cheerful way with her, and a single-hearted desire to look upon the best side of everything, which was the very moral and image of Tom; 'very happy to think that you will be able to tell him how more than comfortably I am situated here, and how unnecessary it is that he should ever waste a regret on my being cast upon my own resources. Dear me! So long as I heard that he was happy, and he heard that I was,' said Tom's sister, 'we could both bear, without one impatient or complaining thought, a great deal more than ever we have had to endure, I am very certain.' And if ever the plain truth were spoken on this occasionally false earth, Tom's sister spoke it when she said that.

'Ah!' cried Mr Pecksniff whose eyes had in the meantime wandered to the pupil; 'certainly. And how do YOU do, my very interesting child?'

'Quite well, I thank you, sir,' replied that frosty innocent.

'A sweet face this, my dears,' said Mr Pecksniff, turning to his daughters. 'A charming manner!'

Both young ladies had been in ecstasies with the scion of a wealthy house (through whom the nearest road and shortest cut to her parents might be supposed to lie) from the first. Mrs Todgers vowed that anything one quarter so angelic she had never seen. 'She wanted but a pair of wings, a dear,' said that good woman, 'to be a young syrup'—meaning, possibly, young sylph, or seraph.

'If you will give that to your distinguished parents, my amiable little friend,' said Mr Pecksniff, producing one of his professional cards, 'and will say that I and my daughters—'

'And Mrs Todgers, pa,' said Merry.

'And Mrs Todgers, of London,' added Mr Pecksniff; 'that I, and my daughters, and Mrs Todgers, of London, did not intrude upon them, as our object simply was to take some notice of Miss Pinch, whose brother is a young man in my employment; but that I could not leave this very chaste mansion, without adding my humble tribute, as an Architect, to the correctness and elegance of the owner's taste, and to his just appreciation of that beautiful art to the cultivation of which I have devoted a life, and to the promotion of whose glory and advancement I have sacrified a—a fortune—I shall be very much obliged to you.'

'Missis's compliments to Miss Pinch,' said the footman, suddenly appearing, and speaking in exactly the same key as before, 'and begs to know wot my young lady is a-learning of just now.'

'Oh!' said Mr Pecksniff, 'Here is the young man. HE will take the card. With my compliments, if you please, young man. My dears, we are interrupting the studies. Let us go.'

Some confusion was occasioned for an instant by Mrs Todgers's unstrapping her little flat hand-basket, and hurriedly entrusting the 'young man' with one of her own cards, which, in addition to certain detailed information relative to the terms of the commercial establishment, bore a foot-note to the effect that M. T. took that opportunity of thanking those gentlemen who had honoured her with their favours, and begged they would have the goodness, if satisfied with the table, to recommend her to their friends. But Mr Pecksniff, with admirable presence of mind, recovered this document, and buttoned it up in his own pocket.

Then he said to Miss Pinch—with more condescension and kindness than ever, for it was desirable the footman should expressly understand that they were not friends of hers, but patrons:

'Good morning. Good-bye. God bless you! You may depend upon my continued protection of your brother Thomas. Keep your mind quite at ease, Miss Pinch!'

'Thank you,' said Tom's sister heartily; 'a thousand times.'

'Not at all,' he retorted, patting her gently on the head. 'Don't mention it. You will make me angry if you do. My sweet child'—to the pupil

—'farewell! That fairy creature,' said Mr Pecksniff, looking in his pensive mood hard at the footman, as if he meant him, 'has shed a vision on my path, refulgent in its nature, and not easily to be obliterated. My dears, are you ready?'

They were not quite ready yet, for they were still caressing the pupil. But they tore themselves away at length; and sweeping past Miss Pinch with each a haughty inclination of the head and a curtsey strangled in its birth, flounced into the passage.

The young man had rather a long job in showing them out; for Mr Pecksniff's delight in the tastefulness of the house was such that he could not help often stopping (particularly when they were near the parlour door) and giving it expression, in a loud voice and very learned terms. Indeed, he delivered, between the study and the hall, a familiar exposition of the whole science of architecture as applied to dwelling-houses, and was yet in the freshness of his eloquence when they reached the garden.

'If you look,' said Mr Pecksniff, backing from the steps, with his head on one side and his eyes half-shut that he might the better take in the proportions of the exterior: 'If you look, my dears, at the cornice which supports the roof, and observe the airiness of its construction, especially where it sweeps the southern angle of the building, you will feel with me—How do you do, sir? I hope you're well?'

Interrupting himself with these words, he very politely bowed to a middle-aged gentleman at an upper window, to whom he spoke—not because the gentleman could hear him (for he certainly could not), but as an appropriate accompaniment to his salutation.

'I have no doubt, my dears,' said Mr Pecksniff, feigning to point out other beauties with his hand, 'that this is the proprietor. I should be glad to know him. It might lead to something. Is he looking this way, Charity?'

'He is opening the window pa!'

'Ha, ha!' cried Mr Pecksniff softly. 'All right! He has found I'm professional. He heard me inside just now, I have no doubt. Don't look! With regard to the fluted pillars in the portico, my dears—'

'Hallo!' cried the gentleman.

'Sir, your servant!' said Mr Pecksniff, taking off his hat. 'I am proud to make your acquaintance.'

'Come off the grass, will you!' roared the gentleman.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, doubtful of his having heard aright. 'Did you—?'

'Come off the grass!' repeated the gentleman, warmly.

'We are unwilling to intrude, sir,' Mr Pecksniff smilingly began.

'But you ARE intruding,' returned the other, 'unwarrantably intruding. Trespassing. You see a gravel walk, don't you? What do you think it's meant for? Open the gate there! Show that party out!'

With that he clapped down the window again, and disappeared.

Mr Pecksniff put on his hat, and walked with great deliberation and in profound silence to the fly, gazing at the clouds as he went, with great interest. After helping his daughters and Mrs Todgers into that conveyance, he stood looking at it for some moments, as if he were not quite certain whether it was a carriage or a temple; but having settled this point in his mind, he got into his place, spread his hands out on his knees, and smiled upon the three beholders.

But his daughters, less tranquil-minded, burst into a torrent of indignation. This came, they said, of cherishing such creatures as the Pinches. This came of lowering themselves to their level. This came of putting themselves in the humiliating position of seeming to know such bold, audacious, cunning, dreadful girls as that. They had expected this. They had predicted it to Mrs Todgers, as she (Todgers) could depone, that very morning. To this, they added, that the owner of the house, supposing them to be Miss Pinch's friends, had acted, in their opinion, quite correctly, and had done no more than, under such circumstances, might reasonably have been expected. To that they added (with a trifling inconsistency), that he was a brute and a bear; and then they merged into a flood of tears, which swept away all wandering epithets before it.

Perhaps Miss Pinch was scarcely so much to blame in the matter as the Seraph, who, immediately on the withdrawal of the visitors, had hastened to report them at head-quarters, with a full account of their having presumptuously charged her with the delivery of a message afterwards consigned to the footman; which outrage, taken in conjunction with Mr Pecksniff's unobtrusive remarks on the establishment, might possibly have had some share in their dismissal. Poor Miss Pinch, however, had to bear the brunt of it with both parties; being so severely taken to task by the Seraph's mother for having such vulgar acquaintances, that she was fain to retire to her own room in tears, which her natural cheerfulness and submission, and the delight of having seen Mr Pecksniff, and having received a letter from her brother, were at first insufficient to repress.

As to Mr Pecksniff, he told them in the fly, that a good action was its own reward; and rather gave them to understand, that if he could have been kicked in such a cause, he would have liked it all the better. But this was no comfort to the young ladies, who scolded violently the whole way back, and even exhibited, more than once, a keen desire to attack the devoted Mrs Todgers; on whose personal appearance, but particularly on whose offending card and hand-basket, they were secretly inclined to lay the blame of half their failure.

Todgers's was in a great bustle that evening, partly owing to some additional domestic preparations for the morrow, and partly to the excitement always inseparable in that house from Saturday night, when every gentleman's linen arrived at a different hour in its own little bundle, with his private account pinned on the outside. There was always a great clinking of pattens downstairs, too, until midnight or so, on Saturdays; together with a frequent gleaming of mysterious lights in the area; much working at the pump; and a constant jangling of the iron handle of the pail. Shrill altercations from time to time arose between Mrs Todgers and unknown females in remote back kitchens; and sounds were occasionally heard, indicative of small articles of iron mongery and hardware being thrown at the boy. It was the custom of that youth on Saturdays, to roll up his shirt sleeves to his shoulders, and pervade all parts of the house in an apron of coarse green baize; moreover, he was more strongly tempted on Saturdays than on other days (it being a busy time), to make excursive bolts into the neighbouring alleys when he answered the door, and there to play at leap-frog and other sports with vagrant lads, until pursued and brought back by the hair of his head or the lobe of his ear; thus he was quite a conspicuous feature among the peculiar incidents of the last day in the week at Todgers's.

He was especially so on this particular Saturday evening, and honoured the Miss Pecksniffs with a deal of notice; seldom passing the door of Mrs Todgers's private room, where they sat alone before the fire, working by the light of a solitary candle, without putting in his head and greeting them with some such compliments as, 'There you are agin!' 'An't it nice?'—and similar humorous attentions.

'I say,' he whispered, stopping in one of his journeys to and fro, 'young ladies, there's soup to-morrow. She's a-making it now. An't she a-putting in the water? Oh! not at all neither!'

In the course of answering another knock, he thrust in his head again.

'I say! There's fowls to-morrow. Not skinny ones. Oh no!'

Presently he called through the key-hole:

'There's a fish to-morrow. Just come. Don't eat none of him!' And, with this special warning, vanished again.

By-and-bye, he returned to lay the cloth for supper; it having been arranged between Mrs Todgers and the young ladies, that they should partake of an exclusive veal-cutlet together in the privacy of that apartment. He entertained them on this occasion by thrusting the lighted candle into his mouth, and exhibiting his face in a state of transparency; after the performance of which feat, he went on with his professional duties; brightening every knife as he laid it on the table, by breathing on the blade and afterwards polishing the same on the apron already mentioned. When he had completed his preparations, he grinned at the sisters, and expressed his belief that the approaching collation would be of 'rather a spicy sort.'

'Will it be long, before it's ready, Bailey?' asked Mercy.

'No,' said Bailey, 'it IS cooked. When I come up, she was dodging among the tender pieces with a fork, and eating of 'em.'

But he had scarcely achieved the utterance of these words, when he received a manual compliment on the head, which sent him staggering against the wall; and Mrs Todgers, dish in hand, stood indignantly before him.

'Oh you little villain!' said that lady. 'Oh you bad, false boy!'

'No worse than yerself,' retorted Bailey, guarding his head, on a principle invented by Mr Thomas Cribb. 'Ah! Come now! Do that again, will yer?'

'He's the most dreadful child,' said Mrs Todgers, setting down the dish, 'I ever had to deal with. The gentlemen spoil him to that extent, and teach him such things, that I'm afraid nothing but hanging will ever do him any good.'

'Won't it!' cried Bailey. 'Oh! Yes! Wot do you go a-lowerin the table-beer for then, and destroying my constitooshun?'

'Go downstairs, you vicious boy,' said Mrs Todgers, holding the door open. 'Do you hear me? Go along!'

After two or three dexterous feints, he went, and was seen no more that night, save once, when he brought up some tumblers and hot water, and much disturbed the two Miss Pecksniffs by squinting hideously behind the back of the unconscious Mrs Todgers. Having done this justice to his wounded feelings, he retired underground; where, in company with a swarm of black beetles and a kitchen candle, he employed his faculties in cleaning boots and brushing clothes until the night was far advanced.

Benjamin was supposed to be the real name of this young retainer but he was known by a great variety of names. Benjamin, for instance, had been converted into Uncle Ben, and that again had been corrupted into Uncle; which, by an easy transition, had again passed into Barnwell, in memory of the celebrated relative in that degree who was shot by his nephew George, while meditating in his garden at Camberwell. The gentlemen at Todgers's had a merry habit, too, of bestowing upon him, for the time being, the name of any notorious malefactor or minister; and sometimes when current events were flat they even sought the pages of history for these distinctions; as Mr Pitt, Young Brownrigg, and the like. At the period of which we write, he was generally known among the gentlemen as Bailey junior; a name bestowed upon him in contradistinction, perhaps, to Old Bailey; and possibly as involving the recollection of an unfortunate lady of the same name, who perished by her own hand early in life, and has been immortalised in a ballad.

The usual Sunday dinner-hour at Todgers's was two o'clock—a suitable time, it was considered for all parties; convenient to Mrs Todgers, on account of the bakers; and convenient to the gentlemen with reference to their afternoon engagements. But on the Sunday which was to introduce the two Miss Pecksniffs to a full knowledge of Todgers's and its society, the dinner was postponed until five, in order that everything might be as genteel as the occasion demanded.

When the hour drew nigh, Bailey junior, testifying great excitement, appeared in a complete suit of cast-off clothes several sizes too large for him, and in particular, mounted a clean shirt of such extraordinary magnitude, that one of the gentlemen (remarkable for his ready wit) called him 'collars' on the spot. At about a quarter before five, a deputation, consisting of Mr Jinkins, and another gentleman, whose name was Gander, knocked at the door of Mrs Todgers's room, and, being formally introduced to the two Miss Pecksniffs by their parent who was in waiting, besought the honour of conducting them upstairs.

The drawing-room at Todgers's was out of the common style; so much so indeed, that you would hardly have taken it to be a drawingroom, unless you were told so by somebody who was in the secret. It was floor-clothed all over; and the ceiling, including a great beam in the middle, was papered. Besides the three little windows, with seats in them, commanding the opposite archway, there was another window looking point blank, without any compromise at all about it into Jinkins's bedroom; and high up, all along one side of the wall was a strip of panes of glass, two-deep, giving light to the staircase. There were the oddest closets possible, with little casements in them like eight-day clocks, lurking in the wainscot and taking the shape of the stairs; and the very door itself (which was painted black) had two great glass eyes in its forehead, with an inquisitive green pupil in the middle of each.

Here the gentlemen were all assembled. There was a general cry of 'Hear, hear!' and 'Bravo Jink!' when Mr Jinkins appeared with Charity on his arm; which became quite rapturous as Mr Gander followed, escorting Mercy, and Mr Pecksniff brought up the rear with Mrs Todgers.

Then the presentations took place. They included a gentleman of a sporting turn, who propounded questions on jockey subjects to the editors of Sunday papers, which were regarded by his friends as rather stiff things to answer; and they included a gentleman of a theatrical turn, who had once entertained serious thoughts of 'coming out,' but had been kept in by the wickedness of human nature; and they included a gentleman of a debating turn, who was strong at speech-making; and a gentleman of a literary turn, who wrote squibs upon the rest, and knew the weak side of everybody's character but his own. There was a gentleman of a vocal turn, and a gentleman of a smoking turn, and a gentleman of a convivial turn; some of the gentlemen had a turn for whist, and a large proportion of the gentlemen had a strong turn for billiards and betting. They had all, it may be presumed, a turn for business; being all commercially employed in one way or other; and had, every one in his own way, a decided turn for pleasure to boot. Mr Jinkins was of a fashionable turn; being a regular frequenter of the Parks on Sundays, and knowing a great many carriages by sight. He spoke mysteriously, too, of splendid women, and was suspected of having once committed himself with a Countess. Mr Gander was of a witty turn being indeed the gentleman who had originated the sally about 'collars;' which sparkling pleasantry was now retailed from mouth to mouth, under the title of Gander's Last, and was received in all parts of the room with great applause. Mr Jinkins it may be added, was much the oldest of the party; being a fish-salesman's book-keeper, aged forty. He was the oldest boarder also; and in right of his double seniority, took the lead in the house, as Mrs Todgers had already said.

There was considerable delay in the production of dinner, and poor Mrs Todgers, being reproached in confidence by Jinkins, slipped in and out, at least twenty times to see about it; always coming back as though she had no such thing upon her mind, and hadn't been out at all. But there was no hitch in the conversation nevertheless; for one gentleman, who travelled in the perfumery line, exhibited an interesting nick-nack, in the way of a remarkable cake of shaving soap which he had lately met with in Germany; and the gentleman of a literary turn repeated (by desire) some sarcastic stanzas he had recently produced on the freezing of the tank at the back of the house. These amusements, with the miscellaneous conversation arising out of them, passed the time splendidly, until dinner was announced by Bailey junior in these terms:

'The wittles is up!'

On which notice they immediately descended to the banquet-hall; some of the more facetious spirits in the rear taking down gentlemen as if they were ladies, in imitation of the fortunate possessors of the two Miss Pecksniffs.

Mr Pecksniff said grace—a short and pious grace, involving a blessing on the appetites of those present, and committing all persons who had nothing to eat, to the care of Providence; whose business (so said the grace, in effect) it clearly was, to look after them. This done, they fell to with less ceremony than appetite; the table groaning beneath the weight, not only of the delicacies whereof the Miss Pecksniffs had been previously forewarned, but of boiled beef, roast veal, bacon, pies and abundance of such heavy vegetables as are favourably known to housekeepers for their satisfying qualities. Besides which, there were bottles of stout, bottles of wine, bottles of ale, and divers other strong drinks, native and foreign.

All this was highly agreeable to the two Miss Pecksniffs, who were in immense request; sitting one on either hand of Mr Jinkins at the bottom of the table; and who were called upon to take wine with some new admirer every minute. They had hardly ever felt so pleasant, and so full of conversation, in their lives; Mercy, in particular, was uncommonly brilliant, and said so many good things in the way of lively repartee that she was looked upon as a prodigy. 'In short,' as that young lady observed, 'they felt now, indeed, that they were in London, and for the first time too.'

Their young friend Bailey sympathized in these feelings to the fullest extent, and, abating nothing of his patronage, gave them every encouragement in his power; favouring them, when the general attention was diverted from his proceedings, with many nods and winks and other tokens of recognition, and occasionally touching his nose with a corkscrew, as if to express the Bacchanalian character of the meeting. In truth, perhaps even the spirits of the two Miss Pecksniffs, and the hungry watchfulness of Mrs Todgers, were less worthy of note than the proceedings of this remarkable boy, whom nothing disconcerted or put out of his way. If any piece of crockery, a dish or otherwise, chanced to slip through his hands (which happened once or twice), he let it go with perfect good breeding, and never added to the painful emotions of the company by exhibiting the least regret. Nor did he, by hurrying to and fro, disturb the repose of the assembly, as many well-trained servants do; on the contrary, feeling the hopelessness of waiting upon so large a party, he left the gentlemen to help themselves to what they wanted, and seldom stirred from behind Mr Jinkins's chair, where, with his hands in his pockets, and his legs planted pretty wide apart, he led the laughter, and enjoyed the conversation.

The dessert was splendid. No waiting either. The pudding-plates had been washed in a little tub outside the door while cheese was on, and though they were moist and warm with friction, still there they were again, up to the mark, and true to time. Quarts of almonds; dozens of oranges; pounds of raisins; stacks of biffins; soup-plates full of nuts.—Oh, Todgers's could do it when it chose! mind that.

Then more wine came on; red wines and white wines; and a large china bowl of punch, brewed by the gentleman of a convivial turn, who adjured the Miss Pecksniffs not to be despondent on account of its dimensions, as there were materials in the house for the decoction of half a dozen more of the same size. Good gracious, how they laughed! How they coughed when they sipped it, because it was so strong; and how they laughed again when somebody vowed that but for its colour it might have been mistaken, in regard of its innocuous qualities, for new milk! What a shout of 'No!' burst from the gentlemen when they pathetically implored Mr Jinkins to suffer them to qualify it with hot water; and how blushingly, by little and little, did each of them drink her whole glassful, down to its very dregs!

Now comes the trying time. The sun, as Mr Jinkins says (gentlemanly creature, Jinkins—never at a loss!), is about to leave the firmament. 'Miss Pecksniff!' says Mrs Todgers, softly, 'will you—?' 'Oh dear, no more, Mrs Todgers.' Mrs Todgers rises; the two Miss Pecksniffs rise; all rise. Miss Mercy Pecksniff looks downward for her scarf. Where is it? Dear me, where CAN it be? Sweet girl, she has it on; not on her fair neck, but loose upon her flowing figure. A dozen hands assist her. She is all confusion. The youngest gentleman in company thirsts to murder Jinkins. She skips and joins her sister at the door. Her sister has her arm about the waist of Mrs Todgers. She winds her arm around her sister. Diana, what a picture! The last things visible are a shape and a skip. 'Gentlemen, let us drink the ladies!'

The enthusiasm is tremendous. The gentleman of a debating turn rises in the midst, and suddenly lets loose a tide of eloquence which bears down everything before it. He is reminded of a toast—a toast to which they will respond. There is an individual present; he has him in his eye; to whom they owe a debt of gratitude. He repeats it—a debt of gratitude. Their rugged natures have been softened and ameliorated that day, by the society of lovely woman. There is a gentleman in company whom two accomplished and delightful females regard with veneration, as the fountain of their existence. Yes, when yet the two Miss Pecksniffs lisped in language scarce intelligible, they called that individual 'Father!' There is great applause. He gives them 'Mr Pecksniff, and God bless him!' They all shake hands with Mr Pecksniff, as they drink the toast. The youngest gentleman in company does so with a thrill; for he feels that a mysterious influence pervades the man who claims that being in the pink scarf for his daughter.

What saith Mr Pecksniff in reply? Or rather let the question be, What leaves he unsaid? Nothing. More punch is called for, and produced, and drunk. Enthusiasm mounts still higher. Every man comes out freely in his own character. The gentleman of a theatrical turn recites. The vocal gentleman regales them with a song. Gander leaves the Gander of all former feasts whole leagues behind. HE rises to propose a toast. It is, The Father of Todgers's. It is their common friend Jink—it is old Jink, if he may call him by that familiar and endearing appellation. The youngest gentleman in company utters a frantic negative. He won't have it—he can't bear it—it mustn't be. But his depth of feeling is misunderstood. He is supposed to be a little elevated; and nobody heeds him.

Mr Jinkins thanks them from his heart. It is, by many degrees, the proudest day in his humble career. When he looks around him on the present occasion, he feels that he wants words in which to express his gratitude. One thing he will say. He hopes it has been shown that Todgers's can be true to itself; and that, an opportunity arising, it can come out quite as strong as its neighbours—perhaps stronger. He reminds them, amidst thunders of encouragement, that they have heard of a somewhat similar establishment in Cannon Street; and that they have heard it praised. He wishes to draw no invidious comparisons; he would be the last man to do it; but when that Cannon Street establishment shall be able to produce such a combination of wit and beauty as has graced that board that day, and shall be able to serve up (all things considered) such a dinner as that of which they have just partaken, he will be happy to talk to it. Until then, gentlemen, he will stick to Todgers's.

More punch, more enthusiasm, more speeches. Everybody's health is drunk, saving the youngest gentleman's in company. He sits apart, with his elbow on the back of a vacant chair, and glares disdainfully at Jinkins. Gander, in a convulsing speech, gives them the health of Bailey junior; hiccups are heard; and a glass is broken. Mr Jinkins feels that it is time to join the ladies. He proposes, as a final sentiment, Mrs Todgers. She is worthy to be remembered separately. Hear, hear. So she is; no doubt of it. They all find fault with her at other times; but every man feels now, that he could die in her defence.

They go upstairs, where they are not expected so soon; for Mrs Todgers is asleep, Miss Charity is adjusting her hair, and Mercy, who has made a sofa of one of the window-seats is in a gracefully recumbent attitude. She is rising hastily, when Mr Jinkins implores her, for all their sakes, not to stir; she looks too graceful and too lovely, he remarks, to be disturbed. She laughs, and yields, and fans herself, and drops her fan, and there is a rush to pick it up. Being now installed, by one consent, as the beauty of the party, she is cruel and capricious, and sends gentlemen on messages to other gentlemen, and forgets all about them before they can return with the answer, and invents a thousand tortures, rending their hearts to pieces. Bailey brings up the tea and coffee. There is a small cluster of admirers round Charity; but they are only those who cannot get near her sister. The youngest gentleman in company is pale, but collected, and still sits apart; for his spirit loves to hold communion with itself, and his soul recoils from noisy revellers. She has a consciousness of his presence and adoration. He sees it flashing sometimes in the corner of her eye. Have a care, Jinkins, ere you provoke a desperate man to frenzy!

Mr Pecksniff had followed his younger friends upstairs, and taken a chair at the side of Mrs Todgers. He had also spilt a cup of coffee over his legs without appearing to be aware of the circumstance; nor did he seem to know that there was muffin on his knee.

'And how have they used you downstairs, sir?' asked the hostess.

'Their conduct has been such, my dear madam,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'as I can never think of without emotion, or remember without a tear. Oh, Mrs Todgers!'

'My goodness!' exclaimed that lady. 'How low you are in your spirits, sir!'

'I am a man, my dear madam,' said Mr Pecksniff, shedding tears and speaking with an imperfect articulation, 'but I am also a father. I am also a widower. My feelings, Mrs Todgers, will not consent to be entirely smothered, like the young children in the Tower. They are grown up, and the more I press the bolster on them, the more they look round the corner of it.'

He suddenly became conscious of the bit of muffin, and stared at it intently; shaking his head the while, in a forlorn and imbecile manner, as if he regarded it as his evil genius, and mildly reproached it.

'She was beautiful, Mrs Todgers,' he said, turning his glazed eye again upon her, without the least preliminary notice. 'She had a small property.'

'So I have heard,' cried Mrs Todgers with great sympathy.

'Those are her daughters,' said Mr Pecksniff, pointing out the young ladies, with increased emotion.

Mrs Todgers had no doubt about it.

'Mercy and Charity,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'Charity and Mercy. Not unholy names, I hope?'

'Mr Pecksniff!' cried Mrs Todgers. 'What a ghastly smile! Are you ill, sir?'

He pressed his hand upon her arm, and answered in a solemn manner, and a faint voice, 'Chronic.'

'Cholic?' cried the frightened Mrs Todgers.

'Chron-ic,' he repeated with some difficulty. 'Chron-ic. A chronic disorder. I have been its victim from childhood. It is carrying me to my grave.'

'Heaven forbid!' cried Mrs Todgers.

'Yes, it is,' said Mr Pecksniff, reckless with despair. 'I am rather glad of it, upon the whole. You are like her, Mrs Todgers.'

'Don't squeeze me so tight, pray, Mr Pecksniff. If any of the gentlemen should notice us.'

'For her sake,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Permit me—in honour of her memory. For the sake of a voice from the tomb. You are VERY like her Mrs Todgers! What a world this is!'

'Ah! Indeed you may say that!' cried Mrs Todgers.

'I'm afraid it is a vain and thoughtless world,' said Mr Pecksniff, overflowing with despondency. 'These young people about us. Oh! what sense have they of their responsibilities? None. Give me your other hand, Mrs Todgers.'

The lady hesitated, and said 'she didn't like.'

'Has a voice from the grave no influence?' said Mr Pecksniff, with, dismal tenderness. 'This is irreligious! My dear creature.'

'Hush!' urged Mrs Todgers. 'Really you mustn't.'

'It's not me,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Don't suppose it's me; it's the voice; it's her voice.'

Mrs Pecksniff deceased, must have had an unusually thick and husky voice for a lady, and rather a stuttering voice, and to say the truth somewhat of a drunken voice, if it had ever borne much resemblance to that in which Mr Pecksniff spoke just then. But perhaps this was delusion on his part.

'It has been a day of enjoyment, Mrs Todgers, but still it has been a day of torture. It has reminded me of my loneliness. What am I in the world?'

'An excellent gentleman, Mr Pecksniff,' said Mrs Todgers.

'There is consolation in that too,' cried Mr Pecksniff. 'Am I?'

'There is no better man living,' said Mrs Todgers, 'I am sure.'

Mr Pecksniff smiled through his tears, and slightly shook his head. 'You are very good,' he said, 'thank you. It is a great happiness to me, Mrs Todgers, to make young people happy. The happiness of my pupils is my chief object. I dote upon 'em. They dote upon me too—sometimes.'

'Always,' said Mrs Todgers.

'When they say they haven't improved, ma'am,' whispered Mr Pecksniff, looking at her with profound mystery, and motioning to her to advance her ear a little closer to his mouth. 'When they say they haven't improved, ma'am, and the premium was too high, they lie! I shouldn't wish it to be mentioned; you will understand me; but I say to you as to an old friend, they lie.'

'Base wretches they must be!' said Mrs Todgers.

'Madam,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'you are right. I respect you for that observation. A word in your ear. To Parents and Guardians. This is in confidence, Mrs Todgers?'

'The strictest, of course!' cried that lady.

'To Parents and Guardians,' repeated Mr Pecksniff. 'An eligible opportunity now offers, which unites the advantages of the best practical architectural education with the comforts of a home, and the constant association with some, who, however humble their sphere and limited their capacity—observe!—are not unmindful of their moral responsibilities.'

Mrs Todgers looked a little puzzled to know what this might mean, as well she might; for it was, as the reader may perchance remember, Mr Pecksniff's usual form of advertisement when he wanted a pupil; and seemed to have no particular reference, at present, to anything. But Mr Pecksniff held up his finger as a caution to her not to interrupt him.

'Do you know any parent or guardian, Mrs Todgers,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'who desires to avail himself of such an opportunity for a young gentleman? An orphan would be preferred. Do you know of any orphan with three or four hundred pound?'

Mrs Todgers reflected, and shook her head.

'When you hear of an orphan with three or four hundred pound,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'let that dear orphan's friends apply, by letter post-paid, to S. P., Post Office, Salisbury. I don't know who he is exactly. Don't be alarmed, Mrs Todgers,' said Mr Pecksniff, falling heavily against her; 'Chronic—chronic! Let's have a little drop of something to drink.'

'Bless my life, Miss Pecksniffs!' cried Mrs Todgers, aloud, 'your dear pa's took very poorly!'

Mr Pecksniff straightened himself by a surprising effort, as every one turned hastily towards him; and standing on his feet, regarded the assembly with a look of ineffable wisdom. Gradually it gave place to a smile; a feeble, helpless, melancholy smile; bland, almost to sickliness. 'Do not repine, my friends,' said Mr Pecksniff, tenderly. 'Do not weep for me. It is chronic.' And with these words, after making a futile attempt to pull off his shoes, he fell into the fireplace.

The youngest gentleman in company had him out in a second. Yes, before a hair upon his head was singed, he had him on the hearth-rug—her father!

She was almost beside herself. So was her sister. Jinkins consoled them both. They all consoled them. Everybody had something to say, except the youngest gentleman in company, who with a noble self-devotion did the heavy work, and held up Mr Pecksniff's head without being taken notice of by anybody. At last they gathered round, and agreed to carry him upstairs to bed. The youngest gentleman in company was rebuked by Jinkins for tearing Mr Pecksniff's coat! Ha, ha! But no matter.

They carried him upstairs, and crushed the youngest gentleman at every step. His bedroom was at the top of the house, and it was a long way; but they got him there in course of time. He asked them frequently on the road for a little drop of something to drink. It seemed an idiosyncrasy. The youngest gentleman in company proposed a draught of water. Mr Pecksniff called him opprobious names for the suggestion.

Jinkins and Gander took the rest upon themselves, and made him as comfortable as they could, on the outside of his bed; and when he seemed disposed to sleep, they left him. But before they had all gained the bottom of the staircase, a vision of Mr Pecksniff, strangely attired, was seen to flutter on the top landing. He desired to collect their sentiments, it seemed, upon the nature of human life.

'My friends,' cried Mr Pecksniff, looking over the banisters, 'let us improve our minds by mutual inquiry and discussion. Let us be moral. Let us contemplate existence. Where is Jinkins?'

'Here,' cried that gentleman. 'Go to bed again'

'To bed!' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Bed! 'Tis the voice of the sluggard, I hear him complain, you have woke me too soon, I must slumber again. If any young orphan will repeat the remainder of that simple piece from Doctor Watts's collection, an eligible opportunity now offers.'

Nobody volunteered.

'This is very soothing,' said Mr Pecksniff, after a pause. 'Extremely so. Cool and refreshing; particularly to the legs! The legs of the human subject, my friends, are a beautiful production. Compare them with wooden legs, and observe the difference between the anatomy of nature and the anatomy of art. Do you know,' said Mr Pecksniff, leaning over the banisters, with an odd recollection of his familiar manner among new pupils at home, 'that I should very much like to see Mrs Todgers's notion of a wooden leg, if perfectly agreeable to herself!'

As it appeared impossible to entertain any reasonable hopes of him after this speech, Mr Jinkins and Mr Gander went upstairs again, and once more got him into bed. But they had not descended to the second floor before he was out again; nor, when they had repeated the process, had they descended the first flight, before he was out again. In a word, as often as he was shut up in his own room, he darted out afresh, charged with some new moral sentiment, which he continually repeated over the banisters, with extraordinary relish, and an irrepressible desire for the improvement of his fellow creatures that nothing could subdue.

Under these circumstances, when they had got him into bed for the thirtieth time or so, Mr Jinkins held him, while his companion went downstairs in search of Bailey junior, with whom he presently returned. That youth having been apprised of the service required of him, was in great spirits, and brought up a stool, a candle, and his supper; to the end that he might keep watch outside the bedroom door with tolerable comfort.

When he had completed his arrangements, they locked Mr Pecksniff in, and left the key on the outside; charging the young page to listen attentively for symptoms of an apoplectic nature, with which the patient might be troubled, and, in case of any such presenting themselves, to summon them without delay. To which Mr Bailey modestly replied that 'he hoped he knowed wot o'clock it wos in gineral, and didn't date his letters to his friends from Todgers's for nothing.'

CHAPTER TEN

CONTAINING STRANGE MATTER, ON WHICH MANY EVENTS IN THIS HISTORY MAY, FOR THEIR GOOD OR EVIL INFLUENCE, CHIEFLY DEPEND

But Mr Pecksniff came to town on business. Had he forgotten that? Was he always taking his pleasure with Todgers's jovial brood, unmindful of the serious demands, whatever they might be, upon his calm consideration? No.

Time and tide will wait for no man, saith the adage. But all men have to wait for time and tide. That tide which, taken at the flood, would lead Seth Pecksniff on to fortune, was marked down in the table, and about to flow. No idle Pecksniff lingered far inland, unmindful of the changes of the stream; but there, upon the water's edge, over his shoes already, stood the worthy creature, prepared to wallow in the very mud, so that it slid towards the quarter of his hope.

The trustfulness of his two fair daughters was beautiful indeed. They had that firm reliance on their parent's nature, which taught them to feel certain that in all he did he had his purpose straight and full before him. And that its noble end and object was himself, which almost of necessity included them, they knew. The devotion of these maids was perfect.

Their filial confidence was rendered the more touching, by their having no knowledge of their parent's real designs, in the present instance. All that they knew of his proceedings was, that every morning, after the early breakfast, he repaired to the post office and inquired for letters. That task performed, his business for the day was over; and he again relaxed, until the rising of another sun proclaimed the advent of another post.

This went on for four or five days. At length, one morning, Mr Pecksniff returned with a breathless rapidity, strange to observe in him, at other times so calm; and, seeking immediate speech with his daughters, shut himself up with them in private conference for two whole hours. Of all that passed in this period, only the following words of Mr Pecksniff's utterance are known:

'How he has come to change so very much (if it should turn out as I expect, that he has), we needn't stop to inquire. My dears, I have my thoughts upon the subject, but I will not impart them. It is enough that we will not be proud, resentful, or unforgiving. If he wants our friendship he shall have it. We know our duty, I hope!'

That same day at noon, an old gentleman alighted from a hackney-coach at the post-office, and, giving his name, inquired for a letter addressed to himself, and directed to be left till called for. It had been lying there some days. The superscription was in Mr Pecksniff's hand, and it was sealed with Mr Pecksniff's seal.

It was very short, containing indeed nothing more than an address 'with Mr Pecksniff's respectful, and (not withstanding what has passed) sincerely affectionate regards.' The old gentleman tore off the direction—scattering the rest in fragments to the winds—and giving it to the coachman, bade him drive as near that place as he could. In pursuance of these instructions he was driven to the Monument; where he again alighted, and dismissed the vehicle, and walked towards Todgers's.

Though the face, and form, and gait of this old man, and even his grip of the stout stick on which he leaned, were all expressive of a resolution not easily shaken, and a purpose (it matters little whether right or wrong, just now) such as in other days might have survived the rack, and had its strongest life in weakest death; still there were grains of hesitation in his mind, which made him now avoid the house he sought, and loiter to and fro in a gleam of sunlight, that brightened the little churchyard hard by. There may have been, in the presence of those idle heaps of dust among the busiest stir of life, something to increase his wavering; but there he walked, awakening the echoes as he paced up and down, until the church clock, striking the quarters for the second time since he had been there, roused him from his meditation. Shaking off his incertitude as the air parted with the sound of the bells, he walked rapidly to the house, and knocked at the door.

Mr Pecksniff was seated in the landlady's little room, and his visitor found him reading—by an accident; he apologised for it—an excellent theological work. There were cake and wine upon a little table—by another accident, for which he also apologised. Indeed he said, he had given his visitor up, and was about to partake of that simple refreshment with his children, when he knocked at the door.

'Your daughters are well?' said old Martin, laying down his hat and stick.

Mr Pecksniff endeavoured to conceal his agitation as a father when he answered Yes, they were. They were good girls, he said, very good. He would not venture to recommend Mr Chuzzlewit to take the easy-chair, or to keep out of the draught from the door. If he made any such suggestion, he would expose himself, he feared, to most unjust suspicion. He would, therefore, content himself with remarking that there was an easy-chair in the room, and that the door was far from being air-tight. This latter imperfection, he might perhaps venture to add, was not uncommonly to be met with in old houses.

The old man sat down in the easy-chair, and after a few moments' silence, said:

'In the first place, let me thank you for coming to London so promptly, at my almost unexplained request; I need scarcely add, at my cost.'

'At YOUR cost, my good sir!' cried Mr Pecksniff, in a tone of great surprise.

'It is not,' said Martin, waving his hand impatiently, 'my habit to put my—well! my relatives—to any personal expense to gratify my caprices.'

'Caprices, my good sir!' cried Mr Pecksniff

'That is scarcely the proper word either, in this instance,' said the old man. 'No. You are right.'

Mr Pecksniff was inwardly very much relieved to hear it, though he didn't at all know why.

'You are right,' repeated Martin. 'It is not a caprice. It is built up on reason, proof, and cool comparison. Caprices never are. Moreover, I am not a capricious man. I never was.'

'Most assuredly not,' said Mr Pecksniff.

'How do you know?' returned the other quickly. 'You are to begin to know it now. You are to test and prove it, in time to come. You and yours are to find that I can be constant, and am not to be diverted from my end. Do you hear?'

'Perfectly,' said Mr Pecksniff.

'I very much regret,' Martin resumed, looking steadily at him, and speaking in a slow and measured tone; 'I very much regret that you and I held such a conversation together, as that which passed between us at our last meeting. I very much regret that I laid open to you what were then my thoughts of you, so freely as I did. The intentions that I bear towards you now are of another kind; deserted by all in whom I have ever trusted; hoodwinked and beset by all who should help and sustain me; I fly to you for refuge. I confide in you to be my ally; to attach yourself to me by ties of

Interest and Expectation'—he laid great stress upon these words, though Mr Pecksniff particularly begged him not to mention it; 'and to help me to visit the consequences of the very worst species of meanness, dissimulation, and subtlety, on the right heads.'

'My noble sir!' cried Mr Pecksniff, catching at his outstretched hand. 'And YOU regret the having harboured unjust thoughts of me! YOU with those grey hairs!'

'Regrets,' said Martin, 'are the natural property of grey hairs; and I enjoy, in common with all other men, at least my share of such inheritance. And so enough of that. I regret having been severed from you so long. If I had known you sooner, and sooner used you as you well deserve, I might have been a happier man.'

Mr Pecksniff looked up to the ceiling, and clasped his hands in rapture.

'Your daughters,' said Martin, after a short silence. 'I don't know them. Are they like you?'

'In the nose of my eldest and the chin of my youngest, Mr Chuzzlewit,' returned the widower, 'their sainted parent (not myself, their mother) lives again.'

'I don't mean in person,' said the old man. 'Morally, morally.'

''Tis not for me to say,' retorted Mr Pecksniff with a gentle smile. 'I have done my best, sir.'

'I could wish to see them,' said Martin; 'are they near at hand?'

They were, very near; for they had in fact been listening at the door from the beginning of this conversation until now, when they precipitately retired. Having wiped the signs of weakness from his eyes, and so given them time to get upstairs, Mr Pecksniff opened the door, and mildly cried in the passage,

'My own darlings, where are you?'

'Here, my dear pa!' replied the distant voice of Charity.

'Come down into the back parlour, if you please, my love,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'and bring your sister with you.'

'Yes, my dear pa,' cried Merry; and down they came directly (being all obedience), singing as they came.

Nothing could exceed the astonishment of the two Miss Pecksniffs when they found a stranger with their dear papa. Nothing could surpass their mute amazement when he said, 'My children, Mr Chuzzlewit!' But when he told them that Mr Chuzzlewit and he were friends, and that Mr

Chuzzlewit had said such kind and tender words as pierced his very heart, the two Miss Pecksniffs cried with one accord, 'Thank Heaven for this!' and fell upon the old man's neck. And when they had embraced him with such fervour of affection that no words can describe it, they grouped themselves about his chair, and hung over him, as figuring to themselves no earthly joy like that of ministering to his wants, and crowding into the remainder of his life, the love they would have diffused over their whole existence, from infancy, if he—dear obdurate!—had but consented to receive the precious offering.

The old man looked attentively from one to the other, and then at Mr Pecksniff, several times.

'What,' he asked of Mr Pecksniff, happening to catch his eye in its descent; for until now it had been piously upraised, with something of that expression which the poetry of ages has attributed to a domestic bird, when breathing its last amid the ravages of an electric storm: 'What are their names?'

Mr Pecksniff told him, and added, rather hastily; his caluminators would have said, with a view to any testamentary thoughts that might be flitting through old Martin's mind; 'Perhaps, my dears, you had better write them down. Your humble autographs are of no value in themselves, but affection may prize them.'

'Affection,' said the old man, 'will expend itself on the living originals. Do not trouble yourselves, my girls, I shall not so easily forget you, Charity and Mercy, as to need such tokens of remembrance. Cousin!'

'Sir!' said Mr Pecksniff, with alacrity.

'Do you never sit down?'

'Why—yes—occasionally, sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, who had been standing all this time.

'Will you do so now?'

'Can you ask me,' returned Mr Pecksniff, slipping into a chair immediately, 'whether I will do anything that you desire?'

'You talk confidently,' said Martin, 'and you mean well; but I fear you don't know what an old man's humours are. You don't know what it is to be required to court his likings and dislikings; to adapt yourself to his prejudices; to do his bidding, be it what it may; to bear with his distrusts and jealousies; and always still be zealous in his service. When I remember how numerous these failings are in me, and judge of their occasional enormity by the injurious thoughts I lately entertained of you, I hardly dare to claim you for my friend.'

'My worthy sir,' returned his relative, 'how CAN you talk in such a painful strain! What was more natural than that you should make one slight mistake, when in all other respects you were so very correct, and have had such reason—such very sad and undeniable reason—to judge of every one about you in the worst light!'

'True,' replied the other. 'You are very lenient with me.'

'We always said, my girls and I,' cried Mr Pecksniff with increasing obsequiousness, 'that while we mourned the heaviness of our misfortune in being confounded with the base and mercenary, still we could not wonder at it. My dears, you remember?'

Oh vividly! A thousand times!

'We uttered no complaint,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Occasionally we had the presumption to console ourselves with the remark that Truth would in the end prevail, and Virtue be triumphant; but not often. My loves, you recollect?'

Recollect! Could he doubt it! Dearest pa, what strange unnecessary questions!

'And when I saw you,' resumed Mr Pecksniff, with still greater deference, 'in the little, unassuming village where we take the liberty of dwelling, I said you were mistaken in me, my dear sir; that was all, I think?'

'No—not all,' said Martin, who had been sitting with his hand upon his brow for some time past, and now looked up again; 'you said much more, which, added to other circumstances that have come to my knowledge, opened my eyes. You spoke to me, disinterestedly, on behalf of—I needn't name him. You know whom I mean.'

Trouble was expressed in Mr Pecksniff's visage, as he pressed his hot hands together, and replied, with humility, 'Quite disinterestedly, sir, I assure you.'

'I know it,' said old Martin, in his quiet way. 'I am sure of it. I said so. It was disinterested too, in you, to draw that herd of harpies off from me, and be their victim yourself; most other men would have suffered them to display themselves in all their rapacity, and would have striven to rise, by contrast, in my estimation. You felt for me, and drew them off, for which I owe you many thanks. Although I left the place, I know what passed behind my back, you see!'

'You amaze me, sir!' cried Mr Pecksniff; which was true enough.

'My knowledge of your proceedings,' said the old man, does not stop at this. You have a new inmate in your house.'

'Yes, sir,' rejoined the architect, 'I have.'

'He must quit it' said Martin.

'For—for yours?' asked Mr Pecksniff, with a quavering mildness.

'For any shelter he can find,' the old man answered. 'He has deceived you.'

'I hope not' said Mr Pecksniff, eagerly. 'I trust not. I have been extremely well disposed towards that young man. I hope it cannot be shown that he has forfeited all claim to my protection. Deceit—deceit, my dear Mr Chuzzlewit, would be final. I should hold myself bound, on proof of deceit, to renounce him instantly.'

The old man glanced at both his fair supporters, but especially at Miss Mercy, whom, indeed, he looked full in the face, with a greater demonstration of interest than had yet appeared in his features. His gaze again encountered Mr Pecksniff, as he said, composedly:

'Of course you know that he has made his matrimonial choice?'

'Oh dear!' cried Mr Pecksniff, rubbing his hair up very stiff upon his head, and staring wildly at his daughters. 'This is becoming tremendous!'

'You know the fact?' repeated Martin

'Surely not without his grandfather's consent and approbation my dear sir!' cried Mr Pecksniff. 'Don't tell me that. For the honour of human nature, say you're not about to tell me that!'

'I thought he had suppressed it,' said the old man.

The indignation felt by Mr Pecksniff at this terrible disclosure, was only to be equalled by the kindling anger of his daughters. What! Had they taken to their hearth and home a secretly contracted serpent; a crocodile, who had made a furtive offer of his hand; an imposition on society; a bankrupt bachelor with no effects, trading with the spinster world on false pretences! And oh, to think that he should have disobeyed and practised on that sweet, that venerable gentleman, whose name he bore; that kind and tender guardian; his more than father—to say nothing at all of mother—horrible, horrible! To turn him out with ignominy would be treatment much too good. Was there nothing else that could be done to him? Had he incurred no legal pains and penalties? Could it be that the statutes of the land were so remiss as to have affixed no punishment to such delinquency? Monster; how basely had they been deceived!

'I am glad to find you second me so warmly,' said the old man holding up his hand to stay the torrent of their wrath. 'I will not deny that it is a pleasure to me to find you so full of zeal. We will consider that topic as disposed of.'

'No, my dear sir,' cried Mr Pecksniff, 'not as disposed of, until I have purged my house of this pollution.'

'That will follow,' said the old man, 'in its own time. I look upon that as done.'

'You are very good, sir,' answered Mr Pecksniff, shaking his hand. 'You do me honour. You MAY look upon it as done, I assure you.'

'There is another topic,' said Martin, 'on which I hope you will assist me. You remember Mary, cousin?'

'The young lady that I mentioned to you, my dears, as having interested me so very much,' remarked Mr Pecksniff. 'Excuse my interrupting you, sir.'

'I told you her history?' said the old man.

'Which I also mentioned, you will recollect, my dears,' cried Mr Pecksniff. 'Silly girls, Mr Chuzzlewit—quite moved by it, they were!'

'Why, look now!' said Martin, evidently pleased; 'I feared I should have had to urge her case upon you, and ask you to regard her favourably for my sake. But I find you have no jealousies! Well! You have no cause for any, to be sure. She has nothing to gain from me, my dears, and she knows it.'

The two Miss Pecksniffs murmured their approval of this wise arrangement, and their cordial sympathy with its interesting object.

'If I could have anticipated what has come to pass between us four,' said the old man thoughfully; 'but it is too late to think of that. You would receive her courteously, young ladies, and be kind to her, if need were?'

Where was the orphan whom the two Miss Pecksniffs would not have cherished in their sisterly bosom! But when that orphan was commended to their care by one on whom the dammed-up love of years was gushing forth, what exhaustless stores of pure affection yearned to expend themselves upon her!

An interval ensued, during which Mr Chuzzlewit, in an absent frame of mind, sat gazing at the ground, without uttering a word; and as it was plain that he had no desire to be interrupted in his meditations, Mr Pecksniff and his daughters were profoundly silent also. During the whole of the foregoing dialogue, he had borne his part with a cold, passionless promptitude, as though he had learned and painfully rehearsed it all a hundred times. Even when his expressions were warmest and his language most encouraging, he had retained the same manner, without the least abatement. But now there was a keener brightness in his eye, and more expression in his voice, as he said, awakening from his thoughtful mood:

'You know what will be said of this? Have you reflected?'

'Said of what, my dear sir?' Mr Pecksniff asked.

'Of this new understanding between us.'

Mr Pecksniff looked benevolently sagacious, and at the same time far above all earthly misconstruction, as he shook his head, and observed that a great many things would be said of it, no doubt.

'A great many,' rejoined the old man. 'Some will say that I dote in my old age; that illness has shaken me; that I have lost all strength of mind, and have grown childish. You can bear that?'

Mr Pecksniff answered that it would be dreadfully hard to bear, but he thought he could, if he made a great effort.

'Others will say—I speak of disappointed, angry people only—that you have lied and fawned, and wormed yourself through dirty ways into my favour; by such concessions and such crooked deeds, such meannesses and vile endurances, as nothing could repay; no, not the legacy of half the world we live in. You can bear that?'

Mr Pecksniff made reply that this would be also very hard to bear, as reflecting, in some degree, on the discernment of Mr Chuzzlewit. Still he had a modest confidence that he could sustain the calumny, with the help of a good conscience, and that gentleman's friendship.

'With the great mass of slanderers,' said old Martin, leaning back in his chair, 'the tale, as I clearly foresee, will run thus: That to mark my contempt for the rabble whom I despised, I chose from among them the very worst, and made him do my will, and pampered and enriched him at the cost of all the rest. That, after casting about for the means of a punishment which should rankle in the bosoms of these kites the most, and strike into their gall, I devised this scheme at a time when the last link in the chain of grateful love and duty, that held me to my race, was roughly snapped asunder; roughly, for I loved him well; roughly, for I had ever put my trust in his affection; roughly, for that he broke it when I loved him most—God help me!—and he without a pang could throw me off, while I clung about his heart! Now,' said the old man, dismissing this passionate outburst as suddenly as he had yielded to it, 'is your mind made up to bear this likewise? Lay your account with having it to bear, and put no trust in being set right by me.'

'My dear Mr Chuzzlewit,' cried Pecksniff in an ecstasy, 'for such a man as you have shown yourself to be this day; for a man so injured, yet so very humane; for a man so—I am at a loss what precise term to use—yet at the same time so remarkably—I don't know how to express my meaning; for such a man as I have described, I hope it is no presumption to say that I, and I am sure I may add my children also (my dears, we perfectly agree in this, I think?), would bear anything whatever!'

'Enough,' said Martin. 'You can charge no consequences on me. When do you retire home?'

'Whenever you please, my dear sir. To-night if you desire it.'

'I desire nothing,' returned the old man, 'that is unreasonable. Such a request would be. Will you be ready to return at the end of this week?'

The very time of all others that Mr Pecksniff would have suggested if it had been left to him to make his own choice. As to his daughters—the words, 'Let us be at home on Saturday, dear pa,' were actually upon their lips.

'Your expenses, cousin,' said Martin, taking a folded slip of paper from his pocketbook, 'may possibly exceed that amount. If so, let me know the balance that I owe you, when we next meet. It would be useless if I told you where I live just now; indeed, I have no fixed abode. When I have, you shall know it. You and your daughters may expect to see me before long; in the meantime I need not tell you that we keep our own confidence. What you will do when you get home is understood between us. Give me no account of it at any time; and never refer to it in any way. I ask that as a favour. I am commonly a man of few words, cousin; and all that need be said just now is said, I think.'

'One glass of wine—one morsel of this homely cake?' cried Mr Pecksniff, venturing to detain him. 'My dears—!'

The sisters flew to wait upon him.

'Poor girls!' said Mr Pecksniff. 'You will excuse their agitation, my dear sir. They are made up of feeling. A bad commodity to go through the world with, Mr Chuzzlewit! My youngest daughter is almost as much of a woman as my eldest, is she not, sir?'

'Which IS the youngest?' asked the old man.

'Mercy, by five years,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'We sometimes venture to consider her rather a fine figure, sir. Speaking as an artist, I may perhaps be permitted to suggest that its outline is graceful and correct. I am naturally,' said Mr Pecksniff, drying his hands upon his handkerchief, and looking anxiously in his cousin's face at almost every word, 'proud, if I may use the expression, to have a daughter who is constructed on the best models.'

'She seems to have a lively disposition,' observed Martin.

'Dear me!' said Mr Pecksniff. 'That is quite remarkable. You have defined her character, my dear sir, as correctly as if you had known her from her birth. She HAS a lively disposition. I assure you, my dear sir, that in our unpretending home her gaiety is delightful.'

'No doubt,' returned the old man.

'Charity, upon the other hand,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'is remarkable for strong sense, and for rather a deep tone of sentiment, if the partiality of a father may be excused in saying so. A wonderful affection between them, my dear sir! Allow me to drink your health. Bless you!'

'I little thought,' retorted Martin, 'but a month ago, that I should be breaking bread and pouring wine with you. I drink to you.'

Not at all abashed by the extraordinary abruptness with which these latter words were spoken, Mr Pecksniff thanked him devoutly.

'Now let me go,' said Martin, putting down the wine when he had merely touched it with his lips. 'My dears, good morning!'

But this distant form of farewell was by no means tender enough for the yearnings of the young ladies, who again embraced him with all their hearts—with all their arms at any rate—to which parting caresses their new-found friend submitted with a better grace than might have been expected from one who, not a moment before, had pledged their parent in such a very uncomfortable manner. These endearments terminated, he took a hasty leave of Mr Pecksniff and withdrew, followed to the door by both father and daughters, who stood there kissing their hands and beaming with affection until he disappeared; though, by the way, he never once looked back, after he had crossed the threshold.

When they returned into the house, and were again alone in Mrs Todgers's room, the two young ladies exhibited an unusual amount of gaiety; insomuch that they clapped their hands, and laughed, and looked with roguish aspects and a bantering air upon their dear papa. This conduct was so very unaccountable, that Mr Pecksniff (being singularly grave himself) could scarcely choose but ask them what it meant; and took them to task, in his gentle manner, for yielding to such light emotions.

'If it was possible to divine any cause for this merriment, even the most remote,' he said, 'I should not reprove you. But when you can have none whatever—oh, really, really!'

This admonition had so little effect on Mercy, that she was obliged to hold her handkerchief before her rosy lips, and to throw herself back in her chair, with every demonstration of extreme amusement; which want of duty so offended Mr Pecksniff that he reproved her in set terms, and gave her his parental advice to correct herself in solitude and contemplation. But at that juncture they were disturbed by the sound of voices in dispute; and as it proceeded from the next room, the subject matter of the altercation quickly reached their ears.

'I don't care that! Mrs Todgers,' said the young gentleman who had been the youngest gentleman in company on the day of the festival; 'I don't care THAT, ma'am,' said he, snapping his fingers, 'for Jinkins. Don't suppose I do.'

'I am quite certain you don't, sir,' replied Mrs Todgers. 'You have too independent a spirit, I know, to yield to anybody. And quite right. There is no reason why you should give way to any gentleman. Everybody must be well aware of that.'

'I should think no more of admitting daylight into the fellow,' said the youngest gentleman, in a desperate voice, 'than if he was a bulldog.'

Mrs Todgers did not stop to inquire whether, as a matter of principle, there was any particular reason for admitting daylight even into a bulldog, otherwise than by the natural channel of his eyes, but she seemed to wring her hands, and she moaned.

'Let him be careful,' said the youngest gentleman. 'I give him warning. No man shall step between me and the current of my vengeance. I know a Cove—' he used that familiar epithet in his agitation but corrected himself by adding, 'a gentleman of property, I mean—who practices with a pair of pistols (fellows too) of his own. If I am driven to borrow 'em, and to send at friend to Jinkins, a tragedy will get into the papers. That's all.'

Again Mrs Todgers moaned.

'I have borne this long enough,' said the youngest gentleman but now my soul rebels against it, and I won't stand it any longer. I left home originally, because I had that within me which wouldn't be domineered over by a sister; and do you think I'm going to be put down by HIM? No.'

'It is very wrong in Mr Jinkins; I know it is perfectly inexcusable in Mr Jinkins, if he intends it,' observed Mrs Todgers

'If he intends it!' cried the youngest gentleman. 'Don't he interrupt and contradict me on every occasion? Does he ever fail to interpose himself between me and anything or anybody that he sees I have set my mind upon? Does he make a point of always pretending to forget me, when he's pouring out the beer? Does he make bragging remarks about his razors, and insulting allusions to people who have no necessity to shave more than once a week? But let him look out! He'll find himself shaved, pretty close, before long, and so I tell him.'

The young gentleman was mistaken in this closing sentence, inasmuch as he never told it to Jinkins, but always to Mrs Todgers.

'However,' he said, 'these are not proper subjects for ladies' ears. All I've got to say to you, Mrs Todgers, is, a week's notice from next Saturday. The same house can't contain that miscreant and me any longer. If we get over the intermediate time without bloodshed, you may think yourself pretty fortunate. I don't myself expect we shall.'

'Dear, dear!' cried Mrs Todgers, 'what would I have given to have prevented this? To lose you, sir, would be like losing the house's right-hand. So popular as you are among the gentlemen; so generally looked up to; and so much liked! I do hope you'll think better of it; if on nobody else's account, on mine.'

'There's Jinkins,' said the youngest gentleman, moodily. 'Your favourite. He'll console you, and the gentlemen too, for the loss of twenty such as me. I'm not understood in this house. I never have been.'

'Don't run away with that opinion, sir!' cried Mrs Todgers, with a show of honest indignation. 'Don't make such a charge as that against the establishment, I must beg of you. It is not so bad as that comes to, sir. Make any remark you please against the gentlemen, or against me; but don't say you're not understood in this house.'

'I'm not treated as if I was,' said the youngest gentleman.

'There you make a great mistake, sir,' returned Mrs Todgers, in the same strain. 'As many of the gentlemen and I have often said, you are too sensitive. That's where it is. You are of too susceptible a nature; it's in your spirit.'

The young gentleman coughed.

'And as,' said Mrs Todgers, 'as to Mr Jinkins, I must beg of you, if we ARE to part, to understand that I don't abet Mr Jinkins by any means. Far from it. I could wish that Mr Jinkins would take a lower tone in this establishment, and would not be the means of raising differences between me and gentlemen that I can much less bear to part with than I could with Mr Jinkins. Mr Jinkins is not such a boarder, sir,' added Mrs Todgers, 'that all considerations of private feeling and respect give way before him. Quite the contrary, I assure you.'

The young gentleman was so much mollified by these and similar speeches on the part of Mrs Todgers, that he and that lady gradually changed positions; so that she became the injured party, and he was understood to be the injurer; but in a complimentary, not in an offensive sense; his cruel conduct being attributable to his exalted nature, and to that alone. So, in the end, the young gentleman withdrew his notice, and assured Mrs Todgers of his unalterable regard; and having done so, went back to business.

'Goodness me, Miss Pecksniffs!' cried that lady, as she came into the back room, and sat wearily down, with her basket on her knees, and her hands folded upon it, 'what a trial of temper it is to keep a house like this! You must have heard most of what has just passed. Now did you ever hear the like?'

'Never!' said the two Miss Pecksniffs.

'Of all the ridiculous young fellows that ever I had to deal with,' resumed Mrs Todgers, 'that is the most ridiculous and unreasonable. Mr Jinkins is hard upon him sometimes, but not half as hard as he deserves. To mention such a gentleman as Mr Jinkins in the same breath with HIM—you know it's too much! And yet he's as jealous of him, bless you, as if he was his equal.'

The young ladies were greatly entertained by Mrs Todgers's account, no less than with certain anecdotes illustrative of the youngest gentleman's character, which she went on to tell them. But Mr Pecksniff looked quite stern and angry; and when she had concluded, said in a solemn voice:

'Pray, Mrs Todgers, if I may inquire, what does that young gentleman contribute towards the support of these premises?'

'Why, sir, for what HE has, he pays about eighteen shillings a week!' said Mrs Todgers.

'Eighteen shillings a week!' repeated Mr Pecksniff.

'Taking one week with another; as near that as possible,' said Mrs Todgers.

Mr Pecksniff rose from his chair, folded his arms, looked at her, and shook his head.

'And do you mean to say, ma'am—is it possible, Mrs Todgers—that for such a miserable consideration as eighteen shillings a week, a female of your understanding can so far demean herself as to wear a double face, even for an instant?'

'I am forced to keep things on the square if I can, sir,' faltered Mrs Todgers. 'I must preserve peace among them, and keep my connection together, if possible, Mr Pecksniff. The profit is very small.'

'The profit!' cried that gentleman, laying great stress upon the word. 'The profit, Mrs Todgers! You amaze me!'

He was so severe, that Mrs Todgers shed tears.

'The profit!' repeated Mr pecksniff. 'The profit of dissimulation! To worship the golden calf of Baal, for eighteen shillings a week!'

'Don't in your own goodness be too hard upon me, Mr Pecksniff,' cried Mrs Todgers, taking out her handkerchief.

'Oh Calf, Calf!' cried Mr Pecksniff mournfully. 'Oh, Baal, Baal! oh my friend, Mrs Todgers! To barter away that precious jewel, self-esteem, and cringe to any mortal creature—for eighteen shillings a week!'

He was so subdued and overcome by the reflection, that he immediately took down his hat from its peg in the passage, and went out for a walk, to compose his feelings. Anybody passing him in the street might have known him for a good man at first sight; for his whole figure teemed with a consciousness of the moral homily he had read to Mrs Todgers.

Eighteen shillings a week! Just, most just, thy censure, upright Pecksniff! Had it been for the sake of a ribbon, star, or garter; sleeves of lawn, a great man's smile, a seat in parliament, a tap upon the shoulder from a courtly sword; a place, a party, or a thriving lie, or eighteen thousand pounds, or even eighteen hundred;—but to worship the golden calf for eighteen shillings a week! oh pitiful, pitiful!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WHEREIN A CERTAIN GENTLEMAN BECOMES PARTICULAR IN HIS ATTENTIONS TO A CERTAIN LADY; AND MORE COMING EVENTS THAN ONE, CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE

The family were within two or three days of their departure from Mrs Todgers's, and the commercial gentlemen were to a man despondent and not to be comforted, because of the approaching separation, when Bailey junior, at the jocund time of noon, presented himself before Miss Charity Pecksniff, then sitting with her sister in the banquet chamber, hemming six new pocket-handkerchiefs for Mr Jinkins; and having expressed a hope, preliminary and pious, that he might be blest, gave her in his pleasant way to understand that a visitor attended to pay his respects to her, and was at that moment waiting in the drawing-room. Perhaps this last announcement showed in a more striking point of view than many lengthened speeches could have done, the trustfulness and faith of Bailey's nature; since he had, in fact, last seen the visitor on the door-mat, where, after signifying to him that he would do well to go upstairs, he had left him to the guidance of his own sagacity. Hence it was at least an even chance that the visitor was then wandering on the roof of the house, or vainly seeking to extricate himself from the maze of bedrooms; Todgers's being precisely that kind of establishment in which an unpiloted stranger is pretty sure to find himself in some place where he least expects and least desires to be.

'A gentleman for me!' cried Charity, pausing in her work; 'my gracious, Bailey!'

'Ah!' said Bailey. 'It IS my gracious, an't it? Wouldn't I be gracious neither, not if I wos him!'

The remark was rendered somewhat obscure in itself, by reason (as the reader may have observed) of a redundancy of negatives; but accompanied by action expressive of a faithful couple walking arm-in-arm towards a parochial church, mutually exchanging looks of love, it clearly signified this youth's conviction that the caller's purpose was of an amorous tendency. Miss Charity affected to reprove so great a liberty; but she could not help smiling. He was a strange boy, to be sure. There was always some ground of probability and likelihood mingled with his absurd behaviour. That was the best of it!

'But I don't know any gentlemen, Bailey,' said Miss Pecksniff. 'I think you must have made a mistake.'

Mr Bailey smiled at the extreme wildness of such a supposition, and regarded the young ladies with unimpaired affability.

'My dear Merry,' said Charity, 'who CAN it be? Isn't it odd? I have a great mind not to go to him really. So very strange, you know!'

The younger sister plainly considered that this appeal had its origin in the pride of being called upon and asked for; and that it was intended as an assertion of superiority, and a retaliation upon her for having captured the commercial gentlemen. Therefore, she replied, with great affection and politeness, that it was, no doubt, very strange indeed; and that she was totally at a loss to conceive what the ridiculous person unknown could mean by it.

'Quite impossible to divine!' said Charity, with some sharpness, 'though still, at the same time, you needn't be angry, my dear.'

'Thank you,' retorted Merry, singing at her needle. 'I am quite aware of that, my love.'

'I am afraid your head is turned, you silly thing,' said Cherry.

'Do you know, my dear,' said Merry, with engaging candour, 'that I have been afraid of that, myself, all along! So much incense and nonsense, and all the rest of it, is enough to turn a stronger head than mine. What a relief it must be to you, my dear, to be so very comfortable in that respect, and not to be worried by those odious men! How do you do it, Cherry?'

This artless inquiry might have led to turbulent results, but for the strong emotions of delight evinced by Bailey junior, whose relish in the turn the conversation had lately taken was so acute, that it impelled and forced him to the instantaneous performance of a dancing step, extremely difficult in its nature, and only to be achieved in a moment of ecstasy, which is commonly called The Frog's Hornpipe. A manifestation so lively, brought to their immediate recollection the great virtuous precept, 'Keep up appearances whatever you do,' in which they had been educated. They forbore at once, and jointly signified to Mr Bailey that if he should presume to practice that figure any more in their presence, they would instantly acquaint Mrs Todgers with the fact, and would demand his condign punishment, at the hands of that lady. The young gentleman having expressed the bitterness of his contrition by affecting to wipe away scalding tears with his apron, and afterwards feigning to wring a vast amount of water from that garment, held the door open while Miss Charity passed out; and so that damsel went in state upstairs to receive her mysterious adorer.

By some strange occurrence of favourable circumstances he had found out the drawing-room, and was sitting there alone.

'Ah, cousin!' he said. 'Here I am, you see. You thought I was lost, I'll be bound. Well! how do you find yourself by this time?'

Miss Charity replied that she was quite well, and gave Mr Jonas Chuzzlewit her hand.

'That's right,' said Mr Jonas, 'and you've got over the fatigues of the journey have you? I say. How's the other one?'

'My sister is very well, I believe,' returned the young lady. 'I have not heard her complain of any indisposition, sir. Perhaps you would like to see her, and ask her yourself?'

'No, no cousin!' said Mr Jonas, sitting down beside her on the window-seat. 'Don't be in a hurry. There's no occasion for that, you know. What a cruel girl you are!'

'It's impossible for YOU to know,' said Cherry, 'whether I am or not.'

'Well, perhaps it is,' said Mr Jonas. 'I say—Did you think I was lost? You haven't told me that.'

'I didn't think at all about it,' answered Cherry.

'Didn't you though?' said Jonas, pondering upon this strange reply. 'Did the other one?'

'I am sure it's impossible for me to say what my sister may, or may not have thought on such a subject,' cried Cherry. 'She never said anything to me about it, one way or other.'

'Didn't she laugh about it?' inquired Jonas.

'No. She didn't even laugh about it,' answered Charity.

'She's a terrible one to laugh, an't she?' said Jonas, lowering his voice.

'She is very lively,' said Cherry.

'Liveliness is a pleasant thing—when it don't lead to spending money. An't it?' asked Mr Jonas.

'Very much so, indeed,' said Cherry, with a demureness of manner that gave a very disinterested character to her assent.

'Such liveliness as yours I mean, you know,' observed Mr Jonas, as he nudged her with his elbow. 'I should have come to see you before, but I didn't know where you was. How quick you hurried off, that morning!'

'I was amenable to my papa's directions,' said Miss Charity.

'I wish he had given me his direction,' returned her cousin, 'and then I should have found you out before. Why, I shouldn't have found you even now, if I hadn't met him in the street this morning. What a sleek, sly chap he is! Just like a tomcat, an't he?'

'I must trouble you to have the goodness to speak more respectfully of my papa, Mr Jonas,' said Charity. 'I can't allow such a tone as that, even in jest.'

'Ecod, you may say what you like of MY father, then, and so I give you leave,' said Jonas. 'I think it's liquid aggravation that circulates through his veins, and not regular blood. How old should you think my father was, cousin?'

'Old, no doubt,' replied Miss Charity; 'but a fine old gentleman.'

'A fine old gentleman!' repeated Jonas, giving the crown of his hat an angry knock. 'Ah! It's time he was thinking of being drawn out a little finer too. Why, he's eighty!'

'Is he, indeed?' said the young lady.

'And ecod,' cried Jonas, 'now he's gone so far without giving in, I don't see much to prevent his being ninety; no, nor even a hundred. Why, a man with any feeling ought to be ashamed of being eighty, let alone more. Where's his religion, I should like to know, when he goes flying in the face of the Bible like that? Threescore-and-ten's the mark, and no man with a conscience, and a proper sense of what's expected of him, has any business to live longer.'

Is any one surprised at Mr Jonas making such a reference to such a book for such a purpose? Does any one doubt the old saw, that the Devil (being a layman) quotes Scripture for his own ends? If he will take the trouble to look about him, he may find a greater number of confirmations of the fact in the occurrences of any single day, than the steam-gun can discharge balls in a minute.

'But there's enough of my father,' said Jonas; 'it's of no use to go putting one's self out of the way by talking about HIM. I called to ask you to come and take a walk, cousin, and see some of the sights; and to come to our house afterwards, and have a bit of something. Pecksniff will most likely look in in the evening, he says, and bring you home. See, here's his writing; I made him put it down this morning when he told me he shouldn't be back before I came here; in case you wouldn't believe me. There's nothing like proof, is there? Ha, ha! I say—you'll bring the other one, you know!'

Miss Charity cast her eyes upon her father's autograph, which merely said—'Go, my children, with your cousin. Let there be union among us when it is possible;' and after enough of hesitation to impart a proper value to her consent, withdrew to prepare her sister and herself for the excursion. She soon returned, accompanied by Miss Mercy, who was by no means pleased to leave the brilliant triumphs of Todgers's for the society of Mr Jonas and his respected father.

'Aha!' cried Jonas. 'There you are, are you?'

'Yes, fright,' said Mercy, 'here I am; and I would much rather be anywhere else, I assure you.'

'You don't mean that,' cried Mr Jonas. 'You can't, you know. It isn't possible.'

'You can have what opinion you like, fright,' retorted Mercy. 'I am content to keep mine; and mine is that you are a very unpleasant, odious, disagreeable person.' Here she laughed heartily, and seemed to enjoy herself very much.

'Oh, you're a sharp gal!' said Mr Jonas. 'She's a regular teaser, an't she, cousin?'

Miss Charity replied in effect, that she was unable to say what the habits and propensities of a regular teaser might be; and that even if she possessed such information, it would ill become her to admit the existence of any creature with such an unceremonious name in her family; far less in the person of a beloved sister; 'whatever,' added Cherry with an angry glance, 'whatever her real nature may be.'

'Well, my dear,' said Merry, 'the only observation I have to make is, that if we don't go out at once, I shall certainly take my bonnet off again, and stay at home.'

This threat had the desired effect of preventing any farther altercation, for Mr Jonas immediately proposed an adjournment, and the same being carried unanimously, they departed from the house straightway. On the doorstep, Mr Jonas gave an arm to each cousin; which act of gallantry being observed by Bailey junior, from the garret window, was by him saluted with a loud and violent fit of coughing, to which paroxysm he was still the victim when they turned the corner.

Mr Jonas inquired in the first instance if they were good walkers and being answered, 'Yes,' submitted their pedestrian powers to a pretty severe test; for he showed them as many sights, in the way of bridges, churches, streets, outsides of theatres, and other free spectacles, in that one forenoon, as most people see in a twelvemonth. It was observable in this gentleman, that he had an insurmountable distaste to the insides of buildings, and that he was perfectly acquainted with the merits of all shows, in respect of which there was any charge for admission, which it seemed were every one detestable, and of the very lowest grade of merit. He was so thoroughly possessed with this opinion, that when Miss Charity happened to mention the circumstance of their having been twice or thrice to the theatre with Mr Jinkins and party, he inquired, as a matter of course, 'where the orders came from?' and being told that Mr Jinkins and party paid, was beyond description entertained, observing that 'they must be nice flats, certainly;' and often in the course of the walk, bursting out again into a perfect convulsion of laughter at the surpassing silliness of those gentlemen, and (doubtless) at his own superior wisdom.

When they had been out for some hours and were thoroughly fatigued, it being by that time twilight, Mr Jonas intimated that he would show them one of the best pieces of fun with which he was acquainted. This joke was of a practical kind, and its humour lay in taking a hackney-coach to the extreme limits of possibility for a shilling. Happily it brought them to the place where Mr Jonas dwelt, or the young ladies might have rather missed the point and cream of the jest.

The old-established firm of Anthony Chuzzlewit and Son, Manchester Warehousemen, and so forth, had its place of business in a very narrow street somewhere behind the Post Office; where every house was in the brightest summer morning very gloomy; and where light porters watered the pavement, each before his own employer's premises, in fantastic patterns, in the dog-days; and where spruce gentlemen with their hands in the pockets of symmetrical trousers, were always to be seen in warm weather, contemplating their undeniable boots in dusty warehouse doorways; which appeared to be the hardest work they did, except now and then carrying pens behind their ears. A dim, dirty, smoky, tumble-down, rotten old house it was, as anybody would desire to see; but there the firm of Anthony Chuzzlewit and Son transacted all their business and their pleasure too, such as it was; for neither the young man nor the old had any other residence, or any care or thought beyond its narrow limits.

Business, as may be readily supposed, was the main thing in this establishment; insomuch indeed that it shouldered comfort out of doors, and jostled the domestic arrangements at every turn. Thus in the miserable bedrooms there were files of moth-eaten letters hanging up against the walls; and linen rollers, and fragments of old patterns, and odds and ends of spoiled goods, strewed upon the ground; while the meagre bedsteads, washing-stands, and scraps of carpet, were huddled away into corners as objects of secondary consideration, not to be thought of but as disagreeable necessities, furnishing no profit, and intruding on the one affair of life. The single sitting-room was on the same principle, a chaos of boxes and old papers, and had more counting-house stools in it than chairs; not to mention a great monster of a desk straddling over the middle of the floor, and an iron safe sunk into the wall above the fireplace. The solitary little table for purposes of refection and social enjoyment, bore as fair a proportion to the desk and other business furniture, as the graces and harmless relaxations of life had ever done, in the persons of the old man and his son, to their pursuit of wealth. It was meanly laid out now for dinner; and in a chair before the fire sat Anthony himself, who rose to greet his son and his fair cousins as they entered.

An ancient proverb warns us that we should not expect to find old heads upon young shoulders; to which it may be added that we seldom meet with that unnatural combination, but we feel a strong desire to knock them off; merely from an inherent love we have of seeing things in their right places. It is not improbable that many men, in no wise choleric by nature, felt this impulse rising up within them, when they first made the acquaintance of Mr Jonas; but if they had known him more intimately in his own house, and had sat with him at his own board, it would assuredly have been paramount to all other considerations.

'Well, ghost!' said Mr Jonas, dutifully addressing his parent by that title. 'Is dinner nearly ready?'

'I should think it was,' rejoined the old man.

'What's the good of that?' rejoined the son. 'I should think it was. I want to know.'

'Ah! I don't know for certain,' said Anthony.

'You don't know for certain,' rejoined his son in a lower tone. 'No. You don't know anything for certain, YOU don't. Give me your candle here. I want it for the gals.'

Anthony handed him a battered old office candlestick, with which Mr Jonas preceded the young ladies to the nearest bedroom, where he left them to take off their shawls and bonnets; and returning, occupied himself in opening a bottle of wine, sharpening the carving-knife, and muttering compliments to his father, until they and the dinner appeared together. The repast consisted of a hot leg of mutton with greens and potatoes; and the dishes having been set upon the table by a slipshod old woman, they were left to enjoy it after their own manner.

'Bachelor's Hall, you know, cousin,' said Mr Jonas to Charity. 'I say—the other one will be having a laugh at this when she gets home, won't she? Here; you sit on the right side of me, and I'll have her upon the left. Other one, will you come here?'

'You're such a fright,' replied Mercy, 'that I know I shall have no appetite if I sit so near you; but I suppose I must.'

'An't she lively?' whispered Mr Jonas to the elder sister, with his favourite elbow emphasis.

'Oh I really don't know!' replied Miss Pecksniff, tartly. 'I am tired of being asked such ridiculous questions.'

'What's that precious old father of mine about now?' said Mr Jonas, seeing that his parent was travelling up and down the room instead of taking his seat at table. 'What are you looking for?'

'I've lost my glasses, Jonas,' said old Anthony.

'Sit down without your glasses, can't you?' returned his son. 'You don't eat or drink out of 'em, I think; and where's that sleepy-headed old Chuffey got to! Now, stupid. Oh! you know your name, do you?'

It would seem that he didn't, for he didn't come until the father called. As he spoke, the door of a small glass office, which was partitioned off from the rest of the room, was slowly opened, and a little blear-eyed, weazen-faced, ancient man came creeping out. He was of a remote fashion, and dusty, like the rest of the furniture; he was dressed in a decayed suit of black; with breeches garnished at the knees with rusty wisps of ribbon, the very paupers of shoestrings; on the lower portion of his spindle legs were dingy worsted stockings of the same colour. He looked as if he had been put away and forgotten half a century before, and somebody had just found him in a lumber-closet.

Such as he was, he came slowly creeping on towards the table, until at last he crept into the vacant chair, from which, as his dim faculties became conscious of the presence of strangers, and those strangers ladies, he rose again, apparently intending to make a bow. But he sat down once more without having made it, and breathing on his shrivelled hands to warm them, remained with his poor blue nose immovable above his plate, looking at nothing, with eyes that saw nothing, and a face that meant nothing. Take him in that state, and he was an embodiment of nothing. Nothing else.

'Our clerk,' said Mr Jonas, as host and master of the ceremonies: 'Old Chuffey.'

'Is he deaf?' inquired one of the young ladies.

'No, I don't know that he is. He an't deaf, is he, father?'

'I never heard him say he was,' replied the old man.

'Blind?' inquired the young ladies.

'N—no. I never understood that he was at all blind,' said Jonas, carelessly. 'You don't consider him so, do you, father?'

'Certainly not,' replied Anthony.

'What is he, then?'

'Why, I'll tell you what he is,' said Mr Jonas, apart to the young ladies, 'he's precious old, for one thing; and I an't best pleased with him for that, for I think my father must have caught it of him. He's a strange old chap, for another,' he added in a louder voice, 'and don't understand any one hardly, but HIM!' He pointed to his honoured parent with the carving-fork, in order that they might know whom he meant.

'How very strange!' cried the sisters.

'Why, you see,' said Mr Jonas, 'he's been addling his old brains with figures and book-keeping all his life; and twenty years ago or so he went and took a fever. All the time he was out of his head (which was three weeks) he never left off casting up; and he got to so many million at last that I don't believe he's ever been quite right since. We don't do much business now though, and he an't a bad clerk.'

'A very good one,' said Anthony.

'Well! He an't a dear one at all events,' observed Jonas; 'and he earns his salt, which is enough for our look-out. I was telling you that he hardly understands any one except my father; he always understands him, though, and wakes up quite wonderful. He's been used to his ways so long, you see! Why, I've seen him play whist, with my father for a partner; and a good rubber too; when he had no more notion what sort of people he was playing against, than you have.'

'Has he no appetite?' asked Merry.

'Oh, yes,' said Jonas, plying his own knife and fork very fast. 'He eats—when he's helped. But he don't care whether he waits a minute or an hour, as long as father's here; so when I'm at all sharp set, as I am to-day, I come to him after I've taken the edge off my own hunger, you know. Now, Chuffey, stupid, are you ready?'

Chuffey remained immovable.

'Always a perverse old file, he was,' said Mr Jonas, coolly helping himself to another slice. 'Ask him, father.'

'Are you ready for your dinner, Chuffey?' asked the old man

'Yes, yes,' said Chuffey, lighting up into a sentient human creature at the first sound of the voice, so that it was at once a curious and quite a moving sight to see him. 'Yes, yes. Quite ready, Mr Chuzzlewit. Quite ready, sir. All ready, all ready, all ready.' With that he stopped, smilingly, and listened for some further address; but being spoken to no more, the light forsook his face by little and little, until he was nothing again.

'He'll be very disagreeable, mind,' said Jonas, addressing his cousins as he handed the old man's portion to his father. 'He always chokes himself when it an't broth. Look at him, now! Did you ever see a horse with such a wall-eyed expression as he's got? If it hadn't been for the joke of it I wouldn't have let him come in to-day; but I thought he'd amuse you.'

The poor old subject of this humane speech was, happily for himself, as unconscious of its purport as of most other remarks that were made in his presence. But the mutton being tough, and his gums weak, he quickly verified the statement relative to his choking propensities, and underwent so much in his attempts to dine, that Mr Jonas was infinitely amused; protesting that he had seldom seen him better company in all his life, and that he was enough to make a man split his sides with laughing. Indeed, he went so far as to assure the sisters, that in this point of view he considered Chuffey superior to his own father; which, as he significantly added, was saying a great deal.

It was strange enough that Anthony Chuzzlewit, himself so old a man, should take a pleasure in these gibings of his estimable son at the expense of the poor shadow at their table. But he did, unquestionably; though not so much—to do him justice—with reference to their ancient clerk, as in exultation at the sharpness of Jonas. For the same reason that young man's coarse allusions, even to himself, filled him with a stealthy glee; causing him to rub his hands and chuckle covertly, as if he said in his sleeve, 'I taught him. I trained him. This is the heir of my bringing-up. Sly, cunning, and covetous, he'll not squander my money. I worked for this; I hoped for this; it has been the great end and aim of my life.'

What a noble end and aim it was to contemplate in the attainment truly! But there be some who manufacture idols after the fashion of themselves, and fail to worship them when they are made; charging their deformity on outraged nature. Anthony was better than these at any rate.

Chuffey boggled over his plate so long, that Mr Jones, losing patience, took it from him at last with his own hands, and requested his father to signify to that venerable person that he had better 'peg away at his bread;' which Anthony did.

'Aye, aye!' cried the old man, brightening up as before, when this was communicated to him in the same voice, 'quite right, quite right. He's your own son, Mr Chuzzlewit! Bless him for a sharp lad! Bless him, bless him!'

Mr Jonas considered this so particularly childish (perhaps with some reason), that he only laughed the more, and told his cousins that he was afraid one of these fine days, Chuffey would be the death of him. The cloth was then removed, and the bottle of wine set upon the table, from which Mr Jonas filled the young ladies' glasses, calling on them not to spare it, as they might be certain there was plenty more where that came from. But he added with some haste after this sally that it was only his joke, and they wouldn't suppose him to be in earnest, he was sure.

'I shall drink,' said Anthony, 'to Pecksniff. Your father, my dears. A clever man, Pecksniff. A wary man! A hypocrite, though, eh? A hypocrite, girls, eh? Ha, ha, ha! Well, so he is. Now, among friends, he is. I don't think the worse of him for that, unless it is that he overdoes it. You may overdo anything, my darlings. You may overdo even hypocrisy. Ask Jonas!'

'You can't overdo taking care of yourself,' observed that hopeful gentleman with his mouth full.

'Do you hear that, my dears?' cried Anthony, quite enraptured. 'Wisdom, wisdom! A good exception, Jonas. No. It's not easy to overdo that.'

'Except,' whispered Mr Jonas to his favourite cousin, 'except when one lives too long. Ha, ha! Tell the other one that—I say!'

'Good gracious me!' said Cherry, in a petulant manner. 'You can tell her yourself, if you wish, can't you?'

'She seems to make such game of one,' replied Mr Jonas.

'Then why need you trouble yourself about her?' said Charity. 'I am sure she doesn't trouble herself much about you.'

'Don't she though?' asked Jonas.

'Good gracious me, need I tell you that she don't?' returned the young lady.

Mr Jonas made no verbal rejoinder, but he glanced at Mercy with an odd expression in his face; and said THAT wouldn't break his heart, she might depend upon it. Then he looked on Charity with even greater favour than before, and besought her, as his polite manner was, to 'come a little closer.'

'There's another thing that's not easily overdone, father,' remarked Jonas, after a short silence.

'What's that?' asked the father; grinning already in anticipation.

'A bargain,' said the son. 'Here's the rule for bargains—"Do other men, for they would do you." That's the true business precept. All others are counterfeits.'

The delighted father applauded this sentiment to the echo; and was so much tickled by it, that he was at the pains of imparting the same to his ancient clerk, who rubbed his hands, nodded his palsied head, winked his watery eyes, and cried in his whistling tones, 'Good! good! Your own son, Mr Chuzzlewit' with every feeble demonstration of delight that he was capable of making. But this old man's enthusiasm had the redeeming quality of being felt in sympathy with the only creature to whom he was linked by ties of long association, and by his present helplessness. And if there had been anybody there, who cared to think about it, some dregs of a better nature unawakened, might perhaps have been descried through that very medium, melancholy though it was, yet lingering at the bottom of the worn-out cask called Chuffey.

As matters stood, nobody thought or said anything upon the subject; so Chuffey fell back into a dark corner on one side of the fireplace, where he always spent his evenings, and was neither seen nor heard again that night; save once, when a cup of tea was given him, in which he was seen to soak his bread mechanically. There was no reason to suppose that he went to sleep at these seasons, or that he heard, or saw, or felt, or thought. He remained, as it were, frozen up—if any term expressive of such a vigorous process can be applied to him—until he was again thawed for the moment by a word or touch from Anthony.

Miss Charity made tea by desire of Mr Jonas, and felt and looked so like the lady of the house that she was in the prettiest confusion imaginable; the more so from Mr Jonas sitting close beside her, and whispering a variety of admiring expressions in her ear. Miss Mercy, for her part, felt the entertainment of the evening to be so distinctly and exclusively theirs, that she silently deplored the commercial gentlemen—at that moment, no doubt, wearying for her return—and yawned over yesterday's newspaper. As to Anthony, he went to sleep outright, so Jonas and Cherry had a clear stage to themselves as long as they chose to keep possession of it.

When the tea-tray was taken away, as it was at last, Mr Jonas produced a dirty pack of cards, and entertained the sisters with divers small feats of dexterity: whereof the main purpose of every one was, that you were to decoy somebody into laying a wager with you that you couldn't do it; and were then immediately to win and pocket his money. Mr Jonas informed them that these accomplishments were in high vogue in the most intellectual circles, and that large amounts were constantly changing hands on such hazards. And it may be remarked that he fully believed this; for there is a simplicity of cunning no less than a simplicity of innocence; and in all matters where a lively faith in knavery and meanness was required as the ground-work of belief, Mr Jonas was one of the most credulous of men. His ignorance, which was stupendous, may be taken into account, if the reader pleases, separately.

This fine young man had all the inclination to be a profligate of the first water, and only lacked the one good trait in the common catalogue of debauched vices—open-handedness—to be a notable vagabond. But there his griping and penurious habits stepped in; and as one poison will sometimes neutralise another, when wholesome remedies would not avail, so he was restrained by a bad passion from quaffing his full measure of evil, when virtue might have sought to hold him back in vain.

By the time he had unfolded all the peddling schemes he knew upon the cards, it was growing late in the evening; and Mr Pecksniff not making his appearance, the young ladies expressed a wish to return home. But this, Mr

Jonas, in his gallantry, would by no means allow, until they had partaken of some bread and cheese and porter; and even then he was excessively unwilling to allow them to depart; often beseeching Miss Charity to come a little closer, or to stop a little longer, and preferring many other complimentary petitions of that nature in his own hospitable and earnest way. When all his efforts to detain them were fruitless, he put on his hat and greatcoat preparatory to escorting them to Todgers's; remarking that he knew they would rather walk thither than ride; and that for his part he was quite of their opinion.

'Good night,' said Anthony. 'Good night; remember me to—ha, ha, ha!—to Pecksniff. Take care of your cousin, my dears; beware of Jonas; he's a dangerous fellow. Don't quarrel for him, in any case!'

'Oh, the creature!' cried Mercy. 'The idea of quarrelling for HIM! You may take him, Cherry, my love, all to yourself. I make you a present of my share.'

'What! I'm a sour grape, am I, cousin?' said Jonas.

Miss Charity was more entertained by this repartee than one would have supposed likely, considering its advanced age and simple character. But in her sisterly affection she took Mr Jonas to task for leaning so very hard upon a broken reed, and said that he must not be so cruel to poor Merry any more, or she (Charity) would positively be obliged to hate him. Mercy, who really had her share of good humour, only retorted with a laugh; and they walked home in consequence without any angry passages of words upon the way. Mr Jonas being in the middle, and having a cousin on each arm, sometimes squeezed the wrong one; so tightly too, as to cause her not a little inconvenience; but as he talked to Charity in whispers the whole time, and paid her great attention, no doubt this was an accidental circumstance. When they arrived at Todgers's, and the door was opened, Mercy broke hastily from them, and ran upstairs; but Charity and Jonas lingered on the steps talking together for more than five minutes; so, as Mrs Todgers observed next morning, to a third party, 'It was pretty clear what was going on THERE, and she was glad of it, for it really was high time that Miss Pecksniff thought of settling.'

And now the day was coming on, when that bright vision which had burst on Todgers's so suddenly, and made a sunshine in the shady breast of Jinkins, was to be seen no more; when it was to be packed, like a brown paper parcel, or a fish-basket, or an oyster barrel or a fat gentleman, or any other dull reality of life, in a stagecoach and carried down into the country.

'Never, my dear Miss Pecksniffs,' said Mrs Todgers, when they retired to rest on the last night of their stay, 'never have I seen an establishment so perfectly broken-hearted as mine is at this present moment of time. I don't believe the gentlemen will be the gentlemen they were, or anything like it—no, not for weeks to come. You have a great deal to answer for, both of you.'

They modestly disclaimed any wilful agency in this disastrous state of things, and regretted it very much.

'Your pious pa, too,' said Mrs Todgers. 'There's a loss! My dear Miss Pecksniffs, your pa is a perfect missionary of peace and love.'

Entertaining an uncertainty as to the particular kind of love supposed to be comprised in Mr Pecksniff's mission, the young ladies received the compliment rather coldly.

'If I dared,' said Mrs Todgers, perceiving this, 'to violate a confidence which has been reposed in me, and to tell you why I must beg of you to leave the little door between your room and mine open tonight, I think you would be interested. But I mustn't do it, for I promised Mr Jinkins faithfully, that I would be as silent as the tomb.'

'Dear Mrs Todgers! What can you mean?'

'Why, then, my sweet Miss Pecksniffs,' said the lady of the house; 'my own loves, if you will allow me the privilege of taking that freedom on the eve of our separation, Mr Jinkins and the gentlemen have made up a little musical party among themselves, and DO intend, in the dead of this night, to perform a serenade upon the stairs outside the door. I could have wished, I own,' said Mrs Todgers, with her usual foresight, 'that it had been fixed to take place an hour or two earlier; because when gentlemen sit up late they drink, and when they drink they're not so musical, perhaps, as when they don't. But this is the arrangement; and I know you will be gratified, my dear Miss Pecksniffs, by such a mark of their attention.'

The young ladies were at first so much excited by the news, that they vowed they couldn't think of going to bed until the serenade was over. But half an hour of cool waiting so altered their opinion that they not only went to bed, but fell asleep; and were, moreover, not ecstatically charmed to be awakened some time afterwards by certain dulcet strains breaking in upon the silent watches of the night.

It was very affecting—very. Nothing more dismal could have been desired by the most fastidious taste. The gentleman of a vocal turn was head mute, or chief mourner; Jinkins took the bass; and the rest took anything they could get. The youngest gentleman blew his melancholy into a flute. He didn't blow much out of it, but that was all the better. If the two Miss Pecksniffs and Mrs Todgers had perished by spontaneous combustion, and the serenade had been in honour of their ashes, it would have been impossible to surpass the unutterable despair expressed in that one chorus, 'Go where glory waits thee!' It was a requiem, a dirge, a moan, a howl, a wail, a lament, an abstract of everything that is sorrowful and hideous in sound. The flute of the youngest gentleman was wild and fitful. It came and went in gusts, like the wind. For a long time together he seemed to have left off, and when it was quite settled by Mrs Todgers and the young ladies that, overcome by his feelings, he had retired in tears, he unexpectedly turned up again at the very top of the tune, gasping for breath. He was a tremendous performer. There was no knowing where to have him; and exactly when you thought he was doing nothing at all, then was he doing the very thing that ought to astonish you most.

There were several of these concerted pieces; perhaps two or three too many, though that, as Mrs Todgers said, was a fault on the right side. But even then, even at that solemn moment, when the thrilling sounds may be presumed to have penetrated into the very depths of his nature, if he had any depths, Jinkins couldn't leave the youngest gentleman alone. He asked him distinctly, before the second song began—as a personal favour too, mark the villain in that—not to play. Yes; he said so; not to play. The breathing of the youngest gentleman was heard through the key-hole of the door. He DIDN'T play. What vent was a flute for the passions swelling up within his breast? A trombone would have been a world too mild.

The serenade approached its close. Its crowning interest was at hand. The gentleman of a literary turn had written a song on the departure of the ladies, and adapted it to an old tune. They all joined, except the youngest gentleman in company, who, for the reasons aforesaid, maintained a fearful silence. The song (which was of a classical nature) invoked the oracle of Apollo, and demanded to know what would become of Todgers's when CHARITY and MERCY were banished from its walls. The oracle delivered no opinion particularly worth remembering, according to the not infrequent practice of oracles from the earliest ages down to the present time. In the absence of enlightenment on that subject, the strain deserted it, and went on to show that the Miss Pecksniffs were nearly related to Rule Britannia, and that if Great Britain hadn't been an island, there could have been no Miss Pecksniffs. And being now on a nautical tack, it closed with this verse:

'All hail to the vessel of Pecksniff the sire!
       And favouring breezes to fan;
While Tritons flock round it, and proudly admire
       The architect, artist, and man!'

As they presented this beautiful picture to the imagination, the gentlemen gradually withdrew to bed to give the music the effect of distance; and so it died away, and Todgers's was left to its repose.

Mr Bailey reserved his vocal offering until the morning, when he put his head into the room as the young ladies were kneeling before their trunks, packing up, and treated them to an imitation of the voice of a young dog in trying circumstances; when that animal is supposed by persons of a lively fancy, to relieve his feelings by calling for pen and ink.

'Well, young ladies,' said the youth, 'so you're a-going home, are you, worse luck?'

'Yes, Bailey, we're going home,' returned Mercy.

'An't you a-going to leave none of 'em a lock of your hair?' inquired the youth. 'It's real, an't it?'

They laughed at this, and told him of course it was.

'Oh, is it of course, though?' said Bailey. 'I know better than that. Hers an't. Why, I see it hanging up once, on that nail by the winder. Besides, I have gone behind her at dinner-time and pulled it; and she never know'd. I say, young ladies, I'm a-going to leave. I an't a-going to stand being called names by her, no longer.'

Miss Mercy inquired what his plans for the future might be; in reply to whom Mr Bailey intimated that he thought of going either into top-boots, or into the army.

'Into the army!' cried the young ladies, with a laugh.

'Ah!' said Bailey, 'why not? There's a many drummers in the Tower. I'm acquainted with 'em. Don't their country set a valley on 'em, mind you! Not at all!'

'You'll be shot, I see,' observed Mercy.

'Well!' cried Mr Bailey, 'wot if I am? There's something gamey in it, young ladies, an't there? I'd sooner be hit with a cannon-ball than a rolling-pin, and she's always a-catching up something of that sort, and throwing it at me, when the gentlemans' appetites is good. Wot,' said Mr Bailey, stung by the recollection of his wrongs, 'wot, if they DO consume the per-vishuns. It an't MY fault, is it?'

'Surely no one says it is,' said Mercy.

'Don't they though?' retorted the youth. 'No. Yes. Ah! oh! No one mayn't say it is! but some one knows it is. But I an't a-going to have every rise in prices wisited on me. I an't a-going to be killed because the markets is dear. I won't stop. And therefore,' added Mr Bailey, relenting into a smile, 'wotever you mean to give me, you'd better give me all at once, becos if ever you come back agin, I shan't be here; and as to the other boy, HE won't deserve nothing, I know.'

The young ladies, on behalf of Mr Pecksniff and themselves, acted on this thoughtful advice; and in consideration of their private friendship, presented Mr Bailey with a gratuity so liberal that he could hardly do enough to show his gratitude; which found but an imperfect vent, during the remainder of the day, in divers secret slaps upon his pocket, and other such facetious pantomime. Nor was it confined to these ebullitions; for besides crushing a bandbox, with a bonnet in it, he seriously damaged Mr Pecksniff's luggage, by ardently hauling it down from the top of the house; and in short evinced, by every means in his power, a lively sense of the favours he had received from that gentleman and his family.

Mr Pecksniff and Mr Jinkins came home to dinner arm-in-arm; for the latter gentleman had made half-holiday on purpose; thus gaining an immense advantage over the youngest gentleman and the rest, whose time, as it perversely chanced, was all bespoke, until the evening. The bottle of wine was Mr Pecksniff's treat, and they were very sociable indeed; though full of lamentations on the necessity of parting. While they were in the midst of their enjoyment, old Anthony and his son were announced; much to the surprise of Mr Pecksniff, and greatly to the discomfiture of Jinkins.

'Come to say good-bye, you see,' said Anthony, in a low voice, to Mr Pecksniff, as they took their seats apart at the table, while the rest conversed among themselves. 'Where's the use of a division between you and me? We are the two halves of a pair of scissors, when apart, Pecksniff; but together we are something. Eh?'

'Unanimity, my good sir,' rejoined Mr Pecksniff, 'is always delightful.'

'I don't know about that,' said the old man, 'for there are some people I would rather differ from than agree with. But you know my opinion of you.'

Mr Pecksniff, still having 'hypocrite' in his mind, only replied by a motion of his head, which was something between an affirmative bow, and a negative shake.

'Complimentary,' said Anthony. 'Complimentary, upon my word. It was an involuntary tribute to your abilities, even at the time; and it was not a time to suggest compliments either. But we agreed in the coach, you know, that we quite understood each other.'

'Oh, quite!' assented Mr Pecksniff, in a manner which implied that he himself was misunderstood most cruelly, but would not complain.

Anthony glanced at his son as he sat beside Miss Charity, and then at Mr Pecksniff, and then at his son again, very many times. It happened that Mr Pecksniff's glances took a similar direction; but when he became aware of it, he first cast down his eyes, and then closed them; as if he were determined that the old man should read nothing there.

'Jonas is a shrewd lad,' said the old man.

'He appears,' rejoined Mr Pecksniff in his most candid manner, 'to be very shrewd.'

'And careful,' said the old man.

'And careful, I have no doubt,' returned Mr Pecksniff.

'Look ye!' said Anthony in his ear. 'I think he is sweet upon you daughter.'

'Tut, my good sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, with his eyes still closed; 'young people—young people—a kind of cousins, too—no more sweetness than is in that, sir.'

'Why, there is very little sweetness in that, according to our experience,' returned Anthony. 'Isn't there a trifle more here?'

'Impossible to say,' rejoined Mr Pecksniff. 'Quite impossible! You surprise me.'

'Yes, I know that,' said the old man, drily. 'It may last; I mean the sweetness, not the surprise; and it may die off. Supposing it should last, perhaps (you having feathered your nest pretty well, and I having done the same), we might have a mutual interest in the matter.'

Mr Pecksniff, smiling gently, was about to speak, but Anthony stopped him.

'I know what you are going to say. It's quite unnecessary. You have never thought of this for a moment; and in a point so nearly affecting the happiness of your dear child, you couldn't, as a tender father, express an opinion; and so forth. Yes, quite right. And like you! But it seems to me, my dear Pecksniff,' added Anthony, laying his hand upon his sleeve, 'that if you and I kept up the joke of pretending not to see this, one of us might possibly be placed in a position of disadvantage; and as I am very unwilling to be that party myself, you will excuse my taking the liberty of putting the matter beyond a doubt thus early; and having it distinctly understood, as it is now, that we do see it, and do know it. Thank you for your attention. We are now upon an equal footing; which is agreeable to us both, I am sure.'

He rose as he spoke; and giving Mr Pecksniff a nod of intelligence, moved away from him to where the young people were sitting; leaving that good man somewhat puzzled and discomfited by such very plain dealing, and not quite free from a sense of having been foiled in the exercise of his familiar weapons.

But the night-coach had a punctual character, and it was time to join it at the office; which was so near at hand that they had already sent their luggage and arranged to walk. Thither the whole party repaired, therefore, after no more delay than sufficed for the equipment of the Miss Pecksniffs and Mrs Todgers. They found the coach already at its starting-place, and the horses in; there, too, were a large majority of the commercial gentlemen, including the youngest, who was visibly agitated, and in a state of deep mental dejection.

Nothing could equal the distress of Mrs Todgers in parting from the young ladies, except the strong emotions with which she bade adieu to Mr Pecksniff. Never surely was a pocket-handkerchief taken in and out of a flat reticule so often as Mrs Todgers's was, as she stood upon the pavement by the coach-door supported on either side by a commercial gentleman; and by the sight of the coach-lamps caught such brief snatches and glimpses of the good man's face, as the constant interposition of Mr Jinkins allowed. For Jinkins, to the last the youngest gentleman's rock a-head in life, stood upon the coachstep talking to the ladies. Upon the other step was Mr Jonas, who maintained that position in right of his cousinship; whereas the youngest gentleman, who had been first upon the ground, was deep in the booking-office among the black and red placards, and the portraits of fast coaches, where he was ignominiously harassed by porters, and had to contend and strive perpetually with heavy baggage. This false position, combined with his nervous excitement, brought about the very consummation and catastrophe of his miseries; for when in the moment of parting he aimed a flower, a hothouse flower that had cost money, at the fair hand of Mercy, it reached, instead, the coachman on the box, who thanked him kindly, and stuck it in his buttonhole.

They were off now; and Todgers's was alone again. The two young ladies, leaning back in their separate corners, resigned themselves to their own regretful thoughts. But Mr Pecksniff, dismissing all ephemeral considerations of social pleasure and enjoyment, concentrated his meditations on the one great virtuous purpose before him, of casting out that ingrate and deceiver, whose presence yet troubled his domestic hearth, and was a sacrilege upon the altars of his household gods.

CHAPTER TWELVE

WILL BE SEEN IN THE LONG RUN, IF NOT IN THE SHORT ONE, TO CONCERN MR PINCH AND OTHERS, NEARLY. MR PECKSNIFF ASSERTS THE DIGNITY OF OUTRAGED VIRTUE. YOUNG MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT FORMS A DESPERATE RESOLUTION

Mr Pinch and Martin, little dreaming of the stormy weather that impended, made themselves very comfortable in the Pecksniffian halls, and improved their friendship daily. Martin's facility, both of invention and execution, being remarkable, the grammar-school proceeded with great vigour; and Tom repeatedly declared, that if there were anything like certainty in human affairs, or impartiality in human judges, a design so new and full of merit could not fail to carry off the first prize when the time of competition arrived. Without being quite so sanguine himself, Martin had his hopeful anticipations too; and they served to make him brisk and eager at his task.

'If I should turn out a great architect, Tom,' said the new pupil one day, as he stood at a little distance from his drawing, and eyed it with much complacency, 'I'll tell you what should be one of the things I'd build.'

'Aye!' cried Tom. 'What?'

'Why, your fortune.'

'No!' said Tom Pinch, quite as much delighted as if the thing were done. 'Would you though? How kind of you to say so.'

'I'd build it up, Tom,' returned Martin, 'on such a strong foundation, that it should last your life—aye, and your children's lives too, and their children's after them. I'd be your patron, Tom. I'd take you under my protection. Let me see the man who should give the cold shoulder to anybody I chose to protect and patronise, if I were at the top of the tree, Tom!'

'Now, I don't think,' said Mr Pinch, 'upon my word, that I was ever more gratified than by this. I really don't.'

'Oh! I mean what I say,' retorted Martin, with a manner as free and easy in its condescension to, not to say in its compassion for, the other, as if he were already First Architect in ordinary to all the Crowned Heads in Europe. 'I'd do it. I'd provide for you.'

'I am afraid,' said Tom, shaking his head, 'that I should be a mighty awkward person to provide for.'

'Pooh, pooh!' rejoined Martin. 'Never mind that. If I took it in my head to say, "Pinch is a clever fellow; I approve of Pinch;" I should like to know the man who would venture to put himself in opposition to me. Besides, confound it, Tom, you could be useful to me in a hundred ways.'

'If I were not useful in one or two, it shouldn't be for want of trying,' said Tom.

'For instance,' pursued Martin, after a short reflection, 'you'd be a capital fellow, now, to see that my ideas were properly carried out; and to overlook the works in their progress before they were sufficiently advanced to be very interesting to ME; and to take all that sort of plain sailing. Then you'd be a splendid fellow to show people over my studio, and to talk about Art to 'em, when I couldn't be bored myself, and all that kind of thing. For it would be devilish creditable, Tom (I'm quite in earnest, I give you my word), to have a man of your information about one, instead of some ordinary blockhead. Oh, I'd take care of you. You'd be useful, rely upon it!'

To say that Tom had no idea of playing first fiddle in any social orchestra, but was always quite satisfied to be set down for the hundred and fiftieth violin in the band, or thereabouts, is to express his modesty in very inadequate terms. He was much delighted, therefore, by these observations.

'I should be married to her then, Tom, of course,' said Martin.

What was that which checked Tom Pinch so suddenly, in the high flow of his gladness; bringing the blood into his honest cheeks, and a remorseful feeling to his honest heart, as if he were unworthy of his friend's regard?

'I should be married to her then,' said Martin, looking with a smile towards the light; 'and we should have, I hope, children about us. They'd be very fond of you, Tom.'

But not a word said Mr Pinch. The words he would have uttered died upon his lips, and found a life more spiritual in self-denying thoughts.

'All the children hereabouts are fond of you, Tom, and mine would be, of course,' pursued Martin. 'Perhaps I might name one of 'em after you. Tom, eh? Well, I don't know. Tom's not a bad name. Thomas Pinch Chuzzlewit. T. P. C. on his pinafores—no objection to that, I should say?'

Tom cleared his throat, and smiled.

'SHE would like you, Tom, I know,' said Martin.

'Aye!' cried Tom Pinch, faintly.

'I can tell exactly what she would think of you,' said Martin leaning his chin upon his hand, and looking through the window-glass as if he read there what he said; 'I know her so well. She would smile, Tom, often at first when you spoke to her, or when she looked at you—merrily too—but you wouldn't mind that. A brighter smile you never saw.'

'No, no,' said Tom. 'I wouldn't mind that.'

'She would be as tender with you, Tom,' said Martin, 'as if you were a child yourself. So you are almost, in some things, an't you, Tom?'

Mr Pinch nodded his entire assent.

'She would always be kind and good-humoured, and glad to see you,' said Martin; 'and when she found out exactly what sort of fellow you were (which she'd do very soon), she would pretend to give you little commissions to execute, and to ask little services of you, which she knew you were burning to render; so that when she really pleased you most, she would try to make you think you most pleased her. She would take to you uncommonly, Tom; and would understand you far more delicately than I ever shall; and would often say, I know, that you were a harmless, gentle, well-intentioned, good fellow.'

How silent Tom Pinch was!

'In honour of old time,' said Martin, 'and of her having heard you play the organ in this damp little church down here—for nothing too—we will have one in the house. I shall build an architectural music-room on a plan of my own, and it'll look rather knowing in a recess at one end. There you shall play away, Tom, till you tire yourself; and, as you like to do so in the dark, it shall BE dark; and many's the summer evening she and I will sit and listen to you, Tom; be sure of that!'

It may have required a stronger effort on Tom Pinch's part to leave the seat on which he sat, and shake his friend by both hands, with nothing but serenity and grateful feeling painted on his face; it may have required a stronger effort to perform this simple act with a pure heart, than to achieve many and many a deed to which the doubtful trumpet blown by Fame has lustily resounded. Doubtful, because from its long hovering over scenes of violence, the smoke and steam of death have clogged the keys of that brave instrument; and it is not always that its notes are either true or tuneful.

'It's a proof of the kindness of human nature,' said Tom, characteristically putting himself quite out of sight in the matter, 'that everybody who comes here, as you have done, is more considerate and affectionate to me than I should have any right to hope, if I were the most sanguine creature in the world; or should have any power to express, if I were the most eloquent. It really overpowers me. But trust me,' said Tom, 'that I am not ungrateful—that I never forget—and that if I can ever prove the truth of my words to you, I will.'

'That's all right,' observed Martin, leaning back in his chair with a hand in each pocket, and yawning drearily. 'Very fine talking, Tom; but I'm at Pecksniff's, I remember, and perhaps a mile or so out of the high-road to fortune just at this minute. So you've heard again this morning from what's his name, eh?'

'Who may that be?' asked Tom, seeming to enter a mild protest on behalf of the dignity of an absent person.

'YOU know. What is it? Northkey.'

'Westlock,' rejoined Tom, in rather a louder tone than usual.

'Ah! to be sure,' said Martin, 'Westlock. I knew it was something connected with a point of the compass and a door. Well! and what says Westlock?'

'Oh! he has come into his property,' answered Tom, nodding his head, and smiling.

'He's a lucky dog,' said Martin. 'I wish it were mine instead. Is that all the mystery you were to tell me?'

'No,' said Tom; 'not all.'

'What's the rest?' asked Martin.

'For the matter of that,' said Tom, 'it's no mystery, and you won't think much of it; but it's very pleasant to me. John always used to say when he was here, "Mark my words, Pinch. When my father's executors cash up"—he used strange expressions now and then, but that was his way.'

'Cash-up's a very good expression,' observed Martin, 'when other people don't apply it to you. Well!—What a slow fellow you are, Pinch!'

'Yes, I am I know,' said Tom; 'but you'll make me nervous if you tell me so. I'm afraid you have put me out a little now, for I forget what I was going to say.'

'When John's father's executors cashed up,' said Martin impatiently.

'Oh yes, to be sure,' cried Tom; 'yes. "Then," says John, "I'll give you a dinner, Pinch, and come down to Salisbury on purpose." Now, when John wrote the other day—the morning Pecksniff left, you know—he said his business was on the point of being immediately settled, and as he was to receive his money directly, when could I meet him at Salisbury? I wrote and said, any day this week; and I told him besides, that there was a new pupil here, and what a fine fellow you were, and what friends we had become. Upon which John writes back this letter'—Tom produced it—'fixes to-morrow; sends his compliments to you; and begs that we three may have the pleasure of dining together; not at the house where you and I were, either; but at the very first hotel in the town. Read what he says.'

'Very well,' said Martin, glancing over it with his customary coolness; 'much obliged to him. I'm agreeable.'

Tom could have wished him to be a little more astonished, a little more pleased, or in some form or other a little more interested in such a great event. But he was perfectly self-possessed; and falling into his favourite solace of whistling, took another turn at the grammar-school, as if nothing at all had happened.

Mr Pecksniff's horse being regarded in the light of a sacred animal, only to be driven by him, the chief priest of that temple, or by some person distinctly nominated for the time being to that high office by himself, the two young men agreed to walk to Salisbury; and so, when the time came, they set off on foot; which was, after all, a better mode of travelling than in the gig, as the weather was very cold and very dry.

Better! A rare strong, hearty, healthy walk—four statute miles an hour—preferable to that rumbling, tumbling, jolting, shaking, scraping, creaking, villanous old gig? Why, the two things will not admit of comparison. It is an insult to the walk, to set them side by side. Where is an instance of a gig having ever circulated a man's blood, unless when, putting him in danger of his neck, it awakened in his veins and in his ears, and all along his spine, a tingling heat, much more peculiar than agreeable? When did a gig ever sharpen anybody's wits and energies, unless it was when the horse bolted, and, crashing madly down a steep hill with a stone wall at the bottom, his desperate circumstances suggested to the only gentleman left inside, some novel and unheard-of mode of dropping out behind? Better than the gig!

The air was cold, Tom; so it was, there was no denying it; but would it have been more genial in the gig? The blacksmith's fire burned very bright, and leaped up high, as though it wanted men to warm; but would it have been less tempting, looked at from the clammy cushions of a gig? The wind blew keenly, nipping the features of the hardy wight who fought his way along; blinding him with his own hair if he had enough to it, and wintry dust if he hadn't; stopping his breath as though he had been soused in a cold bath; tearing aside his wrappings-up, and whistling in the very marrow of his bones; but it would have done all this a hundred times more fiercely to a man in a gig, wouldn't it? A fig for gigs!

Better than the gig! When were travellers by wheels and hoofs seen with such red-hot cheeks as those? when were they so good-humouredly and merrily bloused? when did their laughter ring upon the air, as they turned them round, what time the stronger gusts came sweeping up; and, facing round again as they passed by, dashed on, in such a glow of ruddy health as nothing could keep pace with, but the high spirits it engendered? Better than the gig! Why, here is a man in a gig coming the same way now. Look at him as he passes his whip into his left hand, chafes his numbed right fingers on his granite leg, and beats those marble toes of his upon the foot-board. Ha, ha, ha! Who would exchange this rapid hurry of the blood for yonder stagnant misery, though its pace were twenty miles for one?

Better than the gig! No man in a gig could have such interest in the milestones. No man in a gig could see, or feel, or think, like merry users of their legs. How, as the wind sweeps on, upon these breezy downs, it tracks its flight in darkening ripples on the grass, and smoothest shadows on the hills! Look round and round upon this bare bleak plain, and see even here, upon a winter's day, how beautiful the shadows are! Alas! it is the nature of their kind to be so. The loveliest things in life, Tom, are but shadows; and they come and go, and change and fade away, as rapidly as these!

Another mile, and then begins a fall of snow, making the crow, who skims away so close above the ground to shirk the wind, a blot of ink upon the landscape. But though it drives and drifts against them as they walk, stiffening on their skirts, and freezing in the lashes of their eyes, they wouldn't have it fall more sparingly, no, not so much as by a single flake, although they had to go a score of miles. And, lo! the towers of the Old Cathedral rise before them, even now! and by-and-bye they come into the sheltered streets, made strangely silent by their white carpet; and so to the Inn for which they are bound; where they present such flushed and burning faces to the cold waiter, and are so brimful of vigour, that he almost feels assaulted by their presence; and, having nothing to oppose to the attack (being fresh, or rather stale, from the blazing fire in the coffee-room), is quite put out of his pale countenance.

A famous Inn! the hall a very grove of dead game, and dangling joints of mutton; and in one corner an illustrious larder, with glass doors, developing cold fowls and noble joints, and tarts wherein the raspberry jam coyly withdrew itself, as such a precious creature should, behind a lattice work of pastry. And behold, on the first floor, at the court-end of the house, in a room with all the window-curtains drawn, a fire piled half-way up the chimney, plates warming before it, wax candles gleaming everywhere, and a table spread for three, with silver and glass enough for thirty—John Westlock; not the old John of Pecksniff's, but a proper gentleman; looking another and a grander person, with the consciousness of being his own master and having money in the bank; and yet in some respects the old John too, for he seized Tom Pinch by both his hands the instant he appeared, and fairly hugged him, in his cordial welcome.

'And this,' said John, 'is Mr Chuzzlewit. I am very glad to see him!'—John had an off-hand manner of his own; so they shook hands warmly, and were friends in no time.

'Stand off a moment, Tom,' cried the old pupil, laying one hand on each of Mr Pinch's shoulders, and holding him out at arm's length. 'Let me look at you! Just the same! Not a bit changed!'

'Why, it's not so very long ago, you know,' said Tom Pinch, 'after all.'

'It seems an age to me,' cried John, 'and so it ought to seem to you, you dog.' And then he pushed Tom down into the easiest chair, and clapped him on the back so heartily, and so like his old self in their old bedroom at old Pecksniff's that it was a toss-up with Tom Pinch whether he should laugh or cry. Laughter won it; and they all three laughed together.

'I have ordered everything for dinner, that we used to say we'd have, Tom,' observed John Westlock.

'No!' said Tom Pinch. 'Have you?'

'Everything. Don't laugh, if you can help it, before the waiters. I couldn't when I was ordering it. It's like a dream.'

John was wrong there, because nobody ever dreamed such soup as was put upon the table directly afterwards; or such fish; or such side-dishes; or such a top and bottom; or such a course of birds and sweets; or in short anything approaching the reality of that entertainment at ten-and-sixpence a head, exclusive of wines. As to THEM, the man who can dream such iced champagne, such claret, port, or sherry, had better go to bed and stop there.

But perhaps the finest feature of the banquet was, that nobody was half so much amazed by everything as John himself, who in his high delight was constantly bursting into fits of laughter, and then endeavouring to appear preternaturally solemn, lest the waiters should conceive he wasn't used to it. Some of the things they brought him to carve, were such outrageous practical jokes, though, that it was impossible to stand it; and when Tom Pinch insisted, in spite of the deferential advice of an attendant, not only on breaking down the outer wall of a raised pie with a tablespoon, but on trying to eat it afterwards, John lost all dignity, and sat behind the gorgeous dish-cover at the head of the table, roaring to that extent that he was audible in the kitchen. Nor had he the least objection to laugh at himself, as he demonstrated when they had all three gathered round the fire and the dessert was on the table; at which period the head waiter inquired with respectful solicitude whether that port, being a light and tawny wine, was suited to his taste, or whether he would wish to try a fruity port with greater body. To this John gravely answered that he was well satisfied with what he had, which he esteemed, as one might say, a pretty tidy vintage; for which the waiter thanked him and withdrew. And then John told his friends, with a broad grin, that he supposed it was all right, but he didn't know; and went off into a perfect shout.

They were very merry and full of enjoyment the whole time, but not the least pleasant part of the festival was when they all three sat about the fire, cracking nuts, drinking wine and talking cheerfully. It happened that Tom Pinch had a word to say to his friend the organist's assistant, and so deserted his warm corner for a few minutes at this season, lest it should grow too late; leaving the other two young men together.

They drank his health in his absence, of course; and John Westlock took that opportunity of saying, that he had never had even a peevish word with Tom during the whole term of their residence in Mr Pecksniff's house. This naturally led him to dwell upon Tom's character, and to hint that Mr Pecksniff understood it pretty well. He only hinted this, and very distantly; knowing that it pained Tom Pinch to have that gentleman disparaged, and thinking it would be as well to leave the new pupil to his own discoveries.

'Yes,' said Martin. 'It's impossible to like Pinch better than I do, or to do greater justice to his good qualities. He is the most willing fellow I ever saw.'

'He's rather too willing,' observed John, who was quick in observation. 'It's quite a fault in him.'

'So it is,' said Martin. 'Very true. There was a fellow only a week or so ago—a Mr Tigg—who borrowed all the money he had, on a promise to repay it in a few days. It was but half a sovereign, to be sure; but it's well it was no more, for he'll never see it again.'

'Poor fellow!' said John, who had been very attentive to these few words. 'Perhaps you have not had an opportunity of observing that, in his own pecuniary transactions, Tom's proud.'

'You don't say so! No, I haven't. What do you mean? Won't he borrow?'

John Westlock shook his head.

'That's very odd,' said Martin, setting down his empty glass. 'He's a strange compound, to be sure.'

'As to receiving money as a gift,' resumed John Westlock; 'I think he'd die first.'

'He's made up of simplicity,' said Martin. 'Help yourself.'

'You, however,' pursued John, filling his own glass, and looking at his companion with some curiosity, 'who are older than the majority of Mr Pecksniff's assistants, and have evidently had much more experience, understand him, I have no doubt, and see how liable he is to be imposed upon.'

'Certainly,' said Martin, stretching out his legs, and holding his wine between his eye and the light. 'Mr Pecksniff knows that too. So do his daughters. Eh?'

John Westlock smiled, but made no answer.

'By the bye,' said Martin, 'that reminds me. What's your opinion of Pecksniff? How did he use you? What do you think of him now?—Coolly, you know, when it's all over?'

'Ask Pinch,' returned the old pupil. 'He knows what my sentiments used to be upon the subject. They are not changed, I assure you.'

'No, no,' said Martin, 'I'd rather have them from you.'

'But Pinch says they are unjust,' urged John with a smile.

'Oh! well! Then I know what course they take beforehand,' said Martin; 'and, therefore, you can have no delicacy in speaking plainly. Don't mind me, I beg. I don't like him I tell you frankly. I am with him because it happens from particular circumstances to suit my convenience. I have some ability, I believe, in that way; and the obligation, if any, will most likely be on his side and not mine. At the lowest mark, the balance will be even, and there'll be no obligation at all. So you may talk to me, as if I had no connection with him.'

'If you press me to give my opinion—' returned John Westlock.

'Yes, I do,' said Martin. 'You'll oblige me.'

'—I should say,' resumed the other, 'that he is the most consummate scoundrel on the face of the earth.'

'Oh!' said Martin, as coolly as ever. 'That's rather strong.'

'Not stronger than he deserves,' said John; 'and if he called upon me to express my opinion of him to his face, I would do so in the very same terms, without the least qualification. His treatment of Pinch is in itself enough to justify them; but when I look back upon the five years I passed in that house, and remember the hyprocrisy, the knavery, the meannesses, the false pretences, the lip service of that fellow, and his trading in saintly semblances for the very worst realities; when I remember how often I was the witness of all this and how often I was made a kind of party to it, by the fact of being there, with him for my teacher; I swear to you that I almost despise myself.'

Martin drained his glass, and looked at the fire.

'I don't mean to say that is a right feeling,' pursued John Westlock 'because it was no fault of mine; and I can quite understand—you for instance, fully appreciating him, and yet being forced by circumstances to remain there. I tell you simply what my feeling is; and even now, when, as you say, it's all over; and when I have the satisfaction of knowing that he always hated me, and we always quarrelled, and I always told him my mind; even now, I feel sorry that I didn't yield to an impulse I often had, as a boy, of running away from him and going abroad.'

'Why abroad?' asked Martin, turning his eyes upon the speaker.

'In search,' replied John Westlock, shrugging his shoulders, 'of the livelihood I couldn't have earned at home. There would have been something spirited in that. But, come! Fill your glass, and let us forget him.'

'As soon as you please,' said Martin. 'In reference to myself and my connection with him, I have only to repeat what I said before. I have taken my own way with him so far, and shall continue to do so, even more than ever; for the fact is, to tell you the truth, that I believe he looks to me to supply his defects, and couldn't afford to lose me. I had a notion of that in first going there. Your health!'

'Thank you,' returned young Westlock. 'Yours. And may the new pupil turn out as well as you can desire!'

'What new pupil?'

'The fortunate youth, born under an auspicious star,' returned John Westlock, laughing; 'whose parents, or guardians, are destined to be hooked by the advertisement. What! Don't you know that he has advertised again?'

'No.'

'Oh, yes. I read it just before dinner in the old newspaper. I know it to be his; having some reason to remember the style. Hush! Here's Pinch. Strange, is it not, that the more he likes Pecksniff (if he can like him better than he does), the greater reason one has to like HIM? Not a word more, or we shall spoil his whole enjoyment.'

Tom entered as the words were spoken, with a radiant smile upon his face; and rubbing his hands, more from a sense of delight than because he was cold (for he had been running fast), sat down in his warm corner again, and was as happy as only Tom Pinch could be. There is no other simile that will express his state of mind.

'And so,' he said, when he had gazed at his friend for some time in silent pleasure, 'so you really are a gentleman at last, John. Well, to be sure!'

'Trying to be, Tom; trying to be,' he rejoined good-humouredly. 'There is no saying what I may turn out, in time.'

'I suppose you wouldn't carry your own box to the mail now?' said Tom Pinch, smiling; 'although you lost it altogether by not taking it.'

'Wouldn't I?' retorted John. 'That's all you know about it, Pinch. It must be a very heavy box that I wouldn't carry to get away from Pecksniff's, Tom.'

'There!' cried Pinch, turning to Martin, 'I told you so. The great fault in his character is his injustice to Pecksniff. You mustn't mind a word he says on that subject. His prejudice is most extraordinary.'

'The absence of anything like prejudice on Tom's part, you know,' said John Westlock, laughing heartily, as he laid his hand on Mr Pinch's shoulder, 'is perfectly wonderful. If one man ever had a profound knowledge of another, and saw him in a true light, and in his own proper colours, Tom has that knowledge of Mr Pecksniff.'

'Why, of course I have,' cried Tom. 'That's exactly what I have so often said to you. If you knew him as well as I do—John, I'd give almost any money to bring that about—you'd admire, respect, and reverence him. You couldn't help it. Oh, how you wounded his feelings when you went away!'

'If I had known whereabout his feelings lay,' retorted young Westlock, 'I'd have done my best, Tom, with that end in view, you may depend upon it. But as I couldn't wound him in what he has not, and in what he knows nothing of, except in his ability to probe them to the quick in other people, I am afraid I can lay no claim to your compliment.'

Mr Pinch, being unwilling to protract a discussion which might possibly corrupt Martin, forbore to say anything in reply to this speech; but John Westlock, whom nothing short of an iron gag would have silenced when Mr Pecksniff's merits were once in question, continued notwithstanding.

'HIS feelings! Oh, he's a tender-hearted man. HIS feelings! Oh, he's a considerate, conscientious, self-examining, moral vagabond, he is! HIS feelings! Oh!—what's the matter, Tom?'

Mr Pinch was by this time erect upon the hearth-rug, buttoning his coat with great energy.

'I can't bear it,' said Tom, shaking his head. 'No. I really cannot. You must excuse me, John. I have a great esteem and friendship for you; I love you very much; and have been perfectly charmed and overjoyed to-day, to find you just the same as ever; but I cannot listen to this.'

'Why, it's my old way, Tom; and you say yourself that you are glad to find me unchanged.'

'Not in this respect,' said Tom Pinch. 'You must excuse me, John. I cannot, really; I will not. It's very wrong; you should be more guarded in your expressions. It was bad enough when you and I used to be alone together, but under existing circumstances, I can't endure it, really. No. I cannot, indeed.'

'You are quite right!' exclaimed the other, exchanging looks with Martin. 'and I am quite wrong, Tom, I don't know how the deuce we fell on this unlucky theme. I beg your pardon with all my heart.'

'You have a free and manly temper, I know,' said Pinch; 'and therefore, your being so ungenerous in this one solitary instance, only grieves me the more. It's not my pardon you have to ask, John. You have done ME nothing but kindnesses.'

'Well! Pecksniff's pardon then,' said young Westlock. 'Anything Tom, or anybody. Pecksniff's pardon—will that do? Here! let us drink Pecksniff's health!'

'Thank you,' cried Tom, shaking hands with him eagerly, and filling a bumper. 'Thank you; I'll drink it with all my heart, John. Mr Pecksniff's health, and prosperity to him!'

John Westlock echoed the sentiment, or nearly so; for he drank Mr Pecksniff's health, and Something to him—but what, was not quite audible. The general unanimity being then completely restored, they drew their chairs closer round the fire, and conversed in perfect harmony and enjoyment until bed-time.

No slight circumstance, perhaps, could have better illustrated the difference of character between John Westlock and Martin Chuzzlewit, than the manner in which each of the young men contemplated Tom Pinch, after the little rupture just described. There was a certain amount of jocularity in the looks of both, no doubt, but there all resemblance ceased. The old pupil could not do enough to show Tom how cordially he felt towards him, and his friendly regard seemed of a graver and more thoughtful kind than before. The new one, on the other hand, had no impulse but to laugh at the recollection of Tom's extreme absurdity; and mingled with his amusement there was something slighting and contemptuous, indicative, as it appeared, of his opinion that Mr Pinch was much too far gone in simplicity to be admitted as the friend, on serious and equal terms, of any rational man.

John Westlock, who did nothing by halves, if he could help it, had provided beds for his two guests in the hotel; and after a very happy evening, they retired. Mr Pinch was sitting on the side of his bed with his cravat and shoes off, ruminating on the manifold good qualities of his old friend, when he was interrupted by a knock at his chamber door, and the voice of John himself.

'You're not asleep yet, are you, Tom?'

'Bless you, no! not I. I was thinking of you,' replied Tom, opening the door. 'Come in.'

'I am not going to detail you,' said John; 'but I have forgotten all the evening a little commission I took upon myself; and I am afraid I may forget it again, if I fail to discharge it at once. You know a Mr Tigg, Tom, I believe?'

'Tigg!' cried Tom. 'Tigg! The gentleman who borrowed some money of me?'

'Exactly,' said John Westlock. 'He begged me to present his compliments, and to return it with many thanks. Here it is. I suppose it's a good one, but he is rather a doubtful kind of customer, Tom.'

Mr Pinch received the little piece of gold with a face whose brightness might have shamed the metal; and said he had no fear about that. He was glad, he added, to find Mr Tigg so prompt and honourable in his dealings; very glad.

'Why, to tell you the truth, Tom,' replied his friend, 'he is not always so. If you'll take my advice, you'll avoid him as much as you can, in the event of your encountering him again. And by no means, Tom—pray bear this in mind, for I am very serious—by no means lend him money any more.'

'Aye, aye!' said Tom, with his eyes wide open.

'He is very far from being a reputable acquaintance,' returned young Westlock; 'and the more you let him know you think so, the better for you, Tom.'

'I say, John,' quoth Mr Pinch, as his countenance fell, and he shook his head in a dejected manner. 'I hope you are not getting into bad company.'

'No, no,' he replied laughing. 'Don't be uneasy on that score.'

'Oh, but I AM uneasy,' said Tom Pinch; 'I can't help it, when I hear you talking in that way. If Mr Tigg is what you describe him to be, you have no business to know him, John. You may laugh, but I don't consider it by any means a laughing matter, I assure you.'

'No, no,' returned his friend, composing his features. 'Quite right. It is not, certainly.'

'You know, John,' said Mr Pinch, 'your very good nature and kindness of heart make you thoughtless, and you can't be too careful on such a point as this. Upon my word, if I thought you were falling among bad companions, I should be quite wretched, for I know how difficult you would find it to shake them off. I would much rather have lost this money, John, than I would have had it back again on such terms.'

'I tell you, my dear good old fellow,' cried his friend, shaking him to and fro with both hands, and smiling at him with a cheerful, open countenance, that would have carried conviction to a mind much more suspicious than Tom's; 'I tell you there is no danger.'

'Well!' cried Tom, 'I am glad to hear it; I am overjoyed to hear it. I am sure there is not, when you say so in that manner. You won't take it ill, John, that I said what I did just now!'

'Ill!' said the other, giving his hand a hearty squeeze; 'why what do you think I am made of? Mr Tigg and I are not on such an intimate footing that you need be at all uneasy, I give you my solemn assurance of that, Tom. You are quite comfortable now?'

'Quite,' said Tom.

'Then once more, good night!'

'Good night!' cried Tom; 'and such pleasant dreams to you as should attend the sleep of the best fellow in the world!'

'—Except Pecksniff,' said his friend, stopping at the door for a moment, and looking gayly back.

'Except Pecksniff,' answered Tom, with great gravity; 'of course.'

And thus they parted for the night; John Westlock full of light-heartedness and good humour, and poor Tom Pinch quite satisfied; though still, as he turned over on his side in bed, he muttered to himself, 'I really do wish, for all that, though, that he wasn't acquainted with Mr Tigg.'

They breakfasted together very early next morning, for the two young men desired to get back again in good season; and John Westlock was to return to London by the coach that day. As he had some hours to spare, he bore them company for three or four miles on their walk, and only parted from them at last in sheer necessity. The parting was an unusually hearty one, not only as between him and Tom Pinch, but on the side of Martin also, who had found in the old pupil a very different sort of person from the milksop he had prepared himself to expect.

Young Westlock stopped upon a rising ground, when he had gone a little distance, and looked back. They were walking at a brisk pace, and Tom appeared to be talking earnestly. Martin had taken off his greatcoat, the wind being now behind them, and carried it upon his arm. As he looked, he saw Tom relieve him of it, after a faint resistance, and, throwing it upon his own, encumber himself with the weight of both. This trivial incident impressed the old pupil mightily, for he stood there, gazing after them, until they were hidden from his view; when he shook his head, as if he were troubled by some uneasy reflection, and thoughtfully retraced his steps to Salisbury.

In the meantime, Martin and Tom pursued their way, until they halted, safe and sound, at Mr Pecksniff's house, where a brief epistle from that good gentleman to Mr Pinch announced the family's return by that night's coach. As it would pass the corner of the lane at about six o'clock in the morning, Mr Pecksniff requested that the gig might be in waiting at the finger-post about that time, together with a cart for the luggage. And to the end that he might be received with the greater honour, the young men agreed to rise early, and be upon the spot themselves.

It was the least cheerful day they had yet passed together. Martin was out of spirits and out of humour, and took every opportunity of comparing his condition and prospects with those of young Westlock; much to his own disadvantage always. This mood of his depressed Tom; and neither that morning's parting, nor yesterday's dinner, helped to mend the matter. So the hours dragged on heavily enough; and they were glad to go to bed early.

They were not quite so glad to get up again at half-past four o'clock, in all the shivering discomfort of a dark winter's morning; but they turned out punctually, and were at the finger-post full half-an-hour before the appointed time. It was not by any means a lively morning, for the sky was black and cloudy, and it rained hard; but Martin said there was some satisfaction in seeing that brute of a horse (by this, he meant Mr Pecksniff's Arab steed) getting very wet; and that he rejoiced, on his account, that it rained so fast. From this it may be inferred that Martin's spirits had not improved, as indeed they had not; for while he and Mr Pinch stood waiting under a hedge, looking at the rain, the gig, the cart, and its reeking driver, he did nothing but grumble; and, but that it is indispensable to any dispute that there should be two parties to it, he would certainly have picked a quarrel with Tom.

At length the noise of wheels was faintly audible in the distance and presently the coach came splashing through the mud and mire with one miserable outside passenger crouching down among wet straw, under a saturated umbrella; and the coachman, guard, and horses, in a fellowship of dripping wretchedness. Immediately on its stopping, Mr Pecksniff let down the window-glass and hailed Tom Pinch.

'Dear me, Mr Pinch! Is it possible that you are out upon this very inclement morning?'

'Yes, sir,' cried Tom, advancing eagerly, 'Mr Chuzzlewit and I, sir.'

'Oh!' said Mr Pecksniff, looking not so much at Martin as at the spot on which he stood. 'Oh! Indeed. Do me the favour to see to the trunks, if you please, Mr Pinch.'

Then Mr Pecksniff descended, and helped his daughters to alight; but neighter he nor the young ladies took the slightest notice of Martin, who had advanced to offer his assistance, but was repulsed by Mr Pecksniff's standing immediately before his person, with his back towards him. In the same manner, and in profound silence, Mr Pecksniff handed his daughters into the gig; and following himself and taking the reins, drove off home.

Lost in astonishment, Martin stood staring at the coach, and when the coach had driven away, at Mr Pinch, and the luggage, until the cart moved off too; when he said to Tom:

'Now will you have the goodness to tell me what THIS portends?'

'What?' asked Tom.

'This fellow's behaviour. Mr Pecksniff's, I mean. You saw it?'

'No. Indeed I did not,' cried Tom. 'I was busy with the trunks.'

'It is no matter,' said Martin. 'Come! Let us make haste back!' And without another word started off at such a pace, that Tom had some difficulty in keeping up with him.

He had no care where he went, but walked through little heaps of mud and little pools of water with the utmost indifference; looking straight before him, and sometimes laughing in a strange manner within himself. Tom felt that anything he could say would only render him the more obstinate, and therefore trusted to Mr Pecksniff's manner when they reached the house, to remove the mistaken impression under which he felt convinced so great a favourite as the new pupil must unquestionably be labouring. But he was not a little amazed himself, when they did reach it, and entered the parlour where Mr Pecksniff was sitting alone before the fire, drinking some hot tea, to find that instead of taking favourable notice of his relative and keeping him, Mr Pinch, in the background, he did exactly the reverse, and was so lavish in his attentions to Tom, that Tom was thoroughly confounded.

'Take some tea, Mr Pinch—take some tea,' said Pecksniff, stirring the fire. 'You must be very cold and damp. Pray take some tea, and come into a warm place, Mr Pinch.'

Tom saw that Martin looked at Mr Pecksniff as though he could have easily found it in his heart to give HIM an invitation to a very warm place; but he was quite silent, and standing opposite that gentleman at the table, regarded him attentively.

'Take a chair, Pinch,' said Pecksniff. 'Take a chair, if you please. How have things gone on in our absence, Mr Pinch?'

'You—you will be very much pleased with the grammar-school, sir,' said Tom. 'It's nearly finished.'

'If you will have the goodness, Mr Pinch,' said Pecksniff, waving his hand and smiling, 'we will not discuss anything connected with that question at present. What have YOU been doing, Thomas, humph?'

Mr Pinch looked from master to pupil, and from pupil to master, and was so perplexed and dismayed that he wanted presence of mind to answer the question. In this awkward interval, Mr Pecksniff (who was perfectly conscious of Martin's gaze, though he had never once glanced towards him) poked the fire very much, and when he couldn't do that any more, drank tea assiduously.

'Now, Mr Pecksniff,' said Martin at last, in a very quiet voice, 'if you have sufficiently refreshed and recovered yourself, I shall be glad to hear what you mean by this treatment of me.'

'And what,' said Mr Pecksniff, turning his eyes on Tom Pinch, even more placidly and gently than before, 'what have YOU been doing, Thomas, humph?'

When he had repeated this inquiry, he looked round the walls of the room as if he were curious to see whether any nails had been left there by accident in former times.

Tom was almost at his wit's end what to say between the two, and had already made a gesture as if he would call Mr Pecksniff's attention to the gentleman who had last addressed him, when Martin saved him further trouble, by doing so himself.

'Mr Pecksniff,' he said, softly rapping the table twice or thrice, and moving a step or two nearer, so that he could have touched him with his hand; 'you heard what I said just now. Do me the favour to reply, if you please. I ask you'—he raised his voice a little here—'what you mean by this?'

'I will talk to you, sir,' said Mr Pecksniff in a severe voice, as he looked at him for the first time, 'presently.'

'You are very obliging,' returned Martin; 'presently will not do. I must trouble you to talk to me at once.'

Mr Pecksniff made a feint of being deeply interested in his pocketbook, but it shook in his hands; he trembled so.

'Now,' retorted Martin, rapping the table again. 'Now. Presently will not do. Now!'

'Do you threaten me, sir?' cried Mr Pecksniff.

Martin looked at him, and made no answer; but a curious observer might have detected an ominous twitching at his mouth, and perhaps an involuntary attraction of his right hand in the direction of Mr Pecksniff's cravat.

'I lament to be obliged to say, sir,' resumed Mr Pecksniff, 'that it would be quite in keeping with your character if you did threaten me. You have deceived me. You have imposed upon a nature which you knew to be confiding and unsuspicious. You have obtained admission, sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, rising, 'to this house, on perverted statements and on false pretences.'

'Go on,' said Martin, with a scornful smile. 'I understand you now. What more?'

'Thus much more, sir,' cried Mr Pecksniff, trembling from head to foot, and trying to rub his hands, as though he were only cold. 'Thus much more, if you force me to publish your shame before a third party, which I was unwilling and indisposed to do. This lowly roof, sir, must not be contaminated by the presence of one who has deceived, and cruelly deceived, an honourable, beloved, venerated, and venerable gentleman; and who wisely suppressed that deceit from me when he sought my protection and favour, knowing that, humble as I am, I am an honest man, seeking to do my duty in this carnal universe, and setting my face against all vice and treachery. I weep for your depravity, sir,' said Mr Pecksniff; 'I mourn over your corruption, I pity your voluntary withdrawal of yourself from the flowery paths of purity and peace;' here he struck himself upon his breast, or moral garden; 'but I cannot have a leper and a serpent for an inmate. Go forth,' said Mr Pecksniff, stretching out his hand: 'go forth, young man! Like all who know you, I renounce you!'

With what intention Martin made a stride forward at these words, it is impossible to say. It is enough to know that Tom Pinch caught him in his arms, and that, at the same moment, Mr Pecksniff stepped back so hastily, that he missed his footing, tumbled over a chair, and fell in a sitting posture on the ground; where he remained without an effort to get up again, with his head in a corner, perhaps considering it the safest place.

'Let me go, Pinch!' cried Martin, shaking him away. 'Why do you hold me? Do you think a blow could make him a more abject creature than he is? Do you think that if I spat upon him, I could degrade him to a lower level than his own? Look at him. Look at him, Pinch!'

Mr Pinch involuntarily did so. Mr Pecksniff sitting, as has been already mentioned, on the carpet, with his head in an acute angle of the wainscot, and all the damage and detriment of an uncomfortable journey about him, was not exactly a model of all that is prepossessing and dignified in man, certainly. Still he WAS Pecksniff; it was impossible to deprive him of that unique and paramount appeal to Tom. And he returned Tom's glance, as if he would have said, 'Aye, Mr Pinch, look at me! Here I am! You know what the Poet says about an honest man; and an honest man is one of the few great works that can be seen for nothing! Look at me!'

'I tell you,' said Martin, 'that as he lies there, disgraced, bought, used; a cloth for dirty hands, a mat for dirty feet, a lying, fawning, servile hound, he is the very last and worst among the vermin of the world. And mark me, Pinch! The day will come—he knows it; see it written on his face, while I speak!—when even you will find him out, and will know him as I do, and as he knows I do. HE renounce ME! Cast your eyes on the Renouncer, Pinch, and be the wiser for the recollection!'

He pointed at him as he spoke, with unutterable contempt, and flinging his hat upon his head, walked from the room and from the house. He went so rapidly that he was already clear of the village, when he heard Tom Pinch calling breathlessly after him in the distance.

'Well! what now?' he said, when Tom came up.

'Dear, dear!' cried Tom, 'are you going?'

'Going!' he echoed. 'Going!'

'I didn't so much mean that, as were you going now at once—in this bad weather—on foot—without your clothes—with no money?' cried Tom.

'Yes,' he answered sternly, 'I am.'

'And where?' cried Tom. 'Oh where will you go?'

'I don't know,' he said. 'Yes, I do. I'll go to America!'

'No, no,' cried Tom, in a kind of agony. 'Don't go there. Pray don't. Think better of it. Don't be so dreadfully regardless of yourself. Don't go to America!'

'My mind is made up,' he said. 'Your friend was right. I'll go to America. God bless you, Pinch!'

'Take this!' cried Tom, pressing a book upon him in great agitation. 'I must make haste back, and can't say anything I would. Heaven be with you. Look at the leaf I have turned down. Good-bye, good-bye!'

The simple fellow wrung him by the hand, with tears stealing down his cheeks; and they parted hurriedly upon their separate ways.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SHOWING WHAT BECAME OF MARTIN AND HIS DESPARATE RESOLVE, AFTER HE LEFT MR PECKSNIFF'S HOUSE; WHAT PERSONS HE ENCOUNTERED; WHAT ANXIETIES HE SUFFERED; AND WHAT NEWS HE HEARD

Carrying Tom Pinch's book quite unconsciously under his arm, and not even buttoning his coat as a protection against the heavy rain, Martin went doggedly forward at the same quick pace, until he had passed the finger-post, and was on the high road to London. He slackened very little in his speed even then, but he began to think, and look about him, and to disengage his senses from the coil of angry passions which hitherto had held them prisoner.

It must be confessed that, at that moment, he had no very agreeable employment either for his moral or his physical perceptions. The day was dawning from a patch of watery light in the east, and sullen clouds came driving up before it, from which the rain descended in a thick, wet mist. It streamed from every twig and bramble in the hedge; made little gullies in the path; ran down a hundred channels in the road; and punched innumerable holes into the face of every pond and gutter. It fell with an oozy, slushy sound among the grass; and made a muddy kennel of every furrow in the ploughed fields. No living creature was anywhere to be seen. The prospect could hardly have been more desolate if animated nature had been dissolved in water, and poured down upon the earth again in that form.

The range of view within the solitary traveller was quite as cheerless as the scene without. Friendless and penniless; incensed to the last degree; deeply wounded in his pride and self-love; full of independent schemes, and perfectly destitute of any means of realizing them; his most vindictive enemy might have been satisfied with the extent of his troubles. To add to his other miseries, he was by this time sensible of being wet to the skin, and cold at his very heart.

In this deplorable condition he remembered Mr Pinch's book; more because it was rather troublesome to carry, than from any hope of being comforted by that parting gift. He looked at the dingy lettering on the back, and finding it to be an odd volume of the 'Bachelor of Salamanca,' in the

French tongue, cursed Tom Pinch's folly twenty times. He was on the point of throwing it away, in his ill-humour and vexation, when he bethought himself that Tom had referred him to a leaf, turned down; and opening it at that place, that he might have additional cause of complaint against him for supposing that any cold scrap of the Bachelor's wisdom could cheer him in such circumstances, found!—

Well, well! not much, but Tom's all. The half-sovereign. He had wrapped it hastily in a piece of paper, and pinned it to the leaf. These words were scrawled in pencil on the inside: 'I don't want it indeed. I should not know what to do with it if I had it.'

There are some falsehoods, Tom, on which men mount, as on bright wings, towards Heaven. There are some truths, cold bitter taunting truths, wherein your worldly scholars are very apt and punctual, which bind men down to earth with leaden chains. Who would not rather have to fan him, in his dying hour, the lightest feather of a falsehood such as thine, than all the quills that have been plucked from the sharp porcupine, reproachful truth, since time began!

Martin felt keenly for himself, and he felt this good deed of Tom's keenly. After a few minutes it had the effect of raising his spirits, and reminding him that he was not altogether destitute, as he had left a fair stock of clothes behind him, and wore a gold hunting-watch in his pocket. He found a curious gratification, too, in thinking what a winning fellow he must be to have made such an impression on Tom; and in reflecting how superior he was to Tom; and how much more likely to make his way in the world. Animated by these thoughts, and strengthened in his design of endeavouring to push his fortune in another country, he resolved to get to London as a rallying-point, in the best way he could; and to lose no time about it.

He was ten good miles from the village made illustrious by being the abiding-place of Mr Pecksniff, when he stopped to breakfast at a little roadside alehouse; and resting upon a high-backed settle before the fire, pulled off his coat, and hung it before the cheerful blaze to dry. It was a very different place from the last tavern in which he had regaled; boasting no greater extent of accommodation than the brick-floored kitchen yielded; but the mind so soon accommodates itself to the necessities of the body, that this poor waggoner's house-of-call, which he would have despised yesterday, became now quite a choice hotel; while his dish of eggs and bacon, and his mug of beer, were not by any means the coarse fare he had supposed, but fully bore out the inscription on the window-shutter, which proclaimed those viands to be 'Good entertainment for Travellers.'

He pushed away his empty plate; and with a second mug upon the hearth before him, looked thoughtfully at the fire until his eyes ached. Then he looked at the highly-coloured scripture pieces on the walls, in little black frames like common shaving-glasses, and saw how the Wise Men (with a strong family likeness among them) worshipped in a pink manger; and how the Prodigal Son came home in red rags to a purple father, and already feasted his imagination on a sea-green calf. Then he glanced through the window at the falling rain, coming down aslant upon the sign-post over against the house, and overflowing the horse-trough; and then he looked at the fire again, and seemed to descry a double distant London, retreating among the fragments of the burning wood.

He had repeated this process in just the same order, many times, as if it were a matter of necessity, when the sound of wheels called his attention to the window out of its regular turn; and there he beheld a kind of light van drawn by four horses, and laden, as well as he could see (for it was covered in), with corn and straw. The driver, who was alone, stopped at the door to water his team, and presently came stamping and shaking the wet off his hat and coat, into the room where Martin sat.

He was a red-faced burly young fellow; smart in his way, and with a good-humoured countenance. As he advanced towards the fire he touched his shining forehead with the forefinger of his stiff leather glove, by way of salutation; and said (rather unnecessarily) that it was an uncommon wet day.

'Very wet,' said Martin.

'I don't know as ever I see a wetter.'

'I never felt one,' said Martin.

The driver glanced at Martin's soiled dress, and his damp shirt-sleeves, and his coat hung up to dry; and said, after a pause, as he warmed his hands:

'You have been caught in it, sir?'

'Yes,' was the short reply.

'Out riding, maybe?' said the driver

'I should have been, if I owned a horse; but I don't,' returned Martin.

'That's bad,' said the driver.

'And may be worse,' said Martin.

Now the driver said 'That's bad,' not so much because Martin didn't own a horse, as because he said he didn't with all the reckless desperation of his mood and circumstances, and so left a great deal to be inferred. Martin put his hands in his pockets and whistled when he had retorted on the driver; thus giving him to understand that he didn't care a pin for Fortune; that he was above pretending to be her favourite when he was not; and that he snapped his fingers at her, the driver, and everybody else.

The driver looked at him stealthily for a minute or so; and in the pauses of his warming whistled too. At length he asked, as he pointed his thumb towards the road.

'Up or down?'

'Which IS up?' said Martin.

'London, of course,' said the driver.

'Up then,' said Martin. He tossed his head in a careless manner afterwards, as if he would have added, 'Now you know all about it.' put his hands deeper into his pockets; changed his tune, and whistled a little louder.

'I'm going up,' observed the driver; 'Hounslow, ten miles this side London.'

'Are you?' cried Martin, stopping short and looking at him.

The driver sprinkled the fire with his wet hat until it hissed again and answered, 'Aye, to be sure he was.'

'Why, then,' said Martin, 'I'll be plain with you. You may suppose from my dress that I have money to spare. I have not. All I can afford for coach-hire is a crown, for I have but two. If you can take me for that, and my waistcoat, or this silk handkerchief, do. If you can't, leave it alone.'

'Short and sweet,' remarked the driver.

'You want more?' said Martin. 'Then I haven't got more, and I can't get it, so there's an end of that.' Whereupon he began to whistle again.

'I didn't say I wanted more, did I?' asked the driver, with something like indignation.

'You didn't say my offer was enough,' rejoined Martin.

'Why, how could I, when you wouldn't let me? In regard to the waistcoat, I wouldn't have a man's waistcoat, much less a gentleman's waistcoat, on my mind, for no consideration; but the silk handkerchief's another thing; and if you was satisfied when we got to Hounslow, I shouldn't object to that as a gift.'

'Is it a bargain, then?' said Martin.

'Yes, it is,' returned the other.

'Then finish this beer,' said Martin, handing him the mug, and pulling on his coat with great alacrity; 'and let us be off as soon as you like.'

In two minutes more he had paid his bill, which amounted to a shilling; was lying at full length on a truss of straw, high and dry at the top of the van, with the tilt a little open in front for the convenience of talking to his new friend; and was moving along in the right direction with a most satisfactory and encouraging briskness.

The driver's name, as he soon informed Martin, was William Simmons, better known as Bill; and his spruce appearance was sufficiently explained by his connection with a large stage-coaching establishment at Hounslow, whither he was conveying his load from a farm belonging to the concern in Wiltshire. He was frequently up and down the road on such errands, he said, and to look after the sick and rest horses, of which animals he had much to relate that occupied a long time in the telling. He aspired to the dignity of the regular box, and expected an appointment on the first vacancy. He was musical besides, and had a little key-bugle in his pocket, on which, whenever the conversation flagged, he played the first part of a great many tunes, and regularly broke down in the second.

'Ah!' said Bill, with a sigh, as he drew the back of his hand across his lips, and put this instrument in his pocket, after screwing off the mouth-piece to drain it; 'Lummy Ned of the Light Salisbury, HE was the one for musical talents. He WAS a guard. What you may call a Guard'an Angel, was Ned.'

'Is he dead?' asked Martin.

'Dead!' replied the other, with a contemptuous emphasis. 'Not he. You won't catch Ned a-dying easy. No, no. He knows better than that.'

'You spoke of him in the past tense,' observed Martin, 'so I supposed he was no more.

'He's no more in England,' said Bill, 'if that's what you mean. He went to the U-nited States.'

'Did he?' asked Martin, with sudden interest. 'When?'

'Five year ago, or then about,' said Bill. 'He had set up in the public line here, and couldn't meet his engagements, so he cut off to Liverpool one day, without saying anything about it, and went and shipped himself for the U-nited States.'

'Well?' said Martin.

'Well! as he landed there without a penny to bless himself with, of course they wos very glad to see him in the U-nited States.'

'What do you mean?' asked Martin, with some scorn.

'What do I mean?' said Bill. 'Why, THAT. All men are alike in the U-nited States, an't they? It makes no odds whether a man has a thousand pound, or nothing, there. Particular in New York, I'm told, where Ned landed.'

'New York, was it?' asked Martin, thoughtfully.

'Yes,' said Bill. 'New York. I know that, because he sent word home that it brought Old York to his mind, quite vivid, in consequence of being so exactly unlike it in every respect. I don't understand what particular business Ned turned his mind to, when he got there; but he wrote home that him and his friends was always a-singing, Ale Columbia, and blowing up the President, so I suppose it was something in the public line; or free-and-easy way again. Anyhow, he made his fortune.'

'No!' cried Martin.

'Yes, he did,' said Bill. 'I know that, because he lost it all the day after, in six-and-twenty banks as broke. He settled a lot of the notes on his father, when it was ascertained that they was really stopped and sent 'em over with a dutiful letter. I know that, because they was shown down our yard for the old gentleman's benefit, that he might treat himself with tobacco in the workus.'

'He was a foolish fellow not to take care of his money when he had it,' said Martin, indignantly.

'There you're right,' said Bill, 'especially as it was all in paper, and he might have took care of it so very easy, by folding it up in a small parcel.'

Martin said nothing in reply, but soon afterwards fell asleep, and remained so for an hour or more. When he awoke, finding it had ceased to rain, he took his seat beside the driver, and asked him several questions; as how long had the fortunate guard of the Light Salisbury been in crossing the Atlantic; at what time of the year had he sailed; what was the name of the ship in which he made the voyage; how much had he paid for passage-money; did he suffer greatly from sea-sickness? and so forth. But on these points of detail his friend was possessed of little or no information; either answering obviously at random or acknowledging that he had never heard, or had forgotten; nor, although he returned to the charge very often, could he obtain any useful intelligence on these essential particulars.

They jogged on all day, and stopped so often—now to refresh, now to change their team of horses, now to exchange or bring away a set of harness, now on one point of business, and now upon another, connected with the coaching on that line of road—that it was midnight when they reached Hounslow. A little short of the stables for which the van was bound, Martin got down, paid his crown, and forced his silk handkerchief upon his honest friend, notwithstanding the many protestations that he didn't wish to deprive him of it, with which he tried to give the lie to his longing looks. That done, they parted company; and when the van had driven into its own yard and the gates were closed, Martin stood in the dark street, with a pretty strong sense of being shut out, alone, upon the dreary world, without the key of it.

But in this moment of despondency, and often afterwards, the recollection of Mr Pecksniff operated as a cordial to him; awakening in his breast an indignation that was very wholesome in nerving him to obstinate endurance. Under the influence of this fiery dram he started off for London without more ado. Arriving there in the middle of the night, and not knowing where to find a tavern open, he was fain to stroll about the streets and market-places until morning.

He found himself, about an hour before dawn, in the humbler regions of the Adelphi; and addressing himself to a man in a fur-cap, who was taking down the shutters of an obscure public-house, informed him that he was a stranger, and inquired if he could have a bed there. It happened by good luck that he could. Though none of the gaudiest, it was tolerably clean, and Martin felt very glad and grateful when he crept into it, for warmth, rest, and forgetfulness.

It was quite late in the afternoon when he awoke; and by the time he had washed and dressed, and broken his fast, it was growing dusk again. This was all the better, for it was now a matter of absolute necessity that he should part with his watch to some obliging pawn-broker. He would have waited until after dark for this purpose, though it had been the longest day in the year, and he had begun it without a breakfast.

He passed more Golden Balls than all the jugglers in Europe have juggled with, in the course of their united performances, before he could determine in favour of any particular shop where those symbols were displayed. In the end he came back to one of the first he had seen, and entering by a side-door in a court, where the three balls, with the legend 'Money Lent,' were repeated in a ghastly transparency, passed into one of a series of little closets, or private boxes, erected for the accommodation of the more bashful and uninitiated customers. He bolted himself in; pulled out his watch; and laid it on the counter.

'Upon my life and soul!' said a low voice in the next box to the shopman who was in treaty with him, 'you must make it more; you must make it a trifle more, you must indeed! You must dispense with one half-quarter of an ounce in weighing out your pound of flesh, my best of friends, and make it two-and-six.'

Martin drew back involuntarily, for he knew the voice at once.

'You're always full of your chaff,' said the shopman, rolling up the article (which looked like a shirt) quite as a matter of course, and nibbing his pen upon the counter.

'I shall never be full of my wheat,' said Mr Tigg, 'as long as I come here. Ha, ha! Not bad! Make it two-and-six, my dear friend, positively for this occasion only. Half-a-crown is a delightful coin. Two-and-six. Going at two-and-six! For the last time at two-and-six!'

'It'll never be the last time till it's quite worn out,' rejoined the shopman. 'It's grown yellow in the service as it is.'

'Its master has grown yellow in the service, if you mean that, my friend,' said Mr Tigg; 'in the patriotic service of an ungrateful country. You are making it two-and-six, I think?'

'I'm making it,' returned the shopman, 'what it always has been—two shillings. Same name as usual, I suppose?'

'Still the same name,' said Mr Tigg; 'my claim to the dormant peerage not being yet established by the House of Lords.'

'The old address?'

'Not at all,' said Mr Tigg; 'I have removed my town establishment from thirty-eight, Mayfair, to number fifteen-hundred-and-forty-two, Park Lane.'

'Come, I'm not going to put down that, you know,' said the shopman with a grin.

'You may put down what you please, my friend,' quoth Mr Tigg. 'The fact is still the same. The apartments for the under-butler and the fifth footman being of a most confounded low and vulgar kind at thirty-eight, Mayfair, I have been compelled, in my regard for the feelings which do them so much honour, to take on lease for seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years, renewable at the option of the tenant, the elegant and commodious family mansion, number fifteen-hundred-and-forty-two Park Lane. Make it two-and-six, and come and see me!'

The shopman was so highly entertained by this piece of humour that Mr Tigg himself could not repress some little show of exultation. It vented itself, in part, in a desire to see how the occupant of the next box received his pleasantry; to ascertain which he glanced round the partition, and immediately, by the gaslight, recognized Martin.

'I wish I may die,' said Mr Tigg, stretching out his body so far that his head was as much in Martin's little cell as Martin's own head was, 'but this is one of the most tremendous meetings in Ancient or Modern History! How are you? What is the news from the agricultural districts? How are our friends the P.'s? Ha, ha! David, pay particular attention to this gentleman immediately, as a friend of mine, I beg.'

'Here! Please to give me the most you can for this,' said Martin, handing the watch to the shopman. 'I want money sorely.'

'He wants money, sorely!' cried Mr Tigg with excessive sympathy. 'David, will you have the goodness to do your very utmost for my friend, who wants money sorely. You will deal with my friend as if he were myself. A gold hunting-watch, David, engine-turned, capped and jewelled in four holes, escape movement, horizontal lever, and warranted to perform correctly, upon my personal reputation, who have observed it narrowly for many years, under the most trying circumstances'—here he winked at Martin, that he might understand this recommendation would have an immense effect upon the shopman; 'what do you say, David, to my friend? Be very particular to deserve my custom and recommendation, David.'

'I can lend you three pounds on this, if you like' said the shopman to Martin, confidentially. 'It is very old-fashioned. I couldn't say more.'

'And devilish handsome, too,' cried Mr Tigg. 'Two-twelve-six for the watch, and seven-and-six for personal regard. I am gratified; it may be weakness, but I am. Three pounds will do. We take it. The name of my friend is Smivey: Chicken Smivey, of Holborn, twenty-six-and-a-half B: lodger.' Here he winked at Martin again, to apprise him that all the forms and ceremonies prescribed by law were now complied with, and nothing remained but the receipt for the money.

In point of fact, this proved to be the case, for Martin, who had no resource but to take what was offered him, signified his acquiescence by a nod of his head, and presently came out with the cash in his pocket. He was joined in the entry by Mr Tigg, who warmly congratulated him, as he took his arm and accompanied him into the street, on the successful issue of the negotiation.

'As for my part in the same,' said Mr Tigg, 'don't mention it. Don't compliment me, for I can't bear it!'

'I have no such intention, I assure you,' retorted Martin, releasing his arm and stopping.

'You oblige me very much' said Mr Tigg. 'Thank you.'

'Now, sir,' observed Martin, biting his lip, 'this is a large town, and we can easily find different ways in it. If you will show me which is your way, I will take another.'

Mr Tigg was about to speak, but Martin interposed:

'I need scarcely tell you, after what you have just seen, that I have nothing to bestow upon your friend Mr Slyme. And it is quite as unnecessary for me to tell you that I don't desire the honour of your company.'

'Stop' cried Mr Tigg, holding out his hand. 'Hold! There is a most remarkably long-headed, flowing-bearded, and patriarchal proverb, which observes that it is the duty of a man to be just before he is generous. Be just now, and you can be generous presently. Do not confuse me with the man Slyme. Do not distinguish the man Slyme as a friend of mine, for he is no such thing. I have been compelled, sir, to abandon the party whom you call Slyme. I have no knowledge of the party whom you call Slyme. I am, sir,' said Mr Tigg, striking himself upon the breast, 'a premium tulip, of a very different growth and cultivation from the cabbage Slyme, sir.'

'It matters very little to me,' said Martin coolly, 'whether you have set up as a vagabond on your own account, or are still trading on behalf of Mr Slyme. I wish to hold no correspondence with you. In the devil's name, man' said Martin, scarcely able, despite his vexation, to repress a smile as Mr Tigg stood leaning his back against the shutters of a shop window, adjusting his hair with great composure, 'will you go one way or other?'

'You will allow me to remind you, sir,' said Mr Tigg, with sudden dignity, 'that you—not I—that you—I say emphatically, YOU—have reduced the proceedings of this evening to a cold and distant matter of business, when I was disposed to place them on a friendly footing. It being made a matter of business, sir, I beg to say that I expect a trifle (which I shall bestow in charity) as commission upon the pecuniary advance, in which I have rendered you my humble services. After the terms in which you have addressed me, sir,' concluded Mr Tigg, 'you will not insult me, if you please, by offering more than half-a-crown.'

Martin drew that piece of money from his pocket, and tossed it towards him. Mr Tigg caught it, looked at it to assure himself of its goodness, spun it in the air after the manner of a pieman, and buttoned it up. Finally, he raised his hat an inch or two from his head with a military air, and, after pausing a moment with deep gravity, as to decide in which direction he should go, and to what Earl or Marquis among his friends he should give the preference in his next call, stuck his hands in his skirt-pockets and swaggered round the corner. Martin took the directly opposite course; and so, to his great content, they parted company.

It was with a bitter sense of humiliation that he cursed, again and again, the mischance of having encountered this man in the pawnbroker's shop. The only comfort he had in the recollection was, Mr Tigg's voluntary avowal of a separation between himself and Slyme, that would at least prevent his circumstances (so Martin argued) from being known to any member of his family, the bare possibility of which filled him with shame and wounded pride. Abstractedly there was greater reason, perhaps, for supposing any declaration of Mr Tigg's to be false, than for attaching the least credence to it; but remembering the terms on which the intimacy between that gentleman and his bosom friend had subsisted, and the strong probability of Mr Tigg's having established an independent business of his own on Mr Slyme's connection, it had a reasonable appearance of probability; at all events, Martin hoped so; and that went a long way.

His first step, now that he had a supply of ready money for his present necessities, was, to retain his bed at the public-house until further notice, and to write a formal note to Tom Pinch (for he knew Pecksniff would see it) requesting to have his clothes forwarded to London by coach, with a direction to be left at the office until called for. These measures taken, he passed the interval before the box arrived—three days—in making inquiries relative to American vessels, at the offices of various shipping-agents in the city; and in lingering about the docks and wharves, with the faint hope of stumbling upon some engagement for the voyage, as clerk or supercargo, or custodian of something or somebody, which would enable him to procure a free passage. But finding, soon, that no such means of employment were likely to present themselves, and dreading the consequences of delay, he drew up a short advertisement, stating what he wanted, and inserted it in the leading newspapers. Pending the receipt of the twenty or thirty answers which he vaguely expected, he reduced his wardrobe to the narrowest limits consistent with decent respectability, and carried the overplus at different times to the pawnbroker's shop, for conversion into money.

And it was strange, very strange, even to himself, to find how, by quick though almost imperceptible degrees, he lost his delicacy and self-respect, and gradually came to do that as a matter of course, without the least compunction, which but a few short days before had galled him to the quick. The first time he visited the pawnbroker's, he felt on his way there as if every person whom he passed suspected whither he was going; and on his way back again, as if the whole human tide he stemmed, knew well where he had come from. When did he care to think of their discernment now! In his first wanderings up and down the weary streets, he counterfeited the walk of one who had an object in his view; but soon there came upon him the sauntering, slipshod gait of listless idleness, and the lounging at street-corners, and plucking and biting of stray bits of straw, and strolling up and down the same place, and looking into the same shop-windows, with a miserable indifference, fifty times a day. At first, he came out from his lodging with an uneasy sense of being observed—even by those chance passers-by, on whom he had never looked before, and hundreds to one would never see again—issuing in the morning from a public-house; but now, in his comings-out and goings-in he did not mind to lounge about the door, or to stand sunning himself in careless thought beside the wooden stem, studded from head to heel with pegs, on which the beer-pots dangled like so many boughs upon a pewter-tree. And yet it took but five weeks to reach the lowest round of this tall ladder!

Oh, moralists, who treat of happiness and self-respect, innate in every sphere of life, and shedding light on every grain of dust in God's highway, so smooth below your carriage-wheels, so rough beneath the tread of naked feet, bethink yourselves in looking on the swift descent of men who HAVE lived in their own esteem, that there are scores of thousands breathing now, and breathing thick with painful toil, who in that high respect have never lived at all, nor had a chance of life! Go ye, who rest so placidly upon the sacred Bard who had been young, and when he strung his harp was old, and had never seen the righteous forsaken, or his seed begging their bread; go, Teachers of content and honest pride, into the mine, the mill, the forge, the squalid depths of deepest ignorance, and uttermost abyss of man's neglect, and say can any hopeful plant spring up in air so foul that it extinguishes the soul's bright torch as fast as it is kindled! And, oh! ye Pharisees of the nineteen hundredth year of Christian Knowledge, who soundingly appeal to human nature, see that it be human first. Take heed it has not been transformed, during your slumber and the sleep of generations, into the nature of the Beasts!

Five weeks! Of all the twenty or thirty answers, not one had come. His money—even the additional stock he had raised from the disposal of his spare clothes (and that was not much, for clothes, though dear to buy, are cheap to pawn)—was fast diminishing. Yet what could he do? At times an agony came over him in which he darted forth again, though he was but newly home, and, returning to some place where he had been already twenty times, made some new attempt to gain his end, but always unsuccessfully. He was years and years too old for a cabin-boy, and years upon years too inexperienced to be accepted as a common seaman. His dress and manner, too, militated fatally against any such proposal as the latter; and yet he was reduced to making it; for even if he could have contemplated the being set down in America totally without money, he had not enough left now for a steerage passage and the poorest provisions upon the voyage.

It is an illustration of a very common tendency in the mind of man, that all this time he never once doubted, one may almost say the certainty of doing great things in the New World, if he could only get there. In proportion as he became more and more dejected by his present circumstances, and the means of gaining America receded from his grasp, the more he fretted himself with the conviction that that was the only place in which he could hope to achieve any high end, and worried his brain with the thought that men going there in the meanwhile might anticipate him in the attainment of those objects which were dearest to his heart. He often thought of John Westlock, and besides looking out for him on all occasions, actually walked about London for three days together for the express purpose of meeting with him. But although he failed in this; and although he would not have scrupled to borrow money of him; and although he believed that John would have lent it; yet still he could not bring his mind to write to Pinch and inquire where he was to be found. For although, as we have seen, he was fond of Tom after his own fashion, he could not endure the thought (feeling so superior to Tom) of making him the stepping-stone to his fortune, or being anything to him but a patron; and his pride so revolted from the idea that it restrained him even now.

It might have yielded, however; and no doubt must have yielded soon, but for a very strange and unlooked-for occurrence.

The five weeks had quite run out, and he was in a truly desperate plight, when one evening, having just returned to his lodging, and being in the act of lighting his candle at the gas jet in the bar before stalking moodily upstairs to his own room, his landlord called him by his name. Now as he had never told it to the man, but had scrupulously kept it to himself, he was not a little startled by this; and so plainly showed his agitation that the landlord, to reassure him, said 'it was only a letter.'

'A letter!' cried Martin.

'For Mr Martin Chuzzlewit,' said the landlord, reading the superscription of one he held in his hand. 'Noon. Chief office. Paid.'

Martin took it from him, thanked him, and walked upstairs. It was not sealed, but pasted close; the handwriting was quite unknown to him. He opened it and found enclosed, without any name, address, or other inscription or explanation of any kind whatever, a Bank of England note for Twenty Pounds.

To say that he was perfectly stunned with astonishment and delight; that he looked again and again at the note and the wrapper; that he hurried below stairs to make quite certain that the note was a good note; and then hurried up again to satisfy himself for the fiftieth time that he had not overlooked some scrap of writing on the wrapper; that he exhausted and bewildered himself with conjectures; and could make nothing of it but that there the note was, and he was suddenly enriched; would be only to relate so many matters of course to no purpose. The final upshot of the business at that time was, that he resolved to treat himself to a comfortable but frugal meal in his own chamber; and having ordered a fire to be kindled, went out to purchase it forthwith.

He bought some cold beef, and ham, and French bread, and butter, and came back with his pockets pretty heavily laden. It was somewhat of a damping circumstance to find the room full of smoke, which was attributable to two causes; firstly, to the flue being naturally vicious and a smoker; and secondly, to their having forgotten, in lighting the fire, an odd sack or two and some trifles, which had been put up the chimney to keep the rain out. They had already remedied this oversight, however; and propped up the window-sash with a bundle of firewood to keep it open; so that except in being rather inflammatory to the eyes and choking to the lungs, the apartment was quite comfortable.

Martin was in no vein to quarrel with it, if it had been in less tolerable order, especially when a gleaming pint of porter was set upon the table, and the servant-girl withdrew, bearing with her particular instructions relative to the production of something hot when he should ring the bell. The cold meat being wrapped in a playbill, Martin laid the cloth by spreading that document on the little round table with the print downwards, and arranging the collation upon it. The foot of the bed, which was very close to the fire, answered for a sideboard; and when he had completed these preparations, he squeezed an old arm-chair into the warmest corner, and sat down to enjoy himself.

He had begun to eat with great appetite, glancing round the room meanwhile with a triumphant anticipation of quitting it for ever on the morrow, when his attention was arrested by a stealthy footstep on the stairs, and presently by a knock at his chamber door, which, although it was a gentle knock enough, communicated such a start to the bundle of firewood, that it instantly leaped out of window, and plunged into the street.

'More coals, I suppose,' said Martin. 'Come in!'

'It an't a liberty, sir, though it seems so,' rejoined a man's voice. 'Your servant, sir. Hope you're pretty well, sir.'

Martin stared at the face that was bowing in the doorway, perfectly remembering the features and expression, but quite forgetting to whom they belonged.

'Tapley, sir,' said his visitor. 'Him as formerly lived at the Dragon, sir, and was forced to leave in consequence of a want of jollity, sir.'

'To be sure!' cried Martin. 'Why, how did you come here?'

'Right through the passage, and up the stairs, sir,' said Mark.

'How did you find me out, I mean?' asked Martin.

'Why, sir,' said Mark, 'I've passed you once or twice in the street, if I'm not mistaken; and when I was a-looking in at the beef-and-ham shop just now, along with a hungry sweep, as was very much calculated to make a man jolly, sir—I see you a-buying that.'

Martin reddened as he pointed to the table, and said, somewhat hastily:

'Well! What then?'

'Why, then, sir,' said Mark, 'I made bold to foller; and as I told 'em downstairs that you expected me, I was let up.'

'Are you charged with any message, that you told them you were expected?' inquired Martin.

'No, sir, I an't,' said Mark. 'That was what you may call a pious fraud, sir, that was.'

Martin cast an angry look at him; but there was something in the fellow's merry face, and in his manner—which with all its cheerfulness was far from being obtrusive or familiar—that quite disarmed him. He had lived a solitary life too, for many weeks, and the voice was pleasant in his ear.

'Tapley,' he said, 'I'll deal openly with you. From all I can judge and from all I have heard of you through Pinch, you are not a likely kind of fellow to have been brought here by impertinent curiosity or any other offensive motive. Sit down. I'm glad to see you.'

'Thankee, sir,' said Mark. 'I'd as lieve stand.'

'If you don't sit down,' retorted Martin, 'I'll not talk to you.'

'Very good, sir,' observed Mark. 'Your will's a law, sir. Down it is;' and he sat down accordingly upon the bedstead.

'Help yourself,' said Martin, handing him the only knife.

'Thankee, sir,' rejoined Mark. 'After you've done.'

'If you don't take it now, you'll not have any,' said Martin.

'Very good, sir,' rejoined Mark. 'That being your desire—now it is.' With which reply he gravely helped himself and went on eating. Martin having done the like for a short time in silence, said abruptly:

'What are you doing in London?'

'Nothing at all, sir,' rejoined Mark.

'How's that?' asked Martin.

'I want a place,' said Mark.

'I'm sorry for you,' said Martin.

'—To attend upon a single gentleman,' resumed Mark. 'If from the country the more desirable. Makeshifts would be preferred. Wages no object.'

He said this so pointedly, that Martin stopped in his eating, and said:

'If you mean me—'

'Yes, I do, sir,' interposed Mark.

'Then you may judge from my style of living here, of my means of keeping a man-servant. Besides, I am going to America immediately.'

'Well, sir,' returned Mark, quite unmoved by this intelligence 'from all that ever I heard about it, I should say America is a very likely sort of place for me to be jolly in!'

Again Martin looked at him angrily; and again his anger melted away in spite of himself.

'Lord bless you, sir,' said Mark, 'what is the use of us a-going round and round, and hiding behind the corner, and dodging up and down, when we can come straight to the point in six words? I've had my eye upon you any time this fortnight. I see well enough there's a screw loose in your affairs. I know'd well enough the first time I see you down at the Dragon that it must be so, sooner or later. Now, sir here am I, without a sitiwation; without any want of wages for a year to come; for I saved up (I didn't mean to do it, but I couldn't help it) at the Dragon—here am I with a liking for what's wentersome, and a liking for you, and a wish to come out strong under circumstances as would keep other men down; and will you take me, or will you leave me?'

'How can I take you?' cried Martin.

'When I say take,' rejoined Mark, 'I mean will you let me go? and when I say will you let me go, I mean will you let me go along with you? for go I will, somehow or another. Now that you've said America, I see clear at once, that that's the place for me to be jolly in. Therefore, if I don't pay my own passage in the ship you go in, sir, I'll pay my own passage in another. And mark my words, if I go alone it shall be, to carry out the principle, in the rottenest, craziest, leakingest tub of a wessel that a place can be got in for love or money. So if I'm lost upon the way, sir, there'll be a drowned man at your door—and always a-knocking double knocks at it, too, or never trust me!'

'This is mere folly,' said Martin.

'Very good, sir,' returned Mark. 'I'm glad to hear it, because if you don't mean to let me go, you'll be more comfortable, perhaps, on account of thinking so. Therefore I contradict no gentleman. But all I say is, that if I don't emigrate to America in that case, in the beastliest old cockle-shell as goes out of port, I'm—'

'You don't mean what you say, I'm sure,' said Martin.

'Yes I do,' cried Mark.

'I tell you I know better,' rejoined Martin.

'Very good, sir,' said Mark, with the same air of perfect satisfaction. 'Let it stand that way at present, sir, and wait and see how it turns out. Why, love my heart alive! the only doubt I have is, whether there's any credit in going with a gentleman like you, that's as certain to make his way there as a gimlet is to go through soft deal.'

This was touching Martin on his weak point, and having him at a great advantage. He could not help thinking, either, what a brisk fellow this Mark was, and how great a change he had wrought in the atmosphere of the dismal little room already.

'Why, certainly, Mark,' he said, 'I have hopes of doing well there, or I shouldn't go. I may have the qualifications for doing well, perhaps.'

'Of course you have, sir,' returned Mark Tapley. 'Everybody knows that.'

'You see,' said Martin, leaning his chin upon his hand, and looking at the fire, 'ornamental architecture applied to domestic purposes, can hardly fail to be in great request in that country; for men are constantly changing their residences there, and moving further off; and it's clear they must have houses to live in.'

'I should say, sir,' observed Mark, 'that that's a state of things as opens one of the jolliest look-outs for domestic architecture that ever I heerd tell on.'

Martin glanced at him hastily, not feeling quite free from a suspicion that this remark implied a doubt of the successful issue of his plans. But Mr Tapley was eating the boiled beef and bread with such entire good faith and singleness of purpose expressed in his visage that he could not but be satisfied. Another doubt arose in his mind however, as this one disappeared. He produced the blank cover in which the note had been enclosed, and fixing his eyes on Mark as he put it in his hands, said:

'Now tell me the truth. Do you know anything about that?'

Mark turned it over and over; held it near his eyes; held it away from him at arm's length; held it with the superscription upwards and with the superscription downwards; and shook his head with such a genuine expression of astonishment at being asked the question, that Martin said, as he took it from him again:

'No, I see you don't. How should you! Though, indeed, your knowing about it would not be more extraordinary than its being here. Come, Tapley,' he added, after a moment's thought, 'I'll trust you with my history, such as it is, and then you'll see more clearly what sort of fortunes you would link yourself to, if you followed me.'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said Mark; 'but afore you enter upon it will you take me if I choose to go? Will you turn off me—Mark Tapley—formerly of the Blue Dragon, as can be well recommended by Mr Pinch, and as wants a gentleman of your strength of mind to look up to; or will you, in climbing the ladder as you're certain to get to the top of, take me along with you at a respectful dutance? Now, sir,' said Mark, 'it's of very little importance to you, I know, there's the difficulty; but it's of very great importance to me, and will you be so good as to consider of it?'

If this were meant as a second appeal to Martin's weak side, founded on his observation of the effect of the first, Mr Tapley was a skillful and shrewd observer. Whether an intentional or an accidental shot, it hit the mark fully for Martin, relenting more and more, said with a condescension which was inexpressibly delicious to him, after his recent humiliation:

'We'll see about it, Tapley. You shall tell me in what disposition you find yourself to-morrow.'

'Then, sir,' said Mark, rubbing his hands, 'the job's done. Go on, sir, if you please. I'm all attention.'

Throwing himself back in his arm-chair, and looking at the fire, with now and then a glance at Mark, who at such times nodded his head sagely, to express his profound interest and attention. Martin ran over the chief points in his history, to the same effect as he had related them, weeks before, to Mr Pinch. But he adapted them, according to the best of his judgment, to Mr Tapley's comprehension; and with that view made as light of his love affair as he could, and referred to it in very few words. But here he reckoned without his host; for Mark's interest was keenest in this part of the business, and prompted him to ask sundry questions in relation to it; for which he apologised as one in some measure privileged to do so, from having seen (as Martin explained to him) the young lady at the Blue Dragon.

'And a young lady as any gentleman ought to feel more proud of being in love with,' said Mark, energetically, 'don't draw breath.'

'Aye! You saw her when she was not happy,' said Martin, gazing at the fire again. 'If you had seen her in the old times, indeed—'

'Why, she certainly was a little down-hearted, sir, and something paler in her colour than I could have wished,' said Mark, 'but none the worse in her looks for that. I think she seemed better, sir, after she come to London.'

Martin withdrew his eyes from the fire; stared at Mark as if he thought he had suddenly gone mad; and asked him what he meant.

'No offence intended, sir,' urged Mark. 'I don't mean to say she was any the happier without you; but I thought she was a-looking better, sir.'

'Do you mean to tell me she has been in London?' asked Martin, rising hurriedly, and pushing back his chair.

'Of course I do,' said Mark, rising too, in great amazement from the bedstead.

'Do you mean to tell me she is in London now?'

'Most likely, sir. I mean to say she was a week ago.'

'And you know where?'

'Yes!' cried Mark. 'What! Don't you?'

'My good fellow!' exclaimed Martin, clutching him by both arms, 'I have never seen her since I left my grandfather's house.'

'Why, then!' cried Mark, giving the little table such a blow with his clenched fist that the slices of beef and ham danced upon it, while all his features seemed, with delight, to be going up into his forehead, and never coming back again any more, 'if I an't your nat'ral born servant, hired by Fate, there an't such a thing in natur' as a Blue Dragon. What! when I was a-rambling up and down a old churchyard in the City, getting myself into a jolly state, didn't I see your grandfather a-toddling to and fro for pretty nigh a mortal hour! Didn't I watch him into Todgers's commercial boarding-house, and watch him out, and watch him home to his hotel, and go and tell him as his was the service for my money, and I had said so, afore I left the Dragon! Wasn't the young lady a-sitting with him then, and didn't she fall a-laughing in a manner as was beautiful to see! Didn't your grandfather say, "Come back again next week," and didn't I go next week; and didn't he say that he couldn't make up his mind to trust nobody no more; and therefore wouldn't engage me, but at the same time stood something to drink as was handsome! Why,' cried Mr Tapley, with a comical mixture of delight and chagrin, 'where's the credit of a man's being jolly under such circumstances! Who could help it, when things come about like this!'

For some moments Martin stood gazing at him, as if he really doubted the evidence of his senses, and could not believe that Mark stood there, in the body, before him. At length he asked him whether, if the young lady were still in London, he thought he could contrive to deliver a letter to her secretly.

'Do I think I can?' cried Mark. 'THINK I can? Here, sit down, sir. Write it out, sir!'

With that he cleared the table by the summary process of tilting everything upon it into the fireplace; snatched some writing materials from the mantel-shelf; set Martin's chair before them; forced him down into it; dipped a pen into the ink; and put it in his hand.

'Cut away, sir!' cried Mark. 'Make it strong, sir. Let it be wery pinted, sir. Do I think so? I should think so. Go to work, sir!'

Martin required no further adjuration, but went to work at a great rate; while Mr Tapley, installing himself without any more formalities into the functions of his valet and general attendant, divested himself of his coat, and went on to clear the fireplace and arrange the room; talking to himself in a low voice the whole time.

'Jolly sort of lodgings,' said Mark, rubbing his nose with the knob at the end of the fire-shovel, and looking round the poor chamber; 'that's a comfort. The rain's come through the roof too. That an't bad. A lively old bedstead, I'll be bound; popilated by lots of wampires, no doubt. Come! my spirits is a-getting up again. An uncommon ragged nightcap this. A very good sign. We shall do yet! Here, Jane, my dear,' calling down the stairs, 'bring up that there hot tumbler for my master as was a-mixing when I come in. That's right, sir,' to Martin. 'Go at it as if you meant it, sir. Be very tender, sir, if you please. You can't make it too strong, sir!'

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

IN WHICH MARTIN BIDS ADIEU TO THE LADY OF HIS LOVE; AND HONOURS AN OBSCURE INDIVIDUAL WHOSE FORTUNE HE INTENDS TO MAKE BY COMMENDING HER TO HIS PROTECTION

The letter being duly signed, sealed, and delivered, was handed to Mark Tapley, for immediate conveyance if possible. And he succeeded so well in his embassy as to be enabled to return that same night, just as the house was closing, with the welcome intelligence that he had sent it upstairs to the young lady, enclosed in a small manuscript of his own, purporting to contain his further petition to be engaged in Mr Chuzzlewit's service; and that she had herself come down and told him, in great haste and agitation, that she would meet the gentleman at eight o'clock to-morrow morning in St. James's Park. It was then agreed between the new master and the new man, that Mark should be in waiting near the hotel in good time, to escort the young lady to the place of appointment; and when they had parted for the night with this understanding, Martin took up his pen again; and before he went to bed wrote another letter, whereof more will be seen presently.

He was up before daybreak, and came upon the Park with the morning, which was clad in the least engaging of the three hundred and sixty-five dresses in the wardrobe of the year. It was raw, damp, dark, and dismal; the clouds were as muddy as the ground; and the short perspective of every street and avenue was closed up by the mist as by a filthy curtain.

'Fine weather indeed,' Martin bitterly soliloquised, 'to be wandering up and down here in, like a thief! Fine weather indeed, for a meeting of lovers in the open air, and in a public walk! I need be departing, with all speed, for another country; for I have come to a pretty pass in this!'

He might perhaps have gone on to reflect that of all mornings in the year, it was not the best calculated for a young lady's coming forth on such an errand, either. But he was stopped on the road to this reflection, if his thoughts tended that way, by her appearance at a short distance, on which he hurried forward to meet her. Her squire, Mr Tapley, at the same time fell discreetly back, and surveyed the fog above him with an appearance of attentive interest.

'My dear Martin,' said Mary.

'My dear Mary,' said Martin; and lovers are such a singular kind of people that this is all they did say just then, though Martin took her arm, and her hand too, and they paced up and down a short walk that was least exposed to observation, half-a-dozen times.

'If you have changed at all, my love, since we parted,' said Martin at length, as he looked upon her with a proud delight, 'it is only to be more beautiful than ever!'

Had she been of the common metal of love-worn young ladies, she would have denied this in her most interesting manner; and would have told him that she knew she had become a perfect fright; or that she had wasted away with weeping and anxiety; or that she was dwindling gently into an early grave; or that her mental sufferings were unspeakable; or would, either by tears or words, or a mixture of both, have furnished him with some other information to that effect, and made him as miserable as possible. But she had been reared up in a sterner school than the minds of most young girls are formed in; she had had her nature strengthened by the hands of hard endurance and necessity; had come out from her young trials constant, self-denying, earnest, and devoted; had acquired in her maidenhood—whether happily in the end, for herself or him, is foreign to our present purpose to inquire—something of that nobler quality of gentle hearts which is developed often by the sorrows and struggles of matronly years, but often by their lessons only. Unspoiled, unpampered in her joys or griefs; with frank and full, and deep affection for the object of her early love; she saw in him one who for her sake was an outcast from his home and fortune, and she had no more idea of bestowing that love upon him in other than cheerful and sustaining words, full of high hope and grateful trustfulness, than she had of being unworthy of it, in her lightest thought or deed, for any base temptation that the world could offer.

'What change is there in YOU, Martin,' she replied; 'for that concerns me nearest? You look more anxious and more thoughtful than you used.'

'Why, as to that, my love,' said Martin as he drew her waist within his arm, first looking round to see that there were no observers near, and beholding Mr Tapley more intent than ever on the fog; 'it would be strange if I did not; for my life—especially of late—has been a hard one.'

'I know it must have been,' she answered. 'When have I forgotten to think of it and you?'

'Not often, I hope,' said Martin. 'Not often, I am sure. Not often, I have some right to expect, Mary; for I have undergone a great deal of vexation and privation, and I naturally look for that return, you know.'

'A very, very poor return,' she answered with a fainter smile. 'But you have it, and will have it always. You have paid a dear price for a poor heart, Martin; but it is at least your own, and a true one.'

'Of course I feel quite certain of that,' said Martin, 'or I shouldn't have put myself in my present position. And don't say a poor heart, Mary, for I say a rich one. Now, I am about to break a design to you, dearest, which will startle you at first, but which is undertaken for your sake. I am going,' he added slowly, looking far into the deep wonder of her bright dark eyes, 'abroad.'

'Abroad, Martin!'

'Only to America. See now. How you droop directly!'

'If I do, or, I hope I may say, if I did,' she answered, raising her head after a short silence, and looking once more into his face, 'it was for grief to think of what you are resolved to undergo for me. I would not venture to dissuade you, Martin; but it is a long, long distance; there is a wide ocean to be crossed; illness and want are sad calamities in any place, but in a foreign country dreadful to endure. Have you thought of all this?'

'Thought of it!' cried Martin, abating, in his fondness—and he WAS very fond of her—hardly an iota of his usual impetuosity. 'What am I to do? It's very well to say, "Have I thought of it?" my love; but you should ask me in the same breath, have I thought of starving at home; have I thought of doing porter's work for a living; have I thought of holding horses in the streets to earn my roll of bread from day to day? Come, come,' he added, in a gentler tone, 'do not hang down your head, my dear, for I need the encouragement that your sweet face alone can give me. Why, that's well! Now you are brave again.'

'I am endeavouring to be,' she answered, smiling through her tears.

'Endeavouring to be anything that's good, and being it, is, with you, all one. Don't I know that of old?' cried Martin, gayly. 'So! That's famous! Now I can tell you all my plans as cheerfully as if you were my little wife already, Mary.'

She hung more closely on his arm, and looking upwards in his face, bade him speak on.

'You see,' said Martin, playing with the little hand upon his wrist, 'that my attempts to advance myself at home have been baffled and rendered abortive. I will not say by whom, Mary, for that would give pain to us both. But so it is. Have you heard him speak of late of any relative of mine or his, called Pecksniff? Only tell me what I ask you, no more.'

'I have heard, to my surprise, that he is a better man than was supposed.'

'I thought so,' interrupted Martin.

'And that it is likely we may come to know him, if not to visit and reside with him and—I think—his daughters. He HAS daughters, has he, love?'

'A pair of them,' Martin answered. 'A precious pair! Gems of the first water!'

'Ah! You are jesting!'

'There is a sort of jesting which is very much in earnest, and includes some pretty serious disgust,' said Martin. 'I jest in reference to Mr Pecksniff (at whose house I have been living as his assistant, and at whose hands I have received insult and injury), in that vein. Whatever betides, or however closely you may be brought into communication with this family, never forget that, Mary; and never for an instant, whatever appearances may seem to contradict me, lose sight of this assurance—Pecksniff is a scoundrel.'

'Indeed!'

'In thought, and in deed, and in everything else. A scoundrel from the topmost hair of his head, to the nethermost atom of his heel. Of his daughters I will only say that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, they are dutiful young ladies, and take after their father closely. This is a digression from the main point, and yet it brings me to what I was going to say.'

He stopped to look into her eyes again, and seeing, in a hasty glance over his shoulder, that there was no one near, and that Mark was still intent upon the fog, not only looked at her lips, too, but kissed them into the bargain.

'Now I am going to America, with great prospects of doing well, and of returning home myself very soon; it may be to take you there for a few years, but, at all events, to claim you for my wife; which, after such trials, I should do with no fear of your still thinking it a duty to cleave to him who will not suffer me to live (for this is true), if he can help it, in my own land. How long I may be absent is, of course, uncertain; but it shall not be very long. Trust me for that.'

'In the meantime, dear Martin—'

'That's the very thing I am coming to. In the meantime you shall hear, constantly, of all my goings-on. Thus.'

He paused to take from his pocket the letter he had written overnight, and then resumed:

'In this fellow's employment, and living in this fellow's house (by fellow, I mean Mr Pecksniff, of course), there is a certain person of the name of Pinch. Don't forget; a poor, strange, simple oddity, Mary; but thoroughly honest and sincere; full of zeal; and with a cordial regard for me. Which I mean to return one of these days, by setting him up in life in some way or other.'

'Your old kind nature, Martin!'

'Oh!' said Martin, 'that's not worth speaking of, my love. He's very grateful and desirous to serve me; and I am more than repaid. Now one night I told this Pinch my history, and all about myself and you; in which he was not a little interested, I can tell you, for he knows you! Aye, you may look surprised—and the longer the better for it becomes you—but you have heard him play the organ in the church of that village before now; and he has seen you listening to his music; and has caught his inspiration from you, too!'

'Was HE the organist?' cried Mary. 'I thank him from my heart!'

'Yes, he was,' said Martin, 'and is, and gets nothing for it either. There never was such a simple fellow! Quite an infant! But a very good sort of creature, I assure you.'

'I am sure of that,' she said with great earnestness. 'He must be!'

'Oh, yes, no doubt at all about it,' rejoined Martin, in his usual careless way. 'He is. Well! It has occurred to me—but stay. If I read you what I have written and intend sending to him by post to-night it will explain itself. "My dear Tom Pinch." That's rather familiar perhaps,' said Martin, suddenly remembering that he was proud when they had last met, 'but I call him my dear Tom Pinch because he likes it, and it pleases him.'

'Very right, and very kind,' said Mary.

'Exactly so!' cried Martin. 'It's as well to be kind whenever one can; and, as I said before, he really is an excellent fellow. "My dear Tom Pinch—I address this under cover to Mrs Lupin, at the Blue Dragon, and have begged her in a short note to deliver it to you without saying anything about it elsewhere; and to do the same with all future letters she may receive from me. My reason for so doing will be at once apparent to you"—I don't know that it will be, by the bye,' said Martin, breaking off, 'for he's slow of comprehension, poor fellow; but he'll find it out in time. My reason simply is, that I don't want my letters to be read by other people; and particularly by the scoundrel whom he thinks an angel.'

'Mr Pecksniff again?' asked Mary.

'The same,' said Martin '—will be at once apparent to you. I have completed my arrangements for going to America; and you will be surprised to hear that I am to be accompanied by Mark Tapley, upon whom I have stumbled strangely in London, and who insists on putting himself under my protection'—meaning, my love,' said Martin, breaking off again, 'our friend in the rear, of course.'

She was delighted to hear this, and bestowed a kind glance upon Mark, which he brought his eyes down from the fog to encounter and received with immense satisfaction. She said in his hearing, too, that he was a good soul and a merry creature, and would be faithful, she was certain; commendations which Mr Tapley inwardly resolved to deserve, from such lips, if he died for it.

'"Now, my dear Pinch,"' resumed Martin, proceeding with his letter; '"I am going to repose great trust in you, knowing that I may do so with perfect reliance on your honour and secrecy, and having nobody else just now to trust in."'

'I don't think I would say that, Martin.'

'Wouldn't you? Well! I'll take that out. It's perfectly true, though.'

'But it might seem ungracious, perhaps.'

'Oh, I don't mind Pinch,' said Martin. 'There's no occasion to stand on any ceremony with HIM. However, I'll take it out, as you wish it, and make the full stop at "secrecy." Very well! "I shall not only"—this is the letter again, you know.'

'I understand.'

'"I shall not only enclose my letters to the young lady of whom I have told you, to your charge, to be forwarded as she may request; but I most earnestly commit her, the young lady herself, to your care and regard, in the event of your meeting in my absence. I have reason to think that the probabilities of your encountering each other—perhaps very frequently—are now neither remote nor few; and although in our position you can do very little to lessen the uneasiness of hers, I trust to you implicitly to do that much, and so deserve the confidence I have reposed in you." You see, my dear Mary,' said Martin, 'it will be a great consolation to you to have anybody, no matter how simple, with whom you can speak about ME; and the very first time you talk to Pinch, you'll feel at once that there is no more occasion for any embarrassment or hesitation in talking to him, than if he were an old woman.'

'However that may be,' she returned, smiling, 'he is your friend, and that is enough.'

'Oh, yes, he's my friend,' said Martin, 'certainly. In fact, I have told him in so many words that we'll always take notice of him, and protect him; and it's a good trait in his character that he's grateful—very grateful indeed. You'll like him of all things, my love, I know. You'll observe very much that's comical and old-fashioned about Pinch, but you needn't mind laughing at him; for he'll not care about it. He'll rather like it indeed!'

'I don't think I shall put that to the test, Martin.'

'You won't if you can help it, of course,' he said, 'but I think you'll find him a little too much for your gravity. However, that's neither here nor there, and it certainly is not the letter; which ends thus: "Knowing that I need not impress the nature and extent of that confidence upon you at any greater length, as it is already sufficiently established in your mind, I will only say, in bidding you farewell and looking forward to our next meeting, that I shall charge myself from this time, through all changes for the better, with your advancement and happiness, as if they were my own. You may rely upon that. And always believe me, my dear Tom Pinch, faithfully your friend, Martin Chuzzlewit. P.S.—I enclose the amount which you so kindly"—Oh,' said Martin, checking himself, and folding up the letter, 'that's nothing!'

At this crisis Mark Tapley interposed, with an apology for remarking that the clock at the Horse Guards was striking.

'Which I shouldn't have said nothing about, sir,' added Mark, 'if the young lady hadn't begged me to be particular in mentioning it.'

'I did,' said Mary. 'Thank you. You are quite right. In another minute I shall be ready to return. We have time for a very few words more, dear Martin, and although I had much to say, it must remain unsaid until the happy time of our next meeting. Heaven send it may come speedily and prosperously! But I have no fear of that.'

'Fear!' cried Martin. 'Why, who has? What are a few months? What is a whole year? When I come gayly back, with a road through life hewn out before me, then indeed, looking back upon this parting, it may seem a dismal one. But now! I swear I wouldn't have it happen under more favourable auspices, if I could; for then I should be less inclined to go, and less impressed with the necessity.'

'Yes, yes. I feel that too. When do you go?'

'To-night. We leave for Liverpool to-night. A vessel sails from that port, as I hear, in three days. In a month, or less, we shall be there. Why, what's a month! How many months have flown by, since our last parting!'

'Long to look back upon,' said Mary, echoing his cheerful tone, 'but nothing in their course!'

'Nothing at all!' cried Martin. 'I shall have change of scene and change of place; change of people, change of manners, change of cares and hopes! Time will wear wings indeed! I can bear anything, so that I have swift action, Mary.'

Was he thinking solely of her care for him, when he took so little heed of her share in the separation; of her quiet monotonous endurance, and her slow anxiety from day to day? Was there nothing jarring and discordant even in his tone of courage, with this one note 'self' for ever audible, however high the strain? Not in her ears. It had been better otherwise, perhaps, but so it was. She heard the same bold spirit which had flung away as dross all gain and profit for her sake, making light of peril and privation that she might be calm and happy; and she heard no more. That heart where self has found no place and raised no throne, is slow to recognize its ugly presence when it looks upon it. As one possessed of an evil spirit was held in old time to be alone conscious of the lurking demon in the breasts of other men, so kindred vices know each other in their hiding-places every day, when Virtue is incredulous and blind.

'The quarter's gone!' cried Mr Tapley, in a voice of admonition.

'I shall be ready to return immediately,' she said. 'One thing, dear Martin, I am bound to tell you. You entreated me a few minutes since only to answer what you asked me in reference to one theme, but you should and must know (otherwise I could not be at ease) that since that separation of which I was the unhappy occasion, he has never once uttered your name; has never coupled it, or any faint allusion to it, with passion or reproach; and has never abated in his kindness to me.'

'I thank him for that last act,' said Martin, 'and for nothing else. Though on consideration I may thank him for his other forbearance also, inasmuch as I neither expect nor desire that he will mention my name again. He may once, perhaps—to couple it with reproach—in his will. Let him, if he please! By the time it reaches me, he will be in his grave; a satire on his own anger, God help him!'

'Martin! If you would but sometimes, in some quiet hour; beside the winter fire; in the summer air; when you hear gentle music, or think of Death, or Home, or Childhood; if you would at such a season resolve to think, but once a month, or even once a year, of him, or any one who ever wronged you, you would forgive him in your heart, I know!'

'If I believed that to be true, Mary,' he replied, 'I would resolve at no such time to bear him in my mind; wishing to spare myself the shame of such a weakness. I was not born to be the toy and puppet of any man, far less his; to whose pleasure and caprice, in return for any good he did me, my whole youth was sacrificed. It became between us two a fair exchange—a barter—and no more; and there is no such balance against me that I need throw in a mawkish forgiveness to poise the scale. He has forbidden all mention of me to you, I know,' he added hastily. 'Come! Has he not?'

'That was long ago,' she returned; 'immediately after your parting; before you had left the house. He has never done so since.'

'He has never done so since because he has seen no occasion,' said Martin; 'but that is of little consequence, one way or other. Let all allusion to him between you and me be interdicted from this time forth. And therefore, love'—he drew her quickly to him, for the time of parting had now come—'in the first letter that you write to me through the Post Office, addressed to New York; and in all the others that you send through Pinch; remember he has no existence, but has become to us as one who is dead. Now, God bless you! This is a strange place for such a meeting and such a parting; but our next meeting shall be in a better, and our next and last parting in a worse.'

'One other question, Martin, I must ask. Have you provided money for this journey?'

'Have I?' cried Martin; it might have been in his pride; it might have been in his desire to set her mind at ease: 'Have I provided money? Why, there's a question for an emigrant's wife! How could I move on land or sea without it, love?'

'I mean, enough.'

'Enough! More than enough. Twenty times more than enough. A pocket-full. Mark and I, for all essential ends, are quite as rich as if we had the purse of Fortunatus in our baggage.'

'The half-hour's a-going!' cried Mr Tapley.

'Good-bye a hundred times!' cried Mary, in a trembling voice.

But how cold the comfort in Good-bye! Mark Tapley knew it perfectly. Perhaps he knew it from his reading, perhaps from his experience, perhaps from intuition. It is impossible to say; but however he knew it, his knowledge instinctively suggested to him the wisest course of proceeding that any man could have adopted under the circumstances. He was taken with a violent fit of sneezing, and was obliged to turn his head another way. In doing which, he, in a manner fenced and screened the lovers into a corner by themselves.

There was a short pause, but Mark had an undefined sensation that it was a satisfactory one in its way. Then Mary, with her veil lowered, passed him with a quick step, and beckoned him to follow. She stopped once more before they lost that corner; looked back; and waved her hand to Martin. He made a start towards them at the moment as if he had some other farewell words to say; but she only hurried off the faster, and Mr Tapley followed as in duty bound.

When he rejoined Martin again in his own chamber, he found that gentleman seated moodily before the dusty grate, with his two feet on the fender, his two elbows on his knees, and his chin supported, in a not very ornamental manner, on the palms of his hands.

'Well, Mark!'

'Well, sir,' said Mark, taking a long breath, 'I see the young lady safe home, and I feel pretty comfortable after it. She sent a lot of kind words, sir, and this,' handing him a ring, 'for a parting keepsake.'

'Diamonds!' said Martin, kissing it—let us do him justice, it was for her sake; not for theirs—and putting it on his little finger. 'Splendid diamonds! My grandfather is a singular character, Mark. He must have given her this now.'

Mark Tapley knew as well that she had bought it, to the end that that unconscious speaker might carry some article of sterling value with him in his necessity; as he knew that it was day, and not night. Though he had no more acquaintance of his own knowledge with the history of the glittering trinket on Martin's outspread finger, than Martin himself had, he was as certain that in its purchase she had expended her whole stock of hoarded money, as if he had seen it paid down coin by coin. Her lover's strange obtuseness in relation to this little incident, promptly suggested to Mark's mind its real cause and root; and from that moment he had a clear and perfect insight into the one absorbing principle of Martin's character.

'She is worthy of the sacrifices I have made,' said Martin, folding his arms, and looking at the ashes in the stove, as if in resumption of some former thoughts. 'Well worthy of them. No riches'—here he stroked his chin and mused—'could have compensated for the loss of such a nature. Not to mention that in gaining her affection I have followed the bent of my own wishes, and baulked the selfish schemes of others who had no right to form them. She is quite worthy—more than worthy—of the sacrifices I have made. Yes, she is. No doubt of it.'

These ruminations might or might not have reached Mark Tapley; for though they were by no means addressed to him, yet they were softly uttered. In any case, he stood there, watching Martin with an indescribable and most involved expression on his visage, until that young man roused himself and looked towards him; when he turned away, as being suddenly intent upon certain preparations for the journey, and, without giving vent to any articulate sound, smiled with surpassing ghastliness, and seemed by a twist of his features and a motion of his lips, to release himself of this word:

'Jolly!'

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE BURDEN WHEREOF, IS HAIL COLUMBIA!

A dark and dreary night; people nestling in their beds or circling late about the fire; Want, colder than Charity, shivering at the street corners; church-towers humming with the faint vibration of their own tongues, but newly resting from the ghostly preachment 'One!' The earth covered with a sable pall as for the burial of yesterday; the clumps of dark trees, its giant plumes of funeral feathers, waving sadly to and fro: all hushed, all noiseless, and in deep repose, save the swift clouds that skim across the moon, and the cautious wind, as, creeping after them upon the ground, it stops to listen, and goes rustling on, and stops again, and follows, like a savage on the trail.

Whither go the clouds and wind so eagerly? If, like guilty spirits, they repair to some dread conference with powers like themselves, in what wild regions do the elements hold council, or where unbend in terrible disport?

Here! Free from that cramped prison called the earth, and out upon the waste of waters. Here, roaring, raging, shrieking, howling, all night long. Hither come the sounding voices from the caverns on the coast of that small island, sleeping, a thousand miles away, so quietly in the midst of angry waves; and hither, to meet them, rush the blasts from unknown desert places of the world. Here, in the fury of their unchecked liberty, they storm and buffet with each other, until the sea, lashed into passion like their own, leaps up, in ravings mightier than theirs, and the whole scene is madness.

On, on, on, over the countless miles of angry space roll the long heaving billows. Mountains and caves are here, and yet are not; for what is now the one, is now the other; then all is but a boiling heap of rushing water. Pursuit, and flight, and mad return of wave on wave, and savage struggle, ending in a spouting-up of foam that whitens the black night; incessant change of place, and form, and hue; constancy in nothing, but eternal strife; on, on, on, they roll, and darker grows the night, and louder howls the wind, and more clamorous and fierce become the million voices in the sea, when the wild cry goes forth upon the storm 'A ship!'

Onward she comes, in gallant combat with the elements, her tall masts trembling, and her timbers starting on the strain; onward she comes, now high upon the curling billows, now low down in the hollows of the sea, as hiding for the moment from its fury; and every storm-voice in the air and water cries more loudly yet, 'A ship!'

Still she comes striving on; and at her boldness and the spreading cry, the angry waves rise up above each other's hoary heads to look; and round about the vessel, far as the mariners on the decks can pierce into the gloom, they press upon her, forcing each other down and starting up, and rushing forward from afar, in dreadful curiosity. High over her they break; and round her surge and roar; and giving place to others, moaningly depart, and dash themselves to fragments in their baffled anger. Still she comes onward bravely. And though the eager multitude crowd thick and fast upon her all the night, and dawn of day discovers the untiring train yet bearing down upon the ship in an eternity of troubled water, onward she comes, with dim lights burning in her hull, and people there, asleep; as if no deadly element were peering in at every seam and chink, and no drowned seaman's grave, with but a plank to cover it, were yawning in the unfathomable depths below.

Among these sleeping voyagers were Martin and Mark Tapley, who, rocked into a heavy drowsiness by the unaccustomed motion, were as insensible to the foul air in which they lay, as to the uproar without. It was broad day when the latter awoke with a dim idea that he was dreaming of having gone to sleep in a four-post bedstead which had turned bottom upwards in the course of the night. There was more reason in this too, than in the roasting of eggs; for the first objects Mr Tapley recognized when he opened his eyes were his own heels—looking down to him, as he afterwards observed, from a nearly perpendicular elevation.

'Well!' said Mark, getting himself into a sitting posture, after various ineffectual struggles with the rolling of the ship. 'This is the first time as ever I stood on my head all night.'

'You shouldn't go to sleep upon the ground with your head to leeward then,' growled a man in one of the berths.

'With my head to WHERE?' asked Mark.

The man repeated his previous sentiment.

'No, I won't another time,' said Mark, 'when I know whereabouts on the map that country is. In the meanwhile I can give you a better piece of advice. Don't you nor any other friend of mine never go to sleep with his head in a ship any more.'

The man gave a grunt of discontented acquiescence, turned over in his berth, and drew his blanket over his head.

'—For,' said Mr Tapley, pursuing the theme by way of soliloquy in a low tone of voice; 'the sea is as nonsensical a thing as any going. It never knows what to do with itself. It hasn't got no employment for its mind, and is always in a state of vacancy. Like them Polar bears in the wild-beast shows as is constantly a-nodding their heads from side to side, it never CAN be quiet. Which is entirely owing to its uncommon stupidity.'

'Is that you, Mark?' asked a faint voice from another berth.

'It's as much of me as is left, sir, after a fortnight of this work,' Mr Tapley replied, 'What with leading the life of a fly, ever since I've been aboard—for I've been perpetually holding-on to something or other in a upside-down position—what with that, sir, and putting a very little into myself, and taking a good deal out of myself, there an't too much of me to swear by. How do you find yourself this morning, sir?'

'Very miserable,' said Martin, with a peevish groan. 'Ugh. This is wretched, indeed!'

'Creditable,' muttered Mark, pressing one hand upon his aching head and looking round him with a rueful grin. 'That's the great comfort. It IS creditable to keep up one's spirits here. Virtue's its own reward. So's jollity.'

Mark was so far right that unquestionably any man who retained his cheerfulness among the steerage accommodations of that noble and fast-sailing line-of-packet ship, 'THE SCREW,' was solely indebted to his own resources, and shipped his good humour, like his provisions, without any contribution or assistance from the owners. A dark, low, stifling cabin, surrounded by berths all filled to overflowing with men, women, and children, in various stages of sickness and misery, is not the liveliest place of assembly at any time; but when it is so crowded (as the steerage cabin of the Screw was, every passage out), that mattresses and beds are heaped upon the floor, to the extinction of everything like comfort, cleanliness, and decency, it is liable to operate not only as a pretty strong banner against amiability of temper, but as a positive encourager of selfish and rough humours. Mark felt this, as he sat looking about him; and his spirits rose proportionately.

There were English people, Irish people, Welsh people, and Scotch people there; all with their little store of coarse food and shabby clothes; and nearly all with their families of children. There were children of all ages; from the baby at the breast, to the slattern-girl who was as much a grown woman as her mother. Every kind of domestic suffering that is bred in poverty, illness, banishment, sorrow, and long travel in bad weather, was crammed into the little space; and yet was there infinitely less of complaint and querulousness, and infinitely more of mutual assistance and general kindness to be found in that unwholesome ark, than in many brilliant ballrooms.

Mark looked about him wistfully, and his face brightened as he looked. Here an old grandmother was crooning over a sick child, and rocking it to and fro, in arms hardly more wasted than its own young limbs; here a poor woman with an infant in her lap, mended another little creature's clothes, and quieted another who was creeping up about her from their scanty bed upon the floor. Here were old men awkwardly engaged in little household offices, wherein they would have been ridiculous but for their good-will and kind purpose; and here were swarthy fellows—giants in their way—doing such little acts of tenderness for those about them, as might have belonged to gentlest-hearted dwarfs. The very idiot in the corner who sat mowing there, all day, had his faculty of imitation roused by what he saw about him; and snapped his fingers to amuse a crying child.

'Now, then,' said Mark, nodding to a woman who was dressing her three children at no great distance from him—and the grin upon his face had by this time spread from ear to ear—'Hand over one of them young 'uns according to custom.'

'I wish you'd get breakfast, Mark, instead of worrying with people who don't belong to you,' observed Martin, petulantly.

'All right,' said Mark. 'SHE'll do that. It's a fair division of labour, sir. I wash her boys, and she makes our tea. I never COULD make tea, but any one can wash a boy.'

The woman, who was delicate and ill, felt and understood his kindness, as well she might, for she had been covered every night with his greatcoat, while he had for his own bed the bare boards and a rug. But Martin, who seldom got up or looked about him, was quite incensed by the folly of this speech, and expressed his dissatisfaction by an impatient groan.

'So it is, certainly,' said Mark, brushing the child's hair as coolly as if he had been born and bred a barber.

'What are you talking about, now?' asked Martin.

'What you said,' replied Mark; 'or what you meant, when you gave that there dismal vent to your feelings. I quite go along with it, sir. It IS very hard upon her.'

'What is?'

'Making the voyage by herself along with these young impediments here, and going such a way at such a time of the year to join her husband. If you don't want to be driven mad with yellow soap in your eye, young man,' said Mr Tapley to the second urchin, who was by this time under his hands at the basin, 'you'd better shut it.'

'Where does she join her husband?' asked Martin, yawning.

'Why, I'm very much afraid,' said Mr Tapley, in a low voice, 'that she don't know. I hope she mayn't miss him. But she sent her last letter by hand, and it don't seem to have been very clearly understood between 'em without it, and if she don't see him a-waving his pocket-handkerchief on the shore, like a pictur out of a song-book, my opinion is, she'll break her heart.'

'Why, how, in Folly's name, does the woman come to be on board ship on such a wild-goose venture!' cried Martin.

Mr Tapley glanced at him for a moment as he lay prostrate in his berth, and then said, very quietly:

'Ah! How indeed! I can't think! He's been away from her for two year; she's been very poor and lonely in her own country; and has always been a-looking forward to meeting him. It's very strange she should be here. Quite amazing! A little mad perhaps! There can't be no other way of accounting for it.'

Martin was too far gone in the lassitude of sea-sickness to make any reply to these words, or even to attend to them as they were spoken. And the subject of their discourse returning at this crisis with some hot tea, effectually put a stop to any resumption of the theme by Mr Tapley; who, when the meal was over and he had adjusted Martin's bed, went up on deck to wash the breakfast service, which consisted of two half-pint tin mugs, and a shaving-pot of the same metal.

It is due to Mark Tapley to state that he suffered at least as much from sea-sickness as any man, woman, or child, on board; and that he had a peculiar faculty of knocking himself about on the smallest provocation, and losing his legs at every lurch of the ship. But resolved, in his usual phrase, to 'come out strong' under disadvantageous circumstances, he was the life and soul of the steerage, and made no more of stopping in the middle of a facetious conversation to go away and be excessively ill by himself, and afterwards come back in the very best and gayest of tempers to resume it, than if such a course of proceeding had been the commonest in the world.

It cannot be said that as his illness wore off, his cheerfulness and good nature increased, because they would hardly admit of augmentation; but his usefulness among the weaker members of the party was much enlarged; and at all times and seasons there he was exerting it. If a gleam of sun shone out of the dark sky, down Mark tumbled into the cabin, and presently up he came again with a woman in his arms, or half-a-dozen children, or a man, or a bed, or a saucepan, or a basket, or something animate or inanimate, that he thought would be the better for the air. If an hour or two of fine weather in the middle of the day tempted those who seldom or never came on deck at other times to crawl into the long-boat, or lie down upon the spare spars, and try to eat, there, in the centre of the group, was Mr Tapley, handing about salt beef and biscuit, or dispensing tastes of grog, or cutting up the children's provisions with his pocketknife, for their greater ease and comfort, or reading aloud from a venerable newspaper, or singing some roaring old song to a select party, or writing the beginnings of letters to their friends at home for people who couldn't write, or cracking jokes with the crew, or nearly getting blown over the side, or emerging, half-drowned, from a shower of spray, or lending a hand somewhere or other; but always doing something for the general entertainment. At night, when the cooking-fire was lighted on the deck, and the driving sparks that flew among the rigging, and the clouds of sails, seemed to menace the ship with certain annihilation by fire, in case the elements of air and water failed to compass her destruction; there, again, was Mr Tapley, with his coat off and his shirt-sleeves turned up to his elbows, doing all kinds of culinary offices; compounding the strangest dishes; recognized by every one as an established authority; and helping all parties to achieve something which, left to themselves, they never could have done, and never would have dreamed of. In short, there never was a more popular character than Mark

Tapley became, on board that noble and fast-sailing line-of-packet ship, the Screw; and he attained at last to such a pitch of universal admiration, that he began to have grave doubts within himself whether a man might reasonably claim any credit for being jolly under such exciting circumstances.

'If this was going to last,' said Tapley, 'there'd be no great difference as I can perceive, between the Screw and the Dragon. I never am to get credit, I think. I begin to be afraid that the Fates is determined to make the world easy to me.'

'Well, Mark,' said Martin, near whose berth he had ruminated to this effect. 'When will this be over?'

'Another week, they say, sir,' returned Mark, 'will most likely bring us into port. The ship's a-going along at present, as sensible as a ship can, sir; though I don't mean to say as that's any very high praise.'

'I don't think it is, indeed,' groaned Martin.

'You'd feel all the better for it, sir, if you was to turn out,' observed Mark.

'And be seen by the ladies and gentlemen on the after-deck,' returned Martin, with a scronful emphasis upon the words, 'mingling with the beggarly crowd that are stowed away in this vile hole. I should be greatly the better for that, no doubt.'

'I'm thankful that I can't say from my own experience what the feelings of a gentleman may be,' said Mark, 'but I should have thought, sir, as a gentleman would feel a deal more uncomfortable down here than up in the fresh air, especially when the ladies and gentlemen in the after-cabin know just as much about him as he does about them, and are likely to trouble their heads about him in the same proportion. I should have thought that, certainly.'

'I tell you, then,' rejoined Martin, 'you would have thought wrong, and do think wrong.'

'Very likely, sir,' said Mark, with imperturbable good temper. 'I often do.'

'As to lying here,' cried Martin, raising himself on his elbow, and looking angrily at his follower. 'Do you suppose it's a pleasure to lie here?'

'All the madhouses in the world,' said Mr Tapley, 'couldn't produce such a maniac as the man must be who could think that.'

'Then why are you forever goading and urging me to get up?' asked Martin, 'I lie here because I don't wish to be recognized, in the better days to which I aspire, by any purse-proud citizen, as the man who came over with him among the steerage passengers. I lie here because I wish to conceal my circumstances and myself, and not to arrive in a new world badged and ticketed as an utterly poverty-stricken man. If I could have afforded a passage in the after-cabin I should have held up my head with the rest. As I couldn't I hide it. Do you understand that?'

'I am very sorry, sir,' said Mark. 'I didn't know you took it so much to heart as this comes to.'

'Of course you didn't know,' returned his master. 'How should you know, unless I told you? It's no trial to you, Mark, to make yourself comfortable and to bustle about. It's as natural for you to do so under the circumstances as it is for me not to do so. Why, you don't suppose there is a living creature in this ship who can by possibility have half so much to undergo on board of her as I have? Do you?' he asked, sitting upright in his berth and looking at Mark, with an expression of great earnestness not unmixed with wonder.

Mark twisted his face into a tight knot, and with his head very much on one side, pondered upon this question as if he felt it an extremely difficult one to answer. He was relieved from his embarrassment by Martin himself, who said, as he stretched himself upon his back again and resumed the book he had been reading:

'But what is the use of my putting such a case to you, when the very essence of what I have been saying is, that you cannot by possibility understand it! Make me a little brandy-and-water—cold and very weak—and give me a biscuit, and tell your friend, who is a nearer neighbour of ours than I could wish, to try and keep her children a little quieter to-night than she did last night; that's a good fellow.'

Mr Tapley set himself to obey these orders with great alacrity, and pending their execution, it may be presumed his flagging spirits revived; inasmuch as he several times observed, below his breath, that in respect of its power of imparting a credit to jollity, the Screw unquestionably had some decided advantages over the Dragon. He also remarked that it was a high gratification to him to reflect that he would carry its main excellence ashore with him, and have it constantly beside him wherever he went; but what he meant by these consolatory thoughts he did not explain.

And now a general excitement began to prevail on board; and various predictions relative to the precise day, and even the precise hour at which they would reach New York, were freely broached. There was infinitely more crowding on deck and looking over the ship's side than there had been before; and an epidemic broke out for packing up things every morning, which required unpacking again every night. Those who had any letters to deliver, or any friends to meet, or any settled plans of going anywhere or doing anything, discussed their prospects a hundred times a day; and as this class of passengers was very small, and the number of those who had no prospects whatever was very large, there were plenty of listeners and few talkers. Those who had been ill all along, got well now, and those who had been well, got better. An American gentleman in the after-cabin, who had been wrapped up in fur and oilskin the whole passage, unexpectedly appeared in a very shiny, tall, black hat, and constantly overhauled a very little valise of pale leather, which contained his clothes, linen, brushes, shaving apparatus, books, trinkets, and other baggage. He likewise stuck his hands deep into his pockets, and walked the deck with his nostrils dilated, as already inhaling the air of Freedom which carries death to all tyrants, and can never (under any circumstances worth mentioning) be breathed by slaves. An English gentleman who was strongly suspected of having run away from a bank, with something in his possession belonging to its strong box besides the key, grew eloquent upon the subject of the rights of man, and hummed the Marseillaise Hymn constantly. In a word, one great sensation pervaded the whole ship, and the soil of America lay close before them; so close at last, that, upon a certain starlight night they took a pilot on board, and within a few hours afterwards lay to until the morning, awaiting the arrival of a steamboat in which the passengers were to be conveyed ashore.

Off she came, soon after it was light next morning, and lying alongside an hour or more—during which period her very firemen were objects of hardly less interest and curiosity than if they had been so many angels, good or bad—took all her living freight aboard. Among them Mark, who still had his friend and her three children under his close protection; and Martin, who had once more dressed himself in his usual attire, but wore a soiled, old cloak above his ordinary clothes, until such time as he should separate for ever from his late companions.

The steamer—which, with its machinery on deck, looked, as it worked its long slim legs, like some enormously magnified insect or antediluvian monster—dashed at great speed up a beautiful bay; and presently they saw some heights, and islands, and a long, flat, straggling city.

'And this,' said Mr Tapley, looking far ahead, 'is the Land of Liberty, is it? Very well. I'm agreeable. Any land will do for me, after so much water!'

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

MARTIN DISEMBARKS FROM THAT NOBLE AND FAST-SAILING LINE-OF-PACKET SHIP, 'THE SCREW', AT THE PORT OF NEW YORK, IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. HE MAKES SOME ACQUAINTANCES, AND DINES AT A BOARDING-HOUSE. THE PARTICULARS OF THOSE TRANSACTIONS

Some trifling excitement prevailed upon the very brink and margin of the land of liberty; for an alderman had been elected the day before; and Party Feeling naturally running rather high on such an exciting occasion, the friends of the disappointed candidate had found it necessary to assert the great principles of Purity of Election and Freedom of opinion by breaking a few legs and arms, and furthermore pursuing one obnoxious gentleman through the streets with the design of hitting his nose. These good-humoured little outbursts of the popular fancy were not in themselves sufficiently remarkable to create any great stir, after the lapse of a whole night; but they found fresh life and notoriety in the breath of the newsboys, who not only proclaimed them with shrill yells in all the highways and byways of the town, upon the wharves and among the shipping, but on the deck and down in the cabins of the steamboat; which, before she touched the shore, was boarded and overrun by a legion of those young citizens.

'Here's this morning's New York Sewer!' cried one. 'Here's this morning's New York Stabber! Here's the New York Family Spy! Here's the New York Private Listener! Here's the New York Peeper! Here's the New York Plunderer! Here's the New York Keyhole Reporter! Here's the New York Rowdy Journal! Here's all the New York papers! Here's full particulars of the patriotic locofoco movement yesterday, in which the whigs was so chawed up; and the last Alabama gouging case; and the interesting Arkansas dooel with Bowie knives; and all the Political, Commercial, and Fashionable News. Here they are! Here they are! Here's the papers, here's the papers!'

'Here's the Sewer!' cried another. 'Here's the New York Sewer! Here's some of the twelfth thousand of to-day's Sewer, with the best accounts of the markets, and all the shipping news, and four whole columns of country correspondence, and a full account of the Ball at Mrs White's last night, where all the beauty and fashion of New York was assembled; with the Sewer's own particulars of the private lives of all the ladies that was there! Here's the Sewer! Here's some of the twelfth thousand of the New York Sewer! Here's the Sewer's exposure of the Wall Street Gang, and the Sewer's exposure of the Washington Gang, and the Sewer's exclusive account of a flagrant act of dishonesty committed by the Secretary of State when he was eight years old; now communicated, at a great expense, by his own nurse. Here's the Sewer! Here's the New York Sewer, in its twelfth thousand, with a whole column of New Yorkers to be shown up, and all their names printed! Here's the Sewer's article upon the Judge that tried him, day afore yesterday, for libel, and the Sewer's tribute to the independent Jury that didn't convict him, and the Sewer's account of what they might have expected if they had! Here's the Sewer, here's the Sewer! Here's the wide-awake Sewer; always on the lookout; the leading Journal of the United States, now in its twelfth thousand, and still a-printing off:—Here's the New York Sewer!'

'It is in such enlightened means,' said a voice almost in Martin's ear, 'that the bubbling passions of my country find a vent.'

Martin turned involuntarily, and saw, standing close at his side, a sallow gentleman, with sunken cheeks, black hair, small twinkling eyes, and a singular expression hovering about that region of his face, which was not a frown, nor a leer, and yet might have been mistaken at the first glance for either. Indeed it would have been difficult, on a much closer acquaintance, to describe it in any more satisfactory terms than as a mixed expression of vulgar cunning and conceit. This gentleman wore a rather broad-brimmed hat for the greater wisdom of his appearance; and had his arms folded for the greater impressiveness of his attitude. He was somewhat shabbily dressed in a blue surtout reaching nearly to his ankles, short loose trousers of the same colour, and a faded buff waistcoat, through which a discoloured shirt-frill struggled to force itself into notice, as asserting an equality of civil rights with the other portions of his dress, and maintaining a declaration of Independence on its own account. His feet, which were of unusually large proportions, were leisurely crossed before him as he half leaned against, half sat upon, the steamboat's bulwark; and his thick cane, shod with a mighty ferule at one end and armed with a great metal knob at the other, depended from a line-and-tassel on his wrist. Thus attired, and thus composed into an aspect of great profundity, the gentleman twitched up the right-hand corner of his mouth and his right eye simultaneously, and said, once more:

'It is in such enlightened means that the bubbling passions of my country find a vent.'

As he looked at Martin, and nobody else was by, Martin inclined his head, and said:

'You allude to—?'

'To the Palladium of rational Liberty at home, sir, and the dread of Foreign oppression abroad,' returned the gentleman, as he pointed with his cane to an uncommonly dirty newsboy with one eye. 'To the Envy of the world, sir, and the leaders of Human Civilization. Let me ask you sir,' he added, bringing the ferule of his stick heavily upon the deck with the air of a man who must not be equivocated with, 'how do you like my Country?'

'I am hardly prepared to answer that question yet,' said Martin 'seeing that I have not been ashore.'

'Well, I should expect you were not prepared, sir,' said the gentleman, 'to behold such signs of National Prosperity as those?'

He pointed to the vessels lying at the wharves; and then gave a vague flourish with his stick, as if he would include the air and water, generally, in this remark.

'Really,' said Martin, 'I don't know. Yes. I think I was.'

The gentleman glanced at him with a knowing look, and said he liked his policy. It was natural, he said, and it pleased him as a philosopher to observe the prejudices of human nature.

'You have brought, I see, sir,' he said, turning round towards Martin, and resting his chin on the top of his stick, 'the usual amount of misery and poverty and ignorance and crime, to be located in the bosom of the great Republic. Well, sir! let 'em come on in shiploads from the old country. When vessels are about to founder, the rats are said to leave 'em. There is considerable of truth, I find, in that remark.'

'The old ship will keep afloat a year or two longer yet, perhaps,' said Martin with a smile, partly occasioned by what the gentleman said, and partly by his manner of saying it, which was odd enough for he emphasised all the small words and syllables in his discourse, and left the others to take care of themselves; as if he thought the larger parts of speech could be trusted alone, but the little ones required to be constantly looked after.

'Hope is said by the poet, sir,' observed the gentleman, 'to be the nurse of young Desire.'

Martin signified that he had heard of the cardinal virtue in question serving occasionally in that domestic capacity.

'She will not rear her infant in the present instance, sir, you'll find,' observed the gentleman.

'Time will show,' said Martin.

The gentleman nodded his head gravely; and said, 'What is your name, sir?'

Martin told him.

'How old are you, sir?'

Martin told him.

'What is your profession, sir?'

Martin told him that also.

'What is your destination, sir?' inquired the gentleman.

'Really,' said Martin laughing, 'I can't satisfy you in that particular, for I don't know it myself.'

'Yes?' said the gentleman.

'No,' said Martin.

The gentleman adjusted his cane under his left arm, and took a more deliberate and complete survey of Martin than he had yet had leisure to make. When he had completed his inspection, he put out his right hand, shook Martin's hand, and said:

'My name is Colonel Diver, sir. I am the Editor of the New York Rowdy Journal.'

Martin received the communication with that degree of respect which an announcement so distinguished appeared to demand.

'The New York Rowdy Journal, sir,' resumed the colonel, 'is, as I expect you know, the organ of our aristocracy in this city.'

'Oh! there IS an aristocracy here, then?' said Martin. 'Of what is it composed?'

'Of intelligence, sir,' replied the colonel; 'of intelligence and virtue. And of their necessary consequence in this republic—dollars, sir.'

Martin was very glad to hear this, feeling well assured that if intelligence and virtue led, as a matter of course, to the acquisition of dollars, he would speedily become a great capitalist. He was about to express the gratification such news afforded him, when he was interrupted by the captain of the ship, who came up at the moment to shake hands with the colonel; and who, seeing a well-dressed stranger on the deck (for Martin had thrown aside his cloak), shook hands with him also. This was an unspeakable relief to Martin, who, in spite of the acknowledged supremacy of Intelligence and virtue in that happy country, would have been deeply mortified to appear before Colonel Diver in the poor character of a steerage passenger.

'Well cap'en!' said the colonel.

'Well colonel,' cried the captain. 'You're looking most uncommon bright, sir. I can hardly realise its being you, and that's a fact.'

'A good passage, cap'en?' inquired the colonel, taking him aside,

'Well now! It was a pretty spanking run, sir,' said, or rather sung, the captain, who was a genuine New Englander; 'considerin' the weather.'

'Yes?' said the colonel.

'Well! It was, sir,' said the captain. 'I've just now sent a boy up to your office with the passenger-list, colonel.'

'You haven't got another boy to spare, p'raps, cap'en?' said the colonel, in a tone almost amounting to severity.

'I guess there air a dozen if you want 'em, colonel,' said the captain.

'One moderate big 'un could convey a dozen champagne, perhaps,' observed the colonel, musing, 'to my office. You said a spanking run, I think?'

'Well, so I did,' was the reply.

'It's very nigh, you know,' observed the colonel. 'I'm glad it was a spanking run, cap'en. Don't mind about quarts if you're short of 'em. The boy can as well bring four-and-twenty pints, and travel twice as once.—A first-rate spanker, cap'en, was it? Yes?'

'A most e—tarnal spanker,' said the skipper.

'I admire at your good fortun, cap'en. You might loan me a corkscrew at the same time, and half-a-dozen glasses if you liked. However bad the elements combine against my country's noble packet-ship, the Screw, sir,' said the colonel, turning to Martin, and drawing a flourish on the surface of the deck with his cane, 'her passage either way is almost certain to eventuate a spanker!'

The captain, who had the Sewer below at that moment, lunching expensively in one cabin, while the amiable Stabber was drinking himself into a state of blind madness in another, took a cordial leave of his friend the colonel, and hurried away to dispatch the champagne; well knowing (as it afterwards appeared) that if he failed to conciliate the editor of the Rowdy Journal, that potentate would denounce him and his ship in large capitals before he was a day older; and would probably assault the memory of his mother also, who had not been dead more than twenty years. The colonel being again left alone with Martin, checked him as he was moving away, and offered in consideration of his being an Englishman, to show him the town and to introduce him, if such were his desire, to a genteel boarding-house. But before they entered on these proceedings (he said), he would beseech the honour of his company at the office of the Rowdy Journal, to partake of a bottle of champagne of his own importation.

All this was so extremely kind and hospitable, that Martin, though it was quite early in the morning, readily acquiesced. So, instructing Mark, who was deeply engaged with his friend and her three children, that when he had done assisting them, and had cleared the baggage, he was to wait for further orders at the Rowdy Journal Office, Martin accompanied his new friend on shore.

They made their way as they best could through the melancholy crowd of emigrants upon the wharf, who, grouped about their beds and boxes, with the bare ground below them and the bare sky above, might have fallen from another planet, for anything they knew of the country; and walked for some short distance along a busy street, bounded on one side by the quays and shipping; and on the other by a long row of staring red-brick storehouses and offices, ornamented with more black boards and white letters, and more white boards and black letters, than Martin had ever seen before, in fifty times the space. Presently they turned up a narrow street, and presently into other narrow streets, until at last they stopped before a house whereon was painted in great characters, 'ROWDY JOURNAL.'

The colonel, who had walked the whole way with one hand in his breast, his head occasionally wagging from side to side, and his hat thrown back upon his ears, like a man who was oppressed to inconvenience by a sense of his own greatness, led the way up a dark and dirty flight of stairs into a room of similar character, all littered and bestrewn with odds and ends of newspapers and other crumpled fragments, both in proof and manuscript. Behind a mangy old writing-table in this apartment sat a figure with a stump of a pen in its mouth and a great pair of scissors in its right hand, clipping and slicing at a file of Rowdy Journals; and it was such a laughable figure that Martin had some difficulty in preserving his gravity, though conscious of the close observation of Colonel Diver.

The individual who sat clipping and slicing as aforesaid at the Rowdy Journals, was a small young gentleman of very juvenile appearance, and unwholesomely pale in the face; partly, perhaps, from intense thought, but partly, there is no doubt, from the excessive use of tobacco, which he was at that moment chewing vigorously. He wore his shirt-collar turned down over a black ribbon; and his lank hair, a fragile crop, was not only smoothed and parted back from his brow, that none of the Poetry of his aspect might be lost, but had, here and there, been grubbed up by the roots; which accounted for his loftiest developments being somewhat pimply. He had that order of nose on which the envy of mankind has bestowed the appellation 'snub,' and it was very much turned up at the end, as with a lofty scorn. Upon the upper lip of this young gentleman were tokens of a sandy down; so very, very smooth and scant, that, though encouraged to the utmost, it looked more like a recent trace of gingerbread than the fair promise of a moustache; and this conjecture, his apparently tender age went far to strengthen. He was intent upon his work. Every time he snapped the great pair of scissors, he made a corresponding motion with his jaws, which gave him a very terrible appearance.

Martin was not long in determining within himself that this must be Colonel Diver's son; the hope of the family, and future mainspring of the Rowdy Journal. Indeed he had begun to say that he presumed this was the colonel's little boy, and that it was very pleasant to see him playing at Editor in all the guilelessness of childhood, when the colonel proudly interposed and said:

'My War Correspondent, sir—Mr Jefferson Brick!'

Martin could not help starting at this unexpected announcement, and the consciousness of the irretrievable mistake he had nearly made.

Mr Brick seemed pleased with the sensation he produced upon the stranger, and shook hands with him, with an air of patronage designed to reassure him, and to let him blow that there was no occasion to be frightened, for he (Brick) wouldn't hurt him.

'You have heard of Jefferson Brick, I see, sir,' quoth the colonel, with a smile. 'England has heard of Jefferson Brick. Europe has heard of Jefferson Brick. Let me see. When did you leave England, sir?'

'Five weeks ago,' said Martin.

'Five weeks ago,' repeated the colonel, thoughtfully; as he took his seat upon the table, and swung his legs. 'Now let me ask you, sir which of Mr Brick's articles had become at that time the most obnoxious to the British Parliament and the Court of Saint James's?'

'Upon my word,' said Martin, 'I—'

'I have reason to know, sir,' interrupted the colonel, 'that the aristocratic circles of your country quail before the name of Jefferson Brick. I should like to be informed, sir, from your lips, which of his sentiments has struck the deadliest blow—'

'At the hundred heads of the Hydra of Corruption now grovelling in the dust beneath the lance of Reason, and spouting up to the universal arch above us, its sanguinary gore,' said Mr Brick, putting on a little blue cloth cap with a glazed front, and quoting his last article.

'The libation of freedom, Brick'—hinted the colonel.

'—Must sometimes be quaffed in blood, colonel,' cried Brick. And when he said 'blood,' he gave the great pair of scissors a sharp snap, as if THEY said blood too, and were quite of his opinion.

This done, they both looked at Martin, pausing for a reply.

'Upon my life,' said Martin, who had by this time quite recovered his usual coolness, 'I can't give you any satisfactory information about it; for the truth is that I—'

'Stop!' cried the colonel, glancing sternly at his war correspondent and giving his head one shake after every sentence. 'That you never heard of Jefferson Brick, sir. That you never read Jefferson Brick, sir. That you never saw the Rowdy Journal, sir. That you never knew, sir, of its mighty influence upon the cabinets of Europe. Yes?'

'That's what I was about to observe, certainly,' said Martin.

'Keep cool, Jefferson,' said the colonel gravely. 'Don't bust! oh you Europeans! After that, let's have a glass of wine!' So saying, he got down from the table, and produced, from a basket outside the door, a bottle of champagne, and three glasses.

'Mr Jefferson Brick, sir,' said the colonel, filling Martin's glass and his own, and pushing the bottle to that gentleman, 'will give us a sentiment.'

'Well, sir!' cried the war correspondent, 'Since you have concluded to call upon me, I will respond. I will give you, sir, The Rowdy Journal and its brethren; the well of Truth, whose waters are black from being composed of printers' ink, but are quite clear enough for my country to behold the shadow of her Destiny reflected in.'

'Hear, hear!' cried the colonel, with great complacency. 'There are flowery components, sir, in the language of my friend?'

'Very much so, indeed,' said Martin.

'There is to-day's Rowdy, sir,' observed the colonel, handing him a paper. 'You'll find Jefferson Brick at his usual post in the van of human civilization and moral purity.'

The colonel was by this time seated on the table again. Mr Brick also took up a position on that same piece of furniture; and they fell to drinking pretty hard. They often looked at Martin as he read the paper, and then at each other. When he laid it down, which was not until they had finished a second bottle, the colonel asked him what he thought of it.

'Why, it's horribly personal,' said Martin.

The colonel seemed much flattered by this remark; and said he hoped it was.

'We are independent here, sir,' said Mr Jefferson Brick. 'We do as we like.'

'If I may judge from this specimen,' returned Martin, 'there must be a few thousands here, rather the reverse of independent, who do as they don't like.'

'Well! They yield to the popular mind of the Popular Instructor, sir,' said the colonel. 'They rile up, sometimes; but in general we have a hold upon our citizens, both in public and in private life, which is as much one of the ennobling institutions of our happy country as—'

'As nigger slavery itself,' suggested Mr Brick.

'En—tirely so,' remarked the colonel.

'Pray,' said Martin, after some hesitation, 'may I venture to ask, with reference to a case I observe in this paper of yours, whether the Popular Instructor often deals in—I am at a loss to express it without giving you offence—in forgery? In forged letters, for instance,' he pursued, for the colonel was perfectly calm and quite at his ease, 'solemnly purporting to have been written at recent periods by living men?'

'Well, sir!' replied the colonel. 'It does, now and then.'

'And the popular instructed—what do they do?' asked Martin.

'Buy 'em:' said the colonel.

Mr Jefferson Brick expectorated and laughed; the former copiously, the latter approvingly.

'Buy 'em by hundreds of thousands,' resumed the colonel. 'We are a smart people here, and can appreciate smartness.'

'Is smartness American for forgery?' asked Martin.

'Well!' said the colonel, 'I expect it's American for a good many things that you call by other names. But you can't help yourself in Europe. We can.'

'And do, sometimes,' thought Martin. 'You help yourselves with very little ceremony, too!'

'At all events, whatever name we choose to employ,' said the colonel, stooping down to roll the third empty bottle into a corner after the other two, 'I suppose the art of forgery was not invented here sir?'

'I suppose not,' replied Martin.

'Nor any other kind of smartness I reckon?'

'Invented! No, I presume not.'

'Well!' said the colonel; 'then we got it all from the old country, and the old country's to blame for it, and not the new 'un. There's an end of THAT. Now, if Mr Jefferson Brick and you will be so good as to clear, I'll come out last, and lock the door.'

Rightly interpreting this as the signal for their departure, Martin walked downstairs after the war correspondent, who preceded him with great majesty. The colonel following, they left the Rowdy Journal Office and walked forth into the streets; Martin feeling doubtful whether he ought to kick the colonel for having presumed to speak to him, or whether it came within the bounds of possibility that he and his establishment could be among the boasted usages of that regenerated land.

It was clear that Colonel Diver, in the security of his strong position, and in his perfect understanding of the public sentiment, cared very little what Martin or anybody else thought about him. His high-spiced wares were made to sell, and they sold; and his thousands of readers could as rationally charge their delight in filth upon him, as a glutton can shift upon his cook the responsibility of his beastly excess. Nothing would have delighted the colonel more than to be told that no such man as he could walk in high success the streets of any other country in the world; for that would only have been a logical assurance to him of the correct adaptation of his labours to the prevailing taste, and of his being strictly and peculiarly a national feature of America.

They walked a mile or more along a handsome street which the colonel said was called Broadway, and which Mr Jefferson Brick said 'whipped the universe.' Turning, at length, into one of the numerous streets which branched from this main thoroughfare, they stopped before a rather mean-looking house with jalousie blinds to every window; a flight of steps before the green street-door; a shining white ornament on the rails on either side like a petrified pineapple, polished; a little oblong plate of the same material over the knocker whereon the name of 'Pawkins' was engraved; and four accidental pigs looking down the area.

The colonel knocked at this house with the air of a man who lived there; and an Irish girl popped her head out of one of the top windows to see who it was. Pending her journey downstairs, the pigs were joined by two or three friends from the next street, in company with whom they lay down sociably in the gutter.

'Is the major indoors?' inquired the colonel, as he entered.

'Is it the master, sir?' returned the girl, with a hesitation which seemed to imply that they were rather flush of majors in that establishment.

'The master!' said Colonel Diver, stopping short and looking round at his war correspondent.

'Oh! The depressing institutions of that British empire, colonel!' said Jefferson Brick. 'Master!'

'What's the matter with the word?' asked Martin.

'I should hope it was never heard in our country, sir; that's all,' said Jefferson Brick; 'except when it is used by some degraded Help, as new to the blessings of our form of government, as this Help is. There are no masters here.'

'All "owners," are they?' said Martin.

Mr Jefferson Brick followed in the Rowdy Journal's footsteps without returning any answer. Martin took the same course, thinking as he went, that perhaps the free and independent citizens, who in their moral elevation, owned the colonel for their master, might render better homage to the goddess, Liberty, in nightly dreams upon the oven of a Russian Serf.

The colonel led the way into a room at the back of the house upon the ground-floor, light, and of fair dimensions, but exquisitely uncomfortable; having nothing in it but the four cold white walls and ceiling, a mean carpet, a dreary waste of dining-table reaching from end to end, and a bewildering collection of cane-bottomed chairs. In the further region of this banqueting-hall was a stove, garnished on either side with a great brass spittoon, and shaped in itself like three little iron barrels set up on end in a fender, and joined together on the principle of the Siamese Twins. Before it, swinging himself in a rocking-chair, lounged a large gentleman with his hat on, who amused himself by spitting alternately into the spittoon on the right hand of the stove, and the spittoon on the left, and then working his way back again in the same order. A negro lad in a soiled white jacket was busily engaged in placing on the table two long rows of knives and forks, relieved at intervals by jugs of water; and as he travelled down one side of this festive board, he straightened with his dirty hands the dirtier cloth, which was all askew, and had not been removed since breakfast. The atmosphere of this room was rendered intensely hot and stifling by the stove; but being further flavoured by a sickly gush of soup from the kitchen, and by such remote suggestions of tobacco as lingered within the brazen receptacles already mentioned, it became, to a stranger's senses, almost insupportable.

The gentleman in the rocking-chair having his back towards them, and being much engaged in his intellectual pastime, was not aware of their approach until the colonel, walking up to the stove, contributed his mite towards the support of the left-hand spittoon, just as the major—for it was the major—bore down upon it. Major Pawkins then reserved his fire, and looking upward, said, with a peculiar air of quiet weariness, like a man who had been up all night—an air which Martin had already observed both in the colonel and Mr Jefferson Brick—

'Well, colonel!'

'Here is a gentleman from England, major,' the colonel replied, 'who has concluded to locate himself here if the amount of compensation suits him.'

'I am glad to see you, sir,' observed the major, shaking hands with Martin, and not moving a muscle of his face. 'You are pretty bright, I hope?'

'Never better,' said Martin.

'You are never likely to be,' returned the major. 'You will see the sun shine HERE.'

'I think I remember to have seen it shine at home sometimes,' said Martin, smiling.

'I think not,' replied the major. He said so with a stoical indifference certainly, but still in a tone of firmness which admitted of no further dispute on that point. When he had thus settled the question, he put his hat a little on one side for the greater convenience of scratching his head, and saluted Mr Jefferson Brick with a lazy nod.

Major Pawkins (a gentleman of Pennsylvanian origin) was distinguished by a very large skull, and a great mass of yellow forehead; in deference to which commodities it was currently held in bar-rooms and other such places of resort that the major was a man of huge sagacity. He was further to be known by a heavy eye and a dull slow manner; and for being a man of that kind who—mentally speaking—requires a deal of room to turn himself in. But, in trading on his stock of wisdom, he invariably proceeded on the principle of putting all the goods he had (and more) into his window; and that went a great way with his constituency of admirers. It went a great way, perhaps, with Mr Jefferson Brick, who took occasion to whisper in Martin's ear:

'One of the most remarkable men in our country, sir!'

It must not be supposed, however, that the perpetual exhibition in the market-place of all his stock-in-trade for sale or hire, was the major's sole claim to a very large share of sympathy and support. He was a great politician; and the one article of his creed, in reference to all public obligations involving the good faith and integrity of his country, was, 'run a moist pen slick through everything, and start fresh.' This made him a patriot. In commercial affairs he was a bold speculator. In plainer words he had a most distinguished genius for swindling, and could start a bank, or negotiate a loan, or form a land-jobbing company (entailing ruin, pestilence, and death, on hundreds of families), with any gifted creature in the Union. This made him an admirable man of business. He could hang about a bar-room, discussing the affairs of the nation, for twelve hours together; and in that time could hold forth with more intolerable dulness, chew more tobacco, smoke more tobacco, drink more rum-toddy, mint-julep, gin-sling, and cocktail, than any private gentleman of his acquaintance. This made him an orator and a man of the people. In a word, the major was a rising character, and a popular character, and was in a fair way to be sent by the popular party to the State House of New York, if not in the end to Washington itself. But as a man's private prosperity does not always keep pace with his patriotic devotion to public affairs; and as fraudulent transactions have their downs as well as ups, the major was occasionally under a cloud. Hence, just now Mrs Pawkins kept a boarding-house, and Major Pawkins rather 'loafed' his time away than otherwise.

'You have come to visit our country, sir, at a season of great commercial depression,' said the major.

'At an alarming crisis,' said the colonel.

'At a period of unprecedented stagnation,' said Mr Jefferson Brick.

'I am sorry to hear that,' returned Martin. 'It's not likely to last, I hope?'

Martin knew nothing about America, or he would have known perfectly well that if its individual citizens, to a man, are to be believed, it always IS depressed, and always IS stagnated, and always IS at an alarming crisis, and never was otherwise; though as a body they are ready to make oath upon the Evangelists at any hour of the day or night, that it is the most thriving and prosperous of all countries on the habitable globe.

'It's not likely to last, I hope?' said Martin.

'Well!' returned the major, 'I expect we shall get along somehow, and come right in the end.'

'We are an elastic country,' said the Rowdy Journal.

'We are a young lion,' said Mr Jefferson Brick.

'We have revivifying and vigorous principles within ourselves,' observed the major. 'Shall we drink a bitter afore dinner, colonel?'

The colonel assenting to this proposal with great alacrity, Major Pawkins proposed an adjournment to a neighbouring bar-room, which, as he observed, was 'only in the next block.' He then referred Martin to Mrs Pawkins for all particulars connected with the rate of board and lodging, and informed him that he would have the pleasure of seeing that lady at dinner, which would soon be ready, as the dinner hour was two o'clock, and it only wanted a quarter now. This reminded him that if the bitter were to be taken at all, there was no time to lose; so he walked off without more ado, and left them to follow if they thought proper.

When the major rose from his rocking-chair before the stove, and so disturbed the hot air and balmy whiff of soup which fanned their brows, the odour of stale tobacco became so decidedly prevalent as to leave no doubt of its proceeding mainly from that gentleman's attire. Indeed, as Martin walked behind him to the bar-room, he could not help thinking that the great square major, in his listlessness and langour, looked very much like a stale weed himself; such as might be hoed out of the public garden, with great advantage to the decent growth of that preserve, and tossed on some congenial dunghill.

They encountered more weeds in the bar-room, some of whom (being thirsty souls as well as dirty) were pretty stale in one sense, and pretty fresh in another. Among them was a gentleman who, as Martin gathered from the conversation that took place over the bitter, started that afternoon for the Far West on a six months' business tour, and who, as his outfit and equipment for this journey, had just such another shiny hat and just such another little pale valise as had composed the luggage of the gentleman who came from England in the Screw.

They were walking back very leisurely; Martin arm-in-arm with Mr Jefferson Brick, and the major and the colonel side-by-side before them; when, as they came within a house or two of the major's residence, they heard a bell ringing violently. The instant this sound struck upon their ears, the colonel and the major darted off, dashed up the steps and in at the street-door (which stood ajar) like lunatics; while Mr Jefferson Brick, detaching his arm from Martin's, made a precipitate dive in the same direction, and vanished also.

'Good Heaven!' thought Martin. 'The premises are on fire! It was an alarm bell!'

But there was no smoke to be seen, nor any flame, nor was there any smell of fire. As Martin faltered on the pavement, three more gentlemen, with horror and agitation depicted in their faces, came plunging wildly round the street corner; jostled each other on the steps; struggled for an instant; and rushed into the house, a confused heap of arms and legs. Unable to bear it any longer, Martin followed. Even in his rapid progress he was run down, thrust aside, and passed, by two more gentlemen, stark mad, as it appeared, with fierce excitement.

'Where is it?' cried Martin, breathlessly, to a negro whom he encountered in the passage.

'In a eatin room, sa. Kernell, sa, him kep a seat 'side himself, sa.'

'A seat!' cried Martin.

'For a dinnar, sa.'

Martin started at him for a moment, and burst into a hearty laugh; to which the negro, out of his natural good humour and desire to please, so heartily responded, that his teeth shone like a gleam of light. 'You're the pleasantest fellow I have seen yet,' said Martin clapping him on the back, 'and give me a better appetite than bitters.'

With this sentiment he walked into the dining-room and slipped into a chair next the colonel, which that gentleman (by this time nearly through his dinner) had turned down in reserve for him, with its back against the table.

It was a numerous company—eighteen or twenty perhaps. Of these some five or six were ladies, who sat wedged together in a little phalanx by themselves. All the knives and forks were working away at a rate that was quite alarming; very few words were spoken; and everybody seemed to eat his utmost in self-defence, as if a famine were expected to set in before breakfast time to-morrow morning, and it had become high time to assert the first law of nature. The poultry, which may perhaps be considered to have formed the staple of the entertainment—for there was a turkey at the top, a pair of ducks at the bottom, and two fowls in the middle—disappeared as rapidly as if every bird had had the use of its wings, and had flown in desperation down a human throat. The oysters, stewed and pickled, leaped from their capacious reservoirs, and slid by scores into the mouths of the assembly. The sharpest pickles vanished, whole cucumbers at once, like sugar-plums, and no man winked his eye. Great heaps of indigestible matter melted away as ice before the sun. It was a solemn and an awful thing to see. Dyspeptic individuals bolted their food in wedges; feeding, not themselves, but broods of nightmares, who were continually standing at livery within them. Spare men, with lank and rigid cheeks, came out unsatisfied from the destruction of heavy dishes, and glared with watchful eyes upon the pastry. What Mrs Pawkins felt each day at dinner-time is hidden from all human knowledge. But she had one comfort. It was very soon over.

When the colonel had finished his dinner, which event took place while Martin, who had sent his plate for some turkey, was waiting to begin, he asked him what he thought of the boarders, who were from all parts of the Union, and whether he would like to know any particulars concerning them.

'Pray,' said Martin, 'who is that sickly little girl opposite, with the tight round eyes? I don't see anybody here, who looks like her mother, or who seems to have charge of her.'

'Do you mean the matron in blue, sir?' asked the colonel, with emphasis. 'That is Mrs Jefferson Brick, sir.'

'No, no,' said Martin, 'I mean the little girl, like a doll; directly opposite.'

'Well, sir!' cried the colonel. 'THAT is Mrs Jefferson Brick.'

Martin glanced at the colonel's face, but he was quite serious.

'Bless my soul! I suppose there will be a young Brick then, one of these days?' said Martin.

'There are two young Bricks already, sir,' returned the colonel.

The matron looked so uncommonly like a child herself, that Martin could not help saying as much. 'Yes, sir,' returned the colonel, 'but some institutions develop human natur; others re—tard it.'

'Jefferson Brick,' he observed after a short silence, in commendation of his correspondent, 'is one of the most remarkable men in our country, sir!'

This had passed almost in a whisper, for the distinguished gentleman alluded to sat on Martin's other hand.

'Pray, Mr Brick,' said Martin, turning to him, and asking a question more for conversation's sake than from any feeling of interest in its subject, 'who is that;' he was going to say 'young' but thought it prudent to eschew the word—'that very short gentleman yonder, with the red nose?'

'That is Pro—fessor Mullit, sir,' replied Jefferson.

'May I ask what he is professor of?' asked Martin.

'Of education, sir,' said Jefferson Brick.

'A sort of schoolmaster, possibly?' Martin ventured to observe.

'He is a man of fine moral elements, sir, and not commonly endowed,' said the war correspondent. 'He felt it necessary, at the last election for President, to repudiate and denounce his father, who voted on the wrong interest. He has since written some powerful pamphlets, under the signature of "Suturb," or Brutus reversed. He is one of the most remarkable men in our country, sir.'

'There seem to be plenty of 'em,' thought Martin, 'at any rate.'

Pursuing his inquiries Martin found that there were no fewer than four majors present, two colonels, one general, and a captain, so that he could not help thinking how strongly officered the American militia must be; and wondering very much whether the officers commanded each other; or if they did not, where on earth the privates came from. There seemed to be no man there without a title; for those who had not attained to military honours were either doctors, professors, or reverends. Three very hard and disagreeable gentlemen were on missions from neighbouring States; one on monetary affairs, one on political, one on sectarian. Among the ladies, there were Mrs Pawkins, who was very straight, bony, and silent; and a wiry-faced old damsel, who held strong sentiments touching the rights of women, and had diffused the same in lectures; but the rest were strangely devoid of individual traits of character, insomuch that any one of them might have changed minds with the other, and nobody would have found it out. These, by the way, were the only members of the party who did not appear to be among the most remarkable people in the country.

Several of the gentlemen got up, one by one, and walked off as they swallowed their last morsel; pausing generally by the stove for a minute or so to refresh themselves at the brass spittoons. A few sedentary characters, however, remained at table full a quarter of an hour, and did not rise until the ladies rose, when all stood up.

'Where are they going?' asked Martin, in the ear of Mr Jefferson Brick.

'To their bedrooms, sir.'

'Is there no dessert, or other interval of conversation?' asked Martin, who was disposed to enjoy himself after his long voyage.

'We are a busy people here, sir, and have no time for that,' was the reply.

So the ladies passed out in single file; Mr Jefferson Brick and such other married gentlemen as were left, acknowledging the departure of their other halves by a nod; and there was an end of THEM. Martin thought this an uncomfortable custom, but he kept his opinion to himself for the present, being anxious to hear, and inform himself by, the conversation of the busy gentlemen, who now lounged about the stove as if a great weight had been taken off their minds by the withdrawal of the other sex; and who made a plentiful use of the spittoons and their toothpicks.

It was rather barren of interest, to say the truth; and the greater part of it may be summed up in one word. Dollars. All their cares, hopes, joys, affections, virtues, and associations, seemed to be melted down into dollars. Whatever the chance contributions that fell into the slow cauldron of their talk, they made the gruel thick and slab with dollars. Men were weighed by their dollars, measures gauged by their dollars; life was auctioneered, appraised, put up, and knocked down for its dollars. The next respectable thing to dollars was any venture having their attainment for its end. The more of that worthless ballast, honour and fair-dealing, which any man cast overboard from the ship of his Good Name and Good Intent, the more ample stowage-room he had for dollars. Make commerce one huge lie and mighty theft. Deface the banner of the nation for an idle rag; pollute it star by star; and cut out stripe by stripe as from the arm of a degraded soldier. Do anything for dollars! What is a flag to THEM!

One who rides at all hazards of limb and life in the chase of a fox, will prefer to ride recklessly at most times. So it was with these gentlemen. He was the greatest patriot, in their eyes, who brawled the loudest, and who cared the least for decency. He was their champion who, in the brutal fury of his own pursuit, could cast no stigma upon them for the hot knavery of theirs. Thus, Martin learned in the five minutes' straggling talk about the stove, that to carry pistols into legislative assemblies, and swords in sticks, and other such peaceful toys; to seize opponents by the throat, as dogs or rats might do; to bluster, bully, and overbear by personal assailment; were glowing deeds. Not thrusts and stabs at Freedom, striking far deeper into her House of Life than any sultan's scimitar could reach; but rare incense on her altars, having a grateful scent in patriotic nostrils, and curling upward to the seventh heaven of Fame.

Once or twice, when there was a pause, Martin asked such questions as naturally occurred to him, being a stranger, about the national poets, the theatre, literature, and the arts. But the information which these gentlemen were in a condition to give him on such topics, did not extend beyond the effusions of such master-spirits of the time as Colonel Diver, Mr Jefferson Brick, and others; renowned, as it appeared, for excellence in the achievement of a peculiar style of broadside essay called 'a screamer.'

'We are a busy people, sir,' said one of the captains, who was from the West, 'and have no time for reading mere notions. We don't mind 'em if they come to us in newspapers along with almighty strong stuff of another sort, but darn your books.'

Here the general, who appeared to grow quite faint at the bare thought of reading anything which was neither mercantile nor political, and was not in a newspaper, inquired 'if any gentleman would drink some?' Most of the company, considering this a very choice and seasonable idea, lounged out, one by one, to the bar-room in the next block. Thence they probably went to their stores and counting-houses; thence to the bar-room again, to talk once more of dollars, and enlarge their minds with the perusal and discussion of screamers; and thence each man to snore in the bosom of his own family.

'Which would seem,' said Martin, pursuing the current of his own thoughts, 'to be the principal recreation they enjoy in common.' With that, he fell a-musing again on dollars, demagogues, and bar-rooms; debating within himself whether busy people of this class were really as busy as they claimed to be, or only had an inaptitude for social and domestic pleasure.

It was a difficult question to solve; and the mere fact of its being strongly presented to his mind by all that he had seen and heard, was not encouraging. He sat down at the deserted board, and becoming more and more despondent, as he thought of all the uncertainties and difficulties of his precarious situation, sighed heavily.

Now, there had been at the dinner-table a middle-aged man with a dark eye and a sunburnt face, who had attracted Martin's attention by having something very engaging and honest in the expression of his features; but of whom he could learn nothing from either of his neighbours, who seemed to consider him quite beneath their notice. He had taken no part in the conversation round the stove, nor had he gone forth with the rest; and now, when he heard Martin sigh for the third or fourth time, he interposed with some casual remark, as if he desired, without obtruding himself upon a stranger's notice, to engage him in cheerful conversation if he could. His motive was so obvious, and yet so delicately expressed, that Martin felt really grateful to him, and showed him so in the manner of his reply.

'I will not ask you,' said this gentleman with a smile, as he rose and moved towards him, 'how you like my country, for I can quite anticipate your feeling on that point. But, as I am an American, and consequently bound to begin with a question, I'll ask you how you like the colonel?'

'You are so very frank,' returned Martin, 'that I have no hesitation in saying I don't like him at all. Though I must add that I am beholden to him for his civility in bringing me here—and arranging for my stay, on pretty reasonable terms, by the way,' he added, remembering that the colonel had whispered him to that effect, before going out.

'Not much beholden,' said the stranger drily. 'The colonel occasionally boards packet-ships, I have heard, to glean the latest information for his journal; and he occasionally brings strangers to board here, I believe, with a view to the little percentage which attaches to those good offices; and which the hostess deducts from his weekly bill. I don't offend you, I hope?' he added, seeing that Martin reddened.

'My dear sir,' returned Martin, as they shook hands, 'how is that possible! to tell you the truth, I—am—'

'Yes?' said the gentleman, sitting down beside him.

'I am rather at a loss, since I must speak plainly,' said Martin, getting the better of his hesitation, 'to know how this colonel escapes being beaten.'

'Well! He has been beaten once or twice,' remarked the gentleman quietly. 'He is one of a class of men, in whom our own Franklin, so long ago as ten years before the close of the last century, foresaw our danger and disgrace. Perhaps you don't know that Franklin, in very severe terms, published his opinion that those who were slandered by such fellows as this colonel, having no sufficient remedy in the administration of this country's laws or in the decent and right-minded feeling of its people, were justified in retorting on such public nuisances by means of a stout cudgel?'

'I was not aware of that,' said Martin, 'but I am very glad to know it, and I think it worthy of his memory; especially'—here he hesitated again.

'Go on,' said the other, smiling as if he knew what stuck in Martin's throat.

'Especially,' pursued Martin, 'as I can already understand that it may have required great courage, even in his time, to write freely on any question which was not a party one in this very free country.'

'Some courage, no doubt,' returned his new friend. 'Do you think it would require any to do so, now?'

'Indeed I think it would; and not a little,' said Martin.

'You are right. So very right, that I believe no satirist could breathe this air. If another Juvenal or Swift could rise up among us to-morrow, he would be hunted down. If you have any knowledge of our literature, and can give me the name of any man, American born and bred, who has anatomized our follies as a people, and not as this or that party; and who has escaped the foulest and most brutal slander, the most inveterate hatred and intolerant pursuit; it will be a strange name in my ears, believe me. In some cases I could name to you, where a native writer has ventured on the most harmless and good-humoured illustrations of our vices or defects, it has been found necessary to announce, that in a second edition the passage has been expunged, or altered, or explained away, or patched into praise.'

'And how has this been brought about?' asked Martin, in dismay.

'Think of what you have seen and heard to-day, beginning with the colonel,' said his friend, 'and ask yourself. How THEY came about, is another question. Heaven forbid that they should be samples of the intelligence and virtue of America, but they come uppermost, and in great numbers, and too often represent it. Will you walk?'

There was a cordial candour in his manner, and an engaging confidence that it would not be abused; a manly bearing on his own part, and a simple reliance on the manly faith of a stranger; which Martin had never seen before. He linked his arm readily in that of the American gentleman, and they walked out together.

It was perhaps to men like this, his new companion, that a traveller of honoured name, who trod those shores now nearly forty years ago, and woke upon that soil, as many have done since, to blots and stains upon its high pretensions, which in the brightness of his distant dreams were lost to view, appealed in these words—

'Oh, but for such, Columbia's days were done;
Rank without ripeness, quickened without sun,
Crude at the surface, rotten at the core,
Her fruits would fall before her spring were o'er!'

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

MARTIN ENLARGES HIS CIRCLE OF AQUAINTANCE; INCREASES HIS STOCK OF WISDOM; AND HAS AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY OF COMPARING HIS OWN EXPERIENCES WITH THOSE OF LUMMY NED OF THE LIGHT SALISBURY, AS RELATED BY HIS FRIEND MR WILLIAM SIMMONS

It was characteristic of Martin, that all this while he had either forgotten Mark Tapley as completely as if there had been no such person in existence, or, if for a moment the figure of that gentleman rose before his mental vision, had dismissed it as something by no means of a pressing nature, which might be attended to by-and-bye, and could wait his perfect leisure. But, being now in the streets again, it occurred to him as just coming within the bare limits of possibility that Mr Tapley might, in course of time, grow tired of waiting on the threshold of the Rowdy Journal Office, so he intimated to his new friend, that if they could conveniently walk in that direction, he would be glad to get this piece of business off his mind.

'And speaking of business,' said Martin, 'may I ask, in order that I may not be behind-hand with questions either, whether your occupation holds you to this city, or like myself, you are a visitor here?'

'A visitor,' replied his friend. 'I was "raised" in the State of Massachusetts, and reside there still. My home is in a quiet country town. I am not often in these busy places; and my inclination to visit them does not increase with our better acquaintance, I assure you.'

'You have been abroad?' asked Martin.

'Oh yes.'

'And, like most people who travel, have become more than ever attached to your home and native country,' said Martin, eyeing him curiously.

'To my home—yes,' rejoined his friend. 'To my native country AS my home—yes, also.'

'You imply some reservation,' said Martin.

'Well,' returned his new friend, 'if you ask me whether I came back here with a greater relish for my country's faults; with a greater fondness for those who claim (at the rate of so many dollars a day) to be her friends;

with a cooler indifference to the growth of principles among us in respect of public matters and of private dealings between man and man, the advocacy of which, beyond the foul atmosphere of a criminal trial, would disgrace your own old Bailey lawyers; why, then I answer plainly, No.'

'Oh!' said Martin; in so exactly the same key as his friend's No, that it sounded like an echo.

'If you ask me,' his companion pursued, 'whether I came back here better satisfied with a state of things which broadly divides society into two classes—whereof one, the great mass, asserts a spurious independence, most miserably dependent for its mean existence on the disregard of humanizing conventionalities of manner and social custom, so that the coarser a man is, the more distinctly it shall appeal to his taste; while the other, disgusted with the low standard thus set up and made adaptable to everything, takes refuge among the graces and refinements it can bring to bear on private life, and leaves the public weal to such fortune as may betide it in the press and uproar of a general scramble—then again I answer, No.'

And again Martin said 'Oh!' in the same odd way as before, being anxious and disconcerted; not so much, to say the truth, on public grounds, as with reference to the fading prospects of domestic architecture.

'In a word,' resumed the other, 'I do not find and cannot believe and therefore will not allow, that we are a model of wisdom, and an example to the world, and the perfection of human reason, and a great deal more to the same purpose, which you may hear any hour in the day; simply because we began our political life with two inestimable advantages.'

'What were they?' asked Martin.

'One, that our history commenced at so late a period as to escape the ages of bloodshed and cruelty through which other nations have passed; and so had all the light of their probation, and none of its darkness. The other, that we have a vast territory, and not—as yet—too many people on it. These facts considered, we have done little enough, I think.'

'Education?' suggested Martin, faintly.

'Pretty well on that head,' said the other, shrugging his shoulders, 'still no mighty matter to boast of; for old countries, and despotic countries too, have done as much, if not more, and made less noise about it. We shine out brightly in comparison with England, certainly; but hers is a very extreme case. You complimented me on my frankness, you know,' he added, laughing.

'Oh! I am not at all astonished at your speaking thus openly when my country is in question,' returned Martin. 'It is your plain-speaking in reference to your own that surprises me.'

'You will not find it a scarce quality here, I assure you, saving among the Colonel Divers, and Jefferson Bricks, and Major Pawkinses; though the best of us are something like the man in Goldsmith's comedy, who wouldn't suffer anybody but himself to abuse his master. Come!' he added. 'Let us talk of something else. You have come here on some design of improving your fortune, I dare say; and I should grieve to put you out of heart. I am some years older than you, besides; and may, on a few trivial points, advise you, perhaps.'

There was not the least curiosity or impertinence in the manner of this offer, which was open-hearted, unaffected, and good-natured. As it was next to impossible that he should not have his confidence awakened by a deportment so prepossessing and kind, Martin plainly stated what had brought him into those parts, and even made the very difficult avowal that he was poor. He did not say how poor, it must be admitted, rather throwing off the declaration with an air which might have implied that he had money enough for six months, instead of as many weeks; but poor he said he was, and grateful he said he would be, for any counsel that his friend would give him.

It would not have been very difficult for any one to see; but it was particularly easy for Martin, whose perceptions were sharpened by his circumstances, to discern; that the stranger's face grew infinitely longer as the domestic-architecture project was developed. Nor, although he made a great effort to be as encouraging as possible, could he prevent his head from shaking once involuntarily, as if it said in the vulgar tongue, upon its own account, 'No go!' But he spoke in a cheerful tone, and said, that although there was no such opening as Martin wished, in that city, he would make it matter of immediate consideration and inquiry where one was most likely to exist; and then he made Martin acquainted with his name, which was Bevan; and with his profession, which was physic, though he seldom or never practiced; and with other circumstances connected with himself and family, which fully occupied the time, until they reached the Rowdy Journal Office.

Mr Tapley appeared to be taking his ease on the landing of the first floor; for sounds as of some gentleman established in that region whistling 'Rule Britannia' with all his might and main, greeted their ears before they reached the house. On ascending to the spot from whence this music proceeded, they found him recumbent in the midst of a fortification of luggage, apparently performing his national anthem for the gratification of a grey-haired black man, who sat on one of the outworks (a portmanteau), staring intently at Mark, while Mark, with his head reclining on his hand, returned the compliment in a thoughtful manner, and whistled all the time. He seemed to have recently dined, for his knife, a casebottle, and certain broken meats in a handkerchief, lay near at hand. He had employed a portion of his leisure in the decoration of the Rowdy Journal door, whereon his own initials now appeared in letters nearly half a foot long, together with the day of the month in smaller type; the whole surrounded by an ornamental border, and looking very fresh and bold.

'I was a'most afraid you was lost, sir!' cried Mark, rising, and stopping the tune at that point where Britons generally are supposed to declare (when it is whistled) that they never, never, never—

'Nothing gone wrong, I hope, sir?'

'No, Mark. Where's your friend?'

'The mad woman, sir?' said Mr Tapley. 'Oh! she's all right, sir.'

'Did she find her husband?'

'Yes, sir. Leastways she's found his remains,' said Mark, correcting himself.

'The man's not dead, I hope?'

'Not altogether dead, sir,' returned Mark; 'but he's had more fevers and agues than is quite reconcilable with being alive. When she didn't see him a-waiting for her, I thought she'd have died herself, I did!'

'Was he not here, then?'

'HE wasn't here. There was a feeble old shadow come a-creeping down at last, as much like his substance when she know'd him, as your shadow when it's drawn out to its very finest and longest by the sun, is like you. But it was his remains, there's no doubt about that. She took on with joy, poor thing, as much as if it had been all of him!'

'Had he bought land?' asked Mr Bevan.

'Ah! He'd bought land,' said Mark, shaking his head, 'and paid for it too. Every sort of nateral advantage was connected with it, the agents said; and there certainly was ONE, quite unlimited. No end to the water!'

'It's a thing he couldn't have done without, I suppose,' observed Martin, peevishly.

'Certainly not, sir. There it was, any way; always turned on, and no water-rate. Independent of three or four slimy old rivers close by, it varied on the farm from four to six foot deep in the dry season. He couldn't say how deep it was in the rainy time, for he never had anything long enough to sound it with.'

'Is this true?' asked Martin of his companion.

'Extremely probable,' he answered. 'Some Mississippi or Missouri lot, I dare say.'

'However,' pursued Mark, 'he came from I-don't-know-where-and-all, down to New York here, to meet his wife and children; and they started off again in a steamboat this blessed afternoon, as happy to be along with each other as if they were going to Heaven. I should think they was, pretty straight, if I may judge from the poor man's looks.'

'And may I ask,' said Martin, glancing, but not with any displeasure, from Mark to the negro, 'who this gentleman is? Another friend of yours?'

'Why sir,' returned Mark, taking him aside, and speaking confidentially in his ear, 'he's a man of colour, sir!'

'Do you take me for a blind man,' asked Martin, somewhat impatiently, 'that you think it necessary to tell me that, when his face is the blackest that ever was seen?'

'No, no; when I say a man of colour,' returned Mark, 'I mean that he's been one of them as there's picters of in the shops. A man and a brother, you know, sir,' said Mr Tapley, favouring his master with a significant indication of the figure so often represented in tracts and cheap prints.

'A slave!' cried Martin, in a whisper.

'Ah!' said Mark in the same tone. 'Nothing else. A slave. Why, when that there man was young—don't look at him while I'm a-telling it—he was shot in the leg; gashed in the arm; scored in his live limbs, like crimped fish; beaten out of shape; had his neck galled with an iron collar, and wore iron rings upon his wrists and ankles. The marks are on him to this day. When I was having my dinner just now, he stripped off his coat, and took away my appetite.'

'Is THIS true?' asked Martin of his friend, who stood beside them.

'I have no reason to doubt it,' he answered, shaking his head 'It very often is.'

'Bless you,' said Mark, 'I know it is, from hearing his whole story. That master died; so did his second master from having his head cut open with a hatchet by another slave, who, when he'd done it, went and drowned himself; then he got a better one; in years and years he saved up a little money, and bought his freedom, which he got pretty cheap at last, on account of his strength being nearly gone, and he being ill. Then he come here. And now he's a-saving up to treat himself, afore he dies, to one small purchase—it's nothing to speak of. Only his own daughter; that's all!' cried Mr Tapley, becoming excited. 'Liberty for ever! Hurrah! Hail, Columbia!'

'Hush!' cried Martin, clapping his hand upon his mouth; 'and don't be an idiot. What is he doing here?'

'Waiting to take our luggage off upon a truck,' said Mark. 'He'd have come for it by-and-bye, but I engaged him for a very reasonable charge (out of my own pocket) to sit along with me and make me jolly; and I am jolly; and if I was rich enough to contract with him to wait upon me once a day, to be looked at, I'd never be anything else.'

The fact may cause a solemn impeachment of Mark's veracity, but it must be admitted nevertheless, that there was that in his face and manner at the moment, which militated strongly against this emphatic declaration of his state of mind.

'Lord love you, sir,' he added, 'they're so fond of Liberty in this part of the globe, that they buy her and sell her and carry her to market with 'em. They've such a passion for Liberty, that they can't help taking liberties with her. That's what it's owing to.'

'Very well,' said Martin, wishing to change the theme. 'Having come to that conclusion, Mark, perhaps you'll attend to me. The place to which the luggage is to go is printed on this card. Mrs Pawkins's Boarding House.'

'Mrs Pawkins's boarding-house,' repeated Mark. 'Now, Cicero.'

'Is that his name?' asked Martin

'That's his name, sir,' rejoined Mark. And the negro grinning assent from under a leathern portmanteau, than which his own face was many shades deeper, hobbled downstairs with his portion of their worldly goods; Mark Tapley having already gone before with his share.

Martin and his friend followed them to the door below, and were about to pursue their walk, when the latter stopped, and asked, with some hesitation, whether that young man was to be trusted?

'Mark! oh certainly! with anything.'

'You don't understand me—I think he had better go with us. He is an honest fellow, and speaks his mind so very plainly.'

'Why, the fact is,' said Martin, smiling, 'that being unaccustomed to a free republic, he is used to do so.'

'I think he had better go with us,' returned the other. 'He may get into some trouble otherwise. This is not a slave State; but I am ashamed to say that a spirit of Tolerance is not so common anywhere in these latitudes as the form. We are not remarkable for behaving very temperately to each other when we differ; but to strangers! no, I really think he had better go with us.'

Martin called to him immediately to be of their party; so Cicero and the truck went one way, and they three went another.

They walked about the city for two or three hours; seeing it from the best points of view, and pausing in the principal streets, and before such public buildings as Mr Bevan pointed out. Night then coming on apace, Martin proposed that they should adjourn to Mrs Pawkins's establishment for coffee; but in this he was overruled by his new acquaintance, who seemed to have set his heart on carrying him, though it were only for an hour, to the house of a friend of his who lived hard by. Feeling (however disinclined he was, being weary) that it would be in bad taste, and not very gracious, to object that he was unintroduced, when this open-hearted gentleman was so ready to be his sponsor, Martin—for once in his life, at all events—sacrificed his own will and pleasure to the wishes of another, and consented with a fair grace. So travelling had done him that much good, already.

Mr Bevan knocked at the door of a very neat house of moderate size, from the parlour windows of which, lights were shining brightly into the now dark street. It was quickly opened by a man with such a thoroughly Irish face, that it seemed as if he ought, as a matter of right and principle, to be in rags, and could have no sort of business to be looking cheerfully at anybody out of a whole suit of clothes.

Commending Mark to the care of this phenomenon—for such he may be said to have been in Martin's eyes—Mr Bevan led the way into the room which had shed its cheerfulness upon the street, to whose occupants he introduced Mr Chuzzlewit as a gentleman from England, whose acquaintance he had recently had the pleasure to make. They gave him welcome in all courtesy and politeness; and in less than five minutes' time he found himself sitting very much at his ease by the fireside, and becoming vastly well acquainted with the whole family.

There were two young ladies—one eighteen; the other twenty—both very slender, but very pretty; their mother, who looked, as Martin thought much older and more faded than she ought to have looked; and their grandmother, a little sharp-eyed, quick old woman, who seemed to have got past that stage, and to have come all right again. Besides these, there were the young ladies' father, and the young ladies' brother; the first engaged in mercantile affairs; the second, a student at college; both, in a certain cordiality of manner, like his own friend, and not unlike him in face. Which was no great wonder, for it soon appeared that he was their near relation. Martin could not help tracing the family pedigree from the two young ladies, because they were foremost in his thoughts; not only from being, as aforesaid, very pretty, but by reason of their wearing miraculously small shoes, and the thinnest possible silk stockings; the which their rocking-chairs developed to a distracting extent.

There is no doubt that it was a monstrous comfortable circumstance to be sitting in a snug, well-furnished room, warmed by a cheerful fire, and full of various pleasant decorations, including four small shoes, and the like amount of silk stockings, and—yes, why not?—the feet and legs therein enshrined. And there is no doubt that Martin was monstrous well-disposed to regard his position in that light, after his recent experience of the Screw, and of Mrs Pawkins's boarding-house. The consequence was that he made himself very agreeable indeed; and by the time the tea and coffee arrived (with sweet preserves, and cunning tea-cakes in its train), was in a highly genial state, and much esteemed by the whole family.

Another delightful circumstance turned up before the first cup of tea was drunk. The whole family had been in England. There was a pleasant thing! But Martin was not quite so glad of this, when he found that they knew all the great dukes, lords, viscounts, marquesses, duchesses, knights, and baronets, quite affectionately, and were beyond everything interested in the least particular concerning them. However, when they asked, after the wearer of this or that coronet, and said, 'Was he quite well?' Martin answered, 'Yes, oh yes. Never better;' and when they said, 'his lordship's mother, the duchess, was she much changed?' Martin said, 'Oh dear no, they would know her anywhere, if they saw her to-morrow;' and so got on pretty well. In like manner when the young ladies questioned him touching the Gold Fish in that Grecian fountain in such and such a nobleman's conservatory, and whether there were as many as there used to be, he gravely reported, after mature consideration, that there must be at least twice as many; and as to the exotics, 'Oh! well! it was of no use talking about THEM; they must be seen to be believed;' which improved state of circumstances reminded the family of the splendour of that brilliant festival (comprehending the whole British Peerage and Court Calendar) to which they were specially invited, and which indeed had been partly given in their honour; and recollections of what Mr Norris the father had said to the marquess, and of what Mrs Norris the mother had said to the marchioness, and of what the marquess and marchioness had both said, when they said that upon their words and honours they wished Mr Norris the father and Mrs Norris the mother, and the Misses Norris the daughters, and Mr Norris Junior, the son, would only take up their permanent residence in England, and give them the pleasure of their everlasting friendship, occupied a very considerable time.

Martin thought it rather stange, and in some sort inconsistent, that during the whole of these narrations, and in the very meridian of their enjoyment thereof, both Mr Norris the father, and Mr Norris Junior, the son (who corresponded, every post, with four members of the English Peerage), enlarged upon the inestimable advantage of having no such arbitrary distinctions in that enlightened land, where there were no noblemen but nature's noblemen, and where all society was based on one broad level of brotherly love and natural equality. Indeed, Mr Norris the father gradually expanding into an oration on this swelling theme, was becoming tedious, when Mr Bevan diverted his thoughts by happening to make some causal inquiry relative to the occupier of the next house; in reply to which, this same Mr Norris the father observed, that 'that person entertained religious opinions of which he couldn't approve; and therefore he hadn't the honour of knowing the gentleman.' Mrs Norris the mother added another reason of her own, the same in effect, but varying in words; to wit, that she believed the people were well enough in their way, but they were not genteel.

Another little trait came out, which impressed itself on Martin forcibly. Mr Bevan told them about Mark and the negro, and then it appeared that all the Norrises were abolitionists. It was a great relief to hear this, and Martin was so much encouraged on finding himself in such company, that he expressed his sympathy with the oppressed and wretched blacks. Now, one of the young ladies—the prettiest and most delicate—was mightily amused at the earnestness with which he spoke; and on his craving leave to ask her why, was quite unable for a time to speak for laughing. As soon however as she could, she told him that the negroes were such a funny people, so excessively ludicrous in their manners and appearance, that it was wholly impossible for those who knew them well, to associate any serious ideas with such a very absurd part of the creation. Mr Norris the father, and Mrs Norris the mother, and Miss Norris the sister, and Mr Norris Junior the brother, and even Mrs Norris Senior the grandmother, were all of this opinion, and laid it down as an absolute matter of fact—as if there were nothing in suffering and slavery, grim enough to cast a solemn air on any human animal; though it were as ridiculous, physically, as the most grotesque of apes, or morally, as the mildest Nimrod among tuft-hunting republicans!

'In short,' said Mr Norris the father, settling the question comfortably, 'there is a natural antipathy between the races.'

'Extending,' said Martin's friend, in a low voice, 'to the cruellest of tortures, and the bargain and sale of unborn generations.'

Mr Norris the son said nothing, but he made a wry face, and dusted his fingers as Hamlet might after getting rid of Yorick's skull; just as though he had that moment touched a negro, and some of the black had come off upon his hands.

In order that their talk might fall again into its former pleasant channel, Martin dropped the subject, with a shrewd suspicion that it would be a dangerous theme to revive under the best of circumstances; and again addressed himself to the young ladies, who were very gorgeously attired in very beautiful colours, and had every article of dress on the same extensive scale as the little shoes and the thin silk stockings. This suggested to him that they were great proficients in the French fashions, which soon turned out to be the case, for though their information appeared to be none of the newest, it was very extensive; and the eldest sister in particular, who was distinguished by a talent for metaphysics, the laws of hydraulic pressure, and the rights of human kind, had a novel way of combining these acquirements and bringing them to bear on any subject from Millinery to the Millennium, both inclusive, which was at once improving and remarkable; so much so, in short, that it was usually observed to reduce foreigners to a state of temporary insanity in five minutes.

Martin felt his reason going; and as a means of saving himself, besought the other sister (seeing a piano in the room) to sing. With this request she willingly complied; and a bravura concert, solely sustained by the Misses Noriss, presently began. They sang in all languages—except their own. German, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Swiss; but nothing native; nothing so low as native. For, in this respect, languages are like many other travellers—ordinary and commonplace enough at home, but 'specially genteel abroad.

There is little doubt that in course of time the Misses Norris would have come to Hebrew, if they had not been interrupted by an announcement from the Irishman, who, flinging open the door, cried in a loud voice—

'Jiniral Fladdock!'

'My!' cried the sisters, desisting suddenly. 'The general come back!'

As they made the exclamation, the general, attired in full uniform for a ball, came darting in with such precipitancy that, hitching his boot in the carpet, and getting his sword between his legs, he came down headlong, and presented a curious little bald place on the crown of his head to the eyes of the astonished company. Nor was this the worst of it; for being rather corpulent and very tight, the general being down, could not get up again, but lay there writing and doing such things with his boots, as there is no other instance of in military history.

Of course there was an immediate rush to his assistance; and the general was promptly raised. But his uniform was so fearfully and wonderfully made, that he came up stiff and without a bend in him like a dead Clown, and had no command whatever of himself until he was put quite flat upon the soles of his feet, when he became animated as by a miracle, and moving edgewise that he might go in a narrower compass and be in less danger of fraying the gold lace on his epaulettes by brushing them against anything, advanced with a smiling visage to salute the lady of the house.

To be sure, it would have been impossible for the family to testify purer delight and joy than at this unlooked-for appearance of General Fladdock! The general was as warmly received as if New York had been in a state of siege and no other general was to be got for love or money. He shook hands with the Norrises three times all round, and then reviewed them from a little distance as a brave commander might, with his ample cloak drawn forward over the right shoulder and thrown back upon the left side to reveal his manly breast.

'And do I then,' cried the general, 'once again behold the choicest spirits of my country!'

'Yes,' said Mr Norris the father. 'Here we are, general.'

Then all the Norrises pressed round the general, inquiring how and where he had been since the date of his letter, and how he had enjoyed himself in foreign parts, and particularly and above all, to what extent he had become acquainted with the great dukes, lords, viscounts, marquesses, duchesses, knights, and baronets, in whom the people of those benighted countries had delight.

'Well, then, don't ask me,' said the general, holding up his hand. 'I was among 'em all the time, and have got public journals in my trunk with my name printed'—he lowered his voice and was very impressive here—'among the fashionable news. But, oh, the conventionalities of that a-mazing Europe!'

'Ah!' cried Mr Norris the father, giving his head a melancholy shake, and looking towards Martin as though he would say, 'I can't deny it, sir. I would if I could.'

'The limited diffusion of a moral sense in that country!' exclaimed the general. 'The absence of a moral dignity in man!'

'Ah!' sighed all the Norrises, quite overwhelmed with despondency.

'I couldn't have realised it,' pursued the general, 'without being located on the spot. Norris, your imagination is the imagination of a strong man, but YOU couldn't have realised it, without being located on the spot!'

'Never,' said Mr Norris.

'The ex-clusiveness, the pride, the form, the ceremony,' exclaimed the general, emphasizing the article more vigorously at every repetition. 'The artificial barriers set up between man and man; the division of the human race into court cards and plain cards, of every denomination—into clubs, diamonds, spades—anything but heart!'

'Ah!' cried the whole family. 'Too true, general!'

'But stay!' cried Mr Norris the father, taking him by the arm. 'Surely you crossed in the Screw, general?'

'Well! so I did,' was the reply.

'Possible!' cried the young ladies. 'Only think!'

The general seemed at a loss to understand why his having come home in the Screw should occasion such a sensation, nor did he seem at all clearer on the subject when Mr Norris, introducing him to Martin, said:

'A fellow-passenger of yours, I think?'

'Of mine?' exclaimed the general; 'No!'

He had never seen Martin, but Martin had seen him, and recognized him, now that they stood face to face, as the gentleman who had stuck his hands in his pockets towards the end of the voyage, and walked the deck with his nostrils dilated.

Everybody looked at Martin. There was no help for it. The truth must out.

'I came over in the same ship as the general,' said Martin, 'but not in the same cabin. It being necessary for me to observe strict economy, I took my passage in the steerage.'

If the general had been carried up bodily to a loaded cannon, and required to let it off that moment, he could not have been in a state of greater consternation than when he heard these words. He, Fladdock—Fladdock in full militia uniform, Fladdock the General, Fladdock, the caressed of foreign noblemen—expected to know a fellow who had come over in the steerage of line-of-packet ship, at the cost of four pound ten! And meeting that fellow in the very sanctuary of New York fashion, and nestling in the bosom of the New York aristocracy! He almost laid his hand upon his sword.

A death-like stillness fell upon the Norisses. If this story should get wind, their country relation had, by his imprudence, for ever disgraced them. They were the bright particular stars of an exalted New York sphere. There were other fashionable spheres above them, and other fashionable spheres below, and none of the stars in any one of these spheres had anything to say to the stars in any other of these spheres. But, through all the spheres it would go forth that the Norrises, deceived by gentlemanly manners and appearances, had, falling from their high estate, 'received' a dollarless and unknown man. O guardian eagle of the pure Republic, had they lived for this!

'You will allow me,' said Martin, after a terrible silence, 'to take my leave. I feel that I am the cause of at least as much embarrassment here, as I have brought upon myself. But I am bound, before I go, to exonerate this gentleman, who, in introducing me to such society, was quite ignorant of my unworthiness, I assure you.'

With that he made his bow to the Norrises, and walked out like a man of snow; very cool externally, but pretty hot within.

'Come, come,' said Mr Norris the father, looking with a pale face on the assembled circle as Martin closed the door, 'the young man has this night beheld a refinement of social manner, and an easy magnificence of social decoration, to which he is a stranger in his own country. Let us hope it may awake a moral sense within him.'

If that peculiarly transatlantic article, a moral sense—for, if native statesmen, orators, and pamphleteers, are to be believed, America quite monopolises the commodity—if that peculiarly transatlantic article be supposed to include a benevolent love of all mankind, certainly Martin's would have borne, just then, a deal of waking. As he strode along the street, with Mark at his heels, his immoral sense was in active operation; prompting him to the utterance of some rather sanguinary remarks, which it was well for his own credit that nobody overheard. He had so far cooled down, however, that he had begun to laugh at the recollection of these incidents, when he heard another step behind him, and turning round encountered his friend Bevan, quite out of breath.

He drew his arm through Martin's, and entreating him to walk slowly, was silent for some minutes. At length he said:

'I hope you exonerate me in another sense?'

'How do you mean?' asked Martin.

'I hope you acquit me of intending or foreseeing the termination of our visit. But I scarcely need ask you that.'

'Scarcely indeed,' said Martin. 'I am the more beholden to you for your kindness, when I find what kind of stuff the good citizens here are made of.'

'I reckon,' his friend returned, 'that they are made of pretty much the same stuff as other folks, if they would but own it, and not set up on false pretences.'

'In good faith, that's true,' said Martin.

'I dare say,' resumed his friend, 'you might have such a scene as that in an English comedy, and not detect any gross improbability or anomaly in the matter of it?'

'Yes, indeed!'

'Doubtless it is more ridiculous here than anywhere else,' said his companion; 'but our professions are to blame for that. So far as I myself am concerned, I may add that I was perfectly aware from the first that you came over in the steerage, for I had seen the list of passengers, and knew it did not comprise your name.'

'I feel more obliged to you than before,' said Martin.

'Norris is a very good fellow in his way,' observed Mr Bevan.

'Is he?' said Martin drily.

'Oh yes! there are a hundred good points about him. If you or anybody else addressed him as another order of being, and sued to him IN FORMA PAUPERIS, he would be all kindness and consideration.'

'I needn't have travelled three thousand miles from home to find such a character as THAT,' said Martin. Neither he nor his friend said anything more on the way back; each appearing to find sufficient occupation in his own thoughts.

The tea, or the supper, or whatever else they called the evening meal, was over when they reached the Major's; but the cloth, ornamented with a few additional smears and stains, was still upon the table. At one end of the board Mrs Jefferson Brick and two other ladies were drinking tea; out of the ordinary course, evidently, for they were bonneted and shawled, and seemed to have just come home. By the light of three flaring candles of different lengths, in as many candlesticks of different patterns, the room showed to almost as little advantage as in broad day.

These ladies were all three talking together in a very loud tone when Martin and his friend entered; but seeing those gentlemen, they stopped directly, and became excessively genteel, not to say frosty. As they went on to exchange some few remarks in whispers, the very water in the teapot might have fallen twenty degrees in temperature beneath their chilling coldness.

'Have you been to meeting, Mrs Brick?' asked Martin's friend, with something of a roguish twinkle in his eye.

'To lecture, sir.'

'I beg your pardon. I forgot. You don't go to meeting, I think?'

Here the lady on the right of Mrs Brick gave a pious cough as much as to say 'I do!'—as, indeed, she did nearly every night in the week.

'A good discourse, ma'am?' asked Mr Bevan, addressing this lady.

The lady raised her eyes in a pious manner, and answered 'Yes.' She had been much comforted by some good, strong, peppery doctrine, which satisfactorily disposed of all her friends and acquaintances, and quite settled their business. Her bonnet, too, had far outshone every bonnet in the congregation; so she was tranquil on all accounts.

'What course of lectures are you attending now, ma'am?' said Martin's friend, turning again to Mrs Brick.

'The Philosophy of the Soul, on Wednesdays.'

'On Mondays?'

'The Philosophy of Crime.'

'On Fridays?'

'The Philosophy of Vegetables.'

'You have forgotten Thursdays; the Philosophy of Government, my dear,' observed the third lady.

'No,' said Mrs Brick. 'That's Tuesdays.'

'So it is!' cried the lady. 'The Philosophy of Matter on Thursdays, of course.'

'You see, Mr Chuzzlewit, our ladies are fully employed,' said Bevan.

'Indeed you have reason to say so,' answered Martin. 'Between these very grave pursuits abroad, and family duties at home, their time must be pretty well engrossed.'

Martin stopped here, for he saw that the ladies regarded him with no very great favour, though what he had done to deserve the disdainful expression which appeared in their faces he was at a loss to divine. But on their going upstairs to their bedrooms—which they very soon did—Mr Bevan informed him that domestic drudgery was far beneath the exalted range of these Philosophers, and that the chances were a hundred to one that not one of the three could perform the easiest woman's work for herself, or make the simplest article of dress for any of her children.

'Though whether they might not be better employed with such blunt instruments as knitting-needles than with these edge-tools,' he said, 'is another question; but I can answer for one thing—they don't often cut themselves. Devotions and lectures are our balls and concerts. They go to these places of resort, as an escape from monotony; look at each other's clothes; and come home again.'

'When you say "home," do you mean a house like this?'

'Very often. But I see you are tired to death, and will wish you good night. We will discuss your projects in the morning. You cannot but feel already that it is useless staying here, with any hope of advancing them. You will have to go further.'

'And to fare worse?' said Martin, pursuing the old adage.

'Well, I hope not. But sufficient for the day, you know—good night'

They shook hands heartily and separated. As soon as Martin was left alone, the excitement of novelty and change which had sustained him through all the fatigues of the day, departed; and he felt so thoroughly dejected and worn out, that he even lacked the energy to crawl upstairs to bed.

In twelve or fifteen hours, how great a change had fallen on his hopes and sanguine plans! New and strange as he was to the ground on which he stood, and to the air he breathed, he could not—recalling all that he had crowded into that one day—but entertain a strong misgiving that his enterprise was doomed. Rash and ill-considered as it had often looked on shipboard, but had never seemed on shore, it wore a dismal aspect, now, that frightened him. Whatever thoughts he called up to his aid, they came upon him in depressing and discouraging shapes, and gave him no relief. Even the diamonds on his finger sparkled with the brightness of tears, and had no ray of hope in all their brilliant lustre.

He continued to sit in gloomy rumination by the stove, unmindful of the boarders who dropped in one by one from their stores and counting-houses, or the neighbouring bar-rooms, and, after taking long pulls from a great white waterjug upon the sideboard, and lingering with a kind of hideous fascination near the brass spittoons, lounged heavily to bed; until at length Mark Tapley came and shook him by the arm, supposing him asleep.

'Mark!' he cried, starting.

'All right, sir,' said that cheerful follower, snuffing with his fingers the candle he bore. 'It ain't a very large bed, your'n, sir; and a man as wasn't thirsty might drink, afore breakfast, all the water you've got to wash in, and afterwards eat the towel. But you'll sleep without rocking to-night, sir.'

'I feel as if the house were on the sea' said Martin, staggering when he rose; 'and am utterly wretched.'

'I'm as jolly as a sandboy, myself, sir,' said Mark. 'But, Lord, I have reason to be! I ought to have been born here; that's my opinion. Take care how you go'—for they were now ascending the stairs. 'You recollect the gentleman aboard the Screw as had the very small trunk, sir?'

'The valise? Yes.'

'Well, sir, there's been a delivery of clean clothes from the wash to-night, and they're put outside the bedroom doors here. If you take notice as we go up, what a very few shirts there are, and what a many fronts, you'll penetrate the mystery of his packing.'

But Martin was too weary and despondent to take heed of anything, so had no interest in this discovery. Mr Tapley, nothing dashed by his indifference, conducted him to the top of the house, and into the bed-chamber prepared for his reception; which was a very little narrow room, with half a window in it; a bedstead like a chest without a lid; two chairs; a piece of carpet, such as shoes are commonly tried upon at a ready-made establishment in England; a little looking-glass nailed against the wall; and a washing-table, with a jug and ewer, that might have been mistaken for a milk-pot and slop-basin.

'I suppose they polish themselves with a dry cloth in this country,' said Mark. 'They've certainly got a touch of the 'phoby, sir.'

'I wish you would pull off my boots for me,' said Martin, dropping into one of the chairs 'I am quite knocked up—dead beat, Mark.'

'You won't say that to-morrow morning, sir,' returned Mr Tapley; 'nor even to-night, sir, when you've made a trial of this.' With which he produced a very large tumbler, piled up to the brim with little blocks of clear transparent ice, through which one or two thin slices of lemon, and a golden liquid of delicious appearance, appealed from the still depths below, to the loving eye of the spectator.

'What do you call this?' said Martin.

But Mr Tapley made no answer; merely plunging a reed into the mixture—which caused a pleasant commotion among the pieces of ice—and signifying by an expressive gesture that it was to be pumped up through that agency by the enraptured drinker.

Martin took the glass with an astonished look; applied his lips to the reed; and cast up his eyes once in ecstasy. He paused no more until the goblet was drained to the last drop.

'There, sir!' said Mark, taking it from him with a triumphant face; 'if ever you should happen to be dead beat again, when I ain't in the way, all you've got to do is to ask the nearest man to go and fetch a cobbler.'

'To go and fetch a cobbler?' repeated Martin.

'This wonderful invention, sir,' said Mark, tenderly patting the empty glass, 'is called a cobbler. Sherry cobbler when you name it long; cobbler, when you name it short. Now you're equal to having your boots took off, and are, in every particular worth mentioning, another man.'

Having delivered himself of this solemn preface, he brought the bootjack.

'Mind! I am not going to relapse, Mark,' said Martin; 'but, good Heaven, if we should be left in some wild part of this country without goods or money!'

'Well, sir!' replied the imperturbable Tapley; 'from what we've seen already, I don't know whether, under those circumstances, we shouldn't do better in the wild parts than in the tame ones.'

'Oh, Tom Pinch, Tom Pinch!' said Martin, in a thoughtful tone; 'what would I give to be again beside you, and able to hear your voice, though it were even in the old bedroom at Pecksniff's!'

'Oh, Dragon, Dragon!' echoed Mark, cheerfully, 'if there warn't any water between you and me, and nothing faint-hearted-like in going back, I don't know that I mightn't say the same. But here am I, Dragon, in New York, America; and there are you in Wiltshire, Europe; and there's a fortune to make, Dragon, and a beautiful young lady to make it for; and whenever you go to see the Monument, Dragon, you mustn't give in on the doorsteps, or you'll never get up to the top!'

'Wisely said, Mark,' cried Martin. 'We must look forward.'

'In all the story-books as ever I read, sir, the people as looked backward was turned into stones,' replied Mark; 'and my opinion always was, that they brought it on themselves, and it served 'em right. I wish you good night, sir, and pleasant dreams!'

'They must be of home, then,' said Martin, as he lay down in bed.

'So I say, too,' whispered Mark Tapley, when he was out of hearing and in his own room; 'for if there don't come a time afore we're well out of this, when there'll be a little more credit in keeping up one's jollity, I'm a United Statesman!'

Leaving them to blend and mingle in their sleep the shadows of objects afar off, as they take fantastic shapes upon the wall in the dim light of thought without control, be it the part of this slight chronicle—a dream within a dream—as rapidly to change the scene, and cross the ocean to the English shore.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

DOES BUSINESS WITH THE HOUSE OF ANTHONY CHUZZLEWIT AND SON, FROM WHICH ONE OF THE PARTNERS RETIRES UNEXPECTEDLY

Change begets change. Nothing propagates so fast. If a man habituated to a narrow circle of cares and pleasures, out of which he seldom travels, step beyond it, though for never so brief a space, his departure from the monotonous scene on which he has been an actor of importance, would seem to be the signal for instant confusion. As if, in the gap he had left, the wedge of change were driven to the head, rending what was a solid mass to fragments, things cemented and held together by the usages of years, burst asunder in as many weeks. The mine which Time has slowly dug beneath familiar objects is sprung in an instant; and what was rock before, becomes but sand and dust.

Most men, at one time or other, have proved this in some degree. The extent to which the natural laws of change asserted their supremacy in that limited sphere of action which Martin had deserted, shall be faithfully set down in these pages.

'What a cold spring it is!' whimpered old Anthony, drawing near the evening fire, 'It was a warmer season, sure, when I was young!'

'You needn't go scorching your clothes into holes, whether it was or not,' observed the amiable Jonas, raising his eyes from yesterday's newspaper, 'Broadcloth ain't so cheap as that comes to.'

'A good lad!' cried the father, breathing on his cold hands, and feebly chafing them against each other. 'A prudent lad! He never delivered himself up to the vanities of dress. No, no!'

'I don't know but I would, though, mind you, if I could do it for nothing,' said his son, as he resumed the paper.

'Ah!' chuckled the old man. 'IF, indeed!—But it's very cold.'

'Let the fire be!' cried Mr Jonas, stopping his honoured parent's hand in the use of the poker. 'Do you mean to come to want in your old age, that you take to wasting now?'

'There's not time for that, Jonas,' said the old man.

'Not time for what?' bawled his heir.

'For me to come to want. I wish there was!'

'You always were as selfish an old blade as need be,' said Jonas in a voice too low for him to hear, and looking at him with an angry frown. 'You act up to your character. You wouldn't mind coming to want, wouldn't you! I dare say you wouldn't. And your own flesh and blood might come to want too, might they, for anything you cared? Oh you precious old flint!'

After this dutiful address he took his tea-cup in his hand—for that meal was in progress, and the father and son and Chuffey were partakers of it. Then, looking steadfastly at his father, and stopping now and then to carry a spoonful of tea to his lips, he proceeded in the same tone, thus:

'Want, indeed! You're a nice old man to be talking of want at this time of day. Beginning to talk of want, are you? Well, I declare! There isn't time? No, I should hope not. But you'd live to be a couple of hundred if you could; and after all be discontented. I know you!'

The old man sighed, and still sat cowering before the fire. Mr Jonas shook his Britannia-metal teaspoon at him, and taking a loftier position, went on to argue the point on high moral grounds.

'If you're in such a state of mind as that,' he grumbled, but in the same subdued key, 'why don't you make over your property? Buy an annuity cheap, and make your life interesting to yourself and everybody else that watches the speculation. But no, that wouldn't suit YOU. That would be natural conduct to your own son, and you like to be unnatural, and to keep him out of his rights. Why, I should be ashamed of myself if I was you, and glad to hide my head in the what you may call it.'

Possibly this general phrase supplied the place of grave, or tomb, or sepulchre, or cemetery, or mausoleum, or other such word which the filial tenderness of Mr Jonas made him delicate of pronouncing. He pursued the theme no further; for Chuffey, somehow discovering, from his old corner by the fireside, that Anthony was in the attitude of a listener, and that Jonas appeared to be speaking, suddenly cried out, like one inspired:

'He is your own son, Mr Chuzzlewit. Your own son, sir!'

Old Chuffey little suspected what depth of application these words had, or that, in the bitter satire which they bore, they might have sunk into the old man's very soul, could he have known what words here hanging on his own son's lips, or what was passing in his thoughts. But the voice diverted the current of Anthony's reflections, and roused him.

'Yes, yes, Chuffey, Jonas is a chip of the old block. It is a very old block, now, Chuffey,' said the old man, with a strange look of discomposure.

'Precious old,' assented Jonas

'No, no, no,' said Chuffey. 'No, Mr Chuzzlewit. Not old at all, sir.'

'Oh! He's worse than ever, you know!' cried Jonas, quite disgusted. 'Upon my soul, father, he's getting too bad. Hold your tongue, will you?'

'He says you're wrong!' cried Anthony to the old clerk.

'Tut, tut!' was Chuffey's answer. 'I know better. I say HE'S wrong. I say HE'S wrong. He's a boy. That's what he is. So are you, Mr Chuzzlewit—a kind of boy. Ha! ha! ha! You're quite a boy to many I have known; you're a boy to me; you're a boy to hundreds of us. Don't mind him!'

With which extraordinary speech—for in the case of Chuffey this was a burst of eloquence without a parallel—the poor old shadow drew through his palsied arm his master's hand, and held it there, with his own folded upon it, as if he would defend him.

'I grow deafer every day, Chuff,' said Anthony, with as much softness of manner, or, to describe it more correctly, with as little hardness as he was capable of expressing.

'No, no,' cried Chuffey. 'No, you don't. What if you did? I've been deaf this twenty year.'

'I grow blinder, too,' said the old man, shaking his head.

'That's a good sign!' cried Chuffey. 'Ha! ha! The best sign in the world! You saw too well before.'

He patted Anthony upon the hand as one might comfort a child, and drawing the old man's arm still further through his own, shook his trembling fingers towards the spot where Jonas sat, as though he would wave him off. But, Anthony remaining quite still and silent, he relaxed his hold by slow degrees and lapsed into his usual niche in the corner; merely putting forth his hand at intervals and touching his old employer gently on the coat, as with the design of assuring himself that he was yet beside him.

Mr Jonas was so very much amazed by these proceedings that he could do nothing but stare at the two old men, until Chuffey had fallen into his usual state, and Anthony had sunk into a doze; when he gave some vent to his emotions by going close up to the former personage, and making as though he would, in vulgar parlance, 'punch his head.'

'They've been carrying on this game,' thought Jonas in a brown study, 'for the last two or three weeks. I never saw my father take so much notice of him as he has in that time. What! You're legacy hunting, are you, Mister Chuff? Eh?'

But Chuffey was as little conscious of the thought as of the bodily advance of Mr Jonas's clenched fist, which hovered fondly about his ear. When he had scowled at him to his heart's content, Jonas took the candle from the table, and walking into the glass office, produced a bunch of keys from his pocket. With one of these he opened a secret drawer in the desk; peeping stealthily out, as he did so, to be certain that the two old men were still before the fire.

'All as right as ever,' said Jonas, propping the lid of the desk open with his forehead, and unfolding a paper. 'Here's the will, Mister Chuff. Thirty pound a year for your maintenance, old boy, and all the rest to his only son, Jonas. You needn't trouble yourself to be too affectionate. You won't get anything by it. What's that?'

It WAS startling, certainly. A face on the other side of the glass partition looking curiously in; and not at him but at the paper in his hand. For the eyes were attentively cast down upon the writing, and were swiftly raised when he cried out. Then they met his own, and were as the eyes of Mr Pecksniff.

Suffering the lid of the desk to fall with a loud noise, but not forgetting even then to lock it, Jonas, pale and breathless, gazed upon this phantom. It moved, opened the door, and walked in.

'What's the matter?' cried Jonas, falling back. 'Who is it? Where do you come from? What do you want?'

'Matter!' cried the voice of Mr Pecksniff, as Pecksniff in the flesh smiled amiably upon him. 'The matter, Mr Jonas!'

'What are you prying and peering about here for?' said Jonas, angrily. 'What do you mean by coming up to town in this way, and taking one unawares? It's precious odd a man can't read the—the newspaper—in his own office without being startled out of his wits by people coming in without notice. Why didn't you knock at the door?'

'So I did, Mr Jonas,' answered Pecksniff, 'but no one heard me. I was curious,' he added in his gentle way as he laid his hand upon the young man's shoulder, 'to find out what part of the newspaper interested you so much; but the glass was too dim and dirty.'

Jonas glanced in haste at the partition. Well. It wasn't very clean. So far he spoke the truth.

'Was it poetry now?' said Mr Pecksniff, shaking the forefinger of his right hand with an air of cheerful banter. 'Or was it politics? Or was it the price of stock? The main chance, Mr Jonas, the main chance, I suspect.'

'You ain't far from the truth,' answered Jonas, recovering himself and snuffing the candle; 'but how the deuce do you come to be in London again? Ecod! it's enough to make a man stare, to see a fellow looking at him all of a sudden, who he thought was sixty or seventy mile away.'

'So it is,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'No doubt of it, my dear Mr Jonas. For while the human mind is constituted as it is—'

'Oh, bother the human mind,' interrupted Jonas with impatience 'what have you come up for?'

'A little matter of business,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'which has arisen quite unexpectedly.'

'Oh!' cried Jonas, 'is that all? Well. Here's father in the next room. Hallo father, here's Pecksniff! He gets more addle-pated every day he lives, I do believe,' muttered Jonas, shaking his honoured parent roundly. 'Don't I tell you Pecksniff's here, stupid-head?'

The combined effects of the shaking and this loving remonstrance soon awoke the old man, who gave Mr Pecksniff a chuckling welcome which was attributable in part to his being glad to see that gentleman, and in part to his unfading delight in the recollection of having called him a hypocrite. As Mr Pecksniff had not yet taken tea (indeed he had, but an hour before, arrived in London) the remains of the late collation, with a rasher of bacon, were served up for his entertainment; and as Mr Jonas had a business appointment in the next street, he stepped out to keep it; promising to return before Mr Pecksniff could finish his repast.

'And now, my good sir,' said Mr Pecksniff to Anthony; 'now that we are alone, pray tell me what I can do for you. I say alone, because I believe that our dear friend Mr Chuffey is, metaphysically speaking, a—shall I say a dummy?' asked Mr Pecksniff with his sweetest smile, and his head very much on one side.

'He neither hears us,' replied Anthony, 'nor sees us.'

'Why, then,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'I will be bold to say, with the utmost sympathy for his afflictions, and the greatest admiration of those excellent qualities which do equal honour to his head and to his heart, that he is what is playfully termed a dummy. You were going to observe, my dear sir—?'

'I was not going to make any observation that I know of,' replied the old man.

'I was,' said Mr Pecksniff, mildly.

'Oh! YOU were? What was it?'

'That I never,' said Mr Pecksniff, previously rising to see that the door was shut, and arranging his chair when he came back, so that it could not be opened in the least without his immediately becoming aware of the circumstance; 'that I never in my life was so astonished as by the receipt of your letter yesterday. That you should do me the honour to wish to take counsel with me on any matter, amazed me; but that you should desire to do so, to the exclusion even of Mr Jonas, showed an amount of confidence in one to whom you had done a verbal injury—merely a verbal injury, you were anxious to repair—which gratified, which moved, which overcame me.'

He was always a glib speaker, but he delivered this short address very glibly; having been at some pains to compose it outside the coach.

Although he paused for a reply, and truly said that he was there at Anthony's request, the old man sat gazing at him in profound silence and with a perfectly blank face. Nor did he seem to have the least desire or impulse to pursue the conversation, though Mr Pecksniff looked towards the door, and pulled out his watch, and gave him many other hints that their time was short, and Jonas, if he kept his word, would soon return. But the strangest incident in all this strange behaviour was, that of a sudden, in a moment, so swiftly that it was impossible to trace how, or to observe any process of change, his features fell into their old expression, and he cried, striking his hand passionately upon the table as if no interval at all had taken place:

'Will you hold your tongue, sir, and let me speak?'

Mr Pecksniff deferred to him with a submissive bow; and said within himself, 'I knew his hand was changed, and that his writing staggered. I said so yesterday. Ahem! Dear me!'

'Jonas is sweet upon your daughter, Pecksniff,' said the old man, in his usual tone.

'We spoke of that, if you remember, sir, at Mrs Todgers's,' replied the courteous architect.

'You needn't speak so loud,' retorted Anthony. 'I'm not so deaf as that.'

Mr Pecksniff had certainly raised his voice pretty high; not so much because he thought Anthony was deaf, as because he felt convinced that his perceptive faculties were waxing dim; but this quick resentment of his considerate behaviour greatly disconcerted him, and, not knowing what tack to shape his course upon, he made another inclination of the head, yet more submissive that the last.

'I have said,' repeated the old man, 'that Jonas is sweet upon your daughter.'

'A charming girl, sir,' murmured Mr Pecksniff, seeing that he waited for an answer. 'A dear girl, Mr Chuzzlewit, though I say it, who should not.'

'You know better,' cried the old man, advancing his weazen face at least a yard, and starting forward in his chair to do it. 'You lie! What, you WILL be a hypocrite, will you?'

'My good sir,' Mr Pecksniff began.

'Don't call me a good sir,' retorted Anthony, 'and don't claim to be one yourself. If your daughter was what you would have me believe, she wouldn't do for Jonas. Being what she is, I think she will. He might be deceived in a wife. She might run riot, contract debts, and waste his substance. Now when I am dead—'

His face altered so horribly as he said the word, that Mr Pecksniff really was fain to look another way.

'—It will be worse for me to know of such doings, than if I was alive; for to be tormented for getting that together, which even while I suffer for its acquisition, is flung into the very kennels of the streets, would be insupportable torture. No,' said the old man, hoarsely, 'let that be saved at least; let there be something gained, and kept fast hold of, when so much is lost.'

'My dear Mr Chuzzlewit,' said Pecksniff, 'these are unwholesome fancies; quite unnecessary, sir, quite uncalled for, I am sure. The truth is, my dear sir, that you are not well!'

'Not dying though!' cried Anthony, with something like the snarl of a wild animal. 'Not yet! There are years of life in me. Why, look at him,' pointing to his feeble clerk. 'Death has no right to leave him standing, and to mow me down!'

Mr Pecksniff was so much afraid of the old man, and so completely taken aback by the state in which he found him, that he had not even presence of mind enough to call up a scrap of morality from the great storehouse within his own breast. Therefore he stammered out that no doubt it was, in fairness and decency, Mr Chuffey's turn to expire; and that from all he had heard of Mr Chuffey, and the little he had the pleasure of knowing of that gentleman, personally, he felt convinced in his own mind that he would see the propriety of expiring with as little delay as possible.

'Come here!' said the old man, beckoning him to draw nearer. 'Jonas will be my heir, Jonas will be rich, and a great catch for you. You know that. Jonas is sweet upon your daughter.'

'I know that too,' thought Mr Pecksniff, 'for you have said it often enough.'

'He might get more money than with her,' said the old man, 'but she will help him to take care of what they have. She is not too young or heedless, and comes of a good hard griping stock. But don't you play too fine a game. She only holds him by a thread; and if you draw it too tight (I know his temper) it'll snap. Bind him when he's in the mood, Pecksniff; bind him. You're too deep. In your way of leading him on, you'll leave him miles behind. Bah, you man of oil, have I no eyes to see how you have angled with him from the first?'

'Now I wonder,' thought Mr Pecksniff, looking at him with a wistful face, 'whether this is all he has to say?'

Old Anthony rubbed his hands and muttered to himself; complained again that he was cold; drew his chair before the fire; and, sitting with his back to Mr Pecksniff, and his chin sunk down upon his breast, was, in another minute, quite regardless or forgetful of his presence.

Uncouth and unsatisfactory as this short interview had been, it had furnished Mr Pecksniff with a hint which, supposing nothing further were imparted to him, repaid the journey up and home again. For the good gentleman had never (for want of an opportunity) dived into the depths of Mr Jonas's nature; and any recipe for catching such a son-in-law (much more one written on a leaf out of his own father's book) was worth the having. In order that he might lose no chance of improving so fair an opportunity by allowing Anthony to fall asleep before he had finished all he had to say, Mr Pecksniff, in the disposal of the refreshments on the table, a work to which he now applied himself in earnest, resorted to many ingenious contrivances for attracting his attention; such as coughing, sneezing, clattering the teacups, sharpening the knives, dropping the loaf, and so forth. But all in vain, for Mr Jonas returned, and Anthony had said no more.

'What! My father asleep again?' he cried, as he hung up his hat, and cast a look at him. 'Ah! and snoring. Only hear!'

'He snores very deep,' said Mr Pecksniff.

'Snores deep?' repeated Jonas. 'Yes; let him alone for that. He'll snore for six, at any time.'

'Do you know, Mr Jonas,' said Pecksniff, 'that I think your father is—don't let me alarm you—breaking?'

'Oh, is he though?' replied Jonas, with a shake of the head which expressed the closeness of his dutiful observation. 'Ecod, you don't know how tough he is. He ain't upon the move yet.'

'It struck me that he was changed, both in his appearance and manner,' said Mr Pecksniff.

'That's all you know about it,' returned Jonas, seating himself with a melancholy air. 'He never was better than he is now. How are they all at home? How's Charity?'

'Blooming, Mr Jonas, blooming.'

'And the other one; how's she?'

'Volatile trifler!' said Mr Pecksniff, fondly musing. 'She is well, she is well. Roving from parlour to bedroom, Mr Jonas, like a bee, skimming from post to pillar, like the butterfly; dipping her young beak into our currant wine, like the humming-bird! Ah! were she a little less giddy than she is; and had she but the sterling qualities of Cherry, my young friend!'

'Is she so very giddy, then?' asked Jonas.

'Well, well!' said Mr Pecksniff, with great feeling; 'let me not be hard upon my child. Beside her sister Cherry she appears so. A strange noise that, Mr Jonas!'

'Something wrong in the clock, I suppose,' said Jonas, glancing towards it. 'So the other one ain't your favourite, ain't she?'

The fond father was about to reply, and had already summoned into his face a look of most intense sensibility, when the sound he had already noticed was repeated.

'Upon my word, Mr Jonas, that is a very extraordinary clock,' said Pecksniff.

It would have been, if it had made the noise which startled them; but another kind of time-piece was fast running down, and from that the sound proceeded. A scream from Chuffey, rendered a hundred times more loud and formidable by his silent habits, made the house ring from roof to cellar; and, looking round, they saw Anthony Chuzzlewit extended on the floor, with the old clerk upon his knees beside him.

He had fallen from his chair in a fit, and lay there, battling for each gasp of breath, with every shrivelled vein and sinew starting in its place, as if it were bent on bearing witness to his age, and sternly pleading with Nature against his recovery. It was frightful to see how the principle of life, shut up within his withered frame, fought like a strong devil, mad to be released, and rent its ancient prison-house. A young man in the fullness of his vigour, struggling with so much strength of desperation, would have been a dismal sight; but an old, old, shrunken body, endowed with preternatural might, and giving the lie in every motion of its every limb and joint to its enfeebled aspect, was a hideous spectacle indeed.

They raised him up, and fetched a surgeon with all haste, who bled the patient and applied some remedies; but the fits held him so long that it was past midnight when they got him—quiet now, but quite unconscious and exhausted—into bed.

'Don't go,' said Jonas, putting his ashy lips to Mr Pecksniff's ear and whispered across the bed. 'It was a mercy you were present when he was taken ill. Some one might have said it was my doing.'

'YOUR doing!' cried Mr Pecksniff.

'I don't know but they might,' he replied, wiping the moisture from his white face. 'People say such things. How does he look now?'

Mr Pecksniff shook his head.

'I used to joke, you know,' said. Jonas: 'but I—I never wished him dead. Do you think he's very bad?'

'The doctor said he was. You heard,' was Mr Pecksniff's answer.

'Ah! but he might say that to charge us more, in case of his getting well' said Jonas. 'You mustn't go away, Pecksniff. Now it's come to this, I wouldn't be without a witness for a thousand pound.'

Chuffey said not a word, and heard not a word. He had sat himself down in a chair at the bedside, and there he remained, motionless; except that he sometimes bent his head over the pillow, and seemed to listen. He never changed in this. Though once in the dreary night Mr Pecksniff, having dozed, awoke with a confused impression that he had heard him praying, and strangely mingling figures—not of speech, but arithmetic—with his broken prayers.

Jonas sat there, too, all night; not where his father could have seen him, had his consciousness returned, but hiding, as it were, behind him, and only reading how he looked, in Mr Pecksniff's eyes. HE, the coarse upstart, who had ruled the house so long—that craven cur, who was afraid to move, and shook so, that his very shadow fluttered on the wall!

It was broad, bright, stirring day when, leaving the old clerk to watch him, they went down to breakfast. People hurried up and down the street; windows and doors were opened; thieves and beggars took their usual posts; workmen bestirred themselves; tradesmen set forth their shops; bailiffs and constables were on the watch; all kinds of human creatures strove, in their several ways, as hard to live, as the one sick old man who combated for every grain of sand in his fast-emptying glass, as eagerly as if it were an empire.

'If anything happens Pecksniff,' said Jonas, 'you must promise me to stop here till it's all over. You shall see that I do what's right.'

'I know that you will do what's right, Mr Jonas,' said Pecksniff.

'Yes, yes, but I won't be doubted. No one shall have it in his power to say a syllable against me,' he returned. 'I know how people will talk. Just as if he wasn't old, or I had the secret of keeping him alive!'

Mr Pecksniff promised that he would remain, if circumstances should render it, in his esteemed friend's opinion, desirable; they were finishing their meal in silence, when suddenly an apparition stood before them, so ghastly to the view that Jonas shrieked aloud, and both recoiled in horror.

Old Anthony, dressed in his usual clothes, was in the room—beside the table. He leaned upon the shoulder of his solitary friend; and on his livid face, and on his horny hands, and in his glassy eyes, and traced by an eternal finger in the very drops of sweat upon his brow, was one word—Death.

He spoke to them—in something of his own voice too, but sharpened and made hollow, like a dead man's face. What he would have said, God knows. He seemed to utter words, but they were such as man had never heard. And this was the most fearful circumstance of all, to see him standing there, gabbling in an unearthly tongue.

'He's better now,' said Chuffey. 'Better now. Let him sit in his old chair, and he'll be well again. I told him not to mind. I said so, yesterday.'

They put him in his easy-chair, and wheeled it near the window; then, swinging open the door, exposed him to the free current of morning air. But not all the air that is, nor all the winds that ever blew 'twixt Heaven and Earth, could have brought new life to him.

Plunge him to the throat in golden pieces now, and his heavy fingers shall not close on one!

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE READER IS BROUGHT INTO COMMUNICATION WITH SOME PROFESSIONAL PERSONS, AND SHEDS A TEAR OVER THE FILAIL PIETY OF GOOD MR JONAS

Mr Pecksniff was in a hackney cabriolet, for Jonas Chuzzlewit had said 'Spare no expense.' Mankind is evil in its thoughts and in its base constructions, and Jonas was resolved it should not have an inch to stretch into an ell against him. It never should be charged upon his father's son that he had grudged the money for his father's funeral. Hence, until the obsequies should be concluded, Jonas had taken for his motto 'Spend, and spare not!'

Mr Pecksniff had been to the undertaker, and was now upon his way to another officer in the train of mourning—a female functionary, a nurse, and watcher, and performer of nameless offices about the persons of the dead—whom he had recommended. Her name, as Mr Pecksniff gathered from a scrap of writing in his hand, was Gamp; her residence in Kingsgate Street, High Holborn. So Mr Pecksniff, in a hackney cab, was rattling over Holborn stones, in quest of Mrs Gamp.

This lady lodged at a bird-fancier's, next door but one to the celebrated mutton-pie shop, and directly opposite to the original cat's-meat warehouse; the renown of which establishments was duly heralded on their respective fronts. It was a little house, and this was the more convenient; for Mrs Gamp being, in her highest walk of art, a monthly nurse, or, as her sign-board boldly had it, 'Midwife,' and lodging in the first-floor front, was easily assailable at night by pebbles, walking-sticks, and fragments of tobacco-pipe; all much more efficacious than the street-door knocker, which was so constructed as to wake the street with ease, and even spread alarms of fire in Holborn, without making the smallest impression on the premises to which it was addressed.

It chanced on this particular occasion, that Mrs Gamp had been up all the previous night, in attendance upon a ceremony to which the usage of gossips has given that name which expresses, in two syllables, the curse pronounced on Adam. It chanced that Mrs Gamp had not been regularly engaged, but had been called in at a crisis, in consequence of her great repute, to assist another professional lady with her advice; and thus it happened that, all points of interest in the case being over, Mrs Gamp had come home again to the bird-fancier's and gone to bed. So when Mr Pecksniff drove up in the hackney cab, Mrs Gamp's curtains were drawn close, and Mrs Gamp was fast asleep behind them.

If the bird-fancier had been at home, as he ought to have been, there would have been no great harm in this; but he was out, and his shop was closed. The shutters were down certainly; and in every pane of glass there was at least one tiny bird in a tiny bird-cage, twittering and hopping his little ballet of despair, and knocking his head against the roof; while one unhappy goldfinch who lived outside a red villa with his name on the door, drew the water for his own drinking, and mutely appealed to some good man to drop a farthing's-worth of poison in it. Still, the door was shut. Mr Pecksniff tried the latch, and shook it, causing a cracked bell inside to ring most mournfully; but no one came. The bird-fancier was an easy shaver also, and a fashionable hair-dresser also, and perhaps he had been sent for, express, from the court end of the town, to trim a lord, or cut and curl a lady; but however that might be, there, upon his own ground, he was not; nor was there any more distinct trace of him to assist the imagination of an inquirer, than a professional print or emblem of his calling (much favoured in the trade), representing a hair-dresser of easy manners curling a lady of distinguished fashion, in the presence of a patent upright grand pianoforte.

Noting these circumstances, Mr Pecksniff, in the innocence of his heart, applied himself to the knocker; but at the first double knock every window in the street became alive with female heads; and before he could repeat the performance whole troops of married ladies (some about to trouble Mrs Gamp themselves very shortly) came flocking round the steps, all crying out with one accord, and with uncommon interest, 'Knock at the winder, sir, knock at the winder. Lord bless you, don't lose no more time than you can help—knock at the winder!'

Acting upon this suggestion, and borrowing the driver's whip for the purpose, Mr Pecksniff soon made a commotion among the first floor flower-pots, and roused Mrs Gamp, whose voice—to the great satisfaction of the matrons—was heard to say, 'I'm coming.'

'He's as pale as a muffin,' said one lady, in allusion to Mr Pecksniff.

'So he ought to be, if he's the feelings of a man,' observed another.

A third lady (with her arms folded) said she wished he had chosen any other time for fetching Mrs Gamp, but it always happened so with HER.

It gave Mr Pecksniff much uneasiness to find, from these remarks, that he was supposed to have come to Mrs Gamp upon an errand touching—not the close of life, but the other end. Mrs Gamp herself was under the same impression, for, throwing open the window, she cried behind the curtains, as she hastily attired herself—

'Is it Mrs Perkins?'

'No!' returned Mr Pecksniff, sharply. 'Nothing of the sort.'

'What, Mr Whilks!' cried Mrs Gamp. 'Don't say it's you, Mr Whilks, and that poor creetur Mrs Whilks with not even a pincushion ready. Don't say it's you, Mr Whilks!'

'It isn't Mr Whilks,' said Pecksniff. 'I don't know the man. Nothing of the kind. A gentleman is dead; and some person being wanted in the house, you have been recommended by Mr Mould the undertaker.'

As she was by this time in a condition to appear, Mrs Gamp, who had a face for all occasions, looked out of the window with her mourning countenance, and said she would be down directly. But the matrons took it very ill that Mr Pecksniff's mission was of so unimportant a kind; and the lady with her arms folded rated him in good round terms, signifying that she would be glad to know what he meant by terrifying delicate females 'with his corpses;' and giving it as her opinion that he was quite ugly enough to know better. The other ladies were not at all behind-hand in expressing similar sentiments; and the children, of whom some scores had now collected, hooted and defied Mr Pecksniff quite savagely. So when Mrs Gamp appeared, the unoffending gentleman was glad to hustle her with very little ceremony into the cabriolet, and drive off, overwhelmed with popular execration.

Mrs Gamp had a large bundle with her, a pair of pattens, and a species of gig umbrella; the latter article in colour like a faded leaf, except where a circular patch of a lively blue had been dexterously let in at the top. She was much flurried by the haste she had made, and laboured under the most erroneous views of cabriolets, which she appeared to confound with mail-coaches or stage-wagons, inasmuch as she was constantly endeavouring for the first half mile to force her luggage through the little front window, and clamouring to the driver to 'put it in the boot.' When she was disabused of this idea, her whole being resolved itself into an absorbing anxiety about her pattens, with which she played innumerable games at quoits on Mr Pecksniff's legs. It was not until they were close upon the house of mourning that she had enough composure to observe—

'And so the gentleman's dead, sir! Ah! The more's the pity.' She didn't even know his name. 'But it's what we must all come to. It's as certain as being born, except that we can't make our calculations as exact. Ah! Poor dear!'

She was a fat old woman, this Mrs Gamp, with a husky voice and a moist eye, which she had a remarkable power of turning up, and only showing the white of it. Having very little neck, it cost her some trouble to look over herself, if one may say so, at those to whom she talked. She wore a very rusty black gown, rather the worse for snuff, and a shawl and bonnet to correspond. In these dilapidated articles of dress she had, on principle, arrayed herself, time out of mind, on such occasions as the present; for this at once expressed a decent amount of veneration for the deceased, and invited the next of kin to present her with a fresher suit of weeds; an appeal so frequently successful, that the very fetch and ghost of Mrs Gamp, bonnet and all, might be seen hanging up, any hour in the day, in at least a dozen of the second-hand clothes shops about Holborn. The face of Mrs Gamp—the nose in particular—was somewhat red and swollen, and it was difficult to enjoy her society without becoming conscious of a smell of spirits. Like most persons who have attained to great eminence in their profession, she took to hers very kindly; insomuch that, setting aside her natural predilections as a woman, she went to a lying-in or a laying-out with equal zest and relish.

'Ah!' repeated Mrs Gamp; for it was always a safe sentiment in cases of mourning. 'Ah dear! When Gamp was summoned to his long home, and I see him a-lying in Guy's Hospital with a penny-piece on each eye, and his wooden leg under his left arm, I thought I should have fainted away. But I bore up.'

If certain whispers current in the Kingsgate Street circles had any truth in them, she had indeed borne up surprisingly; and had exerted such uncommon fortitude as to dispose of Mr Gamp's remains for the benefit of science. But it should be added, in fairness, that this had happened twenty years before; and that Mr and Mrs Gamp had long been separated on the ground of incompatibility of temper in their drink.

'You have become indifferent since then, I suppose?' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Use is second nature, Mrs Gamp.'

'You may well say second nater, sir,' returned that lady. 'One's first ways is to find sich things a trial to the feelings, and so is one's lasting custom. If it wasn't for the nerve a little sip of liquor gives me (I never was able to do more than taste it), I never could go through with what I sometimes has to do. "Mrs Harris," I says, at the very last case as ever I acted in, which it was but a young person, "Mrs Harris," I says, "leave the bottle on the chimley-piece, and don't ask me to take none, but let me put my lips to it when I am so dispoged, and then I will do what I'm engaged to do, according to the best of my ability." "Mrs Gamp," she says, in answer, "if ever there was a sober creetur to be got at eighteen pence a day for working people, and three and six for gentlefolks—night watching,"' said Mrs Gamp with emphasis, '"being a extra charge—you are that inwallable person." "Mrs Harris," I says to her, "don't name the charge, for if I could afford to lay all my feller creeturs out for nothink, I would gladly do it, sich is the love I bears 'em. But what I always says to them as has the management of matters, Mrs Harris"'—here she kept her eye on Mr Pecksniff—'"be they gents or be they ladies, is, don't ask me whether I won't take none, or whether I will, but leave the bottle on the chimley-piece, and let me put my lips to it when I am so dispoged."'

The conclusion of this affecting narrative brought them to the house. In the passage they encountered Mr Mould the undertaker; a little elderly gentleman, bald, and in a suit of black; with a notebook in his hand, a massive gold watch-chain dangling from his fob, and a face in which a queer attempt at melancholy was at odds with a smirk of satisfaction; so that he looked as a man might, who, in the very act of smacking his lips over choice old wine, tried to make believe it was physic.

'Well, Mrs Gamp, and how are YOU, Mrs Gamp?' said this gentleman, in a voice as soft as his step.

'Pretty well, I thank you, sir,' dropping a curtsey.

'You'll be very particular here, Mrs Gamp. This is not a common case, Mrs Gamp. Let everything be very nice and comfortable, Mrs Gamp, if you please,' said the undertaker, shaking his head with a solemn air.

'It shall be, sir,' she replied, curtseying again. 'You knows me of old, sir, I hope.'

'I hope so, too, Mrs Gamp,' said the undertaker, 'and I think so also.' Mrs Gamp curtseyed again. 'This is one of the most impressive cases, sir,' he continued, addressing Mr Pecksniff, 'that I have seen in the whole course of my professional experience.'

'Indeed, Mr Mould!' cried that gentleman.

'Such affectionate regret, sir, I never saw. There is no limitation, there is positively NO limitation'—opening his eyes wide, and standing on tiptoe—'in point of expense! I have orders, sir, to put on my whole establishment of mutes; and mutes come very dear, Mr Pecksniff; not to mention their drink. To provide silver-plated handles of the very best description, ornamented with angels' heads from the most expensive dies. To be perfectly profuse in feathers. In short, sir, to turn out something absolutely gorgeous.'

'My friend Mr Jonas is an excellent man,' said Mr Pecksniff.

'I have seen a good deal of what is filial in my time, sir,' retorted Mould, 'and what is unfilial too. It is our lot. We come into the knowledge of those secrets. But anything so filial as this; anything so honourable to human nature; so calculated to reconcile all of us to the world we live in; never yet came under my observation. It only proves, sir, what was so forcibly observed by the lamented theatrical poet—buried at Stratford—that there is good in everything.'

'It is very pleasant to hear you say so, Mr Mould,' observed Pecksniff.

'You are very kind, sir. And what a man Mr Chuzzlewit was, sir! Ah! what a man he was. You may talk of your lord mayors,' said Mould, waving his hand at the public in general, 'your sheriffs, your common councilmen, your trumpery; but show me a man in this city who is worthy to walk in the shoes of the departed Mr Chuzzlewit. No, no,' cried Mould, with bitter sarcasm. 'Hang 'em up, hang 'em up; sole 'em and heel 'em, and have 'em ready for his son against he's old enough to wear 'em; but don't try 'em on yourselves, for they won't fit you. We knew him,' said Mould, in the same biting vein, as he pocketed his note-book; 'we knew him, and are not to be caught with chaff. Mr Pecksniff, sir, good morning.'

Mr Pecksniff returned the compliment; and Mould, sensible of having distinguished himself, was going away with a brisk smile, when he fortunately remembered the occasion. Quickly becoming depressed again, he sighed; looked into the crown of his hat, as if for comfort; put it on without finding any; and slowly departed.

Mrs Gamp and Mr Pecksniff then ascended the staircase; and the former, having been shown to the chamber in which all that remained of Anthony Chuzzlewit lay covered up, with but one loving heart, and that a halting one, to mourn it, left the latter free to enter the darkened room below, and rejoin Mr Jonas, from whom he had now been absent nearly two hours.

He found that example to bereaved sons, and pattern in the eyes of all performers of funerals, musing over a fragment of writing-paper on the desk, and scratching figures on it with a pen. The old man's chair, and hat, and walking-stick, were removed from their accustomed places, and put out of sight; the window-blinds as yellow as November fogs, were drawn down close; Jonas himself was so subdued, that he could scarcely be heard to speak, and only seen to walk across the room.

'Pecksniff,' he said, in a whisper, 'you shall have the regulation of it all, mind! You shall be able to tell anybody who talks about it that everything was correctly and nicely done. There isn't any one you'd like to ask to the funeral, is there?'

'No, Mr Jonas, I think not.'

'Because if there is, you know,' said Jonas, 'ask him. We don't want to make a secret of it.'

'No,' repeated Mr Pecksniff, after a little reflection. 'I am not the less obliged to you on that account, Mr Jonas, for your liberal hospitality; but there really is no one.'

'Very well,' said Jonas; 'then you, and I, and Chuffey, and the doctor, will be just a coachful. We'll have the doctor, Pecksniff, because he knows what was the matter with him, and that it couldn't be helped.'

'Where is our dear friend, Mr Chuffey?' asked Pecksniff, looking round the chamber, and winking both his eyes at once—for he was overcome by his feelings.

But here he was interrupted by Mrs Gamp, who, divested of her bonnet and shawl, came sidling and bridling into the room; and with some sharpness demanded a conference outside the door with Mr Pecksniff.

'You may say whatever you wish to say here, Mrs Gamp,' said that gentleman, shaking his head with a melancholy expression.

'It is not much as I have to say when people is a-mourning for the dead and gone,' said Mrs Gamp; 'but what I have to say is TO the pint and purpose, and no offence intended, must be so considered. I have been at a many places in my time, gentlemen, and I hope I knows what my duties is, and how the same should be performed; in course, if I did not, it would be very strange, and very wrong in sich a gentleman as Mr Mould, which has undertook the highest families in this land, and given every satisfaction, so to recommend me as he does. I have seen a deal of trouble my own self,' said Mrs Gamp, laying greater and greater stress upon her words, 'and I can feel for them as has their feelings tried, but I am not a Rooshan or a Prooshan, and consequently cannot suffer Spies to be set over me.'

Before it was possible that an answer could be returned, Mrs Gamp, growing redder in the face, went on to say:

'It is not a easy matter, gentlemen, to live when you are left a widder woman; particular when your feelings works upon you to that extent that you often find yourself a-going out on terms which is a certain loss, and never can repay. But in whatever way you earns your bread, you may have rules and regulations of your own which cannot be broke through. Some people,' said Mrs Gamp, again entrenching herself behind her strong point, as if it were not assailable by human ingenuity, 'may be Rooshans, and others may be Prooshans; they are born so, and will please themselves. Them which is of other naturs thinks different.'

'If I understand this good lady,' said Mr Pecksniff, turning to Jonas, 'Mr Chuffey is troublesome to her. Shall I fetch him down?'

'Do,' said Jonas. 'I was going to tell you he was up there, when she came in. I'd go myself and bring him down, only—only I'd rather you went, if you don't mind.'

Mr Pecksniff promptly departed, followed by Mrs Gamp, who, seeing that he took a bottle and glass from the cupboard, and carried it in his hand, was much softened.

'I am sure,' she said, 'that if it wasn't for his own happiness, I should no more mind him being there, poor dear, than if he was a fly. But them as isn't used to these things, thinks so much of 'em afterwards, that it's a kindness to 'em not to let 'em have their wish. And even,' said Mrs Gamp, probably in reference to some flowers of speech she had already strewn on Mr Chuffey, 'even if one calls 'em names, it's only done to rouse 'em.'

Whatever epithets she had bestowed on the old clerk, they had not roused HIM. He sat beside the bed, in the chair he had occupied all the previous night, with his hands folded before him, and his head bowed down; and neither looked up, on their entrance, nor gave any sign of consciousness, until Mr Pecksniff took him by the arm, when he meekly rose.

'Three score and ten,' said Chuffey, 'ought and carry seven. Some men are so strong that they live to four score—four times ought's an ought, four times two's an eight—eighty. Oh! why—why—why didn't he live to four times ought's an ought, and four times two's an eight, eighty?'

'Ah! what a wale of grief!' cried Mrs Gamp, possessing herself of the bottle and glass.

'Why did he die before his poor old crazy servant?' said Chuffey, clasping his hands and looking up in anguish. 'Take him from me, and what remains?'

'Mr Jonas,' returned Pecksniff, 'Mr Jonas, my good friend.'

'I loved him,' cried the old man, weeping. 'He was good to me. We learnt Tare and Tret together at school. I took him down once, six boys in the arithmetic class. God forgive me! Had I the heart to take him down!'

'Come, Mr Chuffey,' said Pecksniff. 'Come with me. Summon up your fortitude, Mr Chuffey.'

'Yes, I will,' returned the old clerk. 'Yes. I'll sum up my forty—How many times forty—Oh, Chuzzlewit and Son—Your own son Mr Chuzzlewit; your own son, sir!'

He yielded to the hand that guided him, as he lapsed into this familiar expression, and submitted to be led away. Mrs Gamp, with the bottle on one knee, and the glass on the other, sat upon a stool, shaking her head for a long time, until, in a moment of abstraction, she poured out a dram of spirits, and raised it to her lips. It was succeeded by a second, and by a third, and then her eyes—either in the sadness of her reflections upon life and death, or in her admiration of the liquor—were so turned up, as to be quite invisible. But she shook her head still.

Poor Chuffey was conducted to his accustomed corner, and there he remained, silent and quiet, save at long intervals, when he would rise, and walk about the room, and wring his hands, or raise some strange and sudden cry. For a whole week they all three sat about the hearth and never stirred abroad. Mr Pecksniff would have walked out in the evening time, but Mr Jonas was so averse to his being absent for a minute, that he abandoned the idea, and so, from morning until night, they brooded together in the dark room, without relief or occupation.

The weight of that which was stretched out, stiff and stark, in the awful chamber above-stairs, so crushed and bore down Jonas, that he bent beneath the load. During the whole long seven days and nights, he was always oppressed and haunted by a dreadful sense of its presence in the house. Did the door move, he looked towards it with a livid face and starting eye, as if he fully believed that ghostly fingers clutched the handle. Did the fire flicker in a draught of air, he glanced over his shoulder, as almost dreading to behold some shrouded figure fanning and flapping at it with its fearful dress. The lightest noise disturbed him; and once, in the night, at the sound of a footstep overhead, he cried out that the dead man was walking—tramp, tramp, tramp—about his coffin.

He lay at night upon a mattress on the floor of the sitting-room; his own chamber having been assigned to Mrs Gamp; and Mr Pecksniff was similarly accommodated. The howling of a dog before the house, filled him with a terror he could not disguise. He avoided the reflection in the opposite windows of the light that burned above, as though it had been an angry eye. He often, in every night, rose up from his fitful sleep, and looked and longed for dawn; all directions and arrangements, even to the ordering of their daily meals, he abandoned to Mr Pecksniff. That excellent gentleman, deeming that the mourner wanted comfort, and that high feeding was likely to do him infinite service, availed himself of these opportunities to such good purpose, that they kept quite a dainty table during this melancholy season; with sweetbreads, stewed kidneys, oysters, and other such light viands for supper every night; over which, and sundry jorums of hot punch, Mr Pecksniff delivered such moral reflections and spiritual consolation as might have converted a Heathen—especially if he had had but an imperfect acquaintance with the English tongue.

Nor did Mr Pecksniff alone indulge in the creature comforts during this sad time. Mrs Gamp proved to be very choice in her eating, and repudiated hashed mutton with scorn. In her drinking too, she was very punctual and particular, requiring a pint of mild porter at lunch, a pint at dinner, half-a-pint as a species of stay or holdfast between dinner and tea, and a pint of the celebrated staggering ale, or Real Old Brighton Tipper, at supper; besides the bottle on the chimney-piece, and such casual invitations to refresh herself with wine as the good breeding of her employers might prompt them to offer. In like manner, Mr Mould's men found it necessary to drown their grief, like a young kitten in the morning of its existence, for which reason they generally fuddled themselves before they began to do anything, lest it should make head and get the better of them. In short, the whole of that strange week was a round of dismal joviality and grim enjoyment; and every one, except poor Chuffey, who came within the shadow of Anthony Chuzzlewit's grave, feasted like a Ghoul.

At length the day of the funeral, pious and truthful ceremony that it was, arrived. Mr Mould, with a glass of generous port between his eye and the light, leaned against the desk in the little glass office with his gold watch in his unoccupied hand, and conversed with Mrs Gamp; two mutes were at the house-door, looking as mournful as could be reasonably expected of men with such a thriving job in hand; the whole of Mr Mould's establishment were on duty within the house or without; feathers waved, horses snorted, silk and velvets fluttered; in a word, as Mr Mould emphatically said, 'Everything that money could do was done.'

'And what can do more, Mrs Gamp?' exclaimed the undertaker as he emptied his glass and smacked his lips.

'Nothing in the world, sir.'

'Nothing in the world,' repeated Mr Mould. 'You are right, Mrs Gamp. Why do people spend more money'—here he filled his glass again—'upon a death, Mrs Gamp, than upon a birth? Come, that's in your way; you ought to know. How do you account for that now?'

'Perhaps it is because an undertaker's charges comes dearer than a nurse's charges, sir,' said Mrs Gamp, tittering, and smoothing down her new black dress with her hands.

'Ha, ha!' laughed Mr Mould. 'You have been breakfasting at somebody's expense this morning, Mrs Gamp.' But seeing, by the aid of a little shaving-glass which hung opposite, that he looked merry, he composed his features and became sorrowful.

'Many's the time that I've not breakfasted at my own expense along of your recommending, sir; and many's the time I hope to do the same in time to come,' said Mrs Gamp, with an apologetic curtsey.

'So be it,' replied Mr Mould, 'please Providence. No, Mrs Gamp; I'll tell you why it is. It's because the laying out of money with a well-conducted establishment, where the thing is performed upon the very best scale, binds the broken heart, and sheds balm upon the wounded spirit. Hearts want binding, and spirits want balming when people die; not when people are born. Look at this gentleman to-day; look at him.'

'An open-handed gentleman?' cried Mrs Gamp, with enthusiasm.

'No, no,' said the undertaker; 'not an open-handed gentleman in general, by any means. There you mistake him; but an afflicted gentleman, an affectionate gentleman, who knows what it is in the power of money to do, in giving him relief, and in testifying his love and veneration for the departed. It can give him,' said Mr Mould, waving his watch-chain slowly round and round, so that he described one circle after every item; 'it can give him four horses to each vehicle; it can give him velvet trappings; it can give him drivers in cloth cloaks and top-boots; it can give him the plumage of the ostrich, dyed black; it can give him any number of walking attendants, dressed in the first style of funeral fashion, and carrying batons tipped with brass; it can give him a handsome tomb; it can give him a place in Westminster Abbey itself, if he choose to invest it in such a purchase. Oh! do not let us say that gold is dross, when it can buy such things as these, Mrs Gamp.'

'But what a blessing, sir,' said Mrs Gamp, 'that there are such as you, to sell or let 'em out on hire!'

'Aye, Mrs Gamp, you are right,' rejoined the undertaker. 'We should be an honoured calling. We do good by stealth, and blush to have it mentioned in our little bills. How much consolation may I—even I,' cried Mr Mould, 'have diffused among my fellow-creatures by means of my four long-tailed prancers, never harnessed under ten pund ten!'

Mrs Gamp had begun to make a suitable reply, when she was interrupted by the appearance of one of Mr Mould's assistants—his chief mourner in fact—an obese person, with his waistcoat in closer connection with his legs than is quite reconcilable with the established ideas of grace; with that cast of feature which is figuratively called a bottle nose; and with a face covered all over with pimples. He had been a tender plant once upon a time, but from constant blowing in the fat atmosphere of funerals, had run to seed.

'Well, Tacker,' said Mr Mould, 'is all ready below?'

'A beautiful show, sir,' rejoined Tacker. 'The horses are prouder and fresher than ever I see 'em; and toss their heads, they do, as if they knowed how much their plumes cost. One, two, three, four,' said Mr Tacker, heaping that number of black cloaks upon his left arm.

'Is Tom there, with the cake and wine?' asked Mr Mould.

'Ready to come in at a moment's notice, sir,' said Tacker.

'Then,' rejoined Mr Mould, putting up his watch, and glancing at himself in the little shaving-glass, that he might be sure his face had the right expression on it; 'then I think we may proceed to business. Give me the paper of gloves, Tacker. Ah, what a man he was! Ah, Tacker, Tacker, what a man he was!'

Mr Tacker, who from his great experience in the performance of funerals, would have made an excellent pantomime actor, winked at Mrs Gamp without at all disturbing the gravity of his countenance, and followed his master into the next room.

It was a great point with Mr Mould, and a part of his professional tact, not to seem to know the doctor; though in reality they were near neighbours, and very often, as in the present instance, worked together. So he advanced to fit on his black kid gloves as if he had never seen him in all his life; while the doctor, on his part, looked as distant and unconscious as if he had heard and read of undertakers, and had passed their shops, but had never before been brought into communication with one.

'Gloves, eh?' said the doctor. 'Mr Pecksniff after you.'

'I couldn't think of it,' returned Mr Pecksniff.

'You are very good,' said the doctor, taking a pair. 'Well, sir, as I was saying—I was called up to attend that case at about half-past one o'clock. Cake and wine, eh? Which is port? Thank you.'

Mr Pecksniff took some also.

'At about half-past one o'clock in the morning, sir,' resumed the doctor, 'I was called up to attend that case. At the first pull of the night-bell I turned out, threw up the window, and put out my head. Cloak, eh? Don't tie it too tight. That'll do.'

Mr Pecksniff having been likewise inducted into a similar garment, the doctor resumed.

'And put out my head—hat, eh? My good friend, that is not mine. Mr Pecksniff, I beg your pardon, but I think we have unintentionally made an exchange. Thank you. Well, sir, I was going to tell you—'

'We are quite ready,' interrupted Mould in a low voice.

'Ready, eh?' said the doctor. 'Very good, Mr Pecksniff, I'll take an opportunity of relating the rest in the coach. It's rather curious. Ready, eh? No rain, I hope?'

'Quite fair, sir,' returned Mould.

'I was afraid the ground would have been wet,' said the doctor, 'for my glass fell yesterday. We may congratulate ourselves upon our good fortune.' But seeing by this time that Mr Jonas and Chuffey were going out at the door, he put a white pocket-handkerchief to his face as if a violent burst of grief had suddenly come upon him, and walked down side by side with Mr Pecksniff.

Mr Mould and his men had not exaggerated the grandeur of the arrangements. They were splendid. The four hearse-horses, especially, reared and pranced, and showed their highest action, as if they knew a man was dead, and triumphed in it. 'They break us, drive us, ride us; ill-treat, abuse, and maim us for their pleasure—But they die; Hurrah, they die!'

So through the narrow streets and winding city ways, went Anthony Chuzzlewit's funeral; Mr Jonas glancing stealthily out of the coach-window now and then, to observe its effect upon the crowd; Mr Mould as he walked along, listening with a sober pride to the exclamations of the bystanders; the doctor whispering his story to Mr Pecksniff, without appearing to come any nearer the end of it; and poor old Chuffey sobbing unregarded in a corner. But he had greatly scandalized Mr Mould at an early stage of the ceremony by carrying his handkerchief in his hat in a perfectly informal manner, and wiping his eyes with his knuckles. And as Mr Mould himself had said already, his behaviour was indecent, and quite unworthy of such an occasion; and he never ought to have been there.

There he was, however; and in the churchyard there he was, also, conducting himself in a no less unbecoming manner, and leaning for support on Tacker, who plainly told him that he was fit for nothing better than a walking funeral. But Chuffey, Heaven help him! heard no sound but the echoes, lingering in his own heart, of a voice for ever silent.

'I loved him,' cried the old man, sinking down upon the grave when all was done. 'He was very good to me. Oh, my dear old friend and master!'

'Come, come, Mr Chuffey,' said the doctor, 'this won't do; it's a clayey soil, Mr Chuffey. You mustn't, really.'

'If it had been the commonest thing we do, and Mr Chuffey had been a Bearer, gentlemen,' said Mould, casting an imploring glance upon them, as he helped to raise him, 'he couldn't have gone on worse than this.'

'Be a man, Mr Chuffey,' said Pecksniff.

'Be a gentleman, Mr Chuffey,' said Mould.

'Upon my word, my good friend,' murmured the doctor, in a tone of stately reproof, as he stepped up to the old man's side, 'this is worse than weakness. This is bad, selfish, very wrong, Mr Chuffey. You should take example from others, my good sir. You forget that you were not connected by ties of blood with our deceased friend; and that he had a very near and very dear relation, Mr Chuffey.'

'Aye, his own son!' cried the old man, clasping his hands with remarkable passion. 'His own, own, only son!'

'He's not right in his head, you know,' said Jonas, turning pale. 'You're not to mind anything he says. I shouldn't wonder if he was to talk some precious nonsense. But don't you mind him, any of you. I don't. My father left him to my charge; and whatever he says or does, that's enough. I'll take care of him.'

A hum of admiration rose from the mourners (including Mr Mould and his merry men) at this new instance of magnanimity and kind feeling on the part of Jonas. But Chuffey put it to the test no farther. He said not a word more, and being left to himself for a little while, crept back again to the coach.

It has been said that Mr Jonas turned pale when the behaviour of the old clerk attracted general attention; his discomposure, however, was but momentary, and he soon recovered. But these were not the only changes he had exhibited that day. The curious eyes of Mr Pecksniff had observed that as soon as they left the house upon their mournful errand, he began to mend; that as the ceremonies proceeded he gradually, by little and little, recovered his old condition, his old looks, his old bearing, his old agreeable characteristics of speech and manner, and became, in all respects, his old pleasant self. And now that they were seated in the coach on their return home; and more when they got there, and found the windows open, the light and air admitted, and all traces of the late event removed; he felt so well convinced that Jonas was again the Jonas he had known a week ago, and not the Jonas of the intervening time, that he voluntarily gave up his recently-acquired power without one faint attempt to exercise it, and at once fell back into his former position of mild and deferential guest.

Mrs Gamp went home to the bird-fancier's, and was knocked up again that very night for a birth of twins; Mr Mould dined gayly in the bosom of his family, and passed the evening facetiously at his club; the hearse, after standing for a long time at the door of a roistering public-house, repaired to its stables with the feathers inside and twelve red-nosed undertakers on the roof, each holding on by a dingy peg, to which, in times of state, a waving plume was fitted; the various trappings of sorrow were carefully laid by in presses for the next hirer; the fiery steeds were quenched and quiet in their stalls; the doctor got merry with wine at a wedding-dinner, and forgot the middle of the story which had no end to it; the pageant of a few short hours ago was written nowhere half so legibly as in the undertaker's books.

Not in the churchyard? Not even there. The gates were closed; the night was dark and wet; the rain fell silently, among the stagnant weeds and nettles. One new mound was there which had not been there last night. Time, burrowing like a mole below the ground, had marked his track by throwing up another heap of earth. And that was all.

CHAPTER TWENTY

IS A CHAPTER OF LOVE

'Pecksniff,' said Jonas, taking off his hat, to see that the black crape band was all right; and finding that it was, putting it on again, complacently; 'what do you mean to give your daughters when they marry?'

'My dear Mr Jonas,' cried the affectionate parent, with an ingenuous smile, 'what a very singular inquiry!'

'Now, don't you mind whether it's a singular inquiry or a plural one,' retorted Jonas, eyeing Mr Pecksniff with no great favour, 'but answer it, or let it alone. One or the other.'

'Hum! The question, my dear friend,' said Mr Pecksniff, laying his hand tenderly upon his kinsman's knee, 'is involved with many considerations. What would I give them? Eh?'

'Ah! what would you give 'em?' repeated Jonas.

'Why, that, 'said Mr Pecksniff, 'would naturally depend in a great measure upon the kind of husbands they might choose, my dear young friend.'

Mr Jonas was evidently disconcerted, and at a loss how to proceed. It was a good answer. It seemed a deep one, but such is the wisdom of simplicity!'

'My standard for the merits I would require in a son-in-law,' said Mr Pecksniff, after a short silence, 'is a high one. Forgive me, my dear Mr Jonas,' he added, greatly moved, 'if I say that you have spoiled me, and made it a fanciful one; an imaginative one; a prismatically tinged one, if I may be permitted to call it so.'

'What do you mean by that?' growled Jonas, looking at him with increased disfavour.

'Indeed, my dear friend,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'you may well inquire. The heart is not always a royal mint, with patent machinery to work its metal into current coin. Sometimes it throws it out in strange forms, not easily recognized as coin at all. But it is sterling gold. It has at least that merit. It is sterling gold.'

'Is it?' grumbled Jonas, with a doubtful shake of the head.

'Aye!' said Mr Pecksniff, warming with his subject 'it is. To be plain with you, Mr Jonas, if I could find two such sons-in-law as you will one day make to some deserving man, capable of appreciating a nature such as yours, I would—forgetful of myself—bestow upon my daughters portions reaching to the very utmost limit of my means.'

This was strong language, and it was earnestly delivered. But who can wonder that such a man as Mr Pecksniff, after all he had seen and heard of Mr Jonas, should be strong and earnest upon such a theme; a theme that touched even the worldly lips of undertakers with the honey of eloquence!

Mr Jonas was silent, and looked thoughtfully at the landscape. For they were seated on the outside of the coach, at the back, and were travelling down into the country. He accompanied Mr Pecksniff home for a few days' change of air and scene after his recent trials.

'Well,' he said, at last, with captivating bluntness, 'suppose you got one such son-in-law as me, what then?'

Mr Pecksniff regarded him at first with inexpressible surprise; then gradually breaking into a sort of dejected vivacity, said:

'Then well I know whose husband he would be!'

'Whose?' asked Jonas, drily.

'My eldest girl's, Mr Jonas,' replied Pecksniff, with moistening eyes. 'My dear Cherry's; my staff, my scrip, my treasure, Mr Jonas. A hard struggle, but it is in the nature of things! I must one day part with her to a husband. I know it, my dear friend. I am prepared for it.'

'Ecod! you've been prepared for that a pretty long time, I should think,' said Jonas.

'Many have sought to bear her from me,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'All have failed. "I never will give my hand, papa"—those were her words—"unless my heart is won." She has not been quite so happy as she used to be, of late. I don't know why.'

Again Mr Jonas looked at the landscape; then at the coachman; then at the luggage on the roof; finally at Mr Pecksniff.

'I suppose you'll have to part with the other one, some of these days?' he observed, as he caught that gentleman's eye.

'Probably,' said the parent. 'Years will tame down the wildness of my foolish bird, and then it will be caged. But Cherry, Mr Jonas, Cherry—'

'Oh, ah!' interrupted Jonas. 'Years have made her all right enough. Nobody doubts that. But you haven't answered what I asked you. Of course, you're not obliged to do it, you know, if you don't like. You're the best judge.'

There was a warning sulkiness in the manner of this speech, which admonished Mr Pecksniff that his dear friend was not to be trifled with or fenced off, and that he must either return a straight-forward reply to his question, or plainly give him to understand that he declined to enlighten him upon the subject to which it referred. Mindful in this dilemma of the caution old Anthony had given him almost with his latest breath, he resolved to speak to the point, and so told Mr Jonas (enlarging upon the communication as a proof of his great attachment and confidence), that in the case he had put; to wit, in the event of such a man as he proposing for his daughter's hand, he would endow her with a fortune of four thousand pounds.

'I should sadly pinch and cramp myself to do so,' was his fatherly remark; 'but that would be my duty, and my conscience would reward me. For myself, my conscience is my bank. I have a trifle invested there—a mere trifle, Mr Jonas—but I prize it as a store of value, I assure you.'

The good man's enemies would have divided upon this question into two parties. One would have asserted without scruple that if Mr Pecksniff's conscience were his bank, and he kept a running account there, he must have overdrawn it beyond all mortal means of computation. The other would have contended that it was a mere fictitious form; a perfectly blank book; or one in which entries were only made with a peculiar kind of invisible ink to become legible at some indefinite time; and that he never troubled it at all.

'It would sadly pinch and cramp me, my dear friend,' repeated Mr Pecksniff, 'but Providence—perhaps I may be permitted to say a special Providence—has blessed my endeavours, and I could guarantee to make the sacrifice.'

A question of philosophy arises here, whether Mr Pecksniff had or had not good reason to say that he was specially patronized and encouraged in his undertakings. All his life long he had been walking up and down the narrow ways and by-places, with a hook in one hand and a crook in the other, scraping all sorts of valuable odds and ends into his pouch. Now, there being a special Providence in the fall of a sparrow, it follows (so Mr

Pecksniff, and only such admirable men, would have reasoned), that there must also be a special Providence in the alighting of the stone or stick, or other substance which is aimed at the sparrow. And Mr Pecksniff's hook, or crook, having invariably knocked the sparrow on the head and brought him down, that gentleman may have been led to consider himself as specially licensed to bag sparrows, and as being specially seized and possessed of all the birds he had got together. That many undertakings, national as well as individual—but especially the former—are held to be specially brought to a glorious and successful issue, which never could be so regarded on any other process of reasoning, must be clear to all men. Therefore the precedents would seem to show that Mr Pecksniff had (as things go) good argument for what he said and might be permitted to say it, and did not say it presumptuously, vainly, or arrogantly, but in a spirit of high faith and great wisdom.

Mr Jonas, not being much accustomed to perplex his mind with theories of this nature, expressed no opinion on the subject. Nor did he receive his companion's announcement with one solitary syllable, good, bad, or indifferent. He preserved this taciturnity for a quarter of an hour at least, and during the whole of that time appeared to be steadily engaged in subjecting some given amount to the operation of every known rule in figures; adding to it, taking from it, multiplying it, reducing it by long and short division; working it by the rule-of-three direct and inversed; exchange or barter; practice; simple interest; compound interest; and other means of arithmetical calculation. The result of these labours appeared to be satisfactory, for when he did break silence, it was as one who had arrived at some specific result, and freed himself from a state of distressing uncertainty.

'Come, old Pecksniff!'—Such was his jocose address, as he slapped that gentleman on the back, at the end of the stage—'let's have something!'

'With all my heart,' said Mr Pecksniff.

'Let's treat the driver,' cried Jonas.

'If you think it won't hurt the man, or render him discontented with his station—certainly,' faltered Mr Pecksniff.

Jonas only laughed at this, and getting down from the coach-top with great alacrity, cut a cumbersome kind of caper in the road. After which, he went into the public-house, and there ordered spirituous drink to such an extent, that Mr Pecksniff had some doubts of his perfect sanity, until Jonas set them quite at rest by saying, when the coach could wait no longer:

'I've been standing treat for a whole week and more, and letting you have all the delicacies of the season. YOU shall pay for this Pecksniff.' It was not a joke either, as Mr Pecksniff at first supposed; for he went off to the coach without further ceremony, and left his respected victim to settle the bill.

But Mr Pecksniff was a man of meek endurance, and Mr Jonas was his friend. Moreover, his regard for that gentleman was founded, as we know, on pure esteem, and a knowledge of the excellence of his character. He came out from the tavern with a smiling face, and even went so far as to repeat the performance, on a less expensive scale, at the next ale-house. There was a certain wildness in the spirits of Mr Jonas (not usually a part of his character) which was far from being subdued by these means, and, for the rest of the journey, he was so very buoyant—it may be said, boisterous—that Mr Pecksniff had some difficulty in keeping pace with him.

They were not expected—oh dear, no! Mr Pecksniff had proposed in London to give the girls a surprise, and had said he wouldn't write a word to prepare them on any account, in order that he and Mr Jonas might take them unawares, and just see what they were doing, when they thought their dear papa was miles and miles away. As a consequence of this playful device, there was nobody to meet them at the finger-post, but that was of small consequence, for they had come down by the day coach, and Mr Pecksniff had only a carpetbag, while Mr Jonas had only a portmanteau. They took the portmanteau between them, put the bag upon it, and walked off up the lane without delay; Mr Pecksniff already going on tiptoe as if, without this precaution, his fond children, being then at a distance of a couple of miles or so, would have some filial sense of his approach.

It was a lovely evening in the spring-time of the year; and in the soft stillness of the twilight, all nature was very calm and beautiful. The day had been fine and warm; but at the coming on of night, the air grew cool, and in the mellowing distance smoke was rising gently from the cottage chimneys. There were a thousand pleasant scents diffused around, from young leaves and fresh buds; the cuckoo had been singing all day long, and was but just now hushed; the smell of earth newly-upturned, first breath of hope to the first labourer after his garden withered, was fragrant in the evening breeze. It was a time when most men cherish good resolves, and sorrow for the wasted past; when most men, looking on the shadows as they gather, think of that evening which must close on all, and that to-morrow which has none beyond.

'Precious dull,' said Mr Jonas, looking about. 'It's enough to make a man go melancholy mad.'

'We shall have lights and a fire soon,' observed Mr Pecksniff.

'We shall need 'em by the time we get there,' said Jonas. 'Why the devil don't you talk? What are you thinking of?'

'To tell you the truth, Mr Jonas,' said Pecksniff with great solemnity, 'my mind was running at that moment on our late dear friend, your departed father.'

Mr Jonas immediately let his burden fall, and said, threatening him with his hand:

'Drop that, Pecksniff!'

Mr Pecksniff not exactly knowing whether allusion was made to the subject or the portmanteau, stared at his friend in unaffected surprise.

'Drop it, I say!' cried Jonas, fiercely. 'Do you hear? Drop it, now and for ever. You had better, I give you notice!'

'It was quite a mistake,' urged Mr Pecksniff, very much dismayed; 'though I admit it was foolish. I might have known it was a tender string.'

'Don't talk to me about tender strings,' said Jonas, wiping his forehead with the cuff of his coat. 'I'm not going to be crowed over by you, because I don't like dead company.'

Mr Pecksniff had got out the words 'Crowed over, Mr Jonas!' when that young man, with a dark expression in his countenance, cut him short once more:

'Mind!' he said. 'I won't have it. I advise you not to revive the subject, neither to me nor anybody else. You can take a hint, if you choose as well as another man. There's enough said about it. Come along!'

Taking up his part of the load again, when he had said these words, he hurried on so fast that Mr Pecksniff, at the other end of the portmanteau, found himself dragged forward, in a very inconvenient and ungraceful manner, to the great detriment of what is called by fancy gentlemen 'the bark' upon his shins, which were most unmercifully bumped against the hard leather and the iron buckles. In the course of a few minutes, however, Mr Jonas relaxed his speed, and suffered his companion to come up with him, and to bring the portmanteau into a tolerably straight position.

It was pretty clear that he regretted his late outbreak, and that he mistrusted its effect on Mr Pecksniff; for as often as that gentleman glanced towards Mr Jonas, he found Mr Jonas glancing at him, which was a new source of embarrassment. It was but a short-lived one, though, for Mr Jonas soon began to whistle, whereupon Mr Pecksniff, taking his cue from his friend, began to hum a tune melodiously.

'Pretty nearly there, ain't we?' said Jonas, when this had lasted some time.

'Close, my dear friend,' said Mr Pecksniff.

'What'll they be doing, do you suppose?' asked Jonas.

'Impossible to say,' cried Mr Pecksniff. 'Giddy truants! They may be away from home, perhaps. I was going to—he! he! he!—I was going to propose,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'that we should enter by the back way, and come upon them like a clap of thunder, Mr Jonas.'

It might not have been easy to decide in respect of which of their manifold properties, Jonas, Mr Pecksniff, the carpet-bag, and the portmanteau, could be likened to a clap of thunder. But Mr Jonas giving his assent to this proposal, they stole round into the back yard, and softly advanced towards the kitchen window, through which the mingled light of fire and candle shone upon the darkening night.

Truly Mr Pecksniff is blessed in his children—in one of them, at any rate. The prudent Cherry—staff and scrip, and treasure of her doting father—there she sits, at a little table white as driven snow, before the kitchen fire, making up accounts! See the neat maiden, as with pen in hand, and calculating look addressed towards the ceiling and bunch of keys within a little basket at her side, she checks the housekeeping expenditure! From flat-iron, dish-cover, and warming-pan; from pot and kettle, face of brass footman, and black-leaded stove; bright glances of approbation wink and glow upon her. The very onions dangling from the beam, mantle and shine like cherubs' cheeks. Something of the influence of those vegetables sinks into Mr Pecksniff's nature. He weeps.

It is but for a moment, and he hides it from the observation of his friend—very carefully—by a somewhat elaborate use of his pocket-handkerchief, in fact; for he would not have his weakness known.

'Pleasant,' he murmured, 'pleasant to a father's feelings! My dear girl! Shall we let her know we are here, Mr Jonas?'

'Why, I suppose you don't mean to spend the evening in the stable, or the coach-house,' he returned.

'That, indeed, is not such hospitality as I would show to YOU, my friend,' cried Mr Pecksniff, pressing his hand. And then he took a long breath, and tapping at the window, shouted with stentorian blandness:

'Boh!'

Cherry dropped her pen and screamed. But innocence is ever bold, or should be. As they opened the door, the valiant girl exclaimed in a firm voice, and with a presence of mind which even in that trying moment did not desert her, 'Who are you? What do you want? Speak! or I will call my Pa.'

Mr Pecksniff held out his arms. She knew him instantly, and rushed into his fond embrace.

'It was thoughtless of us, Mr Jonas, it was very thoughtless,' said Pecksniff, smoothing his daugther's hair. 'My darling, do you see that I am not alone!'

Not she. She had seen nothing but her father until now. She saw Mr Jonas now, though; and blushed, and hung her head down, as she gave him welcome.

But where was Merry? Mr Pecksniff didn't ask the question in reproach, but in a vein of mildness touched with a gentle sorrow. She was upstairs, reading on the parlour couch. Ah! Domestic details had no charms for HER. 'But call her down,' said Mr Pecksniff, with a placid resignation. 'Call her down, my love.'

She was called and came, all flushed and tumbled from reposing on the sofa; but none the worse for that. No, not at all. Rather the better, if anything.

'Oh my goodness me!' cried the arch girl, turning to her cousin when she had kissed her father on both cheeks, and in her frolicsome nature had bestowed a supernumerary salute upon the tip of his nose, 'YOU here, fright! Well, I'm very thankful that you won't trouble ME much!'

'What! you're as lively as ever, are you?' said Jonas. 'Oh! You're a wicked one!'

'There, go along!' retorted Merry, pushing him away. 'I'm sure I don't know what I shall ever do, if I have to see much of you. Go along, for gracious' sake!'

Mr Pecksniff striking in here, with a request that Mr Jonas would immediately walk upstairs, he so far complied with the young lady's adjuration as to go at once. But though he had the fair Cherry on his arm, he could not help looking back at her sister, and exchanging some further dialogue of the same bantering description, as they all four ascended to the parlour; where—for the young ladies happened, by good fortune, to be a little later than usual that night—the tea-board was at that moment being set out.

Mr Pinch was not at home, so they had it all to themselves, and were very snug and talkative, Jonas sitting between the two sisters, and displaying his gallantry in that engaging manner which was peculiar to him. It was a hard thing, Mr Pecksniff said, when tea was done, and cleared away, to leave so pleasant a little party, but having some important papers to examine in his own apartment, he must beg them to excuse him for half an hour. With this apology he withdrew, singing a careless strain as he went. He had not been gone five minutes, when Merry, who had been sitting in the window, apart from Jonas and her sister, burst into a half-smothered laugh, and skipped towards the door.

'Hallo!' cried Jonas. 'Don't go.'

'Oh, I dare say!' rejoined Merry, looking back. 'You're very anxious I should stay, fright, ain't you?'

'Yes, I am,' said Jonas. 'Upon my word I am. I want to speak to you.' But as she left the room notwithstanding, he ran out after her, and brought her back, after a short struggle in the passage which scandalized Miss Cherry very much.

'Upon my word, Merry,' urged that young lady, 'I wonder at you! There are bounds even to absurdity, my dear.'

'Thank you, my sweet,' said Merry, pursing up her rosy Lips. 'Much obliged to it for its advice. Oh! do leave me alone, you monster, do!' This entreaty was wrung from her by a new proceeding on the part of Mr Jonas, who pulled her down, all breathless as she was, into a seat beside him on the sofa, having at the same time Miss Cherry upon the other side.

'Now,' said Jonas, clasping the waist of each; 'I have got both arms full, haven't I?'

'One of them will be black and blue to-morrow, if you don't let me go,' cried the playful Merry.

'Ah! I don't mind YOUR pinching,' grinned Jonas, 'a bit.'

'Pinch him for me, Cherry, pray,' said Mercy. 'I never did hate anybody so much as I hate this creature, I declare!'

'No, no, don't say that,' urged Jonas, 'and don't pinch either, because I want to be serious. I say—Cousin Charity—'

'Well! what?' she answered sharply.

'I want to have some sober talk,' said Jonas; 'I want to prevent any mistakes, you know, and to put everything upon a pleasant understanding. That's desirable and proper, ain't it?'

Neither of the sisters spoke a word. Mr Jonas paused and cleared his throat, which was very dry.

'She'll not believe what I am going to say, will she, cousin?' said Jonas, timidly squeezing Miss Charity.

'Really, Mr Jonas, I don't know, until I hear what it is. It's quite impossible!'

'Why, you see,' said Jonas, 'her way always being to make game of people, I know she'll laugh, or pretend to—I know that, beforehand. But you can tell her I'm in earnest, cousin; can't you? You'll confess you know, won't you? You'll be honourable, I'm sure,' he added persuasively.

No answer. His throat seemed to grow hotter and hotter, and to be more and more difficult of control.

'You see, Cousin Charity,' said Jonas, 'nobody but you can tell her what pains I took to get into her company when you were both at the boarding-house in the city, because nobody's so well aware of it, you know. Nobody else can tell her how hard I tried to get to know you better, in order that I might get to know her without seeming to wish it; can they? I always asked you about her, and said where had she gone, and when would she come, and how lively she was, and all that; didn't I, cousin? I know you'll tell her so, if you haven't told her so already, and—and—I dare say you have, because I'm sure you're honourable, ain't you?'

Still not a word. The right arm of Mr Jonas—the elder sister sat upon his right—may have been sensible of some tumultuous throbbing which was not within itself; but nothing else apprised him that his words had had the least effect.

'Even if you kept it to yourself, and haven't told her,' resumed Jonas, 'it don't much matter, because you'll bear honest witness now; won't you? We've been very good friends from the first; haven't we? and of course we shall be quite friends in future, and so I don't mind speaking before you a bit. Cousin Mercy, you've heard what I've been saying. She'll confirm it, every word; she must. Will you have me for your husband? Eh?'

As he released his hold of Charity, to put this question with better effect, she started up and hurried away to her own room, marking her progress as she went by such a train of passionate and incoherent sound, as nothing but a slighted woman in her anger could produce.

'Let me go away. Let me go after her,' said Merry, pushing him off, and giving him—to tell the truth—more than one sounding slap upon his outstretched face.

'Not till you say yes. You haven't told me. Will you have me for your husband?'

'No, I won't. I can't bear the sight of you. I have told you so a hundred times. You are a fright. Besides, I always thought you liked my sister best. We all thought so.'

'But that wasn't my fault,' said Jonas.

'Yes it was; you know it was.'

'Any trick is fair in love,' said Jonas. 'She may have thought I liked her best, but you didn't.'

'I did!'

'No, you didn't. You never could have thought I liked her best, when you were by.'

'There's no accounting for tastes,' said Merry; 'at least I didn't mean to say that. I don't know what I mean. Let me go to her.'

'Say "Yes," and then I will.'

'If I ever brought myself to say so, it should only be that I might hate and tease you all my life.'

'That's as good,' cried Jonas, 'as saying it right out. It's a bargain, cousin. We're a pair, if ever there was one.'

This gallant speech was succeeded by a confused noise of kissing and slapping; and then the fair but much dishevelled Merry broke away, and followed in the footsteps of her sister.

Now whether Mr Pecksniff had been listening—which in one of his character appears impossible; or divined almost by inspiration what the matter was—which, in a man of his sagacity is far more probable; or happened by sheer good fortune to find himself in exactly the right place, at precisely the right time—which, under the special guardianship in which he lived might very reasonably happen; it is quite certain that at the moment when the sisters came together in their own room, he appeared at the chamber door. And a marvellous contrast it was—they so heated, noisy, and vehement; he so calm, so self-possessed, so cool and full of peace, that not a hair upon his head was stirred.

'Children!' said Mr Pecksniff, spreading out his hands in wonder, but not before he had shut the door, and set his back against it. 'Girls! Daughters! What is this?'

'The wretch; the apostate; the false, mean, odious villain; has before my very face proposed to Mercy!' was his eldest daughter's answer.

'Who has proposed to Mercy!' asked Mr Pecksniff.

'HE has. That thing, Jonas, downstairs.'

'Jonas proposed to Mercy?' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Aye, aye! Indeed!'

'Have you nothing else to say?' cried Charity. 'Am I to be driven mad, papa? He has proposed to Mercy, not to me.'

'Oh, fie! For shame!' said Mr Pecksniff, gravely. 'Oh, for shame! Can the triumph of a sister move you to this terrible display, my child? Oh, really this is very sad! I am sorry; I am surprised and hurt to see you so. Mercy, my girl, bless you! See to her. Ah, envy, envy, what a passion you are!'

Uttering this apostrophe in a tone full of grief and lamentation, Mr Pecksniff left the room (taking care to shut the door behind him), and walked downstairs into the parlour. There he found his intended son-in-law, whom he seized by both hands.

'Jonas!' cried Mr Pecksniff. 'Jonas! the dearest wish of my heart is now fulfilled!'

'Very well; I'm glad to hear it,' said Jonas. 'That'll do. I say! As it ain't the one you're so fond of, you must come down with another thousand, Pecksniff. You must make it up five. It's worth that, to keep your treasure to yourself, you know. You get off very cheap that way, and haven't a sacrifice to make.'

The grin with which he accompanied this, set off his other attractions to such unspeakable advantage, that even Mr Pecksniff lost his presence of mind for a moment, and looked at the young man as if he were quite stupefied with wonder and admiration. But he quickly regained his composure, and was in the very act of changing the subject, when a hasty step was heard without, and Tom Pinch, in a state of great excitement, came darting into the room.

On seeing a stranger there, apparently engaged with Mr Pecksniff in private conversation, Tom was very much abashed, though he still looked as if he had something of great importance to communicate, which would be a sufficient apology for his intrusion.

'Mr Pinch,' said Pecksniff, 'this is hardly decent. You will excuse my saying that I think your conduct scarcely decent, Mr Pinch.'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' replied Tom, 'for not knocking at the door.'

'Rather beg this gentleman's pardon, Mr Pinch,' said Pecksniff. 'I know you; he does not.—My young man, Mr Jonas.'

The son-in-law that was to be gave him a slight nod—not actively disdainful or contemptuous, only passively; for he was in a good humour.

'Could I speak a word with you, sir, if you please?' said Tom. 'It's rather pressing.'

'It should be very pressing to justify this strange behaviour, Mr Pinch,' returned his master. 'Excuse me for one moment, my dear friend. Now, sir, what is the reason of this rough intrusion?'

'I am very sorry, sir, I am sure,' said Tom, standing, cap in hand, before his patron in the passage; 'and I know it must have a very rude appearance —'

'It HAS a very rude appearance, Mr Pinch.'

'Yes, I feel that, sir; but the truth is, I was so surprised to see them, and knew you would be too, that I ran home very fast indeed, and really hadn't enough command over myself to know what I was doing very well. I was in the church just now, sir, touching the organ for my own amusement, when I happened to look round, and saw a gentleman and lady standing in the aisle listening. They seemed to be strangers, sir, as well as I could make out in the dusk; and I thought I didn't know them; so presently I left off, and said, would they walk up into the organ-loft, or take a seat? No, they said, they wouldn't do that; but they thanked me for the music they had heard. In fact,' observed Tom, blushing, 'they said, "Delicious music!" at least, SHE did; and I am sure that was a greater pleasure and honour to me than any compliment I could have had. I—I—beg your pardon sir;' he was all in a tremble, and dropped his hat for the second time 'but I—I'm rather flurried, and I fear I've wandered from the point.'

'If you will come back to it, Thomas,' said Mr Pecksniff, with an icy look, 'I shall feel obliged.'

'Yes, sir,' returned Tom, 'certainly. They had a posting carriage at the porch, sir, and had stopped to hear the organ, they said. And then they said—SHE said, I mean, "I believe you live with Mr Pecksniff, sir?" I said I had that honour, and I took the liberty, sir,' added Tom, raising his eyes to his benefactor's face, 'of saying, as I always will and must, with your permission, that I was under great obligations to you, and never could express my sense of them sufficiently.'

'That,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'was very, very wrong. Take your time, Mr Pinch.'

'Thank you, sir,' cried Tom. 'On that they asked me—she asked, I mean—"Wasn't there a bridle road to Mr Pecksniff's house?"'

Mr Pecksniff suddenly became full of interest.

'"Without going by the Dragon?" When I said there was, and said how happy I should be to show it 'em, they sent the carriage on by the road, and came with me across the meadows. I left 'em at the turnstile to run forward and tell you they were coming, and they'll be here, sir, in—in less than a minute's time, I should say,' added Tom, fetching his breath with difficulty.

'Now, who,' said Mr Pecksniff, pondering, 'who may these people be?'

'Bless my soul, sir!' cried Tom, 'I meant to mention that at first, I thought I had. I knew them—her, I mean—directly. The gentleman who was ill at the Dragon, sir, last winter; and the young lady who attended him.'

Tom's teeth chattered in his head, and he positively staggered with amazement, at witnessing the extraordinary effect produced on Mr Pecksniff by these simple words. The dread of losing the old man's favour almost as soon as they were reconciled, through the mere fact of having Jonas in the house; the impossibility of dismissing Jonas, or shutting him up, or tying him hand and foot and putting him in the coal-cellar, without offending him beyond recall; the horrible discordance prevailing in the establishment, and the impossibility of reducing it to decent harmony with Charity in loud hysterics, Mercy in the utmost disorder, Jonas in the parlour, and Martin Chuzzlewit and his young charge upon the very doorsteps; the total hopelessness of being able to disguise or feasibly explain this state of rampant confusion; the sudden accumulation over his devoted head of every complicated perplexity and entanglement for his extrication from which he had trusted to time, good fortune, chance, and his own plotting, so filled the entrapped architect with dismay, that if Tom could have been a Gorgon staring at Mr Pecksniff, and Mr Pecksniff could have been a Gorgon staring at Tom, they could not have horrified each other half so much as in their own bewildered persons.

'Dear, dear!' cried Tom, 'what have I done? I hoped it would be a pleasant surprise, sir. I thought you would like to know.'

But at that moment a loud knocking was heard at the hall door.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

MORE AMERICAN EXPERIENCES, MARTIN TAKES A PARTNER, AND MAKES A PURCHASE. SOME ACCOUNT OF EDEN, AS IT APPEARED ON PAPER. ALSO OF THE BRITISH LION. ALSO OF THE KIND OF SYMPATHY PROFESSED AND ENTERTAINED BY THE WATERTOAST ASSOCIATION OF UNITED SYMPATHISERS

The knocking at Mr Pecksniff's door, though loud enough, bore no resemblance whatever to the noise of an American railway train at full speed. It may be well to begin the present chapter with this frank admission, lest the reader should imagine that the sounds now deafening this history's ears have any connection with the knocker on Mr Pecksniff's door, or with the great amount of agitation pretty equally divided between that worthy man and Mr Pinch, of which its strong performance was the cause.

Mr Pecksniff's house is more than a thousand leagues away; and again this happy chronicle has Liberty and Moral Sensibility for its high companions. Again it breathes the blessed air of Independence; again it contemplates with pious awe that moral sense which renders unto Ceasar nothing that is his; again inhales that sacred atmosphere which was the life of him—oh noble patriot, with many followers!—who dreamed of Freedom in a slave's embrace, and waking sold her offspring and his own in public markets.

How the wheels clank and rattle, and the tram-road shakes, as the train rushes on! And now the engine yells, as it were lashed and tortured like a living labourer, and writhed in agony. A poor fancy; for steel and iron are of infinitely greater account, in this commonwealth, than flesh and blood. If the cunning work of man be urged beyond its power of endurance, it has within it the elements of its own revenge; whereas the wretched mechanism of the Divine Hand is dangerous with no such property, but may be tampered with, and crushed, and broken, at the driver's pleasure. Look at that engine! It shall cost a man more dollars in the way of penalty and fine, and satisfaction of the outraged law, to deface in wantonness that senseless mass of metal, than to take the lives of twenty human creatures! Thus the stars wink upon the bloody stripes; and Liberty pulls down her cap upon her eyes, and owns Oppression in its vilest aspect, for her sister.

The engine-driver of the train whose noise awoke us to the present chapter was certainly troubled with no such reflections as these; nor is it very probable that his mind was disturbed by any reflections at all. He leaned with folded arms and crossed legs against the side of the carriage, smoking; and, except when he expressed, by a grunt as short as his pipe, his approval of some particularly dexterous aim on the part of his colleague, the fireman, who beguiled his leisure by throwing logs of wood from the tender at the numerous stray cattle on the line, he preserved a composure so immovable, and an indifference so complete, that if the locomotive had been a sucking-pig, he could not have been more perfectly indifferent to its doings. Notwithstanding the tranquil state of this officer, and his unbroken peace of mind, the train was proceeding with tolerable rapidity; and the rails being but poorly laid, the jolts and bumps it met with in its progress were neither slight nor few.

There were three great caravans or cars attached. The ladies' car, the gentlemen's car, and the car for negroes; the latter painted black, as an appropriate compliment to its company. Martin and Mark Tapley were in the first, as it was the most comfortable; and, being far from full, received other gentlemen who, like them, were unblessed by the society of ladies of their own. They were seated side by side, and were engaged in earnest conversation.

'And so, Mark,' said Martin, looking at him with an anxious expression, 'and so you are glad we have left New York far behind us, are you?'

'Yes, sir,' said Mark. 'I am. Precious glad.'

'Were you not "jolly" there?' asked Martin.

'On the contrairy, sir,' returned Mark. 'The jolliest week as ever I spent in my life, was that there week at Pawkins's.'

'What do you think of our prospects?' inquired Martin, with an air that plainly said he had avoided the question for some time.

'Uncommon bright, sir,' returned Mark. 'Impossible for a place to have a better name, sir, than the Walley of Eden. No man couldn't think of settling in a better place than the Walley of Eden. And I'm told,' added Mark, after a pause, 'as there's lots of serpents there, so we shall come out, quite complete and reg'lar.'

So far from dwelling upon this agreeable piece of information with the least dismay, Mark's face grew radiant as he called it to mind; so very radiant, that a stranger might have supposed he had all his life been yearning for the society of serpents, and now hailed with delight the approaching consummation of his fondest wishes.

'Who told you that?' asked Martin, sternly.

'A military officer,' said Mark.

'Confound you for a ridiculous fellow!' cried Martin, laughing heartily in spite of himself. 'What military officer? You know they spring up in every field.'

'As thick as scarecrows in England, sir,' interposed Mark, 'which is a sort of milita themselves, being entirely coat and wescoat, with a stick inside. Ha, ha!—Don't mind me, sir; it's my way sometimes. I can't help being jolly. Why it was one of them inwading conquerors at Pawkins's, as told me. "Am I rightly informed," he says—not exactly through his nose, but as if he'd got a stoppage in it, very high up—"that you're a-going to the Walley of Eden?" "I heard some talk on it," I told him. "Oh!" says he, "if you should ever happen to go to bed there—you MAY, you know," he says, "in course of time as civilisation progresses—don't forget to take a axe with you." I looks at him tolerable hard. "Fleas?" says I. "And more," says he. "Wampires?" says I. "And more," says he. "Musquitoes, perhaps?" says I. "And more," says he. "What more?" says I. "Snakes more," says he; "rattle-snakes. You're right to a certain extent, stranger. There air some catawampous chawers in the small way too, as graze upon a human pretty strong; but don't mind THEM—they're company. It's snakes," he says, "as you'll object to; and whenever you wake and see one in a upright poster on your bed," he says, "like a corkscrew with the handle off a-sittin' on its bottom ring, cut him down, for he means wenom."'

'Why didn't you tell me this before!' cried Martin, with an expression of face which set off the cheerfulness of Mark's visage to great advantage.

'I never thought on it, sir,' said Mark. 'It come in at one ear, and went out at the other. But Lord love us, he was one of another Company, I dare say, and only made up the story that we might go to his Eden, and not the opposition one.'

'There's some probability in that,' observed Martin. 'I can honestly say that I hope so, with all my heart.'

'I've not a doubt about it, sir,' returned Mark, who, full of the inspiriting influence of the anecodote upon himself, had for the moment forgotten its probable effect upon his master; 'anyhow, we must live, you know, sir.'

'Live!' cried Martin. 'Yes, it's easy to say live; but if we should happen not to wake when rattlesnakes are making corkscrews of themselves upon our beds, it may be not so easy to do it.'

'And that's a fact,' said a voice so close in his ear that it tickled him. 'That's dreadful true.'

Martin looked round, and found that a gentleman, on the seat behind, had thrust his head between himself and Mark, and sat with his chin resting on the back rail of their little bench, entertaining himself with their conversation. He was as languid and listless in his looks as most of the gentlemen they had seen; his cheeks were so hollow that he seemed to be always sucking them in; and the sun had burnt him, not a wholesome red or brown, but dirty yellow. He had bright dark eyes, which he kept half closed; only peeping out of the corners, and even then with a glance that seemed to say, 'Now you won't overreach me; you want to, but you won't.' His arms rested carelessly on his knees as he leant forward; in the palm of his left hand, as English rustics have their slice of cheese, he had a cake of tobacco; in his right a penknife. He struck into the dialogue with as little reserve as if he had been specially called in, days before, to hear the arguments on both sides, and favour them with his opinion; and he no more contemplated or cared for the possibility of their not desiring the honour of his acquaintance or interference in their private affairs than if he had been a bear or a buffalo.

'That,' he repeated, nodding condescendingly to Martin, as to an outer barbarian and foreigner, 'is dreadful true. Darn all manner of vermin.'

Martin could not help frowning for a moment, as if he were disposed to insinuate that the gentleman had unconsciously 'darned' himself. But remembering the wisdom of doing at Rome as Romans do, he smiled with the pleasantest expression he could assume upon so short a notice.

Their new friend said no more just then, being busily employed in cutting a quid or plug from his cake of tobacco, and whistling softly to himself the while. When he had shaped it to his liking, he took out his old plug, and deposited the same on the back of the seat between Mark and Martin, while he thrust the new one into the hollow of his cheek, where it looked like a large walnut, or tolerable pippin. Finding it quite satisfactory, he stuck the point of his knife into the old plug, and holding it out for their inspection, remarked with the air of a man who had not lived in vain, that it was 'used up considerable.' Then he tossed it away; put his knife into one pocket and his tobacco into another; rested his chin upon the rail as before;

and approving of the pattern on Martin's waistcoat, reached out his hand to feel the texture of that garment.

'What do you call this now?' he asked.

'Upon my word' said Martin, 'I don't know what it's called.'

'It'll cost a dollar or more a yard, I reckon?'

'I really don't know.'

'In my country,' said the gentleman, 'we know the cost of our own produce.'

Martin not discussing the question, there was a pause.

'Well!' resumed their new friend, after staring at them intently during the whole interval of silence; 'how's the unnat'ral old parent by this time?'

Mr Tapley regarding this inquiry as only another version of the impertinent English question, 'How's your mother?' would have resented it instantly, but for Martin's prompt interposition.

'You mean the old country?' he said.

'Ah!' was the reply. 'How's she? Progressing back'ards, I expect, as usual? Well! How's Queen Victoria?'

'In good health, I believe,' said Martin.

'Queen Victoria won't shake in her royal shoes at all, when she hears to-morrow named,' observed the stranger, 'No.'

'Not that I am aware of. Why should she?'

'She won't be taken with a cold chill, when she realises what is being done in these diggings,' said the stranger. 'No.'

'No,' said Martin. 'I think I could take my oath of that.'

The strange gentleman looked at him as if in pity for his ignorance or prejudice, and said:

'Well, sir, I tell you this—there ain't a engine with its biler bust, in God A'mighty's free U-nited States, so fixed, and nipped, and frizzled to a most e-tarnal smash, as that young critter, in her luxurious location in the Tower of London will be, when she reads the next double-extra Watertoast Gazette.'

Several other gentlemen had left their seats and gathered round during the foregoing dialogue. They were highly delighted with this speech. One very lank gentleman, in a loose limp white cravat, long white waistcoat, and a black great-coat, who seemed to be in authority among them, felt called upon to acknowledge it.

'Hem! Mr La Fayette Kettle,' he said, taking off his hat.

There was a grave murmur of 'Hush!'

'Mr La Fayette Kettle! Sir!'

Mr Kettle bowed.

'In the name of this company, sir, and in the name of our common country, and in the name of that righteous cause of holy sympathy in which we are engaged, I thank you. I thank you, sir, in the name of the Watertoast Sympathisers; and I thank you, sir, in the name of the Watertoast Gazette; and I thank you, sir, in the name of the star-spangled banner of the Great United States, for your eloquent and categorical exposition. And if, sir,' said the speaker, poking Martin with the handle of his umbrella to bespeak his attention, for he was listening to a whisper from Mark; 'if, sir, in such a place, and at such a time, I might venture to con-clude with a sentiment, glancing—however slantin'dicularly—at the subject in hand, I would say, sir, may the British Lion have his talons eradicated by the noble bill of the American Eagle, and be taught to play upon the Irish Harp and the Scotch Fiddle that music which is breathed in every empty shell that lies upon the shores of green Co-lumbia!'

Here the lank gentleman sat down again, amidst a great sensation; and every one looked very grave.

'General Choke,' said Mr La Fayette Kettle, 'you warm my heart; sir, you warm my heart. But the British Lion is not unrepresented here, sir; and I should be glad to hear his answer to those remarks.'

'Upon my word,' cried Martin, laughing, 'since you do me the honour to consider me his representative, I have only to say that I never heard of Queen Victoria reading the What's-his-name Gazette and that I should scarcely think it probable.'

General Choke smiled upon the rest, and said, in patient and benignant explanation:

'It is sent to her, sir. It is sent to her. Her mail.'

'But if it is addressed to the Tower of London, it would hardly come to hand, I fear,' returned Martin; 'for she don't live there.'

'The Queen of England, gentlemen,' observed Mr Tapley, affecting the greatest politeness, and regarding them with an immovable face, 'usually lives in the Mint to take care of the money. She HAS lodgings, in virtue of her office, with the Lord Mayor at the Mansion House; but don't often occupy them, in consequence of the parlour chimney smoking.'

'Mark,' said Martin, 'I shall be very much obliged to you if you'll have the goodness not to interfere with preposterous statements, however jocose they may appear to you. I was merely remarking gentlemen—though it's a point of very little import—that the Queen of England does not happen to live in the Tower of London.'

'General!' cried Mr La Fayette Kettle. 'You hear?'

'General!' echoed several others. 'General!'

'Hush! Pray, silence!' said General Choke, holding up his hand, and speaking with a patient and complacent benevolence that was quite touching. 'I have always remarked it as a very extraordinary circumstance, which I impute to the natur' of British Institutions and their tendency to suppress that popular inquiry and information which air so widely diffused even in the trackless forests of this vast Continent of the Western Ocean; that the knowledge of Britishers themselves on such points is not to be compared with that possessed by our intelligent and locomotive citizens. This is interesting, and confirms my observation. When you say, sir,' he continued, addressing Martin, 'that your Queen does not reside in the Tower of London, you fall into an error, not uncommon to your countrymen, even when their abilities and moral elements air such as to command respect. But, sir, you air wrong. She DOES live there—'

'When she is at the Court of Saint James's,' interposed Kettle.

'When she is at the Court of Saint James's, of course,' returned the General, in the same benignant way; 'for if her location was in Windsor Pavilion it couldn't be in London at the same time. Your Tower of London, sir,' pursued the General, smiling with a mild consciousness of his knowledge, 'is nat'rally your royal residence. Being located in the immediate neighbourhood of your Parks, your Drives, your Triumphant Arches, your Opera, and your Royal Almacks, it nat'rally suggests itself as the place for holding a luxurious and thoughtless court. And, consequently,' said the General, 'consequently, the court is held there.'

'Have you been in England?' asked Martin.

'In print I have, sir,' said the General, 'not otherwise. We air a reading people here, sir. You will meet with much information among us that will surprise you, sir.'

'I have not the least doubt of it,' returned Martin. But here he was interrupted by Mr La Fayette Kettle, who whispered in his ear:

'You know General Choke?'

'No,' returned Martin, in the same tone.

'You know what he is considered?'

'One of the most remarkable men in the country?' said Martin, at a venture.

'That's a fact,' rejoined Kettle. 'I was sure you must have heard of him!'

'I think,' said Martin, addressing himself to the General again, 'that I have the pleasure of being the bearer of a letter of introduction to you, sir. From Mr Bevan, of Massachusetts,' he added, giving it to him.

The General took it and read it attentively; now and then stopping to glance at the two strangers. When he had finished the note, he came over to Martin, sat down by him, and shook hands.

'Well!' he said, 'and you think of settling in Eden?'

'Subject to your opinion, and the agent's advice,' replied Martin. 'I am told there is nothing to be done in the old towns.'

'I can introduce you to the agent, sir,' said the General. 'I know him. In fact, I am a member of the Eden Land Corporation myself.'

This was serious news to Martin, for his friend had laid great stress upon the General's having no connection, as he thought, with any land company, and therefore being likely to give him disinterested advice. The General explained that he had joined the Corporation only a few weeks ago, and that no communication had passed between himself and Mr Bevan since.

'We have very little to venture,' said Martin anxiously—'only a few pounds—but it is our all. Now, do you think that for one of my profession, this would be a speculation with any hope or chance in it?'

'Well,' observed the General, gravely, 'if there wasn't any hope or chance in the speculation, it wouldn't have engaged my dollars, I opinionate.'

'I don't mean for the sellers,' said Martin. 'For the buyers—for the buyers!'

'For the buyers, sir?' observed the General, in a most impressive manner. 'Well! you come from an old country; from a country, sir, that has piled up golden calves as high as Babel, and worshipped 'em for ages. We are a new country, sir; man is in a more primeval state here, sir; we have not the excuse of having lapsed in the slow course of time into degenerate practices; we have no false gods; man, sir, here, is man in all his dignity. We fought for that or nothing. Here am I, sir,' said the General, setting up his umbrella to represent himself, and a villanous-looking umbrella it was; a very bad counter to stand for the sterling coin of his benevolence, 'here am I with grey hairs sir, and a moral sense. Would I, with my principles, invest capital in this speculation if I didn't think it full of hopes and chances for my brother man?'

Martin tried to look convinced, but he thought of New York, and found it difficult.

'What are the Great United States for, sir,' pursued the General 'if not for the regeneration of man? But it is nat'ral in you to make such an enquerry, for you come from England, and you do not know my country.'

'Then you think,' said Martin, 'that allowing for the hardships we are prepared to undergo, there is a reasonable—Heaven knows we don't expect much—a reasonable opening in this place?'

'A reasonable opening in Eden, sir! But see the agent, see the agent; see the maps and plans, sir; and conclude to go or stay, according to the natur' of the settlement. Eden hadn't need to go a-begging yet, sir,' remarked the General.

'It is an awful lovely place, sure-ly. And frightful wholesome, likewise!' said Mr Kettle, who had made himself a party to this conversation as a matter of course.

Martin felt that to dispute such testimony, for no better reason than because he had his secret misgivings on the subject, would be ungentlemanly and indecent. So he thanked the General for his promise to put him in personal communication with the agent; and 'concluded' to see that officer next morning. He then begged the General to inform him who the Watertoast Sympathisers were, of whom he had spoken in addressing Mr La Fayette Kettle, and on what grievances they bestowed their Sympathy. To which the General, looking very serious, made answer, that he might fully enlighten himself on those points to-morrow by attending a Great Meeting of the Body, which would then be held at the town to which they were travelling; 'over which, sir,' said the General, 'my fellow-citizens have called on me to preside.'

They came to their journey's end late in the evening. Close to the railway was an immense white edifice, like an ugly hospital, on which was painted 'NATIONAL HOTEL.' There was a wooden gallery or verandah in front, in which it was rather startling, when the train stopped, to behold a great many pairs of boots and shoes, and the smoke of a great many cigars, but no other evidences of human habitation. By slow degrees, however, some heads and shoulders appeared, and connecting themselves with the boots and shoes, led to the discovery that certain gentlemen boarders, who had a fancy for putting their heels where the gentlemen boarders in other countries usually put their heads, were enjoying themselves after their own manner in the cool of the evening.

There was a great bar-room in this hotel, and a great public room in which the general table was being set out for supper. There were interminable whitewashed staircases, long whitewashed galleries upstairs and downstairs, scores of little whitewashed bedrooms, and a four-sided verandah to every story in the house, which formed a large brick square with an uncomfortable courtyard in the centre, where some clothes were drying. Here and there, some yawning gentlemen lounged up and down with their hands in their pockets; but within the house and without, wherever half a dozen people were collected together, there, in their looks, dress, morals, manners, habits, intellect, and conversation, were Mr Jefferson Brick, Colonel Diver, Major Pawkins, General Choke, and Mr La Fayette Kettle, over, and over, and over again. They did the same things; said the same things; judged all subjects by, and reduced all subjects to, the same standard. Observing how they lived, and how they were always in the enchanting company of each other, Martin even began to comprehend their being the social, cheerful, winning, airy men they were.

At the sounding of a dismal gong, this pleasant company went trooping down from all parts of the house to the public room; while from the neighbouring stores other guests came flocking in, in shoals; for half the town, married folks as well as single, resided at the National Hotel. Tea, coffee, dried meats, tongue, ham, pickles, cake, toast, preserves, and bread and butter, were swallowed with the usual ravaging speed; and then, as before, the company dropped off by degrees, and lounged away to the desk, the counter, or the bar-room. The ladies had a smaller ordinary of their own, to which their husbands and brothers were admitted if they chose; and in all other respects they enjoyed themselves as at Pawkins's.

'Now, Mark, my good fellow, said Martin, closing the door of his little chamber, 'we must hold a solemn council, for our fate is decided to-morrow morning. You are determined to invest these savings of yours in the common stock, are you?'

'If I hadn't been determined to make that wentur, sir,' answered Mr Tapley, 'I shouldn't have come.'

'How much is there here, did you say' asked Martin, holding up a little bag.

'Thirty-seven pound ten and sixpence. The Savings' Bank said so at least. I never counted it. But THEY know, bless you!' said Mark, with a shake of the head expressive of his unbounded confidence in the wisdom and arithmetic of those Institutions.

'The money we brought with us,' said Martin, 'is reduced to a few shillings less than eight pounds.'

Mr Tapley smiled, and looked all manner of ways, that he might not be supposed to attach any importance to this fact.

'Upon the ring—HER ring, Mark,' said Martin, looking ruefully at his empty finger—

'Ah!' sighed Mr Tapley. 'Beg your pardon, sir.'

'—We raised, in English money, fourteen pounds. So, even with that, your share of the stock is still very much the larger of the two you see. Now, Mark,' said Martin, in his old way, just as he might have spoken to Tom Pinch, 'I have thought of a means of making this up to you—more than making it up to you, I hope—and very materially elevating your prospects in life.'

'Oh! don't talk of that, you know, sir,' returned Mark. 'I don't want no elevating, sir. I'm all right enough, sir, I am.'

'No, but hear me,' said Martin, 'because this is very important to you, and a great satisfaction to me. Mark, you shall be a partner in the business; an equal partner with myself. I will put in, as my additional capital, my professional knowledge and ability; and half the annual profits, as long as it is carried on, shall be yours.'

Poor Martin! For ever building castles in the air. For ever, in his very selfishness, forgetful of all but his own teeming hopes and sanguine plans. Swelling, at that instant, with the consciousness of patronizing and most munificently rewarding Mark!

'I don't know, sir,' Mark rejoined, much more sadly than his custom was, though from a very different cause than Martin supposed, 'what I can say to this, in the way of thanking you. I'll stand by you, sir, to the best of my ability, and to the last. That's all.'

'We quite understand each other, my good fellow,' said Martin rising in self-approval and condescension. 'We are no longer master and servant, but friends and partners; and are mutually gratified. If we determine on Eden, the business shall be commenced as soon as we get there. Under the name,' said Martin, who never hammered upon an idea that wasn't red hot, 'under the name of Chuzzlewit and Tapley.'

'Lord love you, sir,' cried Mark, 'don't have my name in it. I ain't acquainted with the business, sir. I must be Co., I must. I've often thought,' he added, in a low voice, 'as I should like to know a Co.; but I little thought as ever I should live to be one.'

'You shall have your own way, Mark.'

'Thank'ee, sir. If any country gentleman thereabouts, in the public way, or otherwise, wanted such a thing as a skittle-ground made, I could take that part of the bis'ness, sir.'

'Against any architect in the States,' said Martin. 'Get a couple of sherry-cobblers, Mark, and we'll drink success to the firm.'

Either he forgot already (and often afterwards), that they were no longer master and servant, or considered this kind of duty to be among the legitimate functions of the Co. But Mark obeyed with his usual alacrity; and before they parted for the night, it was agreed between them that they should go together to the agent's in the morning, but that Martin should decide the Eden question, on his own sound judgment. And Mark made no merit, even to himself in his jollity, of this concession; perfectly well knowing that the matter would come to that in the end, any way.

The General was one of the party at the public table next day, and after breakfast suggested that they should wait upon the agent without loss of time. They, desiring nothing more, agreed; so off they all four started for the office of the Eden Settlement, which was almost within rifle-shot of the National Hotel.

It was a small place—something like a turnpike. But a great deal of land may be got into a dice-box, and why may not a whole territory be bargained for in a shed? It was but a temporary office too; for the Edeners were 'going' to build a superb establishment for the transaction of their business, and had already got so far as to mark out the site. Which is a great way in America. The office-door was wide open, and in the doorway was the agent; no doubt a tremendous fellow to get through his work, for he seemed to have no arrears, but was swinging backwards and forwards in a rocking-chair, with one of his legs planted high up against the door-post, and the other doubled up under him, as if he were hatching his foot.

He was a gaunt man in a huge straw hat, and a coat of green stuff. The weather being hot, he had no cravat, and wore his shirt collar wide open; so that every time he spoke something was seen to twitch and jerk up in his throat, like the little hammers in a harpsichord when the notes are struck. Perhaps it was the Truth feebly endeavouring to leap to his lips. If so, it never reached them.

Two grey eyes lurked deep within this agent's head, but one of them had no sight in it, and stood stock still. With that side of his face he seemed to listen to what the other side was doing. Thus each profile had a distinct expression; and when the movable side was most in action, the rigid one was in its coldest state of watchfulness. It was like turning the man inside out, to pass to that view of his features in his liveliest mood, and see how calculating and intent they were.

Each long black hair upon his head hung down as straight as any plummet line; but rumpled tufts were on the arches of his eyes, as if the crow whose foot was deeply printed in the corners had pecked and torn them in a savage recognition of his kindred nature as a bird of prey.

Such was the man whom they now approached, and whom the General saluted by the name of Scadder.

'Well, Gen'ral,' he returned, 'and how are you?'

'Ac-tive and spry, sir, in my country's service and the sympathetic cause. Two gentlemen on business, Mr Scadder.'

He shook hands with each of them—nothing is done in America without shaking hands—then went on rocking.

'I think I know what bis'ness you have brought these strangers here upon, then, Gen'ral?'

'Well, sir. I expect you may.'

'You air a tongue-y person, Gen'ral. For you talk too much, and that's fact,' said Scadder. 'You speak a-larming well in public, but you didn't ought to go ahead so fast in private. Now!'

'If I can realise your meaning, ride me on a rail!' returned the General, after pausing for consideration.

'You know we didn't wish to sell the lots off right away to any loafer as might bid,' said Scadder; 'but had con-cluded to reserve 'em for Aristocrats of Natur'. Yes!'

'And they are here, sir!' cried the General with warmth. 'They are here, sir!'

'If they air here,' returned the agent, in reproachful accents, 'that's enough. But you didn't ought to have your dander ris with ME, Gen'ral.'

The General whispered Martin that Scadder was the honestest fellow in the world, and that he wouldn't have given him offence designedly, for ten thousand dollars.

'I do my duty; and I raise the dander of my feller critters, as I wish to serve,' said Scadder in a low voice, looking down the road and rocking still. 'They rile up rough, along of my objecting to their selling Eden off too cheap. That's human natur'! Well!'

'Mr Scadder,' said the General, assuming his oratorical deportment. 'Sir! Here is my hand, and here my heart. I esteem you, sir, and ask your pardon. These gentlemen air friends of mine, or I would not have brought 'em here, sir, being well aware, sir, that the lots at present go entirely too cheap. But these air friends, sir; these air partick'ler friends.'

Mr Scadder was so satisfied by this explanation, that he shook the General warmly by the hand, and got out of the rocking-chair to do it. He then invited the General's particular friends to accompany him into the office. As to the General, he observed, with his usual benevolence, that being one of the company, he wouldn't interfere in the transaction on any account; so he appropriated the rocking-chair to himself, and looked at the prospect, like a good Samaritan waiting for a traveller.

'Heyday!' cried Martin, as his eye rested on a great plan which occupied one whole side of the office. Indeed, the office had little else in it, but some geological and botanical specimens, one or two rusty ledgers, a homely desk, and a stool. 'Heyday! what's that?'

'That's Eden,' said Scadder, picking his teeth with a sort of young bayonet that flew out of his knife when he touched a spring.

'Why, I had no idea it was a city.'

'Hadn't you? Oh, it's a city.'

A flourishing city, too! An architectural city! There were banks, churches, cathedrals, market-places, factories, hotels, stores, mansions, wharves; an exchange, a theatre; public buildings of all kinds, down to the office of the Eden Stinger, a daily journal; all faithfully depicted in the view before them.

'Dear me! It's really a most important place!' cried Martin turning round.

'Oh! it's very important,' observed the agent.

'But, I am afraid,' said Martin, glancing again at the Public Buildings, 'that there's nothing left for me to do.'

'Well! it ain't all built,' replied the agent. 'Not quite.'

This was a great relief.

'The market-place, now,' said Martin. 'Is that built?'

'That?' said the agent, sticking his toothpick into the weathercock on the top. 'Let me see. No; that ain't built.'

'Rather a good job to begin with—eh, Mark?' whispered Martin nudging him with his elbow.

Mark, who, with a very stolid countenance had been eyeing the plan and the agent by turns, merely rejoined 'Uncommon!'

A dead silence ensued, Mr Scadder in some short recesses or vacations of his toothpick, whistled a few bars of Yankee Doodle, and blew the dust off the roof of the Theatre.

'I suppose,' said Martin, feigning to look more narrowly at the plan, but showing by his tremulous voice how much depended, in his mind, upon the answer; 'I suppose there are—several architects there?'

'There ain't a single one,' said Scadder.

'Mark,' whispered Martin, pulling him by the sleeve, 'do you hear that? But whose work is all this before us, then?' he asked aloud.

'The soil being very fruitful, public buildings grows spontaneous, perhaps,' said Mark.

He was on the agent's dark side as he said it; but Scadder instantly changed his place, and brought his active eye to bear upon him.

'Feel of my hands, young man,' he said.

'What for?' asked Mark, declining.

'Air they dirty, or air they clean, sir?' said Scadder, holding them out.

In a physical point of view they were decidedly dirty. But it being obvious that Mr Scadder offered them for examination in a figurative sense, as emblems of his moral character, Martin hastened to pronounce them pure as the driven snow.

'I entreat, Mark,' he said, with some irritation, 'that you will not obtrude remarks of that nature, which, however harmless and well-intentioned, are quite out of place, and cannot be expected to be very agreeable to strangers. I am quite surprised.'

'The Co.'s a-putting his foot in it already,' thought Mark. 'He must be a sleeping partner—fast asleep and snoring—Co. must; I see.'

Mr Scadder said nothing, but he set his back against the plan, and thrust his toothpick into the desk some twenty times; looking at Mark all the while as if he were stabbing him in effigy.

'You haven't said whose work it is,' Martin ventured to observe at length, in a tone of mild propitiation.

'Well, never mind whose work it is, or isn't,' said the agent sulkily. 'No matter how it did eventuate. P'raps he cleared off, handsome, with a heap of dollars; p'raps he wasn't worth a cent. P'raps he was a loafin' rowdy; p'raps a ring-tailed roarer. Now!'

'All your doing, Mark!' said Martin.

'P'raps,' pursued the agent, 'them ain't plants of Eden's raising. No! P'raps that desk and stool ain't made from Eden lumber. No! P'raps no end of squatters ain't gone out there. No! P'raps there ain't no such location in the territoary of the Great U-nited States. Oh, no!'

'I hope you're satisfied with the success of your joke, Mark,' said Martin.

But here, at a most opportune and happy time, the General interposed, and called out to Scadder from the doorway to give his friends the particulars of that little lot of fifty acres with the house upon it; which, having belonged to the company formerly, had lately lapsed again into their hands.

'You air a deal too open-handed, Gen'ral,' was the answer. 'It is a lot as should be rose in price. It is.'

He grumblingly opened his books notwithstanding, and always keeping his bright side towards Mark, no matter at what amount of inconvenience to himself, displayed a certain leaf for their perusal. Martin read it greedily, and then inquired:

'Now where upon the plan may this place be?'

'Upon the plan?' said Scadder.

'Yes.'

He turned towards it, and reflected for a short time, as if, having been put upon his mettle, he was resolved to be particular to the very minutest hair's breadth of a shade. At length, after wheeling his toothpick slowly round and round in the air, as if it were a carrier pigeon just thrown up, he suddenly made a dart at the drawing, and pierced the very centre of the main wharf, through and through.

'There!' he said, leaving his knife quivering in the wall; 'that's where it is!'

Martin glanced with sparkling eyes upon his Co., and his Co. saw that the thing was done.

The bargain was not concluded as easily as might have been expected though, for Scadder was caustic and ill-humoured, and cast much unnecessary opposition in the way; at one time requesting them to think of it, and call again in a week or a fortnight; at another, predicting that they wouldn't like it; at another, offering to retract and let them off, and muttering strong imprecations upon the folly of the General. But the whole of the astoundingly small sum total of purchase-money—it was only one hundred and fifty dollars, or something more than thirty pounds of the capital brought by Co. into the architectural concern—was ultimately paid down; and Martin's head was two inches nearer the roof of the little wooden office, with the consciousness of being a landed proprietor in the thriving city of Eden.

'If it shouldn't happen to fit,' said Scadder, as he gave Martin the necessary credentials on recepit of his money, 'don't blame me.'

'No, no,' he replied merrily. 'We'll not blame you. General, are you going?'

'I am at your service, sir; and I wish you,' said the General, giving him his hand with grave cordiality, 'joy of your po-ssession. You air now, sir, a denizen of the most powerful and highly-civilised dominion that has ever graced the world; a do-minion, sir, where man is bound to man in one vast bond of equal love and truth. May you, sir, be worthy of your a-dopted country!'

Martin thanked him, and took leave of Mr Scadder; who had resumed his post in the rocking-chair, immediately on the General's rising from it, and was once more swinging away as if he had never been disturbed. Mark looked back several times as they went down the road towards the National Hotel, but now his blighted profile was towards them, and nothing but attentive thoughtfulness was written on it. Strangely different to the other side! He was not a man much given to laughing, and never laughed outright; but every line in the print of the crow's foot, and every little wiry vein in that division of his head, was wrinkled up into a grin! The compound figure of Death and the Lady at the top of the old ballad was not divided with a greater nicety, and hadn't halves more monstrously unlike each other, than the two profiles of Zephaniah Scadder.

The General posted along at a great rate, for the clock was on the stroke of twelve; and at that hour precisely, the Great Meeting of the Watertoast Sympathisers was to be holden in the public room of the National Hotel. Being very curious to witness the demonstration, and know what it was all about, Martin kept close to the General; and, keeping closer than ever when they entered the Hall, got by that means upon a little platform of tables at the upper end; where an armchair was set for the General, and Mr La Fayette Kettle, as secretary, was making a great display of some foolscap documents. Screamers, no doubt.

'Well, sir!' he said, as he shook hands with Martin, 'here is a spectacle calc'lated to make the British Lion put his tail between his legs, and howl with anguish, I expect!'

Martin certainly thought it possible that the British Lion might have been rather out of his element in that Ark; but he kept the idea to himself. The General was then voted to the chair, on the motion of a pallid lad of the Jefferson Brick school; who forthwith set in for a high-spiced speech, with a good deal about hearths and homes in it, and unriveting the chains of Tyranny.

Oh but it was a clincher for the British Lion, it was! The indignation of the glowing young Columbian knew no bounds. If he could only have been one of his own forefathers, he said, wouldn't he have peppered that same Lion, and been to him as another Brute Tamer with a wire whip, teaching him lessons not easily forgotten. 'Lion! (cried that young Columbian) where is he? Who is he? What is he? Show him to me. Let me have him here. Here!' said the young Columbian, in a wrestling attitude, 'upon this sacred altar. Here!' cried the young Columbian, idealising the dining-table, 'upon ancestral ashes, cemented with the glorious blood poured out like water on our native plains of Chickabiddy Lick! Bring forth that Lion!' said the young Columbian. 'Alone, I dare him! I taunt that Lion. I tell that Lion, that Freedom's hand once twisted in his mane, he rolls a corse before me, and the Eagles of the Great Republic laugh ha, ha!'

When it was found that the Lion didn't come, but kept out of the way; that the young Columbian stood there, with folded arms, alone in his glory; and consequently that the Eagles were no doubt laughing wildly on the mountain tops; such cheers arose as might have shaken the hands upon the

Horse-Guards' clock, and changed the very mean time of the day in England's capital.

'Who is this?' Martin telegraphed to La Fayette.

The Secretary wrote something, very gravely, on a piece of paper, twisted it up, and had it passed to him from hand to hand. It was an improvement on the old sentiment: 'Perhaps as remarkable a man as any in our country.'

This young Columbian was succeeded by another, to the full as eloquent as he, who drew down storms of cheers. But both remarkable youths, in their great excitement (for your true poetry can never stoop to details), forgot to say with whom or what the Watertoasters sympathized, and likewise why or wherefore they were sympathetic. Thus Martin remained for a long time as completely in the dark as ever; until at length a ray of light broke in upon him through the medium of the Secretary, who, by reading the minutes of their past proceedings, made the matter somewhat clearer. He then learned that the Watertoast Association sympathized with a certain Public Man in Ireland, who held a contest upon certain points with England; and that they did so, because they didn't love England at all—not by any means because they loved Ireland much; being indeed horribly jealous and distrustful of its people always, and only tolerating them because of their working hard, which made them very useful; labour being held in greater indignity in the simple republic than in any other country upon earth. This rendered Martin curious to see what grounds of sympathy the Watertoast Association put forth; nor was he long in suspense, for the General rose to read a letter to the Public Man, which with his own hands he had written.

'Thus,' said the General, 'thus, my friends and fellow-citizens, it runs:

'"SIR—I address you on behalf of the Watertoast Association of United Sympathisers. It is founded, sir, in the great republic of America! and now holds its breath, and swells the blue veins in its forehead nigh to bursting, as it watches, sir, with feverish intensity and sympathetic ardour, your noble efforts in the cause of Freedom."'

At the name of Freedom, and at every repetition of that name, all the Sympathisers roared aloud; cheering with nine times nine, and nine times over.

'"In Freedom's name, sir—holy Freedom—I address you. In Freedom's name, I send herewith a contribution to the funds of your society. In

Freedom's name, sir, I advert with indignation and disgust to that accursed animal, with gore-stained whiskers, whose rampant cruelty and fiery lust have ever been a scourge, a torment to the world. The naked visitors to Crusoe's Island, sir; the flying wives of Peter Wilkins; the fruit-smeared children of the tangled bush; nay, even the men of large stature, anciently bred in the mining districts of Cornwall; alike bear witness to its savage nature. Where, sir, are the Cormorans, the Blunderbores, the Great Feefofums, named in History? All, all, exterminated by its destroying hand.

'"I allude, sir, to the British Lion.

'"Devoted, mind and body, heart and soul, to Freedom, sir—to Freedom, blessed solace to the snail upon the cellar-door, the oyster in his pearly bed, the still mite in his home of cheese, the very winkle of your country in his shelly lair—in her unsullied name, we offer you our sympathy. Oh, sir, in this our cherished and our happy land, her fires burn bright and clear and smokeless; once lighted up in yours, the lion shall be roasted whole.

'"I am, sir, in Freedom's name,

'"Your affectionate friend and faithful Sympathiser,

'"CYRUS CHOKE,

'"General, U.S.M."'

It happened that just as the General began to read this letter, the railroad train arrived, bringing a new mail from England; and a packet had been handed in to the Secretary, which during its perusal and the frequent cheerings in homage to freedom, he had opened. Now, its contents disturbed him very much, and the moment the General sat down, he hurried to his side, and placed in his hand a letter and several printed extracts from English newspapers; to which, in a state of infinite excitement, he called his immediate attention.

The General, being greatly heated by his own composition, was in a fit state to receive any inflammable influence; but he had no sooner possessed himself of the contents of these documents, than a change came over his face, involving such a huge amount of choler and passion, that the noisy concourse were silent in a moment, in very wonder at the sight of him.

'My friends!' cried the General, rising; 'my friends and fellow citizens, we have been mistaken in this man.'

'In what man?' was the cry.

'In this,' panted the General, holding up the letter he had read aloud a few minutes before. 'I find that he has been, and is, the advocate—

consistent in it always too—of Nigger emancipation!'

If anything beneath the sky be real, those Sons of Freedom would have pistolled, stabbed—in some way slain—that man by coward hands and murderous violence, if he had stood among them at that time. The most confiding of their own countrymen would not have wagered then—no, nor would they ever peril—one dunghill straw, upon the life of any man in such a strait. They tore the letter, cast the fragments in the air, trod down the pieces as they fell; and yelled, and groaned, and hissed, till they could cry no longer.

'I shall move,' said the General, when he could make himself heard, 'that the Watertoast Association of United Sympathisers be immediately dissolved!'

Down with it! Away with it! Don't hear of it! Burn its records! Pull the room down! Blot it out of human memory!

'But, my fellow-countrymen!' said the General, 'the contributions. We have funds. What is to be done with the funds?'

It was hastily resolved that a piece of plate should be presented to a certain constitutional Judge, who had laid down from the Bench the noble principle that it was lawful for any white mob to murder any black man; and that another piece of plate, of similar value should be presented to a certain Patriot, who had declared from his high place in the Legislature, that he and his friends would hang without trial, any Abolitionist who might pay them a visit. For the surplus, it was agreed that it should be devoted to aiding the enforcement of those free and equal laws, which render it incalculably more criminal and dangerous to teach a negro to read and write than to roast him alive in a public city. These points adjusted, the meeting broke up in great disorder, and there was an end of the Watertoast Sympathy.

As Martin ascended to his bedroom, his eye was attracted by the Republican banner, which had been hoisted from the house-top in honour of the occasion, and was fluttering before a window which he passed.

'Tut!' said Martin. 'You're a gay flag in the distance. But let a man be near enough to get the light upon the other side and see through you; and you are but sorry fustian!'

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

FROM WHICH IT WILL BE SEEN THAT MARTIN BECAME A LION OF HIS OWN ACCOUNT. TOGETHER WITH THE REASON WHY

As soon as it was generally known in the National Hotel, that the young Englishman, Mr Chuzzlewit, had purchased a 'lo-cation' in the Valley of Eden, and intended to betake himself to that earthly Paradise by the next steamboat, he became a popular character. Why this should be, or how it had come to pass, Martin no more knew than Mrs Gamp, of Kingsgate Street, High Holborn, did; but that he was for the time being the lion, by popular election, of the Watertoast community, and that his society was in rather inconvenient request there could be no kind of doubt.

The first notification he received of this change in his position, was the following epistle, written in a thin running hand—with here and there a fat letter or two, to make the general effect more striking—on a sheet of paper, ruled with blue lines.

'NATIONAL HOTEL,
'MONDAY MORNING.

'Dear Sir—'When I had the privillidge of being your fellow-traveller in the cars, the day before yesterday, you offered some remarks upon the subject of the tower of London, which (in common with my fellow-citizens generally) I could wish to hear repeated to a public audience.

'As secretary to the Young Men's Watertoast Association of this town, I am requested to inform you that the Society will be proud to hear you deliver a lecture upon the Tower of London, at their Hall to-morrow evening, at seven o'clock; and as a large issue of quarter-dollar tickets may be expected, your answer and consent by bearer will be considered obliging.

'Dear Sir,
'Yours truly,

'LA FAYETTE KETTLE.

'The Honourable M. Chuzzlewit.

'P.S.—The Society would not be particular in limiting you to the Tower of London. Permit me to suggest that any remarks upon the Elements of

Geology, or (if more convenient) upon the Writings of your talented and witty countryman, the honourable Mr Miller, would be well received.'

Very much aghast at this invitation, Martin wrote back, civilly declining it; and had scarcely done so, when he received another letter.

'No. 47, Bunker Hill Street,

'Monday Morning.

'(Private).

'Sir—I was raised in those interminable solitudes where our mighty Mississippi (or Father of Waters) rolls his turbid flood.

'I am young, and ardent. For there is a poetry in wildness, and every alligator basking in the slime is in himself an Epic, self-contained. I aspirate for fame. It is my yearning and my thirst.

'Are you, sir, aware of any member of Congress in England, who would undertake to pay my expenses to that country, and for six months after my arrival?

'There is something within me which gives me the assurance that this enlightened patronage would not be thrown away. In literature or art; the bar, the pulpit, or the stage; in one or other, if not all, I feel that I am certain to succeed.

'If too much engaged to write to any such yourself, please let me have a list of three or four of those most likely to respond, and I will address them through the Post Office. May I also ask you to favour me with any critical observations that have ever presented themselves to your reflective faculties, on "Cain, a Mystery," by the Right Honourable Lord Byron?

'I am, Sir,

'Yours (forgive me if I add, soaringly),

'PUTNAM SMIF

'P.S.—Address your answer to America Junior, Messrs. Hancock & Floby, Dry Goods Store, as above.'

Both of which letters, together with Martin's reply to each, were, according to a laudable custom, much tending to the promotion of gentlemanly feeling and social confidence, published in the next number of the Watertoast Gazette.

He had scarcely got through this correspondence when Captain Kedgick, the landlord, kindly came upstairs to see how he was getting on. The Captain sat down upon the bed before he spoke; and finding it rather hard, moved to the pillow.

'Well, sir!' said the Captain, putting his hat a little more on one side, for it was rather tight in the crown: 'You're quite a public man I calc'late.'

'So it seems,' retorted Martin, who was very tired.

'Our citizens, sir,' pursued the Captain, 'intend to pay their respects to you. You will have to hold a sort of le-vee, sir, while you're here.'

'Powers above!' cried Martin, 'I couldn't do that, my good fellow!'

'I reckon you MUST then,' said the Captain.

'Must is not a pleasant word, Captain,' urged Martin.

'Well! I didn't fix the mother language, and I can't unfix it,' said the Captain coolly; 'else I'd make it pleasant. You must re-ceive. That's all.'

'But why should I receive people who care as much for me as I care for them?' asked Martin.

'Well! because I have had a muniment put up in the bar,' returned the Captain.

'A what?' cried Martin.

'A muniment,' rejoined the Captain.

Martin looked despairingly at Mark, who informed him that the Captain meant a written notice that Mr Chuzzlewit would receive the Watertoasters that day, at and after two o'clock which was in effect then hanging in the bar, as Mark, from ocular inspection of the same, could testify.

'You wouldn't be unpop'lar, I know,' said the Captain, paring his nails. 'Our citizens an't long of riling up, I tell you; and our Gazette could flay you like a wild cat.'

Martin was going to be very wroth, but he thought better of it, and said:

'In Heaven's name let them come, then.'

'Oh, THEY'll come,' returned the Captain. 'I have seen the big room fixed a'purpose, with my eyes.'

'But will you,' said Martin, seeing that the Captain was about to go; 'will you at least tell me this? What do they want to see me for? what have I done? and how do they happen to have such a sudden interest in me?'

Captain Kedgick put a thumb and three fingers to each side of the brim of his hat; lifted it a little way off his head; put it on again carefully; passed one hand all down his face, beginning at the forehead and ending at the chin; looked at Martin; then at Mark; then at Martin again; winked, and walked out.

'Upon my life, now!' said Martin, bringing his hand heavily upon the table; 'such a perfectly unaccountable fellow as that, I never saw. Mark, what do you say to this?'

'Why, sir,' returned his partner, 'my opinion is that we must have got to the MOST remarkable man in the country at last. So I hope there's an end to the breed, sir.'

Although this made Martin laugh, it couldn't keep off two o'clock. Punctually, as the hour struck, Captain Kedgick returned to hand him to the room of state; and he had no sooner got him safe there, than he bawled down the staircase to his fellow-citizens below, that Mr Chuzzlewit was 'receiving.'

Up they came with a rush. Up they came until the room was full, and, through the open door, a dismal perspective of more to come, was shown upon the stairs. One after another, one after another, dozen after dozen, score after score, more, more, more, up they came; all shaking hands with Martin. Such varieties of hands, the thick, the thin, the short, the long, the fat, the lean, the coarse, the fine; such differences of temperature, the hot, the cold, the dry, the moist, the flabby; such diversities of grasp, the tight, the loose, the short-lived, and the lingering! Still up, up, up, more, more, more; and ever and anon the Captain's voice was heard above the crowd—'There's more below! there's more below. Now, gentlemen you that have been introduced to Mr Chuzzlewit, will you clear gentlemen? Will you clear? Will you be so good as clear, gentlemen, and make a little room for more?'

Regardless of the Captain's cries, they didn't clear at all, but stood there, bolt upright and staring. Two gentlemen connected with the Watertoast Gazette had come express to get the matter for an article on Martin. They had agreed to divide the labour. One of them took him below the waistcoat. One above. Each stood directly in front of his subject with his head a little on one side, intent on his department. If Martin put one boot before the other, the lower gentleman was down upon him; he rubbed a pimple on his nose, and the upper gentleman booked it. He opened his mouth to speak, and the same gentleman was on one knee before him, looking in at his teeth, with the nice scrutiny of a dentist. Amateurs in the physiognomical and phrenological sciences roved about him with watchful eyes and itching fingers, and sometimes one, more daring than the rest, made a mad grasp at the back of his head, and vanished in the crowd. They had him in all points of view: in front, in profile, three-quarter face, and behind. Those who were not professional or scientific, audibly exchanged opinions on his looks.

New lights shone in upon him, in respect of his nose. Contradictory rumours were abroad on the subject of his hair. And still the Captain's voice was heard—so stifled by the concourse, that he seemed to speak from underneath a feather-bed—exclaiming—'Gentlemen, you that have been introduced to Mr Chuzzlewit, WILL you clear?'

Even when they began to clear it was no better; for then a stream of gentlemen, every one with a lady on each arm (exactly like the chorus to the National Anthem when Royalty goes in state to the play), came gliding in—every new group fresher than the last, and bent on staying to the latest moment. If they spoke to him, which was not often, they invariably asked the same questions, in the same tone; with no more remorse, or delicacy, or consideration, than if he had been a figure of stone, purchased, and paid for, and set up there for their delight. Even when, in the slow course of time, these died off, it was as bad as ever, if not worse; for then the boys grew bold, and came in as a class of themselves, and did everything that the grown-up people had done. Uncouth stragglers, too, appeared; men of a ghostly kind, who being in, didn't know how to get out again; insomuch that one silent gentleman with glazed and fishy eyes and only one button on his waistcoat (which was a very large metal one, and shone prodigiously), got behind the door, and stood there, like a clock, long after everybody else was gone.

Martin felt, from pure fatigue, and heat, and worry, as if he could have fallen on the ground and willingly remained there, if they would but have had the mercy to leave him alone. But as letters and messages, threatening his public denouncement if he didn't see the senders, poured in like hail; and as more visitors came while he took his coffee by himself; and as Mark, with all his vigilance, was unable to keep them from the door; he resolved to go to bed—not that he felt at all sure of bed being any protection, but that he might not leave a forlorn hope untried.

He had communicated this design to Mark, and was on the eve of escaping, when the door was thrown open in a great hurry, and an elderly gentleman entered; bringing with him a lady who certainly could not be considered young—that was matter of fact; and probably could not be considered handsome—but that was matter of opinion. She was very straight, very tall, and not at all flexible in face or figure. On her head she wore a great straw bonnet, with trimmings of the same, in which she looked as if she had been thatched by an unskillful labourer; and in her hand she held a most enormous fan.

'Mr Chuzzlewit, I believe?' said the gentleman.

'That is my name.'

'Sir,' said the gentleman, 'I am pressed for time.'

'Thank God!' thought Martin.

'I go back Toe my home, sir,' pursued the gentleman, 'by the return train, which starts immediate. Start is not a word you use in your country, sir.'

'Oh yes, it is,' said Martin.

'You air mistaken, sir,' returned the gentleman, with great decision: 'but we will not pursue the subject, lest it should awake your preju—dice. Sir, Mrs Hominy.'

Martin bowed.

'Mrs Hominy, sir, is the lady of Major Hominy, one of our chicest spirits; and belongs Toe one of our most aristocratic families. You air, p'raps, acquainted, sir, with Mrs Hominy's writings.'

Martin couldn't say he was.

'You have much Toe learn, and Toe enjoy, sir,' said the gentleman. 'Mrs Hominy is going Toe stay until the end of the Fall, sir, with her married daughter at the settlement of New Thermopylae, three days this side of Eden. Any attention, sir, that you can show Toe Mrs Hominy upon the journey, will be very grateful Toe the Major and our fellow-citizens. Mrs Hominy, I wish you good night, ma'am, and a pleasant pro-gress on your route!'

Martin could scarcely believe it; but he had gone, and Mrs Hominy was drinking the milk.

'A'most used-up I am, I do declare!' she observed. 'The jolting in the cars is pretty nigh as bad as if the rail was full of snags and sawyers.'

'Snags and sawyers, ma'am?' said Martin.

'Well, then, I do suppose you'll hardly realise my meaning, sir,' said Mrs Hominy. 'My! Only think! DO tell!'

It did not appear that these expressions, although they seemed to conclude with an urgent entreaty, stood in need of any answer; for Mrs Hominy, untying her bonnet-strings, observed that she would withdraw to lay that article of dress aside, and would return immediately.

'Mark!' said Martin. 'Touch me, will you. Am I awake?'

'Hominy is, sir,' returned his partner—'Broad awake! Just the sort of woman, sir, as would be discovered with her eyes wide open, and her mind a-working for her country's good, at any hour of the day or night.'

They had no opportunity of saying more, for Mrs Hominy stalked in again—very erect, in proof of her aristocratic blood; and holding in her clasped hands a red cotton pocket-handkerchief, perhaps a parting gift from that choice spirit, the Major. She had laid aside her bonnet, and now appeared in a highly aristocratic and classical cap, meeting beneath her chin: a style of headdress so admirably adapted to her countenance, that if the late Mr Grimaldi had appeared in the lappets of Mrs Siddons, a more complete effect could not have been produced.

Martin handed her to a chair. Her first words arrested him before he could get back to his own seat.

'Pray, sir!' said Mrs Hominy, 'where do you hail from?'

'I am afraid I am dull of comprehension,' answered Martin, 'being extremely tired; but upon my word I don't understand you.'

Mrs Hominy shook her head with a melancholy smile that said, not inexpressively, 'They corrupt even the language in that old country!' and added then, as coming down a step or two to meet his low capacity, 'Where was you rose?'

'Oh!' said Martin 'I was born in Kent.'

'And how do you like our country, sir?' asked Mrs Hominy.

'Very much indeed,' said Martin, half asleep. 'At least—that is—pretty well, ma'am.'

'Most strangers—and partick'larly Britishers—are much surprised by what they see in the U-nited States,' remarked Mrs Hominy.

'They have excellent reason to be so, ma'am,' said Martin. 'I never was so much surprised in all my life.'

'Our institutions make our people smart much, sir,' Mrs Hominy remarked.

'The most short-sighted man could see that at a glance, with his naked eye,' said Martin.

Mrs Hominy was a philosopher and an authoress, and consequently had a pretty strong digestion; but this coarse, this indecorous phrase, was almost too much for her. For a gentleman sitting alone with a lady—although the door WAS open—to talk about a naked eye!

A long interval elapsed before even she—woman of masculine and towering intellect though she was—could call up fortitude enough to resume the conversation. But Mrs Hominy was a traveller. Mrs Hominy was a writer of reviews and analytical disquisitions. Mrs Hominy had had her letters from abroad, beginning 'My ever dearest blank,' and signed 'The Mother of the Modern Gracchi' (meaning the married Miss Hominy), regularly printed in a public journal, with all the indignation in capitals, and all the sarcasm in italics. Mrs Hominy had looked on foreign countries with the eye of a perfect republican hot from the model oven; and Mrs Hominy could talk (or write) about them by the hour together. So Mrs Hominy at last came down on Martin heavily, and as he was fast asleep, she had it all her own way, and bruised him to her heart's content.

It is no great matter what Mrs Hominy said, save that she had learnt it from the cant of a class, and a large class, of her fellow countrymen, who in their every word, avow themselves to be as senseless to the high principles on which America sprang, a nation, into life, as any Orson in her legislative halls. Who are no more capable of feeling, or of caring if they did feel, that by reducing their own country to the ebb of honest men's contempt, they put in hazard the rights of nations yet unborn, and very progress of the human race, than are the swine who wallow in their streets. Who think that crying out to other nations, old in their iniquity, 'We are no worse than you!' (No worse!) is high defence and 'vantage-ground enough for that Republic, but yesterday let loose upon her noble course, and but to-day so maimed and lame, so full of sores and ulcers, foul to the eye and almost hopeless to the sense, that her best friends turn from the loathsome creature with disgust. Who, having by their ancestors declared and won their Independence, because they would not bend the knee to certain Public vices and corruptions, and would not abrogate the truth, run riot in the Bad, and turn their backs upon the Good; and lying down contented with the wretched boast that other Temples also are of glass, and stones which batter theirs may be flung back; show themselves, in that alone, as immeasurably behind the import of the trust they hold, and as unworthy to possess it as if the sordid hucksterings of all their little governments—each one a kingdom in its small depravity—were brought into a heap for evidence against them.

Martin by degrees became so far awake, that he had a sense of a terrible oppression on his mind; an imperfect dream that he had murdered a particular friend, and couldn't get rid of the body. When his eyes opened it was staring him full in the face. There was the horrible Hominy talking deep truths in a melodious snuffle, and pouring forth her mental endowments to such an extent that the Major's bitterest enemy, hearing her, would have forgiven him from the bottom of his heart. Martin might have done something desperate if the gong had not sounded for supper; but sound it did most opportunely; and having stationed Mrs Hominy at the upper end of the table he took refuge at the lower end himself; whence, after a hasty meal he stole away, while the lady was yet busied with dried beef and a saucer-full of pickled fixings.

It would be difficult to give an adequate idea of Mrs Hominy's freshness next day, or of the avidity with which she went headlong into moral philosophy at breakfast. Some little additional degree of asperity, perhaps, was visible in her features, but not more than the pickles would have naturally produced. All that day she clung to Martin. She sat beside him while he received his friends (for there was another Reception, yet more numerous than the former), propounded theories, and answered imaginary objections, so that Martin really began to think he must be dreaming, and speaking for two; she quoted interminable passages from certain essays on government, written by herself; used the Major's pocket-handkerchief as if the snuffle were a temporary malady, of which she was determined to rid herself by some means or other; and, in short, was such a remarkable companion, that Martin quite settled it between himself and his conscience, that in any new settlement it would be absolutely necessary to have such a person knocked on the head for the general peace of society.

In the meantime Mark was busy, from early in the morning until late at night, in getting on board the steamboat such provisions, tools and other necessaries, as they had been forewarned it would be wise to take. The purchase of these things, and the settlement of their bill at the National, reduced their finances to so low an ebb, that if the captain had delayed his departure any longer, they would have been in almost as bad a plight as the unfortunate poorer emigrants, who (seduced on board by solemn advertisement) had been living on the lower deck a whole week, and exhausting their miserable stock of provisions before the voyage commenced. There they were, all huddled together with the engine and the fires. Farmers who had never seen a plough; woodmen who had never used an axe; builders who couldn't make a box; cast out of their own land, with not a hand to aid them: newly come into an unknown world, children in helplessness, but men in wants—with younger children at their backs, to live or die as it might happen!

The morning came, and they would start at noon. Noon came, and they would start at night. But nothing is eternal in this world; not even the procrastination of an American skipper; and at night all was ready.

Dispirited and weary to the last degree, but a greater lion than ever (he had done nothing all the afternoon but answer letters from strangers; half of them about nothing; half about borrowing money, and all requiring an instantaneous reply), Martin walked down to the wharf, through a concourse of people, with Mrs Hominy upon his arm; and went on board. But Mark was bent on solving the riddle of this lionship, if he could; and so, not without the risk of being left behind, ran back to the hotel.

Captain Kedgick was sitting in the colonnade, with a julep on his knee, and a cigar in his mouth. He caught Mark's eye, and said:

'Why, what the 'Tarnal brings you here?'

'I'll tell you plainly what it is, Captain,' said Mark. 'I want to ask you a question.'

'A man may ASK a question, so he may,' returned Kedgick; strongly implying that another man might not answer a question, so he mightn't.

'What have they been making so much of him for, now?' said Mark, slyly. 'Come!'

'Our people like ex-citement,' answered Kedgick, sucking his cigar.

'But how has he excited 'em?' asked Mark.

The Captain looked at him as if he were half inclined to unburden his mind of a capital joke.

'You air a-going?' he said.

'Going!' cried Mark. 'Ain't every moment precious?'

'Our people like ex-citement,' said the Captain, whispering. 'He ain't like emigrants in gin'ral; and he excited 'em along of this;' he winked and burst into a smothered laugh; 'along of this. Scadder is a smart man, and—and—nobody as goes to Eden ever comes back alive!'

The wharf was close at hand, and at that instant Mark could hear them shouting out his name; could even hear Martin calling to him to make haste, or they would be separated. It was too late to mend the matter, or put any face upon it but the best. He gave the Captain a parting benediction, and ran off like a race-horse.

'Mark! Mark!' cried Martin.

'Here am I, sir!' shouted Mark, suddenly replying from the edge of the quay, and leaping at a bound on board. 'Never was half so jolly, sir. All right. Haul in! Go ahead!'

The sparks from the wood fire streamed upward from the two chimneys, as if the vessel were a great firework just lighted; and they roared away upon the dark water.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

MARTIN AND HIS PARTNER TAKE POSSESSION OF THEIR ESTATE. THE JOYFUL OCCASION INVOLVES SOME FURTHER ACCOUNT OF EDEN

There happened to be on board the steamboat several gentlemen passengers, of the same stamp as Martin's New York friend Mr Bevan; and in their society he was cheerful and happy. They released him as well as they could from the intellectual entanglements of Mrs Hominy; and exhibited, in all they said and did, so much good sense and high feeling, that he could not like them too well. 'If this were a republic of Intellect and Worth,' he said, 'instead of vapouring and jobbing, they would not want the levers to keep it in motion.'

'Having good tools, and using bad ones,' returned Mr Tapley, 'would look as if they was rather a poor sort of carpenters, sir, wouldn't it?'

Martin nodded. 'As if their work were infinitely above their powers and purpose, Mark; and they botched it in consequence.'

'The best on it is,' said Mark, 'that when they do happen to make a decent stroke; such as better workmen, with no such opportunities, make every day of their lives and think nothing of—they begin to sing out so surprising loud. Take notice of my words, sir. If ever the defaulting part of this here country pays its debts—along of finding that not paying 'em won't do in a commercial point of view, you see, and is inconvenient in its consequences—they'll take such a shine out of it, and make such bragging speeches, that a man might suppose no borrowed money had ever been paid afore, since the world was first begun. That's the way they gammon each other, sir. Bless you, I know 'em. Take notice of my words, now!'

'You seem to be growing profoundly sagacious!' cried Martin, laughing.

'Whether that is,' thought Mark, 'because I'm a day's journey nearer Eden, and am brightening up afore I die, I can't say. P'rhaps by the time I get there I shall have growed into a prophet.'

He gave no utterance to these sentiments; but the excessive joviality they inspired within him, and the merriment they brought upon his shining face, were quite enough for Martin. Although he might sometimes profess to make light of his partner's inexhaustible cheerfulness, and might sometimes, as in the case of Zephaniah Scadder, find him too jocose a commentator, he was always sensible of the effect of his example in rousing him to hopefulness and courage. Whether he were in the humour to profit by it, mattered not a jot. It was contagious, and he could not choose but be affected.

At first they parted with some of their passengers once or twice a day, and took in others to replace them. But by degrees, the towns upon their route became more thinly scattered; and for many hours together they would see no other habitations than the huts of the wood-cutters, where the vessel stopped for fuel. Sky, wood, and water all the livelong day; and heat that blistered everything it touched.

On they toiled through great solitudes, where the trees upon the banks grew thick and close; and floatad in the stream; and held up shrivelled arms from out the river's depths; and slid down from the margin of the land, half growing, half decaying, in the miry water. On through the weary day and melancholy night; beneath the burning sun, and in the mist and vapour of the evening; on, until return appeared impossible, and restoration to their home a miserable dream.

They had now but few people on board, and these few were as flat, as dull, and stagnant, as the vegetation that oppressed their eyes. No sound of cheerfulness or hope was heard; no pleasant talk beguiled the tardy time; no little group made common cause against the full depression of the scene. But that, at certain periods, they swallowed food together from a common trough, it might have been old Charon's boat, conveying melancholy shades to judgment.

At length they drew near New Thermopylae; where, that same evening, Mrs Hominy would disembark. A gleam of comfort sunk into Martin's bosom when she told him this. Mark needed none; but he was not displeased.

It was almost night when they came alongside the landing-place. A steep bank with an hotel like a barn on the top of it; a wooden store or two; and a few scattered sheds.

'You sleep here to-night, and go on in the morning, I suppose, ma'am?' said Martin.

'Where should I go on to?' cried the mother of the modern Gracchi.

'To New Thermopylae.'

'My! ain't I there?' said Mrs Hominy.

Martin looked for it all round the darkening panorama; but he couldn't see it, and was obliged to say so.

'Why that's it!' cried Mrs Hominy, pointing to the sheds just mentioned.

'THAT!' exclaimed Martin.

'Ah! that; and work it which way you will, it whips Eden,' said Mrs Hominy, nodding her head with great expression.

The married Miss Hominy, who had come on board with her husband, gave to this statement her most unqualified support, as did that gentleman also. Martin gratefully declined their invitation to regale himself at their house during the half hour of the vessel's stay; and having escorted Mrs Hominy and the red pocket-handkerchief (which was still on active service) safely across the gangway, returned in a thoughtful mood to watch the emigrants as they removed their goods ashore.

Mark, as he stood beside him, glanced in his face from time to time; anxious to discover what effect this dialogue had had upon him, and not unwilling that his hopes should be dashed before they reached their destination, so that the blow he feared might be broken in its fall. But saving that he sometimes looked up quickly at the poor erections on the hill, he gave him no clue to what was passing in his mind, until they were again upon their way.

'Mark,' he said then, 'are there really none but ourselves on board this boat who are bound for Eden?'

'None at all, sir. Most of 'em, as you know, have stopped short; and the few that are left are going further on. What matters that! More room there for us, sir.'

'Oh, to be sure!' said Martin. 'But I was thinking—' and there he paused.

'Yes, sir?' observed Mark.

'How odd it was that the people should have arranged to try their fortune at a wretched hole like that, for instance, when there is such a much better, and such a very different kind of place, near at hand, as one may say.'

He spoke in a tone so very different from his usual confidence, and with such an obvious dread of Mark's reply, that the good-natured fellow was full of pity.

'Why, you know, sir,' said Mark, as gently as he could by any means insinuate the observation, 'we must guard against being too sanguine. There's no occasion for it, either, because we're determined to make the best of everything, after we know the worst of it. Ain't we, sir?'

Martin looked at him, but answered not a word.

'Even Eden, you know, ain't all built,' said Mark.

'In the name of Heaven, man,' cried Martin angrily, 'don't talk of Eden in the same breath with that place. Are you mad? There—God forgive me!—don't think harshly of me for my temper!'

After that, he turned away, and walked to and fro upon the deck full two hours. Nor did he speak again, except to say 'Good night,' until next day; nor even then upon this subject, but on other topics quite foreign to the purpose.

As they proceeded further on their track, and came more and more towards their journey's end, the monotonous desolation of the scene increased to that degree, that for any redeeming feature it presented to their eyes, they might have entered, in the body, on the grim domains of Giant Despair. A flat morass, bestrewn with fallen timber; a marsh on which the good growth of the earth seemed to have been wrecked and cast away, that from its decomposing ashes vile and ugly things might rise; where the very trees took the aspect of huge weeds, begotten of the slime from which they sprung, by the hot sun that burnt them up; where fatal maladies, seeking whom they might infect, came forth at night in misty shapes, and creeping out upon the water, hunted them like spectres until day; where even the blessed sun, shining down on festering elements of corruption and disease, became a horror; this was the realm of Hope through which they moved.

At last they stopped. At Eden too. The waters of the Deluge might have left it but a week before; so choked with slime and matted growth was the hideous swamp which bore that name.

There being no depth of water close in shore, they landed from the vessel's boat, with all their goods beside them. There were a few log-houses visible among the dark trees; the best, a cow-shed or a rude stable; but for the wharves, the market-place, the public buildings—

'Here comes an Edener,' said Mark. 'He'll get us help to carry these things up. Keep a good heart, sir. Hallo there!'

The man advanced toward them through the thickening gloom, very slowly; leaning on a stick. As he drew nearer, they observed that he was pale and worn, and that his anxious eyes were deeply sunken in his head. His dress of homespun blue hung about him in rags; his feet and head were bare. He sat down on a stump half-way, and beckoned them to come to him.

When they complied, he put his hand upon his side as if in pain, and while he fetched his breath stared at them, wondering.

'Strangers!' he exclaimed, as soon as he could speak.

'The very same,' said Mark. 'How are you, sir?'

'I've had the fever very bad,' he answered faintly. 'I haven't stood upright these many weeks. Those are your notions I see,' pointing to their property.

'Yes, sir,' said Mark, 'they are. You couldn't recommend us some one as would lend a hand to help carry 'em up to the—to the town, could you, sir?'

'My eldest son would do it if he could,' replied the man; 'but today he has his chill upon him, and is lying wrapped up in the blankets. My youngest died last week.'

'I'm sorry for it, governor, with all my heart,' said Mark, shaking him by the hand. 'Don't mind us. Come along with me, and I'll give you an arm back. The goods is safe enough, sir'—to Martin—'there ain't many people about, to make away with 'em. What a comfort that is!'

'No,' cried the man. 'You must look for such folk here,' knocking his stick upon the ground, 'or yonder in the bush, towards the north. We've buried most of 'em. The rest have gone away. Them that we have here, don't come out at night.'

'The night air ain't quite wholesome, I suppose?' said Mark.

'It's deadly poison,' was the settler's answer.

Mark showed no more uneasiness than if it had been commended to him as ambrosia; but he gave the man his arm, and as they went along explained to him the nature of their purchase, and inquired where it lay. Close to his own log-house, he said; so close that he had used their dwelling as a store-house for some corn; they must excuse it that night, but he would endeavour to get it taken out upon the morrow. He then gave them to understand, as an additional scrap of local chit-chat, that he had buried the last proprietor with his own hands; a piece of information which Mark also received without the least abatement of his equanimity.

In a word, he conducted them to a miserable cabin, rudely constructed of the trunks of trees; the door of which had either fallen down or been carried away long ago; and which was consequently open to the wild landscape and the dark night. Saving for the little store he had mentioned, it was perfectly bare of all furniture; but they had left a chest upon the landing-place, and he gave them a rude torch in lieu of candle. This latter acquisition Mark planted in the earth, and then declaring that the mansion 'looked quite comfortable,' hurried Martin off again to help bring up the chest. And all the way to the landing-place and back, Mark talked incessantly; as if he would infuse into his partner's breast some faint belief that they had arrived under the most auspicious and cheerful of all imaginable circumstances.

But many a man who would have stood within a home dismantled, strong in his passion and design of vengeance, has had the firmness of his nature conquered by the razing of an air-built castle. When the log-hut received them for the second time, Martin laid down upon the ground, and wept aloud.

'Lord love you, sir!' cried Mr Tapley, in great terror; 'Don't do that! Don't do that, sir! Anything but that! It never helped man, woman, or child, over the lowest fence yet, sir, and it never will. Besides its being of no use to you, it's worse than of no use to me, for the least sound of it will knock me flat down. I can't stand up agin it, sir. Anything but that!'

There is no doubt he spoke the truth, for the extraordinary alarm with which he looked at Martin as he paused upon his knees before the chest, in the act of unlocking it, to say these words, sufficiently confirmed him.

'I ask your forgiveness a thousand times, my dear fellow,' said Martin. 'I couldn't have helped it, if death had been the penalty.'

'Ask my forgiveness!' said Mark, with his accustomed cheerfulness, as he proceeded to unpack the chest. 'The head partner a-asking forgiveness of Co., eh? There must be something wrong in the firm when that happens. I must have the books inspected and the accounts gone over immediate. Here we are. Everything in its proper place. Here's the salt pork. Here's the biscuit. Here's the whiskey. Uncommon good it smells too. Here's the tin pot. This tin pot's a small fortun' in itself! Here's the blankets. Here's the axe. Who says we ain't got a first-rate fit out? I feel as if I was a cadet gone out to Indy, and my noble father was chairman of the Board of Directors. Now, when I've got some water from the stream afore the door and mixed the grog,' cried Mark, running out to suit the action to the word, 'there's a supper ready, comprising every delicacy of the season. Here we are, sir, all complete. For what we are going to receive, et cetrer. Lord bless you, sir, it's very like a gipsy party!'

It was impossible not to take heart, in the company of such a man as this. Martin sat upon the ground beside the box; took out his knife; and ate and drank sturdily.

'Now you see,' said Mark, when they had made a hearty meal; 'with your knife and mine, I sticks this blanket right afore the door. Or where, in a state of high civilization, the door would be. And very neat it looks. Then I stops the aperture below, by putting the chest agin it. And very neat THAT looks. Then there's your blanket, sir. Then here's mine. And what's to hinder our passing a good night?'

For all his light-hearted speaking, it was long before he slept himself. He wrapped his blanket round him, put the axe ready to his hand, and lay across the threshold of the door; too anxious and too watchful to close his eyes. The novelty of their dreary situation, the dread of some rapacious animal or human enemy, the terrible uncertainty of their means of subsistence, the apprehension of death, the immense distance and the hosts of obstacles between themselves and England, were fruitful sources of disquiet in the deep silence of the night. Though Martin would have had him think otherwise, Mark felt that he was waking also, and a prey to the same reflections. This was almost worse than all, for if he began to brood over their miseries instead of trying to make head against them there could be little doubt that such a state of mind would powerfully assist the influence of the pestilent climate. Never had the light of day been half so welcome to his eyes, as when awaking from a fitful doze, Mark saw it shining through the blanket in the doorway.

He stole out gently, for his companion was sleeping now; and having refreshed himself by washing in the river, where it snowed before the door, took a rough survey of the settlement. There were not above a score of cabins in the whole; half of these appeared untenanted; all were rotten and decayed. The most tottering, abject, and forlorn among them was called, with great propriety, the Bank, and National Credit Office. It had some feeble props about it, but was settling deep down in the mud, past all recovery.

Here and there an effort had been made to clear the land, and something like a field had been marked out, where, among the stumps and ashes of burnt trees, a scanty crop of Indian corn was growing. In some quarters, a snake or zigzag fence had been begun, but in no instance had it been completed; and the felled logs, half hidden in the soil, lay mouldering away. Three or four meagre dogs, wasted and vexed with hunger; some long-legged pigs, wandering away into the woods in search of food; some children, nearly naked, gazing at him from the huts; were all the living things he saw. A fetid vapour, hot and sickening as the breath of an oven, rose up from the earth, and hung on everything around; and as his footprints sunk into the marshy ground, a black ooze started forth to blot them out.

Their own land was mere forest. The trees had grown so think and close that they shouldered one another out of their places, and the weakest, forced into shapes of strange distortion, languished like cripples. The best were stunted, from the pressure and the want of room; and high about the stems of all grew long rank grass, dank weeds, and frowsy underwood; not divisible into their separate kinds, but tangled all together in a heap; a jungle deep and dark, with neither earth nor water at its roots, but putrid matter, formed of the pulpy offal of the two, and of their own corruption.

He went down to the landing-place where they had left their goods last night; and there he found some half-dozen men—wan and forlorn to look at, but ready enough to assist—who helped him to carry them to the log-house. They shook their heads in speaking of the settlement, and had no comfort to give him. Those who had the means of going away had all deserted it. They who were left had lost their wives, their children, friends, or brothers there, and suffered much themselves. Most of them were ill then; none were the men they had been once. They frankly offered their assistance and advice, and, leaving him for that time, went sadly off upon their several tasks.

Martin was by this time stirring; but he had greatly changed, even in one night. He was very pale and languid; he spoke of pains and weakness in his limbs, and complained that his sight was dim, and his voice feeble. Increasing in his own briskness as the prospect grew more and more dismal, Mark brought away a door from one of the deserted houses, and fitted it to their own habitation; then went back again for a rude bench he had observed, with which he presently returned in triumph; and having put this piece of furniture outside the house, arranged the notable tin pot and other such movables upon it, that it might represent a dresser or a sideboard. Greatly satisfied with this arrangement, he next rolled their cask of flour into the house and set it up on end in one corner, where it served for a side-table. No better dining-table could be required than the chest, which he solemnly devoted to that useful service thenceforth. Their blankets, clothes, and the like, he hung on pegs and nails. And lastly, he brought forth a great placard (which Martin in the exultation of his heart had prepared with his own hands at the National Hotel) bearing the inscription, CHUZZLEWIT & CO., ARCHITECTS AND SURVEYORS, which he displayed upon the most conspicuous part of the premises, with as much gravity as if the thriving city of Eden had a real existence, and they expected to be overwhelmed with business.

'These here tools,' said Mark, bringing forward Martin's case of instruments and sticking the compasses upright in a stump before the door, 'shall be set out in the open air to show that we come provided. And now, if any gentleman wants a house built, he'd better give his orders, afore we're other ways bespoke.'

Considering the intense heat of the weather, this was not a bad morning's work; but without pausing for a moment, though he was streaming at every pore, Mark vanished into the house again, and presently reappeared with a hatchet; intent on performing some impossibilities with that implement.

'Here's ugly old tree in the way, sir,' he observed, 'which'll be all the better down. We can build the oven in the afternoon. There never was such a handy spot for clay as Eden is. That's convenient, anyhow.'

But Martin gave him no answer. He had sat the whole time with his head upon his hands, gazing at the current as it rolled swiftly by; thinking, perhaps, how fast it moved towards the open sea, the high road to the home he never would behold again.

Not even the vigorous strokes which Mark dealt at the tree awoke him from his mournful meditation. Finding all his endeavours to rouse him of no use, Mark stopped in his work and came towards him.

'Don't give in, sir,' said Mr Tapley.

'Oh, Mark,' returned his friend, 'what have I done in all my life that has deserved this heavy fate?'

'Why, sir,' returned Mark, 'for the matter of that, everybody as is here might say the same thing; many of 'em with better reason p'raps than you or me. Hold up, sir. Do something. Couldn't you ease your mind, now, don't you think, by making some personal obserwations in a letter to Scadder?'

'No,' said Martin, shaking his head sorrowfully: 'I am past that.'

'But if you're past that already,' returned Mark, 'you must be ill, and ought to be attended to.'

'Don't mind me,' said Martin. 'Do the best you can for yourself. You'll soon have only yourself to consider. And then God speed you home, and forgive me for bringing you here! I am destined to die in this place. I felt it the instant I set foot upon the shore. Sleeping or waking, Mark, I dreamed it all last night.'

'I said you must be ill,' returned Mark, tenderly, 'and now I'm sure of it. A touch of fever and ague caught on these rivers, I dare say; but bless you, THAT'S nothing. It's only a seasoning, and we must all be seasoned, one way or another. That's religion that is, you know,' said Mark.

He only sighed and shook his head.

'Wait half a minute,' said Mark cheerily, 'till I run up to one of our neighbours and ask what's best to be took, and borrow a little of it to give you; and to-morrow you'll find yourself as strong as ever again. I won't be gone a minute. Don't give in while I'm away, whatever you do!'

Throwing down his hatchet, he sped away immediately, but stopped when he had got a little distance, and looked back; then hurried on again.

'Now, Mr Tapley,' said Mark, giving himself a tremendous blow in the chest by way of reviver, 'just you attend to what I've got to say. Things is looking about as bad as they CAN look, young man. You'll not have such another opportunity for showing your jolly disposition, my fine fellow, as long as you live. And therefore, Tapley, Now's your time to come out strong; or Never!'

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

REPORTS PROGRESS IN CERTAIN HOMELY MATTERS OF LOVE, HATRED, JEALOUSY, AND REVENGE

'Hallo, Pecksniff!' cried Mr Jonas from the parlour. 'Isn't somebody a-going to open that precious old door of yours?'

'Immediately, Mr Jonas. Immediately.'

'Ecod,' muttered the orphan, 'not before it's time neither. Whoever it is, has knocked three times, and each one loud enough to wake the—' he had such a repugnance to the idea of waking the Dead, that he stopped even then with the words upon his tongue, and said, instead, 'the Seven Sleepers.'

'Immediately, Mr Jonas; immediately,' repeated Pecksniff. 'Thomas Pinch'—he couldn't make up his mind, in his great agitation, whether to call Tom his dear friend or a villain, so he shook his fist at him PRO TEM—'go up to my daughters' room, and tell them who is here. Say, Silence. Silence! Do you hear me, sir?

'Directly, sir!' cried Tom, departing, in a state of much amazement, on his errand.

'You'll—ha, ha, ha!—you'll excuse me, Mr Jonas, if I close this door a moment, will you?' said Pecksniff. 'This may be a professional call. Indeed I am pretty sure it is. Thank you.' Then Mr Pecksniff, gently warbling a rustic stave, put on his garden hat, seized a spade, and opened the street door; calmly appearing on the threshold, as if he thought he had, from his vineyard, heard a modest rap, but was not quite certain.

Seeing a gentleman and lady before him, he started back in as much confusion as a good man with a crystal conscience might betray in mere surprise. Recognition came upon him the next moment, and he cried:

'Mr Chuzzlewit! Can I believe my eyes! My dear sir; my good sir! A joyful hour, a happy hour indeed. Pray, my dear sir, walk in. You find me in my garden-dress. You will excuse it, I know. It is an ancient pursuit, gardening. Primitive, my dear sir. Or, if I am not mistaken, Adam was the first of our calling. MY Eve, I grieve to say is no more, sir; but'—here he pointed to his spade, and shook his head as if he were not cheerful without an effort—'but I do a little bit of Adam still.'

He had by this time got them into the best parlour, where the portrait by Spiller, and the bust by Spoker, were.

'My daughters,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'will be overjoyed. If I could feel weary upon such a theme, I should have been worn out long ago, my dear sir, by their constant anticipation of this happiness and their repeated allusions to our meeting at Mrs Todgers's. Their fair young friend, too,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'whom they so desire to know and love—indeed to know her, is to love—I hope I see her well. I hope in saying, "Welcome to my humble roof!" I find some echo in her own sentiments. If features are an index to the heart, I have no fears of that. An extremely engaging expression of countenance, Mr Chuzzlewit, my dear sir—very much so!'

'Mary,' said the old man, 'Mr Pecksniff flatters you. But flattery from him is worth the having. He is not a dealer in it, and it comes from his heart. We thought Mr—'

'Pinch,' said Mary.

'Mr Pinch would have arrived before us, Pecksniff.'

'He did arrive before you, my dear sir,' retorted Pecksniff, raising his voice for the edification of Tom upon the stairs, 'and was about, I dare say, to tell me of your coming, when I begged him first to knock at my daughters' chamber, and inquire after Charity, my dear child, who is not so well as I could wish. No,' said Mr Pecksniff, answering their looks, 'I am sorry to say, she is not. It is merely an hysterical affection; nothing more, I am not uneasy. Mr Pinch! Thomas!' exclaimed Pecksniff, in his kindest accents. 'Pray come in. I shall make no stranger of you. Thomas is a friend of mine, of rather long-standing, Mr Chuzzlewit, you must know.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Tom. 'You introduce me very kindly, and speak of me in terms of which I am very proud.'

'Old Thomas!' cried his master, pleasantly 'God bless you!'

Tom reported that the young ladies would appear directly, and that the best refreshments which the house afforded were even then in preparation, under their joint superintendence. While he was speaking, the old man looked at him intently, though with less harshness than was common to him; nor did the mutual embarrassment of Tom and the young lady, to whatever cause he attributed it, seem to escape his observation.

'Pecksniff,' he said after a pause, rising and taking him aside towards the window, 'I was much shocked on hearing of my brother's death. We had been strangers for many years. My only comfort is that he must have lived the happier and better man for having associated no hopes or schemes with me. Peace to his memory! We were play-fellows once; and it would have been better for us both if we had died then.'

Finding him in this gentle mood, Mr Pecksniff began to see another way out of his difficulties, besides the casting overboard of Jonas.

'That any man, my dear sir, could possibly be the happier for not knowing you,' he returned, 'you will excuse my doubting. But that Mr Anthony, in the evening of his life, was happier in the affection of his excellent son—a pattern, my dear sir, a pattern to all sons—and in the care of a distant relation who, however lowly in his means of serving him, had no bounds to his inclination; I can inform you.'

'How's this?' said the old man. 'You are not a legatee?'

'You don't,' said Mr Pecksniff, with a melancholy pressure of his hand, 'quite understand my nature yet, I find. No, sir, I am not a legatee. I am proud to say I am not a legatee. I am proud to say that neither of my children is a legatee. And yet, sir, I was with him at his own request. HE understood me somewhat better, sir. He wrote and said, "I am sick. I am sinking. Come to me!" I went to him. I sat beside his bed, sir, and I stood beside his grave. Yes, at the risk of offending even you, I did it, sir. Though the avowal should lead to our instant separation, and to the severing of those tender ties between us which have recently been formed, I make it. But I am not a legatee,' said Mr Pecksniff, smiling dispassionately; 'and I never expected to be a legatee. I knew better!'

'His son a pattern!' cried old Martin. 'How can you tell me that? My brother had in his wealth the usual doom of wealth, and root of misery. He carried his corrupting influence with him, go where he would; and shed it round him, even on his hearth. It made of his own child a greedy expectant, who measured every day and hour the lessening distance between his father and the grave, and cursed his tardy progress on that dismal road.'

'No!' cried Mr Pecksniff, boldly. 'Not at all, sir!'

'But I saw that shadow in his house,' said Martin Chuzzlewit, 'the last time we met, and warned him of its presence. I know it when I see it, do I not? I, who have lived within it all these years!'

'I deny it,' Mr Pecksniff answered, warmly. 'I deny it altogether. That bereaved young man is now in this house, sir, seeking in change of scene the peace of mind he has lost. Shall I be backward in doing justice to that young man, when even undertakers and coffin-makers have been moved by the conduct he has exhibited; when even mutes have spoken in his praise, and the medical man hasn't known what to do with himself in the excitement of his feelings! There is a person of the name of Gamp, sir—Mrs Gamp—ask her. She saw Mr Jonas in a trying time. Ask HER, sir. She is respectable, but not sentimental, and will state the fact. A line addressed to Mrs Gamp, at the Bird Shop, Kingsgate Street, High Holborn, London, will meet with every attention, I have no doubt. Let her be examined, my good sir. Strike, but hear! Leap, Mr Chuzzlewit, but look! Forgive me, my dear sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, taking both his hands, 'if I am warm; but I am honest, and must state the truth.'

In proof of the character he gave himself, Mr Pecksniff suffered tears of honesty to ooze out of his eyes.

The old man gazed at him for a moment with a look of wonder, repeating to himself, 'Here now! In this house!' But he mastered his surprise, and said, after a pause:

'Let me see him.'

'In a friendly spirit, I hope?' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Forgive me, sir but he is in the receipt of my humble hospitality.'

'I said,' replied the old man, 'let me see him. If I were disposed to regard him in any other than a friendly spirit, I should have said keep us apart.'

'Certainly, my dear sir. So you would. You are frankness itself, I know. I will break this happiness to him,' said Mr Pecksniff, as he left the room, 'if you will excuse me for a minute—gently.'

He paved the way to the disclosure so very gently, that a quarter of an hour elapsed before he returned with Mr Jonas. In the meantime the young ladies had made their appearance, and the table had been set out for the refreshment of the travellers.

Now, however well Mr Pecksniff, in his morality, had taught Jonas the lesson of dutiful behaviour to his uncle, and however perfectly Jonas, in the cunning of his nature, had learnt it, that young man's bearing, when presented to his father's brother, was anything but manly or engaging. Perhaps, indeed, so singular a mixture of defiance and obsequiousness, of fear and hardihood, of dogged sullenness and an attempt at enraging and propitiation, never was expressed in any one human figure as in that of Jonas, when, having raised his downcast eyes to Martin's face, he let them fall again, and uneasily closing and unclosing his hands without a moment's intermission, stood swinging himself from side to side, waiting to be addressed.

'Nephew,' said the old man. 'You have been a dutiful son, I hear.'

'As dutiful as sons in general, I suppose,' returned Jonas, looking up and down once more. 'I don't brag to have been any better than other sons; but I haven't been any worse, I dare say.'

'A pattern to all sons, I am told,' said the old man, glancing towards Mr Pecksniff.

'Ecod!' said Jonas, looking up again for a moment, and shaking his head, 'I've been as good a son as ever you were a brother. It's the pot and the kettle, if you come to that.'

'You speak bitterly, in the violence of your regret,' said Martin, after a pause. 'Give me your hand.'

Jonas did so, and was almost at his ease. 'Pecksniff,' he whispered, as they drew their chairs about the table; 'I gave him as good as he brought, eh? He had better look at home, before he looks out of window, I think?'

Mr Pecksniff only answered by a nudge of the elbow, which might either be construed into an indignant remonstrance or a cordial assent; but which, in any case, was an emphatic admonition to his chosen son-in-law to be silent. He then proceeded to do the honours of the house with his accustomed ease and amiability.

But not even Mr Pecksniff's guileless merriment could set such a party at their ease, or reconcile materials so utterly discordant and conflicting as those with which he had to deal. The unspeakable jealously and hatred which that night's explanation had sown in Charity's breast, was not to be so easily kept down; and more than once it showed itself in such intensity, as seemed to render a full disclosure of all the circumstances then and there, impossible to be avoided. The beauteous Merry, too, with all the glory of her conquest fresh upon her, so probed and lanced the rankling disappointment of her sister by her capricious airs and thousand little trials of Mr Jonas's obedience, that she almost goaded her into a fit of madness, and obliged her to retire from table in a burst of passion, hardly less vehement than that to which she had abandoned herself in the first tumult of her wrath. The constraint imposed upon the family by the presence among them for the first time of Mary Graham (for by that name old Martin Chuzzlewit had introduced her) did not at all improve this state of things; gentle and quiet though her manner was. Mr Pecksniff's situation was peculiarly trying; for, what with having constantly to keep the peace between his daughters; to maintain a reasonable show of affection and unity in his household; to curb the growing ease and gaiety of Jonas, which vented itself in sundry insolences towards Mr Pinch, and an indefinable coarseness of manner in reference to Mary (they being the two dependants); to make no mention at all of his having perpetually to conciliate his rich old relative, and to smooth down, or explain away, some of the ten thousand bad appearances and combinations of bad appearances, by which they were surrounded on that unlucky evening—what with having to do this, and it would be difficult to sum up how much more, without the least relief or assistance from anybody, it may be easily imagined that Mr Pecksniff had in his enjoyment something more than that usual portion of alloy which is mixed up with the best of men's delights. Perhaps he had never in his life felt such relief as when old Martin, looking at his watch, announced that it was time to go.

'We have rooms,' he said, 'at the Dragon, for the present. I have a fancy for the evening walk. The nights are dark just now; perhaps Mr Pinch would not object to light us home?'

'My dear sir!' cried Pecksniff, 'I shall be delighted. Merry, my child, the lantern.'

'The lantern, if you please, my dear,' said Martin; 'but I couldn't think of taking your father out of doors to-night; and, to be brief, I won't.'

Mr Pecksniff already had his hat in his hand, but it was so emphatically said that he paused.

'I take Mr Pinch, or go alone,' said Martin. 'Which shall it be?'

'It shall be Thomas, sir,' cried Pecksniff, 'since you are so resolute upon it. Thomas, my friend, be very careful, if you please.'

Tom was in some need of this injunction, for he felt so nervous, and trembled to such a degree, that he found it difficult to hold the lantern. How much more difficult when, at the old man's bidding she drew her hand through his—Tom Pinch's—arm!

'And so, Mr Pinch,' said Martin, on the way, 'you are very comfortably situated here; are you?'

Tom answered, with even more than his usual enthusiasm, that he was under obligations to Mr Pecksniff which the devotion of a lifetime would but imperfectly repay.

'How long have you known my nephew?' asked Martin.

'Your nephew, sir?' faltered Tom.

'Mr Jonas Chuzzlewit,' said Mary.

'Oh dear, yes,' cried Tom, greatly relieved, for his mind was running upon Martin. 'Certainly. I never spoke to him before to-night, sir!'

'Perhaps half a lifetime will suffice for the acknowledgment of HIS kindness,' observed the old man.

Tom felt that this was a rebuff for him, and could not but understand it as a left-handed hit at his employer. So he was silent. Mary felt that Mr Pinch was not remarkable for presence of mind, and that he could not say too little under existing circumstances. So SHE was silent. The old man, disgusted by what in his suspicious nature he considered a shameless and fulsome puff of Mr Pecksniff, which was a part of Tom's hired service and in which he was determined to persevere, set him down at once for a deceitful, servile, miserable fawner. So HE was silent. And though they were all sufficiently uncomfortable, it is fair to say that Martin was perhaps the most so; for he had felt kindly towards Tom at first, and had been interested by his seeming simplicity.

'You're like the rest,' he thought, glancing at the face of the unconscious Tom. 'You had nearly imposed upon me, but you have lost your labour. You are too zealous a toad-eater, and betray yourself, Mr Pinch.'

During the whole remainder of the walk, not another word was spoken. First among the meetings to which Tom had long looked forward with a beating heart, it was memorable for nothing but embarrassment and confusion. They parted at the Dragon door; and sighing as he extinguished the candle in the lantern, Tom turned back again over the gloomy fields.

As he approached the first stile, which was in a lonely part, made very dark by a plantation of young firs, a man slipped past him and went on before. Coming to the stile he stopped, and took his seat upon it. Tom was rather startled, and for a moment stood still, but he stepped forward again immediately, and went close up to him.

It was Jonas; swinging his legs to and fro, sucking the head of a stick, and looking with a sneer at Tom.

'Good gracious me!' cried Tom, 'who would have thought of its being you! You followed us, then?'

'What's that to you?' said Jonas. 'Go to the devil!'

'You are not very civil, I think,' remarked Tom.

'Civil enough for YOU,' retorted Jonas. 'Who are you?'

'One who has as good a right to common consideration as another,' said Tom mildly.

'You're a liar,' said Jonas. 'You haven't a right to any consideration. You haven't a right to anything. You're a pretty sort of fellow to talk about your rights, upon my soul! Ha, ha!—Rights, too!'

'If you proceed in this way,' returned Tom, reddening, 'you will oblige me to talk about my wrongs. But I hope your joke is over.'

'It's the way with you curs,' said Mr Jonas, 'that when you know a man's in real earnest, you pretend to think he's joking, so that you may turn it off. But that won't do with me. It's too stale. Now just attend to me for a bit, Mr Pitch, or Witch, or Stitch, or whatever your name is.'

'My name is Pinch,' observed Tom. 'Have the goodness to call me by it.'

'What! You mustn't even be called out of your name, mustn't you!' cried Jonas. 'Pauper' prentices are looking up, I think. Ecod, we manage 'em a little better in the city!'

'Never mind what you do in the city,' said Tom. 'What have you got to say to me?'

'Just this, Mister Pinch,' retorted Jonas, thrusting his face so close to Tom's that Tom was obliged to retreat a step. 'I advise you to keep your own counsel, and to avoid title-tattle, and not to cut in where you're not wanted. I've heard something of you, my friend, and your meek ways; and I recommend you to forget 'em till I am married to one of Pecksniff's gals, and not to curry favour among my relations, but to leave the course clear. You know, when curs won't leave the course clear, they're whipped off; so this is kind advice. Do you understand? Eh? Damme, who are you,' cried Jonas, with increased contempt, 'that you should walk home with THEM, unless it was behind 'em, like any other servant out of livery?'

'Come!' cried Tom, 'I see that you had better get off the stile, and let me pursue my way home. Make room for me, if you please.'

'Don't think it!' said Jonas, spreading out his legs. 'Not till I choose. And I don't choose now. What! You're afraid of my making you split upon some of your babbling just now, are you, Sneak?'

'I am not afraid of many things, I hope,' said Tom; 'and certainly not of anything that you will do. I am not a tale-bearer, and I despise all meanness. You quite mistake me. Ah!' cried Tom, indignantly. 'Is this manly from one in your position to one in mine? Please to make room for me to pass. The less I say, the better.'

'The less you say!' retorted Jonas, dangling his legs the more, and taking no heed of this request. 'You say very little, don't you? Ecod, I should like to know what goes on between you and a vagabond member of my family. There's very little in that too, I dare say!'

'I know no vagabond member of your family,' cried Tom, stoutly.

'You do!' said Jonas.

'I don't,' said Tom. 'Your uncle's namesake, if you mean him, is no vagabond. Any comparison between you and him'—Tom snapped his fingers at him, for he was rising fast in wrath—'is immeasurably to your disadvantage.'

'Oh indeed!' sneered Jonas. 'And what do you think of his deary—his beggarly leavings, eh, Mister Pinch?'

'I don't mean to say another word, or stay here another instant,' replied Tom.

'As I told you before, you're a liar,' said Jonas, coolly. 'You'll stay here till I give you leave to go. Now, keep where you are, will you?'

He flourished his stick over Tom's head; but in a moment it was spinning harmlessly in the air, and Jonas himself lay sprawling in the ditch. In the momentary struggle for the stick, Tom had brought it into violent contact with his opponent's forehead; and the blood welled out profusely from a deep cut on the temple. Tom was first apprised of this by seeing that he pressed his handkerchief to the wounded part, and staggered as he rose, being stunned.

'Are you hurt?' said Tom. 'I am very sorry. Lean on me for a moment. You can do that without forgiving me, if you still bear me malice. But I don't know why; for I never offended you before we met on this spot.'

He made him no answer; not appearing at first to understand him, or even to know that he was hurt, though he several times took his handkerchief from the cut to look vacantly at the blood upon it. After one of these examinations, he looked at Tom, and then there was an expression in his features, which showed that he understood what had taken place, and would remember it.

Nothing more passed between them as they went home. Jonas kept a little in advance, and Tom Pinch sadly followed, thinking of the grief which the knowledge of this quarrel must occasion his excellent benefactor. When Jonas knocked at the door, Tom's heart beat high; higher when Miss Mercy answered it, and seeing her wounded lover, shireked aloud; higher, when he followed them into the family parlour; higher than at any other time, when Jonas spoke.

'Don't make a noise about it,' he said. 'It's nothing worth mentioning. I didn't know the road; the night's very dark; and just as I came up with Mr Pinch'—he turned his face towards Tom, but not his eyes—'I ran against a tree. It's only skin deep.'

'Cold water, Merry, my child!' cried Mr Pecksniff. 'Brown paper! Scissors! A piece of old linen! Charity, my dear, make a bandage. Bless me, Mr Jonas!'

'Oh, bother YOUR nonsense,' returned the gracious son-in-law elect. 'Be of some use if you can. If you can't, get out!'

Miss Charity, though called upon to lend her aid, sat upright in one corner, with a smile upon her face, and didn't move a finger. Though Mercy laved the wound herself; and Mr Pecksniff held the patient's head between his two hands, as if without that assistance it must inevitably come in half; and Tom Pinch, in his guilty agitation, shook a bottle of Dutch Drops until they were nothing but English Froth, and in his other hand sustained a formidable carving-knife, really intended to reduce the swelling, but apparently designed for the ruthless infliction of another wound as soon as that was dressed; Charity rendered not the least assistance, nor uttered a word. But when Mr Jonas's head was bound up, and he had gone to bed, and everybody else had retired, and the house was quiet, Mr Pinch, as he sat mournfully on his bedstead, ruminating, heard a gentle tap at his door; and opening it, saw her, to his great astonishment, standing before him with her finger on her lip.

'Mr Pinch,' she whispered. 'Dear Mr Pinch! Tell me the truth! You did that? There was some quarrel between you, and you struck him? I am sure of it!'

It was the first time she had ever spoken kindly to Tom, in all the many years they had passed together. He was stupefied with amazement.

'Was it so, or not?' she eagerly demanded.

'I was very much provoked,' said Tom.

'Then it was?' cried Charity, with sparkling eyes.

'Ye-yes. We had a struggle for the path,' said Tom. 'But I didn't mean to hurt him so much.'

'Not so much!' she repeated, clenching her hand and stamping her foot, to Tom's great wonder. 'Don't say that. It was brave of you. I honour you for it. If you should ever quarrel again, don't spare him for the world, but beat him down and set your shoe upon him. Not a word of this to anybody. Dear Mr Pinch, I am your friend from tonight. I am always your friend from this time.'

She turned her flushed face upon Tom to confirm her words by its kindling expression; and seizing his right hand, pressed it to her breast, and kissed it. And there was nothing personal in this to render it at all embarrassing, for even Tom, whose power of observation was by no means remarkable, knew from the energy with which she did it that she would have fondled any hand, no matter how bedaubed or dyed, that had broken the head of Jonas Chuzzlewit.

Tom went into his room, and went to bed, full of uncomfortable thoughts. That there should be any such tremendous division in the family as he knew must have taken place to convert Charity Pecksniff into his friend, for any reason, but, above all, for that which was clearly the real one; that Jonas, who had assailed him with such exceeding coarseness, should have been sufficiently magnanimous to keep the secret of their quarrel; and that any train of circumstances should have led to the commission of an assault and battery by Thomas Pinch upon any man calling himself the friend of Seth Pecksniff; were matters of such deep and painful cogitation that he could not close his eyes. His own violence, in particular, so preyed upon the generous mind of Tom, that coupling it with the many former occasions on which he had given Mr Pecksniff pain and anxiety (occasions of which that gentleman often reminded him), he really began to regard himself as destined by a mysterious fate to be the evil genius and bad angel of his patron. But he fell asleep at last, and dreamed—new source of waking uneasiness—that he had betrayed his trust, and run away with Mary Graham.

It must be acknowledged that, asleep or awake, Tom's position in reference to this young lady was full of uneasiness. The more he saw of her, the more he admired her beauty, her intelligence, the amiable qualities that even won on the divided house of Pecksniff, and in a few days restored, at all events, the semblance of harmony and kindness between the angry sisters. When she spoke, Tom held his breath, so eagerly he listened; when she sang, he sat like one entranced. She touched his organ, and from that bright epoch even it, the old companion of his happiest hours, incapable as he had thought of elevation, began a new and deified existence.

God's love upon thy patience, Tom! Who, that had beheld thee, for three summer weeks, poring through half the deadlong night over the jingling anatomy of that inscrutable old harpsichord in the back parlour, could have missed the entrance to thy secret heart: albeit it was dimly known to thee? Who that had seen the glow upon thy cheek when leaning down to listen, after hours of labour, for the sound of one incorrigible note, thou foundest that it had a voice at last, and wheezed out a flat something, distantly akin to what it ought to be, would not have known that it was destined for no common touch, but one that smote, though gently as an angel's hand, upon the deepest chord within thee! And if a friendly glance—aye, even though it were as guileless as thine own, Dear Tom—could have but pierced the twilight of that evening, when, in a voice well tempered to the time, sad, sweet, and low, yet hopeful, she first sang to the altered instrument, and wondered at the change; and thou, sitting apart at the open window, kept a glad silence and a swelling heart—must not that glance have read perforce the dawning of a story, Tom, that it were well for thee had never been begun!

Tom Pinch's situation was not made the less dangerous or difficult by the fact of no one word passing between them in reference to Martin. Honourably mindful of his promise, Tom gave her opportunities of all kinds. Early and late he was in the church; in her favourite walks; in the village, in the garden, in the meadows; and in any or all of these places he might have spoken freely. But no; at all such times she carefully avoided him, or never came in his way unaccompanied. It could not be that she disliked or distrusted him, for by a thousand little delicate means, too slight for any notice but his own, she singled him out when others were present, and showed herself the very soul of kindness. Could it be that she had broken with Martin, or had never returned his affection, save in his own bold and heightened fancy? Tom's cheek grew red with self-reproach as he dismissed the thought.

All this time old Martin came and went in his own strange manner, or sat among the rest absorbed within himself, and holding little intercourse with any one. Although he was unsocial, he was not willful in other things, or troublesome, or morose; being never better pleased than when they left him quite unnoticed at his book, and pursued their own amusements in his presence, unreserved. It was impossible to discern in whom he took an interest, or whether he had an interest in any of them. Unless they spoke to him directly, he never showed that he had ears or eyes for anything that passed.

One day the lively Merry, sitting with downcast eyes under a shady tree in the churchyard, whither she had retired after fatiguing herself by the imposition of sundry trials on the temper of Mr Jonas, felt that a new shadow came between her and the sun. Raising her eyes in the expectation of seeing her betrothed, she was not a little surprised to see old Martin instead. Her surprise was not diminished when he took his seat upon the turf beside her, and opened a conversation thus:

'When are you to be married?'

'Oh! dear Mr Chuzzlewit, my goodness me! I'm sure I don't know. Not yet awhile, I hope.'

'You hope?' said the old man.

It was very gravely said, but she took it for banter, and giggled excessively.

'Come!' said the old man, with unusual kindness, 'you are young, good-looking, and I think good-natured! Frivolous you are, and love to be, undoubtedly; but you must have some heart.'

'I have not given it all away, I can tell you,' said Merry, nodding her head shrewdly, and plucking up the grass.

'Have you parted with any of it?'

She threw the grass about, and looked another way, but said nothing.

Martin repeated his question.

'Lor, my dear Mr Chuzzlewit! really you must excuse me! How very odd you are.'

'If it be odd in me to desire to know whether you love the young man whom I understand you are to marry, I AM very odd,' said Martin. 'For that is certainly my wish.'

'He's such a monster, you know,' said Merry, pouting.

'Then you don't love him?' returned the old man. 'Is that your meaning?'

'Why, my dear Mr Chuzzlewit, I'm sure I tell him a hundred times a day that I hate him. You must have heard me tell him that.'

'Often,' said Martin.

'And so I do,' cried Merry. 'I do positively.'

'Being at the same time engaged to marry him,' observed the old man.

'Oh yes,' said Merry. 'But I told the wretch—my dear Mr Chuzzlewit, I told him when he asked me—that if I ever did marry him, it should only be that I might hate and tease him all my life.'

She had a suspicion that the old man regarded Jonas with anything but favour, and intended these remarks to be extremely captivating. He did not appear, however, to regard them in that light by any means; for when he spoke again, it was in a tone of severity.

'Look about you,' he said, pointing to the graves; 'and remember that from your bridal hour to the day which sees you brought as low as these, and laid in such a bed, there will be no appeal against him. Think, and speak, and act, for once, like an accountable creature. Is any control put upon your inclinations? Are you forced into this match? Are you insidiously advised or tempted to contract it, by any one? I will not ask by whom; by any one?'

'No,' said Merry, shrugging her shoulders. 'I don't know that I am.'

'Don't know that you are! Are you?'

'No,' replied Merry. 'Nobody ever said anything to me about it. If any one had tried to make me have him, I wouldn't have had him at all.'

'I am told that he was at first supposed to be your sister's admirer,' said Martin.

'Oh, good gracious! My dear Mr Chuzzlewit, it would be very hard to make him, though he IS a monster, accountable for other people's vanity,' said Merry. 'And poor dear Cherry is the vainest darling!'

'It was her mistake, then?'

'I hope it was,' cried Merry; 'but, all along, the dear child has been so dreadfully jealous, and SO cross, that, upon my word and honour, it's impossible to please her, and it's of no use trying.'

'Not forced, persuaded, or controlled,' said Martin, thoughtfully. 'And that's true, I see. There is one chance yet. You may have lapsed into this engagement in very giddiness. It may have been the wanton act of a light head. Is that so?'

'My dear Mr Chuzzlewit,' simpered Merry, 'as to light-headedness, there never was such a feather of a head as mine. It's perfect balloon, I declare! You never DID, you know!'

He waited quietly till she had finished, and then said, steadily and slowly, and in a softened voice, as if he would still invite her confidence:

'Have you any wish—or is there anything within your breast that whispers you may form the wish, if you have time to think—to be released from this engagement?'

Again Miss Merry pouted, and looked down, and plucked the grass, and shrugged her shoulders. No. She didn't know that she had. She was pretty sure she hadn't. Quite sure, she might say. She 'didn't mind it.'

'Has it ever occurred to you,' said Martin, 'that your married life may perhaps be miserable, full of bitterness, and most unhappy?'

Merry looked down again; and now she tore the grass up by the roots.

'My dear Mr Chuzzlewit, what shocking words! Of course, I shall quarrel with him. I should quarrel with any husband. Married people always quarrel, I believe. But as to being miserable, and bitter, and all those dreadful things, you know, why I couldn't be absolutely that, unless he always had the best of it; and I mean to have the best of it myself. I always do now,' cried Merry, nodding her head and giggling very much; 'for I make a perfect slave of the creature.'

'Let it go on,' said Martin, rising. 'Let it go on! I sought to know your mind, my dear, and you have shown it me. I wish you joy. Joy!' he repeated, looking full upon her, and pointing to the wicket-gate where Jonas entered at the moment. And then, without waiting for his nephew, he passed out at another gate, and went away.

'Oh, you terrible old man!' cried the facetious Merry to herself. 'What a perfectly hideous monster to be wandering about churchyards in the broad daylight, frightening people out of their wits! Don't come here, Griffin, or I'll go away directly.'

Mr Jonas was the Griffin. He sat down upon the grass at her side, in spite of this warning, and sulkily inquired:

'What's my uncle been a-talking about?'

'About you,' rejoined Merry. 'He says you're not half good enough for me.'

'Oh, yes, I dare say! We all know that. He means to give you some present worth having, I hope. Did he say anything that looked like it?'

'THAT he didn't!' cried Merry, most decisively.

'A stingy old dog he is,' said Jonas. 'Well?'

'Griffin!' cried Miss Mercy, in counterfeit amazement; 'what are you doing, Griffin?'

'Only giving you a squeeze,' said the discomfited Jonas. 'There's no harm in that, I suppose?'

'But there is great deal of harm in it, if I don't consider it agreeable,' returned his cousin. 'Do go along, will you? You make me so hot!'

Mr Jonas withdrew his arm, and for a moment looked at her more like a murderer than a lover. But he cleared his brow by degrees, and broke silence with:

'I say, Mel!'

'What do you say, you vulgar thing—you low savage?' cried his fair betrothed.

'When is it to be? I can't afford to go on dawdling about here half my life, I needn't tell you, and Pecksniff says that father's being so lately dead makes very little odds; for we can be married as quiet as we please down here, and my being lonely is a good reason to the neighbours for taking a wife home so soon, especially one that he knew. As to crossbones (my uncle, I mean), he's sure not to put a spoke in the wheel, whatever we settle on, for he told Pecksniff only this morning, that if YOU liked it he'd nothing at all to say. So, Mel,' said Jonas, venturing on another squeeze; 'when shall it be?'

'Upon my word!' cried Merry.

'Upon my soul, if you like,' said Jonas. 'What do you say to next week, now?'

'To next week! If you had said next quarter, I should have wondered at your impudence.'

'But I didn't say next quarter,' retorted Jonas. 'I said next week.'

'Then, Griffin,' cried Miss Merry, pushing him off, and rising. 'I say no! not next week. It shan't be till I choose, and I may not choose it to be for months. There!'

He glanced up at her from the ground, almost as darkly as he had looked at Tom Pinch; but held his peace.

'No fright of a Griffin with a patch over his eye shall dictate to me or have a voice in the matter,' said Merry. 'There!'

Still Mr Jonas held his peace.

'If it's next month, that shall be the very earliest; but I won't say when it shall be till to-morrow; and if you don't like that, it shall never be at all,' said Merry; 'and if you follow me about and won't leave me alone, it shall never be at all. There! And if you don't do everything I order you to do, it shall never be at all. So don't follow me. There, Griffin!'

And with that, she skipped away, among the trees.

'Ecod, my lady!' said Jonas, looking after her, and biting a piece of straw, almost to powder; 'you'll catch it for this, when you ARE married. It's all very well now—it keeps one on, somehow, and you know it—but I'll pay you off scot and lot by-and-bye. This is a plaguey dull sort of a place for a man to be sitting by himself in. I never could abide a mouldy old churchyard.'

As he turned into the avenue himself, Miss Merry, who was far ahead, happened to look back.

'Ah!' said Jonas, with a sullen smile, and a nod that was not addressed to her. 'Make the most of it while it lasts. Get in your hay while the sun shines. Take your own way as long as it's in your power, my lady!'

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

IS IN PART PROFESSIONAL, AND FURNISHES THE READER WITH SOME VALUABLE HINTS IN RELATION TO THE MANAGEMENT OF A SICK CHAMBER

Mr Mould was surrounded by his household gods. He was enjoying the sweets of domestic repose, and gazing on them with a calm delight. The day being sultry, and the window open, the legs of Mr Mould were on the window-seat, and his back reclined against the shutter. Over his shining head a handkerchief was drawn, to guard his baldness from the flies. The room was fragrant with the smell of punch, a tumbler of which grateful compound stood upon a small round table, convenient to the hand of Mr Mould; so deftly mixed that as his eye looked down into the cool transparent drink, another eye, peering brightly from behind the crisp lemon-peel, looked up at him, and twinkled like a star.

Deep in the City, and within the ward of Cheap, stood Mr Mould's establishment. His Harem, or, in other words, the common sitting room of Mrs Mould and family, was at the back, over the little counting-house behind the shop; abutting on a churchyard small and shady. In this domestic chamber Mr Mould now sat; gazing, a placid man, upon his punch and home. If, for a moment at a time, he sought a wider prospect, whence he might return with freshened zest to these enjoyments, his moist glance wandered like a sunbeam through a rural screen of scarlet runners, trained on strings before the window, and he looked down, with an artist's eye, upon the graves.

The partner of his life, and daughters twain, were Mr Mould's companions. Plump as any partridge was each Miss Mould, and Mrs M. was plumper than the two together. So round and chubby were their fair proportions, that they might have been the bodies once belonging to the angels' faces in the shop below, grown up, with other heads attached to make them mortal. Even their peachy cheeks were puffed out and distended, as though they ought of right to be performing on celestial trumpets. The bodiless cherubs in the shop, who were depicted as constantly blowing those instruments for ever and ever without any lungs, played, it is to be presumed, entirely by ear.

Mr Mould looked lovingly at Mrs Mould, who sat hard by, and was a helpmate to him in his punch as in all other things. Each seraph daughter, too, enjoyed her share of his regards, and smiled upon him in return. So bountiful were Mr Mould's possessions, and so large his stock in trade, that even there, within his household sanctuary, stood a cumbrous press, whose mahogany maw was filled with shrouds, and winding-sheets, and other furniture of funerals. But, though the Misses Mould had been brought up, as one may say, beneath his eye, it had cast no shadow on their timid infancy or blooming youth. Sporting behind the scenes of death and burial from cradlehood, the Misses Mould knew better. Hat-bands, to them, were but so many yards of silk or crape; the final robe but such a quantity of linen. The Misses Mould could idealise a player's habit, or a court-lady's petticoat, or even an act of parliament. But they were not to be taken in by palls. They made them sometimes.

The premises of Mr Mould were hard of hearing to the boisterous noises in the great main streets, and nestled in a quiet corner, where the City strife became a drowsy hum, that sometimes rose and sometimes fell and sometimes altogether ceased; suggesting to a thoughtful mind a stoppage in Cheapside. The light came sparkling in among the scarlet runners, as if the churchyard winked at Mr Mould, and said, 'We understand each other;' and from the distant shop a pleasant sound arose of coffin-making with a low melodious hammer, rat, tat, tat, tat, alike promoting slumber and digestion.

'Quite the buzz of insects,' said Mr Mould, closing his eyes in a perfect luxury. 'It puts one in mind of the sound of animated nature in the agricultural districts. It's exactly like the woodpecker tapping.'

'The woodpecker tapping the hollow ELM tree,' observed Mrs Mould, adapting the words of the popular melody to the description of wood commonly used in the trade.

'Ha, ha!' laughed Mr Mould. 'Not at all bad, my dear. We shall be glad to hear from you again, Mrs M. Hollow elm tree, eh! Ha, ha! Very good indeed. I've seen worse than that in the Sunday papers, my love.'

Mrs Mould, thus encouraged, took a little more of the punch, and handed it to her daughters, who dutifully followed the example of their mother.

'Hollow ELM tree, eh?' said Mr Mould, making a slight motion with his legs in his enjoyment of the joke. 'It's beech in the song. Elm, eh? Yes, to be sure. Ha, ha, ha! Upon my soul, that's one of the best things I know?' He was so excessively tickled by the jest that he couldn't forget it, but repeated twenty times, 'Elm, eh? Yes, to be sure. Elm, of course. Ha, ha, ha! Upon my life, you know, that ought to be sent to somebody who could make use of it. It's one of the smartest things that ever was said. Hollow ELM tree, eh? of course. Very hollow. Ha, ha, ha!'

Here a knock was heard at the room door.

'That's Tacker, I know,' said Mrs Mould, 'by the wheezing he makes. Who that hears him now, would suppose he'd ever had wind enough to carry the feathers on his head! Come in, Tacker.'

'Beg your pardon, ma'am,' said Tacker, looking in a little way. 'I thought our Governor was here.'

'Well! so he is,' cried Mould.

'Oh! I didn't see you, I'm sure,' said Tacker, looking in a little farther. 'You wouldn't be inclined to take a walking one of two, with the plain wood and a tin plate, I suppose?'

'Certainly not,' replied Mr Mould, 'much too common. Nothing to say to it.'

'I told 'em it was precious low,' observed Mr Tacker.

'Tell 'em to go somewhere else. We don't do that style of business here,' said Mr Mould. 'Like their impudence to propose it. Who is it?'

'Why,' returned Tacker, pausing, 'that's where it is, you see. It's the beadle's son-in-law.'

'The beadle's son-in-law, eh?' said Mould. 'Well! I'll do it if the beadle follows in his cocked hat; not else. We carry it off that way, by looking official, but it'll be low enough, then. His cocked hat, mind!'

'I'll take care, sir,' rejoined Tacker. 'Oh! Mrs Gamp's below, and wants to speak to you.'

'Tell Mrs Gamp to come upstairs,' said Mould. 'Now Mrs Gamp, what's YOUR news?'

The lady in question was by this time in the doorway, curtseying to Mrs Mould. At the same moment a peculiar fragrance was borne upon the breeze, as if a passing fairy had hiccoughed, and had previously been to a wine-vaults.

Mrs Gamp made no response to Mr Mould, but curtseyed to Mrs Mould again, and held up her hands and eyes, as in a devout thanksgiving that she looked so well. She was neatly, but not gaudily attired, in the weeds she had worn when Mr Pecksniff had the pleasure of making her acquaintance; and was perhaps the turning of a scale more snuffy.

'There are some happy creeturs,' Mrs Gamp observed, 'as time runs back'ards with, and you are one, Mrs Mould; not that he need do nothing except use you in his most owldacious way for years to come, I'm sure; for young you are and will be. I says to Mrs Harris,' Mrs Gamp continued, 'only t'other day; the last Monday evening fortnight as ever dawned upon this Piljian's Projiss of a mortal wale; I says to Mrs Harris when she says to me, "Years and our trials, Mrs Gamp, sets marks upon us all."—"Say not the words, Mrs Harris, if you and me is to be continual friends, for sech is not the case. Mrs Mould," I says, making so free, I will confess, as use the name,' (she curtseyed here), '"is one of them that goes agen the observation straight; and never, Mrs Harris, whilst I've a drop of breath to draw, will I set by, and not stand up, don't think it."—"I ast your pardon, ma'am," says Mrs Harris, "and I humbly grant your grace; for if ever a woman lived as would see her feller creeturs into fits to serve her friends, well do I know that woman's name is Sairey Gamp."'

At this point she was fain to stop for breath; and advantage may be taken of the circumstance, to state that a fearful mystery surrounded this lady of the name of Harris, whom no one in the circle of Mrs Gamp's acquaintance had ever seen; neither did any human being know her place of residence, though Mrs Gamp appeared on her own showing to be in constant communication with her. There were conflicting rumours on the subject; but the prevalent opinion was that she was a phantom of Mrs Gamp's brain—as Messrs. Doe and Roe are fictions of the law—created for the express purpose of holding visionary dialogues with her on all manner of subjects, and invariably winding up with a compliment to the excellence of her nature.

'And likeways what a pleasure,' said Mrs Gamp, turning with a tearful smile towards the daughters, 'to see them two young ladies as I know'd afore a tooth in their pretty heads was cut, and have many a day seen—ah, the sweet creeturs!—playing at berryins down in the shop, and follerin' the order-book to its long home in the iron safe! But that's all past and over, Mr Mould;' as she thus got in a carefully regulated routine to that gentleman, she shook her head waggishly; 'That's all past and over now, sir, an't it?'

'Changes, Mrs Gamp, changes!' returned the undertaker.

'More changes too, to come, afore we've done with changes, sir,' said Mrs Gamp, nodding yet more waggishly than before. 'Young ladies with such faces thinks of something else besides berryins, don't they, sir?'

'I am sure I don't know, Mrs Gamp,' said Mould, with a chuckle—'Not bad in Mrs Gamp, my dear?'

'Oh yes, you do know, sir!' said Mrs Gamp, 'and so does Mrs Mould, your 'ansome pardner too, sir; and so do I, although the blessing of a daughter was deniged me; which, if we had had one, Gamp would certainly have drunk its little shoes right off its feet, as with our precious boy he did, and arterward send the child a errand to sell his wooden leg for any money it would fetch as matches in the rough, and bring it home in liquor; which was truly done beyond his years, for ev'ry individgle penny that child lost at toss or buy for kidney ones; and come home arterwards quite bold, to break the news, and offering to drown himself if sech would be a satisfaction to his parents.—Oh yes, you do know, sir,' said Mrs Gamp, wiping her eye with her shawl, and resuming the thread of her discourse. 'There's something besides births and berryins in the newspapers, an't there, Mr Mould?'

Mr Mould winked at Mrs Mould, whom he had by this time taken on his knee, and said: 'No doubt. A good deal more, Mrs Gamp. Upon my life, Mrs Gamp is very far from bad, my dear!'

'There's marryings, an't there, sir?' said Mrs Gamp, while both the daughters blushed and tittered. 'Bless their precious hearts, and well they knows it! Well you know'd it too, and well did Mrs Mould, when you was at their time of life! But my opinion is, you're all of one age now. For as to you and Mrs Mould, sir, ever having grandchildren—'

'Oh! Fie, fie! Nonsense, Mrs Gamp,' replied the undertaker. 'Devilish smart, though. Ca-pi-tal!'—this was in a whisper. 'My dear'—aloud again—'Mrs Gamp can drink a glass of rum, I dare say. Sit down, Mrs Gamp, sit down.'

Mrs Gamp took the chair that was nearest the door, and casting up her eyes towards the ceiling, feigned to be wholly insensible to the fact of a glass of rum being in preparation, until it was placed in her hand by one of the young ladies, when she exhibited the greatest surprise.

'A thing,' she said, 'as hardly ever, Mrs Mould, occurs with me unless it is when I am indispoged, and find my half a pint of porter settling heavy on the chest. Mrs Harris often and often says to me, "Sairey Gamp," she says, "you raly do amaze me!" "Mrs Harris," I says to her, "why so? Give it a name, I beg." "Telling the truth then, ma'am," says Mrs Harris, "and shaming him as shall be nameless betwixt you and me, never did I think till I know'd you, as any woman could sick-nurse and monthly likeways, on the little that you takes to drink." "Mrs Harris," I says to her, "none on us knows what we can do till we tries; and wunst, when me and Gamp kept 'ouse, I thought so too. But now," I says, "my half a pint of porter fully satisfies; perwisin', Mrs Harris, that it is brought reg'lar, and draw'd mild. Whether I sicks or monthlies, ma'am, I hope I does my duty, but I am but a poor woman, and I earns my living hard; therefore I DO require it, which I makes confession, to be brought reg'lar and draw'd mild."'

The precise connection between these observations and the glass of rum, did not appear; for Mrs Gamp proposing as a toast 'The best of lucks to all!' took off the dram in quite a scientific manner, without any further remarks.

'And what's your news, Mrs Gamp?' asked Mould again, as that lady wiped her lips upon her shawl, and nibbled a corner off a soft biscuit, which she appeared to carry in her pocket as a provision against contingent drams. 'How's Mr Chuffey?'

'Mr Chuffey, sir,' she replied, 'is jest as usual; he an't no better and he an't no worse. I take it very kind in the gentleman to have wrote up to you and said, "let Mrs Gamp take care of him till I come home;" but ev'rythink he does is kind. There an't a many like him. If there was, we shouldn't want no churches.'

'What do you want to speak to me about, Mrs Gamp?' said Mould, coming to the point.

'Jest this, sir,' Mrs Gamp returned, 'with thanks to you for asking. There IS a gent, sir, at the Bull in Holborn, as has been took ill there, and is bad abed. They have a day nurse as was recommended from Bartholomew's; and well I knows her, Mr Mould, her name bein' Mrs Prig, the best of creeturs. But she is otherways engaged at night, and they are in wants of night-watching; consequent she says to them, having reposed the greatest friendliness in me for twenty year, "The soberest person going, and the best of blessings in a sick room, is Mrs Gamp. Send a boy to Kingsgate Street," she says, "and snap her up at any price, for Mrs Gamp is worth her weight and more in goldian guineas." My landlord brings the message down to me, and says, "bein' in a light place where you are, and this job promising so well, why not unite the two?" "No, sir," I says, "not unbeknown to Mr Mould, and therefore do not think it. But I will go to Mr Mould," I says, "and ast him, if you like."' Here she looked sideways at the undertaker, and came to a stop.

'Night-watching, eh?' said Mould, rubbing his chin.

'From eight o'clock till eight, sir. I will not deceive you,' Mrs Gamp rejoined.

'And then go back, eh?' said would.

'Quite free, then, sir, to attend to Mr Chuffey. His ways bein' quiet, and his hours early, he'd be abed, sir, nearly all the time. I will not deny,' said Mrs Gamp with meekness, 'that I am but a poor woman, and that the money is a object; but do not let that act upon you, Mr Mould. Rich folks may ride on camels, but it an't so easy for 'em to see out of a needle's eye. That is my comfort, and I hope I knows it.'

'Well, Mrs Gamp,' observed Mould, 'I don't see any particular objection to your earning an honest penny under such circumstances. I should keep it quiet, I think, Mrs Gamp. I wouldn't mention it to Mr Chuzzlewit on his return, for instance, unless it were necessary, or he asked you pointblank.'

'The very words was on my lips, sir,' Mrs Gamp rejoined. 'Suppoging that the gent should die, I hope I might take the liberty of saying as I know'd some one in the undertaking line, and yet give no offence to you, sir?'

'Certainly, Mrs Gamp,' said Mould, with much condescension. 'You may casually remark, in such a case, that we do the thing pleasantly and in a great variety of styles, and are generally considered to make it as agreeable as possible to the feelings of the survivors. But don't obtrude it, don't obtrude it. Easy, easy! My dear, you may as well give Mrs Gamp a card or two, if you please.'

Mrs Gamp received them, and scenting no more rum in the wind (for the bottle was locked up again) rose to take her departure.

'Wishing ev'ry happiness to this happy family,' said Mrs Gamp 'with all my heart. Good arternoon, Mrs Mould! If I was Mr would I should be jealous of you, ma'am; and I'm sure, if I was you, I should be jealous of Mr Mould.'

'Tut, tut! Bah, bah! Go along, Mrs Gamp!' cried the delighted undertaker.

'As to the young ladies,' said Mrs Gamp, dropping a curtsey, 'bless their sweet looks—how they can ever reconsize it with their duties to be so grown up with such young parents, it an't for sech as me to give a guess at.'

'Nonsense, nonsense. Be off, Mrs Gamp!' cried Mould. But in the height of his gratification he actually pinched Mrs Mould as he said it.

'I'll tell you what, my dear,' he observed, when Mrs Gamp had at last withdrawn and shut the door, 'that's a ve-ry shrewd woman. That's a woman whose intellect is immensely superior to her station in life. That's a woman who observes and reflects in an uncommon manner. She's the sort of woman now,' said Mould, drawing his silk handkerchief over his head again, and composing himself for a nap 'one would almost feel disposed to bury for nothing; and do it neatly, too!'

Mrs Mould and her daughters fully concurred in these remarks; the subject of which had by this time reached the street, where she experienced so much inconvenience from the air, that she was obliged to stand under an archway for a short time, to recover herself. Even after this precaution, she walked so unsteadily as to attract the compassionate regards of divers kind-hearted boys, who took the liveliest interest in her disorder; and in their simple language bade her be of good cheer, for she was 'only a little screwed.'

Whatever she was, or whatever name the vocabulary of medical science would have bestowed upon her malady, Mrs Gamp was perfectly acquainted with the way home again; and arriving at the house of Anthony Chuzzlewit & Son, lay down to rest. Remaining there until seven o'clock in the evening, and then persuading poor old Chuffey to betake himself to bed, she sallied forth upon her new engagement. First, she went to her private lodgings in Kingsgate Street, for a bundle of robes and wrappings comfortable in the night season; and then repaired to the Bull in Holborn, which she reached as the clocks were striking eight.

As she turned into the yard, she stopped; for the landlord, landlady, and head chambermaid, were all on the threshold together talking earnestly with a young gentleman who seemed to have just come or to be just going away. The first words that struck upon Mrs Gamp's ear obviously bore reference to the patient; and it being expedient that all good attendants should know as much as possible about the case on which their skill is brought to bear, Mrs Gamp listened as a matter of duty.

'No better, then?' observed the gentleman.

'Worse!' said the landlord.

'Much worse,' added the landlady.

'Oh! a deal badder,' cried the chambermaid from the background, opening her eyes very wide, and shaking her head.

'Poor fellow!' said the gentleman, 'I am sorry to hear it. The worst of it is, that I have no idea what friends or relations he has, or where they live, except that it certainly is not in London.'

The landlord looked at the landlady; the landlady looked at the landlord; and the chambermaid remarked, hysterically, 'that of all the many wague directions she had ever seen or heerd of (and they wasn't few in an hotel), THAT was the waguest.'

'The fact is, you see,' pursued the gentleman, 'as I told you yesterday when you sent to me, I really know very little about him. We were school-fellows together; but since that time I have only met him twice. On both occasions I was in London for a boy's holiday (having come up for a week or so from Wiltshire), and lost sight of him again directly. The letter bearing my name and address which you found upon his table, and which led to your applying to me, is in answer, you will observe, to one he wrote from this house the very day he was taken ill, making an appointment with him at his own request. Here is his letter, if you wish to see it.'

The landlord read it; the landlady looked over him. The chambermaid, in the background, made out as much of it as she could, and invented the rest; believing it all from that time forth as a positive piece of evidence.

'He has very little luggage, you say?' observed the gentleman, who was no other than our old friend, John Westlock.

'Nothing but a portmanteau,' said the landlord; 'and very little in it.'

'A few pounds in his purse, though?'

'Yes. It's sealed up, and in the cash-box. I made a memorandum of the amount, which you're welcome to see.'

'Well!' said John, 'as the medical gentleman says the fever must take its course, and nothing can be done just now beyond giving him his drinks regularly and having him carefully attended to, nothing more can be said that I know of, until he is in a condition to give us some information. Can you suggest anything else?'

'N-no,' replied the landlord, 'except—'

'Except, who's to pay, I suppose?' said John.

'Why,' hesitated the landlord, 'it would be as well.'

'Quite as well,' said the landlady.

'Not forgetting to remember the servants,' said the chambermaid in a bland whisper.

'It is but reasonable, I fully admit,' said John Westlock. 'At all events, you have the stock in hand to go upon for the present; and I will readily undertake to pay the doctor and the nurses.'

'Ah!' cried Mrs Gamp. 'A rayal gentleman!'

She groaned her admiration so audibly, that they all turned round. Mrs Gamp felt the necessity of advancing, bundle in hand, and introducing herself.

'The night-nurse,' she observed, 'from Kingsgate Street, well beknown to Mrs Prig the day-nurse, and the best of creeturs. How is the poor dear gentleman to-night? If he an't no better yet, still that is what must be expected and prepared for. It an't the fust time by a many score, ma'am,' dropping a curtsey to the landlady, 'that Mrs Prig and me has nussed together, turn and turn about, one off, one on. We knows each other's ways, and often gives relief when others fail. Our charges is but low, sir'—Mrs Gamp addressed herself to John on this head—'considerin' the nater of our painful dooty. If they wos made accordin' to our wishes, they would be easy paid.'

Regarding herself as having now delivered her inauguration address, Mrs Gamp curtseyed all round, and signified her wish to be conducted to the scene of her official duties. The chambermaid led her, through a variety of intricate passages, to the top of the house; and pointing at length to a solitary door at the end of a gallery, informed her that yonder was the chamber where the patient lay. That done, she hurried off with all the speed she could make.

Mrs Gamp traversed the gallery in a great heat from having carried her large bundle up so many stairs, and tapped at the door which was immediately opened by Mrs Prig, bonneted and shawled and all impatience to be gone. Mrs Prig was of the Gamp build, but not so fat; and her voice was deeper and more like a man's. She had also a beard.

'I began to think you warn't a-coming!' Mrs Prig observed, in some displeasure.

'It shall be made good to-morrow night,' said Mrs Gamp 'Honorable. I had to go and fetch my things.' She had begun to make signs of inquiry in reference to the position of the patient and his overhearing them—for there was a screen before the door—when Mrs Prig settled that point easily.

'Oh!' she said aloud, 'he's quiet, but his wits is gone. It an't no matter wot you say.'

'Anythin' to tell afore you goes, my dear?' asked Mrs Gamp, setting her bundle down inside the door, and looking affectionately at her partner.

'The pickled salmon,' Mrs Prig replied, 'is quite delicious. I can partlck'ler recommend it. Don't have nothink to say to the cold meat, for it tastes of the stable. The drinks is all good.'

Mrs Gamp expressed herself much gratified.

'The physic and them things is on the drawers and mankleshelf,' said Mrs Prig, cursorily. 'He took his last slime draught at seven. The easy-chair an't soft enough. You'll want his piller.'

Mrs Gamp thanked her for these hints, and giving her a friendly good night, held the door open until she had disappeared at the other end of the gallery. Having thus performed the hospitable duty of seeing her safely off, she shut it, locked it on the inside, took up her bundle, walked round the screen, and entered on her occupation of the sick chamber.

'A little dull, but not so bad as might be,' Mrs Gamp remarked. 'I'm glad to see a parapidge, in case of fire, and lots of roofs and chimley-pots to walk upon.'

It will be seen from these remarks that Mrs Gamp was looking out of window. When she had exhausted the prospect, she tried the easy-chair, which she indignantly declared was 'harder than a brickbadge.' Next she pursued her researches among the physic-bottles, glasses, jugs, and tea-cups; and when she had entirely satisfied her curiosity on all these subjects of investigation, she untied her bonnet-strings and strolled up to the bedside to take a look at the patient.

A young man—dark and not ill-looking—with long black hair, that seemed the blacker for the whiteness of the bed-clothes. His eyes were partly open, and he never ceased to roll his head from side to side upon the pillow, keeping his body almost quiet. He did not utter words; but every now and then gave vent to an expression of impatience or fatigue, sometimes of surprise; and still his restless head—oh, weary, weary hour!—went to and fro without a moment's intermission.

Mrs Gamp solaced herself with a pinch of snuff, and stood looking at him with her head inclined a little sideways, as a connoisseur might gaze upon a doubtful work of art. By degrees, a horrible remembrance of one branch of her calling took possession of the woman; and stooping down, she pinned his wandering arms against his sides, to see how he would look if laid out as a dead man. Her fingers itched to compose his limbs in that last marble attitude.

'Ah!' said Mrs Gamp, walking away from the bed, 'he'd make a lovely corpse.'

She now proceeded to unpack her bundle; lighted a candle with the aid of a fire-box on the drawers; filled a small kettle, as a preliminary to refreshing herself with a cup of tea in the course of the night; laid what she called 'a little bit of fire,' for the same philanthropic purpose; and also set forth a small tea-board, that nothing might be wanting for her comfortable enjoyment. These preparations occupied so long, that when they were brought to a conclusion it was high time to think about supper; so she rang the bell and ordered it.

'I think, young woman,' said Mrs Gamp to the assistant chambermaid, in a tone expressive of weakness, 'that I could pick a little bit of pickled salmon, with a nice little sprig of fennel, and a sprinkling of white pepper. I takes new bread, my dear, with just a little pat of fresh butter, and a mossel of cheese. In case there should be such a thing as a cowcumber in the 'ouse, will you be so kind as bring it, for I'm rather partial to 'em, and they does a world of good in a sick room. If they draws the Brighton Old Tipper here, I takes THAT ale at night, my love, it bein' considered wakeful by the doctors. And whatever you do, young woman, don't bring more than a shilling's-worth of gin and water-warm when I rings the bell a second time; for that is always my allowance, and I never takes a drop beyond!'

Having preferred these moderate requests, Mrs Gamp observed that she would stand at the door until the order was executed, to the end that the patient might not be disturbed by her opening it a second time; and therefore she would thank the young woman to 'look sharp.'

A tray was brought with everything upon it, even to the cucumber and Mrs Gamp accordingly sat down to eat and drink in high good humour. The extent to which she availed herself of the vinegar, and supped up that refreshing fluid with the blade of her knife, can scarcely be expressed in narrative.

'Ah!' sighed Mrs Gamp, as she meditated over the warm shilling's-worth, 'what a blessed thing it is—living in a wale—to be contented! What a blessed thing it is to make sick people happy in their beds, and never mind one's self as long as one can do a service! I don't believe a finer cowcumber was ever grow'd. I'm sure I never see one!'

She moralised in the same vein until her glass was empty, and then administered the patient's medicine, by the simple process of clutching his windpipe to make him gasp, and immediately pouring it down his throat.

'I a'most forgot the piller, I declare!' said Mrs Gamp, drawing it away. 'There! Now he's comfortable as he can be, I'm sure! I must try to make myself as much so as I can.'

With this view, she went about the construction of an extemporaneous bed in the easy-chair, with the addition of the next easy one for her feet. Having formed the best couch that the circumstances admitted of, she took out of her bundle a yellow night-cap, of prodigious size, in shape resembling a cabbage; which article of dress she fixed and tied on with the utmost care, previously divesting herself of a row of bald old curls that could scarcely be called false, they were so very innocent of anything approaching to deception. From the same repository she brought forth a night-jacket, in which she also attired herself. Finally, she produced a watchman's coat which she tied round her neck by the sleeves, so that she become two people; and looked, behind, as if she were in the act of being embraced by one of the old patrol.

All these arrangements made, she lighted the rush-light, coiled herself up on her couch, and went to sleep. Ghostly and dark the room became, and full of lowering shadows. The distant noises in the streets were gradually hushed; the house was quiet as a sepulchre; the dead of might was coffined in the silent city.

Oh, weary, weary hour! Oh, haggard mind, groping darkly through the past; incapable of detaching itself from the miserable present; dragging its heavy chain of care through imaginary feasts and revels, and scenes of awful pomp; seeking but a moment's rest among the long-forgotten haunts of childhood, and the resorts of yesterday; and dimly finding fear and horror everywhere! Oh, weary, weary hour! What were the wanderings of Cain, to these!

Still, without a moment's interval, the burning head tossed to and fro. Still, from time to time, fatigue, impatience, suffering, and surprise, found utterance upon that rack, and plainly too, though never once in words. At length, in the solemn hour of midnight, he began to talk; waiting awfully for answers sometimes; as though invisible companions were about his bed; and so replying to their speech and questioning again.

Mrs Gamp awoke, and sat up in her bed; presenting on the wall the shadow of a gigantic night constable, struggling with a prisoner.

'Come! Hold your tongue!' she cried, in sharp reproof. 'Don't make none of that noise here.'

There was no alteration in the face, or in the incessant motion of the head, but he talked on wildly.

'Ah!' said Mrs Gamp, coming out of the chair with an impatient shiver; 'I thought I was a-sleepin' too pleasant to last! The devil's in the night, I think, it's turned so chilly!'

'Don't drink so much!' cried the sick man. 'You'll ruin us all. Don't you see how the fountain sinks? Look at the mark where the sparkling water was just now!'

'Sparkling water, indeed!' said Mrs Gamp. 'I'll have a sparkling cup o' tea, I think. I wish you'd hold your noise!'

He burst into a laugh, which, being prolonged, fell off into a dismal wail. Checking himself, with fierce inconstancy he began to count—fast.

'One—two—three—four—five—six.'

"One, two, buckle my shoe,"' said Mrs Gamp, who was now on her knees, lighting the fire, "three, four, shut the door,"—I wish you'd shut your mouth, young man—"five, six, picking up sticks." If I'd got a few handy, I should have the kettle boiling all the sooner.'

Awaiting this desirable consummation, she sat down so close to the fender (which was a high one) that her nose rested upon it; and for some time she drowsily amused herself by sliding that feature backwards and forwards along the brass top, as far as she could, without changing her position to do it. She maintained, all the while, a running commentary upon the wanderings of the man in bed.

'That makes five hundred and twenty-one men, all dressed alike, and with the same distortion on their faces, that have passed in at the window, and out at the door,' he cried, anxiously. 'Look there! Five hundred and twenty-two—twenty-three—twenty-four. Do you see them?'

'Ah! I see 'em,' said Mrs Gamp; 'all the whole kit of 'em numbered like hackney-coaches, an't they?'

'Touch me! Let me be sure of this. Touch me!'

'You'll take your next draught when I've made the kettle bile,' retorted Mrs Gamp, composedly, 'and you'll be touched then. You'll be touched up, too, if you don't take it quiet.'

'Five hundred and twenty-eight, five hundred and twenty-nine, five hundred and thirty.—Look here!'

'What's the matter now?' said Mrs Gamp.

'They're coming four abreast, each man with his arm entwined in the next man's, and his hand upon his shoulder. What's that upon the arm of every man, and on the flag?'

'Spiders, p'raps,' said Mrs Gamp.

'Crape! Black crape! Good God! why do they wear it outside?'

'Would you have 'em carry black crape in their insides?' Mrs Gamp retorted. 'Hold your noise, hold your noise.'

The fire beginning by this time to impart a grateful warmth, Mrs Gamp became silent; gradually rubbed her nose more and more slowly along the top of the fender; and fell into a heavy doze. She was awakened by the room ringing (as she fancied) with a name she knew:

'Chuzzlewit!'

The sound was so distinct and real, and so full of agonised entreaty, that Mrs Gamp jumped up in terror, and ran to the door. She expected to find the passage filled with people, come to tell her that the house in the city had taken fire. But the place was empty; not a soul was there. She opened the window, and looked out. Dark, dull, dingy, and desolate house-tops. As she passed to her seat again, she glanced at the patient. Just the same; but silent. Mrs Gamp was so warm now, that she threw off the watchman's coat, and fanned herself.

'It seemed to make the wery bottles ring,' she said. 'What could I have been a-dreaming of? That dratted Chuffey, I'll be bound.'

The supposition was probable enough. At any rate, a pinch of snuff, and the song of the steaming kettle, quite restored the tone of Mrs Gamp's nerves, which were none of the weakest. She brewed her tea; made some buttered toast; and sat down at the tea-board, with her face to the fire.

When once again, in a tone more terrible than that which had vibrated in her slumbering ear, these words were shrieked out:

'Chuzzlewit! Jonas! No!'

Mrs Gamp dropped the cup she was in the act of raising to her lips, and turned round with a start that made the little tea-board leap. The cry had come from the bed.

It was bright morning the next time Mrs Gamp looked out of the window, and the sun was rising cheerfully. Lighter and lighter grew the sky, and noisier the streets; and high into the summer air uprose the smoke of newly kindled fires, until the busy day was broad awake.

Mrs Prig relieved punctually, having passed a good night at her other patient's. Mr Westlock came at the same time, but he was not admitted, the disorder being infectious. The doctor came too. The doctor shook his head. It was all he could do, under the circumstances, and he did it well.

'What sort of a night, nurse?'

'Restless, sir,' said Mrs Gamp.

'Talk much?'

'Middling, sir,' said Mrs Gamp.

'Nothing to the purpose, I suppose?'

'Oh bless you, no, sir. Only jargon.'

'Well!' said the doctor, 'we must keep him quiet; keep the room cool; give him his draughts regularly; and see that he's carefully looked to. That's all!'

'And as long as Mrs Prig and me waits upon him, sir, no fear of that,' said Mrs Gamp.

'I suppose,' observed Mrs Prig, when they had curtseyed the doctor out; 'there's nothin' new?'

'Nothin' at all, my dear,' said Mrs Gamp. 'He's rather wearin' in his talk from making up a lot of names; elseways you needn't mind him.'

'Oh, I shan't mind him,' Mrs Prig returned. 'I have somethin' else to think of.'

'I pays my debts to-night, you know, my dear, and comes afore my time,' said Mrs Gamp. 'But, Betsy Prig'—speaking with great feeling, and laying her hand upon her arm—'try the cowcumbers, God bless you!'

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING, AND A PROMISING PROSPECT

The laws of sympathy between beards and birds, and the secret source of that attraction which frequently impels a shaver of the one to be a dealer in the other, are questions for the subtle reasoning of scientific bodies; not the less so, because their investigation would seem calculated to lead to no particular result. It is enough to know that the artist who had the honour of entertaining Mrs Gamp as his first-floor lodger, united the two pursuits of barbering and bird-fancying; and that it was not an original idea of his, but one in which he had, dispersed about the by-streets and suburbs of the town, a host of rivals.

The name of the householder was Paul Sweedlepipe. But he was commonly called Poll Sweedlepipe; and was not uncommonly believed to have been so christened, among his friends and neighbours.

With the exception of the staircase, and his lodger's private apartment, Poll Sweedlepipe's house was one great bird's nest. Gamecocks resided in the kitchen; pheasants wasted the brightness of their golden plumage on the garret; bantams roosted in the cellar; owls had possession of the bedroom; and specimens of all the smaller fry of birds chirrupped and twittered in the shop. The staircase was sacred to rabbits. There in hutches of all shapes and kinds, made from old packing-cases, boxes, drawers, and tea-chests, they increased in a prodigious degree, and contributed their share towards that complicated whiff which, quite impartially, and without distinction of persons, saluted every nose that was put into Sweedlepipe's easy shaving-shop.

Many noses found their way there, for all that, especially on Sunday morning, before church-time. Even archbishops shave, or must be shaved, on a Sunday, and beards WILL grow after twelve o'clock on Saturday night, though it be upon the chins of base mechanics; who, not being able to engage their valets by the quarter, hire them by the job, and pay them—oh, the wickedness of copper coin!—in dirty pence. Poll Sweedlepipe, the sinner, shaved all comers at a penny each, and cut the hair of any customer for twopence; and being a lone unmarried man, and having some connection in the bird line, Poll got on tolerably well.

He was a little elderly man, with a clammy cold right hand, from which even rabbits and birds could not remove the smell of shaving-soap. Poll had something of the bird in his nature; not of the hawk or eagle, but of the sparrow, that builds in chimney-stacks and inclines to human company. He was not quarrelsome, though, like the sparrow; but peaceful, like the dove. In his walk he strutted; and, in this respect, he bore a faint resemblance to the pigeon, as well as in a certain prosiness of speech, which might, in its monotony, be likened to the cooing of that bird. He was very inquisitive; and when he stood at his shop-door in the evening-tide, watching the neighbours, with his head on one side, and his eye cocked knowingly, there was a dash of the raven in him. Yet there was no more wickedness in Poll than in a robin. Happily, too, when any of his ornithological properties were on the verge of going too far, they were quenched, dissolved, melted down, and neutralised in the barber; just as his bald head—otherwise, as the head of a shaved magpie—lost itself in a wig of curly black ringlets, parted on one side, and cut away almost to the crown, to indicate immense capacity of intellect.

Poll had a very small, shrill treble voice, which might have led the wags of Kingsgate Street to insist the more upon his feminine designation. He had a tender heart, too; for, when he had a good commission to provide three or four score sparrows for a shooting-match, he would observe, in a compassionate tone, how singular it was that sparrows should have been made expressly for such purposes. The question, whether men were made to shoot them, never entered into Poll's philosophy.

Poll wore, in his sporting character, a velveteen coat, a great deal of blue stocking, ankle boots, a neckerchief of some bright colour, and a very tall hat. Pursuing his more quiet occupation of barber, he generally subsided into an apron not over-clean, a flannel jacket, and corduroy knee-shorts. It was in this latter costume, but with his apron girded round his waist, as a token of his having shut up shop for the night, that he closed the door one evening, some weeks after the occurrences detailed in the last chapter, and stood upon the steps in Kingsgate Street, listening until the little cracked bell within should leave off ringing. For until it did—this was Mr

Sweedlepipe's reflection—the place never seemed quiet enough to be left to itself.

'It's the greediest little bell to ring,' said Poll, 'that ever was. But it's quiet at last.'

He rolled his apron up a little tighter as he said these words, and hastened down the street. Just as he was turning into Holborn, he ran against a young gentleman in a livery. This youth was bold, though small, and with several lively expressions of displeasure, turned upon him instantly.

'Now, STOO-PID!' cried the young gentleman. 'Can't you look where you're a-going to—eh? Can't you mind where you're a-coming to—eh? What do you think your eyes was made for—eh? Ah! Yes. Oh! Now then!'

The young gentleman pronounced the two last words in a very loud tone and with frightful emphasis, as though they contained within themselves the essence of the direst aggravation. But he had scarcely done so, when his anger yielded to surprise, and he cried, in a milder tone:

'What! Polly!'

'Why, it an't you, sure!' cried Poll. 'It can't be you!'

'No. It an't me,' returned the youth. 'It's my son, my oldest one. He's a credit to his father, an't he, Polly?' With this delicate little piece of banter, he halted on the pavement, and went round and round in circles, for the better exhibition of his figure; rather to the inconvenience of the passengers generally, who were not in an equal state of spirits with himself.

'I wouldn't have believed it,' said Poll. 'What! You've left your old place, then? Have you?'

'Have I!' returned his young friend, who had by this time stuck his hands into the pockets of his white cord breeches, and was swaggering along at the barber's side. 'D'ye know a pair of top-boots when you see 'em, Polly?—look here!'

'Beau-ti-ful' cried Mr Sweedlepipe.

'D'ye know a slap-up sort of button, when you see it?' said the youth. 'Don't look at mine, if you ain't a judge, because these lions' heads was made for men of taste; not snobs.'

'Beau-ti-ful!' cried the barber again. 'A grass-green frock-coat, too, bound with gold; and a cockade in your hat!'

'I should hope so,' replied the youth. 'Blow the cockade, though; for, except that it don't turn round, it's like the wentilator that used to be in the kitchen winder at Todgers's. You ain't seen the old lady's name in the Gazette, have you?'

'No,' returned the barber. 'Is she a bankrupt?'

'If she ain't, she will be,' retorted Bailey. 'That bis'ness never can be carried on without ME. Well! How are you?'

'Oh! I'm pretty well,' said Poll. 'Are you living at this end of the town, or were you coming to see me? Was that the bis'ness that brought you to Holborn?'

'I haven't got no bis'ness in Holborn,' returned Bailey, with some displeasure. 'All my bis'ness lays at the West End. I've got the right sort of governor now. You can't see his face for his whiskers, and can't see his whiskers for the dye upon 'em. That's a gentleman ain't it? You wouldn't like a ride in a cab, would you? Why, it wouldn't be safe to offer it. You'd faint away, only to see me a-comin' at a mild trot round the corner.'

To convey a slight idea of the effect of this approach, Mr Bailey counterfeited in his own person the action of a high-trotting horse and threw up his head so high, in backing against a pump, that he shook his hat off.

'Why, he's own uncle to Capricorn,' said Bailey, 'and brother to Cauliflower. He's been through the winders of two chaney shops since we've had him, and was sold for killin' his missis. That's a horse, I hope?'

'Ah! you'll never want to buy any more red polls, now,' observed Poll, looking on his young friend with an air of melancholy. 'You'll never want to buy any more red polls now, to hang up over the sink, will you?'

'I should think not,' replied Bailey. 'Reether so. I wouldn't have nothin' to say to any bird below a Peacock; and HE'd be wulgar. Well, how are you?'

'Oh! I'm pretty well,' said Poll. He answered the question again because Mr Bailey asked it again; Mr Bailey asked it again, because—accompanied with a straddling action of the white cords, a bend of the knees, and a striking forth of the top-boots—it was an easy horse-fleshy, turfy sort of thing to do.

'Wot are you up to, old feller?' added Mr Bailey, with the same graceful rakishness. He was quite the man-about-town of the conversation, while the easy-shaver was the child.

'Why, I am going to fetch my lodger home,' said Paul.

'A woman!' cried Mr Bailey, 'for a twenty-pun' note!'

The little barber hastened to explain that she was neither a young woman, nor a handsome woman, but a nurse, who had been acting as a kind of house-keeper to a gentleman for some weeks past, and left her place that night, in consequence of being superseded by another and a more legitimate house-keeper—to wit, the gentleman's bride.

'He's newly married, and he brings his young wife home to-night,' said the barber. 'So I'm going to fetch my lodger away—Mr Chuzzlewit's, close behind the Post Office—and carry her box for her.'

'Jonas Chuzzlewit's?' said Bailey.

'Ah!' returned Paul: 'that's the name sure enough. Do you know him?'

'Oh, no!' cried Mr Bailey; 'not at all. And I don't know her! Not neither! Why, they first kept company through me, a'most.'

'Ah?' said Paul.

'Ah!' said Mr Bailey, with a wink; 'and she ain't bad looking mind you. But her sister was the best. SHE was the merry one. I often used to have a bit of fun with her, in the hold times!'

Mr Bailey spoke as if he already had a leg and three-quarters in the grave, and this had happened twenty or thirty years ago. Paul Sweedlepipe, the meek, was so perfectly confounded by his precocious self-possession, and his patronizing manner, as well as by his boots, cockade, and livery, that a mist swam before his eyes, and he saw—not the Bailey of acknowledged juvenility from Todgers's Commercial Boarding House, who had made his acquaintance within a twelvemonth, by purchasing, at sundry times, small birds at twopence each—but a highly-condensed embodiment of all the sporting grooms in London; an abstract of all the stable-knowledge of the time; a something at a high-pressure that must have had existence many years, and was fraught with terrible experiences. And truly, though in the cloudy atmosphere of Todgers's, Mr Bailey's genius had ever shone out brightly in this particular respect, it now eclipsed both time and space, cheated beholders of their senses, and worked on their belief in defiance of all natural laws. He walked along the tangible and real stones of Holborn Hill, an undersized boy; and yet he winked the winks, and thought the thoughts, and did the deeds, and said the sayings of an ancient man. There was an old principle within him, and a young surface without. He became an inexplicable creature; a breeched and booted Sphinx. There was no course open to the barber, but to go distracted himself, or to take Bailey for granted; and he wisely chose the latter.

Mr Bailey was good enough to continue to bear him company, and to entertain him, as they went, with easy conversation on various sporting topics; especially on the comparative merits, as a general principle, of horses with white stockings, and horses without. In regard to the style of tail to be preferred, Mr Bailey had opinions of his own, which he explained, but begged they might by no means influence his friend's, as here he knew he had the misfortune to differ from some excellent authorities. He treated Mr Sweedlepipe to a dram, compounded agreeably to his own directions, which he informed him had been invented by a member of the Jockey Club; and, as they were by this time near the barber's destination, he observed that, as he had an hour to spare, and knew the parties, he would, if quite agreeable, be introduced to Mrs Gamp.

Paul knocked at Jonas Chuzzlewit's; and, on the door being opened by that lady, made the two distinguished persons known to one another. It was a happy feature in Mrs Gamp's twofold profession, that it gave her an interest in everything that was young as well as in everything that was old. She received Mr Bailey with much kindness.

'It's very good, I'm sure, of you to come,' she said to her landlord, 'as well as bring so nice a friend. But I'm afraid that I must trouble you so far as to step in, for the young couple has not yet made appearance.'

'They're late, ain't they?' inquired her landlord, when she had conducted them downstairs into the kitchen.

'Well, sir, considern' the Wings of Love, they are,' said Mrs Gamp.

Mr Bailey inquired whether the Wings of Love had ever won a plate, or could be backed to do anything remarkable; and being informed that it was not a horse, but merely a poetical or figurative expression, evinced considerable disgust. Mrs Gamp was so very much astonished by his affable manners and great ease, that she was about to propound to her landlord in a whisper the staggering inquiry, whether he was a man or a boy, when Mr Sweedlepipe, anticipating her design, made a timely diversion.

'He knows Mrs Chuzzlewit,' said Paul aloud.

'There's nothin' he don't know; that's my opinion,' observed Mrs Gamp. 'All the wickedness of the world is Print to him.'

Mr Bailey received this as a compliment, and said, adjusting his cravat, 'reether so.'

'As you knows Mrs Chuzzlewit, you knows, p'raps, what her chris'en name is?' Mrs Gamp observed.

'Charity,' said Bailey.

'That it ain't!' cried Mrs Gamp.

'Cherry, then,' said Bailey. 'Cherry's short for it. It's all the same.'

'It don't begin with a C at all,' retorted Mrs Gamp, shaking her head. 'It begins with a M.'

'Whew!' cried Mr Bailey, slapping a little cloud of pipe-clay out of his left leg, 'then he's been and married the merry one!'

As these words were mysterious, Mrs Gamp called upon him to explain, which Mr Bailey proceeded to do; that lady listening greedily to everything he said. He was yet in the fullness of his narrative when the sound of wheels, and a double knock at the street door, announced the arrival of the newly married couple. Begging him to reserve what more he had to say for her hearing on the way home, Mrs Gamp took up the candle, and hurried away to receive and welcome the young mistress of the house.

'Wishing you appiness and joy with all my art,' said Mrs Gamp, dropping a curtsey as they entered the hall; 'and you, too, sir. Your lady looks a little tired with the journey, Mr Chuzzlewit, a pretty dear!'

'She has bothered enough about it,' grumbled Mr Jonas. 'Now, show a light, will you?'

'This way, ma'am, if you please,' said Mrs Gamp, going upstairs before them. 'Things has been made as comfortable as they could be, but there's many things you'll have to alter your own self when you gets time to look about you! Ah! sweet thing! But you don't,' added Mrs Gamp, internally, 'you don't look much like a merry one, I must say!'

It was true; she did not. The death that had gone before the bridal seemed to have left its shade upon the house. The air was heavy and oppressive; the rooms were dark; a deep gloom filled up every chink and corner. Upon the hearthstone, like a creature of ill omen, sat the aged clerk, with his eyes fixed on some withered branches in the stove. He rose and looked at her.

'So there you are, Mr Chuff,' said Jonas carelessly, as he dusted his boots; 'still in the land of the living, eh?'

'Still in the land of the living, sir,' retorted Mrs Gamp. 'And Mr Chuffey may thank you for it, as many and many a time I've told him.'

Mr Jonas was not in the best of humours, for he merely said, as he looked round, 'We don't want you any more, you know, Mrs Gamp.'

'I'm a-going immediate, sir,' returned the nurse; 'unless there's nothink I can do for you, ma'am. Ain't there,' said Mrs Gamp, with a look of great sweetness, and rummaging all the time in her pocket; 'ain't there nothink I can do for you, my little bird?'

'No,' said Merry, almost crying. 'You had better go away, please!'

With a leer of mingled sweetness and slyness; with one eye on the future, one on the bride, and an arch expression in her face, partly spiritual, partly spirituous, and wholly professional and peculiar to her art; Mrs Gamp rummaged in her pocket again, and took from it a printed card, whereon was an inscription copied from her signboard.

'Would you be so good, my darling dovey of a dear young married lady,' Mrs Gamp observed, in a low voice, 'as put that somewheres where you can keep it in your mind? I'm well beknown to many ladies, and it's my card. Gamp is my name, and Gamp my nater. Livin' quite handy, I will make so bold as call in now and then, and make inquiry how your health and spirits is, my precious chick!'

And with innumerable leers, winks, coughs, nods, smiles, and curtseys, all leading to the establishment of a mysterious and confidential understanding between herself and the bride, Mrs Gamp, invoking a blessing upon the house, leered, winked, coughed, nodded, smiled, and curtseyed herself out of the room.

'But I will say, and I would if I was led a Martha to the Stakes for it,' Mrs Gamp remarked below stairs, in a whisper, 'that she don't look much like a merry one at this present moment of time.'

'Ah! wait till you hear her laugh!' said Bailey.

'Hem!' cried Mrs Gamp, in a kind of groan. 'I will, child.'

They said no more in the house, for Mrs Gamp put on her bonnet, Mr Sweedlepipe took up her box; and Mr Bailey accompanied them towards Kingsgate Street; recounting to Mrs Gamp as they went along, the origin and progress of his acquaintance with Mrs Chuzzlewit and her sister. It was a pleasant instance of this youth's precocity, that he fancied Mrs Gamp had conceived a tenderness for him, and was much tickled by her misplaced attachment.

As the door closed heavily behind them, Mrs Jonas sat down in a chair, and felt a strange chill creep upon her, whilst she looked about the room. It was pretty much as she had known it, but appeared more dreary. She had thought to see it brightened to receive her.

'It ain't good enough for you, I suppose?' said Jonas, watching her looks.

'Why, it IS dull,' said Merry, trying to be more herself.

'It'll be duller before you're done with it,' retorted Jonas, 'if you give me any of your airs. You're a nice article, to turn sulky on first coming home! Ecod, you used to have life enough, when you could plague me with it. The gal's downstairs. Ring the bell for supper, while I take my boots off!'

She roused herself from looking after him as he left the room, to do what he had desired; when the old man Chuffey laid his hand softly on her arm.

'You are not married?' he said eagerly. 'Not married?'

'Yes. A month ago. Good Heaven, what is the matter?'

He answered nothing was the matter; and turned from her. But in her fear and wonder, turning also, she saw him raise his trembling hands above his head, and heard him say:

'Oh! woe, woe, woe, upon this wicked house!'

It was her welcome—HOME.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

SHOWING THAT OLD FRIENDS MAY NOT ONLY APPEAR WITH NEW FACES, BUT IN FALSE COLOURS. THAT PEOPLE ARE PRONE TO BITE, AND THAT BITERS MAY SOMETIMES BE BITTEN.

Mr Bailey, Junior—for the sporting character, whilom of general utility at Todgers's, had now regularly set up in life under that name, without troubling himself to obtain from the legislature a direct licence in the form of a Private Bill, which of all kinds and classes of bills is without exception the most unreasonable in its charges—Mr Bailey, Junior, just tall enough to be seen by an inquiring eye, gazing indolently at society from beneath the apron of his master's cab, drove slowly up and down Pall Mall, about the hour of noon, in waiting for his 'Governor.' The horse of distinguished family, who had Capricorn for his nephew, and Cauliflower for his brother, showed himself worthy of his high relations by champing at the bit until his chest was white with foam, and rearing like a horse in heraldry; the plated harness and the patent leather glittered in the sun; pedestrians admired; Mr Bailey was complacent, but unmoved. He seemed to say, 'A barrow, good people, a mere barrow; nothing to what we could do, if we chose!' and on he went, squaring his short green arms outside the apron, as if he were hooked on to it by his armpits.

Mr Bailey had a great opinion of Brother to Cauliflower, and estimated his powers highly. But he never told him so. On the contrary, it was his practice, in driving that animal, to assail him with disrespectful, if not injurious, expressions, as, 'Ah! would you!' 'Did you think it, then?' 'Where are you going to now?' 'No, you won't, my lad!' and similar fragmentary remarks. These being usually accompanied by a jerk of the rein, or a crack of the whip, led to many trials of strength between them, and to many contentions for the upper-hand, terminating, now and then, in china-shops, and other unusual goals, as Mr Bailey had already hinted to his friend Poll Sweedlepipe.

On the present occasion Mr Bailey, being in spirits, was more than commonly hard upon his charge; in consequence of which that fiery animal confined himself almost entirely to his hind legs in displaying his paces, and constantly got himself into positions with reference to the cabriolet that very much amazed the passengers in the street. But Mr Bailey, not at all disturbed, had still a shower of pleasantries to bestow on any one who crossed his path; as, calling to a full-grown coal-heaver in a wagon, who for a moment blocked the way, 'Now, young 'un, who trusted YOU with a cart?' inquiring of elderly ladies who wanted to cross, and ran back again, 'Why they didn't go to the workhouse and get an order to be buried?' tempting boys, with friendly words, to get up behind, and immediately afterwards cutting them down; and the like flashes of a cheerful humour, which he would occasionally relieve by going round St. James's Square at a hand gallop, and coming slowly into Pall Mall by another entry, as if, in the interval, his pace had been a perfect crawl.

It was not until these amusements had been very often repeated, and the apple-stall at the corner had sustained so many miraculous escapes as to appear impregnable, that Mr Bailey was summoned to the door of a certain house in Pall Mall, and turning short, obeyed the call and jumped out. It was not until he had held the bridle for some minutes longer, every jerk of Cauliflower's brother's head, and every twitch of Cauliflower's brother's nostril, taking him off his legs in the meanwhile, that two persons entered the vehicle, one of whom took the reins and drove rapidly off. Nor was it until Mr Bailey had run after it some hundreds of yards in vain, that he managed to lift his short leg into the iron step, and finally to get his boots upon the little footboard behind. Then, indeed, he became a sight to see; and—standing now on one foot and now upon the other, now trying to look round the cab on this side, now on that, and now endeavouring to peep over the top of it, as it went dashing in among the carts and coaches—was from head to heel Newmarket.

The appearance of Mr Bailey's governor as he drove along fully justified that enthusiastic youth's description of him to the wondering Poll. He had a world of jet-black shining hair upon his head, upon his cheeks, upon his chin, upon his upper lip. His clothes, symmetrically made, were of the newest fashion and the costliest kind. Flowers of gold and blue, and green and blushing red, were on his waistcoat; precious chains and jewels sparkled on his breast; his fingers, clogged with brilliant rings, were as unwieldly as summer flies but newly rescued from a honey-pot. The daylight mantled in his gleaming hat and boots as in a polished glass. And yet, though changed his name, and changed his outward surface, it was Tigg. Though turned and twisted upside down, and inside out, as great men have been sometimes known to be; though no longer Montague Tigg, but Tigg Montague; still it was Tigg; the same Satanic, gallant, military Tigg. The brass was burnished, lacquered, newly stamped; yet it was the true Tigg metal notwithstanding.

Beside him sat a smiling gentleman, of less pretensions and of business looks, whom he addressed as David. Surely not the David of the—how shall it be phrased?—the triumvirate of golden balls? Not David, tapster at the Lombards' Arms? Yes. The very man.

'The secretary's salary, David,' said Mr Montague, 'the office being now established, is eight hundred pounds per annum, with his house-rent, coals, and candles free. His five-and-twenty shares he holds, of course. Is that enough?'

David smiled and nodded, and coughed behind a little locked portfolio which he carried; with an air that proclaimed him to be the secretary in question.

'If that's enough,' said Montague, 'I will propose it at the Board to-day, in my capacity as chairman.'

The secretary smiled again; laughed, indeed, this time; and said, rubbing his nose slily with one end of the portfolio:

'It was a capital thought, wasn't it?'

'What was a capital thought, David?' Mr Montague inquired.

'The Anglo-Bengalee,' tittered the secretary.

'The Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company is rather a capital concern, I hope, David,' said Montague.

'Capital indeed!' cried the secretary, with another laugh—' in one sense.'

'In the only important one,' observed the chairman; 'which is number one, David.'

'What,' asked the secretary, bursting into another laugh, 'what will be the paid up capital, according to the next prospectus?'

'A figure of two, and as many oughts after it as the printer can get into the same line,' replied his friend. 'Ha, ha!'

At this they both laughed; the secretary so vehemently, that in kicking up his feet, he kicked the apron open, and nearly started Cauliflower's brother into an oyster shop; not to mention Mr Bailey's receiving such a sudden swing, that he held on for a moment quite a young Fame, by one strap and no legs.

'What a chap you are!' exclaimed David admiringly, when this little alarm had subsided.

'Say, genius, David, genius.'

'Well, upon my soul, you ARE a genius then,' said David. 'I always knew you had the gift of the gab, of course; but I never believed you were half the man you are. How could I?'

'I rise with circumstances, David. That's a point of genius in itself,' said Tigg. 'If you were to lose a hundred pound wager to me at this minute David, and were to pay it (which is most confoundedly improbable), I should rise, in a mental point of view, directly.'

It is due to Mr Tigg to say that he had really risen with his opportunities; and, peculating on a grander scale, he had become a grander man altogether.

'Ha, ha,' cried the secretary, laying his hand, with growing familiarity, upon the chairman's arm. 'When I look at you, and think of your property in Bengal being—ha, ha, ha!—'

The half-expressed idea seemed no less ludicrous to Mr Tigg than to his friend, for he laughed too, heartily.

'—Being,' resumed David, 'being amenable—your property in Bengal being amenable—to all claims upon the company; when I look at you and think of that, you might tickle me into fits by waving the feather of a pen at me. Upon my soul you might!'

'It a devilish fine property,' said Tigg Montague, 'to be amenable to any claims. The preserve of tigers alone is worth a mint of money, David.'

David could only reply in the intervals of his laughter, 'Oh, what a chap you are!' and so continued to laugh, and hold his sides, and wipe his eyes, for some time, without offering any other observation.

'A capital idea?' said Tigg, returning after a time to his companion's first remark; 'no doubt it was a capital idea. It was my idea.'

'No, no. It was my idea,' said David. 'Hang it, let a man have some credit. Didn't I say to you that I'd saved a few pounds?—'

'You said! Didn't I say to you,' interposed Tigg, 'that I had come into a few pounds?'

'Certainly you did,' returned David, warmly, 'but that's not the idea. Who said, that if we put the money together we could furnish an office, and make a show?'

'And who said,' retorted Mr Tigg, 'that, provided we did it on a sufficiently large scale, we could furnish an office and make a show, without any money at all? Be rational, and just, and calm, and tell me whose idea was that.'

'Why, there,' David was obliged to confess, 'you had the advantage of me, I admit. But I don't put myself on a level with you. I only want a little credit in the business.'

'All the credit you deserve to have,' said Tigg.

'The plain work of the company, David—figures, books, circulars, advertisements, pen, ink, and paper, sealing-wax and wafers—is admirably done by you. You are a first-rate groveller. I don't dispute it. But the ornamental department, David; the inventive and poetical department—'

'Is entirely yours,' said his friend. 'No question of it. But with such a swell turnout as this, and all the handsome things you've got about you, and the life you lead, I mean to say it's a precious comfortable department too.'

'Does it gain the purpose? Is it Anglo-Bengalee?' asked Tigg.

'Yes,' said David.

'Could you undertake it yourself?' demanded Tigg.

'No,' said David.

'Ha, ha!' laughed Tigg. 'Then be contented with your station and your profits, David, my fine fellow, and bless the day that made us acquainted across the counter of our common uncle, for it was a golden day to you.'

It will have been already gathered from the conversation of these worthies, that they were embarked in an enterprise of some magnitude, in which they addressed the public in general from the strong position of having everything to gain and nothing at all to lose; and which, based upon this great principle, was thriving pretty comfortably.

The Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company started into existence one morning, not an Infant Institution, but a Grown-up Company running alone at a great pace, and doing business right and left: with a 'branch' in a first floor over a tailor's at the west-end of the town, and main offices in a new street in the City, comprising the upper part of a spacious house resplendent in stucco and plate-glass, with wire-blinds in all the windows, and 'Anglo-Bengalee' worked into the pattern of every one of them. On the doorpost was painted again in large letters, 'offices of the Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company,' and on the door was a large brass plate with the same inscription; always kept very bright, as courting inquiry; staring the City out of countenance after office hours on working days, and all day long on Sundays; and looking bolder than the Bank. Within, the offices were newly plastered, newly painted, newly papered, newly countered, newly floor-clothed, newly tabled, newly chaired, newly fitted up in every way, with goods that were substantial and expensive, and designed (like the company) to last. Business! Look at the green ledgers with red backs, like strong cricket-balls beaten flat; the court-guides directories, day-books, almanacks, letter-boxes, weighing-machines for letters, rows of fire-buckets for dashing out a conflagration in its first spark, and saving the immense wealth in notes and bonds belonging to the company; look at the iron safes, the clock, the office seal—in its capacious self, security for anything. Solidity! Look at the massive blocks of marble in the chimney-pieces, and the gorgeous parapet on the top of the house! Publicity! Why, Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance company is painted on the very coal-scuttles. It is repeated at every turn until the eyes are dazzled with it, and the head is giddy. It is engraved upon the top of all the letter paper, and it makes a scroll-work round the seal, and it shines out of the porter's buttons, and it is repeated twenty times in every circular and public notice wherein one David Crimple, Esquire, Secretary and resident Director, takes the liberty of inviting your attention to the accompanying statement of the advantages offered by the Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company; and fully proves to you that any connection on your part with that establishment must result in a perpetual Christmas Box and constantly increasing Bonus to yourself, and that nobody can run any risk by the transaction except the office, which, in its great liberality is pretty sure to lose. And this, David Crimple, Esquire, submits to you (and the odds are heavy you believe him), is the best guarantee that can reasonably be suggested by the Board of Management for its permanence and stability.

This gentleman's name, by the way, had been originally Crimp; but as the word was susceptible of an awkward construction and might be misrepresented, he had altered it to Crimple.

Lest with all these proofs and confirmations, any man should be suspicious of the Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance company; should doubt in tiger, cab, or person, Tigg Montague, Esquire, (of Pall Mall and Bengal), or any other name in the imaginative List of Directors; there was a porter on the premises—a wonderful creature, in a vast red waistcoat and a short-tailed pepper-and-salt coat—who carried more conviction to the minds of sceptics than the whole establishment without him. No confidences existed between him and the Directorship; nobody knew where he had served last; no character or explanation had been given or required. No questions had been asked on either side. This mysterious being, relying solely on his figure, had applied for the situation, and had been instantly engaged on his own terms. They were high; but he knew, doubtless, that no man could carry such an extent of waistcoat as himself, and felt the full value of his capacity to such an institution. When he sat upon a seat erected for him in a corner of the office, with his glazed hat hanging on a peg over his head, it was impossible to doubt the respectability of the concern. It went on doubling itself with every square inch of his red waistcoat until, like the problem of the nails in the horse's shoes, the total became enormous. People had been known to apply to effect an insurance on their lives for a thousand pounds, and looking at him, to beg, before the form of proposal was filled up, that it might be made two. And yet he was not a giant. His coat was rather small than otherwise. The whole charm was in his waistcoat. Respectability, competence, property in Bengal or anywhere else, responsibility to any amount on the part of the company that employed him, were all expressed in that one garment.

Rival offices had endeavoured to lure him away; Lombard Street itself had beckoned to him; rich companies had whispered 'Be a Beadle!' but he still continued faithful to the Anglo-Bengalee. Whether he was a deep rogue, or a stately simpleton, it was impossible to make out, but he appeared to believe in the Anglo-Bengalee. He was grave with imaginary cares of office; and having nothing whatever to do, and something less to take care of, would look as if the pressure of his numerous duties, and a sense of the treasure in the company's strong-room, made him a solemn and a thoughtful man.

As the cabriolet drove up to the door, this officer appeared bare-headed on the pavement, crying aloud 'Room for the chairman, room for the chairman, if you please!' much to the admiration of the bystanders, who, it is needless to say, had their attention directed to the Anglo-Bengalee Company thenceforth, by that means. Mr Tigg leaped gracefully out, followed by the Managing Director (who was by this time very distant and respectful), and ascended the stairs, still preceded by the porter, who cried as he went, 'By your leave there! by your leave! The Chairman of the

Board, Gentle—MEN! In like manner, but in a still more stentorian voice, he ushered the chairman through the public office, where some humble clients were transacting business, into an awful chamber, labelled Board-room; the door of which sanctuary immediately closed, and screened the great capitalist from vulgar eyes.

The board-room had a Turkey carpet in it, a sideboard, a portrait of Tigg Montague, Esquire, as chairman; a very imposing chair of office, garnished with an ivory hammer and a little hand-bell; and a long table, set out at intervals with sheets of blotting-paper, foolscap, clean pens, and inkstands. The chairman having taken his seat with great solemnity, the secretary supported him on his right hand, and the porter stood bolt upright behind them, forming a warm background of waistcoat. This was the board: everything else being a light-hearted little fiction.

'Bullamy!' said Mr Tigg.

'Sir!' replied the porter.

'Let the Medical Officer know, with my compliments, that I wish to see him.'

Bullamy cleared his throat, and bustled out into the office, crying 'The Chairman of the Board wishes to see the Medical Officer. By your leave there! By your leave!' He soon returned with the gentleman in question; and at both openings of the board-room door—at his coming in and at his going out—simple clients were seen to stretch their necks and stand upon their toes, thirsting to catch the slightest glimpse of that mysterious chamber.

'Jobling, my dear friend!' said Mr Tigg, 'how are you? Bullamy, wait outside. Crimple, don't leave us. Jobling, my good fellow, I am glad to see you.'

'And how are you, Mr Montague, eh?' said the Medical Officer, throwing himself luxuriously into an easy-chair (they were all easy-chairs in the board-room), and taking a handsome gold snuff-box from the pocket of his black satin waistcoat. 'How are you? A little worn with business, eh? If so, rest. A little feverish from wine, humph? If so, water. Nothing at all the matter, and quite comfortable? Then take some lunch. A very wholesome thing at this time of day to strengthen the gastric juices with lunch, Mr Montague.'

The Medical Officer (he was the same medical officer who had followed poor old Anthony Chuzzlewit to the grave, and who had attended Mrs Gamp's patient at the Bull) smiled in saying these words; and casually added, as he brushed some grains of snuff from his shirt-frill, 'I always take it myself about this time of day, do you know!'

'Bullamy!' said the Chairman, ringing the little bell.

'Sir!'

'Lunch.'

'Not on my account, I hope?' said the doctor. 'You are very good. Thank you. I'm quite ashamed. Ha, ha! if I had been a sharp practitioner, Mr Montague, I shouldn't have mentioned it without a fee; for you may depend upon it, my dear sir, that if you don't make a point of taking lunch, you'll very soon come under my hands. Allow me to illustrate this. In Mr Crimple's leg—'

The resident Director gave an involuntary start, for the doctor, in the heat of his demonstration, caught it up and laid it across his own, as if he were going to take it off, then and there.

'In Mr Crimple's leg, you'll observe,' pursued the doctor, turning back his cuffs and spanning the limb with both hands, 'where Mr Crimple's knee fits into the socket, here, there is—that is to say, between the bone and the socket—a certain quantity of animal oil.'

'What do you pick MY leg out for?' said Mr Crimple, looking with something of an anxious expression at his limb. 'It's the same with other legs, ain't it?'

'Never you mind, my good sir,' returned the doctor, shaking his head, 'whether it is the same with other legs, or not the same.'

'But I do mind,' said David.

'I take a particular case, Mr Montague,' returned the doctor, 'as illustrating my remark, you observe. In this portion of Mr Crimple's leg, sir, there is a certain amount of animal oil. In every one of Mr Crimple's joints, sir, there is more or less of the same deposit. Very good. If Mr Crimple neglects his meals, or fails to take his proper quantity of rest, that oil wanes, and becomes exhausted. What is the consequence? Mr Crimple's bones sink down into their sockets, sir, and Mr Crimple becomes a weazen, puny, stunted, miserable man!'

The doctor let Mr Crimple's leg fall suddenly, as if he were already in that agreeable condition; turned down his wristbands again, and looked triumphantly at the chairman.

'We know a few secrets of nature in our profession, sir,' said the doctor. 'Of course we do. We study for that; we pass the Hall and the College for that; and we take our station in society BY that. It's extraordinary how little is known on these subjects generally. Where do you suppose, now'—the doctor closed one eye, as he leaned back smilingly in his chair, and formed a triangle with his hands, of which his two thumbs composed the base—'where do you suppose Mr Crimple's stomach is?'

Mr Crimple, more agitated than before, clapped his hand immediately below his waistcoat.

'Not at all,' cried the doctor; 'not at all. Quite a popular mistake! My good sir, you're altogether deceived.'

'I feel it there, when it's out of order; that's all I know,' said Crimple.

'You think you do,' replied the doctor; 'but science knows better. There was a patient of mine once,' touching one of the many mourning rings upon his fingers, and slightly bowing his head, 'a gentleman who did me the honour to make a very handsome mention of me in his will—"in testimony," as he was pleased to say, "of the unremitting zeal, talent, and attention of my friend and medical attendant, John Jobling, Esquire, M.R.C.S.,"—who was so overcome by the idea of having all his life laboured under an erroneous view of the locality of this important organ, that when I assured him on my professional reputation, he was mistaken, he burst into tears, put out his hand, and said, "Jobling, God bless you!" Immediately afterwards he became speechless, and was ultimately buried at Brixton.'

'By your leave there!' cried Bullamy, without. 'By your leave! Refreshment for the Board-room!'

'Ha!' said the doctor, jocularly, as he rubbed his hands, and drew his chair nearer to the table. 'The true Life Assurance, Mr Montague. The best Policy in the world, my dear sir. We should be provident, and eat and drink whenever we can. Eh, Mr Crimple?'

The resident Director acquiesced rather sulkily, as if the gratification of replenishing his stomach had been impaired by the unsettlement of his preconceived opinions in reference to its situation. But the appearance of the porter and under-porter with a tray covered with a snow-white cloth, which, being thrown back, displayed a pair of cold roast fowls, flanked by some potted meats and a cool salad, quickly restored his good humour. It was enhanced still further by the arrival of a bottle of excellent madeira, and another of champagne; and he soon attacked the repast with an appetite scarcely inferior to that of the medical officer.

The lunch was handsomely served, with a profusion of rich glass plate, and china; which seemed to denote that eating and drinking on a showy scale formed no unimportant item in the business of the Anglo-Bengalee Directorship. As it proceeded, the Medical Officer grew more and more joyous and red-faced, insomuch that every mouthful he ate, and every drop of wine he swallowed, seemed to impart new lustre to his eyes, and to light up new sparks in his nose and forehead.

In certain quarters of the City and its neighbourhood, Mr Jobling was, as we have already seen in some measure, a very popular character. He had a portentously sagacious chin, and a pompous voice, with a rich huskiness in some of its tones that went directly to the heart, like a ray of light shining through the ruddy medium of choice old burgundy. His neckerchief and shirt-frill were ever of the whitest, his clothes of the blackest and sleekest, his gold watch-chain of the heaviest, and his seals of the largest. His boots, which were always of the brightest, creaked as he walked. Perhaps he could shake his head, rub his hands, or warm himself before a fire, better than any man alive; and he had a peculiar way of smacking his lips and saying, 'Ah!' at intervals while patients detailed their symptoms, which inspired great confidence. It seemed to express, 'I know what you're going to say better than you do; but go on, go on.' As he talked on all occasions whether he had anything to say or not, it was unanimously observed of him that he was 'full of anecdote;' and his experience and profit from it were considered, for the same reason, to be something much too extensive for description. His female patients could never praise him too highly; and the coldest of his male admirers would always say this for him to their friends, 'that whatever Jobling's professional skill might be (and it could not be denied that he had a very high reputation), he was one of the most comfortable fellows you ever saw in your life!'

Jobling was for many reasons, and not last in the list because his connection lay principally among tradesmen and their families, exactly the sort of person whom the Anglo-Bengalee Company wanted for a medical officer. But Jobling was far too knowing to connect himself with the company in any closer ties than as a paid (and well paid) functionary, or to allow his connection to be misunderstood abroad, if he could help it. Hence he always stated the case to an inquiring patient, after this manner:

'Why, my dear sir, with regard to the Anglo-Bengalee, my information, you see, is limited; very limited. I am the medical officer, in consideration of a certain monthly payment. The labourer is worthy of his hire; BIS DAT QUI CITO DAT'—('classical scholar, Jobling!' thinks the patient, 'well-read man!')—'and I receive it regularly. Therefore I am bound, so far as my own knowledge goes, to speak well of the establishment.' ('Nothing can be fairer than Jobling's conduct,' thinks the patient, who has just paid Jobling's bill himself.) 'If you put any question to me, my dear friend,' says the doctor, 'touching the responsibility or capital of the company, there I am at fault; for I have no head for figures, and not being a shareholder, am delicate of showing any curiosity whatever on the subject. Delicacy—your amiable lady will agree with me I am sure—should be one of the first characteristics of a medical man.' ('Nothing can be finer or more gentlemanly than Jobling's feeling,' thinks the patient.) 'Very good, my dear sir, so the matter stands. You don't know Mr Montague? I'm sorry for it. A remarkably handsome man, and quite the gentleman in every respect. Property, I am told, in India. House and everything belonging to him, beautiful. Costly furniture on the most elegant and lavish scale. And pictures, which, even in an anatomical point of view, are perfection. In case you should ever think of doing anything with the company, I'll pass you, you may depend upon it. I can conscientiously report you a healthy subject. If I understand any man's constitution, it is yours; and this little indisposition has done him more good, ma'am,' says the doctor, turning to the patient's wife, 'than if he had swallowed the contents of half the nonsensical bottles in my surgery. For they ARE nonsense—to tell the honest truth, one half of them are nonsense—compared with such a constitution as his!' ('Jobling is the most friendly creature I ever met with in my life,' thinks the patient; 'and upon my word and honour, I'll consider of it!')

'Commission to you, doctor, on four new policies, and a loan this morning, eh?' said Crimple, looking, when they had finished lunch, over some papers brought in by the porter. 'Well done!'

'Jobling, my dear friend,' said Tigg, 'long life to you.'

'No, no. Nonsense. Upon my word I've no right to draw the commission,' said the doctor, 'I haven't really. It's picking your pocket. I don't recommend anybody here. I only say what I know. My patients ask me what I know, and I tell 'em what I know. Nothing else. Caution is my weak side, that's the truth; and always was from a boy. That is,' said the doctor, filling his glass, 'caution in behalf of other people. Whether I would repose confidence in this company myself, if I had not been paying money elsewhere for many years—that's quite another question.'

He tried to look as if there were no doubt about it; but feeling that he did it but indifferently, changed the theme and praised the wine.

'Talking of wine,' said the doctor, 'reminds me of one of the finest glasses of light old port I ever drank in my life; and that was at a funeral. You have not seen anything of—of THAT party, Mr Montague, have you?' handing him a card.

'He is not buried, I hope?' said Tigg, as he took it. 'The honour of his company is not requested if he is.'

'Ha, ha!' laughed the doctor. 'No; not quite. He was honourably connected with that very occasion though.'

'Oh!' said Tigg, smoothing his moustache, as he cast his eyes upon the name. 'I recollect. No. He has not been here.'

The words were on his lips, when Bullamy entered, and presented a card to the Medical Officer.

'Talk of the what's his name—' observed the doctor rising.

'And he's sure to appear, eh?' said Tigg.

'Why, no, Mr Montague, no,' returned the doctor. 'We will not say that in the present case, for this gentleman is very far from it.'

'So much the better,' retorted Tigg. 'So much the more adaptable to the Anglo-Bengalee. Bullamy, clear the table and take the things out by the other door. Mr Crimple, business.'

'Shall I introduce him?' asked Jobling.

'I shall be eternally delighted,' answered Tigg, kissing his hand and smiling sweetly.

The doctor disappeared into the outer office, and immediately returned with Jonas Chuzzlewit.

'Mr Montague,' said Jobling. 'Allow me. My friend Mr Chuzzlewit. My dear friend—our chairman. Now do you know,' he added checking himself with infinite policy, and looking round with a smile; 'that's a very singular instance of the force of example. It really is a very remarkable instance of the force of example. I say OUR chairman. Why do I say our chairman? Because he is not MY chairman, you know. I have no connection with the company, farther than giving them, for a certain fee and reward, my poor opinion as a medical man, precisely as I may give it any day to Jack Noakes or Tom Styles. Then why do I say our chairman? Simply because I hear the phrase constantly repeated about me. Such is the involuntary operation of the mental faculty in the imitative biped man. Mr Crimple, I believe you never take snuff? Injudicious. You should.'

Pending these remarks on the part of the doctor, and the lengthened and sonorous pinch with which he followed them up, Jonas took a seat at the board; as ungainly a man as ever he has been within the reader's knowledge. It is too common with all of us, but it is especially in the nature of a mean mind, to be overawed by fine clothes and fine furniture. They had a very decided influence on Jonas.

'Now you two gentlemen have business to discuss, I know,' said the doctor, 'and your time is precious. So is mine; for several lives are waiting for me in the next room, and I have a round of visits to make after—after I have taken 'em. Having had the happiness to introduce you to each other, I may go about my business. Good-bye. But allow me, Mr Montague, before I go, to say this of my friend who sits beside you: That gentleman has done more, sir,' rapping his snuff-box solemnly, 'to reconcile me to human nature, than any man alive or dead. Good-bye!'

With these words Jobling bolted abruptly out of the room, and proceeded in his own official department, to impress the lives in waiting with a sense of his keen conscientiousness in the discharge of his duty, and the great difficulty of getting into the Anglo-Bengalee; by feeling their pulses, looking at their tongues, listening at their ribs, poking them in the chest, and so forth; though, if he didn't well know beforehand that whatever kind of lives they were, the Anglo-Bengalee would accept them readily, he was far from being the Jobling that his friend considered him; and was not the original Jobling, but a spurious imitation.

Mr Crimple also departed on the business of the morning; and Jonas Chuzzlewit and Tigg were left alone.

'I learn from our friend,' said Tigg, drawing his chair towards Jonas with a winning ease of manner, 'that you have been thinking—'

'Oh! Ecod then he'd no right to say so,' cried Jonas, interrupting. 'I didn't tell HIM my thoughts. If he took it into his head that I was coming here for such or such a purpose, why, that's his lookout. I don't stand committed by that.'

Jonas said this offensively enough; for over and above the habitual distrust of his character, it was in his nature to seek to revenge himself on the fine clothes and the fine furniture, in exact proportion as he had been unable to withstand their influence.

'If I come here to ask a question or two, and get a document or two to consider of, I don't bind myself to anything. Let's understand that, you know,' said Jonas.

'My dear fellow!' cried Tigg, clapping him on the shoulder, 'I applaud your frankness. If men like you and I speak openly at first, all possible misunderstanding is avoided. Why should I disguise what you know so well, but what the crowd never dream of? We companies are all birds of prey; mere birds of prey. The only question is, whether in serving our own turn, we can serve yours too; whether in double-lining our own nest, we can put a single living into yours. Oh, you're in our secret. You're behind the scenes. We'll make a merit of dealing plainly with you, when we know we can't help it.'

It was remarked, on the first introduction of Mr Jonas into these pages, that there is a simplicity of cunning no less than a simplicity of innocence, and that in all matters involving a faith in knavery, he was the most credulous of men. If Mr Tigg had preferred any claim to high and honourable dealing, Jonas would have suspected him though he had been a very model of probity; but when he gave utterance to Jonas's own thoughts of everything and everybody, Jonas began to feel that he was a pleasant fellow, and one to be talked to freely.

He changed his position in the chair, not for a less awkward, but for a more boastful attitude; and smiling in his miserable conceit rejoined:

'You an't a bad man of business, Mr Montague. You know how to set about it, I WILL say.'

'Tut, tut,' said Tigg, nodding confidentially, and showing his white teeth; 'we are not children, Mr Chuzzlewit; we are grown men, I hope.'

Jonas assented, and said after a short silence, first spreading out his legs, and sticking one arm akimbo to show how perfectly at home he was,

'The truth is—'

'Don't say, the truth,' interposed Tigg, with another grin. 'It's so like humbug.'

Greatly charmed by this, Jonas began again.

'The long and the short of it is—'

'Better,' muttered Tigg. 'Much better!'

'—That I didn't consider myself very well used by one or two of the old companies in some negotiations I have had with 'em—once had, I mean. They started objections they had no right to start, and put questions they had no right to put, and carried things much too high for my taste.'

As he made these observations he cast down his eyes, and looked curiously at the carpet. Mr Tigg looked curiously at him.

He made so long a pause, that Tigg came to the rescue, and said, in his pleasantest manner:

'Take a glass of wine.'

'No, no,' returned Jonas, with a cunning shake of the head; 'none of that, thankee. No wine over business. All very well for you, but it wouldn't do for me.'

'What an old hand you are, Mr Chuzzlewit!' said Tigg, leaning back in his chair, and leering at him through his half-shut eyes.

Jonas shook his head again, as much as to say, 'You're right there;' And then resumed, jocosely:

'Not such an old hand, either, but that I've been and got married. That's rather green, you'll say. Perhaps it is, especially as she's young. But one never knows what may happen to these women, so I'm thinking of insuring her life. It is but fair, you know, that a man should secure some consolation in case of meeting with such a loss.'

'If anything can console him under such heart-breaking circumstances,' murmured Tigg, with his eyes shut up as before.

'Exactly,' returned Jonas; 'if anything can. Now, supposing I did it here, I should do it cheap, I know, and easy, without bothering her about it; which I'd much rather not do, for it's just in a woman's way to take it into her head, if you talk to her about such things, that she's going to die directly.'

'So it is,' cried Tigg, kissing his hand in honour of the sex. 'You're quite right. Sweet, silly, fluttering little simpletons!'

'Well,' said Jonas, 'on that account, you know, and because offence has been given me in other quarters, I wouldn't mind patronizing this Company. But I want to know what sort of security there is for the Company's going on. That's the—'

'Not the truth?' cried Tigg, holding up his jewelled hand. 'Don't use that Sunday School expression, please!'

'The long and the short of it,' said Jonas. 'The long and the short of it is, what's the security?'

'The paid-up capital, my dear sir,' said Tigg, referring to some papers on the table, 'is, at this present moment—'

'Oh! I understand all about paid-up capitals, you know,' said Jonas.

'You do?' cried Tigg, stopping short.

'I should hope so.'

He turned the papers down again, and moving nearer to him, said in his ear:

'I know you do. I know you do. Look at me!'

It was not much in Jonas's way to look straight at anybody; but thus requested, he made shift to take a tolerable survey of the chairman's features. The chairman fell back a little, to give him the better opportunity.

'You know me?' he inquired, elevating his eyebrows. 'You recollect? You've seen me before?'

'Why, I thought I remembered your face when I first came in,' said Jonas, gazing at it; 'but I couldn't call to mind where I had seen it. No. I don't remember, even now. Was it in the street?'

'Was it in Pecksniff's parlour?' said Tigg

'In Pecksniff's parlour!' echoed Jonas, fetching a long breath. 'You don't mean when—'

'Yes,' cried Tigg, 'when there was a very charming and delightful little family party, at which yourself and your respected father assisted.'

'Well, never mind HIM,' said Jonas. 'He's dead, and there's no help for it.'

'Dead, is he!' cried Tigg, 'Venerable old gentleman, is he dead! You're very like him.'

Jonas received this compliment with anything but a good grace, perhaps because of his own private sentiments in reference to the personal appearance of his deceased parent; perhaps because he was not best pleased to find that Montague and Tigg were one. That gentleman perceived it, and tapping him familiarly on the sleeve, beckoned him to the window. From this moment, Mr Montague's jocularity and flow of spirits were remarkable.

'Do you find me at all changed since that time?' he asked. 'Speak plainly.'

Jonas looked hard at his waistcoat and jewels; and said 'Rather, ecod!'

'Was I at all seedy in those days?' asked Montague.

'Precious seedy,' said Jonas.

Mr Montague pointed down into the street, where Bailey and the cab were in attendance.

'Neat; perhaps dashing. Do you know whose it is?'

'No.'

'Mine. Do you like this room?'

'It must have cost a lot of money,' said Jonas.

'You're right. Mine too. Why don't you'—he whispered this, and nudged him in the side with his elbow—'why don't you take premiums, instead of paying 'em? That's what a man like you should do. Join us!'

Jonas stared at him in amazement.

'Is that a crowded street?' asked Montague, calling his attention to the multitude without.

'Very,' said Jonas, only glancing at it, and immediately afterwards looking at him again.

'There are printed calculations,' said his companion, 'which will tell you pretty nearly how many people will pass up and down that thoroughfare in the course of a day. I can tell you how many of 'em will come in here, merely because they find this office here; knowing no more about it than they do of the Pyramids. Ha, ha! Join us. You shall come in cheap.'

Jonas looked at him harder and harder.

'I can tell you,' said Tigg in his ear, 'how many of 'em will buy annuities, effect insurances, bring us their money in a hundred shapes and ways, force it upon us, trust us as if we were the Mint; yet know no more about us than you do of that crossing-sweeper at the corner. Not so much. Ha, ha!'

Jonas gradually broke into a smile.

'Yah!' said Montague, giving him a pleasant thrust in the breast; 'you're too deep for us, you dog, or I wouldn't have told you. Dine with me to-morrow, in Pall Mall!'

'I will' said Jonas.

'Done!' cried Montague. 'Wait a bit. Take these papers with you and look 'em over. See,' he said, snatching some printed forms from the table. 'B is a little tradesman, clerk, parson, artist, author, any common thing you like.'

'Yes,' said Jonas, looking greedily over his shoulder. 'Well!'

'B wants a loan. Say fifty or a hundred pound; perhaps more; no matter. B proposes self and two securities. B is accepted. Two securities give a bond. B assures his own life for double the amount, and brings two friends' lives also—just to patronize the office. Ha ha, ha! Is that a good notion?'

'Ecod, that's a capital notion!' cried Jonas. 'But does he really do it?'

'Do it!' repeated the chairman. 'B's hard up, my good fellow, and will do anything. Don't you see? It's my idea.'

'It does you honour. I'm blest if it don't,' said Jonas.

'I think it does,' replied the chairman, 'and I'm proud to hear you say so. B pays the highest lawful interest—'

'That an't much,' interrupted Jonas.

'Right! quite right!' retorted Tigg. 'And hard it is upon the part of the law that it should be so confoundedly down upon us unfortunate victims; when it takes such amazing good interest for itself from all its clients. But charity begins at home, and justice begins next door. Well! The law being hard upon us, we're not exactly soft upon B; for besides charging B the regular interest, we get B's premium, and B's friends' premiums, and we charge B for the bond, and, whether we accept him or not, we charge B for "inquiries" (we keep a man, at a pound a week, to make 'em), and we charge B a trifle for the secretary; and in short, my good fellow, we stick it into B, up hill and down dale, and make a devilish comfortable little property out of him. Ha, ha, ha! I drive B, in point of fact,' said Tigg, pointing to the cabriolet, 'and a thoroughbred horse he is. Ha, ha, ha!'

Jonas enjoyed this joke very much indeed. It was quite in his peculiar vein of humour.

'Then,' said Tigg Montague, 'we grant annuities on the very lowest and most advantageous terms known in the money market; and the old ladies and gentlemen down in the country buy 'em. Ha, ha, ha! And we pay 'em too—perhaps. Ha, ha, ha!'

'But there's responsibility in that,' said Jonas, looking doubtful.

'I take it all myself,' said Tigg Montague. 'Here I am responsible for everything. The only responsible person in the establishment! Ha, ha, ha! Then there are the Life Assurances without loans; the common policies. Very profitable, very comfortable. Money down, you know; repeated every year; capital fun!'

'But when they begin to fall in,' observed Jonas. 'It's all very well, while the office is young, but when the policies begin to die—that's what I am thinking of.'

'At the first start, my dear fellow,' said Montague, 'to show you how correct your judgment is, we had a couple of unlucky deaths that brought us down to a grand piano.'

'Brought you down where?' cried Jonas.

'I give you my sacred word of honour,' said Tigg Montague, 'that I raised money on every other individual piece of property, and was left alone in the world with a grand piano. And it was an upright-grand too, so that I couldn't even sit upon it. But, my dear fellow, we got over it. We granted a great many new policies that week (liberal allowance to solicitors, by the bye), and got over it in no time. Whenever they should chance to fall in heavily, as you very justly observe they may, one of these days; then—' he finished the sentence in so low a whisper, that only one disconnected word was audible, and that imperfectly. But it sounded like 'Bolt.'

'Why, you're as bold as brass!' said Jonas, in the utmost admiration.

'A man can well afford to be as bold as brass, my good fellow, when he gets gold in exchange!' cried the chairman, with a laugh that shook him from head to foot. 'You'll dine with me to-morrow?'

'At what time?' asked Jonas.

'Seven. Here's my card. Take the documents. I see you'll join us!'

'I don't know about that,' said Jonas. 'There's a good deal to be looked into first.'

'You shall look,' said Montague, slapping him on the back, 'into anything and everything you please. But you'll join us, I am convinced. You were made for it. Bullamy!'

Obedient to the summons and the little bell, the waistcoat appeared. Being charged to show Jonas out, it went before; and the voice within it cried, as usual, 'By your leave there, by your leave! Gentleman from the board-room, by your leave!'

Mr Montague being left alone, pondered for some moments, and then said, raising his voice:

'Is Nadgett in the office there?'

'Here he is, sir.' And he promptly entered; shutting the board-room door after him, as carefully as if he were about to plot a murder.

He was the man at a pound a week who made the inquiries. It was no virtue or merit in Nadgett that he transacted all his Anglo-Bengalee business secretly and in the closest confidence; for he was born to be a secret. He was a short, dried-up, withered old man, who seemed to have secreted his very blood; for nobody would have given him credit for the possession of six ounces of it in his whole body. How he lived was a secret; where he lived was a secret; and even what he was, was a secret. In his musty old pocket-book he carried contradictory cards, in some of which he called himself a coal-merchant, in others a wine-merchant, in others a commission-agent, in others a collector, in others an accountant; as if he really didn't know the secret himself. He was always keeping appointments in the City, and the other man never seemed to come. He would sit on 'Change for hours, looking at everybody who walked in and out, and would do the like at Garraway's, and in other business coffee-rooms, in some of which he would be occasionally seen drying a very damp pocket-handkerchief before the fire, and still looking over his shoulder for the man who never appeared. He was mildewed, threadbare, shabby; always had flue upon his legs and back; and kept his linen so secretly buttoning up and wrapping over, that he might have had none—perhaps he hadn't. He carried one stained beaver glove, which he dangled before him by the forefinger as he walked or sat; but even its fellow was a secret. Some people said he had been a bankrupt, others that he had gone an infant into an ancient Chancery suit which was still depending, but it was all a secret. He carried bits of sealing-wax and a hieroglyphical old copper seal in his pocket, and often secretly indited letters in corner boxes of the trysting-places before mentioned; but they never appeared to go to anybody, for he would put them into a secret place in his coat, and deliver them to himself weeks afterwards, very much to his own surprise, quite yellow. He was that sort of man that if he had died worth a million of money, or had died worth twopence halfpenny, everybody would have been perfectly satisfied, and would have said it was just as they expected. And yet he belonged to a class; a race peculiar to the City; who are secrets as profound to one another, as they are to the rest of mankind.

'Mr Nadgett,' said Montague, copying Jonas Chuzzlewit's address upon a piece of paper, from the card which was still lying on the table, 'any information about this name, I shall be glad to have myself. Don't you mind what it is. Any you can scrape together, bring me. Bring it to me, Mr Nadgett.'

Nadgett put on his spectacles, and read the name attentively; then looked at the chairman over his glasses, and bowed; then took them off, and put them in their case; and then put the case in his pocket. When he had done so, he looked, without his spectacles, at the paper as it lay before him, and at the same time produced his pocket-book from somewhere about the middle of his spine. Large as it was, it was very full of documents, but he found a place for this one; and having clasped it carefully, passed it by a kind of solemn legerdemain into the same region as before.

He withdrew with another bow and without a word; opening the door no wider than was sufficient for his passage out; and shutting it as carefully as before. The chairman of the board employed the rest of the morning in affixing his sign-manual of gracious acceptance to various new proposals of annuity-purchase and assurance. The Company was looking up, for they flowed in gayly.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

MR MONTAGUE AT HOME. AND MR JONAS CHUZZLEWIT AT HOME

There were many powerful reasons for Jonas Chuzzlewit being strongly prepossessed in favour of the scheme which its great originator had so boldly laid open to him; but three among them stood prominently forward. Firstly, there was money to be made by it. Secondly, the money had the peculiar charm of being sagaciously obtained at other people's cost. Thirdly, it involved much outward show of homage and distinction: a board being an awful institution in its own sphere, and a director a mighty man. 'To make a swingeing profit, have a lot of chaps to order about, and get into regular good society by one and the same means, and them so easy to one's hand, ain't such a bad look-out,' thought Jonas. The latter considerations were only second to his avarice; for, conscious that there was nothing in his person, conduct, character, or accomplishments, to command respect, he was greedy of power, and was, in his heart, as much a tyrant as any laureled conqueror on record.

But he determined to proceed with cunning and caution, and to be very keen on his observation of the gentility of Mr Montague's private establishment. For it no more occurred to this shallow knave that Montague wanted him to be so, or he wouldn't have invited him while his decision was yet in abeyance, than the possibility of that genius being able to overreach him in any way, pierced through his self-deceit by the inlet of a needle's point. He had said, in the outset, that Jonas was too sharp for him; and Jonas, who would have been sharp enough to believe him in nothing else, though he had solemnly sworn it, believed him in that, instantly.

It was with a faltering hand, and yet with an imbecile attempt at a swagger, that he knocked at his new friend's door in Pall Mall when the appointed hour arrived. Mr Bailey quickly answered to the summons. He was not proud and was kindly disposed to take notice of Jonas; but Jonas had forgotten him.

'Mr Montague at home?'

'I should hope he wos at home, and waiting dinner, too,' said Bailey, with the ease of an old acquaintance. 'Will you take your hat up along with you, or leave it here?'

Mr Jonas preferred leaving it there.

'The hold name, I suppose?' said Bailey, with a grin.

Mr Jonas stared at him in mute indignation.

'What, don't you remember hold mother Todgers's?' said Mr Bailey, with his favourite action of the knees and boots. 'Don't you remember my taking your name up to the young ladies, when you came a-courting there? A reg'lar scaly old shop, warn't it? Times is changed ain't they. I say how you've growed!'

Without pausing for any acknowledgement of this compliment, he ushered the visitor upstairs, and having announced him, retired with a private wink.

The lower story of the house was occupied by a wealthy tradesman, but Mr Montague had all the upper portion, and splendid lodging it was. The room in which he received Jonas was a spacious and elegant apartment, furnished with extreme magnificence; decorated with pictures, copies from the antique in alabaster and marble, china vases, lofty mirrors, crimson hangings of the richest silk, gilded carvings, luxurious couches, glistening cabinets inlaid with precious woods; costly toys of every sort in negligent abundance. The only guests besides Jonas were the doctor, the resident Director, and two other gentlemen, whom Montague presented in due form.

'My dear friend, I am delighted to see you. Jobling you know, I believe?'

'I think so,' said the doctor pleasantly, as he stepped out of the circle to shake hands. 'I trust I have the honour. I hope so. My dear sir, I see you well. Quite well? THAT'S well!'

'Mr Wolf,' said Montague, as soon as the doctor would allow him to introduce the two others, 'Mr Chuzzlewit. Mr Pip, Mr Chuzzlewit.'

Both gentlemen were exceedingly happy to have the honour of making Mr Chuzzlewit's acquaintance. The doctor drew Jonas a little apart, and whispered behind his hand:

'Men of the world, my dear sir—men of the world. Hem! Mr Wolf—literary character—you needn't mention it—remarkably clever weekly paper—oh, remarkably clever! Mr Pip—theatrical man—capital man to know—oh, capital man!'

'Well!' said Wolf, folding his arms and resuming a conversation which the arrival of Jonas had interrupted. 'And what did Lord Nobley say to that?'

'Why,' returned Pip, with an oath. 'He didn't know what to say. Same, sir, if he wasn't as mute as a poker. But you know what a good fellow Nobley is!'

'The best fellow in the world!' cried Wolf. 'It as only last week that Nobley said to me, "By Gad, Wolf, I've got a living to bestow, and if you had but been brought up at the University, strike me blind if I wouldn't have made a parson of you!"'

'Just like him,' said Pip with another oath. 'And he'd have done it!'

'Not a doubt of it,' said Wolf. 'But you were going to tell us—'

'Oh, yes!' cried Pip. 'To be sure. So I was. At first he was dumb—sewn up, dead, sir—but after a minute he said to the Duke, "Here's Pip. Ask Pip. Pip's our mutual friend. Ask Pip. He knows." "Damme!" said the Duke, "I appeal to Pip then. Come, Pip. Bandy or not bandy? Speak out!" "Bandy, your Grace, by the Lord Harry!" said I. "Ha, ha!" laughed the Duke. "To be sure she is. Bravo, Pip. Well said Pip. I wish I may die if you're not a trump, Pip. Pop me down among your fashionable visitors whenever I'm in town, Pip." And so I do, to this day.'

The conclusion of this story gave immense satisfaction, which was in no degree lessened by the announcement of dinner. Jonas repaired to the dining room, along with his distinguished host, and took his seat at the board between that individual and his friend the doctor. The rest fell into their places like men who were well accustomed to the house; and dinner was done full justice to, by all parties.

It was a good a one as money (or credit, no matter which) could produce. The dishes, wines, and fruits were of the choicest kind. Everything was elegantly served. The plate was gorgeous. Mr Jonas was in the midst of a calculation of the value of this item alone, when his host disturbed him.

'A glass of wine?'

'Oh!' said Jonas, who had had several glasses already. 'As much of that as you like! It's too good to refuse.'

'Well said, Mr Chuzzlewit!' cried Wolf.

'Tom Gag, upon my soul!' said Pip.

'Positively, you know, that's—ha, ha, ha!' observed the doctor, laying down his knife and fork for one instant, and then going to work again, pell-mell—'that's epigrammatic; quite!'

'You're tolerably comfortable, I hope?' said Tigg, apart to Jonas.

'Oh! You needn't trouble your head about ME,' he replied, 'Famous!'

'I thought it best not to have a party,' said Tigg. 'You feel that?'

'Why, what do you call this?' retorted Jonas. 'You don't mean to say you do this every day, do you?'

'My dear fellow,' said Montague, shrugging his shoulders, 'every day of my life, when I dine at home. This is my common style. It was of no use having anything uncommon for you. You'd have seen through it. "You'll have a party?" said Crimple. "No, I won't," I said, "he shall take us in the rough!"

'And pretty smooth, too, ecod!' said Jonas, glancing round the table. 'This don't cost a trifle.'

'Why, to be candid with you, it does not,' returned the other. 'But I like this sort of thing. It's the way I spend my money.'

Jonas thrust his tongue into his cheek, and said, 'Was it?'

'When you join us, you won't get rid of your share of the profits in the same way?' said Tigg.

'Quite different,' retorted Jonas.

'Well, and you're right,' said Tigg, with friendly candour. 'You needn't. It's not necessary. One of a Company must do it to hold the connection together; but, as I take a pleasure in it, that's my department. You don't mind dining expensively at another man's expense, I hope?'

'Not a bit,' said Jonas.

'Then I hope you'll often dine with me?'

'Ah!' said Jonas, 'I don't mind. On the contrary.'

'And I'll never attempt to talk business to you over wine, I take my oath,' said Tigg. 'Oh deep, deep, deep of you this morning! I must tell 'em that. They're the very men to enjoy it. Pip, my good fellow, I've a splendid little trait to tell you of my friend Chuzzlewit who is the deepest dog I know; I give you my sacred word of honour he is the deepest dog I know, Pip!'

Pip swore a frightful oath that he was sure of it already; and the anecdote, being told, was received with loud applause, as an incontestable proof of Mr Jonas's greatness. Pip, in a natural spirit of emulation, then related some instances of his own depth; and Wolf not to be left behind-hand, recited the leading points of one or two vastly humorous articles he was then preparing. These lucubrations being of what he called 'a warm complexion,' were highly approved; and all the company agreed that they were full of point.

'Men of the world, my dear sir,' Jobling whispered to Jonas; 'thorough men of the world! To a professional person like myself it's quite refreshing to come into this kind of society. It's not only agreeable—and nothing CAN be more agreeable—but it's philosophically improving. It's character, my dear sir; character!'

It is so pleasant to find real merit appreciated, whatever its particular walk in life may be, that the general harmony of the company was doubtless much promoted by their knowing that the two men of the world were held in great esteem by the upper classes of society, and by the gallant defenders of their country in the army and navy, but particularly the former. The least of their stories had a colonel in it; lords were as plentiful as oaths; and even the Blood Royal ran in the muddy channel of their personal recollections.

'Mr Chuzzlewit didn't know him, I'm afraid,' said Wolf, in reference to a certain personage of illustrious descent, who had previously figured in a reminiscence.

'No,' said Tigg. 'But we must bring him into contact with this sort of fellows.'

'He was very fond of literature,' observed Wolf.

'Was he?' said Tigg.

'Oh, yes; he took my paper regularly for many years. Do you know he said some good things now and then? He asked a certain Viscount, who's a friend of mine—Pip knows him—"What's the editor's name, what's the editor's name?" "Wolf." "Wolf, eh? Sharp biter, Wolf. We must keep the Wolf from the door, as the proverb says." It was very well. And being complimentary, I printed it.'

'But the Viscount's the boy!' cried Pip, who invented a new oath for the introduction of everything he said. 'The Viscount's the boy! He came into our place one night to take Her home; rather slued, but not much; and said, "Where's Pip? I want to see Pip. Produce Pip!"—"What's the row, my lord?"—"Shakspeare's an infernal humbug, Pip! What's the good of Shakspeare, Pip? I never read him. What the devil is it all about, Pip? There's a lot of feet in Shakspeare's verse, but there an't any legs worth mentioning in Shakspeare's plays, are there, Pip? Juliet, Desdemona, Lady Macbeth, and all the rest of 'em, whatever their names are, might as well have no legs at all, for anything the audience know about it, Pip. Why, in that respect they're all Miss Biffins to the audience, Pip. I'll tell you what it is. What the people call dramatic poetry is a collection of sermons. Do I go to the theatre to be lectured? No, Pip. If I wanted that, I'd go to church. What's the legitimate object of the drama, Pip? Human nature. What are legs? Human nature. Then let us have plenty of leg pieces, Pip, and I'll stand by you, my buck!" and I am proud to say,' added Pip, 'that he DID stand by me, handsomely.'

The conversation now becoming general, Mr Jonas's opinion was requested on this subject; and as it was in full accordance with the sentiments of Mr Pip, that gentleman was extremely gratified. Indeed, both himself and Wolf had so much in common with Jonas, that they became very amicable; and between their increasing friendship and the fumes of wine, Jonas grew talkative.

It does not follow in the case of such a person that the more talkative he becomes, the more agreeable he is; on the contrary, his merits show to most advantage, perhaps, in silence. Having no means, as he thought, of putting himself on an equality with the rest, but by the assertion of that depth and sharpness on which he had been complimented, Jonas exhibited that faculty to the utmost; and was so deep and sharp that he lost himself in his own profundity, and cut his fingers with his own edge-tools.

It was especially in his way and character to exhibit his quality at his entertainer's expense; and while he drank of his sparkling wines, and partook of his monstrous profusion, to ridicule the extravagance which had set such costly fare before him. Even at such a wanton board, and in such more than doubtful company, this might have proved a disagreeable experiment, but that Tigg and Crimple, studying to understand their man thoroughly, gave him what license he chose: knowing that the more he took, the better for their purpose. And thus while the blundering cheat—gull that he was, for all his cunning—thought himself rolled up hedgehog fashion, with his sharpest points towards them, he was, in fact, betraying all his vulnerable parts to their unwinking watchfulness.

Whether the two gentlemen who contributed so much to the doctor's philosophical knowledge (by the way, the doctor slipped off quietly, after swallowing his usual amount of wine) had had their cue distinctly from the host, or took it from what they saw and heard, they acted their parts very well. They solicited the honour of Jonas's better acquaintance; trusted that they would have the pleasure of introducing him into that elevated society in which he was so well qualified to shine; and informed him, in the most friendly manner that the advantages of their respective establishments were entirely at his control. In a word, they said 'Be one of us!' And Jonas said he was infinitely obliged to them, and he would be; adding within himself, that so long as they 'stood treat,' there was nothing he would like better.

After coffee, which was served in the drawing-room, there was a short interval (mainly sustained by Pip and Wolf) of conversation; rather highly spiced and strongly seasoned. When it flagged, Jonas took it up and showed considerable humour in appraising the furniture; inquiring whether such an article was paid for; what it had originally cost, and the like. In all of this, he was, as he considered, desperately hard on Montague, and very demonstrative of his own brilliant parts.

Some Champagne Punch gave a new though temporary fillip to the entertainments of the evening. For after leading to some noisy proceedings, which were not intelligible, it ended in the unsteady departure of the two gentlemen of the world, and the slumber of Mr Jonas upon one of the sofas.

As he could not be made to understand where he was, Mr Bailey received orders to call a hackney-coach, and take him home; which that young gentleman roused himself from an uneasy sleep in the hall to do. It being now almost three o'clock in the morning.

'Is he hooked, do you think?' whispered Crimple, as himself and partner stood in a distant part of the room observing him as he lay.

'Aye!' said Tigg, in the same tone. 'With a strong iron, perhaps. Has Nadgett been here to-night?'

'Yes. I went out to him. Hearing you had company, he went away.'

'Why did he do that?'

'He said he would come back early in the morning, before you were out of bed.'

'Tell them to be sure and send him up to my bedside. Hush! Here's the boy! Now Mr Bailey, take this gentleman home, and see him safely in. Hallo, here! Why Chuzzlewit, halloa!'

They got him upright with some difficulty, and assisted him downstairs, where they put his hat upon his head, and tumbled him into the coach. Mr Bailey, having shut him in, mounted the box beside the coachman, and smoked his cigar with an air of particular satisfaction; the undertaking in which he was engaged having a free and sporting character about it, which was quite congenial to his taste.

Arriving in due time at the house in the City, Mr Bailey jumped down, and expressed the lively nature of his feelings in a knock the like of which had probably not been heard in that quarter since the great fire of London. Going out into the road to observe the effect of this feat, he saw that a dim light, previously visible at an upper window, had been already removed and was travelling downstairs. To obtain a foreknowledge of the bearer of this taper, Mr Bailey skipped back to the door again, and put his eye to the keyhole.

It was the merry one herself. But sadly, strangely altered! So careworn and dejected, so faltering and full of fear; so fallen, humbled, broken; that to have seen her quiet in her coffin would have been a less surprise.

She set the light upon a bracket in the hall, and laid her hand upon her heart; upon her eyes; upon her burning head. Then she came on towards the door with such a wild and hurried step that Mr Bailey lost his self-possession, and still had his eye where the keyhole had been, when she opened it.

'Aha!' said Mr Bailey, with an effort. 'There you are, are you? What's the matter? Ain't you well, though?'

In the midst of her astonishment as she recognized him in his altered dress, so much of her old smile came back to her face that Bailey was glad. But next moment he was sorry again, for he saw tears standing in her poor dim eyes.

'Don't be frightened,' said Bailey. 'There ain't nothing the matter. I've brought home Mr Chuzzlewit. He ain't ill. He's only a little swipey, you know.' Mr Bailey reeled in his boots, to express intoxication.

'Have you come from Mrs Todgers's?' asked Merry, trembling.

'Todgers's, bless you! No!' cried Mr Bailey. 'I haven't got nothin, to do with Todgers's. I cut that connection long ago. He's been a-dining with my governor at the west-end. Didn't you know he was a-coming to see us?'

'No,' she said, faintly.

'Oh yes! We're heavy swells too, and so I tell you. Don't you come out, a-catching cold in your head. I'll wake him!' Mr Bailey expressing in his demeanour a perfect confidence that he could carry him in with ease, if necessary, opened the coach door, let down the steps, and giving Jonas a shake, cried 'We've got home, my flower! Tumble up, then!'

He was so far recovered as to be able to respond to this appeal, and to come stumbling out of the coach in a heap, to the great hazard of Mr

Bailey's person. When he got upon the pavement, Mr Bailey first butted at him in front, and then dexterously propped him up behind; and having steadied him by these means, he assisted him into the house.

'You go up first with the light,' said Bailey to Mr Jonas, 'and we'll foller. Don't tremble so. He won't hurt you. When I've had a drop too much, I'm full of good natur myself.'

She went on before; and her husband and Bailey, by dint of tumbling over each other, and knocking themselves about, got at last into the sitting-room above stairs, where Jonas staggered into a seat.

'There!' said Mr Bailey. 'He's all right now. You ain't got nothing to cry for, bless you! He's righter than a trivet!'

The ill-favoured brute, with dress awry, and sodden face, and rumpled hair, sat blinking and drooping, and rolling his idiotic eyes about, until, becoming conscious by degrees, he recognized his wife, and shook his fist at her.

'Ah!' cried Mr Bailey, squaring his arms with a sudden emotion. 'What, you're wicious, are you? Would you though! You'd better not!'

'Pray, go away!' said Merry. 'Bailey, my good boy, go home. Jonas!' she said; timidly laying her hand upon his shoulder, and bending her head down over him. 'Jonas!'

'Look at her!' cried Jonas, pushing her off with his extended arm. 'Look here! Look at her! Here's a bargain for a man!'

'Dear Jonas!'

'Dear Devil!' he replied, with a fierce gesture. 'You're a pretty clog to be tied to a man for life, you mewling, white-faced cat! Get out of my sight!'

'I know you don't mean it, Jonas. You wouldn't say it if you were sober.'

With affected gayety she gave Bailey a piece of money, and again implored him to be gone. Her entreaty was so earnest, that the boy had not the heart to stay there. But he stopped at the bottom of the stairs, and listened.

'I wouldn't say it if I was sober!' retorted Jonas. 'You know better. Have I never said it when I was sober?'

'Often, indeed!' she answered through her tears.

'Hark ye!' cried Jonas, stamping his foot upon the ground. 'You made me bear your pretty humours once, and ecod I'll make you bear mine now. I always promised myself I would. I married you that I might. I'll know who's master, and who's slave!'

'Heaven knows I am obedient!' said the sobbing girl. 'Much more so than I ever thought to be!'

Jonas laughed in his drunken exultation. 'What! you're finding it out, are you! Patience, and you will in time! Griffins have claws, my girl. There's not a pretty slight you ever put upon me, nor a pretty trick you ever played me, nor a pretty insolence you ever showed me, that I won't pay back a hundred-fold. What else did I marry you for? YOU, too!' he said, with coarse contempt.

It might have softened him—indeed it might—to hear her turn a little fragment of a song he used to say he liked; trying, with a heart so full, to win him back.

'Oho!' he said, 'you're deaf, are you? You don't hear me, eh? So much the better for you. I hate you. I hate myself, for having, been fool enough to strap a pack upon my back for the pleasure of treading on it whenever I choose. Why, things have opened to me, now, so that I might marry almost where I liked. But I wouldn't; I'd keep single. I ought to be single, among the friends I know. Instead of that, here I am, tied like a log to you. Pah! Why do you show your pale face when I come home? Am I never to forget you?'

'How late it is!' she said cheerfully, opening the shutter after an interval of silence. 'Broad day, Jonas!'

'Broad day or black night, what do I care!' was the kind rejoinder.

'The night passed quickly, too. I don't mind sitting up, at all.'

'Sit up for me again, if you dare!' growled Jonas.

'I was reading,' she proceeded, 'all night long. I began when you went out, and read till you came home again. The strangest story, Jonas! And true, the book says. I'll tell it you to-morrow.'

'True, was it?' said Jonas, doggedly.

'So the book says.'

'Was there anything in it, about a man's being determined to conquer his wife, break her spirit, bend her temper, crush all her humours like so many nut-shells—kill her, for aught I know?' said Jonas.

'No. Not a word,' she answered quickly.

'Oh!' he returned. 'That'll be a true story though, before long; for all the book says nothing about it. It's a lying book, I see. A fit book for a lying reader. But you're deaf. I forgot that.'

There was another interval of silence; and the boy was stealing away, when he heard her footstep on the floor, and stopped. She went up to him, as it seemed, and spoke lovingly; saying that she would defer to him in everything and would consult his wishes and obey them, and they might be very happy if he would be gentle with her. He answered with an imprecation, and—

Not with a blow? Yes. Stern truth against the base-souled villain; with a blow.

No angry cries; no loud reproaches. Even her weeping and her sobs were stifled by her clinging round him. She only said, repeating it in agony of heart, how could he, could he, could he—and lost utterance in tears.

Oh woman, God beloved in old Jerusalem! The best among us need deal lightly with thy faults, if only for the punishment thy nature will endure, in bearing heavy evidence against us, on the Day of Judgment!

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

IN WHICH SOME PEOPLE ARE PRECOCIOUS, OTHERS PROFESSIONAL, AND OTHERS MYSTERIOUS; ALL IN THEIR SEVERAL WAYS

It may have been the restless remembrance of what he had seen and heard overnight, or it may have been no deeper mental operation than the discovery that he had nothing to do, which caused Mr Bailey, on the following afternoon, to feel particularly disposed for agreeable society, and prompted him to pay a visit to his friend Poll Sweedlepipe.

On the little bell giving clamorous notice of a visitor's approach (for Mr Bailey came in at the door with a lunge, to get as much sound out of the bell as possible), Poll Sweedlepipe desisted from the contemplation of a favourite owl, and gave his young friend hearty welcome.

'Why, you look smarter by day,' said Poll, 'than you do by candle-light. I never see such a tight young dasher.'

'Reether so, Polly. How's our fair friend, Sairah?'

'Oh, she's pretty well,' said Poll. 'She's at home.'

'There's the remains of a fine woman about Sairah, Poll,' observed Mr Bailey, with genteel indifference.

'Oh!' thought Poll, 'he's old. He must be very old!'

'Too much crumb, you know,' said Mr Bailey; 'too fat, Poll. But there's many worse at her time of life.'

'The very owl's a-opening his eyes!' thought Poll. 'I don't wonder at it in a bird of his opinions.'

He happened to have been sharpening his razors, which were lying open in a row, while a huge strop dangled from the wall. Glancing at these preparations, Mr Bailey stroked his chin, and a thought appeared to occur to him.

'Poll,' he said, 'I ain't as neat as I could wish about the gills. Being here, I may as well have a shave, and get trimmed close.'

The barber stood aghast; but Mr Bailey divested himself of his neck-cloth, and sat down in the easy shaving chair with all the dignity and confidence in life. There was no resisting his manner. The evidence of sight and touch became as nothing. His chin was as smooth as a new-laid egg or a scraped Dutch cheese; but Poll Sweedlepipe wouldn't have ventured to deny, on affidavit, that he had the beard of a Jewish rabbi.

'Go WITH the grain, Poll, all round, please,' said Mr Bailey, screwing up his face for the reception of the lather. 'You may do wot you like with the bits of whisker. I don't care for 'em.'

The meek little barber stood gazing at him with the brush and soap-dish in his hand, stirring them round and round in a ludicrous uncertainty, as if he were disabled by some fascination from beginning. At last he made a dash at Mr Bailey's cheek. Then he stopped again, as if the ghost of a beard had suddenly receded from his touch; but receiving mild encouragement from Mr Bailey, in the form of an adjuration to 'Go in and win,' he lathered him bountifully. Mr Bailey smiled through the suds in his satisfaction. 'Gently over the stones, Poll. Go a tip-toe over the pimples!'

Poll Sweedlepipe obeyed, and scraped the lather off again with particular care. Mr Bailey squinted at every successive dab, as it was deposited on a cloth on his left shoulder, and seemed, with a microscopic eye, to detect some bristles in it; for he murmured more than once 'Reether redder than I could wish, Poll.' The operation being concluded, Poll fell back and stared at him again, while Mr Bailey, wiping his face on the jack-towel, remarked, 'that arter late hours nothing freshened up a man so much as a easy shave.'

He was in the act of tying his cravat at the glass, without his coat, and Poll had wiped his razor, ready for the next customer, when Mrs Gamp, coming downstairs, looked in at the shop-door to give the barber neighbourly good day. Feeling for her unfortunate situation, in having conceived a regard for himself which it was not in the nature of things that he could return, Mr Bailey hastened to soothe her with words of kindness.

'Hallo!' he said, 'Sairah! I needn't ask you how you've been this long time, for you're in full bloom. All a-blowin and a-growin; ain't she, Polly?'

'Why, drat the Bragian boldness of that boy!' cried Mrs Gamp, though not displeased. 'What a imperent young sparrow it is! I wouldn't be that creetur's mother not for fifty pound!'

Mr Bailey regarded this as a delicate confession of her attachment, and a hint that no pecuniary gain could recompense her for its being rendered hopeless. He felt flattered. Disinterested affection is always flattering.

'Ah, dear!' moaned Mrs Gamp, sinking into the shaving chair, 'that there blessed Bull, Mr Sweedlepipe, has done his wery best to conker me. Of all the trying inwalieges in this walley of the shadder, that one beats 'em black and blue.'

It was the practice of Mrs Gamp and her friends in the profession, to say this of all the easy customers; as having at once the effect of discouraging competitors for office, and accounting for the necessity of high living on the part of the nurses.

'Talk of constitooshun!' Mrs Gamp observed. 'A person's constitooshun need be made of bricks to stand it. Mrs Harris jestly says to me, but t'other day, "Oh! Sairey Gamp," she says, "how is it done?" "Mrs Harris, ma'am," I says to her, "we gives no trust ourselves, and puts a deal o'trust elsevere; these is our religious feelins, and we finds 'em answer." "Sairey," says Mrs Harris, "sech is life. Vich likeways is the hend of all things!"'

The barber gave a soft murmur, as much as to say that Mrs Harris's remark, though perhaps not quite so intelligible as could be desired from such an authority, did equal honour to her head and to her heart.

'And here,' continued Mrs Gamp, 'and here am I a-goin twenty mile in distant, on as wentersome a chance as ever any one as monthlied ever run, I do believe. Says Mrs Harris, with a woman's and a mother's art a-beatin in her human breast, she says to me, "You're not a-goin, Sairey, Lord forgive you!" "Why am I not a-goin, Mrs Harris?" I replies. "Mrs Gill," I says, "wos never wrong with six; and is it likely, ma'am—I ast you as a mother—that she will begin to be unreg'lar now? Often and often have I heerd him say," I says to Mrs Harris, meaning Mr Gill, "that he would back his wife agen Moore's almanack, to name the very day and hour, for ninepence farden. IS it likely, ma'am," I says, "as she will fail this once?" Says Mrs Harris "No, ma'am, not in the course of natur. But," she says, the tears a-fillin in her eyes, "you knows much betterer than me, with your experienge, how little puts us out. A Punch's show," she says, "a chimbley sweep, a newfundlan dog, or a drunkin man a-comin round the corner sharp may do it." So it may, Mr Sweedlepipes,' said Mrs Gamp, 'there's no deniging of it; and though my books is clear for a full week, I takes a anxious art along with me, I do assure you, sir.'

'You're so full of zeal, you see!' said Poll. 'You worrit yourself so.'

'Worrit myself!' cried Mrs Gamp, raising her hands and turning up her eyes. 'You speak truth in that, sir, if you never speaks no more 'twixt this and when two Sundays jines together. I feels the sufferins of other people more than I feels my own, though no one mayn't suppoge it. The families

I've had,' said Mrs Gamp, 'if all was knowd and credit done where credit's doo, would take a week to chris'en at Saint Polge's fontin!'

'Where's the patient goin?' asked Sweedlepipe.

'Into Har'fordshire, which is his native air. But native airs nor native graces neither,' Mrs Gamp observed, 'won't bring HIM round.'

'So bad as that?' inquired the wistful barber. 'Indeed!'

Mrs Gamp shook her head mysteriously, and pursed up her lips. 'There's fevers of the mind,' she said, 'as well as body. You may take your slime drafts till you files into the air with efferwescence; but you won't cure that.'

'Ah!' said the barber, opening his eyes, and putting on his raven aspect; 'Lor!'

'No. You may make yourself as light as any gash balloon,' said Mrs Gamp. 'But talk, when you're wrong in your head and when you're in your sleep, of certain things; and you'll be heavy in your mind.'

'Of what kind of things now?' inquired Poll, greedily biting his nails in his great interest. 'Ghosts?'

Mrs Gamp, who perhaps had been already tempted further than she had intended to go, by the barber's stimulating curiosity, gave a sniff of uncommon significance, and said, it didn't signify.

'I'm a-goin down with my patient in the coach this arternoon,' she proceeded. 'I'm a-goin to stop with him a day or so, till he gets a country nuss (drat them country nusses, much the orkard hussies knows about their bis'ness); and then I'm a-comin back; and that's my trouble, Mr Sweedlepipes. But I hope that everythink'll only go on right and comfortable as long as I'm away; perwisin which, as Mrs Harris says, Mrs Gill is welcome to choose her own time; all times of the day and night bein' equally the same to me.'

During the progress of the foregoing remarks, which Mrs Gamp had addressed exclusively to the barber, Mr Bailey had been tying his cravat, getting on his coat, and making hideous faces at himself in the glass. Being now personally addressed by Mrs Gamp, he turned round, and mingled in the conversation.

'You ain't been in the City, I suppose, sir, since we was all three there together,' said Mrs Gamp, 'at Mr Chuzzlewit's?'

'Yes, I have, Sairah. I was there last night.'

'Last night!' cried the barber.

'Yes, Poll, reether so. You can call it this morning, if you like to be particular. He dined with us.'

'Who does that young Limb mean by "hus?"' said Mrs Gamp, with most impatient emphasis.

'Me and my Governor, Sairah. He dined at our house. We wos very merry, Sairah. So much so, that I was obliged to see him home in a hackney coach at three o'clock in the morning.' It was on the tip of the boy's tongue to relate what had followed; but remembering how easily it might be carried to his master's ears, and the repeated cautions he had had from Mr Crimple 'not to chatter,' he checked himself; adding, only, 'She was sitting up, expecting him.'

'And all things considered,' said Mrs Gamp sharply, 'she might have know'd better than to go a-tirin herself out, by doin' anythink of the sort. Did they seem pretty pleasant together, sir?'

'Oh, yes,' answered Bailey, 'pleasant enough.'

'I'm glad on it,' said Mrs Gamp, with a second sniff of significance.

'They haven't been married so long,' observed Poll, rubbing his hands, 'that they need be anything but pleasant yet awhile.'

'No,' said Mrs Gamp, with a third significant signal.

'Especially,' pursued the barber, 'when the gentleman bears such a character as you gave him.'

'I speak; as I find, Mr Sweedlepipes,' said Mrs Gamp. 'Forbid it should be otherways! But we never knows wot's hidden in each other's hearts; and if we had glass winders there, we'd need keep the shetters up, some on us, I do assure you!'

'But you don't mean to say—' Poll Sweedlepipe began.

'No,' said Mrs Gamp, cutting him very short, 'I don't. Don't think I do. The torters of the Imposition shouldn't make me own I did. All I says is,' added the good woman, rising and folding her shawl about her, 'that the Bull's a-waitin, and the precious moments is a-flyin' fast.'

The little barber having in his eager curiosity a great desire to see Mrs Gamp's patient, proposed to Mr Bailey that they should accompany her to the Bull, and witness the departure of the coach. That young gentleman assenting, they all went out together.

Arriving at the tavern, Mrs Gamp (who was full-dressed for the journey, in her latest suit of mourning) left her friends to entertain themselves in the yard, while she ascended to the sick room, where her fellow-labourer Mrs Prig was dressing the invalid.

He was so wasted, that it seemed as if his bones would rattle when they moved him. His cheeks were sunken, and his eyes unnaturally large. He lay back in the easy-chair like one more dead than living; and rolled his languid eyes towards the door when Mrs Gamp appeared, as painfully as if their weight alone were burdensome to move.

'And how are we by this time?' Mrs Gamp observed. 'We looks charming.'

'We looks a deal charminger than we are, then,' returned Mrs Prig, a little chafed in her temper. 'We got out of bed back'ards, I think, for we're as cross as two sticks. I never see sich a man. He wouldn't have been washed, if he'd had his own way.'

'She put the soap in my mouth,' said the unfortunate patient feebly.

'Couldn't you keep it shut then?' retorted Mrs Prig. 'Who do you think's to wash one feater, and miss another, and wear one's eyes out with all manner of fine work of that description, for half-a-crown a day! If you wants to be tittivated, you must pay accordin'.'

'Oh dear me!' cried the patient, 'oh dear, dear!'

'There!' said Mrs Prig, 'that's the way he's been a-conductin of himself, Sarah, ever since I got him out of bed, if you'll believe it.'

'Instead of being grateful,' Mrs Gamp observed, 'for all our little ways. Oh, fie for shame, sir, fie for shame!'

Here Mrs Prig seized the patient by the chin, and began to rasp his unhappy head with a hair-brush.

'I suppose you don't like that, neither!' she observed, stopping to look at him.

It was just possible that he didn't for the brush was a specimen of the hardest kind of instrument producible by modern art; and his very eyelids were red with the friction. Mrs Prig was gratified to observe the correctness of her supposition, and said triumphantly 'she know'd as much.'

When his hair was smoothed down comfortably into his eyes, Mrs Prig and Mrs Gamp put on his neckerchief; adjusting his shirt collar with great nicety, so that the starched points should also invade those organs, and afflict them with an artificial ophthalmia. His waistcoat and coat were next arranged; and as every button was wrenched into a wrong button-hole, and the order of his boots was reversed, he presented on the whole rather a melancholy appearance.

'I don't think it's right,' said the poor weak invalid. 'I feel as if I was in somebody else's clothes. I'm all on one side; and you've made one of my legs shorter than the other. There's a bottle in my pocket too. What do you make me sit upon a bottle for?'

'Deuce take the man!' cried Mrs Gamp, drawing it forth. 'If he ain't been and got my night-bottle here. I made a little cupboard of his coat when it hung behind the door, and quite forgot it, Betsey. You'll find a ingun or two, and a little tea and sugar in his t'other pocket, my dear, if you'll just be good enough to take 'em out.'

Betsey produced the property in question, together with some other articles of general chandlery; and Mrs Gamp transferred them to her own pocket, which was a species of nankeen pannier. Refreshment then arrived in the form of chops and strong ale for the ladies, and a basin of beef-tea for the patient; which refection was barely at an end when John Westlock appeared.

'Up and dressed!' cried John, sitting down beside him. 'That's brave. How do you feel?'

'Much better. But very weak.'

'No wonder. You have had a hard bout of it. But country air, and change of scene,' said John, 'will make another man of you! Why, Mrs Gamp,' he added, laughing, as he kindly arranged the sick man's garments, 'you have odd notions of a gentleman's dress!'

'Mr Lewsome an't a easy gent to get into his clothes, sir,' Mrs Gamp replied with dignity; 'as me and Betsey Prig can certify afore the Lord Mayor and Uncommon Counsellors, if needful!'

John at that moment was standing close in front of the sick man, in the act of releasing him from the torture of the collars before mentioned, when he said in a whisper:

'Mr Westlock! I don't wish to be overheard. I have something very particular and strange to say to you; something that has been a dreadful weight on my mind, through this long illness.'

Quick in all his motions, John was turning round to desire the women to leave the room; when the sick man held him by the sleeve.

'Not now. I've not the strength. I've not the courage. May I tell it when I have? May I write it, if I find that easier and better?'

'May you!' cried John. 'Why, Lewsome, what is this!'

'Don't ask me what it is. It's unnatural and cruel. Frightful to think of. Frightful to tell. Frightful to know. Frightful to have helped in. Let me kiss your hand for all your goodness to me. Be kinder still, and don't ask me what it is!'

At first, John gazed at him in great surprise; but remembering how very much reduced he was, and how recently his brain had been on fire with fever, believed that he was labouring under some imaginary horror or despondent fancy. For farther information on this point, he took an opportunity of drawing Mrs Gamp aside, while Betsey Prig was wrapping him in cloaks and shawls, and asked her whether he was quite collected in his mind.

'Oh bless you, no!' said Mrs Gamp. 'He hates his nusses to this hour. They always does it, sir. It's a certain sign. If you could have heerd the poor dear soul a-findin fault with me and Betsey Prig, not half an hour ago, you would have wondered how it is we don't get fretted to the tomb.'

This almost confirmed John in his suspicion; so, not taking what had passed into any serious account, he resumed his former cheerful manner, and assisted by Mrs Gamp and Betsey Prig, conducted Lewsome downstairs to the coach; just then upon the point of starting. Poll Sweedlepipe was at the door with his arms tight folded and his eyes wide open, and looked on with absorbing interest, while the sick man was slowly moved into the vehicle. His bony hands and haggard face impressed Poll wonderfully; and he informed Mr Bailey in confidence, that he wouldn't have missed seeing him for a pound. Mr Bailey, who was of a different constitution, remarked that he would have stayed away for five shillings.

It was a troublesome matter to adjust Mrs Gamp's luggage to her satisfaction; for every package belonging to that lady had the inconvenient property of requiring to be put in a boot by itself, and to have no other luggage near it, on pain of actions at law for heavy damages against the proprietors of the coach. The umbrella with the circular patch was particularly hard to be got rid of, and several times thrust out its battered brass nozzle from improper crevices and chinks, to the great terror of the other passengers. Indeed, in her intense anxiety to find a haven of refuge for this chattel, Mrs Gamp so often moved it, in the course of five minutes, that it seemed not one umbrella but fifty. At length it was lost, or said to be; and for the next five minutes she was face to face with the coachman, go wherever he might, protesting that it should be 'made good,' though she took the question to the House of Commons.

At last, her bundle, and her pattens, and her basket, and everything else, being disposed of, she took a friendly leave of Poll and Mr Bailey, dropped a curtsey to John Westlock, and parted as from a cherished member of the sisterhood with Betsey Prig.

'Wishin you lots of sickness, my darlin creetur,' Mrs Gamp observed, 'and good places. It won't be long, I hope, afore we works together, off and on, again, Betsey; and may our next meetin' be at a large family's, where they all takes it reg'lar, one from another, turn and turn about, and has it business-like.'

'I don't care how soon it is,' said Mrs Prig; 'nor how many weeks it lasts.'

Mrs Gamp with a reply in a congenial spirit was backing to the coach, when she came in contact with a lady and gentleman who were passing along the footway.

'Take care, take care here!' cried the gentleman. 'Halloo! My dear! Why, it's Mrs Gamp!'

'What, Mr Mould!' exclaimed the nurse. 'And Mrs Mould! who would have thought as we should ever have a meetin' here, I'm sure!'

'Going out of town, Mrs Gamp?' cried Mould. 'That's unusual, isn't it?'

'It IS unusual, sir,' said Mrs Gamp. 'But only for a day or two at most. The gent,' she whispered, 'as I spoke about.'

'What, in the coach!' cried Mould. 'The one you thought of recommending? Very odd. My dear, this will interest you. The gentleman that Mrs Gamp thought likely to suit us is in the coach, my love.'

Mrs Mould was greatly interested.

'Here, my dear. You can stand upon the door-step,' said Mould, 'and take a look at him. Ha! There he is. Where's my glass? Oh! all right. I've got it. Do you see him, my dear?'

'Quite plain,' said Mrs Mould.

'Upon my life, you know, this is a very singular circumstance,' said Mould, quite delighted. 'This is the sort of thing, my dear, I wouldn't have missed on any account. It tickles one. It's interesting. It's almost a little play, you know. Ah! There he is! To be sure. Looks poorly, Mrs M., don't he?'

Mrs Mould assented.

'He's coming our way, perhaps, after all,' said Mould. 'Who knows! I feel as if I ought to show him some little attention, really. He don't seem a stranger to me. I'm very much inclined to move my hat, my dear.'

'He's looking hard this way,' said Mrs Mould.

'Then I will!' cried Mould. 'How d'ye do, sir! I wish you good day. Ha! He bows too. Very gentlemanly. Mrs Gamp has the cards in her pocket, I have no doubt. This is very singular, my dear—and very pleasant. I am not superstitious, but it really seems as if one was destined to pay him those little melancholy civilities which belong to our peculiar line of business. There can be no kind of objection to your kissing your hand to him, my dear.'

Mrs Mould did so.

'Ha!' said Mould. 'He's evidently gratified. Poor fellow! I am quite glad you did it, my love. Bye bye, Mrs Gamp!' waving his hand. 'There he goes; there he goes!'

So he did; for the coach rolled off as the words were spoken. Mr and Mrs Mould, in high good humour, went their merry way. Mr Bailey retired with Poll Sweedlepipe as soon as possible; but some little time elapsed before he could remove his friend from the ground, owing to the impression wrought upon the barber's nerves by Mrs Prig, whom he pronounced, in admiration of her beard, to be a woman of transcendent charms.

When the light cloud of bustle hanging round the coach was thus dispersed, Nadgett was seen in the darkest box of the Bull coffee-room, looking wistfully up at the clock—as if the man who never appeared were a little behind his time.

CHAPTER THIRTY

PROVES THAT CHANGES MAY BE RUNG IN THE BEST-REGULATED FAMILIES, AND THAT MR PECKNIFF WAS A SPECIAL HAND AT A TRIPLE-BOB-MAJOR

As the surgeon's first care after amputating a limb, is to take up the arteries the cruel knife has severed, so it is the duty of this history, which in its remorseless course has cut from the Pecksniffian trunk its right arm, Mercy, to look to the parent stem, and see how in all its various ramifications it got on without her.

And first of Mr Pecksniff it may be observed, that having provided for his youngest daughter that choicest of blessings, a tender and indulgent husband; and having gratified the dearest wish of his parental heart by establishing her in life so happily; he renewed his youth, and spreading the plumage of his own bright conscience, felt himself equal to all kinds of flights. It is customary with fathers in stage-plays, after giving their daughters to the men of their hearts, to congratulate themselves on having no other business on their hands but to die immediately; though it is rarely found that they are in a hurry to do it. Mr Pecksniff, being a father of a more sage and practical class, appeared to think that his immediate business was to live; and having deprived himself of one comfort, to surround himself with others.

But however much inclined the good man was to be jocose and playful, and in the garden of his fancy to disport himself (if one may say so) like an architectural kitten, he had one impediment constantly opposed to him. The gentle Cherry, stung by a sense of slight and injury, which far from softening down or wearing out, rankled and festered in her heart—the gentle Cherry was in flat rebellion. She waged fierce war against her dear papa, she led her parent what is usually called, for want of a better figure of speech, the life of a dog. But never did that dog live, in kennel, stable-yard, or house, whose life was half as hard as Mr Pecksniff's with his gentle child.

The father and daughter were sitting at their breakfast. Tom had retired, and they were alone. Mr Pecksniff frowned at first; but having cleared his brow, looked stealthily at his child. Her nose was very red indeed, and screwed up tight, with hostile preparation.

'Cherry,' cried Mr Pecksniff, 'what is amiss between us? My child, why are we disunited?'

Miss Pecksniff's answer was scarcely a response to this gush of affection, for it was simply, 'Bother, Pa!'

'Bother!' repeated Mr Pecksniff, in a tone of anguish.

'Oh! 'tis too late, Pa,' said his daughter, calmly 'to talk to me like this. I know what it means, and what its value is.'

'This is hard!' cried Mr Pecksniff, addressing his breakfast-cup. 'This is very hard! She is my child. I carried her in my arms when she wore shapeless worsted shoes—I might say, mufflers—many years ago!'

'You needn't taunt me with that, Pa,' retorted Cherry, with a spiteful look. 'I am not so many years older than my sister, either, though she IS married to your friend!'

'Ah, human nature, human nature! Poor human nature!' said Mr Pecksniff, shaking his head at human nature, as if he didn't belong to it. 'To think that this discord should arise from such a cause! oh dear, oh dear!'

'From such a cause indeed!' cried Cherry. 'State the real cause, Pa, or I'll state it myself. Mind! I will!'

Perhaps the energy with which she said this was infectious. However that may be, Mr Pecksniff changed his tone and the expression of his face for one of anger, if not downright violence, when he said:

'You will! you have. You did yesterday. You do always. You have no decency; you make no secret of your temper; you have exposed yourself to Mr Chuzzlewit a hundred times.'

'Myself!' cried Cherry, with a bitter smile. 'Oh indeed! I don't mind that.'

'Me, too, then,' said Mr Pecksniff.

His daughter answered with a scornful laugh.

'And since we have come to an explanation, Charity,' said Mr Pecksniff, rolling his head portentously, 'let me tell you that I won't allow it. None of your nonsense, Miss! I won't permit it to be done.'

'I shall do,' said Charity, rocking her chair backwards and forwards, and raising her voice to a high pitch, 'I shall do, Pa, what I please and what I have done. I am not going to be crushed in everything, depend upon it. I've been more shamefully used than anybody ever was in this world,' here she began to cry and sob, 'and may expect the worse treatment from you, I know. But I don't care for that. No, I don't!'

Mr Pecksniff was made so desperate by the loud tone in which she spoke, that, after looking about him in frantic uncertainty for some means of softening it, he rose and shook her until the ornamental bow of hair upon her head nodded like a plume. She was so very much astonished by this assault, that it really had the desired effect.

'I'll do it again!' cried Mr Pecksniff, as he resumed his seat and fetched his breath, 'if you dare to talk in that loud manner. How do you mean about being shamefully used? If Mr Jonas chose your sister in preference to you, who could help it, I should wish to know? What have I to do with it?'

'Wasn't I made a convenience of? Weren't my feelings trifled with? Didn't he address himself to me first?' sobbed Cherry, clasping her hands; 'and oh, good gracious, that I should live to be shook!'

'You'll live to be shaken again,' returned her parent, 'if you drive me to that means of maintaining the decorum of this humble roof. You surprise me. I wonder you have not more spirit. If Mr Jonas didn't care for you, how could you wish to have him?'

'I wish to have him!' exclaimed Cherry. 'I wish to have him, Pa!'

'Then what are you making all this piece of work for,' retorted her father, 'if you didn't wish to have him?'

'Because I was treated with duplicity,' said Cherry; 'and because my own sister and my own father conspired against me. I am not angry with HER,' said Cherry; looking much more angry than ever. 'I pity her. I'm sorry for her. I know the fate that's in store for her, with that Wretch.'

'Mr Jonas will survive your calling him a wretch, my child, I dare say,' said Mr Pecksniff, with returning resignation; 'but call him what you like and make an end of it.'

'Not an end, Pa,' said Charity. 'No, not an end. That's not the only point on which we're not agreed. I won't submit to it. It's better you should know that at once. No; I won't submit to it indeed, Pa! I am not quite a fool, and I am not blind. All I have got to say is, I won't submit to it.'

Whatever she meant, she shook Mr Pecksniff now; for his lame attempt to seem composed was melancholy in the last degree. His anger changed to meekness, and his words were mild and fawning.

'My dear,' he said; 'if in the short excitement of an angry moment I resorted to an unjustifiable means of suppressing a little outbreak calculated to injure you as well as myself—it's possible I may have done so; perhaps I did—I ask your pardon. A father asking pardon of his child,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'is, I believe, a spectacle to soften the most rugged nature.'

But it didn't at all soften Miss Pecksniff; perhaps because her nature was not rugged enough. On the contrary, she persisted in saying, over and over again, that she wasn't quite a fool, and wasn't blind, and wouldn't submit to it.

'You labour under some mistake, my child!' said Mr Pecksniff, 'but I will not ask you what it is; I don't desire to know. No, pray!' he added, holding out his hand and colouring again, 'let us avoid the subject, my dear, whatever it is!'

'It's quite right that the subject should be avoided between us, sir,' said Cherry. 'But I wish to be able to avoid it altogether, and consequently must beg you to provide me with a home.'

Mr Pecksniff looked about the room, and said, 'A home, my child!'

'Another home, papa,' said Cherry, with increasing stateliness 'Place me at Mrs Todgers's or somewhere, on an independent footing; but I will not live here, if such is to be the case.'

It is possible that Miss Pecksniff saw in Mrs Todgers's a vision of enthusiastic men, pining to fall in adoration at her feet. It is possible that Mr Pecksniff, in his new-born juvenility, saw, in the suggestion of that same establishment, an easy means of relieving himself from an irksome charge in the way of temper and watchfulness. It is undoubtedly a fact that in the attentive ears of Mr Pecksniff, the proposition did not sound quite like the dismal knell of all his hopes.

But he was a man of great feeling and acute sensibility; and he squeezed his pocket-handkerchief against his eyes with both hands—as such men always do, especially when they are observed. 'One of my birds,' Mr Pecksniff said, 'has left me for the stranger's breast; the other would take wing to Todgers's! Well, well, what am I? I don't know what I am, exactly. Never mind!'

Even this remark, made more pathetic perhaps by his breaking down in the middle of it, had no effect upon Charity. She was grim, rigid, and inflexible.

'But I have ever,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'sacrificed my children's happiness to my own—I mean my own happiness to my children's—and I will not begin to regulate my life by other rules of conduct now. If you can be happier at Mrs Todgers's than in your father's house, my dear, go to Mrs Todgers's! Do not think of me, my girl!' said Mr Pecksniff with emotion; 'I shall get on pretty well, no doubt.'

Miss Charity, who knew he had a secret pleasure in the contemplation of the proposed change, suppressed her own, and went on to negotiate the terms. His views upon this subject were at first so very limited that another difference, involving possibly another shaking, threatened to ensue; but by degrees they came to something like an understanding, and the storm blew over. Indeed, Miss Charity's idea was so agreeable to both, that it would have been strange if they had not come to an amicable agreement. It was soon arranged between them that the project should be tried, and that immediately; and that Cherry's not being well, and needing change of scene, and wishing to be near her sister, should form the excuse for her departure to Mr Chuzzlewit and Mary, to both of whom she had pleaded indisposition for some time past. These premises agreed on, Mr Pecksniff gave her his blessing, with all the dignity of a self-denying man who had made a hard sacrifice, but comforted himself with the reflection that virtue is its own reward. Thus they were reconciled for the first time since that not easily forgiven night, when Mr Jonas, repudiating the elder, had confessed his passion for the younger sister, and Mr Pecksniff had abetted him on moral grounds.

But how happened it—in the name of an unexpected addition to that small family, the Seven Wonders of the World, whatever and wherever they may be, how happened it—that Mr Pecksniff and his daughter were about to part? How happened it that their mutual relations were so greatly altered? Why was Miss Pecksniff so clamorous to have it understood that she was neither blind nor foolish, and she wouldn't bear it? It is not possible that Mr Pecksniff had any thoughts of marrying again; or that his daughter, with the sharp eye of a single woman, fathomed his design!

Let us inquire into this.

Mr Pecksniff, as a man without reproach, from whom the breath of slander passed like common breath from any other polished surface, could afford to do what common men could not. He knew the purity of his own motives; and when he had a motive worked at it as only a very good man (or a very bad one) can. Did he set before himself any strong and palpable motives for taking a second wife? Yes; and not one or two of them, but a combination of very many.

Old Martin Chuzzlewit had gradually undergone an important change. Even upon the night when he made such an ill-timed arrival at Mr Pecksniff's house, he was comparatively subdued and easy to deal with. This Mr Pecksniff attributed, at the time, to the effect his brother's death had had upon him. But from that hour his character seemed to have modified by regular degrees, and to have softened down into a dull indifference for almost every one but Mr Pecksniff. His looks were much the same as ever, but his mind was singularly altered. It was not that this or that passion stood out in brighter or in dimmer hues; but that the colour of the whole man was faded. As one trait disappeared, no other trait sprung up to take its place. His senses dwindled too. He was less keen of sight; was deaf sometimes; took little notice of what passed before him; and would be profoundly taciturn for days together. The process of this alteration was so easy that almost as soon as it began to be observed it was complete. But Mr Pecksniff saw it first, and having Anthony Chuzzlewit fresh in his recollection, saw in his brother Martin the same process of decay.

To a gentleman of Mr Pecksniff's tenderness, this was a very mournful sight. He could not but foresee the probability of his respected relative being made the victim of designing persons, and of his riches falling into worthless hands. It gave him so much pain that he resolved to secure the property to himself; to keep bad testamentary suitors at a distance; to wall up the old gentleman, as it were, for his own use. By little and little, therefore, he began to try whether Mr Chuzzlewit gave any promise of becoming an instrument in his hands, and finding that he did, and indeed that he was very supple in his plastic fingers, he made it the business of his life—kind soul!—to establish an ascendancy over him; and every little test he durst apply meeting with a success beyond his hopes, he began to think he heard old Martin's cash already chinking in his own unworldly pockets.

But when Mr Pecksniff pondered on this subject (as, in his zealous way, he often did), and thought with an uplifted heart of the train of circumstances which had delivered the old gentleman into his hands for the confusion of evil-doers and the triumph of a righteous nature, he always felt that Mary Graham was his stumbling-block. Let the old man say what he would, Mr Pecksniff knew he had a strong affection for her. He knew that he showed it in a thousand little ways; that he liked to have her near him, and was never quite at ease when she was absent long. That he had ever really sworn to leave her nothing in his will, Mr Pecksniff greatly doubted.

That even if he had, there were many ways by which he could evade the oath and satisfy his conscience, Mr Pecksniff knew. That her unprotected state was no light burden on the old man's mind, he also knew, for Mr Chuzzlewit had plainly told him so. 'Then,' said Mr Pecksniff 'what if I married her! What,' repeated Mr Pecksniff, sticking up his hair and glancing at his bust by Spoker; 'what if, making sure of his approval first—he is nearly imbecile, poor gentleman—I married her!'

Mr Pecksniff had a lively sense of the Beautiful; especially in women. His manner towards the sex was remarkable for its insinuating character. It is recorded of him in another part of these pages, that he embraced Mrs Todgers on the smallest provocation; and it was a way he had; it was a part of the gentle placidity of his disposition. Before any thought of matrimony was in his mind, he had bestowed on Mary many little tokens of his spiritual admiration. They had been indignantly received, but that was nothing. True, as the idea expanded within him, these had become too ardent to escape the piercing eye of Cherry, who read his scheme at once; but he had always felt the power of Mary's charms. So Interest and Inclination made a pair, and drew the curricle of Mr Pecksniff's plan.

As to any thought of revenging himself on young Martin for his insolent expressions when they parted, and of shutting him out still more effectually from any hope of reconciliation with his grandfather, Mr Pecksniff was much too meek and forgiving to be suspected of harbouring it. As to being refused by Mary, Mr Pecksniff was quite satisfied that in her position she could never hold out if he and Mr Chuzzlewit were both against her. As to consulting the wishes of her heart in such a case, it formed no part of Mr Pecksniff's moral code; for he knew what a good man he was, and what a blessing he must be to anybody. His daughter having broken the ice, and the murder being out between them, Mr Pecksniff had now only to pursue his design as cleverly as he could, and by the craftiest approaches.

'Well, my good sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, meeting old Martin in the garden, for it was his habit to walk in and out by that way, as the fancy took him; 'and how is my dear friend this delicious morning?'

'Do you mean me?' asked the old man.

'Ah!' said Mr Pecksniff, 'one of his deaf days, I see. Could I mean any one else, my dear sir?'

'You might have meant Mary,' said the old man.

'Indeed I might. Quite true. I might speak of her as a dear, dear friend, I hope?' observed Mr Pecksniff.

'I hope so,' returned old Martin. 'I think she deserves it.'

'Think!' cried Pecksniff, 'think, Mr Chuzzlewit!'

'You are speaking, I know,' returned Martin, 'but I don't catch what you say. Speak up!'

'He's getting deafer than a flint,' said Pecksniff. 'I was saying, my dear sir, that I am afraid I must make up my mind to part with Cherry.'

'What has SHE been doing?' asked the old man.

'He puts the most ridiculous questions I ever heard!' muttered Mr Pecksniff. 'He's a child to-day.' After which he added, in a mild roar: 'She hasn't been doing anything, my dear friend.'

'What are you going to part with her for?' demanded Martin.

'She hasn't her health by any means,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'She misses her sister, my dear sir; they doted on each other from the cradle. And I think of giving her a run in London for a change. A good long run, sir, if I find she likes it.'

'Quite right,' cried Martin. 'It's judicious.'

'I am glad to hear you say so. I hope you mean to bear me company in this dull part, while she's away?' said Mr Pecksniff.

'I have no intention of removing from it,' was Martin's answer.

'Then why,' said Mr Pecksniff, taking the old man's arm in his, and walking slowly on; 'Why, my good sir, can't you come and stay with me? I am sure I could surround you with more comforts—lowly as is my Cot—than you can obtain at a village house of entertainment. And pardon me, Mr Chuzzlewit, pardon me if I say that such a place as the Dragon, however well-conducted (and, as far as I know, Mrs Lupin is one of the worthiest creatures in this county), is hardly a home for Miss Graham.'

Martin mused a moment; and then said, as he shook him by the hand:

'No. You're quite right; it is not.'

'The very sight of skittles,' Mr Pecksniff eloquently pursued, 'is far from being congenial to a delicate mind.'

'It's an amusement of the vulgar,' said old Martin, 'certainly.'

'Of the very vulgar,' Mr Pecksniff answered. 'Then why not bring Miss Graham here, sir? Here is the house. Here am I alone in it, for Thomas Pinch I do not count as any one. Our lovely friend shall occupy my daughter's chamber; you shall choose your own; we shall not quarrel, I hope!'

'We are not likely to do that,' said Martin.

Mr Pecksniff pressed his hand. 'We understand each other, my dear sir, I see!—I can wind him,' he thought, with exultation, 'round my little finger.'

'You leave the recompense to me?' said the old man, after a minute's silence.

'Oh! do not speak of recompense!' cried Pecksniff.

'I say,' repeated Martin, with a glimmer of his old obstinacy, 'you leave the recompense to me. Do you?'

'Since you desire it, my good sir.'

'I always desire it,' said the old man. 'You know I always desire it. I wish to pay as I go, even when I buy of you. Not that I do not leave a balance to be settled one day, Pecksniff.'

The architect was too much overcome to speak. He tried to drop a tear upon his patron's hand, but couldn't find one in his dry distillery.

'May that day be very distant!' was his pious exclamation. 'Ah, sir! If I could say how deep an interest I have in you and yours! I allude to our beautiful young friend.'

'True,' he answered. 'True. She need have some one interested in her. I did her wrong to train her as I did. Orphan though she was, she would have found some one to protect her whom she might have loved again. When she was a child, I pleased myself with the thought that in gratifying my whim of placing her between me and false-hearted knaves, I had done her a kindness. Now she is a woman, I have no such comfort. She has no protector but herself. I have put her at such odds with the world, that any dog may bark or fawn upon her at his pleasure. Indeed she stands in need of delicate consideration. Yes; indeed she does!'

'If her position could be altered and defined, sir?' Mr Pecksniff hinted.

'How can that be done? Should I make a seamstress of her, or a governess?'

'Heaven forbid!' said Mr Pecksniff. 'My dear sir, there are other ways. There are indeed. But I am much excited and embarrassed at present, and would rather not pursue the subject. I scarcely know what I mean. Permit me to resume it at another time.'

'You are not unwell?' asked Martin anxiously.

'No, no!' cried Pecksniff. 'No. Permit me to resume it at another time. I'll walk a little. Bless you!'

Old Martin blessed him in return, and squeezed his hand. As he turned away, and slowly walked towards the house, Mr Pecksniff stood gazing after him; being pretty well recovered from his late emotion, which, in any other man, one might have thought had been assumed as a machinery for feeling Martin's pulse. The change in the old man found such a slight expression in his figure, that Mr Pecksniff, looking after him, could not help saying to himself:

'And I can wind him round my little finger! Only think!'

Old Martin happening to turn his head, saluted him affectionately. Mr Pecksniff returned the gesture.

'Why, the time was,' said Mr Pecksniff; 'and not long ago, when he wouldn't look at me! How soothing is this change. Such is the delicate texture of the human heart; so complicated is the process of its being softened! Externally he looks the same, and I can wind him round my little finger. Only think!'

In sober truth, there did appear to be nothing on which Mr Pecksniff might not have ventured with Martin Chuzzlewit; for whatever Mr Pecksniff said or did was right, and whatever he advised was done. Martin had escaped so many snares from needy fortune-hunters, and had withered in the shell of his suspicion and distrust for so many years, but to become the good man's tool and plaything. With the happiness of this conviction painted on his face, the architect went forth upon his morning walk.

The summer weather in his bosom was reflected in the breast of Nature. Through deep green vistas where the boughs arched overhead, and showed the sunlight flashing in the beautiful perspective; through dewy fern from which the startled hares leaped up, and fled at his approach; by mantled pools, and fallen trees, and down in hollow places, rustling among last year's leaves whose scent woke memory of the past; the placid Pecksniff strolled. By meadow gates and hedges fragrant with wild roses; and by thatched-roof cottages whose inmates humbly bowed before him as a man both good and wise; the worthy Pecksniff walked in tranquil meditation. The bee passed onward, humming of the work he had to do; the idle gnats for ever going round and round in one contracting and expanding ring, yet always going on as fast as he, danced merrily before him; the colour of the long grass came and went, as if the light clouds made it timid as they floated through the distant air. The birds, so many Pecksniff consciences, sang gayly upon every branch; and Mr Pecksniff paid HIS homage to the day by ruminating on his projects as he walked along.

Chancing to trip, in his abstraction, over the spreading root of an old tree, he raised his pious eyes to take a survey of the ground before him. It startled him to see the embodied image of his thoughts not far ahead. Mary herself. And alone.

At first Mr Pecksniff stopped as if with the intention of avoiding her; but his next impulse was to advance, which he did at a brisk pace; caroling as he went so sweetly and with so much innocence that he only wanted feathers and wings to be a bird.

Hearing notes behind her, not belonging to the songsters of the grove, she looked round. Mr Pecksniff kissed his hand, and was at her side immediately.

'Communing with nature?' said Mr Pecksniff. 'So am I.'

She said the morning was so beautiful that she had walked further than she intended, and would return. Mr Pecksniff said it was exactly his case, and he would return with her.

'Take my arm, sweet girl,' said Mr Pecksniff.

Mary declined it, and walked so very fast that he remonstrated. 'You were loitering when I came upon you,' Mr Pecksniff said. 'Why be so cruel as to hurry now? You would not shun me, would you?'

'Yes, I would,' she answered, turning her glowing cheek indignantly upon him, 'you know I would. Release me, Mr Pecksniff. Your touch is disagreeable to me.'

His touch! What? That chaste patriarchal touch which Mrs Todgers—surely a discreet lady—had endured, not only without complaint, but with apparent satisfaction! This was positively wrong. Mr Pecksniff was sorry to hear her say it.

'If you have not observed,' said Mary, 'that it is so, pray take assurance from my lips, and do not, as you are a gentleman, continue to offend me.'

'Well, well!' said Mr Pecksniff, mildly, 'I feel that I might consider this becoming in a daughter of my own, and why should I object to it in one so beautiful! It's harsh. It cuts me to the soul,' said Mr Pecksniff; 'but I cannot quarrel with you, Mary.'

She tried to say she was sorry to hear it, but burst into tears. Mr Pecksniff now repeated the Todgers performance on a comfortable scale, as if he intended it to last some time; and in his disengaged hand, catching hers, employed himself in separating the fingers with his own, and sometimes kissing them, as he pursued the conversation thus:

'I am glad we met. I am very glad we met. I am able now to ease my bosom of a heavy load, and speak to you in confidence. Mary,' said Mr Pecksniff in his tenderest tones, indeed they were so very tender that he almost squeaked: 'My soul! I love you!'

A fantastic thing, that maiden affectation! She made believe to shudder.

'I love you,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'my gentle life, with a devotion which is quite surprising, even to myself. I did suppose that the sensation was buried in the silent tomb of a lady, only second to you in qualities of the mind and form; but I find I am mistaken.'

She tried to disengage her hand, but might as well have tried to free herself from the embrace of an affectionate boa-constrictor; if anything so wily may be brought into comparison with Pecksniff.

'Although I am a widower,' said Mr Pecksniff, examining the rings upon her fingers, and tracing the course of one delicate blue vein with his fat thumb, 'a widower with two daughters, still I am not encumbered, my love. One of them, as you know, is married. The other, by her own desire, but with a view, I will confess—why not?—to my altering my condition, is about to leave her father's house. I have a character, I hope. People are pleased to speak well of me, I think. My person and manner are not absolutely those of a monster, I trust. Ah! naughty Hand!' said Mr Pecksniff, apostrophizing the reluctant prize, 'why did you take me prisoner? Go, go!'

He slapped the hand to punish it; but relenting, folded it in his waistcoat to comfort it again.

'Blessed in each other, and in the society of our venerable friend, my darling,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'we shall be happy. When he is wafted to a haven of rest, we will console each other. My pretty primrose, what do you say?'

'It is possible,' Mary answered, in a hurried manner, 'that I ought to feel grateful for this mark of your confidence. I cannot say that I do, but I am willing to suppose you may deserve my thanks. Take them; and pray leave me, Mr Pecksniff.'

The good man smiled a greasy smile; and drew her closer to him.

'Pray, pray release me, Mr Pecksniff. I cannot listen to your proposal. I cannot receive it. There are many to whom it may be acceptable, but it is not so to me. As an act of kindness and an act of pity, leave me!'

Mr Pecksniff walked on with his arm round her waist, and her hand in his, as contentedly as if they had been all in all to each other, and were joined in the bonds of truest love.

'If you force me by your superior strength,' said Mary, who finding that good words had not the least effect upon him, made no further effort to suppress her indignation; 'if you force me by your superior strength to accompany you back, and to be the subject of your insolence upon the way, you cannot constrain the expression of my thoughts. I hold you in the deepest abhorrence. I know your real nature and despise it.'

'No, no,' said Mr Pecksniff, sweetly. 'No, no, no!'

'By what arts or unhappy chances you have gained your influence over Mr Chuzzlewit, I do not know,' said Mary; 'it may be strong enough to soften even this, but he shall know of this, trust me, sir.'

Mr Pecksniff raised his heavy eyelids languidly, and let them fall again. It was saying with perfect coolness, 'Aye, aye! Indeed!'

'Is it not enough,' said Mary, 'that you warp and change his nature, adapt his every prejudice to your bad ends, and harden a heart naturally kind by shutting out the truth and allowing none but false and distorted views to reach it; is it not enough that you have the power of doing this, and that you exercise it, but must you also be so coarse, so cruel, and so cowardly to me?'

Still Mr Pecksniff led her calmly on, and looked as mild as any lamb that ever pastured in the fields.

'Will nothing move you, sir?' cried Mary.

'My dear,' observed Mr Pecksniff, with a placid leer, 'a habit of self-examination, and the practice of—shall I say of virtue?'

'Of hypocrisy,' said Mary.

'No, no,' resumed Mr Pecksniff, chafing the captive hand reproachfully, 'of virtue—have enabled me to set such guards upon myself, that it is really difficult to ruffle me. It is a curious fact, but it is difficult, do you know, for any one to ruffle me. And did she think,' said Mr Pecksniff, with a playful tightening of his grasp 'that SHE could! How little did she know his heart!'

Little, indeed! Her mind was so strangely constituted that she would have preferred the caresses of a toad, an adder, or a serpent—nay, the hug of a bear—to the endearments of Mr Pecksniff.

'Come, come,' said that good gentleman, 'a word or two will set this matter right, and establish a pleasant understanding between us. I am not angry, my love.'

'YOU angry!'

'No,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'I am not. I say so. Neither are you.'

There was a beating heart beneath his hand that told another story though.

'I am sure you are not,' said Mr Pecksniff: 'and I will tell you why. There are two Martin Chuzzlewits, my dear; and your carrying your anger to one might have a serious effect—who knows!—upon the other. You wouldn't wish to hurt him, would you?'

She trembled violently, and looked at him with such a proud disdain that he turned his eyes away. No doubt lest he should be offended with her in spite of his better self.

'A passive quarrel, my love,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'may be changed into an active one, remember. It would be sad to blight even a disinherited young man in his already blighted prospects; but how easy to do it. Ah, how easy! HAVE I influence with our venerable friend, do you think? Well, perhaps I have. Perhaps I have.'

He raised his eyes to hers; and nodded with an air of banter that was charming.

'No,' he continued, thoughtfully. 'Upon the whole, my sweet, if I were you I'd keep my secret to myself. I am not at all sure—very far from it—that it would surprise our friend in any way, for he and I have had some conversation together only this morning, and he is anxious, very anxious, to establish you in some more settled manner. But whether he was surprised or not surprised, the consequence of your imparting it might be the same. Martin junior might suffer severely. I'd have compassion on Martin junior, do you know?' said Mr Pecksniff, with a persuasive smile. 'Yes. He don't deserve it, but I would.'

She wept so bitterly now, and was so much distressed, that he thought it prudent to unclasp her waist, and hold her only by the hand.

'As to our own share in the precious little mystery,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'we will keep it to ourselves, and talk of it between ourselves, and you shall think it over. You will consent, my love; you will consent, I know. Whatever you may think; you will. I seem to remember to have heard—I really don't know where, or how'—he added, with bewitching frankness, 'that you and Martin junior, when you were children, had a sort of childish fondness for each other. When we are married, you shall have the satisfaction of thinking that it didn't last to ruin him, but passed away to do him good; for we'll see then what we can do to put some trifling help in Martin junior's way. HAVE I any influence with our venerable friend? Well! Perhaps I have. Perhaps I have.'

The outlet from the wood in which these tender passages occurred, was close to Mr Pecksniff's house. They were now so near it that he stopped, and holding up her little finger, said in playful accents, as a parting fancy:

'Shall I bite it?'

Receiving no reply he kissed it instead; and then stooping down, inclined his flabby face to hers—he had a flabby face, although he WAS a good man—and with a blessing, which from such a source was quite enough to set her up in life, and prosper her from that time forth permitted her to leave him.

Gallantry in its true sense is supposed to ennoble and dignify a man; and love has shed refinements on innumerable Cymons. But Mr Pecksniff—perhaps because to one of his exalted nature these were mere grossnesses—certainly did not appear to any unusual advantage, now that he was left alone. On the contrary, he seemed to be shrunk and reduced; to be trying to hide himself within himself; and to be wretched at not having the power to do it. His shoes looked too large; his sleeve looked too long; his hair looked too limp; his features looked too mean; his exposed throat looked as if a halter would have done it good. For a minute or two, in fact, he was hot, and pale, and mean, and shy, and slinking, and consequently not at all Pecksniffian. But after that, he recovered himself, and went home with as beneficent an air as if he had been the High Priest of the summer weather.

'I have arranged to go, Papa,' said Charity, 'to-morrow.'

'So soon, my child!'

'I can't go too soon,' said Charity, 'under the circumstances. I have written to Mrs Todgers to propose an arrangement, and have requested her to meet me at the coach, at all events. You'll be quite your own master now, Mr Pinch!'

Mr Pecksniff had just gone out of the room, and Tom had just come into it.

'My own master!' repeated Tom.

'Yes, you'll have nobody to interfere with you,' said Charity. 'At least I hope you won't. Hem! It's a changing world.'

'What! are YOU going to be married, Miss Pecksniff?' asked Tom in great surprise.

'Not exactly,' faltered Cherry. 'I haven't made up my mind to be. I believe I could be, if I chose, Mr Pinch.'

'Of course you could!' said Tom. And he said it in perfect good faith. He believed it from the bottom of his heart.

'No,' said Cherry, 'I am not going to be married. Nobody is, that I know of. Hem! But I am not going to live with Papa. I have my reasons, but it's all a secret. I shall always feel very kindly towards you, I assure you, for the boldness you showed that night. As to you and me, Mr Pinch, WE part the best friends possible!'

Tom thanked her for her confidence, and for her friendship, but there was a mystery in the former which perfectly bewildered him. In his extravagant devotion to the family, he had felt the loss of Merry more than any one but those who knew that for all the slights he underwent he thought his own demerits were to blame, could possibly have understood. He had scarcely reconciled himself to that when here was Charity about to leave them. She had grown up, as it were, under Tom's eye. The sisters were a part of Pecksniff, and a part of Tom; items in Pecksniff's goodness, and in Tom's service. He couldn't bear it; not two hours' sleep had Tom that night, through dwelling in his bed upon these dreadful changes.

When morning dawned he thought he must have dreamed this piece of ambiguity; but no, on going downstairs he found them packing trunks and cording boxes, and making other preparations for Miss Charity's departure, which lasted all day long. In good time for the evening coach, Miss Charity deposited her housekeeping keys with much ceremony upon the parlour table; took a gracious leave of all the house; and quitted her paternal roof—a blessing for which the Pecksniffian servant was observed by some profane persons to be particularly active in the thanksgiving at church next Sunday.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

MR PINCH IS DISCHARGED OF A DUTY WHICH HE NEVER OWED TO ANYBODY, AND MR PECKSNIFF DISCHARGES A DUTY WHICH HE OWES TO SOCIETY

The closing words of the last chapter lead naturally to the commencement of this, its successor; for it has to do with a church. With the church, so often mentioned heretofore, in which Tom Pinch played the organ for nothing.

One sultry afternoon, about a week after Miss Charity's departure for London, Mr Pecksniff being out walking by himself, took it into his head to stray into the churchyard. As he was lingering among the tombstones, endeavouring to extract an available sentiment or two from the epitaphs—for he never lost an opportunity of making up a few moral crackers, to be let off as occasion served—Tom Pinch began to practice. Tom could run down to the church and do so whenever he had time to spare; for it was a simple little organ, provided with wind by the action of the musician's feet; and he was independent, even of a bellows-blower. Though if Tom had wanted one at any time, there was not a man or boy in all the village, and away to the turnpike (tollman included), but would have blown away for him till he was black in the face.

Mr Pecksniff had no objection to music; not the least. He was tolerant of everything; he often said so. He considered it a vagabond kind of trifling, in general, just suited to Tom's capacity. But in regard to Tom's performance upon this same organ, he was remarkably lenient, singularly amiable; for when Tom played it on Sundays, Mr Pecksniff in his unbounded sympathy felt as if he played it himself, and were a benefactor to the congregation. So whenever it was impossible to devise any other means of taking the value of Tom's wages out of him, Mr Pecksniff gave him leave to cultivate this instrument. For which mark of his consideration Tom was very grateful.

The afternoon was remarkably warm, and Mr Pecksniff had been strolling a long way. He had not what may be called a fine ear for music, but he knew when it had a tranquilizing influence on his soul; and that was the case now, for it sounded to him like a melodious snore. He approached the church, and looking through the diamond lattice of a window near the porch, saw Tom, with the curtains in the loft drawn back, playing away with great expression and tenderness.

The church had an inviting air of coolness. The old oak roof supported by cross-beams, the hoary walls, the marble tablets, and the cracked stone pavement, were refreshing to look at. There were leaves of ivy tapping gently at the opposite windows; and the sun poured in through only one; leaving the body of the church in tempting shade. But the most tempting spot of all, was one red-curtained and soft-cushioned pew, wherein the official dignitaries of the place (of whom Mr Pecksniff was the head and chief) enshrined themselves on Sundays. Mr Pecksniff's seat was in the corner; a remarkably comfortable corner; where his very large Prayer-Book was at that minute making the most of its quarto self upon the desk. He determined to go in and rest.

He entered very softly; in part because it was a church; in part because his tread was always soft; in part because Tom played a solemn tune; in part because he thought he would surprise him when he stopped. Unbolting the door of the high pew of state, he glided in and shut it after him; then sitting in his usual place, and stretching out his legs upon the hassocks, he composed himself to listen to the music.

It is an unaccountable circumstance that he should have felt drowsy there, where the force of association might surely have been enough to keep him wide awake; but he did. He had not been in the snug little corner five minutes before he began to nod. He had not recovered himself one minute before he began to nod again. In the very act of opening his eyes indolently, he nodded again. In the very act of shutting them, he nodded again. So he fell out of one nod into another until at last he ceased to nod at all, and was as fast as the church itself.

He had a consciousness of the organ, long after he fell asleep, though as to its being an organ he had no more idea of that than he had of its being a bull. After a while he began to have at intervals the same dreamy impressions of voices; and awakening to an indolent curiosity upon the subject, opened his eyes.

He was so indolent, that after glancing at the hassocks and the pew, he was already half-way off to sleep again, when it occurred to him that there really were voices in the church; low voices, talking earnestly hard by; while the echoes seemed to mutter responses. He roused himself, and listened.

Before he had listened half a dozen seconds, he became as broad awake as ever he had been in all his life. With eyes, and ears, and mouth, wide open, he moved himself a very little with the utmost caution, and gathering the curtain in his hand, peeped out.

Tom Pinch and Mary. Of course. He had recognized their voices, and already knew the topic they discussed. Looking like the small end of a guillotined man, with his chin on a level with the top of the pew, so that he might duck down immediately in case of either of them turning round, he listened. Listened with such concentrated eagerness, that his very hair and shirt-collar stood bristling up to help him.

'No,' cried Tom. 'No letters have ever reached me, except that one from New York. But don't be uneasy on that account, for it's very likely they have gone away to some far-off place, where the posts are neither regular nor frequent. He said in that very letter that it might be so, even in that city to which they thought of travelling—Eden, you know.'

'It is a great weight upon my mind,' said Mary.

'Oh, but you mustn't let it be,' said Tom. 'There's a true saying that nothing travels so fast as ill news; and if the slightest harm had happened to Martin, you may be sure you would have heard of it long ago. I have often wished to say this to you,' Tom continued with an embarrassment that became him very well, 'but you have never given me an opportunity.'

'I have sometimes been almost afraid,' said Mary, 'that you might suppose I hesitated to confide in you, Mr Pinch.'

'No,' Tom stammered, 'I—I am not aware that I ever supposed that. I am sure that if I have, I have checked the thought directly, as an injustice to you. I feel the delicacy of your situation in having to confide in me at all,' said Tom, 'but I would risk my life to save you from one day's uneasiness; indeed I would!'

Poor Tom!

'I have dreaded sometimes,' Tom continued, 'that I might have displeased you by—by having the boldness to try and anticipate your wishes now and then. At other times I have fancied that your kindness prompted you to keep aloof from me.'

'Indeed!'

'It was very foolish; very presumptuous and ridiculous, to think so,' Tom pursued; 'but I feared you might suppose it possible that I—I—should admire you too much for my own peace; and so denied yourself the slight assistance you would otherwise have accepted from me. If such an idea has ever presented itself to you,' faltered Tom, 'pray dismiss it. I am easily made happy; and I shall live contented here long after you and Martin have forgotten me. I am a poor, shy, awkward creature; not at all a man of the world; and you should think no more of me, bless you, than if I were an old friar!'

If friars bear such hearts as thine, Tom, let friars multiply; though they have no such rule in all their stern arithmetic.

'Dear Mr Pinch!' said Mary, giving him her hand; 'I cannot tell you how your kindness moves me. I have never wronged you by the lightest doubt, and have never for an instant ceased to feel that you were all—much more than all—that Martin found you. Without the silent care and friendship I have experienced from you, my life here would have been unhappy. But you have been a good angel to me; filling me with gratitude of heart, hope, and courage.'

'I am as little like an angel, I am afraid,' replied Tom, shaking his head, 'as any stone cherubim among the grave-stones; and I don't think there are many real angels of THAT pattern. But I should like to know (if you will tell me) why you have been so very silent about Martin.'

'Because I have been afraid,' said Mary, 'of injuring you.'

'Of injuring me!' cried Tom.

'Of doing you an injury with your employer.'

The gentleman in question dived.

'With Pecksniff!' rejoined Tom, with cheerful confidence. 'Oh dear, he'd never think of us! He's the best of men. The more at ease you were, the happier he would be. Oh dear, you needn't be afraid of Pecksniff. He is not a spy.'

Many a man in Mr Pecksniff's place, if he could have dived through the floor of the pew of state and come out at Calcutta or any inhabited region on the other side of the earth, would have done it instantly. Mr Pecksniff sat down upon a hassock, and listening more attentively than ever, smiled.

Mary seemed to have expressed some dissent in the meanwhile, for Tom went on to say, with honest energy:

'Well, I don't know how it is, but it always happens, whenever I express myself in this way to anybody almost, that I find they won't do justice to Pecksniff. It is one of the most extraordinary circumstances that ever came within my knowledge, but it is so. There's John Westlock, who used to be a pupil here, one of the best-hearted young men in the world, in all other matters—I really believe John would have Pecksniff flogged at the cart's tail if he could. And John is not a solitary case, for every pupil we have had in my time has gone away with the same inveterate hatred of him. There was Mark Tapley, too, quite in another station of life,' said Tom; 'the mockery he used to make of Pecksniff when he was at the Dragon was shocking. Martin too: Martin was worse than any of 'em. But I forgot. He prepared you to dislike Pecksniff, of course. So you came with a prejudice, you know, Miss Graham, and are not a fair witness.'

Tom triumphed very much in this discovery, and rubbed his hands with great satisfaction.

'Mr Pinch,' said Mary, 'you mistake him.'

'No, no!' cried Tom. 'YOU mistake him. But,' he added, with a rapid change in his tone, 'what is the matter? Miss Graham, what is the matter?'

Mr Pecksniff brought up to the top of the pew, by slow degrees, his hair, his forehead, his eyebrow, his eye. She was sitting on a bench beside the door with her hands before her face; and Tom was bending over her.

'What is the matter?' cried Tom. 'Have I said anything to hurt you? Has any one said anything to hurt you? Don't cry. Pray tell me what it is. I cannot bear to see you so distressed. Mercy on us, I never was so surprised and grieved in all my life!'

Mr Pecksniff kept his eye in the same place. He could have moved it now for nothing short of a gimlet or a red-hot wire.

'I wouldn't have told you, Mr Pinch,' said Mary, 'if I could have helped it; but your delusion is so absorbing, and it is so necessary that we should be upon our guard; that you should not be compromised; and to that end that you should know by whom I am beset; that no alternative is left me. I came here purposely to tell you, but I think I should have wanted courage if you had not chanced to lead me so directly to the object of my coming.'

Tom gazed at her steadfastly, and seemed to say, 'What else?' But he said not a word.

'That person whom you think the best of men,' said Mary, looking up, and speaking with a quivering lip and flashing eye.

'Lord bless me!' muttered Tom, staggering back. 'Wait a moment. That person whom I think the best of men! You mean Pecksniff, of course. Yes, I see you mean Pecksniff. Good gracious me, don't speak without authority. What has he done? If he is not the best of men, what is he?'

'The worst. The falsest, craftiest, meanest, cruellest, most sordid, most shameless,' said the trembling girl—trembling with her indignation.

Tom sat down on a seat, and clasped his hands.

'What is he,' said Mary, 'who receiving me in his house as his guest; his unwilling guest; knowing my history, and how defenceless and alone I am, presumes before his daughters to affront me so, that if I had a brother but a child, who saw it, he would instinctively have helped me?'

'He is a scoundrel!' exclaimed Tom. 'Whoever he may be, he is a scoundrel.'

Mr Pecksniff dived again.

'What is he,' said Mary, 'who, when my only friend—a dear and kind one, too—was in full health of mind, humbled himself before him, but was spurned away (for he knew him then) like a dog. Who, in his forgiving spirit, now that that friend is sunk into a failing state, can crawl about him again, and use the influence he basely gains for every base and wicked purpose, and not for one—not one—that's true or good?'

'I say he is a scoundrel!' answered Tom.

'But what is he—oh, Mr Pinch, what IS he—who, thinking he could compass these designs the better if I were his wife, assails me with the coward's argument that if I marry him, Martin, on whom I have brought so much misfortune, shall be restored to something of his former hopes; and if I do not, shall be plunged in deeper ruin? What is he who makes my very constancy to one I love with all my heart a torture to myself and wrong to him; who makes me, do what I will, the instrument to hurt a head I would heap blessings on! What is he who, winding all these cruel snares about me, explains their purpose to me, with a smooth tongue and a smiling face, in the broad light of day; dragging me on, the while, in his embrace, and holding to his lips a hand,' pursued the agitated girl, extending it, 'which I would have struck off, if with it I could lose the shame and degradation of his touch?'

'I say,' cried Tom, in great excitement, 'he is a scoundrel and a villain! I don't care who he is, I say he is a double-dyed and most intolerable villain!'

Covering her face with her hands again, as if the passion which had sustained her through these disclosures lost itself in an overwhelming sense of shame and grief, she abandoned herself to tears.

Any sight of distress was sure to move the tenderness of Tom, but this especially. Tears and sobs from her were arrows in his heart. He tried to comfort her; sat down beside her; expended all his store of homely eloquence; and spoke in words of praise and hope of Martin. Aye, though he loved her from his soul with such a self-denying love as woman seldom wins; he spoke from first to last of Martin. Not the wealth of the rich Indies would have tempted Tom to shirk one mention of her lover's name.

When she was more composed, she impressed upon Tom that this man she had described, was Pecksniff in his real colours; and word by word and phrase by phrase, as well as she remembered it, related what had passed between them in the wood: which was no doubt a source of high gratification to that gentleman himself, who in his desire to see and his dread of being seen, was constantly diving down into the state pew, and coming up again like the intelligent householder in Punch's Show, who avoids being knocked on the head with a cudgel. When she had concluded her account, and had besought Tom to be very distant and unconscious in his manner towards her after this explanation, and had thanked him very much, they parted on the alarm of footsteps in the burial-ground; and Tom was left alone in the church again.

And now the full agitation and misery of the disclosure came rushing upon Tom indeed. The star of his whole life from boyhood had become, in a moment, putrid vapour. It was not that Pecksniff, Tom's Pecksniff, had ceased to exist, but that he never had existed. In his death Tom would have had the comfort of remembering what he used to be, but in this discovery, he had the anguish of recollecting what he never was. For, as Tom's blindness in this matter had been total and not partial, so was his restored sight. HIS Pecksniff could never have worked the wickedness of which he had just now heard, but any other Pecksniff could; and the Pecksniff who could do that could do anything, and no doubt had been doing anything and everything except the right thing, all through his career. From the lofty height on which poor Tom had placed his idol it was tumbled down headlong, and

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Not all the king's horses, nor all the king's men,
Could have set Mr Pecksniff up again.
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Legions of Titans couldn't have got him out of the mud; and serve him right! But it was not he who suffered; it was Tom. His compass was broken, his chart destroyed, his chronometer had stopped, his masts were gone by the board; his anchor was adrift, ten thousand leagues away.

Mr Pecksniff watched him with a lively interest, for he divined the purpose of Tom's ruminations, and was curious to see how he conducted himself. For some time, Tom wandered up and down the aisle like a man demented, stopping occasionally to lean against a pew and think it over; then he stood staring at a blank old monument bordered tastefully with skulls and cross-bones, as if it were the finest work of Art he had ever seen, although at other times he held it in unspeakable contempt; then he sat down; then walked to and fro again; then went wandering up into the organ-loft, and touched the keys. But their minstrelsy was changed, their music gone; and sounding one long melancholy chord, Tom drooped his head upon his hands and gave it up as hopeless.

'I wouldn't have cared,' said Tom Pinch, rising from his stool and looking down into the church as if he had been the Clergyman, 'I wouldn't have cared for anything he might have done to Me, for I have tried his patience often, and have lived upon his sufferance and have never been the help to him that others could have been. I wouldn't have minded, Pecksniff,' Tom continued, little thinking who heard him, 'if you had done Me any wrong; I could have found plenty of excuses for that; and though you might have hurt me, could have still gone on respecting you. But why did you ever fall so low as this in my esteem! Oh Pecksniff, Pecksniff, there is nothing I would not have given, to have had you deserve my old opinion of you; nothing!'

Mr Pecksniff sat upon the hassock pulling up his shirt-collar, while Tom, touched to the quick, delivered this apostrophe. After a pause he heard Tom coming down the stairs, jingling the church keys; and bringing his eye to the top of the pew again, saw him go slowly out and lock the door.

Mr Pecksniff durst not issue from his place of concealment; for through the windows of the church he saw Tom passing on among the graves, and sometimes stopping at a stone, and leaning there as if he were a mourner who had lost a friend. Even when he had left the churchyard, Mr Pecksniff still remained shut up; not being at all secure but that in his restless state of mind Tom might come wandering back. At length he issued forth, and walked with a pleasant countenance into the vestry; where he knew there was a window near the ground, by which he could release himself by merely stepping out.

He was in a curious frame of mind, Mr Pecksniff; being in no hurry to go, but rather inclining to a dilatory trifling with the time, which prompted him to open the vestry cupboard, and look at himself in the parson's little glass that hung within the door. Seeing that his hair was rumpled, he took the liberty of borrowing the canonical brush and arranging it. He also took the liberty of opening another cupboard; but he shut it up again quickly, being rather startled by the sight of a black and a white surplice dangling against the wall; which had very much the appearance of two curates who had committed suicide by hanging themselves. Remembering that he had seen in the first cupboard a port-wine bottle and some biscuits, he peeped into it again, and helped himself with much deliberation; cogitating all the time though, in a very deep and weighty manner, as if his thoughts were otherwise employed.

He soon made up his mind, if it had ever been in doubt; and putting back the bottle and biscuits, opened the casement. He got out into the churchyard without any difficulty; shut the window after him; and walked straight home.

'Is Mr Pinch indoors?' asked Mr Pecksniff of his serving-maid.

'Just come in, sir.'

'Just come in, eh?' repeated Mr Pecksniff, cheerfully. 'And gone upstairs, I suppose?'

'Yes sir. Gone upstairs. Shall I call him, sir?'

'No,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'no. You needn't call him, Jane. Thank you, Jane. How are your relations, Jane?'

'Pretty well, I thank you, sir.'

'I am glad to hear it. Let them know I asked about them, Jane. Is Mr Chuzzlewit in the way, Jane?'

'Yes, sir. He's in the parlour, reading.'

'He's in the parlour, reading, is he, Jane?' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Very well. Then I think I'll go and see him, Jane.'

Never had Mr Pecksniff been beheld in a more pleasant humour!

But when he walked into the parlour where the old man was engaged as Jane had said; with pen and ink and paper on a table close at hand (for Mr Pecksniff was always very particular to have him well supplied with writing materials), he became less cheerful. He was not angry, he was not vindictive, he was not cross, he was not moody, but he was grieved; he was sorely grieved. As he sat down by the old man's side, two tears—not tears like those with which recording angels blot their entries out, but drops so precious that they use them for their ink—stole down his meritorious cheeks.

'What is the matter?' asked old Martin. 'Pecksniff, what ails you, man?'

'I am sorry to interrupt you, my dear sir, and I am still more sorry for the cause. My good, my worthy friend, I am deceived.'

'You are deceived!'

'Ah!' cried Mr Pecksniff, in an agony, 'deceived in the tenderest point. Cruelly deceived in that quarter, sir, in which I placed the most unbounded confidence. Deceived, Mr Chuzzlewit, by Thomas Pinch.'

'Oh! bad, bad, bad!' said Martin, laying down his book. 'Very bad! I hope not. Are you certain?'

'Certain, my good sir! My eyes and ears are witnesses. I wouldn't have believed it otherwise. I wouldn't have believed it, Mr Chuzzlewit, if a Fiery Serpent had proclaimed it from the top of Salisbury Cathedral. I would have said,' cried Mr Pecksniff, 'that the Serpent lied. Such was my faith in Thomas Pinch, that I would have cast the falsehood back into the Serpent's teeth, and would have taken Thomas to my heart. But I am not a Serpent, sir, myself, I grieve to say, and no excuse or hope is left me.'

Martin was greatly disturbed to see him so much agitated, and to hear such unexpected news. He begged him to compose himself, and asked upon what subject Mr Pinch's treachery had been developed.

'That is almost the worst of all, sir,' Mr Pecksniff answered, 'on a subject nearly concerning YOU. Oh! is it not enough,' said Mr Pecksniff, looking upward, 'that these blows must fall on me, but must they also hit my friends!'

'You alarm me,' cried the old man, changing colour. 'I am not so strong as I was. You terrify me, Pecksniff!'

'Cheer up, my noble sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, taking courage, 'and we will do what is required of us. You shall know all, sir, and shall be righted. But first excuse me, sir, excuse me. I have a duty to discharge, which I owe to society.'

He rang the bell, and Jane appeared. 'Send Mr Pinch here, if you please, Jane.'

Tom came. Constrained and altered in his manner, downcast and dejected, visibly confused; not liking to look Pecksniff in the face.

The honest man bestowed a glance on Mr Chuzzlewit, as who should say 'You see!' and addressed himself to Tom in these terms:

'Mr Pinch, I have left the vestry-window unfastened. Will you do me the favour to go and secure it; then bring the keys of the sacred edifice to me!'

'The vestry-window, sir?' cried Tom.

'You understand me, Mr Pinch, I think,' returned his patron. 'Yes, Mr Pinch, the vestry-window. I grieve to say that sleeping in the church after a fatiguing ramble, I overheard just now some fragments,' he emphasised that word, 'of a dialogue between two parties; and one of them locking the church when he went out, I was obliged to leave it myself by the vestry-window. Do me the favour to secure that vestry-window, Mr Pinch, and then come back to me.'

No physiognomist that ever dwelt on earth could have construed Tom's face when he heard these words. Wonder was in it, and a mild look of reproach, but certainly no fear or guilt, although a host of strong emotions struggled to display themselves. He bowed, and without saying one word, good or bad, withdrew.

'Pecksniff,' cried Martin, in a tremble, 'what does all this mean? You are not going to do anything in haste, you may regret!'

'No, my good sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, firmly, 'No. But I have a duty to discharge which I owe to society; and it shall be discharged, my friend, at any cost!'

Oh, late-remembered, much-forgotten, mouthing, braggart duty, always owed, and seldom paid in any other coin than punishment and wrath, when will mankind begin to know thee! When will men acknowledge thee in thy neglected cradle, and thy stunted youth, and not begin their recognition in thy sinful manhood and thy desolate old age! Oh, ermined Judge whose duty to society is, now, to doom the ragged criminal to punishment and death, hadst thou never, Man, a duty to discharge in barring up the hundred open gates that wooed him to the felon's dock, and throwing but ajar the portals to a decent life! Oh, prelate, prelate, whose duty to society it is to mourn in melancholy phrase the sad degeneracy of these bad times in which thy lot of honours has been cast, did nothing go before thy elevation to the lofty seat, from which thou dealest out thy homilies to other tarriers for dead men's shoes, whose duty to society has not begun! Oh! magistrate, so rare a country gentleman and brave a squire, had you no duty to society, before the ricks were blazing and the mob were mad; or did it spring up, armed and booted from the earth, a corps of yeomanry full-grown!

Mr Pecksniff's duty to society could not be paid till Tom came back. The interval which preceded the return of that young man, he occupied in a close conference with his friend; so that when Tom did arrive, he found the two quite ready to receive him. Mary was in her own room above, whither Mr Pecksniff, always considerate, had besought old Martin to entreat her to remain some half-hour longer, that her feelings might be spared.

When Tom came back, he found old Martin sitting by the window, and Mr Pecksniff in an imposing attitude at the table. On one side of him was his pocket-handkerchief; and on the other a little heap (a very little heap) of gold and silver, and odd pence. Tom saw, at a glance, that it was his own salary for the current quarter.

'Have you fastened the vestry-window, Mr Pinch?' said Pecksniff.

'Yes, sir.'

'Thank you. Put down the keys if you please, Mr Pinch.'

Tom placed them on the table. He held the bunch by the key of the organ-loft (though it was one of the smallest), and looked hard at it as he laid it down. It had been an old, old friend of Tom's; a kind companion to him, many and many a day.

'Mr Pinch,' said Pecksniff, shaking his head; 'oh, Mr Pinch! I wonder you can look me in the face!'

Tom did it though; and notwithstanding that he has been described as stooping generally, he stood as upright then as man could stand.

'Mr Pinch,' said Pecksniff, taking up his handkerchief, as if he felt that he should want it soon, 'I will not dwell upon the past. I will spare you, and I will spare myself, that pain at least.'

Tom's was not a very bright eye, but it was a very expressive one when he looked at Mr Pecksniff, and said:

'Thank you, sir. I am very glad you will not refer to the past.'

'The present is enough,' said Mr Pecksniff, dropping a penny, 'and the sooner THAT is past, the better. Mr Pinch, I will not dismiss you without a word of explanation. Even such a course would be quite justifiable under the circumstances; but it might wear an appearance of hurry, and I will not do it; for I am,' said Mr Pecksniff, knocking down another penny, 'perfectly self-possessed. Therefore I will say to you, what I have already said to Mr Chuzzlewit.'

Tom glanced at the old gentleman, who nodded now and then as approving of Mr Pecksniff's sentences and sentiments, but interposed between them in no other way.

'From fragments of a conversation which I overheard in the church, just now, Mr Pinch,' said Pecksniff, 'between yourself and Miss Graham—I say fragments, because I was slumbering at a considerable distance from you, when I was roused by your voices—and from what I saw, I ascertained (I would have given a great deal not to have ascertained, Mr Pinch) that you, forgetful of all ties of duty and of honour, sir; regardless of the sacred laws of hospitality, to which you were pledged as an inmate of this house; have presumed to address Miss Graham with unreturned professions of attachment and proposals of love.'

Tom looked at him steadily.

'Do you deny it, sir?' asked Mr Pecksniff, dropping one pound two and fourpence, and making a great business of picking it up again.

'No, sir,' replied Tom. 'I do not.'

'You do not,' said Mr Pecksniff, glancing at the old gentleman. 'Oblige me by counting this money, Mr Pinch, and putting your name to this receipt. You do not?'

No, Tom did not. He scorned to deny it. He saw that Mr Pecksniff having overheard his own disgrace, cared not a jot for sinking lower yet in his contempt. He saw that he had devised this fiction as the readiest means of getting rid of him at once, but that it must end in that any way. He saw that Mr Pecksniff reckoned on his not denying it, because his doing so and explaining would incense the old man more than ever against Martin and against Mary; while Pecksniff himself would only have been mistaken in his 'fragments.' Deny it! No.

'You find the amount correct, do you, Mr Pinch?' said Pecksniff.

'Quite correct, sir,' answered Tom.

'A person is waiting in the kitchen,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'to carry your luggage wherever you please. We part, Mr Pinch, at once, and are strangers from this time.'

Something without a name; compassion, sorrow, old tenderness, mistaken gratitude, habit; none of these, and yet all of them; smote upon Tom's gentle heart at parting. There was no such soul as Pecksniff's in that carcase; and yet, though his speaking out had not involved the compromise of one he loved, he couldn't have denounced the very shape and figure of the man. Not even then.

'I will not say,' cried Mr Pecksniff, shedding tears, 'what a blow this is. I will not say how much it tries me; how it works upon my nature; how it grates upon my feelings. I do not care for that. I can endure as well as another man. But what I have to hope, and what you have to hope, Mr Pinch (otherwise a great responsibility rests upon you), is, that this deception may not alter my ideas of humanity; that it may not impair my freshness, or contract, if I may use the expression, my Pinions. I hope it will not; I don't think it will. It may be a comfort to you, if not now, at some future time, to know that I shall endeavour not to think the worse of my fellow-creatures in general, for what has passed between us. Farewell!'

Tom had meant to spare him one little puncturation with a lancet, which he had it in his power to administer, but he changed his mind on hearing this, and said:

'I think you left something in the church, sir.'

'Thank you, Mr Pinch,' said Pecksniff. 'I am not aware that I did.'

'This is your double eye-glass, I believe?' said Tom.

'Oh!' cried Pecksniff, with some degree of confusion. 'I am obliged to you. Put it down, if you please.'

'I found it,' said Tom, slowly—'when I went to bolt the vestry-window—in the pew.'

So he had. Mr Pecksniff had taken it off when he was bobbing up and down, lest it should strike against the panelling; and had forgotten it. Going back to the church with his mind full of having been watched, and wondering very much from what part, Tom's attention was caught by the door of the state pew standing open. Looking into it he found the glass. And thus he knew, and by returning it gave Mr Pecksniff the information that he knew, where the listener had been; and that instead of overhearing fragments of the conversation, he must have rejoiced in every word of it.

'I am glad he's gone,' said Martin, drawing a long breath when Tom had left the room.

'It IS a relief,' assented Mr Pecksniff. 'It is a great relief. But having discharged—I hope with tolerable firmness—the duty which I owed to society, I will now, my dear sir, if you will give me leave, retire to shed a few tears in the back garden, as an humble individual.'

Tom went upstairs; cleared his shelf of books; packed them up with his music and an old fiddle in his trunk; got out his clothes (they were not so many that they made his head ache); put them on the top of his books; and went into the workroom for his case of instruments. There was a ragged stool there, with the horsehair all sticking out of the top like a wig: a very Beast of a stool in itself; on which he had taken up his daily seat, year after year, during the whole period of his service. They had grown older and shabbier in company. Pupils had served their time; seasons had come and gone. Tom and the worn-out stool had held together through it all. That part of the room was traditionally called 'Tom's Corner.' It had been assigned to him at first because of its being situated in a strong draught, and a great way from the fire; and he had occupied it ever since. There were portraits of him on the walls, with all his weak points monstrously portrayed. Diabolical sentiments, foreign to his character, were represented as issuing from his mouth in fat balloons. Every pupil had added something, even unto fancy portraits of his father with one eye, and of his mother with a disproportionate nose, and especially of his sister; who always being presented as extremely beautiful, made full amends to Tom for any other jokes. Under less uncommon circumstances, it would have cut Tom to the heart to leave these things and think that he saw them for the last time; but it didn't now. There was no Pecksniff; there never had been a Pecksniff; and all his other griefs were swallowed up in that.

So, when he returned into the bedroom, and, having fastened his box and a carpet-bag, put on his walking gaiters, and his great-coat, and his hat, and taken his stick in his hand, looked round it for the last time. Early on summer mornings, and by the light of private candle-ends on winter nights, he had read himself half blind in this same room. He had tried in this same room to learn the fiddle under the bedclothes, but yielding to objections from the other pupils, had reluctantly abandoned the design. At any other time he would have parted from it with a pang, thinking of all he had learned there, of the many hours he had passed there; for the love of his very dreams. But there was no Pecksniff; there never had been a Pecksniff, and the unreality of Pecksniff extended itself to the chamber, in which, sitting on one particular bed, the thing supposed to be that Great Abstraction had often preached morality with such effect that Tom had felt a moisture in his eyes, while hanging breathless on the words.

The man engaged to bear his box—Tom knew him well: a Dragon man—came stamping up the stairs, and made a roughish bow to Tom (to whom in common times he would have nodded with a grin) as though he were aware of what had happened, and wished him to perceive it made no difference to HIM. It was clumsily done; he was a mere waterer of horses; but Tom liked the man for it, and felt it more than going away.

Tom would have helped him with the box, but he made no more of it, though it was a heavy one, than an elephant would have made of a castle; just swinging it on his back and bowling downstairs as if, being naturally a heavy sort of fellow, he could carry a box infinitely better than he could go alone. Tom took the carpet-bag, and went downstairs along with him. At the outer door stood Jane, crying with all her might; and on the steps was Mrs Lupin, sobbing bitterly, and putting out her hand for Tom to shake.

'You're coming to the Dragon, Mr Pinch?'

'No,' said Tom, 'no. I shall walk to Salisbury to-night. I couldn't stay here. For goodness' sake, don't make me so unhappy, Mrs Lupin.'

'But you'll come to the Dragon, Mr Pinch. If it's only for tonight. To see me, you know; not as a traveller.'

'God bless my soul!' said Tom, wiping his eyes. 'The kindness of people is enough to break one's heart! I mean to go to Salisbury to-night, my dear good creature. If you'll take care of my box for me till I write for it, I shall consider it the greatest kindness you can do me.'

'I wish,' cried Mrs Lupin, 'there were twenty boxes, Mr Pinch, that I might have 'em all.'

'Thank'ee,' said Tom. 'It's like you. Good-bye. Good-bye.'

There were several people, young and old, standing about the door, some of whom cried with Mrs Lupin; while others tried to keep up a stout heart, as Tom did; and others were absorbed in admiration of Mr Pecksniff—a man who could build a church, as one may say, by squinting at a sheet of paper; and others were divided between that feeling and sympathy with Tom. Mr Pecksniff had appeared on the top of the steps, simultaneously with his old pupil, and while Tom was talking with Mrs Lupin kept his hand stretched out, as though he said 'Go forth!' When Tom went forth, and had turned the corner Mr Pecksniff shook his head, shut his eyes, and heaving a deep sigh, shut the door. On which, the best of Tom's supporters said he must have done some dreadful deed, or such a man as Mr Pecksniff never could have felt like that. If it had been a common quarrel (they observed), he would have said something, but when he didn't, Mr Pinch must have shocked him dreadfully.

Tom was out of hearing of their shrewd opinions, and plodded on as steadily as he could go, until he came within sight of the turnpike where the tollman's family had cried out 'Mr Pinch!' that frosty morning, when he went to meet young Martin. He had got through the village, and this toll-bar was his last trial; but when the infant toll-takers came screeching out, he had half a mind to run for it, and make a bolt across the country.

'Why, deary Mr Pinch! oh, deary sir!' cried the tollman's wife. 'What an unlikely time for you to be a-going this way with a bag!'

'I am going to Salisbury,' said Tom.

'Why, goodness, where's the gig, then?' cried the tollman's wife, looking down the road, as if she thought Tom might have been upset without observing it.

'I haven't got it,' said Tom. 'I—' he couldn't evade it; he felt she would have him in the next question, if he got over this one. 'I have left Mr Pecksniff.'

The tollman—a crusty customer, always smoking solitary pipes in a Windsor chair, inside, set artfully between two little windows that looked up and down the road, so that when he saw anything coming up he might hug himself on having toll to take, and when he saw it going down, might hug himself on having taken it—the tollman was out in an instant.

'Left Mr Pecksniff!' cried the tollman.

'Yes,' said Tom, 'left him.'

The tollman looked at his wife, uncertain whether to ask her if she had anything to suggest, or to order her to mind the children. Astonishment making him surly, he preferred the latter, and sent her into the toll-house with a flea in her ear.

'You left Mr Pecksniff!' cried the tollman, folding his arms, and spreading his legs. 'I should as soon have thought of his head leaving him.'

'Aye!' said Tom, 'so should I, yesterday. Good night!'

If a heavy drove of oxen hadn't come by immediately, the tollman would have gone down to the village straight, to inquire into it. As things turned out, he smoked another pipe, and took his wife into his confidence. But their united sagacity could make nothing of it, and they went to bed—metaphorically—in the dark. But several times that night, when a waggon or other vehicle came through, and the driver asked the tollkeeper 'What news?' he looked at the man by the light of his lantern, to assure himself that he had an interest in the subject, and then said, wrapping his watch-coat round his legs:

'You've heerd of Mr Pecksniff down yonder?'

'Ah! sure-ly!'

'And of his young man Mr Pinch, p'raps?'

'Ah!'

'They've parted.'

After every one of these disclosures, the tollman plunged into his house again, and was seen no more, while the other side went on in great amazement.

But this was long after Tom was abed, and Tom was now with his face towards Salisbury, doing his best to get there. The evening was beautiful at first, but it became cloudy and dull at sunset, and the rain fell heavily soon afterwards. For ten long miles he plodded on, wet through, until at last the lights appeared, and he came into the welcome precincts of the city.

He went to the inn where he had waited for Martin, and briefly answering their inquiries after Mr Pecksniff, ordered a bed. He had no heart for tea or supper, meat or drink of any kind, but sat by himself before an empty table in the public room while the bed was getting ready, revolving in his mind all that had happened that eventful day, and wondering what he could or should do for the future. It was a great relief when the chambermaid came in, and said the bed was ready.

It was a low four-poster, shelving downward in the centre like a trough, and the room was crowded with impracticable tables and exploded chests of drawers, full of damp linen. A graphic representation in oil of a remarkably fat ox hung over the fireplace, and the portrait of some former landlord (who might have been the ox's brother, he was so like him) stared roundly in, at the foot of the bed. A variety of queer smells were partially quenched in the prevailing scent of very old lavender; and the window had not been opened for such a long space of time that it pleaded immemorial usage, and wouldn't come open now.

These were trifles in themselves, but they added to the strangeness of the place, and did not induce Tom to forget his new position. Pecksniff had gone out of the world—had never been in it—and it was as much as Tom could do to say his prayers without him. But he felt happier afterwards, and went to sleep, and dreamed about him as he Never Was.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

TREATS OF TODGER'S AGAIN; AND OF ANOTHER BLIGHTED PLANT BESIDES THE PLANTS UPON THE LEADS

Early on the day next after that on which she bade adieu to the halls of her youth and the scenes of her childhood, Miss Pecksniff, arriving safely at the coach-office in London, was there received, and conducted to her peaceful home beneath the shadow of the Monument, by Mrs Todgers. M. Todgers looked a little worn by cares of gravy and other such solicitudes arising out of her establishment, but displayed her usual earnestness and warmth of manner.

'And how, my sweet Miss Pecksniff,' said she, 'how is your princely pa?'

Miss Pecksniff signified (in confidence) that he contemplated the introduction of a princely ma; and repeated the sentiment that she wasn't blind, and wasn't quite a fool, and wouldn't bear it.

Mrs Todgers was more shocked by the intelligence than any one could have expected. She was quite bitter. She said there was no truth in man and that the warmer he expressed himself, as a general principle, the falser and more treacherous he was. She foresaw with astonishing clearness that the object of Mr Pecksniff's attachment was designing, worthless, and wicked; and receiving from Charity the fullest confirmation of these views, protested with tears in her eyes that she loved Miss Pecksniff like a sister, and felt her injuries as if they were her own.

'Your real darling sister, I have not seen her more than once since her marriage,' said Mrs Todgers, 'and then I thought her looking poorly. My sweet Miss Pecksniff, I always thought that you was to be the lady?'

'Oh dear no!' cried Cherry, shaking her head. 'Oh no, Mrs Todgers. Thank you. No! not for any consideration he could offer.'

'I dare say you are right,' said Mrs Todgers with a sigh. 'I feared it all along. But the misery we have had from that match, here among ourselves, in this house, my dear Miss Pecksniff, nobody would believe.'

'Lor, Mrs Todgers!'

'Awful, awful!' repeated Mrs Todgers, with strong emphasis. 'You recollect our youngest gentleman, my dear?'

'Of course I do,' said Cherry.

'You might have observed,' said Mrs Todgers, 'how he used to watch your sister; and that a kind of stony dumbness came over him whenever she was in company?'

'I am sure I never saw anything of the sort,' said Cherry, in a peevish manner. 'What nonsense, Mrs Todgers!'

'My dear,' returned that lady in a hollow voice, 'I have seen him again and again, sitting over his pie at dinner, with his spoon a perfect fixture in his mouth, looking at your sister. I have seen him standing in a corner of our drawing-room, gazing at her, in such a lonely, melancholy state, that he was more like a Pump than a man, and might have drawed tears.'

'I never saw it!' cried Cherry; 'that's all I can say.'

'But when the marriage took place,' said Mrs Todgers, proceeding with her subject, 'when it was in the paper, and was read out here at breakfast, I thought he had taken leave of his senses, I did indeed. The violence of that young man, my dear Miss Pecksniff; the frightful opinions he expressed upon the subject of self-destruction; the extraordinary actions he performed with his tea; the clenching way in which he bit his bread and butter; the manner in which he taunted Mr Jinkins; all combined to form a picture never to be forgotten.'

'It's a pity he didn't destroy himself, I think,' observed Miss Pecksniff.

'Himself!' said Mrs Todgers, 'it took another turn at night. He was for destroying other people then. There was a little chaffing going on—I hope you don't consider that a low expression, Miss Pecksniff; it is always in our gentlemen's mouths—a little chaffing going on, my dear, among 'em, all in good nature, when suddenly he rose up, foaming with his fury, and but for being held by three would have had Mr Jinkins's life with a bootjack.'

Miss Pecksniff's face expressed supreme indifference.

'And now,' said Mrs Todgers, 'now he is the meekest of men. You can almost bring the tears into his eyes by looking at him. He sits with me the whole day long on Sundays, talking in such a dismal way that I find it next to impossible to keep my spirits up equal to the accommodation of the boarders. His only comfort is in female society. He takes me half-price to the play, to an extent which I sometimes fear is beyond his means; and I see the tears a-standing in his eyes during the whole performance—particularly if it is anything of a comic nature. The turn I experienced only yesterday,' said Mrs Todgers putting her hand to her side, 'when the house-maid threw his bedside carpet out of the window of his room, while I was sitting here, no one can imagine. I thought it was him, and that he had done it at last!'

The contempt with which Miss Charity received this pathetic account of the state to which the youngest gentleman in company was reduced, did not say much for her power of sympathising with that unfortunate character. She treated it with great levity, and went on to inform herself, then and afterwards, whether any other changes had occurred in the commercial boarding-house.

Mr Bailey was gone, and had been succeeded (such is the decay of human greatness!) by an old woman whose name was reported to be Tamaroo—which seemed an impossibility. Indeed it appeared in the fullness of time that the jocular boarders had appropriated the word from an English ballad, in which it is supposed to express the bold and fiery nature of a certain hackney coachman; and that it was bestowed upon Mr Bailey's successor by reason of her having nothing fiery about her, except an occasional attack of that fire which is called St. Anthony's. This ancient female had been engaged, in fulfillment of a vow, registered by Mrs Todgers, that no more boys should darken the commercial doors; and she was chiefly remarkable for a total absence of all comprehension upon every subject whatever. She was a perfect Tomb for messages and small parcels; and when dispatched to the Post Office with letters, had been frequently seen endeavouring to insinuate them into casual chinks in private doors, under the delusion that any door with a hole in it would answer the purpose. She was a very little old woman, and always wore a very coarse apron with a bib before and a loop behind, together with bandages on her wrists, which appeared to be afflicted with an everlasting sprain. She was on all occasions chary of opening the street door, and ardent to shut it again; and she waited at table in a bonnet.

This was the only great change over and above the change which had fallen on the youngest gentleman. As for him, he more than corroborated the account of Mrs Todgers; possessing greater sensibility than even she had given him credit for. He entertained some terrible notions of Destiny, among other matters, and talked much about people's 'Missions'; upon which he seemed to have some private information not generally attainable, as he knew it had been poor Merry's mission to crush him in the bud. He was very frail and tearful; for being aware that a shepherd's mission was to pipe to his flocks, and that a boatswain's mission was to pipe all hands, and that one man's mission was to be a paid piper, and another man's mission was to pay the piper, so he had got it into his head that his own peculiar mission was to pipe his eye. Which he did perpetually.

He often informed Mrs Todgers that the sun had set upon him; that the billows had rolled over him; that the car of Juggernaut had crushed him, and also that the deadly Upas tree of Java had blighted him. His name was Moddle.

Towards this most unhappy Moddle, Miss Pecksniff conducted herself at first with distant haughtiness, being in no humour to be entertained with dirges in honour of her married sister. The poor young gentleman was additionally crushed by this, and remonstrated with Mrs Todgers on the subject.

'Even she turns from me, Mrs Todgers,' said Moddle.

'Then why don't you try and be a little bit more cheerful, sir?' retorted Mrs Todgers.

'Cheerful, Mrs Todgers! cheerful!' cried the youngest gentleman; 'when she reminds me of days for ever fled, Mrs Todgers!'

'Then you had better avoid her for a short time, if she does,' said Mrs Todgers, 'and come to know her again, by degrees. That's my advice.'

'But I can't avoid her,' replied Moddle, 'I haven't strength of mind to do it. Oh, Mrs Todgers, if you knew what a comfort her nose is to me!'

'Her nose, sir!' Mrs Todgers cried.

'Her profile, in general,' said the youngest gentleman, 'but particularly her nose. It's so like;' here he yielded to a burst of grief. 'It's so like hers who is Another's, Mrs Todgers!'

The observant matron did not fail to report this conversation to Charity, who laughed at the time, but treated Mr Moddle that very evening with increased consideration, and presented her side face to him as much as possible. Mr Moddle was not less sentimental than usual; was rather more so, if anything; but he sat and stared at her with glistening eyes, and seemed grateful.

'Well, sir!' said the lady of the Boarding-House next day. 'You held up your head last night. You're coming round, I think.'

'Only because she's so like her who is Another's, Mrs Todgers,' rejoined the youth. 'When she talks, and when she smiles, I think I'm looking on HER brow again, Mrs Todgers.'

This was likewise carried to Charity, who talked and smiled next evening in her most engaging manner, and rallying Mr Moddle on the lowness of his spirits, challenged him to play a rubber at cribbage. Mr Moddle taking up the gauntlet, they played several rubbers for sixpences, and Charity won them all. This may have been partially attributable to the gallantry of the youngest gentleman, but it was certainly referable to the state of his feelings also; for his eyes being frequently dimmed by tears, he thought that aces were tens, and knaves queens, which at times occasioned some confusion in his play.

On the seventh night of cribbage, when Mrs Todgers, sitting by, proposed that instead of gambling they should play for 'love,' Mr Moddle was seen to change colour. On the fourteenth night, he kissed Miss Pecksniff's snuffers, in the passage, when she went upstairs to bed; meaning to have kissed her hand, but missing it.

In short, Mr Moddle began to be impressed with the idea that Miss Pecksniff's mission was to comfort him; and Miss Pecksniff began to speculate on the probability of its being her mission to become ultimately Mrs Moddle. He was a young gentleman (Miss Pecksniff was not a very young lady) with rising prospects, and 'almost' enough to live on. Really it looked very well.

Besides—besides—he had been regarded as devoted to Merry. Merry had joked about him, and had once spoken of it to her sister as a conquest. He was better looking, better shaped, better spoken, better tempered, better mannered than Jonas. He was easy to manage, could be made to consult the humours of his Betrothed, and could be shown off like a lamb when Jonas was a bear. There was the rub!

In the meantime the cribbage went on, and Mrs Todgers went off; for the youngest gentleman, dropping her society, began to take Miss Pecksniff to the play. He also began, as Mrs Todgers said, to slip home 'in his dinner-times,' and to get away from 'the office' at unholy seasons; and twice, as he informed Mrs Todgers himself, he received anonymous letters, enclosing cards from Furniture Warehouses—clearly the act of that ungentlemanly ruffian Jinkins; only he hadn't evidence enough to call him out upon. All of which, so Mrs Todgers told Miss Pecksniff, spoke as plain English as the shining sun.

'My dear Miss Pecksniff, you may depend upon it,' said Mrs Todgers, 'that he is burning to propose.'

'My goodness me, why don't he then?' cried Cherry.

'Men are so much more timid than we think 'em, my dear,' returned Mrs Todgers. 'They baulk themselves continually. I saw the words on Todgers's lips for months and months and months, before he said 'em.'

Miss Pecksniff submitted that Todgers might not have been a fair specimen.

'Oh yes, he was. Oh bless you, yes, my dear. I was very particular in those days, I assure you,' said Mrs Todgers, bridling. 'No, no. You give Mr Moddle a little encouragement, Miss Pecksniff, if you wish him to speak; and he'll speak fast enough, depend upon it.'

'I am sure I don't know what encouragement he would have, Mrs Todgers,' returned Charity. 'He walks with me, and plays cards with me, and he comes and sits alone with me.'

'Quite right,' said Mrs Todgers. 'That's indispensable, my dear.'

'And he sits very close to me.'

'Also quite correct,' said Mrs Todgers.

'And he looks at me.'

'To be sure he does,' said Mrs Todgers.

'And he has his arm upon the back of the chair or sofa, or whatever it is—behind me, you know.'

'I should think so,' said Mrs Todgers.

'And then he begins to cry!'

Mrs Todgers admitted that he might do better than that; and might undoubtedly profit by the recollection of the great Lord Nelson's signal at the battle of Trafalgar. Still, she said, he would come round, or, not to mince the matter, would be brought round, if Miss Pecksniff took up a decided position, and plainly showed him that it must be done.

Determining to regulate her conduct by this opinion, the young lady received Mr Moddle, on the earliest subsequent occasion, with an air of constraint; and gradually leading him to inquire, in a dejected manner, why she was so changed, confessed to him that she felt it necessary for their mutual peace and happiness to take a decided step. They had been much together lately, she observed, much together, and had tasted the sweets of a genuine reciprocity of sentiment. She never could forget him, nor could she ever cease to think of him with feelings of the liveliest friendship, but people had begun to talk, the thing had been observed, and it was necessary that they should be nothing more to each other, than any gentleman and lady in society usually are. She was glad she had had the resolution to say thus much before her feelings had been tried too far; they had been greatly tried, she would admit; but though she was weak and silly, she would soon get the better of it, she hoped.

Moddle, who had by this time become in the last degree maudlin, and wept abundantly, inferred from the foregoing avowal, that it was his mission to communicate to others the blight which had fallen on himself; and that, being a kind of unintentional Vampire, he had had Miss Pecksniff assigned to him by the Fates, as Victim Number One. Miss Pecksniff controverting this opinion as sinful, Moddle was goaded on to ask whether she could be contented with a blighted heart; and it appearing on further examination that she could be, plighted his dismal troth, which was accepted and returned.

He bore his good fortune with the utmost moderation. Instead of being triumphant, he shed more tears than he had ever been known to shed before; and, sobbing, said:

'Oh! what a day this has been! I can't go back to the office this afternoon. Oh, what a trying day this has been! Good Gracious!'

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

FURTHER PROCEEDINGS IN EDEN, AND A PROCEEDING OUT OF IT. MARTIN MAKES A DISCOVERY OF SOME IMPORTANCE

From Mr Moddle to Eden is an easy and natural transition. Mr Moddle, living in the atmosphere of Miss Pecksniff's love, dwelt (if he had but known it) in a terrestrial Paradise. The thriving city of Eden was also a terrestrial Paradise, upon the showing of its proprietors. The beautiful Miss Pecksniff might have been poetically described as a something too good for man in his fallen and degraded state. That was exactly the character of the thriving city of Eden, as poetically heightened by Zephaniah Scadder, General Choke, and other worthies; part and parcel of the talons of that great American Eagle, which is always airing itself sky-high in purest aether, and never, no never, never, tumbles down with draggled wings into the mud.

When Mark Tapley, leaving Martin in the architectural and surveying offices, had effectually strengthened and encouraged his own spirits by the contemplation of their joint misfortunes, he proceeded, with new cheerfulness, in search of help; congratulating himself, as he went along, on the enviable position to which he had at last attained.

'I used to think, sometimes,' said Mr Tapley, 'as a desolate island would suit me, but I should only have had myself to provide for there, and being naturally a easy man to manage, there wouldn't have been much credit in THAT. Now here I've got my partner to take care on, and he's something like the sort of man for the purpose. I want a man as is always a-sliding off his legs when he ought to be on 'em. I want a man as is so low down in the school of life that he's always a-making figures of one in his copy-book, and can't get no further. I want a man as is his own great coat and cloak, and is always a-wrapping himself up in himself. And I have got him too,' said Mr Tapley, after a moment's silence. 'What a happiness!'

He paused to look round, uncertain to which of the log-houses he should repair.

'I don't know which to take,' he observed; 'that's the truth. They're equally prepossessing outside, and equally commodious, no doubt, within; being fitted up with every convenience that a Alligator, in a state of natur', could possibly require. Let me see! The citizen as turned out last night, lives under water, in the right hand dog-kennel at the corner. I don't want to trouble him if I can help it, poor man, for he is a melancholy object; a reg'lar Settler in every respect. There's house with a winder, but I am afraid of their being proud. I don't know whether a door ain't too aristocratic; but here goes for the first one!'

He went up to the nearest cabin, and knocked with his hand. Being desired to enter, he complied.

'Neighbour,' said Mark; 'for I AM a neighbour, though you don't know me; I've come a-begging. Hallo! hal—lo! Am I a-bed, and dreaming!'

He made this exclamation on hearing his own name pronounced, and finding himself clasped about the skirts by two little boys, whose faces he had often washed, and whose suppers he had often cooked, on board of that noble and fast-sailing line-of-packet ship, the Screw.

'My eyes is wrong!' said Mark. 'I don't believe 'em. That ain't my fellow-passenger younder, a-nursing her little girl, who, I am sorry to see, is so delicate; and that ain't her husband as come to New York to fetch her. Nor these,' he added, looking down upon the boys, 'ain't them two young shavers as was so familiar to me; though they are uncommon like 'em. That I must confess.'

The woman shed tears, in very joy to see him; the man shook both his hands and would not let them go; the two boys hugged his legs; the sick child in the mother's arms stretched out her burning little fingers, and muttered, in her hoarse, dry throat, his well-remembered name.

It was the same family, sure enough. Altered by the salubrious air of Eden. But the same.

'This is a new sort of a morning call,' said Mark, drawing a long breath. 'It strikes one all of a heap. Wait a little bit! I'm a-coming round fast. That'll do! These gentlemen ain't my friends. Are they on the visiting list of the house?'

The inquiry referred to certain gaunt pigs, who had walked in after him, and were much interested in the heels of the family. As they did not belong to the mansion, they were expelled by the two little boys.

'I ain't superstitious about toads,' said Mark, looking round the room, 'but if you could prevail upon the two or three I see in company, to step out at the same time, my young friends, I think they'd find the open air refreshing. Not that I at all object to 'em. A very handsome animal is a toad,' said Mr Tapley, sitting down upon a stool; 'very spotted; very like a partickler style of old gentleman about the throat; very bright-eyed, very cool, and very slippy. But one sees 'em to the best advantage out of doors perhaps.'

While pretending, with such talk as this, to be perfectly at his ease, and to be the most indifferent and careless of men, Mark Tapley had an eye on all around him. The wan and meagre aspect of the family, the changed looks of the poor mother, the fevered child she held in her lap, the air of great despondency and little hope on everything, were plain to him, and made a deep impression on his mind. He saw it all as clearly and as quickly, as with his bodily eyes he saw the rough shelves supported by pegs driven between the logs, of which the house was made; the flour-cask in the corner, serving also for a table; the blankets, spades, and other articles against the walls; the damp that blotched the ground; or the crop of vegetable rottenness in every crevice of the hut.

'How is it that you have come here?' asked the man, when their first expressions of surprise were over.

'Why, we come by the steamer last night,' replied Mark. 'Our intention is to make our fortuns with punctuality and dispatch; and to retire upon our property as soon as ever it's realised. But how are you all? You're looking noble!'

'We are but sickly now,' said the poor woman, bending over her child. 'But we shall do better when we are seasoned to the place.'

'There are some here,' thought Mark 'whose seasoning will last for ever.'

But he said cheerfully, 'Do better! To be sure you will. We shall all do better. What we've got to do is, to keep up our spirits, and be neighbourly. We shall come all right in the end, never fear. That reminds me, by the bye, that my partner's all wrong just at present; and that I looked in to beg for him. I wish you'd come and give me your opinion of him, master.'

That must have been a very unreasonable request on the part of Mark Tapley, with which, in their gratitude for his kind offices on board the ship, they would not have complied instantly. The man rose to accompany him without a moment's delay. Before they went, Mark took the sick child in his arms, and tried to comfort the mother; but the hand of death was on it then, he saw.

They found Martin in the house, lying wrapped up in his blanket on the ground. He was, to all appearance, very ill indeed, and shook and shivered horribly; not as people do from cold, but in a frightful kind of spasm or convulsion, that racked his whole body. Mark's friend pronounced his disease an aggravated kind of fever, accompanied with ague; which was very common in those parts, and which he predicted would be worse to-morrow, and for many more to-morrows. He had had it himself off and on, he said, for a couple of years or so; but he was thankful that, while so many he had known had died about him, he had escaped with life.

'And with not too much of that,' thought Mark, surveying his emaciated form. 'Eden for ever!'

They had some medicine in their chest; and this man of sad experience showed Mark how and when to administer it, and how he could best alleviate the sufferings of Martin. His attentions did not stop there; for he was backwards and forwards constantly, and rendered Mark good service in all his brisk attempts to make their situation more endurable. Hope or comfort for the future he could not bestow. The season was a sickly one; the settlement a grave. His child died that night; and Mark, keeping the secret from Martin, helped to bury it, beneath a tree, next day.

With all his various duties of attendance upon Martin (who became the more exacting in his claims, the worse he grew), Mark worked out of doors, early and late; and with the assistance of his friend and others, laboured to do something with their land. Not that he had the least strength of heart or hope, or steady purpose in so doing, beyond the habitual cheerfulness of his disposition, and his amazing power of self-sustainment; for within himself, he looked on their condition as beyond all hope, and, in his own words, 'came out strong' in consequence.

'As to coming out as strong as I could wish, sir,' he confided to Martin in a leisure moment; that is to say, one evening, while he was washing the linen of the establishment, after a hard day's work, 'that I give up. It's a piece of good fortune as never is to happen to me, I see!'

'Would you wish for circumstances stronger than these?' Martin retorted with a groan, from underneath his blanket.

'Why, only see how easy they might have been stronger, sir,' said Mark, 'if it wasn't for the envy of that uncommon fortun of mine, which is always after me, and tripping me up. The night we landed here, I thought things did look pretty jolly. I won't deny it. I thought they did look pretty jolly.'

'How do they look now?' groaned Martin.

'Ah!' said Mark, 'Ah, to be sure. That's the question. How do they look now? On the very first morning of my going out, what do I do? Stumble on a family I know, who are constantly assisting of us in all sorts of ways, from that time to this! That won't do, you know; that ain't what I'd a right to expect. If I had stumbled on a serpent and got bit; or stumbled on a first-rate patriot, and got bowie-knifed, or stumbled on a lot of Sympathisers with inverted shirt-collars, and got made a lion of; I might have distinguished myself, and earned some credit. As it is, the great object of my voyage is knocked on the head. So it would be, wherever I went. How do you feel to-night, sir?'

'Worse than ever,' said poor Martin.

'That's something,' returned Mark, 'but not enough. Nothing but being very bad myself, and jolly to the last, will ever do me justice.'

'In Heaven's name, don't talk of that,' said Martin with a thrill of terror. 'What should I do, Mark, if you were taken ill!'

Mr Tapley's spirits appeared to be stimulated by this remark, although it was not a very flattering one. He proceeded with his washing in a brighter mood; and observed 'that his glass was arising.'

'There's one good thing in this place, sir,' said Mr Tapley, scrubbing away at the linen, 'as disposes me to be jolly; and that is that it's a reg'lar little United States in itself. There's two or three American settlers left; and they coolly comes over one, even here, sir, as if it was the wholesomest and loveliest spot in the world. But they're like the cock that went and hid himself to save his life, and was found out by the noise he made. They can't help crowing. They was born to do it, and do it they must, whatever comes of it.'

Glancing from his work out at the door as he said these words, Mark's eyes encountered a lean person in a blue frock and a straw hat, with a short black pipe in his mouth, and a great hickory stick studded all over with knots, in his hand; who smoking and chewing as he came along, and spitting frequently, recorded his progress by a train of decomposed tobacco on the ground.

'Here's one on 'em,' cried Mark, 'Hannibal Chollop.'

'Don't let him in,' said Martin, feebly.

'He won't want any letting in,' replied Mark. 'He'll come in, sir.' Which turned out to be quite true, for he did. His face was almost as hard and knobby as his stick; and so were his hands. His head was like an old black hearth-broom. He sat down on the chest with his hat on; and crossing his legs and looking up at Mark, said, without removing his pipe:

'Well, Mr Co.! and how do you git along, sir?'

It may be necessary to observe that Mr Tapley had gravely introduced himself to all strangers, by that name.

'Pretty well, sir; pretty well,' said Mark.

'If this ain't Mr Chuzzlewit, ain't it!' exclaimed the visitor 'How do YOU git along, sir?'

Martin shook his head, and drew the blanket over it involuntarily; for he felt that Hannibal was going to spit; and his eye, as the song says, was upon him.

'You need not regard me, sir,' observed Mr Chollop, complacently. 'I am fever-proof, and likewise agur.'

'Mine was a more selfish motive,' said Martin, looking out again. 'I was afraid you were going to—'

'I can calc'late my distance, sir,' returned Mr Chollop, 'to an inch.'

With a proof of which happy faculty he immediately favoured him.

'I re-quire, sir,' said Hannibal, 'two foot clear in a circ'lar di-rection, and can engage my-self toe keep within it. I HAVE gone ten foot, in a circ'lar di-rection, but that was for a wager.'

'I hope you won it, sir,' said Mark.

'Well, sir, I realised the stakes,' said Chollop. 'Yes, sir.'

He was silent for a time, during which he was actively engaged in the formation of a magic circle round the chest on which he sat. When it was completed, he began to talk again.

'How do you like our country, sir?' he inquired, looking at Martin.

'Not at all,' was the invalid's reply.

Chollop continued to smoke without the least appearance of emotion, until he felt disposed to speak again. That time at length arriving, he took his pipe from his mouth, and said:

'I am not surprised to hear you say so. It re-quires An elevation, and A preparation of the intellect. The mind of man must be prepared for Freedom, Mr Co.'

He addressed himself to Mark; because he saw that Martin, who wished him to go, being already half-mad with feverish irritation, which the droning voice of this new horror rendered almost insupportable, had closed his eyes, and turned on his uneasy bed.

'A little bodily preparation wouldn't be amiss, either, would it, sir,' said Mark, 'in the case of a blessed old swamp like this?'

'Do you con-sider this a swamp, sir?' inquired Chollop gravely.

'Why yes, sir,' returned Mark. 'I haven't a doubt about it myself.'

'The sentiment is quite Europian,' said the major, 'and does not surprise me; what would your English millions say to such a swamp in England, sir?'

'They'd say it was an uncommon nasty one, I should think, said Mark; 'and that they would rather be inoculated for fever in some other way.'

'Europian!' remarked Chollop, with sardonic pity. 'Quite Europian!'

And there he sat. Silent and cool, as if the house were his; smoking away like a factory chimney.

Mr Chollop was, of course, one of the most remarkable men in the country; but he really was a notorious person besides. He was usually described by his friends, in the South and West, as 'a splendid sample of our na-tive raw material, sir,' and was much esteemed for his devotion to rational Liberty; for the better propagation whereof he usually carried a brace of revolving pistols in his coat pocket, with seven barrels a-piece. He also carried, amongst other trinkets, a sword-stick, which he called his 'Tickler.' and a great knife, which (for he was a man of a pleasant turn of humour) he called 'Ripper,' in allusion to its usefulness as a means of ventilating the stomach of any adversary in a close contest. He had used these weapons with distinguished effect in several instances, all duly chronicled in the newspapers; and was greatly beloved for the gallant manner in which he had 'jobbed out' the eye of one gentleman, as he was in the act of knocking at his own street-door.

Mr Chollop was a man of a roving disposition; and, in any less advanced community, might have been mistaken for a violent vagabond. But his fine qualities being perfectly understood and appreciated in those regions where his lot was cast, and where he had many kindred spirits to consort with, he may be regarded as having been born under a fortunate star, which is not always the case with a man so much before the age in which he lives. Preferring, with a view to the gratification of his tickling and ripping fancies, to dwell upon the outskirts of society, and in the more remote towns and cities, he was in the habit of emigrating from place to place, and establishing in each some business—usually a newspaper—which he presently sold; for the most part closing the bargain by challenging, stabbing, pistolling, or gouging the new editor, before he had quite taken possession of the property.

He had come to Eden on a speculation of this kind, but had abandoned it, and was about to leave. He always introduced himself to strangers as a worshipper of Freedom; was the consistent advocate of Lynch law, and slavery; and invariably recommended, both in print and speech, the 'tarring and feathering' of any unpopular person who differed from himself. He called this 'planting the standard of civilization in the wilder gardens of My country.'

There is little doubt that Chollop would have planted this standard in Eden at Mark's expense, in return for his plainness of speech (for the genuine Freedom is dumb, save when she vaunts herself), but for the utter desolation and decay prevailing in the settlement, and his own approaching departure from it. As it was, he contented himself with showing Mark one of the revolving-pistols, and asking him what he thought of that weapon.

'It ain't long since I shot a man down with that, sir, in the State of IllinOY,' observed Chollop.

'Did you, indeed!' said Mark, without the smallest agitation. 'Very free of you. And very independent!'

'I shot him down, sir,' pursued Chollop, 'for asserting in the Spartan Portico, a tri-weekly journal, that the ancient Athenians went a-head of the present Locofoco Ticket.'

'And what's that?' asked Mark.

'Europian not to know,' said Chollop, smoking placidly. 'Europian quite!'

After a short devotion to the interests of the magic circle, he resumed the conversation by observing:

'You won't half feel yourself at home in Eden, now?'

'No,' said Mark, 'I don't.'

'You miss the imposts of your country. You miss the house dues?' observed Chollop.

'And the houses—rather,' said Mark.

'No window dues here, sir,' observed Chollop.

'And no windows to put 'em on,' said Mark.

'No stakes, no dungeons, no blocks, no racks, no scaffolds, no thumbscrews, no pikes, no pillories,' said Chollop.

'Nothing but rewolwers and bowie-knives,' returned Mark. 'And what are they? Not worth mentioning!'

The man who had met them on the night of their arrival came crawling up at this juncture, and looked in at the door.

'Well, sir,' said Chollop. 'How do YOU git along?'

He had considerable difficulty in getting along at all, and said as much in reply.

'Mr Co. And me, sir,' observed Chollop, 'are disputating a piece. He ought to be slicked up pretty smart to disputate between the Old World and the New, I do expect?'

'Well!' returned the miserable shadow. 'So he had.'

'I was merely observing, sir,' said Mark, addressing this new visitor, 'that I looked upon the city in which we have the honour to live, as being swampy. What's your sentiments?'

'I opinionate it's moist perhaps, at certain times,' returned the man.

'But not as moist as England, sir?' cried Chollop, with a fierce expression in his face.

'Oh! Not as moist as England; let alone its Institutions,' said the man.

'I should hope there ain't a swamp in all Americay, as don't whip THAT small island into mush and molasses,' observed Chollop, decisively. 'You bought slick, straight, and right away, of Scadder, sir?' to Mark.

He answered in the affirmative. Mr Chollop winked at the other citizen.

'Scadder is a smart man, sir? He is a rising man? He is a man as will come up'ards, right side up, sir?' Mr Chollop winked again at the other citizen.

'He should have his right side very high up, if I had my way,' said Mark. 'As high up as the top of a good tall gallows, perhaps.'

Mr Chollop was so delighted at the smartness of his excellent countryman having been too much for the Britisher, and at the Britisher's resenting it, that he could contain himself no longer, and broke forth in a shout of delight. But the strangest exposition of this ruling passion was in the other—the pestilence-stricken, broken, miserable shadow of a man—who derived so much entertainment from the circumstance that he seemed to forget his own ruin in thinking of it, and laughed outright when he said 'that Scadder was a smart man, and had draw'd a lot of British capital that way, as sure as sun-up.'

After a full enjoyment of this joke, Mr Hannibal Chollop sat smoking and improving the circle, without making any attempts either to converse or to take leave; apparently labouring under the not uncommon delusion that for a free and enlightened citizen of the United States to convert another man's house into a spittoon for two or three hours together, was a delicate attention, full of interest and politeness, of which nobody could ever tire. At last he rose.

'I am a-going easy,' he observed.

Mark entreated him to take particular care of himself.

'Afore I go,' he said sternly, 'I have got a leetle word to say to you. You are darnation 'cute, you are.'

Mark thanked him for the compliment.

'But you are much too 'cute to last. I can't con-ceive of any spotted Painter in the bush, as ever was so riddled through and through as you will be, I bet.'

'What for?' asked Mark.

'We must be cracked up, sir,' retorted Chollop, in a tone of menace. 'You are not now in A despotic land. We are a model to the airth, and must be jist cracked-up, I tell you.'

'What! I speak too free, do I?' cried Mark.

'I have draw'd upon A man, and fired upon A man for less,' said Chollop, frowning. 'I have know'd strong men obleeged to make themselves uncommon skase for less. I have know'd men Lynched for less, and beaten into punkin'-sarse for less, by an enlightened people. We are the intellect and virtue of the airth, the cream of human natur', and the flower Of moral force. Our backs is easy ris. We must be cracked-up, or they rises, and we snarls. We shows our teeth, I tell you, fierce. You'd better crack us up, you had!'

After the delivery of this caution, Mr Chollop departed; with Ripper, Tickler, and the revolvers, all ready for action on the shortest notice.

'Come out from under the blanket, sir,' said Mark, 'he's gone. What's this!' he added softly; kneeling down to look into his partner's face, and taking his hot hand. 'What's come of all that chattering and swaggering? He's wandering in his mind to-night, and don't know me!'

Martin indeed was dangerously ill; very near his death. He lay in that state many days, during which time Mark's poor friends, regardless of themselves, attended him. Mark, fatigued in mind and body; working all the day and sitting up at night; worn with hard living and the unaccustomed toil of his new life; surrounded by dismal and discouraging circumstances of every kind; never complained or yielded in the least degree. If ever he had thought Martin selfish or inconsiderate, or had deemed him energetic only by fits and starts, and then too passive for their desperate fortunes, he now forgot it all. He remembered nothing but the better qualities of his fellow-wanderer, and was devoted to him, heart and hand.

Many weeks elapsed before Martin was strong enough to move about with the help of a stick and Mark's arm; and even then his recovery, for want of wholesome air and proper nourishment, was very slow. He was yet in a feeble and weak condition, when the misfourtune he had so much dreaded fell upon them. Mark was taken ill.

Mark fought against it; but the malady fought harder, and his efforts were in vain.

'Floored for the present, sir,' he said one morning, sinking back upon his bed; 'but jolly!'

Floored indeed, and by a heavy blow! As any one but Martin might have known beforehand.

If Mark's friends had been kind to Martin (and they had been very), they were twenty times kinder to Mark. And now it was Martin's turn to work, and sit beside the bed and watch, and listen through the long, long nights, to every sound in the gloomy wilderness; and hear poor Mr Tapley, in his wandering fancy, playing at skittles in the Dragon, making love-remonstrances to Mrs Lupin, getting his sea-legs on board the Screw, travelling with old Tom Pinch on English roads, and burning stumps of trees in Eden, all at once.

But whenever Martin gave him drink or medicine, or tended him in any way, or came into the house returning from some drudgery without, the patient Mr Tapley brightened up and cried: 'I'm jolly, sir; 'I'm jolly!'

Now, when Martin began to think of this, and to look at Mark as he lay there; never reproaching him by so much as an expression of regret; never murmuring; always striving to be manful and staunch; he began to think, how was it that this man who had had so few advantages, was so much better than he who had had so many? And attendance upon a sick bed, but especially the sick bed of one whom we have been accustomed to see in full activity and vigour, being a great breeder of reflection, he began to ask himself in what they differed.

He was assisted in coming to a conclusion on this head by the frequent presence of Mark's friend, their fellow-passenger across the ocean, which suggested to him that in regard to having aided her, for example, they had differed very much. Somehow he coupled Tom Pinch with this train of reflection; and thinking that Tom would be very likely to have struck up the same sort of acquaintance under similar circumstances, began to think in what respects two people so extremely different were like each other, and were unlike him. At first sight there was nothing very distressing in these meditations, but they did undoubtedly distress him for all that.

Martin's nature was a frank and generous one; but he had been bred up in his grandfather's house; and it will usually be found that the meaner domestic vices propagate themselves to be their own antagonists. Selfishness does this especially; so do suspicion, cunning, stealth, and covetous propensities. Martin had unconsciously reasoned as a child, 'My guardian takes so much thought of himself, that unless I do the like by MYself, I shall be forgotten.' So he had grown selfish.

But he had never known it. If any one had taxed him with the vice, he would have indignantly repelled the accusation, and conceived himself unworthily aspersed. He never would have known it, but that being newly risen from a bed of dangerous sickness, to watch by such another couch, he felt how nearly Self had dropped into the grave, and what a poor dependent, miserable thing it was.

It was natural for him to reflect—he had months to do it in—upon his own escape, and Mark's extremity. This led him to consider which of them could be the better spared, and why? Then the curtain slowly rose a very little way; and Self, Self, Self, was shown below.

He asked himself, besides, when dreading Mark's decease (as all men do and must, at such a time), whether he had done his duty by him, and had deserved and made a good response to his fidelity and zeal. No. Short as their companionship had been, he felt in many, many instances, that there was blame against himself; and still inquiring why, the curtain slowly rose a little more, and Self, Self, Self, dilated on the scene.

It was long before he fixed the knowledge of himself so firmly in his mind that he could thoroughly discern the truth; but in the hideous solitude of that most hideous place, with Hope so far removed, Ambition quenched, and Death beside him rattling at the very door, reflection came, as in a plague-beleaguered town; and so he felt and knew the failing of his life, and saw distinctly what an ugly spot it was.

Eden was a hard school to learn so hard a lesson in; but there were teachers in the swamp and thicket, and the pestilential air, who had a searching method of their own.

He made a solemn resolution that when his strength returned he would not dispute the point or resist the conviction, but would look upon it as an established fact, that selfishness was in his breast, and must be rooted out. He was so doubtful (and with justice) of his own character, that he determined not to say one word of vain regret or good resolve to Mark, but steadily to keep his purpose before his own eyes solely; and there was not a jot of pride in this; nothing but humility and steadfastness; the best armour he could wear. So low had Eden brought him down. So high had Eden raised him up.

After a long and lingering illness (in certain forlorn stages of which, when too far gone to speak, he had feebly written 'jolly!' on a slate), Mark showed some symptoms of returning health. They came and went, and flickered for a time; but he began to mend at last decidedly; and after that continued to improve from day to day.

As soon as he was well enough to talk without fatigue, Martin consulted him upon a project he had in his mind, and which a few months back he would have carried into execution without troubling anybody's head but his own.

'Ours is a desperate case,' said Martin. 'Plainly. The place is deserted; its failure must have become known; and selling what we have bought to any one, for anything, is hopeless, even if it were honest. We left home on a mad enterprise, and have failed. The only hope left us, the only one end for which we have now to try, is to quit this settlement for ever, and get back to England. Anyhow! by any means! only to get back there, Mark.'

'That's all, sir,' returned Mr Tapley, with a significant stress upon the words; 'only that!'

'Now, upon this side of the water,' said Martin, 'we have but one friend who can help us, and that is Mr Bevan.'

'I thought of him when you was ill,' said Mark.

'But for the time that would be lost, I would even write to my grandfather,' Martin went on to say, 'and implore him for money to free us from this trap into which we were so cruelly decoyed. Shall I try Mr Bevan first?'

'He's a very pleasant sort of a gentleman,' said Mark. 'I think so.'

'The few goods we brought here, and in which we spent our money, would produce something if sold,' resumed Martin; 'and whatever they realise shall be paid him instantly. But they can't be sold here.'

'There's nobody but corpses to buy 'em,' said Mr Tapley, shaking his head with a rueful air, 'and pigs.'

'Shall I tell him so, and only ask him for money enough to enable us by the cheapest means to reach New York, or any port from which we may hope to get a passage home, by serving in any capacity? Explaining to him at the same time how I am connected, and that I will endeavour to repay him, even through my grandfather, immediately on our arrival in England?'

'Why to be sure,' said Mark: 'he can only say no, and he may say yes. If you don't mind trying him, sir—'

'Mind!' exclaimed Martin. 'I am to blame for coming here, and I would do anything to get away. I grieve to think of the past. If I had taken your opinion sooner, Mark, we never should have been here, I am certain.'

Mr Tapley was very much surprised at this admission, but protested, with great vehemence, that they would have been there all the same; and that he had set his heart upon coming to Eden, from the first word he had ever heard of it.

Martin then read him a letter to Mr Bevan, which he had already prepared. It was frankly and ingenuously written, and described their situation without the least concealment; plainly stated the miseries they had undergone; and preferred their request in modest but straightforward terms. Mark highly commended it; and they determined to dispatch it by the next steamboat going the right way, that might call to take in wood at Eden—where there was plenty of wood to spare. Not knowing how to address Mr Bevan at his own place of abode, Martin superscribed it to the care of the memorable Mr Norris of New York, and wrote upon the cover an entreaty that it might be forwarded without delay.

More than a week elapsed before a boat appeared; but at length they were awakened very early one morning by the high-pressure snorting of the 'Esau Slodge;' named after one of the most remarkable men in the country, who had been very eminent somewhere. Hurrying down to the landing-place, they got it safe on board; and waiting anxiously to see the boat depart, stopped up the gangway; an instance of neglect which caused the 'Capting' of the Esau Slodge to 'wish he might be sifted fine as flour, and whittled small as chips; that if they didn't come off that there fixing right smart too, he'd spill 'em in the drink;' whereby the Capting metaphorically said he'd throw them in the river.

They were not likely to receive an answer for eight or ten weeks at the earliest. In the meantime they devoted such strength as they had to the attempted improvement of their land; to clearing some of it, and preparing it for useful purposes. Monstrously defective as their farming was, still it was better than their neighbours'; for Mark had some practical knowledge of such matters, and Martin learned of him; whereas the other settlers who remained upon the putrid swamp (a mere handful, and those withered by disease), appeared to have wandered there with the idea that husbandry was the natural gift of all mankind. They helped each other after their own manner in these struggles, and in all others; but they worked as hopelessly and sadly as a gang of convicts in a penal settlement.

Often at night when Mark and Martin were alone, and lying down to sleep, they spoke of home, familiar places, houses, roads, and people whom they knew; sometimes in the lively hope of seeing them again, and sometimes with a sorrowful tranquillity, as if that hope were dead. It was a source of great amazement to Mark Tapley to find, pervading all these conversations, a singular alteration in Martin.

'I don't know what to make of him,' he thought one night, 'he ain't what I supposed. He don't think of himself half as much. I'll try him again. Asleep, sir?'

'No, Mark.'

'Thinking of home, sir?'

'Yes, Mark.'

'So was I, sir. I was wondering how Mr Pinch and Mr Pecksniff gets on now.'

'Poor Tom!' said Martin, thoughtfully.

'Weak-minded man, sir,' observed Mr Tapley. 'Plays the organ for nothing, sir. Takes no care of himself?'

'I wish he took a little more, indeed,' said Martin. 'Though I don't know why I should. We shouldn't like him half as well, perhaps.'

'He gets put upon, sir,' hinted Mark.

'Yes!' said Martin, after a short silence. 'I know that, Mark.'

He spoke so regretfully that his partner abandoned the theme, and was silent for a short time until he had thought of another.

'Ah, sir!' said Mark, with a sigh. 'Dear me! You've ventured a good deal for a young lady's love!'

'I tell you what. I'm not so sure of that, Mark,' was the reply; so hastily and energetically spoken, that Martin sat up in his bed to give it. 'I begin to be far from clear upon it. You may depend upon it she is very unhappy. She has sacrificed her peace of mind; she has endangered her interests very much; she can't run away from those who are jealous of her, and opposed to her, as I have done. She has to endure, Mark; to endure without the possibility of action, poor girl! I begin to think that she has more to bear than ever I had. Upon my soul I do!'

Mr Tapley opened his eyes wide in the dark; but did not interrupt.

'And I'll tell you a secret, Mark,' said Martin, 'since we ARE upon this subject. That ring—'

'Which ring, sir?' Mark inquired, opening his eyes still wider.

'That ring she gave me when we parted, Mark. She bought it; bought it; knowing I was poor and proud (Heaven help me! Proud!) and wanted money.'

'Who says so, sir?' asked Mark.

'I say so. I know it. I thought of it, my good fellow, hundreds of times, while you were lying ill. And like a beast, I took it from her hand, and wore it on my own, and never dreamed of this even at the moment when I parted with it, when some faint glimmering of the truth might surely have possessed me! But it's late,' said Martin, checking himself, 'and you are weak and tired, I know. You only talk to cheer me up. Good night! God bless you, Mark!'

'God bless you, sir! But I'm reg'larly defrauded,' thought Mr Tapley, turning round with a happy face. 'It's a swindle. I never entered for this sort of service. There'll be no credit in being jolly with HIM!'

The time wore on, and other steamboats coming from the point on which their hopes were fixed, arrived to take in wood; but still no answer to the letter. Rain, heat, foul slime, and noxious vapour, with all the ills and filthy things they bred, prevailed. The earth, the air, the vegetation, and the water that they drank, all teemed with deadly properties. Their fellow-passenger had lost two children long before; and buried now her last. Such things are much too common to be widely known or cared for. Smart citizens grow rich, and friendless victims smart and die, and are forgotten. That is all.

At last a boat came panting up the ugly river, and stopped at Eden. Mark was waiting at the wood hut when it came, and had a letter handed to him from on board. He bore it off to Martin. They looked at one another, trembling.

'It feels heavy,' faltered Martin. And opening it a little roll of dollar-notes fell out upon the ground.

What either of them said, or did, or felt, at first, neither of them knew. All Mark could ever tell was, that he was at the river's bank again out of breath, before the boat had gone, inquiring when it would retrace its track and put in there.

The answer was, in ten or twelve days; notwithstanding which they began to get their goods together and to tie them up that very night. When this stage of excitement was passed, each of them believed (they found this out, in talking of it afterwards) that he would surely die before the boat returned.

They lived, however, and it came, after the lapse of three long crawling weeks. At sunrise, on an autumn day, they stood upon her deck.

'Courage! We shall meet again!' cried Martin, waving his hand to two thin figures on the bank. 'In the Old World!'

'Or in the next one,' added Mark below his breath. 'To see them standing side by side, so quiet, is a'most the worst of all!'

They looked at one another as the vessel moved away, and then looked backward at the spot from which it hurried fast. The log-house, with the open door, and drooping trees about it; the stagnant morning mist, and red sun, dimly seen beyond; the vapour rising up from land and river; the quick stream making the loathsome banks it washed more flat and dull; how often they returned in dreams! How often it was happiness to wake and find them Shadows that had vanished!

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

IN WHICH THE TRAVELLERS MOVE HOMEWARD, AND ENCOUNTER SOME DISTINGUISHED CHARACTERS UPON THE WAY

Among the passengers on board the steamboat, there was a faint gentleman sitting on a low camp-stool, with his legs on a high barrel of flour, as if he were looking at the prospect with his ankles, who attracted their attention speedily.

He had straight black hair, parted up the middle of his head and hanging down upon his coat; a little fringe of hair upon his chin; wore no neckcloth; a white hat; a suit of black, long in the sleeves and short in the legs; soiled brown stockings and laced shoes. His complexion, naturally muddy, was rendered muddier by too strict an economy of soap and water; and the same observation will apply to the washable part of his attire, which he might have changed with comfort to himself and gratification to his friends. He was about five and thirty; was crushed and jammed up in a heap, under the shade of a large green cotton umbrella; and ruminated over his tobacco-plug like a cow.

He was not singular, to be sure, in these respects; for every gentleman on board appeared to have had a difference with his laundress and to have left off washing himself in early youth. Every gentleman, too, was perfectly stopped up with tight plugging, and was dislocated in the greater part of his joints. But about this gentleman there was a peculiar air of sagacity and wisdom, which convinced Martin that he was no common character; and this turned out to be the case.

'How do you do sir?' said a voice in Martin's ear

'How do you do sir?' said Martin.

It was a tall thin gentleman who spoke to him, with a carpet-cap on, and a long loose coat of green baize, ornamented about the pockets with black velvet.

'You air from Europe, sir?'

'I am,' said Martin.

'You air fortunate, sir.'

Martin thought so too; but he soon discovered that the gentleman and he attached different meanings to this remark.

'You air fortunate, sir, in having an opportunity of beholding our Elijah Pogram, sir.'

'Your Elijahpogram!' said Martin, thinking it was all one word, and a building of some sort.

'Yes sir.'

Martin tried to look as if he understood him, but he couldn't make it out.

'Yes, sir,' repeated the gentleman, 'our Elijah Pogram, sir, is, at this minute, identically settin' by the engine biler.'

The gentleman under the umbrella put his right forefinger to his eyebrow, as if he were revolving schemes of state.

'That is Elijah Pogram, is it?' said Martin.

'Yes, sir,' replied the other. 'That is Elijah Pogram.'

'Dear me!' said Martin. 'I am astonished.' But he had not the least idea who this Elijah Pogram was; having never heard the name in all his life.

'If the biler of this vessel was Toe bust, sir,' said his new acquaintance, 'and Toe bust now, this would be a festival day in the calendar of despotism; pretty nigh equallin', sir, in its effects upon the human race, our Fourth of glorious July. Yes, sir, that is the Honourable Elijah Pogram, Member of Congress; one of the master-minds of our country, sir. There is a brow, sir, there!'

'Quite remarkable,' said Martin.

'Yes, sir. Our own immortal Chiggle, sir, is said to have observed, when he made the celebrated Pogram statter in marble, which rose so much con-test and preju-dice in Europe, that the brow was more than mortal. This was before the Pogram Defiance, and was, therefore, a pre-diction, cruel smart.'

'What is the Pogram Defiance?' asked Martin, thinking, perhaps, it was the sign of a public-house.

'An o-ration, sir,' returned his friend.

'Oh! to be sure,' cried Martin. 'What am I thinking of! It defied—'

'It defied the world, sir,' said the other, gravely. 'Defied the world in general to com-pete with our country upon any hook; and devellop'd our internal resources for making war upon the universal airth. You would like to know Elijah Pogram, sir?'

'If you please,' said Martin.

'Mr Pogram,' said the stranger—Mr Pogram having overheard every word of the dialogue—'this is a gentleman from Europe, sir; from England, sir. But gen'rous ene-mies may meet upon the neutral sile of private life, I think.'

The languid Mr Pogram shook hands with Martin, like a clock-work figure that was just running down. But he made amends by chewing like one that was just wound up.

'Mr Pogram,' said the introducer, 'is a public servant, sir. When Congress is recessed, he makes himself acquainted with those free United States, of which he is the gifted son.'

It occurred to Martin that if the Honourable Elijah Pogram had stayed at home, and sent his shoes upon a tour, they would have answered the same purpose; for they were the only part of him in a situation to see anything.

In course of time, however, Mr Pogram rose; and having ejected certain plugging consequences which would have impeded his articulation, took up a position where there was something to lean against, and began to talk to Martin; shading himself with the green umbrella all the time.

As he began with the words, 'How do you like—?' Martin took him up and said:

'The country, I presume?'

'Yes, sir,' said Elijah Pogram. A knot of passengers gathered round to hear what followed; and Martin heard his friend say, as he whispered to another friend, and rubbed his hands, 'Pogram will smash him into sky-blue fits, I know!'

'Why,' said Martin, after a moment's hesitation, 'I have learned by experience, that you take an unfair advantage of a stranger, when you ask that question. You don't mean it to be answered, except in one way. Now, I don't choose to answer it in that way, for I cannot honestly answer it in that way. And therefore, I would rather not answer it at all.'

But Mr Pogram was going to make a great speech in the next session about foreign relations, and was going to write strong articles on the subject; and as he greatly favoured the free and independent custom (a very harmless and agreeable one) of procuring information of any sort in any kind of confidence, and afterwards perverting it publicly in any manner that happened to suit him, he had determined to get at Martin's opinions somehow or other. For if he could have got nothing out of him, he would have had to invent it for him, and that would have been laborious. He made a mental note of his answer, and went in again.

'You are from Eden, sir? How did you like Eden?'

Martin said what he thought of that part of the country, in pretty strong terms.

'It is strange,' said Pogram, looking round upon the group, 'this hatred of our country, and her Institutions! This national antipathy is deeply rooted in the British mind!'

'Good Heaven, sir,' cried Martin. 'Is the Eden Land Corporation, with Mr Scadder at its head, and all the misery it has worked, at its door, an Institution of America? A part of any form of government that ever was known or heard of?'

'I con-sider the cause of this to be,' said Pogram, looking round again and taking himself up where Martin had interrupted him, 'partly jealousy and pre-judice, and partly the nat'ral unfitness of the British people to appreciate the ex-alted Institutions of our native land. I expect, sir,' turning to Martin again, 'that a gentleman named Chollop happened in upon you during your lo-cation in the town of Eden?'

'Yes,' answered Martin; 'but my friend can answer this better than I can, for I was very ill at the time. Mark! The gentleman is speaking of Mr Chollop.'

'Oh. Yes, sir. Yes. I see him,' observed Mark.

'A splendid example of our na-tive raw material, sir?' said Pogram, interrogatively.

'Indeed, sir!' cried Mark.

The Honourable Elijah Pogram glanced at his friends as though he would have said, 'Observe this! See what follows!' and they rendered tribute to the Pogram genius by a gentle murmur.

'Our fellow-countryman is a model of a man, quite fresh from Natur's mould!' said Pogram, with enthusiasm. 'He is a true-born child of this free hemisphere! Verdant as the mountains of our country; bright and flowing as our mineral Licks; unspiled by withering conventionalities as air our broad and boundless Perearers! Rough he may be. So air our Barrs. Wild he may be. So air our Buffalers. But he is a child of Natur', and a child of Freedom; and his boastful answer to the Despot and the Tyrant is, that his bright home is in the Settin Sun.'

Part of this referred to Chollop, and part to a Western postmaster, who, being a public defaulter not very long before (a character not at all uncommon in America), had been removed from office; and on whose behalf Mr Pogram (he voted for Pogram) had thundered the last sentence from his seat in Congress, at the head of an unpopular President. It told brilliantly; for the bystanders were delighted, and one of them said to Martin, 'that he guessed he had now seen something of the eloquential aspect of our country, and was chawed up pritty small.'

Mr Pogram waited until his hearers were calm again, before he said to Mark:

'You do not seem to coincide, sir?'

'Why,' said Mark, 'I didn't like him much; and that's the truth, sir. I thought he was a bully; and I didn't admire his carryin' them murderous little persuaders, and being so ready to use 'em.'

'It's singler!' said Pogram, lifting his umbrella high enough to look all round from under it. 'It's strange! You observe the settled opposition to our Institutions which pervades the British mind!'

'What an extraordinary people you are!' cried Martin. 'Are Mr Chollop and the class he represents, an Institution here? Are pistols with revolving barrels, sword-sticks, bowie-knives, and such things, Institutions on which you pride yourselves? Are bloody duels, brutal combats, savage assaults, shooting down and stabbing in the streets, your Institutions! Why, I shall hear next that Dishonour and Fraud are among the Institutions of the great republic!'

The moment the words passed his lips, the Honourable Elijah Pogram looked round again.

'This morbid hatred of our Institutions,' he observed, 'is quite a study for the psychological observer. He's alludin' to Repudiation now!'

'Oh! you may make anything an Institution if you like,' said Martin, laughing, 'and I confess you had me there, for you certainly have made that one. But the greater part of these things are one Institution with us, and we call it by the generic name of Old Bailey!'

The bell being rung for dinner at this moment, everybody ran away into the cabin, whither the Honourable Elijah Pogram fled with such precipitation that he forgot his umbrella was up, and fixed it so tightly in the cabin door that it could neither be let down nor got out. For a minute or so this accident created a perfect rebellion among the hungry passengers behind, who, seeing the dishes, and hearing the knives and forks at work, well knew what would happen unless they got there instantly, and were nearly mad; while several virtuous citizens at the table were in deadly peril of choking themselves in their unnatural efforts to get rid of all the meat before these others came.

They carried the umbrella by storm, however, and rushed in at the breach. The Honourable Elijah Pogram and Martin found themselves, after a severe struggle, side by side, as they might have come together in the pit of a London theatre; and for four whole minutes afterwards, Pogram was snapping up great blocks of everything he could get hold of, like a raven. When he had taken this unusually protracted dinner, he began to talk to Martin; and begged him not to have the least delicacy in speaking with perfect freedom to him, for he was a calm philosopher. Which Martin was extremely glad to hear; for he had begun to speculate on Elijah being a disciple of that other school of republican philosophy, whose noble sentiments are carved with knives upon a pupil's body, and written, not with pen and ink, but tar and feathers.

'What do you think of my countrymen who are present, sir?' inquired Elijah Pogram.

'Oh! very pleasant,' said Martin.

They were a very pleasant party. No man had spoken a word; every one had been intent, as usual, on his own private gorging; and the greater part of the company were decidedly dirty feeders.

The Honourable Elijah Pogram looked at Martin as if he thought 'You don't mean that, I know!' and he was soon confirmed in this opinion.

Sitting opposite to them was a gentleman in a high state of tobacco, who wore quite a little beard, composed of the overflowing of that weed, as they had dried about his mouth and chin; so common an ornament that it would scarcely have attracted Martin's observation, but that this good citizen, burning to assert his equality against all comers, sucked his knife for some moments, and made a cut with it at the butter, just as Martin was in the act of taking some. There was a juiciness about the deed that might have sickened a scavenger.

When Elijah Pogram (to whom this was an every-day incident) saw that Martin put the plate away, and took no butter, he was quite delighted, and said, 'Well! The morbid hatred of you British to the Institutions of our country is as-TONishing!'

'Upon my life!' cried Martin, in his turn. 'This is the most wonderful community that ever existed. A man deliberately makes a hog of himself, and THAT'S an Institution!'

'We have no time to ac-quire forms, sir,' said Elijah Pogram.

'Acquire!' cried Martin. 'But it's not a question of acquiring anything. It's a question of losing the natural politeness of a savage, and that instinctive good breeding which admonishes one man not to offend and disgust another. Don't you think that man over the way, for instance, naturally knows better, but considers it a very fine and independent thing to be a brute in small matters?'

'He is a na-tive of our country, and is nat'rally bright and spry, of course,' said Mr Pogram.

'Now, observe what this comes to, Mr Pogram,' pursued Martin. 'The mass of your countrymen begin by stubbornly neglecting little social observances, which have nothing to do with gentility, custom, usage, government, or country, but are acts of common, decent, natural, human politeness. You abet them in this, by resenting all attacks upon their social offences as if they were a beautiful national feature. From disregarding small obligations they come in regular course to disregard great ones; and so refuse to pay their debts. What they may do, or what they may refuse to do next, I don't know; but any man may see if he will, that it will be something following in natural succession, and a part of one great growth, which is rotten at the root.'

The mind of Mr Pogram was too philosophical to see this; so they went on deck again, where, resuming his former post, he chewed until he was in a lethargic state, amounting to insensibility.

After a weary voyage of several days, they came again to that same wharf where Mark had been so nearly left behind, on the night of starting for Eden. Captain Kedgick, the landlord, was standing there, and was greatly surprised to see them coming from the boat.

'Why, what the 'tarnal!' cried the Captain. 'Well! I do admire at this, I do!'

'We can stay at your house until to-morrow, Captain, I suppose?' said Martin.

'I reckon you can stay there for a twelvemonth if you like,' retorted Kedgick coolly. 'But our people won't best like your coming back.'

'Won't like it, Captain Kedgick!' said Martin.

'They did expect you was a-going to settle,' Kedgick answered, as he shook his head. 'They've been took in, you can't deny!'

'What do you mean?' cried Martin.

'You didn't ought to have received 'em,' said the Captain. 'No you didn't!'

'My good friend,' returned Martin, 'did I want to receive them? Was it any act of mine? Didn't you tell me they would rile up, and that I should be flayed like a wild cat—and threaten all kinds of vengeance, if I didn't receive them?'

'I don't know about that,' returned the Captain. 'But when our people's frills is out, they're starched up pretty stiff, I tell you!'

With that, he fell into the rear to walk with Mark, while Martin and Elijah Pogram went on to the National.

'We've come back alive, you see!' said Mark.

'It ain't the thing I did expect,' the Captain grumbled. 'A man ain't got no right to be a public man, unless he meets the public views. Our fashionable people wouldn't have attended his le-vee, if they had know'd it.'

Nothing mollified the Captain, who persisted in taking it very ill that they had not both died in Eden. The boarders at the National felt strongly on the subject too; but it happened by good fortune that they had not much time to think about this grievance, for it was suddenly determined to pounce upon the Honourable Elijah Pogram, and give HIM a le-vee forthwith.

As the general evening meal of the house was over before the arrival of the boat, Martin, Mark, and Pogram were taking tea and fixings at the public table by themselves, when the deputation entered to announce this honour; consisting of six gentlemen boarders and a very shrill boy.

'Sir!' said the spokesman.

'Mr Pogram!' cried the shrill boy.

The spokesman thus reminded of the shrill boy's presence, introduced him. 'Doctor Ginery Dunkle, sir. A gentleman of great poetical elements. He has recently jined us here, sir, and is an acquisition to us, sir, I do assure you. Yes, sir. Mr Jodd, sir. Mr Izzard, sir. Mr Julius Bib, sir.'

'Julius Washington Merryweather Bib,' said the gentleman himself TO himself.

'I beg your pardon, sir. Excuse me. Mr Julius Washington Merryweather Bib, sir; a gentleman in the lumber line, sir, and much esteemed. Colonel Groper, sir. Pro-fessor Piper, sir. My own name, sir, is Oscar Buffum.'

Each man took one slide forward as he was named; butted at the Honourable Elijah Pogram with his head; shook hands, and slid back again. The introductions being completed, the spokesman resumed.

'Sir!'

'Mr Pogram!' cried the shrill boy.

'Perhaps,' said the spokesman, with a hopeless look, 'you will be so good, Dr. Ginery Dunkle, as to charge yourself with the execution of our little office, sir?'

As there was nothing the shrill boy desired more, he immediately stepped forward.

'Mr Pogram! Sir! A handful of your fellow-citizens, sir, hearing of your arrival at the National Hotel, and feeling the patriotic character of your public services, wish, sir, to have the gratification of beholding you, and mixing with you, sir; and unbending with you, sir, in those moments which —'

'Air,' suggested Buffum.

'Which air so peculiarly the lot, sir, of our great and happy country.'

'Hear!' cried Colonel Grouper, in a loud voice. 'Good! Hear him! Good!'

'And therefore, sir,' pursued the Doctor, 'they request; as A mark Of their respect; the honour of your company at a little le-Vee, sir, in the ladies' ordinary, at eight o'clock.'

Mr Pogram bowed, and said:

'Fellow countrymen!'

'Good!' cried the Colonel. 'Hear, him! Good!'

Mr Pogram bowed to the Colonel individually, and then resumed.

'Your approbation of My labours in the common cause goes to My heart. At all times and in all places; in the ladies' ordinary, My friends, and in the Battle Field—'

'Good, very good! Hear him! Hear him!' said the Colonel.

'The name of Pogram will be proud to jine you. And may it, My friends, be written on My tomb, "He was a member of the Congress of our common country, and was ac-Tive in his trust."'

'The Com-mittee, sir,' said the shrill boy, 'will wait upon you at five minutes afore eight. I take My leave, sir!'

Mr Pogram shook hands with him, and everybody else, once more; and when they came back again at five minutes before eight, they said, one by one, in a melancholy voice, 'How do you do, sir?' and shook hands with Mr Pogram all over again, as if he had been abroad for a twelvemonth in the meantime, and they met, now, at a funeral.

But by this time Mr Pogram had freshened himself up, and had composed his hair and features after the Pogram statue, so that any one with half an eye might cry out, 'There he is! as he delivered the Defiance!' The Committee were embellished also; and when they entered the ladies' ordinary in a body, there was much clapping of hands from ladies and gentlemen, accompanied by cries of 'Pogram! Pogram!' and some standing up on chairs to see him.

The object of the popular caress looked round the room as he walked up it, and smiled; at the same time observing to the shrill boy, that he knew something of the beauty of the daughters of their common country, but had never seen it in such lustre and perfection as at that moment. Which the shrill boy put in the paper next day; to Elijah Pogram's great surprise.

'We will re-quest you, sir, if you please,' said Buffum, laying hands on Mr Pogram as if he were taking his measure for a coat, 'to stand up with your back agin the wall right in the furthest corner, that there may be more room for our fellow citizens. If you could set your back right slap agin that curtain-peg, sir, keeping your left leg everlastingly behind the stove, we should be fixed quite slick.'

Mr Pogram did as he was told, and wedged himself into such a little corner that the Pogram statue wouldn't have known him.

The entertainments of the evening then began. Gentlemen brought ladies up, and brought themselves up, and brought each other up; and asked Elijah Pogram what he thought of this political question, and what he thought of that; and looked at him, and looked at one another, and seemed very unhappy indeed. The ladies on the chairs looked at Elijah Pogram through their glasses, and said audibly, 'I wish he'd speak. Why don't he speak? Oh, do ask him to speak!' And Elijah Pogram looked sometimes at the ladies and sometimes elsewhere, delivering senatorial opinions, as he was asked for them. But the great end and object of the meeting seemed to be, not to let Elijah Pogram out of the corner on any account; so there they kept him, hard and fast.

A great bustle at the door, in the course of the evening, announced the arrival of some remarkable person; and immediately afterwards an elderly gentleman, much excited, was seen to precipitate himself upon the crowd, and battle his way towards the Honourable Elijah Pogram. Martin, who had found a snug place of observation in a distant corner, where he stood with Mark beside him (for he did not so often forget him now as formerly, though he still did sometimes), thought he knew this gentleman, but had no doubt of it, when he cried as loud as he could, with his eyes starting out of his head:

'Sir, Mrs Hominy!'

'Lord bless that woman, Mark. She has turned up again!'

'Here she comes, sir,' answered Mr Tapley. 'Pogram knows her. A public character! Always got her eye upon her country, sir! If that there lady's husband is of my opinion, what a jolly old gentleman he must be!'

A lane was made; and Mrs Hominy, with the aristocratic stalk, the pocket handkerchief, the clasped hands, and the classical cap, came slowly up it, in a procession of one. Mr Pogram testified emotions of delight on seeing her, and a general hush prevailed. For it was known that when a woman like Mrs Hominy encountered a man like Pogram, something interesting must be said.

Their first salutations were exchanged in a voice too low to reach the impatient ears of the throng; but they soon became audible, for Mrs Hominy felt her position, and knew what was expected of her.

Mrs H. was hard upon him at first; and put him through a rigid catechism in reference to a certain vote he had given, which she had found it necessary, as the mother of the modern Gracchi, to deprecate in a line by itself, set up expressly for the purpose in German text. But Mr Pogram evading it by a well-timed allusion to the star-spangled banner, which, it appeared, had the remarkable peculiarity of flouting the breeze whenever it was hoisted where the wind blew, she forgave him. They now enlarged on certain questions of tariff, commercial treaty, boundary, importation and exportation with great effect. And Mrs Hominy not only talked, as the saying is, like a book, but actually did talk her own books, word for word.

'My! what is this!' cried Mrs Hominy, opening a little note which was handed her by her excited gentleman-usher. 'Do tell! oh, well, now! on'y think!'

And then she read aloud, as follows:

'Two literary ladies present their compliments to the mother of the modern Gracchi, and claim her kind introduction, as their talented countrywoman, to the honourable (and distinguished) Elijah Pogram, whom the two L. L.'s have often contemplated in the speaking marble of the soul-subduing Chiggle. On a verbal intimation from the mother of the M. G., that she will comply with the request of the two L. L.'s, they will have the immediate pleasure of joining the galaxy assembled to do honour to the patriotic conduct of a Pogram. It may be another bond of union between the two L. L.'s and the mother of the M. G. to observe, that the two L. L.'s are Transcendental.'

Mrs Hominy promptly rose, and proceeded to the door, whence she returned, after a minute's interval, with the two L. L.'s, whom she led, through the lane in the crowd, with all that stateliness of deportment which was so remarkably her own, up to the great Elijah Pogram. It was (as the shrill boy cried out in an ecstasy) quite the Last Scene from Coriolanus. One of the L. L.'s wore a brown wig of uncommon size. Sticking on the forehead of the other, by invisible means, was a massive cameo, in size and shape like the raspberry tart which is ordinarily sold for a penny, representing on its front the Capitol at Washington.

'Miss Toppit, and Miss Codger!' said Mrs Hominy.

'Codger's the lady so often mentioned in the English newspapers I should think, sir,' whispered Mark. 'The oldest inhabitant as never remembers anything.'

'To be presented to a Pogram,' said Miss Codger, 'by a Hominy, indeed, a thrilling moment is it in its impressiveness on what we call our feelings. But why we call them so, or why impressed they are, or if impressed they are at all, or if at all we are, or if there really is, oh gasping one! a Pogram or a Hominy, or any active principle to which we give those titles, is a topic, Spirit searching, light abandoned, much too vast to enter on, at this unlooked-for crisis.'

'Mind and matter,' said the lady in the wig, 'glide swift into the vortex of immensity. Howls the sublime, and softly sleeps the calm Ideal, in the whispering chambers of Imagination. To hear it, sweet it is. But then, outlaughs the stern philosopher, and saith to the Grotesque, "What ho! arrest for me that Agency. Go, bring it here!" And so the vision fadeth.'

After this, they both took Mr Pogram by the hand, and pressed it to their lips, as a patriotic palm. That homage paid, the mother of the modern

Gracchi called for chairs, and the three literary ladies went to work in earnest, to bring poor Pogram out, and make him show himself in all his brilliant colours.

How Pogram got out of his depth instantly, and how the three L. L.'s were never in theirs, is a piece of history not worth recording. Suffice it, that being all four out of their depths, and all unable to swim, they splashed up words in all directions, and floundered about famously. On the whole, it was considered to have been the severest mental exercise ever heard in the National Hotel. Tears stood in the shrill boy's eyes several times; and the whole company observed that their heads ached with the effort—as well they might.

When it at last became necessary to release Elijah Pogram from the corner, and the Committee saw him safely back again to the next room, they were fervent in their admiration.

'Which,' said Mr Buffum, 'must have vent, or it will bust. Toe you, Mr Pogram, I am grateful. Toe-wards you, sir, I am inspired with lofty veneration, and with deep e-mo-tion. The sentiment Toe which I would propose to give ex-pression, sir, is this: "May you ever be as firm, sir, as your marble statter! May it ever be as great a terror Toe its ene-mies as you."'

There is some reason to suppose that it was rather terrible to its friends; being a statue of the Elevated or Goblin School, in which the Honourable Elijah Pogram was represented as in a very high wind, with his hair all standing on end, and his nostrils blown wide open. But Mr Pogram thanked his friend and countryman for the aspiration to which he had given utterance, and the Committee, after another solemn shaking of hands, retired to bed, except the Doctor; who immediately repaired to the newspaper-office, and there wrote a short poem suggested by the events of the evening, beginning with fourteen stars, and headed, 'A Fragment. Suggested by witnessing the Honourable Elijah Pogram engaged in a philosophical disputation with three of Columbia's fairest daughters. By Doctor Ginery Dunkle. Of Troy.'

If Pogram was as glad to get to bed as Martin was, he must have been well rewarded for his labours. They started off again next day (Martin and Mark previously disposing of their goods to the storekeepers of whom they had purchased them, for anything they would bring), and were fellow travellers to within a short distance of New York. When Pogram was about to leave them he grew thoughtful, and after pondering for some time, took Martin aside.

'We air going to part, sir,' said Pogram.

'Pray don't distress yourself,' said Martin; 'we must bear it.'

'It ain't that, sir,' returned Pogram, 'not at all. But I should wish you to accept a copy of My oration.'

'Thank you,' said Martin, 'you are very good. I shall be most happy.'

'It ain't quite that, sir, neither,' resumed Pogram; 'air you bold enough to introduce a copy into your country?'

'Certainly,' said Martin. 'Why not?'

'Its sentiments air strong, sir,' hinted Pogram, darkly.

'That makes no difference,' said Martin. 'I'll take a dozen if you like.'

'No, sir,' retorted Pogram. 'Not A dozen. That is more than I require. If you are content to run the hazard, sir, here is one for your Lord Chancellor,' producing it, 'and one for Your principal Secretary of State. I should wish them to see it, sir, as expressing what my opinions air. That they may not plead ignorance at a future time. But don't get into danger, sir, on my account!'

'There is not the least danger, I assure you,' said Martin. So he put the pamphlets in his pocket, and they parted.

Mr Bevan had written in his letter that, at a certain time, which fell out happily just then, he would be at a certain hotel in the city, anxiously expecting to see them. To this place they repaired without a moment's delay. They had the satisfaction of finding him within; and of being received by their good friend, with his own warmth and heartiness.

'I am truly sorry and ashamed,' said Martin, 'to have begged of you. But look at us. See what we are, and judge to what we are reduced!'

'So far from claiming to have done you any service,' returned the other, 'I reproach myself with having been, unwittingly, the original cause of your misfortunes. I no more supposed you would go to Eden on such representations as you received; or, indeed, that you would do anything but be dispossessed, by the readiest means, of your idea that fortunes were so easily made here; than I thought of going to Eden myself.'

'The fact is, I closed with the thing in a mad and sanguine manner,' said Martin, 'and the less said about it the better for me. Mark, here, hadn't a voice in the matter.'

'Well! but he hadn't a voice in any other matter, had he?' returned Mr Bevan; laughing with an air that showed his understanding of Mark and Martin too.

'Not a very powerful one, I am afraid,' said Martin with a blush. 'But live and learn, Mr Bevan! Nearly die and learn; we learn the quicker.'

'Now,' said their friend, 'about your plans. You mean to return home at once?'

'Oh, I think so,' returned Martin hastily, for he turned pale at the thought of any other suggestion. 'That is your opinion too, I hope?'

'Unquestionably. For I don't know why you ever came here; though it's not such an unusual case, I am sorry to say, that we need go any farther into that. You don't know that the ship in which you came over with our friend General Fladdock, is in port, of course?'

'Indeed!' said Martin.

'Yes. And is advertised to sail to-morrow.'

This was tempting news, but tantalising too; for Martin knew that his getting any employment on board a ship of that class was hopeless. The money in his pocket would not pay one-fourth of the sum he had already borrowed, and if it had been enough for their passage-money, he could hardly have resolved to spend it. He explained this to Mr Bevan, and stated what their project was.

'Why, that's as wild as Eden every bit,' returned his friend. 'You must take your passage like a Christian; at least, as like a Christian as a fore-cabin passenger can; and owe me a few more dollars than you intend. If Mark will go down to the ship and see what passengers there are, and finds that you can go in her without being actually suffocated, my advice is, go! You and I will look about us in the meantime (we won't call at the Norris's unless you like), and we will all three dine together in the afternoon.'

Martin had nothing to express but gratitude, and so it was arranged. But he went out of the room after Mark, and advised him to take their passage in the Screw, though they lay upon the bare deck; which Mr Tapley, who needed no entreaty on the subject readily promised to do.

When he and Martin met again, and were alone, he was in high spirits, and evidently had something to communicate, in which he gloried very much.

'I've done Mr Bevan, sir,' said Mark.

'Done Mr Bevan!' repeated Martin.

'The cook of the Screw went and got married yesterday, sir,' said Mr Tapley.

Martin looked at him for farther explanation.

'And when I got on board, and the word was passed that it was me,' said Mark, 'the mate he comes and asks me whether I'd engage to take this said cook's place upon the passage home. "For you're used to it," he says; "you were always a-cooking for everybody on your passage out." And so I was,' said Mark, 'although I never cooked before, I'll take my oath.'

'What did you say?' demanded Martin.

'Say!' cried Mark. 'That I'd take anything I could get. "If that's so," says the mate, "why, bring a glass of rum;" which they brought according. And my wages, sir,' said Mark in high glee, 'pays your passage; and I've put the rolling-pin in your berth to take it (it's the easy one up in the corner); and there we are, Rule Britannia, and Britons strike home!'

'There never was such a good fellow as you are!' cried Martin seizing him by the hand. 'But what do you mean by "doing" Mr Bevan, Mark?'

'Why, don't you see?' said Mark. 'We don't tell him, you know. We take his money, but we don't spend it, and we don't keep it. What we do is, write him a little note, explaining this engagement, and roll it up, and leave it at the bar, to be given to him after we are gone. Don't you see?'

Martin's delight in this idea was not inferior to Mark's. It was all done as he proposed. They passed a cheerful evening; slept at the hotel; left the letter as arranged; and went off to the ship betimes next morning, with such light hearts as the weight of their past miseries engendered.

'Good-bye! a hundred thousand times good-bye!' said Martin to their friend. 'How shall I remember all your kindness! How shall I ever thank you!'

'If you ever become a rich man, or a powerful one,' returned his friend, 'you shall try to make your Government more careful of its subjects when they roam abroad to live. Tell it what you know of emigration in your own case, and impress upon it how much suffering may be prevented with a little pains!'

Cheerily, lads, cheerily! Anchor weighed. Ship in full sail. Her sturdy bowsprit pointing true to England. America a cloud upon the sea behind them!

'Why, Cook! what are you thinking of so steadily?' said Martin.

'Why, I was a-thinking, sir,' returned Mark, 'that if I was a painter and was called upon to paint the American Eagle, how should I do it?'

'Paint it as like an Eagle as you could, I suppose.'

'No,' said Mark. 'That wouldn't do for me, sir. I should want to draw it like a Bat, for its short-sightedness; like a Bantam, for its bragging; like a Magpie, for its honesty; like a Peacock, for its vanity; like a ostrich, for its putting its head in the mud, and thinking nobody sees it—'

'And like a Phoenix, for its power of springing from the ashes of its faults and vices, and soaring up anew into the sky!' said Martin. 'Well, Mark. Let us hope so.'

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

ARRIVING IN ENGLAND, MARTIN WITNESSES A CEREMONY, FROM WHICH HE DERIVES THE CHEERING INFORMATION THAT HE HAS NOT BEEN FORGOTTEN IN HIS ABSENCE

It was mid-day, and high water in the English port for which the Screw was bound, when, borne in gallantly upon the fullness of the tide, she let go her anchor in the river.

Bright as the scene was; fresh, and full of motion; airy, free, and sparkling; it was nothing to the life and exultation in the breasts of the two travellers, at sight of the old churches, roofs, and darkened chimney stacks of Home. The distant roar that swelled up hoarsely from the busy streets, was music in their ears; the lines of people gazing from the wharves, were friends held dear; the canopy of smoke that overhung the town was brighter and more beautiful to them than if the richest silks of Persia had been waving in the air. And though the water going on its glistening track, turned, ever and again, aside to dance and sparkle round great ships, and heave them up; and leaped from off the blades of oars, a shower of diving diamonds; and wantoned with the idle boats, and swiftly passed, in many a sportive chase, through obdurate old iron rings, set deep into the stone-work of the quays; not even it was half so buoyant, and so restless, as their fluttering hearts, when yearning to set foot, once more, on native ground.

A year had passed since those same spires and roofs had faded from their eyes. It seemed to them, a dozen years. Some trifling changes, here and there, they called to mind; and wondered that they were so few and slight. In health and fortune, prospect and resource, they came back poorer men than they had gone away. But it was home. And though home is a name, a word, it is a strong one; stronger than magician ever spoke, or spirit answered to, in strongest conjuration.

Being set ashore, with very little money in their pockets, and no definite plan of operation in their heads, they sought out a cheap tavern, where they regaled upon a smoking steak, and certain flowing mugs of beer, as only men just landed from the sea can revel in the generous dainties of the earth. When they had feasted, as two grateful-tempered giants might have done, they stirred the fire, drew back the glowing curtain from the window, and making each a sofa for himself, by union of the great unwieldy chairs, gazed blissfully into the street.

Even the street was made a fairy street, by being half hidden in an atmosphere of steak, and strong, stout, stand-up English beer. For on the window-glass hung such a mist, that Mr Tapley was obliged to rise and wipe it with his handkerchief, before the passengers appeared like common mortals. And even then, a spiral little cloud went curling up from their two glasses of hot grog, which nearly hid them from each other.

It was one of those unaccountable little rooms which are never seen anywhere but in a tavern, and are supposed to have got into taverns by reason of the facilities afforded to the architect for getting drunk while engaged in their construction. It had more corners in it than the brain of an obstinate man; was full of mad closets, into which nothing could be put that was not specially invented and made for that purpose; had mysterious shelvings and bulkheads, and indications of staircases in the ceiling; and was elaborately provided with a bell that rung in the room itself, about two feet from the handle, and had no connection whatever with any other part of the establishment. It was a little below the pavement, and abutted close upon it; so that passengers grated against the window-panes with their buttons, and scraped it with their baskets; and fearful boys suddenly coming between a thoughtful guest and the light, derided him, or put out their tongues as if he were a physician; or made white knobs on the ends of their noses by flattening the same against the glass, and vanished awfully, like spectres.

Martin and Mark sat looking at the people as they passed, debating every now and then what their first step should be.

'We want to see Miss Mary, of course,' said Mark.

'Of course,' said Martin. 'But I don't know where she is. Not having had the heart to write in our distress—you yourself thought silence most advisable—and consequently, never having heard from her since we left New York the first time, I don't know where she is, my good fellow.'

'My opinion is, sir,' returned Mark, 'that what we've got to do is to travel straight to the Dragon. There's no need for you to go there, where you're known, unless you like. You may stop ten mile short of it. I'll go on. Mrs Lupin will tell me all the news. Mr Pinch will give me every information that we want; and right glad Mr Pinch will be to do it. My proposal is: To set off walking this afternoon. To stop when we are tired. To get a lift when we can. To walk when we can't. To do it at once, and do it cheap.'

'Unless we do it cheap, we shall have some difficulty in doing it at all,' said Martin, pulling out the bank, and telling it over in his hand.

'The greater reason for losing no time, sir,' replied Mark. 'Whereas, when you've seen the young lady; and know what state of mind the old gentleman's in, and all about it; then you'll know what to do next.'

'No doubt,' said Martin. 'You are quite right.'

They were raising their glasses to their lips, when their hands stopped midway, and their gaze was arrested by a figure which slowly, very slowly, and reflectively, passed the window at that moment.

Mr Pecksniff. Placid, calm, but proud. Honestly proud. Dressed with peculiar care, smiling with even more than usual blandness, pondering on the beauties of his art with a mild abstraction from all sordid thoughts, and gently travelling across the disc, as if he were a figure in a magic lantern.

As Mr Pecksniff passed, a person coming in the opposite direction stopped to look after him with great interest and respect, almost with veneration; and the landlord bouncing out of the house, as if he had seen him too, joined this person, and spoke to him, and shook his head gravely, and looked after Mr Pecksniff likewise.

Martin and Mark sat staring at each other, as if they could not believe it; but there stood the landlord, and the other man still. In spite of the indignation with which this glimpse of Mr Pecksniff had inspired him, Martin could not help laughing heartily. Neither could Mark.

'We must inquire into this!' said Martin. 'Ask the landlord in, Mark.'

Mr Tapley retired for that purpose, and immediately returned with their large-headed host in safe convoy.

'Pray, landlord!' said Martin, 'who is that gentleman who passed just now, and whom you were looking after?'

The landlord poked the fire as if, in his desire to make the most of his answer, he had become indifferent even to the price of coals; and putting his hands in his pockets, said, after inflating himself to give still further effect to his reply:

'That, gentlemen, is the great Mr Pecksniff! The celebrated architect, gentlemen!'

He looked from one to the other while he said it, as if he were ready to assist the first man who might be overcome by the intelligence.

'The great Mr Pecksniff, the celebrated architect, gentlemen.' said the landlord, 'has come down here, to help to lay the first stone of a new and splendid public building.'

'Is it to be built from his designs?' asked Martin.

'The great Mr Pecksniff, the celebrated architect, gentlemen,' returned the landlord, who seemed to have an unspeakable delight in the repetition of these words, 'carried off the First Premium, and will erect the building.'

'Who lays the stone?' asked Martin.

'Our member has come down express,' returned the landlord. 'No scrubs would do for no such a purpose. Nothing less would satisfy our Directors than our member in the House of Commons, who is returned upon the Gentlemanly Interest.'

'Which interest is that?' asked Martin.

'What, don't you know!' returned the landlord.

It was quite clear the landlord didn't. They always told him at election time, that it was the Gentlemanly side, and he immediately put on his top-boots, and voted for it.

'When does the ceremony take place?' asked Martin.

'This day,' replied the landlord. Then pulling out his watch, he added, impressively, 'almost this minute.'

Martin hastily inquired whether there was any possibility of getting in to witness it; and finding that there would be no objection to the admittance of any decent person, unless indeed the ground were full, hurried off with Mark, as hard as they could go.

They were fortunate enough to squeeze themselves into a famous corner on the ground, where they could see all that passed, without much dread of being beheld by Mr Pecksniff in return. They were not a minute too soon, for as they were in the act of congratulating each other, a great noise was heard at some distance, and everybody looked towards the gate. Several ladies prepared their pocket handkerchiefs for waving; and a stray teacher belonging to the charity school being much cheered by mistake, was immensely groaned at when detected.

'Perhaps he has Tom Pinch with him,' Martin whispered Mr Tapley.

'It would be rather too much of a treat for him, wouldn't it, sir?' whispered Mr Tapley in return.

There was no time to discuss the probabilities either way, for the charity school, in clean linen, came filing in two and two, so much to the self-approval of all the people present who didn't subscribe to it, that many of them shed tears. A band of music followed, led by a conscientious drummer who never left off. Then came a great many gentlemen with wands in their hands, and bows on their breasts, whose share in the proceedings did not appear to be distinctly laid down, and who trod upon each other, and blocked up the entry for a considerable period. These were followed by the Mayor and Corporation, all clustering round the member for the Gentlemanly Interest; who had the great Mr Pecksniff, the celebrated architect on his right hand, and conversed with him familiarly as they came along. Then the ladies waved their handkerchiefs, and the gentlemen their hats, and the charity children shrieked, and the member for the Gentlemanly Interest bowed.

Silence being restored, the member for the Gentlemanly Interest rubbed his hands, and wagged his head, and looked about him pleasantly; and there was nothing this member did, at which some lady or other did not burst into an ecstatic waving of her pocket handkerchief. When he looked up at the stone, they said how graceful! when he peeped into the hole, they said how condescending! when he chatted with the Mayor, they said how easy! when he folded his arms they cried with one accord, how statesman-like!

Mr Pecksniff was observed too, closely. When he talked to the Mayor, they said, Oh, really, what a courtly man he was! When he laid his hand upon the mason's shoulder, giving him directions, how pleasant his demeanour to the working classes; just the sort of man who made their toil a pleasure to them, poor dear souls!

But now a silver trowel was brought; and when the member for the Gentlemanly Interest, tucking up his coat-sleeve, did a little sleight of hand with the mortar, the air was rent, so loud was the applause. The workman-like manner in which he did it was amazing. No one could conceive where such a gentlemanly creature could have picked the knowledge up.

When he had made a kind of dirt-pie under the direction of the mason, they brought a little vase containing coins, the which the member for the Gentlemanly Interest jingled, as if he were going to conjure. Whereat they said how droll, how cheerful, what a flow of spirits! This put into its place, an ancient scholar read the inscription, which was in Latin; not in English; that would never do. It gave great satisfaction; especially every time there was a good long substantive in the third declension, ablative case, with an adjective to match; at which periods the assembly became very tender, and were much affected.

And now the stone was lowered down into its place, amidst the shouting of the concourse. When it was firmly fixed, the member for the Gentlemanly Interest struck upon it thrice with the handle of the trowel, as if inquiring, with a touch of humour, whether anybody was at home. Mr Pecksniff then unrolled his Plans (prodigious plans they were), and people gathered round to look at and admire them.

Martin, who had been fretting himself—quite unnecessarily, as Mark thought—during the whole of these proceedings, could no longer restrain his impatience; but stepping forward among several others, looked straight over the shoulder of the unconscious Mr Pecksniff, at the designs and plans he had unrolled. He returned to Mark, boiling with rage.

'Why, what's the matter, sir?' cried Mark.

'Matter! This is MY building.'

'Your building, sir!' said Mark.

'My grammar-school. I invented it. I did it all. He has only put four windows in, the villain, and spoilt it!'

Mark could hardly believe it at first, but being assured that it was really so, actually held him to prevent his interference foolishly, until his temporary heat was past. In the meantime, the member addressed the company on the gratifying deed which he had just performed.

He said that since he had sat in Parliament to represent the Gentlemanly Interest of that town; and he might add, the Lady Interest, he hoped, besides (pocket handkerchiefs); it had been his pleasant duty to come among them, and to raise his voice on their behalf in Another Place (pocket handkerchiefs and laughter), often. But he had never come among them, and had never raised his voice, with half such pure, such deep, such unalloyed delight, as now. 'The present occasion,' he said, 'will ever be memorable to me; not only for the reasons I have assigned, but because it has afforded me an opportunity of becoming personally known to a gentleman—'

Here he pointed the trowel at Mr Pecksniff, who was greeted with vociferous cheering, and laid his hand upon his heart.

'To a gentleman who, I am happy to believe, will reap both distinction and profit from this field; whose fame had previously penetrated to me—as to whose ears has it not!—but whose intellectual countenance I never had the distinguished honour to behold until this day, and whose intellectual conversation I had never before the improving pleasure to enjoy.'

Everybody seemed very glad of this, and applauded more than ever.

'But I hope my Honourable Friend,' said the Gentlemanly member—of course he added "if he will allow me to call him so," and of course Mr Pecksniff bowed—'will give me many opportunities of cultivating the knowledge of him; and that I may have the extraordinary gratification of reflecting in after-time that I laid on this day two first stones, both belonging to structures which shall last my life!'

Great cheering again. All this time, Martin was cursing Mr Pecksniff up hill and down dale.

'My friends!' said Mr Pecksniff, in reply. 'My duty is to build, not speak; to act, not talk; to deal with marble, stone, and brick; not language. I am very much affected. God bless you!'

This address, pumped out apparently from Mr Pecksniff's very heart, brought the enthusiasm to its highest pitch. The pocket handkerchiefs were waved again; the charity children were admonished to grow up Pecksniffs, every boy among them; the Corporation, gentlemen with wands, member for the Gentlemanly Interest, all cheered for Mr Pecksniff. Three cheers for Mr Pecksniff! Three more for Mr Pecksniff! Three more for Mr Pecksniff, gentlemen, if you please! One more, gentlemen, for Mr Pecksniff, and let it be a good one to finish with!

In short, Mr Pecksniff was supposed to have done a great work and was very kindly, courteously, and generously rewarded. When the procession moved away, and Martin and Mark were left almost alone upon the ground, his merits and a desire to acknowledge them formed the common topic. He was only second to the Gentlemanly member.

'Compare the fellow's situation to-day with ours!' said Martin bitterly.

'Lord bless you, sir!' cried Mark, 'what's the use? Some architects are clever at making foundations, and some architects are clever at building on 'em when they're made. But it'll all come right in the end, sir; it'll all come right!'

'And in the meantime—' began Martin.

'In the meantime, as you say, sir, we have a deal to do, and far to go. So sharp's the word, and Jolly!'

'You are the best master in the world, Mark,' said Martin, 'and I will not be a bad scholar if I can help it, I am resolved! So come! Best foot foremost, old fellow!'

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

TOM PINCH DEPARTS TO SEEK HIS FORTUNE. WHAT HE FINDS AT STARTING

Oh! What a different town Salisbury was in Tom Pinch's eyes to be sure, when the substantial Pecksniff of his heart melted away into an idle dream! He possessed the same faith in the wonderful shops, the same intensified appreciation of the mystery and wickedness of the place; made the same exalted estimate of its wealth, population, and resources; and yet it was not the old city nor anything like it. He walked into the market while they were getting breakfast ready for him at the Inn; and though it was the same market as of old, crowded by the same buyers and sellers; brisk with the same business; noisy with the same confusion of tongues and cluttering of fowls in coops; fair with the same display of rolls of butter, newly made, set forth in linen cloths of dazzling whiteness; green with the same fresh show of dewy vegetables; dainty with the same array in higglers' baskets of small shaving-glasses, laces, braces, trouser-straps, and hardware; savoury with the same unstinted show of delicate pigs' feet, and pies made precious by the pork that once had walked upon them; still it was strangely changed to Tom. For, in the centre of the market-place, he missed a statue he had set up there as in all other places of his personal resort; and it looked cold and bare without that ornament.

The change lay no deeper than this, for Tom was far from being sage enough to know, that, having been disappointed in one man, it would have been a strictly rational and eminently wise proceeding to have revenged himself upon mankind in general, by mistrusting them one and all. Indeed this piece of justice, though it is upheld by the authority of divers profound poets and honourable men, bears a nearer resemblance to the justice of that good Vizier in the Thousand-and-one Nights, who issues orders for the destruction of all the Porters in Bagdad because one of that unfortunate fraternity is supposed to have misconducted himself, than to any logical, not to say Christian, system of conduct, known to the world in later times.

Tom had so long been used to steep the Pecksniff of his fancy in his tea, and spread him out upon his toast, and take him as a relish with his beer, that he made but a poor breakfast on the first morning after his expulsion. Nor did he much improve his appetite for dinner by seriously considering his own affairs, and taking counsel thereon with his friend the organist's assistant.

The organist's assistant gave it as his decided opinion that whatever Tom did, he must go to London; for there was no place like it. Which may be true in the main, though hardly, perhaps, in itself, a sufficient reason for Tom's going there.

But Tom had thought of London before, and had coupled with it thoughts of his sister, and of his old friend John Westlock, whose advice he naturally felt disposed to seek in this important crisis of his fortunes. To London, therefore, he resolved to go; and he went away to the coach-office at once, to secure his place. The coach being already full, he was obliged to postpone his departure until the next night; but even this circumstance had its bright side as well as its dark one, for though it threatened to reduce his poor purse with unexpected country charges, it afforded him an opportunity of writing to Mrs Lupin and appointing his box to be brought to the old finger-post at the old time; which would enable him to take that treasure with him to the metropolis, and save the expense of its carriage. 'So,' said Tom, comforting himself, 'it's very nearly as broad as it's long.'

And it cannot be denied that, when he had made up his mind to even this extent, he felt an unaccustomed sense of freedom—a vague and indistinct impression of holiday-making—which was very luxurious. He had his moments of depression and anxiety, and they were, with good reason, pretty numerous; but still, it was wonderfully pleasant to reflect that he was his own master, and could plan and scheme for himself. It was startling, thrilling, vast, difficult to understand; it was a stupendous truth, teeming with responsibility and self-distrust; but in spite of all his cares, it gave a curious relish to the viands at the Inn, and interposed a dreamy haze between him and his prospects, in which they sometimes showed to magical advantage.

In this unsettled state of mind, Tom went once more to bed in the low four-poster, to the same immovable surprise of the effigies of the former landlord and the fat ox; and in this condition, passed the whole of the succeeding day. When the coach came round at last with 'London' blazoned in letters of gold upon the boot, it gave Tom such a turn, that he was half disposed to run away. But he didn't do it; for he took his seat upon the box instead, and looking down upon the four greys, felt as if he were another grey himself, or, at all events, a part of the turn-out; and was quite confused by the novelty and splendour of his situation.

And really it might have confused a less modest man than Tom to find himself sitting next that coachman; for of all the swells that ever flourished a whip professionally, he might have been elected emperor. He didn't handle his gloves like another man, but put them on—even when he was standing on the pavement, quite detached from the coach—as if the four greys were, somehow or other, at the ends of the fingers. It was the same with his hat. He did things with his hat, which nothing but an unlimited knowledge of horses and the wildest freedom of the road, could ever have made him perfect in. Valuable little parcels were brought to him with particular instructions, and he pitched them into this hat, and stuck it on again; as if the laws of gravity did not admit of such an event as its being knocked off or blown off, and nothing like an accident could befall it. The guard, too! Seventy breezy miles a day were written in his very whiskers. His manners were a canter; his conversation a round trot. He was a fast coach upon a down-hill turnpike road; he was all pace. A waggon couldn't have moved slowly, with that guard and his key-bugle on the top of it.

These were all foreshadowings of London, Tom thought, as he sat upon the box, and looked about him. Such a coachman, and such a guard, never could have existed between Salisbury and any other place. The coach was none of your steady-going, yokel coaches, but a swaggering, rakish, dissipated London coach; up all night, and lying by all day, and leading a devil of a life. It cared no more for Salisbury than if it had been a hamlet. It rattled noisily through the best streets, defied the Cathedral, took the worst corners sharpest, went cutting in everywhere, making everything get out of its way; and spun along the open country-road, blowing a lively defiance out of its key-bugle, as its last glad parting legacy.

It was a charming evening. Mild and bright. And even with the weight upon his mind which arose out of the immensity and uncertainty of London, Tom could not resist the captivating sense of rapid motion through the pleasant air. The four greys skimmed along, as if they liked it quite as well as Tom did; the bugle was in as high spirits as the greys; the coachman chimed in sometimes with his voice; the wheels hummed cheerfully in unison; the brass work on the harness was an orchestra of little bells; and thus, as they went clinking, jingling, rattling smoothly on, the whole concern, from the buckles of the leaders' coupling-reins to the handle of the hind boot, was one great instrument of music.

Yoho, past hedges, gates, and trees; past cottages and barns, and people going home from work. Yoho, past donkey-chaises, drawn aside into the ditch, and empty carts with rampant horses, whipped up at a bound upon the little watercourse, and held by struggling carters close to the five-barred gate, until the coach had passed the narrow turning in the road. Yoho, by churches dropped down by themselves in quiet nooks, with rustic burial-grounds about them, where the graves are green, and daisies sleep—for it is evening—on the bosoms of the dead. Yoho, past streams, in which the cattle cool their feet, and where the rushes grow; past paddock-fences, farms, and rick-yards; past last year's stacks, cut, slice by slice, away, and showing, in the waning light, like ruined gables, old and brown. Yoho, down the pebbly dip, and through the merry water-splash and up at a canter to the level road again. Yoho! Yoho!

Was the box there, when they came up to the old finger-post? The box! Was Mrs Lupin herself? Had she turned out magnificently as a hostess should, in her own chaise-cart, and was she sitting in a mahogany chair, driving her own horse Dragon (who ought to have been called Dumpling), and looking lovely? Did the stage-coach pull up beside her, shaving her very wheel, and even while the guard helped her man up with the trunk, did he send the glad echoes of his bugle careering down the chimneys of the distant Pecksniff, as if the coach expressed its exultation in the rescue of Tom Pinch?

'This is kind indeed!' said Tom, bending down to shake hands with her. 'I didn't mean to give you this trouble.'

'Trouble, Mr Pinch!' cried the hostess of the Dragon.

'Well! It's a pleasure to you, I know,' said Tom, squeezing her hand heartily. 'Is there any news?'

The hostess shook her head.

'Say you saw me,' said Tom, 'and that I was very bold and cheerful, and not a bit down-hearted; and that I entreated her to be the same, for all is certain to come right at last. Good-bye!'

'You'll write when you get settled, Mr Pinch?' said Mrs Lupin.

'When I get settled!' cried Tom, with an involuntary opening of his eyes. 'Oh, yes, I'll write when I get settled. Perhaps I had better write before, because I may find that it takes a little time to settle myself; not having too much money, and having only one friend. I shall give your love to the friend, by the way. You were always great with Mr Westlock, you know. Good-bye!'

'Good-bye!' said Mrs Lupin, hastily producing a basket with a long bottle sticking out of it. 'Take this. Good-bye!'

'Do you want me to carry it to London for you?' cried Tom. She was already turning the chaise-cart round.

'No, no,' said Mrs Lupin. 'It's only a little something for refreshment on the road. Sit fast, Jack. Drive on, sir. All right! Good-bye!'

She was a quarter of a mile off, before Tom collected himself; and then he was waving his hand lustily; and so was she.

'And that's the last of the old finger-post,' thought Tom, straining his eyes, 'where I have so often stood to see this very coach go by, and where I have parted with so many companions! I used to compare this coach to some great monster that appeared at certain times to bear my friends away into the world. And now it's bearing me away, to seek my fortune, Heaven knows where and how!'

It made Tom melancholy to picture himself walking up the lane and back to Pecksniff's as of old; and being melancholy, he looked downwards at the basket on his knee, which he had for the moment forgotten.

'She is the kindest and most considerate creature in the world,' thought Tom. 'Now I KNOW that she particularly told that man of hers not to look at me, on purpose to prevent my throwing him a shilling! I had it ready for him all the time, and he never once looked towards me; whereas that man naturally, (for I know him very well,) would have done nothing but grin and stare. Upon my word, the kindness of people perfectly melts me.'

Here he caught the coachman's eye. The coachman winked. 'Remarkable fine woman for her time of life,' said the coachman.

'I quite agree with you,' returned Tom. 'So she is.'

'Finer than many a young 'un, I mean to say,' observed the coachman. 'Eh?'

'Than many a young one,' Tom assented.

'I don't care for 'em myself when they're too young,' remarked the coachman.

This was a matter of taste, which Tom did not feel himself called upon to discuss.

'You'll seldom find 'em possessing correct opinions about refreshment, for instance, when they're too young, you know,' said the coachman; 'a woman must have arrived at maturity, before her mind's equal to coming provided with a basket like that.'

'Perhaps you would like to know what it contains?' said Tom, smiling.

As the coachman only laughed, and as Tom was curious himself, he unpacked it, and put the articles, one by one, upon the footboard. A cold roast fowl, a packet of ham in slices, a crusty loaf, a piece of cheese, a paper of biscuits, half a dozen apples, a knife, some butter, a screw of salt, and a bottle of old sherry. There was a letter besides, which Tom put in his pocket.

The coachman was so earnest in his approval of Mrs Lupin's provident habits, and congratulated Torn so warmly on his good fortune, that Tom felt it necessary, for the lady's sake, to explain that the basket was a strictly Platonic basket, and had merely been presented to him in the way of friendship. When he had made the statement with perfect gravity; for he felt it incumbent on him to disabuse the mind of this lax rover of any incorrect impressions on the subject; he signified that he would be happy to share the gifts with him, and proposed that they should attack the basket in a spirit of good fellowship at any time in the course of the night which the coachman's experience and knowledge of the road might suggest, as being best adapted to the purpose. From this time they chatted so pleasantly together, that although Tom knew infinitely more of unicorns than horses, the coachman informed his friend the guard at the end of the next stage, 'that rum as the box-seat looked, he was as good a one to go, in pint of conversation, as ever he'd wish to sit by.'

Yoho, among the gathering shades; making of no account the deep reflections of the trees, but scampering on through light and darkness, all the same, as if the light of London fifty miles away, were quite enough to travel by, and some to spare. Yoho, beside the village green, where cricket-players linger yet, and every little indentation made in the fresh grass by bat or wicket, ball or player's foot, sheds out its perfume on the night. Away with four fresh horses from the Bald-faced Stag, where topers congregate about the door admiring; and the last team with traces hanging loose, go roaming off towards the pond, until observed and shouted after by a dozen throats, while volunteering boys pursue them. Now, with a clattering of hoofs and striking out of fiery sparks, across the old stone bridge, and down again into the shadowy road, and through the open gate, and far away, away, into the wold. Yoho!

Yoho, behind there, stop that bugle for a moment! Come creeping over to the front, along the coach-roof, guard, and make one at this basket! Not that we slacken in our pace the while, not we; we rather put the bits of blood upon their metal, for the greater glory of the snack. Ah! It is long since this bottle of old wine was brought into contact with the mellow breath of night, you may depend, and rare good stuff it is to wet a bugler's whistle with. Only try it. Don't be afraid of turning up your finger, Bill, another pull! Now, take your breath, and try the bugle, Bill. There's music! There's a tone!' over the hills and far away,' indeed. Yoho! The skittish mare is all alive to-night. Yoho! Yoho!

See the bright moon! High up before we know it; making the earth reflect the objects on its breast like water. Hedges, trees, low cottages, church steeples, blighted stumps and flourishing young slips, have all grown vain upon the sudden, and mean to contemplate their own fair images till morning. The poplars yonder rustle that their quivering leaves may see themselves upon the ground. Not so the oak; trembling does not become HIM; and he watches himself in his stout old burly steadfastness, without the motion of a twig. The moss-grown gate, ill-poised upon its creaking hinges, crippled and decayed swings to and fro before its glass, like some fantastic dowager; while our own ghostly likeness travels on, Yoho! Yoho! through ditch and brake, upon the ploughed land and the smooth, along the steep hillside and steeper wall, as if it were a phantom-Hunter.

Clouds too! And a mist upon the Hollow! Not a dull fog that hides it, but a light airy gauze-like mist, which in our eyes of modest admiration gives a new charm to the beauties it is spread before; as real gauze has done ere now, and would again, so please you, though we were the Pope. Yoho! Why now we travel like the Moon herself. Hiding this minute in a grove of trees; next minute in a patch of vapour; emerging now upon our broad clear course; withdrawing now, but always dashing on, our journey is a counter-part of hers. Yoho! A match against the Moon!

The beauty of the night is hardly felt, when Day comes rushing up. Yoho! Two stages, and the country roads are almost changed to a continuous street. Yoho, past market-gardens, rows of houses, villas, crescents, terraces, and squares; past waggons, coaches, carts; past early workmen, late stragglers, drunken men, and sober carriers of loads; past brick and mortar in its every shape; and in among the rattling pavements, where a jaunty-seat upon a coach is not so easy to preserve! Yoho, down countless turnings, and through countless mazy ways, until an old Innyard is gained, and Tom Pinch, getting down quite stunned and giddy, is in London!

'Five minutes before the time, too!' said the driver, as he received his fee of Tom.

'Upon my word,' said Tom, 'I should not have minded very much, if we had been five hours after it; for at this early hour I don't know where to go, or what to do with myself.'

'Don't they expect you then?' inquired the driver.

'Who?' said Tom.

'Why them,' returned the driver.

His mind was so clearly running on the assumption of Tom's having come to town to see an extensive circle of anxious relations and friends, that it would have been pretty hard work to undeceive him. Tom did not try. He cheerfully evaded the subject, and going into the Inn, fell fast asleep before a fire in one of the public rooms opening from the yard. When he awoke, the people in the house were all astir, so he washed and dressed himself; to his great refreshment after the journey; and, it being by that time eight o'clock, went forth at once to see his old friend John.

John Westlock lived in Furnival's Inn, High Holborn, which was within a quarter of an hour's walk of Tom's starting-point, but seemed a long way off, by reason of his going two or three miles out of the straight road to make a short cut. When at last he arrived outside John's door, two stories up, he stood faltering with his hand upon the knocker, and trembled from head to foot. For he was rendered very nervous by the thought of having to relate what had fallen out between himself and Pecksniff; and he had a misgiving that John would exult fearfully in the disclosure.

'But it must be made,' thought Tom, 'sooner or later; and I had better get it over.'

Rat tat.

'I am afraid that's not a London knock,' thought Tom. 'It didn't sound bold. Perhaps that's the reason why nobody answers the door.'

It is quite certain that nobody came, and that Tom stood looking at the knocker; wondering whereabouts in the neighbourhood a certain gentleman resided, who was roaring out to somebody 'Come in!' with all his might.

'Bless my soul!' thought Tom at last. 'Perhaps he lives here, and is calling to me. I never thought of that. Can I open the door from the outside, I wonder. Yes, to be sure I can.'

To be sure he could, by turning the handle; and to be sure when he did turn it the same voice came rushing out, crying 'Why don't you come in? Come in, do you hear? What are you standing there for?'—quite violently.

Tom stepped from the little passage into the room from which these sounds proceeded, and had barely caught a glimpse of a gentleman in a dressing-gown and slippers (with his boots beside him ready to put on), sitting at his breakfast with a newspaper in his hand, when the said gentleman, at the imminent hazard of oversetting his tea-table, made a plunge at Tom, and hugged him.

'Why, Tom, my boy!' cried the gentleman. 'Tom!'

'How glad I am to see you, Mr Westlock!' said Tom Pinch, shaking both his hands, and trembling more than ever. 'How kind you are!'

'Mr Westlock!' repeated John, 'what do you mean by that, Pinch? You have not forgotten my Christian name, I suppose?'

'No, John, no. I have not forgotten,' said Thomas Pinch. 'Good gracious me, how kind you are!'

'I never saw such a fellow in all my life!' cried John. 'What do you mean by saying THAT over and over again? What did you expect me to be, I wonder! Here, sit down, Tom, and be a reasonable creature. How are you, my boy? I am delighted to see you!'

'And I am delighted to see YOU,' said Tom.

'It's mutual, of course,' returned John. 'It always was, I hope. If I had known you had been coming, Tom, I would have had something for breakfast. I would rather have such a surprise than the best breakfast in the world, myself; but yours is another case, and I have no doubt you are as hungry as a hunter. You must make out as well as you can, Tom, and we'll recompense ourselves at dinner-time. You take sugar, I know; I recollect the sugar at Pecksniff's. Ha, ha, ha! How IS Pecksniff? When did you come to town? DO begin at something or other, Tom. There are only scraps here, but they are not at all bad. Boar's Head potted. Try it, Tom. Make a beginning whatever you do. What an old Blade you are! I am delighted to see you.'

While he delivered himself of these words in a state of great commotion, John was constantly running backwards and forwards to and from the closet, bringing out all sorts of things in pots, scooping extraordinary quantities of tea out of the caddy, dropping French rolls into his boots, pouring hot water over the butter, and making a variety of similar mistakes without disconcerting himself in the least.

'There!' said John, sitting down for the fiftieth time, and instantly starting up again to make some other addition to the breakfast. 'Now we are as well off as we are likely to be till dinner. And now let us have the news, Tom. Imprimis, how's Pecksniff?'

'I don't know how he is,' was Tom's grave answer.

John Westlock put the teapot down, and looked at him, in astonishment.

'I don't know how he is,' said Thomas Pinch; 'and, saving that I wish him no ill, I don't care. I have left him, John. I have left him for ever.'

'Voluntarily?'

'Why, no, for he dismissed me. But I had first found out that I was mistaken in him; and I could not have remained with him under any circumstances. I grieve to say that you were right in your estimate of his character. It may be a ridiculous weakness, John, but it has been very painful and bitter to me to find this out, I do assure you.'

Tom had no need to direct that appealing look towards his friend, in mild and gentle deprecation of his answering with a laugh. John Westlock would as soon have thought of striking him down upon the floor.

'It was all a dream of mine,' said Tom, 'and it is over. I'll tell you how it happened, at some other time. Bear with my folly, John. I do not, just now, like to think or speak about it.'

'I swear to you, Tom,' returned his friend, with great earnestness of manner, after remaining silent for a few moments, 'that when I see, as I do now, how deeply you feel this, I don't know whether to be glad or sorry that you have made the discovery at last. I reproach myself with the thought that I ever jested on the subject; I ought to have known better.'

'My dear friend,' said Tom, extending his hand, 'it is very generous and gallant in you to receive me and my disclosure in this spirit; it makes me blush to think that I should have felt a moment's uneasiness as I came along. You can't think what a weight is lifted off my mind,' said Tom, taking up his knife and fork again, and looking very cheerful. 'I shall punish the Boar's Head dreadfully.'

The host, thus reminded of his duties, instantly betook himself to piling up all kinds of irreconcilable and contradictory viands in Tom's plate, and a very capital breakfast Tom made, and very much the better for it Tom felt.

'That's all right,' said John, after contemplating his visitor's proceedings with infinite satisfaction. 'Now, about our plans. You are going to stay with me, of course. Where's your box?'

'It's at the Inn,' said Tom. 'I didn't intend—'

'Never mind what you didn't intend,' John Westlock interposed. 'What you DID intend is more to the purpose. You intended, in coming here, to ask my advice, did you not, Tom?'

'Certainly.'

'And to take it when I gave it to you?'

'Yes,' rejoined Tom, smiling, 'if it were good advice, which, being yours, I have no doubt it will be.'

'Very well. Then don't be an obstinate old humbug in the outset, Tom, or I shall shut up shop and dispense none of that invaluable commodity. You are on a visit to me. I wish I had an organ for you, Tom!'

'So do the gentlemen downstairs, and the gentlemen overhead I have no doubt,' was Tom's reply.

'Let me see. In the first place, you will wish to see your sister this morning,' pursued his friend, 'and of course you will like to go there alone. I'll walk part of the way with you; and see about a little business of my own, and meet you here again in the afternoon. Put that in your pocket, Tom. It's only the key of the door. If you come home first you'll want it.'

'Really,' said Tom, 'quartering one's self upon a friend in this way—'

'Why, there are two keys,' interposed John Westlock. 'I can't open the door with them both at once, can I? What a ridiculous fellow you are, Tom? Nothing particular you'd like for dinner, is there?'

'Oh dear no,' said Tom.

'Very well, then you may as well leave it to me. Have a glass of cherry brandy, Tom?'

'Not a drop! What remarkable chambers these are!' said Pinch 'there's everything in 'em!'

'Bless your soul, Tom, nothing but a few little bachelor contrivances! the sort of impromptu arrangements that might have suggested themselves to Philip Quarll or Robinson Crusoe, that's all. What do you say? Shall we walk?'

'By all means,' cried Tom. 'As soon as you like.'

Accordingly John Westlock took the French rolls out of his boots, and put his boots on, and dressed himself; giving Tom the paper to read in the meanwhile. When he returned, equipped for walking, he found Tom in a brown study, with the paper in his hand.

'Dreaming, Tom?'

'No,' said Mr Pinch, 'No. I have been looking over the advertising sheet, thinking there might be something in it which would be likely to suit me. But, as I often think, the strange thing seems to be that nobody is suited. Here are all kinds of employers wanting all sorts of servants, and all sorts of servants wanting all kinds of employers, and they never seem to come together. Here is a gentleman in a public office in a position of temporary difficulty, who wants to borrow five hundred pounds; and in the very next advertisement here is another gentleman who has got exactly that sum to lend. But he'll never lend it to him, John, you'll find! Here is a lady possessing a moderate independence, who wants to board and lodge with a quiet, cheerful family; and here is a family describing themselves in those very words, "a quiet, cheerful family," who want exactly such a lady to come and live with them. But she'll never go, John! Neither do any of these single gentlemen who want an airy bedroom, with the occasional use of a parlour, ever appear to come to terms with these other people who live in a rural situation remarkable for its bracing atmosphere, within five minutes' walk of the Royal Exchange. Even those letters of the alphabet who are always running away from their friends and being entreated at the tops of columns to come back, never DO come back, if we may judge from the number of times they are asked to do it and don't. It really seems,' said Tom, relinquishing the paper with a thoughtful sigh, 'as if people had the same gratification in printing their complaints as in making them known by word of mouth; as if they found it a comfort and consolation to proclaim "I want such and such a thing, and I can't get it, and I don't expect I ever shall!"'

John Westlock laughed at the idea, and they went out together. So many years had passed since Tom was last in London, and he had known so little of it then, that his interest in all he saw was very great. He was particularly anxious, among other notorious localities, to have those streets pointed out to him which were appropriated to the slaughter of countrymen; and was quite disappointed to find, after half-an-hour's walking, that he hadn't had his pocket picked. But on John Westlock's inventing a pickpocket for his gratification, and pointing out a highly respectable stranger as one of that fraternity, he was much delighted.

His friend accompanied him to within a short distance of Camberwell and having put him beyond the possibility of mistaking the wealthy brass-and-copper founder's, left him to make his visit. Arriving before the great bell-handle, Tom gave it a gentle pull. The porter appeared.

'Pray does Miss Pinch live here?' said Tom.

'Miss Pinch is governess here,' replied the porter.

At the same time he looked at Tom from head to foot, as if he would have said, 'You are a nice man, YOU are; where did YOU come from?'

'It's the same young lady,' said Tom. 'It's quite right. Is she at home?'

'I don't know, I'm sure,' rejoined the porter.

'Do you think you could have the goodness to ascertain?' said Tom. He had quite a delicacy in offering the suggestion, for the possibility of such a step did not appear to present itself to the porter's mind at all.

The fact was that the porter in answering the gate-bell had, according to usage, rung the house-bell (for it is as well to do these things in the Baronial style while you are about it), and that there the functions of his office had ceased. Being hired to open and shut the gate, and not to explain himself to strangers, he left this little incident to be developed by the footman with the tags, who, at this juncture, called out from the door steps:

'Hollo, there! wot are you up to? This way, young man!'

'Oh!' said Tom, hurrying towards him. 'I didn't observe that there was anybody else. Pray is Miss Pinch at home?'

'She's IN,' replied the footman. As much as to say to Tom: 'But if you think she has anything to do with the proprietorship of this place you had better abandon that idea.'

'I wish to see her, if you please,' said Tom.

The footman, being a lively young man, happened to have his attention caught at that moment by the flight of a pigeon, in which he took so warm an interest that his gaze was rivetted on the bird until it was quite out of sight. He then invited Tom to come in, and showed him into a parlour.

'Hany neem?' said the young man, pausing languidly at the door.

It was a good thought; because without providing the stranger, in case he should happen to be of a warm temper, with a sufficient excuse for knocking him down, it implied this young man's estimate of his quality, and relieved his breast of the oppressive burden of rating him in secret as a nameless and obscure individual.

'Say her brother, if you please,' said Tom.

'Mother?' drawled the footman.

'Brother,' repeated Tom, slightly raising his voice. 'And if you will say, in the first instance, a gentleman, and then say her brother, I shall be obliged to you, as she does not expect me or know I am in London, and I do not wish to startle her.'

The young man's interest in Tom's observations had ceased long before this time, but he kindly waited until now; when, shutting the door, he withdrew.

'Dear me!' said Tom. 'This is very disrespectful and uncivil behaviour. I hope these are new servants here, and that Ruth is very differently treated.'

His cogitations were interrupted by the sound of voices in the adjoining room. They seemed to be engaged in high dispute, or in indignant reprimand of some offender; and gathering strength occasionally, broke out into a perfect whirlwind. It was in one of these gusts, as it appeared to Tom, that the footman announced him; for an abrupt and unnatural calm took place, and then a dead silence. He was standing before the window, wondering what domestic quarrel might have caused these sounds, and hoping Ruth had nothing to do with it, when the door opened, and his sister ran into his arms.

'Why, bless my soul!' said Tom, looking at her with great pride, when they had tenderly embraced each other, 'how altered you are Ruth! I should scarcely have known you, my love, if I had seen you anywhere else, I declare! You are so improved,' said Tom, with inexpressible delight; 'you are so womanly; you are so—positively, you know, you are so handsome!'

'If YOU think so Tom—'

'Oh, but everybody must think so, you know,' said Tom, gently smoothing down her hair. 'It's matter of fact; not opinion. But what's the matter?' said Tom, looking at her more intently, 'how flushed you are! and you have been crying.'

'No, I have not, Tom.'

'Nonsense,' said her brother stoutly. 'That's a story. Don't tell me! I know better. What is it, dear? I'm not with Mr Pecksniff now. I am going to try and settle myself in London; and if you are not happy here (as I very much fear you are not, for I begin to think you have been deceiving me with the kindest and most affectionate intention) you shall not remain here.'

Oh! Tom's blood was rising; mind that! Perhaps the Boar's Head had something to do with it, but certainly the footman had. So had the sight of his pretty sister—a great deal to do with it. Tom could bear a good deal himself, but he was proud of her, and pride is a sensitive thing. He began to think, 'there are more Pecksniffs than one, perhaps,' and by all the pins and needles that run up and down in angry veins, Tom was in a most unusual tingle all at once!

'We will talk about it, Tom,' said Ruth, giving him another kiss to pacify him. 'I am afraid I cannot stay here.'

'Cannot!' replied Tom. 'Why then, you shall not, my love. Heyday! You are not an object of charity! Upon my word!'

Tom was stopped in these exclamations by the footman, who brought a message from his master, importing that he wished to speak with him before he went, and with Miss Pinch also.

'Show the way,' said Tom. 'I'll wait upon him at once.'

Accordingly they entered the adjoining room from which the noise of altercation had proceeded; and there they found a middle-aged gentleman, with a pompous voice and manner, and a middle-aged lady, with what may be termed an excisable face, or one in which starch and vinegar were decidedly employed. There was likewise present that eldest pupil of Miss Pinch, whom Mrs Todgers, on a previous occasion, had called a syrup, and who was now weeping and sobbing spitefully.

'My brother, sir,' said Ruth Pinch, timidly presenting Tom.

'Oh!' cried the gentleman, surveying Tom attentively. 'You really are Miss Pinch's brother, I presume? You will excuse my asking. I don't observe any resemblance.'

'Miss Pinch has a brother, I know,' observed the lady.

'Miss Pinch is always talking about her brother, when she ought to be engaged upon my education,' sobbed the pupil.

'Sophia! Hold your tongue!' observed the gentleman. 'Sit down, if you please,' addressing Tom.

Tom sat down, looking from one face to another, in mute surprise.

'Remain here, if you please, Miss Pinch,' pursued the gentleman, looking slightly over his shoulder.

Tom interrupted him here, by rising to place a chair for his sister. Having done which he sat down again.

'I am glad you chance to have called to see your sister to-day, sir,' resumed the brass-and-copper founder. 'For although I do not approve, as a principle, of any young person engaged in my family in the capacity of a governess, receiving visitors, it happens in this case to be well timed. I am sorry to inform you that we are not at all satisfied with your sister.'

'We are very much DISsatisfied with her,' observed the lady.

'I'd never say another lesson to Miss Pinch if I was to be beat to death for it!' sobbed the pupil.

'Sophia!' cried her father. 'Hold your tongue!'

'Will you allow me to inquire what your ground of dissatisfaction is?' asked Tom.

'Yes,' said the gentleman, 'I will. I don't recognize it as a right; but I will. Your sister has not the slightest innate power of commanding respect. It has been a constant source of difference between us. Although she has been in this family for some time, and although the young lady who is now present has almost, as it were, grown up under her tuition, that young lady has no respect for her. Miss Pinch has been perfectly unable to command my daughter's respect, or to win my daughter's confidence. Now,' said the gentleman, allowing the palm of his hand to fall gravely down upon the table: 'I maintain that there is something radically wrong in that! You, as her brother, may be disposed to deny it—'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said Tom. 'I am not at all disposed to deny it. I am sure that there is something radically wrong; radically monstrous, in that.'

'Good Heavens!' cried the gentleman, looking round the room with dignity, 'what do I find to be the case! what results obtrude themselves upon me as flowing from this weakness of character on the part of Miss Pinch! What are my feelings as a father, when, after my desire (repeatedly expressed to Miss Pinch, as I think she will not venture to deny) that my daughter should be choice in her expressions, genteel in her deportment, as becomes her station in life, and politely distant to her inferiors in society, I find her, only this very morning, addressing Miss Pinch herself as a beggar!'

'A beggarly thing,' observed the lady, in correction.

'Which is worse,' said the gentleman, triumphantly; 'which is worse. A beggarly thing. A low, coarse, despicable expression!'

'Most despicable,' cried Tom. 'I am glad to find that there is a just appreciation of it here.'

'So just, sir,' said the gentleman, lowering his voice to be the more impressive. 'So just, that, but for my knowing Miss Pinch to be an unprotected young person, an orphan, and without friends, I would, as I assured Miss Pinch, upon my veracity and personal character, a few minutes ago, I would have severed the connection between us at that moment and from that time.'

'Bless my soul, sir!' cried Tom, rising from his seat; for he was now unable to contain himself any longer; 'don't allow such considerations as those to influence you, pray. They don't exist, sir. She is not unprotected. She is ready to depart this instant. Ruth, my dear, get your bonnet on!'

'Oh, a pretty family!' cried the lady. 'Oh, he's her brother! There's no doubt about that!'

'As little doubt, madam,' said Tom, 'as that the young lady yonder is the child of your teaching, and not my sister's. Ruth, my dear, get your bonnet on!'

'When you say, young man,' interposed the brass-and-copper founder, haughtily, 'with that impertinence which is natural to you, and which I therefore do not condescend to notice further, that the young lady, my eldest daughter, has been educated by any one but Miss Pinch, you—I needn't proceed. You comprehend me fully. I have no doubt you are used to it.'

'Sir!' cried Tom, after regarding him in silence for some little time. 'If you do not understand what I mean, I will tell you. If you do understand what I mean, I beg you not to repeat that mode of expressing yourself in answer to it. My meaning is, that no man can expect his children to respect what he degrades.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed the gentleman. 'Cant! cant! The common cant!'

'The common story, sir!' said Tom; 'the story of a common mind. Your governess cannot win the confidence and respect of your children, forsooth! Let her begin by winning yours, and see what happens then.'

'Miss Pinch is getting her bonnet on, I trust, my dear?' said the gentleman.

'I trust she is,' said Tom, forestalling the reply. 'I have no doubt she is. In the meantime I address myself to you, sir. You made your statement to me, sir; you required to see me for that purpose; and I have a right to answer it. I am not loud or turbulent,' said Tom, which was quite true, 'though I can scarcely say as much for you, in your manner of addressing yourself to me. And I wish, on my sister's behalf, to state the simple truth.'

'You may state anything you like, young man,' returned the gentleman, affecting to yawn. 'My dear, Miss Pinch's money.'

'When you tell me,' resumed Tom, who was not the less indignant for keeping himself quiet, 'that my sister has no innate power of commanding the respect of your children, I must tell you it is not so; and that she has. She is as well bred, as well taught, as well qualified by nature to command respect, as any hirer of a governess you know. But when you place her at a disadvantage in reference to every servant in your house, how can you suppose, if you have the gift of common sense, that she is not in a tenfold worse position in reference to your daughters?'

'Pretty well! Upon my word,' exclaimed the gentleman, 'this is pretty well!'

'It is very ill, sir,' said Tom. 'It is very bad and mean, and wrong and cruel. Respect! I believe young people are quick enough to observe and imitate; and why or how should they respect whom no one else respects, and everybody slights? And very partial they must grow—oh, very partial!—to their studies, when they see to what a pass proficiency in those same tasks has brought their governess! Respect! Put anything the most deserving of respect before your daughters in the light in which you place her, and you will bring it down as low, no matter what it is!'

'You speak with extreme impertinence, young man,' observed the gentleman.

'I speak without passion, but with extreme indignation and contempt for such a course of treatment, and for all who practice it,' said Tom. 'Why, how can you, as an honest gentleman, profess displeasure or surprise at your daughter telling my sister she is something beggarly and humble, when you are for ever telling her the same thing yourself in fifty plain, outspeaking ways, though not in words; and when your very porter and footman make the same delicate announcement to all comers? As to your suspicion and distrust of her; even of her word; if she is not above their reach, you have no right to employ her.'

'No right!' cried the brass-and-copper founder.

'Distinctly not,' Tom answered. 'If you imagine that the payment of an annual sum of money gives it to you, you immensely exaggerate its power and value. Your money is the least part of your bargain in such a case. You may be punctual in that to half a second on the clock, and yet be Bankrupt. I have nothing more to say,' said Tom, much flushed and flustered, now that it was over, 'except to crave permission to stand in your garden until my sister is ready.'

Not waiting to obtain it, Tom walked out.

Before he had well begun to cool, his sister joined him. She was crying; and Tom could not bear that any one about the house should see her doing that.

'They will think you are sorry to go,' said Tom. 'You are not sorry to go?'

'No, Tom, no. I have been anxious to go for a very long time.'

'Very well, then! Don't cry!' said Tom.

'I am so sorry for YOU, dear,' sobbed Tom's sister.

'But you ought to be glad on my account,' said Tom. 'I shall be twice as happy with you for a companion. Hold up your head. There! Now we go out as we ought. Not blustering, you know, but firm and confident in ourselves.'

The idea of Tom and his sister blustering, under any circumstances, was a splendid absurdity. But Tom was very far from feeling it to be so, in his excitement; and passed out at the gate with such severe determination written in his face that the porter hardly knew him again.

It was not until they had walked some short distance, and Tom found himself getting cooler and more collected, that he was quite restored to himself by an inquiry from his sister, who said in her pleasant little voice:

'Where are we going, Tom?'

'Dear me!' said Tom, stopping, 'I don't know.'

'Don't you—don't you live anywhere, dear?' asked Tom's sister looking wistfully in his face.

'No,' said Tom. 'Not at present. Not exactly. I only arrived this morning. We must have some lodgings.'

He didn't tell her that he had been going to stay with his friend John, and could on no account think of billeting two inmates upon him, of whom one was a young lady; for he knew that would make her uncomfortable, and would cause her to regard herself as being an inconvenience to him. Neither did he like to leave her anywhere while he called on John, and told him of this change in his arrangements; for he was delicate of seeming to encroach upon the generous and hospitable nature of his friend. Therefore he said again, 'We must have some lodgings, of course;' and said it as stoutly as if he had been a perfect Directory and Guide-Book to all the lodgings in London.

'Where shall we go and look for 'em?' said Tom. 'What do you think?'

Tom's sister was not much wiser on such a topic than he was. So she squeezed her little purse into his coat-pocket, and folding the little hand with which she did so on the other little hand with which she clasped his arm, said nothing.

'It ought to be a cheap neighbourhood,' said Tom, 'and not too far from London. Let me see. Should you think Islington a good place?'

'I should think it was an excellent place, Tom.'

'It used to be called Merry Islington, once upon a time,' said Tom. 'Perhaps it's merry now; if so, it's all the better. Eh?'

'If it's not too dear,' said Tom's sister.

'Of course, if it's not too dear,' assented Tom. 'Well, where IS Islington? We can't do better than go there, I should think. Let's go.'

Tom's sister would have gone anywhere with him; so they walked off, arm in arm, as comfortably as possible. Finding, presently, that Islington was not in that neighbourhood, Tom made inquiries respecting a public conveyance thither; which they soon obtained. As they rode along they were very full of conversation indeed, Tom relating what had happened to him, and Tom's sister relating what had happened to her, and both finding a great deal more to say than time to say it in; for they had only just begun to talk, in comparison with what they had to tell each other, when they reached their journey's end.

'Now,' said Tom, 'we must first look out for some very unpretending streets, and then look out for bills in the windows.'

So they walked off again, quite as happily as if they had just stepped out of a snug little house of their own, to look for lodgings on account of somebody else. Tom's simplicity was unabated, Heaven knows; but now that he had somebody to rely upon him, he was stimulated to rely a little more upon himself, and was, in his own opinion, quite a desperate fellow.

After roaming up and down for hours, looking at some scores of lodgings, they began to find it rather fatiguing, especially as they saw none which were at all adapted to their purpose. At length, however, in a singular little old-fashioned house, up a blind street, they discovered two small bedrooms and a triangular parlour, which promised to suit them well enough. Their desiring to take possession immediately was a suspicious circumstance, but even this was surmounted by the payment of their first week's rent, and a reference to John Westlock, Esquire, Furnival's Inn, High Holborn.

Ah! It was a goodly sight, when this important point was settled, to behold Tom and his sister trotting round to the baker's, and the butcher's, and the grocer's, with a kind of dreadful delight in the unaccustomed cares of housekeeping; taking secret counsel together as they gave their small orders, and distracted by the least suggestion on the part of the shopkeeper! When they got back to the triangular parlour, and Tom's sister, bustling to and fro, busy about a thousand pleasant nothings, stopped every now and then to give old Tom a kiss or smile upon him, Tom rubbed his hands as if all Islington were his.

It was late in the afternoon now, though, and high time for Tom to keep his appointment. So, after agreeing with his sister that in consideration of not having dined, they would venture on the extravagance of chops for supper at nine, he walked out again to narrate these marvellous occurrences to John.

'I am quite a family man all at once,' thought Tom. 'If I can only get something to do, how comfortable Ruth and I may be! Ah, that if! But it's of no use to despond. I can but do that, when I have tried everything and failed; and even then it won't serve me much. Upon my word,' thought Tom, quickening his pace, 'I don't know what John will think has become of me. He'll begin to be afraid I have strayed into one of those streets where the countrymen are murdered; and that I have been made meat pies of, or some such horrible thing.'

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

TOM PINCH, GOING ASTRAY, FINDS THAT HE IS NOT THE ONLY PERSON IN THAT PREDICAMENT. HE RETALIATES UPON A FALLEN FOE

Tom's evil genius did not lead him into the dens of any of those preparers of cannibalic pastry, who are represented in many standard country legends as doing a lively retail business in the Metropolis; nor did it mark him out as the prey of ring-droppers, pea and thimble-riggers, duffers, touters, or any of those bloodless sharpers, who are, perhaps, a little better known to the Police. He fell into conversation with no gentleman who took him into a public-house, where there happened to be another gentleman who swore he had more money than any gentleman, and very soon proved he had more money than one gentleman by taking his away from him; neither did he fall into any other of the numerous man-traps which are set up without notice, in the public grounds of this city. But he lost his way. He very soon did that; and in trying to find it again he lost it more and more.

Now, Tom, in his guileless distrust of London, thought himself very knowing in coming to the determination that he would not ask to be directed to Furnival's Inn, if he could help it; unless, indeed, he should happen to find himself near the Mint, or the Bank of England; in which case he would step in, and ask a civil question or two, confiding in the perfect respectability of the concern. So on he went, looking up all the streets he came near, and going up half of them; and thus, by dint of not being true to Goswell Street, and filing off into Aldermanbury, and bewildering himself in Barbican, and being constant to the wrong point of the compass in London Wall, and then getting himself crosswise into Thames Street, by an instinct that would have been marvellous if he had had the least desire or reason to go there, he found himself, at last, hard by the Monument.

The Man in the Monument was quite as mysterious a being to Tom as the Man in the Moon. It immediately occurred to him that the lonely creature who held himself aloof from all mankind in that pillar like some old hermit was the very man of whom to ask his way. Cold, he might be; little sympathy he had, perhaps, with human passion—the column seemed too tall for that; but if Truth didn't live in the base of the Monument, notwithstanding Pope's couplet about the outside of it, where in London (thought Tom) was she likely to be found!

Coming close below the pillar, it was a great encouragement to Tom to find that the Man in the Monument had simple tastes; that stony and artificial as his residence was, he still preserved some rustic recollections; that he liked plants, hung up bird-cages, was not wholly cut off from fresh groundsel, and kept young trees in tubs. The Man in the Monument, himself, was sitting outside the door—his own door: the Monument-door: what a grand idea!—and was actually yawning, as if there were no Monument to stop his mouth, and give him a perpetual interest in his own existence.

Tom was advancing towards this remarkable creature, to inquire the way to Furnival's Inn, when two people came to see the Monument. They were a gentleman and a lady; and the gentleman said, 'How much a-piece?'

The Man in the Monument replied, 'A Tanner.'

It seemed a low expression, compared with the Monument.

The gentleman put a shilling into his hand, and the Man in the Monument opened a dark little door. When the gentleman and lady had passed out of view, he shut it again, and came slowly back to his chair.

He sat down and laughed.

'They don't know what a many steps there is!' he said. 'It's worth twice the money to stop here. Oh, my eye!'

The Man in the Monument was a Cynic; a worldly man! Tom couldn't ask his way of HIM. He was prepared to put no confidence in anything he said.

'My gracious!' cried a well-known voice behind Mr Pinch. 'Why, to be sure it is!'

At the same time he was poked in the back by a parasol. Turning round to inquire into this salute, he beheld the eldest daughter of his late patron.

'Miss Pecksniff!' said Tom.

'Why, my goodness, Mr Pinch!' cried Cherry. 'What are you doing here?'

'I have rather wandered from my way,' said Tom. 'I—'

'I hope you have run away,' said Charity. 'It would be quite spirited and proper if you had, when my Papa so far forgets himself.'

'I have left him,' returned Tom. 'But it was perfectly understood on both sides. It was not done clandestinely.'

'Is he married?' asked Cherry, with a spasmodic shake of her chin.

'No, not yet,' said Tom, colouring; 'to tell you the truth, I don't think he is likely to be, if—if Miss Graham is the object of his passion.'

'Tcha, Mr Pinch!' cried Charity, with sharp impatience, 'you're very easily deceived. You don't know the arts of which such a creature is capable. Oh! it's a wicked world.'

'You are not married?' Tom hinted, to divert the conversation.

'N—no!' said Cherry, tracing out one particular paving-stone in Monument Yard with the end of her parasol. 'I—but really it's quite impossible to explain. Won't you walk in?'

'You live here, then?' said Tom

'Yes,' returned Miss Pecksniff, pointing with her parasol to Todgers's; 'I reside with this lady, AT PRESENT.'

The great stress on the two last words suggested to Tom that he was expected to say something in reference to them. So he said.

'Only at present! Are you going home again soon?'

'No, Mr Pinch,' returned Charity. 'No, thank you. No! A mother-in-law who is younger than—I mean to say, who is as nearly as possible about the same age as one's self, would not quite suit my spirit. Not quite!' said Cherry, with a spiteful shiver.

'I thought from your saying "at present"'—Tom observed.

'Really, upon my word! I had no idea you would press me so very closely on the subject, Mr Pinch,' said Charity, blushing, 'or I should not have been so foolish as to allude to—oh really!—won't you walk in?'

Tom mentioned, to excuse himself, that he had an appointment in Furnival's Inn, and that coming from Islington he had taken a few wrong turnings, and arrived at the Monument instead. Miss Pecksniff simpered very much when he asked her if she knew the way to Furnival's Inn, and at length found courage to reply.

'A gentleman who is a friend of mine, or at least who is not exactly a friend so much as a sort of acquaintance—Oh upon my word, I hardly know what I say, Mr Pinch; you mustn't suppose there is any engagement between us; or at least if there is, that it is at all a settled thing as yet—is going to Furnival's Inn immediately, I believe upon a little business, and I am sure he would be very glad to accompany you, so as to prevent your going wrong again. You had better walk in. You will very likely find my sister Merry here,' she said with a curious toss of her head, and anything but an agreeable smile.

'Then, I think, I'll endeavour to find my way alone,' said Tom, 'for I fear she would not be very glad to see me. That unfortunate occurrence, in relation to which you and I had some amicable words together, in private, is not likely to have impressed her with any friendly feeling towards me. Though it really was not my fault.'

'She has never heard of that, you may depend,' said Cherry, gathering up the corners of her mouth, and nodding at Tom. 'I am far from sure that she would bear you any mighty ill will for it, if she had.'

'You don't say so?' cried Tom, who was really concerned by this insinuation.

'I say nothing,' said Charity. 'If I had not already known what shocking things treachery and deceit are in themselves, Mr Pinch, I might perhaps have learnt it from the success they meet with—from the success they meet with.' Here she smiled as before. 'But I don't say anything. On the contrary, I should scorn it. You had better walk in!'

There was something hidden here, which piqued Tom's interest and troubled his tender heart. When, in a moment's irresolution, he looked at Charity, he could not but observe a struggle in her face between a sense of triumph and a sense of shame; nor could he but remark how, meeting even his eyes, which she cared so little for, she turned away her own, for all the splenetic defiance in her manner.

An uneasy thought entered Tom's head; a shadowy misgiving that the altered relations between himself and Pecksniff were somehow to involve an altered knowledge on his part of other people, and were to give him an insight into much of which he had had no previous suspicion. And yet he put no definite construction upon Charity's proceedings. He certainly had no idea that as he had been the audience and spectator of her mortification, she grasped with eager delight at any opportunity of reproaching her sister with his presence in HER far deeper misery; for he knew nothing of it, and only pictured that sister as the same giddy, careless, trivial creature she always had been, with the same slight estimation of himself which she had never been at the least pains to conceal. In short, he had merely a confused impression that Miss Pecksniff was not quite sisterly or kind; and being curious to set it right, accompanied her as she desired.

The house-door being opened, she went in before Tom, requesting him to follow her; and led the way to the parlour door.

'Oh, Merry!' she said, looking in, 'I am so glad you have not gone home. Who do you think I have met in the street, and brought to see you! Mr Pinch! There. Now you ARE surprised, I am sure!'

Not more surprised than Tom was, when he looked upon her. Not so much. Not half so much.

'Mr Pinch has left Papa, my dear,' said Cherry, 'and his prospects are quite flourishing. I have promised that Augustus, who is going that way, shall escort him to the place he wants. Augustus, my child, where are you?'

With these words Miss Pecksniff screamed her way out of the parlour, calling on Augustus Moddle to appear; and left Tom Pinch alone with her sister.

If she had always been his kindest friend; if she had treated him through all his servitude with such consideration as was never yet received by struggling man; if she had lightened every moment of those many years, and had ever spared and never wounded him; his honest heart could not have swelled before her with a deeper pity, or a purer freedom from all base remembrance than it did then.

'My gracious me! You are really the last person in the world I should have thought of seeing, I am sure!'

Tom was sorry to hear her speaking in her old manner. He had not expected that. Yet he did not feel it a contradiction that he should be sorry to see her so unlike her old self, and sorry at the same time to hear her speaking in her old manner. The two things seemed quite natural.

'I wonder you find any gratification in coming to see me. I can't think what put it in your head. I never had much in seeing you. There was no love lost between us, Mr Pinch, at any time, I think.'

Her bonnet lay beside her on the sofa, and she was very busy with the ribbons as she spoke. Much too busy to be conscious of the work her fingers did.

'We never quarrelled,' said Tom.—Tom was right in that, for one person can no more quarrel without an adversary, than one person can play at chess, or fight a duel. 'I hoped you would be glad to shake hands with an old friend. Don't let us rake up bygones,' said Tom. 'If I ever offended you, forgive me.'

She looked at him for a moment; dropped her bonnet from her hands; spread them before her altered face, and burst into tears.

'Oh, Mr Pinch!' she said, 'although I never used you well, I did believe your nature was forgiving. I did not think you could be cruel.'

She spoke as little like her old self now, for certain, as Tom could possibly have wished. But she seemed to be appealing to him reproachfully, and he did not understand her.

'I seldom showed it—never—I know that. But I had that belief in you, that if I had been asked to name the person in the world least likely to retort upon me, I would have named you, confidently.'

'Would have named me!' Tom repeated.

'Yes,' she said with energy, 'and I have often thought so.'

After a moment's reflection, Tom sat himself upon a chair beside her.

'Do you believe,' said Tom, 'oh, can you think, that what I said just now, I said with any but the true and plain intention which my words professed? I mean it, in the spirit and the letter. If I ever offended you, forgive me; I may have done so, many times. You never injured or offended me. How, then, could I possibly retort, if even I were stern and bad enough to wish to do it!'

After a little while she thanked him, through her tears and sobs, and told him she had never been at once so sorry and so comforted, since she left home. Still she wept bitterly; and it was the greater pain to Tom to see her weeping, from her standing in especial need, just then, of sympathy and tenderness.

'Come, come!' said Tom, 'you used to be as cheerful as the day was long.'

'Ah! used!' she cried, in such a tone as rent Tom's heart.

'And will be again,' said Tom.

'No, never more. No, never, never more. If you should talk with old Mr Chuzzlewit, at any time,' she added, looking hurriedly into his face—'I sometimes thought he liked you, but suppressed it—will you promise me to tell him that you saw me here, and that I said I bore in mind the time we talked together in the churchyard?'

Tom promised that he would.

'Many times since then, when I have wished I had been carried there before that day, I have recalled his words. I wish that he should know how true they were, although the least acknowledgment to that effect has never passed my lips and never will.'

Tom promised this, conditionally too. He did not tell her how improbable it was that he and the old man would ever meet again, because he thought it might disturb her more.

'If he should ever know this, through your means, dear Mr Pinch,' said Mercy, 'tell him that I sent the message, not for myself, but that he might be more forbearing and more patient, and more trustful to some other person, in some other time of need. Tell him that if he could know how my heart trembled in the balance that day, and what a very little would have turned the scale, his own would bleed with pity for me.'

'Yes, yes,' said Tom, 'I will.'

'When I appeared to him the most unworthy of his help, I was—I know I was, for I have often, often, thought about it since—the most inclined to yield to what he showed me. Oh! if he had relented but a little more; if he had thrown himself in my way for but one other quarter of an hour; if he had extended his compassion for a vain, unthinking, miserable girl, in but the least degree; he might, and I believe he would, have saved her! Tell him that I don't blame him, but am grateful for the effort that he made; but ask him for the love of God, and youth, and in merciful consideration for the struggle which an ill-advised and unwakened nature makes to hide the strength it thinks its weakness—ask him never, never, to forget this, when he deals with one again!'

Although Tom did not hold the clue to her full meaning, he could guess it pretty nearly. Touched to the quick, he took her hand and said, or meant to say, some words of consolation. She felt and understood them, whether they were spoken or no. He was not quite certain, afterwards, but that she had tried to kneel down at his feet, and bless him.

He found that he was not alone in the room when she had left it. Mrs Todgers was there, shaking her head. Tom had never seen Mrs Todgers, it is needless to say, but he had a perception of her being the lady of the house; and he saw some genuine compassion in her eyes, that won his good opinion.

'Ah, sir! You are an old friend, I see,' said Mrs Todgers.

'Yes,' said Tom.

'And yet,' quoth Mrs Todgers, shutting the door softly, 'she hasn't told you what her troubles are, I'm certain.'

Tom was struck by these words, for they were quite true. 'Indeed,' he said, 'she has not.'

'And never would,' said Mrs Todgers, 'if you saw her daily. She never makes the least complaint to me, or utters a single word of explanation or reproach. But I know,' said Mrs Todgers, drawing in her breath, 'I know!'

Tom nodded sorrowfully, 'So do I.'

'I fully believe,' said Mrs Todgers, taking her pocket-handkerchief from the flat reticule, 'that nobody can tell one half of what that poor young creature has to undergo. But though she comes here, constantly, to ease her poor full heart without his knowing it; and saying, "Mrs Todgers, I am very low to-day; I think that I shall soon be dead," sits crying in my room until the fit is past; I know no more from her. And, I believe,' said Mrs Todgers, putting back her handkerchief again, 'that she considers me a good friend too.'

Mrs Todgers might have said her best friend. Commercial gentlemen and gravy had tried Mrs Todgers's temper; the main chance—it was such a very small one in her case, that she might have been excused for looking sharp after it, lest it should entirely vanish from her sight—had taken a firm hold on Mrs Todgers's attention. But in some odd nook in Mrs Todgers's breast, up a great many steps, and in a corner easy to be overlooked, there was a secret door, with 'Woman' written on the spring, which, at a touch from Mercy's hand, had flown wide open, and admitted her for shelter.

When boarding-house accounts are balanced with all other ledgers, and the books of the Recording Angel are made up for ever, perhaps there may be seen an entry to thy credit, lean Mrs Todgers, which shall make thee beautiful!

She was growing beautiful so rapidly in Tom's eyes; for he saw that she was poor, and that this good had sprung up in her from among the sordid strivings of her life; that she might have been a very Venus in a minute more, if Miss Pecksniff had not entered with her friend.

'Mr Thomas Pinch!' said Charity, performing the ceremony of introduction with evident pride. 'Mr Moddle. Where's my sister?'

'Gone, Miss Pecksniff,' Mrs Todgers answered. 'She had appointed to be home.'

'Ah!' said Charity, looking at Tom. 'Oh, dear me!'

'She's greatly altered since she's been Anoth—since she's been married, Mrs Todgers!' observed Moddle.

'My dear Augustus!' said Miss Pecksniff, in a low voice. 'I verily believe you have said that fifty thousand times, in my hearing. What a Prose you are!'

This was succeeded by some trifling love passages, which appeared to originate with, if not to be wholly carried on by Miss Pecksniff. At any rate, Mr Moddle was much slower in his responses than is customary with young lovers, and exhibited a lowness of spirits which was quite oppressive.

He did not improve at all when Tom and he were in the streets, but sighed so dismally that it was dreadful to hear him. As a means of cheering him up, Tom told him that he wished him joy.

'Joy!' cried Moddle. 'Ha, ha!'

'What an extraordinary young man!' thought Tom.

'The Scorner has not set his seal upon you. YOU care what becomes of you?' said Moddle.

Tom admitted that it was a subject in which he certainly felt some interest.

'I don't,' said Mr Moddle. 'The Elements may have me when they please. I'm ready.'

Tom inferred from these, and other expressions of the same nature, that he was jealous. Therefore he allowed him to take his own course; which was such a gloomy one, that he felt a load removed from his mind when they parted company at the gate of Furnival's Inn.

It was now a couple of hours past John Westlock's dinner-time; and he was walking up and down the room, quite anxious for Tom's safety. The table was spread; the wine was carefully decanted; and the dinner smelt delicious.

'Why, Tom, old boy, where on earth have you been? Your box is here. Get your boots off instantly, and sit down!'

'I am sorry to say I can't stay, John,' replied Tom Pinch, who was breathless with the haste he had made in running up the stairs.

'Can't stay!'

'If you'll go on with your dinner,' said Tom, 'I'll tell you my reason the while. I mustn't eat myself, or I shall have no appetite for the chops.'

'There are no chops here, my food fellow.'

'No. But there are at Islington,' said Tom.

John Westlock was perfectly confounded by this reply, and vowed he would not touch a morsel until Tom had explained himself fully. So Tom sat down, and told him all; to which he listened with the greatest interest.

He knew Tom too well, and respected his delicacy too much, to ask him why he had taken these measures without communicating with him first. He quite concurred in the expediency of Tom's immediately returning to his sister, as he knew so little of the place in which he had left her, and good-humouredly proposed to ride back with him in a cab, in which he might convey his box. Tom's proposition that he should sup with them that night, he flatly rejected, but made an appointment with him for the morrow. 'And now Tom,' he said, as they rode along, 'I have a question to ask you to which I expect a manly and straightforward answer. Do you want any money? I am pretty sure you do.'

'I don't indeed,' said Tom.

'I believe you are deceiving me.'

'No. With many thanks to you, I am quite in earnest,' Tom replied. 'My sister has some money, and so have I. If I had nothing else, John, I have a five-pound note, which that good creature, Mrs Lupin, of the Dragon, handed up to me outside the coach, in a letter begging me to borrow it; and then drove off as hard as she could go.'

'And a blessing on every dimple in her handsome face, say I!' cried John, 'though why you should give her the preference over me, I don't know. Never mind. I bide my time, Tom.'

'And I hope you'll continue to bide it,' returned Tom, gayly. 'For I owe you more, already, in a hundred other ways, than I can ever hope to pay.'

They parted at the door of Tom's new residence. John Westlock, sitting in the cab, and, catching a glimpse of a blooming little busy creature darting out to kiss Tom and to help him with his box, would not have had the least objection to change places with him.

Well! she WAS a cheerful little thing; and had a quaint, bright quietness about her that was infinitely pleasant. Surely she was the best sauce for chops ever invented. The potatoes seemed to take a pleasure in sending up their grateful steam before her; the froth upon the pint of porter pouted to attract her notice. But it was all in vain. She saw nothing but Tom. Tom was the first and last thing in the world.

As she sat opposite to Tom at supper, fingering one of Tom's pet tunes upon the table-cloth, and smiling in his face, he had never been so happy in his life.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

SECRET SERVICE

In walking from the city with his sentimental friend, Tom Pinch had looked into the face, and brushed against the threadbare sleeve, of Mr Nadgett, man of mystery to the Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company. Mr Nadgett naturally passed away from Tom's remembrance as he passed out of his view; for he didn't know him, and had never heard his name.

As there are a vast number of people in the huge metropolis of England who rise up every morning not knowing where their heads will rest at night, so there are a multitude who shooting arrows over houses as their daily business, never know on whom they fall. Mr Nadgett might have passed Tom Pinch ten thousand times; might even have been quite familiar with his face, his name, pursuits, and character; yet never once have dreamed that Tom had any interest in any act or mystery of his. Tom might have done the like by him of course. But the same private man out of all the men alive, was in the mind of each at the same moment; was prominently connected though in a different manner, with the day's adventures of both; and formed, when they passed each other in the street, the one absorbing topic of their thoughts.

Why Tom had Jonas Chuzzlewit in his mind requires no explanation. Why Mr Nadgett should have had Jonas Chuzzlewit in his, is quite another thing.

But, somehow or other, that amiable and worthy orphan had become a part of the mystery of Mr Nadgett's existence. Mr Nadgett took an interest in his lightest proceedings; and it never flagged or wavered. He watched him in and out of the Assurance Office, where he was now formally installed as a Director; he dogged his footsteps in the streets; he stood listening when he talked; he sat in coffee-rooms entering his name in the great pocket-book, over and over again; he wrote letters to himself about him constantly; and, when he found them in his pocket, put them in the fire, with such distrust and caution that he would bend down to watch the crumpled tinder while it floated upwards, as if his mind misgave him, that the mystery it had contained might come out at the chimney-pot.

And yet all this was quite a secret. Mr Nadgett kept it to himself, and kept it close. Jonas had no more idea that Mr Nadgett's eyes were fixed on him, than he had that he was living under the daily inspection and report of a whole order of Jesuits. Indeed Mr Nadgett's eyes were seldom fixed on any other objects than the ground, the clock, or the fire; but every button on his coat might have been an eye, he saw so much.

The secret manner of the man disarmed suspicion in this wise; suggesting, not that he was watching any one, but that he thought some other man was watching him. He went about so stealthily, and kept himself so wrapped up in himself, that the whole object of his life appeared to be, to avoid notice and preserve his own mystery. Jonas sometimes saw him in the street, hovering in the outer office, waiting at the door for the man who never came, or slinking off with his immovable face and drooping head, and the one beaver glove dangling before him; but he would as soon have thought of the cross upon the top of St. Paul's Cathedral taking note of what he did, or slowly winding a great net about his feet, as of Nadgett's being engaged in such an occupation.

Mr Nadgett made a mysterious change about this time in his mysterious life: for whereas he had, until now, been first seen every morning coming down Cornhill, so exactly like the Nadgett of the day before as to occasion a popular belief that he never went to bed or took his clothes off, he was now first seen in Holborn, coming out of Kingsgate Street; and it was soon discovered that he actually went every morning to a barber's shop in that street to get shaved; and that the barber's name was Sweedlepipe. He seemed to make appointments with the man who never came, to meet him at this barber's; for he would frequently take long spells of waiting in the shop, and would ask for pen and ink, and pull out his pocket-book, and be very busy over it for an hour at a time. Mrs Gamp and Mr Sweedlepipe had many deep discoursings on the subject of this mysterious customer; but they usually agreed that he had speculated too much and was keeping out of the way.

He must have appointed the man who never kept his word, to meet him at another new place too; for one day he was found, for the first time, by the waiter at the Mourning Coach-Horse, the House-of-call for Undertakers, down in the City there, making figures with a pipe-stem in the sawdust of a clean spittoon; and declining to call for anything, on the ground of expecting a gentleman presently. As the gentleman was not honourable enough to keep his engagement, he came again next day, with his pocket-book in such a state of distention that he was regarded in the bar as a man of large property. After that, he repeated his visits every day, and had so much writing to do, that he made nothing of emptying a capacious leaden inkstand in two sittings. Although he never talked much, still, by being there among the regular customers, he made their acquaintance, and in course of time became quite intimate with Mr Tacker, Mr Mould's foreman; and even with Mr Mould himself, who openly said he was a long-headed man, a dry one, a salt fish, a deep file, a rasper; and made him the subject of many other flattering encomiums.

At the same time, too, he told the people at the Assurance Office, in his own mysterious way, that there was something wrong (secretly wrong, of course) in his liver, and that he feared he must put himself under the doctor's hands. He was delivered over to Jobling upon this representation; and though Jobling could not find out where his liver was wrong, wrong Mr Nadgett said it was; observing that it was his own liver, and he hoped he ought to know. Accordingly, he became Mr Jobling's patient; and detailing his symptoms in his slow and secret way, was in and out of that gentleman's room a dozen times a day.

As he pursued all these occupations at once; and all steadily; and all secretly; and never slackened in his watchfulness of everything that Mr Jonas said and did, and left unsaid and undone; it is not improbable that they were, secretly, essential parts of some great scheme which Mr Nadgett had on foot.

It was on the morning of this very day on which so much had happened to Tom Pinch, that Nadgett suddenly appeared before Mr Montague's house in Pall Mall—he always made his appearance as if he had that moment come up a trap—when the clocks were striking nine. He rang the bell in a covert under-handed way, as though it were a treasonable act; and passed in at the door, the moment it was opened wide enough to receive his body. That done, he shut it immediately with his own hands.

Mr Bailey, taking up his name without delay, returned with a request that he would follow him into his master's chamber. The chairman of the Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Board was dressing, and received him as a business person who was often backwards and forwards, and was received at all times for his business' sake.

'Well, Mr Nadgett?'

Mr Nadgett put his hat upon the ground and coughed. The boy having withdrawn and shut the door, he went to it softly, examined the handle, and returned to within a pace or two of the chair in which Mr Montague sat.

'Any news, Mr Nadgett?'

'I think we have some news at last, sir.'

'I am happy to hear it. I began to fear you were off the scent, Mr Nadgett.'

'No, sir. It grows cold occasionally. It will sometimes. We can't help that.'

'You are truth itself, Mr Nadgett. Do you report a great success?'

'That depends upon your judgment and construction of it,' was his answer, as he put on his spectacles.

'What do you think of it yourself? Have you pleased yourself?'

Mr Nadgett rubbed his hands slowly, stroked his chin, looked round the room, and said, 'Yes, yes, I think it's a good case. I am disposed to think it's a good case. Will you go into it at once?'

'By all means.'

Mr Nadgett picked out a certain chair from among the rest, and having planted it in a particular spot, as carefully as if he had been going to vault over it, placed another chair in front of it; leaving room for his own legs between them. He then sat down in chair number two, and laid his pocket-book, very carefully, on chair number one. He then untied the pocket-book, and hung the string over the back of chair number one. He then drew both the chairs a little nearer Mr Montague, and opening the pocket-book spread out its contents. Finally he selected a certain memorandum from the rest, and held it out to his employer, who, during the whole of these preliminary ceremonies, had been making violent efforts to conceal his impatience.

'I wish you wouldn't be so fond of making notes, my excellent friend,' said Tigg Montague with a ghastly smile. 'I wish you would consent to give me their purport by word of mouth.'

'I don't like word of mouth,' said Mr Nadgett gravely. 'We never know who's listening.'

Mr Montague was going to retort, when Nadgett handed him the paper, and said, with quiet exultation in his tone, 'We'll begin at the beginning, and take that one first, if you please, sir.'

The chairman cast his eyes upon it, coldly, and with a smile which did not render any great homage to the slow and methodical habits of his spy. But he had not read half-a-dozen lines when the expression of his face began to change, and before he had finished the perusal of the paper, it was full of grave and serious attention.

'Number Two,' said Mr Nadgett, handing him another, and receiving back the first. 'Read Number Two, sir, if you please. There is more interest as you go on.'

Tigg Montague leaned backward in his chair, and cast upon his emissary such a look of vacant wonder (not unmingled with alarm), that Mr Nadgett considered it necessary to repeat the request he had already twice preferred; with the view to recalling his attention to the point in hand. Profiting by the hint, Mr Montague went on with Number Two, and afterwards with Numbers Three, and Four, and Five, and so on.

These documents were all in Mr Nadgett's writing, and were apparently a series of memoranda, jotted down from time to time upon the backs of old letters, or any scrap of paper that came first to hand. Loose straggling scrawls they were, and of very uninviting exterior; but they had weighty purpose in them, if the chairman's face were any index to the character of their contents.

The progress of Mr Nadgett's secret satisfaction arising out of the effect they made, kept pace with the emotions of the reader. At first, Mr Nadgett sat with his spectacles low down upon his nose, looking over them at his employer, and nervously rubbing his hands. After a little while, he changed his posture in his chair for one of greater ease, and leisurely perused the next document he held ready as if an occasional glance at his employer's face were now enough and all occasion for anxiety or doubt were gone. And finally he rose and looked out of the window, where he stood with a triumphant air until Tigg Montague had finished.

'And this is the last, Mr Nadgett!' said that gentleman, drawing a long breath.

'That, sir, is the last.'

'You are a wonderful man, Mr Nadgett!'

'I think it is a pretty good case,' he returned as he gathered up his papers. 'It cost some trouble, sir.'

'The trouble shall be well rewarded, Mr Nadgett.' Nadgett bowed. 'There is a deeper impression of Somebody's Hoof here, than I had expected, Mr Nadgett. I may congratulate myself upon your being such a good hand at a secret.'

'Oh! nothing has an interest to me that's not a secret,' replied Nadgett, as he tied the string about his pocket-book, and put it up. 'It always takes away any pleasure I may have had in this inquiry even to make it known to you.'

'A most invaluable constitution,' Tigg retorted. 'A great gift for a gentleman employed as you are, Mr Nadgett. Much better than discretion; though you possess that quality also in an eminent degree. I think I heard a double knock. Will you put your head out of window, and tell me whether there is anybody at the door?'

Mr Nadgett softly raised the sash, and peered out from the very corner, as a man might who was looking down into a street from whence a brisk discharge of musketry might be expected at any moment. Drawing in his head with equal caution, he observed, not altering his voice or manner:

'Mr Jonas Chuzzlewit!'

'I thought so,' Tigg retorted.

'Shall I go?'

'I think you had better. Stay though! No! remain here, Mr Nadgett, if you please.'

It was remarkable how pale and flurried he had become in an instant. There was nothing to account for it. His eye had fallen on his razors; but what of them!

Mr Chuzzlewit was announced.

'Show him up directly. Nadgett! don't you leave us alone together. Mind you don't, now! By the Lord!' he added in a whisper to himself: 'We don't know what may happen.'

Saying this, he hurriedly took up a couple of hair-brushes, and began to exercise them on his own head, as if his toilet had not been interrupted. Mr Nadgett withdrew to the stove, in which there was a small fire for the convenience of heating curling-irons; and taking advantage of so favourable an opportunity for drying his pocket-handkerchief, produced it without loss of time. There he stood, during the whole interview, holding it before the bars, and sometimes, but not often, glancing over his shoulder.

'My dear Chuzzlewit!' cried Montague, as Jonas entered. 'You rise with the lark. Though you go to bed with the nightingale, you rise with the lark.

You have superhuman energy, my dear Chuzzlewit!'

'Ecod!' said Jonas, with an air of langour and ill-humour, as he took a chair, 'I should be very glad not to get up with the lark, if I could help it. But I am a light sleeper; and it's better to be up than lying awake, counting the dismal old church-clocks, in bed.'

'A light sleeper!' cried his friend. 'Now, what is a light sleeper? I often hear the expression, but upon my life I have not the least conception what a light sleeper is.'

'Hallo!' said Jonas, 'Who's that? Oh, old what's-his-name: looking (as usual) as if he wanted to skulk up the chimney.'

'Ha, ha! I have no doubt he does.'

'Well! He's not wanted here, I suppose,' said Jonas. 'He may go, mayn't he?'

'Oh, let him stay, let him stay!' said Tigg. 'He's a mere piece of furniture. He has been making his report, and is waiting for further orders. He has been told,' said Tigg, raising his voice, 'not to lose sight of certain friends of ours, or to think that he has done with them by any means. He understands his business.'

'He need,' replied Jonas; 'for of all the precious old dummies in appearance that I ever saw, he's about the worst. He's afraid of me, I think.'

'It's my belief,' said Tigg, 'that you are Poison to him. Nadgett! give me that towel!'

He had as little occasion for a towel as Jonas had for a start. But Nadgett brought it quickly; and, having lingered for a moment, fell back upon his old post by the fire.

'You see, my dear fellow,' resumed Tigg, 'you are too—what's the matter with your lips? How white they are!'

'I took some vinegar just now,' said Jonas. 'I had oysters for my breakfast. Where are they white?' he added, muttering an oath, and rubbing them upon his handkerchief. 'I don't believe they ARE white.'

'Now I look again, they are not,' replied his friend. 'They are coming right again.'

'Say what you were going to say,' cried Jonas angrily, 'and let my face be! As long as I can show my teeth when I want to (and I can do that pretty well), the colour of my lips is not material.'

'Quite true,' said Tigg. 'I was only going to say that you are too quick and active for our friend. He is too shy to cope with such a man as you, but does his duty well. Oh, very well! But what is a light sleeper?'

'Hang a light sleeper!' exclaimed Jonas pettishly.

'No, no,' interrupted Tigg. 'No. We'll not do that.'

'A light sleeper ain't a heavy one,' said Jonas in his sulky way; 'don't sleep much, and don't sleep well, and don't sleep sound.'

'And dreams,' said Tigg, 'and cries out in an ugly manner; and when the candle burns down in the night, is in an agony; and all that sort of thing. I see!'

They were silent for a little time. Then Jonas spoke:

'Now we've done with child's talk, I want to have a word with you. I want to have a word with you before we meet up yonder to-day. I am not satisfied with the state of affairs.'

'Not satisfied!' cried Tigg. 'The money comes in well.'

'The money comes in well enough,' retorted Jonas, 'but it don't come out well enough. It can't be got at easily enough. I haven't sufficient power; it is all in your hands. Ecod! what with one of your by-laws, and another of your by-laws, and your votes in this capacity, and your votes in that capacity, and your official rights, and your individual rights, and other people's rights who are only you again, there are no rights left for me. Everybody else's rights are my wrongs. What's the use of my having a voice if it's always drowned? I might as well be dumb, and it would be much less aggravating. I'm not a-going to stand that, you know.'

'No!' said Tigg in an insinuating tone.

'No!' returned Jonas, 'I'm not indeed. I'll play old Gooseberry with the office, and make you glad to buy me out at a good high figure, if you try any of your tricks with me.'

'I give you my honour—' Montague began.

'Oh! confound your honour,' interrupted Jonas, who became more coarse and quarrelsome as the other remonstrated, which may have been a part of Mr Montague's intention; 'I want a little more control over the money. You may have all the honour, if you like; I'll never bring you to book for that. But I'm not a-going to stand it, as it is now. If you should take it into your honourable head to go abroad with the bank, I don't see much to prevent you. Well! That won't do. I've had some very good dinners here, but they'd come too dear on such terms; and therefore, that won't do.'

'I am unfortunate to find you in this humour,' said Tigg, with a remarkable kind of smile; 'for I was going to propose to you—for your own advantage; solely for your own advantage—that you should venture a little more with us.'

'Was you, by G—?' said Jonas, with a short laugh.

'Yes. And to suggest,' pursued Montague, 'that surely you have friends; indeed, I know you have; who would answer our purpose admirably, and whom we should be delighted to receive.'

'How kind of you! You'd be delighted to receive 'em, would you?' said Jonas, bantering.

'I give you my sacred honour, quite transported. As your friends, observe!'

'Exactly,' said Jonas; 'as my friends, of course. You'll be very much delighted when you get 'em, I have no doubt. And it'll be all to my advantage, won't it?'

'It will be very much to your advantage,' answered Montague poising a brush in each hand, and looking steadily upon him. 'It will be very much to your advantage, I assure you.'

'And you can tell me how,' said Jonas, 'can't you?'

'SHALL I tell you how?' returned the other.

'I think you had better,' said Jonas. 'Strange things have been done in the Assurance way before now, by strange sorts of men, and I mean to take care of myself.'

'Chuzzlewit!' replied Montague, leaning forward, with his arms upon his knees, and looking full into his face. 'Strange things have been done, and are done every day; not only in our way, but in a variety of other ways; and no one suspects them. But ours, as you say, my good friend, is a strange way; and we strangely happen, sometimes, to come into the knowledge of very strange events.'

He beckoned to Jonas to bring his chair nearer; and looking slightly round, as if to remind him of the presence of Nadgett, whispered in his ear.

From red to white; from white to red again; from red to yellow; then to a cold, dull, awful, sweat-bedabbled blue. In that short whisper, all these changes fell upon the face of Jonas Chuzzlewit; and when at last he laid his hand upon the whisperer's mouth, appalled, lest any syllable of what he said should reach the ears of the third person present, it was as bloodless and as heavy as the hand of Death.

He drew his chair away, and sat a spectacle of terror, misery, and rage. He was afraid to speak, or look, or move, or sit still. Abject, crouching, and miserable, he was a greater degradation to the form he bore, than if he had been a loathsome wound from head to heel.

His companion leisurely resumed his dressing, and completed it, glancing sometimes with a smile at the transformation he had effected, but never speaking once.

'You'll not object,' he said, when he was quite equipped, 'to venture further with us, Chuzzlewit, my friend?'

His pale lips faintly stammered out a 'No.'

'Well said! That's like yourself. Do you know I was thinking yesterday that your father-in-law, relying on your advice as a man of great sagacity in money matters, as no doubt you are, would join us, if the thing were well presented to him. He has money?'

'Yes, he has money.'

'Shall I leave Mr Pecksniff to you? Will you undertake for Mr Pecksniff.'

'I'll try. I'll do my best.'

'A thousand thanks,' replied the other, clapping him upon the shoulder. 'Shall we walk downstairs? Mr Nadgett! Follow us, if you please.'

They went down in that order. Whatever Jonas felt in reference to Montague; whatever sense he had of being caged, and barred, and trapped, and having fallen down into a pit of deepest ruin; whatever thoughts came crowding on his mind even at that early time, of one terrible chance of escape, of one red glimmer in a sky of blackness; he no more thought that the slinking figure half-a-dozen stairs behind him was his pursuing Fate, than that the other figure at his side was his Good Angel.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

CONTAINING SOME FURTHER PARTICULARS OF THE DOMESTIC ECONOMY OF THE PINCHES; WITH STRANGE NEWS FROM THE CITY, NARROWLY CONCERNING TOM

Pleasant little Ruth! Cheerful, tidy, bustling, quiet little Ruth! No doll's house ever yielded greater delight to its young mistress, than little Ruth derived from her glorious dominion over the triangular parlour and the two small bedrooms.

To be Tom's housekeeper. What dignity! Housekeeping, upon the commonest terms, associated itself with elevated responsibilities of all sorts and kinds; but housekeeping for Tom implied the utmost complication of grave trusts and mighty charges. Well might she take the keys out of the little chiffonier which held the tea and sugar; and out of the two little damp cupboards down by the fireplace, where the very black beetles got mouldy, and had the shine taken out of their backs by envious mildew; and jingle them upon a ring before Tom's eyes when he came down to breakfast! Well might she, laughing musically, put them up in that blessed little pocket of hers with a merry pride! For it was such a grand novelty to be mistress of anything, that if she had been the most relentless and despotic of all little housekeepers, she might have pleaded just that much for her excuse, and have been honourably acquitted.

So far from being despotic, however, there was a coyness about her very way of pouring out the tea, which Tom quite revelled in. And when she asked him what he would like to have for dinner, and faltered out 'chops' as a reasonably good suggestion after their last night's successful supper, Tom grew quite facetious, and rallied her desperately.

'I don't know, Tom,' said his sister, blushing, 'I am not quite confident, but I think I could make a beef-steak pudding, if I tried, Tom.'

'In the whole catalogue of cookery, there is nothing I should like so much as a beef-steak pudding!' cried Tom, slapping his leg to give the greater force to this reply.

'Yes, dear, that's excellent! But if it should happen not to come quite right the first time,' his sister faltered; 'if it should happen not to be a pudding exactly, but should turn out a stew, or a soup, or something of that sort, you'll not be vexed, Tom, will you?'

The serious way in which she looked at Tom; the way in which Tom looked at her; and the way in which she gradually broke into a merry laugh at her own expense, would have enchanted you.

'Why,' said Tom 'this is capital. It gives us a new, and quite an uncommon interest in the dinner. We put into a lottery for a beefsteak pudding, and it is impossible to say what we may get. We may make some wonderful discovery, perhaps, and produce such a dish as never was known before.'

'I shall not be at all surprised if we do, Tom,' returned his sister, still laughing merrily, 'or if it should prove to be such a dish as we shall not feel very anxious to produce again; but the meat must come out of the saucepan at last, somehow or other, you know. We can't cook it into nothing at all; that's a great comfort. So if you like to venture, I will.'

'I have not the least doubt,' rejoined Tom, 'that it will come out an excellent pudding, or at all events, I am sure that I shall think it so. There is naturally something so handy and brisk about you, Ruth, that if you said you could make a bowl of faultless turtle soup, I should believe you.'

And Tom was right. She was precisely that sort of person. Nobody ought to have been able to resist her coaxing manner; and nobody had any business to try. Yet she never seemed to know it was her manner at all. That was the best of it.

Well! she washed up the breakfast cups, chatting away the whole time, and telling Tom all sorts of anecdotes about the brass-and-copper founder; put everything in its place; made the room as neat as herself;—you must not suppose its shape was half as neat as hers though, or anything like it—and brushed Tom's old hat round and round and round again, until it was as sleek as Mr Pecksniff. Then she discovered, all in a moment, that Tom's shirt-collar was frayed at the edge; and flying upstairs for a needle and thread, came flying down again with her thimble on, and set it right with wonderful expertness; never once sticking the needle into his face, although she was humming his pet tune from first to last, and beating time with the fingers of her left hand upon his neckcloth. She had no sooner done this, than off she was again; and there she stood once more, as brisk and busy as a bee, tying that compact little chin of hers into an equally compact little bonnet; intent on bustling out to the butcher's, without a minute's loss of time; and inviting Tom to come and see the steak cut, with his own eyes. As to Tom, he was ready to go anywhere; so off they trotted, arm-in-arm, as nimbly as you please; saying to each other what a quiet street it was to lodge in, and how very cheap, and what an airy situation.

To see the butcher slap the steak, before he laid it on the block, and give his knife a sharpening, was to forget breakfast instantly. It was agreeable, too—it really was—to see him cut it off, so smooth and juicy. There was nothing savage in the act, although the knife was large and keen; it was a piece of art, high art; there was delicacy of touch, clearness of tone, skillful handling of the subject, fine shading. It was the triumph of mind over matter; quite.

Perhaps the greenest cabbage-leaf ever grown in a garden was wrapped about this steak, before it was delivered over to Tom. But the butcher had a sentiment for his business, and knew how to refine upon it. When he saw Tom putting the cabbage-leaf into his pocket awkwardly, he begged to be allowed to do it for him; 'for meat,' he said with some emotion, 'must be humoured, not drove.'

Back they went to the lodgings again, after they had bought some eggs, and flour, and such small matters; and Tom sat gravely down to write at one end of the parlour table, while Ruth prepared to make the pudding at the other end; for there was nobody in the house but an old woman (the landlord being a mysterious sort of man, who went out early in the morning, and was scarcely ever seen); and saving in mere household drudgery, they waited on themselves.

'What are you writing, Tom?' inquired his sister, laying her hand upon his shoulder.

'Why, you see, my dear,' said Tom, leaning back in his chair, and looking up in her face, 'I am very anxious, of course, to obtain some suitable employment; and before Mr Westlock comes this afternoon, I think I may as well prepare a little description of myself and my qualifications; such as he could show to any friend of his.'

'You had better do the same for me, Tom, also,' said his sister, casting down her eyes. 'I should dearly like to keep house for you and take care of you always, Tom; but we are not rich enough for that.'

'We are not rich,' returned Tom, 'certainly; and we may be much poorer. But we will not part if we can help it. No, no; we will make up our minds Ruth, that unless we are so very unfortunate as to render me quite sure that you would be better off away from me than with me, we will battle it out together. I am certain we shall be happier if we can battle it out together. Don't you think we shall?'

'Think, Tom!'

'Oh, tut, tut!' interposed Tom, tenderly. 'You mustn't cry.'

'No, no; I won't, Tom. But you can't afford it, dear. You can't, indeed.'

'We don't know that,' said Tom. 'How are we to know that, yet awhile, and without trying? Lord bless my soul!'—Tom's energy became quite grand—'there is no knowing what may happen, if we try hard. And I am sure we can live contentedly upon a very little—if we can only get it.'

'Yes; that I am sure we can, Tom.'

'Why, then,' said Tom, 'we must try for it. My friend, John Westlock, is a capital fellow, and very shrewd and intelligent. I'll take his advice. We'll talk it over with him—both of us together. You'll like John very much, when you come to know him, I am certain. Don't cry, don't cry. YOU make a beef-steak pudding, indeed!' said Tom, giving her a gentle push. 'Why, you haven't boldness enough for a dumpling!'

'You WILL call it a pudding, Tom. Mind! I told you not!'

'I may as well call it that, till it proves to be something else,' said Tom. 'Oh, you are going to work in earnest, are you?'

Aye, aye! That she was. And in such pleasant earnest, moreover, that Tom's attention wandered from his writing every moment. First, she tripped downstairs into the kitchen for the flour, then for the pie-board, then for the eggs, then for the butter, then for a jug of water, then for the rolling-pin, then for a pudding-basin, then for the pepper, then for the salt; making a separate journey for everything, and laughing every time she started off afresh. When all the materials were collected she was horrified to find she had no apron on, and so ran UPstairs by way of variety, to fetch it. She didn't put it on upstairs, but came dancing down with it in her hand; and being one of those little women to whom an apron is a most becoming little vanity, it took an immense time to arrange; having to be carefully smoothed down beneath—Oh, heaven, what a wicked little stomacher!—and to be gathered up into little plaits by the strings before it could be tied, and to be tapped, rebuked, and wheedled, at the pockets, before it would set right, which at last it did, and when it did—but never mind; this is a sober chronicle. And then, there were her cuffs to be tucked up, for fear of flour; and she had a little ring to pull off her finger, which wouldn't come off (foolish little ring!); and during the whole of these preparations she looked demurely every now and then at Tom, from under her dark eyelashes, as if they were all a part of the pudding, and indispensable to its composition.

For the life and soul of him, Tom could get no further in his writing than, 'A respectable young man, aged thirty-five,' and this, notwithstanding the show she made of being supernaturally quiet, and going about on tiptoe, lest she should disturb him; which only served as an additional means of distracting his attention, and keeping it upon her.

'Tom,' she said at last, in high glee. 'Tom!'

'What now?' said Tom, repeating to himself, 'aged thirty-five!'

'Will you look here a moment, please?'

As if he hadn't been looking all the time!

'I am going to begin, Tom. Don't you wonder why I butter the inside of the basin?' said his busy little sister.

'Not more than you do, I dare say,' replied Tom, laughing. 'For I believe you don't know anything about it.'

'What an infidel you are, Tom! How else do you think it would turn out easily when it was done! For a civil-engineer and land-surveyor not to know that! My goodness, Tom!'

It was wholly out of the question to try to write. Tom lined out 'respectable young man, aged thirty-five;' and sat looking on, pen in hand, with one of the most loving smiles imaginable.

Such a busy little woman as she was! So full of self-importance and trying so hard not to smile, or seem uncertain about anything! It was a perfect treat to Tom to see her with her brows knit, and her rosy lips pursed up, kneading away at the crust, rolling it out, cutting it up into strips, lining the basin with it, shaving it off fine round the rim, chopping up the steak into small pieces, raining down pepper and salt upon them, packing them into the basin, pouring in cold water for gravy, and never venturing to steal a look in his direction, lest her gravity should be disturbed; until, at last, the basin being quite full and only wanting the top crust, she clapped her hands all covered with paste and flour, at Tom, and burst out heartily into such a charming little laugh of triumph, that the pudding need have had no other seasoning to commend it to the taste of any reasonable man on earth.

'Where's the pudding?' said Tom. For he was cutting his jokes, Tom was.

'Where!' she answered, holding it up with both hands. 'Look at it!'

'THAT a pudding!' said Tom.

'It WILL be, you stupid fellow, when it's covered in,' returned his sister. Tom still pretending to look incredulous, she gave him a tap on the head with the rolling-pin, and still laughing merrily, had returned to the composition of the top crust, when she started and turned very red. Tom started, too, for following her eyes, he saw John Westlock in the room.

'Why, my goodness, John! How did YOU come in?'

'I beg pardon,' said John—' your sister's pardon especially—but I met an old lady at the street door, who requested me to enter here; and as you didn't hear me knock, and the door was open, I made bold to do so. I hardly know,' said John, with a smile, 'why any of us should be disconcerted at my having accidentally intruded upon such an agreeable domestic occupation, so very agreeably and skillfully pursued; but I must confess that I am. Tom, will you kindly come to my relief?'

'Mr John Westlock,' said Tom. 'My sister.'

'I hope that, as the sister of so old a friend,' said John, laughing 'you will have the goodness to detach your first impressions of me from my unfortunate entrance.'

'My sister is not indisposed perhaps to say the same to you on her own behalf,' retorted Tom.

John said, of course, that this was quite unnecessary, for he had been transfixed in silent admiration; and he held out his hand to Miss Pinch; who couldn't take it, however, by reason of the flour and paste upon her own. This, which might seem calculated to increase the general confusion and render matters worse, had in reality the best effect in the world, for neither of them could help laughing; and so they both found themselves on easy terms immediately.

'I am delighted to see you,' said Tom. 'Sit down.'

'I can only think of sitting down on one condition,' returned his friend; 'and that is, that your sister goes on with the pudding, as if you were still alone.'

'That I am sure she will,' said Tom. 'On one other condition, and that is, that you stay and help us to eat it.'

Poor little Ruth was seized with a palpitation of the heart when Tom committed this appalling indiscretion, for she felt that if the dish turned out a failure, she never would be able to hold up her head before John Westlock again. Quite unconscious of her state of mind, John accepted the invitation with all imaginable heartiness; and after a little more pleasantry concerning this same pudding, and the tremendous expectations he made believe to entertain of it, she blushingly resumed her occupation, and he took a chair.

'I am here much earlier than I intended, Tom; but I will tell you, what brings me, and I think I can answer for your being glad to hear it. Is that anything you wish to show me?'

'Oh dear no!' cried Tom, who had forgotten the blotted scrap of paper in his hand, until this inquiry brought it to his recollection. '"A respectable young man, aged thirty-five"—The beginning of a description of myself. That's all.'

'I don't think you will have occasion to finish it, Tom. But how is it you never told me you had friends in London?'

Tom looked at his sister with all his might; and certainly his sister looked with all her might at him.

'Friends in London!' echoed Tom.

'Ah!' said Westlock, 'to be sure.'

'Have YOU any friends in London, Ruth, my dear!' asked Tom.

'No, Tom.'

'I am very happy to hear that I have,' said Tom, 'but it's news to me. I never knew it. They must be capital people to keep a secret, John.'

'You shall judge for yourself,' returned the other. 'Seriously, Tom, here is the plain state of the case. As I was sitting at breakfast this morning, there comes a knock at my door.'

'On which you cried out, very loud, "Come in!"' suggested Tom.

'So I did. And the person who knocked, not being a respectable young man, aged thirty-five, from the country, came in when he was invited, instead of standing gaping and staring about him on the landing. Well! When he came in, I found he was a stranger; a grave, business-like, sedate-looking, stranger. "Mr Westlock?" said he. "That is my name," said I. "The favour of a few words with you?" said he. "Pray be seated, sir," said I.'

Here John stopped for an instant, to glance towards the table, where Tom's sister, listening attentively, was still busy with the basin, which by this time made a noble appearance. Then he resumed:

'The pudding having taken a chair, Tom—'

'What!' cried Tom.

'Having taken a chair.'

'You said a pudding.'

'No, no,' replied John, colouring rather; 'a chair. The idea of a stranger coming into my rooms at half-past eight o'clock in the morning, and taking a pudding! Having taken a chair, Tom, a chair—amazed me by opening the conversation thus: "I believe you are acquainted, sir, with Mr Thomas Pinch?"

'No!' cried Tom.

'His very words, I assure you. I told him I was. Did I know where you were at present residing? Yes. In London? Yes. He had casually heard, in a roundabout way, that you had left your situation with Mr Pecksniff. Was that the fact? Yes, it was. Did you want another? Yes, you did.'

'Certainly,' said Tom, nodding his head.

'Just what I impressed upon him. You may rest assured that I set that point beyond the possibility of any mistake, and gave him distinctly to understand that he might make up his mind about it. Very well.'

"Then," said he, "I think I can accommodate him."'

Tom's sister stopped short.

'Lord bless me!' cried Tom. 'Ruth, my dear, "think I can accommodate him."'

'Of course I begged him,' pursued John Westlock, glancing at Tom's sister, who was not less eager in her interest than Tom himself, 'to proceed, and said that I would undertake to see you immediately. He replied that he had very little to say, being a man of few words, but such as it was, it was to the purpose—and so, indeed, it turned out—for he immediately went on to tell me that a friend of his was in want of a kind of secretary and librarian; and that although the salary was small, being only a hundred pounds a year, with neither board nor lodging, still the duties were not heavy, and there the post was. Vacant, and ready for your acceptance.'

'Good gracious me!' cried Tom; 'a hundred pounds a year! My dear John! Ruth, my love! A hundred pounds a year!'

'But the strangest part of the story,' resumed John Westlock, laying his hand on Tom's wrist, to bespeak his attention, and repress his ecstasies for the moment; 'the strangest part of the story, Miss Pinch, is this. I don't know this man from Adam; neither does this man know Tom.'

'He can't,' said Tom, in great perplexity, 'if he's a Londoner. I don't know any one in London.'

'And on my observing,' John resumed, still keeping his hand upon Tom's wrist, 'that I had no doubt he would excuse the freedom I took in inquiring who directed him to me; how he came to know of the change which had taken place in my friend's position; and how he came to be acquainted with my friend's peculiar fitness for such an office as he had described; he drily said that he was not at liberty to enter into any explanations.'

'Not at liberty to enter into any explanations!' repeated Tom, drawing a long breath.

'"I must be perfectly aware," he said,' John added, '"that to any person who had ever been in Mr Pecksniff's neighbourhood, Mr Thomas Pinch and his acquirements were as well known as the Church steeple, or the Blue Dragon."'

'The Blue Dragon!' repeated Tom, staring alternately at his friend and his sister.

'Aye, think of that! He spoke as familiarly of the Blue Dragon, I give you my word, as if he had been Mark Tapley. I opened my eyes, I can tell you, when he did so; but I could not fancy I had ever seen the man before, although he said with a smile, "You know the Blue Dragon, Mr Westlock; you kept it up there, once or twice, yourself." Kept it up there! So I did. You remember, Tom?'

Tom nodded with great significance, and, falling into a state of deeper perplexity than before, observed that this was the most unaccountable and extraordinary circumstance he had ever heard of in his life.

'Unaccountable?' his friend repeated. 'I became afraid of the man. Though it was broad day, and bright sunshine, I was positively afraid of him. I declare I half suspected him to be a supernatural visitor, and not a mortal, until he took out a common-place description of pocket-book, and handed me this card.'

'Mr Fips,' said Tom, reading it aloud. 'Austin Friars. Austin Friars sounds ghostly, John.'

'Fips don't, I think,' was John's reply. 'But there he lives, Tom, and there he expects us to call this morning. And now you know as much of this strange incident as I do, upon my honour.'

Tom's face, between his exultation in the hundred pounds a year, and his wonder at this narration, was only to be equalled by the face of his sister, on which there sat the very best expression of blooming surprise that any painter could have wished to see. What the beef-steak pudding would have come to, if it had not been by this time finished, astrology itself could hardly determine.

'Tom,' said Ruth, after a little hesitation, 'perhaps Mr Westlock, in his friendship for you, knows more of this than he chooses to tell.'

'No, indeed!' cried John, eagerly. 'It is not so, I assure you. I wish it were. I cannot take credit to myself, Miss Pinch, for any such thing. All that I know, or, so far as I can judge, am likely to know, I have told you.'

'Couldn't you know more, if you thought proper?' said Ruth, scraping the pie-board industriously.

'No,' retorted John. 'Indeed, no. It is very ungenerous in you to be so suspicious of me when I repose implicit faith in you. I have unbounded confidence in the pudding, Miss Pinch.'

She laughed at this, but they soon got back into a serious vein, and discussed the subject with profound gravity. Whatever else was obscure in the business, it appeared to be quite plain that Tom was offered a salary of one hundred pounds a year; and this being the main point, the surrounding obscurity rather set it off than otherwise.

Tom, being in a great flutter, wished to start for Austin Friars instantly, but they waited nearly an hour, by John's advice, before they departed. Tom made himself as spruce as he could before leaving home, and when John Westlock, through the half-opened parlour door, had glimpses of that brave little sister brushing the collar of his coat in the passage, taking up loose stitches in his gloves and hovering lightly about and about him, touching him up here and there in the height of her quaint, little, old-fashioned tidiness, he called to mind the fancy-portraits of her on the wall of the Pecksniffian workroom, and decided with uncommon indignation that they were gross libels, and not half pretty enough; though, as hath been mentioned in its place, the artists always made those sketches beautiful, and he had drawn at least a score of them with his own hands.

'Tom,' he said, as they were walking along, 'I begin to think you must be somebody's son.'

'I suppose I am,' Tom answered in his quiet way.

'But I mean somebody's of consequence.'

'Bless your heart,' replied Tom, 'my poor father was of no consequence, nor my mother either.'

'You remember them perfectly, then?'

'Remember them? oh dear yes. My poor mother was the last. She died when Ruth was a mere baby, and then we both became a charge upon the savings of that good old grandmother I used to tell you of. You remember! Oh! There's nothing romantic in our history, John.'

'Very well,' said John in quiet despair. 'Then there is no way of accounting for my visitor of this morning. So we'll not try, Tom.'

They did try, notwithstanding, and never left off trying until they got to Austin Friars, where, in a very dark passage on the first floor, oddly situated at the back of a house, across some leads, they found a little blear-eyed glass door up in one corner, with Mr FIPS painted on it in characters which were meant to be transparent. There was also a wicked old sideboard hiding in the gloom hard by, meditating designs upon the ribs of visitors; and an old mat, worn into lattice work, which, being useless as a mat (even if anybody could have seen it, which was impossible), had for many years directed its industry into another channel, and regularly tripped up every one of Mr Fips's clients.

Mr Fips, hearing a violent concussion between a human hat and his office door, was apprised, by the usual means of communication, that somebody had come to call upon him, and giving that somebody admission, observed that it was 'rather dark.'

'Dark indeed,' John whispered in Tom Pinch's ear. 'Not a bad place to dispose of a countryman in, I should think, Tom.'

Tom had been already turning over in his mind the possibility of their having been tempted into that region to furnish forth a pie; but the sight of Mr Fips, who was small and spare, and looked peaceable, and wore black shorts and powder, dispelled his doubts.

'Walk in,' said Mr Fips.

They walked in. And a mighty yellow-jaundiced little office Mr Fips had of it; with a great, black, sprawling splash upon the floor in one corner, as if some old clerk had cut his throat there, years ago, and had let out ink instead of blood.

'I have brought my friend Mr Pinch, sir,' said John Westlock.

'Be pleased to sit,' said Mr Fips.

They occupied the two chairs, and Mr Fips took the office stool from the stuffing whereof he drew forth a piece of horse-hair of immense length, which he put into his mouth with a great appearance of appetite.

He looked at Tom Pinch curiously, but with an entire freedom from any such expression as could be reasonably construed into an unusual display of interest. After a short silence, during which Mr Fips was so perfectly unembarrassed as to render it manifest that he could have broken it sooner without hesitation, if he had felt inclined to do so, he asked if Mr Westlock had made his offer fully known to Mr Pinch.

John answered in the affirmative.

'And you think it worth your while, sir, do you?' Mr Fips inquired of Tom.

'I think it a piece of great good fortune, sir,' said Tom. 'I am exceedingly obliged to you for the offer.'

'Not to me,' said Mr Fips. 'I act upon instructions.'

'To your friend, sir, then,' said Tom. 'To the gentleman with whom I am to engage, and whose confidence I shall endeavour to deserve. When he knows me better, sir, I hope he will not lose his good opinion of me. He will find me punctual and vigilant, and anxious to do what is right. That I think I can answer for, and so,' looking towards him, 'can Mr Westlock.'

'Most assuredly,' said John.

Mr Fips appeared to have some little difficulty in resuming the conversation. To relieve himself, he took up the wafer-stamp, and began stamping capital F's all over his legs.

'The fact is,' said Mr Fips, 'that my friend is not, at this present moment, in town.'

Tom's countenance fell; for he thought this equivalent to telling him that his appearance did not answer; and that Fips must look out for somebody else.

'When do you think he will be in town, sir?' he asked.

'I can't say; it's impossible to tell. I really have no idea. But,' said Fips, taking off a very deep impression of the wafer-stamp upon the calf of his left leg, and looking steadily at Tom, 'I don't know that it's a matter of much consequence.'

Poor Tom inclined his head deferentially, but appeared to doubt that.

'I say,' repeated Mr Fips, 'that I don't know it's a matter of much consequence. The business lies entirely between yourself and me, Mr Pinch. With reference to your duties, I can set you going; and with reference to your salary, I can pay it. Weekly,' said Mr Fips, putting down the wafer-stamp, and looking at John Westlock and Tom Pinch by turns, 'weekly; in this office; at any time between the hours of four and five o'clock in the afternoon.' As Mr Fips said this, he made up his face as if he were going to whistle. But he didn't.

'You are very good,' said Tom, whose countenance was now suffused with pleasure; 'and nothing can be more satisfactory or straightforward. My attendance will be required—'

'From half-past nine to four o'clock or so, I should say,' interrupted Mr Fips. 'About that.'

'I did not mean the hours of attendance,' retorted Tom, 'which are light and easy, I am sure; but the place.'

'Oh, the place! The place is in the Temple.'

Tom was delighted.

'Perhaps,' said Mr Fips, 'you would like to see the place?'

'Oh, dear!' cried Tom. 'I shall only be too glad to consider myself engaged, if you will allow me; without any further reference to the place.'

'You may consider yourself engaged, by all means,' said Mr Fips; 'you couldn't meet me at the Temple Gate in Fleet Street, in an hour from this time, I suppose, could you?'

Certainly Tom could.

'Good,' said Mr Fips, rising. 'Then I will show you the place; and you can begin your attendance to-morrow morning. In an hour, therefore, I shall see you. You too, Mr Westlock? Very good. Take care how you go. It's rather dark.'

With this remark, which seemed superfluous, he shut them out upon the staircase, and they groped their way into the street again. The interview had done so little to remove the mystery in which Tom's new engagement was involved, and had done so much to thicken it, that neither could help smiling at the puzzled looks of the other. They agreed, however, that the introduction of Tom to his new office and office companions could hardly fail to throw a light upon the subject; and therefore postponed its further consideration until after the fulfillment of the appointment they had made with Mr Fips.

After looking at John Westlock's chambers, and devoting a few spare minutes to the Boar's Head, they issued forth again to the place of meeting. The time agreed upon had not quite come; but Mr Fips was already at the Temple Gate, and expressed his satisfaction at their punctuality.

He led the way through sundry lanes and courts, into one more quiet and more gloomy than the rest, and, singling out a certain house, ascended a common staircase; taking from his pocket, as he went, a bunch of rusty keys. Stopping before a door upon an upper story, which had nothing but a yellow smear of paint where custom would have placed the tenant's name, he began to beat the dust out of one of these keys, very deliberately, upon the great broad handrail of the balustrade.

'You had better have a little plug made,' he said, looking round at Tom, after blowing a shrill whistle into the barrel of the key. 'It's the only way of preventing them from getting stopped up. You'll find the lock go the better, too, I dare say, for a little oil.'

Tom thanked him; but was too much occupied with his own speculations, and John Westlock's looks, to be very talkative. In the meantime Mr Fips opened the door, which yielded to his hand very unwillingly, and with a horribly discordant sound. He took the key out, when he had done so, and gave it to Tom.

'Aye, aye!' said Mr Fips. 'The dust lies rather thick here.'

Truly, it did. Mr Fips might have gone so far as to say, very thick. It had accumulated everywhere; lay deep on everything, and in one part, where a ray of sun shone through a crevice in the shutter and struck upon the opposite wall, it went twirling round and round, like a gigantic squirrel-cage.

Dust was the only thing in the place that had any motion about it. When their conductor admitted the light freely, and lifting up the heavy window-sash, let in the summer air, he showed the mouldering furniture, discoloured wainscoting and ceiling, rusty stove, and ashy hearth, in all their inert neglect. Close to the door there stood a candlestick, with an extinguisher upon it; as if the last man who had been there had paused, after securing a retreat, to take a parting look at the dreariness he left behind, and then had shut out light and life together, and closed the place up like a tomb.

There were two rooms on that floor; and in the first or outer one a narrow staircase, leading to two more above. These last were fitted up as bed-chambers. Neither in them, nor in the rooms below, was any scarcity of convenient furniture observable, although the fittings were of a bygone fashion; but solitude and want of use seemed to have rendered it unfit for any purposes of comfort, and to have given it a grisly, haunted air.

Movables of every kind lay strewn about, without the least attempt at order, and were intermixed with boxes, hampers, and all sorts of lumber. On all the floors were piles of books, to the amount, perhaps, of some thousands of volumes: these, still in bales; those, wrapped in paper, as they had been purchased; others scattered singly or in heaps; not one upon the shelves which lined the walls. To these Mr Fips called Tom's attention.

'Before anything else can be done, we must have them put in order, catalogued, and ranged upon the book-shelves, Mr Pinch. That will do to begin with, I think, sir.'

Tom rubbed his hands in the pleasant anticipation of a task so congenial to his taste, and said:

'An occupation full of interest for me, I assure you. It will occupy me, perhaps, until Mr—'

'Until Mr—' repeated Fips; as much as to ask Tom what he was stopping for.

'I forgot that you had not mentioned the gentleman's name,' said Tom.

'Oh!' cried Mr Fips, pulling on his glove, 'didn't I? No, by-the-bye, I don't think I did. Ah! I dare say he'll be here soon. You will get on very well together, I have no doubt. I wish you success I am sure. You won't forget to shut the door? It'll lock of itself if you slam it. Half-past nine, you know. Let us say from half-past nine to four, or half-past four, or thereabouts; one day, perhaps, a little earlier, another day, perhaps, a little later, according as you feel disposed, and as you arrange your work. Mr Fips, Austin Friars of course you'll remember? And you won't forget to slam the door, if you please!'

He said all this in such a comfortable, easy manner, that Tom could only rub his hands, and nod his head, and smile in acquiescence which he was still doing, when Mr Fips walked coolly out.

'Why, he's gone!' cried Tom.

'And what's more, Tom,' said John Westlock, seating himself upon a pile of books, and looking up at his astonished friend, 'he is evidently not coming back again; so here you are, installed. Under rather singular circumstances, Tom!'

It was such an odd affair throughout, and Tom standing there among the books with his hat in one hand and the key in the other, looked so prodigiously confounded, that his friend could not help laughing heartily. Tom himself was tickled; no less by the hilarity of his friend than by the recollection of the sudden manner in which he had been brought to a stop, in the very height of his urbane conference with Mr Fips; so by degrees Tom burst out laughing too; and each making the other laugh more, they fairly roared.

When they had had their laugh out, which did not happen very soon, for give John an inch that way and he was sure to take several ells, being a jovial, good-tempered fellow, they looked about them more closely, groping among the lumber for any stray means of enlightenment that might turn up. But no scrap or shred of information could they find. The books were marked with a variety of owner's names, having, no doubt, been bought at sales, and collected here and there at different times; but whether any one of these names belonged to Tom's employer, and, if so, which of them, they had no means whatever of determining. It occurred to John as a very bright thought to make inquiry at the steward's office, to whom the chambers belonged, or by whom they were held; but he came back no wiser than he went, the answer being, 'Mr Fips, of Austin Friars.'

'After all, Tom, I begin to think it lies no deeper than this. Fips is an eccentric man; has some knowledge of Pecksniff; despises him, of course; has heard or seen enough of you to know that you are the man he wants; and engages you in his own whimsical manner.'

'But why in his own whimsical manner?' asked Tom.

'Oh! why does any man entertain his own whimsical taste? Why does Mr Fips wear shorts and powder, and Mr Fips's next-door neighbour boots and a wig?'

Tom, being in that state of mind in which any explanation is a great relief, adopted this last one (which indeed was quite as feasible as any other) readily, and said he had no doubt of it. Nor was his faith at all shaken by his having said exactly the same thing to each suggestion of his friend's in turn, and being perfectly ready to say it again if he had any new solution to propose.

As he had not, Tom drew down the window-sash, and folded the shutter; and they left the rooms. He closed the door heavily, as Mr Fips had desired him; tried it, found it all safe, and put the key in his pocket.

They made a pretty wide circuit in going back to Islington, as they had time to spare, and Tom was never tired of looking about him. It was well he had John Westlock for his companion, for most people would have been weary of his perpetual stoppages at shop-windows, and his frequent dashes into the crowded carriage-way at the peril of his life, to get the better view of church steeples, and other public buildings. But John was charmed to see him so much interested, and every time Tom came back with a beaming face from among the wheels of carts and hackney-coaches, wholly unconscious of the personal congratulations addressed to him by the drivers, John seemed to like him better than before.

There was no flour on Ruth's hands when she received them in the triangular parlour, but there were pleasant smiles upon her face, and a crowd of welcomes shining out of every smile, and gleaming in her bright eyes. By the bye, how bright they were! Looking into them for but a moment, when you took her hand, you saw, in each, such a capital miniature of yourself, representing you as such a restless, flashing, eager, brilliant little fellow—

Ah! if you could only have kept them for your own miniature! But, wicked, roving, restless, too impartial eyes, it was enough for any one to stand before them, and, straightway, there he danced and sparkled quite as merrily as you!

The table was already spread for dinner; and though it was spread with nothing very choice in the way of glass or linen, and with green-handled knives, and very mountebanks of two-pronged forks, which seemed to be trying how far asunder they could possibly stretch their legs without converting themselves into double the number of iron toothpicks, it wanted neither damask, silver, gold, nor china; no, nor any other garniture at all. There it was; and, being there, nothing else would have done as well.

The success of that initiative dish; that first experiment of hers in cookery; was so entire, so unalloyed and perfect, that John Westlock and Tom agreed she must have been studying the art in secret for a long time past; and urged her to make a full confession of the fact. They were exceedingly merry over this jest, and many smart things were said concerning it; but John was not as fair in his behaviour as might have been expected, for, after luring Tom Pinch on for a long time, he suddenly went over to the enemy, and swore to everything his sister said. However, as Tom observed the same night before going to bed, it was only in joke, and John had always been famous for being polite to ladies, even when he was quite a boy. Ruth said, 'Oh! indeed!' She didn't say anything else.

It is astonishing how much three people may find to talk about. They scarcely left off talking once. And it was not all lively chat which occupied them; for when Tom related how he had seen Mr Pecksniff's daughters, and what a change had fallen on the younger, they were very serious.

John Westlock became quite absorbed in her fortunes; asking many questions of Tom Pinch about her marriage, inquiring whether her husband was the gentleman whom Tom had brought to dine with him at Salisbury; in what degree of relationship they stood towards each other, being different persons; and taking, in short, the greatest interest in the subject. Tom then went into it, at full length; he told how Martin had gone abroad, and had not been heard of for a long time; how Dragon Mark had borne him company; how Mr Pecksniff had got the poor old doting grandfather into his power; and how he basely sought the hand of Mary Graham. But not a word said Tom of what lay hidden in his heart; his heart, so deep, and true, and full of honour, and yet with so much room for every gentle and unselfish thought; not a word.

Tom, Tom! The man in all this world most confident in his sagacity and shrewdness; the man in all this world most proud of his distrust of other men, and having most to show in gold and silver as the gains belonging to his creed; the meekest favourer of that wise doctrine, Every man for himself, and God for us all (there being high wisdom in the thought that the Eternal Majesty of Heaven ever was, or can be, on the side of selfish lust and love!); shall never find, oh, never find, be sure of that, the time come home to him, when all his wisdom is an idiot's folly, weighed against a simple heart!

Well, well, Tom, it was simple too, though simple in a different way, to be so eager touching that same theatre, of which John said, when tea was done, he had the absolute command, so far as taking parties in without the payment of a sixpence was concerned; and simpler yet, perhaps, never to suspect that when he went in first, alone, he paid the money! Simple in thee, dear Tom, to laugh and cry so heartily at such a sorry show, so poorly shown; simple to be so happy and loquacious trudging home with Ruth; simple to be so surprised to find that merry present of a cookery-book awaiting her in the parlour next morning, with the beef-steak-pudding-leaf turned down and blotted out. There! Let the record stand! Thy quality of soul was simple, simple, quite contemptible, Tom Pinch!

CHAPTER FORTY

THE PINCHES MAKE A NEW ACQUAINTANCE, AND HAVE FRESH OCCASION FOR SURPRISE AND WONDER

There was a ghostly air about these uninhabited chambers in the Temple, and attending every circumstance of Tom's employment there, which had a strange charm in it. Every morning when he shut his door at Islington, he turned his face towards an atmosphere of unaccountable fascination, as surely as he turned it to the London smoke; and from that moment it thickened round and round him all day long, until the time arrived for going home again, and leaving it, like a motionless cloud, behind.

It seemed to Tom, every morning, that he approached this ghostly mist, and became enveloped in it, by the easiest succession of degrees imaginable. Passing from the roar and rattle of the streets into the quiet court-yards of the Temple, was the first preparation. Every echo of his footsteps sounded to him like a sound from the old walls and pavements, wanting language to relate the histories of the dim, dismal rooms; to tell him what lost documents were decaying in forgotten corners of the shut-up cellars, from whose lattices such mouldy sighs came breathing forth as he went past; to whisper of dark bins of rare old wine, bricked up in vaults among the old foundations of the Halls; or mutter in a lower tone yet darker legends of the cross-legged knights, whose marble effigies were in the church. With the first planting of his foot upon the staircase of his dusty office, all these mysteries increased; until, ascending step by step, as Tom ascended, they attained their full growth in the solitary labours of the day.

Every day brought one recurring, never-failing source of speculation. This employer; would he come to-day, and what would he be like? For Tom could not stop short at Mr Fips; he quite believed that Mr Fips had spoken truly, when he said he acted for another; and what manner of man that other was, became a full-blown flower of wonder in the garden of Tom's fancy, which never faded or got trodden down.

At one time, he conceived that Mr Pecksniff, repenting of his falsehood, might, by exertion of his influence with some third person have devised these means of giving him employment. He found this idea so insupportable after what had taken place between that good man and himself, that he confided it to John Westlock on the very same day; informing John that he would rather ply for hire as a porter, than fall so low in his own esteem as to accept the smallest obligation from the hands of Mr Pecksniff. But John assured him that he (Tom Pinch) was far from doing justice to the character of Mr Pecksniff yet, if he supposed that gentleman capable of performing a generous action; and that he might make his mind quite easy on that head until he saw the sun turn green and the moon black, and at the same time distinctly perceived with the naked eye, twelve first-rate comets careering round those planets. In which unusual state of things, he said (and not before), it might become not absolutely lunatic to suspect Mr Pecksniff of anything so monstrous. In short he laughed the idea down completely; and Tom, abandoning it, was thrown upon his beam-ends again, for some other solution.

In the meantime Tom attended to his duties daily, and made considerable progress with the books; which were already reduced to some sort of order, and made a great appearance in his fairly-written catalogue. During his business hours, he indulged himself occasionally with snatches of reading; which were often, indeed, a necessary part of his pursuit; and as he usually made bold to carry one of these goblin volumes home at night (always bringing it back again next morning, in case his strange employer should appear and ask what had become of it), he led a happy, quiet, studious kind of life, after his own heart.

But though the books were never so interesting, and never so full of novelty to Tom, they could not so enchain him, in those mysterious chambers, as to render him unconscious, for a moment, of the lightest sound. Any footstep on the flags without set him listening attentively and when it turned into that house, and came up, up, up the stairs, he always thought with a beating heart, 'Now I am coming face to face with him at last!' But no footstep ever passed the floor immediately below: except his own.

This mystery and loneliness engendered fancies in Tom's mind, the folly of which his common sense could readily discover, but which his common sense was quite unable to keep away, notwithstanding; that quality being with most of us, in such a case, like the old French Police—quick at detection, but very weak as a preventive power. Misgivings, undefined, absurd, inexplicable, that there was some one hiding in the inner room—

walking softly overhead, peeping in through the door-chink, doing something stealthy, anywhere where he was not—came over him a hundred times a day, making it pleasant to throw up the sash, and hold communication even with the sparrows who had built in the roof and water-spout, and were twittering about the windows all day long.

He sat with the outer door wide open, at all times, that he might hear the footsteps as they entered, and turned off into the chambers on the lower floor. He formed odd prepossessions too, regarding strangers in the streets; and would say within himself of such or such a man, who struck him as having anything uncommon in his dress or aspect, 'I shouldn't wonder, now, if that were he!' But it never was. And though he actually turned back and followed more than one of these suspected individuals, in a singular belief that they were going to the place he was then upon his way from, he never got any other satisfaction by it, than the satisfaction of knowing it was not the case.

Mr Fips, of Austin Friars, rather deepened than illumined the obscurity of his position; for on the first occasion of Tom's waiting on him to receive his weekly pay, he said:

'Oh! by the bye, Mr Pinch, you needn't mention it, if you please!'

Tom thought he was going to tell him a secret; so he said that he wouldn't on any account, and that Mr Fips might entirely depend upon him. But as Mr Fips said 'Very good,' in reply, and nothing more, Tom prompted him:

'Not on any account,' repeated Tom.

Mr Fips repeated: 'Very good.'

'You were going to say'—Tom hinted.

'Oh dear no!' cried Fips. 'Not at all.' However, seeing Tom confused, he added, 'I mean that you needn't mention any particulars about your place of employment, to people generally. You'll find it better not.'

'I have not had the pleasure of seeing my employer yet, sir,' observed Tom, putting his week's salary in his pocket.

'Haven't you?' said Fips. 'No, I don't suppose you have though.'

'I should like to thank him, and to know that what I have done so far, is done to his satisfaction,' faltered Tom.

'Quite right,' said Mr Fips, with a yawn. 'Highly creditable. Very proper.'

Tom hastily resolved to try him on another tack.

'I shall soon have finished with the books,' he said. 'I hope that will not terminate my engagement, sir, or render me useless?'

'Oh dear no!' retorted Fips. 'Plenty to do; plen-ty to do! Be careful how you go. It's rather dark.'

This was the very utmost extent of information Tom could ever get out of HIM. So it was dark enough in all conscience; and if Mr Fips expressed himself with a double meaning, he had good reason for doing so.

But now a circumstance occurred, which helped to divert Tom's thoughts from even this mystery, and to divide them between it and a new channel, which was a very Nile in itself.

The way it came about was this. Having always been an early riser and having now no organ to engage him in sweet converse every morning, it was his habit to take a long walk before going to the Temple; and naturally inclining, as a stranger, towards those parts of the town which were conspicuous for the life and animation pervading them, he became a great frequenter of the market-places, bridges, quays, and especially the steam-boat wharves; for it was very lively and fresh to see the people hurrying away upon their many schemes of business or pleasure, and it made Tom glad to think that there was that much change and freedom in the monotonous routine of city lives.

In most of these morning excursions Ruth accompanied him. As their landlord was always up and away at his business (whatever that might be, no one seemed to know) at a very early hour, the habits of the people of the house in which they lodged corresponded with their own. Thus they had often finished their breakfast, and were out in the summer air, by seven o'clock. After a two hours' stroll they parted at some convenient point; Tom going to the Temple, and his sister returning home, as methodically as you please.

Many and many a pleasant stroll they had in Covent Garden Market; snuffing up the perfume of the fruits and flowers, wondering at the magnificence of the pineapples and melons; catching glimpses down side avenues, of rows and rows of old women, seated on inverted baskets, shelling peas; looking unutterable things at the fat bundles of asparagus with which the dainty shops were fortified as with a breastwork; and, at the herbalist's doors, gratefully inhaling scents as of veal-stuffing yet uncooked, dreamily mixed up with capsicums, brown-paper, seeds, even with hints of lusty snails and fine young curly leeches. Many and many a pleasant stroll they had among the poultry markets, where ducks and fowls, with necks unnaturally long, lay stretched out in pairs, ready for cooking; where there were speckled eggs in mossy baskets, white country sausages beyond impeachment by surviving cat or dog, or horse or donkey; new cheeses to any wild extent, live birds in coops and cages, looking much too big to be natural, in consequence of those receptacles being much too little; rabbits, alive and dead, innumerable. Many a pleasant stroll they had among the cool, refreshing, silvery fish-stalls, with a kind of moonlight effect about their stock-in-trade, excepting always for the ruddy lobsters. Many a pleasant stroll among the waggon-loads of fragrant hay, beneath which dogs and tired waggoners lay fast asleep, oblivious of the pieman and the public-house. But never half so good a stroll as down among the steamboats on a bright morning.

There they lay, alongside of each other; hard and fast for ever, to all appearance, but designing to get out somehow, and quite confident of doing it; and in that faith shoals of passengers, and heaps of luggage, were proceeding hurriedly on board. Little steam-boats dashed up and down the stream incessantly. Tiers upon tiers of vessels, scores of masts, labyrinths of tackle, idle sails, splashing oars, gliding row-boats, lumbering barges, sunken piles, with ugly lodgings for the water-rat within their mud-discoloured nooks; church steeples, warehouses, house-roofs, arches, bridges, men and women, children, casks, cranes, boxes horses, coaches, idlers, and hard-labourers; there they were, all jumbled up together, any summer morning, far beyond Tom's power of separation.

In the midst of all this turmoil there was an incessant roar from every packet's funnel, which quite expressed and carried out the uppermost emotion of the scene. They all appeared to be perspiring and bothering themselves, exactly as their passengers did; they never left off fretting and chafing, in their own hoarse manner, once; but were always panting out, without any stops, 'Come along do make haste I'm very nervous come along oh good gracious we shall never get there how late you are do make haste I'm off directly come along!'

Even when they had left off, and had got safely out into the current, on the smallest provocation they began again; for the bravest packet of them all, being stopped by some entanglement in the river, would immediately begin to fume and pant afresh, 'oh here's a stoppage what's the matter do go on there I'm in a hurry it's done on purpose did you ever oh my goodness

DO go on here!' and so, in a state of mind bordering on distraction, would be last seen drifting slowly through the mist into the summer light beyond, that made it red.

Tom's ship, however; or, at least, the packet-boat in which Tom and his sister took the greatest interest on one particular occasion; was not off yet, by any means; but was at the height of its disorder. The press of passengers was very great; another steam-boat lay on each side of her; the gangways were choked up; distracted women, obviously bound for Gravesend, but turning a deaf ear to all representations that this particular vessel was about to sail for Antwerp, persisted in secreting baskets of refreshments behind bulk-heads, and water-casks, and under seats; and very great confusion prevailed.

It was so amusing, that Tom, with Ruth upon his arm, stood looking down from the wharf, as nearly regardless as it was in the nature of flesh and blood to be, of an elderly lady behind him, who had brought a large umbrella with her, and didn't know what to do with it. This tremendous instrument had a hooked handle; and its vicinity was first made known to him by a painful pressure on the windpipe, consequent upon its having caught him round the throat. Soon after disengaging himself with perfect good humour, he had a sensation of the ferule in his back; immediately afterwards, of the hook entangling his ankles; then of the umbrella generally, wandering about his hat, and flapping at it like a great bird; and, lastly, of a poke or thrust below the ribs, which give him such exceeding anguish, that he could not refrain from turning round to offer a mild remonstrance.

Upon his turning round, he found the owner of the umbrella struggling on tip-toe, with a countenance expressive of violent animosity, to look down upon the steam-boats; from which he inferred that she had attacked him, standing in the front row, by design, and as her natural enemy.

'What a very ill-natured person you must be!' said Tom.

The lady cried out fiercely, 'Where's the pelisse!'—meaning the constabulary—and went on to say, shaking the handle of the umbrella at Tom, that but for them fellers never being in the way when they was wanted, she'd have given him in charge, she would.

'If they greased their whiskers less, and minded the duties which they're paid so heavy for, a little more,' she observed, 'no one needn't be drove mad by scrouding so!'

She had been grievously knocked about, no doubt, for her bonnet was bent into the shape of a cocked hat. Being a fat little woman, too, she was in a state of great exhaustion and intense heat. Instead of pursuing the altercation, therefore, Tom civilly inquired what boat she wanted to go on board of?

'I suppose,' returned the lady, 'as nobody but yourself can want to look at a steam package, without wanting to go a-boarding of it, can they! Booby!'

'Which one do you want to look at then?' said Tom. 'We'll make room for you if we can. Don't be so ill-tempered.'

'No blessed creetur as ever I was with in trying times,' returned the lady, somewhat softened, 'and they're a many in their numbers, ever brought it as a charge again myself that I was anythin' but mild and equal in my spirits. Never mind a contradicting of me, if you seem to feel it does you good, ma'am, I often says, for well you know that Sairey may be trusted not to give it back again. But I will not denige that I am worrited and wexed this day, and with good reagion, Lord forbid!'

By this time, Mrs Gamp (for it was no other than that experienced practitioner) had, with Tom's assistance, squeezed and worked herself into a small corner between Ruth and the rail; where, after breathing very hard for some little time, and performing a short series of dangerous evolutions with her umbrella, she managed to establish herself pretty comfortably.

'And which of all them smoking monsters is the Ankworks boat, I wonder. Goodness me!' cried Mrs Gamp.

'What boat did you want?' asked Ruth.

'The Ankworks package,' Mrs Gamp replied. 'I will not deceive you, my sweet. Why should I?'

'That is the Antwerp packet in the middle,' said Ruth.

'And I wish it was in Jonadge's belly, I do,' cried Mrs Gamp; appearing to confound the prophet with the whale in this miraculous aspiration.

Ruth said nothing in reply; but, as Mrs Gamp, laying her chin against the cool iron of the rail, continued to look intently at the Antwerp boat, and every now and then to give a little groan, she inquired whether any child of hers was going aboard that morning? Or perhaps her husband, she said kindly.

'Which shows,' said Mrs Gamp, casting up her eyes, 'what a little way you've travelled into this wale of life, my dear young creetur! As a good friend of mine has frequent made remark to me, which her name, my love, is Harris, Mrs Harris through the square and up the steps a-turnin' round by the tobacker shop, "Oh Sairey, Sairey, little do we know wot lays afore us!" "Mrs Harris, ma'am," I says, "not much, it's true, but more than you suppoge. Our calcilations, ma'am," I says, "respectin' wot the number of a family will be, comes most times within one, and oftener than you would suppoge, exact." "Sairey," says Mrs Harris, in a awful way, "Tell me wot is my indiwidgle number." "No, Mrs Harris," I says to her, "ex-cuge me, if you please. My own," I says, "has fallen out of three-pair backs, and had damp doorsteps settled on their lungs, and one was turned up smilin' in a bedstead unbeknown. Therefore, ma'am," I says, "seek not to proticipate, but take 'em as they come and as they go." Mine,' says Mrs Gamp, 'mine is all gone, my dear young chick. And as to husbands, there's a wooden leg gone likeways home to its account, which in its constancy of walkin' into wine vaults, and never comin' out again 'till fetched by force, was quite as weak as flesh, if not weaker.'

When she had delivered this oration, Mrs Gamp leaned her chin upon the cool iron again; and looking intently at the Antwerp packet, shook her head and groaned.

'I wouldn't,' said Mrs Gamp, 'I wouldn't be a man and have such a think upon my mind!—but nobody as owned the name of man, could do it!'

Tom and his sister glanced at each other; and Ruth, after a moment's hesitation, asked Mrs Gamp what troubled her so much.

'My dear,' returned that lady, dropping her voice, 'you are single, ain't you?'

Ruth laughed blushed, and said 'Yes.'

'Worse luck,' proceeded Mrs Gamp, 'for all parties! But others is married, and in the marriage state; and there is a dear young creetur a-comin' down this mornin' to that very package, which is no more fit to trust herself to sea, than nothin' is!'

She paused here to look over the deck of the packet in question, and on the steps leading down to it, and on the gangways. Seeming to have thus assured herself that the object of her commiseration had not yet arrived, she raised her eyes gradually up to the top of the escape-pipe, and indignantly apostrophised the vessel:

'Oh, drat you!' said Mrs Gamp, shaking her umbrella at it, 'you're a nice spluttering nisy monster for a delicate young creetur to go and be a passinger by; ain't you! YOU never do no harm in that way, do you? With your hammering, and roaring, and hissing, and lamp-iling, you brute! Them Confugion steamers,' said Mrs Gamp, shaking her umbrella again, 'has done more to throw us out of our reg'lar work and bring ewents on at times when nobody counted on 'em (especially them screeching railroad ones), than all the other frights that ever was took. I have heerd of one young man, a guard upon a railway, only three years opened—well does Mrs Harris know him, which indeed he is her own relation by her sister's marriage with a master sawyer—as is godfather at this present time to six-and-twenty blessed little strangers, equally unexpected, and all on 'um named after the Ingeines as was the cause. Ugh!' said Mrs Gamp, resuming her apostrophe, 'one might easy know you was a man's inwention, from your disregardlessness of the weakness of our naturs, so one might, you brute!'

It would not have been unnatural to suppose, from the first part of Mrs Gamp's lamentations, that she was connected with the stage-coaching or post-horsing trade. She had no means of judging of the effect of her concluding remarks upon her young companion; for she interrupted herself at this point, and exclaimed:

'There she identically goes! Poor sweet young creetur, there she goes, like a lamb to the sacrifige! If there's any illness when that wessel gets to sea,' said Mrs Gamp, prophetically, 'it's murder, and I'm the witness for the persecution.'

She was so very earnest on the subject, that Tom's sister (being as kind as Tom himself) could not help saying something to her in reply.

'Pray, which is the lady,' she inquired, 'in whom you are so much interested?'

'There!' groaned Mrs Gamp. 'There she goes! A-crossin' the little wooden bridge at this minute. She's a-slippin' on a bit of orangepeel!' tightly clutching her umbrella. 'What a turn it give me.'

'Do you mean the lady who is with that man wrapped up from head to foot in a large cloak, so that his face is almost hidden?'

'Well he may hide it!' Mrs Gamp replied. 'He's good call to be ashamed of himself. Did you see him a-jerking of her wrist, then?'

'He seems to be hasty with her, indeed.'

'Now he's a-taking of her down into the close cabin!' said Mrs Gamp, impatiently. 'What's the man about! The deuce is in him, I think. Why can't he leave her in the open air?'

He did not, whatever his reason was, but led her quickly down and disappeared himself, without loosening his cloak, or pausing on the crowded deck one moment longer than was necessary to clear their way to that part of the vessel.

Tom had not heard this little dialogue; for his attention had been engaged in an unexpected manner. A hand upon his sleeve had caused him to look round, just when Mrs Gamp concluded her apostrophe to the steam-engine; and on his right arm, Ruth being on his left, he found their landlord, to his great surprise.

He was not so much surprised at the man's being there, as at his having got close to him so quietly and swiftly; for another person had been at his elbow one instant before; and he had not in the meantime been conscious of any change or pressure in the knot of people among whom he stood. He and Ruth had frequently remarked how noiselessly this landlord of theirs came into and went out of his own house; but Tom was not the less amazed to see him at his elbow now.

'I beg your pardon, Mr Pinch,' he said in his ear. 'I am rather infirm, and out of breath, and my eyes are not very good. I am not as young as I was, sir. You don't see a gentleman in a large cloak down yonder, with a lady on his arm; a lady in a veil and a black shawl; do you?'

If HE did not, it was curious that in speaking he should have singled out from all the crowd the very people whom he described; and should have glanced hastily from them to Tom, as if he were burning to direct his wandering eyes.

'A gentleman in a large cloak!' said Tom, 'and a lady in a black shawl! Let me see!'

'Yes, yes!' replied the other, with keen impatience. 'A gentleman muffled up from head to foot—strangely muffled up for such a morning as this—like an invalid, with his hand to his face at this minute, perhaps. No, no, no! not there,' he added, following Tom's gaze; 'the other way; in that direction; down yonder.' Again he indicated, but this time in his hurry, with his outstretched finger, the very spot on which the progress of these persons was checked at that moment.

'There are so many people, and so much motion, and so many objects,' said Tom, 'that I find it difficult to—no, I really don't see a gentleman in a large cloak, and a lady in a black shawl. There's a lady in a red shawl over there!'

'No, no, no!' cried his landlord, pointing eagerly again, 'not there. The other way; the other way. Look at the cabin steps. To the left. They must be near the cabin steps. Do you see the cabin steps? There's the bell ringing already! DO you see the steps?'

'Stay!' said Tom, 'you're right. Look! there they go now. Is that the gentleman you mean? Descending at this minute, with the folds of a great cloak trailing down after him?'

'The very man!' returned the other, not looking at what Tom pointed out, however, but at Tom's own face. 'Will you do me a kindness, sir, a great kindness? Will you put that letter in his hand? Only give him that! He expects it. I am charged to do it by my employers, but I am late in finding him, and, not being as young as I have been, should never be able to make my way on board and off the deck again in time. Will you pardon my boldness, and do me that great kindness?'

His hands shook, and his face bespoke the utmost interest and agitation, as he pressed the letter upon Tom, and pointed to its destination, like the Tempter in some grim old carving.

To hesitate in the performance of a good-natured or compassionate office was not in Tom's way. He took the letter; whispered Ruth to wait till he returned, which would be immediately; and ran down the steps with all the expedition he could make. There were so many people going down, so many others coming up, such heavy goods in course of transit to and fro, such a ringing of bell, blowing-off of steam, and shouting of men's voices, that he had much ado to force his way, or keep in mind to which boat he was going. But he reached the right one with good speed, and going down the cabin-stairs immediately, described the object of his search standing at the upper end of the saloon, with his back towards him, reading some notice which was hung against the wall. As Tom advanced to give him the letter, he started, hearing footsteps, and turned round.

What was Tom's astonishment to find in him the man with whom he had had the conflict in the field—poor Mercy's husband. Jonas!

Tom understood him to say, what the devil did he want; but it was not easy to make out what he said; he spoke so indistinctly.

'I want nothing with you for myself,' said Tom; 'I was asked, a moment since, to give you this letter. You were pointed out to me, but I didn't know you in your strange dress. Take it!'

He did so, opened it, and read the writing on the inside. The contents were evidently very brief; not more perhaps than one line; but they struck upon him like a stone from a sling. He reeled back as he read.

His emotion was so different from any Tom had ever seen before that he stopped involuntarily. Momentary as his state of indecision was, the bell ceased while he stood there, and a hoarse voice calling down the steps, inquired if there was any to go ashore?

'Yes,' cried Jonas, 'I—I am coming. Give me time. Where's that woman! Come back; come back here.'

He threw open another door as he spoke, and dragged, rather than led, her forth. She was pale and frightened, and amazed to see her old acquaintance; but had no time to speak, for they were making a great stir above; and Jonas drew her rapidly towards the deck.

'Where are we going? What is the matter?'

'We are going back,' said Jonas. 'I have changed my mind. I can't go. Don't question me, or I shall be the death of you, or some one else. Stop there! Stop! We're for the shore. Do you hear? We're for the shore!'

He turned, even in the madness of his hurry, and scowling darkly back at Tom, shook his clenched hand at him. There are not many human faces capable of the expression with which he accompanied that gesture.

He dragged her up, and Tom followed them. Across the deck, over the side, along the crazy plank, and up the steps, he dragged her fiercely; not bestowing any look on her, but gazing upwards all the while among the faces on the wharf. Suddenly he turned again, and said to Tom with a tremendous oath:

'Where is he?'

Before Tom, in his indignation and amazement, could return an answer to a question he so little understood, a gentleman approached Tom behind, and saluted Jonas Chuzzlewit by name. He has a gentleman of foreign appearance, with a black moustache and whiskers; and addressed him with a polite composure, strangely different from his own distracted and desperate manner.

'Chuzzlewit, my good fellow!' said the gentleman, raising his hat in compliment to Mrs Chuzzlewit, 'I ask your pardon twenty thousand times. I am most unwilling to interfere between you and a domestic trip of this nature (always so very charming and refreshing, I know, although I have not the happiness to be a domestic man myself, which is the great infelicity of my existence); but the beehive, my dear friend, the beehive—will you introduce me?'

'This is Mr Montague,' said Jonas, whom the words appeared to choke.

'The most unhappy and most penitent of men, Mrs Chuzzlewit,' pursued that gentleman, 'for having been the means of spoiling this excursion; but as I tell my friend, the beehive, the beehive. You projected a short little continental trip, my dear friend, of course?'

Jonas maintained a dogged silence.

'May I die,' cried Montague, 'but I am shocked! Upon my soul I am shocked. But that confounded beehive of ours in the city must be paramount to every other consideration, when there is honey to be made; and that is my best excuse. Here is a very singular old female dropping curtseys on my right,' said Montague, breaking off in his discourse, and looking at Mrs Gamp, 'who is not a friend of mine. Does anybody know her?'

'Ah! Well they knows me, bless their precious hearts!' said Mrs Gamp, 'not forgettin' your own merry one, sir, and long may it be so! Wishin' as every one' (she delivered this in the form of a toast or sentiment) 'was as merry, and as handsome-lookin', as a little bird has whispered me a certain gent is, which I will not name for fear I give offence where none is doo! My precious lady,' here she stopped short in her merriment, for she had until now affected to be vastly entertained, 'you're too pale by half!'

'YOU are here too, are you?' muttered Jonas. 'Ecod, there are enough of you.'

'I hope, sir,' returned Mrs Gamp, dropping an indignant curtsey, 'as no bones is broke by me and Mrs Harris a-walkin' down upon a public wharf. Which was the very words she says to me (although they was the last I ever had to speak) was these: "Sairey," she says, "is it a public wharf?" "Mrs Harris," I makes answer, "can you doubt it? You have know'd me now, ma'am, eight and thirty year; and did you ever know me go, or wish to go, where I was not made welcome, say the words." "No, Sairey," Mrs Harris says, "contrairy quite." And well she knows it too. I am but a poor woman, but I've been sought after, sir, though you may not think it. I've been knocked up at all hours of the night, and warned out by a many landlords, in consequence of being mistook for Fire. I goes out workin' for my bread, 'tis true, but I maintains my independency, with your kind leave, and which I will till death. I has my feelins as a woman, sir, and I have been a mother likeways; but touch a pipkin as belongs to me, or make the least remarks on what I eats or drinks, and though you was the favouritest young for'ard hussy of a servant-gal as ever come into a house, either you leaves the place, or me. My earnins is not great, sir, but I will not be impoged upon. Bless the babe, and save the mother, is my mortar, sir; but I makes so free as add to that, Don't try no impogician with the Nuss, for she will not abear it!'

Mrs Gamp concluded by drawing her shawl tightly over herself with both hands, and, as usual, referring to Mrs Harris for full corroboration of these particulars. She had that peculiar trembling of the head which, in ladies of her excitable nature, may be taken as a sure indication of their breaking out again very shortly; when Jonas made a timely interposition.

'As you ARE here,' he said, 'you had better see to her, and take her home. I am otherwise engaged.' He said nothing more; but looked at Montague as if to give him notice that he was ready to attend him.

'I am sorry to take you away,' said Montague.

Jonas gave him a sinister look, which long lived in Tom's memory, and which he often recalled afterwards.

'I am, upon my life,' said Montague. 'Why did you make it necessary?'

With the same dark glance as before, Jonas replied, after a moment's silence:

'The necessity is none of my making. You have brought it about yourself.'

He said nothing more. He said even this as if he were bound, and in the other's power, but had a sullen and suppressed devil within him, which he could not quite resist. His very gait, as they walked away together, was like that of a fettered man; but, striving to work out at his clenched hands, knitted brows, and fast-set lips, was the same imprisoned devil still.

They got into a handsome cabriolet which was waiting for them and drove away.

The whole of this extraordinary scene had passed so rapidly and the tumult which prevailed around as so unconscious of any impression from it, that, although Tom had been one of the chief actors, it was like a dream. No one had noticed him after they had left the packet. He had stood behind Jonas, and so near him, that he could not help hearing all that passed. He had stood there, with his sister on his arm, expecting and hoping to have an opportunity of explaining his strange share in this yet stranger business. But Jonas had not raised his eyes from the ground; no one else had even looked towards him; and before he could resolve on any course of action, they were all gone.

He gazed round for his landlord. But he had done that more than once already, and no such man was to be seen. He was still pursuing this search with his eyes, when he saw a hand beckoning to him from a hackney-coach; and hurrying towards it, found it was Merry's. She addressed him hurriedly, but bent out of the window, that she might not be overheard by her companion, Mrs Gamp.

'What is it?' she said. 'Good heaven, what is it? Why did he tell me last night to prepare for a long journey, and why have you brought us back like criminals? Dear Mr Pinch!' she clasped her hands distractedly, 'be merciful to us. Whatever this dreadful secret is, be merciful, and God will bless you!'

'If any power of mercy lay with me,' cried Tom, 'trust me, you shouldn't ask in vain. But I am far more ignorant and weak than you.'

She withdrew into the coach again, and he saw the hand waving towards him for a moment; but whether in reproachfulness or incredulity or misery, or grief, or sad adieu, or what else, he could not, being so hurried, understand. SHE was gone now; and Ruth and he were left to walk away, and wonder.

Had Mr Nadgett appointed the man who never came, to meet him upon London Bridge that morning? He was certainly looking over the parapet, and down upon the steamboat-wharf at that moment. It could not have been for pleasure; he never took pleasure. No. He must have had some business there.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

MR JONAS AND HIS FRIEND, ARRIVING AT A PLEASANT UNDERSTANDING, SET FORTH UPON AN ENTERPRISE

The office of the Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company being near at hand, and Mr Montague driving Jonas straight there, they had very little way to go. But the journey might have been one of several hours' duration, without provoking a remark from either; for it was clear that Jonas did not mean to break the silence which prevailed between them, and that it was not, as yet, his dear friend's cue to tempt them into conversation.

He had thrown aside his cloak, as having now no motive for concealment, and with that garment huddled on his knees, sat as far removed from his companion as the limited space in such a carriage would allow. There was a striking difference in his manner, compared with what it had been, within a few minutes, when Tom encountered him so unexpectedly on board the packet, or when the ugly change had fallen on him in Mr Montague's dressing-room. He had the aspect of a man found out and held at bay; of being baffled, hunted, and beset; but there was now a dawning and increasing purpose in his face, which changed it very much. It was gloomy, distrustful, lowering; pale with anger and defeat; it still was humbled, abject, cowardly and mean; but, let the conflict go on as it would, there was one strong purpose wrestling with every emotion of his mind, and casting the whole series down as they arose.

Not prepossessing in appearance at the best of times, it may be readily supposed that he was not so now. He had left deep marks of his front teeth in his nether lip; and those tokens of the agitation he had lately undergone improved his looks as little as the heavy corrugations in his forehead. But he was self-possessed now; unnaturally self-possessed, indeed, as men quite otherwise than brave are known to be in desperate extremities; and when the carriage stopped, he waited for no invitation, but leapt hardily out, and went upstairs.

The chairman followed him; and closing the board-room door as soon as they had entered, threw himself upon a sofa. Jonas stood before the window, looking down into the street; and leaned against the sash, resting his head upon his arms.

'This is not handsome, Chuzzlewit!' said Montague at length. 'Not handsome upon my soul!'

'What would you have me do?' he answered, looking round abruptly; 'What do you expect?'

'Confidence, my good fellow. Some confidence!' said Montague in an injured tone.

'Ecod! You show great confidence in me,' retorted Jonas. 'Don't you?'

'Do I not?' said his companion, raising his head, and looking at him, but he had turned again. 'Do I not? Have I not confided to you the easy schemes I have formed for our advantage; OUR advantage, mind; not mine alone; and what is my return? Attempted flight!'

'How do you know that? Who said I meant to fly?'

'Who said? Come, come. A foreign boat, my friend, an early hour, a figure wrapped up for disguise! Who said? If you didn't mean to jilt me, why were you there? If you didn't mean to jilt me, why did you come back?'

'I came back,' said Jonas, 'to avoid disturbance.'

'You were wise,' rejoined his friend.

Jonas stood quite silent; still looking down into the street, and resting his head upon his arms.

'Now, Chuzzlewit,' said Montague, 'notwithstanding what has passed I will be plain with you. Are you attending to me there? I only see your back.'

'I hear you. Go on!'

'I say that notwithstanding what has passed, I will be plain with you.'

'You said that before. And I have told you once I heard you say it. Go on.'

'You are a little chafed, but I can make allowance for that, and am, fortunately, myself in the very best of tempers. Now, let us see how circumstances stand. A day or two ago, I mentioned to you, my dear fellow, that I thought I had discovered—'

'Will you hold your tongue?' said Jonas, looking fiercely round, and glancing at the door.

'Well, well!' said Montague. 'Judicious! Quite correct! My discoveries being published, would be like many other men's discoveries in this honest world; of no further use to me. You see, Chuzzlewit, how ingenuous and frank I am in showing you the weakness of my own position! To return. I make, or think I make, a certain discovery which I take an early opportunity of mentioning in your ear, in that spirit of confidence which I really hoped did prevail between us, and was reciprocated by you. Perhaps there is something in it; perhaps there is nothing. I have my knowledge and opinion on the subject. You have yours. We will not discuss the question. But, my good fellow, you have been weak; what I wish to point out to you is, that you have been weak. I may desire to turn this little incident to my account (indeed, I do—I'll not deny it), but my account does not lie in probing it, or using it against you.'

'What do you call using it against me?' asked Jonas, who had not yet changed his attitude.

'Oh!' said Montague, with a laugh. 'We'll not enter into that.'

'Using it to make a beggar of me. Is that the use you mean?'

'No.'

'Ecod,' muttered Jonas, bitterly. 'That's the use in which your account DOES lie. You speak the truth there.'

'I wish you to venture (it's a very safe venture) a little more with us, certainly, and to keep quiet,' said Montague. 'You promised me you would; and you must. I say it plainly, Chuzzlewit, you MUST. Reason the matter. If you don't, my secret is worthless to me: and being so, it may as well become the public property as mine; better, for I shall gain some credit, bringing it to light. I want you, besides, to act as a decoy in a case I have already told you of. You don't mind that, I know. You care nothing for the man (you care nothing for any man; you are too sharp; so am I, I hope); and could bear any loss of his with pious fortitude. Ha, ha, ha! You have tried to escape from the first consequence. You cannot escape it, I assure you. I have shown you that to-day. Now, I am not a moral man, you know. I am not the least in the world affected by anything you may have done; by any little indiscretion you may have committed; but I wish to profit by it if I can; and to a man of your intelligence I make that free confession. I am not at all singular in that infirmity. Everybody profits by the indiscretion of his neighbour; and the people in the best repute, the most. Why do you give me this trouble? It must come to a friendly agreement, or an unfriendly crash. It must. If the former, you are very little hurt. If the latter—well! you know best what is likely to happen then.'

Jonas left the window, and walked up close to him. He did not look him in the face; it was not his habit to do that; but he kept his eyes towards him

—on his breast, or thereabouts—and was at great pains to speak slowly and distinctly in reply. Just as a man in a state of conscious drunkenness might be.

'Lying is of no use now,' he said. 'I DID think of getting away this morning, and making better terms with you from a distance.'

'To be sure! to be sure!' replied Montague. 'Nothing more natural. I foresaw that, and provided against it. But I am afraid I am interrupting you.'

'How the devil,' pursued Jonas, with a still greater effort, 'you made choice of your messenger, and where you found him, I'll not ask you. I owed him one good turn before to-day. If you are so careless of men in general, as you said you were just now, you are quite indifferent to what becomes of such a crop-tailed cur as that, and will leave me to settle my account with him in my own manner.'

If he had raised his eyes to his companion's face, he would have seen that Montague was evidently unable to comprehend his meaning. But continuing to stand before him, with his furtive gaze directed as before, and pausing here only to moisten his dry lips with his tongue, the fact was lost upon him. It might have struck a close observer that this fixed and steady glance of Jonas's was a part of the alteration which had taken place in his demeanour. He kept it riveted on one spot, with which his thoughts had manifestly nothing to do; like as a juggler walking on a cord or wire to any dangerous end, holds some object in his sight to steady him, and never wanders from it, lest he trip.

Montague was quick in his rejoinder, though he made it at a venture. There was no difference of opinion between him and his friend on THAT point. Not the least.

'Your great discovery,' Jonas proceeded, with a savage sneer that got the better of him for the moment, 'may be true, and may be false. Whichever it is, I dare say I'm no worse than other men.'

'Not a bit,' said Tigg. 'Not a bit. We're all alike—or nearly so.'

'I want to know this,' Jonas went on to say; 'is it your own? You'll not wonder at my asking the question.'

'My own!' repeated Montague.

'Aye!' returned the other, gruffly. 'Is it known to anybody else? Come! Don't waver about that.'

'No!' said Montague, without the smallest hesitation. 'What would it be worth, do you think, unless I had the keeping of it?'

Now, for the first time, Jonas looked at him. After a pause, he put out his hand, and said, with a laugh:

'Come! make things easy to me, and I'm yours. I don't know that I may not be better off here, after all, than if I had gone away this morning. But here I am, and here I'll stay now. Take your oath!'

He cleared his throat, for he was speaking hoarsely and said in a lighter tone:

'Shall I go to Pecksniff? When? Say when!'

'Immediately!' cried Montague. 'He cannot be enticed too soon.'

'Ecod!' cried Jonas, with a wild laugh. 'There's some fun in catching that old hypocrite. I hate him. Shall I go to-night?'

'Aye! This,' said Montague, ecstatically, 'is like business! We understand each other now! To-night, my good fellow, by all means.'

'Come with me,' cried Jonas. 'We must make a dash; go down in state, and carry documents, for he's a deep file to deal with, and must be drawn on with an artful hand, or he'll not follow. I know him. As I can't take your lodgings or your dinners down, I must take you. Will you come to-night?'

His friend appeared to hesitate; and neither to have anticipated this proposal, nor to relish it very much.

'We can concert our plans upon the road,' said Jonas. 'We must not go direct to him, but cross over from some other place, and turn out of our way to see him. I may not want to introduce you, but I must have you on the spot. I know the man, I tell you.'

'But what if the man knows me?' said Montague, shrugging his shoulders.

'He know!' cried Jonas. 'Don't you run that risk with fifty men a day! Would your father know you? Did I know you? Ecod! You were another figure when I saw you first. Ha, ha, ha! I see the rents and patches now! No false hair then, no black dye! You were another sort of joker in those days, you were! You even spoke different then. You've acted the gentleman so seriously since, that you've taken in yourself. If he should know you, what does it matter? Such a change is a proof of your success. You know that, or you would not have made yourself known to me. Will you come?'

'My good fellow,' said Montague, still hesitating, 'I can trust you alone.'

'Trust me! Ecod, you may trust me now, far enough. I'll try to go away no more—no more!' He stopped, and added in a more sober tone, 'I can't get on without you. Will you come?'

'I will,' said Montague, 'if that's your opinion.' And they shook hands upon it.

The boisterous manner which Jonas had exhibited during the latter part of this conversation, and which had gone on rapidly increasing with almost every word he had spoken, from the time when he looked his honourable friend in the face until now, did not now subside, but, remaining at its height, abided by him. Most unusual with him at any period; most inconsistent with his temper and constitution; especially unnatural it would appear in one so darkly circumstanced; it abided by him. It was not like the effect of wine, or any ardent drink, for he was perfectly coherent. It even made him proof against the usual influence of such means of excitement; for, although he drank deeply several times that day, with no reserve or caution, he remained exactly the same man, and his spirits neither rose nor fell in the least observable degree.

Deciding, after some discussion, to travel at night, in order that the day's business might not be broken in upon, they took counsel together in reference to the means. Mr Montague being of opinion that four horses were advisable, at all events for the first stage, as throwing a great deal of dust into people's eyes, in more senses than one, a travelling chariot and four lay under orders for nine o'clock. Jonas did not go home; observing, that his being obliged to leave town on business in so great a hurry, would be a good excuse for having turned back so unexpectedly in the morning. So he wrote a note for his portmanteau, and sent it by a messenger, who duly brought his luggage back, with a short note from that other piece of luggage, his wife, expressive of her wish to be allowed to come and see him for a moment. To this request he sent for answer, 'she had better;' and one such threatening affirmative being sufficient, in defiance of the English grammar, to express a negative, she kept away.

Mr Montague being much engaged in the course of the day, Jonas bestowed his spirits chiefly on the doctor, with whom he lunched in the medical officer's own room. On his way thither, encountering Mr Nadgett in the outer room, he bantered that stealthy gentleman on always appearing anxious to avoid him, and inquired if he were afraid of him. Mr Nadgett slyly answered, 'No, but he believed it must be his way as he had been charged with much the same kind of thing before.'

Mr Montague was listening to, or, to speak with greater elegance, he overheard, this dialogue. As soon as Jonas was gone he beckoned Nadgett to him with the feather of his pen, and whispered in his ear.

'Who gave him my letter this morning?'

'My lodger, sir,' said Nadgett, behind the palm of his hand.

'How came that about?'

'I found him on the wharf, sir. Being so much hurried, and you not arrived, it was necessary to do something. It fortunately occurred to me, that if I gave it him myself I could be of no further use. I should have been blown upon immediately.'

'Mr Nadgett, you are a jewel,' said Montague, patting him on the back. 'What's your lodger's name?'

'Pinch, sir. Thomas Pinch.'

Montague reflected for a little while, and then asked:

'From the country, do you know?'

'From Wiltshire, sir, he told me.'

They parted without another word. To see Mr Nadgett's bow when Montague and he next met, and to see Mr Montague acknowledge it, anybody might have undertaken to swear that they had never spoken to each other confidentially in all their lives.

In the meanwhile, Mr Jonas and the doctor made themselves very comfortable upstairs, over a bottle of the old Madeira and some sandwiches; for the doctor having been already invited to dine below at six o'clock, preferred a light repast for lunch. It was advisable, he said, in two points of view: First, as being healthy in itself. Secondly as being the better preparation for dinner.

'And you are bound for all our sakes to take particular care of your digestion, Mr Chuzzlewit, my dear sir,' said the doctor smacking his lips after a glass of wine; 'for depend upon it, it is worth preserving. It must be in admirable condition, sir; perfect chronometer-work. Otherwise your spirits could not be so remarkable. Your bosom's lord sits lightly on its throne, Mr Chuzzlewit, as what's-his-name says in the play. I wish he said it in a play which did anything like common justice to our profession, by the bye. There is an apothecary in that drama, sir, which is a low thing; vulgar, sir; out of nature altogether.'

Mr Jobling pulled out his shirt-frill of fine linen, as though he would have said, 'This is what I call nature in a medical man, sir;' and looked at Jonas for an observation.

Jonas not being in a condition to pursue the subject, took up a case of lancets that was lying on the table, and opened it.

'Ah!' said the doctor, leaning back in his chair, 'I always take 'em out of my pocket before I eat. My pockets are rather tight. Ha, ha, ha!'

Jonas had opened one of the shining little instruments; and was scrutinizing it with a look as sharp and eager as its own bright edge.

'Good steel, doctor. Good steel! Eh!'

'Ye-es,' replied the doctor, with the faltering modesty of ownership. 'One might open a vein pretty dexterously with that, Mr Chuzzlewit.'

'It has opened a good many in its time, I suppose?' said Jonas looking at it with a growing interest.

'Not a few, my dear sir, not a few. It has been engaged in a—in a pretty good practice, I believe I may say,' replied the doctor, coughing as if the matter-of-fact were so very dry and literal that he couldn't help it. 'In a pretty good practice,' repeated the doctor, putting another glass of wine to his lips.

'Now, could you cut a man's throat with such a thing as this?' demanded Jonas.

'Oh certainly, certainly, if you took him in the right place,' returned the doctor. 'It all depends upon that.'

'Where you have your hand now, hey?' cried Jonas, bending forward to look at it.

'Yes,' said the doctor; 'that's the jugular.'

Jonas, in his vivacity, made a sudden sawing in the air, so close behind the doctor's jugular that he turned quite red. Then Jonas (in the same strange spirit of vivacity) burst into a loud discordant laugh.

'No, no,' said the doctor, shaking his head; 'edge tools, edge tools; never play with 'em. A very remarkable instance of the skillful use of edge-tools, by the way, occurs to me at this moment. It was a case of murder. I am afraid it was a case of murder, committed by a member of our profession; it was so artistically done.'

'Aye!' said Jonas. 'How was that?'

'Why, sir,' returned Jobling, 'the thing lies in a nutshell. A certain gentleman was found, one morning, in an obscure street, lying in an angle of a doorway—I should rather say, leaning, in an upright position, in the angle of a doorway, and supported consequently by the doorway. Upon his waistcoat there was one solitary drop of blood. He was dead and cold; and had been murdered, sir.'

'Only one drop of blood!' said Jonas.

'Sir, that man,' replied the doctor, 'had been stabbed to the heart. Had been stabbed to the heart with such dexterity, sir, that he had died instantly, and had bled internally. It was supposed that a medical friend of his (to whom suspicion attached) had engaged him in conversation on some pretence; had taken him, very likely, by the button in a conversational manner; had examined his ground at leisure with his other hand; had marked the exact spot; drawn out the instrument, whatever it was, when he was quite prepared; and—'

'And done the trick,' suggested Jonas.

'Exactly so,' replied the doctor. 'It was quite an operation in its way, and very neat. The medical friend never turned up; and, as I tell you, he had the credit of it. Whether he did it or not I can't say. But, having had the honour to be called in with two or three of my professional brethren on the occasion, and having assisted to make a careful examination of the wound, I have no hesitation in saying that it would have reflected credit on any medical man; and that in an unprofessional person it could not but be considered, either as an extraordinary work of art, or the result of a still more extraordinary, happy, and favourable conjunction of circumstances.'

His hearer was so much interested in this case, that the doctor went on to elucidate it with the assistance of his own finger and thumb and waistcoat; and at Jonas's request, he took the further trouble of going into a corner of the room, and alternately representing the murdered man and the murderer; which he did with great effect. The bottle being emptied and the story done, Jonas was in precisely the same boisterous and unusual state as when they had sat down. If, as Jobling theorized, his good digestion were the cause, he must have been a very ostrich.

At dinner it was just the same; and after dinner too; though wine was drunk in abundance, and various rich meats eaten. At nine o'clock it was still the same. There being a lamp in the carriage, he swore they would take a pack of cards, and a bottle of wine; and with these things under his cloak, went down to the door.

'Out of the way, Tom Thumb, and get to bed!'

This was the salutation he bestowed on Mr Bailey, who, booted and wrapped up, stood at the carriage door to help him in.

'To bed, sir! I'm a-going, too,' said Bailey.

He alighted quickly, and walked back into the hall, where Montague was lighting a cigar; conducting Mr Bailey with him, by the collar.

'You are not a-going to take this monkey of a boy, are you?'

'Yes,' said Montague.

He gave the boy a shake, and threw him roughly aside. There was more of his familiar self in the action, than in anything he had done that day; but he broke out laughing immediately afterwards, and making a thrust at the doctor with his hand, in imitation of his representation of the medical friend, went out to the carriage again, and took his seat. His companion followed immediately. Mr Bailey climbed into the rumble. 'It will be a stormy night!' exclaimed the doctor, as they started.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

CONTINUATION OF THE ENTERPRISE OF MR JONAS AND HIS FRIEND

The doctor's prognostication in reference to the weather was speedily verified. Although the weather was not a patient of his, and no third party had required him to give an opinion on the case, the quick fulfilment of his prophecy may be taken as an instance of his professional tact; for, unless the threatening aspect of the night had been perfectly plain and unmistakable, Mr Jobling would never have compromised his reputation by delivering any sentiments on the subject. He used this principle in Medicine with too much success to be unmindful of it in his commonest transactions.

It was one of those hot, silent nights, when people sit at windows listening for the thunder which they know will shortly break; when they recall dismal tales of hurricanes and earthquakes; and of lonely travellers on open plains, and lonely ships at sea, struck by lightning. Lightning flashed and quivered on the black horizon even now; and hollow murmurings were in the wind, as though it had been blowing where the thunder rolled, and still was charged with its exhausted echoes. But the storm, though gathering swiftly, had not yet come up; and the prevailing stillness was the more solemn, from the dull intelligence that seemed to hover in the air, of noise and conflict afar off.

It was very dark; but in the murky sky there were masses of cloud which shone with a lurid light, like monstrous heaps of copper that had been heated in a furnace, and were growing cold. These had been advancing steadily and slowly, but they were now motionless, or nearly so. As the carriage clattered round the corners of the streets, it passed at every one a knot of persons who had come there—many from their houses close at hand, without hats—to look up at that quarter of the sky. And now a very few large drops of rain began to fall, and thunder rumbled in the distance.

Jonas sat in a corner of the carriage with his bottle resting on his knee, and gripped as tightly in his hand as if he would have ground its neck to powder if he could. Instinctively attracted by the night, he had laid aside the pack of cards upon the cushion; and with the same involuntary impulse, so intelligible to both of them as not to occasion a remark on either side, his companion had extinguished the lamp. The front glasses were down; and they sat looking silently out upon the gloomy scene before them.

They were clear of London, or as clear of it as travellers can be whose way lies on the Western Road, within a stage of that enormous city. Occasionally they encountered a foot-passenger, hurrying to the nearest place of shelter; or some unwieldy cart proceeding onward at a heavy trot, with the same end in view. Little clusters of such vehicles were gathered round the stable-yard or baiting-place of every wayside tavern; while their drivers watched the weather from the doors and open windows, or made merry within. Everywhere the people were disposed to bear each other company rather than sit alone; so that groups of watchful faces seemed to be looking out upon the night AND THEM, from almost every house they passed.

It may appear strange that this should have disturbed Jonas, or rendered him uneasy; but it did. After muttering to himself, and often changing his position, he drew up the blind on his side of the carriage, and turned his shoulder sulkily towards it. But he neither looked at his companion, nor broke the silence which prevailed between them, and which had fallen so suddenly upon himself, by addressing a word to him.

The thunder rolled, the lightning flashed; the rain poured down like Heaven's wrath. Surrounded at one moment by intolerable light, and at the next by pitchy darkness, they still pressed forward on their journey. Even when they arrived at the end of the stage, and might have tarried, they did not; but ordered horses out immediately. Nor had this any reference to some five minutes' lull, which at that time seemed to promise a cessation of the storm. They held their course as if they were impelled and driven by its fury. Although they had not exchanged a dozen words, and might have tarried very well, they seemed to feel, by joint consent, that onward they must go.

Louder and louder the deep thunder rolled, as through the myriad halls of some vast temple in the sky; fiercer and brighter became the lightning, more and more heavily the rain poured down. The horses (they were travelling now with a single pair) plunged and started from the rills of quivering fire that seemed to wind along the ground before them; but there these two men sat, and forward they went as if they were led on by an invisible attraction.

The eye, partaking of the quickness of the flashing light, saw in its every gleam a multitude of objects which it could not see at steady noon in fifty times that period. Bells in steeples, with the rope and wheel that moved them; ragged nests of birds in cornices and nooks; faces full of consternation in the tilted waggons that came tearing past; their frightened teams ringing out a warning which the thunder drowned; harrows and ploughs left out in fields; miles upon miles of hedge-divided country, with the distant fringe of trees as obvious as the scarecrow in the bean-field close at hand; in a trembling, vivid, flickering instant, everything was clear and plain; then came a flush of red into the yellow light; a change to blue; a brightness so intense that there was nothing else but light; and then the deepest and profoundest darkness.

The lightning being very crooked and very dazzling may have presented or assisted a curious optical illusion, which suddenly rose before the startled eyes of Montague in the carriage, and as rapidly disappeared. He thought he saw Jonas with his hand lifted, and the bottle clenched in it like a hammer, making as if he would aim a blow at his head. At the same time he observed (or so believed) an expression in his face—a combination of the unnatural excitement he had shown all day, with a wild hatred and fear—which might have rendered a wolf a less terrible companion.

He uttered an involuntary exclamation, and called to the driver, who brought his horses to a stop with all speed.

It could hardly have been as he supposed, for although he had not taken his eyes off his companion, and had not seen him move, he sat reclining in his corner as before.

'What's the matter?' said Jonas. 'Is that your general way of waking out of your sleep?'

'I could swear,' returned the other, 'that I have not closed my eyes!'

'When you have sworn it,' said Jonas, composedly, 'we had better go on again, if you have only stopped for that.'

He uncorked the bottle with the help of his teeth; and putting it to his lips, took a long draught.

'I wish we had never started on this journey. This is not,' said Montague, recoiling instinctively, and speaking in a voice that betrayed his agitation; 'this is not a night to travel in.'

'Ecod! you're right there,' returned Jonas, 'and we shouldn't be out in it but for you. If you hadn't kept me waiting all day, we might have been at Salisbury by this time; snug abed and fast asleep. What are we stopping for?'

His companion put his head out of window for a moment, and drawing it in again, observed (as if that were his cause of anxiety), that the boy was drenched to the skin.

'Serve him right,' said Jonas. 'I'm glad of it. What the devil are we stopping for? Are you going to spread him out to dry?'

'I have half a mind to take him inside,' observed the other with some hesitation.

'Oh! thankee!' said Jonas. 'We don't want any damp boys here; especially a young imp like him. Let him be where he is. He ain't afraid of a little thunder and lightning, I dare say; whoever else is. Go on, driver. We had better have HIM inside perhaps,' he muttered with a laugh; 'and the horses!'

'Don't go too fast,' cried Montague to the postillion; 'and take care how you go. You were nearly in the ditch when I called to you.'

This was not true; and Jonas bluntly said so, as they moved forward again. Montague took little or no heed of what he said, but repeated that it was not a night for travelling, and showed himself, both then and afterwards, unusually anxious.

From this time Jonas recovered his former spirits, if such a term may be employed to express the state in which he had left the city. He had his bottle often at his mouth; roared out snatches of songs, without the least regard to time or tune or voice, or anything but loud discordance; and urged his silent friend to be merry with him.

'You're the best company in the world, my good fellow,' said Montague with an effort, 'and in general irresistible; but to-night—do you hear it?'

'Ecod! I hear and see it too,' cried Jonas, shading his eyes, for the moment, from the lightning which was flashing, not in any one direction, but all around them. 'What of that? It don't change you, nor me, nor our affairs. Chorus, chorus,

It may lighten and storm,
Till it hunt the red worm
From the grass where the gibbet is driven;

But it can't hurt the dead,
And it won't save the head
That is doom'd to be rifled and riven.

That must be a precious old song,' he added with an oath, as he stopped short in a kind of wonder at himself. 'I haven't heard it since I was a boy, and how it comes into my head now, unless the lightning put it there, I don't know. "Can't hurt the dead"! No, no. "And won't save the head"! No, no. No! Ha, ha, ha!'

His mirth was of such a savage and extraordinary character, and was, in an inexplicable way, at once so suited to the night, and yet such a coarse intrusion on its terrors, that his fellow-traveller, always a coward, shrunk from him in positive fear. Instead of Jonas being his tool and instrument, their places seemed to be reversed. But there was reason for this too, Montague thought; since the sense of his debasement might naturally inspire such a man with the wish to assert a noisy independence, and in that licence to forget his real condition. Being quick enough, in reference to such subjects of contemplation, he was not long in taking this argument into account and giving it its full weight. But still, he felt a vague sense of alarm, and was depressed and uneasy.

He was certain he had not been asleep; but his eyes might have deceived him; for, looking at Jonas now in any interval of darkness, he could represent his figure to himself in any attitude his state of mind suggested. On the other hand, he knew full well that Jonas had no reason to love him; and even taking the piece of pantomime which had so impressed his mind to be a real gesture, and not the working of his fancy, the most that could be said of it was, that it was quite in keeping with the rest of his diabolical fun, and had the same impotent expression of truth in it. 'If he could kill me with a wish,' thought the swindler, 'I should not live long.'

He resolved that when he should have had his use of Jonas, he would restrain him with an iron curb; in the meantime, that he could not do better than leave him to take his own way, and preserve his own peculiar description of good-humour, after his own uncommon manner. It was no great sacrifice to bear with him; 'for when all is got that can be got,' thought Montague, 'I shall decamp across the water, and have the laugh on my side—and the gains.'

Such were his reflections from hour to hour; his state of mind being one in which the same thoughts constantly present themselves over and over again in wearisome repetition; while Jonas, who appeared to have dismissed reflection altogether, entertained himself as before. They agreed that they would go to Salisbury, and would cross to Mr Pecksniff's in the morning; and at the prospect of deluding that worthy gentleman, the spirits of his amiable son-in-law became more boisterous than ever.

As the night wore on, the thunder died away, but still rolled gloomily and mournfully in the distance. The lightning too, though now comparatively harmless, was yet bright and frequent. The rain was quite as violent as it had ever been.

It was their ill-fortune, at about the time of dawn and in the last stage of their journey, to have a restive pair of horses. These animals had been greatly terrified in their stable by the tempest; and coming out into the dreary interval between night and morning, when the glare of the lightning was yet unsubdued by day, and the various objects in their view were presented in indistinct and exaggerated shapes which they would not have worn by night, they gradually became less and less capable of control; until, taking a sudden fright at something by the roadside, they dashed off wildly down a steep hill, flung the driver from his saddle, drew the carriage to the brink of a ditch, stumbled headlong down, and threw it crashing over.

The travellers had opened the carriage door, and had either jumped or fallen out. Jonas was the first to stagger to his feet. He felt sick and weak, and very giddy, and reeling to a five-barred gate, stood holding by it; looking drowsily about as the whole landscape swam before his eyes. But, by degrees, he grew more conscious, and presently observed that Montague was lying senseless in the road, within a few feet of the horses.

In an instant, as if his own faint body were suddenly animated by a demon, he ran to the horses' heads; and pulling at their bridles with all his force, set them struggling and plunging with such mad violence as brought their hoofs at every effort nearer to the skull of the prostrate man; and must have led in half a minute to his brains being dashed out on the highway.

As he did this, he fought and contended with them like a man possessed, making them wilder by his cries.

'Whoop!' cried Jonas. 'Whoop! again! another! A little more, a little more! Up, ye devils! Hillo!'

As he heard the driver, who had risen and was hurrying up, crying to him to desist, his violence increased.

'Hiilo! Hillo!' cried Jonas.

'For God's sake!' cried the driver. 'The gentleman—in the road—he'll be killed!'

The same shouts and the same struggles were his only answer. But the man darting in at the peril of his own life, saved Montague's, by dragging him through the mire and water out of the reach of present harm. That done, he ran to Jonas; and with the aid of his knife they very shortly disengaged the horses from the broken chariot, and got them, cut and bleeding, on their legs again. The postillion and Jonas had now leisure to look at each other, which they had not had yet.

'Presence of mind, presence of mind!' cried Jonas, throwing up his hands wildly. 'What would you have done without me?'

'The other gentleman would have done badly without ME,' returned the man, shaking his head. 'You should have moved him first. I gave him up for dead.'

'Presence of mind, you croaker, presence of mind' cried Jonas with a harsh loud laugh. 'Was he struck, do you think?'

They both turned to look at him. Jonas muttered something to himself, when he saw him sitting up beneath the hedge, looking vacantly around.

'What's the matter?' asked Montague. 'Is anybody hurt?'

'Ecod!' said Jonas, 'it don't seem so. There are no bones broken, after all.'

They raised him, and he tried to walk. He was a good deal shaken, and trembled very much. But with the exception of a few cuts and bruises this was all the damage he had sustained.

'Cuts and bruises, eh?' said Jonas. 'We've all got them. Only cuts and bruises, eh?'

'I wouldn't have given sixpence for the gentleman's head in half-a-dozen seconds more, for all he's only cut and bruised,' observed the post-boy. 'If ever you're in an accident of this sort again, sir; which I hope you won't be; never you pull at the bridle of a horse that's down, when there's a man's head in the way. That can't be done twice without there being a dead man in the case; it would have ended in that, this time, as sure as ever you were born, if I hadn't come up just when I did.'

Jonas replied by advising him with a curse to hold his tongue, and to go somewhere, whither he was not very likely to go of his own accord. But Montague, who had listened eagerly to every word, himself diverted the subject, by exclaiming: 'Where's the boy?'

'Ecod! I forgot that monkey,' said Jonas. 'What's become of him?' A very brief search settled that question. The unfortunate Mr Bailey had been thrown sheer over the hedge or the five-barred gate; and was lying in the neighbouring field, to all appearance dead.

'When I said to-night, that I wished I had never started on this journey,' cried his master, 'I knew it was an ill-fated one. Look at this boy!'

'Is that all?' growled Jonas. 'If you call THAT a sign of it—'

'Why, what should I call a sign of it?' asked Montague, hurriedly. 'What do you mean?'

'I mean,' said Jonas, stooping down over the body, 'that I never heard you were his father, or had any particular reason to care much about him. Halloa. Hold up there!'

But the boy was past holding up, or being held up, or giving any other sign of life than a faint and fitful beating of the heart. After some discussion the driver mounted the horse which had been least injured, and took the lad in his arms as well as he could; while Montague and Jonas, leading the other horse, and carrying a trunk between them, walked by his side towards Salisbury.

'You'd get there in a few minutes, and be able to send assistance to meet us, if you went forward, post-boy,' said Jonas. 'Trot on!'

'No, no,' cried Montague; 'we'll keep together.'

'Why, what a chicken you are! You are not afraid of being robbed; are you?' said Jonas.

'I am not afraid of anything,' replied the other, whose looks and manner were in flat contradiction to his words. 'But we'll keep together.'

'You were mighty anxious about the boy, a minute ago,' said Jonas. 'I suppose you know that he may die in the meantime?'

'Aye, aye. I know. But we'll keep together.'

As it was clear that he was not to be moved from this determination, Jonas made no other rejoinder than such as his face expressed; and they proceeded in company. They had three or four good miles to travel; and the way was not made easier by the state of the road, the burden by which they were embarrassed, or their own stiff and sore condition. After a sufficiently long and painful walk, they arrived at the Inn; and having knocked the people up (it being yet very early in the morning), sent out messengers to see to the carriage and its contents, and roused a surgeon from his bed to tend the chief sufferer. All the service he could render, he rendered promptly and skillfully. But he gave it as his opinion that the boy was labouring under a severe concussion of the brain, and that Mr Bailey's mortal course was run.

If Montague's strong interest in the announcement could have been considered as unselfish in any degree, it might have been a redeeming trait in a character that had no such lineaments to spare. But it was not difficult to see that, for some unexpressed reason best appreciated by himself, he attached a strange value to the company and presence of this mere child. When, after receiving some assistance from the surgeon himself, he retired to the bedroom prepared for him, and it was broad day, his mind was still dwelling on this theme.

'I would rather have lost,' he said, 'a thousand pounds than lost the boy just now. But I'll return home alone. I am resolved upon that. Chuzzlewit shall go forward first, and I will follow in my own time. I'll have no more of this,' he added, wiping his damp forehead. 'Twenty-four hours of this would turn my hair grey!'

After examining his chamber, and looking under the bed, and in the cupboards, and even behind the curtains, with unusual caution (although it was, as has been said, broad day), he double-locked the door by which he had entered, and retired to rest. There was another door in the room, but it was locked on the outer side; and with what place it communicated, he knew not.

His fears or evil conscience reproduced this door in all his dreams. He dreamed that a dreadful secret was connected with it; a secret which he knew, and yet did not know, for although he was heavily responsible for it, and a party to it, he was harassed even in his vision by a distracting uncertainty in reference to its import. Incoherently entwined with this dream was another, which represented it as the hiding-place of an enemy, a shadow, a phantom; and made it the business of his life to keep the terrible creature closed up, and prevent it from forcing its way in upon him. With this view Nadgett, and he, and a strange man with a bloody smear upon his head (who told him that he had been his playfellow, and told him, too, the real name of an old schoolmate, forgotten until then), worked with iron plates and nails to make the door secure; but though they worked never so hard, it was all in vain, for the nails broke, or changed to soft twigs, or what was worse, to worms, between their fingers; the wood of the door splintered and crumbled, so that even nails would not remain in it; and the iron plates curled up like hot paper. All this time the creature on the other side—whether it was in the shape of man, or beast, he neither knew nor sought to know—was gaining on them. But his greatest terror was when the man with the bloody smear upon his head demanded of him if he knew this creatures name, and said that he would whisper it. At this the dreamer fell upon his knees, his whole blood thrilling with inexplicable fear, and held his ears. But looking at the speaker's lips, he saw that they formed the utterance of the letter 'J'; and crying out aloud that the secret was discovered, and they were all lost, he awoke.

Awoke to find Jonas standing at his bedside watching him. And that very door wide open.

As their eyes met, Jonas retreated a few paces, and Montague sprang out of bed.

'Heyday!' said Jonas. 'You're all alive this morning.'

'Alive!' the other stammered, as he pulled the bell-rope violently. 'What are you doing here?'

'It's your room to be sure,' said Jonas; 'but I'm almost inclined to ask you what YOU are doing here? My room is on the other side of that door. No one told me last night not to open it. I thought it led into a passage, and was coming out to order breakfast. There's—there's no bell in my room.'

Montague had in the meantime admitted the man with his hot water and boots, who hearing this, said, yes, there was; and passed into the adjoining room to point it out, at the head of the bed.

'I couldn't find it, then,' said Jonas; 'it's all the same. Shall I order breakfast?'

Montague answered in the affirmative. When Jonas had retired, whistling, through his own room, he opened the door of communication, to take out the key and fasten it on the inner side. But it was taken out already.

He dragged a table against the door, and sat down to collect himself, as if his dreams still had some influence upon his mind.

'An evil journey,' he repeated several times. 'An evil journey. But I'll travel home alone. I'll have no more of this.'

His presentiment, or superstition, that it was an evil journey, did not at all deter him from doing the evil for which the journey was undertaken. With this in view, he dressed himself more carefully than usual to make a favourable impression on Mr Pecksniff; and, reassured by his own appearance, the beauty of the morning, and the flashing of the wet boughs outside his window in the merry sunshine, was soon sufficiently inspirited to swear a few round oaths, and hum the fag-end of a song.

But he still muttered to himself at intervals, for all that: 'I'll travel home alone!'

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

HAS AN INFLUENCE ON THE FORTUNES OF SEVERAL PEOPLE. MR PECKSNIFF IS EXHIBITED IN THE PLENITUDE OF POWER; AND WIELDS THE SAME WITH FORTITUDE AND MAGNANIMITY

On the night of the storm, Mrs Lupin, hostess of the Blue Dragon, sat by herself in her little bar. Her solitary condition, or the bad weather, or both united, made Mrs Lupin thoughtful, not to say sorrowful. As she sat with her chin upon her hand, looking out through a low back lattice, rendered dim in the brightest day-time by clustering vine-leaves, she shook her head very often, and said, 'Dear me! Oh, dear, dear me!'

It was a melancholy time, even in the snugness of the Dragon bar. The rich expanse of corn-field, pasture-land, green slope, and gentle undulation, with its sparkling brooks, its many hedgerows, and its clumps of beautiful trees, was black and dreary, from the diamond panes of the lattice away to the far horizon, where the thunder seemed to roll along the hills. The heavy rain beat down the tender branches of vine and jessamine, and trampled on them in its fury; and when the lightning gleamed it showed the tearful leaves shivering and cowering together at the window, and tapping at it urgently, as if beseeching to be sheltered from the dismal night.

As a mark of her respect for the lightning, Mrs Lupin had removed her candle to the chimney-piece. Her basket of needle-work stood unheeded at her elbow; her supper, spread on a round table not far off, was untasted; and the knives had been removed for fear of attraction. She had sat for a long time with her chin upon her hand, saying to herself at intervals, 'Dear me! Ah, dear, dear me!'

She was on the eve of saying so, once more, when the latch of the house-door (closed to keep the rain out), rattled on its well-worn catch, and a traveller came in, who, shutting it after him, and walking straight up to the half-door of the bar, said, rather gruffly:

'A pint of the best old beer here.'

He had some reason to be gruff, for if he had passed the day in a waterfall, he could scarcely have been wetter than he was. He was wrapped up to the eyes in a rough blue sailor's coat, and had an oil-skin hat on, from the capacious brim of which the rain fell trickling down upon his breast, and back, and shoulders. Judging from a certain liveliness of chin—he had so pulled down his hat, and pulled up his collar, to defend himself from the weather, that she could only see his chin, and even across that he drew the wet sleeve of his shaggy coat, as she looked at him—Mrs Lupin set him down for a good-natured fellow, too.

'A bad night!' observed the hostess cheerfully.

The traveller shook himself like a Newfoundland dog, and said it was, rather.

'There's a fire in the kitchen,' said Mrs Lupin, 'and very good company there. Hadn't you better go and dry yourself?'

'No, thankee,' said the man, glancing towards the kitchen as he spoke; he seemed to know the way.

'It's enough to give you your death of cold,' observed the hostess.

'I don't take my death easy,' returned the traveller; 'or I should most likely have took it afore to-night. Your health, ma'am!'

Mrs Lupin thanked him; but in the act of lifting the tankard to his mouth, he changed his mind, and put it down again. Throwing his body back, and looking about him stiffly, as a man does who is wrapped up, and has his hat low down over his eyes, he said:

'What do you call this house? Not the Dragon, do you?'

Mrs Lupin complacently made answer, 'Yes, the Dragon.'

'Why, then, you've got a sort of a relation of mine here, ma'am,' said the traveller; 'a young man of the name of Tapley. What! Mark, my boy!' apostrophizing the premises, 'have I come upon you at last, old buck!'

This was touching Mrs Lupin on a tender point. She turned to trim the candle on the chimney-piece, and said, with her back towards the traveller:

'Nobody should be made more welcome at the Dragon, master, than any one who brought me news of Mark. But it's many and many a long day and month since he left here and England. And whether he's alive or dead, poor fellow, Heaven above us only knows!'

She shook her head, and her voice trembled; her hand must have done so too, for the light required a deal of trimming.

'Where did he go, ma'am?' asked the traveller, in a gentler voice.

'He went,' said Mrs Lupin, with increased distress, 'to America. He was always tender-hearted and kind, and perhaps at this moment may be lying in prison under sentence of death, for taking pity on some miserable black, and helping the poor runaway creetur to escape. How could he ever go to America! Why didn't he go to some of those countries where the savages eat each other fairly, and give an equal chance to every one!'

Quite subdued by this time, Mrs Lupin sobbed, and was retiring to a chair to give her grief free vent, when the traveller caught her in his arms, and she uttered a glad cry of recognition.

'Yes, I will!' cried Mark, 'another—one more—twenty more! You didn't know me in that hat and coat? I thought you would have known me anywheres! Ten more!'

'So I should have known you, if I could have seen you; but I couldn't, and you spoke so gruff. I didn't think you could speak gruff to me, Mark, at first coming back.'

'Fifteen more!' said Mr Tapley. 'How handsome and how young you look! Six more! The last half-dozen warn't a fair one, and must be done over again. Lord bless you, what a treat it is to see you! One more! Well, I never was so jolly. Just a few more, on account of there not being any credit in it!'

When Mr Tapley stopped in these calculations in simple addition, he did it, not because he was at all tired of the exercise, but because he was out of breath. The pause reminded him of other duties.

'Mr Martin Chuzzlewit's outside,' he said. 'I left him under the cartshed, while I came on to see if there was anybody here. We want to keep quiet to-night, till we know the news from you, and what it's best for us to do.'

'There's not a soul in the house, except the kitchen company,' returned the hostess. 'If they were to know you had come back, Mark, they'd have a bonfire in the street, late as it is.'

'But they mustn't know it to-night, my precious soul,' said Mark; 'so have the house shut, and the kitchen fire made up; and when it's all ready, put a light in the winder, and we'll come in. One more! I long to hear about old friends. You'll tell me all about 'em, won't you; Mr Pinch, and the butcher's dog down the street, and the terrier over the way, and the wheelwright's, and every one of 'em. When I first caught sight of the church to-night, I thought the steeple would have choked me, I did. One more! Won't you? Not a very little one to finish off with?'

'You have had plenty, I am sure,' said the hostess. 'Go along with your foreign manners!'

'That ain't foreign, bless you!' cried Mark. 'Native as oysters, that is! One more, because it's native! As a mark of respect for the land we live in! This don't count as between you and me, you understand,' said Mr Tapley. 'I ain't a-kissing you now, you'll observe. I have been among the patriots; I'm a-kissin' my country.'

It would have been very unreasonable to complain of the exhibition of his patriotism with which he followed up this explanation, that it was at all lukewarm or indifferent. When he had given full expression to his nationality, he hurried off to Martin; while Mrs Lupin, in a state of great agitation and excitement, prepared for their reception.

The company soon came tumbling out; insisting to each other that the Dragon clock was half an hour too fast, and that the thunder must have affected it. Impatient, wet, and weary though they were, Martin and Mark were overjoyed to see these old faces, and watched them with delighted interest as they departed from the house, and passed close by them.

'There's the old tailor, Mark!' whispered Martin.

'There he goes, sir! A little bandier than he was, I think, sir, ain't he? His figure's so far altered, as it seems to me, that you might wheel a rather larger barrow between his legs as he walks, than you could have done conveniently when we know'd him. There's Sam a-coming out, sir.'

'Ah, to be sure!' cried Martin; 'Sam, the hostler. I wonder whether that horse of Pecksniff's is alive still?'

'Not a doubt on it, sir,' returned Mark. 'That's a description of animal, sir, as will go on in a bony way peculiar to himself for a long time, and get into the newspapers at last under the title of "Sing'lar Tenacity of Life in a Quadruped." As if he had ever been alive in all his life, worth mentioning! There's the clerk, sir—wery drunk, as usual.'

'I see him!' said Martin, laughing. 'But, my life, how wet you are, Mark!'

'I am! What do you consider yourself, sir?'

'Oh, not half as bad,' said his fellow-traveller, with an air of great vexation. 'I told you not to keep on the windy side, Mark, but to let us change and change about. The rain has been beating on you ever since it began.'

'You don't know how it pleases me, sir,' said Mark, after a short silence, 'if I may make so bold as say so, to hear you a-going on in that there uncommon considerate way of yours; which I don't mean to attend to, never, but which, ever since that time when I was floored in Eden, you have showed.'

'Ah, Mark!' sighed Martin, 'the less we say of that the better. Do I see the light yonder?'

'That's the light!' cried Mark. 'Lord bless her, what briskness she possesses! Now for it, sir. Neat wines, good beds, and first-rate entertainment for man or beast.'

The kitchen fire burnt clear and red, the table was spread out, the kettle boiled; the slippers were there, the boot-jack too, sheets of ham were there, cooking on the gridiron; half-a-dozen eggs were there, poaching in the frying-pan; a plethoric cherry-brandy bottle was there, winking at a foaming jug of beer upon the table; rare provisions were there, dangling from the rafters as if you had only to open your mouth, and something exquisitely ripe and good would be glad of the excuse for tumbling into it. Mrs Lupin, who for their sakes had dislodged the very cook, high priestess of the temple, with her own genial hands was dressing their repast.

It was impossible to help it—a ghost must have hugged her. The Atlantic Ocean and the Red Sea being, in that respect, all one, Martin hugged her instantly. Mr Tapley (as if the idea were quite novel, and had never occurred to him before), followed, with much gravity, on the same side.

'Little did I ever think,' said Mrs Lupin, adjusting her cap and laughing heartily; yes, and blushing too; 'often as I have said that Mr Pecksniff's young gentlemen were the life and soul of the Dragon, and that without them it would be too dull to live in—little did I ever think I am sure, that any one of them would ever make so free as you, Mr Martin! And still less that I shouldn't be angry with him, but should be glad with all my heart to be the first to welcome him home from America, with Mark Tapley for his —'

'For his friend, Mrs Lupin,' interposed Martin.

'For his friend,' said the hostess, evidently gratified by this distinction, but at the same time admonishing Mr Tapley with a fork to remain at a respectful distance. 'Little did I ever think that! But still less, that I should ever have the changes to relate that I shall have to tell you of, when you have done your supper!'

'Good Heaven!' cried Martin, changing colour, 'what changes?'

'SHE,' said the hostess, 'is quite well, and now at Mr Pecksniff's. Don't be at all alarmed about her. She is everything you could wish. It's of no use mincing matters, or making secrets, is it?' added Mrs Lupin. 'I know all about it, you see!'

'My good creature,' returned Martin, 'you are exactly the person who ought to know all about it. I am delighted to think you DO know about that! But what changes do you hint at? Has any death occurred?'

'No, no!' said the hostess. 'Not as bad as that. But I declare now that I will not be drawn into saying another word till you have had your supper. If you ask me fifty questions in the meantime, I won't answer one.'

She was so positive, that there was nothing for it but to get the supper over as quickly as possible; and as they had been walking a great many miles, and had fasted since the middle of the day, they did no great violence to their own inclinations in falling on it tooth and nail. It took rather longer to get through than might have been expected; for, half-a-dozen times, when they thought they had finished, Mrs Lupin exposed the fallacy of that impression triumphantly. But at last, in the course of time and nature, they gave in. Then, sitting with their slippered feet stretched out upon the kitchen hearth (which was wonderfully comforting, for the night had grown by this time raw and chilly), and looking with involuntary admiration at their dimpled, buxom, blooming hostess, as the firelight sparkled in her eyes and glimmered in her raven hair, they composed themselves to listen to her news.

Many were the exclamations of surprise which interrupted her, when she told them of the separation between Mr Pecksniff and his daughters, and between the same good gentleman and Mr Pinch. But these were nothing to the indignant demonstrations of Martin, when she related, as the common talk of the neighbourhood, what entire possession he had obtained over the mind and person of old Mr Chuzzlewit, and what high honour he designed for Mary. On receipt of this intelligence, Martin's slippers flew off in a twinkling, and he began pulling on his wet boots with that indefinite intention of going somewhere instantly, and doing something to somebody, which is the first safety-valve of a hot temper.

'He!' said Martin, 'smooth-tongued villain that he is! He! Give me that other boot, Mark?'

'Where was you a-thinking of going to, sir?' inquired Mr Tapley drying the sole at the fire, and looking coolly at it as he spoke, as if it were a slice of toast.

'Where!' repeated Martin. 'You don't suppose I am going to remain here, do you?'

The imperturbable Mark confessed that he did.

You do!' retorted Martin angrily. 'I am much obliged to you. What do you take me for?'

'I take you for what you are, sir,' said Mark; 'and, consequently, am quite sure that whatever you do will be right and sensible. The boot, sir.'

Martin darted an impatient look at him, without taking it, and walked rapidly up and down the kitchen several times, with one boot and a stocking on. But, mindful of his Eden resolution, he had already gained many victories over himself when Mark was in the case, and he resolved to conquer now. So he came back to the book-jack, laid his hand on Mark's shoulder to steady himself, pulled the boot off, picked up his slippers, put them on, and sat down again. He could not help thrusting his hands to the very bottom of his pockets, and muttering at intervals, 'Pecksniff too! That fellow! Upon my soul! In-deed! What next?' and so forth; nor could he help occasionally shaking his fist at the chimney, with a very threatening countenance; but this did not last long; and he heard Mrs Lupin out, if not with composure, at all events in silence.

'As to Mr Pecksniff himself,' observed the hostess in conclusion, spreading out the skirts of her gown with both hands, and nodding her head a great many times as she did so, 'I don't know what to say. Somebody must have poisoned his mind, or influenced him in some extraordinary way. I cannot believe that such a noble-spoken gentleman would go and do wrong of his own accord!'

A noble-spoken gentleman! How many people are there in the world, who, for no better reason, uphold their Pecksniffs to the last and abandon virtuous men, when Pecksniffs breathe upon them!

'As to Mr Pinch,' pursued the landlady, 'if ever there was a dear, good, pleasant, worthy soul alive, Pinch, and no other, is his name. But how do we know that old Mr Chuzzlewit himself was not the cause of difference arising between him and Mr Pecksniff? No one but themselves can tell; for Mr Pinch has a proud spirit, though he has such a quiet way; and when he left us, and was so sorry to go, he scorned to make his story good, even to me.'

'Poor old Tom!' said Martin, in a tone that sounded like remorse.

'It's a comfort to know,' resumed the landlady, 'that he has his sister living with him, and is doing well. Only yesterday he sent me back, by post, a little'—here the colour came into her cheeks—'a little trifle I was bold enough to lend him when he went away; saying, with many thanks, that he had good employment, and didn't want it. It was the same note; he hadn't broken it. I never thought I could have been so little pleased to see a bank-note come back to me as I was to see that.'

'Kindly said, and heartily!' said Martin. 'Is it not, Mark?'

'She can't say anything as does not possess them qualities,' returned Mr Tapley; 'which as much belongs to the Dragon as its licence. And now that we have got quite cool and fresh, to the subject again, sir; what will you do? If you're not proud, and can make up your mind to go through with what you spoke of, coming along, that's the course for you to take. If you started wrong with your grandfather (which, you'll excuse my taking the liberty of saying, appears to have been the case), up with you, sir, and tell him so, and make an appeal to his affections. Don't stand out. He's a great deal older than you, and if he was hasty, you was hasty too. Give way, sir, give way.'

The eloquence of Mr Tapley was not without its effect on Martin but he still hesitated, and expressed his reason thus:

'That's all very true, and perfectly correct, Mark; and if it were a mere question of humbling myself before HIM, I would not consider it twice. But don't you see, that being wholly under this hypocrite's government, and having (if what we hear be true) no mind or will of his own, I throw myself, in fact, not at his feet, but at the feet of Mr Pecksniff? And when I am rejected and spurned away,' said Martin, turning crimson at the thought, 'it is not by him; my own blood stirred against me; but by Pecksniff—Pecksniff, Mark!'

'Well, but we know beforehand,' returned the politic Mr Tapley, 'that Pecksniff is a wagabond, a scoundrel, and a willain.'

'A most pernicious villain!' said Martin.

'A most pernicious willain. We know that beforehand, sir; and, consequently, it's no shame to be defeated by Pecksniff. Blow Pecksniff!' cried Mr Tapley, in the fervour of his eloquence. 'Who's he! It's not in the natur of Pecksniff to shame US, unless he agreed with us, or done us a service; and, in case he offered any audacity of that description, we could express our sentiments in the English language, I hope. Pecksniff!' repeated Mr Tapley, with ineffable disdain. 'What's Pecksniff, who's Pecksniff, where's Pecksniff, that he's to be so much considered? We're not a-calculating for ourselves;' he laid uncommon emphasis on the last syllable of that word, and looked full in Martin's face; 'we're making a effort for a young lady likewise as has undergone her share; and whatever little hope we have, this here Pecksniff is not to stand in its way, I expect. I never heard of any act of Parliament, as was made by Pecksniff. Pecksniff! Why, I wouldn't see the man myself; I wouldn't hear him; I wouldn't choose to know he was in company. I'd scrape my shoes on the scraper of the door, and call that Pecksniff, if you liked; but I wouldn't condescend no further.'

The amazement of Mrs Lupin, and indeed of Mr Tapley himself for that matter, at this impassioned flow of language, was immense. But Martin, after looking thoughtfully at the fire for a short time, said:

'You are right, Mark. Right or wrong, it shall be done. I'll do it.'

'One word more, sir,' returned Mark. 'Only think of him so far as not to give him a handle against you. Don't you do anything secret that he can report before you get there. Don't you even see Miss Mary in the morning, but let this here dear friend of ours'—Mr Tapley bestowed a smile upon the hostess—'prepare her for what's a-going to happen, and carry any little message as may be agreeable. She knows how. Don't you?' Mrs Lupin laughed and tossed her head. 'Then you go in, bold and free as a gentleman should. "I haven't done nothing under-handed," says you. "I haven't been skulking about the premises, here I am, for-give me, I ask your pardon, God Bless You!"'

Martin smiled, but felt that it was good advice notwithstanding, and resolved to act upon it. When they had ascertained from Mrs Lupin that Pecksniff had already returned from the great ceremonial at which they had beheld him in his glory; and when they had fully arranged the order of their proceedings; they went to bed, intent upon the morrow.

In pursuance of their project as agreed upon at this discussion, Mr Tapley issued forth next morning, after breakfast, charged with a letter from Martin to his grandfather, requesting leave to wait upon him for a few minutes. And postponing as he went along the congratulations of his numerous friends until a more convenient season, he soon arrived at Mr Pecksniff's house. At that gentleman's door; with a face so immovable that it would have been next to an impossibility for the most acute physiognomist to determine what he was thinking about, or whether he was thinking at all; he straightway knocked.

A person of Mr Tapley's observation could not long remain insensible to the fact that Mr Pecksniff was making the end of his nose very blunt against the glass of the parlour window, in an angular attempt to discover who had knocked at the door. Nor was Mr Tapley slow to baffle this movement on the part of the enemy, by perching himself on the top step, and presenting the crown of his hat in that direction. But possibly Mr Pecksniff had already seen him, for Mark soon heard his shoes creaking, as he advanced to open the door with his own hands.

Mr Pecksniff was as cheerful as ever, and sang a little song in the passage.

'How d'ye do, sir?' said Mark.

'Oh!' cried Mr Pecksniff. 'Tapley, I believe? The Prodigal returned! We don't want any beer, my friend.'

'Thankee, sir,' said Mark. 'I couldn't accommodate you if you did. A letter, sir. Wait for an answer.'

'For me?' cried Mr Pecksniff. 'And an answer, eh?'

'Not for you, I think, sir,' said Mark, pointing out the direction. 'Chuzzlewit, I believe the name is, sir.'

'Oh!' returned Mr Pecksniff. 'Thank you. Yes. Who's it from, my good young man?'

'The gentleman it comes from wrote his name inside, sir,' returned Mr Tapley with extreme politeness. 'I see him a-signing of it at the end, while I was a-waitin'.'

'And he said he wanted an answer, did he?' asked Mr Pecksniff in his most persuasive manner.

Mark replied in the affirmative.

'He shall have an answer. Certainly,' said Mr Pecksniff, tearing the letter into small pieces, as mildly as if that were the most flattering attention a correspondent could receive. 'Have the goodness to give him that, with my compliments, if you please. Good morning!' Whereupon he handed Mark the scraps; retired, and shut the door.

Mark thought it prudent to subdue his personal emotions, and return to Martin at the Dragon. They were not unprepared for such a reception, and suffered an hour or so to elapse before making another attempt. When this interval had gone by, they returned to Mr Pecksniff's house in company. Martin knocked this time, while Mr Tapley prepared himself to keep the door open with his foot and shoulder, when anybody came, and by that means secure an enforced parley. But this precaution was needless, for the servant-girl appeared almost immediately. Brushing quickly past her as he had resolved in such a case to do, Martin (closely followed by his faithful ally) opened the door of that parlour in which he knew a visitor was most likely to be found; passed at once into the room; and stood, without a word of notice or announcement, in the presence of his grandfather.

Mr Pecksniff also was in the room; and Mary. In the swift instant of their mutual recognition, Martin saw the old man droop his grey head, and hide his face in his hands.

It smote him to the heart. In his most selfish and most careless day, this lingering remnant of the old man's ancient love, this buttress of a ruined tower he had built up in the time gone by, with so much pride and hope, would have caused a pang in Martin's heart. But now, changed for the better in his worst respect; looking through an altered medium on his former friend, the guardian of his childhood, so broken and bowed down; resentment, sullenness, self-confidence, and pride, were all swept away, before the starting tears upon the withered cheeks. He could not bear to see them. He could not bear to think they fell at sight of him. He could not bear to view reflected in them, the reproachful and irrevocable Past.

He hurriedly advanced to seize the old man's hand in his, when Mr Pecksniff interposed himself between them.

'No, young man!' said Mr Pecksniff, striking himself upon the breast, and stretching out his other arm towards his guest as if it were a wing to shelter him. 'No, sir. None of that. Strike here, sir, here! Launch your arrows at me, sir, if you'll have the goodness; not at Him!'

'Grandfather!' cried Martin. 'Hear me! I implore you, let me speak!'

'Would you, sir? Would you?' said Mr Pecksniff, dodging about, so as to keep himself always between them. 'Is it not enough, sir, that you come into my house like a thief in the night, or I should rather say, for we can never be too particular on the subject of Truth, like a thief in the day-time; bringing your dissolute companions with you, to plant themselves with their backs against the insides of parlour doors, and prevent the entrance or issuing forth of any of my household'—Mark had taken up this position, and held it quite unmoved—'but would you also strike at venerable Virtue? Would you? Know that it is not defenceless. I will be its shield, young man. Assail me. Come on, sir. Fire away!'

'Pecksniff,' said the old man, in a feeble voice. 'Calm yourself. Be quiet.'

'I can't be calm,' cried Mr Pecksniff, 'and I won't be quiet. My benefactor and my friend! Shall even my house be no refuge for your hoary pillow!'

'Stand aside!' said the old man, stretching out his hand; 'and let me see what it is I used to love so dearly.'

'It is right that you should see it, my friend,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'It is well that you should see it, my noble sir. It is desirable that you should contemplate it in its true proportions. Behold it! There it is, sir. There it is!'

Martin could hardly be a mortal man, and not express in his face something of the anger and disdain with which Mr Pecksniff inspired him. But beyond this he evinced no knowledge whatever of that gentleman's presence or existence. True, he had once, and that at first, glanced at him involuntarily, and with supreme contempt; but for any other heed he took of him, there might have been nothing in his place save empty air.

As Mr Pecksniff withdrew from between them, agreeably to the wish just now expressed (which he did during the delivery of the observations last recorded), old Martin, who had taken Mary Graham's hand in his, and whispered kindly to her, as telling her she had no cause to be alarmed, gently pushed her from him, behind his chair; and looked steadily at his grandson.

'And that,' he said, 'is he. Ah! that is he! Say what you wish to say. But come no nearer,'

'His sense of justice is so fine,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'that he will hear even him, although he knows beforehand that nothing can come of it. Ingenuous mind!' Mr Pecksniff did not address himself immediately to any person in saying this, but assuming the position of the Chorus in a Greek Tragedy, delivered his opinion as a commentary on the proceedings.

'Grandfather!' said Martin, with great earnestness. 'From a painful journey, from a hard life, from a sick-bed, from privation and distress, from gloom and disappointment, from almost hopelessness and despair, I have come back to you.'

'Rovers of this sort,' observed Mr Pecksniff, as Chorus, 'very commonly come back when they find they don't meet with the success they expected in their marauding ravages.'

'But for this faithful man,' said Martin, turning towards Mark, 'whom I first knew in this place, and who went away with me voluntarily, as a servant, but has been, throughout, my zealous and devoted friend; but for him, I must have died abroad. Far from home, far from any help or consolation; far from the probability even of my wretched fate being ever known to any one who cared to hear it—oh, that you would let me say, of being known to you!'

The old man looked at Mr Pecksniff. Mr Pecksniff looked at him. 'Did you speak, my worthy sir?' said Mr Pecksniff, with a smile. The old man answered in the negative. 'I know what you thought,' said Mr Pecksniff, with another smile. 'Let him go on my friend. The development of self-interest in the human mind is always a curious study. Let him go on, sir.'

'Go on!' observed the old man; in a mechanical obedience, it appeared, to Mr Pecksniff's suggestion.

'I have been so wretched and so poor,' said Martin, 'that I am indebted to the charitable help of a stranger, in a land of strangers, for the means of returning here. All this tells against me in your mind, I know. I have given you cause to think I have been driven here wholly by want, and have not been led on, in any degree, by affection or regret. When I parted from you, Grandfather, I deserved that suspicion, but I do not now. I do not now.'

The Chorus put its hand in its waistcoat, and smiled. 'Let him go on, my worthy sir,' it said. 'I know what you are thinking of, but don't express it prematurely.'

Old Martin raised his eyes to Mr Pecksniff's face, and appearing to derive renewed instruction from his looks and words, said, once again:

'Go on!'

'I have little more to say,' returned Martin. 'And as I say it now, with little or no hope, Grandfather; whatever dawn of hope I had on entering the room; believe it to be true. At least, believe it to be true.'

'Beautiful Truth!' exclaimed the Chorus, looking upward. 'How is your name profaned by vicious persons! You don't live in a well, my holy principle, but on the lips of false mankind. It is hard to bear with mankind, dear sir'—addressing the elder Mr Chuzzlewit; 'but let us do so meekly. It is our duty so to do. Let us be among the Few who do their duty. If,' pursued the Chorus, soaring up into a lofty flight, 'as the poet informs us, England expects Every man to do his duty, England is the most sanguine country on the face of the earth, and will find itself continually disappointed.'

'Upon that subject,' said Martin, looking calmly at the old man as he spoke, but glancing once at Mary, whose face was now buried in her hands, upon the back of his easy-chair; 'upon that subject which first occasioned a division between us, my mind and heart are incapable of change. Whatever influence they have undergone, since that unhappy time, has not been one to weaken but to strengthen me. I cannot profess sorrow for that, nor irresolution in that, nor shame in that. Nor would you wish me, I know. But that I might have trusted to your love, if I had thrown myself manfully upon it; that I might have won you over with ease, if I had been more yielding and more considerate; that I should have best remembered myself in forgetting myself, and recollecting you; reflection, solitude, and misery, have taught me. I came resolved to say this, and to ask your forgiveness; not so much in hope for the future, as in regret for the past; for all that I would ask of you is, that you would aid me to live. Help me to get honest work to do, and I would do it. My condition places me at the disadvantage of seeming to have only my selfish ends to serve, but try if that be so or not. Try if I be self-willed, obdurate, and haughty, as I was; or have been disciplined in a rough school. Let the voice of nature and association plead between us, Grandfather; and do not, for one fault, however thankless, quite reject me!'

As he ceased, the grey head of the old man drooped again; and he concealed his face behind his outspread fingers.

'My dear sir,' cried Mr Pecksniff, bending over him, 'you must not give way to this. It is very natural, and very amiable, but you must not allow the shameless conduct of one whom you long ago cast off, to move you so far. Rouse yourself. Think,' said Pecksniff, 'think of Me, my friend.'

'I will,' returned old Martin, looking up into his face. 'You recall me to myself. I will.'

'Why, what,' said Mr Pecksniff, sitting down beside him in a chair which he drew up for the purpose, and tapping him playfully on the arm, 'what is the matter with my strong-minded compatriot, if I may venture to take the liberty of calling him by that endearing expression? Shall I have to scold my coadjutor, or to reason with an intellect like this? I think not.'

'No, no. There is no occasion,' said the old man. 'A momentary feeling. Nothing more.'

'Indignation,' observed Mr Pecksniff, 'WILL bring the scalding tear into the honest eye, I know'—he wiped his own elaborately. 'But we have highest duties to perform than that. Rouse yourself, Mr Chuzzlewit. Shall I give expression to your thoughts, my friend?'

'Yes,' said old Martin, leaning back in his chair, and looking at him, half in vacancy and half in admiration, as if he were fascinated by the man. 'Speak for me, Pecksniff, Thank you. You are true to me. Thank you!'

'Do not unman me, sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, shaking his hand vigorously, 'or I shall be unequal to the task. It is not agreeable to my feelings, my good sir, to address the person who is now before us, for when I ejected him from this house, after hearing of his unnatural conduct from your lips, I renounced communication with him for ever. But you desire it; and that is sufficient. Young man! The door is immediately behind the companion of your infamy. Blush if you can; begone without a blush, if you can't.'

Martin looked as steadily at his grandfather as if there had been a dead silence all this time. The old man looked no less steadily at Mr Pecksniff.

'When I ordered you to leave this house upon the last occasion of your being dismissed from it with disgrace,' said Mr Pecksniff; 'when, stung and stimulated beyond endurance by your shameless conduct to this extraordinarily noble-minded individual, I exclaimed "Go forth!" I told you that I wept for your depravity. Do not suppose that the tear which stands in my eye at this moment, is shed for you. It is shed for him, sir. It is shed for him.'

Here Mr Pecksniff, accidentally dropping the tear in question on a bald part of Mr Chuzzlewit's head, wiped the place with his pocket-handkerchief, and begged pardon.

'It is shed for him, sir, whom you seek to make the victim of your arts,' said Mr Pecksniff; 'whom you seek to plunder, to deceive, and to mislead. It is shed in sympathy with him, and admiration of him; not in pity for him, for happily he knows what you are. You shall not wrong him further, sir, in any way,' said Mr Pecksniff, quite transported with enthusiasm, 'while I have life. You may bestride my senseless corse, sir. That is very likely. I can imagine a mind like yours deriving great satisfaction from any measure of that kind. But while I continue to be called upon to exist, sir, you must strike at him through me. Awe!' said Mr Pecksniff, shaking his head at Martin with indignant jocularity; 'and in such a cause you will find me, my young sir, an Ugly Customer!'

Still Martin looked steadily and mildly at his grandfather. 'Will you give me no answer,' he said, at length, 'not a word?'

'You hear what has been said,' replied the old man, without averting his eyes from the face of Mr Pecksniff; who nodded encouragingly.

'I have not heard your voice. I have not heard your spirit,' returned Martin.

'Tell him again,' said the old man, still gazing up in Mr Pecksniff's face.

'I only hear,' replied Martin, strong in his purpose from the first, and stronger in it as he felt how Pecksniff winced and shrunk beneath his contempt; 'I only hear what you say to me, grandfather.'

Perhaps it was well for Mr Pecksniff that his venerable friend found in his (Mr Pecksniff's) features an exclusive and engrossing object of contemplation, for if his eyes had gone astray, and he had compared young Martin's bearing with that of his zealous defender, the latter disinterested gentleman would scarcely have shown to greater advantage than on the memorable afternoon when he took Tom Pinch's last receipt in full of all demands. One really might have thought there was some quality in Mr Pecksniff—an emanation from the brightness and purity within him perhaps—which set off and adorned his foes; they looked so gallant and so manly beside him.

'Not a word?' said Martin, for the second time.

'I remember that I have a word to say, Pecksniff,' observed the old man. 'But a word. You spoke of being indebted to the charitable help of some stranger for the means of returning to England. Who is he? And what help in money did he render you?'

Although he asked this question of Martin, he did not look towards him, but kept his eyes on Mr Pecksniff as before. It appeared to have become a habit with him, both in a literal and figurative sense, to look to Mr Pecksniff alone.

Martin took out his pencil, tore a leaf from his pocket-book, and hastily wrote down the particulars of his debt to Mr Bevan. The old man stretched out his hand for the paper, and took it; but his eyes did not wander from Mr Pecksniff's face.

'It would be a poor pride and a false humility,' said Martin, in a low voice, 'to say, I do not wish that to be paid, or that I have any present hope of being able to pay it. But I never felt my poverty so deeply as I feel it now.'

'Read it to me, Pecksniff,' said the old man.

Mr Pecksniff, after approaching the perusal of the paper as if it were a manuscript confession of a murder, complied.

'I think, Pecksniff,' said old Martin, 'I could wish that to be discharged. I should not like the lender, who was abroad, who had no opportunity of making inquiry, and who did (as he thought) a kind action, to suffer.'

'An honourable sentiment, my dear sir. Your own entirely. But a dangerous precedent,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'permit me to suggest.'

'It shall not be a precedent,' returned the old man. 'It is the only recognition of him. But we will talk of it again. You shall advise me. There is nothing else?'

'Nothing else,' said Mr Pecksniff buoyantly, 'but for you to recover this intrusion—this cowardly and indefensible outrage on your feelings—with all possible dispatch, and smile again.'

'You have nothing more to say?' inquired the old man, laying his hand with unusual earnestness on Mr Pecksniff's sleeve.

Mr Pecksniff would not say what rose to his lips. For reproaches he observed, were useless.

'You have nothing at all to urge? You are sure of that! If you have, no matter what it is, speak freely. I will oppose nothing that you ask of me,' said the old man.

The tears rose in such abundance to Mr Pecksniff's eyes at this proof of unlimited confidence on the part of his friend, that he was fain to clasp the bridge of his nose convulsively before he could at all compose himself. When he had the power of utterance again, he said with great emotion, that he hoped he should live to deserve this; and added, that he had no other observation whatever to make.

For a few moments the old man sat looking at him, with that blank and motionless expression which is not uncommon in the faces of those whose faculties are on the wane, in age. But he rose up firmly too, and walked towards the door, from which Mark withdrew to make way for him.

The obsequious Mr Pecksniff proffered his arm. The old man took it. Turning at the door, he said to Martin, waving him off with his hand,

'You have heard him. Go away. It is all over. Go!'

Mr Pecksniff murmured certain cheering expressions of sympathy and encouragement as they retired; and Martin, awakening from the stupor into which the closing portion of this scene had plunged him, to the opportunity afforded by their departure, caught the innocent cause of all in his embrace, and pressed her to his heart.

'Dear girl!' said Martin. 'He has not changed you. Why, what an impotent and harmless knave the fellow is!'

'You have restrained yourself so nobly! You have borne so much!'

'Restrained myself!' cried Martin, cheerfully. 'You were by, and were unchanged, I knew. What more advantage did I want? The sight of me was such a bitterness to the dog, that I had my triumph in his being forced to endure it. But tell me, love—for the few hasty words we can exchange now are precious—what is this which has been rumoured to me? Is it true that you are persecuted by this knave's addresses?'

'I was, dear Martin, and to some extent am now; but my chief source of unhappiness has been anxiety for you. Why did you leave us in such terrible suspense?'

'Sickness, distance; the dread of hinting at our real condition, the impossibility of concealing it except in perfect silence; the knowledge that the truth would have pained you infinitely more than uncertainty and doubt,' said Martin, hurriedly; as indeed everything else was done and said, in those few hurried moments, 'were the causes of my writing only once. But Pecksniff? You needn't fear to tell me the whole tale; for you saw me with him face to face, hearing him speak, and not taking him by the throat; what is the history of his pursuit of you? Is it known to my grandfather?'

'Yes.'

'And he assists him in it?'

'No,' she answered eagerly.

'Thank Heaven!' cried Martin, 'that it leaves his mind unclouded in that one respect!'

'I do not think,' said Mary, 'it was known to him at first. When this man had sufficiently prepared his mind, he revealed it to him by degrees. I think so, but I only know it from my own impression: now from anything they told me. Then he spoke to me alone.'

'My grandfather did?' said Martin.

'Yes—spoke to me alone, and told me—'

'What the hound had said,' cried Martin. 'Don't repeat it.'

'And said I knew well what qualities he possessed; that he was moderately rich; in good repute; and high in his favour and confidence. But seeing me very much distressed, he said that he would not control or force my inclinations, but would content himself with telling me the fact. He would not pain me by dwelling on it, or reverting to it; nor has he ever done so since, but has truly kept his word.'

'The man himself?—' asked Martin.

'He has had few opportunities of pursuing his suit. I have never walked out alone, or remained alone an instant in his presence. Dear Martin, I must tell you,' she continued, 'that the kindness of your grandfather to me remains unchanged. I am his companion still. An indescribable tenderness and compassion seem to have mingled themselves with his old regard; and if I were his only child, I could not have a gentler father. What former fancy or old habit survives in this, when his heart has turned so cold to you, is a mystery I cannot penetrate; but it has been, and it is, a happiness to me, that I remained true to him; that if he should wake from his delusion, even at the point of death, I am here, love, to recall you to his thoughts.'

Martin looked with admiration on her glowing face, and pressed his lips to hers.

'I have sometimes heard, and read,' she said, 'that those whose powers had been enfeebled long ago, and whose lives had faded, as it were, into a dream, have been known to rouse themselves before death, and inquire for familiar faces once very dear to them; but forgotten, unrecognized, hated even, in the meantime. Think, if with his old impressions of this man, he should suddenly resume his former self, and find in him his only friend!'

'I would not urge you to abandon him, dearest,' said Martin, 'though I could count the years we are to wear out asunder. But the influence this fellow exercises over him has steadily increased, I fear.'

She could not help admitting that. Steadily, imperceptibly, and surely, until it was paramount and supreme. She herself had none; and yet he treated her with more affection than at any previous time. Martin thought the inconsistency a part of his weakness and decay.

'Does the influence extend to fear?' said Martin. 'Is he timid of asserting his own opinion in the presence of this infatuation? I fancied so just now.'

'I have thought so, often. Often when we are sitting alone, almost as we used to do, and I have been reading a favourite book to him or he has been talking quite cheerfully, I have observed that the entrance of Mr Pecksniff has changed his whole demeanour. He has broken off immediately, and become what you have seen to-day. When we first came here he had his impetuous outbreaks, in which it was not easy for Mr Pecksniff with his utmost plausibility to appease him. But these have long since dwindled away. He defers to him in everything, and has no opinion upon any question, but that which is forced upon him by this treacherous man.'

Such was the account, rapidly furnished in whispers, and interrupted, brief as it was, by many false alarms of Mr Pecksniff's return; which Martin received of his grandfather's decline, and of that good gentleman's ascendancy. He heard of Tom Pinch too, and Jonas too, with not a little about himself into the bargain; for though lovers are remarkable for leaving a great deal unsaid on all occasions, and very properly desiring to come back and say it, they are remarkable also for a wonderful power of condensation, and can, in one way or other, give utterance to more language—eloquent language—in any given short space of time, than all the six hundred and fifty-eight members in the Commons House of Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland; who are strong lovers no doubt, but of their country only, which makes all the difference; for in a passion of that kind (which is not always returned), it is the custom to use as many words as possible, and express nothing whatever.

A caution from Mr Tapley; a hasty interchange of farewells, and of something else which the proverb says must not be told of afterwards; a white hand held out to Mr Tapley himself, which he kissed with the devotion of a knight-errant; more farewells, more something else's; a parting word from Martin that he would write from London and would do great things there yet (Heaven knows what, but he quite believed it); and Mark and he stood on the outside of the Pecksniffian halls.

'A short interview after such an absence!' said Martin, sorrowfully. 'But we are well out of the house. We might have placed ourselves in a false position by remaining there, even so long, Mark.'

'I don't know about ourselves, sir,' he returned; 'but somebody else would have got into a false position, if he had happened to come back again, while we was there. I had the door all ready, sir. If Pecksniff had showed his head, or had only so much as listened behind it, I would have caught him like a walnut. He's the sort of man,' added Mr Tapley, musing, 'as would squeeze soft, I know.'

A person who was evidently going to Mr Pecksniff's house, passed them at this moment. He raised his eyes at the mention of the architect's name; and when he had gone on a few yards, stopped and gazed at them. Mr Tapley, also, looked over his shoulder, and so did Martin; for the stranger, as he passed, had looked very sharply at them.

'Who may that be, I wonder!' said Martin. 'The face seems familiar to me, but I don't know the man.'

'He seems to have a amiable desire that his face should be tolerable familiar to us,' said Mr Tapley, 'for he's a-staring pretty hard. He'd better not waste his beauty, for he ain't got much to spare.'

Coming in sight of the Dragon, they saw a travelling carriage at the door.

'And a Salisbury carriage, eh?' said Mr Tapley. 'That's what he came in depend upon it. What's in the wind now? A new pupil, I shouldn't wonder. P'raps it's a order for another grammar-school, of the same pattern as the last.'

Before they could enter at the door, Mrs Lupin came running out; and beckoning them to the carriage showed them a portmanteau with the name of CHUZZLEWIT upon it.

'Miss Pecksniff's husband that was,' said the good woman to Martin. 'I didn't know what terms you might be on, and was quite in a worry till you came back.'

'He and I have never interchanged a word yet,' observed Martin; 'and as I have no wish to be better or worse acquainted with him, I will not put myself in his way. We passed him on the road, I have no doubt. I am glad he timed his coming as he did. Upon my word! Miss Pecksniff's husband travels gayly!'

'A very fine-looking gentleman with him—in the best room now,' whispered Mrs Lupin, glancing up at the window as they went into the house. 'He has ordered everything that can be got for dinner; and has the glossiest moustaches and whiskers ever you saw.'

'Has he?' cried Martin, 'why then we'll endeavour to avoid him too, in the hope that our self-denial may be strong enough for the sacrifice. It is only for a few hours,' said Martin, dropping wearily into a chair behind the little screen in the bar. 'Our visit has met with no success, my dear Mrs Lupin, and I must go to London.'

'Dear, dear!' cried the hostess.

'Yes, one foul wind no more makes a winter, than one swallow makes a summer. I'll try it again. Tom Pinch has succeeded. With his advice to guide me, I may do the same. I took Tom under my protection once, God save the mark!' said Martin, with a melancholy smile; 'and promised I would make his fortune. Perhaps Tom will take me under HIS protection now, and teach me how to earn my bread.'

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

FURTHER CONTINUATION OF THE ENTERPRISE OF MR JONAS AND HIS FRIEND

It was a special quality, among the many admirable qualities possessed by Mr Pecksniff, that the more he was found out, the more hypocrisy he practised. Let him be discomfited in one quarter, and he refreshed and recompensed himself by carrying the war into another. If his workings and windings were detected by A, so much the greater reason was there for practicing without loss of time on B, if it were only to keep his hand in. He had never been such a saintly and improving spectacle to all about him, as after his detection by Thomas Pinch. He had scarcely ever been at once so tender in his humanity, and so dignified and exalted in his virtue, as when young Martin's scorn was fresh and hot upon him.

Having this large stock of superfluous sentiment and morality on hand which must positively be cleared off at any sacrifice, Mr Pecksniff no sooner heard his son-in-law announced, than he regarded him as a kind of wholesale or general order, to be immediately executed. Descending, therefore, swiftly to the parlour, and clasping the young man in his arms, he exclaimed, with looks and gestures that denoted the perturbation of his spirit:

'Jonas. My child—she is well! There is nothing the matter?'

'What, you're at it again, are you?' replied his son-in-law. 'Even with me? Get away with you, will you?'

'Tell me she is well then,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Tell me she is well my boy!'

'She's well enough,' retorted Jonas, disengaging himself. 'There's nothing the matter with HER.'

'There is nothing the matter with her!' cried Mr Pecksniff, sitting down in the nearest chair, and rubbing up his hair. 'Fie upon my weakness! I cannot help it, Jonas. Thank you. I am better now. How is my other child;

my eldest; my Cherrywerrychigo?' said Mr Pecksniff, inventing a playful little name for her, in the restored lightness of his heart.

'She's much about the same as usual,' returned Jonas. 'She sticks pretty close to the vinegar-bottle. You know she's got a sweetheart, I suppose?'

'I have heard of it,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'from headquarters; from my child herself I will not deny that it moved me to contemplate the loss of my remaining daughter, Jonas—I am afraid we parents are selfish, I am afraid we are—but it has ever been the study of my life to qualify them for the domestic hearth; and it is a sphere which Cherry will adorn.'

'She need adorn some sphere or other,' observed the son-in-law, for she ain't very ornamental in general.'

'My girls are now provided for,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'They are now happily provided for, and I have not laboured in vain!'

This is exactly what Mr Pecksniff would have said, if one of his daughters had drawn a prize of thirty thousand pounds in the lottery, or if the other had picked up a valuable purse in the street, which nobody appeared to claim. In either of these cases he would have invoked a patriarchal blessing on the fortunate head, with great solemnity, and would have taken immense credit to himself, as having meant it from the infant's cradle.

'Suppose we talk about something else, now,' observed Jonas, drily. 'just for a change. Are you quite agreeable?'

'Quite,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Ah, you wag, you naughty wag! You laugh at poor old fond papa. Well! He deserves it. And he don't mind it either, for his feelings are their own reward. You have come to stay with me, Jonas?'

'No. I've got a friend with me,' said Jonas.

'Bring your friend!' cried Mr Pecksniff, in a gush of hospitality. 'Bring any number of your friends!'

'This ain't the sort of man to be brought,' said Jonas, contemptuously. 'I think I see myself "bringing" him to your house, for a treat! Thank'ee all the same; but he's a little too near the top of the tree for that, Pecksniff.'

The good man pricked up his ears; his interest was awakened. A position near the top of the tree was greatness, virtue, goodness, sense, genius; or, it should rather be said, a dispensation from all, and in itself something immeasurably better than all; with Mr Pecksniff. A man who was able to look down upon Mr Pecksniff could not be looked up at, by that gentleman, with too great an amount of deference, or from a position of too much humility. So it always is with great spirits.

'I'll tell you what you may do, if you like,' said Jonas; 'you may come and dine with us at the Dragon. We were forced to come down to Salisbury last night, on some business, and I got him to bring me over here this morning, in his carriage; at least, not his own carriage, for we had a breakdown in the night, but one we hired instead; it's all the same. Mind what you're about, you know. He's not used to all sorts; he only mixes with the best!'

'Some young nobleman who has been borrowing money of you at good interest, eh?' said Mr Pecksniff, shaking his forefinger facetiously. 'I shall be delighted to know the gay sprig.'

'Borrowing!' echoed Jonas. 'Borrowing! When you're a twentieth part as rich as he is, you may shut up shop! We should be pretty well off if we could buy his furniture, and plate, and pictures, by clubbing together. A likely man to borrow: Mr Montague! Why since I was lucky enough (come! and I'll say, sharp enough, too) to get a share in the Assurance office that he's President of, I've made—never mind what I've made,' said Jonas, seeming to recover all at once his usual caution. 'You know me pretty well, and I don't blab about such things. But, Ecod, I've made a trifle.'

'Really, my dear Jonas,' cried Mr Pecksniff, with much warmth, 'a gentleman like this should receive some attention. Would he like to see the church? or if he has a taste for the fine arts—which I have no doubt he has, from the description you give of his circumstances—I can send him down a few portfolios. Salisbury Cathedral, my dear Jonas,' said Mr Pecksniff; the mention of the portfolios and his anxiety to display himself to advantage, suggesting his usual phraseology in that regard, 'is an edifice replete with venerable associations, and strikingly suggestive of the loftiest emotions. It is here we contemplate the work of bygone ages. It is here we listen to the swelling organ, as we stroll through the reverberating aisles. We have drawings of this celebrated structure from the North, from the South, from the East, from the West, from the South-East, from the Nor'West—'

During this digression, and indeed during the whole dialogue, Jonas had been rocking on his chair, with his hands in his pockets and his head thrown cunningly on one side. He looked at Mr Pecksniff now with such shrewd meaning twinkling in his eyes, that Mr Pecksniff stopped, and asked him what he was going to say.

'Ecod!' he answered. 'Pecksniff if I knew how you meant to leave your money, I could put you in the way of doubling it in no time. It wouldn't be bad to keep a chance like this snug in the family. But you're such a deep one!'

'Jonas!' cried Mr Pecksniff, much affected, 'I am not a diplomatical character; my heart is in my hand. By far the greater part of the inconsiderable savings I have accumulated in the course of—I hope—a not dishonourable or useless career, is already given, devised, and bequeathed (correct me, my dear Jonas, if I am technically wrong), with expressions of confidence, which I will not repeat; and in securities which it is unnecessary to mention to a person whom I cannot, whom I will not, whom I need not, name.' Here he gave the hand of his son-in-law a fervent squeeze, as if he would have added, 'God bless you; be very careful of it when you get it!'

Mr Jonas only shook his head and laughed, and, seeming to think better of what he had had in his mind, said, 'No. He would keep his own counsel.' But as he observed that he would take a walk, Mr Pecksniff insisted on accompanying him, remarking that he could leave a card for Mr Montague, as they went along, by way of gentleman-usher to himself at dinner-time. Which he did.

In the course of their walk, Mr Jonas affected to maintain that close reserve which had operated as a timely check upon him during the foregoing dialogue. And as he made no attempt to conciliate Mr Pecksniff, but, on the contrary, was more boorish and rude to him than usual, that gentleman, so far from suspecting his real design, laid himself out to be attacked with advantage. For it is in the nature of a knave to think the tools with which he works indispensable to knavery; and knowing what he would do himself in such a case, Mr Pecksniff argued, 'if this young man wanted anything of me for his own ends, he would be polite and deferential.'

The more Jonas repelled him in his hints and inquiries, the more solicitous, therefore, Mr Pecksniff became to be initiated into the golden mysteries at which he had obscurely glanced. Why should there be cold and worldly secrets, he observed, between relations? What was life without confidence? If the chosen husband of his daughter, the man to whom he had delivered her with so much pride and hope, such bounding and such beaming joy; if he were not a green spot in the barren waste of life, where was that oasis to be bound?

Little did Mr Pecksniff think on what a very green spot he planted one foot at that moment! Little did he foresee when he said, 'All is but dust!' how very shortly he would come down with his own!

Inch by inch, in his grudging and ill-conditioned way; sustained to the life, for the hope of making Mr Pecksniff suffer in that tender place, the pocket, where Jonas smarted so terribly himself, gave him an additional and malicious interest in the wiles he was set on to practise; inch by inch, and bit by bit, Jonas rather allowed the dazzling prospects of the Anglo-Bengalee establishment to escape him, than paraded them before his greedy listener. And in the same niggardly spirit, he left Mr Pecksniff to infer, if he chose (which he DID choose, of course), that a consciousness of not having any great natural gifts of speech and manner himself, rendered him desirous to have the credit of introducing to Mr Montague some one who was well endowed in those respects, and so atone for his own deficiencies. Otherwise, he muttered discontentedly, he would have seen his beloved father-in-law 'far enough off,' before he would have taken him into his confidence.

Primed in this artful manner, Mr Pecksniff presented himself at dinner-time in such a state of suavity, benevolence, cheerfulness, politeness, and cordiality, as even he had perhaps never attained before. The frankness of the country gentleman, the refinement of the artist, the good-humoured allowance of the man of the world; philanthropy, forbearance, piety, toleration, all blended together in a flexible adaptability to anything and everything; were expressed in Mr Pecksniff, as he shook hands with the great speculator and capitalist.

'Welcome, respected sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'to our humble village! We are a simple people; primitive clods, Mr Montague; but we can appreciate the honour of your visit, as my dear son-in-law can testify. It is very strange,' said Mr Pecksniff, pressing his hand almost reverentially, 'but I seem to know you. That towering forehead, my dear Jonas,' said Mr Pecksniff aside, 'and those clustering masses of rich hair—I must have seen you, my dear sir, in the sparkling throng.'

Nothing was more probable, they all agreed.

'I could have wished,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'to have had the honour of introducing you to an elderly inmate of our house: to the uncle of our friend. Mr Chuzzlewit, sir, would have been proud indeed to have taken you by the hand.'

'Is the gentleman here now?' asked Montague, turning deeply red. 'He is,' said Mr Pecksniff.

'You said nothing about that, Chuzzlewit.'

'I didn't suppose you'd care to hear of it,' returned Jonas. 'You wouldn't care to know him, I can promise you.'

'Jonas! my dear Jonas!' remonstrated Mr Pecksniff. 'Really!'

'Oh! it's all very well for you to speak up for him,' said Jonas. 'You have nailed him. You'll get a fortune by him.'

'Oho! Is the wind in that quarter?' cried Montague. 'Ha, ha, ha!' and here they all laughed—especially Mr Pecksniff.

'No, no!' said that gentleman, clapping his son-in-law playfully upon the shoulder. 'You must not believe all that my young relative says, Mr Montague. You may believe him in official business, and trust him in official business, but you must not attach importance to his flights of fancy.'

'Upon my life, Mr Pecksniff,' cried Montague, 'I attach the greatest importance to that last observation of his. I trust and hope it's true. Money cannot be turned and turned again quickly enough in the ordinary course, Mr Pecksniff. There is nothing like building our fortune on the weaknesses of mankind.'

'Oh fie! oh fie, for shame!' cried Mr Pecksniff. But they all laughed again—especially Mr Pecksniff.

'I give you my honour that WE do it,' said Montague.

'Oh fie, fie!' cried Mr Pecksniff. 'You are very pleasant. That I am sure you don't! That I am sure you don't! How CAN you, you know?'

Again they all laughed in concert; and again Mr Pecksniff laughed especially.

This was very agreeable indeed. It was confidential, easy, straightforward; and still left Mr Pecksniff in the position of being in a gentle way the Mentor of the party. The greatest achievements in the article of cookery that the Dragon had ever performed, were set before them; the oldest and best wines in the Dragon's cellar saw the light on that occasion; a thousand bubbles, indicative of the wealth and station of Mr Montague in the depths of his pursuits, were constantly rising to the surface of the conversation; and they were as frank and merry as three honest men could be. Mr Pecksniff thought it a pity (he said so) that Mr Montague should think lightly of mankind and their weaknesses. He was anxious upon this subject; his mind ran upon it; in one way or another he was constantly coming back to it; he must make a convert of him, he said. And as often as Mr Montague repeated his sentiment about building fortunes on the weaknesses of mankind, and added frankly, 'WE do it!' just as often Mr Pecksniff repeated 'Oh fie! oh fie, for shame! I am sure you don't. How CAN you, you know?' laying a greater stress each time on those last words.

The frequent repetition of this playful inquiry on the part of Mr Pecksniff, led at last to playful answers on the part of Mr Montague; but after some little sharp-shooting on both sides, Mr Pecksniff became grave, almost to tears; observing that if Mr Montague would give him leave, he would drink the health of his young kinsman, Mr Jonas; congratulating him upon the valuable and distinguished friendship he had formed, but envying him, he would confess, his usefulness to his fellow-creatures. For, if he understood the objects of that Institution with which he was newly and advantageously connected—knowing them but imperfectly—they were calculated to do Good; and for his (Mr Pecksniff's) part, if he could in any way promote them, he thought he would be able to lay his head upon his pillow every night, with an absolute certainty of going to sleep at once.

The transition from this accidental remark (for it was quite accidental and had fallen from Mr Pecksniff in the openness of his soul), to the discussion of the subject as a matter of business, was easy. Books, papers, statements, tables, calculations of various kinds, were soon spread out before them; and as they were all framed with one object, it is not surprising that they should all have tended to one end. But still, whenever Montague enlarged upon the profits of the office, and said that as long as there were gulls upon the wing it must succeed, Mr Pecksniff mildly said 'Oh fie!'—and might indeed have remonstrated with him, but that he knew he was joking. Mr Pecksniff did know he was joking; because he said so.

There never had been before, and there never would be again, such an opportunity for the investment of a considerable sum (the rate of advantage increased in proportion to the amount invested), as at that moment. The only time that had at all approached it, was the time when Jonas had come into the concern; which made him ill-natured now, and inclined him to pick out a doubt in this place, and a flaw in that, and grumbling to advise Mr Pecksniff to think better of it. The sum which would complete the proprietorship in this snug concern, was nearly equal to Mr Pecksniff's whole hoard; not counting Mr Chuzzlewit, that is to say, whom he looked upon as money in the Bank, the possession of which inclined him the more to make a dash with his own private sprats for the capture of such a whale as Mr Montague described. The returns began almost immediately, and were immense. The end of it was, that Mr Pecksniff agreed to become the last partner and proprietor in the Anglo-Bengalee, and made an appointment to dine with Mr Montague, at Salisbury, on the next day but one, then and there to complete the negotiation.

It took so long to bring the subject to this head, that it was nearly midnight when they parted. When Mr Pecksniff walked downstairs to the door, he found Mrs Lupin standing there, looking out.

'Ah, my good friend!' he said; 'not a-bed yet! Contemplating the stars, Mrs Lupin?'

'It's a beautiful starlight night, sir.'

'A beautiful starlight night,' said Mr Pecksniff, looking up. 'Behold the planets, how they shine! Behold the—those two persons who were here this morning have left your house, I hope, Mrs Lupin?'

'Yes, sir. They are gone.'

'I am glad to hear it,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Behold the wonders of the firmament, Mrs Lupin! how glorious is the scene! When I look up at those shining orbs, I think that each of them is winking to the other to take notice of the vanity of men's pursuits. My fellowmen!' cried Mr Pecksniff, shaking his head in pity; 'you are much mistaken; my wormy relatives, you are much deceived! The stars are perfectly contented (I suppose so) in their several spheres. Why are not you? Oh! do not strive and struggle to enrich yourselves, or to get the better of each other, my deluded friends, but look up there, with me!'

Mrs Lupin shook her head, and heaved a sigh. It was very affecting.

'Look up there, with me!' repeated Mr Pecksniff, stretching out his hand; 'With me, a humble individual who is also an insect like yourselves. Can silver, gold, or precious stones, sparkle like those constellations! I think not. Then do not thirst for silver, gold, or precious stones; but look up there, with me!'

With those words, the good man patted Mrs Lupin's hand between his own, as if he would have added 'think of this, my good woman!' and walked away in a sort of ecstasy or rapture, with his hat under his arm.

Jonas sat in the attitude in which Mr Pecksniff had left him, gazing moodily at his friend; who, surrounded by a heap of documents, was writing something on an oblong slip of paper.

'You mean to wait at Salisbury over the day after to-morrow, do you, then?' said Jonas.

'You heard our appointment,' returned Montague, without raising his eyes. 'In any case I should have waited to see after the boy.'

They appeared to have changed places again; Montague being in high spirits; Jonas gloomy and lowering.

'You don't want me, I suppose?' said Jonas.

'I want you to put your name here,' he returned, glancing at him with a smile, 'as soon as I have filled up the stamp. I may as well have your note of hand for that extra capital. That's all I want. If you wish to go home, I can manage Mr Pecksniff now, alone. There is a perfect understanding between us.'

Jonas sat scowling at him as he wrote, in silence. When he had finished his writing, and had dried it on the blotting paper in his travelling-desk; he looked up, and tossed the pen towards him.

'What, not a day's grace, not a day's trust, eh?' said Jonas bitterly. 'Not after the pains I have taken with to-night's work?'

'To night's work was a part of our bargain,' replied Montague; 'and so was this.'

'You drive a hard bargain,' said Jonas, advancing to the table. 'You know best. Give it here!'

Montague gave him the paper. After pausing as if he could not make up his mind to put his name to it, Jonas dipped his pen hastily in the nearest inkstand, and began to write. But he had scarcely marked the paper when he started back, in a panic.

'Why, what the devil's this?' he said. 'It's bloody!'

He had dipped the pen, as another moment showed, into red ink. But he attached a strange degree of importance to the mistake. He asked how it had come there, who had brought it, why it had been brought; and looked at Montague, at first, as if he thought he had put a trick upon him. Even when he used a different pen, and the right ink, he made some scratches on another paper first, as half believing they would turn red also.

'Black enough, this time,' he said, handing the note to Montague. 'Good-bye.'

'Going now! how do you mean to get away from here?'

'I shall cross early in the morning to the high road, before you are out of bed; and catch the day-coach, going up. Good-bye!'

'You are in a hurry!'

'I have something to do,' said Jonas. 'Good-bye!'

His friend looked after him as he went out, in surprise, which gradually gave place to an air of satisfaction and relief.

'It happens all the better. It brings about what I wanted, without any difficulty. I shall travel home alone.'

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

IN WHICH TOM PINCH AND HIS SISTER TAKE A LITTLE PLEASURE; BUT QUITE IN A DOMESTIC WAY, AND WITH NO CEREMONY ABOUT IT

Tom Pinch and his sister having to part, for the dispatch of the morning's business, immediately after the dispersion of the other actors in the scene upon the wharf with which the reader has been already made acquainted, had no opportunity of discussing the subject at that time. But Tom, in his solitary office, and Ruth, in the triangular parlour, thought about nothing else all day; and, when their hour of meeting in the afternoon approached, they were very full of it, to be sure.

There was a little plot between them, that Tom should always come out of the Temple by one way; and that was past the fountain. Coming through Fountain Court, he was just to glance down the steps leading into Garden Court, and to look once all round him; and if Ruth had come to meet him, there he would see her; not sauntering, you understand (on account of the clerks), but coming briskly up, with the best little laugh upon her face that ever played in opposition to the fountain, and beat it all to nothing. For, fifty to one, Tom had been looking for her in the wrong direction, and had quite given her up, while she had been tripping towards him from the first; jingling that little reticule of hers (with all the keys in it) to attract his wandering observation.

Whether there was life enough left in the slow vegetation of Fountain Court for the smoky shrubs to have any consciousness of the brightest and purest-hearted little woman in the world, is a question for gardeners, and those who are learned in the loves of plants. But, that it was a good thing for that same paved yard to have such a delicate little figure flitting through it; that it passed like a smile from the grimy old houses, and the worn flagstones, and left them duller, darker, sterner than before; there is no sort of doubt. The Temple fountain might have leaped up twenty feet to greet the spring of hopeful maidenhood, that in her person stole on, sparkling, through the dry and dusty channels of the Law; the chirping sparrows, bred in Temple chinks and crannies, might have held their peace to listen to imaginary skylarks, as so fresh a little creature passed; the dingy boughs, unused to droop, otherwise than in their puny growth, might have bent down in a kindred gracefulness to shed their benedictions on her graceful head; old love letters, shut up in iron boxes in the neighbouring offices, and made of no account among the heaps of family papers into which they had strayed, and of which, in their degeneracy, they formed a part, might have stirred and fluttered with a moment's recollection of their ancient tenderness, as she went lightly by. Anything might have happened that did not happen, and never will, for the love of Ruth.

Something happened, too, upon the afternoon of which the history treats. Not for her love. Oh no! quite by accident, and without the least reference to her at all.

Either she was a little too soon, or Tom was a little too late—she was so precise in general, that she timed it to half a minute—but no Tom was there. Well! But was anybody else there, that she blushed so deeply, after looking round, and tripped off down the steps with such unusual expedition?

Why, the fact is, that Mr Westlock was passing at that moment. The Temple is a public thoroughfare; they may write up on the gates that it is not, but so long as the gates are left open it is, and will be; and Mr Westlock had as good a right to be there as anybody else. But why did she run away, then? Not being ill dressed, for she was much too neat for that, why did she run away? The brown hair that had fallen down beneath her bonnet, and had one impertinent imp of a false flower clinging to it, boastful of its licence before all men, THAT could not have been the cause, for it looked charming. Oh! foolish, panting, frightened little heart, why did she run away!

Merrily the tiny fountain played, and merrily the dimples sparkled on its sunny face. John Westlock hurried after her. Softly the whispering water broke and fell; as roguishly the dimples twinkled, as he stole upon her footsteps.

Oh, foolish, panting, timid little heart, why did she feign to be unconscious of his coming! Why wish herself so far away, yet be so flutteringly happy there!

'I felt sure it was you,' said John, when he overtook her in the sanctuary of Garden Court. 'I knew I couldn't be mistaken.'

She was SO surprised.

'You are waiting for your brother,' said John. 'Let me bear you company.'

So light was the touch of the coy little hand, that he glanced down to assure himself he had it on his arm. But his glance, stopping for an instant at the bright eyes, forgot its first design, and went no farther.

They walked up and down three or four times, speaking about Tom and his mysterious employment. Now that was a very natural and innocent subject, surely. Then why, whenever Ruth lifted up her eyes, did she let them fall again immediately, and seek the uncongenial pavement of the court? They were not such eyes as shun the light; they were not such eyes as require to be hoarded to enhance their value. They were much too precious and too genuine to stand in need of arts like those. Somebody must have been looking at them!

They found out Tom, though, quickly enough. This pair of eyes descried him in the distance, the moment he appeared. He was staring about him, as usual, in all directions but the right one; and was as obstinate in not looking towards them, as if he had intended it. As it was plain that, being left to himself, he would walk away home, John Westlock darted off to stop him.

This made the approach of poor little Ruth, by herself, one of the most embarrassing of circumstances. There was Tom, manifesting extreme surprise (he had no presence of mind, that Tom, on small occasions); there was John, making as light of it as he could, but explaining at the same time with most unnecessary elaboration; and here was she, coming towards them, with both of them looking at her, conscious of blushing to a terrible extent, but trying to throw up her eyebrows carelessly, and pout her rosy lips, as if she were the coolest and most unconcerned of little women.

Merrily the fountain plashed and plashed, until the dimples, merging into one another, swelled into a general smile, that covered the whole surface of the basin.

'What an extraordinary meeting!' said Tom. 'I should never have dreamed of seeing you two together here.'

'Quite accidental,' John was heard to murmur.

'Exactly,' cried Tom; 'that's what I mean, you know. If it wasn't accidental, there would be nothing remarkable in it.'

'To be sure,' said John.

'Such an out-of-the-way place for you to have met in,' pursued Tom, quite delighted. 'Such an unlikely spot!'

John rather disputed that. On the contrary, he considered it a very likely spot, indeed. He was constantly passing to and fro there, he said. He shouldn't wonder if it were to happen again. His only wonder was, that it had never happened before.

By this time Ruth had got round on the farther side of her brother, and had taken his arm. She was squeezing it now, as much as to say 'Are you going to stop here all day, you dear, old, blundering Tom?'

Tom answered the squeeze as if it had been a speech. 'John,' he said, 'if you'll give my sister your arm, we'll take her between us, and walk on. I have a curious circumstance to relate to you. Our meeting could not have happened better.'

Merrily the fountain leaped and danced, and merrily the smiling dimples twinkled and expanded more and more, until they broke into a laugh against the basin's rim, and vanished.

'Tom,' said his friend, as they turned into the noisy street, 'I have a proposition to make. It is, that you and your sister—if she will so far honour a poor bachelor's dwelling—give me a great pleasure, and come and dine with me.'

'What, to-day?' cried Tom.

'Yes, to-day. It's close by, you know. Pray, Miss Pinch, insist upon it. It will be very disinterested, for I have nothing to give you.'

'Oh! you must not believe that, Ruth,' said Tom. 'He is the most tremendous fellow, in his housekeeping, that I ever heard of, for a single man. He ought to be Lord Mayor. Well! what do you say? Shall we go?'

'If you please, Tom,' rejoined his dutiful little sister.

'But I mean,' said Tom, regarding her with smiling admiration; 'is there anything you ought to wear, and haven't got? I am sure I don't know, John; she may not be able to take her bonnet off, for anything I can tell.'

There was a great deal of laughing at this, and there were divers compliments from John Westlock—not compliments HE said at least (and really he was right), but good, plain, honest truths, which no one could deny. Ruth laughed, and all that, but she made no objection; so it was an engagement.

'If I had known it a little sooner,' said John, 'I would have tried another pudding. Not in rivalry; but merely to exalt that famous one. I wouldn't on any account have had it made with suet.'

'Why not?' asked Tom.

'Because that cookery-book advises suet,' said John Westlock; 'and ours was made with flour and eggs.'

'Oh good gracious!' cried Tom. 'Ours was made with flour and eggs, was it? Ha, ha, ha! A beefsteak pudding made with flour and eggs! Why anybody knows better than that. I know better than that! Ha, ha, ha!'

It is unnecessary to say that Tom had been present at the making of the pudding, and had been a devoted believer in it all through. But he was so delighted to have this joke against his busy little sister and was tickled to that degree at having found her out, that he stopped in Temple Bar to laugh; and it was no more to Tom, that he was anathematized and knocked about by the surly passengers, than it would have been to a post; for he continued to exclaim with unabated good humour, 'flour and eggs! A beefsteak pudding made with flour and eggs!' until John Westlock and his sister fairly ran away from him, and left him to have his laugh out by himself; which he had, and then came dodging across the crowded street to them, with such sweet temper and tenderness (it was quite a tender joke of Tom's) beaming in his face, God bless it, that it might have purified the air, though Temple Bar had been, as in the golden days gone by, embellished with a row of rotting human heads.

There are snug chambers in those Inns where the bachelors live, and, for the desolate fellows they pretend to be, it is quite surprising how well they get on. John was very pathetic on the subject of his dreary life, and the deplorable makeshifts and apologetic contrivances it involved, but he really seemed to make himself pretty comfortable. His rooms were the perfection of neatness and convenience at any rate; and if he were anything but comfortable, the fault was certainly not theirs.

He had no sooner ushered Tom and his sister into his best room (where there was a beautiful little vase of fresh flowers on the table, all ready for Ruth. Just as if he had expected her, Tom said), than, seizing his hat, he bustled out again, in his most energetically bustling, way; and presently came hurrying back, as they saw through the half-opened door, attended by a fiery-faced matron attired in a crunched bonnet, with particularly long strings to it hanging down her back; in conjunction with whom he instantly began to lay the cloth for dinner, polishing up the wine-glasses with his own hands, brightening the silver top of the pepper-caster on his coat-sleeve, drawing corks and filling decanters, with a skill and expedition that were quite dazzling. And as if, in the course of this rubbing and polishing, he had rubbed an enchanted lamp or a magic ring, obedient to which there were twenty thousand supernatural slaves at least, suddenly there appeared a being in a white waistcoat, carrying under his arm a napkin, and attended by another being with an oblong box upon his head, from which a banquet, piping hot, was taken out and set upon the table.

Salmon, lamb, peas, innocent young potatoes, a cool salad, sliced cucumber, a tender duckling, and a tart—all there. They all came at the right time. Where they came from, didn't appear; but the oblong box was constantly going and coming, and making its arrival known to the man in the white waistcoat by bumping modestly against the outside of the door; for, after its first appearance, it entered the room no more. He was never surprised, this man; he never seemed to wonder at the extraordinary things he found in the box, but took them out with a face expressive of a steady purpose and impenetrable character, and put them on the table. He was a kind man; gentle in his manners, and much interested in what they ate and drank. He was a learned man, and knew the flavour of John Westlock's private sauces, which he softly and feelingly described, as he handed the little bottles round. He was a grave man, and a noiseless; for dinner being done, and wine and fruit arranged upon the board, he vanished, box and all, like something that had never been.

'Didn't I say he was a tremendous fellow in his housekeeping?' cried Tom. 'Bless my soul! It's wonderful.'

'Ah, Miss Pinch,' said John. 'This is the bright side of the life we lead in such a place. It would be a dismal life, indeed, if it didn't brighten up to-day'

'Don't believe a word he says,' cried Tom. 'He lives here like a monarch, and wouldn't change his mode of life for any consideration. He only pretends to grumble.'

No, John really did not appear to pretend; for he was uncommonly earnest in his desire to have it understood that he was as dull, solitary, and uncomfortable on ordinary occasions as an unfortunate young man could, in reason, be. It was a wretched life, he said, a miserable life. He thought of getting rid of the chambers as soon as possible; and meant, in fact, to put a bill up very shortly.

'Well' said Tom Pinch, 'I don't know where you can go, John, to be more comfortable. That's all I can say. What do YOU say, Ruth?'

Ruth trifled with the cherries on her plate, and said that she thought Mr Westlock ought to be quite happy, and that she had no doubt he was.

Ah, foolish, panting, frightened little heart, how timidly she said it!

'But you are forgetting what you had to tell, Tom; what occurred this morning,' she added in the same breath.

'So I am,' said Tom. 'We have been so talkative on other topics that I declare I have not had time to think of it. I'll tell it you at once, John, in case I should forget it altogether.'

On Tom's relating what had passed upon the wharf, his friend was very much surprised, and took such a great interest in the narrative as Tom could not quite understand. He believed he knew the old lady whose acquaintance they had made, he said; and that he might venture to say, from their description of her, that her name was Gamp. But of what nature the communication could have been which Tom had borne so unexpectedly; why its delivery had been entrusted to him; how it happened that the parties were involved together; and what secret lay at the bottom of the whole affair; perplexed him very much. Tom had been sure of his taking some interest in the matter; but was not prepared for the strong interest he showed. It held John Westlock to the subject even after Ruth had left the room; and evidently made him anxious to pursue it further than as a mere subject of conversation.

'I shall remonstrate with my landlord, of course,' said Tom; 'though he is a very singular secret sort of man, and not likely to afford me much satisfaction; even if he knew what was in the letter.'

'Which you may swear he did,' John interposed.

'You think so?'

'I am certain of it.'

'Well!' said Tom, 'I shall remonstrate with him when I see him (he goes in and out in a strange way, but I will try to catch him tomorrow morning), on his having asked me to execute such an unpleasant commission. And I have been thinking, John, that if I went down to Mrs What's-her-name's in the City, where I was before, you know—Mrs Todgers's—to-morrow morning, I might find poor Mercy Pecksniff there, perhaps, and be able to explain to her how I came to have any hand in the business.'

'You are perfectly right, Tom,' returned his friend, after a short interval of reflection. 'You cannot do better. It is quite clear to me that whatever the business is, there is little good in it; and it is so desirable for you to disentangle yourself from any appearance of willful connection with it, that I would counsel you to see her husband, if you can, and wash your hands of it by a plain statement of the facts. I have a misgiving that there is something dark at work here, Tom. I will tell you why, at another time; when I have made an inquiry or two myself.'

All this sounded very mysterious to Tom Pinch. But as he knew he could rely upon his friend, he resolved to follow this advice.

Ah, but it would have been a good thing to have had a coat of invisibility, wherein to have watched little Ruth, when she was left to herself in John Westlock's chambers, and John and her brother were talking thus, over their wine! The gentle way in which she tried to get up a little conversation with the fiery-faced matron in the crunched bonnet, who was waiting to attend her; after making a desperate rally in regard of her dress, and attiring herself in a washed-out yellow gown with sprigs of the same upon it, so that it looked like a tesselated work of pats of butter. That would have been pleasant. The grim and griffin-like inflexibility with which the fiery-faced matron repelled these engaging advances, as proceeding from a hostile and dangerous power, who could have no business there, unless it were to deprive her of a customer, or suggest what became of the self-consuming tea and sugar, and other general trifles. That would have been agreeable. The bashful, winning, glorious curiosity, with which little Ruth, when fiery-face was gone, peeped into the books and nick-nacks that were lying about, and had a particular interest in some delicate paper-matches on the chimney-piece; wondering who could have made them. That would have been worth seeing. The faltering hand with which she tied those flowers together; with which, almost blushing at her own fair self as imaged in the glass, she arranged them in her breast, and looking at them with her head aside, now half resolved to take them out again, now half resolved to leave them where they were. That would have been delightful!

John seemed to think it all delightful; for coming in with Tom to tea, he took his seat beside her like a man enchanted. And when the tea-service had been removed, and Tom, sitting down at the piano, became absorbed in some of his old organ tunes, he was still beside her at the open window, looking out upon the twilight.

There is little enough to see in Furnival's Inn. It is a shady, quiet place, echoing to the footsteps of the stragglers who have business there; and rather monotonous and gloomy on summer evenings. What gave it such a charm to them, that they remained at the window as unconscious of the flight of time as Tom himself, the dreamer, while the melodies which had so often soothed his spirit were hovering again about him! What power infused into the fading light, the gathering darkness; the stars that here and there appeared; the evening air, the City's hum and stir, the very chiming of the old church clocks; such exquisite enthrallment, that the divinest regions of the earth spread out before their eyes could not have held them captive in a stronger chain?

The shadows deepened, deepened, and the room became quite dark. Still Tom's fingers wandered over the keys of the piano, and still the window had its pair of tenants. At length, her hand upon his shoulder, and her breath upon his forehead, roused Tom from his reverie.

'Dear me!' he cried, desisting with a start. 'I am afraid I have been very inconsiderate and unpolite.'

Tom little thought how much consideration and politeness he had shown!

'Sing something to us, my dear,' said Tom, 'let us hear your voice. Come!'

John Westlock added his entreaties with such earnestness that a flinty heart alone could have resisted them. Hers was not a flinty heart. Oh, dear no! Quite another thing.

So down she sat, and in a pleasant voice began to sing the ballads Tom loved well. Old rhyming stories, with here and there a pause for a few simple chords, such as a harper might have sounded in the ancient time while looking upward for the current of some half-remembered legend; words of old poets, wedded to such measures that the strain of music might have been the poet's breath, giving utterance and expression to his thoughts; and now a melody so joyous and light-hearted, that the singer seemed incapable of sadness, until in her inconstancy (oh wicked little singer!) she relapsed, and broke the listeners' hearts again; these were the simple means she used to please them. And that these simple means prevailed, and she DID please them, let the still darkened chamber, and its long-deferred illumination witness.

The candles came at last, and it was time for moving homeward. Cutting paper carefully, and rolling it about the stalks of those same flowers, occasioned some delay; but even this was done in time, and Ruth was ready.

'Good night!' said Tom. 'A memorable and delightful visit, John! Good night!'

John thought he would walk with them.

'No, no. Don't!' said Tom. 'What nonsense! We can get home very well alone. I couldn't think of taking you out.'

But John said he would rather.

'Are you sure you would rather?' said Tom. 'I am afraid you only say so out of politeness.'

John being quite sure, gave his arm to Ruth, and led her out. Fiery-face, who was again in attendance, acknowledged her departure with so cold a curtsey that it was hardly visible; and cut Tom, dead.

Their host was bent on walking the whole distance, and would not listen to Tom's dissuasions. Happy time, happy walk, happy parting, happy dreams! But there are some sweet day-dreams, so there are that put the visions of the night to shame.

Busily the Temple fountain murmured in the moonlight, while Ruth lay sleeping, with her flowers beside her; and John Westlock sketched a portrait—whose?—from memory.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

IN WHICH MISS PECKSNIFF MAKES LOVE, MR JONAS MAKES WRATH, MRS GAMP MAKES TEA, AND MR CHUFFEY MAKES BUSINESS

On the next day's official duties coming to a close, Tom hurried home without losing any time by the way; and after dinner and a short rest sallied out again, accompanied by Ruth, to pay his projected visit to Todgers's. Tom took Ruth with him, not only because it was a great pleasure to him to have her for his companion whenever he could, but because he wished her to cherish and comfort poor Merry; which she, for her own part (having heard the wretched history of that young wife from Tom), was all eagerness to do.

'She was so glad to see me,' said Tom, 'that I am sure she will be glad to see you. Your sympathy is certain to be much more delicate and acceptable than mine.'

'I am very far from being certain of that, Tom,' she replied; 'and indeed you do yourself an injustice. Indeed you do. But I hope she may like me, Tom.'

'Oh, she is sure to do that!' cried Tom, confidently.

'What a number of friends I should have, if everybody was of your way of thinking. Shouldn't I, Tom, dear?' said his little sister pinching him upon the cheek.

Tom laughed, and said that with reference to this particular case he had no doubt at all of finding a disciple in Merry. 'For you women,' said Tom, 'you women, my dear, are so kind, and in your kindness have such nice perception; you know so well how to be affectionate and full of solicitude without appearing to be; your gentleness of feeling is like your touch so light and easy, that the one enables you to deal with wounds of the mind as tenderly as the other enables you to deal with wounds of the body. You are such—'

'My goodness, Tom!' his sister interposed. 'You ought to fall in love immediately.'

Tom put this observation off good humouredly, but somewhat gravely too; and they were soon very chatty again on some other subject.

As they were passing through a street in the City, not very far from Mrs Todgers's place of residence, Ruth checked Tom before the window of a large Upholstery and Furniture Warehouse, to call his attention to something very magnificent and ingenious, displayed there to the best advantage, for the admiration and temptation of the public. Tom had hazarded some most erroneous and extravagantly wrong guess in relation to the price of this article, and had joined his sister in laughing heartily at his mistake, when he pressed her arm in his, and pointed to two persons at a little distance, who were looking in at the same window with a deep interest in the chests of drawers and tables.

'Hush!' Tom whispered. 'Miss Pecksniff, and the young gentleman to whom she is going to be married.'

'Why does he look as if he was going to be buried, Tom?' inquired his little sister.

'Why, he is naturally a dismal young gentleman, I believe,' said Tom 'but he is very civil and inoffensive.'

'I suppose they are furnishing their house,' whispered Ruth.

'Yes, I suppose they are,' replied Tom. 'We had better avoid speaking to them.'

They could not very well avoid looking at them, however, especially as some obstruction on the pavement, at a little distance, happened to detain them where they were for a few moments. Miss Pecksniff had quite the air of having taken the unhappy Moddle captive, and brought him up to the contemplation of the furniture like a lamb to the altar. He offered no resistance, but was perfectly resigned and quiet. The melancholy depicted in the turn of his languishing head, and in his dejected attitude, was extreme; and though there was a full-sized four-post bedstead in the window, such a tear stood trembling in his eye as seemed to blot it out.

'Augustus, my love,' said Miss Pecksniff, 'ask the price of the eight rosewood chairs, and the loo table.'

'Perhaps they are ordered already,' said Augustus. 'Perhaps they are Another's.'

'They can make more like them, if they are,' rejoined Miss Pecksniff.

'No, no, they can't,' said Moddle. 'It's impossible!'

He appeared, for the moment, to be quite overwhelmed and stupefied by the prospect of his approaching happiness; but recovering, entered the shop. He returned immediately, saying in a tone of despair

'Twenty-four pound ten!'

Miss Pecksniff, turning to receive this announcement, became conscious of the observation of Tom Pinch and his sister.

'Oh, really!' cried Miss Pecksniff, glancing about her, as if for some convenient means of sinking into the earth. 'Upon my word, I—there never was such a—to think that one should be so very—Mr Augustus Moddle, Miss Pinch!'

Miss Pecksniff was quite gracious to Miss Pinch in this triumphant introduction; exceedingly gracious. She was more than gracious; she was kind and cordial. Whether the recollection of the old service Tom had rendered her in knocking Mr Jonas on the head had wrought this change in her opinions; or whether her separation from her parent had reconciled her to all human-kind, or to all that interesting portion of human-kind which was not friendly to him; or whether the delight of having some new female acquaintance to whom to communicate her interesting prospects was paramount to every other consideration; cordial and kind Miss Pecksniff was. And twice Miss Pecksniff kissed Miss Pinch upon the cheek.

'Augustus—Mr Pinch, you know. My dear girl!' said Miss Pecksniff, aside. 'I never was so ashamed in my life.'

Ruth begged her not to think of it.

'I mind your brother less than anybody else,' simpered Miss Pecksniff. 'But the indelicacy of meeting any gentleman under such circumstances! Augustus, my child, did you—'

Here Miss Pecksniff whispered in his ear. The suffering Moddle repeated:

'Twenty-four pound ten!'

'Oh, you silly man! I don't mean them,' said Miss Pecksniff. 'I am speaking of the—'

Here she whispered him again.

'If it's the same patterned chintz as that in the window; thirty-two, twelve, six,' said Moddle, with a sigh. 'And very dear.'

Miss Pecksniff stopped him from giving any further explanation by laying her hand upon his lips, and betraying a soft embarrassment. She then asked Tom Pinch which way he was going.

'I was going to see if I could find your sister,' answered Tom, 'to whom I wished to say a few words. We were going to Mrs Todgers's, where I had the pleasure of seeing her before.'

'It's of no use your going on, then,' said Cherry, 'for we have not long left there; and I know she is not at home. But I'll take you to my sister's house, if you please. Augustus—Mr Moddle, I mean—and myself, are on our way to tea there, now. You needn't think of HIM,' she added, nodding her head as she observed some hesitation on Tom's part. 'He is not at home.'

'Are you sure?' asked Tom.

'Oh, I am quite sure of that. I don't want any MORE revenge,' said Miss Pecksniff, expressively. 'But, really, I must beg you two gentlemen to walk on, and allow me to follow with Miss Pinch. My dear, I never was so taken by surprise!'

In furtherance of this bashful arrangement, Moddle gave his arm to Tom; and Miss Pecksniff linked her own in Ruth's.

'Of course, my love,' said Miss Pecksniff, 'it would be useless for me to disguise, after what you have seen, that I am about to be united to the gentleman who is walking with your brother. It would be in vain to conceal it. What do you think of him? Pray, let me have your candid opinion.'

Ruth intimated that, as far as she could judge, he was a very eligible swain.

'I am curious to know,' said Miss Pecksniff, with loquacious frankness, 'whether you have observed, or fancied, in this very short space of time, that he is of a rather melancholy turn?'

'So very short a time,' Ruth pleaded.

'No, no; but don't let that interfere with your answer,' returned Miss Pecksniff. 'I am curious to hear what you say.'

Ruth acknowledged that he had impressed her at first sight as looking 'rather low.'

'No, really?' said Miss Pecksniff. 'Well! that is quite remarkable! Everybody says the same. Mrs Todgers says the same; and Augustus informs me that it is quite a joke among the gentlemen in the house. Indeed, but for the positive commands I have laid upon him, I believe it would have been the occasion of loaded fire-arms being resorted to more than once. What do you think is the cause of his appearance of depression?'

Ruth thought of several things; such as his digestion, his tailor, his mother, and the like. But hesitating to give utterance to any one of them, she refrained from expressing an opinion.

'My dear,' said Miss Pecksniff; 'I shouldn't wish it to be known, but I don't mind mentioning it to you, having known your brother for so many years—I refused Augustus three times. He is of a most amiable and sensitive nature, always ready to shed tears if you look at him, which is extremely charming; and he has never recovered the effect of that cruelty. For it WAS cruel,' said Miss Pecksniff, with a self-conviction candour that might have adorned the diadem of her own papa. 'There is no doubt of it. I look back upon my conduct now with blushes. I always liked him. I felt that he was not to me what the crowd of young men who had made proposals had been, but something very different. Then what right had I to refuse him three times?'

'It was a severe trial of his fidelity, no doubt,' said Ruth.

'My dear,' returned Miss Pecksniff. 'It was wrong. But such is the caprice and thoughtlessness of our sex! Let me be a warning to you. Don't try the feelings of any one who makes you an offer, as I have tried the feelings of Augustus; but if you ever feel towards a person as I really felt towards him, at the very time when I was driving him to distraction, let that feeling find expression, if that person throws himself at your feet, as Augustus Moddle did at mine. Think,' said Miss Pecksniff, 'what my feelings would have been, if I had goaded him to suicide, and it had got into the papers!'

Ruth observed that she would have been full of remorse, no doubt.

'Remorse!' cried Miss Pecksniff, in a sort of snug and comfortable penitence. 'What my remorse is at this moment, even after making reparation by accepting him, it would be impossible to tell you! Looking back upon my giddy self, my dear, now that I am sobered down and made thoughtful, by treading on the very brink of matrimony; and contemplating myself as I was when I was like what you are now; I shudder. I shudder. What is the consequence of my past conduct? Until Augustus leads me to the altar he is not sure of me. I have blighted and withered the affections of his heart to that extent that he is not sure of me. I see that preying on his mind and feeding on his vitals. What are the reproaches of my conscience, when I see this in the man I love!'

Ruth endeavoured to express some sense of her unbounded and flattering confidence; and presumed that she was going to be married soon.

'Very soon indeed,' returned Miss Pecksniff. 'As soon as our house is ready. We are furnishing now as fast as we can.'

In the same vein of confidence Miss Pecksniff ran through a general inventory of the articles that were already bought with the articles that remained to be purchased; what garments she intended to be married in, and where the ceremony was to be performed; and gave Miss Pinch, in short (as she told her), early and exclusive information on all points of interest connected with the event.

While this was going forward in the rear, Tom and Mr Moddle walked on, arm in arm, in the front, in a state of profound silence, which Tom at last broke; after thinking for a long time what he could say that should refer to an indifferent topic, in respect of which he might rely, with some degree of certainty, on Mr Moddle's bosom being unruffled.

'I wonder,' said Tom, 'that in these crowded streets the foot-passengers are not oftener run over.'

Mr Moddle, with a dark look, replied:

'The drivers won't do it.'

'Do you mean?' Tom began—

'That there are some men,' interrupted Moddle, with a hollow laugh, 'who can't get run over. They live a charmed life. Coal waggons recoil from them, and even cabs refuse to run them down. Ah!' said Augustus, marking Tom's astonishment. 'There are such men. One of 'em is a friend of mine.'

'Upon my word and honour,' thought Tom, 'this young gentleman is in a state of mind which is very serious indeed!' Abandoning all idea of conversation, he did not venture to say another word, but he was careful to keep a tight hold upon Augustus's arm, lest he should fly into the road, and making another and a more successful attempt, should get up a private little Juggernaut before the eyes of his betrothed. Tom was so afraid of his committing this rash act, that he had scarcely ever experienced such mental relief as when they arrived in safety at Mrs Jonas Chuzzlewit's house.

'Walk up, pray, Mr Pinch,' said Miss Pecksniff. For Tom halted, irresolutely, at the door.

'I am doubtful whether I should be welcome,' replied Tom, 'or, I ought rather to say, I have no doubt about it. I will send up a message, I think.'

'But what nonsense that is!' returned Miss Pecksniff, speaking apart to Tom. 'He is not at home, I am certain. I know he is not; and Merry hasn't the least idea that you ever—'

'No,' interrupted Tom. 'Nor would I have her know it, on any account. I am not so proud of that scuffle, I assure you.'

'Ah, but then you are so modest, you see,' returned Miss Pecksniff, with a smile. 'But pray walk up. If you don't wish her to know it, and do wish to speak to her, pray walk up. Pray walk up, Miss Pinch. Don't stand here.'

Tom still hesitated for he felt that he was in an awkward position. But Cherry passing him at this juncture, and leading his sister upstairs, and the house-door being at the same time shut behind them, he followed without quite knowing whether it was well or ill-judged so to do.

'Merry, my darling!' said the fair Miss Pecksniff, opening the door of the usual sitting-room. 'Here are Mr Pinch and his sister come to see you! I thought we should find you here, Mrs Todgers! How do you do, Mrs Gamp? And how do you do, Mr Chuffey, though it's of no use asking you the question, I am well aware.'

Honouring each of these parties, as she severally addressed them, with an acid smile, Miss Charity presented 'Mr Moddle.'

'I believe you have seen HIM before,' she pleasantly observed. 'Augustus, my sweet child, bring me a chair.'

The sweet child did as he was told; and was then about to retire into a corner to mourn in secret, when Miss Charity, calling him in an audible whisper a 'little pet,' gave him leave to come and sit beside her. It is to be hoped, for the general cheerfulness of mankind, that such a doleful little pet was never seen as Mr Moddle looked when he complied. So despondent was his temper, that he showed no outward thrill of ecstasy when Miss Pecksniff placed her lily hand in his, and concealed this mark of her favour from the vulgar gaze by covering it with a corner of her shawl. Indeed, he was infinitely more rueful then than he had been before; and, sitting uncomfortably upright in his chair, surveyed the company with watery eyes, which seemed to say, without the aid of language, 'Oh, good gracious! look here! Won't some kind Christian help me!'

But the ecstasies of Mrs Gamp were sufficient to have furnished forth a score of young lovers; and they were chiefly awakened by the sight of Tom Pinch and his sister. Mrs Gamp was a lady of that happy temperament which can be ecstatic without any other stimulating cause than a general desire to establish a large and profitable connection. She added daily so many strings to her bow, that she made a perfect harp of it; and upon that instrument she now began to perform an extemporaneous concerto.

'Why, goodness me!' she said, 'Mrs Chuzzlewit! To think as I should see beneath this blessed 'ouse, which well I know it, Miss Pecksniff, my sweet young lady, to be a 'ouse as there is not a many like, worse luck, and wishin' it were not so, which then this tearful walley would be changed into a flowerin' guardian, Mr Chuffey; to think as I should see beneath this indiwidgle roof, identically comin', Mr Pinch (I take the liberty, though almost unbeknown), and do assure you of it, sir, the smilinest and sweetest face as ever, Mrs Chuzzlewit, I see exceptin' yourn, my dear good lady, and YOUR good lady's too, sir, Mr Moddle, if I may make so bold as speak so plain of what is plain enough to them as needn't look through millstones, Mrs Todgers, to find out wot is wrote upon the wall behind. Which no offence is meant, ladies and gentlemen; none bein' took, I hope. To think as I should see that smilinest and sweetest face which me and another friend of mine, took notice of among the packages down London Bridge, in this promiscous place, is a surprige in-deed!'

Having contrived, in this happy manner, to invest every member of her audience with an individual share and immediate personal interest in her address, Mrs Gamp dropped several curtseys to Ruth, and smilingly shaking her head a great many times, pursued the thread of her discourse:

'Now, ain't we rich in beauty this here joyful arternoon, I'm sure. I knows a lady, which her name, I'll not deceive you, Mrs Chuzzlewit, is Harris, her husband's brother bein' six foot three, and marked with a mad bull in Wellington boots upon his left arm, on account of his precious mother havin' been worrited by one into a shoemaker's shop, when in a sitiwation which blessed is the man as has his quiver full of sech, as many times I've said to Gamp when words has roge betwixt us on account of the expense—and often have I said to Mrs Harris, "Oh, Mrs Harris, ma'am! your countenance is quite a angel's!" Which, but for Pimples, it would be. "No, Sairey Gamp," says she, "you best of hard-working and industrious creeturs as ever was underpaid at any price, which underpaid you are, quite diff'rent. Harris had it done afore marriage at ten and six," she says, "and wore it faithful next his heart till the colour run, when the money was declined to be give back, and no arrangement could be come to. But he never said it was a angel's, Sairey, wotever he might have thought." If Mrs Harris's husband was here now,' said Mrs Gamp, looking round, and chuckling as she dropped a general curtsey, 'he'd speak out plain, he would, and his dear wife would be the last to blame him! For if ever a woman lived as know'd not wot it was to form a wish to pizon them as had good looks, and had no reagion give her by the best of husbands, Mrs Harris is that ev'nly dispogician!'

With these words the worthy woman, who appeared to have dropped in to take tea as a delicate little attention, rather than to have any engagement on the premises in an official capacity, crossed to Mr Chuffey, who was seated in the same corner as of old, and shook him by the shoulder.

'Rouge yourself, and look up! Come!' said Mrs Gamp. 'Here's company, Mr Chuffey.'

'I am sorry for it,' cried the old man, looking humbly round the room. 'I know I'm in the way. I ask pardon, but I've nowhere else to go to. Where is she?'

Merry went to him.

'Ah!' said the old man, patting her on the check. 'Here she is. Here she is! She's never hard on poor old Chuffey. Poor old Chuff!'

As she took her seat upon a low chair by the old man's side, and put herself within the reach of his hand, she looked up once at Tom. It was a sad look that she cast upon him, though there was a faint smile trembling on her face. It was a speaking look, and Tom knew what it said. 'You see how misery has changed me. I can feel for a dependant NOW, and set some value on his attachment.'

'Aye, aye!' cried Chuffey in a soothing tone. 'Aye, aye, aye! Never mind him. It's hard to hear, but never mind him. He'll die one day. There are three hundred and sixty-five days in the year—three hundred and sixty-six in leap year—and he may die on any one of 'em.'

'You're a wearing old soul, and that's the sacred truth,' said Mrs Gamp, contemplating him from a little distance with anything but favour, as he continued to mutter to himself. 'It's a pity that you don't know wot you say, for you'd tire your own patience out if you did, and fret yourself into a happy releage for all as knows you.'

'His son,' murmured the old man, lifting up his hand. 'His son!'

'Well, I'm sure!' said Mrs Gamp, 'you're a-settlin' of it, Mr Chuffey. To your satigefaction, sir, I hope. But I wouldn't lay a new pincushion on it myself, sir, though you ARE so well informed. Drat the old creetur, he's a-layin' down the law tolerable confident, too! A deal he knows of sons! or darters either! Suppose you was to favour us with some remarks on twins, sir, WOULD you be so good!'

The bitter and indignant sarcasm which Mrs Gamp conveyed into these taunts was altogether lost on the unconscious Chuffey, who appeared to be as little cognizant of their delivery as of his having given Mrs Gamp offence. But that high-minded woman being sensitively alive to any invasion of her professional province, and imagining that Mr Chuffey had given utterance to some prediction on the subject of sons, which ought to have emanated in the first instance from herself as the only lawful authority, or which should at least have been on no account proclaimed without her sanction and concurrence, was not so easily appeased. She continued to sidle at Mr Chuffey with looks of sharp hostility, and to defy him with many other ironical remarks, uttered in that low key which commonly denotes suppressed indignation; until the entrance of the teaboard, and a request from Mrs Jonas that she would make tea at a side-table for the party that had unexpectedly assembled, restored her to herself. She smiled again, and entered on her ministration with her own particular urbanity.

'And quite a family it is to make tea for,' said Mrs Gamp; 'and wot a happiness to do it! My good young 'ooman'—to the servant-girl—'p'raps somebody would like to try a new-laid egg or two, not biled too hard. Likeways, a few rounds o' buttered toast, first cuttin' off the crust, in consequence of tender teeth, and not too many of 'em; which Gamp himself, Mrs Chuzzlewit, at one blow, being in liquor, struck out four, two single, and two double, as was took by Mrs Harris for a keepsake, and is carried in her pocket at this present hour, along with two cramp-bones, a bit o' ginger, and a grater like a blessed infant's shoe, in tin, with a little heel to put the nutmeg in; as many times I've seen and said, and used for candle when required, within the month.'

As the privileges of the side-table—besides including the small prerogatives of sitting next the toast, and taking two cups of tea to other people's one, and always taking them at a crisis, that is to say, before putting fresh water into the tea-pot, and after it had been standing for some time—also comprehended a full view of the company, and an opportunity of addressing them as from a rostrum, Mrs Gamp discharged the functions entrusted to her with extreme good-humour and affability. Sometimes resting her saucer on the palm of her outspread hand, and supporting her elbow on the table, she stopped between her sips of tea to favour the circle with a smile, a wink, a roll of the head, or some other mark of notice; and at those periods her countenance was lighted up with a degree of intelligence and vivacity, which it was almost impossible to separate from the benignant influence of distilled waters.

But for Mrs Gamp, it would have been a curiously silent party. Miss Pecksniff only spoke to her Augustus, and to him in whispers. Augustus spoke to nobody, but sighed for every one, and occasionally gave himself such a sounding slap upon the forehead as would make Mrs Todgers, who was rather nervous, start in her chair with an involuntary exclamation. Mrs Todgers was occupied in knitting, and seldom spoke. Poor Merry held the hand of cheerful little Ruth between her own, and listening with evident pleasure to all she said, but rarely speaking herself, sometimes smiled, and sometimes kissed her on the cheek, and sometimes turned aside to hide the tears that trembled in her eyes. Tom felt this change in her so much, and was so glad to see how tenderly Ruth dealt with her, and how she knew and answered to it, that he had not the heart to make any movement towards their departure, although he had long since given utterance to all he came to say.

The old clerk, subsiding into his usual state, remained profoundly silent, while the rest of the little assembly were thus occupied, intent upon the dreams, whatever they might be, which hardly seemed to stir the surface of his sluggish thoughts. The bent of these dull fancies combining probably with the silent feasting that was going on about him, and some struggling recollection of the last approach to revelry he had witnessed, suggested a strange question to his mind. He looked round upon a sudden, and said:

'Who's lying dead upstairs?'

'No one,' said Merry, turning to him. 'What is the matter? We are all here.'

'All here!' cried the old man. 'All here! Where is he then—my old master, Mr Chuzzlewit, who had the only son? Where is he?'

'Hush! Hush!' said Merry, speaking kindly to him. 'That happened long ago. Don't you recollect?'

'Recollect!' rejoined the old man, with a cry of grief. 'As if I could forget! As if I ever could forget!'

He put his hand up to his face for a moment; and then repeated turning round exactly as before:

'Who's lying dead upstairs?'

'No one!' said Merry.

At first he gazed angrily upon her, as upon a stranger who endeavoured to deceive him; but peering into her face, and seeing that it was indeed she, he shook his head in sorrowful compassion.

'You think not. But they don't tell you. No, no, poor thing! They don't tell you. Who are these, and why are they merry-making here, if there is no one dead? Foul play! Go see who it is!'

She made a sign to them not to speak to him, which indeed they had little inclination to do; and remained silent herself. So did he for a short time; but then he repeated the same question with an eagerness that had a peculiar terror in it.

'There's some one dead,' he said, 'or dying; and I want to knows who it is. Go see, go see! Where's Jonas?'

'In the country,' she replied.

The old man gazed at her as if he doubted what she said, or had not heard her; and, rising from his chair, walked across the room and upstairs, whispering as he went, 'Foul play!' They heard his footsteps overhead, going up into that corner of the room in which the bed stood (it was there old Anthony had died); and then they heard him coming down again immediately. His fancy was not so strong or wild that it pictured to him anything in the deserted bedchamber which was not there; for he returned much calmer, and appeared to have satisfied himself.

'They don't tell you,' he said to Merry in his quavering voice, as he sat down again, and patted her upon the head. 'They don't tell me either; but I'll watch, I'll watch. They shall not hurt you; don't be frightened. When you have sat up watching, I have sat up watching too. Aye, aye, I have!' he piped out, clenching his weak, shrivelled hand. 'Many a night I have been ready!'

He said this with such trembling gaps and pauses in his want of breath, and said it in his jealous secrecy so closely in her ear, that little or nothing of it was understood by the visitors. But they had heard and seen enough of the old man to be disquieted, and to have left their seats and gathered about him; thereby affording Mrs Gamp, whose professional coolness was not so easily disturbed, an eligible opportunity for concentrating the whole resources of her powerful mind and appetite upon the toast and butter, tea and eggs. She had brought them to bear upon those viands with such vigour that her face was in the highest state of inflammation, when she now (there being nothing left to eat or drink) saw fit to interpose.

'Why, highty tighty, sir!' cried Mrs Gamp, 'is these your manners? You want a pitcher of cold water throw'd over you to bring you round; that's my belief, and if you was under Betsey Prig you'd have it, too, I do assure you, Mr Chuffey. Spanish Flies is the only thing to draw this nonsense out of you; and if anybody wanted to do you a kindness, they'd clap a blister of 'em on your head, and put a mustard poultige on your back. 'Who's dead, indeed! It wouldn't be no grievous loss if some one was, I think!'

'He's quiet now, Mrs Gamp,' said Merry. 'Don't disturb him.'

'Oh, bother the old wictim, Mrs Chuzzlewit,' replied that zealous lady, 'I ain't no patience with him. You give him his own way too much by half. A worritin' wexagious creetur!'

No doubt with the view of carrying out the precepts she enforced, and 'bothering the old wictim' in practice as well as in theory, Mrs Gamp took him by the collar of his coat, and gave him some dozen or two of hearty shakes backward and forward in his chair; that exercise being considered by the disciples of the Prig school of nursing (who are very numerous among professional ladies) as exceedingly conducive to repose, and highly beneficial to the performance of the nervous functions. Its effect in this instance was to render the patient so giddy and addle-headed, that he could say nothing more; which Mrs Gamp regarded as the triumph of her art.

'There!' she said, loosening the old man's cravat, in consequence of his being rather black in the face, after this scientific treatment. 'Now, I hope, you're easy in your mind. If you should turn at all faint we can soon rewive you, sir, I promige you. Bite a person's thumbs, or turn their fingers the wrong way,' said Mrs Gamp, smiling with the consciousness of at once imparting pleasure and instruction to her auditors, 'and they comes to, wonderful, Lord bless you!'

As this excellent woman had been formerly entrusted with the care of Mr Chuffey on a previous occasion, neither Mrs Jonas nor anybody else had the resolution to interfere directly with her mode of treatment; though all present (Tom Pinch and his sister especially) appeared to be disposed to differ from her views. For such is the rash boldness of the uninitiated, that they will frequently set up some monstrous abstract principle, such as humanity, or tenderness, or the like idle folly, in obstinate defiance of all precedent and usage; and will even venture to maintain the same against the persons who have made the precedents and established the usage, and who must therefore be the best and most impartial judges of the subject.

'Ah, Mr Pinch!' said Miss Pecksniff. 'It all comes of this unfortunate marriage. If my sister had not been so precipitate, and had not united herself to a Wretch, there would have been no Mr Chuffey in the house.'

'Hush!' cried Tom. 'She'll hear you.'

'I should be very sorry if she did hear me, Mr Pinch,' said Cherry, raising her voice a little; 'for it is not in my nature to add to the uneasiness of any person; far less of my own sister. I know what a sister's duties are, Mr Pinch, and I hope I always showed it in my practice. Augustus, my dear child, find my pocket-handkerchief, and give it to me.'

Augustus obeyed, and took Mrs Todgers aside to pour his griefs into her friendly bosom.

'I am sure, Mr Pinch,' said Charity, looking after her betrothed and glancing at her sister, 'that I ought to be very grateful for the blessings I enjoy, and those which are yet in store for me. When I contrast Augustus'—here she was modest and embarrased—'who, I don't mind saying to you, is all softness, mildness, and devotion, with the detestable man who is my sister's husband; and when I think, Mr Pinch, that in the dispensations of this world, our cases might have been reversed; I have much to be thankful for, indeed, and much to make me humble and contented.'

Contented she might have been, but humble she assuredly was not. Her face and manner experienced something so widely different from humility, that Tom could not help understanding and despising the base motives that were working in her breast. He turned away, and said to Ruth, that it was time for them to go.

'I will write to your husband,' said Tom to Merry, 'and explain to him, as I would have done if I had met him here, that if he has sustained any inconvenience through my means, it is not my fault; a postman not being more innocent of the news he brings, than I was when I handed him that letter.'

'I thank you!' said Merry. 'It may do some good.'

She parted tenderly from Ruth, who with her brother was in the act of leaving the room, when a key was heard in the lock of the door below, and immediately afterwards a quick footstep in the passage. Tom stopped, and looked at Merry.

It was Jonas, she said timidly.

'I had better not meet him on the stairs, perhaps,' said Tom, drawing his sister's arm through his, and coming back a step or two. 'I'll wait for him here, a moment.'

He had scarcely said it when the door opened, and Jonas entered. His wife came forward to receive him; but he put her aside with his hand, and said in a surly tone:

'I didn't know you'd got a party.'

As he looked, at the same time, either by accident or design, towards Miss Pecksniff; and as Miss Pecksniff was only too delighted to quarrel with him, she instantly resented it.

'Oh dear!' she said, rising. 'Pray don't let us intrude upon your domestic happiness! That would be a pity. We have taken tea here, sir, in your absence; but if you will have the goodness to send us a note of the expense, receipted, we shall be happy to pay it. Augustus, my love, we will go, if you please. Mrs Todgers, unless you wish to remain here, we shall be happy to take you with us. It would be a pity, indeed, to spoil the bliss which this gentleman always brings with him, especially into his own home.'

'Charity! Charity!' remonstrated her sister, in such a heartfelt tone that she might have been imploring her to show the cardinal virtue whose name she bore.

'Merry, my dear, I am much obliged to you for your advice,' returned Miss Pecksniff, with a stately scorn—by the way, she had not been offered any—'but I am not his slave—'

'No, nor wouldn't have been if you could,' interrupted Jonas. 'We know all about it.'

'WHAT did you say, sir?' cried Miss Pecksniff, sharply.

'Didn't you hear?' retorted Jonas, lounging down upon a chair. 'I am not a-going to say it again. If you like to stay, you may stay. If you like to go, you may go. But if you stay, please to be civil.'

'Beast!' cried Miss Pecksniff, sweeping past him. 'Augustus! He is beneath your notice!' Augustus had been making some faint and sickly demonstration of shaking his fist. 'Come away, child,' screamed Miss Pecksniff, 'I command you!'

The scream was elicited from her by Augustus manifesting an intention to return and grapple with him. But Miss Pecksniff giving the fiery youth a pull, and Mrs Todgers giving him a push they all three tumbled out of the room together, to the music of Miss Pecksniff's shrill remonstrances.

All this time Jonas had seen nothing of Tom and his sister; for they were almost behind the door when he opened it, and he had sat down with his back towards them, and had purposely kept his eyes upon the opposite side of the street during his altercation with Miss Pecksniff, in order that his seeming carelessness might increase the exasperation of that wronged young damsel. His wife now faltered out that Tom had been waiting to see him; and Tom advanced.

The instant he presented himself, Jonas got up from his chair, and swearing a great oath, caught it in his grasp, as if he would have felled Tom to the ground with it. As he most unquestionably would have done, but that his very passion and surprise made him irresolute, and gave Tom, in his calmness, an opportunity of being heard.

'You have no cause to be violent, sir,' said Tom. 'Though what I wish to say relates to your own affairs, I know nothing of them, and desire to know nothing of them.'

Jonas was too enraged to speak. He held the door open; and stamping his foot upon the ground, motioned Tom away.

'As you cannot suppose,' said Tom, 'that I am here with any view of conciliating you or pleasing myself, I am quite indifferent to your reception of me, or your dismissal of me. Hear what I have to say, if you are not a madman! I gave you a letter the other day, when you were about to go abroad.'

'You Thief, you did!' retorted Jonas. 'I'll pay you for the carriage of it one day, and settle an old score besides. I will!'

'Tut, tut,' said Tom, 'you needn't waste words or threats. I wish you to understand—plainly because I would rather keep clear of you and everything that concerns you: not because I have the least apprehension of your doing me any injury: which would be weak indeed—that I am no party to the contents of that letter. That I know nothing of it. That I was not even aware that it was to be delivered to you; and that I had it from—'

'By the Lord!' cried Jonas, fiercely catching up the chair, 'I'll knock your brains out, if you speak another word.'

Tom, nevertheless, persisting in his intention, and opening his lips to speak again, Jonas set upon him like a savage; and in the quickness and ferocity of his attack would have surely done him some grievous injury, defenceless as he was, and embarrassed by having his frightened sister clinging to his arm, if Merry had not run between them, crying to Tom for the love of Heaven to leave the house. The agony of this poor creature, the terror of his sister, the impossibility of making himself audible, and the equal impossibility of bearing up against Mrs Gamp, who threw herself upon him like a feather-bed, and forced him backwards down the stairs by the mere oppression of her dead weight, prevailed. Tom shook the dust of that house off his feet, without having mentioned Nadgett's name.

If the name could have passed his lips; if Jonas, in the insolence of his vile nature, had never roused him to do that old act of manliness, for which (and not for his last offence) he hated him with such malignity; if Jonas could have learned, as then he could and would have learned, through Tom's means, what unsuspected spy there was upon him; he would have been saved from the commission of a Guilty Deed, then drawing on towards its black accomplishment. But the fatality was of his own working; the pit was of his own digging; the gloom that gathered round him was the shadow of his own life.

His wife had closed the door, and thrown herself before it, on the ground, upon her knees. She held up her hands to him now, and besought him not to be harsh with her, for she had interposed in fear of bloodshed.

'So, so!' said Jonas, looking down upon her, as he fetched his breath. 'These are your friends, are they, when I am away? You plot and tamper with this sort of people, do you?'

'No, indeed! I have no knowledge of these secrets, and no clue to their meaning. I have never seen him since I left home but once—but twice—before to-day.'

'Oh!' sneered Jonas, catching at this correction. 'But once, but twice, eh? Which do you mean? Twice and once, perhaps. Three times! How many more, you lying jade?'

As he made an angry motion with his hand, she shrunk down hastily. A suggestive action! Full of a cruel truth!

'How many more times?' he repeated.

'No more. The other morning, and to-day, and once besides.'

He was about to retort upon her, when the clock struck. He started stopped, and listened; appearing to revert to some engagement, or to some other subject, a secret within his own breast, recalled to him by this record of the progress of the hours.

'Don't lie there! Get up!'

Having helped her to rise, or rather hauled her up by the arm, he went on to say:

'Listen to me, young lady; and don't whine when you have no occasion, or I may make some for you. If I find him in my house again, or find that you have seen him in anybody else's house, you'll repent it. If you are not deaf and dumb to everything that concerns me, unless you have my leave to hear and speak, you'll repent it. If you don't obey exactly what I order, you'll repent it. Now, attend. What's the time?'

'It struck eight a minute ago.'

He looked towards her intently; and said, with a laboured distinctness, as if he had got the words off by heart:

'I have been travelling day and night, and am tired. I have lost some money, and that don't improve me. Put my supper in the little off-room below, and have the truckle-bed made. I shall sleep there to-night, and maybe to-morrow night; and if I can sleep all day to-morrow, so much the better, for I've got trouble to sleep off, if I can. Keep the house quiet, and don't call me. Mind! Don't call me. Don't let anybody call me. Let me lie there.'

She said it should be done. Was that all?

'All what? You must be prying and questioning!' he angrily retorted. 'What more do you want to know?'

'I want to know nothing, Jonas, but what you tell me. All hope of confidence between us has long deserted me!'

'Ecod, I should hope so!' he muttered.

'But if you will tell me what you wish, I will be obedient and will try to please you. I make no merit of that, for I have no friend in my father or my sister, but am quite alone. I am very humble and submissive. You told me you would break my spirit, and you have done so. Do not break my heart too!'

She ventured, as she said these words, to lay her hand upon his shoulder. He suffered it to rest there, in his exultation; and the whole mean, abject, sordid, pitiful soul of the man, looked at her, for the moment, through his wicked eyes.

For the moment only; for, with the same hurried return to something within himself, he bade her, in a surly tone, show her obedience by executing his commands without delay. When she had withdrawn he paced up and down the room several times; but always with his right hand clenched, as if it held something; which it did not, being empty. When he was tired of this, he threw himself into a chair, and thoughtfully turned up the sleeve of his right arm, as if he were rather musing about its strength than examining it; but, even then, he kept the hand clenched.

He was brooding in this chair, with his eyes cast down upon the ground, when Mrs Gamp came in to tell him that the little room was ready. Not being quite sure of her reception after interfering in the quarrel, Mrs Gamp, as a means of interesting and propitiating her patron, affected a deep solicitude in Mr Chuffey.

'How is he now, sir?' she said.

'Who?' cried Jonas, raising his head, and staring at her.

'To be sure!' returned the matron with a smile and a curtsey. 'What am I thinking of! You wasn't here, sir, when he was took so strange. I never see a poor dear creetur took so strange in all my life, except a patient much about the same age, as I once nussed, which his calling was the custom-'us, and his name was Mrs Harris's own father, as pleasant a singer, Mr Chuzzlewit, as ever you heerd, with a voice like a Jew's-harp in the bass notes, that it took six men to hold at sech times, foaming frightful.'

'Chuffey, eh?' said Jonas carelessly, seeing that she went up to the old, clerk, and looked at him. 'Ha!'

'The creetur's head's so hot,' said Mrs Gamp, 'that you might heat a flat-iron at it. And no wonder I am sure, considerin' the things he said!'

'Said!' cried Jonas. 'What did he say?'

Mrs Gamp laid her hand upon her heart, to put some check upon its palpitations, and turning up her eyes replied in a faint voice:

'The awfulest things, Mr Chuzzlewit, as ever I heerd! Which Mrs Harris's father never spoke a word when took so, some does and some don't, except sayin' when he come round, "Where is Sairey Gamp?" But raly, sir, when Mr Chuffey comes to ask who's lyin' dead upstairs, and—'

'Who's lying dead upstairs!' repeated Jonas, standing aghast.

Mrs Gamp nodded, made as if she were swallowing, and went on.

'Who's lying dead upstairs; sech was his Bible language; and where was Mr Chuzzlewit as had the only son; and when he goes upstairs a-looking in the beds and wandering about the rooms, and comes down again a-whisperin' softly to his-self about foul play and that; it gives me sech a turn, I don't deny it, Mr Chuzzlewit, that I never could have kep myself up but for a little drain o' spirits, which I seldom touches, but could always wish to know where to find, if so dispoged, never knowin' wot may happen next, the world bein' so uncertain.'

'Why, the old fool's mad!' cried Jonas, much disturbed.

'That's my opinion, sir,' said Mrs Gamp, 'and I will not deceive you. I believe as Mr Chuffey, sir, rekwires attention (if I may make so bold), and should not have his liberty to wex and worrit your sweet lady as he does.'

'Why, who minds what he says?' retorted Jonas.

'Still he is worritin' sir,' said Mrs Gamp. 'No one don't mind him, but he IS a ill conwenience.'

'Ecod you're right,' said Jonas, looking doubtfully at the subject of this conversation. 'I have half a mind to shut him up.'

Mrs Gamp rubbed her hands, and smiled, and shook her head, and sniffed expressively, as scenting a job.

'Could you—could you take care of such an idiot, now, in some spare room upstairs?' asked Jonas.

'Me and a friend of mine, one off, one on, could do it, Mr Chuzzlewit,' replied the nurse; 'our charges not bein' high, but wishin' they was lower, and allowance made considerin' not strangers. Me and Betsey Prig, sir, would undertake Mr Chuffey reasonable,' said Mrs Gamp, looking at him with her head on one side, as if he had been a piece of goods, for which she was driving a bargain; 'and give every satigefaction. Betsey Prig has nussed a many lunacies, and well she knows their ways, which puttin' 'em right close afore the fire, when fractious, is the certainest and most compoging.'

While Mrs Gamp discoursed to this effect, Jonas was walking up and down the room again, glancing covertly at the old clerk, as he did so. He now made a stop, and said:

'I must look after him, I suppose, or I may have him doing some mischief. What say you?'

'Nothin' more likely!' Mrs Gamp replied. 'As well I have experienged, I do assure you, sir.'

'Well! Look after him for the present, and—let me see—three days from this time let the other woman come here, and we'll see if we can make a bargain of it. About nine or ten o'clock at night, say. Keep your eye upon him in the meanwhile, and don't talk about it. He's as mad as a March hare!'

'Madder!' cried Mrs Gamp. 'A deal madder!'

'See to him, then; take care that he does no harm; and recollect what I have told you.'

Leaving Mrs Gamp in the act of repeating all she had been told, and of producing in support of her memory and trustworthiness, many commendations selected from among the most remarkable opinions of the celebrated Mrs Harris, he descended to the little room prepared for him, and pulling off his coat and his boots, put them outside the door before he locked it. In locking it, he was careful so to adjust the key as to baffle any curious person who might try to peep in through the key-hole; and when he had taken these precautions, he sat down to his supper.

'Mr Chuff,' he muttered, 'it'll be pretty easy to be even with YOU. It's of no use doing things by halves, and as long as I stop here, I'll take good care of you. When I'm off you may say what you please. But it's a d—d strange thing,' he added, pushing away his untouched plate, and striding moodily to and fro, 'that his drivellings should have taken this turn just now.'

After pacing the little room from end to end several times, he sat down in another chair.

'I say just now, but for anything I know, he may have been carrying on the same game all along. Old dog! He shall be gagged!'

He paced the room again in the same restless and unsteady way; and then sat down upon the bedstead, leaning his chin upon his hand, and looking at the table. When he had looked at it for a long time, he remembered his supper; and resuming the chair he had first occupied, began to eat with great rapacity; not like a hungry man, but as if he were determined to do it. He drank too, roundly; sometimes stopping in the middle of a draught to walk, and change his seat and walk again, and dart back to the table and fall to, in a ravenous hurry, as before.

It was now growing dark. As the gloom of evening, deepening into night, came on, another dark shade emerging from within him seemed to overspread his face, and slowly change it. Slowly, slowly; darker and darker; more and more haggard; creeping over him by little and little, until it was black night within him and without.

The room in which he had shut himself up, was on the ground floor, at the back of the house. It was lighted by a dirty skylight, and had a door in the wall, opening into a narrow covered passage or blind-alley, very little frequented after five or six o'clock in the evening, and not in much use as a thoroughfare at any hour. But it had an outlet in a neighbouring street.

The ground on which this chamber stood had, at one time, not within his recollection, been a yard; and had been converted to its present purpose for use as an office. But the occasion for it died with the man who built it; and saving that it had sometimes served as an apology for a spare bedroom, and that the old clerk had once held it (but that was years ago) as his recognized apartment, it had been little troubled by Anthony Chuzzlewit and Son. It was a blotched, stained, mouldering room, like a vault; and there were water-pipes running through it, which at unexpected times in the night, when other things were quiet, clicked and gurgled suddenly, as if they were choking.

The door into the court had not been open for a long, long time; but the key had always hung in one place, and there it hung now. He was prepared for its being rusty; for he had a little bottle of oil in his pocket and the feather of a pen, with which he lubricated the key and the lock too, carefully. All this while he had been without his coat, and had nothing on his feet but his stockings. He now got softly into bed in the same state, and tossed from side to side to tumble it. In his restless condition that was easily done.

When he arose, he took from his portmanteau, which he had caused to be carried into that place when he came home, a pair of clumsy shoes, and put them on his feet; also a pair of leather leggings, such as countrymen are used to wear, with straps to fasten them to the waistband. In these he dressed himself at leisure. Lastly, he took out a common frock of coarse dark jean, which he drew over his own under-clothing; and a felt hat—he had purposely left his own upstairs. He then sat himself down by the door, with the key in his hand, waiting.

He had no light; the time was dreary, long, and awful. The ringers were practicing in a neighbouring church, and the clashing of the bells was almost maddening. Curse the clamouring bells, they seemed to know that he was listening at the door, and to proclaim it in a crowd of voices to all the town! Would they never be still?

They ceased at last, and then the silence was so new and terrible that it seemed the prelude to some dreadful noise. Footsteps in the court! Two men. He fell back from the door on tiptoe, as if they could have seen him through its wooden panels.

They passed on, talking (he could make out) about a skeleton which had been dug up yesterday, in some work of excavation near at hand, and was supposed to be that of a murdered man. 'So murder is not always found out, you see,' they said to one another as they turned the corner.

Hush!

He put the key into the lock, and turned it. The door resisted for a while, but soon came stiffly open; mingling with the sense of fever in his mouth, a taste of rust, and dust, and earth, and rotting wood. He looked out; passed out; locked it after him.

All was clear and quiet, as he fled away.

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

CONCLUSION OF THE ENTERPRISE OF MR JONAS AND HIS FRIEND

Did no men passing through the dim streets shrink without knowing why, when he came stealing up behind them? As he glided on, had no child in its sleep an indistinct perception of a guilty shadow falling on its bed, that troubled its innocent rest? Did no dog howl, and strive to break its rattling chain, that it might tear him; no burrowing rat, scenting the work he had in hand, essay to gnaw a passage after him, that it might hold a greedy revel at the feast of his providing? When he looked back, across his shoulder, was it to see if his quick footsteps still fell dry upon the dusty pavement, or were already moist and clogged with the red mire that stained the naked feet of Cain!

He shaped his course for the main western road, and soon reached it; riding a part of the way, then alighting and walking on again. He travelled for a considerable distance upon the roof of a stage-coach, which came up while he was afoot; and when it turned out of his road, bribed the driver of a return post-chaise to take him on with him; and then made across the country at a run, and saved a mile or two before he struck again into the road. At last, as his plan was, he came up with a certain lumbering, slow, night-coach, which stopped wherever it could, and was stopping then at a public-house, while the guard and coachman ate and drank within.

He bargained for a seat outside this coach, and took it. And he quitted it no more until it was within a few miles of its destination, but occupied the same place all night.

All night! It is a common fancy that nature seems to sleep by night. It is a false fancy, as who should know better than he?

The fishes slumbered in the cold, bright, glistening streams and rivers, perhaps; and the birds roosted on the branches of the trees; and in their stalls and pastures beasts were quiet; and human creatures slept. But what of that, when the solemn night was watching, when it never winked, when its darkness watched no less than its light! The stately trees, the moon and shining stars, the softly stirring wind, the over-shadowed lane, the broad, bright countryside, they all kept watch. There was not a blade of growing grass or corn, but watched; and the quieter it was, the more intent and fixed its watch upon him seemed to be.

And yet he slept. Riding on among those sentinels of God, he slept, and did not change the purpose of his journey. If he forgot it in his troubled dreams, it came up steadily, and woke him. But it never woke him to remorse, or to abandonment of his design.

He dreamed at one time that he was lying calmly in his bed, thinking of a moonlight night and the noise of wheels, when the old clerk put his head in at the door, and beckoned him. At this signal he arose immediately—being already dressed in the clothes he actually wore at that time—and accompanied him into a strange city, where the names of the streets were written on the walls in characters quite new to him; which gave him no surprise or uneasiness, for he remembered in his dream to have been there before. Although these streets were very precipitous, insomuch that to get from one to another it was necessary to descend great heights by ladders that were too short, and ropes that moved deep bells, and swung and swayed as they were clung to, the danger gave him little emotion beyond the first thrill of terror; his anxieties being concentrated on his dress which was quite unfitted for some festival that was about to be holden there, and in which he had come to take a part. Already, great crowds began to fill the streets, and in one direction myriads of people came rushing down an interminable perspective, strewing flowers and making way for others on white horses, when a terrible figure started from the throng, and cried out that it was the Last Day for all the world. The cry being spread, there was a wild hurrying on to Judgment; and the press became so great that he and his companion (who was constantly changing, and was never the same man two minutes together, though he never saw one man come or another go), stood aside in a porch, fearfully surveying the multitude; in which there were many faces that he knew, and many that he did not know, but dreamed he did; when all at once a struggling head rose up among the rest—livid and deadly, but the same as he had known it—and denounced him as having appointed that direful day to happen. They closed together. As he strove to free the hand in which he held a club, and strike the blow he had so often thought of, he started to the knowledge of his waking purpose and the rising of the sun.

The sun was welcome to him. There were life and motion, and a world astir, to divide the attention of Day. It was the eye of Night—of wakeful, watchful, silent, and attentive Night, with so much leisure for the observation of his wicked thoughts—that he dreaded most. There is no glare in the night. Even Glory shows to small advantage in the night, upon a crowded battle-field. How then shows Glory's blood-relation, bastard Murder!

Aye! He made no compromise, and held no secret with himself now. Murder. He had come to do it.

'Let me get down here' he said

'Short of the town, eh!' observed the coachman.

'I may get down where I please, I suppose?'

'You got up to please yourself, and may get down to please yourself. It won't break our hearts to lose you, and it wouldn't have broken 'em if we'd never found you. Be a little quicker. That's all.'

The guard had alighted, and was waiting in the road to take his money. In the jealousy and distrust of what he contemplated, he thought this man looked at him with more than common curiosity.

'What are you staring at?' said Jonas.

'Not at a handsome man,' returned the guard. 'If you want your fortune told, I'll tell you a bit of it. You won't be drowned. That's a consolation for you.'

Before he could retort or turn away, the coachman put an end to the dialogue by giving him a cut with his whip, and biddig him get out for a surly dog. The guard jumped up to his seat at the same moment, and they drove off, laughing; leaving him to stand in the road and shake his fist at them. He was not displeased though, on second thoughts, to have been taken for an ill-conditioned common country fellow; but rather congratulated himself upon it as a proof that he was well disguised.

Wandering into a copse by the road-side—but not in that place; two or three miles off—he tore out from a fence a thick, hard, knotted stake; and, sitting down beneath a hayrick, spent some time in shaping it, in peeling off the bark, and fashioning its jagged head with his knife.

The day passed on. Noon, afternoon, evening. Sunset.

At that serene and peaceful time two men, riding in a gig, came out of the city by a road not much frequented. It was the day on which Mr Pecksniff had agreed to dine with Montague. He had kept his appointment, and was now going home. His host was riding with him for a short distance; meaning to return by a pleasant track, which Mr Pecksniff had engaged to show him, through some fields. Jonas knew their plans. He had hung about the inn-yard while they were at dinner and had heard their orders given.

They were loud and merry in their conversation, and might have been heard at some distance; far above the sound of their carriage wheels or horses' hoofs. They came on noisily, to where a stile and footpath indicated their point of separation. Here they stopped.

'It's too soon. Much too soon,' said Mr Pecksniff. 'But this is the place, my dear sir. Keep the path, and go straight through the little wood you'll come to. The path is narrower there, but you can't miss it. When shall I see you again? Soon I hope?'

'I hope so,' replied Montague.

'Good night!'

'Good night. And a pleasant ride!'

So long as Mr Pecksniff was in sight, and turned his head at intervals to salute him, Montague stood in the road smiling, and waving his hand. But when his new partner had disappeared, and this show was no longer necessary, he sat down on the stile with looks so altered, that he might have grown ten years older in the meantime.

He was flushed with wine, but not gay. His scheme had succeeded, but he showed no triumph. The effort of sustaining his difficult part before his late companion had fatigued him, perhaps, or it may be that the evening whispered to his conscience, or it may be (as it HAS been) that a shadowy veil was dropping round him, closing out all thoughts but the presentiment and vague foreknowledge of impending doom.

If there be fluids, as we know there are, which, conscious of a coming wind, or rain, or frost, will shrink and strive to hide themselves in their glass arteries; may not that subtle liquor of the blood perceive, by properties within itself, that hands are raised to waste and spill it; and in the veins of men run cold and dull as his did, in that hour!

So cold, although the air was warm; so dull, although the sky was bright; that he rose up shivering from his seat, and hastily resumed his walk.

He checked himself as hastily; undecided whether to pursue the footpath, which was lonely and retired, or to go back by the road.

He took the footpath.

The glory of the departing sun was on his face. The music of the birds was in his ears. Sweet wild flowers bloomed about him. Thatched roofs of poor men's homes were in the distance; and an old grey spire, surmounted by a Cross, rose up between him and the coming night.

He had never read the lesson which these things conveyed; he had ever mocked and turned away from it; but, before going down into a hollow place, he looked round, once, upon the evening prospect, sorrowfully. Then he went down, down, down, into the dell.

It brought him to the wood; a close, thick, shadowy wood, through which the path went winding on, dwindling away into a slender sheep-track. He paused before entering; for the stillness of this spot almost daunted him.

The last rays of the sun were shining in, aslant, making a path of golden light along the stems and branches in its range, which, even as he looked, began to die away, yielding gently to the twilight that came creeping on. It was so very quiet that the soft and stealthy moss about the trunks of some old trees, seemed to have grown out of the silence, and to be its proper offspring. Those other trees which were subdued by blasts of wind in winter time, had not quite tumbled down, but being caught by others, lay all bare and scathed across their leafy arms, as if unwilling to disturb the general repose by the crash of their fall. Vistas of silence opened everywhere, into the heart and innermost recesses of the wood; beginning with the likeness of an aisle, a cloister, or a ruin open to the sky; then tangling off into a deep green rustling mystery, through which gnarled trunks, and twisted boughs, and ivy-covered stems, and trembling leaves, and bark-stripped bodies of old trees stretched out at length, were faintly seen in beautiful confusion.

As the sunlight died away, and evening fell upon the wood, he entered it. Moving, here and there a bramble or a drooping bough which stretched across his path, he slowly disappeared. At intervals a narrow opening showed him passing on, or the sharp cracking of some tender branch denoted where he went; then, he was seen or heard no more.

Never more beheld by mortal eye or heard by mortal ear; one man excepted. That man, parting the leaves and branches on the other side, near where the path emerged again, came leaping out soon afterwards.

What had he left within the wood, that he sprang out of it as if it were a hell!

The body of a murdered man. In one thick solitary spot, it lay among the last year's leaves of oak and beech, just as it had fallen headlong down. Sopping and soaking in among the leaves that formed its pillow; oozing down into the boggy ground, as if to cover itself from human sight; forcing its way between and through the curling leaves, as if those senseless things rejected and forswore it and were coiled up in abhorrence; went a dark, dark stain that dyed the whole summer night from earth to heaven.

The doer of this deed came leaping from the wood so fiercely, that he cast into the air a shower of fragments of young boughs, torn away in his passage, and fell with violence upon the grass. But he quickly gained his feet again, and keeping underneath a hedge with his body bent, went running on towards the road. The road once reached, he fell into a rapid walk, and set on toward London.

And he was not sorry for what he had done. He was frightened when he thought of it—when did he not think of it!—but he was not sorry. He had had a terror and dread of the wood when he was in it; but being out of it, and having committed the crime, his fears were now diverted, strangely, to the dark room he had left shut up at home. He had a greater horror, infinitely greater, of that room than of the wood. Now that he was on his return to it, it seemed beyond comparison more dismal and more dreadful than the wood. His hideous secret was shut up in the room, and all its terrors were there; to his thinking it was not in the wood at all.

He walked on for ten miles; and then stopped at an ale-house for a coach, which he knew would pass through, on its way to London, before long; and which he also knew was not the coach he had travelled down by, for it came from another place. He sat down outside the door here, on a bench, beside a man who was smoking his pipe. Having called for some beer, and drunk, he offered it to this companion, who thanked him, and took a draught. He could not help thinking that, if the man had known all, he might scarcely have relished drinking out of the same cup with him.

'A fine night, master!' said this person. 'And a rare sunset.'

'I didn't see it,' was his hasty answer.

'Didn't see it?' returned the man.

'How the devil could I see it, if I was asleep?'

'Asleep! Aye, aye.' The man appeared surprised by his unexpected irritability, and saying no more, smoked his pipe in silence. They had not sat very long, when there was a knocking within.

'What's that?' cried Jonas.

'Can't say, I'm sure,' replied the man.

He made no further inquiry, for the last question had escaped him in spite of himself. But he was thinking, at the moment, of the closed-up room; of the possibility of their knocking at the door on some special occasion; of their being alarmed at receiving no answer; of their bursting it open; of their finding the room empty; of their fastening the door into the court, and rendering it impossible for him to get into the house without showing himself in the garb he wore, which would lead to rumour, rumour to detection, detection to death. At that instant, as if by some design and order of circumstances, the knocking had come.

It still continued; like a warning echo of the dread reality he had conjured up. As he could not sit and hear it, he paid for his beer and walked on again. And having slunk about, in places unknown to him all day; and being out at night, in a lonely road, in an unusual dress and in that wandering and unsettled frame of mind; he stopped more than once to look about him, hoping he might be in a dream.

Still he was not sorry. No. He had hated the man too much, and had been bent, too desperately and too long, on setting himself free. If the thing could have come over again, he would have done it again. His malignant and revengeful passions were not so easily laid. There was no more penitence or remorse within him now than there had been while the deed was brewing.

Dread and fear were upon him, to an extent he had never counted on, and could not manage in the least degree. He was so horribly afraid of that infernal room at home. This made him, in a gloomy murderous, mad way, not only fearful FOR himself, but OF himself; for being, as it were, a part of the room: a something supposed to be there, yet missing from it: he invested himself with its mysterious terrors; and when he pictured in his mind the ugly chamber, false and quiet, false and quiet, through the dark hours of two nights; and the tumbled bed, and he not in it, though believed to be; he became in a manner his own ghost and phantom, and was at once the haunting spirit and the haunted man.

When the coach came up, which it soon did, he got a place outside and was carried briskly onward towards home. Now, in taking his seat among the people behind, who were chiefly country people, he conceived a fear that they knew of the murder, and would tell him that the body had been found; which, considering the time and place of the commission of the crime, were events almost impossible to have happened yet, as he very well knew. But although he did know it, and had therefore no reason to regard their ignorance as anything but the natural sequence to the facts, still this very ignorance of theirs encouraged him. So far encouraged him, that he began to believe the body never would be found, and began to speculate on that probability. Setting off from this point, and measuring time by the rapid hurry of his guilty thoughts, and what had gone before the bloodshed, and the troops of incoherent and disordered images of which he was the constant prey; he came by daylight to regard the murder as an old murder, and to think himself comparatively safe because it had not been discovered yet. Yet! When the sun which looked into the wood, and gilded with its rising light a dead man's lace, had seen that man alive, and sought to win him to a thought of Heaven, on its going down last night!

But here were London streets again. Hush!

It was but five o'clock. He had time enough to reach his own house unobserved, and before there were many people in the streets, if nothing had happened so far, tending to his discovery. He slipped down from the coach without troubling the driver to stop his horses; and hurrying across the road, and in and out of every by-way that lay near his course, at length approached his own dwelling. He used additional caution in his immediate neighbourhood; halting first to look all down the street before him; then gliding swiftly through that one, and stopping to survey the next, and so on.

The passage-way was empty when his murderer's face looked into it. He stole on, to the door on tiptoe, as if he dreaded to disturb his own imaginary rest.

He listened. Not a sound. As he turned the key with a trembling hand, and pushed the door softly open with his knee, a monstrous fear beset his mind.

What if the murdered man were there before him!

He cast a fearful glance all round. But there was nothing there.

He went in, locked the door, drew the key through and through the dust and damp in the fire-place to sully it again, and hung it up as of old. He took off his disguise, tied it up in a bundle ready for carrying away and sinking in the river before night, and locked it up in a cupboard. These precautions taken, he undressed and went to bed.

The raging thirst, the fire that burnt within him as he lay beneath the clothes, the augmented horror of the room when they shut it out from his view; the agony of listening, in which he paid enforced regard to every sound, and thought the most unlikely one the prelude to that knocking which should bring the news; the starts with which he left his couch, and looking in the glass, imagined that his deed was broadly written in his face, and lying down and burying himself once more beneath the blankets, heard his own heart beating Murder, Murder, Murder, in the bed; what words can paint tremendous truths like these!

The morning advanced. There were footsteps in the house. He heard the blinds drawn up, and shutters opened; and now and then a stealthy tread outside his own door. He tried to call out, more than once, but his mouth was dry as if it had been filled with sand. At last he sat up in his bed, and cried:

'Who's there?'

It was his wife.

He asked her what it was o'clock? Nine.

'Did—did no one knock at my door yesterday?' he faltered. 'Something disturbed me; but unless you had knocked the door down, you would have got no notice from me.'

'No one,' she replied. That was well. He had waited, almost breathless, for her answer. It was a relief to him, if anything could be.

'Mr Nadgett wanted to see you,' she said, 'but I told him you were tired, and had requested not to be disturbed. He said it was of little consequence, and went away. As I was opening my window to let in the cool air, I saw him passing through the street this morning, very early; but he hasn't been again.'

Passing through the street that morning? Very early! Jonas trembled at the thought of having had a narrow chance of seeing him himself; even him, who had no object but to avoid people, and sneak on unobserved, and keep his own secrets; and who saw nothing.

He called to her to get his breakfast ready, and prepared to go upstairs; attiring himself in the clothes he had taken off when he came into that room, which had been, ever since, outside the door. In his secret dread of meeting the household for the first time, after what he had done, he lingered at the door on slight pretexts that they might see him without looking in his face; and left it ajar while he dressed; and called out to have the windows opened, and the pavement watered, that they might become accustomed to his voice. Even when he had put off the time, by one means or other, so that he had seen or spoken to them all, he could not muster courage for a long while to go in among them, but stood at his own door listening to the murmur of their distant conversation.

He could not stop there for ever, and so joined them. His last glance at the glass had seen a tell-tale face, but that might have been because of his anxious looking in it. He dared not look at them to see if they observed him, but he thought them very silent.

And whatsoever guard he kept upon himself, he could not help listening, and showing that he listened. Whether he attended to their talk, or tried to think of other things, or talked himself, or held his peace, or resolutely counted the dull tickings of a hoarse clock at his back, he always lapsed, as if a spell were on him, into eager listening. For he knew it must come. And his present punishment, and torture and distraction, were, to listen for its coming.

Hush!

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

BEARS TIDINGS OF MARTIN AND OF MARK, AS WELL AS OF A THIRD PERSON NOT QUITE UNKNOWN TO THE READER. EXHIBITS FILIAL PIETY IN AN UGLY ASPECT; AND CASTS A DOUBTFUL RAY OF LIGHT UPON A VERY DARK PLACE

Tom Pinch and Ruth were sitting at their early breakfast, with the window open, and a row of the freshest little plants ranged before it on the inside by Ruth's own hands; and Ruth had fastened a sprig of geranium in Tom's button-hole, to make him very smart and summer-like for the day (it was obliged to be fastened in, or that dear old Tom was certain to lose it); and people were crying flowers up and down the street; and a blundering bee, who had got himself in between the two sashes of the window, was bruising his head against the glass, endeavouring to force himself out into the fine morning, and considering himself enchanted because he couldn't do it; and the morning was as fine a morning as ever was seen; and the fragrant air was kissing Ruth and rustling about Tom, as if it said, 'how are you, my dears; I came all this way on purpose to salute you;' and it was one of those glad times when we form, or ought to form, the wish that every one on earth were able to be happy, and catching glimpses of the summer of the heart, to feel the beauty of the summer of the year.

It was even a pleasanter breakfast than usual; and it was always a pleasant one. For little Ruth had now two pupils to attend, each three times a week; and each two hours at a time; and besides this, she had painted some screens and card-racks, and, unknown to Tom (was there ever anything so delightful!), had walked into a certain shop which dealt in such articles, after often peeping through the window; and had taken courage to ask the Mistress of that shop whether she would buy them. And the mistress had not only bought them, but had ordered more, and that very morning Ruth had made confession of these facts to Tom, and had handed him the money in a little purse she had worked expressly for the purpose. They had been in a flutter about this, and perhaps had shed a happy tear or two for anything the history knows to the contrary; but it was all over now; and a brighter face than Tom's, or a brighter face than Ruth's, the bright sun had not looked on since he went to bed last night.

'My dear girl,' said Tom, coming so abruptly on the subject, that he interrupted himself in the act of cutting a slice of bread, and left the knife sticking in the loaf, 'what a queer fellow our landlord is! I don't believe he has been home once since he got me into that unsatisfactory scrape. I begin to think he will never come home again. What a mysterious life that man does lead, to be sure!'

'Very strange. Is it not, Tom?'

'Really,' said Tom, 'I hope it is only strange. I hope there may be nothing wrong in it. Sometimes I begin to be doubtful of that. I must have an explanation with him,' said Tom, shaking his head as if this were a most tremendous threat, 'when I can catch him!'

A short double knock at the door put Tom's menacing looks to flight, and awakened an expression of surprise instead.

'Heyday!' said Tom. 'An early hour for visitors! It must be John, I suppose.'

'I—I—don't think it was his knock, Tom,' observed his little sister.

'No?' said Tom. 'It surely can't be my employer suddenly arrived in town; directed here by Mr Fips; and come for the key of the office. It's somebody inquiring for me, I declare! Come in, if you please!'

But when the person came in, Tom Pinch, instead of saying, 'Did you wish to speak with me, sir?' or, 'My name is Pinch, sir; what is your business, may I ask?' or addressing him in any such distant terms; cried out, 'Good gracious Heaven!' and seized him by both hands, with the liveliest manifestations of astonishment and pleasure.

The visitor was not less moved than Tom himself, and they shook hands a great many times, without another word being spoken on either side. Tom was the first to find his voice.

'Mark Tapley, too!' said Tom, running towards the door, and shaking hands with somebody else. 'My dear Mark, come in. How are you, Mark? He don't look a day older than he used to do at the Dragon. How ARE you, Mark?'

'Uncommonly jolly, sir, thank'ee,' returned Mr Tapley, all smiles and bows. 'I hope I see you well, sir.'

'Good gracious me!' cried Tom, patting him tenderly on the back. 'How delightful it is to hear his old voice again! My dear Martin, sit down. My sister, Martin. Mr Chuzzlewit, my love. Mark Tapley from the Dragon, my dear. Good gracious me, what a surprise this is! Sit down. Lord, bless me!'

Tom was in such a state of excitement that he couldn't keep himself still for a moment, but was constantly running between Mark and Martin, shaking hands with them alternately, and presenting them over and over again to his sister.

'I remember the day we parted, Martin, as well as if it were yesterday,' said Tom. 'What a day it was! and what a passion you were in! And don't you remember my overtaking you in the road that morning, Mark, when I was going to Salisbury in the gig to fetch him, and you were looking out for a situation? And don't you recollect the dinner we had at Salisbury, Martin, with John Westlock, eh! Good gracious me! Ruth, my dear, Mr Chuzzlewit. Mark Tapley, my love, from the Dragon. More cups and saucers, if you please. Bless my soul, how glad I am to see you both!'

And then Tom (as John Westlock had done on his arrival) ran off to the loaf to cut some bread and butter for them; and before he had spread a single slice, remembered something else, and came running back again to tell it; and then he shook hands with them again; and then he introduced his sister again; and then he did everything he had done already all over again; and nothing Tom could do, and nothing Tom could say, was half sufficient to express his joy at their safe return.

Mr Tapley was the first to resume his composure. In a very short space of time he was discovered to have somehow installed himself in office as waiter, or attendant upon the party; a fact which was first suggested to them by his temporary absence in the kitchen, and speedy return with a kettle of boiling water, from which he replenished the tea-pot with a self-possession that was quite his own.

'Sit down, and take your breakfast, Mark,' said Tom. 'Make him sit down and take his breakfast, Martin.'

'Oh! I gave him up, long ago, as incorrigible,' Martin replied. 'He takes his own way, Tom. You would excuse him, Miss Pinch, if you knew his value.'

'She knows it, bless you!' said Tom. 'I have told her all about Mark Tapley. Have I not, Ruth?'

'Yes, Tom.'

'Not all,' returned Martin, in a low voice. 'The best of Mark Tapley is only known to one man, Tom; and but for Mark he would hardly be alive to tell it!'

'Mark!' said Tom Pinch energetically; 'if you don't sit down this minute, I'll swear at you!'

'Well, sir,' returned Mr Tapley, 'sooner than you should do that, I'll comply. It's a considerable invasion of a man's jollity to be made so partickler welcome, but a Werb is a word as signifies to be, to do, or to suffer (which is all the grammar, and enough too, as ever I wos taught); and if there's a Werb alive, I'm it. For I'm always a-bein', sometimes a-doin', and continually a-sufferin'.'

'Not jolly yet?' asked Tom, with a smile.

'Why, I was rather so, over the water, sir,' returned Mr Tapley; 'and not entirely without credit. But Human Natur' is in a conspiracy again' me; I can't get on. I shall have to leave it in my will, sir, to be wrote upon my tomb: "He was a man as might have come out strong if he could have got a chance. But it was denied him."'

Mr Tapley took this occasion of looking about him with a grin, and subsequently attacking the breakfast, with an appetite not at all expressive of blighted hopes, or insurmountable despondency.

In the meanwhile, Martin drew his chair a little nearer to Tom and his sister, and related to them what had passed at Mr Pecksniff's house; adding in few words a general summary of the distresses and disappointments he had undergone since he left England.

'For your faithful stewardship in the trust I left with you, Tom,' he said, 'and for all your goodness and disinterestedness, I can never thank you enough. When I add Mary's thanks to mine—'

Ah, Tom! The blood retreated from his cheeks, and came rushing back, so violently, that it was pain to feel it; ease though, ease, compared with the aching of his wounded heart.

'When I add Mary's thanks to mine,' said Martin, 'I have made the only poor acknowledgment it is in our power to offer; but if you knew how much we feel, Tom, you would set some store by it, I am sure.'

And if they had known how much Tom felt—but that no human creature ever knew—they would have set some store by him. Indeed they would.

Tom changed the topic of discourse. He was sorry he could not pursue it, as it gave Martin pleasure; but he was unable, at that moment. No drop of envy or bitterness was in his soul; but he could not master the firm utterance of her name.

He inquired what Martin's projects were.

'No longer to make your fortune, Tom,' said Martin, 'but to try to live. I tried that once in London, Tom; and failed. If you will give me the benefit of your advice and friendly counsel, I may succeed better under your guidance. I will do anything Tom, anything, to gain a livelihood by my own exertions. My hopes do not soar above that, now.'

High-hearted, noble Tom! Sorry to find the pride of his old companion humbled, and to hear him speaking in this altered strain at once, at once, he drove from his breast the inability to contend with its deep emotions, and spoke out bravely.

'Your hopes do not soar above that!' cried Tom. 'Yes they do. How can you talk so! They soar up to the time when you will be happy with her, Martin. They soar up to the time when you will be able to claim her, Martin. They soar up to the time when you will not be able to believe that you were ever cast down in spirit, or poor in pocket, Martin. Advice, and friendly counsel! Why, of course. But you shall have better advice and counsel (though you cannot have more friendly) than mine. You shall consult John Westlock. We'll go there immediately. It is yet so early that I shall have time to take you to his chambers before I go to business; they are in my way; and I can leave you there, to talk over your affairs with him. So come along. Come along. I am a man of occupation now, you know,' said Tom, with his pleasantest smile; 'and have no time to lose. Your hopes don't soar higher than that? I dare say they don't. I know you, pretty well. They'll be soaring out of sight soon, Martin, and leaving all the rest of us leagues behind.'

'Aye! But I may be a little changed,' said Martin, 'since you knew me pretty well, Tom.'

'What nonsense!' exclaimed Tom. 'Why should you be changed? You talk as if you were an old man. I never heard such a fellow! Come to John Westlock's, come. Come along, Mark Tapley. It's Mark's doing, I have no doubt; and it serves you right for having such a grumbler for your companion.'

'There's no credit to be got through being jolly with YOU, Mr Pinch, anyways,' said Mark, with his face all wrinkled up with grins. 'A parish doctor might be jolly with you. There's nothing short of goin' to the U-nited States for a second trip, as would make it at all creditable to be jolly, arter seein' you again!'

Tom laughed, and taking leave of his sister, hurried Mark and Martin out into the street, and away to John Westlock's by the nearest road; for his hour of business was very near at hand, and he prided himself on always being exact to his time.

John Westlock was at home, but, strange to say, was rather embarrassed to see them; and when Tom was about to go into the room where he was breakfasting, said he had a stranger there. It appeared to be a mysterious stranger, for John shut that door as he said it, and led them into the next room.

He was very much delighted, though, to see Mark Tapley; and received Martin with his own frank courtesy. But Martin felt that he did not inspire John Westlock with any unusual interest; and twice or thrice observed that he looked at Tom Pinch doubtfully; not to say compassionately. He thought, and blushed to think, that he knew the cause of this.

'I apprehend you are engaged,' said Martin, when Tom had announced the purport of their visit. 'If you will allow me to come again at your own time, I shall be glad to do so.'

'I AM engaged,' replied John, with some reluctance; 'but the matter on which I am engaged is one, to say the truth, more immediately demanding your knowledge than mine.'

'Indeed!' cried Martin.

'It relates to a member of your family, and is of a serious nature. If you will have the kindness to remain here, it will be a satisfaction to me to have it privately communicated to you, in order that you may judge of its importance for yourself.'

'And in the meantime,' said Tom, 'I must really take myself off, without any further ceremony.'

'Is your business so very particular,' asked Martin, 'that you cannot remain with us for half an hour? I wish you could. What IS your business, Tom?'

It was Tom's turn to be embarrassed now; but he plainly said, after a little hesitation:

'Why, I am not at liberty to say what it is, Martin; though I hope soon to be in a condition to do so, and am aware of no other reason to prevent my doing so now, than the request of my employer. It's an awkward position to be placed in,' said Tom, with an uneasy sense of seeming to doubt his friend, 'as I feel every day; but I really cannot help it, can I, John?'

John Westlock replied in the negative; and Martin, expressing himself perfectly satisfied, begged them not to say another word; though he could not help wondering very much what curious office Tom held, and why he was so secret, and embarrassed, and unlike himself, in reference to it. Nor could he help reverting to it, in his own mind, several times after Tom went away, which he did as soon as this conversation was ended, taking Mr Tapley with him, who, as he laughingly said, might accompany him as far as Fleet Street without injury.

'And what do you mean to do, Mark?' asked Tom, as they walked on together.

'Mean to do, sir?' returned Mr Tapley.

'Aye. What course of life do you mean to pursue?'

'Well, sir,' said Mr Tapley. 'The fact is, that I have been a-thinking rather of the matrimonial line, sir.'

'You don't say so, Mark!' cried Tom.

'Yes, sir. I've been a-turnin' of it over.'

'And who is the lady, Mark?'

'The which, sir?' said Mr Tapley.

'The lady. Come! You know what I said,' replied Tom, laughing, 'as well as I do!'

Mr Tapley suppressed his own inclination to laugh; and with one of his most whimsically-twisted looks, replied:

'You couldn't guess, I suppose, Mr Pinch?'

'How is it possible?' said Tom. 'I don't know any of your flames, Mark. Except Mrs Lupin, indeed.'

'Well, sir!' retorted Mr Tapley. 'And supposing it was her!'

Tom stopping in the street to look at him, Mr Tapley for a moment presented to his view an utterly stolid and expressionless face; a perfect dead wall of countenance. But opening window after window in it with astonishing rapidity, and lighting them all up as for a general illumination, he repeated:

'Supposin', for the sake of argument, as it was her, sir!'

'Why I thought such a connection wouldn't suit you, Mark, on any terms!' cried Tom.

'Well, sir! I used to think so myself, once,' said Mark. 'But I ain't so clear about it now. A dear, sweet creetur, sir!'

'A dear, sweet creature? To be sure she is,' cried Tom. 'But she always was a dear, sweet creature, was she not?'

'WAS she not!' assented Mr Tapley.

'Then why on earth didn't you marry her at first, Mark, instead of wandering abroad, and losing all this time, and leaving her alone by herself, liable to be courted by other people?'

'Why, sir,' retorted Mr Tapley, in a spirit of unbounded confidence, 'I'll tell you how it come about. You know me, Mr Pinch, sir; there ain't a gentleman alive as knows me better. You're acquainted with my constitution, and you're acquainted with my weakness. My constitution is, to be jolly; and my weakness is, to wish to find a credit in it. Wery good, sir. In this state of mind, I gets a notion in my head that she looks on me with a eye of—with what you may call a favourable sort of a eye in fact,' said Mr Tapley, with modest hesitation.

'No doubt,' replied Tom. 'We knew that perfectly well when we spoke on this subject long ago; before you left the Dragon.'

Mr Tapley nodded assent. 'Well, sir! But bein' at that time full of hopeful wisions, I arrives at the conclusion that no credit is to be got out of such a way of life as that, where everything agreeable would be ready to one's hand. Lookin' on the bright side of human life in short, one of my hopeful wisions is, that there's a deal of misery awaitin' for me; in the midst of which I may come out tolerable strong, and be jolly under circumstances as reflects some credit. I goes into the world, sir, wery boyant, and I tries this. I goes aboard ship first, and wery soon discovers (by the ease with which I'm jolly, mind you) as there's no credit to be got THERE. I might have took warning by this, and gave it up; but I didn't. I gets to the U-nited States; and then I DO begin, I won't deny it, to feel some little credit in sustaining my spirits. What follows? Jest as I'm a-beginning to come out, and am a-treadin' on the werge, my master deceives me.'

'Deceives you!' cried Tom.

'Swindles me,' retorted Mr Tapley with a beaming face. 'Turns his back on everything as made his service a creditable one, and leaves me high and dry, without a leg to stand upon. In which state I returns home. Wery good. Then all my hopeful wisions bein' crushed; and findin' that there ain't no credit for me nowhere; I abandons myself to despair, and says, "Let me do that as has the least credit in it of all; marry a dear, sweet creetur, as is wery fond of me; me bein', at the same time, wery fond of her; lead a happy life, and struggle no more again' the blight which settles on my prospects."'

'If your philosophy, Mark,' said Tom, who laughed heartily at this speech, 'be the oddest I ever heard of, it is not the least wise. Mrs Lupin has said "yes," of course?'

'Why, no, sir,' replied Mr Tapley; 'she hasn't gone so far as that yet. Which I attribute principally to my not havin' asked her. But we was wery agreeable together—comfortable, I may say—the night I come home. It's all right, sir.'

'Well!' said Tom, stopping at the Temple Gate. 'I wish you joy, Mark, with all my heart. I shall see you again to-day, I dare say. Good-bye for the present.'

'Good-bye, sir! Good-bye, Mr Pinch!' he added by way of soliloquy, as he stood looking after him. 'Although you ARE a damper to a honourable ambition. You little think it, but you was the first to dash my hopes. Pecksniff would have built me up for life, but your sweet temper pulled me down. Good-bye, Mr Pinch!'

While these confidences were interchanged between Tom Pinch and Mark, Martin and John Westlock were very differently engaged. They were no sooner left alone together than Martin said, with an effort he could not disguise:

'Mr Westlock, we have met only once before, but you have known Tom a long while, and that seems to render you familiar to me. I cannot talk freely with you on any subject unless I relieve my mind of what oppresses it just now. I see with pain that you so far mistrust me that you think me likely to impose on Tom's regardlessness of himself, or on his kind nature, or some of his good qualities.'

'I had no intention,' replied John, 'of conveying any such impression to you, and am exceedingly sorry to have done so.'

'But you entertain it?' said Martin.

'You ask me so pointedly and directly,' returned the other, 'that I cannot deny the having accustomed myself to regard you as one who, not in wantonness but in mere thoughtlessness of character, did not sufficiently consider his nature and did not quite treat it as it deserves to be treated. It is much easier to slight than to appreciate Tom Pinch.'

This was not said warmly, but was energetically spoken too; for there was no subject in the world (but one) on which the speaker felt so strongly.

'I grew into the knowledge of Tom,' he pursued, 'as I grew towards manhood; and I have learned to love him as something, infinitely better than myself. I did not think that you understood him when we met before. I did not think that you greatly cared to understand him. The instances of this which I observed in you were, like my opportunities for observation, very trivial—and were very harmless, I dare say. But they were not agreeable to me, and they forced themselves upon me; for I was not upon the watch for them, believe me. You will say,' added John, with a smile, as he subsided into more of his accustomed manner, 'that I am not by any means agreeable to you. I can only assure you, in reply, that I would not have originated this topic on any account.'

'I originated it,' said Martin; 'and so far from having any complaint to make against you, highly esteem the friendship you entertain for Tom, and the very many proofs you have given him of it. Why should I endeavour to conceal from you'—he coloured deeply though—'that I neither understood him nor cared to understand him when I was his companion; and that I am very truly sorry for it now!'

It was so sincerely said, at once so modestly and manfully, that John offered him his hand as if he had not done so before; and Martin giving his in the same open spirit, all constraint between the young men vanished.

'Now pray,' said John, 'when I tire your patience very much in what I am going to say, recollect that it has an end to it, and that the end is the point of the story.'

With this preface, he related all the circumstances connected with his having presided over the illness and slow recovery of the patient at the Bull; and tacked on to the skirts of that narrative Tom's own account of the business on the wharf. Martin was not a little puzzled when he came to an end, for the two stories seemed to have no connection with each other, and to leave him, as the phrase is, all abroad.

'If you will excuse me for one moment,' said John, rising, 'I will beg you almost immediately to come into the next room.'

Upon that, he left Martin to himself, in a state of considerable astonishment; and soon came back again to fulfil his promise. Accompanying him into the next room, Martin found there a third person; no doubt the stranger of whom his host had spoken when Tom Pinch introduced him.

He was a young man; with deep black hair and eyes. He was gaunt and pale; and evidently had not long recovered from a severe illness. He stood as Martin entered, but sat again at John's desire. His eyes were cast downward; and but for one glance at them both, half in humiliation and half in entreaty, he kept them so, and sat quite still and silent.

'This person's name is Lewsome,' said John Westlock, 'whom I have mentioned to you as having been seized with an illness at the inn near here, and undergone so much. He has had a very hard time of it, ever since he began to recover; but, as you see, he is now doing well.'

As he did not move or speak, and John Westlock made a pause, Martin, not knowing what to say, said that he was glad to hear it.

'The short statement that I wish you to hear from his own lips, Mr Chuzzlewit,' John pursued—looking attentively at him, and not at Martin—'he made to me for the first time yesterday, and repeated to me this morning, without the least variation of any essential particular. I have already told you that he informed me before he was removed from the Inn, that he had a secret to disclose to me which lay heavy on his mind. But, fluctuating between sickness and health and between his desire to relieve himself of it, and his dread of involving himself by revealing it, he has, until yesterday, avoided the disclosure. I never pressed him for it (having no idea of its weight or import, or of my right to do so), until within a few days past; when, understanding from him, on his own voluntary avowal, in a letter from the country, that it related to a person whose name was Jonas Chuzzlewit; and thinking that it might throw some light on that little mystery which made Tom anxious now and then; I urged the point upon him, and heard his statement, as you will now, from his own lips. It is due to him to say, that in the apprehension of death, he committed it to writing sometime since, and folded it in a sealed paper, addressed to me; which he could not resolve, however, to place of his own act in my hands. He has the paper in his breast, I believe, at this moment.'

The young man touched it hastily; in corroboration of the fact.

'It will be well to leave that in our charge, perhaps,' said John. 'But do not mind it now.'

As he said this, he held up his hand to bespeak Martin's attention. It was already fixed upon the man before him, who, after a short silence said, in a low, weak, hollow voice:

'What relation was Mr Anthony Chuzzlewit, who—'

'—Who died—to me?' said Martin. 'He was my grandfather's brother.'

'I fear he was made away with. Murdered!'

'My God!' said Martin. 'By whom?'

The young man, Lewsome, looked up in his face, and casting down his eyes again, replied:

'I fear, by me.'

'By you?' cried Martin.

'Not by my act, but I fear by my means.'

'Speak out!' said Martin, 'and speak the truth.'

'I fear this IS the truth.'

Martin was about to interrupt him again, but John Westlock saying softly, 'Let him tell his story in his own way,' Lewsome went on thus:

'I have been bred a surgeon, and for the last few years have served a general practitioner in the City, as his assistant. While I was in his employment I became acquainted with Jonas Chuzzlewit. He is the principal in this deed.'

'What do you mean?' demanded Martin, sternly. 'Do you know he is the son of the old man of whom you have spoken?'

'I do,' he answered.

He remained silent for some moments, when he resumed at the point where he had left off.

'I have reason to know it; for I have often heard him wish his old father dead, and complain of his being wearisome to him, and a drag upon him. He was in the habit of doing so, at a place of meeting we had—three or four of us—at night. There was no good in the place you may suppose, when you hear that he was the chief of the party. I wish I had died myself, and never seen it!'

He stopped again; and again resumed as before.

'We met to drink and game; not for large sums, but for sums that were large to us. He generally won. Whether or no, he lent money at interest to those who lost; and in this way, though I think we all secretly hated him, he came to be the master of us. To propitiate him we made a jest of his father; it began with his debtors; I was one; and we used to toast a quicker journey to the old man, and a swift inheritance to the young one.'

He paused again.

'One night he came there in a very bad humour. He had been greatly tried, he said, by the old man that day. He and I were alone together; and he angrily told me, that the old man was in his second childhood; that he was weak, imbecile, and drivelling; as unbearable to himself as he was to other people; and that it would be a charity to put him out of the way. He swore that he had often thought of mixing something with the stuff he took for his cough, which should help him to die easily. People were sometimes smothered who were bitten by mad dogs, he said; and why not help these lingering old men out of their troubles too? He looked full at me as he said so, and I looked full at him; but it went no farther that night.'

He stopped once more, and was silent for so long an interval that John Westlock said 'Go on.' Martin had never removed his eyes from his face, but was so absorbed in horror and astonishment that he could not speak.

'It may have been a week after that, or it may have been less or more—the matter was in my mind all the time, but I cannot recollect the time, as I should any other period—when he spoke to me again. We were alone then, too; being there before the usual hour of assembling. There was no appointment between us; but I think I went there to meet him, and I know he came there to meet me. He was there first. He was reading a newspaper when I went in, and nodded to me without looking up, or leaving off reading. I sat down opposite and close to him. He said, immediately, that he wanted me to get him some of two sorts of drugs. One that was instantaneous in its effect; of which he wanted very little. One that was slow and not suspicious in appearance; of which he wanted more. While he was speaking to me he still read the newspaper. He said "Drugs," and never used any other word. Neither did I.'

'This all agrees with what I have heard before,' observed John Westlock.

'I asked him what he wanted the drugs for? He said for no harm; to physic cats; what did it matter to me? I was going out to a distant colony (I had recently got the appointment, which, as Mr Westlock knows, I have since lost by my sickness, and which was my only hope of salvation from ruin), and what did it matter to me? He could get them without my aid at half a hundred places, but not so easily as he could get them of me. This was true. He might not want them at all, he said, and he had no present idea of using them; but he wished to have them by him. All this time he still read the newspaper. We talked about the price. He was to forgive me a small debt—I was quite in his power—and to pay me five pounds; and there the matter dropped, through others coming in. But, next night, under exactly similar circumstances, I gave him the drugs, on his saying I was a fool to think that he should ever use them for any harm; and he gave me the money. We have never met since. I only know that the poor old father died soon afterwards, just as he would have died from this cause; and that I have undergone, and suffer now, intolerable misery. Nothing' he added, stretching out his hands, 'can paint my misery! It is well deserved, but nothing can paint it.'

With that he hung his head, and said no more, wasted and wretched, he was not a creature upon whom to heap reproaches that were unavailing.

'Let him remain at hand,' said Martin, turning from him; 'but out of sight, in Heaven's name!'

'He will remain here,' John whispered. 'Come with me!' Softly turning the key upon him as they went out, he conducted Martin into the adjoining room, in which they had been before.

Martin was so amazed, so shocked, and confounded by what he had heard that it was some time before he could reduce it to any order in his mind, or could sufficiently comprehend the bearing of one part upon another, to take in all the details at one view. When he, at length, had the whole narrative clearly before him, John Westlock went on to point out the great probability of the guilt of Jonas being known to other people, who traded in it for their own benefit, and who were, by such means, able to exert that control over him which Tom Pinch had accidentally witnessed, and unconsciously assisted. This appeared so plain, that they agreed upon it without difficulty; but instead of deriving the least assistance from this source, they found that it embarrassed them the more.

They knew nothing of the real parties who possessed this power. The only person before them was Tom's landlord. They had no right to question Tom's landlord, even if they could find him, which, according to Tom's account, it would not be easy to do. And granting that they did question him, and he answered (which was taking a good deal for granted), he had only to say, with reference to the adventure on the wharf, that he had been sent from such and such a place to summon Jonas back on urgent business, and there was an end of it.

Besides, there was the great difficulty and responsibility of moving at all in the matter. Lewsome's story might be false; in his wretched state it might be greatly heightened by a diseased brain; or admitting it to be entirely true, the old man might have died a natural death. Mr Pecksniff had been there at the time; as Tom immediately remembered, when he came back in the afternoon, and shared their counsels; and there had been no secrecy about it. Martin's grandfather was of right the person to decide upon the course that should be taken; but to get at his views would be impossible, for Mr Pecksniff's views were certain to be his. And the nature of Mr

Pecksniff's views in reference to his own son-in-law might be easily reckoned upon.

Apart from these considerations, Martin could not endure the thought of seeming to grasp at this unnatural charge against his relative, and using it as a stepping-stone to his grandfather's favour. But that he would seem to do so, if he presented himself before his grandfather in Mr Pecksniff's house again, for the purpose of declaring it; and that Mr Pecksniff, of all men, would represent his conduct in that despicable light, he perfectly well knew. On the other hand to be in possession of such a statement, and take no measures of further inquiry in reference to it, was tantamount to being a partner in the guilt it professed to disclose.

In a word, they were wholly unable to discover any outlet from this maze of difficulty, which did not lie through some perplexed and entangled thicket. And although Mr Tapley was promptly taken into their confidence; and the fertile imagination of that gentleman suggested many bold expedients, which, to do him justice, he was quite ready to carry into instant operation on his own personal responsibility; still 'bating the general zeal of Mr Tapley's nature, nothing was made particularly clearer by these offers of service.

It was in this position of affairs that Tom's account of the strange behaviour of the decayed clerk, on the night of the tea-party, became of great moment, and finally convinced them that to arrive at a more accurate knowledge of the workings of that old man's mind and memory, would be to take a most important stride in their pursuit of the truth. So, having first satisfied themselves that no communication had ever taken place between Lewsome and Mr Chuffey (which would have accounted at once for any suspicions the latter might entertain), they unanimously resolved that the old clerk was the man they wanted.

But, like the unanimous resolution of a public meeting, which will oftentimes declare that this or that grievance is not to be borne a moment longer, which is nevertheless borne for a century or two afterwards, without any modification, they only reached in this the conclusion that they were all of one mind. For it was one thing to want Mr Chuffey, and another thing to get at him; and to do that without alarming him, or without alarming Jonas, or without being discomfited by the difficulty of striking, in an instrument so out of tune and so unused, the note they sought, was an end as far from their reach as ever.

The question then became, who of those about the old clerk had had most influence with him that night? Tom said his young mistress clearly. But Tom and all of them shrunk from the thought of entrapping her, and making her the innocent means of bringing retribution on her cruel husband. Was there nobody else? Why yes. In a very different way, Tom said, he was influenced by Mrs Gamp, the nurse; who had once had the control of him, as he understood, for some time.

They caught at this immediately. Here was a new way out, developed in a quarter until then overlooked. John Westlock knew Mrs Gamp; he had given her employment; he was acquainted with her place of residence: for that good lady had obligingly furnished him, at parting, with a pack of her professional cards for general distribution. It was decided that Mrs Gamp should be approached with caution, but approached without delay; and that the depths of that discreet matron's knowledge of Mr Chuffey, and means of bringing them, or one of them, into communication with him, should be carefully sounded.

On this service, Martin and John Westlock determined to proceed that night; waiting on Mrs Gamp first, at her lodgings; and taking their chance of finding her in the repose of private life, or of having to seek her out, elsewhere, in the exercise of her professional duties. Tom returned home, that he might lose no opportunity of having an interview with Nadgett, by being absent in the event of his reappearance. And Mr Tapley remained (by his own particular desire) for the time being in Furnival's Inn, to look after Lewsome; who might safely have been left to himself, however, for any thought he seemed to entertain of giving them the slip.

Before they parted on their several errands, they caused him to read aloud, in the presence of them all, the paper which he had about him, and the declaration he had attached to it, which was to the effect that he had written it voluntarily, in the fear of death and in the torture of his mind. And when he had done so, they all signed it, and taking it from him, of his free will, locked it in a place of safety.

Martin also wrote, by John's advice, a letter to the trustees of the famous Grammar School, boldly claiming the successful design as his, and charging Mr Pecksniff with the fraud he had committed. In this proceeding also, John was hotly interested; observing, with his usual irreverance, that Mr Pecksniff had been a successful rascal all his life through, and that it would be a lasting source of happiness to him (John) if he could help to do him justice in the smallest particular.

A busy day! But Martin had no lodgings yet; so when these matters were disposed of, he excused himself from dining with John Westlock and was fain to wander out alone, and look for some. He succeeded, after great trouble, in engaging two garrets for himself and Mark, situated in a court in the Strand, not far from Temple Bar. Their luggage, which was waiting for them at a coach-office, he conveyed to this new place of refuge; and it was with a glow of satisfaction, which as a selfish man he never could have known and never had, that, thinking how much pains and trouble he had saved Mark, and how pleased and astonished Mark would be, he afterwards walked up and down, in the Temple, eating a meat-pie for his dinner.

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

IN WHICH MRS HARRIS ASSISTED BY A TEAPOT, IS THE CAUSE OF A DIVISION BETWEEN FRIENDS

Mrs Gamp's apartment in Kingsgate Street, High Holborn, wore, metaphorically speaking, a robe of state. It was swept and garnished for the reception of a visitor. That visitor was Betsey Prig; Mrs Prig, of Bartlemy's; or as some said Barklemy's, or as some said Bardlemy's; for by all these endearing and familiar appellations, had the hospital of Saint Bartholomew become a household word among the sisterhood which Betsey Prig adorned.

Mrs Gamp's apartment was not a spacious one, but, to a contented mind, a closet is a palace; and the first-floor front at Mr Sweedlepipe's may have been, in the imagination of Mrs Gamp, a stately pile. If it were not exactly that, to restless intellects, it at least comprised as much accommodation as any person, not sanguine to insanity, could have looked for in a room of its dimensions. For only keep the bedstead always in your mind; and you were safe. That was the grand secret. Remembering the bedstead, you might even stoop to look under the little round table for anything you had dropped, without hurting yourself much against the chest of drawers, or qualifying as a patient of Saint Bartholomew, by falling into the fire.

Visitors were much assisted in their cautious efforts to preserve an unflagging recollection of this piece of furniture, by its size; which was great. It was not a turn-up bedstead, nor yet a French bedstead, nor yet a four-post bedstead, but what is poetically called a tent; the sacking whereof was low and bulgy, insomuch that Mrs Gamp's box would not go under it, but stopped half-way, in a manner which, while it did violence to the reason, likewise endangered the legs of a stranger. The frame too, which would have supported the canopy and hangings if there had been any, was ornamented with divers pippins carved in timber, which on the slightest provocation, and frequently on none at all, came tumbling down; harassing the peaceful guest with inexplicable terrors.

The bed itself was decorated with a patchwork quilt of great antiquity; and at the upper end, upon the side nearest to the door, hung a scanty curtain of blue check, which prevented the Zephyrs that were abroad in

Kingsgate Street, from visiting Mrs Gamp's head too roughly. Some rusty gowns and other articles of that lady's wardrobe depended from the posts; and these had so adapted themselves by long usage to her figure, that more than one impatient husband coming in precipitately, at about the time of twilight, had been for an instant stricken dumb by the supposed discovery that Mrs Gamp had hanged herself. One gentleman, coming on the usual hasty errand, had said indeed, that they looked like guardian angels 'watching of her in her sleep.' But that, as Mrs Gamp said, 'was his first;' and he never repeated the sentiment, though he often repeated his visit.

The chairs in Mrs Gamp's apartment were extremely large and broad-backed, which was more than a sufficient reason for there being but two in number. They were both elbow-chairs, of ancient mahogany; and were chiefly valuable for the slippery nature of their seats, which had been originally horsehair, but were now covered with a shiny substance of a bluish tint, from which the visitor began to slide away with a dismayed countenance, immediately after sitting down. What Mrs Gamp wanted in chairs she made up in bandboxes; of which she had a great collection, devoted to the reception of various miscellaneous valuables, which were not, however, as well protected as the good woman, by a pleasant fiction, seemed to think; for, though every bandbox had a carefully closed lid, not one among them had a bottom; owing to which cause the property within was merely, as it were, extinguished. The chest of drawers having been originally made to stand upon the top of another chest, had a dwarfish, elfin look, alone; but in regard of its security it had a great advantage over the bandboxes, for as all the handles had been long ago pulled off, it was very difficult to get at its contents. This indeed was only to be done by one or two devices; either by tilting the whole structure forward until all the drawers fell out together, or by opening them singly with knives, like oysters.

Mrs Gamp stored all her household matters in a little cupboard by the fire-place; beginning below the surface (as in nature) with the coals, and mounting gradually upwards to the spirits, which, from motives of delicacy, she kept in a teapot. The chimney-piece was ornamented with a small almanack, marked here and there in Mrs Gamp's own hand with a memorandum of the date at which some lady was expected to fall due. It was also embellished with three profiles: one, in colours, of Mrs Gamp herself in early life; one, in bronze, of a lady in feathers, supposed to be

Mrs Harris, as she appeared when dressed for a ball; and one, in black, of Mr Gamp, deceased. The last was a full length, in order that the likeness might be rendered more obvious and forcible by the introduction of the wooden leg.

A pair of bellows, a pair of pattens, a toasting-fork, a kettle, a pap-boat, a spoon for the administration of medicine to the refractory, and lastly, Mrs Gamp's umbrella, which as something of great price and rarity, was displayed with particular ostentation, completed the decorations of the chimney-piece and adjacent wall. Towards these objects Mrs Gamp raised her eyes in satisfaction when she had arranged the tea-board, and had concluded her arrangements for the reception of Betsey Prig, even unto the setting forth of two pounds of Newcastle salmon, intensely pickled.

'There! Now drat you, Betsey, don't be long!' said Mrs Gamp, apostrophizing her absent friend. 'For I can't abear to wait, I do assure you. To wotever place I goes, I sticks to this one mortar, "I'm easy pleased; it is but little as I wants; but I must have that little of the best, and to the minute when the clock strikes, else we do not part as I could wish, but bearin' malice in our arts."'

Her own preparations were of the best, for they comprehended a delicate new loaf, a plate of fresh butter, a basin of fine white sugar, and other arrangements on the same scale. Even the snuff with which she now refreshed herself, was so choice in quality that she took a second pinch.

'There's the little bell a-ringing now,' said Mrs Gamp, hurrying to the stair-head and looking over. 'Betsey Prig, my—why it's that there disapintin' Sweedlepipes, I do believe.'

'Yes, it's me,' said the barber in a faint voice; 'I've just come in.'

'You're always a-comin' in, I think,' muttered Mrs Gamp to herself, 'except wen you're a-goin' out. I ha'n't no patience with that man!'

'Mrs Gamp,' said the barber. 'I say! Mrs Gamp!'

'Well,' cried Mrs Gamp, impatiently, as she descended the stairs. 'What is it? Is the Thames a-fire, and cooking its own fish, Mr Sweedlepipes? Why wot's the man gone and been a-doin' of to himself? He's as white as chalk!'

She added the latter clause of inquiry, when she got downstairs, and found him seated in the shaving-chair, pale and disconsolate.

'You recollect,' said Poll. 'You recollect young—'

'Not young Wilkins!' cried Mrs Gamp. 'Don't say young Wilkins, wotever you do. If young Wilkins's wife is took—'

'It isn't anybody's wife,' exclaimed the little barber. 'Bailey, young Bailey!'

'Why, wot do you mean to say that chit's been a-doin' of?' retorted Mrs Gamp, sharply. 'Stuff and nonsense, Mrs Sweedlepipes!'

'He hasn't been a-doing anything!' exclaimed poor Poll, quite desperate. 'What do you catch me up so short for, when you see me put out to that extent that I can hardly speak? He'll never do anything again. He's done for. He's killed. The first time I ever see that boy,' said Poll, 'I charged him too much for a red-poll. I asked him three-halfpence for a penny one, because I was afraid he'd beat me down. But he didn't. And now he's dead; and if you was to crowd all the steam-engines and electric fluids that ever was, into this shop, and set 'em every one to work their hardest, they couldn't square the account, though it's only a ha'penny!'

Mr Sweedlepipe turned aside to the towel, and wiped his eyes with it.

'And what a clever boy he was!' he said. 'What a surprising young chap he was! How he talked! and what a deal he know'd! Shaved in this very chair he was; only for fun; it was all his fun; he was full of it. Ah! to think that he'll never be shaved in earnest! The birds might every one have died, and welcome,' cried the little barber, looking round him at the cages, and again applying to the towel, 'sooner than I'd have heard this news!'

'How did you ever come to hear it?' said Mrs Gamp, 'who told you?'

'I went out,' returned the little barber, 'into the City, to meet a sporting gent upon the Stock Exchange, that wanted a few slow pigeons to practice at; and when I'd done with him, I went to get a little drop of beer, and there I heard everybody a-talking about it. It's in the papers.'

'You are in a nice state of confugion, Mr Sweedlepipes, you are!' said Mrs Gamp, shaking her head; 'and my opinion is, as half-a-dudgeon fresh young lively leeches on your temples, wouldn't be too much to clear your mind, which so I tell you. Wot were they a-talkin' on, and wot was in the papers?'

'All about it!' cried the barber. 'What else do you suppose? Him and his master were upset on a journey, and he was carried to Salisbury, and was breathing his last when the account came away. He never spoke afterwards. Not a single word. That's the worst of it to me; but that ain't all. His master can't be found. The other manager of their office in the city, Crimple, David

Crimple, has gone off with the money, and is advertised for, with a reward, upon the walls. Mr Montague, poor young Bailey's master (what a boy he was!) is advertised for, too. Some say he's slipped off, to join his friend abroad; some say he mayn't have got away yet; and they're looking for him high and low. Their office is a smash; a swindle altogether. But what's a Life Assurance office to a Life! And what a Life Young Bailey's was!'

'He was born into a wale,' said Mrs Gamp, with philosophical coolness. 'and he lived in a wale; and he must take the consequences of sech a sitiwation. But don't you hear nothink of Mr Chuzzlewit in all this?'

'No,' said Poll, 'nothing to speak of. His name wasn't printed as one of the board, though some people say it was just going to be. Some believe he was took in, and some believe he was one of the takers-in; but however that may be, they can't prove nothing against him. This morning he went up of his own accord afore the Lord Mayor or some of them City big-wigs, and complained that he'd been swindled, and that these two persons had gone off and cheated him, and that he had just found out that Montague's name wasn't even Montague, but something else. And they do say that he looked like Death, owing to his losses. But, Lord forgive me,' cried the barber, coming back again to the subject of his individual grief, 'what's his looks to me! He might have died and welcome, fifty times, and not been such a loss as Bailey!'

At this juncture the little bell rang, and the deep voice of Mrs Prig struck into the conversation.

'Oh! You're a-talkin' about it, are you!' observed that lady. 'Well, I hope you've got it over, for I ain't interested in it myself.'

'My precious Betsey,' said Mrs Gamp, 'how late you are!'

The worthy Mrs Prig replied, with some asperity, 'that if perwerse people went off dead, when they was least expected, it warn't no fault of her'n.' And further, 'that it was quite aggrawation enough to be made late when one was dropping for one's tea, without hearing on it again.'

Mrs Gamp, deriving from this exhibition of repartee some clue to the state of Mrs Prig's feelings, instantly conducted her upstairs; deeming that the sight of pickled salmon might work a softening change.

But Betsey Prig expected pickled salmon. It was obvious that she did; for her first words, after glancing at the table, were:

'I know'd she wouldn't have a cowcumber!'

Mrs Gamp changed colour, and sat down upon the bedstead.

'Lord bless you, Betsey Prig, your words is true. I quite forgot it!'

Mrs Prig, looking steadfastly at her friend, put her hand in her pocket, and with an air of surly triumph drew forth either the oldest of lettuces or youngest of cabbages, but at any rate, a green vegetable of an expansive nature, and of such magnificent proportions that she was obliged to shut it up like an umbrella before she could pull it out. She also produced a handful of mustard and cress, a trifle of the herb called dandelion, three bunches of radishes, an onion rather larger than an average turnip, three substantial slices of beetroot, and a short prong or antler of celery; the whole of this garden-stuff having been publicly exhibited, but a short time before, as a twopenny salad, and purchased by Mrs Prig on condition that the vendor could get it all into her pocket. Which had been happily accomplished, in High Holborn, to the breathless interest of a hackney-coach stand. And she laid so little stress on this surprising forethought, that she did not even smile, but returning her pocket into its accustomed sphere, merely recommended that these productions of nature should be sliced up, for immediate consumption, in plenty of vinegar.

'And don't go a-droppin' none of your snuff in it,' said Mrs Prig. 'In gruel, barley-water, apple-tea, mutton-broth, and that, it don't signify. It stimulates a patient. But I don't relish it myself.'

'Why, Betsey Prig!' cried Mrs Gamp, 'how CAN you talk so!'

'Why, ain't your patients, wotever their diseases is, always asneezin' their wery heads off, along of your snuff?' said Mrs Prig.

'And wot if they are!' said Mrs Gamp

'Nothing if they are,' said Mrs Prig. 'But don't deny it, Sairah.'

'Who deniges of it?' Mrs Gamp inquired.

Mrs Prig returned no answer.

'WHO deniges of it, Betsey?' Mrs Gamp inquired again. Then Mrs Gamp, by reversing the question, imparted a deeper and more awful character of solemnity to the same. 'Betsey, who deniges of it?'

It was the nearest possible approach to a very decided difference of opinion between these ladies; but Mrs Prig's impatience for the meal being greater at the moment than her impatience of contradiction, she replied, for the present, 'Nobody, if you don't, Sairah,' and prepared herself for tea. For a quarrel can be taken up at any time, but a limited quantity of salmon cannot.

Her toilet was simple. She had merely to 'chuck' her bonnet and shawl upon the bed; give her hair two pulls, one upon the right side and one upon the left, as if she were ringing a couple of bells; and all was done. The tea was already made, Mrs Gamp was not long over the salad, and they were soon at the height of their repast.

The temper of both parties was improved, for the time being, by the enjoyments of the table. When the meal came to a termination (which it was pretty long in doing), and Mrs Gamp having cleared away, produced the teapot from the top shelf, simultaneously with a couple of wine-glasses, they were quite amiable.

'Betsey,' said Mrs Gamp, filling her own glass and passing the teapot, 'I will now propoge a toast. My frequent pardner, Betsey Prig!'

'Which, altering the name to Sairah Gamp; I drink,' said Mrs Prig, 'with love and tenderness.'

From this moment symptoms of inflammation began to lurk in the nose of each lady; and perhaps, notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary, in the temper also.

'Now, Sairah,' said Mrs Prig, 'joining business with pleasure, wot is this case in which you wants me?'

Mrs Gamp betraying in her face some intention of returning an evasive answer, Betsey added:

'IS it Mrs Harris?'

'No, Betsey Prig, it ain't,' was Mrs Gamp's reply.

'Well!' said Mrs Prig, with a short laugh. 'I'm glad of that, at any rate.'

'Why should you be glad of that, Betsey?' Mrs Gamp retorted, warmly. 'She is unbeknown to you except by hearsay, why should you be glad? If you have anythink to say contrairy to the character of Mrs Harris, which well I knows behind her back, afore her face, or anywheres, is not to be impeaged, out with it, Betsey. I have know'd that sweetest and best of women,' said Mrs Gamp, shaking her head, and shedding tears, 'ever since afore her First, which Mr Harris who was dreadful timid went and stopped his ears in a empty dog-kennel, and never took his hands away or come out once till he was showed the baby, wen bein' took with fits, the doctor collared him and laid him on his back upon the airy stones, and she was told to ease her mind, his owls was organs. And I have know'd her, Betsey Prig, when he has hurt her feelin' art by sayin' of his Ninth that it was one too many, if not two, while that dear innocent was cooin' in his face, which thrive it did though bandy, but I have never know'd as you had occagion to be glad, Betsey, on accounts of Mrs Harris not requiring you. Require she never will, depend upon it, for her constant words in sickness is, and will be, "Send for Sairey?"'

During this touching address, Mrs Prig adroitly feigning to be the victim of that absence of mind which has its origin in excessive attention to one topic, helped herself from the teapot without appearing to observe it. Mrs Gamp observed it, however, and came to a premature close in consequence.

'Well, it ain't her, it seems,' said Mrs Prig, coldly; 'who is it then?'

'You have heerd me mention, Betsey,' Mrs Gamp replied, after glancing in an expressive and marked manner at the tea-pot, 'a person as I took care on at the time as you and me was pardners off and on, in that there fever at the Bull?'

'Old Snuffey,' Mrs Prig observed.

Sarah Gamp looked at her with an eye of fire, for she saw in this mistake of Mrs Prig, another willful and malignant stab at that same weakness or custom of hers, an ungenerous allusion to which, on the part of Betsey, had first disturbed their harmony that evening. And she saw it still more clearly, when, politely but firmly correcting that lady by the distinct enunciation of the word 'Chuffey,' Mrs Prig received the correction with a diabolical laugh.

The best among us have their failings, and it must be conceded of Mrs Prig, that if there were a blemish in the goodness of her disposition, it was a habit she had of not bestowing all its sharp and acid properties upon her patients (as a thoroughly amiable woman would have done), but of keeping a considerable remainder for the service of her friends. Highly pickled salmon, and lettuces chopped up in vinegar, may, as viands possessing some acidity of their own, have encouraged and increased this failing in Mrs Prig; and every application to the teapot certainly did; for it was often remarked of her by her friends, that she was most contradictory when most elevated. It is certain that her countenance became about this time derisive and defiant, and that she sat with her arms folded, and one eye shut up, in a somewhat offensive, because obstrusively intelligent, manner.

Mrs Gamp observing this, felt it the more necessary that Mrs Prig should know her place, and be made sensible of her exact station in society, as well as of her obligations to herself. She therefore assumed an air of greater patronage and importance, as she went on to answer Mrs Prig a little more in detail.

'Mr Chuffey, Betsey,' said Mrs Gamp, 'is weak in his mind. Excuge me if I makes remark, that he may neither be so weak as people thinks, nor people may not think he is so weak as they pretends, and what I knows, I knows; and what you don't, you don't; so do not ask me, Betsey. But Mr Chuffey's friends has made propojals for his bein' took care on, and has said to me, "Mrs Gamp, WILL you undertake it? We couldn't think," they says, "of trusting him to nobody but you, for, Sairey, you are gold as has passed the furnage. Will you undertake it, at your own price, day and night, and by your own self?" "No," I says, "I will not. Do not reckon on it. There is," I says, "but one creetur in the world as I would undertake on sech terms, and her name is Harris. But," I says, "I am acquainted with a friend, whose name is Betsey Prig, that I can recommend, and will assist me. Betsey," I says, "is always to be trusted under me, and will be guided as I could desire."'

Here Mrs Prig, without any abatement of her offensive manner again counterfeited abstraction of mind, and stretched out her hand to the teapot. It was more than Mrs Gamp could bear. She stopped the hand of Mrs Prig with her own, and said, with great feeling:

'No, Betsey! Drink fair, wotever you do!'

Mrs Prig, thus baffled, threw herself back in her chair, and closing the same eye more emphatically, and folding her arms tighter, suffered her head to roll slowly from side to side, while she surveyed her friend with a contemptuous smile.

Mrs Gamp resumed:

'Mrs Harris, Betsey—'

'Bother Mrs Harris!' said Betsey Prig.

Mrs Gamp looked at her with amazement, incredulity, and indignation; when Mrs Prig, shutting her eye still closer, and folding her arms still tighter, uttered these memorable and tremendous words:

'I don't believe there's no sich a person!'

After the utterance of which expressions, she leaned forward, and snapped her fingers once, twice, thrice; each time nearer to the face of Mrs Gamp, and then rose to put on her bonnet, as one who felt that there was now a gulf between them, which nothing could ever bridge across.

The shock of this blow was so violent and sudden, that Mrs Gamp sat staring at nothing with uplifted eyes, and her mouth open as if she were gasping for breath, until Betsey Prig had put on her bonnet and her shawl, and was gathering the latter about her throat. Then Mrs Gamp rose—morally and physically rose—and denounced her.

'What!' said Mrs Gamp, 'you bage creetur, have I know'd Mrs Harris five and thirty year, to be told at last that there ain't no sech a person livin'! Have I stood her friend in all her troubles, great and small, for it to come at last to sech a end as this, which her own sweet picter hanging up afore you all the time, to shame your Bragian words! But well you mayn't believe there's no sech a creetur, for she wouldn't demean herself to look at you, and often has she said, when I have made mention of your name, which, to my sinful sorrow, I have done, "What, Sairey Gamp! debage yourself to HER!" Go along with you!'

'I'm a-goin', ma'am, ain't I?' said Mrs Prig, stopping as she said it.

'You had better, ma'am,' said Mrs Gamp.

'Do you know who you're talking to, ma'am?' inquired her visitor.

'Aperiently,' said Mrs Gamp, surveying her with scorn from head to foot, 'to Betsey Prig. Aperiently so. I know her. No one better. Go along with you!'

'And YOU was a-goin' to take me under you!' cried Mrs Prig, surveying Mrs Gamp from head to foot in her turn. 'YOU was, was you? Oh, how kind! Why, deuce take your imperence,' said Mrs Prig, with a rapid change from banter to ferocity, 'what do you mean?'

'Go along with you!' said Mrs Gamp. 'I blush for you.'

'You had better blush a little for yourself, while you ARE about it!' said Mrs Prig. 'You and your Chuffeys! What, the poor old creetur isn't mad enough, isn't he? Aha!'

'He'd very soon be mad enough, if you had anything to do with him,' said Mrs Gamp.

'And that's what I was wanted for, is it?' cried Mrs Prig, triumphantly. 'Yes. But you'll find yourself deceived. I won't go near him. We shall see how you get on without me. I won't have nothink to do with him.'

'You never spoke a truer word than that!' said Mrs Gamp. 'Go along with you!'

She was prevented from witnessing the actual retirement of Mrs Prig from the room, notwithstanding the great desire she had expressed to behold it, by that lady, in her angry withdrawal, coming into contact with the bedstead, and bringing down the previously mentioned pippins; three or four of which came rattling on the head of Mrs Gamp so smartly, that when she recovered from this wooden shower-bath, Mrs Prig was gone.

She had the satisfaction, however, of hearing the deep voice of Betsey, proclaiming her injuries and her determination to have nothing to do with Mr Chuffey, down the stairs, and along the passage, and even out in Kingsgate Street. Likewise of seeing in her own apartment, in the place of Mrs Prig, Mr Sweedlepipe and two gentlemen.

'Why, bless my life!' exclaimed the little barber, 'what's amiss? The noise you ladies have been making, Mrs Gamp! Why, these two gentlemen have been standing on the stairs, outside the door, nearly all the time, trying to make you hear, while you were pelting away, hammer and tongs! It'll be the death of the little bullfinch in the shop, that draws his own water. In his fright, he's been a-straining himself all to bits, drawing more water than he could drink in a twelvemonth. He must have thought it was Fire!'

Mrs Gamp had in the meanwhile sunk into her chair, from whence, turning up her overflowing eyes, and clasping her hands, she delivered the following lamentation:

'Oh, Mr Sweedlepipes, which Mr Westlock also, if my eyes do not deceive, and a friend not havin' the pleasure of bein' beknown, wot I have took from Betsey Prig this blessed night, no mortial creetur knows! If she had abuged me, bein' in liquor, which I thought I smelt her wen she come, but could not so believe, not bein' used myself'—Mrs Gamp, by the way, was pretty far gone, and the fragrance of the teapot was strong in the room—'I could have bore it with a thankful art. But the words she spoke of Mrs Harris, lambs could not forgive. No, Betsey!' said Mrs Gamp, in a violent burst of feeling, 'nor worms forget!'

The little barber scratched his head, and shook it, and looked at the teapot, and gradually got out of the room. John Westlock, taking a chair, sat down on one side of Mrs Gamp. Martin, taking the foot of the bed, supported her on the other.

'You wonder what we want, I daresay,' observed John. 'I'll tell you presently, when you have recovered. It's not pressing, for a few minutes or so. How do you find yourself? Better?'

Mrs Gamp shed more tears, shook her head and feebly pronounced Mrs Harris's name.

'Have a little—' John was at a loss what to call it.

'Tea,' suggested Martin.

'It ain't tea,' said Mrs Gamp.

'Physic of some sort, I suppose,' cried John. 'Have a little.'

Mrs Gamp was prevailed upon to take a glassful. 'On condition,' she passionately observed, 'as Betsey never has another stroke of work from me.'

'Certainly not,' said John. 'She shall never help to nurse ME.'

'To think,' said Mrs Gamp, 'as she should ever have helped to nuss that friend of yourn, and been so near of hearing things that—Ah!'

John looked at Martin.

'Yes,' he said. 'That was a narrow escape, Mrs Gamp.'

'Narrer, in-deed!' she returned. 'It was only my having the night, and hearin' of him in his wanderins; and her the day, that saved it. Wot would she have said and done, if she had know'd what I know; that perfeejus wretch! Yet, oh good gracious me!' cried Mrs Gamp, trampling on the floor, in the absence of Mrs Prig, 'that I should hear from that same woman's lips what I have heerd her speak of Mrs Harris!'

'Never mind,' said John. 'You know it is not true.'

'Isn't true!' cried Mrs Gamp. 'True! Don't I know as that dear woman is expecting of me at this minnit, Mr Westlock, and is a-lookin' out of window down the street, with little Tommy Harris in her arms, as calls me his own Gammy, and truly calls, for bless the mottled little legs of that there precious child (like Canterbury Brawn his own dear father says, which so they are) his own I have been, ever since I found him, Mr Westlock, with his small red worsted shoe a-gurglin' in his throat, where he had put it in his play, a chick, wile they was leavin' of him on the floor a-lookin' for it through the ouse and him a-choakin' sweetly in the parlour! Oh, Betsey Prig, what wickedness you've showed this night, but never shall you darken Sairey's doors agen, you twining serpiant!'

'You were always so kind to her, too!' said John, consolingly.

'That's the cutting part. That's where it hurts me, Mr Westlock,' Mrs Gamp replied; holding out her glass unconsciously, while Martin filled it.

'Chosen to help you with Mr Lewsome!' said John. 'Chosen to help you with Mr Chuffey!'

'Chose once, but chose no more,' cried Mrs Gamp. 'No pardnership with Betsey Prig agen, sir!'

'No, no,' said John. 'That would never do.'

'I don't know as it ever would have done, sir,' Mrs Gamp replied, with a solemnity peculiar to a certain stage of intoxication. 'Now that the marks,' by which Mrs Gamp is supposed to have meant mask, 'is off that creetur's face, I do not think it ever would have done. There are reagions in families for keeping things a secret, Mr Westlock, and havin' only them about you as you knows you can repoge in. Who could repoge in Betsey Prig, arter her words of Mrs Harris, setting in that chair afore my eyes!'

'Quite true,' said John; 'quite. I hope you have time to find another assistant, Mrs Gamp?'

Between her indignation and the teapot, her powers of comprehending what was said to her began to fail. She looked at John with tearful eyes, and murmuring the well-remembered name which Mrs Prig had challenged—as if it were a talisman against all earthly sorrows—seemed to wander in her mind.

'I hope,' repeated John, 'that you have time to find another assistant?'

'Which short it is, indeed,' cried Mrs Gamp, turning up her languid eyes, and clasping Mr Westlock's wrist with matronly affection. 'To-morrow evenin', sir, I waits upon his friends. Mr Chuzzlewit apinted it from nine to ten.'

'From nine to ten,' said John, with a significant glance at Martin. 'and then Mr Chuffey retires into safe keeping, does he?'

'He needs to be kep safe, I do assure you,' Mrs Gamp replied with a mysterious air. 'Other people besides me has had a happy deliverance from Betsey Prig. I little know'd that woman. She'd have let it out!'

'Let HIM out, you mean,' said John.

'Do I!' retorted Mrs Gamp. 'Oh!'

The severely ironical character of this reply was strengthened by a very slow nod, and a still slower drawing down of the corners of Mrs Gamp's mouth. She added with extreme stateliness of manner after indulging in a short doze:

'But I am a-keepin' of you gentlemen, and time is precious.'

Mingling with that delusion of the teapot which inspired her with the belief that they wanted her to go somewhere immediately, a shrewd avoidance of any further reference to the topics into which she had lately strayed, Mrs Gamp rose; and putting away the teapot in its accustomed place, and locking the cupboard with much gravity proceeded to attire herself for a professional visit.

This preparation was easily made, as it required nothing more than the snuffy black bonnet, the snuffy black shawl, the pattens and the indispensable umbrella, without which neither a lying-in nor a laying-out could by any possibility be attempted. When Mrs Gamp had invested herself with these appendages she returned to her chair, and sitting down again, declared herself quite ready.

'It's a 'appiness to know as one can benefit the poor sweet creetur,' she observed, 'I'm sure. It isn't all as can. The torters Betsey Prig inflicts is frightful!'

Closing her eyes as she made this remark, in the acuteness of her commiseration for Betsey's patients, she forgot to open them again until she dropped a patten. Her nap was also broken at intervals like the fabled slumbers of Friar Bacon, by the dropping of the other patten, and of the umbrella. But when she had got rid of those incumbrances, her sleep was peaceful.

The two young men looked at each other, ludicrously enough; and Martin, stifling his disposition to laugh, whispered in John Westlock's ear,

'What shall we do now?'

'Stay here,' he replied.

Mrs Gamp was heard to murmur 'Mrs Harris' in her sleep.

'Rely upon it,' whispered John, looking cautiously towards her, 'that you shall question this old clerk, though you go as Mrs Harris herself. We know quite enough to carry her our own way now, at all events; thanks to this quarrel, which confirms the old saying that when rogues fall out, honest people get what they want. Let Jonas Chuzzlewit look to himself; and let her sleep as long as she likes. We shall gain our end in good time.'

CHAPTER FIFTY

SURPRISES TOM PINCH VERY MUCH, AND SHOWS HOW CERTAIN CONFIDENCES PASSED BETWEEN HIM AND HIS SISTER

It was the next evening; and Tom and his sister were sitting together before tea, talking, in their usual quiet way, about a great many things, but not at all about Lewsome's story or anything connected with it; for John Westlock—really John, for so young a man, was one of the most considerate fellows in the world—had particularly advised Tom not to mention it to his sister just yet, in case it should disquiet her. 'And I wouldn't, Tom,' he said, with a little hesitation, 'I wouldn't have a shadow on her happy face, or an uneasy thought in her gentle heart, for all the wealth and honours of the universe!' Really John was uncommonly kind; extraordinarily kind. If he had been her father, Tom said, he could not have taken a greater interest in her.

But although Tom and his sister were extremely conversational, they were less lively, and less cheerful, than usual. Tom had no idea that this originated with Ruth, but took it for granted that he was rather dull himself. In truth he was; for the lightest cloud upon the Heaven of her quiet mind, cast its shadow upon Tom.

And there was a cloud on little Ruth that evening. Yes, indeed. When Tom was looking in another direction, her bright eyes, stealing on towards his face, would sparkle still more brightly than their custom was, and then grow dim. When Tom was silent, looking out upon the summer weather, she would sometimes make a hasty movement, as if she were about to throw herself upon his neck; then check the impulse, and when he looked round, show a laughing face, and speak to him very merrily; when she had anything to give Tom, or had any excuse for coming near him, she would flutter about him, and lay her bashful hand upon his shoulder, and not be willing to withdraw it; and would show by all such means that there was something on her heart which in her great love she longed to say to him, but had not the courage to utter.

So they were sitting, she with her work before her, but not working, and Tom with his book beside him, but not reading, when Martin knocked at the door. Anticipating who it was, Tom went to open it; and he and Martin came back into the room together. Tom looked surprised, for in answer to his cordial greeting Martin had hardly spoken a word.

Ruth also saw that there was something strange in the manner of their visitor, and raised her eyes inquiringly to Tom's face, as if she were seeking an explanation there. Tom shook his head, and made the same mute appeal to Martin.

Martin did not sit down but walked up to the window, and stood there looking out. He turned round after a few moments to speak, but hastily averted his head again, without doing so.

'What has happened, Martin?' Tom anxiously inquired. 'My dear fellow, what bad news do you bring?'

'Oh, Tom!' replied Martin, in a tone of deep reproach. 'To hear you feign that interest in anything that happens to me, hurts me even more than your ungenerous dealing.'

'My ungenerous dealing! Martin! My—' Tom could say no more.

'How could you, Tom, how could you suffer me to thank you so fervently and sincerely for your friendship; and not tell me, like a man, that you had deserted me! Was it true, Tom! Was it honest! Was it worthy of what you used to be—of what I am sure you used to be—to tempt me, when you had turned against me, into pouring out my heart! Oh, Tom!'

His tone was one of such strong injury and yet of so much grief for the loss of a friend he had trusted in—it expressed such high past love for Tom, and so much sorrow and compassion for his supposed unworthiness—that Tom, for a moment, put his hand before his face, and had no more power of justifying himself, than if he had been a monster of deceit and falsehood.

'I protest, as I must die,' said Martin, 'that I grieve over the loss of what I thought you; and have no anger in the recollection of my own injuries. It is only at such a time, and after such a discovery, that we know the full measure of our old regard for the subject of it. I swear, little as I showed it—little as I know I showed it—that when I had the least consideration for you, Tom, I loved you like a brother.'

Tom was composed by this time, and might have been the Spirit of Truth, in a homely dress—it very often wears a homely dress, thank God!—when he replied to him.

'Martin,' he said, 'I don't know what is in your mind, or who has abused it, or by what extraordinary means. But the means are false. There is no truth whatever in the impression under which you labour. It is a delusion from first to last; and I warn you that you will deeply regret the wrong you do me. I can honestly say that I have been true to you, and to myself. You will be very sorry for this. Indeed, you will be very sorry for it, Martin.'

'I AM sorry,' returned Martin, shaking his head. 'I think I never knew what it was to be sorry in my heart, until now.'

'At least,' said Tom, 'if I had always been what you charge me with being now, and had never had a place in your regard, but had always been despised by you, and had always deserved it, you should tell me in what you have found me to be treacherous; and on what grounds you proceed. I do not intreat you, therefore, to give me that satisfaction as a favour, Martin, but I ask it of you as a right.'

'My own eyes are my witnesses,' returned Martin. 'Am I to believe them?'

'No,' said Tom, calmly. 'Not if they accuse me.'

'Your own words. Your own manner,' pursued Martin. 'Am I to believe THEM?'

'No,' replied Tom, calmly. 'Not if they accuse me. But they never have accused me. Whoever has perverted them to such a purpose, has wronged me almost as cruelly'—his calmness rather failed him here—'as you have done.'

'I came here,' said Martin; 'and I appeal to your good sister to hear me—'

'Not to her,' interrupted Tom. 'Pray, do not appeal to her. She will never believe you.'

He drew her arm through his own, as he said it.

'I believe it, Tom!'

'No, no,' cried Tom, 'of course not. I said so. Why, tut, tut, tut. What a silly little thing you are!'

'I never meant,' said Martin, hastily, 'to appeal to you against your brother. Do not think me so unmanly and unkind. I merely appealed to you to hear my declaration, that I came here for no purpose of reproach—I have not one reproach to vent—but in deep regret. You could not know in what bitterness of regret, unless you knew how often I have thought of Tom; how long in almost hopeless circumstances, I have looked forward to the better estimation of his friendship; and how steadfastly I have believed and trusted in him.'

'Tut, tut,' said Tom, stopping her as she was about to speak. 'He is mistaken. He is deceived. Why should you mind? He is sure to be set right at last.'

'Heaven bless the day that sets me right!' cried Martin, 'if it could ever come!'

'Amen!' said Tom. 'And it will!'

Martin paused, and then said in a still milder voice:

'You have chosen for yourself, Tom, and will be relieved by our parting. It is not an angry one. There is no anger on my side—'

'There is none on mine,' said Tom.

'—It is merely what you have brought about, and worked to bring about. I say again, you have chosen for yourself. You have made the choice that might have been expected in most people situated as you are, but which I did not expect in you. For that, perhaps, I should blame my own judgment more than you. There is wealth and favour worth having, on one side; and there is the worthless friendship of an abandoned, struggling fellow, on the other. You were free to make your election, and you made it; and the choice was not difficult. But those who have not the courage to resist such temptations, should have the courage to avow what they have yielded to them; and I DO blame you for this, Tom: that you received me with a show of warmth, encouraged me to be frank and plain-spoken, tempted me to confide in you, and professed that you were able to be mine; when you had sold yourself to others. I do not believe,' said Martin, with emotion—'hear me say it from my heart—I CANNOT believe, Tom, now that I am standing face to face with you, that it would have been in your nature to do me any serious harm, even though I had not discovered, by chance, in whose employment you were. But I should have encumbered you; I should have led you into more double-dealing; I should have hazarded your retaining the favour for which you have paid so high a price, bartering away your former self; and it is best for both of us that I have found out what you so much desired to keep secret.'

'Be just,' said Tom; who, had not removed his mild gaze from Martin's face since the commencement of this last address; 'be just even in your injustice, Martin. You forget. You have not yet told me what your accusation is!'

'Why should I?' returned Martin, waving his hand, and moving towards the door. 'You could not know it the better for my dwelling on it, and though it would be really none the worse, it might seem to me to be. No, Tom. Bygones shall be bygones between us. I can take leave of you at this moment, and in this place—in which you are so amiable and so good—as heartily, if not as cheerfully, as ever I have done since we first met. All good go with you, Tom!—I—'

'You leave me so? You can leave me so, can you?' said Tom.

'I—you—you have chosen for yourself, Tom! I—I hope it was a rash choice,' Martin faltered. 'I think it was. I am sure it was! Good-bye!'

And he was gone.

Tom led his little sister to her chair, and sat down in his own. He took his book, and read, or seemed to read. Presently he said aloud, turning a leaf as he spoke: 'He will be very sorry for this.' And a tear stole down his face, and dropped upon the page.

Ruth nestled down beside him on her knees, and clasped her arms about his neck.

'No, Tom! No, no! Be comforted! Dear Tom!'

'I am quite—comforted,' said Tom. 'It will be set right.'

'Such a cruel, bad return!' cried Ruth.

'No, no,' said Tom. 'He believes it. I cannot imagine why. But it will be set right.'

More closely yet, she nestled down about him; and wept as if her heart would break.

'Don't. Don't,' said Tom. 'Why do you hide your face, my dear!'

Then in a burst of tears, it all broke out at last.

'Oh Tom, dear Tom, I know your secret heart. I have found it out; you couldn't hide the truth from me. Why didn't you tell me? I am sure I could have made you happier, if you had! You love her, Tom, so dearly!'

Tom made a motion with his hand as if he would have put his sister hurriedly away; but it clasped upon hers, and all his little history was written in the action. All its pathetic eloquence was in the silent touch.

'In spite of that,' said Ruth, 'you have been so faithful and so good, dear; in spite of that, you have been so true and self-denying, and have struggled with yourself; in spite of that, you have been so gentle, and so kind, and even-tempered, that I have never seen you give a hasty look, or heard you say one irritable word. In spite of all, you have been so cruelly mistaken. Oh Tom, dear Tom, will THIS be set right too! Will it, Tom? Will you always have this sorrow in your breast; you who deserve to be so happy; or is there any hope?'

And still she hid her face from Tom, and clasped him round the neck, and wept for him, and poured out all her woman's heart and soul in the relief and pain of this disclosure.

It was not very long before she and Tom were sitting side by side, and she was looking with an earnest quietness in Tom's face. Then Tom spoke to her thus, cheerily, though gravely:

'I am very glad, my dear, that this has passed between us. Not because it assures me of your tender affection (for I was well assured of that before), but because it relieves my mind of a great weight.'

Tom's eyes glistened when he spoke of her affection; and he kissed her on the cheek.

'My dear girl,' said Tom; 'with whatever feeling I regard her'—they seemed to avoid the name by mutual consent—'I have long ago—I am sure I may say from the very first—looked upon it as a dream. As something that might possibly have happened under very different circumstances, but which can never be. Now, tell me. What would you have set right?'

She gave Tom such a significant little look, that he was obliged to take it for an answer whether he would or no; and to go on.

'By her own choice and free consent, my love, she is betrothed to Martin; and was, long before either of them knew of my existence. You would have her betrothed to me?'

'Yes,' she said directly.

'Yes,' rejoined Tom, 'but that might be setting it wrong, instead of right. Do you think,' said Tom, with a grave smile, 'that even if she had never seen him, it is very likely she would have fallen in love with Me?'

'Why not, dear Tom?'

Tom shook his head, and smiled again.

'You think of me, Ruth,' said Tom, 'and it is very natural that you should, as if I were a character in a book; and you make it a sort of poetical justice that I should, by some impossible means or other, come, at last, to marry the person I love. But there is a much higher justice than poetical justice, my dear, and it does not order events upon the same principle. Accordingly, people who read about heroes in books, and choose to make heroes of themselves out of books, consider it a very fine thing to be discontented and gloomy, and misanthropical, and perhaps a little blasphemous, because they cannot have everything ordered for their individual accommodation. Would you like me to become one of that sort of people?'

'No, Tom. But still I know,' she added timidly, 'that this is a sorrow to you in your own better way.'

Tom thought of disputing the position. But it would have been mere folly, and he gave it up.

'My dear,' said Tom, 'I will repay your affection with the Truth and all the Truth. It is a sorrow to me. I have proved it to be so sometimes, though I have always striven against it. But somebody who is precious to you may die, and you may dream that you are in heaven with the departed spirit, and you may find it a sorrow to wake to the life on earth, which is no harder to be borne than when you fell asleep. It is sorrowful to me to contemplate my dream which I always knew was a dream, even when it first presented itself; but the realities about me are not to blame. They are the same as they were. My sister, my sweet companion, who makes this place so dear, is she less devoted to me, Ruth, than she would have been, if this vision had never troubled me? My old friend John, who might so easily have treated me with coldness and neglect, is he less cordial to me? The world about me, is there less good in that? Are my words to be harsh and my looks to be sour, and is my heart to grow cold, because there has fallen in my way a good and beautiful creature, who but for the selfish regret that I cannot call her my own, would, like all other good and beautiful creatures, make me happier and better! No, my dear sister. No,' said Tom stoutly. 'Remembering all my means of happiness, I hardly dare to call this lurking something a sorrow; but whatever name it may justly bear, I thank Heaven that it renders me more sensible of affection and attachment, and softens me in fifty ways. Not less happy. Not less happy, Ruth!'

She could not speak to him, but she loved him, as he well deserved. Even as he deserved, she loved him.

'She will open Martin's eyes,' said Tom, with a glow of pride, 'and that (which is indeed wrong) will be set right. Nothing will persuade her, I know, that I have betrayed him. It will be set right through her, and he will be very sorry for it. Our secret, Ruth, is our own, and lives and dies with us. I don't believe I ever could have told it you,' said Tom, with a smile, 'but how glad I am to think you have found it out!'

They had never taken such a pleasant walk as they took that night. Tom told her all so freely and so simply, and was so desirous to return her tenderness with his fullest confidence, that they prolonged it far beyond their usual hour, and sat up late when they came home. And when they parted for the night there was such a tranquil, beautiful expression in Tom's face, that she could not bear to shut it out, but going back on tiptoe to his chamber-door, looked in and stood there till he saw her, and then embracing him again, withdrew. And in her prayers and in her sleep—good times to be remembered with such fervour, Tom!—his name was uppermost.

When he was left alone, Tom pondered very much on this discovery of hers, and greatly wondered what had led her to it. 'Because,' thought Tom, 'I have been so very careful. It was foolish and unnecessary in me, as I clearly see now, when I am so relieved by her knowing it; but I have been so very careful to conceal it from her. Of course I knew that she was intelligent and quick, and for that reason was more upon my guard; but I was not in the least prepared for this. I am sure her discovery has been sudden too. Dear me!' said Tom. 'It's a most singular instance of penetration!'

Tom could not get it out of his head. There it was, when his head was on his pillow.

'How she trembled when she began to tell me she knew it!' thought Tom, recalling all the little incidents and circumstances; 'and how her face flushed! But that was natural! Oh, quite natural! That needs no accounting for.'

Tom little thought how natural it was. Tom little knew that there was that in Ruth's own heart, but newly set there, which had helped her to the reading of his mystery. Ah, Tom! He didn't understand the whispers of the Temple Fountain, though he passed it every day.

Who so lively and cheerful as busy Ruth next morning! Her early tap at Tom's door, and her light foot outside, would have been music to him though she had not spoken. But she said it was the brightest morning ever seen; and so it was; and if it had been otherwise, she would have made it so to Tom.

She was ready with his neat breakfast when he went downstairs, and had her bonnet ready for the early walk, and was so full of news, that Tom was lost in wonder. She might have been up all night, collecting it for his entertainment. There was Mr Nadgett not come home yet, and there was bread down a penny a loaf, and there was twice as much strength in this tea as in the last, and the milk-woman's husband had come out of the hospital cured, and the curly-headed child over the way had been lost all yesterday, and she was going to make all sorts of preserves in a desperate hurry, and there happened to be a saucepan in the house which was the very saucepan for the purpose; and she knew all about the last book Tom had brought home, all through, though it was a teaser to read; and she had so much to tell him that she had finished breakfast first. Then she had her little bonnet on, and the tea and sugar locked up, and the keys in her reticule, and the flower, as usual, in Tom's coat, and was in all respects quite ready to accompany him, before Tom knew she had begun to prepare. And in short, as Tom said, with a confidence in his own assertion which amounted to a defiance of the public in general, there never was such a little woman.

She made Tom talkative. It was impossible to resist her. She put such enticing questions to him; about books, and about dates of churches, and about organs and about the Temple, and about all kinds of things. Indeed, she lightened the way (and Tom's heart with it) to that degree, that the Temple looked quite blank and solitary when he parted from her at the gate.

'No Mr Fips's friend to-day, I suppose,' thought Tom, as he ascended the stairs.

Not yet, at any rate, for the door was closed as usual, and Tom opened it with his key. He had got the books into perfect order now, and had mended the torn leaves, and had pasted up the broken backs, and substituted neat labels for the worn-out letterings. It looked a different place, it was so orderly and neat. Tom felt some pride in comtemplating the change he had wrought, though there was no one to approve or disapprove of it.

He was at present occupied in making a fair copy of his draught of the catalogue; on which, as there was no hurry, he was painfully concentrating all the ingenious and laborious neatness he had ever expended on map or plan in Mr Pecksniff's workroom. It was a very marvel of a catalogue; for Tom sometimes thought he was really getting his money too easily, and he had determined within himself that this document should take a little of his superfluous leisure out of him.

So with pens and ruler, and compasses and india-rubber, and pencil, and black ink, and red ink, Tom worked away all the morning. He thought a good deal about Martin, and their interview of yesterday, and would have been far easier in his mind if he could have resolved to confide it to his friend John, and to have taken his opinion on the subject. But besides that he knew what John's boiling indignation would be, he bethought himself that he was helping Martin now in a matter of great moment, and that to deprive the latter of his assistance at such a crisis of affairs, would be to inflict a serious injury upon him.

'So I'll keep it to myself,' said Tom, with a sigh. 'I'll keep it to myself.'

And to work he went again, more assiduously than ever, with the pens, and the ruler, and the india-rubber, and the pencils, and the red ink, that he might forget it.

He had laboured away another hour or more, when he heard a footstep in the entry, down below.

'Ah!' said Tom, looking towards the door; 'time was, not long ago either, when that would have set me wondering and expecting. But I have left off now.'

The footstep came on, up the stairs.

'Thirty-six, thirty-seven, thirty-eight,' said Tom, counting. 'Now you'll stop. Nobody ever comes past the thirty-eighth stair.'

The person did, certainly, but only to take breath; for up the footstep came again. Forty, forty-one, forty-two, and so on.

The door stood open. As the tread advanced, Tom looked impatiently and eagerly towards it. When a figure came upon the landing, and arriving in the doorway, stopped and gazed at him, he rose up from his chair, and half believed he saw a spirit.

Old Martin Chuzzlewit! The same whom he had left at Mr Pecksniff's, weak and sinking!

The same? No, not the same, for this old man, though old, was strong, and leaned upon his stick with a vigorous hand, while with the other he signed to Tom to make no noise. One glance at the resolute face, the watchful eye, the vigorous hand upon the staff, the triumphant purpose in the figure, and such a light broke in on Tom as blinded him.

'You have expected me,' said Martin, 'a long time.'

'I was told that my employer would arrive soon,' said Tom; 'but—'

'I know. You were ignorant who he was. It was my desire. I am glad it has been so well observed. I intended to have been with you much sooner. I thought the time had come. I thought I could know no more, and no worse, of him, than I did on that day when I saw you last. But I was wrong.'

He had by this time come up to Tom, and now he grasped his hand.

'I have lived in his house, Pinch, and had him fawning on me days and weeks and months. You know it. I have suffered him to treat me like his tool and instrument. You know it; you have seen me there. I have undergone ten thousand times as much as I could have endured if I had been the miserable weak old man he took me for. You know it. I have seen him offer love to Mary. You know it; who better—who better, my true heart! I have had his base soul bare before me, day by day, and have not betrayed myself once. I never could have undergone such torture but for looking forward to this time.'

He stopped, even in the passion of his speech—if that can be called passion which was so resolute and steady—to press Tom's hand again. Then he said, in great excitement:

'Close the door, close the door. He will not be long after me, but may come too soon. The time now drawing on,' said the old man, hurriedly—his eyes and whole face brightening as he spoke—'will make amends for all. I wouldn't have him die or hang himself, for millions of golden pieces! Close the door!'

Tom did so; hardly knowing yet whether he was awake or in a dream.

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

SHEDS NEW AND BRIGHTER LIGHT UPON THE VERY DARK PLACE; AND CONTAINS THE SEQUEL OF THE ENTERPRISE OF MR JONAS AND HIS FRIEND

The night had now come, when the old clerk was to be delivered over to his keepers. In the midst of his guilty distractions, Jonas had not forgotten it.

It was a part of his guilty state of mind to remember it; for on his persistence in the scheme depended one of his precautions for his own safety. A hint, a word, from the old man, uttered at such a moment in attentive ears, might fire the train of suspicion, and destroy him. His watchfulness of every avenue by which the discovery of his guilt might be approached, sharpened with his sense of the danger by which he was encompassed. With murder on his soul, and its innumerable alarms and terrors dragging at him night and day, he would have repeated the crime, if he had seen a path of safety stretching out beyond. It was in his punishment; it was in his guilty condition. The very deed which his fears rendered insupportable, his fears would have impelled him to commit again.

But keeping the old man close, according to his design, would serve his turn. His purpose was to escape, when the first alarm and wonder had subsided; and when he could make the attempt without awakening instant suspicion. In the meanwhile these women would keep him quiet; and if the talking humour came upon him, would not be easily startled. He knew their trade.

Nor had he spoken idly when he said the old man should be gagged. He had resolved to ensure his silence; and he looked to the end, not the means. He had been rough and rude and cruel to the old man all his life; and violence was natural to his mind in connection with him. 'He shall be gagged if he speaks, and pinioned if he writes,' said Jonas, looking at him; for they sat alone together. 'He is mad enough for that; I'll go through with it!'

Hush!

Still listening! To every sound. He had listened ever since, and it had not come yet. The exposure of the Assurance office; the flight of Crimple and Bullamy with the plunder, and among the rest, as he feared, with his own bill, which he had not found in the pocket-book of the murdered man, and which with Mr Pecksniff's money had probably been remitted to one or other of those trusty friends for safe deposit at the banker's; his immense losses, and peril of being still called to account as a partner in the broken firm; all these things rose in his mind at one time and always, but he could not contemplate them. He was aware of their presence, and of the rage, discomfiture, and despair, they brought along with them; but he thought—of his own controlling power and direction he thought—of the one dread question only. When they would find the body in the wood.

He tried—he had never left off trying—not to forget it was there, for that was impossible, but to forget to weary himself by drawing vivid pictures of it in his fancy; by going softly about it and about it among the leaves, approaching it nearer and nearer through a gap in the boughs, and startling the very flies that were thickly sprinkled all over it, like heaps of dried currants. His mind was fixed and fastened on the discovery, for intelligence of which he listened intently to every cry and shout; listened when any one came in or went out; watched from the window the people who passed up and down the street; mistrusted his own looks and words. And the more his thoughts were set upon the discovery, the stronger was the fascination which attracted them to the thing itself; lying alone in the wood. He was for ever showing and presenting it, as it were, to every creature whom he saw. 'Look here! Do you know of this? Is it found? Do you suspect ME?' If he had been condemned to bear the body in his arms, and lay it down for recognition at the feet of every one he met, it could not have been more constantly with him, or a cause of more monotonous and dismal occupation than it was in this state of his mind.

Still he was not sorry. It was no contrition or remorse for what he had done that moved him; it was nothing but alarm for his own security. The vague consciousness he possessed of having wrecked his fortune in the murderous venture, intensified his hatred and revenge, and made him set the greater store by what he had gained The man was dead; nothing could undo that. He felt a triumph yet, in the reflection.

He had kept a jealous watch on Chuffey ever since the deed; seldom leaving him but on compulsion, and then for as short intervals as possible. They were alone together now. It was twilight, and the appointed time drew near at hand. Jonas walked up and down the room. The old man sat in his accustomed corner.

The slightest circumstance was matter of disquiet to the murderer, and he was made uneasy at this time by the absence of his wife, who had left home early in the afternoon, and had not returned yet. No tenderness for her was at the bottom of this; but he had a misgiving that she might have been waylaid, and tempted into saying something that would criminate him when the news came. For anything he knew, she might have knocked at the door of his room, while he was away, and discovered his plot. Confound her, it was like her pale face to be wandering up and down the house! Where was she now?

'She went to her good friend, Mrs Todgers,' said the old man, when he asked the question with an angry oath.

Aye! To be sure! Always stealing away into the company of that woman. She was no friend of his. Who could tell what devil's mischief they might hatch together! Let her be fetched home directly.

The old man, muttering some words softly, rose as if he would have gone himself, but Jonas thrust him back into his chair with an impatient imprecation, and sent a servant-girl to fetch her. When he had charged her with her errand he walked to and fro again, and never stopped till she came back, which she did pretty soon; the way being short, and the woman having made good haste.

Well! Where was she? Had she come?

No. She had left there, full three hours.

'Left there! Alone?'

The messenger had not asked; taking that for granted.

'Curse you for a fool. Bring candles!'

She had scarcely left the room when the old clerk, who had been unusually observant of him ever since he had asked about his wife, came suddenly upon him.

'Give her up!' cried the old man. 'Come! Give her up to me! Tell me what you have done with her. Quick! I have made no promises on that score. Tell me what you have done with her.'

He laid his hands upon his collar as he spoke, and grasped it; tightly too.

'You shall not leave me!' cried the old man. 'I am strong enough to cry out to the neighbours, and I will, unless you give her up. Give her up to me!'

Jonas was so dismayed and conscience-stricken, that he had not even hardihood enough to unclench the old man's hands with his own; but stood looking at him as well as he could in the darkness, without moving a finger. It was as much as he could do to ask him what he meant.

'I will know what you have done with her!' retorted Chuffey. 'If you hurt a hair of her head, you shall answer it. Poor thing! Poor thing! Where is she?'

'Why, you old madman!' said Jonas, in a low voice, and with trembling lips. 'What Bedlam fit has come upon you now?'

'It is enough to make me mad, seeing what I have seen in this house!' cried Chuffey. 'Where is my dear old master! Where is his only son that I have nursed upon my knee, a child! Where is she, she who was the last; she that I've seen pining day by day, and heard weeping in the dead of night! She was the last, the last of all my friends! Heaven help me, she was the very last!'

Seeing that the tears were stealing down his face, Jonas mustered courage to unclench his hands, and push him off before he answered:

'Did you hear me ask for her? Did you hear me send for her? How can I give you up what I haven't got, idiot! Ecod, I'd give her up to you and welcome, if I could; and a precious pair you'd be!'

'If she has come to any harm,' cried Chuffey, 'mind! I'm old and silly; but I have my memory sometimes; and if she has come to any harm—'

'Devil take you,' interrupted Jonas, but in a suppressed voice still; 'what harm do you suppose she has come to? I know no more where she is than you do; I wish I did. Wait till she comes home, and see; she can't be long. Will that content you?'

'Mind!' exclaimed the old man. 'Not a hair of her head! not a hair of her head ill-used! I won't bear it. I—I—have borne it too long Jonas. I am silent, but I—I—I can speak. I—I—I can speak—' he stammered, as he crept back to his chair, and turned a threatening, though a feeble, look upon him.

'You can speak, can you!' thought Jonas. 'So, so, we'll stop your speaking. It's well I knew of this in good time. Prevention is better than cure.'

He had made a poor show of playing the bully and evincing a desire to conciliate at the same time, but was so afraid of the old man that great drops had started out upon his brow; and they stood there yet. His unusual tone of voice and agitated manner had sufficiently expressed his fear; but his face would have done so now, without that aid, as he again walked to and fro, glancing at him by the candelight.

He stopped at the window to think. An opposite shop was lighted up; and the tradesman and a customer were reading some printed bill together across the counter. The sight brought him back, instantly, to the occupation he had forgotten. 'Look here! Do you know of this? Is it found? Do you suspect ME?'

A hand upon the door. 'What's that!'

'A pleasant evenin',' said the voice of Mrs Gamp, 'though warm, which, bless you, Mr Chuzzlewit, we must expect when cowcumbers is three for twopence. How does Mr Chuffey find his self to-night, sir?'

Mrs Gamp kept particularly close to the door in saying this, and curtseyed more than usual. She did not appear to be quite so much at her ease as she generally was.

'Get him to his room,' said Jonas, walking up to her, and speaking in her ear. 'He has been raving to-night—stark mad. Don't talk while he's here, but come down again.'

'Poor sweet dear!' cried Mrs Gamp, with uncommon tenderness. 'He's all of a tremble.'

'Well he may be,' said Jonas, 'after the mad fit he has had. Get him upstairs.'

She was by this time assisting him to rise.

'There's my blessed old chick!' cried Mrs Gamp, in a tone that was at once soothing and encouraging. 'There's my darlin' Mr Chuffey! Now come up to your own room, sir, and lay down on your bed a bit; for you're a-shakin' all over, as if your precious jints was hung upon wires. That's a good creetur! Come with Sairey!'

'Is she come home?' inquired the old man.

'She'll be here directly minit,' returned Mrs Gamp. 'Come with Sairey, Mr Chuffey. Come with your own Sairey!'

The good woman had no reference to any female in the world in promising this speedy advent of the person for whom Mr Chuffey inquired, but merely threw it out as a means of pacifying the old man. It had its effect, for he permitted her to lead him away; and they quitted the room together.

Jonas looked out of the window again. They were still reading the printed paper in the shop opposite, and a third man had joined in the perusal. What could it be, to interest them so?'

A dispute or discussion seemed to arise among them, for they all looked up from their reading together, and one of the three, who had been glancing over the shoulder of another, stepped back to explain or illustrate some action by his gestures.

Horror! How like the blow he had struck in the wood!

It beat him from the window as if it had lighted on himself. As he staggered into a chair, he thought of the change in Mrs Gamp exhibited in her new-born tenderness to her charge. Was that because it was found?—because she knew of it?—because she suspected him?

'Mr Chuffey is a-lyin' down,' said Mrs Gamp, returning, 'and much good may it do him, Mr Chuzzlewit, which harm it can't and good it may; be joyful!'

'Sit down,' said Jonas, hoarsely, 'and let us get this business done. Where is the other woman?'

'The other person's with him now,' she answered.

'That's right,' said Jonas. 'He is not fit to be left to himself. Why, he fastened on me to-night; here, upon my coat; like a savage dog. Old as he is, and feeble as he is usually, I had some trouble to shake him off. You—Hush!—It's nothing. You told me the other woman's name. I forget it.'

'I mentioned Betsey Prig,' said Mrs Gamp.

'She is to be trusted, is she?'

'That she ain't!' said Mrs Gamp; 'nor have I brought her, Mr Chuzzlewit. I've brought another, which engages to give every satigefaction.'

'What is her name?' asked Jonas.

Mrs Gamp looked at him in an odd way without returning any answer, but appeared to understand the question too.

'What is her name?' repeated Jonas.

'Her name,' said Mrs Gamp, 'is Harris.'

It was extraordinary how much effort it cost Mrs Gamp to pronounce the name she was commonly so ready with. She made some three or four gasps before she could get it out; and, when she had uttered it, pressed her hand upon her side, and turned up her eyes, as if she were going to faint away. But, knowing her to labour under a complication of internal disorders, which rendered a few drops of spirits indispensable at certain times to her existence, and which came on very strong when that remedy was not at hand, Jonas merely supposed her to be the victim of one of these attacks.

'Well!' he said, hastily, for he felt how incapable he was of confining his wandering attention to the subject. 'You and she have arranged to take care of him, have you?'

Mrs Gamp replied in the affirmative, and softly discharged herself of her familiar phrase, 'Turn and turn about; one off, one on.' But she spoke so tremulously that she felt called upon to add, 'which fiddle-strings is weakness to expredge my nerves this night!'

Jonas stopped to listen. Then said, hurriedly:

'We shall not quarrel about terms. Let them be the same as they were before. Keep him close, and keep him quiet. He must be restrained. He has got it in his head to-night that my wife's dead, and has been attacking me as if I had killed her. It's—it's common with mad people to take the worst fancies of those they like best. Isn't it?'

Mrs Gamp assented with a short groan.

'Keep him close, then, or in one of his fits he'll be doing me a mischief. And don't trust him at any time; for when he seems most rational, he's wildest in his talk. But that you know already. Let me see the other.'

'The t'other person, sir?' said Mrs Gamp.

'Aye! Go you to him and send the other. Quick! I'm busy.'

Mrs Gamp took two or three backward steps towards the door, and stopped there.

'It is your wishes, Mr Chuzzlewit,' she said, in a sort of quavering croak, 'to see the t'other person. Is it?'

But the ghastly change in Jonas told her that the other person was already seen. Before she could look round towards the door, she was put aside by old Martin's hand; and Chuffey and John Westlock entered with him.

'Let no one leave the house,' said Martin. 'This man is my brother's son. Ill-met, ill-trained, ill-begotten. If he moves from the spot on which he stands, or speaks a word above his breath to any person here, open the window, and call for help!'

'What right have you to give such directions in this house?' asked Jonas faintly.

'The right of your wrong-doing. Come in there!'

An irrepressible exclamation burst from the lips of Jonas, as Lewsome entered at the door. It was not a groan, or a shriek, or a word, but was wholly unlike any sound that had ever fallen on the ears of those who heard it, while at the same time it was the most sharp and terrible expression of what was working in his guilty breast, that nature could have invented.

He had done murder for this! He had girdled himself about with perils, agonies of mind, innumerable fears, for this! He had hidden his secret in the wood; pressed and stamped it down into the bloody ground; and here it started up when least expected, miles upon miles away; known to many; proclaiming itself from the lips of an old man who had renewed his strength and vigour as by a miracle, to give it voice against him!

He leaned his hand on the back of a chair, and looked at them. It was in vain to try to do so scornfully, or with his usual insolence. He required the chair for his support. But he made a struggle for it.

'I know that fellow,' he said, fetching his breath at every word, and pointing his trembling finger towards Lewsome. 'He's the greatest liar alive. What's his last tale? Ha, ha! You're rare fellows, too! Why, that uncle of mine is childish; he's even a greater child than his brother, my father, was, in his old age; or than Chuffey is. What the devil do you mean,' he added, looking fiercely at John Westlock and Mark Tapley (the latter had entered with Lewsome), 'by coming here, and bringing two idiots and a knave with you to take my house by storm? Hallo, there! Open the door! Turn these strangers out!'

'I tell you what,' cried Mr Tapley, coming forward, 'if it wasn't for your name, I'd drag you through the streets of my own accord, and single-handed I would! Ah, I would! Don't try and look bold at me. You can't do it! Now go on, sir,' this was to old Martin. 'Bring the murderin' wagabond upon his knees! If he wants noise, he shall have enough of it; for as sure as he's a shiverin' from head to foot I'll raise a uproar at this winder that shall bring half London in. Go on, sir! Let him try me once, and see whether I'm a man of my word or not.'

With that, Mark folded his arms, and took his seat upon the window-ledge, with an air of general preparation for anything, which seemed to imply that he was equally ready to jump out himself, or to throw Jonas out, upon receiving the slightest hint that it would be agreeable to the company.

Old Martin turned to Lewsome:

'This is the man,' he said, extending his hand towards Jonas. 'Is it?'

'You need do no more than look at him to be sure of that, or of the truth of what I have said,' was the reply. 'He is my witness.'

'Oh, brother!' cried old Martin, clasping his hands and lifting up his eyes. 'Oh, brother, brother! Were we strangers half our lives that you might breed a wretch like this, and I make life a desert by withering every flower that grew about me! Is it the natural end of your precepts and mine, that this should be the creature of your rearing, training, teaching, hoarding, striving for; and I the means of bringing him to punishment, when nothing can repair the wasted past!'

He sat down upon a chair as he spoke, and turning away his face, was silent for a few moments. Then with recovered energy he proceeded:

'But the accursed harvest of our mistaken lives shall be trodden down. It is not too late for that. You are confronted with this man, you monster there; not to be spared, but to be dealt with justly. Hear what he says! Reply, be silent, contradict, repeat, defy, do what you please. My course will be the same. Go on! And you,' he said to Chuffey, 'for the love of your old friend, speak out, good fellow!'

'I have been silent for his love!' cried the old man. 'He urged me to it. He made me promise it upon his dying bed. I never would have spoken, but for your finding out so much. I have thought about it ever since; I couldn't help that; and sometimes I have had it all before me in a dream; but in the day-time, not in sleep. Is there such a kind of dream?' said Chuffey, looking anxiously in old Martin's face.

As Martin made him an encouraging reply, he listened attentively to his voice, and smiled.

'Ah, aye!' he cried. 'He often spoke to me like that. We were at school together, he and I. I couldn't turn against his son, you know—his only son, Mr Chuzzlewit!'

'I would to Heaven you had been his son!' said Martin.

'You speak so like my dear old master,' cried the old man with a childish delight, 'that I almost think I hear him. I can hear you quite as well as I used to hear him. It makes me young again. He never spoke unkindly to me, and I always understood him. I could always see him too, though my sight was dim. Well, well! He's dead, he's dead. He was very good to me, my dear old master!'

He shook his head mournfully over the brother's hand. At this moment Mark, who had been glancing out of the window, left the room.

'I couldn't turn against his only son, you know,' said Chuffey. 'He has nearly driven me to do it sometimes; he very nearly did tonight. Ah!' cried the old man, with a sudden recollection of the cause. 'Where is she? She's not come home!'

'Do you mean his wife?' said Mr Chuzzlewit.

'Yes.'

'I have removed her. She is in my care, and will be spared the present knowledge of what is passing here. She has known misery enough, without that addition.'

Jonas heard this with a sinking heart. He knew that they were on his heels, and felt that they were resolute to run him to destruction. Inch by inch the ground beneath him was sliding from his feet; faster and faster the encircling ruin contracted and contracted towards himself, its wicked centre, until it should close in and crush him.

And now he heard the voice of his accomplice stating to his face, with every circumstance of time and place and incident; and openly proclaiming, with no reserve, suppression, passion, or concealment; all the truth. The truth, which nothing would keep down; which blood would not smother, and earth would not hide; the truth, whose terrible inspiration seemed to change dotards into strong men; and on whose avenging wings, one whom he had supposed to be at the extremest corner of the earth came swooping down upon him.

He tried to deny it, but his tongue would not move. He conceived some desperate thought of rushing away, and tearing through the streets; but his limbs would as little answer to his will as his stark, stiff staring face. All this time the voice went slowly on, denouncing him. It was as if every drop of blood in the wood had found a voice to jeer him with.

When it ceased, another voice took up the tale, but strangely; for the old clerk, who had watched, and listened to the whole, and had wrung his hands from time to time, as if he knew its truth and could confirm it, broke in with these words:

'No, no, no! you're wrong; you're wrong—all wrong together! Have patience, for the truth is only known to me!'

'How can that be,' said his old master's brother, 'after what you have heard? Besides, you said just now, above-stairs, when I told you of the accusation against him, that you knew he was his father's murderer.'

'Aye, yes! and so he was!' cried Chuffey, wildly. 'But not as you suppose—not as you suppose. Stay! Give me a moment's time. I have it all here—all here! It was foul, foul, cruel, bad; but not as you suppose. Stay, stay!'

He put his hands up to his head, as if it throbbed or pained him. After looking about him in a wandering and vacant manner for some moments, his eyes rested upon Jonas, when they kindled up with sudden recollection and intelligence.

'Yes!' cried old Chuffey, 'yes! That's how it was. It's all upon me now. He—he got up from his bed before he died, to be sure, to say that he forgave him; and he came down with me into this room; and when he saw him—his only son, the son he loved—his speech forsook him; he had no speech for what he knew—and no one understood him except me. But I did—I did!'

Old Martin regarded him in amazement; so did his companions. Mrs Gamp, who had said nothing yet; but had kept two-thirds of herself behind the door, ready for escape, and one-third in the room, ready for siding with the strongest party; came a little further in and remarked, with a sob, that Mr Chuffey was 'the sweetest old creetur goin'.'

'He bought the stuff,' said Chuffey, stretching out his arm towards Jonas while an unwonted fire shone in his eye, and lightened up his face; 'he bought the stuff, no doubt, as you have heard, and brought it home. He mixed the stuff—look at him!—with some sweetmeat in a jar, exactly as the medicine for his father's cough was mixed, and put it in a drawer; in that drawer yonder in the desk; he knows which drawer I mean! He kept it there locked up. But his courage failed him or his heart was touched—my God! I hope it was his heart! He was his only son!—and he did not put it in the usual place, where my old master would have taken it twenty times a day.'

The trembling figure of the old man shook with the strong emotions that possessed him. But, with the same light in his eye, and with his arm outstretched, and with his grey hair stirring on his head, he seemed to grow in size, and was like a man inspired. Jonas shrunk from looking at him, and cowered down into the chair by which he had held. It seemed as if this tremendous Truth could make the dumb speak.

'I know it every word now!' cried Chuffey. 'Every word! He put it in that drawer, as I have said. He went so often there, and was so secret, that his father took notice of it; and when he was out, had it opened. We were there together, and we found the mixture—Mr Chuzzlewit and I. He took it into his possession, and made light of it at the time; but in the night he came to my bedside, weeping, and told me that his own son had it in his mind to poison him. "Oh, Chuff," he said, "oh, dear old Chuff! a voice came into my room to-night, and told me that this crime began with me. It began when I taught him to be too covetous of what I have to leave, and made the expectation of it his great business!" Those were his words; aye, they are his very words! If he was a hard man now and then, it was for his only son. He loved his only son, and he was always good to me!'

Jonas listened with increased attention. Hope was breaking in upon him.

'"He shall not weary for my death, Chuff;" that was what he said next,' pursued the old clerk, as he wiped his eyes; 'that was what he said next, crying like a little child: "He shall not weary for my death, Chuff. He shall have it now; he shall marry where he has a fancy, Chuff, although it don't please me; and you and I will go away and live upon a little. I always loved him; perhaps he'll love me then. It's a dreadful thing to have my own child thirsting for my death. But I might have known it. I have sown, and I must reap. He shall believe that I am taking this; and when I see that he is sorry, and has all he wants, I'll tell him that I found it out, and I'll forgive him. He'll make a better man of his own son, and be a better man himself, perhaps, Chuff!"'

Poor Chuffey paused to dry his eyes again. Old Martin's face was hidden in his hands. Jonas listened still more keenly, and his breast heaved like a swollen water, but with hope. With growing hope.

'My dear old master made believe next day,' said Chuffey, 'that he had opened the drawer by mistake with a key from the bunch, which happened to fit it (we had one made and hung upon it); and that he had been surprised to find his fresh supply of cough medicine in such a place, but supposed it had been put there in a hurry when the drawer stood open. We burnt it; but his son believed that he was taking it—he knows he did. Once Mr Chuzzlewit, to try him, took heart to say it had a strange taste; and he got up directly, and went out.'

Jonas gave a short, dry cough; and, changing his position for an easier one, folded his arms without looking at them, though they could now see his face.

'Mr Chuzzlewit wrote to her father; I mean the father of the poor thing who's his wife,' said Chuffey; 'and got him to come up, intending to hasten on the marriage. But his mind, like mine, went a little wrong through grief, and then his heart broke. He sank and altered from the time when he came to me in the night; and never held up his head again. It was only a few days, but he had never changed so much in twice the years. "Spare him, Chuff!" he said, before he died. They were the only words he could speak. "Spare him, Chuff!" I promised him I would. I've tried to do it. He's his only son.'

On his recollection of the last scene in his old friend's life, poor Chuffey's voice, which had grown weaker and weaker, quite deserted him. Making a motion with his hand, as if he would have said that Anthony had taken it, and had died with it in his, he retreated to the corner where he usually concealed his sorrows; and was silent.

Jonas could look at his company now, and vauntingly too. 'Well!' he said, after a pause. 'Are you satisfied? or have you any more of your plots to broach? Why that fellow, Lewsome, can invent 'em for you by the score. Is this all? Have you nothing else?'

Old Martin looked at him steadily.

'Whether you are what you seemed to be at Pecksniff's, or are something else and a mountebank, I don't know and I don't care,' said Jonas, looking downward with a smile, 'but I don't want you here. You were here so often when your brother was alive, and were always so fond of him (your dear, dear brother, and you would have been cuffing one another before this, ecod!), that I am not surprised at your being attached to the place; but the place is not attached to you, and you can't leave it too soon, though you may leave it too late. And for my wife, old man, send her home straight, or it will be the worse for her. Ha, ha! You carry it with a high hand, too! But it isn't hanging yet for a man to keep a penn'orth of poison for his own purposes, and have it taken from him by two old crazy jolter-heads who go and act a play about it. Ha, ha! Do you see the door?'

His base triumph, struggling with his cowardice, and shame, and guilt, was so detestable, that they turned away from him, as if he were some obscene and filthy animal, repugnant to the sight. And here that last black crime was busy with him too; working within him to his perdition. But for that, the old clerk's story might have touched him, though never so lightly; but for that, the sudden removal of so great a load might have brought about some wholesome change even in him. With that deed done, however; with that unnecessary wasteful danger haunting him; despair was in his very triumph and relief; wild, ungovernable, raging despair, for the uselessness of the peril into which he had plunged; despair that hardened him and maddened him, and set his teeth a-grinding in a moment of his exultation.

'My good friend!' said old Martin, laying his hand on Chuffey's sleeve. 'This is no place for you to remain in. Come with me.'

'Just his old way!' cried Chuffey, looking up into his face. 'I almost believe it's Mr Chuzzlewit alive again. Yes! Take me with you! Stay, though, stay.'

'For what?' asked old Martin.

'I can't leave her, poor thing!' said Chuffey. 'She has been very good to me. I can't leave her, Mr Chuzzlewit. Thank you kindly. I'll remain here. I haven't long to remain; it's no great matter.'

As he meekly shook his poor, grey head, and thanked old Martin in these words, Mrs Gamp, now entirely in the room, was affected to tears.

'The mercy as it is!' she said, 'as sech a dear, good, reverend creetur never got into the clutches of Betsey Prig, which but for me he would have done, undoubted; facts bein' stubborn and not easy drove!'

'You heard me speak to you just now, old man,' said Jonas to his uncle. 'I'll have no more tampering with my people, man or woman. Do you see the door?'

'Do YOU see the door?' returned the voice of Mark, coming from that direction. 'Look at it!'

He looked, and his gaze was nailed there. Fatal, ill-omened blighted threshold, cursed by his father's footsteps in his dying hour, cursed by his young wife's sorrowing tread, cursed by the daily shadow of the old clerk's figure, cursed by the crossing of his murderer's feet—what men were standing in the door way!

Nadgett foremost.

Hark! It came on, roaring like a sea! Hawkers burst into the street, crying it up and down; windows were thrown open that the inhabitants might hear it; people stopped to listen in the road and on the pavement; the bells, the same bells, began to ring; tumbling over one another in a dance of boisterous joy at the discovery (that was the sound they had in his distempered thoughts), and making their airy play-ground rock.

'That is the man,' said Nadgett. 'By the window!'

Three others came in, laid hands upon him, and secured him. It was so quickly done, that he had not lost sight of the informer's face for an instant when his wrists were manacled together.

'Murder,' said Nadgett, looking round on the astonished group. 'Let no one interfere.'

The sounding street repeated Murder; barbarous and dreadful Murder. Murder, Murder, Murder. Rolling on from house to house, and echoing from stone to stone, until the voices died away into the distant hum, which seemed to mutter the same word!

They all stood silent: listening, and gazing in each other's faces, as the noise passed on.

Old Martin was the first to speak. 'What terrible history is this?' he demanded.

'Ask HIM,' said Nadgett. 'You're his friend, sir. He can tell you, if he will. He knows more of it than I do, though I know much.'

'How do you know much?'

'I have not been watching him so long for nothing,' returned Nadgett. 'I never watched a man so close as I have watched him.'

Another of the phantom forms of this terrific Truth! Another of the many shapes in which it started up about him, out of vacancy. This man, of all men in the world, a spy upon him; this man, changing his identity; casting off his shrinking, purblind, unobservant character, and springing up into a watchful enemy! The dead man might have come out of his grave, and not confounded and appalled him more.

The game was up. The race was at an end; the rope was woven for his neck. If, by a miracle, he could escape from this strait, he had but to turn his face another way, no matter where, and there would rise some new avenger front to front with him; some infant in an hour grown old, or old man in an hour grown young, or blind man with his sight restored, or deaf man with his hearing given him. There was no chance. He sank down in a heap against the wall, and never hoped again from that moment.

'I am not his friend, although I have the honour to be his relative,' said Mr Chuzzlewit. 'You may speak to me. Where have you watched, and what have you seen?'

'I have watched in many places,' returned Nadgett, 'night and day. I have watched him lately, almost without rest or relief;' his anxious face and bloodshot eyes confirmed it. 'I little thought to what my watching was to lead. As little as he did when he slipped out in the night, dressed in those clothes which he afterwards sunk in a bundle at London Bridge!'

Jonas moved upon the ground like a man in bodily torture. He uttered a suppressed groan, as if he had been wounded by some cruel weapon; and plucked at the iron band upon his wrists, as though (his hands being free) he would have torn himself.

'Steady, kinsman!' said the chief officer of the party. 'Don't be violent.'

'Whom do you call kinsman?' asked old Martin sternly.

'You,' said the man, 'among others.'

Martin turned his scrutinizing gaze upon him. He was sitting lazily across a chair with his arms resting on the back; eating nuts, and throwing the shells out of window as he cracked them, which he still continued to do while speaking.

'Aye,' he said, with a sulky nod. 'You may deny your nephews till you die; but Chevy Slyme is Chevy Slyme still, all the world over. Perhaps even you may feel it some disgrace to your own blood to be employed in this way. I'm to be bought off.'

'At every turn!' cried Martin. 'Self, self, self. Every one among them for himself!'

'You had better save one or two among them the trouble then and be for them as well as YOURself,' replied his nephew. 'Look here at me! Can you see the man of your family who has more talent in his little finger than all the rest in their united brains, dressed as a police officer without being ashamed? I took up with this trade on purpose to shame you. I didn't think I should have to make a capture in the family, though.'

'If your debauchery, and that of your chosen friends, has really brought you to this level,' returned the old man, 'keep it. You are living honestly, I hope, and that's something.'

'Don't be hard upon my chosen friends,' returned Slyme, 'for they were sometimes your chosen friends too. Don't say you never employed my friend Tigg, for I know better. We quarrelled upon it.'

'I hired the fellow,' retorted Mr Chuzzlewit, 'and I paid him.'

'It's well you paid him,' said his nephew, 'for it would be too late to do so now. He has given his receipt in full; or had it forced from him rather.'

The old man looked at him as if he were curious to know what he meant, but scorned to prolong the conversation.

'I have always expected that he and I would be brought together again in the course of business,' said Slyme, taking a fresh handful of nuts from his pocket; 'but I thought he would be wanted for some swindling job; it never entered my head that I should hold a warrant for the apprehension of his murderer.'

'HIS murderer!' cried Mr Chuzzlewit, looking from one to another.

'His or Mr Montague's,' said Nadgett. 'They are the same, I am told. I accuse him yonder of the murder of Mr Montague, who was found last night, killed, in a wood. You will ask me why I accuse him as you have already asked me how I know so much. I'll tell you. It can't remain a secret long.'

The ruling passion of the man expressed itself even then, in the tone of regret in which he deplored the approaching publicity of what he knew.

'I told you I had watched him,' he proceeded. 'I was instructed to do so by Mr Montague, in whose employment I have been for some time. We had our suspicions of him; and you know what they pointed at, for you have been discussing it since we have been waiting here, outside the room. If you care to hear, now it's all over, in what our suspicions began, I'll tell you plainly: in a quarrel (it first came to our ears through a hint of his own) between him and another office in which his father's life was insured, and which had so much doubt and distrust upon the subject, that he compounded with them, and took half the money; and was glad to do it. Bit by bit, I ferreted out more circumstances against him, and not a few. It required a little patience, but it's my calling. I found the nurse—here she is to confirm me; I found the doctor, I found the undertaker, I found the undertaker's man. I found out how the old gentleman there, Mr Chuffey, had behaved at the funeral; and I found out what this man,' touching Lewsome on the arm, 'had talked about in his fever. I found out how he conducted himself before his father's death, and how since and how at the time; and writing it all down, and putting it carefully together, made case enough for Mr Montague to tax him with the crime, which (as he himself believed until to-night) he had committed. I was by when this was done. You see him now. He is only worse than he was then.'

Oh, miserable, miserable fool! oh, insupportable, excruciating torture! To find alive and active—a party to it all—the brain and right-hand of the secret he had thought to crush! In whom, though he had walled the murdered man up, by enchantment in a rock, the story would have lived and walked abroad! He tried to stop his ears with his fettered arms, that he might shut out the rest.

As he crouched upon the floor, they drew away from him as if a pestilence were in his breath. They fell off, one by one, from that part of the room, leaving him alone upon the ground. Even those who had him in their keeping shunned him, and (with the exception of Slyme, who was still occupied with his nuts) kept apart.

'From that garret-window opposite,' said Nadgett, pointing across the narrow street, 'I have watched this house and him for days and nights. From that garret-window opposite I saw him return home, alone, from a journey on which he had set out with Mr Montague. That was my token that Mr Montague's end was gained; and I might rest easy on my watch, though I was not to leave it until he dismissed me. But, standing at the door opposite, after dark that same night, I saw a countryman steal out of this house, by a side-door in the court, who had never entered it. I knew his walk, and that it was himself, disguised. I followed him immediately. I lost him on the western road, still travelling westward.'

Jonas looked up at him for an instant, and muttered an oath.

'I could not comprehend what this meant,' said Nadgett; 'but, having seen so much, I resolved to see it out, and through. And I did. Learning, on inquiry at his house from his wife, that he was supposed to be sleeping in the room from which I had seen him go out, and that he had given strict orders not to be disturbed, I knew that he was coming back; and for his coming back I watched. I kept my watch in the street—in doorways, and such places—all that night; at the same window, all next day; and when night came on again, in the street once more. For I knew he would come back, as he had gone out, when this part of the town was empty. He did. Early in the morning, the same countryman came creeping, creeping, creeping home.'

'Look sharp!' interposed Slyme, who had now finished his nuts. 'This is quite irregular, Mr Nadgett.'

'I kept at the window all day,' said Nadgett, without heeding him. 'I think I never closed my eyes. At night, I saw him come out with a bundle. I followed him again. He went down the steps at London Bridge, and sunk it in the river. I now began to entertain some serious fears, and made a communication to the Police, which caused that bundle to be—'

'To be fished up,' interrupted Slyme. 'Be alive, Mr Nadgett.'

'It contained the dress I had seen him wear,' said Nadgett; 'stained with clay, and spotted with blood. Information of the murder was received in town last night. The wearer of that dress is already known to have been seen near the place; to have been lurking in that neighbourhood; and to have alighted from a coach coming from that part of the country, at a time exactly tallying with the very minute when I saw him returning home. The warrant has been out, and these officers have been with me, some hours. We chose our time; and seeing you come in, and seeing this person at the window—'

'Beckoned to him,' said Mark, taking up the thread of the narrative, on hearing this allusion to himself, 'to open the door; which he did with a deal of pleasure.'

'That's all at present,' said Nadgett, putting up his great pocketbook, which from mere habit he had produced when he began his revelation, and had kept in his hand all the time; 'but there is plenty more to come. You asked me for the facts, so far I have related them, and need not detain these gentlemen any longer. Are you ready, Mr Slyme?'

'And something more,' replied that worthy, rising. 'If you walk round to the office, we shall be there as soon as you. Tom! Get a coach!'

The officer to whom he spoke departed for that purpose. Old Martin lingered for a few moments, as if he would have addressed some words to Jonas; but looking round, and seeing him still seated on the floor, rocking himself in a savage manner to and fro, took Chuffey's arm, and slowly followed Nadgett out. John Westlock and Mark Tapley accompanied them. Mrs Gamp had tottered out first, for the better display of her feelings, in a kind of walking swoon; for Mrs Gamp performed swoons of different sorts, upon a moderate notice, as Mr Mould did Funerals.

'Ha!' muttered Slyme, looking after them. 'Upon my soul! As insensible of being disgraced by having such a nephew as myself, in such a situation, as he was of my being an honour and a credit to the family! That's the return I get for having humbled my spirit—such a spirit as mine—to earn a livelihood, is it?'

He got up from his chair, and kicked it away indignantly.

'And such a livelihood too! When there are hundreds of men, not fit to hold a candle to me, rolling in carriages and living on their fortunes. Upon my soul it's a nice world!'

His eyes encountered Jonas, who looked earnestly towards him, and moved his lips as if he were whispering.

'Eh?' said Slyme.

Jonas glanced at the attendant whose back was towards him, and made a clumsy motion with his bound hands towards the door.

'Humph!' said Slyme, thoughtfully. 'I couldn't hope to disgrace him into anything when you have shot so far ahead of me though. I forgot that.'

Jonas repeated the same look and gesture.

'Jack!' said Slyme.

'Hallo!' returned his man.

'Go down to the door, ready for the coach. Call out when it comes. I'd rather have you there. Now then,' he added, turning hastily to Jonas, when the man was gone. 'What's the matter?'

Jonas essayed to rise.

'Stop a bit,' said Slyme. 'It's not so easy when your wrists are tight together. Now then! Up! What is it?'

'Put your hand in my pocket. Here! The breast pocket, on the left!' said Jonas.

He did so; and drew out a purse.

'There's a hundred pound in it,' said Jonas, whose words were almost unintelligible; as his face, in its pallor and agony, was scarcely human.

Slyme looked at him; gave it into his hands; and shook his head.

'I can't. I daren't. I couldn't if I dared. Those fellows below—'

'Escape's impossible,' said Jonas. 'I know it. One hundred pound for only five minutes in the next room!'

'What to do?' he asked.

The face of his prisoner as he advanced to whisper in his ear, made him recoil involuntarily. But he stopped and listened to him. The words were few, but his own face changed as he heard them.

'I have it about me,' said Jonas, putting his hands to his throat, as though whatever he referred to were hidden in his neckerchief. 'How should you know of it? How could you know? A hundred pound for only five minutes in the next room! The time's passing. Speak!'

'It would be more—more creditable to the family,' observed Slyme, with trembling lips. 'I wish you hadn't told me half so much. Less would have served your purpose. You might have kept it to yourself.'

'A hundred pound for only five minutes in the next room! Speak!' cried Jonas, desperately.

He took the purse. Jonas, with a wild unsteady step, retreated to the door in the glass partition.

'Stop!' cried Slyme, catching at his skirts. 'I don't know about this. Yet it must end so at last. Are you guilty?'

'Yes!' said Jonas.

'Are the proofs as they were told just now?'

'Yes!' said Jonas.

'Will you—will you engage to say a—a Prayer, now, or something of that sort?' faltered Slyme.

Jonas broke from him without replying, and closed the door between them.

Slyme listened at the keyhole. After that, he crept away on tiptoe, as far off as he could; and looked awfully towards the place. He was roused by the arrival of the coach, and their letting down the steps.

'He's getting a few things together,' he said, leaning out of window, and speaking to the two men below, who stood in the full light of a street-lamp. 'Keep your eye upon the back, one of you, for form's sake.'

One of the men withdrew into the court. The other, seating himself self on the steps of the coach, remained in conversation with Slyme at the window who perhaps had risen to be his superior, in virtue of his old propensity (one so much lauded by the murdered man) of being always round the corner. A useful habit in his present calling.

'Where is he?' asked the man.

Slyme looked into the room for an instant and gave his head a jerk as much as to say, 'Close at hand. I see him.'

'He's booked,' observed the man.

'Through,' said Slyme.

They looked at each other, and up and down the street. The man on the coach-steps took his hat off, and put it on again, and whistled a little.

'I say! He's taking his time!' he remonstrated.

'I allowed him five minutes,' said Slyme. 'Time's more than up, though. I'll bring him down.'

He withdrew from the window accordingly, and walked on tiptoe to the door in the partition. He listened. There was not a sound within. He set the candles near it, that they might shine through the glass.

It was not easy, he found, to make up his mind to the opening of the door. But he flung it wide open suddenly, and with a noise; then retreated. After peeping in and listening again, he entered.

He started back as his eyes met those of Jonas, standing in an angle of the wall, and staring at him. His neckerchief was off; his face was ashy pale.

'You're too soon,' said Jonas, with an abject whimper. 'I've not had time. I have not been able to do it. I—five minutes more—two minutes more!—only one!'

Slyme gave him no reply, but thrusting the purse upon him and forcing it back into his pocket, called up his men.

He whined, and cried, and cursed, and entreated them, and struggled, and submitted, in the same breath, and had no power to stand. They got him away and into the coach, where they put him on a seat; but he soon fell moaning down among the straw at the bottom, and lay there.

The two men were with him. Slyme being on the box with the driver; and they let him lie. Happening to pass a fruiterer's on their way; the door of which was open, though the shop was by this time shut; one of them remarked how faint the peaches smelled.

The other assented at the moment, but presently stooped down in quick alarm, and looked at the prisoner.

'Stop the coach! He has poisoned himself! The smell comes from this bottle in his hand!'

The hand had shut upon it tight. With that rigidity of grasp with which no living man, in the full strength and energy of life, can clutch a prize he has won.

They dragged him out into the dark street; but jury, judge, and hangman, could have done no more, and could do nothing now. Dead, dead, dead.

CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

IN WHICH THE TABLES ARE TURNED, COMPLETELY UPSIDE DOWN

Old Martin's cherished projects, so long hidden in his own breast, so frequently in danger of abrupt disclosure through the bursting forth of the indignation he had hoarded up during his residence with Mr Pecksniff, were retarded, but not beyond a few hours, by the occurrences just now related. Stunned, as he had been at first by the intelligence conveyed to him through Tom Pinch and John Westlock, of the supposed manner of his brother's death; overwhelmed as he was by the subsequent narratives of Chuffey and Nadgett, and the forging of that chain of circumstances ending in the death of Jonas, of which catastrophe he was immediately informed; scattered as his purposes and hopes were for the moment, by the crowding in of all these incidents between him and his end; still their very intensity and the tumult of their assemblage nerved him to the rapid and unyielding execution of his scheme. In every single circumstance, whether it were cruel, cowardly, or false, he saw the flowering of the same pregnant seed. Self; grasping, eager, narrow-ranging, overreaching self; with its long train of suspicions, lusts, deceits, and all their growing consequences; was the root of the vile tree. Mr Pecksniff had so presented his character before the old man's eyes, that he—the good, the tolerant, enduring Pecksniff—had become the incarnation of all selfishness and treachery; and the more odious the shapes in which those vices ranged themselves before him now, the sterner consolation he had in his design of setting Mr Pecksniff right and Mr Pecksniff's victims too.

To this work he brought, not only the energy and determination natural to his character (which, as the reader may have observed in the beginning of his or her acquaintance with this gentleman, was remarkable for the strong development of those qualities), but all the forced and unnaturally nurtured energy consequent upon their long suppression. And these two tides of resolution setting into one and sweeping on, became so strong and vigorous, that, to prevent themselves from being carried away before it, Heaven knows where, was as much as John Westlock and Mark Tapley together (though they were tolerably energetic too) could manage to effect.

He had sent for John Westlock immediately on his arrival; and John, under the conduct of Tom Pinch, had waited on him. Having a lively recollection of Mr Tapley, he had caused that gentleman's attendance to be secured, through John's means, without delay; and thus, as we have seen, they had all repaired together to the City. But his grandson he had refused to see until to-morrow, when Mr Tapley was instructed to summon him to the Temple at ten o'clock in the forenoon. Tom he would not allow to be employed in anything, lest he should be wrongfully suspected; but he was a party to all their proceedings, and was with them until late at night—until after they knew of the death of Jonas; when he went home to tell all these wonders to little Ruth, and to prepare her for accompanying him to the Temple in the morning, agreeably to Mr Chuzzlewit's particular injunction.

It was characteristic of old Martin, and his looking on to something which he had distinctly before him, that he communicated to them nothing of his intentions, beyond such hints of reprisal on Mr Pecksniff as they gathered from the game he had played in that gentleman's house, and the brightening of his eyes whenever his name was mentioned. Even to John Westlock, in whom he was evidently disposed to place great confidence (which may indeed be said of every one of them), he gave no explanation whatever. He merely requested him to return in the morning; and with this for their utmost satisfaction, they left him, when the night was far advanced, alone.

The events of such a day might have worn out the body and spirit of a much younger man than he, but he sat in deep and painful meditation until the morning was bright. Nor did he even then seek any prolonged repose, but merely slumbered in his chair, until seven o'clock, when Mr Tapley had appointed to come to him by his desire; and came—as fresh and clean and cheerful as the morning itself.

'You are punctual,' said Mr Chuzzlewit, opening the door to him in reply to his light knock, which had roused him instantly.

'My wishes, sir,' replied Mr Tapley, whose mind would appear from the context to have been running on the matrimonial service, 'is to love, honour, and obey. The clock's a-striking now, sir.'

'Come in!'

'Thank'ee, sir,' rejoined Mr Tapley, 'what could I do for you first, sir?'

'You gave my message to Martin?' said the old man, bending his eyes upon him.

'I did, sir,' returned Mark; 'and you never see a gentleman more surprised in all your born days than he was.'

'What more did you tell him?' Mr Chuzzlewit inquired.

'Why, sir,' said Mr Tapley, smiling, 'I should have liked to tell him a deal more, but not being able, sir, I didn't tell it him.'

'You told him all you knew?'

'But it was precious little, sir,' retorted Mr Tapley. 'There was very little respectin' you that I was able to tell him, sir. I only mentioned my opinion that Mr Pecksniff would find himself deceived, sir, and that you would find yourself deceived, and that he would find himself deceived, sir.'

'In what?' asked Mr Chuzzlewit.

'Meaning him, sir?'

'Meaning both him and me.'

'Well, sir,' said Mr Tapley. 'In your old opinions of each other. As to him, sir, and his opinions, I know he's a altered man. I know it. I know'd it long afore he spoke to you t'other day, and I must say it. Nobody don't know half as much of him as I do. Nobody can't. There was always a deal of good in him, but a little of it got crusted over, somehow. I can't say who rolled the paste of that 'ere crust myself, but—'

'Go on,' said Martin. 'Why do you stop?'

'But it—well! I beg your pardon, but I think it may have been you, sir. Unintentional I think it may have been you. I don't believe that neither of you gave the other quite a fair chance. There! Now I've got rid on it,' said Mr Tapley in a fit of desperation: 'I can't go a-carryin' it about in my own mind, bustin' myself with it; yesterday was quite long enough. It's out now. I can't help it. I'm sorry for it. Don't wisit on him, sir, that's all.'

It was clear that Mark expected to be ordered out immediately, and was quite prepared to go.

'So you think,' said Martin, 'that his old faults are, in some degree, of my creation, do you?'

'Well, sir,' retorted Mr Tapley, 'I'm werry sorry, but I can't unsay it. It's hardly fair of you, sir, to make a ignorant man conwict himself in this way, but I DO think so. I am as respectful disposed to you, sir, as a man can be; but I DO think so.'

The light of a faint smile seemed to break through the dull steadiness of Martin's face, as he looked attentively at him, without replying.

'Yet you are an ignorant man, you say,' he observed after a long pause.

'Werry much so,' Mr Tapley replied.

'And I a learned, well-instructed man, you think?'

'Likewise wery much so,' Mr Tapley answered.

The old man, with his chin resting on his hand, paced the room twice or thrice before he added:

'You have left him this morning?'

'Come straight from him now, sir.'

'For what does he suppose?'

'He don't know what to suppose, sir, no more than myself. I told him jest wot passed yesterday, sir, and that you had said to me, "Can you be here by seven in the morning?" and that you had said to him, through me, "Can you be here by ten in the morning?" and that I had said "Yes" to both. That's all, sir.'

His frankness was so genuine that it plainly WAS all.

'Perhaps,' said Martin, 'he may think you are going to desert him, and to serve me?'

'I have served him in that sort of way, sir,' replied Mark, without the loss of any atom of his self-possession; 'and we have been that sort of companions in misfortune, that my opinion is, he don't believe a word on it. No more than you do, sir.'

'Will you help me to dress, and get me some breakfast from the hotel?' asked Martin.

'With pleasure, sir,' said Mark.

'And by-and-bye,' said Martin, 'remaining in the room, as I wish you to do, will you attend to the door yonder—give admission to visitors, I mean, when they knock?'

'Certainly, sir,' said Mr Tapley.

'You will not find it necessary to express surprise at their appearance,' Martin suggested.

'Oh dear no, sir!' said Mr Tapley, 'not at all.'

Although he pledged himself to this with perfect confidence, he was in a state of unbounded astonishment even now. Martin appeared to observe it, and to have some sense of the ludicrous bearing of Mr Tapley under these perplexing circumstances; for, in spite of the composure of his voice and the gravity of his face, the same indistinct light flickered on the latter several times. Mark bestirred himself, however, to execute the offices with which he was entrusted; and soon lost all tendency to any outward expression of his surprise, in the occupation of being brisk and busy.

But when he had put Mr Chuzzlewit's clothes in good order for dressing, and when that gentleman was dressed and sitting at his breakfast, Mr Tapley's feelings of wonder began to return upon him with great violence; and, standing beside the old man with a napkin under his arm (it was as natural and easy to joke to Mark to be a butler in the Temple, as it had been to volunteer as cook on board the Screw), he found it difficult to resist the temptation of casting sidelong glances at him very often. Nay, he found it impossible; and accordingly yielded to this impulse so often, that Martin caught him in the fact some fifty times. The extraordinary things Mr Tapley did with his own face when any of these detections occurred; the sudden occasions he had to rub his eyes or his nose or his chin; the look of wisdom with which he immediately plunged into the deepest thought, or became intensely interested in the habits and customs of the flies upon the ceiling, or the sparrows out of doors; or the overwhelming politeness with which he endeavoured to hide his confusion by handing the muffin; may not unreasonably be assumed to have exercised the utmost power of feature that even Martin Chuzzlewit the elder possessed.

But he sat perfectly quiet and took his breakfast at his leisure, or made a show of doing so, for he scarcely ate or drank, and frequently lapsed into long intervals of musing. When he had finished, Mark sat down to his breakfast at the same table; and Mr Chuzzlewit, quite silent still, walked up and down the room.

Mark cleared away in due course, and set a chair out for him, in which, as the time drew on towards ten o'clock, he took his seat, leaning his hands upon his stick, and clenching them upon the handle, and resting his chin on them again. All his impatience and abstraction of manner had vanished now; and as he sat there, looking, with his keen eyes, steadily towards the door, Mark could not help thinking what a firm, square, powerful face it was; or exulting in the thought that Mr Pecksniff, after playing a pretty long game of bowls with its owner, seemed to be at last in a very fair way of coming in for a rubber or two.

Mark's uncertainty in respect of what was going to be done or said, and by whom to whom, would have excited him in itself. But knowing for a certainty besides, that young Martin was coming, and in a very few minutes must arrive, he found it by no means easy to remain quiet and silent. But, excepting that he occasionally coughed in a hollow and unnatural manner to relieve himself, he behaved with great decorum through the longest ten minutes he had ever known.

A knock at the door. Mr Westlock. Mr Tapley, in admitting him, raised his eyebrows to the highest possible pitch, implying thereby that he considered himself in an unsatisfactory position. Mr Chuzzlewit received him very courteously.

Mark waited at the door for Tom Pinch and his sister, who were coming up the stairs. The old man went to meet them; took their hands in his; and kissed her on the cheek. As this looked promising, Mr Tapley smiled benignantly.

Mr Chuzzlewit had resumed his chair before young Martin, who was close behind them, entered. The old man, scarcely looking at him, pointed to a distant seat. This was less encouraging; and Mr Tapley's spirits fell again.

He was quickly summoned to the door by another knock. He did not start, or cry, or tumble down, at sight of Miss Graham and Mrs Lupin, but he drew a very long breath, and came back perfectly resigned, looking on them and on the rest with an expression which seemed to say that nothing could surprise him any more; and that he was rather glad to have done with that sensation for ever.

The old man received Mary no less tenderly than he had received Tom Pinch's sister. A look of friendly recognition passed between himself and Mrs Lupin, which implied the existence of a perfect understanding between them. It engendered no astonishment in Mr Tapley; for, as he afterwards observed, he had retired from the business, and sold off the stock.

Not the least curious feature in this assemblage was, that everybody present was so much surprised and embarrassed by the sight of everybody else, that nobody ventured to speak. Mr Chuzzlewit alone broke silence.

'Set the door open, Mark!' he said; 'and come here.'

Mark obeyed.

The last appointed footstep sounded now upon the stairs. They all knew it. It was Mr Pecksniff's; and Mr Pecksniff was in a hurry too, for he came bounding up with such uncommon expedition that he stumbled twice or thrice.

'Where is my venerable friend?' he cried upon the upper landing; and then with open arms came darting in.

Old Martin merely looked at him; but Mr Pecksniff started back as if he had received the charge from an electric battery.

'My venerable friend is well?' cried Mr Pecksniff.

'Quite well.'

It seemed to reassure the anxious inquirer. He clasped his hands and, looking upwards with a pious joy, silently expressed his gratitude. He then looked round on the assembled group, and shook his head reproachfully. For such a man severely, quite severely.

'Oh, vermin!' said Mr Pecksniff. 'Oh, bloodsuckers! Is it not enough that you have embittered the existence of an individual wholly unparalleled in the biographical records of amiable persons, but must you now, even now, when he has made his election, and reposed his trust in a Numble, but at least sincere and disinterested relative; must you now, vermin and swarmers (I regret to make use of these strong expressions, my dear sir, but there are times when honest indignation will not be controlled), must you now, vermin and swarmers (for I WILL repeat it), take advantage of his unprotected state, assemble round him from all quarters, as wolves and vultures, and other animals of the feathered tribe assemble round—I will not say round carrion or a carcass, for Mr Chuzzlewit is quite the contrary—but round their prey; their prey; to rifle and despoil; gorging their voracious maws, and staining their offensive beaks, with every description of carnivorous enjoyment!'

As he stopped to fetch his breath, he waved them off, in a solemn manner, with his hand.

'Horde of unnatural plunderers and robbers!' he continued; 'leave him! leave him, I say! Begone! Abscond! You had better be off! Wander over the face of the earth, young sirs, like vagabonds as you are, and do not presume to remain in a spot which is hallowed by the grey hairs of the patriarchal gentleman to whose tottering limbs I have the honour to act as an unworthy, but I hope an unassuming, prop and staff. And you, my tender sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, addressing himself in a tone of gentle remonstrance to the old man, 'how could you ever leave me, though even for this short period! You have absented yourself, I do not doubt, upon some act of kindness to me; bless you for it; but you must not do it; you must not be so venturesome. I should really be angry with you if I could, my friend!'

He advanced with outstretched arms to take the old man's hand. But he had not seen how the hand clasped and clutched the stick within its grasp. As he came smiling on, and got within his reach, old Martin, with his burning indignation crowded into one vehement burst, and flashing out of every line and wrinkle in his face, rose up, and struck him down upon the ground.

With such a well-directed nervous blow, that down he went, as heavily and true as if the charge of a Life-Guardsman had tumbled him out of a saddle. And whether he was stunned by the shock, or only confused by the wonder and novelty of this warm reception, he did not offer to get up again; but lay there, looking about him with a disconcerted meekness in his face so enormously ridiculous, that neither Mark Tapley nor John Westlock could repress a smile, though both were actively interposing to prevent a repetition of the blow; which the old man's gleaming eyes and vigorous attitude seemed to render one of the most probable events in the world.

'Drag him away! Take him out of my reach!' said Martin; 'or I can't help it. The strong restraint I have put upon my hands has been enough to palsy them. I am not master of myself while he is within their range. Drag him away!'

Seeing that he still did not rise, Mr Tapley, without any compromise about it, actually did drag him away, and stick him up on the floor, with his back against the opposite wall.

'Hear me, rascal!' said Mr Chuzzlewit. 'I have summoned you here to witness your own work. I have summoned you here to witness it, because I know it will be gall and wormwood to you! I have summoned you here to witness it, because I know the sight of everybody here must be a dagger in your mean, false heart! What! do you know me as I am, at last!'

Mr Pecksniff had cause to stare at him, for the triumph in his face and speech and figure was a sight to stare at.

'Look there!' said the old man, pointing at him, and appealing to the rest. 'Look there! And then—come hither, my dear Martin—look here! here! here!' At every repetition of the word he pressed his grandson closer to his breast.

'The passion I felt, Martin, when I dared not do this,' he said, 'was in the blow I struck just now. Why did we ever part! How could we ever part! How could you ever fly from me to him!'

Martin was about to answer, but he stopped him, and went on.

'The fault was mine no less than yours. Mark has told me so today, and I have known it long; though not so long as I might have done. Mary, my love, come here.'

As she trembled and was very pale, he sat her in his own chair, and stood beside it with her hand in his; and Martin standing by him.

'The curse of our house,' said the old man, looking kindly down upon her, 'has been the love of self; has ever been the love of self. How often have I said so, when I never knew that I had wrought it upon others.'

He drew one hand through Martin's arm, and standing so, between them, proceeded thus:

'You all know how I bred this orphan up, to tend me. None of you can know by what degrees I have come to regard her as a daughter; for she has won upon me, by her self-forgetfulness, her tenderness, her patience, all the goodness of her nature, when Heaven is her witness that I took but little pains to draw it forth. It blossomed without cultivation, and it ripened without heat. I cannot find it in my heart to say that I am sorry for it now, or yonder fellow might be holding up his head.'

Mr Pecksniff put his hand into his waistcoat, and slightly shook that part of him to which allusion had been made; as if to signify that it was still uppermost.

'There is a kind of selfishness,' said Martin—'I have learned it in my own experience of my own breast—which is constantly upon the watch for selfishness in others; and holding others at a distance, by suspicions and distrusts, wonders why they don't approach, and don't confide, and calls that selfishness in them. Thus I once doubted those about me—not without reason in the beginning—and thus I once doubted you, Martin.'

'Not without reason,' Martin answered, 'either.'

'Listen, hypocrite! Listen, smooth-tongued, servile, crawling knave!' said Martin. 'Listen, you shallow dog. What! When I was seeking him, you had already spread your nets; you were already fishing for him, were ye? When I lay ill in this good woman's house and your meek spirit pleaded for my grandson, you had already caught him, had ye? Counting on the restoration of the love you knew I bore him, you designed him for one of your two daughters did ye? Or failing that, you traded in him as a speculation which at any rate should blind me with the lustre of your charity, and found a claim upon me! Why, even then I knew you, and I told you so. Did I tell you that I knew you, even then?'

'I am not angry, sir,' said Mr Pecksniff, softly. 'I can bear a great deal from you. I will never contradict you, Mr Chuzzlewit.'

'Observe!' said Martin, looking round. 'I put myself in that man's hands on terms as mean and base, and as degrading to himself, as I could render them in words. I stated them at length to him, before his own children, syllable by syllable, as coarsely as I could, and with as much offence, and with as plain an exposition of my contempt, as words—not looks and manner merely—could convey. If I had only called the angry blood into his face, I would have wavered in my purpose. If I had only stung him into being a man for a minute I would have abandoned it. If he had offered me one word of remonstrance, in favour of the grandson whom he supposed I had disinherited; if he had pleaded with me, though never so faintly, against my appeal to him to abandon him to misery and cast him from his house; I think I could have borne with him for ever afterwards. But not a word, not a word. Pandering to the worst of human passions was the office of his nature; and faithfully he did his work!'

'I am not angry,' observed Mr Pecksniff. 'I am hurt, Mr Chuzzlewit; wounded in my feelings; but I am not angry, my good sir.'

Mr Chuzzlewit resumed.

'Once resolved to try him, I was resolute to pursue the trial to the end; but while I was bent on fathoming the depth of his duplicity, I made a sacred compact with myself that I would give him credit on the other side for any latent spark of goodness, honour, forbearance—any virtue—that might glimmer in him. For first to last there has been no such thing. Not once. He cannot say I have not given him opportunity. He cannot say I have ever led him on. He cannot say I have not left him freely to himself in all things; or that I have not been a passive instrument in his hands, which he might have used for good as easily as evil. Or if he can, he Lies! And that's his nature, too.'

'Mr Chuzzlewit,' interrupted Pecksniff, shedding tears. 'I am not angry, sir. I cannot be angry with you. But did you never, my dear sir, express a desire that the unnatural young man who by his wicked arts has estranged your good opinion from me, for the time being; only for the time being; that your grandson, Mr Chuzzlewit, should be dismissed my house? Recollect yourself, my Christian friend.'

'I have said so, have I not?' retorted the old man, sternly. 'I could not tell how far your specious hypocrisy had deceived him, knave; and knew no better way of opening his eyes than by presenting you before him in your own servile character. Yes. I did express that desire. And you leaped to meet it; and you met it; and turning in an instant on the hand you had licked and beslavered, as only such hounds can, you strengthened, and confirmed, and justified me in my scheme.'

Mr Pecksniff made a bow; a submissive, not to say a grovelling and an abject bow. If he had been complimented on his practice of the loftiest virtues, he never could have bowed as he bowed then.

'The wretched man who has been murdered,' Mr Chuzzlewit went on to say; 'then passing by the name of—'

'Tigg,' suggested Mark.

'Of Tigg; brought begging messages to me on behalf of a friend of his, and an unworthy relative of mine; and finding him a man well enough suited to my purpose, I employed him to glean some news of you, Martin, for me. It was from him I learned that you had taken up your abode with yonder fellow. It was he, who meeting you here in town, one evening—you remember where?'

'At the pawnbroker's shop,' said Martin.

'Yes; watched you to your lodging, and enabled me to send you a bank-note.'

'I little thought,' said Martin, greatly moved, 'that it had come from you; I little thought that you were interested in my fate. If I had—'

'If you had,' returned the old man, sorrowfully, 'you would have shown less knowledge of me as I seemed to be, and as I really was. I hoped to bring you back, Martin, penitent and humbled. I hoped to distress you into coming back to me. Much as I loved you, I had that to acknowledge which I could not reconcile it to myself to avow, then, unless you made submission to me first. Thus it was I lost you. If I have had, indirectly, any act or part in the fate of that unhappy man, by putting means, however small, within his reach, Heaven forgive me! I might have known, perhaps, that he would misuse money; that it was ill-bestowed upon him; and that sown by his hands it could engender mischief only. But I never thought of him at that time as having the disposition or ability to be a serious impostor, or otherwise than as a thoughtless, idle-humoured, dissipated spendthrift, sinning more against himself than others, and frequenting low haunts and indulging vicious tastes, to his own ruin only.'

'Beggin' your pardon, sir,' said Mr Tapley, who had Mrs Lupin on his arm by this time, quite agreeably; 'if I may make so bold as say so, my opinion is, as you was quite correct, and that he turned out perfectly nat'ral for all that. There's surprisin' number of men sir, who as long as they've only got their own shoes and stockings to depend upon, will walk down hill, along the gutters quiet enough and by themselves, and not do much harm. But set any on 'em up with a coach and horses, sir; and it's wonderful what a knowledge of drivin' he'll show, and how he'll fill his wehicle with passengers, and start off in the middle of the road, neck or nothing, to the Devil! Bless your heart, sir, there's ever so many Tiggs a-passin' this here Temple-gate any hour in the day, that only want a chance to turn out full-blown Montagues every one!'

'Your ignorance, as you call it, Mark,' said Mr Chuzzlewit, 'is wiser than some men's enlightenment, and mine among them. You are right; not for the first time to-day. Now hear me out, my dears. And hear me, you, who, if what I have been told be accurately stated, are Bankrupt in pocket no less than in good name! And when you have heard me, leave this place, and poison my sight no more!'

Mr Pecksniff laid his hand upon his breast, and bowed again.

'The penance I have done in this house,' said Mr Chuzzlewit, 'has earned this reflection with it constantly, above all others. That if it had pleased Heaven to visit such infirmity on my old age as really had reduced me to the state in which I feigned to be, I should have brought its misery upon myself. Oh, you whose wealth, like mine, has been a source of continual unhappiness, leading you to distrust the nearest and dearest, and to dig yourself a living grave of suspicion and reserve; take heed that, having cast off all whom you might have bound to you, and tenderly, you do not become in your decay the instrument of such a man as this, and waken in another world to the knowledge of such wrong as would embitter Heaven itself, if wrong or you could ever reach it!'

And then he told them how he had sometimes thought, in the beginning, that love might grow up between Mary and Martin; and how he had pleased his fancy with the picture of observing it when it was new, and taking them to task, apart, in counterfeited doubt, and then confessing to them that it had been an object dear to his heart; and by his sympathy with them, and generous provision for their young fortunes, establishing a claim on their affection and regard which nothing should wither, and which should surround his old age with means of happiness. How in the first dawn of this design, and when the pleasure of such a scheme for the happiness of others was new and indistinct within him, Martin had come to tell him that he had already chosen for himself; knowing that he, the old man, had some faint project on that head, but ignorant whom it concerned. How it was little comfort to him to know that Martin had chosen Her, because the grace of his design was lost, and because finding that she had returned his love, he tortured himself with the reflection that they, so young, to whom he had been so kind a benefactor, were already like the world, and bent on their own selfish, stealthy ends. How in the bitterness of this impression, and of his past experience, he had reproached Martin so harshly (forgetting that he had never invited his confidence on such a point, and confounding what he had meant to do with what he had done), that high words sprung up between them, and they separated in wrath. How he loved him still, and hoped he would return. How on the night of his illness at the Dragon, he had secretly written tenderly of him, and made him his heir, and sanctioned his marriage with Mary; and how, after his interview with Mr Pecksniff, he had distrusted him again, and burnt the paper to ashes, and had lain down in his bed distracted by suspicions, doubts, and regrets.

And then he told them how, resolved to probe this Pecksniff, and to prove the constancy and truth of Mary (to himself no less than Martin), he had conceived and entered on his plan; and how, beneath her gentleness and patience, he had softened more and more; still more and more beneath the goodness and simplicity, the honour and the manly faith of Tom. And when he spoke of Tom, he said God bless him; and the tears were in his eyes; for he said that Tom, mistrusted and disliked by him at first, had come like summer rain upon his heart; and had disposed it to believe in better things. And Martin took him by the hand, and Mary too, and John, his old friend, stoutly too; and Mark, and Mrs Lupin, and his sister, little Ruth. And peace of mind, deep, tranquil peace of mind, was in Tom's heart.

The old man then related how nobly Mr Pecksniff had performed the duty in which he stood indebted to society, in the matter of Tom's dismissal; and how, having often heard disparagement of Mr Westlock from Pecksniffian lips, and knowing him to be a friend to Tom, he had used, through his confidential agent and solicitor, that little artifice which had kept him in readiness to receive his unknown friend in London. And he called on Mr Pecksniff (by the name of Scoundrel) to remember that there again he had not trapped him to do evil, but that he had done it of his own free will and agency; nay, that he had cautioned him against it. And once again he called on Mr Pecksniff (by the name of Hang-dog) to remember that when Martin coming home at last, an altered man, had sued for the forgiveness which awaited him, he, Pecksniff, had rejected him in language of his own, and had remorsely stepped in between him and the least touch of natural tenderness. 'For which,' said the old man, 'if the bending of my finger would remove a halter from your neck, I wouldn't bend it!'

'Martin,' he added, 'your rival has not been a dangerous one, but Mrs Lupin here has played duenna for some weeks; not so much to watch your love as to watch her lover. For that Ghoul'—his fertility in finding names for Mr Pecksniff was astonishing—'would have crawled into her daily walks otherwise, and polluted the fresh air. What's this? Her hand is trembling strangely. See if you can hold it.'

Hold it! If he clasped it half as tightly as he did her waist. Well, well!

But it was good in him that even then, in his high fortune and happiness, with her lips nearly printed on his own, and her proud young beauty in his close embrace, he had a hand still left to stretch out to Tom Pinch.

'Oh, Tom! Dear Tom! I saw you, accidentally, coming here. Forgive me!'

'Forgive!' cried Tom. 'I'll never forgive you as long as I live, Martin, if you say another syllable about it. Joy to you both! Joy, my dear fellow, fifty thousand times.'

Joy! There is not a blessing on earth that Tom did not wish them. There is not a blessing on earth that Tom would not have bestowed upon them, if he could.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said Mr Tapley, stepping forward, 'but yow was mentionin', just now, a lady of the name of Lupin, sir.'

'I was,' returned old Martin

'Yes, sir. It's a pretty name, sir?'

'A very good name,' said Martin.

'It seems a'most a pity to change such a name into Tapley. Don't it, sir?' said Mark.

'That depends upon the lady. What is HER opinion?'

'Why, sir,' said Mr Tapley, retiring, with a bow, towards the buxom hostess, 'her opinion is as the name ain't a change for the better, but the indiwidual may be, and, therefore, if nobody ain't acquainted with no jest cause or impediment, et cetrer, the Blue Dragon will be con-werted into the Jolly Tapley. A sign of my own inwention, sir. Wery new, conwivial, and expressive!'

The whole of these proceedings were so agreeable to Mr Pecksniff that he stood with his eyes fixed upon the floor and his hands clasping one another alternately, as if a host of penal sentences were being passed upon him. Not only did his figure appear to have shrunk, but his discomfiture seemed to have extended itself even to his dress. His clothes seemed to have grown shabbier, his linen to have turned yellow, his hair to have become lank and frowsy; his very boots looked villanous and dim, as if their gloss had departed with his own.

Feeling, rather than seeing, that the old man now pointed to the door, he raised his eyes, picked up his hat, and thus addressed him:

'Mr Chuzzlewit, sir! you have partaken of my hospitality.'

'And paid for it,' he observed.

'Thank you. That savours,' said Mr Pecksniff, taking out his pocket-handkerchief, 'of your old familiar frankness. You have paid for it. I was about to make the remark. You have deceived me, sir. Thank you again. I am glad of it. To see you in the possession of your health and faculties on any terms, is, in itself, a sufficient recompense. To have been deceived implies a trusting nature. Mine is a trusting nature. I am thankful for it. I would rather have a trusting nature, do you know, sir, than a doubting one!'

Here Mr Pecksniff, with a sad smile, bowed, and wiped his eyes.

'There is hardly any person present, Mr Chuzzlewit,' said Pecksniff, 'by whom I have not been deceived. I have forgiven those persons on the spot. That was my duty; and, of course, I have done it. Whether it was worthy of you to partake of my hospitality, and to act the part you did act in my house, that, sir, is a question which I leave to your own conscience. And your conscience does not acquit you. No, sir, no!'

Pronouncing these last words in a loud and solemn voice, Mr Pecksniff was not so absolutely lost in his own fervour as to be unmindful of the expediency of getting a little nearer to the door.

'I have been struck this day,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'with a walking stick (which I have every reason to believe has knobs upon it), on that delicate and exquisite portion of the human anatomy—the brain. Several blows have been inflicted, sir, without a walking-stick, upon that tenderer portion of my frame—my heart. You have mentioned, sir, my being bankrupt in my purse.

Yes, sir, I am. By an unfortunate speculation, combined with treachery, I find myself reduced to poverty; at a time, sir, when the child of my bosom is widowed, and affliction and disgrace are in my family.'

Here Mr Pecksniff wiped his eyes again, and gave himself two or three little knocks upon the breast, as if he were answering two or three other little knocks from within, given by the tinkling hammer of his conscience, to express 'Cheer up, my boy!'

'I know the human mind, although I trust it. That is my weakness. Do I not know, sir'—here he became exceedingly plaintive and was observed to glance towards Tom Pinch—'that my misfortunes bring this treatment on me? Do I not know, sir, that but for them I never should have heard what I have heard to-day? Do I not know that in the silence and the solitude of night, a little voice will whisper in your ear, Mr Chuzzlewit, "This was not well. This was not well, sir!" Think of this, sir (if you will have the goodness), remote from the impulses of passion, and apart from the specialities, if I may use that strong remark, of prejudice. And if you ever contemplate the silent tomb, sir, which you will excuse me for entertaining some doubt of your doing, after the conduct into which you have allowed yourself to be betrayed this day; if you ever contemplate the silent tomb sir, think of me. If you find yourself approaching to the silent tomb, sir, think of me. If you should wish to have anything inscribed upon your silent tomb, sir, let it be, that I—ah, my remorseful sir! that I—the humble individual who has now the honour of reproaching you, forgave you. That I forgave you when my injuries were fresh, and when my bosom was newly wrung. It may be bitterness to you to hear it now, sir, but you will live to seek a consolation in it. May you find a consolation in it when you want it, sir! Good morning!'

With this sublime address, Mr Pecksniff departed. But the effect of his departure was much impaired by his being immediately afterwards run against, and nearly knocked down, by a monstrously excited little man in velveteen shorts and a very tall hat; who came bursting up the stairs, and straight into the chambers of Mr Chuzzlewit, as if he were deranged.

'Is there anybody here that knows him?' cried the little man. 'Is there anybody here that knows him? Oh, my stars, is there anybody here that knows him?'

They looked at each other for an explanation; but nobody knew anything more than that here was an excited little man with a very tall hat on, running in and out of the room as hard as he could go; making his single pair of bright blue stockings appear at least a dozen; and constantly repeating in a shrill voice, 'IS there anybody here that knows him?'

'If your brains is not turned topjy turjey, Mr Sweedlepipes!' exclaimed another voice, 'hold that there nige of yourn, I beg you, sir.'

At the same time Mrs Gamp was seen in the doorway; out of breath from coming up so many stairs, and panting fearfully; but dropping curtseys to the last.

'Excuge the weakness of the man,' said Mrs Gamp, eyeing Mr Sweedlepipe with great indignation; 'and well I might expect it, as I should have know'd, and wishin' he was drownded in the Thames afore I had brought him here, which not a blessed hour ago he nearly shaved the noge off from the father of as lovely a family as ever, Mr Chuzzlewit, was born three sets of twins, and would have done it, only he see it a-goin' in the glass, and dodged the rager. And never, Mr Sweedlepipes, I do assure you, sir, did I so well know what a misfortun it was to be acquainted with you, as now I do, which so I say, sir, and I don't deceive you!'

'I ask your pardon, ladies and gentlemen all,' cried the little barber, taking off his hat, 'and yours too, Mrs Gamp. But—but,' he added this half laughing and half crying, 'IS there anybody here that knows him?'

As the barber said these words, a something in top-boots, with its head bandaged up, staggered into the room, and began going round and round and round and round, apparently under the impression that it was walking straight forward.

'Look at him!' cried the excited little barber. 'Here he is! That'll soon wear off, and then he'll be all right again. He's no more dead than I am. He's all alive and hearty. Aint you, Bailey?'

'R—r—reether so, Poll!' replied that gentleman.

'Look here!' cried the little barber, laughing and crying in the same breath. 'When I steady him he comes all right. There! He's all right now. Nothing's the matter with him now, except that he's a little shook and rather giddy; is there, Bailey?'

'R—r—reether shook, Poll—reether so!' said Mr Bailey. 'What, my lovely Sairey! There you air!'

'What a boy he is!' cried the tender-hearted Poll, actually sobbing over him. 'I never see sech a boy! It's all his fun. He's full of it. He shall go into the business along with me. I am determined he shall. We'll make it

Sweedlepipe and Bailey. He shall have the sporting branch (what a one he'll be for the matches!) and me the shavin'. I'll make over the birds to him as soon as ever he's well enough. He shall have the little bullfinch in the shop, and all. He's sech a boy! I ask your pardon, ladies and gentlemen, but I thought there might be some one here that know'd him!'

Mrs Gamp had observed, not without jealousy and scorn, that a favourable impression appeared to exist in behalf of Mr Sweedlepipe and his young friend; and that she had fallen rather into the background in consequence. She now struggled to the front, therefore, and stated her business.

'Which, Mr Chuzzlewit,' she said, 'is well beknown to Mrs Harris as has one sweet infant (though she DO not wish it known) in her own family by the mother's side, kep in spirits in a bottle; and that sweet babe she see at Greenwich Fair, a-travelling in company with a pink-eyed lady, Prooshan dwarf, and livin' skelinton, which judge her feelings when the barrel organ played, and she was showed her own dear sister's child, the same not bein' expected from the outside picter, where it was painted quite contrairy in a livin' state, a many sizes larger, and performing beautiful upon the Arp, which never did that dear child know or do; since breathe it never did, to speak on in this wale! And Mrs Harris, Mr Chuzzlewit, has knowed me many year, and can give you information that the lady which is widdered can't do better and may do worse, than let me wait upon her, which I hope to do. Permittin' the sweet faces as I see afore me.'

'Oh!' said Mr Chuzzlewit. 'Is that your business? Was this good person paid for the trouble we gave her?'

'I paid her, sir,' returned Mark Tapley; 'liberal.'

'The young man's words is true,' said Mrs Gamp, 'and thank you kindly.'

'Then here we will close our acquaintance, Mrs Gamp,' retorted Mr Chuzzlewit. 'And Mr Sweedlepipe—is that your name?'

'That is my name, sir,' replied Poll, accepting with a profusion of gratitude, some chinking pieces which the old man slipped into his hand.

'Mr Sweedlepipe, take as much care of your lady-lodger as you can, and give her a word or two of good advice now and then. Such,' said old Martin, looking gravely at the astonished Mrs Gamp, 'as hinting at the expediency of a little less liquor, and a little more humanity, and a little less regard for herself, and a little more regard for her patients, and perhaps a trifle of additional honesty. Or when Mrs Gamp gets into trouble, Mr Sweedlepipe, it had better not be at a time when I am near enough to the Old Bailey to volunteer myself as a witness to her character. Endeavour to impress that upon her at your leisure, if you please.'

Mrs Gamp clasped her hands, turned up her eyes until they were quite invisible, threw back her bonnet for the admission of fresh air to her heated brow; and in the act of saying faintly—'Less liquor!—Sairey Gamp—Bottle on the chimney-piece, and let me put my lips to it, when I am so dispoged!'—fell into one of the walking swoons; in which pitiable state she was conducted forth by Mr Sweedlepipe, who, between his two patients, the swooning Mrs Gamp and the revolving Bailey, had enough to do, poor fellow.

The old man looked about him, with a smile, until his eyes rested on Tom Pinch's sister; when he smiled the more.

'We will all dine here together,' he said; 'and as you and Mary have enough to talk of, Martin, you shall keep house for us until the afternoon, with Mr and Mrs Tapley. I must see your lodgings in the meanwhile, Tom.'

Tom was quite delighted. So was Ruth. She would go with them.

'Thank you, my love,' said Mr Chuzzlewit. 'But I am afraid I must take Tom a little out of the way, on business. Suppose you go on first, my dear?'

Pretty little Ruth was equally delighted to do that.

'But not alone,' said Martin, 'not alone. Mr Westlock, I dare say, will escort you.'

Why, of course he would: what else had Mr Westlock in his mind? How dull these old men are!

'You are sure you have no engagement?' he persisted.

Engagement! As if he could have any engagement!

So they went off arm-in-arm. When Tom and Mr Chuzzlewit went off arm-in-arm a few minutes after them, the latter was still smiling; and really, for a gentleman of his habits, in rather a knowing manner.

CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

WHAT JOHN WESTLOCK SAID TO TOM PINCH'S SISTER; WHAT TOM PINCH'S SISTER SAID TO JOHN WESTLOCK; WHAT TOM PINCH SAID TO BOTH OF THEM; AND HOW THEY ALL PASSED THE REMAINDER OF THE DAY

Brilliantly the Temple Fountain sparkled in the sun, and laughingly its liquid music played, and merrily the idle drops of water danced and danced, and peeping out in sport among the trees, plunged lightly down to hide themselves, as little Ruth and her companion came toward it.

And why they came toward the Fountain at all is a mystery; for they had no business there. It was not in their way. It was quite out of their way. They had no more to do with the Fountain, bless you, than they had with—with Love, or any out-of-the-way thing of that sort.

It was all very well for Tom and his sister to make appointments by the Fountain, but that was quite another affair. Because, of course, when she had to wait a minute or two, it would have been very awkward for her to have had to wait in any but a tolerably quiet spot; but that was as quiet a spot, everything considered, as they could choose. But when she had John Westlock to take care of her, and was going home with her arm in his (home being in a different direction altogether), their coming anywhere near that Fountain was quite extraordinary.

However, there they found themselves. And another extraordinary part of the matter was, that they seemed to have come there, by a silent understanding. Yet when they got there, they were a little confused by being there, which was the strangest part of all; because there is nothing naturally confusing in a Fountain. We all know that.

'What a good old place it was!' John said. With quite an earnest affection for it.

'A pleasant place indeed,' said little Ruth. 'So shady!'

Oh wicked little Ruth!

They came to a stop when John began to praise it. The day was exquisite; and stopping at all, it was quite natural—nothing could be more so—that they should glance down Garden Court; because Garden Court ends in the Garden, and the Garden ends in the River, and that glimpse is very bright and fresh and shining on a summer's day. Then, oh, little Ruth, why not look boldly at it! Why fit that tiny, precious, blessed little foot into the cracked corner of an insensible old flagstone in the pavement; and be so very anxious to adjust it to a nicety!

If the Fiery-faced matron in the crunched bonnet could have seen them as they walked away, how many years' purchase might Fiery Face have been disposed to take for her situation in Furnival's Inn as laundress to Mr Westlock!

They went away, but not through London's streets! Through some enchanted city, where the pavements were of air; where all the rough sounds of a stirring town were softened into gentle music; where everything was happy; where there was no distance, and no time. There were two good-tempered burly draymen letting down big butts of beer into a cellar, somewhere; and when John helped her—almost lifted her—the lightest, easiest, neatest thing you ever saw—across the rope, they said he owed them a good turn for giving him the chance. Celestial draymen!

Green pastures in the summer tide, deep-littered straw yards in the winter, no start of corn and clover, ever, to that noble horse who WOULD dance on the pavement with a gig behind him, and who frightened her, and made her clasp his arm with both hands (both hands meeting one upon the another so endearingly!), and caused her to implore him to take refuge in the pastry-cook's, and afterwards to peep out at the door so shrinkingly; and then, looking at him with those eyes, to ask him was he sure—now was he sure—they might go safely on! Oh for a string of rampant horses! For a lion, for a bear, for a mad bull, for anything to bring the little hands together on his arm again!

They talked, of course. They talked of Tom, and all these changes and the attachment Mr Chuzzlewit had conceived for him, and the bright prospects he had in such a friend, and a great deal more to the same purpose. The more they talked, the more afraid this fluttering little Ruth became of any pause; and sooner than have a pause she would say the same things over again; and if she hadn't courage or presence of mind enough for that (to say the truth she very seldom had), she was ten thousand times more charming and irresistible than she had been before.

'Martin will be married very soon now, I suppose?' said John.

She supposed he would. Never did a bewitching little woman suppose anything in such a faint voice as Ruth supposed that.

But seeing that another of those alarming pauses was approaching, she remarked that he would have a beautiful wife. Didn't Mr Westlock think so?

'Ye—yes,' said John, 'oh, yes.'

She feared he was rather hard to please, he spoke so coldly.

'Rather say already pleased,' said John. 'I have scarcely seen her. I had no care to see her. I had no eyes for HER, this morning.'

Oh, good gracious!

It was well they had reached their destination. She never could have gone any further. It would have been impossible to walk in such a tremble.

Tom had not come in. They entered the triangular parlour together, and alone. Fiery Face, Fiery Face, how many years' purchase NOW!

She sat down on the little sofa, and untied her bonnet-strings. He sat down by her side, and very near her; very, very near her. Oh rapid, swelling, bursting little heart, you knew that it would come to this, and hoped it would. Why beat so wildly, heart!

'Dear Ruth! Sweet Ruth! If I had loved you less, I could have told you that I loved you, long ago. I have loved you from the first. There never was a creature in the world more truly loved than you, dear Ruth, by me!'

She clasped her little hands before her face. The gushing tears of joy, and pride, and hope, and innocent affection, would not be restrained. Fresh from her full young heart they came to answer him.

'My dear love! If this is—I almost dare to hope it is, now—not painful or distressing to you, you make me happier than I can tell, or you imagine. Darling Ruth! My own good, gentle, winning Ruth! I hope I know the value of your heart, I hope I know the worth of your angel nature. Let me try and show you that I do; and you will make me happier, Ruth—'

'Not happier,' she sobbed, 'than you make me. No one can be happier, John, than you make me!'

Fiery Face, provide yourself! The usual wages or the usual warning. It's all over, Fiery Face. We needn't trouble you any further.

The little hands could meet each other now, without a rampant horse to urge them. There was no occasion for lions, bears, or mad bulls. It could all be done, and infinitely better, without their assistance. No burly drayman or big butts of beer, were wanted for apologies. No apology at all was wanted. The soft light touch fell coyly, but quite naturally, upon the lover's shoulder; the delicate waist, the drooping head, the blushing cheek, the beautiful eyes, the exquisite mouth itself, were all as natural as possible. If all the horses in Araby had run away at once, they couldn't have improved upon it.

They soon began to talk of Tom again.

'I hope he will be glad to hear of it!' said John, with sparkling eyes.

Ruth drew the little hands a little tighter when he said it, and looked up seriously into his face.

'I am never to leave him, AM I, dear? I could never leave Tom. I am sure you know that.'

'Do you think I would ask you?' he returned, with a—well! Never mind with what.

'I am sure you never would,' she answered, the bright tears standing in her eyes.

'And I will swear it, Ruth, my darling, if you please. Leave Tom! That would be a strange beginning. Leave Tom, dear! If Tom and we be not inseparable, and Tom (God bless him) have not all honour and all love in our home, my little wife, may that home never be! And that's a strong oath, Ruth.'

Shall it be recorded how she thanked him? Yes, it shall. In all simplicity and innocence and purity of heart, yet with a timid, graceful, half-determined hesitation, she set a little rosy seal upon the vow, whose colour was reflected in her face, and flashed up to the braiding of her dark brown hair.

'Tom will be so happy, and so proud, and glad,' she said, clasping her little hands. 'But so surprised! I am sure he had never thought of such a thing.'

Of course John asked her immediately—because you know they were in that foolish state when great allowances must be made—when SHE had begun to think of such a thing, and this made a little diversion in their talk; a charming diversion to them, but not so interesting to us; at the end of which, they came back to Tom again.

'Ah! dear Tom!' said Ruth. 'I suppose I ought to tell you everything now. I should have no secrets from you. Should I, John, love?'

It is of no use saying how that preposterous John answered her, because he answered in a manner which is untranslatable on paper though highly satisfactory in itself. But what he conveyed was, No no no, sweet Ruth; or something to that effect.

Then she told him Tom's great secret; not exactly saying how she had found it out, but leaving him to understand it if he liked; and John was sadly grieved to hear it, and was full of sympathy and sorrow. But they would try, he said, only the more, on this account to make him happy, and to beguile him with his favourite pursuits. And then, in all the confidence of such a time, he told her how he had a capital opportunity of establishing himself in his old profession in the country; and how he had been thinking, in the event of that happiness coming upon him which had actually come—there was another slight diversion here—how he had been thinking that it would afford occupation to Tom, and enable them to live together in the easiest manner, without any sense of dependence on Tom's part; and to be as happy as the day was long. And Ruth receiving this with joy, they went on catering for Tom to that extent that they had already purchased him a select library and built him an organ, on which he was performing with the greatest satisfaction, when they heard him knocking at the door.

Though she longed to tell him what had happened, poor little Ruth was greatly agitated by his arrival; the more so because she knew that Mr Chuzzlewit was with him. So she said, all in a tremble:

'What shall I do, dear John! I can't bear that he should hear it from any one but me, and I could not tell him, unless we were alone.'

'Do, my love,' said John, 'whatever is natural to you on the impulse of the moment, and I am sure it will be right.'

He had hardly time to say thus much, and Ruth had hardly time to—just to get a little farther off—upon the sofa, when Tom and Mr Chuzzlewit came in. Mr Chuzzlewit came first, and Tom was a few seconds behind him.

Now Ruth had hastily resolved that she would beckon Tom upstairs after a short time, and would tell him in his little bedroom. But when she saw his dear old face come in, her heart was so touched that she ran into his arms, and laid her head down on his breast and sobbed out, 'Bless me, Tom! My dearest brother!'

Tom looked up, in surprise, and saw John Westlock close beside him, holding out his hand.

'John!' cried Tom. 'John!'

'Dear Tom,' said his friend, 'give me your hand. We are brothers, Tom.'

Tom wrung it with all his force, embraced his sister fervently, and put her in John Westlock's arms.

'Don't speak to me, John. Heaven is very good to us. I—' Tom could find no further utterance, but left the room; and Ruth went after him.

And when they came back, which they did by-and-bye, she looked more beautiful, and Tom more good and true (if that were possible) than ever. And though Tom could not speak upon the subject even now; being yet too newly glad, he put both his hands in both of John's with emphasis sufficient for the best speech ever spoken.

'I am glad you chose to-day,' said Mr Chuzzlewit to John; with the same knowing smile as when they had left him. 'I thought you would. I hoped Tom and I lingered behind a discreet time. It's so long since I had any practical knowledge of these subjects, that I have been anxious, I assure you.'

'Your knowledge is still pretty accurate, sir,' returned John, laughing, 'if it led you to foresee what would happen to-day.'

'Why, I am not sure, Mr Westlock,' said the old man, 'that any great spirit of prophecy was needed, after seeing you and Ruth together. Come hither, pretty one. See what Tom and I purchased this morning, while you were dealing in exchange with that young merchant there.'

The old man's way of seating her beside him, and humouring his voice as if she were a child, was whimsical enough, but full of tenderness, and not ill adapted, somehow, to little Ruth.

'See here!' he said, taking a case from his pocket, 'what a beautiful necklace. Ah! How it glitters! Earrings, too, and bracelets, and a zone for your waist. This set is yours, and Mary has another like it. Tom couldn't understand why I wanted two. What a short-sighted Tom! Earrings and bracelets, and a zone for your waist! Ah! Beautiful! Let us see how brave they look. Ask Mr Westlock to clasp them on.'

It was the prettiest thing to see her holding out her round, white arm; and John (oh deep, deep John!) pretending that the bracelet was very hard to fasten; it was the prettiest thing to see her girding on the precious little zone, and yet obliged to have assistance because her fingers were in such terrible perplexity; it was the prettiest thing to see her so confused and bashful, with the smiles and blushes playing brightly on her face, like the sparkling light upon the jewels; it was the prettiest thing that you would see, in the common experiences of a twelvemonth, rely upon it.

'The set of jewels and the wearer are so well matched,' said the old man, 'that I don't know which becomes the other most. Mr Westlock could tell me, I have no doubt, but I'll not ask him, for he is bribed. Health to wear them, my dear, and happiness to make you forgetful of them, except as a remembrance from a loving friend!'

He patted her upon the cheek, and said to Tom:

'I must play the part of a father here, Tom, also. There are not many fathers who marry two such daughters on the same day; but we will overlook the improbability for the gratification of an old man's fancy. I may claim that much indulgence,' he added, 'for I have gratified few fancies enough in my life tending to the happiness of others, Heaven knows!'

These various proceedings had occupied so much time, and they fell into such a pleasant conversation now, that it was within a quarter of an hour of the time appointed for dinner before any of them thought about it. A hackney-coach soon carried them to the Temple, however; and there they found everything prepared for their reception.

Mr Tapley having been furnished with unlimited credentials relative to the ordering of dinner, had so exerted himself for the honour of the party, that a prodigious banquet was served, under the joint direction of himself and his Intended. Mr Chuzzlewit would have had them of the party, and Martin urgently seconded his wish, but Mark could by no means be persuaded to sit down at table; observing, that in having the honour of attending to their comforts, he felt himself, indeed, the landlord of the Jolly Tapley, and could almost delude himself into the belief that the entertainment was actually being held under the Jolly Tapley's roof.

For the better encouragement of himself in this fable, Mr Tapley took it upon him to issue divers general directions to the waiters from the hotel, relative to the disposal of the dishes and so forth; and as they were usually in direct opposition to all precedent, and were always issued in his most facetious form of thought and speech, they occasioned great merriment among those attendants; in which Mr Tapley participated, with an infinite enjoyment of his own humour. He likewise entertained them with short anecdotes of his travels appropriate to the occasion; and now and then with some comic passage or other between himself and Mrs Lupin; so that explosive laughs were constantly issuing from the side-board, and from the backs of chairs; and the head-waiter (who wore powder, and knee-smalls, and was usually a grave man) got to be a bright scarlet in the face, and broke his waistcoat-strings audibly.

Young Martin sat at the head of the table, and Tom Pinch at the foot; and if there were a genial face at that board, it was Tom's. They all took their tone from Tom. Everybody drank to him, everybody looked to him, everybody thought of him, everybody loved him. If he so much as laid down his knife and fork, somebody put out a hand to shake with him. Martin and Mary had taken him aside before dinner, and spoken to him so heartily of the time to come, laying such fervent stress upon the trust they had in his completion of their felicity, by his society and closest friendship, that Tom was positively moved to tears. He couldn't bear it. His heart was full, he said, of happiness. And so it was. Tom spoke the honest truth. It was. Large as thy heart was, dear Tom Pinch, it had no room that day for anything but happiness and sympathy!

And there was Fips, old Fips of Austin Friars, present at the dinner, and turning out to be the jolliest old dog that ever did violence to his convivial sentiments by shutting himself up in a dark office. 'Where is he?' said Fips, when he came in. And then he pounced on Tom, and told him that he wanted to relieve himself of all his old constraint; and in the first place shook him by one hand, and in the second place shook him by the other, and in the third place nudged him in the waistcoat, and in the fourth place said, 'How are you?' and in a great many other places did a great many other things to show his friendliness and joy. And he sang songs, did Fips; and made speeches, did Fips; and knocked off his wine pretty handsomely, did Fips; and in short, he showed himself a perfect Trump, did Fips, in all respects.

But ah! the happiness of strolling home at night—obstinate little Ruth, she wouldn't hear of riding!—as they had done on that dear night, from Furnival's Inn! The happiness of being able to talk about it, and to confide their happiness to each other! The happiness of stating all their little plans to Tom, and seeing his bright face grow brighter as they spoke!

When they reached home, Tom left John and his sister in the parlour, and went upstairs into his own room, under pretence of seeking a book. And Tom actually winked to himself when he got upstairs; he thought it such a deep thing to have done.

'They like to be by themselves, of course,' said Tom; 'and I came away so naturally, that I have no doubt they are expecting me, every moment, to return. That's capital!'

But he had not sat reading very long, when he heard a tap at his door.

'May I come in?' said John.

'Oh, surely!' Tom replied.

'Don't leave us, Tom. Don't sit by yourself. We want to make you merry; not melancholy.'

'My dear friend,' said Tom, with a cheerful smile.

'Brother, Tom. Brother.'

'My dear brother,' said Tom; 'there is no danger of my being melancholy, how can I be melancholy, when I know that you and Ruth are so blest in each other! I think I can find my tongue tonight, John,' he added, after a moment's pause. 'But I never can tell you what unutterable joy this day has given me. It would be unjust to you to speak of your having chosen a portionless girl, for I feel that you know her worth; I am sure you know her worth. Nor will it diminish in your estimation, John, which money might.'

'Which money would, Tom,' he returned. 'Her worth! Oh, who could see her here, and not love her! Who could know her, Tom, and not honour her! Who could ever stand possessed of such a heart as hers, and grow indifferent to the treasure! Who could feel the rapture that I feel to-day, and love as I love her, Tom, without knowing something of her worth! Your joy unutterable! No, no, Tom. It's mine, it's mine.

'No, no, John,' said Tom. 'It's mine, it's mine.'

Their friendly contention was brought to a close by little Ruth herself, who came peeping in at the door. And oh, the look, the glorious, half-proud, half-timid look she gave Tom, when her lover drew her to his side! As much as to say, 'Yes, indeed, Tom, he will do it. But then he has a right, you know. Because I AM fond of him, Tom.'

As to Tom, he was perfectly delighted. He could have sat and looked at them, just as they were, for hours.

'I have told Tom, love, as we agreed, that we are not going to permit him to run away, and that we cannot possibly allow it. The loss of one person, and such a person as Tom, too, out of our small household of three, is not to be endured; and so I have told him. Whether he is considerate, or whether he is only selfish, I don't know. But he needn't be considerate, for he is not the least restraint upon us. Is he, dearest Ruth?'

Well! He really did not seem to be any particular restraint upon them. Judging from what ensued.

Was it folly in Tom to be so pleased by their remembrance of him at such a time? Was their graceful love a folly, were their dear caresses follies, was their lengthened parting folly? Was it folly in him to watch her window from the street, and rate its scantiest gleam of light above all diamonds; folly in her to breathe his name upon her knees, and pour out her pure heart before that Being from whom such hearts and such affections come?

If these be follies, then Fiery Face go on and prosper! If they be not, then Fiery Face avaunt! But set the crunched bonnet at some other single gentleman, in any case, for one is lost to thee for ever!

CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

GIVES THE AUTHOR GREAT CONCERN. FOR IT IS THE LAST IN THE BOOK

Todger's was in high feather, and mighty preparations for a late breakfast were astir in its commercial bowers. The blissful morning had arrived when Miss Pecksniff was to be united in holy matrimony, to Augustus.

Miss Pecksniff was in a frame of mind equally becoming to herself and the occasion. She was full of clemency and conciliation. She had laid in several caldrons of live coals, and was prepared to heap them on the heads of her enemies. She bore no spite nor malice in her heart. Not the least.

Quarrels, Miss Pecksniff said, were dreadful things in families; and though she never could forgive her dear papa, she was willing to receive her other relations. They had been separated, she observed, too long. It was enough to call down a judgment upon the family. She believed the death of Jonas WAS a judgment on them for their internal dissensions. And Miss Pecksniff was confirmed in this belief, by the lightness with which the visitation had fallen on herself.

By way of doing sacrifice—not in triumph; not, of course, in triumph, but in humiliation of spirit—this amiable young person wrote, therefore, to her kinswoman of the strong mind, and informed her that her nuptials would take place on such a day. That she had been much hurt by the unnatural conduct of herself and daughters, and hoped they might not have suffered in their consciences. That, being desirous to forgive her enemies, and make her peace with the world before entering into the most solemn of covenants with the most devoted of men, she now held out the hand of friendship. That if the strong-minded women took that hand, in the temper in which it was extended to her, she, Miss Pecksniff, did invite her to be present at the ceremony of her marriage, and did furthermore invite the three red-nosed spinsters, her daughters (but Miss Pecksniff did not particularize their noses), to attend as bridesmaids.

The strong-minded women returned for answer, that herself and daughters were, as regarded their consciences, in the enjoyment of robust health, which she knew Miss Pecksniff would be glad to hear. That she had received Miss Pecksniff's note with unalloyed delight, because she never had attached the least importance to the paltry and insignificant jealousies with which herself and circle had been assailed; otherwise than as she had found them, in the contemplation, a harmless source of innocent mirth. That she would joyfully attend Miss Pecksniff's bridal; and that her three dear daughters would be happy to assist, on so interesting, and SO VERY UNEXPECTED—which the strong-minded woman underlined—SO VERY UNEXPECTED an occasion.

On the receipt of this gracious reply, Miss Pecksniff extended her forgiveness and her invitations to Mr and Mrs Spottletoe; to Mr George Chuzzlewit the bachelor cousin; to the solitary female who usually had the toothache; and to the hairy young gentleman with the outline of a face; surviving remnants of the party that had once assembled in Mr Pecksniff's parlour. After which Miss Pecksniff remarked that there was a sweetness in doing our duty, which neutralized the bitter in our cups.

The wedding guests had not yet assembled, and indeed it was so early that Miss Pecksniff herself was in the act of dressing at her leisure, when a carriage stopped near the Monument; and Mark, dismounting from the rumble, assisted Mr Chuzzlewit to alight. The carriage remained in waiting; so did Mr Tapley. Mr Chuzzlewit betook himself to Todger's.

He was shown, by the degenerate successor of Mr Bailey, into the dining-parlour; where—for his visit was expected—Mrs Todgers immediately appeared.

'You are dressed, I see, for the wedding,' he said.

Mrs Todgers, who was greatly flurried by the preparations, replied in the affirmative.

'It goes against my wishes to have it in progress just now, I assure you, sir,' said Mrs Todgers; 'but Miss Pecksniff's mind was set upon it, and it really is time that Miss Pecksniff was married. That cannot be denied, sir.'

'No,' said Mr Chuzzlewit, 'assuredly not. Her sister takes no part in the proceedings?'

'Oh, dear no, sir. Poor thing!' said Mrs Todgers, shaking her head, and dropping her voice. 'Since she has known the worst, she has never left my room; the next room.'

'Is she prepared to see me?' he inquired.

'Quite prepared, sir.'

'Then let us lose no time.'

Mrs Todgers conducted him into the little back chamber commanding the prospect of the cistern; and there, sadly different from when it had first been her lodging, sat poor Merry, in mourning weeds. The room looked very dark and sorrowful; and so did she; but she had one friend beside her, faithful to the last. Old Chuffey.

When Mr Chuzzlewit sat down at her side, she took his hand and put it to her lips. She was in great grief. He too was agitated; for he had not seen her since their parting in the churchyard.

'I judged you hastily,' he said, in a low voice. 'I fear I judged you cruelly. Let me know that I have your forgiveness.'

She kissed his hand again; and retaining it in hers, thanked him in a broken voice, for all his kindness to her since.

'Tom Pinch,' said Martin, 'has faithfully related to me all that you desired him to convey; at a time when he deemed it very improbable that he would ever have an opportunity of delivering your message. Believe me, that if I ever deal again with an ill-advised and unawakened nature, hiding the strength it thinks its weakness, I will have long and merciful consideration for it.'

'You had for me; even for me,' she answered. 'I quite believe it. I said the words you have repeated, when my distress was very sharp and hard to bear; I say them now for others; but I cannot urge them for myself. You spoke to me after you had seen and watched me day by day. There was great consideration in that. You might have spoken, perhaps, more kindly; you might have tried to invite my confidence by greater gentleness; but the end would have been the same.'

He shook his head in doubt, and not without some inward self-reproach.

'How can I hope,' she said, 'that your interposition would have prevailed with me, when I know how obdurate I was! I never thought at all; dear Mr Chuzzlewit, I never thought at all; I had no thought, no heart, no care to find one; at that time. It has grown out of my trouble. I have felt it in my trouble. I wouldn't recall my trouble such as it is and has been—and it is light in comparison with trials which hundreds of good people suffer every day, I know—I wouldn't recall it to-morrow, if I could. It has been my friend, for without it no one could have changed me; nothing could have changed me. Do not mistrust me because of these tears; I cannot help them. I am grateful for it, in my soul. Indeed I am!'

'Indeed she is!' said Mrs Todgers. 'I believe it, sir.'

'And so do I!' said Mr Chuzzlewit. 'Now, attend to me, my dear. Your late husband's estate, if not wasted by the confession of a large debt to the broken office (which document, being useless to the runaways, has been sent over to England by them; not so much for the sake of the creditors as for the gratification of their dislike to him, whom they suppose to be still living), will be seized upon by law; for it is not exempt, as I learn, from the claims of those who have suffered by the fraud in which he was engaged. Your father's property was all, or nearly all, embarked in the same transaction. If there be any left, it will be seized on, in like manner. There is no home THERE.'

'I couldn't return to him,' she said, with an instinctive reference to his having forced her marriage on. 'I could not return to him.'

'I know it,' Mr Chuzzlewit resumed; 'and I am here because I know it. Come with me! From all who are about me, you are certain (I have ascertained it) of a generous welcome. But until your health is re-established, and you are sufficiently composed to bear that welcome, you shall have your abode in any quiet retreat of your own choosing, near London; not so far removed but that this kind-hearted lady may still visit you as often as she pleases. You have suffered much; but you are young, and have a brighter and a better future stretching out before you. Come with me. Your sister is careless of you, I know. She hurries on and publishes her marriage, in a spirit which (to say no more of it) is barely decent, is unsisterly, and bad. Leave the house before her guests arrive. She means to give you pain. Spare her the offence, and come with me!'

Mrs Todgers, though most unwilling to part with her, added her persuasions. Even poor old Chuffey (of course included in the project) added his. She hurriedly attired herself, and was ready to depart, when Miss Pecksniff dashed into the room.

Miss Pecksniff dashed in so suddenly, that she was placed in an embarrassing position. For though she had completed her bridal toilette as to her head, on which she wore a bridal bonnet with orange flowers, she had not completed it as to her skirts, which displayed no choicer decoration than a dimity bedgown. She had dashed in, in fact, about half-way through, to console her sister, in her affliction, with a sight of the aforesaid bonnet; and being quite unconscious of the presence of a visitor, until she found Mr Chuzzlewit standing face to face with her, her surprise was an uncomfortable one.

'So, young lady!' said the old man, eyeing her with strong disfavour. 'You are to be married to-day!'

'Yes, sir,' returned Miss Pecksniff, modestly. 'I am. I—my dress is rather—really, Mrs Todgers!'

'Your delicacy,' said old Martin, 'is troubled, I perceive. I am not surprised to find it so. You have chosen the period of your marriage unfortunately.'

'I beg your pardon, Mr Chuzzlewit,' retorted Cherry; very red and angry in a moment; 'but if you have anything to say on that subject, I must beg to refer you to Augustus. You will scarcely think it manly, I hope, to force an argument on me, when Augustus is at all times ready to discuss it with you. I have nothing to do with any deceptions that may have been practiced on my parent,' said Miss Pecksniff, pointedly; 'and as I wish to be on good terms with everybody at such a time, I should have been glad if you would have favoured us with your company at breakfast. But I will not ask you as it is; seeing that you have been prepossessed and set against me in another quarter. I hope I have my natural affections for another quarter, and my natural pity for another quarter; but I cannot always submit to be subservient to it, Mr Chuzzlewit. That would be a little too much. I trust I have more respect for myself, as well as for the man who claims me as his Bride.'

'Your sister, meeting—as I think; not as she says, for she has said nothing about it—with little consideration from you, is going away with me,' said Mr Chuzzlewit.

'I am very happy to find that she has some good fortune at last,' returned Miss Pecksniff, tossing her head. 'I congratulate her, I am sure. I am not surprised that this event should be painful to her—painful to her—but I can't help that, Mr Chuzzlewit. It's not my fault.'

'Come, Miss Pecksniff!' said the old man, quietly. 'I should like to see a better parting between you. I should like to see a better parting on your side, in such circumstances. It would make me your friend. You may want a friend one day or other.'

'Every relation of life, Mr Chuzzlewit, begging your pardon; and every friend in life,' returned Miss Pecksniff, with dignity, 'is now bound up and cemented in Augustus. So long as Augustus is my own, I cannot want a friend. When you speak of friends, sir, I must beg, once for all, to refer you to Augustus. That is my impression of the religious ceremony in which I am so soon to take a part at that altar to which Augustus will conduct me. I bear no malice at any time, much less in a moment of triumph, towards any one; much less towards my sister. On the contrary, I congratulate her. If you didn't hear me say so, I am not to blame. And as I owe it to Augustus, to be punctual on an occasion when he may naturally be supposed to be—to be impatient—really, Mrs Todgers!—I must beg your leave, sir, to retire.'

After these words the bridal bonnet disappeared; with as much state as the dimity bedgown left in it.

Old Martin gave his arm to the younger sister without speaking; and led her out. Mrs Todgers, with her holiday garments fluttering in the wind, accompanied them to the carriage, clung round Merry's neck at parting, and ran back to her own dingy house, crying the whole way. She had a lean, lank body, Mrs Todgers, but a well-conditioned soul within. Perhaps the good Samaritan was lean and lank, and found it hard to live. Who knows!

Mr Chuzzlewit followed her so closely with his eyes, that, until she had shut her own door, they did not encounter Mr Tapley's face.

'Why, Mark!' he said, as soon as he observed it, 'what's the matter?'

'The wonderfulest ewent, sir!' returned Mark, pumping at his voice in a most laborious manner, and hardly able to articulate with all his efforts. 'A coincidence as never was equalled! I'm blessed if here ain't two old neighbours of ourn, sir!'

'What neighbours?' cried old Martin, looking out of window. 'Where?'

'I was a-walkin' up and down not five yards from this spot,' said Mr Tapley, breathless, 'and they come upon me like their own ghosts, as I thought they was! It's the wonderfulest ewent that ever happened. Bring a feather, somebody, and knock me down with it!'

'What do you mean!' exclaimed old Martin, quite as much excited by the spectacle of Mark's excitement as that strange person was himself. 'Neighbours, where?'

'Here, sir!' replied Mr Tapley. 'Here in the city of London! Here upon these very stones! Here they are, sir! Don't I know 'em? Lord love their welcome faces, don't I know 'em!'

With which ejaculations Mr Tapley not only pointed to a decent-looking man and woman standing by, but commenced embracing them alternately, over and over again, in Monument Yard.

'Neighbours, WHERE? old Martin shouted; almost maddened by his ineffectual efforts to get out at the coach-door.

'Neighbours in America! Neighbours in Eden!' cried Mark. 'Neighbours in the swamp, neighbours in the bush, neighbours in the fever. Didn't she nurse us! Didn't he help us! Shouldn't we both have died without 'em! Haven't they come a-strugglin' back, without a single child for their consolation! And talk to me of neighbours!'

Away he went again, in a perfectly wild state, hugging them, and skipping round them, and cutting in between them, as if he were performing some frantic and outlandish dance.

Mr Chuzzlewit no sooner gathered who these people were, than he burst open the coach-door somehow or other, and came tumbling out among them; and as if the lunacy of Mr Tapley were contagious, he immediately began to shake hands too, and exhibit every demonstration of the liveliest joy.

'Get up, behind!' he said. 'Get up in the rumble. Come along with me! Go you on the box, Mark. Home! Home!'

'Home!' cried Mr Tapley, seizing the old man's hand in a burst of enthusiasm. 'Exactly my opinion, sir. Home for ever! Excuse the liberty, sir, I can't help it. Success to the Jolly Tapley! There's nothin' in the house they shan't have for the askin' for, except a bill. Home to be sure! Hurrah!'

Home they rolled accordingly, when he had got the old man in again, as fast as they could go; Mark abating nothing of his fervour by the way, by allowing it to vent itself as unrestrainedly as if he had been on Salisbury Plain.

And now the wedding party began to assemble at Todgers's. Mr Jinkins, the only boarder invited, was on the ground first. He wore a white favour in his button-hole, and a bran new extra super double-milled blue saxony dress coat (that was its description in the bill), with a variety of tortuous embellishments about the pockets, invented by the artist to do honour to the day. The miserable Augustus no longer felt strongly even on the subject of Jinkins. He hadn't strength of mind enough to do it. 'Let him come!' he had said, in answer to Miss Pecksniff, when she urged the point. 'Let him come! He has ever been my rock ahead through life. 'Tis meet he should be there. Ha, ha! Oh, yes! let Jinkins come!'

Jinkins had come with all the pleasure in life, and there he was. For some few minutes he had no companion but the breakfast, which was set forth in the drawing-room, with unusual taste and ceremony. But Mrs Todgers soon joined him; and the bachelor cousin, the hairy young gentleman, and Mr and Mrs Spottletoe, arrived in quick succession.

Mr Spottletoe honoured Jinkins with an encouraging bow. 'Glad to know you, sir,' he said. 'Give you joy!' Under the impression that Jinkins was the happy man.

Mr Jinkins explained. He was merely doing the honours for his friend Moddle, who had ceased to reside in the house, and had not yet arrived.

'Not arrived, sir!' exclaimed Spottletoe, in a great heat.

'Not yet,' said Mr Jinkins.

'Upon my soul!' cried Spottletoe. 'He begins well! Upon my life and honour this young man begins well! But I should very much like to know how it is that every one who comes into contact with this family is guilty of some gross insult to it. Death! Not arrived yet. Not here to receive us!'

The nephew with the outline of a countenance, suggested that perhaps he had ordered a new pair of boots, and they hadn't come home.

'Don't talk to me of Boots, sir!' retorted Spottletoe, with immense indignation. 'He is bound to come here in his slippers then; he is bound to come here barefoot. Don't offer such a wretched and evasive plea to me on behalf of your friend, as Boots, sir.'

'He is not MY friend,' said the nephew. 'I never saw him.'

'Very well, sir,' returned the fiery Spottletoe. 'Then don't talk to me!'

The door was thrown open at this juncture, and Miss Pecksniff entered, tottering, and supported by her three bridesmaids. The strong-minded woman brought up the rear; having waited outside until now, for the purpose of spoiling the effect.

'How do you do, ma'am!' said Spottletoe to the strong-minded woman in a tone of defiance. 'I believe you see Mrs Spottletoe, ma'am?'

The strong-minded woman with an air of great interest in Mrs Spottletoe's health, regretted that she was not more easily seen. Nature erring, in that lady's case, upon the slim side.

'Mrs Spottletoe is at least more easily seen than the bridegroom, ma'am,' returned that lady's husband. 'That is, unless he has confined his attentions to any particular part or branch of this family, which would be quite in keeping with its usual proceedings.'

'If you allude to me, sir—' the strong-minded woman began.

'Pray,' interposed Miss Pecksniff, 'do not allow Augustus, at this awful moment of his life and mine, to be the means of disturbing that harmony which it is ever Augustus's and my wish to maintain. Augustus has not been introduced to any of my relations now present. He preferred not.'

'Why, then, I venture to assert,' cried Mr Spottletoe, 'that the man who aspires to join this family, and "prefers not" to be introduced to its members, is an impertinent Puppy. That is my opinion of HIM!'

The strong-minded woman remarked with great suavity, that she was afraid he must be. Her three daughters observed aloud that it was 'Shameful!'

'You do not know Augustus,' said Miss Pecksniff, tearfully, 'indeed you do not know him. Augustus is all mildness and humility. Wait till you see Augustus, and I am sure he will conciliate your affections.'

'The question arises,' said Spottletoe, folding his arms: 'How long we are to wait. I am not accustomed to wait; that's the fact. And I want to know how long we are expected to wait.'

'Mrs Todgers!' said Charity, 'Mr Jinkins! I am afraid there must be some mistake. I think Augustus must have gone straight to the Altar!'

As such a thing was possible, and the church was close at hand, Mr Jinkins ran off to see, accompanied by Mr George Chuzzlewit the bachelor cousin, who preferred anything to the aggravation of sitting near the breakfast, without being able to eat it. But they came back with no other tidings than a familiar message from the clerk, importing that if they wanted to be married that morning they had better look sharp, as the curate wasn't going to wait there all day.

The bride was now alarmed; seriously alarmed. Good Heavens, what could have happened! Augustus! Dear Augustus!

Mr Jinkins volunteered to take a cab, and seek him at the newly-furnished house. The strong-minded woman administered comfort to Miss Pecksniff. 'It was a specimen of what she had to expect. It would do her good. It would dispel the romance of the affair.' The red-nosed daughters also administered the kindest comfort. 'Perhaps he'd come,' they said. The sketchy nephew hinted that he might have fallen off a bridge. The wrath of Mr Spottletoe resisted all the entreaties of his wife. Everybody spoke at once, and Miss Pecksniff, with clasped hands, sought consolation everywhere and found it nowhere, when Jinkins, having met the postman at the door, came back with a letter, which he put into her hand.

Miss Pecksniff opened it, uttered a piercing shriek, threw it down upon the ground, and fainted away.

They picked it up; and crowding round, and looking over one another's shoulders, read, in the words and dashes following, this communication:

'OFF GRAVESEND.

'CLIPPER SCHOONER, CUPID

'Wednesday night

'EVER INJURED MISS PECKSNIFF—Ere this reaches you, the undersigned will be—if not a corpse—on the way to Van Dieman's Land. Send not in pursuit. I never will be taken alive!

'The burden—300 tons per register—forgive, if in my distraction, I allude to the ship—on my mind—has been truly dreadful. Frequently—when you have sought to soothe my brow with kisses—has self-destruction flashed across me. Frequently—incredible as it may seem—have I abandoned the idea.

'I love another. She is Another's. Everything appears to be somebody else's. Nothing in the world is mine—not even my Situation—which I have forfeited—by my rash conduct—in running away.

'If you ever loved me, hear my last appeal! The last appeal of a miserable and blighted exile. Forward the inclosed—it is the key of my desk—to the office—by hand. Please address to Bobbs and Cholberry—I mean to Chobbs and Bolberry—but my mind is totally unhinged. I left a penknife—with a buckhorn handle—in your work-box. It will repay the messenger. May it make him happier than ever it did me!

'Oh, Miss Pecksniff, why didn't you leave me alone! Was it not cruel, CRUEL! Oh, my goodness, have you not been a witness of my feelings—have you not seen them flowing from my eyes—did you not, yourself, reproach me with weeping more than usual on that dreadful night when last we met—in that house—where I once was peaceful—though blighted—in the society of Mrs Todgers!

'But it was written—in the Talmud—that you should involve yourself in the inscrutable and gloomy Fate which it is my mission to accomplish, and which wreathes itself—e'en now—about in temples. I will not reproach, for I have wronged you. May the Furniture make some amends!

'Farewell! Be the proud bride of a ducal coronet, and forget me! Long may it be before you know the anguish with which I now subscribe myself—amid the tempestuous howlings of the—sailors,

'Unalterably,

'Never yours,

'AUGUSTUS.'

They thought as little of Miss Pecksniff, while they greedily perused this letter, as if she were the very last person on earth whom it concerned. But Miss Pecksniff really had fainted away. The bitterness of her mortification; the bitterness of having summoned witnesses, and such witnesses, to behold it; the bitterness of knowing that the strong-minded women and the red-nosed daughters towered triumphant in this hour of their anticipated overthrow; was too much to be borne. Miss Pecksniff had fainted away in earnest.

What sounds are these that fall so grandly on the ear! What darkening room is this!

And that mild figure seated at an organ, who is he! Ah Tom, dear Tom, old friend!

Thy head is prematurely grey, though Time has passed thee and our old association, Tom. But, in those sounds with which it is thy wont to bear the twilight company, the music of thy heart speaks out—the story of thy life relates itself.

Thy life is tranquil, calm, and happy, Tom. In the soft strain which ever and again comes stealing back upon the ear, the memory of thine old love may find a voice perhaps; but it is a pleasant, softened, whispering memory, like that in which we sometimes hold the dead, and does not pain or grieve thee, God be thanked.

Touch the notes lightly, Tom, as lightly as thou wilt, but never will thine hand fall half so lightly on that Instrument as on the head of thine old tyrant brought down very, very low; and never will it make as hollow a response to any touch of thine, as he does always.

For a drunken, begging, squalid, letter-writing man, called Pecksniff, with a shrewish daughter, haunts thee, Tom; and when he makes appeals to thee for cash, reminds thee that he built thy fortunes better than his own; and when he spends it, entertains the alehouse company with tales of thine ingratitude and his munificence towards thee once upon a time; and then he shows his elbows worn in holes, and puts his soleless shoes up on a bench, and begs his auditors look there, while thou art comfortably housed and clothed. All known to thee, and yet all borne with, Tom!

So, with a smile upon thy face, thou passest gently to another measure—to a quicker and more joyful one—and little feet are used to dance about thee at the sound, and bright young eyes to glance up into thine. And there is one slight creature, Tom—her child; not Ruth's—whom thine eyes follow in the romp and dance; who, wondering sometimes to see thee look so thoughtful, runs to climb up on thy knee, and put her cheek to thine; who loves thee, Tom, above the rest, if that can be; and falling sick once, chose thee for her nurse, and never knew impatience, Tom, when thou wert by her side.

Thou glidest, now, into a graver air; an air devoted to old friends and bygone times; and in thy lingering touch upon the keys, and the rich swelling of the mellow harmony, they rise before thee. The spirit of that old man dead, who delighted to anticipate thy wants, and never ceased to honour thee, is there, among the rest; repeating, with a face composed and calm, the words he said to thee upon his bed, and blessing thee!

And coming from a garden, Tom, bestrewn with flowers by children's hands, thy sister, little Ruth, as light of foot and heart as in old days, sits down beside thee. From the Present, and the Past, with which she is so tenderly entwined in all thy thoughts, thy strain soars onward to the Future. As it resounds within thee and without, the noble music, rolling round ye both, shuts out the grosser prospect of an earthly parting, and uplifts ye both to Heaven!

THE END OF
Life And Adventures
Of Martin Chuzzlewit

Master Humphrey's Clock

by Charles Dickens

CHAPTER I - MASTER HUMPHREY, FROM HIS CLOCK-SIDE IN THE CHIMNEY CORNER

THE reader must not expect to know where I live. At present, it is true, my abode may be a question of little or no import to anybody; but if I should carry my readers with me, as I hope to do, and there should spring up between them and me feelings of homely affection and regard attaching something of interest to matters ever so slightly connected with my fortunes or my speculations, even my place of residence might one day have a kind of charm for them. Bearing this possible contingency in mind, I wish them to understand, in the outset, that they must never expect to know it.

I am not a churlish old man. Friendless I can never be, for all mankind are my kindred, and I am on ill terms with no one member of my great family. But for many years I have led a lonely, solitary life; - what wound I sought to heal, what sorrow to forget, originally, matters not now; it is sufficient that retirement has become a habit with me, and that I am unwilling to break the spell which for so long a time has shed its quiet influence upon my home and heart.

I live in a venerable suburb of London, in an old house which in bygone days was a famous resort for merry roysterers and peerless ladies, long since departed. It is a silent, shady place, with a paved courtyard so full of echoes, that sometimes I am tempted to believe that faint responses to the noises of old times linger there yet, and that these ghosts of sound haunt my footsteps as I pace it up and down. I am the more confirmed in this belief, because, of late years, the echoes that attend my walks have been less loud and marked than they were wont to be; and it is pleasanter to imagine in them the rustling of silk brocade, and the light step of some lovely girl, than to recognise in their altered note the failing tread of an old man.

Those who like to read of brilliant rooms and gorgeous furniture would derive but little pleasure from a minute description of my simple dwelling. It is dear to me for the same reason that they would hold it in slight regard. Its worm-eaten doors, and low ceilings crossed by clumsy beams; its walls of wainscot, dark stairs, and gaping closets; its small chambers, communicating with each other by winding passages or narrow steps; its many nooks, scarce larger than its corner-cupboards; its very dust and dulness, are all dear to me. The moth and spider are my constant tenants; for in my house the one basks in his long sleep, and the other plies his busy loom secure and undisturbed. I have a pleasure in thinking on a summer's day how many butterflies have sprung for the first time into light and sunshine from some dark corner of these old walls.

When I first came to live here, which was many years ago, the neighbours were curious to know who I was, and whence I came, and why I lived so much alone. As time went on, and they still remained unsatisfied on these points, I became the centre of a popular ferment, extending for half a mile round, and in one direction for a full mile. Various rumours were circulated to my prejudice. I was a spy, an infidel, a conjurer, a kidnapper of children, a refugee, a priest, a monster. Mothers caught up their infants and ran into their houses as I passed; men eyed me spitefully, and muttered threats and curses. I was the object of suspicion and distrust - ay, of downright hatred too.

But when in course of time they found I did no harm, but, on the contrary, inclined towards them despite their unjust usage, they began to relent. I found my footsteps no longer dogged, as they had often been before, and observed that the women and children no longer retreated, but would stand and gaze at me as I passed their doors. I took this for a good omen, and waited patiently for better times. By degrees I began to make friends among these humble folks; and though they were yet shy of speaking, would give them 'good day,' and so pass on. In a little time, those whom I had thus accosted would make a point of coming to their doors and windows at the usual hour, and nod or courtesy to me; children, too, came timidly within my reach, and ran away quite scared when I patted their heads and bade them be good at school. These little people soon grew more familiar. From exchanging mere words of course with my older neighbours, I gradually became their friend and adviser, the depositary of their cares and sorrows, and sometimes, it may be, the reliever, in my small way, of their distresses. And now I never walk abroad but pleasant recognitions and smiling faces wait on Master Humphrey.

It was a whim of mine, perhaps as a whet to the curiosity of my neighbours, and a kind of retaliation upon them for their suspicions - it was, I say, a whim of mine, when I first took up my abode in this place, to acknowledge no other name than Humphrey. With my detractors, I was Ugly Humphrey. When I began to convert them into friends, I was Mr. Humphrey and Old Mr. Humphrey. At length I settled down into plain Master Humphrey, which was understood to be the title most pleasant to my ear; and so completely a matter of course has it become, that sometimes when I am taking my morning walk in my little courtyard, I overhear my barber - who has a profound respect for me, and would not, I am sure, abridge my honours for the world - holding forth on the other side of the wall, touching the state of 'Master Humphrey's' health, and communicating to some friend the substance of the conversation that he and Master Humphrey have had together in the course of the shaving which he has just concluded.

That I may not make acquaintance with my readers under false pretences, or give them cause to complain hereafter that I have withheld any matter which it was essential for them to have learnt at first, I wish them to know - and I smile sorrowfully to think that the time has been when the confession would have given me pain - that I am a misshapen, deformed old man.

I have never been made a misanthrope by this cause. I have never been stung by any insult, nor wounded by any jest upon my crooked figure. As a child I was melancholy and timid, but that was because the gentle consideration paid to my misfortune sunk deep into my spirit and made me sad, even in those early days. I was but a very young creature when my poor mother died, and yet I remember that often when I hung around her neck, and oftener still when I played about the room before her, she would catch me to her bosom, and bursting into tears, would soothe me with every term of fondness and affection. God knows I was a happy child at those times, - happy to nestle in her breast, - happy to weep when she did, - happy in not knowing why.

These occasions are so strongly impressed upon my memory, that they seem to have occupied whole years. I had numbered very, very few when they ceased for ever, but before then their meaning had been revealed to me.

I do not know whether all children are imbued with a quick perception of childish grace and beauty, and a strong love for it, but I was. I had no thought that I remember, either that I possessed it myself or that I lacked it, but I admired it with an intensity that I cannot describe. A little knot of playmates - they must have been beautiful, for I see them now - were clustered one day round my mother's knee in eager admiration of some picture representing a group of infant angels, which she held in her hand. Whose the picture was, whether it was familiar to me or otherwise, or how all the children came to be there, I forget; I have some dim thought it was my birthday, but the beginning of my recollection is that we were all together in a garden, and it was summer weather, - I am sure of that, for one of the little girls had roses in her sash. There were many lovely angels in this picture, and I remember the fancy coming upon me to point out which of them represented each child there, and that when I had gone through my companions, I stopped and hesitated, wondering which was most like me. I remember the children looking at each other, and my turning red and hot, and their crowding round to kiss me, saying that they loved me all the same; and then, and when the old sorrow came into my dear mother's mild and tender look, the truth broke upon me for the first time, and I knew, while watching my awkward and ungainly sports, how keenly she had felt for her poor crippled boy.

I used frequently to dream of it afterwards, and now my heart aches for that child as if I had never been he, when I think how often he awoke from some fairy change to his own old form, and sobbed himself to sleep again.

Well, well, - all these sorrows are past. My glancing at them may not be without its use, for it may help in some measure to explain why I have all my life been attached to the inanimate objects that people my chamber, and how I have come to look upon them rather in the light of old and constant friends, than as mere chairs and tables which a little money could replace at will.

Chief and first among all these is my Clock, - my old, cheerful, companionable Clock. How can I ever convey to others an idea of the comfort and consolation that this old Clock has been for years to me!

It is associated with my earliest recollections. It stood upon the staircase at home (I call it home still mechanically), nigh sixty years ago. I like it for that; but it is not on that account, nor because it is a quaint old thing in a huge oaken case curiously and richly carved, that I prize it as I do. I incline to it as if it were alive, and could understand and give me back the love I bear it.

And what other thing that has not life could cheer me as it does? what other thing that has not life (I will not say how few things that have) could have proved the same patient, true, untiring friend? How often have I sat in the long winter evenings feeling such society in its cricket-voice, that raising my eyes from my book and looking gratefully towards it, the face reddened by the glow of the shining fire has seemed to relax from its staid expression and to regard me kindly! how often in the summer twilight, when my thoughts have wandered back to a melancholy past, have its regular whisperings recalled them to the calm and peaceful present! how often in the dead tranquillity of night has its bell broken the oppressive silence, and seemed to give me assurance that the old clock was still a faithful watcher at my chamber-door! My easy-chair, my desk, my ancient furniture, my very books, I can scarcely bring myself to love even these last like my old clock.

It stands in a snug corner, midway between the fireside and a low arched door leading to my bedroom. Its fame is diffused so extensively throughout the neighbourhood, that I have often the satisfaction of hearing the publican, or the baker, and sometimes even the parish-clerk, petitioning my housekeeper (of whom I shall have much to say by-and-by) to inform him the exact time by Master Humphrey's clock. My barber, to whom I have referred, would sooner believe it than the sun. Nor are these its only distinctions. It has acquired, I am happy to say, another, inseparably connecting it not only with my enjoyments and reflections, but with those of other men; as I shall now relate.

I lived alone here for a long time without any friend or acquaintance. In the course of my wanderings by night and day, at all hours and seasons, in city streets and quiet country parts, I came to be familiar with certain faces, and to take it to heart as quite a heavy disappointment if they failed to present themselves each at its accustomed spot. But these were the only friends I knew, and beyond them I had none.

It happened, however, when I had gone on thus for a long time, that I formed an acquaintance with a deaf gentleman, which ripened into intimacy and close companionship. To this hour, I am ignorant of his name. It is his humour to conceal it, or he has a reason and purpose for so doing. In either case, I feel that he has a right to require a return of the trust he has reposed; and as he has never sought to discover my secret, I have never sought to penetrate his. There may have been something in this tacit confidence in each other flattering and pleasant to us both, and it may have imparted in the beginning an additional zest, perhaps, to our friendship. Be this as it may, we have grown to be like brothers, and still I only know him as the deaf gentleman.

I have said that retirement has become a habit with me. When I add, that the deaf gentleman and I have two friends, I communicate nothing which is inconsistent with that declaration. I spend many hours of every day in solitude and study, have no friends or change of friends but these, only see them at stated periods, and am supposed to be of a retired spirit by the very nature and object of our association.

We are men of secluded habits, with something of a cloud upon our early fortunes, whose enthusiasm, nevertheless, has not cooled with age, whose spirit of romance is not yet quenched, who are content to ramble through the world in a pleasant dream, rather than ever waken again to its harsh realities. We are alchemists who would extract the essence of perpetual youth from dust and ashes, tempt coy Truth in many light and airy forms from the bottom of her well, and discover one crumb of comfort or one grain of good in the commonest and least-regarded matter that passes through our crucible. Spirits of past times, creatures of imagination, and people of to-day are alike the objects of our seeking, and, unlike the objects of search with most philosophers, we can insure their coming at our command.

The deaf gentleman and I first began to beguile our days with these fancies, and our nights in communicating them to each other. We are now four. But in my room there are six old chairs, and we have decided that the two empty seats shall always be placed at our table when we meet, to remind us that we may yet increase our company by that number, if we should find two men to our mind. When one among us dies, his chair will always be set in its usual place, but never occupied again; and I have caused my will to be so drawn out, that when we are all dead the house shall be shut up, and the vacant chairs still left in their accustomed places. It is pleasant to think that even then our shades may, perhaps, assemble together as of yore we did, and join in ghostly converse.

One night in every week, as the clock strikes ten, we meet. At the second stroke of two, I am alone.

And now shall I tell how that my old servant, besides giving us note of time, and ticking cheerful encouragement of our proceedings, lends its name to our society, which for its punctuality and my love is christened 'Master Humphrey's Clock'? Now shall I tell how that in the bottom of the old dark closet, where the steady pendulum throbs and beats with healthy action, though the pulse of him who made it stood still long ago, and never moved again, there are piles of dusty papers constantly placed there by our hands, that we may link our enjoyments with my old friend, and draw means to beguile time from the heart of time itself? Shall I, or can I, tell with what a secret pride I open this repository when we meet at night, and still find new store of pleasure in my dear old Clock?

Friend and companion of my solitude! mine is not a selfish love; I would not keep your merits to myself, but disperse something of pleasant association with your image through the whole wide world; I would have men couple with your name cheerful and healthy thoughts; I would have them believe that you keep true and honest time; and how it would gladden me to know that they recognised some hearty English work in Master Humphrey's clock!

THE CLOCK-CASE

It is my intention constantly to address my readers from the chimney-corner, and I would fain hope that such accounts as I shall give them of our histories and proceedings, our quiet speculations or more busy adventures, will never be unwelcome. Lest, however, I should grow prolix in the outset by lingering too long upon our little association, confounding the enthusiasm with which I regard this chief happiness of my life with that minor degree of interest which those to whom I address myself may be supposed to feel for it, I have deemed it expedient to break off as they have seen.

But, still clinging to my old friend, and naturally desirous that all its merits should be known, I am tempted to open (somewhat irregularly and against our laws, I must admit) the clock-case. The first roll of paper on which I lay my hand is in the writing of the deaf gentleman. I shall have to speak of him in my next paper; and how can I better approach that welcome task than by prefacing it with a production of his own pen, consigned to the safe keeping of my honest Clock by his own hand?

The manuscript runs thus

INTRODUCTION TO THE GIANT CHRONICLES

Once upon a time, that is to say, in this our time, - the exact year, month, and day are of no matter, - there dwelt in the city of London a substantial citizen, who united in his single person the dignities of wholesale fruiterer, alderman, common-councilman, and member of the worshipful Company of Patten-makers; who had superadded to these extraordinary distinctions the important post and title of Sheriff, and who at length, and to crown all, stood next in rotation for the high and honourable office of Lord Mayor.

He was a very substantial citizen indeed. His face was like the full moon in a fog, with two little holes punched out for his eyes, a very ripe pear stuck on for his nose, and a wide gash to serve for a mouth. The girth of his waistcoat was hung up and lettered in his tailor's shop as an extraordinary curiosity. He breathed like a heavy snorer, and his voice in speaking came thickly forth, as if it were oppressed and stifled by feather-beds. He trod the ground like an elephant, and eat and drank like - like nothing but an alderman, as he was.

This worthy citizen had risen to his great eminence from small beginnings. He had once been a very lean, weazen little boy, never dreaming of carrying such a weight of flesh upon his bones or of money in his pockets, and glad enough to take his dinner at a baker's door, and his tea at a pump. But he had long ago forgotten all this, as it was proper that a wholesale fruiterer, alderman, common-councilman, member of the worshipful Company of Patten- makers, past sheriff, and, above all, a Lord

Mayor that was to be, should; and he never forgot it more completely in all his life than on the eighth of November in the year of his election to the great golden civic chair, which was the day before his grand dinner at Guildhall.

It happened that as he sat that evening all alone in his counting- house, looking over the bill of fare for next day, and checking off the fat capons in fifties, and the turtle-soup by the hundred quarts, for his private amusement, - it happened that as he sat alone occupied in these pleasant calculations, a strange man came in and asked him how he did, adding, 'If I am half as much changed as you, sir, you have no recollection of me, I am sure.'

The strange man was not over and above well dressed, and was very far from being fat or rich-looking in any sense of the word, yet he spoke with a kind of modest confidence, and assumed an easy, gentlemanly sort of an air, to which nobody but a rich man can lawfully presume. Besides this, he interrupted the good citizen just as he had reckoned three hundred and seventy-two fat capons, and was carrying them over to the next column; and as if that were not aggravation enough, the learned recorder for the city of London had only ten minutes previously gone out at that very same door, and had turned round and said, 'Good night, my lord.' Yes, he had said, 'my lord;' - he, a man of birth and education, of the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple, Barrister-at-Law, - he who had an uncle in the House of Commons, and an aunt almost but not quite in the House of Lords (for she had married a feeble peer, and made him vote as she liked), - he, this man, this learned recorder, had said, 'my lord.' 'I'll not wait till to-morrow to give you your title, my Lord Mayor,' says he, with a bow and a smile; 'you are Lord Mayor DE FACTO, if not DE JURE. Good night, my lord.'

The Lord Mayor elect thought of this, and turning to the stranger, and sternly bidding him 'go out of his private counting-house,' brought forward the three hundred and seventy-two fat capons, and went on with his account.

'Do you remember,' said the other, stepping forward, - 'DO you remember little Joe Toddyhigh?'

The port wine fled for a moment from the fruiterer's nose as he muttered, 'Joe Toddyhigh! What about Joe Toddyhigh?'

'I am Joe Toddyhigh,' cried the visitor. 'Look at me, look hard at me, - harder, harder. You know me now? You know little Joe again? What a happiness to us both, to meet the very night before your grandeur! O! give me your hand, Jack, - both hands, - both, for the sake of old times.'

'You pinch me, sir. You're a-hurting of me,' said the Lord Mayor elect pettishly. 'Don't, - suppose anybody should come, - Mr. Toddyhigh, sir.'

'Mr. Toddyhigh!' repeated the other ruefully.

'O, don't bother,' said the Lord Mayor elect, scratching his head.
'Dear me! Why, I thought you was dead. What a fellow you are!'

Indeed, it was a pretty state of things, and worthy the tone of vexation and disappointment in which the Lord Mayor spoke. Joe Toddyhigh had been a poor boy with him at Hull, and had oftentimes divided his last penny and parted his last crust to relieve his wants; for though Joe was a destitute child in those times, he was as faithful and affectionate in his friendship as ever man of might could be. They parted one day to seek their fortunes in different directions. Joe went to sea, and the now wealthy citizen begged his way to London, They separated with many tears, like foolish fellows as they were, and agreed to remain fast friends, and if they lived, soon to communicate again.

When he was an errand-boy, and even in the early days of his apprenticeship, the citizen had many a time trudged to the Post- office to ask if there were any letter from poor little Joe, and had gone home again with tears in his eyes, when he found no news of his only friend. The world is a wide place, and it was a long time before the letter came; when it did, the writer was forgotten. It turned from white to yellow from lying in the Post-office with nobody to claim it, and in course of time was torn up with five hundred others, and sold for waste-paper. And now at last, and when it might least have been expected, here was this Joe Toddyhigh turning up and claiming acquaintance with a great public character, who on the morrow would be cracking jokes with the Prime Minister of England, and who had only, at any time during the next twelve months, to say the word, and he could shut up Temple Bar, and make it no thoroughfare for the king himself!

'I am sure I don't know what to say, Mr. Toddyhigh,' said the Lord Mayor elect; 'I really don't. It's very inconvenient. I'd sooner have given twenty pound, - it's very inconvenient, really.' - A thought had come into his mind, that perhaps his old friend might say something passionate which would give him an excuse for being angry himself. No such thing. Joe looked at him steadily, but very mildly, and did not open his lips.

'Of course I shall pay you what I owe you,' said the Lord Mayor elect, fidgeting in his chair. 'You lent me - I think it was a shilling or some small coin - when we parted company, and that of course I shall pay with good interest. I can pay my way with any man, and always have done. If you look into the Mansion House the day after to-morrow, - some time after dusk, - and ask for my private clerk, you'll find he has a draft for you. I haven't got time to say anything more just now, unless,' - he hesitated, for, coupled with a strong desire to glitter for once in all his glory in the eyes of his former companion, was a distrust of his appearance, which might be more shabby than he could tell by that feeble light, - 'unless you'd like to come to the dinner to-morrow. I don't mind your having this ticket, if you like to take it. A great many people would give their ears for it, I can tell you.'

His old friend took the card without speaking a word, and instantly departed. His sunburnt face and gray hair were present to the citizen's mind for a moment; but by the time he reached three hundred and eighty-one fat capons, he had quite forgotten him.

Joe Toddyhigh had never been in the capital of Europe before, and he wandered up and down the streets that night amazed at the number of churches and other public buildings, the splendour of the shops, the riches that were heaped up on every side, the glare of light in which they were displayed, and the concourse of people who hurried to and fro, indifferent, apparently, to all the wonders that surrounded them. But in all the long streets and broad squares, there were none but strangers; it was quite a relief to turn down a by-way and hear his own footsteps on the pavement. He went home to his inn, thought that London was a dreary, desolate place, and felt disposed to doubt the existence of one true-hearted man in the whole worshipful Company of Patten-makers. Finally, he went to bed, and dreamed that he and the Lord Mayor elect were boys again.

He went next day to the dinner; and when in a burst of light and music, and in the midst of splendid decorations and surrounded by brilliant company, his former friend appeared at the head of the Hall, and was hailed with shouts and cheering, he cheered and shouted with the best, and for the moment could have cried. The next moment he cursed his weakness in behalf of a man so changed and selfish, and quite hated a jolly-looking old gentleman opposite for declaring himself in the pride of his heart a Patten-maker.

As the banquet proceeded, he took more and more to heart the rich citizen's unkindness; and that, not from any envy, but because he felt that a man of his state and fortune could all the better afford to recognise an old friend, even if he were poor and obscure. The more he thought of this, the more lonely and sad he felt. When the company dispersed and adjourned to the ball-room, he paced the hall and passages alone, ruminating in a very melancholy condition upon the disappointment he had experienced.

It chanced, while he was lounging about in this moody state, that he stumbled upon a flight of stairs, dark, steep, and narrow, which he ascended without any thought about the matter, and so came into a little music-gallery, empty and deserted. From this elevated post, which commanded the whole hall, he amused himself in looking down upon the attendants who were clearing away the fragments of the feast very lazily, and drinking out of all the bottles and glasses with most commendable perseverance.

His attention gradually relaxed, and he fell fast asleep.

When he awoke, he thought there must be something the matter with his eyes; but, rubbing them a little, he soon found that the moonlight was really streaming through the east window, that the lamps were all extinguished, and that he was alone. He listened, but no distant murmur in the echoing passages, not even the shutting of a door, broke the deep silence; he groped his way down the stairs, and found that the door at the bottom was locked on the other side. He began now to comprehend that he must have slept a long time, that he had been overlooked, and was shut up there for the night.

His first sensation, perhaps, was not altogether a comfortable one, for it was a dark, chilly, earthy-smelling place, and something too large, for a man so situated, to feel at home in. However, when the momentary consternation of his surprise was over, he made light of the accident, and resolved to feel his way up the stairs again, and make himself as comfortable as he could in the gallery until morning. As he turned to execute this purpose, he heard the clocks strike three.

Any such invasion of a dead stillness as the striking of distant clocks, causes it to appear the more intense and insupportable when the sound has ceased. He listened with strained attention in the hope that some clock, lagging behind its fellows, had yet to strike, - looking all the time into the profound darkness before him, until it seemed to weave itself into a black tissue, patterned with a hundred reflections of his own eyes. But the bells had all pealed out their warning for that once, and the gust of wind that moaned through the place seemed cold and heavy with their iron breath.

The time and circumstances were favourable to reflection. He tried to keep his thoughts to the current, unpleasant though it was, in which they had moved all day, and to think with what a romantic feeling he had looked forward to shaking his old friend by the hand before he died, and what a wide and cruel difference there was between the meeting they had had, and that which he had so often and so long anticipated. Still, he was disordered by waking to such sudden loneliness, and could not prevent his mind from running upon odd tales of people of undoubted courage, who, being shut up by night in vaults or churches, or other dismal places, had scaled great heights to get out, and fled from silence as they had never done from danger. This brought to his mind the moonlight through the window, and bethinking himself of it, he groped his way back up the crooked stairs, - but very stealthily, as though he were fearful of being overheard.

He was very much astonished when he approached the gallery again, to see a light in the building: still more so, on advancing hastily and looking round, to observe no visible source from which it could proceed. But how much greater yet was his astonishment at the spectacle which this light revealed.

The statues of the two giants, Gog and Magog, each above fourteen feet in height, those which succeeded to still older and more barbarous figures, after the Great Fire of London, and which stand in the Guildhall to this day, were endowed with life and motion. These guardian genii of the City had quitted their pedestals, and reclined in easy attitudes in the great stained glass window. Between them was an ancient cask, which seemed to be full of wine; for the younger Giant, clapping his huge hand upon it, and throwing up his mighty leg, burst into an exulting laugh, which reverberated through the hall like thunder.

Joe Toddyhigh instinctively stooped down, and, more dead than alive, felt his hair stand on end, his knees knock together, and a cold damp break out upon his forehead. But even at that minute curiosity prevailed over every other feeling, and somewhat reassured by the good-humour of the Giants and their apparent unconsciousness of his presence, he crouched in a corner of the gallery, in as small a space as he could, and, peeping between the rails, observed them closely.

It was then that the elder Giant, who had a flowing gray beard, raised his thoughtful eyes to his companion's face, and in a grave and solemn voice addressed him thus:

FIRST NIGHT OF THE GIANT CHRONICLES

Turning towards his companion the elder Giant uttered these words in a grave, majestic tone:

'Magog, does boisterous mirth beseem the Giant Warder of this ancient city? Is this becoming demeanour for a watchful spirit over whose bodiless head so many years have rolled, so many changes swept like empty air - in whose impalpable nostrils the scent of blood and crime, pestilence, cruelty, and horror, has been familiar as breath to mortals - in whose sight Time has gathered in the harvest of centuries, and garnered so many crops of human pride, affections, hopes, and sorrows? Bethink you of our compact. The night wanes; feasting, revelry, and music have encroached upon our usual hours of solitude, and morning will be here apace. Ere we are stricken mute again, bethink you of our compact.'

Pronouncing these latter words with more of impatience than quite accorded with his apparent age and gravity, the Giant raised a long pole (which he still bears in his hand) and tapped his brother Giant rather smartly on the head; indeed, the blow was so smartly administered, that the latter quickly withdrew his lips from the cask, to which they had been applied, and, catching up his shield and halberd, assumed an attitude of defence. His irritation was but momentary, for he laid these weapons aside as hastily as he had assumed them, and said as he did so:

'You know, Gog, old friend, that when we animate these shapes which the Londoners of old assigned (and not unworthily) to the guardian genii of their city, we are susceptible of some of the sensations which belong to human kind. Thus when I taste wine, I feel blows; when I relish the one, I disrelish the other. Therefore, Gog, the more especially as your arm is none of the lightest, keep your good staff by your side, else we may chance to differ. Peace be between us!'

'Amen!' said the other, leaning his staff in the window-corner.

'Why did you laugh just now?'

'To think,' replied the Giant Magog, laying his hand upon the cask, 'of him who owned this wine, and kept it in a cellar hoarded from the light of day, for thirty years, - "till it should be fit to drink," quoth he. He was twoscore and ten years old when he buried it beneath his house, and yet never thought that he might be scarcely "fit to drink" when the wine became so. I wonder it never occurred to him to make himself unfit to be eaten. There is very little of him left by this time.'

'The night is waning,' said Gog mournfully.

'I know it,' replied his companion, 'and I see you are impatient. But look. Through the eastern window - placed opposite to us, that the first beams of the rising sun may every morning gild our giant faces - the moon-rays fall upon the pavement in a stream of light that to my fancy sinks through the cold stone and gushes into the old crypt below. The night is scarcely past its noon, and our great charge is sleeping heavily.'

They ceased to speak, and looked upward at the moon. The sight of their large, black, rolling eyes filled Joe Toddyhigh with such horror that he could scarcely draw his breath. Still they took no note of him, and appeared to believe themselves quite alone.

'Our compact,' said Magog after a pause, 'is, if I understand it, that, instead of watching here in silence through the dreary nights, we entertain each other with stories of our past experience; with tales of the past, the present, and the future; with legends of London and her sturdy citizens from the old simple times. That every night at midnight, when St. Paul's bell tolls out one, and we may move and speak, we thus discourse, nor leave such themes till the first gray gleam of day shall strike us dumb. Is that our bargain, brother?'

'Yes,' said the Giant Gog, 'that is the league between us who guard this city, by day in spirit, and by night in body also; and never on ancient holidays have its conduits run wine more merrily than we will pour forth our legendary lore. We are old chroniclers from this time hence. The crumbled walls encircle us once more, the postern-gates are closed, the drawbridge is up, and pent in its narrow den beneath, the water foams and struggles with the sunken starlings. Jerkins and quarter-staves are in the streets again, the nightly watch is set, the rebel, sad and lonely in his Tower dungeon, tries to sleep and weeps for home and children. Aloft upon the gates and walls are noble heads glaring fiercely down upon the dreaming city, and vexing the hungry dogs that scent them in the air, and tear the ground beneath with dismal howlings. The axe, the block, the rack, in their dark chambers give signs of recent use. The Thames, floating past long lines of cheerful windows whence come a burst of music and a stream of light, bears suddenly to the Palace wall the last red stain brought on the tide from Traitor's Gate. But your pardon, brother. The night wears, and I am talking idly.'

The other Giant appeared to be entirely of this opinion, for during the foregoing rhapsody of his fellow-sentinel he had been scratching his head with an air of comical uneasiness, or rather with an air that would have been very comical if he had been a dwarf or an ordinary-sized man. He winked too, and though it could not be doubted for a moment that he winked to himself, still he certainly cocked his enormous eye towards the gallery where the listener was concealed. Nor was this all, for he gaped; and when he gaped, Joe was horribly reminded of the popular prejudice on the subject of giants, and of their fabled power of smelling out Englishmen, however closely concealed.

His alarm was such that he nearly swooned, and it was some little time before his power of sight or hearing was restored. When he recovered he found that the elder Giant was pressing the younger to commence the Chronicles, and that the latter was endeavouring to excuse himself on the ground that the night was far spent, and it would be better to wait until the next. Well assured by this that he was certainly about to begin directly, the listener collected his faculties by a great effort, and distinctly heard Magog express himself to the following effect:

In the sixteenth century and in the reign of Queen Elizabeth of glorious memory (albeit her golden days are sadly rusted with blood), there lived in the city of London a bold young 'prentice who loved his master's daughter. There were no doubt within the walls a great many 'prentices in this condition, but I speak of only one, and his name was Hugh Graham.

This Hugh was apprenticed to an honest Bowyer who dwelt in the ward of Cheype, and was rumoured to possess great wealth. Rumour was quite as infallible in those days as at the present time, but it happened then as now to be sometimes right by accident. It stumbled upon the truth when it gave the old Bowyer a mint of money. His trade had been a profitable one in the time of King Henry the Eighth, who encouraged English archery to the utmost, and he had been prudent and discreet. Thus it came to pass that Mistress Alice, his only daughter, was the richest heiress in all his wealthy ward. Young Hugh had often maintained with staff and cudgel that she was the handsomest. To do him justice, I believe she was.

If he could have gained the heart of pretty Mistress Alice by knocking this conviction into stubborn people's heads, Hugh would have had no cause to fear. But though the Bowyer's daughter smiled in secret to hear of his doughty deeds for her sake, and though her little waiting-woman reported all her smiles (and many more) to Hugh, and though he was at a vast expense in kisses and small coin to recompense her fidelity, he made no progress in his love. He durst not whisper it to Mistress Alice save on sure encouragement, and that she never gave him. A glance of her dark eye as she sat at the door on a summer's evening after prayer-time, while he and the neighbouring 'prentices exercised themselves in the street with blunted sword and buckler, would fire Hugh's blood so that none could stand before him; but then she glanced at others quite as kindly as on him, and where was the use of cracking crowns if Mistress Alice smiled upon the cracked as well as on the cracker?

Still Hugh went on, and loved her more and more. He thought of her all day, and dreamed of her all night long. He treasured up her every word and gesture, and had a palpitation of the heart whenever he heard her footstep on the stairs or her voice in an adjoining room. To him, the old Bowyer's house was haunted by an angel; there was enchantment in the air and space in which she moved. It would have been no miracle to Hugh if flowers had sprung from the rush-strewn floors beneath the tread of lovely Mistress Alice.

Never did 'prentice long to distinguish himself in the eyes of his lady-love so ardently as Hugh. Sometimes he pictured to himself the house taking fire by night, and he, when all drew back in fear, rushing through flame and smoke, and bearing her from the ruins in his arms. At other times he thought of a rising of fierce rebels, an attack upon the city, a strong assault upon the Bowyer's house in particular, and he falling on the threshold pierced with numberless wounds in defence of Mistress Alice. If he could only enact some prodigy of valour, do some wonderful deed, and let her know that she had inspired it, he thought he could die contented.

Sometimes the Bowyer and his daughter would go out to supper with a worthy citizen at the fashionable hour of six o'clock, and on such occasions

Hugh, wearing his blue 'prentice cloak as gallantly as 'prentice might, would attend with a lantern and his trusty club to escort them home. These were the brightest moments of his life. To hold the light while Mistress Alice picked her steps, to touch her hand as he helped her over broken ways, to have her leaning on his arm, - it sometimes even came to that, - this was happiness indeed!

When the nights were fair, Hugh followed in the rear, his eyes riveted on the graceful figure of the Bowyer's daughter as she and the old man moved on before him. So they threaded the narrow winding streets of the city, now passing beneath the overhanging gables of old wooden houses whence creaking signs projected into the street, and now emerging from some dark and frowning gateway into the clear moonlight. At such times, or when the shouts of straggling brawlers met her ear, the Bowyer's daughter would look timidly back at Hugh, beseeching him to draw nearer; and then how he grasped his club and longed to do battle with a dozen rufflers, for the love of Mistress Alice!

The old Bowyer was in the habit of lending money on interest to the gallants of the Court, and thus it happened that many a richly- dressed gentleman dismounted at his door. More waving plumes and gallant steeds, indeed, were seen at the Bowyer's house, and more embroidered silks and velvets sparkled in his dark shop and darker private closet, than at any merchants in the city. In those times no less than in the present it would seem that the richest-looking cavaliers often wanted money the most.

Of these glittering clients there was one who always came alone. He was nobly mounted, and, having no attendant, gave his horse in charge to Hugh while he and the Bowyer were closeted within. Once as he sprung into the saddle Mistress Alice was seated at an upper window, and before she could withdraw he had doffed his jewelled cap and kissed his hand. Hugh watched him caracoling down the street, and burnt with indignation. But how much deeper was the glow that reddened in his cheeks when, raising his eyes to the casement, he saw that Alice watched the stranger too!

He came again and often, each time arrayed more gaily than before, and still the little casement showed him Mistress Alice. At length one heavy day, she fled from home. It had cost her a hard struggle, for all her old father's gifts were strewn about her chamber as if she had parted from them one by one, and knew that the time must come when these tokens of his love would wring her heart, - yet she was gone.

She left a letter commanding her poor father to the care of Hugh, and wishing he might be happier than ever he could have been with her, for he deserved the love of a better and a purer heart than she had to bestow. The old man's forgiveness (she said) she had no power to ask, but she prayed God to bless him, - and so ended with a blot upon the paper where her tears had fallen.

At first the old man's wrath was kindled, and he carried his wrong to the Queen's throne itself; but there was no redress he learnt at Court, for his daughter had been conveyed abroad. This afterwards appeared to be the truth, as there came from France, after an interval of several years, a letter in her hand. It was written in trembling characters, and almost illegible. Little could be made out save that she often thought of home and her old dear pleasant room, - and that she had dreamt her father was dead and had not blessed her, - and that her heart was breaking.

The poor old Bowyer lingered on, never suffering Hugh to quit his sight, for he knew now that he had loved his daughter, and that was the only link that bound him to earth. It broke at length and he died, - bequeathing his old 'prentice his trade and all his wealth, and solemnly charging him with his last breath to revenge his child if ever he who had worked her misery crossed his path in life again.

From the time of Alice's flight, the tilting-ground, the fields, the fencing-school, the summer-evening sports, knew Hugh no more. His spirit was dead within him. He rose to great eminence and repute among the citizens, but was seldom seen to smile, and never mingled in their revelries or rejoicings. Brave, humane, and generous, he was beloved by all. He was pitied too by those who knew his story, and these were so many that when he walked along the streets alone at dusk, even the rude common people doffed their caps and mingled a rough air of sympathy with their respect.

One night in May - it was her birthnight, and twenty years since she had left her home - Hugh Graham sat in the room she had hallowed in his boyish days. He was now a gray-haired man, though still in the prime of life. Old thoughts had borne him company for many hours, and the chamber had gradually grown quite dark, when he was roused by a low knocking at the outer door.

He hastened down, and opening it saw by the light of a lamp which he had seized upon the way, a female figure crouching in the portal. It hurried swiftly past him and glided up the stairs. He looked for pursuers. There were none in sight. No, not one.

He was inclined to think it a vision of his own brain, when suddenly a vague suspicion of the truth flashed upon his mind. He barred the door, and hastened wildly back. Yes, there she was, - there, in the chamber he had quitted, - there in her old innocent, happy home, so changed that none but he could trace one gleam of what she had been, - there upon her knees, - with her hands clasped in agony and shame before her burning face.

'My God, my God!' she cried, 'now strike me dead! Though I have brought death and shame and sorrow on this roof, O, let me die at home in mercy!'

There was no tear upon her face then, but she trembled and glanced round the chamber. Everything was in its old place. Her bed looked as if she had risen from it but that morning. The sight of these familiar objects, marking the dear remembrance in which she had been held, and the blight she had brought upon herself, was more than the woman's better nature that had carried her there could bear. She wept and fell upon the ground.

A rumour was spread about, in a few days' time, that the Bowyer's cruel daughter had come home, and that Master Graham had given her lodging in his house. It was rumoured too that he had resigned her fortune, in order that she might bestow it in acts of charity, and that he had vowed to guard her in her solitude, but that they were never to see each other more. These rumours greatly incensed all virtuous wives and daughters in the ward, especially when they appeared to receive some corroboration from the circumstance of Master Graham taking up his abode in another tenement hard by. The estimation in which he was held, however, forbade any questioning on the subject; and as the Bowyer's house was close shut up, and nobody came forth when public shows and festivities were in progress, or to flaunt in the public walks, or to buy new fashions at the mercers' booths, all the well-conducted females agreed among themselves that there could be no woman there.

These reports had scarcely died away when the wonder of every good citizen, male and female, was utterly absorbed and swallowed up by a Royal Proclamation, in which her Majesty, strongly censuring the practice of wearing long Spanish rapiers of preposterous length (as being a bullying and swaggering custom, tending to bloodshed and public disorder), commanded that on a particular day therein named, certain grave citizens should repair to the city gates, and there, in public, break all rapiers worn or carried by persons claiming admission, that exceeded, though it were only by a quarter of an inch, three standard feet in length.

Royal Proclamations usually take their course, let the public wonder never so much. On the appointed day two citizens of high repute took up their stations at each of the gates, attended by a party of the city guard, the main body to enforce the Queen's will, and take custody of all such rebels (if any) as might have the temerity to dispute it: and a few to bear the standard measures and instruments for reducing all unlawful sword-blades to the prescribed dimensions. In pursuance of these arrangements, Master Graham and another were posted at Lud Gate, on the hill before St. Paul's.

A pretty numerous company were gathered together at this spot, for, besides the officers in attendance to enforce the proclamation, there was a motley crowd of lookers-on of various degrees, who raised from time to time such shouts and cries as the circumstances called forth. A spruce young courtier was the first who approached: he unsheathed a weapon of burnished steel that shone and glistened in the sun, and handed it with the newest air to the officer, who, finding it exactly three feet long, returned it with a bow. Thereupon the gallant raised his hat and crying, 'God save the Queen!' passed on amidst the plaudits of the mob. Then came another - a better courtier still - who wore a blade but two feet long, whereat the people laughed, much to the disparagement of his honour's dignity. Then came a third, a sturdy old officer of the army, girded with a rapier at least a foot and a half beyond her Majesty's pleasure; at him they raised a great shout, and most of the spectators (but especially those who were armourers or cutlers) laughed very heartily at the breakage which would ensue. But they were disappointed; for the old campaigner, coolly unbuckling his sword and bidding his servant carry it home again, passed through unarmed, to the great indignation of all the beholders. They relieved themselves in some degree by hooting a tall blustering fellow with a prodigious weapon, who stopped short on coming in sight of the preparations, and after a little consideration turned back again. But all this time no rapier had been broken, although it was high noon, and all cavaliers of any quality or appearance were taking their way towards Saint Paul's churchyard.

During these proceedings, Master Graham had stood apart, strictly confining himself to the duty imposed upon him, and taking little heed of anything beyond. He stepped forward now as a richly- dressed gentleman on foot, followed by a single attendant, was seen advancing up the hill.

As this person drew nearer, the crowd stopped their clamour, and bent forward with eager looks. Master Graham standing alone in the gateway, and the stranger coming slowly towards him, they seemed, as it were, set face to face. The nobleman (for he looked one) had a haughty and disdainful air, which bespoke the slight estimation in which he held the citizen. The citizen, on the other hand, preserved the resolute bearing of one who was not to be frowned down or daunted, and who cared very little for any nobility but that of worth and manhood. It was perhaps some consciousness on the part of each, of these feelings in the other, that infused a more stern expression into their regards as they came closer together.

'Your rapier, worthy sir!'

At the instant that he pronounced these words Graham started, and falling back some paces, laid his hand upon the dagger in his belt.

'You are the man whose horse I used to hold before the Bowyer's door? You are that man? Speak!'

'Out, you 'prentice hound!' said the other.

'You are he! I know you well now!' cried Graham. 'Let no man step between us two, or I shall be his murderer.' With that he drew his dagger, and rushed in upon him.

The stranger had drawn his weapon from the scabbard ready for the scrutiny, before a word was spoken. He made a thrust at his assailant, but the dagger which Graham clutched in his left hand being the dirk in use at that time for parrying such blows, promptly turned the point aside. They closed. The dagger fell rattling on the ground, and Graham, wresting his adversary's sword from his grasp, plunged it through his heart. As he drew it out it snapped in two, leaving a fragment in the dead man's body.

All this passed so swiftly that the bystanders looked on without an effort to interfere; but the man was no sooner down than an uproar broke forth which rent the air. The attendant rushing through the gate proclaimed that his master, a nobleman, had been set upon and slain by a citizen; the word quickly spread from mouth to mouth; Saint Paul's Cathedral, and every book-shop, ordinary, and smoking- house in the churchyard poured out its stream of cavaliers and their followers, who mingling together in a dense tumultuous body, struggled, sword in hand, towards the spot.

With equal impetuosity, and stimulating each other by loud cries and shouts, the citizens and common people took up the quarrel on their side, and encircling Master Graham a hundred deep, forced him from the gate. In vain he waved the broken sword above his head, crying that he would die on London's threshold for their sacred homes. They bore him on, and ever keeping him in the midst, so that no man could attack him, fought their way into the city.

The clash of swords and roar of voices, the dust and heat and pressure, the trampling under foot of men, the distracted looks and shrieks of women at the windows above as they recognised their relatives or lovers in the crowd, the rapid tolling of alarm-bells, the furious rage and passion of the scene, were fearful. Those who, being on the outskirts of each crowd, could use their weapons with effect, fought desperately, while those behind, maddened with baffled rage, struck at each other over the heads of those before them, and crushed their own fellows. Wherever the broken sword was seen above the people's heads, towards that spot the cavaliers made a new rush. Every one of these charges was marked by sudden gaps in the throng where men were trodden down, but as fast as they were made, the tide swept over them, and still the multitude pressed on again, a confused mass of swords, clubs, staves, broken plumes, fragments of rich cloaks and doublets, and angry, bleeding faces, all mixed up together in inextricable disorder.

The design of the people was to force Master Graham to take refuge in his dwelling, and to defend it until the authorities could interfere, or they could gain time for parley. But either from ignorance or in the confusion of the moment they stopped at his old house, which was closely shut. Some time was lost in beating the doors open and passing him to the front. About a score of the boldest of the other party threw themselves into the torrent while this was being done, and reaching the door at the same moment with himself cut him off from his defenders.

'I never will turn in such a righteous cause, so help me Heaven!' cried Graham, in a voice that at last made itself heard, and confronting them as he spoke. 'Least of all will I turn upon this threshold which owes its desolation to such men as ye. I give no quarter, and I will have none! Strike!'

For a moment they stood at bay. At that moment a shot from an unseen hand, apparently fired by some person who had gained access to one of the opposite houses, struck Graham in the brain, and he fell dead. A low wail was heard in the air, - many people in the concourse cried that they had seen a spirit glide across the little casement window of the Bowyer's house -

A dead silence succeeded. After a short time some of the flushed and heated throng laid down their arms and softly carried the body within doors. Others fell off or slunk away in knots of two or three, others whispered together in groups, and before a numerous guard which then rode up could muster in the street, it was nearly empty.

Those who carried Master Graham to the bed up-stairs were shocked to see a woman lying beneath the window with her hands clasped together. After trying to recover her in vain, they laid her near the citizen, who still retained, tightly grasped in his right hand, the first and last sword that was broken that day at Lud Gate.

The Giant uttered these concluding words with sudden precipitation; and on the instant the strange light which had filled the hall faded away. Joe Toddyhigh glanced involuntarily at the eastern window, and saw the first pale gleam of morning. He turned his head again towards the other window in which the Giants had been seated. It was empty. The cask of wine was gone, and he could dimly make out that the two great figures stood mute and motionless upon their pedestals.

After rubbing his eyes and wondering for full half an hour, during which time he observed morning come creeping on apace, he yielded to the drowsiness which overpowered him and fell into a refreshing slumber. When he awoke it was broad day; the building was open, and workmen were busily engaged in removing the vestiges of last night's feast.

Stealing gently down the little stairs, and assuming the air of some early lounger who had dropped in from the street, he walked up to the foot of each pedestal in turn, and attentively examined the figure it supported. There could be no doubt about the features of either; he recollected the exact expression they had worn at different passages of their conversation, and recognised in every line and lineament the Giants of the night. Assured that it was no vision, but that he had heard and seen with his own proper senses, he walked forth, determining at all hazards to conceal himself in the Guildhall again that evening. He further resolved to sleep all day, so that he might be very wakeful and vigilant, and above all that he might take notice of the figures at the precise moment of their becoming animated and subsiding into their old state, which he greatly reproached himself for not having done already.

CORRESPONDENCE TO MASTER HUMPHREY

'SIR, - Before you proceed any further in your account of your friends and what you say and do when you meet together, excuse me if I proffer my claim to be elected to one of the vacant chairs in that old room of yours. Don't reject me without full consideration; for if you do, you will be sorry for it afterwards - you will, upon my life.

'I enclose my card, sir, in this letter. I never was ashamed of my name, and I never shall be. I am considered a devilish gentlemanly fellow, and I act up to the character. If you want a reference, ask any of the men at our club. Ask any fellow who goes there to write his letters, what sort of conversation mine is. Ask him if he thinks I have the sort of voice that will suit your deaf friend and make him hear, if he can hear anything at all. Ask the servants what they think of me. There's not a rascal among 'em, sir, but will tremble to hear my name. That reminds me - don't you say too much about that housekeeper of yours; it's a low subject, damned low.

'I tell you what, sir. If you vote me into one of those empty chairs, you'll have among you a man with a fund of gentlemanly information that'll rather astonish you. I can let you into a few anecdotes about some fine women of title, that are quite high life, sir - the tiptop sort of thing. I know the name of every man who has been out on an affair of honour within the last five-and-twenty years; I know the private particulars of every cross and squabble that has taken place upon the turf, at the gaming-table, or elsewhere, during the whole of that time. I have been called the gentlemanly chronicle. You may consider yourself a lucky dog; upon my soul, you may congratulate yourself, though I say so.

'It's an uncommon good notion that of yours, not letting anybody know where you live. I have tried it, but there has always been an anxiety respecting me, which has found me out. Your deaf friend is a cunning fellow to keep his name so close. I have tried that too, but have always failed. I shall be proud to make his acquaintance - tell him so, with my compliments.

'You must have been a queer fellow when you were a child, confounded queer. It's odd, all that about the picture in your first paper - prosy, but told in a devilish gentlemanly sort of way. In places like that I could come in with great effect with a touch of life - don't you feel that?

'I am anxiously waiting for your next paper to know whether your friends live upon the premises, and at your expense, which I take it for granted is the case. If I am right in this impression, I know a charming fellow (an excellent companion and most delightful company) who will be proud to join you. Some years ago he seconded a great many prize-fighters, and once fought an amateur match himself; since then he has driven several mails, broken at different periods all the lamps on the right-hand side of Oxford- street, and six times carried away every bell-handle in Bloomsbury- square, besides turning off the gas in various thoroughfares. In point of gentlemanliness he is unrivalled, and I should say that next to myself he is of all men the best suited to your purpose.

'Expecting your reply,

'I am,

'&c. &c.'

Master Humphrey informs this gentleman that his application, both as it concerns himself and his friend, is rejected.

CHAPTER II - MASTER HUMPHREY, FROM HIS CLOCK-SIDE IN THE CHIMNEY-CORNER

MY old companion tells me it is midnight. The fire glows brightly, crackling with a sharp and cheerful sound, as if it loved to burn. The merry cricket on the hearth (my constant visitor), this ruddy blaze, my clock, and I, seem to share the world among us, and to be the only things awake. The wind, high and boisterous but now, has died away and hoarsely mutters in its sleep. I love all times and seasons each in its turn, and am apt, perhaps, to think the present one the best; but past or coming I always love this peaceful time of night, when long-buried thoughts, favoured by the gloom and silence, steal from their graves, and haunt the scenes of faded happiness and hope.

The popular faith in ghosts has a remarkable affinity with the whole current of our thoughts at such an hour as this, and seems to be their necessary and natural consequence. For who can wonder that man should feel a vague belief in tales of disembodied spirits wandering through those places which they once dearly affected, when he himself, scarcely less separated from his old world than they, is for ever lingering upon past emotions and bygone times, and hovering, the ghost of his former self, about the places and people that warmed his heart of old? It is thus that at this quiet hour I haunt the house where I was born, the rooms I used to tread, the scenes of my infancy, my boyhood, and my youth; it is thus that I prowl around my buried treasure (though not of gold or silver), and mourn my loss; it is thus that I revisit the ashes of extinguished fires, and take my silent stand at old bedsides. If my spirit should ever glide back to this chamber when my body is mingled with the dust, it will but follow the course it often took in the old man's lifetime, and add but one more change to the subjects of its contemplation.

In all my idle speculations I am greatly assisted by various legends connected with my venerable house, which are current in the neighbourhood, and are so numerous that there is scarce a cupboard or corner that has not some dismal story of its own. When I first entertained thoughts of becoming its tenant, I was assured that it was haunted from roof to cellar, and I believe that the bad opinion in which my neighbours once held me, had its rise in my not being torn to pieces, or at least distracted with terror, on the night I took possession; in either of which cases I should doubtless have arrived by a short cut at the very summit of popularity.

But traditions and rumours all taken into account, who so abets me in every fancy and chimes with my every thought, as my dear deaf friend? and how often have I cause to bless the day that brought us two together! Of all days in the year I rejoice to think that it should have been Christmas Day, with which from childhood we associate something friendly, hearty, and sincere.

I had walked out to cheer myself with the happiness of others, and, in the little tokens of festivity and rejoicing, of which the streets and houses present so many upon that day, had lost some hours. Now I stopped to look at a merry party hurrying through the snow on foot to their place of meeting, and now turned back to see a whole coachful of children safely deposited at the welcome house. At one time, I admired how carefully the working man carried the baby in its gaudy hat and feathers, and how his wife, trudging patiently on behind, forgot even her care of her gay clothes, in exchanging greeting with the child as it crowed and laughed over the father's shoulder; at another, I pleased myself with some passing scene of gallantry or courtship, and was glad to believe that for a season half the world of poverty was gay.

As the day closed in, I still rambled through the streets, feeling a companionship in the bright fires that cast their warm reflection on the windows as I passed, and losing all sense of my own loneliness in imagining the sociality and kind-fellowship that everywhere prevailed. At length I happened to stop before a Tavern, and, encountering a Bill of Fare in the window, it all at once brought it into my head to wonder what kind of people dined alone in Taverns upon Christmas Day.

Solitary men are accustomed, I suppose, unconsciously to look upon solitude as their own peculiar property. I had sat alone in my room on many, many anniversaries of this great holiday, and had never regarded it but as one of universal assemblage and rejoicing. I had excepted, and with an aching heart, a crowd of prisoners and beggars; but THESE were not the men for whom the Tavern doors were open. Had they any customers, or was it a mere form? - a form, no doubt.

Trying to feel quite sure of this, I walked away; but before I had gone many paces, I stopped and looked back. There was a provoking air of business in the lamp above the door which I could not overcome. I began to be afraid there might be many customers - young men, perhaps, struggling with the world, utter strangers in this great place, whose friends lived at a long distance off, and whose means were too slender to enable them to make the journey. The supposition gave rise to so many distressing little pictures, that in preference to carrying them home with me, I determined to encounter the realities. So I turned and walked in.

I was at once glad and sorry to find that there was only one person in the dining-room; glad to know that there were not more, and sorry that he should be there by himself. He did not look so old as I, but like me he was advanced in life, and his hair was nearly white. Though I made more noise in entering and seating myself than was quite necessary, with the view of attracting his attention and saluting him in the good old form of that time of year, he did not raise his head, but sat with it resting on his hand, musing over his half-finished meal.

I called for something which would give me an excuse for remaining in the room (I had dined early, as my housekeeper was engaged at night to partake of some friend's good cheer), and sat where I could observe without intruding on him. After a time he looked up. He was aware that somebody had entered, but could see very little of me, as I sat in the shade and he in the light. He was sad and thoughtful, and I forbore to trouble him by speaking.

Let me believe it was something better than curiosity which riveted my attention and impelled me strongly towards this gentleman. I never saw so patient and kind a face. He should have been surrounded by friends, and yet here he sat dejected and alone when all men had their friends about them. As often as he roused himself from his reverie he would fall into it again, and it was plain that, whatever were the subject of his thoughts, they were of a melancholy kind, and would not be controlled.

He was not used to solitude. I was sure of that; for I know by myself that if he had been, his manner would have been different, and he would have taken some slight interest in the arrival of another. I could not fail to mark that he had no appetite; that he tried to eat in vain; that time after time the plate was pushed away, and he relapsed into his former posture.

His mind was wandering among old Christmas days, I thought. Many of them sprung up together, not with a long gap between each, but in unbroken succession like days of the week. It was a great change to find himself for the first time (I quite settled that it WAS the first) in an empty silent room with no soul to care for. I could not help following him in imagination through crowds of pleasant faces, and then coming back to that dull place with its bough of mistletoe sickening in the gas, and sprigs of holly parched up already by a Simoom of roast and boiled. The very waiter had gone home; and his representative, a poor, lean, hungry man, was keeping Christmas in his jacket.

I grew still more interested in my friend. His dinner done, a decanter of wine was placed before him. It remained untouched for a long time, but at length with a quivering hand he filled a glass and raised it to his lips. Some tender wish to which he had been accustomed to give utterance on that day, or some beloved name that he had been used to pledge, trembled upon them at the moment. He put it down very hastily - took it up once more - again put it down - pressed his hand upon his face - yes - and tears stole down his cheeks, I am certain.

Without pausing to consider whether I did right or wrong, I stepped across the room, and sitting down beside him laid my hand gently on his arm.

'My friend,' I said, 'forgive me if I beseech you to take comfort and consolation from the lips of an old man. I will not preach to you what I have not practised, indeed. Whatever be your grief, be of a good heart - be of a good heart, pray!'

'I see that you speak earnestly,' he replied, 'and kindly I am very sure, but - '

I nodded my head to show that I understood what he would say; for I had already gathered, from a certain fixed expression in his face, and from the attention with which he watched me while I spoke, that his sense of hearing was destroyed. 'There should be a freemasonry between us,' said I, pointing from himself to me to explain my meaning; 'if not in our gray hairs, at least in our misfortunes. You see that I am but a poor cripple.'

I never felt so happy under my affliction since the trying moment of my first becoming conscious of it, as when he took my hand in his with a smile that has lighted my path in life from that day, and we sat down side by side.

This was the beginning of my friendship with the deaf gentleman; and when was ever the slight and easy service of a kind word in season repaid by such attachment and devotion as he has shown to me!

He produced a little set of tablets and a pencil to facilitate our conversation, on that our first acquaintance; and I well remember how awkward and constrained I was in writing down my share of the dialogue, and how easily he guessed my meaning before I had written half of what I had to say. He told me in a faltering voice that he had not been accustomed to be alone on that day - that it had always been a little festival with him; and seeing that I glanced at his dress in the expectation that he wore mourning, he added hastily that it was not that; if it had been he thought he could have borne it better. From that time to the present we have never touched upon this theme. Upon every return of the same day we have been together; and although we make it our annual custom to drink to each other hand in hand after dinner, and to recall with affectionate garrulity every circumstance of our first meeting, we always avoid this one as if by mutual consent.

Meantime we have gone on strengthening in our friendship and regard and forming an attachment which, I trust and believe, will only be interrupted by death, to be renewed in another existence. I scarcely know how we communicate as we do; but he has long since ceased to be deaf to me. He is frequently my companion in my walks, and even in crowded streets replies to my slightest look or gesture, as though he could read my thoughts. From the vast number of objects which pass in rapid succession before our eyes, we frequently select the same for some particular notice or remark; and when one of these little coincidences occurs, I cannot describe the pleasure which animates my friend, or the beaming countenance he will preserve for half-an-hour afterwards at least.

He is a great thinker from living so much within himself, and, having a lively imagination, has a facility of conceiving and enlarging upon odd ideas, which renders him invaluable to our little body, and greatly astonishes our two friends. His powers in this respect are much assisted by a large pipe, which he assures us once belonged to a German Student. Be this as it may, it has undoubtedly a very ancient and mysterious appearance, and is of such capacity that it takes three hours and a half to smoke it out. I have reason to believe that my barber, who is the chief authority of a knot of gossips, who congregate every evening at a small tobacconist's hard by, has related anecdotes of this pipe and the grim figures that are carved upon its bowl, at which all the smokers in the neighbourhood have stood aghast; and I know that my housekeeper, while she holds it in high veneration, has a superstitious feeling connected with it which would render her exceedingly unwilling to be left alone in its company after dark.

Whatever sorrow my dear friend has known, and whatever grief may linger in some secret corner of his heart, he is now a cheerful, placid, happy creature. Misfortune can never have fallen upon such a man but for some good purpose; and when I see its traces in his gentle nature and his earnest feeling, I am the less disposed to murmur at such trials as I may have undergone myself. With regard to the pipe, I have a theory of my own; I cannot help thinking that it is in some manner connected with the event that brought us together; for I remember that it was a long time before he even talked about it; that when he did, he grew reserved and melancholy; and that it was a long time yet before he brought it forth. I have no curiosity, however, upon this subject; for I know that it promotes his tranquillity and comfort, and I need no other inducement to regard it with my utmost favour.

Such is the deaf gentleman. I can call up his figure now, clad in sober gray, and seated in the chimney-corner. As he puffs out the smoke from his favourite pipe, he casts a look on me brimful of cordiality and friendship, and says all manner of kind and genial things in a cheerful smile; then he raises his eyes to my clock, which is just about to strike, and, glancing from it to me and back again, seems to divide his heart between us. For myself, it is not too much to say that I would gladly part with one of my poor limbs, could he but hear the old clock's voice.

Of our two friends, the first has been all his life one of that easy, wayward, truant class whom the world is accustomed to designate as nobody's enemies but their own. Bred to a profession for which he never qualified himself, and reared in the expectation of a fortune he has never inherited, he has undergone every vicissitude of which such an existence is capable. He and his younger brother, both orphans from their childhood, were educated by a wealthy relative, who taught them to expect an equal division of his property; but too indolent to court, and too honest to flatter, the elder gradually lost ground in the affections of a capricious old man, and the younger, who did not fail to improve his opportunity, now triumphs in the possession of enormous wealth. His triumph is to hoard it in solitary wretchedness, and probably to feel with the expenditure of every shilling a greater pang than the loss of his whole inheritance ever cost his brother.

Jack Redburn - he was Jack Redburn at the first little school he went to, where every other child was mastered and surnamed, and he has been Jack Redburn all his life, or he would perhaps have been a richer man by this time - has been an inmate of my house these eight years past. He is my librarian, secretary, steward, and first minister; director of all my affairs, and inspector-general of my household. He is something of a musician, something of an author, something of an actor, something of a painter, very much of a carpenter, and an extraordinary gardener, having had all his life a wonderful aptitude for learning everything that was of no use to him. He is remarkably fond of children, and is the best and kindest nurse in sickness that ever drew the breath of life. He has mixed with every grade of society, and known the utmost distress; but there never was a less selfish, a more tender- hearted, a more enthusiastic, or a more guileless man; and I dare say, if few have done less good, fewer still have done less harm in the world than he. By what chance Nature forms such whimsical jumbles I don't know; but I do know that she sends them among us very often, and that the king of the whole race is Jack Redburn.

I should be puzzled to say how old he is. His health is none of the best, and he wears a quantity of iron-gray hair, which shades his face and gives it rather a worn appearance; but we consider him quite a young fellow notwithstanding; and if a youthful spirit, surviving the roughest contact with the world, confers upon its possessor any title to be considered young, then he is a mere child. The only interruptions to his careless cheerfulness are on a wet Sunday, when he is apt to be unusually religious and solemn, and sometimes of an evening, when he has been blowing a very slow tune on the flute. On these last-named occasions he is apt to incline towards the mysterious, or the terrible. As a specimen of his powers in this mood, I refer my readers to the extract from the clock-case which follows this paper: he brought it to me not long ago at midnight, and informed me that the main incident had been suggested by a dream of the night before.

His apartments are two cheerful rooms looking towards the garden, and one of his great delights is to arrange and rearrange the furniture in these chambers, and put it in every possible variety of position. During the whole time he has been here, I do not think he has slept for two nights running with the head of his bed in the same place; and every time he moves it, is to be the last. My housekeeper was at first well-nigh distracted by these frequent changes; but she has become quite reconciled to them by degrees, and has so fallen in with his humour, that they often consult together with great gravity upon the next final alteration. Whatever his arrangements are, however, they are always a pattern of neatness; and every one of the manifold articles connected with his manifold occupations is to be found in its own particular place. Until within the last two or three years he was subject to an occasional fit (which usually came upon him in very fine weather), under the influence of which he would dress himself with peculiar care, and, going out under pretence of taking a walk, disappeared for several days together. At length, after the interval between each outbreak of this disorder had gradually grown longer and longer, it wholly disappeared; and now he seldom stirs abroad, except to stroll out a little way on a summer's evening. Whether he yet mistrusts his own constancy in this respect, and is therefore afraid to wear a coat, I know not; but we seldom see him in any other upper garment than an old spectral-looking dressing-gown, with very disproportionate pockets, full of a miscellaneous collection of odd matters, which he picks up wherever he can lay his hands upon them.

Everything that is a favourite with our friend is a favourite with us; and thus it happens that the fourth among us is Mr. Owen Miles, a most worthy gentleman, who had treated Jack with great kindness before my deaf friend and I encountered him by an accident, to which I may refer on some future occasion. Mr. Miles was once a very rich merchant; but receiving a severe shock in the death of his wife, he retired from business, and devoted himself to a quiet, unostentatious life. He is an excellent man, of thoroughly sterling character: not of quick apprehension, and not without some amusing prejudices, which I shall leave to their own development. He holds us all in profound veneration; but Jack Redburn he esteems as a kind of pleasant wonder, that he may venture to approach familiarly. He believes, not only that no man ever lived who could do so many things as Jack, but that no man ever lived who could do anything so well; and he never calls my attention to any of his ingenious proceedings, but he whispers in my ear, nudging me at the same time with his elbow: 'If he had only made it his trade, sir - if he had only made it his trade!'

They are inseparable companions; one would almost suppose that, although Mr. Miles never by any chance does anything in the way of assistance, Jack could do nothing without him. Whether he is reading, writing, painting, carpentering, gardening, flute-playing, or what not, there is Mr. Miles beside him, buttoned up to the chin in his blue coat, and looking on with a face of incredulous delight, as though he could not credit the testimony of his own senses, and had a misgiving that no man could be so clever but in a dream.

These are my friends; I have now introduced myself and them.

THE CLOCK-CASE

A CONFESSION FOUND IN A PRISON IN THE TIME OF CHARLES THE SECOND

I held a lieutenant's commission in his Majesty's army, and served abroad in the campaigns of 1677 and 1678. The treaty of Nimeguen being concluded, I returned home, and retiring from the service, withdrew to a small estate lying a few miles east of London, which I had recently acquired in right of my wife.

This is the last night I have to live, and I will set down the naked truth without disguise. I was never a brave man, and had always been from my childhood of a secret, sullen, distrustful nature. I speak of myself as if I had passed from the world; for while I write this, my grave is digging, and my name is written in the black-book of death.

Soon after my return to England, my only brother was seized with mortal illness. This circumstance gave me slight or no pain; for since we had been men, we had associated but very little together. He was open-hearted and generous, handsomer than I, more accomplished, and generally beloved. Those who sought my acquaintance abroad or at home, because they were friends of his, seldom attached themselves to me long, and would usually say, in our first conversation, that they were surprised to find two brothers so unlike in their manners and appearance. It was my habit to lead them on to this avowal; for I knew what comparisons they must draw between us; and having a rankling envy in my heart, I sought to justify it to myself.

We had married two sisters. This additional tie between us, as it may appear to some, only estranged us the more. His wife knew me well. I never struggled with any secret jealousy or gall when she was present but that woman knew it as well as I did. I never raised my eyes at such times but I found hers fixed upon me; I never bent them on the ground or looked another way but I felt that she overlooked me always. It was an inexpressible relief to me when we quarrelled, and a greater relief still when I heard abroad that she was dead. It seems to me now as if some strange and terrible foreshadowing of what has happened since must have hung over us then. I was afraid of her; she haunted me; her fixed and steady look comes back upon me now, like the memory of a dark dream, and makes my blood run cold.

She died shortly after giving birth to a child - a boy. When my brother knew that all hope of his own recovery was past, he called my wife to his bedside, and confided this orphan, a child of four years old, to her protection. He bequeathed to him all the property he had, and willed that, in case of his child's death, it should pass to my wife, as the only acknowledgment he could make her for her care and love. He exchanged a few brotherly words with me, deploring our long separation; and being exhausted, fell into a slumber, from which he never awoke.

We had no children; and as there had been a strong affection between the sisters, and my wife had almost supplied the place of a mother to this boy, she loved him as if he had been her own. The child was ardently attached to her; but he was his mother's image in face and spirit, and always mistrusted me.

I can scarcely fix the date when the feeling first came upon me; but I soon began to be uneasy when this child was by. I never roused myself from some moody train of thought but I marked him looking at me; not with mere childish wonder, but with something of the purpose and meaning that I had so often noted in his mother. It was no effort of my fancy, founded on close resemblance of feature and expression. I never could look the boy down. He feared me, but seemed by some instinct to despise me while he did so; and even when he drew back beneath my gaze - as he would when we were alone, to get nearer to the door - he would keep his bright eyes upon me still.

Perhaps I hide the truth from myself, but I do not think that, when this began, I meditated to do him any wrong. I may have thought how serviceable his inheritance would be to us, and may have wished him dead; but I believe I had no thought of compassing his death. Neither did the idea come upon me at once, but by very slow degrees, presenting itself at first in dim shapes at a very great distance, as men may think of an earthquake or the last day; then drawing nearer and nearer, and losing something of its horror and improbability; then coming to be part and parcel - nay nearly the whole sum and substance - of my daily thoughts, and resolving itself into a question of means and safety; not of doing or abstaining from the deed.

While this was going on within me, I never could bear that the child should see me looking at him, and yet I was under a fascination which made it a kind of business with me to contemplate his slight and fragile figure and think how easily it might be done. Sometimes I would steal up-stairs and watch him as he slept; but usually I hovered in the garden near the window of the room in which he learnt his little tasks; and there, as he sat upon a low seat beside my wife, I would peer at him for hours together from behind a tree; starting, like the guilty wretch I was, at every rustling of a leaf, and still gliding back to look and start again.

Hard by our cottage, but quite out of sight, and (if there were any wind astir) of hearing too, was a deep sheet of water. I spent days in shaping with my pocket-knife a rough model of a boat, which I finished at last and dropped in the child's way. Then I withdrew to a secret place, which he must pass if he stole away alone to swim this bauble, and lurked there for his coming. He came neither that day nor the next, though I waited from noon till nightfall. I was sure that I had him in my net, for I had heard him prattling of the toy, and knew that in his infant pleasure he kept it by his side in bed. I felt no weariness or fatigue, but waited patiently, and on the third day he passed me, running joyously along, with his silken hair streaming in the wind, and he singing - God have mercy upon me! - singing a merry ballad, - who could hardly lisp the words.

I stole down after him, creeping under certain shrubs which grow in that place, and none but devils know with what terror I, a strong, full-grown man, tracked the footsteps of that baby as he approached the water's brink. I was close upon him, had sunk upon my knee and raised my hand to thrust him in, when he saw my shadow in the stream and turned him round.

His mother's ghost was looking from his eyes. The sun burst forth from behind a cloud; it shone in the bright sky, the glistening earth, the clear water, the sparkling drops of rain upon the leaves. There were eyes in everything. The whole great universe of light was there to see the murder done. I know not what he said; he came of bold and manly blood, and, child as he was, he did not crouch or fawn upon me. I heard him cry that he would try to love me, - not that he did, - and then I saw him running back towards the house. The next I saw was my own sword naked in my hand, and he lying at my feet stark dead, - dabbled here and there with blood, but otherwise no different from what I had seen him in his sleep - in the same attitude too, with his cheek resting upon his little hand.

I took him in my arms and laid him - very gently now that he was dead - in a thicket. My wife was from home that day, and would not return until the next. Our bedroom window, the only sleeping-room on that side of the house, was but a few feet from the ground, and I resolved to descend from it at night and bury him in the garden. I had no thought that I had failed in my design, no thought that the water would be dragged and nothing found, that the money must now lie waste, since I must encourage the idea that the child was lost or stolen. All my thoughts were bound up and knotted together in the one absorbing necessity of hiding what I had done.

How I felt when they came to tell me that the child was missing, when I ordered scouts in all directions, when I gasped and trembled at every one's approach, no tongue can tell or mind of man conceive. I buried him that night. When I parted the boughs and looked into the dark thicket, there was a glow-worm shining like the visible spirit of God upon the murdered child. I glanced down into his grave when I had placed him there, and still it gleamed upon his breast; an eye of fire looking up to Heaven in supplication to the stars that watched me at my work.

I had to meet my wife, and break the news, and give her hope that the child would soon be found. All this I did, - with some appearance, I suppose, of being sincere, for I was the object of no suspicion. This done, I sat at the bedroom window all day long, and watched the spot where the dreadful secret lay.

It was in a piece of ground which had been dug up to be newly turfed, and which I had chosen on that account, as the traces of my spade were less likely to attract attention. The men who laid down the grass must have thought me mad. I called to them continually to expedite their work, ran out and worked beside them, trod down the earth with my feet, and hurried them with frantic eagerness. They had finished their task before night, and then I thought myself comparatively safe.

I slept, - not as men do who awake refreshed and cheerful, but I did sleep, passing from vague and shadowy dreams of being hunted down, to visions of the plot of grass, through which now a hand, and now a foot, and now the head itself was starting out. At this point I always woke and stole to the window, to make sure that it was not really so. That done, I crept to bed again; and thus I spent the night in fits and starts, getting up and lying down full twenty times, and dreaming the same dream over and over again, - which was far worse than lying awake, for every dream had a whole night's suffering of its own. Once I thought the child was alive, and that I had never tried to kill him. To wake from that dream was the most dreadful agony of all.

The next day I sat at the window again, never once taking my eyes from the place, which, although it was covered by the grass, was as plain to me - its shape, its size, its depth, its jagged sides, and all - as if it had been open to the light of day. When a servant walked across it, I felt as if he must sink in; when he had passed, I looked to see that his feet had not worn the edges. If a bird lighted there, I was in terror lest by some tremendous interposition it should be instrumental in the discovery; if a breath of air sighed across it, to me it whispered murder. There was not a sight or a sound - how ordinary, mean, or unimportant soever - but was fraught with fear. And in this state of ceaseless watching I spent three days.

On the fourth there came to the gate one who had served with me abroad, accompanied by a brother officer of his whom I had never seen. I felt that I could not bear to be out of sight of the place. It was a summer evening, and I bade my people take a table and a flask of wine into the garden. Then I sat down WITH MY CHAIR UPON THE GRAVE, and being assured that nobody could disturb it now without my knowledge, tried to drink and talk.

They hoped that my wife was well, - that she was not obliged to keep her chamber, - that they had not frightened her away. What could I do but tell them with a faltering tongue about the child? The officer whom I did not know was a down-looking man, and kept his eyes upon the ground while I was speaking. Even that terrified me. I could not divest myself of the idea that he saw something there which caused him to suspect the truth. I asked him hurriedly if he supposed that - and stopped. 'That the child has been murdered?' said he, looking mildly at me: 'O no! what could a man gain by murdering a poor child?' I could have told him what a man gained by such a deed, no one better: but I held my peace and shivered as with an ague.

Mistaking my emotion, they were endeavouring to cheer me with the hope that the boy would certainly be found, - great cheer that was for me! - when we heard a low deep howl, and presently there sprung over the wall two great dogs, who, bounding into the garden, repeated the baying sound we had heard before.

'Bloodhounds!' cried my visitors.

What need to tell me that! I had never seen one of that kind in all my life, but I knew what they were and for what purpose they had come. I grasped the elbows of my chair, and neither spoke nor moved.

'They are of the genuine breed,' said the man whom I had known abroad, 'and being out for exercise have no doubt escaped from their keeper.'

Both he and his friend turned to look at the dogs, who with their noses to the ground moved restlessly about, running to and fro, and up and down, and across, and round in circles, careering about like wild things, and all this time taking no notice of us, but ever and again repeating the yell we had heard already, then dropping their noses to the ground again and tracking earnestly here and there. They now began to snuff the earth more eagerly than they had done yet, and although they were still very restless, no longer beat about in such wide circuits, but kept near to one spot, and constantly diminished the distance between themselves and me.

At last they came up close to the great chair on which I sat, and raising their frightful howl once more, tried to tear away the wooden rails that kept them from the ground beneath. I saw how I looked, in the faces of the two who were with me.

'They scent some prey,' said they, both together.

'They scent no prey!' cried I.

'In Heaven's name, move!' said the one I knew, very earnestly, 'or you will be torn to pieces.'

'Let them tear me from limb to limb, I'll never leave this place!' cried I. 'Are dogs to hurry men to shameful deaths? Hew them down, cut them in pieces.'

'There is some foul mystery here!' said the officer whom I did not know, drawing his sword. 'In King Charles's name, assist me to secure this man.'

They both set upon me and forced me away, though I fought and bit and caught at them like a madman. After a struggle, they got me quietly between them; and then, my God! I saw the angry dogs tearing at the earth and throwing it up into the air like water.

What more have I to tell? That I fell upon my knees, and with chattering teeth confessed the truth, and prayed to be forgiven. That I have since denied, and now confess to it again. That I have been tried for the crime, found guilty, and sentenced. That I have not the courage to anticipate my doom, or to bear up manfully against it. That I have no compassion, no consolation, no hope, no friend. That my wife has happily lost for the time those faculties which would enable her to know my misery or hers. That I am alone in this stone dungeon with my evil spirit, and that I die to-morrow.

CORRESPONDENCE

Master Humphrey has been favoured with the following letter written on strongly-scented paper, and sealed in light-blue wax with the representation of two very plump doves interchanging beaks. It does not commence with any of the usual forms of address, but begins as is here set forth.

Bath, Wednesday night.

Heavens! into what an indiscretion do I suffer myself to be betrayed! To address these faltering lines to a total stranger, and that stranger one of a conflicting sex! - and yet I am precipitated into the abyss, and have no power of self-snatchation (forgive me if I coin that phrase) from the yawning gulf before me.

Yes, I am writing to a man; but let me not think of that, for madness is in the thought. You will understand my feelings? O yes, I am sure you will; and you will respect them too, and not despise them, - will you?

Let me be calm. That portrait, - smiling as once he smiled on me; that cane, - dangling as I have seen it dangle from his hand I know not how oft; those legs that have glided through my nightly dreams and never stopped to speak; the perfectly gentlemanly, though false original, - can I be mistaken? O no, no.

Let me be calmer yet; I would be calm as coffins. You have published a letter from one whose likeness is engraved, but whose name (and wherefore?) is suppressed. Shall I breathe that name! Is it - but why ask when my heart tells me too truly that it is!

I would not upbraid him with his treachery; I would not remind him of those times when he plighted the most eloquent of vows, and procured from me a small pecuniary accommodation; and yet I would see him - see him did I say - HIM - alas! such is woman's nature. For as the poet beautifully says - but you will already have anticipated the sentiment. Is it not sweet? O yes!

It was in this city (hallowed by the recollection) that I met him first; and assuredly if mortal happiness be recorded anywhere, then those rubbers with their three-and-sixpenny points are scored on tablets of celestial brass. He always held an honour - generally two. On that eventful night we stood at eight. He raised his eyes (luminous in their seductive sweetness) to my agitated face. 'CAN you?' said he, with peculiar meaning. I felt the gentle pressure of his foot on mine; our corns throbbed in unison. 'CAN you?' he said again; and every lineament of his expressive countenance added the words 'resist me?' I murmured 'No,' and fainted.

They said, when I recovered, it was the weather. I said it was the nutmeg in the negus. How little did they suspect the truth! How little did they guess the deep mysterious meaning of that inquiry! He called next morning on his knees; I do not mean to say that he actually came in that position to the house-door, but that he went down upon those joints directly the servant had retired. He brought some verses in his hat, which he said were original, but which I have since found were Milton's; likewise a little bottle labelled laudanum; also a pistol and a sword-stick. He drew the latter, uncorked the former, and clicked the trigger of the pocket fire-arm. He had come, he said, to conquer or to die. He did not die. He wrested from me an avowal of my love, and let off the pistol out of a back window previous to partaking of a slight repast.

Faithless, inconstant man! How many ages seem to have elapsed since his unaccountable and perfidious disappearance! Could I still forgive him both that and the borrowed lucre that he promised to pay next week! Could I spurn him from my feet if he approached in penitence, and with a matrimonial object! Would the blandishing enchanter still weave his spells around me, or should I burst them all and turn away in coldness! I dare not trust my weakness with the thought.

My brain is in a whirl again. You know his address, his occupations, his mode of life, - are acquainted, perhaps, with his inmost thoughts. You are a humane and philanthropic character; reveal all you know - all; but especially the street and number of his lodgings. The post is departing, the bellman rings, - pray Heaven it be not the knell of love and hope to

BELINDA.

P.S. Pardon the wanderings of a bad pen and a distracted mind. Address to the Post-office. The bellman, rendered impatient by delay, is ringing dreadfully in the passage.

P.P.S. I open this to say that the bellman is gone, and that you must not expect it till the next post; so don't be surprised when you don't get it.

Master Humphrey does not feel himself at liberty to furnish his fair correspondent with the address of the gentleman in question, but he publishes her letter as a public appeal to his faith and gallantry.

CHAPTER III - MASTER HUMPHREY'S VISITOR

WHEN I am in a thoughtful mood, I often succeed in diverting the current of some mournful reflections, by conjuring up a number of fanciful associations with the objects that surround me, and dwelling upon the scenes and characters they suggest.

I have been led by this habit to assign to every room in my house and every old staring portrait on its walls a separate interest of its own. Thus, I am persuaded that a stately dame, terrible to behold in her rigid modesty, who hangs above the chimney-piece of my bedroom, is the former lady of the mansion. In the courtyard below is a stone face of surpassing ugliness, which I have somehow - in a kind of jealousy, I am afraid - associated with her husband. Above my study is a little room with ivy peeping through the lattice, from which I bring their daughter, a lovely girl of eighteen or nineteen years of age, and dutiful in all respects save one, that one being her devoted attachment to a young gentleman on the stairs, whose grandmother (degraded to a disused laundry in the garden) piques herself upon an old family quarrel, and is the implacable enemy of their love. With such materials as these I work out many a little drama, whose chief merit is, that I can bring it to a happy end at will. I have so many of them on hand, that if on my return home one of these evenings I were to find some bluff old wight of two centuries ago comfortably seated in my easy chair, and a lovelorn damsel vainly appealing to his heart, and leaning her white arm upon my clock itself, I verily believe I should only express my surprise that they had kept me waiting so long, and never honoured me with a call before.

I was in such a mood as this, sitting in my garden yesterday morning under the shade of a favourite tree, revelling in all the bloom and brightness about me, and feeling every sense of hope and enjoyment quickened by this most beautiful season of Spring, when my meditations were interrupted by the unexpected appearance of my barber at the end of the walk, who I immediately saw was coming towards me with a hasty step that betokened something remarkable.

My barber is at all times a very brisk, bustling, active little man, - for he is, as it were, chubby all over, without being stout or unwieldy, - but yesterday his alacrity was so very uncommon that it quite took me by surprise. For could I fail to observe when he came up to me that his gray eyes were twinkling in a most extraordinary manner, that his little red nose was in an unusual glow, that every line in his round bright face was twisted and curved into an expression of pleased surprise, and that his whole countenance was radiant with glee? I was still more surprised to see my housekeeper, who usually preserves a very staid air, and stands somewhat upon her dignity, peeping round the hedge at the bottom of the walk, and exchanging nods and smiles with the barber, who twice or thrice looked over his shoulder for that purpose. I could conceive no announcement to which these appearances could be the prelude, unless it were that they had married each other that morning.

I was, consequently, a little disappointed when it only came out that there was a gentleman in the house who wished to speak with me.

'And who is it?' said I.

The barber, with his face screwed up still tighter than before, replied that the gentleman would not send his name, but wished to see me. I pondered for a moment, wondering who this visitor might be, and I remarked that he embraced the opportunity of exchanging another nod with the housekeeper, who still lingered in the distance.

'Well!' said I, 'bid the gentleman come here.'

This seemed to be the consummation of the barber's hopes, for he turned sharp round, and actually ran away.

Now, my sight is not very good at a distance, and therefore when the gentleman first appeared in the walk, I was not quite clear whether he was a stranger to me or otherwise. He was an elderly gentleman, but came tripping along in the pleasantest manner conceivable, avoiding the garden-roller and the borders of the beds with inimitable dexterity, picking his way among the flower-pots, and smiling with unspeakable good humour. Before he was half-way up the walk he began to salute me; then I thought I knew him; but when he came towards me with his hat in his hand, the sun shining on his bald head, his bland face, his bright spectacles, his fawn- coloured tights, and his black gaiters, - then my heart warmed towards him, and I felt quite certain that it was Mr. Pickwick.

'My dear sir,' said that gentleman as I rose to receive him, 'pray be seated. Pray sit down. Now, do not stand on my account. I must insist upon it, really.' With these words Mr. Pickwick gently pressed me down into my seat, and taking my hand in his, shook it again and again with a warmth of manner perfectly irresistible. I endeavoured to express in my welcome something of that heartiness and pleasure which the sight of him awakened, and made him sit down beside me. All this time he kept alternately releasing my hand and grasping it again, and surveying me through his spectacles with such a beaming countenance as I never till then beheld.

'You knew me directly!' said Mr. Pickwick. 'What a pleasure it is to think that you knew me directly!'

I remarked that I had read his adventures very often, and his features were quite familiar to me from the published portraits. As I thought it a good opportunity of adverting to the circumstance, I condoled with him upon the various libels on his character which had found their way into print. Mr. Pickwick shook his head, and for a moment looked very indignant, but smiling again directly, added that no doubt I was acquainted with Cervantes's introduction to the second part of Don Quixote, and that it fully expressed his sentiments on the subject.

'But now,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'don't you wonder how I found you out?'

'I shall never wonder, and, with your good leave, never know,' said I, smiling in my turn. 'It is enough for me that you give me this gratification. I have not the least desire that you should tell me by what means I have obtained it.'

'You are very kind,' returned Mr. Pickwick, shaking me by the hand again; 'you are so exactly what I expected! But for what particular purpose do you think I have sought you, my dear sir? Now what DO you think I have come for?'

Mr. Pickwick put this question as though he were persuaded that it was morally impossible that I could by any means divine the deep purpose of his visit, and that it must be hidden from all human ken. Therefore, although I was rejoiced to think that I had anticipated his drift, I feigned to be quite ignorant of it, and after a brief consideration shook my head despairingly.

'What should you say,' said Mr. Pickwick, laying the forefinger of his left hand upon my coat-sleeve, and looking at me with his head thrown back, and a little on one side, - 'what should you say if I confessed that after reading your account of yourself and your little society, I had come here, a humble candidate for one of those empty chairs?'

'I should say,' I returned, 'that I know of only one circumstance which could still further endear that little society to me, and that would be the associating with it my old friend, - for you must let me call you so, - my old friend, Mr. Pickwick.'

As I made him this answer every feature of Mr. Pickwick's face fused itself into one all-pervading expression of delight. After shaking me heartily by both hands at once, he patted me gently on the back, and then - I well understood why - coloured up to the eyes, and hoped with great earnestness of manner that he had not hurt me.

If he had, I would have been content that he should have repeated the offence a hundred times rather than suppose so; but as he had not, I had no difficulty in changing the subject by making an inquiry which had been upon my lips twenty times already.

'You have not told me,' said I, 'anything about Sam Weller.'

'O! Sam,' replied Mr. Pickwick, 'is the same as ever. The same true, faithful fellow that he ever was. What should I tell you about Sam, my dear sir, except that he is more indispensable to my happiness and comfort every day of my life?'

'And Mr. Weller senior?' said I.

'Old Mr. Weller,' returned Mr. Pickwick, 'is in no respect more altered than Sam, unless it be that he is a little more opinionated than he was formerly, and perhaps at times more talkative. He spends a good deal of his time now in our neighbourhood, and has so constituted himself a part of my bodyguard, that when I ask permission for Sam to have a seat in your kitchen on clock nights (supposing your three friends think me worthy to fill one of the chairs), I am afraid I must often include Mr. Weller too.'

I very readily pledged myself to give both Sam and his father a free admission to my house at all hours and seasons, and this point settled, we fell into a lengthy conversation which was carried on with as little reserve on both sides as if we had been intimate friends from our youth, and which conveyed to me the comfortable assurance that Mr. Pickwick's buoyancy of spirit, and indeed all his old cheerful characteristics, were wholly unimpaired. As he had spoken of the consent of my friends as being yet in abeyance, I repeatedly assured him that his proposal was certain to receive their most joyful sanction, and several times entreated that he would give me leave to introduce him to Jack Redburn and Mr. Miles (who were near at hand) without further ceremony.

To this proposal, however, Mr. Pickwick's delicacy would by no means allow him to accede, for he urged that his eligibility must be formally discussed, and that, until this had been done, he could not think of obtruding himself further. The utmost I could obtain from him was a promise that he would attend upon our next night of meeting, that I might have the pleasure of presenting him immediately on his election.

Mr. Pickwick, having with many blushes placed in my hands a small roll of paper, which he termed his 'qualification,' put a great many questions to me touching my friends, and particularly Jack Redburn, whom he repeatedly termed 'a fine fellow,' and in whose favour I could see he was strongly predisposed. When I had satisfied him on these points, I took him up into my room, that he might make acquaintance with the old chamber which is our place of meeting.

'And this,' said Mr. Pickwick, stopping short, 'is the clock! Dear me! And this is really the old clock!'

I thought he would never have come away from it. After advancing towards it softly, and laying his hand upon it with as much respect and as many smiling looks as if it were alive, he set himself to consider it in every possible direction, now mounting on a chair to look at the top, now going down upon his knees to examine the bottom, now surveying the sides with his spectacles almost touching the case, and now trying to peep between it and the wall to get a slight view of the back. Then he would retire a pace or two and look up at the dial to see it go, and then draw near again and stand with his head on one side to hear it tick: never failing to glance towards me at intervals of a few seconds each, and nod his head with such complacent gratification as I am quite unable to describe. His admiration was not confined to the clock either, but extended itself to every article in the room; and really, when he had gone through them every one, and at last sat himself down in all the six chairs, one after another, to try how they felt, I never saw such a picture of good-humour and happiness as he presented, from the top of his shining head down to the very last button of his gaiters.

I should have been well pleased, and should have had the utmost enjoyment of his company, if he had remained with me all day, but my favourite, striking the hour, reminded him that he must take his leave. I could not forbear telling him once more how glad he had made me, and we shook hands all the way down-stairs.

We had no sooner arrived in the Hall than my housekeeper, gliding out of her little room (she had changed her gown and cap, I observed), greeted Mr. Pickwick with her best smile and courtesy; and the barber, feigning to be accidentally passing on his way out, made him a vast number of bows. When the housekeeper courtesied, Mr. Pickwick bowed with the utmost politeness, and when he bowed, the housekeeper courtesied again; between the housekeeper and the barber, I should say that Mr. Pickwick faced about and bowed with undiminished affability fifty times at least.

I saw him to the door; an omnibus was at the moment passing the corner of the lane, which Mr. Pickwick hailed and ran after with extraordinary nimbleness. When he had got about half-way, he turned his head, and seeing that I was still looking after him and that I waved my hand, stopped, evidently irresolute whether to come back and shake hands again, or to go on. The man behind the omnibus shouted, and Mr. Pickwick ran a little way towards him: then he looked round at me, and ran a little way back again. Then there was another shout, and he turned round once more and ran the other way. After several of these vibrations, the man settled the question by taking Mr. Pickwick by the arm and putting him into the carriage; but his last action was to let down the window and wave his hat to me as it drove off.

I lost no time in opening the parcel he had left with me. The following were its contents:-

MR. PICKWICK'S TALE

A good many years have passed away since old John Podgers lived in the town of Windsor, where he was born, and where, in course of time, he came to be comfortably and snugly buried. You may be sure that in the time of King James the First, Windsor was a very quaint queer old town, and you may take it upon my authority that John Podgers was a very quaint queer old fellow; consequently he and Windsor fitted each other to a nicety, and seldom parted company even for half a day.

John Podgers was broad, sturdy, Dutch-built, short, and a very hard eater, as men of his figure often are. Being a hard sleeper likewise, he divided his time pretty equally between these two recreations, always falling asleep when he had done eating, and always taking another turn at the trencher when he had done sleeping, by which means he grew more corpulent and more drowsy every day of his life. Indeed it used to be currently reported that when he sauntered up and down the sunny side of the street before dinner (as he never failed to do in fair weather), he enjoyed his soundest nap; but many people held this to be a fiction, as he had several times been seen to look after fat oxen on market-days, and had even been heard, by persons of good credit and reputation, to chuckle at the sight, and say to himself with great glee, 'Live beef, live beef!' It was upon this evidence that the wisest people in Windsor (beginning with the local authorities of course) held that John Podgers was a man of strong, sound sense, not what is called smart, perhaps, and it might be of a rather lazy and apoplectic turn, but still a man of solid parts, and one who meant much more than he cared to show. This impression was confirmed by a very dignified way he had of shaking his head and imparting, at the same time, a pendulous motion to his double chin; in short, he passed for one of those people who, being plunged into the Thames, would make no vain efforts to set it afire, but would straightway flop down to the bottom with a deal of gravity, and be highly respected in consequence by all good men.

Being well to do in the world, and a peaceful widower, - having a great appetite, which, as he could afford to gratify it, was a luxury and no inconvenience, and a power of going to sleep, which, as he had no occasion to keep awake, was a most enviable faculty, - you will readily suppose that

John Podgers was a happy man. But appearances are often deceptive when they least seem so, and the truth is that, notwithstanding his extreme sleekness, he was rendered uneasy in his mind and exceedingly uncomfortable by a constant apprehension that beset him night and day.

You know very well that in those times there flourished divers evil old women who, under the name of Witches, spread great disorder through the land, and inflicted various dismal tortures upon Christian men; sticking pins and needles into them when they least expected it, and causing them to walk in the air with their feet upwards, to the great terror of their wives and families, who were naturally very much disconcerted when the master of the house unexpectedly came home, knocking at the door with his heels and combing his hair on the scraper. These were their commonest pranks, but they every day played a hundred others, of which none were less objectionable, and many were much more so, being improper besides; the result was that vengeance was denounced against all old women, with whom even the king himself had no sympathy (as he certainly ought to have had), for with his own most Gracious hand he penned a most Gracious consignment of them to everlasting wrath, and devised most Gracious means for their confusion and slaughter, in virtue whereof scarcely a day passed but one witch at the least was most graciously hanged, drowned, or roasted in some part of his dominions. Still the press teemed with strange and terrible news from the North or the South, or the East or the West, relative to witches and their unhappy victims in some corner of the country, and the Public's hair stood on end to that degree that it lifted its hat off its head, and made its face pale with terror.

You may believe that the little town of Windsor did not escape the general contagion. The inhabitants boiled a witch on the king's birthday and sent a bottle of the broth to court, with a dutiful address expressive of their loyalty. The king, being rather frightened by the present, piously bestowed it upon the Archbishop of Canterbury, and returned an answer to the address, wherein he gave them golden rules for discovering witches, and laid great stress upon certain protecting charms, and especially horseshoes. Immediately the towns-people went to work nailing up horseshoes over every door, and so many anxious parents apprenticed their children to farriers to keep them out of harm's way, that it became quite a genteel trade, and flourished exceedingly.

In the midst of all this bustle John Podgers ate and slept as usual, but shook his head a great deal oftener than was his custom, and was observed to look at the oxen less, and at the old women more. He had a little shelf put up in his sitting-room, whereon was displayed, in a row which grew longer every week, all the witchcraft literature of the time; he grew learned in charms and exorcisms, hinted at certain questionable females on broomsticks whom he had seen from his chamber window, riding in the air at night, and was in constant terror of being bewitched. At length, from perpetually dwelling upon this one idea, which, being alone in his head, had all its own way, the fear of witches became the single passion of his life. He, who up to that time had never known what it was to dream, began to have visions of witches whenever he fell asleep; waking, they were incessantly present to his imagination likewise; and, sleeping or waking, he had not a moment's peace. He began to set witch-traps in the highway, and was often seen lying in wait round the corner for hours together, to watch their effect. These engines were of simple construction, usually consisting of two straws disposed in the form of a cross, or a piece of a Bible cover with a pinch of salt upon it; but they were infallible, and if an old woman chanced to stumble over them (as not unfrequently happened, the chosen spot being a broken and stony place), John started from a doze, pounced out upon her, and hung round her neck till assistance arrived, when she was immediately carried away and drowned. By dint of constantly inveigling old ladies and disposing of them in this summary manner, he acquired the reputation of a great public character; and as he received no harm in these pursuits beyond a scratched face or so, he came, in the course of time, to be considered witch-proof.

There was but one person who entertained the least doubt of John Podgers's gifts, and that person was his own nephew, a wild, roving young fellow of twenty who had been brought up in his uncle's house and lived there still, - that is to say, when he was at home, which was not as often as it might have been. As he was an apt scholar, it was he who read aloud every fresh piece of strange and terrible intelligence that John Podgers bought; and this he always did of an evening in the little porch in front of the house, round which the neighbours would flock in crowds to hear the direful news, - for people like to be frightened, and when they can be frightened for nothing and at another man's expense, they like it all the better.

One fine midsummer evening, a group of persons were gathered in this place, listening intently to Will Marks (that was the nephew's name), as with his cap very much on one side, his arm coiled slyly round the waist of a pretty girl who sat beside him, and his face screwed into a comical expression intended to represent extreme gravity, he read - with Heaven knows how many embellishments of his own - a dismal account of a gentleman down in Northamptonshire under the influence of witchcraft and taken forcible possession of by the Devil, who was playing his very self with him. John Podgers, in a high sugar-loaf hat and short cloak, filled the opposite seat, and surveyed the auditory with a look of mingled pride and horror very edifying to see; while the hearers, with their heads thrust forward and their mouths open, listened and trembled, and hoped there was a great deal more to come. Sometimes Will stopped for an instant to look round upon his eager audience, and then, with a more comical expression of face than before and a settling of himself comfortably, which included a squeeze of the young lady before mentioned, he launched into some new wonder surpassing all the others.

The setting sun shed his last golden rays upon this little party, who, absorbed in their present occupation, took no heed of the approach of night, or the glory in which the day went down, when the sound of a horse, approaching at a good round trot, invading the silence of the hour, caused the reader to make a sudden stop, and the listeners to raise their heads in wonder. Nor was their wonder diminished when a horseman dashed up to the porch, and abruptly checking his steed, inquired where one John Podgers dwelt.

'Here!' cried a dozen voices, while a dozen hands pointed out sturdy John, still basking in the terrors of the pamphlet.

The rider, giving his bridle to one of those who surrounded him, dismounted, and approached John, hat in hand, but with great haste.

'Whence come ye?' said John.

'From Kingston, master.'

'And wherefore?'

'On most pressing business.'

'Of what nature?'

'Witchcraft.'

Witchcraft! Everybody looked aghast at the breathless messenger, and the breathless messenger looked equally aghast at everybody - except Will

Marks, who, finding himself unobserved, not only squeezed the young lady again, but kissed her twice. Surely he must have been bewitched himself, or he never could have done it - and the young lady too, or she never would have let him.

'Witchcraft!' cried Will, drowning the sound of his last kiss, which was rather a loud one.

The messenger turned towards him, and with a frown repeated the word more solemnly than before; then told his errand, which was, in brief, that the people of Kingston had been greatly terrified for some nights past by hideous revels, held by witches beneath the gibbet within a mile of the town, and related and deposed to by chance wayfarers who had passed within ear-shot of the spot; that the sound of their voices in their wild orgies had been plainly heard by many persons; that three old women laboured under strong suspicion, and that precedents had been consulted and solemn council had, and it was found that to identify the hags some single person must watch upon the spot alone; that no single person had the courage to perform the task; and that he had been despatched express to solicit John Podgers to undertake it that very night, as being a man of great renown, who bore a charmed life, and was proof against unholy spells.

John received this communication with much composure, and said in a few words, that it would have afforded him inexpressible pleasure to do the Kingston people so slight a service, if it were not for his unfortunate propensity to fall asleep, which no man regretted more than himself upon the present occasion, but which quite settled the question. Nevertheless, he said, there WAS a gentleman present (and here he looked very hard at a tall farrier), who, having been engaged all his life in the manufacture of horseshoes, must be quite invulnerable to the power of witches, and who, he had no doubt, from his own reputation for bravery and good-nature, would readily accept the commission. The farrier politely thanked him for his good opinion, which it would always be his study to deserve, but added that, with regard to the present little matter, he couldn't think of it on any account, as his departing on such an errand would certainly occasion the instant death of his wife, to whom, as they all knew, he was tenderly attached. Now, so far from this circumstance being notorious, everybody had suspected the reverse, as the farrier was in the habit of beating his lady rather more than tender husbands usually do; all the married men present, however, applauded his resolution with great vehemence, and one and all declared that they would stop at home and die if needful (which happily it was not) in defence of their lawful partners.

This burst of enthusiasm over, they began to look, as by one consent, toward Will Marks, who, with his cap more on one side than ever, sat watching the proceedings with extraordinary unconcern. He had never been heard openly to express his disbelief in witches, but had often cut such jokes at their expense as left it to be inferred; publicly stating on several occasions that he considered a broomstick an inconvenient charger, and one especially unsuited to the dignity of the female character, and indulging in other free remarks of the same tendency, to the great amusement of his wild companions.

As they looked at Will they began to whisper and murmur among themselves, and at length one man cried, 'Why don't you ask Will Marks?'

As this was what everybody had been thinking of, they all took up the word, and cried in concert, 'Ah! why don't you ask Will?'

'HE don't care,' said the farrier.

'Not he,' added another voice in the crowd.

'He don't believe in it, you know,' sneered a little man with a yellow face and a taunting nose and chin, which he thrust out from under the arm of a long man before him.

'Besides,' said a red-faced gentleman with a gruff voice, 'he's a single man.'

'That's the point!' said the farrier; and all the married men murmured, ah! that was it, and they only wished they were single themselves; they would show him what spirit was, very soon.

The messenger looked towards Will Marks beseechingly.

'It will be a wet night, friend, and my gray nag is tired after yesterday's work - '

Here there was a general titter.

'But,' resumed Will, looking about him with a smile, 'if nobody else puts in a better claim to go, for the credit of the town I am your man, and I would be, if I had to go afoot. In five minutes I shall be in the saddle, unless I am depriving any worthy gentleman here of the honour of the adventure, which I wouldn't do for the world.'

But here arose a double difficulty, for not only did John Podgers combat the resolution with all the words he had, which were not many, but the young lady combated it too with all the tears she had, which were very many indeed. Will, however, being inflexible, parried his uncle's objections with a joke, and coaxed the young lady into a smile in three short whispers. As it was plain that he set his mind upon it, and would go, John Podgers offered him a few first-rate charms out of his own pocket, which he dutifully declined to accept; and the young lady gave him a kiss, which he also returned.

'You see what a rare thing it is to be married,' said Will, 'and how careful and considerate all these husbands are. There's not a man among them but his heart is leaping to forestall me in this adventure, and yet a strong sense of duty keeps him back. The husbands in this one little town are a pattern to the world, and so must the wives be too, for that matter, or they could never boast half the influence they have!'

Waiting for no reply to this sarcasm, he snapped his fingers and withdrew into the house, and thence into the stable, while some busied themselves in refreshing the messenger, and others in baiting his steed. In less than the specified time he returned by another way, with a good cloak hanging over his arm, a good sword girded by his side, and leading his good horse caparisoned for the journey.

'Now,' said Will, leaping into the saddle at a bound, 'up and away.
Upon your mettle, friend, and push on. Good night!'

He kissed his hand to the girl, nodded to his drowsy uncle, waved his cap to the rest - and off they flew pell-mell, as if all the witches in England were in their horses' legs. They were out of sight in a minute.

The men who were left behind shook their heads doubtfully, stroked their chins, and shook their heads again. The farrier said that certainly Will Marks was a good horseman, nobody should ever say he denied that: but he was rash, very rash, and there was no telling what the end of it might be; what did he go for, that was what he wanted to know? He wished the young fellow no harm, but why did he go? Everybody echoed these words, and shook their heads again, having done which they wished John Podgers good night, and straggled home to bed.

The Kingston people were in their first sleep when Will Marks and his conductor rode through the town and up to the door of a house where sundry grave functionaries were assembled, anxiously expecting the arrival of the renowned Podgers. They were a little disappointed to find a gay young man in his place; but they put the best face upon the matter, and gave him full instructions how he was to conceal himself behind the gibbet, and watch and listen to the witches, and how at a certain time he was to burst forth and cut and slash among them vigorously, so that the suspected parties might be found bleeding in their beds next day, and thoroughly confounded. They gave him a great quantity of wholesome advice besides, and - which was more to the purpose with Will - a good supper. All these things being done, and midnight nearly come, they sallied forth to show him the spot where he was to keep his dreary vigil.

The night was by this time dark and threatening. There was a rumbling of distant thunder, and a low sighing of wind among the trees, which was very dismal. The potentates of the town kept so uncommonly close to Will that they trod upon his toes, or stumbled against his ankles, or nearly tripped up his heels at every step he took, and, besides these annoyances, their teeth chattered so with fear, that he seemed to be accompanied by a dirge of castanets.

At last they made a halt at the opening of a lonely, desolate space, and, pointing to a black object at some distance, asked Will if he saw that, yonder.

'Yes,' he replied. 'What then?'

Informing him abruptly that it was the gibbet where he was to watch, they wished him good night in an extremely friendly manner, and ran back as fast as their feet would carry them.

Will walked boldly to the gibbet, and, glancing upwards when he came under it, saw - certainly with satisfaction - that it was empty, and that nothing dangled from the top but some iron chains, which swung mournfully to and fro as they were moved by the breeze. After a careful survey of every quarter he determined to take his station with his face towards the town; both because that would place him with his back to the wind, and because, if any trick or surprise were attempted, it would probably come from that direction in the first instance. Having taken these precautions, he wrapped his cloak about him so that it left the handle of his sword free, and ready to his hand, and leaning against the gallows-tree with his cap not quite so much on one side as it had been before, took up his position for the night.

SECOND CHAPTER OF MR. PICKWICK'S TALE

We left Will Marks leaning under the gibbet with his face towards the town, scanning the distance with a keen eye, which sought to pierce the darkness and catch the earliest glimpse of any person or persons that might approach towards him. But all was quiet, and, save the howling of the wind as it swept across the heath in gusts, and the creaking of the chains that dangled above his head, there was no sound to break the sullen stillness of the night. After half an hour or so this monotony became more disconcerting to Will than the most furious uproar would have been, and he heartily wished for some one antagonist with whom he might have a fair stand-up fight, if it were only to warm himself.

Truth to tell, it was a bitter wind, and seemed to blow to the very heart of a man whose blood, heated but now with rapid riding, was the more sensitive to the chilling blast. Will was a daring fellow, and cared not a jot for hard knocks or sharp blades; but he could not persuade himself to move or walk about, having just that vague expectation of a sudden assault which made it a comfortable thing to have something at his back, even though that something were a gallows-tree. He had no great faith in the superstitions of the age, still such of them as occurred to him did not serve to lighten the time, or to render his situation the more endurable. He remembered how witches were said to repair at that ghostly hour to churchyards and gibbets, and such-like dismal spots, to pluck the bleeding mandrake or scrape the flesh from dead men's bones, as choice ingredients for their spells; how, stealing by night to lonely places, they dug graves with their finger-nails, or anointed themselves before riding in the air, with a delicate pomatum made of the fat of infants newly boiled. These, and many other fabled practices of a no less agreeable nature, and all having some reference to the circumstances in which he was placed, passed and repassed in quick succession through the mind of Will Marks, and adding a shadowy dread to that distrust and watchfulness which his situation inspired, rendered it, upon the whole, sufficiently uncomfortable. As he had foreseen, too, the rain began to descend heavily, and driving before the wind in a thick mist, obscured even those few objects which the darkness of the night had before imperfectly revealed.

'Look!' shrieked a voice. 'Great Heaven, it has fallen down, and stands erect as if it lived!'

The speaker was close behind him; the voice was almost at his ear. Will threw off his cloak, drew his sword, and darting swiftly round, seized a woman by the wrist, who, recoiling from him with a dreadful shriek, fell struggling upon her knees. Another woman, clad, like her whom he had grasped, in mourning garments, stood rooted to the spot on which they were, gazing upon his face with wild and glaring eyes that quite appalled him.

'Say,' cried Will, when they had confronted each other thus for some time, 'what are ye?'

'Say what are YOU,' returned the woman, 'who trouble even this obscene resting-place of the dead, and strip the gibbet of its honoured burden? Where is the body?'

He looked in wonder and affright from the woman who questioned him to the other whose arm he clutched.

'Where is the body?' repeated the questioner more firmly than before. 'You wear no livery which marks you for the hireling of the government. You are no friend to us, or I should recognise you, for the friends of such as we are few in number. What are you then, and wherefore are you here?'

'I am no foe to the distressed and helpless,' said Will. 'Are ye among that number? ye should be by your looks.'

'We are!' was the answer.

'Is it ye who have been wailing and weeping here under cover of the night?' said Will.

'It is,' replied the woman sternly; and pointing, as she spoke, towards her companion, 'she mourns a husband, and I a brother. Even the bloody law that wreaks its vengeance on the dead does not make that a crime, and if it did 'twould be alike to us who are past its fear or favour.'

Will glanced at the two females, and could barely discern that the one whom he addressed was much the elder, and that the other was young and of a slight figure. Both were deadly pale, their garments wet and worn, their hair dishevelled and streaming in the wind, themselves bowed down with grief and misery; their whole appearance most dejected, wretched, and forlorn. A sight so different from any he had expected to encounter touched him to the quick, and all idea of anything but their pitiable condition vanished before it.

'I am a rough, blunt yeoman,' said Will. 'Why I came here is told in a word; you have been overheard at a distance in the silence of the night, and I have undertaken a watch for hags or spirits. I came here expecting an adventure, and prepared to go through with any. If there be aught that I can do to help or aid you, name it, and on the faith of a man who can be secret and trusty, I will stand by you to the death.'

'How comes this gibbet to be empty?' asked the elder female.

'I swear to you,' replied Will, 'that I know as little as yourself. But this I know, that when I came here an hour ago or so, it was as it is now; and if, as I gather from your question, it was not so last night, sure I am that it has been secretly disturbed without the knowledge of the folks in yonder town. Bethink you, therefore, whether you have no friends in league with you or with him on whom the law has done its worst, by whom these sad remains have been removed for burial.'

The women spoke together, and Will retired a pace or two while they conversed apart. He could hear them sob and moan, and saw that they wrung their hands in fruitless agony. He could make out little that they said, but between whiles he gathered enough to assure him that his suggestion was not very wide of the mark, and that they not only suspected by whom the body had been removed, but also whither it had been conveyed. When they had been in conversation a long time, they turned towards him once more. This time the younger female spoke.

'You have offered us your help?'

'I have.'

'And given a pledge that you are still willing to redeem?'

'Yes. So far as I may, keeping all plots and conspiracies at arm's length.'

'Follow us, friend.'

Will, whose self-possession was now quite restored, needed no second bidding, but with his drawn sword in his hand, and his cloak so muffled over his left arm as to serve for a kind of shield without offering any impediment to its free action, suffered them to lead the way. Through mud and mire, and wind and rain, they walked in silence a full mile. At length they turned into a dark lane, where, suddenly starting out from beneath some trees where he had taken shelter, a man appeared, having in his charge three saddled horses. One of these (his own apparently), in obedience to a whisper from the women, he consigned to Will, who, seeing that they mounted, mounted also. Then, without a word spoken, they rode on together, leaving the attendant behind.

They made no halt nor slackened their pace until they arrived near Putney. At a large wooden house which stood apart from any other they alighted, and giving their horses to one who was already waiting, passed in by a side door, and so up some narrow creaking stairs into a small panelled chamber, where Will was left alone. He had not been here very long, when the door was softly opened, and there entered to him a cavalier whose face was concealed beneath a black mask.

Will stood upon his guard, and scrutinised this figure from head to foot. The form was that of a man pretty far advanced in life, but of a firm and stately carriage. His dress was of a rich and costly kind, but so soiled and disordered that it was scarcely to be recognised for one of those gorgeous suits which the expensive taste and fashion of the time prescribed for men of any rank or station.

He was booted and spurred, and bore about him even as many tokens of the state of the roads as Will himself. All this he noted, while the eyes behind the mask regarded him with equal attention. This survey over, the cavalier broke silence.

'Thou'rt young and bold, and wouldst be richer than thou art?'

'The two first I am,' returned Will. 'The last I have scarcely thought of. But be it so. Say that I would be richer than I am; what then?'

'The way lies before thee now,' replied the Mask.

'Show it me.'

'First let me inform thee, that thou wert brought here to-night lest thou shouldst too soon have told thy tale to those who placed thee on the watch.'

'I thought as much when I followed,' said Will. 'But I am no blab, not I.'

'Good,' returned the Mask. 'Now listen. He who was to have executed the enterprise of burying that body, which, as thou hast suspected, was taken down to-night, has left us in our need.'

Will nodded, and thought within himself that if the Mask were to attempt to play any tricks, the first eyelet-hole on the left-hand side of his doublet, counting from the buttons up the front, would be a very good place in which to pink him neatly.

'Thou art here, and the emergency is desperate. I propose his task to thee. Convey the body (now coffined in this house), by means that I shall show, to the Church of St. Dunstan in London to-morrow night, and thy service shall be richly paid. Thou'rt about to ask whose corpse it is. Seek not to know. I warn thee, seek not to know. Felons hang in chains on every moor and heath. Believe, as others do, that this was one, and ask no further. The murders of state policy, its victims or avengers, had best remain unknown to such as thee.'

'The mystery of this service,' said Will, 'bespeaks its danger.
What is the reward?'

'One hundred golden unities,' replied the cavalier. 'The danger to one who cannot be recognised as the friend of a fallen cause is not great, but there is some hazard to be run. Decide between that and the reward.'

'What if I refuse?' said Will.

'Depart in peace, in God's name,' returned the Mask in a melancholy tone, 'and keep our secret, remembering that those who brought thee here were crushed and stricken women, and that those who bade thee go free could have had thy life with one word, and no man the wiser.'

Men were readier to undertake desperate adventures in those times than they are now. In this case the temptation was great, and the punishment, even in case of detection, was not likely to be very severe, as Will came of a loyal stock, and his uncle was in good repute, and a passable tale to account for his possession of the body and his ignorance of the identity might be easily devised.

The cavalier explained that a coveted cart had been prepared for the purpose; that the time of departure could be arranged so that he should reach London Bridge at dusk, and proceed through the City after the day had closed in; that people would be ready at his journey's end to place the coffin in a vault without a minute's delay; that officious inquirers in the streets would be easily repelled by the tale that he was carrying for interment the corpse of one who had died of the plague; and in short showed him every reason why he should succeed, and none why he should fail. After a time they were joined by another gentleman, masked like the first, who added new arguments to those which had been already urged; the wretched wife, too, added her tears and prayers to their calmer representations; and in the end, Will, moved by compassion and good-nature, by a love of the marvellous, by a mischievous anticipation of the terrors of the Kingston people when he should be missing next day, and finally, by the prospect of gain, took upon himself the task, and devoted all his energies to its successful execution.

The following night, when it was quite dark, the hollow echoes of old London Bridge responded to the rumbling of the cart which contained the ghastly load, the object of Will Marks' care. Sufficiently disguised to attract no attention by his garb, Will walked at the horse's head, as unconcerned as a man could be who was sensible that he had now arrived at the most dangerous part of his undertaking, but full of boldness and confidence.

It was now eight o'clock. After nine, none could walk the streets without danger of their lives, and even at this hour, robberies and murder were of no uncommon occurrence. The shops upon the bridge were all closed; the low wooden arches thrown across the way were like so many black pits, in every one of which ill-favoured fellows lurked in knots of three or four; some standing upright against the wall, lying in wait; others skulking in gateways, and thrusting out their uncombed heads and scowling eyes: others crossing and recrossing, and constantly jostling both horse and man to provoke a quarrel; others stealing away and summoning their companions in a low whistle. Once, even in that short passage, there was the noise of scuffling and the clash of swords behind him, but Will, who knew the City and its ways, kept straight on and scarcely turned his head.

The streets being unpaved, the rain of the night before had converted them into a perfect quagmire, which the splashing water- spouts from the gables, and the filth and offal cast from the different houses, swelled in no small degree. These odious matters being left to putrefy in the close and heavy air, emitted an insupportable stench, to which every court and passage poured forth a contribution of its own. Many parts, even of the main streets, with their projecting stories tottering overhead and nearly shutting out the sky, were more like huge chimneys than open ways. At the corners of some of these, great bonfires were burning to prevent infection from the plague, of which it was rumoured that some citizens had lately died; and few, who availing themselves of the light thus afforded paused for a moment to look around them, would have been disposed to doubt the existence of the disease, or wonder at its dreadful visitations.

But it was not in such scenes as these, or even in the deep and miry road, that Will Marks found the chief obstacles to his progress. There were kites and ravens feeding in the streets (the only scavengers the City kept), who, scenting what he carried, followed the cart or fluttered on its top, and croaked their knowledge of its burden and their ravenous appetite for prey. There were distant fires, where the poor wood and plaster tenements wasted fiercely, and whither crowds made their way, clamouring eagerly for plunder, beating down all who came within their reach, and yelling like devils let loose. There were single-handed men flying from bands of ruffians, who pursued them with naked weapons, and hunted them savagely; there were drunken, desperate robbers issuing from their dens and staggering through the open streets where no man dared molest them; there were vagabond servitors returning from the Bear Garden, where had been good sport that day, dragging after them their torn and bleeding dogs, or leaving them to die and rot upon the road. Nothing was abroad but cruelty, violence, and disorder.

Many were the interruptions which Will Marks encountered from these stragglers, and many the narrow escapes he made. Now some stout bully would take his seat upon the cart, insisting to be driven to his own home, and now two or three men would come down upon him together, and demand that on peril of his life he showed them what he had inside. Then a party of the city watch, upon their rounds, would draw across the road, and not satisfied with his tale, question him closely, and revenge themselves by a little cuffing and hustling for maltreatment sustained at other hands that night. All these assailants had to be rebutted, some by fair words, some by foul, and some by blows. But Will Marks was not the man to be stopped or turned back now he had penetrated so far, and though he got on slowly, still he made his way down Fleet-street and reached the church at last.

As he had been forewarned, all was in readiness. Directly he stopped, the coffin was removed by four men, who appeared so suddenly that they seemed to have started from the earth. A fifth mounted the cart, and scarcely allowing Will time to snatch from it a little bundle containing such of his own clothes as he had thrown off on assuming his disguise, drove briskly away. Will never saw cart or man again.

He followed the body into the church, and it was well he lost no time in doing so, for the door was immediately closed. There was no light in the building save that which came from a couple of torches borne by two men in cloaks, who stood upon the brink of a vault. Each supported a female figure, and all observed a profound silence.

By this dim and solemn glare, which made Will feel as though light itself were dead, and its tomb the dreary arches that frowned above, they placed the coffin in the vault, with uncovered heads, and closed it up. One of the torch-bearers then turned to Will, and stretched forth his hand, in which was a purse of gold. Something told him directly that those were the same eyes which he had seen beneath the mask.

'Take it,' said the cavalier in a low voice, 'and be happy. Though these have been hasty obsequies, and no priest has blessed the work, there will not be the less peace with thee thereafter, for having laid his bones beside those of his little children. Keep thy own counsel, for thy sake no less than ours, and God be with thee!'

'The blessing of a widowed mother on thy head, good friend!' cried the younger lady through her tears; 'the blessing of one who has now no hope or rest but in this grave!'

Will stood with the purse in his hand, and involuntarily made a gesture as though he would return it, for though a thoughtless fellow, he was of a frank and generous nature. But the two gentlemen, extinguishing their torches, cautioned him to be gone, as their common safety would be endangered by a longer delay; and at the same time their retreating footsteps sounded through the church. He turned, therefore, towards the point at which he had entered, and seeing by a faint gleam in the distance that the door was again partially open, groped his way towards it and so passed into the street.

Meantime the local authorities of Kingston had kept watch and ward all the previous night, fancying every now and then that dismal shrieks were borne towards them on the wind, and frequently winking to each other, and drawing closer to the fire as they drank the health of the lonely sentinel, upon whom a clerical gentleman present was especially severe by reason of his levity and youthful folly. Two or three of the gravest in company, who were of a theological turn, propounded to him the question, whether such a character was not but poorly armed for single combat with the Devil, and whether he himself would not have been a stronger opponent; but the clerical gentleman, sharply reproving them for their presumption in discussing such questions, clearly showed that a fitter champion than Will could scarcely have been selected, not only for that being a child of Satan, he was the less likely to be alarmed by the appearance of his own father, but because Satan himself would be at his ease in such company, and would not scruple to kick up his heels to an extent which it was quite certain he would never venture before clerical eyes, under whose influence (as was notorious) he became quite a tame and milk-and-water character.

But when next morning arrived, and with it no Will Marks, and when a strong party repairing to the spot, as a strong party ventured to do in broad day, found Will gone and the gibbet empty, matters grew serious indeed. The day passing away and no news arriving, and the night going on also without any intelligence, the thing grew more tremendous still; in short, the neighbourhood worked itself up to such a comfortable pitch of mystery and horror, that it is a great question whether the general feeling was not one of excessive disappointment, when, on the second morning, Will Marks returned.

However this may be, back Will came in a very cool and collected state, and appearing not to trouble himself much about anybody except old John Podgers, who, having been sent for, was sitting in the Town Hall crying slowly, and dozing between whiles. Having embraced his uncle and assured him of his safety, Will mounted on a table and told his story to the crowd.

And surely they would have been the most unreasonable crowd that ever assembled together, if they had been in the least respect disappointed with the tale he told them; for besides describing the Witches' Dance to the minutest motion of their legs, and performing it in character on the table, with the assistance of a broomstick, he related how they had carried off the body in a copper caldron, and so bewitched him, that he lost his senses until he found himself lying under a hedge at least ten miles off, whence he had straightway returned as they then beheld. The story gained such universal applause that it soon afterwards brought down express from London the great witch-finder of the age, the Heaven-born Hopkins, who having examined Will closely on several points, pronounced it the most extraordinary and the best accredited witch- story ever known, under which title it was published at the Three Bibles on London Bridge, in small quarto, with a view of the caldron from an original drawing, and a portrait of the clerical gentleman as he sat by the fire.

On one point Will was particularly careful: and that was to describe for the witches he had seen, three impossible old females, whose likenesses never were or will be. Thus he saved the lives of the suspected parties, and of all other old women who were dragged before him to be identified.

This circumstance occasioned John Podgers much grief and sorrow, until happening one day to cast his eyes upon his house-keeper, and observing her to be plainly afflicted with rheumatism, he procured her to be burnt as an undoubted witch. For this service to the state he was immediately knighted, and became from that time Sir John Podgers.

Will Marks never gained any clue to the mystery in which he had been an actor, nor did any inscription in the church, which he often visited afterwards, nor any of the limited inquiries that he dared to make, yield him the least assistance. As he kept his own secret, he was compelled to spend the gold discreetly and sparingly. In the course of time he married the young lady of whom I have already told you, whose maiden name is not recorded, with whom he led a prosperous and happy life. Years and years after this adventure, it was his wont to tell her upon a stormy night that it was a great comfort to him to think those bones, to whomsoever they might have once belonged, were not bleaching in the troubled air, but were mouldering away with the dust of their own kith and kindred in a quiet grave.

FURTHER PARTICULARS OF MASTER HUMPHREY'S VISITOR

Being very full of Mr. Pickwick's application, and highly pleased with the compliment he had paid me, it will be readily supposed that long before our next night of meeting I communicated it to my three friends, who unanimously voted his admission into our body. We all looked forward with some impatience to the occasion which would enroll him among us, but I am greatly mistaken if Jack Redburn and myself were not by many degrees the most impatient of the party.

At length the night came, and a few minutes after ten Mr. Pickwick's knock was heard at the street-door. He was shown into a lower room, and I directly took my crooked stick and went to accompany him up-stairs, in order that he might be presented with all honour and formality.

'Mr. Pickwick,' said I, on entering the room, 'I am rejoiced to see you, - rejoiced to believe that this is but the opening of a long series of visits to this house, and but the beginning of a close and lasting friendship.'

That gentleman made a suitable reply with a cordiality and frankness peculiarly his own, and glanced with a smile towards two persons behind the door, whom I had not at first observed, and whom I immediately recognised as Mr. Samuel Weller and his father.

It was a warm evening, but the elder Mr. Weller was attired, notwithstanding, in a most capacious greatcoat, and his chin enveloped in a large speckled shawl, such as is usually worn by stage coachmen on active service. He looked very rosy and very stout, especially about the legs, which appeared to have been compressed into his top-boots with some difficulty. His broad- brimmed hat he held under his left arm, and with the forefinger of his right hand he touched his forehead a great many times in acknowledgment of my presence.

'I am very glad to see you in such good health, Mr. Weller,' said I.

'Why, thankee, sir,' returned Mr. Weller, 'the axle an't broke yet. We keeps up a steady pace, - not too sewere, but vith a moderate degree o' friction, - and the consekens is that ve're still a runnin' and comes in to the time reg'lar. - My son Samivel, sir, as you may have read on in history,' added Mr. Weller, introducing his first-born.

I received Sam very graciously, but before he could say a word his father struck in again.

'Samivel Veller, sir,' said the old gentleman, 'has conferred upon me the ancient title o' grandfather vich had long laid dormouse, and wos s'posed to be nearly hex-tinct in our family. Sammy, relate a anecdote o' vun o' them boys, - that 'ere little anecdote about young Tony sayin' as he WOULD smoke a pipe unbeknown to his mother.'

'Be quiet, can't you?' said Sam; 'I never see such a old magpie - never!'

'That 'ere Tony is the blessedest boy,' said Mr. Weller, heedless of this rebuff, 'the blessedest boy as ever I see in MY days! of all the charmin'est infants as ever I heerd tell on, includin' them as was kivered over by the robin-redbreasts arter they'd committed sooicide with blackberries, there never wos any like that 'ere little Tony. He's alvays a playin' vith a quart pot, that boy is! To see him a settin' down on the doorstep pretending to drink out of it, and fetching a long breath artervards, and smoking a bit of firevood, and sayin', "Now I'm grandfather," - to see him a doin' that at two year old is better than any play as wos ever wrote. "Now I'm grandfather!"

He wouldn't take a pint pot if you wos to make him a present on it, but he gets his quart, and then he says, "Now I'm grandfather!"'

Mr. Weller was so overpowered by this picture that he straightway fell into a most alarming fit of coughing, which must certainly have been attended with some fatal result but for the dexterity and promptitude of Sam, who, taking a firm grasp of the shawl just under his father's chin, shook him to and fro with great violence, at the same time administering some smart blows between his shoulders. By this curious mode of treatment Mr. Weller was finally recovered, but with a very crimson face, and in a state of great exhaustion.

'He'll do now, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, who had been in some alarm himself.

'He'll do, sir!' cried Sam, looking reproachfully at his parent. 'Yes, he WILL do one o' these days, - he'll do for his-self and then he'll wish he hadn't. Did anybody ever see sich a inconsiderate old file, - laughing into conwulsions afore company, and stamping on the floor as if he'd brought his own carpet vith him and wos under a wager to punch the pattern out in a given time? He'll begin again in a minute. There - he's a goin' off - I said he would!'

In fact, Mr. Weller, whose mind was still running upon his precocious grandson, was seen to shake his head from side to side, while a laugh, working like an earthquake, below the surface, produced various extraordinary appearances in his face, chest, and shoulders, - the more alarming because unaccompanied by any noise whatever. These emotions, however, gradually subsided, and after three or four short relapses he wiped his eyes with the cuff of his coat, and looked about him with tolerable composure.

'Afore the governor vith-draws,' said Mr. Weller, 'there is a pint, respecting vich Sammy has a qvestion to ask. Vile that qvestion is a perwadin' this here conwersation, p'raps the genl'men vill permit me to retire.'

'Wot are you goin' away for?' demanded Sam, seizing his father by the coat-tail.

'I never see such a undootiful boy as you, Samivel,' returned Mr. Weller. 'Didn't you make a solemn promise, amountin' almost to a speeches o' wow, that you'd put that 'ere qvestion on my account?'

'Well, I'm agreeable to do it,' said Sam, 'but not if you go cuttin' away like that, as the bull turned round and mildly observed to the drover ven they wos a goadin' him into the butcher's door. The fact is, sir,' said Sam, addressing me, 'that he wants to know somethin' respectin' that 'ere lady as is housekeeper here.'

'Ay. What is that?'

'Vy, sir,' said Sam, grinning still more, 'he wishes to know vether she - '

'In short,' interposed old Mr. Weller decisively, a perspiration breaking out upon his forehead, 'vether that 'ere old creetur is or is not a widder.'

Mr. Pickwick laughed heartily, and so did I, as I replied decisively, that 'my housekeeper was a spinster.'

'There!' cried Sam, 'now you're satisfied. You hear she's a spinster.'

'A wot?' said his father, with deep scorn.

'A spinster,' replied Sam.

Mr. Weller looked very hard at his son for a minute or two, and then said,

'Never mind vether she makes jokes or not, that's no matter. Wot I say is, is that 'ere female a widder, or is she not?'

'Wot do you mean by her making jokes?' demanded Sam, quite aghast at the obscurity of his parent's speech.

'Never you mind, Samivel,' returned Mr. Weller gravely; 'puns may be wery good things or they may be wery bad 'uns, and a female may be none the better or she may be none the vurse for making of 'em; that's got nothing to do vith widders.'

'Wy now,' said Sam, looking round, 'would anybody believe as a man at his time o' life could be running his head agin spinsters and punsters being the same thing?'

'There an't a straw's difference between 'em,' said Mr. Weller. 'Your father didn't drive a coach for so many years, not to be ekal to his own langvidge as far as THAT goes, Sammy.'

Avoiding the question of etymology, upon which the old gentleman's mind was quite made up, he was several times assured that the housekeeper had never been married. He expressed great satisfaction on hearing this, and apologised for the question, remarking that he had been greatly terrified by a widow not long before, and that his natural timidity was increased in consequence.

'It wos on the rail,' said Mr. Weller, with strong emphasis; 'I wos a goin' down to Birmingham by the rail, and I wos locked up in a close carriage vith a living widder. Alone we wos; the widder and me wos alone; and I believe it wos only because we WOS alone and there wos no clergyman in the conwayance, that that 'ere widder didn't marry me afore ve reached the half-way station. Ven I think how she began a screaming as we wos a goin' under them tunnels in the dark, - how she kept on a faintin' and ketchin' hold o' me, - and how I tried to bust open the door as was tight-locked and perwented all escape - Ah! It was a awful thing, most awful!'

Mr. Weller was so very much overcome by this retrospect that he was unable, until he had wiped his brow several times, to return any reply to the question whether he approved of railway communication, notwithstanding that it would appear from the answer which he ultimately gave, that he entertained strong opinions on the subject.

'I con-sider,' said Mr. Weller, 'that the rail is unconstitootional and an inwaser o' priwileges, and I should wery much like to know what that 'ere old Carter as once stood up for our liberties and wun 'em too, - I should like to know wot he vould say, if he wos alive now, to Englishmen being locked up vith widders, or with anybody again their wills. Wot a old Carter would have said, a old Coachman may say, and I as-sert that in that pint o' view alone, the rail is an inwaser. As to the comfort, vere's the comfort o' sittin' in a harm-cheer lookin' at brick walls or heaps o' mud, never comin' to a public-house, never seein' a glass o' ale, never goin' through a pike, never meetin' a change o' no kind (horses or othervise), but alvays comin' to a place, ven you come to one at all, the wery picter o' the last, vith the same p'leesemen standing about, the same blessed old bell a ringin', the same unfort'nate people standing behind the bars, a waitin' to be let in; and everythin' the same except the name, vich is wrote up in the same sized letters as the last name, and vith the same colours. As to the Honour and dignity o' travellin', vere can that be vithout a coachman; and wot's the rail to sich coachmen and guards as is sometimes forced to go by it, but a outrage and a insult? As to the pace, wot sort o' pace do you think I, Tony Veller, could have kept a coach goin' at, for five hundred thousand pound a mile, paid in adwance afore the coach was on the road? And as to the ingein, - a nasty, wheezin', creakin', gaspin', puffin', bustin' monster, alvays out o' breath, vith a shiny green-and-gold back, like a unpleasant beetle in that 'ere gas magnifier, - as to the ingein as is alvays a pourin' out red-hot coals at night, and black smoke in the day, the sensiblest thing it does, in my opinion, is, ven there's somethin' in the vay, and it sets up that 'ere frightful scream vich seems to say, "Now here's two hundred and forty passengers in the wery greatest extremity o' danger, and here's their two hundred and forty screams in vun!"'

By this time I began to fear that my friends would be rendered impatient by my protracted absence. I therefore begged Mr. Pickwick to accompany me up-stairs, and left the two Mr. Wellers in the care of the housekeeper, laying strict injunctions upon her to treat them with all possible hospitality.

CHAPTER IV - THE CLOCK

As we were going up-stairs, Mr. Pickwick put on his spectacles, which he had held in his hand hitherto; arranged his neckerchief, smoothed down his waistcoat, and made many other little preparations of that kind which men are accustomed to be mindful of, when they are going among strangers for the first time, and are anxious to impress them pleasantly. Seeing that I smiled, he smiled too, and said that if it had occurred to him before he left home, he would certainly have presented himself in pumps and silk stockings.

'I would, indeed, my dear sir,' he said very seriously; 'I would have shown my respect for the society, by laying aside my gaiters.'

'You may rest assured,' said I, 'that they would have regretted your doing so very much, for they are quite attached to them.'

'No, really!' cried Mr. Pickwick, with manifest pleasure. 'Do you think they care about my gaiters? Do you seriously think that they identify me at all with my gaiters?'

'I am sure they do,' I replied.

'Well, now,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'that is one of the most charming and agreeable circumstances that could possibly have occurred to me!'

I should not have written down this short conversation, but that it developed a slight point in Mr. Pickwick's character, with which I was not previously acquainted. He has a secret pride in his legs. The manner in which he spoke, and the accompanying glance he bestowed upon his tights, convince me that Mr. Pickwick regards his legs with much innocent vanity.

'But here are our friends,' said I, opening the door and taking his arm in mine; 'let them speak for themselves. - Gentlemen, I present to you Mr. Pickwick.'

Mr. Pickwick and I must have been a good contrast just then. I, leaning quietly on my crutch-stick, with something of a care-worn, patient air; he, having hold of my arm, and bowing in every direction with the most elastic politeness, and an expression of face whose sprightly cheerfulness and good-humour knew no bounds. The difference between us must have been more striking yet, as we advanced towards the table, and the amiable gentleman, adapting his jocund step to my poor tread, had his attention divided between treating my infirmities with the utmost consideration, and affecting to be wholly unconscious that I required any.

I made him personally known to each of my friends in turn. First, to the deaf gentleman, whom he regarded with much interest, and accosted with great frankness and cordiality. He had evidently some vague idea, at the moment, that my friend being deaf must be dumb also; for when the latter opened his lips to express the pleasure it afforded him to know a gentleman of whom he had heard so much, Mr. Pickwick was so extremely disconcerted, that I was obliged to step in to his relief.

His meeting with Jack Redburn was quite a treat to see. Mr. Pickwick smiled, and shook hands, and looked at him through his spectacles, and under them, and over them, and nodded his head approvingly, and then nodded to me, as much as to say, 'This is just the man; you were quite right;' and then turned to Jack and said a few hearty words, and then did and said everything over again with unimpaired vivacity. As to Jack himself, he was quite as much delighted with Mr. Pickwick as Mr. Pickwick could possibly be with him. Two people never can have met together since the world began, who exchanged a warmer or more enthusiastic greeting.

It was amusing to observe the difference between this encounter and that which succeeded, between Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Miles. It was clear that the latter gentleman viewed our new member as a kind of rival in the affections of Jack Redburn, and besides this, he had more than once hinted to me, in secret, that although he had no doubt Mr. Pickwick was a very worthy man, still he did consider that some of his exploits were unbecoming a gentleman of his years and gravity. Over and above these grounds of distrust, it is one of his fixed opinions, that the law never can by possibility do anything wrong; he therefore looks upon Mr. Pickwick as one who has justly suffered in purse and peace for a breach of his plighted faith to an unprotected female, and holds that he is called upon to regard him with some suspicion on that account. These causes led to a rather cold and formal reception; which Mr. Pickwick acknowledged with the same stateliness and intense politeness as was displayed on the other side. Indeed, he assumed an air of such majestic defiance, that I was fearful he might break out into some solemn protest or declaration, and therefore inducted him into his chair without a moment's delay.

This piece of generalship was perfectly successful. The instant he took his seat, Mr. Pickwick surveyed us all with a most benevolent aspect, and was taken with a fit of smiling full five minutes long. His interest in our ceremonies was immense. They are not very numerous or complicated, and a description of them may be comprised in very few words. As our transactions have already been, and must necessarily continue to be, more or less anticipated by being presented in these pages at different times, and under various forms, they do not require a detailed account.

Our first proceeding when we are assembled is to shake hands all round, and greet each other with cheerful and pleasant looks. Remembering that we assemble not only for the promotion of our happiness, but with the view of adding something to the common stock, an air of languor or indifference in any member of our body would be regarded by the others as a kind of treason. We have never had an offender in this respect; but if we had, there is no doubt that he would be taken to task pretty severely.

Our salutation over, the venerable piece of antiquity from which we take our name is wound up in silence. The ceremony is always performed by Master Humphrey himself (in treating of the club, I may be permitted to assume the historical style, and speak of myself in the third person), who mounts upon a chair for the purpose, armed with a large key. While it is in progress, Jack Redburn is required to keep at the farther end of the room under the guardianship of Mr. Miles, for he is known to entertain certain aspiring and unhallowed thoughts connected with the clock, and has even gone so far as to state that if he might take the works out for a day or two, he thinks he could improve them. We pardon him his presumption in consideration of his good intentions, and his keeping this respectful distance, which last penalty is insisted on, lest by secretly wounding the object of our regard in some tender part, in the ardour of his zeal for its improvement, he should fill us with dismay and consternation.

This regulation afforded Mr. Pickwick the highest delight, and seemed, if possible, to exalt Jack in his good opinion.

The next ceremony is the opening of the clock-case (of which Master Humphrey has likewise the key), the taking from it as many papers as will furnish forth our evening's entertainment, and arranging in the recess such new contributions as have been provided since our last meeting. This is always done with peculiar solemnity. The deaf gentleman then fills and lights his pipe, and we once more take our seats round the table before mentioned, Master Humphrey acting as president, - if we can be said to have any president, where all are on the same social footing, - and our friend Jack as secretary. Our preliminaries being now concluded, we fall into any train of conversation that happens to suggest itself, or proceed immediately to one of our readings. In the latter case, the paper selected is consigned to Master Humphrey, who flattens it carefully on the table and makes dog's ears in the corner of every page, ready for turning over easily; Jack Redburn trims the lamp with a small machine of his own invention which usually puts it out; Mr. Miles looks on with great approval notwithstanding; the deaf gentleman draws in his chair, so that he can follow the words on the paper or on Master Humphrey's lips as he pleases; and Master Humphrey himself, looking round with mighty gratification, and glancing up at his old clock, begins to read aloud.

Mr. Pickwick's face, while his tale was being read, would have attracted the attention of the dullest man alive. The complacent motion of his head and forefinger as he gently beat time, and corrected the air with imaginary punctuation, the smile that mantled on his features at every jocose passage, and the sly look he stole around to observe its effect, the calm manner in which he shut his eyes and listened when there was some little piece of description, the changing expression with which he acted the dialogue to himself, his agony that the deaf gentleman should know what it was all about, and his extraordinary anxiety to correct the reader when he hesitated at a word in the manuscript, or substituted a wrong one, were alike worthy of remark. And when at last, endeavouring to communicate with the deaf gentleman by means of the finger alphabet, with which he constructed such words as are unknown in any civilised or savage language, he took up a slate and wrote in large text, one word in a line, the question, 'How - do - you - like - it?' - when he did this, and handing it over the table awaited the reply, with a countenance only brightened and improved by his great excitement, even Mr. Miles relaxed, and could not forbear looking at him for the moment with interest and favour.

'It has occurred to me,' said the deaf gentleman, who had watched Mr. Pickwick and everybody else with silent satisfaction - 'it has occurred to me,' said the deaf gentleman, taking his pipe from his lips, 'that now is our time for filling our only empty chair.'

As our conversation had naturally turned upon the vacant seat, we lent a willing ear to this remark, and looked at our friend inquiringly.

'I feel sure,' said he, 'that Mr. Pickwick must be acquainted with somebody who would be an acquisition to us; that he must know the man we want. Pray let us not lose any time, but set this question at rest. Is it so, Mr. Pickwick?'

The gentleman addressed was about to return a verbal reply, but remembering our friend's infirmity, he substituted for this kind of answer some fifty nods. Then taking up the slate and printing on it a gigantic 'Yes,' he handed it across the table, and rubbing his hands as he looked round upon our faces, protested that he and the deaf gentleman quite understood each other, already.

'The person I have in my mind,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'and whom I should not have presumed to mention to you until some time hence, but for the opportunity you have given me, is a very strange old man. His name is Bamber.'

'Bamber!' said Jack. 'I have certainly heard the name before.'

'I have no doubt, then,' returned Mr. Pickwick, 'that you remember him in those adventures of mine (the Posthumous Papers of our old club, I mean), although he is only incidentally mentioned; and, if I remember right, appears but once.'

'That's it,' said Jack. 'Let me see. He is the person who has a grave interest in old mouldy chambers and the Inns of Court, and who relates some anecdotes having reference to his favourite theme, - and an odd ghost story, - is that the man?'

'The very same. Now,' said Mr. Pickwick, lowering his voice to a mysterious and confidential tone, 'he is a very extraordinary and remarkable person; living, and talking, and looking, like some strange spirit, whose delight is to haunt old buildings; and absorbed in that one subject which you have just mentioned, to an extent which is quite wonderful. When I retired into private life, I sought him out, and I do assure you that the more I see of him, the more strongly I am impressed with the strange and dreamy character of his mind.'

'Where does he live?' I inquired.

'He lives,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'in one of those dull, lonely old places with which his thoughts and stories are all connected; quite alone, and often shut up close for several weeks together. In this dusty solitude he broods upon the fancies he has so long indulged, and when he goes into the world, or anybody from the world without goes to see him, they are still present to his mind and still his favourite topic. I may say, I believe, that he has brought himself to entertain a regard for me, and an interest in my visits; feelings which I am certain he would extend to Master Humphrey's Clock if he were once tempted to join us. All I wish you to understand is, that he is a strange, secluded visionary, in the world but not of it; and as unlike anybody here as he is unlike anybody elsewhere that I have ever met or known.'

Mr. Miles received this account of our proposed companion with rather a wry face, and after murmuring that perhaps he was a little mad, inquired if he were rich.

'I never asked him,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'You might know, sir, for all that,' retorted Mr. Miles, sharply.

'Perhaps so, sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, no less sharply than the other, 'but I do not. Indeed,' he added, relapsing into his usual mildness, 'I have no means of judging. He lives poorly, but that would seem to be in keeping with his character. I never heard him allude to his circumstances, and never fell into the society of any man who had the slightest acquaintance with them. I have really told you all I know about him, and it rests with you to say whether you wish to know more, or know quite enough already.'

We were unanimously of opinion that we would seek to know more; and as a sort of compromise with Mr. Miles (who, although he said 'Yes - O certainly - he should like to know more about the gentleman - he had no right to put himself in opposition to the general wish,' and so forth, shook his head doubtfully and hemmed several times with peculiar gravity), it was arranged that Mr. Pickwick should carry me with him on an evening visit to the subject of our discussion, for which purpose an early appointment between that gentleman and myself was immediately agreed upon; it being understood that I was to act upon my own responsibility, and to invite him to join us or not, as I might think proper. This solemn question determined, we returned to the clock-case (where we have been forestalled by the reader), and between its contents, and the conversation they occasioned, the remainder of our time passed very quickly.

When we broke up, Mr. Pickwick took me aside to tell me that he had spent a most charming and delightful evening. Having made this communication with an air of the strictest secrecy, he took Jack Redburn into another corner to tell him the same, and then retired into another corner with the deaf gentleman and the slate, to repeat the assurance. It was amusing to observe the contest in his mind whether he should extend his confidence to Mr. Miles, or treat him with dignified reserve. Half a dozen times he stepped up behind him with a friendly air, and as often stepped back again without saying a word; at last, when he was close at that gentleman's ear and upon the very point of whispering something conciliating and agreeable, Mr. Miles happened suddenly to turn his head, upon which Mr. Pickwick skipped away, and said with some fierceness, 'Good night, sir - I was about to say good night, sir, - nothing more;' and so made a bow and left him.

'Now, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, when he had got down-stairs.

'All right, sir,' replied Mr. Weller. 'Hold hard, sir. Right arm fust - now the left - now one strong conwulsion, and the great- coat's on, sir.'

Mr. Pickwick acted upon these directions, and being further assisted by Sam, who pulled at one side of the collar, and Mr. Weller, who pulled hard at the other, was speedily enrobed. Mr. Weller, senior, then produced a full-sized stable lantern, which he had carefully deposited in a remote corner, on his arrival, and inquired whether Mr. Pickwick would have 'the lamps alight.'

'I think not to-night,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Then if this here lady vill per-mit,' rejoined Mr. Weller, 'we'll leave it here, ready for next journey. This here lantern, mum,' said Mr. Weller, handing it to the housekeeper, 'vunce belonged to the celebrated Bill Blinder as is now at grass, as all on us vill be in our turns. Bill, mum, wos the hostler as had charge o' them two vell-known piebald leaders that run in the Bristol fast coach, and vould never go to no other tune but a sutherly vind and a cloudy sky, which wos consekvently played incessant, by the guard, wenever they wos on duty. He wos took wery bad one arternoon, arter having been off his feed, and wery shaky on his legs for some veeks; and he says to his mate, "Matey," he says, "I think I'm a- goin' the wrong side o' the post, and that my foot's wery near the bucket. Don't say I an't," he says, "for I know I am, and don't let me be interrupted," he says, "for I've saved a little money, and I'm a-goin' into the stable to make my last vill and testymint." "I'll take care as nobody interrupts," says his mate, "but you on'y hold up your head, and shake your ears a bit, and you're good for twenty years to come." Bill Blinder makes him no answer, but he goes avay into the stable, and there he soon artervards lays himself down a'tween the two piebalds, and dies, - previously a writin' outside the corn-chest, "This is the last vill and testymint of Villiam Blinder." They wos nat'rally wery much amazed at this, and arter looking among the litter, and up in the loft, and vere not, they opens the corn-chest, and finds that he'd been and chalked his vill inside the lid; so the lid was obligated to be took off the hinges, and sent up to Doctor Commons to be proved, and under that 'ere wery instrument this here lantern was passed to Tony Veller; vich circumstarnce, mum, gives it a wally in my eyes, and makes me rekvest, if you vill be so kind, as to take partickler care on it.'

The housekeeper graciously promised to keep the object of Mr. Weller's regard in the safest possible custody, and Mr. Pickwick, with a laughing face, took his leave. The bodyguard followed, side by side; old Mr. Weller buttoned and wrapped up from his boots to his chin; and Sam with his hands in his pockets and his hat half off his head, remonstrating with his father, as he went, on his extreme loquacity.

I was not a little surprised, on turning to go up-stairs, to encounter the barber in the passage at that late hour; for his attendance is usually confined to some half-hour in the morning. But Jack Redburn, who finds out (by instinct, I think) everything that happens in the house, informed me with great glee, that a society in imitation of our own had been that night formed in the kitchen, under the title of 'Mr. Weller's Watch,' of which the barber was a member; and that he could pledge himself to find means of making me acquainted with the whole of its future proceedings, which I begged him, both on my own account and that of my readers, by no means to neglect doing.

CHAPTER V - MR. WELLER'S WATCH

IT SEEMS that the housekeeper and the two Mr. Wellers were no sooner left together on the occasion of their first becoming acquainted, than the housekeeper called to her assistance Mr. Slithers the barber, who had been lurking in the kitchen in expectation of her summons; and with many smiles and much sweetness introduced him as one who would assist her in the responsible office of entertaining her distinguished visitors.

'Indeed,' said she, 'without Mr. Slithers I should have been placed in quite an awkward situation.'

'There is no call for any hock'erdness, mum,' said Mr. Weller with the utmost politeness; 'no call wotsumever. A lady,' added the old gentleman, looking about him with the air of one who establishes an incontrovertible position, - 'a lady can't be hock'erd. Natur' has otherwise purwided.'

The housekeeper inclined her head and smiled yet more sweetly. The barber, who had been fluttering about Mr. Weller and Sam in a state of great anxiety to improve their acquaintance, rubbed his hands and cried, 'Hear, hear! Very true, sir;' whereupon Sam turned about and steadily regarded him for some seconds in silence.

'I never knew,' said Sam, fixing his eyes in a ruminative manner upon the blushing barber, - 'I never knew but vun o' your trade, but HE wos worth a dozen, and wos indeed dewoted to his callin'!'

'Was he in the easy shaving way, sir,' inquired Mr. Slithers; 'or in the cutting and curling line?'

'Both,' replied Sam; 'easy shavin' was his natur', and cuttin' and curlin' was his pride and glory. His whole delight wos in his trade. He spent all his money in bears, and run in debt for 'em besides, and there they wos a growling avay down in the front cellar all day long, and ineffectooally gnashing their teeth, vile the grease o' their relations and friends wos being re-tailed in gallipots in the shop above, and the first-floor winder wos ornamented vith their heads; not to speak o' the dreadful aggrawation it must have been to 'em to see a man alvays a walkin' up and down the pavement outside, vith the portrait of a bear in his last agonies, and underneath in large letters, "Another fine animal wos slaughtered yesterday at Jinkinson's!" Hows'ever, there they wos, and there Jinkinson wos, till he wos took wery ill with some inn'ard disorder, lost the use of his legs, and wos confined to his bed, vere he laid a wery long time, but sich wos his pride in his profession, even then, that wenever he wos worse than usual the doctor used to go down-stairs and say, "Jinkinson's wery low this mornin'; we must give the bears a stir;" and as sure as ever they stirred 'em up a bit and made 'em roar, Jinkinson opens his eyes if he wos ever so bad, calls out, "There's the bears!" and rewives agin.'

'Astonishing!' cried the barber.

'Not a bit,' said Sam, 'human natur' neat as imported. Vun day the doctor happenin' to say, "I shall look in as usual to-morrow mornin'," Jinkinson catches hold of his hand and says, "Doctor," he says, "will you grant me one favour?" "I will, Jinkinson," says the doctor. "Then, doctor," says Jinkinson, "vill you come unshaved, and let me shave you?" "I will," says the doctor. "God bless you," says Jinkinson. Next day the doctor came, and arter he'd been shaved all skilful and reg'lar, he says, "Jinkinson," he says, "it's wery plain this does you good. Now," he says, "I've got a coachman as has got a beard that it 'ud warm your heart to work on, and though the footman," he says, "hasn't got much of a beard, still he's a trying it on vith a pair o' viskers to that extent that razors is Christian charity. If they take it in turns to mind the carriage when it's a waitin' below," he says, "wot's to hinder you from operatin' on both of 'em ev'ry day as well as upon me? you've got six children," he says, "wot's to hinder you from shavin' all their heads and keepin' 'em shaved? you've got two assistants in the shop down-stairs, wot's to hinder you from cuttin' and curlin' them as often as you like? Do this," he says, "and you're a man agin." Jinkinson squeedged the doctor's hand and begun that wery day; he kept his tools upon the bed, and wenever he felt his-self gettin' worse, he turned to at vun o' the children who wos a runnin' about the house vith heads like clean Dutch cheeses, and shaved him agin. Vun day the lawyer come to make his vill; all the time he wos a takin' it down, Jinkinson was secretly a clippin' avay at his hair vith a large pair of scissors. "Wot's that 'ere snippin' noise?" says the lawyer every now and then; "it's like a man havin' his hair cut." "It IS wery like a man havin' his hair cut," says poor Jinkinson, hidin' the scissors, and lookin' quite innocent. By the time the lawyer found it out, he was wery nearly bald. Jinkinson wos kept alive in this vay for a long time, but at last vun day he has in all the children vun arter another, shaves each on 'em wery clean, and gives him vun kiss on the crown o' his head; then he has in the two assistants, and arter cuttin' and curlin' of 'em in the first style of elegance, says he should like to hear the woice o' the greasiest bear, vich rekvest is immediately complied with; then he says that he feels wery happy in his mind and vishes to be left alone; and then he dies, previously cuttin' his own hair and makin' one flat curl in the wery middle of his forehead.'

This anecdote produced an extraordinary effect, not only upon Mr. Slithers, but upon the housekeeper also, who evinced so much anxiety to please and be pleased, that Mr. Weller, with a manner betokening some alarm, conveyed a whispered inquiry to his son whether he had gone 'too fur.'

'Wot do you mean by too fur?' demanded Sam.

'In that 'ere little compliment respectin' the want of hock'erdness in ladies, Sammy,' replied his father.

'You don't think she's fallen in love with you in consekens o' that, do you?' said Sam.

'More unlikelier things have come to pass, my boy,' replied Mr. Weller in a hoarse whisper; 'I'm always afeerd of inadwertent captiwation, Sammy. If I know'd how to make myself ugly or unpleasant, I'd do it, Samivel, rayther than live in this here state of perpetival terror!'

Mr. Weller had, at that time, no further opportunity of dwelling upon the apprehensions which beset his mind, for the immediate occasion of his fears proceeded to lead the way down-stairs, apologising as they went for conducting him into the kitchen, which apartment, however, she was induced to proffer for his accommodation in preference to her own little room, the rather as it afforded greater facilities for smoking, and was immediately adjoining the ale-cellar. The preparations which were already made sufficiently proved that these were not mere words of course, for on the deal table were a sturdy ale-jug and glasses, flanked with clean pipes and a plentiful supply of tobacco for the old gentleman and his son, while on a dresser hard by was goodly store of cold meat and other eatables. At sight of these arrangements Mr. Weller was at first distracted between his love of joviality and his doubts whether they were not to be considered as so many evidences of captivation having already taken place; but he soon yielded to his natural impulse, and took his seat at the table with a very jolly countenance.

'As to imbibin' any o' this here flagrant veed, mum, in the presence of a lady,' said Mr. Weller, taking up a pipe and laying it down again, 'it couldn't be. Samivel, total abstinence, if YOU please.'

'But I like it of all things,' said the housekeeper.

'No,' rejoined Mr. Weller, shaking his head, - 'no.'

'Upon my word I do,' said the housekeeper. 'Mr. Slithers knows I do.'

Mr. Weller coughed, and notwithstanding the barber's confirmation of the statement, said 'No' again, but more feebly than before. The housekeeper lighted a piece of paper, and insisted on applying it to the bowl of the pipe with her own fair hands; Mr. Weller resisted; the housekeeper cried that her fingers would be burnt; Mr. Weller gave way. The pipe was ignited, Mr. Weller drew a long puff of smoke, and detecting himself in the very act of smiling on the housekeeper, put a sudden constraint upon his countenance and looked sternly at the candle, with a determination not to captivate, himself, or encourage thoughts of captivation in others. From this iron frame of mind he was roused by the voice of his son.

'I don't think,' said Sam, who was smoking with great composure and enjoyment, 'that if the lady wos agreeable it 'ud be wery far out o' the vay for us four to make up a club of our own like the governors does up-stairs, and let him,' Sam pointed with the stem of his pipe towards his parent, 'be the president.'

The housekeeper affably declared that it was the very thing she had been thinking of. The barber said the same. Mr. Weller said nothing, but he laid down his pipe as if in a fit of inspiration, and performed the following manoeuvres.

Unbuttoning the three lower buttons of his waistcoat and pausing for a moment to enjoy the easy flow of breath consequent upon this process, he laid violent hands upon his watch-chain, and slowly and with extreme difficulty drew from his fob an immense double-cased silver watch, which brought the lining of the pocket with it, and was not to be disentangled but by great exertions and an amazing redness of face. Having fairly got it out at last, he detached the outer case and wound it up with a key of corresponding magnitude; then put the case on again, and having applied the watch to his ear to ascertain that it was still going, gave it some half-dozen hard knocks on the table to improve its performance.

'That,' said Mr. Weller, laying it on the table with its face upwards, 'is the title and emblem o' this here society. Sammy, reach them two stools this vay for the wacant cheers. Ladies and gen'lmen, Mr. Weller's Watch is vound up and now a-goin'. Order!'

By way of enforcing this proclamation, Mr. Weller, using the watch after the manner of a president's hammer, and remarking with great pride that nothing hurt it, and that falls and concussions of all kinds materially enhanced the excellence of the works and assisted the regulator, knocked the table a great many times, and declared the association formally constituted.

'And don't let's have no grinnin' at the cheer, Samivel,' said Mr. Weller to his son, 'or I shall be committin' you to the cellar, and then p'r'aps we may get into what the 'Merrikins call a fix, and the English a qvestion o' privileges.'

Having uttered this friendly caution, the President settled himself in his chair with great dignity, and requested that Mr. Samuel would relate an anecdote.

'I've told one,' said Sam.

'Wery good, sir; tell another,' returned the chair.

'We wos a talking jist now, sir,' said Sam, turning to Slithers, 'about barbers. Pursuing that 'ere fruitful theme, sir, I'll tell you in a wery few words a romantic little story about another barber as p'r'aps you may never have heerd.'

'Samivel!' said Mr. Weller, again bringing his watch and the table into smart collision, 'address your obserwations to the cheer, sir, and not to priwate indiwiduals!'

'And if I might rise to order,' said the barber in a soft voice, and looking round him with a conciliatory smile as he leant over the table, with the knuckles of his left hand resting upon it, - 'if I MIGHT rise to order, I would suggest that "barbers" is not exactly the kind of language which is agreeable and soothing to our feelings. You, sir, will correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe there IS such a word in the dictionary as hairdressers.'

'Well, but suppose he wasn't a hairdresser,' suggested Sam.

'Wy then, sir, be parliamentary and call him vun all the more,' returned his father. 'In the same vay as ev'ry gen'lman in another place is a Honourable, ev'ry barber in this place is a hairdresser. Ven you read the speeches in the papers, and see as vun gen'lman says of another, "the Honourable member, if he vill allow me to call him so," you vill understand, sir, that that means, "if he vill allow me to keep up that 'ere pleasant and uniwersal fiction."'

It is a common remark, confirmed by history and experience, that great men rise with the circumstances in which they are placed. Mr. Weller came out so strong in his capacity of chairman, that Sam was for some time prevented from speaking by a grin of surprise, which held his faculties enchained, and at last subsided in a long whistle of a single note. Nay, the old gentleman appeared even to have astonished himself, and that to no small extent, as was demonstrated by the vast amount of chuckling in which he indulged, after the utterance of these lucid remarks.

'Here's the story,' said Sam. 'Vunce upon a time there wos a young hairdresser as opened a wery smart little shop vith four wax dummies in the winder, two gen'lmen and two ladies - the gen'lmen vith blue dots for their beards, wery large viskers, oudacious heads of hair, uncommon clear eyes, and nostrils of amazin' pinkness; the ladies vith their heads o' one side, their right forefingers on their lips, and their forms deweloped beautiful, in vich last respect they had the adwantage over the gen'lmen, as wasn't allowed but wery little shoulder, and terminated raythe abrupt in fancy drapery. He had also a many hair-brushes and tooth-brushes bottled up in the winder, neat glass-cases on the counter, a floor-clothed cuttin'-room up-stairs, and a weighin'- macheen in the shop, right opposite the door. But the great attraction and ornament wos the dummies, which this here young hairdresser wos constantly a runnin' out in the road to look at, and constantly a runnin' in again to touch up and polish; in short, he wos so proud on 'em, that ven Sunday come, he wos always wretched and mis'rable to think they wos behind the shutters, and looked anxiously for Monday on that account. Vun o' these dummies wos a favrite vith him beyond the others; and ven any of his acquaintance asked him wy he didn't get married - as the young ladies he know'd, in partickler, often did - he used to say, "Never! I never vill enter into the bonds of vedlock," he says, "until I meet vith a young 'ooman as realises my idea o' that 'ere fairest dummy vith the light hair. Then, and not till then," he says, "I vill approach the altar." All the young ladies he know'd as had got dark hair told him this wos wery sinful, and that he wos wurshippin' a idle; but them as wos at all near the same shade as the dummy coloured up wery much, and wos observed to think him a wery nice young man.'

'Samivel,' said Mr. Weller, gravely, 'a member o' this associashun bein' one o' that 'ere tender sex which is now immedetly referred to, I have to rekvest that you vill make no reflections.'

'I ain't a makin' any, am I?' inquired Sam.

'Order, sir!' rejoined Mr. Weller, with severe dignity. Then, sinking the chairman in the father, he added, in his usual tone of voice: 'Samivel, drive on!'

Sam interchanged a smile with the housekeeper, and proceeded:

'The young hairdresser hadn't been in the habit o' makin' this avowal above six months, ven he en-countered a young lady as wos the wery picter o' the fairest dummy. "Now," he says, "it's all up. I am a slave!" The young lady wos not only the picter o' the fairest dummy, but she was wery romantic, as the young hairdresser was, too, and he says, "O!" he says, "here's a community o' feelin', here's a flow o' soul!" he says, "here's a interchange o' sentiment!" The young lady didn't say much, o' course, but she expressed herself agreeable, and shortly artervards vent to see him vith a mutual friend. The hairdresser rushes out to meet her, but d'rectly she sees the dummies she changes colour and falls a tremblin' wiolently. "Look up, my love," says the hairdresser, "behold your imige in my winder, but not correcter than in my art!" "My imige!" she says. "Yourn!" replies the hairdresser. "But whose imige is THAT?" she says, a pinting at vun o' the gen'lmen. "No vun's, my love," he says, "it is but a idea." "A idea! " she cries: "it is a portrait, I feel it is a portrait, and that 'ere noble face must be in the millingtary!" "Wot do I hear!" says he, a crumplin' his curls. "Villiam Gibbs," she says, quite firm, "never renoo the subject. I respect you as a friend," she says, "but my affections is set upon that manly brow." "This," says the hairdresser, "is a reg'lar blight, and in it I perceive the hand of Fate. Farevell!" Vith these vords he rushes into the shop, breaks the dummy's nose vith a blow of his curlin'-irons, melts him down at the parlour fire, and never smiles artervards.'

'The young lady, Mr. Weller?' said the housekeeper.

'Why, ma'am,' said Sam, 'finding that Fate had a spite agin her, and everybody she come into contact vith, she never smiled neither, but read a deal o' poetry and pined avay, - by rayther slow degrees, for she ain't dead yet. It took a deal o' poetry to kill the hair-dresser, and some people say arter all that it was more the gin and water as caused him to be run over; p'r'aps it was a little o' both, and came o' mixing the two.'

The barber declared that Mr. Weller had related one of the most interesting stories that had ever come within his knowledge, in which opinion the housekeeper entirely concurred.

'Are you a married man, sir?' inquired Sam.

The barber replied that he had not that honour.

'I s'pose you mean to be?' said Sam.

'Well,' replied the barber, rubbing his hands smirkingly, 'I don't know, I don't think it's very likely.'

'That's a bad sign,' said Sam; 'if you'd said you meant to be vun o' these days, I should ha' looked upon you as bein' safe. You're in a wery precarious state.'

'I am not conscious of any danger, at all events,' returned the barber.

'No more wos I, sir,' said the elder Mr. Weller, interposing; 'those vere my symptoms, exactly. I've been took that vay twice. Keep your vether eye open, my friend, or you're gone.'

There was something so very solemn about this admonition, both in its matter and manner, and also in the way in which Mr. Weller still kept his eye fixed upon the unsuspecting victim, that nobody cared to speak for some little time, and might not have cared to do so for some time longer, if the housekeeper had not happened to sigh, which called off the old gentleman's attention and gave rise to a gallant inquiry whether 'there wos anythin' wery piercin' in that 'ere little heart?'

'Dear me, Mr. Weller!' said the housekeeper, laughing.

'No, but is there anythin' as agitates it?' pursued the old gentleman. 'Has it always been obderrate, always opposed to the happiness o' human creeturs? Eh? Has it?'

At this critical juncture for her blushes and confusion, the housekeeper discovered that more ale was wanted, and hastily withdrew into the cellar to draw the same, followed by the barber, who insisted on carrying the candle. Having looked after her with a very complacent expression of face, and after him with some disdain, Mr. Weller caused his glance to travel slowly round the kitchen, until at length it rested on his son.

'Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, 'I mistrust that barber.'

'Wot for?' returned Sam; 'wot's he got to do with you? You're a nice man, you are, arter pretendin' all kinds o' terror, to go a payin' compliments and talkin' about hearts and piercers.'

The imputation of gallantry appeared to afford Mr. Weller the utmost delight, for he replied in a voice choked by suppressed laughter, and with the tears in his eyes,

'Wos I a talkin' about hearts and piercers, - wos I though, Sammy, eh?'

'Wos you? of course you wos.'

'She don't know no better, Sammy, there ain't no harm in it, - no danger, Sammy; she's only a punster. She seemed pleased, though, didn't she? O' course, she wos pleased, it's nat'ral she should be, wery nat'ral.'

'He's wain of it!' exclaimed Sam, joining in his father's mirth.
'He's actually wain!'

'Hush!' replied Mr. Weller, composing his features, 'they're a comin' back, - the little heart's a comin' back. But mark these wurds o' mine once more, and remember 'em ven your father says he said 'em. Samivel, I mistrust that 'ere deceitful barber.'

CHAPTER VI - MASTER HUMPHREY, FROM HIS CLOCK-SIDE IN THE CHIMNEY CORNER

TWO or three evenings after the institution of Mr. Weller's Watch, I thought I heard, as I walked in the garden, the voice of Mr. Weller himself at no great distance; and stopping once or twice to listen more attentively, I found that the sounds proceeded from my housekeeper's little sitting-room, which is at the back of the house. I took no further notice of the circumstance at that time, but it formed the subject of a conversation between me and my friend Jack Redburn next morning, when I found that I had not been deceived in my impression. Jack furnished me with the following particulars; and as he appeared to take extraordinary pleasure in relating them, I have begged him in future to jot down any such domestic scenes or occurrences that may please his humour, in order that they may be told in his own way. I must confess that, as Mr. Pickwick and he are constantly together, I have been influenced, in making this request, by a secret desire to know something of their proceedings.

On the evening in question, the housekeeper's room was arranged with particular care, and the housekeeper herself was very smartly dressed. The preparations, however, were not confined to mere showy demonstrations, as tea was prepared for three persons, with a small display of preserves and jams and sweet cakes, which heralded some uncommon occasion. Miss Benton (my housekeeper bears that name) was in a state of great expectation, too, frequently going to the front door and looking anxiously down the lane, and more than once observing to the servant-girl that she expected company, and hoped no accident had happened to delay them.

A modest ring at the bell at length allayed her fears, and Miss Benton, hurrying into her own room and shutting herself up, in order that she might preserve that appearance of being taken by surprise which is so essential to the polite reception of visitors, awaited their coming with a smiling countenance.

'Good ev'nin', mum,' said the older Mr. Weller, looking in at the door after a prefatory tap. 'I'm afeerd we've come in rayther arter the time, mum, but the young colt being full o' wice, has been' a boltin' and shyin' and gettin' his leg over the traces to sich a extent that if he an't wery soon broke in, he'll wex me into a broken heart, and then he'll never be brought out no more except to learn his letters from the writin' on his grandfather's tombstone.'

With these pathetic words, which were addressed to something outside the door about two feet six from the ground, Mr. Weller introduced a very small boy firmly set upon a couple of very sturdy legs, who looked as if nothing could ever knock him down. Besides having a very round face strongly resembling Mr. Weller's, and a stout little body of exactly his build, this young gentleman, standing with his little legs very wide apart, as if the top-boots were familiar to them, actually winked upon the housekeeper with his infant eye, in imitation of his grandfather.

'There's a naughty boy, mum,' said Mr. Weller, bursting with delight, 'there's a immoral Tony. Wos there ever a little chap o' four year and eight months old as vinked his eye at a strange lady afore?'

As little affected by this observation as by the former appeal to his feelings, Master Weller elevated in the air a small model of a coach whip which he carried in his hand, and addressing the housekeeper with a shrill 'ya - hip!' inquired if she was 'going down the road;' at which happy adaptation of a lesson he had been taught from infancy, Mr. Weller could restrain his feelings no longer, but gave him twopence on the spot.

'It's in wain to deny it, mum,' said Mr. Weller, 'this here is a boy arter his grandfather's own heart, and beats out all the boys as ever wos or will be. Though at the same time, mum,' added Mr. Weller, trying to look gravely down upon his favourite, 'it was wery wrong on him to want to - over all the posts as we come along, and wery cruel on him to force poor grandfather to lift him cross- legged over every vun of 'em. He wouldn't pass vun single blessed post, mum, and at the top o' the lane there's seven-and-forty on 'em all in a row, and wery close together.'

Here Mr. Weller, whose feelings were in a perpetual conflict between pride in his grandson's achievements and a sense of his own responsibility, and the importance of impressing him with moral truths, burst into a fit of laughter, and suddenly checking himself, remarked in a severe tone that little boys as made their grandfathers put 'em over posts never went to heaven at any price.

By this time the housekeeper had made tea, and little Tony, placed on a chair beside her, with his eyes nearly on a level with the top of the table, was provided with various delicacies which yielded him extreme contentment. The housekeeper (who seemed rather afraid of the child, notwithstanding her caresses) then patted him on the head, and declared that he was the finest boy she had ever seen.

'Wy, mum,' said Mr. Weller, 'I don't think you'll see a many sich, and that's the truth. But if my son Samivel vould give me my vay, mum, and only dis-pense vith his - MIGHT I wenter to say the vurd?'

'What word, Mr. Weller?' said the housekeeper, blushing slightly.

'Petticuts, mum,' returned that gentleman, laying his hand upon the garments of his grandson. 'If my son Samivel, mum, vould only dis- pense vith these here, you'd see such a alteration in his appearance, as the imagination can't depicter.'

'But what would you have the child wear instead, Mr. Weller?' said the housekeeper.

'I've offered my son Samivel, mum, agen and agen,' returned the old gentleman, 'to purwide him at my own cost vith a suit o' clothes as 'ud be the makin' on him, and form his mind in infancy for those pursuits as I hope the family o' the Vellers vill alvays dewote themselves to. Tony, my boy, tell the lady wot them clothes are, as grandfather says, father ought to let you vear.'

'A little white hat and a little sprig weskut and little knee cords and little top-boots and a little green coat with little bright buttons and a little welwet collar,' replied Tony, with great readiness and no stops.

'That's the cos-toom, mum,' said Mr. Weller, looking proudly at the housekeeper. 'Once make sich a model on him as that, and you'd say he WOS an angel!'

Perhaps the housekeeper thought that in such a guise young Tony would look more like the angel at Islington than anything else of that name, or perhaps she was disconcerted to find her previously- conceived ideas disturbed, as angels are not commonly represented in top-boots and sprig waistcoats. She coughed doubtfully, but said nothing.

'How many brothers and sisters have you, my dear?' she asked, after a short silence.

'One brother and no sister at all,' replied Tony. 'Sam his name is, and so's my father's. Do you know my father?'

'O yes, I know him,' said the housekeeper, graciously.

'Is my father fond of you?' pursued Tony.

'I hope so,' rejoined the smiling housekeeper.

Tony considered a moment, and then said, 'Is my grandfather fond of you?'

This would seem a very easy question to answer, but instead of replying to it, the housekeeper smiled in great confusion, and said that really children did ask such extraordinary questions that it was the most difficult thing in the world to talk to them. Mr. Weller took upon himself to reply that he was very fond of the lady; but the housekeeper entreating that he would not put such things into the child's head, Mr. Weller shook his own while she looked another way, and seemed to be troubled with a misgiving that captivation was in progress. It was, perhaps, on this account that he changed the subject precipitately.

'It's wery wrong in little boys to make game o' their grandfathers, an't it, mum?' said Mr. Weller, shaking his head waggishly, until Tony looked at him, when he counterfeited the deepest dejection and sorrow.

'O, very sad!' assented the housekeeper. 'But I hope no little boys do that?'

'There is vun young Turk, mum,' said Mr. Weller, 'as havin' seen his grandfather a little overcome vith drink on the occasion of a friend's birthday, goes a reelin' and staggerin' about the house, and makin' believe that he's the old gen'lm'n.'

'O, quite shocking!' cried the housekeeper,

'Yes, mum,' said Mr. Weller; 'and previously to so doin', this here young traitor that I'm a speakin' of, pinches his little nose to make it red, and then he gives a hiccup and says, "I'm all right," he says; "give us another song!" Ha, ha! "Give us another song," he says. Ha, ha, ha!'

In his excessive delight, Mr. Weller was quite unmindful of his moral responsibility, until little Tony kicked up his legs, and laughing immoderately, cried, 'That was me, that was;' whereupon the grandfather, by a great effort, became extremely solemn.

'No, Tony, not you,' said Mr. Weller. 'I hope it warn't you, Tony. It must ha' been that 'ere naughty little chap as comes sometimes out o' the empty watch-box round the corner, - that same little chap as wos found standing on the table afore the looking-glass, pretending to shave himself vith a oyster-knife.'

'He didn't hurt himself, I hope?' observed the housekeeper.

'Not he, mum,' said Mr. Weller proudly; 'bless your heart, you might trust that 'ere boy vith a steam-engine a'most, he's such a knowin' young' - but suddenly recollecting himself and observing that Tony perfectly understood and appreciated the compliment, the old gentleman groaned and observed that 'it wos all wery shockin' - wery.'

'O, he's a bad 'un,' said Mr. Weller, 'is that 'ere watch-box boy, makin' such a noise and litter in the back yard, he does, waterin' wooden horses and feedin' of 'em vith grass, and perpetivally spillin' his little brother out of a veelbarrow and frightenin' his mother out of her vits, at the wery moment wen she's expectin' to increase his stock of happiness vith another play-feller, - O, he's a bad one! He's even gone so far as to put on a pair of paper spectacles as he got his father to make for him, and walk up and down the garden vith his hands behind him in imitation of Mr. Pickwick, - but Tony don't do sich things, O no!'

'O no!' echoed Tony.

'He knows better, he does,' said Mr. Weller. 'He knows that if he wos to come sich games as these nobody wouldn't love him, and that his grandfather in partickler couldn't abear the sight on him; for vich reasons Tony's always good.'

'Always good,' echoed Tony; and his grandfather immediately took him on his knee and kissed him, at the same time, with many nods and winks, slyly pointing at the child's head with his thumb, in order that the housekeeper, otherwise deceived by the admirable manner in which he (Mr. Weller) had sustained his character, might not suppose that any other young gentleman was referred to, and might clearly understand that the boy of the watch-box was but an imaginary creation, and a fetch of Tony himself, invented for his improvement and reformation.

Not confining himself to a mere verbal description of his grandson's abilities, Mr. Weller, when tea was finished, invited him by various gifts of pence and halfpence to smoke imaginary pipes, drink visionary beer from real pots, imitate his grandfather without reserve, and in particular to go through the drunken scene, which threw the old gentleman into ecstasies and filled the housekeeper with wonder. Nor was Mr. Weller's pride satisfied with even this display, for when he took his leave he carried the child, like some rare and astonishing curiosity, first to the barber's house and afterwards to the tobacconist's, at each of which places he repeated his performances with the utmost effect to applauding and delighted audiences. It was half-past nine o'clock when Mr. Weller was last seen carrying him home upon his shoulder, and it has been whispered abroad that at that time the infant Tony was rather intoxicated.

I was musing the other evening upon the characters and incidents with which I had been so long engaged; wondering how I could ever have looked forward with pleasure to the completion of my tale, and reproaching myself for having done so, as if it were a kind of cruelty to those companions of my solitude whom I had now dismissed, and could never again recall; when my clock struck ten. Punctual to the hour, my friends appeared.

On our last night of meeting, we had finished the story which the reader has just concluded. Our conversation took the same current as the meditations which the entrance of my friends had interrupted, and The Old Curiosity Shop was the staple of our discourse.

I may confide to the reader now, that in connection with this little history I had something upon my mind; something to communicate which I had all along with difficulty repressed; something I had deemed it, during the progress of the story, necessary to its interest to disguise, and which, now that it was over, I wished, and was yet reluctant, to disclose.

To conceal anything from those to whom I am attached, is not in my nature. I can never close my lips where I have opened my heart. This temper, and the consciousness of having done some violence to it in my narrative, laid me under a restraint which I should have had great difficulty in overcoming, but for a timely remark from Mr. Miles, who, as I hinted in a former paper, is a gentleman of business habits, and of great exactness and propriety in all his transactions.

'I could have wished,' my friend objected, 'that we had been made acquainted with the single gentleman's name. I don't like his withholding his name. It made me look upon him at first with suspicion, and caused me to doubt his moral character, I assure you. I am fully satisfied by this time of his being a worthy creature; but in this respect he certainly would not appear to have acted at all like a man of business.'

'My friends,' said I, drawing to the table, at which they were by this time seated in their usual chairs, 'do you remember that this story bore another title besides that one we have so often heard of late?'

Mr. Miles had his pocket-book out in an instant, and referring to an entry therein, rejoined, 'Certainly. Personal Adventures of Master Humphrey. Here it is. I made a note of it at the time.'

I was about to resume what I had to tell them, when the same Mr. Miles again interrupted me, observing that the narrative originated in a personal adventure of my own, and that was no doubt the reason for its being thus designated.

This led me to the point at once.

'You will one and all forgive me,' I returned, 'if for the greater convenience of the story, and for its better introduction, that adventure was fictitious. I had my share, indeed, - no light or trivial one, - in the pages we have read, but it was not the share I feigned to have at first. The younger brother, the single gentleman, the nameless actor in this little drama, stands before you now.'

It was easy to see they had not expected this disclosure.

'Yes,' I pursued. 'I can look back upon my part in it with a calm, half-smiling pity for myself as for some other man. But I am he, indeed; and now the chief sorrows of my life are yours.'

I need not say what true gratification I derived from the sympathy and kindness with which this acknowledgment was received; nor how often it had risen to my lips before; nor how difficult I had found it - how impossible, when I came to those passages which touched me most, and most nearly concerned me - to sustain the character I had assumed. It is enough to say that I replaced in the clock-case the record of so many trials, - sorrowfully, it is true, but with a softened sorrow which was almost pleasure; and felt that in living through the past again, and communicating to others the lesson it had helped to teach me, I had been a happier man.

We lingered so long over the leaves from which I had read, that as I consigned them to their former resting-place, the hand of my trusty clock pointed to twelve, and there came towards us upon the wind the voice of the deep and distant bell of St. Paul's as it struck the hour of midnight.

'This,' said I, returning with a manuscript I had taken at the moment, from the same repository, 'to be opened to such music, should be a tale where London's face by night is darkly seen, and where some deed of such a time as this is dimly shadowed out. Which of us here has seen the working of that great machine whose voice has just now ceased?'

Mr. Pickwick had, of course, and so had Mr. Miles. Jack and my deaf friend were in the minority.

I had seen it but a few days before, and could not help telling them of the fancy I had about it.

I paid my fee of twopence upon entering, to one of the money- changers who sit within the Temple; and falling, after a few turns up and down, into the quiet train of thought which such a place awakens, paced the echoing stones like some old monk whose present world lay all within its walls. As I looked afar up into the lofty dome, I could not help wondering what were his reflections whose genius reared that mighty pile, when, the last small wedge of timber fixed, the last nail driven into its home for many centuries, the clang of hammers, and the hum of busy voices gone, and the Great Silence whole years of noise had helped to make, reigning undisturbed around, he mused, as I did now, upon his work, and lost himself amid its vast extent. I could not quite determine whether the contemplation of it would impress him with a sense of greatness or of insignificance; but when I remembered how long a time it had taken to erect, in how short a space it might be traversed even to its remotest parts, for how brief a term he, or any of those who cared to bear his name, would live to see it, or know of its existence, I imagined him far more melancholy than proud, and looking with regret upon his labour done. With these thoughts in my mind, I began to ascend, almost unconsciously, the flight of steps leading to the several wonders of the building, and found myself before a barrier where another money-taker sat, who demanded which among them I would choose to see. There were the stone gallery, he said, and the whispering gallery, the geometrical staircase, the room of models, the clock - the clock being quite in my way, I stopped him there, and chose that sight from all the rest.

I groped my way into the Turret which it occupies, and saw before me, in a kind of loft, what seemed to be a great, old oaken press with folding doors. These being thrown back by the attendant (who was sleeping when I came upon him, and looked a drowsy fellow, as though his close companionship with Time had made him quite indifferent to it), disclosed a complicated crowd of wheels and chains in iron and brass, - great, sturdy, rattling engines, - suggestive of breaking a finger put in here or there, and grinding the bone to powder, - and these were the Clock! Its very pulse, if I may use the word, was like no other clock. It did not mark the flight of every moment with a gentle second stroke, as though it would check old Time, and have him stay his pace in pity, but measured it with one sledge-hammer beat, as if its business were to crush the seconds as they came trooping on, and remorselessly to clear a path before the Day of Judgment.

I sat down opposite to it, and hearing its regular and never- changing voice, that one deep constant note, uppermost amongst all the noise and clatter in the streets below, - marking that, let that tumult rise or fall, go on or stop, - let it be night or noon, to-morrow or to-day, this year or next, - it still performed its functions with the same dull constancy, and regulated the progress of the life around, the fancy came upon me that this was London's Heart, - and that when it should cease to beat, the City would be no more.

It is night. Calm and unmoved amidst the scenes that darkness favours, the great heart of London throbs in its Giant breast. Wealth and beggary, vice and virtue, guilt and innocence, repletion and the direst hunger, all treading on each other and crowding together, are gathered round it. Draw but a little circle above the clustering housetops, and you shall have within its space everything, with its opposite extreme and contradiction, close beside. Where yonder feeble light is shining, a man is but this moment dead. The taper at a few yards' distance is seen by eyes that have this instant opened on the world. There are two houses separated by but an inch or two of wall. In one, there are quiet minds at rest; in the other, a waking conscience that one might think would trouble the very air. In that close corner where the roofs shrink down and cower together as if to hide their secrets from the handsome street hard by, there are such dark crimes, such miseries and horrors, as could be hardly told in whispers. In the handsome street, there are folks asleep who have dwelt there all their lives, and have no more knowledge of these things than if they had never been, or were transacted at the remotest limits of the world, - who, if they were hinted at, would shake their heads, look wise, and frown, and say they were impossible, and out of Nature, - as if all great towns were not. Does not this Heart of London, that nothing moves, nor stops, nor quickens, - that goes on the same let what will be done, does it not express the City's character well?

The day begins to break, and soon there is the hum and noise of life. Those who have spent the night on doorsteps and cold stones crawl off to beg; they who have slept in beds come forth to their occupation, too, and business is astir. The fog of sleep rolls slowly off, and London shines awake. The streets are filled with carriages and people gaily clad. The jails are full, too, to the throat, nor have the workhouses or hospitals much room to spare. The courts of law are crowded. Taverns have their regular frequenters by this time, and every mart of traffic has its throng. Each of these places is a world, and has its own inhabitants; each is distinct from, and almost unconscious of the existence of any other. There are some few people well to do, who remember to have heard it said, that numbers of men and women - thousands, they think it was - get up in London every day, unknowing where to lay their heads at night; and that there are quarters of the town where misery and famine always are. They don't believe it quite, - there may be some truth in it, but it is exaggerated, of course. So, each of these thousand worlds goes on, intent upon itself, until night comes again, - first with its lights and pleasures, and its cheerful streets; then with its guilt and darkness.

Heart of London, there is a moral in thy every stroke! as I look on at thy indomitable working, which neither death, nor press of life, nor grief, nor gladness out of doors will influence one jot, I seem to hear a voice within thee which sinks into my heart, bidding me, as I elbow my way among the crowd, have some thought for the meanest wretch that passes, and, being a man, to turn away with scorn and pride from none that bear the human shape.

I am by no means sure that I might not have been tempted to enlarge upon the subject, had not the papers that lay before me on the table been a silent reproach for even this digression. I took them up again when I had got thus far, and seriously prepared to read.

The handwriting was strange to me, for the manuscript had been fairly copied. As it is against our rules, in such a case, to inquire into the authorship until the reading is concluded, I could only glance at the different faces round me, in search of some expression which should betray the writer. Whoever he might be, he was prepared for this, and gave no sign for my enlightenment.

I had the papers in my hand, when my deaf friend interposed with a suggestion.

'It has occurred to me,' he said, 'bearing in mind your sequel to the tale we have finished, that if such of us as have anything to relate of our own lives could interweave it with our contribution to the Clock, it would be well to do so. This need be no restraint upon us, either as to time, or place, or incident, since any real passage of this kind may be surrounded by fictitious circumstances, and represented by fictitious characters. What if we make this an article of agreement among ourselves?'

The proposition was cordially received, but the difficulty appeared to be that here was a long story written before we had thought of it.

'Unless,' said I, 'it should have happened that the writer of this tale - which is not impossible, for men are apt to do so when they write - has actually mingled with it something of his own endurance and experience.'

Nobody spoke, but I thought I detected in one quarter that this was really the case.

'If I have no assurance to the contrary,' I added, therefore, 'I shall take it for granted that he has done so, and that even these papers come within our new agreement. Everybody being mute, we hold that understanding if you please.'

And here I was about to begin again, when Jack informed us softly, that during the progress of our last narrative, Mr. Weller's Watch had adjourned its sittings from the kitchen, and regularly met outside our door, where he had no doubt that august body would be found at the present moment. As this was for the convenience of listening to our stories, he submitted that they might be suffered to come in, and hear them more pleasantly.

To this we one and all yielded a ready assent, and the party being discovered, as Jack had supposed, and invited to walk in, entered (though not without great confusion at having been detected), and were accommodated with chairs at a little distance.

Then, the lamp being trimmed, the fire well stirred and burning brightly, the hearth clean swept, the curtains closely drawn, the clock wound up, we entered on our new story.

It is again midnight. My fire burns cheerfully; the room is filled with my old friend's sober voice; and I am left to muse upon the story we have just now finished.

It makes me smile, at such a time as this, to think if there were any one to see me sitting in my easy-chair, my gray head hanging down, my eyes bent thoughtfully upon the glowing embers, and my crutch - emblem of my helplessness - lying upon the hearth at my feet, how solitary I should seem. Yet though I am the sole tenant of this chimney-corner, though I am childless and old, I have no sense of loneliness at this hour; but am the centre of a silent group whose company I love.

Thus, even age and weakness have their consolations. If I were a younger man, if I were more active, more strongly bound and tied to life, these visionary friends would shun me, or I should desire to fly from them. Being what I am, I can court their society, and delight in it; and pass whole hours in picturing to myself the shadows that perchance flock every night into this chamber, and in imagining with pleasure what kind of interest they have in the frail, feeble mortal who is its sole inhabitant.

All the friends I have ever lost I find again among these visitors. I love to fancy their spirits hovering about me, feeling still some earthly kindness for their old companion, and watching his decay. 'He is weaker, he declines apace, he draws nearer and nearer to us, and will soon be conscious of our existence.' What is there to alarm me in this? It is encouragement and hope.

These thoughts have never crowded on me half so fast as they have done to-night. Faces I had long forgotten have become familiar to me once again; traits I had endeavoured to recall for years have come before me in an instant; nothing is changed but me; and even I can be my former self at will.

Raising my eyes but now to the face of my old clock, I remember, quite involuntarily, the veneration, not unmixed with a sort of childish awe, with which I used to sit and watch it as it ticked, unheeded in a dark staircase corner. I recollect looking more grave and steady when I met its dusty face, as if, having that strange kind of life within it, and being free from all excess of vulgar appetite, and warning all the house by night and day, it were a sage. How often have I listened to it as it told the beads of time, and wondered at its constancy! How often watched it slowly pointing round the dial, and, while I panted for the eagerly expected hour to come, admired, despite myself, its steadiness of purpose and lofty freedom from all human strife, impatience, and desire!

I thought it cruel once. It was very hard of heart, to my mind, I remember. It was an old servant even then; and I felt as though it ought to show some sorrow; as though it wanted sympathy with us in our distress, and were a dull, heartless, mercenary creature. Ah! how soon I learnt to know that in its ceaseless going on, and in its being checked or stayed by nothing, lay its greatest kindness, and the only balm for grief and wounded peace of mind.

To-night, to-night, when this tranquillity and calm are on my spirits, and memory presents so many shifting scenes before me, I take my quiet stand at will by many a fire that has been long extinguished, and mingle with the cheerful group that cluster round it. If I could be sorrowful in such a mood, I should grow sad to think what a poor blot I was upon their youth and beauty once, and now how few remain to put me to the blush; I should grow sad to think that such among them as I sometimes meet with in my daily walks are scarcely less infirm than I; that time has brought us to a level; and that all distinctions fade and vanish as we take our trembling steps towards the grave.

But memory was given us for better purposes than this, and mine is not a torment, but a source of pleasure. To muse upon the gaiety and youth I have known suggests to me glad scenes of harmless mirth that may be passing now. From contemplating them apart, I soon become an actor in these little dramas, and humouring my fancy, lose myself among the beings it invokes.

When my fire is bright and high, and a warm blush mantles in the walls and ceiling of this ancient room; when my clock makes cheerful music, like one of those chirping insects who delight in the warm hearth, and are sometimes, by a good superstition, looked upon as the harbingers of fortune and plenty to that household in whose mercies they put their humble trust; when everything is in a ruddy genial glow, and there are voices in the crackling flame, and smiles in its flashing light, other smiles and other voices congregate around me, invading, with their pleasant harmony, the silence of the time.

For then a knot of youthful creatures gather round my fireside, and the room re-echoes to their merry voices. My solitary chair no longer holds its ample place before the fire, but is wheeled into a smaller corner, to leave more room for the broad circle formed about the cheerful hearth. I have sons, and daughters, and grandchildren, and we are assembled on some occasion of rejoicing common to us all. It is a birthday, perhaps, or perhaps it may be Christmas time; but be it what it may, there is rare holiday among us; we are full of glee.

In the chimney-comer, opposite myself, sits one who has grown old beside me. She is changed, of course; much changed; and yet I recognise the girl even in that gray hair and wrinkled brow. Glancing from the laughing child who half hides in her ample skirts, and half peeps out, - and from her to the little matron of twelve years old, who sits so womanly and so demure at no great distance from me, - and from her again, to a fair girl in the full bloom of early womanhood, the centre of the group, who has glanced more than once towards the opening door, and by whom the children, whispering and tittering among themselves, WILL leave a vacant chair, although she bids them not, - I see her image thrice repeated, and feel how long it is before one form and set of features wholly pass away, if ever, from among the living. While I am dwelling upon this, and tracing out the gradual change from infancy to youth, from youth to perfect growth, from that to age, and thinking, with an old man's pride, that she is comely yet, I feel a slight thin hand upon my arm, and, looking down, see seated at my feet a crippled boy, - a gentle, patient child, - whose aspect I know well. He rests upon a little crutch, - I know it too, - and leaning on it as he climbs my footstool, whispers in my ear, 'I am hardly one of these, dear grandfather, although I love them dearly. They are very kind to me, but you will be kinder still, I know.'

I have my hand upon his neck, and stoop to kiss him, when my clock strikes, my chair is in its old spot, and I am alone.

What if I be? What if this fireside be tenantless, save for the presence of one weak old man? From my house-top I can look upon a hundred homes, in every one of which these social companions are matters of reality. In my daily walks I pass a thousand men whose cares are all forgotten, whose labours are made light, whose dull routine of work from day to day is cheered and brightened by their glimpses of domestic joy at home. Amid the struggles of this struggling town what cheerful sacrifices are made; what toil endured with readiness; what patience shown and fortitude displayed for the mere sake of home and its affections! Let me thank Heaven that I can people my fireside with shadows such as these; with shadows of bright objects that exist in crowds about me; and let me say, 'I am alone no more.'

I never was less so - I write it with a grateful heart - than I am to-night. Recollections of the past and visions of the present come to bear me company; the meanest man to whom I have ever given alms appears, to add his mite of peace and comfort to my stock; and whenever the fire within me shall grow cold, to light my path upon this earth no more, I pray that it may be at such an hour as this, and when I love the world as well as I do now.

THE DEAF GENTLEMAN FROM HIS OWN APARTMENT

Our dear friend laid down his pen at the end of the foregoing paragraph, to take it up no more. I little thought ever to employ mine upon so sorrowful a task as that which he has left me, and to which I now devote it.

As he did not appear among us at his usual hour next morning, we knocked gently at his door. No answer being given, it was softly opened; and then, to our surprise, we saw him seated before the ashes of his fire, with a little table I was accustomed to set at his elbow when I left him for the night at a short distance from him, as though he had pushed it away with the idea of rising and retiring to his bed. His crutch and footstool lay at his feet as usual, and he was dressed in his chamber-gown, which he had put on before I left him. He was reclining in his chair, in his accustomed posture, with his face towards the fire, and seemed absorbed in meditation, - indeed, at first, we almost hoped he was.

Going up to him, we found him dead. I have often, very often, seen him sleeping, and always peacefully, but I never saw him look so calm and tranquil. His face wore a serene, benign expression, which had impressed me very strongly when we last shook hands; not that he had ever had any other look, God knows; but there was something in this so very spiritual, so strangely and indefinably allied to youth, although his head was gray and venerable, that it was new even in him. It came upon me all at once when on some slight pretence he called me back upon the previous night to take me by the hand again, and once more say, 'God bless you.'

A bell-rope hung within his reach, but he had not moved towards it; nor had he stirred, we all agreed, except, as I have said, to push away his table, which he could have done, and no doubt did, with a very slight motion of his hand. He had relapsed for a moment into his late train of meditation, and, with a thoughtful smile upon his face, had died.

I had long known it to be his wish that whenever this event should come to pass we might be all assembled in the house. I therefore lost no time in sending for Mr. Pickwick and for Mr. Miles, both of whom arrived before the messenger's return.

It is not my purpose to dilate upon the sorrow and affectionate emotions of which I was at once the witness and the sharer. But I may say, of the humbler mourners, that his faithful housekeeper was fairly heart-broken; that the poor barber would not be comforted; and that I shall respect the homely truth and warmth of heart of Mr. Weller and his son to the last moment of my life.

'And the sweet old creetur, sir,' said the elder Mr. Weller to me in the afternoon, 'has bolted. Him as had no wice, and was so free from temper that a infant might ha' drove him, has been took at last with that 'ere unawoidable fit o' staggers as we all must come to, and gone off his feed for ever! I see him,' said the old gentleman, with a moisture in his eye, which could not be mistaken, - 'I see him gettin', every journey, more and more groggy; I says to Samivel, "My boy! the Grey's a-goin' at the knees;" and now my predilictions is fatally werified, and him as I could never do enough to serve or show my likin' for, is up the great uniwersal spout o' natur'.'

I was not the less sensible of the old man's attachment because he expressed it in his peculiar manner. Indeed, I can truly assert of both him and his son, that notwithstanding the extraordinary dialogues they held together, and the strange commentaries and corrections with which each of them illustrated the other's speech, I do not think it possible to exceed the sincerity of their regret; and that I am sure their thoughtfulness and anxiety in anticipating the discharge of many little offices of sympathy would have done honour to the most delicate-minded persons.

Our friend had frequently told us that his will would be found in a box in the Clock-case, the key of which was in his writing-desk. As he had told us also that he desired it to be opened immediately after his death, whenever that should happen, we met together that night for the fulfilment of his request.

We found it where he had told us, wrapped in a sealed paper, and with it a codicil of recent date, in which he named Mr. Miles and Mr. Pickwick his executors, - as having no need of any greater benefit from his estate than a generous token (which he bequeathed to them) of his friendship and remembrance.

After pointing out the spot in which he wished his ashes to repose, he gave to 'his dear old friends,' Jack Redburn and myself, his house, his books, his furniture, - in short, all that his house contained; and with this legacy more ample means of maintaining it in its present state than we, with our habits and at our terms of life, can ever exhaust. Besides these gifts, he left to us, in trust, an annual sum of no insignificant amount, to be distributed in charity among his accustomed pensioners - they are a long list - and such other claimants on his bounty as might, from time to time, present themselves. And as true charity not only covers a multitude of sins, but includes a multitude of virtues, such as forgiveness, liberal construction, gentleness and mercy to the faults of others, and the remembrance of our own imperfections and advantages, he bade us not inquire too closely into the venial errors of the poor, but finding that they WERE poor, first to relieve and then endeavour - at an advantage - to reclaim them.

To the housekeeper he left an annuity, sufficient for her comfortable maintenance and support through life. For the barber, who had attended him many years, he made a similar provision. And I may make two remarks in this place: first, that I think this pair are very likely to club their means together and make a match of it; and secondly, that I think my friend had this result in his mind, for I have heard him say, more than once, that he could not concur with the generality of mankind in censuring equal marriages made in later life, since there were many cases in which such unions could not fail to be a wise and rational source of happiness to both parties.

The elder Mr. Weller is so far from viewing this prospect with any feelings of jealousy, that he appears to be very much relieved by its contemplation; and his son, if I am not mistaken, participates in this feeling. We are all of opinion, however, that the old gentleman's danger, even at its crisis, was very slight, and that he merely laboured under one of those transitory weaknesses to which persons of his temperament are now and then liable, and which become less and less alarming at every return, until they wholly subside. I have no doubt he will remain a jolly old widower for the rest of his life, as he has already inquired of me, with much gravity, whether a writ of habeas corpus would enable him to settle his property upon Tony beyond the possibility of recall; and has, in my presence, conjured his son, with tears in his eyes, that in the event of his ever becoming amorous again, he will put him in a strait-waistcoat until the fit is past, and distinctly inform the lady that his property is 'made over.'

Although I have very little doubt that Sam would dutifully comply with these injunctions in a case of extreme necessity, and that he would do so with perfect composure and coolness, I do not apprehend things will ever come to that pass, as the old gentleman seems perfectly happy in the society of his son, his pretty daughter-in- law, and his grandchildren, and has solemnly announced his determination to 'take arter the old 'un in all respects;' from which I infer that it is his intention to regulate his conduct by the model of Mr. Pickwick, who will certainly set him the example of a single life.

I have diverged for a moment from the subject with which I set out, for I know that my friend was interested in these little matters, and I have a natural tendency to linger upon any topic that occupied his thoughts or gave him pleasure and amusement. His remaining wishes are very briefly told. He desired that we would make him the frequent subject of our conversation; at the same time, that we would never speak of him with an air of gloom or restraint, but frankly, and as one whom we still loved and hoped to meet again. He trusted that the old house would wear no aspect of mourning, but that it would be lively and cheerful; and that we would not remove or cover up his picture, which hangs in our dining-room, but make it our companion as he had been. His own room, our place of meeting, remains, at his desire, in its accustomed state; our seats are placed about the table as of old; his easy-chair, his desk, his crutch, his footstool, hold their accustomed places, and the clock stands in its familiar corner. We go into the chamber at stated times to see that all is as it should be, and to take care that the light and air are not shut out, for on that point he expressed a strong solicitude. But it was his fancy that the apartment should not be inhabited; that it should be religiously preserved in this condition, and that the voice of his old companion should be heard no more.

My own history may be summed up in very few words; and even those I should have spared the reader but for my friend's allusion to me some time since. I have no deeper sorrow than the loss of a child, - an only daughter, who is living, and who fled from her father's house but a few weeks before our friend and I first met. I had never spoken of this even to him, because I have always loved her, and I could not bear to tell him of her error until I could tell him also of her sorrow and regret. Happily I was enabled to do so some time ago. And it will not be long, with Heaven's leave, before she is restored to me; before I find in her and her husband the support of my declining years.

For my pipe, it is an old relic of home, a thing of no great worth, a poor trifle, but sacred to me for her sake.

Thus, since the death of our venerable friend, Jack Redburn and I have been the sole tenants of the old house; and, day by day, have lounged together in his favourite walks. Mindful of his injunctions, we have long been able to speak of him with ease and cheerfulness, and to remember him as he would be remembered. From certain allusions which Jack has dropped, to his having been deserted and cast off in early life, I am inclined to believe that some passages of his youth may possibly be shadowed out in the history of Mr. Chester and his son, but seeing that he avoids the subject, I have not pursued it.

My task is done. The chamber in which we have whiled away so many hours, not, I hope, without some pleasure and some profit, is deserted; our happy hour of meeting strikes no more; the chimney- corner has grown cold; and MASTER HUMPHREY'S CLOCK has stopped for ever.

THE END OF
Master Humphrey's Clock

A MESSAGE FROM THE SEA

CHAPTER I—THE VILLAGE

"And a mighty sing'lar and pretty place it is, as ever I saw in all the days of my life!" said Captain Jorgan, looking up at it.

Captain Jorgan had to look high to look at it, for the village was built sheer up the face of a steep and lofty cliff. There was no road in it, there was no wheeled vehicle in it, there was not a level yard in it. From the sea-beach to the cliff-top two irregular rows of white houses, placed opposite to one another, and twisting here and there, and there and here, rose, like the sides of a long succession of stages of crooked ladders, and you climbed up the village or climbed down the village by the staves between, some six feet wide or so, and made of sharp irregular stones. The old pack-saddle, long laid aside in most parts of England as one of the appendages of its infancy, flourished here intact. Strings of pack-horses and pack-donkeys toiled slowly up the staves of the ladders, bearing fish, and coal, and such other cargo as was unshipping at the pier from the dancing fleet of village boats, and from two or three little coasting traders. As the beasts of burden ascended laden, or descended light, they got so lost at intervals in the floating clouds of village smoke, that they seemed to dive down some of the village chimneys, and come to the surface again far off, high above others. No two houses in the village were alike, in chimney, size, shape, door, window, gable, roof-tree, anything. The sides of the ladders were musical with water, running clear and bright. The staves were musical with the clattering feet of the pack-horses and pack-donkeys, and the voices of the fishermen urging them up, mingled with the voices of the fishermen's wives and their many children. The pier was musical with the wash of the sea, the creaking of capstans and windlasses, and the airy fluttering of little vanes and sails. The rough, sea-bleached boulders of which the pier was made, and the whiter boulders of the shore, were brown with drying nets. The red-brown cliffs, richly wooded to their extremest verge, had their softened and beautiful forms reflected in the bluest water, under the clear North Devonshire sky of a November day without a cloud. The village itself was so steeped in autumnal foliage, from the houses lying on the pier to the topmost round of the topmost ladder, that one might have fancied it was out a bird's-nesting, and was (as indeed it was) a wonderful climber. And mentioning birds, the place was not without some music from them too; for the rook was very busy on the higher levels, and the gull with his flapping wings was fishing in the bay, and the lusty little robin was hopping among the great stone blocks and iron rings of the breakwater, fearless in the faith of his ancestors, and the Children in the Wood.

Thus it came to pass that Captain Jorgan, sitting balancing himself on the pier-wall, struck his leg with his open hand, as some men do when they are pleased—and as he always did when he was pleased—and said,—

“A mighty sing’lar and pretty place it is, as ever I saw in all the days of my life!”

Captain Jorgan had not been through the village, but had come down to the pier by a winding side-road, to have a preliminary look at it from the level of his own natural element. He had seen many things and places, and had stowed them all away in a shrewd intellect and a vigorous memory. He was an American born, was Captain Jorgan,—a New-Englander,—but he was a citizen of the world, and a combination of most of the best qualities of most of its best countries.

For Captain Jorgan to sit anywhere in his long-skirted blue coat and blue trousers, without holding converse with everybody within speaking distance, was a sheer impossibility. So the captain fell to talking with the fishermen, and to asking them knowing questions about the fishery, and the tides, and the currents, and the race of water off that point yonder, and what you kept in your eye, and got into a line with what else when you ran into the little harbour; and other nautical profundities. Among the men who exchanged ideas with the captain was a young fellow, who exactly hit his fancy,—a young fisherman of two or three and twenty, in the rough sea-dress of his craft, with a brown face, dark curling hair, and bright, modest eyes under his Sou’wester hat, and with a frank, but simple and retiring manner, which the captain found uncommonly taking. “I’d bet a thousand dollars,” said the captain to himself, “that your father was an honest man!”

“Might you be married now?” asked the captain, when he had had some talk with this new acquaintance.

“Not yet.”

“Going to be?” said the captain.

“I hope so.”

The captain’s keen glance followed the slightest possible turn of the dark eye, and the slightest possible tilt of the Sou’wester hat. The captain then slapped both his legs, and said to himself,—

“Never knew such a good thing in all my life! There’s his sweetheart looking over the wall!”

There was a very pretty girl looking over the wall, from a little platform of cottage, vine, and fuchsia; and she certainly dig not look as if the presence of this young fisherman in the landscape made it any the less sunny and hopeful for her.

Captain Jorgan, having doubled himself up to laugh with that hearty good-nature which is quite exultant in the innocent happiness of other people, had undoubted himself, and was going to start a new subject, when there appeared coming down the lower ladders of stones, a man whom he hailed as “Tom Pettifer, Ho!” Tom Pettifer, Ho, responded with alacrity, and in speedy course descended on the pier.

“Afraid of a sun-stroke in England in November, Tom, that you wear your tropical hat, strongly paid outside and paper-lined inside, here?” said the captain, eyeing it.

“It’s as well to be on the safe side, sir,” replied Tom.

“Safe side!” repeated the captain, laughing. “You’d guard against a sun-stroke, with that old hat, in an Ice Pack. Wa’al! What have you made out at the Post-office?”

“It *is* the Post-office, sir.”

“What’s the Post-office?” said the captain.

“The name, sir. The name keeps the Post-office.”

“A coincidence!” said the captain. “A lucky bit! Show me where it is. Good-bye, shipmates, for the present! I shall come and have another look at you, afore I leave, this afternoon.”

This was addressed to all there, but especially the young fisherman; so all there acknowledged it, but especially the young fisherman. “*He’s* a sailor!” said one to another, as they looked after the captain moving away. That he was; and so outspeaking was the sailor in him, that although his dress had nothing nautical about it, with the single exception of its colour, but was a suit of a shore-going shape and form, too long in the sleeves and too short in the legs, and too unaccommodating everywhere, terminating earthward in a pair of Wellington boots, and surmounted by a tall, stiff hat, which no mortal could have worn at sea in any wind under heaven; nevertheless, a glimpse of his sagacious, weather-beaten face, or his strong, brown hand, would have established the captain’s calling. Whereas Mr.

Pettifer—a man of a certain plump neatness, with a curly whisker, and elaborately nautical in a jacket, and shoes, and all things correspondent—looked no more like a seaman, beside Captain Jorgan, than he looked like a sea-serpent.

The two climbed high up the village,—which had the most arbitrary turns and twists in it, so that the cobbler's house came dead across the ladder, and to have held a reasonable course, you must have gone through his house, and through him too, as he sat at his work between two little windows,—with one eye microscopically on the geological formation of that part of Devonshire, and the other telescopically on the open sea,—the two climbed high up the village, and stopped before a quaint little house, on which was painted, "MRS. RAYBROCK, DRAPER;" and also "POST-OFFICE." Before it, ran a rill of murmuring water, and access to it was gained by a little plank-bridge.

"Here's the name," said Captain Jorgan, "sure enough. You can come in if you like, Tom."

The captain opened the door, and passed into an odd little shop, about six feet high, with a great variety of beams and bumps in the ceiling, and, besides the principal window giving on the ladder of stones, a purblind little window of a single pane of glass, peeping out of an abutting corner at the sun-lighted ocean, and winking at its brightness.

"How do you do, ma'am?" said the captain. "I am very glad to see you. I have come a long way to see you."

"*Have* you, sir? Then I am sure I am very glad to see *you*, though I don't know you from Adam."

Thus a comely elderly woman, short of stature, plump of form, sparkling and dark of eye, who, perfectly clean and neat herself, stood in the midst of her perfectly clean and neat arrangements, and surveyed Captain Jorgan with smiling curiosity. "Ah! but you are a sailor, sir," she added, almost immediately, and with a slight movement of her hands, that was not very unlike wringing them; "then you are heartily welcome."

"Thank'ee, ma'am," said the captain, "I don't know what it is, I am sure; that brings out the salt in me, but everybody seems to see it on the crown of my hat and the collar of my coat. Yes, ma'am, I am in that way of life."

"And the other gentleman, too," said Mrs. Raybrock.

“Well now, ma’am,” said the captain, glancing shrewdly at the other gentleman, “you are that nigh right, that he goes to sea,—if that makes him a sailor. This is my steward, ma’am, Tom Pettifer; he’s been a’most all trades you could name, in the course of his life,—would have bought all your chairs and tables once, if you had wished to sell ’em,—but now he’s my steward. My name’s Jorgan, and I’m a ship-owner, and I sail my own and my partners’ ships, and have done so this five-and-twenty year. According to custom I am called Captain Jorgan, but I am no more a captain, bless your heart, than you are.”

“Perhaps you’ll come into my parlour, sir, and take a chair?” said Mrs. Raybrock.

“Ex-actly what I was going to propose myself, ma’am. After you.”

Thus replying, and enjoining Tom to give an eye to the shop, Captain Jorgan followed Mrs. Raybrock into the little, low back-room,—decorated with divers plants in pots, tea-trays, old china teapots, and punch-bowls,—which was at once the private sitting-room of the Raybrock family and the inner cabinet of the post-office of the village of Steepways.

“Now, ma’am,” said the captain, “it don’t signify a cent to you where I was born, except—” But here the shadow of some one entering fell upon the captain’s figure, and he broke off to double himself up, slap both his legs, and ejaculate, “Never knew such a thing in all my life! Here he is again! How are you?”

These words referred to the young fellow who had so taken Captain Jorgan’s fancy down at the pier. To make it all quite complete he came in accompanied by the sweetheart whom the captain had detected looking over the wall. A prettier sweetheart the sun could not have shone upon that shining day. As she stood before the captain, with her rosy lips just parted in surprise, her brown eyes a little wider open than was usual from the same cause, and her breathing a little quickened by the ascent (and possibly by some mysterious hurry and flurry at the parlour door, in which the captain had observed her face to be for a moment totally eclipsed by the Sou’wester hat), she looked so charming, that the captain felt himself under a moral obligation to slap both his legs again. She was very simply dressed, with no other ornament than an autumnal flower in her bosom. She wore neither hat nor bonnet, but merely a scarf or kerchief, folded squarely back over the head, to keep the sun off,—according to a fashion that may be sometimes seen in the more genial parts of England as well as of Italy, and which is probably the first fashion of head-dress that came into the world when grasses and leaves went out.

“In my country,” said the captain, rising to give her his chair, and dexterously sliding it close to another chair on which the young fisherman must necessarily establish himself,—“in my country we should call Devonshire beauty first-rate!”

Whenever a frank manner is offensive, it is because it is strained or feigned; for there may be quite as much intolerable affectation in plainness as in mincing nicety. All that the captain said and did was honestly according to his nature; and his nature was open nature and good nature; therefore, when he paid this little compliment, and expressed with a sparkle or two of his knowing eye, “I see how it is, and nothing could be better,” he had established a delicate confidence on that subject with the family.

“I was saying to your worthy mother,” said the captain to the young man, after again introducing himself by name and occupation,—“I was saying to your mother (and you’re very like her) that it didn’t signify where I was born, except that I was raised on question-asking ground, where the babies as soon as ever they come into the world, inquire of their mothers, ‘Neow, how old may *you* be, and wa’at air you a goin’ to name me?’—which is a fact.” Here he slapped his leg. “Such being the case, I may be excused for asking you if your name’s Alfred?”

“Yes, sir, my name is Alfred,” returned the young man.

“I am not a conjurer,” pursued the captain, “and don’t think me so, or I shall right soon undeceive you. Likewise don’t think, if you please, though I *do* come from that country of the babies, that I am asking questions for question-asking’s sake, for I am not. Somebody belonging to you went to sea?”

“My elder brother, Hugh,” returned the young man. He said it in an altered and lower voice, and glanced at his mother, who raised her hands hurriedly, and put them together across her black gown, and looked eagerly at the visitor.

“No! For God’s sake, don’t think that!” said the captain, in a solemn way; “I bring no good tidings of him.”

There was a silence, and the mother turned her face to the fire and put her hand between it and her eyes. The young fisherman slightly motioned toward the window, and the captain, looking in that direction, saw a young widow, sitting at a neighbouring window across a little garden, engaged in needlework, with a young child sleeping on her bosom. The silence continued until the captain asked of Alfred,—

“How long is it since it happened?”

“He shipped for his last voyage better than three years ago.”

“Ship struck upon some reef or rock, as I take it,” said the captain, “and all hands lost?”

“Yes.”

“Wa’al!” said the captain, after a shorter silence, “Here I sit who may come to the same end, like enough. He holds the seas in the hollow of His hand. We must all strike somewhere and go down. Our comfort, then, for ourselves and one another is to have done our duty. I’d wager your brother did his!”

“He did!” answered the young fisherman. “If ever man strove faithfully on all occasions to do his duty, my brother did. My brother was not a quick man (anything but that), but he was a faithful, true, and just man. We were the sons of only a small tradesman in this county, sir; yet our father was as watchful of his good name as if he had been a king.”

“A precious sight more so, I hope—bearing in mind the general run of that class of crittur,” said the captain. “But I interrupt.”

“My brother considered that our father left the good name to us, to keep clear and true.”

“Your brother considered right,” said the captain; “and you couldn’t take care of a better legacy. But again I interrupt.”

“No; for I have nothing more to say. We know that Hugh lived well for the good name, and we feel certain that he died well for the good name. And now it has come into my keeping. And that’s all.”

“Well spoken!” cried the captain. “Well spoken, young man! Concerning the manner of your brother’s death,”—by this time the captain had released the hand he had shaken, and sat with his own broad, brown hands spread out on his knees, and spoke aside,—“concerning the manner of your brother’s death, it may be that I have some information to give you; though it may not be, for I am far from sure. Can we have a little talk alone?”

The young man rose; but not before the captain’s quick eye had noticed that, on the pretty sweetheart’s turning to the window to greet the young widow with a nod and a wave of the hand, the young widow had held up to her the needlework on which she was engaged, with a patient and pleasant smile. So the captain said, being on his legs,—

"What might she be making now?"

"What is Margaret making, Kitty?" asked the young fisherman,—with one of his arms apparently mislaid somewhere.

As Kitty only blushed in reply, the captain doubled himself up as far as he could, standing, and said, with a slap of his leg,—

"In my country we should call it wedding-clothes. Fact! We should, I do assure you."

But it seemed to strike the captain in another light too; for his laugh was not a long one, and he added, in quite a gentle tone,—

"And it's very pretty, my dear, to see her—poor young thing, with her fatherless child upon her bosom—giving up her thoughts to your home and your happiness. It's very pretty, my dear, and it's very good. May your marriage be more prosperous than hers, and be a comfort to her too. May the blessed sun see you all happy together, in possession of the good name, long after I have done ploughing the great salt field that is never sown!"

Kitty answered very earnestly, "O! Thank you, sir, with all my heart!" And, in her loving little way, kissed her hand to him, and possibly by implication to the young fisherman, too, as the latter held the parlour-door open for the captain to pass out.

CHAPTER II—THE MONEY

“The stairs are very narrow, sir,” said Alfred Raybrock to Captain Jorgan.

“Like my cabin-stairs,” returned the captain, “on many a voyage.”

“And they are rather inconvenient for the head.”

“If my head can’t take care of itself by this time, after all the knocking about the world it has had,” replied the captain, as unconcernedly as if he had no connection with it, “it’s not worth looking after.”

Thus they came into the young fisherman’s bedroom, which was as perfectly neat and clean as the shop and parlour below; though it was but a little place, with a sliding window, and a phrenological ceiling expressive of all the peculiarities of the house-roof. Here the captain sat down on the foot of the bed, and glancing at a dreadful libel on Kitty which ornamented the wall,—the production of some wandering limner, whom the captain secretly admired as having studied portraiture from the figure-heads of ships,—motioned to the young man to take the rush-chair on the other side of the small round table. That done, the captain put his hand in the deep breast-pocket of his long-skirted blue coat, and took out of it a strong square case-bottle,—not a large bottle, but such as may be seen in any ordinary ship’s medicine-chest. Setting this bottle on the table without removing his hand from it, Captain Jorgan then spake as follows:—

“In my last voyage homeward-bound,” said the captain, “and that’s the voyage off of which I now come straight, I encountered such weather off the Horn as is not very often met with, even there. I have rounded that stormy Cape pretty often, and I believe I first beat about there in the identical storms that blew the Devil’s horns and tail off, and led to the horns being worked up into tooth-picks for the plantation overseers in my country, who may be seen (if you travel down South, or away West, fur enough) picking their teeth with ’em, while the whips, made of the tail, flog hard. In this last voyage, homeward-bound for Liverpool from South America, I say to you, my young friend, it blew. Whole measures! No half measures, nor making believe to blow; it blew! Now I warn’t blown clean out of the water into the sky,—though I expected to be even that,—but I was blown clean out of my course; and when at last it fell calm, it fell dead calm, and a strong current set one way, day and night, night and day, and I drifted—drifted—drifted—out of all the ordinary tracks and courses of ships, and drifted yet, and yet drifted. It behooves a man who takes charge of fellow-critturs' lives, never to rest from making himself master of his calling. I never did rest, and consequently I knew pretty well ('specially looking over the side in the dead calm of that strong current) what dangers to expect, and what precautions to take against 'em. In short, we were driving head on to an island. There was no island in the chart, and, therefore, you may say it was ill-manners in the island to be there; I don't dispute its bad breeding, but there it was. Thanks be to Heaven, I was as ready for the island as the island was ready for me. I made it out myself from the masthead, and I got enough way upon her in good time to keep her off. I ordered a boat to be lowered and manned, and went in that boat myself to explore the island. There was a reef outside it, and, floating in a corner of the smooth water within the reef, was a heap of sea-weed, and entangled in that sea-weed was this bottle."

Here the captain took his hand from the bottle for a moment, that the young fisherman might direct a wondering glance at it; and then replaced his band and went on:—

"If ever you come—or even if ever you don't come—to a desert place, use you your eyes and your spy-glass well; for the smallest thing you see may prove of use to you; and may have some information or some warning in it. That's the principle on which I came to see this bottle. I picked up the bottle and ran the boat alongside the island, and made fast and went ashore armed, with a part of my boat's crew. We found that every scrap of vegetation on the island (I give it you as my opinion, but scant and scrubby at the best of times) had been consumed by fire. As we were making our way, cautiously and toilsomely, over the pulverised embers, one of my people sank into the earth breast-high. He turned pale, and 'Haul me out smart, shipmates,' says he, 'for my feet are among bones.' We soon got him on his legs again, and then we dug up the spot, and we found that the man was right, and that his feet had been among bones. More than that, they were human bones; though whether the remains of one man, or of two or three men, what with calcination and ashes, and what with a poor practical knowledge of anatomy, I can't undertake to say. We examined the whole island and made out nothing else, save and except that, from its opposite side, I sighted a considerable tract of land, which land I was able to identify, and according to the bearings of which (not to trouble you with my log) I took a fresh departure. When I got aboard again I opened the bottle, which was oilskin-covered as you see, and glass-stoppered as you see. Inside of it," pursued the captain, suiting his action to his words, "I found this little crumpled, folded paper, just as you see. Outside of it was written, as you see, these words: 'Whoever finds this, is solemnly entreated by the dead to convey it unread to Alfred Raybrock, Steepways, North Devon, England.' A sacred charge," said the captain, concluding his narrative, "and, Alfred Raybrock, there it is!"

"This is my poor brother's writing!"

"I suppose so," said Captain Jorgan. "I'll take a look out of this little window while you read it."

"Pray no, sir! I should be hurt. My brother couldn't know it would fall into such hands as yours."

The captain sat down again on the foot of the bed, and the young man opened the folded paper with a trembling hand, and spread it on the table. The ragged paper, evidently creased and torn both before and after being written on, was much blotted and stained, and the ink had faded and run, and many words were wanting. What the captain and the young fisherman made out together, after much re-reading and much humouring of the folds of the paper, is given on the next page.

The young fisherman had become more and more agitated, as the writing had become clearer to him. He now left it lying before the captain, over whose shoulder he had been reading it, and dropping into his former seat, leaned forward on the table and laid his face in his hands.

"What, man," urged the captain, "don't give in! Be up and doing *like* a man!"

"It is selfish, I know,—but doing what, doing what?" cried the young fisherman, in complete despair, and stamping his sea-boot on the ground.

"Doing what?" returned the captain. "Something! I'd go down to the little breakwater below yonder, and take a wrench at one of the salt-rusted iron rings there, and either wrench it up by the roots or wrench my teeth out of my head, sooner than I'd do nothing. Nothing!" ejaculated the captain. "Any fool or fainting heart can do *that,* and nothing can come of nothing,—which was pretended to be found out, I believe, by one of them Latin critters," said the captain with the deepest disdain; "as if Adam hadn't found it out, afore ever he so much as named the beasts!"

Yet the captain saw, in spite of his bold words, that there was some greater reason than he yet understood for the young man’s distress. And he eyed him with a sympathising curiosity.

“Come, come!” continued the captain, “Speak out. What is it, boy!”

“You have seen how beautiful she is, sir,” said the young man, looking up for the moment, with a flushed face and rumpled hair.

“Did any man ever say she warn’t beautiful?” retorted the captain. “If so, go and lick him.”

The young man laughed fretfully in spite of himself, and said—

“It’s not that, it’s not that.”

“Wa’al, then, what is it?” said the captain in a more soothing tone.

The young fisherman mournfully composed himself to tell the captain what it was, and began: “We were to have been married next Monday week—”

“Were to have been!” interrupted Captain Jorgan. “And are to be? Hey?”

Young Raybrock shook his head, and traced out with his fore-finger the words, “*poor father’s five hundred pounds*,” in the written paper.

“Go along,” said the captain. “Five hundred pounds? Yes?”

“That sum of money,” pursued the young fisherman, entering with the greatest earnestness on his demonstration, while the captain eyed him with equal earnestness, “was all my late father possessed. When he died, he owed no man more than he left means to pay, but he had been able to lay by only five hundred pounds.”

“Five hundred pounds,” repeated the captain. “Yes?”

“In his lifetime, years before, he had expressly laid the money aside to leave to my mother,—like to settle upon her, if I make myself understood.”

“Yes?”

“He had risked it once—my father put down in writing at that time, respecting the money—and was resolved never to risk it again.”

“Not a spectator,” said the captain. “My country wouldn’t have suited him. Yes?”

“My mother has never touched the money till now. And now it was to have been laid out, this very next week, in buying me a handsome share in our neighbouring fishery here, to settle me in life with Kitty.”

The captain’s face fell, and he passed and repassed his sun-browned right hand over his thin hair, in a discomfited manner.

"Kitty's father has no more than enough to live on, even in the sparing way in which we live about here. He is a kind of bailiff or steward of manor rights here, and they are not much, and it is but a poor little office. He was better off once, and Kitty must never marry to mere drudgery and hard living."

The captain still sat stroking his thin hair, and looking at the young fisherman.

"I am as certain that my father had no knowledge that any one was wronged as to this money, or that any restitution ought to be made, as I am certain that the sun now shines. But, after this solemn warning from my brother's grave in the sea, that the money is Stolen Money," said Young Raybrock, forcing himself to the utterance of the words, "can I doubt it? Can I touch it?"

"About not doubting, I ain't so sure," observed the captain; "but about not touching—no—I don't think you can."

"See then," said Young Raybrock, "why I am so grieved. Think of Kitty. Think what I have got to tell her!"

His heart quite failed him again when he had come round to that, and he once more beat his sea-boot softly on the floor. But not for long; he soon began again, in a quietly resolute tone.

"However! Enough of that! You spoke some brave words to me just now, Captain Jorgan, and they shall not be spoken in vain. I have got to do something. What I have got to do, before all other things, is to trace out the meaning of this paper, for the sake of the Good Name that has no one else to put it right. And still for the sake of the Good Name, and my father's memory, not a word of this writing must be breathed to my mother, or to Kitty, or to any human creature. You agree in this?"

"I don't know what they'll think of us below," said the captain, "but for certain I can't oppose it. Now, as to tracing. How will you do?"

They both, as by consent, bent over the paper again, and again carefully puzzled out the whole of the writing.

"I make out that this would stand, if all the writing was here, 'Inquire among the old men living there, for'—some one. Most like, you'll go to this village named here?" said the captain, musing, with his finger on the name.

"Yes! And Mr. Tregarthen is a Cornishman, and—to be sure!—comes from Lanrean."

"Does he?" said the captain quietly. "As I ain't acquainted with him, who may *he* be?"

"Mr. Tregarthen is Kitty's father."

"Ay, ay!" cried the captain. "Now you speak! Tregarthen knows this village of Lanrean, then?"

"Beyond all doubt he does. I have often heard him mention it, as being his native place. He knows it well."

"Stop half a moment," said the captain. "We want a name here. You could ask Tregarthen (or if you couldn't I could) what names of old men he remembers in his time in those diggings? Hey?"

"I can go straight to his cottage, and ask him now."

"Take me with you," said the captain, rising in a solid way that had a most comfortable reliability in it, "and just a word more first. I have knocked about harder than you, and have got along further than you. I have had, all my sea-going life long, to keep my wits polished bright with acid and friction, like the brass cases of the ship's instruments. I'll keep you company on this expedition. Now you don't live by talking any more than I do. Clench that hand of yours in this hand of mine, and that's a speech on both sides."

Captain Jorgan took command of the expedition with that hearty shake. He at once refolded the paper exactly as before, replaced it in the bottle, put the stopper in, put the oilskin over the stopper, confided the whole to Young Raybrock's keeping, and led the way down-stairs.

But it was harder navigation below-stairs than above. The instant they set foot in the parlour the quick, womanly eye detected that there was something wrong. Kitty exclaimed, frightened, as she ran to her lover's side, "Alfred! What's the matter?" Mrs. Raybrock cried out to the captain, "Gracious! what have you done to my son to change him like this all in a minute?" And the young widow—who was there with her work upon her arm—was at first so agitated that she frightened the little girl she held in her hand, who hid her face in her mother's skirts and screamed. The captain, conscious of being held responsible for this domestic change, contemplated it with quite a guilty expression of countenance, and looked to the young fisherman to come to his rescue.

"Kitty, darling," said Young Raybrock, "Kitty, dearest love, I must go away to Lanrean, and I don't know where else or how much further, this very day. Worse than that—our marriage, Kitty, must be put off, and I don't know for how long."

Kitty stared at him, in doubt and wonder and in anger, and pushed him from her with her hand.

"Put off?" cried Mrs. Raybrock. "The marriage put off? And you going to Lanrean! Why, in the name of the dear Lord?"

"Mother dear, I can't say why; I must not say why. It would be dishonourable and undutiful to say why."

"Dishonourable and undutiful?" returned the dame. "And is there nothing dishonourable or undutiful in the boy's breaking the heart of his own plighted love, and his mother's heart too, for the sake of the dark secrets and counsels of a wicked stranger? Why did you ever come here?" she apostrophised the innocent captain. "Who wanted you? Where did you come from? Why couldn't you rest in your own bad place, wherever it is, instead of disturbing the peace of quiet unoffending folk like us?"

"And what," sobbed the poor little Kitty, "have I ever done to you, you hard and cruel captain, that you should come and serve me so?"

And then they both began to weep most pitifully, while the captain could only look from the one to the other, and lay hold of himself by the coat collar.

"Margaret," said the poor young fisherman, on his knees at Kitty's feet, while Kitty kept both her hands before her tearful face, to shut out the traitor from her view,—but kept her fingers wide asunder and looked at him all the time,—"Margaret, you have suffered so much, so uncomplainingly, and are always so careful and considerate! Do take my part, for poor Hugh's sake!"

The quiet Margaret was not appealed to in vain. "I will, Alfred," she returned, "and I do. I wish this gentleman had never come near us;" whereupon the captain laid hold of himself the tighter; "but I take your part for all that. I am sure you have some strong reason and some sufficient reason for what you do, strange as it is, and even for not saying why you do it, strange as that is. And, Kitty darling, you are bound to think so more than any one, for true love believes everything, and bears everything, and trusts everything. And, mother dear, you are bound to think so too, for you know you have been blest with good sons, whose word was always as good as their oath, and who were brought up in as true a sense of honour as any gentleman in this land. And I am sure you have no more call, mother, to doubt your living son than to doubt your dead son; and for the sake of the dear dead, I stand up for the dear living."

"Wa'al now," the captain struck in, with enthusiasm, "this I say, That whether your opinions flatter me or not, you are a young woman of sense, and spirit, and feeling; and I'd sooner have you by my side in the hour of danger, than a good half of the men I've ever fallen in with—or fallen out with, ayther."

Margaret did not return the captain's compliment, or appear fully to reciprocate his good opinion, but she applied herself to the consolation of Kitty, and of Kitty's mother-in-law that was to have been next Monday week, and soon restored the parlour to a quiet condition.

"Kitty, my darling," said the young fisherman, "I must go to your father to entreat him still to trust me in spite of this wretched change and mystery, and to ask him for some directions concerning Lanrean. Will you come home? Will you come with me, Kitty?"

Kitty answered not a word, but rose sobbing, with the end of her simple head-dress at her eyes. Captain Jorgan followed the lovers out, quite sheepishly, pausing in the shop to give an instruction to Mr. Pettifer.

"Here, Tom!" said the captain, in a low voice. "Here's something in your line. Here's an old lady poorly and low in her spirits. Cheer her up a bit, Tom. Cheer 'em all up."

Mr. Pettifer, with a brisk nod of intelligence, immediately assumed his steward face, and went with his quiet, helpful, steward step into the parlour, where the captain had the great satisfaction of seeing him, through the glass door, take the child in his arms (who offered no objection), and bend over Mrs. Raybrock, administering soft words of consolation.

"Though what he finds to say, unless he's telling her that 't'll soon be over, or that most people is so at first, or that it'll do her good afterward, I cannot imaginate!" was the captain's reflection as he followed the lovers.

He had not far to follow them, since it was but a short descent down the stony ways to the cottage of Kitty's father. But short as the distance was, it was long enough to enable the captain to observe that he was fast becoming the village Ogre; for there was not a woman standing working at her door, or a fisherman coming up or going down, who saw Young Raybrock unhappy and little Kitty in tears, but he or she instantly darted a suspicious and indignant glance at the captain, as the foreigner who must somehow be responsible for this unusual spectacle. Consequently, when they came into

Tregarthen's little garden,—which formed the platform from which the captain had seen Kitty peeping over the wall,—the captain brought to, and stood off and on at the gate, while Kitty hurried to hide her tears in her own room, and Alfred spoke with her father, who was working in the garden. He was a rather infirm man, but could scarcely be called old yet, with an agreeable face and a promising air of making the best of things. The conversation began on his side with great cheerfulness and good humour, but soon became distrustful, and soon angry. That was the captain's cue for striking both into the conversation and the garden.

"Morning, sir!" said Captain Jorgan. "How do you do?"

"The gentleman I am going away with," said the young fisherman to Tregarthen.

"O!" returned Kitty's father, surveying the unfortunate captain with a look of extreme disfavour. "I confess that I can't say I am glad to see you."

"No," said the captain, "and, to admit the truth, that seems to be the general opinion in these parts. But don't be hasty; you may think better of me by-and-by."

"I hope so," observed Tregarthen.

"Wa'al, *I* hope so," observed the captain, quite at his ease; "more than that, I believe so,—though you don't. Now, Mr. Tregarthen, you don't want to exchange words of mistrust with me; and if you did, you couldn't, because I wouldn't. You and I are old enough to know better than to judge against experience from surfaces and appearances; and if you haven't lived to find out the evil and injustice of such judgments, you are a lucky man."

The other seemed to shrink under this remark, and replied, "Sir, I *have* lived to feel it deeply."

"Wa'al," said the captain, mollified, "then I've made a good cast without knowing it. Now, Tregarthen, there stands the lover of your only child, and here stand I who know his secret. I warrant it a righteous secret, and none of his making, though bound to be of his keeping. I want to help him out with it, and tewwards that end we ask you to favour us with the names of two or three old residents in the village of Lanrean. As I am taking out my pocket-book and pencil to put the names down, I may as well observe to you that this, wrote atop of the first page here, is my name and address: 'Silas Jonas Jorgan, Salem, Massachusetts, United States.' If ever you take it in your head to run over any morning, I shall be glad to welcome you. Now, what may be the spelling of these said names?"

“There was an elderly man,” said Tregarthen, “named David Polreath. He may be dead.”

“Wa’al,” said the captain, cheerfully, “if Polreath’s dead and buried, and can be made of any service to us, Polreath won’t object to our digging of him up. Polreath’s down, anyhow.”

“There was another named Penrewen. I don’t know his Christian name.”

“Never mind his Chris’en name,” said the captain; “Penrewen, for short.”

“There was another named John Tredgear.”

“And a pleasant-sounding name, too,” said the captain; “John Tredgear’s booked.”

“I can recall no other except old Parvis.”

“One of old Parvis’s fam’ly I reckon,” said the captain, “kept a dry-goods store in New York city, and realised a handsome competency by burning his house to ashes. Same name, anyhow. David Polreath, Unchris’en Penrewen, John Tredgear, and old Arson Parvis.”

“I cannot recall any others at the moment.”

“Thank’ee,” said the captain. “And so, Tregarthen, hoping for your good opinion yet, and likewise for the fair Devonshire Flower’s, your daughter’s, I give you my hand, sir, and wish you good day.”

Young Raybrock accompanied him disconsolately; for there was no Kitty at the window when he looked up, no Kitty in the garden when he shut the gate, no Kitty gazing after them along the stony ways when they begin to climb back.

“Now I tell you what,” said the captain. “Not being at present calculated to promote harmony in your family, I won’t come in. You go and get your dinner at home, and I’ll get mine at the little hotel. Let our hour of meeting be two o’clock, and you’ll find me smoking a cigar in the sun afore the hotel door. Tell Tom Pettifer, my steward, to consider himself on duty, and to look after your people till we come back; you’ll find he’ll have made himself useful to ’em already, and will be quite acceptable.”

All was done as Captain Jorgan directed. Punctually at two o’clock the young fisherman appeared with his knapsack at his back; and punctually at two o’clock the captain jerked away the last feather-end of his cigar.

“Let me carry your baggage, Captain Jorgan; I can easily take it with mine.”

“Thank’ee,” said the captain. “I’ll carry it myself. It’s only a comb.”

They climbed out of the village, and paused among the trees and fern on the summit of the hill above, to take breath, and to look down at the beautiful sea. Suddenly the captain gave his leg a resounding slap, and cried, “Never knew such a right thing in all my life!”—and ran away.

The cause of this abrupt retirement on the part of the captain was little Kitty among the trees. The captain went out of sight and waited, and kept out of sight and waited, until it occurred to him to beguile the time with another cigar. He lighted it, and smoked it out, and still he was out of sight and waiting. He stole within sight at last, and saw the lovers, with their arms entwined and their bent heads touching, moving slowly among the trees. It was the golden time of the afternoon then, and the captain said to himself, “Golden sun, golden sea, golden sails, golden leaves, golden love, golden youth,—a golden state of things altogether!”

Nevertheless the captain found it necessary to hail his young companion before going out of sight again. In a few moments more he came up and they began their journey.

“That still young woman with the fatherless child,” said Captain Jorgan, as they fell into step, “didn’t throw her words away; but good honest words are never thrown away. And now that I am conveying you off from that tender little thing that loves, and relies, and hopes, I feel just as if I was the snarling crittur in the picters, with the tight legs, the long nose, and the feather in his cap, the tips of whose moustaches get up nearer to his eyes the wickeder he gets.”

The young fisherman knew nothing of Mephistopheles; but he smiled when the captain stopped to double himself up and slap his leg, and they went along in right goodfellowship.

CHAPTER V [1]—THE RESTITUTION

Captain Jorgan, up and out betimes, had put the whole village of Lanrean under an amicable cross-examination, and was returning to the King Arthur's Arms to breakfast, none the wiser for his trouble, when he beheld the young fisherman advancing to meet him, accompanied by a stranger. A glance at this stranger assured the captain that he could be no other than the Seafaring Man; and the captain was about to hail him as a fellow-craftsman, when the two stood still and silent before the captain, and the captain stood still, silent, and wondering before them.

"Why, what's this?" cried the captain, when at last he broke the silence. "You two are alike. You two are much alike. What's this?"

Not a word was answered on the other side, until after the seafaring brother had got hold of the captain's right hand, and the fisherman brother had got hold of the captain's left hand; and if ever the captain had had his fill of hand-shaking, from his birth to that hour, he had it then. And presently up and spoke the two brothers, one at a time, two at a time, two dozen at a time for the bewilderment into which they plunged the captain, until he gradually had Hugh Raybrock's deliverance made clear to him, and also unravelled the fact that the person referred to in the half-obliterated paper was Tregarthen himself.

"Formerly, dear Captain Jorgan," said Alfred, "of Lanrean, you recollect? Kitty and her father came to live at Steepways after Hugh shipped on his last voyage."

"Ay, ay!" cried the captain, fetching a breath. "*Now* you have me in tow. Then your brother here don't know his sister-in-law that is to be so much as by name?"

"Never saw her; never heard of her!"

"Ay, ay, ay!" cried the captain. "Why then we every one go back together—paper, writer, and all—and take Tregarthen into the secret we kept from him?"

"Surely," said Alfred, "we can't help it now. We must go through with our duty."

"Not a doubt," returned the captain. "Give me an arm apiece, and let us set this ship-shape."

So walking up and down in the shrill wind on the wild moor, while the neglected breakfast cooled within, the captain and the brothers settled their course of action.

It was that they should all proceed by the quickest means they could secure to Barnstaple, and there look over the father’s books and papers in the lawyer’s keeping; as Hugh had proposed to himself to do if ever he reached home. That, enlightened or unenlightened, they should then return to Steepways and go straight to Mr. Tregarthen, and tell him all they knew, and see what came of it, and act accordingly. Lastly, that when they got there they should enter the village with all precautions against Hugh’s being recognised by any chance; and that to the captain should be consigned the task of preparing his wife and mother for his restoration to this life.

“For you see,” quoth Captain Jorgan, touching the last head, “it requires caution any way, great joys being as dangerous as great griefs, if not more dangerous, as being more uncommon (and therefore less provided against) in this round world of ours. And besides, I should like to free my name with the ladies, and take you home again at your brightest and luckiest; so don’t let’s throw away a chance of success.”

The captain was highly lauded by the brothers for his kind interest and foresight.

“And now stop!” said the captain, coming to a standstill, and looking from one brother to the other, with quite a new rigging of wrinkles about each eye; “you are of opinion,” to the elder, “that you are ra’ather slow?”

“I assure you I am very slow,” said the honest Hugh.

“Wa’al,” replied the captain, “I assure you that to the best of my belief I am ra’ather smart. Now a slow man ain’t good at quick business, is he?”

That was clear to both.

“You,” said the captain, turning to the younger brother, “are a little in love; ain’t you?”

“Not a little, Captain Jorgan.”

“Much or little, you’re sort preoccupied; ain’t you?”

It was impossible to be denied.

“And a sort preoccupied man ain’t good at quick business, is he?” said the captain.

Equally clear on all sides.

“Now,” said the captain, “I ain’t in love myself, and I’ve made many a smart run across the ocean, and I should like to carry on and go ahead with this affair of yours, and make a run slick through it. Shall I try? Will you hand it over to me?"

They were both delighted to do so, and thanked him heartily.

"Good," said the captain, taking out his watch. "This is half-past eight a.m., Friday morning. I'll jot that down, and we'll compute how many hours we've been out when we run into your mother's post-office. There! The entry's made, and now we go ahead."

They went ahead so well that before the Barnstaple lawyer's office was open next morning, the captain was sitting whistling on the step of the door, waiting for the clerk to come down the street with his key and open it. But instead of the clerk there came the master, with whom the captain fraternised on the spot to an extent that utterly confounded him.

As he personally knew both Hugh and Alfred, there was no difficulty in obtaining immediate access to such of the father's papers as were in his keeping. These were chiefly old letters and cash accounts; from which the captain, with a shrewdness and despatch that left the lawyer far behind, established with perfect clearness, by noon, the following particulars:—

That one Lawrence Clissold had borrowed of the deceased, at a time when he was a thriving young tradesman in the town of Barnstaple, the sum of five hundred pounds. That he had borrowed it on the written statement that it was to be laid out in furtherance of a speculation which he expected would raise him to independence; he being, at the time of writing that letter, no more than a clerk in the house of Dringworth Brothers, America Square, London. That the money was borrowed for a stipulated period; but that, when the term was out, the aforesaid speculation failed, and Clissold was without means of repayment. That, hereupon, he had written to his creditor, in no very persuasive terms, vaguely requesting further time. That the creditor had refused this concession, declaring that he could not afford delay. That Clissold then paid the debt, accompanying the remittance of the money with an angry letter describing it as having been advanced by a relative to save him from ruin. That, in acknowlodging the receipt, Raybrock had cautioned Clissold to seek to borrow money of him no more, as he would never so risk money again.

Before the lawyer the captain said never a word in reference to these discoveries. But when the papers had been put back in their box, and he and his two companions were well out of the office, his right leg suffered for it, and he said,—

"So far this run's begun with a fair wind and a prosperous; for don't you see that all this agrees with that dutiful trust in his father maintained by the slow member of the Raybrock family?"

Whether the brothers had seen it before or no, they saw it now. Not that the captain gave them much time to contemplate the state of things at their ease, for he instantly whipped them into a chaise again, and bore them off to Steepways. Although the afternoon was but just beginning to decline when they reached it, and it was broad day-light, still they had no difficulty, by dint of muffing the returned sailor up, and ascending the village rather than descending it, in reaching Tregarthen's cottage unobserved. Kitty was not visible, and they surprised Tregarthen sitting writing in the small bay-window of his little room.

"Sir," said the captain, instantly shaking hands with him, pen and all, "I'm glad to see you, sir. How do you do, sir? I told you you'd think better of me by-and-by, and I congratulate you on going to do it."

Here the captain's eye fell on Tom Pettifer Ho, engaged in preparing some cookery at the fire.

"That critter," said the captain, smiting his leg, "is a born steward, and never ought to have been in any other way of life. Stop where you are, Tom, and make yourself useful. Now, Tregarthen, I'm going to try a chair."

Accordingly the captain drew one close to him, and went on:—

"This loving member of the Raybrock family you know, sir. This slow member of the same family you don't know, sir. Wa'al, these two are brothers,—fact! Hugh's come to life again, and here he stands. Now see here, my friend! You don't want to be told that he was cast away, but you do want to be told (for there's a purpose in it) that he was cast away with another man. That man by name was Lawrence Clissold."

At the mention of this name Tregarthen started and changed colour. "What's the matter?" said the captain.

"He was a fellow-clerk of mine thirty—five-and-thirty—years ago."

"True," said the captain, immediately catching at the clew: "Dringworth Brothers, America Square, London City."

The other started again, nodded, and said, "That was the house."

"Now," pursued the captain, "between those two men cast away there arose a mystery concerning the round sum of five hundred pound."

Again Tregarthen started, changing colour. Again the captain said, "What's the matter?"

As Tregarthen only answered, “Please to go on,” the captain recounted, very tersely and plainly, the nature of Clissold’s wanderings on the barren island, as he had condensed them in his mind from the seafaring man. Tregarthen became greatly agitated during this recital, and at length exclaimed,—

“Clissold was the man who ruined me! I have suspected it for many a long year, and now I know it.”

“And how,” said the captain, drawing his chair still closer to Tregarthen, and clapping his hand upon his shoulder,—“how may you know it?”

“When we were fellow-clerks,” replied Tregarthen, “in that London house, it was one of my duties to enter daily in a certain book an account of the sums received that day by the firm, and afterward paid into the bankers’. One memorable day,—a Wednesday, the black day of my life,—among the sums I so entered was one of five hundred pounds.”

“I begin to make it out,” said the captain. “Yes?”

“It was one of Clissold’s duties to copy from this entry a memorandum of the sums which the clerk employed to go to the bankers’ paid in there. It was my duty to hand the money to Clissold; it was Clissold’s to hand it to the clerk, with that memorandum of his writing. On that Wednesday I entered a sum of five hundred pounds received. I handed that sum, as I handed the other sums in the day’s entry, to Clissold. I was absolutely certain of it at the time; I have been absolutely certain of it ever since. A sum of five hundred pounds was afterward found by the house to have been that day wanting from the bag, from Clissold’s memorandum, and from the entries in my book. Clissold, being questioned, stood upon his perfect clearness in the matter, and emphatically declared that he asked no better than to be tested by ‘Tregarthen’s book.’ My book was examined, and the entry of five hundred pounds was not there.”

“How not there,” said the captain, “when you made it yourself?”

Tregarthen continued:—

“I was then questioned. Had I made the entry? Certainly I had. The house produced my book, and it was not there. I could not deny my book; I could not deny my writing. I knew there must be forgery by some one; but the writing was wonderfully like mine, and I could impeach no one if the house could not. I was required to pay the money back. I did so; and I left the house, almost broken-hearted, rather than remain there,—even if I could have done so,—with a dark shadow of suspicion always on me. I returned to my native place, Lanrean, and remained there, clerk to a mine, until I was appointed to my little post here."

"I well remember," said the captain, "that I told you that if you had no experience of ill judgments on deceiving appearances, you were a lucky man. You went hurt at that, and I see why. I'm sorry."

"Thus it is," said Tregarthen. "Of my own innocence I have of course been sure; it has been at once my comfort and my trial. Of Clissold I have always had suspicions almost amounting to certainty; but they have never been confirmed until now. For my daughter's sake and for my own I have carried this subject in my own heart, as the only secret of my life, and have long believed that it would die with me."

"Wa'al, my good sir," said the captain cordially, "the present question is, and will be long, I hope, concerning living, and not dying. Now, here are our two honest friends, the loving Raybrock and the slow. Here they stand, agreed on one point, on which I'd back 'em round the world, and right across it from north to south, and then again from east to west, and through it, from your deepest Cornish mine to China. It is, that they will never use this same so-often-mentioned sum of money, and that restitution of it must be made to you. These two, the loving member and the slow, for the sake of the right and of their father's memory, will have it ready for you to-morrow. Take it, and ease their minds and mine, and end a most unfortunate transaction."

Tregarthen took the captain by the hand, and gave his hand to each of the young men, but positively and finally answered No. He said, they trusted to his word, and he was glad of it, and at rest in his mind; but there was no proof, and the money must remain as it was. All were very earnest over this; and earnestness in men, when they are right and true, is so impressive, that Mr. Pettifer deserted his cookery and looked on quite moved.

"And so," said the captain, "so we come—as that lawyer-crittur over yonder where we were this morning might—to mere proof; do we? We must have it; must we? How? From this Clissold's wanderings, and from what you say, it ain't hard to make out that there was a neat forgery of your writing committed by the too smart rowdy that was grease and ashes when I made his acquaintance, and a substitution of a forged leaf in your book for a real and torn leaf torn out. Now was that real and true leaf then and there destroyed? No,—for says he, in his drunken way, he slipped it into a crack in his own desk, because you came into the office before there was time to burn it, and could never get back to it arterwards. Wait a bit. Where is that desk now? Do you consider it likely to be in America Square, London City?"

Tregarthen shook his head.

"The house has not, for years, transacted business in that place. I have heard of it, and read of it, as removed, enlarged, every way altered. Things alter so fast in these times."

"You think so," returned the captain, with compassion; "but you should come over and see *me* afore you talk about *that*. Wa'al, now. This desk, this paper,—this paper, this desk," said the captain, ruminating and walking about, and looking, in his uneasy abstraction, into Mr. Pettifer's hat on a table, among other things. "This desk, this paper,—this paper, this desk," the captain continued, musing and roaming about the room, "I'd give—"

However, he gave nothing, but took up his steward's hat instead, and stood looking into it, as if he had just come into church. After that he roamed again, and again said, "This desk, belonging to this house of Dringworth Brothers, America Square, London City—"

Mr. Pettifer, still strangely moved, and now more moved than before, cut the captain off as he backed across the room, and bespake him thus:—

"Captain Jorgan, I have been wishful to engage your attention, but I couldn't do it. I am unwilling to interrupt Captain Jorgan, but I must do it. *I* knew something about that house."

The captain stood stock-still and looked at him,—with his (Mr. Pettifer's) hat under his arm.

"You're aware," pursued his steward, "that I was once in the broking business, Captain Jorgan?"

"I was aware," said the captain, "that you had failed in that calling, and in half the businesses going, Tom."

"Not quite so, Captain Jorgan; but I failed in the broking business. I was partners with my brother, sir. There was a sale of old office furniture at Dringworth Brothers' when the house was moved from America Square, and me and my brother made what we call in the trade a Deal there, sir. And I'll make bold to say, sir, that the only thing I ever had from my brother, or from any relation,—for my relations have mostly taken property from me instead of giving me any,—was an old desk we bought at that same sale, with a crack in it. My brother wouldn't have given me even that, when we broke partnership, if it had been worth anything."

"Where is that desk now?" said the captain.

"Well, Captain Jorgan," replied the steward, "I couldn't say for certain where it is now; but when I saw it last,—which was last time we were outward bound,—it was at a very nice lady's at Wapping, along with a little chest of mine which was detained for a small matter of a bill owing."

The captain, instead of paying that rapt attention to his steward which was rendered by the other three persons present, went to Church again, in respect of the steward's hat. And a most especially agitated and memorable face the captain produced from it, after a short pause.

"Now, Tom," said the captain, "I spoke to you, when we first came here, respecting your constitutional weakness on the subject of sun-stroke."

"You did, sir."

"Will my slow friend," said the captain, "lend me his arm, or I shall sink right back'ards into this blessed steward's cookery? Now, Tom," pursued the captain, when the required assistance was given, "on your oath as a steward, didn't you take that desk to pieces to make a better one of it, and put it together fresh,—or something of the kind?"

"On my oath I did, sir," replied the steward.

"And by the blessing of Heaven, my friends, one and all," cried the captain, radiant with joy,—"of the Heaven that put it into this Tom Pettifer's head to take so much care of his head against the bright sun,—he lined his hat with the original leaf in Tregarthen's writing,—and here it is!"

With that the captain, to the utter destruction of Mr. Pettifer's favourite hat, produced the book-leaf, very much worn, but still legible, and gave both his legs such tremendous slaps that they were heard far off in the bay, and never accounted for.

"A quarter past five p.m.," said the captain, pulling out his watch, "and that's thirty-three hours and a quarter in all, and a pritty run!"

How they were all overpowered with delight and triumph; how the money was restored, then and there, to Tregarthen; how Tregarthen, then and there, gave it all to his daughter; how the captain undertook to go to Dringworth Brothers and re-establish the reputation of their forgotten old clerk; how Kitty came in, and was nearly torn to pieces, and the marriage was reappointed, needs not to be told. Nor how she and the young fisherman went home to the post-office to prepare the way for the captain's coming, by declaring him to be the mightiest of men, who had made all their fortunes,—and then dutifully withdrew together, in order that he might have the domestic coast entirely to himself. How he availed himself of it is all that remains to tell.

Deeply delighted with his trust, and putting his heart into it, he raised the latch of the post-office parlour where Mrs. Raybrock and the young widow sat, and said,—

"May I come in?"

"Sure you may, Captain Jorgan!" replied the old lady. "And good reason you have to be free of the house, though you have not been too well used in it by some who ought to have known better. I ask your pardon."

"No you don't, ma'am," said the captain, "for I won't let you. Wa'al, to be sure!"

By this time he had taken a chair on the hearth between them.

"Never felt such an evil spirit in the whole course of my life! There! I tell you! I could a'most have cut my own connection. Like the dealer in my country, away West, who when he had let himself be outdone in a bargain, said to himself, 'Now I tell you what! I'll never speak to you again.' And he never did, but joined a settlement of oysters, and translated the multiplication table into their language,—which is a fact that can be proved. If you doubt it, mention it to any oyster you come across, and see if he'll have the face to contradict it."

He took the child from her mother's lap and set it on his knee.

"Not a bit afraid of me now, you see. Knows I am fond of small people. I have a child, and she's a girl, and I sing to her sometimes."

"What do you sing?" asked Margaret.

"Not a long song, my dear.

Silas Jorgan
Played the organ.

That's about all. And sometimes I tell her stories,—stories of sailors supposed to be lost, and recovered after all hope was abandoned." Here the captain musingly went back to his song,—

Silas Jorgan
Played the organ;

repeating it with his eyes on the fire, as he softly danced the child on his knee. For he felt that Margaret had stopped working.

“Yes,” said the captain, still looking at the fire, “I make up stories and tell ’em to that child. Stories of shipwreck on desert islands, and long delay in getting back to civilised lauds. It is to stories the like of that, mostly, that

Silas Jorgan
Plays the organ.”

There was no light in the room but the light of the fire; for the shades of night were on the village, and the stars had begun to peep out of the sky one by one, as the houses of the village peeped out from among the foliage when the night departed. The captain felt that Margaret’s eyes were upon him, and thought it discreetest to keep his own eyes on the fire.

“Yes; I make ’em up,” said the captain. “I make up stories of brothers brought together by the good providence of GOD,—of sons brought back to mothers, husbands brought back to wives, fathers raised from the deep, for little children like herself.”

Margaret’s touch was on his arm, and he could not choose but look round now. Next moment her hand moved imploringly to his breast, and she was on her knees before him,—supporting the mother, who was also kneeling.

“What’s the matter?” said the captain. “What’s the matter?

Silas Jorgan
Played the—

Their looks and tears were too much for him, and he could not finish the song, short as it was.

“Mistress Margaret, you have borne ill fortune well. Could you bear good fortune equally well, if it was to come?”

“I hope so. I thankfully and humbly and earnestly hope so!”

“Wa’al, my dear,” said the captain, “p’rhaps it has come. He’s—don’t be frightened—shall I say the word—”

“Alive?”

“Yes!”

The thanks they fervently addressed to Heaven were again too much for the captain, who openly took out his handkerchief and dried his eyes.

“He’s no further off,” resumed the captain, “than my country. Indeed, he’s no further off than his own native country. To tell you the truth, he’s no further off than Falmouth. Indeed, I doubt if he’s quite so fur. Indeed, if you was sure you could bear it nicely, and I was to do no more than whistle for him—”

The captain’s trust was discharged. A rush came, and they were all together again.

This was a fine opportunity for Tom Pettifer to appear with a tumbler of cold water, and he presently appeared with it, and administered it to the ladies; at the same time soothing them, and composing their dresses, exactly as if they had been passengers crossing the Channel. The extent to which the captain slapped his legs, when Mr. Pettifer acquitted himself of this act of stewardship, could have been thoroughly appreciated by no one but himself; inasmuch as he must have slapped them black and blue, and they must have smarted tremendously.

He couldn’t stay for the wedding, having a few appointments to keep at the irreconcilable distance of about four thousand miles. So next morning all the village cheered him up to the level ground above, and there he shook hands with a complete Census of its population, and invited the whole, without exception, to come and stay several months with him at Salem, Mass., U.S. And there as he stood on the spot where he had seen that little golden picture of love and parting, and from which he could that morning contemplate another golden picture with a vista of golden years in it, little Kitty put her arms around his neck, and kissed him on both his bronzed cheeks, and laid her pretty face upon his storm-beaten breast, in sight of all,—ashamed to have called such a noble captain names. And there the captain waved his hat over his head three final times; and there he was last seen, going away accompanied by Tom Pettifer Ho, and carrying his hands in his pockets. And there, before that ground was softened with the fallen leaves of three more summers, a rosy little boy took his first unsteady run to a fair young mother’s breast, and the name of that infant fisherman was Jorgan Raybrock.

FOOTNOTES

{1} Dicken’s didn’t write chapters three and four and they are omitted in this edition. The story continues with Captain Jorgan and Alfred at Lanrean.

THE END OF
A Message from the Sea

MISCELLANEOUS PAPERS

BY CHARLES DICKENS

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THE AGRICULTURAL INTEREST

The present Government, having shown itself to be particularly clever in its management of Indictments for Conspiracy, cannot do better, we think (keeping in its administrative eye the pacification of some of its most influential and most unruly supporters), than indict the whole manufacturing interest of the country for a conspiracy against the agricultural interest. As the jury ought to be beyond impeachment, the panel might be chosen among the Duke of Buckingham's tenants, with the Duke of Buckingham himself as foreman; and, to the end that the country might be quite satisfied with the judge, and have ample security beforehand for his moderation and impartiality, it would be desirable, perhaps, to make such a slight change in the working of the law (a mere nothing to a Conservative Government, bent upon its end), as would enable the question to be tried before an Ecclesiastical Court, with the Bishop of Exeter presiding. The Attorney-General for Ireland, turning his sword into a ploughshare, might conduct the prosecution; and Mr. Cobden and the other traversers might adopt any ground of defence they chose, or prove or disprove anything they pleased, without being embarrassed by the least anxiety or doubt in reference to the verdict.

That the country in general is in a conspiracy against this sacred but unhappy agricultural interest, there can be no doubt. It is not alone within the walls of Covent Garden Theatre, or the Free Trade Hall at Manchester, or the Town Hall at Birmingham, that the cry "Repeal the Corn-laws!" is raised. It may be heard, moaning at night, through the straw-littered wards of Refuges for the Destitute; it may be read in the gaunt and famished faces which make our streets terrible; it is muttered in the thankful grace pronounced by haggard wretches over their felon fare in gaols; it is inscribed in dreadful characters upon the walls of Fever Hospitals; and may be plainly traced in every record of mortality. All of which proves, that there is a vast conspiracy afoot, against the unfortunate agricultural interest.

They who run, even upon railroads, may read of this conspiracy. The old stage-coachman was a farmer's friend. He wore top-boots, understood cattle, fed his horses upon corn, and had a lively personal interest in malt. The engine-driver's garb, and sympathies, and tastes belong to the factory. His fustian dress, besmeared with coal-dust and begrimed with soot; his oily hands, his dirty face, his knowledge of machinery; all point him out as one devoted to the manufacturing interest. Fire and smoke, and red-hot cinders follow in his wake. He has no attachment to the soil, but travels on a road of iron, furnace wrought. His warning is not conveyed in the fine old Saxon dialect of our glorious forefathers, but in a fiendish yell. He never cries "ya-hip", with agricultural lungs; but jerks forth a manufactured shriek from a brazen throat.

Where is the agricultural interest represented? From what phase of our social life has it not been driven, to the undue setting up of its false rival?

Are the police agricultural? The watchmen were. They wore woollen nightcaps to a man; they encouraged the growth of timber, by patriotically adhering to staves and rattles of immense size; they slept every night in boxes, which were but another form of the celebrated wooden walls of Old England; they never woke up till it was too lateâ€”in which respect you might have thought them very farmers. How is it with the police? Their buttons are made at Birmingham; a dozen of their truncheons would poorly furnish forth a watchman's staff; they have no wooden walls to repose between; and the crowns of their hats are plated with cast-iron.

Are the doctors agricultural? Let Messrs. Morison and Moat, of the Hygeian establishment at King's Cross, London, reply. Is it not, upon the constant showing of those gentlemen, an ascertained fact that the whole medical profession have united to depreciate the worth of the Universal Vegetable Medicines? And is this opposition to vegetables, and exaltation of steel and iron instead, on the part of the regular practitioners, capable of any interpretation but one? Is it not a distinct renouncement of the agricultural interest, and a setting up of the manufacturing interest instead?

Do the professors of the law at all fail in their truth to the beautiful maid whom they ought to adore? Inquire of the Attorney- General for Ireland. Inquire of that honourable and learned gentleman, whose last public act was to cast aside the grey goose- quill, an article of agricultural produce, and take up the pistol, which, under the system of percussion locks, has not even a flint to connect it with farming. Or put the question to a still higher legal functionary, who, on the same occasion, when he should have been a reed, inclining here and there, as adverse gales of evidence disposed him, was seen to be a manufactured image on the seat of Justice, cast by Power, in most impenetrable brass.

The world is too much with us in this manufacturing interest, early and late; that is the great complaint and the great truth. It is not so with the agricultural interest, or what passes by that name. It never thinks of the suffering world, or sees it, or cares to extend its knowledge of it; or, so long as it remains a world, cares anything about it. All those whom Dante placed in the first pit or circle of the doleful regions, might have represented the agricultural interest in the present Parliament, or at quarter sessions, or at meetings of the farmers' friends, or anywhere else.

But that is not the question now. It is conspired against; and we have given a few proofs of the conspiracy, as they shine out of various classes engaged in it. An indictment against the whole manufacturing interest need not be longer, surely, than the indictment in the case of the Crown against O'Connell and others. Mr. Cobden may be taken as its representativeâ€”as indeed he is, by one consent already. There may be no evidence; but that is not required. A judge and jury are all that is needed. And the Government know where to find them, or they gain experience to little purpose.

THREATENING LETTER TO THOMAS HOOD FROM AN ANCIENT GENTLEMAN

MR. HOOD. SIR,â€”The Constitution is going at last! You needn't laugh, Mr. Hood. I am aware that it has been going, two or three times before; perhaps four times; but it is on the move now, sir, and no mistake.

I beg to say, that I use those last expressions advisedly, sir, and not in the sense in which they are now used by Jackanapeses. There were no Jackanapeses when I was a boy, Mr. Hood. England was Old England when

I was young. I little thought it would ever come to be Young England when I was old. But everything is going backward.

Ah! governments were governments, and judges were judges, in my day, Mr. Hood. There was no nonsense then. Any of your seditious complainings, and we were ready with the military on the shortest notice. We should have charged Covent Garden Theatre, sir, on a Wednesday night: at the point of the bayonet. Then, the judges were full of dignity and firmness, and knew how to administer the law. There is only one judge who knows how to do his duty, now. He tried that revolutionary female the other day, who, though she was in full work (making shirts at three-halfpence a piece), had no pride in her country, but treasonably took it in her head, in the distraction of having been robbed of her easy earnings, to attempt to drown herself and her young child; and the glorious man went out of his way, sirâ€”out of his wayâ€”to call her up for instant sentence of Death; and to tell her she had no hope of mercy in this worldâ€”as you may see yourself if you look in the papers of Wednesday the 17th of April. He won't be supported, sir, I know he won't; but it is worth remembering that his words were carried into every manufacturing town of this kingdom, and read aloud to crowds in every political parlour, beer-shop, news-room, and secret or open place of assembly, frequented by the discontented working-men; and that no milk-and-water weakness on the part of the executive can ever blot them out. Great things like that, are caught up, and stored up, in these times, and are not forgotten, Mr. Hood. The public at large (especially those who wish for peace and conciliation) are universally obliged to him. If it is reserved for any man to set the Thames on fire, it is reserved for him; and indeed I am told he very nearly did it, once.

But even he won't save the constitution, sir: it is mauled beyond the power of preservation. Do you know in what foul weather it will be sacrificed and shipwrecked, Mr. Hood? Do you know on what rock it will strike, sir? You don't, I am certain; for nobody does know as yet but myself. I will tell you.

The constitution will go down, sir (nautically speaking), in the degeneration of the human species in England, and its reduction into a mingled race of savages and pigmies.

That is my proposition. That is my prediction. That is the event of which I give you warning. I am now going to prove it, sir.

You are a literary man, Mr. Hood, and have written, I am told, some things worth reading. I say I am told, because I never read what is written in these days. You'll excuse me; but my principle is, that no man ought to know anything about his own time, except that it is the worst time that ever was, or is ever likely to be. That is the only way, sir, to be truly wise and happy.

In your station, as a literary man, Mr. Hood, you are frequently at the Court of Her Gracious Majesty the Queen. God bless her! You have reason to know that the three great keys to the royal palace (after rank and politics) are Science, Literature, Art. I don't approve of this myself. I think it ungenteel and barbarous, and quite un-English; the custom having been a foreign one, ever since the reigns of the uncivilised sultans in the Arabian Nights, who always called the wise men of their time about them. But so it is. And when you don't dine at the royal table, there is always a knife and fork for you at the equerries' table: where, I understand, all gifted men are made particularly welcome.

But all men can't be gifted, Mr. Hood. Neither scientific, literary, nor artistical powers are any more to be inherited than the property arising from scientific, literary, or artistic productions, which the law, with a beautiful imitation of nature, declines to protect in the second generation. Very good, sir. Then, people are naturally very prone to cast about in their minds for other means of getting at Court Favour; and, watching the signs of the times, to hew out for themselves, or their descendants, the likeliest roads to that distinguished goal.

Mr. Hood, it is pretty clear, from recent records in the Court Circular, that if a father wish to train up his son in the way he should go, to go to Court: and cannot indenture him to be a scientific man, an author, or an artist, three courses are open to him. He must endeavour by artificial means to make him a dwarf, a wild man, or a Boy Jones.

Now, sir, this is the shoal and quicksand on which the constitution will go to pieces.

I have made inquiry, Mr. Hood, and find that in my neighbourhood two families and a fraction out of every four, in the lower and middle classes of society, are studying and practising all conceivable arts to keep their infant children down. Understand me. I do not mean down in their numbers, or down in their precocity, but down in their growth, sir. A destructive and subduing drink, compounded of gin and milk in equal quantities, such as is given to puppies to retard their growth: not something short, but something shortening: is administered to these young creatures many times a day. An unnatural and artificial thirst is first awakened in these infants by meals of salt beef, bacon, anchovies, sardines, red herrings, shrimps, olives, pea-soup, and that description of diet; and when they screech for drink, in accents that might melt a heart of stone, which they do constantly (I allude to screeching, not to melting), this liquid is introduced into their too confiding stomachs. At such an early age, and to so great an extent, is this custom of provoking thirst, then quenching it with a stunting drink, observed, that brine pap has already superseded the use of tops-and-bottoms; and wet-nurses, previously free from any kind of reproach, have been seen to stagger in the streets: owing, sir, to the quantity of gin introduced into their systems, with a view to its gradual and natural conversion into the fluid I have already mentioned.

Upon the best calculation I can make, this is going on, as I have said, in the proportion of about two families and a fraction in four. In one more family and a fraction out of the same number, efforts are being made to reduce the children to a state of nature; and to inculcate, at a tender age, the love of raw flesh, train oil, new rum, and the acquisition of scalps. Wild and outlandish dances are also in vogue (you will have observed the prevailing rage for the Polka); and savage cries and whoops are much indulged in (as you may discover, if you doubt it, in the House of Commons any night). Nay, some persons, Mr. Hood; and persons of some figure and distinction too; have already succeeded in breeding wild sons; who have been publicly shown in the Courts of Bankruptcy, and in police- offices, and in other commodious exhibition-rooms, with great effect, but who have not yet found favour at court; in consequence, as I infer, of the impression made by Mr. Rankin's wild men being too fresh and recent, to say nothing of Mr. Rankin's wild men being foreigners.

I need not refer you, sir, to the late instance of the Ojibbeway Bride. But I am credibly informed, that she is on the eve of retiring into a savage fastness, where she may bring forth and educate a wild family, who shall in course of time, by the dexterous use of the popularity they are certain to acquire at Windsor and St. James's, divide with dwarfs the principal offices of state, of patronage, and power, in the United Kingdom.

Consider the deplorable consequences, Mr. Hood, which must result from these proceedings, and the encouragement they receive in the highest quarters.

The dwarf being the favourite, sir, it is certain that the public mind will run in a great and eminent degree upon the production of dwarfs. Perhaps the failures only will be brought up, wild. The imagination goes a long way in these cases; and all that the imagination can do, will be done, and is doing. You may convince yourself of this, by observing the condition of those ladies who take particular notice of General Tom Thumb at the Egyptian Hall, during his hours of performance.

The rapid increase of dwarfs, will be first felt in her Majesty's recruiting department. The standard will, of necessity, be lowered; the dwarfs will grow smaller and smaller; the vulgar expression "a man of his inches" will become a figure of fact, instead of a figure of speech; crack regiments, household-troops especially, will pick the smallest men from all parts of the country; and in the two little porticoes at the Horse Guards, two Tom Thumbs will be daily seen, doing duty, mounted on a pair of Shetland ponies. Each of them will be relieved (as Tom Thumb is at this moment, in the intervals of his performance) by a wild man; and a British Grenadier will either go into a quart pot, or be an Old Boy, or Blue Gull, or Flying Bull, or some other savage chief of that nature.

I will not expatiate upon the number of dwarfs who will be found representing Grecian statues in all parts of the metropolis; because I am inclined to think that this will be a change for the better; and that the engagement of two or three in Trafalgar Square will tend to the improvement of the public taste.

The various genteel employments at Court being held by dwarfs, sir, it will be necessary to alter, in some respects, the present regulations. It is quite clear that not even General Tom Thumb himself could preserve a becoming dignity on state occasions, if required to walk about with a scaffolding-pole under his arm; therefore the gold and silver sticks at present used, must be cut down into skewers of those precious metals; a twig of the black rod will be quite as much as can be conveniently preserved; the coral and bells of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, will be used in lieu of the mace at present in existence; and that bauble (as Oliver Cromwell called it, Mr. Hood), its value being first calculated by Mr. Finlayson, the government actuary, will be placed to the credit of the National Debt.

All this, sir, will be the death of the constitution. But this is not all. The constitution dies hard, perhaps; but there is enough disease impending, Mr. Hood, to kill it three times over.

Wild men will get into the House of Commons. Imagine that, sir! Imagine Strong Wind in the House of Commons! It is not an easy matter to get through a debate now; but I say, imagine Strong Wind, speaking for the benefit of his constituents, upon the floor of the House of Commons! or imagine (which is pregnant with more awful consequences still) the ministry having an interpreter in the House of Commons, to tell the country, in English, what it really means!

Why, sir, that in itself would be blowing the constitution out of the mortar in St. James's Park, and leaving nothing of it to be seen but smoke.

But this, I repeat it, is the state of things to which we are fast tending, Mr. Hood; and I enclose my card for your private eye, that you may be quite certain of it. What the condition of this country will be, when its standing army is composed of dwarfs, with here and there a wild man to throw its ranks into confusion, like the elephants employed in war in former times, I leave you to imagine, sir. It may be objected by some hopeful jackanapeses, that the number of impressments in the navy, consequent upon the seizure of the Boy-Joneses, or remaining portion of the population ambitious of Court Favour, will be in itself sufficient to defend our Island from foreign invasion. But I tell those jackanapeses, sir, that while I admit the wisdom of the Boy Jones precedent, of kidnapping such youths after the expiration of their several terms of imprisonment as vagabonds; hurrying them on board ship; and packing them off to sea again whenever they venture to take the air on shore; I deny the justice of the inference; inasmuch as it appears to me, that the inquiring minds of those young outlaws must naturally lead to their being hanged by the enemy as spies, early in their career; and before they shall have been rated on the books of our fleet as able seamen.

Such, Mr. Hood, sir, is the prospect before us! And unless you, and some of your friends who have influence at Court, can get up a giant as a forlorn hope, it is all over with this ill-fated land.

In reference to your own affairs, sir, you will take whatever course may seem to you most prudent and advisable after this warning. It is not a warning to be slighted: that I happen to know. I am informed by the gentleman who favours this, that you have recently been making some changes and improvements in your Magazine, and are, in point of fact, starting afresh. If I be well informed, and this be really so, rely upon it that you cannot start too small, sir. Come down to the duodecimo size instantly, Mr. Hood. Take time by the forelock; and, reducing the stature of your Magazine every month, bring it at last to the dimensions of the little almanack no longer issued, I regret to say, by the ingenious Mr. Schloss: which was invisible to the naked eye until examined through a little eye-glass.

You project, I am told, the publication of a new novel, by yourself, in the pages of your Magazine. A word in your ear. I am not a young man, sir, and have had some experience. Don't put your own name on the title-page; it would be suicide and madness. Treat with General Tom Thumb, Mr. Hood, for the use of his name on any terms. If the gallant general should decline to treat with you, get Mr. Barnum's name, which is the next best in the market. And when, through this politic course, you shall have received, in presents, a richly jewelled set of tablets from Buckingham Palace, and a gold watch and appendages from Marlborough House; and when those valuable trinkets shall be left under a glass case at your publisher's for inspection by your friends and the public in general;â€”then, sir, you will do me the justice of remembering this communication.

It is unnecessary for me to add, after what I have observed in the course of this letter, that I am not,â€”sir, ever your

CONSTANT READER.

TUESDAY, 23rd April 1844.

P.S.â€”Impress it upon your contributors that they cannot be too short; and that if not dwarfish, they must be wildâ€”or at all events not tame.

CRIME AND EDUCATION

I offer no apology for entreating the attention of the readers of The Daily News to an effort which has been making for some three years and a half, and which is making now, to introduce among the most miserable and neglected outcasts in London, some knowledge of the commonest principles of morality and religion; to commence their recognition as immortal human creatures, before the Gaol Chaplain becomes their only schoolmaster; to suggest to Society that its duty to this wretched throng, foredoomed to crime and punishment, rightfully begins at some distance from the police office; and that the careless maintenance from year to year, in this, the capital city of the world, of a vast hopeless nursery of ignorance, misery and vice; a breeding place for the hulks and jails: is horrible to contemplate.

This attempt is being made in certain of the most obscure and squalid parts of the Metropolis, where rooms are opened, at night, for the gratuitous instruction of all comers, children or adults, under the title of RAGGED SCHOOLS. The name implies the purpose. They who are too ragged, wretched, filthy, and forlorn, to enter any other place: who could gain admission into no charity school, and who would be driven from any church door; are invited to come in here, and find some people not depraved, willing to teach them something, and show them some sympathy, and stretch a hand out, which is not the iron hand of Law, for their correction.

Before I describe a visit of my own to a Ragged School, and urge the readers of this letter for God's sake to visit one themselves, and think of it (which is my main object), let me say, that I know the prisons of London well; that I have visited the largest of them more times than I could count; and that the children in them are enough to break the heart and hope of any man. I have never taken a foreigner or a stranger of any kind to one of these establishments but I have seen him so moved at sight of the child offenders, and so affected by the contemplation of their utter renouncement and desolation outside the prison walls, that he has been as little able to disguise his emotion, as if some great grief had suddenly burst upon him. Mr. Chesterton and Lieutenant Tracey (than whom more intelligent and humane Governors of Prisons it would be hard, if not impossible, to find) know perfectly well that these children pass and repass through the prisons all their lives; that they are never taught; that the first distinctions between right and wrong are, from their cradles, perfectly confounded and perverted in their minds; that they come of untaught parents, and will give birth to another untaught generation; that in exact proportion to their natural abilities, is the extent and scope of their depravity; and that there is no escape or chance for them in any ordinary revolution of human affairs. Happily, there are schools in these prisons now. If any readers doubt how ignorant the children are, let them visit those schools and see them at their tasks, and hear how much they knew when they were sent there. If they would know the produce of this seed, let them see a class of men and boys together, at their books (as I have seen them in the House of Correction for this county of Middlesex), and mark how painfully the full grown felons toil at the very shape and form of letters; their ignorance being so confirmed and solid. The contrast of this labour in the men, with the less blunted quickness of the boys; the latent shame and sense of degradation struggling through their dull attempts at infant lessons; and the universal eagerness to learn, impress me, in this passing retrospect, more painfully than I can tell.

For the instruction, and as a first step in the reformation, of such unhappy beings, the Ragged Schools were founded. I was first attracted to the subject, and indeed was first made conscious of their existence, about two years ago, or more, by seeing an advertisement in the papers dated from West Street, Saffron Hill, stating "That a room had been opened and supported in that wretched neighbourhood for upwards of twelve months, where religious instruction had been imparted to the poor", and explaining in a few words what was meant by Ragged Schools as a generic term, including, then, four or five similar places of instruction. I wrote to the masters of this particular school to make some further inquiries, and went myself soon afterwards.

It was a hot summer night; and the air of Field Lane and Saffron Hill was not improved by such weather, nor were the people in those streets very sober or honest company. Being unacquainted with the exact locality of the school, I was fain to make some inquiries about it. These were very jocosely received in general; but everybody knew where it was, and gave the right direction to it. The prevailing idea among the loungers (the greater part of them the very sweepings of the streets and station houses) seemed to be, that the teachers were quixotic, and the school upon the whole "a lark". But there was certainly a kind of rough respect for the intention, and (as I have said) nobody denied the school or its whereabouts, or refused assistance in directing to it.

It consisted at that time of either two or threeâ€”I forget whichâ€” miserable rooms, upstairs in a miserable house. In the best of these, the pupils in the female school were being taught to read and write; and though there were among the number, many wretched creatures steeped in degradation to the lips, they were tolerably quiet, and listened with apparent earnestness and patience to their instructors. The appearance of this room was sad and melancholy, of courseâ€”how could it be otherwise!â€—but, on the whole, encouraging.

The close, low chamber at the back, in which the boys were crowded, was so foul and stifling as to be, at first, almost insupportable. But its moral aspect was so far worse than its physical, that this was soon forgotten. Huddled together on a bench about the room, and shown out by some flaring candles stuck against the walls, were a crowd of boys, varying from mere infants to young men; sellers of fruit, herbs, lucifer-matches, flints; sleepers under the dry arches of bridges; young thieves and beggarsâ€—with nothing natural to youth about them: with nothing frank, ingenuous, or pleasant in their faces; low-browed, vicious, cunning, wicked; abandoned of all help but this; speeding downward to destruction; and UNUTTERABLY IGNORANT.

This, Reader, was one room as full as it could hold; but these were only grains in sample of a Multitude that are perpetually sifting through these schools; in sample of a Multitude who had within them once, and perhaps have now, the elements of men as good as you or I, and maybe infinitely better; in sample of a Multitude among whose doomed and sinful ranks (oh, think of this, and think of them!) the child of any man upon this earth, however lofty his degree, must, as by Destiny and Fate, be found, if, at its birth, it were consigned to such an infancy and nurture, as these fallen creatures had!

This was the Class I saw at the Ragged School. They could not be trusted with books; they could only be instructed orally; they were difficult of reduction to anything like attention, obedience, or decent behaviour; their benighted ignorance in reference to the Deity, or to any social duty (how could they guess at any social duty, being so discarded by all social teachers but the gaoler and the hangman!) was terrible to see. Yet, even here, and among these, something had been done already. The Ragged School was of recent date and very poor; but he had inculcated some association with the name of the Almighty, which was not an oath, and had taught them to look forward in a hymn (they sang it) to another life, which would correct the miseries and woes of this.

The new exposition I found in this Ragged School, of the frightful neglect by the State of those whom it punishes so constantly, and whom it might, as easily and less expensively, instruct and save; together with the sight I had seen there, in the heart of London; haunted me, and finally impelled me to an endeavour to bring these Institutions under the notice of the Government; with some faint hope that the vastness of the question would supersede the Theology of the schools, and that the Bench of Bishops might adjust the latter question, after some small grant had been conceded. I made the attempt; and have heard no more of the subject from that hour.

The perusal of an advertisement in yesterday's paper, announcing a lecture on the Ragged Schools last night, has led me into these remarks. I might easily have given them another form; but I address this letter to you, in the hope that some few readers in whom I have awakened an interest, as a writer of fiction, may be, by that means, attracted to the subject, who might otherwise, unintentionally, pass it over.

I have no desire to praise the system pursued in the Ragged Schools; which is necessarily very imperfect, if indeed there be one. So far as I have any means of judging of what is taught there, I should individually object to it, as not being sufficiently secular, and as presenting too many religious mysteries and difficulties, to minds not sufficiently prepared for their reception. But I should very imperfectly discharge in myself the duty I wish to urge and impress on others, if I allowed any such doubt of mine to interfere with my appreciation of the efforts of these teachers, or my true wish to promote them by any slight means in my power. Irritating topics, of all kinds, are equally far removed from my purpose and intention. But, I adjure those excellent persons who aid, munificently, in the building of New Churches, to think of these Ragged Schools; to reflect whether some portion of their rich endowments might not be spared for such a purpose; to contemplate, calmly, the necessity of beginning at the beginning; to consider for themselves where the Christian Religion most needs and most suggests immediate help and illustration; and not to decide on any theory or hearsay, but to go themselves into the Prisons and the Ragged Schools, and form their own conclusions. They will be shocked, pained, and repelled, by much that they learn there; but nothing they can learn will be one-thousandth part so shocking, painful, and repulsive, as the continuance for one year more of these things as they have been for too many years already.

Anticipating that some of the more prominent facts connected with the history of the Ragged Schools, may become known to the readers of The Daily News through your account of the lecture in question, I abstain (though in possession of some such information) from pursuing the question further, at this time. But if I should see occasion, I will take leave to return to it.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

I will take for the subject of this letter, the effect of Capital Punishment on the commission of crime, or rather of murder; the only crime with one exception (and that a rare one) to which it is now applied. Its effect in preventing crime, I will reserve for another letter: and a few of the more striking illustrations of each aspect of the subject, for a concluding one.

The effect of Capital Punishment on the commission of Murder.

Some murders are committed in hot blood and furious rage; some, in deliberate revenge; some, in terrible despair; some (but not many) for mere gain; some, for the removal of an object dangerous to the murderer's peace or good name; some, to win a monstrous notoriety.

On murders committed in rage, in the despair of strong affection (as when a starving child is murdered by its parent) or for gain, I believe the punishment of death to have no effect in the least. In the two first cases, the impulse is a blind and wild one, infinitely beyond the reach of any reference to the punishment. In the last, there is little calculation beyond the absorbing greed of the money to be got. Courvoisier, for example, might have robbed his master with greater safety, and with fewer chances of detection, if he had not murdered him. But, his calculations going to the gain and not to the loss, he had no balance for the consequences of what he did. So, it would have been more safe and prudent in the woman who was hanged a few weeks since, for the murder in Westminster, to have simply robbed her old companion in an unguarded moment, as in her sleep. But, her calculation going to the gain of what she took to be a Bank note; and the poor old woman living between her and the gain; she murdered her.

On murders committed in deliberate revenge, or to remove a stumbling block in the murderer's path, or in an insatiate craving for notoriety, is there reason to suppose that the punishment of death has the direct effect of an incentive and an impulse?

A murder is committed in deliberate revenge. The murderer is at no trouble to prepare his train of circumstances, takes little or no pains to escape, is quite cool and collected, perfectly content to deliver himself up to the Police, makes no secret of his guilt, but boldly says, "I killed him. I'm glad of it. I meant to do it. I am ready to die." There was such a case the other day. There was such another case not long ago. There are such cases frequently. It is the commonest first exclamation on being seized. Now, what is this but a false arguing of the question, announcing a foregone conclusion, expressly leading to the crime, and inseparably arising out of the Punishment of Death? "I took his life. I give up mine to pay for it. Life for life; blood for blood. I have done the crime. I am ready with the atonement. I know all about it; it's a fair bargain between me and the law. Here am I to execute my part of it; and what more is to be said or done?" It is the very essence of the maintenance of this punishment for murder, that it does set life against life. It is in the essence of a stupid, weak, or otherwise ill-regulated mind (of such a murderer's mind, in short), to recognise in this set off, a something that diminishes the base and coward character of murder. "In a pitched battle, I, a common man, may kill my adversary, but he may kill me. In a duel, a gentleman may shoot his opponent through the head, but the opponent may shoot him too, and this makes it fair. Very well. I take this man's life for a reason I have, or choose to think I have, and the law takes mine. The law says, and the clergyman says, there must be blood for blood and life for life. Here it is. I pay the penalty."

A mind incapable, or confounded in its perceptionsâ€”and you must argue with reference to such a mind, or you could not have such a murderâ€”may not only establish on these grounds an idea of strict justice and fair reparation, but a stubborn and dogged fortitude and foresight that satisfy it hugely. Whether the fact be really so, or not, is a question I would be content to rest, alone, on the number of cases of revengeful murder in which this is well known, without dispute, to have been the prevailing demeanour of the criminal: and in which such speeches and such absurd reasoning have been constantly uppermost with him. "Blood for blood", and "life for life", and such like balanced jingles, have passed current in people's mouths, from legislators downwards, until they have been corrupted into "tit for tat", and acted on.

Next, come the murders done, to sweep out of the way a dreaded or detested object. At the bottom of this class of crimes, there is a slow, corroding, growing hate. Violent quarrels are commonly found to have taken place between the murdered person and the murderer: usually of opposite sexes. There are witnesses to old scenes of reproach and recrimination, in which they were the actors; and the murderer has been heard to say, in this or that coarse phrase, "that he wouldn't mind killing her, though he should be hanged for it"â€”in these cases, the commonest avowal.

It seems to me, that in this well-known scrap of evidence, there is a deeper meaning than is usually attached to it. I do not know, but it may beâ€”I have a strong suspicion that it isâ€”a clue to the slow growth of the crime, and its gradual development in the mind. More than this; a clue to the mental connection of the deed, with the punishment to which the doer of that deed is liable, until the two, conjoined, give birth to monstrous and misshapen Murder.

The idea of murder, in such a case, like that of self-destruction in the great majority of instances, is not a new one. It may have presented itself to the disturbed mind in a dim shape and afar off; but it has been there. After a quarrel, or with some strong sense upon him of irritation or discomfort arising out of the continuance of this life in his path, the man has brooded over the unformed desire to take it. "Though he should be hanged for it." With the entrance of the Punishment into his thoughts, the shadow of the fatal beam begins to attendâ€”not on himself, but on the object of his hate. At every new temptation, it is there, stronger and blacker yet, trying to terrify him. When she defies or threatens him, the scaffold seems to be her strength and "vantage ground". Let her not be too sure of that; "though he should be hanged for it".

Thus, he begins to raise up, in the contemplation of this death by hanging, a new and violent enemy to brave. The prospect of a slow and solitary expiation would have no congeniality with his wicked thoughts, but this throttling and strangling has. There is always before him, an ugly, bloody, scarecrow phantom, that champions her, as it were, and yet shows him, in a ghastly way, the example of murder. Is she very weak, or very trustful in him, or infirm, or old? It gives a hideous courage to what would be mere slaughter otherwise; for there it is, a presence always about her, darkly menacing him with that penalty whose murky secret has a fascination for all secret and unwholesome thoughts. And when he struggles with his victim at the last, "though he should be hanged for it", it is a merciless wrestle, not with one weak life only, but with that ever- haunting, ever-beckoning shadow of the gallows, too; and with a fierce defiance to it, after their long survey of each other, to come on and do its worst.

Present this black idea of violence to a bad mind contemplating violence; hold up before a man remotely compassing the death of another person, the spectacle of his own ghastly and untimely death by man's hands; and out of the depths of his own nature you shall assuredly raise up that which lures and tempts him on. The laws which regulate those mysteries have not been studied or cared for, by the maintainers of this law; but they are paramount and will always assert their power.

Out of one hundred and sixty-seven persons under sentence of Death in England, questioned at different times, in the course of years, by an English clergyman in the performance of his duty, there were only three who had not been spectators of executions.

We come, now, to the consideration of those murders which are committed, or attempted, with no other object than the attainment of an infamous notoriety. That this class of crimes has its origin in the Punishment of Death, we cannot question; because (as we have already seen, and shall presently establish by another proof) great notoriety and interest attach, and are generally understood to attach, only to those criminals who are in danger of being executed.

One of the most remarkable instances of murder originating in mad self-conceit; and of the murderer's part in the repulsive drama, in which the law appears at such great disadvantage to itself and to society, being acted almost to the last with a self-complacency that would be horribly ludicrous if it were not utterly revolting; is presented in the case of Hocker.

Here is an insolent, flippant, dissolute youth: aping the man of intrigue and levity: over-dressed, over-confident, inordinately vain of his personal appearance: distinguished as to his hair, cane, snuff-box, and singing-voice: and unhappily the son of a working shoemaker. Bent on loftier flights than such a poor house- swallow as a teacher in a Sunday-school can take; and having no truth, industry, perseverance, or other dull work-a-day quality, to plume his wings withal; he casts about him, in his jaunty way, for some mode of distinguishing himselfâ€”some means of getting that head of hair into the print-shops; of having something like justice done to his singing-voice and fine intellect; of making the life and adventures of Thomas Hocker remarkable; and of getting up some excitement in connection with that slighted piece of biography. The Stage? No. Not feasible. There has always been a conspiracy against the Thomas Hockers, in that kind of effort. It has been the same with Authorship in prose and poetry. Is there nothing else? A Murder, now, would make a noise in the papers! There is the gallows to be sure; but without that, it would be nothing. Short of that, it wouldn't be fame. Well! We must all die at one time or other; and to die game, and have it in print, is just the thing for a man of spirit. They always die game at the Minor Theatres and the Saloons, and the people like it very much. Thurtell, too, died very game, and made a capital speech when he was tried. There's all about it in a book at the cigar-shop now. Come, Tom, get your name up! Let it be a dashing murder that shall keep the wood-engravers at it for the next two months. You are the boy to go through with it, and interest the town!

The miserable wretch, inflated by this lunatic conceit, arranges his whole plan for publication and effect. It is quite an epitome of his experience of the domestic melodrama or penny novel. There is the Victim Friend; the mysterious letter of the injured Female to the Victim Friend; the romantic spot for the Death-Struggle by night; the unexpected appearance of Thomas Hocker to the Policeman; the parlour of the Public House, with Thomas Hocker reading the paper to a strange gentleman; the Family Apartment, with a song by Thomas Hocker; the Inquest Room, with Thomas Hocker boldly looking on; the interior of the Marylebone Theatre, with Thomas Hocker taken into custody; the Police Office with Thomas Hocker "affable" to the spectators; the interior of Newgate, with Thomas Hocker preparing his defence; the Court, where Thomas Hocker, with his dancing-master airs, is put upon his trial, and complimented by the Judge; the Prosecution, the Defence, the Verdict, the Black Cap, the Sentenceâ€”each of them a line in any Playbill, and how bold a line in Thomas Hocker's life!

It is worthy of remark, that the nearer he approaches to the gallowsâ€”the great last scene to which the whole of these effects have been working upâ€”the more the overweening conceit of the poor wretch shows itself; the more he feels that he is the hero of the hour; the more audaciously and recklessly he lies, in supporting the character. In publicâ€—at the condemned sermonâ€”he deports himself as becomes the man whose autographs are precious, whose portraits are innumerable; in memory of whom, whole fences and gates have been borne away, in splinters, from the scene of murder. He knows that the eyes of Europe are upon him; but he is not proudâ€”only graceful. He bows, like the first gentleman in Europe, to the turnkey who brings him a glass of water; and composes his clothes and hassock as carefully, as good Madame Blaize could do. In privateâ€—within the walls of the condemned cellâ€—every word and action of his waning life, is a lie. His whole time is divided between telling lies and writing them. If he ever have another thought, it is for his genteel appearance on the scaffold; as when he begs the barber "not to cut his hair too short, or they won't know him when he comes out". His last proceeding but one is to write two romantic love letters to women who have no existence. His last proceeding of all (but less characteristic, though the only true one) is to swoon away, miserably, in the arms of the attendants, and be hanged up like a craven dog.

Is not such a history, from first to last, a most revolting and disgraceful one; and can the student of it bring himself to believe that it ever could have place in any record of facts, or that the miserable chief-actor in it could have ever had a motive for his arrogant wickedness, but for the comment and the explanation which the Punishment of Death supplies!

It is not a solitary case, nor is it a prodigy, but a mere specimen of a class. The case of Oxford, who fired at Her Majesty in the Park, will be found, on examination, to resemble it very nearly, in the essential feature. There is no proved pretence whatever for regarding him as mad; other than that he was like this malefactor, brimful of conceit, and a desire to become, even at the cost of the gallows (the only cost within his reach) the talk of the town. He had less invention than Hocker, and perhaps was not so deliberately bad; but his attempt was a branch of the same tree, and it has its root in the ground where the scaffold is erected.

Oxford had his imitators. Let it never be forgotten in the consideration of this part of the subject, how they were stopped. So long as attempts invested them with the distinction of being in danger of death at the hangman's hands, so long did they spring up. When the penalty of death was removed, and a mean and humiliating punishment substituted in its place, the race was at an end, and ceased to be.

II

We come, now, to consider the effect of Capital Punishment in the prevention of crime.

Does it prevent crime in those who attend executions?

There never is (and there never was) an execution at the Old Bailey in London, but the spectators include two large classes of thievesâ€” one class who go there as they would go to a dog-fight, or any other brutal sport, for the attraction and excitement of the spectacle; the other who make it a dry matter of business, and mix with the crowd solely to pick pockets. Add to these, the dissolute, the drunken, the most idle, profligate, and abandoned of both sexesâ€” some moody ill-conditioned minds, drawn thither by a fearful interestâ€”and some impelled by curiosity; of whom the greater part are of an age and temperament rendering the gratification of that curiosity highly dangerous to themselves and to societyâ€”and the great elements of the concourse are stated.

Nor is this assemblage peculiar to London. It is the same in country towns, allowing for the different statistics of the population. It is the same in America. I was present at an execution in Rome, for a most treacherous and wicked murder, and not only saw the same kind of assemblage there, but, wearing what is called a shooting-coat, with a great many pockets in it, felt innumerable hands busy in every one of them, close to the scaffold.

I have already mentioned that out of one hundred and sixty-seven convicts under sentence of death, questioned at different times in the performance of his duty by an English clergyman, there were only three who had not been spectators of executions. Mr. Wakefield, in his Facts relating to the Punishment of Death, goes into the working, as it were, of this sum. His testimony is extremely valuable, because it is the evidence of an educated and observing man, who, before having personal knowledge of the subject and of Newgate, was quite satisfied that the Punishment of Death should continue, but who, when he gained that experience, exerted himself to the utmost for its abolition, even at the pain of constant public reference in his own person to his own imprisonment. "It cannot be egotism", he reasonably observes, "that prompts a man to speak of himself in connection with Newgate."

"Whoever will undergo the pain," says Mr. Wakefield, "of witnessing the public destruction of a fellow-creature's life, in London, must be perfectly satisfied that in the great mass of spectators, the effect of the punishment is to excite sympathy for the criminal and hatred of the law. . . I am inclined to believe that the criminals of London, spoken of as a class and allowing for exceptions, take the same sort of delight in witnessing executions, as the sportsman and soldier find in the dangers of hunting and war. . . I am confident that few Old Bailey Sessions pass without the trial of a boy, whose first thought of crime occurred whilst he was witnessing an execution. . . And one grown man, of great mental powers and superior education, who was acquitted of a charge of forgery, assured me that the first idea of committing a forgery occurred to him at the moment when he was accidentally witnessing the execution of Fauntleroy. To which it may be added, that Fauntleroy is said to have made precisely the same declaration in reference to the origin of his own criminality.

But one convict "who was within an ace of being hanged", among the many with whom Mr. Wakefield conversed, seems to me to have unconsciously put a question which the advocates of Capital Punishment would find it very difficult indeed to answer. "Have you often seen an execution?" asked Mr. Wakefield. "Yes, often." "Did it not frighten you?" "No. Why should it?"

It is very easy and very natural to turn from this ruffian, shocked by the hardened retort; but answer his question, why should it? Should he be frightened by the sight of a dead man? We are born to die, he says, with a careless triumph. We are not born to the treadmill, or to servitude and slavery, or to banishment; but the executioner has done no more for that criminal than nature may do tomorrow for the judge, and will certainly do, in her own good time, for judge and jury, counsel and witnesses, turnkeys, hangman, and all. Should he be frightened by the manner of the death? It is horrible, truly, so horrible, that the law, afraid or ashamed of its own deed, hides the face of the struggling wretch it slays; but does this fact naturally awaken in such a man, terrorâ€”or defiance? Let the same man speak. "What did you think then?" asked Mr. Wakefield. "Think? Why, I thought it was aâ€”shame."

Disgust and indignation, or recklessness and indifference, or a morbid tendency to brood over the sight until temptation is engendered by it, are the inevitable consequences of the spectacle, according to the difference of habit and disposition in those who behold it. Why should it frighten or deter? We know it does not. We know it from the police reports, and from the testimony of those who have experience of prisons and prisoners, and we may know it, on the occasion of an execution, by the evidence of our own senses; if we will be at the misery of using them for such a purpose. But why should it? Who would send his child or his apprentice, or what tutor would send his scholars, or what master would send his servants, to be deterred from vice by the spectacle of an execution? If it be an example to criminals, and to criminals only, why are not the prisoners in Newgate brought out to see the show before the debtors' door? Why, while they are made parties to the condemned sermon, are they rigidly excluded from the improving postscript of the gallows? Because an execution is well known to be an utterly useless, barbarous, and brutalising sight, and because the sympathy of all beholders, who have any sympathy at all, is certain to be always with the criminal, and never with the law.

I learn from the newspaper accounts of every execution, how Mr. So-and-so, and Mr. Somebody else, and Mr. So-forth shook hands with the culprit, but I never find them shaking hands with the hangman. All kinds of attention and consideration are lavished on the one; but the other is universally avoided, like a pestilence. I want to know why so much sympathy is expended on the man who kills another in the vehemence of his own bad passions, and why the man who kills him in the name of the law is shunned and fled from? Is it because the murderer is going to die? Then by no means put him to death. Is it because the hangman executes a law, which, when they once come near it face to face, all men instinctively revolt from? Then by all means change it. There is, there can be, no prevention in such a law.

It may be urged that Public Executions are not intended for the benefit of those dregs of society who habitually attend them. This is an absurdity, to which the obvious answer is, So much the worse. If they be not considered with reference to that class of persons, comprehending a great host of criminals in various stages of development, they ought to be, and must be. To lose sight of that consideration is to be irrational, unjust, and cruel. All other punishments are especially devised, with a reference to the rooted habits, propensities, and antipathies of criminals. And shall it be said, out of Bedlam, that this last punishment of all is alone to be made an exception from the rule, even where it is shown to be a means of propagating vice and crime?

But there may be people who do not attend executions, to whom the general fame and rumour of such scenes is an example, and a means of deterring from crime.

Who are they? We have seen that around Capital Punishment there lingers a fascination, urging weak and bad people towards it, and imparting an interest to details connected with it, and with malefactors awaiting it or suffering it, which even good and well- disposed people cannot withstand. We know that last-dying speeches and Newgate calendars are the favourite literature of very low intellects. The gallows is not appealed to as an example in the instruction of youth (unless they are training for it); nor are there condensed accounts of celebrated executions for the use of national schools. There is a story in an old spelling-book of a certain Don't Care who was hanged at last, but it is not understood to have had any remarkable effect on crimes or executions in the generation to which it belonged, and with which it has passed away. Hogarth's idle apprentice is hanged; but the whole sceneâ€”with the unmistakable stout lady, drunk and pious, in the cast; the quarrelling, blasphemy, lewdness, and uproar; Tiddy Doll vending his gingerbread, and the boys picking his pocketâ€”is a bitter satire on the great example; as efficient then, as now.

Is it efficient to prevent crime? The parliamentary returns demonstrate that it is not. I was engaged in making some extracts from these documents, when I found them so well abstracted in one of the papers published by the committee on this subject established at Aylesbury last year, by the humane exertions of Lord Nugent, that I am glad to quote the general results from its pages:

"In 1843 a return was laid on the table of the House of the commitments and executions for murder in England and Wales during the thirty years ending with December 1842, divided into five periods of six years each. It shows that in the last six years, from 1836 to 1842, during which there were only 50 executions, the commitments for murder were fewer by 61 than in the six years preceding with 74 executions; fewer by 63 than in the six years ending 1830 with 75 executions; fewer by 56 than in the six years ending 1824 with 94 executions; and fewer by 93 than in the six years ending 1818 when there was no less a number of executions than 122. But it may be said, perhaps, that in the inference we draw from this return, we are substituting cause for effect, and that in each successive cycle, the number of murders decreased in consequence of the example of public executions in the cycle immediately preceding, and that it was for that reason there were fewer commitments. This might be said with some colour of truth, if the example had been taken from two successive cycles only. But when the comparative examples adduced are of no less than five successive cycles, and the result gradually and constantly progressive in the same direction, the relation of facts to each other is determined beyond all ground for dispute, namely, that the number of these crimes has diminished in consequence of the diminution of the number of executions. More especially when it is also remembered that it was immediately after the first of these cycles of five years, when there had been the greatest number of executions and the greatest number of murders, that the greatest number of persons were suddenly cast loose upon the country, without employ, by the reduction of the Army and Navy; that then came periods of great distress and great disturbance in the agricultural and manufacturing districts; and above all, that it was during the subsequent cycles that the most important mitigations were effected in the law, and that the Punishment of Death was taken away not only for crimes of stealth, such as cattle and horse stealing and forgery, of which crimes corresponding statistics show likewise a corresponding decrease, but for the crimes of violence too, tending to murder, such as are many of the incendiary offences, and such as are highway robbery and burglary. But another return, laid before the House at the same time, bears upon our argument, if possible, still more conclusively. In table 11 we have only the years which have occurred since 1810, in which all persons convicted of murder suffered death; and, compared with these an equal number of years in which the smallest proportion of persons convicted were executed. In the first case there were 66 persons convicted, all of whom underwent the penalty of death; in the second 83 were convicted, of whom 31 only were executed. Now see how these two very different methods of dealing with the crime of murder affected the commission of it in the years immediately following. The number of commitments for murder, in the four years immediately following those in which all persons convicted were executed, was 270.

"In the four years immediately following those in which little more than one-third of the persons convicted were executed, there were but 222, being 48 less. If we compare the commitments in the following years with those in the first years, we shall find that, immediately after the examples of unsparing execution, the crime increased nearly 13 per cent., and that after commutation was the practice and capital punishment the exception, it decreased 17 per cent.

"In the same parliamentary return is an account of the commitments and executions in London and Middlesex, spread over a space of 32 years, ending in 1842, divided into two cycles of 16 years each. In the first of these, 34 persons were convicted of murder, all of whom were executed. In the second, 27 were convicted, and only 17 executed. The commitments for murder during the latter long period, with 17 executions, were more than one half fewer than they had been in the former long period with exactly double the number of executions. This appears to us to be as conclusive upon our argument as any statistical illustration can be upon any argument professing to place successive events in the relation of cause and effect to each other. How justly then is it said in that able and useful periodical work, now in the course of publication at Glasgow, under the name of the Magazine of Popular Information on Capital and Secondary Punishment, 'the greater the number of executions, the greater the number of murders; the smaller the number of executions, the smaller the number of murders. The lives of her Majesty's subjects are less safe with a hundred executions a year than with fifty; less safe with fifty than with twenty-five.'"

Similar results have followed from rendering public executions more and more infrequent, in Tuscany, in Prussia, in France, in Belgium. Wherever capital punishments are diminished in their number, there, crimes diminish in their number too.

But the very same advocates of the punishment of Death who contend, in the teeth of all facts and figures, that it does prevent crime, contend in the same breath against its abolition because it does not! "There are so many bad murders," say they, "and they follow in such quick succession, that the Punishment must not be repealed." Why, is not this a reason, among others, for repealing it? Does it not go to show that it is ineffective as an example; that it fails to prevent crime; and that it is wholly inefficient to stay that imitation, or contagion, call it what you please, which brings one murder on the heels of another?

One forgery came crowding on another's heels in the same way, when the same punishment attached to that crime. Since it has been removed, forgeries have diminished in a most remarkable degree. Yet within five and thirty years, Lord Eldon, with tearful solemnity, imagined in the House of Lords as a possibility for their Lordships to shudder at, that the time might come when some visionary and morbid person might even propose the abolition of the punishment of Death for forgery. And when it was proposed, Lords Lyndhurst, Wynford, Tenterden, and Eldonâ€”all Law Lordsâ€”opposed it.

The same Lord Tenterden manfully said, on another occasion and another question, that he was glad the subject of the amendment of the laws had been taken up by Mr. Peel, "who had not been bred to the law; for those who were, were rendered dull, by habit, to many of its defects!" I would respectfully submit, in extension of this text, that a criminal judge is an excellent witness against the Punishment of Death, but a bad witness in its favour; and I will reserve this point for a few remarks in the next, concluding, Letter.

III

The last English Judge, I believe, who gave expression to a public and judicial opinion in favour of the punishment of Death, is Mr. Justice Coleridge, who, in charging the Grand Jury at Hertford last year, took occasion to lament the presence of serious crimes in the calendar, and to say that he feared that they were referable to the comparative infrequency of Capital Punishment.

It is not incompatible with the utmost deference and respect for an authority so eminent, to say that, in this, Mr. Justice Coleridge was not supported by facts, but quite the reverse. He went out of his way to found a general assumption on certain very limited and partial grounds, and even on those grounds was wrong. For among the few crimes which he instanced, murder stood prominently forth. Now persons found guilty of murder are more certainly and unsparingly hanged at this time, as the Parliamentary Returns demonstrate, than such criminals ever were. So how can the decline of public executions affect that class of crimes? As to persons committing murder, and yet not found guilty of it by juries, they escape solely because there are many public executionsâ€”not because there are none or few.

But when I submit that a criminal judge is an excellent witness against Capital Punishment, but a bad witness in its favour, I do so on more broad and general grounds than apply to this error in fact and deduction (so I presume to consider it) on the part of the distinguished judge in question. And they are grounds which do not apply offensively to judges, as a class; than whom there are no authorities in England so deserving of general respect and confidence, or so possessed of it; but which apply alike to all men in their several degrees and pursuits.

It is certain that men contract a general liking for those things which they have studied at great cost of time and intellect, and their proficiency in which has led to their becoming distinguished and successful. It is certain that out of this feeling arises, not only that passive blindness to their defects of which the example given by my Lord Tenterden was quoted in the last letter, but an active disposition to advocate and defend them. If it were otherwise; if it were not for this spirit of interest and partisanship; no single pursuit could have that attraction for its votaries which most pursuits in course of time establish. Thus legal authorities are usually jealous of innovations on legal principles. Thus it is described of the lawyer in the Introductory Discourse to the Description of Utopia, that he said of a proposal against Capital Punishment, "'this could never be so established in England but that it must needs bring the weal-public into great jeopardy and hazard', and as he was thus saying, he shaked his head, and made a wry mouth, and so he held his peace". Thus the Recorder of London, in 1811, objected to "the capital part being taken off" from the offence of picking pockets. Thus the Lord Chancellor, in 1813, objected to the removal of the penalty of death from the offence of stealing to the amount of five shillings from a shop. Thus, Lord Ellenborough, in 1820, anticipated the worst effects from there being no punishment of death for stealing five shillings worth of wet linen from a bleaching ground. Thus the Solicitor General, in 1830, advocated the punishment of death for forgery, and "the satisfaction of thinking" in the teeth of mountains of evidence from bankers and other injured parties (one thousand bankers alone!) "that he was deterring persons from the commission of crime, by the severity of the law". Thus, Mr. Justice Coleridge delivered his charge at Hertford in 1845. Thus there were in the criminal code of England, in 1790, one hundred and sixty crimes punishable with death. Thus the lawyer has said, again and again, in his generation, that any change in such a state of things "must needs bring the weal-public into jeopardy and hazard". And thus he has, all through the dismal history, "shaked his head, and made a wry mouth, and held his peace". Exceptâ€”a glorious exception!â€”when such lawyers as Bacon, More, Blackstone, Romilly, andâ€”let us ever gratefully rememberâ€”in later times Mr. Basil Montagu, have striven, each in his day, within the utmost limits of the endurance of the mistaken feeling of the people or the legislature of the time, to champion and maintain the truth.

There is another and a stronger reason still, why a criminal judge is a bad witness in favour of the punishment of Death. He is a chief actor in the terrible drama of a trial, where the life or death of a fellow creature is at issue. No one who has seen such a trial can fail to know, or can ever forget, its intense interest. I care not how painful this interest is to the good, wise judge upon the bench. I admit its painful nature, and the judge's goodness and wisdom to the fullest extentâ€”but I submit that his prominent share in the excitement of such a trial, and the dread mystery involved, has a tendency to bewilder and confuse the judge upon the general subject of that penalty. I know the solemn pause before the verdict, the bush and stifling of the fever in the court, the solitary figure brought back to the bar, and standing there, observed of all the outstretched heads and gleaming eyes, to be next minute stricken dead as one may say, among them. I know the thrill that goes round when the black cap is put on, and how there will be shrieks among the women, and a taking out of some one in a swoon; and, when the judge's faltering voice delivers sentence, how awfully the prisoner and he confront each other; two mere men, destined one day, however far removed from one another at this time, to stand alike as suppliants at the bar of God. I know all this, I can imagine what the office of the judge costs in this execution of it; but I say that in these strong sensations he is lost, and is unable to abstract the penalty as a preventive or example, from an experience of it, and from associations surrounding it, which are and can be, only his, and his alone.

Not to contend that there is no amount of wig or ermine that can change the nature of the man inside; not to say that the nature of a judge may be, like the dyer's hand, subdued to what it works in, and may become too used to this punishment of death to consider it quite dispassionately; not to say that it may possibly be inconsistent to have, deciding as calm authorities in favour of death, judges who have been constantly sentencing to death;â€”I contend that for the reasons I have stated alone, a judge, and especially a criminal judge, is a bad witness for the punishment but an excellent witness against it, inasmuch as in the latter case his conviction of its inutility has been so strong and paramount as utterly to beat down and conquer these adverse incidents. I have no scruple in stating this position, because, for anything I know, the majority of excellent judges now on the bench may have overcome them, and may be opposed to the punishment of Death under any circumstances.

I mentioned that I would devote a portion of this letter to a few prominent illustrations of each head of objection to the punishment of Death. Those on record are so very numerous that selection is extremely difficult; but in reference to the possibility of mistake, and the impossibility of reparation, one case is as good (I should rather say as bad) as a hundred; and if there were none but Eliza Fenning's, that would be sufficient. Nay, if there were none at all, it would be enough to sustain this objection, that men of finite and limited judgment do inflict, on testimony which admits of doubt, an infinite and irreparable punishment. But there are on record numerous instances of mistake; many of them very generally known and immediately recognisable in the following summary, which I copy from the New York Report already referred to.

"There have been cases in which groans have been heard in the apartment of the crime, which have attracted the steps of those on whose testimony the case has turnedâ€”when, on proceeding to the spot, they have found a man bending over the murdered body, a lantern in the left hand, and the knife yet dripping with the warm current in the blood-stained right, with horror-stricken countenance, and lips which, in the presence of the dead, seem to refuse to deny the crime in the very act of which he is thus surprisedâ€”and yet the man has been, many years after, when his memory alone could be benefited by the discovery, ascertained not to have been the real murderer! There have been cases in which, in a house in which were two persons alone, a murder has been committed on one of themâ€”when many additional circumstances have fastened the imputation upon the otherâ€”and when, all apparent modes of access from without, being closed inward, the demonstration has seemed complete of the guilt for which that other has suffered the doom of the lawâ€”yet suffered innocently! There have been cases in which a father has been found murdered in an outhouse, the only person at home being a son, sworn by a sister to have been dissolute and undutiful, and anxious for the death of the father, and succession to the family propertyâ€”when the track of his shoes in the snow is found from the house to the spot of the murder, and the hammer with which it was committed (known as his own), found, on a search, in the corner of one of his private drawers, with the bloody evidence of the deed only imperfectly effaced from itâ€”and yet the son has been innocent! â€”the sister, years after, on her death-bed, confessing herself the fratricide as well as the parricide. There have been cases in which men have been hung on the most positive testimony to identity (aided by many suspicious circumstances), by persons familiar with their appearance, which have afterwards proved grievous mistakes, growing out of remarkable personal resemblance. There have been cases in which two men have been seen fighting in a fieldâ€”an old enmity existing between themâ€”the one found dead, killed by a stab from a pitchfork known as belonging to the other, and which that other had been carrying, the pitch-fork lying by the side of the murdered manâ€”and yet its owner has been afterwards found not to have been the author of the murder of which it had been the instrument, the true murderer sitting on the jury that tried him. There have been cases in which an innkeeper has been charged by one of his servants with the murder of a traveller, the servant deposing to having seen his master on the stranger's bed, strangling him, and afterwards rifling his pocketsâ€”another servant deposing that she saw him come down at that time at a very early hour in the morning, steal into the garden, take gold from his pocket, and carefully wrapping it up bury it in a designated spotâ€—on the search of which the ground is found loose and freshly dug, and a sum of thirty pounds in gold found buried according to the descriptionâ€—the master, who confessed the burying of the money, with many evidences of guilt in his hesitation and confusion, has been hung of course, and proved innocent only too late. There have been cases in which a traveller has been robbed on the highway of twenty guineas, which he had taken the precaution to markâ€—one of these is found to have been paid away or changed by one of the servants of the inn which the traveller reaches the same eveningâ€”the servant is about the height of the robber, who had been cloaked and disguisedâ€”his master deposes to his having been recently unaccountably extravagant and flush of goldâ€”and on his trunk being searched the other nineteen marked guineas and the traveller's purse are found there, the servant being asleep at the time, half-drunkâ€”he is of course convicted and hung, for the crime of which his master was the author! There have been cases in which a father and daughter have been overheard in violent disputeâ€”the words "barbarity", "cruelly", and "death", being heard frequently to proceed from the latterâ€”the former goes out locking the door behind himâ€”groans are overheard, and the words, "cruel father, thou art the cause of my death!"â€”on the room being opened she is found on the point of death from a wound in her side, and near her the knife with which it had been inflictedâ€”and on being questioned as to her owing her death to her father, her last motion before expiring is an expression of assentâ€” the father, on returning to the room, exhibits the usual evidences of guiltâ€”he, too, is of course hungâ€”and it is not till nearly a year afterwards that, on the discovery of conclusive evidence that it was a suicide, the vain reparation is made, to his memory by the public authorities, ofâ€”waving a pair of colours over his grave in token of the recognition of his innocence."

More than a hundred such cases are known, it is said in this Report, in English criminal jurisprudence. The same Report contains three striking cases of supposed criminals being unjustly hanged in America; and also five more in which people whose innocence was not afterwards established were put to death on evidence as purely circumstantial and as doubtful, to say the least of it, as any that was held to be sufficient in this general summary of legal murders. Mr. O'Connell defended, in Ireland, within five and twenty years, three brothers who were hanged for a murder of which they were afterwards shown to have been innocent. I cannot find the reference at this moment, but I have seen it stated on good authority, that but for the exertions, I think of the present Lord Chief Baron, six or seven innocent men would certainly have been hanged. Such are the instances of wrong judgment which are known to us. How many more there may be in which the real murderers never disclosed their guilt, or were never discovered, and where the odium of great crimes still rests on guiltless people long since resolved to dust in their untimely graves, no human power can tell.

The effect of public executions on those who witness them, requires no better illustration, and can have none, than the scene which any execution in itself presents, and the general Police-office knowledge of the offences arising out of them. I have stated my belief that the study of rude scenes leads to the disregard of human life, and to murder. Referring, since that expression of opinion, to the very last trial for murder in London, I have made inquiry, and am assured that the youth now under sentence of death in Newgate for the murder of his master in Drury Lane, was a vigilant spectator of the three last public executions in this City. What effects a daily increasing familiarity with the scaffold, and with death upon it, wrought in France in the Great Revolution, everybody knows. In reference to this very question of Capital Punishment, Robespierre himself, before he was

"in blood stept in so far",

warned the National Assembly that in taking human life, and in displaying before the eyes of the people scenes of cruelty and the bodies of murdered men, the law awakened ferocious prejudices, which gave birth to a long and growing train of their own kind. With how much reason this was said, let his own detestable name bear witness! If we would know how callous and hardened society, even in a peaceful and settled state, becomes to public executions when they are frequent, let us recollect how few they were who made the last attempt to stay the dreadful Monday-morning spectacles of men and women strung up in a row for crimes as different in their degree as our whole social scheme is different in its component parts, which, within some fifteen years or so, made human shambles of the Old Bailey.

There is no better way of testing the effect of public executions on those who do not actually behold them, but who read of them and know of them, than by inquiring into their efficiency in preventing crime. In this respect they have always, and in all countries, failed. According to all facts and figures, failed. In Russia, in Spain, in France, in Italy, in Belgium, in Sweden, in England, there has been one result. In Bombay, during the Recordership of Sir James Macintosh, there were fewer crimes in seven years without one execution, than in the preceding seven years with forty-seven executions; notwithstanding that in the seven years without capital punishment, the population had greatly increased, and there had been a large accession to the numbers of the ignorant and licentious soldiery, with whom the more violent offences originated. During the four wickedest years of the Bank of England (from 1814 to 1817, inclusive), when the one-pound note capital prosecutions were most numerous and shocking, the number of forged one-pound notes discovered by the Bank steadily increased, from the gross amount in the first year of 10,342 pounds, to the gross amount in the last of 28,412 pounds. But in every branch of this part of the subjectâ€”the inefficiency of capital punishment to prevent crime, and its efficiency to produce itâ€”the body of evidence (if there were space to quote or analyse it here) is overpowering and resistless.

I have purposely deferred until now any reference to one objection which is urged against the abolition of capital punishment: I mean that objection which claims to rest on Scriptural authority.

It was excellently well said by Lord Melbourne, that no class of persons can be shown to be very miserable and oppressed, but some supporters of things as they are will immediately rise up and assertâ€”not that those persons are moderately well to do, or that their lot in life has a reasonably bright sideâ€”but that they are, of all sorts and conditions of men, the happiest. In like manner, when a certain proceeding or institution is shown to be very wrong indeed, there is a class of people who rush to the fountainhead at once, and will have no less an authority for it than the Bible, on any terms.

So, we have the Bible appealed to in behalf of Capital Punishment. So, we have the Bible produced as a distinct authority for Slavery. So, American representatives find the title of their country to the Oregon territory distinctly laid down in the Book of Genesis. So, in course of time, we shall find Repudiation, perhaps, expressly commanded in the Sacred Writings.

It is enough for me to be satisfied, on calm inquiry and with reason, that an Institution or Custom is wrong and bad; and thence to feel assured that IT CANNOT BE a part of the law laid down by the Divinity who walked the earth. Though every other man who wields a pen should turn himself into a commentator on the Scripturesâ€”not all their united efforts, pursued through our united lives, could ever persuade me that Slavery is a Christian law; nor, with one of these objections to an execution in my certain knowledge, that Executions are a Christian law, my will is not concerned. I could not, in my veneration for the life and lessons of Our Lord, believe it. If any text appeared to justify the claim, I would reject that limited appeal, and rest upon the character of the Redeemer, and the great scheme of His Religion, where, in its broad spirit, made so plainâ€”and not this or that disputed letterâ€”we all put our trust. But, happily, such doubts do not exist. The case is far too plain. The Rev. Henry Christmas, in a recent pamphlet on this subject, shows clearly that in five important versions of the Old Testament (to say nothing of versions of less note) the words, "by man", in the often-quoted text, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed", do not appear at all. We know that the law of Moses was delivered to certain wandering tribes in a peculiar and perfectly different social condition from that which prevails among us at this time. We know that the Christian Dispensation did distinctly repeal and annul certain portions of that law. We know that the doctrine of retributive justice or vengeance, was plainly disavowed by the Saviour. We know that on the only occasion of an offender, liable by the law to death, being brought before Him for His judgment, it was not death. We know that He said, "Thou shalt not kill". And if we are still to inflict capital punishment because of the Mosaic law (under which it was not the consequence of a legal proceeding, but an act of vengeance from the next of kin, which would surely be discouraged by our later laws if it were revived among the Jews just now) it would be equally reasonable to establish the lawfulness of a plurality of wives on the same authority.

Here I will leave this aspect of the question. I should not have treated of it at all in the columns of a newspaper, but for the possibility of being unjustly supposed to have given it no consideration in my own mind.

In bringing to a close these letters on a subject, in connection with which there is happily very little that is new to be said or written, I beg to be understood as advocating the total abolition of the Punishment of Death, as a general principle, for the advantage of society, for the prevention of crime, and without the least reference to, or tenderness for any individual malefactor whomsoever. Indeed, in most cases of murder, my feeling towards the culprit is very strongly and violently the reverse. I am the more desirous to be so understood, after reading a speech made by Mr. Macaulay in the House of Commons last Tuesday night, in which that accomplished gentleman hardly seemed to recognise the possibility of anybody entertaining an honest conviction of the inutility and bad effects of Capital Punishment in the abstract, founded on inquiry and reflection, without being the victim of "a kind of effeminate feeling". Without staying to inquire what there may be that is especially manly and heroic in the advocacy of the gallows, or to express my admiration of Mr. Calcraft, the hangman, as doubtless one of the most manly specimens now in existence, I would simply hint a doubt, in all good humour, whether this be the true Macaulay way of meeting a great question? One of the instances of effeminacy of feeling quoted by Mr. Macaulay, I have reason to think was not quite fairly stated. I allude to the petition in Tawell's case. I had neither hand nor part in it myself; but, unless I am greatly mistaken, it did pretty clearly set forth that Tawell was a most abhorred villain, and that the House might conclude how strongly the petitioners were opposed to the Punishment of Death, when they prayed for its non-infliction even in such a case.

THE SPIRIT OF CHIVALRY IN WESTMINSTER HALL

"Of all the cants that are canted in this canting world," wrote Sterne, "kind Heaven defend me from the cant of Art!" We have no intention of tapping our little cask of cant, soured by the thunder of great men's fame, for the refreshment of our readers: its freest draught would be unreasonably dear at a shilling, when the same small liquor may be had for nothing, at innumerable ready pipes and conduits.

But it is a main part of the design of this Magazine to sympathise with what is truly great and good; to scout the miserable discouragements that beset, especially in England, the upward path of men of high desert; and gladly to give honour where it is due, in right of Something achieved, tending to elevate the tastes and thoughts of all who contemplate it, and prove a lasting credit to the country of its birth.

Upon the walls of Westminster Hall, there hangs, at this time, such a Something. A composition of such marvellous beauty, of such infinite variety, of such masterly design, of such vigorous and skilful drawing, of such thought and fancy, of such surprising and delicate accuracy of detail, subserving one grand harmony, and one plain purpose, that it may be questioned whether the Fine Arts in any period of their history have known a more remarkable performance.

It is the cartoon of Daniel Maclise, "executed by order of the Commissioners", and called The Spirit of Chivalry. It may be left an open question, whether or no this allegorical order on the part of the Commissioners, displays any uncommon felicity of idea. We rather think not; and are free to confess that we should like to have seen the Commissioners' notion of the Spirit of Chivalry stated by themselves, in the first instance, on a sheet of foolscap, as the ground-plan of a model cartoon, with all the commissioned proportions of height and breadth. That the treatment of such an abstraction, for the purposes of Art, involves great and peculiar difficulties, no one who considers the subject for a moment can doubt. That nothing is easier to render it absurd and monstrous, is a position as little capable of dispute by anybody who has beheld another cartoon on the same subject in the same Hall, representing a Ghoule in a state of raving madness, dancing on a Body in a very high wind, to the great astonishment of John the Baptist's head, which is looking on from a corner.

Mr. Maclise's handling of the subject has by this time sunk into the hearts of thousands upon thousands of people. It is familiar knowledge among all classes and conditions of men. It is the great feature within the Hall, and the constant topic of discourse elsewhere. It has awakened in the great body of society a new interest in, and a new perception and a new love of, Art. Students of Art have sat before it, hour by hour, perusing in its many forms of Beauty, lessons to delight the world, and raise themselves, its future teachers, in its better estimation. Eyes well accustomed to the glories of the Vatican, the galleries of Florence, all the mightiest works of art in Europe, have grown dim before it with the strong emotions it inspires; ignorant, unlettered, drudging men, mere hewers and drawers, have gathered in a knot about it (as at our back a week ago), and read it, in their homely language, as it were a Book. In minds, the roughest and the most refined, it has alike found quick response; and will, and must, so long as it shall hold together.

For how can it be otherwise? Look up, upon the pressing throng who strive to win distinction from the Guardian Genius of all noble deeds and honourable renown,â€”a gentle Spirit, holding her fair state for their reward and recognition (do not be alarmed, my Lord Chamberlain; this is only in a picture); and say what young and ardent heart may not find one to beat in unison with itâ€”beat high with generous aspiration like its ownâ€”in following their onward course, as it is traced by this great pencil! Is it the Love of Woman, in its truth and deep devotion, that inspires you? See it here! Is it Glory, as the world has learned to call the pomp and circumstance of arms? Behold it at the summit of its exaltation, with its mailed hand resting on the altar where the Spirit ministers. The Poet's laurel-crown, which they who sit on thrones can neither twine or witherâ€”is that the aim of thy ambition? It is there, upon his brow; it wreathes his stately forehead, as he walks apart and holds communion with himself. The Palmer and the Bard are there; no solitary wayfarers, now; but two of a great company of pilgrims, climbing up to honour by the different paths that lead to the great end. And sure, amidst the gravity and beauty of them all- -unseen in his own form, but shining in his spirit, out of every gallant shape and earnest thoughtâ€”the Painter goes triumphant!

Or say that you who look upon this work, be old, and bring to it grey hairs, a head bowed down, a mind on which the day of life has spent itself, and the calm evening closes gently in. Is its appeal to you confined to its presentment of the Past? Have you no share in this, but while the grace of youth and the strong resolve of maturity are yours to aid you? Look up again. Look up where the spirit is enthroned, and see about her, reverend men, whose task is done; whose struggle is no more; who cluster round her as her train and council; who have lost no share or interest in that great rising up and progress, which bears upward with it every means of human happiness, but, true in Autumn to the purposes of Spring, are there to stimulate the race who follow in their steps; to contemplate, with hearts grown serious, not cold or sad, the striving in which they once had part; to die in that great Presence, which is Truth and Bravery, and Mercy to the Weak, beyond all power of separation.

It would be idle to observe of this last group that, both in execution and idea, they are of the very highest order of Art, and wonderfully serve the purpose of the picture. There is not one among its three-and-twenty heads of which the same remark might not be made. Neither will we treat of great effects produced by means quite powerless in other hands for such an end, or of the prodigious force and colour which so separate this work from all the rest exhibited, that it would scarcely appear to be produced upon the same kind of surface by the same description of instrument. The bricks and stones and timbers of the Hall itself are not facts more indisputable than these.

It has been objected to this extraordinary work that it is too elaborately finished; too complete in its several parts. And Heaven knows, if it be judged in this respect by any standard in the Hall about it, it will find no parallel, nor anything approaching to it. But it is a design, intended to be afterwards copied and painted in fresco; and certain finish must be had at last, if not at first. It is very well to take it for granted in a Cartoon that a series of cross-lines, almost as rough and apart as the lattice-work of a garden summerhouse, represents the texture of a human face; but the face cannot be painted so. A smear upon the paper may be understood, by virtue of the context gained from what surrounds it, to stand for a limb, or a body, or a cuirass, or a hat and feathers, or a flag, or a boot, or an angel. But when the time arrives for rendering these things in colours on a wall, they must be grappled with, and cannot be slurred over in this wise. Great misapprehension on this head seems to have been engendered in the minds of some observers by the famous cartoons of Raphael; but they forget that these were never intended as designs for fresco painting. They were designs for tapestry-work, which is susceptible of only certain broad and general effects, as no one better knew than the Great Master. Utterly detestable and vile as the tapestry is, compared with the immortal Cartoons from which it was worked, it is impossible for any man who casts his eyes upon it where it hangs at Rome, not to see immediately the special adaptation of the drawings to that end, and for that purpose. The aim of these Cartoons being wholly different, Mr. Maclise's object, if we understand it, was to show precisely what he meant to do, and knew he could perform, in fresco, on a wall. And here his meaning is; worked out; without a compromise of any difficulty; without the avoidance of any disconcerting truth; expressed in all its beauty, strength, and power.

To what end? To be perpetuated hereafter in the high place of the chief Senate-House of England? To be wrought, as it were, into the very elements of which that Temple is composed; to co-endure with it, and still present, perhaps, some lingering traces of its ancient Beauty, when London shall have sunk into a grave of grass-grown ruin,â€”and the whole circle of the Arts, another revolution of the mighty wheel completed, shall be wrecked and broken?

Let us hope so. We will contemplate no other possibilityâ€”at present.

IN MEMORIAMâ€”W. M. THACKERAY

It has been desired by some of the personal friends of the great English writer who established this magazine, {1} that its brief record of his having been stricken from among men should be written by the old comrade and brother in arms who pens these lines, and of whom he often wrote himself, and always with the warmest generosity.

I saw him first nearly twenty-eight years ago, when he proposed to become the illustrator of my earliest book. I saw him last, shortly before Christmas, at the Athenaeum Club, when he told me that he had been in bed three daysâ€”that, after these attacks, he was troubled with cold shiverings, "which quite took the power of work out of him"â€”and that he had it in his mind to try a new remedy which he laughingly described. He was very cheerful, and looked very bright. In the night of that day week, he died.

The long interval between those two periods is marked in my remembrance of him by many occasions when he was supremely humorous, when he was irresistibly extravagant, when he was softened and serious, when he was charming with children. But, by none do I recall him more tenderly than by two or three that start out of the crowd, when he unexpectedly presented himself in my room, announcing how that some passage in a certain book had made him cry yesterday, and how that he had come to dinner, "because he couldn't help it", and must talk such passage over. No one can ever have seen him more genial, natural, cordial, fresh, and honestly impulsive, than I have seen him at those times. No one can be surer than I, of the greatness and the goodness of the heart that then disclosed itself.

We had our differences of opinion. I thought that he too much feigned a want of earnestness, and that he made a pretence of under- valuing his art, which was not good for the art that he held in trust. But, when we fell upon these topics, it was never very gravely, and I have a lively image of him in my mind, twisting both his hands in his hair, and stamping about, laughing, to make an end of the discussion.

When we were associated in remembrance of the late Mr. Douglas Jerrold, he delivered a public lecture in London, in the course of which, he read his very best contribution to Punch, describing the grown-up cares of a poor family of young children. No one hearing him could have doubted his natural gentleness, or his thoroughly unaffected manly sympathy with the weak and lowly. He read the paper most pathetically, and with a simplicity of tenderness that certainly moved one of his audience to tears. This was presently after his standing for Oxford, from which place he had dispatched his agent to me, with a droll note (to which he afterwards added a verbal postscript), urging me to "come down and make a speech, and tell them who he was, for he doubted whether more than two of the electors had ever heard of him, and he thought there might be as many as six or eight who had heard of me". He introduced the lecture just mentioned, with a reference to his late electioneering failure, which was full of good sense, good spirits, and good humour.

He had a particular delight in boys, and an excellent way with them. I remember his once asking me with fantastic gravity, when he had been to Eton where my eldest son then was, whether I felt as he did in regard of never seeing a boy without wanting instantly to give him a sovereign? I thought of this when I looked down into his grave, after he was laid there, for I looked down into it over the shoulder of a boy to whom he had been kind.

These are slight remembrances; but it is to little familiar things suggestive of the voice, look, manner, never, never more to be encountered on this earth, that the mind first turns in a bereavement. And greater things that are known of him, in the way of his warm affections, his quiet endurance, his unselfish thoughtfulness for others, and his munificent hand, may not be told.

If, in the reckless vivacity of his youth, his satirical pen had ever gone astray or done amiss, he had caused it to prefer its own petition for forgiveness, long before:-

I've writ the foolish fancy of his brain;
The aimless jest that, striking, hath caused pain;
The idle word that he'd wish back again.

In no pages should I take it upon myself at this time to discourse of his books, of his refined knowledge of character, of his subtle acquaintance with the weaknesses of human nature, of his delightful playfulness as an essayist, of his quaint and touching ballads, of his mastery over the English language. Least of all, in these pages, enriched by his brilliant qualities from the first of the series, and beforehand accepted by the Public through the strength of his great name.

But, on the table before me, there lies all that he had written of his latest and last story. That it would be very sad to any oneâ€” that it is inexpressibly so to a writerâ€”in its evidences of matured designs never to be accomplished, of intentions begun to be executed and destined never to be completed, of careful preparation for long roads of thought that he was never to traverse, and for shining goals that he was never to reach, will be readily believed. The pain, however, that I have felt in perusing it, has not been deeper than the conviction that he was in the healthiest vigour of his powers when he wrought on this last labour. In respect of earnest feeling, far-seeing purpose, character, incident, and a certain loving picturesqueness blending the whole, I believe it to be much the best of all his works. That he fully meant it to be so, that he had become strongly attached to it, and that he bestowed great pains upon it, I trace in almost every page. It contains one picture which must have cost him extreme distress, and which is a masterpiece. There are two children in it, touched with a hand as loving and tender as ever a father caressed his little child with. There is some young love as pure and innocent and pretty as the truth. And it is very remarkable that, by reason of the singular construction of the story, more than one main incident usually belonging to the end of such a fiction is anticipated in the beginning, and thus there is an approach to completeness in the fragment, as to the satisfaction of the reader's mind concerning the most interesting persons, which could hardly have been better attained if the writer's breaking-off had been foreseen.

The last line he wrote, and the last proof he corrected, are among these papers through which I have so sorrowfully made my way. The condition of the little pages of manuscript where Death stopped his hand, shows that he had carried them about, and often taken them out of his pocket here and there, for patient revision and interlineation. The last words he corrected in print were, "And my heart throbbed with an exquisite bliss". GOD grant that on that Christmas Eve when he laid his head back on his pillow and threw up his arms as he had been wont to do when very weary, some consciousness of duty done and Christian hope throughout life humbly cherished, may have caused his own heart so to throb, when he passed away to his Redeemer's rest!

He was found peacefully lying as above described, composed, undisturbed, and to all appearance asleep, on the twenty-fourth of December 1863. He was only in his fifty-third year; so young a man that the mother who blessed him in his first sleep blessed him in his last. Twenty years before, he had written, after being in a white squall:

And when, its force expended,
The harmless storm was ended,
And, as the sunrise splendid
Came blushing o'er the sea;
I thought, as day was breaking,
My little girls were waking,
And smiling, and making
A prayer at home for me.

Those little girls had grown to be women when the mournful day broke that saw their father lying dead. In those twenty years of companionship with him they had learned much from him; and one of them has a literary course before her, worthy of her famous name.

On the bright wintry day, the last but one of the old year, he was laid in his grave at Kensal Green, there to mingle the dust to which the mortal part of him had returned, with that of a third child, lost in her infancy years ago. The heads of a great concourse of his fellow-workers in the Arts were bowed around his tomb.

ADELAIDE ANNE PROCTER INTRODUCTION TO HER "LEGENDS AND LYRICS"

In the spring of the year 1853, I observed, as conductor of the weekly journal Household Words, a short poem among the proffered contributions, very different, as I thought, from the shoal of verses perpetually setting through the office of such a periodical, and possessing much more merit. Its authoress was quite unknown to me. She was one Miss Mary Berwick, whom I had never heard of; and she was to be addressed by letter, if addressed at all, at a circulating library in the western district of London. Through this channel, Miss Berwick was informed that her poem was accepted, and was invited to send another. She complied, and became a regular and frequent contributor. Many letters passed between the journal and Miss Berwick, but Miss Berwick herself was never seen.

How we came gradually to establish, at the office of Household Words, that we knew all about Miss Berwick, I have never discovered. But we settled somehow, to our complete satisfaction, that she was governess in a family; that she went to Italy in that capacity, and returned; and that she had long been in the same family. We really knew nothing whatever of her, except that she was remarkably business-like, punctual, self-reliant, and reliable: so I suppose we insensibly invented the rest. For myself, my mother was not a more real personage to me, than Miss Berwick the governess became.

This went on until December, 1854, when the Christmas number, entitled The Seven Poor Travellers, was sent to press. Happening to be going to dine that day with an old and dear friend, distinguished in literature as Barry Cornwall, I took with me an early proof of that number, and remarked, as I laid it on the drawing-room table, that it contained a very pretty poem, written by a certain Miss Berwick. Next day brought me the disclosure that I had so spoken of the poem to the mother of its writer, in its writer's presence; that I had no such correspondent in existence as Miss Berwick; and that the name had been assumed by Barry Cornwall's eldest daughter, Miss Adelaide Anne Procter.

The anecdote I have here noted down, besides serving to explain why the parents of the late Miss Procter have looked to me for these poor words of remembrance of their lamented child, strikingly illustrates the honesty, independence, and quiet dignity, of the lady's character. I had known her when she was very young; I had been honoured with her father's friendship when I was myself a young aspirant; and she had said at home, "If I send him, in my own name, verses that he does not honestly like, either it will be very painful to him to return them, or he will print them for papa's sake, and not for their own. So I have made up my mind to take my chance fairly with the unknown volunteers."

Perhaps it requires an editor's experience of the profoundly unreasonable grounds on which he is often urged to accept unsuitable articlesâ€”such as having been to school with the writer's husband's brother-in-law, or having lent an alpenstock in Switzerland to the writer's wife's nephew, when that interesting stranger had broken his ownâ€”fully to appreciate the delicacy and the self-respect of this resolution.

Some verses by Miss Procter had been published in the Book of Beauty, ten years before she became Miss Berwick. With the exception of two poems in the Cornhill Magazine, two in Good Words, and others in a little book called A Chaplet of Verses (issued in 1862 for the benefit of a Night Refuge), her published writings first appeared in Household Words, or All the Year Round. The present edition contains the whole of her Legends and Lyrics, and originates in the great favour with which they have been received by the public.

Miss Procter was born in Bedford Square, London, on the 30th of October, 1825. Her love of poetry was conspicuous at so early an age, that I have before me a tiny album made of small note-paper, into which her favourite passages were copied for her by her mother's hand before she herself could write. It looks as if she had carried it about, as another little girl might have carried a doll. She soon displayed a remarkable memory, and great quickness of apprehension. When she was quite a young child, she learned with facility several of the problems of Euclid. As she grew older, she acquired the French, Italian, and German languages; became a clever pianoforte player; and showed a true taste and sentiment in drawing. But, as soon as she had completely vanquished the difficulties of any one branch of study, it was her way to lose interest in it, and pass to another. While her mental resources were being trained, it was not at all suspected in her family that she had any gift of authorship, or any ambition to become a writer. Her father had no idea of her having ever attempted to turn a rhyme, until her first little poem saw the light in print.

When she attained to womanhood, she had read an extraordinary number of books, and throughout her life she was always largely adding to the number. In 1853 she went to Turin and its neighbourhood, on a visit to her aunt, a Roman Catholic lady. As Miss Procter had herself professed the Roman Catholic Faith two years before, she entered with the greater ardour on the study of the Piedmontese dialect, and the observation of the habits and manners of the peasantry. In the former, she soon became a proficient. On the latter head, I extract from her familiar letters written home to England at the time, two pleasant pieces of description.

A BETROTHAL

"We have been to a ball, of which I must give you a description. Last Tuesday we had just done dinner at about seven, and stepped out into the balcony to look at the remains of the sunset behind the mountains, when we heard very distinctly a band of music, which rather excited my astonishment, as a solitary organ is the utmost that toils up here. I went out of the room for a few minutes, and, on my returning, Emily said, 'Oh! That band is playing at the farmer's near here. The daughter is fiancee to-day, and they have a ball.' I said, 'I wish I was going!' 'Well,' replied she, 'the farmer's wife did call to invite us.' 'Then I shall certainly go,' I exclaimed. I applied to Madame B., who said she would like it very much, and we had better go, children and all. Some of the servants were already gone. We rushed away to put on some shawls, and put off any shred of black we might have about us (as the people would have been quite annoyed if we had appeared on such an occasion with any black), and we started. When we reached the farmer's, which is a stone's throw above our house, we were received with great enthusiasm; the only drawback being, that no one spoke French, and we did not yet speak Piedmontese. We were placed on a bench against the wall, and the people went on dancing. The room was a large whitewashed kitchen (I suppose), with several large pictures in black frames, and very smoky. I distinguished the Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian, and the others appeared equally lively and appropriate subjects. Whether they were Old

Masters or not, and if so, by whom, I could not ascertain. The band were seated opposite us. Five men, with wind instruments, part of the band of the National Guard, to which the farmer's sons belong. They played really admirably, and I began to be afraid that some idea of our dignity would prevent me getting a partner; so, by Madame B.'s advice, I went up to the bride, and offered to dance with her. Such a handsome young woman! Like one of Uwins's pictures. Very dark, with a quantity of black hair, and on an immense scale. The children were already dancing, as well as the maids. After we came to an end of our dance, which was what they called a Polka-Mazourka, I saw the bride trying to screw up the courage of her fiance to ask me to dance, which after a little hesitation he did. And admirably he danced, as indeed they all didâ€”in excellent time, and with a little more spirit than one sees in a ball-room. In fact, they were very like one's ordinary partners, except that they wore earrings and were in their shirt-sleeves, and truth compels me to state that they decidedly smelt of garlic. Some of them had been smoking, but threw away their cigars when we came in. The only thing that did not look cheerful was, that the room was only lighted by two or three oil-lamps, and that there seemed to be no preparation for refreshments. Madame B., seeing this, whispered to her maid, who disengaged herself from her partner, and ran off to the house; she and the kitchenmaid presently returning with a large tray covered with all kinds of cakes (of which we are great consumers and always have a stock), and a large hamper full of bottles of wine, with coffee and sugar. This seemed all very acceptable. The fiancee was requested to distribute the eatables, and a bucket of water being produced to wash the glasses in, the wine disappeared very quicklyâ€” as fast as they could open the bottles. But, elated, I suppose, by this, the floor was sprinkled with water, and the musicians played a Monferrino, which is a Piedmontese dance. Madame B. danced with the farmer's son, and Emily with another distinguished member of the company. It was very fatiguingâ€—something like a Scotch reel. My partner was a little man, like Perrot, and very proud of his dancing. He cut in the air and twisted about, until I was out of breath, though my attempts to imitate him were feeble in the extreme. At last, after seven or eight dances, I was obliged to sit down. We stayed till nine, and I was so dead beat with the heat that I could hardly crawl about the house, and in an agony with the cramp, it is so long since I have danced."

A MARRIAGE

The wedding of the farmer's daughter has taken place. We had hoped it would have been in the little chapel of our house, but it seems some special permission was necessary, and they applied for it too late. They all said, "This is the Constitution. There would have been no difficulty before!" the lower classes making the poor Constitution the scapegoat for everything they don't like. So as it was impossible for us to climb up to the church where the wedding was to be, we contented ourselves with seeing the procession pass. It was not a very large one, for, it requiring some activity to go up, all the old people remained at home. It is not etiquette for the bride's mother to go, and no unmarried woman can go to a weddingâ€”I suppose for fear of its making her discontented with her own position. The procession stopped at our door, for the bride to receive our congratulations. She was dressed in a shot silk, with a yellow handkerchief, and rows of a large gold chain. In the afternoon they sent to request us to go there. On our arrival we found them dancing out of doors, and a most melancholy affair it was. All the bride's sisters were not to be recognised, they had cried so. The mother sat in the house, and could not appear. And the bride was sobbing so, she could hardly stand! The most melancholy spectacle of all to my mind was, that the bridegroom was decidedly tipsy. He seemed rather affronted at all the distress. We danced a Monferrino; I with the bridegroom; and the bride crying the whole time. The company did their utmost to enliven her by firing pistols, but without success, and at last they began a series of yells, which reminded me of a set of savages. But even this delicate method of consolation failed, and the wishing good-bye began. It was altogether so melancholy an affair that Madame B. dropped a few tears, and I was very near it, particularly when the poor mother came out to see the last of her daughter, who was finally dragged off between her brother and uncle, with a last explosion of pistols. As she lives quite near, makes an excellent match, and is one of nine children, it really was a most desirable marriage, in spite of all the show of distress. Albert was so discomfited by it, that he forgot to kiss the bride as he had intended to do, and therefore went to call upon her yesterday, and found her very smiling in her new house, and supplied the omission. The cook came home from the wedding, declaring she was cured of any wish to marryâ€”but I would not recommend any man to act upon that threat and make her an offer. In a couple of days we had some rolls of the bride's first baking, which they call Madonnas. The musicians, it seems, were in the same state as the bridegroom, for, in escorting her home, they all fell down in the mud. My wrath against the bridegroom is somewhat calmed by finding that it is considered bad luck if he does not get tipsy at his wedding."

Those readers of Miss Procter's poems who should suppose from their tone that her mind was of a gloomy or despondent cast, would be curiously mistaken. She was exceedingly humorous, and had a great delight in humour. Cheerfulness was habitual with her, she was very ready at a sally or a reply, and in her laugh (as I remember well) there was an unusual vivacity, enjoyment, and sense of drollery. She was perfectly unconstrained and unaffected: as modestly silent about her productions, as she was generous with their pecuniary results. She was a friend who inspired the strongest attachments; she was a finely sympathetic woman, with a great accordant heart and a sterling noble nature. No claim can be set up for her, thank God, to the possession of any of the conventional poetical qualities. She never by any means held the opinion that she was among the greatest of human beings; she never suspected the existence of a conspiracy on the part of mankind against her; she never recognised in her best friends, her worst enemies; she never cultivated the luxury of being misunderstood and unappreciated; she would far rather have died without seeing a line of her composition in print, than that I should have maundered about her, here, as "the Poet", or "the Poetess".

With the recollection of Miss Procter as a mere child and as a woman, fresh upon me, it is natural that I should linger on my way to the close of this brief record, avoiding its end. But, even as the close came upon her, so must it come here.

Always impelled by an intense conviction that her life must not be dreamed away, and that her indulgence in her favourite pursuits must be balanced by action in the real world around her, she was indefatigable in her endeavours to do some good. Naturally enthusiastic, and conscientiously impressed with a deep sense of her Christian duty to her neighbour, she devoted herself to a variety of benevolent objects. Now, it was the visitation of the sick, that had possession of her; now, it was the sheltering of the houseless; now, it was the elementary teaching of the densely ignorant; now, it was the raising up of those who had wandered and got trodden under foot; now, it was the wider employment of her own sex in the general business of life; now, it was all these things at once. Perfectly unselfish, swift to sympathise and eager to relieve, she wrought at such designs with a flushed earnestness that disregarded season, weather, time of day or night, food, rest. Under such a hurry of the spirits, and such incessant occupation, the strongest constitution will commonly go down. Hers, neither of the strongest nor the weakest, yielded to the burden, and began to sink.

To have saved her life, then, by taking action on the warning that shone in her eyes and sounded in her voice, would have been impossible, without changing her nature. As long as the power of moving about in the old way was left to her, she must exercise it, or be killed by the restraint. And so the time came when she could move about no longer, and took to her bed.

All the restlessness gone then, and all the sweet patience of her natural disposition purified by the resignation of her soul, she lay upon her bed through the whole round of changes of the seasons. She lay upon her bed through fifteen months. In all that time, her old cheerfulness never quitted her. In all that time, not an impatient or a querulous minute can be remembered.

At length, at midnight on the second of February, 1864, she turned down a leaf of a little book she was reading, and shut it up.

The ministering hand that had copied the verses into the tiny album was soon around her neck, and she quietly asked, as the clock was on the stroke of one:

"Do you think I am dying, mamma?"

"I think you are very, very ill to-night, my dear!"

"Send for my sister. My feet are so cold. Lift me up?"

Her sister entering as they raised her, she said: "It has come at last!" And with a bright and happy smile, looked upward, and departed.

Well had she written:

Why shouldst thou fear the beautiful angel, Death,
Who waits thee at the portals of the skies,
Ready to kiss away thy struggling breath,
Ready with gentle hand to close thine eyes?

Oh what were life, if life were all? Thine eyes
Are blinded by their tears, or thou wouldst see
Thy treasures wait thee in the far-off skies,
And Death, thy friend, will give them all to thee.

CHAUNCEY HARE TOWNSHEND EXPLANATORY INTRODUCTION TO "RELIGIOUS OPINIONS" BY THE LATE REVEREND CHAUNCEY HARE TOWNSHEND

Mr. Chauncey Hare Townshend died in London, on the 25th of February 1868. His will contained the following passage:-

"I appoint my friend Charles Dickens, of Gad's Hill Place, in the County of Kent, Esquire, my literary executor; and beg of him to publish without alteration as much of my notes and reflections as may make known my opinions on religious matters, they being such as I verily believe would be conducive to the happiness of mankind."

In pursuance of the foregoing injunction, the Literary Executor so appointed (not previously aware that the publication of any Religious Opinions would be enjoined upon him), applied himself to the examination of the numerous papers left by his deceased friend. Some of these were in Lausanne, and some were in London. Considerable delay occurred before they could be got together, arising out of certain claims preferred, and formalities insisted on by the authorities of the Canton de Vaud. When at length the whole of his late friend's papers passed into the Literary Executor's hands, it was found that Religious Opinions were scattered up and down through a variety of memoranda and note-books, the gradual accumulation of years and years. Many of the following pages were carefully transcribed, numbered, connected, and prepared for the press; but many more were dispersed fragments, originally written in pencil, afterwards inked over, the intended sequence of which in the writer's mind, it was extremely difficult to follow. These again were intermixed with journals of travel, fragments of poems, critical essays, voluminous correspondence, and old school-exercises and college themes, having no kind of connection with them.

To publish such materials "without alteration", was simply impossible. But finding everywhere internal evidence that Mr. Townshend's Religious Opinions had been constantly meditated and reconsidered with great pains and sincerity throughout his life, the Literary Executor carefully compiled them (always in the writer's exact words), and endeavoured in piecing them together to avoid needless repetition. He does not doubt that Mr. Townshend held the clue to a precise plan, which could have greatly simplified the presentation of these views; and he has devoted the first section of this volume to Mr. Townshend's own notes of his comprehensive intentions. Proofs of the devout spirit in which they were conceived, and of the sense of responsibility with which he worked at them, abound through the whole mass of papers. Mr. Townshend's varied attainments, delicate tastes, and amiable and gentle nature, caused him to be beloved through life by the variously distinguished men who were his compeers at Cambridge long ago. To his Literary Executor he was always a warmly-attached and sympathetic friend. To the public, he has been a most generous benefactor, both in his munificent bequest of his collection of precious stones in the South Kensington Museum, and in the devotion of the bulk of his property to the education of poor children.

ON MR. FECHTER'S ACTING

The distinguished artist whose name is prefixed to these remarks purposes to leave England for a professional tour in the United States. A few words from me, in reference to his merits as an actor, I hope may not be uninteresting to some readers, in advance of his publicly proving them before an American audience, and I know will not be unacceptable to my intimate friend. I state at once that Mr. Fechter holds that relation towards me; not only because it is the fact, but also because our friendship originated in my public appreciation of him. I had studied his acting closely, and had admired it highly, both in Paris and in London, years before we exchanged a word. Consequently my appreciation is not the result of personal regard, but personal regard has sprung out of my appreciation.

The first quality observable in Mr. Fechter's acting is, that it is in the highest degree romantic. However elaborated in minute details, there is always a peculiar dash and vigour in it, like the fresh atmosphere of the story whereof it is a part. When he is on the stage, it seems to me as though the story were transpiring before me for the first and last time. Thus there is a fervour in his love-makingâ€”a suffusion of his whole being with the rapture of his passionâ€”that sheds a glory on its object, and raises her, before the eyes of the audience, into the light in which he sees her. It was this remarkable power that took Paris by storm when he became famous in the lover's part in the Dame aux Camelias. It is a short part, really comprised in two scenes, but, as he acted it (he was its original representative), it left its poetic and exalting influence on the heroine throughout the play. A woman who could be so lovedâ€”who could be so devotedly and romantically adoredâ€”had a hold upon the general sympathy with which nothing less absorbing and complete could have invested her. When I first saw this play and this actor, I could not in forming my lenient judgment of the heroine, forget that she had been the inspiration of a passion of which I had beheld such profound and affecting marks. I said to myself, as a child might have said: "A bad woman could not have been the object of that wonderful tenderness, could not have so subdued that worshipping heart, could not have drawn such tears from such a lover". I am persuaded that the same effect was wrought upon the Parisian audiences, both consciously and unconsciously, to a very great extent, and that what was morally disagreeable in the Dame aux Camelias first got lost in this brilliant halo of romance. I have seen the same play with the same part otherwise acted, and in exact degree as the love became dull and earthy, the heroine descended from her pedestal.

In Ruy Blas, in the Master of Ravenswood, and in the Lady of Lyonsâ€”three dramas in which Mr. Fechter especially shines as a lover, but notably in the firstâ€”this remarkable power of surrounding the beloved creature, in the eyes of the audience, with the fascination that she has for him, is strikingly displayed. That observer must be cold indeed who does not feel, when Ruy Blas stands in the presence of the young unwedded Queen of Spain, that the air is enchanted; or, when she bends over him, laying her tender touch upon his bloody breast, that it is better so to die than to live apart from her, and that she is worthy to be so died for. When the Master of Ravenswood declares his love to Lucy Ashton, and she hers to him, and when in a burst of rapture, he kisses the skirt of her dress, we feel as though we touched it with our lips to stay our goddess from soaring away into the very heavens. And when they plight their troth and break the piece of gold, it is weâ€”not Edgarâ€”who quickly exchange our half for the half she was about to hang about her neck, solely because the latter has for an instant touched the bosom we so dearly love. Again, in the Lady of Lyons: the picture on the easel in the poor cottage studio is not the unfinished portrait of a vain and arrogant girl, but becomes the sketch of a Soul's high ambition and aspiration here and hereafter.

Picturesqueness is a quality above all others pervading Mr. Fechter's assumptions. Himself a skilled painter and sculptor, learned in the history of costume, and informing those accomplishments and that knowledge with a similar infusion of romance (for romance is inseparable from the man), he is always a picture,â€”always a picture in its right place in the group, always in true composition with the background of the scene. For picturesqueness of manner, note so trivial a thing as the turn of his hand in beckoning from a window, in Ruy Blas, to a personage down in an outer courtyard to come up; or his assumption of the Duke's livery in the same scene; or his writing a letter from dictation. In the last scene of Victor Hugo's noble drama, his bearing becomes positively inspired; and his sudden assumption of the attitude of the headsman, in his denunciation of the Duke and threat to be his executioner, is, so far as I know, one of the most ferociously picturesque things conceivable on the stage.

The foregoing use of the word "ferociously" reminds me to remark that this artist is a master of passionate vehemence; in which aspect he appears to me to represent, perhaps more than in any other, an interesting union of characteristics of two great nations,â€”the French and the Anglo-Saxon. Born in London of a French mother, by a German father, but reared entirely in England and in France, there is, in his fury, a combination of French suddenness and impressibility with our more slowly demonstrative Anglo-Saxon way when we get, as we say, "our blood up", that produces an intensely fiery result. The fusion of two races is in it, and one cannot decidedly say that it belongs to either; but one can most decidedly say that it belongs to a powerful concentration of human passion and emotion, and to human nature.

Mr. Fechter has been in the main more accustomed to speak French than to speak English, and therefore he speaks our language with a French accent. But whosoever should suppose that he does not speak English fluently, plainly, distinctly, and with a perfect understanding of the meaning, weight, and value of every word, would be greatly mistaken. Not only is his knowledge of Englishâ€” extending to the most subtle idiom, or the most recondite cant phraseâ€”more extensive than that of many of us who have English for our mother-tongue, but his delivery of Shakespeare's blank verse is remarkably facile, musical, and intelligent. To be in a sort of pain for him, as one sometimes is for a foreigner speaking English, or to be in any doubt of his having twenty synonymes at his tongue's end if he should want one, is out of the question after having been of his audience.

A few words on two of his Shakespearian impersonations, and I shall have indicated enough, in advance of Mr. Fechter's presentation of himself. That quality of picturesqueness, on which I have already laid stress, is strikingly developed in his Iago, and yet it is so judiciously governed that his Iago is not in the least picturesque according to the conventional ways of frowning, sneering, diabolically grinning, and elaborately doing everything else that would induce Othello to run him through the body very early in the play. Mr. Fechter's is the Iago who could, and did, make friends, who could dissect his master's soul, without flourishing his scalpel as if it were a walking-stick, who could overpower Emilia by other arts than a sign-of-the-Saracen's-Head grimness; who could be a boon companion without ipso facto warning all beholders off by the portentous phenomenon; who could sing a song and clink a can naturally enough, and stab men really in the dark,â€”not in a transparent notification of himself as going about seeking whom to stab. Mr. Fechter's Iago is no more in the conventional psychological mode than in the conventional hussar pantaloons and boots; and you shall see the picturesqueness of his wearing borne out in his bearing all through the tragedy down to the moment when he becomes invincibly and consistently dumb.

Perhaps no innovation in Art was ever accepted with so much favour by so many intellectual persons pre-committed to, and preoccupied by, another system, as Mr. Fechter's Hamlet. I take this to have been the case (as it unquestionably was in London), not because of its picturesqueness, not because of its novelty, not because of its many scattered beauties, but because of its perfect consistency with itself. As the animal-painter said of his favourite picture of rabbits that there was more nature about those rabbits than you usually found in rabbits, so it may be said of Mr. Fechter's Hamlet, that there was more consistency about that Hamlet than you usually found in Hamlets. Its great and satisfying originality was in its possessing the merit of a distinctly conceived and executed idea. From the first appearance of the broken glass of fashion and mould of form, pale and worn with weeping for his father's death, and remotely suspicious of its cause, to his final struggle with Horatio for the fatal cup, there were cohesion and coherence in Mr. Fechter's view of the character. Devrient, the German actor, had, some years before in London, fluttered the theatrical doves considerably, by such changes as being seated when instructing the players, and like mild departures from established usage; but he had worn, in the main, the old nondescript dress, and had held forth, in the main, in the old way, hovering between sanity and madness. I do not remember whether he wore his hair crisply curled short, as if he were going to an everlasting dancing-master's party at the Danish court; but I do remember that most other Hamlets since the great Kemble had been bound to do so. Mr. Fechter's Hamlet, a pale, woebegone Norseman with long flaxen hair, wearing a strange garb never associated with the part upon the English stage (if ever seen there at all) and making a piratical swoop upon the whole fleet of little theatrical prescriptions without meaning, or, like Dr. Johnson's celebrated friend, with only one idea in them, and that a wrong one, never could have achieved its extraordinary success but for its animation by one pervading purpose, to which all changes were made intelligently subservient. The bearing of this purpose on the treatment of Ophelia, on the death of Polonius, and on the old student fellowship between Hamlet and Horatio, was exceedingly striking; and the difference between picturesqueness of stage arrangement for mere stage effect, and for the elucidation of a meaning, was well displayed in there having been a gallery of musicians at the Play, and in one of them passing on his way out, with his instrument in his hand, when Hamlet, seeing it, took it from him, to point his talk with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

This leads me to the observation with which I have all along desired to conclude: that Mr. Fechter's romance and picturesqueness are always united to a true artist's intelligence, and a true artist's training in a true artist's spirit. He became one of the company of the Theatre Francais when he was a very young man, and he has cultivated his natural gifts in the best schools. I cannot wish my friend a better audience than he will have in the American people, and I cannot wish them a better actor than they will have in my friend.

Footnotes:

{1} Cornhill Magazine

THE END OF
Miscellaneous Papers

MRS. LIRRIPER’S LEGACY

CHAPTER I—MRS. LIRRIPER RELATES HOW SHE WENT ON, AND WENT OVER

Ah! It’s pleasant to drop into my own easy-chair my dear though a little palpitating what with trotting up-stairs and what with trotting down, and why kitchen stairs should all be corner stairs is for the builders to justify though I do not think they fully understand their trade and never did, else why the sameness and why not more conveniences and fewer draughts and likewise making a practice of laying the plaster on too thick I am well convinced which holds the damp, and as to chimney-pots putting them on by guess-work like hats at a party and no more knowing what their effect will be upon the smoke bless you than I do if so much, except that it will mostly be either to send it down your throat in a straight form or give it a twist before it goes there. And what I says speaking as I find of those new metal chimneys all manner of shapes (there’s a row of ’em at Miss Wozenham’s lodging-house lower down on the other side of the way) is that they only work your smoke into artificial patterns for you before you swallow it and that I’d quite as soon swallow mine plain, the flavour being the same, not to mention the conceit of putting up signs on the top of your house to show the forms in which you take your smoke into your inside.

Being here before your eyes my dear in my own easy-chair in my own quiet room in my own Lodging-House Number Eighty-one Norfolk Street Strand London situated midway between the City and St. James’s—if anything is where it used to be with these hotels calling themselves Limited but called unlimited by Major Jackman rising up everywhere and rising up into flagstaffs where they can’t go any higher, but my mind of those monsters is give me a landlord’s or landlady’s wholesome face when I come off a journey and not a brass plate with an electrified number clicking out of it which it’s not in nature can be glad to see me and to which I don’t want to be hoisted like molasses at the Docks and left there telegraphing for help with the most ingenious instruments but quite in vain—being here my dear I have no call to mention that I am still in the Lodgings as a business hoping to die in the same and if agreeable to the clergy partly read over at Saint

Clement’s Danes and concluded in Hatfield churchyard when lying once again by my poor Lirriper ashes to ashes and dust to dust.

Neither should I tell you any news my dear in telling you that the Major is still a fixture in the Parlours quite as much so as the roof of the house, and that Jemmy is of boys the best and brightest and has ever had kept from him the cruel story of his poor pretty young mother Mrs. Edson being deserted in the second floor and dying in my arms, fully believing that I am his born Gran and him an orphan, though what with engineering since he took a taste for it and him and the Major making Locomotives out of parasols broken iron pots and cotton-reels and them absolutely a getting off the line and falling over the table and injuring the passengers almost equal to the originals it really is quite wonderful. And when I says to the Major, “Major can’t you by *any* means give us a communication with the guard?” the Major says quite huffy, “No madam it’s not to be done,” and when I says “Why not?” the Major says, “That is between us who are in the Railway Interest madam and our friend the Right Honourable Vice-President of the Board of Trade” and if you’ll believe me my dear the Major wrote to Jemmy at school to consult him on the answer I should have before I could get even that amount of unsatisfactoriness out of the man, the reason being that when we first began with the little model and the working signals beautiful and perfect (being in general as wrong as the real) and when I says laughing “What appointment am I to hold in this undertaking gentlemen?” Jemmy hugs me round the neck and tells me dancing, “You shall be the Public Gran” and consequently they put upon me just as much as ever they like and I sit a growling in my easy-chair.

My dear whether it is that a grown man as clever as the Major cannot give half his heart and mind to anything—even a plaything—but must get into right down earnest with it, whether it is so or whether it is not so I do not undertake to say, but Jemmy is far out-done by the serious and believing ways of the Major in the management of the United Grand Junction Lirriper and Jackman Great Norfolk Parlour Line, “For” says my Jemmy with the sparkling eyes when it was christened, “we must have a whole mouthful of name Gran or our dear old Public” and there the young rogue kissed me, “won’t stump up.” So the Public took the shares—ten at ninepence, and immediately when that was spent twelve Preference at one and sixpence—and they were all signed by Jemmy and countersigned by the Major, and between ourselves much better worth the money than some shares I have paid for in my time. In the same holidays the line was made and worked and opened and ran excursions and had collisions and burst its boilers and all sorts of accidents and offences all most regular correct and pretty. The sense of responsibility entertained by the Major as a military style of station-master my dear starting the down train behind time and ringing one of those little bells that you buy with the little coal-scuttles off the tray round the man's neck in the street did him honour, but noticing the Major of a night when he is writing out his monthly report to Jemmy at school of the state of the Rolling Stock and the Permanent Way and all the rest of it (the whole kept upon the Major's sideboard and dusted with his own hands every morning before varnishing his boots) I notice him as full of thought and care as full can be and frowning in a fearful manner, but indeed the Major does nothing by halves as witness his great delight in going out surveying with Jemmy when he has Jemmy to go with, carrying a chain and a measuring-tape and driving I don't know what improvements right through Westminster Abbey and fully believed in the streets to be knocking everything upside down by Act of Parliament. As please Heaven will come to pass when Jemmy takes to that as a profession!

Mentioning my poor Lirriper brings into my head his own youngest brother the Doctor though Doctor of what I am sure it would be hard to say unless Liquor, for neither Physic nor Music nor yet Law does Joshua Lirriper know a morsel of except continually being summoned to the County Court and having orders made upon him which he runs away from, and once was taken in the passage of this very house with an umbrella up and the Major's hat on, giving his name with the door-mat round him as Sir Johnson Jones, K.C.B. in spectacles residing at the Horse Guards. On which occasion he had got into the house not a minute before, through the girl letting him on the mat when he sent in a piece of paper twisted more like one of those spills for lighting candles than a note, offering me the choice between thirty shillings in hand and his brains on the premises marked immediate and waiting for an answer. My dear it gave me such a dreadful turn to think of the brains of my poor dear Lirriper's own flesh and blood flying about the new oilcloth however unworthy to be so assisted, that I went out of my room here to ask him what he would take once for all not to do it for life when I found him in the custody of two gentlemen that I should have judged to be in the feather-bed trade if they had not announced the law, so fluffy were their personal appearance. "Bring your chains, sir," says Joshua to the littlest of the two in the biggest hat, “rivet on my fetters!” Imagine my feelings when I pictered him clanking up Norfolk Street in irons and Miss Wozenham looking out of window! “Gentlemen,” I says all of a tremble and ready to drop “please to bring him into Major Jackman’s apartments.” So they brought him into the Parlours, and when the Major spies his own curly-brimmed hat on him which Joshua Lirriper had whipped off its peg in the passage for a military disguise he goes into such a tearing passion that he tips it off his head with his hand and kicks it up to the ceiling with his foot where it grazed long afterwards. “Major” I says “be cool and advise me what to do with Joshua my dead and gone Lirriper’s own youngest brother.” “Madam” says the Major “my advice is that you board and lodge him in a Powder Mill, with a handsome gratuity to the proprietor when exploded.” “Major” I says “as a Christian you cannot mean your words.” “Madam” says the Major “by the Lord I do!” and indeed the Major besides being with all his merits a very passionate man for his size had a bad opinion of Joshua on account of former troubles even unattended by liberties taken with his apparel. When Joshua Lirriper hears this conversation betwixt us he turns upon the littlest one with the biggest hat and says “Come sir! Remove me to my vile dungeon. Where is my mouldy straw?” My dear at the picter of him rising in my mind dressed almost entirely in padlocks like Baron Trenck in Jemmy’s book I was so overcome that I burst into tears and I says to the Major, “Major take my keys and settle with these gentlemen or I shall never know a happy minute more,” which was done several times both before and since, but still I must remember that Joshua Lirriper has his good feelings and shows them in being always so troubled in his mind when he cannot wear mourning for his brother. Many a long year have I left off my widow’s mourning not being wishful to intrude, but the tender point in Joshua that I cannot help a little yielding to is when he writes “One single sovereign would enable me to wear a decent suit of mourning for my much-loved brother. I vowed at the time of his lamented death that I would ever wear sables in memory of him but Alas how short-sighted is man, How keep that vow when penniless!” It says a good deal for the strength of his feelings that he couldn’t have been seven year old when my poor Lirriper died and to have kept to it ever since is highly creditable. But we know there’s good in all of us,—if we only knew where it was in some of us,—and though it was far from delicate in Joshua to work upon the dear child’s feelings when first sent to school and write down into Lincolnshire for his pocket-money by return of post and got it, still he is my poor Lirriper's own youngest brother and mightn't have meant not paying his bill at the Salisbury Arms when his affection took him down to stay a fortnight at Hatfield churchyard and might have meant to keep sober but for bad company. Consequently if the Major *had* played on him with the garden-engine which he got privately into his room without my knowing of it, I think that much as I should have regretted it there would have been words betwixt the Major and me. Therefore my dear though he played on Mr. Buffle by mistake being hot in his head, and though it might have been misrepresented down at Wozenham's into not being ready for Mr. Buffle in other respects he being the Assessed Taxes, still I do not so much regret it as perhaps I ought. And whether Joshua Lirriper will yet do well in life I cannot say, but I did hear of his coming, out at a Private Theatre in the character of a Bandit without receiving any offers afterwards from the regular managers.

Mentioning Mr. Baffle gives an instance of there being good in persons where good is not expected, for it cannot be denied that Mr. Buffle's manners when engaged in his business were not agreeable. To collect is one thing, and to look about as if suspicious of the goods being gradually removing in the dead of the night by a back door is another, over taxing you have no control but suspecting is voluntary. Allowances too must ever be made for a gentleman of the Major's warmth not relishing being spoke to with a pen in the mouth, and while I do not know that it is more irritable to my own feelings to have a low-crowned hat with a broad brim kept on in doors than any other hat still I can appreciate the Major's, besides which without bearing malice or vengeance the Major is a man that scores up arrears as his habit always was with Joshua Lirriper. So at last my dear the Major lay in wait for Mr. Buffle, and it worrited me a good deal. Mr. Buffle gives his rap of two sharp knocks one day and the Major bounces to the door. "Collector has called for two quarters' Assessed Taxes" says Mr. Buffle. "They are ready for him" says the Major and brings him in here. But on the way Mr. Buffle looks about him in his usual suspicious manner and the Major fires and asks him "Do you see a Ghost sir?" "No sir" says Mr. Buffle. "Because I have before noticed you" says the Major "apparently looking for a spectre very hard beneath the roof of my respected friend. When you find that supernatural agent, be so good as point him out sir." Mr. Buffle stares at the Major and then nods at me.

"Mrs. Lirriper sir" says the Major going off into a perfect steam and introducing me with his hand. "Pleasure of knowing her" says Mr. Buffle. "A—hum!—Jemmy Jackman sir!" says the Major introducing himself. "Honour of knowing you by sight" says Mr. Buffle. "Jemmy Jackman sir" says the Major wagging his head sideways in a sort of obstinate fury "presents to you his esteemed friend that lady Mrs. Emma Lirriper of Eighty-one Norfolk Street Strand London in the County of Middlesex in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Upon which occasion sir," says the Major, "Jemmy Jackman takes your hat off." Mr. Buffle looks at his hat where the Major drops it on the floor, and he picks it up and puts it on again. "Sir" says the Major very red and looking him full in the face "there are two quarters of the Gallantry Taxes due and the Collector has called." Upon which if you can believe my words my dear the Major drops Mr. Buffle's hat off again. "This—" Mr. Buffle begins very angry with his pen in his mouth, when the Major steaming more and more says "Take your bit out sir! Or by the whole infernal system of Taxation of this country and every individual figure in the National Debt, I'll get upon your back and ride you like a horse!" which it's my belief he would have done and even actually jerking his neat little legs ready for a spring as it was. "This," says Mr. Buffle without his pen "is an assault and I'll have the law of you." "Sir" replies the Major "if you are a man of honour, your Collector of whatever may be due on the Honourable Assessment by applying to Major Jackman at the Parlours Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings, may obtain what he wants in full at any moment."

When the Major glared at Mr. Buffle with those meaning words my dear I literally gasped for a teaspoonful of salvolatile in a wine-glass of water, and I says "Pray let it go no farther gentlemen I beg and beseech of you!" But the Major could be got to do nothing else but snort long after Mr. Buffle was gone, and the effect it had upon my whole mass of blood when on the next day of Mr. Buffle's rounds the Major spruced himself up and went humming a tune up and down the street with one eye almost obliterated by his hat there are not expressions in Johnson's Dictionary to state. But I safely put the street door on the jar and got behind the Major's blinds with my shawl on and my mind made up the moment I saw danger to rush out screeching till my voice failed me and catch the Major round the neck till my strength went and have all parties bound. I had not been behind the blinds a quarter of an hour when I saw Mr. Buffle approaching with his

Collecting-books in his hand. The Major likewise saw him approaching and hummed louder and himself approached. They met before the Airy railings. The Major takes off his hat at arm's length and says "Mr. Buffle I believe?" Mr. Buffle takes off *his* hat at arm's length and says "That is my name sir." Says the Major "Have you any commands for me, Mr. Buffle?" Says Mr. Buffle "Not any sir." Then my dear both of 'em bowed very low and haughty and parted, and whenever Mr. Buffle made his rounds in future him and the Major always met and bowed before the Airy railings, putting me much in mind of Hamlet and the other gentleman in mourning before killing one another, though I could have wished the other gentleman had done it fairer and even if less polite no poison.

Mr. Buffle's family were not liked in this neighbourhood, for when you are a householder my dear you'll find it does not come by nature to like the Assessed, and it was considered besides that a one-horse pheayton ought not to have elevated Mrs. Buffle to that height especially when purloined from the Taxes which I myself did consider uncharitable. But they were *not* liked and there was that domestic unhappiness in the family in consequence of their both being very hard with Miss Buffle and one another on account of Miss Buffle's favouring Mr. Buffle's articled young gentleman, that it *was* whispered that Miss Buffle would go either into a consumption or a convent she being so very thin and off her appetite and two close-shaved gentlemen with white bands round their necks peeping round the corner whenever she went out in waistcoats resembling black pinafores. So things stood towards Mr. Buffle when one night I was woke by a frightful noise and a smell of burning, and going to my bedroom window saw the whole street in a glow. Fortunately we had two sets empty just then and before I could hurry on some clothes I heard the Major hammering at the attics' doors and calling out "Dress yourselves!—Fire! Don't be frightened!—Fire! Collect your presence of mind!—Fire! All right—Fire!" most tremenjously. As I opened my bedroom door the Major came tumbling in over himself and me, and caught me in his arms. "Major" I says breathless "where is it?" "I don't know dearest madam" says the Major—"Fire! Jemmy Jackman will defend you to the last drop of his blood—Fire! If the dear boy was at home what a treat this would be for him—Fire!" and altogether very collected and bold except that he couldn't say a single sentence without shaking me to the very centre with roaring Fire. We ran down to the drawing-room and put our heads out of window, and the Major calls to an unfeeling young monkey, scampering by be joyful and ready to split "Where is it?—Fire!" The monkey answers without stopping "O here's a lark! Old Buffle's been setting his house alight to prevent its being found out that he boned the Taxes. Hurrah! Fire!" And then the sparks came flying up and the smoke came pouring down and the crackling of flames and spatting of water and banging of engines and hacking of axes and breaking of glass and knocking at doors and the shouting and crying and hurrying and the heat and altogether gave me a dreadful palpitation. "Don't be frightened dearest madam," says the Major, "—Fire! There's nothing to be alarmed at—Fire! Don't open the street door till I come back—Fire! I'll go and see if I can be of any service—Fire! You're quite composed and comfortable ain't you?—Fire, Fire, Fire!" It was in vain for me to hold the man and tell him he'd be galloped to death by the engines—pumped to death by his over-exertions—wet-feeted to death by the slop and mess—flattened to death when the roofs fell in—his spirit was up and he went scampering off after the young monkey with all the breath he had and none to spare, and me and the girls huddled together at the parlour windows looking at the dreadful flames above the houses over the way, Mr. Buffle's being round the corner. Presently what should we see but some people running down the street straight to our door, and then the Major directing operations in the busiest way, and then some more people and then—carried in a chair similar to Guy Fawkes—Mr. Buffle in a blanket!

My dear the Major has Mr. Buffle brought up our steps and whisked into the parlour and carted out on the sofy, and then he and all the rest of them without so much as a word burst away again full speed leaving the impression of a vision except for Mr. Buffle awful in his blanket with his eyes a rolling. In a twinkling they all burst back again with Mrs. Buffle in another blanket, which whisked in and carted out on the sofy they all burst off again and all burst back again with Miss Buffle in another blanket, which again whisked in and carted out they all burst off again and all burst back again with Mr. Buffle's articled young gentleman in another blanket—him a holding round the necks of two men carrying him by the legs, similar to the picter of the disgraceful creetur who has lost the fight (but where the chair I do not know) and his hair having the appearance of newly played upon. When all four of a row, the Major rubs his hands and whispers me with what little hoarseness he can get together, "If our dear remarkable boy was only at home what a delightful treat this would be for him!"

My dear we made them some hot tea and toast and some hot brandy-and-water with a little comfortable nutmeg in it, and at first they were scared and low in their spirits but being fully insured got sociable. And the first use Mr. Buffle made of his tongue was to call the Major his Preserver and his best of friends and to say “My for ever dearest sir let me make you known to Mrs. Buffle” which also addressed him as her Preserver and her best of friends and was fully as cordial as the blanket would admit of. Also Miss Buffle. The articled young gentleman’s head was a little light and he sat a moaning “Robina is reduced to cinders, Robina is reduced to cinders!” Which went more to the heart on account of his having got wrapped in his blanket as if he was looking out of a violinceller case, until Mr. Buffle says “Robina speak to him!” Miss Buffle says “Dear George!” and but for the Major’s pouring down brandy-and-water on the instant which caused a catching in his throat owing to the nutmeg and a violent fit of coughing it might have proved too much for his strength. When the articled young gentleman got the better of it Mr. Buffle leaned up against Mrs. Buffle being two bundles, a little while in confidence, and then says with tears in his eyes which the Major noticing wiped, “We have not been an united family, let us after this danger become so, take her George.” The young gentleman could not put his arm out far to do it, but his spoken expressions were very beautiful though of a wandering class. And I do not know that I ever had a much pleasanter meal than the breakfast we took together after we had all dozed, when Miss Buffle made tea very sweetly in quite the Roman style as depicted formerly at Covent Garden Theatre and when the whole family was most agreeable, as they have ever proved since that night when the Major stood at the foot of the Fire-Escape and claimed them as they came down—the young gentleman head-foremost, which accounts. And though I do not say that we should be less liable to think ill of one another if strictly limited to blankets, still I do say that we might most of us come to a better understanding if we kept one another less at a distance.

Why there’s Wozenham’s lower down on the other side of the street. I had a feeling of much soreness several years respecting what I must still ever call Miss Wozenham’s systematic underbidding and the likeness of the house in Bradshaw having far too many windows and a most umbrageous and outrageous Oak which never yet was seen in Norfolk Street nor yet a carriage and four at Wozenham’s door, which it would have been far more to Bradshaw's credit to have drawn a cab. This frame of mind continued bitter down to the very afternoon in January last when one of my girls, Sally Rairyganoo which I still suspect of Irish extraction though family represented Cambridge, else why abscond with a bricklayer of the Limerick persuasion and be married in pattens not waiting till his black eye was decently got round with all the company fourteen in number and one horse fighting outside on the roof of the vehicle,—I repeat my dear my ill-regulated state of mind towards Miss Wozenham continued down to the very afternoon of January last past when Sally Rairyganoo came banging (I can use no milder expression) into my room with a jump which may be Cambridge and may not, and said "Hurroo Missis! Miss Wozenham's sold up!" My dear when I had it thrown in my face and conscience that the girl Sally had reason to think I could be glad of the ruin of a fellow-creeter, I burst into tears and dropped back in my chair and I says "I am ashamed of myself!"

Well! I tried to settle to my tea but I could not do it what with thinking of Miss Wozenham and her distresses. It was a wretched night and I went up to a front window and looked over at Wozenham's and as well as I could make it out down the street in the fog it was the dismallest of the dismal and not a light to be seen. So at last I save to myself "This will not do," and I puts on my oldest bonnet and shawl not wishing Miss Wozenham to be reminded of my best at such a time, and lo and behold you I goes over to Wozenham's and knocks. "Miss Wozenham at home?" I says turning my head when I heard the door go. And then I saw it was Miss Wozenham herself who had opened it and sadly worn she was poor thing and her eyes all swelled and swelled with crying. "Miss Wozenham" I says "it is several years since there was a little unpleasantness betwixt us on the subject of my grandson's cap being down your Airy. I have overlooked it and I hope you have done the same." "Yes Mrs. Lirriper" she says in a surprise, "I have." "Then my dear" I says "I should be glad to come in and speak a word to you." Upon my calling her my dear Miss Wozenham breaks out a crying most pitiful, and a not unfeeling elderly person that might have been better shaved in a nightcap with a hat over it offering a polite apology for the mumps having worked themselves into his constitution, and also for sending home to his wife on the bellows which was in his hand as a writing-desk, looks out of the back parlour and says "The lady wants a word of comfort" and goes in again. So I was able to say quite natural "Wants a word of comfort does she sir? Then please the pigs she shall have it!" And Miss Wozenham and me we go into the front room with a wretched light that seemed to have been crying too and was sputtering out, and I says "Now my dear, tell me all," and she wrings her hands and says "O Mrs. Lirriper that man is in possession here, and I have not a friend in the world who is able to help me with a shilling."

It doesn't signify a bit what a talkative old body like me said to Miss Wozenham when she said that, and so I'll tell you instead my dear that I'd have given thirty shillings to have taken her over to tea, only I durstn't on account of the Major. Not you see but what I knew I could draw the Major out like thread and wind him round my finger on most subjects and perhaps even on that if I was to set myself to it, but him and me had so often belied Miss Wozenham to one another that I was shamefaced, and I knew she had offended his pride and never mine, and likewise I felt timid that that Rairyganoo girl might make things awkward. So I says "My dear if you could give me a cup of tea to clear my muddle of a head I should better understand your affairs." And we had the tea and the affairs too and after all it was but forty pound, and—There! she's as industrious and straight a creeter as ever lived and has paid back half of it already, and where's the use of saying more, particularly when it ain't the point? For the point is that when she was a kissing my hands and holding them in hers and kissing them again and blessing blessing blessing, I cheered up at last and I says "Why what a waddling old goose I have been my dear to take you for something so very different!" "Ah but I too" says she "how have *I* mistaken *you*!" "Come for goodness' sake tell me" I says "what you thought of me?" "O" says she "I thought you had no feeling for such a hard hand-to-mouth life as mine, and were rolling in affluence." I says shaking my sides (and very glad to do it for I had been a choking quite long enough) "Only look at my figure my dear and give me your opinion whether if I was in affluence I should be likely to roll in it?" That did it? We got as merry as grigs (whatever *they* are, if you happen to know my dear—*I* don't) and I went home to my blessed home as happy and as thankful as could be. But before I make an end of it, think even of my having misunderstood the Major! Yes! For next forenoon the Major came into my little room with his brushed hat in his hand and he begins "My dearest madam—" and then put his face in his hat as if he had just come into church. As I sat all in a maze he came out of his hat and began again. "My esteemed and beloved friend

—” and then went into his hat again. “Major,” I cries out frightened “has anything happened to our darling boy?” “No, no, no” says the Major “but Miss Wozenham has been here this morning to make her excuses to me, and by the Lord I can’t get over what she told me.” “Hoity toity, Major,” I says “you don’t know yet that I was afraid of you last night and didn’t think half as well of you as I ought! So come out of church Major and forgive me like a dear old friend and I’ll never do so any more.” And I leave you to judge my dear whether I ever did or will. And how affecting to think of Miss Wozenham out of her small income and her losses doing so much for her poor old father, and keeping a brother that had had the misfortune to soften his brain against the hard mathematics as neat as a new pin in the three back represented to lodgers as a lumber-room and consuming a whole shoulder of mutton whenever provided!

And now my dear I really am a going to tell you about my Legacy if you’re inclined to favour me with your attention, and I did fully intend to have come straight to it only one thing does so bring up another. It was the month of June and the day before Midsummer Day when my girl Winifred Madgers—she was what is termed a Plymouth Sister, and the Plymouth Brother that made away with her was quite right, for a tidier young woman for a wife never came into a house and afterwards called with the beautifullest Plymouth Twins—it was the day before Midsummer Day when Winifred Madgers comes and says to me “A gentleman from the Consul’s wishes particular to speak to Mrs. Lirriper.” If you’ll believe me my dear the Consols at the bank where I have a little matter for Jemmy got into my head, and I says “Good gracious I hope he ain’t had any dreadful fall!” Says Winifred “He don’t look as if he had ma’am.” And I says “Show him in.”

The gentleman came in dark and with his hair cropped what I should consider too close, and he says very polite “Madame Lirrwiper!” I says, “Yes sir. Take a chair.” “I come,” says he “frrwom the Frrwench Consul’s.” So I saw at once that it wasn’t the Bank of England. “We have rrweceived,” says the gentleman turning his r’s very curious and skilful, “frrwom the Mairrwie at Sens, a communication which I will have the honour to rrwead. Madame Lirrwiper understands Frrwench?” “O dear no sir!” says I. “Madame Lirriper don’t understand anything of the sort.” “It matters not,” says the gentleman, “I will trrwanslate.”

With that my dear the gentleman after reading something about a Department and a Marie (which Lord forgive me I supposed till the Major came home was Mary, and never was I more puzzled than to think how that young woman came to have so much to do with it) translated a lot with the most obliging pains, and it came to this:—That in the town of Sons in France an unknown Englishman lay a dying. That he was speechless and without motion. That in his lodging there was a gold watch and a purse containing such and such money and a trunk containing such and such clothes, but no passport and no papers, except that on his table was a pack of cards and that he had written in pencil on the back of the ace of hearts: "To the authorities. When I am dead, pray send what is left, as a last Legacy, to Mrs. Lirriper Eighty-one Norfolk Street Strand London." When the gentleman had explained all this, which seemed to be drawn up much more methodical than I should have given the French credit for, not at that time knowing the nation, he put the document into my hand. And much the wiser I was for that you may be sure, except that it had the look of being made out upon grocery paper and was stamped all over with eagles.

"Does Madame Lirrwiper" says the gentleman "believe she rrwecognises her unfortunate compatrrwiot?"

You may imagine the flurry it put me into my dear to be talked to about my compatriots.

I says "Excuse me. Would you have the kindness sir to make your language as simple as you can?"

"This Englishman unhappy, at the point of death. This compatrrwiot afflicted," says the gentleman.

"Thank you sir" I says "I understand you now. No sir I have not the least idea who this can be."

"Has Madame Lirrwiper no son, no nephew, no godson, no frrwiend, no acquaintance of any kind in Frrwance?"

"To my certain knowledge" says I "no relation or friend, and to the best of my belief no acquaintance."

"Pardon me. You take Locataires?" says the gentleman.

My dear fully believing he was offering me something with his obliging foreign manners,—snuff for anything I knew,—I gave a little bend of my head and I says if you'll credit it, "No I thank you. I have not contracted the habit."

The gentleman looks perplexed and says "Lodgers!"

“Oh!” says I laughing. “Bless the man! Why yes to be sure!”

“May it not be a former lodger?” says the gentleman. “Some lodger that you pardoned some rrwent? You have pardoned lodgers some rrwent?”

“Hem! It has happened sir” says I, “but I assure you I can call to mind no gentleman of that description that this is at all likely to be.”

In short my dear, we could make nothing of it, and the gentleman noted down what I said and went away. But he left me the paper of which he had two with him, and when the Major came in I says to the Major as I put it in his hand “Major here’s Old Moore’s Almanac with the hieroglyphic complete, for your opinion.”

It took the Major a little longer to read than I should have thought, judging from the copious flow with which he seemed to be gifted when attacking the organ-men, but at last he got through it, and stood a gazing at me in amazement.

“Major” I says “you’re paralysed.”

“Madam” says the Major, “Jemmy Jackman is doubled up.”

Now it did so happen that the Major had been out to get a little information about railroads and steamboats, as our boy was coming home for his Midsummer holidays next day and we were going to take him somewhere for a treat and a change. So while the Major stood a gazing it came into my head to say to him “Major I wish you’d go and look at some of your books and maps, and see whereabouts this same town of Sens is in France.”

The Major he roused himself and he went into the Parlours and he poked about a little, and he came back to me and he says, “Sens my dearest madam is seventy-odd miles south of Paris.”

With what I may truly call a desperate effort “Major,” I says “we’ll go there with our blessed boy.”

If ever the Major was beside himself it was at the thoughts of that journey. All day long he was like the wild man of the woods after meeting with an advertisement in the papers telling him something to his advantage, and early next morning hours before Jemmy could possibly come home he was outside in the street ready to call out to him that we was all a going to France. Young Rosycheeks you may believe was as wild as the Major, and they did carry on to that degree that I says “If you two children ain’t more orderly I’ll pack you both off to bed.” And then they fell to cleaning up the Major’s telescope to see France with, and went out and bought a leather bag with a snap to hang round Jemmy, and him to carry the money like a little Fortunatus with his purse.

If I hadn't passed my word and raised their hopes, I doubt if I could have gone through with the undertaking but it was too late to go back now. So on the second day after Midsummer Day we went off by the morning mail. And when we came to the sea which I had never seen but once in my life and that when my poor Lirriper was courting me, the freshness of it and the deepness and the airiness and to think that it had been rolling ever since and that it was always a rolling and so few of us minding, made me feel quite serious. But I felt happy too and so did Jemmy and the Major and not much motion on the whole, though me with a swimming in the head and a sinking but able to take notice that the foreign insides appear to be constructed hollower than the English, leading to much more tremenjous noises when bad sailors.

But my dear the blueness and the lightness and the coloured look of everything and the very sentry-boxes striped and the shining rattling drums and the little soldiers with their waists and tidy gaiters, when we got across to the Continent—it made me feel as if I don't know what—as if the atmosphere had been lifted off me. And as to lunch why bless you if I kept a man-cook and two kitchen-maids I couldn't got it done for twice the money, and no injured young woman a glaring at you and grudging you and acknowledging your patronage by wishing that your food might choke you, but so civil and so hot and attentive and every way comfortable except Jemmy pouring wine down his throat by tumblers-full and me expecting to see him drop under the table.

And the way in which Jemmy spoke his French was a real charm. It was often wanted of him, for whenever anybody spoke a syllable to me I says "Non-comprenny, you're very kind, but it's no use—Now Jemmy!" and then Jemmy he fires away at 'em lovely, the only thing wanting in Jemmy's French being as it appeared to me that he hardly ever understood a word of what they said to him which made it scarcely of the use it might have been though in other respects a perfect Native, and regarding the Major's fluency I should have been of the opinion judging French by English that there might have been a greater choice of words in the language though still I must admit that if I hadn't known him when he asked a military gentleman in a gray cloak what o'clock it was I should have took him for a Frenchman born.

Before going on to look after my Legacy we were to make one regular day in Paris, and I leave you to judge my dear what a day *that* was with Jemmy and the Major and the telescope and me and the prowling young man at the inn door (but very civil too) that went along with us to show the sights. All along the railway to Paris Jemmy and the Major had been frightening me to death by stooping down on the platforms at stations to inspect the engines underneath their mechanical stomachs, and by creeping in and out I don't know where all, to find improvements for the United Grand Junction Parlour, but when we got out into the brilliant streets on a bright morning they gave up all their London improvements as a bad job and gave their minds to Paris. Says the prowling young man to me "Will I speak Inglis No?" So I says "If you can young man I shall take it as a favour," but after half-an-hour of it when I fully believed the man had gone mad and me too I says "Be so good as fall back on your French sir," knowing that then I shouldn't have the agonies of trying to understand him, which was a happy release. Not that I lost much more than the rest either, for I generally noticed that when he had described something very long indeed and I says to Jemmy "What does he say Jemmy?" Jemmy says looking with vengeance in his eye "He is so jolly indistinct!" and that when he had described it longer all over again and I says to Jemmy "Well Jemmy what's it all about?" Jemmy says "He says the building was repaired in seventeen hundred and four, Gran."

Wherever that prowling young man formed his prowling habits I cannot be expected to know, but the way in which he went round the corner while we had our breakfasts and was there again when we swallowed the last crumb was most marvellous, and just the same at dinner and at night, prowling equally at the theatre and the inn gateway and the shop doors when we bought a trifle or two and everywhere else but troubled with a tendency to spit. And of Paris I can tell you no more my dear than that it's town and country both in one, and carved stone and long streets of high houses and gardens and fountains and statues and trees and gold, and immensely big soldiers and immensely little soldiers and the pleasantest nurses with the whitest caps a playing at skipping-rope with the bunchiest babies in the flattest caps, and clean table-cloths spread everywhere for dinner and people sitting out of doors smoking and sipping all day long and little plays being acted in the open air for little people and every shop a complete and elegant room, and everybody seeming to play at everything in this world. And as to the sparkling lights my dear after dark, glittering high up and low down and on before and on behind and all round, and the crowd of theatres and the crowd of people and the crowd of all sorts, it’s pure enchantment. And pretty well the only thing that grated on me was that whether you pay your fare at the railway or whether you change your money at a money-dealer’s or whether you take your ticket at the theatre, the lady or gentleman is caged up (I suppose by government) behind the strongest iron bars having more of a Zoological appearance than a free country.

Well to be sure when I did after all get my precious bones to bed that night, and my Young Rogue came in to kiss me and asks “What do you think of this lovely lovely Paris, Gran?” I says “Jemmy I feel as if it was beautiful fireworks being let off in my head.” And very cool and refreshing the pleasant country was next day when we went on to look after my Legacy, and rested me much and did me a deal of good.

So at length and at last my dear we come to Sens, a pretty little town with a great two-towered cathedral and the rooks flying in and out of the loopholes and another tower atop of one of the towers like a sort of a stone pulpit. In which pulpit with the birds skimming below him if you’ll believe me, I saw a speck while I was resting at the inn before dinner which they made signs to me was Jemmy and which really was. I had been a fancying as I sat in the balcony of the hotel that an Angel might light there and call down to the people to be good, but I little thought what Jemmy all unknown to himself was a calling down from that high place to some one in the town.

The pleasantest-situated inn my dear! Right under the two towers, with their shadows a changing upon it all day like a kind of a sundial, and country people driving in and out of the courtyard in carts and hooded cabriolets and such like, and a market outside in front of the cathedral, and all so quaint and like a picter. The Major and me agreed that whatever came of my Legacy this was the place to stay in for our holiday, and we also agreed that our dear boy had best not be checked in his joy that night by the sight of the Englishman if he was still alive, but that we would go together and alone. For you are to understand that the Major not feeling himself quite equal in his wind to the height to which Jemmy had climbed, had come back to me and left him with the Guide.

So after dinner when Jemmy had set off to see the river, the Major went down to the Mairie, and presently came back with a military character in a sword and spurs and a cocked hat and a yellow shoulder-belt and long tags about him that he must have found inconvenient. And the Major says "The Englishman still lies in the same state dearest madam. This gentleman will conduct us to his lodging." Upon which the military character pulled off his cocked hat to me, and I took notice that he had shaved his forehead in imitation of Napoleon Bonaparte but not like.

We wont out at the courtyard gate and past the great doors of the cathedral and down a narrow High Street where the people were sitting chatting at their shop doors and the children were at play. The military character went in front and he stopped at a pork-shop with a little statue of a pig sitting up, in the window, and a private door that a donkey was looking out of.

When the donkey saw the military character he came slipping out on the pavement to turn round and then clattered along the passage into a back yard. So the coast being clear, the Major and me were conducted up the common stair and into the front room on the second, a bare room with a red tiled floor and the outside lattice blinds pulled close to darken it. As the military character opened the blinds I saw the tower where I had seen Jemmy, darkening as the sun got low, and I turned to the bed by the wall and saw the Englishman.

It was some kind of brain fever he had had, and his hair was all gone, and some wetted folded linen lay upon his head. I looked at him very attentive as he lay there all wasted away with his eyes closed, and I says to the Major—

"*I* never saw this face before."

The Major looked at him very attentive too, and he says "I never saw this face before."

When the Major explained our words to the military character, that gentleman shrugged his shoulders and showed the Major the card on which it was written about the Legacy for me. It had been written with a weak and trembling hand in bed, and I knew no more of the writing than of the face. Neither did the Major.

Though lying there alone, the poor creetur was as well taken care of as could be hoped, and would have been quite unconscious of any one's sitting by him then. I got the Major to say that we were not going away at present and that I would come back to-morrow and watch a bit by the bedside. But

I got him to add—and I shook my head hard to make it stronger—“We agree that we never saw this face before.”

Our boy was greatly surprised when we told him sitting out in the balcony in the starlight, and he ran over some of those stories of former Lodgers, of the Major’s putting down, and asked wasn’t it possible that it might be this lodger or that lodger. It was not possible, and we went to bed.

In the morning just at breakfast-time the military character came jingling round, and said that the doctor thought from the signs he saw there might be some rally before the end. So I says to the Major and Jemmy, “You two boys go and enjoy yourselves, and I’ll take my Prayer Book and go sit by the bed.” So I went, and I sat there some hours, reading a prayer for him poor soul now and then, and it was quite on in the day when he moved his hand.

He had been so still, that the moment he moved I knew of it, and I pulled off my spectacles and laid down my book and rose and looked at him. From moving one hand he began to move both, and then his action was the action of a person groping in the dark. Long after his eyes had opened, there was a film over them and he still felt for his way out into light. But by slow degrees his sight cleared and his hands stopped. He saw the ceiling, he saw the wall, he saw me. As his sight cleared, mine cleared too, and when at last we looked in one another’s faces, I started back, and I cries passionately:

“O you wicked wicked man! Your sin has found you out!”

For I knew him, the moment life looked out of his eyes, to be Mr. Edson, Jemmy’s father who had so cruelly deserted Jemmy’s young unmarried mother who had died in my arms, poor tender creetur, and left Jemmy to me.

“You cruel wicked man! You bad black traitor!”

With the little strength he had, he made an attempt to turn over on his wretched face to hide it. His arm dropped out of the bed and his head with it, and there he lay before me crushed in body and in mind. Surely the miserablest sight under the summer sun!

“O blessed Heaven,” I says a crying, “teach me what to say to this broken mortal! I am a poor sinful creetur, and the Judgment is not mine.”

As I lifted my eyes up to the clear bright sky, I saw the high tower where Jemmy had stood above the birds, seeing that very window; and the last look of that poor pretty young mother when her soul brightened and got free, seemed to shine down from it.

"O man, man, man!" I says, and I went on my knees beside the bed; "if your heart is rent asunder and you are truly penitent for what you did, Our Saviour will have mercy on you yet!"

As I leaned my face against the bed, his feeble hand could just move itself enough to touch me. I hope the touch was penitent. It tried to hold my dress and keep hold, but the fingers were too weak to close.

I lifted him back upon the pillows and I says to him:

"Can you hear me?"

He looked yes.

"Do you know me?"

He looked yes, even yet more plainly.

"I am not here alone. The Major is with me. You recollect the Major?"

Yes. That is to say he made out yes, in the same way as before.

"And even the Major and I are not alone. My grandson—his godson—is with us. Do you hear? My grandson."

The fingers made another trial to catch my sleeve, but could only creep near it and fall.

"Do you know who my grandson is?"

Yes.

"I pitied and loved his lonely mother. When his mother lay a dying I said to her, 'My dear, this baby is sent to a childless old woman.' He has been my pride and joy ever since. I love him as dearly as if he had drunk from my breast. Do you ask to see my grandson before you die?"

Yes.

"Show me, when I leave off speaking, if you correctly understand what I say. He has been kept unacquainted with the story of his birth. He has no knowledge of it. No suspicion of it. If I bring him here to the side of this bed, he will suppose you to be a perfect stranger. It is more than I can do to keep from him the knowledge that there is such wrong and misery in the world; but that it was ever so near him in his innocent cradle I have kept from him, and I do keep from him, and I ever will keep from him, for his mother's sake, and for his own."

He showed me that he distinctly understood, and the tears fell from his eyes.

"Now rest, and you shall see him."

So I got him a little wine and some brandy, and I put things straight about his bed. But I began to be troubled in my mind lest Jemmy and the Major might be too long of coming back. What with this occupation for my thoughts and hands, I didn't hear a foot upon the stairs, and was startled when I saw the Major stopped short in the middle of the room by the eyes of the man upon the bed, and knowing him then, as I had known him a little while ago.

There was anger in the Major's face, and there was horror and repugnance and I don't know what. So I went up to him and I led him to the bedside, and when I clasped my hands and lifted of them up, the Major did the like.

"O Lord" I says "Thou knowest what we two saw together of the sufferings and sorrows of that young creetur now with Thee. If this dying man is truly penitent, we two together humbly pray Thee to have mercy on him!"

The Major says "Amen!" and then after a little stop I whispers him, "Dear old friend fetch our beloved boy." And the Major, so clever as to have got to understand it all without being told a word, went away and brought him.

Never never never shall I forget the fair bright face of our boy when he stood at the foot of the bed, looking at his unknown father. And O so like his dear young mother then!

"Jemmy" I says, "I have found out all about this poor gentleman who is so ill, and he did lodge in the old house once. And as he wants to see all belonging to it, now that he is passing away, I sent for you."

"Ah poor man!" says Jemmy stepping forward and touching one of his hands with great gentleness. "My heart melts for him. Poor, poor man!"

The eyes that were so soon to close for ever turned to me, and I was not that strong in the pride of my strength that I could resist them.

"My darling boy, there is a reason in the secret history of this fellow-creetur lying as the best and worst of us must all lie one day, which I think would ease his spirit in his last hour if you would lay your cheek against his forehead and say, 'May God forgive you!'"

"O Gran," says Jemmy with a full heart, "I am not worthy!" But he leaned down and did it. Then the faltering fingers made out to catch hold of my sleeve at last, and I believe he was a-trying to kiss me when he died.

* * * * *

There my dear! There you have the story of my Legacy in full, and it's worth ten times the trouble I have spent upon it if you are pleased to like it.

You might suppose that it set us against the little French town of Sens, but no we didn't find that. I found myself that I never looked up at the high tower atop of the other tower, but the days came back again when that fair young creetur with her pretty bright hair trusted in me like a mother, and the recollection made the place so peaceful to me as I can't express. And every soul about the hotel down to the pigeons in the courtyard made friends with Jemmy and the Major, and went lumbering away with them on all sorts of expeditions in all sorts of vehicles drawn by rampagious cart-horses,—with heads and without,—mud for paint and ropes for harness,—and every new friend dressed in blue like a butcher, and every new horse standing on his hind legs wanting to devour and consume every other horse, and every man that had a whip to crack crack-crack-crack-crack-cracking it as if it was a schoolboy with his first. As to the Major my dear that man lived the greater part of his time with a little tumbler in one hand and a bottle of small wine in the other, and whenever he saw anybody else with a little tumbler, no matter who it was,—the military character with the tags, or the inn-servants at their supper in the courtyard, or townspeople a chatting on a bench, or country people a starting home after market,—down rushes the Major to clink his glass against their glasses and cry,—Hola! Vive Somebody! or Vive Something! as if he was beside himself. And though I could not quite approve of the Major's doing it, still the ways of the world are the ways of the world varying according to the different parts of it, and dancing at all in the open Square with a lady that kept a barber's shop my opinion is that the Major was right to dance his best and to lead off with a power that I did not think was in him, though I was a little uneasy at the Barricading sound of the cries that were set up by the other dancers and the rest of the company, until when I says "What are they ever calling out Jemmy?" Jemmy says, "They're calling out Gran, Bravo the Military English! Bravo the Military English!" which was very gratifying to my feelings as a Briton and became the name the Major was known by.

But every evening at a regular time we all three sat out in the balcony of the hotel at the end of the courtyard, looking up at the golden and rosy light as it changed on the great towers, and looking at the shadows of the towers as they changed on all about us ourselves included, and what do you think we did there? My dear, if Jemmy hadn't brought some other of those stories of the Major’s taking down from the telling of former lodgers at Eighty-one Norfolk Street, and if he didn’t bring ’em out with this speech:

“Here you are Gran! Here you are godfather! More of ’em! I’ll read. And though you wrote ’em for me, godfather, I know you won’t disapprove of my making ’em over to Gran; will you?”

“No, my dear boy,” says the Major. “Everything we have is hers, and we are hers.”

“Hers ever affectionately and devotedly J. Jackman, and J. Jackman Lirriper,” cries the Young Rogue giving me a close hug. “Very well then godfather. Look here. As Gran is in the Legacy way just now, I shall make these stories a part of Gran’s Legacy. I’ll leave ’em to her. What do you say godfather?”

“Hip hip Hurrah!” says the Major.

“Very well then,” cries Jemmy all in a bustle. “Vive the Military English! Vive the Lady Lirriper! Vive the Jemmy Jackman Ditto! Vive the Legacy! Now, you look out, Gran. And you look out, godfather. *I’ll* read! And I’ll tell you what I’ll do besides. On the last night of our holiday here when we are all packed and going away, I’ll top up with something of my own.”

“Mind you do sir” says I.

CHAPTER II—MRS. LIRRIPER RELATES HOW JEMMY TOPPED UP

Well my dear and so the evening readings of those jottings of the Major's brought us round at last to the evening when we were all packed and going away next day, and I do assure you that by that time though it was deliciously comfortable to look forward to the dear old house in Norfolk Street again, I had formed quite a high opinion of the French nation and had noticed them to be much more homely and domestic in their families and far more simple and amiable in their lives than I had ever been led to expect, and it did strike me between ourselves that in one particular they might be imitated to advantage by another nation which I will not mention, and that is in the courage with which they take their little enjoyments on little means and with little things and don't let solemn big-wigs stare them out of countenance or speechify them dull, of which said solemn big-wigs I have ever had the one opinion that I wish they were all made comfortable separately in coppers with the lids on and never let out any more.

"Now young man," I says to Jemmy when we brought our chairs into the balcony that last evening, "you please to remember who was to 'top up.'"

"All right Gran" says Jemmy. "I am the illustrious personage."

But he looked so serious after he had made me that light answer, that the Major raised his eyebrows at me and I raised mine at the Major.

"Gran and godfather," says Jemmy, "you can hardly think how much my mind has run on Mr. Edson's death."

It gave me a little check. "Ah! it was a sad scene my love" I says, "and sad remembrances come back stronger than merry. But this" I says after a little silence, to rouse myself and the Major and Jemmy all together, "is not topping up. Tell us your story my dear."

"I will" says Jemmy.

"What is the date sir?" says I. "Once upon a time when pigs drank wine?"

“No Gran,” says Jemmy, still serious; “once upon a time when the French drank wine.”

Again I glanced at the Major, and the Major glanced at me.

“In short, Gran and godfather,” says Jemmy, looking up, “the date is this time, and I’m going to tell you Mr. Edson’s story.”

The flutter that it threw me into. The change of colour on the part of the Major!

“That is to say, you understand,” our bright-eyed boy says, “I am going to give you my version of it. I shall not ask whether it’s right or not, firstly because you said you knew very little about it, Gran, and secondly because what little you did know was a secret.”

I folded my hands in my lap and I never took my eyes off Jemmy as he went running on.

“The unfortunate gentleman” Jemmy commences, “who is the subject of our present narrative was the son of Somebody, and was born Somewhere, and chose a profession Somehow. It is not with those parts of his career that we have to deal; but with his early attachment to a young and beautiful lady.”

I thought I should have dropped. I durstn’t look at the Major; but I know what his state was, without looking at him.

“The father of our ill-starred hero” says Jemmy, copying as it seemed to me the style of some of his story-books, “was a worldly man who entertained ambitious views for his only son and who firmly set his face against the contemplated alliance with a virtuous but penniless orphan. Indeed he went so far as roundly to assure our hero that unless he weaned his thoughts from the object of his devoted affection, he would disinherit him. At the same time, he proposed as a suitable match the daughter of a neighbouring gentleman of a good estate, who was neither ill-favoured nor unamiable, and whose eligibility in a pecuniary point of view could not be disputed. But young Mr. Edson, true to the first and only love that had inflamed his breast, rejected all considerations of self-advancement, and, deprecating his father’s anger in a respectful letter, ran away with her.”

My dear I had begun to take a turn for the better, but when it come to running away I began to take another turn for the worse.

“The lovers” says Jemmy “fled to London and were united at the altar of Saint Clement’s Danes. And it is at this period of their simple but touching story that we find them inmates of the dwelling of a highly-respected and beloved lady of the name of Gran, residing within a hundred miles of Norfolk Street."

I felt that we were almost safe now, I felt that the dear boy had no suspicion of the bitter truth, and I looked at the Major for the first time and drew a long breath. The Major gave me a nod.

"Our hero's father" Jemmy goes on "proving implacable and carrying his threat into unrelenting execution, the struggles of the young couple in London were severe, and would have been far more so, but for their good angel's having conducted them to the abode of Mrs. Gran; who, divining their poverty (in spite of their endeavours to conceal it from her), by a thousand delicate arts smoothed their rough way, and alleviated the sharpness of their first distress."

Here Jemmy took one of my hands in one of his, and began a marking the turns of his story by making me give a beat from time to time upon his other hand.

"After a while, they left the house of Mrs. Gran, and pursued their fortunes through a variety of successes and failures elsewhere. But in all reverses, whether for good or evil, the words of Mr. Edson to the fair young partner of his life were, 'Unchanging Love and Truth will carry us through all!'"

My hand trembled in the dear boy's, those words were so wofully unlike the fact.

"Unchanging Love and Truth" says Jemmy over again, as if he had a proud kind of a noble pleasure in it, "will carry us through all! Those were his words. And so they fought their way, poor but gallant and happy, until Mrs. Edson gave birth to a child."

"A daughter," I says.

"No," says Jemmy, "a son. And the father was so proud of it that he could hardly bear it out of his sight. But a dark cloud overspread the scene. Mrs. Edson sickened, drooped, and died."

"Ah! Sickened, drooped, and died!" I says.

"And so Mr. Edson's only comfort, only hope on earth, and only stimulus to action, was his darling boy. As the child grew older, he grew so like his mother that he was her living picture. It used to make him wonder why his father cried when he kissed him. But unhappily he was like his mother in constitution as well as in face, and lo, died too before he had grown out of childhood. Then Mr. Edson, who had good abilities, in his forlornness and despair, threw them all to the winds. He became apathetic, reckless, lost. Little by little he sank down, down, down, down, until at last he almost lived (I think) by gaming. And so sickness overtook him in the town of Sens in France, and he lay down to die. But now that he laid him down when all was done, and looked back upon the green Past beyond the time when he had covered it with ashes, he thought gratefully of the good Mrs. Gran long lost sight of, who had been so kind to him and his young wife in the early days of their marriage, and he left the little that he had as a last Legacy to her. And she, being brought to see him, at first no more knew him than she would know from seeing the ruin of a Greek or Roman Temple, what it used to be before it fell; but at length she remembered him. And then he told her, with tears, of his regret for the misspent part of his life, and besought her to think as mildly of it as she could, because it was the poor fallen Angel of his unchanging Love and Constancy after all. And because she had her grandson with her, and he fancied that his own boy, if he had lived, might have grown to be something like him, he asked her to let him touch his forehead with his cheek and say certain parting words."

Jemmy's voice sank low when it got to that, and tears filled my eyes, and filled the Major's.

"You little Conjurer" I says, "how did you ever make it all out? Go in and write it every word down, for it's a wonder."

Which Jemmy did, and I have repeated it to you my dear from his writing.

Then the Major took my hand and kissed it, and said, "Dearest madam all has prospered with us."

"Ah Major" I says drying my eyes, "we needn't have been afraid. We might have known it. Treachery don't come natural to beaming youth; but trust and pity, love and constancy,—they do, thank God!"

THE END OF
Mrs. Lirriper's Legacy

MRS. LIRRIPER’S LODGINGS

CHAPTER I—HOW MRS. LIRRIPER CARRIED ON THE BUSINESS

Whoever would begin to be worried with letting Lodgings that wasn't a lone woman with a living to get is a thing inconceivable to me, my dear; excuse the familiarity, but it comes natural to me in my own little room, when wishing to open my mind to those that I can trust, and I should be truly thankful if they were all mankind, but such is not so, for have but a Furnished bill in the window and your watch on the mantelpiece, and farewell to it if you turn your back for but a second, however gentlemanly the manners; nor is being of your own sex any safeguard, as I have reason, in the form of sugar-tongs to know, for that lady (and a fine woman she was) got me to run for a glass of water, on the plea of going to be confined, which certainly turned out true, but it was in the Station-house.

Number Eighty-one Norfolk Street, Strand—situated midway between the City and St. James's, and within five minutes' walk of the principal places of public amusement—is my address. I have rented this house many years, as the parish rate-books will testify; and I could wish my landlord was as alive to the fact as I am myself; but no, bless you, not a half a pound of paint to save his life, nor so much, my dear, as a tile upon the roof, though on your bended knees.

My dear, you never have found Number Eighty-one Norfolk Street Strand advertised in Bradshaw's *Railway Guide*, and with the blessing of Heaven you never will or shall so find it. Some there are who do not think it lowering themselves to make their names that cheap, and even going the lengths of a portrait of the house not like it with a blot in every window and a coach and four at the door, but what will suit Wozenham's lower down on the other side of the way will not suit me, Miss Wozenham having her opinions and me having mine, though when it comes to systematic underbidding capable of being proved on oath in a court of justice and taking the form of "If Mrs. Lirriper names eighteen shillings a week, I name fifteen and six," it then comes to a settlement between yourself and your conscience, supposing for the sake of argument your name to be Wozenham, which I am well aware it is not or my opinion of you would be greatly lowered, and as to airy bedrooms and a night-porter in constant attendance the less said the better, the bedrooms being stuffy and the porter stuff.

It is forty years ago since me and my poor Lirriper got married at St. Clement’s Danes, where I now have a sitting in a very pleasant pew with genteel company and my own hassock, and being partial to evening service not too crowded. My poor Lirriper was a handsome figure of a man, with a beaming eye and a voice as mellow as a musical instrument made of honey and steel, but he had ever been a free liver being in the commercial travelling line and travelling what he called a limekiln road—“a dry road, Emma my dear,” my poor Lirriper says to me, “where I have to lay the dust with one drink or another all day long and half the night, and it wears me Emma”—and this led to his running through a good deal and might have run through the turnpike too when that dreadful horse that never would stand still for a single instant set off, but for its being night and the gate shut and consequently took his wheel, my poor Lirriper and the gig smashed to atoms and never spoke afterwards. He was a handsome figure of a man, and a man with a jovial heart and a sweet temper; but if they had come up then they never could have given you the mellowness of his voice, and indeed I consider photographs wanting in mellowness as a general rule and making you look like a new-ploughed field.

My poor Lirriper being behindhand with the world and being buried at Hatfield church in Hertfordshire, not that it was his native place but that he had a liking for the Salisbury Arms where we went upon our wedding-day and passed as happy a fortnight as ever happy was, I went round to the creditors and I says “Gentlemen I am acquainted with the fact that I am not answerable for my late husband’s debts but I wish to pay them for I am his lawful wife and his good name is dear to me. I am going into the Lodgings gentlemen as a business and if I prosper every farthing that my late husband owed shall be paid for the sake of the love I bore him, by this right hand.” It took a long time to do but it was done, and the silver cream-jug which is between ourselves and the bed and the mattress in my room up-stairs (or it would have found legs so sure as ever the Furnished bill was up) being presented by the gentlemen engraved “To Mrs. Lirriper a mark of grateful respect for her honourable conduct” gave me a turn which was too much for my feelings, till Mr. Betley which at that time had the parlours and loved his joke says “Cheer up Mrs. Lirriper, you should feel as if it was only your christening and they were your godfathers and godmothers which did promise for you." And it brought me round, and I don't mind confessing to you my dear that I then put a sandwich and a drop of sherry in a little basket and went down to Hatfield church-yard outside the coach and kissed my hand and laid it with a kind of proud and swelling love on my husband's grave, though bless you it had taken me so long to clear his name that my wedding-ring was worn quite fine and smooth when I laid it on the green green waving grass.

I am an old woman now and my good looks are gone but that's me my dear over the plate-warmer and considered like in the times when you used to pay two guineas on ivory and took your chance pretty much how you came out, which made you very careful how you left it about afterwards because people were turned so red and uncomfortable by mostly guessing it was somebody else quite different, and there was once a certain person that had put his money in a hop business that came in one morning to pay his rent and his respects being the second floor that would have taken it down from its hook and put it in his breast-pocket—you understand my dear—for the L, he says of the original—only there was no mellowness in *his* voice and I wouldn't let him, but his opinion of it you may gather from his saying to it "Speak to me Emma!" which was far from a rational observation no doubt but still a tribute to its being a likeness, and I think myself it *was* like me when I was young and wore that sort of stays.

But it was about the Lodgings that I was intending to hold forth and certainly I ought to know something of the business having been in it so long, for it was early in the second year of my married life that I lost my poor Lirriper and I set up at Islington directly afterwards and afterwards came here, being two houses and eight-and-thirty years and some losses and a deal of experience.

Girls are your first trial after fixtures and they try you even worse than what I call the Wandering Christians, though why *they* should roam the earth looking for bills and then coming in and viewing the apartments and stickling about terms and never at all wanting them or dreaming of taking them being already provided, is, a mystery I should be thankful to have explained if by any miracle it could be. It's wonderful they live so long and thrive so on it but I suppose the exercise makes it healthy, knocking so much and going from house to house and up and down-stairs all day, and then their pretending to be so particular and punctual is a most astonishing thing, looking at their watches and saying "Could you give me the refusal of the rooms till twenty minutes past eleven the day after to-morrow in the forenoon, and supposing it to be considered essential by my friend from the country could there be a small iron bedstead put in the little room upon the stairs?" Why when I was new to it my dear I used to consider before I promised and to make my mind anxious with calculations and to get quite wearied out with disappointments, but now I says "Certainly by all means" well knowing it's a Wandering Christian and I shall hear no more about it, indeed by this time I know most of the Wandering Christians by sight as well as they know me, it being the habit of each individual revolving round London in that capacity to come back about twice a year, and it's very remarkable that it runs in families and the children grow up to it, but even were it otherwise I should no sooner hear of the friend from the country which is a certain sign than I should nod and say to myself You're a Wandering Christian, though whether they are (as I *have* heard) persons of small property with a taste for regular employment and frequent change of scene I cannot undertake to tell you.

Girls as I was beginning to remark are one of your first and your lasting troubles, being like your teeth which begin with convulsions and never cease tormenting you from the time you cut them till they cut you, and then you don't want to part with them which seems hard but we must all succumb or buy artificial, and even where you get a will nine times out of ten you'll get a dirty face with it and naturally lodgers do not like good society to be shown in with a smear of black across the nose or a smudgy eyebrow. Where they pick the black up is a mystery I cannot solve, as in the case of the willingest girl that ever came into a house half-starved poor thing, a girl so willing that I called her Willing Sophy down upon her knees scrubbing early and late and ever cheerful but always smiling with a black face. And I says to Sophy, "Now Sophy my good girl have a regular day for your stoves and keep the width of the Airy between yourself and the blacking and do not brush your hair with the bottoms of the saucepans and do not meddle with the snuffs of the candles and it stands to reason that it can no longer be" yet there it was and always on her nose, which turning up and being broad at the end seemed to boast of it and caused warning from a steady gentleman and excellent lodger with breakfast by the week but a little irritable and use of a sitting-room when required, his words being "Mrs. Lirriper I have arrived at the point of admitting that the Black is a man and a brother, but only in a natural form and when it can't be got off." Well consequently I put poor Sophy on to other work and forbid her answering the door or answering a bell on any account but she was so unfortunately willing that nothing would stop her flying up the kitchen-stairs whenever a bell was heard to tingle. I put it to her "O Sophy Sophy for goodness' goodness' sake where does it come from?" To which that poor unlucky willing mortal—bursting out crying to see me so vexed replied "I took a deal of black into me ma'am when I was a small child being much neglected and I think it must be, that it works out," so it continuing to work out of that poor thing and not having another fault to find with her I says "Sophy what do you seriously think of my helping you away to New South Wales where it might not be noticed?" Nor did I ever repent the money which was well spent, for she married the ship's cook on the voyage (himself a Mulotter) and did well and lived happy, and so far as ever I heard it was *not* noticed in a new state of society to her dying day.

In what way Miss Wozenham lower down on the other side of the way reconciled it to her feelings as a lady (which she is not) to entice Mary Anne Perkinsop from my service is best known to herself, I do not know and I do not wish to know how opinions are formed at Wozenham's on any point. But Mary Anne Perkinsop although I behaved handsomely to her and she behaved unhandsomely to me was worth her weight in gold as overawing lodgers without driving them away, for lodgers would be far more sparing of their bells with Mary Anne than I ever knew them to be with Maid or Mistress, which is a great triumph especially when accompanied with a cast in the eye and a bag of bones, but it was the steadiness of her way with them through her father's having failed in Pork. It was Mary Anne's looking so respectable in her person and being so strict in her spirits that conquered the tea-and-sugarest gentleman (for he weighed them both in a pair of scales every morning) that I have ever had to deal with and no lamb grew meeker, still it afterwards came round to me that Miss Wozenham happening to pass and seeing Mary Anne take in the milk of a milkman that made free in a rosy-faced way (I think no worse of him) with every girl in the street but was quite frozen up like the statue at Charing-cross by her, saw Mary Anne's value in the lodging business and went as high as one pound per quarter more, consequently Mary Anne with not a word betwixt us says "If you will provide yourself Mrs. Lirriper in a month from this day I have already done the same," which hurt me and I said so, and she then hurt me more by insinuating that her father having failed in Pork had laid her open to it.

My dear I do assure you it's a harassing thing to know what kind of girls to give the preference to, for if they are lively they get bell'd off their legs and if they are sluggish you suffer from it yourself in complaints and if they are sparkling-eyed they get made love to, and if they are smart in their persons they try on your Lodgers' bonnets and if they are musical I defy you to keep them away from bands and organs, and allowing for any difference you like in their heads their heads will be always out of window just the same. And then what the gentlemen like in girls the ladies don't, which is fruitful hot water for all parties, and then there's temper though such a temper as Caroline Maxey's I hope not often. A good-looking black-eyed girl was Caroline and a comely-made girl to your cost when she did break out and laid about her, as took place first and last through a new-married couple come to see London in the first floor and the lady very high and it *was* supposed not liking the good looks of Caroline having none of her own to spare, but anyhow she did try Caroline though that was no excuse. So one afternoon Caroline comes down into the kitchen flushed and flashing, and she says to me "Mrs. Lirriper that woman in the first has aggravated me past bearing," I says "Caroline keep your temper," Caroline says with a curdling laugh "Keep my temper? You're right Mrs. Lirriper, so I will. Capital D her!" bursts out Caroline (you might have struck me into the centre of the earth with a feather when she said it) "I'll give her a touch of the temper that *I* keep!" Caroline downs with her hair my dear, screeches and rushes up-stairs, I following as fast as my trembling legs could bear me, but before I got into the room the dinner-cloth and pink-and-white service all dragged off upon the floor with a crash and the new-married couple on their backs in the firegrate, him with the shovel and tongs and a dish of cucumber across him and a mercy it was summer-time. "Caroline" I says "be calm," but she catches off my cap and tears it in her teeth as she passes me, then pounces on the new-married lady makes her a bundle of ribbons takes her by the two ears and knocks the back of her head upon the carpet Murder screaming all the time Policemen running down the street and Wozenham's windows (judge of my feelings when I came to know it) thrown up and Miss Wozenham calling out from the balcony with crocodile's tears "It's Mrs. Lirriper been overcharging somebody to madness—she'll be murdered—I always thought so—Pleeseman save her!" My dear four of them and Caroline behind the chiffoniere attacking with the poker and when disarmed prize-fighting with her double fists, and down and up and up and down and dreadful! But I couldn't bear to see the poor young creature roughly handled and her hair torn when they got the better of her, and I says "Gentlemen Policemen pray remember that her sex is the sex of your mothers and sisters and your sweethearts, and God bless them and you!" And there she was sitting down on the ground handcuffed, taking breath against the skirting-board and them cool with their coats in strips, and all she says was "Mrs. Lirriper I'm sorry as ever I touched you, for you're a kind motherly old thing," and it made me think that I had often wished I had been a mother indeed and how would my heart have felt if I had been the mother of that girl! Well you know it turned out at the Police-office that she had done it before, and she had her clothes away and was sent to prison, and when she was to come out I trotted off to the gate in the evening with just a morsel of jelly in that little basket of mine to give her a mite of strength to face the world again, and there I met with a very decent mother waiting for her son through bad company and a stubborn one he was with his half-boots not laced. So out came Caroline and I says "Caroline come along with me and sit down under the wall where it's retired and eat a little trifle that I have brought with me to do you good," and she throws her arms round my neck and says sobbing "O why were you never a mother when there are such mothers as there are!" she says, and in half a minute more she begins to laugh and says "Did I really tear your cap to shreds?" and when I told her "You certainly did so Caroline" she laughed again and said while she patted my face "Then why do you wear such queer old caps you dear old thing? if you hadn't worn such queer old caps I don't think I should have done it even then." Fancy the girl! Nothing could get out of her what she was going to do except O she would do well enough, and we parted she being very thankful and kissing my hands, and I nevermore saw or heard of that girl, except that I shall always believe that a very genteel cap which was brought anonymous to me one Saturday night in an oilskin basket by a most impertinent young sparrow of a monkey whistling with dirty shoes on the clean steps and playing the harp on the Airy railings with a hoop-stick came from Caroline.

What you lay yourself open to my dear in the way of being the object of uncharitable suspicions when you go into the Lodging business I have not the words to tell you, but never was I so dishonourable as to have two keys nor would I willingly think it even of Miss Wozenham lower down on the other side of the way sincerely hoping that it may not be, though doubtless at the same time money cannot come from nowhere and it is not reason to suppose that Bradshaws put it in for love be it blotty as it may. It *is* a hardship hurting to the feelings that Lodgers open their minds so wide to the idea that you are trying to get the better of them and shut their minds so close to the idea that they are trying to get the better of you, but as Major Jackman says to me, “I know the ways of this circular world Mrs. Lirriper, and that’s one of ’em all round it” and many is the little ruffle in my mind that the Major has smoothed, for he is a clever man who has seen much. Dear dear, thirteen years have passed though it seems but yesterday since I was sitting with my glasses on at the open front parlour window one evening in August (the parlours being then vacant) reading yesterday’s paper my eyes for print being poor though still I am thankful to say a long sight at a distance, when I hear a gentleman come posting across the road and up the street in a dreadful rage talking to himself in a fury and d’ing and c’ing somebody. “By George!” says he out loud and clutching his walking-stick, “I’ll go to Mrs. Lirriper’s. Which is Mrs. Lirriper’s?” Then looking round and seeing me he flourishes his hat right off his head as if I had been the queen and he says, “Excuse the intrusion Madam, but pray Madam can you tell me at what number in this street there resides a well-known and much-respected lady by the name of Lirriper?” A little flustered though I must say gratified I took off my glasses and courtesied and said “Sir, Mrs. Lirriper is your humble servant.” “Astonishing!” says he. “A million pardons! Madam, may I ask you to have the kindness to direct one of your domestics to open the door to a gentleman in search of apartments, by the name of Jackman?” I had never heard the name but a politer gentleman I never hope to see, for says he, “Madam I am shocked at your opening the door yourself to no worthier a fellow than Jemmy Jackman. After you Madam. I never precede a lady.” Then he comes into the parlours and he sniffs, and he says “Hah! These are parlours! Not musty cupboards” he says “but parlours, and no smell of coal-sacks.” Now my dear it having been remarked by some inimical to the whole neighbourhood that it always smells of coal-sacks which might prove a drawback to Lodgers if encouraged, I says to the Major gently though firmly that I think he is referring to Arundel or Surrey or Howard but not Norfolk. “Madam” says he “I refer to Wozenham’s lower down over the way—Madam you can form no notion what Wozenham's is—Madam it is a vast coal-sack, and Miss Wozenham has the principles and manners of a female heaver—Madam from the manner in which I have heard her mention you I know she has no appreciation of a lady, and from the manner in which she has conducted herself towards me I know she has no appreciation of a gentleman—Madam my name is Jackman—should you require any other reference than what I have already said, I name the Bank of England—perhaps you know it!" Such was the beginning of the Major's occupying the parlours and from that hour to this the same and a most obliging Lodger and punctual in all respects except one irregular which I need not particularly specify, but made up for by his being a protection and at all times ready to fill in the papers of the Assessed Taxes and Juries and that, and once collared a young man with the drawing-room clock under his coat, and once on the parapets with his own hands and blankets put out the kitchen chimney and afterwards attending the summons made a most eloquent speech against the Parish before the magistrates and saved the engine, and ever quite the gentleman though passionate. And certainly Miss Wozenham's detaining the trunks and umbrella was not in a liberal spirit though it may have been according to her rights in law or an act *I* would myself have stooped to, the Major being so much the gentleman that though he is far from tall he seems almost so when he has his shirt-frill out and his frock-coat on and his hat with the curly brims, and in what service he was I cannot truly tell you my dear whether Militia or Foreign, for I never heard him even name himself as Major but always simple "Jemmy Jackman" and once soon after he came when I felt it my duty to let him know that Miss Wozenham had put it about that he was no Major and I took the liberty of adding "which you are sir" his words were "Madam at any rate I am not a Minor, and sufficient for the day is the evil thereof" which cannot be denied to be the sacred truth, nor yet his military ways of having his boots with only the dirt brushed off taken to him in the front parlour every morning on a clean plate and varnishing them himself with a little sponge and a saucer and a whistle in a whisper so sure as ever his breakfast is ended, and so neat his ways that it never soils his linen which is scrupulous though more in quality than quantity, neither that nor his mustachios which to the best of my belief are done at the same time and which are as black and shining as his boots, his head of hair being a lovely white.

It was the third year nearly up of the Major's being in the parlours that early one morning in the month of February when Parliament was coming on and you may therefore suppose a number of impostors were about ready to take hold of anything they could get, a gentleman and a lady from the country came in to view the Second, and I well remember that I had been looking out of window and had watched them and the heavy sleet driving down the street together looking for bills. I did not quite take to the face of the gentleman though he was good-looking too but the lady was a very pretty young thing and delicate, and it seemed too rough for her to be out at all though she had only come from the Adelphi Hotel which would not have been much above a quarter of a mile if the weather had been less severe. Now it did so happen my dear that I had been forced to put five shillings weekly additional on the second in consequence of a loss from running away full dressed as if going out to a dinner-party, which was very artful and had made me rather suspicious taking it along with Parliament, so when the gentleman proposed three months certain and the money in advance and leave then reserved to renew on the same terms for six months more, I says I was not quite certain but that I might have engaged myself to another party but would step down-stairs and look into it if they would take a seat. They took a seat and I went down to the handle of the Major's door that I had already began to consult finding it a great blessing, and I knew by his whistling in a whisper that he was varnishing his boots which was generally considered private, however he kindly calls out "If it's you, Madam, come in," and I went in and told him.

"Well, Madam," says the Major rubbing his nose—as I did fear at the moment with the black sponge but it was only his knuckle, he being always neat and dexterous with his fingers—"well, Madam, I suppose you would be glad of the money?"

I was delicate of saying "Yes" too out, for a little extra colour rose into the Major's cheeks and there was irregularity which I will not particularly specify in a quarter which I will not name.

"I am of opinion, Madam," says the Major, "that when money is ready for you—when it is ready for you, Mrs. Lirriper—you ought to take it. What is there against it, Madam, in this case up-stairs?"

"I really cannot say there is anything against it, sir, still I thought I would consult you."

"You said a newly-married couple, I think, Madam?" says the Major.

I says “Ye-es. Evidently. And indeed the young lady mentioned to me in a casual way that she had not been married many months.”

The Major rubbed his nose again and stirred the varnish round and round in its little saucer with his piece of sponge and took to his whistling in a whisper for a few moments. Then he says “You would call it a Good Let, Madam?”

“O certainly a Good Let sir.”

“Say they renew for the additional six months. Would it put you about very much Madam if—if the worst was to come to the worst?” said the Major.

“Well I hardly know,” I says to the Major. “It depends upon circumstances. Would *you* object Sir for instance?”

“I?” says the Major. “Object? Jemmy Jackman? Mrs. Lirriper close with the proposal.”

So I went up-stairs and accepted, and they came in next day which was Saturday and the Major was so good as to draw up a Memorandum of an agreement in a beautiful round hand and expressions that sounded to me equally legal and military, and Mr. Edson signed it on the Monday morning and the Major called upon Mr. Edson on the Tuesday and Mr. Edson called upon the Major on the Wednesday and the Second and the parlours were as friendly as could be wished.

The three months paid for had run out and we had got without any fresh overtures as to payment into May my dear, when there came an obligation upon Mr. Edson to go a business expedition right across the Isle of Man, which fell quite unexpected upon that pretty little thing and is not a place that according to my views is particularly in the way to anywhere at any time but that may be a matter of opinion. So short a notice was it that he was to go next day, and dreadfully she cried poor pretty, and I am sure I cried too when I saw her on the cold pavement in the sharp east wind—it being a very backward spring that year—taking a last leave of him with her pretty bright hair blowing this way and that and her arms clinging round his neck and him saying “There there there. Now let me go Peggy.” And by that time it was plain that what the Major had been so accommodating as to say he would not object to happening in the house, would happen in it, and I told her as much when he was gone while I comforted her with my arm up the staircase, for I says “You will soon have others to keep up for my pretty and you must think of that.”

His letter never came when it ought to have come and what she went through morning after morning when the postman brought none for her the very postman himself compassionated when she ran down to the door, and yet we cannot wonder at its being calculated to blunt the feelings to have all the trouble of other people's letters and none of the pleasure and doing it oftener in the mud and mizzle than not and at a rate of wages more resembling Little Britain than Great. But at last one morning when she was too poorly to come running down-stairs he says to me with a pleased look in his face that made me next to love the man in his uniform coat though he was dripping wet "I have taken you first in the street this morning Mrs. Lirriper, for here's the one for Mrs. Edson." I went up to her bedroom with it as fast as ever I could go, and she sat up in bed when she saw it and kissed it and tore it open and then a blank stare came upon her. "It's very short!" she says lifting her large eyes to my face. "O Mrs. Lirriper it's very short!" I says "My dear Mrs. Edson no doubt that's because your husband hadn't time to write more just at that time." "No doubt, no doubt," says she, and puts her two hands on her face and turns round in her bed.

I shut her softly in and I crept down-stairs and I tapped at the Major's door, and when the Major having his thin slices of bacon in his own Dutch oven saw me he came out of his chair and put me down on the sofa. "Hush!" says he, "I see something's the matter. Don't speak—take time." I says "O Major I'm afraid there's cruel work up-stairs." "Yes yes" says he "I had begun to be afraid of it—take time." And then in opposition to his own words he rages out frightfully, and says "I shall never forgive myself Madam, that I, Jemmy Jackman, didn't see it all that morning—didn't go straight up-stairs when my boot-sponge was in my hand—didn't force it down his throat—and choke him dead with it on the spot!"

The Major and me agreed when we came to ourselves that just at present we could do no more than take on to suspect nothing and use our best endeavours to keep that poor young creature quiet, and what I ever should have done without the Major when it got about among the organ-men that quiet was our object is unknown, for he made lion and tiger war upon them to that degree that without seeing it I could not have believed it was in any gentleman to have such a power of bursting out with fire-irons walking-sticks water-jugs coals potatoes off his table the very hat off his head, and at the same time so furious in foreign languages that they would stand with their handles half-turned fixed like the Sleeping Ugly—for I cannot say Beauty.

Ever to see the postman come near the house now gave me such I fear that it was a reprieve when he went by, but in about another ten days or a fortnight he says again, “Here’s one for Mrs. Edson.—Is she pretty well?” “She is pretty well postman, but not well enough to rise so early as she used” which was so far gospel-truth.

I carried the letter in to the Major at his breakfast and I says tottering “Major I have not the courage to take it up to her.”

“It’s an ill-looking villain of a letter,” says the Major.

“I have not the courage Major” I says again in a tremble “to take it up to her.”

After seeming lost in consideration for some moments the Major says, raising his head as if something new and useful had occurred to his mind “Mrs. Lirriper, I shall never forgive myself that I, Jemmy Jackman, didn’t go straight up-stairs that morning when my boot-sponge was in my hand—and force it down his throat—and choke him dead with it.”

“Major” I says a little hasty “you didn’t do it which is a blessing, for it would have done no good and I think your sponge was better employed on your own honourable boots.”

So we got to be rational, and planned that I should tap at her bedroom door and lay the letter on the mat outside and wait on the upper landing for what might happen, and never was gunpowder cannon-balls or shells or rockets more dreaded than that dreadful letter was by me as I took it to the second floor.

A terrible loud scream sounded through the house the minute after she had opened it, and I found her on the floor lying as if her life was gone. My dear I never looked at the face of the letter which was lying, open by her, for there was no occasion.

Everything I needed to bring her round the Major brought up with his own hands, besides running out to the chemist’s for what was not in the house and likewise having the fiercest of all his many skirmishes with a musical instrument representing a ball-room I do not know in what particular country and company waltzing in and out at folding-doors with rolling eyes. When after a long time I saw her coming to, I slipped on the landing till I heard her cry, and then I went in and says cheerily “Mrs. Edson you’re not well my dear and it’s not to be wondered at,” as if I had not been in before. Whether she believed or disbelieved I cannot say and it would signify nothing if I could, but I stayed by her for hours and then she God ever blesses me! and says she will try to rest for her head is bad.

"Major," I whispers, looking in at the parlours, "I beg and pray of you don't go out."

The Major whispers, "Madam, trust me I will do no such a thing. How is she?"

I says "Major the good Lord above us only knows what burns and rages in her poor mind. I left her sitting at her window. I am going to sit at mine."

It came on afternoon and it came on evening. Norfolk is a delightful street to lodge in—provided you don't go lower down—but of a summer evening when the dust and waste paper lie in it and stray children play in it and a kind of a gritty calm and bake settles on it and a peal of church-bells is practising in the neighbourhood it is a trifle dull, and never have I seen it since at such a time and never shall I see it evermore at such a time without seeing the dull June evening when that forlorn young creature sat at her open corner window on the second and me at my open corner window (the other corner) on the third. Something merciful, something wiser and better far than my own self, had moved me while it was yet light to sit in my bonnet and shawl, and as the shadows fell and the tide rose I could sometimes—when I put out my head and looked at her window below—see that she leaned out a little looking down the street. It was just settling dark when I saw *her* in the street.

So fearful of losing sight of her that it almost stops my breath while I tell it, I went down-stairs faster than I ever moved in all my life and only tapped with my hand at the Major's door in passing it and slipping out. She was gone already. I made the same speed down the street and when I came to the corner of Howard Street I saw that she had turned it and was there plain before me going towards the west. O with what a thankful heart I saw her going along!

She was quite unacquainted with London and had very seldom been out for more than an airing in our own street where she knew two or three little children belonging to neighbours and had sometimes stood among them at the street looking at the water. She must be going at hazard I knew, still she kept the by-streets quite correctly as long as they would serve her, and then turned up into the Strand. But at every corner I could see her head turned one way, and that way was always the river way.

It may have been only the darkness and quiet of the Adelphi that caused her to strike into it but she struck into it much as readily as if she had set out to go there, which perhaps was the case. She went straight down to the Terrace and along it and looked over the iron rail, and I often woke afterwards in my own bed with the horror of seeing her do it. The desertion of the wharf below and the flowing of the high water there seemed to settle her purpose. She looked about as if to make out the way down, and she struck out the right way or the wrong way—I don't know which, for I don't know the place before or since—and I followed her the way she went.

It was noticeable that all this time she never once looked back. But there was now a great change in the manner of her going, and instead of going at a steady quick walk with her arms folded before her,—among the dark dismal arches she went in a wild way with her arms opened wide, as if they were wings and she was flying to her death.

We were on the wharf and she stopped. I stopped. I saw her hands at her bonnet-strings, and I rushed between her and the brink and took her round the waist with both my arms. She might have drowned me, I felt then, but she could never have got quit of me.

Down to that moment my mind had been all in a maze and not half an idea had I had in it what I should say to her, but the instant I touched her it came to me like magic and I had my natural voice and my senses and even almost my breath.

"Mrs. Edson!" I says "My dear! Take care. How ever did you lose your way and stumble on a dangerous place like this? Why you must have come here by the most perplexing streets in all London. No wonder you are lost, I'm sure. And this place too! Why I thought nobody ever got here, except me to order my coals and the Major in the parlours to smoke his cigar!"—for I saw that blessed man close by, pretending to it.

"Hah—Hah—Hum!" coughs the Major.

"And good gracious me" I says, "why here he is!"

"Halloa! who goes there?" says the Major in a military manner.

"Well!" I says, "if this don't beat everything! Don't you know us Major Jackman?"

"Halloa!" says the Major. "Who calls on Jemmy Jackman?" (and more out of breath he was, and did it less like life than I should have expected.)

“Why here’s Mrs. Edson Major” I says, “strolling out to cool her poor head which has been very bad, has missed her way and got lost, and Goodness knows where she might have got to but for me coming here to drop an order into my coal merchant’s letter-box and you coming here to smoke your cigar!—And you really are not well enough my dear” I says to her “to be half so far from home without me. And your arm will be very acceptable I am sure Major” I says to him “and I know she may lean upon it as heavy as she likes.” And now we had both got her—thanks be Above!—one on each side.

She was all in a cold shiver and she so continued till I laid her on her own bed, and up to the early morning she held me by the hand and moaned and moaned “O wicked, wicked, wicked!” But when at last I made believe to droop my head and be overpowered with a dead sleep, I heard that poor young creature give such touching and such humble thanks for being preserved from taking her own life in her madness that I thought I should have cried my eyes out on the counterpane and I knew she was safe.

Being well enough to do and able to afford it, me and the Major laid our little plans next day while she was asleep worn out, and so I says to her as soon as I could do it nicely:

“Mrs. Edson my dear, when Mr. Edson paid me the rent for these farther six months—”

She gave a start and I felt her large eyes look at me, but I went on with it and with my needlework.

“—I can’t say that I am quite sure I dated the receipt right. Could you let me look at it?”

She laid her frozen cold hand upon mine and she looked through me when I was forced to look up from my needlework, but I had taken the precaution of having on my spectacles.

“I have no receipt” says she.

“Ah! Then he has got it” I says in a careless way. “It’s of no great consequence. A receipt’s a receipt.”

From that time she always had hold of my hand when I could spare it which was generally only when I read to her, for of course she and me had our bits of needlework to plod at and neither of us was very handy at those little things, though I am still rather proud of my share in them too considering. And though she took to all I read to her, I used to fancy that next to what was taught upon the Mount she took most of all to His gentle compassion for us poor women and to His young life and to how His mother was proud of Him and treasured His sayings in her heart. She had a grateful look in her eyes that never never never will be out of mine until they are closed in my last sleep, and when I chanced to look at her without thinking of it I would always meet that look, and she would often offer me her trembling lip to kiss, much more like a little affectionate half broken-hearted child than ever I can imagine any grown person.

One time the trembling of this poor lip was so strong and her tears ran down so fast that I thought she was going to tell me all her woe, so I takes her two hands in mine and I says:

“No my dear not now, you had best not try to do it now. Wait for better times when you have got over this and are strong, and then you shall tell me whatever you will. Shall it be agreed?”

With our hands still joined she nodded her head many times, and she lifted my hands and put them to her lips and to her bosom. “Only one word now my dear” I says. “Is there any one?”

She looked inquiringly “Any one?”

“That I can go to?”

She shook her head.

“No one that I can bring?”

She shook her head.

“No one is wanted by *me* my dear. Now that may be considered past and gone.”

Not much more than a week afterwards—for this was far on in the time of our being so together—I was bending over at her bedside with my ear down to her lips, by turns listening for her breath and looking for a sign of life in her face. At last it came in a solemn way—not in a flash but like a kind of pale faint light brought very slow to the face.

She said something to me that had no sound in it, but I saw she asked me:

“Is this death?”

And I says:

“Poor dear poor dear, I think it is.”

Knowing somehow that she wanted me to move her weak right hand, I took it and laid it on her breast and then folded her other hand upon it, and she prayed a good good prayer and I joined in it poor me though there were no words spoke. Then I brought the baby in its wrappers from where it lay, and I says:

“My dear this is sent to a childless old woman. This is for me to take care of.”

The trembling lip was put up towards my face for the last time, and I dearly kissed it.

“Yes my dear,” I says. “Please God! Me and the Major.”

I don’t know how to tell it right, but I saw her soul brighten and leap up, and get free and fly away in the grateful look.

* * * * *

So this is the why and wherefore of its coming to pass my dear that we called him Jemmy, being after the Major his own godfather with Lirriper for a surname being after myself, and never was a dear child such a brightening thing in a Lodgings or such a playmate to his grandmother as Jemmy to this house and me, and always good and minding what he was told (upon the whole) and soothing for the temper and making everything pleasanter except when he grew old enough to drop his cap down Wozenham’s Airy and they wouldn’t hand it up to him, and being worked into a state I put on my best bonnet and gloves and parasol with the child in my hand and I says “Miss Wozenham I little thought ever to have entered your house but unless my grandson’s cap is instantly restored, the laws of this country regulating the property of the Subject shall at length decide betwixt yourself and me, cost what it may.” With a sneer upon her face which did strike me I must say as being expressive of two keys but it may have been a mistake and if there is any doubt let Miss Wozenham have the full benefit of it as is but right, she rang the bell and she says “Jane, is there a street-child’s old cap down our Airy?” I says “Miss Wozenham before your housemaid answers that question you must allow me to inform you to your face that my grandson is *not* a street-child and is *not* in the habit of wearing old caps. In fact” I says “Miss Wozenham I am far from sure that my grandson’s cap may not be newer than your own” which was perfectly savage in me, her lace being the commonest machine-make washed and torn besides, but I had been put into a state to begin with fomented by impertinence. Miss Wozenham says red in the face “Jane you heard my question, is there any child’s cap down our Airy?” “Yes Ma’am” says Jane, “I think I did see some such rubbish a-lying there.” “Then” says Miss Wozenham “let these visitors out, and then throw up that worthless article out of my premises.”

But here the child who had been staring at Miss Wozenham with all his eyes and more, frowns down his little eyebrows purses up his little mouth puts his chubby legs far apart turns his little dimpled fists round and round slowly over one another like a little coffee-mill, and says to her "Oo impdent to mi Gran, me tut oor hi!" "O!" says Miss Wozenham looking down scornfully at the Mite "this is not a street-child is it not! Really!" I bursts out laughing and I says "Miss Wozenham if this ain't a pretty sight to you I don't envy your feelings and I wish you good-day. Jemmy come along with Gran." And I was still in the best of humours though his cap came flying up into the street as if it had been just turned on out of the water-plug, and I went home laughing all the way, all owing to that dear boy.

The miles and miles that me and the Major have travelled with Jemmy in the dusk between the lights are not to be calculated, Jemmy driving on the coach-box which is the Major's brass-bound writing desk on the table, me inside in the easy-chair and the Major Guard up behind with a brown-paper horn doing it really wonderful. I do assure you my dear that sometimes when I have taken a few winks in my place inside the coach and have come half awake by the flashing light of the fire and have heard that precious pet driving and the Major blowing up behind to have the change of horses ready when we got to the Inn, I have half believed we were on the old North Road that my poor Lirriper knew so well. Then to see that child and the Major both wrapped up getting down to warm their feet and going stamping about and having glasses of ale out of the paper matchboxes on the chimney-piece is to see the Major enjoying it fully as much as the child I am very sure, and it's equal to any play when Coachee opens the coach-door to look in at me inside and say "Wery 'past that 'tage.—'Prightened old lady?"

But what my inexpressible feelings were when we lost that child can only be compared to the Major's which were not a shade better, through his straying out at five years old and eleven o'clock in the forenoon and never heard of by word or sign or deed till half-past nine at night, when the Major had gone to the Editor of the *Times* newspaper to put in an advertisement, which came out next day four-and-twenty hours after he was found, and which I mean always carefully to keep in my lavender drawer as the first printed account of him. The more the day got on, the more I got distracted and the Major too and both of us made worse by the composed ways of the police though very civil and obliging and what I must call their obstinacy in not entertaining the idea that he was stolen. “We mostly find Mum” says the sergeant who came round to comfort me, which he didn’t at all and he had been one of the private constables in Caroline’s time to which he referred in his opening words when he said “Don’t give way to uneasiness in your mind Mum, it’ll all come as right as my nose did when I got the same barked by that young woman in your second floor”—says this sergeant “we mostly find Mum as people ain’t over-anxious to have what I may call second-hand children. *You’ll* get him back Mum.” “O but my dear good sir” I says clasping my hands and wringing them and clasping them again “he is such an uncommon child!” “Yes Mum” says the sergeant, “we mostly find that too Mum. The question is what his clothes were worth.” “His clothes” I says “were not worth much sir for he had only got his playing-dress on, but the dear child!—” “All right Mum” says the sergeant. “You’ll get him back Mum. And even if he’d had his best clothes on, it wouldn’t come to worse than his being found wrapped up in a cabbage-leaf, a shivering in a lane.” His words pierced my heart like daggers and daggers, and me and the Major ran in and out like wild things all day long till the Major returning from his interview with the Editor of the *Times* at night rushes into my little room hysterical and squeezes my hand and wipes his eyes and says “Joy joy—officer in plain clothes came up on the steps as I was letting myself in—compose your feelings—Jemmy’s found.” Consequently I fainted away and when I came to, embraced the legs of the officer in plain clothes who seemed to be taking a kind of a quiet inventory in his mind of the property in my little room with brown whiskers, and I says “Blessings on you sir where is the Darling!” and he says “In Kennington Station House.” I was dropping at his feet Stone at the image of that Innocence in cells with murderers when he adds “He followed the Monkey.” I says deeming it slang language “O sir explain for a loving grandmother what Monkey!” He says “Him in the spangled cap with the strap under the chin, as won’t keep on—him as sweeps the crossings on a round table and don’t want to draw his sabre more than he can help.” Then I understood it all and most thankfully thanked him, and me and the Major and him drove over to Kennington and there we found our boy lying quite comfortable before a blazing fire having sweetly played himself to sleep upon a small accordion nothing like so big as a flat-iron which they had been so kind as to lend him for the purpose and which it appeared had been stopped upon a very young person.

My dear the system upon which the Major commenced and as I may say perfected Jemmy’s learning when he was so small that if the dear was on the other side of the table you had to look under it instead of over it to see him with his mother’s own bright hair in beautiful curls, is a thing that ought to be known to the Throne and Lords and Commons and then might obtain some promotion for the Major which he well deserves and would be none the worse for (speaking between friends) L. S. D.-ically. When the Major first undertook his learning he says to me:

“I’m going Madam,” he says “to make our child a Calculating Boy.

“Major,” I says, “you terrify me and may do the pet a permanent injury you would never forgive yourself.”

“Madam,” says the Major, “next to my regret that when I had my boot-sponge in my hand, I didn’t choke that scoundrel with it—on the spot—”

“There! For Gracious’ sake,” I interrupts, “let his conscience find him without sponges.”

“—I say next to that regret, Madam,” says the Major “would be the regret with which my breast,” which he tapped, “would be surcharged if this fine mind was not early cultivated. But mark me Madam,” says the Major holding up his forefinger “cultivated on a principle that will make it a delight.”

“Major” I says “I will be candid with you and tell you openly that if ever I find the dear child fall off in his appetite I shall know it is his calculations and shall put a stop to them at two minutes’ notice. Or if I find them mounting to his head” I says, “or striking anyways cold to his stomach or leading to anything approaching flabbiness in his legs, the result will be the same, but Major you are a clever man and have seen much and you love the child and are his own godfather, and if you feel a confidence in trying try.”

“Spoken Madam” says the Major “like Emma Lirriper. All I have to ask, Madam, is that you will leave my godson and myself to make a week or two’s preparations for surprising you, and that you will give me leave to have up and down any small articles not actually in use that I may require from the kitchen.”

“From the kitchen Major?” I says half feeling as if he had a mind to cook the child.

“From the kitchen” says the Major, and smiles and swells, and at the same time looks taller.

So I passed my word and the Major and the dear boy were shut up together for half an hour at a time through a certain while, and never could I hear anything going on betwixt them but talking and laughing and Jemmy clapping his hands and screaming out numbers, so I says to myself “it has not harmed him yet” nor could I on examining the dear find any signs of it anywhere about him which was likewise a great relief. At last one day Jemmy brings me a card in joke in the Major’s neat writing “The Messrs. Jemmy Jackman” for we had given him the Major’s other name too “request the honour of Mrs. Lirriper’s company at the Jackman Institution in the front parlour this evening at five, military time, to witness a few slight feats of elementary arithmetic.” And if you’ll believe me there in the front parlour at five punctual to the moment was the Major behind the Pembroke table with both leaves up and a lot of things from the kitchen tidily set out on old newspapers spread atop of it, and there was the Mite stood upon a chair with his rosy cheeks flushing and his eyes sparkling clusters of diamonds.

“Now Gran” says he, “oo tit down and don’t oo touch ler people”—for he saw with every one of those diamonds of his that I was going to give him a squeeze.

“Very well sir” I says “I am obedient in this good company I am sure.” And I sits down in the easy-chair that was put for me, shaking my sides.

But picture my admiration when the Major going on almost as quick as if he was conjuring sets out all the articles he names, and says “Three saucepans, an Italian iron, a hand-bell, a toasting-fork, a nutmeg-grater, four potlids, a spice-box, two egg-cups, and a chopping-board—how many?” and when that Mite instantly cries “Tifteen, tut down tive and carry ler ’toppin-board” and then claps his hands draws up his legs and dances on his chair.

My dear with the same astonishing ease and correctness him and the Major added up the tables chairs and sofy, the picters fenders and fire-irons their own selves me and the cat and the eyes in Miss Wozenham’s head, and whenever the sum was done Young Roses and Diamonds claps his hands and draws up his legs and dances on his chair.

The pride of the Major! (“*Here’s* a mind Ma’am!” he says to me behind his hand.)

Then he says aloud, “We now come to the next elementary rule,—which is called—”

“Umtraction!” cries Jemmy.

“Right,” says the Major. “We have here a toasting-fork, a potato in its natural state, two potlids, one egg-cup, a wooden spoon, and two skewers, from which it is necessary for commercial purposes to subtract a sprat-gridiron, a small pickle-jar, two lemons, one pepper-castor, a blackbeetle-trap, and a knob of the dresser-drawer—what remains?”

“Toatin-fork!” cries Jemmy.

“In numbers how many?” says the Major.

“One!” cries Jemmy.

(“*Here’s* a boy, Ma’am!” says the Major to me behind his hand.) Then the Major goes on:

“We now approach the next elementary rule,—which is entitled—”

“Tickleication” cries Jemmy.

“Correct” says the Major.

But my dear to relate to you in detail the way in which they multiplied fourteen sticks of firewood by two bits of ginger and a larding needle, or divided pretty well everything else there was on the table by the heater of the Italian iron and a chamber candlestick, and got a lemon over, would make my head spin round and round and round as it did at the time. So I says “if you’ll excuse my addressing the chair Professor Jackman I think the period of the lecture has now arrived when it becomes necessary that I should take a good hug of this young scholar.” Upon which Jemmy calls out from his station on the chair, “Gran oo open oor arms and me’ll make a ’pring into ’em.” So I opened my arms to him as I had opened my sorrowful heart when his poor young mother lay a dying, and he had his jump and we had a good long hug together and the Major prouder than any peacock says to me behind his hand, “You need not let him know it Madam” (which I certainly need not for the Major was quite audible) “but he *is* a boy!”

In this way Jemmy grew and grew and went to day-school and continued under the Major too, and in summer we were as happy as the days were long, and in winter we were as happy as the days were short and there seemed to rest a Blessing on the Lodgings for they as good as Let themselves and would have done it if there had been twice the accommodation, when sore and hard against my will I one day says to the Major.

"Major you know what I am going to break to you. Our boy must go to boarding-school."

It was a sad sight to see the Major's countenance drop, and I pitied the good soul with all my heart.

"Yes Major" I says, "though he is as popular with the Lodgers as you are yourself and though he is to you and me what only you and me know, still it is in the course of things and Life is made of partings and we must part with our Pet."

Bold as I spoke, I saw two Majors and half-a-dozen fireplaces, and when the poor Major put one of his neat bright-varnished boots upon the fender and his elbow on his knee and his head upon his hand and rocked himself a little to and fro, I was dreadfully cut up.

"But" says I clearing my throat "you have so well prepared him Major—he has had such a Tutor in you—that he will have none of the first drudgery to go through. And he is so clever besides that he'll soon make his way to the front rank."

"He is a boy" says the Major—having sniffed—"that has not his like on the face of the earth."

"True as you say Major, and it is not for us merely for our own sakes to do anything to keep him back from being a credit and an ornament wherever he goes and perhaps even rising to be a great man, is it Major? He will have all my little savings when my work is done (being all the world to me) and we must try to make him a wise man and a good man, mustn't we Major?"

"Madam" says the Major rising "Jemmy Jackman is becoming an older file than I was aware of, and you put him to shame. You are thoroughly right Madam. You are simply and undeniably right.—And if you'll excuse me, I'll take a walk."

So the Major being gone out and Jemmy being at home, I got the child into my little room here and I stood him by my chair and I took his mother's own curls in my hand and I spoke to him loving and serious. And when I had reminded the darling how that he was now in his tenth year and when I had said to him about his getting on in life pretty much what I had said to the Major I broke to him how that we must have this same parting, and there I was forced to stop for there I saw of a sudden the well-remembered lip with its tremble, and it so brought back that time! But with the spirit that was in him he controlled it soon and he says gravely nodding through his tears, “I understand Gran—I know it *must* be, Gran—go on Gran, don’t be afraid of *me*.” And when I had said all that ever I could think of, he turned his bright steady face to mine and he says just a little broken here and there “You shall see Gran that I can be a man and that I can do anything that is grateful and loving to you—and if I don’t grow up to be what you would like to have me—I hope it will be—because I shall die.” And with that he sat down by me and I went on to tell him of the school of which I had excellent recommendations and where it was and how many scholars and what games they played as I had heard and what length of holidays, to all of which he listened bright and clear. And so it came that at last he says “And now dear Gran let me kneel down here where I have been used to say my prayers and let me fold my face for just a minute in your gown and let me cry, for you have been more than father—more than mother—more than brothers sisters friends—to me!” And so he did cry and I too and we were both much the better for it.

From that time forth he was true to his word and ever blithe and ready, and even when me and the Major took him down into Lincolnshire he was far the gayest of the party though for sure and certain he might easily have been that, but he really was and put life into us only when it came to the last Good-bye, he says with a wistful look, “You wouldn’t have me not really sorry would you Gran?” and when I says “No dear, Lord forbid!” he says “I am glad of that!” and ran in out of sight.

But now that the child was gone out of the Lodgings the Major fell into a regularly moping state. It was taken notice of by all the Lodgers that the Major moped. He hadn’t even the same air of being rather tall than he used to have, and if he varnished his boots with a single gleam of interest it was as much as he did.

One evening the Major came into my little room to take a cup of tea and a morsel of buttered toast and to read Jemmy’s newest letter which had arrived that afternoon (by the very same postman more than middle-aged upon the Beat now), and the letter raising him up a little I says to the Major:

“Major you mustn’t get into a moping way.”

The Major shook his head. “Jemmy Jackman Madam,” he says with a deep sigh, “is an older file than I thought him.”

“Moping is not the way to grow younger Major.”

“My dear Madam,” says the Major, “is there *any* way of growing younger?”

Feeling that the Major was getting rather the best of that point I made a diversion to another.

“Thirteen years! Thir-teen years! Many Lodgers have come and gone, in the thirteen years that you have lived in the parlours Major.”

“Hah!” says the Major warming. “Many Madam, many.”

“And I should say you have been familiar with them all?”

“As a rule (with its exceptions like all rules) my dear Madam” says the Major, “they have honoured me with their acquaintance, and not unfrequently with their confidence.”

Watching the Major as he drooped his white head and stroked his black mustachios and moped again, a thought which I think must have been going about looking for an owner somewhere dropped into my old noddle if you will excuse the expression.

“The walls of my Lodgings” I says in a casual way—for my dear it is of no use going straight at a man who mopes—“might have something to tell if they could tell it.”

The Major neither moved nor said anything but I saw he was attending with his shoulders my dear—attending with his shoulders to what I said. In fact I saw that his shoulders were struck by it.

“The dear boy was always fond of story-books” I went on, like as if I was talking to myself. “I am sure this house—his own home—might write a story or two for his reading one day or another.”

The Major’s shoulders gave a dip and a curve and his head came up in his shirt-collar. The Major’s head came up in his shirt-collar as I hadn’t seen it come up since Jemmy went to school.

“It is unquestionable that in intervals of cribbage and a friendly rubber, my dear Madam,” says the Major, “and also over what used to be called in my young times—in the salad days of Jemmy Jackman—the social glass, I have exchanged many a reminiscence with your Lodgers.”

My remark was—I confess I made it with the deepest and artfullest of intentions—“I wish our dear boy had heard them!”

“Are you serious Madam?” asked the Major starting and turning full round.

“Why not Major?”

“Madam” says the Major, turning up one of his cuffs, “they shall be written for him.”

“Ah! Now you speak” I says giving my hands a pleased clap. “Now you are in a way out of moping Major!”

“Between this and my holidays—I mean the dear boy’s” says the Major turning up his other cuff, “a good deal may be done towards it.”

“Major you are a clever man and you have seen much and not a doubt of it.”

“I’ll begin,” says the Major looking as tall as ever he did, “to-morrow.”

My dear the Major was another man in three days and he was himself again in a week and he wrote and wrote and wrote with his pen scratching like rats behind the wainscot, and whether he had many grounds to go upon or whether he did at all romance I cannot tell you, but what he has written is in the left-hand glass closet of the little bookcase close behind you.

CHAPTER II—HOW THE PARLOURS ADDED A FEW WORDS

I have the honour of presenting myself by the name of Jackman. I esteem it a proud privilege to go down to posterity through the instrumentality of the most remarkable boy that ever lived,—by the name of JEMMY JACKMAN LIRRIPER,—and of my most worthy and most highly respected friend, Mrs. Emma Lirriper, of Eighty-one, Norfolk Street, Strand, in the County of Middlesex, in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

It is not for me to express the rapture with which we received that dear and eminently remarkable boy, on the occurrence of his first Christmas holidays. Suffice it to observe that when he came flying into the house with two splendid prizes (Arithmetic, and Exemplary Conduct), Mrs. Lirriper and myself embraced with emotion, and instantly took him to the Play, where we were all three admirably entertained.

Nor is it to render homage to the virtues of the best of her good and honoured sex—whom, in deference to her unassuming worth, I will only here designate by the initials E. L.—that I add this record to the bundle of papers with which our, in a most distinguished degree, remarkable boy has expressed himself delighted, before re-consigning the same to the left-hand glass closet of Mrs. Lirriper’s little bookcase.

Neither is it to obtrude the name of the old original superannuated obscure Jemmy Jackman, once (to his degradation) of Wozenham’s, long (to his elevation) of Lirriper’s. If I could be consciously guilty of that piece of bad taste, it would indeed be a work of supererogation, now that the name is borne by JEMMY JACKMAN LIRRIPER.

No, I take up my humble pen to register a little record of our strikingly remarkable boy, which my poor capacity regards as presenting a pleasant little picture of the dear boy’s mind. The picture may be interesting to himself when he is a man.

Our first reunited Christmas-day was the most delightful one we have ever passed together. Jemmy was never silent for five minutes, except in church-time. He talked as we sat by the fire, he talked when we were out walking, he talked as we sat by the fire again, he talked incessantly at dinner, though he made a dinner almost as remarkable as himself. It was the spring of happiness in his fresh young heart flowing and flowing, and it fertilised (if I may be allowed so bold a figure) my much-esteemed friend, and J. J. the present writer.

There were only we three. We dined in my esteemed friend's little room, and our entertainment was perfect. But everything in the establishment is, in neatness, order, and comfort, always perfect. After dinner our boy slipped away to his old stool at my esteemed friend's knee, and there, with his hot chestnuts and his glass of brown sherry (really, a most excellent wine!) on a chair for a table, his face outshone the apples in the dish.

We talked of these jottings of mine, which Jemmy had read through and through by that time; and so it came about that my esteemed friend remarked, as she sat smoothing Jemmy's curls:

"And as you belong to the house too, Jemmy,—and so much more than the Lodgers, having been born in it,—why, your story ought to be added to the rest, I think, one of these days."

Jemmy's eyes sparkled at this, and he said, "So *I* think, Gran."

Then he sat looking at the fire, and then he began to laugh in a sort of confidence with the fire, and then he said, folding his arms across my esteemed friend's lap, and raising his bright face to hers. "Would you like to hear a boy's story, Gran?"

"Of all things," replied my esteemed friend.

"Would you, godfather?"

"Of all things," I too replied.

"Well, then," said Jemmy, "I'll tell you one."

Here our indisputably remarkable boy gave himself a hug, and laughed again, musically, at the idea of his coming out in that new line. Then he once more took the fire into the same sort of confidence as before, and began:

"Once upon a time, When pigs drank wine, And monkeys chewed tobaccer, 'Twas neither in your time nor mine, But that's no macker—"

"Bless the child!" cried my esteemed friend, "what's amiss with his brain?"

"It's poetry, Gran," returned Jemmy, shouting with laughter. "We always begin stories that way at school."

"Gave me quite a turn, Major," said my esteemed friend, fanning herself with a plate. "Thought he was light-headed!"

"In those remarkable times, Gran and godfather, there was once a boy,—not me, you know."

"No, no," says my respected friend, "not you. Not him, Major, you understand?"

"No, no," says I.

"And he went to school in Rutlandshire—"

"Why not Lincolnshire?" says my respected friend.

"Why not, you dear old Gran? Because *I* go to school in Lincolnshire, don't I?"

"Ah, to be sure!" says my respected friend. "And it's not Jemmy, you understand, Major?"

"No, no," says I.

"Well!" our boy proceeded, hugging himself comfortably, and laughing merrily (again in confidence with the fire), before he again looked up in Mrs. Lirriper's face, "and so he was tremendously in love with his schoolmaster's daughter, and she was the most beautiful creature that ever was seen, and she had brown eyes, and she had brown hair all curling beautifully, and she had a delicious voice, and she was delicious altogether, and her name was Seraphina."

"What's the name of *your* schoolmaster's daughter, Jemmy?" asks my respected friend.

"Polly!" replied Jemmy, pointing his forefinger at her. "There now! Caught you! Ha, ha, ha!"

When he and my respected friend had had a laugh and a hug together, our admittedly remarkable boy resumed with a great relish:

"Well! And so he loved her. And so he thought about her, and dreamed about her, and made her presents of oranges and nuts, and would have made her presents of pearls and diamonds if he could have afforded it out of his pocket-money, but he couldn't. And so her father—O, he WAS a Tartar! Keeping the boys up to the mark, holding examinations once a month, lecturing upon all sorts of subjects at all sorts of times, and knowing everything in the world out of book. And so this boy—"

"Had he any name?" asks my respected friend.

"No, he hadn't, Gran. Ha, ha! There now! Caught you again!"

After this, they had another laugh and another hug, and then our boy went on.

"Well! And so this boy, he had a friend about as old as himself at the same school, and his name (for He *had* a name, as it happened) was—let me remember—was Bobbo."

"Not Bob," says my respected friend.

"Of course not," says Jemmy. "What made you think it was, Gran? Well! And so this friend was the cleverest and bravest and best-looking and most generous of all the friends that ever were, and so he was in love with Seraphina's sister, and so Seraphina's sister was in love with him, and so they all grew up."

"Bless us!" says my respected friend. "They were very sudden about it."

"So they all grew up," our boy repeated, laughing heartily, "and Bobbo and this boy went away together on horseback to seek their fortunes, and they partly got their horses by favour, and partly in a bargain; that is to say, they had saved up between them seven and fourpence, and the two horses, being Arabs, were worth more, only the man said he would take that, to favour them. Well! And so they made their fortunes and came prancing back to the school, with their pockets full of gold, enough to last for ever. And so they rang at the parents' and visitors' bell (not the back gate), and when the bell was answered they proclaimed 'The same as if it was scarlet fever! Every boy goes home for an indefinite period!' And then there was great hurrahing, and then they kissed Seraphina and her sister,—each his own love, and not the other's on any account,—and then they ordered the Tartar into instant confinement."

"Poor man!" said my respected friend.

"Into instant confinement, Gran," repeated Jemmy, trying to look severe and roaring with laughter; "and he was to have nothing to eat but the boys' dinners, and was to drink half a cask of their beer every day. And so then the preparations were made for the two weddings, and there were hampers, and potted things, and sweet things, and nuts, and postage-stamps, and all manner of things. And so they were so jolly, that they let the Tartar out, and he was jolly too."

"I am glad they let him out," says my respected friend, "because he had only done his duty."

“O, but hadn’t he overdone it, though!” cried Jemmy. “Well! And so then this boy mounted his horse, with his bride in his arms, and cantered away, and cantered on and on till he came to a certain place where he had a certain Gran and a certain godfather,—not you two, you know.”

“No, no,” we both said.

“And there he was received with great rejoicings, and he filled the cupboard and the bookcase with gold, and he showered it out on his Gran and his godfather because they were the two kindest and dearest people that ever lived in this world. And so while they were sitting up to their knees in gold, a knocking was heard at the street door, and who should it be but Bobbo, also on horseback with his bride in his arms, and what had he come to say but that he would take (at double rent) all the Lodgings for ever, that were not wanted by this a boy and this Gran and this godfather, and that they would all live together, and all be happy! And so they were, and so it never ended!”

“And was there no quarrelling?” asked my respected friend, as Jemmy sat upon her lap and hugged her.

“No! Nobody ever quarrelled.”

“And did the money never melt away?”

“No! Nobody could ever spend it all.”

“And did none of them ever grow older?”

“No! Nobody ever grew older after that.”

“And did none of them ever die?”

“O, no, no, no, Gran!” exclaimed our dear boy, laying his cheek upon her breast, and drawing her closer to him. “Nobody ever died.”

“Ah, Major, Major!” says my respected friend, smiling benignly upon me, “this beats our stories. Let us end with the Boy’s story, Major, for the Boy’s story is the best that is ever told!”

In submission to which request on the part of the best of women, I have here noted it down as faithfully as my best abilities, coupled with my best intentions, would admit, subscribing it with my name,

J. JACKMAN.
THE PARLOURS.
MRS. LIRRIPER’S LODGINGS.

THE END OF
Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings

MUDFOG AND OTHER SKETCHES

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PUBLIC LIFE OF MR. TULRUMBLE—ONCE MAYOR OF MUDFOG

Mudfog is a pleasant town—a remarkably pleasant town—situated in a charming hollow by the side of a river, from which river, Mudfog derives an agreeable scent of pitch, tar, coals, and rope-yarn, a roving population in oilskin hats, a pretty steady influx of drunken bargemen, and a great many other maritime advantages. There is a good deal of water about Mudfog, and yet it is not exactly the sort of town for a watering-place, either. Water is a perverse sort of element at the best of times, and in Mudfog it is particularly so. In winter, it comes oozing down the streets and tumbling over the fields,—nay, rushes into the very cellars and kitchens of the houses, with a lavish prodigality that might well be dispensed with; but in the hot summer weather it *will* dry up, and turn green: and, although green is a very good colour in its way, especially in grass, still it certainly is not becoming to water; and it cannot be denied that the beauty of Mudfog is rather impaired, even by this trifling circumstance. Mudfog is a healthy place—very healthy;—damp, perhaps, but none the worse for that. It’s quite a mistake to suppose that damp is unwholesome: plants thrive best in damp situations, and why shouldn’t men? The inhabitants of Mudfog are unanimous in asserting that there exists not a finer race of people on the face of the earth; here we have an indisputable and veracious contradiction of the vulgar error at once. So, admitting Mudfog to be damp, we distinctly state that it is salubrious.

The town of Mudfog is extremely picturesque. Limehouse and Ratcliff Highway are both something like it, but they give you a very faint idea of Mudfog. There are a great many more public-houses in Mudfog—more than in Ratcliff Highway and Limehouse put together. The public buildings, too, are very imposing. We consider the town-hall one of the finest specimens of shed architecture, extant: it is a combination of the pig-sty and tea-garden-box orders; and the simplicity of its design is of surpassing beauty. The idea of placing a large window on one side of the door, and a small one on the other, is particularly happy. There is a fine old Doric beauty, too, about the padlock and scraper, which is strictly in keeping with the general effect.

In this room do the mayor and corporation of Mudfog assemble together in solemn council for the public weal. Seated on the massive wooden benches, which, with the table in the centre, form the only furniture of the whitewashed apartment, the sage men of Mudfog spend hour after hour in grave deliberation. Here they settle at what hour of the night the public-houses shall be closed, at what hour of the morning they shall be permitted to open, how soon it shall be lawful for people to eat their dinner on church-days, and other great political questions; and sometimes, long after silence has fallen on the town, and the distant lights from the shops and houses have ceased to twinkle, like far-off stars, to the sight of the boatmen on the river, the illumination in the two unequal-sized windows of the town-hall, warns the inhabitants of Mudfog that its little body of legislators, like a larger and better-known body of the same genus, a great deal more noisy, and not a whit more profound, are patriotically dozing away in company, far into the night, for their country’s good.

Among this knot of sage and learned men, no one was so eminently distinguished, during many years, for the quiet modesty of his appearance and demeanour, as Nicholas Tulrumble, the well-known coal-dealer. However exciting the subject of discussion, however animated the tone of the debate, or however warm the personalities exchanged, (and even in Mudfog we get personal sometimes,) Nicholas Tulrumble was always the same. To say truth, Nicholas, being an industrious man, and always up betimes, was apt to fall asleep when a debate began, and to remain asleep till it was over, when he would wake up very much refreshed, and give his vote with the greatest complacency. The fact was, that Nicholas Tulrumble, knowing that everybody there had made up his mind beforehand, considered the talking as just a long botheration about nothing at all; and to the present hour it remains a question, whether, on this point at all events, Nicholas Tulrumble was not pretty near right.

Time, which strews a man’s head with silver, sometimes fills his pockets with gold. As he gradually performed one good office for Nicholas Tulrumble, he was obliging enough, not to omit the other. Nicholas began life in a wooden tenement of four feet square, with a capital of two and ninepence, and a stock in trade of three bushels and a-half of coals, exclusive of the large lump which hung, by way of sign-board, outside. Then he enlarged the shed, and kept a truck; then he left the shed, and the truck too, and started a donkey and a Mrs. Tulrumble; then he moved again and set up a cart; the cart was soon afterwards exchanged for a waggon; and so he went on like his great predecessor Whittington—only without a cat for a partner—increasing in wealth and fame, until at last he gave up business altogether, and retired with Mrs. Tulrumble and family to Mudfog Hall, which he had himself erected, on something which he attempted to delude himself into the belief was a hill, about a quarter of a mile distant from the town of Mudfog.

About this time, it began to be murmured in Mudfog that Nicholas Tulrumble was growing vain and haughty; that prosperity and success had corrupted the simplicity of his manners, and tainted the natural goodness of his heart; in short, that he was setting up for a public character, and a great gentleman, and affected to look down upon his old companions with compassion and contempt. Whether these reports were at the time well-founded, or not, certain it is that Mrs. Tulrumble very shortly afterwards started a four-wheel chaise, driven by a tall postilion in a yellow cap,—that Mr. Tulrumble junior took to smoking cigars, and calling the footman a 'feller,'—and that Mr. Tulrumble from that time forth, was no more seen in his old seat in the chimney-corner of the Lighterman's Arms at night. This looked bad; but, more than this, it began to be observed that Mr. Nicholas Tulrumble attended the corporation meetings more frequently than heretofore; and he no longer went to sleep as he had done for so many years, but propped his eyelids open with his two forefingers; that he read the newspapers by himself at home; and that he was in the habit of indulging abroad in distant and mysterious allusions to 'masses of people,' and 'the property of the country,' and 'productive power,' and 'the monied interest:' all of which denoted and proved that Nicholas Tulrumble was either mad, or worse; and it puzzled the good people of Mudfog amazingly.

At length, about the middle of the month of October, Mr. Tulrumble and family went up to London; the middle of October being, as Mrs. Tulrumble informed her acquaintance in Mudfog, the very height of the fashionable season.

Somehow or other, just about this time, despite the health-preserving air of Mudfog, the Mayor died. It was a most extraordinary circumstance; he had lived in Mudfog for eighty-five years. The corporation didn't understand it at all; indeed it was with great difficulty that one old gentleman, who was a great stickler for forms, was dissuaded from proposing a vote of censure on such unaccountable conduct. Strange as it was, however, die he did, without taking the slightest notice of the corporation; and the corporation were imperatively called upon to elect his successor. So, they met for the purpose; and being very full of Nicholas Tulrumble just then, and Nicholas Tulrumble being a very important man, they elected him, and wrote off to London by the very next post to acquaint Nicholas Tulrumble with his new elevation.

Now, it being November time, and Mr. Nicholas Tulrumble being in the capital, it fell out that he was present at the Lord Mayor’s show and dinner, at sight of the glory and splendour whereof, he, Mr. Tulrumble, was greatly mortified, inasmuch as the reflection would force itself on his mind, that, had he been born in London instead of in Mudfog, he might have been a Lord Mayor too, and have patronized the judges, and been affable to the Lord Chancellor, and friendly with the Premier, and coldly condescending to the Secretary to the Treasury, and have dined with a flag behind his back, and done a great many other acts and deeds which unto Lord Mayors of London peculiarly appertain. The more he thought of the Lord Mayor, the more enviable a personage he seemed. To be a King was all very well; but what was the King to the Lord Mayor! When the King made a speech, everybody knew it was somebody else’s writing; whereas here was the Lord Mayor, talking away for half an hour-all out of his own head—amidst the enthusiastic applause of the whole company, while it was notorious that the King might talk to his parliament till he was black in the face without getting so much as a single cheer. As all these reflections passed through the mind of Mr. Nicholas Tulrumble, the Lord Mayor of London appeared to him the greatest sovereign on the face of the earth, beating the Emperor of Russia all to nothing, and leaving the Great Mogul immeasurably behind.

Mr. Nicholas Tulrumble was pondering over these things, and inwardly cursing the fate which had pitched his coal-shed in Mudfog, when the letter of the corporation was put into his hand. A crimson flush mantled over his face as he read it, for visions of brightness were already dancing before his imagination.

‘My dear,’ said Mr. Tulrumble to his wife, ‘they have elected me, Mayor of Mudfog.’

‘Lor-a-mussy!’ said Mrs. Tulrumble: ‘why what’s become of old Sniggs?’

‘The late Mr. Sniggs, Mrs. Tulrumble,’ said Mr. Tulrumble sharply, for he by no means approved of the notion of unceremoniously designating a gentleman who filled the high office of Mayor, as ‘Old Sniggs,’—‘The late Mr. Sniggs, Mrs. Tulrumble, is dead.’

The communication was very unexpected; but Mrs. Tulrumble only ejaculated ‘Lor-a-mussy!’ once again, as if a Mayor were a mere ordinary Christian, at which Mr. Tulrumble frowned gloomily.

‘What a pity ’tan’t in London, ain’t it?’ said Mrs. Tulrumble, after a short pause; ‘what a pity ’tan’t in London, where you might have had a show.’

‘I *might* have a show in Mudfog, if I thought proper, I apprehend,’ said Mr. Tulrumble mysteriously.

‘Lor! so you might, I declare,’ replied Mrs. Tulrumble.

‘And a good one too,’ said Mr. Tulrumble.

‘Delightful!’ exclaimed Mrs. Tulrumble.

‘One which would rather astonish the ignorant people down there,’ said Mr. Tulrumble.

‘It would kill them with envy,’ said Mrs. Tulrumble.

So it was agreed that his Majesty’s lieges in Mudfog should be astonished with splendour, and slaughtered with envy, and that such a show should take place as had never been seen in that town, or in any other town before,—no, not even in London itself.

On the very next day after the receipt of the letter, down came the tall postilion in a post-chaise,—not upon one of the horses, but inside—actually inside the chaise,—and, driving up to the very door of the town-hall, where the corporation were assembled, delivered a letter, written by the Lord knows who, and signed by Nicholas Tulrumble, in which Nicholas said, all through four sides of closely-written, gilt-edged, hot-pressed, Bath post letter paper, that he responded to the call of his fellow-townsmen with feelings of heartfelt delight; that he accepted the arduous office which their confidence had imposed upon him; that they would never find him shrinking from the discharge of his duty; that he would endeavour to execute his functions with all that dignity which their magnitude and importance demanded; and a great deal more to the same effect. But even this was not all. The tall postilion produced from his right-hand top-boot, a damp copy of that afternoon’s number of the county paper; and there, in large type, running the whole length of the very first column, was a long address from Nicholas Tulrumble to the inhabitants of Mudfog, in which he said that he cheerfully complied with their requisition, and, in short, as if to prevent any mistake about the matter, told them over again what a grand fellow he meant to be, in very much the same terms as those in which he had already told them all about the matter in his letter.

The corporation stared at one another very hard at all this, and then looked as if for explanation to the tall postilion, but as the tall postilion was intently contemplating the gold tassel on the top of his yellow cap, and could have afforded no explanation whatever, even if his thoughts had been entirely disengaged, they contented themselves with coughing very dubiously, and looking very grave. The tall postilion then delivered another letter, in which Nicholas Tulrumble informed the corporation, that he intended repairing to the town-hall, in grand state and gorgeous procession, on the Monday afternoon next ensuing. At this the corporation looked still more solemn; but, as the epistle wound up with a formal invitation to the whole body to dine with the Mayor on that day, at Mudfog Hall, Mudfog Hill, Mudfog, they began to see the fun of the thing directly, and sent back their compliments, and they’d be sure to come.

Now there happened to be in Mudfog, as somehow or other there does happen to be, in almost every town in the British dominions, and perhaps in foreign dominions too—we think it very likely, but, being no great traveller, cannot distinctly say—there happened to be, in Mudfog, a merry-tempered, pleasant-faced, good-for-nothing sort of vagabond, with an invincible dislike to manual labour, and an unconquerable attachment to strong beer and spirits, whom everybody knew, and nobody, except his wife, took the trouble to quarrel with, who inherited from his ancestors the appellation of Edward Twigger, and rejoiced in the *sobriquet* of Bottle-nosed Ned. He was drunk upon the average once a day, and penitent upon an equally fair calculation once a month; and when he was penitent, he was invariably in the very last stage of maudlin intoxication. He was a ragged, roving, roaring kind of fellow, with a burly form, a sharp wit, and a ready head, and could turn his hand to anything when he chose to do it. He was by no means opposed to hard labour on principle, for he would work away at a cricket-match by the day together,—running, and catching, and batting, and bowling, and revelling in toil which would exhaust a galley-slave. He would have been invaluable to a fire-office; never was a man with such a natural taste for pumping engines, running up ladders, and throwing furniture out of two-pair-of-stairs' windows: nor was this the only element in which he was at home; he was a humane society in himself, a portable drag, an animated life-preserver, and had saved more people, in his time, from drowning, than the Plymouth life-boat, or Captain Manby's apparatus. With all these qualifications, notwithstanding his dissipation, Bottle-nosed Ned was a general favourite; and the authorities of Mudfog, remembering his numerous services to the population, allowed him in return to get drunk in his own way, without the fear of stocks, fine, or imprisonment. He had a general licence, and he showed his sense of the compliment by making the most of it.

We have been thus particular in describing the character and avocations of Bottle-nosed Ned, because it enables us to introduce a fact politely, without hauling it into the reader's presence with indecent haste by the head and shoulders, and brings us very naturally to relate, that on the very same evening on which Mr. Nicholas Tulrumble and family returned to Mudfog, Mr. Tulrumble's new secretary, just imported from London, with a pale face and light whiskers, thrust his head down to the very bottom of his neckcloth-tie, in at the tap-room door of the Lighterman's Arms, and inquiring whether one Ned Twigger was luxuriating within, announced himself as the bearer of a message from Nicholas Tulrumble, Esquire, requiring Mr. Twigger's immediate attendance at the hall, on private and particular business. It being by no means Mr. Twigger's interest to affront the Mayor, he rose from the fireplace with a slight sigh, and followed the light-whiskered secretary through the dirt and wet of Mudfog streets, up to Mudfog Hall, without further ado.

Mr. Nicholas Tulrumble was seated in a small cavern with a skylight, which he called his library, sketching out a plan of the procession on a large sheet of paper; and into the cavern the secretary ushered Ned Twigger.

'Well, Twigger!' said Nicholas Tulrumble, condescendingly.

There was a time when Twigger would have replied, 'Well, Nick!' but that was in the days of the truck, and a couple of years before the donkey; so, he only bowed.

'I want you to go into training, Twigger,' said Mr. Tulrumble.

'What for, sir?' inquired Ned, with a stare.

‘Hush, hush, Twigger!’ said the Mayor. ‘Shut the door, Mr. Jennings. Look here, Twigger.’

As the Mayor said this, he unlocked a high closet, and disclosed a complete suit of brass armour, of gigantic dimensions.

‘I want you to wear this next Monday, Twigger,’ said the Mayor.

‘Bless your heart and soul, sir!’ replied Ned, ‘you might as well ask me to wear a seventy-four pounder, or a cast-iron boiler.’

‘Nonsense, Twigger, nonsense!’ said the Mayor.

‘I couldn’t stand under it, sir,’ said Twigger; ‘it would make mashed potatoes of me, if I attempted it.’

‘Pooh, pooh, Twigger!’ returned the Mayor. ‘I tell you I have seen it done with my own eyes, in London, and the man wasn’t half such a man as you are, either.’

‘I should as soon have thought of a man’s wearing the case of an eight-day clock to save his linen,’ said Twigger, casting a look of apprehension at the brass suit.

‘It’s the easiest thing in the world,’ rejoined the Mayor.

‘It’s nothing,’ said Mr. Jennings.

‘When you’re used to it,’ added Ned.

‘You do it by degrees,’ said the Mayor. ‘You would begin with one piece to-morrow, and two the next day, and so on, till you had got it all on. Mr. Jennings, give Twigger a glass of rum. Just try the breast-plate, Twigger. Stay; take another glass of rum first. Help me to lift it, Mr. Jennings. Stand firm, Twigger! There!—it isn’t half as heavy as it looks, is it?’

Twigger was a good strong, stout fellow; so, after a great deal of staggering, he managed to keep himself up, under the breastplate, and even contrived, with the aid of another glass of rum, to walk about in it, and the gauntlets into the bargain. He made a trial of the helmet, but was not equally successful, inasmuch as he tipped over instantly,—an accident which Mr. Tulrumble clearly demonstrated to be occasioned by his not having a counteracting weight of brass on his legs.

‘Now, wear that with grace and propriety on Monday next,’ said Tulrumble, ‘and I’ll make your fortune.’

‘I’ll try what I can do, sir,’ said Twigger.

‘It must be kept a profound secret,’ said Tulrumble.

‘Of course, sir,’ replied Twigger.

‘And you must be sober,’ said Tulrumble; ‘perfectly sober.’ Mr. Twigger at once solemnly pledged himself to be as sober as a judge, and Nicholas Tulrumble was satisfied, although, had we been Nicholas, we should certainly have exacted some promise of a more specific nature; inasmuch as, having attended the Mudfog assizes in the evening more than once, we can solemnly testify to having seen judges with very strong symptoms of dinner under their wigs. However, that’s neither here nor there.

The next day, and the day following, and the day after that, Ned Twigger was securely locked up in the small cavern with the sky-light, hard at work at the armour. With every additional piece he could manage to stand upright in, he had an additional glass of rum; and at last, after many partial suffocations, he contrived to get on the whole suit, and to stagger up and down the room in it, like an intoxicated effigy from Westminster Abbey.

Never was man so delighted as Nicholas Tulrumble; never was woman so charmed as Nicholas Tulrumble’s wife. Here was a sight for the common people of Mudfog! A live man in brass armour! Why, they would go wild with wonder!

The day—*the* Monday—arrived.

If the morning had been made to order, it couldn’t have been better adapted to the purpose. They never showed a better fog in London on Lord Mayor’s day, than enwrapped the town of Mudfog on that eventful occasion. It had risen slowly and surely from the green and stagnant water with the first light of morning, until it reached a little above the lamp-post tops; and there it had stopped, with a sleepy, sluggish obstinacy, which bade defiance to the sun, who had got up very blood-shot about the eyes, as if he had been at a drinking-party over-night, and was doing his day’s work with the worst possible grace. The thick damp mist hung over the town like a huge gauze curtain. All was dim and dismal. The church steeples had bidden a temporary adieu to the world below; and every object of lesser importance—houses, barns, hedges, trees, and barges—had all taken the veil.

The church-clock struck one. A cracked trumpet from the front garden of Mudfog Hall produced a feeble flourish, as if some asthmatic person had coughed into it accidentally; the gate flew open, and out came a gentleman, on a moist-sugar coloured charger, intended to represent a herald, but bearing a much stronger resemblance to a court-card on horseback. This was one of the Circus people, who always came down to Mudfog at that time of the year, and who had been engaged by Nicholas Tulrumble expressly for the occasion. There was the horse, whisking his tail about, balancing himself on his hind-legs, and flourishing away with his fore-feet, in a manner which would have gone to the hearts and souls of any reasonable crowd. But a Mudfog crowd never was a reasonable one, and in all probability never will be. Instead of scattering the very fog with their shouts, as they ought most indubitably to have done, and were fully intended to do, by Nicholas Tulrumble, they no sooner recognized the herald, than they began to growl forth the most unqualified disapprobation at the bare notion of his riding like any other man. If he had come out on his head indeed, or jumping through a hoop, or flying through a red-hot drum, or even standing on one leg with his other foot in his mouth, they might have had something to say to him; but for a professional gentleman to sit astride in the saddle, with his feet in the stirrups, was rather too good a joke. So, the herald was a decided failure, and the crowd hooted with great energy, as he pranced ingloriously away.

On the procession came. We are afraid to say how many supernumeraries there were, in striped shirts and black velvet caps, to imitate the London watermen, or how many base imitations of running-footmen, or how many banners, which, owing to the heaviness of the atmosphere, could by no means be prevailed on to display their inscriptions: still less do we feel disposed to relate how the men who played the wind instruments, looking up into the sky (we mean the fog) with musical fervour, walked through pools of water and hillocks of mud, till they covered the powdered heads of the running-footmen aforesaid with splashes, that looked curious, but not ornamental; or how the barrel-organ performer put on the wrong stop, and played one tune while the band played another; or how the horses, being used to the arena, and not to the streets, would stand still and dance, instead of going on and prancing;—all of which are matters which might be dilated upon to great advantage, but which we have not the least intention of dilating upon, notwithstanding.

Oh! it was a grand and beautiful sight to behold a corporation in glass coaches, provided at the sole cost and charge of Nicholas Tulrumble, coming rolling along, like a funeral out of mourning, and to watch the attempts the corporation made to look great and solemn, when Nicholas

Tulrumble himself, in the four-wheel chaise, with the tall postilion, rolled out after them, with Mr. Jennings on one side to look like a chaplain, and a supernumerary on the other, with an old life-guardsman's sabre, to imitate the sword-bearer; and to see the tears rolling down the faces of the mob as they screamed with merriment. This was beautiful! and so was the appearance of Mrs. Tulrumble and son, as they bowed with grave dignity out of their coach-window to all the dirty faces that were laughing around them: but it is not even with this that we have to do, but with the sudden stopping of the procession at another blast of the trumpet, whereat, and whereupon, a profound silence ensued, and all eyes were turned towards Mudfog Hall, in the confident anticipation of some new wonder.

'They won't laugh now, Mr. Jennings,' said Nicholas Tulrumble.

'I think not, sir,' said Mr. Jennings.

'See how eager they look,' said Nicholas Tulrumble. 'Aha! the laugh will be on our side now; eh, Mr. Jennings?'

'No doubt of that, sir,' replied Mr. Jennings; and Nicholas Tulrumble, in a state of pleasurable excitement, stood up in the four-wheel chaise, and telegraphed gratification to the Mayoress behind.

While all this was going forward, Ned Twigger had descended into the kitchen of Mudfog Hall for the purpose of indulging the servants with a private view of the curiosity that was to burst upon the town; and, somehow or other, the footman was so companionable, and the housemaid so kind, and the cook so friendly, that he could not resist the offer of the first-mentioned to sit down and take something—just to drink success to master in.

So, down Ned Twigger sat himself in his brass livery on the top of the kitchen-table; and in a mug of something strong, paid for by the unconscious Nicholas Tulrumble, and provided by the companionable footman, drank success to the Mayor and his procession; and, as Ned laid by his helmet to imbibe the something strong, the companionable footman put it on his own head, to the immeasurable and unrecordable delight of the cook and housemaid. The companionable footman was very facetious to Ned, and Ned was very gallant to the cook and housemaid by turns. They were all very cosy and comfortable; and the something strong went briskly round.

At last Ned Twigger was loudly called for, by the procession people: and, having had his helmet fixed on, in a very complicated manner, by the companionable footman, and the kind housemaid, and the friendly cook, he walked gravely forth, and appeared before the multitude.

The crowd roared—it was not with wonder, it was not with surprise; it was most decidedly and unquestionably with laughter.

'What!' said Mr. Tulrumble, starting up in the four-wheel chaise. 'Laughing? If they laugh at a man in real brass armour, they'd laugh when their own fathers were dying. Why doesn't he go into his place, Mr. Jennings? What's he rolling down towards us for? he has no business here!'

'I am afraid, sir—' faltered Mr. Jennings.

'Afraid of what, sir?' said Nicholas Tulrumble, looking up into the secretary's face.

'I am afraid he's drunk, sir,' replied Mr. Jennings.

Nicholas Tulrumble took one look at the extraordinary figure that was bearing down upon them; and then, clasping his secretary by the arm, uttered an audible groan in anguish of spirit.

It is a melancholy fact that Mr. Twigger having full licence to demand a single glass of rum on the putting on of every piece of the armour, got, by some means or other, rather out of his calculation in the hurry and confusion of preparation, and drank about four glasses to a piece instead of one, not to mention the something strong which went on the top of it. Whether the brass armour checked the natural flow of perspiration, and thus prevented the spirit from evaporating, we are not scientific enough to know; but, whatever the cause was, Mr. Twigger no sooner found himself outside the gate of Mudfog Hall, than he also found himself in a very considerable state of intoxication; and hence his extraordinary style of progressing. This was bad enough, but, as if fate and fortune had conspired against Nicholas Tulrumble, Mr. Twigger, not having been penitent for a good calendar month, took it into his head to be most especially and particularly sentimental, just when his repentance could have been most conveniently dispensed with. Immense tears were rolling down his cheeks, and he was vainly endeavouring to conceal his grief by applying to his eyes a blue cotton pocket-handkerchief with white spots,—an article not strictly in keeping with a suit of armour some three hundred years old, or thereabouts.

'Twigger, you villain!' said Nicholas Tulrumble, quite forgetting his dignity, 'go back.'

'Never,' said Ned. 'I'm a miserable wretch. I'll never leave you.'

The by-standers of course received this declaration with acclamations of 'That's right, Ned; don't!'

'I don't intend it,' said Ned, with all the obstinacy of a very tipsy man. 'I'm very unhappy. I'm the wretched father of an unfortunate family; but I am very faithful, sir. I'll never leave you.' Having reiterated this obliging promise, Ned proceeded in broken words to harangue the crowd upon the number of years he had lived in Mudfog, the excessive respectability of his character, and other topics of the like nature.

'Here! will anybody lead him away?' said Nicholas: 'if they'll call on me afterwards, I'll reward them well.'

Two or three men stepped forward, with the view of bearing Ned off, when the secretary interposed.

'Take care! take care!' said Mr. Jennings. 'I beg your pardon, sir; but they'd better not go too near him, because, if he falls over, he'll certainly crush somebody.'

At this hint the crowd retired on all sides to a very respectful distance, and left Ned, like the Duke of Devonshire, in a little circle of his own.

'But, Mr. Jennings,' said Nicholas Tulrumble, 'he'll be suffocated.'

'I'm very sorry for it, sir,' replied Mr. Jennings; 'but nobody can get that armour off, without his own assistance. I'm quite certain of it from the way he put it on.'

Here Ned wept dolefully, and shook his helmeted head, in a manner that might have touched a heart of stone; but the crowd had not hearts of stone, and they laughed heartily.

'Dear me, Mr. Jennings,' said Nicholas, turning pale at the possibility of Ned's being smothered in his antique costume—'Dear me, Mr. Jennings, can nothing be done with him?'

'Nothing at all,' replied Ned, 'nothing at all. Gentlemen, I'm an unhappy wretch. I'm a body, gentlemen, in a brass coffin.' At this poetical idea of his own conjuring up, Ned cried so much that the people began to get sympathetic, and to ask what Nicholas Tulrumble meant by putting a man into such a machine as that; and one individual in a hairy waistcoat like the top of a trunk, who had previously expressed his opinion that if Ned hadn't been a poor man, Nicholas wouldn't have dared do it, hinted at the propriety of breaking the four-wheel chaise, or Nicholas's head, or both, which last compound proposition the crowd seemed to consider a very good notion.

It was not acted upon, however, for it had hardly been broached, when Ned Twigger's wife made her appearance abruptly in the little circle before noticed, and Ned no sooner caught a glimpse of her face and form, than from the mere force of habit he set off towards his home just as fast as his legs could carry him; and that was not very quick in the present instance either, for, however ready they might have been to carry *him*, they couldn't get on very well under the brass armour. So, Mrs. Twigger had plenty of time to denounce Nicholas Tulrumble to his face: to express her opinion that he was a decided monster; and to intimate that, if her ill-used husband sustained any personal damage from the brass armour, she would have the law of Nicholas Tulrumble for manslaughter. When she had said all this with due vehemence, she posted after Ned, who was dragging himself along as best he could, and deploring his unhappiness in most dismal tones.

What a wailing and screaming Ned's children raised when he got home at last! Mrs. Twigger tried to undo the armour, first in one place, and then in another, but she couldn't manage it; so she tumbled Ned into bed, helmet, armour, gauntlets, and all. Such a creaking as the bedstead made, under Ned's weight in his new suit! It didn't break down though; and there Ned lay, like the anonymous vessel in the Bay of Biscay, till next day, drinking barley-water, and looking miserable: and every time he groaned, his good lady said it served him right, which was all the consolation Ned Twigger got.

Nicholas Tulrumble and the gorgeous procession went on together to the town-hall, amid the hisses and groans of all the spectators, who had suddenly taken it into their heads to consider poor Ned a martyr. Nicholas was formally installed in his new office, in acknowledgment of which ceremony he delivered himself of a speech, composed by the secretary, which was very long, and no doubt very good, only the noise of the people outside prevented anybody from hearing it, but Nicholas Tulrumble himself. After which, the procession got back to Mudfog Hall any how it could; and Nicholas and the corporation sat down to dinner.

But the dinner was flat, and Nicholas was disappointed. They were such dull sleepy old fellows, that corporation. Nicholas made quite as long speeches as the Lord Mayor of London had done, nay, he said the very same things that the Lord Mayor of London had said, and the deuce a cheer the corporation gave him. There was only one man in the party who was thoroughly awake; and he was insolent, and called him Nick. Nick! What would be the consequence, thought Nicholas, of anybody presuming to call the Lord Mayor of London ‘Nick!’ He should like to know what the sword-bearer would say to that; or the recorder, or the toast-master, or any other of the great officers of the city. They’d nick him.

But these were not the worst of Nicholas Tulrumble’s doings. If they had been, he might have remained a Mayor to this day, and have talked till he lost his voice. He contracted a relish for statistics, and got philosophical; and the statistics and the philosophy together, led him into an act which increased his unpopularity and hastened his downfall.

At the very end of the Mudfog High-street, and abutting on the river-side, stands the Jolly Boatmen, an old-fashioned low-roofed, bay-windowed house, with a bar, kitchen, and tap-room all in one, and a large fireplace with a kettle to correspond, round which the working men have congregated time out of mind on a winter’s night, refreshed by draughts of good strong beer, and cheered by the sounds of a fiddle and tambourine: the Jolly Boatmen having been duly licensed by the Mayor and corporation, to scrape the fiddle and thumb the tambourine from time, whereof the memory of the oldest inhabitants goeth not to the contrary. Now Nicholas Tulrumble had been reading pamphlets on crime, and parliamentary reports,—or had made the secretary read them to him, which is the same thing in effect,—and he at once perceived that this fiddle and tambourine must have done more to demoralize Mudfog, than any other operating causes that ingenuity could imagine. So he read up for the subject, and determined to come out on the corporation with a burst, the very next time the licence was applied for.

The licensing day came, and the red-faced landlord of the Jolly Boatmen walked into the town-hall, looking as jolly as need be, having actually put on an extra fiddle for that night, to commemorate the anniversary of the Jolly Boatmen’s music licence. It was applied for in due form, and was just about to be granted as a matter of course, when up rose Nicholas Tulrumble, and drowned the astonished corporation in a torrent of eloquence. He descanted in glowing terms upon the increasing depravity of his native town of Mudfog, and the excesses committed by its population. Then, he related how shocked he had been, to see barrels of beer sliding down into the cellar of the Jolly Boatmen week after week; and how he had sat at a window opposite the Jolly Boatmen for two days together, to count the people who went in for beer between the hours of twelve and one o’clock alone—which, by-the-bye, was the time at which the great majority of the Mudfog people dined. Then, he went on to state, how the number of people who came out with beer-jugs, averaged twenty-one in five minutes, which, being multiplied by twelve, gave two hundred and fifty-two people with beer-jugs in an hour, and multiplied again by fifteen (the number of hours during which the house was open daily) yielded three thousand seven hundred and eighty people with beer-jugs per day, or twenty-six thousand four hundred and sixty people with beer-jugs, per week. Then he proceeded to show that a tambourine and moral degradation were synonymous terms, and a fiddle and vicious propensities wholly inseparable. All these arguments he strengthened and demonstrated by frequent references to a large book with a blue cover, and sundry quotations from the Middlesex magistrates; and in the end, the corporation, who were posed with the figures, and sleepy with the speech, and sadly in want of dinner into the bargain, yielded the palm to Nicholas Tulrumble, and refused the music licence to the Jolly Boatmen.

But although Nicholas triumphed, his triumph was short. He carried on the war against beer-jugs and fiddles, forgetting the time when he was glad to drink out of the one, and to dance to the other, till the people hated, and his old friends shunned him. He grew tired of the lonely magnificence of Mudfog Hall, and his heart yearned towards the Lighterman’s Arms. He wished he had never set up as a public man, and sighed for the good old times of the coal-shop, and the chimney corner.

At length old Nicholas, being thoroughly miserable, took heart of grace, paid the secretary a quarter’s wages in advance, and packed him off to London by the next coach. Having taken this step, he put his hat on his head, and his pride in his pocket, and walked down to the old room at the Lighterman’s Arms. There were only two of the old fellows there, and they looked coldly on Nicholas as he proffered his hand.

‘Are you going to put down pipes, Mr. Tulrumble?’ said one.

‘Or trace the progress of crime to ‘bacca?’ growled another.

‘Neither,’ replied Nicholas Tulrumble, shaking hands with them both, whether they would or not. ‘I’ve come down to say that I’m very sorry for having made a fool of myself, and that I hope you’ll give me up the old chair, again.’

The old fellows opened their eyes, and three or four more old fellows opened the door, to whom Nicholas, with tears in his eyes, thrust out his hand too, and told the same story. They raised a shout of joy, that made the bells in the ancient church-tower vibrate again, and wheeling the old chair into the warm corner, thrust old Nicholas down into it, and ordered in the very largest-sized bowl of hot punch, with an unlimited number of pipes, directly.

The next day, the Jolly Boatmen got the licence, and the next night, old Nicholas and Ned Twigger's wife led off a dance to the music of the fiddle and tambourine, the tone of which seemed mightily improved by a little rest, for they never had played so merrily before. Ned Twigger was in the very height of his glory, and he danced hornpipes, and balanced chairs on his chin, and straws on his nose, till the whole company, including the corporation, were in raptures of admiration at the brilliancy of his acquirements.

Mr. Tulrumble, junior, couldn't make up his mind to be anything but magnificent, so he went up to London and drew bills on his father; and when he had overdrawn, and got into debt, he grew penitent, and came home again.

As to old Nicholas, he kept his word, and having had six weeks of public life, never tried it any more. He went to sleep in the town-hall at the very next meeting; and, in full proof of his sincerity, has requested us to write this faithful narrative. We wish it could have the effect of reminding the Tulrumbles of another sphere, that puffed-up conceit is not dignity, and that snarling at the little pleasures they were once glad to enjoy, because they would rather forget the times when they were of lower station, renders them objects of contempt and ridicule.

This is the first time we have published any of our gleanings from this particular source. Perhaps, at some future period, we may venture to open the chronicles of Mudfog.

FULL REPORT OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE MUDFOG ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF EVERYTHING

We have made the most unparalleled and extraordinary exertions to place before our readers a complete and accurate account of the proceedings at the late grand meeting of the Mudfog Association, holden in the town of Mudfog; it affords us great happiness to lay the result before them, in the shape of various communications received from our able, talented, and graphic correspondent, expressly sent down for the purpose, who has immortalized us, himself, Mudfog, and the association, all at one and the same time. We have been, indeed, for some days unable to determine who will transmit the greatest name to posterity; ourselves, who sent our correspondent down; our correspondent, who wrote an account of the matter; or the association, who gave our correspondent something to write about. We rather incline to the opinion that we are the greatest man of the party, inasmuch as the notion of an exclusive and authentic report originated with us; this may be prejudice: it may arise from a prepossession on our part in our own favour. Be it so. We have no doubt that every gentleman concerned in this mighty assemblage is troubled with the same complaint in a greater or less degree; and it is a consolation to us to know that we have at least this feeling in common with the great scientific stars, the brilliant and extraordinary luminaries, whose speculations we record.

We give our correspondent's letters in the order in which they reached us. Any attempt at amalgamating them into one beautiful whole, would only destroy that glowing tone, that dash of wildness, and rich vein of picturesque interest, which pervade them throughout.

'Mudfog, Monday night, seven o'clock.

'We are in a state of great excitement here. Nothing is spoken of, but the approaching meeting of the association. The inn-doors are thronged with waiters anxiously looking for the expected arrivals; and the numerous bills which are wafered up in the windows of private houses, intimating that there are beds to let within, give the streets a very animated and cheerful appearance, the wafers being of a great variety of colours, and the monotony of printed inscriptions being relieved by every possible size and style of hand-writing. It is confidently rumoured that Professors Snore, Doze, and Wheezy have engaged three beds and a sitting-room at the Pig and Tinder-box. I give you the rumour as it has reached me; but I cannot, as yet, vouch for its accuracy. The moment I have been enabled to obtain any certain information upon this interesting point, you may depend upon receiving it.'

'Half-past seven.

I have just returned from a personal interview with the landlord of the Pig and Tinder-box. He speaks confidently of the probability of Professors Snore, Doze, and Wheezy taking up their residence at his house during the sitting of the association, but denies that the beds have been yet engaged; in which representation he is confirmed by the chambermaid—a girl of artless manners, and interesting appearance. The boots denies that it is at all likely that Professors Snore, Doze, and Wheezy will put up here; but I have reason to believe that this man has been suborned by the proprietor of the Original Pig, which is the opposition hotel. Amidst such conflicting testimony it is difficult to arrive at the real truth; but you may depend upon receiving authentic information upon this point the moment the fact is ascertained. The excitement still continues. A boy fell through the window of the pastrycook's shop at the corner of the High-street about half an hour ago, which has occasioned much confusion. The general impression is, that it was an accident. Pray heaven it may prove so!'

'Tuesday, noon.

'At an early hour this morning the bells of all the churches struck seven o'clock; the effect of which, in the present lively state of the town, was extremely singular. While I was at breakfast, a yellow gig, drawn by a dark grey horse, with a patch of white over his right eyelid, proceeded at a rapid pace in the direction of the Original Pig stables; it is currently reported that this gentleman has arrived here for the purpose of attending the association, and, from what I have heard, I consider it extremely probable, although nothing decisive is yet known regarding him. You may conceive the anxiety with which we are all looking forward to the arrival of the four o'clock coach this afternoon.

'Notwithstanding the excited state of the populace, no outrage has yet been committed, owing to the admirable discipline and discretion of the police, who are nowhere to be seen. A barrel-organ is playing opposite my window, and groups of people, offering fish and vegetables for sale, parade the streets. With these exceptions everything is quiet, and I trust will continue so.'

'Five o'clock.

'It is now ascertained, beyond all doubt, that Professors Snore, Doze, and Wheezy will *not* repair to the Pig and Tinder-box, but have actually engaged apartments at the Original Pig. This intelligence is *exclusive*; and I leave you and your readers to draw their own inferences from it. Why Professor Wheezy, of all people in the world, should repair to the Original Pig in preference to the Pig and Tinder-box, it is not easy to conceive. The professor is a man who should be above all such petty feelings. Some people here openly impute treachery, and a distinct breach of faith to Professors Snore and Doze; while others, again, are disposed to acquit them of any culpability in the transaction, and to insinuate that the blame rests solely with Professor Wheezy. I own that I incline to the latter opinion; and although it gives me great pain to speak in terms of censure or disapprobation of a man of such transcendent genius and acquirements, still I am bound to say that, if my suspicions be well founded, and if all the reports which have reached my ears be true, I really do not well know what to make of the matter.

'Mr. Slug, so celebrated for his statistical researches, arrived this afternoon by the four o'clock stage. His complexion is a dark purple, and he has a habit of sighing constantly. He looked extremely well, and appeared in high health and spirits. Mr. Woodensconce also came down in the same conveyance. The distinguished gentleman was fast asleep on his arrival, and I am informed by the guard that he had been so the whole way. He was, no doubt, preparing for his approaching fatigues; but what gigantic visions must those be that flit through the brain of such a man when his body is in a state of torpidity!

'The influx of visitors increases every moment. I am told (I know not how truly) that two post-chaises have arrived at the Original Pig within the last half-hour, and I myself observed a wheelbarrow, containing three carpet bags and a bundle, entering the yard of the Pig and Tinder-box no longer ago than five minutes since. The people are still quietly pursuing their ordinary occupations; but there is a wildness in their eyes, and an unwonted rigidity in the muscles of their countenances, which shows to the observant spectator that their expectations are strained to the very utmost pitch. I fear, unless some very extraordinary arrivals take place to-night, that consequences may arise from this popular ferment, which every man of sense and feeling would deplore.'

'*Twenty minutes past six.*

'I have just heard that the boy who fell through the pastrycook's window last night has died of the fright. He was suddenly called upon to pay three and sixpence for the damage done, and his constitution, it seems, was not strong enough to bear up against the shock. The inquest, it is said, will be held to-morrow.'

'*Three-quarters part seven.*

'Professors Muff and Nogo have just driven up to the hotel door; they at once ordered dinner with great condescension. We are all very much delighted with the urbanity of their manners, and the ease with which they adapt themselves to the forms and ceremonies of ordinary life. Immediately on their arrival they sent for the head waiter, and privately requested him to purchase a live dog,—as cheap a one as he could meet with,—and to send him up after dinner, with a pie-board, a knife and fork, and a clean plate. It is conjectured that some experiments will be tried upon the dog to-night; if any particulars should transpire, I will forward them by express.'

'*Half-past eight.*

'The animal has been procured. He is a pug-dog, of rather intelligent appearance, in good condition, and with very short legs. He has been tied to a curtain-peg in a dark room, and is howling dreadfully.'

'Ten minutes to nine.

'The dog has just been rung for. With an instinct which would appear almost the result of reason, the sagacious animal seized the waiter by the calf of the leg when he approached to take him, and made a desperate, though ineffectual resistance. I have not been able to procure admission to the apartment occupied by the scientific gentlemen; but, judging from the sounds which reached my ears when I stood upon the landing-place outside the door, just now, I should be disposed to say that the dog had retreated growling beneath some article of furniture, and was keeping the professors at bay. This conjecture is confirmed by the testimony of the ostler, who, after peeping through the keyhole, assures me that he distinctly saw Professor Nogo on his knees, holding forth a small bottle of prussic acid, to which the animal, who was crouched beneath an arm-chair, obstinately declined to smell. You cannot imagine the feverish state of irritation we are in, lest the interests of science should be sacrificed to the prejudices of a brute creature, who is not endowed with sufficient sense to foresee the incalculable benefits which the whole human race may derive from so very slight a concession on his part.'

'*Nine o'clock.*

'The dog's tail and ears have been sent down-stairs to be washed; from which circumstance we infer that the animal is no more. His forelegs have been delivered to the boots to be brushed, which strengthens the supposition.'

'*Half after ten.*

'My feelings are so overpowered by what has taken place in the course of the last hour and a half, that I have scarcely strength to detail the rapid succession of events which have quite bewildered all those who are cognizant of their occurrence. It appears that the pug-dog mentioned in my last was surreptitiously obtained,—stolen, in fact,—by some person attached to the stable department, from an unmarried lady resident in this town. Frantic on discovering the loss of her favourite, the lady rushed distractedly into the street, calling in the most heart-rending and pathetic manner upon the passengers to restore her, her Augustus,—for so the deceased was named, in affectionate remembrance of a former lover of his mistress, to whom he bore a striking personal resemblance, which renders the circumstances additionally affecting. I am not yet in a condition to inform you what circumstance induced the bereaved lady to direct her steps to the hotel which had witnessed the last struggles of her *protégé*. I can only state that she arrived there, at the very instant when his detached members were passing through the passage on a small tray. Her shrieks still reverberate in my ears! I grieve to say that the expressive features of Professor Muff were much scratched and lacerated by the injured lady; and that Professor Nogo, besides sustaining several severe bites, has lost some handfuls of hair from the same cause. It must be some consolation to these gentlemen to know that their ardent attachment to scientific pursuits has alone occasioned these unpleasant consequences; for which the sympathy of a grateful country will sufficiently reward them. The unfortunate lady remains at the Pig and Tinder-box, and up to this time is reported in a very precarious state.

'I need scarcely tell you that this unlooked-for catastrophe has cast a damp and gloom upon us in the midst of our exhilaration; natural in any case, but greatly enhanced in this, by the amiable qualities of the deceased animal, who appears to have been much and deservedly respected by the whole of his acquaintance.'

'Twelve o'clock.

'I take the last opportunity before sealing my parcel to inform you that the boy who fell through the pastrycook's window is not dead, as was universally believed, but alive and well. The report appears to have had its origin in his mysterious disappearance. He was found half an hour since on the premises of a sweet-stuff maker, where a raffle had been announced for a second-hand seal-skin cap and a tambourine; and where—a sufficient number of members not having been obtained at first—he had patiently waited until the list was completed. This fortunate discovery has in some degree restored our gaiety and cheerfulness. It is proposed to get up a subscription for him without delay.

'Everybody is nervously anxious to see what to-morrow will bring forth. If any one should arrive in the course of the night, I have left strict directions to be called immediately. I should have sat up, indeed, but the agitating events of this day have been too much for me.

'No news yet of either of the Professors Snore, Doze, or Wheezy. It is very strange!'

'*Wednesday afternoon.*

'All is now over; and, upon one point at least, I am at length enabled to set the minds of your readers at rest. The three professors arrived at ten minutes after two o'clock, and, instead of taking up their quarters at the Original Pig, as it was universally understood in the course of yesterday that they would assuredly have done, drove straight to the Pig and Tinder-box, where they threw off the mask at once, and openly announced their intention of remaining. Professor Wheezy may reconcile this very extraordinary conduct with *his* notions of fair and equitable dealing, but I would recommend Professor Wheezy to be cautious how he presumes too far upon his well-earned reputation. How such a man as Professor Snore, or, which is still more extraordinary, such an individual as Professor Doze, can quietly allow himself to be mixed up with such proceedings as these, you will naturally inquire. Upon this head, rumour is silent; I have my speculations, but forbear to give utterance to them just now.'

'Four o'clock.

'The town is filling fast; eighteenpence has been offered for a bed and refused. Several gentlemen were under the necessity last night of sleeping in the brick fields, and on the steps of doors, for which they were taken before the magistrates in a body this morning, and committed to prison as vagrants for various terms. One of these persons I understand to be a highly-respectable tinker, of great practical skill, who had forwarded a paper to the President of Section D. Mechanical Science, on the construction of pipkins with copper bottoms and safety-values, of which report speaks highly. The incarceration of this gentleman is greatly to be regretted, as his absence will preclude any discussion on the subject.

'The bills are being taken down in all directions, and lodgings are being secured on almost any terms. I have heard of fifteen shillings a week for two rooms, exclusive of coals and attendance, but I can scarcely believe it. The excitement is dreadful. I was informed this morning that the civil authorities, apprehensive of some outbreak of popular feeling, had commanded a recruiting sergeant and two corporals to be under arms; and that, with the view of not irritating the people unnecessarily by their presence, they had been requested to take up their position before daybreak in a turnpike, distant about a quarter of a mile from the town. The vigour and promptness of these measures cannot be too highly extolled.

'Intelligence has just been brought me, that an elderly female, in a state of inebriety, has declared in the open street her intention to "do" for Mr. Slug. Some statistical returns compiled by that gentleman, relative to the consumption of raw spirituous liquors in this place, are supposed to be the cause of the wretch's animosity. It is added that this declaration was loudly cheered by a crowd of persons who had assembled on the spot; and that one man had the boldness to designate Mr. Slug aloud by the opprobrious epithet of "Stick-in-the-mud!" It is earnestly to be hoped that now, when the moment has arrived for their interference, the magistrates will not shrink from the exercise of that power which is vested in them by the constitution of our common country.'

'Half-past ten.

‘The disturbance, I am happy to inform you, has been completely quelled, and the ringleader taken into custody. She had a pail of cold water thrown over her, previous to being locked up, and expresses great contrition and uneasiness. We are all in a fever of anticipation about to-morrow; but, now that we are within a few hours of the meeting of the association, and at last enjoy the proud consciousness of having its illustrious members amongst us, I trust and hope everything may go off peaceably. I shall send you a full report of to-morrow’s proceedings by the night coach.’

‘Eleven o’clock.

‘I open my letter to say that nothing whatever has occurred since I folded it up.’

‘Thursday.

‘The sun rose this morning at the usual hour. I did not observe anything particular in the aspect of the glorious planet, except that he appeared to me (it might have been a delusion of my heightened fancy) to shine with more than common brilliancy, and to shed a refulgent lustre upon the town, such as I had never observed before. This is the more extraordinary, as the sky was perfectly cloudless, and the atmosphere peculiarly fine. At half-past nine o’clock the general committee assembled, with the last year’s president in the chair. The report of the council was read; and one passage, which stated that the council had corresponded with no less than three thousand five hundred and seventy-one persons, (all of whom paid their own postage,) on no fewer than seven thousand two hundred and forty-three topics, was received with a degree of enthusiasm which no efforts could suppress. The various committees and sections having been appointed, and the more formal business transacted, the great proceedings of the meeting commenced at eleven o’clock precisely. I had the happiness of occupying a most eligible position at that time, in

‘SECTION A.—ZOOLOGY AND BOTANY.
GREAT ROOM, PIG AND TINDER-BOX.

President—Professor Snore. *Vice-Presidents*—Professors Doze and Wheezy.

‘The scene at this moment was particularly striking. The sun streamed through the windows of the apartments, and tinted the whole scene with its brilliant rays, bringing out in strong relief the noble visages of the professors and scientific gentlemen, who, some with bald heads, some with red heads, some with brown heads, some with grey heads, some with black heads, some with block heads, presented a *coup d'oeil* which no eye-witness will readily forget. In front of these gentlemen were papers and inkstands; and round the room, on elevated benches extending as far as the forms could reach, were assembled a brilliant concourse of those lovely and elegant women for which Mudfog is justly acknowledged to be without a rival in the whole world. The contrast between their fair faces and the dark coats and trousers of the scientific gentlemen I shall never cease to remember while Memory holds her seat.

'Time having been allowed for a slight confusion, occasioned by the falling down of the greater part of the platforms, to subside, the president called on one of the secretaries to read a communication entitled, "Some remarks on the industrious fleas, with considerations on the importance of establishing infant-schools among that numerous class of society; of directing their industry to useful and practical ends; and of applying the surplus fruits thereof, towards providing for them a comfortable and respectable maintenance in their old age."

'The author stated, that, having long turned his attention to the moral and social condition of these interesting animals, he had been induced to visit an exhibition in Regent-street, London, commonly known by the designation of "The Industrious Fleas." He had there seen many fleas, occupied certainly in various pursuits and avocations, but occupied, he was bound to add, in a manner which no man of well-regulated mind could fail to regard with sorrow and regret. One flea, reduced to the level of a beast of burden, was drawing about a miniature gig, containing a particularly small effigy of His Grace the Duke of Wellington; while another was staggering beneath the weight of a golden model of his great adversary Napoleon Bonaparte. Some, brought up as mountebanks and ballet-dancers, were performing a figure-dance (he regretted to observe, that, of the fleas so employed, several were females); others were in training, in a small card-board box, for pedestrians,—mere sporting characters—and two were actually engaged in the cold-blooded and barbarous occupation of duelling; a pursuit from which humanity recoiled with horror and disgust. He suggested that measures should be immediately taken to employ the labour of these fleas as part and parcel of the productive power of the country, which might easily be done by the establishment among them of infant schools and houses of industry, in which a system of virtuous education, based upon sound principles, should be observed, and moral precepts strictly inculcated. He proposed that every flea who presumed to exhibit, for hire, music, or dancing, or any species of theatrical entertainment, without a licence, should be considered a vagabond, and treated accordingly; in which respect he only placed him upon a level with the rest of mankind. He would further suggest that their labour should be placed under the control and regulation of the state, who should set apart from the profits, a fund for the support of superannuated or disabled fleas, their widows and orphans. With this view, he proposed that liberal premiums should be offered for the three best designs for a general almshouse; from which—as insect architecture was well known to be in a very advanced and perfect state—we might possibly derive many valuable hints for the improvement of our metropolitan universities, national galleries, and other public edifices.

‘THE PRESIDENT wished to be informed how the ingenious gentleman proposed to open a communication with fleas generally, in the first instance, so that they might be thoroughly imbued with a sense of the advantages they must necessarily derive from changing their mode of life, and applying themselves to honest labour. This appeared to him, the only difficulty.

‘THE AUTHOR submitted that this difficulty was easily overcome, or rather that there was no difficulty at all in the case. Obviously the course to be pursued, if Her Majesty’s government could be prevailed upon to take up the plan, would be, to secure at a remunerative salary the individual to whom he had alluded as presiding over the exhibition in Regent-street at the period of his visit. That gentleman would at once be able to put himself in communication with the mass of the fleas, and to instruct them in pursuance of some general plan of education, to be sanctioned by Parliament, until such time as the more intelligent among them were advanced enough to officiate as teachers to the rest.

‘The President and several members of the section highly complimented the author of the paper last read, on his most ingenious and important treatise. It was determined that the subject should be recommended to the immediate consideration of the council.

‘MR. WIGSBY produced a cauliflower somewhat larger than a chaise-umbrella, which had been raised by no other artificial means than the simple application of highly carbonated soda-water as manure. He explained that by scooping out the head, which would afford a new and delicious species of nourishment for the poor, a parachute, in principle something similar to that constructed by M. Garnerin, was at once obtained; the stalk of course being kept downwards. He added that he was perfectly willing to make a descent from a height of not less than three miles and a quarter; and had in fact already proposed the same to the proprietors of Vauxhall Gardens, who in the handsomest manner at once consented to his wishes, and appointed an early day next summer for the undertaking; merely stipulating that the rim of the cauliflower should be previously broken in three or four places to ensure the safety of the descent.

'THE PRESIDENT congratulated the public on the *grand gala* in store for them, and warmly eulogised the proprietors of the establishment alluded to, for their love of science, and regard for the safety of human life, both of which did them the highest honour.

'A Member wished to know how many thousand additional lamps the royal property would be illuminated with, on the night after the descent.

'MR. WIGSBY replied that the point was not yet finally decided; but he believed it was proposed, over and above the ordinary illuminations, to exhibit in various devices eight millions and a-half of additional lamps.

'The Member expressed himself much gratified with this announcement.

'MR. BLUNDERUM delighted the section with a most interesting and valuable paper "on the last moments of the learned pig," which produced a very strong impression on the assembly, the account being compiled from the personal recollections of his favourite attendant. The account stated in the most emphatic terms that the animal's name was not Toby, but Solomon; and distinctly proved that he could have no near relatives in the profession, as many designing persons had falsely stated, inasmuch as his father, mother, brothers and sisters, had all fallen victims to the butcher at different times. An uncle of his indeed, had with very great labour been traced to a sty in Somers Town; but as he was in a very infirm state at the time, being afflicted with measles, and shortly afterwards disappeared, there appeared too much reason to conjecture that he had been converted into sausages. The disorder of the learned pig was originally a severe cold, which, being aggravated by excessive trough indulgence, finally settled upon the lungs, and terminated in a general decay of the constitution. A melancholy instance of a presentiment entertained by the animal of his approaching dissolution, was recorded. After gratifying a numerous and fashionable company with his performances, in which no falling off whatever was visible, he fixed his eyes on the biographer, and, turning to the watch which lay on the floor, and on which he was accustomed to point out the hour, deliberately passed his snout twice round the dial. In precisely four-and-twenty hours from that time he had ceased to exist!

‘PROFESSOR WHEEZY inquired whether, previous to his demise, the animal had expressed, by signs or otherwise, any wishes regarding the disposal of his little property.

‘MR. BLUNDERUM replied, that, when the biographer took up the pack of cards at the conclusion of the performance, the animal grunted several times in a significant manner, and nodding his head as he was accustomed to do, when gratified. From these gestures it was understood that he wished the attendant to keep the cards, which he had ever since done. He had not expressed any wish relative to his watch, which had accordingly been pawned by the same individual.

‘THE PRESIDENT wished to know whether any Member of the section had ever seen or conversed with the pig-faced lady, who was reported to have worn a black velvet mask, and to have taken her meals from a golden trough.

‘After some hesitation a Member replied that the pig-faced lady was his mother-in-law, and that he trusted the President would not violate the sanctity of private life.

‘THE PRESIDENT begged pardon. He had considered the pig-faced lady a public character. Would the honourable member object to state, with a view to the advancement of science, whether she was in any way connected with the learned pig?

‘The Member replied in the same low tone, that, as the question appeared to involve a suspicion that the learned pig might be his half-brother, he must decline answering it.

‘SECTION B.—ANATOMY AND MEDICINE.
COACH-HOUSE, PIG AND TINDER-BOX.

President—Dr. Toorell. *Vice-Presidents*—Professors Muff and Nogo.

DR. KUTANKUMAGEN (of Moscow) read to the section a report of a case which had occurred within his own practice, strikingly illustrative of the power of medicine, as exemplified in his successful treatment of a virulent disorder. He had been called in to visit the patient on the 1st of April, 1837. He was then labouring under symptoms peculiarly alarming to any medical man. His frame was stout and muscular, his step firm and elastic, his cheeks plump and red, his voice loud, his appetite good, his pulse full and round. He was in the constant habit of eating three meals *per diem*, and of drinking at least one bottle of wine, and one glass of spirituous liquors diluted with water, in the course of the four-and-twenty hours. He laughed constantly, and in so hearty a manner that it was terrible to hear him. By dint of powerful medicine, low diet, and bleeding, the symptoms in the course of three days perceptibly decreased. A rigid perseverance in the same course of treatment for only one week, accompanied with small doses of water-gruel, weak broth, and barley-water, led to their entire disappearance. In the course of a month he was sufficiently recovered to be carried down-stairs by two nurses, and to enjoy an airing in a close carriage, supported by soft pillows. At the present moment he was restored so far as to walk about, with the slight assistance of a crutch and a boy. It would perhaps be gratifying to the section to learn that he ate little, drank little, slept little, and was never heard to laugh by any accident whatever.

‘DR. W. R. FEE, in complimenting the honourable member upon the triumphant cure he had effected, begged to ask whether the patient still bled freely?

‘DR. KUTANKUMAGEN replied in the affirmative.

‘DR. W. R. FEE.—And you found that he bled freely during the whole course of the disorder?

‘DR. KUTANKUMAGEN.—Oh dear, yes; most freely.

‘DR. NEESHAWTS supposed, that if the patient had not submitted to be bled with great readiness and perseverance, so extraordinary a cure could never, in fact, have been accomplished. Dr. Kutankumagen rejoined, certainly not.

‘MR. KNIGHT BELL (M.R.C.S.) exhibited a wax preparation of the interior of a gentleman who in early life had inadvertently swallowed a door-key. It was a curious fact that a medical student of dissipated habits, being present at the *post mortem* examination, found means to escape unobserved from the room, with that portion of the coats of the stomach upon which an exact model of the instrument was distinctly impressed, with which he hastened to a locksmith of doubtful character, who made a new key from the pattern so shown to him. With this key the medical student entered the house of the deceased gentleman, and committed a burglary to a large amount, for which he was subsequently tried and executed.

‘THE PRESIDENT wished to know what became of the original key after the lapse of years. Mr. Knight Bell replied that the gentleman was always much accustomed to punch, and it was supposed the acid had gradually devoured it.

‘DR. NEESHAWTS and several of the members were of opinion that the key must have lain very cold and heavy upon the gentleman’s stomach.

‘MR. KNIGHT BELL believed it did at first. It was worthy of remark, perhaps, that for some years the gentleman was troubled with a night-mare, under the influence of which he always imagined himself a wine-cellar door.

‘PROFESSOR MUFF related a very extraordinary and convincing proof of the wonderful efficacy of the system of infinitesimal doses, which the section were doubtless aware was based upon the theory that the very minutest amount of any given drug, properly dispersed through the human frame, would be productive of precisely the same result as a very large dose administered in the usual manner. Thus, the fortieth part of a grain of calomel was supposed to be equal to a five-grain calomel pill, and so on in proportion throughout the whole range of medicine. He had tried the experiment in a curious manner upon a publican who had been brought into the hospital with a broken head, and was cured upon the infinitesimal system in the incredibly short space of three months. This man was a hard drinker. He (Professor Muff) had dispersed three drops of rum through a bucket of water, and requested the man to drink the whole. What was the result? Before he had drunk a quart, he was in a state of beastly intoxication; and five other men were made dead drunk with the remainder.

‘THE PRESIDENT wished to know whether an infinitesimal dose of soda-water would have recovered them? Professor Muff replied that the twenty-fifth part of a teaspoonful, properly administered to each patient, would have sobered him immediately. The President remarked that this was a most important discovery, and he hoped the Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen would patronize it immediately.

‘A Member begged to be informed whether it would be possible to administer—say, the twentieth part of a grain of bread and cheese to all grown-up paupers, and the fortieth part to children, with the same satisfying effect as their present allowance.

‘PROFESSOR MUFF was willing to stake his professional reputation on the perfect adequacy of such a quantity of food to the support of human life—in workhouses; the addition of the fifteenth part of a grain of pudding twice a week would render it a high diet.

‘PROFESSOR NOGO called the attention of the section to a very extraordinary case of animal magnetism. A private watchman, being merely looked at by the operator from the opposite side of a wide street, was at once observed to be in a very drowsy and languid state. He was followed to his box, and being once slightly rubbed on the palms of the hands, fell into a sound sleep, in which he continued without intermission for ten hours.

‘SECTION C.—STATISTICS.

HAY-LOFT, ORIGINAL PIG.

President—Mr. Woodensconce. *Vice-Presidents*—Mr. Ledbrain and Mr. Timbered.

‘MR. SLUG stated to the section the result of some calculations he had made with great difficulty and labour, regarding the state of infant education among the middle classes of London. He found that, within a circle of three miles from the Elephant and Castle, the following were the names and numbers of children’s books principally in circulation:-

‘Jack the Giant-killer	7,943
Ditto and Bean-stalk	8,621
Ditto and Eleven Brothers	2,845
Ditto and Jill	1,998
Total	21,407

‘He found that the proportion of Robinson Crusoes to Philip Quarlls was as four and a half to one; and that the preponderance of Valentine and Orsons over Goody Two Shoeses was as three and an eighth of the former to half a one of the latter; a comparison of Seven Champions with Simple

Simons gave the same result. The ignorance that prevailed, was lamentable. One child, on being asked whether he would rather be Saint George of England or a respectable tallow-chandler, instantly replied, “Taint George of Ingling.” Another, a little boy of eight years old, was found to be firmly impressed with a belief in the existence of dragons, and openly stated that it was his intention when he grew up, to rush forth sword in hand for the deliverance of captive princesses, and the promiscuous slaughter of giants. Not one child among the number interrogated had ever heard of Mungo Park,—some inquiring whether he was at all connected with the black man that swept the crossing; and others whether he was in any way related to the Regent’s Park. They had not the slightest conception of the commonest principles of mathematics, and considered Sindbad the Sailor the most enterprising voyager that the world had ever produced.

‘A Member strongly deprecating the use of all the other books mentioned, suggested that Jack and Jill might perhaps be exempted from the general censure, inasmuch as the hero and heroine, in the very outset of the tale, were depicted as going *up* a hill to fetch a pail of water, which was a laborious and useful occupation,—supposing the family linen was being washed, for instance.

‘MR. SLUG feared that the moral effect of this passage was more than counterbalanced by another in a subsequent part of the poem, in which very gross allusion was made to the mode in which the heroine was personally chastised by her mother

“‘For laughing at Jack’s disaster;”

besides, the whole work had this one great fault, *it was not true.*

‘THE PRESIDENT complimented the honourable member on the excellent distinction he had drawn. Several other Members, too, dwelt upon the immense and urgent necessity of storing the minds of children with nothing but facts and figures; which process the President very forcibly remarked, had made them (the section) the men they were.

‘MR. SLUG then stated some curious calculations respecting the dogs’-meat barrows of London. He found that the total number of small carts and barrows engaged in dispensing provision to the cats and dogs of the metropolis was, one thousand seven hundred and forty-three. The average number of skewers delivered daily with the provender, by each dogs’-meat cart or barrow, was thirty-six. Now, multiplying the number of skewers so delivered by the number of barrows, a total of sixty-two thousand seven hundred and forty-eight skewers daily would be obtained. Allowing that, of these sixty-two thousand seven hundred and forty-eight skewers, the odd two thousand seven hundred and forty-eight were accidentally devoured with the meat, by the most voracious of the animals supplied, it followed that sixty thousand skewers per day, or the enormous number of twenty-one millions nine hundred thousand skewers annually, were wasted in the kennels and dustholes of London; which, if collected and warehoused, would in ten years' time afford a mass of timber more than sufficient for the construction of a first-rate vessel of war for the use of her Majesty's navy, to be called "The Royal Skewer," and to become under that name the terror of all the enemies of this island.

'MR. X. LEDBRAIN read a very ingenious communication, from which it appeared that the total number of legs belonging to the manufacturing population of one great town in Yorkshire was, in round numbers, forty thousand, while the total number of chair and stool legs in their houses was only thirty thousand, which, upon the very favourable average of three legs to a seat, yielded only ten thousand seats in all. From this calculation it would appear,—not taking wooden or cork legs into the account, but allowing two legs to every person,—that ten thousand individuals (one-half of the whole population) were either destitute of any rest for their legs at all, or passed the whole of their leisure time in sitting upon boxes.

'SECTION D.—MECHANICAL SCIENCE.
COACH-HOUSE, ORIGINAL PIG.

President—Mr. Carter. *Vice-Presidents*—Mr. Truck and Mr. Waghorn.

'PROFESSOR QUEERSPECK exhibited an elegant model of a portable railway, neatly mounted in a green case, for the waistcoat pocket. By attaching this beautiful instrument to his boots, any Bank or public-office clerk could transport himself from his place of residence to his place of business, at the easy rate of sixty-five miles an hour, which, to gentlemen of sedentary pursuits, would be an incalculable advantage.

'THE PRESIDENT was desirous of knowing whether it was necessary to have a level surface on which the gentleman was to run.

‘PROFESSOR QUEERSPECK explained that City gentlemen would run in trains, being handcuffed together to prevent confusion or unpleasantness. For instance, trains would start every morning at eight, nine, and ten o’clock, from Camden Town, Islington, Camberwell, Hackney, and various other places in which City gentlemen are accustomed to reside. It would be necessary to have a level, but he had provided for this difficulty by proposing that the best line that the circumstances would admit of, should be taken through the sewers which undermine the streets of the metropolis, and which, well lighted by jets from the gas pipes which run immediately above them, would form a pleasant and commodious arcade, especially in winter-time, when the inconvenient custom of carrying umbrellas, now so general, could be wholly dispensed with. In reply to another question, Professor Queerspeck stated that no substitute for the purposes to which these arcades were at present devoted had yet occurred to him, but that he hoped no fanciful objection on this head would be allowed to interfere with so great an undertaking.

‘MR. JOBBA produced a forcing-machine on a novel plan, for bringing joint-stock railway shares prematurely to a premium. The instrument was in the form of an elegant gilt weather-glass, of most dazzling appearance, and was worked behind, by strings, after the manner of a pantomime trick, the strings being always pulled by the directors of the company to which the machine belonged. The quicksilver was so ingeniously placed, that when the acting directors held shares in their pockets, figures denoting very small expenses and very large returns appeared upon the glass; but the moment the directors parted with these pieces of paper, the estimate of needful expenditure suddenly increased itself to an immense extent, while the statements of certain profits became reduced in the same proportion. Mr. Jobba stated that the machine had been in constant requisition for some months past, and he had never once known it to fail.

‘A Member expressed his opinion that it was extremely neat and pretty. He wished to know whether it was not liable to accidental derangement? Mr. Jobba said that the whole machine was undoubtedly liable to be blown up, but that was the only objection to it.

‘PROFESSOR NOGO arrived from the anatomical section to exhibit a model of a safety fire-escape, which could be fixed at any time, in less than half an hour, and by means of which, the youngest or most infirm persons (successfully resisting the progress of the flames until it was quite ready) could be preserved if they merely balanced themselves for a few minutes on the sill of their bedroom window, and got into the escape without falling into the street. The Professor stated that the number of boys who had been rescued in the daytime by this machine from houses which were not on fire, was almost incredible. Not a conflagration had occurred in the whole of London for many months past to which the escape had not been carried on the very next day, and put in action before a concourse of persons.

‘THE PRESIDENT inquired whether there was not some difficulty in ascertaining which was the top of the machine, and which the bottom, in cases of pressing emergency.

‘PROFESSOR NOGO explained that of course it could not be expected to act quite as well when there was a fire, as when there was not a fire; but in the former case he thought it would be of equal service whether the top were up or down.’

With the last section our correspondent concludes his most able and faithful Report, which will never cease to reflect credit upon him for his scientific attainments, and upon us for our enterprising spirit. It is needless to take a review of the subjects which have been discussed; of the mode in which they have been examined; of the great truths which they have elicited. They are now before the world, and we leave them to read, to consider, and to profit.

The place of meeting for next year has undergone discussion, and has at length been decided, regard being had to, and evidence being taken upon, the goodness of its wines, the supply of its markets, the hospitality of its inhabitants, and the quality of its hotels. We hope at this next meeting our correspondent may again be present, and that we may be once more the means of placing his communications before the world. Until that period we have been prevailed upon to allow this number of our Miscellany to be retailed to the public, or wholesaled to the trade, without any advance upon our usual price.

We have only to add, that the committees are now broken up, and that Mudfog is once again restored to its accustomed tranquillity,—that Professors and Members have had balls, and *soirées*, and suppers, and great mutual complimentations, and have at length dispersed to their several homes,—whither all good wishes and joys attend them, until next year!

Signed BOZ.

FULL REPORT OF THE SECOND MEETING OF THE MUDFOG ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF EVERYTHING

In October last, we did ourselves the immortal credit of recording, at an enormous expense, and by dint of exertions unnpralleled in the history of periodical publication, the proceedings of the Mudfog Association for the Advancement of Everything, which in that month held its first great half-yearly meeting, to the wonder and delight of the whole empire. We announced at the conclusion of that extraordinary and most remarkable Report, that when the Second Meeting of the Society should take place, we should be found again at our post, renewing our gigantic and spirited endeavours, and once more making the world ring with the accuracy, authenticity, immeasurable superiority, and intense remarkability of our account of its proceedings. In redemption of this pledge, we caused to be despatched per steam to Oldcastle (at which place this second meeting of the Society was held on the 20th instant), the same superhumanly-endowed gentleman who furnished the former report, and who,—gifted by nature with transcendent abilities, and furnished by us with a body of assistants scarcely inferior to himself,—has forwarded a series of letters, which, for faithfulness of description, power of language, fervour of thought, happiness of expression, and importance of subject-matter, have no equal in the epistolary literature of any age or country. We give this gentleman's correspondence entire, and in the order in which it reached our office.

'*Saloon of Steamer, Thursday night, half-past eight.*

'When I left New Burlington Street this evening in the hackney cabriolet, number four thousand two hundred and eighty-five, I experienced sensations as novel as they were oppressive. A sense of the importance of the task I had undertaken, a consciousness that I was leaving London, and, stranger still, going somewhere else, a feeling of loneliness and a sensation of jolting, quite bewildered my thoughts, and for a time rendered me even insensible to the presence of my carpet-bag and hat-box. I shall ever feel grateful to the driver of a Blackwall omnibus who, by thrusting the pole of his vehicle through the small door of the cabriolet, awakened me from a tumult of imaginings that are wholly indescribable. But of such materials is our imperfect nature composed!

'I am happy to say that I am the first passenger on board, and shall thus be enabled to give you an account of all that happens in the order of its occurrence. The chimney is smoking a good deal, and so are the crew; and the captain, I am informed, is very drunk in a little house upon deck, something like a black turnpike. I should infer from all I hear that he has got the steam up.

'You will readily guess with what feelings I have just made the discovery that my berth is in the same closet with those engaged by Professor Woodensconce, Mr. Slug, and Professor Grime. Professor Woodensconce has taken the shelf above me, and Mr. Slug and Professor Grime the two shelves opposite. Their luggage has already arrived. On Mr. Slug's bed is a long tin tube of about three inches in diameter, carefully closed at both ends. What can this contain? Some powerful instrument of a new construction, doubtless.'

'Ten minutes past nine.

'Nobody has yet arrived, nor has anything fresh come in my way except several joints of beef and mutton, from which I conclude that a good plain dinner has been provided for to-morrow. There is a singular smell below, which gave me some uneasiness at first; but as the steward says it is always there, and never goes away, I am quite comfortable again. I learn from this man that the different sections will be distributed at the Black Boy and Stomach-ache, and the Boot-jack and Countenance. If this intelligence be true (and I have no reason to doubt it), your readers will draw such conclusions as their different opinions may suggest.

'I write down these remarks as they occur to me, or as the facts come to my knowledge, in order that my first impressions may lose nothing of their original vividness. I shall despatch them in small packets as opportunities arise.'

'*Half past nine.*

'Some dark object has just appeared upon the wharf. I think it is a travelling carriage.'

‘A quarter to ten.

‘No, it isn’t.’

‘Half-past ten.

The passengers are pouring in every instant. Four omnibuses full have just arrived upon the wharf, and all is bustle and activity. The noise and confusion are very great. Cloths are laid in the cabins, and the steward is placing blue plates—full of knobs of cheese at equal distances down the centre of the tables. He drops a great many knobs; but, being used to it, picks them up again with great dexterity, and, after wiping them on his sleeve, throws them back into the plates. He is a young man of exceedingly prepossessing appearance—either dirty or a mulatto, but I think the former.

‘An interesting old gentleman, who came to the wharf in an omnibus, has just quarrelled violently with the porters, and is staggering towards the vessel with a large trunk in his arms. I trust and hope that he may reach it in safety; but the board he has to cross is narrow and slippery. Was that a splash? Gracious powers!

‘I have just returned from the deck. The trunk is standing upon the extreme brink of the wharf, but the old gentleman is nowhere to be seen. The watchman is not sure whether he went down or not, but promises to drag for him the first thing to-morrow morning. May his humane efforts prove successful!

‘Professor Nogo has this moment arrived with his nightcap on under his hat. He has ordered a glass of cold brandy and water, with a hard biscuit and a basin, and has gone straight to bed. What can this mean?

‘The three other scientific gentlemen to whom I have already alluded have come on board, and have all tried their beds, with the exception of Professor Woodensconce, who sleeps in one of the top ones, and can’t get into it. Mr. Slug, who sleeps in the other top one, is unable to get out of his, and is to have his supper handed up by a boy. I have had the honour to introduce myself to these gentlemen, and we have amicably arranged the order in which we shall retire to rest; which it is necessary to agree upon, because, although the cabin is very comfortable, there is not room for more than one gentleman to be out of bed at a time, and even he must take his boots off in the passage.

‘As I anticipated, the knobs of cheese were provided for the passengers’ supper, and are now in course of consumption. Your readers will be surprised to hear that Professor Woodensconce has abstained from cheese for eight years, although he takes butter in considerable quantities. Professor Grime having lost several teeth, is unable, I observe, to eat his crusts without previously soaking them in his bottled porter. How interesting are these peculiarities!'

'Half-past eleven.

'Professors Woodensconce and Grime, with a degree of good humour that delights us all, have just arranged to toss for a bottle of mulled port. There has been some discussion whether the payment should be decided by the first toss or the best out of three. Eventually the latter course has been determined on. Deeply do I wish that both gentlemen could win; but that being impossible, I own that my personal aspirations (I speak as an individual, and do not compromise either you or your readers by this expression of feeling) are with Professor Woodensconce. I have backed that gentleman to the amount of eighteenpence.'

'Twenty minutes to twelve.

'Professor Grime has inadvertently tossed his half-crown out of one of the cabin-windows, and it has been arranged that the steward shall toss for him. Bets are offered on any side to any amount, but there are no takers.

'Professor Woodensconce has just called "woman;" but the coin having lodged in a beam, is a long time coming down again. The interest and suspense of this one moment are beyond anything that can be imagined.'

'Twelve o'clock.

'The mulled port is smoking on the table before me, and Professor Grime has won. Tossing is a game of chance; but on every ground, whether of public or private character, intellectual endowments, or scientific attainments, I cannot help expressing my opinion that Professor Woodensconce *ought* to have come off victorious. There is an exultation about Professor Grime incompatible, I fear, with true greatness.'

'A quarter past twelve.

'Professor Grime continues to exult, and to boast of his victory in no very measured terms, observing that he always does win, and that he knew it would be a "head" beforehand, with many other remarks of a similar nature. Surely this gentleman is not so lost to every feeling of decency and propriety as not to feel and know the superiority of Professor Woodensconce? Is Professor Grime insane? or does he wish to be reminded in plain language of his true position in society, and the precise level of his acquirements and abilities? Professor Grime will do well to look to this.'

‘One o’clock.

‘I am writing in bed. The small cabin is illuminated by the feeble light of a flickering lamp suspended from the ceiling; Professor Grime is lying on the opposite shelf on the broad of his back, with his mouth wide open. The scene is indescribably solemn. The rippling of the tide, the noise of the sailors’ feet overhead, the gruff voices on the river, the dogs on the shore, the snoring of the passengers, and a constant creaking of every plank in the vessel, are the only sounds that meet the ear. With these exceptions, all is profound silence.

‘My curiosity has been within the last moment very much excited. Mr. Slug, who lies above Professor Grime, has cautiously withdrawn the curtains of his berth, and, after looking anxiously out, as if to satisfy himself that his companions are asleep, has taken up the tin tube of which I have before spoken, and is regarding it with great interest. What rare mechanical combination can be contained in that mysterious case? It is evidently a profound secret to all.’

‘A quarter past one.

‘The behaviour of Mr. Slug grows more and more mysterious. He has unscrewed the top of the tube, and now renews his observations upon his companions, evidently to make sure that he is wholly unobserved. He is clearly on the eve of some great experiment. Pray heaven that it be not a dangerous one; but the interests of science must be promoted, and I am prepared for the worst.’

‘Five minutes later.

‘He has produced a large pair of scissors, and drawn a roll of some substance, not unlike parchment in appearance, from the tin case. The experiment is about to begin. I must strain my eyes to the utmost, in the attempt to follow its minutest operation.’

‘Twenty minutes before two.

‘I have at length been enabled to ascertain that the tin tube contains a few yards of some celebrated plaster, recommended—as I discover on regarding the label attentively through my eye-glass—as a preservative against sea-sickness. Mr. Slug has cut it up into small portions, and is now sticking it over himself in every direction.’

‘Three o’clock.

‘Precisely a quarter of an hour ago we weighed anchor, and the machinery was suddenly put in motion with a noise so appalling, that

Professor Woodensconce (who had ascended to his berth by means of a platform of carpet-bags arranged by himself on geometrical principals) darted from his shelf head foremost, and, gaining his feet with all the rapidity of extreme terror, ran wildly into the ladies' cabin, under the impression that we were sinking, and uttering loud cries for aid. I am assured that the scene which ensued baffles all description. There were one hundred and forty-seven ladies in their respective berths at the time.

'Mr. Slug has remarked, as an additional instance of the extreme ingenuity of the steam-engine as applied to purposes of navigation, that in whatever part of the vessel a passenger's berth may be situated, the machinery always appears to be exactly under his pillow. He intends stating this very beautiful, though simple discovery, to the association.'

'Half-past ten.

'We are still in smooth water; that is to say, in as smooth water as a steam-vessel ever can be, for, as Professor Woodensconce (who has just woke up) learnedly remarks, another great point of ingenuity about a steamer is, that it always carries a little storm with it. You can scarcely conceive how exciting the jerking pulsation of the ship becomes. It is a matter of positive difficulty to get to sleep.'

'Friday afternoon, six o'clock.

'I regret to inform you that Mr. Slug's plaster has proved of no avail. He is in great agony, but has applied several large, additional pieces notwithstanding. How affecting is this extreme devotion to science and pursuit of knowledge under the most trying circumstances!

'We were extremely happy this morning, and the breakfast was one of the most animated description. Nothing unpleasant occurred until noon, with the exception of Doctor Foxey's brown silk umbrella and white hat becoming entangled in the machinery while he was explaining to a knot of ladies the construction of the steam-engine. I fear the gravy soup for lunch was injudicious. We lost a great many passengers almost immediately afterwards.'

'Half-past six.

'I am again in bed. Anything so heart-rending as Mr. Slug's sufferings it has never yet been my lot to witness.'

'Seven o'clock.

'A messenger has just come down for a clean pocket-handkerchief from Professor Woodensconce's bag, that unfortunate gentleman being quite unable to leave the deck, and imploring constantly to be thrown overboard. From this man I understand that Professor Nogo, though in a state of utter exhaustion, clings feebly to the hard biscuit and cold brandy and water, under the impression that they will yet restore him. Such is the triumph of mind over matter.

'Professor Grime is in bed, to all appearance quite well; but he *will* eat, and it is disagreeable to see him. Has this gentleman no sympathy with the sufferings of his fellow-creatures? If he has, on what principle can he call for mutton-chops—and smile?'

'*Black Boy and Stomach-ache, Oldcastle, Saturday noon.*

'You will be happy to learn that I have at length arrived here in safety. The town is excessively crowded, and all the private lodgings and hotels are filled with *savans* of both sexes. The tremendous assemblage of intellect that one encounters in every street is in the last degree overwhelming.

'Notwithstanding the throng of people here, I have been fortunate enough to meet with very comfortable accommodation on very reasonable terms, having secured a sofa in the first-floor passage at one guinea per night, which includes permission to take my meals in the bar, on condition that I walk about the streets at all other times, to make room for other gentlemen similarly situated. I have been over the outhouses intended to be devoted to the reception of the various sections, both here and at the Boot-jack and Countenance, and am much delighted with the arrangements. Nothing can exceed the fresh appearance of the saw-dust with which the floors are sprinkled. The forms are of unplaned deal, and the general effect, as you can well imagine, is extremely beautiful.'

'*Half-past nine.*

'The number and rapidity of the arrivals are quite bewildering. Within the last ten minutes a stage-coach has driven up to the door, filled inside and out with distinguished characters, comprising Mr. Muddlebranes, Mr. Drawley, Professor Muff, Mr. X. Misty, Mr. X. X. Misty, Mr. Purblind, Professor Rummun, The Honourable and Reverend Mr. Long Eers, Professor John Ketch, Sir William Joltered, Doctor Buffer, Mr. Smith (of London), Mr. Brown (of Edinburgh), Sir Hookham Snivey, and Professor Pumpkinskull. The ten last-named gentlemen were wet through, and looked extremely intelligent.'

'*Sunday, two o'clock, p.m.*

‘The Honourable and Reverend Mr. Long Eers, accompanied by Sir William Joltered, walked and drove this morning. They accomplished the former feat in boots, and the latter in a hired fly. This has naturally given rise to much discussion.

‘I have just learnt that an interview has taken place at the Boot-jack and Countenance between Sowster, the active and intelligent beadle of this place, and Professor Pumpkinskull, who, as your readers are doubtless aware, is an influential member of the council. I forbear to communicate any of the rumours to which this very extraordinary proceeding has given rise until I have seen Sowster, and endeavoured to ascertain the truth from him.’

‘Half-past six.

‘I engaged a donkey-chaise shortly after writing the above, and proceeded at a brisk trot in the direction of Sowster’s residence, passing through a beautiful expanse of country, with red brick buildings on either side, and stopping in the marketplace to observe the spot where Mr. Kwakley’s hat was blown off yesterday. It is an uneven piece of paving, but has certainly no appearance which would lead one to suppose that any such event had recently occurred there. From this point I proceeded—passing the gas-works and tallow-melter’s—to a lane which had been pointed out to me as the beadle’s place of residence; and before I had driven a dozen yards further, I had the good fortune to meet Sowster himself advancing towards me.

‘Sowster is a fat man, with a more enlarged development of that peculiar conformation of countenance which is vulgarly termed a double chin than I remember to have ever seen before. He has also a very red nose, which he attributes to a habit of early rising—so red, indeed, that but for this explanation I should have supposed it to proceed from occasional inebriety. He informed me that he did not feel himself at liberty to relate what had passed between himself and Professor Pumpkinskull, but had no objection to state that it was connected with a matter of police regulation, and added with peculiar significance “Never wos sitch times!”

‘You will easily believe that this intelligence gave me considerable surprise, not wholly unmixed with anxiety, and that I lost no time in waiting on Professor Pumpkinskull, and stating the object of my visit. After a few moments’ reflection, the Professor, who, I am bound to say, behaved with the utmost politeness, openly avowed (I mark the passage in italics) *that he* *had requested Sowster to attend on the Monday morning at the Boot-jack and Countenance, to keep off the boys; and that he had further desired that the under-beadle might be stationed, with the same object, at the Black Boy and Stomach-ache*!

'Now I leave this unconstitutional proceeding to your comments and the consideration of your readers. I have yet to learn that a beadle, without the precincts of a church, churchyard, or work-house, and acting otherwise than under the express orders of churchwardens and overseers in council assembled, to enforce the law against people who come upon the parish, and other offenders, has any lawful authority whatever over the rising youth of this country. I have yet to learn that a beadle can be called out by any civilian to exercise a domination and despotism over the boys of Britain. I have yet to learn that a beadle will be permitted by the commissioners of poor law regulation to wear out the soles and heels of his boots in illegal interference with the liberties of people not proved poor or otherwise criminal. I have yet to learn that a beadle has power to stop up the Queen's highway at his will and pleasure, or that the whole width of the street is not free and open to any man, boy, or woman in existence, up to the very walls of the houses—ay, be they Black Boys and Stomach-aches, or Boot-jacks and Countenances, I care not.'

'*Nine o'clock.*

'I have procured a local artist to make a faithful sketch of the tyrant Sowster, which, as he has acquired this infamous celebrity, you will no doubt wish to have engraved for the purpose of presenting a copy with every copy of your next number. I enclose it.

[Picture which cannot be reproduced]

The under-beadle has consented to write his life, but it is to be strictly anonymous.

'The accompanying likeness is of course from the life, and complete in every respect. Even if I had been totally ignorant of the man's real character, and it had been placed before me without remark, I should have shuddered involuntarily. There is an intense malignity of expression in the features, and a baleful ferocity of purpose in the ruffian's eye, which appals and sickens. His whole air is rampant with cruelty, nor is the stomach less characteristic of his demoniac propensities.'

'*Monday.*

‘The great day has at length arrived. I have neither eyes, nor ears, nor pens, nor ink, nor paper, for anything but the wonderful proceedings that have astounded my senses. Let me collect my energies and proceed to the account.

‘SECTION A.—ZOOLOGY AND BOTANY.
FRONT PARLOUR, BLACK BOY AND STOMACH-ACHE.

President—Sir William Joltered. *Vice-Presidents*—Mr. Muddlebranes and Mr. Drawley.

‘MR. X. X. MISTY communicated some remarks on the disappearance of dancing-bears from the streets of London, with observations on the exhibition of monkeys as connected with barrel-organs. The writer had observed, with feelings of the utmost pain and regret, that some years ago a sudden and unaccountable change in the public taste took place with reference to itinerant bears, who, being discountenanced by the populace, gradually fell off one by one from the streets of the metropolis, until not one remained to create a taste for natural history in the breasts of the poor and uninstructed. One bear, indeed,—a brown and ragged animal,—had lingered about the haunts of his former triumphs, with a worn and dejected visage and feeble limbs, and had essayed to wield his quarter-staff for the amusement of the multitude; but hunger, and an utter want of any due recompense for his abilities, had at length driven him from the field, and it was only too probable that he had fallen a sacrifice to the rising taste for grease. He regretted to add that a similar, and no less lamentable, change had taken place with reference to monkeys. These delightful animals had formerly been almost as plentiful as the organs on the tops of which they were accustomed to sit; the proportion in the year 1829 (it appeared by the parliamentary return) being as one monkey to three organs. Owing, however, to an altered taste in musical instruments, and the substitution, in a great measure, of narrow boxes of music for organs, which left the monkeys nothing to sit upon, this source of public amusement was wholly dried up. Considering it a matter of the deepest importance, in connection with national education, that the people should not lose such opportunities of making themselves acquainted with the manners and customs of two most interesting species of animals, the author submitted that some measures should be immediately taken for the restoration of these pleasing and truly intellectual amusements.

‘THE PRESIDENT inquired by what means the honourable member proposed to attain this most desirable end?

‘THE AUTHOR submitted that it could be most fully and satisfactorily accomplished, if Her Majesty’s Government would cause to be brought over to England, and maintained at the public expense, and for the public amusement, such a number of bears as would enable every quarter of the town to be visited—say at least by three bears a week. No difficulty whatever need be experienced in providing a fitting place for the reception of these animals, as a commodious bear-garden could be erected in the immediate neighbourhood of both Houses of Parliament; obviously the most proper and eligible spot for such an establishment.

‘PROFESSOR MULL doubted very much whether any correct ideas of natural history were propagated by the means to which the honourable member had so ably adverted. On the contrary, he believed that they had been the means of diffusing very incorrect and imperfect notions on the subject. He spoke from personal observation and personal experience, when he said that many children of great abilities had been induced to believe, from what they had observed in the streets, at and before the period to which the honourable gentleman had referred, that all monkeys were born in red coats and spangles, and that their hats and feathers also came by nature. He wished to know distinctly whether the honourable gentleman attributed the want of encouragement the bears had met with to the decline of public taste in that respect, or to a want of ability on the part of the bears themselves?

‘MR. X. X. MISTY replied, that he could not bring himself to believe but that there must be a great deal of floating talent among the bears and monkeys generally; which, in the absence of any proper encouragement, was dispersed in other directions.

‘PROFESSOR PUMPKINSKULL wished to take that opportunity of calling the attention of the section to a most important and serious point. The author of the treatise just read had alluded to the prevalent taste for bears’-grease as a means of promoting the growth of hair, which undoubtedly was diffused to a very great and (as it appeared to him) very alarming extent. No gentleman attending that section could fail to be aware of the fact that the youth of the present age evinced, by their behaviour in the streets, and at all places of public resort, a considerable lack of that gallantry and gentlemanly feeling which, in more ignorant times, had been thought becoming. He wished to know whether it were possible that a constant outward application of bears'-grease by the young gentlemen about town had imperceptibly infused into those unhappy persons something of the nature and quality of the bear. He shuddered as he threw out the remark; but if this theory, on inquiry, should prove to be well founded, it would at once explain a great deal of unpleasant eccentricity of behaviour, which, without some such discovery, was wholly unaccountable.

'THE PRESIDENT highly complimented the learned gentleman on his most valuable suggestion, which produced the greatest effect upon the assembly; and remarked that only a week previous he had seen some young gentlemen at a theatre eyeing a box of ladies with a fierce intensity, which nothing but the influence of some brutish appetite could possibly explain. It was dreadful to reflect that our youth were so rapidly verging into a generation of bears.

'After a scene of scientific enthusiasm it was resolved that this important question should be immediately submitted to the consideration of the council.

'THE PRESIDENT wished to know whether any gentleman could inform the section what had become of the dancing-dogs?

'A MEMBER replied, after some hesitation, that on the day after three glee-singers had been committed to prison as criminals by a late most zealous police-magistrate of the metropolis, the dogs had abandoned their professional duties, and dispersed themselves in different quarters of the town to gain a livelihood by less dangerous means. He was given to understand that since that period they had supported themselves by lying in wait for and robbing blind men's poodles.

'MR. FLUMMERY exhibited a twig, claiming to be a veritable branch of that noble tree known to naturalists as the SHAKSPEARE, which has taken root in every land and climate, and gathered under the shade of its broad green boughs the great family of mankind. The learned gentleman remarked that the twig had been undoubtedly called by other names in its time; but that it had been pointed out to him by an old lady in Warwickshire, where the great tree had grown, as a shoot of the genuine SHAKSPEARE, by which name he begged to introduce it to his countrymen.

‘THE PRESIDENT wished to know what botanical definition the honourable gentleman could afford of the curiosity.

‘MR. FLUMMERY expressed his opinion that it was A DECIDED PLANT.

‘SECTION B.—DISPLAY OF MODELS AND MECHANICAL SCIENCE.

LARGE ROOM, BOOT-JACK AND COUNTENANCE.

President—Mr. Mallett. *Vice-Presidents*—Messrs. Leaver and Scroo.

‘MR. CRINKLES exhibited a most beautiful and delicate machine, of little larger size than an ordinary snuff-box, manufactured entirely by himself, and composed exclusively of steel, by the aid of which more pockets could be picked in one hour than by the present slow and tedious process in four-and-twenty. The inventor remarked that it had been put into active operation in Fleet Street, the Strand, and other thoroughfares, and had never been once known to fail.

‘After some slight delay, occasioned by the various members of the section buttoning their pockets,

‘THE PRESIDENT narrowly inspected the invention, and declared that he had never seen a machine of more beautiful or exquisite construction. Would the inventor be good enough to inform the section whether he had taken any and what means for bringing it into general operation?

‘MR. CRINKLES stated that, after encountering some preliminary difficulties, he had succeeded in putting himself in communication with Mr. Fogle Hunter, and other gentlemen connected with the swell mob, who had awarded the invention the very highest and most unqualified approbation. He regretted to say, however, that these distinguished practitioners, in common with a gentleman of the name of Gimlet-eyed Tommy, and other members of a secondary grade of the profession whom he was understood to represent, entertained an insuperable objection to its being brought into general use, on the ground that it would have the inevitable effect of almost entirely superseding manual labour, and throwing a great number of highly-deserving persons out of employment.

‘THE PRESIDENT hoped that no such fanciful objections would be allowed to stand in the way of such a great public improvement.

‘MR. CRINKLES hoped so too; but he feared that if the gentlemen of the swell mob persevered in their objection, nothing could be done.

‘PROFESSOR GRIME suggested, that surely, in that case, Her Majesty’s Government might be prevailed upon to take it up.

‘MR. CRINKLES said, that if the objection were found to be insuperable he should apply to Parliament, which he thought could not fail to recognise the utility of the invention.

‘THE PRESIDENT observed that, up to this time Parliament had certainly got on very well without it; but, as they did their business on a very large scale, he had no doubt they would gladly adopt the improvement. His only fear was that the machine might be worn out by constant working.

‘MR. COPPERNOSE called the attention of the section to a proposition of great magnitude and interest, illustrated by a vast number of models, and stated with much clearness and perspicuity in a treatise entitled “Practical Suggestions on the necessity of providing some harmless and wholesome relaxation for the young noblemen of England.” His proposition was, that a space of ground of not less than ten miles in length and four in breadth should be purchased by a new company, to be incorporated by Act of Parliament, and inclosed by a brick wall of not less than twelve feet in height. He proposed that it should be laid out with highway roads, turnpikes, bridges, miniature villages, and every object that could conduce to the comfort and glory of Four-in-hand Clubs, so that they might be fairly presumed to require no drive beyond it. This delightful retreat would be fitted up with most commodious and extensive stables, for the convenience of such of the nobility and gentry as had a taste for ostlering, and with houses of entertainment furnished in the most expensive and handsome style. It would be further provided with whole streets of door-knockers and bell-handles of extra size, so constructed that they could be easily wrenched off at night, and regularly screwed on again, by attendants provided for the purpose, every day. There would also be gas lamps of real glass, which could be broken at a comparatively small expense per dozen, and a broad and handsome foot pavement for gentlemen to drive their cabriolets upon when they were humorously disposed—for the full enjoyment of which feat live pedestrians would be procured from the workhouse at a very small charge per head. The place being inclosed, and carefully screened from the intrusion of the public, there would be no objection to gentlemen laying aside any article of their costume that was considered to interfere with a pleasant frolic, or, indeed, to their walking about without any costume at all, if they liked that better. In short, every facility of enjoyment would be afforded that the most gentlemanly person could possibly desire. But as even these advantages would be incomplete unless there were some means provided of enabling the nobility and gentry to display their prowess when they sallied forth after dinner, and as some inconvenience might be experienced in the event of their being reduced to the necessity of pummelling each other, the inventor had turned his attention to the construction of an entirely new police force, composed exclusively of automaton figures, which, with the assistance of the ingenious Signor Gagliardi, of Windmill-street, in the Haymarket, he had succeeded in making with such nicety, that a policeman, cab-driver, or old woman, made upon the principle of the models exhibited, would walk about until knocked down like any real man; nay, more, if set upon and beaten by six or eight noblemen or gentlemen, after it was down, the figure would utter divers groans, mingled with entreaties for mercy, thus rendering the illusion complete, and the enjoyment perfect. But the invention did not stop even here; for station-houses would be built, containing good beds for noblemen and gentlemen during the night, and in the morning they would repair to a commodious police office, where a pantomimic investigation would take place before the automaton magistrates,—quite equal to life,—who would fine them in so many counters, with which they would be previously provided for the purpose. This office would be furnished with an inclined plane, for the convenience of any nobleman or gentleman who might wish to bring in his horse as a witness; and the prisoners would be at perfect liberty, as they were now, to interrupt the complainants as much as they pleased, and to make any remarks that they thought proper. The charge for these amusements would amount to very little more than they already cost, and the inventor submitted that the public would be much benefited and comforted by the proposed arrangement.

‘PROFESSOR NOGO wished to be informed what amount of automaton police force it was proposed to raise in the first instance.

‘MR. COPPERNOSE replied, that it was proposed to begin with seven divisions of police of a score each, lettered from A to G inclusive. It was proposed that not more than half this number should be placed on active duty, and that the remainder should be kept on shelves in the police office ready to be called out at a moment's notice.

'THE PRESIDENT, awarding the utmost merit to the ingenious gentleman who had originated the idea, doubted whether the automaton police would quite answer the purpose. He feared that noblemen and gentlemen would perhaps require the excitement of thrashing living subjects.

'MR. COPPERNOSE submitted, that as the usual odds in such cases were ten noblemen or gentlemen to one policeman or cab-driver, it could make very little difference in point of excitement whether the policeman or cab-driver were a man or a block. The great advantage would be, that a policeman's limbs might be all knocked off, and yet he would be in a condition to do duty next day. He might even give his evidence next morning with his head in his hand, and give it equally well.

'PROFESSOR MUFF.—Will you allow me to ask you, sir, of what materials it is intended that the magistrates' heads shall be composed?

'MR. COPPERNOSE.—The magistrates will have wooden heads of course, and they will be made of the toughest and thickest materials that can possibly be obtained.

'PROFESSOR MUFF.—I am quite satisfied. This is a great invention.

'PROFESSOR NOGO.—I see but one objection to it. It appears to me that the magistrates ought to talk.

'MR. COPPERNOSE no sooner heard this suggestion than he touched a small spring in each of the two models of magistrates which were placed upon the table; one of the figures immediately began to exclaim with great volubility that he was sorry to see gentlemen in such a situation, and the other to express a fear that the policeman was intoxicated.

'The section, as with one accord, declared with a shout of applause that the invention was complete; and the President, much excited, retired with Mr. Coppernose to lay it before the council. On his return,

'MR. TICKLE displayed his newly-invented spectacles, which enabled the wearer to discern, in very bright colours, objects at a great distance, and rendered him wholly blind to those immediately before him. It was, he said, a most valuable and useful invention, based strictly upon the principle of the human eye.

'THE PRESIDENT required some information upon this point. He had yet to learn that the human eye was remarkable for the peculiarities of which the honourable gentleman had spoken.

‘MR. TICKLE was rather astonished to hear this, when the President could not fail to be aware that a large number of most excellent persons and great statesmen could see, with the naked eye, most marvellous horrors on West India plantations, while they could discern nothing whatever in the interior of Manchester cotton mills. He must know, too, with what quickness of perception most people could discover their neighbour’s faults, and how very blind they were to their own. If the President differed from the great majority of men in this respect, his eye was a defective one, and it was to assist his vision that these glasses were made.

‘MR. BLANK exhibited a model of a fashionable annual, composed of copper-plates, gold leaf, and silk boards, and worked entirely by milk and water.

‘MR. PROSEE, after examining the machine, declared it to be so ingeniously composed, that he was wholly unable to discover how it went on at all.

‘MR. BLANK.—Nobody can, and that is the beauty of it.

‘SECTION C.—ANATOMY AND MEDICINE.
BAR ROOM, BLACK BOY AND STOMACH-ACHE.

President—Dr. Soemup. *Vice-Presidents*—Messrs. Pessell and Mortair.

‘DR. GRUMMIDGE stated to the section a most interesting case of monomania, and described the course of treatment he had pursued with perfect success. The patient was a married lady in the middle rank of life, who, having seen another lady at an evening party in a full suit of pearls, was suddenly seized with a desire to possess a similar equipment, although her husband’s finances were by no means equal to the necessary outlay. Finding her wish ungratified, she fell sick, and the symptoms soon became so alarming, that he (Dr. Grummidge) was called in. At this period the prominent tokens of the disorder were sullenness, a total indisposition to perform domestic duties, great peevishness, and extreme languor, except when pearls were mentioned, at which times the pulse quickened, the eyes grew brighter, the pupils dilated, and the patient, after various incoherent exclamations, burst into a passion of tears, and exclaimed that nobody cared for her, and that she wished herself dead. Finding that the patient’s appetite was affected in the presence of company, he began by ordering a total abstinence from all stimulants, and forbidding any sustenance but weak gruel; he then took twenty ounces of blood, applied a blister under each ear, one upon the chest, and another on the back; having done which, and administered five grains of calomel, he left the patient to her repose. The next day she was somewhat low, but decidedly better, and all appearances of irritation were removed. The next day she improved still further, and on the next again. On the fourth there was some appearance of a return of the old symptoms, which no sooner developed themselves, than he administered another dose of calomel, and left strict orders that, unless a decidedly favourable change occurred within two hours, the patient's head should be immediately shaved to the very last curl. From that moment she began to mend, and, in less than four-and-twenty hours was perfectly restored. She did not now betray the least emotion at the sight or mention of pearls or any other ornaments. She was cheerful and good-humoured, and a most beneficial change had been effected in her whole temperament and condition.

'MR. PIPKIN (M.R.C.S.) read a short but most interesting communication in which he sought to prove the complete belief of Sir William Courtenay, otherwise Thorn, recently shot at Canterbury, in the Homoeopathic system. The section would bear in mind that one of the Homoeopathic doctrines was, that infinitesimal doses of any medicine which would occasion the disease under which the patient laboured, supposing him to be in a healthy state, would cure it. Now, it was a remarkable circumstance—proved in the evidence—that the deceased Thorn employed a woman to follow him about all day with a pail of water, assuring her that one drop (a purely homoeopathic remedy, the section would observe), placed upon his tongue, after death, would restore him. What was the obvious inference? That Thorn, who was marching and countermarching in osier beds, and other swampy places, was impressed with a presentiment that he should be drowned; in which case, had his instructions been complied with, he could not fail to have been brought to life again instantly by his own prescription. As it was, if this woman, or any other person, had administered an infinitesimal dose of lead and gunpowder immediately after he fell, he would have recovered forthwith. But unhappily the woman concerned did not possess the power of reasoning by analogy, or carrying out a principle, and thus the unfortunate gentleman had been sacrificed to the ignorance of the peasantry.

‘SECTION D.—STATISTICS.

OUT-HOUSE, BLACK BOY AND STOMACH-ACHE.

President—Mr. Slug. *Vice-Presidents*—Messrs. Noakes and Styles.

‘MR. KWAKLEY stated the result of some most ingenious statistical inquiries relative to the difference between the value of the qualification of several members of Parliament as published to the world, and its real nature and amount. After reminding the section that every member of Parliament for a town or borough was supposed to possess a clear freehold estate of three hundred pounds per annum, the honourable gentleman excited great amusement and laughter by stating the exact amount of freehold property possessed by a column of legislators, in which he had included himself. It appeared from this table, that the amount of such income possessed by each was 0 pounds, 0 shillings, and 0 pence, yielding an average of the same. (Great laughter.) It was pretty well known that there were accommodating gentlemen in the habit of furnishing new members with temporary qualifications, to the ownership of which they swore solemnly—of course as a mere matter of form. He argued from these *data* that it was wholly unnecessary for members of Parliament to possess any property at all, especially as when they had none the public could get them so much cheaper.

‘SUPPLEMENTARY SECTION, E.—UMBUGOLOGY AND DITCHWATERISICS.

President—Mr. Grub. *Vice Presidents*—Messrs. Dull and Dummy.

‘A paper was read by the secretary descriptive of a bay pony with one eye, which had been seen by the author standing in a butcher’s cart at the corner of Newgate Market. The communication described the author of the paper as having, in the prosecution of a mercantile pursuit, betaken himself one Saturday morning last summer from Somers Town to Cheapside; in the course of which expedition he had beheld the extraordinary appearance above described. The pony had one distinct eye, and it had been pointed out to him by his friend Captain Blunderbore, of the Horse Marines, who assisted the author in his search, that whenever he winked this eye he whisked his tail (possibly to drive the flies off), but that he always winked and whisked at the same time. The animal was lean, spavined, and tottering; and the author proposed to constitute it of the family of *Fitfordogsmeataurious*. It certainly did occur to him that there was no case on record of a pony with one clearly-defined and distinct organ of vision, winking and whisking at the same moment.

‘MR. Q. J. SNUFFLETOFFLE had heard of a pony winking his eye, and likewise of a pony whisking his tail, but whether they were two ponies or the same pony he could not undertake positively to say. At all events, he was acquainted with no authenticated instance of a simultaneous winking and whisking, and he really could not but doubt the existence of such a marvellous pony in opposition to all those natural laws by which ponies were governed. Referring, however, to the mere question of his one organ of vision, might he suggest the possibility of this pony having been literally half asleep at the time he was seen, and having closed only one eye.

‘THE PRESIDENT observed that, whether the pony was half asleep or fast asleep, there could be no doubt that the association was wide awake, and therefore that they had better get the business over, and go to dinner. He had certainly never seen anything analogous to this pony, but he was not prepared to doubt its existence; for he had seen many queerer ponies in his time, though he did not pretend to have seen any more remarkable donkeys than the other gentlemen around him.

‘PROFESSOR JOHN KETCH was then called upon to exhibit the skull of the late Mr. Greenacre, which he produced from a blue bag, remarking, on being invited to make any observations that occurred to him, “that he’d pound it as that ’ere ’spectable section had never seed a more gamerer cove nor he vos.”

‘A most animated discussion upon this interesting relic ensued; and, some difference of opinion arising respecting the real character of the deceased gentleman, Mr. Blubb delivered a lecture upon the cranium before him, clearly showing that Mr. Greenacre possessed the organ of destructiveness to a most unusual extent, with a most remarkable development of the organ of carveativeness. Sir Hookham Snivey was proceeding to combat this opinion, when Professor Ketch suddenly interrupted the proceedings by exclaiming, with great excitement of manner, “Walker!”

‘THE PRESIDENT begged to call the learned gentleman to order.

‘PROFESSOR KETCH.—“Order be blowed! you’ve got the wrong un, I tell you. It ain’t no ’ed at all; it’s a coker-nut as my brother-in-law has been a-carvin', to hornament his new baked tatur-stall wots a-comin' down 'ere vile the 'sociation's in the town. Hand over, vill you?"

'With these words, Professor Ketch hastily repossessed himself of the cocoa-nut, and drew forth the skull, in mistake for which he had exhibited it. A most interesting conversation ensued; but as there appeared some doubt ultimately whether the skull was Mr. Greenacre's, or a hospital patient's, or a pauper's, or a man's, or a woman's, or a monkey's, no particular result was obtained.'

'I cannot,' says our talented correspondent in conclusion, 'I cannot close my account of these gigantic researches and sublime and noble triumphs without repeating a *bon mot* of Professor Woodensconce's, which shows how the greatest minds may occasionally unbend when truth can be presented to listening ears, clothed in an attractive and playful form. I was standing by, when, after a week of feasting and feeding, that learned gentleman, accompanied by the whole body of wonderful men, entered the hall yesterday, where a sumptuous dinner was prepared; where the richest wines sparkled on the board, and fat bucks—propitiatory sacrifices to learning—sent forth their savoury odours. "Ah!" said Professor Woodensconce, rubbing his hands, "this is what we meet for; this is what inspires us; this is what keeps us together, and beckons us onward; this is the *spread* of science, and a glorious spread it is."'

THE PANTOMIME OF LIFE

Before we plunge headlong into this paper, let us at once confess to a fondness for pantomimes—to a gentle sympathy with clowns and pantaloons—to an unqualified admiration of harlequins and columbines—to a chaste delight in every action of their brief existence, varied and many-coloured as those actions are, and inconsistent though they occasionally be with those rigid and formal rules of propriety which regulate the proceedings of meaner and less comprehensive minds. We revel in pantomimes—not because they dazzle one's eyes with tinsel and gold leaf; not because they present to us, once again, the well-beloved chalked faces, and goggle eyes of our childhood; not even because, like Christmas-day, and Twelfth-night, and Shrove-Tuesday, and one's own birthday, they come to us but once a year;—our attachment is founded on a graver and a very different reason. A pantomime is to us, a mirror of life; nay, more, we maintain that it is so to audiences generally, although they are not aware of it, and that this very circumstance is the secret cause of their amusement and delight.

Let us take a slight example. The scene is a street: an elderly gentleman, with a large face and strongly marked features, appears. His countenance beams with a sunny smile, and a perpetual dimple is on his broad, red cheek. He is evidently an opulent elderly gentleman, comfortable in circumstances, and well-to-do in the world. He is not unmindful of the adornment of his person, for he is richly, not to say gaudily, dressed; and that he indulges to a reasonable extent in the pleasures of the table may be inferred from the joyous and oily manner in which he rubs his stomach, by way of informing the audience that he is going home to dinner. In the fulness of his heart, in the fancied security of wealth, in the possession and enjoyment of all the good things of life, the elderly gentleman suddenly loses his footing, and stumbles. How the audience roar! He is set upon by a noisy and officious crowd, who buffet and cuff him unmercifully. They scream with delight! Every time the elderly gentleman struggles to get up, his relentless persecutors knock him down again. The spectators are convulsed with merriment! And when at last the elderly gentleman does get up, and staggers away, despoiled of hat, wig, and clothing, himself battered to pieces, and his watch and money gone, they are exhausted with laughter, and express their merriment and admiration in rounds of applause.

Is this like life? Change the scene to any real street;—to the Stock Exchange, or the City banker's; the merchant's counting-house, or even the tradesman's shop. See any one of these men fall,—the more suddenly, and the nearer the zenith of his pride and riches, the better. What a wild hallo is raised over his prostrate carcase by the shouting mob; how they whoop and yell as he lies humbled beneath them! Mark how eagerly they set upon him when he is down; and how they mock and deride him as he slinks away. Why, it is the pantomime to the very letter.

Of all the pantomimic *dramatis personae*, we consider the pantaloon the most worthless and debauched. Independent of the dislike one naturally feels at seeing a gentleman of his years engaged in pursuits highly unbecoming his gravity and time of life, we cannot conceal from ourselves the fact that he is a treacherous, worldly-minded old villain, constantly enticing his younger companion, the clown, into acts of fraud or petty larceny, and generally standing aside to watch the result of the enterprise. If it be successful, he never forgets to return for his share of the spoil; but if it turn out a failure, he generally retires with remarkable caution and expedition, and keeps carefully aloof until the affair has blown over. His amorous propensities, too, are eminently disagreeable; and his mode of addressing ladies in the open street at noon-day is down-right improper, being usually neither more nor less than a perceptible tickling of the aforesaid ladies in the waist, after committing which, he starts back, manifestly ashamed (as well he may be) of his own indecorum and temerity; continuing, nevertheless, to ogle and beckon to them from a distance in a very unpleasant and immoral manner.

Is there any man who cannot count a dozen pantaloons in his own social circle? Is there any man who has not seen them swarming at the west end of the town on a sunshiny day or a summer's evening, going through the last-named pantomimic feats with as much liquorish energy, and as total an absence of reserve, as if they were on the very stage itself? We can tell upon our fingers a dozen pantaloons of our acquaintance at this moment—

capital pantaloons, who have been performing all kinds of strange freaks, to the great amusement of their friends and acquaintance, for years past; and who to this day are making such comical and ineffectual attempts to be young and dissolute, that all beholders are like to die with laughter.

Take that old gentleman who has just emerged from the *Café de l'Europe* in the Haymarket, where he has been dining at the expense of the young man upon town with whom he shakes hands as they part at the door of the tavern. The affected warmth of that shake of the hand, the courteous nod, the obvious recollection of the dinner, the savoury flavour of which still hangs upon his lips, are all characteristics of his great prototype. He hobbles away humming an opera tune, and twirling his cane to and fro, with affected carelessness. Suddenly he stops—'tis at the milliner's window. He peeps through one of the large panes of glass; and, his view of the ladies within being obstructed by the India shawls, directs his attentions to the young girl with the band-box in her hand, who is gazing in at the window also. See! he draws beside her. He coughs; she turns away from him. He draws near her again; she disregards him. He gleefully chucks her under the chin, and, retreating a few steps, nods and beckons with fantastic grimaces, while the girl bestows a contemptuous and supercilious look upon his wrinkled visage. She turns away with a flounce, and the old gentleman trots after her with a toothless chuckle. The pantaloon to the life!

But the close resemblance which the clowns of the stage bear to those of every-day life is perfectly extraordinary. Some people talk with a sigh of the decline of pantomime, and murmur in low and dismal tones the name of Grimaldi. We mean no disparagement to the worthy and excellent old man when we say that this is downright nonsense. Clowns that beat Grimaldi all to nothing turn up every day, and nobody patronizes them—more's the pity!

'I know who you mean,' says some dirty-faced patron of Mr. Osbaldistone's, laying down the Miscellany when he has got thus far, and bestowing upon vacancy a most knowing glance; 'you mean C. J. Smith as did Guy Fawkes, and George Barnwell at the Garden.' The dirty-faced gentleman has hardly uttered the words, when he is interrupted by a young gentleman in no shirt-collar and a Petersham coat. 'No, no,' says the young gentleman; 'he means Brown, King, and Gibson, at the 'Delphi.' Now, with great deference both to the first-named gentleman with the dirty face, and the last-named gentleman in the non-existing shirt-collar, we do *not* mean either the performer who so grotesquely burlesqued the Popish conspirator, or the three unchangeables who have been dancing the same dance under different imposing titles, and doing the same thing under various high-sounding names for some five or six years last past. We have no sooner made this avowal, than the public, who have hitherto been silent witnesses of the dispute, inquire what on earth it is we *do* mean; and, with becoming respect, we proceed to tell them.

It is very well known to all playgoers and pantomime-seers, that the scenes in which a theatrical clown is at the very height of his glory are those which are described in the play-bills as ‘Cheesemonger’s shop and Crockery warehouse,’ or ‘Tailor’s shop, and Mrs. Queertable’s boarding-house,’ or places bearing some such title, where the great fun of the thing consists in the hero’s taking lodgings which he has not the slightest intention of paying for, or obtaining goods under false pretences, or abstracting the stock-in-trade of the respectable shopkeeper next door, or robbing warehouse porters as they pass under his window, or, to shorten the catalogue, in his swindling everybody he possibly can, it only remaining to be observed that, the more extensive the swindling is, and the more barefaced the impudence of the swindler, the greater the rapture and ecstasy of the audience. Now it is a most remarkable fact that precisely this sort of thing occurs in real life day after day, and nobody sees the humour of it. Let us illustrate our position by detailing the plot of this portion of the pantomime—not of the theatre, but of life.

The Honourable Captain Fitz-Whisker Fiercy, attended by his livery servant Do’em—a most respectable servant to look at, who has grown grey in the service of the captain’s family—views, treats for, and ultimately obtains possession of, the unfurnished house, such a number, such a street. All the tradesmen in the neighbourhood are in agonies of competition for the captain’s custom; the captain is a good-natured, kind-hearted, easy man, and, to avoid being the cause of disappointment to any, he most handsomely gives orders to all. Hampers of wine, baskets of provisions, cart-loads of furniture, boxes of jewellery, supplies of luxuries of the costliest description, flock to the house of the Honourable Captain Fitz-Whisker Fiercy, where they are received with the utmost readiness by the highly respectable Do’em; while the captain himself struts and swaggers about with that compound air of conscious superiority and general blood-thirstiness which a military captain should always, and does most times, wear, to the admiration and terror of plebeian men. But the tradesmen’s backs are no sooner turned, than the captain, with all the eccentricity of a mighty mind, and assisted by the faithful Do’em, whose devoted fidelity is not the least touching part of his character, disposes of everything to great advantage; for, although the articles fetch small sums, still they are sold considerably above cost price, the cost to the captain having been nothing at all. After various manoeuvres, the imposture is discovered, Fitz-Fiercy and Do’em are recognized as confederates, and the police office to which they are both taken is thronged with their dupes.

Who can fail to recognize in this, the exact counterpart of the best portion of a theatrical pantomime—Fitz-Whisker Fiercy by the clown; Do’em by the pantaloon; and supernumeraries by the tradesmen? The best of the joke, too, is, that the very coal-merchant who is loudest in his complaints against the person who defrauded him, is the identical man who sat in the centre of the very front row of the pit last night and laughed the most boisterously at this very same thing,—and not so well done either. Talk of Grimaldi, we say again! Did Grimaldi, in his best days, ever do anything in this way equal to Da Costa?

The mention of this latter justly celebrated clown reminds us of his last piece of humour, the fraudulently obtaining certain stamped acceptances from a young gentleman in the army. We had scarcely laid down our pen to contemplate for a few moments this admirable actor’s performance of that exquisite practical joke, than a new branch of our subject flashed suddenly upon us. So we take it up again at once.

All people who have been behind the scenes, and most people who have been before them, know, that in the representation of a pantomime, a good many men are sent upon the stage for the express purpose of being cheated, or knocked down, or both. Now, down to a moment ago, we had never been able to understand for what possible purpose a great number of odd, lazy, large-headed men, whom one is in the habit of meeting here, and there, and everywhere, could ever have been created. We see it all, now. They are the supernumeraries in the pantomime of life; the men who have been thrust into it, with no other view than to be constantly tumbling over each other, and running their heads against all sorts of strange things. We sat opposite to one of these men at a supper-table, only last week. Now we think of it, he was exactly like the gentlemen with the pasteboard heads and faces, who do the corresponding business in the theatrical pantomimes; there was the same broad stolid simper—the same dull leaden eye—the same unmeaning, vacant stare; and whatever was said, or whatever was done, he always came in at precisely the wrong place, or jostled against something that he had not the slightest business with. We looked at the man across the table again and again; and could not satisfy ourselves what race of beings to class him with. How very odd that this never occurred to us before!

We will frankly own that we have been much troubled with the harlequin. We see harlequins of so many kinds in the real living pantomime, that we hardly know which to select as the proper fellow of him of the theatres. At one time we were disposed to think that the harlequin was neither more nor less than a young man of family and independent property, who had run away with an opera-dancer, and was fooling his life and his means away in light and trivial amusements. On reflection, however, we remembered that harlequins are occasionally guilty of witty, and even clever acts, and we are rather disposed to acquit our young men of family and independent property, generally speaking, of any such misdemeanours. On a more mature consideration of the subject, we have arrived at the conclusion that the harlequins of life are just ordinary men, to be found in no particular walk or degree, on whom a certain station, or particular conjunction of circumstances, confers the magic wand. And this brings us to a few words on the pantomime of public and political life, which we shall say at once, and then conclude—merely premising in this place that we decline any reference whatever to the columbine, being in no wise satisfied of the nature of her connection with her parti-coloured lover, and not feeling by any means clear that we should be justified in introducing her to the virtuous and respectable ladies who peruse our lucubrations.

We take it that the commencement of a Session of Parliament is neither more nor less than the drawing up of the curtain for a grand comic pantomime, and that his Majesty’s most gracious speech on the opening thereof may be not inaptly compared to the clown’s opening speech of ‘Here we are!’ ‘My lords and gentlemen, here we are!’ appears, to our mind at least, to be a very good abstract of the point and meaning of the propitiatory address of the ministry. When we remember how frequently this speech is made, immediately after *the change* too, the parallel is quite perfect, and still more singular.

Perhaps the cast of our political pantomime never was richer than at this day. We are particularly strong in clowns. At no former time, we should say, have we had such astonishing tumblers, or performers so ready to go through the whole of their feats for the amusement of an admiring throng. Their extreme readiness to exhibit, indeed, has given rise to some ill-natured reflections; it having been objected that by exhibiting gratuitously through the country when the theatre is closed, they reduce themselves to the level of mountebanks, and thereby tend to degrade the respectability of the profession. Certainly Grimaldi never did this sort of thing; and though Brown, King, and Gibson have gone to the Surrey in vacation time, and Mr. C. J. Smith has ruralised at Sadler's Wells, we find no theatrical precedent for a general tumbling through the country, except in the gentleman, name unknown, who threw summersets on behalf of the late Mr. Richardson, and who is no authority either, because he had never been on the regular boards.

But, laying aside this question, which after all is a mere matter of taste, we may reflect with pride and gratification of heart on the proficiency of our clowns as exhibited in the season. Night after night will they twist and tumble about, till two, three, and four o'clock in the morning; playing the strangest antics, and giving each other the funniest slaps on the face that can possibly be imagined, without evincing the smallest tokens of fatigue. The strange noises, the confusion, the shouting and roaring, amid which all this is done, too, would put to shame the most turbulent sixpenny gallery that ever yelled through a boxing-night.

It is especially curious to behold one of these clowns compelled to go through the most surprising contortions by the irresistible influence of the wand of office, which his leader or harlequin holds above his head. Acted upon by this wonderful charm he will become perfectly motionless, moving neither hand, foot, nor finger, and will even lose the faculty of speech at an instant's notice; or on the other hand, he will become all life and animation if required, pouring forth a torrent of words without sense or meaning, throwing himself into the wildest and most fantastic contortions, and even grovelling on the earth and licking up the dust. These exhibitions are more curious than pleasing; indeed, they are rather disgusting than otherwise, except to the admirers of such things, with whom we confess we have no fellow-feeling.

Strange tricks—very strange tricks—are also performed by the harlequin who holds for the time being the magic wand which we have just mentioned. The mere waving it before a man's eyes will dispossess his brains of all the notions previously stored there, and fill it with an entirely new set of ideas; one gentle tap on the back will alter the colour of a man's coat completely; and there are some expert performers, who, having this wand held first on one side and then on the other, will change from side to side, turning their coats at every evolution, with so much rapidity and dexterity, that the quickest eye can scarcely detect their motions. Occasionally, the genius who confers the wand, wrests it from the hand of the temporary possessor, and consigns it to some new performer; on which occasions all the characters change sides, and then the race and the hard knocks begin anew.

We might have extended this chapter to a much greater length—we might have carried the comparison into the liberal professions—we might have shown, as was in fact our original purpose, that each is in itself a little pantomime with scenes and characters of its own, complete; but, as we fear we have been quite lengthy enough already, we shall leave this chapter just where it is. A gentleman, not altogether unknown as a dramatic poet, wrote thus a year or two ago -

'All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:'

and we, tracking out his footsteps at the scarcely-worth-mentioning little distance of a few millions of leagues behind, venture to add, by way of new reading, that he meant a Pantomime, and that we are all actors in The Pantomime of Life.

SOME PARTICULARS CONCERNING A LION

We have a great respect for lions in the abstract. In common with most other people, we have heard and read of many instances of their bravery and generosity. We have duly admired that heroic self-denial and charming philanthropy which prompts them never to eat people except when they are hungry, and we have been deeply impressed with a becoming sense of the politeness they are said to display towards unmarried ladies of a certain state. All natural histories teem with anecdotes illustrative of their excellent qualities; and one old spelling-book in particular recounts a touching instance of an old lion, of high moral dignity and stern principle, who felt it his imperative duty to devour a young man who had contracted a habit of swearing, as a striking example to the rising generation.

All this is extremely pleasant to reflect upon, and, indeed, says a very great deal in favour of lions as a mass. We are bound to state, however, that such individual lions as we have happened to fall in with have not put forth any very striking characteristics, and have not acted up to the chivalrous character assigned them by their chroniclers. We never saw a lion in what is called his natural state, certainly; that is to say, we have never met a lion out walking in a forest, or crouching in his lair under a tropical sun, waiting till his dinner should happen to come by, hot from the baker's. But we have seen some under the influence of captivity, and the pressure of misfortune; and we must say that they appeared to us very apathetic, heavy-headed fellows.

The lion at the Zoological Gardens, for instance. He is all very well; he has an undeniable mane, and looks very fierce; but, Lord bless us! what of that? The lions of the fashionable world look just as ferocious, and are the most harmless creatures breathing. A box-lobby lion or a Regent-street animal will put on a most terrible aspect, and roar, fearfully, if you affront him; but he will never bite, and, if you offer to attack him manfully, will fairly turn tail and sneak off. Doubtless these creatures roam about sometimes in herds, and, if they meet any especially meek-looking and peaceably-disposed fellow, will endeavour to frighten him; but the faintest show of a vigorous resistance is sufficient to scare them even then. These are pleasant characteristics, whereas we make it matter of distinct charge against the Zoological lion and his brethren at the fairs, that they are sleepy, dreamy, sluggish quadrupeds.

We do not remember to have ever seen one of them perfectly awake, except at feeding-time. In every respect we uphold the biped lions against their four-footed namesakes, and we boldly challenge controversy upon the subject.

With these opinions it may be easily imagined that our curiosity and interest were very much excited the other day, when a lady of our acquaintance called on us and resolutely declined to accept our refusal of her invitation to an evening party; ‘for,’ said she, ‘I have got a lion coming.’ We at once retracted our plea of a prior engagement, and became as anxious to go, as we had previously been to stay away.

We went early, and posted ourselves in an eligible part of the drawing-room, from whence we could hope to obtain a full view of the interesting animal. Two or three hours passed, the quadrilles began, the room filled; but no lion appeared. The lady of the house became inconsolable,—for it is one of the peculiar privileges of these lions to make solemn appointments and never keep them,—when all of a sudden there came a tremendous double rap at the street-door, and the master of the house, after gliding out (unobserved as he flattered himself) to peep over the banisters, came into the room, rubbing his hands together with great glee, and cried out in a very important voice, ‘My dear, Mr.—(naming the lion) has this moment arrived.’

Upon this, all eyes were turned towards the door, and we observed several young ladies, who had been laughing and conversing previously with great gaiety and good humour, grow extremely quiet and sentimental; while some young gentlemen, who had been cutting great figures in the facetious and small-talk way, suddenly sank very obviously in the estimation of the company, and were looked upon with great coldness and indifference. Even the young man who had been ordered from the music shop to play the pianoforte was visibly affected, and struck several false notes in the excess of his excitement.

All this time there was a great talking outside, more than once accompanied by a loud laugh, and a cry of ‘Oh! capital! excellent!’ from which we inferred that the lion was jocose, and that these exclamations were occasioned by the transports of his keeper and our host. Nor were we deceived; for when the lion at last appeared, we overheard his keeper, who was a little prim man, whisper to several gentlemen of his acquaintance, with uplifted hands, and every expression of half-suppressed admiration, that—(naming the lion again) was in *such* cue to-night!

The lion was a literary one. Of course, there were a vast number of people present who had admired his roarings, and were anxious to be introduced to him; and very pleasant it was to see them brought up for the purpose, and to observe the patient dignity with which he received all their patting and caressing. This brought forcibly to our mind what we had so often witnessed at country fairs, where the other lions are compelled to go through as many forms of courtesy as they chance to be acquainted with, just as often as admiring parties happen to drop in upon them.

While the lion was exhibiting in this way, his keeper was not idle, for he mingled among the crowd, and spread his praises most industriously. To one gentleman he whispered some very choice thing that the noble animal had said in the very act of coming up-stairs, which, of course, rendered the mental effort still more astonishing; to another he murmured a hasty account of a grand dinner that had taken place the day before, where twenty-seven gentlemen had got up all at once to demand an extra cheer for the lion; and to the ladies he made sundry promises of interceding to procure the majestic brute’s sign-manual for their albums. Then, there were little private consultations in different corners, relative to the personal appearance and stature of the lion; whether he was shorter than they had expected to see him, or taller, or thinner, or fatter, or younger, or older; whether he was like his portrait, or unlike it; and whether the particular shade of his eyes was black, or blue, or hazel, or green, or yellow, or mixture. At all these consultations the keeper assisted; and, in short, the lion was the sole and single subject of discussion till they sat him down to whist, and then the people relapsed into their old topics of conversation—themselves and each other.

We must confess that we looked forward with no slight impatience to the announcement of supper; for if you wish to see a tame lion under particularly favourable circumstances, feeding-time is the period of all others to pitch upon. We were therefore very much delighted to observe a sensation among the guests, which we well knew how to interpret, and immediately afterwards to behold the lion escorting the lady of the house down-stairs. We offered our arm to an elderly female of our acquaintance, who—dear old soul!—is the very best person that ever lived, to lead down to any meal; for, be the room ever so small, or the party ever so large, she is sure, by some intuitive perception of the eligible, to push and pull herself and conductor close to the best dishes on the table;—we say we offered our arm to this elderly female, and, descending the stairs shortly after the lion, were fortunate enough to obtain a seat nearly opposite him.

Of course the keeper was there already. He had planted himself at precisely that distance from his charge which afforded him a decent pretext for raising his voice, when he addressed him, to so loud a key, as could not fail to attract the attention of the whole company, and immediately began to apply himself seriously to the task of bringing the lion out, and putting him through the whole of his manoeuvres. Such flashes of wit as he elicited from the lion! First of all, they began to make puns upon a salt-cellar, and then upon the breast of a fowl, and then upon the trifle; but the best jokes of all were decidedly on the lobster salad, upon which latter subject the lion came out most vigorously, and, in the opinion of the most competent authorities, quite outshone himself. This is a very excellent mode of shining in society, and is founded, we humbly conceive, upon the classic model of the dialogues between Mr. Punch and his friend the proprietor, wherein the latter takes all the up-hill work, and is content to pioneer to the jokes and repartees of Mr. P. himself, who never fails to gain great credit and excite much laughter thereby. Whatever it be founded on, however, we recommend it to all lions, present and to come; for in this instance it succeeded to admiration, and perfectly dazzled the whole body of hearers.

When the salt-cellar, and the fowl’s breast, and the trifle, and the lobster salad were all exhausted, and could not afford standing-room for another solitary witticism, the keeper performed that very dangerous feat which is still done with some of the caravan lions, although in one instance it terminated fatally, of putting his head in the animal’s mouth, and placing himself entirely at its mercy. Boswell frequently presents a melancholy instance of the lamentable results of this achievement, and other keepers and jackals have been terribly lacerated for their daring. It is due to our lion to state, that he condescended to be trifled with, in the most gentle manner, and finally went home with the showman in a hack cab: perfectly peaceable, but slightly fuddled.

Being in a contemplative mood, we were led to make some reflections upon the character and conduct of this genus of lions as we walked homewards, and we were not long in arriving at the conclusion that our former impression in their favour was very much strengthened and confirmed by what we had recently seen. While the other lions receive company and compliments in a sullen, moody, not to say snarling manner, these appear flattered by the attentions that are paid them; while those conceal themselves to the utmost of their power from the vulgar gaze, these court the popular eye, and, unlike their brethren, whom nothing short of compulsion will move to exertion, are ever ready to display their acquirements to the wondering throng. We have known bears of undoubted ability who, when the expectations of a large audience have been wound up to the utmost pitch, have peremptorily refused to dance; well-taught monkeys, who have unaccountably objected to exhibit on the slack wire; and elephants of unquestioned genius, who have suddenly declined to turn the barrel-organ; but we never once knew or heard of a biped lion, literary or otherwise,—and we state it as a fact which is highly creditable to the whole species,—who, occasion offering, did not seize with avidity on any opportunity which was afforded him, of performing to his heart’s content on the first violin.

MR. ROBERT BOLTON: THE ‘GENTLEMAN CONNECTED WITH THE PRESS’

In the parlour of the Green Dragon, a public-house in the immediate neighbourhood of Westminster Bridge, everybody talks politics, every evening, the great political authority being Mr. Robert Bolton, an individual who defines himself as ‘a gentleman connected with the press,’ which is a definition of peculiar indefiniteness. Mr. Robert Bolton’s regular circle of admirers and listeners are an undertaker, a greengrocer, a hairdresser, a baker, a large stomach surmounted by a man’s head, and placed on the top of two particularly short legs, and a thin man in black, name, profession, and pursuit unknown, who always sits in the same position, always displays the same long, vacant face, and never opens his lips, surrounded as he is by most enthusiastic conversation, except to puff forth a volume of tobacco smoke, or give vent to a very snappy, loud, and shrill *hem*! The conversation sometimes turns upon literature, Mr. Bolton being a literary character, and always upon such news of the day as is exclusively possessed by that talented individual. I found myself (of course, accidentally) in the Green Dragon the other evening, and, being somewhat amused by the following conversation, preserved it.

‘Can you lend me a ten-pound note till Christmas?’ inquired the hairdresser of the stomach.

‘Where’s your security, Mr. Clip?’

‘My stock in trade,—there’s enough of it, I’m thinking, Mr. Thicknesse. Some fifty wigs, two poles, half-a-dozen head blocks, and a dead Bruin.’

‘No, I won’t, then,’ growled out Thicknesse. ‘I lends nothing on the security of the whigs or the Poles either. As for whigs, they’re cheats; as for the Poles, they’ve got no cash. I never have nothing to do with blockheads, unless I can’t awoid it (ironically), and a dead bear’s about as much use to me as I could be to a dead bear.’

‘Well, then,’ urged the other, ‘there’s a book as belonged to Pope, Byron’s Poems, valued at forty pounds, because it’s got Pope’s identical scratch on the back; what do you think of that for security?’

‘Well, to be sure!’ cried the baker. ‘But how d’ye mean, Mr. Clip?’

‘Mean! why, that it’s got the *hottergruff* of Pope.

“Steal not this book, for fear of hangman’s rope;
For it belongs to Alexander Pope.”

All that’s written on the inside of the binding of the book; so, as my son says, we’re *bound* to believe it.’

‘Well, sir,’ observed the undertaker, deferentially, and in a half-whisper, leaning over the table, and knocking over the hairdresser’s grog as he spoke, ‘that argument’s very easy upset.’

‘Perhaps, sir,’ said Clip, a little flurried, ‘you’ll pay for the first upset afore you thinks of another.’

‘Now,’ said the undertaker, bowing amicably to the hairdresser, ‘I *think*, I says I *think*—you’ll excuse me, Mr. Clip, I *think*, you see, that won’t go down with the present company—unfortunately, my master had the honour of making the coffin of that ere Lord’s housemaid, not no more nor twenty year ago. Don’t think I’m proud on it, gentlemen; others might be; but I hate rank of any sort. I’ve no more respect for a Lord’s footman than I have for any respectable tradesman in this room. I may say no more nor I have for Mr. Clip! (bowing). Therefore, that ere Lord must have been born long after Pope died. And it’s a logical interference to defer, that they neither of them lived at the same time. So what I mean is this here, that Pope never had no book, never seed, felt, never smelt no book (triumphantly) as belonged to that ere Lord. And, gentlemen, when I consider how patiently you have ’eared the ideas what I have expressed, I feel bound, as the best way to reward you for the kindness you have exhibited, to sit down without saying anything more—partickler as I perceive a worthier visitor nor myself is just entered. I am not in the habit of paying compliments, gentlemen; when I do, therefore, I hope I strikes with double force.’

‘Ah, Mr. Murgatroyd! what’s all this about striking with double force?’ said the object of the above remark, as he entered. ‘I never excuse a man’s getting into a rage during winter, even when he’s seated so close to the fire as you are. It is very injudicious to put yourself into such a perspiration. What is the cause of this extreme physical and mental excitement, sir?'

Such was the very philosophical address of Mr. Robert Bolton, a shorthand-writer, as he termed himself—a bit of equivoque passing current among his fraternity, which must give the uninitiated a vast idea of the establishment of the ministerial organ, while to the initiated it signifies that no one paper can lay claim to the enjoyment of their services. Mr. Bolton was a young man, with a somewhat sickly and very dissipated expression of countenance. His habiliments were composed of an exquisite union of gentility, slovenliness, assumption, simplicity, *newness*, and old age. Half of him was dressed for the winter, the other half for the summer. His hat was of the newest cut, the D'Orsay; his trousers had been white, but the inroads of mud and ink, etc., had given them a pie-bald appearance; round his throat he wore a very high black cravat, of the most tyrannical stiffness; while his *tout ensemble* was hidden beneath the enormous folds of an old brown poodle-collared great-coat, which was closely buttoned up to the aforesaid cravat. His fingers peeped through the ends of his black kid gloves, and two of the toes of each foot took a similar view of society through the extremities of his high-lows. Sacred to the bare walls of his garret be the mysteries of his interior dress! He was a short, spare man, of a somewhat inferior deportment. Everybody seemed influenced by his entry into the room, and his salutation of each member partook of the patronizing. The hairdresser made way for him between himself and the stomach. A minute afterwards he had taken possession of his pint and pipe. A pause in the conversation took place. Everybody was waiting, anxious for his first observation.

'Horrid murder in Westminster this morning,' observed Mr. Bolton.

Everybody changed their positions. All eyes were fixed upon the man of paragraphs.

'A baker murdered his son by boiling him in a copper,' said Mr. Bolton.

'Good heavens!' exclaimed everybody, in simultaneous horror.

'Boiled him, gentlemen!' added Mr. Bolton, with the most effective emphasis; '*boiled* him!'

'And the particulars, Mr. B.,' inquired the hairdresser, 'the particulars?'

Mr. Bolton took a very long draught of porter, and some two or three dozen whiffs of tobacco, doubtless to instil into the commercial capacities of the company the superiority of a gentlemen connected with the press, and then said -

'The man was a baker, gentlemen.' (Every one looked at the baker present, who stared at Bolton.) 'His victim, being his son, also was necessarily the son of a baker. The wretched murderer had a wife, whom he was frequently in the habit, while in an intoxicated state, of kicking, pummelling, flinging mugs at, knocking down, and half-killing while in bed, by inserting in her mouth a considerable portion of a sheet or blanket.'

The speaker took another draught, everybody looked at everybody else, and exclaimed, 'Horrid!'

'It appears in evidence, gentlemen,' continued Mr. Bolton, 'that, on the evening of yesterday, Sawyer the baker came home in a reprehensible state of beer. Mrs. S., connubially considerate, carried him in that condition up-stairs into his chamber, and consigned him to their mutual couch. In a minute or two she lay sleeping beside the man whom the morrow's dawn beheld a murderer!' (Entire silence informed the reporter that his picture had attained the awful effect he desired.) 'The son came home about an hour afterwards, opened the door, and went up to bed. Scarcely (gentlemen, conceive his feelings of alarm), scarcely had he taken off his indescribables, when shrieks (to his experienced ear *maternal* shrieks) scared the silence of surrounding night. He put his indescribables on again, and ran down-stairs. He opened the door of the parental bed-chamber. His father was dancing upon his mother. What must have been his feelings! In the agony of the minute he rushed at his male parent as he was about to plunge a knife into the side of his female. The mother shrieked. The father caught the son (who had wrested the knife from the paternal grasp) up in his arms, carried him down-stairs, shoved him into a copper of boiling water among some linen, closed the lid, and jumped upon the top of it, in which position he was found with a ferocious countenance by the mother, who arrived in the melancholy wash-house just as he had so settled himself.

'"Where's my boy?" shrieked the mother.

'"In that copper, boiling," coolly replied the benign father.

'Struck by the awful intelligence, the mother rushed from the house, and alarmed the neighbourhood. The police entered a minute afterwards. The father, having bolted the wash-house door, had bolted himself. They dragged the lifeless body of the boiled baker from the cauldron, and, with a promptitude commendable in men of their station, they immediately carried it to the station-house. Subsequently, the baker was apprehended while seated on the top of a lamp-post in Parliament Street, lighting his pipe.'

The whole horrible ideality of the Mysteries of Udolpho, condensed into the pithy effect of a ten-line paragraph, could not possibly have so affected the narrator's auditory. Silence, the purest and most noble of all kinds of applause, bore ample testimony to the barbarity of the baker, as well as to Bolton's knack of narration; and it was only broken after some minutes had elapsed by interjectional expressions of the intense indignation of every man present. The baker wondered how a British baker could so disgrace himself and the highly honourable calling to which he belonged; and the others indulged in a variety of wonderments connected with the subject; among which not the least wonderment was that which was awakened by the genius and information of Mr. Robert Bolton, who, after a glowing eulogium on himself, and his unspeakable influence with the daily press, was proceeding, with a most solemn countenance, to hear the pros and cons of the Pope autograph question, when I took up my hat, and left.

FAMILIAR EPISTLE FROM A PARENT TO A CHILD AGED TWO YEARS AND TWO MONTHS

MY CHILD,

To recount with what trouble I have brought you up—with what an anxious eye I have regarded your progress,—how late and how often I have sat up at night working for you,—and how many thousand letters I have received from, and written to your various relations and friends, many of whom have been of a querulous and irritable turn,—to dwell on the anxiety and tenderness with which I have (as far as I possessed the power) inspected and chosen your food; rejecting the indigestible and heavy matter which some injudicious but well-meaning old ladies would have had you swallow, and retaining only those light and pleasant articles which I deemed calculated to keep you free from all gross humours, and to render you an agreeable child, and one who might be popular with society in general,—to dilate on the steadiness with which I have prevented your annoying any company by talking politics—always assuring you that you would thank me for it yourself some day when you grew older,—to expatiate, in short, upon my own assiduity as a parent, is beside my present purpose, though I cannot but contemplate your fair appearance—your robust health, and unimpeded circulation (which I take to be the great secret of your good looks) without the liveliest satisfaction and delight.

It is a trite observation, and one which, young as you are, I have no doubt you have often heard repeated, that we have fallen upon strange times, and live in days of constant shiftings and changes. I had a melancholy instance of this only a week or two since. I was returning from Manchester to London by the Mail Train, when I suddenly fell into another train—a mixed train—of reflection, occasioned by the dejected and disconsolate demeanour of the Post-Office Guard. We were stopping at some station where they take in water, when he dismounted slowly from the little box in which he sits in ghastly mockery of his old condition with pistol and blunderbuss beside him, ready to shoot the first highwayman (or railwayman) who shall attempt to stop the horses, which now travel (when they travel at all) *inside* and in a portable stable invented for the purpose,—he dismounted, I say, slowly and sadly, from his post, and looking mournfully about him as if in dismal recollection of the old roadside public-house the blazing fire—the glass of foaming ale—the buxom handmaid and admiring hangers-on of tap-room and stable, all honoured by his notice; and, retiring a little apart, stood leaning against a signal-post, surveying the engine with a look of combined affliction and disgust which no words can describe. His scarlet coat and golden lace were tarnished with ignoble smoke; flakes of soot had fallen on his bright green shawl—his pride in days of yore—the steam condensed in the tunnel from which we had just emerged, shone upon his hat like rain. His eye betokened that he was thinking of the coachman; and as it wandered to his own seat and his own fast-fading garb, it was plain to see that he felt his office and himself had alike no business there, and were nothing but an elaborate practical joke.

As we whirled away, I was led insensibly into an anticipation of those days to come, when mail-coach guards shall no longer be judges of horse-flesh—when a mail-coach guard shall never even have seen a horse—when stations shall have superseded stables, and corn shall have given place to coke. ‘In those dawning times,’ thought I, ‘exhibition-rooms shall teem with portraits of Her Majesty’s favourite engine, with boilers after Nature by future Landseers. Some Amburgh, yet unborn, shall break wild horses by his magic power; and in the dress of a mail-coach guard exhibit his TRAINED ANIMALS in a mock mail-coach. Then, shall wondering crowds observe how that, with the exception of his whip, it is all his eye; and crowned heads shall see them fed on oats, and stand alone unmoved and undismayed, while counters flee affrighted when the coursers neigh!’

Such, my child, were the reflections from which I was only awakened then, as I am now, by the necessity of attending to matters of present though minor importance. I offer no apology to you for the digression, for it brings me very naturally to the subject of change, which is the very subject of which I desire to treat.

In fact, my child, you have changed hands. Henceforth I resign you to the guardianship and protection of one of my most intimate and valued friends, Mr. Ainsworth, with whom, and with you, my best wishes and warmest feelings will ever remain. I reap no gain or profit by parting from you, nor will any conveyance of your property be required, for, in this respect, you have always been literally 'Bentley's' Miscellany, and never mine.

Unlike the driver of the old Manchester mail, I regard this altered state of things with feelings of unmingled pleasure and satisfaction.

Unlike the guard of the new Manchester mail, *your* guard is at home in his new place, and has roystering highwaymen and gallant desperadoes ever within call. And if I might compare you, my child, to an engine; (not a Tory engine, nor a Whig engine, but a brisk and rapid locomotive;) your friends and patrons to passengers; and he who now stands towards you *in loco parentis* as the skilful engineer and supervisor of the whole, I would humbly crave leave to postpone the departure of the train on its new and auspicious course for one brief instant, while, with hat in hand, I approach side by side with the friend who travelled with me on the old road, and presume to solicit favour and kindness in behalf of him and his new charge, both for their sakes and that of the old coachman,

Boz.

THE END OF
Mudfog and Other Sketches

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christmas stories
from "household
words" and "all
the year round"
edited by
charles dickens

Mugby Junction

By Charles Dickens

Richard Clay & Sons, Limited,
London & Bungay.

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MUGBY JUNCTION

Barbox Brothers.
Barbox Brothers & Co.
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BARBOX BROTHERS

I

“Guard! What place is this?”

“Mugby Junction, sir.”

“A windy place!”

“Yes, it mostly is, sir.”

“And looks comfortless indeed!”

“Yes, it generally does, sir.”

“Is it a rainy night still?”

“Pours, sir.”

“Open the door. I’ll get out.”

“You’ll have, sir,” said the guard, glistening with drops of wet, and looking at the tearful face of his watch by the light of his lantern as the traveller descended, “three minutes here.”

“More, I think.—For I am not going on.”

“Thought you had a through ticket, sir?”

“So I have, but I shall sacrifice the rest of it. I want my luggage.”

“Please to come to the van and point it out, sir. Be good enough to look very sharp, sir. Not a moment to spare.”

The guard hurried to the luggage van, and the traveller hurried after him. The guard got into it, and the traveller looked into it.

“Those two large black portmanteaus in the corner where your light shines. Those are mine.”

“Name upon ’em, sir?”

“Barbox Brothers.”

“Stand clear, sir, if you please. One. Two. Right!”

Lamp waved. Signal lights ahead already changing. Shriek from engine. Train gone.

“Mugby Junction!” said the traveller, pulling up the woollen muffler round his throat with both hands. “At past three o’clock of a tempestuous morning! So!”

He spoke to himself. There was no one else to speak to. Perhaps, though there had been any one else to speak to, he would have preferred to speak to himself. Speaking to himself, he spoke to a man within five years of fifty either way, who had turned grey too soon, like a neglected fire; a man of pondering habit, brooding carriage of the head, and suppressed internal voice; a man with many indications on him of having been much alone.

He stood unnoticed on the dreary platform, except by the rain and by the wind. Those two vigilant assailants made a rush at him. "Very well," said he, yielding. "It signifies nothing to me, to what quarter I turn my face."

Thus, at Mugby Junction, at past three o'clock of a tempestuous morning, the traveller went where the weather drove him.

Not but what he could make a stand when he was so minded, for, coming to the end of the roofed shelter (it is of considerable extent at Mugby Junction) and looking out upon the dark night, with a yet darker spirit-wing of storm beating its wild way through it, he faced about, and held his own as ruggedly in the difficult direction, as he had held it in the easier one. Thus, with a steady step, the traveller went up and down, up and down, up and down, seeking nothing, and finding it.

A place replete with shadowy shapes, this Mugby Junction in the black hours of the four-and-twenty. Mysterious goods trains, covered with palls and gliding on like vast weird funerals, conveying themselves guiltily away from the presence of the few lighted lamps, as if their freight had come to a secret and unlawful end. Half miles of coal pursuing in a Detective manner, following when they lead, stopping when they stop, backing when they back. Red hot embers showering out upon the ground, down this dark avenue, and down the other, as if torturing fires were being raked clear; concurrently, shrieks and groans and grinds invading the ear, as if the tortured were at the height of their suffering. Iron-barred cages full of cattle jangling by midway, the drooping beasts with horns entangled, eyes frozen with terror, and mouths too: at least they have long icicles (or what seem so) hanging from their lips. Unknown languages in the air, conspiring in red, green, and white characters. An earthquake accompanied with thunder and lightning, going up express to London.

Now, all quiet, all rusty, wind and rain in possession, lamps extinguished, Mugby Junction dead and indistinct, with its robe drawn over its head, like Cæsar. Now, too, as the belated traveller plodded up and down, a shadowy train went by him in the gloom which was no other than the train of a life. From whatsoever intangible deep cutting or dark tunnel it emerged, here it came, unsummoned and unannounced, stealing upon him and passing away into obscurity. Here, mournfully went by, a child who had never had a childhood or known a parent, inseparable from a youth with a bitter sense of his namelessness, coupled to a man the enforced business of whose best years had been distasteful and oppressive, linked to an ungrateful friend, dragging after him a woman once beloved. Attendant, with many a clank and wrench, were lumbering cares, dark meditations, huge dim disappointments, monotonous years, a long jarring line of the discords of a solitary and unhappy existence.

"—Yours, sir?"

The traveller recalled his eyes from the waste into which they had been staring, and fell back a step or so under the abruptness, and perhaps the chance appropriateness, of the question.

"O! My thoughts were not here for the moment. Yes. Yes. Those two portmanteaus are mine. Are you a Porter?"

"On Porter's wages, sir. But I am Lamps."

The traveller looked a little confused.

"Who did you say you are?"

"Lamps, sir," showing an oily cloth in his hand, as further explanation.

"Surely, surely. Is there any hotel or tavern here?"

"Not exactly here, sir. There is a Refreshment Room here, but—" Lamps, with a mighty serious look, gave his head a warning roll that plainly added—"but it's a blessed circumstance for you that it's not open."

"You couldn't recommend it, I see, if it was available?"

"Ask your pardon, sir. If it was—?"

"Open?"

"It ain't my place, as a paid servant of the to give my opinion on any of the company's toepics," he pronounced it more like toothpicks, "beyond lamp-ile and cottons," returned Lamps, in a confidential tone; "but speaking as a man, I wouldn't recommend my father (if he was to come to life again) to go and try how he'd be treated at the Refreshment Room. Not speaking as a man, no, I would *not*."

The traveller nodded conviction. "I suppose I can put up in the town? There is a town here?" For the traveller (though a stay-at-home compared with most travellers) had been, like many others, carried on the steam winds and the iron tides through that Junction before, without having ever, as one might say, gone ashore there.

“O yes, there’s a town, sir. Anyways there’s town enough to put up in. But,” following the glance of the other at his luggage, “this is a very dead time of the night with us, sir. The deadest time. I might a’most call it our deadest and buriedest time.”

“No porters about?”

“Well, sir, you see,” returned Lamps, confidential again, “they in general goes off with the gas. That’s how it is. And they seem to have overlooked you, through your walking to the furder end of the platform. But in about twelve minutes or so, she may be up.”

“Who may be up?”

“The three forty-two, sir. She goes off in a sidin’ till the Up X passes, and then she,” here an air of hopeful vagueness pervaded Lamps, “doos all as lays in her power.”

“I doubt if I comprehend the arrangement.”

“I doubt if anybody do, sir. She’s a Parliamentary, sir. And, you see, a Parliamentary, or a Skirmishun—”

“Do you mean an Excursion?”

“That’s it, sir.—A Parliamentary, or a Skirmishun, she mostly *doos* go off into a sidin’. But when she *can* get a chance, she’s whistled out of it, and she’s whistled up into doin’ all as,” Lamps again wore the air of a highly sanguine man who hoped for the best, “all as lays in her power.”

He then explained that porters on duty being required to be in attendance on the Parliamentary matron in question, would doubtless turn up with the gas. In the meantime, if the gentleman would not very much object to the smell of lamp-oil, and would accept the warmth of his little room.—The gentleman being by this time very cold, instantly closed with the proposal.

A greasy little cabin it was, suggestive to the sense of smell, of a cabin in a Whaler. But there was a bright fire burning in its rusty grate, and on the floor there stood a wooden stand of newly trimmed and lighted lamps, ready for carriage service. They made a bright show, and their light, and the warmth, accounted for the popularity of the room, as borne witness to by many impressions of velveteen trousers on a form by the fire, and many rounded smears and smudges of stooping velveteen shoulders on the adjacent wall. Various untidy shelves accommodated a quantity of lamps and oil-cans, and also a fragrant collection of what looked like the pocket-handkerchiefs of the whole lamp family.

As Barbox Brothers (so to call the traveller on the warranty of his luggage) took his seat upon the form, and warmed his now ungloved hands at the fire, he glanced aside at a little deal desk, much blotched with ink, which his elbow touched. Upon it, were some scraps of coarse paper, and a superannuated steel pen in very reduced and gritty circumstances.

From glancing at the scraps of paper, he turned involuntarily to his host, and said, with some roughness—

“Why, you are never a poet, man!”

Lamps had certainly not the conventional appearance of one, as he stood modestly rubbing his squab nose with a handkerchief so exceedingly oily, that he might have been in the act of mistaking himself for one of his charges. He was a spare man of about the Barbox Brothers’ time of life, with his features whimsically drawn upward as if they were attracted by the roots of his hair. He had a peculiarly shining transparent complexion, probably occasioned by constant oleaginous application; and his attractive hair, being cut short, and being grizzled, and standing straight up on end as if it in its turn were attracted by some invisible magnet above it, the top of his head was not very unlike a lamp-wick.

“But to be sure it’s no business of mine,” said Barbox Brothers. “That was an impertinent observation on my part. Be what you like.”

“Some people, sir,” remarked Lamps, in a tone of apology, “are sometimes what they don’t like.”

“Nobody knows that better than I do,” sighed the other. “I have been what I don’t like, all my life.”

“When I first took, sir,” resumed Lamps, “to composing little Comic-Songs-like—”

Barbox Brothers eyed him with great disfavour.

“—To composing little Comic-Songs-like—and what was more hard—to singing ’em afterwards,” said Lamps, “it went against the grain at that time, it did indeed.”

Something that was not all oil here shining in Lamps’s eye, Barbox Brothers withdrew his own a little disconcerted, looked at the fire, and put a foot on the top bar. “Why did you do it, then?” he asked, after a short pause; abruptly enough but in a softer tone. “If you didn’t want to do it, why did you do it? Where did you sing them? Public-house?”

To which Mr. Lamps returned the curious reply: “Bedside.”

At this moment, while the traveller looked at him for elucidation, Mugby Junction started suddenly, trembled violently, and opened its gas eyes. “She’s got up!” Lamps announced, excited. “What lays in her power is sometimes more, and sometimes less; but it’s laid in her power to get up to-night, by George!”

The legend “Barbox Brothers” in large white letters on two black surfaces, was very soon afterwards trundling on a truck through a silent street, and, when the owner of the legend had shivered on the pavement half an hour, what time the porter’s knocks at the Inn Door knocked up the whole town first, and the Inn last, he groped his way into the close air of a shut-up house, and so groped between the sheets of a shut-up bed that seemed to have been expressly refrigerated for him when last made.

II

“You remember me, Young Jackson?”

“What do I remember if not you? You are my first remembrance. It was you who told me that was my name. It was you who told me that on every twentieth of December my life had a penitential anniversary in it called a birthday. I suppose the last communication was truer than the first!”

“What am I like, Young Jackson?”

“You are like a blight all through the year, to me. You hard-lined, thin-lipped, repressive, changeless woman with a wax mask on. You are like the Devil to me; most of all when you teach me religious things, for you make me abhor them.”

“You remember me, Mr. Young Jackson?” In another voice from another quarter.

“Most gratefully, sir. You were the ray of hope and prospering ambition in my life. When I attended your course, I believed that I should come to be a great healer, and I felt almost happy—even though I was still the one boarder in the house with that horrible mask, and ate and drank in silence and constraint with the mask before me, every day. As I had done every,

every, every day, through my school-time and from my earliest recollection.”

“What am I like, Mr. Young Jackson?”

“You are like a Superior Being to me. You are like Nature beginning to reveal herself to me. I hear you again, as one of the hushed crowd of young men kindling under the power of your presence and knowledge, and you bring into my eyes the only exultant tears that ever stood in them.”

“You remember Me, Mr. Young Jackson?” In a grating voice from quite another quarter.

“Too well. You made your ghostly appearance in my life one day, and announced that its course was to be suddenly and wholly changed. You showed me which was my wearisome seat in the Galley of Barbox Brothers. (When *they* were, if they ever were, is unknown to me; there was nothing of them but the name when I bent to the oar.) You told me what I was to do, and what to be paid; you told me afterwards, at intervals of years, when I was to sign for the Firm, when I became a partner, when I became the Firm. I know no more of it, or of myself.”

“What am I like, Mr. Young Jackson?”

“You are like my father, I sometimes think. You are hard enough and cold enough so to have brought up an unacknowledged son. I see your scanty figure, your close brown suit, and your tight brown wig; but you, too, wear a wax mask to your death. You never by a chance remove it—it never by a chance falls off—and I know no more of you.”

Throughout this dialogue, the traveller spoke to himself at his window in the morning, as he had spoken to himself at the Junction over-night. And as he had then looked in the darkness, a man who had turned grey too soon, like a neglected fire: so he now looked in the sunlight, an ashier grey, like a fire which the brightness of the sun put out.

The firm of Barbox Brothers had been some offshoot or irregular branch of the Public Notary and bill-broking tree. It had gained for itself a griping reputation before the days of Young Jackson, and the reputation had stuck to it and to him. As he had imperceptibly come into possession of the dim den up in the corner of a court off Lombard-street, on whose grimy windows the inscription Barbox Brothers had for many long years daily interposed itself between him and the sky, so he had insensibly found himself a personage held in chronic distrust, whom it was essential to screw tight to every transaction in which he engaged, whose word was never to be taken without his attested bond, whom all dealers with openly set up guards and wards against. This character had come upon him through no act of his own. It was as if the original Barbox had stretched himself down upon the office-floor, and had thither caused to be conveyed Young Jackson in his sleep, and had there effected a metempsychosis and exchange of persons with him. The discovery—aided in its turn by the deceit of the only woman he had ever loved, and the deceit of the only friend he had ever made: who eloped from him to be married together—the discovery, so followed up, completed what his earliest rearing had begun. He shrank, abashed, within the form of Barbox, and lifted up his head and heart no more.

But he did at last effect one great release in his condition. He broke the oar he had plied so long, and he scuttled and sank the galley. He prevented the gradual retirement of an old conventional business from him, by taking the initiative and retiring from it. With enough to live on (though after all with not too much), he obliterated the firm of Barbox Brothers from the pages of the Post-office Directory and the face of the earth, leaving nothing of it but its name on two portmanteaus.

"For one must have some name in going about, for people to pick up," he explained to Mugby High-street, through the Inn-window, "and that name at least was real once. Whereas, Young Jackson!—Not to mention its being a sadly satirical misnomer for Old Jackson."

He took up his hat and walked out, just in time to see, passing along on the opposite side of the way, a velveteen man, carrying his day's dinner in a small bundle that might have been larger without suspicion of gluttony, and pelting away towards the Junction at a great pace.

"There's Lamps!" said Barbox Brother. "And by-the-by—"

Ridiculous, surely, that a man so serious, so self-contained, and not yet three days emancipated from a routine of drudgery, should stand rubbing his chin in the street, in a brown study about Comic Songs.

"Bedside?" said Barbox Brothers, testily. "Sings them at the bedside? Why at the bedside, unless he goes to bed drunk? Does, I shouldn't wonder. But it's no business of mine. Let me see. Mugby Junction, Mugby Junction. Where shall I go next? As it came into my head last night when I woke from an uneasy sleep in the carriage and found myself here, I can go anywhere from here. Where shall I go? I'll go and look at the Junction by daylight. There's no hurry, and I may like the look of one Line better than another."

But there were so many Lines. Gazing down upon them from a bridge at the Junction, it was as if the concentrating Companies formed a great Industrial Exhibition of the works of extraordinary ground-spiders that spun iron. And then so many of the Lines went such wonderful ways, so crossing and curving among one another, that the eye lost them. And then some of them appeared to start with the fixed intention of going five hundred miles, and all of a sudden gave it up at an insignificant barrier, or turned off into a workshop. And then others, like intoxicated men, went a little way very straight, and surprisingly slued round and came back again. And then others were so chock-full of trucks of coal, others were so blocked with trucks of casks, others were so gorged with trucks of ballast, others were so set apart for wheeled objects like immense iron cotton-reels: while others were so bright and clear, and others were so delivered over to rust and ashes and idle wheelbarrows out of work, with their legs in the air (looking much like their masters on strike), that there was no beginning, middle, or end, to the bewilderment.

Barbox Brothers stood puzzled on the bridge, passing his right hand across the lines on his forehead, which multiplied while he looked down, as if the railway Lines were getting themselves photographed on that sensitive plate. Then, was heard a distant ringing of bells and blowing of whistles. Then, puppet-looking heads of men popped out of boxes in perspective, and popped in again. Then, prodigious wooden razors set up on end, began shaving the atmosphere. Then, several locomotive engines in several directions began to scream and be agitated. Then, along one avenue a train came in. Then, along another two trains appeared that didn’t come in, but stopped without. Then, bits of trains broke mugbypageoff. Then, a struggling horse became involved with them. Then, the locomotives shared the bits of trains, and ran away with the whole.

“I have not made my next move much clearer by this. No hurry. No need to make up my mind to-day, or to-morrow, nor yet the day after. I’ll take a walk.”

It fell out somehow (perhaps he meant it should) that the walk tended to the platform at which he had alighted, and to Lamps’s room. But Lamps was not in his room. A pair of velveteen shoulders were adapting themselves to one of the impressions on the wall by Lamps’s fireplace, but otherwise the room was void. In passing back to get out of the station again, he learnt the cause of this vacancy, by catching sight of Lamps on the opposite line of railway, skipping along the top of a train, from carriage to carriage, and catching lighted namesakes thrown up to him by a coadjutor.

“He is busy. He has not much time for composing or singing Comic Songs this morning, I take it.”

The direction he pursued now, was into the country, keeping very near to the side of one great Line of railway, and within easy view of others. “I have half a mind,” he said, glancing around, “to settle the question from this point, by saying, ‘I’ll take this set of rails, or that, or t’other, and stick to it.’ They separate themselves from the confusion, out here, and go their ways.”

Ascending a gentle hill of some extent, he came to a few cottages. There, looking about him as a very reserved man might who had never looked about him in his life before, he saw some six or eight young children come merrily trooping and whooping from one of the cottages, and disperse. But not until they had all turned at the little garden gate, and kissed their hands to a face at the upper window: a low window enough, although the upper, for the cottage had but a story of one room above the ground.

Now, that the children should do this was nothing; but that they should do this to a face lying on the sill of the open window, turned towards them in a horizontal position, and apparently only a face, was something noticeable. He looked up at the window again. Could only see a very fragile though a very bright face, lying on one cheek on the window-sill. The delicate smiling face of a girl or woman. Framed in long bright brown hair, round which was tied a light blue band or fillet, passing under the chin.

He walked on, turned back, passed the window again, shyly glanced up again. No change. He struck off by a winding branch-road at the top of the hill—which he must otherwise have descended—kept the cottages in view, worked his way round at a distance so as to come out once more into the main road and be obliged to pass the cottages again. The face still lay on the window-sill, but not so much inclined towards him. And now there were a pair of delicate hands too. They had the action of performing on some musical instrument, and yet it produced no sound that reached his ears.

“Mugby Junction must be the maddest place in England,” said Barbox Brothers, pursuing his way down the hill. “The first thing I find here is a Railway Porter who composes comic songs to sing at his bedside. The second thing I find here is a face, and a pair of hands playing a musical instrument that don't play!"

The day was a fine bright day in the early beginning of November, the air was clear and inspiriting, and the landscape was rich in beautiful colours. The prevailing colours in the court off Lombard-street, London city, had been few and sombre. Sometimes, when the weather elsewhere was very bright indeed, the dwellers in those tents enjoyed a pepper-and-salt-coloured day or two, but their atmosphere's usual wear was slate, or snuff colour.

He relished his walk so well, that he repeated it next day. He was a little earlier at the cottage than on the day before, and he could hear the children up-stairs singing to a regular measure and clapping out the time with their hands.

"Still, there is no sound of any musical instrument," he said, listening at the corner, "and yet I saw the performing hands again, as I came by. What are the children singing? Why, good Lord, they can never be singing the multiplication-table!"

They were though, and with infinite enjoyment. The mysterious face had a voice attached to it which occasionally led or set the children right. Its musical cheerfulness was delightful. The measure at length stopped, and was succeeded by a murmuring of young voices, and then by a short song which he made out to be about the current month of the year, and about what work it yielded to the labourers in the fields and farm-yards. Then, there was a stir of little feet, and the children came trooping and whooping out, as on the previous day. And again, as on the previous day, they all turned at the garden gate, and kissed their hands—evidently to the face on the window-sill, though Barbox Brothers from his retired post of disadvantage at the corner could not see it.

But as the children dispersed, he cut off one small straggler—a brown faced boy with flaxen hair—and said to him:

"Come here, little one. Tell me whose house is that?"

The child, with one swarthy arm held up across his eyes, half in shyness, and half ready for defence, said from behind the inside of his elbow:

"Phœbe's."

"And who," said Barbox Brothers, quite as much embarrassed by his part in the dialogue as the child could possibly be by his, "is Phœbe?"

To which the child made answer: “Why, Phœbe, of course.”

The small but sharp observer had eyed his questioner closely, and had taken his moral measure. He lowered his guard, and rather assumed a tone with him: as having discovered him to be an unaccustomed person in the art of polite conversation.

“Phœbe,” said the child, “can’t be anybobby else but Phœbe. Can she?”

“No, I suppose not.”

“Well,” returned the child, “then why did you ask me?”

Deeming it prudent to shift his ground, Barbox Brothers took up a new position.

“What do you do there? Up there in that room where the open window is. What do you do there?”

“Cool,” said the child.

“Eh?”

“Co-o-ol,” the child repeated in a louder voice, lengthening out the word with a fixed look and great emphasis, as much as to say: “What’s the use of your having grown up, if you’re such a donkey as not to understand me?”

“Ah! School, school,” said Barbox Brothers. “Yes, yes, yes. And Phœbe teaches you?”

The child nodded.

“Good boy.”

“Tound it out, have you?” said the child.

“Yes, I have found it out. What would you do with twopence, if I gave it you?”

“Pend it.”

The knock-down promptitude of this reply leaving him not a leg to stand upon, Barbox Brothers produced the twopence with great lameness, and withdrew in a state of humiliation.

But, seeing the face on the window-sill as he passed the cottage, he acknowledged its presence there with a gesture, which was not a nod, not a bow, not a removal of his hat from his head, but was a diffident compromise between or struggle with all three. The eyes in the face seemed amused, or cheered, or both, and the lips modestly said: “Good day to you, sir.”

“I find I must stick for a time to Mugby Junction,” said Barbox Brothers, with much gravity, after once more stopping on his return road to look at the Lines where they went their several ways so quietly. “I can’t make up my mind yet, which iron road to take. In fact, I must get a little accustomed to the Junction before I can decide."

So, he announced at the Inn that he was "going to stay on, for the present," and improved his acquaintance with the Junction that night, and again next morning, and again next night and morning: going down to the station, mingling with the people there, looking about him down all the avenues of railway, and beginning to take an interest in the incomings and outgoings of the trains. At first, he often put his head into Lamps's little room, but he never found Lamps there. A pair or two of velveteen shoulders he usually found there, stooping over the fire, sometimes in connexion with a clasped knife and a piece of bread and meat; but the answer to his inquiry, "Where's Lamps?" was, either that he was "t'other side the line," or, that it was his off-time, or (in the latter case), his own personal introduction to another Lamps who was not his Lamps. However, he was not so desperately set upon seeing Lamps now, but he bore the disappointment. Nor did he so wholly devote himself to his severe application to the study of Mugby Junction, as to neglect exercise. On the contrary, he took a walk every day, and always the same walk. But the weather turned cold and wet again, and the window was never open.

III

At length, after a lapse of some days, there came another streak of fine bright hardy autumn weather. It was a Saturday. The window was open, and the children were gone. Not surprising, this, for he had patiently watched and waited at the corner, until they *were* gone.

"Good day," he said to the face; absolutely getting his hat clear off his head this time.

"Good day to you, sir."

"I am glad you have a fine sky again, to look at."

"Thank you, sir. It is kind of you."

"You are an invalid, I fear?"

"No, sir. I have very good health."

"But are you not always lying down?"

"O yes, I am always lying down, because I cannot sit up. But I am not an invalid."

The laughing eyes seemed highly to enjoy his great mistake.

"Would you mind taking the trouble to come in, sir? There is a beautiful view from this window. And you would see that I am not at all ill—being so good as to care."

It was said to help him, as he stood irresolute, but evidently desiring to enter, with his diffident hand on the latch of the garden gate. It did help him, and he went in.

The room up-stairs was a very clean white room with a low roof. Its only inmate lay on a couch that brought her face on a level with the window. The couch was white too; and her simple dress or wrapper being light blue, like the band around her hair, she had an ethereal look, and a fanciful appearance of lying among clouds. He felt that she instinctively perceived him to be by habit a downcast taciturn man; it was another help to him to have established that understanding so easily, and got it over.

There was an awkward constraint upon him, nevertheless, as he touched her hand, and took a chair at the side of her couch.

"I see now," he began, not at all fluently, "how you occupy your hands. Only seeing you from the path outside, I thought you were playing upon something."

She was engaged in very nimbly and dexterously making lace. A lace-pillow lay upon her breast; and the quick movements and changes of her hands upon it as she worked, had given them the action he had misinterpreted.

"That is curious," she answered, with a bright smile. "For I often fancy, myself, that I play tunes while I am at work."

"Have you any musical knowledge?"

She shook her head.

"I think I could pick out tunes, if I had any instrument, which could be made as handy to me as my lace-pillow. But I dare say I deceive myself. At all events, I shall never know."

"You have a musical voice. Excuse me; I have heard you sing."

"With the children?" she answered, slightly colouring. "O yes. I sing with the dear children, if it can be called singing."

Barbox Brothers glanced at the two small forms in the room, and hazarded the speculation that she was fond of children, and that she was learned in new systems of teaching them? "Very fond of them," she said, shaking her head again; "but I know nothing of teaching, beyond the interest I have in it, and the pleasure it gives me when they learn. Perhaps your overhearing my little scholars sing some of their lessons, has led you so far astray as to think me a grand teacher? Ah! I thought so! No, I have only read and been told about that system. It seemed so pretty and pleasant, and to treat them so like the merry Robins they are, that I took up with it in my little way. You don't need to be told what a very little way mine is, sir," she added, with a glance at the small forms and round the room.

All this time her hands were busy at her lace-pillow. As they still continued so, and as there was a kind of substitute for conversation in the click and play of its pegs, Barbox Brothers took the opportunity of observing her. He guessed her to be thirty. The charm of her transparent face and large bright brown eyes, was, not that they were passively resigned, but that they were actively and thoroughly cheerful. Even her busy hands, which of their own thinness alone might have besought compassion, plied their task with a gay courage that made mere compassion an unjustifiable assumption of superiority, and an impertinence.

He saw her eyes in the act of rising towards his, and he directed his towards the prospect, saying: "Beautiful indeed!"

"Most beautiful, sir. I have sometimes had a fancy that I would like to sit up, for once, only to try how it looks to an erect head. But what a foolish fancy that would be to encourage! It cannot look more lovely to any one than it does to me."

Her eyes were turned to it as she spoke, with most delighted admiration and enjoyment. There was not a trace in it of any sense of deprivation.

"And those threads of railway, with their puffs of smoke and steam changing places so fast, make it so lively for me," she went on. "I think of the number of people who *can* go where they wish, on their business, or their pleasure; I remember that the puffs make signs to me that they are actually going while I look; and that enlivens the prospect with abundance of company, if I want company. There is the great Junction, too. I don't see mugbypageit under the foot of the hill, but I can very often hear it, and I always know it is there. It seems to join me, in a way, to I don't know how many places and things that *I* shall never see."

With an abashed kind of idea that it might have already joined himself to something he had never seen, he said constrainedly: "Just so."

"And so you see, sir," pursued Phœbe, "I am not the invalid you thought me, and I am very well off indeed."

“You have a happy disposition,” said Barbox Brothers: perhaps with a slight excusatory touch for his own disposition.

“Ah! But you should know my father,” she replied. “His is the happy disposition!—Don’t mind, sir!” For his reserve took the alarm at a step upon the stairs, and he distrusted that he would be set down for a troublesome intruder. “This is my father coming.”

The door opened, and the father paused there.

“Why, Lamps!” exclaimed Barbox Brothers, starting from his chair. “How do you do, Lamps?”

To which, Lamps responded: “The gentleman for Nowhere! How do you do, sir?”

And they shook hands, to the greatest admiration and surprise of Lamps’s daughter.

“I have looked you up, half a dozen times since that night,” said Barbox Brothers, “but have never found you.”

“So I’ve heerd on, sir, so I’ve heerd on,” returned Lamps. “It’s your being noticed so often down at the Junction, without taking any train, that has begun to get you the name among us of the gentleman for Nowhere. No offence in my having called you by it when took by surprise, I hope, sir?”

“None at all. It’s as good a name for me as any other you could call me by. But may I ask you a question in the corner here?”

Lamps suffered himself to be led aside from his daughter’s couch, by one of the buttons of his velveteen jacket.

“Is this the bedside where you sing your songs?”

Lamps nodded.

The gentleman for Nowhere clapped him on the shoulder; and they faced about again.

“Upon my word, my dear,” said Lamps then to his daughter, looking from her to her visitor, “it is such an amaze to me, to find you brought acquainted with this gentleman, that I must (if this gentleman will excuse me) take a rounder.”

Mr. Lamps demonstrated in action what this meant, by pulling out his oily handkerchief rolled up in the form of a ball, and giving himself an elaborate smear, from behind the right ear, up the cheek, across the forehead, and down the other cheek to behind his left ear. After this operation he shone exceedingly.

"It's according to my custom when particular warmed up by any agitation, sir," he offered by way of apology. "And really, I am throwed into that state of amaze by finding you brought acquainted with Phœbe, that I—that I think I will, if you'll excuse me, take another rounder." Which he did, seeming to be greatly restored by it.

They were now both standing by the side of her couch, and she was working at her lace-pillow. "Your daughter tells me," said Barbox Brothers, still in a half reluctant shamefaced way, "that she never sits up."

"No, sir, nor never has done. You see, her mother (who died when she was a year and two months old) was subject to very bad fits, and as she had never mentioned to me that she *was* subject to fits, they couldn't be guarded against. Consequently, she dropped the baby when took, and this happened."

"It was very wrong of her," said Barbox Brothers, with a knitted brow, "to marry you, making a secret of her infirmity."

"Well, sir," pleaded Lamps, in behalf of the long-deceased. "You see, Phœbe and me, we have talked that over too. And Lord bless us! Such a number on us has our infirmities, what with fits, and what with misfits, of one sort and another, that if we confessed to 'em all before we got married, most of us might never get married."

"Might not that be for the better?"

"Not in this case, sir," said Phœbe, giving her hand to her father.

"No, not in this case, sir," said her father, patting it between his own.

"You correct me," returned Barbox Brothers, with a blush; "and I must look so like a Brute, that at all events it would be superfluous in me to confess to *that* infirmity. I wish you would tell me a little more about yourselves. I hardly know how to ask it of you, for I am conscious that I have a bad stiff manner, a dull discouraging way with me, but I wish you would."

"With all our hearts, sir," returned Lamps, gaily, for both. "And first of all, that you may know my name—"

"Stay!" interposed the visitor, with a slight flush. "What signifies your name! Lamps is name enough for me. I like it. It is bright and expressive. What do I want more!"

"Why to be sure, sir," returned Lamps. "I have in general no other name down at the Junction; but I thought, on account of your being here as a first-class single, in a private character, that you might—"

The visitor waved the thought away with his hand, and Lamps acknowledged the mark of confidence by taking another rounder.

"You are hard-worked, I take for granted?" said Barbox Brothers, when the subject of the rounder came out of it much dirtier than he went into it.

Lamps was beginning, "Not particular so"—when his daughter took him up.

"O yes, sir, he is very hard-worked. Fourteen, fifteen, eighteen, hours a day. Sometimes twenty-four hours at a time."

"And you," said Barbox Brothers, "what with your school, Phœbe, and what with your lace-making—"

"But my school is a pleasure to me," she interrupted, opening her brown eyes wider, as if surprised to find him so obtuse. "I began it when I was but a child, because it brought me and other children into company, don't you see? *That* was not work. I carry it on still, because it keeps children about me. *That* is not work. I do it as love, not as work. Then my lace-pillow;" her busy hands had stopped, as if her argument required all her cheerful earnestness, but now went on again at the name; "it goes with my thoughts when I think, and it goes with my tunes when I hum any, and *that's* not work. Why, you yourself thought it was music, you know, sir. And so it is, to me."

"Everything is!" cried Lamps, radiantly. "Everything is music to her, sir."

"My father is, at any rate," said Phœbe, exultingly pointing her thin forefinger at him. "There is more music in my father than there is in a brass band."

"I say! My dear! It's very fillyillially done, you know; but you are flattering your father," he protested, sparkling.

"No I am not, sir, I assure you. No I am not. If you could hear my father sing, you would know I am not. But you never will hear him sing, because he never sings to any one but me. However tired he is, he always sings to me when he comes home. When I lay here long ago, quite a poor little broken doll, he used to sing to me. More than that, he used to make songs, bringing in whatever little jokes we had between us. More than that, he often does so to this day. O! I'll tell of you, father, as the gentleman has asked about you. He is a poet, sir."

"I shouldn't wish the gentleman, my dear," observed Lamps, for the moment turning grave, "to carry away that opinion of your father, because it might look as if I was given to asking the stars in a molloncolly manner what they was up to. Which I wouldn't at once waste the time, and take the liberty, my dear."

"My father," resumed Phœbe, amending her text, "is always on the bright side, and the good side. You told me just now, I had a happy disposition. How can I help it?"

"Well! but my dear," returned Lamps argumentatively, "how can *I* help it? Put it to yourself, sir. Look at her. Always as you see her now. Always working—and after all, sir, for but a very few shillings a week—always contented, always lively, always interested in others, of all sorts. I said, this moment, she was always as you see her now. So she is, with a difference that comes to much the same. For, when it's my Sunday off and the morning bells have done ringing, I hear the prayers and thanks read in the touchingest way, and I have the hymns sung to me—so soft, sir, that you couldn't hear 'em out of this room—in notes that seem to me, I am sure, to come from Heaven and go back to it."

It might have been merely through the association of these words with their sacredly quiet time, or it might have been through the larger association of the words with the Redeemer's presence beside the bedridden; but here her dexterous fingers came to a stop on the lace-pillow, and clasped themselves round his neck as he bent down. There was great natural sensibility in both father and daughter, the visitor could easily see; but each made it, for the other's sake, retiring, not demonstrative; and perfect cheerfulness, intuitive or acquired, was either the first or second nature of both. In a very few moments, Lamps was taking another rounder with his comical features beaming, while Phœbe's laughing eyes (just a glistening speck or so upon their lashes) were again directed by turns to him, and to her work, and to Barbox Brothers.

"When my father, sir," she said brightly, "tells you about my being interested in other people even though they know nothing about me—which, by-the-by, I told you myself—you ought to know how that comes about. That's my father's doing."

"No, it isn't!" he protested.

"Don't you believe him, sir; yes, it is. He tells me of everything he sees down at his work. You would be surprised what a quantity he gets together for me every day. He looks into the carriages, and tells me how the ladies are drest—so that I know all the fashions! He looks into the carriages, and tells me what pairs of lovers he sees, and what new-married couples on their wedding trip—so that I know all about that! He collects chance newspapers and books—so that I have plenty to read! He tells me about the sick people who are travelling to try to get better—so that I know all about them! In short, as I began by saying, he tells me everything he sees and makes out, down at his work, and you can't think what a quantity he does see and make out."

"As to collecting newspapers and books, my dear," said Lamps, "it's clear I can have no merit in that, because they're not my perquisites. You see, sir, it's this way: A Guard, he'll say to me, 'Hallo, here you are, Lamps. I've saved this paper for your daughter. How is she agoing on?' A Head-Porter, he'll say to me, 'Here! Catch hold, Lamps. Here's a couple of wollumes for your daughter. Is she pretty much where she were?' And that's what makes it double welcome, you see. If she had a thousand pound in' a box, they wouldn't trouble themselves about her; but being what she is—that is, you understand," Lamps added, somewhat hurriedly, "not having a thousand pound in a box—they take thought for her. And as concerning the young pairs, married and unmarried, it's only natural I should bring home what little I can about *them*, seeing that there's not a Couple of either sort in the neighbourhood that don't come of their own accord to confide in Phœbe."

She raised her eyes triumphantly to Barbox Brothers, as she said:

"Indeed, sir, that is true. If I could have got up and gone to church, I don't know how often I should have been a bridesmaid. But if I could have done that, some girls in love might have been jealous of me, and as it is, no girl is jealous of me. And my pillow would not have been half as ready to put the piece of cake under, as I always find it," she added, turning her face on it with a light sigh, and a smile at her father.

The arrival of a little girl, the biggest of the scholars, now led to an understanding on the part of Barbox Brothers, that she was the domestic of the cottage, and had come to take active measures in it, attended by a pail that might have extinguished her, and a broom three times her height. He therefore rose to take his leave, and took it; saying that if Phœbe had no objection, he would come again.

He had muttered that he would come "in the course of his walks." The course of his walks must have been highly favourable to his return, for he returned after an interval of a single day.

“You thought you would never see me any more, I suppose?” he said to Phœbe as he touched her hand, and sat down by her couch.

“Why should I think so!” was her surprised rejoinder.

“I took it for granted you would mistrust me.”

“For granted, sir? Have you been so much mistrusted?”

“I think I am justified in answering yes. But I may have mistrusted too, on my part. No matter just now. We were speaking of the Junction last time. I have passed hours there since the day before yesterday.”

“Are you now the gentleman for Somewhere?” she asked with a smile.

“Certainly for Somewhere; but I don’t yet know Where. You would never guess what I am travelling from. Shall I tell you? I am travelling from my birthday.”

Her hands stopped in her work, and she looked at him with incredulous astonishment.

“Yes,” said Barbox Brothers, not quite easy in his chair, “from my birthday. I am, to myself, an unintelligible book with the earlier chapters all torn out, and thrown away. My childhood had no grace of childhood, my youth had no charm of youth, and what can be expected from such a lost beginning?” His eyes meeting hers as they were addressed intently to him, something seemed to stir within his breast, whispering: “Was this bed a place for the graces of childhood and the charms of youth to take to, kindly? O shame, shame!”

“It is a disease with me,” said Barbox Brothers, checking himself, and making as though he had a difficulty in swallowing something, “to go wrong about that. I don’t know how I came to speak of that. I hope it is because of an old misplaced confidence in one of your sex involving an old bitter treachery. I don’t know. I am all wrong together.”

Her hands quietly and slowly resumed their work. Glancing at her, he saw that her eyes were thoughtfully following them.

“I am travelling from my birthday,” he resumed, “because it has always been a dreary day to me. My first free birthday coming round some five or six weeks hence, I am travelling to put its predecessors far behind me, and to try to crush the day—or, at all events, put it out of my sight—by heaping new objects on it.”

As he paused, she looked at him; but only shook her head as being quite at a loss.

"This is unintelligible to your happy disposition," he pursued, abiding by his former phrase as if there were some lingering virtue of self-defence in it: "I knew it would be, and am glad it is. However, on this travel of mine (in which I mean to pass the rest of my days, having abandoned all thought of a fixed home), I stopped, as you heard from your father, at the Junction here. The extent of its ramifications quite confused me as to whither I should go, *from* here. I have not yet settled, being still perplexed among so many roads. What do you think I mean to do? How many of the branching roads can you see from your window?"

Looking out, full of interest, she answered, "Seven."

"Seven," said Barbox Brothers, watching her with a grave smile. "Well! I propose to myself, at once to reduce the gross number to those very seven, and gradually to fine them down to one—the most promising for me—and to take that."

"But how will you know, sir, which is the most promising?" she asked, with her brightened eyes roving over the view.

"Ah!" said Barbox Brothers, with another grave smile, and considerably improving in his ease of speech. "To be sure. In this way. Where your father can pick up so much every day for a good purpose, I may once and again pick up a little for an indifferent purpose. The gentleman for Nowhere must become still better known at the Junction. He shall continue to explore it, until he attaches something that he has seen, heard, or found out, at the head of each of the seven roads, to the road itself. And so his choice of a road shall be determined by his choice among his discoveries."

Her hands still busy, she again glanced at the prospect, as if it comprehended something that had not been in it before, and laughed as if it yielded her new pleasure.

"But I must not forget," said Barbox Brothers, "(having got so far) to ask a favour. I want your help in this expedient of mine. I want to bring you what I pick up at the heads of the seven roads that you lie here looking out at, and to compare notes with you about it. May I? They say two heads are better than one. I should say myself that probably depends upon the heads concerned. But I am quite sure, though we are so newly acquainted, that your head and your father's have found out better things, Phœbe, than ever mine of itself discovered."

She gave him her sympathetic right hand, in perfect rapture with his proposal, and eagerly and gratefully thanked him.

"That's well!" said Barbox Brothers. "Again I must not forget (having got so far) to ask a favour. Will you shut your eyes?"

Laughing playfully at the strange nature of the request, she did so.

"Keep them shut," said Barbox Brothers, going softly to the door, and coming back. "You are on your honour, mind, not to open your eyes until I tell you that you may?"

"Yes! On my honour."

"Good. May I take your lace-pillow from you for a minute?"

Still laughing and wondering, she removed her hands from it, and he put it aside.

"Tell me. Did you see the puffs of smoke and steam made by the morning fast-train yesterday on road number seven from here?"

"Behind the elm-trees and the spire?"

"That's the road," said Barbox Brothers, directing his eyes towards it.

"Yes. I watched them melt away."

"Anything unusual in what they expressed?"

"No!" she answered merrily.

"Not complimentary to me, for I was in that train. I went—don't open your eyes—to fetch you this, from the great ingenious town. It is not half so large as your lace-pillow, and lies easily and lightly in its place. These little keys are like the keys of a miniature piano, and you supply the air required with your left hand. May you pick out delightful music from it, my dear! For the present—you can open your eyes now—good-bye!"

In his embarrassed way, he closed the door upon himself, and only saw, in doing so, that she ecstatically took the present to her bosom and caressed it. The glimpse gladdened his heart, and yet saddened it; for so might she, if her youth had flourished in its natural course, have taken to her breast that day the slumbering music of her own child's voice.

BARBOX BROTHERS AND CO.

With good will and earnest purpose, the gentleman for Nowhere began, on the very next day, his researches at the heads of the seven roads. The results of his researches, as he and Phœbe afterwards set them down in fair writing, hold their due places in this veracious chronicle, from its seventeenth page, onward. But they occupied a much longer time in the getting together than they ever will in the perusal. And this is probably the case with most reading matter, except when it is of that highly beneficial kind (for Posterity) which is "thrown off in a few moments of leisure" by the superior poetic geniuses who scorn to take prose pains.

It must be admitted, however, that Barbox by no means hurried himself. His heart being in his work of good-nature, he revelled in it. There was the joy, too (it was a true joy to him), of sometimes sitting by, listening to Phœbe as she picked out more and more discourse from her musical instrument, and as her natural taste and ear refined daily upon her first discoveries. Besides being a pleasure, this was an occupation, and in the course of weeks it consumed hours. It resulted that his dreaded birthday was close upon him before he had troubled himself any more about it.

The matter was made more pressing by the unforeseen circumstance that the councils held (at which Mr. Lamps, beaming most brilliantly, on a few rare occasions assisted) respecting the road to be selected, were, after all, in no wise assisted by his investigations. For, he had connected this interest with this road, or that interest with the other, but could deduce no reason from it for giving any road the preference. Consequently, when the last council was holden, that part of the business stood, in the end, exactly where it had stood in the beginning.

"But, sir," remarked Phœbe, "we have only six roads after all. Is the seventh road dumb?"

"The seventh road? O!" said Barbox Brothers, rubbing his chin. "That is the road I took, you know, when I went to get your little present. That is *its* story, Phœbe."

"Would you mind taking that road again, sir?" she asked with hesitation.

"Not in the least; it is a great high road after all."

“I should like you to take it,” returned Phœbe, with a persuasive smile, “for the love of that little present which must ever be so dear to me. I should like you to take it, because that road can never be again, like any other road to me. I should like you to take it, in remembrance of your having done me so much good: of your having made me so much happier! If you leave me by the road you travelled when you went to do me this great kindness,” sounding a faint chord as she spoke, “I shall feel, lying here watching at my window, as if it must conduct you to a prosperous end, and bring you back some day.”

“It shall be done, my dear; it shall be done.”

So at last the gentleman for Nowhere took a ticket for Somewhere, and his destination was the great ingenious town.

He had loitered so long about the Junction that it was the eighteenth of December when he left it. “High time,” he reflected, as he seated himself in the train, “that I started in earnest! Only one clear day remains between me and the day I am running away from. I’ll push onward for the hill-country to-morrow. I’ll go to Wales.”

It was with some pains that he placed before himself the undeniable advantages to be gained in the way of novel occupation for his senses from misty mountains, swollen streams, rain, mugbypagecold, a wild seashore, and rugged roads. And yet he scarcely made them out as distinctly as he could have wished. Whether the poor girl, in spite of her new resource, her music, would have any feeling of loneliness upon her now—just at first—that she had not had before; whether she saw those very puffs of steam and smoke that he saw, as he sat in the train thinking of her; whether her face would have any pensive shadow on it as they died out of the distant view from her window; whether, in telling him he had done her so much good, she had not unconsciously corrected his old moody bemoaning of his station in life, by setting him thinking that a man might be a great healer, if he would, and yet not be a great doctor; these and other similar meditations got between him and his Welsh picture. There was within him, too, that dull sense of vacuity which follows separation from an object of interest, and cessation of a pleasant pursuit; and this sense, being quite new to him, made him restless. Further, in losing Mugby Junction he had found himself again; and he was not the more enamoured of himself for having lately passed his time in better company.

But surely, here not far ahead, must be the great ingenious town. This crashing and clashing that the train was undergoing, and this coupling on to it of a multitude of new mugbypageechoes, could mean nothing less than approach to the great station. It did mean nothing less. After some stormy flashes of town lightning, in the way of swift revelations of red-brick blocks of houses, high red-brick chimney-shafts, vistas of red-brick railway arches, tongues of fire, blots of smoke, valleys of canal, and hills of coal, there came the thundering in at the journey’s end.

Having seen his portmanteaus safely housed in the hotel he chose, and having appointed his dinner-hour, Barbox Brothers went out for a walk in the busy streets. And now it began to be suspected by him that Mugby Junction was a Junction of many branches, invisible as well as visible, and had joined him to an endless number of byways. For, whereas he would, but a little while ago, have walked these streets blindly brooding, he now had eyes and thoughts for a new external world. How the many toiling people lived, and loved, and died; how wonderful it was to consider the various trainings of eye and hand, the nice distinctions of sight and touch, that separated them into classes of workers, and even into classes of workers at subdivisions of one complete whole which combined their many intelligences and forces, though of itself but some cheap object of use or ornament in common life; how good it was to know that such assembling in a multitude on their part, and such contribution of their several dexterities towards a civilising end, did not deteriorate them as it was the fashion of the supercilious May-flies of humanity to pretend, but engendered among them a self-respect and yet a modest desire to be much wiser than they were (the first evinced in their well-balanced bearing and manner of speech when he stopped to ask a question; the second, in the announcements of their popular studies and amusements on the public walls); these considerations, and a host of such, made his walk a memorable one. “I too am but a little part of a great whole,” he began to think; “and to be serviceable to myself and others, or to be happy, I must cast my interest into, and draw it out of, the common stock.”

Although he had arrived at his journey’s end for the day by noon, he had since insensibly walked about the town so far and so long that the lamplighters were now at their work in the streets, and the shops were sparkling up brilliantly. Thus reminded to turn towards his quarters, he was in the act of doing so, when a very little hand crept into his, and a very little voice said:

"O! If you please, I am lost."

He looked down, and saw a very little fair-haired girl.

"Yes," she said, confirming her words with a serious nod. "I am indeed. I am lost."

Greatly perplexed, he stopped, looked about him for help, descried none, and said, bending low: "Where do you live, my child?"

"I don't know where I live," she returned. "I am lost."

"What is your name?"

"Polly."

"What is your other name?"

The reply was prompt, but unintelligible.

Imitating the sound, as he caught it, he hazarded the guess, "Trivits?"

"O no!" said the child, shaking her head. "Nothing like that."

"Say it again, little one."

An unpromising business. For this time it had quite a different sound.

He made the venture: "Paddens?"

"O no!" said the child. "Nothing like that."

"Once more. Let us try it again, dear."

A most hopeless business. This time it swelled into four syllables. "It can't be Tappitarver?" said Barbox Brothers, rubbing his head with his hat in discomfiture.

"No! It ain't," the child quietly assented.

On her trying this unfortunate name once more, with extraordinary efforts at distinctness, it swelled into eight syllables at least.

"Ah! I think," said Barbox Brothers, with a desperate air of resignation, "that we had better give it up."

"But I am lost," said the child, nestling her little hand more closely in his, "and you'll take care of me, won't you?"

If ever a man were disconcerted by division between compassion on the one hand, and the very imbecility of irresolution on the other, here the man was. "Lost!" he repeated, looking down at the child. "I am sure *I* am. What is to be done!"

"Where do *you* live?" asked the child, looking up at him, wistfully.

"Over there," he answered, pointing vaguely in the direction of his hotel.

“Hadn’t we better go there?” said the child.

“Really,” he replied, “I don’t know but what we had.”

So they set off, hand in hand. He, through comparison of himself against his little companion, with a clumsy feeling on him as if he had just developed into a foolish giant. She, clearly elevated in her own tiny opinion by having got him so neatly out of his embarrassment.

“We are going to have dinner when we get there, I suppose?” said Polly.

“Well,” he rejoined, “I—yes, I suppose we are.”

“Do you like your dinner?” asked the child.

“Why, on the whole,” said Barbox Brothers, “yes, I think I do.”

“I do mine,” said Polly. “Have you any brothers and sisters?”

“No. Have you?”

“Mine are dead.”

“Oh!” said Barbox Brothers. With that absurd sense of unwieldiness of mind and body weighing him down, he would have not known how to pursue the conversation beyond this curt rejoinder, but that the child was always ready for him.

“What,” she asked, turning her soft hand coaxingly in his, “are you going to do to amuse me, after dinner?”

“Upon my soul, Polly,” exclaimed Barbox Brothers, very much at a loss, “I have not the slightest idea!”

“Then I tell you what,” said Polly. “Have you got any cards at your house?”

“Plenty,” said Barbox Brothers, in a boastful vein.

“Very well. Then I’ll build houses, and you shall look at me. You mustn’t blow, you know.”

“O no!” said Barbox Brothers. “No, no, no. No blowing. Blowing’s not fair.”

He flattered himself that he had said this pretty well for an idiotic Monster; but the child, instantly perceiving the awkwardness of his attempt to adapt himself to her level, utterly destroyed his hopeful opinion of himself by saying, compassionately: “What a funny man you are!”

Feeling, after this melancholy failure, as if he every minute grew bigger and heavier in person, and weaker in mind, Barbox gave himself up for a bad job. No giant ever submitted more meekly to be led in triumph by all-conquering Jack, than he to be bound in slavery to Polly.

“Do you know any stories?” she asked him.

He was reduced to the humiliating confession: “No.”

“What a dunce you must be, mustn’t you?” said Polly.

He was reduced to the humiliating confession: “Yes.”

“Would you like me to teach you a story? But you must remember it, you know, and be able to tell it right to somebody else afterwards.”

He professed that it would afford him the highest mental gratification to be taught a story, and that he would humbly endeavour to retain it in his mind. Whereupon Polly, giving her hand a new little turn in his, expressive of settling down for enjoyment, commenced a long romance, of which every relishing clause began with the words: “So this” or “And so this.” As, “So this boy;” or, “So this fairy;” or, “And so this pie was four yards round, and two yards and a quarter deep.” mugbypageThe interest of the romance was derived from the intervention of this fairy to punish this boy for having a greedy appetite. To achieve which purpose, this fairy made this pie, and this boy ate and ate and ate, and his cheeks swelled and swelled and swelled. There were many tributary circumstances, but the forcible interest culminated in the total consumption of this pie, and the bursting of this boy. Truly he was a fine sight, Barbox Brothers, with serious attentive face, and ear bent down, much jostled on the pavements of the busy town, but afraid of losing a single incident of the epic, lest he should be examined in it by-and-by and found deficient.

Thus they arrived at the hotel. And there he had to say at the bar, and said awkwardly enough: “I have found a little girl!”

The whole establishment turned out to look at the little girl. Nobody knew her; nobody could make out her name, as she set it forth—except one chambermaid, who said it was Constantinople—which it wasn’t.

“I will dine with my young friend in a private room,” said Barbox Brothers to the hotel authorities, “and perhaps you will be so good as let the police know that the pretty baby is here. I suppose she is sure to be inquired for, soon, if she has not been already. Come along, Polly.”

Perfectly at ease and peace, Polly came along, but, finding the stairs rather stiff work, was carried up by Barbox Brothers. The dinner was a most transcendent success, and the Barbox sheepishness, under Polly’s directions how to mince her meat for her, and how to diffuse gravy over the plate with a liberal and equal hand, was another fine sight.

“And now,” said Polly, “while we are at dinner, you be good, and tell me that story I taught you.”

With the tremors of a civil service examination on him, and very uncertain indeed, not only as to the epoch at which the pie appeared in history, but also as to the measurements of that indispensable fact, Barbox Brothers made a shaky beginning, but under encouragement did very fairly. There was a want of breadth observable in his rendering of the cheeks, as well as the appetite, of the boy; and there was a certain tameness in his fairy, referable to an under-current of desire to account for her. Still, as the first lumbering performance of a good-humoured monster, it passed muster.

"I told you to be good," said Polly, "and you are good, ain't you?"

"I hope so," replied Barbox Brothers.

Such was his deference that Polly, elevated on a platform of sofa-cushions in a chair at his right hand, encouraged him with a pat or two on the face from the greasy bowl of her spoon, and even with a gracious kiss. In getting on her feet upon her chair, however, to give him this last reward, she toppled forward among the dishes, and caused him to exclaim as he effected her rescue: "Gracious Angels! Whew! I thought we were in the fire, Polly!"

"What a coward you are, ain't you?" said Polly, when replaced.

"Yes, I am rather nervous," he replied. "Whew! Don't, Polly! Don't flourish your spoon, or you'll go over sideways. Don't tilt up your legs when you laugh, Polly, or you'll go over backwards. Whew! Polly, Polly, Polly," said Barbox Brothers, nearly succumbing to despair, "we are environed with dangers!"

Indeed, he could descry no security from the pitfalls that were yawning for Polly, but in proposing to her, after dinner, to sit upon a low stool. "I will, if you will," said Polly. So, as peace of mind should go before all, he begged the waiter to wheel aside the table, bring a pack of cards, a couple of footstools, and a screen, and close in Polly and himself before the fire, as it were in a snug room within the room. Then, finest sight of all, was Barbox Brothers on his footstool, with a pint decanter on the rug, contemplating Polly as she built successfully, and growing blue in the face with holding his breath, lest he should blow the house down.

"How you stare, don't you?" said Polly, in a houseless pause.

Detected in the ignoble fact, he felt obliged to admit, apologetically: "I am afraid I was looking rather hard at you, Polly."

"Why do you stare?" asked Polly.

"I cannot," he murmured to himself, "recall why.—I don't know, Polly."

“You must be a simpleton to do things and not know why, mustn’t you?” said Polly.

In spite of which reproof, he looked at the child again, intently, as she bent her head over her card-structure, her rich curls shading her face. “It is impossible,” he thought, “that I can ever have seen this pretty baby before. Can I have dreamed of her? In some sorrowful dream?”

He could make nothing of it. So he went into the building trade as a journeyman under Polly, and they built three stories high, four stories high: even five.

“I say. Who do you think is coming?” asked Polly, rubbing her eyes after tea.

He guessed: “The waiter?”

“No,” said Polly, “the dustman. I am getting sleepy.”

A new embarrassment for Barbox Brothers!

“I don’t think I am going to be fetched to-night,” said Polly; “what do you think?”

He thought not, either. After another quarter of an hour, the dustman not merely impending but actually arriving, recourse was had to the Constantinopolitan chambermaid: who cheerily undertook that the child should sleep in a comfortable and wholesome room, which she herself would share.

“And I know you will be careful, won’t you,” said Barbox Brothers, as a new fear dawned upon him, “that she don’t fall out of bed.”

Polly found this so highly entertaining that she was under the necessity of clutching him round the neck with both arms as he sat on his footstool picking up the cards, and rocking him to and fro, with her dimpled chin on his shoulder.

“O what a coward you are, ain’t you!” said Polly. “Do *you* fall out of bed?”

“N—not generally, Polly.”

“No more do I.”

With that, Polly gave him a reassuring hug or two to keep him going, and then giving that confiding mite of a hand of hers to be swallowed up in the hand of the Constantinopolitan chambermaid, trotted off, chattering, without a vestige of anxiety.

He looked after her, had the screen removed and the table and chairs replaced, and still looked after her. He paced the room for half an hour. “A most engaging little creature, but it's not that. A most winning little voice, but it's not that. That has much to do with it, but there is something more. How can it be that I seem to know this child? What was it she imperfectly recalled to me when I felt her touch in the street, and, looking down at her, saw her looking up at me?"

"Mr. Jackson!"

With a start he turned towards the sound of the subdued voice, and saw his answer standing at the door.

"O Mr. Jackson, do not be severe with me. Speak a word of encouragement to me, I beseech you."

"You are Polly's mother."

"Yes."

Yes. Polly herself might come to this, one day. As you see what the rose was, in its faded leaves; as you see what the summer growth of the woods was, in their wintry branches; so Polly might be traced, one day, in a care-worn woman like this, with her hair turned grey. Before him, were the ashes of a dead fire that had once burned bright. This was the woman he had loved. This was the woman he had lost. Such had been the constancy of his imagination to her, so had Time spared her under its withholding, that now, seeing how roughly the inexorable hand had struck her, his soul was filled with pity and amazement.

He led her to a chair, and stood leaning on a corner of the chimney-piece, with his head resting on his hand, and his face half averted.

"Did you see me in the street, and show me to your child?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Is the little creature, then, a party to deceit?"

"I hope there is no deceit. I said to her, 'We have lost our way, and I must try to find mine by myself. Go to that gentleman and tell him you are lost. You shall be fetched by-and-by.' Perhaps you have not thought how very young she is?"

"She is very self-reliant."

"Perhaps because she is so young?"

He asked, after a short pause, "Why did you do this?"

"O Mr. Jackson, do you ask me? In the hope that you might see something in my innocent child to soften your heart towards me. Not only towards me, but towards my husband."

He suddenly turned about, and walked to the opposite end of the room. He came back again with a slower step, and resumed his former attitude, saying:

"I thought you had emigrated to America?"

"We did. But life went ill with us there, and we came back."

"Do you live in this town?"

"Yes. I am a daily teacher of music here. My husband is a book-keeper."

"Are you—forgive my asking—poor?"

"We earn enough for our wants. That is not our distress. My husband is very, very ill of a lingering disorder. He will never recover—"

"You check yourself. If it is for want of the encouraging word you spoke of, take it from me. I cannot forget the old time, Beatrice."

"God bless you!" she replied, with a burst of tears, and gave him her trembling hand.

"Compose yourself. I cannot be composed if you are not, for to see you weep distresses me beyond expression. Speak freely to me. Trust me."

She shaded her face with her veil, and after a little while spoke calmly. Her voice had the ring of Polly's.

"It is not that my husband's mind is at all impaired by his bodily suffering, for I assure you that is not the case. But in his weakness, and in his knowledge that he is incurably ill, he cannot overcome the ascendancy of one idea. It preys upon him, embitters every moment of his painful life, and will shorten it."

She stopping, he said again: "Speak freely to me. Trust me."

"We have had five children before this darling, and they all lie in their little graves. He believes that they have withered away under a curse, and that it will blight this child like the rest."

"Under what curse?"

"Both I and he have it on our conscience that we tried you very heavily, and I do not know but that, if I were as ill as he, I might suffer in my mind as he does. This is the constant burden:—'I believe, Beatrice, I was the only friend that Mr. Jackson ever cared to make, though I was so much his junior. The more influence he acquired in the business, the higher he advanced me, and I was alone in his private confidence. I came between him and you, and I took you from him. We were both secret, and the blow fell when he was wholly unprepared. The anguish it caused a man so compressed, must have been terrible; the wrath it awakened, inappeasable. So, a curse came to be invoked on our poor pretty little flowers, and they fall.'"

"And you, Beatrice," he asked, when she had ceased to speak, and there had been a silence afterwards: "how say you?"

"Until within these few weeks I was afraid of you, and I believed that you would never, never, forgive."

"Until within these few weeks," he repeated. "Have you changed your opinion of me within these few weeks?"

"Yes."

"For what reason?"

"I was getting some pieces of music in a shop in this town, when, to my terror, you came in. As I veiled my face and stood in the dark end of the shop, I heard you explain that you wanted a musical instrument for a bedridden girl. Your voice and manner were so softened, you showed such interest in its selection, you took it away yourself with so much tenderness of care and pleasure, that I knew you were a man with a most gentle heart. O Mr. Jackson, Mr. Jackson, if you could have felt the refreshing rain of tears that followed for me!"

Was Phœbe playing at that moment, on her distant couch? He seemed to hear her.

"I inquired in the shop where you lived, but could get no information. As I had heard you say that you were going back by the next train (but you did not say where), I resolved to visit the station at about that time of day, as often as I could, between my lessons, on the chance of seeing you again. I have been there very often, but saw you no more until to-day. You were meditating as you walked the street, but the calm expression of your face emboldened me to send my child to you. And when I saw you bend your head to speak tenderly to her, I prayed to God to forgive me for having ever brought a sorrow on it. I now pray to you to forgive me, and to forgive my husband. I was very young, he was young too, and in the ignorant hardihood of such a time of life we don't know what we do to those who have undergone more discipline. You generous man! You good man! So to raise me up and make nothing of my crime against you!"—for he would not see her on her knees, and soothed her as a kind father might have soothed an erring daughter—"thank you, bless you, thank you!"

When he next spoke, it was after having drawn aside the window-curtain and looked out a while. Then, he only said:

“Is Polly asleep?”

“Yes. As I came in, I met her going away up-stairs, and put her to bed myself.”

“Leave her with me for to-morrow, Beatrice, and write me your address on this leaf of my pocket-book. In the evening I will bring her home to you—and to her father.”

* * * * *

“Hallo!” cried Polly, putting her saucy sunny face in at the door next morning when breakfast was ready: “I thought I was fetched last night?”

“So you were, Polly, but I asked leave to keep you here for the day, and to take you home in the evening.”

“Upon my word!” said Polly. “You are very cool, ain’t you?”

However, Polly seemed to think it a good idea, and added, “I suppose I must give you a kiss, though you *are* cool.” The kiss given and taken, they sat down to breakfast in a highly conversational tone.

“Of course, you are going to amuse me?” said Polly.

“Oh, of course,” said Barbox Brothers.

In the pleasurable height of her anticipations, Polly found it indispensable to put down her piece of toast, cross one of her little fat knees over the other, and bring her little fat right hand down into her left hand with a business-like slap. After this gathering of herself together, Polly, by that time, a mere heap of dimples, asked in a wheedling manner: “What are we going to do, you dear old thing?”

“Why, I was thinking,” said Barbox Brothers, “—but are you fond of horses, Polly?”

“Ponies, I am,” said Polly, “especially when their tails are long. But horses—n—no—too big, you know.”

“Well,” pursued Barbox Brothers, in a spirit of grave mysterious confidence adapted to the importance of the consultation, “I did see yesterday, Polly, on the walls, pictures of two long-tailed ponies, speckled all over—”

“No, no, no!” cried Polly, in an ecstatic desire to linger on the charming details. “Not speckled all over!”

“Speckled all over. Which ponies jump through hoops—”

“No, no, no!” cried Polly, as before. “They never jump through hoops!”

"Yes, they do. O I assure you, they do. And eat pie in pinafores—"

"Ponies eating pie in pinafores!" said Polly. "What a story-teller you are, ain't you?"

"Upon my honour.—And fire off guns."

(Polly hardly seemed to see the force of the ponies resorting to fire-arms.)

"And I was thinking," pursued the exemplary Barbox, "that if you and I were to go to the Circus where these ponies are, it would do our constitutions good."

"Does that mean, amuse us?" inquired Polly. "What long words you do use, don't you?"

Apologetic for having wandered out of his depth, he replied: "That means, amuse us. That is exactly what it means. There are many other wonders besides the ponies, and we shall see them all. Ladies and gentlemen in spangled dresses, and elephants and lions and tigers."

Polly became observant of the teapot, with a curled-up nose indicating some uneasiness of mind. "They never get out, of course," she remarked as a mere truism.

"The elephants and lions and tigers? O dear no!"

"O dear no!" said Polly. "And of mugbypagecourse nobody's afraid of the ponies shooting anybody."

"Not the least in the world."

"No, no, not the least in the world," said Polly.

"I was also thinking," proceeded Barbox, "that if we were to look in at the toy-shop, to choose a doll—"

"Not dressed!" cried Polly, with a clap of her hands. "No, no, no, not dressed!"

"Full dressed. Together with a house, and all things necessary for housekeeping—"

Polly gave a little scream, and seemed in danger of falling into a swoon of bliss. "What a darling you are!" she languidly exclaimed, leaning back in her chair. "Come and be hugged, or I must come and hug you!"

This resplendent programme was carried into execution with the utmost rigour of the law. It being essential to make the purchase of the doll its first feature—or that lady would have lost the ponies—the toy-shop expedition took precedence. Polly in the magic warehouse, with a doll as large as herself under each arm, and a neat assortment of some twenty more on view upon the counter, did indeed present a spectacle of indecision not quite compatible with unalloyed happiness, but the light cloud passed. The lovely specimen oftenest chosen, oftenest rejected, and finally abided by, was of Circassian descent, possessing as much boldness of beauty as was reconcilable with extreme feebleness of mouth, and combining a sky-blue silk pelisse with rose-coloured satin trousers, and a black velvet hat: which this fair stranger to our northern shores would seem to have founded on the portraits of the late Duchess of Kent. The name this distinguished foreigner brought with her from beneath the glowing skies of a sunny clime was (on Polly's authority) Miss Melluka, and the costly nature of her outfit as a housekeeper, from the Barbox coffers, may be inferred from the two facts that her silver teaspoons were as large as her kitchen poker, and that the proportions of her watch exceeded those of her frying-pan. Miss Melluka was graciously pleased to express her entire approbation of the Circus, and so was Polly; for the ponies *were* speckled, and brought down nobody when they fired, and the savagery of the wild beasts appeared to be mere smoke—which article, in fact, they did produce in large quantities from their insides. The Barbox absorption in the general subject throughout the realisation of these delights was again a sight to see, nor was it less worthy to behold at dinner, when he drank to Miss Melluka, tied stiff in a chair opposite to Polly (the fair Circassian possessing an unbendable spine), and even induced the waiter to assist in carrying out with due decorum the prevailing glorious idea. To wind up, there came the agreeable fever of getting Miss Melluka and all her wardrobe and rich possessions into a fly with Polly, to be taken home. But by that time Polly had become unable to look upon such accumulated joys with waking eyes, and had withdrawn her consciousness into the wonderful Paradise of a child's sleep. "Sleep, Polly, sleep," said Barbox Brothers, as her head dropped on his shoulder; "you shall not fall out of this bed, easily, at any rate!"

What rustling piece of paper he took from his pocket, and carefully folded into the bosom of Polly's frock, shall not be mentioned. He said nothing about it, and nothing shall be said about it. They drove to a modest suburb of the great ingenious town, and stopped at the forecourt of a small house. "Do not wake the child," said Barbox Brothers, softly, to the driver, "I will carry her in as she is."

Greeting the light at the opened door which was held by Polly's mother, Polly's bearer passed on with mother and child into a ground-floor room.

There, stretched on a sofa, lay a sick man, sorely wasted, who covered his eyes with his emaciated hands.

“Tresham,” said Barbox, in a kindly voice, “I have brought you back your Polly, fast asleep. Give me your hand, and tell me you are better.”

The sick man reached forth his right hand, and bowed his head over the hand into which it was taken and kissed it. “Thank you, thank you! I may say that I am well and happy.”

“That’s brave,” said Barbox. “Tresham, I have a fancy—can you make room for me beside you here?”

He sat down on the sofa as he said words, cherishing the plump peachy cheek that lay uppermost on his shoulder.

“I have a fancy, Tresham (I am getting quite an old fellow now, you know, and old fellows may take fancies into their heads sometimes), to give up Polly, having found her, to no one but you. Will you take her from me?”

As the father held out his arms for the child, each of the two men looked steadily at the other.

“She is very dear to you, Tresham?”

“Unutterably dear.”

“God bless her! It is not much, Polly,” he continued, turning his eyes upon her peaceful face as he apostrophised her, “it is not much, Polly, for a blind and sinful man to invoke a blessing on something so far better than himself as a little child is; but it would be much—much upon his cruel head, and much upon his guilty soul—if he could be so wicked as to invoke a curse. He had better have a millstone round his neck, and be cast into the deepest sea. Live and thrive, my pretty baby!” Here he kissed her. “Live and prosper, and become in time the mother of other little children, like the Angels who behold The Father’s face!”

He kissed her again, gave her up gently to both her parents, and went out.

But he went not to Wales. No, he never went to Wales. He went straightway for another stroll about the town, and he looked in upon the people at their work, and at their play, here, there, everywhere, and where not. For he was Barbox Brothers and Co. now, and had taken thousands of partners into the solitary firm.

He had at length got back to his hotel room, and was standing before his fire refreshing himself with a glass of hot drink which he had stood upon the chimney-piece, when he heard the town clocks striking, and, referring to his watch, found the evening to have so slipped away, that they were striking twelve. As he put up his watch again, his eyes met those of his reflection in the chimney-glass.

"Why it's your birthday already," he said, smiling. "You are looking very well. I wish you many happy returns of the day."

He had never before bestowed that wish upon himself. "By Jupiter!" he discovered, "it alters the whole case of running away from one's birthday! It's a thing to explain to Phœbe. Besides, here is quite a long story to tell her, that has sprung out of the road with no story. I'll go back, instead of going on. I'll go back by my friend Lamps's Up X presently."

He went back to Mugby Junction, and in point of fact he established himself at Mugby Junction. It was the convenient place to live in, for brightening Phœbe's life. It was the convenient place to live in, for having her taught music by Beatrice. It was the convenient place to live in, for occasionally borrowing Polly. It was the convenient place to live in, for being joined at will to all sorts of agreeable places and persons. So, he became settled there, and, his house standing in an elevated situation, it is noteworthy of him in conclusion, as Polly herself might (not irreverently) have put it:

There was an Old Barbox who lived on a hill,
And if he ain't gone, he lives there still.

Here follows the substance of what was seen, heard, or otherwise picked up, by the Gentleman for Nowhere, in his careful study of the Junction.

MAIN LINE
THE BOY AT MUGBY

I am The Boy at Mugby. That’s about what *I* am.

You don’t know what I mean? What a pity! But I think you do. I think you must. Look here. I am the Boy at what is called The Refreshment Room at Mugby Junction, and what’s proudest boast is, that it never yet refreshed a mortal being.

Up in a corner of the Down Refreshment Room at Mugby Junction, in the height of twenty-seven cross draughts (I’ve often counted ’em while they brush the First Class hair twenty-seven ways), behind the bottles, among the glasses, bounded on the nor’-west by the beer, stood pretty far to the right of a metallic object that’s at times the tea-urn and at times the soup-tureen, according to the nature of the last twang imparted to its contents which are the same groundwork, fended off from the traveller by a barrier of stale sponge-cakes erected atop of the counter, and lastly exposed sideways to the glare of our Missis’s eye—you ask a Boy so sitiwated, next time you stop in a hurry at Mugby, for anything to drink; you take particular notice that he’ll try to seem not to hear you, that he’ll appear in a absent manner to survey the Line through a transparent medium composed of your head and body, and that he won’t serve you as long as you can possibly bear it. That’s Me.

What a lark it is! We are the Model Establishment, we are, at Mugby. Other Refreshment Rooms send their imperfect young ladies up to be finished off by our Missis. For some of the young ladies, when they’re new to the business, come into it mild! Ah! Our Missis, she soon takes that out of ’em. Why, I originally come into the business meek myself. But Our Missis she soon took that out of *me*.

What a delightful lark it is! I look upon us Refreshmenters as ockipying the only proudly independent footing on the Line. There’s Papers for instance—my honourable friend if he will allow me to call him so—him as belongs to Smith’s bookstall. Why he no more mugbypagedares to be up to our Refreshmenting games, than he dares to jump atop of a locomotive with her steam at full pressure, and cut away upon her alone, driving himself, at limited-mail speed. Papers, he'd get his head punched at every compartment, first, second and third, the whole length of a train, if he was to ventur to imitate my demeanour. It's the same with the porters, the same with the guards, the same with the ticket clerks, the same the whole way up to the secretary, traffic manager, or very chairman. There ain't a one among 'em on the nobly independent footing we are. Did you ever catch one of *them*, when you wanted anything of him, making a system of surveying the Line through a transparent medium composed of your head and body? I should hope not.

You should see our Bandolining Room at Mugby Junction. It's led to, by the door behind the counter which you'll notice usually stands ajar, and it's the room where Our Missis and our young ladies Bandolines their hair. You should see 'em at it, betwixt trains, Bandolining away, as if they was anointing themselves for the combat. When you're telegraphed, you should see their noses all a going up with scorn, as if it was a part of the working of the same Cooke and Wheatstone electrical machinery. You should hear Our Missis give the word "Here comes the Beast to be Fed!" and then you should see 'em indignantly skipping across the Line, from the Up to the Down, or Wicer Warsaw, and begin to pitch the stale pastry into the plates, and chuck the sawdust sangwiches under the glass covers, and get out the—ha ha ha!—the Sherry—O my eye, my eye!—for your Refreshment.

It's only in the Isle of the Brave and Land of the Free (by which of course I mean to say Britannia) that Refreshmenting is so effective, so 'olesome, so constitutional, a check upon the public. There was a foreigner, which having politely, with his hat off, beseeched our young ladies and Our Missis for "a leetel gloss hoff prarndee," and having had the Line surveyed through him by all and no other acknowledgment, was a proceeding at last to help himself, as seems to be the custom in his own country, when Our Missis with her hair almost a coming un-Bandolined with rage, and her eyes omitting sparks, flew at him, cotched the decanter out of his hand, and said: "Put it down! I won't allow that!" The foreigner turned pale, stepped back with his arms stretched out in front of him, his hands clasped, and his shoulders riz, and exclaimed: "Ah! Is it possible this! That these disdaineous females and this ferocious old woman are placed here by the administration, not only to empoison the voyagers, but to affront them! Great Heaven! How arrives it? The English people. Or is he then a slave? Or idiot?" Another time, a merry wideawake American gent had tried the sawdust and spit it out, and had tried the Sherry and spit that out, and had tried in vain to sustain exhausted natur upon Butter-Scotch, and had been rather extra Bandolined and Line-surveyed through, when, as the bell was ringing and he paid Our Missis, he says, very loud and good-tempered: “I tell Yew what ’tis, ma’arm. I la’af. Theer! I la’af. I Dew. I oughter ha’ seen most things, for I hail from the Onlimited side of the Atlantic Ocean, and I haive travelled right slick over the Limited, head on through Jee-rusalemm and the East, and likeways France and Italy, Europe Old World, and am now upon the track to the Chief Europian Village; but such an Institution as Yew, and Yewer young ladies, and Yewer fixin’s solid and liquid, afore the glorious Tarnal I never did see yet! And if I hain’t found the eighth wonder of monarchical Creation, in finding Yew, and Yewer young ladies, and Yewer fixin’s solid and liquid, all as aforesaid, established in a country where the people air not absolute Loo-naticks, I am Extra Double Darned with a Nip and Frizzle to the innermostest grit! Wheerfur—Theer!—I la’af! I Dew, ma’arm. I la’af!” And so he went, stamping and shaking his sides, along the platform all the way to his own compartment.

I think it was her standing up agin the Foreigner, as giv’ Our Missis the idea of going over to France, and droring a comparison betwixt Refreshmenting as followed among the frog-eaters, and Refreshmenting as triumphant in the Isle of the Brave and Land of the Free (by which of course I mean to say agin, Britannia). Our young ladies, Miss Whiff, Miss Piff, and Mrs. Sniff, was unanimous opposed to her going; for, as they says to Our Missis one and all, it is well beknown to the hends of the herth as no other nation except Britain has a idea of anythink, but above all of business. Why then should you tire yourself to prove what is aready proved? Our Missis however (being a teazer at all pints) stood out grim obstinate, and got a return pass by South-Eastern Tidal, to go right through, if such should be her dispositions, to Marseilles.

Sniff is husband to Mrs. Sniff, and is a regular insignificant cove. He looks arter the sawdust department in a back room, and is sometimes when we are very hard put to it let in behind the counter with a corkscrew; but never when it can be helped, his demeanour towards the public being disgusting servile. How Mrs. Sniff ever come so far to lower herself as to marry him, I don’t know; but I suppose *he* does, and I should think he wished he didn’t, for he leads a awful life. Mrs. Sniff couldn’t be much harder with him if he was public. Similarly, Miss Whiff and Miss Piff; taking the tone of Mrs. Sniff, they shoulder Sniff about when he is let in with a corkscrew, and they whisk things out of his hands when in his servility he is a going to let the public have ’em, and they snap him up when in the crawling baseness of his spirit he is a going to answer a public question, and they drore more tears into his eyes than ever the mustard does which he all day long lays on to the sawdust. (But it ain’t strong.) Once, when Sniff had the repulsiveness to reach across to get the milk-pot to hand over for a baby, I see Our Missis in her rage catch him by both his shoulders and spin him out into the Bandolining Room.

But Mrs. Sniff. How different! She’s the one! She’s the one as you’ll notice to be always looking another way from you, when you look at her. She’s the one with the small waist buckled in tight in front, and with the lace cuffs at her wrists, which she puts on the edge of the counter before her, and stands a smoothing while the public foams. This smoothing the cuffs and looking another way while the public foams, is the last accomplishment taught to the young ladies as come to Mugby to be finished by Our Missis; and it’s always taught by Mrs. Sniff.

When Our Missis went away upon her journey, Mrs. Sniff was left in charge. She did hold the public in check most beautiful! In all my time, I never see half so many cups of tea given without milk to people as wanted it with, nor half so many cups of tea with milk given to people as wanted it without. When foaming ensued, Mrs. Sniff would say: “Then you’d better settle it among yourselves, and change with one another.” It was a most highly delicious lark. I enjoyed the Refreshmenting business more than ever, and was so glad I had took to it when young.

Our Missis returned. It got circulated among the young ladies, and it as it might be penetrated to me through the crevices of the Bandolining Room, that she had Orrors to reveal, if revelations so contemptible could be dignified with the name. Agitation become awakened. Excitement was up in the stirrups. Expectation stood a tiptoe. At length it was put forth that on our slackest evening in the week, and at our slackest time of that evening betwixt trains, Our Missis would give her views of foreign Refreshmenting, in the Bandolining Room.

It was arranged tasteful for the purpose. The Bandolining table and glass was hid in a corner, a arm-chair was elevated on a packing-case for Our Missis’s ockypation, a table and a tumbler of water (no sherry in it, thankee) was placed beside it. Two of the pupils, the season being autumn, and hollyhocks and daliahs being in, ornamented the wall with three devices in those flowers. On one might be read, “May Albion never Learn;” on another, “Keep the Public Down;” on another, “Our Refreshmenting Charter.” The whole had a beautiful appearance, with which the beauty of the sentiments corresponded.

On Our Missis’s brow was wrote Severity, as she ascended the fatal platform. (Not that that was anythink new.) Miss Whiff and Miss Piff sat at her feet. Three chairs from the Waiting Room might have been perceived by a average eye, in front of her, on which the pupils was accommodated. Behind them, a very close observer might have discerned a Boy. Myself.

“Where,” said Our Missis, glancing gloomily around, “is Sniff?”

“I thought it better,” answered Mrs. Sniff, “that he should not be let to come in. He is such an Ass.”

“No doubt,” assented Our Missis. “But for that reason is it not desirable to improve his mind?”

“O! Nothing will ever improve *him*,” said Mrs. Sniff.

“However,” pursued Our Missis, “call him in, Ezekiel.”

I called him in. The appearance of the low-minded cove was hailed with disapprobation from all sides, on account of his having brought his corkscrew with him. He pleaded “the force of habit.”

“The force!” said Mrs. Sniff. “Don’t let us have you talking about force, for Gracious sake. There! Do stand still where you are, with your back against the wall.”

He is a smiling piece of vacancy, and he smiled in the mean way in which he will even smile at the public if he gets a chance (language can say no meaner of him), and he stood upright near the door with the back of his head agin the wall, as if he was a waiting for somebody to come and measure his heighth for the Army.

“I should not enter, ladies,” says Our Missis, “on the revolting disclosures I am about to make, if it was not in the hope that they will cause you to be yet more implacable in the exercise of the power you wield in a constitutional country, and yet more devoted to the constitutional motto which I see before me;” it was behind her, but the words sounded better so; “‘May Albion never learn!’”

Here the pupils as had made the motto, admired it, and cried, “Hear! Hear! Hear!” Sniff, showing an inclination to join in chorus, got himself frowned down by every brow.

"The baseness of the French," pursued Our Missis, "as displayed in the fawning nature of their Refreshmenting, equals, if not surpasses, anythink as was ever heard of the baseness of the celebrated Buonaparte."

Miss Whiff, Miss Piff and me, we drored a heavy breath, equal to saying, "We thought as much!"

Miss Whiff and Miss Piff seeming to object to my droring mine along with theirs, I drored another, to aggravate 'em.

"Shall I be believed," says Our Missis, with flashing eyes, "when I tell you that no sooner had I set my foot upon that treacherous shore—"

Here Sniff, either busting out mad, or thinking aloud, says, in a low voice: "Feet. Plural, you know."

The cowering that come upon him when he was spurned by all eyes, added to his being beneath contempt, was sufficient punishment for a cove so grovelling. In the midst of a silence rendered more impressive by the turned-up female noses with which it was pervaded, Our Missis went on:

"Shall I be believed when I tell you that no sooner had I landed," this word with a killing look at Sniff, "on that treacherous shore, than I was ushered into a Refreshment Room where there were, I do not exaggerate, actually eatable things to eat?"

A groan burst from the ladies. I not only did myself the honour of jining, but also of lengthening it out.

"Where there were," Our Missis added, "not only eatable things to eat, but also drinkable things to drink?"

A murmur, swelling almost into a scream, ariz. Miss Piff, trembling with indignation, called out: "Name!"

"I *will* name," said Our Missis. "There was roast fowls, hot and cold; there was smoking roast veal surrounded with browned potatoes; there was hot soup with (again I ask shall I be credited?) nothing bitter in it, and no flour to choke off the consumer; there was a variety of cold dishes set off with jelly; there was salad; there was—mark me!—*fresh* pastry, and that of a light construction; there was a luscious show of fruit. There was bottles and decanters of sound small wine, of every size and adapted to every pocket; the same odious statement will apply to brandy; and these were set out upon the counter so that all could help themselves."

Our Missis's lips so quivered, that Mrs. Sniff, though scarcely less convulsed than she were, got up and held the tumbler to them.

“This,” proceeds Our Missis, “was my first unconstitutional experience. Well would it have been, if it had been my last and worst. But no. As I proceeded further into that enslaved and ignorant land, its aspect became more hideous. I need not explain to this assembly, the ingredients and formation of the British Refreshment sangwich?”

Universal laughter—except from Sniff, who, as sangwich-cutter, shook his head in a state of the utmost dejection as he stood with it agin the wall.

“Well!” said Our Missis, with dilated nostrils. “Take a fresh crisp long crusty penny loaf made of the whitest and best flower. Cut it longwise through the middle. Insert a fair and nicely fitting slice of ham. Tie a smart piece of ribbon round the middle of the whole to bind it together. Add at one end a neat wrapper of clean white paper by which to hold it. And the universal French Refreshment sangwich busts on your disgusted vision.”

A cry of “Shame!” from all—except Sniff, which rubbed his stomach with a soothing hand.

“I need not,” said Our Missis, “explain to this assembly, the usual formation and fitting of the British Refreshment Room?”

No, no, and laughter. Sniff agin shaking his head in low spirits agin the wall.

“Well,” said Our Missis, “what would you say to a general decoration of everythink, to hangings (sometimes elegant), to easy velvet furniture, to abundance of little tables, to abundance of little seats, to brisk bright waiters, to great convenience, to a pervading cleanliness and tastefulness positively addressing the public and making the Beast thinking itself worth the pains?”

Contemptuous fury on the part of all the ladies. Mrs. Sniff looking as if she wanted somebody to hold her, and everybody else looking as if they’d raything not.

“Three times,” said our Missis, working herself into a truly terrimenjious state, “three times did I see these shamful things, only between the coast and Paris, and not counting either: at Hazebroucke, at Arras, at Amiens. But worse remains. Tell me, what would you call a person who should propose in England that there should be kept, say at our own model Mugby Junction, pretty baskets, each holding an assorted cold lunch and dessert for one, each at a certain fixed price, and each within a passenger’s power to take away, to empty in the carriage at perfect leisure, and to return at another station fifty or a hundred miles further on?”

There was disagreement what such a person should be called. Whether revolutionist, atheist, Bright (*I* said him), or Un-English. Miss Piff screeched her shrill opinion last, in the words: “A malignant maniac!”

“I adopt,” says Our Missis, “the brand set upon such a person by the righteous indignation of my friend Miss Piff. A malignant maniac. Know then, that that malignant maniac has sprung from the congenial soil of France, and that his malignant madness was in unchecked action on this same part of my journey.”

I noticed that Sniff was a rubbing his hands, and that Mrs. Sniff had got her eye upon him. But I did not take more particular notice, owing to the excited state in which the young ladies was, and to feeling myself called upon to keep it up with a howl.

“On my experience south of Paris,” said Our Missis, in a deep tone, “I will not expatiate. Too loathsome were the task! But fancy this. Fancy a guard coming round, with the train at full speed, to inquire how many for dinner. Fancy his telegraphing forward, the number of diners. Fancy every one expected, and the table elegantly laid for the complete party. Fancy a charming dinner, in a charming room, and the head-cook, concerned for the honour of every dish, superintending in his clean white jacket and cap. Fancy the Beast travelling six hundred miles on end, very fast, and with great punctuality, yet being taught to expect all this to be done for it!”

A spirited chorus of “The Beast!”

I noticed that Sniff was agin a rubbing his stomach with a soothing hand, and that he had drored up one leg. But agin I didn’t take particular notice, looking on myself as called upon to stimilate public feeling. It being a lark besides.

“Putting everything together,” said Our Missis, “French Refreshmenting comes to this, and O it comes to a nice total! First: eatable things to eat, and drinkable things to drink.”

A groan from the young ladies, kep’ up by me.

“Second: convenience, and even elegance.”

Another groan from the young ladies, kep’ up by me.

“Third: moderate charges.”

This time, a groan from me, kep’ up by the young ladies.

“Fourth:—and here,” says Our Missis, “I claim your angriest sympathy—attention, common civility, nay, even politeness!”

Me and the young ladies regularly raging mad all together.

“And I cannot in conclusion,” says Our Missis, with her spitefullest sneer, “give you a completer pictur of that despicable nation (after what I have related), than assuring you that they wouldn’t bear our constitutional ways and noble independence at Mugby Junction, for a single month, and that they would turn us to the right-about and put another system in our places, as soon as look at us; perhaps sooner, for I do not believe they have the good taste to care to look at us twice.”

The swelling tumult was arrested in its rise. Sniff, bore away by his servile disposition, had drored up his leg with a higher and a higher relish, and was now discovered to be waving his corkscrew over his head. It was at this moment that Mrs. Sniff, who had kep’ her eye upon him like the fabled obelisk, descended on her victim. Our Missis followed them both out, and cries was heard in the sawdust department.

You come into the Down Refreshment Room, at the Junction, making believe you don’t know me, and I’ll pint you out with my right thumb over my shoulder which is Our Missis, and which is Miss Whiff; and which is Miss Piff; and which is Mrs. Sniff. But you won’t get a chance to see Sniff, because he disappeared that night. Whether he perished, tore to pieces, I cannot say; but his corkscrew alone remains, to bear witness to the servility of his disposition.

No. 1 BRANCH LINE
THE SIGNAL-MAN

"Halloa! Below there!"

When he heard a voice thus calling to him, he was standing at the door of his box, with a flag in his hand, furled round its short pole. One would have thought, considering the nature of the ground, that he could not have doubted from what quarter the voice came; but, instead of looking up to where I stood on the top of the steep cutting nearly over his head, he turned himself about and looked down the Line. There was something remarkable in his manner of doing so, though I could not have said, for my life, what. But, I know it was remarkable enough to attract my notice, even though his figure was foreshortened and shadowed, down in the deep trench, and mine was high above him, so steeped in the glow of an angry sunset that I had shaded my eyes with my hand before I saw him at all.

"Halloa! Below!"

From looking down the Line, he turned himself about again, and, raising his eyes, saw my figure high above him.

"Is there any path by which I can come down and speak to you?"

He looked up at me without replying, and I looked down at him without pressing him too soon with a repetition of my idle question. Just then, there came a vague vibration in the earth and air, quickly changing into a violent pulsation, and an oncoming rush that caused me to start back, as though it had force to draw me down. When such vapour as rose to my height from this rapid train, had passed me and was skimming away over the landscape, I looked down again and saw him re-furling the flag he had shown while the train went by.

I repeated my inquiry. After a pause, during which he seemed to regard me with fixed attention, he motioned with his rolled-up flag towards a point on my level, some two or three hundred yards distant. I called down to him, "All right!" and made for that point. There, by dint of looking closely about me, I found a rough zig-zag descending path notched out: which I followed.

The cutting was extremely deep, and unusually precipitate. It was made through a clammy stone that became oozier and wetter as I went down. For these reasons, I found the way long enough to give me time to recall a singular air of reluctance or compulsion with which he had pointed out the path.

When I came down low enough upon the zig-zag descent, to see him again, I saw that he was standing between the rails on the way by which the train had lately passed, in an attitude as if he were waiting for me to appear. He had his left hand at his chin, and that left elbow rested on his right hand crossed over his breast. His attitude was one of such expectation and watchfulness, that I stopped a moment, wondering at it.

I resumed my downward way, and, stepping out upon the level of the railroad and drawing nearer to him, saw that he was a dark sallow man, with a dark beard and rather heavy eyebrows. His post was in as solitary and dismal a place as ever I saw. On either side, a dripping-wet wall of jagged stone, excluding all view but a strip of sky; the perspective one way, only a crooked prolongation of this great dungeon; the shorter perspective in the other direction, terminating in a gloomy red light, and the gloomier entrance to a black tunnel, in whose massive architecture there was a barbarous, depressing, and forbidding air. So little sunlight ever found its way to this spot, that it had an earthy deadly smell; and so much cold wind rushed through it, that it struck chill to me, as if I had left the natural world.

Before he stirred, I was near enough to him to have touched him. Not even then removing his eyes from mine, he stepped back one step, and lifted his hand.

This was a lonesome post to occupy (I said), and it had riveted my attention when I looked down from up yonder. A visitor was a rarity, I should suppose; not an unwelcome rarity, I hoped? In me, he merely saw a man who had been shut up within narrow limits all his life, and who, being at last set free, had a newly-awakened interest in these great works. To such purpose I spoke to him; but I am far from sure of the terms I used, for, besides that I am not happy in opening any conversation, there was something in the man that daunted me.

He directed a most curious look towards the red light near the tunnel’s mouth, and looked all about it, as if something were missing from it, and then looked at me.

That light was part of his charge? Was it not?

He answered in a low voice: “Don’t you know it is?”

The monstrous thought came into my mind as I perused the fixed eyes and the saturnine face, that this was a spirit, not a man. I have speculated since, whether there may have been infection in his mind.

In my turn, I stepped back. But in making the action, I detected in his eyes some latent fear of me. This put the monstrous thought to flight.

“You look at me,” I said, forcing a smile, “as if you had a dread of me.”

“I was doubtful,” he returned, “whether I had seen you before.”

“Where?”

He pointed to the red light he had looked at.

“There?” I said.

Intently watchful of me, he replied (but without sound), “Yes.”

“My good fellow, what should I do there? However, be that as it may, I never was there, you may swear.”

“I think I may,” he rejoined. “Yes. I am sure I may.”

His manner cleared, like my own. He replied to my remarks with readiness, and in well-chosen words. Had he much to do there? Yes; that was to say, he had enough responsibility to bear; but exactness and watchfulness were what was required of him, and of actual work—manual labour—he had next to none. To change that signal, to trim those lights, and to turn this iron handle now and then, was all he had to do under that head. Regarding those many long and lonely hours of which I seemed to make so much, he could only say that the routine of his life had shaped itself into that form, and he had grown used to it. He had taught himself a language down here—if only to know it by sight, and to have formed his own crude ideas of its pronunciation, could be called learning it. He had also worked at fractions and decimals, and tried a little algebra; but he was, and had been as a boy, a poor hand at figures. Was it necessary for him when on duty, always to remain in that channel of damp air, and could he never rise into the sunshine from between those high stone walls? Why, that depended upon times and circumstances. Under some conditions there would be less upon the Line than under others, and the same held good as to certain hours of the day and night. In bright weather, he did choose occasions for getting a little above these lower shadows; but, being at all times liable to be called by his electric bell, and at such times listening for it with redoubled anxiety, the relief was less than I would suppose.

He took me into his box, where there was a fire, a desk for an official book in which he had to make certain entries, a telegraphic instrument with its dial face and needles, and the little bell of which he had spoken. On my trusting that he would excuse the remark that he had been well educated, and (I hoped I might say without offence), perhaps educated above that station, he observed that instances of slight incongruity in such-wise would rarely be found wanting among large bodies of men; that he had heard it was so in workhouses, in the police force, even in that last desperate resource, the army; and that he knew it was so, more or less, in any great railway staff. He had been, when young (if I could believe it, sitting in that hut; he scarcely could), a student of natural philosophy, and had attended lectures; but he had run wild, misused his opportunities, gone down, and never risen again. He had no complaint to offer about that. He had made his bed, and he lay upon it. It was far too late to make another.

All that I have here condensed, he said in a quiet manner, with his grave dark regards divided between me and the fire. He threw in the word "Sir," from time to time, and especially when he referred to his youth: as though to request me to understand that he claimed to be nothing but what I found him. He was several times interrupted by the little bell, and had to read off messages, and send replies. Once, he had to stand without the door, and display a flag as a train passed, and make some verbal communication to the driver. In the discharge of his duties I observed him to be remarkably exact and vigilant, breaking off his discourse at a syllable, and remaining silent until what he had to do was done.

In a word, I should have set this man down as one of the safest of men to be employed in that capacity, but for the circumstance that while he was speaking to me he twice broke off with a fallen colour, turned his face towards the little bell when it did not ring, opened the door of the hut (which was kept shut to exclude the unhealthy damp), and looked out towards the red light near the mouth of the tunnel. On both of those occasions, he came back to the fire with the inexplicable air upon him which I had remarked, without being able to define, when we were so far asunder.

Said I when I rose to leave him: "You almost make me think that I have met with a contented man."

(I am afraid I must acknowledge that I said it to lead him on).

“I believe I used to be so,” he rejoined, in the low voice in which he had first spoken; “but I am troubled, sir, I am troubled.”

He would have recalled the words if he could. He had said them, however, and I took them up quickly.

“With what? What is your trouble?”

“It is very difficult to impart, sir. It is very, very, difficult to speak of. If ever you make me another visit, I will try to tell you.”

“But I expressly intend to make you another visit. Say, when shall it be?”

“I go off early in the morning, and I shall be on again at ten to-morrow night, sir.”

“I will come at eleven.”

He thanked me, and went out at the door with me. “I’ll show my white light, sir,” he said, in his peculiar low voice, “till you have found the way up. When you have found it, don’t call out! And when you are at the top, don’t call out!”

His manner seemed to make the place strike colder to me, but I said no more than “Very well.”

“And when you come down to-morrow night, don’t call out! Let me ask you a parting question. What made you cry ‘Halloa! Below there!’ to-night?”

“Heaven knows,” said I. “I cried something to that effect—”

“Not to that effect, sir. Those were the very words. I know them well.”

“Admit those were the very words. I said them, no doubt, because I saw you below.”

“For no other reason?”

“What other reason could I possibly have!”

“You had no feeling that they were conveyed to you in any supernatural way?”

“No.”

He wished me good night, and held up his light. I walked by the side of the down Line of rails (with a very disagreeable sensation of a train coming behind me), until I found the path. It was easier to mount than to descend, and I got back to my inn without any adventure.

Punctual to my appointment, I placed my foot on the first notch of the zig-zag next night, as the distant clocks were striking eleven. He was waiting for me at the bottom, with his white light on. “I have not called out,” I said, when we came close together; “may I speak now?” “By all means, sir.” “Good night then, and here’s my hand.” “Good night, sir, and here’s mine.” With that, we walked side by side to his box, entered it, closed the door, and sat down by the fire.

“I have made up my mind, sir,” he began, bending forward as soon as we were seated, and speaking in a tone but a little above a whisper, “that you shall not have to ask me twice what troubles me. I took you for some one else yesterday evening. That troubles me.”

“That mistake?”

“No. That some one else.”

“Who is it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Like me?”

“I don’t know. I never saw the face. The left arm is across the face, and the right arm is waved. Violently waved. This way.”

I followed his action with my eyes, and it was the action of an arm gesticulating with the utmost passion and vehemence: “For God’s sake clear the way!”

“One moonlight night,” said the man, “I was sitting here, when I heard a voice cry ‘Halloa! Below there!’ I started up, looked from that door, and saw this Some one else standing by the red light near the tunnel, waving as I just now showed you. The voice seemed hoarse with shouting, and it cried, ‘Look out! Look out!’ And then again ‘Halloa! Below there! Look out!’ I caught up my lamp, turned it on red, and ran towards the figure, calling, ‘What’s wrong? What has happened? Where?’ It stood just outside the blackness of the tunnel. I advanced so close upon it that I wondered at its keeping the sleeve across its eyes. I ran right up at it, and had my hand stretched out to pull the sleeve away, when it was gone.”

“Into the tunnel,” said I.

“No. I ran on, into the tunnel, five hundred yards. I stopped and held my lamp above my head, and saw the figures of the measured distance, and saw the wet stains stealing down the walls and trickling through the arch. I ran out again, faster than I had run in (for I had a mortal abhorrence of the place upon me), and I looked all round the red light with my own red light, and I went up the iron ladder to the gallery atop of it, and I came down again, and ran back here. I telegraphed both ways: ‘An alarm has been given. Is anything wrong?’ The answer came back, both ways: ‘All well.’”

Resisting the slow touch of a frozen finger tracing out my spine, I showed him how that this figure must be a deception of his sense of sight, and how that figures, originating in disease of the delicate nerves that minister to the functions of the eye, were known to have often troubled patients, some of whom had become conscious of the nature of their affliction, and had even proved it by experiments upon themselves. "As to an imaginary cry," said I, "do but listen for a moment to the wind in this unnatural valley while we speak so low, and to the wild harp it makes of the telegraph wires!"

That was all very well, he returned, after we had sat listening for a while, and he ought to know something of the wind and the wires, he who so often passed long winter nights there, alone and watching. But he would beg to remark that he had not finished.

I asked his pardon, and he slowly added these words, touching my arm:

"Within six hours after the Appearance, the memorable accident on this Line happened, and within ten hours the dead and wounded were brought along through the tunnel over the spot where the figure had stood."

A disagreeable shudder crept over me, but I did my best against it. It was not to be denied, I rejoined, that this was a remarkable coincidence, calculated deeply to impress his mind. But, it was unquestionable that remarkable coincidences did continually occur, and they must be taken into account in dealing with such a subject. Though to be sure I must admit, I added (for I thought I saw that he was going to bring the objection to bear upon me), men of common sense did not allow much for coincidences in making the ordinary calculations of life.

He again begged to remark that he had not finished.

I again begged his pardon for being betrayed into interruptions.

"This," he said, again laying his hand upon my arm, and glancing over his shoulder with hollow eyes, "was just a year ago. Six or seven months passed, and I had recovered from the surprise and shock, when one morning, as the day was breaking, I, standing at that door, looked towards the red light, and saw the spectre again." He stopped, with a fixed look at me.

"Did it cry out?"

"No. It was silent."

"Did it wave its arm?"

"No. It leaned against the shaft of the light, with both hands before the face. Like this."

Once more, I followed his action with my eyes. It was an action of mourning. I have seen such an attitude in stone figures on tombs.

"Did you go up to it?"

"I came in and sat down, partly to collect my thoughts, partly because it had turned me faint. When I went to the door again, daylight was above me, and the ghost was gone."

"But nothing followed? Nothing came of this?"

He touched me on the arm with his forefinger twice or thrice, giving a ghastly nod each time:

"That very day, as a train came out of the tunnel, I noticed, at a carriage window on my side, what looked like a confusion of hands and heads, and something waved. I saw it, just in time to signal the driver, Stop! He shut off, and put his brake on, but the train drifted past here a hundred and fifty yards or more. I ran after it, and, as I went along, heard terrible screams and cries. A beautiful young lady had died instantaneously in one of the compartments, and was brought in here, and laid down on this floor between us."

Involuntarily, I pushed my chair back, as I looked from the boards at which he pointed, to himself.

"True, sir. True. Precisely as it happened, so I tell it you."

I could think of nothing to say, to any purpose, and my mouth was very dry. The wind and the wires took up the story with a long lamenting wail.

He resumed. "Now, sir, mark this, and judge how my mind is troubled. The spectre came back, a week ago. Ever since, it has been there, now and again, by fits and starts."

"At the light?"

"At the Danger-light."

"What does it seem to do?"

He repeated, if possible with increased passion and vehemence, that former gesticulation of "For God's sake clear the way!"

Then, he went on. "I have no peace or rest for it. It calls to me, for many minutes together, in an agonised manner, 'Below there! Look out! Look out!' It stands waving to me. It rings my little bell—"

I caught at that. "Did it ring your bell yesterday evening when I was here, and you went to the door?"

“Twice.”

“Why, see,” said I, “how your imagination misleads you. My eyes were on the bell, and my ears were open to the bell, and if I am a living man, it did not ring at those times. No, nor at any other time, except when it was rung in the natural course of physical things by the station communicating with you.”

He shook his head. “I have never made a mistake as to that, yet, sir. I have never confused the spectre’s ring with the man’s. The ghost’s ring is a strange vibration in the bell that it derives from nothing else, and I have not asserted that the bell stirs to the eye. I don’t wonder that you failed to hear it. But *I* heard it.”

“And did the spectre seem to be there, when you looked out?”

“It was there.”

“Both times?”

He repeated firmly: “Both times.”

“Will you come to the door with me, and look for it now?”

He bit his under-lip as though he were somewhat unwilling, but arose. I opened the door, and stood on the step, while he stood in the doorway. There, was the Danger-light. There, was the dismal mouth of the tunnel. There, were the high wet stone walls of the cutting. There, were the stars above them.

“Do you see it?” I asked him, taking particular note of his face. His eyes were prominent and strained; but not very much more so, perhaps, than my own had been when I had directed them earnestly towards the same spot.

“No,” he answered. “It is not there.”

“Agreed,” said I.

We went in again, shut the door, and resumed our seats. I was thinking how best to improve this advantage, if it might be called one, when he took up the conversation in such a matter of course way, so assuming that there could be no serious question of fact between us, that I felt myself placed in the weakest of positions.

“By this time you will fully understand, sir,” he said, “that what troubles me so dreadfully, is the question, What does the spectre mean?”

I was not sure, I told him, that I did fully understand.

“What is its warning against?” he said, ruminating, with his eyes on the fire, and only by times turning them on me. “What is the danger? Where is the danger? There is danger overhanging, somewhere on the Line. Some dreadful calamity will happen. It is not to be doubted this third time, after what has gone before. But surely this is a cruel haunting of *me*. What can *I* do!”

He pulled out his handkerchief, and wiped the drops from his heated forehead.

“If I telegraph Danger, on either side of me, or on both, I can give no reason for it,” he went on, wiping the palms of his hands. “I should get into trouble, and do no good. They would think I was mad. This is the way it would work:—Message: ‘Danger! Take care!’ Answer: ‘What danger? Where?’ Message: ‘Don’t know. But for God’s sake take care!’ They would displace me. What else could they do?”

His pain of mind was most pitiable to see. It was the mental torture of a conscientious man, oppressed beyond endurance by an unintelligible responsibility involving life.

“When it first stood under the Danger-light,” he went on, putting his dark hair back from his head, and drawing his hands outward across and across his temples in an extremity of feverish distress, “why not tell me where that accident was to happen—if it must happen? Why not tell me how it could be averted—if it could have been averted? When on its second coming it hid its face, why not tell me instead: ‘She is going to die. Let them keep her at home’? If it came, on those two occasions, only to show me that its warnings were true, and so to prepare me for the third, why not warn me plainly now? And I, Lord help me! A mere poor signal-man on this solitary station! Why not go to somebody with credit to be believed, and power to act!”

When I saw him in this state, I saw that for the poor man’s sake, as well as for the public safety, what I had to do for the time was, to compose his mind. Therefore, setting aside all question of reality or unreality between us, I represented to him that whoever thoroughly discharged his duty, must do well, and that at least it was his comfort that he understood his duty, though he did not understand these confounding Appearances. In this effort I succeeded far better than in the attempt to reason him out of his conviction. He became calm; the occupations incidental to his post as the night advanced, began to make larger demands on his attention; and I left him at two in the morning. I had offered to stay through the night, but he would not hear of it.

That I more than once looked back at the red light as I ascended the pathway, that I did not like the red light, and that I should have slept but poorly if my bed had been under it, I see no reason to conceal. Nor, did I like the two sequences of the accident and the dead girl. I see no reason to conceal that, either.

But, what ran most in my thoughts was the consideration how ought I to act, having become the recipient of this disclosure? I had proved the man to be intelligent, vigilant, painstaking, and exact; but how long might he remain so, in his state of mind? Though in a subordinate position, still he held a most important trust, and would I (for instance) like to stake my own life on the chances of his continuing to execute it with precision?

Unable to overcome a feeling that there would be something treacherous in my communicating what he had told me, to his superiors in the Company, without first being plain with himself and proposing a middle course to him, I ultimately resolved to offer to accompany him (otherwise keeping his secret for the present) to the wisest medical practitioner we could hear of in those parts, and to take his opinion. A change in his time of duty would come round next night, he had apprised me, and he would be off an hour or two after sunrise, and on again soon after sunset. I had appointed to return accordingly.

Next evening was a lovely evening, and I walked out early to enjoy it. The sun was not yet quite down when I traversed the field-path near the top of the deep cutting. I would extend my walk for an hour, I said to myself, half an hour on and half an hour back, and it would then be time to go to my signal-man's box.

Before pursuing my stroll, I stepped to the brink, and mechanically looked down, from the point from which I had first seen him. I cannot describe the thrill that seized upon me, when, close at the mouth of the tunnel, I saw the appearance of a man, with his left sleeve across his eyes, passionately waving his right arm.

The nameless horror that oppressed me, passed in a moment, for in a moment I saw that this appearance of a man was a man indeed, and that there was a little group of other men standing at a short distance, to whom he seemed to be rehearsing the gesture he made. The Danger-light was not yet lighted. Against its shaft, a little low hut, entirely new to me, had been made of some wooden supports and tarpaulin. It looked no bigger than a bed.

With an irresistible sense that something was wrong—with a flashing self-reproachful fear that fatal mischief had come of my leaving the man there, and causing no one to be sent to overlook or correct what he did—I descended the notched path with all the speed I could make.

“What is the matter?” I asked the men.

“Signal-man killed this morning, sir.”

“Not the man belonging to that box?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Not the man I know?”

“You will recognise him, sir, if you knew him,” said the man who spoke for the others, solemnly uncovering his own head and raising an end of the tarpaulin, “for his face is quite composed.”

“O! how did this happen, how did this happen?” I asked, turning from one to another as the hut closed in again.

“He was cut down by an engine, sir. No man in England knew his work better. But somehow he was not clear of the outer rail. It was just at broad day. He had struck the light, and had the lamp in his hand. As the engine came out of the tunnel, his back was towards her, and she cut him down. That man drove her, and was showing how it happened. Show the gentleman, Tom.”

The man, who wore a rough dark dress, stepped back to his former place at the mouth of the tunnel:

“Coming round the curve in the tunnel, sir,” he said, “I saw him at the end, like as if I saw him down a perspective-glass. There was no time to check speed, and I knew him to be very careful. As he didn’t seem to take heed of the whistle, I shut it off when we were running down upon him, and called to him as loud as I could call.”

“What did you say?”

“I said, Below there! Look out! Look out! For God’s sake clear the way!”

I started.

“Ah! it was a dreadful time, sir. I never left off calling to him. I put this arm before my eyes, not to see, and I waved this arm to the last; but it was no use.”

Without prolonging the narrative to dwell on any one of its curious circumstances more than on any other, I may, in closing it, point out the coincidence that the warning of the Engine-Driver included, not only the words which the unfortunate Signal-man had repeated to me as haunting him, but also the words which I myself—not he—had attached, and that only in my own mind, to the gesticulation he had imitated.

No. 2 BRANCH LINE
THE ENGINE-DRIVER

“Altogether? Well. Altogether, since 1841, I’ve killed seven men and boys. It ain’t many in all those years.”

These startling words he uttered in a serious tone as he leaned against the Station-wall. He was a thick-set, ruddy-faced man, with coal-black eyes, the whites of which were not white, but a brownish-yellow, and apparently scarred and seamed, as if they had been operated upon. They were eyes that had worked hard in looking through wind and weather. He was dressed in a short black pea-jacket and grimy white canvas trousers, and wore on his head a flat black cap. There was no sign of levity in his face. His look was serious even to sadness, and there was an air of responsibility about his whole bearing which assured me that he spoke in earnest.

“Yes, sir, I have been for five-and-twenty years a Locomotive Engine-driver; and in all that time, I’ve only killed seven men and boys. There’s not many of my mates as can say as much for themselves. Steadiness, sir—steadiness and keeping your eyes open, is what does it. When I say seven men and boys, I mean my mates—stokers, porters, and so forth. I don’t count passengers.”

How did he become an engine-driver?

“My father,” he said, “was a wheelwright in a small way, and lived in a little cottage by the side of the railway which runs betwixt Leeds and Selby. It was the second railway laid down in the kingdom, the second after the Liverpool and Manchester, where Mr. Huskisson was killed, as you may have heard on, sir. When the trains rushed by, we young ’uns used to run out to look at ’em, and hooray. I noticed the driver turning handles, and making it go, and I thought to myself it would be a fine thing to be a engine-driver, and have the control of a wonderful machine like that. Before the railway, the driver of the mail-coach was the biggest man I knew. I thought I should like to be the driver of a coach. We had a picture in our cottage of George the Third in a red coat. I always mixed up the driver of the mail-coach—who had a red coat, too—with the king, only he had a low-crowned broad-brimmed hat, which the king hadn't. In my idea, the king couldn't be a greater man than the driver of the mail-coach. I had always a fancy to be a head man of some kind. When I went to Leeds once, and saw a man conducting a orchestra, I thought I should like to be the conductor of a orchestra. When I went home I made myself a baton, and went about the fields conducting a orchestra. It wasn't there, of course, but I pretended it was. At another time, a man with a whip and a speaking-trumpet, on the stage outside a show, took my fancy, and I thought I should like to be him. But when the train came, the engine-driver put them all in the shade, and I was resolved to be a engine-driver. It wasn't long before I had to do something to earn my own living, though I was only a young 'un. My father died suddenly—he was killed by thunder and lightning while standing under a tree out of the rain—and mother couldn't keep us all. The day after my father's burial I walked down to the station, and said I wanted to be a engine-driver. The station-master laughed a bit, said I was for beginning early, but that I was not quite big enough yet. He gave me a penny, and told me to go home and grow, and come again in ten years' time. I didn't dream of danger then. If I couldn't be a engine-driver, I was determined to have something to do about a engine; so, as I could get nothing else, I went on board a Humber steamer, and broke up coals for the stoker. That was how I began. From that, I became a stoker, first on board a boat, and then on a locomotive. Then, after two years' service, I became a driver on the very Line which passed our cottage. My mother and my brothers and sisters came out to look at me, the first day I drove. I was watching for them and they was watching for me, and they waved their hands and hoora'd, and I waved my hand to them. I had the steam well up, and was going at a rattling pace, and rare proud I was that minute. Never was so proud in my life!

"When a man has a liking for a thing it's as good as being clever. In a very short time I became one of the best drivers on the Line. That was allowed. I took a pride in it, you see, and liked it. No, I didn't know much about the engine scientifically, as you call it; but I could put her to rights if anything went out of gear—that is to say, if there was nothing broken—but I couldn't have explained how the steam worked inside. Starting a engine, it's just like drawing a drop of gin. You turn a handle and off she goes; then you turn the handle the other way, put on the brakes, and you stop her. There's not much more in it, so far. It's no good being scientific and knowing the principle of the engine inside; no good at all. Fitters, who know all the ins and outs of the engine, make the worst drivers. That’s well known. They know too much. It’s just as I’ve heard of a man with regard to *his* inside: if he knew what a complicated machine it is, he would never eat, or drink, or dance, or run, or do anything, for fear of busting something. So it is with fitters. But us as are not troubled with such thoughts, we go ahead.

“But starting a engine’s one thing and driving of her is another. Any one, a child a’most, can turn on the steam and turn it off again; but it ain’t every one that can keep a engine well on the road, no more than it ain’t every one who can ride a horse properly. It is much the same thing. If you gallop a horse right off for a mile or two, you take the wind out of him, and for the next mile or two you must let him trot or walk. So it is with a engine. If you put on too much steam, to get over the ground at the start, you exhaust the boiler, and then you’ll have to crawl along till your fresh water boils up. The great thing in driving, is, to go steady, never to let your water get too low, nor your fire too low. It’s the same with a kettle. If you fill it up when it’s about half empty, it soon comes to the boil again; but if you don’t fill it up until the water’s nearly out, it’s a long time in coming to the boil again. Another thing; you should never make spurts, unless you are detained and lose time. You should go up a incline and down a incline at the same pace. Sometimes a driver will waste his steam, and when he comes to a hill he has scarcely enough to drag him up. When you’re in a train that goes by fits and starts, you may be sure that there is a bad driver on the engine. That kind of driving frightens passengers dreadful. When the train, after rattling along, suddenly slackens speed when it ain’t near a station, it may be in the middle of a tunnel, the passengers think there is danger. But generally it’s because the driver has exhausted his steam.

“I drove the Brighton express, four or five years before I come here, and the annuals—that is, the passengers who had annual tickets—always said they knew when I was on the engine, because they wasn’t jerked. Gentlemen used to say as they came on to the platform, ‘Who drives to-day—Jim Martin?’ And when the guard told them yes, they said ‘All right,’ and took their seats quite comfortable. But the driver never gets so much as a shilling; the guard comes in for all that, and he does nothing much. Few ever think of the driver. I dare say they think the train goes along of itself; yet if we didn’t keep a sharp look-out, know our duty, and do it, they might all go smash at any moment. I used to make that journey to Brighton in fifty-two minutes. The papers said forty-nine minutes, but that was coming it a little too strong. I had to watch signals all the way, one every two miles, so that me and my stoker were on the stretch all the time, doing two things at once—attending to the engine and looking out. I've driven on this Line, eighty-one miles and three-quarters, in eighty-six minutes. There's no danger in speed if you have a good road, a good engine, and not too many coaches behind. No, we don't call them carriages, we call them 'coaches.'

"Yes; oscillation means danger. If you're ever in a coach that oscillates much, tell of it at the first station and get it coupled up closer. Coaches when they're too loose are apt to jump, or swing off the rails; and it's quite as dangerous when they're coupled up too close. There ought to be just space enough for the buffers to work easy. Passengers are frightened in tunnels, but there's less danger, *now*, in tunnels than anywhere else. We never enter a tunnel unless it's signalled Clear.

"A train can be stopped wonderful quick, even when running express, if the guards act with the driver and clap on all the brakes promptly. Much depends upon the guards. One brake behind, is as good as two in front. The engine, you see, loses weight as she burns her coals and consumes her water, but the coaches behind don't alter. We have a good deal of trouble with young guards. In their anxiety to perform their duties, they put on the brakes too soon, so that sometimes we can scarcely drag the train into the station; when they grow older at it they are not so anxious, and don't put them on soon enough. It's no use to say, when an accident happens, that they did not put on the brakes in time; they swear they did, and you can't prove that they didn't.

"Do I think that the tapping of the wheels with a hammer is a mere ceremony? Well, I don't know exactly; I should not like to say. It's not often that the chaps find anything wrong. They may sometimes be half asleep when a train comes into a station in the middle of the night. You would be yourself. They ought to tap the axle-box, but they don't.

"Many accidents take place that never get into the papers; many trains, full of passengers, escape being dashed to pieces by next door to a miracle. Nobody knows anything about it but the driver and the stoker. I remember once, when I was driving on the Eastern Counties. Going round a curve, I suddenly saw a train coming along on the same line of rails. I clapped on the brake, but it was too late, I thought. Seeing the engine almost close upon us, I cried to my stoker to jump. He jumped off the engine, almost before the words were out of my mouth. I was just taking my hand off the lever to follow, when the coming train turned off on the points, and the next instant the hind coach passed my engine by a shave. It was the nearest touch I ever saw. My stoker was killed. In another half second I should have jumped off and been killed too. What would have become of the train without us is more than I can tell you.

“There are heaps of people run over, that no one ever hears about. One dark night in the Black Country, me and my mate felt something wet and warm splash in our faces. ‘That didn’t come from the engine, Bill,’ I said. ‘No,’ he said; ‘it’s something thick, Jim.’ It was blood. That’s what it was. We heard afterwards that a collier had been run over. When we kill any of our own chaps, we say as little about it as possible. It’s generally—mostly always—their own fault. No, we never think of danger ourselves. We’re used to it, you see. But we’re not reckless. I don’t believe there’s any body of men that takes more pride in their work than engine-drivers do. We are as proud and as fond of our engines as if they were living things; as proud of them as a huntsman or a jockey is of his horse. And a engine has almost as many ways as a horse; she’s a kicker, a plunger, a roarer, or what not, in her way. Put a stranger on to my engine, and he wouldn’t know what to do with her. Yes; there’s wonderful improvements in engines since the last great Exhibition. Some of them mugbypagetake up their water without stopping. That’s a wonderful invention, and yet as simple as A B C. There are water-troughs at certain places, lying between the rails. By moving a lever you let down the mouth of a scoop into the water, and as you rush along the water is forced into the tank, at the rate of three thousand gallons a minute.

“A engine-driver’s chief anxiety is to keep time; that’s what he thinks most of. When I was driving the Brighton express, I always felt like as if I was riding a race against time. I had no fear of the pace; what I feared was losing way, and not getting in to the minute. We have to give in an account of our time when we arrive. The company provides us with watches, and we go by them. Before starting on a journey, we pass through a room to be inspected. That’s to see if we are sober. But they don’t say nothing to us, and a man who was a little gone might pass easy. I’ve known a stoker that had passed the inspection, come on to the engine as drunk as a fly, flop down among the coals, and sleep there like a log for the whole run. I had to be my own stoker then. If you ask me if engine-drivers are drinking men, I must answer you that they are pretty well. It's trying work; one half of you cold as ice; t'other half hot as fire; wet one minute, dry the next. If ever a man had an excuse for drinking, that man's a engine-driver. And yet I don't know if ever a driver goes upon his engine drunk. If he was to, the wind would soon sober him.

"I believe engine-drivers, as a body, are the healthiest fellows alive; but they don't live long. The cause of that, I believe to be the cold food, and the shaking. By the cold food, I mean that a engine-driver never gets his meals comfortable. He's never at home to his dinner. When he starts away the first thing in the morning, he takes a bit of cold meat and a piece of bread with him for his dinner; and generally he has to eat it in the shed, for he mustn't leave his engine. You can understand how the jolting and shaking knocks a man up, after a bit. The insurance companies won't take us at ordinary rates. We're obliged to be Foresters, or Old Friends, or that sort of thing, where they ain't so particular. The wages of a engine-driver average about eight shillings a day, but if he's a good schemer with his coals—yes, I mean if he economises his coals—he's allowed so much more. Some will make from five to ten shillings a week that way. I don't complain of the wages particular; but it's hard lines for such as us, to have to pay income-tax. The company gives an account of all our wages, and we have to pay. It's a shame.

"Our domestic life—our life at home, you mean? Well, as to that, we don't see much of our families. I leave home at half-past seven in the morning, and don't get back again until half-past nine, or maybe later. The children are not up when I leave, and they've gone to bed again before I come home. This is about my day:—Leave London at 8.45; drive for four hours and a half; cold snack on the engine step; see to engine; drive back again; clean engine; report myself; and home. Twelve hours' hard and anxious work, and no comfortable victuals. Yes, our wives are anxious about us; for we never know when we go out, if we'll ever come back again. We ought to go home the minute we leave the station, and report ourselves to those that are thinking on us and depending on us; but I'm afraid we don't always. Perhaps we go first to the public-house, and perhaps you would, too, if you were in charge of a engine all day long. But the wives have a way of their own, of finding out if we're all right. They inquire among each other. 'Have you seen my Jim?' one says. 'No,' says another, ‘but Jack see him coming out of the station half an hour ago.’ Then she knows that her Jim’s all right, and knows where to find him if she wants him. It’s a sad thing when any of us have to carry bad news to a mate’s wife. None of us likes that job. I remember when Jack Davidge was killed, none of us could face his poor missus with the news. She had seven children, poor thing, and two of ’em, the youngest, was down with the fever. We got old Mrs. Berridge—Tom Berridge’s mother—to break it to her. But she knew summat was the matter, the minute the old woman went in, and, afore she spoke a word, fell down like as if she was dead. She lay all night like that, and never heard from mortal lips until next morning that her Jack was killed. But she knew it in her heart. It’s a pitch and toss kind of a life ours!

“And yet I never was nervous on a engine but once. I never think of my own life. You go in for staking that, when you begin, and you get used to the risk. I never think of the passengers either. The thoughts of a engine-driver never go behind his engine. If he keeps his engine all right, the coaches behind will be all right, as far as the driver is concerned. But once I *did* think of the passengers. My little boy, Bill, was among them that morning. He was a poor little cripple fellow that we all loved more nor the others, because he *was* a cripple, and so quiet, and wise-like. He was going down to his aunt in the country, who was to take care of him for a while. We thought the country air would do him good. I did think there were lives behind me that morning; at least, I thought hard of one little life that was in my hands. There were twenty coaches on; my little Bill seemed to me to be in every one of ’em. My hand trembled as I turned on the steam. I felt my heart thumping as we drew close to the pointsman’s box; as we neared the Junction, I was all in a cold sweat. At the end of the first fifty miles I was nearly eleven minutes behind time. ‘What’s the matter with you this morning?’ my stoker said. ‘Did you have a drop too much last night?’ ‘Don’t speak to me, Fred,’ I said, ‘till we get to Peterborough; and keep a sharp look-out, there’s a good fellow.’ I never was so thankful in my life as when I shut off steam to enter the station at Peterborough. Little Bill’s aunt was waiting for him, and I saw her lift him out of the carriage. I called out to her to bring him to me, and I took him upon the engine and kissed him—ah, twenty times I should think—making him in such a mess with grease and coal-dust as you never saw.

“I was all right for the rest of the journey. And I do believe, sir, the passengers were safer after little Bill was gone. It would never do, you see, for engine-drivers to know too much, or to feel too much.”

No. 3 BRANCH LINE
THE COMPENSATION HOUSE

"There's not a looking-glass in all the house, sir. It's some peculiar fancy of my master's. There isn't one in any single room in the house."

It was a dark and gloomy-looking building, and had been purchased by this Company for an enlargement of their Goods Station. The value of the house had been referred to what was popularly called "a compensation jury," and the house was called, in consequence, The Compensation House. It had become the Company's property; but its tenant still remained in possession, pending the commencement of active building operations. My attention was originally drawn to this house because it stood directly in front of a collection of huge pieces of timber which lay near this part of the Line, and on which I sometimes sat for half an hour at a time, when I was tired by my wanderings about Mugby Junction.

It was square, cold, grey-looking, built of rough-hewn stone, and roofed with thin slabs of the same material. Its windows were few in number, and very small for the size of the building. In the great blank, grey broad-side, there were only four windows. The entrance-door was in the middle of the house; there was a window on either side of it, and there were two more in the single story above. The blinds were all closely drawn, and, when the door was shut, the dreary building gave no sign of life or occupation.

But the door was not always shut. Sometimes it was opened from within, with a great jingling of bolts and door-chains, and then a man would come forward and stand upon the door-step, snuffing the air as one might do who was ordinarily kept on rather a small allowance of that element. He was stout, thick-set, and perhaps fifty or sixty years old—a man whose hair was cut exceedingly close, who wore a large bushy beard, and whose eye had a sociable twinkle in it which was prepossessing. He was dressed, whenever I saw him, in a greenish-brown frock-coat made of some material which was not cloth, wore a waistcoat and trousers of light colour, and had a frill to his shirt—an ornament, by the way, which did not seem to go at all well with the beard, which was continually in contact with it. It was the custom of this worthy person, after standing for a short time on the threshold inhaling the air, to come forward into the road, and, after glancing at one of the upper windows in a half mechanical way, to cross over to the logs, and, leaning over the fence which guarded the railway, to look up and down the Line (it passed before the house) with the air of a man accomplishing a self-imposed task of which nothing was expected to come. This done, he would cross the road again, and turning on the threshold to take a final sniff of air, disappeared once more within the house, bolting and chaining the door again as if there were no probability of its being reopened for at least a week. Yet half an hour had not passed before he was out in the road again, sniffing the air and looking up and down the Line as before.

It was not very long before I managed to scrape acquaintance with this restless personage. I soon found out that my friend with the shirt-frill was the confidential servant, butler, valet, factotum, what you will, of a sick gentleman, a Mr. Oswald Strange, who had recently come to inhabit the house opposite, and concerning whose history my new acquaintance, whose name I ascertained was Masey, seemed disposed to be somewhat communicative. His master, it appeared, had come down to this place, partly for the sake of reducing his establishment—not, Mr. Masey was swift to inform me, on economical principles, but because the poor gentleman, for particular reasons, wished to have few dependents about him—partly in order that he might be near his old friend, Dr. Garden, who was established in the neighbourhood, and whose society and advice were necessary to Mr. Strange's life. That life was, it appeared, held by this suffering gentleman on a precarious tenure. It was ebbing away fast with each passing hour. The servant already spoke of his master in the past tense, describing him to me as a young gentleman not more than five-and-thirty years of age, with a young face, as far as the features and build of it went, but with an expression which had nothing of youth about it. This was the great peculiarity of the man. At a distance he looked younger than he was by many years, and strangers, at the time when he had been used to get about, always took him for a man of seven or eight-and-twenty, but they changed their minds on getting nearer to him. Old Masey had a way of his own of summing up the peculiarities of his master, repeating twenty times over: "Sir, he was Strange by name, and Strange by nature, and Strange to look at into the bargain."

It was during my second or third interview with the old fellow that he uttered the words quoted at the beginning of this plain narrative.

“Not such a thing as a looking-glass in all the house,” the old man said, standing beside my piece of timber, and looking across reflectively at the house opposite. “Not one.”

“In the sitting-rooms, I suppose you mean?”

“No, sir, I mean sitting-rooms and bedrooms both; there isn’t so much as a shaving-glass as big as the palm of your hand anywhere.”

“But how is it?” I asked. “Why are there no looking-glasses in any of the rooms?”

“Ah, sir!” replied Masey, “that’s what none of us can ever tell. There is the mystery. It’s just a fancy on the part of my master. He had some strange fancies, and this was one of them. A pleasant gentleman he was to live with, as any servant could desire. A liberal gentleman, and one who gave but little trouble; always ready with a kind word, and a kind deed, too, for the matter of that. There was not a house in all the parish of St. George’s (in which we lived before we came down here) where the servants had more holidays or a better table kept; but, for all that, he had his queer ways and his fancies, as I may call them, and this was one of them. And the point he made of it, sir,” the old man went on; “the extent to which that regulation was enforced, whenever a new servant was engaged; and the changes in the establishment it occasioned. In hiring a new servant, the very first stipulation made, was that about the looking-glasses. It was one of my duties to explain the thing, as far as it could be explained, before any servant was taken into the house. ‘You’ll find it an easy place,’ I used to say, ‘with a liberal table, good wages, and a deal of leisure; but there’s one thing you must make up your mind to; you must do without looking-glasses while you’re here, for there isn’t one in the house, and, what’s more, there never will be.’”

“But how did you know there never would be one?” I asked.

“Lor’ bless you, sir! If you’d seen and heard all that I’d seen and heard, you could have no doubt about it. Why, only to take one instance:—I remember a particular day when my master had occasion to go into the housekeeper’s room where the cook lived, to see about some alterations that were making, and when a pretty scene took place. The cook—she was a very ugly woman, and awful vain—had left a little bit of looking-glass, about six inches square, upon the chimney-piece; she had got it *surreptious*, and kept it always locked up; but she’d left it out, being called away suddenly, while titivating her hair. I had seen the glass, and was making for the chimney-piece as fast as I could; but master came in front of it before I could get there, and it was all over in a moment. He gave one long piercing look into it, turned deadly pale, and seizing the glass, dashed it into a hundred pieces on the floor, and then stamped upon the fragments and ground them into powder with his feet. He shut himself up for the rest of that day in his own room, first ordering me to discharge the cook, then and there, at a moment's notice."

"What an extraordinary thing!" I said, pondering.

"Ah, sir," continued the old man, "it was astonishing what trouble I had with those women-servants. It was difficult to get any that would take the place at all under the circumstances. 'What not so much as a mossul to do one's 'air at?' they would say, and they'd go off, in spite of extra wages. Then those who did consent to come, what lies they would tell, to be sure! They would protest that they didn't want to look in the glass, that they never had been in the habit of looking in the glass, and all the while that very wench would have her looking-glass of some kind or another, hid away among her clothes up-stairs. Sooner or later, she would bring it out too, and leave it about somewhere or other (just like the cook), where it was as likely as not that master might see it. And then—for girls like that have no consciences, sir—when I had caught one of 'em at it, she'd turn round as bold as brass, 'And how am I to know whether my 'air's parted straight?' she'd say, just as if it hadn't been considered in her wages that that was the very thing which she never *was* to know while she lived in our house. A vain lot, sir, and the ugly ones always the vainest. There was no end to their dodges. They'd have looking-glasses in the interiors of their workbox-lids, where it was next to impossible that I could find 'em, or inside the covers of hymn-books, or cookery-books, or in their caddies. I recollect one girl, a sly one she was, and marked with the small-pox terrible, who was always reading her prayer-book at odd times. Sometimes I used to think what a religious mind she'd got, and at other times (depending on the mood I was in) I would conclude that it was the marriage-service she was studying; but one day, when I got behind her to satisfy my doubts—lo and behold! it was the old story: a bit of glass, without a frame, fastened into the kiver with the outside edges of the sheets of postage-stamps. Dodges! Why they'd keep their looking-glasses in the scullery or the coal-cellar, or leave them in charge of the servants next door, or with the milk-woman round the corner; but have 'em they would. And I don't mind confessing, sir," said the old man, bringing his long speech to an end, “that it *was* an inconveniency not to have so much as a scrap to shave before. I used to go to the barber’s at first, but I soon gave that up, and took to wearing my beard as my master did; likewise to keeping my hair”—Mr. Masey touched his head as he spoke—“so short, that it didn’t require any parting, before or behind.”

I sat for some time lost in amazement, and staring at my companion. My curiosity was powerfully stimulated, and the desire to learn more was very strong within me.

“Had your master any personal defect,” I inquired, “which might have made it distressing to him to see his own image reflected?”

“By no means, sir,” said the old man. “He was as handsome a gentleman as you would wish to see: a little delicate-looking and careworn, perhaps, with a very pale face; but as free from any deformity as you or I, sir. No, sir, no; it was nothing of that.”

“Then what was it? What is it?” I asked, desperately. “Is there no one who is, or has been, in your master’s confidence?”

“Yes, sir,” said the old fellow, with his eyes turning to that window opposite. “There is one person who knows all my master’s secrets, and this secret among the rest.”

“And who is that?”

The old man turned round and looked at me fixedly. “The doctor here,” he said. “Dr. Garden. My master’s very old friend.”

“I should like to speak with this gentleman,” I said, involuntarily.

“He is with my master now,” answered Masey. “He will be coming out presently, and I think I may say he will answer any question you may like to put to him.” As the old man spoke, the door of the house opened, and a middle-aged gentleman, who was tall and thin, but who lost something of his height by a habit of stooping, appeared on the step. Old Masey left me in a moment. He muttered something about taking the doctor’s directions, and hastened across the road. The tall gentleman spoke to him for a minute or two very seriously, probably about the patient up-stairs, and it then seemed to me from their gestures that I myself was the subject of some further conversation between them. At all events, when old Masey retired into the house, the doctor came across to where I was standing, and addressed me with a very agreeable smile.

“John Masey tells me that you are interested in the case of my poor friend, sir. I am now going back to my house, and if you don’t mind the trouble of walking with me, I shall be happy to enlighten you as far as I am able."

I hastened to make my apologies and express my acknowledgments, and we set off together. When we had reached the doctor's house and were seated in his study, I ventured to inquire after the health of this poor gentleman.

"I am afraid there is no amendment, nor any prospect of amendment," said the doctor. "Old Masey has told you something of his strange condition, has he not?"

"Yes, he has told me something," I answered, "and he says you know all about it."

Dr. Garden looked very grave. "I don't know all about it. I only know what happens when he comes into the presence of a looking-glass. But as to the circumstances which have led to his being haunted in the strangest fashion that I ever heard of, I know no more of them than you do."

"Haunted?" I repeated. "And in the strangest fashion that you ever heard of?"

Dr. Garden smiled at my eagerness, seemed to be collecting his thoughts, and presently went on:

"I made the acquaintance of Mr. Oswald Strange in a curious way. It was on board of an Italian steamer, bound from Civita Vecchia to Marseilles. We had been travelling all night. In the morning I was shaving myself in the cabin, when suddenly this man came behind me, glanced for a moment into the small mirror before which I was standing, and then, without a word of warning, tore it from the nail, and dashed it to pieces at my feet. His face was at first livid with passion—it seemed to me rather the passion of fear than of anger—but it changed after a moment, and he seemed ashamed of what he had done. Well," continued the doctor, relapsing for a moment into a smile, "of course I was in a devil of a rage. I was operating on my under-jaw, and the start the thing gave me caused me to cut myself. Besides, altogether it seemed an outrageous and insolent thing, and I gave it to poor Strange in a style of language which I am sorry to think of now, but which, I hope, was excusable at the time. As to the offender himself, his confusion and regret, now that his passion was at an end, disarmed me. He sent for the steward, and paid most liberally for the damage done to the steam-boat property, explaining to him, and to some other passengers who were present in the cabin, that what had happened had been accidental. For me, however, he had another explanation. Perhaps he felt that I must know it to have been no accident—perhaps he really wished to confide in some one. At all events, he owned to me that what he had done was done under the influence of an uncontrollable impulse—a seizure which took him, he said, at times—something like a fit. He begged my pardon, and entreated that I would endeavour to disassociate him personally from this action, of which he was heartily ashamed. Then he attempted a sickly joke, poor fellow, about his wearing a beard, and feeling a little spiteful, in consequence, when he saw other people taking the trouble to shave; but he said nothing about any infirmity or delusion, and shortly after left me.

"In my professional capacity I could not help taking some interest in Mr. Strange. I did not altogether lose sight of him after our sea-journey to Marseilles was over. I found him a pleasant companion up to a certain point; but I always felt that there was a reserve about him. He was uncommunicative about his past life, and especially would never allude to anything connected with his travels or his residence in Italy, which, however, I could make out had been a long one. He spoke Italian well, and seemed familiar with the country, but disliked to talk about it.

"During the time we spent together there were seasons when he was so little himself, that I, with a pretty large experience, was almost afraid to be with him. His attacks were violent and sudden in the last degree; and there was one most extraordinary feature connected with them all:—some horrible association of ideas took possession of him whenever he found himself before a looking-glass. And after we had travelled together for a time, I dreaded the sight of a mirror hanging harmlessly against a wall, or a toilet-glass standing on a dressing-table, almost as much as he did.

"Poor Strange was not always affected in the same manner by a looking-glass. Sometimes it seemed to madden him with fury; at other times, it appeared to turn him to stone: remaining motionless and speechless as if attacked by catalepsy. One night—the worst things always happen at night, and oftener than one would think on stormy nights—we arrived at a small town in the central district of Auvergne: a place but little known, out of the line of railways, and to which we had been drawn, partly by the antiquarian attractions which the place possessed, and partly by the beauty of the scenery. The weather had been rather against us. The day had been dull and murky, the heat stifling, and the sky had threatened mischief since the morning. At sundown, these threats were fulfilled. The thunderstorm, which had been all day coming up—as it seemed to us, against the wind—burst over the place where we were lodged, with very great violence.

"There are some practical-minded persons with strong constitutions, who deny roundly that their fellow-creatures are, or can be, affected, in mind or body, by atmospheric influences. I am not a disciple of that school, simply because I cannot believe that those changes of weather, which have so much effect upon animals, and even on inanimate objects, can fail to have some influence on a piece of machinery so sensitive and intricate as the human frame. I think, then, that it was in part owing to the disturbed state of the atmosphere that, on this particular evening I felt nervous and depressed. When my new friend Strange and I parted for the night, I felt as little disposed to go to rest as I ever did in my life. The thunder was still lingering among the mountains in the midst of which our inn was placed. Sometimes it seemed nearer, and at other times further off; but it never left off altogether, except for a few minutes at a time. I was quite unable to shake off a succession of painful ideas which persistently besieged my mind.

"It is hardly necessary to add that I thought from time to time of my travelling-companion in the next room. His image was almost continually before me. He had been dull and depressed all the evening, and when we parted for the night there was a look in his eyes which I could not get out of my memory.

"There was a door between our rooms, and the partition dividing them was not very solid; and yet I had heard no sound since I parted from him which could indicate that he was there at all, much less that he was awake and stirring. I was in a mood, sir, which made this silence terrible to me, and so many foolish fancies—as that he was lying there dead, or in a fit, or what not—took possession of me, that at last I could bear it no longer. I went to the door, and, after listening, very attentively but quite in vain, for any sound, I at last knocked pretty sharply. There was no answer. Feeling that longer suspense would be unendurable, I, without more ceremony, turned the handle and went in.

"It was a great bare room, and so imperfectly lighted by a single candle that it was almost impossible—except when the lightning flashed—to see into its great dark corners. A small rickety bedstead stood against one of the walls, shrouded by yellow cotton curtains, passed through a great iron ring in the ceiling. There was, for all other furniture, an old chest of drawers which served also as a washing-stand, having a small basin and ewer and a single towel arranged on the top of it. There were, moreover, two ancient chairs and a dressing-table. On this last, stood a large old-fashioned looking-glass with a carved frame.

“I must have seen all these things, because I remember them so well now, but I do not know how I could have seen them, for it seems to me that, from the moment of my entering that room, the action of my senses and of the faculties of my mind was held fast by the ghastly figure which stood motionless before the looking-glass in the middle of the empty room.

“How terrible it was! The weak light of one candle standing on the table shone upon Strange’s face, lighting it from below, and throwing (as I now remember) his shadow, mugbypagevast and black, upon the wall behind him and upon the ceiling overhead. He was leaning rather forward, with his hands upon the table supporting him, and gazing into the glass which stood before him with a horrible fixity. The sweat was on his white face; his rigid features and his pale lips showed in that feeble light were horrible, more than words can tell, to look at. He was so completely stupefied and lost, that the noise I had made in knocking and in entering the room was unobserved by him. Not even when I called him loudly by name did he move or did his face change.

“What a vision of horror that was, in the great dark empty room, in a silence that was something more than negative, that ghastly figure frozen into stone by some unexplained terror! And the silence and the stillness! The very thunder had ceased now. My heart stood still with fear. Then, moved by some instinctive feeling, under whose influence I acted mechanically, I crept with slow steps nearer and nearer to the table, and at last, half expecting to see some spectre even more horrible than this which I saw already, I looked over his shoulder into the looking-glass. I happened to touch his arm, though only in the lightest manner. In that one moment the spell which had held him—who knows how long?—enchained, seemed broken, and he lived in this world again. He turned round upon me, as suddenly as a tiger makes its spring, and seized me by the arm.

“I have told you that even before I entered my friend’s room I had felt, all that night, depressed and nervous. The necessity for action at this time was, however, so obvious, and this man’s agony made all that I had felt, appear so trifling, that much of my own discomfort seemed to leave me. I felt that I *must* be strong.

"The face before me almost unmanned me. The eyes which looked into mine were so scared with terror, the lips—if I may say so—looked so speechless. The wretched man gazed long into my face, and then, still holding me by the arm, slowly, very slowly, turned his head. I had gently tried to move him away from the looking-glass, but he would not stir, and now he was looking into it as fixedly as ever. I could bear this no longer, and, using such force as was necessary, I drew him gradually away, and got him to one of the chairs at the foot of the bed. 'Come!' I said—after the long silence my voice, even to myself, sounded strange and hollow—'come! You are over-tired, and you feel the weather. Don't you think you ought to be in bed? Suppose you lie down. Let me try my medical skill in mixing you a composing draught.'

"He held my hand, and looked eagerly into my eyes. 'I am better now,' he said, speaking at last very faintly. Still he looked at me in that wistful way. It seemed as if there were something that he wanted to do or say, but had not sufficient resolution. At length he got up from the chair to which I had led him, and beckoning me to follow him, went across the room to the dressing-table, and stood again before the glass. A violent shudder passed through his frame as he looked into it; but apparently forcing himself to go through with what he had now begun, he remained where he was, and, without looking away, moved to me with his hand to come and stand beside him. I complied.

"'Look in there!' he said, in an almost inaudible tone. He was supported, as before, by his hands resting on the table, and could only bow with his head towards the glass to intimate what he meant. 'Look in there!' he repeated.

"I did as he asked me.

"'What do you see?' he asked next.

"'See?' I repeated, trying to speak as cheerfully as I could, and describing the reflexion of his own face as nearly as I could. 'I see a very, very pale face with sunken cheeks—'

"'What?' he cried, with an alarm in his voice which I could not understand.

"'With sunken cheeks,' I went on, 'and two hollow eyes with large pupils.'

"I saw the reflexion of my friend's face change, and felt his hand clutch my arm even more tightly than he had done before. I stopped abruptly and looked round at him. He did not turn his head towards me, but, gazing still into the looking-glass, seemed to labour for utterance.

"'What,' he stammered at last. 'Do you—see it—too?'

"'See what?' I asked, quickly.

"'That face!' he cried, in accents of horror. 'That face—which is not mine—and which—I see instead of mine—always!'

"I was struck speechless by the words. In a moment this mystery was explained—but what an explanation! Worse, a hundred times worse, than anything I had imagined. What! Had this man lost the power of seeing his own image as it was reflected there before him? and, in its place, was there the image of another? Had he changed reflexions with some other man? The frightfulness of the thought struck me speechless for a time—then I saw how false an impression my silence was conveying.

"'No, no, no!' I cried, as soon as I could speak—'a hundred times, no! I see you, of course, and only you. It was your face I attempted to describe, and no other.'

"He seemed not to hear me. 'Why, look there!' he said, in a low, indistinct voice, pointing to his own image in the glass. 'Whose face do you see there?'

"'Why yours, of course.' And then, after a moment, I added, 'Whose do you see?'

"He answered, like one in a trance, '*His*—only his—always his!' He stood still a moment, and then, with a loud and terrific scream, repeated those words, 'Always his, always his,' and fell down in a fit before me.

"I knew what to do now. Here was a thing which, at any rate, I could understand. I had with me my usual small stock of medicines and surgical instruments, and I did what was necessary: first to restore my unhappy patient, and next to procure for him the rest he needed so much. He was very ill—at death's door for some days—and I could not leave him, though there was urgent need that I should be back in London. When he began to mend, I sent over to England for my servant—John Masey—whom I knew I could trust. Acquainting him with the outlines of the case, I left him in charge of my patient, with orders that he should be brought over to this country as soon as he was fit to travel.

"That awful scene was always before me. I saw this devoted man day after day, with the eyes of my imagination, sometimes destroying in his rage the harmless looking-glass, which was the immediate cause of his suffering, sometimes transfixed before the horrid image that turned him to stone. I recollect coming upon him once when we were stopping at a roadside inn, and seeing him stand so by broad daylight. His back was turned towards me, and I waited and watched him for nearly half an hour as he stood there motionless and speechless, and appearing not to breathe. I am not sure but that this apparition seen so by daylight was more ghastly than that apparition seen in the middle of the night, with the thunder rumbling among the hills.

"Back in London in his own house, where he could command in some sort the objects which should surround him, poor Strange was better than he would have been elsewhere. He seldom went out except at night, but once or twice I have walked with him by daylight, and have seen him terribly agitated when we have had to pass a shop in which looking-glasses were exposed for sale.

"It is nearly a year now since my poor friend followed me down to this place, to which I have retired. For some months he has been daily getting weaker and weaker, and a disease of the lungs has become developed in him, which has brought him to his death-bed. I should add, by-the-by, that John Masey has been his constant companion ever since I brought them mugbypagetogether, and I have had, consequently, to look after a new servant.

"And now tell me," the doctor added, bringing his tale to an end, "did you ever hear a more miserable history, or was ever man haunted in a more ghastly manner than this man?"

I was about to reply when I heard a sound of footsteps outside, and before I could speak old Masey entered the room, in haste and disorder.

"I was just telling this gentleman," the doctor said: not at the moment observing old Masey's changed manner: "how you deserted me to go over to your present master."

"Ah! sir," the man answered, in a troubled voice, "I'm afraid he won't be my master long."

The doctor was on his legs in a moment. "What! Is he worse?"

"I think, sir, he is dying," said the old man.

“Come with me, sir; you may be of use if you can keep quiet.” The doctor caught up his hat as he addressed me in those words, and in a few minutes we had reached The Compensation House. A few seconds more, and we were standing in a darkened room on the first floor, and I saw lying on a bed before me—pale, emaciated, and, as it seemed, dying—the man whose story I had just heard.

He was lying with closed eyes when we came into the room, and I had leisure to examine his features. What a tale of misery they told! They were regular and symmetrical in their arrangement, and not without beauty—the beauty of exceeding refinement and delicacy. Force there was none, and perhaps it was to the want of this that the faults—perhaps the crime—which had made the man’s life so miserable were to be attributed. Perhaps the crime? Yes, it was not likely that an affliction, lifelong and terrible, such as this he had endured, would come upon him unless some misdeed had provoked the punishment. What misdeed we were soon to know.

It sometimes—I think generally—happens that the presence of any one who stands and watches beside a sleeping man will wake him, unless his slumbers are unusually heavy. It was so now. While we looked at him, the sleeper awoke very suddenly, and fixed his eyes upon us. He put out his hand and took the doctor’s in its feeble grasp. “Who is that?” he asked next, pointing towards me.

“Do you wish him to go? The gentleman knows something of your sufferings, and is powerfully interested in your case; but he will leave us, if you wish it,” the doctor said.

“No. Let him stay.”

Seating myself out of sight, but where I could both see and hear what passed, I waited for what should follow. Dr. Garden and John Masey stood beside the bed. There was a moment’s pause.

“I want a looking-glass,” said Strange, without a word of preface.

We all started to hear him say those words. “I am dying,” said Strange; “will you not grant me my request?”

Doctor Garden whispered to old Masey; and the latter left the room. He was not absent long, having gone no further than the next house. He held an oval-framed mirror in his hand when he returned. A shudder passed through the body of the sick man as he saw it.

“Put it down,” he said, faintly—“anywhere—for the present.”

No one of us spoke. I do not think, in that moment of suspense, that we could, any of us, have spoken if we had tried.

The sick man tried to raise himself a little. “Prop me up,” he said. “I speak with difficulty—I have something to say.”

They put pillows behind him, so as to raise his head and body.

“I have presently a use for it,” he said, indicating the mirror. “I want to see—” He stopped, and seemed to change his mind. He was sparing of his words. “I want to tell you—all about it.” Again he was silent. Then he seemed to make a great effort and spoke once more, beginning very abruptly.

“I loved my wife fondly. I loved her—her name was Lucy. She was English; but, after we were married, we lived long abroad—in Italy. She liked the country, and I liked what she liked. She liked to draw, too, and I got her a master. He was an Italian. I will not give his name. We always called him ‘the Master.’ A treacherous insidious man this was, and, under cover of his profession, took advantage of his opportunities, and taught my wife to love him—to love him.

“I am short of breath. I need not enter into details as to how I found them out; but I did find them out. We were away on a sketching expedition when I made my discovery. My rage maddened me, and there was one at hand who fomented my madness. My wife had a maid, who, it seemed, had also loved this man—the Master—and had been ill treated and deserted by him. She told me all. She had played the part of go-between—had carried letters. When she told me these things, it was night, in a solitary Italian town, among the mountains. ‘He is in his room now,’ she said, ‘writing to her.’

“A frenzy took possession of me as I listened to those words. I am naturally vindictive—remember that—and now my longing for revenge was like a thirst. Travelling in those lonely regions, I was armed, and when the woman said, ‘He is writing to your wife,’ I laid hold of my pistols, as by an instinct. It has been some comfort to me since, that I took them both. Perhaps, at that moment, I may have meant fairly by him—meant that we should fight. I don’t know what I meant, quite. The woman’s words, ‘He is in his own room now, writing to her,’ rung in my ears.”

The sick man stopped to take breath. It seemed an hour, though it was probably not more than two minutes, before he spoke again.

“I managed to get into his room unobserved. Indeed, he was altogether absorbed in what he was doing. He was sitting at the only table in the room, writing at a travelling-desk, by the light of a single candle. It was a rude dressing-table, and—and before him—exactly before him—there was—there was a looking-glass.

“I stole up behind him as he sat and wrote by the light of the candle. I looked over his shoulder at the letter, and I read, ‘Dearest Lucy, my love, my darling.’ As I read the words, I pulled the trigger of the pistol I held in my right hand, and killed him—killed him—but, before he died, he looked up once—not at me, but at my image before him in the glass, and his face—such a face—has been there—ever since, and mine—my face—is gone!”

He fell back exhausted, and we all pressed forward thinking that he must be dead, he lay so still.

But he had not yet passed away. He revived under the influence of stimulants. He tried to speak, and muttered indistinctly from time to time words of which we could sometimes make no sense. We understood, however, that he had been tried by an Italian tribunal, and had been found guilty; but with such extenuating circumstances that his sentence was commuted to imprisonment, during, we thought we made out, two years. But we could not understand what he said about his wife, though we gathered that she was still alive, from something he whispered to the doctor of there being provision made for her in his will.

He lay in a doze for something more than an hour after he had told his tale, and then he woke up quite suddenly, as he had done when we had first entered the room. He looked round uneasily in all directions, until his eye fell on the looking-glass.

“I want it,” he said, hastily; but I noticed that he did not shudder now, as it was brought near. When old Masey approached, holding it in his hand, and crying like a child, Dr. Garden came forward and stood between him and his master, taking the hand of poor Strange in his.

“Is this wise?” he asked. “Is it good, do you think, to revive this misery of your life now, when it is so near its close? The chastisement of your crime,” he added, solemnly, “has been a terrible one. Let us hope in God’s mercy that your punishment is over.”

The dying man raised himself with a last great effort, and looked up at the doctor with such an expression on his face as none of us had seen on any face, before.

“I do hope so,” he said, faintly, “but you must let me have my way in this—for if, now, when I look, I see aright—once more—I shall then hope yet more strongly—for I shall take it as a sign.”

The doctor stood aside without another word, when he heard the dying man speak thus, and the old servant drew near, and, stooping over softly, held the looking-glass before his master. Presently afterwards, we, who stood around looking breathlessly at him, saw such a rapture upon his face, as left no doubt upon our minds that the face which had haunted him so long, had, in his last hour, disappeared.

No. 4 BRANCH LINE
THE TRAVELLING POST-OFFICE

Many years ago, and before this Line was so much as projected, I was engaged as a clerk in a Travelling Post-office running along the Line of railway from London to a town in the Midland Counties, which we will call Fazeley. My duties were to accompany the mail-train which left Fazeley at 8.15 p.m., and arrived in London about midnight, and to return by the day mail leaving London at 10.30 the following morning, after which I had an unbroken night at Fazeley, while another clerk discharged the same round of work; and in this way each alternative evening I was on duty in the railway post-office van. At first I suffered a little from a hurry and tremor of nerve in pursuing my occupation while the train was crashing along under bridges and through tunnels at a speed which was then thought marvellous and perilous; but it was not long before my hands and eyes became accustomed to the motion of the carriage, and I could go through my business with the same despatch and ease as in the post-office of the country town where I had learned it, and from which I had been promoted by the influence of the surveyor of the district, Mr. Huntingdon. In fact, the work soon fell into a monotonous routine, which, night after night, was pursued in an unbroken course by myself and the junior clerk, who was my only assistant: the railway post-office work not having then attained the importance and magnitude it now possesses.

Our route lay through an agricultural district containing many small towns, which made up two or three bags only; one for London; another perhaps for the county town; a third for the railway post-office, to be opened by us, and the enclosures to be distributed according to their various addresses. The clerks in many of these small offices were women, as is very generally the case still, being the daughters and female relatives of the nominal postmaster, who transact most of the business of the office, and whose names are most frequently signed upon the bills accompanying the bags. I was a young man, and somewhat more curious in feminine handwriting than I am now. There was one family in particular, whom I had never seen, but with whose signatures I was perfectly familiar—clear, delicate, and educated, very unlike the miserable scrawl upon other letter-bills. One New Year's-eve, in a moment of sentiment, I tied a slip of paper among a bundle of letters for their office, upon which I had written, "A happy New Year to you all." The next evening brought me a return of my good wishes, signed, as I guessed, by three sisters of the name of Clifton. From that day, every now and then, a sentence or two as brief as the one above passed between us, and the feeling of acquaintance and friendship grew upon me, though I had never yet had an opportunity of seeing my fair unknown friends.

It was towards the close of the following October that it came under my notice that the then Premier of the ministry was paying an autumn visit to a nobleman, whose country seat was situated near a small village on our line of rail. The Premier's despatch-box, containing, of course, all the despatches which it was necessary to send down to him, passed between him and the Secretary of State, and was, as usual, entrusted to the care of the post-office. The Continent was just then in a more than ordinarily critical state; we were thought to be upon the verge of an European war; and there were murmurs floating about, at the dispersion of the ministry up and down the country. These circumstances made the charge of the despatch-box the more interesting to me. It was very similar in size and shape to the old-fashioned workboxes used by ladies before boxes of polished and ornamental wood came into vogue, and, like them, it was covered with red morocco leather, and it fastened with a lock and key. The first time it came into my hands I took such special notice of it as might be expected. Upon one corner of the lid I detected a peculiar device scratched slightly upon it, most probably with the sharp point of a steel pen, in such a moment of preoccupation of mind as causes most of us to draw odd lines and caricatured faces upon any piece of paper which may lie under our hand. It was the old revolutionary device of a heart with a dagger piercing it; and I wondered whether it could be the Premier, or one of his secretaries, who had traced it upon the morocco.

This box had been travelling up and down for about ten days, and, as the village did not make up a bag for London, there being very few letters excepting those from the great house, the letter-bag from the house, and the despatch-box, were handed direct into our travelling post-office. But in compliment to the presence of the Premier in the neighbourhood, the train, instead of slackening speed only, stopped altogether, in order that the

Premier's trusty and confidential messenger mugbypagemight deliver the important box into my own hands, that its perfect safety might be ensured.

I had an undefined suspicion that some person was also employed to accompany the train up to London, for three or four times I had met with a foreign-looking gentleman at Euston-square, standing at the door of the carriage nearest the post-office van, and eyeing the heavy bags as they were transferred from my care to the custody of the officials from the General Post-office. But though I felt amused and somewhat nettled at this needless precaution, I took no further notice of the man, except to observe that he had the swarthy aspect of a foreigner, and that he kept his face well away from the light of the lamps. Except for these things, and after the first time or two, the Premier's despatch-box interested me no more than any other part of my charge. My work had been doubly monotonous for some time past, and I began to think it time to get up some little entertainment with my unknown friends, the Cliftons. I was just thinking of it as the train stopped at the station about a mile from the town where they lived, and their postman, a gruff matter-of-fact fellow—you could see it in every line of his face—put in the letter-bags, and with them a letter addressed to me. It was in an official envelope, "On Her Majesty's Service," and the seal was an official seal. On mugbypagethe folded paper inside it (folded officially also) I read the following order: "Mr. Wilcox is requested to permit the bearer, the daughter of the postmaster at Eaton, to see the working of the railway post-office during the up-journey." The writing I knew well as being that of one of the surveyor's clerks, and the signature was Mr. Huntingdon's. The bearer of the order presented herself at the door, the snorting of the engine gave notice of the instant departure of the train, I held out my hand, the young lady sprang lightly and deftly into the van, and we were off again on our midnight journey.

She was a small slight creature, one of those slender little girls one never thinks of as being a woman, dressed neatly and plainly in a dark dress, with a veil hanging a little over her face and tied under her chin: the most noticeable thing about her appearance being a great mass of light hair, almost yellow, which had got loose in some way, and fell down her neck in thick wavy tresses. She had a free pleasant way about her, not in the least bold or forward, which in a minute or two made her presence seem the most natural thing in the world. As she stood beside me before the row of boxes into which I was sorting my letters, she asked questions and I answered as if it were quite an every-day occurrence for us to be travelling up together in the night mail to Euston-square station. I blamed myself for an idiot that I had not sooner made an opportunity for visiting my unknown friends at Eaton.

"Then," I said, putting down the letter-bill from their own office before her, "may I ask which of the signatures I know so well, is yours? Is it A. Clifton, or M. Clifton, or S. Clifton?" She hesitated a little, and blushed, and lifted up her frank childlike eyes to mine.

"I am A. Clifton," she answered.

"And your name?" I said.

"Anne;" then, as if anxious to give some explanation to me of her present position, she added, "I was going up to London on a visit, and I thought it would be so nice to travel in the post-office to see how the work was done, and Mr. Huntingdon came to survey our office, and he said he would send me an order."

I felt somewhat surprised, for a stricter martinet than Mr. Huntingdon did not breathe; but I glanced down at the small innocent face at my side, and cordially approved of his departure from ordinary rules.

"Did you know you would travel with me?" I asked, in a lower voice; for Tom Morville, my junior, was at my other elbow.

"I knew I should travel with Mr. Wilcox," mugbypageshe answered, with a smile that made all my nerves tingle.

"You have not written me a word for ages," said I, reproachfully.

"You had better not talk, or you'll be making mistakes," she replied, in an arch tone. It was quite true; for, a sudden confusion coming over me, I was sorting the letters at random.

We were just then approaching the small station where the letter-bag from the great house was taken up. The engine was slackening speed. Miss Clifton manifested some natural and becoming diffidence.

"It would look so odd," she said, "to any one on the platform, to see a girl in the post-office van! And they couldn't know I was a postmaster's daughter, and had an order from Mr. Huntingdon. Is there no dark corner to shelter me?"

I must explain to you in a word or two the construction of the van, which was much less efficiently fitted up than the travelling post-offices of the present day. It was a reversible van, with a door at each right-hand corner. At each door the letter-boxes were so arranged as to form a kind of screen about two feet in width, which prevented people from seeing all over the carriage at once. Thus the door at the far end of the van, the one not in use at the time, was thrown into deep shadow, and the screen before it turned it into a small niche, where a slight little person like Miss Clifton was very well concealed from curious eyes. Before the train came within the light from the lamps on the platform, she ensconced herself in this shelter. No one but I could see her laughing face, as she stood there leaning cautiously forward with her finger pressed upon her rosy lips, peeping at the messenger who delivered into my own hands the Premier's despatch-box, while Tom Morville received the letter-bag of the great house.

"See," I said, when we were again in motion, and she had emerged from her concealment, "this is the Premier's despatch-box, going back to the Secretary of State. There are some state secrets for you, and ladies are fond of secrets."

"Oh! I know nothing about politics," she answered, indifferently, "and we have had that box through our office a time or two."

"Did you ever notice this mark upon it," I asked—"a heart with a dagger through it?" and bending down my face to hers, I added a certain spooney remark, which I do not care to repeat. Miss Clifton tossed her little head, and pouted her lips; but she took the box out of my hands, and carried it to the lamp nearest the further end of the van, after which she put it down upon the counter close beside the screen, and I thought no more about it. The midnight ride was entertaining in the extreme, for the girl was full of young life and sauciness and merry humour. I can safely aver that I have never been to an evening's so-called entertainment which, to me, was half so enjoyable. It added also to the zest and keen edge of the enjoyment to see her hasten to hide herself whenever I told her we were going to stop to take up the mails.

"We had passed Watford, the last station at which we stopped, before I became alive to the recollection that our work was terribly behindhand. Miss Clifton also became grave, and sat at the end of the counter very quiet and subdued, as if her frolic were over, and it was possible she might find something to repent of in it. I had told her we should stop no more until we reached Euston-square station, but to my surprise I felt our speed decreasing, and our train coming to a standstill. I looked out and called to the guard in the van behind, who told me he supposed there was something on the line before us, and that we should go on in a minute or two. I turned my head, and gave this information to my fellow-clerk and Miss Clifton.

"Do you know where we are?" she asked, in a frightened tone.

"At Camden-town," I replied. She sprang hastily from her seat, and came towards me.

"I am close to my friend's house here," she said, "so it is a lucky thing for me. It is not five minutes' walk from the station. I will say good-bye to you now, Mr. Wilcox, and I thank you a thousand times for your kindness."

She seemed flurried, and she held out both her little hands to me in an appealing kind of way, as if she were afraid of my detaining her against her will. I took them both into mine, pressing them with rather more ardour than was quite necessary.

"I do not like you to go alone at this hour," I said, "but there is no help for it. It has been a delightful time to me. Will you allow me to call upon you to-morrow morning early, for I leave London at 10.30; or on Wednesday, when I shall be in town again?"

"O," she answered, hanging her head, "I don't know. I'll write and tell mamma how kind you have been, and, and—but I must go, Mr. Wilcox."

"I don't like your going alone," I repeated.

"O! I know the way perfectly," she said, in the same flurried manner, "perfectly, thank you. And it is close at hand. Goodbye."

She jumped lightly out of the carriage, and the train started on again at the same instant. We were busy enough, as you may suppose. In five minutes more we should be in Euston-square, and there was nearly fifteen minutes work still to be done. Spite of the enjoyment he had afforded me, I mentally anathematised Mr. Huntingdon and his departure from ordinary rules, and, thrusting Miss Clifton forcibly out of my thoughts, I set to work with a will, gathered up the registered letters for London, tied them into a bundle with the paper bill, and then turned to the corner of the counter for the despatch-box.

You have guessed already my cursed misfortune. The Premier's despatch-box was not there. For the first minute or so I was in nowise alarmed, and merely looked round, upon the floor, under the bags, into the boxes, into any place into which it could have fallen or been deposited. We reached Euston-square while I was still searching, and losing more and more of my composure every instant. Tom Morville joined me in my quest, and felt every bag which had been made up and sealed. The box was no small article which could go into little compass; it was certainly twelve inches long, and more than that in girth. But it turned up nowhere. I never felt nearer fainting than at that moment.

“Could Miss Clifton have carried it off?” suggested Tom Morville.

“No,” I said, indignantly but thoughtfully, “she couldn’t have carried off such a bulky thing as that, without our seeing it. It would not go into one of our pockets, Tom, and she wore a tight-fitting jacket that would not conceal anything.”

“No, she can’t have it,” assented Tom; “then it must be somewhere about.” We searched again and again, turning over everything in the van, but without success. The Premier’s despatch-box was gone; and all we could do at first was to stand and stare at one another. Our trance of blank dismay was of short duration, for the van was assailed by the postmen from St. Martin’s-le-Grand, who were waiting for our charge. In a stupor of bewilderment we completed our work, and delivered up the mails; then, once more we confronted one another with pale faces, frightened out of our seven senses. All the scrapes we had ever been in (and we had had our usual share of errors and blunders) faded into utter insignificance compared with this. My eye fell upon Mr. Huntingdon’s order lying among some scraps of waste paper on the floor, and I picked it up, and put it carefully, with its official envelope, into my pocket.

“We can’t stay here,” said Tom. The porters were looking in inquisitively; we were seldom so long in quitting oar empty van.

“No,” I replied, a sudden gleam of sense darting across the blank bewilderment of my brain; “no, we must go to head-quarters at once, and make a clean breast of it. This is no private business, Tom.”

We made one more ineffectual search, and then we hailed a cab and drove as hard as we could to the General Post-office. The secretary of the Post-office was not there, of course, but we obtained the address of his residence in one of the suburbs, four or five miles from the City, and we told no one of our misfortune, my idea being that the fewer who were made acquainted with the loss the better. My judgment was in the right there.

We had to knock up the household of the secretary—a formidable personage with whom I had never been brought into contact before—and in a short time we were holding a strictly private and confidential interview with him, by the glimmer of a solitary candle, just serving to light up his severe face, which changed its expression several times as I narrated the calamity. It was too stupendous for rebuke, and I fancied his eyes softened with something like commiseration as he gazed upon us. After a short interval of deliberation, he announced his intention of accompanying us to the residence of the Secretary of State; and in a few minutes we were driving back again to the opposite extremity of London. It was not far off the hour for the morning delivery of letters when we reached our destination; but the atmosphere was yellow with fog, and we could see nothing as we passed along in almost utter silence, for neither of us ventured to speak, and the secretary only made a brief remark now and then. We drove up to some dwelling enveloped in fog, and we were left in the cab for nearly half an hour, while our secretary went in. At the end of that time we were summoned to an apartment where there was seated at a large desk a small spare man, with a great head, and eyes deeply sunk under the brows. There was no form of introduction, of course, and we could only guess who he might be; but we were requested to repeat our statement, and a few shrewd questions were put to us by the stranger. We were eager to put him in possession of everything we knew, but that was little beyond the fact that the despatch-box was lost.

"That young person must have taken it," he said.

"She could not, sir," I answered, positively, but deferentially. "She wore the tightest-fitting pelisse I ever saw, and she gave me both her hands when she said good-bye. She could not possibly have it concealed about her. It would not go into my pocket."

"How did she come to travel up with you in the van, sir?" he asked severely.

I gave him for answer the order signed by Mr. Huntingdon. He and our secretary scanned it closely.

"It is Huntingdon's signature without doubt," said the latter; "I could swear to it anywhere. This is an extraordinary circumstance!"

It was an extraordinary circumstance. The two retired into an adjoining room, where they stayed for another half-hour, and when they returned to us their faces still bore an aspect of grave perplexity.

"Mr. Wilcox and Mr. Morville," said our secretary, "it is expedient that this affair should be kept inviolably secret. You must even be careful not to hint that you hold any secret. You did well not to announce your loss at the Post-office, and I shall cause it to be understood that you had instructions to take the despatch-box direct to its destination. Your business now is to find the young woman, and return with her not later than six o'clock this afternoon to my office at the General Post-office. What other steps we think it requisite to take, you need know nothing about; the less you know, the better for yourselves."

Another gleam of commiseration in his official eye made our hearts sink within us. We departed promptly, and, with that instinct of wisdom which at times dictates infallibly what course we should pursue, we decided our line of action. Tom Morville was to go down to Camden-town, and inquire at every house for Miss Clifton, while I—there would be just time for it—was to run down to Eaton by train and obtain her exact address from her parents. We agreed to meet at the General Post-office at half-past five, if I could possibly reach it by that time; but in any case Tom was to report himself to the secretary and account for my absence.

When I arrived at the station at Eaton, I found that I had only forty-five minutes before the up train went by. The town was nearly a mile away, but I made all the haste I could to reach it. I was not surprised to find the post-office in connexion with a bookseller's shop, and I saw a pleasant elderly lady seated behind the counter, while a tall dark-haired girl was sitting at some work a little out of sight. I introduced myself at once.

"I am Frank Wilcox, of the railway post-office, and I have just run down to Eaton to obtain some information from you."

"Certainly. We know you well by name," was the reply, given in a cordial manner, which was particularly pleasant to me.

"Will you be so good as give me the address of Miss Anne Clifton in Camden-town?" I said.

"Miss Anne Clifton?" ejaculated the lady.

"Yes. Your daughter, I presume. Who went up to London last night."

"I have no daughter Anne," she said; "I am Anne Clifton, and my daughters are named Mary and Susan. This is my daughter Mary."

The tall dark-haired girl had left her seat, and now stood beside her mother. Certainly she was very unlike the small golden-haired coquette who had travelled up to London with me as Anne Clifton.

"Madam," I said, scarcely able to speak, "is your other daughter a slender little creature, exactly the reverse of this young lady?"

"No," she answered, laughing; "Susan is both taller and darker than Mary. Call Susan, my dear."

In a few seconds Miss Susan made her appearance, and I had the three before me—A. Clifton, S. Clifton, and M. Clifton. There was no other girl in the family; and when I described the young lady who had travelled under their name, they could not think of any one in the town—it was a small one—who answered my description, or who had gone on a visit to London. I had no time to spare, and I hurried back to the station, just catching the train as it left the platform. At the appointed hour I met Morville at the General Post-office, and threading the long passages of the secretary's offices, we at length found ourselves anxiously waiting in an ante-room, until we were called into his presence. Morville had discovered nothing, except that the porters and policemen at Camden-town station had seen a young lady pass out last night, attended by a swarthy man who looked like a foreigner, and carried a small black portmanteau.

I scarcely know how long we waited; it might have been years, for I was conscious of an ever-increasing difficulty in commanding my thoughts, or fixing them upon the subject which had engrossed them all day. I had not tasted food for twenty-four hours, nor closed my eyes for thirty-six, while, during the whole of the time, my nervous system had been on full strain.

Presently, the summons came, and I was ushered, first, into the inner apartment. There sat five gentlemen round a table, which was strewed with a number of documents. There were the Secretary of State, whom we had seen in the morning, our secretary, and Mr. Huntingdon; the fourth was a fine-looking man, whom I afterwards knew to be the Premier; the fifth I recognised as our great chief, the Postmaster-General. It was an august assemblage to me, and I bowed low; but my head was dizzy, and my throat parched.

"Mr. Wilcox," said our secretary, "you will tell these gentlemen again, the circumstances of the loss you reported to me this morning."

I laid my hand upon the back of a chair to steady myself, and went through the narration for the third time, passing over sundry remarks made by myself to the young lady. That mugbypagedone, I added the account of my expedition to Eaton, and the certainty at which I had arrived that my fellow-traveller was not the person she represented herself to be. After which, I inquired with indescribable anxiety if Mr. Huntingdon's order were a forgery?

"I cannot tell, Mr. Wilcox," said that gentleman, taking the order into his hands, and regarding it with an air of extreme perplexity. "I could have sworn it was mine, had it been attached to any other document. I think Forbes's handwriting is not so well imitated. But it is the very ink I use, and mine is a peculiar signature."

It was a very peculiar and old-fashioned signature, with a flourish underneath it not unlike a whip-handle, with the lash caught round it in the middle; but that did not make it the more difficult to forge, as I humbly suggested. Mr. Huntingdon wrote his name upon a paper, and two or three of the gentlemen tried to imitate the flourish, but vainly. They gave it up with a smile upon their grave faces.

"You have been careful not to let a hint of this matter drop from you, Mr. Wilcox?" said the Postmaster-General.

"Not a syllable, my lord," I answered.

"It is imperatively necessary that the secret should be kept. You would be removed from the temptation of telling it, if you had an appointment in some office abroad. The packet-agency at Alexandria is vacant, and I will have you appointed to it at once."

It would be a good advance from my present situation, and would doubtless prove a stepping-stone to other and better appointments; but I had a mother living at Fazeley, bedridden and paralytic, who had no pleasure in existence except having me to dwell under the same roof with her. My head was growing more and more dizzy, and a strange vagueness was creeping over me.

"Gentlemen," I muttered, "I have a bedridden mother whom I cannot leave. I was not to blame, gentlemen." I fancied there was a stir and movement at the table, but my eyes were dim, and in another second I had lost consciousness.

When I came to myself, in two or three minutes, I found that Mr. Huntingdon was kneeling on the floor beside me, supporting my head, while our secretary held a glass of wine to my lips. I rallied as quickly as possible, and staggered to my feet; but the two gentlemen placed me in the chair against which I had been leaning, and insisted upon my finishing the wine before I tried to speak.

"I have not tasted food all day," I said, faintly.

"Then, my good fellow, you shall go home immediately," said the Postmaster-General; "but be on your guard! Not a word of this must escape you. Are you a married man?"

"No, my lord," I answered.

“So much the better,” he added, smiling. “You can keep a secret from your mother, I dare say. We rely upon your honour.”

The secretary then rang a bell, and I was committed to the charge of the messenger who answered it; and in a few minutes I was being conveyed in a cab to my London lodgings. A week afterwards, Tom Morville was sent out to a post-office in Canada, where he settled down, married, and is still living, perfectly satisfied with his position, as he occasionally informs me by letter. For myself, I remained as I desired, in my old post as travelling-clerk until the death of my mother, which occurred some ten or twelve months afterwards. I was then promoted to an appointment as a clerk in charge, upon the first vacancy.

The business of the clerks in charge is to take possession of any post-office in the kingdom, upon the death or resignation of the postmaster, or when circumstances of suspicion cause his suspension from office. My new duties carried me three or four times into Mr. Huntingdon’s district. Though that gentleman and I never exchanged a word with regard to the mysterious loss in which we had both had an innocent share, he distinguished me with peculiar favour, and more than once invited me to visit him at his own house. He lived alone, having but one daughter, who had married, somewhat against his will, one of his clerks: the Mr. Forbes whose handwriting had been so successfully imitated in the official order presented to me by the self-styled Miss Anne Clifton. (By the way, I may here mention, though it has nothing to do with my story, that my acquaintance with the Cliftons had ripened into an intimacy, which resulted in my engagement and marriage to Mary.)

It would be beside my purpose to specify the precise number of years which elapsed before I was once again summoned to the secretary’s private apartment, where I found him closeted with Mr. Huntingdon. Mr. Huntingdon shook hands with unofficial cordiality; and then the secretary proceeded to state the business on hand.

“Mr. Wilcox, you remember our offer to place you in office in Alexandria?” he said.

“Certainly, sir,” I answered.

“It has been a troublesome office,” he continued, almost pettishly. “We sent out Mr. Forbes only six months ago, on account of his health, which required a warmer climate, and now his medical man reports that his life is not worth three weeks’ purchase.”

Upon Mr. Huntingdon's face there rested an expression of profound anxiety; and as the secretary paused he addressed himself to me.

"Mr. Wilcox," he said, "I have been soliciting, as a personal favour, that you should be sent out to take charge of the packet-agency, in order that my daughter may have some one at hand to befriend her, and manage her business affairs for her. You are not personally acquainted with her, but I know I can trust her with you."

"You may, Mr. Huntingdon," I said, warmly. "I will do anything I can to aid Mrs. Forbes. When do you wish me to start?"

"How soon can you be ready?" was the rejoinder.

"To-morrow morning."

I was not married then, and I anticipated no delay in setting off. Nor was there any. I travelled with the overland mail through France to Marseilles, embarked in a vessel for Alexandria, and in a few days from the time I first heard of my destination set foot in the office there. All the postal arrangements had fallen into considerable irregularity and confusion; for, as I was informed immediately on my arrival, Mr. Forbes had been in a dying condition for the last week, and of course the absence of a master had borne the usual results. I took formal possession of the office, and then, conducted by one of the clerks, I proceeded to the dwelling of the unfortunate postmaster and his no less unfortunate wife. It would be out of place in this narrative to indulge in any traveller's tales about the strange place where I was so unexpectedly located. Suffice it to say, that the darkened sultry room into which I was shown, on inquiring for Mrs. Forbes, was bare of furniture, and destitute of all those little tokens of refinement and taste which make our English parlours so pleasant to the eye. There was, however, a piano in one of the dark corners of the room, open, and with a sheet of music on it. While I waited for Mrs. Forbes's appearance, I strolled idly up to the piano to see what music it might be. The next moment my eye fell upon an antique red morocco workbox standing on the top of the piano—a workbox evidently, for the lid was not closely shut, and a few threads of silk and cotton were hanging out of it. In a kind of dream—for it was difficult to believe that the occurrence was a fact—I carried the box to the darkened window, and there, plain in my sight, was the device scratched upon the leather: the revolutionary symbol of a heart with a dagger through it. I had found the Premier's despatch-box in the parlour of the packet-agent of Alexandria!

I stood for some minutes with that dream-like feeling upon me, gazing at the box in the dim obscure light. It could *not* be real! My fancy must be playing a trick upon me! But the sound of a light step—for, light as it was, I heard it distinctly as it approached the room—broke my trance, and I hastened to replace the box on the piano, and to stoop down as if examining the music before the door opened. I had not sent in my name to Mrs. Forbes, for I did not suppose that she was acquainted with it, nor could she see me distinctly, as I stood in the gloom. But I could see her. She had the slight slender figure, the childlike face, and the fair hair of Miss Anne Clifton. She came quickly across the room, holding out both her hands in a childish appealing manner.

"O!" she wailed, in a tone that went straight to my heart, "he is dead! He has just died!"

It was no time then to speak about the red morocco workbox. This little childish creature, who did not look a day older than when I had last seen her in my travelling post-office, was a widow in a strange land, far away from any friend save myself. I had brought her a letter from her father. The first duties that devolved upon me were those of her husband's interment, which had to take place immediately. Three or four weeks elapsed before I could, with any humanity, enter upon the investigation of her mysterious complicity in the daring theft practised on the government and the post-office.

I did not see the despatch-box again. In the midst of her new and vehement grief, Mrs. Forbes had the precaution to remove it before I was ushered again into the room where I had discovered it. I was at some trouble to hit upon any plan by which to gain a second sight of it; but I was resolved that Mrs. Forbes should not leave Alexandria without giving me a full explanation. We were waiting for remittances and instructions from England, and in the meantime the violence of her grief abated, and she recovered a good share of her old buoyancy and loveliness, which had so delighted me on my first acquaintance with her. As her demands upon my sympathy weakened, my curiosity grew stronger, and at last mastered me. I carried with me a netted purse which required mending, and I asked her to catch up the broken meshes while I waited for it.

"I will tell your maid to bring your workbox," I said, going to the door and calling the servant. "Your mistress has a red morocco workbox," I said to her, as she answered my summons.

"Yes, sir," she replied.

"Where is it?"

"In her bedroom," she said.

"Mrs. Forbes wishes it brought here." I mugbypageturned back into the room. Mrs. Forbes had gone deadly pale, but her eyes looked sullen, and her teeth were clenched under her lips with an expression of stubbornness. The maid brought the workbox. I walked, with it in my hands, up to the sofa where she was seated.

"You remember this mark?" I asked; "I think neither of us can ever forget it."

She did not answer by word, but there was a very intelligent gleam in her blue eyes.

"Now," I continued, softly, "I promised your father to befriend you, and I am not a man to forget a promise. But you must tell me the whole simple truth."

I was compelled to reason with her, and to urge her for some time. I confess I went so far as to remind her that there was an English consul at Alexandria, to whom I could resort. At last she opened her stubborn lips, and the whole story came out, mingled with sobs and showers of tears.

She had been in love with Alfred, she said, and they were too poor to marry, and papa would not hear of such a thing. She was always in want of money, she was kept so short; and they promised to give her such a great sum—a vast sum—five hundred pounds.

"But who bribed you?" I inquired.

A foreign gentleman whom she had met in London, called Monsieur Bonnard. It was a French name, but she was not sure that he was a Frenchman. He talked to her about her father being a surveyor in the post-office, and asked her a great number of questions. A few weeks after, she met him in their own town by accident, she and Mr. Forbes; and Alfred had a long private talk with him, and they came to her, and told her she could help them very much. They asked her if she could be brave enough to carry off a little red box out of the travelling post-office, containing nothing but papers. After a while she consented. When she had confessed so much under compulsion, Mrs. Forbes seemed to take a pleasure in the narrative, and went on fluently.

"We required papa's signature to the order, and we did not know how to get it. Luckily he had a fit of the gout, and was very peevish; and I had to read over a lot of official papers to him, and then he signed them. One of the papers I read twice, and slipped the order into its place after the second reading. I thought I should have died with fright; but just then he was in great pain, and glad to get his work over. I made an excuse that I was going to visit my aunt at Beckby, but instead of going there direct, we contrived to be at the station at Eaton a minute or two before the mail train came up. I kept outside the station door till we heard the whistle, and just then the postman came running down the road, and I followed him straight through the booking-office, and asked him to give you the order, which I put into his hand. He scarcely saw me. I just caught a glimpse of Monsieur Bonnard's face through the window of the compartment next the van, when Alfred had gone. They had promised me that the train should stop at Camden-town, if I could only keep your attention engaged until then. You know how I succeeded."

"But how did you dispose of the box?" I asked. "You could not have concealed it about you; that I am sure of."

"Ah!" she said, "nothing was easier. Monsieur Bonnard had described the van to me, and you remember I put the box down at the end of the counter, close to the corner where I hid myself at every station. There was a door with a window in it, and I asked if I might have the window open, as the van was too warm for me. I believe Monsieur Bonnard could have taken it from me by only leaning through his window, but he preferred stepping out, and taking it from my hand, just as the train was leaving Watford—on the far side of the carriages, you understand. It was the last station, and the train came to a stand at Camden-town. After all, the box was not out of your sight more than twenty minutes before you missed it. Monsieur Bonnard and I hurried out of the station, and Alfred followed us. The box was forced open—the lock has never been mended, for it was a peculiar one—and Monsieur Bonnard took possession of the papers. He left the box with me, after putting inside it a roll of notes. Alfred and I were married next morning, and I went back to my aunt's; but we did not tell papa of our marriage for three or four months. That is the story of my red morocco workbox."

She smiled with the provoking mirthfulness of a mischievous child. There was one point still, on which my curiosity was unsatisfied.

"Did you know what the despatches were about?" I asked.

"O no!" she answered; "I never understood politics in the least. I knew nothing about them. Monsieur did not say a word; he did not even look at the papers while we were by. I would never, never, have taken a registered letter, or anything with money in it, you know. But all those papers could be written again quite easily. You must not think me a thief, Mr. Wilcox; there was nothing worth money among the papers."

"They were worth five hundred pounds to you," I said. "Did you ever see Bonnard again?"

"Never again," she replied. "He said he was going to return to his native country. I don't think Bonnard was his real name."

Most likely not, I thought; but I said no more to Mrs. Forbes. Once again I was involved in a great perplexity about this affair. It was clearly my duty to report the discovery at head-quarters, but I shrank from doing so. One of the chief culprits was already gone to another judgment than that of man; several years had obliterated all traces of Monsieur Bonnard; and the only victim of justice would be this poor little dupe of the two greater criminals. At last I came to the conclusion to send the whole of the particulars to Mr. Huntingdon himself; and I wrote them to him, without remark or comment.

The answer that came to Mrs. Forbes and me in Alexandria was the announcement of Mr. Huntingdon's sudden death of some disease of the heart, on the day which I calculated would put him in possession of my communication. Mrs. Forbes was again overwhelmed with apparently heartrending sorrow and remorse. The income left to her was something less than one hundred pounds a year. The secretary of the post-office, who had been a personal friend of the deceased gentleman, was his sole executor; and I received a letter from him, containing one for Mrs. Forbes, which recommended her, in terms not to be misunderstood, to fix upon some residence abroad, and not to return to England. She fancied she would like the seclusion and quiet of a convent; and I made arrangements for her to enter one in Malta, where she would still be under British protection. I left Alexandria myself on the arrival of another packet-agent; and on my return to London I had a private interview with the secretary. I found that there was no need to inform him of the circumstances I have related to you, as he had taken possession of all Mr. Huntingdon's papers. In consideration of his ancient friendship, and of the escape of those who most merited punishment, he had come to the conclusion that it was quite as well to let bygones be bygones.

At the conclusion of the interview I delivered a message which Mrs. Forbes had emphatically entrusted to me.

“Mrs. Forbes wished me to impress upon your mind,” I said, “that neither she nor Mr. Forbes would have been guilty of this misdemeanour if they had not been very much in love with one another, and very much in want of money.”

“Ah!” replied the secretary, with a smile, “if Cleopatra’s nose had been shorter, the fate of the world would have been different!”

No. 5 BRANCH LINE

THE ENGINEER

His name, sir, was Matthew Price; mine is Benjamin Hardy. We were born within a few days of each other; bred up in the same village; taught at the same school. I cannot remember the time when we were not close friends. Even as boys, we never knew what it was to quarrel. We had not a thought, we had not a possession, that was not in common. We would have stood by each other, fearlessly, to the death. It was such a friendship as one reads about sometimes in books: fast and firm as the great Tors upon our native moorlands, true as the sun in the heavens.

The name of our village was Chadleigh. Lifted high above the pasture flats which stretched away at our feet like a measureless green lake and melted into mist on the furthest horizon, it nestled, a tiny stone-built hamlet, in a sheltered hollow about midway between the plain and the plateau. Above us, rising ridge beyond ridge, slope beyond slope, mugbypagespread the mountainous moor-country, bare and bleak for the most part, with here and there a patch of cultivated field or hardy plantation, and crowned highest of all with masses of huge grey crag, abrupt, isolated, hoary, and older than the deluge. These were the Tors—Druids' Tor, King's Tor, Castle Tor, and the like; sacred places, as I have heard, in the ancient time, where crownings, burnings, human sacrifices, and all kinds of bloody heathen rites were performed. Bones, too, had been found there, and arrow-heads, and ornaments of gold and glass. I had a vague awe of the Tors in those boyish days, and would not have gone near them after dark for the heaviest bribe.

I have said that we were born in the same village. He was the son of a small farmer, named William Price, and the eldest of a family of seven; I was the only child of Ephraim Hardy, the Chadleigh blacksmith—a well-known man in those parts, whose memory is not forgotten to this day. Just so far as a farmer is supposed to be a bigger man than a blacksmith, Mat's father might be said to have a better standing than mine; but William Price, with his small holding and his seven boys, was, in fact, as poor as many a day-labourer; whilst the blacksmith, well-to-do, bustling, popular, and open-handed, was a person of some importance in the place. All this, however, had nothing to do with Mat and myself. It never occurred to either of us that his jacket was out at elbows, or that our mutual funds came altogether from my pocket. It was enough for us that we sat on the same school-bench, conned our tasks from the same primer, fought each other’s battles, screened each other’s faults, fished, nutted, played truant, robbed orchards and birds’ nests together, and spent every half-hour, authorised or stolen, in each other’s society. It was a happy time; but it could not go on for ever. My father, being prosperous, resolved to put me forward in the world. I must know more, and do better, than himself. The forge was not good enough, the little world of Chadleigh not wide enough, for me. Thus it happened that I was still swinging the satchel when Mat was whistling at the plough, and that at last, when my future course was shaped out, we were separated, as it then seemed to us, for life. For, blacksmith’s son as I was, furnace and forge, in some form or other, pleased me best, and I chose to be a working engineer. So my father by-and-by apprenticed me to a Birmingham iron-master; and, having bidden farewell to Mat, and Chadleigh, and the grey old Tors in the shadow of which I had spent all the days of my life, I turned my face northward, and went over into “the Black Country.”

I am not going to dwell on this part of my story. How I worked out the term of my apprenticeship; how, when I had served my full time and become a skilled workman, I took Mat from the plough and brought him over to the Black Country, sharing with him lodging, wages, experience—all, in short, that I had to give; how he, naturally quick to learn and brimful of quiet energy, worked his way up a step at a time, and came by-and-by to be a “first hand” in his own department; how, during all these years of change, and trial, and effort, the old boyish affection never wavered or weakened, but went on, growing with our growth and strengthening with our strength—are facts which I need do no more than outline in this place.

About this time—it will be remembered that I speak of the days when Mat and I were on the bright side of thirty—it happened that our firm contracted to supply six first-class locomotives to run on the new line, then in process of construction, between Turin and Genoa. It was the first Italian order we had taken. We had had dealings with France, Holland, Belgium, Germany; but never with Italy. The connexion, therefore, was new and valuable—all the more valuable because our Transalpine neighbours had but lately begun to lay down the iron roads, and would be safe to need more of our good English work as they went on. So the Birmingham firm set themselves to the contract with a will, lengthened our working hours, increased our wages, took on fresh hands, and determined, if energy and promptitude could do it, to place themselves at the head of the Italian labour-market, and stay there. They deserved and achieved success. The six locomotives were not only turned out to time, but were shipped, despatched, and delivered with a promptitude that fairly amazed our Piedmontese consignee. I was not a little proud, you may be sure, when I found myself appointed to superintend the transport of the engines. Being allowed a couple of assistants, I contrived that Mat should be one of them; and thus we enjoyed together the first great holiday of our lives.

It was a wonderful change for two Birmingham operatives fresh from the Black Country. The fairy city, with its crescent background of Alps; the port crowded with strange shipping; the marvellous blue sky and bluer sea; the painted houses on the quays; the quaint cathedral, faced with black and white marble; the street of jewellers, like an Arabian Nights' bazaar; the street of palaces, with its Moorish court-yards, its fountains and orange-trees; the women veiled like brides; the galley-slaves chained two and two; the processions of priests and friars; the everlasting clangour of bells; the babble of a strange tongue; the singular lightness and brightness of the climate—made, altogether, such a combination of wonders that we wandered about, the first day, in a kind of bewildered dream, like children at a fair. Before that week was ended, being tempted by the beauty of the place and the liberality of the pay, we had agreed to take service with the Turin and Genoa Railway Company, and to turn our backs upon Birmingham for ever.

Then began a new life—a life so active and healthy, so steeped in fresh air and sunshine, that we sometimes marvelled how we could have endured the gloom of the Black Country. We were constantly up and down the line: now at Genoa, now at Turin, taking trial trips with the locomotives, and placing our old experiences at the service of our new employers.

In the meanwhile we made Genoa our headquarters, and hired a couple of rooms over a small shop in a by-street sloping down to the quays. Such a busy little street—so steep and winding that no vehicles could pass through it, and so narrow that the sky looked like a mere strip of deep-blue ribbon overhead! Every house in it, however, was a shop, where the goods encroached on the footway, or were piled about the door, or hung like tapestry from the balconies; and all day long, from dawn to dusk, an incessant stream of passers-by poured up and down between the port and the upper quarter of the city.

Our landlady was the widow of a silver-worker, and lived by the sale of filigree ornaments, cheap jewellery, combs, fans, and toys in ivory and jet. She had an only daughter named Gianetta, who served in the shop, and was simply the most beautiful woman I ever beheld. Looking back across this weary chasm of years, and bringing her image before me (as I can and do) with all the vividness of life, I am unable, even now, to detect a flaw in her beauty. I do not attempt to describe her. I do not believe there is a poet living who could find the words to do it; but I once saw a picture that was somewhat like her (not half so lovely, but still like her), and, for aught I know, that picture is still hanging where I last looked at it—upon the walls of the Louvre. It represented a woman with brown eyes and golden hair, looking over her shoulder into a circular mirror held by a bearded man in the background. In this man, as I then understood, the artist had painted his own portrait; in her, the portrait of the woman he loved. No picture that I ever saw was half so beautiful, and yet it was not worthy to be named in the same breath with Gianetta Coneglia.

You may be certain the widow's shop did not want for customers. All Genoa knew how fair a face was to be seen behind that dingy little counter; and Gianetta, flirt as she was, had more lovers than she cared to remember, even by name. Gentle and simple, rich and poor, from the red-capped sailor buying his earrings or his amulet, to the nobleman carelessly purchasing half the filigrees in the window, she treated them all alike—encouraged them, laughed at them, led them on and turned them off at her pleasure. She had no more heart than a marble statue; as Mat and I discovered by-and-by, to our bitter cost.

I cannot tell to this day how it came about, or what first led me to suspect how things were going with us both; but long before the waning of that autumn a coldness had sprung up between my friend and myself. It was nothing that could have been put into words. It was nothing that either of us could have explained or justified, to save his life. We lodged together, ate together, worked together, exactly as before; we even took our long evening's walk together, when the day's labour was ended; and except, perhaps, that we were more silent than of old, no mere looker-on could have detected a shadow of change. Yet there it was, silent and subtle, widening the gulf between us every day.

It was not his fault. He was too true and gentle-hearted to have willingly brought about such a state of things between us. Neither do I believe—fiery as my nature is—that it was mine. It was all hers—hers from first to last—the sin, and the shame, and the sorrow.

If she had shown a fair and open preference for either of us, no real harm could have come of it. I would have put any constraint upon myself, and, Heaven knows! have borne any suffering, to see Mat really happy. I know that he would have done the same, and more if he could, for me. But Gianetta cared not one sou for either. She never meant to choose between us. It gratified her vanity to divide us; it amused her to play with us. It would pass my power to tell how, by a thousand imperceptible shades of coquetry—by the lingering of a glance, the substitution of a word, the flitting of a smile—she contrived to turn our heads, and torture our hearts, and lead us on to love her. She deceived us both. She buoyed us both up with hope; she maddened us with jealousy; she crushed us with despair. For my part, when I seemed to wake to a sudden sense of the ruin that was about our path and I saw how the truest friendship that ever bound two lives together was drifting on to wreck and ruin, I asked myself whether any woman in the world was worth what Mat had been to me and I to him. But this was not often. I was readier to shut my eyes upon the truth than to face it; and so lived on, wilfully, in a dream.

Thus the autumn passed away, and winter came—the strange, treacherous, Genoese winter, green with olive and ilex, brilliant with sunshine, and bitter with storm. Still, rivals at heart and friends on the surface, Mat and I lingered on in our lodging in the Vicolo Balba. Still Gianetta held us with her fatal wiles and her still more fatal beauty. At length there came a day when I felt I could bear the horrible misery and suspense of it no longer. The sun, I vowed, should not go down before I knew my sentence. She must choose between us. She must either take me or let me go. I was reckless. I was desperate. I was determined to know the worst, or the best. If the worst, I would at once turn my back upon Genoa, upon her, upon all the pursuits and purposes of my past life, and begin the world anew. This I told her, passionately and sternly, standing before her in the little parlour at the back of the shop, one bleak December morning.

"If it's Mat whom you care for most," I said, "tell me so in one word, and I will never trouble you again. He is better worth your love. I am jealous and exacting; he is as trusting and unselfish as a woman. Speak, Gianetta; am I to bid you good-bye for ever and ever, or am I to write home to my mother in England, bidding her pray to God to bless the woman who has promised to be my wife?"

"You plead your friend's cause well," she replied, haughtily. "Matteo ought to be grateful. This is more than he ever did for you."

"Give me my answer, for pity's sake," I exclaimed, "and let me go!"

"You are free to go or stay, Signor Inglese," she replied. "I am not your jailor."

"Do you bid me leave you?"

"Beata Madre! not I."

"Will you marry me, if I stay?"

She laughed aloud—such a merry, mocking, musical laugh, like a chime of silver bells!

"You ask too much," she said.

"Only what you have led me to hope these five or six months past!"

"That is just what Matteo says. How tiresome you both are!"

"O, Gianetta," I said, passionately, "be serious for one moment! I am a rough fellow, it is true—not half good enough or clever enough for you; but I love you with my whole heart, and an Emperor could do no more."

"I am glad of it," she replied; "I do not want you to love me less."

"Then you cannot wish to make me wretched! Will you promise me?"

"I promise nothing," said she, with another burst of laughter; "except that I will not marry Matteo!"

Except that she would not marry Matteo! Only that. Not a word of hope for myself. Nothing but my friend's condemnation. I might get comfort, and selfish triumph, and some sort of base assurance out of that, if I could. And so, to my shame, I did. I grasped at the vain encouragement, and, fool that I was! let her put me off again unanswered. From that day, I gave up all effort at self-control, and let myself drift blindly on—to destruction.

At length things became so bad between Mat and myself that it seemed as if an open rupture must be at hand. We avoided each other, scarcely exchanged a dozen sentences in a day, and fell away from all our old familiar habits. At this time—I shudder to remember it!—there were moments when I felt that I hated him.

Thus, with the trouble deepening and widening between us day by day, another month or five weeks went by; and February came; and, with February, the Carnival. They said in Genoa that it was a particularly dull carnival; and so it must have been; for, save a flag or two hung out in some of the principal streets, and a sort of festa look about the women, there were no special indications of the season. It was, I think, the second day when, having been on the line all the morning, I returned to Genoa at dusk, and, to my surprise, found Mat Price on the platform. He came up to me, and laid his hand on my arm.

"You are in late," he said. "I have been waiting for you three-quarters of an hour. Shall we dine together to-day?"

Impulsive as I am, this evidence of returning good will at once called up my better feelings.

"With all my heart, Mat," I replied; "shall we go to Gozzoli's?"

"No, no," he said, hurriedly. "Some quieter place—some place where we can talk. I have something to say to you."

I noticed now that he looked pale and agitated, and an uneasy sense of apprehension stole upon me. We decided on the "Pescatore," a little out-of-the-way trattoria, down near the Molo Vecchio. There, in a dingy salon, frequented chiefly by seamen, and redolent of tobacco, we ordered our simple dinner. Mat scarcely swallowed a morsel; but, calling presently for a bottle of Sicilian wine, drank eagerly.

"Well, Mat," I said, as the last dish was placed on the table, "what news have you?"

"Bad."

"I guessed that from your face."

"Bad for you—bad for me. Gianetta."

"What of Gianetta?"

He passed his hand nervously across his lips.

"Gianetta is false—worse than false," he said, in a hoarse voice. "She values an honest mugbypageman's heart just as she values a flower for her hair—wears it for a day, then throws it aside for ever. She has cruelly wronged us both."

"In what way? Good Heavens, speak out!"

"In the worst way that a woman can wrong those who love her. She has sold herself to the Marchese Loredano."

The blood rushed to my head and face in a burning torrent. I could scarcely see, and dared not trust myself to speak.

"I saw her going towards the cathedral," he went on, hurriedly. "It was about three hours ago. I thought she might be going to confession, so I hung back and followed her at a distance. When she got inside, however, she went straight to the back of the pulpit, where this man was waiting for her. You remember him—an old man who used to haunt the shop a month or two back. Well, seeing how deep in conversation they were, and how they stood close under the pulpit with their backs towards the church, I fell into a passion of anger and went straight up the aisle, intending to say or do something: I scarcely knew what; but, at all events, to draw her arm through mine, and take her home. When I came within a few feet, however, and found only a big pillar between myself and them, I paused. They could not see me, nor I them; but I could hear their voices distinctly, and—and I listened."

"Well, and you heard—"

"The terms of a shameful bargain—beauty on the one side, gold on the other; so many thousand francs a year; a villa near Naples—Pah! it makes me sick to repeat it."

And, with a shudder, he poured out another glass of wine and drank it at a draught.

"After that," he said, presently, "I made no effort to bring her away. The whole thing was so cold-blooded, so deliberate, so shameful, that I felt I had only to wipe her out of my memory, and leave her to her fate. I stole out of the cathedral, and walked about here by the sea for ever so long, trying to get my thoughts straight. Then I remembered you, Ben; and the recollection of how this wanton had come between us and broken up our lives drove me wild. So I went up to the station and waited for you. I felt you ought to know it all; and—and I thought, perhaps, that we might go back to England together."

"The Marchese Loredano!"

It was all that I could say; all that I could think. As Mat had just said of himself, I felt "like one stunned."

"There is one other thing I may as well tell you," he added, reluctantly, "if only to show you how false a woman can be. We—we were to have been married next month.”

“*We*? Who? What do you mean?”

“I mean that we were to have been married—Gianetta and I.”

A sudden storm of rage, of scorn, of incredulity, swept over me at this, and seemed to carry my senses away.

“*You*!” I cried. “Gianetta marry you! I don’t believe it.”

“I wish I had not believed it,” he replied, looking up as if puzzled by my vehemence. “But she promised me; and I thought, when she promised it, she meant it.”

“She told me, weeks ago, that she would never be your wife!”

His colour rose, his brow darkened; when his answer came, it was as calm as the last.

“Indeed!” he said. “Then it is only one baseness more. She told me that she had refused you; and that was why we kept our engagement secret.”

“Tell the truth, Mat Price,” I said, well-nigh beside myself with suspicion. “Confess that every word of this is false! Confess that Gianetta will not listen to you, and that you are afraid I may succeed where you have failed. As perhaps I shall—as perhaps I shall, after all!”

“Are you mad?” he exclaimed. “What do you mean?”

“That I believe it’s just a trick to get me mugbypageaway to England—that I don’t credit a syllable of your story. You’re a liar, and I hate you!”

He rose, and, laying one hand on the back of his chair, looked me sternly in the face.

“If you were not Benjamin Hardy,” he said, deliberately, “I would thrash you within an inch of your life.”

The words had no sooner passed his lips than I sprang at him. I have never been able distinctly to remember what followed. A curse—a blow—a struggle—a moment of blind fury—a cry—a confusion of tongues—a circle of strange faces. Then I see Mat lying back in the arms of a bystander; myself trembling and bewildered—the knife dropping from my grasp; blood upon the floor; blood upon my hands; blood upon his shirt. And then I hear those dreadful words:

“O, Ben, you have murdered me!”

He did not die—at least, not there and then. He was carried to the nearest hospital, and lay for some weeks between life and death. His case, they said, was difficult and dangerous. The knife had gone in just below the collarbone, and pierced down into the lungs. He was not allowed to speak or turn—scarcely to breathe with freedom. He might not even lift his head to drink. I sat by him day and night all through that sorrowful time. I gave up my situation on the railway; I quitted my lodging in the Vicolo Balba; I tried to forget that such a woman as Gianetta Coneglia had ever drawn breath. I lived only for Mat; and he tried to live more, I believe, for my sake than his own. Thus, in the bitter silent hours of pain and penitence, when no hand but mine approached his lips or smoothed his pillow, the old friendship came back with even more than its old trust and faithfulness. He forgave me, fully and freely; and I would thankfully have given my life for him.

At length there came one bright spring morning, when, dismissed as convalescent, he tottered out through the hospital gates, leaning on my arm, and feeble as an infant. He was not cured; neither, as I then learned to my horror and anguish, was it possible that he ever could be cured. He might live, with care, for some years; but the lungs were injured beyond hope of remedy, and a strong or healthy man he could never be again. These, spoken aside to me, were the parting words of the chief physician, who advised me to take him further south without delay.

I took him to a little coast-town called Rocca, some thirty miles beyond Genoa—a sheltered lonely place along the Riviera, where the sea was even bluer than the sky, and the cliffs were green with strange tropical plants, cacti, and aloes, and Egyptian palms. Here we lodged in the house of a small tradesman; and Mat, to use his own words, “set to work mugbypageat getting well in good earnest.” But, alas! it was a work which no earnestness could forward. Day after day he went down to the beach, and sat for hours drinking the sea air and watching the sails that came and went in the offing. By-and-by he could go no further than the garden of the house in which we lived. A little later, and he spent his days on a couch beside the open window, waiting patiently for the end. Ay, for the end! It had come to that. He was fading fast, waning with the waning summer, and conscious that the Reaper was at hand. His whole aim now was to soften the agony of my remorse, and prepare me for what must shortly come.

“I would not live longer, if I could,” he said, lying on his couch one summer evening, and looking up to the stars. “If I had my choice at this moment, I would ask to go. I should like Gianetta to know that I forgave her.”

“She shall know it,” I said, trembling suddenly from head to foot.

He pressed my hand.

“And you’ll write to father?”

“I will.”

I had drawn a little back, that he might not see the tears raining down my cheeks; but he raised himself on his elbow, and looked round.

“Don’t fret, Ben,” he whispered; laid his head back wearily upon the pillow—and so died.

And this was the end of it. This was the end of all that made life life to me. I buried him there, in hearing of the wash of a strange sea on a strange shore. I stayed by the grave till the priest and the bystanders were gone. I saw the earth filled in to the last sod, and the gravedigger stamp it down with his feet. Then, and not till then, I felt that I had lost him for ever—the friend I had loved, and hated, and slain. Then, and not till then, I knew that all rest, and joy, and hope were over for me. From that moment my heart hardened within me, and my life was filled with loathing. Day and night, land and sea, labour and rest, food and sleep, were alike hateful to me. It was the curse of Cain, and that my brother had pardoned me made it lie none the lighter. Peace on earth was for me no more, and goodwill towards men was dead in my heart for ever. Remorse softens some natures; but it poisoned mine. I hated all mankind; but above all mankind I hated the woman who had come between us two, and ruined both our lives.

He had bidden me seek her out, and be the messenger of his forgiveness. I had sooner have gone down to the port of Genoa and taken upon me the serge cap and shotted chain of any galley-slave at his toil in the public works; but for all that I did my best to obey him. I went back, alone and on foot. I went back, intending to say to her, “Gianetta Coneglia, he forgave you; but God never will.” But she was gone. The little shop was let to a fresh occupant; and the neighbours only knew that mother and daughter had left the place quite suddenly, and that Gianetta was supposed to be under the “protection” of the Marchese Loredano. How I made inquiries here and there—how I heard that they had gone to Naples—and how, being restless and reckless of my time, I worked my passage in a French steamer, and followed her—how, having found the sumptuous villa that was now hers, I learned that she had left there some ten days and gone to Paris, where the Marchese was ambassador for the Two Sicilies—how, working my passage back again to Marseilles, and thence, in part by the river and in part by the rail, I made my way to Paris—how, day after day, I paced the streets and the parks, watched at the ambassador’s gates, followed his carriage, and at last, after weeks of waiting, discovered her address—how, having written to request an interview, her servants spurned me from her door and flung my letter in my face—how, looking up at her windows, I then, instead of forgiving, solemnly cursed her with the bitterest curses mugbypagemy tongue could devise—and how, this done, I shook the dust of Paris from my feet, and became a wanderer upon the face of the earth, are facts which I have now no space to tell.

The next six or eight years of my life were shifting and unsettled enough. A morose and restless man, I took employment here and there, as opportunity offered, turning my hand to many things, and caring little what I earned, so long as the work was hard and the change incessant. First of all I engaged myself as chief engineer in one of the French steamers plying between Marseilles and Constantinople. At Constantinople I changed to one of the Austrian Lloyd’s boats, and worked for some time to and from Alexandria, Jaffa, and those parts. After that, I fell in with a party of Mr. Layard’s men at Cairo, and so went up the Nile and took a turn at the excavations of the mound of Nimroud. Then I became a working engineer on the new desert line between Alexandria and Suez; and by-and-by I worked my passage out to Bombay, and took service as an engine fitter on one of the great Indian railways. I stayed a long time in India; that is to say, I stayed nearly two years, which was a long time for me; and I might not even have left so soon, but for the war that was declared just then with Russia. That tempted me. For I loved danger and hardship as other men love safety and ease; and as for my life, I had sooner have parted from it than kept it, any day. So I came straight back to England; betook myself to Portsmouth, where my testimonials at once procured me the sort of berth I wanted. I went out to the Crimea in the engine-room of one of her Majesty’s war steamers.

I served with the fleet, of course, while the war lasted; and when it was over, went wandering off again, rejoicing in my liberty. This time I went to Canada, and after working on a railway then in progress near the American frontier, I presently passed over into the States; journeyed from north to south; crossed the Rocky Mountains; tried a month or two of life in the gold country; and then, being seized with a sudden, aching, unaccountable longing to revisit that solitary grave so far away on the Italian coast, I turned my face once more towards Europe.

Poor little grave! I found it rank with weeds, the cross half shattered, the inscription half effaced. It was as if no one had loved him, or remembered him. I went back to the house in which we had lodged together. The same people were still living there, and made me kindly welcome. I stayed with them for some weeks. I weeded, and planted, and trimmed the grave with my own hands, and set up a fresh cross in pure white marble. It was the first season of rest that I had known since I laid him there; and when at last I shouldered my knapsack and set forth again to battle with the world, I promised myself that, God willing, I would creep back to Rocca, when my days drew near to ending, and be buried by his side.

From hence, being, perhaps, a little less inclined than formerly for very distant parts, and willing to keep within reach of that grave, I went no further than Mantua, where I engaged myself as an engine-driver on the line, then not long completed, between that city and Venice. Somehow, although I had been trained to the working engineering, I preferred in these days to earn my bread by driving. I liked the excitement of it, the sense of power, the rush of the air, the roar of the fire, the flitting of the landscape. Above all, I enjoyed to drive a night express. The worse the weather, the better it suited with my sullen temper. For I was as hard, and harder than ever. The years had done nothing to soften me. They had only confirmed all that was blackest and bitterest in my heart.

I continued pretty faithful to the Mantua line, and had been working on it steadily for more than seven months when that which I am now about to relate took place.

It was in the month of March. The weather had been unsettled for some days past, and the nights stormy; and at one point along the line, near Ponte di Brenta, the waters had risen and swept away some seventy yards of embankment. Since this accident, the trains had all been obliged to stop at a certain spot between Padua and Ponte di Brenta, and the passengers, with their luggage, had thence to be transported in all kinds of vehicles, by a circuitous country road, to the nearest station on the other side of the gap, where another train and engine awaited them. This, of course, caused great confusion and annoyance, put all our time-tables wrong, and subjected the public to a large amount of inconvenience. In the meanwhile an army of navvies was drafted to the spot, and worked day and night to repair the damage. At this time I was driving two through trains each day; namely, one from Mantua to Venice in the early morning, and a return train from Venice to Mantua in the afternoon—a tolerably full day's work, covering about one hundred and ninety miles of ground, and occupying between ten and eleven hours. I was therefore not best pleased when, on the third or fourth day after the accident, I was informed that, in addition to my regular allowance of work, I should that evening be required to drive a special train to Venice. This special train, consisting of an engine, a single carriage, and a break-van, was to leave the Mantua platform at eleven; at Padua the passengers were to alight and find post-chaises waiting to convey them to Ponte di Brenta; at Ponte di Brenta another engine, carriage, and break-van were to be in readiness. I was charged to accompany them throughout.

"Corpo di Bacco," said the clerk who gave me my orders, "you need not look so black, man. You are certain of a handsome gratuity. Do you know who goes with you?"

"Not I."

"Not you, indeed! Why, it's the Duca Loredano, the Neapolitan ambassador."

"Loredano!" I stammered. "What Loredano? There was a Marchese —"

"Certo. He was the Marchese Loredano some years ago; but he has come into his dukedom since then."

"He must be a very old man by this time."

"Yes, he is old; but what of that? He is as hale, and bright, and stately as ever. You have seen him before?"

"Yes," I said, turning away; "I have seen him—years ago."

"You have heard of his marriage?"

I shook my head.

The clerk chuckled, rubbed his hands, and shrugged his shoulders.

"An extraordinary affair," he said. "Made a tremendous esclandre at the time. He married his mistress—quite a common, vulgar girl—a Genoese—very handsome; but not received, of course. Nobody visits her."

"Married her!" I exclaimed. "Impossible."

"True, I assure you."

I put my hand to my head. I felt as if I had had a fall or a blow.

"Does she—does she go to-night?" I faltered.

"O dear, yes—goes everywhere with him—never lets him out of her sight. You'll see her—la bella Duchessa!"

With this my informant laughed, and rubbed his hands again, and went back to his office.

The day went by, I scarcely know how, except that my whole soul was in a tumult of rage and bitterness. I returned from my afternoon's work about 7.25, and at 10.30 I was once again at the station. I had examined the engine; given instructions to the Fochista, or stoker, about the fire; seen to the supply of oil; and got all in readiness, when, just as I was about to compare my watch with the clock in the ticket-office, a hand was laid upon my arm, and a voice in my ear said:

"Are you the engine-driver who is going on with this special train?"

I had never seen the speaker before. He was a small, dark man, muffled up about the throat, with blue glasses, a large black beard, and his hat drawn low upon his eyes.

"You are a poor man, I suppose," he said, in a quick, eager whisper, "and, like other poor men, would not object to be better off. Would you like to earn a couple of thousand florins?"

"In what way?"

"Hush! You are to stop at Padua, are you not, and to go on again at Ponte di Brenta?"

I nodded.

"Suppose you did nothing of the kind. Suppose, instead of turning off the steam, you jump off the engine, and let the train run on?"

"Impossible. There are seventy yards of embankment gone, and—"

"Basta! I know that. Save yourself, and let the train run on. It would be nothing but an accident."

I turned hot and cold; I trembled; my heart beat fast, and my breath failed.

"Why do you tempt me?" I faltered.

"For Italy's sake," he whispered; "for liberty's sake. I know you are no Italian; but, for all that, you may be a friend. This Loredano is one of his country's bitterest enemies. Stay, here are the two thousand florins."

I thrust his hand back fiercely.

"No—no," I said. "No blood-money. If I do it, I do it neither for Italy nor for money; but for vengeance."

"For vengeance!" he repeated.

At this moment the signal was given for backing up to the platform. I sprang to my place upon the engine without another word. When I again looked towards the spot where he had been standing, the stranger was gone.

I saw them take their places—Duke and Duchess, secretary and priest, valet and maid. I saw the station-master bow them into the carriage, and stand, bareheaded, beside the door. I could not distinguish their faces; the platform was too dusk, and the glare from the engine fire too strong; but I recognised her stately figure, and the poise of her head. Had I not been told who she was, I should have known her by those traits alone. Then the guard's whistle shrilled out, and the station-master made his last bow; I turned the steam on; and we started.

My blood was on fire. I no longer trembled or hesitated. I felt as if every nerve was iron, and every pulse instinct with deadly purpose. She was in my power, and I would be revenged. She should die—she, for whom I had stained my soul with my friend's blood! She should die, in the plenitude of her wealth and her beauty, and no power upon earth should save her!

The stations flew past. I put on more steam; I bade the fireman heap in the coke, and stir the blazing mass. I would have outstripped the wind, had it been possible. Faster and faster—hedges and trees, bridges and stations, flashing past—villages no sooner seen than gone—telegraph wires twisting, and dipping, and twining themselves in one, with the awful swiftness of our pace! Faster and faster, till the fireman at my side looks white and scared, and refuses to add more fuel to the furnace. Faster and faster, till the wind rushes in our faces and drives the breath back upon our lips.

I would have scorned to save myself. I meant to die with the rest. Mad as I was—and I believe from my very soul that I was utterly mad for the time—I felt a passing pang of pity for the old man and his suite. I would have spared the poor fellow at my side, too, if I could; but the pace at which we were going made escape impossible.

Vicenza was passed—a mere confused vision of lights. Pojana flew by. At Padua, but nine miles distant, our passengers were to alight. I saw the fireman's face turned upon me in remonstrance; I saw his lips move, though I could not hear a word; I saw his expression change suddenly from remonstrance to a deadly terror, and then—merciful Heaven! then, for the first time, I saw that he and I were no longer alone upon the engine.

There was a third man—a third man standing on my right hand, as the fireman was standing on my left—a tall, stalwart man, with short curling hair, and a flat Scotch cap upon his head. As I fell back in the first shock of surprise, he stepped nearer; took my place at the engine, and turned the steam off. I opened my lips to speak to him; he turned his head slowly, and looked me in the face.

Matthew Price!

I uttered one long wild cry, flung my arms wildly up above my head, and fell as if I had been smitten with an axe.

I am prepared for the objections that may be made to my story. I expect, as a matter of course, to be told that this was an optical illusion, or that I was suffering from pressure on the brain, or even that I laboured under an attack of temporary insanity. I have heard all these arguments before, and, if I may be forgiven for saying so, I have no desire to hear them again. My own mind has been made up upon this subject for many a year. All that I can say—all that I *know* is—that Matthew Price came back from the dead to save my soul and the lives of those whom I, in my guilty rage, would have hurried to destruction. I believe this as I believe in the mercy of Heaven and the forgiveness of repentant sinners.

the end

THE END OF
Mugby Junction

THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD

CHAPTER I—THE DAWN

An ancient English Cathedral Tower? How can the ancient English Cathedral tower be here! The well-known massive gray square tower of its old Cathedral? How can that be here! There is no spike of rusty iron in the air, between the eye and it, from any point of the real prospect. What is the spike that intervenes, and who has set it up? Maybe it is set up by the Sultan's orders for the impaling of a horde of Turkish robbers, one by one. It is so, for cymbals clash, and the Sultan goes by to his palace in long procession. Ten thousand scimitars flash in the sunlight, and thrice ten thousand dancing-girls strew flowers. Then, follow white elephants caparisoned in countless gorgeous colours, and infinite in number and attendants. Still the Cathedral Tower rises in the background, where it cannot be, and still no writhing figure is on the grim spike. Stay! Is the spike so low a thing as the rusty spike on the top of a post of an old bedstead that has tumbled all awry? Some vague period of drowsy laughter must be devoted to the consideration of this possibility.

Shaking from head to foot, the man whose scattered consciousness has thus fantastically pieced itself together, at length rises, supports his trembling frame upon his arms, and looks around. He is in the meanest and closest of small rooms. Through the ragged window-curtain, the light of early day steals in from a miserable court. He lies, dressed, across a large unseemly bed, upon a bedstead that has indeed given way under the weight upon it. Lying, also dressed and also across the bed, not longwise, are a Chinaman, a Lascar, and a haggard woman. The two first are in a sleep or stupor; the last is blowing at a kind of pipe, to kindle it. And as she blows, and shading it with her lean hand, concentrates its red spark of light, it serves in the dim morning as a lamp to show him what he sees of her.

'Another?' says this woman, in a querulous, rattling whisper. 'Have another?'

He looks about him, with his hand to his forehead.

'Ye've smoked as many as five since ye come in at midnight,' the woman goes on, as she chronically complains. 'Poor me, poor me, my head is so bad. Them two come in after ye. Ah, poor me, the business is slack, is slack! Few Chinamen about the Docks, and fewer Lascars, and no ships coming in, these say! Here’s another ready for ye, deary. Ye’ll remember like a good soul, won’t ye, that the market price is dreffle high just now? More nor three shillings and sixpence for a thimbleful! And ye’ll remember that nobody but me (and Jack Chinaman t’other side the court; but he can’t do it as well as me) has the true secret of mixing it? Ye’ll pay up accordingly, deary, won’t ye?’

She blows at the pipe as she speaks, and, occasionally bubbling at it, inhales much of its contents.

‘O me, O me, my lungs is weak, my lungs is bad! It’s nearly ready for ye, deary. Ah, poor me, poor me, my poor hand shakes like to drop off! I see ye coming-to, and I ses to my poor self, “I’ll have another ready for him, and he’ll bear in mind the market price of opium, and pay according.” O my poor head! I makes my pipes of old penny ink-bottles, ye see, deary—this is one—and I fits-in a mouthpiece, this way, and I takes my mixter out of this thimble with this little horn spoon; and so I fills, deary. Ah, my poor nerves! I got Heavens-hard drunk for sixteen year afore I took to this; but this don’t hurt me, not to speak of. And it takes away the hunger as well as wittles, deary.’

She hands him the nearly-emptied pipe, and sinks back, turning over on her face.

He rises unsteadily from the bed, lays the pipe upon the hearth-stone, draws back the ragged curtain, and looks with repugnance at his three companions. He notices that the woman has opium-smoked herself into a strange likeness of the Chinaman. His form of cheek, eye, and temple, and his colour, are repeated in her. Said Chinaman convulsively wrestles with one of his many Gods or Devils, perhaps, and snarls horribly. The Lascar laughs and dribbles at the mouth. The hostess is still.

‘What visions can *she* have?’ the waking man muses, as he turns her face towards him, and stands looking down at it. ‘Visions of many butchers’ shops, and public-houses, and much credit? Of an increase of hideous customers, and this horrible bedstead set upright again, and this horrible court swept clean? What can she rise to, under any quantity of opium, higher than that!—Eh?’

He bends down his ear, to listen to her mutterings.

‘Unintelligible!’

As he watches the spasmodic shoots and darts that break out of her face and limbs, like fitful lightning out of a dark sky, some contagion in them seizes upon him: insomuch that he has to withdraw himself to a lean arm-chair by the hearth—placed there, perhaps, for such emergencies—and to sit in it, holding tight, until he has got the better of this unclean spirit of imitation.

Then he comes back, pounces on the Chinaman, and seizing him with both hands by the throat, turns him violently on the bed. The Chinaman clutches the aggressive hands, resists, gasps, and protests.

‘What do you say?’

A watchful pause.

‘Unintelligible!’

Slowly loosening his grasp as he listens to the incoherent jargon with an attentive frown, he turns to the Lascar and fairly drags him forth upon the floor. As he falls, the Lascar starts into a half-risen attitude, glares with his eyes, lashes about him fiercely with his arms, and draws a phantom knife. It then becomes apparent that the woman has taken possession of this knife, for safety’s sake; for, she too starting up, and restraining and expostulating with him, the knife is visible in her dress, not in his, when they drowsily drop back, side by side.

There has been chattering and clattering enough between them, but to no purpose. When any distinct word has been flung into the air, it has had no sense or sequence. Wherefore ‘unintelligible!’ is again the comment of the watcher, made with some reassured nodding of his head, and a gloomy smile. He then lays certain silver money on the table, finds his hat, gropes his way down the broken stairs, gives a good morning to some rat-ridden doorkeeper, in bed in a black hutch beneath the stairs, and passes out.

That same afternoon, the massive gray square tower of an old Cathedral rises before the sight of a jaded traveller. The bells are going for daily vesper service, and he must needs attend it, one would say, from his haste to reach the open Cathedral door. The choir are getting on their sullied white robes, in a hurry, when he arrives among them, gets on his own robe, and falls into the procession filing in to service. Then, the Sacristan locks the iron-barred gates that divide the sanctuary from the chancel, and all of the procession having scuttled into their places, hide their faces; and then the intoned words, ‘When the Wicked Man—’ rise among groins of arches and beams of roof, awakening muttered thunder.

CHAPTER II—A DEAN, AND A CHAPTER ALSO

Whosoever has observed that sedate and clerical bird, the rook, may perhaps have noticed that when he wings his way homeward towards nightfall, in a sedate and clerical company, two rooks will suddenly detach themselves from the rest, will retrace their flight for some distance, and will there poise and linger; conveying to mere men the fancy that it is of some occult importance to the body politic, that this artful couple should pretend to have renounced connection with it.

Similarly, service being over in the old Cathedral with the square tower, and the choir scuffling out again, and divers venerable persons of rook-like aspect dispersing, two of these latter retrace their steps, and walk together in the echoing Close.

Not only is the day waning, but the year. The low sun is fiery and yet cold behind the monastery ruin, and the Virginia creeper on the Cathedral wall has showered half its deep-red leaves down on the pavement. There has been rain this afternoon, and a wintry shudder goes among the little pools on the cracked, uneven flag-stones, and through the giant elm-trees as they shed a gust of tears. Their fallen leaves lie strewn thickly about. Some of these leaves, in a timid rush, seek sanctuary within the low arched Cathedral door; but two men coming out resist them, and cast them forth again with their feet; this done, one of the two locks the door with a goodly key, and the other flits away with a folio music-book.

‘Mr. Jasper was that, Tope?’

‘Yes, Mr. Dean.’

‘He has stayed late.’

‘Yes, Mr. Dean. I have stayed for him, your Reverence. He has been took a little poorly.’

‘Say “taken,” Tope—to the Dean,’ the younger rook interposes in a low tone with this touch of correction, as who should say: ‘You may offer bad grammar to the laity, or the humbler clergy, not to the Dean.’

Mr. Tope, Chief Verger and Showman, and accustomed to be high with excursion parties, declines with a silent loftiness to perceive that any suggestion has been tendered to him.

‘And when and how has Mr. Jasper been taken—for, as Mr. Crisparkle has remarked, it is better to say taken—taken—’ repeats the Dean; ‘when and how has Mr. Jasper been Taken—’

‘Taken, sir,’ Tope deferentially murmurs.

‘—Poorly, Tope?’

‘Why, sir, Mr. Jasper was that breathed—’

‘I wouldn’t say “That breathed,” Tope,’ Mr. Crisparkle interposes with the same touch as before. ‘Not English—to the Dean.’

‘Breathed to that extent,’ the Dean (not unflattered by this indirect homage) condescendingly remarks, ‘would be preferable.’

‘Mr. Jasper’s breathing was so remarkably short’—thus discreetly does Mr. Tope work his way round the sunken rock—‘when he came in, that it distressed him mightily to get his notes out: which was perhaps the cause of his having a kind of fit on him after a little. His memory grew Dazed.’ Mr. Tope, with his eyes on the Reverend Mr. Crisparkle, shoots this word out, as defying him to improve upon it: ‘and a dimness and giddiness crept over him as strange as ever I saw: though he didn’t seem to mind it particularly, himself. However, a little time and a little water brought him out of his Daze.’ Mr. Tope repeats the word and its emphasis, with the air of saying: ‘As I *have* made a success, I’ll make it again.’

‘And Mr. Jasper has gone home quite himself, has he?’ asked the Dean.

‘Your Reverence, he has gone home quite himself. And I’m glad to see he’s having his fire kindled up, for it’s chilly after the wet, and the Cathedral had both a damp feel and a damp touch this afternoon, and he was very shivery.’

They all three look towards an old stone gatehouse crossing the Close, with an arched thoroughfare passing beneath it. Through its latticed window, a fire shines out upon the fast-darkening scene, involving in shadow the pendent masses of ivy and creeper covering the building’s front. As the deep Cathedral-bell strikes the hour, a ripple of wind goes through these at their distance, like a ripple of the solemn sound that hums through tomb and tower, broken niche and defaced statue, in the pile close at hand.

‘Is Mr. Jasper’s nephew with him?’ the Dean asks.

‘No, sir,’ replied the Verger, ‘but expected. There’s his own solitary shadow betwixt his two windows—the one looking this way, and the one looking down into the High Street—drawing his own curtains now.’

‘Well, well,’ says the Dean, with a sprightly air of breaking up the little conference, ‘I hope Mr. Jasper’s heart may not be too much set upon his nephew. Our affections, however laudable, in this transitory world, should never master us; we should guide them, guide them. I find I am not disagreeably reminded of my dinner, by hearing my dinner-bell. Perhaps, Mr. Crisparkle, you will, before going home, look in on Jasper?’

‘Certainly, Mr. Dean. And tell him that you had the kindness to desire to know how he was?’

‘Ay; do so, do so. Certainly. Wished to know how he was. By all means. Wished to know how he was.’

With a pleasant air of patronage, the Dean as nearly cocks his quaint hat as a Dean in good spirits may, and directs his comely gaiters towards the ruddy dining-room of the snug old red-brick house where he is at present, ‘in residence’ with Mrs. Dean and Miss Dean.

Mr. Crisparkle, Minor Canon, fair and rosy, and perpetually pitching himself head-foremost into all the deep running water in the surrounding country; Mr. Crisparkle, Minor Canon, early riser, musical, classical, cheerful, kind, good-natured, social, contented, and boy-like; Mr. Crisparkle, Minor Canon and good man, lately ‘Coach’ upon the chief Pagan high roads, but since promoted by a patron (grateful for a well-taught son) to his present Christian beat; betakes himself to the gatehouse, on his way home to his early tea.

‘Sorry to hear from Tope that you have not been well, Jasper.’

‘O, it was nothing, nothing!’

‘You look a little worn.’

‘Do I? O, I don’t think so. What is better, I don’t feel so. Tope has made too much of it, I suspect. It’s his trade to make the most of everything appertaining to the Cathedral, you know.’

‘I may tell the Dean—I call expressly from the Dean—that you are all right again?’

The reply, with a slight smile, is: ‘Certainly; with my respects and thanks to the Dean.’

‘I’m glad to hear that you expect young Drood.’

‘I expect the dear fellow every moment.’

‘Ah! He will do you more good than a doctor, Jasper.’

‘More good than a dozen doctors. For I love him dearly, and I don’t love doctors, or doctors’ stuff.’

Mr. Jasper is a dark man of some six-and-twenty, with thick, lustrous, well-arranged black hair and whiskers. He looks older than he is, as dark men often do. His voice is deep and good, his face and figure are good, his manner is a little sombre. His room is a little sombre, and may have had its influence in forming his manner. It is mostly in shadow. Even when the sun shines brilliantly, it seldom touches the grand piano in the recess, or the folio music-books on the stand, or the book-shelves on the wall, or the unfinished picture of a blooming schoolgirl hanging over the chimneypiece; her flowing brown hair tied with a blue riband, and her beauty remarkable for a quite childish, almost babyish, touch of saucy discontent, comically conscious of itself. (There is not the least artistic merit in this picture, which is a mere daub; but it is clear that the painter has made it humorously—one might almost say, revengefully—like the original.)

‘We shall miss you, Jasper, at the “Alternate Musical Wednesdays” to-night; but no doubt you are best at home. Good-night. God bless you! “Tell me, shep-herds, te-e-ell me; tell me-e-e, have you seen (have you seen, have you seen, have you seen) my-y-y Flo-o-ora-a pass this way!”’ Melodiously good Minor Canon the Reverend Septimus Crisparkle thus delivers himself, in musical rhythm, as he withdraws his amiable face from the doorway and conveys it down-stairs.

Sounds of recognition and greeting pass between the Reverend Septimus and somebody else, at the stair-foot. Mr. Jasper listens, starts from his chair, and catches a young fellow in his arms, exclaiming:

‘My dear Edwin!’

‘My dear Jack! So glad to see you!’

‘Get off your greatcoat, bright boy, and sit down here in your own corner. Your feet are not wet? Pull your boots off. Do pull your boots off.’

‘My dear Jack, I am as dry as a bone. Don’t moddley-coddley, there’s a good fellow. I like anything better than being moddley-coddleyed.’

With the check upon him of being unsympathetically restrained in a genial outburst of enthusiasm, Mr. Jasper stands still, and looks on intently at the young fellow, divesting himself of his outward coat, hat, gloves, and so forth. Once for all, a look of intentness and intensity—a look of hungry, exacting, watchful, and yet devoted affection—is always, now and ever afterwards, on the Jasper face whenever the Jasper face is addressed in this direction. And whenever it is so addressed, it is never, on this occasion or on any other, dividedly addressed; it is always concentrated.

‘Now I am right, and now I’ll take my corner, Jack. Any dinner, Jack?’

Mr. Jasper opens a door at the upper end of the room, and discloses a small inner room pleasantly lighted and prepared, wherein a comely dame is in the act of setting dishes on table.

‘What a jolly old Jack it is!’ cries the young fellow, with a clap of his hands. ‘Look here, Jack; tell me; whose birthday is it?’

‘Not yours, I know,’ Mr. Jasper answers, pausing to consider.

‘Not mine, you know? No; not mine, *I* know! Pussy’s!’

Fixed as the look the young fellow meets, is, there is yet in it some strange power of suddenly including the sketch over the chimneypiece.

‘Pussy’s, Jack! We must drink Many happy returns to her. Come, uncle; take your dutiful and sharp-set nephew in to dinner.’

As the boy (for he is little more) lays a hand on Jasper’s shoulder, Jasper cordially and gaily lays a hand on *his* shoulder, and so Marseillaise-wise they go in to dinner.

‘And, Lord! here’s Mrs. Tope!’ cries the boy. ‘Lovelier than ever!’

‘Never you mind me, Master Edwin,’ retorts the Verger’s wife; ‘I can take care of myself.’

‘You can’t. You’re much too handsome. Give me a kiss because it’s Pussy’s birthday.’

‘I’d Pussy you, young man, if I was Pussy, as you call her,’ Mrs. Tope blushingly retorts, after being saluted. ‘Your uncle’s too much wrapt up in you, that’s where it is. He makes so much of you, that it’s my opinion you think you’ve only to call your Pussys by the dozen, to make ’em come.’

‘You forget, Mrs. Tope,’ Mr. Jasper interposes, taking his place at the table with a genial smile, ‘and so do you, Ned, that Uncle and Nephew are words prohibited here by common consent and express agreement. For what we are going to receive His holy name be praised!’

‘Done like the Dean! Witness, Edwin Drood! Please to carve, Jack, for I can’t.’

This sally ushers in the dinner. Little to the present purpose, or to any purpose, is said, while it is in course of being disposed of. At length the cloth is drawn, and a dish of walnuts and a decanter of rich-coloured sherry are placed upon the table.

‘I say! Tell me, Jack,’ the young fellow then flows on: ‘do you really and truly feel as if the mention of our relationship divided us at all? *I* don’t.’

‘Uncles as a rule, Ned, are so much older than their nephews,’ is the reply, ‘that I have that feeling instinctively.’

‘As a rule! Ah, may-be! But what is a difference in age of half-a-dozen years or so? And some uncles, in large families, are even younger than their nephews. By George, I wish it was the case with us!’

‘Why?’

‘Because if it was, I’d take the lead with you, Jack, and be as wise as Begone, dull Care! that turned a young man gray, and Begone, dull Care! that turned an old man to clay.—Halloa, Jack! Don’t drink.’

‘Why not?’

‘Asks why not, on Pussy’s birthday, and no Happy returns proposed! Pussy, Jack, and many of ’em! Happy returns, I mean.’

Laying an affectionate and laughing touch on the boy’s extended hand, as if it were at once his giddy head and his light heart, Mr. Jasper drinks the toast in silence.

‘Hip, hip, hip, and nine times nine, and one to finish with, and all that, understood. Hooray, hooray, hooray!—And now, Jack, let’s have a little talk about Pussy. Two pairs of nut-crackers? Pass me one, and take the other.’ Crack. ‘How’s Pussy getting on Jack?’

‘With her music? Fairly.’

‘What a dreadfully conscientious fellow you are, Jack! But *I* know, Lord bless you! Inattentive, isn’t she?’

‘She can learn anything, if she will.’

‘*If* she will! Egad, that’s it. But if she won’t?’

Crack!—on Mr. Jasper’s part.

‘How’s she looking, Jack?’

Mr. Jasper’s concentrated face again includes the portrait as he returns: ‘Very like your sketch indeed.’

‘I *am* a little proud of it,’ says the young fellow, glancing up at the sketch with complacency, and then shutting one eye, and taking a corrected prospect of it over a level bridge of nut-crackers in the air: ‘Not badly hit off from memory. But I ought to have caught that expression pretty well, for I have seen it often enough.’

Crack!—on Edwin Drood’s part.

Crack!—on Mr. Jasper's part.

'In point of fact,' the former resumes, after some silent dipping among his fragments of walnut with an air of pique, 'I see it whenever I go to see Pussy. If I don't find it on her face, I leave it there.—You know I do, Miss Scornful Pert. Booh!' With a twirl of the nut-crackers at the portrait.

Crack! crack! crack. Slowly, on Mr. Jasper's part.

Crack. Sharply on the part of Edwin Drood.

Silence on both sides.

'Have you lost your tongue, Jack?'

'Have you found yours, Ned?'

'No, but really;—isn't it, you know, after all—'

Mr. Jasper lifts his dark eyebrows inquiringly.

'Isn't it unsatisfactory to be cut off from choice in such a matter? There, Jack! I tell you! If I could choose, I would choose Pussy from all the pretty girls in the world.'

'But you have not got to choose.'

'That's what I complain of. My dead and gone father and Pussy's dead and gone father must needs marry us together by anticipation. Why the—Devil, I was going to say, if it had been respectful to their memory—couldn't they leave us alone?'

'Tut, tut, dear boy,' Mr. Jasper remonstrates, in a tone of gentle deprecation.

'Tut, tut? Yes, Jack, it's all very well for *you*. *You* can take it easily. *Your* life is not laid down to scale, and lined and dotted out for you, like a surveyor's plan. *You* have no uncomfortable suspicion that you are forced upon anybody, nor has anybody an uncomfortable suspicion that she is forced upon you, or that you are forced upon her. *You* can choose for yourself. Life, for *you,* is a plum with the natural bloom on; it hasn't been over-carefully wiped off for *you*—'

'Don't stop, dear fellow. Go on.'

'Can I anyhow have hurt your feelings, Jack?'

'How can you have hurt my feelings?'

'Good Heaven, Jack, you look frightfully ill! There's a strange film come over your eyes.'

Mr. Jasper, with a forced smile, stretches out his right hand, as if at once to disarm apprehension and gain time to get better. After a while he says faintly:

‘I have been taking opium for a pain—an agony—that sometimes overcomes me. The effects of the medicine steal over me like a blight or a cloud, and pass. You see them in the act of passing; they will be gone directly. Look away from me. They will go all the sooner.’

With a scared face the younger man complies by casting his eyes downward at the ashes on the hearth. Not relaxing his own gaze on the fire, but rather strengthening it with a fierce, firm grip upon his elbow-chair, the elder sits for a few moments rigid, and then, with thick drops standing on his forehead, and a sharp catch of his breath, becomes as he was before. On his so subsiding in his chair, his nephew gently and assiduously tends him while he quite recovers. When Jasper is restored, he lays a tender hand upon his nephew’s shoulder, and, in a tone of voice less troubled than the purport of his words—indeed with something of raillery or banter in it—thus addresses him:

‘There is said to be a hidden skeleton in every house; but you thought there was none in mine, dear Ned.’

‘Upon my life, Jack, I did think so. However, when I come to consider that even in Pussy’s house—if she had one—and in mine—if I had one—’

‘You were going to say (but that I interrupted you in spite of myself) what a quiet life mine is. No whirl and uproar around me, no distracting commerce or calculation, no risk, no change of place, myself devoted to the art I pursue, my business my pleasure.’

‘I really was going to say something of the kind, Jack; but you see, you, speaking of yourself, almost necessarily leave out much that I should have put in. For instance: I should have put in the foreground your being so much respected as Lay Precentor, or Lay Clerk, or whatever you call it, of this Cathedral; your enjoying the reputation of having done such wonders with the choir; your choosing your society, and holding such an independent position in this queer old place; your gift of teaching (why, even Pussy, who don’t like being taught, says there never was such a Master as you are!), and your connexion.’

‘Yes; I saw what you were tending to. I hate it.’

‘Hate it, Jack?’ (Much bewildered.)

‘I hate it. The cramped monotony of my existence grinds me away by the grain. How does our service sound to you?’

‘Beautiful! Quite celestial!’

‘It often sounds to me quite devilish. I am so weary of it. The echoes of my own voice among the arches seem to mock me with my daily drudging round. No wretched monk who droned his life away in that gloomy place, before me, can have been more tired of it than I am. He could take for relief (and did take) to carving demons out of the stalls and seats and desks. What shall I do? Must I take to carving them out of my heart?’

‘I thought you had so exactly found your niche in life, Jack,’ Edwin Drood returns, astonished, bending forward in his chair to lay a sympathetic hand on Jasper’s knee, and looking at him with an anxious face.

‘I know you thought so. They all think so.’

‘Well, I suppose they do,’ says Edwin, meditating aloud. ‘Pussy thinks so.’

‘When did she tell you that?’

‘The last time I was here. You remember when. Three months ago.’

‘How did she phrase it?’

‘O, she only said that she had become your pupil, and that you were made for your vocation.’

The younger man glances at the portrait. The elder sees it in him.

‘Anyhow, my dear Ned,’ Jasper resumes, as he shakes his head with a grave cheerfulness, ‘I must subdue myself to my vocation: which is much the same thing outwardly. It’s too late to find another now. This is a confidence between us.’

‘It shall be sacredly preserved, Jack.’

‘I have reposed it in you, because—’

‘I feel it, I assure you. Because we are fast friends, and because you love and trust me, as I love and trust you. Both hands, Jack.’

As each stands looking into the other’s eyes, and as the uncle holds the nephew’s hands, the uncle thus proceeds:

‘You know now, don’t you, that even a poor monotonous chorister and grinder of music—in his niche—may be troubled with some stray sort of ambition, aspiration, restlessness, dissatisfaction, what shall we call it?’

‘Yes, dear Jack.’

‘And you will remember?’

‘My dear Jack, I only ask you, am I likely to forget what you have said with so much feeling?’

‘Take it as a warning, then.’

In the act of having his hands released, and of moving a step back, Edwin pauses for an instant to consider the application of these last words. The instant over, he says, sensibly touched:

‘I am afraid I am but a shallow, surface kind of fellow, Jack, and that my headpiece is none of the best. But I needn’t say I am young; and perhaps I shall not grow worse as I grow older. At all events, I hope I have something impressible within me, which feels—deeply feels—the disinterestedness of your painfully laying your inner self bare, as a warning to me.’

Mr. Jasper’s steadiness of face and figure becomes so marvellous that his breathing seems to have stopped.

‘I couldn’t fail to notice, Jack, that it cost you a great effort, and that you were very much moved, and very unlike your usual self. Of course I knew that you were extremely fond of me, but I really was not prepared for your, as I may say, sacrificing yourself to me in that way.’

Mr. Jasper, becoming a breathing man again without the smallest stage of transition between the two extreme states, lifts his shoulders, laughs, and waves his right arm.

‘No; don’t put the sentiment away, Jack; please don’t; for I am very much in earnest. I have no doubt that that unhealthy state of mind which you have so powerfully described is attended with some real suffering, and is hard to bear. But let me reassure you, Jack, as to the chances of its overcoming me. I don’t think I am in the way of it. In some few months less than another year, you know, I shall carry Pussy off from school as Mrs. Edwin Drood. I shall then go engineering into the East, and Pussy with me. And although we have our little tiffs now, arising out of a certain unavoidable flatness that attends our love-making, owing to its end being all settled beforehand, still I have no doubt of our getting on capitally then, when it’s done and can’t be helped. In short, Jack, to go back to the old song I was freely quoting at dinner (and who knows old songs better than you?), my wife shall dance, and I will sing, so merrily pass the day. Of Pussy’s being beautiful there cannot be a doubt;—and when you are good besides, Little Miss Impudence,’ once more apostrophising the portrait, ‘I’ll burn your comic likeness, and paint your music-master another.’

Mr. Jasper, with his hand to his chin, and with an expression of musing benevolence on his face, has attentively watched every animated look and gesture attending the delivery of these words. He remains in that attitude after they, are spoken, as if in a kind of fascination attendant on his strong interest in the youthful spirit that he loves so well. Then he says with a quiet smile:

‘You won’t be warned, then?’

‘No, Jack.’

‘You can’t be warned, then?’

‘No, Jack, not by you. Besides that I don’t really consider myself in danger, I don’t like your putting yourself in that position.’

‘Shall we go and walk in the churchyard?’

‘By all means. You won’t mind my slipping out of it for half a moment to the Nuns’ House, and leaving a parcel there? Only gloves for Pussy; as many pairs of gloves as she is years old to-day. Rather poetical, Jack?’

Mr. Jasper, still in the same attitude, murmurs: ‘“Nothing half so sweet in life,” Ned!’

‘Here’s the parcel in my greatcoat-pocket. They must be presented to-night, or the poetry is gone. It’s against regulations for me to call at night, but not to leave a packet. I am ready, Jack!’

Mr. Jasper dissolves his attitude, and they go out together.

CHAPTER III—THE NUNS' HOUSE

For sufficient reasons, which this narrative will itself unfold as it advances, a fictitious name must be bestowed upon the old Cathedral town. Let it stand in these pages as Cloisterham. It was once possibly known to the Druids by another name, and certainly to the Romans by another, and to the Saxons by another, and to the Normans by another; and a name more or less in the course of many centuries can be of little moment to its dusty chronicles.

An ancient city, Cloisterham, and no meet dwelling-place for any one with hankerings after the noisy world. A monotonous, silent city, deriving an earthy flavour throughout from its Cathedral crypt, and so abounding in vestiges of monastic graves, that the Cloisterham children grow small salad in the dust of abbots and abbesses, and make dirt-pies of nuns and friars; while every ploughman in its outlying fields renders to once puissant Lord Treasurers, Archbishops, Bishops, and such-like, the attention which the Ogre in the story-book desired to render to his unbidden visitor, and grinds their bones to make his bread.

A drowsy city, Cloisterham, whose inhabitants seem to suppose, with an inconsistency more strange than rare, that all its changes lie behind it, and that there are no more to come. A queer moral to derive from antiquity, yet older than any traceable antiquity. So silent are the streets of Cloisterham (though prone to echo on the smallest provocation), that of a summer-day the sunblinds of its shops scarce dare to flap in the south wind; while the sun-browned tramps, who pass along and stare, quicken their limp a little, that they may the sooner get beyond the confines of its oppressive respectability. This is a feat not difficult of achievement, seeing that the streets of Cloisterham city are little more than one narrow street by which you get into it and get out of it: the rest being mostly disappointing yards with pumps in them and no thoroughfare—exception made of the Cathedral-close, and a paved Quaker settlement, in colour and general confirmation very like a Quakeress's bonnet, up in a shady corner.

In a word, a city of another and a bygone time is Cloisterham, with its hoarse Cathedral-bell, its hoarse rooks hovering about the Cathedral tower, its hoarser and less distinct rooks in the stalls far beneath. Fragments of old wall, saint’s chapel, chapter-house, convent and monastery, have got incongruously or obstructively built into many of its houses and gardens, much as kindred jumbled notions have become incorporated into many of its citizens’ minds. All things in it are of the past. Even its single pawnbroker takes in no pledges, nor has he for a long time, but offers vainly an unredeemed stock for sale, of which the costlier articles are dim and pale old watches apparently in a slow perspiration, tarnished sugar-tongs with ineffectual legs, and odd volumes of dismal books. The most abundant and the most agreeable evidences of progressing life in Cloisterham are the evidences of vegetable life in many gardens; even its drooping and despondent little theatre has its poor strip of garden, receiving the foul fiend, when he ducks from its stage into the infernal regions, among scarlet-beans or oyster-shells, according to the season of the year.

In the midst of Cloisterham stands the Nuns’ House: a venerable brick edifice, whose present appellation is doubtless derived from the legend of its conventual uses. On the trim gate enclosing its old courtyard is a resplendent brass plate flashing forth the legend: ‘Seminary for Young Ladies. Miss Twinkleton.’ The house-front is so old and worn, and the brass plate is so shining and staring, that the general result has reminded imaginative strangers of a battered old beau with a large modern eye-glass stuck in his blind eye.

Whether the nuns of yore, being of a submissive rather than a stiff-necked generation, habitually bent their contemplative heads to avoid collision with the beams in the low ceilings of the many chambers of their House; whether they sat in its long low windows telling their beads for their mortification, instead of making necklaces of them for their adornment; whether they were ever walled up alive in odd angles and jutting gables of the building for having some ineradicable leaven of busy mother Nature in them which has kept the fermenting world alive ever since; these may be matters of interest to its haunting ghosts (if any), but constitute no item in Miss Twinkleton’s half-yearly accounts. They are neither of Miss Twinkleton’s inclusive regulars, nor of her extras. The lady who undertakes the poetical department of the establishment at so much (or so little) a quarter has no pieces in her list of recitals bearing on such unprofitable questions.

As, in some cases of drunkenness, and in others of animal magnetism, there are two states of consciousness which never clash, but each of which pursues its separate course as though it were continuous instead of broken (thus, if I hide my watch when I am drunk, I must be drunk again before I can remember where), so Miss Twinkleton has two distinct and separate phases of being. Every night, the moment the young ladies have retired to rest, does Miss Twinkleton smarten up her curls a little, brighten up her eyes a little, and become a sprightlier Miss Twinkleton than the young ladies have ever seen. Every night, at the same hour, does Miss Twinkleton resume the topics of the previous night, comprehending the tenderer scandal of Cloisterham, of which she has no knowledge whatever by day, and references to a certain season at Tunbridge Wells (airily called by Miss Twinkleton in this state of her existence ‘The Wells’), notably the season wherein a certain finished gentleman (compassionately called by Miss Twinkleton, in this stage of her existence, ‘Foolish Mr. Porters’) revealed a homage of the heart, whereof Miss Twinkleton, in her scholastic state of existence, is as ignorant as a granite pillar. Miss Twinkleton’s companion in both states of existence, and equally adaptable to either, is one Mrs. Tisher: a deferential widow with a weak back, a chronic sigh, and a suppressed voice, who looks after the young ladies’ wardrobes, and leads them to infer that she has seen better days. Perhaps this is the reason why it is an article of faith with the servants, handed down from race to race, that the departed Tisher was a hairdresser.

The pet pupil of the Nuns’ House is Miss Rosa Bud, of course called Rosebud; wonderfully pretty, wonderfully childish, wonderfully whimsical. An awkward interest (awkward because romantic) attaches to Miss Bud in the minds of the young ladies, on account of its being known to them that a husband has been chosen for her by will and bequest, and that her guardian is bound down to bestow her on that husband when he comes of age. Miss Twinkleton, in her seminarial state of existence, has combated the romantic aspect of this destiny by affecting to shake her head over it behind Miss Bud’s dimpled shoulders, and to brood on the unhappy lot of that doomed little victim. But with no better effect—possibly some unfelt touch of foolish Mr. Porters has undermined the endeavour—than to evoke from the young ladies an unanimous bedchamber cry of ‘O, what a pretending old thing Miss Twinkleton is, my dear!’

The Nuns’ House is never in such a state of flutter as when this allotted husband calls to see little Rosebud. (It is unanimously understood by the young ladies that he is lawfully entitled to this privilege, and that if Miss

Twinkleton disputed it, she would be instantly taken up and transported.) When his ring at the gate-bell is expected, or takes place, every young lady who can, under any pretence, look out of window, looks out of window; while every young lady who is 'practising,' practises out of time; and the French class becomes so demoralised that the mark goes round as briskly as the bottle at a convivial party in the last century.

On the afternoon of the day next after the dinner of two at the gatehouse, the bell is rung with the usual fluttering results.

'Mr. Edwin Drood to see Miss Rosa.'

This is the announcement of the parlour-maid in chief. Miss Twinkleton, with an exemplary air of melancholy on her, turns to the sacrifice, and says, 'You may go down, my dear.' Miss Bud goes down, followed by all eyes.

Mr. Edwin Drood is waiting in Miss Twinkleton's own parlour: a dainty room, with nothing more directly scholastic in it than a terrestrial and a celestial globe. These expressive machines imply (to parents and guardians) that even when Miss Twinkleton retires into the bosom of privacy, duty may at any moment compel her to become a sort of Wandering Jewess, scouring the earth and soaring through the skies in search of knowledge for her pupils.

The last new maid, who has never seen the young gentleman Miss Rosa is engaged to, and who is making his acquaintance between the hinges of the open door, left open for the purpose, stumbles guiltily down the kitchen stairs, as a charming little apparition, with its face concealed by a little silk apron thrown over its head, glides into the parlour.

'O! *it is* so ridiculous!' says the apparition, stopping and shrinking. 'Don't, Eddy!'

'Don't what, Rosa?'

'Don't come any nearer, please. It *is* so absurd.'

'What is absurd, Rosa?'

'The whole thing is. It *is* so absurd to be an engaged orphan and it *is* so absurd to have the girls and the servants scuttling about after one, like mice in the wainscot; and it *is* so absurd to be called upon!'

The apparition appears to have a thumb in the corner of its mouth while making this complaint.

'You give me an affectionate reception, Pussy, I must say.'

‘Well, I will in a minute, Eddy, but I can’t just yet. How are you?’ (very shortly.)

‘I am unable to reply that I am much the better for seeing you, Pussy, inasmuch as I see nothing of you.’

This second remonstrance brings a dark, bright, pouting eye out from a corner of the apron; but it swiftly becomes invisible again, as the apparition exclaims: ‘O good gracious! you have had half your hair cut off!’

‘I should have done better to have had my head cut off, I think,’ says Edwin, rumpling the hair in question, with a fierce glance at the looking-glass, and giving an impatient stamp. ‘Shall I go?’

‘No; you needn’t go just yet, Eddy. The girls would all be asking questions why you went.’

‘Once for all, Rosa, will you uncover that ridiculous little head of yours and give me a welcome?’

The apron is pulled off the childish head, as its wearer replies: ‘You’re very welcome, Eddy. There! I’m sure that’s nice. Shake hands. No, I can’t kiss you, because I’ve got an acidulated drop in my mouth.’

‘Are you at all glad to see me, Pussy?’

‘O, yes, I’m dreadfully glad.—Go and sit down.—Miss Twinkleton.’

It is the custom of that excellent lady when these visits occur, to appear every three minutes, either in her own person or in that of Mrs. Tisher, and lay an offering on the shrine of Propriety by affecting to look for some desiderated article. On the present occasion Miss Twinkleton, gracefully gliding in and out, says in passing: ‘How do you do, Mr. Drood? Very glad indeed to have the pleasure. Pray excuse me. Tweezers. Thank you!’

‘I got the gloves last evening, Eddy, and I like them very much. They are beauties.’

‘Well, that’s something,’ the affianced replies, half grumbling. ‘The smallest encouragement thankfully received. And how did you pass your birthday, Pussy?’

‘Delightfully! Everybody gave me a present. And we had a feast. And we had a ball at night.’

‘A feast and a ball, eh? These occasions seem to go off tolerably well without me, Pussy.’

‘De-lightfully!’ cries Rosa, in a quite spontaneous manner, and without the least pretence of reserve.

‘Hah! And what was the feast?’

‘Tarts, oranges, jellies, and shrimps.’

‘Any partners at the ball?’

‘We danced with one another, of course, sir. But some of the girls made game to be their brothers. It *was* so droll!’

‘Did anybody make game to be—’

‘To be you? O dear yes!’ cries Rosa, laughing with great enjoyment. ‘That was the first thing done.’

‘I hope she did it pretty well,’ says Edwin rather doubtfully.

‘O, it was excellent!—I wouldn’t dance with you, you know.’

Edwin scarcely seems to see the force of this; begs to know if he may take the liberty to ask why?

‘Because I was so tired of you,’ returns Rosa. But she quickly adds, and pleadingly too, seeing displeasure in his face: ‘Dear Eddy, you were just as tired of me, you know.’

‘Did I say so, Rosa?’

‘Say so! Do you ever say so? No, you only showed it. O, she did it so well!’ cries Rosa, in a sudden ecstasy with her counterfeit betrothed.

‘It strikes me that she must be a devilish impudent girl,’ says Edwin Drood. ‘And so, Pussy, you have passed your last birthday in this old house.’

‘Ah, yes!’ Rosa clasps her hands, looks down with a sigh, and shakes her head.

‘You seem to be sorry, Rosa.’

‘I am sorry for the poor old place. Somehow, I feel as if it would miss me, when I am gone so far away, so young.’

‘Perhaps we had better stop short, Rosa?’

She looks up at him with a swift bright look; next moment shakes her head, sighs, and looks down again.

‘That is to say, is it, Pussy, that we are both resigned?’

She nods her head again, and after a short silence, quaintly bursts out with: ‘You know we must be married, and married from here, Eddy, or the poor girls will be so dreadfully disappointed!’

For the moment there is more of compassion, both for her and for himself, in her affianced husband’s face, than there is of love. He checks the look, and asks: ‘Shall I take you out for a walk, Rosa dear?’

Rosa dear does not seem at all clear on this point, until her face, which has been comically reflective, brightens. ‘O, yes, Eddy; let us go for a walk! And I tell you what we'll do. You shall pretend that you are engaged to somebody else, and I'll pretend that I am not engaged to anybody, and then we shan't quarrel.'

'Do you think that will prevent our falling out, Rosa?'

'I know it will. Hush! Pretend to look out of window—Mrs. Tisher!'

Through a fortuitous concourse of accidents, the matronly Tisher heaves in sight, says, in rustling through the room like the legendary ghost of a dowager in silken skirts: 'I hope I see Mr. Drood well; though I needn't ask, if I may judge from his complexion. I trust I disturb no one; but there *was* a paper-knife—O, thank you, I am sure!' and disappears with her prize.

'One other thing you must do, Eddy, to oblige me,' says Rosebud. 'The moment we get into the street, you must put me outside, and keep close to the house yourself—squeeze and graze yourself against it.'

'By all means, Rosa, if you wish it. Might I ask why?'

'O! because I don't want the girls to see you.'

'It's a fine day; but would you like me to carry an umbrella up?'

'Don't be foolish, sir. You haven't got polished leather boots on,' pouting, with one shoulder raised.

'Perhaps that might escape the notice of the girls, even if they did see me,' remarks Edwin, looking down at his boots with a sudden distaste for them.

'Nothing escapes their notice, sir. And then I know what would happen. Some of them would begin reflecting on me by saying (for *they* are free) that they never will on any account engage themselves to lovers without polished leather boots. Hark! Miss Twinkleton. I'll ask for leave.'

That discreet lady being indeed heard without, inquiring of nobody in a blandly conversational tone as she advances: 'Eh? Indeed! Are you quite sure you saw my mother-of-pearl button-holder on the work-table in my room?' is at once solicited for walking leave, and graciously accords it. And soon the young couple go out of the Nuns' House, taking all precautions against the discovery of the so vitally defective boots of Mr. Edwin Drood: precautions, let us hope, effective for the peace of Mrs. Edwin Drood that is to be.

'Which way shall we take, Rosa?'

Rosa replies: 'I want to go to the Lumps-of-Delight shop.'

'To the—?'

‘A Turkish sweetmeat, sir. My gracious me, don’t you understand anything? Call yourself an Engineer, and not know *that*?’

‘Why, how should I know it, Rosa?’

‘Because I am very fond of them. But O! I forgot what we are to pretend. No, you needn’t know anything about them; never mind.’

So he is gloomily borne off to the Lumps-of-Delight shop, where Rosa makes her purchase, and, after offering some to him (which he rather indignantly declines), begins to partake of it with great zest: previously taking off and rolling up a pair of little pink gloves, like rose-leaves, and occasionally putting her little pink fingers to her rosy lips, to cleanse them from the Dust of Delight that comes off the Lumps.

‘Now, be a good-tempered Eddy, and pretend. And so you are engaged?’

‘And so I am engaged.’

‘Is she nice?’

‘Charming.’

‘Tall?’

‘Immensely tall!’ Rosa being short.

‘Must be gawky, I should think,’ is Rosa’s quiet commentary.

‘I beg your pardon; not at all,’ contradiction rising in him.

‘What is termed a fine woman; a splendid woman.’

‘Big nose, no doubt,’ is the quiet commentary again.

‘Not a little one, certainly,’ is the quick reply, (Rosa’s being a little one.)

‘Long pale nose, with a red knob in the middle. I know the sort of nose,’ says Rosa, with a satisfied nod, and tranquilly enjoying the Lumps.

‘You *don’t* know the sort of nose, Rosa,’ with some warmth; ‘because it’s nothing of the kind.’

‘Not a pale nose, Eddy?’

‘No.’ Determined not to assent.

‘A red nose? O! I don’t like red noses. However; to be sure she can always powder it.’

‘She would scorn to powder it,’ says Edwin, becoming heated.

‘Would she? What a stupid thing she must be! Is she stupid in everything?’

‘No; in nothing.’

After a pause, in which the whimsically wicked face has not been unobservant of him, Rosa says:

‘And this most sensible of creatures likes the idea of being carried off to Egypt; does she, Eddy?’

‘Yes. She takes a sensible interest in triumphs of engineering skill: especially when they are to change the whole condition of an undeveloped country.’

‘Lor!’ says Rosa, shrugging her shoulders, with a little laugh of wonder.

‘Do you object,’ Edwin inquires, with a majestic turn of his eyes downward upon the fairy figure: ‘do you object, Rosa, to her feeling that interest?’

‘Object? my dear Eddy! But really, doesn’t she hate boilers and things?’

‘I can answer for her not being so idiotic as to hate Boilers,’ he returns with angry emphasis; ‘though I cannot answer for her views about Things; really not understanding what Things are meant.’

‘But don’t she hate Arabs, and Turks, and Fellahs, and people?’

‘Certainly not.’ Very firmly.

‘At least she *must* hate the Pyramids? Come, Eddy?’

‘Why should she be such a little—tall, I mean—goose, as to hate the Pyramids, Rosa?’

‘Ah! you should hear Miss Twinkleton,’ often nodding her head, and much enjoying the Lumps, ‘bore about them, and then you wouldn’t ask. Tiresome old burying-grounds! Isises, and Ibises, and Cheopses, and Pharaohses; who cares about them? And then there was Belzoni, or somebody, dragged out by the legs, half-choked with bats and dust. All the girls say: Serve him right, and hope it hurt him, and wish he had been quite choked.’

The two youthful figures, side by side, but not now arm-in-arm, wander discontentedly about the old Close; and each sometimes stops and slowly imprints a deeper footstep in the fallen leaves.

‘Well!’ says Edwin, after a lengthy silence. ‘According to custom. We can’t get on, Rosa.’

Rosa tosses her head, and says she don’t want to get on.

‘That’s a pretty sentiment, Rosa, considering.’

‘Considering what?’

‘If I say what, you’ll go wrong again.’

‘*You’ll* go wrong, you mean, Eddy. Don’t be ungenerous.’

‘Ungenerous! I like that!’

‘Then I *don’t* like that, and so I tell you plainly,’ Rosa pouts.

‘Now, Rosa, I put it to you. Who disparaged my profession, my destination—’

‘You are not going to be buried in the Pyramids, I hope?’ she interrupts, arching her delicate eyebrows. ‘You never said you were. If you are, why haven’t you mentioned it to me? I can’t find out your plans by instinct.’

‘Now, Rosa, you know very well what I mean, my dear.’

‘Well then, why did you begin with your detestable red-nosed giantesses? And she would, she would, she would, she would, she would powder it!’ cries Rosa, in a little burst of comical contradictory spleen.

‘Somehow or other, I never can come right in these discussions,’ says Edwin, sighing and becoming resigned.

‘How is it possible, sir, that you ever can come right when you’re always wrong? And as to Belzoni, I suppose he’s dead;—I’m sure I hope he is—and how can his legs or his chokes concern you?’

‘It is nearly time for your return, Rosa. We have not had a very happy walk, have we?’

‘A happy walk? A detestably unhappy walk, sir. If I go up-stairs the moment I get in and cry till I can’t take my dancing lesson, you are responsible, mind!’

‘Let us be friends, Rosa.’

‘Ah!’ cries Rosa, shaking her head and bursting into real tears, ‘I wish we *could* be friends! It’s because we can’t be friends, that we try one another so. I am a young little thing, Eddy, to have an old heartache; but I really, really have, sometimes. Don’t be angry. I know you have one yourself too often. We should both of us have done better, if What is to be had been left What might have been. I am quite a little serious thing now, and not teasing you. Let each of us forbear, this one time, on our own account, and on the other’s!’

Disarmed by this glimpse of a woman’s nature in the spoilt child, though for an instant disposed to resent it as seeming to involve the enforced infliction of himself upon her, Edwin Drood stands watching her as she childishly cries and sobs, with both hands to the handkerchief at her eyes, and then—she becoming more composed, and indeed beginning in her young inconstancy to laugh at herself for having been so moved—leads her to a seat hard by, under the elm-trees.

‘One clear word of understanding, Pussy dear. I am not clever out of my own line—now I come to think of it, I don’t know that I am particularly clever in it—but I want to do right. There is not—there may be—I really don’t see my way to what I want to say, but I must say it before we part—there is not any other young—’

‘O no, Eddy! It’s generous of you to ask me; but no, no, no!’

They have come very near to the Cathedral windows, and at this moment the organ and the choir sound out sublimely. As they sit listening to the solemn swell, the confidence of last night rises in young Edwin Drood’s mind, and he thinks how unlike this music is to that discordance.

‘I fancy I can distinguish Jack’s voice,’ is his remark in a low tone in connection with the train of thought.

‘Take me back at once, please,’ urges his Affianced, quickly laying her light hand upon his wrist. ‘They will all be coming out directly; let us get away. O, what a resounding chord! But don’t let us stop to listen to it; let us get away!’

Her hurry is over as soon as they have passed out of the Close. They go arm-in-arm now, gravely and deliberately enough, along the old High-street, to the Nuns’ House. At the gate, the street being within sight empty, Edwin bends down his face to Rosebud’s.

She remonstrates, laughing, and is a childish schoolgirl again.

‘Eddy, no! I’m too sticky to be kissed. But give me your hand, and I’ll blow a kiss into that.’

He does so. She breathes a light breath into it and asks, retaining it and looking into it:—

‘Now say, what do you see?’

‘See, Rosa?’

‘Why, I thought you Egyptian boys could look into a hand and see all sorts of phantoms. Can’t you see a happy Future?’

For certain, neither of them sees a happy Present, as the gate opens and closes, and one goes in, and the other goes away.

CHAPTER IV—MR. SAPSEA

Accepting the Jackass as the type of self-sufficient stupidity and conceit—a custom, perhaps, like some few other customs, more conventional than fair—then the purest jackass in Cloisterham is Mr. Thomas Sapsea, Auctioneer.

Mr. Sapsea 'dresses at' the Dean; has been bowed to for the Dean, in mistake; has even been spoken to in the street as My Lord, under the impression that he was the Bishop come down unexpectedly, without his chaplain. Mr. Sapsea is very proud of this, and of his voice, and of his style. He has even (in selling landed property) tried the experiment of slightly intoning in his pulpit, to make himself more like what he takes to be the genuine ecclesiastical article. So, in ending a Sale by Public Auction, Mr. Sapsea finishes off with an air of bestowing a benediction on the assembled brokers, which leaves the real Dean—a modest and worthy gentleman—far behind.

Mr. Sapsea has many admirers; indeed, the proposition is carried by a large local majority, even including non-believers in his wisdom, that he is a credit to Cloisterham. He possesses the great qualities of being portentous and dull, and of having a roll in his speech, and another roll in his gait; not to mention a certain gravely flowing action with his hands, as if he were presently going to Confirm the individual with whom he holds discourse. Much nearer sixty years of age than fifty, with a flowing outline of stomach, and horizontal creases in his waistcoat; reputed to be rich; voting at elections in the strictly respectable interest; morally satisfied that nothing but he himself has grown since he was a baby; how can dunder-headed Mr. Sapsea be otherwise than a credit to Cloisterham, and society?

Mr. Sapsea's premises are in the High-street, over against the Nuns' House. They are of about the period of the Nuns' House, irregularly modernised here and there, as steadily deteriorating generations found, more and more, that they preferred air and light to Fever and the Plague. Over the doorway is a wooden effigy, about half life-size, representing Mr. Sapsea's father, in a curly wig and toga, in the act of selling. The chastity of the idea, and the natural appearance of the little finger, hammer, and pulpit, have been much admired.

Mr. Sapsea sits in his dull ground-floor sitting-room, giving first on his paved back yard; and then on his railed-off garden. Mr. Sapsea has a bottle of port wine on a table before the fire—the fire is an early luxury, but pleasant on the cool, chilly autumn evening—and is characteristically attended by his portrait, his eight-day clock, and his weather-glass. Characteristically, because he would uphold himself against mankind, his weather-glass against weather, and his clock against time.

By Mr. Sapsea's side on the table are a writing-desk and writing materials. Glancing at a scrap of manuscript, Mr. Sapsea reads it to himself with a lofty air, and then, slowly pacing the room with his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, repeats it from memory: so internally, though with much dignity, that the word 'Ethelinda' is alone audible.

There are three clean wineglasses in a tray on the table. His serving-maid entering, and announcing 'Mr. Jasper is come, sir,' Mr. Sapsea waves 'Admit him,' and draws two wineglasses from the rank, as being claimed.

'Glad to see you, sir. I congratulate myself on having the honour of receiving you here for the first time.' Mr. Sapsea does the honours of his house in this wise.

'You are very good. The honour is mine and the self-congratulation is mine.'

'You are pleased to say so, sir. But I do assure you that it is a satisfaction to me to receive you in my humble home. And that is what I would not say to everybody.' Ineffable loftiness on Mr. Sapsea's part accompanies these words, as leaving the sentence to be understood: 'You will not easily believe that your society can be a satisfaction to a man like myself; nevertheless, it is.'

'I have for some time desired to know you, Mr. Sapsea.'

'And I, sir, have long known you by reputation as a man of taste. Let me fill your glass. I will give you, sir,' says Mr. Sapsea, filling his own:

'When the French come over,
May we meet them at Dover!'

This was a patriotic toast in Mr. Sapsea's infancy, and he is therefore fully convinced of its being appropriate to any subsequent era.

'You can scarcely be ignorant, Mr. Sapsea,' observes Jasper, watching the auctioneer with a smile as the latter stretches out his legs before the fire, 'that you know the world.'

‘Well, sir,’ is the chuckling reply, ‘I think I know something of it; something of it.’

‘Your reputation for that knowledge has always interested and surprised me, and made me wish to know you. For Cloisterham is a little place. Cooped up in it myself, I know nothing beyond it, and feel it to be a very little place.’

‘If I have not gone to foreign countries, young man,’ Mr. Sapsea begins, and then stops:—‘You will excuse me calling you young man, Mr. Jasper? You are much my junior.’

‘By all means.’

‘If I have not gone to foreign countries, young man, foreign countries have come to me. They have come to me in the way of business, and I have improved upon my opportunities. Put it that I take an inventory, or make a catalogue. I see a French clock. I never saw him before, in my life, but I instantly lay my finger on him and say “Paris!” I see some cups and saucers of Chinese make, equally strangers to me personally: I put my finger on them, then and there, and I say “Pekin, Nankin, and Canton.” It is the same with Japan, with Egypt, and with bamboo and sandalwood from the East Indies; I put my finger on them all. I have put my finger on the North Pole before now, and said “Spear of Esquimaux make, for half a pint of pale sherry!”’

‘Really? A very remarkable way, Mr. Sapsea, of acquiring a knowledge of men and things.’

‘I mention it, sir,’ Mr. Sapsea rejoins, with unspeakable complacency, ‘because, as I say, it don’t do to boast of what you are; but show how you came to be it, and then you prove it.’

‘Most interesting. We were to speak of the late Mrs. Sapsea.’

‘We were, sir.’ Mr. Sapsea fills both glasses, and takes the decanter into safe keeping again. ‘Before I consult your opinion as a man of taste on this little trifle’—holding it up—‘which is *but* a trifle, and still has required some thought, sir, some little fever of the brow, I ought perhaps to describe the character of the late Mrs. Sapsea, now dead three quarters of a year.’

Mr. Jasper, in the act of yawning behind his wineglass, puts down that screen and calls up a look of interest. It is a little impaired in its expressiveness by his having a shut-up gape still to dispose of, with watering eyes.

‘Half a dozen years ago, or so,’ Mr. Sapsea proceeds, ‘when I had enlarged my mind up to—I will not say to what it now is, for that might seem to aim at too much, but up to the pitch of wanting another mind to be absorbed in it—I cast my eye about me for a nuptial partner. Because, as I say, it is not good for man to be alone.’

Mr. Jasper appears to commit this original idea to memory.

‘Miss Brobity at that time kept, I will not call it the rival establishment to the establishment at the Nuns’ House opposite, but I will call it the other parallel establishment down town. The world did have it that she showed a passion for attending my sales, when they took place on half holidays, or in vacation time. The world did put it about, that she admired my style. The world did notice that as time flowed by, my style became traceable in the dictation-exercises of Miss Brobity’s pupils. Young man, a whisper even sprang up in obscure malignity, that one ignorant and besotted Churl (a parent) so committed himself as to object to it by name. But I do not believe this. For is it likely that any human creature in his right senses would so lay himself open to be pointed at, by what I call the finger of scorn?’

Mr. Jasper shakes his head. Not in the least likely. Mr. Sapsea, in a grandiloquent state of absence of mind, seems to refill his visitor’s glass, which is full already; and does really refill his own, which is empty.

‘Miss Brobity’s Being, young man, was deeply imbued with homage to Mind. She revered Mind, when launched, or, as I say, precipitated, on an extensive knowledge of the world. When I made my proposal, she did me the honour to be so overshadowed with a species of Awe, as to be able to articulate only the two words, “O Thou!” meaning myself. Her limpid blue eyes were fixed upon me, her semi-transparent hands were clasped together, pallor overspread her aquiline features, and, though encouraged to proceed, she never did proceed a word further. I disposed of the parallel establishment by private contract, and we became as nearly one as could be expected under the circumstances. But she never could, and she never did, find a phrase satisfactory to her perhaps-too-favourable estimate of my intellect. To the very last (feeble action of liver), she addressed me in the same unfinished terms.’

Mr. Jasper has closed his eyes as the auctioneer has deepened his voice. He now abruptly opens them, and says, in unison with the deepened voice

‘Ah!’—rather as if stopping himself on the extreme verge of adding—‘men!’

‘I have been since,’ says Mr. Sapsea, with his legs stretched out, and solemnly enjoying himself with the wine and the fire, ‘what you behold me; I have been since a solitary mourner; I have been since, as I say, wasting my evening conversation on the desert air. I will not say that I have reproached myself; but there have been times when I have asked myself the question: What if her husband had been nearer on a level with her? If she had not had to look up quite so high, what might the stimulating action have been upon the liver?’

Mr. Jasper says, with an appearance of having fallen into dreadfully low spirits, that he ‘supposes it was to be.’

‘We can only suppose so, sir,’ Mr. Sapsea coincides. ‘As I say, Man proposes, Heaven disposes. It may or may not be putting the same thought in another form; but that is the way I put it.’

Mr. Jasper murmurs assent.

‘And now, Mr. Jasper,’ resumes the auctioneer, producing his scrap of manuscript, ‘Mrs. Sapsea’s monument having had full time to settle and dry, let me take your opinion, as a man of taste, on the inscription I have (as I before remarked, not without some little fever of the brow) drawn out for it. Take it in your own hand. The setting out of the lines requires to be followed with the eye, as well as the contents with the mind.’

Mr. Jasper complying, sees and reads as follows:

ETHELINDA,
Reverential Wife of
MR. THOMAS SAPSEA,
AUCTIONEER, VALUER, ESTATE AGENT, &c.,
of this city.
Whose Knowledge of the World,
Though somewhat extensive,
Never brought him acquainted with
A SPIRIT
More capable of
looking up to him.
STRANGER, PAUSE
And ask thyself the Question,
CANST THOU DO LIKEWISE?

If Not,
WITH A BLUSH RETIRE.

Mr. Sapsea having risen and stationed himself with his back to the fire, for the purpose of observing the effect of these lines on the countenance of a man of taste, consequently has his face towards the door, when his serving-maid, again appearing, announces, ‘Durdles is come, sir!’ He promptly draws forth and fills the third wineglass, as being now claimed, and replies, ‘Show Durdles in.’

‘Admirable!’ quoth Mr. Jasper, handing back the paper.

‘You approve, sir?’

‘Impossible not to approve. Striking, characteristic, and complete.’

The auctioneer inclines his head, as one accepting his due and giving a receipt; and invites the entering Durdles to take off that glass of wine (handing the same), for it will warm him.

Durdles is a stonemason; chiefly in the gravestone, tomb, and monument way, and wholly of their colour from head to foot. No man is better known in Cloisterham. He is the chartered libertine of the place. Fame trumpets him a wonderful workman—which, for aught that anybody knows, he may be (as he never works); and a wonderful sot—which everybody knows he is. With the Cathedral crypt he is better acquainted than any living authority; it may even be than any dead one. It is said that the intimacy of this acquaintance began in his habitually resorting to that secret place, to lock-out the Cloisterham boy-populace, and sleep off fumes of liquor: he having ready access to the Cathedral, as contractor for rough repairs. Be this as it may, he does know much about it, and, in the demolition of impedimental fragments of wall, buttress, and pavement, has seen strange sights. He often speaks of himself in the third person; perhaps, being a little misty as to his own identity, when he narrates; perhaps impartially adopting the Cloisterham nomenclature in reference to a character of acknowledged distinction. Thus he will say, touching his strange sights: ‘Durdles come upon the old chap,’ in reference to a buried magnate of ancient time and high degree, ‘by striking right into the coffin with his pick. The old chap gave Durdles a look with his open eyes, as much as to say, “Is your name Durdles? Why, my man, I’ve been waiting for you a devil of a time!” And then he turned to powder.’ With a two-foot rule always in his pocket, and a mason’s hammer all but always in his hand, Durdles goes continually sounding and tapping all about and about the

Cathedral; and whenever he says to Tope: ‘Tope, here’s another old ’un in here!’ Tope announces it to the Dean as an established discovery.

In a suit of coarse flannel with horn buttons, a yellow neckerchief with draggled ends, an old hat more russet-coloured than black, and laced boots of the hue of his stony calling, Durdles leads a hazy, gipsy sort of life, carrying his dinner about with him in a small bundle, and sitting on all manner of tombstones to dine. This dinner of Durdles’s has become quite a Cloisterham institution: not only because of his never appearing in public without it, but because of its having been, on certain renowned occasions, taken into custody along with Durdles (as drunk and incapable), and exhibited before the Bench of justices at the townhall. These occasions, however, have been few and far apart: Durdles being as seldom drunk as sober. For the rest, he is an old bachelor, and he lives in a little antiquated hole of a house that was never finished: supposed to be built, so far, of stones stolen from the city wall. To this abode there is an approach, ankle-deep in stone chips, resembling a petrified grove of tombstones, urns, draperies, and broken columns, in all stages of sculpture. Herein two journeymen incessantly chip, while other two journeymen, who face each other, incessantly saw stone; dipping as regularly in and out of their sheltering sentry-boxes, as if they were mechanical figures emblematical of Time and Death.

To Durdles, when he had consumed his glass of port, Mr. Sapsea intrusts that precious effort of his Muse. Durdles unfeelingly takes out his two-foot rule, and measures the lines calmly, alloying them with stone-grit.

‘This is for the monument, is it, Mr. Sapsea?’

‘The Inscription. Yes.’ Mr. Sapsea waits for its effect on a common mind.

‘It’ll come in to a eighth of a inch,’ says Durdles. ‘Your servant, Mr. Jasper. Hope I see you well.’

‘How are you Durdles?’

‘I’ve got a touch of the Tombatism on me, Mr. Jasper, but that I must expect.’

‘You mean the Rheumatism,’ says Sapsea, in a sharp tone. (He is nettled by having his composition so mechanically received.)

‘No, I don’t. I mean, Mr. Sapsea, the Tombatism. It’s another sort from Rheumatism. Mr. Jasper knows what Durdles means. You get among them Tombs afore it’s well light on a winter morning, and keep on, as the

Catechism says, a-walking in the same all the days of your life, and *you'll* know what Durdles means.'

'It is a bitter cold place,' Mr. Jasper assents, with an antipathetic shiver.

'And if it's bitter cold for you, up in the chancel, with a lot of live breath smoking out about you, what the bitterness is to Durdles, down in the crypt among the earthy damps there, and the dead breath of the old 'uns,' returns that individual, 'Durdles leaves you to judge.—Is this to be put in hand at once, Mr. Sapsea?'

Mr. Sapsea, with an Author's anxiety to rush into publication, replies that it cannot be out of hand too soon.

'You had better let me have the key then,' says Durdles.

'Why, man, it is not to be put inside the monument!'

'Durdles knows where it's to be put, Mr. Sapsea; no man better. Ask 'ere a man in Cloisterham whether Durdles knows his work.'

Mr. Sapsea rises, takes a key from a drawer, unlocks an iron safe let into the wall, and takes from it another key.

'When Durdles puts a touch or a finish upon his work, no matter where, inside or outside, Durdles likes to look at his work all round, and see that his work is a-doing him credit,' Durdles explains, doggedly.

The key proffered him by the bereaved widower being a large one, he slips his two-foot rule into a side-pocket of his flannel trousers made for it, and deliberately opens his flannel coat, and opens the mouth of a large breast-pocket within it before taking the key to place it in that repository.

'Why, Durdles!' exclaims Jasper, looking on amused, 'you are undermined with pockets!'

'And I carries weight in 'em too, Mr. Jasper. Feel those!' producing two other large keys.

'Hand me Mr. Sapsea's likewise. Surely this is the heaviest of the three.'

'You'll find 'em much of a muchness, I expect,' says Durdles. 'They all belong to monuments. They all open Durdles's work. Durdles keeps the keys of his work mostly. Not that they're much used.'

'By the bye,' it comes into Jasper's mind to say, as he idly examines the keys, 'I have been going to ask you, many a day, and have always forgotten. You know they sometimes call you Stony Durdles, don't you?'

'Cloisterham knows me as Durdles, Mr. Jasper.'

'I am aware of that, of course. But the boys sometimes—'

‘O! if you mind them young imps of boys—’ Durdles gruffly interrupts.

‘I don’t mind them any more than you do. But there was a discussion the other day among the Choir, whether Stony stood for Tony;’ clinking one key against another.

(‘Take care of the wards, Mr. Jasper.’)

‘Or whether Stony stood for Stephen;’ clinking with a change of keys.

(‘You can’t make a pitch pipe of ’em, Mr. Jasper.’)

‘Or whether the name comes from your trade. How stands the fact?’

Mr. Jasper weighs the three keys in his hand, lifts his head from his idly stooping attitude over the fire, and delivers the keys to Durdles with an ingenuous and friendly face.

But the stony one is a gruff one likewise, and that hazy state of his is always an uncertain state, highly conscious of its dignity, and prone to take offence. He drops his two keys back into his pocket one by one, and buttons them up; he takes his dinner-bundle from the chair-back on which he hung it when he came in; he distributes the weight he carries, by tying the third key up in it, as though he were an Ostrich, and liked to dine off cold iron; and he gets out of the room, deigning no word of answer.

Mr. Sapsea then proposes a hit at backgammon, which, seasoned with his own improving conversation, and terminating in a supper of cold roast beef and salad, beguiles the golden evening until pretty late. Mr. Sapsea’s wisdom being, in its delivery to mortals, rather of the diffuse than the epigrammatic order, is by no means expended even then; but his visitor intimates that he will come back for more of the precious commodity on future occasions, and Mr. Sapsea lets him off for the present, to ponder on the instalment he carries away.

CHAPTER V—MR. DURDLES AND FRIEND

John Jasper, on his way home through the Close, is brought to a standstill by the spectacle of Stony Durdles, dinner-bundle and all, leaning his back against the iron railing of the burial-ground enclosing it from the old cloister-arches; and a hideous small boy in rags flinging stones at him as a well-defined mark in the moonlight. Sometimes the stones hit him, and sometimes they miss him, but Durdles seems indifferent to either fortune. The hideous small boy, on the contrary, whenever he hits Durdles, blows a whistle of triumph through a jagged gap, convenient for the purpose, in the front of his mouth, where half his teeth are wanting; and whenever he misses him, yelps out ‘Mulled agin!’ and tries to atone for the failure by taking a more correct and vicious aim.

‘What are you doing to the man?’ demands Jasper, stepping out into the moonlight from the shade.

‘Making a cock-shy of him,’ replies the hideous small boy.

‘Give me those stones in your hand.’

‘Yes, I’ll give ’em you down your throat, if you come a-ketching hold of me,’ says the small boy, shaking himself loose, and backing. ‘I’ll smash your eye, if you don’t look out!’

‘Baby-Devil that you are, what has the man done to you?’

‘He won’t go home.’

‘What is that to you?’

‘He gives me a ’apenny to pelt him home if I ketches him out too late,’ says the boy. And then chants, like a little savage, half stumbling and half dancing among the rags and laces of his dilapidated boots:—

‘Widdy widdy wen!
I—ket—ches—Im—out—ar—ter—ten,
Widdy widdy wy!
Then—E—don’t—go—then—I—shy—
Widdy Widdy Wake-cock warning!’

—with a comprehensive sweep on the last word, and one more delivery at Durdles.

This would seem to be a poetical note of preparation, agreed upon, as a caution to Durdles to stand clear if he can, or to betake himself homeward.

John Jasper invites the boy with a beck of his head to follow him (feeling it hopeless to drag him, or coax him), and crosses to the iron railing where the Stony (and stoned) One is profoundly meditating.

‘Do you know this thing, this child?’ asks Jasper, at a loss for a word that will define this thing.

‘Deputy,’ says Durdles, with a nod.

‘Is that its—his—name?’

‘Deputy,’ assents Durdles.

‘I’m man-servant up at the Travellers’ Twopenny in Gas Works Garding,’ this thing explains. ‘All us man-servants at Travellers’ Lodgings is named Deputy. When we’re chock full and the Travellers is all a-bed I come out for my ’elth.’ Then withdrawing into the road, and taking aim, he resumes:—

‘Widdy widdy wen!
I—ket—ches—Im—out—ar—ter—’

‘Hold your hand,’ cries Jasper, ‘and don’t throw while I stand so near him, or I’ll kill you! Come, Durdles; let me walk home with you to-night. Shall I carry your bundle?’

‘Not on any account,’ replies Durdles, adjusting it. ‘Durdles was making his reflections here when you come up, sir, surrounded by his works, like a poplar Author.—Your own brother-in-law;’ introducing a sarcophagus within the railing, white and cold in the moonlight. ‘Mrs. Sapsea;’ introducing the monument of that devoted wife. ‘Late Incumbent;’ introducing the Reverend Gentleman’s broken column. ‘Departed Assessed Taxes;’ introducing a vase and towel, standing on what might represent the cake of soap. ‘Former pastrycook and Muffin-maker, much respected;’ introducing gravestone. ‘All safe and sound here, sir, and all Durdles’s work. Of the common folk, that is merely bundled up in turf and brambles, the less said the better. A poor lot, soon forgot.’

‘This creature, Deputy, is behind us,’ says Jasper, looking back. ‘Is he to follow us?’

The relations between Durdles and Deputy are of a capricious kind; for, on Durdles’s turning himself about with the slow gravity of beery suddenness, Deputy makes a pretty wide circuit into the road and stands on the defensive.

‘You never cried Widdy Warning before you begun to-night,’ says Durdles, unexpectedly reminded of, or imagining, an injury.

‘Yer lie, I did,’ says Deputy, in his only form of polite contradiction.

‘Own brother, sir,’ observes Durdles, turning himself about again, and as unexpectedly forgetting his offence as he had recalled or conceived it; ‘own brother to Peter the Wild Boy! But I gave him an object in life.’

‘At which he takes aim?’ Mr. Jasper suggests.

‘That’s it, sir,’ returns Durdles, quite satisfied; ‘at which he takes aim. I took him in hand and gave him an object. What was he before? A destroyer. What work did he do? Nothing but destruction. What did he earn by it? Short terms in Cloisterham jail. Not a person, not a piece of property, not a winder, not a horse, nor a dog, nor a cat, nor a bird, nor a fowl, nor a pig, but what he stoned, for want of an enlightened object. I put that enlightened object before him, and now he can turn his honest halfpenny by the three penn’orth a week.’

‘I wonder he has no competitors.’

‘He has plenty, Mr. Jasper, but he stones ’em all away. Now, I don’t know what this scheme of mine comes to,’ pursues Durdles, considering about it with the same sodden gravity; ‘I don’t know what you may precisely call it. It ain’t a sort of a—scheme of a—National Education?’

‘I should say not,’ replies Jasper.

‘I should say not,’ assents Durdles; ‘then we won’t try to give it a name.’

‘He still keeps behind us,’ repeats Jasper, looking over his shoulder; ‘is he to follow us?’

‘We can’t help going round by the Travellers’ Twopenny, if we go the short way, which is the back way,’ Durdles answers, ‘and we’ll drop him there.’

So they go on; Deputy, as a rear rank one, taking open order, and invading the silence of the hour and place by stoning every wall, post, pillar, and other inanimate object, by the deserted way.

‘Is there anything new down in the crypt, Durdles?’ asks John Jasper.

‘Anything old, I think you mean,’ growls Durdles. ‘It ain’t a spot for novelty.’

‘Any new discovery on your part, I meant.’

‘There’s a old ’un under the seventh pillar on the left as you go down the broken steps of the little underground chapel as formerly was; I make him out (so fur as I've made him out yet) to be one of them old 'uns with a crook. To judge from the size of the passages in the walls, and of the steps and doors, by which they come and went, them crooks must have been a good deal in the way of the old 'uns! Two on 'em meeting promiscuous must have hitched one another by the mitre pretty often, I should say.'

Without any endeavour to correct the literality of this opinion, Jasper surveys his companion—covered from head to foot with old mortar, lime, and stone grit—as though he, Jasper, were getting imbued with a romantic interest in his weird life.

'Yours is a curious existence.'

Without furnishing the least clue to the question, whether he receives this as a compliment or as quite the reverse, Durdles gruffly answers: 'Yours is another.'

'Well! inasmuch as my lot is cast in the same old earthy, chilly, never-changing place, Yes. But there is much more mystery and interest in your connection with the Cathedral than in mine. Indeed, I am beginning to have some idea of asking you to take me on as a sort of student, or free 'prentice, under you, and to let me go about with you sometimes, and see some of these odd nooks in which you pass your days.'

The Stony One replies, in a general way, 'All right. Everybody knows where to find Durdles, when he's wanted.' Which, if not strictly true, is approximately so, if taken to express that Durdles may always be found in a state of vagabondage somewhere.

'What I dwell upon most,' says Jasper, pursuing his subject of romantic interest, 'is the remarkable accuracy with which you would seem to find out where people are buried.—What is the matter? That bundle is in your way; let me hold it.'

Durdles has stopped and backed a little (Deputy, attentive to all his movements, immediately skirmishing into the road), and was looking about for some ledge or corner to place his bundle on, when thus relieved of it.

'Just you give me my hammer out of that,' says Durdles, 'and I'll show you.'

Clink, clink. And his hammer is handed him.

'Now, lookee here. You pitch your note, don't you, Mr. Jasper?'

'Yes.'

'So I sound for mine. I take my hammer, and I tap.' (Here he strikes the pavement, and the attentive Deputy skirmishes at a rather wider range, as supposing that his head may be in requisition.) ‘I tap, tap, tap. Solid! I go on tapping. Solid still! Tap again. Holloa! Hollow! Tap again, persevering. Solid in hollow! Tap, tap, tap, to try it better. Solid in hollow; and inside solid, hollow again! There you are! Old ’un crumbled away in stone coffin, in vault!’

‘Astonishing!’

‘I have even done this,’ says Durdles, drawing out his two-foot rule (Deputy meanwhile skirmishing nearer, as suspecting that Treasure may be about to be discovered, which may somehow lead to his own enrichment, and the delicious treat of the discoverers being hanged by the neck, on his evidence, until they are dead). ‘Say that hammer of mine’s a wall—my work. Two; four; and two is six,’ measuring on the pavement. ‘Six foot inside that wall is Mrs. Sapsea.’

‘Not really Mrs. Sapsea?’

‘Say Mrs. Sapsea. Her wall’s thicker, but say Mrs. Sapsea. Durdles taps, that wall represented by that hammer, and says, after good sounding: “Something betwixt us!” Sure enough, some rubbish has been left in that same six-foot space by Durdles’s men!’

Jasper opines that such accuracy ‘is a gift.’

‘I wouldn’t have it at a gift,’ returns Durdles, by no means receiving the observation in good part. ‘I worked it out for myself. Durdles comes by *his* knowledge through grubbing deep for it, and having it up by the roots when it don’t want to come.—Holloa you Deputy!’

‘Widdy!’ is Deputy’s shrill response, standing off again.

‘Catch that ha’penny. And don’t let me see any more of you to-night, after we come to the Travellers’ Twopenny.’

‘Warning!’ returns Deputy, having caught the halfpenny, and appearing by this mystic word to express his assent to the arrangement.

They have but to cross what was once the vineyard, belonging to what was once the Monastery, to come into the narrow back lane wherein stands the crazy wooden house of two low stories currently known as the Travellers’ Twopenny:—a house all warped and distorted, like the morals of the travellers, with scant remains of a lattice-work porch over the door, and also of a rustic fence before its stamped-out garden; by reason of the travellers being so bound to the premises by a tender sentiment (or so fond of having a fire by the roadside in the course of the day), that they can never be persuaded or threatened into departure, without violently possessing themselves of some wooden forget-me-not, and bearing it off.

The semblance of an inn is attempted to be given to this wretched place by fragments of conventional red curtaining in the windows, which rags are made muddily transparent in the night-season by feeble lights of rush or cotton dip burning dully in the close air of the inside. As Durdles and Jasper come near, they are addressed by an inscribed paper lantern over the door, setting forth the purport of the house. They are also addressed by some half-dozen other hideous small boys—whether twopenny lodgers or followers or hangers-on of such, who knows!—who, as if attracted by some carrion-scent of Deputy in the air, start into the moonlight, as vultures might gather in the desert, and instantly fall to stoning him and one another.

‘Stop, you young brutes,’ cries Jasper angrily, ‘and let us go by!’

This remonstrance being received with yells and flying stones, according to a custom of late years comfortably established among the police regulations of our English communities, where Christians are stoned on all sides, as if the days of Saint Stephen were revived, Durdles remarks of the young savages, with some point, that ‘they haven’t got an object,’ and leads the way down the lane.

At the corner of the lane, Jasper, hotly enraged, checks his companion and looks back. All is silent. Next moment, a stone coming rattling at his hat, and a distant yell of ‘Wake-Cock! Warning!’ followed by a crow, as from some infernally-hatched Chanticleer, apprising him under whose victorious fire he stands, he turns the corner into safety, and takes Durdles home: Durdles stumbling among the litter of his stony yard as if he were going to turn head foremost into one of the unfinished tombs.

John Jasper returns by another way to his gatehouse, and entering softly with his key, finds his fire still burning. He takes from a locked press a peculiar-looking pipe, which he fills—but not with tobacco—and, having adjusted the contents of the bowl, very carefully, with a little instrument, ascends an inner staircase of only a few steps, leading to two rooms. One of these is his own sleeping chamber: the other is his nephew’s. There is a light in each.

His nephew lies asleep, calm and untroubled. John Jasper stands looking down upon him, his unlighted pipe in his hand, for some time, with a fixed and deep attention. Then, hushing his footsteps, he passes to his own room, lights his pipe, and delivers himself to the Spectres it invokes at midnight.

CHAPTER VI—PHILANTHROPY IN MINOR CANON CORNER

The Reverend Septimus Crisparkle (Septimus, because six little brother Crisparkles before him went out, one by one, as they were born, like six weak little rushlights, as they were lighted), having broken the thin morning ice near Cloisterham Weir with his amiable head, much to the invigoration of his frame, was now assisting his circulation by boxing at a looking-glass with great science and prowess. A fresh and healthy portrait the looking-glass presented of the Reverend Septimus, feinting and dodging with the utmost artfulness, and hitting out from the shoulder with the utmost straightness, while his radiant features teemed with innocence, and soft-hearted benevolence beamed from his boxing-gloves.

It was scarcely breakfast-time yet, for Mrs. Crisparkle—mother, not wife of the Reverend Septimus—was only just down, and waiting for the urn. Indeed, the Reverend Septimus left off at this very moment to take the pretty old lady's entering face between his boxing-gloves and kiss it. Having done so with tenderness, the Reverend Septimus turned to again, countering with his left, and putting in his right, in a tremendous manner.

'I say, every morning of my life, that you'll do it at last, Sept,' remarked the old lady, looking on; 'and so you will.'

'Do what, Ma dear?'

'Break the pier-glass, or burst a blood-vessel.'

'Neither, please God, Ma dear. Here's wind, Ma. Look at this!' In a concluding round of great severity, the Reverend Septimus administered and escaped all sorts of punishment, and wound up by getting the old lady's cap into Chancery—such is the technical term used in scientific circles by the learned in the Noble Art—with a lightness of touch that hardly stirred the lightest lavender or cherry riband on it. Magnanimously releasing the defeated, just in time to get his gloves into a drawer and feign to be looking out of window in a contemplative state of mind when a servant entered, the Reverend Septimus then gave place to the urn and other preparations for breakfast. These completed, and the two alone again, it was pleasant to see (or would have been, if there had been any one to see it, which there never was), the old lady standing to say the Lord's Prayer aloud, and her son, Minor Canon nevertheless, standing with bent head to hear it, he being within five years of forty: much as he had stood to hear the same words from the same lips when he was within five months of four.

What is prettier than an old lady—except a young lady—when her eyes are bright, when her figure is trim and compact, when her face is cheerful and calm, when her dress is as the dress of a china shepherdess: so dainty in its colours, so individually assorted to herself, so neatly moulded on her? Nothing is prettier, thought the good Minor Canon frequently, when taking his seat at table opposite his long-widowed mother. Her thought at such times may be condensed into the two words that oftenest did duty together in all her conversations: 'My Sept!'

They were a good pair to sit breakfasting together in Minor Canon Corner, Cloisterham. For Minor Canon Corner was a quiet place in the shadow of the Cathedral, which the cawing of the rooks, the echoing footsteps of rare passers, the sound of the Cathedral bell, or the roll of the Cathedral organ, seemed to render more quiet than absolute silence. Swaggering fighting men had had their centuries of ramping and raving about Minor Canon Corner, and beaten serfs had had their centuries of drudging and dying there, and powerful monks had had their centuries of being sometimes useful and sometimes harmful there, and behold they were all gone out of Minor Canon Corner, and so much the better. Perhaps one of the highest uses of their ever having been there, was, that there might be left behind, that blessed air of tranquillity which pervaded Minor Canon Corner, and that serenely romantic state of the mind—productive for the most part of pity and forbearance—which is engendered by a sorrowful story that is all told, or a pathetic play that is played out.

Red-brick walls harmoniously toned down in colour by time, strong-rooted ivy, latticed windows, panelled rooms, big oaken beams in little places, and stone-walled gardens where annual fruit yet ripened upon monkish trees, were the principal surroundings of pretty old Mrs. Crisparkle and the Reverend Septimus as they sat at breakfast.

'And what, Ma dear,' inquired the Minor Canon, giving proof of a wholesome and vigorous appetite, 'does the letter say?'

The pretty old lady, after reading it, had just laid it down upon the breakfast-cloth. She handed it over to her son.

Now, the old lady was exceedingly proud of her bright eyes being so clear that she could read writing without spectacles. Her son was also so proud of the circumstance, and so dutifully bent on her deriving the utmost possible gratification from it, that he had invented the pretence that he himself could *not* read writing without spectacles. Therefore he now assumed a pair, of grave and prodigious proportions, which not only seriously inconvenienced his nose and his breakfast, but seriously impeded his perusal of the letter. For, he had the eyes of a microscope and a telescope combined, when they were unassisted.

'It's from Mr. Honeythunder, of course,' said the old lady, folding her arms.

'Of course,' assented her son. He then lamely read on:

'"Haven of Philanthropy,
Chief Offices, London, Wednesday.

'"Dear Madam,

'"I write in the—;" In the what's this? What does he write in?'

'In the chair,' said the old lady.

The Reverend Septimus took off his spectacles, that he might see her face, as he exclaimed:

'Why, what should he write in?'

'Bless me, bless me, Sept,' returned the old lady, 'you don't see the context! Give it back to me, my dear.'

Glad to get his spectacles off (for they always made his eyes water), her son obeyed: murmuring that his sight for reading manuscript got worse and worse daily.

'"I write,"' his mother went on, reading very perspicuously and precisely, '"from the chair, to which I shall probably be confined for some hours."'

Septimus looked at the row of chairs against the wall, with a half-protesting and half-appealing countenance.

'"We have,"' the old lady read on with a little extra emphasis, '"a meeting of our Convened Chief Composite Committee of Central and District Philanthropists, at our Head Haven as above; and it is their unanimous pleasure that I take the chair."'

Septimus breathed more freely, and muttered: 'O! if he comes to *that*, let him.'

‘“Not to lose a day’s post, I take the opportunity of a long report being read, denouncing a public miscreant—”’

‘It is a most extraordinary thing,’ interposed the gentle Minor Canon, laying down his knife and fork to rub his ear in a vexed manner, ‘that these Philanthropists are always denouncing somebody. And it is another most extraordinary thing that they are always so violently flush of miscreants!’

‘“Denouncing a public miscreant—”’—the old lady resumed, ‘“to get our little affair of business off my mind. I have spoken with my two wards, Neville and Helena Landless, on the subject of their defective education, and they give in to the plan proposed; as I should have taken good care they did, whether they liked it or not.”’

‘And it is another most extraordinary thing,’ remarked the Minor Canon in the same tone as before, ‘that these philanthropists are so given to seizing their fellow-creatures by the scruff of the neck, and (as one may say) bumping them into the paths of peace.—I beg your pardon, Ma dear, for interrupting.’

‘“Therefore, dear Madam, you will please prepare your son, the Rev. Mr. Septimus, to expect Neville as an inmate to be read with, on Monday next. On the same day Helena will accompany him to Cloisterham, to take up her quarters at the Nuns’ House, the establishment recommended by yourself and son jointly. Please likewise to prepare for her reception and tuition there. The terms in both cases are understood to be exactly as stated to me in writing by yourself, when I opened a correspondence with you on this subject, after the honour of being introduced to you at your sister’s house in town here. With compliments to the Rev. Mr. Septimus, I am, Dear Madam, Your affectionate brother (In Philanthropy), Luke Honeythunder.”’

‘Well, Ma,’ said Septimus, after a little more rubbing of his ear, ‘we must try it. There can be no doubt that we have room for an inmate, and that I have time to bestow upon him, and inclination too. I must confess to feeling rather glad that he is not Mr. Honeythunder himself. Though that seems wretchedly prejudiced—does it not?—for I never saw him. Is he a large man, Ma?’

‘I should call him a large man, my dear,’ the old lady replied after some hesitation, ‘but that his voice is so much larger.’

‘Than himself?’

‘Than anybody.’

‘Hah!’ said Septimus. And finished his breakfast as if the flavour of the Superior Family Souchong, and also of the ham and toast and eggs, were a little on the wane.

Mrs. Crisparkle’s sister, another piece of Dresden china, and matching her so neatly that they would have made a delightful pair of ornaments for the two ends of any capacious old-fashioned chimneypiece, and by right should never have been seen apart, was the childless wife of a clergyman holding Corporation preferment in London City. Mr. Honeythunder in his public character of Professor of Philanthropy had come to know Mrs. Crisparkle during the last re-matching of the china ornaments (in other words during her last annual visit to her sister), after a public occasion of a philanthropic nature, when certain devoted orphans of tender years had been glutted with plum buns, and plump bumptiousness. These were all the antecedents known in Minor Canon Corner of the coming pupils.

‘I am sure you will agree with me, Ma,’ said Mr. Crisparkle, after thinking the matter over, ‘that the first thing to be done, is, to put these young people as much at their ease as possible. There is nothing disinterested in the notion, because we cannot be at our ease with them unless they are at their ease with us. Now, Jasper’s nephew is down here at present; and like takes to like, and youth takes to youth. He is a cordial young fellow, and we will have him to meet the brother and sister at dinner. That’s three. We can’t think of asking him, without asking Jasper. That’s four. Add Miss Twinkleton and the fairy bride that is to be, and that’s six. Add our two selves, and that’s eight. Would eight at a friendly dinner at all put you out, Ma?’

‘Nine would, Sept,’ returned the old lady, visibly nervous.

‘My dear Ma, I particularise eight.’

‘The exact size of the table and the room, my dear.’

So it was settled that way: and when Mr. Crisparkle called with his mother upon Miss Twinkleton, to arrange for the reception of Miss Helena Landless at the Nuns’ House, the two other invitations having reference to that establishment were proffered and accepted. Miss Twinkleton did, indeed, glance at the globes, as regretting that they were not formed to be taken out into society; but became reconciled to leaving them behind. Instructions were then despatched to the Philanthropist for the departure and arrival, in good time for dinner, of Mr. Neville and Miss Helena; and stock for soup became fragrant in the air of Minor Canon Corner.

In those days there was no railway to Cloisterham, and Mr. Sapsea said there never would be. Mr. Sapsea said more; he said there never should be. And yet, marvellous to consider, it has come to pass, in these days, that Express Trains don't think Cloisterham worth stopping at, but yell and whirl through it on their larger errands, casting the dust off their wheels as a testimony against its insignificance. Some remote fragment of Main Line to somewhere else, there was, which was going to ruin the Money Market if it failed, and Church and State if it succeeded, and (of course), the Constitution, whether or no; but even that had already so unsettled Cloisterham traffic, that the traffic, deserting the high road, came sneaking in from an unprecedented part of the country by a back stable-way, for many years labelled at the corner: 'Beware of the Dog.'

To this ignominious avenue of approach, Mr. Crisparkle repaired, awaiting the arrival of a short, squat omnibus, with a disproportionate heap of luggage on the roof—like a little Elephant with infinitely too much Castle—which was then the daily service between Cloisterham and external mankind. As this vehicle lumbered up, Mr. Crisparkle could hardly see anything else of it for a large outside passenger seated on the box, with his elbows squared, and his hands on his knees, compressing the driver into a most uncomfortably small compass, and glowering about him with a strongly-marked face.

'Is this Cloisterham?' demanded the passenger, in a tremendous voice.

'It is,' replied the driver, rubbing himself as if he ached, after throwing the reins to the ostler. 'And I never was so glad to see it.'

'Tell your master to make his box-seat wider, then,' returned the passenger. 'Your master is morally bound—and ought to be legally, under ruinous penalties—to provide for the comfort of his fellow-man.'

The driver instituted, with the palms of his hands, a superficial perquisition into the state of his skeleton; which seemed to make him anxious.

'Have I sat upon you?' asked the passenger.

'You have,' said the driver, as if he didn't like it at all.

'Take that card, my friend.'

'I think I won't deprive you on it,' returned the driver, casting his eyes over it with no great favour, without taking it. 'What's the good of it to me?'

'Be a Member of that Society,' said the passenger.

‘What shall I get by it?’ asked the driver.

‘Brotherhood,’ returned the passenger, in a ferocious voice.

‘Thankee,’ said the driver, very deliberately, as he got down; ‘my mother was contented with myself, and so am I. I don’t want no brothers.’

‘But you must have them,’ replied the passenger, also descending, ‘whether you like it or not. I am your brother.’

‘I say!’ expostulated the driver, becoming more chafed in temper, ‘not too fur! The worm *will*, when—’

But here, Mr. Crisparkle interposed, remonstrating aside, in a friendly voice: ‘Joe, Joe, Joe! don’t forget yourself, Joe, my good fellow!’ and then, when Joe peaceably touched his hat, accosting the passenger with: ‘Mr. Honeythunder?’

‘That is my name, sir.’

‘My name is Crisparkle.’

‘Reverend Mr. Septimus? Glad to see you, sir. Neville and Helena are inside. Having a little succumbed of late, under the pressure of my public labours, I thought I would take a mouthful of fresh air, and come down with them, and return at night. So you are the Reverend Mr. Septimus, are you?’ surveying him on the whole with disappointment, and twisting a double eyeglass by its ribbon, as if he were roasting it, but not otherwise using it. ‘Hah! I expected to see you older, sir.’

‘I hope you will,’ was the good-humoured reply.

‘Eh?’ demanded Mr. Honeythunder.

‘Only a poor little joke. Not worth repeating.’

‘Joke? Ay; I never see a joke,’ Mr. Honeythunder frowningly retorted. ‘A joke is wasted upon me, sir. Where are they? Helena and Neville, come here! Mr. Crisparkle has come down to meet you.’

An unusually handsome lithe young fellow, and an unusually handsome lithe girl; much alike; both very dark, and very rich in colour; she of almost the gipsy type; something untamed about them both; a certain air upon them of hunter and huntress; yet withal a certain air of being the objects of the chase, rather than the followers. Slender, supple, quick of eye and limb; half shy, half defiant; fierce of look; an indefinable kind of pause coming and going on their whole expression, both of face and form, which might be equally likened to the pause before a crouch or a bound. The rough mental notes made in the first five minutes by Mr. Crisparkle would have read thus, *verbatim*.

He invited Mr. Honeythunder to dinner, with a troubled mind (for the discomfiture of the dear old china shepherdess lay heavy on it), and gave his arm to Helena Landless. Both she and her brother, as they walked all together through the ancient streets, took great delight in what he pointed out of the Cathedral and the Monastery ruin, and wondered—so his notes ran on—much as if they were beautiful barbaric captives brought from some wild tropical dominion. Mr. Honeythunder walked in the middle of the road, shouldering the natives out of his way, and loudly developing a scheme he had, for making a raid on all the unemployed persons in the United Kingdom, laying them every one by the heels in jail, and forcing them, on pain of prompt extermination, to become philanthropists.

Mrs. Crisparkle had need of her own share of philanthropy when she beheld this very large and very loud excrescence on the little party. Always something in the nature of a Boil upon the face of society, Mr. Honeythunder expanded into an inflammatory Wen in Minor Canon Corner. Though it was not literally true, as was facetiously charged against him by public unbelievers, that he called aloud to his fellow-creatures: ‘Curse your souls and bodies, come here and be blessed!’ still his philanthropy was of that gunpowderous sort that the difference between it and animosity was hard to determine. You were to abolish military force, but you were first to bring all commanding officers who had done their duty, to trial by court-martial for that offence, and shoot them. You were to abolish war, but were to make converts by making war upon them, and charging them with loving war as the apple of their eye. You were to have no capital punishment, but were first to sweep off the face of the earth all legislators, jurists, and judges, who were of the contrary opinion. You were to have universal concord, and were to get it by eliminating all the people who wouldn’t, or conscientiously couldn’t, be concordant. You were to love your brother as yourself, but after an indefinite interval of maligning him (very much as if you hated him), and calling him all manner of names. Above all things, you were to do nothing in private, or on your own account. You were to go to the offices of the Haven of Philanthropy, and put your name down as a Member and a Professing Philanthropist. Then, you were to pay up your subscription, get your card of membership and your riband and medal, and were evermore to live upon a platform, and evermore to say what Mr. Honeythunder said, and what the Treasurer said, and what the sub-Treasurer said, and what the Committee said, and what the sub-Committee said, and what the Secretary said, and what the Vice-Secretary said. And this was usually said in the unanimously-carried resolution under hand and seal, to the effect: ‘That this assembled Body of Professing Philanthropists views, with indignant scorn and contempt, not unmixed with utter detestation and loathing abhorrence’—in short, the baseness of all those who do not belong to it, and pledges itself to make as many obnoxious statements as possible about them, without being at all particular as to facts.

The dinner was a most doleful breakdown. The philanthropist deranged the symmetry of the table, sat himself in the way of the waiting, blocked up the thoroughfare, and drove Mr. Tope (who assisted the parlour-maid) to the verge of distraction by passing plates and dishes on, over his own head. Nobody could talk to anybody, because he held forth to everybody at once, as if the company had no individual existence, but were a Meeting. He impounded the Reverend Mr. Septimus, as an official personage to be addressed, or kind of human peg to hang his oratorical hat on, and fell into the exasperating habit, common among such orators, of impersonating him as a wicked and weak opponent. Thus, he would ask: ‘And will you, sir, now stultify yourself by telling me’—and so forth, when the innocent man had not opened his lips, nor meant to open them. Or he would say: ‘Now see, sir, to what a position you are reduced. I will leave you no escape. After exhausting all the resources of fraud and falsehood, during years upon years; after exhibiting a combination of dastardly meanness with ensanguined daring, such as the world has not often witnessed; you have now the hypocrisy to bend the knee before the most degraded of mankind, and to sue and whine and howl for mercy!’ Whereat the unfortunate Minor Canon would look, in part indignant and in part perplexed; while his worthy mother sat bridling, with tears in her eyes, and the remainder of the party lapsed into a sort of gelatinous state, in which there was no flavour or solidity, and very little resistance.

But the gush of philanthropy that burst forth when the departure of Mr. Honeythunder began to impend, must have been highly gratifying to the feelings of that distinguished man. His coffee was produced, by the special activity of Mr. Tope, a full hour before he wanted it. Mr. Crisparkle sat with his watch in his hand for about the same period, lest he should overstay his time. The four young people were unanimous in believing that the Cathedral clock struck three-quarters, when it actually struck but one.

Miss Twinkleton estimated the distance to the omnibus at five-and-twenty minutes’ walk, when it was really five. The affectionate kindness of the whole circle hustled him into his greatcoat, and shoved him out into the moonlight, as if he were a fugitive traitor with whom they sympathised, and a troop of horse were at the back door. Mr. Crisparkle and his new charge, who took him to the omnibus, were so fervent in their apprehensions of his catching cold, that they shut him up in it instantly and left him, with still half-an-hour to spare.

CHAPTER VII—MORE CONFIDENCES THAN ONE

‘I know very little of that gentleman, sir,’ said Neville to the Minor Canon as they turned back.

‘You know very little of your guardian?’ the Minor Canon repeated.

‘Almost nothing!’

‘How came he—’

‘To *be* my guardian? I’ll tell you, sir. I suppose you know that we come (my sister and I) from Ceylon?’

‘Indeed, no.’

‘I wonder at that. We lived with a stepfather there. Our mother died there, when we were little children. We have had a wretched existence. She made him our guardian, and he was a miserly wretch who grudged us food to eat, and clothes to wear. At his death, he passed us over to this man; for no better reason that I know of, than his being a friend or connexion of his, whose name was always in print and catching his attention.’

‘That was lately, I suppose?’

‘Quite lately, sir. This stepfather of ours was a cruel brute as well as a grinding one. It is well he died when he did, or I might have killed him.’

Mr. Crisparkle stopped short in the moonlight and looked at his hopeful pupil in consternation.

‘I surprise you, sir?’ he said, with a quick change to a submissive manner.

‘You shock me; unspeakably shock me.’

The pupil hung his head for a little while, as they walked on, and then said: ‘You never saw him beat your sister. I have seen him beat mine, more than once or twice, and I never forgot it.’

‘Nothing,’ said Mr. Crisparkle, ‘not even a beloved and beautiful sister’s tears under dastardly ill-usage;’ he became less severe, in spite of himself, as his indignation rose; ‘could justify those horrible expressions that you used.’

‘I am sorry I used them, and especially to you, sir. I beg to recall them. But permit me to set you right on one point. You spoke of my sister’s tears. My sister would have let him tear her to pieces, before she would have let him believe that he could make her shed a tear.’

Mr. Crisparkle reviewed those mental notes of his, and was neither at all surprised to hear it, nor at all disposed to question it.

‘Perhaps you will think it strange, sir,’—this was said in a hesitating voice—‘that I should so soon ask you to allow me to confide in you, and to have the kindness to hear a word or two from me in my defence?’

‘Defence?’ Mr. Crisparkle repeated. ‘You are not on your defence, Mr. Neville.’

‘I think I am, sir. At least I know I should be, if you were better acquainted with my character.’

‘Well, Mr. Neville,’ was the rejoinder. ‘What if you leave me to find it out?’

‘Since it is your pleasure, sir,’ answered the young man, with a quick change in his manner to sullen disappointment: ‘since it is your pleasure to check me in my impulse, I must submit.’

There was that in the tone of this short speech which made the conscientious man to whom it was addressed uneasy. It hinted to him that he might, without meaning it, turn aside a trustfulness beneficial to a mis-shapen young mind and perhaps to his own power of directing and improving it. They were within sight of the lights in his windows, and he stopped.

‘Let us turn back and take a turn or two up and down, Mr. Neville, or you may not have time to finish what you wish to say to me. You are hasty in thinking that I mean to check you. Quite the contrary. I invite your confidence.’

‘You have invited it, sir, without knowing it, ever since I came here. I say “ever since,” as if I had been here a week. The truth is, we came here (my sister and I) to quarrel with you, and affront you, and break away again.’

‘Really?’ said Mr. Crisparkle, at a dead loss for anything else to say.

‘You see, we could not know what you were beforehand, sir; could we?’

‘Clearly not,’ said Mr. Crisparkle.

‘And having liked no one else with whom we have ever been brought into contact, we had made up our minds not to like you.’

‘Really?’ said Mr. Crisparkle again.

‘But we do like you, sir, and we see an unmistakable difference between your house and your reception of us, and anything else we have ever known. This—and my happening to be alone with you—and everything around us seeming so quiet and peaceful after Mr. Honeythunder’s departure—and Cloisterham being so old and grave and beautiful, with the moon shining on it—these things inclined me to open my heart.’

‘I quite understand, Mr. Neville. And it is salutary to listen to such influences.’

‘In describing my own imperfections, sir, I must ask you not to suppose that I am describing my sister’s. She has come out of the disadvantages of our miserable life, as much better than I am, as that Cathedral tower is higher than those chimneys.’

Mr. Crisparkle in his own breast was not so sure of this.

‘I have had, sir, from my earliest remembrance, to suppress a deadly and bitter hatred. This has made me secret and revengeful. I have been always tyrannically held down by the strong hand. This has driven me, in my weakness, to the resource of being false and mean. I have been stinted of education, liberty, money, dress, the very necessaries of life, the commonest pleasures of childhood, the commonest possessions of youth. This has caused me to be utterly wanting in I don’t know what emotions, or remembrances, or good instincts—I have not even a name for the thing, you see!—that you have had to work upon in other young men to whom you have been accustomed.’

‘This is evidently true. But this is not encouraging,’ thought Mr. Crisparkle as they turned again.

‘And to finish with, sir: I have been brought up among abject and servile dependents, of an inferior race, and I may easily have contracted some affinity with them. Sometimes, I don’t know but that it may be a drop of what is tigerish in their blood.’

‘As in the case of that remark just now,’ thought Mr. Crisparkle.

‘In a last word of reference to my sister, sir (we are twin children), you ought to know, to her honour, that nothing in our misery ever subdued her, though it often cowed me. When we ran away from it (we ran away four times in six years, to be soon brought back and cruelly punished), the flight was always of her planning and leading. Each time she dressed as a boy, and showed the daring of a man. I take it we were seven years old when we first decamped; but I remember, when I lost the pocket-knife with which she was to have cut her hair short, how desperately she tried to tear it out, or bite it off. I have nothing further to say, sir, except that I hope you will bear with me and make allowance for me.'

'Of that, Mr. Neville, you may be sure,' returned the Minor Canon. 'I don't preach more than I can help, and I will not repay your confidence with a sermon. But I entreat you to bear in mind, very seriously and steadily, that if I am to do you any good, it can only be with your own assistance; and that you can only render that, efficiently, by seeking aid from Heaven.'

'I will try to do my part, sir.'

'And, Mr. Neville, I will try to do mine. Here is my hand on it. May God bless our endeavours!'

They were now standing at his house-door, and a cheerful sound of voices and laughter was heard within.

'We will take one more turn before going in,' said Mr. Crisparkle, 'for I want to ask you a question. When you said you were in a changed mind concerning me, you spoke, not only for yourself, but for your sister too?'

'Undoubtedly I did, sir.'

'Excuse me, Mr. Neville, but I think you have had no opportunity of communicating with your sister, since I met you. Mr. Honeythunder was very eloquent; but perhaps I may venture to say, without ill-nature, that he rather monopolised the occasion. May you not have answered for your sister without sufficient warrant?'

Neville shook his head with a proud smile.

'You don't know, sir, yet, what a complete understanding can exist between my sister and me, though no spoken word—perhaps hardly as much as a look—may have passed between us. She not only feels as I have described, but she very well knows that I am taking this opportunity of speaking to you, both for her and for myself.'

Mr. Crisparkle looked in his face, with some incredulity; but his face expressed such absolute and firm conviction of the truth of what he said, that Mr. Crisparkle looked at the pavement, and mused, until they came to his door again.

'I will ask for one more turn, sir, this time,' said the young man, with a rather heightened colour rising in his face. 'But for Mr. Honeythunder's—I think you called it eloquence, sir?' (somewhat slyly.)

‘I—yes, I called it eloquence,’ said Mr. Crisparkle.

‘But for Mr. Honeythunder’s eloquence, I might have had no need to ask you what I am going to ask you. This Mr. Edwin Drood, sir: I think that’s the name?’

‘Quite correct,’ said Mr. Crisparkle. ‘D-r-double o-d.’

‘Does he—or did he—read with you, sir?’

‘Never, Mr. Neville. He comes here visiting his relation, Mr. Jasper.’

‘Is Miss Bud his relation too, sir?’

(‘Now, why should he ask that, with sudden superciliousness?’ thought Mr. Crisparkle.) Then he explained, aloud, what he knew of the little story of their betrothal.

‘O! *that’s* it, is it?’ said the young man. ‘I understand his air of proprietorship now!’

This was said so evidently to himself, or to anybody rather than Mr. Crisparkle, that the latter instinctively felt as if to notice it would be almost tantamount to noticing a passage in a letter which he had read by chance over the writer’s shoulder. A moment afterwards they re-entered the house.

Mr. Jasper was seated at the piano as they came into his drawing-room, and was accompanying Miss Rosebud while she sang. It was a consequence of his playing the accompaniment without notes, and of her being a heedless little creature, very apt to go wrong, that he followed her lips most attentively, with his eyes as well as hands; carefully and softly hinting the key-note from time to time. Standing with an arm drawn round her, but with a face far more intent on Mr. Jasper than on her singing, stood Helena, between whom and her brother an instantaneous recognition passed, in which Mr. Crisparkle saw, or thought he saw, the understanding that had been spoken of, flash out. Mr. Neville then took his admiring station, leaning against the piano, opposite the singer; Mr. Crisparkle sat down by the china shepherdess; Edwin Drood gallantly furled and unfurled Miss Twinkleton’s fan; and that lady passively claimed that sort of exhibitor’s proprietorship in the accomplishment on view, which Mr. Tope, the Verger, daily claimed in the Cathedral service.

The song went on. It was a sorrowful strain of parting, and the fresh young voice was very plaintive and tender. As Jasper watched the pretty lips, and ever and again hinted the one note, as though it were a low whisper from himself, the voice became less steady, until all at once the singer broke into a burst of tears, and shrieked out, with her hands over her eyes: 'I can't bear this! I am frightened! Take me away!'

With one swift turn of her lithe figures Helena laid the little beauty on a sofa, as if she had never caught her up. Then, on one knee beside her, and with one hand upon her rosy mouth, while with the other she appealed to all the rest, Helena said to them: 'It's nothing; it's all over; don't speak to her for one minute, and she is well!'

Jasper's hands had, in the same instant, lifted themselves from the keys, and were now poised above them, as though he waited to resume. In that attitude he yet sat quiet: not even looking round, when all the rest had changed their places and were reassuring one another.

'Pussy's not used to an audience; that's the fact,' said Edwin Drood. 'She got nervous, and couldn't hold out. Besides, Jack, you are such a conscientious master, and require so much, that I believe you make her afraid of you. No wonder.'

'No wonder,' repeated Helena.

'There, Jack, you hear! You would be afraid of him, under similar circumstances, wouldn't you, Miss Landless?'

'Not under any circumstances,' returned Helena.

Jasper brought down his hands, looked over his shoulder, and begged to thank Miss Landless for her vindication of his character. Then he fell to dumbly playing, without striking the notes, while his little pupil was taken to an open window for air, and was otherwise petted and restored. When she was brought back, his place was empty. 'Jack's gone, Pussy,' Edwin told her. 'I am more than half afraid he didn't like to be charged with being the Monster who had frightened you.' But she answered never a word, and shivered, as if they had made her a little too cold.

Miss Twinkleton now opining that indeed these were late hours, Mrs. Crisparkle, for finding ourselves outside the walls of the Nuns' House, and that we who undertook the formation of the future wives and mothers of England (the last words in a lower voice, as requiring to be communicated in confidence) were really bound (voice coming up again) to set a better example than one of rakish habits, wrappers were put in requisition, and the two young cavaliers volunteered to see the ladies home. It was soon done, and the gate of the Nuns' House closed upon them.

The boarders had retired, and only Mrs. Tisher in solitary vigil awaited the new pupil. Her bedroom being within Rosa's, very little introduction or explanation was necessary, before she was placed in charge of her new friend, and left for the night.

‘This is a blessed relief, my dear,’ said Helena. ‘I have been dreading all day, that I should be brought to bay at this time.’

‘There are not many of us,’ returned Rosa, ‘and we are good-natured girls; at least the others are; I can answer for them.’

‘I can answer for you,’ laughed Helena, searching the lovely little face with her dark, fiery eyes, and tenderly caressing the small figure. ‘You will be a friend to me, won’t you?’

‘I hope so. But the idea of my being a friend to you seems too absurd, though.’

‘Why?’

‘O, I am such a mite of a thing, and you are so womanly and handsome. You seem to have resolution and power enough to crush me. I shrink into nothing by the side of your presence even.’

‘I am a neglected creature, my dear, unacquainted with all accomplishments, sensitively conscious that I have everything to learn, and deeply ashamed to own my ignorance.’

‘And yet you acknowledge everything to me!’ said Rosa.

‘My pretty one, can I help it? There is a fascination in you.’

‘O! is there though?’ pouted Rosa, half in jest and half in earnest. ‘What a pity Master Eddy doesn’t feel it more!’

Of course her relations towards that young gentleman had been already imparted in Minor Canon Corner.

‘Why, surely he must love you with all his heart!’ cried Helena, with an earnestness that threatened to blaze into ferocity if he didn’t.

‘Eh? O, well, I suppose he does,’ said Rosa, pouting again; ‘I am sure I have no right to say he doesn’t. Perhaps it’s my fault. Perhaps I am not as nice to him as I ought to be. I don’t think I am. But it *is* so ridiculous!’

Helena’s eyes demanded what was.

‘*We* are,’ said Rosa, answering as if she had spoken. ‘We are such a ridiculous couple. And we are always quarrelling.’

‘Why?’

‘Because we both know we are ridiculous, my dear!’ Rosa gave that answer as if it were the most conclusive answer in the world.

Helena’s masterful look was intent upon her face for a few moments, and then she impulsively put out both her hands and said:

‘You will be my friend and help me?’

‘Indeed, my dear, I will,’ replied Rosa, in a tone of affectionate childishness that went straight and true to her heart; ‘I will be as good a friend as such a mite of a thing can be to such a noble creature as you. And be a friend to me, please; I don’t understand myself: and I want a friend who can understand me, very much indeed.’

Helena Landless kissed her, and retaining both her hands said:

‘Who is Mr. Jasper?’

Rosa turned aside her head in answering: ‘Eddy’s uncle, and my music-master.’

‘You do not love him?’

‘Ugh!’ She put her hands up to her face, and shook with fear or horror.

‘You know that he loves you?’

‘O, don’t, don’t, don’t!’ cried Rosa, dropping on her knees, and clinging to her new resource. ‘Don’t tell me of it! He terrifies me. He haunts my thoughts, like a dreadful ghost. I feel that I am never safe from him. I feel as if he could pass in through the wall when he is spoken of.’ She actually did look round, as if she dreaded to see him standing in the shadow behind her.

‘Try to tell me more about it, darling.’

‘Yes, I will, I will. Because you are so strong. But hold me the while, and stay with me afterwards.’

‘My child! You speak as if he had threatened you in some dark way.’

‘He has never spoken to me about—that. Never.’

‘What has he done?’

‘He has made a slave of me with his looks. He has forced me to understand him, without his saying a word; and he has forced me to keep silence, without his uttering a threat. When I play, he never moves his eyes from my hands. When I sing, he never moves his eyes from my lips. When he corrects me, and strikes a note, or a chord, or plays a passage, he himself is in the sounds, whispering that he pursues me as a lover, and commanding me to keep his secret. I avoid his eyes, but he forces me to see them without looking at them. Even when a glaze comes over them (which is sometimes the case), and he seems to wander away into a frightful sort of dream in which he threatens most, he obliges me to know it, and to know that he is sitting close at my side, more terrible to me than ever.’

‘What is this imagined threatening, pretty one? What is threatened?’

‘I don’t know. I have never even dared to think or wonder what it is.’

‘And was this all, to-night?’

‘This was all; except that to-night when he watched my lips so closely as I was singing, besides feeling terrified I felt ashamed and passionately hurt. It was as if he kissed me, and I couldn’t bear it, but cried out. You must never breathe this to any one. Eddy is devoted to him. But you said to-night that you would not be afraid of him, under any circumstances, and that gives me—who am so much afraid of him—courage to tell only you. Hold me! Stay with me! I am too frightened to be left by myself.’

The lustrous gipsy-face drooped over the clinging arms and bosom, and the wild black hair fell down protectingly over the childish form. There was a slumbering gleam of fire in the intense dark eyes, though they were then softened with compassion and admiration. Let whomsoever it most concerned look well to it!

CHAPTER VIII—DAGGERS DRAWN

The two young men, having seen the damsels, their charges, enter the courtyard of the Nuns' House, and finding themselves coldly stared at by the brazen door-plate, as if the battered old beau with the glass in his eye were insolent, look at one another, look along the perspective of the moonlit street, and slowly walk away together.

'Do you stay here long, Mr. Drood?' says Neville.

'Not this time,' is the careless answer. 'I leave for London again, to-morrow. But I shall be here, off and on, until next Midsummer; then I shall take my leave of Cloisterham, and England too; for many a long day, I expect.'

'Are you going abroad?'

'Going to wake up Egypt a little,' is the condescending answer.

'Are you reading?'

'Reading?' repeats Edwin Drood, with a touch of contempt. 'No. Doing, working, engineering. My small patrimony was left a part of the capital of the Firm I am with, by my father, a former partner; and I am a charge upon the Firm until I come of age; and then I step into my modest share in the concern. Jack—you met him at dinner—is, until then, my guardian and trustee.'

'I heard from Mr. Crisparkle of your other good fortune.'

'What do you mean by my other good fortune?'

Neville has made his remark in a watchfully advancing, and yet furtive and shy manner, very expressive of that peculiar air already noticed, of being at once hunter and hunted. Edwin has made his retort with an abruptness not at all polite. They stop and interchange a rather heated look.

'I hope,' says Neville, 'there is no offence, Mr. Drood, in my innocently referring to your betrothal?'

'By George!' cries Edwin, leading on again at a somewhat quicker pace; 'everybody in this chattering old Cloisterham refers to it I wonder no public-house has been set up, with my portrait for the sign of The Betrothed's Head. Or Pussy's portrait. One or the other.'

'I am not accountable for Mr. Crisparkle's mentioning the matter to me, quite openly,' Neville begins.

‘No; that’s true; you are not,’ Edwin Drood assents.

‘But,’ resumes Neville, ‘I am accountable for mentioning it to you. And I did so, on the supposition that you could not fail to be highly proud of it.’

Now, there are these two curious touches of human nature working the secret springs of this dialogue. Neville Landless is already enough impressed by Little Rosebud, to feel indignant that Edwin Drood (far below her) should hold his prize so lightly. Edwin Drood is already enough impressed by Helena, to feel indignant that Helena’s brother (far below her) should dispose of him so coolly, and put him out of the way so entirely.

However, the last remark had better be answered. So, says Edwin:

‘I don’t know, Mr. Neville’ (adopting that mode of address from Mr. Crisparkle), ‘that what people are proudest of, they usually talk most about; I don’t know either, that what they are proudest of, they most like other people to talk about. But I live a busy life, and I speak under correction by you readers, who ought to know everything, and I daresay do.’

By this time they had both become savage; Mr. Neville out in the open; Edwin Drood under the transparent cover of a popular tune, and a stop now and then to pretend to admire picturesque effects in the moonlight before him.

‘It does not seem to me very civil in you,’ remarks Neville, at length, ‘to reflect upon a stranger who comes here, not having had your advantages, to try to make up for lost time. But, to be sure, I was not brought up in “busy life,” and my ideas of civility were formed among Heathens.’

‘Perhaps, the best civility, whatever kind of people we are brought up among,’ retorts Edwin Drood, ‘is to mind our own business. If you will set me that example, I promise to follow it.’

‘Do you know that you take a great deal too much upon yourself?’ is the angry rejoinder, ‘and that in the part of the world I come from, you would be called to account for it?’

‘By whom, for instance?’ asks Edwin Drood, coming to a halt, and surveying the other with a look of disdain.

But, here a startling right hand is laid on Edwin’s shoulder, and Jasper stands between them. For, it would seem that he, too, has strolled round by the Nuns’ House, and has come up behind them on the shadowy side of the road.

‘Ned, Ned, Ned!’ he says; ‘we must have no more of this. I don’t like this. I have overheard high words between you two. Remember, my dear boy, you are almost in the position of host to-night. You belong, as it were, to the place, and in a manner represent it towards a stranger. Mr. Neville is a stranger, and you should respect the obligations of hospitality. And, Mr. Neville,' laying his left hand on the inner shoulder of that young gentleman, and thus walking on between them, hand to shoulder on either side: 'you will pardon me; but I appeal to you to govern your temper too. Now, what is amiss? But why ask! Let there be nothing amiss, and the question is superfluous. We are all three on a good understanding, are we not?'

After a silent struggle between the two young men who shall speak last, Edwin Drood strikes in with: 'So far as I am concerned, Jack, there is no anger in me.'

'Nor in me,' says Neville Landless, though not so freely; or perhaps so carelessly. 'But if Mr. Drood knew all that lies behind me, far away from here, he might know better how it is that sharp-edged words have sharp edges to wound me.'

'Perhaps,' says Jasper, in a soothing manner, 'we had better not qualify our good understanding. We had better not say anything having the appearance of a remonstrance or condition; it might not seem generous. Frankly and freely, you see there is no anger in Ned. Frankly and freely, there is no anger in you, Mr. Neville?'

'None at all, Mr. Jasper.' Still, not quite so frankly or so freely; or, be it said once again, not quite so carelessly perhaps.

'All over then! Now, my bachelor gatehouse is a few yards from here, and the heater is on the fire, and the wine and glasses are on the table, and it is not a stone's throw from Minor Canon Corner. Ned, you are up and away to-morrow. We will carry Mr. Neville in with us, to take a stirrup-cup.'

'With all my heart, Jack.'

'And with all mine, Mr. Jasper.' Neville feels it impossible to say less, but would rather not go. He has an impression upon him that he has lost hold of his temper; feels that Edwin Drood's coolness, so far from being infectious, makes him red-hot.

Mr. Jasper, still walking in the centre, hand to shoulder on either side, beautifully turns the Refrain of a drinking song, and they all go up to his rooms. There, the first object visible, when he adds the light of a lamp to that of the fire, is the portrait over the chimneypicce. It is not an object calculated to improve the understanding between the two young men, as rather awkwardly reviving the subject of their difference. Accordingly, they both glance at it consciously, but say nothing. Jasper, however (who would appear from his conduct to have gained but an imperfect clue to the cause of their late high words), directly calls attention to it.

‘You recognise that picture, Mr. Neville?’ shading the lamp to throw the light upon it.

‘I recognise it, but it is far from flattering the original.’

‘O, you are hard upon it! It was done by Ned, who made me a present of it.’

‘I am sorry for that, Mr. Drood.’ Neville apologises, with a real intention to apologise; ‘if I had known I was in the artist’s presence—’

‘O, a joke, sir, a mere joke,’ Edwin cuts in, with a provoking yawn. ‘A little humouring of Pussy’s points! I’m going to paint her gravely, one of these days, if she’s good.’

The air of leisurely patronage and indifference with which this is said, as the speaker throws himself back in a chair and clasps his hands at the back of his head, as a rest for it, is very exasperating to the excitable and excited Neville. Jasper looks observantly from the one to the other, slightly smiles, and turns his back to mix a jug of mulled wine at the fire. It seems to require much mixing and compounding.

‘I suppose, Mr. Neville,’ says Edwin, quick to resent the indignant protest against himself in the face of young Landless, which is fully as visible as the portrait, or the fire, or the lamp: ‘I suppose that if you painted the picture of your lady love—’

‘I can’t paint,’ is the hasty interruption.

‘That’s your misfortune, and not your fault. You would if you could. But if you could, I suppose you would make her (no matter what she was in reality), Juno, Minerva, Diana, and Venus, all in one. Eh?’

‘I have no lady love, and I can’t say.’

‘If I were to try my hand,’ says Edwin, with a boyish boastfulness getting up in him, ‘on a portrait of Miss Landless—in earnest, mind you; in earnest—you should see what I could do!’

‘My sister’s consent to sit for it being first got, I suppose? As it never will be got, I am afraid I shall never see what you can do. I must bear the loss.’

Jasper turns round from the fire, fills a large goblet glass for Neville, fills a large goblet glass for Edwin, and hands each his own; then fills for himself, saying:

‘Come, Mr. Neville, we are to drink to my nephew, Ned. As it is his foot that is in the stirrup—metaphorically—our stirrup-cup is to be devoted to him. Ned, my dearest fellow, my love!’

Jasper sets the example of nearly emptying his glass, and Neville follows it. Edwin Drood says, ‘Thank you both very much,’ and follows the double example.

‘Look at him,’ cries Jasper, stretching out his hand admiringly and tenderly, though rallyingly too. ‘See where he lounges so easily, Mr. Neville! The world is all before him where to choose. A life of stirring work and interest, a life of change and excitement, a life of domestic ease and love! Look at him!’

Edwin Drood’s face has become quickly and remarkably flushed with the wine; so has the face of Neville Landless. Edwin still sits thrown back in his chair, making that rest of clasped hands for his head.

‘See how little he heeds it all!’ Jasper proceeds in a bantering vein. ‘It is hardly worth his while to pluck the golden fruit that hangs ripe on the tree for him. And yet consider the contrast, Mr. Neville. You and I have no prospect of stirring work and interest, or of change and excitement, or of domestic ease and love. You and I have no prospect (unless you are more fortunate than I am, which may easily be), but the tedious unchanging round of this dull place.’

‘Upon my soul, Jack,’ says Edwin, complacently, ‘I feel quite apologetic for having my way smoothed as you describe. But you know what I know, Jack, and it may not be so very easy as it seems, after all. May it, Pussy?’ To the portrait, with a snap of his thumb and finger. ‘We have got to hit it off yet; haven’t we, Pussy? You know what I mean, Jack.’

His speech has become thick and indistinct. Jasper, quiet and self-possessed, looks to Neville, as expecting his answer or comment. When Neville speaks, *his* speech is also thick and indistinct.

‘It might have been better for Mr. Drood to have known some hardships,’ he says, defiantly.

‘Pray,’ retorts Edwin, turning merely his eyes in that direction, ‘pray why might it have been better for Mr. Drood to have known some hardships?’

‘Ay,’ Jasper assents, with an air of interest; ‘let us know why?’

‘Because they might have made him more sensible,’ says Neville, ‘of good fortune that is not by any means necessarily the result of his own merits.'

Mr. Jasper quickly looks to his nephew for his rejoinder.

'Have *you* known hardships, may I ask?' says Edwin Drood, sitting upright.

Mr. Jasper quickly looks to the other for his retort.

'I have.'

'And what have they made you sensible of?'

Mr. Jasper's play of eyes between the two holds good throughout the dialogue, to the end.

'I have told you once before to-night.'

'You have done nothing of the sort.'

'I tell you I have. That you take a great deal too much upon yourself.'

'You added something else to that, if I remember?'

'Yes, I did say something else.'

'Say it again.'

'I said that in the part of the world I come from, you would be called to account for it.'

'Only there?' cries Edwin Drood, with a contemptuous laugh. 'A long way off, I believe? Yes; I see! That part of the world is at a safe distance.'

'Say here, then,' rejoins the other, rising in a fury. 'Say anywhere! Your vanity is intolerable, your conceit is beyond endurance; you talk as if you were some rare and precious prize, instead of a common boaster. You are a common fellow, and a common boaster.'

'Pooh, pooh,' says Edwin Drood, equally furious, but more collected; 'how should you know? You may know a black common fellow, or a black common boaster, when you see him (and no doubt you have a large acquaintance that way); but you are no judge of white men.'

This insulting allusion to his dark skin infuriates Neville to that violent degree, that he flings the dregs of his wine at Edwin Drood, and is in the act of flinging the goblet after it, when his arm is caught in the nick of time by Jasper.

'Ned, my dear fellow!' he cries in a loud voice; 'I entreat you, I command you, to be still!' There has been a rush of all the three, and a clattering of glasses and overturning of chairs. 'Mr. Neville, for shame! Give this glass to me. Open your hand, sir. I will have it!'

But Neville throws him off, and pauses for an instant, in a raging passion, with the goblet yet in his uplifted hand. Then, he dashes it down under the grate, with such force that the broken splinters fly out again in a shower; and he leaves the house.

When he first emerges into the night air, nothing around him is still or steady; nothing around him shows like what it is; he only knows that he stands with a bare head in the midst of a blood-red whirl, waiting to be struggled with, and to struggle to the death.

But, nothing happening, and the moon looking down upon him as if he were dead after a fit of wrath, he holds his steam-hammer beating head and heart, and staggers away. Then, he becomes half-conscious of having heard himself bolted and barred out, like a dangerous animal; and thinks what shall he do?

Some wildly passionate ideas of the river dissolve under the spell of the moonlight on the Cathedral and the graves, and the remembrance of his sister, and the thought of what he owes to the good man who has but that very day won his confidence and given him his pledge. He repairs to Minor Canon Corner, and knocks softly at the door.

It is Mr. Crisparkle's custom to sit up last of the early household, very softly touching his piano and practising his favourite parts in concerted vocal music. The south wind that goes where it lists, by way of Minor Canon Corner on a still night, is not more subdued than Mr. Crisparkle at such times, regardful of the slumbers of the china shepherdess.

His knock is immediately answered by Mr. Crisparkle himself. When he opens the door, candle in hand, his cheerful face falls, and disappointed amazement is in it.

'Mr. Neville! In this disorder! Where have you been?'

'I have been to Mr. Jasper's, sir. With his nephew.'

'Come in.'

The Minor Canon props him by the elbow with a strong hand (in a strictly scientific manner, worthy of his morning trainings), and turns him into his own little book-room, and shuts the door.'

'I have begun ill, sir. I have begun dreadfully ill.'

'Too true. You are not sober, Mr. Neville.'

'I am afraid I am not, sir, though I can satisfy you at another time that I have had a very little indeed to drink, and that it overcame me in the strangest and most sudden manner.'

'Mr. Neville, Mr. Neville,' says the Minor Canon, shaking his head with a sorrowful smile; 'I have heard that said before.'

‘I think—my mind is much confused, but I think—it is equally true of Mr. Jasper’s nephew, sir.’

‘Very likely,’ is the dry rejoinder.

‘We quarrelled, sir. He insulted me most grossly. He had heated that tigerish blood I told you of to-day, before then.’

‘Mr. Neville,’ rejoins the Minor Canon, mildly, but firmly: ‘I request you not to speak to me with that clenched right hand. Unclench it, if you please.’

‘He goaded me, sir,’ pursues the young man, instantly obeying, ‘beyond my power of endurance. I cannot say whether or no he meant it at first, but he did it. He certainly meant it at last. In short, sir,’ with an irrepressible outburst, ‘in the passion into which he lashed me, I would have cut him down if I could, and I tried to do it.’

‘You have clenched that hand again,’ is Mr. Crisparkle’s quiet commentary.

‘I beg your pardon, sir.’

‘You know your room, for I showed it you before dinner; but I will accompany you to it once more. Your arm, if you please. Softly, for the house is all a-bed.’

Scooping his hand into the same scientific elbow-rest as before, and backing it up with the inert strength of his arm, as skilfully as a Police Expert, and with an apparent repose quite unattainable by novices, Mr. Crisparkle conducts his pupil to the pleasant and orderly old room prepared for him. Arrived there, the young man throws himself into a chair, and, flinging his arms upon his reading-table, rests his head upon them with an air of wretched self-reproach.

The gentle Minor Canon has had it in his thoughts to leave the room, without a word. But looking round at the door, and seeing this dejected figure, he turns back to it, touches it with a mild hand, says ‘Good night!’ A sob is his only acknowledgment. He might have had many a worse; perhaps, could have had few better.

Another soft knock at the outer door attracts his attention as he goes down-stairs. He opens it to Mr. Jasper, holding in his hand the pupil’s hat.

‘We have had an awful scene with him,’ says Jasper, in a low voice.

‘Has it been so bad as that?’

‘Murderous!’

Mr. Crisparkle remonstrates: ‘No, no, no. Do not use such strong words.’

‘He might have laid my dear boy dead at my feet. It is no fault of his, that he did not. But that I was, through the mercy of God, swift and strong with him, he would have cut him down on my hearth.’

The phrase smites home. ‘Ah!’ thinks Mr. Crisparkle, ‘his own words!’

‘Seeing what I have seen to-night, and hearing what I have heard,’ adds Jasper, with great earnestness, ‘I shall never know peace of mind when there is danger of those two coming together, with no one else to interfere. It was horrible. There is something of the tiger in his dark blood.’

‘Ah!’ thinks Mr. Crisparkle, ‘so he said!’

‘You, my dear sir,’ pursues Jasper, taking his hand, ‘even you, have accepted a dangerous charge.’

‘You need have no fear for me, Jasper,’ returns Mr. Crisparkle, with a quiet smile. ‘I have none for myself.’

‘I have none for myself,’ returns Jasper, with an emphasis on the last pronoun, ‘because I am not, nor am I in the way of being, the object of his hostility. But you may be, and my dear boy has been. Good night!’

Mr. Crisparkle goes in, with the hat that has so easily, so almost imperceptibly, acquired the right to be hung up in his hall; hangs it up; and goes thoughtfully to bed.

CHAPTER IX—BIRDS IN THE BUSH

Rosa, having no relation that she knew of in the world, had, from the seventh year of her age, known no home but the Nuns' House, and no mother but Miss Twinkleton. Her remembrance of her own mother was of a pretty little creature like herself (not much older than herself it seemed to her), who had been brought home in her father's arms, drowned. The fatal accident had happened at a party of pleasure. Every fold and colour in the pretty summer dress, and even the long wet hair, with scattered petals of ruined flowers still clinging to it, as the dead young figure, in its sad, sad beauty lay upon the bed, were fixed indelibly in Rosa's recollection. So were the wild despair and the subsequent bowed-down grief of her poor young father, who died broken-hearted on the first anniversary of that hard day.

The betrothal of Rosa grew out of the soothing of his year of mental distress by his fast friend and old college companion, Drood: who likewise had been left a widower in his youth. But he, too, went the silent road into which all earthly pilgrimages merge, some sooner, and some later; and thus the young couple had come to be as they were.

The atmosphere of pity surrounding the little orphan girl when she first came to Cloisterham, had never cleared away. It had taken brighter hues as she grew older, happier, prettier; now it had been golden, now roseate, and now azure; but it had always adorned her with some soft light of its own. The general desire to console and caress her, had caused her to be treated in the beginning as a child much younger than her years; the same desire had caused her to be still petted when she was a child no longer. Who should be her favourite, who should anticipate this or that small present, or do her this or that small service; who should take her home for the holidays; who should write to her the oftenest when they were separated, and whom she would most rejoice to see again when they were reunited; even these gentle rivalries were not without their slight dashes of bitterness in the Nuns' House. Well for the poor Nuns in their day, if they hid no harder strife under their veils and rosaries!

Thus Rosa had grown to be an amiable, giddy, wilful, winning little creature; spoilt, in the sense of counting upon kindness from all around her;

but not in the sense of repaying it with indifference. Possessing an exhaustless well of affection in her nature, its sparkling waters had freshened and brightened the Nuns' House for years, and yet its depths had never yet been moved: what might betide when that came to pass; what developing changes might fall upon the heedless head, and light heart, then; remained to be seen.

By what means the news that there had been a quarrel between the two young men overnight, involving even some kind of onslaught by Mr. Neville upon Edwin Drood, got into Miss Twinkleton's establishment before breakfast, it is impossible to say. Whether it was brought in by the birds of the air, or came blowing in with the very air itself, when the casement windows were set open; whether the baker brought it kneaded into the bread, or the milkman delivered it as part of the adulteration of his milk; or the housemaids, beating the dust out of their mats against the gateposts, received it in exchange deposited on the mats by the town atmosphere; certain it is that the news permeated every gable of the old building before Miss Twinkleton was down, and that Miss Twinkleton herself received it through Mrs. Tisher, while yet in the act of dressing; or (as she might have expressed the phrase to a parent or guardian of a mythological turn) of sacrificing to the Graces.

Miss Landless's brother had thrown a bottle at Mr. Edwin Drood.

Miss Landless's brother had thrown a knife at Mr. Edwin Drood.

A knife became suggestive of a fork; and Miss Landless's brother had thrown a fork at Mr. Edwin Drood.

As in the governing precedence of Peter Piper, alleged to have picked the peck of pickled pepper, it was held physically desirable to have evidence of the existence of the peck of pickled pepper which Peter Piper was alleged to have picked; so, in this case, it was held psychologically important to know why Miss Landless's brother threw a bottle, knife, or fork-or bottle, knife, *and* fork—for the cook had been given to understand it was all three—at Mr. Edwin Drood?

Well, then. Miss Landless's brother had said he admired Miss Bud. Mr. Edwin Drood had said to Miss Landless's brother that he had no business to admire Miss Bud. Miss Landless's brother had then 'up'd' (this was the cook's exact information) with the bottle, knife, fork, and decanter (the decanter now coolly flying at everybody's head, without the least introduction), and thrown them all at Mr. Edwin Drood.

Poor little Rosa put a forefinger into each of her ears when these rumours began to circulate, and retired into a corner, beseeching not to be told any more; but Miss Landless, begging permission of Miss Twinkleton to go and speak with her brother, and pretty plainly showing that she would take it if it were not given, struck out the more definite course of going to Mr. Crisparkle's for accurate intelligence.

When she came back (being first closeted with Miss Twinkleton, in order that anything objectionable in her tidings might be retained by that discreet filter), she imparted to Rosa only, what had taken place; dwelling with a flushed cheek on the provocation her brother had received, but almost limiting it to that last gross affront as crowning 'some other words between them,' and, out of consideration for her new friend, passing lightly over the fact that the other words had originated in her lover's taking things in general so very easily. To Rosa direct, she brought a petition from her brother that she would forgive him; and, having delivered it with sisterly earnestness, made an end of the subject.

It was reserved for Miss Twinkleton to tone down the public mind of the Nuns' House. That lady, therefore, entering in a stately manner what plebeians might have called the school-room, but what, in the patrician language of the head of the Nuns' House, was euphuistically, not to say round-aboutedly, denominated 'the apartment allotted to study,' and saying with a forensic air, 'Ladies!' all rose. Mrs. Tisher at the same time grouped herself behind her chief, as representing Queen Elizabeth's first historical female friend at Tilbury fort. Miss Twinkleton then proceeded to remark that Rumour, Ladies, had been represented by the bard of Avon—needless were it to mention the immortal Shakespeare, also called the Swan of his native river, not improbably with some reference to the ancient superstition that that bird of graceful plumage (Miss Jennings will please stand upright) sang sweetly on the approach of death, for which we have no ornithological authority,—Rumour, Ladies, had been represented by that bard—hem!—

'who drew
The celebrated Jew,'

as painted full of tongues. Rumour in Cloisterham (Miss Ferdinand will honour me with her attention) was no exception to the great limner's portrait of Rumour elsewhere. A slight *fracas* between two young gentlemen occurring last night within a hundred miles of these peaceful walls (Miss Ferdinand, being apparently incorrigible, will have the kindness to write out this evening, in the original language, the first four fables of our vivacious neighbour, Monsieur La Fontaine) had been very grossly exaggerated by Rumour's voice. In the first alarm and anxiety arising from our sympathy with a sweet young friend, not wholly to be dissociated from one of the gladiators in the bloodless arena in question (the impropriety of Miss Reynolds's appearing to stab herself in the hand with a pin, is far too obvious, and too glaringly unladylike, to be pointed out), we descended from our maiden elevation to discuss this uncongenial and this unfit theme. Responsible inquiries having assured us that it was but one of those 'airy nothings' pointed at by the Poet (whose name and date of birth Miss Giggles will supply within half an hour), we would now discard the subject, and concentrate our minds upon the grateful labours of the day.

But the subject so survived all day, nevertheless, that Miss Ferdinand got into new trouble by surreptitiously clapping on a paper moustache at dinner-time, and going through the motions of aiming a water-bottle at Miss Giggles, who drew a table-spoon in defence.

Now, Rosa thought of this unlucky quarrel a great deal, and thought of it with an uncomfortable feeling that she was involved in it, as cause, or consequence, or what not, through being in a false position altogether as to her marriage engagement. Never free from such uneasiness when she was with her affianced husband, it was not likely that she would be free from it when they were apart. To-day, too, she was cast in upon herself, and deprived of the relief of talking freely with her new friend, because the quarrel had been with Helena's brother, and Helena undisguisedly avoided the subject as a delicate and difficult one to herself. At this critical time, of all times, Rosa's guardian was announced as having come to see her.

Mr. Grewgious had been well selected for his trust, as a man of incorruptible integrity, but certainly for no other appropriate quality discernible on the surface. He was an arid, sandy man, who, if he had been put into a grinding-mill, looked as if he would have ground immediately into high-dried snuff. He had a scanty flat crop of hair, in colour and consistency like some very mangy yellow fur tippet; it was so unlike hair, that it must have been a wig, but for the stupendous improbability of anybody's voluntarily sporting such a head. The little play of feature that his face presented, was cut deep into it, in a few hard curves that made it more like work; and he had certain notches in his forehead, which looked as though Nature had been about to touch them into sensibility or refinement, when she had impatiently thrown away the chisel, and said: ‘I really cannot be worried to finish off this man; let him go as he is.’

With too great length of throat at his upper end, and too much ankle-bone and heel at his lower; with an awkward and hesitating manner; with a shambling walk; and with what is called a near sight—which perhaps prevented his observing how much white cotton stocking he displayed to the public eye, in contrast with his black suit—Mr. Grewgious still had some strange capacity in him of making on the whole an agreeable impression.

Mr. Grewgious was discovered by his ward, much discomfited by being in Miss Twinkleton’s company in Miss Twinkleton’s own sacred room. Dim forebodings of being examined in something, and not coming well out of it, seemed to oppress the poor gentleman when found in these circumstances.

‘My dear, how do you do? I am glad to see you. My dear, how much improved you are. Permit me to hand you a chair, my dear.’

Miss Twinkleton rose at her little writing-table, saying, with general sweetness, as to the polite Universe: ‘Will you permit me to retire?’

‘By no means, madam, on my account. I beg that you will not move.’

‘I must entreat permission to *move,*’ returned Miss Twinkleton, repeating the word with a charming grace; ‘but I will not withdraw, since you are so obliging. If I wheel my desk to this corner window, shall I be in the way?’

‘Madam! In the way!’

‘You are very kind.—Rosa, my dear, you will be under no restraint, I am sure.’

Here Mr. Grewgious, left by the fire with Rosa, said again: ‘My dear, how do you do? I am glad to see you, my dear.’ And having waited for her to sit down, sat down himself.

‘My visits,’ said Mr. Grewgious, ‘are, like those of the angels—not that I compare myself to an angel.’

‘No, sir,’ said Rosa.

‘Not by any means,’ assented Mr. Grewgious. ‘I merely refer to my visits, which are few and far between. The angels are, we know very well, up-stairs.’

Miss Twinkleton looked round with a kind of stiff stare.

‘I refer, my dear,’ said Mr. Grewgious, laying his hand on Rosa’s, as the possibility thrilled through his frame of his otherwise seeming to take the awful liberty of calling Miss Twinkleton my dear; ‘I refer to the other young ladies.’

Miss Twinkleton resumed her writing.

Mr. Grewgious, with a sense of not having managed his opening point quite as neatly as he might have desired, smoothed his head from back to front as if he had just dived, and were pressing the water out—this smoothing action, however superfluous, was habitual with him—and took a pocket-book from his coat-pocket, and a stump of black-lead pencil from his waistcoat-pocket.

‘I made,’ he said, turning the leaves: ‘I made a guiding memorandum or so—as I usually do, for I have no conversational powers whatever—to which I will, with your permission, my dear, refer. “Well and happy.” Truly. You are well and happy, my dear? You look so.’

‘Yes, indeed, sir,’ answered Rosa.

‘For which,’ said Mr. Grewgious, with a bend of his head towards the corner window, ‘our warmest acknowledgments are due, and I am sure are rendered, to the maternal kindness and the constant care and consideration of the lady whom I have now the honour to see before me.’

This point, again, made but a lame departure from Mr. Grewgious, and never got to its destination; for, Miss Twinkleton, feeling that the courtesies required her to be by this time quite outside the conversation, was biting the end of her pen, and looking upward, as waiting for the descent of an idea from any member of the Celestial Nine who might have one to spare.

Mr. Grewgious smoothed his smooth head again, and then made another reference to his pocket-book; lining out ‘well and happy,’ as disposed of.

‘“Pounds, shillings, and pence,” is my next note. A dry subject for a young lady, but an important subject too. Life is pounds, shillings, and pence. Death is—’ A sudden recollection of the death of her two parents seemed to stop him, and he said in a softer tone, and evidently inserting the negative as an after-thought: ‘Death is *not* pounds, shillings, and pence.’

His voice was as hard and dry as himself, and Fancy might have ground it straight, like himself, into high-dried snuff. And yet, through the very limited means of expression that he possessed, he seemed to express kindness. If Nature had but finished him off, kindness might have been recognisable in his face at this moment. But if the notches in his forehead wouldn't fuse together, and if his face would work and couldn't play, what could he do, poor man!

'"Pounds, shillings, and pence." You find your allowance always sufficient for your wants, my dear?'

Rosa wanted for nothing, and therefore it was ample.

'And you are not in debt?'

Rosa laughed at the idea of being in debt. It seemed, to her inexperience, a comical vagary of the imagination. Mr. Grewgious stretched his near sight to be sure that this was her view of the case. 'Ah!' he said, as comment, with a furtive glance towards Miss Twinkleton, and lining out pounds, shillings, and pence: 'I spoke of having got among the angels! So I did!'

Rosa felt what his next memorandum would prove to be, and was blushing and folding a crease in her dress with one embarrassed hand, long before he found it.

'"Marriage." Hem!' Mr. Grewgious carried his smoothing hand down over his eyes and nose, and even chin, before drawing his chair a little nearer, and speaking a little more confidentially: 'I now touch, my dear, upon the point that is the direct cause of my troubling you with the present visit. Othenwise, being a particularly Angular man, I should not have intruded here. I am the last man to intrude into a sphere for which I am so entirely unfitted. I feel, on these premises, as if I was a bear—with the cramp—in a youthful Cotillon.'

His ungainliness gave him enough of the air of his simile to set Rosa off laughing heartily.

'It strikes you in the same light,' said Mr. Grewgious, with perfect calmness. 'Just so. To return to my memorandum. Mr. Edwin has been to and fro here, as was arranged. You have mentioned that, in your quarterly letters to me. And you like him, and he likes you.'

'I *like* him very much, sir,' rejoined Rosa.

'So I said, my dear,' returned her guardian, for whose ear the timid emphasis was much too fine. 'Good. And you correspond.'

'We write to one another,' said Rosa, pouting, as she recalled their epistolary differences.

'Such is the meaning that I attach to the word "correspond" in this application, my dear,' said Mr. Grewgious. 'Good. All goes well, time works on, and at this next Christmas-time it will become necessary, as a matter of form, to give the exemplary lady in the corner window, to whom we are so much indebted, business notice of your departure in the ensuing half-year. Your relations with her are far more than business relations, no doubt; but a residue of business remains in them, and business is business ever. I am a particularly Angular man,' proceeded Mr. Grewgious, as if it suddenly occurred to him to mention it, 'and I am not used to give anything away. If, for these two reasons, some competent Proxy would give *you* away, I should take it very kindly.'

Rosa intimated, with her eyes on the ground, that she thought a substitute might be found, if required.

'Surely, surely,' said Mr. Grewgious. 'For instance, the gentleman who teaches Dancing here—he would know how to do it with graceful propriety. He would advance and retire in a manner satisfactory to the feelings of the officiating clergyman, and of yourself, and the bridegroom, and all parties concerned. I am—I am a particularly Angular man,' said Mr. Grewgious, as if he had made up his mind to screw it out at last: 'and should only blunder.'

Rosa sat still and silent. Perhaps her mind had not got quite so far as the ceremony yet, but was lagging on the way there.

'Memorandum, "Will." Now, my dear,' said Mr. Grewgious, referring to his notes, disposing of 'Marriage' with his pencil, and taking a paper from his pocket; 'although. I have before possessed you with the contents of your father's will, I think it right at this time to leave a certified copy of it in your hands. And although Mr. Edwin is also aware of its contents, I think it right at this time likewise to place a certified copy of it in Mr. Jasper's hand—'

'Not in his own!' asked Rosa, looking up quickly. 'Cannot the copy go to Eddy himself?'

'Why, yes, my dear, if you particularly wish it; but I spoke of Mr. Jasper as being his trustee.'

'I do particularly wish it, if you please,' said Rosa, hurriedly and earnestly; 'I don't like Mr. Jasper to come between us, in any way.'

'It is natural, I suppose,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'that your young husband should be all in all. Yes. You observe that I say, I suppose. The fact is, I am a particularly Unnatural man, and I don't know from my own knowledge.'

Rosa looked at him with some wonder.

‘I mean,’ he explained, ‘that young ways were never my ways. I was the only offspring of parents far advanced in life, and I half believe I was born advanced in life myself. No personality is intended towards the name you will so soon change, when I remark that while the general growth of people seem to have come into existence, buds, I seem to have come into existence a chip. I was a chip—and a very dry one—when I first became aware of myself. Respecting the other certified copy, your wish shall be complied with. Respecting your inheritance, I think you know all. It is an annuity of two hundred and fifty pounds. The savings upon that annuity, and some other items to your credit, all duly carried to account, with vouchers, will place you in possession of a lump-sum of money, rather exceeding Seventeen Hundred Pounds. I am empowered to advance the cost of your preparations for your marriage out of that fund. All is told.’

‘Will you please tell me,’ said Rosa, taking the paper with a prettily knitted brow, but not opening it: ‘whether I am right in what I am going to say? I can understand what you tell me, so very much better than what I read in law-writings. My poor papa and Eddy’s father made their agreement together, as very dear and firm and fast friends, in order that we, too, might be very dear and firm and fast friends after them?’

‘Just so.’

‘For the lasting good of both of us, and the lasting happiness of both of us?’

‘Just so.’

‘That we might be to one another even much more than they had been to one another?’

‘Just so.’

‘It was not bound upon Eddy, and it was not bound upon me, by any forfeit, in case—’

‘Don’t be agitated, my dear. In the case that it brings tears into your affectionate eyes even to picture to yourself—in the case of your not marrying one another—no, no forfeiture on either side. You would then have been my ward until you were of age. No worse would have befallen you. Bad enough perhaps!’

‘And Eddy?’

‘He would have come into his partnership derived from his father, and into its arrears to his credit (if any), on attaining his majority, just as now.’

Rosa, with her perplexed face and knitted brow, bit the corner of her attested copy, as she sat with her head on one side, looking abstractedly on the floor, and smoothing it with her foot.

‘In short,’ said Mr. Grewgious, ‘this betrothal is a wish, a sentiment, a friendly project, tenderly expressed on both sides. That it was strongly felt, and that there was a lively hope that it would prosper, there can be no doubt. When you were both children, you began to be accustomed to it, and it *has* prospered. But circumstances alter cases; and I made this visit to-day, partly, indeed principally, to discharge myself of the duty of telling you, my dear, that two young people can only be betrothed in marriage (except as a matter of convenience, and therefore mockery and misery) of their own free will, their own attachment, and their own assurance (it may or it may not prove a mistaken one, but we must take our chance of that), that they are suited to each other, and will make each other happy. Is it to be supposed, for example, that if either of your fathers were living now, and had any mistrust on that subject, his mind would not be changed by the change of circumstances involved in the change of your years? Untenable, unreasonable, inconclusive, and preposterous!’

Mr. Grewgious said all this, as if he were reading it aloud; or, still more, as if he were repeating a lesson. So expressionless of any approach to spontaneity were his face and manner.

‘I have now, my dear,’ he added, blurring out ‘Will’ with his pencil, ‘discharged myself of what is doubtless a formal duty in this case, but still a duty in such a case. Memorandum, “Wishes.” My dear, is there any wish of yours that I can further?’

Rosa shook her head, with an almost plaintive air of hesitation in want of help.

‘Is there any instruction that I can take from you with reference to your affairs?’

‘I—I should like to settle them with Eddy first, if you please,’ said Rosa, plaiting the crease in her dress.

‘Surely, surely,’ returned Mr. Grewgious. ‘You two should be of one mind in all things. Is the young gentleman expected shortly?’

‘He has gone away only this morning. He will be back at Christmas.’

‘Nothing could happen better. You will, on his return at Christmas, arrange all matters of detail with him; you will then communicate with me; and I will discharge myself (as a mere business acquaintance) of my business responsibilities towards the accomplished lady in the corner window. They will accrue at that season.' Blurring pencil once again. 'Memorandum, "Leave." Yes. I will now, my dear, take my leave.'

'Could I,' said Rosa, rising, as he jerked out of his chair in his ungainly way: 'could I ask you, most kindly to come to me at Christmas, if I had anything particular to say to you?'

'Why, certainly, certainly,' he rejoined; apparently—if such a word can be used of one who had no apparent lights or shadows about him—complimented by the question. 'As a particularly Angular man, I do not fit smoothly into the social circle, and consequently I have no other engagement at Christmas-time than to partake, on the twenty-fifth, of a boiled turkey and celery sauce with a—with a particularly Angular clerk I have the good fortune to possess, whose father, being a Norfolk farmer, sends him up (the turkey up), as a present to me, from the neighbourhood of Norwich. I should be quite proud of your wishing to see me, my dear. As a professional Receiver of rents, so very few people *do* wish to see me, that the novelty would be bracing.'

For his ready acquiescence, the grateful Rosa put her hands upon his shoulders, stood on tiptoe, and instantly kissed him.

'Lord bless me!' cried Mr. Grewgious. 'Thank you, my dear! The honour is almost equal to the pleasure. Miss Twinkleton, madam, I have had a most satisfactory conversation with my ward, and I will now release you from the incumbrance of my presence.'

'Nay, sir,' rejoined Miss Twinkleton, rising with a gracious condescension: 'say not incumbrance. Not so, by any means. I cannot permit you to say so.'

'Thank you, madam. I have read in the newspapers,' said Mr. Grewgious, stammering a little, 'that when a distinguished visitor (not that I am one: far from it) goes to a school (not that this is one: far from it), he asks for a holiday, or some sort of grace. It being now the afternoon in the —College—of which you are the eminent head, the young ladies might gain nothing, except in name, by having the rest of the day allowed them. But if there is any young lady at all under a cloud, might I solicit—'

'Ah, Mr. Grewgious, Mr. Grewgious!' cried Miss Twinkleton, with a chastely-rallying forefinger. 'O you gentlemen, you gentlemen! Fie for shame, that you are so hard upon us poor maligned disciplinarians of our sex, for your sakes! But as Miss Ferdinand is at present weighed down by an incubus'—Miss Twinkleton might have said a pen-and-ink-ubus of writing out Monsieur La Fontaine—'go to her, Rosa my dear, and tell her the penalty is remitted, in deference to the intercession of your guardian, Mr. Grewgious.'

Miss Twinkleton here achieved a curtsey, suggestive of marvels happening to her respected legs, and which she came out of nobly, three yards behind her starting-point.

As he held it incumbent upon him to call on Mr. Jasper before leaving Cloisterham, Mr. Grewgious went to the gatehouse, and climbed its postern stair. But Mr. Jasper's door being closed, and presenting on a slip of paper the word 'Cathedral,' the fact of its being service-time was borne into the mind of Mr. Grewgious. So he descended the stair again, and, crossing the Close, paused at the great western folding-door of the Cathedral, which stood open on the fine and bright, though short-lived, afternoon, for the airing of the place.

'Dear me,' said Mr. Grewgious, peeping in, 'it's like looking down the throat of Old Time.'

Old Time heaved a mouldy sigh from tomb and arch and vault; and gloomy shadows began to deepen in corners; and damps began to rise from green patches of stone; and jewels, cast upon the pavement of the nave from stained glass by the declining sun, began to perish. Within the grill-gate of the chancel, up the steps surmounted loomingly by the fast-darkening organ, white robes could be dimly seen, and one feeble voice, rising and falling in a cracked, monotonous mutter, could at intervals be faintly heard. In the free outer air, the river, the green pastures, and the brown arable lands, the teeming hills and dales, were reddened by the sunset: while the distant little windows in windmills and farm homesteads, shone, patches of bright beaten gold. In the Cathedral, all became gray, murky, and sepulchral, and the cracked monotonous mutter went on like a dying voice, until the organ and the choir burst forth, and drowned it in a sea of music. Then, the sea fell, and the dying voice made another feeble effort, and then the sea rose high, and beat its life out, and lashed the roof, and surged among the arches, and pierced the heights of the great tower; and then the sea was dry, and all was still.

Mr. Grewgious had by that time walked to the chancel-steps, where he met the living waters coming out.

‘Nothing is the matter?’ Thus Jasper accosted him, rather quickly. ‘You have not been sent for?’

‘Not at all, not at all. I came down of my own accord. I have been to my pretty ward’s, and am now homeward bound again.’

‘You found her thriving?’

‘Blooming indeed. Most blooming. I merely came to tell her, seriously, what a betrothal by deceased parents is.’

‘And what is it—according to your judgment?’

Mr. Grewgious noticed the whiteness of the lips that asked the question, and put it down to the chilling account of the Cathedral.

‘I merely came to tell her that it could not be considered binding, against any such reason for its dissolution as a want of affection, or want of disposition to carry it into effect, on the side of either party.’

‘May I ask, had you any especial reason for telling her that?’

Mr. Grewgious answered somewhat sharply: ‘The especial reason of doing my duty, sir. Simply that.’ Then he added: ‘Come, Mr. Jasper; I know your affection for your nephew, and that you are quick to feel on his behalf. I assure you that this implies not the least doubt of, or disrespect to, your nephew.’

‘You could not,’ returned Jasper, with a friendly pressure of his arm, as they walked on side by side, ‘speak more handsomely.’

Mr. Grewgious pulled off his hat to smooth his head, and, having smoothed it, nodded it contentedly, and put his hat on again.

‘I will wager,’ said Jasper, smiling—his lips were still so white that he was conscious of it, and bit and moistened them while speaking: ‘I will wager that she hinted no wish to be released from Ned.’

‘And you will win your wager, if you do,’ retorted Mr. Grewgious. ‘We should allow some margin for little maidenly delicacies in a young motherless creature, under such circumstances, I suppose; it is not in my line; what do you think?’

‘There can be no doubt of it.’

‘I am glad you say so. Because,’ proceeded Mr. Grewgious, who had all this time very knowingly felt his way round to action on his remembrance of what she had said of Jasper himself: ‘because she seems to have some little delicate instinct that all preliminary arrangements had best be made between Mr. Edwin Drood and herself, don’t you see? She don’t want us, don’t you know?’

Jasper touched himself on the breast, and said, somewhat indistinctly: ‘You mean me.’

Mr. Grewgious touched himself on the breast, and said: ‘I mean us. Therefore, let them have their little discussions and councils together, when Mr. Edwin Drood comes back here at Christmas; and then you and I will step in, and put the final touches to the business.’

‘So, you settled with her that you would come back at Christmas?’ observed Jasper. ‘I see! Mr. Grewgious, as you quite fairly said just now, there is such an exceptional attachment between my nephew and me, that I am more sensitive for the dear, fortunate, happy, happy fellow than for myself. But it is only right that the young lady should be considered, as you have pointed out, and that I should accept my cue from you. I accept it. I understand that at Christmas they will complete their preparations for May, and that their marriage will be put in final train by themselves, and that nothing will remain for us but to put ourselves in train also, and have everything ready for our formal release from our trusts, on Edwin’s birthday.’

‘That is my understanding,’ assented Mr. Grewgious, as they shook hands to part. ‘God bless them both!’

‘God save them both!’ cried Jasper.

‘I said, bless them,’ remarked the former, looking back over his shoulder.

‘I said, save them,’ returned the latter. ‘Is there any difference?’

CHAPTER X—SMOOTHING THE WAY

It has been often enough remarked that women have a curious power of divining the characters of men, which would seem to be innate and instinctive; seeing that it is arrived at through no patient process of reasoning, that it can give no satisfactory or sufficient account of itself, and that it pronounces in the most confident manner even against accumulated observation on the part of the other sex. But it has not been quite so often remarked that this power (fallible, like every other human attribute) is for the most part absolutely incapable of self-revision; and that when it has delivered an adverse opinion which by all human lights is subsequently proved to have failed, it is undistinguishable from prejudice, in respect of its determination not to be corrected. Nay, the very possibility of contradiction or disproof, however remote, communicates to this feminine judgment from the first, in nine cases out of ten, the weakness attendant on the testimony of an interested witness; so personally and strongly does the fair diviner connect herself with her divination.

‘Now, don’t you think, Ma dear,’ said the Minor Canon to his mother one day as she sat at her knitting in his little book-room, ‘that you are rather hard on Mr. Neville?’

‘No, I do *not*, Sept,’ returned the old lady.

‘Let us discuss it, Ma.’

‘I have no objection to discuss it, Sept. I trust, my dear, I am always open to discussion.’ There was a vibration in the old lady’s cap, as though she internally added: ‘and I should like to see the discussion that would change *my* mind!’

‘Very good, Ma,’ said her conciliatory son. ‘There is nothing like being open to discussion.’

‘I hope not, my dear,’ returned the old lady, evidently shut to it.

‘Well! Mr. Neville, on that unfortunate occasion, commits himself under provocation.’

‘And under mulled wine,’ added the old lady.

‘I must admit the wine. Though I believe the two young men were much alike in that regard.’

‘I don’t,’ said the old lady.

‘Why not, Ma?’

‘Because I *don’t*,’ said the old lady. ‘Still, I am quite open to discussion.’

‘But, my dear Ma, I cannot see how we are to discuss, if you take that line.’

‘Blame Mr. Neville for it, Sept, and not me,’ said the old lady, with stately severity.

‘My dear Ma! why Mr. Neville?’

‘Because,’ said Mrs. Crisparkle, retiring on first principles, ‘he came home intoxicated, and did great discredit to this house, and showed great disrespect to this family.’

‘That is not to be denied, Ma. He was then, and he is now, very sorry for it.’

‘But for Mr. Jasper’s well-bred consideration in coming up to me, next day, after service, in the Nave itself, with his gown still on, and expressing his hope that I had not been greatly alarmed or had my rest violently broken, I believe I might never have heard of that disgraceful transaction,’ said the old lady.

‘To be candid, Ma, I think I should have kept it from you if I could: though I had not decidedly made up my mind. I was following Jasper out, to confer with him on the subject, and to consider the expediency of his and my jointly hushing the thing up on all accounts, when I found him speaking to you. Then it was too late.’

‘Too late, indeed, Sept. He was still as pale as gentlemanly ashes at what had taken place in his rooms overnight.’

‘If I *had* kept it from you, Ma, you may be sure it would have been for your peace and quiet, and for the good of the young men, and in my best discharge of my duty according to my lights.’

The old lady immediately walked across the room and kissed him: saying, ‘Of course, my dear Sept, I am sure of that.’

‘However, it became the town-talk,’ said Mr. Crisparkle, rubbing his ear, as his mother resumed her seat, and her knitting, ‘and passed out of my power.’

‘And I said then, Sept,’ returned the old lady, ‘that I thought ill of Mr. Neville. And I say now, that I think ill of Mr. Neville. And I said then, and I say now, that I hope Mr. Neville may come to good, but I don’t believe he will.’ Here the cap vibrated again considerably.

‘I am sorry to hear you say so, Ma—’

‘I am sorry to say so, my dear,’ interposed the old lady, knitting on firmly, ‘but I can’t help it.’

‘—For,’ pursued the Minor Canon, ‘it is undeniable that Mr. Neville is exceedingly industrious and attentive, and that he improves apace, and that he has—I hope I may say—an attachment to me.’

‘There is no merit in the last article, my dear,’ said the old lady, quickly; ‘and if he says there is, I think the worse of him for the boast.’

‘But, my dear Ma, he never said there was.’

‘Perhaps not,’ returned the old lady; ‘still, I don’t see that it greatly signifies.’

There was no impatience in the pleasant look with which Mr. Crisparkle contemplated the pretty old piece of china as it knitted; but there was, certainly, a humorous sense of its not being a piece of china to argue with very closely.

‘Besides, Sept, ask yourself what he would be without his sister. You know what an influence she has over him; you know what a capacity she has; you know that whatever he reads with you, he reads with her. Give her her fair share of your praise, and how much do you leave for him?’

At these words Mr. Crisparkle fell into a little reverie, in which he thought of several things. He thought of the times he had seen the brother and sister together in deep converse over one of his own old college books; now, in the rimy mornings, when he made those sharpening pilgrimages to Cloisterham Weir; now, in the sombre evenings, when he faced the wind at sunset, having climbed his favourite outlook, a beetling fragment of monastery ruin; and the two studious figures passed below him along the margin of the river, in which the town fires and lights already shone, making the landscape bleaker. He thought how the consciousness had stolen upon him that in teaching one, he was teaching two; and how he had almost insensibly adapted his explanations to both minds—that with which his own was daily in contact, and that which he only approached through it. He thought of the gossip that had reached him from the Nuns’ House, to the effect that Helena, whom he had mistrusted as so proud and fierce, submitted herself to the fairy-bride (as he called her), and learnt from her what she knew. He thought of the picturesque alliance between those two, externally so very different. He thought—perhaps most of all—could it be that these things were yet but so many weeks old, and had become an integral part of his life?

As, whenever the Reverend Septimus fell a-musing, his good mother took it to be an infallible sign that he 'wanted support,' the blooming old lady made all haste to the dining-room closet, to produce from it the support embodied in a glass of Constantia and a home-made biscuit. It was a most wonderful closet, worthy of Cloisterham and of Minor Canon Corner. Above it, a portrait of Handel in a flowing wig beamed down at the spectator, with a knowing air of being up to the contents of the closet, and a musical air of intending to combine all its harmonies in one delicious fugue. No common closet with a vulgar door on hinges, openable all at once, and leaving nothing to be disclosed by degrees, this rare closet had a lock in mid-air, where two perpendicular slides met; the one falling down, and the other pushing up. The upper slide, on being pulled down (leaving the lower a double mystery), revealed deep shelves of pickle-jars, jam-pots, tin canisters, spice-boxes, and agreeably outlandish vessels of blue and white, the luscious lodgings of preserved tamarinds and ginger. Every benevolent inhabitant of this retreat had his name inscribed upon his stomach. The pickles, in a uniform of rich brown double-breasted buttoned coat, and yellow or sombre drab continuations, announced their portly forms, in printed capitals, as Walnut, Gherkin, Onion, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Mixed, and other members of that noble family. The jams, as being of a less masculine temperament, and as wearing curlpapers, announced themselves in feminine caligraphy, like a soft whisper, to be Raspberry, Gooseberry, Apricot, Plum, Damson, Apple, and Peach. The scene closing on these charmers, and the lower slide ascending, oranges were revealed, attended by a mighty japanned sugar-box, to temper their acerbity if unripe. Home-made biscuits waited at the Court of these Powers, accompanied by a goodly fragment of plum-cake, and various slender ladies' fingers, to be dipped into sweet wine and kissed. Lowest of all, a compact leaden-vault enshrined the sweet wine and a stock of cordials: whence issued whispers of Seville Orange, Lemon, Almond, and Caraway-seed. There was a crowning air upon this closet of closets, of having been for ages hummed through by the Cathedral bell and organ, until those venerable bees had made sublimated honey of everything in store; and it was always observed that every dipper among the shelves (deep, as has been noticed, and swallowing up head, shoulders, and elbows) came forth again mellow-faced, and seeming to have undergone a saccharine transfiguration.

The Reverend Septimus yielded himself up quite as willing a victim to a nauseous medicinal herb-closet, also presided over by the china shepherdess, as to this glorious cupboard. To what amazing infusions of gentian, peppermint, gilliflower, sage, parsley, thyme, rue, rosemary, and dandelion, did his courageous stomach submit itself! In what wonderful wrappers, enclosing layers of dried leaves, would he swathe his rosy and contented face, if his mother suspected him of a toothache! What botanical blotches would he cheerfully stick upon his cheek, or forehead, if the dear old lady convicted him of an imperceptible pimple there! Into this herbaceous penitentiary, situated on an upper staircase-landing: a low and narrow whitewashed cell, where bunches of dried leaves hung from rusty hooks in the ceiling, and were spread out upon shelves, in company with portentous bottles: would the Reverend Septimus submissively be led, like the highly popular lamb who has so long and unresistingly been led to the slaughter, and there would he, unlike that lamb, bore nobody but himself. Not even doing that much, so that the old lady were busy and pleased, he would quietly swallow what was given him, merely taking a corrective dip of hands and face into the great bowl of dried rose-leaves, and into the other great bowl of dried lavender, and then would go out, as confident in the sweetening powers of Cloisterham Weir and a wholesome mind, as Lady Macbeth was hopeless of those of all the seas that roll.

In the present instance the good Minor Canon took his glass of Constantia with an excellent grace, and, so supported to his mother’s satisfaction, applied himself to the remaining duties of the day. In their orderly and punctual progress they brought round Vesper Service and twilight. The Cathedral being very cold, he set off for a brisk trot after service; the trot to end in a charge at his favourite fragment of ruin, which was to be carried by storm, without a pause for breath.

He carried it in a masterly manner, and, not breathed even then, stood looking down upon the river. The river at Cloisterham is sufficiently near the sea to throw up oftentimes a quantity of seaweed. An unusual quantity had come in with the last tide, and this, and the confusion of the water, and the restless dipping and flapping of the noisy gulls, and an angry light out seaward beyond the brown-sailed barges that were turning black, foreshadowed a stormy night. In his mind he was contrasting the wild and noisy sea with the quiet harbour of Minor Canon Corner, when Helena and Neville Landless passed below him. He had had the two together in his thoughts all day, and at once climbed down to speak to them together. The footing was rough in an uncertain light for any tread save that of a good climber; but the Minor Canon was as good a climber as most men, and stood beside them before many good climbers would have been half-way down.

‘A wild evening, Miss Landless! Do you not find your usual walk with your brother too exposed and cold for the time of year? Or at all events, when the sun is down, and the weather is driving in from the sea?’

Helena thought not. It was their favourite walk. It was very retired.

‘It is very retired,’ assented Mr. Crisparkle, laying hold of his opportunity straightway, and walking on with them. ‘It is a place of all others where one can speak without interruption, as I wish to do. Mr. Neville, I believe you tell your sister everything that passes between us?’

‘Everything, sir.’

‘Consequently,’ said Mr. Crisparkle, ‘your sister is aware that I have repeatedly urged you to make some kind of apology for that unfortunate occurrence which befell on the night of your arrival here.’ In saying it he looked to her, and not to him; therefore it was she, and not he, who replied:

‘Yes.’

‘I call it unfortunate, Miss Helena,’ resumed Mr. Crisparkle, ‘forasmuch as it certainly has engendered a prejudice against Neville. There is a notion about, that he is a dangerously passionate fellow, of an uncontrollable and furious temper: he is really avoided as such.’

‘I have no doubt he is, poor fellow,’ said Helena, with a look of proud compassion at her brother, expressing a deep sense of his being ungenerously treated. ‘I should be quite sure of it, from your saying so; but what you tell me is confirmed by suppressed hints and references that I meet with every day.’

‘Now,’ Mr. Crisparkle again resumed, in a tone of mild though firm persuasion, ‘is not this to be regretted, and ought it not to be amended? These are early days of Neville’s in Cloisterham, and I have no fear of his outliving such a prejudice, and proving himself to have been misunderstood. But how much wiser to take action at once, than to trust to uncertain time! Besides, apart from its being politic, it is right. For there can be no question that Neville was wrong.’

‘He was provoked,’ Helena submitted.

‘He was the assailant,’ Mr. Crisparkle submitted.

They walked on in silence, until Helena raised her eyes to the Minor Canon’s face, and said, almost reproachfully: ‘O Mr. Crisparkle, would you have Neville throw himself at young Drood’s feet, or at Mr. Jasper’s, who maligns him every day? In your heart you cannot mean it. From your heart you could not do it, if his case were yours.’

‘I have represented to Mr. Crisparkle, Helena,’ said Neville, with a glance of deference towards his tutor, ‘that if I could do it from my heart, I would. But I cannot, and I revolt from the pretence. You forget however, that to put the case to Mr. Crisparkle as his own, is to suppose to have done what I did.’

‘I ask his pardon,’ said Helena.

‘You see,’ remarked Mr. Crisparkle, again laying hold of his opportunity, though with a moderate and delicate touch, ‘you both instinctively acknowledge that Neville did wrong. Then why stop short, and not otherwise acknowledge it?’

‘Is there no difference,’ asked Helena, with a little faltering in her manner; ‘between submission to a generous spirit, and submission to a base or trivial one?’

Before the worthy Minor Canon was quite ready with his argument in reference to this nice distinction, Neville struck in:

‘Help me to clear myself with Mr. Crisparkle, Helena. Help me to convince him that I cannot be the first to make concessions without mockery and falsehood. My nature must be changed before I can do so, and it is not changed. I am sensible of inexpressible affront, and deliberate aggravation of inexpressible affront, and I am angry. The plain truth is, I am still as angry when I recall that night as I was that night.’

‘Neville,’ hinted the Minor Canon, with a steady countenance, ‘you have repeated that former action of your hands, which I so much dislike.’

‘I am sorry for it, sir, but it was involuntary. I confessed that I was still as angry.’

‘And I confess,’ said Mr. Crisparkle, ‘that I hoped for better things.’

‘I am sorry to disappoint you, sir, but it would be far worse to deceive you, and I should deceive you grossly if I pretended that you had softened me in this respect. The time may come when your powerful influence will do even that with the difficult pupil whose antecedents you know; but it has not come yet. Is this so, and in spite of my struggles against myself, Helena?'

She, whose dark eyes were watching the effect of what he said on Mr. Crisparkle's face, replied—to Mr. Crisparkle, not to him: 'It is so.' After a short pause, she answered the slightest look of inquiry conceivable, in her brother's eyes, with as slight an affirmative bend of her own head; and he went on:

'I have never yet had the courage to say to you, sir, what in full openness I ought to have said when you first talked with me on this subject. It is not easy to say, and I have been withheld by a fear of its seeming ridiculous, which is very strong upon me down to this last moment, and might, but for my sister, prevent my being quite open with you even now.—I admire Miss Bud, sir, so very much, that I cannot bear her being treated with conceit or indifference; and even if I did not feel that I had an injury against young Drood on my own account, I should feel that I had an injury against him on hers.'

Mr. Crisparkle, in utter amazement, looked at Helena for corroboration, and met in her expressive face full corroboration, and a plea for advice.

'The young lady of whom you speak is, as you know, Mr. Neville, shortly to be married,' said Mr. Crisparkle, gravely; 'therefore your admiration, if it be of that special nature which you seem to indicate, is outrageously misplaced. Moreover, it is monstrous that you should take upon yourself to be the young lady's champion against her chosen husband. Besides, you have seen them only once. The young lady has become your sister's friend; and I wonder that your sister, even on her behalf, has not checked you in this irrational and culpable fancy.'

'She has tried, sir, but uselessly. Husband or no husband, that fellow is incapable of the feeling with which I am inspired towards the beautiful young creature whom he treats like a doll. I say he is as incapable of it, as he is unworthy of her. I say she is sacrificed in being bestowed upon him. I say that I love her, and despise and hate him!' This with a face so flushed, and a gesture so violent, that his sister crossed to his side, and caught his arm, remonstrating, 'Neville, Neville!'

Thus recalled to himself, he quickly became sensible of having lost the guard he had set upon his passionate tendency, and covered his face with his hand, as one repentant and wretched.

Mr. Crisparkle, watching him attentively, and at the same time meditating how to proceed, walked on for some paces in silence. Then he spoke:

‘Mr. Neville, Mr. Neville, I am sorely grieved to see in you more traces of a character as sullen, angry, and wild, as the night now closing in. They are of too serious an aspect to leave me the resource of treating the infatuation you have disclosed, as undeserving serious consideration. I give it very serious consideration, and I speak to you accordingly. This feud between you and young Drood must not go on. I cannot permit it to go on any longer, knowing what I now know from you, and you living under my roof. Whatever prejudiced and unauthorised constructions your blind and envious wrath may put upon his character, it is a frank, good-natured character. I know I can trust to it for that. Now, pray observe what I am about to say. On reflection, and on your sister’s representation, I am willing to admit that, in making peace with young Drood, you have a right to be met half-way. I will engage that you shall be, and even that young Drood shall make the first advance. This condition fulfilled, you will pledge me the honour of a Christian gentleman that the quarrel is for ever at an end on your side. What may be in your heart when you give him your hand, can only be known to the Searcher of all hearts; but it will never go well with you, if there be any treachery there. So far, as to that; next as to what I must again speak of as your infatuation. I understand it to have been confided to me, and to be known to no other person save your sister and yourself. Do I understand aright?’

Helena answered in a low voice: ‘It is only known to us three who are here together.’

‘It is not at all known to the young lady, your friend?’

‘On my soul, no!’

‘I require you, then, to give me your similar and solemn pledge, Mr. Neville, that it shall remain the secret it is, and that you will take no other action whatsoever upon it than endeavouring (and that most earnestly) to erase it from your mind. I will not tell you that it will soon pass; I will not tell you that it is the fancy of the moment; I will not tell you that such caprices have their rise and fall among the young and ardent every hour; I will leave you undisturbed in the belief that it has few parallels or none, that it will abide with you a long time, and that it will be very difficult to conquer. So much the more weight shall I attach to the pledge I require from you, when it is unreservedly given.'

The young man twice or thrice essayed to speak, but failed.

'Let me leave you with your sister, whom it is time you took home,' said Mr. Crisparkle. 'You will find me alone in my room by-and-by.'

'Pray do not leave us yet,' Helena implored him. 'Another minute.'

'I should not,' said Neville, pressing his hand upon his face, 'have needed so much as another minute, if you had been less patient with me, Mr. Crisparkle, less considerate of me, and less unpretendingly good and true. O, if in my childhood I had known such a guide!'

'Follow your guide now, Neville,' murmured Helena, 'and follow him to Heaven!'

There was that in her tone which broke the good Minor Canon's voice, or it would have repudiated her exaltation of him. As it was, he laid a finger on his lips, and looked towards her brother.

'To say that I give both pledges, Mr. Crisparkle, out of my innermost heart, and to say that there is no treachery in it, is to say nothing!' Thus Neville, greatly moved. 'I beg your forgiveness for my miserable lapse into a burst of passion.'

'Not mine, Neville, not mine. You know with whom forgiveness lies, as the highest attribute conceivable. Miss Helena, you and your brother are twin children. You came into this world with the same dispositions, and you passed your younger days together surrounded by the same adverse circumstances. What you have overcome in yourself, can you not overcome in him? You see the rock that lies in his course. Who but you can keep him clear of it?'

'Who but you, sir?' replied Helena. 'What is my influence, or my weak wisdom, compared with yours!'

'You have the wisdom of Love,' returned the Minor Canon, 'and it was the highest wisdom ever known upon this earth, remember. As to mine—but the less said of that commonplace commodity the better. Good night!'

She took the hand he offered her, and gratefully and almost reverently raised it to her lips.

'Tut!' said the Minor Canon softly, 'I am much overpaid!' and turned away.

Retracing his steps towards the Cathedral Close, he tried, as he went along in the dark, to think out the best means of bringing to pass what he had promised to effect, and what must somehow be done. ‘I shall probably be asked to marry them,’ he reflected, ‘and I would they were married and gone! But this presses first.’

He debated principally whether he should write to young Drood, or whether he should speak to Jasper. The consciousness of being popular with the whole Cathedral establishment inclined him to the latter course, and the well-timed sight of the lighted gatehouse decided him to take it. ‘I will strike while the iron is hot,’ he said, ‘and see him now.’

Jasper was lying asleep on a couch before the fire, when, having ascended the postern-stair, and received no answer to his knock at the door, Mr. Crisparkle gently turned the handle and looked in. Long afterwards he had cause to remember how Jasper sprang from the couch in a delirious state between sleeping and waking, and crying out: ‘What is the matter? Who did it?’

‘It is only I, Jasper. I am sorry to have disturbed you.’

The glare of his eyes settled down into a look of recognition, and he moved a chair or two, to make a way to the fireside.

‘I was dreaming at a great rate, and am glad to be disturbed from an indigestive after-dinner sleep. Not to mention that you are always welcome.’

‘Thank you. I am not confident,’ returned Mr. Crisparkle, as he sat himself down in the easy-chair placed for him, ‘that my subject will at first sight be quite as welcome as myself; but I am a minister of peace, and I pursue my subject in the interests of peace. In a word, Jasper, I want to establish peace between these two young fellows.’

A very perplexed expression took hold of Mr. Jasper’s face; a very perplexing expression too, for Mr. Crisparkle could make nothing of it.

‘How?’ was Jasper’s inquiry, in a low and slow voice, after a silence.

‘For the “How” I come to you. I want to ask you to do me the great favour and service of interposing with your nephew (I have already interposed with Mr. Neville), and getting him to write you a short note, in his lively way, saying that he is willing to shake hands. I know what a good-natured fellow he is, and what influence you have with him. And without in the least defending Mr. Neville, we must all admit that he was bitterly stung.’

Jasper turned that perplexed face towards the fire. Mr. Crisparkle continuing to observe it, found it even more perplexing than before, inasmuch as it seemed to denote (which could hardly be) some close internal calculation.

‘I know that you are not prepossessed in Mr. Neville’s favour,’ the Minor Canon was going on, when Jasper stopped him:

‘You have cause to say so. I am not, indeed.’

‘Undoubtedly; and I admit his lamentable violence of temper, though I hope he and I will get the better of it between us. But I have exacted a very solemn promise from him as to his future demeanour towards your nephew, if you do kindly interpose; and I am sure he will keep it.’

‘You are always responsible and trustworthy, Mr. Crisparkle. Do you really feel sure that you can answer for him so confidently?’

‘I do.’

The perplexed and perplexing look vanished.

‘Then you relieve my mind of a great dread, and a heavy weight,’ said Jasper; ‘I will do it.’

Mr. Crisparkle, delighted by the swiftness and completeness of his success, acknowledged it in the handsomest terms.

‘I will do it,’ repeated Jasper, ‘for the comfort of having your guarantee against my vague and unfounded fears. You will laugh—but do you keep a Diary?’

‘A line for a day; not more.’

‘A line for a day would be quite as much as my uneventful life would need, Heaven knows,’ said Jasper, taking a book from a desk, ‘but that my Diary is, in fact, a Diary of Ned’s life too. You will laugh at this entry; you will guess when it was made:

> ‘“Past midnight.—After what I have just now seen, I have a morbid dread upon me of some horrible consequences resulting to my dear boy, that I cannot reason with or in any way contend against. All my efforts are vain. The demoniacal passion of this Neville Landless, his strength in his fury, and his savage rage for the destruction of its object, appal me. So profound is the impression, that twice since I have gone into my dear boy’s room, to assure myself of his sleeping safely, and not lying dead in his blood.”

‘Here is another entry next morning:

> ‘“Ned up and away. Light-hearted and unsuspicious as ever. He laughed when I cautioned him, and said he was as good a man as Neville Landless any day. I told him that might be, but he was not as

> bad a man. He continued to make light of it, but I travelled with him as far as I could, and left him most unwillingly. I am unable to shake off these dark intangible presentiments of evil—if feelings founded upon staring facts are to be so called.”

‘Again and again,’ said Jasper, in conclusion, twirling the leaves of the book before putting it by, ‘I have relapsed into these moods, as other entries show. But I have now your assurance at my back, and shall put it in my book, and make it an antidote to my black humours.’

‘Such an antidote, I hope,’ returned Mr. Crisparkle, ‘as will induce you before long to consign the black humours to the flames. I ought to be the last to find any fault with you this evening, when you have met my wishes so freely; but I must say, Jasper, that your devotion to your nephew has made you exaggerative here.’

‘You are my witness,’ said Jasper, shrugging his shoulders, ‘what my state of mind honestly was, that night, before I sat down to write, and in what words I expressed it. You remember objecting to a word I used, as being too strong? It was a stronger word than any in my Diary.’

‘Well, well. Try the antidote,’ rejoined Mr. Crisparkle; ‘and may it give you a brighter and better view of the case! We will discuss it no more now. I have to thank you for myself, thank you sincerely.’

‘You shall find,’ said Jasper, as they shook hands, ‘that I will not do the thing you wish me to do, by halves. I will take care that Ned, giving way at all, shall give way thoroughly.’

On the third day after this conversation, he called on Mr. Crisparkle with the following letter:

> ‘My dear Jack,
>
> ‘I am touched by your account of your interview with Mr. Crisparkle, whom I much respect and esteem. At once I openly say that I forgot myself on that occasion quite as much as Mr. Landless did, and that I wish that bygone to be a bygone, and all to be right again.
>
> ‘Look here, dear old boy. Ask Mr. Landless to dinner on Christmas Eve (the better the day the better the deed), and let there be only we three, and let us shake hands all round there and then, and say no more about it.
>
> ‘My dear Jack,
> ‘Ever your most affectionate,

‘Edwin Drood.

‘P.S. Love to Miss Pussy at the next music-lesson.’

‘You expect Mr. Neville, then?’ said Mr. Crisparkle.

‘I count upon his coming,’ said Mr. Jasper.

CHAPTER XI—A PICTURE AND A RING

Behind the most ancient part of Holborn, London, where certain gabled houses some centuries of age still stand looking on the public way, as if disconsolately looking for the Old Bourne that has long run dry, is a little nook composed of two irregular quadrangles, called Staple Inn. It is one of those nooks, the turning into which out of the clashing street, imparts to the relieved pedestrian the sensation of having put cotton in his ears, and velvet soles on his boots. It is one of those nooks where a few smoky sparrows twitter in smoky trees, as though they called to one another, ‘Let us play at country,’ and where a few feet of garden-mould and a few yards of gravel enable them to do that refreshing violence to their tiny understandings. Moreover, it is one of those nooks which are legal nooks; and it contains a little Hall, with a little lantern in its roof: to what obstructive purposes devoted, and at whose expense, this history knoweth not.

In the days when Cloisterham took offence at the existence of a railroad afar off, as menacing that sensitive constitution, the property of us Britons: the odd fortune of which sacred institution it is to be in exactly equal degrees croaked about, trembled for, and boasted of, whatever happens to anything, anywhere in the world: in those days no neighbouring architecture of lofty proportions had arisen to overshadow Staple Inn. The westering sun bestowed bright glances on it, and the south-west wind blew into it unimpeded.

Neither wind nor sun, however, favoured Staple Inn one December afternoon towards six o’clock, when it was filled with fog, and candles shed murky and blurred rays through the windows of all its then-occupied sets of chambers; notably from a set of chambers in a corner house in the little inner quadrangle, presenting in black and white over its ugly portal the mysterious inscription:

P
J T
1747

In which set of chambers, never having troubled his head about the inscription, unless to bethink himself at odd times on glancing up at it, that haply it might mean Perhaps John Thomas, or Perhaps Joe Tyler, sat Mr. Grewgious writing by his fire.

Who could have told, by looking at Mr. Grewgious, whether he had ever known ambition or disappointment? He had been bred to the Bar, and had laid himself out for chamber practice; to draw deeds; 'convey the wise it call,' as Pistol says. But Conveyancing and he had made such a very indifferent marriage of it that they had separated by consent—if there can be said to be separation where there has never been coming together.

No. Coy Conveyancing would not come to Mr. Grewgious. She was wooed, not won, and they went their several ways. But an Arbitration being blown towards him by some unaccountable wind, and he gaining great credit in it as one indefatigable in seeking out right and doing right, a pretty fat Receivership was next blown into his pocket by a wind more traceable to its source. So, by chance, he had found his niche. Receiver and Agent now, to two rich estates, and deputing their legal business, in an amount worth having, to a firm of solicitors on the floor below, he had snuffed out his ambition (supposing him to have ever lighted it), and had settled down with his snuffers for the rest of his life under the dry vine and fig-tree of P. J. T., who planted in seventeen-forty-seven.

Many accounts and account-books, many files of correspondence, and several strong boxes, garnished Mr. Grewgious's room. They can scarcely be represented as having lumbered it, so conscientious and precise was their orderly arrangement. The apprehension of dying suddenly, and leaving one fact or one figure with any incompleteness or obscurity attaching to it, would have stretched Mr. Grewgious stone-dead any day. The largest fidelity to a trust was the life-blood of the man. There are sorts of life-blood that course more quickly, more gaily, more attractively; but there is no better sort in circulation.

There was no luxury in his room. Even its comforts were limited to its being dry and warm, and having a snug though faded fireside. What may be called its private life was confined to the hearth, and all easy-chair, and an old-fashioned occasional round table that was brought out upon the rug after business hours, from a corner where it elsewise remained turned up like a shining mahogany shield. Behind it, when standing thus on the defensive, was a closet, usually containing something good to drink. An outer room was the clerk’s room; Mr. Grewgious’s sleeping-room was across the common stair; and he held some not empty cellarage at the bottom of the common stair. Three hundred days in the year, at least, he crossed over to the hotel in Furnival’s Inn for his dinner, and after dinner crossed back again, to make the most of these simplicities until it should become broad business day once more, with P. J. T., date seventeen-forty-seven.

As Mr. Grewgious sat and wrote by his fire that afternoon, so did the clerk of Mr. Grewgious sit and write by *his* fire. A pale, puffy-faced, dark-haired person of thirty, with big dark eyes that wholly wanted lustre, and a dissatisfied doughy complexion, that seemed to ask to be sent to the baker’s, this attendant was a mysterious being, possessed of some strange power over Mr. Grewgious. As though he had been called into existence, like a fabulous Familiar, by a magic spell which had failed when required to dismiss him, he stuck tight to Mr. Grewgious’s stool, although Mr. Grewgious’s comfort and convenience would manifestly have been advanced by dispossessing him. A gloomy person with tangled locks, and a general air of having been reared under the shadow of that baleful tree of Java which has given shelter to more lies than the whole botanical kingdom, Mr. Grewgious, nevertheless, treated him with unaccountable consideration.

‘Now, Bazzard,’ said Mr. Grewgious, on the entrance of his clerk: looking up from his papers as he arranged them for the night: ‘what is in the wind besides fog?’

‘Mr. Drood,’ said Bazzard.

‘What of him?’

‘Has called,’ said Bazzard.

‘You might have shown him in.’

‘I am doing it,’ said Bazzard.

The visitor came in accordingly.

‘Dear me!’ said Mr. Grewgious, looking round his pair of office candles. ‘I thought you had called and merely left your name and gone. How do you do, Mr. Edwin? Dear me, you’re choking!’

‘It’s this fog,’ returned Edwin; ‘and it makes my eyes smart, like Cayenne pepper.’

‘Is it really so bad as that? Pray undo your wrappers. It’s fortunate I have so good a fire; but Mr. Bazzard has taken care of me.’

‘No I haven’t,’ said Mr. Bazzard at the door.

‘Ah! then it follows that I must have taken care of myself without observing it,’ said Mr. Grewgious. ‘Pray be seated in my chair. No. I beg! Coming out of such an atmosphere, in *my* chair.’

Edwin took the easy-chair in the corner; and the fog he had brought in with him, and the fog he took off with his greatcoat and neck-shawl, was speedily licked up by the eager fire.

‘I look,’ said Edwin, smiling, ‘as if I had come to stop.’

‘—By the by,’ cried Mr. Grewgious; ‘excuse my interrupting you; do stop. The fog may clear in an hour or two. We can have dinner in from just across Holborn. You had better take your Cayenne pepper here than outside; pray stop and dine.’

‘You are very kind,’ said Edwin, glancing about him as though attracted by the notion of a new and relishing sort of gipsy-party.

‘Not at all,’ said Mr. Grewgious; ‘*you* are very kind to join issue with a bachelor in chambers, and take pot-luck. And I’ll ask,’ said Mr. Grewgious, dropping his voice, and speaking with a twinkling eye, as if inspired with a bright thought: ‘I’ll ask Bazzard. He mightn’t like it else.—Bazzard!’

Bazzard reappeared.

‘Dine presently with Mr. Drood and me.’

‘If I am ordered to dine, of course I will, sir,’ was the gloomy answer.

‘Save the man!’ cried Mr. Grewgious. ‘You’re not ordered; you’re invited.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ said Bazzard; ‘in that case I don’t care if I do.’

‘That’s arranged. And perhaps you wouldn’t mind,’ said Mr. Grewgious, ‘stepping over to the hotel in Furnival’s, and asking them to send in materials for laying the cloth. For dinner we’ll have a tureen of the hottest and strongest soup available, and we’ll have the best made-dish that can be recommended, and we’ll have a joint (such as a haunch of mutton), and we’ll have a goose, or a turkey, or any little stuffed thing of that sort that may happen to be in the bill of fare—in short, we’ll have whatever there is on hand.’

These liberal directions Mr. Grewgious issued with his usual air of reading an inventory, or repeating a lesson, or doing anything else by rote. Bazzard, after drawing out the round table, withdrew to execute them.

‘I was a little delicate, you see,’ said Mr. Grewgious, in a lower tone, after his clerk’s departure, ‘about employing him in the foraging or commissariat department. Because he mightn't like it.'

'He seems to have his own way, sir,' remarked Edwin.

'His own way?' returned Mr. Grewgious. 'O dear no! Poor fellow, you quite mistake him. If he had his own way, he wouldn't be here.'

'I wonder where he would be!' Edwin thought. But he only thought it, because Mr. Grewgious came and stood himself with his back to the other corner of the fire, and his shoulder-blades against the chimneypiece, and collected his skirts for easy conversation.

'I take it, without having the gift of prophecy, that you have done me the favour of looking in to mention that you are going down yonder—where I can tell you, you are expected—and to offer to execute any little commission from me to my charming ward, and perhaps to sharpen me up a bit in any proceedings? Eh, Mr. Edwin?'

'I called, sir, before going down, as an act of attention.'

'Of attention!' said Mr. Grewgious. 'Ah! of course, not of impatience?'

'Impatience, sir?'

Mr. Grewgious had meant to be arch—not that he in the remotest degree expressed that meaning—and had brought himself into scarcely supportable proximity with the fire, as if to burn the fullest effect of his archness into himself, as other subtle impressions are burnt into hard metals. But his archness suddenly flying before the composed face and manner of his visitor, and only the fire remaining, he started and rubbed himself.

'I have lately been down yonder,' said Mr. Grewgious, rearranging his skirts; 'and that was what I referred to, when I said I could tell you you are expected.'

'Indeed, sir! Yes; I knew that Pussy was looking out for me.'

'Do you keep a cat down there?' asked Mr. Grewgious.

Edwin coloured a little as he explained: 'I call Rosa Pussy.'

'O, really,' said Mr. Grewgious, smoothing down his head; 'that's very affable.'

Edwin glanced at his face, uncertain whether or no he seriously objected to the appellation. But Edwin might as well have glanced at the face of a clock.

'A pet name, sir,' he explained again.

'Umps,' said Mr. Grewgious, with a nod. But with such an extraordinary compromise between an unqualified assent and a qualified dissent, that his visitor was much disconcerted.

‘Did PRosa—’ Edwin began by way of recovering himself.

‘PRosa?’ repeated Mr. Grewgious.

‘I was going to say Pussy, and changed my mind;—did she tell you anything about the Landlesses?’

‘No,’ said Mr. Grewgious. ‘What is the Landlesses? An estate? A villa? A farm?’

‘A brother and sister. The sister is at the Nuns’ House, and has become a great friend of P—’

‘PRosa’s,’ Mr. Grewgious struck in, with a fixed face.

‘She is a strikingly handsome girl, sir, and I thought she might have been described to you, or presented to you perhaps?’

‘Neither,’ said Mr. Grewgious. ‘But here is Bazzard.’

Bazzard returned, accompanied by two waiters—an immovable waiter, and a flying waiter; and the three brought in with them as much fog as gave a new roar to the fire. The flying waiter, who had brought everything on his shoulders, laid the cloth with amazing rapidity and dexterity; while the immovable waiter, who had brought nothing, found fault with him. The flying waiter then highly polished all the glasses he had brought, and the immovable waiter looked through them. The flying waiter then flew across Holborn for the soup, and flew back again, and then took another flight for the made-dish, and flew back again, and then took another flight for the joint and poultry, and flew back again, and between whiles took supplementary flights for a great variety of articles, as it was discovered from time to time that the immovable waiter had forgotten them all. But let the flying waiter cleave the air as he might, he was always reproached on his return by the immovable waiter for bringing fog with him, and being out of breath. At the conclusion of the repast, by which time the flying waiter was severely blown, the immovable waiter gathered up the tablecloth under his arm with a grand air, and having sternly (not to say with indignation) looked on at the flying waiter while he set the clean glasses round, directed a valedictory glance towards Mr. Grewgious, conveying: ‘Let it be clearly understood between us that the reward is mine, and that Nil is the claim of this slave,’ and pushed the flying waiter before him out of the room.

It was like a highly-finished miniature painting representing My Lords of the Circumlocution Department, Commandership-in-Chief of any sort, Government. It was quite an edifying little picture to be hung on the line in the National Gallery.

As the fog had been the proximate cause of this sumptuous repast, so the fog served for its general sauce. To hear the out-door clerks sneezing, wheezing, and beating their feet on the gravel was a zest far surpassing Doctor Kitchener's. To bid, with a shiver, the unfortunate flying waiter shut the door before he had opened it, was a condiment of a profounder flavour than Harvey. And here let it be noticed, parenthetically, that the leg of this young man, in its application to the door, evinced the finest sense of touch: always preceding himself and tray (with something of an angling air about it), by some seconds: and always lingering after he and the tray had disappeared, like Macbeth's leg when accompanying him off the stage with reluctance to the assassination of Duncan.

The host had gone below to the cellar, and had brought up bottles of ruby, straw-coloured, and golden drinks, which had ripened long ago in lands where no fogs are, and had since lain slumbering in the shade. Sparkling and tingling after so long a nap, they pushed at their corks to help the corkscrew (like prisoners helping rioters to force their gates), and danced out gaily. If P. J. T. in seventeen-forty-seven, or in any other year of his period, drank such wines—then, for a certainty, P. J. T. was Pretty Jolly Too.

Externally, Mr. Grewgious showed no signs of being mellowed by these glowing vintages. Instead of his drinking them, they might have been poured over him in his high-dried snuff form, and run to waste, for any lights and shades they caused to flicker over his face. Neither was his manner influenced. But, in his wooden way, he had observant eyes for Edwin; and when at the end of dinner, he motioned Edwin back to his own easy-chair in the fireside corner, and Edwin sank luxuriously into it after very brief remonstrance, Mr. Grewgious, as he turned his seat round towards the fire too, and smoothed his head and face, might have been seen looking at his visitor between his smoothing fingers.

'Bazzard!' said Mr. Grewgious, suddenly turning to him.

'I follow you, sir,' returned Bazzard; who had done his work of consuming meat and drink in a workmanlike manner, though mostly in speechlessness.

'I drink to you, Bazzard; Mr. Edwin, success to Mr. Bazzard!'

'Success to Mr. Bazzard!' echoed Edwin, with a totally unfounded appearance of enthusiasm, and with the unspoken addition: 'What in, I wonder!'

‘And May!’ pursued Mr. Grewgious—‘I am not at liberty to be definite—May!—my conversational powers are so very limited that I know I shall not come well out of this—May!—it ought to be put imaginatively, but I have no imagination—May!—the thorn of anxiety is as nearly the mark as I am likely to get—May it come out at last!’

Mr. Bazzard, with a frowning smile at the fire, put a hand into his tangled locks, as if the thorn of anxiety were there; then into his waistcoat, as if it were there; then into his pockets, as if it were there. In all these movements he was closely followed by the eyes of Edwin, as if that young gentleman expected to see the thorn in action. It was not produced, however, and Mr. Bazzard merely said: ‘I follow you, sir, and I thank you.’

‘I am going,’ said Mr. Grewgious, jingling his glass on the table with one hand, and bending aside under cover of the other, to whisper to Edwin, ‘to drink to my ward. But I put Bazzard first. He mightn’t like it else.’

This was said with a mysterious wink; or what would have been a wink, if, in Mr. Grewgious’s hands, it could have been quick enough. So Edwin winked responsively, without the least idea what he meant by doing so.

‘And now,’ said Mr. Grewgious, ‘I devote a bumper to the fair and fascinating Miss Rosa. Bazzard, the fair and fascinating Miss Rosa!’

‘I follow you, sir,’ said Bazzard, ‘and I pledge you!’

‘And so do I!’ said Edwin.

‘Lord bless me,’ cried Mr. Grewgious, breaking the blank silence which of course ensued: though why these pauses *should* come upon us when we have performed any small social rite, not directly inducive of self-examination or mental despondency, who can tell? ‘I am a particularly Angular man, and yet I fancy (if I may use the word, not having a morsel of fancy), that I could draw a picture of a true lover’s state of mind, to-night.’

‘Let us follow you, sir,’ said Bazzard, ‘and have the picture.’

‘Mr. Edwin will correct it where it’s wrong,’ resumed Mr. Grewgious, ‘and will throw in a few touches from the life. I dare say it is wrong in many particulars, and wants many touches from the life, for I was born a Chip, and have neither soft sympathies nor soft experiences. Well! I hazard the guess that the true lover’s mind is completely permeated by the beloved object of his affections. I hazard the guess that her dear name is precious to him, cannot be heard or repeated without emotion, and is preserved sacred. If he has any distinguishing appellation of fondness for her, it is reserved for her, and is not for common ears. A name that it would be a privilege to call her by, being alone with her own bright self, it would be a liberty, a coldness, an insensibility, almost a breach of good faith, to flaunt elsewhere.'

It was wonderful to see Mr. Grewgious sitting bolt upright, with his hands on his knees, continuously chopping this discourse out of himself: much as a charity boy with a very good memory might get his catechism said: and evincing no correspondent emotion whatever, unless in a certain occasional little tingling perceptible at the end of his nose.

'My picture,' Mr. Grewgious proceeded, 'goes on to represent (under correction from you, Mr. Edwin), the true lover as ever impatient to be in the presence or vicinity of the beloved object of his affections; as caring very little for his case in any other society; and as constantly seeking that. If I was to say seeking that, as a bird seeks its nest, I should make an ass of myself, because that would trench upon what I understand to be poetry; and I am so far from trenching upon poetry at any time, that I never, to my knowledge, got within ten thousand miles of it. And I am besides totally unacquainted with the habits of birds, except the birds of Staple Inn, who seek their nests on ledges, and in gutter-pipes and chimneypots, not constructed for them by the beneficent hand of Nature. I beg, therefore, to be understood as foregoing the bird's-nest. But my picture does represent the true lover as having no existence separable from that of the beloved object of his affections, and as living at once a doubled life and a halved life. And if I do not clearly express what I mean by that, it is either for the reason that having no conversational powers, I cannot express what I mean, or that having no meaning, I do not mean what I fail to express. Which, to the best of my belief, is not the case.'

Edwin had turned red and turned white, as certain points of this picture came into the light. He now sat looking at the fire, and bit his lip.

'The speculations of an Angular man,' resumed Mr. Grewgious, still sitting and speaking exactly as before, 'are probably erroneous on so globular a topic. But I figure to myself (subject, as before, to Mr. Edwin's correction), that there can be no coolness, no lassitude, no doubt, no indifference, no half fire and half smoke state of mind, in a real lover. Pray am I at all near the mark in my picture?'

As abrupt in his conclusion as in his commencement and progress, he jerked this inquiry at Edwin, and stopped when one might have supposed him in the middle of his oration.

‘I should say, sir,’ stammered Edwin, ‘as you refer the question to me—’

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Grewgious, ‘I refer it to you, as an authority.’

‘I should say, then, sir,’ Edwin went on, embarrassed, ‘that the picture you have drawn is generally correct; but I submit that perhaps you may be rather hard upon the unlucky lover.’

‘Likely so,’ assented Mr. Grewgious, ‘likely so. I am a hard man in the grain.’

‘He may not show,’ said Edwin, ‘all he feels; or he may not—’

There he stopped so long, to find the rest of his sentence, that Mr. Grewgious rendered his difficulty a thousand times the greater by unexpectedly striking in with:

‘No to be sure; he *may* not!’

After that, they all sat silent; the silence of Mr. Bazzard being occasioned by slumber.

‘His responsibility is very great, though,’ said Mr. Grewgious at length, with his eyes on the fire.

Edwin nodded assent, with *his* eyes on the fire.

‘And let him be sure that he trifles with no one,’ said Mr. Grewgious; ‘neither with himself, nor with any other.’

Edwin bit his lip again, and still sat looking at the fire.

‘He must not make a plaything of a treasure. Woe betide him if he does! Let him take that well to heart,’ said Mr. Grewgious.

Though he said these things in short sentences, much as the supposititious charity boy just now referred to might have repeated a verse or two from the Book of Proverbs, there was something dreamy (for so literal a man) in the way in which he now shook his right forefinger at the live coals in the grate, and again fell silent.

But not for long. As he sat upright and stiff in his chair, he suddenly rapped his knees, like the carved image of some queer Joss or other coming out of its reverie, and said: ‘We must finish this bottle, Mr. Edwin. Let me help you. I’ll help Bazzard too, though he *is* asleep. He mightn’t like it else.’

He helped them both, and helped himself, and drained his glass, and stood it bottom upward on the table, as though he had just caught a bluebottle in it.

‘And now, Mr. Edwin,’ he proceeded, wiping his mouth and hands upon his handkerchief: ‘to a little piece of business. You received from me, the other day, a certified copy of Miss Rosa’s father’s will. You knew its contents before, but you received it from me as a matter of business. I should have sent it to Mr. Jasper, but for Miss Rosa’s wishing it to come straight to you, in preference. You received it?’

‘Quite safely, sir.’

‘You should have acknowledged its receipt,’ said Mr. Grewgious; ‘business being business all the world over. However, you did not.’

‘I meant to have acknowledged it when I first came in this evening, sir.’

‘Not a business-like acknowledgment,’ returned Mr. Grewgious; ‘however, let that pass. Now, in that document you have observed a few words of kindly allusion to its being left to me to discharge a little trust, confided to me in conversation, at such time as I in my discretion may think best.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Mr. Edwin, it came into my mind just now, when I was looking at the fire, that I could, in my discretion, acquit myself of that trust at no better time than the present. Favour me with your attention, half a minute.’

He took a bunch of keys from his pocket, singled out by the candle-light the key he wanted, and then, with a candle in his hand, went to a bureau or escritoire, unlocked it, touched the spring of a little secret drawer, and took from it an ordinary ring-case made for a single ring. With this in his hand, he returned to his chair. As he held it up for the young man to see, his hand trembled.

‘Mr. Edwin, this rose of diamonds and rubies delicately set in gold, was a ring belonging to Miss Rosa’s mother. It was removed from her dead hand, in my presence, with such distracted grief as I hope it may never be my lot to contemplate again. Hard man as I am, I am not hard enough for that. See how bright these stones shine!’ opening the case. ‘And yet the eyes that were so much brighter, and that so often looked upon them with a light and a proud heart, have been ashes among ashes, and dust among dust, some years! If I had any imagination (which it is needless to say I have not), I might imagine that the lasting beauty of these stones was almost cruel.’

He closed the case again as he spoke.

‘This ring was given to the young lady who was drowned so early in her beautiful and happy career, by her husband, when they first plighted their faith to one another. It was he who removed it from her unconscious hand, and it was he who, when his death drew very near, placed it in mine. The trust in which I received it, was, that, you and Miss Rosa growing to manhood and womanhood, and your betrothal prospering and coming to maturity, I should give it to you to place upon her finger. Failing those desired results, it was to remain in my possession.’

Some trouble was in the young man’s face, and some indecision was in the action of his hand, as Mr. Grewgious, looking steadfastly at him, gave him the ring.

‘Your placing it on her finger,’ said Mr. Grewgious, ‘will be the solemn seal upon your strict fidelity to the living and the dead. You are going to her, to make the last irrevocable preparations for your marriage. Take it with you.’

The young man took the little case, and placed it in his breast.

‘If anything should be amiss, if anything should be even slightly wrong, between you; if you should have any secret consciousness that you are committing yourself to this step for no higher reason than because you have long been accustomed to look forward to it; then,’ said Mr. Grewgious, ‘I charge you once more, by the living and by the dead, to bring that ring back to me!’

Here Bazzard awoke himself by his own snoring; and, as is usual in such cases, sat apoplectically staring at vacancy, as defying vacancy to accuse him of having been asleep.

‘Bazzard!’ said Mr. Grewgious, harder than ever.

‘I follow you, sir,’ said Bazzard, ‘and I have been following you.’

‘In discharge of a trust, I have handed Mr. Edwin Drood a ring of diamonds and rubies. You see?’

Edwin reproduced the little case, and opened it; and Bazzard looked into it.

‘I follow you both, sir,’ returned Bazzard, ‘and I witness the transaction.’

Evidently anxious to get away and be alone, Edwin Drood now resumed his outer clothing, muttering something about time and appointments. The fog was reported no clearer (by the flying waiter, who alighted from a speculative flight in the coffee interest), but he went out into it; and Bazzard, after his manner, 'followed' him.

Mr. Grewgious, left alone, walked softly and slowly to and fro, for an hour and more. He was restless to-night, and seemed dispirited.

'I hope I have done right,' he said. 'The appeal to him seemed necessary. It was hard to lose the ring, and yet it must have gone from me very soon.'

He closed the empty little drawer with a sigh, and shut and locked the escritoire, and came back to the solitary fireside.

'Her ring,' he went on. 'Will it come back to me? My mind hangs about her ring very uneasily to-night. But that is explainable. I have had it so long, and I have prized it so much! I wonder—'

He was in a wondering mood as well as a restless; for, though he checked himself at that point, and took another walk, he resumed his wondering when he sat down again.

'I wonder (for the ten-thousandth time, and what a weak fool I, for what can it signify now!) whether he confided the charge of their orphan child to me, because he knew—Good God, how like her mother she has become!'

'I wonder whether he ever so much as suspected that some one doted on her, at a hopeless, speechless distance, when he struck in and won her. I wonder whether it ever crept into his mind who that unfortunate some one was!'

'I wonder whether I shall sleep to-night! At all events, I will shut out the world with the bedclothes, and try.'

Mr. Grewgious crossed the staircase to his raw and foggy bedroom, and was soon ready for bed. Dimly catching sight of his face in the misty looking-glass, he held his candle to it for a moment.

'A likely some one, *you*, to come into anybody's thoughts in such an aspect!' he exclaimed. 'There! there! there! Get to bed, poor man, and cease to jabber!'

With that, he extinguished his light, pulled up the bedclothes around him, and with another sigh shut out the world. And yet there are such unexplored romantic nooks in the unlikeliest men, that even old tinderous and touchwoody P. J. T. Possibly Jabbered Thus, at some odd times, in or about seventeen-forty-seven.

CHAPTER XII—A NIGHT WITH DURDLES

When Mr. Sapsea has nothing better to do, towards evening, and finds the contemplation of his own profundity becoming a little monotonous in spite of the vastness of the subject, he often takes an airing in the Cathedral Close and thereabout. He likes to pass the churchyard with a swelling air of proprietorship, and to encourage in his breast a sort of benignant-landlord feeling, in that he has been bountiful towards that meritorious tenant, Mrs. Sapsea, and has publicly given her a prize. He likes to see a stray face or two looking in through the railings, and perhaps reading his inscription. Should he meet a stranger coming from the churchyard with a quick step, he is morally convinced that the stranger is 'with a blush retiring,' as monumentally directed.

Mr. Sapsea's importance has received enhancement, for he has become Mayor of Cloisterham. Without mayors, and many of them, it cannot be disputed that the whole framework of society—Mr. Sapsea is confident that he invented that forcible figure—would fall to pieces. Mayors have been knighted for 'going up' with addresses: explosive machines intrepidly discharging shot and shell into the English Grammar. Mr. Sapsea may 'go up' with an address. Rise, Sir Thomas Sapsea! Of such is the salt of the earth.

Mr. Sapsea has improved the acquaintance of Mr. Jasper, since their first meeting to partake of port, epitaph, backgammon, beef, and salad. Mr. Sapsea has been received at the gatehouse with kindred hospitality; and on that occasion Mr. Jasper seated himself at the piano, and sang to him, tickling his ears—figuratively—long enough to present a considerable area for tickling. What Mr. Sapsea likes in that young man is, that he is always ready to profit by the wisdom of his elders, and that he is sound, sir, at the core. In proof of which, he sang to Mr. Sapsea that evening, no kickshaw ditties, favourites with national enemies, but gave him the genuine George the Third home-brewed; exhorting him (as 'my brave boys') to reduce to a smashed condition all other islands but this island, and all continents, peninsulas, isthmuses, promontories, and other geographical forms of land soever, besides sweeping the seas in all directions. In short, he rendered it pretty clear that Providence made a distinct mistake in originating so small a nation of hearts of oak, and so many other verminous peoples.

Mr. Sapsea, walking slowly this moist evening near the churchyard with his hands behind him, on the look-out for a blushing and retiring stranger, turns a corner, and comes instead into the goodly presence of the Dean, conversing with the Verger and Mr. Jasper. Mr. Sapsea makes his obeisance, and is instantly stricken far more ecclesiastical than any Archbishop of York or Canterbury.

‘You are evidently going to write a book about us, Mr. Jasper,’ quoth the Dean; ‘to write a book about us. Well! We are very ancient, and we ought to make a good book. We are not so richly endowed in possessions as in age; but perhaps you will put *that* in your book, among other things, and call attention to our wrongs.’

Mr. Tope, as in duty bound, is greatly entertained by this.

‘I really have no intention at all, sir,’ replies Jasper, ‘of turning author or archæologist. It is but a whim of mine. And even for my whim, Mr. Sapsea here is more accountable than I am.’

‘How so, Mr. Mayor?’ says the Dean, with a nod of good-natured recognition of his Fetch. ‘How is that, Mr. Mayor?’

‘I am not aware,’ Mr. Sapsea remarks, looking about him for information, ‘to what the Very Reverend the Dean does me the honour of referring.’ And then falls to studying his original in minute points of detail.

‘Durdles,’ Mr. Tope hints.

‘Ay!’ the Dean echoes; ‘Durdles, Durdles!’

‘The truth is, sir,’ explains Jasper, ‘that my curiosity in the man was first really stimulated by Mr. Sapsea. Mr. Sapsea’s knowledge of mankind and power of drawing out whatever is recluse or odd around him, first led to my bestowing a second thought upon the man: though of course I had met him constantly about. You would not be surprised by this, Mr. Dean, if you had seen Mr. Sapsea deal with him in his own parlour, as I did.’

‘O!’ cries Sapsea, picking up the ball thrown to him with ineffable complacency and pomposity; ‘yes, yes. The Very Reverend the Dean refers to that? Yes. I happened to bring Durdles and Mr. Jasper together. I regard Durdles as a Character.’

‘A character, Mr. Sapsea, that with a few skilful touches you turn inside out,’ says Jasper.

‘Nay, not quite that,’ returns the lumbering auctioneer. ‘I may have a little influence over him, perhaps; and a little insight into his character, perhaps. The Very Reverend the Dean will please to bear in mind that I have seen the world.’ Here Mr. Sapsea gets a little behind the Dean, to inspect his coat-buttons.

‘Well!’ says the Dean, looking about him to see what has become of his copyist: ‘I hope, Mr. Mayor, you will use your study and knowledge of Durdles to the good purpose of exhorting him not to break our worthy and respected Choir-Master’s neck; we cannot afford it; his head and voice are much too valuable to us.’

Mr. Tope is again highly entertained, and, having fallen into respectful convulsions of laughter, subsides into a deferential murmur, importing that surely any gentleman would deem it a pleasure and an honour to have his neck broken, in return for such a compliment from such a source.

‘I will take it upon myself, sir,’ observes Sapsea loftily, ‘to answer for Mr. Jasper’s neck. I will tell Durdles to be careful of it. He will mind what *I* say. How is it at present endangered?’ he inquires, looking about him with magnificent patronage.

‘Only by my making a moonlight expedition with Durdles among the tombs, vaults, towers, and ruins,’ returns Jasper. ‘You remember suggesting, when you brought us together, that, as a lover of the picturesque, it might be worth my while?’

‘I remember!’ replies the auctioneer. And the solemn idiot really believes that he does remember.

‘Profiting by your hint,’ pursues Jasper, ‘I have had some day-rambles with the extraordinary old fellow, and we are to make a moonlight hole-and-corner exploration to-night.’

‘And here he is,’ says the Dean.

Durdles with his dinner-bundle in his hand, is indeed beheld slouching towards them. Slouching nearer, and perceiving the Dean, he pulls off his hat, and is slouching away with it under his arm, when Mr. Sapsea stops him.

‘Mind you take care of my friend,’ is the injunction Mr. Sapsea lays upon him.

‘What friend o’ yourn is dead?’ asks Durdles. ‘No orders has come in for any friend o’ yourn.’

‘I mean my live friend there.’

‘O! him?’ says Durdles. ‘He can take care of himself, can Mister Jarsper.’

‘But do you take care of him too,’ says Sapsea.

Whom Durdles (there being command in his tone) surlily surveys from head to foot.

‘With submission to his Reverence the Dean, if you’ll mind what concerns you, Mr. Sapsea, Durdles he’ll mind what concerns him.’

‘You’re out of temper,’ says Mr. Sapsea, winking to the company to observe how smoothly he will manage him. ‘My friend concerns me, and Mr. Jasper is my friend. And you are my friend.’

‘Don’t you get into a bad habit of boasting,’ retorts Durdles, with a grave cautionary nod. ‘It’ll grow upon you.’

‘You are out of temper,’ says Sapsea again; reddening, but again sinking to the company.

‘I own to it,’ returns Durdles; ‘I don’t like liberties.’

Mr. Sapsea winks a third wink to the company, as who should say: ‘I think you will agree with me that I have settled *his* business;’ and stalks out of the controversy.

Durdles then gives the Dean a good evening, and adding, as he puts his hat on, ‘You’ll find me at home, Mister Jarsper, as agreed, when you want me; I’m a-going home to clean myself,’ soon slouches out of sight. This going home to clean himself is one of the man’s incomprehensible compromises with inexorable facts; he, and his hat, and his boots, and his clothes, never showing any trace of cleaning, but being uniformly in one condition of dust and grit.

The lamplighter now dotting the quiet Close with specks of light, and running at a great rate up and down his little ladder with that object—his little ladder under the sacred shadow of whose inconvenience generations had grown up, and which all Cloisterham would have stood aghast at the idea of abolishing—the Dean withdraws to his dinner, Mr. Tope to his tea, and Mr. Jasper to his piano. There, with no light but that of the fire, he sits chanting choir-music in a low and beautiful voice, for two or three hours; in short, until it has been for some time dark, and the moon is about to rise.

Then he closes his piano softly, softly changes his coat for a pea-jacket, with a goodly wicker-cased bottle in its largest pocket, and putting on a low-crowned, flap-brimmed hat, goes softly out. Why does he move so softly to-night? No outward reason is apparent for it. Can there be any sympathetic reason crouching darkly within him?

Repairing to Durdles's unfinished house, or hole in the city wall, and seeing a light within it, he softly picks his course among the gravestones, monuments, and stony lumber of the yard, already touched here and there, sidewise, by the rising moon. The two journeymen have left their two great saws sticking in their blocks of stone; and two skeleton journeymen out of the Dance of Death might be grinning in the shadow of their sheltering sentry-boxes, about to slash away at cutting out the gravestones of the next two people destined to die in Cloisterham. Likely enough, the two think little of that now, being alive, and perhaps merry. Curious, to make a guess at the two;—or say one of the two!

'Ho! Durdles!'

The light moves, and he appears with it at the door. He would seem to have been 'cleaning himself' with the aid of a bottle, jug, and tumbler; for no other cleansing instruments are visible in the bare brick room with rafters overhead and no plastered ceiling, into which he shows his visitor.

'Are you ready?'

'I am ready, Mister Jarsper. Let the old 'uns come out if they dare, when we go among their tombs. My spirit is ready for 'em.'

'Do you mean animal spirits, or ardent?'

'The one's the t'other,' answers Durdles, 'and I mean 'em both.'

He takes a lantern from a hook, puts a match or two in his pocket wherewith to light it, should there be need; and they go out together, dinner-bundle and all.

Surely an unaccountable sort of expedition! That Durdles himself, who is always prowling among old graves, and ruins, like a Ghoul—that he should be stealing forth to climb, and dive, and wander without an object, is nothing extraordinary; but that the Choir-Master or any one else should hold it worth his while to be with him, and to study moonlight effects in such company is another affair. Surely an unaccountable sort of expedition, therefore!

''Ware that there mound by the yard-gate, Mister Jarsper.'

'I see it. What is it?'

'Lime.'

Mr. Jasper stops, and waits for him to come up, for he lags behind. 'What you call quick-lime?'

‘Ay!’ says Durdles; ‘quick enough to eat your boots. With a little handy stirring, quick enough to eat your bones.’

They go on, presently passing the red windows of the Travellers’ Twopenny, and emerging into the clear moonlight of the Monks’ Vineyard. This crossed, they come to Minor Canon Corner: of which the greater part lies in shadow until the moon shall rise higher in the sky.

The sound of a closing house-door strikes their ears, and two men come out. These are Mr. Crisparkle and Neville. Jasper, with a strange and sudden smile upon his face, lays the palm of his hand upon the breast of Durdles, stopping him where he stands.

At that end of Minor Canon Corner the shadow is profound in the existing state of the light: at that end, too, there is a piece of old dwarf wall, breast high, the only remaining boundary of what was once a garden, but is now the thoroughfare. Jasper and Durdles would have turned this wall in another instant; but, stopping so short, stand behind it.

‘Those two are only sauntering,’ Jasper whispers; ‘they will go out into the moonlight soon. Let us keep quiet here, or they will detain us, or want to join us, or what not.’

Durdles nods assent, and falls to munching some fragments from his bundle. Jasper folds his arms upon the top of the wall, and, with his chin resting on them, watches. He takes no note whatever of the Minor Canon, but watches Neville, as though his eye were at the trigger of a loaded rifle, and he had covered him, and were going to fire. A sense of destructive power is so expressed in his face, that even Durdles pauses in his munching, and looks at him, with an unmunched something in his cheek.

Meanwhile Mr. Crisparkle and Neville walk to and fro, quietly talking together. What they say, cannot be heard consecutively; but Mr. Jasper has already distinguished his own name more than once.

‘This is the first day of the week,’ Mr. Crisparkle can be distinctly heard to observe, as they turn back; ‘and the last day of the week is Christmas Eve.’

‘You may be certain of me, sir.’

The echoes were favourable at those points, but as the two approach, the sound of their talking becomes confused again. The word ‘confidence,’ shattered by the echoes, but still capable of being pieced together, is uttered by Mr. Crisparkle. As they draw still nearer, this fragment of a reply is heard: ‘Not deserved yet, but shall be, sir.’ As they turn away again, Jasper again hears his own name, in connection with the words from Mr. Crisparkle: ‘Remember that I said I answered for you confidently.’ Then the sound of their talk becomes confused again; they halting for a little while, and some earnest action on the part of Neville succeeding. When they move once more, Mr. Crisparkle is seen to look up at the sky, and to point before him. They then slowly disappear; passing out into the moonlight at the opposite end of the Corner.

It is not until they are gone, that Mr. Jasper moves. But then he turns to Durdles, and bursts into a fit of laughter. Durdles, who still has that suspended something in his cheek, and who sees nothing to laugh at, stares at him until Mr. Jasper lays his face down on his arms to have his laugh out. Then Durdles bolts the something, as if desperately resigning himself to indigestion.

Among those secluded nooks there is very little stir or movement after dark. There is little enough in the high tide of the day, but there is next to none at night. Besides that the cheerfully frequented High Street lies nearly parallel to the spot (the old Cathedral rising between the two), and is the natural channel in which the Cloisterham traffic flows, a certain awful hush pervades the ancient pile, the cloisters, and the churchyard, after dark, which not many people care to encounter. Ask the first hundred citizens of Cloisterham, met at random in the streets at noon, if they believed in Ghosts, they would tell you no; but put them to choose at night between these eerie Precincts and the thoroughfare of shops, and you would find that ninety-nine declared for the longer round and the more frequented way. The cause of this is not to be found in any local superstition that attaches to the Precincts—albeit a mysterious lady, with a child in her arms and a rope dangling from her neck, has been seen flitting about there by sundry witnesses as intangible as herself—but it is to be sought in the innate shrinking of dust with the breath of life in it from dust out of which the breath of life has passed; also, in the widely diffused, and almost as widely unacknowledged, reflection: ‘If the dead do, under any circumstances, become visible to the living, these are such likely surroundings for the purpose that I, the living, will get out of them as soon as I can.’ Hence, when Mr. Jasper and Durdles pause to glance around them, before descending into the crypt by a small side door, of which the latter has a key, the whole expanse of moonlight in their view is utterly deserted. One might fancy that the tide of life was stemmed by Mr. Jasper’s own gatehouse. The murmur of the tide is heard beyond; but no wave passes the archway, over which his lamp burns red behind his curtain, as if the building were a Lighthouse.

They enter, locking themselves in, descend the rugged steps, and are down in the Crypt. The lantern is not wanted, for the moonlight strikes in at the groined windows, bare of glass, the broken frames for which cast patterns on the ground. The heavy pillars which support the roof engender masses of black shade, but between them there are lanes of light. Up and down these lanes they walk, Durdles discoursing of the 'old uns' he yet counts on disinterring, and slapping a wall, in which he considers 'a whole family on 'em' to be stoned and earthed up, just as if he were a familiar friend of the family. The taciturnity of Durdles is for the time overcome by Mr. Jasper's wicker bottle, which circulates freely;—in the sense, that is to say, that its contents enter freely into Mr. Durdles's circulation, while Mr. Jasper only rinses his mouth once, and casts forth the rinsing.

They are to ascend the great Tower. On the steps by which they rise to the Cathedral, Durdles pauses for new store of breath. The steps are very dark, but out of the darkness they can see the lanes of light they have traversed. Durdles seats himself upon a step. Mr. Jasper seats himself upon another. The odour from the wicker bottle (which has somehow passed into Durdles's keeping) soon intimates that the cork has been taken out; but this is not ascertainable through the sense of sight, since neither can descry the other. And yet, in talking, they turn to one another, as though their faces could commune together.

'This is good stuff, Mister Jarsper!'

'It is very good stuff, I hope.—I bought it on purpose.'

'They don't show, you see, the old uns don't, Mister Jarsper!'

'It would be a more confused world than it is, if they could.'

'Well, it *would* lead towards a mixing of things,' Durdles acquiesces: pausing on the remark, as if the idea of ghosts had not previously presented itself to him in a merely inconvenient light, domestically or chronologically. 'But do you think there may be Ghosts of other things, though not of men and women?'

'What things? Flower-beds and watering-pots? horses and harness?'

'No. Sounds.'

'What sounds?'

'Cries.'

‘What cries do you mean? Chairs to mend?’

‘No. I mean screeches. Now I’ll tell you, Mr. Jarsper. Wait a bit till I put the bottle right.’ Here the cork is evidently taken out again, and replaced again. ‘There! *Now* it’s right! This time last year, only a few days later, I happened to have been doing what was correct by the season, in the way of giving it the welcome it had a right to expect, when them town-boys set on me at their worst. At length I gave ’em the slip, and turned in here. And here I fell asleep. And what woke me? The ghost of a cry. The ghost of one terrific shriek, which shriek was followed by the ghost of the howl of a dog: a long, dismal, woeful howl, such as a dog gives when a person’s dead. That was *my* last Christmas Eve.’

‘What do you mean?’ is the very abrupt, and, one might say, fierce retort.

‘I mean that I made inquiries everywhere about, and, that no living ears but mine heard either that cry or that howl. So I say they was both ghosts; though why they came to me, I’ve never made out.’

‘I thought you were another kind of man,’ says Jasper, scornfully.

‘So I thought myself,’ answers Durdles with his usual composure; ‘and yet I was picked out for it.’

Jasper had risen suddenly, when he asked him what he meant, and he now says, ‘Come; we shall freeze here; lead the way.’

Durdles complies, not over-steadily; opens the door at the top of the steps with the key he has already used; and so emerges on the Cathedral level, in a passage at the side of the chancel. Here, the moonlight is so very bright again that the colours of the nearest stained-glass window are thrown upon their faces. The appearance of the unconscious Durdles, holding the door open for his companion to follow, as if from the grave, is ghastly enough, with a purple hand across his face, and a yellow splash upon his brow; but he bears the close scrutiny of his companion in an insensible way, although it is prolonged while the latter fumbles among his pockets for a key confided to him that will open an iron gate, so to enable them to pass to the staircase of the great tower.

‘That and the bottle are enough for you to carry,’ he says, giving it to Durdles; ‘hand your bundle to me; I am younger and longer-winded than you.’ Durdles hesitates for a moment between bundle and bottle; but gives the preference to the bottle as being by far the better company, and consigns the dry weight to his fellow-explorer.

Then they go up the winding staircase of the great tower, toilsomely, turning and turning, and lowering their heads to avoid the stairs above, or the rough stone pivot around which they twist. Durdles has lighted his lantern, by drawing from the cold, hard wall a spark of that mysterious fire which lurks in everything, and, guided by this speck, they clamber up among the cobwebs and the dust. Their way lies through strange places. Twice or thrice they emerge into level, low-arched galleries, whence they can look down into the moon-lit nave; and where Durdles, waving his lantern, waves the dim angels' heads upon the corbels of the roof, seeming to watch their progress. Anon they turn into narrower and steeper staircases, and the night-air begins to blow upon them, and the chirp of some startled jackdaw or frightened rook precedes the heavy beating of wings in a confined space, and the beating down of dust and straws upon their heads. At last, leaving their light behind a stair—for it blows fresh up here—they look down on Cloisterham, fair to see in the moonlight: its ruined habitations and sanctuaries of the dead, at the tower's base: its moss-softened red-tiled roofs and red-brick houses of the living, clustered beyond: its river winding down from the mist on the horizon, as though that were its source, and already heaving with a restless knowledge of its approach towards the sea.

Once again, an unaccountable expedition this! Jasper (always moving softly with no visible reason) contemplates the scene, and especially that stillest part of it which the Cathedral overshadows. But he contemplates Durdles quite as curiously, and Durdles is by times conscious of his watchful eyes.

Only by times, because Durdles is growing drowsy. As aëronauts lighten the load they carry, when they wish to rise, similarly Durdles has lightened the wicker bottle in coming up. Snatches of sleep surprise him on his legs, and stop him in his talk. A mild fit of calenture seizes him, in which he deems that the ground so far below, is on a level with the tower, and would as lief walk off the tower into the air as not. Such is his state when they begin to come down. And as aëronauts make themselves heavier when they wish to descend, similarly Durdles charges himself with more liquid from the wicker bottle, that he may come down the better.

The iron gate attained and locked—but not before Durdles has tumbled twice, and cut an eyebrow open once—they descend into the crypt again, with the intent of issuing forth as they entered. But, while returning among those lanes of light, Durdles becomes so very uncertain, both of foot and speech, that he half drops, half throws himself down, by one of the heavy pillars, scarcely less heavy than itself, and indistinctly appeals to his companion for forty winks of a second each.

‘If you will have it so, or must have it so,’ replies Jasper, ‘I’ll not leave you here. Take them, while I walk to and fro.’

Durdles is asleep at once; and in his sleep he dreams a dream.

It is not much of a dream, considering the vast extent of the domains of dreamland, and their wonderful productions; it is only remarkable for being unusually restless and unusually real. He dreams of lying there, asleep, and yet counting his companion’s footsteps as he walks to and fro. He dreams that the footsteps die away into distance of time and of space, and that something touches him, and that something falls from his hand. Then something clinks and gropes about, and he dreams that he is alone for so long a time, that the lanes of light take new directions as the moon advances in her course. From succeeding unconsciousness he passes into a dream of slow uneasiness from cold; and painfully awakes to a perception of the lanes of light—really changed, much as he had dreamed—and Jasper walking among them, beating his hands and feet.

‘Holloa!’ Durdles cries out, unmeaningly alarmed.

‘Awake at last?’ says Jasper, coming up to him. ‘Do you know that your forties have stretched into thousands?’

‘No.’

‘They have though.’

‘What’s the time?’

‘Hark! The bells are going in the Tower!’

They strike four quarters, and then the great bell strikes.

‘Two!’ cries Durdles, scrambling up; ‘why didn’t you try to wake me, Mister Jarsper?’

‘I did. I might as well have tried to wake the dead—your own family of dead, up in the corner there.’

‘Did you touch me?’

‘Touch you! Yes. Shook you.’

As Durdles recalls that touching something in his dream, he looks down on the pavement, and sees the key of the crypt door lying close to where he himself lay.

‘I dropped you, did I?’ he says, picking it up, and recalling that part of his dream. As he gathers himself up again into an upright position, or into a position as nearly upright as he ever maintains, he is again conscious of being watched by his companion.

‘Well?’ says Jasper, smiling, ‘are you quite ready? Pray don’t hurry.’

‘Let me get my bundle right, Mister Jarsper, and I’m with you.’ As he ties it afresh, he is once more conscious that he is very narrowly observed.

‘What do you suspect me of, Mister Jarsper?’ he asks, with drunken displeasure. ‘Let them as has any suspicions of Durdles name ’em.’

‘I’ve no suspicions of you, my good Mr. Durdles; but I have suspicions that my bottle was filled with something stiffer than either of us supposed. And I also have suspicions,’ Jasper adds, taking it from the pavement and turning it bottom upwards, ‘that it’s empty.’

Durdles condescends to laugh at this. Continuing to chuckle when his laugh is over, as though remonstrant with himself on his drinking powers, he rolls to the door and unlocks it. They both pass out, and Durdles relocks it, and pockets his key.

‘A thousand thanks for a curious and interesting night,’ says Jasper, giving him his hand; ‘you can make your own way home?’

‘I should think so!’ answers Durdles. ‘If you was to offer Durdles the affront to show him his way home, he wouldn’t go home.

Durdles wouldn’t go home till morning;
And *then* Durdles wouldn’t go home,

Durdles wouldn’t.’ This with the utmost defiance.

‘Good-night, then.’

‘Good-night, Mister Jarsper.’

Each is turning his own way, when a sharp whistle rends the silence, and the jargon is yelped out:

Widdy widdy wen!
I—ket—ches—Im—out—ar—ter—ten.
Widdy widdy wy!
Then—E—don’t—go—then—I—shy—
Widdy Widdy Wake-cock warning!’

Instantly afterwards, a rapid fire of stones rattles at the Cathedral wall, and the hideous small boy is beheld opposite, dancing in the moonlight.

‘What! Is that baby-devil on the watch there!’ cries Jasper in a fury: so quickly roused, and so violent, that he seems an older devil himself. ‘I shall shed the blood of that impish wretch! I know I shall do it!' Regardless of the fire, though it hits him more than once, he rushes at Deputy, collars him, and tries to bring him across. But Deputy is not to be so easily brought across. With a diabolical insight into the strongest part of his position, he is no sooner taken by the throat than he curls up his legs, forces his assailant to hang him, as it were, and gurgles in his throat, and screws his body, and twists, as already undergoing the first agonies of strangulation. There is nothing for it but to drop him. He instantly gets himself together, backs over to Durdles, and cries to his assailant, gnashing the great gap in front of his mouth with rage and malice:

'I'll blind yer, s'elp me! I'll stone yer eyes out, s'elp me! If I don't have yer eyesight, bellows me!' At the same time dodging behind Durdles, and snarling at Jasper, now from this side of him, and now from that: prepared, if pounced upon, to dart away in all manner of curvilinear directions, and, if run down after all, to grovel in the dust, and cry: 'Now, hit me when I'm down! Do it!'

'Don't hurt the boy, Mister Jarsper,' urges Durdles, shielding him. 'Recollect yourself.'

'He followed us to-night, when we first came here!'

'Yer lie, I didn't!' replies Deputy, in his one form of polite contradiction.

'He has been prowling near us ever since!'

'Yer lie, I haven't,' returns Deputy. 'I'd only jist come out for my 'elth when I see you two a-coming out of the Kin-freederel. If

I—ket—ches—Im—out—ar—ter—ten!'

(with the usual rhythm and dance, though dodging behind Durdles), 'it ain't *any* fault, is it?'

'Take him home, then,' retorts Jasper, ferociously, though with a strong check upon himself, 'and let my eyes be rid of the sight of you!'

Deputy, with another sharp whistle, at once expressing his relief, and his commencement of a milder stoning of Mr. Durdles, begins stoning that respectable gentleman home, as if he were a reluctant ox. Mr. Jasper goes to his gatehouse, brooding. And thus, as everything comes to an end, the unaccountable expedition comes to an end—for the time.

CHAPTER XIII—BOTH AT THEIR BEST

Miss Twinkleton's establishment was about to undergo a serene hush. The Christmas recess was at hand. What had once, and at no remote period, been called, even by the erudite Miss Twinkleton herself, 'the half;' but what was now called, as being more elegant, and more strictly collegiate, 'the term,' would expire to-morrow. A noticeable relaxation of discipline had for some few days pervaded the Nuns' House. Club suppers had occurred in the bedrooms, and a dressed tongue had been carved with a pair of scissors, and handed round with the curling tongs. Portions of marmalade had likewise been distributed on a service of plates constructed of curlpaper; and cowslip wine had been quaffed from the small squat measuring glass in which little Rickitts (a junior of weakly constitution) took her steel drops daily. The housemaids had been bribed with various fragments of riband, and sundry pairs of shoes more or less down at heel, to make no mention of crumbs in the beds; the airiest costumes had been worn on these festive occasions; and the daring Miss Ferdinand had even surprised the company with a sprightly solo on the comb-and-curlpaper, until suffocated in her own pillow by two flowing-haired executioners.

Nor were these the only tokens of dispersal. Boxes appeared in the bedrooms (where they were capital at other times), and a surprising amount of packing took place, out of all proportion to the amount packed. Largess, in the form of odds and ends of cold cream and pomatum, and also of hairpins, was freely distributed among the attendants. On charges of inviolable secrecy, confidences were interchanged respecting golden youth of England expected to call, 'at home,' on the first opportunity. Miss Giggles (deficient in sentiment) did indeed profess that she, for her part, acknowledged such homage by making faces at the golden youth; but this young lady was outvoted by an immense majority.

On the last night before a recess, it was always expressly made a point of honour that nobody should go to sleep, and that Ghosts should be encouraged by all possible means. This compact invariably broke down, and all the young ladies went to sleep very soon, and got up very early.

The concluding ceremony came off at twelve o'clock on the day of departure; when Miss Twinkleton, supported by Mrs. Tisher, held a drawing-room in her own apartment (the globes already covered with brown Holland), where glasses of white-wine and plates of cut pound-cake were discovered on the table. Miss Twinkleton then said: Ladies, another revolving year had brought us round to that festive period at which the first feelings of our nature bounded in our—Miss Twinkleton was annually going to add 'bosoms,' but annually stopped on the brink of that expression, and substituted 'hearts.' Hearts; our hearts. Hem! Again a revolving year, ladies, had brought us to a pause in our studies—let us hope our greatly advanced studies—and, like the mariner in his bark, the warrior in his tent, the captive in his dungeon, and the traveller in his various conveyances, we yearned for home. Did we say, on such an occasion, in the opening words of Mr. Addison's impressive tragedy:

'The dawn is overcast, the morning lowers,
And heavily in clouds brings on the day,
The great, th' important day—?'

Not so. From horizon to zenith all was *couleur de rose*, for all was redolent of our relations and friends. Might *we* find *them* prospering as *we* expected; might *they* find *us* prospering as *they* expected! Ladies, we would now, with our love to one another, wish one another good-bye, and happiness, until we met again. And when the time should come for our resumption of those pursuits which (here a general depression set in all round), pursuits which, pursuits which;—then let us ever remember what was said by the Spartan General, in words too trite for repetition, at the battle it were superfluous to specify.

The handmaidens of the establishment, in their best caps, then handed the trays, and the young ladies sipped and crumbled, and the bespoken coaches began to choke the street. Then leave-taking was not long about; and Miss Twinkleton, in saluting each young lady's cheek, confided to her an exceedingly neat letter, addressed to her next friend at law, 'with Miss Twinkleton's best compliments' in the corner. This missive she handed with an air as if it had not the least connexion with the bill, but were something in the nature of a delicate and joyful surprise.

So many times had Rosa seen such dispersals, and so very little did she know of any other Home, that she was contented to remain where she was, and was even better contented than ever before, having her latest friend with her. And yet her latest friendship had a blank place in it of which she could not fail to be sensible. Helena Landless, having been a party to her brother's revelation about Rosa, and having entered into that compact of silence with Mr. Crisparkle, shrank from any allusion to Edwin Drood's name. Why she so avoided it, was mysterious to Rosa, but she perfectly perceived the fact. But for the fact, she might have relieved her own little perplexed heart of some of its doubts and hesitations, by taking Helena into her confidence. As it was, she had no such vent: she could only ponder on her own difficulties, and wonder more and more why this avoidance of Edwin's name should last, now that she knew—for so much Helena had told her—that a good understanding was to be reëstablished between the two young men, when Edwin came down.

It would have made a pretty picture, so many pretty girls kissing Rosa in the cold porch of the Nuns' House, and that sunny little creature peeping out of it (unconscious of sly faces carved on spout and gable peeping at her), and waving farewells to the departing coaches, as if she represented the spirit of rosy youth abiding in the place to keep it bright and warm in its desertion. The hoarse High Street became musical with the cry, in various silvery voices, 'Good-bye, Rosebud darling!' and the effigy of Mr. Sapsea's father over the opposite doorway seemed to say to mankind: 'Gentlemen, favour me with your attention to this charming little last lot left behind, and bid with a spirit worthy of the occasion!' Then the staid street, so unwontedly sparkling, youthful, and fresh for a few rippling moments, ran dry, and Cloisterham was itself again.

If Rosebud in her bower now waited Edwin Drood's coming with an uneasy heart, Edwin for his part was uneasy too. With far less force of purpose in his composition than the childish beauty, crowned by acclamation fairy queen of Miss Twinkleton's establishment, he had a conscience, and Mr. Grewgious had pricked it. That gentleman's steady convictions of what was right and what was wrong in such a case as his, were neither to be frowned aside nor laughed aside. They would not be moved. But for the dinner in Staple Inn, and but for the ring he carried in the breast pocket of his coat, he would have drifted into their wedding-day without another pause for real thought, loosely trusting that all would go well, left alone. But that serious putting him on his truth to the living and the dead had brought him to a check. He must either give the ring to Rosa, or he must take it back. Once put into this narrowed way of action, it was curious that he began to consider Rosa's claims upon him more unselfishly than he had ever considered them before, and began to be less sure of himself than he had ever been in all his easy-going days.

'I will be guided by what she says, and by how we get on,' was his decision, walking from the gatehouse to the Nuns' House. 'Whatever comes of it, I will bear his words in mind, and try to be true to the living and the dead.'

Rosa was dressed for walking. She expected him. It was a bright, frosty day, and Miss Twinkleton had already graciously sanctioned fresh air. Thus they got out together before it became necessary for either Miss Twinkleton, or the deputy high-priest Mrs. Tisher, to lay even so much as one of those usual offerings on the shrine of Propriety.

'My dear Eddy,' said Rosa, when they had turned out of the High Street, and had got among the quiet walks in the neighbourhood of the Cathedral and the river: 'I want to say something very serious to you. I have been thinking about it for a long, long time.'

'I want to be serious with you too, Rosa dear. I mean to be serious and earnest.'

'Thank you, Eddy. And you will not think me unkind because I begin, will you? You will not think I speak for myself only, because I speak first? That would not be generous, would it? And I know you are generous!'

He said, 'I hope I am not ungenerous to you, Rosa.' He called her Pussy no more. Never again.

'And there is no fear,' pursued Rosa, 'of our quarrelling, is there? Because, Eddy,' clasping her hand on his arm, 'we have so much reason to be very lenient to each other!'

'We will be, Rosa.'

'That's a dear good boy! Eddy, let us be courageous. Let us change to brother and sister from this day forth.'

'Never be husband and wife?'

'Never!'

Neither spoke again for a little while. But after that pause he said, with some effort:

'Of course I know that this has been in both our minds, Rosa, and of course I am in honour bound to confess freely that it does not originate with you.'

‘No, nor with you, dear,’ she returned, with pathetic earnestness. ‘That sprung up between us. You are not truly happy in our engagement; I am not truly happy in it. O, I am so sorry, so sorry!’ And there she broke into tears.

‘I am deeply sorry too, Rosa. Deeply sorry for you.’

‘And I for you, poor boy! And I for you!’

This pure young feeling, this gentle and forbearing feeling of each towards the other, brought with it its reward in a softening light that seemed to shine on their position. The relations between them did not look wilful, or capricious, or a failure, in such a light; they became elevated into something more self-denying, honourable, affectionate, and true.

‘If we knew yesterday,’ said Rosa, as she dried her eyes, ‘and we did know yesterday, and on many, many yesterdays, that we were far from right together in those relations which were not of our own choosing, what better could we do to-day than change them? It is natural that we should be sorry, and you see how sorry we both are; but how much better to be sorry now than then!’

‘When, Rosa?’

‘When it would be too late. And then we should be angry, besides.’

Another silence fell upon them.

‘And you know,’ said Rosa innocently, ‘you couldn’t like me then; and you can always like me now, for I shall not be a drag upon you, or a worry to you. And I can always like you now, and your sister will not tease or trifle with you. I often did when I was not your sister, and I beg your pardon for it.’

‘Don’t let us come to that, Rosa; or I shall want more pardoning than I like to think of.’

‘No, indeed, Eddy; you are too hard, my generous boy, upon yourself. Let us sit down, brother, on these ruins, and let me tell you how it was with us. I think I know, for I have considered about it very much since you were here last time. You liked me, didn’t you? You thought I was a nice little thing?’

‘Everybody thinks that, Rosa.’

‘Do they?’ She knitted her brow musingly for a moment, and then flashed out with the bright little induction: ‘Well, but say they do. Surely it was not enough that you should think of me only as other people did; now, was it?’

The point was not to be got over. It was not enough.

‘And that is just what I mean; that is just how it was with us,’ said Rosa. ‘You liked me very well, and you had grown used to me, and had grown used to the idea of our being married. You accepted the situation as an inevitable kind of thing, didn’t you? It was to be, you thought, and why discuss or dispute it?’

It was new and strange to him to have himself presented to himself so clearly, in a glass of her holding up. He had always patronised her, in his superiority to her share of woman’s wit. Was that but another instance of something radically amiss in the terms on which they had been gliding towards a life-long bondage?

‘All this that I say of you is true of me as well, Eddy. Unless it was, I might not be bold enough to say it. Only, the difference between us was, that by little and little there crept into my mind a habit of thinking about it, instead of dismissing it. My life is not so busy as yours, you see, and I have not so many things to think of. So I thought about it very much, and I cried about it very much too (though that was not your fault, poor boy); when all at once my guardian came down, to prepare for my leaving the Nuns’ House. I tried to hint to him that I was not quite settled in my mind, but I hesitated and failed, and he didn’t understand me. But he is a good, good man. And he put before me so kindly, and yet so strongly, how seriously we ought to consider, in our circumstances, that I resolved to speak to you the next moment we were alone and grave. And if I seemed to come to it easily just now, because I came to it all at once, don’t think it was so really, Eddy, for O, it was very, very hard, and O, I am very, very sorry!’

Her full heart broke into tears again. He put his arm about her waist, and they walked by the river-side together.

‘Your guardian has spoken to me too, Rosa dear. I saw him before I left London.’ His right hand was in his breast, seeking the ring; but he checked it, as he thought: ‘If I am to take it back, why should I tell her of it?’

‘And that made you more serious about it, didn’t it, Eddy? And if I had not spoken to you, as I have, you would have spoken to me? I hope you can tell me so? I don’t like it to be *all* my doing, though it *is* so much better for us.’

‘Yes, I should have spoken; I should have put everything before you; I came intending to do it. But I never could have spoken to you as you have spoken to me, Rosa.’

‘Don’t say you mean so coldly or unkindly, Eddy, please, if you can help it.’

‘I mean so sensibly and delicately, so wisely and affectionately.’

‘That’s my dear brother!’ She kissed his hand in a little rapture. ‘The dear girls will be dreadfully disappointed,’ added Rosa, laughing, with the dewdrops glistening in her bright eyes. ‘They have looked forward to it so, poor pets!’

‘Ah! but I fear it will be a worse disappointment to Jack,’ said Edwin Drood, with a start. ‘I never thought of Jack!’

Her swift and intent look at him as he said the words could no more be recalled than a flash of lightning can. But it appeared as though she would have instantly recalled it, if she could; for she looked down, confused, and breathed quickly.

‘You don’t doubt its being a blow to Jack, Rosa?’

She merely replied, and that evasively and hurriedly: Why should she? She had not thought about it. He seemed, to her, to have so little to do with it.

‘My dear child! can you suppose that any one so wrapped up in another—Mrs. Tope’s expression: not mine—as Jack is in me, could fail to be struck all of a heap by such a sudden and complete change in my life? I say sudden, because it will be sudden to *him*, you know.’

She nodded twice or thrice, and her lips parted as if she would have assented. But she uttered no sound, and her breathing was no slower.

‘How shall I tell Jack?’ said Edwin, ruminating. If he had been less occupied with the thought, he must have seen her singular emotion. ‘I never thought of Jack. It must be broken to him, before the town-crier knows it. I dine with the dear fellow to-morrow and next day—Christmas Eve and Christmas Day—but it would never do to spoil his feast-days. He always worries about me, and moddley-coddleys in the merest trifles. The news is sure to overset him. How on earth shall this be broken to Jack?’

‘He must be told, I suppose?’ said Rosa.

‘My dear Rosa! who ought to be in our confidence, if not Jack?’

‘My guardian promised to come down, if I should write and ask him. I am going to do so. Would you like to leave it to him?’

‘A bright idea!’ cried Edwin. ‘The other trustee. Nothing more natural. He comes down, he goes to Jack, he relates what we have agreed upon, and he states our case better than we could. He has already spoken feelingly to you, he has already spoken feelingly to me, and he'll put the whole thing feelingly to Jack. That's it! I am not a coward, Rosa, but to tell you a secret, I am a little afraid of Jack.'

'No, no! you are not afraid of him!' cried Rosa, turning white, and clasping her hands.

'Why, sister Rosa, sister Rosa, what do you see from the turret?' said Edwin, rallying her. 'My dear girl!'

'You frightened me.'

'Most unintentionally, but I am as sorry as if I had meant to do it. Could you possibly suppose for a moment, from any loose way of speaking of mine, that I was literally afraid of the dear fond fellow? What I mean is, that he is subject to a kind of paroxysm, or fit—I saw him in it once—and I don't know but that so great a surprise, coming upon him direct from me whom he is so wrapped up in, might bring it on perhaps. Which—and this is the secret I was going to tell you—is another reason for your guardian's making the communication. He is so steady, precise, and exact, that he will talk Jack's thoughts into shape, in no time: whereas with me Jack is always impulsive and hurried, and, I may say, almost womanish.'

Rosa seemed convinced. Perhaps from her own very different point of view of 'Jack,' she felt comforted and protected by the interposition of Mr. Grewgious between herself and him.

And now, Edwin Drood's right hand closed again upon the ring in its little case, and again was checked by the consideration: 'It is certain, now, that I am to give it back to him; then why should I tell her of it?' That pretty sympathetic nature which could be so sorry for him in the blight of their childish hopes of happiness together, and could so quietly find itself alone in a new world to weave fresh wreaths of such flowers as it might prove to bear, the old world's flowers being withered, would be grieved by those sorrowful jewels; and to what purpose? Why should it be? They were but a sign of broken joys and baseless projects; in their very beauty they were (as the unlikeliest of men had said) almost a cruel satire on the loves, hopes, plans, of humanity, which are able to forecast nothing, and are so much brittle dust. Let them be. He would restore them to her guardian when he came down; he in his turn would restore them to the cabinet from which he had unwillingly taken them; and there, like old letters or old vows, or other records of old aspirations come to nothing, they would be disregarded, until, being valuable, they were sold into circulation again, to repeat their former round.

Let them be. Let them lie unspoken of, in his breast. However distinctly or indistinctly he entertained these thoughts, he arrived at the conclusion, Let them be. Among the mighty store of wonderful chains that are for ever forging, day and night, in the vast iron-works of time and circumstance, there was one chain forged in the moment of that small conclusion, riveted to the foundations of heaven and earth, and gifted with invincible force to hold and drag.

They walked on by the river. They began to speak of their separate plans. He would quicken his departure from England, and she would remain where she was, at least as long as Helena remained. The poor dear girls should have their disappointment broken to them gently, and, as the first preliminary, Miss Twinkleton should be confided in by Rosa, even in advance of the reappearance of Mr. Grewgious. It should be made clear in all quarters that she and Edwin were the best of friends. There had never been so serene an understanding between them since they were first affianced. And yet there was one reservation on each side; on hers, that she intended through her guardian to withdraw herself immediately from the tuition of her music-master; on his, that he did already entertain some wandering speculations whether it might ever come to pass that he would know more of Miss Landless.

The bright, frosty day declined as they walked and spoke together. The sun dipped in the river far behind them, and the old city lay red before them, as their walk drew to a close. The moaning water cast its seaweed duskily at their feet, when they turned to leave its margin; and the rooks hovered above them with hoarse cries, darker splashes in the darkening air.

‘I will prepare Jack for my flitting soon,’ said Edwin, in a low voice, ‘and I will but see your guardian when he comes, and then go before they speak together. It will be better done without my being by. Don’t you think so?’

‘Yes.’

‘We know we have done right, Rosa?’

‘Yes.’

‘We know we are better so, even now?’

‘And shall be far, far better so by-and-by.’

Still there was that lingering tenderness in their hearts towards the old positions they were relinquishing, that they prolonged their parting. When they came among the elm-trees by the Cathedral, where they had last sat together, they stopped as by consent, and Rosa raised her face to his, as she had never raised it in the old days;—for they were old already.

‘God bless you, dear! Good-bye!’

‘God bless you, dear! Good-bye!’

They kissed each other fervently.

‘Now, please take me home, Eddy, and let me be by myself.’

‘Don’t look round, Rosa,’ he cautioned her, as he drew her arm through his, and led her away. ‘Didn’t you see Jack?’

‘No! Where?’

‘Under the trees. He saw us, as we took leave of each other. Poor fellow! he little thinks we have parted. This will be a blow to him, I am much afraid!’

She hurried on, without resting, and hurried on until they had passed under the gatehouse into the street; once there, she asked:

‘Has he followed us? You can look without seeming to. Is he behind?’

‘No. Yes, he is! He has just passed out under the gateway. The dear, sympathetic old fellow likes to keep us in sight. I am afraid he will be bitterly disappointed!’

She pulled hurriedly at the handle of the hoarse old bell, and the gate soon opened. Before going in, she gave him one last, wide, wondering look, as if she would have asked him with imploring emphasis: ‘O! don’t you understand?’ And out of that look he vanished from her view.

CHAPTER XIV—WHEN SHALL THESE THREE MEET AGAIN?

Christmas Eve in Cloisterham. A few strange faces in the streets; a few other faces, half strange and half familiar, once the faces of Cloisterham children, now the faces of men and women who come back from the outer world at long intervals to find the city wonderfully shrunken in size, as if it had not washed by any means well in the meanwhile. To these, the striking of the Cathedral clock, and the cawing of the rooks from the Cathedral tower, are like voices of their nursery time. To such as these, it has happened in their dying hours afar off, that they have imagined their chamber-floor to be strewn with the autumnal leaves fallen from the elm-trees in the Close: so have the rustling sounds and fresh scents of their earliest impressions revived when the circle of their lives was very nearly traced, and the beginning and the end were drawing close together.

Seasonable tokens are about. Red berries shine here and there in the lattices of Minor Canon Corner; Mr. and Mrs. Tope are daintily sticking sprigs of holly into the carvings and sconces of the Cathedral stalls, as if they were sticking them into the coat-button-holes of the Dean and Chapter. Lavish profusion is in the shops: particularly in the articles of currants, raisins, spices, candied peel, and moist sugar. An unusual air of gallantry and dissipation is abroad; evinced in an immense bunch of mistletoe hanging in the greengrocer’s shop doorway, and a poor little Twelfth Cake, culminating in the figure of a Harlequin—such a very poor little Twelfth Cake, that one would rather called it a Twenty-fourth Cake or a Forty-eighth Cake—to be raffled for at the pastrycook’s, terms one shilling per member. Public amusements are not wanting. The Wax-Work which made so deep an impression on the reflective mind of the Emperor of China is to be seen by particular desire during Christmas Week only, on the premises of the bankrupt livery-stable-keeper up the lane; and a new grand comic Christmas pantomime is to be produced at the Theatre: the latter heralded by the portrait of Signor Jacksonini the clown, saying ‘How do you do to-morrow?’ quite as large as life, and almost as miserably. In short, Cloisterham is up and doing: though from this description the High School and Miss Twinkleton's are to be excluded. From the former establishment the scholars have gone home, every one of them in love with one of Miss Twinkleton's young ladies (who knows nothing about it); and only the handmaidens flutter occasionally in the windows of the latter. It is noticed, by the bye, that these damsels become, within the limits of decorum, more skittish when thus intrusted with the concrete representation of their sex, than when dividing the representation with Miss Twinkleton's young ladies.

Three are to meet at the gatehouse to-night. How does each one of the three get through the day?

Neville Landless, though absolved from his books for the time by Mr. Crisparkle—whose fresh nature is by no means insensible to the charms of a holiday—reads and writes in his quiet room, with a concentrated air, until it is two hours past noon. He then sets himself to clearing his table, to arranging his books, and to tearing up and burning his stray papers. He makes a clean sweep of all untidy accumulations, puts all his drawers in order, and leaves no note or scrap of paper undestroyed, save such memoranda as bear directly on his studies. This done, he turns to his wardrobe, selects a few articles of ordinary wear—among them, change of stout shoes and socks for walking—and packs these in a knapsack. This knapsack is new, and he bought it in the High Street yesterday. He also purchased, at the same time and at the same place, a heavy walking-stick; strong in the handle for the grip of the hand, and iron-shod. He tries this, swings it, poises it, and lays it by, with the knapsack, on a window-seat. By this time his arrangements are complete.

He dresses for going out, and is in the act of going—indeed has left his room, and has met the Minor Canon on the staircase, coming out of his bedroom upon the same story—when he turns back again for his walking-stick, thinking he will carry it now. Mr. Crisparkle, who has paused on the staircase, sees it in his hand on his immediately reappearing, takes it from him, and asks him with a smile how he chooses a stick?

'Really I don't know that I understand the subject,' he answers. 'I chose it for its weight.'

'Much too heavy, Neville; *much* too heavy.'

'To rest upon in a long walk, sir?'

'Rest upon?' repeats Mr. Crisparkle, throwing himself into pedestrian form. 'You don't rest upon it; you merely balance with it.'

‘I shall know better, with practice, sir. I have not lived in a walking country, you know.’

‘True,’ says Mr. Crisparkle. ‘Get into a little training, and we will have a few score miles together. I should leave you nowhere now. Do you come back before dinner?’

‘I think not, as we dine early.’

Mr. Crisparkle gives him a bright nod and a cheerful good-bye; expressing (not without intention) absolute confidence and ease.

Neville repairs to the Nuns’ House, and requests that Miss Landless may be informed that her brother is there, by appointment. He waits at the gate, not even crossing the threshold; for he is on his parole not to put himself in Rosa’s way.

His sister is at least as mindful of the obligation they have taken on themselves as he can be, and loses not a moment in joining him. They meet affectionately, avoid lingering there, and walk towards the upper inland country.

‘I am not going to tread upon forbidden ground, Helena,’ says Neville, when they have walked some distance and are turning; ‘you will understand in another moment that I cannot help referring to—what shall I say?—my infatuation.’

‘Had you not better avoid it, Neville? You know that I can hear nothing.’

‘You can hear, my dear, what Mr. Crisparkle has heard, and heard with approval.’

‘Yes; I can hear so much.’

‘Well, it is this. I am not only unsettled and unhappy myself, but I am conscious of unsettling and interfering with other people. How do I know that, but for my unfortunate presence, you, and—and—the rest of that former party, our engaging guardian excepted, might be dining cheerfully in Minor Canon Corner to-morrow? Indeed it probably would be so. I can see too well that I am not high in the old lady’s opinion, and it is easy to understand what an irksome clog I must be upon the hospitalities of her orderly house—especially at this time of year—when I must be kept asunder from this person, and there is such a reason for my not being brought into contact with that person, and an unfavourable reputation has preceded me with such another person; and so on. I have put this very gently to Mr. Crisparkle, for you know his self-denying ways; but still I have put it. What I have laid much greater stress upon at the same time is, that I am engaged in a miserable struggle with myself, and that a little change and absence may enable me to come through it the better. So, the weather being bright and hard, I am going on a walking expedition, and intend taking myself out of everybody's way (my own included, I hope) to-morrow morning.'

'When to come back?'

'In a fortnight.'

'And going quite alone?'

'I am much better without company, even if there were any one but you to bear me company, my dear Helena.'

'Mr. Crisparkle entirely agrees, you say?'

'Entirely. I am not sure but that at first he was inclined to think it rather a moody scheme, and one that might do a brooding mind harm. But we took a moonlight walk last Monday night, to talk it over at leisure, and I represented the case to him as it really is. I showed him that I do want to conquer myself, and that, this evening well got over, it is surely better that I should be away from here just now, than here. I could hardly help meeting certain people walking together here, and that could do no good, and is certainly not the way to forget. A fortnight hence, that chance will probably be over, for the time; and when it again arises for the last time, why, I can again go away. Farther, I really do feel hopeful of bracing exercise and wholesome fatigue. You know that Mr. Crisparkle allows such things their full weight in the preservation of his own sound mind in his own sound body, and that his just spirit is not likely to maintain one set of natural laws for himself and another for me. He yielded to my view of the matter, when convinced that I was honestly in earnest; and so, with his full consent, I start to-morrow morning. Early enough to be not only out of the streets, but out of hearing of the bells, when the good people go to church.'

Helena thinks it over, and thinks well of it. Mr. Crisparkle doing so, she would do so; but she does originally, out of her own mind, think well of it, as a healthy project, denoting a sincere endeavour and an active attempt at self-correction. She is inclined to pity him, poor fellow, for going away solitary on the great Christmas festival; but she feels it much more to the purpose to encourage him. And she does encourage him.

He will write to her?

He will write to her every alternate day, and tell her all his adventures.

Does he send clothes on in advance of him?

‘My dear Helena, no. Travel like a pilgrim, with wallet and staff. My wallet—or my knapsack—is packed, and ready for strapping on; and here is my staff!’

He hands it to her; she makes the same remark as Mr. Crisparkle, that it is very heavy; and gives it back to him, asking what wood it is? Iron-wood.

Up to this point he has been extremely cheerful. Perhaps, the having to carry his case with her, and therefore to present it in its brightest aspect, has roused his spirits. Perhaps, the having done so with success, is followed by a revulsion. As the day closes in, and the city-lights begin to spring up before them, he grows depressed.

‘I wish I were not going to this dinner, Helena.’

‘Dear Neville, is it worth while to care much about it? Think how soon it will be over.’

‘How soon it will be over!’ he repeats gloomily. ‘Yes. But I don’t like it.’

There may be a moment’s awkwardness, she cheeringly represents to him, but it can only last a moment. He is quite sure of himself.

‘I wish I felt as sure of everything else, as I feel of myself,’ he answers her.

‘How strangely you speak, dear! What do you mean?’

‘Helena, I don’t know. I only know that I don’t like it. What a strange dead weight there is in the air!’

She calls his attention to those copperous clouds beyond the river, and says that the wind is rising. He scarcely speaks again, until he takes leave of her, at the gate of the Nuns’ House. She does not immediately enter, when they have parted, but remains looking after him along the street. Twice he passes the gatehouse, reluctant to enter. At length, the Cathedral clock chiming one quarter, with a rapid turn he hurries in.

And so *he* goes up the postern stair.

Edwin Drood passes a solitary day. Something of deeper moment than he had thought, has gone out of his life; and in the silence of his own chamber he wept for it last night. Though the image of Miss Landless still hovers in the background of his mind, the pretty little affectionate creature, so much firmer and wiser than he had supposed, occupies its stronghold. It is with some misgiving of his own unworthiness that he thinks of her, and of what they might have been to one another, if he had been more in earnest some time ago; if he had set a higher value on her; if, instead of accepting his lot in life as an inheritance of course, he had studied the right way to its appreciation and enhancement. And still, for all this, and though there is a sharp heartache in all this, the vanity and caprice of youth sustain that handsome figure of Miss Landless in the background of his mind.

That was a curious look of Rosa's when they parted at the gate. Did it mean that she saw below the surface of his thoughts, and down into their twilight depths? Scarcely that, for it was a look of astonished and keen inquiry. He decides that he cannot understand it, though it was remarkably expressive.

As he only waits for Mr. Grewgious now, and will depart immediately after having seen him, he takes a sauntering leave of the ancient city and its neighbourhood. He recalls the time when Rosa and he walked here or there, mere children, full of the dignity of being engaged. Poor children! he thinks, with a pitying sadness.

Finding that his watch has stopped, he turns into the jeweller's shop, to have it wound and set. The jeweller is knowing on the subject of a bracelet, which he begs leave to submit, in a general and quite aimless way. It would suit (he considers) a young bride, to perfection; especially if of a rather diminutive style of beauty. Finding the bracelet but coldly looked at, the jeweller invites attention to a tray of rings for gentlemen; here is a style of ring, now, he remarks—a very chaste signet—which gentlemen are much given to purchasing, when changing their condition. A ring of a very responsible appearance. With the date of their wedding-day engraved inside, several gentlemen have preferred it to any other kind of memento.

The rings are as coldly viewed as the bracelet. Edwin tells the tempter that he wears no jewellery but his watch and chain, which were his father's; and his shirt-pin.

'That I was aware of,' is the jeweller's reply, 'for Mr. Jasper dropped in for a watch-glass the other day, and, in fact, I showed these articles to him, remarking that if he *should* wish to make a present to a gentleman relative, on any particular occasion—But he said with a smile that he had an inventory in his mind of all the jewellery his gentleman relative ever wore; namely, his watch and chain, and his shirt-pin.' Still (the jeweller considers) that might not apply to all times, though applying to the present time. ‘Twenty minutes past two, Mr. Drood, I set your watch at. Let me recommend you not to let it run down, sir.’

Edwin takes his watch, puts it on, and goes out, thinking: ‘Dear old Jack! If I were to make an extra crease in my neckcloth, he would think it worth noticing!’

He strolls about and about, to pass the time until the dinner-hour. It somehow happens that Cloisterham seems reproachful to him to-day; has fault to find with him, as if he had not used it well; but is far more pensive with him than angry. His wonted carelessness is replaced by a wistful looking at, and dwelling upon, all the old landmarks. He will soon be far away, and may never see them again, he thinks. Poor youth! Poor youth!

As dusk draws on, he paces the Monks’ Vineyard. He has walked to and fro, full half an hour by the Cathedral chimes, and it has closed in dark, before he becomes quite aware of a woman crouching on the ground near a wicket gate in a corner. The gate commands a cross bye-path, little used in the gloaming; and the figure must have been there all the time, though he has but gradually and lately made it out.

He strikes into that path, and walks up to the wicket. By the light of a lamp near it, he sees that the woman is of a haggard appearance, and that her weazen chin is resting on her hands, and that her eyes are staring—with an unwinking, blind sort of steadfastness—before her.

Always kindly, but moved to be unusually kind this evening, and having bestowed kind words on most of the children and aged people he has met, he at once bends down, and speaks to this woman.

‘Are you ill?’

‘No, deary,’ she answers, without looking at him, and with no departure from her strange blind stare.

‘Are you blind?’

‘No, deary.’

‘Are you lost, homeless, faint? What is the matter, that you stay here in the cold so long, without moving?’

By slow and stiff efforts, she appears to contract her vision until it can rest upon him; and then a curious film passes over her, and she begins to shake.

He straightens himself, recoils a step, and looks down at her in a dread amazement; for he seems to know her.

‘Good Heaven!’ he thinks, next moment. ‘Like Jack that night!’

As he looks down at her, she looks up at him, and whimpers: ‘My lungs is weakly; my lungs is dreffle bad. Poor me, poor me, my cough is rattling dry!’ and coughs in confirmation horribly.

‘Where do you come from?’

‘Come from London, deary.’ (Her cough still rending her.)

‘Where are you going to?’

‘Back to London, deary. I came here, looking for a needle in a haystack, and I ain’t found it. Look’ee, deary; give me three-and-sixpence, and don’t you be afeard for me. I’ll get back to London then, and trouble no one. I’m in a business.—Ah, me! It’s slack, it’s slack, and times is very bad!—but I can make a shift to live by it.’

‘Do you eat opium?’

‘Smokes it,’ she replies with difficulty, still racked by her cough. ‘Give me three-and-sixpence, and I’ll lay it out well, and get back. If you don’t give me three-and-sixpence, don’t give me a brass farden. And if you do give me three-and-sixpence, deary, I’ll tell you something.’

He counts the money from his pocket, and puts it in her hand. She instantly clutches it tight, and rises to her feet with a croaking laugh of satisfaction.

‘Bless ye! Hark’ee, dear genl’mn. What’s your Chris’en name?’

‘Edwin.’

‘Edwin, Edwin, Edwin,’ she repeats, trailing off into a drowsy repetition of the word; and then asks suddenly: ‘Is the short of that name Eddy?’

‘It is sometimes called so,’ he replies, with the colour starting to his face.

‘Don’t sweethearts call it so?’ she asks, pondering.

‘How should I know?’

‘Haven’t you a sweetheart, upon your soul?’

‘None.’

She is moving away, with another ‘Bless ye, and thank’ee, deary!’ when he adds: ‘You were to tell me something; you may as well do so.’

‘So I was, so I was. Well, then. Whisper. You be thankful that your name ain’t Ned.’

He looks at her quite steadily, as he asks: ‘Why?’

‘Because it’s a bad name to have just now.’

‘How a bad name?’

‘A threatened name. A dangerous name.’

‘The proverb says that threatened men live long,’ he tells her, lightly.

‘Then Ned—so threatened is he, wherever he may be while I am a-talking to you, deary—should live to all eternity!’ replies the woman.

She has leaned forward to say it in his ear, with her forefinger shaking before his eyes, and now huddles herself together, and with another ‘Bless ye, and thank’ee!’ goes away in the direction of the Travellers’ Lodging House.

This is not an inspiriting close to a dull day. Alone, in a sequestered place, surrounded by vestiges of old time and decay, it rather has a tendency to call a shudder into being. He makes for the better-lighted streets, and resolves as he walks on to say nothing of this to-night, but to mention it to Jack (who alone calls him Ned), as an odd coincidence, to-morrow; of course only as a coincidence, and not as anything better worth remembering.

Still, it holds to him, as many things much better worth remembering never did. He has another mile or so, to linger out before the dinner-hour; and, when he walks over the bridge and by the river, the woman’s words are in the rising wind, in the angry sky, in the troubled water, in the flickering lights. There is some solemn echo of them even in the Cathedral chime, which strikes a sudden surprise to his heart as he turns in under the archway of the gatehouse.

And so *he* goes up the postern stair.

John Jasper passes a more agreeable and cheerful day than either of his guests. Having no music-lessons to give in the holiday season, his time is his own, but for the Cathedral services. He is early among the shopkeepers, ordering little table luxuries that his nephew likes. His nephew will not be with him long, he tells his provision-dealers, and so must be petted and made much of. While out on his hospitable preparations, he looks in on Mr. Sapsea; and mentions that dear Ned, and that inflammable young spark of Mr. Crisparkle’s, are to dine at the gatehouse to-day, and make up their difference. Mr. Sapsea is by no means friendly towards the inflammable young spark. He says that his complexion is ‘Un-English.’ And when Mr. Sapsea has once declared anything to be Un-English, he considers that thing everlastingly sunk in the bottomless pit.

John Jasper is truly sorry to hear Mr. Sapsea speak thus, for he knows right well that Mr. Sapsea never speaks without a meaning, and that he has a subtle trick of being right. Mr. Sapsea (by a very remarkable coincidence) is of exactly that opinion.

Mr. Jasper is in beautiful voice this day. In the pathetic supplication to have his heart inclined to keep this law, he quite astonishes his fellows by his melodious power. He has never sung difficult music with such skill and harmony, as in this day’s Anthem. His nervous temperament is occasionally prone to take difficult music a little too quickly; to-day, his time is perfect.

These results are probably attained through a grand composure of the spirits. The mere mechanism of his throat is a little tender, for he wears, both with his singing-robe and with his ordinary dress, a large black scarf of strong close-woven silk, slung loosely round his neck. But his composure is so noticeable, that Mr. Crisparkle speaks of it as they come out from Vespers.

‘I must thank you, Jasper, for the pleasure with which I have heard you to-day. Beautiful! Delightful! You could not have so outdone yourself, I hope, without being wonderfully well.’

‘I *am* wonderfully well.’

‘Nothing unequal,’ says the Minor Canon, with a smooth motion of his hand: ‘nothing unsteady, nothing forced, nothing avoided; all thoroughly done in a masterly manner, with perfect self-command.’

‘Thank you. I hope so, if it is not too much to say.’

‘One would think, Jasper, you had been trying a new medicine for that occasional indisposition of yours.’

‘No, really? That’s well observed; for I have.’

‘Then stick to it, my good fellow,’ says Mr. Crisparkle, clapping him on the shoulder with friendly encouragement, ‘stick to it.’

‘I will.’

‘I congratulate you,’ Mr. Crisparkle pursues, as they come out of the Cathedral, ‘on all accounts.’

‘Thank you again. I will walk round to the Corner with you, if you don’t object; I have plenty of time before my company come; and I want to say a word to you, which I think you will not be displeased to hear.’

‘What is it?’

‘Well. We were speaking, the other evening, of my black humours.’

Mr. Crisparkle’s face falls, and he shakes his head deploringly.

‘I said, you know, that I should make you an antidote to those black humours; and you said you hoped I would consign them to the flames.’

‘And I still hope so, Jasper.’

‘With the best reason in the world! I mean to burn this year’s Diary at the year’s end.’

‘Because you—?’ Mr. Crisparkle brightens greatly as he thus begins.

‘You anticipate me. Because I feel that I have been out of sorts, gloomy, bilious, brain-oppressed, whatever it may be. You said I had been exaggerative. So I have.’

Mr. Crisparkle’s brightened face brightens still more.

‘I couldn’t see it then, because I *was* out of sorts; but I am in a healthier state now, and I acknowledge it with genuine pleasure. I made a great deal of a very little; that’s the fact.’

‘It does me good,’ cries Mr. Crisparkle, ‘to hear you say it!’

‘A man leading a monotonous life,’ Jasper proceeds, ‘and getting his nerves, or his stomach, out of order, dwells upon an idea until it loses its proportions. That was my case with the idea in question. So I shall burn the evidence of my case, when the book is full, and begin the next volume with a clearer vision.’

‘This is better,’ says Mr. Crisparkle, stopping at the steps of his own door to shake hands, ‘than I could have hoped.’

‘Why, naturally,’ returns Jasper. ‘You had but little reason to hope that I should become more like yourself. You are always training yourself to be, mind and body, as clear as crystal, and you always are, and never change; whereas I am a muddy, solitary, moping weed. However, I have got over that mope. Shall I wait, while you ask if Mr. Neville has left for my place? If not, he and I may walk round together.’

‘I think,’ says Mr. Crisparkle, opening the entrance-door with his key, ‘that he left some time ago; at least I know he left, and I think he has not come back. But I’ll inquire. You won’t come in?’

‘My company wait,’ said Jasper, with a smile.

The Minor Canon disappears, and in a few moments returns. As he thought, Mr. Neville has not come back; indeed, as he remembers now, Mr. Neville said he would probably go straight to the gatehouse.

‘Bad manners in a host!’ says Jasper. ‘My company will be there before me! What will you bet that I don’t find my company embracing?’

‘I will bet—or I would, if ever I did bet,’ returns Mr. Crisparkle, ‘that your company will have a gay entertainer this evening.’

Jasper nods, and laughs good-night!

He retraces his steps to the Cathedral door, and turns down past it to the gatehouse. He sings, in a low voice and with delicate expression, as he walks along. It still seems as if a false note were not within his power to-night, and as if nothing could hurry or retard him. Arriving thus under the arched entrance of his dwelling, he pauses for an instant in the shelter to pull off that great black scarf, and bang it in a loop upon his arm. For that brief time, his face is knitted and stern. But it immediately clears, as he resumes his singing, and his way.

And so *he* goes up the postern stair.

The red light burns steadily all the evening in the lighthouse on the margin of the tide of busy life. Softened sounds and hum of traffic pass it and flow on irregularly into the lonely Precincts; but very little else goes by, save violent rushes of wind. It comes on to blow a boisterous gale.

The Precincts are never particularly well lighted; but the strong blasts of wind blowing out many of the lamps (in some instances shattering the frames too, and bringing the glass rattling to the ground), they are unusually dark to-night. The darkness is augmented and confused, by flying dust from the earth, dry twigs from the trees, and great ragged fragments from the rooks’ nests up in the tower. The trees themselves so toss and creak, as this tangible part of the darkness madly whirls about, that they seem in peril of being torn out of the earth: while ever and again a crack, and a rushing fall, denote that some large branch has yielded to the storm.

Not such power of wind has blown for many a winter night. Chimneys topple in the streets, and people hold to posts and corners, and to one another, to keep themselves upon their feet. The violent rushes abate not, but increase in frequency and fury until at midnight, when the streets are empty, the storm goes thundering along them, rattling at all the latches, and tearing at all the shutters, as if warning the people to get up and fly with it, rather than have the roofs brought down upon their brains.

Still, the red light burns steadily. Nothing is steady but the red light.

All through the night the wind blows, and abates not. But early in the morning, when there is barely enough light in the east to dim the stars, it begins to lull. From that time, with occasional wild charges, like a wounded monster dying, it drops and sinks; and at full daylight it is dead.

It is then seen that the hands of the Cathedral clock are torn off; that lead from the roof has been stripped away, rolled up, and blown into the Close; and that some stones have been displaced upon the summit of the great tower. Christmas morning though it be, it is necessary to send up workmen, to ascertain the extent of the damage done. These, led by Durdles, go aloft; while Mr. Tope and a crowd of early idlers gather down in Minor Canon Corner, shading their eyes and watching for their appearance up there.

This cluster is suddenly broken and put aside by the hands of Mr. Jasper; all the gazing eyes are brought down to the earth by his loudly inquiring of Mr. Crisparkle, at an open window:

‘Where is my nephew?’

‘He has not been here. Is he not with you?’

‘No. He went down to the river last night, with Mr. Neville, to look at the storm, and has not been back. Call Mr. Neville!’

‘He left this morning, early.’

‘Left this morning early? Let me in! let me in!’

There is no more looking up at the tower, now. All the assembled eyes are turned on Mr. Jasper, white, half-dressed, panting, and clinging to the rail before the Minor Canon’s house.

CHAPTER XV—IMPEACHED

Neville Landless had started so early and walked at so good a pace, that when the church-bells began to ring in Cloisterham for morning service, he was eight miles away. As he wanted his breakfast by that time, having set forth on a crust of bread, he stopped at the next roadside tavern to refresh.

Visitors in want of breakfast—unless they were horses or cattle, for which class of guests there was preparation enough in the way of water-trough and hay—were so unusual at the sign of The Tilted Wagon, that it took a long time to get the wagon into the track of tea and toast and bacon. Neville in the interval, sitting in a sanded parlour, wondering in how long a time after he had gone, the sneezy fire of damp fagots would begin to make somebody else warm.

Indeed, The Tilted Wagon, as a cool establishment on the top of a hill, where the ground before the door was puddled with damp hoofs and trodden straw; where a scolding landlady slapped a moist baby (with one red sock on and one wanting), in the bar; where the cheese was cast aground upon a shelf, in company with a mouldy tablecloth and a green-handled knife, in a sort of cast-iron canoe; where the pale-faced bread shed tears of crumb over its shipwreck in another canoe; where the family linen, half washed and half dried, led a public life of lying about; where everything to drink was drunk out of mugs, and everything else was suggestive of a rhyme to mugs; The Tilted Wagon, all these things considered, hardly kept its painted promise of providing good entertainment for Man and Beast. However, Man, in the present case, was not critical, but took what entertainment he could get, and went on again after a longer rest than he needed.

He stopped at some quarter of a mile from the house, hesitating whether to pursue the road, or to follow a cart track between two high hedgerows, which led across the slope of a breezy heath, and evidently struck into the road again by-and-by. He decided in favour of this latter track, and pursued it with some toil; the rise being steep, and the way worn into deep ruts.

He was labouring along, when he became aware of some other pedestrians behind him. As they were coming up at a faster pace than his, he stood aside, against one of the high banks, to let them pass. But their manner was very curious. Only four of them passed. Other four slackened speed, and loitered as intending to follow him when he should go on. The remainder of the party (half-a-dozen perhaps) turned, and went back at a great rate.

He looked at the four behind him, and he looked at the four before him. They all returned his look. He resumed his way. The four in advance went on, constantly looking back; the four in the rear came closing up.

When they all ranged out from the narrow track upon the open slope of the heath, and this order was maintained, let him diverge as he would to either side, there was no longer room to doubt that he was beset by these fellows. He stopped, as a last test; and they all stopped.

‘Why do you attend upon me in this way?’ he asked the whole body. ‘Are you a pack of thieves?’

‘Don’t answer him,’ said one of the number; he did not see which. ‘Better be quiet.’

‘Better be quiet?’ repeated Neville. ‘Who said so?’

Nobody replied.

‘It’s good advice, whichever of you skulkers gave it,’ he went on angrily. ‘I will not submit to be penned in between four men there, and four men there. I wish to pass, and I mean to pass, those four in front.’

They were all standing still; himself included.

‘If eight men, or four men, or two men, set upon one,’ he proceeded, growing more enraged, ‘the one has no chance but to set his mark upon some of them. And, by the Lord, I’ll do it, if I am interrupted any farther!’

Shouldering his heavy stick, and quickening his pace, he shot on to pass the four ahead. The largest and strongest man of the number changed swiftly to the side on which he came up, and dexterously closed with him and went down with him; but not before the heavy stick had descended smartly.

‘Let him be!’ said this man in a suppressed voice, as they struggled together on the grass. ‘Fair play! His is the build of a girl to mine, and he’s got a weight strapped to his back besides. Let him alone. I’ll manage him.’

After a little rolling about, in a close scuffle which caused the faces of both to be besmeared with blood, the man took his knee from Neville’s chest, and rose, saying: ‘There! Now take him arm-in-arm, any two of you!’

It was immediately done.

‘As to our being a pack of thieves, Mr. Landless,’ said the man, as he spat out some blood, and wiped more from his face; ‘you know better than that at midday. We wouldn’t have touched you if you hadn’t forced us. We’re going to take you round to the high road, anyhow, and you’ll find help enough against thieves there, if you want it.—Wipe his face, somebody; see how it’s a-trickling down him!’

When his face was cleansed, Neville recognised in the speaker, Joe, driver of the Cloisterham omnibus, whom he had seen but once, and that on the day of his arrival.

‘And what I recommend you for the present, is, don’t talk, Mr. Landless. You’ll find a friend waiting for you, at the high road—gone ahead by the other way when we split into two parties—and you had much better say nothing till you come up with him. Bring that stick along, somebody else, and let’s be moving!’

Utterly bewildered, Neville stared around him and said not a word. Walking between his two conductors, who held his arms in theirs, he went on, as in a dream, until they came again into the high road, and into the midst of a little group of people. The men who had turned back were among the group; and its central figures were Mr. Jasper and Mr. Crisparkle. Neville’s conductors took him up to the Minor Canon, and there released him, as an act of deference to that gentleman.

‘What is all this, sir? What is the matter? I feel as if I had lost my senses!’ cried Neville, the group closing in around him.

‘Where is my nephew?’ asked Mr. Jasper, wildly.

‘Where is your nephew?’ repeated Neville, ‘Why do you ask me?’

‘I ask you,’ retorted Jasper, ‘because you were the last person in his company, and he is not to be found.’

‘Not to be found!’ cried Neville, aghast.

‘Stay, stay,’ said Mr. Crisparkle. ‘Permit me, Jasper. Mr. Neville, you are confounded; collect your thoughts; it is of great importance that you should collect your thoughts; attend to me.’

‘I will try, sir, but I seem mad.’

‘You left Mr. Jasper last night with Edwin Drood?’

‘Yes.’

‘At what hour?’

‘Was it at twelve o’clock?’ asked Neville, with his hand to his confused head, and appealing to Jasper.

‘Quite right,’ said Mr. Crisparkle; ‘the hour Mr. Jasper has already named to me. You went down to the river together?’

‘Undoubtedly. To see the action of the wind there.’

‘What followed? How long did you stay there?’

‘About ten minutes; I should say not more. We then walked together to your house, and he took leave of me at the door.’

‘Did he say that he was going down to the river again?’

‘No. He said that he was going straight back.’

The bystanders looked at one another, and at Mr. Crisparkle. To whom Mr. Jasper, who had been intensely watching Neville, said, in a low, distinct, suspicious voice: ‘What are those stains upon his dress?’

All eyes were turned towards the blood upon his clothes.

‘And here are the same stains upon this stick!’ said Jasper, taking it from the hand of the man who held it. ‘I know the stick to be his, and he carried it last night. What does this mean?’

‘In the name of God, say what it means, Neville!’ urged Mr. Crisparkle.

‘That man and I,’ said Neville, pointing out his late adversary, ‘had a struggle for the stick just now, and you may see the same marks on him, sir. What was I to suppose, when I found myself molested by eight people? Could I dream of the true reason when they would give me none at all?’

They admitted that they had thought it discreet to be silent, and that the struggle had taken place. And yet the very men who had seen it looked darkly at the smears which the bright cold air had already dried.

‘We must return, Neville,’ said Mr. Crisparkle; ‘of course you will be glad to come back to clear yourself?’

‘Of course, sir.’

‘Mr. Landless will walk at my side,’ the Minor Canon continued, looking around him. ‘Come, Neville!’

They set forth on the walk back; and the others, with one exception, straggled after them at various distances. Jasper walked on the other side of Neville, and never quitted that position. He was silent, while Mr. Crisparkle more than once repeated his former questions, and while Neville repeated his former answers; also, while they both hazarded some explanatory conjectures. He was obstinately silent, because Mr. Crisparkle’s manner directly appealed to him to take some part in the discussion, and no appeal would move his fixed face. When they drew near to the city, and it was suggested by the Minor Canon that they might do well in calling on the Mayor at once, he assented with a stern nod; but he spake no word until they stood in Mr. Sapsea's parlour.

Mr. Sapsea being informed by Mr. Crisparkle of the circumstances under which they desired to make a voluntary statement before him, Mr. Jasper broke silence by declaring that he placed his whole reliance, humanly speaking, on Mr. Sapsea's penetration. There was no conceivable reason why his nephew should have suddenly absconded, unless Mr. Sapsea could suggest one, and then he would defer. There was no intelligible likelihood of his having returned to the river, and been accidentally drowned in the dark, unless it should appear likely to Mr. Sapsea, and then again he would defer. He washed his hands as clean as he could of all horrible suspicions, unless it should appear to Mr. Sapsea that some such were inseparable from his last companion before his disappearance (not on good terms with previously), and then, once more, he would defer. His own state of mind, he being distracted with doubts, and labouring under dismal apprehensions, was not to be safely trusted; but Mr. Sapsea's was.

Mr. Sapsea expressed his opinion that the case had a dark look; in short (and here his eyes rested full on Neville's countenance), an Un-English complexion. Having made this grand point, he wandered into a denser haze and maze of nonsense than even a mayor might have been expected to disport himself in, and came out of it with the brilliant discovery that to take the life of a fellow-creature was to take something that didn't belong to you. He wavered whether or no he should at once issue his warrant for the committal of Neville Landless to jail, under circumstances of grave suspicion; and he might have gone so far as to do it but for the indignant protest of the Minor Canon: who undertook for the young man's remaining in his own house, and being produced by his own hands, whenever demanded. Mr. Jasper then understood Mr. Sapsea to suggest that the river should be dragged, that its banks should be rigidly examined, that particulars of the disappearance should be sent to all outlying places and to London, and that placards and advertisements should be widely circulated imploring Edwin Drood, if for any unknown reason he had withdrawn himself from his uncle's home and society, to take pity on that loving kinsman's sore bereavement and distress, and somehow inform him that he was yet alive. Mr. Sapsea was perfectly understood, for this was exactly his meaning (though he had said nothing about it); and measures were taken towards all these ends immediately.

It would be difficult to determine which was the more oppressed with horror and amazement: Neville Landless, or John Jasper. But that Jasper's position forced him to be active, while Neville's forced him to be passive, there would have been nothing to choose between them. Each was bowed down and broken.

With the earliest light of the next morning, men were at work upon the river, and other men—most of whom volunteered for the service—were examining the banks. All the livelong day the search went on; upon the river, with barge and pole, and drag and net; upon the muddy and rushy shore, with jack-boots, hatchet, spade, rope, dogs, and all imaginable appliances. Even at night, the river was specked with lanterns, and lurid with fires; far-off creeks, into which the tide washed as it changed, had their knots of watchers, listening to the lapping of the stream, and looking out for any burden it might bear; remote shingly causeways near the sea, and lonely points off which there was a race of water, had their unwonted flaring cressets and rough-coated figures when the next day dawned; but no trace of Edwin Drood revisited the light of the sun.

All that day, again, the search went on. Now, in barge and boat; and now ashore among the osiers, or tramping amidst mud and stakes and jagged stones in low-lying places, where solitary watermarks and signals of strange shapes showed like spectres, John Jasper worked and toiled. But to no purpose; for still no trace of Edwin Drood revisited the light of the sun.

Setting his watches for that night again, so that vigilant eyes should be kept on every change of tide, he went home exhausted. Unkempt and disordered, bedaubed with mud that had dried upon him, and with much of his clothing torn to rags, he had but just dropped into his easy-chair, when Mr. Grewgious stood before him.

'This is strange news,' said Mr. Grewgious.

'Strange and fearful news.'

Jasper had merely lifted up his heavy eyes to say it, and now dropped them again as he drooped, worn out, over one side of his easy-chair.

Mr. Grewgious smoothed his head and face, and stood looking at the fire.

'How is your ward?' asked Jasper, after a time, in a faint, fatigued voice.

'Poor little thing! You may imagine her condition.'

'Have you seen his sister?' inquired Jasper, as before.

‘Whose?’

The curtness of the counter-question, and the cool, slow manner in which, as he put it, Mr. Grewgious moved his eyes from the fire to his companion’s face, might at any other time have been exasperating. In his depression and exhaustion, Jasper merely opened his eyes to say: ‘The suspected young man’s.’

‘Do you suspect him?’ asked Mr. Grewgious.

‘I don’t know what to think. I cannot make up my mind.’

‘Nor I,’ said Mr. Grewgious. ‘But as you spoke of him as the suspected young man, I thought you *had* made up your mind.—I have just left Miss Landless.’

‘What is her state?’

‘Defiance of all suspicion, and unbounded faith in her brother.’

‘Poor thing!’

‘However,’ pursued Mr. Grewgious, ‘it is not of her that I came to speak. It is of my ward. I have a communication to make that will surprise you. At least, it has surprised me.’

Jasper, with a groaning sigh, turned wearily in his chair.

‘Shall I put it off till to-morrow?’ said Mr. Grewgious. ‘Mind, I warn you, that I think it will surprise you!’

More attention and concentration came into John Jasper’s eyes as they caught sight of Mr. Grewgious smoothing his head again, and again looking at the fire; but now, with a compressed and determined mouth.

‘What is it?’ demanded Jasper, becoming upright in his chair.

‘To be sure,’ said Mr. Grewgious, provokingly slowly and internally, as he kept his eyes on the fire: ‘I might have known it sooner; she gave me the opening; but I am such an exceedingly Angular man, that it never occurred to me; I took all for granted.’

‘What is it?’ demanded Jasper once more.

Mr. Grewgious, alternately opening and shutting the palms of his hands as he warmed them at the fire, and looking fixedly at him sideways, and never changing either his action or his look in all that followed, went on to reply.

‘This young couple, the lost youth and Miss Rosa, my ward, though so long betrothed, and so long recognising their betrothal, and so near being married—’

Mr. Grewgious saw a staring white face, and two quivering white lips, in the easy-chair, and saw two muddy hands gripping its sides. But for the hands, he might have thought he had never seen the face.

'—This young couple came gradually to the discovery (made on both sides pretty equally, I think), that they would be happier and better, both in their present and their future lives, as affectionate friends, or say rather as brother and sister, than as husband and wife.'

Mr. Grewgious saw a lead-coloured face in the easy-chair, and on its surface dreadful starting drops or bubbles, as if of steel.

'This young couple formed at length the healthy resolution of interchanging their discoveries, openly, sensibly, and tenderly. They met for that purpose. After some innocent and generous talk, they agreed to dissolve their existing, and their intended, relations, for ever and ever.'

Mr. Grewgious saw a ghastly figure rise, open-mouthed, from the easy-chair, and lift its outspread hands towards its head.

'One of this young couple, and that one your nephew, fearful, however, that in the tenderness of your affection for him you would be bitterly disappointed by so wide a departure from his projected life, forbore to tell you the secret, for a few days, and left it to be disclosed by me, when I should come down to speak to you, and he would be gone. I speak to you, and he is gone.'

Mr. Grewgious saw the ghastly figure throw back its head, clutch its hair with its hands, and turn with a writhing action from him.

'I have now said all I have to say: except that this young couple parted, firmly, though not without tears and sorrow, on the evening when you last saw them together.'

Mr. Grewgious heard a terrible shriek, and saw no ghastly figure, sitting or standing; saw nothing but a heap of torn and miry clothes upon the floor.

Not changing his action even then, he opened and shut the palms of his hands as he warmed them, and looked down at it.

CHAPTER XVI—DEVOTED

When John Jasper recovered from his fit or swoon, he found himself being tended by Mr. and Mrs. Tope, whom his visitor had summoned for the purpose. His visitor, wooden of aspect, sat stiffly in a chair, with his hands upon his knees, watching his recovery.

‘There! You’ve come to nicely now, sir,’ said the tearful Mrs. Tope; ‘you were thoroughly worn out, and no wonder!’

‘A man,’ said Mr. Grewgious, with his usual air of repeating a lesson, ‘cannot have his rest broken, and his mind cruelly tormented, and his body overtaxed by fatigue, without being thoroughly worn out.’

‘I fear I have alarmed you?’ Jasper apologised faintly, when he was helped into his easy-chair.

‘Not at all, I thank you,’ answered Mr. Grewgious.

‘You are too considerate.’

‘Not at all, I thank you,’ answered Mr. Grewgious again.

‘You must take some wine, sir,’ said Mrs. Tope, ‘and the jelly that I had ready for you, and that you wouldn’t put your lips to at noon, though I warned you what would come of it, you know, and you not breakfasted; and you must have a wing of the roast fowl that has been put back twenty times if it’s been put back once. It shall all be on table in five minutes, and this good gentleman belike will stop and see you take it.’

This good gentleman replied with a snort, which might mean yes, or no, or anything or nothing, and which Mrs. Tope would have found highly mystifying, but that her attention was divided by the service of the table.

‘You will take something with me?’ said Jasper, as the cloth was laid.

‘I couldn’t get a morsel down my throat, I thank you,’ answered Mr. Grewgious.

Jasper both ate and drank almost voraciously. Combined with the hurry in his mode of doing it, was an evident indifference to the taste of what he took, suggesting that he ate and drank to fortify himself against any other failure of the spirits, far more than to gratify his palate. Mr. Grewgious in the meantime sat upright, with no expression in his face, and a hard kind of imperturbably polite protest all over him: as though he would have said, in reply to some invitation to discourse; ‘I couldn’t originate the faintest approach to an observation on any subject whatever, I thank you.’

‘Do you know,’ said Jasper, when he had pushed away his plate and glass, and had sat meditating for a few minutes: ‘do you know that I find some crumbs of comfort in the communication with which you have so much amazed me?’

‘*Do* you?’ returned Mr. Grewgious, pretty plainly adding the unspoken clause: ‘I don’t, I thank you!’

‘After recovering from the shock of a piece of news of my dear boy, so entirely unexpected, and so destructive of all the castles I had built for him; and after having had time to think of it; yes.’

‘I shall be glad to pick up your crumbs,’ said Mr. Grewgious, dryly.

‘Is there not, or is there—if I deceive myself, tell me so, and shorten my pain—is there not, or is there, hope that, finding himself in this new position, and becoming sensitively alive to the awkward burden of explanation, in this quarter, and that, and the other, with which it would load him, he avoided the awkwardness, and took to flight?’

‘Such a thing might be,’ said Mr. Grewgious, pondering.

‘Such a thing has been. I have read of cases in which people, rather than face a seven days’ wonder, and have to account for themselves to the idle and impertinent, have taken themselves away, and been long unheard of.’

‘I believe such things have happened,’ said Mr. Grewgious, pondering still.

‘When I had, and could have, no suspicion,’ pursued Jasper, eagerly following the new track, ‘that the dear lost boy had withheld anything from me—most of all, such a leading matter as this—what gleam of light was there for me in the whole black sky? When I supposed that his intended wife was here, and his marriage close at hand, how could I entertain the possibility of his voluntarily leaving this place, in a manner that would be so unaccountable, capricious, and cruel? But now that I know what you have told me, is there no little chink through which day pierces? Supposing him to have disappeared of his own act, is not his disappearance more accountable and less cruel? The fact of his having just parted from your ward, is in itself a sort of reason for his going away. It does not make his mysterious departure the less cruel to me, it is true; but it relieves it of cruelty to her.’

Mr. Grewgious could not but assent to this.

‘And even as to me,’ continued Jasper, still pursuing the new track, with ardour, and, as he did so, brightening with hope: ‘he knew that you were coming to me; he knew that you were intrusted to tell me what you have told me; if your doing so has awakened a new train of thought in my perplexed mind, it reasonably follows that, from the same premises, he might have foreseen the inferences that I should draw. Grant that he did foresee them; and even the cruelty to me—and who am I!—John Jasper, Music Master, vanishes!’—

Once more, Mr. Grewgious could not but assent to this.

‘I have had my distrusts, and terrible distrusts they have been,’ said Jasper; ‘but your disclosure, overpowering as it was at first—showing me that my own dear boy had had a great disappointing reservation from me, who so fondly loved him, kindles hope within me. You do not extinguish it when I state it, but admit it to be a reasonable hope. I begin to believe it possible:’ here he clasped his hands: ‘that he may have disappeared from among us of his own accord, and that he may yet be alive and well.’

Mr. Crisparkle came in at the moment. To whom Mr. Jasper repeated:

‘I begin to believe it possible that he may have disappeared of his own accord, and may yet be alive and well.’

Mr. Crisparkle taking a seat, and inquiring: ‘Why so?’ Mr. Jasper repeated the arguments he had just set forth. If they had been less plausible than they were, the good Minor Canon’s mind would have been in a state of preparation to receive them, as exculpatory of his unfortunate pupil. But he, too, did really attach great importance to the lost young man’s having been, so immediately before his disappearance, placed in a new and embarrassing relation towards every one acquainted with his projects and affairs; and the fact seemed to him to present the question in a new light.

‘I stated to Mr. Sapsea, when we waited on him,’ said Jasper: as he really had done: ‘that there was no quarrel or difference between the two young men at their last meeting. We all know that their first meeting was unfortunately very far from amicable; but all went smoothly and quietly when they were last together at my house. My dear boy was not in his usual spirits; he was depressed—I noticed that—and I am bound henceforth to dwell upon the circumstance the more, now that I know there was a special reason for his being depressed: a reason, moreover, which may possibly have induced him to absent himself.’

‘I pray to Heaven it may turn out so!’ exclaimed Mr. Crisparkle.

‘*I* pray to Heaven it may turn out so!’ repeated Jasper. ‘You know—and Mr. Grewgious should now know likewise—that I took a great prepossession against Mr. Neville Landless, arising out of his furious conduct on that first occasion. You know that I came to you, extremely apprehensive, on my dear boy’s behalf, of his mad violence. You know that I even entered in my Diary, and showed the entry to you, that I had dark forebodings against him. Mr. Grewgious ought to be possessed of the whole case. He shall not, through any suppression of mine, be informed of a part of it, and kept in ignorance of another part of it. I wish him to be good enough to understand that the communication he has made to me has hopefully influenced my mind, in spite of its having been, before this mysterious occurrence took place, profoundly impressed against young Landless.’

This fairness troubled the Minor Canon much. He felt that he was not as open in his own dealing. He charged against himself reproachfully that he had suppressed, so far, the two points of a second strong outbreak of temper against Edwin Drood on the part of Neville, and of the passion of jealousy having, to his own certain knowledge, flamed up in Neville’s breast against him. He was convinced of Neville’s innocence of any part in the ugly disappearance; and yet so many little circumstances combined so wofully against him, that he dreaded to add two more to their cumulative weight. He was among the truest of men; but he had been balancing in his mind, much to its distress, whether his volunteering to tell these two fragments of truth, at this time, would not be tantamount to a piecing together of falsehood in the place of truth.

However, here was a model before him. He hesitated no longer. Addressing Mr. Grewgious, as one placed in authority by the revelation he had brought to bear on the mystery (and surpassingly Angular Mr. Grewgious became when he found himself in that unexpected position), Mr. Crisparkle bore his testimony to Mr. Jasper’s strict sense of justice, and, expressing his absolute confidence in the complete clearance of his pupil from the least taint of suspicion, sooner or later, avowed that his confidence in that young gentleman had been formed, in spite of his confidential knowledge that his temper was of the hottest and fiercest, and that it was directly incensed against Mr. Jasper’s nephew, by the circumstance of his romantically supposing himself to be enamoured of the same young lady.

The sanguine reaction manifest in Mr. Jasper was proof even against this unlooked-for declaration. It turned him paler; but he repeated that he would cling to the hope he had derived from Mr. Grewgious; and that if no trace of his dear boy were found, leading to the dreadful inference that he had been made away with, he would cherish unto the last stretch of possibility the idea, that he might have absconded of his own wild will.

Now, it fell out that Mr. Crisparkle, going away from this conference still very uneasy in his mind, and very much troubled on behalf of the young man whom he held as a kind of prisoner in his own house, took a memorable night walk.

He walked to Cloisterham Weir.

He often did so, and consequently there was nothing remarkable in his footsteps tending that way. But the preoccupation of his mind so hindered him from planning any walk, or taking heed of the objects he passed, that his first consciousness of being near the Weir, was derived from the sound of the falling water close at hand.

‘How did I come here!’ was his first thought, as he stopped.

‘Why did I come here!’ was his second.

Then, he stood intently listening to the water. A familiar passage in his reading, about airy tongues that syllable men’s names, rose so unbidden to his ear, that he put it from him with his hand, as if it were tangible.

It was starlight. The Weir was full two miles above the spot to which the young men had repaired to watch the storm. No search had been made up here, for the tide had been running strongly down, at that time of the night of Christmas Eve, and the likeliest places for the discovery of a body, if a fatal accident had happened under such circumstances, all lay—both when the tide ebbed, and when it flowed again—between that spot and the sea. The water came over the Weir, with its usual sound on a cold starlight night, and little could be seen of it; yet Mr. Crisparkle had a strange idea that something unusual hung about the place.

He reasoned with himself: What was it? Where was it? Put it to the proof. Which sense did it address?

No sense reported anything unusual there. He listened again, and his sense of hearing again checked the water coming over the Weir, with its usual sound on a cold starlight night.

Knowing very well that the mystery with which his mind was occupied, might of itself give the place this haunted air, he strained those hawk’s eyes of his for the correction of his sight. He got closer to the Weir, and peered at its well-known posts and timbers. Nothing in the least unusual was remotely shadowed forth. But he resolved that he would come back early in the morning.

The Weir ran through his broken sleep, all night, and he was back again at sunrise. It was a bright frosty morning. The whole composition before him, when he stood where he had stood last night, was clearly discernible in its minutest details. He had surveyed it closely for some minutes, and was about to withdraw his eyes, when they were attracted keenly to one spot.

He turned his back upon the Weir, and looked far away at the sky, and at the earth, and then looked again at that one spot. It caught his sight again immediately, and he concentrated his vision upon it. He could not lose it now, though it was but such a speck in the landscape. It fascinated his sight. His hands began plucking off his coat. For it struck him that at that spot—a corner of the Weir—something glistened, which did not move and come over with the glistening water-drops, but remained stationary.

He assured himself of this, he threw off his clothes, he plunged into the icy water, and swam for the spot. Climbing the timbers, he took from them, caught among their interstices by its chain, a gold watch, bearing engraved upon its back E. D.

He brought the watch to the bank, swam to the Weir again, climbed it, and dived off. He knew every hole and corner of all the depths, and dived and dived and dived, until he could bear the cold no more. His notion was, that he would find the body; he only found a shirt-pin sticking in some mud and ooze.

With these discoveries he returned to Cloisterham, and, taking Neville Landless with him, went straight to the Mayor. Mr. Jasper was sent for, the watch and shirt-pin were identified, Neville was detained, and the wildest frenzy and fatuity of evil report rose against him. He was of that vindictive and violent nature, that but for his poor sister, who alone had influence over him, and out of whose sight he was never to be trusted, he would be in the daily commission of murder. Before coming to England he had caused to be whipped to death sundry 'Natives'—nomadic persons, encamping now in Asia, now in Africa, now in the West Indies, and now at the North Pole—vaguely supposed in Cloisterham to be always black, always of great virtue, always calling themselves Me, and everybody else Massa or Missie (according to sex), and always reading tracts of the obscurest meaning, in broken English, but always accurately understanding them in the purest mother tongue. He had nearly brought Mrs. Crisparkle's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. (Those original expressions were Mr. Sapsea's.) He had repeatedly said he would have Mr. Crisparkle's life. He had repeatedly said he would have everybody's life, and become in effect the last man. He had been brought down to Cloisterham, from London, by an eminent Philanthropist, and why? Because that Philanthropist had expressly declared: 'I owe it to my fellow-creatures that he should be, in the words of Bentham, where he is the cause of the greatest danger to the smallest number.'

These dropping shots from the blunderbusses of blunderheadedness might not have hit him in a vital place. But he had to stand against a trained and well-directed fire of arms of precision too. He had notoriously threatened the lost young man, and had, according to the showing of his own faithful friend and tutor who strove so hard for him, a cause of bitter animosity (created by himself, and stated by himself), against that ill-starred fellow. He had armed himself with an offensive weapon for the fatal night, and he had gone off early in the morning, after making preparations for departure. He had been found with traces of blood on him; truly, they might have been wholly caused as he represented, but they might not, also. On a search-warrant being issued for the examination of his room, clothes, and so forth, it was discovered that he had destroyed all his papers, and rearranged all his possessions, on the very afternoon of the disappearance. The watch found at the Weir was challenged by the jeweller as one he had wound and set for Edwin Drood, at twenty minutes past two on that same afternoon; and it had run down, before being cast into the water; and it was the jeweller's positive opinion that it had never been re-wound. This would justify the hypothesis that the watch was taken from him not long after he left Mr. Jasper's house at midnight, in company with the last person seen with him, and that it had been thrown away after being retained some hours. Why thrown away? If he had been murdered, and so artfully disfigured, or concealed, or both, as that the murderer hoped identification to be impossible, except from something that he wore, assuredly the murderer would seek to remove from the body the most lasting, the best known, and the most easily recognisable, things upon it. Those things would be the watch and shirt-pin. As to his opportunities of casting them into the river; if he were the object of these suspicions, they were easy. For, he had been seen by many persons, wandering about on that side of the city—indeed on all sides of it—in a miserable and seemingly half-distracted manner. As to the choice of the spot, obviously such criminating evidence had better take its chance of being found anywhere, rather than upon himself, or in his possession. Concerning the reconciliatory nature of the appointed meeting between the two young men, very little could be made of that in young Landless's favour; for it distinctly appeared that the meeting originated, not with him, but with Mr. Crisparkle, and that it had been urged on by Mr. Crisparkle; and who could say how unwillingly, or in what ill-conditioned mood, his enforced pupil had gone to it? The more his case was looked into, the weaker it became in every point. Even the broad suggestion that the lost young man had absconded, was rendered additionally improbable on the showing of the young lady from whom he had so lately parted; for; what did she say, with great earnestness and sorrow, when interrogated? That he had, expressly and enthusiastically, planned with her, that he would await the arrival of her guardian, Mr. Grewgious. And yet, be it observed, he disappeared before that gentleman appeared.

On the suspicions thus urged and supported, Neville was detained, and re-detained, and the search was pressed on every hand, and Jasper laboured night and day. But nothing more was found. No discovery being made, which proved the lost man to be dead, it at length became necessary to release the person suspected of having made away with him. Neville was set at large. Then, a consequence ensued which Mr. Crisparkle had too well foreseen. Neville must leave the place, for the place shunned him and cast him out. Even had it not been so, the dear old china shepherdess would have worried herself to death with fears for her son, and with general trepidation occasioned by their having such an inmate. Even had that not been so, the authority to which the Minor Canon deferred officially, would have settled the point.

'Mr. Crisparkle,' quoth the Dean, 'human justice may err, but it must act according to its lights. The days of taking sanctuary are past. This young man must not take sanctuary with us.'

'You mean that he must leave my house, sir?'

'Mr. Crisparkle,' returned the prudent Dean, 'I claim no authority in your house. I merely confer with you, on the painful necessity you find yourself under, of depriving this young man of the great advantages of your counsel and instruction.'

'It is very lamentable, sir,' Mr. Crisparkle represented.

'Very much so,' the Dean assented.

'And if it be a necessity—' Mr. Crisparkle faltered.

'As you unfortunately find it to be,' returned the Dean.

Mr. Crisparkle bowed submissively: 'It is hard to prejudge his case, sir, but I am sensible that—'

'Just so. Perfectly. As you say, Mr. Crisparkle,' interposed the Dean, nodding his head smoothly, 'there is nothing else to be done. No doubt, no doubt. There is no alternative, as your good sense has discovered.'

'I am entirely satisfied of his perfect innocence, sir, nevertheless.'

'We-e-ell!' said the Dean, in a more confidential tone, and slightly glancing around him, 'I would not say so, generally. Not generally. Enough of suspicion attaches to him to—no, I think I would not say so, generally.'

Mr. Crisparkle bowed again.

'It does not become us, perhaps,' pursued the Dean, 'to be partisans. Not partisans. We clergy keep our hearts warm and our heads cool, and we hold a judicious middle course.'

'I hope you do not object, sir, to my having stated in public, emphatically, that he will reappear here, whenever any new suspicion may be awakened, or any new circumstance may come to light in this extraordinary matter?'

'Not at all,' returned the Dean. 'And yet, do you know, I don't think,' with a very nice and neat emphasis on those two words: 'I *don't think* I would state it emphatically. State it? Ye-e-es! But emphatically? No-o-o. I *think* not. In point of fact, Mr. Crisparkle, keeping our hearts warm and our heads cool, we clergy need do nothing emphatically.'

So Minor Canon Row knew Neville Landless no more; and he went whithersoever he would, or could, with a blight upon his name and fame.

It was not until then that John Jasper silently resumed his place in the choir. Haggard and red-eyed, his hopes plainly had deserted him, his sanguine mood was gone, and all his worst misgivings had come back. A day or two afterwards, while unrobing, he took his Diary from a pocket of his coat, turned the leaves, and with an impressive look, and without one spoken word, handed this entry to Mr. Crisparkle to read:

‘My dear boy is murdered. The discovery of the watch and shirt-pin convinces me that he was murdered that night, and that his jewellery was taken from him to prevent identification by its means. All the delusive hopes I had founded on his separation from his betrothed wife, I give to the winds. They perish before this fatal discovery. I now swear, and record the oath on this page, That I nevermore will discuss this mystery with any human creature until I hold the clue to it in my hand. That I never will relax in my secrecy or in my search. That I will fasten the crime of the murder of my dear dead boy upon the murderer. And, That I devote myself to his destruction.’

CHAPTER XVII—PHILANTHROPY, PROFESSIONAL AND UNPROFESSIONAL

Full half a year had come and gone, and Mr. Crisparkle sat in a waiting-room in the London chief offices of the Haven of Philanthropy, until he could have audience of Mr. Honeythunder.

In his college days of athletic exercises, Mr. Crisparkle had known professors of the Noble Art of fisticuffs, and had attended two or three of their gloved gatherings. He had now an opportunity of observing that as to the phrenological formation of the backs of their heads, the Professing Philanthropists were uncommonly like the Pugilists. In the development of all those organs which constitute, or attend, a propensity to 'pitch into' your fellow-creatures, the Philanthropists were remarkably favoured. There were several Professors passing in and out, with exactly the aggressive air upon them of being ready for a turn-up with any Novice who might happen to be on hand, that Mr. Crisparkle well remembered in the circles of the Fancy. Preparations were in progress for a moral little Mill somewhere on the rural circuit, and other Professors were backing this or that Heavy-Weight as good for such or such speech-making hits, so very much after the manner of the sporting publicans, that the intended Resolutions might have been Rounds. In an official manager of these displays much celebrated for his platform tactics, Mr. Crisparkle recognised (in a suit of black) the counterpart of a deceased benefactor of his species, an eminent public character, once known to fame as Frosty-faced Fogo, who in days of yore superintended the formation of the magic circle with the ropes and stakes. There were only three conditions of resemblance wanting between these Professors and those. Firstly, the Philanthropists were in very bad training: much too fleshy, and presenting, both in face and figure, a superabundance of what is known to Pugilistic Experts as Suet Pudding. Secondly, the Philanthropists had not the good temper of the Pugilists, and used worse language. Thirdly, their fighting code stood in great need of revision, as empowering them not only to bore their man to the ropes, but to bore him to the confines of distraction; also to hit him when he was down, hit him anywhere and anyhow, kick him, stamp upon him, gouge him, and maul him behind his back without mercy. In these last particulars the Professors of the Noble Art were much nobler than the Professors of Philanthropy.

Mr. Crisparkle was so completely lost in musing on these similarities and dissimilarities, at the same time watching the crowd which came and went by, always, as it seemed, on errands of antagonistically snatching something from somebody, and never giving anything to anybody, that his name was called before he heard it. On his at length responding, he was shown by a miserably shabby and underpaid stipendiary Philanthropist (who could hardly have done worse if he had taken service with a declared enemy of the human race) to Mr. Honeythunder's room.

'Sir,' said Mr. Honeythunder, in his tremendous voice, like a schoolmaster issuing orders to a boy of whom he had a bad opinion, 'sit down.'

Mr. Crisparkle seated himself.

Mr. Honeythunder having signed the remaining few score of a few thousand circulars, calling upon a corresponding number of families without means to come forward, stump up instantly, and be Philanthropists, or go to the Devil, another shabby stipendiary Philanthropist (highly disinterested, if in earnest) gathered these into a basket and walked off with them.

'Now, Mr. Crisparkle,' said Mr. Honeythunder, turning his chair half round towards him when they were alone, and squaring his arms with his hands on his knees, and his brows knitted, as if he added, I am going to make short work of *you*: 'Now, Mr. Crisparkle, we entertain different views, you and I, sir, of the sanctity of human life.'

'Do we?' returned the Minor Canon.

'We do, sir?'

'Might I ask you,' said the Minor Canon: 'what are your views on that subject?'

'That human life is a thing to be held sacred, sir.'

'Might I ask you,' pursued the Minor Canon as before: 'what you suppose to be my views on that subject?'

'By George, sir!' returned the Philanthropist, squaring his arms still more, as he frowned on Mr. Crisparkle: 'they are best known to yourself.'

'Readily admitted. But you began by saying that we took different views, you know. Therefore (or you could not say so) you must have set up some views as mine. Pray, what views *have* you set up as mine?'

'Here is a man—and a young man,' said Mr. Honeythunder, as if that made the matter infinitely worse, and he could have easily borne the loss of an old one, 'swept off the face of the earth by a deed of violence. What do you call that?'

'Murder,' said the Minor Canon.

'What do you call the doer of that deed, sir?

'A murderer,' said the Minor Canon.

'I am glad to hear you admit so much, sir,' retorted Mr. Honeythunder, in his most offensive manner; 'and I candidly tell you that I didn't expect it.' Here he lowered heavily at Mr. Crisparkle again.

'Be so good as to explain what you mean by those very unjustifiable expressions.'

'I don't sit here, sir,' returned the Philanthropist, raising his voice to a roar, 'to be browbeaten.'

'As the only other person present, no one can possibly know that better than I do,' returned the Minor Canon very quietly. 'But I interrupt your explanation.'

'Murder!' proceeded Mr. Honeythunder, in a kind of boisterous reverie, with his platform folding of his arms, and his platform nod of abhorrent reflection after each short sentiment of a word. 'Bloodshed! Abel! Cain! I hold no terms with Cain. I repudiate with a shudder the red hand when it is offered me.'

Instead of instantly leaping into his chair and cheering himself hoarse, as the Brotherhood in public meeting assembled would infallibly have done on this cue, Mr. Crisparkle merely reversed the quiet crossing of his legs, and said mildly: 'Don't let me interrupt your explanation—when you begin it.'

'The Commandments say, no murder. NO murder, sir!' proceeded Mr. Honeythunder, platformally pausing as if he took Mr. Crisparkle to task for having distinctly asserted that they said: You may do a little murder, and then leave off.

'And they also say, you shall bear no false witness,' observed Mr. Crisparkle.

'Enough!' bellowed Mr. Honeythunder, with a solemnity and severity that would have brought the house down at a meeting, 'E-e-nough! My late wards being now of age, and I being released from a trust which I cannot contemplate without a thrill of horror, there are the accounts which you have undertaken to accept on their behalf, and there is a statement of the balance which you have undertaken to receive, and which you cannot receive too soon. And let me tell you, sir, I wish that, as a man and a Minor Canon, you were better employed,' with a nod. 'Better employed,' with another nod. 'Bet-ter em-ployed!' with another and the three nods added up.

Mr. Crisparkle rose; a little heated in the face, but with perfect command of himself.

'Mr. Honeythunder,' he said, taking up the papers referred to: 'my being better or worse employed than I am at present is a matter of taste and opinion. You might think me better employed in enrolling myself a member of your Society.'

'Ay, indeed, sir!' retorted Mr. Honeythunder, shaking his head in a threatening manner. 'It would have been better for you if you had done that long ago!'

'I think otherwise.'

'Or,' said Mr. Honeythunder, shaking his head again, 'I might think one of your profession better employed in devoting himself to the discovery and punishment of guilt than in leaving that duty to be undertaken by a layman.'

'I may regard my profession from a point of view which teaches me that its first duty is towards those who are in necessity and tribulation, who are desolate and oppressed,' said Mr. Crisparkle. 'However, as I have quite clearly satisfied myself that it is no part of my profession to make professions, I say no more of that. But I owe it to Mr. Neville, and to Mr. Neville's sister (and in a much lower degree to myself), to say to you that I *know* I was in the full possession and understanding of Mr. Neville's mind and heart at the time of this occurrence; and that, without in the least colouring or concealing what was to be deplored in him and required to be corrected, I feel certain that his tale is true. Feeling that certainty, I befriend him. As long as that certainty shall last, I will befriend him. And if any consideration could shake me in this resolve, I should be so ashamed of myself for my meanness, that no man's good opinion—no, nor no woman's—so gained, could compensate me for the loss of my own.'

Good fellow! manly fellow! And he was so modest, too. There was no more self-assertion in the Minor Canon than in the schoolboy who had stood in the breezy playing-fields keeping a wicket. He was simply and staunchly true to his duty alike in the large case and in the small. So all true souls ever are. So every true soul ever was, ever is, and ever will be. There is nothing little to the really great in spirit.

‘Then who do you make out did the deed?’ asked Mr. Honeythunder, turning on him abruptly.

‘Heaven forbid,’ said Mr. Crisparkle, ‘that in my desire to clear one man I should lightly criminate another! I accuse no one.’

‘Tcha!’ ejaculated Mr. Honeythunder with great disgust; for this was by no means the principle on which the Philanthropic Brotherhood usually proceeded. ‘And, sir, you are not a disinterested witness, we must bear in mind.’

‘How am I an interested one?’ inquired Mr. Crisparkle, smiling innocently, at a loss to imagine.

‘There was a certain stipend, sir, paid to you for your pupil, which may have warped your judgment a bit,’ said Mr. Honeythunder, coarsely.

‘Perhaps I expect to retain it still?’ Mr. Crisparkle returned, enlightened; ‘do you mean that too?’

‘Well, sir,’ returned the professional Philanthropist, getting up and thrusting his hands down into his trousers-pockets, ‘I don’t go about measuring people for caps. If people find I have any about me that fit ’em, they can put ’em on and wear ’em, if they like. That’s their look out: not mine.’

Mr. Crisparkle eyed him with a just indignation, and took him to task thus:

‘Mr. Honeythunder, I hoped when I came in here that I might be under no necessity of commenting on the introduction of platform manners or platform manœuvres among the decent forbearances of private life. But you have given me such a specimen of both, that I should be a fit subject for both if I remained silent respecting them. They are detestable.’

‘They don’t suit *you*, I dare say, sir.’

‘They are,’ repeated Mr. Crisparkle, without noticing the interruption, ‘detestable. They violate equally the justice that should belong to Christians, and the restraints that should belong to gentlemen. You assume a great crime to have been committed by one whom I, acquainted with the attendant circumstances, and having numerous reasons on my side, devoutly believe to be innocent of it. Because I differ from you on that vital point, what is your platform resource? Instantly to turn upon me, charging that I have no sense of the enormity of the crime itself, but am its aider and abettor! So, another time—taking me as representing your opponent in other cases—you set up a platform credulity; a moved and seconded and carried-unanimously profession of faith in some ridiculous delusion or mischievous imposition. I decline to believe it, and you fall back upon your platform resource of proclaiming that I believe nothing; that because I will not bow down to a false God of your making, I deny the true God! Another time you make the platform discovery that War is a calamity, and you propose to abolish it by a string of twisted resolutions tossed into the air like the tail of a kite. I do not admit the discovery to be yours in the least, and I have not a grain of faith in your remedy. Again, your platform resource of representing me as revelling in the horrors of a battle-field like a fiend incarnate! Another time, in another of your undiscriminating platform rushes, you would punish the sober for the drunken. I claim consideration for the comfort, convenience, and refreshment of the sober; and you presently make platform proclamation that I have a depraved desire to turn Heaven’s creatures into swine and wild beasts! In all such cases your movers, and your seconders, and your supporters—your regular Professors of all degrees, run amuck like so many mad Malays; habitually attributing the lowest and basest motives with the utmost recklessness (let me call your attention to a recent instance in yourself for which you should blush), and quoting figures which you know to be as wilfully onesided as a statement of any complicated account that should be all Creditor side and no Debtor, or all Debtor side and no Creditor. Therefore it is, Mr. Honeythunder, that I consider the platform a sufficiently bad example and a sufficiently bad school, even in public life; but hold that, carried into private life, it becomes an unendurable nuisance.’

‘These are strong words, sir!’ exclaimed the Philanthropist.

‘I hope so,’ said Mr. Crisparkle. ‘Good morning.’

He walked out of the Haven at a great rate, but soon fell into his regular brisk pace, and soon had a smile upon his face as he went along, wondering what the china shepherdess would have said if she had seen him pounding Mr. Honeythunder in the late little lively affair. For Mr. Crisparkle had just enough of harmless vanity to hope that he had hit hard, and to glow with the belief that he had trimmed the Philanthropic Jacket pretty handsomely.

He took himself to Staple Inn, but not to P. J. T. and Mr. Grewgious. Full many a creaking stair he climbed before he reached some attic rooms in a corner, turned the latch of their unbolted door, and stood beside the table of Neville Landless.

An air of retreat and solitude hung about the rooms and about their inhabitant. He was much worn, and so were they. Their sloping ceilings, cumbrous rusty locks and grates, and heavy wooden bins and beams, slowly mouldering withal, had a prisonous look, and he had the haggard face of a prisoner. Yet the sunlight shone in at the ugly garret-window, which had a penthouse to itself thrust out among the tiles; and on the cracked and smoke-blackened parapet beyond, some of the deluded sparrows of the place rheumatically hopped, like little feathered cripples who had left their crutches in their nests; and there was a play of living leaves at hand that changed the air, and made an imperfect sort of music in it that would have been melody in the country.

The rooms were sparely furnished, but with good store of books. Everything expressed the abode of a poor student. That Mr. Crisparkle had been either chooser, lender, or donor of the books, or that he combined the three characters, might have been easily seen in the friendly beam of his eyes upon them as he entered.

‘How goes it, Neville?’

‘I am in good heart, Mr. Crisparkle, and working away.’

‘I wish your eyes were not quite so large and not quite so bright,’ said the Minor Canon, slowly releasing the hand he had taken in his.

‘They brighten at the sight of you,’ returned Neville. ‘If you were to fall away from me, they would soon be dull enough.’

‘Rally, rally!’ urged the other, in a stimulating tone. ‘Fight for it, Neville!’

‘If I were dying, I feel as if a word from you would rally me; if my pulse had stopped, I feel as if your touch would make it beat again,’ said Neville. ‘But I *have* rallied, and am doing famously.’

Mr. Crisparkle turned him with his face a little more towards the light.

‘I want to see a ruddier touch here, Neville,’ he said, indicating his own healthy cheek by way of pattern. ‘I want more sun to shine upon you.’

Neville drooped suddenly, as he replied in a lowered voice: ‘I am not hardy enough for that, yet. I may become so, but I cannot bear it yet. If you had gone through those Cloisterham streets as I did; if you had seen, as I did, those averted eyes, and the better sort of people silently giving me too much room to pass, that I might not touch them or come near them, you wouldn’t think it quite unreasonable that I cannot go about in the daylight.’

‘My poor fellow!’ said the Minor Canon, in a tone so purely sympathetic that the young man caught his hand, ‘I never said it was unreasonable; never thought so. But I should like you to do it.’

‘And that would give me the strongest motive to do it. But I cannot yet. I cannot persuade myself that the eyes of even the stream of strangers I pass in this vast city look at me without suspicion. I feel marked and tainted, even when I go out—as I do only—at night. But the darkness covers me then, and I take courage from it.’

Mr. Crisparkle laid a hand upon his shoulder, and stood looking down at him.

‘If I could have changed my name,’ said Neville, ‘I would have done so. But as you wisely pointed out to me, I can’t do that, for it would look like guilt. If I could have gone to some distant place, I might have found relief in that, but the thing is not to be thought of, for the same reason. Hiding and escaping would be the construction in either case. It seems a little hard to be so tied to a stake, and innocent; but I don’t complain.’

‘And you must expect no miracle to help you, Neville,’ said Mr. Crisparkle, compassionately.

‘No, sir, I know that. The ordinary fulness of time and circumstances is all I have to trust to.’

‘It will right you at last, Neville.’

‘So I believe, and I hope I may live to know it.’

But perceiving that the despondent mood into which he was falling cast a shadow on the Minor Canon, and (it may be) feeling that the broad hand upon his shoulder was not then quite as steady as its own natural strength had rendered it when it first touched him just now, he brightened and said:

‘Excellent circumstances for study, anyhow! and you know, Mr. Crisparkle, what need I have of study in all ways. Not to mention that you have advised me to study for the difficult profession of the law, specially, and that of course I am guiding myself by the advice of such a friend and helper. Such a good friend and helper!’

He took the fortifying hand from his shoulder, and kissed it. Mr. Crisparkle beamed at the books, but not so brightly as when he had entered.

‘I gather from your silence on the subject that my late guardian is adverse, Mr. Crisparkle?’

The Minor Canon answered: ‘Your late guardian is a—a most unreasonable person, and it signifies nothing to any reasonable person whether he is *ad*verse, *per*verse, or the *re*verse.’

‘Well for me that I have enough with economy to live upon,’ sighed Neville, half wearily and half cheerily, ‘while I wait to be learned, and wait to be righted! Else I might have proved the proverb, that while the grass grows, the steed starves!’

He opened some books as he said it, and was soon immersed in their interleaved and annotated passages; while Mr. Crisparkle sat beside him, expounding, correcting, and advising. The Minor Canon’s Cathedral duties made these visits of his difficult to accomplish, and only to be compassed at intervals of many weeks. But they were as serviceable as they were precious to Neville Landless.

When they had got through such studies as they had in hand, they stood leaning on the window-sill, and looking down upon the patch of garden. ‘Next week,’ said Mr. Crisparkle, ‘you will cease to be alone, and will have a devoted companion.’

‘And yet,’ returned Neville, ‘this seems an uncongenial place to bring my sister to.’

‘I don’t think so,’ said the Minor Canon. ‘There is duty to be done here; and there are womanly feeling, sense, and courage wanted here.’

‘I meant,’ explained Neville, ‘that the surroundings are so dull and unwomanly, and that Helena can have no suitable friend or society here.’

‘You have only to remember,’ said Mr. Crisparkle, ‘that you are here yourself, and that she has to draw you into the sunlight.’

They were silent for a little while, and then Mr. Crisparkle began anew.

‘When we first spoke together, Neville, you told me that your sister had risen out of the disadvantages of your past lives as superior to you as the tower of Cloisterham Cathedral is higher than the chimneys of Minor Canon Corner. Do you remember that?’

‘Right well!’

‘I was inclined to think it at the time an enthusiastic flight. No matter what I think it now. What I would emphasise is, that under the head of Pride your sister is a great and opportune example to you.’

‘Under *all* heads that are included in the composition of a fine character, she is.’

‘Say so; but take this one. Your sister has learnt how to govern what is proud in her nature. She can dominate it even when it is wounded through her sympathy with you. No doubt she has suffered deeply in those same streets where you suffered deeply. No doubt her life is darkened by the cloud that darkens yours. But bending her pride into a grand composure that is not haughty or aggressive, but is a sustained confidence in you and in the truth, she has won her way through those streets until she passes along them as high in the general respect as any one who treads them. Every day and hour of her life since Edwin Drood’s disappearance, she has faced malignity and folly—for you—as only a brave nature well directed can. So it will be with her to the end. Another and weaker kind of pride might sink broken-hearted, but never such a pride as hers: which knows no shrinking, and can get no mastery over her.’

The pale cheek beside him flushed under the comparison, and the hint implied in it.

‘I will do all I can to imitate her,’ said Neville.

‘Do so, and be a truly brave man, as she is a truly brave woman,’ answered Mr. Crisparkle stoutly. ‘It is growing dark. Will you go my way with me, when it is quite dark? Mind! it is not I who wait for darkness.’

Neville replied, that he would accompany him directly. But Mr. Crisparkle said he had a moment’s call to make on Mr. Grewgious as an act of courtesy, and would run across to that gentleman’s chambers, and rejoin Neville on his own doorstep, if he would come down there to meet him.

Mr. Grewgious, bolt upright as usual, sat taking his wine in the dusk at his open window; his wineglass and decanter on the round table at his elbow; himself and his legs on the window-seat; only one hinge in his whole body, like a bootjack.

‘How do you do, reverend sir?’ said Mr. Grewgious, with abundant offers of hospitality, which were as cordially declined as made. ‘And how is your charge getting on over the way in the set that I had the pleasure of recommending to you as vacant and eligible?’

Mr. Crisparkle replied suitably.

‘I am glad you approve of them,’ said Mr. Grewgious, ‘because I entertain a sort of fancy for having him under my eye.’

As Mr. Grewgious had to turn his eye up considerably before he could see the chambers, the phrase was to be taken figuratively and not literally.

‘And how did you leave Mr. Jasper, reverend sir?’ said Mr. Grewgious.

Mr. Crisparkle had left him pretty well.

'And where did you leave Mr. Jasper, reverend sir?' Mr. Crisparkle had left him at Cloisterham.

'And when did you leave Mr. Jasper, reverend sir?' That morning.

'Umps!' said Mr. Grewgious. 'He didn't say he was coming, perhaps?'

'Coming where?'

'Anywhere, for instance?' said Mr. Grewgious.

'No.'

'Because here he is,' said Mr. Grewgious, who had asked all these questions, with his preoccupied glance directed out at window. 'And he don't look agreeable, does he?'

Mr. Crisparkle was craning towards the window, when Mr. Grewgious added:

'If you will kindly step round here behind me, in the gloom of the room, and will cast your eye at the second-floor landing window in yonder house, I think you will hardly fail to see a slinking individual in whom I recognise our local friend.'

'You are right!' cried Mr. Crisparkle.

'Umps!' said Mr. Grewgious. Then he added, turning his face so abruptly that his head nearly came into collision with Mr. Crisparkle's: 'what should you say that our local friend was up to?'

The last passage he had been shown in the Diary returned on Mr. Crisparkle's mind with the force of a strong recoil, and he asked Mr. Grewgious if he thought it possible that Neville was to be harassed by the keeping of a watch upon him?

'A watch?' repeated Mr. Grewgious musingly. 'Ay!'

'Which would not only of itself haunt and torture his life,' said Mr. Crisparkle warmly, 'but would expose him to the torment of a perpetually reviving suspicion, whatever he might do, or wherever he might go.'

'Ay!' said Mr. Grewgious musingly still. 'Do I see him waiting for you?'

'No doubt you do.'

'Then *would* you have the goodness to excuse my getting up to see you out, and to go out to join him, and to go the way that you were going, and to take no notice of our local friend?' said Mr. Grewgious. 'I entertain a sort of fancy for having *him* under my eye to-night, do you know?'

Mr. Crisparkle, with a significant need complied; and rejoining Neville, went away with him. They dined together, and parted at the yet unfinished and undeveloped railway station: Mr. Crisparkle to get home; Neville to walk the streets, cross the bridges, make a wide round of the city in the friendly darkness, and tire himself out.

It was midnight when he returned from his solitary expedition and climbed his staircase. The night was hot, and the windows of the staircase were all wide open. Coming to the top, it gave him a passing chill of surprise (there being no rooms but his up there) to find a stranger sitting on the window-sill, more after the manner of a venturesome glazier than an amateur ordinarily careful of his neck; in fact, so much more outside the window than inside, as to suggest the thought that he must have come up by the water-spout instead of the stairs.

The stranger said nothing until Neville put his key in his door; then, seeming to make sure of his identity from the action, he spoke:

'I beg your pardon,' he said, coming from the window with a frank and smiling air, and a prepossessing address; 'the beans.'

Neville was quite at a loss.

'Runners,' said the visitor. 'Scarlet. Next door at the back.'

'O,' returned Neville. 'And the mignonette and wall-flower?'

'The same,' said the visitor.

'Pray walk in.'

'Thank you.'

Neville lighted his candles, and the visitor sat down. A handsome gentleman, with a young face, but with an older figure in its robustness and its breadth of shoulder; say a man of eight-and-twenty, or at the utmost thirty; so extremely sunburnt that the contrast between his brown visage and the white forehead shaded out of doors by his hat, and the glimpses of white throat below the neckerchief, would have been almost ludicrous but for his broad temples, bright blue eyes, clustering brown hair, and laughing teeth.

'I have noticed,' said he; '—my name is Tartar.'

Neville inclined his head.

'I have noticed (excuse me) that you shut yourself up a good deal, and that you seem to like my garden aloft here. If you would like a little more of it, I could throw out a few lines and stays between my windows and yours, which the runners would take to directly. And I have some boxes, both of mignonette and wall-flower, that I could shove on along the gutter (with a boathook I have by me) to your windows, and draw back again when they wanted watering or gardening, and shove on again when they were ship-shape; so that they would cause you no trouble. I couldn't take this liberty without asking your permission, so I venture to ask it. Tartar, corresponding set, next door.'

'You are very kind.'

'Not at all. I ought to apologise for looking in so late. But having noticed (excuse me) that you generally walk out at night, I thought I should inconvenience you least by awaiting your return. I am always afraid of inconveniencing busy men, being an idle man.'

'I should not have thought so, from your appearance.'

'No? I take it as a compliment. In fact, I was bred in the Royal Navy, and was First Lieutenant when I quitted it. But, an uncle disappointed in the service leaving me his property on condition that I left the Navy, I accepted the fortune, and resigned my commission.'

'Lately, I presume?'

'Well, I had had twelve or fifteen years of knocking about first. I came here some nine months before you; I had had one crop before you came. I chose this place, because, having served last in a little corvette, I knew I should feel more at home where I had a constant opportunity of knocking my head against the ceiling. Besides, it would never do for a man who had been aboard ship from his boyhood to turn luxurious all at once. Besides, again; having been accustomed to a very short allowance of land all my life, I thought I'd feel my way to the command of a landed estate, by beginning in boxes.'

Whimsically as this was said, there was a touch of merry earnestness in it that made it doubly whimsical.

'However,' said the Lieutenant, 'I have talked quite enough about myself. It is not my way, I hope; it has merely been to present myself to you naturally. If you will allow me to take the liberty I have described, it will be a charity, for it will give me something more to do. And you are not to suppose that it will entail any interruption or intrusion on you, for that is far from my intention.'

Neville replied that he was greatly obliged, and that he thankfully accepted the kind proposal.

'I am very glad to take your windows in tow,' said the Lieutenant. 'From what I have seen of you when I have been gardening at mine, and you have been looking on, I have thought you (excuse me) rather too studious and delicate. May I ask, is your health at all affected?'

'I have undergone some mental distress,' said Neville, confused, 'which has stood me in the stead of illness.'

'Pardon me,' said Mr. Tartar.

With the greatest delicacy he shifted his ground to the windows again, and asked if he could look at one of them. On Neville's opening it, he immediately sprang out, as if he were going aloft with a whole watch in an emergency, and were setting a bright example.

'For Heaven's sake,' cried Neville, 'don't do that! Where are you going Mr. Tartar? You'll be dashed to pieces!'

'All well!' said the Lieutenant, coolly looking about him on the housetop. 'All taut and trim here. Those lines and stays shall be rigged before you turn out in the morning. May I take this short cut home, and say good-night?'

'Mr. Tartar!' urged Neville. 'Pray! It makes me giddy to see you!'

But Mr. Tartar, with a wave of his hand and the deftness of a cat, had already dipped through his scuttle of scarlet runners without breaking a leaf, and 'gone below.'

Mr. Grewgious, his bedroom window-blind held aside with his hand, happened at the moment to have Neville's chambers under his eye for the last time that night. Fortunately his eye was on the front of the house and not the back, or this remarkable appearance and disappearance might have broken his rest as a phenomenon. But Mr. Grewgious seeing nothing there, not even a light in the windows, his gaze wandered from the windows to the stars, as if he would have read in them something that was hidden from him. Many of us would, if we could; but none of us so much as know our letters in the stars yet—or seem likely to do it, in this state of existence—and few languages can be read until their alphabets are mastered.

CHAPTER XVIII—A SETTLER IN CLOISTERHAM

At about this time a stranger appeared in Cloisterham; a white-haired personage, with black eyebrows. Being buttoned up in a tightish blue surtout, with a buff waistcoat and gray trousers, he had something of a military air, but he announced himself at the Crozier (the orthodox hotel, where he put up with a portmanteau) as an idle dog who lived upon his means; and he farther announced that he had a mind to take a lodging in the picturesque old city for a month or two, with a view of settling down there altogether. Both announcements were made in the coffee-room of the Crozier, to all whom it might or might not concern, by the stranger as he stood with his back to the empty fireplace, waiting for his fried sole, veal cutlet, and pint of sherry. And the waiter (business being chronically slack at the Crozier) represented all whom it might or might not concern, and absorbed the whole of the information.

This gentleman's white head was unusually large, and his shock of white hair was unusually thick and ample. 'I suppose, waiter,' he said, shaking his shock of hair, as a Newfoundland dog might shake his before sitting down to dinner, 'that a fair lodging for a single buffer might be found in these parts, eh?'

The waiter had no doubt of it.

'Something old,' said the gentleman. 'Take my hat down for a moment from that peg, will you? No, I don't want it; look into it. What do you see written there?'

The waiter read: 'Datchery.'

'Now you know my name,' said the gentleman; 'Dick Datchery. Hang it up again. I was saying something old is what I should prefer, something odd and out of the way; something venerable, architectural, and inconvenient.'

'We have a good choice of inconvenient lodgings in the town, sir, I think,' replied the waiter, with modest confidence in its resources that way; 'indeed, I have no doubt that we could suit you that far, however particular you might be. But a architectural lodging!' That seemed to trouble the waiter's head, and he shook it.

'Anything Cathedraly, now,' Mr. Datchery suggested.

'Mr. Tope,' said the waiter, brightening, as he rubbed his chin with his hand, 'would be the likeliest party to inform in that line.'

'Who is Mr. Tope?' inquired Dick Datchery.

The waiter explained that he was the Verger, and that Mrs. Tope had indeed once upon a time let lodgings herself or offered to let them; but that as nobody had ever taken them, Mrs. Tope's window-bill, long a Cloisterham Institution, had disappeared; probably had tumbled down one day, and never been put up again.

'I'll call on Mrs. Tope,' said Mr. Datchery, 'after dinner.'

So when he had done his dinner, he was duly directed to the spot, and sallied out for it. But the Crozier being an hotel of a most retiring disposition, and the waiter's directions being fatally precise, he soon became bewildered, and went boggling about and about the Cathedral Tower, whenever he could catch a glimpse of it, with a general impression on his mind that Mrs. Tope's was somewhere very near it, and that, like the children in the game of hot boiled beans and very good butter, he was warm in his search when he saw the Tower, and cold when he didn't see it.

He was getting very cold indeed when he came upon a fragment of burial-ground in which an unhappy sheep was grazing. Unhappy, because a hideous small boy was stoning it through the railings, and had already lamed it in one leg, and was much excited by the benevolent sportsmanlike purpose of breaking its other three legs, and bringing it down.

''It 'im agin!' cried the boy, as the poor creature leaped; 'and made a dint in his wool.'

'Let him be!' said Mr. Datchery. 'Don't you see you have lamed him?'

'Yer lie,' returned the sportsman. ''E went and lamed isself. I see 'im do it, and I giv' 'im a shy as a Widdy-warning to 'im not to go a-bruisin' 'is master's mutton any more.'

'Come here.'

'I won't; I'll come when yer can ketch me.'

'Stay there then, and show me which is Mr. Tope's.'

'Ow can I stay here and show you which is Topeseses, when Topeseses is t'other side the Kinfreederal, and over the crossings, and round ever so many comers? Stoo-pid! Ya-a-ah!'

‘Show me where it is, and I’ll give you something.’

‘Come on, then.’

This brisk dialogue concluded, the boy led the way, and by-and-by stopped at some distance from an arched passage, pointing.

‘Lookie yonder. You see that there winder and door?’

‘That’s Tope’s?’

‘Yer lie; it ain’t. That’s Jarsper’s.’

‘Indeed?’ said Mr. Datchery, with a second look of some interest.

‘Yes, and I ain’t a-goin’ no nearer ’Im, I tell yer.’

‘Why not?’

‘’Cos I ain’t a-goin’ to be lifted off my legs and ’ave my braces bust and be choked; not if I knows it, and not by ‘Im. Wait till I set a jolly good flint a-flyin’ at the back o’ ’is jolly old ’ed some day! Now look t’other side the harch; not the side where Jarsper’s door is; t’other side.’

‘I see.’

‘A little way in, o’ that side, there’s a low door, down two steps. That’s Topeseses with ’is name on a hoval plate.’

‘Good. See here,’ said Mr. Datchery, producing a shilling. ‘You owe me half of this.’

‘Yer lie! I don’t owe yer nothing; I never seen yer.’

‘I tell you you owe me half of this, because I have no sixpence in my pocket. So the next time you meet me you shall do something else for me, to pay me.’

‘All right, give us ’old.’

‘What is your name, and where do you live?’

‘Deputy. Travellers’ Twopenny, ’cross the green.’

The boy instantly darted off with the shilling, lest Mr. Datchery should repent, but stopped at a safe distance, on the happy chance of his being uneasy in his mind about it, to goad him with a demon dance expressive of its irrevocability.

Mr. Datchery, taking off his hat to give that shock of white hair of his another shake, seemed quite resigned, and betook himself whither he had been directed.

Mr. Tope’s official dwelling, communicating by an upper stair with Mr. Jasper’s (hence Mrs. Tope’s attendance on that gentleman), was of very modest proportions, and partook of the character of a cool dungeon. Its ancient walls were massive, and its rooms rather seemed to have been dug out of them, than to have been designed beforehand with any reference to them. The main door opened at once on a chamber of no describable shape, with a groined roof, which in its turn opened on another chamber of no describable shape, with another groined roof: their windows small, and in the thickness of the walls. These two chambers, close as to their atmosphere, and swarthy as to their illumination by natural light, were the apartments which Mrs. Tope had so long offered to an unappreciative city. Mr. Datchery, however, was more appreciative. He found that if he sat with the main door open he would enjoy the passing society of all comers to and fro by the gateway, and would have light enough. He found that if Mr. and Mrs. Tope, living overhead, used for their own egress and ingress a little side stair that came plump into the Precincts by a door opening outward, to the surprise and inconvenience of a limited public of pedestrians in a narrow way, he would be alone, as in a separate residence. He found the rent moderate, and everything as quaintly inconvenient as he could desire. He agreed, therefore, to take the lodging then and there, and money down, possession to be had next evening, on condition that reference was permitted him to Mr. Jasper as occupying the gatehouse, of which on the other side of the gateway, the Verger's hole-in-the-wall was an appanage or subsidiary part.

The poor dear gentleman was very solitary and very sad, Mrs. Tope said, but she had no doubt he would 'speak for her.' Perhaps Mr. Datchery had heard something of what had occurred there last winter?

Mr. Datchery had as confused a knowledge of the event in question, on trying to recall it, as he well could have. He begged Mrs. Tope's pardon when she found it incumbent on her to correct him in every detail of his summary of the facts, but pleaded that he was merely a single buffer getting through life upon his means as idly as he could, and that so many people were so constantly making away with so many other people, as to render it difficult for a buffer of an easy temper to preserve the circumstances of the several cases unmixed in his mind.

Mr. Jasper proving willing to speak for Mrs. Tope, Mr. Datchery, who had sent up his card, was invited to ascend the postern staircase. The Mayor was there, Mr. Tope said; but he was not to be regarded in the light of company, as he and Mr. Jasper were great friends.

'I beg pardon,' said Mr. Datchery, making a leg with his hat under his arm, as he addressed himself equally to both gentlemen; 'a selfish precaution on my part, and not personally interesting to anybody but myself. But as a buffer living on his means, and having an idea of doing it in this lovely place in peace and quiet, for remaining span of life, I beg to ask if the Tope family are quite respectable?'

Mr. Jasper could answer for that without the slightest hesitation.

'That is enough, sir,' said Mr. Datchery.

'My friend the Mayor,' added Mr. Jasper, presenting Mr. Datchery with a courtly motion of his hand towards that potentate; 'whose recommendation is actually much more important to a stranger than that of an obscure person like myself, will testify in their behalf, I am sure.'

'The Worshipful the Mayor,' said Mr. Datchery, with a low bow, 'places me under an infinite obligation.'

'Very good people, sir, Mr. and Mrs. Tope,' said Mr. Sapsea, with condescension. 'Very good opinions. Very well behaved. Very respectful. Much approved by the Dean and Chapter.'

'The Worshipful the Mayor gives them a character,' said Mr. Datchery, 'of which they may indeed be proud. I would ask His Honour (if I might be permitted) whether there are not many objects of great interest in the city which is under his beneficent sway?'

'We are, sir,' returned Mr. Sapsea, 'an ancient city, and an ecclesiastical city. We are a constitutional city, as it becomes such a city to be, and we uphold and maintain our glorious privileges.'

'His Honour,' said Mr. Datchery, bowing, 'inspires me with a desire to know more of the city, and confirms me in my inclination to end my days in the city.'

'Retired from the Army, sir?' suggested Mr. Sapsea.

'His Honour the Mayor does me too much credit,' returned Mr. Datchery.

'Navy, sir?' suggested Mr. Sapsea.

'Again,' repeated Mr. Datchery, 'His Honour the Mayor does me too much credit.'

'Diplomacy is a fine profession,' said Mr. Sapsea, as a general remark.

'There, I confess, His Honour the Mayor is too many for me,' said Mr. Datchery, with an ingenious smile and bow; 'even a diplomatic bird must fall to such a gun.'

Now this was very soothing. Here was a gentleman of a great, not to say a grand, address, accustomed to rank and dignity, really setting a fine example how to behave to a Mayor. There was something in that third-person style of being spoken to, that Mr. Sapsea found particularly recognisant of his merits and position.

‘But I crave pardon,’ said Mr. Datchery. ‘His Honour the Mayor will bear with me, if for a moment I have been deluded into occupying his time, and have forgotten the humble claims upon my own, of my hotel, the Crozier.’

‘Not at all, sir,’ said Mr. Sapsea. ‘I am returning home, and if you would like to take the exterior of our Cathedral in your way, I shall be glad to point it out.’

‘His Honour the Mayor,’ said Mr. Datchery, ‘is more than kind and gracious.’

As Mr. Datchery, when he had made his acknowledgments to Mr. Jasper, could not be induced to go out of the room before the Worshipful, the Worshipful led the way down-stairs; Mr. Datchery following with his hat under his arm, and his shock of white hair streaming in the evening breeze.

‘Might I ask His Honour,’ said Mr. Datchery, ‘whether that gentleman we have just left is the gentleman of whom I have heard in the neighbourhood as being much afflicted by the loss of a nephew, and concentrating his life on avenging the loss?’

‘That is the gentleman. John Jasper, sir.’

‘Would His Honour allow me to inquire whether there are strong suspicions of any one?’

‘More than suspicions, sir,’ returned Mr. Sapsea; ‘all but certainties.’

‘Only think now!’ cried Mr. Datchery.

‘But proof, sir, proof must be built up stone by stone,’ said the Mayor. ‘As I say, the end crowns the work. It is not enough that justice should be morally certain; she must be immorally certain—legally, that is.’

‘His Honour,’ said Mr. Datchery, ‘reminds me of the nature of the law. Immoral. How true!’

‘As I say, sir,’ pompously went on the Mayor, ‘the arm of the law is a strong arm, and a long arm. That is the may I put it. A strong arm and a long arm.’

‘How forcible!—And yet, again, how true!’ murmured Mr. Datchery.

‘And without betraying, what I call the secrets of the prison-house,’ said Mr. Sapsea; ‘the secrets of the prison-house is the term I used on the bench.’

‘And what other term than His Honour’s would express it?’ said Mr. Datchery.

‘Without, I say, betraying them, I predict to you, knowing the iron will of the gentleman we have just left (I take the bold step of calling it iron, on account of its strength), that in this case the long arm will reach, and the strong arm will strike.—This is our Cathedral, sir. The best judges are pleased to admire it, and the best among our townsmen own to being a little vain of it.’

All this time Mr. Datchery had walked with his hat under his arm, and his white hair streaming. He had an odd momentary appearance upon him of having forgotten his hat, when Mr. Sapsea now touched it; and he clapped his hand up to his head as if with some vague expectation of finding another hat upon it.

‘Pray be covered, sir,’ entreated Mr. Sapsea; magnificently plying: ‘I shall not mind it, I assure you.’

‘His Honour is very good, but I do it for coolness,’ said Mr. Datchery.

Then Mr. Datchery admired the Cathedral, and Mr. Sapsea pointed it out as if he himself had invented and built it: there were a few details indeed of which he did not approve, but those he glossed over, as if the workmen had made mistakes in his absence. The Cathedral disposed of, he led the way by the churchyard, and stopped to extol the beauty of the evening—by chance—in the immediate vicinity of Mrs. Sapsea’s epitaph.

‘And by the by,’ said Mr. Sapsea, appearing to descend from an elevation to remember it all of a sudden; like Apollo shooting down from Olympus to pick up his forgotten lyre; ‘*that* is one of our small lions. The partiality of our people has made it so, and strangers have been seen taking a copy of it now and then. I am not a judge of it myself, for it is a little work of my own. But it was troublesome to turn, sir; I may say, difficult to turn with elegance.’

Mr. Datchery became so ecstatic over Mr. Sapsea’s composition, that, in spite of his intention to end his days in Cloisterham, and therefore his probably having in reserve many opportunities of copying it, he would have transcribed it into his pocket-book on the spot, but for the slouching towards them of its material producer and perpetuator, Durdles, whom Mr. Sapsea hailed, not sorry to show him a bright example of behaviour to superiors.

‘Ah, Durdles! This is the mason, sir; one of our Cloisterham worthies; everybody here knows Durdles. Mr. Datchery, Durdles a gentleman who is going to settle here.’

‘I wouldn’t do it if I was him,’ growled Durdles. ‘We’re a heavy lot.’

‘You surely don’t speak for yourself, Mr. Durdles,’ returned Mr. Datchery, ‘any more than for His Honour.’

‘Who’s His Honour?’ demanded Durdles.

‘His Honour the Mayor.’

‘I never was brought afore him,’ said Durdles, with anything but the look of a loyal subject of the mayoralty, ‘and it’ll be time enough for me to Honour him when I am. Until which, and when, and where,

“Mister Sapsea is his name,
England is his nation,
Cloisterham’s his dwelling-place,
Aukshneer’s his occupation.”’

Here, Deputy (preceded by a flying oyster-shell) appeared upon the scene, and requested to have the sum of threepence instantly ‘chucked’ to him by Mr. Durdles, whom he had been vainly seeking up and down, as lawful wages overdue. While that gentleman, with his bundle under his arm, slowly found and counted out the money, Mr. Sapsea informed the new settler of Durdles’s habits, pursuits, abode, and reputation. ‘I suppose a curious stranger might come to see you, and your works, Mr. Durdles, at any odd time?’ said Mr. Datchery upon that.

‘Any gentleman is welcome to come and see me any evening if he brings liquor for two with him,’ returned Durdles, with a penny between his teeth and certain halfpence in his hands; ‘or if he likes to make it twice two, he’ll be doubly welcome.’

‘I shall come. Master Deputy, what do you owe me?’

‘A job.’

‘Mind you pay me honestly with the job of showing me Mr. Durdles’s house when I want to go there.’

Deputy, with a piercing broadside of whistle through the whole gap in his mouth, as a receipt in full for all arrears, vanished.

The Worshipful and the Worshipper then passed on together until they parted, with many ceremonies, at the Worshipful’s door; even then the Worshipper carried his hat under his arm, and gave his streaming white hair to the breeze.

Said Mr. Datchery to himself that night, as he looked at his white hair in the gas-lighted looking-glass over the coffee-room chimneypiece at the Crozier, and shook it out: ‘For a single buffer, of an easy temper, living idly on his means, I have had a rather busy afternoon!’

CHAPTER XIX—SHADOW ON THE SUN-DIAL

Again Miss Twinkleton has delivered her valedictory address, with the accompaniments of white-wine and pound-cake, and again the young ladies have departed to their several homes. Helena Landless has left the Nuns' House to attend her brother's fortunes, and pretty Rosa is alone.

Cloisterham is so bright and sunny in these summer days, that the Cathedral and the monastery-ruin show as if their strong walls were transparent. A soft glow seems to shine from within them, rather than upon them from without, such is their mellowness as they look forth on the hot corn-fields and the smoking roads that distantly wind among them. The Cloisterham gardens blush with ripening fruit. Time was when travel-stained pilgrims rode in clattering parties through the city's welcome shades; time is when wayfarers, leading a gipsy life between haymaking time and harvest, and looking as if they were just made of the dust of the earth, so very dusty are they, lounge about on cool door-steps, trying to mend their unmendable shoes, or giving them to the city kennels as a hopeless job, and seeking others in the bundles that they carry, along with their yet unused sickles swathed in bands of straw. At all the more public pumps there is much cooling of bare feet, together with much bubbling and gurgling of drinking with hand to spout on the part of these Bedouins; the Cloisterham police meanwhile looking askant from their beats with suspicion, and manifest impatience that the intruders should depart from within the civic bounds, and once more fry themselves on the simmering high-roads.

On the afternoon of such a day, when the last Cathedral service is done, and when that side of the High Street on which the Nuns' House stands is in grateful shade, save where its quaint old garden opens to the west between the boughs of trees, a servant informs Rosa, to her terror, that Mr. Jasper desires to see her.

If he had chosen his time for finding her at a disadvantage, he could have done no better. Perhaps he has chosen it. Helena Landless is gone, Mrs. Tisher is absent on leave, Miss Twinkleton (in her amateur state of existence) has contributed herself and a veal pie to a picnic.

‘O why, why, why, did you say I was at home!’ cried Rosa, helplessly.

The maid replies, that Mr. Jasper never asked the question.

That he said he knew she was at home, and begged she might be told that he asked to see her.

‘What shall I do! what shall I do!’ thinks Rosa, clasping her hands.

Possessed by a kind of desperation, she adds in the next breath, that she will come to Mr. Jasper in the garden. She shudders at the thought of being shut up with him in the house; but many of its windows command the garden, and she can be seen as well as heard there, and can shriek in the free air and run away. Such is the wild idea that flutters through her mind.

She has never seen him since the fatal night, except when she was questioned before the Mayor, and then he was present in gloomy watchfulness, as representing his lost nephew and burning to avenge him. She hangs her garden-hat on her arm, and goes out. The moment she sees him from the porch, leaning on the sun-dial, the old horrible feeling of being compelled by him, asserts its hold upon her. She feels that she would even then go back, but that he draws her feet towards him. She cannot resist, and sits down, with her head bent, on the garden-seat beside the sun-dial. She cannot look up at him for abhorrence, but she has perceived that he is dressed in deep mourning. So is she. It was not so at first; but the lost has long been given up, and mourned for, as dead.

He would begin by touching her hand. She feels the intention, and draws her hand back. His eyes are then fixed upon her, she knows, though her own see nothing but the grass.

‘I have been waiting,’ he begins, ‘for some time, to be summoned back to my duty near you.’

After several times forming her lips, which she knows he is closely watching, into the shape of some other hesitating reply, and then into none, she answers: ‘Duty, sir?’

‘The duty of teaching you, serving you as your faithful music-master.’

‘I have left off that study.’

‘Not left off, I think. Discontinued. I was told by your guardian that you discontinued it under the shock that we have all felt so acutely. When will you resume?’

‘Never, sir.’

‘Never? You could have done no more if you had loved my dear boy.’

‘I did love him!’ cried Rosa, with a flash of anger.

‘Yes; but not quite—not quite in the right way, shall I say? Not in the intended and expected way. Much as my dear boy was, unhappily, too self-conscious and self-satisfied (I’ll draw no parallel between him and you in that respect) to love as he should have loved, or as any one in his place would have loved—must have loved!’

She sits in the same still attitude, but shrinking a little more.

‘Then, to be told that you discontinued your study with me, was to be politely told that you abandoned it altogether?’ he suggested.

‘Yes,’ says Rosa, with sudden spirit, ‘The politeness was my guardian’s, not mine. I told him that I was resolved to leave off, and that I was determined to stand by my resolution.’

‘And you still are?’

‘I still am, sir. And I beg not to be questioned any more about it. At all events, I will not answer any more; I have that in my power.’

She is so conscious of his looking at her with a gloating admiration of the touch of anger on her, and the fire and animation it brings with it, that even as her spirit rises, it falls again, and she struggles with a sense of shame, affront, and fear, much as she did that night at the piano.

‘I will not question you any more, since you object to it so much; I will confess—’

‘I do not wish to hear you, sir,’ cries Rosa, rising.

This time he does touch her with his outstretched hand. In shrinking from it, she shrinks into her seat again.

‘We must sometimes act in opposition to our wishes,’ he tells her in a low voice. ‘You must do so now, or do more harm to others than you can ever set right.’

‘What harm?’

‘Presently, presently. You question *me*, you see, and surely that’s not fair when you forbid me to question you. Nevertheless, I will answer the question presently. Dearest Rosa! Charming Rosa!’

She starts up again.

This time he does not touch her. But his face looks so wicked and menacing, as he stands leaning against the sun-dial-setting, as it were, his black mark upon the very face of day—that her flight is arrested by horror as she looks at him.

‘I do not forget how many windows command a view of us,’ he says, glancing towards them. ‘I will not touch you again; I will come no nearer to you than I am. Sit down, and there will be no mighty wonder in your music-master’s leaning idly against a pedestal and speaking with you, remembering all that has happened, and our shares in it. Sit down, my beloved.’

She would have gone once more—was all but gone—and once more his face, darkly threatening what would follow if she went, has stopped her. Looking at him with the expression of the instant frozen on her face, she sits down on the seat again.

‘Rosa, even when my dear boy was affianced to you, I loved you madly; even when I thought his happiness in having you for his wife was certain, I loved you madly; even when I strove to make him more ardently devoted to you, I loved you madly; even when he gave me the picture of your lovely face so carelessly traduced by him, which I feigned to hang always in my sight for his sake, but worshipped in torment for years, I loved you madly; in the distasteful work of the day, in the wakeful misery of the night, girded by sordid realities, or wandering through Paradises and Hells of visions into which I rushed, carrying your image in my arms, I loved you madly.’

If anything could make his words more hideous to her than they are in themselves, it would be the contrast between the violence of his look and delivery, and the composure of his assumed attitude.

‘I endured it all in silence. So long as you were his, or so long as I supposed you to be his, I hid my secret loyally. Did I not?’

This lie, so gross, while the mere words in which it is told are so true, is more than Rosa can endure. She answers with kindling indignation: ‘You were as false throughout, sir, as you are now. You were false to him, daily and hourly. You know that you made my life unhappy by your pursuit of me. You know that you made me afraid to open his generous eyes, and that you forced me, for his own trusting, good, good sake, to keep the truth from him, that you were a bad, bad man!’

His preservation of his easy attitude rendering his working features and his convulsive hands absolutely diabolical, he returns, with a fierce extreme of admiration:

‘How beautiful you are! You are more beautiful in anger than in repose. I don’t ask you for your love; give me yourself and your hatred;

give me yourself and that pretty rage; give me yourself and that enchanting scorn; it will be enough for me.'

Impatient tears rise to the eyes of the trembling little beauty, and her face flames; but as she again rises to leave him in indignation, and seek protection within the house, he stretches out his hand towards the porch, as though he invited her to enter it.

'I told you, you rare charmer, you sweet witch, that you must stay and hear me, or do more harm than can ever be undone. You asked me what harm. Stay, and I will tell you. Go, and I will do it!'

Again Rosa quails before his threatening face, though innocent of its meaning, and she remains. Her panting breathing comes and goes as if it would choke her; but with a repressive hand upon her bosom, she remains.

'I have made my confession that my love is mad. It is so mad, that had the ties between me and my dear lost boy been one silken thread less strong, I might have swept even him from your side, when you favoured him.'

A film comes over the eyes she raises for an instant, as though he had turned her faint.

'Even him,' he repeats. 'Yes, even him! Rosa, you see me and you hear me. Judge for yourself whether any other admirer shall love you and live, whose life is in my hand.'

'What do you mean, sir?'

'I mean to show you how mad my love is. It was hawked through the late inquiries by Mr. Crisparkle, that young Landless had confessed to him that he was a rival of my lost boy. That is an inexpiable offence in my eyes. The same Mr. Crisparkle knows under my hand that I have devoted myself to the murderer's discovery and destruction, be he whom he might, and that I determined to discuss the mystery with no one until I should hold the clue in which to entangle the murderer as in a net. I have since worked patiently to wind and wind it round him; and it is slowly winding as I speak.'

'Your belief, if you believe in the criminality of Mr. Landless, is not Mr. Crisparkle's belief, and he is a good man,' Rosa retorts.

'My belief is my own; and I reserve it, worshipped of my soul! Circumstances may accumulate so strongly *even against an innocent man*, that directed, sharpened, and pointed, they may slay him. One wanting link discovered by perseverance against a guilty man, proves his guilt, however slight its evidence before, and he dies. Young Landless stands in deadly peril either way.'

'If you really suppose,' Rosa pleads with him, turning paler, 'that I favour Mr. Landless, or that Mr. Landless has ever in any way addressed himself to me, you are wrong.'

He puts that from him with a slighting action of his hand and a curled lip.

'I was going to show you how madly I love you. More madly now than ever, for I am willing to renounce the second object that has arisen in my life to divide it with you; and henceforth to have no object in existence but you only. Miss Landless has become your bosom friend. You care for her peace of mind?'

'I love her dearly.'

'You care for her good name?'

'I have said, sir, I love her dearly.'

'I am unconsciously,' he observes with a smile, as he folds his hands upon the sun-dial and leans his chin upon them, so that his talk would seem from the windows (faces occasionally come and go there) to be of the airiest and playfullest—'I am unconsciously giving offence by questioning again. I will simply make statements, therefore, and not put questions. You do care for your bosom friend's good name, and you do care for her peace of mind. Then remove the shadow of the gallows from her, dear one!'

'You dare propose to me to—'

'Darling, I dare propose to you. Stop there. If it be bad to idolise you, I am the worst of men; if it be good, I am the best. My love for you is above all other love, and my truth to you is above all other truth. Let me have hope and favour, and I am a forsworn man for your sake.'

Rosa puts her hands to her temples, and, pushing back her hair, looks wildly and abhorrently at him, as though she were trying to piece together what it is his deep purpose to present to her only in fragments.

'Reckon up nothing at this moment, angel, but the sacrifices that I lay at those dear feet, which I could fall down among the vilest ashes and kiss, and put upon my head as a poor savage might. There is my fidelity to my dear boy after death. Tread upon it!'

With an action of his hands, as though he cast down something precious.

'There is the inexpiable offence against my adoration of you. Spurn it!'

With a similar action.

'There are my labours in the cause of a just vengeance for six toiling months. Crush them!'

With another repetition of the action.

'There is my past and my present wasted life. There is the desolation of my heart and my soul. There is my peace; there is my despair. Stamp them into the dust; so that you take me, were it even mortally hating me!'

The frightful vehemence of the man, now reaching its full height, so additionally terrifies her as to break the spell that has held her to the spot. She swiftly moves towards the porch; but in an instant he is at her side, and speaking in her ear.

'Rosa, I am self-repressed again. I am walking calmly beside you to the house. I shall wait for some encouragement and hope. I shall not strike too soon. Give me a sign that you attend to me.'

She slightly and constrainedly moves her hand.

'Not a word of this to any one, or it will bring down the blow, as certainly as night follows day. Another sign that you attend to me.'

She moves her hand once more.

'I love you, love you, love you! If you were to cast me off now—but you will not—you would never be rid of me. No one should come between us. I would pursue you to the death.'

The handmaid coming out to open the gate for him, he quietly pulls off his hat as a parting salute, and goes away with no greater show of agitation than is visible in the effigy of Mr. Sapsea's father opposite. Rosa faints in going up-stairs, and is carefully carried to her room and laid down on her bed. A thunderstorm is coming on, the maids say, and the hot and stifling air has overset the pretty dear: no wonder; they have felt their own knees all of a tremble all day long.

CHAPTER XX—A FLIGHT

Rosa no sooner came to herself than the whole of the late interview was before her. It even seemed as if it had pursued her into her insensibility, and she had not had a moment’s unconsciousness of it. What to do, she was at a frightened loss to know: the only one clear thought in her mind was, that she must fly from this terrible man.

But where could she take refuge, and how could she go? She had never breathed her dread of him to any one but Helena. If she went to Helena, and told her what had passed, that very act might bring down the irreparable mischief that he threatened he had the power, and that she knew he had the will, to do. The more fearful he appeared to her excited memory and imagination, the more alarming her responsibility appeared; seeing that a slight mistake on her part, either in action or delay, might let his malevolence loose on Helena’s brother.

Rosa’s mind throughout the last six months had been stormily confused. A half-formed, wholly unexpressed suspicion tossed in it, now heaving itself up, and now sinking into the deep; now gaining palpability, and now losing it. Jasper’s self-absorption in his nephew when he was alive, and his unceasing pursuit of the inquiry how he came by his death, if he were dead, were themes so rife in the place, that no one appeared able to suspect the possibility of foul play at his hands. She had asked herself the question, ‘Am I so wicked in my thoughts as to conceive a wickedness that others cannot imagine?’ Then she had considered, Did the suspicion come of her previous recoiling from him before the fact? And if so, was not that a proof of its baselessness? Then she had reflected, ‘What motive could he have, according to my accusation?’ She was ashamed to answer in her mind, ‘The motive of gaining *me*!’ And covered her face, as if the lightest shadow of the idea of founding murder on such an idle vanity were a crime almost as great.

She ran over in her mind again, all that he had said by the sun-dial in the garden. He had persisted in treating the disappearance as murder, consistently with his whole public course since the finding of the watch and shirt-pin. If he were afraid of the crime being traced out, would he not rather encourage the idea of a voluntary disappearance? He had even declared that if the ties between him and his nephew had been less strong, he might have swept ‘even him’ away from her side. Was that like his having really done so? He had spoken of laying his six months’ labours in the cause of a just vengeance at her feet. Would he have done that, with that violence of passion, if they were a pretence? Would he have ranged them with his desolate heart and soul, his wasted life, his peace and his despair? The very first sacrifice that he represented himself as making for her, was his fidelity to his dear boy after death. Surely these facts were strong against a fancy that scarcely dared to hint itself. And yet he was so terrible a man! In short, the poor girl (for what could she know of the criminal intellect, which its own professed students perpetually misread, because they persist in trying to reconcile it with the average intellect of average men, instead of identifying it as a horrible wonder apart) could get by no road to any other conclusion than that he *was* a terrible man, and must be fled from.

She had been Helena’s stay and comfort during the whole time. She had constantly assured her of her full belief in her brother’s innocence, and of her sympathy with him in his misery. But she had never seen him since the disappearance, nor had Helena ever spoken one word of his avowal to Mr. Crisparkle in regard of Rosa, though as a part of the interest of the case it was well known far and wide. He was Helena’s unfortunate brother, to her, and nothing more. The assurance she had given her odious suitor was strictly true, though it would have been better (she considered now) if she could have restrained herself from so giving it. Afraid of him as the bright and delicate little creature was, her spirit swelled at the thought of his knowing it from her own lips.

But where was she to go? Anywhere beyond his reach, was no reply to the question. Somewhere must be thought of. She determined to go to her guardian, and to go immediately. The feeling she had imparted to Helena on the night of their first confidence, was so strong upon her—the feeling of not being safe from him, and of the solid walls of the old convent being powerless to keep out his ghostly following of her—that no reasoning of her own could calm her terrors. The fascination of repulsion had been upon her so long, and now culminated so darkly, that she felt as if he had power to bind her by a spell. Glancing out at window, even now, as she rose to dress, the sight of the sun-dial on which he had leaned when he declared himself, turned her cold, and made her shrink from it, as though he had invested it with some awful quality from his own nature.

She wrote a hurried note to Miss Twinkleton, saying that she had sudden reason for wishing to see her guardian promptly, and had gone to him; also, entreating the good lady not to be uneasy, for all was well with her. She hurried a few quite useless articles into a very little bag, left the note in a conspicuous place, and went out, softly closing the gate after her.

It was the first time she had ever been even in Cloisterham High Street alone. But knowing all its ways and windings very well, she hurried straight to the corner from which the omnibus departed. It was, at that very moment, going off.

'Stop and take me, if you please, Joe. I am obliged to go to London.'

In less than another minute she was on her road to the railway, under Joe's protection. Joe waited on her when she got there, put her safely into the railway carriage, and handed in the very little bag after her, as though it were some enormous trunk, hundredweights heavy, which she must on no account endeavour to lift.

'Can you go round when you get back, and tell Miss Twinkleton that you saw me safely off, Joe?'

'It shall be done, Miss.'

'With my love, please, Joe.'

'Yes, Miss—and I wouldn't mind having it myself!' But Joe did not articulate the last clause; only thought it.

Now that she was whirling away for London in real earnest, Rosa was at leisure to resume the thoughts which her personal hurry had checked. The indignant thought that his declaration of love soiled her; that she could only be cleansed from the stain of its impurity by appealing to the honest and true; supported her for a time against her fears, and confirmed her in her hasty resolution. But as the evening grew darker and darker, and the great city impended nearer and nearer, the doubts usual in such cases began to arise. Whether this was not a wild proceeding, after all; how Mr. Grewgious might regard it; whether she should find him at the journey's end; how she would act if he were absent; what might become of her, alone, in a place so strange and crowded; how if she had but waited and taken counsel first; whether, if she could now go back, she would not do it thankfully; a multitude of such uneasy speculations disturbed her, more and more as they accumulated. At length the train came into London over the housetops; and down below lay the gritty streets with their yet un-needed lamps a-glow, on a hot, light, summer night.

‘Hiram Grewgious, Esquire, Staple Inn, London.’ This was all Rosa knew of her destination; but it was enough to send her rattling away again in a cab, through deserts of gritty streets, where many people crowded at the corner of courts and byways to get some air, and where many other people walked with a miserably monotonous noise of shuffling of feet on hot paving-stones, and where all the people and all their surroundings were so gritty and so shabby!

There was music playing here and there, but it did not enliven the case. No barrel-organ mended the matter, and no big drum beat dull care away. Like the chapel bells that were also going here and there, they only seemed to evoke echoes from brick surfaces, and dust from everything. As to the flat wind-instruments, they seemed to have cracked their hearts and souls in pining for the country.

Her jingling conveyance stopped at last at a fast-closed gateway, which appeared to belong to somebody who had gone to bed very early, and was much afraid of housebreakers; Rosa, discharging her conveyance, timidly knocked at this gateway, and was let in, very little bag and all, by a watchman.

‘Does Mr. Grewgious live here?’

‘Mr. Grewgious lives there, Miss,’ said the watchman, pointing further in.

So Rosa went further in, and, when the clocks were striking ten, stood on P. J. T.’s doorsteps, wondering what P. J. T. had done with his street-door.

Guided by the painted name of Mr. Grewgious, she went up-stairs and softly tapped and tapped several times. But no one answering, and Mr. Grewgious’s door-handle yielding to her touch, she went in, and saw her guardian sitting on a window-seat at an open window, with a shaded lamp placed far from him on a table in a corner.

Rosa drew nearer to him in the twilight of the room. He saw her, and he said, in an undertone: ‘Good Heaven!’

Rosa fell upon his neck, with tears, and then he said, returning her embrace:

‘My child, my child! I thought you were your mother!—But what, what, what,’ he added, soothingly, ‘has happened? My dear, what has brought you here? Who has brought you here?'

'No one. I came alone.'

'Lord bless me!' ejaculated Mr. Grewgious. 'Came alone! Why didn't you write to me to come and fetch you?'

'I had no time. I took a sudden resolution. Poor, poor Eddy!'

'Ah, poor fellow, poor fellow!'

'His uncle has made love to me. I cannot bear it,' said Rosa, at once with a burst of tears, and a stamp of her little foot; 'I shudder with horror of him, and I have come to you to protect me and all of us from him, if you will?'

'I will,' cried Mr. Grewgious, with a sudden rush of amazing energy. 'Damn him!

"Confound his politics!
Frustrate his knavish tricks!
On Thee his hopes to fix?
Damn him again!"'

After this most extraordinary outburst, Mr. Grewgious, quite beside himself, plunged about the room, to all appearance undecided whether he was in a fit of loyal enthusiasm, or combative denunciation.

He stopped and said, wiping his face: 'I beg your pardon, my dear, but you will be glad to know I feel better. Tell me no more just now, or I might do it again. You must be refreshed and cheered. What did you take last? Was it breakfast, lunch, dinner, tea, or supper? And what will you take next? Shall it be breakfast, lunch, dinner, tea, or supper?'

The respectful tenderness with which, on one knee before her, he helped her to remove her hat, and disentangle her pretty hair from it, was quite a chivalrous sight. Yet who, knowing him only on the surface, would have expected chivalry—and of the true sort, too; not the spurious—from Mr. Grewgious?

'Your rest too must be provided for,' he went on; 'and you shall have the prettiest chamber in Furnival's. Your toilet must be provided for, and you shall have everything that an unlimited head chambermaid—by which expression I mean a head chambermaid not limited as to outlay—can procure. Is that a bag?' he looked hard at it; sooth to say, it required hard looking at to be seen at all in a dimly lighted room: 'and is it your property, my dear?'

'Yes, sir. I brought it with me.'

‘It is not an extensive bag,’ said Mr. Grewgious, candidly, ‘though admirably calculated to contain a day’s provision for a canary-bird. Perhaps you brought a canary-bird?’

Rosa smiled and shook her head.

‘If you had, he should have been made welcome,’ said Mr. Grewgious, ‘and I think he would have been pleased to be hung upon a nail outside and pit himself against our Staple sparrows; whose execution must be admitted to be not quite equal to their intention. Which is the case with so many of us! You didn’t say what meal, my dear. Have a nice jumble of all meals.’

Rosa thanked him, but said she could only take a cup of tea. Mr. Grewgious, after several times running out, and in again, to mention such supplementary items as marmalade, eggs, watercresses, salted fish, and frizzled ham, ran across to Furnival’s without his hat, to give his various directions. And soon afterwards they were realised in practice, and the board was spread.

‘Lord bless my soul,’ cried Mr. Grewgious, putting the lamp upon it, and taking his seat opposite Rosa; ‘what a new sensation for a poor old Angular bachelor, to be sure!’

Rosa’s expressive little eyebrows asked him what he meant?

‘The sensation of having a sweet young presence in the place, that whitewashes it, paints it, papers it, decorates it with gilding, and makes it Glorious!’ said Mr. Grewgious. ‘Ah me! Ah me!’

As there was something mournful in his sigh, Rosa, in touching him with her tea-cup, ventured to touch him with her small hand too.

‘Thank you, my dear,’ said Mr. Grewgious. ‘Ahem! Let’s talk!’

‘Do you always live here, sir?’ asked Rosa.

‘Yes, my dear.’

‘And always alone?’

‘Always alone; except that I have daily company in a gentleman by the name of Bazzard, my clerk.’

‘*He* doesn’t live here?’

‘No, he goes his way, after office hours. In fact, he is off duty here, altogether, just at present; and a firm down-stairs, with which I have business relations, lend me a substitute. But it would be extremely difficult to replace Mr. Bazzard.’

‘He must be very fond of you,’ said Rosa.

‘He bears up against it with commendable fortitude if he is,’ returned Mr. Grewgious, after considering the matter. ‘But I doubt if he is. Not particularly so. You see, he is discontented, poor fellow.’

‘Why isn’t he contented?’ was the natural inquiry.

‘Misplaced,’ said Mr. Grewgious, with great mystery.

Rosa’s eyebrows resumed their inquisitive and perplexed expression.

‘So misplaced,’ Mr. Grewgious went on, ‘that I feel constantly apologetic towards him. And he feels (though he doesn’t mention it) that I have reason to be.’

Mr. Grewgious had by this time grown so very mysterious, that Rosa did not know how to go on. While she was thinking about it Mr. Grewgious suddenly jerked out of himself for the second time:

‘Let’s talk. We were speaking of Mr. Bazzard. It’s a secret, and moreover it is Mr. Bazzard’s secret; but the sweet presence at my table makes me so unusually expansive, that I feel I must impart it in inviolable confidence. What do you think Mr. Bazzard has done?’

‘O dear!’ cried Rosa, drawing her chair a little nearer, and her mind reverting to Jasper, ‘nothing dreadful, I hope?’

‘He has written a play,’ said Mr. Grewgious, in a solemn whisper. ‘A tragedy.’

Rosa seemed much relieved.

‘And nobody,’ pursued Mr. Grewgious in the same tone, ‘will hear, on any account whatever, of bringing it out.’

Rosa looked reflective, and nodded her head slowly; as who should say, ‘Such things are, and why are they!’

‘Now, you know,’ said Mr. Grewgious, ‘*I* couldn’t write a play.’

‘Not a bad one, sir?’ said Rosa, innocently, with her eyebrows again in action.

‘No. If I was under sentence of decapitation, and was about to be instantly decapitated, and an express arrived with a pardon for the condemned convict Grewgious if he wrote a play, I should be under the necessity of resuming the block, and begging the executioner to proceed to extremities,—meaning,’ said Mr. Grewgious, passing his hand under his chin, ‘the singular number, and this extremity.’

Rosa appeared to consider what she would do if the awkward supposititious case were hers.

‘Consequently,’ said Mr. Grewgious, ‘Mr. Bazzard would have a sense of my inferiority to himself under any circumstances; but when I am his master, you know, the case is greatly aggravated.’

Mr. Grewgious shook his head seriously, as if he felt the offence to be a little too much, though of his own committing.

‘How came you to be his master, sir?’ asked Rosa.

‘A question that naturally follows,’ said Mr. Grewgious. ‘Let’s talk. Mr. Bazzard’s father, being a Norfolk farmer, would have furiously laid about him with a flail, a pitch-fork, and every agricultural implement available for assaulting purposes, on the slightest hint of his son’s having written a play. So the son, bringing to me the father’s rent (which I receive), imparted his secret, and pointed out that he was determined to pursue his genius, and that it would put him in peril of starvation, and that he was not formed for it.’

‘For pursuing his genius, sir?’

‘No, my dear,’ said Mr. Grewgious, ‘for starvation. It was impossible to deny the position, that Mr. Bazzard was not formed to be starved, and Mr. Bazzard then pointed out that it was desirable that I should stand between him and a fate so perfectly unsuited to his formation. In that way Mr. Bazzard became my clerk, and he feels it very much.’

‘I am glad he is grateful,’ said Rosa.

‘I didn’t quite mean that, my dear. I mean, that he feels the degradation. There are some other geniuses that Mr. Bazzard has become acquainted with, who have also written tragedies, which likewise nobody will on any account whatever hear of bringing out, and these choice spirits dedicate their plays to one another in a highly panegyrical manner. Mr. Bazzard has been the subject of one of these dedications. Now, you know, I never had a play dedicated to *me*!’

Rosa looked at him as if she would have liked him to be the recipient of a thousand dedications.

‘Which again, naturally, rubs against the grain of Mr. Bazzard,’ said Mr. Grewgious. ‘He is very short with me sometimes, and then I feel that he is meditating, “This blockhead is my master! A fellow who couldn’t write a tragedy on pain of death, and who will never have one dedicated to him with the most complimentary congratulations on the high position he has taken in the eyes of posterity!” Very trying, very trying. However, in giving him directions, I reflect beforehand: “Perhaps he may not like this,” or “He might take it ill if I asked that;” and so we get on very well. Indeed, better than I could have expected.’

‘Is the tragedy named, sir?’ asked Rosa.

‘Strictly between ourselves,’ answered Mr. Grewgious, ‘it has a dreadfully appropriate name. It is called The Thorn of Anxiety. But Mr. Bazzard hopes—and I hope—that it will come out at last.’

It was not hard to divine that Mr. Grewgious had related the Bazzard history thus fully, at least quite as much for the recreation of his ward’s mind from the subject that had driven her there, as for the gratification of his own tendency to be social and communicative.

‘And now, my dear,’ he said at this point, ‘if you are not too tired to tell me more of what passed to-day—but only if you feel quite able—I should be glad to hear it. I may digest it the better, if I sleep on it to-night.’

Rosa, composed now, gave him a faithful account of the interview. Mr. Grewgious often smoothed his head while it was in progress, and begged to be told a second time those parts which bore on Helena and Neville. When Rosa had finished, he sat grave, silent, and meditative for a while.

‘Clearly narrated,’ was his only remark at last, ‘and, I hope, clearly put away here,’ smoothing his head again. ‘See, my dear,’ taking her to the open window, ‘where they live! The dark windows over yonder.’

‘I may go to Helena to-morrow?’ asked Rosa.

‘I should like to sleep on that question to-night,’ he answered doubtfully. ‘But let me take you to your own rest, for you must need it.’

With that Mr. Grewgious helped her to get her hat on again, and hung upon his arm the very little bag that was of no earthly use, and led her by the hand (with a certain stately awkwardness, as if he were going to walk a minuet) across Holborn, and into Furnival’s Inn. At the hotel door, he confided her to the Unlimited head chambermaid, and said that while she went up to see her room, he would remain below, in case she should wish it exchanged for another, or should find that there was anything she wanted.

Rosa’s room was airy, clean, comfortable, almost gay. The Unlimited had laid in everything omitted from the very little bag (that is to say, everything she could possibly need), and Rosa tripped down the great many stairs again, to thank her guardian for his thoughtful and affectionate care of her.

‘Not at all, my dear,’ said Mr. Grewgious, infinitely gratified; ‘it is I who thank you for your charming confidence and for your charming company. Your breakfast will be provided for you in a neat, compact, and graceful little sitting-room (appropriate to your figure), and I will come to you at ten o'clock in the morning. I hope you don't feel very strange indeed, in this strange place.'

'O no, I feel so safe!'

'Yes, you may be sure that the stairs are fire-proof,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'and that any outbreak of the devouring element would be perceived and suppressed by the watchmen.'

'I did not mean that,' Rosa replied. 'I mean, I feel so safe from him.'

'There is a stout gate of iron bars to keep him out,' said Mr. Grewgious, smiling; 'and Furnival's is fire-proof, and specially watched and lighted, and *I* live over the way!' In the stoutness of his knight-errantry, he seemed to think the last-named protection all sufficient. In the same spirit he said to the gate-porter as he went out, 'If some one staying in the hotel should wish to send across the road to me in the night, a crown will be ready for the messenger.' In the same spirit, he walked up and down outside the iron gate for the best part of an hour, with some solicitude; occasionally looking in between the bars, as if he had laid a dove in a high roost in a cage of lions, and had it on his mind that she might tumble out.

CHAPTER XXI—A RECOGNITION

Nothing occurred in the night to flutter the tired dove; and the dove arose refreshed. With Mr. Grewgious, when the clock struck ten in the morning, came Mr. Crisparkle, who had come at one plunge out of the river at Cloisterham.

‘Miss Twinkleton was so uneasy, Miss Rosa,’ he explained to her, ‘and came round to Ma and me with your note, in such a state of wonder, that, to quiet her, I volunteered on this service by the very first train to be caught in the morning. I wished at the time that you had come to me; but now I think it best that you did *as* you did, and came to your guardian.’

‘I did think of you,’ Rosa told him; ‘but Minor Canon Corner was so near him—’

‘I understand. It was quite natural.’

‘I have told Mr. Crisparkle,’ said Mr. Grewgious, ‘all that you told me last night, my dear. Of course I should have written it to him immediately; but his coming was most opportune. And it was particularly kind of him to come, for he had but just gone.’

‘Have you settled,’ asked Rosa, appealing to them both, ‘what is to be done for Helena and her brother?’

‘Why really,’ said Mr. Crisparkle, ‘I am in great perplexity. If even Mr. Grewgious, whose head is much longer than mine, and who is a whole night’s cogitation in advance of me, is undecided, what must I be!’

The Unlimited here put her head in at the door—after having rapped, and been authorised to present herself—announcing that a gentleman wished for a word with another gentleman named Crisparkle, if any such gentleman were there. If no such gentleman were there, he begged pardon for being mistaken.

‘Such a gentleman is here,’ said Mr. Crisparkle, ‘but is engaged just now.’

‘Is it a dark gentleman?’ interposed Rosa, retreating on her guardian.

‘No, Miss, more of a brown gentleman.’

‘You are sure not with black hair?’ asked Rosa, taking courage.

‘Quite sure of that, Miss. Brown hair and blue eyes.’

‘Perhaps,’ hinted Mr. Grewgious, with habitual caution, ‘it might be well to see him, reverend sir, if you don’t object. When one is in a difficulty or at a loss, one never knows in what direction a way out may chance to open. It is a business principle of mine, in such a case, not to close up any direction, but to keep an eye on every direction that may present itself. I could relate an anecdote in point, but that it would be premature.’

‘If Miss Rosa will allow me, then? Let the gentleman come in,’ said Mr. Crisparkle.

The gentleman came in; apologised, with a frank but modest grace, for not finding Mr. Crisparkle alone; turned to Mr. Crisparkle, and smilingly asked the unexpected question: ‘Who am I?’

‘You are the gentleman I saw smoking under the trees in Staple Inn, a few minutes ago.’

‘True. There I saw you. Who else am I?’

Mr. Crisparkle concentrated his attention on a handsome face, much sunburnt; and the ghost of some departed boy seemed to rise, gradually and dimly, in the room.

The gentleman saw a struggling recollection lighten up the Minor Canon’s features, and smiling again, said: ‘What will you have for breakfast this morning? You are out of jam.’

‘Wait a moment!’ cried Mr. Crisparkle, raising his right hand. ‘Give me another instant! Tartar!’

The two shook hands with the greatest heartiness, and then went the wonderful length—for Englishmen—of laying their hands each on the other’s shoulders, and looking joyfully each into the other’s face.

‘My old fag!’ said Mr. Crisparkle.

‘My old master!’ said Mr. Tartar.

‘You saved me from drowning!’ said Mr. Crisparkle.

‘After which you took to swimming, you know!’ said Mr. Tartar.

‘God bless my soul!’ said Mr. Crisparkle.

‘Amen!’ said Mr. Tartar.

And then they fell to shaking hands most heartily again.

‘Imagine,’ exclaimed Mr. Crisparkle, with glistening eyes: ‘Miss Rosa Bud and Mr. Grewgious, imagine Mr. Tartar, when he was the smallest of juniors, diving for me, catching me, a big heavy senior, by the hair of the head, and striking out for the shore with me like a water-giant!’

‘Imagine my not letting him sink, as I was his fag!’ said Mr. Tartar. ‘But the truth being that he was my best protector and friend, and did me more good than all the masters put together, an irrational impulse seized me to pick him up, or go down with him.’

‘Hem! Permit me, sir, to have the honour,’ said Mr. Grewgious, advancing with extended hand, ‘for an honour I truly esteem it. I am proud to make your acquaintance. I hope you didn’t take cold. I hope you were not inconvenienced by swallowing too much water. How have you been since?’

It was by no means apparent that Mr. Grewgious knew what he said, though it was very apparent that he meant to say something highly friendly and appreciative.

If Heaven, Rosa thought, had but sent such courage and skill to her poor mother’s aid! And he to have been so slight and young then!

‘I don’t wish to be complimented upon it, I thank you; but I think I have an idea,’ Mr. Grewgious announced, after taking a jog-trot or two across the room, so unexpected and unaccountable that they all stared at him, doubtful whether he was choking or had the cramp—‘I *think* I have an idea. I believe I have had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Tartar’s name as tenant of the top set in the house next the top set in the corner?’

‘Yes, sir,’ returned Mr. Tartar. ‘You are right so far.’

‘I am right so far,’ said Mr. Grewgious. ‘Tick that off;’ which he did, with his right thumb on his left. ‘Might you happen to know the name of your neighbour in the top set on the other side of the party-wall?’ coming very close to Mr. Tartar, to lose nothing of his face, in his shortness of sight.

‘Landless.’

‘Tick that off,’ said Mr. Grewgious, taking another trot, and then coming back. ‘No personal knowledge, I suppose, sir?’

‘Slight, but some.’

‘Tick that off,’ said Mr. Grewgious, taking another trot, and again coming back. ‘Nature of knowledge, Mr. Tartar?’

‘I thought he seemed to be a young fellow in a poor way, and I asked his leave—only within a day or so—to share my flowers up there with him; that is to say, to extend my flower-garden to his windows.’

‘Would you have the kindness to take seats?’ said Mr. Grewgious. ‘I *have* an idea!’

They complied; Mr. Tartar none the less readily, for being all abroad; and Mr. Grewgious, seated in the centre, with his hands upon his knees, thus stated his idea, with his usual manner of having got the statement by heart.

‘I cannot as yet make up my mind whether it is prudent to hold open communication under present circumstances, and on the part of the fair member of the present company, with Mr. Neville or Miss Helena. I have reason to know that a local friend of ours (on whom I beg to bestow a passing but a hearty malediction, with the kind permission of my reverend friend) sneaks to and fro, and dodges up and down. When not doing so himself, he may have some informant skulking about, in the person of a watchman, porter, or such-like hanger-on of Staple. On the other hand, Miss Rosa very naturally wishes to see her friend Miss Helena, and it would seem important that at least Miss Helena (if not her brother too, through her) should privately know from Miss Rosa’s lips what has occurred, and what has been threatened. Am I agreed with generally in the views I take?’

‘I entirely coincide with them,’ said Mr. Crisparkle, who had been very attentive.

‘As I have no doubt I should,’ added Mr. Tartar, smiling, ‘if I understood them.’

‘Fair and softly, sir,’ said Mr. Grewgious; ‘we shall fully confide in you directly, if you will favour us with your permission. Now, if our local friend should have any informant on the spot, it is tolerably clear that such informant can only be set to watch the chambers in the occupation of Mr. Neville. He reporting, to our local friend, who comes and goes there, our local friend would supply for himself, from his own previous knowledge, the identity of the parties. Nobody can be set to watch all Staple, or to concern himself with comers and goers to other sets of chambers: unless, indeed, mine.’

‘I begin to understand to what you tend,’ said Mr. Crisparkle, ‘and highly approve of your caution.’

‘I needn’t repeat that I know nothing yet of the why and wherefore,’ said Mr. Tartar; ‘but I also understand to what you tend, so let me say at once that my chambers are freely at your disposal.’

‘There!’ cried Mr. Grewgious, smoothing his head triumphantly, ‘now we have all got the idea. You have it, my dear?’

‘I think I have,’ said Rosa, blushing a little as Mr. Tartar looked quickly towards her.

‘You see, you go over to Staple with Mr. Crisparkle and Mr. Tartar,’ said Mr. Grewgious; ‘I going in and out, and out and in alone, in my usual way; you go up with those gentlemen to Mr. Tartar’s rooms; you look into Mr. Tartar’s flower-garden; you wait for Miss Helena’s appearance there, or you signify to Miss Helena that you are close by; and you communicate with her freely, and no spy can be the wiser.’

‘I am very much afraid I shall be—’

‘Be what, my dear?’ asked Mr. Grewgious, as she hesitated. ‘Not frightened?’

‘No, not that,’ said Rosa, shyly; ‘in Mr. Tartar’s way. We seem to be appropriating Mr. Tartar’s residence so very coolly.’

‘I protest to you,’ returned that gentleman, ‘that I shall think the better of it for evermore, if your voice sounds in it only once.’

Rosa, not quite knowing what to say about that, cast down her eyes, and turning to Mr. Grewgious, dutifully asked if she should put her hat on? Mr. Grewgious being of opinion that she could not do better, she withdrew for the purpose. Mr. Crisparkle took the opportunity of giving Mr. Tartar a summary of the distresses of Neville and his sister; the opportunity was quite long enough, as the hat happened to require a little extra fitting on.

Mr. Tartar gave his arm to Rosa, and Mr. Crisparkle walked, detached, in front.

‘Poor, poor Eddy!’ thought Rosa, as they went along.

Mr. Tartar waved his right hand as he bent his head down over Rosa, talking in an animated way.

‘It was not so powerful or so sun-browned when it saved Mr. Crisparkle,’ thought Rosa, glancing at it; ‘but it must have been very steady and determined even then.’

Mr. Tartar told her he had been a sailor, roving everywhere for years and years.

‘When are you going to sea again?’ asked Rosa.

‘Never!’

Rosa wondered what the girls would say if they could see her crossing the wide street on the sailor’s arm. And she fancied that the passers-by must think her very little and very helpless, contrasted with the strong figure that could have caught her up and carried her out of any danger, miles and miles without resting.

She was thinking further, that his far-seeing blue eyes looked as if they had been used to watch danger afar off, and to watch it without flinching, drawing nearer and nearer: when, happening to raise her own eyes, she found that he seemed to be thinking something about *them*.

This a little confused Rosebud, and may account for her never afterwards quite knowing how she ascended (with his help) to his garden in the air, and seemed to get into a marvellous country that came into sudden bloom like the country on the summit of the magic bean-stalk. May it flourish for ever!

CHAPTER XXII—A GRITTY STATE OF THINGS COMES ON

Mr. Tartar's chambers were the neatest, the cleanest, and the best-ordered chambers ever seen under the sun, moon, and stars. The floors were scrubbed to that extent, that you might have supposed the London blacks emancipated for ever, and gone out of the land for good. Every inch of brass-work in Mr. Tartar's possession was polished and burnished, till it shone like a brazen mirror. No speck, nor spot, nor spatter soiled the purity of any of Mr. Tartar's household gods, large, small, or middle-sized. His sitting-room was like the admiral's cabin, his bath-room was like a dairy, his sleeping-chamber, fitted all about with lockers and drawers, was like a seedsman's shop; and his nicely-balanced cot just stirred in the midst, as if it breathed. Everything belonging to Mr. Tartar had quarters of its own assigned to it: his maps and charts had their quarters; his books had theirs; his brushes had theirs; his boots had theirs; his clothes had theirs; his case-bottles had theirs; his telescopes and other instruments had theirs. Everything was readily accessible. Shelf, bracket, locker, hook, and drawer were equally within reach, and were equally contrived with a view to avoiding waste of room, and providing some snug inches of stowage for something that would have exactly fitted nowhere else. His gleaming little service of plate was so arranged upon his sideboard as that a slack salt-spoon would have instantly betrayed itself; his toilet implements were so arranged upon his dressing-table as that a toothpick of slovenly deportment could have been reported at a glance. So with the curiosities he had brought home from various voyages. Stuffed, dried, repolished, or otherwise preserved, according to their kind; birds, fishes, reptiles, arms, articles of dress, shells, seaweeds, grasses, or memorials of coral reef; each was displayed in its especial place, and each could have been displayed in no better place. Paint and varnish seemed to be kept somewhere out of sight, in constant readiness to obliterate stray finger-marks wherever any might become perceptible in Mr. Tartar's chambers. No man-of-war was ever kept more spick and span from careless touch. On this bright summer day, a neat awning was rigged over Mr. Tartar's flower-garden as only a sailor can rig it, and there was a sea-going air upon the whole effect, so delightfully complete, that the flower-garden might have appertained to stern-windows afloat, and the whole concern might have bowled away gallantly with all on board, if Mr. Tartar had only clapped to his lips the speaking-trumpet that was slung in a corner, and given hoarse orders to heave the anchor up, look alive there, men, and get all sail upon her!

Mr. Tartar doing the honours of this gallant craft was of a piece with the rest. When a man rides an amiable hobby that shies at nothing and kicks nobody, it is only agreeable to find him riding it with a humorous sense of the droll side of the creature. When the man is a cordial and an earnest man by nature, and withal is perfectly fresh and genuine, it may be doubted whether he is ever seen to greater advantage than at such a time. So Rosa would have naturally thought (even if she hadn't been conducted over the ship with all the homage due to the First Lady of the Admiralty, or First Fairy of the Sea), that it was charming to see and hear Mr. Tartar half laughing at, and half rejoicing in, his various contrivances. So Rosa would have naturally thought, anyhow, that the sunburnt sailor showed to great advantage when, the inspection finished, he delicately withdrew out of his admiral's cabin, beseeching her to consider herself its Queen, and waving her free of his flower-garden with the hand that had had Mr. Crisparkle's life in it.

'Helena! Helena Landless! Are you there?'

'Who speaks to me? Not Rosa?' Then a second handsome face appearing.

'Yes, my darling!'

'Why, how did you come here, dearest?'

'I—I don't quite know,' said Rosa with a blush; 'unless I am dreaming!'

Why with a blush? For their two faces were alone with the other flowers. Are blushes among the fruits of the country of the magic bean-stalk?

'*I* am not dreaming,' said Helena, smiling. 'I should take more for granted if I were. How do we come together—or so near together—so very unexpectedly?'

Unexpectedly indeed, among the dingy gables and chimney-pots of P. J. T.'s connection, and the flowers that had sprung from the salt sea. But Rosa, waking, told in a hurry how they came to be together, and all the why and wherefore of that matter.

‘And Mr. Crisparkle is here,’ said Rosa, in rapid conclusion; ‘and, could you believe it? long ago he saved his life!’

‘I could believe any such thing of Mr. Crisparkle,’ returned Helena, with a mantling face.

(More blushes in the bean-stalk country!)

‘Yes, but it wasn’t Crisparkle,’ said Rosa, quickly putting in the correction.

‘I don’t understand, love.’

‘It was very nice of Mr. Crisparkle to be saved,’ said Rosa, ‘and he couldn’t have shown his high opinion of Mr. Tartar more expressively. But it was Mr. Tartar who saved him.’

Helena’s dark eyes looked very earnestly at the bright face among the leaves, and she asked, in a slower and more thoughtful tone:

‘Is Mr. Tartar with you now, dear?’

‘No; because he has given up his rooms to me—to us, I mean. It is such a beautiful place!’

‘Is it?’

‘It is like the inside of the most exquisite ship that ever sailed. It is like—it is like—’

‘Like a dream?’ suggested Helena.

Rosa answered with a little nod, and smelled the flowers.

Helena resumed, after a short pause of silence, during which she seemed (or it was Rosa’s fancy) to compassionate somebody: ‘My poor Neville is reading in his own room, the sun being so very bright on this side just now. I think he had better not know that you are so near.’

‘O, I think so too!’ cried Rosa very readily.

‘I suppose,’ pursued Helena, doubtfully, ‘that he must know by-and-by all you have told me; but I am not sure. Ask Mr. Crisparkle’s advice, my darling. Ask him whether I may tell Neville as much or as little of what you have told me as I think best.’

Rosa subsided into her state-cabin, and propounded the question. The Minor Canon was for the free exercise of Helena’s judgment.

‘I thank him very much,’ said Helena, when Rosa emerged again with her report. ‘Ask him whether it would be best to wait until any more maligning and pursuing of Neville on the part of this wretch shall disclose itself, or to try to anticipate it: I mean, so far as to find out whether any such goes on darkly about us?’

The Minor Canon found this point so difficult to give a confident opinion on, that, after two or three attempts and failures, he suggested a reference to Mr. Grewgious. Helena acquiescing, he betook himself (with a most unsuccessful assumption of lounging indifference) across the quadrangle to P. J. T.'s, and stated it. Mr. Grewgious held decidedly to the general principle, that if you could steal a march upon a brigand or a wild beast, you had better do it; and he also held decidedly to the special case, that John Jasper was a brigand and a wild beast in combination.

Thus advised, Mr. Crisparkle came back again and reported to Rosa, who in her turn reported to Helena. She now steadily pursuing her train of thought at her window, considered thereupon.

'We may count on Mr. Tartar's readiness to help us, Rosa?' she inquired.

O yes! Rosa shyly thought so. O yes, Rosa shyly believed she could almost answer for it. But should she ask Mr. Crisparkle? 'I think your authority on the point as good as his, my dear,' said Helena, sedately, 'and you needn't disappear again for that.' Odd of Helena!

'You see, Neville,' Helena pursued after more reflection, 'knows no one else here: he has not so much as exchanged a word with any one else here. If Mr. Tartar would call to see him openly and often; if he would spare a minute for the purpose, frequently; if he would even do so, almost daily; something might come of it.'

'Something might come of it, dear?' repeated Rosa, surveying her friend's beauty with a highly perplexed face. 'Something might?'

'If Neville's movements are really watched, and if the purpose really is to isolate him from all friends and acquaintance and wear his daily life out grain by grain (which would seem to be the threat to you), does it not appear likely,' said Helena, 'that his enemy would in some way communicate with Mr. Tartar to warn him off from Neville? In which case, we might not only know the fact, but might know from Mr. Tartar what the terms of the communication were.'

'I see!' cried Rosa. And immediately darted into her state-cabin again.

Presently her pretty face reappeared, with a greatly heightened colour, and she said that she had told Mr. Crisparkle, and that Mr. Crisparkle had fetched in Mr. Tartar, and that Mr. Tartar—'who is waiting now, in case you want him,' added Rosa, with a half look back, and in not a little confusion between the inside of the state-cabin and out—had declared his readiness to act as she had suggested, and to enter on his task that very day.

‘I thank him from my heart,’ said Helena. ‘Pray tell him so.’

Again not a little confused between the Flower-garden and the Cabin, Rosa dipped in with her message, and dipped out again with more assurances from Mr. Tartar, and stood wavering in a divided state between Helena and him, which proved that confusion is not always necessarily awkward, but may sometimes present a very pleasant appearance.

‘And now, darling,’ said Helena, ‘we will be mindful of the caution that has restricted us to this interview for the present, and will part. I hear Neville moving too. Are you going back?’

‘To Miss Twinkleton’s?’ asked Rosa.

‘Yes.’

‘O, I could never go there any more. I couldn’t indeed, after that dreadful interview!’ said Rosa.

‘Then where *are* you going, pretty one?’

‘Now I come to think of it, I don’t know,’ said Rosa. ‘I have settled nothing at all yet, but my guardian will take care of me. Don’t be uneasy, dear. I shall be sure to be somewhere.’

(It did seem likely.)

‘And I shall hear of my Rosebud from Mr. Tartar?’ inquired Helena.

‘Yes, I suppose so; from—’ Rosa looked back again in a flutter, instead of supplying the name. ‘But tell me one thing before we part, dearest Helena. Tell me—that you are sure, sure, sure, I couldn’t help it.’

‘Help it, love?’

‘Help making him malicious and revengeful. I couldn’t hold any terms with him, could I?’

‘You know how I love you, darling,’ answered Helena, with indignation; ‘but I would sooner see you dead at his wicked feet.’

‘That’s a great comfort to me! And you will tell your poor brother so, won’t you? And you will give him my remembrance and my sympathy? And you will ask him not to hate me?’

With a mournful shake of the head, as if that would be quite a superfluous entreaty, Helena lovingly kissed her two hands to her friend, and her friend’s two hands were kissed to her; and then she saw a third hand (a brown one) appear among the flowers and leaves, and help her friend out of sight.

The refection that Mr. Tartar produced in the Admiral's Cabin by merely touching the spring knob of a locker and the handle of a drawer, was a dazzling enchanted repast. Wonderful macaroons, glittering liqueurs, magically-preserved tropical spices, and jellies of celestial tropical fruits, displayed themselves profusely at an instant's notice. But Mr. Tartar could not make time stand still; and time, with his hard-hearted fleetness, strode on so fast, that Rosa was obliged to come down from the bean-stalk country to earth and her guardian's chambers.

'And now, my dear,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'what is to be done next? To put the same thought in another form; what is to be done with you?'

Rosa could only look apologetically sensible of being very much in her own way and in everybody else's. Some passing idea of living, fireproof, up a good many stairs in Furnival's Inn for the rest of her life, was the only thing in the nature of a plan that occurred to her.

'It has come into my thoughts,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'that as the respected lady, Miss Twinkleton, occasionally repairs to London in the recess, with the view of extending her connection, and being available for interviews with metropolitan parents, if any—whether, until we have time in which to turn ourselves round, we might invite Miss Twinkleton to come and stay with you for a month?'

'Stay where, sir?'

'Whether,' explained Mr. Grewgious, 'we might take a furnished lodging in town for a month, and invite Miss Twinkleton to assume the charge of you in it for that period?'

'And afterwards?' hinted Rosa.

'And afterwards,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'we should be no worse off than we are now.'

'I think that might smooth the way,' assented Rosa.

'Then let us,' said Mr. Grewgious, rising, 'go and look for a furnished lodging. Nothing could be more acceptable to me than the sweet presence of last evening, for all the remaining evenings of my existence; but these are not fit surroundings for a young lady. Let us set out in quest of adventures, and look for a furnished lodging. In the meantime, Mr. Crisparkle here, about to return home immediately, will no doubt kindly see Miss Twinkleton, and invite that lady to co-operate in our plan.'

Mr. Crisparkle, willingly accepting the commission, took his departure; Mr. Grewgious and his ward set forth on their expedition.

As Mr. Grewgious's idea of looking at a furnished lodging was to get on the opposite side of the street to a house with a suitable bill in the window, and stare at it; and then work his way tortuously to the back of the house, and stare at that; and then not go in, but make similar trials of another house, with the same result; their progress was but slow. At length he bethought himself of a widowed cousin, divers times removed, of Mr. Bazzard's, who had once solicited his influence in the lodger world, and who lived in Southampton Street, Bloomsbury Square. This lady's name, stated in uncompromising capitals of considerable size on a brass door-plate, and yet not lucidly as to sex or condition, was Billickin.

Personal faintness, and an overpowering personal candour, were the distinguishing features of Mrs. Billickin's organisation. She came languishing out of her own exclusive back parlour, with the air of having been expressly brought-to for the purpose, from an accumulation of several swoons.

'I hope I see you well, sir,' said Mrs. Billickin, recognising her visitor with a bend.

'Thank you, quite well. And you, ma'am?' returned Mr. Grewgious.

'I am as well,' said Mrs. Billickin, becoming aspirational with excess of faintness, 'as I hever ham.'

'My ward and an elderly lady,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'wish to find a genteel lodging for a month or so. Have you any apartments available, ma'am?'

'Mr. Grewgious,' returned Mrs. Billickin, 'I will not deceive you; far from it. I *have* apartments available.'

This with the air of adding: 'Convey me to the stake, if you will; but while I live, I will be candid.'

'And now, what apartments, ma'am?' asked Mr. Grewgious, cosily. To tame a certain severity apparent on the part of Mrs. Billickin.

'There is this sitting-room—which, call it what you will, it is the front parlour, Miss,' said Mrs. Billickin, impressing Rosa into the conversation: 'the back parlour being what I cling to and never part with; and there is two bedrooms at the top of the 'ouse with gas laid on. I do not tell you that your bedroom floors is firm, for firm they are not. The gas-fitter himself allowed, that to make a firm job, he must go right under your jistes, and it were not worth the outlay as a yearly tenant so to do. The piping is carried above your jistes, and it is best that it should be made known to you.'

Mr. Grewgious and Rosa exchanged looks of some dismay, though they had not the least idea what latent horrors this carriage of the piping might involve. Mrs. Billickin put her hand to her heart, as having eased it of a load.

‘Well! The roof is all right, no doubt,’ said Mr. Grewgious, plucking up a little.

‘Mr. Grewgious,’ returned Mrs. Billickin, ‘if I was to tell you, sir, that to have nothink above you is to have a floor above you, I should put a deception upon you which I will not do. No, sir. Your slates will rattle loose at that elewation in windy weather, do your utmost, best or worst! I defy you, sir, be you what you may, to keep your slates tight, try how you can.’ Here Mrs. Billickin, having been warm with Mr. Grewgious, cooled a little, not to abuse the moral power she held over him. ‘Consequent,’ proceeded Mrs. Billickin, more mildly, but still firmly in her incorruptible candour: ‘consequent it would be worse than of no use for me to trapse and travel up to the top of the ’ouse with you, and for you to say, “Mrs. Billickin, what stain do I notice in the ceiling, for a stain I do consider it?” and for me to answer, “I do not understand you, sir.” No, sir, I will not be so underhand. I *do* understand you before you pint it out. It is the wet, sir. It do come in, and it do not come in. You may lay dry there half your lifetime; but the time will come, and it is best that you should know it, when a dripping sop would be no name for you.’

Mr. Grewgious looked much disgraced by being prefigured in this pickle.

‘Have you any other apartments, ma’am?’ he asked.

‘Mr. Grewgious,’ returned Mrs. Billickin, with much solemnity, ‘I have. You ask me have I, and my open and my honest answer air, I have. The first and second floors is wacant, and sweet rooms.’

‘Come, come! There’s nothing against *them*,’ said Mr. Grewgious, comforting himself.

‘Mr. Grewgious,’ replied Mrs. Billickin, ‘pardon me, there is the stairs. Unless your mind is prepared for the stairs, it will lead to inevitable disappointment. You cannot, Miss,’ said Mrs. Billickin, addressing Rosa reproachfully, ‘place a first floor, and far less a second, on the level footing ‘of a parlour. No, you cannot do it, Miss, it is beyond your power, and wherefore try?’

Mrs. Billickin put it very feelingly, as if Rosa had shown a headstrong determination to hold the untenable position.

‘Can we see these rooms, ma’am?’ inquired her guardian.

‘Mr. Grewgious,’ returned Mrs. Billickin, ‘you can. I will not disguise it from you, sir; you can.’

Mrs. Billickin then sent into her back parlour for her shawl (it being a state fiction, dating from immemorial antiquity, that she could never go anywhere without being wrapped up), and having been enrolled by her attendant, led the way. She made various genteel pauses on the stairs for breath, and clutched at her heart in the drawing-room as if it had very nearly got loose, and she had caught it in the act of taking wing.

‘And the second floor?’ said Mr. Grewgious, on finding the first satisfactory.

‘Mr. Grewgious,’ replied Mrs. Billickin, turning upon him with ceremony, as if the time had now come when a distinct understanding on a difficult point must be arrived at, and a solemn confidence established, ‘the second floor is over this.’

‘Can we see that too, ma’am?’

‘Yes, sir,’ returned Mrs. Billickin, ‘it is open as the day.’

That also proving satisfactory, Mr. Grewgious retired into a window with Rosa for a few words of consultation, and then asking for pen and ink, sketched out a line or two of agreement. In the meantime Mrs. Billickin took a seat, and delivered a kind of Index to, or Abstract of, the general question.

‘Five-and-forty shillings per week by the month certain at the time of year,’ said Mrs. Billickin, ‘is only reasonable to both parties. It is not Bond Street nor yet St. James’s Palace; but it is not pretended that it is. Neither is it attempted to be denied—for why should it?—that the Arching leads to a mews. Mewses must exist. Respecting attendance; two is kep’, at liberal wages. Words *has* arisen as to tradesmen, but dirty shoes on fresh hearth-stoning was attributable, and no wish for a commission on your orders. Coals is either *by* the fire, or *per* the scuttle.’ She emphasised the prepositions as marking a subtle but immense difference. ‘Dogs is not viewed with favour. Besides litter, they gets stole, and sharing suspicions is apt to creep in, and unpleasantness takes place.’

By this time Mr. Grewgious had his agreement-lines, and his earnest-money, ready. ‘I have signed it for the ladies, ma’am,’ he said, ‘and you’ll have the goodness to sign it for yourself, Christian and Surname, there, if you please.'

'Mr. Grewgious,' said Mrs. Billickin in a new burst of candour, 'no, sir! You must excuse the Christian name.'

Mr. Grewgious stared at her.

'The door-plate is used as a protection,' said Mrs. Billickin, 'and acts as such, and go from it I will not.'

Mr. Grewgious stared at Rosa.

'No, Mr. Grewgious, you must excuse me. So long as this 'ouse is known indefinite as Billickin's, and so long as it is a doubt with the riff-raff where Billickin may be hidin', near the street-door or down the airy, and what his weight and size, so long I feel safe. But commit myself to a solitary female statement, no, Miss! Nor would you for a moment wish,' said Mrs. Billickin, with a strong sense of injury, 'to take that advantage of your sex, if you were not brought to it by inconsiderate example.'

Rosa reddening as if she had made some most disgraceful attempt to overreach the good lady, besought Mr. Grewgious to rest content with any signature. And accordingly, in a baronial way, the sign-manual Billickin got appended to the document.

Details were then settled for taking possession on the next day but one, when Miss Twinkleton might be reasonably expected; and Rosa went back to Furnival's Inn on her guardian's arm.

Behold Mr. Tartar walking up and down Furnival's Inn, checking himself when he saw them coming, and advancing towards them!

'It occurred to me,' hinted Mr. Tartar, 'that we might go up the river, the weather being so delicious and the tide serving. I have a boat of my own at the Temple Stairs.'

'I have not been up the river for this many a day,' said Mr. Grewgious, tempted.

'I was never up the river,' added Rosa.

Within half an hour they were setting this matter right by going up the river. The tide was running with them, the afternoon was charming. Mr. Tartar's boat was perfect. Mr. Tartar and Lobley (Mr. Tartar's man) pulled a pair of oars. Mr. Tartar had a yacht, it seemed, lying somewhere down by Greenhithe; and Mr. Tartar's man had charge of this yacht, and was detached upon his present service. He was a jolly-favoured man, with tawny hair and whiskers, and a big red face. He was the dead image of the sun in old woodcuts, his hair and whiskers answering for rays all around him. Resplendent in the bow of the boat, he was a shining sight, with a man-of-war's man's shirt on—or off, according to opinion—and his arms and breast tattooed all sorts of patterns. Lobley seemed to take it easily, and so did Mr. Tartar; yet their oars bent as they pulled, and the boat bounded under them. Mr. Tartar talked as if he were doing nothing, to Rosa who was really doing nothing, and to Mr. Grewgious who was doing this much that he steered all wrong; but what did that matter, when a turn of Mr. Tartar's skilful wrist, or a mere grin of Mr. Lobley's over the bow, put all to rights! The tide bore them on in the gayest and most sparkling manner, until they stopped to dine in some ever-lastingly-green garden, needing no matter-of-fact identification here; and then the tide obligingly turned—being devoted to that party alone for that day; and as they floated idly among some osier-beds, Rosa tried what she could do in the rowing way, and came off splendidly, being much assisted; and Mr. Grewgious tried what he could do, and came off on his back, doubled up with an oar under his chin, being not assisted at all. Then there was an interval of rest under boughs (such rest!) what time Mr. Lobley mopped, and, arranging cushions, stretchers, and the like, danced the tight-rope the whole length of the boat like a man to whom shoes were a superstition and stockings slavery; and then came the sweet return among delicious odours of limes in bloom, and musical ripplings; and, all too soon, the great black city cast its shadow on the waters, and its dark bridges spanned them as death spans life, and the everlastingly-green garden seemed to be left for everlasting, unregainable and far away.

'Cannot people get through life without gritty stages, I wonder?' Rosa thought next day, when the town was very gritty again, and everything had a strange and an uncomfortable appearance of seeming to wait for something that wouldn't come. No. She began to think, that, now the Cloisterham school-days had glided past and gone, the gritty stages would begin to set in at intervals and make themselves wearily known!

Yet what did Rosa expect? Did she expect Miss Twinkleton? Miss Twinkleton duly came. Forth from her back parlour issued the Billickin to receive Miss Twinkleton, and War was in the Billickin's eye from that fell moment.

Miss Twinkleton brought a quantity of luggage with her, having all Rosa's as well as her own. The Billickin took it ill that Miss Twinkleton's mind, being sorely disturbed by this luggage, failed to take in her personal identity with that clearness of perception which was due to its demands. Stateliness mounted her gloomy throne upon the Billickin's brow in consequence. And when Miss Twinkleton, in agitation taking stock of her trunks and packages, of which she had seventeen, particularly counted in the Billickin herself as number eleven, the B. found it necessary to repudiate.

'Things cannot too soon be put upon the footing,' said she, with a candour so demonstrative as to be almost obtrusive, 'that the person of the 'ouse is not a box nor yet a bundle, nor a carpet-bag. No, I am 'ily obleeged to you, Miss Twinkleton, nor yet a beggar.'

This last disclaimer had reference to Miss Twinkleton's distractedly pressing two-and-sixpence on her, instead of the cabman.

Thus cast off, Miss Twinkleton wildly inquired, 'which gentleman' was to be paid? There being two gentlemen in that position (Miss Twinkleton having arrived with two cabs), each gentleman on being paid held forth his two-and-sixpence on the flat of his open hand, and, with a speechless stare and a dropped jaw, displayed his wrong to heaven and earth. Terrified by this alarming spectacle, Miss Twinkleton placed another shilling in each hand; at the same time appealing to the law in flurried accents, and recounting her luggage this time with the two gentlemen in, who caused the total to come out complicated. Meanwhile the two gentlemen, each looking very hard at the last shilling grumblingly, as if it might become eighteen-pence if he kept his eyes on it, descended the doorsteps, ascended their carriages, and drove away, leaving Miss Twinkleton on a bonnet-box in tears.

The Billickin beheld this manifestation of weakness without sympathy, and gave directions for 'a young man to be got in' to wrestle with the luggage. When that gladiator had disappeared from the arena, peace ensued, and the new lodgers dined.

But the Billickin had somehow come to the knowledge that Miss Twinkleton kept a school. The leap from that knowledge to the inference that Miss Twinkleton set herself to teach *her* something, was easy. 'But you don't do it,' soliloquised the Billickin; 'I am not your pupil, whatever she,' meaning Rosa, 'may be, poor thing!'

Miss Twinkleton, on the other hand, having changed her dress and recovered her spirits, was animated by a bland desire to improve the occasion in all ways, and to be as serene a model as possible. In a happy compromise between her two states of existence, she had already become, with her workbasket before her, the equably vivacious companion with a slight judicious flavouring of information, when the Billickin announced herself.

‘I will not hide from you, ladies,’ said the B., enveloped in the shawl of state, ‘for it is not my character to hide neither my motives nor my actions, that I take the liberty to look in upon you to express a ’ope that your dinner was to your liking. Though not Professed but Plain, still her wages should be a sufficient object to her to stimilate to soar above mere roast and biled.’

‘We dined very well indeed,’ said Rosa, ‘thank you.’

‘Accustomed,’ said Miss Twinkleton with a gracious air, which to the jealous ears of the Billickin seemed to add ‘my good woman’—‘accustomed to a liberal and nutritious, yet plain and salutary diet, we have found no reason to bemoan our absence from the ancient city, and the methodical household, in which the quiet routine of our lot has been hitherto cast.’

‘I did think it well to mention to my cook,’ observed the Billickin with a gush of candour, ‘which I ’ope you will agree with, Miss Twinkleton, was a right precaution, that the young lady being used to what we should consider here but poor diet, had better be brought forward by degrees. For, a rush from scanty feeding to generous feeding, and from what you may call messing to what you may call method, do require a power of constitution which is not often found in youth, particular when undermined by boarding-school!’

It will be seen that the Billickin now openly pitted herself against Miss Twinkleton, as one whom she had fully ascertained to be her natural enemy.

‘Your remarks,’ returned Miss Twinkleton, from a remote moral eminence, ‘are well meant, I have no doubt; but you will permit me to observe that they develop a mistaken view of the subject, which can only be imputed to your extreme want of accurate information.’

‘My informiation,’ retorted the Billickin, throwing in an extra syllable for the sake of emphasis at once polite and powerful—‘my informiation, Miss Twinkleton, were my own experience, which I believe is usually considered to be good guidance. But whether so or not, I was put in youth to a very genteel boarding-school, the mistress being no less a lady than yourself, of about your own age or it may be some years younger, and a poorness of blood flowed from the table which has run through my life.’

‘Very likely,’ said Miss Twinkleton, still from her distant eminence; ‘and very much to be deplored.—Rosa, my dear, how are you getting on with your work?’

‘Miss Twinkleton,’ resumed the Billickin, in a courtly manner, ‘before retiring on the ’int, as a lady should, I wish to ask of yourself, as a lady, whether I am to consider that my words is doubted?’

‘I am not aware on what ground you cherish such a supposition,’ began Miss Twinkleton, when the Billickin neatly stopped her.

‘Do not, if you please, put suppositions betwixt my lips where none such have been imparted by myself. Your flow of words is great, Miss Twinkleton, and no doubt is expected from you by your pupils, and no doubt is considered worth the money. *No* doubt, I am sure. But not paying for flows of words, and not asking to be favoured with them here, I wish to repeat my question.’

‘If you refer to the poverty of your circulation,’ began Miss Twinkleton, when again the Billickin neatly stopped her.

‘I have used no such expressions.’

‘If you refer, then, to the poorness of your blood—’

‘Brought upon me,’ stipulated the Billickin, expressly, ‘at a boarding-school—’

‘Then,’ resumed Miss Twinkleton, ‘all I can say is, that I am bound to believe, on your asseveration, that it is very poor indeed. I cannot forbear adding, that if that unfortunate circumstance influences your conversation, it is much to be lamented, and it is eminently desirable that your blood were richer.—Rosa, my dear, how are you getting on with your work?’

‘Hem! Before retiring, Miss,’ proclaimed the Billickin to Rosa, loftily cancelling Miss Twinkleton, ‘I should wish it to be understood between yourself and me that my transactions in future is with you alone. I know no elderly lady here, Miss, none older than yourself.’

‘A highly desirable arrangement, Rosa my dear,’ observed Miss Twinkleton.

‘It is not, Miss,’ said the Billickin, with a sarcastic smile, ‘that I possess the Mill I have heard of, in which old single ladies could be ground up young (what a gift it would be to some of us), but that I limit myself to you totally.’

‘When I have any desire to communicate a request to the person of the house, Rosa my dear,’ observed Miss Twinkleton with majestic cheerfulness, ‘I will make it known to you, and you will kindly undertake, I am sure, that it is conveyed to the proper quarter.’

‘Good-evening, Miss,’ said the Billickin, at once affectionately and distantly. ‘Being alone in my eyes, I wish you good-evening with best wishes, and do not find myself drove, I am truly ’appy to say, into expressing my contempt for an indiwidual, unfortunately for yourself, belonging to you.’

The Billickin gracefully withdrew with this parting speech, and from that time Rosa occupied the restless position of shuttlecock between these two battledores. Nothing could be done without a smart match being played out. Thus, on the daily-arising question of dinner, Miss Twinkleton would say, the three being present together:

‘Perhaps, my love, you will consult with the person of the house, whether she can procure us a lamb’s fry; or, failing that, a roast fowl.’

On which the Billickin would retort (Rosa not having spoken a word), ‘If you was better accustomed to butcher’s meat, Miss, you would not entertain the idea of a lamb’s fry. Firstly, because lambs has long been sheep, and secondly, because there is such things as killing-days, and there is not. As to roast fowls, Miss, why you must be quite surfeited with roast fowls, letting alone your buying, when you market for yourself, the agedest of poultry with the scaliest of legs, quite as if you was accustomed to picking ’em out for cheapness. Try a little inwention, Miss. Use yourself to ’ousekeeping a bit. Come now, think of somethink else.’

To this encouragement, offered with the indulgent toleration of a wise and liberal expert, Miss Twinkleton would rejoin, reddening:

‘Or, my dear, you might propose to the person of the house a duck.’

‘Well, Miss!’ the Billickin would exclaim (still no word being spoken by Rosa), ‘you do surprise me when you speak of ducks! Not to mention that they’re getting out of season and very dear, it really strikes to my heart to see you have a duck; for the breast, which is the only delicate cuts in a duck, always goes in a direction which I cannot imagine where, and your own plate comes down so miserably skin-and-bony! Try again, Miss. Think more of yourself, and less of others. A dish of sweetbreads now, or a bit of mutton. Something at which you can get your equal chance.’

Occasionally the game would wax very brisk indeed, and would be kept up with a smartness rendering such an encounter as this quite tame. But the Billickin almost invariably made by far the higher score; and would come in with side hits of the most unexpected and extraordinary description, when she seemed without a chance.

All this did not improve the gritty state of things in London, or the air that London had acquired in Rosa's eyes of waiting for something that never came. Tired of working, and conversing with Miss Twinkleton, she suggested working and reading: to which Miss Twinkleton readily assented, as an admirable reader, of tried powers. But Rosa soon made the discovery that Miss Twinkleton didn't read fairly. She cut the love-scenes, interpolated passages in praise of female celibacy, and was guilty of other glaring pious frauds. As an instance in point, take the glowing passage: 'Ever dearest and best adored,—said Edward, clasping the dear head to his breast, and drawing the silken hair through his caressing fingers, from which he suffered it to fall like golden rain,—ever dearest and best adored, let us fly from the unsympathetic world and the sterile coldness of the stony-hearted, to the rich warm Paradise of Trust and Love.' Miss Twinkleton's fraudulent version tamely ran thus: 'Ever engaged to me with the consent of our parents on both sides, and the approbation of the silver-haired rector of the district,—said Edward, respectfully raising to his lips the taper fingers so skilful in embroidery, tambour, crochet, and other truly feminine arts,—let me call on thy papa ere to-morrow's dawn has sunk into the west, and propose a suburban establishment, lowly it may be, but within our means, where he will be always welcome as an evening guest, and where every arrangement shall invest economy, and constant interchange of scholastic acquirements with the attributes of the ministering angel to domestic bliss.'

As the days crept on and nothing happened, the neighbours began to say that the pretty girl at Billickin's, who looked so wistfully and so much out of the gritty windows of the drawing-room, seemed to be losing her spirits. The pretty girl might have lost them but for the accident of lighting on some books of voyages and sea-adventure. As a compensation against their romance, Miss Twinkleton, reading aloud, made the most of all the latitudes and longitudes, bearings, winds, currents, offsets, and other statistics (which she felt to be none the less improving because they expressed nothing whatever to her); while Rosa, listening intently, made the most of what was nearest to her heart. So they both did better than before.

CHAPTER XXIII—THE DAWN AGAIN

Although Mr. Crisparkle and John Jasper met daily under the Cathedral roof, nothing at any time passed between them having reference to Edwin Drood, after the time, more than half a year gone by, when Jasper mutely showed the Minor Canon the conclusion and the resolution entered in his Diary. It is not likely that they ever met, though so often, without the thoughts of each reverting to the subject. It is not likely that they ever met, though so often, without a sensation on the part of each that the other was a perplexing secret to him. Jasper as the denouncer and pursuer of Neville Landless, and Mr. Crisparkle as his consistent advocate and protector, must at least have stood sufficiently in opposition to have speculated with keen interest on the steadiness and next direction of the other's designs. But neither ever broached the theme.

False pretence not being in the Minor Canon's nature, he doubtless displayed openly that he would at any time have revived the subject, and even desired to discuss it. The determined reticence of Jasper, however, was not to be so approached. Impassive, moody, solitary, resolute, so concentrated on one idea, and on its attendant fixed purpose, that he would share it with no fellow-creature, he lived apart from human life. Constantly exercising an Art which brought him into mechanical harmony with others, and which could not have been pursued unless he and they had been in the nicest mechanical relations and unison, it is curious to consider that the spirit of the man was in moral accordance or interchange with nothing around him. This indeed he had confided to his lost nephew, before the occasion for his present inflexibility arose.

That he must know of Rosa's abrupt departure, and that he must divine its cause, was not to be doubted. Did he suppose that he had terrified her into silence? or did he suppose that she had imparted to any one—to Mr. Crisparkle himself, for instance—the particulars of his last interview with her? Mr. Crisparkle could not determine this in his mind. He could not but admit, however, as a just man, that it was not, of itself, a crime to fall in love with Rosa, any more than it was a crime to offer to set love above revenge.

The dreadful suspicion of Jasper, which Rosa was so shocked to have received into her imagination, appeared to have no harbour in Mr. Crisparkle's. If it ever haunted Helena's thoughts or Neville's, neither gave it one spoken word of utterance. Mr. Grewgious took no pains to conceal his implacable dislike of Jasper, yet he never referred it, however distantly, to such a source. But he was a reticent as well as an eccentric man; and he made no mention of a certain evening when he warmed his hands at the gatehouse fire, and looked steadily down upon a certain heap of torn and miry clothes upon the floor.

Drowsy Cloisterham, whenever it awoke to a passing reconsideration of a story above six months old and dismissed by the bench of magistrates, was pretty equally divided in opinion whether John Jasper's beloved nephew had been killed by his treacherously passionate rival, or in an open struggle; or had, for his own purposes, spirited himself away. It then lifted up its head, to notice that the bereaved Jasper was still ever devoted to discovery and revenge; and then dozed off again. This was the condition of matters, all round, at the period to which the present history has now attained.

The Cathedral doors have closed for the night; and the Choir-master, on a short leave of absence for two or three services, sets his face towards London. He travels thither by the means by which Rosa travelled, and arrives, as Rosa arrived, on a hot, dusty evening.

His travelling baggage is easily carried in his hand, and he repairs with it on foot, to a hybrid hotel in a little square behind Aldersgate Street, near the General Post Office. It is hotel, boarding-house, or lodging-house, at its visitor's option. It announces itself, in the new Railway Advertisers, as a novel enterprise, timidly beginning to spring up. It bashfully, almost apologetically, gives the traveller to understand that it does not expect him, on the good old constitutional hotel plan, to order a pint of sweet blacking for his drinking, and throw it away; but insinuates that he may have his boots blacked instead of his stomach, and maybe also have bed, breakfast, attendance, and a porter up all night, for a certain fixed charge. From these and similar premises, many true Britons in the lowest spirits deduce that the times are levelling times, except in the article of high roads, of which there will shortly be not one in England.

He eats without appetite, and soon goes forth again. Eastward and still eastward through the stale streets he takes his way, until he reaches his destination: a miserable court, specially miserable among many such.

He ascends a broken staircase, opens a door, looks into a dark stifling room, and says: ‘Are you alone here?’

‘Alone, deary; worse luck for me, and better for you,’ replies a croaking voice. ‘Come in, come in, whoever you be: I can’t see you till I light a match, yet I seem to know the sound of your speaking. I’m acquainted with you, ain’t I?’

‘Light your match, and try.’

‘So I will, deary, so I will; but my hand that shakes, as I can’t lay it on a match all in a moment. And I cough so, that, put my matches where I may, I never find ’em there. They jump and start, as I cough and cough, like live things. Are you off a voyage, deary?’

‘No.’

‘Not seafaring?’

‘No.’

‘Well, there’s land customers, and there’s water customers. I’m a mother to both. Different from Jack Chinaman t’other side the court. He ain’t a father to neither. It ain’t in him. And he ain’t got the true secret of mixing, though he charges as much as me that has, and more if he can get it. Here’s a match, and now where’s the candle? If my cough takes me, I shall cough out twenty matches afore I gets a light.’

But she finds the candle, and lights it, before the cough comes on. It seizes her in the moment of success, and she sits down rocking herself to and fro, and gasping at intervals: ‘O, my lungs is awful bad! my lungs is wore away to cabbage-nets!’ until the fit is over. During its continuance she has had no power of sight, or any other power not absorbed in the struggle; but as it leaves her, she begins to strain her eyes, and as soon as she is able to articulate, she cries, staring:

‘Why, it’s you!’

‘Are you so surprised to see me?’

‘I thought I never should have seen you again, deary. I thought you was dead, and gone to Heaven.’

‘Why?’

‘I didn’t suppose you could have kept away, alive, so long, from the poor old soul with the real receipt for mixing it. And you are in mourning too! Why didn’t you come and have a pipe or two of comfort? Did they leave you money, perhaps, and so you didn’t want comfort?’

‘No.’

‘Who was they as died, deary?’

‘A relative.’

‘Died of what, lovey?’

‘Probably, Death.’

‘We are short to-night!’ cries the woman, with a propitiatory laugh. ‘Short and snappish we are! But we’re out of sorts for want of a smoke. We’ve got the all-overs, haven’t us, deary? But this is the place to cure ’em in; this is the place where the all-overs is smoked off.’

‘You may make ready, then,’ replies the visitor, ‘as soon as you like.’

He divests himself of his shoes, loosens his cravat, and lies across the foot of the squalid bed, with his head resting on his left hand.

‘Now you begin to look like yourself,’ says the woman approvingly. ‘Now I begin to know my old customer indeed! Been trying to mix for yourself this long time, poppet?’

‘I have been taking it now and then in my own way.’

‘Never take it your own way. It ain’t good for trade, and it ain’t good for you. Where’s my ink-bottle, and where’s my thimble, and where’s my little spoon? He’s going to take it in a artful form now, my deary dear!’

Entering on her process, and beginning to bubble and blow at the faint spark enclosed in the hollow of her hands, she speaks from time to time, in a tone of snuffling satisfaction, without leaving off. When he speaks, he does so without looking at her, and as if his thoughts were already roaming away by anticipation.

‘I’ve got a pretty many smokes ready for you, first and last, haven’t I, chuckey?’

‘A good many.’

‘When you first come, you was quite new to it; warn’t ye?’

‘Yes, I was easily disposed of, then.’

‘But you got on in the world, and was able by-and-by to take your pipe with the best of ’em, warn’t ye?’

‘Ah; and the worst.’

‘It’s just ready for you. What a sweet singer you was when you first come! Used to drop your head, and sing yourself off like a bird! It’s ready for you now, deary.’

He takes it from her with great care, and puts the mouthpiece to his lips. She seats herself beside him, ready to refill the pipe.

After inhaling a few whiffs in silence, he doubtingly accosts her with:

‘Is it as potent as it used to be?’

‘What do you speak of, deary?’

‘What should I speak of, but what I have in my mouth?’

‘It’s just the same. Always the identical same.’

‘It doesn’t taste so. And it’s slower.’

‘You’ve got more used to it, you see.’

‘That may be the cause, certainly. Look here.’ He stops, becomes dreamy, and seems to forget that he has invited her attention. She bends over him, and speaks in his ear.

‘I’m attending to you. Says you just now, Look here. Says I now, I’m attending to ye. We was talking just before of your being used to it.’

‘I know all that. I was only thinking. Look here. Suppose you had something in your mind; something you were going to do.’

‘Yes, deary; something I was going to do?’

‘But had not quite determined to do.’

‘Yes, deary.’

‘Might or might not do, you understand.’

‘Yes.’ With the point of a needle she stirs the contents of the bowl.

‘Should you do it in your fancy, when you were lying here doing this?’

She nods her head. ‘Over and over again.’

‘Just like me! I did it over and over again. I have done it hundreds of thousands of times in this room.’

‘It’s to be hoped it was pleasant to do, deary.’

‘It *was* pleasant to do!’

He says this with a savage air, and a spring or start at her. Quite unmoved she retouches and replenishes the contents of the bowl with her little spatula. Seeing her intent upon the occupation, he sinks into his former attitude.

‘It was a journey, a difficult and dangerous journey. That was the subject in my mind. A hazardous and perilous journey, over abysses where a slip would be destruction. Look down, look down! You see what lies at the bottom there?’

He has darted forward to say it, and to point at the ground, as though at some imaginary object far beneath. The woman looks at him, as his spasmodic face approaches close to hers, and not at his pointing. She seems to know what the influence of her perfect quietude would be; if so, she has not miscalculated it, for he subsides again.

‘Well; I have told you I did it here hundreds of thousands of times. What do I say? I did it millions and billions of times. I did it so often, and through such vast expanses of time, that when it was really done, it seemed not worth the doing, it was done so soon.’

‘That’s the journey you have been away upon,’ she quietly remarks.

He glares at her as he smokes; and then, his eyes becoming filmy, answers: ‘That’s the journey.’

Silence ensues. His eyes are sometimes closed and sometimes open. The woman sits beside him, very attentive to the pipe, which is all the while at his lips.

‘I’ll warrant,’ she observes, when he has been looking fixedly at her for some consecutive moments, with a singular appearance in his eyes of seeming to see her a long way off, instead of so near him: ‘I’ll warrant you made the journey in a many ways, when you made it so often?’

‘No, always in one way.’

‘Always in the same way?’

‘Ay.’

‘In the way in which it was really made at last?’

‘Ay.’

‘And always took the same pleasure in harping on it?’

‘Ay.’

For the time he appears unequal to any other reply than this lazy monosyllabic assent. Probably to assure herself that it is not the assent of a mere automaton, she reverses the form of her next sentence.

‘Did you never get tired of it, deary, and try to call up something else for a change?’

He struggles into a sitting posture, and retorts upon her: ‘What do you mean? What did I want? What did I come for?’

She gently lays him back again, and before returning him the instrument he has dropped, revives the fire in it with her own breath; then says to him, coaxingly:

‘Sure, sure, sure! Yes, yes, yes! Now I go along with you. You was too quick for me. I see now. You come o’ purpose to take the journey. Why, I might have known it, through its standing by you so.’

He answers first with a laugh, and then with a passionate setting of his teeth: 'Yes, I came on purpose. When I could not bear my life, I came to get the relief, and I got it. It was one! It was one!' This repetition with extraordinary vehemence, and the snarl of a wolf.

She observes him very cautiously, as though mentally feeling her way to her next remark. It is: 'There was a fellow-traveller, deary.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' He breaks into a ringing laugh, or rather yell.

'To think,' he cries, 'how often fellow-traveller, and yet not know it! To think how many times he went the journey, and never saw the road!'

The woman kneels upon the floor, with her arms crossed on the coverlet of the bed, close by him, and her chin upon them. In this crouching attitude she watches him. The pipe is falling from his mouth. She puts it back, and laying her hand upon his chest, moves him slightly from side to side. Upon that he speaks, as if she had spoken.

'Yes! I always made the journey first, before the changes of colours and the great landscapes and glittering processions began. They couldn't begin till it was off my mind. I had no room till then for anything else.'

Once more he lapses into silence. Once more she lays her hand upon his chest, and moves him slightly to and fro, as a cat might stimulate a half-slain mouse. Once more he speaks, as if she had spoken.

'What? I told you so. When it comes to be real at last, it is so short that it seems unreal for the first time. Hark!'

'Yes, deary. I'm listening.'

'Time and place are both at hand.'

He is on his feet, speaking in a whisper, and as if in the dark.

'Time, place, and fellow-traveller,' she suggests, adopting his tone, and holding him softly by the arm.

'How could the time be at hand unless the fellow-traveller was? Hush! The journey's made. It's over.'

'So soon?'

'That's what I said to you. So soon. Wait a little. This is a vision. I shall sleep it off. It has been too short and easy. I must have a better vision than this; this is the poorest of all. No struggle, no consciousness of peril, no entreaty—and yet I never saw *that* before.' With a start.

'Saw what, deary?'

'Look at it! Look what a poor, mean, miserable thing it is! *That* must be real. It's over.'

He has accompanied this incoherence with some wild unmeaning gestures; but they trail off into the progressive inaction of stupor, and he lies a log upon the bed.

The woman, however, is still inquisitive. With a repetition of her cat-like action she slightly stirs his body again, and listens; stirs again, and listens; whispers to it, and listens. Finding it past all rousing for the time, she slowly gets upon her feet, with an air of disappointment, and flicks the face with the back of her hand in turning from it.

But she goes no further away from it than the chair upon the hearth. She sits in it, with an elbow on one of its arms, and her chin upon her hand, intent upon him. ‘I heard ye say once,’ she croaks under her breath, ‘I heard ye say once, when I was lying where you’re lying, and you were making your speculations upon me, “Unintelligible!” I heard you say so, of two more than me. But don’t ye be too sure always; don’t be ye too sure, beauty!’

Unwinking, cat-like, and intent, she presently adds: ‘Not so potent as it once was? Ah! Perhaps not at first. You may be more right there. Practice makes perfect. I may have learned the secret how to make ye talk, deary.’

He talks no more, whether or no. Twitching in an ugly way from time to time, both as to his face and limbs, he lies heavy and silent. The wretched candle burns down; the woman takes its expiring end between her fingers, lights another at it, crams the guttering frying morsel deep into the candlestick, and rams it home with the new candle, as if she were loading some ill-savoured and unseemly weapon of witchcraft; the new candle in its turn burns down; and still he lies insensible. At length what remains of the last candle is blown out, and daylight looks into the room.

It has not looked very long, when he sits up, chilled and shaking, slowly recovers consciousness of where he is, and makes himself ready to depart. The woman receives what he pays her with a grateful, ‘Bless ye, bless ye, deary!’ and seems, tired out, to begin making herself ready for sleep as he leaves the room.

But seeming may be false or true. It is false in this case; for, the moment the stairs have ceased to creak under his tread, she glides after him, muttering emphatically: ‘I’ll not miss ye twice!’

There is no egress from the court but by its entrance. With a weird peep from the doorway, she watches for his looking back. He does not look back before disappearing, with a wavering step. She follows him, peeps from the court, sees him still faltering on without looking back, and holds him in view.

He repairs to the back of Aldersgate Street, where a door immediately opens to his knocking. She crouches in another doorway, watching that one, and easily comprehending that he puts up temporarily at that house. Her patience is unexhausted by hours. For sustenance she can, and does, buy bread within a hundred yards, and milk as it is carried past her.

He comes forth again at noon, having changed his dress, but carrying nothing in his hand, and having nothing carried for him. He is not going back into the country, therefore, just yet. She follows him a little way, hesitates, instantaneously turns confidently, and goes straight into the house he has quitted.

‘Is the gentleman from Cloisterham indoors?

‘Just gone out.’

‘Unlucky. When does the gentleman return to Cloisterham?’

‘At six this evening.’

‘Bless ye and thank ye. May the Lord prosper a business where a civil question, even from a poor soul, is so civilly answered!’

‘I’ll not miss ye twice!’ repeats the poor soul in the street, and not so civilly. ‘I lost ye last, where that omnibus you got into nigh your journey’s end plied betwixt the station and the place. I wasn’t so much as certain that you even went right on to the place. Now I know ye did. My gentleman from Cloisterham, I’ll be there before ye, and bide your coming. I’ve swore my oath that I’ll not miss ye twice!’

Accordingly, that same evening the poor soul stands in Cloisterham High Street, looking at the many quaint gables of the Nuns’ House, and getting through the time as she best can until nine o’clock; at which hour she has reason to suppose that the arriving omnibus passengers may have some interest for her. The friendly darkness, at that hour, renders it easy for her to ascertain whether this be so or not; and it is so, for the passenger not to be missed twice arrives among the rest.

‘Now let me see what becomes of you. Go on!’

An observation addressed to the air, and yet it might be addressed to the passenger, so compliantly does he go on along the High Street until he comes to an arched gateway, at which he unexpectedly vanishes. The poor soul quickens her pace; is swift, and close upon him entering under the gateway; but only sees a postern staircase on one side of it, and on the other side an ancient vaulted room, in which a large-headed, gray-haired gentleman is writing, under the odd circumstances of sitting open to the thoroughfare and eyeing all who pass, as if he were toll-taker of the gateway: though the way is free.

‘Halloa!’ he cries in a low voice, seeing her brought to a stand-still: ‘who are you looking for?’

‘There was a gentleman passed in here this minute, sir.’

‘Of course there was. What do you want with him?’

‘Where do he live, deary?’

‘Live? Up that staircase.’

‘Bless ye! Whisper. What’s his name, deary?’

‘Surname Jasper, Christian name John. Mr. John Jasper.’

‘Has he a calling, good gentleman?’

‘Calling? Yes. Sings in the choir.’

‘In the spire?’

‘Choir.’

‘What’s that?’

Mr. Datchery rises from his papers, and comes to his doorstep. ‘Do you know what a cathedral is?’ he asks, jocosely.

The woman nods.

‘What is it?’

She looks puzzled, casting about in her mind to find a definition, when it occurs to her that it is easier to point out the substantial object itself, massive against the dark-blue sky and the early stars.

‘That’s the answer. Go in there at seven to-morrow morning, and you may see Mr. John Jasper, and hear him too.’

‘Thank ye! Thank ye!’

The burst of triumph in which she thanks him does not escape the notice of the single buffer of an easy temper living idly on his means. He glances at her; clasps his hands behind him, as the wont of such buffers is; and lounges along the echoing Precincts at her side.

‘Or,’ he suggests, with a backward hitch of his head, ‘you can go up at once to Mr. Jasper’s rooms there.’

The woman eyes him with a cunning smile, and shakes her head.

‘O! you don’t want to speak to him?’

She repeats her dumb reply, and forms with her lips a soundless ‘No.’

‘You can admire him at a distance three times a day, whenever you like. It’s a long way to come for that, though.’

The woman looks up quickly. If Mr. Datchery thinks she is to be so induced to declare where she comes from, he is of a much easier temper than she is. But she acquits him of such an artful thought, as he lounges along, like the chartered bore of the city, with his uncovered gray hair blowing about, and his purposeless hands rattling the loose money in the pockets of his trousers.

The chink of the money has an attraction for her greedy ears. ‘Wouldn’t you help me to pay for my traveller’s lodging, dear gentleman, and to pay my way along? I am a poor soul, I am indeed, and troubled with a grievous cough.’

‘You know the travellers’ lodging, I perceive, and are making directly for it,’ is Mr. Datchery’s bland comment, still rattling his loose money. ‘Been here often, my good woman?’

‘Once in all my life.’

‘Ay, ay?’

They have arrived at the entrance to the Monks’ Vineyard. An appropriate remembrance, presenting an exemplary model for imitation, is revived in the woman’s mind by the sight of the place. She stops at the gate, and says energetically:

‘By this token, though you mayn’t believe it, That a young gentleman gave me three-and-sixpence as I was coughing my breath away on this very grass. I asked him for three-and-sixpence, and he gave it me.’

‘Wasn’t it a little cool to name your sum?’ hints Mr. Datchery, still rattling. ‘Isn’t it customary to leave the amount open? Mightn’t it have had the appearance, to the young gentleman—only the appearance—that he was rather dictated to?’

‘Look’ee here, deary,’ she replies, in a confidential and persuasive tone, ‘I wanted the money to lay it out on a medicine as does me good, and as I deal in. I told the young gentleman so, and he gave it me, and I laid it out honest to the last brass farden. I want to lay out the same sum in the same way now; and if you’ll give it me, I’ll lay it out honest to the last brass farden again, upon my soul!’

‘What’s the medicine?’

‘I’ll be honest with you beforehand, as well as after. It’s opium.’

Mr. Datchery, with a sudden change of countenance, gives her a sudden look.

'It's opium, deary. Neither more nor less. And it's like a human creetur so far, that you always hear what can be said against it, but seldom what can be said in its praise.'

Mr. Datchery begins very slowly to count out the sum demanded of him. Greedily watching his hands, she continues to hold forth on the great example set him.

'It was last Christmas Eve, just arter dark, the once that I was here afore, when the young gentleman gave me the three-and-six.' Mr. Datchery stops in his counting, finds he has counted wrong, shakes his money together, and begins again.

'And the young gentleman's name,' she adds, 'was Edwin.'

Mr. Datchery drops some money, stoops to pick it up, and reddens with the exertion as he asks:

'How do you know the young gentleman's name?'

'I asked him for it, and he told it me. I only asked him the two questions, what was his Chris'en name, and whether he'd a sweetheart? And he answered, Edwin, and he hadn't.'

Mr. Datchery pauses with the selected coins in his hand, rather as if he were falling into a brown study of their value, and couldn't bear to part with them. The woman looks at him distrustfully, and with her anger brewing for the event of his thinking better of the gift; but he bestows it on her as if he were abstracting his mind from the sacrifice, and with many servile thanks she goes her way.

John Jasper's lamp is kindled, and his lighthouse is shining when Mr. Datchery returns alone towards it. As mariners on a dangerous voyage, approaching an iron-bound coast, may look along the beams of the warning light to the haven lying beyond it that may never be reached, so Mr. Datchery's wistful gaze is directed to this beacon, and beyond.

His object in now revisiting his lodging is merely to put on the hat which seems so superfluous an article in his wardrobe. It is half-past ten by the Cathedral clock when he walks out into the Precincts again; he lingers and looks about him, as though, the enchanted hour when Mr. Durdles may be stoned home having struck, he had some expectation of seeing the Imp who is appointed to the mission of stoning him.

In effect, that Power of Evil is abroad. Having nothing living to stone at the moment, he is discovered by Mr. Datchery in the unholy office of stoning the dead, through the railings of the churchyard. The Imp finds this a relishing and piquing pursuit; firstly, because their resting-place is announced to be sacred; and secondly, because the tall headstones are sufficiently like themselves, on their beat in the dark, to justify the delicious fancy that they are hurt when hit.

Mr. Datchery hails with him: ‘Halloa, Winks!’

He acknowledges the hail with: ‘Halloa, Dick!’ Their acquaintance seemingly having been established on a familiar footing.

‘But, I say,’ he remonstrates, ‘don’t yer go a-making my name public. I never means to plead to no name, mind yer. When they says to me in the Lock-up, a-going to put me down in the book, “What’s your name?” I says to them, “Find out.” Likewise when they says, “What’s your religion?” I says, “Find out.”’

Which, it may be observed in passing, it would be immensely difficult for the State, however statistical, to do.

‘Asides which,’ adds the boy, ‘there ain’t no family of Winkses.’

‘I think there must be.’

‘Yer lie, there ain’t. The travellers give me the name on account of my getting no settled sleep and being knocked up all night; whereby I gets one eye roused open afore I’ve shut the other. That’s what Winks means. Deputy’s the nighest name to indict me by: but yer wouldn’t catch me pleading to that, neither.’

‘Deputy be it always, then. We two are good friends; eh, Deputy?’

‘Jolly good.’

‘I forgave you the debt you owed me when we first became acquainted, and many of my sixpences have come your way since; eh, Deputy?’

‘Ah! And what’s more, yer ain’t no friend o’ Jarsper’s. What did he go a-histing me off my legs for?’

‘What indeed! But never mind him now. A shilling of mine is going your way to-night, Deputy. You have just taken in a lodger I have been speaking to; an infirm woman with a cough.’

‘Puffer,’ assents Deputy, with a shrewd leer of recognition, and smoking an imaginary pipe, with his head very much on one side and his eyes very much out of their places: ‘Hopeum Puffer.’

‘What is her name?’

‘’Er Royal Highness the Princess Puffer.’

‘She has some other name than that; where does she live?’

‘Up in London. Among the Jacks.’

‘The sailors?’

‘I said so; Jacks; and Chayner men: and hother Knifers.’

‘I should like to know, through you, exactly where she lives.’

‘All right. Give us ’old.’

A shilling passes; and, in that spirit of confidence which should pervade all business transactions between principals of honour, this piece of business is considered done.

‘But here’s a lark!’ cries Deputy. ‘Where did yer think ‘Er Royal Highness is a-goin’ to to-morrow morning? Blest if she ain’t a-goin’ to the KIN-FREE-DER-EL!’ He greatly prolongs the word in his ecstasy, and smites his leg, and doubles himself up in a fit of shrill laughter.

‘How do you know that, Deputy?’

‘Cos she told me so just now. She said she must be hup and hout o’ purpose. She ses, “Deputy, I must ’ave a early wash, and make myself as swell as I can, for I’m a-goin’ to take a turn at the Kin-free-der-el!”’ He separates the syllables with his former zest, and, not finding his sense of the ludicrous sufficiently relieved by stamping about on the pavement, breaks into a slow and stately dance, perhaps supposed to be performed by the Dean.

Mr. Datchery receives the communication with a well-satisfied though pondering face, and breaks up the conference. Returning to his quaint lodging, and sitting long over the supper of bread-and-cheese and salad and ale which Mrs. Tope has left prepared for him, he still sits when his supper is finished. At length he rises, throws open the door of a corner cupboard, and refers to a few uncouth chalked strokes on its inner side.

‘I like,’ says Mr. Datchery, ‘the old tavern way of keeping scores. Illegible except to the scorer. The scorer not committed, the scored debited with what is against him. Hum; ha! A very small score this; a very poor score!’

He sighs over the contemplation of its poverty, takes a bit of chalk from one of the cupboard shelves, and pauses with it in his hand, uncertain what addition to make to the account.

‘I think a moderate stroke,’ he concludes, ‘is all I am justified in scoring up;’ so, suits the action to the word, closes the cupboard, and goes to bed.

A brilliant morning shines on the old city. Its antiquities and ruins are surpassingly beautiful, with a lusty ivy gleaming in the sun, and the rich trees waving in the balmy air. Changes of glorious light from moving boughs, songs of birds, scents from gardens, woods, and fields—or, rather, from the one great garden of the whole cultivated island in its yielding time—penetrate into the Cathedral, subdue its earthy odour, and preach the Resurrection and the Life. The cold stone tombs of centuries ago grow warm; and flecks of brightness dart into the sternest marble corners of the building, fluttering there like wings.

Comes Mr. Tope with his large keys, and yawningly unlocks and sets open. Come Mrs. Tope and attendant sweeping sprites. Come, in due time, organist and bellows-boy, peeping down from the red curtains in the loft, fearlessly flapping dust from books up at that remote elevation, and whisking it from stops and pedals. Come sundry rooks, from various quarters of the sky, back to the great tower; who may be presumed to enjoy vibration, and to know that bell and organ are going to give it them. Come a very small and straggling congregation indeed: chiefly from Minor Canon Corner and the Precincts. Come Mr. Crisparkle, fresh and bright; and his ministering brethren, not quite so fresh and bright. Come the Choir in a hurry (always in a hurry, and struggling into their nightgowns at the last moment, like children shirking bed), and comes John Jasper leading their line. Last of all comes Mr. Datchery into a stall, one of a choice empty collection very much at his service, and glancing about him for Her Royal Highness the Princess Puffer.

The service is pretty well advanced before Mr. Datchery can discern Her Royal Highness. But by that time he has made her out, in the shade. She is behind a pillar, carefully withdrawn from the Choir-master’s view, but regards him with the closest attention. All unconscious of her presence, he chants and sings. She grins when he is most musically fervid, and—yes, Mr. Datchery sees her do it!—shakes her fist at him behind the pillar’s friendly shelter.

Mr. Datchery looks again, to convince himself. Yes, again! As ugly and withered as one of the fantastic carvings on the under brackets of the stall seats, as malignant as the Evil One, as hard as the big brass eagle holding the sacred books upon his wings (and, according to the sculptor’s representation of his ferocious attributes, not at all converted by them), she hugs herself in her lean arms, and then shakes both fists at the leader of the Choir.

And at that moment, outside the grated door of the Choir, having eluded the vigilance of Mr. Tope by shifty resources in which he is an adept, Deputy peeps, sharp-eyed, through the bars, and stares astounded from the threatener to the threatened.

The service comes to an end, and the servitors disperse to breakfast. Mr. Datchery accosts his last new acquaintance outside, when the Choir (as much in a hurry to get their bedgowns off, as they were but now to get them on) have scuffled away.

‘Well, mistress. Good morning. You have seen him?’

‘*I’ve* seen him, deary; *I’ve* seen him!’

‘And you know him?’

‘Know him! Better far than all the Reverend Parsons put together know him.’

Mrs. Tope’s care has spread a very neat, clean breakfast ready for her lodger. Before sitting down to it, he opens his corner-cupboard door; takes his bit of chalk from its shelf; adds one thick line to the score, extending from the top of the cupboard door to the bottom; and then falls to with an appetite.

APPENDIX: FRAGMENT OF “THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD”

When Forster was just finishing his biography of Dickens, he found among the leaves of one of the novelist’s other manuscripts certain loose slips in his writing, “on paper only half the size of that used for the tale, so cramped, interlined, and blotted as to be nearly illegible.” These proved, upon examination, to contain a suggested chapter for *Edwin Drood*, in which Sapsea, the auctioneer, appears as the principal figure, surrounded by a group of characters new to the story. That chapter, being among the last things Dickens wrote, seems to contain so much of interest that it may be well to reprint it here.—ed.

HOW MR. SAPSEA CEASED TO BE A MEMBER OF THE EIGHT CLUB

told by himself

Wishing to take the air, I proceeded by a circuitous route to the Club, it being our weekly night of meeting. I found that we mustered our full strength. We were enrolled under the denomination of the Eight Club. We were eight in number; we met at eight o’clock during eight months of the year; we played eight games of four-handed cribbage, at eightpence the game; our frugal supper was composed of eight rolls, eight mutton chops, eight pork sausages, eight baked potatoes, eight marrow-bones, with eight toasts, and eight bottles of ale. There may, or may not, be a certain harmony of colour in the ruling idea of this (to adopt a phrase of our lively neighbours) reunion. It was a little idea of mine.

A somewhat popular member of the Eight Club, was a member by the name of Kimber. By profession, a dancing-master. A commonplace, hopeful sort of man, wholly destitute of dignity or knowledge of the world.

As I entered the Club-room, Kimber was making the remark: “And he still half-believes him to be very high in the Church.”

In the act of hanging up my hat on the eighth peg by the door, I caught Kimber's visual ray. He lowered it, and passed a remark on the next change of the moon. I did not take particular notice of this at the moment, because the world was often pleased to be a little shy of ecclesiastical topics in my presence. For I felt that I was picked out (though perhaps only through a coincidence) to a certain extent to represent what I call our glorious constitution in Church and State. The phrase may be objected to by cautious minds; but I own to it as mine. I threw it off in argument some little time back. I said: "Our Glorious Constitution in Church and State."

Another member of the Eight Club was Peartree; also member of the Royal College of Surgeons. Mr. Peartree is not accountable to me for his opinions, and I say no more of them here than that he attends the poor gratis whenever they want him, and is not the parish doctor. Mr. Peartree may justify it to the grasp of *his* mind thus to do his republican utmost to bring an appointed officer into contempt. Suffice it that Mr. Peartree can never justify it to the grasp of *mine*.

Between Peartree and Kimber there was a sickly sort of feeble-minded alliance. It came under my particular notice when I sold off Kimber by auction. (Goods taken in execution.) He was a widower in a white under-waistcoat, and slight shoes with bows, and had two daughters not ill-looking. Indeed the reverse. Both daughters taught dancing in scholastic establishments for Young Ladies—had done so at Mrs. Sapsea's; nay, Twinkleton's—and both, in giving lessons, presented the unwomanly spectacle of having little fiddles tucked under their chins. In spite of which, the younger one might, if I am correctly informed—I will raise the veil so far as to say I know she might—have soared for life from this degrading taint, but for having the class of mind allotted to what I call the common herd, and being so incredibly devoid of veneration as to become painfully ludicrous.

When I sold off Kimber without reserve, Peartree (as poor as he can hold together) had several prime household lots knocked down to him. I am not to be blinded; and of course it was as plain to me what he was going to do with them, as it was that he was a brown hulking sort of revolutionary subject who had been in India with the soldiers, and ought (for the sake of society) to have his neck broke. I saw the lots shortly afterwards in Kimber's lodgings—through the window—and I easily made out that there had been a sneaking pretence of lending them till better times. A man with a smaller knowledge of the world than myself might have been led to suspect that Kimber had held back money from his creditors, and fraudulently bought the goods. But, besides that I knew for certain he had no money, I knew that this would involve a species of forethought not to be made compatible with the frivolity of a caperer, inoculating other people with capering, for his bread.

As it was the first time I had seen either of those two since the sale, I kept myself in what I call Abeyance. When selling him up, I had delivered a few remarks—shall I say a little homily?—concerning Kimber, which the world did regard as more than usually worth notice. I had come up into my pulpit, it was said, uncommonly like—and a murmur of recognition had repeated his (I will not name whose) title, before I spoke. I had then gone on to say that all present would find, in the first page of the catalogue that was lying before them, in the last paragraph before the first lot, the following words: "Sold in pursuance of a writ of execution issued by a creditor." I had then proceeded to remind my friends, that however frivolous, not to say contemptible, the business by which a man got his goods together, still his goods were as dear to him, and as cheap to society (if sold without reserve), as though his pursuits had been of a character that would bear serious contemplation. I had then divided my text (if I may be allowed so to call it) into three heads: firstly, Sold; secondly, In pursuance of a writ of execution; thirdly, Issued by a creditor; with a few moral reflections on each, and winding up with, "Now to the first lot" in a manner that was complimented when I afterwards mingled with my hearers.

So, not being certain on what terms I and Kimber stood, I was grave, I was chilling. Kimber, however, moving to me, I moved to Kimber. (I was the creditor who had issued the writ. Not that it matters.)

"I was alluding, Mr. Sapsea," said Kimber, "to a stranger who entered into conversation with me in the street as I came to the Club. He had been speaking to you just before, it seemed, by the churchyard; and though you had told him who you were, I could hardly persuade him that you were not high in the Church."

"Idiot?" said Peartree.

"Ass!" said Kimber.

"Idiot and Ass!" said the other five members.

"Idiot and Ass, gentlemen," I remonstrated, looking around me, "are strong expressions to apply to a young man of good appearance and address." My generosity was roused; I own it.

"You'll admit that he must be a Fool," said Peartree.

"You can't deny that he must be a Blockhead," said Kimber.

Their tone of disgust amounted to being offensive. Why should the young man be so calumniated? What had he done? He had only made an innocent and natural mistake. I controlled my generous indignation, and said so.

"Natural?" repeated Kimber. "*He's* a Natural!"

The remaining six members of the Eight Club laughed unanimously. It stung me. It was a scornful laugh. My anger was roused in behalf of an absent, friendless stranger. I rose (for I had been sitting down).

"Gentlemen," I said with dignity, "I will not remain one of this Club allowing opprobrium to be cast on an unoffending person in his absence. I will not so violate what I call the sacred rites of hospitality. Gentlemen, until you know how to behave yourselves better, I leave you. Gentlemen, until then I withdraw, from this place of meeting, whatever personal qualifications I may have brought into it. Gentlemen, until then you cease to be the Eight Club, and must make the best you can of becoming the Seven."

I put on my hat and retired. As I went down stairs I distinctly heard them give a suppressed cheer. Such is the power of demeanour and knowledge of mankind. I had forced it out of them.

II

Whom should I meet in the street, within a few yards of the door of the inn where the Club was held, but the self-same young man whoso cause I had felt it my duty so warmly—and I will add so disinterestedly—to take up.

"Is it Mr. Sapsea," he said doubtfully, "or is it—"

"It is Mr. Sapsea," I replied.

"Pardon me, Mr. Sapsea; you appear warm, sir."

"I have been warm," I said, "and on your account." Having stated the circumstances at some length (my generosity almost overpowered him), I asked him his name.

“Mr. Sapsea,” he answered, looking down, “your penetration is so acute, your glance into the souls of your fellow men is so penetrating, that if I was hardly enough to deny that my name is Poker, what would it avail me?”

I don’t know that I had quite exactly made out to a fraction that his name *was* Poker, but I daresay I had been pretty near doing it.

“Well, well,” said I, trying to put him at his ease by nodding my head in a soothing way. “Your name is Poker, and there is no harm in being named Poker.”

“Oh, Mr. Sapsea!” cried the young man, in a very well-behaved manner. “Bless you for those words!” He then, as if ashamed of having given way to his feelings, looked down again.

“Come Poker,” said I, “let me hear more about you. Tell me. Where are you going to, Poker? and where do you come from?”

“Ah Mr. Sapsea!” exclaimed the young man. “Disguise from you is impossible. You know already that I come from somewhere, and am going somewhere else. If I was to deny it, what would it avail me?”

“Then don’t deny it,” was my remark.

“Or,” pursued Poker, in a kind of despondent rapture, “or if I was to deny that I came to this town to see and hear you, sir, what would it avail me? Or if I was to deny—”

THE END OF
The Mystery of Edwin Drood

THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY,

containing a Faithful Account of the Fortunes, Misfortunes,
Uprisings, Downfallings and Complete Career of the Nickelby Family

by Charles Dickens

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This story was begun, within a few months after the publication of the completed "Pickwick Papers." There were, then, a good many cheap Yorkshire schools in existence. There are very few now.

Of the monstrous neglect of education in England, and the disregard of it by the State as a means of forming good or bad citizens, and miserable or happy men, private schools long afforded a notable example. Although any man who had proved his unfitness for any other occupation in life, was free, without examination or qualification, to open a school anywhere; although preparation for the functions he undertook, was required in the surgeon who assisted to bring a boy into the world, or might one day assist, perhaps, to send him out of it; in the chemist, the attorney, the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker; the whole round of crafts and trades, the schoolmaster excepted; and although schoolmasters, as a race, were the blockheads and impostors who might naturally be expected to spring from such a state of things, and to flourish in it; these Yorkshire schoolmasters were the lowest and most rotten round in the whole ladder. Traders in the avarice, indifference, or imbecility of parents, and the helplessness of children; ignorant, sordid, brutal men, to whom few considerate persons would have entrusted the board and lodging of a horse or a dog; they formed the worthy cornerstone of a structure, which, for absurdity and a magnificent high-minded LAISSEZ-ALLER neglect, has rarely been exceeded in the world.

We hear sometimes of an action for damages against the unqualified medical practitioner, who has deformed a broken limb in pretending to heal it. But, what of the hundreds of thousands of minds that have been deformed for ever by the incapable pettifoggers who have pretended to form them!

I make mention of the race, as of the Yorkshire schoolmasters, in the past tense. Though it has not yet finally disappeared, it is dwindling daily. A long day's work remains to be done about us in the way of education, Heaven knows; but great improvements and facilities towards the attainment of a good one, have been furnished, of late years.

I cannot call to mind, now, how I came to hear about Yorkshire schools when I was a not very robust child, sitting in bye-places near Rochester

Castle, with a head full of PARTRIDGE, STRAP, TOM PIPES, and SANCHO PANZA; but I know that my first impressions of them were picked up at that time, and that they were somehow or other connected with a suppurated abscess that some boy had come home with, in consequence of his Yorkshire guide, philosopher, and friend, having ripped it open with an inky pen-knife. The impression made upon me, however made, never left me. I was always curious about Yorkshire schools—fell, long afterwards and at sundry times, into the way of hearing more about them—at last, having an audience, resolved to write about them.

With that intent I went down into Yorkshire before I began this book, in very severe winter time which is pretty faithfully described herein. As I wanted to see a schoolmaster or two, and was forewarned that those gentlemen might, in their modesty, be shy of receiving a visit from the author of the "Pickwick Papers," I consulted with a professional friend who had a Yorkshire connexion, and with whom I concerted a pious fraud. He gave me some letters of introduction, in the name, I think, of my travelling companion; they bore reference to a supposititious little boy who had been left with a widowed mother who didn't know what to do with him; the poor lady had thought, as a means of thawing the tardy compassion of her relations in his behalf, of sending him to a Yorkshire school; I was the poor lady's friend, travelling that way; and if the recipient of the letter could inform me of a school in his neighbourhood, the writer would be very much obliged.

I went to several places in that part of the country where I understood the schools to be most plentifully sprinkled, and had no occasion to deliver a letter until I came to a certain town which shall be nameless. The person to whom it was addressed, was not at home; but he came down at night, through the snow, to the inn where I was staying. It was after dinner; and he needed little persuasion to sit down by the fire in a warm corner, and take his share of the wine that was on the table.

I am afraid he is dead now. I recollect he was a jovial, ruddy, broad-faced man; that we got acquainted directly; and that we talked on all kinds of subjects, except the school, which he showed a great anxiety to avoid. "Was there any large school near?" I asked him, in reference to the letter. "Oh yes," he said; "there was a pratty big 'un." "Was it a good one?" I asked. "Ey!" he said, "it was as good as anoother; that was a' a matther of opinion"; and fell to looking at the fire, staring round the room, and whistling a little. On my reverting to some other topic that we had been discussing, he recovered immediately; but, though I tried him again and again, I never approached the question of the school, even if he were in the middle of a laugh, without observing that his countenance fell, and that he became uncomfortable. At last, when we had passed a couple of hours or so, very agreeably, he suddenly took up his hat, and leaning over the table and looking me full in the face, said, in a low voice: "Weel, Misther, we've been vara pleasant toogather, and ar'll spak' my moind tiv'ee. Dinnot let the weedur send her lattle boy to yan o' our school-measthers, while there's a harse to hoold in a' Lunnun, or a gootther to lie asleep in. Ar wouldn't mak' ill words amang my neeburs, and ar speak tiv'ee quiet loike. But I'm dom'd if ar can gang to bed and not tellee, for weedur's sak', to keep the lattle boy from a' sike scoondrels while there's a harse to hoold in a' Lunnun, or a gootther to lie asleep in!" Repeating these words with great heartiness, and with a solemnity on his jolly face that made it look twice as large as before, he shook hands and went away. I never saw him afterwards, but I sometimes imagine that I descry a faint reflection of him in John Browdie.

In reference to these gentry, I may here quote a few words from the original preface to this book.

"It has afforded the Author great amusement and satisfaction, during the progress of this work, to learn, from country friends and from a variety of ludicrous statements concerning himself in provincial newspapers, that more than one Yorkshire schoolmaster lays claim to being the original of Mr. Squeers. One worthy, he has reason to believe, has actually consulted authorities learned in the law, as to his having good grounds on which to rest an action for libel; another, has meditated a journey to London, for the express purpose of committing an assault and battery on his traducer; a third, perfectly remembers being waited on, last January twelve-month, by two gentlemen, one of whom held him in conversation while the other took his likeness; and, although Mr. Squeers has but one eye, and he has two, and the published sketch does not resemble him (whoever he may be) in any other respect, still he and all his friends and neighbours know at once for whom it is meant, because—the character is SO like him.

"While the Author cannot but feel the full force of the compliment thus conveyed to him, he ventures to suggest that these contentions may arise from the fact, that Mr. Squeers is the representative of a class, and not of an individual. Where imposture, ignorance, and brutal cupidity, are the stock in trade of a small body of men, and one is described by these characteristics, all his fellows will recognise something belonging to themselves, and each will have a misgiving that the portrait is his own.

"The Author's object in calling public attention to the system would be very imperfectly fulfilled, if he did not state now, in his own person, emphatically and earnestly, that Mr. Squeers and his school are faint and feeble pictures of an existing reality, purposely subdued and kept down lest they should be deemed impossible. That there are, upon record, trials at law in which damages have been sought as a poor recompense for lasting agonies and disfigurements inflicted upon children by the treatment of the master in these places, involving such offensive and foul details of neglect, cruelty, and disease, as no writer of fiction would have the boldness to imagine. And that, since he has been engaged upon these Adventures, he has received, from private quarters far beyond the reach of suspicion or distrust, accounts of atrocities, in the perpetration of which upon neglected or repudiated children, these schools have been the main instruments, very far exceeding any that appear in these pages."

This comprises all I need say on the subject; except that if I had seen occasion, I had resolved to reprint a few of these details of legal proceedings, from certain old newspapers.

One other quotation from the same Preface may serve to introduce a fact that my readers may think curious.

"To turn to a more pleasant subject, it may be right to say, that there ARE two characters in this book which are drawn from life. It is remarkable that what we call the world, which is so very credulous in what professes to be true, is most incredulous in what professes to be imaginary; and that, while, every day in real life, it will allow in one man no blemishes, and in another no virtues, it will seldom admit a very strongly-marked character, either good or bad, in a fictitious narrative, to be within the limits of probability. But those who take an interest in this tale, will be glad to learn that the BROTHERS CHEERYBLE live; that their liberal charity, their singleness of heart, their noble nature, and their unbounded benevolence, are no creations of the Author's brain; but are prompting every day (and oftenest by stealth) some munificent and generous deed in that town of which they are the pride and honour."

If I were to attempt to sum up the thousands of letters, from all sorts of people in all sorts of latitudes and climates, which this unlucky paragraph brought down upon me, I should get into an arithmetical difficulty from which I could not easily extricate myself. Suffice it to say, that I believe the applications for loans, gifts, and offices of profit that I have been requested to forward to the originals of the BROTHERS CHEERYBLE (with whom I never interchanged any communication in my life) would have exhausted the combined patronage of all the Lord Chancellors since the accession of the House of Brunswick, and would have broken the Rest of the Bank of England.

The Brothers are now dead.

There is only one other point, on which I would desire to offer a remark. If Nicholas be not always found to be blameless or agreeable, he is not always intended to appear so. He is a young man of an impetuous temper and of little or no experience; and I saw no reason why such a hero should be lifted out of nature.

CHAPTER 1

Introduces all the Rest

There once lived, in a sequestered part of the county of Devonshire, one Mr Godfrey Nickleby: a worthy gentleman, who, taking it into his head rather late in life that he must get married, and not being young enough or rich enough to aspire to the hand of a lady of fortune, had wedded an old flame out of mere attachment, who in her turn had taken him for the same reason. Thus two people who cannot afford to play cards for money, sometimes sit down to a quiet game for love.

Some ill-conditioned persons who sneer at the life-matrimonial, may perhaps suggest, in this place, that the good couple would be better likened to two principals in a sparring match, who, when fortune is low and backers scarce, will chivalrously set to, for the mere pleasure of the buffeting; and in one respect indeed this comparison would hold good; for, as the adventurous pair of the Fives' Court will afterwards send round a hat, and trust to the bounty of the lookers-on for the means of regaling themselves, so Mr Godfrey Nickleby and HIS partner, the honeymoon being over, looked out wistfully into the world, relying in no inconsiderable degree upon chance for the improvement of their means. Mr Nickleby's income, at the period of his marriage, fluctuated between sixty and eighty pounds PER ANNUM.

There are people enough in the world, Heaven knows! and even in London (where Mr Nickleby dwelt in those days) but few complaints prevail, of the population being scanty. It is extraordinary how long a man may look among the crowd without discovering the face of a friend, but it is no less true. Mr Nickleby looked, and looked, till his eyes became sore as his heart, but no friend appeared; and when, growing tired of the search, he turned his eyes homeward, he saw very little there to relieve his weary vision. A painter who has gazed too long upon some glaring colour, refreshes his dazzled sight by looking upon a darker and more sombre tint; but everything that met Mr Nickleby's gaze wore so black and gloomy a hue, that he would have been beyond description refreshed by the very reverse of the contrast.

At length, after five years, when Mrs Nickleby had presented her husband with a couple of sons, and that embarrassed gentleman, impressed with the necessity of making some provision for his family, was seriously revolving in his mind a little commercial speculation of insuring his life next quarter-day, and then falling from the top of the Monument by accident, there came, one morning, by the general post, a black-bordered letter to inform him how his uncle, Mr Ralph Nickleby, was dead, and had left him the bulk of his little property, amounting in all to five thousand pounds sterling.

As the deceased had taken no further notice of his nephew in his lifetime, than sending to his eldest boy (who had been christened after him, on desperate speculation) a silver spoon in a morocco case, which, as he had not too much to eat with it, seemed a kind of satire upon his having been born without that useful article of plate in his mouth, Mr Godfrey Nickleby could, at first, scarcely believe the tidings thus conveyed to him. On examination, however, they turned out to be strictly correct. The amiable old gentleman, it seemed, had intended to leave the whole to the Royal Humane Society, and had indeed executed a will to that effect; but the Institution, having been unfortunate enough, a few months before, to save the life of a poor relation to whom he paid a weekly allowance of three shillings and sixpence, he had, in a fit of very natural exasperation, revoked the bequest in a codicil, and left it all to Mr Godfrey Nickleby; with a special mention of his indignation, not only against the society for saving the poor relation's life, but against the poor relation also, for allowing himself to be saved.

With a portion of this property Mr Godfrey Nickleby purchased a small farm, near Dawlish in Devonshire, whither he retired with his wife and two children, to live upon the best interest he could get for the rest of his money, and the little produce he could raise from his land. The two prospered so well together that, when he died, some fifteen years after this period, and some five after his wife, he was enabled to leave, to his eldest son, Ralph, three thousand pounds in cash, and to his youngest son, Nicholas, one thousand and the farm, which was as small a landed estate as one would desire to see.

These two brothers had been brought up together in a school at Exeter; and, being accustomed to go home once a week, had often heard, from their mother's lips, long accounts of their father's sufferings in his days of poverty, and of their deceased uncle's importance in his days of affluence: which recitals produced a very different impression on the two: for, while the younger, who was of a timid and retiring disposition, gleaned from thence nothing but forewarnings to shun the great world and attach himself to the quiet routine of a country life, Ralph, the elder, deduced from the often-repeated tale the two great morals that riches are the only true source of happiness and power, and that it is lawful and just to compass their acquisition by all means short of felony. 'And,' reasoned Ralph with himself, 'if no good came of my uncle's money when he was alive, a great deal of good came of it after he was dead, inasmuch as my father has got it now, and is saving it up for me, which is a highly virtuous purpose; and, going back to the old gentleman, good DID come of it to him too, for he had the pleasure of thinking of it all his life long, and of being envied and courted by all his family besides.' And Ralph always wound up these mental soliloquies by arriving at the conclusion, that there was nothing like money.

Not confining himself to theory, or permitting his faculties to rust, even at that early age, in mere abstract speculations, this promising lad commenced usurer on a limited scale at school; putting out at good interest a small capital of slate-pencil and marbles, and gradually extending his operations until they aspired to the copper coinage of this realm, in which he speculated to considerable advantage. Nor did he trouble his borrowers with abstract calculations of figures, or references to ready-reckoners; his simple rule of interest being all comprised in the one golden sentence, 'two-pence for every half-penny,' which greatly simplified the accounts, and which, as a familiar precept, more easily acquired and retained in the memory than any known rule of arithmetic, cannot be too strongly recommended to the notice of capitalists, both large and small, and more especially of money-brokers and bill-discounters. Indeed, to do these gentlemen justice, many of them are to this day in the frequent habit of adopting it, with eminent success.

In like manner, did young Ralph Nickleby avoid all those minute and intricate calculations of odd days, which nobody who has worked sums in simple-interest can fail to have found most embarrassing, by establishing the one general rule that all sums of principal and interest should be paid on pocket-money day, that is to say, on Saturday: and that whether a loan were contracted on the Monday, or on the Friday, the amount of interest should be, in both cases, the same. Indeed he argued, and with great show of reason, that it ought to be rather more for one day than for five, inasmuch as the borrower might in the former case be very fairly presumed to be in great extremity, otherwise he would not borrow at all with such odds against him. This fact is interesting, as illustrating the secret connection and sympathy which always exist between great minds. Though Master Ralph Nickleby was not at that time aware of it, the class of gentlemen before alluded to, proceed on just the same principle in all their transactions.

From what we have said of this young gentleman, and the natural admiration the reader will immediately conceive of his character, it may perhaps be inferred that he is to be the hero of the work which we shall presently begin. To set this point at rest, for once and for ever, we hasten to undeceive them, and stride to its commencement.

On the death of his father, Ralph Nickleby, who had been some time before placed in a mercantile house in London, applied himself passionately to his old pursuit of money-getting, in which he speedily became so buried and absorbed, that he quite forgot his brother for many years; and if, at times, a recollection of his old playfellow broke upon him through the haze in which he lived—for gold conjures up a mist about a man, more destructive of all his old senses and lulling to his feelings than the fumes of charcoal—it brought along with it a companion thought, that if they were intimate he would want to borrow money of him. So, Mr Ralph Nickleby shrugged his shoulders, and said things were better as they were.

As for Nicholas, he lived a single man on the patrimonial estate until he grew tired of living alone, and then he took to wife the daughter of a neighbouring gentleman with a dower of one thousand pounds. This good lady bore him two children, a son and a daughter, and when the son was about nineteen, and the daughter fourteen, as near as we can guess—impartial records of young ladies' ages being, before the passing of the new act, nowhere preserved in the registries of this country—Mr Nickleby looked about him for the means of repairing his capital, now sadly reduced by this increase in his family, and the expenses of their education.

'Speculate with it,' said Mrs Nickleby.

'Spec—u—late, my dear?' said Mr Nickleby, as though in doubt.

'Why not?' asked Mrs Nickleby.

'Because, my dear, if we SHOULD lose it,' rejoined Mr Nickleby, who was a slow and time-taking speaker, 'if we SHOULD lose it, we shall no longer be able to live, my dear.'

'Fiddle,' said Mrs Nickleby.

'I am not altogether sure of that, my dear,' said Mr Nickleby.

'There's Nicholas,' pursued the lady, 'quite a young man—it's time he was in the way of doing something for himself; and Kate too, poor girl, without a penny in the world. Think of your brother! Would he be what he is, if he hadn't speculated?'

'That's true,' replied Mr Nickleby. 'Very good, my dear. Yes. I WILL speculate, my dear.'

Speculation is a round game; the players see little or nothing of their cards at first starting; gains MAY be great—and so may losses. The run of luck went against Mr Nickleby. A mania prevailed, a bubble burst, four stock-brokers took villa residences at Florence, four hundred nobodies were ruined, and among them Mr Nickleby.

'The very house I live in,' sighed the poor gentleman, 'may be taken from me tomorrow. Not an article of my old furniture, but will be sold to strangers!'

The last reflection hurt him so much, that he took at once to his bed; apparently resolved to keep that, at all events.

'Cheer up, sir!' said the apothecary.

'You mustn't let yourself be cast down, sir,' said the nurse.

'Such things happen every day,' remarked the lawyer.

'And it is very sinful to rebel against them,' whispered the clergyman.

'And what no man with a family ought to do,' added the neighbours.

Mr Nickleby shook his head, and motioning them all out of the room, embraced his wife and children, and having pressed them by turns to his languidly beating heart, sunk exhausted on his pillow. They were concerned to find that his reason went astray after this; for he babbled, for a long time, about the generosity and goodness of his brother, and the merry old times when they were at school together. This fit of wandering past, he solemnly commended them to One who never deserted the widow or her fatherless children, and, smiling gently on them, turned upon his face, and observed, that he thought he could fall asleep.

CHAPTER 2

Of Mr Ralph Nickleby, and his Establishments, and his Undertakings, and of a great Joint Stock Company of vast national Importance

Mr Ralph Nickleby was not, strictly speaking, what you would call a merchant, neither was he a banker, nor an attorney, nor a special pleader, nor a notary. He was certainly not a tradesman, and still less could he lay any claim to the title of a professional gentleman; for it would have been impossible to mention any recognised profession to which he belonged. Nevertheless, as he lived in a spacious house in Golden Square, which, in addition to a brass plate upon the street-door, had another brass plate two sizes and a half smaller upon the left hand door-post, surrounding a brass model of an infant's fist grasping a fragment of a skewer, and displaying the word 'Office,' it was clear that Mr Ralph Nickleby did, or pretended to do, business of some kind; and the fact, if it required any further circumstantial evidence, was abundantly demonstrated by the diurnal attendance, between the hours of half-past nine and five, of a sallow-faced man in rusty brown, who sat upon an uncommonly hard stool in a species of butler's pantry at the end of the passage, and always had a pen behind his ear when he answered the bell.

Although a few members of the graver professions live about Golden Square, it is not exactly in anybody's way to or from anywhere. It is one of the squares that have been; a quarter of the town that has gone down in the world, and taken to letting lodgings. Many of its first and second floors are let, furnished, to single gentlemen; and it takes boarders besides. It is a great resort of foreigners. The dark-complexioned men who wear large rings, and heavy watch-guards, and bushy whiskers, and who congregate under the Opera Colonnade, and about the box-office in the season, between four and five in the afternoon, when they give away the orders,—all live in Golden Square, or within a street of it. Two or three violins and a wind instrument from the Opera band reside within its precincts. Its boarding-houses are musical, and the notes of pianos and harps float in the evening time round the head of the mournful statue, the guardian genius of a little wilderness of shrubs, in the centre of the square. On a summer's night, windows are thrown open, and groups of swarthy moustached men are seen by the passer-by, lounging at the casements, and smoking fearfully. Sounds of gruff voices practising vocal music invade the evening's silence; and the fumes of choice tobacco scent the air. There, snuff and cigars, and German pipes and flutes, and violins and violoncellos, divide the supremacy between them. It is the region of song and smoke. Street bands are on their mettle in Golden Square; and itinerant glee-singers quaver involuntarily as they raise their voices within its boundaries.

This would not seem a spot very well adapted to the transaction of business; but Mr Ralph Nickleby had lived there, notwithstanding, for many years, and uttered no complaint on that score. He knew nobody round about, and nobody knew him, although he enjoyed the reputation of being immensely rich. The tradesmen held that he was a sort of lawyer, and the other neighbours opined that he was a kind of general agent; both of which guesses were as correct and definite as guesses about other people's affairs usually are, or need to be.

Mr Ralph Nickleby sat in his private office one morning, ready dressed to walk abroad. He wore a bottle-green spencer over a blue coat; a white waistcoat, grey mixture pantaloons, and Wellington boots drawn over them. The corner of a small-plaited shirt-frill struggled out, as if insisting to show itself, from between his chin and the top button of his spencer; and the latter garment was not made low enough to conceal a long gold watch-chain, composed of a series of plain rings, which had its beginning at the handle of a gold repeater in Mr Nickleby's pocket, and its termination in two little keys: one belonging to the watch itself, and the other to some patent padlock. He wore a sprinkling of powder upon his head, as if to make himself look benevolent; but if that were his purpose, he would perhaps have done better to powder his countenance also, for there was something in its very wrinkles, and in his cold restless eye, which seemed to tell of cunning that would announce itself in spite of him. However this might be, there he was; and as he was all alone, neither the powder, nor the wrinkles, nor the eyes, had the smallest effect, good or bad, upon anybody just then, and are consequently no business of ours just now.

Mr Nickleby closed an account-book which lay on his desk, and, throwing himself back in his chair, gazed with an air of abstraction through the dirty window. Some London houses have a melancholy little plot of ground behind them, usually fenced in by four high whitewashed walls, and frowned upon by stacks of chimneys: in which there withers on, from year to year, a crippled tree, that makes a show of putting forth a few leaves late in autumn when other trees shed theirs, and, drooping in the effort, lingers on, all crackled and smoke-dried, till the following season, when it repeats the same process, and perhaps, if the weather be particularly genial, even tempts some rheumatic sparrow to chirrup in its branches. People sometimes call these dark yards 'gardens'; it is not supposed that they were ever planted, but rather that they are pieces of unreclaimed land, with the withered vegetation of the original brick-field. No man thinks of walking in this desolate place, or of turning it to any account. A few hampers, half-a-dozen broken bottles, and such-like rubbish, may be thrown there, when the tenant first moves in, but nothing more; and there they remain until he goes away again: the damp straw taking just as long to moulder as it thinks proper: and mingling with the scanty box, and stunted everbrowns, and broken flower-pots, that are scattered mournfully about—a prey to 'blacks' and dirt.

It was into a place of this kind that Mr Ralph Nickleby gazed, as he sat with his hands in his pockets looking out of the window. He had fixed his eyes upon a distorted fir tree, planted by some former tenant in a tub that had once been green, and left there, years before, to rot away piecemeal. There was nothing very inviting in the object, but Mr Nickleby was wrapt in a brown study, and sat contemplating it with far greater attention than, in a more conscious mood, he would have deigned to bestow upon the rarest exotic. At length, his eyes wandered to a little dirty window on the left, through which the face of the clerk was dimly visible; that worthy chancing to look up, he beckoned him to attend.

In obedience to this summons the clerk got off the high stool (to which he had communicated a high polish by countless gettings off and on), and presented himself in Mr Nickleby's room. He was a tall man of middle age, with two goggle eyes whereof one was a fixture, a rubicund nose, a cadaverous face, and a suit of clothes (if the term be allowable when they suited him not at all) much the worse for wear, very much too small, and placed upon such a short allowance of buttons that it was marvellous how he contrived to keep them on.

'Was that half-past twelve, Noggs?' said Mr Nickleby, in a sharp and grating voice.

'Not more than five-and-twenty minutes by the—' Noggs was going to add public-house clock, but recollecting himself, substituted 'regular time.'

'My watch has stopped,' said Mr Nickleby; 'I don't know from what cause.'

'Not wound up,' said Noggs.

'Yes it is,' said Mr Nickleby.

'Over-wound then,' rejoined Noggs.

'That can't very well be,' observed Mr Nickleby.

'Must be,' said Noggs.

'Well!' said Mr Nickleby, putting the repeater back in his pocket; 'perhaps it is.'

Noggs gave a peculiar grunt, as was his custom at the end of all disputes with his master, to imply that he (Noggs) triumphed; and (as he rarely spoke to anybody unless somebody spoke to him) fell into a grim silence, and rubbed his hands slowly over each other: cracking the joints of his fingers, and squeezing them into all possible distortions. The incessant performance of this routine on every occasion, and the communication of a fixed and rigid look to his unaffected eye, so as to make it uniform with the other, and to render it impossible for anybody to determine where or at what he was looking, were two among the numerous peculiarities of Mr Noggs, which struck an inexperienced observer at first sight.

'I am going to the London Tavern this morning,' said Mr Nickleby.

'Public meeting?' inquired Noggs.

Mr Nickleby nodded. 'I expect a letter from the solicitor respecting that mortgage of Ruddle's. If it comes at all, it will be here by the two o'clock delivery. I shall leave the city about that time and walk to Charing Cross on the left-hand side of the way; if there are any letters, come and meet me, and bring them with you.'

Noggs nodded; and as he nodded, there came a ring at the office bell. The master looked up from his papers, and the clerk calmly remained in a stationary position.

'The bell,' said Noggs, as though in explanation. 'At home?'

'Yes.'

'To anybody?'

'Yes.'

'To the tax-gatherer?'

'No! Let him call again.'

Noggs gave vent to his usual grunt, as much as to say 'I thought so!' and, the ring being repeated, went to the door, whence he presently returned, ushering in, by the name of Mr Bonney, a pale gentleman in a violent hurry, who, with his hair standing up in great disorder all over his head, and a very narrow white cravat tied loosely round his throat, looked as if he had been knocked up in the night and had not dressed himself since.

'My dear Nickleby,' said the gentleman, taking off a white hat which was so full of papers that it would scarcely stick upon his head, 'there's not a moment to lose; I have a cab at the door. Sir Matthew Pupker takes the chair, and three members of Parliament are positively coming. I have seen two of them safely out of bed. The third, who was at Crockford's all night, has just gone home to put a clean shirt on, and take a bottle or two of soda water, and will certainly be with us, in time to address the meeting. He is a little excited by last night, but never mind that; he always speaks the stronger for it.'

'It seems to promise pretty well,' said Mr Ralph Nickleby, whose deliberate manner was strongly opposed to the vivacity of the other man of business.

'Pretty well!' echoed Mr Bonney. 'It's the finest idea that was ever started. "United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company. Capital, five millions, in five hundred thousand shares of ten pounds each." Why the very name will get the shares up to a premium in ten days.'

'And when they ARE at a premium,' said Mr Ralph Nickleby, smiling.

'When they are, you know what to do with them as well as any man alive, and how to back quietly out at the right time,' said Mr Bonney, slapping the capitalist familiarly on the shoulder. 'By-the-bye, what a VERY remarkable man that clerk of yours is.'

'Yes, poor devil!' replied Ralph, drawing on his gloves. 'Though Newman Noggs kept his horses and hounds once.'

'Ay, ay?' said the other carelessly.

'Yes,' continued Ralph, 'and not many years ago either; but he squandered his money, invested it anyhow, borrowed at interest, and in short made first a thorough fool of himself, and then a beggar. He took to drinking, and had a touch of paralysis, and then came here to borrow a pound, as in his better days I had—'

'Done business with him,' said Mr Bonney with a meaning look.

'Just so,' replied Ralph; 'I couldn't lend it, you know.'

'Oh, of course not.'

'But as I wanted a clerk just then, to open the door and so forth, I took him out of charity, and he has remained with me ever since. He is a little mad, I think,' said Mr Nickleby, calling up a charitable look, 'but he is useful enough, poor creature—useful enough.'

The kind-hearted gentleman omitted to add that Newman Noggs, being utterly destitute, served him for rather less than the usual wages of a boy of thirteen; and likewise failed to mention in his hasty chronicle, that his eccentric taciturnity rendered him an especially valuable person in a place where much business was done, of which it was desirable no mention should be made out of doors. The other gentleman was plainly impatient to be gone, however, and as they hurried into the hackney cabriolet immediately afterwards, perhaps Mr Nickleby forgot to mention circumstances so unimportant.

There was a great bustle in Bishopsgate Street Within, as they drew up, and (it being a windy day) half-a-dozen men were tacking across the road under a press of paper, bearing gigantic announcements that a Public Meeting would be holden at one o'clock precisely, to take into consideration the propriety of petitioning Parliament in favour of the United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company, capital five millions, in five hundred thousand shares of ten pounds each; which sums were duly set forth in fat black figures of considerable size. Mr Bonney elbowed his way briskly upstairs, receiving in his progress many low bows from the waiters who stood on the landings to show the way; and, followed by Mr Nickleby, dived into a suite of apartments behind the great public room: in the second of which was a business-looking table, and several business-looking people.

'Hear!' cried a gentleman with a double chin, as Mr Bonney presented himself. 'Chair, gentlemen, chair!'

The new-comers were received with universal approbation, and Mr Bonney bustled up to the top of the table, took off his hat, ran his fingers through his hair, and knocked a hackney-coachman's knock on the table with a little hammer: whereat several gentlemen cried 'Hear!' and nodded slightly to each other, as much as to say what spirited conduct that was. Just at this moment, a waiter, feverish with agitation, tore into the room, and throwing the door open with a crash, shouted 'Sir Matthew Pupker!'

The committee stood up and clapped their hands for joy, and while they were clapping them, in came Sir Matthew Pupker, attended by two live members of Parliament, one Irish and one Scotch, all smiling and bowing, and looking so pleasant that it seemed a perfect marvel how any man could have the heart to vote against them. Sir Matthew Pupker especially, who had a little round head with a flaxen wig on the top of it, fell into such a paroxysm of bows, that the wig threatened to be jerked off, every instant. When these symptoms had in some degree subsided, the gentlemen who were on speaking terms with Sir Matthew Pupker, or the two other members, crowded round them in three little groups, near one or other of which the gentlemen who were NOT on speaking terms with Sir Matthew Pupker or the two other members, stood lingering, and smiling, and rubbing their hands, in the desperate hope of something turning up which might bring them into notice. All this time, Sir Matthew Pupker and the two other members were relating to their separate circles what the intentions of government were, about taking up the bill; with a full account of what the government had said in a whisper the last time they dined with it, and how the government had been observed to wink when it said so; from which premises they were at no loss to draw the conclusion, that if the government had one object more at heart than another, that one object was the welfare and advantage of the United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company.

Meanwhile, and pending the arrangement of the proceedings, and a fair division of the speechifying, the public in the large room were eyeing, by turns, the empty platform, and the ladies in the Music Gallery. In these amusements the greater portion of them had been occupied for a couple of hours before, and as the most agreeable diversions pall upon the taste on a too protracted enjoyment of them, the sterner spirits now began to hammer the floor with their boot-heels, and to express their dissatisfaction by various hoots and cries. These vocal exertions, emanating from the people who had been there longest, naturally proceeded from those who were nearest to the platform and furthest from the policemen in attendance, who having no great mind to fight their way through the crowd, but entertaining nevertheless a praiseworthy desire to do something to quell the disturbance, immediately began to drag forth, by the coat tails and collars, all the quiet people near the door; at the same time dealing out various smart and tingling blows with their truncheons, after the manner of that ingenious actor, Mr Punch: whose brilliant example, both in the fashion of his weapons and their use, this branch of the executive occasionally follows.

Several very exciting skirmishes were in progress, when a loud shout attracted the attention even of the belligerents, and then there poured on to the platform, from a door at the side, a long line of gentlemen with their hats off, all looking behind them, and uttering vociferous cheers; the cause whereof was sufficiently explained when Sir Matthew Pupker and the two other real members of Parliament came to the front, amidst deafening shouts, and testified to each other in dumb motions that they had never seen such a glorious sight as that, in the whole course of their public career.

At length, and at last, the assembly left off shouting, but Sir Matthew Pupker being voted into the chair, they underwent a relapse which lasted five minutes. This over, Sir Matthew Pupker went on to say what must be his feelings on that great occasion, and what must be that occasion in the eyes of the world, and what must be the intelligence of his fellow-countrymen before him, and what must be the wealth and respectability of his honourable friends behind him, and lastly, what must be the importance to the wealth, the happiness, the comfort, the liberty, the very existence of a free and great people, of such an Institution as the United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company!

Mr Bonney then presented himself to move the first resolution; and having run his right hand through his hair, and planted his left, in an easy manner, in his ribs, he consigned his hat to the care of the gentleman with the double chin (who acted as a species of bottle-holder to the orators generally), and said he would read to them the first resolution—'That this meeting views with alarm and apprehension, the existing state of the Muffin Trade in this Metropolis and its neighbourhood; that it considers the Muffin Boys, as at present constituted, wholly underserving the confidence of the public; and that it deems the whole Muffin system alike prejudicial to the health and morals of the people, and subversive of the best interests of a great commercial and mercantile community.' The honourable gentleman made a speech which drew tears from the eyes of the ladies, and awakened the liveliest emotions in every individual present. He had visited the houses of the poor in the various districts of London, and had found them destitute of the slightest vestige of a muffin, which there appeared too much reason to believe some of these indigent persons did not taste from year's end to year's end. He had found that among muffin-sellers there existed drunkenness, debauchery, and profligacy, which he attributed to the debasing nature of their employment as at present exercised; he had found the same vices among the poorer class of people who ought to be muffin consumers; and this he attributed to the despair engendered by their being placed beyond the reach of that nutritious article, which drove them to seek a false stimulant in intoxicating liquors. He would undertake to prove before a committee of the House of Commons, that there existed a combination to keep up the price of muffins, and to give the bellmen a monopoly; he would prove it by bellmen at the bar of that House; and he would also prove, that these men corresponded with each other by secret words and signs as 'Snooks,' 'Walker,' 'Ferguson,' 'Is Murphy right?' and many others. It was this melancholy state of things that the Company proposed to correct; firstly, by prohibiting, under heavy penalties, all private muffin trading of every description; secondly, by themselves supplying the public generally, and the poor at their own homes, with muffins of first quality at reduced prices. It was with this object that a bill had been introduced into Parliament by their patriotic chairman Sir Matthew Pupker; it was this bill that they had met to support; it was the supporters of this bill who would confer undying brightness and splendour upon England, under the name of the United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company; he would add, with a capital of Five Millions, in five hundred thousand shares of ten pounds each.

Mr Ralph Nickleby seconded the resolution, and another gentleman having moved that it be amended by the insertion of the words 'and crumpet' after the word 'muffin,' whenever it occurred, it was carried triumphantly. Only one man in the crowd cried 'No!' and he was promptly taken into custody, and straightway borne off.

The second resolution, which recognised the expediency of immediately abolishing 'all muffin (or crumpet) sellers, all traders in muffins (or crumpets) of whatsoever description, whether male or female, boys or men, ringing hand-bells or otherwise,' was moved by a grievous gentleman of semi-clerical appearance, who went at once into such deep pathetics, that he knocked the first speaker clean out of the course in no time. You might have heard a pin fall—a pin! a feather—as he described the cruelties inflicted on muffin boys by their masters, which he very wisely urged were in themselves a sufficient reason for the establishment of that inestimable company. It seemed that the unhappy youths were nightly turned out into the wet streets at the most inclement periods of the year, to wander about, in darkness and rain—or it might be hail or snow—for hours together, without shelter, food, or warmth; and let the public never forget upon the latter point, that while the muffins were provided with warm clothing and blankets, the boys were wholly unprovided for, and left to their own miserable resources. (Shame!) The honourable gentleman related one case of a muffin boy, who having been exposed to this inhuman and barbarous system for no less than five years, at length fell a victim to a cold in the head, beneath which he gradually sunk until he fell into a perspiration and recovered; this he could vouch for, on his own authority, but he had heard (and he had no reason to doubt the fact) of a still more heart-rending and appalling circumstance. He had heard of the case of an orphan muffin boy, who, having been run over by a hackney carriage, had been removed to the hospital, had undergone the amputation of his leg below the knee, and was now actually pursuing his occupation on crutches. Fountain of justice, were these things to last!

This was the department of the subject that took the meeting, and this was the style of speaking to enlist their sympathies. The men shouted; the ladies wept into their pocket-handkerchiefs till they were moist, and waved them till they were dry; the excitement was tremendous; and Mr Nickleby whispered his friend that the shares were thenceforth at a premium of five-and-twenty per cent.

The resolution was, of course, carried with loud acclamations, every man holding up both hands in favour of it, as he would in his enthusiasm have held up both legs also, if he could have conveniently accomplished it. This done, the draft of the proposed petition was read at length: and the petition said, as all petitions DO say, that the petitioners were very humble, and the petitioned very honourable, and the object very virtuous; therefore (said the petition) the bill ought to be passed into a law at once, to the everlasting honour and glory of that most honourable and glorious Commons of England in Parliament assembled.

Then, the gentleman who had been at Crockford's all night, and who looked something the worse about the eyes in consequence, came forward to tell his fellow-countrymen what a speech he meant to make in favour of that petition whenever it should be presented, and how desperately he meant to taunt the parliament if they rejected the bill; and to inform them also, that he regretted his honourable friends had not inserted a clause rendering the purchase of muffins and crumpets compulsory upon all classes of the community, which he—opposing all half-measures, and preferring to go the extreme animal—pledged himself to propose and divide upon, in committee. After announcing this determination, the honourable gentleman grew jocular; and as patent boots, lemon-coloured kid gloves, and a fur coat collar, assist jokes materially, there was immense laughter and much cheering, and moreover such a brilliant display of ladies' pocket-handkerchiefs, as threw the grievous gentleman quite into the shade.

And when the petition had been read and was about to be adopted, there came forward the Irish member (who was a young gentleman of ardent temperament,) with such a speech as only an Irish member can make, breathing the true soul and spirit of poetry, and poured forth with such fervour, that it made one warm to look at him; in the course whereof, he told them how he would demand the extension of that great boon to his native country; how he would claim for her equal rights in the muffin laws as in all other laws; and how he yet hoped to see the day when crumpets should be toasted in her lowly cabins, and muffin bells should ring in her rich green valleys. And, after him, came the Scotch member, with various pleasant allusions to the probable amount of profits, which increased the good humour that the poetry had awakened; and all the speeches put together did exactly what they were intended to do, and established in the hearers' minds that there was no speculation so promising, or at the same time so praiseworthy, as the United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company.

So, the petition in favour of the bill was agreed upon, and the meeting adjourned with acclamations, and Mr Nickleby and the other directors went to the office to lunch, as they did every day at half-past one o'clock; and to remunerate themselves for which trouble, (as the company was yet in its infancy,) they only charged three guineas each man for every such attendance.

CHAPTER 3

Mr Ralph Nickleby receives Sad Tidings of his Brother, but bears up nobly against the Intelligence communicated to him. The Reader is informed how he liked Nicholas, who is herein introduced, and how kindly he proposed to make his Fortune at once

Having rendered his zealous assistance towards dispatching the lunch, with all that promptitude and energy which are among the most important qualities that men of business can possess, Mr Ralph Nickleby took a cordial farewell of his fellow-speculators, and bent his steps westward in unwonted good humour. As he passed St Paul's he stepped aside into a doorway to set his watch, and with his hand on the key and his eye on the cathedral dial, was intent upon so doing, when a man suddenly stopped before him. It was Newman Noggs.

'Ah! Newman,' said Mr Nickleby, looking up as he pursued his occupation. 'The letter about the mortgage has come, has it? I thought it would.'

'Wrong,' replied Newman.

'What! and nobody called respecting it?' inquired Mr Nickleby, pausing. Noggs shook his head.

'What HAS come, then?' inquired Mr Nickleby.

'I have,' said Newman.

'What else?' demanded the master, sternly.

'This,' said Newman, drawing a sealed letter slowly from his pocket. 'Post-mark, Strand, black wax, black border, woman's hand, C. N. in the corner.'

'Black wax?' said Mr Nickleby, glancing at the letter. 'I know something of that hand, too. Newman, I shouldn't be surprised if my brother were dead.'

'I don't think you would,' said Newman, quietly.

'Why not, sir?' demanded Mr Nickleby.

'You never are surprised,' replied Newman, 'that's all.'

Mr Nickleby snatched the letter from his assistant, and fixing a cold look upon him, opened, read it, put it in his pocket, and having now hit the time to a second, began winding up his watch.

'It is as I expected, Newman,' said Mr Nickleby, while he was thus engaged. 'He IS dead. Dear me! Well, that's sudden thing. I shouldn't have thought it, really.' With these touching expressions of sorrow, Mr Nickleby replaced his watch in his fob, and, fitting on his gloves to a nicety, turned upon his way, and walked slowly westward with his hands behind him.

'Children alive?' inquired Noggs, stepping up to him.

'Why, that's the very thing,' replied Mr Nickleby, as though his thoughts were about them at that moment. 'They are both alive.'

'Both!' repeated Newman Noggs, in a low voice.

'And the widow, too,' added Mr Nickleby, 'and all three in London, confound them; all three here, Newman.'

Newman fell a little behind his master, and his face was curiously twisted as by a spasm; but whether of paralysis, or grief, or inward laughter, nobody but himself could possibly explain. The expression of a man's face is commonly a help to his thoughts, or glossary on his speech; but the countenance of Newman Noggs, in his ordinary moods, was a problem which no stretch of ingenuity could solve.

'Go home!' said Mr Nickleby, after they had walked a few paces: looking round at the clerk as if he were his dog. The words were scarcely uttered when Newman darted across the road, slunk among the crowd, and disappeared in an instant.

'Reasonable, certainly!' muttered Mr Nickleby to himself, as he walked on, 'very reasonable! My brother never did anything for me, and I never expected it; the breath is no sooner out of his body than I am to be looked to, as the support of a great hearty woman, and a grown boy and girl. What are they to me! I never saw them.'

Full of these, and many other reflections of a similar kind, Mr Nickleby made the best of his way to the Strand, and, referring to his letter as if to ascertain the number of the house he wanted, stopped at a private door about half-way down that crowded thoroughfare.

A miniature painter lived there, for there was a large gilt frame screwed upon the street-door, in which were displayed, upon a black velvet ground, two portraits of naval dress coats with faces looking out of them, and telescopes attached; one of a young gentleman in a very vermilion uniform, flourishing a sabre; and one of a literary character with a high forehead, a pen and ink, six books, and a curtain. There was, moreover, a touching representation of a young lady reading a manuscript in an unfathomable forest, and a charming whole length of a large-headed little boy, sitting on a stool with his legs fore-shortened to the size of salt-spoons. Besides these works of art, there were a great many heads of old ladies and gentlemen smirking at each other out of blue and brown skies, and an elegantly written card of terms with an embossed border.

Mr Nickleby glanced at these frivolities with great contempt, and gave a double knock, which, having been thrice repeated, was answered by a servant girl with an uncommonly dirty face.

'Is Mrs Nickleby at home, girl?' demanded Ralph sharply.

'Her name ain't Nickleby,' said the girl, 'La Creevy, you mean.'

Mr Nickleby looked very indignant at the handmaid on being thus corrected, and demanded with much asperity what she meant; which she was about to state, when a female voice proceeding from a perpendicular staircase at the end of the passage, inquired who was wanted.

'Mrs Nickleby,' said Ralph.

'It's the second floor, Hannah,' said the same voice; 'what a stupid thing you are! Is the second floor at home?'

'Somebody went out just now, but I think it was the attic which had been a cleaning of himself,' replied the girl.

'You had better see,' said the invisible female. 'Show the gentleman where the bell is, and tell him he mustn't knock double knocks for the second floor; I can't allow a knock except when the bell's broke, and then it must be two single ones.'

'Here,' said Ralph, walking in without more parley, 'I beg your pardon; is that Mrs La what's-her-name?'

'Creevy—La Creevy,' replied the voice, as a yellow headdress bobbed over the banisters.

'I'll speak to you a moment, ma'am, with your leave,' said Ralph.

The voice replied that the gentleman was to walk up; but he had walked up before it spoke, and stepping into the first floor, was received by the wearer of the yellow head-dress, who had a gown to correspond, and was of much the same colour herself. Miss La Creevy was a mincing young lady of fifty, and Miss La Creevy's apartment was the gilt frame downstairs on a larger scale and something dirtier.

'Hem!' said Miss La Creevy, coughing delicately behind her black silk mitten. 'A miniature, I presume. A very strongly-marked countenance for the purpose, sir. Have you ever sat before?'

'You mistake my purpose, I see, ma'am,' replied Mr Nickleby, in his usual blunt fashion. 'I have no money to throw away on miniatures, ma'am, and nobody to give one to (thank God) if I had. Seeing you on the stairs, I wanted to ask a question of you, about some lodgers here.'

Miss La Creevy coughed once more—this cough was to conceal her disappointment—and said, 'Oh, indeed!'

'I infer from what you said to your servant, that the floor above belongs to you, ma'am,' said Mr Nickleby.

Yes it did, Miss La Creevy replied. The upper part of the house belonged to her, and as she had no necessity for the second-floor rooms just then, she was in the habit of letting them. Indeed, there was a lady from the country and her two children in them, at that present speaking.

'A widow, ma'am?' said Ralph.

'Yes, she is a widow,' replied the lady.

'A POOR widow, ma'am,' said Ralph, with a powerful emphasis on that little adjective which conveys so much.

'Well, I'm afraid she IS poor,' rejoined Miss La Creevy.

'I happen to know that she is, ma'am,' said Ralph. 'Now, what business has a poor widow in such a house as this, ma'am?'

'Very true,' replied Miss La Creevy, not at all displeased with this implied compliment to the apartments. 'Exceedingly true.'

'I know her circumstances intimately, ma'am,' said Ralph; 'in fact, I am a relation of the family; and I should recommend you not to keep them here, ma'am.'

'I should hope, if there was any incompatibility to meet the pecuniary obligations,' said Miss La Creevy with another cough, 'that the lady's family would—'

'No they wouldn't, ma'am,' interrupted Ralph, hastily. 'Don't think it.'

'If I am to understand that,' said Miss La Creevy, 'the case wears a very different appearance.'

'You may understand it then, ma'am,' said Ralph, 'and make your arrangements accordingly. I am the family, ma'am—at least, I believe I am the only relation they have, and I think it right that you should know I can't support them in their extravagances. How long have they taken these lodgings for?'

'Only from week to week,' replied Miss La Creevy. 'Mrs Nickleby paid the first week in advance.'

'Then you had better get them out at the end of it,' said Ralph. 'They can't do better than go back to the country, ma'am; they are in everybody's way here.'

'Certainly,' said Miss La Creevy, rubbing her hands, 'if Mrs Nickleby took the apartments without the means of paying for them, it was very unbecoming a lady.'

'Of course it was, ma'am,' said Ralph.

'And naturally,' continued Miss La Creevy, 'I who am, AT PRESENT—hem—an unprotected female, cannot afford to lose by the apartments.'

'Of course you can't, ma'am,' replied Ralph.

'Though at the same time,' added Miss La Creevy, who was plainly wavering between her good-nature and her interest, 'I have nothing whatever to say against the lady, who is extremely pleasant and affable, though, poor thing, she seems terribly low in her spirits; nor against the young people either, for nicer, or better-behaved young people cannot be.'

'Very well, ma'am,' said Ralph, turning to the door, for these encomiums on poverty irritated him; 'I have done my duty, and perhaps more than I ought: of course nobody will thank me for saying what I have.'

'I am sure I am very much obliged to you at least, sir,' said Miss La Creevy in a gracious manner. 'Would you do me the favour to look at a few specimens of my portrait painting?'

'You're very good, ma'am,' said Mr Nickleby, making off with great speed; 'but as I have a visit to pay upstairs, and my time is precious, I really can't.'

'At any other time when you are passing, I shall be most happy,' said Miss La Creevy. 'Perhaps you will have the kindness to take a card of terms with you? Thank you—good-morning!'

'Good-morning, ma'am,' said Ralph, shutting the door abruptly after him to prevent any further conversation. 'Now for my sister-in-law. Bah!'

Climbing up another perpendicular flight, composed with great mechanical ingenuity of nothing but corner stairs, Mr Ralph Nickleby stopped to take breath on the landing, when he was overtaken by the handmaid, whom the politeness of Miss La Creevy had dispatched to announce him, and who had apparently been making a variety of unsuccessful attempts, since their last interview, to wipe her dirty face clean, upon an apron much dirtier.

'What name?' said the girl.

'Nickleby,' replied Ralph.

'Oh! Mrs Nickleby,' said the girl, throwing open the door, 'here's Mr Nickleby.'

A lady in deep mourning rose as Mr Ralph Nickleby entered, but appeared incapable of advancing to meet him, and leant upon the arm of a slight but very beautiful girl of about seventeen, who had been sitting by her. A youth, who appeared a year or two older, stepped forward and saluted Ralph as his uncle.

'Oh,' growled Ralph, with an ill-favoured frown, 'you are Nicholas, I suppose?'

'That is my name, sir,' replied the youth.

'Put my hat down,' said Ralph, imperiously. 'Well, ma'am, how do you do? You must bear up against sorrow, ma'am; I always do.'

'Mine was no common loss!' said Mrs Nickleby, applying her handkerchief to her eyes.

'It was no UNcommon loss, ma'am,' returned Ralph, as he coolly unbuttoned his spencer. 'Husbands die every day, ma'am, and wives too.'

'And brothers also, sir,' said Nicholas, with a glance of indignation.

'Yes, sir, and puppies, and pug-dogs likewise,' replied his uncle, taking a chair. 'You didn't mention in your letter what my brother's complaint was, ma'am.'

'The doctors could attribute it to no particular disease,' said Mrs Nickleby; shedding tears. 'We have too much reason to fear that he died of a broken heart.'

'Pooh!' said Ralph, 'there's no such thing. I can understand a man's dying of a broken neck, or suffering from a broken arm, or a broken head, or a broken leg, or a broken nose; but a broken heart!—nonsense, it's the cant of the day. If a man can't pay his debts, he dies of a broken heart, and his widow's a martyr.'

'Some people, I believe, have no hearts to break,' observed Nicholas, quietly.

'How old is this boy, for God's sake?' inquired Ralph, wheeling back his chair, and surveying his nephew from head to foot with intense scorn.

'Nicholas is very nearly nineteen,' replied the widow.

'Nineteen, eh!' said Ralph; 'and what do you mean to do for your bread, sir?'

'Not to live upon my mother,' replied Nicholas, his heart swelling as he spoke.

'You'd have little enough to live upon, if you did,' retorted the uncle, eyeing him contemptuously.

'Whatever it be,' said Nicholas, flushed with anger, 'I shall not look to you to make it more.'

'Nicholas, my dear, recollect yourself,' remonstrated Mrs Nickleby.

'Dear Nicholas, pray,' urged the young lady.

'Hold your tongue, sir,' said Ralph. 'Upon my word! Fine beginnings, Mrs Nickleby—fine beginnings!'

Mrs Nickleby made no other reply than entreating Nicholas by a gesture to keep silent; and the uncle and nephew looked at each other for some seconds without speaking. The face of the old man was stern, hard-featured, and forbidding; that of the young one, open, handsome, and ingenuous. The old man's eye was keen with the twinklings of avarice and cunning; the young man's bright with the light of intelligence and spirit. His figure was somewhat slight, but manly and well formed; and, apart from all the grace of youth and comeliness, there was an emanation from the warm young heart in his look and bearing which kept the old man down.

However striking such a contrast as this may be to lookers-on, none ever feel it with half the keenness or acuteness of perfection with which it strikes to the very soul of him whose inferiority it marks. It galled Ralph to the heart's core, and he hated Nicholas from that hour.

The mutual inspection was at length brought to a close by Ralph withdrawing his eyes, with a great show of disdain, and calling Nicholas 'a boy.' This word is much used as a term of reproach by elderly gentlemen towards their juniors: probably with the view of deluding society into the belief that if they could be young again, they wouldn't on any account.

'Well, ma'am,' said Ralph, impatiently, 'the creditors have administered, you tell me, and there's nothing left for you?'

'Nothing,' replied Mrs Nickleby.

'And you spent what little money you had, in coming all the way to London, to see what I could do for you?' pursued Ralph.

'I hoped,' faltered Mrs Nickleby, 'that you might have an opportunity of doing something for your brother's children. It was his dying wish that I should appeal to you in their behalf.'

'I don't know how it is,' muttered Ralph, walking up and down the room, 'but whenever a man dies without any property of his own, he always seems to think he has a right to dispose of other people's. What is your daughter fit for, ma'am?'

'Kate has been well educated,' sobbed Mrs Nickleby. 'Tell your uncle, my dear, how far you went in French and extras.'

The poor girl was about to murmur something, when her uncle stopped her, very unceremoniously.

'We must try and get you apprenticed at some boarding-school,' said Ralph. 'You have not been brought up too delicately for that, I hope?'

'No, indeed, uncle,' replied the weeping girl. 'I will try to do anything that will gain me a home and bread.'

'Well, well,' said Ralph, a little softened, either by his niece's beauty or her distress (stretch a point, and say the latter). 'You must try it, and if the life is too hard, perhaps dressmaking or tambour-work will come lighter. Have YOU ever done anything, sir?' (turning to his nephew.)

'No,' replied Nicholas, bluntly.

'No, I thought not!' said Ralph. 'This is the way my brother brought up his children, ma'am.'

'Nicholas has not long completed such education as his poor father could give him,' rejoined Mrs Nickleby, 'and he was thinking of—'

'Of making something of him someday,' said Ralph. 'The old story; always thinking, and never doing. If my brother had been a man of activity and prudence, he might have left you a rich woman, ma'am: and if he had turned his son into the world, as my father turned me, when I wasn't as old as that boy by a year and a half, he would have been in a situation to help you, instead of being a burden upon you, and increasing your distress. My brother was a thoughtless, inconsiderate man, Mrs Nickleby, and nobody, I am sure, can have better reason to feel that, than you.'

This appeal set the widow upon thinking that perhaps she might have made a more successful venture with her one thousand pounds, and then she began to reflect what a comfortable sum it would have been just then; which dismal thoughts made her tears flow faster, and in the excess of these griefs she (being a well-meaning woman enough, but weak withal) fell first to deploring her hard fate, and then to remarking, with many sobs, that to be sure she had been a slave to poor Nicholas, and had often told him she might have married better (as indeed she had, very often), and that she never knew in his lifetime how the money went, but that if he had confided in her they might all have been better off that day; with other bitter recollections common to most married ladies, either during their coverture, or afterwards, or at both periods. Mrs Nickleby concluded by lamenting that the dear departed had never deigned to profit by her advice, save on one occasion; which was a strictly veracious statement, inasmuch as he had only acted upon it once, and had ruined himself in consequence.

Mr Ralph Nickleby heard all this with a half-smile; and when the widow had finished, quietly took up the subject where it had been left before the above outbreak.

'Are you willing to work, sir?' he inquired, frowning on his nephew.

'Of course I am,' replied Nicholas haughtily.

'Then see here, sir,' said his uncle. 'This caught my eye this morning, and you may thank your stars for it.'

With this exordium, Mr Ralph Nickleby took a newspaper from his pocket, and after unfolding it, and looking for a short time among the advertisements, read as follows:

'"EDUCATION.—At Mr Wackford Squeers's Academy, Dotheboys Hall, at the delightful village of Dotheboys, near Greta Bridge in Yorkshire, Youth are boarded, clothed, booked, furnished with pocket-money, provided with all necessaries, instructed in all languages living and dead, mathematics, orthography, geometry, astronomy, trigonometry, the use of the globes, algebra, single stick (if required), writing, arithmetic, fortification, and every other branch of classical literature. Terms, twenty guineas per annum. No extras, no vacations, and diet unparalleled. Mr Squeers is in town, and attends daily, from one till four, at the Saracen's Head, Snow Hill. N.B. An able assistant wanted. Annual salary 5 pounds. A Master of Arts would be preferred."

'There!' said Ralph, folding the paper again. 'Let him get that situation, and his fortune is made.'

'But he is not a Master of Arts,' said Mrs Nickleby.

'That,' replied Ralph, 'that, I think, can be got over.'

'But the salary is so small, and it is such a long way off, uncle!' faltered Kate.

'Hush, Kate my dear,' interposed Mrs Nickleby; 'your uncle must know best.'

'I say,' repeated Ralph, tartly, 'let him get that situation, and his fortune is made. If he don't like that, let him get one for himself. Without friends, money, recommendation, or knowledge of business of any kind, let him find honest employment in London, which will keep him in shoe leather, and I'll give him a thousand pounds. At least,' said Mr Ralph Nickleby, checking himself, 'I would if I had it.'

'Poor fellow!' said the young lady. 'Oh! uncle, must we be separated so soon!'

'Don't tease your uncle with questions when he is thinking only for our good, my love,' said Mrs Nickleby. 'Nicholas, my dear, I wish you would say something.'

'Yes, mother, yes,' said Nicholas, who had hitherto remained silent and absorbed in thought. 'If I am fortunate enough to be appointed to this post, sir, for which I am so imperfectly qualified, what will become of those I leave behind?'

'Your mother and sister, sir,' replied Ralph, 'will be provided for, in that case (not otherwise), by me, and placed in some sphere of life in which they will be able to be independent. That will be my immediate care; they will not remain as they are, one week after your departure, I will undertake.'

'Then,' said Nicholas, starting gaily up, and wringing his uncle's hand, 'I am ready to do anything you wish me. Let us try our fortune with Mr Squeers at once; he can but refuse.'

'He won't do that,' said Ralph. 'He will be glad to have you on my recommendation. Make yourself of use to him, and you'll rise to be a partner in the establishment in no time. Bless me, only think! if he were to die, why your fortune's made at once.'

'To be sure, I see it all,' said poor Nicholas, delighted with a thousand visionary ideas, that his good spirits and his inexperience were conjuring up before him. 'Or suppose some young nobleman who is being educated at the Hall, were to take a fancy to me, and get his father to appoint me his travelling tutor when he left, and when we come back from the continent, procured me some handsome appointment. Eh! uncle?'

'Ah, to be sure!' sneered Ralph.

'And who knows, but when he came to see me when I was settled (as he would of course), he might fall in love with Kate, who would be keeping my house, and—and marry her, eh! uncle? Who knows?'

'Who, indeed!' snarled Ralph.

'How happy we should be!' cried Nicholas with enthusiasm. 'The pain of parting is nothing to the joy of meeting again. Kate will be a beautiful woman, and I so proud to hear them say so, and mother so happy to be with us once again, and all these sad times forgotten, and—' The picture was too bright a one to bear, and Nicholas, fairly overpowered by it, smiled faintly, and burst into tears.

This simple family, born and bred in retirement, and wholly unacquainted with what is called the world—a conventional phrase which, being interpreted, often signifieth all the rascals in it—mingled their tears together at the thought of their first separation; and, this first gush of feeling over, were proceeding to dilate with all the buoyancy of untried hope on the bright prospects before them, when Mr Ralph Nickleby suggested, that if they lost time, some more fortunate candidate might deprive Nicholas of the stepping-stone to fortune which the advertisement pointed out, and so undermine all their air-built castles. This timely reminder effectually stopped the conversation. Nicholas, having carefully copied the address of Mr Squeers, the uncle and nephew issued forth together in quest of that accomplished gentleman; Nicholas firmly persuading himself that he had done his relative great injustice in disliking him at first sight; and Mrs Nickleby being at some pains to inform her daughter that she was sure he was a much more kindly disposed person than he seemed; which, Miss Nickleby dutifully remarked, he might very easily be.

To tell the truth, the good lady's opinion had been not a little influenced by her brother-in-law's appeal to her better understanding, and his implied compliment to her high deserts; and although she had dearly loved her husband, and still doted on her children, he had struck so successfully on one of those little jarring chords in the human heart (Ralph was well acquainted with its worst weaknesses, though he knew nothing of its best), that she had already begun seriously to consider herself the amiable and suffering victim of her late husband's imprudence.

CHAPTER 4

Nicholas and his Uncle (to secure the Fortune without loss of time) wait upon Mr Wackford Squeers, the Yorkshire Schoolmaster

Snow Hill! What kind of place can the quiet townspeople who see the words emblazoned, in all the legibility of gilt letters and dark shading, on the north-country coaches, take Snow Hill to be? All people have some undefined and shadowy notion of a place whose name is frequently before their eyes, or often in their ears. What a vast number of random ideas there must be perpetually floating about, regarding this same Snow Hill. The name is such a good one. Snow Hill—Snow Hill too, coupled with a Saracen's Head: picturing to us by a double association of ideas, something stern and rugged! A bleak desolate tract of country, open to piercing blasts and fierce wintry storms—a dark, cold, gloomy heath, lonely by day, and scarcely to be thought of by honest folks at night—a place which solitary wayfarers shun, and where desperate robbers congregate;—this, or something like this, should be the prevalent notion of Snow Hill, in those remote and rustic parts, through which the Saracen's Head, like some grim apparition, rushes each day and night with mysterious and ghost-like punctuality; holding its swift and headlong course in all weathers, and seeming to bid defiance to the very elements themselves.

The reality is rather different, but by no means to be despised notwithstanding. There, at the very core of London, in the heart of its business and animation, in the midst of a whirl of noise and motion: stemming as it were the giant currents of life that flow ceaselessly on from different quarters, and meet beneath its walls: stands Newgate; and in that crowded street on which it frowns so darkly—within a few feet of the squalid tottering houses—upon the very spot on which the vendors of soup and fish and damaged fruit are now plying their trades—scores of human beings, amidst a roar of sounds to which even the tumult of a great city is as nothing, four, six, or eight strong men at a time, have been hurried violently and swiftly from the world, when the scene has been rendered frightful with excess of human life; when curious eyes have glared from casement and house-top, and wall and pillar; and when, in the mass of white and upturned faces, the dying wretch, in his all-comprehensive look of agony, has met not one—not one—that bore the impress of pity or compassion.

Near to the jail, and by consequence near to Smithfield also, and the Compter, and the bustle and noise of the city; and just on that particular part of Snow Hill where omnibus horses going eastward seriously think of falling down on purpose, and where horses in hackney cabriolets going westward not unfrequently fall by accident, is the coach-yard of the Saracen's Head Inn; its portal guarded by two Saracens' heads and shoulders, which it was once the pride and glory of the choice spirits of this metropolis to pull down at night, but which have for some time remained in undisturbed tranquillity; possibly because this species of humour is now confined to St James's parish, where door knockers are preferred as being more portable, and bell-wires esteemed as convenient toothpicks. Whether this be the reason or not, there they are, frowning upon you from each side of the gateway. The inn itself garnished with another Saracen's Head, frowns upon you from the top of the yard; while from the door of the hind boot of all the red coaches that are standing therein, there glares a small Saracen's Head, with a twin expression to the large Saracens' Heads below, so that the general appearance of the pile is decidedly of the Saracenic order.

When you walk up this yard, you will see the booking-office on your left, and the tower of St Sepulchre's church, darting abruptly up into the sky, on your right, and a gallery of bedrooms on both sides. Just before you, you will observe a long window with the words 'coffee-room' legibly painted above it; and looking out of that window, you would have seen in addition, if you had gone at the right time, Mr Wackford Squeers with his hands in his pockets.

Mr Squeers's appearance was not prepossessing. He had but one eye, and the popular prejudice runs in favour of two. The eye he had, was unquestionably useful, but decidedly not ornamental: being of a greenish grey, and in shape resembling the fan-light of a street door. The blank side of his face was much wrinkled and puckered up, which gave him a very sinister appearance, especially when he smiled, at which times his expression bordered closely on the villainous. His hair was very flat and shiny, save at the ends, where it was brushed stiffly up from a low protruding forehead, which assorted well with his harsh voice and coarse manner. He was about two or three and fifty, and a trifle below the middle size; he wore a white neckerchief with long ends, and a suit of scholastic black; but his coat sleeves being a great deal too long, and his trousers a great deal too short, he appeared ill at ease in his clothes, and as if he were in a perpetual state of astonishment at finding himself so respectable.

Mr Squeers was standing in a box by one of the coffee-room fire-places, fitted with one such table as is usually seen in coffee-rooms, and two of extraordinary shapes and dimensions made to suit the angles of the partition. In a corner of the seat, was a very small deal trunk, tied round with a scanty piece of cord; and on the trunk was perched—his lace-up half-boots and corduroy trousers dangling in the air—a diminutive boy, with his shoulders drawn up to his ears, and his hands planted on his knees, who glanced timidly at the schoolmaster, from time to time, with evident dread and apprehension.

'Half-past three,' muttered Mr Squeers, turning from the window, and looking sulkily at the coffee-room clock. 'There will be nobody here today.'

Much vexed by this reflection, Mr Squeers looked at the little boy to see whether he was doing anything he could beat him for. As he happened not to be doing anything at all, he merely boxed his ears, and told him not to do it again.

'At Midsummer,' muttered Mr Squeers, resuming his complaint, 'I took down ten boys; ten twenties is two hundred pound. I go back at eight o'clock tomorrow morning, and have got only three—three oughts is an ought—three twos is six—sixty pound. What's come of all the boys? what's parents got in their heads? what does it all mean?'

Here the little boy on the top of the trunk gave a violent sneeze.

'Halloa, sir!' growled the schoolmaster, turning round. 'What's that, sir?'

'Nothing, please sir,' replied the little boy.

'Nothing, sir!' exclaimed Mr Squeers.

'Please sir, I sneezed,' rejoined the boy, trembling till the little trunk shook under him.

'Oh! sneezed, did you?' retorted Mr Squeers. 'Then what did you say "nothing" for, sir?'

In default of a better answer to this question, the little boy screwed a couple of knuckles into each of his eyes and began to cry, wherefore Mr Squeers knocked him off the trunk with a blow on one side of the face, and knocked him on again with a blow on the other.

'Wait till I get you down into Yorkshire, my young gentleman,' said Mr Squeers, 'and then I'll give you the rest. Will you hold that noise, sir?'

'Ye—ye—yes,' sobbed the little boy, rubbing his face very hard with the Beggar's Petition in printed calico.

'Then do so at once, sir,' said Squeers. 'Do you hear?'

As this admonition was accompanied with a threatening gesture, and uttered with a savage aspect, the little boy rubbed his face harder, as if to keep the tears back; and, beyond alternately sniffing and choking, gave no further vent to his emotions.

'Mr Squeers,' said the waiter, looking in at this juncture; 'here's a gentleman asking for you at the bar.'

'Show the gentleman in, Richard,' replied Mr Squeers, in a soft voice. 'Put your handkerchief in your pocket, you little scoundrel, or I'll murder you when the gentleman goes.'

The schoolmaster had scarcely uttered these words in a fierce whisper, when the stranger entered. Affecting not to see him, Mr Squeers feigned to be intent upon mending a pen, and offering benevolent advice to his youthful pupil.

'My dear child,' said Mr Squeers, 'all people have their trials. This early trial of yours that is fit to make your little heart burst, and your very eyes come out of your head with crying, what is it? Nothing; less than nothing. You are leaving your friends, but you will have a father in me, my dear, and a mother in Mrs Squeers. At the delightful village of Dotheboys, near Greta Bridge in Yorkshire, where youth are boarded, clothed, booked, washed, furnished with pocket-money, provided with all necessaries—'

'It IS the gentleman,' observed the stranger, stopping the schoolmaster in the rehearsal of his advertisement. 'Mr Squeers, I believe, sir?'

'The same, sir,' said Mr Squeers, with an assumption of extreme surprise.

'The gentleman,' said the stranger, 'that advertised in the Times newspaper?'

'—Morning Post, Chronicle, Herald, and Advertiser, regarding the Academy called Dotheboys Hall at the delightful village of Dotheboys, near Greta Bridge in Yorkshire,' added Mr Squeers. 'You come on business, sir. I see by my young friends. How do you do, my little gentleman? and how do you do, sir?' With this salutation Mr Squeers patted the heads of two hollow-eyed, small-boned little boys, whom the applicant had brought with him, and waited for further communications.

'I am in the oil and colour way. My name is Snawley, sir,' said the stranger.

Squeers inclined his head as much as to say, 'And a remarkably pretty name, too.'

The stranger continued. 'I have been thinking, Mr Squeers, of placing my two boys at your school.'

'It is not for me to say so, sir,' replied Mr Squeers, 'but I don't think you could possibly do a better thing.'

'Hem!' said the other. 'Twenty pounds per annewum, I believe, Mr Squeers?'

'Guineas,' rejoined the schoolmaster, with a persuasive smile.

'Pounds for two, I think, Mr Squeers,' said Mr Snawley, solemnly.

'I don't think it could be done, sir,' replied Squeers, as if he had never considered the proposition before. 'Let me see; four fives is twenty, double that, and deduct the—well, a pound either way shall not stand betwixt us. You must recommend me to your connection, sir, and make it up that way.'

'They are not great eaters,' said Mr Snawley.

'Oh! that doesn't matter at all,' replied Squeers. 'We don't consider the boys' appetites at our establishment.' This was strictly true; they did not.

'Every wholesome luxury, sir, that Yorkshire can afford,' continued Squeers; 'every beautiful moral that Mrs Squeers can instil; every—in short, every comfort of a home that a boy could wish for, will be theirs, Mr Snawley.'

'I should wish their morals to be particularly attended to,' said Mr Snawley.

'I am glad of that, sir,' replied the schoolmaster, drawing himself up. 'They have come to the right shop for morals, sir.'

'You are a moral man yourself,' said Mr Snawley.

'I rather believe I am, sir,' replied Squeers.

'I have the satisfaction to know you are, sir,' said Mr Snawley. 'I asked one of your references, and he said you were pious.'

'Well, sir, I hope I am a little in that line,' replied Squeers.

'I hope I am also,' rejoined the other. 'Could I say a few words with you in the next box?'

'By all means,' rejoined Squeers with a grin. 'My dears, will you speak to your new playfellow a minute or two? That is one of my boys, sir. Belling his name is,—a Taunton boy that, sir.'

'Is he, indeed?' rejoined Mr Snawley, looking at the poor little urchin as if he were some extraordinary natural curiosity.

'He goes down with me tomorrow, sir,' said Squeers. 'That's his luggage that he is a sitting upon now. Each boy is required to bring, sir, two suits of clothes, six shirts, six pair of stockings, two nightcaps, two pocket-handkerchiefs, two pair of shoes, two hats, and a razor.'

'A razor!' exclaimed Mr Snawley, as they walked into the next box. 'What for?'

'To shave with,' replied Squeers, in a slow and measured tone.

There was not much in these three words, but there must have been something in the manner in which they were said, to attract attention; for the schoolmaster and his companion looked steadily at each other for a few seconds, and then exchanged a very meaning smile. Snawley was a sleek, flat-nosed man, clad in sombre garments, and long black gaiters, and bearing in his countenance an expression of much mortification and sanctity; so, his smiling without any obvious reason was the more remarkable.

'Up to what age do you keep boys at your school then?' he asked at length.

'Just as long as their friends make the quarterly payments to my agent in town, or until such time as they run away,' replied Squeers. 'Let us understand each other; I see we may safely do so. What are these boys;—natural children?'

'No,' rejoined Snawley, meeting the gaze of the schoolmaster's one eye. 'They ain't.'

'I thought they might be,' said Squeers, coolly. 'We have a good many of them; that boy's one.'

'Him in the next box?' said Snawley.

Squeers nodded in the affirmative; his companion took another peep at the little boy on the trunk, and, turning round again, looked as if he were quite disappointed to see him so much like other boys, and said he should hardly have thought it.

'He is,' cried Squeers. 'But about these boys of yours; you wanted to speak to me?'

'Yes,' replied Snawley. 'The fact is, I am not their father, Mr Squeers. I'm only their father-in-law.'

'Oh! Is that it?' said the schoolmaster. 'That explains it at once. I was wondering what the devil you were going to send them to Yorkshire for. Ha! ha! Oh, I understand now.'

'You see I have married the mother,' pursued Snawley; 'it's expensive keeping boys at home, and as she has a little money in her own right, I am afraid (women are so very foolish, Mr Squeers) that she might be led to squander it on them, which would be their ruin, you know.'

'I see,' returned Squeers, throwing himself back in his chair, and waving his hand.

'And this,' resumed Snawley, 'has made me anxious to put them to some school a good distance off, where there are no holidays—none of those ill-judged coming home twice a year that unsettle children's minds so—and where they may rough it a little—you comprehend?'

'The payments regular, and no questions asked,' said Squeers, nodding his head.

'That's it, exactly,' rejoined the other. 'Morals strictly attended to, though.'

'Strictly,' said Squeers.

'Not too much writing home allowed, I suppose?' said the father-in-law, hesitating.

'None, except a circular at Christmas, to say they never were so happy, and hope they may never be sent for,' rejoined Squeers.

'Nothing could be better,' said the father-in-law, rubbing his hands.

'Then, as we understand each other,' said Squeers, 'will you allow me to ask you whether you consider me a highly virtuous, exemplary, and well-conducted man in private life; and whether, as a person whose business it is to take charge of youth, you place the strongest confidence in my unimpeachable integrity, liberality, religious principles, and ability?'

'Certainly I do,' replied the father-in-law, reciprocating the schoolmaster's grin.

'Perhaps you won't object to say that, if I make you a reference?'

'Not the least in the world.'

'That's your sort!' said Squeers, taking up a pen; 'this is doing business, and that's what I like.'

Having entered Mr Snawley's address, the schoolmaster had next to perform the still more agreeable office of entering the receipt of the first quarter's payment in advance, which he had scarcely completed, when another voice was heard inquiring for Mr Squeers.

'Here he is,' replied the schoolmaster; 'what is it?'

'Only a matter of business, sir,' said Ralph Nickleby, presenting himself, closely followed by Nicholas. 'There was an advertisement of yours in the papers this morning?'

'There was, sir. This way, if you please,' said Squeers, who had by this time got back to the box by the fire-place. 'Won't you be seated?'

'Why, I think I will,' replied Ralph, suiting the action to the word, and placing his hat on the table before him. 'This is my nephew, sir, Mr Nicholas Nickleby.'

'How do you do, sir?' said Squeers.

Nicholas bowed, said he was very well, and seemed very much astonished at the outward appearance of the proprietor of Dotheboys Hall: as indeed he was.

'Perhaps you recollect me?' said Ralph, looking narrowly at the schoolmaster.

'You paid me a small account at each of my half-yearly visits to town, for some years, I think, sir,' replied Squeers.

'I did,' rejoined Ralph.

'For the parents of a boy named Dorker, who unfortunately—'

'—unfortunately died at Dotheboys Hall,' said Ralph, finishing the sentence.

'I remember very well, sir,' rejoined Squeers. 'Ah! Mrs Squeers, sir, was as partial to that lad as if he had been her own; the attention, sir, that was bestowed upon that boy in his illness! Dry toast and warm tea offered him every night and morning when he couldn't swallow anything—a candle in his bedroom on the very night he died—the best dictionary sent up for him to lay his head upon—I don't regret it though. It is a pleasant thing to reflect that one did one's duty by him.'

Ralph smiled, as if he meant anything but smiling, and looked round at the strangers present.

'These are only some pupils of mine,' said Wackford Squeers, pointing to the little boy on the trunk and the two little boys on the floor, who had been staring at each other without uttering a word, and writhing their bodies into most remarkable contortions, according to the custom of little boys when they first become acquainted. 'This gentleman, sir, is a parent who is kind enough to compliment me upon the course of education adopted at Dotheboys Hall, which is situated, sir, at the delightful village of Dotheboys, near Greta Bridge in Yorkshire, where youth are boarded, clothed, booked, washed, furnished with pocket-money—'

'Yes, we know all about that, sir,' interrupted Ralph, testily. 'It's in the advertisement.'

'You are very right, sir; it IS in the advertisement,' replied Squeers.

'And in the matter of fact besides,' interrupted Mr Snawley. 'I feel bound to assure you, sir, and I am proud to have this opportunity OF assuring you, that I consider Mr Squeers a gentleman highly virtuous, exemplary, well conducted, and—'

'I make no doubt of it, sir,' interrupted Ralph, checking the torrent of recommendation; 'no doubt of it at all. Suppose we come to business?'

'With all my heart, sir,' rejoined Squeers. '"Never postpone business," is the very first lesson we instil into our commercial pupils. Master Belling, my dear, always remember that; do you hear?'

'Yes, sir,' repeated Master Belling.

'He recollects what it is, does he?' said Ralph.

'Tell the gentleman,' said Squeers.

'"Never,"' repeated Master Belling.

'Very good,' said Squeers; 'go on.'

'Never,' repeated Master Belling again.

'Very good indeed,' said Squeers. 'Yes.'

'P,' suggested Nicholas, good-naturedly.

'Perform—business!' said Master Belling. 'Never—perform—business!'

'Very well, sir,' said Squeers, darting a withering look at the culprit. 'You and I will perform a little business on our private account by-and-by.'

'And just now,' said Ralph, 'we had better transact our own, perhaps.'

'If you please,' said Squeers.

'Well,' resumed Ralph, 'it's brief enough; soon broached; and I hope easily concluded. You have advertised for an able assistant, sir?'

'Precisely so,' said Squeers.

'And you really want one?'

'Certainly,' answered Squeers.

'Here he is!' said Ralph. 'My nephew Nicholas, hot from school, with everything he learnt there, fermenting in his head, and nothing fermenting in his pocket, is just the man you want.'

'I am afraid,' said Squeers, perplexed with such an application from a youth of Nicholas's figure, 'I am afraid the young man won't suit me.'

'Yes, he will,' said Ralph; 'I know better. Don't be cast down, sir; you will be teaching all the young noblemen in Dotheboys Hall in less than a week's time, unless this gentleman is more obstinate than I take him to be.'

'I fear, sir,' said Nicholas, addressing Mr Squeers, 'that you object to my youth, and to my not being a Master of Arts?'

'The absence of a college degree IS an objection,' replied Squeers, looking as grave as he could, and considerably puzzled, no less by the contrast between the simplicity of the nephew and the worldly manner of the uncle, than by the incomprehensible allusion to the young noblemen under his tuition.

'Look here, sir,' said Ralph; 'I'll put this matter in its true light in two seconds.'

'If you'll have the goodness,' rejoined Squeers.

'This is a boy, or a youth, or a lad, or a young man, or a hobbledehoy, or whatever you like to call him, of eighteen or nineteen, or thereabouts,' said Ralph.

'That I see,' observed the schoolmaster.

'So do I,' said Mr Snawley, thinking it as well to back his new friend occasionally.

'His father is dead, he is wholly ignorant of the world, has no resources whatever, and wants something to do,' said Ralph. 'I recommend him to this splendid establishment of yours, as an opening which will lead him to fortune if he turns it to proper account. Do you see that?'

'Everybody must see that,' replied Squeers, half imitating the sneer with which the old gentleman was regarding his unconscious relative.

'I do, of course,' said Nicholas, eagerly.

'He does, of course, you observe,' said Ralph, in the same dry, hard manner. 'If any caprice of temper should induce him to cast aside this golden opportunity before he has brought it to perfection, I consider myself absolved from extending any assistance to his mother and sister. Look at him, and think of the use he may be to you in half-a-dozen ways! Now, the question is, whether, for some time to come at all events, he won't serve your purpose better than twenty of the kind of people you would get under ordinary circumstances. Isn't that a question for consideration?'

'Yes, it is,' said Squeers, answering a nod of Ralph's head with a nod of his own.

'Good,' rejoined Ralph. 'Let me have two words with you.'

The two words were had apart; in a couple of minutes Mr Wackford Squeers announced that Mr Nicholas Nickleby was, from that moment, thoroughly nominated to, and installed in, the office of first assistant master at Dotheboys Hall.

'Your uncle's recommendation has done it, Mr Nickleby,' said Wackford Squeers.

Nicholas, overjoyed at his success, shook his uncle's hand warmly, and could almost have worshipped Squeers upon the spot.

'He is an odd-looking man,' thought Nicholas. 'What of that? Porson was an odd-looking man, and so was Doctor Johnson; all these bookworms are.'

'At eight o'clock tomorrow morning, Mr Nickleby,' said Squeers, 'the coach starts. You must be here at a quarter before, as we take these boys with us.'

'Certainly, sir,' said Nicholas.

'And your fare down, I have paid,' growled Ralph. 'So, you'll have nothing to do but keep yourself warm.'

Here was another instance of his uncle's generosity! Nicholas felt his unexpected kindness so much, that he could scarcely find words to thank him; indeed, he had not found half enough, when they took leave of the schoolmaster, and emerged from the Saracen's Head gateway.

'I shall be here in the morning to see you fairly off,' said Ralph. 'No skulking!'

'Thank you, sir,' replied Nicholas; 'I never shall forget this kindness.'

'Take care you don't,' replied his uncle. 'You had better go home now, and pack up what you have got to pack. Do you think you could find your way to Golden Square first?'

'Certainly,' said Nicholas. 'I can easily inquire.'

'Leave these papers with my clerk, then,' said Ralph, producing a small parcel, 'and tell him to wait till I come home.'

Nicholas cheerfully undertook the errand, and bidding his worthy uncle an affectionate farewell, which that warm-hearted old gentleman acknowledged by a growl, hastened away to execute his commission.

He found Golden Square in due course; Mr Noggs, who had stepped out for a minute or so to the public-house, was opening the door with a latch-key, as he reached the steps.

'What's that?' inquired Noggs, pointing to the parcel.

'Papers from my uncle,' replied Nicholas; 'and you're to have the goodness to wait till he comes home, if you please.'

'Uncle!' cried Noggs.

'Mr Nickleby,' said Nicholas in explanation.

'Come in,' said Newman.

Without another word he led Nicholas into the passage, and thence into the official pantry at the end of it, where he thrust him into a chair, and mounting upon his high stool, sat, with his arms hanging, straight down by his sides, gazing fixedly upon him, as from a tower of observation.

'There is no answer,' said Nicholas, laying the parcel on a table beside him.

Newman said nothing, but folding his arms, and thrusting his head forward so as to obtain a nearer view of Nicholas's face, scanned his features closely.

'No answer,' said Nicholas, speaking very loud, under the impression that Newman Noggs was deaf.

Newman placed his hands upon his knees, and, without uttering a syllable, continued the same close scrutiny of his companion's face.

This was such a very singular proceeding on the part of an utter stranger, and his appearance was so extremely peculiar, that Nicholas, who had a sufficiently keen sense of the ridiculous, could not refrain from breaking into a smile as he inquired whether Mr Noggs had any commands for him.

Noggs shook his head and sighed; upon which Nicholas rose, and remarking that he required no rest, bade him good-morning.

It was a great exertion for Newman Noggs, and nobody knows to this day how he ever came to make it, the other party being wholly unknown to him, but he drew a long breath and actually said, out loud, without once stopping, that if the young gentleman did not object to tell, he should like to know what his uncle was going to do for him.

Nicholas had not the least objection in the world, but on the contrary was rather pleased to have an opportunity of talking on the subject which occupied his thoughts; so, he sat down again, and (his sanguine imagination warming as he spoke) entered into a fervent and glowing description of all the honours and advantages to be derived from his appointment at that seat of learning, Dotheboys Hall.

'But, what's the matter—are you ill?' said Nicholas, suddenly breaking off, as his companion, after throwing himself into a variety of uncouth attitudes, thrust his hands under the stool, and cracked his finger-joints as if he were snapping all the bones in his hands.

Newman Noggs made no reply, but went on shrugging his shoulders and cracking his finger-joints; smiling horribly all the time, and looking steadfastly at nothing, out of the tops of his eyes, in a most ghastly manner.

At first, Nicholas thought the mysterious man was in a fit, but, on further consideration, decided that he was in liquor, under which circumstances he deemed it prudent to make off at once. He looked back when he had got the street-door open. Newman Noggs was still indulging in the same extraordinary gestures, and the cracking of his fingers sounded louder that ever.

CHAPTER 5

Nicholas starts for Yorkshire. Of his Leave-taking and his Fellow-Travellers, and what befell them on the Road

If tears dropped into a trunk were charms to preserve its owner from sorrow and misfortune, Nicholas Nickleby would have commenced his expedition under most happy auspices. There was so much to be done, and so little time to do it in; so many kind words to be spoken, and such bitter pain in the hearts in which they rose to impede their utterance; that the little preparations for his journey were made mournfully indeed. A hundred things which the anxious care of his mother and sister deemed indispensable for his comfort, Nicholas insisted on leaving behind, as they might prove of some after use, or might be convertible into money if occasion required. A hundred affectionate contests on such points as these, took place on the sad night which preceded his departure; and, as the termination of every angerless dispute brought them nearer and nearer to the close of their slight preparations, Kate grew busier and busier, and wept more silently.

The box was packed at last, and then there came supper, with some little delicacy provided for the occasion, and as a set-off against the expense of which, Kate and her mother had feigned to dine when Nicholas was out. The poor lady nearly choked himself by attempting to partake of it, and almost suffocated himself in affecting a jest or two, and forcing a melancholy laugh. Thus, they lingered on till the hour of separating for the night was long past; and then they found that they might as well have given vent to their real feelings before, for they could not suppress them, do what they would. So, they let them have their way, and even that was a relief.

Nicholas slept well till six next morning; dreamed of home, or of what was home once—no matter which, for things that are changed or gone will come back as they used to be, thank God! in sleep—and rose quite brisk and gay. He wrote a few lines in pencil, to say the goodbye which he was afraid to pronounce himself, and laying them, with half his scanty stock of money, at his sister's door, shouldered his box and crept softly downstairs.

'Is that you, Hannah?' cried a voice from Miss La Creevy's sitting-room, whence shone the light of a feeble candle.

'It is I, Miss La Creevy,' said Nicholas, putting down the box and looking in.

'Bless us!' exclaimed Miss La Creevy, starting and putting her hand to her curl-papers. 'You're up very early, Mr Nickleby.'

'So are you,' replied Nicholas.

'It's the fine arts that bring me out of bed, Mr Nickleby,' returned the lady. 'I'm waiting for the light to carry out an idea.'

Miss La Creevy had got up early to put a fancy nose into a miniature of an ugly little boy, destined for his grandmother in the country, who was expected to bequeath him property if he was like the family.

'To carry out an idea,' repeated Miss La Creevy; 'and that's the great convenience of living in a thoroughfare like the Strand. When I want a nose or an eye for any particular sitter, I have only to look out of window and wait till I get one.'

'Does it take long to get a nose, now?' inquired Nicholas, smiling.

'Why, that depends in a great measure on the pattern,' replied Miss La Creevy. 'Snubs and Romans are plentiful enough, and there are flats of all sorts and sizes when there's a meeting at Exeter Hall; but perfect aquilines, I am sorry to say, are scarce, and we generally use them for uniforms or public characters.'

'Indeed!' said Nicholas. 'If I should meet with any in my travels, I'll endeavour to sketch them for you.'

'You don't mean to say that you are really going all the way down into Yorkshire this cold winter's weather, Mr Nickleby?' said Miss La Creevy. 'I heard something of it last night.'

'I do, indeed,' replied Nicholas. 'Needs must, you know, when somebody drives. Necessity is my driver, and that is only another name for the same gentleman.'

'Well, I am very sorry for it; that's all I can say,' said Miss La Creevy; 'as much on your mother's and sister's account as on yours. Your sister is a very pretty young lady, Mr Nickleby, and that is an additional reason why she should have somebody to protect her. I persuaded her to give me a sitting or two, for the street-door case. 'Ah! she'll make a sweet miniature.' As Miss La Creevy spoke, she held up an ivory countenance intersected with very perceptible sky-blue veins, and regarded it with so much complacency, that Nicholas quite envied her.

'If you ever have an opportunity of showing Kate some little kindness,' said Nicholas, presenting his hand, 'I think you will.'

'Depend upon that,' said the good-natured miniature painter; 'and God bless you, Mr Nickleby; and I wish you well.'

It was very little that Nicholas knew of the world, but he guessed enough about its ways to think, that if he gave Miss La Creevy one little kiss, perhaps she might not be the less kindly disposed towards those he was leaving behind. So, he gave her three or four with a kind of jocose gallantry, and Miss La Creevy evinced no greater symptoms of displeasure than declaring, as she adjusted her yellow turban, that she had never heard of such a thing, and couldn't have believed it possible.

Having terminated the unexpected interview in this satisfactory manner, Nicholas hastily withdrew himself from the house. By the time he had found a man to carry his box it was only seven o'clock, so he walked slowly on, a little in advance of the porter, and very probably with not half as light a heart in his breast as the man had, although he had no waistcoat to cover it with, and had evidently, from the appearance of his other garments, been spending the night in a stable, and taking his breakfast at a pump.

Regarding, with no small curiosity and interest, all the busy preparations for the coming day which every street and almost every house displayed; and thinking, now and then, that it seemed rather hard that so many people of all ranks and stations could earn a livelihood in London, and that he should be compelled to journey so far in search of one; Nicholas speedily arrived at the Saracen's Head, Snow Hill. Having dismissed his attendant, and seen the box safely deposited in the coach-office, he looked into the coffee-room in search of Mr Squeers.

He found that learned gentleman sitting at breakfast, with the three little boys before noticed, and two others who had turned up by some lucky chance since the interview of the previous day, ranged in a row on the opposite seat. Mr Squeers had before him a small measure of coffee, a plate of hot toast, and a cold round of beef; but he was at that moment intent on preparing breakfast for the little boys.

'This is twopenn'orth of milk, is it, waiter?' said Mr Squeers, looking down into a large blue mug, and slanting it gently, so as to get an accurate view of the quantity of liquid contained in it.

'That's twopenn'orth, sir,' replied the waiter.

'What a rare article milk is, to be sure, in London!' said Mr Squeers, with a sigh. 'Just fill that mug up with lukewarm water, William, will you?'

'To the wery top, sir?' inquired the waiter. 'Why, the milk will be drownded.'

'Never you mind that,' replied Mr Squeers. 'Serve it right for being so dear. You ordered that thick bread and butter for three, did you?'

'Coming directly, sir.'

'You needn't hurry yourself,' said Squeers; 'there's plenty of time. Conquer your passions, boys, and don't be eager after vittles.' As he uttered this moral precept, Mr Squeers took a large bite out of the cold beef, and recognised Nicholas.

'Sit down, Mr Nickleby,' said Squeers. 'Here we are, a breakfasting you see!'

Nicholas did NOT see that anybody was breakfasting, except Mr Squeers; but he bowed with all becoming reverence, and looked as cheerful as he could.

'Oh! that's the milk and water, is it, William?' said Squeers. 'Very good; don't forget the bread and butter presently.'

At this fresh mention of the bread and butter, the five little boys looked very eager, and followed the waiter out, with their eyes; meanwhile Mr Squeers tasted the milk and water.

'Ah!' said that gentleman, smacking his lips, 'here's richness! Think of the many beggars and orphans in the streets that would be glad of this, little boys. A shocking thing hunger, isn't it, Mr Nickleby?'

'Very shocking, sir,' said Nicholas.

'When I say number one,' pursued Mr Squeers, putting the mug before the children, 'the boy on the left hand nearest the window may take a drink; and when I say number two, the boy next him will go in, and so till we come to number five, which is the last boy. Are you ready?'

'Yes, sir,' cried all the little boys with great eagerness.

'That's right,' said Squeers, calmly getting on with his breakfast; 'keep ready till I tell you to begin. Subdue your appetites, my dears, and you've conquered human natur. This is the way we inculcate strength of mind, Mr Nickleby,' said the schoolmaster, turning to Nicholas, and speaking with his mouth very full of beef and toast.

Nicholas murmured something—he knew not what—in reply; and the little boys, dividing their gaze between the mug, the bread and butter (which had by this time arrived), and every morsel which Mr Squeers took into his mouth, remained with strained eyes in torments of expectation.

'Thank God for a good breakfast,' said Squeers, when he had finished. 'Number one may take a drink.'

Number one seized the mug ravenously, and had just drunk enough to make him wish for more, when Mr Squeers gave the signal for number two, who gave up at the same interesting moment to number three; and the process was repeated until the milk and water terminated with number five.

'And now,' said the schoolmaster, dividing the bread and butter for three into as many portions as there were children, 'you had better look sharp with your breakfast, for the horn will blow in a minute or two, and then every boy leaves off.'

Permission being thus given to fall to, the boys began to eat voraciously, and in desperate haste: while the schoolmaster (who was in high good humour after his meal) picked his teeth with a fork, and looked smilingly on. In a very short time, the horn was heard.

'I thought it wouldn't be long,' said Squeers, jumping up and producing a little basket from under the seat; 'put what you haven't had time to eat, in here, boys! You'll want it on the road!'

Nicholas was considerably startled by these very economical arrangements; but he had no time to reflect upon them, for the little boys had to be got up to the top of the coach, and their boxes had to be brought out and put in, and Mr Squeers's luggage was to be seen carefully deposited in the boot, and all these offices were in his department. He was in the full heat and bustle of concluding these operations, when his uncle, Mr Ralph Nickleby, accosted him.

'Oh! here you are, sir!' said Ralph. 'Here are your mother and sister, sir.'

'Where?' cried Nicholas, looking hastily round.

'Here!' replied his uncle. 'Having too much money and nothing at all to do with it, they were paying a hackney coach as I came up, sir.'

'We were afraid of being too late to see him before he went away from us,' said Mrs Nickleby, embracing her son, heedless of the unconcerned lookers-on in the coach-yard.

'Very good, ma'am,' returned Ralph, 'you're the best judge of course. I merely said that you were paying a hackney coach. I never pay a hackney coach, ma'am; I never hire one. I haven't been in a hackney coach of my own hiring, for thirty years, and I hope I shan't be for thirty more, if I live as long.'

'I should never have forgiven myself if I had not seen him,' said Mrs Nickleby. 'Poor dear boy—going away without his breakfast too, because he feared to distress us!'

'Mighty fine certainly,' said Ralph, with great testiness. 'When I first went to business, ma'am, I took a penny loaf and a ha'porth of milk for my breakfast as I walked to the city every morning; what do you say to that, ma'am? Breakfast! Bah!'

'Now, Nickleby,' said Squeers, coming up at the moment buttoning his greatcoat; 'I think you'd better get up behind. I'm afraid of one of them boys falling off and then there's twenty pound a year gone.'

'Dear Nicholas,' whispered Kate, touching her brother's arm, 'who is that vulgar man?'

'Eh!' growled Ralph, whose quick ears had caught the inquiry. 'Do you wish to be introduced to Mr Squeers, my dear?'

'That the schoolmaster! No, uncle. Oh no!' replied Kate, shrinking back.

'I'm sure I heard you say as much, my dear,' retorted Ralph in his cold sarcastic manner. 'Mr Squeers, here's my niece: Nicholas's sister!'

'Very glad to make your acquaintance, miss,' said Squeers, raising his hat an inch or two. 'I wish Mrs Squeers took gals, and we had you for a teacher. I don't know, though, whether she mightn't grow jealous if we had. Ha! ha! ha!'

If the proprietor of Dotheboys Hall could have known what was passing in his assistant's breast at that moment, he would have discovered, with some surprise, that he was as near being soundly pummelled as he had ever been in his life. Kate Nickleby, having a quicker perception of her brother's emotions, led him gently aside, and thus prevented Mr Squeers from being impressed with the fact in a peculiarly disagreeable manner.

'My dear Nicholas,' said the young lady, 'who is this man? What kind of place can it be that you are going to?'

'I hardly know, Kate,' replied Nicholas, pressing his sister's hand. 'I suppose the Yorkshire folks are rather rough and uncultivated; that's all.'

'But this person,' urged Kate.

'Is my employer, or master, or whatever the proper name may be,' replied Nicholas quickly; 'and I was an ass to take his coarseness ill. They are looking this way, and it is time I was in my place. Bless you, love, and goodbye! Mother, look forward to our meeting again someday! Uncle, farewell! Thank you heartily for all you have done and all you mean to do. Quite ready, sir!'

With these hasty adieux, Nicholas mounted nimbly to his seat, and waved his hand as gallantly as if his heart went with it.

At this moment, when the coachman and guard were comparing notes for the last time before starting, on the subject of the way-bill; when porters were screwing out the last reluctant sixpences, itinerant newsmen making the last offer of a morning paper, and the horses giving the last impatient rattle to their harness; Nicholas felt somebody pulling softly at his leg. He looked down, and there stood Newman Noggs, who pushed up into his hand a dirty letter.

'What's this?' inquired Nicholas.

'Hush!' rejoined Noggs, pointing to Mr Ralph Nickleby, who was saying a few earnest words to Squeers, a short distance off: 'Take it. Read it. Nobody knows. That's all.'

'Stop!' cried Nicholas.

'No,' replied Noggs.

Nicholas cried stop, again, but Newman Noggs was gone.

A minute's bustle, a banging of the coach doors, a swaying of the vehicle to one side, as the heavy coachman, and still heavier guard, climbed into their seats; a cry of all right, a few notes from the horn, a hasty glance of two sorrowful faces below, and the hard features of Mr Ralph Nickleby—and the coach was gone too, and rattling over the stones of Smithfield.

The little boys' legs being too short to admit of their feet resting upon anything as they sat, and the little boys' bodies being consequently in imminent hazard of being jerked off the coach, Nicholas had enough to do over the stones to hold them on. Between the manual exertion and the mental anxiety attendant upon this task, he was not a little relieved when the coach stopped at the Peacock at Islington. He was still more relieved when a hearty-looking gentleman, with a very good-humoured face, and a very fresh colour, got up behind, and proposed to take the other corner of the seat.

'If we put some of these youngsters in the middle,' said the new-comer, 'they'll be safer in case of their going to sleep; eh?'

'If you'll have the goodness, sir,' replied Squeers, 'that'll be the very thing. Mr Nickleby, take three of them boys between you and the gentleman. Belling and the youngest Snawley can sit between me and the guard. Three children,' said Squeers, explaining to the stranger, 'books as two.'

'I have not the least objection I am sure,' said the fresh-coloured gentleman; 'I have a brother who wouldn't object to book his six children as two at any butcher's or baker's in the kingdom, I dare say. Far from it.'

'Six children, sir?' exclaimed Squeers.

'Yes, and all boys,' replied the stranger.

'Mr Nickleby,' said Squeers, in great haste, 'catch hold of that basket. Let me give you a card, sir, of an establishment where those six boys can be brought up in an enlightened, liberal, and moral manner, with no mistake at all about it, for twenty guineas a year each—twenty guineas, sir—or I'd take all the boys together upon a average right through, and say a hundred pound a year for the lot.'

'Oh!' said the gentleman, glancing at the card, 'you are the Mr Squeers mentioned here, I presume?'

'Yes, I am, sir,' replied the worthy pedagogue; 'Mr Wackford Squeers is my name, and I'm very far from being ashamed of it. These are some of my boys, sir; that's one of my assistants, sir—Mr Nickleby, a gentleman's son, and a good scholar, mathematical, classical, and commercial. We don't do things by halves at our shop. All manner of learning my boys take down, sir; the expense is never thought of; and they get paternal treatment and washing in.'

'Upon my word,' said the gentleman, glancing at Nicholas with a half-smile, and a more than half expression of surprise, 'these are advantages indeed.'

'You may say that, sir,' rejoined Squeers, thrusting his hands into his great-coat pockets. 'The most unexceptionable references are given and required. I wouldn't take a reference with any boy, that wasn't responsible for the payment of five pound five a quarter, no, not if you went down on your knees, and asked me, with the tears running down your face, to do it.'

'Highly considerate,' said the passenger.

'It's my great aim and end to be considerate, sir,' rejoined Squeers. 'Snawley, junior, if you don't leave off chattering your teeth, and shaking with the cold, I'll warm you with a severe thrashing in about half a minute's time.'

'Sit fast here, genelmen,' said the guard as he clambered up.

'All right behind there, Dick?' cried the coachman.

'All right,' was the reply. 'Off she goes!' And off she did go—if coaches be feminine—amidst a loud flourish from the guard's horn, and the calm approval of all the judges of coaches and coach-horses congregated at the Peacock, but more especially of the helpers, who stood, with the cloths over their arms, watching the coach till it disappeared, and then lounged admiringly stablewards, bestowing various gruff encomiums on the beauty of the turn-out.

When the guard (who was a stout old Yorkshireman) had blown himself quite out of breath, he put the horn into a little tunnel of a basket fastened to the coach-side for the purpose, and giving himself a plentiful shower of blows on the chest and shoulders, observed it was uncommon cold; after which, he demanded of every person separately whether he was going right through, and if not, where he WAS going. Satisfactory replies being made to these queries, he surmised that the roads were pretty heavy arter that fall last night, and took the liberty of asking whether any of them gentlemen carried a snuff-box. It happening that nobody did, he remarked with a mysterious air that he had heard a medical gentleman as went down to Grantham last week, say how that snuff-taking was bad for the eyes; but for his part he had never found it so, and what he said was, that everybody should speak as they found. Nobody attempting to controvert this position, he took a small brown-paper parcel out of his hat, and putting on a pair of horn spectacles (the writing being crabbed) read the direction half-a-dozen times over; having done which, he consigned the parcel to its old place, put up his spectacles again, and stared at everybody in turn. After this, he took another blow at the horn by way of refreshment; and, having now exhausted his usual topics of conversation, folded his arms as well as he could in so many coats, and falling into a solemn silence, looked carelessly at the familiar objects which met his eye on every side as the coach rolled on; the only things he seemed to care for, being horses and droves of cattle, which he scrutinised with a critical air as they were passed upon the road.

The weather was intensely and bitterly cold; a great deal of snow fell from time to time; and the wind was intolerably keen. Mr Squeers got down at almost every stage—to stretch his legs as he said—and as he always came back from such excursions with a very red nose, and composed himself to sleep directly, there is reason to suppose that he derived great benefit from the process. The little pupils having been stimulated with the remains of their breakfast, and further invigorated by sundry small cups of a curious cordial carried by Mr Squeers, which tasted very like toast-and-water put into a brandy bottle by mistake, went to sleep, woke, shivered, and cried, as their feelings prompted. Nicholas and the good-tempered man found so many things to talk about, that between conversing together, and cheering up the boys, the time passed with them as rapidly as it could, under such adverse circumstances.

So the day wore on. At Eton Slocomb there was a good coach dinner, of which the box, the four front outsides, the one inside, Nicholas, the good-tempered man, and Mr Squeers, partook; while the five little boys were put to thaw by the fire, and regaled with sandwiches. A stage or two further on, the lamps were lighted, and a great to-do occasioned by the taking up, at a roadside inn, of a very fastidious lady with an infinite variety of cloaks and small parcels, who loudly lamented, for the behoof of the outsides, the non-arrival of her own carriage which was to have taken her on, and made the guard solemnly promise to stop every green chariot he saw coming; which, as it was a dark night and he was sitting with his face the other way, that officer undertook, with many fervent asseverations, to do. Lastly, the fastidious lady, finding there was a solitary gentleman inside, had a small lamp lighted which she carried in reticule, and being after much trouble shut in, the horses were put into a brisk canter and the coach was once more in rapid motion.

The night and the snow came on together, and dismal enough they were. There was no sound to be heard but the howling of the wind; for the noise of the wheels, and the tread of the horses' feet, were rendered inaudible by the thick coating of snow which covered the ground, and was fast increasing every moment. The streets of Stamford were deserted as they passed through the town; and its old churches rose, frowning and dark, from the whitened ground. Twenty miles further on, two of the front outside passengers, wisely availing themselves of their arrival at one of the best inns in England, turned in, for the night, at the George at Grantham. The remainder wrapped themselves more closely in their coats and cloaks, and leaving the light and warmth of the town behind them, pillowed themselves against the luggage, and prepared, with many half-suppressed moans, again to encounter the piercing blast which swept across the open country.

They were little more than a stage out of Grantham, or about halfway between it and Newark, when Nicholas, who had been asleep for a short time, was suddenly roused by a violent jerk which nearly threw him from his seat. Grasping the rail, he found that the coach had sunk greatly on one side, though it was still dragged forward by the horses; and while—confused by their plunging and the loud screams of the lady inside—he hesitated, for an instant, whether to jump off or not, the vehicle turned easily over, and relieved him from all further uncertainty by flinging him into the road.

CHAPTER 6

In which the Occurrence of the Accident mentioned in the last Chapter, affords an Opportunity to a couple of Gentlemen to tell Stories against each other

'Wo ho!' cried the guard, on his legs in a minute, and running to the leaders' heads. 'Is there ony genelmen there as can len' a hond here? Keep quiet, dang ye! Wo ho!'

'What's the matter?' demanded Nicholas, looking sleepily up.

'Matther mun, matter eneaf for one neight,' replied the guard; 'dang the wall-eyed bay, he's gane mad wi' glory I think, carse t'coorch is over. Here, can't ye len' a hond? Dom it, I'd ha' dean it if all my boans were brokken.'

'Here!' cried Nicholas, staggering to his feet, 'I'm ready. I'm only a little abroad, that's all.'

'Hoold 'em toight,' cried the guard, 'while ar coot treaces. Hang on tiv'em sumhoo. Well deane, my lod. That's it. Let'em goa noo. Dang 'em, they'll gang whoam fast eneaf!'

In truth, the animals were no sooner released than they trotted back, with much deliberation, to the stable they had just left, which was distant not a mile behind.

'Can you blo' a harn?' asked the guard, disengaging one of the coach-lamps.

'I dare say I can,' replied Nicholas.

'Then just blo' away into that 'un as lies on the grund, fit to wakken the deead, will'ee,' said the man, 'while I stop sum o' this here squealing inside. Cumin', cumin'. Dean't make that noise, wooman.'

As the man spoke, he proceeded to wrench open the uppermost door of the coach, while Nicholas, seizing the horn, awoke the echoes far and wide with one of the most extraordinary performances on that instrument ever heard by mortal ears. It had its effect, however, not only in rousing such of their fall, but in summoning assistance to their relief; for lights gleamed in the distance, and people were already astir.

In fact, a man on horseback galloped down, before the passengers were well collected together; and a careful investigation being instituted, it appeared that the lady inside had broken her lamp, and the gentleman his head; that the two front outsides had escaped with black eyes; the box with a bloody nose; the coachman with a contusion on the temple; Mr Squeers with a portmanteau bruise on his back; and the remaining passengers without any injury at all—thanks to the softness of the snow-drift in which they had been overturned. These facts were no sooner thoroughly ascertained, than the lady gave several indications of fainting, but being forewarned that if she did, she must be carried on some gentleman's shoulders to the nearest public-house, she prudently thought better of it, and walked back with the rest.

They found on reaching it, that it was a lonely place with no very great accommodation in the way of apartments—that portion of its resources being all comprised in one public room with a sanded floor, and a chair or two. However, a large faggot and a plentiful supply of coals being heaped upon the fire, the appearance of things was not long in mending; and, by the time they had washed off all effaceable marks of the late accident, the room was warm and light, which was a most agreeable exchange for the cold and darkness out of doors.

'Well, Mr Nickleby,' said Squeers, insinuating himself into the warmest corner, 'you did very right to catch hold of them horses. I should have done it myself if I had come to in time, but I am very glad you did it. You did it very well; very well.'

'So well,' said the merry-faced gentleman, who did not seem to approve very much of the patronising tone adopted by Squeers, 'that if they had not been firmly checked when they were, you would most probably have had no brains left to teach with.'

This remark called up a discourse relative to the promptitude Nicholas had displayed, and he was overwhelmed with compliments and commendations.

'I am very glad to have escaped, of course,' observed Squeers: 'every man is glad when he escapes from danger; but if any one of my charges had been hurt—if I had been prevented from restoring any one of these little boys to his parents whole and sound as I received him—what would have been my feelings? Why the wheel a-top of my head would have been far preferable to it.'

'Are they all brothers, sir?' inquired the lady who had carried the 'Davy' or safety-lamp.

'In one sense they are, ma'am,' replied Squeers, diving into his greatcoat pocket for cards. 'They are all under the same parental and affectionate treatment. Mrs Squeers and myself are a mother and father to every one of 'em. Mr Nickleby, hand the lady them cards, and offer these to the gentleman. Perhaps they might know of some parents that would be glad to avail themselves of the establishment.'

Expressing himself to this effect, Mr Squeers, who lost no opportunity of advertising gratuitously, placed his hands upon his knees, and looked at the pupils with as much benignity as he could possibly affect, while Nicholas, blushing with shame, handed round the cards as directed.

'I hope you suffer no inconvenience from the overturn, ma'am?' said the merry-faced gentleman, addressing the fastidious lady, as though he were charitably desirous to change the subject.

'No bodily inconvenience,' replied the lady.

'No mental inconvenience, I hope?'

'The subject is a very painful one to my feelings, sir,' replied the lady with strong emotion; 'and I beg you as a gentleman, not to refer to it.'

'Dear me,' said the merry-faced gentleman, looking merrier still, 'I merely intended to inquire—'

'I hope no inquiries will be made,' said the lady, 'or I shall be compelled to throw myself on the protection of the other gentlemen. Landlord, pray direct a boy to keep watch outside the door—and if a green chariot passes in the direction of Grantham, to stop it instantly.'

The people of the house were evidently overcome by this request, and when the lady charged the boy to remember, as a means of identifying the expected green chariot, that it would have a coachman with a gold-laced hat on the box, and a footman, most probably in silk stockings, behind, the attentions of the good woman of the inn were redoubled. Even the box-passenger caught the infection, and growing wonderfully deferential, immediately inquired whether there was not very good society in that neighbourhood, to which the lady replied yes, there was: in a manner which sufficiently implied that she moved at the very tiptop and summit of it all.

'As the guard has gone on horseback to Grantham to get another coach,' said the good-tempered gentleman when they had been all sitting round the fire, for some time, in silence, 'and as he must be gone a couple of hours at the very least, I propose a bowl of hot punch. What say you, sir?'

This question was addressed to the broken-headed inside, who was a man of very genteel appearance, dressed in mourning. He was not past the middle age, but his hair was grey; it seemed to have been prematurely turned by care or sorrow. He readily acceded to the proposal, and appeared to be prepossessed by the frank good-nature of the individual from whom it emanated.

This latter personage took upon himself the office of tapster when the punch was ready, and after dispensing it all round, led the conversation to the antiquities of York, with which both he and the grey-haired gentleman appeared to be well acquainted. When this topic flagged, he turned with a smile to the grey-headed gentleman, and asked if he could sing.

'I cannot indeed,' replied gentleman, smiling in his turn.

'That's a pity,' said the owner of the good-humoured countenance. 'Is there nobody here who can sing a song to lighten the time?'

The passengers, one and all, protested that they could not; that they wished they could; that they couldn't remember the words of anything without the book; and so forth.

'Perhaps the lady would not object,' said the president with great respect, and a merry twinkle in his eye. 'Some little Italian thing out of the last opera brought out in town, would be most acceptable I am sure.'

As the lady condescended to make no reply, but tossed her head contemptuously, and murmured some further expression of surprise regarding the absence of the green chariot, one or two voices urged upon the president himself, the propriety of making an attempt for the general benefit.

'I would if I could,' said he of the good-tempered face; 'for I hold that in this, as in all other cases where people who are strangers to each other are thrown unexpectedly together, they should endeavour to render themselves as pleasant, for the joint sake of the little community, as possible.'

'I wish the maxim were more generally acted on, in all cases,' said the grey-headed gentleman.

'I'm glad to hear it,' returned the other. 'Perhaps, as you can't sing, you'll tell us a story?'

'Nay. I should ask you.'

'After you, I will, with pleasure.'

'Indeed!' said the grey-haired gentleman, smiling, 'Well, let it be so. I fear the turn of my thoughts is not calculated to lighten the time you must pass here; but you have brought this upon yourselves, and shall judge. We were speaking of York Minster just now. My story shall have some reference to it. Let us call it

THE FIVE SISTERS OF YORK

After a murmur of approbation from the other passengers, during which the fastidious lady drank a glass of punch unobserved, the grey-headed gentleman thus went on:

'A great many years ago—for the fifteenth century was scarce two years old at the time, and King Henry the Fourth sat upon the throne of England—there dwelt, in the ancient city of York, five maiden sisters, the subjects of my tale.

'These five sisters were all of surpassing beauty. The eldest was in her twenty-third year, the second a year younger, the third a year younger than the second, and the fourth a year younger than the third. They were tall stately figures, with dark flashing eyes and hair of jet; dignity and grace were in their every movement; and the fame of their great beauty had spread through all the country round.

'But, if the four elder sisters were lovely, how beautiful was the youngest, a fair creature of sixteen! The blushing tints in the soft bloom on the fruit, or the delicate painting on the flower, are not more exquisite than was the blending of the rose and lily in her gentle face, or the deep blue of her eye. The vine, in all its elegant luxuriance, is not more graceful than were the clusters of rich brown hair that sported round her brow.

'If we all had hearts like those which beat so lightly in the bosoms of the young and beautiful, what a heaven this earth would be! If, while our bodies grow old and withered, our hearts could but retain their early youth and freshness, of what avail would be our sorrows and sufferings! But, the faint image of Eden which is stamped upon them in childhood, chafes and rubs in our rough struggles with the world, and soon wears away: too often to leave nothing but a mournful blank remaining.

'The heart of this fair girl bounded with joy and gladness. Devoted attachment to her sisters, and a fervent love of all beautiful things in nature, were its pure affections. Her gleesome voice and merry laugh were the sweetest music of their home. She was its very light and life. The brightest flowers in the garden were reared by her; the caged birds sang when they heard her voice, and pined when they missed its sweetness. Alice, dear

Alice; what living thing within the sphere of her gentle witchery, could fail to love her!

'You may seek in vain, now, for the spot on which these sisters lived, for their very names have passed away, and dusty antiquaries tell of them as of a fable. But they dwelt in an old wooden house—old even in those days—with overhanging gables and balconies of rudely-carved oak, which stood within a pleasant orchard, and was surrounded by a rough stone wall, whence a stout archer might have winged an arrow to St Mary's Abbey. The old abbey flourished then; and the five sisters, living on its fair domains, paid yearly dues to the black monks of St Benedict, to which fraternity it belonged.

'It was a bright and sunny morning in the pleasant time of summer, when one of those black monks emerged from the abbey portal, and bent his steps towards the house of the fair sisters. Heaven above was blue, and earth beneath was green; the river glistened like a path of diamonds in the sun; the birds poured forth their songs from the shady trees; the lark soared high above the waving corn; and the deep buzz of insects filled the air. Everything looked gay and smiling; but the holy man walked gloomily on, with his eyes bent upon the ground. The beauty of the earth is but a breath, and man is but a shadow. What sympathy should a holy preacher have with either?

'With eyes bent upon the ground, then, or only raised enough to prevent his stumbling over such obstacles as lay in his way, the religious man moved slowly forward until he reached a small postern in the wall of the sisters' orchard, through which he passed, closing it behind him. The noise of soft voices in conversation, and of merry laughter, fell upon his ears ere he had advanced many paces; and raising his eyes higher than was his humble wont, he descried, at no great distance, the five sisters seated on the grass, with Alice in the centre: all busily plying their customary task of embroidering.

'"Save you, fair daughters!" said the friar; and fair in truth they were. Even a monk might have loved them as choice masterpieces of his Maker's hand.

'The sisters saluted the holy man with becoming reverence, and the eldest motioned him to a mossy seat beside them. But the good friar shook his head, and bumped himself down on a very hard stone,—at which, no doubt, approving angels were gratified.

'"Ye were merry, daughters," said the monk.

'"You know how light of heart sweet Alice is," replied the eldest sister, passing her fingers through the tresses of the smiling girl.

'"And what joy and cheerfulness it wakes up within us, to see all nature beaming in brightness and sunshine, father," added Alice, blushing beneath the stern look of the recluse.

'The monk answered not, save by a grave inclination of the head, and the sisters pursued their task in silence.

'"Still wasting the precious hours," said the monk at length, turning to the eldest sister as he spoke, "still wasting the precious hours on this vain trifling. Alas, alas! that the few bubbles on the surface of eternity—all that Heaven wills we should see of that dark deep stream—should be so lightly scattered!"

'"Father," urged the maiden, pausing, as did each of the others, in her busy task, "we have prayed at matins, our daily alms have been distributed at the gate, the sick peasants have been tended,—all our morning tasks have been performed. I hope our occupation is a blameless one?'

'"See here," said the friar, taking the frame from her hand, "an intricate winding of gaudy colours, without purpose or object, unless it be that one day it is destined for some vain ornament, to minister to the pride of your frail and giddy sex. Day after day has been employed upon this senseless task, and yet it is not half accomplished. The shade of each departed day falls upon our graves, and the worm exults as he beholds it, to know that we are hastening thither. Daughters, is there no better way to pass the fleeting hours?"

'The four elder sisters cast down their eyes as if abashed by the holy man's reproof, but Alice raised hers, and bent them mildly on the friar.

'"Our dear mother," said the maiden; "Heaven rest her soul!"

'"Amen!" cried the friar in a deep voice.

'"Our dear mother," faltered the fair Alice, "was living when these long tasks began, and bade us, when she should be no more, ply them in all discretion and cheerfulness, in our leisure hours; she said that if in harmless mirth and maidenly pursuits we passed those hours together, they would prove the happiest and most peaceful of our lives, and that if, in later times, we went forth into the world, and mingled with its cares and trials—if, allured by its temptations and dazzled by its glitter, we ever forgot that love and duty which should bind, in holy ties, the children of one loved parent—

a glance at the old work of our common girlhood would awaken good thoughts of bygone days, and soften our hearts to affection and love."

'"Alice speaks truly, father," said the elder sister, somewhat proudly. And so saying she resumed her work, as did the others.

'It was a kind of sampler of large size, that each sister had before her; the device was of a complex and intricate description, and the pattern and colours of all five were the same. The sisters bent gracefully over their work; the monk, resting his chin upon his hands, looked from one to the other in silence.

'"How much better," he said at length, "to shun all such thoughts and chances, and, in the peaceful shelter of the church, devote your lives to Heaven! Infancy, childhood, the prime of life, and old age, wither as rapidly as they crowd upon each other. Think how human dust rolls onward to the tomb, and turning your faces steadily towards that goal, avoid the cloud which takes its rise among the pleasures of the world, and cheats the senses of their votaries. The veil, daughters, the veil!"

'"Never, sisters," cried Alice. "Barter not the light and air of heaven, and the freshness of earth and all the beautiful things which breathe upon it, for the cold cloister and the cell. Nature's own blessings are the proper goods of life, and we may share them sinlessly together. To die is our heavy portion, but, oh, let us die with life about us; when our cold hearts cease to beat, let warm hearts be beating near; let our last look be upon the bounds which God has set to his own bright skies, and not on stone walls and bars of iron! Dear sisters, let us live and die, if you list, in this green garden's compass; only shun the gloom and sadness of a cloister, and we shall be happy."

'The tears fell fast from the maiden's eyes as she closed her impassioned appeal, and hid her face in the bosom of her sister.

'"Take comfort, Alice," said the eldest, kissing her fair forehead. "The veil shall never cast its shadow on thy young brow. How say you, sisters? For yourselves you speak, and not for Alice, or for me."

'The sisters, as with one accord, cried that their lot was cast together, and that there were dwellings for peace and virtue beyond the convent's walls.

'"Father," said the eldest lady, rising with dignity, "you hear our final resolve. The same pious care which enriched the abbey of St Mary, and left us, orphans, to its holy guardianship, directed that no constraint should be imposed upon our inclinations, but that we should be free to live according to our choice. Let us hear no more of this, we pray you. Sisters, it is nearly noon. Let us take shelter until evening!" With a reverence to the friar, the lady rose and walked towards the house, hand in hand with Alice; the other sisters followed.

'The holy man, who had often urged the same point before, but had never met with so direct a repulse, walked some little distance behind, with his eyes bent upon the earth, and his lips moving AS IF in prayer. As the sisters reached the porch, he quickened his pace, and called upon them to stop.

'"Stay!" said the monk, raising his right hand in the air, and directing an angry glance by turns at Alice and the eldest sister. "Stay, and hear from me what these recollections are, which you would cherish above eternity, and awaken—if in mercy they slumbered—by means of idle toys. The memory of earthly things is charged, in after life, with bitter disappointment, affliction, death; with dreary change and wasting sorrow. The time will one day come, when a glance at those unmeaning baubles will tear open deep wounds in the hearts of some among you, and strike to your inmost souls. When that hour arrives—and, mark me, come it will—turn from the world to which you clung, to the refuge which you spurned. Find me the cell which shall be colder than the fire of mortals grows, when dimmed by calamity and trial, and there weep for the dreams of youth. These things are Heaven's will, not mine," said the friar, subduing his voice as he looked round upon the shrinking girls. "The Virgin's blessing be upon you, daughters!"

'With these words he disappeared through the postern; and the sisters hastening into the house were seen no more that day.

'But nature will smile though priests may frown, and next day the sun shone brightly, and on the next, and the next again. And in the morning's glare, and the evening's soft repose, the five sisters still walked, or worked, or beguiled the time by cheerful conversation, in their quiet orchard.

'Time passed away as a tale that is told; faster indeed than many tales that are told, of which number I fear this may be one. The house of the five sisters stood where it did, and the same trees cast their pleasant shade upon the orchard grass. The sisters too were there, and lovely as at first, but a change had come over their dwelling. Sometimes, there was the clash of armour, and the gleaming of the moon on caps of steel; and, at others, jaded coursers were spurred up to the gate, and a female form glided hurriedly forth, as if eager to demand tidings of the weary messenger. A goodly train of knights and ladies lodged one night within the abbey walls, and next day rode away, with two of the fair sisters among them. Then, horsemen began to come less frequently, and seemed to bring bad tidings when they did, and at length they ceased to come at all, and footsore peasants slunk to the gate after sunset, and did their errand there, by stealth. Once, a vassal was dispatched in haste to the abbey at dead of night, and when morning came, there were sounds of woe and wailing in the sisters' house; and after this, a mournful silence fell upon it, and knight or lady, horse or armour, was seen about it no more.

'There was a sullen darkness in the sky, and the sun had gone angrily down, tinting the dull clouds with the last traces of his wrath, when the same black monk walked slowly on, with folded arms, within a stone's-throw of the abbey. A blight had fallen on the trees and shrubs; and the wind, at length beginning to break the unnatural stillness that had prevailed all day, sighed heavily from time to time, as though foretelling in grief the ravages of the coming storm. The bat skimmed in fantastic flights through the heavy air, and the ground was alive with crawling things, whose instinct brought them forth to swell and fatten in the rain.

'No longer were the friar's eyes directed to the earth; they were cast abroad, and roamed from point to point, as if the gloom and desolation of the scene found a quick response in his own bosom. Again he paused near the sisters' house, and again he entered by the postern.

'But not again did his ear encounter the sound of laughter, or his eyes rest upon the beautiful figures of the five sisters. All was silent and deserted. The boughs of the trees were bent and broken, and the grass had grown long and rank. No light feet had pressed it for many, many a day.

'With the indifference or abstraction of one well accustomed to the change, the monk glided into the house, and entered a low, dark room. Four sisters sat there. Their black garments made their pale faces whiter still, and time and sorrow had worked deep ravages. They were stately yet; but the flush and pride of beauty were gone.

'And Alice—where was she? In Heaven.

'The monk—even the monk—could bear with some grief here; for it was long since these sisters had met, and there were furrows in their blanched faces which years could never plough. He took his seat in silence, and motioned them to continue their speech.

'"They are here, sisters," said the elder lady in a trembling voice. "I have never borne to look upon them since, and now I blame myself for my weakness. What is there in her memory that we should dread? To call up our old days shall be a solemn pleasure yet."

'She glanced at the monk as she spoke, and, opening a cabinet, brought forth the five frames of work, completed long before. Her step was firm, but her hand trembled as she produced the last one; and, when the feelings of the other sisters gushed forth at sight of it, her pent-up tears made way, and she sobbed "God bless her!"

'The monk rose and advanced towards them. "It was almost the last thing she touched in health," he said in a low voice.

'"It was," cried the elder lady, weeping bitterly.

'The monk turned to the second sister.

'"The gallant youth who looked into thine eyes, and hung upon thy very breath when first he saw thee intent upon this pastime, lies buried on a plain whereof the turf is red with blood. Rusty fragments of armour, once brightly burnished, lie rotting on the ground, and are as little distinguishable for his, as are the bones that crumble in the mould!"

'The lady groaned, and wrung her hands.

'"The policy of courts," he continued, turning to the two other sisters, "drew ye from your peaceful home to scenes of revelry and splendour. The same policy, and the restless ambition of—proud and fiery men, have sent ye back, widowed maidens, and humbled outcasts. Do I speak truly?"

'The sobs of the two sisters were their only reply.

'"There is little need," said the monk, with a meaning look, "to fritter away the time in gewgaws which shall raise up the pale ghosts of hopes of early years. Bury them, heap penance and mortification on their heads, keep them down, and let the convent be their grave!"

'The sisters asked for three days to deliberate; and felt, that night, as though the veil were indeed the fitting shroud for their dead joys. But, morning came again, and though the boughs of the orchard trees drooped and ran wild upon the ground, it was the same orchard still. The grass was coarse and high, but there was yet the spot on which they had so often sat together, when change and sorrow were but names. There was every walk and nook which Alice had made glad; and in the minster nave was one flat stone beneath which she slept in peace.

'And could they, remembering how her young heart had sickened at the thought of cloistered walls, look upon her grave, in garbs which would chill the very ashes within it? Could they bow down in prayer, and when all Heaven turned to hear them, bring the dark shade of sadness on one angel's face? No.

'They sent abroad, to artists of great celebrity in those times, and having obtained the church's sanction to their work of piety, caused to be executed, in five large compartments of richly stained glass, a faithful copy of their old embroidery work. These were fitted into a large window until that time bare of ornament; and when the sun shone brightly, as she had so well loved to see it, the familiar patterns were reflected in their original colours, and throwing a stream of brilliant light upon the pavement, fell warmly on the name of Alice.

'For many hours in every day, the sisters paced slowly up and down the nave, or knelt by the side of the flat broad stone. Only three were seen in the customary place, after many years; then but two, and, for a long time afterwards, but one solitary female bent with age. At length she came no more, and the stone bore five plain Christian names.

'That stone has worn away and been replaced by others, and many generations have come and gone since then. Time has softened down the colours, but the same stream of light still falls upon the forgotten tomb, of which no trace remains; and, to this day, the stranger is shown in York Cathedral, an old window called the Five Sisters.'

'That's a melancholy tale,' said the merry-faced gentleman, emptying his glass.

'It is a tale of life, and life is made up of such sorrows,' returned the other, courteously, but in a grave and sad tone of voice.

'There are shades in all good pictures, but there are lights too, if we choose to contemplate them,' said the gentleman with the merry face. 'The youngest sister in your tale was always light-hearted.'

'And died early,' said the other, gently.

'She would have died earlier, perhaps, had she been less happy,' said the first speaker, with much feeling. 'Do you think the sisters who loved her so well, would have grieved the less if her life had been one of gloom and sadness? If anything could soothe the first sharp pain of a heavy loss, it would be—with me—the reflection, that those I mourned, by being innocently happy here, and loving all about them, had prepared themselves for a purer and happier world. The sun does not shine upon this fair earth to meet frowning eyes, depend upon it.'

'I believe you are right,' said the gentleman who had told the story.

'Believe!' retorted the other, 'can anybody doubt it? Take any subject of sorrowful regret, and see with how much pleasure it is associated. The recollection of past pleasure may become pain—'

'It does,' interposed the other.

'Well; it does. To remember happiness which cannot be restored, is pain, but of a softened kind. Our recollections are unfortunately mingled with much that we deplore, and with many actions which we bitterly repent; still in the most chequered life I firmly think there are so many little rays of sunshine to look back upon, that I do not believe any mortal (unless he had put himself without the pale of hope) would deliberately drain a goblet of the waters of Lethe, if he had it in his power.'

'Possibly you are correct in that belief,' said the grey-haired gentleman after a short reflection. 'I am inclined to think you are.'

'Why, then,' replied the other, 'the good in this state of existence preponderates over the bad, let miscalled philosophers tell us what they will. If our affections be tried, our affections are our consolation and comfort; and memory, however sad, is the best and purest link between this world and a better. But come! I'll tell you a story of another kind.'

After a very brief silence, the merry-faced gentleman sent round the punch, and glancing slyly at the fastidious lady, who seemed desperately apprehensive that he was going to relate something improper, began

THE BARON OF GROGZWIG

'The Baron Von Koeldwethout, of Grogzwig in Germany, was as likely a young baron as you would wish to see. I needn't say that he lived in a castle, because that's of course; neither need I say that he lived in an old castle; for what German baron ever lived in a new one? There were many strange circumstances connected with this venerable building, among which, not the least startling and mysterious were, that when the wind blew, it rumbled in the chimneys, or even howled among the trees in the neighbouring forest; and that when the moon shone, she found her way through certain small loopholes in the wall, and actually made some parts of the wide halls and galleries quite light, while she left others in gloomy shadow. I believe that one of the baron's ancestors, being short of money, had inserted a dagger in a gentleman who called one night to ask his way, and it WAS supposed that these miraculous occurrences took place in consequence. And yet I hardly know how that could have been, either, because the baron's ancestor, who was an amiable man, felt very sorry afterwards for having been so rash, and laying violent hands upon a quantity of stone and timber which belonged to a weaker baron, built a chapel as an apology, and so took a receipt from Heaven, in full of all demands.

'Talking of the baron's ancestor puts me in mind of the baron's great claims to respect, on the score of his pedigree. I am afraid to say, I am sure, how many ancestors the baron had; but I know that he had a great many more than any other man of his time; and I only wish that he had lived in these latter days, that he might have had more. It is a very hard thing upon the great men of past centuries, that they should have come into the world so soon, because a man who was born three or four hundred years ago, cannot reasonably be expected to have had as many relations before him, as a man who is born now. The last man, whoever he is—and he may be a cobbler or some low vulgar dog for aught we know—will have a longer pedigree than the greatest nobleman now alive; and I contend that this is not fair.

'Well, but the Baron Von Koeldwethout of Grogzwig! He was a fine swarthy fellow, with dark hair and large moustachios, who rode a-hunting in clothes of Lincoln green, with russet boots on his feet, and a bugle slung over his shoulder like the guard of a long stage. When he blew this bugle, four-and-twenty other gentlemen of inferior rank, in Lincoln green a little coarser, and russet boots with a little thicker soles, turned out directly: and away galloped the whole train, with spears in their hands like lacquered area railings, to hunt down the boars, or perhaps encounter a bear: in which latter case the baron killed him first, and greased his whiskers with him afterwards.

'This was a merry life for the Baron of Grogzwig, and a merrier still for the baron's retainers, who drank Rhine wine every night till they fell under the table, and then had the bottles on the floor, and called for pipes. Never were such jolly, roystering, rollicking, merry-making blades, as the jovial crew of Grogzwig.

'But the pleasures of the table, or the pleasures of under the table, require a little variety; especially when the same five-and-twenty people sit daily down to the same board, to discuss the same subjects, and tell the same stories. The baron grew weary, and wanted excitement. He took to quarrelling with his gentlemen, and tried kicking two or three of them every day after dinner. This was a pleasant change at first; but it became monotonous after a week or so, and the baron felt quite out of sorts, and cast about, in despair, for some new amusement.

'One night, after a day's sport in which he had outdone Nimrod or Gillingwater, and slaughtered "another fine bear," and brought him home in triumph, the Baron Von Koeldwethout sat moodily at the head of his table, eyeing the smoky roof of the hall with a discontented aspect. He swallowed huge bumpers of wine, but the more he swallowed, the more he frowned. The gentlemen who had been honoured with the dangerous distinction of sitting on his right and left, imitated him to a miracle in the drinking, and frowned at each other.

'"I will!" cried the baron suddenly, smiting the table with his right hand, and twirling his moustache with his left. "Fill to the Lady of Grogzwig!"

'The four-and-twenty Lincoln greens turned pale, with the exception of their four-and-twenty noses, which were unchangeable.

'"I said to the Lady of Grogzwig," repeated the baron, looking round the board.

'"To the Lady of Grogzwig!" shouted the Lincoln greens; and down their four-and-twenty throats went four-and-twenty imperial pints of such rare old hock, that they smacked their eight-and-forty lips, and winked again.

'"The fair daughter of the Baron Von Swillenhausen," said Koeldwethout, condescending to explain. "We will demand her in marriage of her father, ere the sun goes down tomorrow. If he refuse our suit, we will cut off his nose."

'A hoarse murmur arose from the company; every man touched, first the hilt of his sword, and then the tip of his nose, with appalling significance.

'What a pleasant thing filial piety is to contemplate! If the daughter of the Baron Von Swillenhausen had pleaded a preoccupied heart, or fallen at her father's feet and corned them in salt tears, or only fainted away, and complimented the old gentleman in frantic ejaculations, the odds are a hundred to one but Swillenhausen Castle would have been turned out at window, or rather the baron turned out at window, and the castle demolished. The damsel held her peace, however, when an early messenger bore the request of Von Koeldwethout next morning, and modestly retired to her chamber, from the casement of which she watched the coming of the suitor and his retinue. She was no sooner assured that the horseman with the large moustachios was her proffered husband, than she hastened to her father's presence, and expressed her readiness to sacrifice herself to secure his peace. The venerable baron caught his child to his arms, and shed a wink of joy.

'There was great feasting at the castle, that day. The four-and-twenty Lincoln greens of Von Koeldwethout exchanged vows of eternal friendship with twelve Lincoln greens of Von Swillenhausen, and promised the old baron that they would drink his wine "Till all was blue"—meaning probably until their whole countenances had acquired the same tint as their noses. Everybody slapped everybody else's back, when the time for parting came; and the Baron Von Koeldwethout and his followers rode gaily home.

'For six mortal weeks, the bears and boars had a holiday. The houses of Koeldwethout and Swillenhausen were united; the spears rusted; and the baron's bugle grew hoarse for lack of blowing.

'Those were great times for the four-and-twenty; but, alas! their high and palmy days had taken boots to themselves, and were already walking off.

'"My dear," said the baroness.

'"My love," said the baron.

'"Those coarse, noisy men—"

'"Which, ma'am?" said the baron, starting.

'The baroness pointed, from the window at which they stood, to the courtyard beneath, where the unconscious Lincoln greens were taking a copious stirrup-cup, preparatory to issuing forth after a boar or two.

'"My hunting train, ma'am," said the baron.

'"Disband them, love," murmured the baroness.

'"Disband them!" cried the baron, in amazement.

'"To please me, love," replied the baroness.

'"To please the devil, ma'am," answered the baron.

'Whereupon the baroness uttered a great cry, and swooned away at the baron's feet.

'What could the baron do? He called for the lady's maid, and roared for the doctor; and then, rushing into the yard, kicked the two Lincoln greens who were the most used to it, and cursing the others all round, bade them go

—but never mind where. I don't know the German for it, or I would put it delicately that way.

'It is not for me to say by what means, or by what degrees, some wives manage to keep down some husbands as they do, although I may have my private opinion on the subject, and may think that no Member of Parliament ought to be married, inasmuch as three married members out of every four, must vote according to their wives' consciences (if there be such things), and not according to their own. All I need say, just now, is, that the Baroness Von Koeldwethout somehow or other acquired great control over the Baron Von Koeldwethout, and that, little by little, and bit by bit, and day by day, and year by year, the baron got the worst of some disputed question, or was slyly unhorsed from some old hobby; and that by the time he was a fat hearty fellow of forty-eight or thereabouts, he had no feasting, no revelry, no hunting train, and no hunting—nothing in short that he liked, or used to have; and that, although he was as fierce as a lion, and as bold as brass, he was decidedly snubbed and put down, by his own lady, in his own castle of Grogzwig.

'Nor was this the whole extent of the baron's misfortunes. About a year after his nuptials, there came into the world a lusty young baron, in whose honour a great many fireworks were let off, and a great many dozens of wine drunk; but next year there came a young baroness, and next year another young baron, and so on, every year, either a baron or baroness (and one year both together), until the baron found himself the father of a small family of twelve. Upon every one of these anniversaries, the venerable Baroness Von Swillenhausen was nervously sensitive for the well-being of her child the Baroness Von Koeldwethout; and although it was not found that the good lady ever did anything material towards contributing to her child's recovery, still she made it a point of duty to be as nervous as possible at the castle of Grogzwig, and to divide her time between moral observations on the baron's housekeeping, and bewailing the hard lot of her unhappy daughter. And if the Baron of Grogzwig, a little hurt and irritated at this, took heart, and ventured to suggest that his wife was at least no worse off than the wives of other barons, the Baroness Von Swillenhausen begged all persons to take notice, that nobody but she, sympathised with her dear daughter's sufferings; upon which, her relations and friends remarked, that to be sure she did cry a great deal more than her son-in-law, and that if there were a hard-hearted brute alive, it was that Baron of Grogzwig.

'The poor baron bore it all as long as he could, and when he could bear it no longer lost his appetite and his spirits, and sat himself gloomily and dejectedly down. But there were worse troubles yet in store for him, and as they came on, his melancholy and sadness increased. Times changed. He got into debt. The Grogzwig coffers ran low, though the Swillenhausen family had looked upon them as inexhaustible; and just when the baroness was on the point of making a thirteenth addition to the family pedigree, Von Koeldwethout discovered that he had no means of replenishing them.

'"I don't see what is to be done," said the baron. "I think I'll kill myself."

'This was a bright idea. The baron took an old hunting-knife from a cupboard hard by, and having sharpened it on his boot, made what boys call "an offer" at his throat.

'"Hem!" said the baron, stopping short. "Perhaps it's not sharp enough."

'The baron sharpened it again, and made another offer, when his hand was arrested by a loud screaming among the young barons and baronesses, who had a nursery in an upstairs tower with iron bars outside the window, to prevent their tumbling out into the moat.

'"If I had been a bachelor," said the baron sighing, "I might have done it fifty times over, without being interrupted. Hallo! Put a flask of wine and the largest pipe in the little vaulted room behind the hall."

'One of the domestics, in a very kind manner, executed the baron's order in the course of half an hour or so, and Von Koeldwethout being apprised thereof, strode to the vaulted room, the walls of which, being of dark shining wood, gleamed in the light of the blazing logs which were piled upon the hearth. The bottle and pipe were ready, and, upon the whole, the place looked very comfortable.

'"Leave the lamp," said the baron.

'"Anything else, my lord?" inquired the domestic.

'"The room," replied the baron. The domestic obeyed, and the baron locked the door.

'"I'll smoke a last pipe," said the baron, "and then I'll be off." So, putting the knife upon the table till he wanted it, and tossing off a goodly measure of wine, the Lord of Grogzwig threw himself back in his chair, stretched his legs out before the fire, and puffed away.

'He thought about a great many things—about his present troubles and past days of bachelorship, and about the Lincoln greens, long since dispersed up and down the country, no one knew whither: with the exception of two who had been unfortunately beheaded, and four who had killed themselves with drinking. His mind was running upon bears and boars, when, in the process of draining his glass to the bottom, he raised his eyes, and saw, for the first time and with unbounded astonishment, that he was not alone.

'No, he was not; for, on the opposite side of the fire, there sat with folded arms a wrinkled hideous figure, with deeply sunk and bloodshot eyes, and an immensely long cadaverous face, shadowed by jagged and matted locks of coarse black hair. He wore a kind of tunic of a dull bluish colour, which, the baron observed, on regarding it attentively, was clasped or ornamented down the front with coffin handles. His legs, too, were encased in coffin plates as though in armour; and over his left shoulder he wore a short dusky cloak, which seemed made of a remnant of some pall. He took no notice of the baron, but was intently eyeing the fire.

'"Halloa!" said the baron, stamping his foot to attract attention.

'"Halloa!" replied the stranger, moving his eyes towards the baron, but not his face or himself "What now?"

'"What now!" replied the baron, nothing daunted by his hollow voice and lustreless eyes. "I should ask that question. How did you get here?"

'"Through the door," replied the figure.

'"What are you?" says the baron.

'"A man," replied the figure.

'"I don't believe it," says the baron.

'"Disbelieve it then," says the figure.

'"I will," rejoined the baron.

'The figure looked at the bold Baron of Grogzwig for some time, and then said familiarly,

'"There's no coming over you, I see. I'm not a man!"

'"What are you then?" asked the baron.

'"A genius," replied the figure.

'"You don't look much like one," returned the baron scornfully.

'"I am the Genius of Despair and Suicide," said the apparition. "Now you know me."

'With these words the apparition turned towards the baron, as if composing himself for a talk—and, what was very remarkable, was, that he threw his cloak aside, and displaying a stake, which was run through the centre of his body, pulled it out with a jerk, and laid it on the table, as composedly as if it had been a walking-stick.

'"Now," said the figure, glancing at the hunting-knife, "are you ready for me?"

'"Not quite," rejoined the baron; "I must finish this pipe first."

'"Look sharp then," said the figure.

'"You seem in a hurry," said the baron.

'"Why, yes, I am," answered the figure; "they're doing a pretty brisk business in my way, over in England and France just now, and my time is a good deal taken up."

'"Do you drink?" said the baron, touching the bottle with the bowl of his pipe.

'"Nine times out of ten, and then very hard," rejoined the figure, drily.

'"Never in moderation?" asked the baron.

'"Never," replied the figure, with a shudder, "that breeds cheerfulness."

'The baron took another look at his new friend, whom he thought an uncommonly queer customer, and at length inquired whether he took any active part in such little proceedings as that which he had in contemplation.

'"No," replied the figure evasively; "but I am always present."

'"Just to see fair, I suppose?" said the baron.

'"Just that," replied the figure, playing with his stake, and examining the ferule. "Be as quick as you can, will you, for there's a young gentleman who is afflicted with too much money and leisure wanting me now, I find."

'"Going to kill himself because he has too much money!" exclaimed the baron, quite tickled. "Ha! ha! that's a good one." (This was the first time the baron had laughed for many a long day.)

'"I say," expostulated the figure, looking very much scared; "don't do that again."

'"Why not?" demanded the baron.

'"Because it gives me pain all over," replied the figure. "Sigh as much as you please: that does me good."

'The baron sighed mechanically at the mention of the word; the figure, brightening up again, handed him the hunting-knife with most winning politeness.

'"It's not a bad idea though," said the baron, feeling the edge of the weapon; "a man killing himself because he has too much money."

'"Pooh!" said the apparition, petulantly, "no better than a man's killing himself because he has none or little."

'Whether the genius unintentionally committed himself in saying this, or whether he thought the baron's mind was so thoroughly made up that it didn't matter what he said, I have no means of knowing. I only know that the baron stopped his hand, all of a sudden, opened his eyes wide, and looked as if quite a new light had come upon him for the first time.

'"Why, certainly," said Von Koeldwethout, "nothing is too bad to be retrieved."

'"Except empty coffers," cried the genius.

'"Well; but they may be one day filled again," said the baron.

'"Scolding wives," snarled the genius.

'"Oh! They may be made quiet," said the baron.

'"Thirteen children," shouted the genius.

'"Can't all go wrong, surely," said the baron.

'The genius was evidently growing very savage with the baron, for holding these opinions all at once; but he tried to laugh it off, and said if he would let him know when he had left off joking he should feel obliged to him.

'"But I am not joking; I was never farther from it," remonstrated the baron.

'"Well, I am glad to hear that," said the genius, looking very grim, "because a joke, without any figure of speech, IS the death of me. Come! Quit this dreary world at once."

'"I don't know," said the baron, playing with the knife; "it's a dreary one certainly, but I don't think yours is much better, for you have not the appearance of being particularly comfortable. That puts me in mind—what security have I, that I shall be any the better for going out of the world after all!" he cried, starting up; "I never thought of that."

'"Dispatch," cried the figure, gnashing his teeth.

'"Keep off!" said the baron. 'I'll brood over miseries no longer, but put a good face on the matter, and try the fresh air and the bears again; and if that don't do, I'll talk to the baroness soundly, and cut the Von Swillenhausens dead.' With this the baron fell into his chair, and laughed so loud and boisterously, that the room rang with it.

'The figure fell back a pace or two, regarding the baron meanwhile with a look of intense terror, and when he had ceased, caught up the stake, plunged it violently into its body, uttered a frightful howl, and disappeared.

'Von Koeldwethout never saw it again. Having once made up his mind to action, he soon brought the baroness and the Von Swillenhausens to reason, and died many years afterwards: not a rich man that I am aware of, but certainly a happy one: leaving behind him a numerous family, who had been carefully educated in bear and boar-hunting under his own personal eye. And my advice to all men is, that if ever they become hipped and melancholy from similar causes (as very many men do), they look at both sides of the question, applying a magnifying-glass to the best one; and if they still feel tempted to retire without leave, that they smoke a large pipe and drink a full bottle first, and profit by the laudable example of the Baron of Grogzwig.'

'The fresh coach is ready, ladies and gentlemen, if you please,' said a new driver, looking in.

This intelligence caused the punch to be finished in a great hurry, and prevented any discussion relative to the last story. Mr Squeers was observed to draw the grey-headed gentleman on one side, and to ask a question with great apparent interest; it bore reference to the Five Sisters of York, and was, in fact, an inquiry whether he could inform him how much per annum the Yorkshire convents got in those days with their boarders.

The journey was then resumed. Nicholas fell asleep towards morning, and, when he awoke, found, with great regret, that, during his nap, both the Baron of Grogzwig and the grey-haired gentleman had got down and were gone. The day dragged on uncomfortably enough. At about six o'clock that night, he and Mr Squeers, and the little boys, and their united luggage, were all put down together at the George and New Inn, Greta Bridge.

CHAPTER 7

Mr and Mrs Squeers at Home

Mr Squeers, being safely landed, left Nicholas and the boys standing with the luggage in the road, to amuse themselves by looking at the coach as it changed horses, while he ran into the tavern and went through the leg-stretching process at the bar. After some minutes, he returned, with his legs thoroughly stretched, if the hue of his nose and a short hiccup afforded any criterion; and at the same time there came out of the yard a rusty pony-chaise, and a cart, driven by two labouring men.

'Put the boys and the boxes into the cart,' said Squeers, rubbing his hands; 'and this young man and me will go on in the chaise. Get in, Nickleby.'

Nicholas obeyed. Mr. Squeers with some difficulty inducing the pony to obey also, they started off, leaving the cart-load of infant misery to follow at leisure.

'Are you cold, Nickleby?' inquired Squeers, after they had travelled some distance in silence.

'Rather, sir, I must say.'

'Well, I don't find fault with that,' said Squeers; 'it's a long journey this weather.'

'Is it much farther to Dotheboys Hall, sir?' asked Nicholas.

'About three mile from here,' replied Squeers. 'But you needn't call it a Hall down here.'

Nicholas coughed, as if he would like to know why.

'The fact is, it ain't a Hall,' observed Squeers drily.

'Oh, indeed!' said Nicholas, whom this piece of intelligence much astonished.

'No,' replied Squeers. 'We call it a Hall up in London, because it sounds better, but they don't know it by that name in these parts. A man may call his house an island if he likes; there's no act of Parliament against that, I believe?'

'I believe not, sir,' rejoined Nicholas.

Squeers eyed his companion slyly, at the conclusion of this little dialogue, and finding that he had grown thoughtful and appeared in nowise disposed to volunteer any observations, contented himself with lashing the pony until they reached their journey's end.

'Jump out,' said Squeers. 'Hallo there! Come and put this horse up. Be quick, will you!'

While the schoolmaster was uttering these and other impatient cries, Nicholas had time to observe that the school was a long, cold-looking house, one storey high, with a few straggling out-buildings behind, and a barn and stable adjoining. After the lapse of a minute or two, the noise of somebody unlocking the yard-gate was heard, and presently a tall lean boy, with a lantern in his hand, issued forth.

'Is that you, Smike?' cried Squeers.

'Yes, sir,' replied the boy.

'Then why the devil didn't you come before?'

'Please, sir, I fell asleep over the fire,' answered Smike, with humility.

'Fire! what fire? Where's there a fire?' demanded the schoolmaster, sharply.

'Only in the kitchen, sir,' replied the boy. 'Missus said as I was sitting up, I might go in there for a warm.'

'Your missus is a fool,' retorted Squeers. 'You'd have been a deuced deal more wakeful in the cold, I'll engage.'

By this time Mr Squeers had dismounted; and after ordering the boy to see to the pony, and to take care that he hadn't any more corn that night, he told Nicholas to wait at the front-door a minute while he went round and let him in.

A host of unpleasant misgivings, which had been crowding upon Nicholas during the whole journey, thronged into his mind with redoubled force when he was left alone. His great distance from home and the impossibility of reaching it, except on foot, should he feel ever so anxious to return, presented itself to him in most alarming colours; and as he looked up at the dreary house and dark windows, and upon the wild country round, covered with snow, he felt a depression of heart and spirit which he had never experienced before.

'Now then!' cried Squeers, poking his head out at the front-door. 'Where are you, Nickleby?'

'Here, sir,' replied Nicholas.

'Come in, then,' said Squeers 'the wind blows in, at this door, fit to knock a man off his legs.'

Nicholas sighed, and hurried in. Mr Squeers, having bolted the door to keep it shut, ushered him into a small parlour scantily furnished with a few chairs, a yellow map hung against the wall, and a couple of tables; one of which bore some preparations for supper; while, on the other, a tutor's assistant, a Murray's grammar, half-a-dozen cards of terms, and a worn letter directed to Wackford Squeers, Esquire, were arranged in picturesque confusion.

They had not been in this apartment a couple of minutes, when a female bounced into the room, and, seizing Mr Squeers by the throat, gave him two loud kisses: one close after the other, like a postman's knock. The lady, who was of a large raw-boned figure, was about half a head taller than Mr Squeers, and was dressed in a dimity night-jacket; with her hair in papers; she had also a dirty nightcap on, relieved by a yellow cotton handkerchief which tied it under the chin.

'How is my Squeery?' said this lady in a playful manner, and a very hoarse voice.

'Quite well, my love,' replied Squeers. 'How's the cows?'

'All right, every one of'em,' answered the lady.

'And the pigs?' said Squeers.

'As well as they were when you went away.'

'Come; that's a blessing,' said Squeers, pulling off his great-coat. 'The boys are all as they were, I suppose?'

'Oh, yes, they're well enough,' replied Mrs Squeers, snappishly. 'That young Pitcher's had a fever.'

'No!' exclaimed Squeers. 'Damn that boy, he's always at something of that sort.'

'Never was such a boy, I do believe,' said Mrs Squeers; 'whatever he has is always catching too. I say it's obstinacy, and nothing shall ever convince me that it isn't. I'd beat it out of him; and I told you that, six months ago.'

'So you did, my love,' rejoined Squeers. 'We'll try what can be done.'

Pending these little endearments, Nicholas had stood, awkwardly enough, in the middle of the room: not very well knowing whether he was expected to retire into the passage, or to remain where he was. He was now relieved from his perplexity by Mr Squeers.

'This is the new young man, my dear,' said that gentleman.

'Oh,' replied Mrs Squeers, nodding her head at Nicholas, and eyeing him coldly from top to toe.

'He'll take a meal with us tonight,' said Squeers, 'and go among the boys tomorrow morning. You can give him a shake-down here, tonight, can't you?'

'We must manage it somehow,' replied the lady. 'You don't much mind how you sleep, I suppose, sir?'

No, indeed,' replied Nicholas, 'I am not particular.'

'That's lucky,' said Mrs Squeers. And as the lady's humour was considered to lie chiefly in retort, Mr Squeers laughed heartily, and seemed to expect that Nicholas should do the same.

After some further conversation between the master and mistress relative to the success of Mr Squeers's trip and the people who had paid, and the people who had made default in payment, a young servant girl brought in a Yorkshire pie and some cold beef, which being set upon the table, the boy Smike appeared with a jug of ale.

Mr Squeers was emptying his great-coat pockets of letters to different boys, and other small documents, which he had brought down in them. The boy glanced, with an anxious and timid expression, at the papers, as if with a sickly hope that one among them might relate to him. The look was a very painful one, and went to Nicholas's heart at once; for it told a long and very sad history.

It induced him to consider the boy more attentively, and he was surprised to observe the extraordinary mixture of garments which formed his dress. Although he could not have been less than eighteen or nineteen years old, and was tall for that age, he wore a skeleton suit, such as is usually put upon very little boys, and which, though most absurdly short in the arms and legs, was quite wide enough for his attenuated frame. In order that the lower part of his legs might be in perfect keeping with this singular dress, he had a very large pair of boots, originally made for tops, which might have been once worn by some stout farmer, but were now too patched and tattered for a beggar. Heaven knows how long he had been there, but he still wore the same linen which he had first taken down; for, round his neck, was a tattered child's frill, only half concealed by a coarse, man's neckerchief. He was lame; and as he feigned to be busy in arranging the table, glanced at the letters with a look so keen, and yet so dispirited and hopeless, that Nicholas could hardly bear to watch him.

'What are you bothering about there, Smike?' cried Mrs Squeers; 'let the things alone, can't you?'

'Eh!' said Squeers, looking up. 'Oh! it's you, is it?'

'Yes, sir,' replied the youth, pressing his hands together, as though to control, by force, the nervous wandering of his fingers. 'Is there—'

'Well!' said Squeers.

'Have you—did anybody—has nothing been heard—about me?'

'Devil a bit,' replied Squeers testily.

The lad withdrew his eyes, and, putting his hand to his face, moved towards the door.

'Not a word,' resumed Squeers, 'and never will be. Now, this is a pretty sort of thing, isn't it, that you should have been left here, all these years, and no money paid after the first six—nor no notice taken, nor no clue to be got who you belong to? It's a pretty sort of thing that I should have to feed a great fellow like you, and never hope to get one penny for it, isn't it?'

The boy put his hand to his head as if he were making an effort to recollect something, and then, looking vacantly at his questioner, gradually broke into a smile, and limped away.

'I'll tell you what, Squeers,' remarked his wife as the door closed, 'I think that young chap's turning silly.'

'I hope not,' said the schoolmaster; 'for he's a handy fellow out of doors, and worth his meat and drink, anyway. I should think he'd have wit enough for us though, if he was. But come; let's have supper, for I am hungry and tired, and want to get to bed.'

This reminder brought in an exclusive steak for Mr Squeers, who speedily proceeded to do it ample justice. Nicholas drew up his chair, but his appetite was effectually taken away.

'How's the steak, Squeers?' said Mrs S.

'Tender as a lamb,' replied Squeers. 'Have a bit.'

'I couldn't eat a morsel,' replied his wife. 'What'll the young man take, my dear?'

'Whatever he likes that's present,' rejoined Squeers, in a most unusual burst of generosity.

'What do you say, Mr Knuckleboy?' inquired Mrs Squeers.

'I'll take a little of the pie, if you please,' replied Nicholas. 'A very little, for I'm not hungry.'

Well, it's a pity to cut the pie if you're not hungry, isn't it?' said Mrs Squeers. 'Will you try a bit of the beef?'

'Whatever you please,' replied Nicholas abstractedly; 'it's all the same to me.'

Mrs Squeers looked vastly gracious on receiving this reply; and nodding to Squeers, as much as to say that she was glad to find the young man knew his station, assisted Nicholas to a slice of meat with her own fair hands.

'Ale, Squeery?' inquired the lady, winking and frowning to give him to understand that the question propounded, was, whether Nicholas should have ale, and not whether he (Squeers) would take any.

'Certainly,' said Squeers, re-telegraphing in the same manner. 'A glassful.'

So Nicholas had a glassful, and being occupied with his own reflections, drank it, in happy innocence of all the foregone proceedings.

'Uncommon juicy steak that,' said Squeers, as he laid down his knife and fork, after plying it, in silence, for some time.

'It's prime meat,' rejoined his lady. 'I bought a good large piece of it myself on purpose for—'

'For what!' exclaimed Squeers hastily. 'Not for the—'

'No, no; not for them,' rejoined Mrs Squeers; 'on purpose for you against you came home. Lor! you didn't think I could have made such a mistake as that.'

'Upon my word, my dear, I didn't know what you were going to say,' said Squeers, who had turned pale.

'You needn't make yourself uncomfortable,' remarked his wife, laughing heartily. 'To think that I should be such a noddy! Well!'

This part of the conversation was rather unintelligible; but popular rumour in the neighbourhood asserted that Mr Squeers, being amiably opposed to cruelty to animals, not unfrequently purchased for by consumption the bodies of horned cattle who had died a natural death; possibly he was apprehensive of having unintentionally devoured some choice morsel intended for the young gentlemen.

Supper being over, and removed by a small servant girl with a hungry eye, Mrs Squeers retired to lock it up, and also to take into safe custody the clothes of the five boys who had just arrived, and who were half-way up the troublesome flight of steps which leads to death's door, in consequence of exposure to the cold. They were then regaled with a light supper of porridge, and stowed away, side by side, in a small bedstead, to warm each other, and dream of a substantial meal with something hot after it, if their fancies set that way: which it is not at all improbable they did.

Mr Squeers treated himself to a stiff tumbler of brandy and water, made on the liberal half-and-half principle, allowing for the dissolution of the sugar; and his amiable helpmate mixed Nicholas the ghost of a small glassful of the same compound. This done, Mr and Mrs Squeers drew close up to the fire, and sitting with their feet on the fender, talked confidentially in whispers; while Nicholas, taking up the tutor's assistant, read the interesting legends in the miscellaneous questions, and all the figures into the bargain, with as much thought or consciousness of what he was doing, as if he had been in a magnetic slumber.

At length, Mr Squeers yawned fearfully, and opined that it was high time to go to bed; upon which signal, Mrs Squeers and the girl dragged in a small straw mattress and a couple of blankets, and arranged them into a couch for Nicholas.

'We'll put you into your regular bedroom tomorrow, Nickelby,' said Squeers. 'Let me see! Who sleeps in Brooks's's bed, my dear?'

'In Brooks's,' said Mrs Squeers, pondering. 'There's Jennings, little Bolder, Graymarsh, and what's his name.'

'So there is,' rejoined Squeers. 'Yes! Brooks is full.'

'Full!' thought Nicholas. 'I should think he was.'

'There's a place somewhere, I know,' said Squeers; 'but I can't at this moment call to mind where it is. However, we'll have that all settled tomorrow. Good-night, Nickleby. Seven o'clock in the morning, mind.'

'I shall be ready, sir,' replied Nicholas. 'Good-night.'

'I'll come in myself and show you where the well is,' said Squeers. 'You'll always find a little bit of soap in the kitchen window; that belongs to you.'

Nicholas opened his eyes, but not his mouth; and Squeers was again going away, when he once more turned back.

'I don't know, I am sure,' he said, 'whose towel to put you on; but if you'll make shift with something tomorrow morning, Mrs Squeers will arrange that, in the course of the day. My dear, don't forget.'

'I'll take care,' replied Mrs Squeers; 'and mind YOU take care, young man, and get first wash. The teacher ought always to have it; but they get the better of him if they can.'

Mr Squeers then nudged Mrs Squeers to bring away the brandy bottle, lest Nicholas should help himself in the night; and the lady having seized it with great precipitation, they retired together.

Nicholas, being left alone, took half-a-dozen turns up and down the room in a condition of much agitation and excitement; but, growing gradually calmer, sat himself down in a chair, and mentally resolved that, come what come might, he would endeavour, for a time, to bear whatever wretchedness might be in store for him, and that remembering the helplessness of his mother and sister, he would give his uncle no plea for deserting them in their need. Good resolutions seldom fail of producing some good effect in the mind from which they spring. He grew less desponding, and—so sanguine and buoyant is youth—even hoped that affairs at Dotheboys Hall might yet prove better than they promised.

He was preparing for bed, with something like renewed cheerfulness, when a sealed letter fell from his coat pocket. In the hurry of leaving London, it had escaped his attention, and had not occurred to him since, but it at once brought back to him the recollection of the mysterious behaviour of Newman Noggs.

'Dear me!' said Nicholas; 'what an extraordinary hand!'

It was directed to himself, was written upon very dirty paper, and in such cramped and crippled writing as to be almost illegible. After great difficulty and much puzzling, he contrived to read as follows:—

My dear young Man.

I know the world. Your father did not, or he would not have done me a kindness when there was no hope of return. You do not, or you would not be bound on such a journey.

If ever you want a shelter in London (don't be angry at this, I once thought I never should), they know where I live, at the sign of the Crown, in Silver Street, Golden Square. It is at the corner of Silver Street and James Street, with a bar door both ways. You can come at night. Once, nobody was ashamed—never mind that. It's all over.

Excuse errors. I should forget how to wear a whole coat now. I have forgotten all my old ways. My spelling may have gone with them.

NEWMAN NOGGS.

P.S. If you should go near Barnard Castle, there is good ale at the King's Head. Say you know me, and I am sure they will not charge you for it. You may say Mr Noggs there, for I was a gentleman then. I was indeed.

It may be a very undignified circumstances to record, but after he had folded this letter and placed it in his pocket-book, Nicholas Nickleby's eyes were dimmed with a moisture that might have been taken for tears.

CHAPTER 8

Of the Internal Economy of Dotheboys Hall

A ride of two hundred and odd miles in severe weather, is one of the best softeners of a hard bed that ingenuity can devise. Perhaps it is even a sweetener of dreams, for those which hovered over the rough couch of Nicholas, and whispered their airy nothings in his ear, were of an agreeable and happy kind. He was making his fortune very fast indeed, when the faint glimmer of an expiring candle shone before his eyes, and a voice he had no difficulty in recognising as part and parcel of Mr Squeers, admonished him that it was time to rise.

'Past seven, Nickleby,' said Mr Squeers.

'Has morning come already?' asked Nicholas, sitting up in bed.

'Ah! that has it,' replied Squeers, 'and ready iced too. Now, Nickleby, come; tumble up, will you?'

Nicholas needed no further admonition, but 'tumbled up' at once, and proceeded to dress himself by the light of the taper, which Mr Squeers carried in his hand.

'Here's a pretty go,' said that gentleman; 'the pump's froze.'

'Indeed!' said Nicholas, not much interested in the intelligence.

'Yes,' replied Squeers. 'You can't wash yourself this morning.'

'Not wash myself!' exclaimed Nicholas.

'No, not a bit of it,' rejoined Squeers tartly. 'So you must be content with giving yourself a dry polish till we break the ice in the well, and can get a bucketful out for the boys. Don't stand staring at me, but do look sharp, will you?'

Offering no further observation, Nicholas huddled on his clothes. Squeers, meanwhile, opened the shutters and blew the candle out; when the voice of his amiable consort was heard in the passage, demanding admittance.

'Come in, my love,' said Squeers.

Mrs Squeers came in, still habited in the primitive night-jacket which had displayed the symmetry of her figure on the previous night, and further ornamented with a beaver bonnet of some antiquity, which she wore, with much ease and lightness, on the top of the nightcap before mentioned.

'Drat the things,' said the lady, opening the cupboard; 'I can't find the school spoon anywhere.'

'Never mind it, my dear,' observed Squeers in a soothing manner; 'it's of no consequence.'

'No consequence, why how you talk!' retorted Mrs Squeers sharply; 'isn't it brimstone morning?'

'I forgot, my dear,' rejoined Squeers; 'yes, it certainly is. We purify the boys' bloods now and then, Nickleby.'

'Purify fiddlesticks' ends,' said his lady. 'Don't think, young man, that we go to the expense of flower of brimstone and molasses, just to purify them; because if you think we carry on the business in that way, you'll find yourself mistaken, and so I tell you plainly.'

'My dear,' said Squeers frowning. 'Hem!'

'Oh! nonsense,' rejoined Mrs Squeers. 'If the young man comes to be a teacher here, let him understand, at once, that we don't want any foolery about the boys. They have the brimstone and treacle, partly because if they hadn't something or other in the way of medicine they'd be always ailing and giving a world of trouble, and partly because it spoils their appetites and comes cheaper than breakfast and dinner. So, it does them good and us good at the same time, and that's fair enough I'm sure.'

Having given this explanation, Mrs Squeers put her head into the closet and instituted a stricter search after the spoon, in which Mr Squeers assisted. A few words passed between them while they were thus engaged, but as their voices were partially stifled by the cupboard, all that Nicholas could distinguish was, that Mr Squeers said what Mrs Squeers had said, was injudicious, and that Mrs Squeers said what Mr Squeers said, was 'stuff.'

A vast deal of searching and rummaging ensued, and it proving fruitless, Smike was called in, and pushed by Mrs Squeers, and boxed by Mr Squeers; which course of treatment brightening his intellects, enabled him to suggest that possibly Mrs Squeers might have the spoon in her pocket, as indeed turned out to be the case. As Mrs Squeers had previously protested, however, that she was quite certain she had not got it, Smike received another box on the ear for presuming to contradict his mistress, together with a promise of a sound thrashing if he were not more respectful in future; so that he took nothing very advantageous by his motion.

'A most invaluable woman, that, Nickleby,' said Squeers when his consort had hurried away, pushing the drudge before her.

'Indeed, sir!' observed Nicholas.

'I don't know her equal,' said Squeers; 'I do not know her equal. That woman, Nickleby, is always the same—always the same bustling, lively, active, saving creetur that you see her now.'

Nicholas sighed involuntarily at the thought of the agreeable domestic prospect thus opened to him; but Squeers was, fortunately, too much occupied with his own reflections to perceive it.

'It's my way to say, when I am up in London,' continued Squeers, 'that to them boys she is a mother. But she is more than a mother to them; ten times more. She does things for them boys, Nickleby, that I don't believe half the mothers going, would do for their own sons.'

'I should think they would not, sir,' answered Nicholas.

Now, the fact was, that both Mr and Mrs Squeers viewed the boys in the light of their proper and natural enemies; or, in other words, they held and considered that their business and profession was to get as much from every boy as could by possibility be screwed out of him. On this point they were both agreed, and behaved in unison accordingly. The only difference between them was, that Mrs Squeers waged war against the enemy openly and fearlessly, and that Squeers covered his rascality, even at home, with a spice of his habitual deceit; as if he really had a notion of someday or other being able to take himself in, and persuade his own mind that he was a very good fellow.

'But come,' said Squeers, interrupting the progress of some thoughts to this effect in the mind of his usher, 'let's go to the schoolroom; and lend me a hand with my school-coat, will you?'

Nicholas assisted his master to put on an old fustian shooting-jacket, which he took down from a peg in the passage; and Squeers, arming himself with his cane, led the way across a yard, to a door in the rear of the house.

'There,' said the schoolmaster as they stepped in together; 'this is our shop, Nickleby!'

It was such a crowded scene, and there were so many objects to attract attention, that, at first, Nicholas stared about him, really without seeing anything at all. By degrees, however, the place resolved itself into a bare and dirty room, with a couple of windows, whereof a tenth part might be of glass, the remainder being stopped up with old copy-books and paper. There were a couple of long old rickety desks, cut and notched, and inked, and damaged, in every possible way; two or three forms; a detached desk for Squeers; and another for his assistant. The ceiling was supported, like that of a barn, by cross-beams and rafters; and the walls were so stained and discoloured, that it was impossible to tell whether they had ever been touched with paint or whitewash.

But the pupils—the young noblemen! How the last faint traces of hope, the remotest glimmering of any good to be derived from his efforts in this den, faded from the mind of Nicholas as he looked in dismay around! Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with the countenances of old men, deformities with irons upon their limbs, boys of stunted growth, and others whose long meagre legs would hardly bear their stooping bodies, all crowded on the view together; there were the bleared eye, the hare-lip, the crooked foot, and every ugliness or distortion that told of unnatural aversion conceived by parents for their offspring, or of young lives which, from the earliest dawn of infancy, had been one horrible endurance of cruelty and neglect. There were little faces which should have been handsome, darkened with the scowl of sullen, dogged suffering; there was childhood with the light of its eye quenched, its beauty gone, and its helplessness alone remaining; there were vicious-faced boys, brooding, with leaden eyes, like malefactors in a jail; and there were young creatures on whom the sins of their frail parents had descended, weeping even for the mercenary nurses they had known, and lonesome even in their loneliness. With every kindly sympathy and affection blasted in its birth, with every young and healthy feeling flogged and starved down, with every revengeful passion that can fester in swollen hearts, eating its evil way to their core in silence, what an incipient Hell was breeding here!

And yet this scene, painful as it was, had its grotesque features, which, in a less interested observer than Nicholas, might have provoked a smile. Mrs Squeers stood at one of the desks, presiding over an immense basin of brimstone and treacle, of which delicious compound she administered a large instalment to each boy in succession: using for the purpose a common wooden spoon, which might have been originally manufactured for some gigantic top, and which widened every young gentleman's mouth considerably: they being all obliged, under heavy corporal penalties, to take in the whole of the bowl at a gasp. In another corner, huddled together for companionship, were the little boys who had arrived on the preceding night, three of them in very large leather breeches, and two in old trousers, a something tighter fit than drawers are usually worn; at no great distance from these was seated the juvenile son and heir of Mr Squeers—a striking likeness of his father—kicking, with great vigour, under the hands of Smike, who was fitting upon him a pair of new boots that bore a most suspicious resemblance to those which the least of the little boys had worn on the journey down—as the little boy himself seemed to think, for he was regarding the appropriation with a look of most rueful amazement. Besides these, there was a long row of boys waiting, with countenances of no pleasant anticipation, to be treacled; and another file, who had just escaped from the infliction, making a variety of wry mouths indicative of anything but satisfaction. The whole were attired in such motley, ill-assorted, extraordinary garments, as would have been irresistibly ridiculous, but for the foul appearance of dirt, disorder, and disease, with which they were associated.

'Now,' said Squeers, giving the desk a great rap with his cane, which made half the little boys nearly jump out of their boots, 'is that physicking over?'

'Just over,' said Mrs Squeers, choking the last boy in her hurry, and tapping the crown of his head with the wooden spoon to restore him. 'Here, you Smike; take away now. Look sharp!'

Smike shuffled out with the basin, and Mrs Squeers having called up a little boy with a curly head, and wiped her hands upon it, hurried out after him into a species of wash-house, where there was a small fire and a large kettle, together with a number of little wooden bowls which were arranged upon a board.

Into these bowls, Mrs Squeers, assisted by the hungry servant, poured a brown composition, which looked like diluted pincushions without the covers, and was called porridge. A minute wedge of brown bread was inserted in each bowl, and when they had eaten their porridge by means of the bread, the boys ate the bread itself, and had finished their breakfast; whereupon Mr Squeers said, in a solemn voice, 'For what we have received, may the Lord make us truly thankful!'—and went away to his own.

Nicholas distended his stomach with a bowl of porridge, for much the same reason which induces some savages to swallow earth—lest they should be inconveniently hungry when there is nothing to eat. Having further disposed of a slice of bread and butter, allotted to him in virtue of his office, he sat himself down, to wait for school-time.

He could not but observe how silent and sad the boys all seemed to be. There was none of the noise and clamour of a schoolroom; none of its boisterous play, or hearty mirth. The children sat crouching and shivering together, and seemed to lack the spirit to move about. The only pupil who evinced the slightest tendency towards locomotion or playfulness was Master Squeers, and as his chief amusement was to tread upon the other boys' toes in his new boots, his flow of spirits was rather disagreeable than otherwise.

After some half-hour's delay, Mr Squeers reappeared, and the boys took their places and their books, of which latter commodity the average might be about one to eight learners. A few minutes having elapsed, during which Mr Squeers looked very profound, as if he had a perfect apprehension of what was inside all the books, and could say every word of their contents by heart if he only chose to take the trouble, that gentleman called up the first class.

Obedient to this summons there ranged themselves in front of the schoolmaster's desk, half-a-dozen scarecrows, out at knees and elbows, one of whom placed a torn and filthy book beneath his learned eye.

'This is the first class in English spelling and philosophy, Nickleby,' said Squeers, beckoning Nicholas to stand beside him. 'We'll get up a Latin one, and hand that over to you. Now, then, where's the first boy?'

'Please, sir, he's cleaning the back-parlour window,' said the temporary head of the philosophical class.

'So he is, to be sure,' rejoined Squeers. 'We go upon the practical mode of teaching, Nickleby; the regular education system. C-l-e-a-n, clean, verb active, to make bright, to scour. W-i-n, win, d-e-r, der, winder, a casement. When the boy knows this out of book, he goes and does it. It's just the same principle as the use of the globes. Where's the second boy?'

'Please, sir, he's weeding the garden,' replied a small voice.

'To be sure,' said Squeers, by no means disconcerted. 'So he is. B-o-t, bot, t-i-n, tin, bottin, n-e-y, ney, bottinney, noun substantive, a knowledge of plants. When he has learned that bottinney means a knowledge of plants, he goes and knows 'em. That's our system, Nickleby: what do you think of it?'

'It's very useful one, at any rate,' answered Nicholas.

'I believe you,' rejoined Squeers, not remarking the emphasis of his usher. 'Third boy, what's horse?'

'A beast, sir,' replied the boy.

'So it is,' said Squeers. 'Ain't it, Nickleby?'

'I believe there is no doubt of that, sir,' answered Nicholas.

'Of course there isn't,' said Squeers. 'A horse is a quadruped, and quadruped's Latin for beast, as everybody that's gone through the grammar knows, or else where's the use of having grammars at all?'

'Where, indeed!' said Nicholas abstractedly.

'As you're perfect in that,' resumed Squeers, turning to the boy, 'go and look after MY horse, and rub him down well, or I'll rub you down. The rest of the class go and draw water up, till somebody tells you to leave off, for it's washing-day tomorrow, and they want the coppers filled.'

So saying, he dismissed the first class to their experiments in practical philosophy, and eyed Nicholas with a look, half cunning and half doubtful, as if he were not altogether certain what he might think of him by this time.

'That's the way we do it, Nickleby,' he said, after a pause.

Nicholas shrugged his shoulders in a manner that was scarcely perceptible, and said he saw it was.

'And a very good way it is, too,' said Squeers. 'Now, just take them fourteen little boys and hear them some reading, because, you know, you must begin to be useful. Idling about here won't do.'

Mr Squeers said this, as if it had suddenly occurred to him, either that he must not say too much to his assistant, or that his assistant did not say enough to him in praise of the establishment. The children were arranged in a semicircle round the new master, and he was soon listening to their dull, drawling, hesitating recital of those stories of engrossing interest which are to be found in the more antiquated spelling-books.

In this exciting occupation, the morning lagged heavily on. At one o'clock, the boys, having previously had their appetites thoroughly taken away by stir-about and potatoes, sat down in the kitchen to some hard salt beef, of which Nicholas was graciously permitted to take his portion to his own solitary desk, to eat it there in peace. After this, there was another hour of crouching in the schoolroom and shivering with cold, and then school began again.

It was Mr Squeer's custom to call the boys together, and make a sort of report, after every half-yearly visit to the metropolis, regarding the relations and friends he had seen, the news he had heard, the letters he had brought down, the bills which had been paid, the accounts which had been left unpaid, and so forth. This solemn proceeding always took place in the afternoon of the day succeeding his return; perhaps, because the boys acquired strength of mind from the suspense of the morning, or, possibly, because Mr Squeers himself acquired greater sternness and inflexibility from certain warm potations in which he was wont to indulge after his early dinner. Be this as it may, the boys were recalled from house-window, garden, stable, and cow-yard, and the school were assembled in full conclave, when Mr Squeers, with a small bundle of papers in his hand, and Mrs S. following with a pair of canes, entered the room and proclaimed silence.

'Let any boy speak a word without leave,' said Mr Squeers mildly, 'and I'll take the skin off his back.'

This special proclamation had the desired effect, and a deathlike silence immediately prevailed, in the midst of which Mr Squeers went on to say:

'Boys, I've been to London, and have returned to my family and you, as strong and well as ever.'

According to half-yearly custom, the boys gave three feeble cheers at this refreshing intelligence. Such cheers! Sights of extra strength with the chill on.

'I have seen the parents of some boys,' continued Squeers, turning over his papers, 'and they're so glad to hear how their sons are getting on, that there's no prospect at all of their going away, which of course is a very pleasant thing to reflect upon, for all parties.'

Two or three hands went to two or three eyes when Squeers said this, but the greater part of the young gentlemen having no particular parents to speak of, were wholly uninterested in the thing one way or other.

'I have had disappointments to contend against,' said Squeers, looking very grim; 'Bolder's father was two pound ten short. Where is Bolder?'

'Here he is, please sir,' rejoined twenty officious voices. Boys are very like men to be sure.

'Come here, Bolder,' said Squeers.

An unhealthy-looking boy, with warts all over his hands, stepped from his place to the master's desk, and raised his eyes imploringly to Squeers's face; his own, quite white from the rapid beating of his heart.

'Bolder,' said Squeers, speaking very slowly, for he was considering, as the saying goes, where to have him. 'Bolder, if you father thinks that because—why, what's this, sir?'

As Squeers spoke, he caught up the boy's hand by the cuff of his jacket, and surveyed it with an edifying aspect of horror and disgust.

'What do you call this, sir?' demanded the schoolmaster, administering a cut with the cane to expedite the reply.

'I can't help it, indeed, sir,' rejoined the boy, crying. 'They will come; it's the dirty work I think, sir—at least I don't know what it is, sir, but it's not my fault.'

'Bolder,' said Squeers, tucking up his wristbands, and moistening the palm of his right hand to get a good grip of the cane, 'you're an incorrigible young scoundrel, and as the last thrashing did you no good, we must see what another will do towards beating it out of you.'

With this, and wholly disregarding a piteous cry for mercy, Mr Squeers fell upon the boy and caned him soundly: not leaving off, indeed, until his arm was tired out.

'There,' said Squeers, when he had quite done; 'rub away as hard as you like, you won't rub that off in a hurry. Oh! you won't hold that noise, won't you? Put him out, Smike.'

The drudge knew better from long experience, than to hesitate about obeying, so he bundled the victim out by a side-door, and Mr Squeers perched himself again on his own stool, supported by Mrs Squeers, who occupied another at his side.

'Now let us see,' said Squeers. 'A letter for Cobbey. Stand up, Cobbey.'

Another boy stood up, and eyed the letter very hard while Squeers made a mental abstract of the same.

'Oh!' said Squeers: 'Cobbey's grandmother is dead, and his uncle John has took to drinking, which is all the news his sister sends, except eighteenpence, which will just pay for that broken square of glass. Mrs Squeers, my dear, will you take the money?'

The worthy lady pocketed the eighteenpence with a most business-like air, and Squeers passed on to the next boy, as coolly as possible.

'Graymarsh,' said Squeers, 'he's the next. Stand up, Graymarsh.'

Another boy stood up, and the schoolmaster looked over the letter as before.

'Graymarsh's maternal aunt,' said Squeers, when he had possessed himself of the contents, 'is very glad to hear he's so well and happy, and sends her respectful compliments to Mrs Squeers, and thinks she must be an angel. She likewise thinks Mr Squeers is too good for this world; but hopes he may long be spared to carry on the business. Would have sent the two pair of stockings as desired, but is short of money, so forwards a tract instead, and hopes Graymarsh will put his trust in Providence. Hopes, above all, that he will study in everything to please Mr and Mrs Squeers, and look upon them as his only friends; and that he will love Master Squeers; and not object to sleeping five in a bed, which no Christian should. Ah!' said Squeers, folding it up, 'a delightful letter. Very affecting indeed.'

It was affecting in one sense, for Graymarsh's maternal aunt was strongly supposed, by her more intimate friends, to be no other than his maternal parent; Squeers, however, without alluding to this part of the story (which would have sounded immoral before boys), proceeded with the business by calling out 'Mobbs,' whereupon another boy rose, and Graymarsh resumed his seat.

'Mobbs's step-mother,' said Squeers, 'took to her bed on hearing that he wouldn't eat fat, and has been very ill ever since. She wishes to know, by an early post, where he expects to go to, if he quarrels with his vittles; and with what feelings he could turn up his nose at the cow's-liver broth, after his good master had asked a blessing on it. This was told her in the London newspapers—not by Mr Squeers, for he is too kind and too good to set anybody against anybody—and it has vexed her so much, Mobbs can't think. She is sorry to find he is discontented, which is sinful and horrid, and hopes Mr Squeers will flog him into a happier state of mind; with which view, she has also stopped his halfpenny a week pocket-money, and given a double-bladed knife with a corkscrew in it to the Missionaries, which she had bought on purpose for him.'

'A sulky state of feeling,' said Squeers, after a terrible pause, during which he had moistened the palm of his right hand again, 'won't do. Cheerfulness and contentment must be kept up. Mobbs, come to me!'

Mobbs moved slowly towards the desk, rubbing his eyes in anticipation of good cause for doing so; and he soon afterwards retired by the side-door, with as good cause as a boy need have.

Mr Squeers then proceeded to open a miscellaneous collection of letters; some enclosing money, which Mrs Squeers 'took care of;' and others referring to small articles of apparel, as caps and so forth, all of which the same lady stated to be too large, or too small, and calculated for nobody but young Squeers, who would appear indeed to have had most accommodating limbs, since everything that came into the school fitted him to a nicety. His head, in particular, must have been singularly elastic, for hats and caps of all dimensions were alike to him.

This business dispatched, a few slovenly lessons were performed, and Squeers retired to his fireside, leaving Nicholas to take care of the boys in the school-room, which was very cold, and where a meal of bread and cheese was served out shortly after dark.

There was a small stove at that corner of the room which was nearest to the master's desk, and by it Nicholas sat down, so depressed and self-degraded by the consciousness of his position, that if death could have come upon him at that time, he would have been almost happy to meet it. The cruelty of which he had been an unwilling witness, the coarse and ruffianly behaviour of Squeers even in his best moods, the filthy place, the sights and sounds about him, all contributed to this state of feeling; but when he recollected that, being there as an assistant, he actually seemed—no matter what unhappy train of circumstances had brought him to that pass—to be the aider and abettor of a system which filled him with honest disgust and indignation, he loathed himself, and felt, for the moment, as though the mere consciousness of his present situation must, through all time to come, prevent his raising his head again.

But, for the present, his resolve was taken, and the resolution he had formed on the preceding night remained undisturbed. He had written to his mother and sister, announcing the safe conclusion of his journey, and saying as little about Dotheboys Hall, and saying that little as cheerfully, as he possibly could. He hoped that by remaining where he was, he might do some good, even there; at all events, others depended too much on his uncle's favour, to admit of his awakening his wrath just then.

One reflection disturbed him far more than any selfish considerations arising out of his own position. This was the probable destination of his sister Kate. His uncle had deceived him, and might he not consign her to some miserable place where her youth and beauty would prove a far greater curse than ugliness and decrepitude? To a caged man, bound hand and foot, this was a terrible idea—but no, he thought, his mother was by; there was the portrait-painter, too—simple enough, but still living in the world, and of it. He was willing to believe that Ralph Nickleby had conceived a personal dislike to himself. Having pretty good reason, by this time, to reciprocate it, he had no great difficulty in arriving at this conclusion, and tried to persuade himself that the feeling extended no farther than between them.

As he was absorbed in these meditations, he all at once encountered the upturned face of Smike, who was on his knees before the stove, picking a few stray cinders from the hearth and planting them on the fire. He had paused to steal a look at Nicholas, and when he saw that he was observed, shrunk back, as if expecting a blow.

'You need not fear me,' said Nicholas kindly. 'Are you cold?'

'N-n-o.'

'You are shivering.'

'I am not cold,' replied Smike quickly. 'I am used to it.'

There was such an obvious fear of giving offence in his manner, and he was such a timid, broken-spirited creature, that Nicholas could not help exclaiming, 'Poor fellow!'

If he had struck the drudge, he would have slunk away without a word. But, now, he burst into tears.

'Oh dear, oh dear!' he cried, covering his face with his cracked and horny hands. 'My heart will break. It will, it will.'

'Hush!' said Nicholas, laying his hand upon his shoulder. 'Be a man; you are nearly one by years, God help you.'

'By years!' cried Smike. 'Oh dear, dear, how many of them! How many of them since I was a little child, younger than any that are here now! Where are they all!'

'Whom do you speak of?' inquired Nicholas, wishing to rouse the poor half-witted creature to reason. 'Tell me.'

'My friends,' he replied, 'myself—my—oh! what sufferings mine have been!'

'There is always hope,' said Nicholas; he knew not what to say.

'No,' rejoined the other, 'no; none for me. Do you remember the boy that died here?'

'I was not here, you know,' said Nicholas gently; 'but what of him?'

'Why,' replied the youth, drawing closer to his questioner's side, 'I was with him at night, and when it was all silent he cried no more for friends he wished to come and sit with him, but began to see faces round his bed that came from home; he said they smiled, and talked to him; and he died at last lifting his head to kiss them. Do you hear?'

'Yes, yes,' rejoined Nicholas.

'What faces will smile on me when I die!' cried his companion, shivering. 'Who will talk to me in those long nights! They cannot come from home; they would frighten me, if they did, for I don't know what it is, and shouldn't know them. Pain and fear, pain and fear for me, alive or dead. No hope, no hope!'

The bell rang to bed: and the boy, subsiding at the sound into his usual listless state, crept away as if anxious to avoid notice. It was with a heavy heart that Nicholas soon afterwards—no, not retired; there was no retirement there—followed—to his dirty and crowded dormitory.

CHAPTER 9

Of Miss Squeers, Mrs Squeers, Master Squeers, and Mr Squeers; and of various Matters and Persons connected no less with the Squeerses than Nicholas Nickleby

When Mr Squeers left the schoolroom for the night, he betook himself, as has been before remarked, to his own fireside, which was situated—not in the room in which Nicholas had supped on the night of his arrival, but in a smaller apartment in the rear of the premises, where his lady wife, his amiable son, and accomplished daughter, were in the full enjoyment of each other's society; Mrs Squeers being engaged in the matronly pursuit of stocking-darning; and the young lady and gentleman being occupied in the adjustment of some youthful differences, by means of a pugilistic contest across the table, which, on the approach of their honoured parent, subsided into a noiseless exchange of kicks beneath it.

And, in this place, it may be as well to apprise the reader, that Miss Fanny Squeers was in her three-and-twentieth year. If there be any one grace or loveliness inseparable from that particular period of life, Miss Squeers may be presumed to have been possessed of it, as there is no reason to suppose that she was a solitary exception to an universal rule. She was not tall like her mother, but short like her father; from the former she inherited a voice of harsh quality; from the latter a remarkable expression of the right eye, something akin to having none at all.

Miss Squeers had been spending a few days with a neighbouring friend, and had only just returned to the parental roof. To this circumstance may be referred, her having heard nothing of Nicholas, until Mr Squeers himself now made him the subject of conversation.

'Well, my dear,' said Squeers, drawing up his chair, 'what do you think of him by this time?'

'Think of who?' inquired Mrs Squeers; who (as she often remarked) was no grammarian, thank Heaven.

'Of the young man—the new teacher—who else could I mean?'

'Oh! that Knuckleboy,' said Mrs Squeers impatiently. 'I hate him.'

'What do you hate him for, my dear?' asked Squeers.

'What's that to you?' retorted Mrs Squeers. 'If I hate him, that's enough, ain't it?'

'Quite enough for him, my dear, and a great deal too much I dare say, if he knew it,' replied Squeers in a pacific tone. 'I only ask from curiosity, my dear.'

'Well, then, if you want to know,' rejoined Mrs Squeers, 'I'll tell you. Because he's a proud, haughty, consequential, turned-up-nosed peacock.'

Mrs Squeers, when excited, was accustomed to use strong language, and, moreover, to make use of a plurality of epithets, some of which were of a figurative kind, as the word peacock, and furthermore the allusion to Nicholas's nose, which was not intended to be taken in its literal sense, but rather to bear a latitude of construction according to the fancy of the hearers.

Neither were they meant to bear reference to each other, so much as to the object on whom they were bestowed, as will be seen in the present case: a peacock with a turned-up nose being a novelty in ornithology, and a thing not commonly seen.

'Hem!' said Squeers, as if in mild deprecation of this outbreak. 'He is cheap, my dear; the young man is very cheap.'

'Not a bit of it,' retorted Mrs Squeers.

'Five pound a year,' said Squeers.

'What of that; it's dear if you don't want him, isn't it?' replied his wife.

'But we DO want him,' urged Squeers.

'I don't see that you want him any more than the dead,' said Mrs Squeers. 'Don't tell me. You can put on the cards and in the advertisements, "Education by Mr Wackford Squeers and able assistants," without having any assistants, can't you? Isn't it done every day by all the masters about? I've no patience with you.'

'Haven't you!' said Squeers, sternly. 'Now I'll tell you what, Mrs Squeers. In this matter of having a teacher, I'll take my own way, if you please. A slave driver in the West Indies is allowed a man under him, to see that his blacks don't run away, or get up a rebellion; and I'll have a man under me to do the same with OUR blacks, till such time as little Wackford is able to take charge of the school.'

'Am I to take care of the school when I grow up a man, father?' said Wackford junior, suspending, in the excess of his delight, a vicious kick which he was administering to his sister.

'You are, my son,' replied Mr Squeers, in a sentimental voice.

'Oh my eye, won't I give it to the boys!' exclaimed the interesting child, grasping his father's cane. 'Oh, father, won't I make 'em squeak again!'

It was a proud moment in Mr Squeers's life, when he witnessed that burst of enthusiasm in his young child's mind, and saw in it a foreshadowing of his future eminence. He pressed a penny into his hand, and gave vent to his feelings (as did his exemplary wife also), in a shout of approving laughter. The infantine appeal to their common sympathies, at once restored cheerfulness to the conversation, and harmony to the company.

'He's a nasty stuck-up monkey, that's what I consider him,' said Mrs Squeers, reverting to Nicholas.

'Supposing he is,' said Squeers, 'he is as well stuck up in our schoolroom as anywhere else, isn't he?—especially as he don't like it.'

'Well,' observed Mrs Squeers, 'there's something in that. I hope it'll bring his pride down, and it shall be no fault of mine if it don't.'

Now, a proud usher in a Yorkshire school was such a very extraordinary and unaccountable thing to hear of,—any usher at all being a novelty; but a proud one, a being of whose existence the wildest imagination could never have dreamed—that Miss Squeers, who seldom troubled herself with scholastic matters, inquired with much curiosity who this Knuckleboy was, that gave himself such airs.

'Nickleby,' said Squeers, spelling the name according to some eccentric system which prevailed in his own mind; 'your mother always calls things and people by their wrong names.'

'No matter for that,' said Mrs Squeers; 'I see them with right eyes, and that's quite enough for me. I watched him when you were laying on to little Bolder this afternoon. He looked as black as thunder, all the while, and, one time, started up as if he had more than got it in his mind to make a rush at you. I saw him, though he thought I didn't.'

'Never mind that, father,' said Miss Squeers, as the head of the family was about to reply. 'Who is the man?'

'Why, your father has got some nonsense in his head that he's the son of a poor gentleman that died the other day,' said Mrs Squeers.

'The son of a gentleman!'

'Yes; but I don't believe a word of it. If he's a gentleman's son at all, he's a fondling, that's my opinion.'

'Mrs Squeers intended to say 'foundling,' but, as she frequently remarked when she made any such mistake, it would be all the same a hundred years hence; with which axiom of philosophy, indeed, she was in the constant habit of consoling the boys when they laboured under more than ordinary ill-usage.

'He's nothing of the kind,' said Squeers, in answer to the above remark, 'for his father was married to his mother years before he was born, and she is alive now. If he was, it would be no business of ours, for we make a very good friend by having him here; and if he likes to learn the boys anything besides minding them, I have no objection I am sure.'

'I say again, I hate him worse than poison,' said Mrs Squeers vehemently.

'If you dislike him, my dear,' returned Squeers, 'I don't know anybody who can show dislike better than you, and of course there's no occasion, with him, to take the trouble to hide it.'

'I don't intend to, I assure you,' interposed Mrs S.

'That's right,' said Squeers; 'and if he has a touch of pride about him, as I think he has, I don't believe there's woman in all England that can bring anybody's spirit down, as quick as you can, my love.'

Mrs Squeers chuckled vastly on the receipt of these flattering compliments, and said, she hoped she had tamed a high spirit or two in her day. It is but due to her character to say, that in conjunction with her estimable husband, she had broken many and many a one.

Miss Fanny Squeers carefully treasured up this, and much more conversation on the same subject, until she retired for the night, when she questioned the hungry servant, minutely, regarding the outward appearance and demeanour of Nicholas; to which queries the girl returned such enthusiastic replies, coupled with so many laudatory remarks touching his beautiful dark eyes, and his sweet smile, and his straight legs—upon which last-named articles she laid particular stress; the general run of legs at Dotheboys Hall being crooked—that Miss Squeers was not long in arriving at the conclusion that the new usher must be a very remarkable person, or, as she herself significantly phrased it, 'something quite out of the common.' And so Miss Squeers made up her mind that she would take a personal observation of Nicholas the very next day.

In pursuance of this design, the young lady watched the opportunity of her mother being engaged, and her father absent, and went accidentally into the schoolroom to get a pen mended: where, seeing nobody but Nicholas presiding over the boys, she blushed very deeply, and exhibited great confusion.

'I beg your pardon,' faltered Miss Squeers; 'I thought my father was—or might be—dear me, how very awkward!'

'Mr Squeers is out,' said Nicholas, by no means overcome by the apparition, unexpected though it was.

'Do you know will he be long, sir?' asked Miss Squeers, with bashful hesitation.

'He said about an hour,' replied Nicholas—politely of course, but without any indication of being stricken to the heart by Miss Squeers's charms.

'I never knew anything happen so cross,' exclaimed the young lady. 'Thank you! I am very sorry I intruded, I am sure. If I hadn't thought my father was here, I wouldn't upon any account have—it is very provoking—must look so very strange,' murmured Miss Squeers, blushing once more, and glancing, from the pen in her hand, to Nicholas at his desk, and back again.

'If that is all you want,' said Nicholas, pointing to the pen, and smiling, in spite of himself, at the affected embarrassment of the schoolmaster's daughter, 'perhaps I can supply his place.'

Miss Squeers glanced at the door, as if dubious of the propriety of advancing any nearer to an utter stranger; then round the schoolroom, as though in some measure reassured by the presence of forty boys; and finally sidled up to Nicholas and delivered the pen into his hand, with a most winning mixture of reserve and condescension.

'Shall it be a hard or a soft nib?' inquired Nicholas, smiling to prevent himself from laughing outright.

'He HAS a beautiful smile,' thought Miss Squeers.

'Which did you say?' asked Nicholas.

'Dear me, I was thinking of something else for the moment, I declare,' replied Miss Squeers. 'Oh! as soft as possible, if you please.' With which words, Miss Squeers sighed. It might be, to give Nicholas to understand that her heart was soft, and that the pen was wanted to match.

Upon these instructions Nicholas made the pen; when he gave it to Miss Squeers, Miss Squeers dropped it; and when he stooped to pick it up, Miss Squeers stopped also, and they knocked their heads together; whereat five-

and-twenty little boys laughed aloud: being positively for the first and only time that half-year.

'Very awkward of me,' said Nicholas, opening the door for the young lady's retreat.

'Not at all, sir,' replied Miss Squeers; 'it was my fault. It was all my foolish—a—a—good-morning!'

'Goodbye,' said Nicholas. 'The next I make for you, I hope will be made less clumsily. Take care! You are biting the nib off now.'

'Really,' said Miss Squeers; 'so embarrassing that I scarcely know what I—very sorry to give you so much trouble.'

'Not the least trouble in the world,' replied Nicholas, closing the schoolroom door.

'I never saw such legs in the whole course of my life!' said Miss Squeers, as she walked away.

In fact, Miss Squeers was in love with Nicholas Nickleby.

To account for the rapidity with which this young lady had conceived a passion for Nicholas, it may be necessary to state, that the friend from whom she had so recently returned, was a miller's daughter of only eighteen, who had contracted herself unto the son of a small corn-factor, resident in the nearest market town. Miss Squeers and the miller's daughter, being fast friends, had covenanted together some two years before, according to a custom prevalent among young ladies, that whoever was first engaged to be married, should straightway confide the mighty secret to the bosom of the other, before communicating it to any living soul, and bespeak her as bridesmaid without loss of time; in fulfilment of which pledge the miller's daughter, when her engagement was formed, came out express, at eleven o'clock at night as the corn-factor's son made an offer of his hand and heart at twenty-five minutes past ten by the Dutch clock in the kitchen, and rushed into Miss Squeers's bedroom with the gratifying intelligence. Now, Miss Squeers being five years older, and out of her teens (which is also a great matter), had, since, been more than commonly anxious to return the compliment, and possess her friend with a similar secret; but, either in consequence of finding it hard to please herself, or harder still to please anybody else, had never had an opportunity so to do, inasmuch as she had no such secret to disclose. The little interview with Nicholas had no sooner passed, as above described, however, than Miss Squeers, putting on her bonnet, made her way, with great precipitation, to her friend's house, and, upon a solemn renewal of divers old vows of secrecy, revealed how that she was—not exactly engaged, but going to be—to a gentleman's son—(none of your corn-factors, but a gentleman's son of high descent)—who had come down as teacher to Dotheboys Hall, under most mysterious and remarkable circumstances—indeed, as Miss Squeers more than once hinted she had good reason to believe, induced, by the fame of her many charms, to seek her out, and woo and win her.

'Isn't it an extraordinary thing?' said Miss Squeers, emphasising the adjective strongly.

'Most extraordinary,' replied the friend. 'But what has he said to you?'

'Don't ask me what he said, my dear,' rejoined Miss Squeers. 'If you had only seen his looks and smiles! I never was so overcome in all my life.'

'Did he look in this way?' inquired the miller's daughter, counterfeiting, as nearly as she could, a favourite leer of the corn-factor.

'Very like that—only more genteel,' replied Miss Squeers.

'Ah!' said the friend, 'then he means something, depend on it.'

Miss Squeers, having slight misgivings on the subject, was by no means ill pleased to be confirmed by a competent authority; and discovering, on further conversation and comparison of notes, a great many points of resemblance between the behaviour of Nicholas, and that of the corn-factor, grew so exceedingly confidential, that she intrusted her friend with a vast number of things Nicholas had NOT said, which were all so very complimentary as to be quite conclusive. Then, she dilated on the fearful hardship of having a father and mother strenuously opposed to her intended husband; on which unhappy circumstance she dwelt at great length; for the friend's father and mother were quite agreeable to her being married, and the whole courtship was in consequence as flat and common-place an affair as it was possible to imagine.

'How I should like to see him!' exclaimed the friend.

'So you shall, 'Tilda,' replied Miss Squeers. 'I should consider myself one of the most ungrateful creatures alive, if I denied you. I think mother's going away for two days to fetch some boys; and when she does, I'll ask you and John up to tea, and have him to meet you.'

This was a charming idea, and having fully discussed it, the friends parted.

It so fell out, that Mrs Squeers's journey, to some distance, to fetch three new boys, and dun the relations of two old ones for the balance of a small account, was fixed that very afternoon, for the next day but one; and on the next day but one, Mrs Squeers got up outside the coach, as it stopped to change at Greta Bridge, taking with her a small bundle containing something in a bottle, and some sandwiches, and carrying besides a large white top-coat to wear in the night-time; with which baggage she went her way.

Whenever such opportunities as these occurred, it was Squeers's custom to drive over to the market town, every evening, on pretence of urgent business, and stop till ten or eleven o'clock at a tavern he much affected. As the party was not in his way, therefore, but rather afforded a means of compromise with Miss Squeers, he readily yielded his full assent thereunto, and willingly communicated to Nicholas that he was expected to take his tea in the parlour that evening, at five o'clock.

To be sure Miss Squeers was in a desperate flutter as the time approached, and to be sure she was dressed out to the best advantage: with her hair—it had more than a tinge of red, and she wore it in a crop—curled in five distinct rows, up to the very top of her head, and arranged dexterously over the doubtful eye; to say nothing of the blue sash which floated down her back, or the worked apron or the long gloves, or the green gauze scarf worn over one shoulder and under the other; or any of the numerous devices which were to be as so many arrows to the heart of Nicholas. She had scarcely completed these arrangements to her entire satisfaction, when the friend arrived with a whity-brown parcel—flat and three-cornered—containing sundry small adornments which were to be put on upstairs, and which the friend put on, talking incessantly. When Miss Squeers had 'done' the friend's hair, the friend 'did' Miss Squeers's hair, throwing in some striking improvements in the way of ringlets down the neck; and then, when they were both touched up to their entire satisfaction, they went downstairs in full state with the long gloves on, all ready for company.

'Where's John, 'Tilda?' said Miss Squeers.

'Only gone home to clean himself,' replied the friend. 'He will be here by the time the tea's drawn.'

'I do so palpitate,' observed Miss Squeers.

'Ah! I know what it is,' replied the friend.

'I have not been used to it, you know, 'Tilda,' said Miss Squeers, applying her hand to the left side of her sash.

'You'll soon get the better of it, dear,' rejoined the friend. While they were talking thus, the hungry servant brought in the tea-things, and, soon afterwards, somebody tapped at the room door.

'There he is!' cried Miss Squeers. 'Oh 'Tilda!'

'Hush!' said 'Tilda. 'Hem! Say, come in.'

'Come in,' cried Miss Squeers faintly. And in walked Nicholas.

'Good-evening,' said that young gentleman, all unconscious of his conquest. 'I understood from Mr Squeers that—'

'Oh yes; it's all right,' interposed Miss Squeers. 'Father don't tea with us, but you won't mind that, I dare say.' (This was said archly.)

Nicholas opened his eyes at this, but he turned the matter off very coolly—not caring, particularly, about anything just then—and went through the ceremony of introduction to the miller's daughter with so much grace, that that young lady was lost in admiration.

'We are only waiting for one more gentleman,' said Miss Squeers, taking off the teapot lid, and looking in, to see how the tea was getting on.

It was matter of equal moment to Nicholas whether they were waiting for one gentleman or twenty, so he received the intelligence with perfect unconcern; and, being out of spirits, and not seeing any especial reason why he should make himself agreeable, looked out of the window and sighed involuntarily.

As luck would have it, Miss Squeers's friend was of a playful turn, and hearing Nicholas sigh, she took it into her head to rally the lovers on their lowness of spirits.

'But if it's caused by my being here,' said the young lady, 'don't mind me a bit, for I'm quite as bad. You may go on just as you would if you were alone.'

''Tilda,' said Miss Squeers, colouring up to the top row of curls, 'I am ashamed of you;' and here the two friends burst into a variety of giggles, and glanced from time to time, over the tops of their pocket-handkerchiefs, at Nicholas, who from a state of unmixed astonishment, gradually fell into one of irrepressible laughter—occasioned, partly by the bare notion of his being in love with Miss Squeers, and partly by the preposterous appearance and behaviour of the two girls. These two causes of merriment, taken together, struck him as being so keenly ridiculous, that, despite his miserable condition, he laughed till he was thoroughly exhausted.

'Well,' thought Nicholas, 'as I am here, and seem expected, for some reason or other, to be amiable, it's of no use looking like a goose. I may as well accommodate myself to the company.'

We blush to tell it; but his youthful spirits and vivacity getting, for the time, the better of his sad thoughts, he no sooner formed this resolution than he saluted Miss Squeers and the friend with great gallantry, and drawing a chair to the tea-table, began to make himself more at home than in all probability an usher has ever done in his employer's house since ushers were first invented.

The ladies were in the full delight of this altered behaviour on the part of Mr Nickleby, when the expected swain arrived, with his hair very damp from recent washing, and a clean shirt, whereof the collar might have belonged to some giant ancestor, forming, together with a white waistcoat of similar dimensions, the chief ornament of his person.

'Well, John,' said Miss Matilda Price (which, by-the-bye, was the name of the miller's daughter).

'Weel,' said John with a grin that even the collar could not conceal.

'I beg your pardon,' interposed Miss Squeers, hastening to do the honours. 'Mr Nickleby—Mr John Browdie.'

'Servant, sir,' said John, who was something over six feet high, with a face and body rather above the due proportion than below it.

'Yours to command, sir,' replied Nicholas, making fearful ravages on the bread and butter.

Mr Browdie was not a gentleman of great conversational powers, so he grinned twice more, and having now bestowed his customary mark of recognition on every person in company, grinned at nothing in particular, and helped himself to food.

'Old wooman awa', bean't she?' said Mr Browdie, with his mouth full.

Miss Squeers nodded assent.

Mr Browdie gave a grin of special width, as if he thought that really was something to laugh at, and went to work at the bread and butter with increased vigour. It was quite a sight to behold how he and Nicholas emptied the plate between them.

'Ye wean't get bread and butther ev'ry neight, I expect, mun,' said Mr Browdie, after he had sat staring at Nicholas a long time over the empty plate.

Nicholas bit his lip, and coloured, but affected not to hear the remark.

'Ecod,' said Mr Browdie, laughing boisterously, 'they dean't put too much intiv'em. Ye'll be nowt but skeen and boans if you stop here long eneaf. Ho! ho! ho!'

'You are facetious, sir,' said Nicholas, scornfully.

'Na; I dean't know,' replied Mr Browdie, 'but t'oother teacher, 'cod he wur a learn 'un, he wur.' The recollection of the last teacher's leanness seemed to afford Mr Browdie the most exquisite delight, for he laughed until he found it necessary to apply his coat-cuffs to his eyes.

'I don't know whether your perceptions are quite keen enough, Mr Browdie, to enable you to understand that your remarks are offensive,' said Nicholas in a towering passion, 'but if they are, have the goodness to—'

'If you say another word, John,' shrieked Miss Price, stopping her admirer's mouth as he was about to interrupt, 'only half a word, I'll never forgive you, or speak to you again.'

'Weel, my lass, I dean't care aboot 'un,' said the corn-factor, bestowing a hearty kiss on Miss Matilda; 'let 'un gang on, let 'un gang on.'

It now became Miss Squeers's turn to intercede with Nicholas, which she did with many symptoms of alarm and horror; the effect of the double intercession was, that he and John Browdie shook hands across the table with much gravity; and such was the imposing nature of the ceremonial, that Miss Squeers was overcome and shed tears.

'What's the matter, Fanny?' said Miss Price.

'Nothing, 'Tilda,' replied Miss Squeers, sobbing.

'There never was any danger,' said Miss Price, 'was there, Mr Nickleby?'

'None at all,' replied Nicholas. 'Absurd.'

'That's right,' whispered Miss Price, 'say something kind to her, and she'll soon come round. Here! Shall John and I go into the little kitchen, and come back presently?'

'Not on any account,' rejoined Nicholas, quite alarmed at the proposition. 'What on earth should you do that for?'

'Well,' said Miss Price, beckoning him aside, and speaking with some degree of contempt—'you ARE a one to keep company.'

'What do you mean?' said Nicholas; 'I am not a one to keep company at all—here at all events. I can't make this out.'

'No, nor I neither,' rejoined Miss Price; 'but men are always fickle, and always were, and always will be; that I can make out, very easily.'

'Fickle!' cried Nicholas; 'what do you suppose? You don't mean to say that you think—'

'Oh no, I think nothing at all,' retorted Miss Price, pettishly. 'Look at her, dressed so beautiful and looking so well—really ALMOST handsome. I am ashamed at you.'

'My dear girl, what have I got to do with her dressing beautifully or looking well?' inquired Nicholas.

'Come, don't call me a dear girl,' said Miss Price—smiling a little though, for she was pretty, and a coquette too in her small way, and Nicholas was good-looking, and she supposed him the property of somebody else, which were all reasons why she should be gratified to think she had made an impression on him,—'or Fanny will be saying it's my fault. Come; we're going to have a game at cards.' Pronouncing these last words aloud, she tripped away and rejoined the big Yorkshireman.

This was wholly unintelligible to Nicholas, who had no other distinct impression on his mind at the moment, than that Miss Squeers was an ordinary-looking girl, and her friend Miss Price a pretty one; but he had not time to enlighten himself by reflection, for the hearth being by this time swept up, and the candle snuffed, they sat down to play speculation.

'There are only four of us, 'Tilda,' said Miss Squeers, looking slyly at Nicholas; 'so we had better go partners, two against two.'

'What do you say, Mr Nickleby?' inquired Miss Price.

'With all the pleasure in life,' replied Nicholas. And so saying, quite unconscious of his heinous offence, he amalgamated into one common heap those portions of a Dotheboys Hall card of terms, which represented his own counters, and those allotted to Miss Price, respectively.

'Mr Browdie,' said Miss Squeers hysterically, 'shall we make a bank against them?'

The Yorkshireman assented—apparently quite overwhelmed by the new usher's impudence—and Miss Squeers darted a spiteful look at her friend, and giggled convulsively.

The deal fell to Nicholas, and the hand prospered.

'We intend to win everything,' said he.

''Tilda HAS won something she didn't expect, I think, haven't you, dear?' said Miss Squeers, maliciously.

'Only a dozen and eight, love,' replied Miss Price, affecting to take the question in a literal sense.

'How dull you are tonight!' sneered Miss Squeers.

'No, indeed,' replied Miss Price, 'I am in excellent spirits. I was thinking YOU seemed out of sorts.'

'Me!' cried Miss Squeers, biting her lips, and trembling with very jealousy. 'Oh no!'

'That's well,' remarked Miss Price. 'Your hair's coming out of curl, dear.'

'Never mind me,' tittered Miss Squeers; 'you had better attend to your partner.'

'Thank you for reminding her,' said Nicholas. 'So she had.'

The Yorkshireman flattened his nose, once or twice, with his clenched fist, as if to keep his hand in, till he had an opportunity of exercising it upon the features of some other gentleman; and Miss Squeers tossed her head with such indignation, that the gust of wind raised by the multitudinous curls in motion, nearly blew the candle out.

'I never had such luck, really,' exclaimed coquettish Miss Price, after another hand or two. 'It's all along of you, Mr Nickleby, I think. I should like to have you for a partner always.'

'I wish you had.'

'You'll have a bad wife, though, if you always win at cards,' said Miss Price.

'Not if your wish is gratified,' replied Nicholas. 'I am sure I shall have a good one in that case.'

To see how Miss Squeers tossed her head, and the corn-factor flattened his nose, while this conversation was carrying on! It would have been worth a small annuity to have beheld that; let alone Miss Price's evident joy at making them jealous, and Nicholas Nickleby's happy unconsciousness of making anybody uncomfortable.

'We have all the talking to ourselves, it seems,' said Nicholas, looking good-humouredly round the table as he took up the cards for a fresh deal.

'You do it so well,' tittered Miss Squeers, 'that it would be a pity to interrupt, wouldn't it, Mr Browdie? He! he! he!'

'Nay,' said Nicholas, 'we do it in default of having anybody else to talk to.'

'We'll talk to you, you know, if you'll say anything,' said Miss Price.

'Thank you, 'Tilda, dear,' retorted Miss Squeers, majestically.

'Or you can talk to each other, if you don't choose to talk to us,' said Miss Price, rallying her dear friend. 'John, why don't you say something?'

'Say summat?' repeated the Yorkshireman.

'Ay, and not sit there so silent and glum.'

'Weel, then!' said the Yorkshireman, striking the table heavily with his fist, 'what I say's this—Dang my boans and boddy, if I stan' this ony longer. Do ye gang whoam wi' me, and do yon loight an' toight young whipster look sharp out for a brokken head, next time he cums under my hond.'

'Mercy on us, what's all this?' cried Miss Price, in affected astonishment.

'Cum whoam, tell 'e, cum whoam,' replied the Yorkshireman, sternly. And as he delivered the reply, Miss Squeers burst into a shower of tears; arising in part from desperate vexation, and in part from an impotent desire to lacerate somebody's countenance with her fair finger-nails.

This state of things had been brought about by divers means and workings. Miss Squeers had brought it about, by aspiring to the high state and condition of being matrimonially engaged, without good grounds for so doing; Miss Price had brought it about, by indulging in three motives of action: first, a desire to punish her friend for laying claim to a rivalship in dignity, having no good title: secondly, the gratification of her own vanity, in receiving the compliments of a smart young man: and thirdly, a wish to convince the corn-factor of the great danger he ran, in deferring the celebration of their expected nuptials; while Nicholas had brought it about, by half an hour's gaiety and thoughtlessness, and a very sincere desire to avoid the imputation of inclining at all to Miss Squeers. So the means employed, and the end produced, were alike the most natural in the world; for young ladies will look forward to being married, and will jostle each other in the race to the altar, and will avail themselves of all opportunities of displaying their own attractions to the best advantage, down to the very end of time, as they have done from its beginning.

'Why, and here's Fanny in tears now!' exclaimed Miss Price, as if in fresh amazement. 'What can be the matter?'

'Oh! you don't know, miss, of course you don't know. Pray don't trouble yourself to inquire,' said Miss Squeers, producing that change of countenance which children call making a face.

'Well, I'm sure!' exclaimed Miss Price.

'And who cares whether you are sure or not, ma'am?' retorted Miss Squeers, making another face.

'You are monstrous polite, ma'am,' said Miss Price.

'I shall not come to you to take lessons in the art, ma'am!' retorted Miss Squeers.

'You needn't take the trouble to make yourself plainer than you are, ma'am, however,' rejoined Miss Price, 'because that's quite unnecessary.'

Miss Squeers, in reply, turned very red, and thanked God that she hadn't got the bold faces of some people. Miss Price, in rejoinder, congratulated herself upon not being possessed of the envious feeling of other people; whereupon Miss Squeers made some general remark touching the danger of associating with low persons; in which Miss Price entirely coincided: observing that it was very true indeed, and she had thought so a long time.

''Tilda,' exclaimed Miss Squeers with dignity, 'I hate you.'

'Ah! There's no love lost between us, I assure you,' said Miss Price, tying her bonnet strings with a jerk. 'You'll cry your eyes out, when I'm gone; you know you will.'

'I scorn your words, Minx,' said Miss Squeers.

'You pay me a great compliment when you say so,' answered the miller's daughter, curtseying very low. 'Wish you a very good-night, ma'am, and pleasant dreams attend your sleep!'

With this parting benediction, Miss Price swept from the room, followed by the huge Yorkshireman, who exchanged with Nicholas, at parting, that peculiarly expressive scowl with which the cut-and-thrust counts, in melodramatic performances, inform each other they will meet again.

They were no sooner gone, than Miss Squeers fulfilled the prediction of her quondam friend by giving vent to a most copious burst of tears, and uttering various dismal lamentations and incoherent words. Nicholas stood looking on for a few seconds, rather doubtful what to do, but feeling uncertain whether the fit would end in his being embraced, or scratched, and considering that either infliction would be equally agreeable, he walked off very quietly while Miss Squeers was moaning in her pocket-handkerchief.

'This is one consequence,' thought Nicholas, when he had groped his way to the dark sleeping-room, 'of my cursed readiness to adapt myself to any society in which chance carries me. If I had sat mute and motionless, as I might have done, this would not have happened.'

He listened for a few minutes, but all was quiet.

'I was glad,' he murmured, 'to grasp at any relief from the sight of this dreadful place, or the presence of its vile master. I have set these people by the ears, and made two new enemies, where, Heaven knows, I needed none. Well, it is a just punishment for having forgotten, even for an hour, what is around me now!'

So saying, he felt his way among the throng of weary-hearted sleepers, and crept into his poor bed.

CHAPTER 10

How Mr Ralph Nickleby provided for his Niece and Sister-in-Law

On the second morning after the departure of Nicholas for Yorkshire, Kate Nickleby sat in a very faded chair raised upon a very dusty throne in Miss La Creevy's room, giving that lady a sitting for the portrait upon which she was engaged; and towards the full perfection of which, Miss La Creevy had had the street-door case brought upstairs, in order that she might be the better able to infuse into the counterfeit countenance of Miss Nickleby, a bright salmon flesh-tint which she had originally hit upon while executing the miniature of a young officer therein contained, and which bright salmon flesh-tint was considered, by Miss La Creevy's chief friends and patrons, to be quite a novelty in art: as indeed it was.

'I think I have caught it now,' said Miss La Creevy. 'The very shade! This will be the sweetest portrait I have ever done, certainly.'

'It will be your genius that makes it so, then, I am sure,' replied Kate, smiling.

'No, no, I won't allow that, my dear,' rejoined Miss La Creevy. 'It's a very nice subject—a very nice subject, indeed—though, of course, something depends upon the mode of treatment.'

'And not a little,' observed Kate.

'Why, my dear, you are right there,' said Miss La Creevy, 'in the main you are right there; though I don't allow that it is of such very great importance in the present case. Ah! The difficulties of Art, my dear, are great.'

'They must be, I have no doubt,' said Kate, humouring her good-natured little friend.

'They are beyond anything you can form the faintest conception of,' replied Miss La Creevy. 'What with bringing out eyes with all one's power, and keeping down noses with all one's force, and adding to heads, and taking away teeth altogether, you have no idea of the trouble one little miniature is.'

'The remuneration can scarcely repay you,' said Kate.

'Why, it does not, and that's the truth,' answered Miss La Creevy; 'and then people are so dissatisfied and unreasonable, that, nine times out of ten, there's no pleasure in painting them. Sometimes they say, "Oh, how very serious you have made me look, Miss La Creevy!" and at others, "La, Miss La Creevy, how very smirking!" when the very essence of a good portrait is, that it must be either serious or smirking, or it's no portrait at all.'

'Indeed!' said Kate, laughing.

'Certainly, my dear; because the sitters are always either the one or the other,' replied Miss La Creevy. 'Look at the Royal Academy! All those beautiful shiny portraits of gentlemen in black velvet waistcoats, with their fists doubled up on round tables, or marble slabs, are serious, you know; and all the ladies who are playing with little parasols, or little dogs, or little children—it's the same rule in art, only varying the objects—are smirking. In fact,' said Miss La Creevy, sinking her voice to a confidential whisper, 'there are only two styles of portrait painting; the serious and the smirk; and we always use the serious for professional people (except actors sometimes), and the smirk for private ladies and gentlemen who don't care so much about looking clever.'

Kate seemed highly amused by this information, and Miss La Creevy went on painting and talking, with immovable complacency.

'What a number of officers you seem to paint!' said Kate, availing herself of a pause in the discourse, and glancing round the room.

'Number of what, child?' inquired Miss La Creevy, looking up from her work. 'Character portraits, oh yes—they're not real military men, you know.'

'No!'

'Bless your heart, of course not; only clerks and that, who hire a uniform coat to be painted in, and send it here in a carpet bag. Some artists,' said Miss La Creevy, 'keep a red coat, and charge seven-and-sixpence extra for hire and carmine; but I don't do that myself, for I don't consider it legitimate.'

Drawing herself up, as though she plumed herself greatly upon not resorting to these lures to catch sitters, Miss La Creevy applied herself, more intently, to her task: only raising her head occasionally, to look with unspeakable satisfaction at some touch she had just put in: and now and then giving Miss Nickleby to understand what particular feature she was at work upon, at the moment; 'not,' she expressly observed, 'that you should make it up for painting, my dear, but because it's our custom sometimes to tell sitters what part we are upon, in order that if there's any particular expression they want introduced, they may throw it in, at the time, you know.'

'And when,' said Miss La Creevy, after a long silence, to wit, an interval of full a minute and a half, 'when do you expect to see your uncle again?'

'I scarcely know; I had expected to have seen him before now,' replied Kate. 'Soon I hope, for this state of uncertainty is worse than anything.'

'I suppose he has money, hasn't he?' inquired Miss La Creevy.

'He is very rich, I have heard,' rejoined Kate. 'I don't know that he is, but I believe so.'

'Ah, you may depend upon it he is, or he wouldn't be so surly,' remarked Miss La Creevy, who was an odd little mixture of shrewdness and simplicity. 'When a man's a bear, he is generally pretty independent.'

'His manner is rough,' said Kate.

'Rough!' cried Miss La Creevy, 'a porcupine's a featherbed to him! I never met with such a cross-grained old savage.'

'It is only his manner, I believe,' observed Kate, timidly; 'he was disappointed in early life, I think I have heard, or has had his temper soured by some calamity. I should be sorry to think ill of him until I knew he deserved it.'

'Well; that's very right and proper,' observed the miniature painter, 'and Heaven forbid that I should be the cause of your doing so! But, now, mightn't he, without feeling it himself, make you and your mama some nice little allowance that would keep you both comfortable until you were well married, and be a little fortune to her afterwards? What would a hundred a year for instance, be to him?'

'I don't know what it would be to him,' said Kate, with energy, 'but it would be that to me I would rather die than take.'

'Heyday!' cried Miss La Creevy.

'A dependence upon him,' said Kate, 'would embitter my whole life. I should feel begging a far less degradation.'

'Well!' exclaimed Miss La Creevy. 'This of a relation whom you will not hear an indifferent person speak ill of, my dear, sounds oddly enough, I confess.'

'I dare say it does,' replied Kate, speaking more gently, 'indeed I am sure it must. I—I—only mean that with the feelings and recollection of better times upon me, I could not bear to live on anybody's bounty—not his particularly, but anybody's.'

Miss La Creevy looked slyly at her companion, as if she doubted whether Ralph himself were not the subject of dislike, but seeing that her young friend was distressed, made no remark.

'I only ask of him,' continued Kate, whose tears fell while she spoke, 'that he will move so little out of his way, in my behalf, as to enable me by his recommendation—only by his recommendation—to earn, literally, my bread and remain with my mother. Whether we shall ever taste happiness again, depends upon the fortunes of my dear brother; but if he will do this, and Nicholas only tells us that he is well and cheerful, I shall be contented.'

As she ceased to speak, there was a rustling behind the screen which stood between her and the door, and some person knocked at the wainscot.'

'Come in, whoever it is!' cried Miss La Creevy.

The person complied, and, coming forward at once, gave to view the form and features of no less an individual than Mr Ralph Nickleby himself.

'Your servant, ladies,' said Ralph, looking sharply at them by turns. 'You were talking so loud, that I was unable to make you hear.'

When the man of business had a more than commonly vicious snarl lurking at his heart, he had a trick of almost concealing his eyes under their thick and protruding brows, for an instant, and then displaying them in their full keenness. As he did so now, and tried to keep down the smile which parted his thin compressed lips, and puckered up the bad lines about his mouth, they both felt certain that some part, if not the whole, of their recent conversation, had been overheard.

'I called in, on my way upstairs, more than half expecting to find you here,' said Ralph, addressing his niece, and looking contemptuously at the portrait. 'Is that my niece's portrait, ma'am?'

'Yes it is, Mr Nickleby,' said Miss La Creevy, with a very sprightly air, 'and between you and me and the post, sir, it will be a very nice portrait too, though I say it who am the painter.'

'Don't trouble yourself to show it to me, ma'am,' cried Ralph, moving away, 'I have no eye for likenesses. Is it nearly finished?'

'Why, yes,' replied Miss La Creevy, considering with the pencil end of her brush in her mouth. 'Two sittings more will—'

'Have them at once, ma'am,' said Ralph. 'She'll have no time to idle over fooleries after tomorrow. Work, ma'am, work; we must all work. Have you let your lodgings, ma'am?'

'I have not put a bill up yet, sir.'

'Put it up at once, ma'am; they won't want the rooms after this week, or if they do, can't pay for them. Now, my dear, if you're ready, we'll lose no more time.'

With an assumption of kindness which sat worse upon him even than his usual manner, Mr Ralph Nickleby motioned to the young lady to precede him, and bowing gravely to Miss La Creevy, closed the door and followed upstairs, where Mrs Nickleby received him with many expressions of regard. Stopping them somewhat abruptly, Ralph waved his hand with an impatient gesture, and proceeded to the object of his visit.

'I have found a situation for your daughter, ma'am,' said Ralph.

'Well,' replied Mrs Nickleby. 'Now, I will say that that is only just what I have expected of you. "Depend upon it," I said to Kate, only yesterday morning at breakfast, "that after your uncle has provided, in that most ready manner, for Nicholas, he will not leave us until he has done at least the same for you." These were my very words, as near as I remember. Kate, my dear, why don't you thank your—'

'Let me proceed, ma'am, pray,' said Ralph, interrupting his sister-in-law in the full torrent of her discourse.

'Kate, my love, let your uncle proceed,' said Mrs Nickleby.

'I am most anxious that he should, mama,' rejoined Kate.

'Well, my dear, if you are anxious that he should, you had better allow your uncle to say what he has to say, without interruption,' observed Mrs Nickleby, with many small nods and frowns. 'Your uncle's time is very valuable, my dear; and however desirous you may be—and naturally desirous, as I am sure any affectionate relations who have seen so little of your uncle as we have, must naturally be to protract the pleasure of having him among us, still, we are bound not to be selfish, but to take into consideration the important nature of his occupations in the city.'

'I am very much obliged to you, ma'am,' said Ralph with a scarcely perceptible sneer. 'An absence of business habits in this family leads, apparently, to a great waste of words before business—when it does come under consideration—is arrived at, at all.'

'I fear it is so indeed,' replied Mrs Nickleby with a sigh. 'Your poor brother—'

'My poor brother, ma'am,' interposed Ralph tartly, 'had no idea what business was—was unacquainted, I verily believe, with the very meaning of the word.'

'I fear he was,' said Mrs Nickleby, with her handkerchief to her eyes. 'If it hadn't been for me, I don't know what would have become of him.'

What strange creatures we are! The slight bait so skilfully thrown out by Ralph, on their first interview, was dangling on the hook yet. At every small deprivation or discomfort which presented itself in the course of the four-and-twenty hours to remind her of her straitened and altered circumstances, peevish visions of her dower of one thousand pounds had arisen before Mrs Nickleby's mind, until, at last, she had come to persuade herself that of all her late husband's creditors she was the worst used and the most to be pitied. And yet, she had loved him dearly for many years, and had no greater share of selfishness than is the usual lot of mortals. Such is the irritability of sudden poverty. A decent annuity would have restored her thoughts to their old train, at once.

'Repining is of no use, ma'am,' said Ralph. 'Of all fruitless errands, sending a tear to look after a day that is gone is the most fruitless.'

'So it is,' sobbed Mrs Nickleby. 'So it is.'

'As you feel so keenly, in your own purse and person, the consequences of inattention to business, ma'am,' said Ralph, 'I am sure you will impress upon your children the necessity of attaching themselves to it early in life.'

'Of course I must see that,' rejoined Mrs Nickleby. 'Sad experience, you know, brother-in-law.—Kate, my dear, put that down in the next letter to Nicholas, or remind me to do it if I write.'

Ralph paused for a few moments, and seeing that he had now made pretty sure of the mother, in case the daughter objected to his proposition, went on to say:

'The situation that I have made interest to procure, ma'am, is with—with a milliner and dressmaker, in short.'

'A milliner!' cried Mrs Nickleby.

'A milliner and dressmaker, ma'am,' replied Ralph. 'Dressmakers in London, as I need not remind you, ma'am, who are so well acquainted with all matters in the ordinary routine of life, make large fortunes, keep equipages, and become persons of great wealth and fortune.'

Now, the first idea called up in Mrs Nickleby's mind by the words milliner and dressmaker were connected with certain wicker baskets lined with black oilskin, which she remembered to have seen carried to and fro in the streets; but, as Ralph proceeded, these disappeared, and were replaced by visions of large houses at the West end, neat private carriages, and a banker's book; all of which images succeeded each other with such rapidity, that he had no sooner finished speaking, than she nodded her head and said 'Very true,' with great appearance of satisfaction.

'What your uncle says is very true, Kate, my dear,' said Mrs Nickleby. 'I recollect when your poor papa and I came to town after we were married, that a young lady brought me home a chip cottage-bonnet, with white and green trimming, and green persian lining, in her own carriage, which drove up to the door full gallop;—at least, I am not quite certain whether it was her own carriage or a hackney chariot, but I remember very well that the horse dropped down dead as he was turning round, and that your poor papa said he hadn't had any corn for a fortnight.'

This anecdote, so strikingly illustrative of the opulence of milliners, was not received with any great demonstration of feeling, inasmuch as Kate hung down her head while it was relating, and Ralph manifested very intelligible symptoms of extreme impatience.

'The lady's name,' said Ralph, hastily striking in, 'is Mantalini—Madame Mantalini. I know her. She lives near Cavendish Square. If your daughter is disposed to try after the situation, I'll take her there directly.'

'Have you nothing to say to your uncle, my love?' inquired Mrs Nickleby.

'A great deal,' replied Kate; 'but not now. I would rather speak to him when we are alone;—it will save his time if I thank him and say what I wish to say to him, as we walk along.'

With these words, Kate hurried away, to hide the traces of emotion that were stealing down her face, and to prepare herself for the walk, while Mrs Nickleby amused her brother-in-law by giving him, with many tears, a detailed account of the dimensions of a rosewood cabinet piano they had possessed in their days of affluence, together with a minute description of eight drawing-room chairs, with turned legs and green chintz squabs to match the curtains, which had cost two pounds fifteen shillings apiece, and had gone at the sale for a mere nothing.

These reminiscences were at length cut short by Kate's return in her walking dress, when Ralph, who had been fretting and fuming during the whole time of her absence, lost no time, and used very little ceremony, in descending into the street.

'Now,' he said, taking her arm, 'walk as fast as you can, and you'll get into the step that you'll have to walk to business with, every morning.' So saying, he led Kate off, at a good round pace, towards Cavendish Square.

'I am very much obliged to you, uncle,' said the young lady, after they had hurried on in silence for some time; 'very.'

'I'm glad to hear it,' said Ralph. 'I hope you'll do your duty.'

'I will try to please, uncle,' replied Kate: 'indeed I—'

'Don't begin to cry,' growled Ralph; 'I hate crying.'

'It's very foolish, I know, uncle,' began poor Kate.

'It is,' replied Ralph, stopping her short, 'and very affected besides. Let me see no more of it.'

Perhaps this was not the best way to dry the tears of a young and sensitive female, about to make her first entry on an entirely new scene of life, among cold and uninterested strangers; but it had its effect notwithstanding. Kate coloured deeply, breathed quickly for a few moments, and then walked on with a firmer and more determined step.

It was a curious contrast to see how the timid country girl shrunk through the crowd that hurried up and down the streets, giving way to the press of people, and clinging closely to Ralph as though she feared to lose him in the throng; and how the stern and hard-featured man of business went doggedly on, elbowing the passengers aside, and now and then exchanging a gruff salutation with some passing acquaintance, who turned to look back upon his pretty charge, with looks expressive of surprise, and seemed to wonder at the ill-assorted companionship. But, it would have been a stranger contrast still, to have read the hearts that were beating side by side; to have laid bare the gentle innocence of the one, and the rugged villainy of the other; to have hung upon the guileless thoughts of the affectionate girl, and been amazed that, among all the wily plots and calculations of the old man, there should not be one word or figure denoting thought of death or of the grave. But so it was; and stranger still—though this is a thing of every day—the warm young heart palpitated with a thousand anxieties and apprehensions, while that of the old worldly man lay rusting in its cell, beating only as a piece of cunning mechanism, and yielding no one throb of hope, or fear, or love, or care, for any living thing.

'Uncle,' said Kate, when she judged they must be near their destination, 'I must ask one question of you. I am to live at home?'

'At home!' replied Ralph; 'where's that?'

'I mean with my mother—THE WIDOW,' said Kate emphatically.

'You will live, to all intents and purposes, here,' rejoined Ralph; 'for here you will take your meals, and here you will be from morning till night—occasionally perhaps till morning again.'

'But at night, I mean,' said Kate; 'I cannot leave her, uncle. I must have some place that I can call a home; it will be wherever she is, you know, and may be a very humble one.'

'May be!' said Ralph, walking faster, in the impatience provoked by the remark; 'must be, you mean. May be a humble one! Is the girl mad?'

'The word slipped from my lips, I did not mean it indeed,' urged Kate.

'I hope not,' said Ralph.

'But my question, uncle; you have not answered it.'

'Why, I anticipated something of the kind,' said Ralph; 'and—though I object very strongly, mind—have provided against it. I spoke of you as an out-of-door worker; so you will go to this home that may be humble, every night.'

There was comfort in this. Kate poured forth many thanks for her uncle's consideration, which Ralph received as if he had deserved them all, and they arrived without any further conversation at the dressmaker's door, which displayed a very large plate, with Madame Mantalini's name and occupation, and was approached by a handsome flight of steps. There was a shop to the house, but it was let off to an importer of otto of roses. Madame Mantalini's shows-rooms were on the first-floor: a fact which was notified to the nobility and gentry by the casual exhibition, near the handsomely curtained windows, of two or three elegant bonnets of the newest fashion, and some costly garments in the most approved taste.

A liveried footman opened the door, and in reply to Ralph's inquiry whether Madame Mantalini was at home, ushered them, through a handsome hall and up a spacious staircase, into the show saloon, which comprised two spacious drawing-rooms, and exhibited an immense variety of superb dresses and materials for dresses: some arranged on stands, others laid carelessly on sofas, and others again, scattered over the carpet, hanging on the cheval-glasses, or mingling, in some other way, with the rich furniture of various descriptions, which was profusely displayed.

They waited here a much longer time than was agreeable to Mr Ralph Nickleby, who eyed the gaudy frippery about him with very little concern, and was at length about to pull the bell, when a gentleman suddenly popped his head into the room, and, seeing somebody there, as suddenly popped it out again.

'Here. Hollo!' cried Ralph. 'Who's that?'

At the sound of Ralph's voice, the head reappeared, and the mouth, displaying a very long row of very white teeth, uttered in a mincing tone the words, 'Demmit. What, Nickleby! oh, demmit!' Having uttered which ejaculations, the gentleman advanced, and shook hands with Ralph, with great warmth. He was dressed in a gorgeous morning gown, with a waistcoat and Turkish trousers of the same pattern, a pink silk neckerchief, and bright green slippers, and had a very copious watch-chain wound round his body. Moreover, he had whiskers and a moustache, both dyed black and gracefully curled.

'Demmit, you don't mean to say you want me, do you, demmit?' said this gentleman, smiting Ralph on the shoulder.

'Not yet,' said Ralph, sarcastically.

'Ha! ha! demmit,' cried the gentleman; when, wheeling round to laugh with greater elegance, he encountered Kate Nickleby, who was standing near.

'My niece,' said Ralph.

'I remember,' said the gentleman, striking his nose with the knuckle of his forefinger as a chastening for his forgetfulness. 'Demmit, I remember what you come for. Step this way, Nickleby; my dear, will you follow me? Ha! ha! They all follow me, Nickleby; always did, demmit, always.'

Giving loose to the playfulness of his imagination, after this fashion, the gentleman led the way to a private sitting-room on the second floor, scarcely less elegantly furnished than the apartment below, where the presence of a silver coffee-pot, an egg-shell, and sloppy china for one, seemed to show that he had just breakfasted.

'Sit down, my dear,' said the gentleman: first staring Miss Nickleby out of countenance, and then grinning in delight at the achievement. 'This cursed high room takes one's breath away. These infernal sky parlours—I'm afraid I must move, Nickleby.'

'I would, by all means,' replied Ralph, looking bitterly round.

'What a demd rum fellow you are, Nickleby,' said the gentleman, 'the demdest, longest-headed, queerest-tempered old coiner of gold and silver ever was—demmit.'

Having complimented Ralph to this effect, the gentleman rang the bell, and stared at Miss Nickleby until it was answered, when he left off to bid the man desire his mistress to come directly; after which, he began again, and left off no more until Madame Mantalini appeared.

The dressmaker was a buxom person, handsomely dressed and rather good-looking, but much older than the gentleman in the Turkish trousers, whom she had wedded some six months before. His name was originally Muntle; but it had been converted, by an easy transition, into Mantalini: the lady rightly considering that an English appellation would be of serious injury to the business. He had married on his whiskers; upon which property he had previously subsisted, in a genteel manner, for some years; and which he had recently improved, after patient cultivation by the addition of a moustache, which promised to secure him an easy independence: his share in the labours of the business being at present confined to spending the money, and occasionally, when that ran short, driving to Mr Ralph Nickleby to procure discount—at a percentage—for the customers' bills.

'My life,' said Mr Mantalini, 'what a demd devil of a time you have been!'

'I didn't even know Mr Nickleby was here, my love,' said Madame Mantalini.

'Then what a doubly demd infernal rascal that footman must be, my soul,' remonstrated Mr Mantalini.

'My dear,' said Madame, 'that is entirely your fault.'

'My fault, my heart's joy?'

'Certainly,' returned the lady; 'what can you expect, dearest, if you will not correct the man?'

'Correct the man, my soul's delight!'

'Yes; I am sure he wants speaking to, badly enough,' said Madame, pouting.

'Then do not vex itself,' said Mr Mantalini; 'he shall be horse-whipped till he cries out demnebly.' With this promise Mr Mantalini kissed Madame Mantalini, and, after that performance, Madame Mantalini pulled Mr Mantalini playfully by the ear: which done, they descended to business.

'Now, ma'am,' said Ralph, who had looked on, at all this, with such scorn as few men can express in looks, 'this is my niece.'

'Just so, Mr Nickleby,' replied Madame Mantalini, surveying Kate from head to foot, and back again. 'Can you speak French, child?'

'Yes, ma'am,' replied Kate, not daring to look up; for she felt that the eyes of the odious man in the dressing-gown were directed towards her.

'Like a demd native?' asked the husband.

Miss Nickleby offered no reply to this inquiry, but turned her back upon the questioner, as if addressing herself to make answer to what his wife might demand.

'We keep twenty young women constantly employed in the establishment,' said Madame.

'Indeed, ma'am!' replied Kate, timidly.

'Yes; and some of 'em demd handsome, too,' said the master.

'Mantalini!' exclaimed his wife, in an awful voice.

'My senses' idol!' said Mantalini.

'Do you wish to break my heart?'

'Not for twenty thousand hemispheres populated with—with—with little ballet-dancers,' replied Mantalini in a poetical strain.

'Then you will, if you persevere in that mode of speaking,' said his wife. 'What can Mr Nickleby think when he hears you?'

'Oh! Nothing, ma'am, nothing,' replied Ralph. 'I know his amiable nature, and yours,—mere little remarks that give a zest to your daily intercourse—lovers' quarrels that add sweetness to those domestic joys which promise to last so long—that's all; that's all.'

If an iron door could be supposed to quarrel with its hinges, and to make a firm resolution to open with slow obstinacy, and grind them to powder in the process, it would emit a pleasanter sound in so doing, than did these words in the rough and bitter voice in which they were uttered by Ralph. Even Mr Mantalini felt their influence, and turning affrighted round, exclaimed: 'What a demd horrid croaking!'

'You will pay no attention, if you please, to what Mr Mantalini says,' observed his wife, addressing Miss Nickleby.

'I do not, ma'am,' said Kate, with quiet contempt.

'Mr Mantalini knows nothing whatever about any of the young women,' continued Madame, looking at her husband, and speaking to Kate. 'If he has seen any of them, he must have seen them in the street, going to, or returning from, their work, and not here. He was never even in the room. I do not allow it. What hours of work have you been accustomed to?'

'I have never yet been accustomed to work at all, ma'am,' replied Kate, in a low voice.

'For which reason she'll work all the better now,' said Ralph, putting in a word, lest this confession should injure the negotiation.

'I hope so,' returned Madame Mantalini; 'our hours are from nine to nine, with extra work when we're very full of business, for which I allow payment as overtime.'

Kate bowed her head, to intimate that she heard, and was satisfied.

'Your meals,' continued Madame Mantalini, 'that is, dinner and tea, you will take here. I should think your wages would average from five to seven shillings a week; but I can't give you any certain information on that point, until I see what you can do.'

Kate bowed her head again.

'If you're ready to come,' said Madame Mantalini, 'you had better begin on Monday morning at nine exactly, and Miss Knag the forewoman shall then have directions to try you with some easy work at first. Is there anything more, Mr Nickleby?'

'Nothing more, ma'am,' replied Ralph, rising.

'Then I believe that's all,' said the lady. Having arrived at this natural conclusion, she looked at the door, as if she wished to be gone, but hesitated notwithstanding, as though unwilling to leave to Mr Mantalini the sole honour of showing them downstairs. Ralph relieved her from her perplexity by taking his departure without delay: Madame Mantalini making many gracious inquiries why he never came to see them; and Mr Mantalini anathematising the stairs with great volubility as he followed them down, in the hope of inducing Kate to look round,—a hope, however, which was destined to remain ungratified.

'There!' said Ralph when they got into the street; 'now you're provided for.'

Kate was about to thank him again, but he stopped her.

'I had some idea,' he said, 'of providing for your mother in a pleasant part of the country—(he had a presentation to some almshouses on the borders of Cornwall, which had occurred to him more than once)—but as you want to be together, I must do something else for her. She has a little money?'

'A very little,' replied Kate.

'A little will go a long way if it's used sparingly,' said Ralph. 'She must see how long she can make it last, living rent free. You leave your lodgings on Saturday?'

'You told us to do so, uncle.'

'Yes; there is a house empty that belongs to me, which I can put you into till it is let, and then, if nothing else turns up, perhaps I shall have another. You must live there.'

'Is it far from here, sir?' inquired Kate.

'Pretty well,' said Ralph; 'in another quarter of the town—at the East end; but I'll send my clerk down to you, at five o'clock on Saturday, to take you there. Goodbye. You know your way? Straight on.'

Coldly shaking his niece's hand, Ralph left her at the top of Regent Street, and turned down a by-thoroughfare, intent on schemes of money-getting. Kate walked sadly back to their lodgings in the Strand.

CHAPTER 11

Newman Noggs inducts Mrs and Miss Nickleby into their New Dwelling in the City

Miss Nickleby's reflections, as she wended her way homewards, were of that desponding nature which the occurrences of the morning had been sufficiently calculated to awaken. Her uncle's was not a manner likely to dispel any doubts or apprehensions she might have formed, in the outset, neither was the glimpse she had had of Madame Mantalini's establishment by any means encouraging. It was with many gloomy forebodings and misgivings, therefore, that she looked forward, with a heavy heart, to the opening of her new career.

If her mother's consolations could have restored her to a pleasanter and more enviable state of mind, there were abundance of them to produce the effect. By the time Kate reached home, the good lady had called to mind two authentic cases of milliners who had been possessed of considerable property, though whether they had acquired it all in business, or had had a capital to start with, or had been lucky and married to advantage, she could not exactly remember. However, as she very logically remarked, there must have been SOME young person in that way of business who had made a fortune without having anything to begin with, and that being taken for granted, why should not Kate do the same? Miss La Creevy, who was a member of the little council, ventured to insinuate some doubts relative to the probability of Miss Nickleby's arriving at this happy consummation in the compass of an ordinary lifetime; but the good lady set that question entirely at rest, by informing them that she had a presentiment on the subject—a species of second-sight with which she had been in the habit of clenching every argument with the deceased Mr Nickleby, and, in nine cases and three-quarters out of every ten, determining it the wrong way.

'I am afraid it is an unhealthy occupation,' said Miss La Creevy. 'I recollect getting three young milliners to sit to me, when I first began to paint, and I remember that they were all very pale and sickly.'

'Oh! that's not a general rule by any means,' observed Mrs Nickleby; 'for I remember, as well as if it was only yesterday, employing one that I was particularly recommended to, to make me a scarlet cloak at the time when scarlet cloaks were fashionable, and she had a very red face—a very red face, indeed.'

'Perhaps she drank,' suggested Miss La Creevy.

'I don't know how that may have been,' returned Mrs Nickleby: 'but I know she had a very red face, so your argument goes for nothing.'

In this manner, and with like powerful reasoning, did the worthy matron meet every little objection that presented itself to the new scheme of the morning. Happy Mrs Nickleby! A project had but to be new, and it came home to her mind, brightly varnished and gilded as a glittering toy.

This question disposed of, Kate communicated her uncle's desire about the empty house, to which Mrs Nickleby assented with equal readiness, characteristically remarking, that, on the fine evenings, it would be a pleasant amusement for her to walk to the West end to fetch her daughter home; and no less characteristically forgetting, that there were such things as wet nights and bad weather to be encountered in almost every week of the year.

'I shall be sorry—truly sorry to leave you, my kind friend,' said Kate, on whom the good feeling of the poor miniature painter had made a deep impression.

'You shall not shake me off, for all that,' replied Miss La Creevy, with as much sprightliness as she could assume. 'I shall see you very often, and come and hear how you get on; and if, in all London, or all the wide world besides, there is no other heart that takes an interest in your welfare, there will be one little lonely woman that prays for it night and day.'

With this, the poor soul, who had a heart big enough for Gog, the guardian genius of London, and enough to spare for Magog to boot, after making a great many extraordinary faces which would have secured her an ample fortune, could she have transferred them to ivory or canvas, sat down in a corner, and had what she termed 'a real good cry.'

But no crying, or talking, or hoping, or fearing, could keep off the dreaded Saturday afternoon, or Newman Noggs either; who, punctual to his time, limped up to the door, and breathed a whiff of cordial gin through the keyhole, exactly as such of the church clocks in the neighbourhood as agreed among themselves about the time, struck five. Newman waited for the last stroke, and then knocked.

'From Mr Ralph Nickleby,' said Newman, announcing his errand, when he got upstairs, with all possible brevity.

'We shall be ready directly,' said Kate. 'We have not much to carry, but I fear we must have a coach.'

'I'll get one,' replied Newman.

'Indeed you shall not trouble yourself,' said Mrs Nickleby.

'I will,' said Newman.

'I can't suffer you to think of such a thing,' said Mrs Nickleby.

'You can't help it,' said Newman.

'Not help it!'

'No; I thought of it as I came along; but didn't get one, thinking you mightn't be ready. I think of a great many things. Nobody can prevent that.'

'Oh yes, I understand you, Mr Noggs,' said Mrs Nickleby. 'Our thoughts are free, of course. Everybody's thoughts are their own, clearly.'

'They wouldn't be, if some people had their way,' muttered Newman.

'Well, no more they would, Mr Noggs, and that's very true,' rejoined Mrs Nickleby. 'Some people to be sure are such—how's your master?'

Newman darted a meaning glance at Kate, and replied with a strong emphasis on the last word of his answer, that Mr Ralph Nickleby was well, and sent his LOVE.

'I am sure we are very much obliged to him,' observed Mrs Nickleby.

'Very,' said Newman. 'I'll tell him so.'

It was no very easy matter to mistake Newman Noggs, after having once seen him, and as Kate, attracted by the singularity of his manner (in which on this occasion, however, there was something respectful and even delicate, notwithstanding the abruptness of his speech), looked at him more closely, she recollected having caught a passing glimpse of that strange figure before.

'Excuse my curiosity,' she said, 'but did I not see you in the coachyard, on the morning my brother went away to Yorkshire?'

Newman cast a wistful glance on Mrs Nickleby and said 'No,' most unblushingly.

'No!' exclaimed Kate, 'I should have said so anywhere.'

'You'd have said wrong,' rejoined Newman. 'It's the first time I've been out for three weeks. I've had the gout.'

Newman was very, very far from having the appearance of a gouty subject, and so Kate could not help thinking; but the conference was cut short by Mrs Nickleby's insisting on having the door shut, lest Mr Noggs should take cold, and further persisting in sending the servant girl for a coach, for fear he should bring on another attack of his disorder. To both conditions, Newman was compelled to yield. Presently, the coach came; and, after many sorrowful farewells, and a great deal of running backwards and forwards across the pavement on the part of Miss La Creevy, in the course of which the yellow turban came into violent contact with sundry foot-passengers, it (that is to say the coach, not the turban) went away again, with the two ladies and their luggage inside; and Newman, despite all Mrs Nickleby's assurances that it would be his death—on the box beside the driver.

They went into the city, turning down by the river side; and, after a long and very slow drive, the streets being crowded at that hour with vehicles of every kind, stopped in front of a large old dingy house in Thames Street: the door and windows of which were so bespattered with mud, that it would have appeared to have been uninhabited for years.

The door of this deserted mansion Newman opened with a key which he took out of his hat—in which, by-the-bye, in consequence of the dilapidated state of his pockets, he deposited everything, and would most likely have carried his money if he had had any—and the coach being discharged, he led the way into the interior of the mansion.

Old, and gloomy, and black, in truth it was, and sullen and dark were the rooms, once so bustling with life and enterprise. There was a wharf behind, opening on the Thames. An empty dog-kennel, some bones of animals, fragments of iron hoops, and staves of old casks, lay strewn about, but no life was stirring there. It was a picture of cold, silent decay.

'This house depresses and chills one,' said Kate, 'and seems as if some blight had fallen on it. If I were superstitious, I should be almost inclined to believe that some dreadful crime had been perpetrated within these old walls, and that the place had never prospered since. How frowning and how dark it looks!'

'Lord, my dear,' replied Mrs Nickleby, 'don't talk in that way, or you'll frighten me to death.'

'It is only my foolish fancy, mama,' said Kate, forcing a smile.

'Well, then, my love, I wish you would keep your foolish fancy to yourself, and not wake up MY foolish fancy to keep it company,' retorted Mrs Nickleby. 'Why didn't you think of all this before—you are so careless—we might have asked Miss La Creevy to keep us company or borrowed a dog, or a thousand things—but it always was the way, and was just the same with your poor dear father. Unless I thought of everything—' This was Mrs Nickleby's usual commencement of a general lamentation, running through a dozen or so of complicated sentences addressed to nobody in particular, and into which she now launched until her breath was exhausted.

Newman appeared not to hear these remarks, but preceded them to a couple of rooms on the first floor, which some kind of attempt had been made to render habitable. In one, were a few chairs, a table, an old hearth-rug, and some faded baize; and a fire was ready laid in the grate. In the other stood an old tent bedstead, and a few scanty articles of chamber furniture.

'Well, my dear,' said Mrs Nickleby, trying to be pleased, 'now isn't this thoughtful and considerate of your uncle? Why, we should not have had anything but the bed we bought yesterday, to lie down upon, if it hadn't been for his thoughtfulness!'

'Very kind, indeed,' replied Kate, looking round.

Newman Noggs did not say that he had hunted up the old furniture they saw, from attic and cellar; or that he had taken in the halfpennyworth of milk for tea that stood upon a shelf, or filled the rusty kettle on the hob, or collected the woodchips from the wharf, or begged the coals. But the notion of Ralph Nickleby having directed it to be done, tickled his fancy so much, that he could not refrain from cracking all his ten fingers in succession: at which performance Mrs Nickleby was rather startled at first, but supposing it to be in some remote manner connected with the gout, did not remark upon.

'We need detain you no longer, I think,' said Kate.

'Is there nothing I can do?' asked Newman.

'Nothing, thank you,' rejoined Miss Nickleby.

'Perhaps, my dear, Mr Noggs would like to drink our healths,' said Mrs Nickleby, fumbling in her reticule for some small coin.

'I think, mama,' said Kate hesitating, and remarking Newman's averted face, 'you would hurt his feelings if you offered it.'

Newman Noggs, bowing to the young lady more like a gentleman than the miserable wretch he seemed, placed his hand upon his breast, and, pausing for a moment, with the air of a man who struggles to speak but is uncertain what to say, quitted the room.

As the jarring echoes of the heavy house-door, closing on its latch, reverberated dismally through the building, Kate felt half tempted to call him back, and beg him to remain a little while; but she was ashamed to own her fears, and Newman Noggs was on his road homewards.

CHAPTER 12

Whereby the Reader will be enabled to trace the further course of Miss Fanny Squeer's Love, and to ascertain whether it ran smooth or otherwise.

It was a fortunate circumstance for Miss Fanny Squeers, that when her worthy papa returned home on the night of the small tea-party, he was what the initiated term 'too far gone' to observe the numerous tokens of extreme vexation of spirit which were plainly visible in her countenance. Being, however, of a rather violent and quarrelsome mood in his cups, it is not impossible that he might have fallen out with her, either on this or some imaginary topic, if the young lady had not, with a foresight and prudence highly commendable, kept a boy up, on purpose, to bear the first brunt of the good gentleman's anger; which, having vented itself in a variety of kicks and cuffs, subsided sufficiently to admit of his being persuaded to go to bed. Which he did with his boots on, and an umbrella under his arm.

The hungry servant attended Miss Squeers in her own room according to custom, to curl her hair, perform the other little offices of her toilet, and administer as much flattery as she could get up, for the purpose; for Miss Squeers was quite lazy enough (and sufficiently vain and frivolous withal) to have been a fine lady; and it was only the arbitrary distinctions of rank and station which prevented her from being one.

'How lovely your hair do curl tonight, miss!' said the handmaiden. 'I declare if it isn't a pity and a shame to brush it out!'

'Hold your tongue!' replied Miss Squeers wrathfully.

Some considerable experience prevented the girl from being at all surprised at any outbreak of ill-temper on the part of Miss Squeers. Having a half-perception of what had occurred in the course of the evening, she changed her mode of making herself agreeable, and proceeded on the indirect tack.

'Well, I couldn't help saying, miss, if you was to kill me for it,' said the attendant, 'that I never see nobody look so vulgar as Miss Price this night.'

Miss Squeers sighed, and composed herself to listen.

'I know it's very wrong in me to say so, miss,' continued the girl, delighted to see the impression she was making, 'Miss Price being a friend of your'n, and all; but she do dress herself out so, and go on in such a manner to get noticed, that—oh—well, if people only saw themselves!'

'What do you mean, Phib?' asked Miss Squeers, looking in her own little glass, where, like most of us, she saw—not herself, but the reflection of some pleasant image in her own brain. 'How you talk!'

'Talk, miss! It's enough to make a Tom cat talk French grammar, only to see how she tosses her head,' replied the handmaid.

'She DOES toss her head,' observed Miss Squeers, with an air of abstraction.

'So vain, and so very—very plain,' said the girl.

'Poor 'Tilda!' sighed Miss Squeers, compassionately.

'And always laying herself out so, to get to be admired,' pursued the servant. 'Oh, dear! It's positive indelicate.'

'I can't allow you to talk in that way, Phib,' said Miss Squeers. "Tilda's friends are low people, and if she don't know any better, it's their fault, and not hers.'

'Well, but you know, miss,' said Phoebe, for which name 'Phib' was used as a patronising abbreviation, 'if she was only to take copy by a friend—oh! if she only knew how wrong she was, and would but set herself right by you, what a nice young woman she might be in time!'

'Phib,' rejoined Miss Squeers, with a stately air, 'it's not proper for me to hear these comparisons drawn; they make 'Tilda look a coarse improper sort of person, and it seems unfriendly in me to listen to them. I would rather you dropped the subject, Phib; at the same time, I must say, that if 'Tilda Price would take pattern by somebody—not me particularly—'

'Oh yes; you, miss,' interposed Phib.

'Well, me, Phib, if you will have it so,' said Miss Squeers. 'I must say, that if she would, she would be all the better for it.'

'So somebody else thinks, or I am much mistaken,' said the girl mysteriously.

'What do you mean?' demanded Miss Squeers.

'Never mind, miss,' replied the girl; 'I know what I know; that's all.'

'Phib,' said Miss Squeers dramatically, 'I insist upon your explaining yourself. What is this dark mystery? Speak.'

'Why, if you will have it, miss, it's this,' said the servant girl. 'Mr John Browdie thinks as you think; and if he wasn't too far gone to do it creditable, he'd be very glad to be off with Miss Price, and on with Miss Squeers.'

'Gracious heavens!' exclaimed Miss Squeers, clasping her hands with great dignity. 'What is this?'

'Truth, ma'am, and nothing but truth,' replied the artful Phib.

'What a situation!' cried Miss Squeers; 'on the brink of unconsciously destroying the peace and happiness of my own 'Tilda. What is the reason that men fall in love with me, whether I like it or not, and desert their chosen intendeds for my sake?'

'Because they can't help it, miss,' replied the girl; 'the reason's plain.' (If Miss Squeers were the reason, it was very plain.)

'Never let me hear of it again,' retorted Miss Squeers. 'Never! Do you hear? 'Tilda Price has faults—many faults—but I wish her well, and above all I wish her married; for I think it highly desirable—most desirable from the very nature of her failings—that she should be married as soon as possible. No, Phib. Let her have Mr Browdie. I may pity HIM, poor fellow; but I have a great regard for 'Tilda, and only hope she may make a better wife than I think she will.'

With this effusion of feeling, Miss Squeers went to bed.

Spite is a little word; but it represents as strange a jumble of feelings, and compound of discords, as any polysyllable in the language. Miss Squeers knew as well in her heart of hearts that what the miserable serving-girl had said was sheer, coarse, lying flattery, as did the girl herself; yet the mere opportunity of venting a little ill-nature against the offending Miss Price, and affecting to compassionate her weaknesses and foibles, though only in the presence of a solitary dependant, was almost as great a relief to her spleen as if the whole had been gospel truth. Nay, more. We have such extraordinary powers of persuasion when they are exerted over ourselves, that Miss Squeers felt quite high-minded and great after her noble renunciation of John Browdie's hand, and looked down upon her rival with a kind of holy calmness and tranquillity, that had a mighty effect in soothing her ruffled feelings.

This happy state of mind had some influence in bringing about a reconciliation; for, when a knock came at the front-door next day, and the miller's daughter was announced, Miss Squeers betook herself to the parlour in a Christian frame of spirit, perfectly beautiful to behold.

'Well, Fanny,' said the miller's daughter, 'you see I have come to see you, although we HAD some words last night.'

'I pity your bad passions, 'Tilda,' replied Miss Squeers, 'but I bear no malice. I am above it.'

'Don't be cross, Fanny,' said Miss Price. 'I have come to tell you something that I know will please you.'

'What may that be, 'Tilda?' demanded Miss Squeers; screwing up her lips, and looking as if nothing in earth, air, fire, or water, could afford her the slightest gleam of satisfaction.

'This,' rejoined Miss Price. 'After we left here last night John and I had a dreadful quarrel.'

'That doesn't please me,' said Miss Squeers—relaxing into a smile though.

'Lor! I wouldn't think so bad of you as to suppose it did,' rejoined her companion. 'That's not it.'

'Oh!' said Miss Squeers, relapsing into melancholy. 'Go on.'

'After a great deal of wrangling, and saying we would never see each other any more,' continued Miss Price, 'we made it up, and this morning John went and wrote our names down to be put up, for the first time, next Sunday, so we shall be married in three weeks, and I give you notice to get your frock made.'

There was mingled gall and honey in this intelligence. The prospect of the friend's being married so soon was the gall, and the certainty of her not entertaining serious designs upon Nicholas was the honey. Upon the whole, the sweet greatly preponderated over the bitter, so Miss Squeers said she would get the frock made, and that she hoped 'Tilda might be happy, though at the same time she didn't know, and would not have her build too much upon it, for men were strange creatures, and a great many married women were very miserable, and wished themselves single again with all their hearts; to which condolences Miss Squeers added others equally calculated to raise her friend's spirits and promote her cheerfulness of mind.

'But come now, Fanny,' said Miss Price, 'I want to have a word or two with you about young Mr Nickleby.'

'He is nothing to me,' interrupted Miss Squeers, with hysterical symptoms. 'I despise him too much!'

'Oh, you don't mean that, I am sure?' replied her friend. 'Confess, Fanny; don't you like him now?'

Without returning any direct reply, Miss Squeers, all at once, fell into a paroxysm of spiteful tears, and exclaimed that she was a wretched, neglected, miserable castaway.

'I hate everybody,' said Miss Squeers, 'and I wish that everybody was dead—that I do.'

'Dear, dear,' said Miss Price, quite moved by this avowal of misanthropical sentiments. 'You are not serious, I am sure.'

'Yes, I am,' rejoined Miss Squeers, tying tight knots in her pocket-handkerchief and clenching her teeth. 'And I wish I was dead too. There!'

'Oh! you'll think very differently in another five minutes,' said Matilda. 'How much better to take him into favour again, than to hurt yourself by going on in that way. Wouldn't it be much nicer, now, to have him all to yourself on good terms, in a company-keeping, love-making, pleasant sort of manner?'

'I don't know but what it would,' sobbed Miss Squeers. 'Oh! 'Tilda, how could you have acted so mean and dishonourable! I wouldn't have believed it of you, if anybody had told me.'

'Heyday!' exclaimed Miss Price, giggling. 'One would suppose I had been murdering somebody at least.'

'Very nigh as bad,' said Miss Squeers passionately.

'And all this because I happen to have enough of good looks to make people civil to me,' cried Miss Price. 'Persons don't make their own faces, and it's no more my fault if mine is a good one than it is other people's fault if theirs is a bad one.'

'Hold your tongue,' shrieked Miss Squeers, in her shrillest tone; 'or you'll make me slap you, 'Tilda, and afterwards I should be sorry for it!'

It is needless to say, that, by this time, the temper of each young lady was in some slight degree affected by the tone of her conversation, and that a dash of personality was infused into the altercation, in consequence. Indeed, the quarrel, from slight beginnings, rose to a considerable height, and was assuming a very violent complexion, when both parties, falling into a great passion of tears, exclaimed simultaneously, that they had never thought of being spoken to in that way: which exclamation, leading to a remonstrance, gradually brought on an explanation: and the upshot was, that they fell into each other's arms and vowed eternal friendship; the occasion in question making the fifty-second time of repeating the same impressive ceremony within a twelvemonth.

Perfect amicability being thus restored, a dialogue naturally ensued upon the number and nature of the garments which would be indispensable for Miss Price's entrance into the holy state of matrimony, when Miss Squeers clearly showed that a great many more than the miller could, or would, afford, were absolutely necessary, and could not decently be dispensed with. The young lady then, by an easy digression, led the discourse to her own wardrobe, and after recounting its principal beauties at some length, took her friend upstairs to make inspection thereof. The treasures of two drawers and a closet having been displayed, and all the smaller articles tried on, it was time for Miss Price to return home; and as she had been in raptures with all the frocks, and had been stricken quite dumb with admiration of a new pink scarf, Miss Squeers said in high good humour, that she would walk part of the way with her, for the pleasure of her company; and off they went together: Miss Squeers dilating, as they walked along, upon her father's accomplishments: and multiplying his income by ten, to give her friend some faint notion of the vast importance and superiority of her family.

It happened that that particular time, comprising the short daily interval which was suffered to elapse between what was pleasantly called the dinner of Mr Squeers's pupils, and their return to the pursuit of useful knowledge, was precisely the hour when Nicholas was accustomed to issue forth for a melancholy walk, and to brood, as he sauntered listlessly through the village, upon his miserable lot. Miss Squeers knew this perfectly well, but had perhaps forgotten it, for when she caught sight of that young gentleman advancing towards them, she evinced many symptoms of surprise and consternation, and assured her friend that she 'felt fit to drop into the earth.'

'Shall we turn back, or run into a cottage?' asked Miss Price. 'He don't see us yet.'

'No, 'Tilda,' replied Miss Squeers, 'it is my duty to go through with it, and I will!'

As Miss Squeers said this, in the tone of one who has made a high moral resolution, and was, besides, taken with one or two chokes and catchings of breath, indicative of feelings at a high pressure, her friend made no further remark, and they bore straight down upon Nicholas, who, walking with his eyes bent upon the ground, was not aware of their approach until they were close upon him; otherwise, he might, perhaps, have taken shelter himself.

'Good-morning,' said Nicholas, bowing and passing by.

'He is going,' murmured Miss Squeers. 'I shall choke, 'Tilda.'

'Come back, Mr Nickleby, do!' cried Miss Price, affecting alarm at her friend's threat, but really actuated by a malicious wish to hear what Nicholas would say; 'come back, Mr Nickleby!'

Mr Nickleby came back, and looked as confused as might be, as he inquired whether the ladies had any commands for him.

'Don't stop to talk,' urged Miss Price, hastily; 'but support her on the other side. How do you feel now, dear?'

'Better,' sighed Miss Squeers, laying a beaver bonnet of a reddish brown with a green veil attached, on Mr Nickleby's shoulder. 'This foolish faintness!'

'Don't call it foolish, dear,' said Miss Price: her bright eye dancing with merriment as she saw the perplexity of Nicholas; 'you have no reason to be ashamed of it. It's those who are too proud to come round again, without all this to-do, that ought to be ashamed.'

'You are resolved to fix it upon me, I see,' said Nicholas, smiling, 'although I told you, last night, it was not my fault.'

'There; he says it was not his fault, my dear,' remarked the wicked Miss Price. 'Perhaps you were too jealous, or too hasty with him? He says it was not his fault. You hear; I think that's apology enough.'

'You will not understand me,' said Nicholas. 'Pray dispense with this jesting, for I have no time, and really no inclination, to be the subject or promoter of mirth just now.'

'What do you mean?' asked Miss Price, affecting amazement.

'Don't ask him, 'Tilda,' cried Miss Squeers; 'I forgive him.'

'Dear me,' said Nicholas, as the brown bonnet went down on his shoulder again, 'this is more serious than I supposed. Allow me! Will you have the goodness to hear me speak?'

Here he raised up the brown bonnet, and regarding with most unfeigned astonishment a look of tender reproach from Miss Squeers, shrunk back a few paces to be out of the reach of the fair burden, and went on to say:

'I am very sorry—truly and sincerely sorry—for having been the cause of any difference among you, last night. I reproach myself, most bitterly, for having been so unfortunate as to cause the dissension that occurred, although I did so, I assure you, most unwittingly and heedlessly.'

'Well; that's not all you have got to say surely,' exclaimed Miss Price as Nicholas paused.

'I fear there is something more,' stammered Nicholas with a half-smile, and looking towards Miss Squeers, 'it is a most awkward thing to say—but—the very mention of such a supposition makes one look like a puppy—still—may I ask if that lady supposes that I entertain any—in short, does she think that I am in love with her?'

'Delightful embarrassment,' thought Miss Squeers, 'I have brought him to it, at last. Answer for me, dear,' she whispered to her friend.

'Does she think so?' rejoined Miss Price; 'of course she does.'

'She does!' exclaimed Nicholas with such energy of utterance as might have been, for the moment, mistaken for rapture.

'Certainly,' replied Miss Price

'If Mr Nickleby has doubted that, 'Tilda,' said the blushing Miss Squeers in soft accents, 'he may set his mind at rest. His sentiments are recipro—'

'Stop,' cried Nicholas hurriedly; 'pray hear me. This is the grossest and wildest delusion, the completest and most signal mistake, that ever human being laboured under, or committed. I have scarcely seen the young lady half-a-dozen times, but if I had seen her sixty times, or am destined to see her sixty thousand, it would be, and will be, precisely the same. I have not one thought, wish, or hope, connected with her, unless it be—and I say this, not to hurt her feelings, but to impress her with the real state of my own—unless it be the one object, dear to my heart as life itself, of being one day able to turn my back upon this accursed place, never to set foot in it again, or think of it—even think of it—but with loathing and disgust.'

With this particularly plain and straightforward declaration, which he made with all the vehemence that his indignant and excited feelings could bring to bear upon it, Nicholas waiting to hear no more, retreated.

But poor Miss Squeers! Her anger, rage, and vexation; the rapid succession of bitter and passionate feelings that whirled through her mind; are not to be described. Refused! refused by a teacher, picked up by advertisement, at an annual salary of five pounds payable at indefinite periods, and 'found' in food and lodging like the very boys themselves; and this too in the presence of a little chit of a miller's daughter of eighteen, who was going to be married, in three weeks' time, to a man who had gone down on his very knees to ask her. She could have choked in right good earnest, at the thought of being so humbled.

But, there was one thing clear in the midst of her mortification; and that was, that she hated and detested Nicholas with all the narrowness of mind and littleness of purpose worthy a descendant of the house of Squeers. And there was one comfort too; and that was, that every hour in every day she could wound his pride, and goad him with the infliction of some slight, or insult, or deprivation, which could not but have some effect on the most insensible person, and must be acutely felt by one so sensitive as Nicholas. With these two reflections uppermost in her mind, Miss Squeers made the best of the matter to her friend, by observing that Mr Nickleby was such an odd creature, and of such a violent temper, that she feared she should be obliged to give him up; and parted from her.

And here it may be remarked, that Miss Squeers, having bestowed her affections (or whatever it might be that, in the absence of anything better, represented them) on Nicholas Nickleby, had never once seriously contemplated the possibility of his being of a different opinion from herself in the business. Miss Squeers reasoned that she was prepossessing and beautiful, and that her father was master, and Nicholas man, and that her father had saved money, and Nicholas had none, all of which seemed to her conclusive arguments why the young man should feel only too much honoured by her preference. She had not failed to recollect, either, how much more agreeable she could render his situation if she were his friend, and how much more disagreeable if she were his enemy; and, doubtless, many less scrupulous young gentlemen than Nicholas would have encouraged her extravagance had it been only for this very obvious and intelligible reason. However, he had thought proper to do otherwise, and Miss Squeers was outrageous.

'Let him see,' said the irritated young lady, when she had regained her own room, and eased her mind by committing an assault on Phib, 'if I don't set mother against him a little more when she comes back!'

It was scarcely necessary to do this, but Miss Squeers was as good as her word; and poor Nicholas, in addition to bad food, dirty lodging, and the being compelled to witness one dull unvarying round of squalid misery, was treated with every special indignity that malice could suggest, or the most grasping cupidity put upon him.

Nor was this all. There was another and deeper system of annoyance which made his heart sink, and nearly drove him wild, by its injustice and cruelty.

The wretched creature, Smike, since the night Nicholas had spoken kindly to him in the schoolroom, had followed him to and fro, with an ever-restless desire to serve or help him; anticipating such little wants as his humble ability could supply, and content only to be near him. He would sit beside him for hours, looking patiently into his face; and a word would brighten up his care-worn visage, and call into it a passing gleam, even of happiness. He was an altered being; he had an object now; and that object was, to show his attachment to the only person—that person a stranger—who had treated him, not to say with kindness, but like a human creature.

Upon this poor being, all the spleen and ill-humour that could not be vented on Nicholas were unceasingly bestowed. Drudgery would have been nothing—Smike was well used to that. Buffetings inflicted without cause, would have been equally a matter of course; for to them also he had served a long and weary apprenticeship; but it was no sooner observed that he had become attached to Nicholas, than stripes and blows, stripes and blows, morning, noon, and night, were his only portion. Squeers was jealous of the influence which his man had so soon acquired, and his family hated him, and Smike paid for both. Nicholas saw it, and ground his teeth at every repetition of the savage and cowardly attack.

He had arranged a few regular lessons for the boys; and one night, as he paced up and down the dismal schoolroom, his swollen heart almost bursting to think that his protection and countenance should have increased the misery of the wretched being whose peculiar destitution had awakened his pity, he paused mechanically in a dark corner where sat the object of his thoughts.

The poor soul was poring hard over a tattered book, with the traces of recent tears still upon his face; vainly endeavouring to master some task which a child of nine years old, possessed of ordinary powers, could have conquered with ease, but which, to the addled brain of the crushed boy of nineteen, was a sealed and hopeless mystery. Yet there he sat, patiently conning the page again and again, stimulated by no boyish ambition, for he was the common jest and scoff even of the uncouth objects that congregated about him, but inspired by the one eager desire to please his solitary friend.

Nicholas laid his hand upon his shoulder.

'I can't do it,' said the dejected creature, looking up with bitter disappointment in every feature. 'No, no.'

'Do not try,' replied Nicholas.

The boy shook his head, and closing the book with a sigh, looked vacantly round, and laid his head upon his arm. He was weeping.

'Do not for God's sake,' said Nicholas, in an agitated voice; 'I cannot bear to see you.'

'They are more hard with me than ever,' sobbed the boy.

'I know it,' rejoined Nicholas. 'They are.'

'But for you,' said the outcast, 'I should die. They would kill me; they would; I know they would.'

'You will do better, poor fellow,' replied Nicholas, shaking his head mournfully, 'when I am gone.'

'Gone!' cried the other, looking intently in his face.

'Softly!' rejoined Nicholas. 'Yes.'

'Are you going?' demanded the boy, in an earnest whisper.

'I cannot say,' replied Nicholas. 'I was speaking more to my own thoughts, than to you.'

'Tell me,' said the boy imploringly, 'oh do tell me, WILL you go—WILL you?'

'I shall be driven to that at last!' said Nicholas. 'The world is before me, after all.'

'Tell me,' urged Smike, 'is the world as bad and dismal as this place?'

'Heaven forbid,' replied Nicholas, pursuing the train of his own thoughts; 'its hardest, coarsest toil, were happiness to this.'

'Should I ever meet you there?' demanded the boy, speaking with unusual wildness and volubility.

'Yes,' replied Nicholas, willing to soothe him.

'No, no!' said the other, clasping him by the hand. 'Should I—should I—tell me that again. Say I should be sure to find you.'

'You would,' replied Nicholas, with the same humane intention, 'and I would help and aid you, and not bring fresh sorrow on you as I have done here.'

The boy caught both the young man's hands passionately in his, and, hugging them to his breast, uttered a few broken sounds which were unintelligible. Squeers entered at the moment, and he shrunk back into his old corner.

CHAPTER 13

Nicholas varies the Monotony of Dothebys Hall by a most vigorous and remarkable proceeding, which leads to Consequences of some Importance

The cold, feeble dawn of a January morning was stealing in at the windows of the common sleeping-room, when Nicholas, raising himself on his arm, looked among the prostrate forms which on every side surrounded him, as though in search of some particular object.

It needed a quick eye to detect, from among the huddled mass of sleepers, the form of any given individual. As they lay closely packed together, covered, for warmth's sake, with their patched and ragged clothes, little could be distinguished but the sharp outlines of pale faces, over which the sombre light shed the same dull heavy colour; with, here and there, a gaunt arm thrust forth: its thinness hidden by no covering, but fully exposed to view, in all its shrunken ugliness. There were some who, lying on their backs with upturned faces and clenched hands, just visible in the leaden light, bore more the aspect of dead bodies than of living creatures; and there were others coiled up into strange and fantastic postures, such as might have been taken for the uneasy efforts of pain to gain some temporary relief, rather than the freaks of slumber. A few—and these were among the youngest of the children—slept peacefully on, with smiles upon their faces, dreaming perhaps of home; but ever and again a deep and heavy sigh, breaking the stillness of the room, announced that some new sleeper had awakened to the misery of another day; and, as morning took the place of night, the smiles gradually faded away, with the friendly darkness which had given them birth.

Dreams are the bright creatures of poem and legend, who sport on earth in the night season, and melt away in the first beam of the sun, which lights grim care and stern reality on their daily pilgrimage through the world.

Nicholas looked upon the sleepers; at first, with the air of one who gazes upon a scene which, though familiar to him, has lost none of its sorrowful effect in consequence; and, afterwards, with a more intense and searching scrutiny, as a man would who missed something his eye was accustomed to meet, and had expected to rest upon. He was still occupied in this search, and had half risen from his bed in the eagerness of his quest, when the voice of Squeers was heard, calling from the bottom of the stairs.

'Now then,' cried that gentleman, 'are you going to sleep all day, up there—'

'You lazy hounds?' added Mrs Squeers, finishing the sentence, and producing, at the same time, a sharp sound, like that which is occasioned by the lacing of stays.

'We shall be down directly, sir,' replied Nicholas.

'Down directly!' said Squeers. 'Ah! you had better be down directly, or I'll be down upon some of you in less. Where's that Smike?'

Nicholas looked hurriedly round again, but made no answer.

'Smike!' shouted Squeers.

'Do you want your head broke in a fresh place, Smike?' demanded his amiable lady in the same key.

Still there was no reply, and still Nicholas stared about him, as did the greater part of the boys, who were by this time roused.

'Confound his impudence!' muttered Squeers, rapping the stair-rail impatiently with his cane. 'Nickleby!'

'Well, sir.'

'Send that obstinate scoundrel down; don't you hear me calling?'

'He is not here, sir,' replied Nicholas.

'Don't tell me a lie,' retorted the schoolmaster. 'He is.'

'He is not,' retorted Nicholas angrily, 'don't tell me one.'

'We shall soon see that,' said Mr Squeers, rushing upstairs. 'I'll find him, I warrant you.'

With which assurance, Mr Squeers bounced into the dormitory, and, swinging his cane in the air ready for a blow, darted into the corner where the lean body of the drudge was usually stretched at night. The cane descended harmlessly upon the ground. There was nobody there.

'What does this mean?' said Squeers, turning round with a very pale face. 'Where have you hid him?'

'I have seen nothing of him since last night,' replied Nicholas.

'Come,' said Squeers, evidently frightened, though he endeavoured to look otherwise, 'you won't save him this way. Where is he?'

'At the bottom of the nearest pond for aught I know,' rejoined Nicholas in a low voice, and fixing his eyes full on the master's face.

'Damn you, what do you mean by that?' retorted Squeers in great perturbation. Without waiting for a reply, he inquired of the boys whether any one among them knew anything of their missing schoolmate.

There was a general hum of anxious denial, in the midst of which, one shrill voice was heard to say (as, indeed, everybody thought):

'Please, sir, I think Smike's run away, sir.'

'Ha!' cried Squeers, turning sharp round. 'Who said that?'

'Tomkins, please sir,' rejoined a chorus of voices. Mr Squeers made a plunge into the crowd, and at one dive, caught a very little boy, habited still in his night-gear, and the perplexed expression of whose countenance, as he was brought forward, seemed to intimate that he was as yet uncertain whether he was about to be punished or rewarded for the suggestion. He was not long in doubt.

'You think he has run away, do you, sir?' demanded Squeers.

'Yes, please sir,' replied the little boy.

'And what, sir,' said Squeers, catching the little boy suddenly by the arms and whisking up his drapery in a most dexterous manner, 'what reason have you to suppose that any boy would want to run away from this establishment? Eh, sir?'

The child raised a dismal cry, by way of answer, and Mr Squeers, throwing himself into the most favourable attitude for exercising his strength, beat him until the little urchin in his writhings actually rolled out of his hands, when he mercifully allowed him to roll away, as he best could.

'There,' said Squeers. 'Now if any other boy thinks Smike has run away, I shall be glad to have a talk with him.'

There was, of course, a profound silence, during which Nicholas showed his disgust as plainly as looks could show it.

'Well, Nickleby,' said Squeers, eyeing him maliciously. 'YOU think he has run away, I suppose?'

'I think it extremely likely,' replied Nicholas, in a quiet manner.

'Oh, you do, do you?' sneered Squeers. 'Maybe you know he has?'

'I know nothing of the kind.'

'He didn't tell you he was going, I suppose, did he?' sneered Squeers.

'He did not,' replied Nicholas; 'I am very glad he did not, for it would then have been my duty to have warned you in time.'

'Which no doubt you would have been devilish sorry to do,' said Squeers in a taunting fashion.

'I should indeed,' replied Nicholas. 'You interpret my feelings with great accuracy.'

Mrs Squeers had listened to this conversation, from the bottom of the stairs; but, now losing all patience, she hastily assumed her night-jacket, and made her way to the scene of action.

'What's all this here to-do?' said the lady, as the boys fell off right and left, to save her the trouble of clearing a passage with her brawny arms. 'What on earth are you a talking to him for, Squeery!'

'Why, my dear,' said Squeers, 'the fact is, that Smike is not to be found.'

'Well, I know that,' said the lady, 'and where's the wonder? If you get a parcel of proud-stomached teachers that set the young dogs a rebelling, what else can you look for? Now, young man, you just have the kindness to take yourself off to the schoolroom, and take the boys off with you, and don't you stir out of there till you have leave given you, or you and I may fall out in a way that'll spoil your beauty, handsome as you think yourself, and so I tell you.'

'Indeed!' said Nicholas.

'Yes; and indeed and indeed again, Mister Jackanapes,' said the excited lady; 'and I wouldn't keep such as you in the house another hour, if I had my way.'

'Nor would you if I had mine,' replied Nicholas. 'Now, boys!'

'Ah! Now, boys,' said Mrs Squeers, mimicking, as nearly as she could, the voice and manner of the usher. 'Follow your leader, boys, and take pattern by Smike if you dare. See what he'll get for himself, when he is brought back; and, mind! I tell you that you shall have as bad, and twice as bad, if you so much as open your mouths about him.'

'If I catch him,' said Squeers, 'I'll only stop short of flaying him alive. I give you notice, boys.'

'IF you catch him,' retorted Mrs Squeers, contemptuously; 'you are sure to; you can't help it, if you go the right way to work. Come! Away with you!'

With these words, Mrs Squeers dismissed the boys, and after a little light skirmishing with those in the rear who were pressing forward to get out of the way, but were detained for a few moments by the throng in front, succeeded in clearing the room, when she confronted her spouse alone.

'He is off,' said Mrs Squeers. 'The cow-house and stable are locked up, so he can't be there; and he's not downstairs anywhere, for the girl has looked. He must have gone York way, and by a public road too.'

'Why must he?' inquired Squeers.

'Stupid!' said Mrs Squeers angrily. 'He hadn't any money, had he?'

'Never had a penny of his own in his whole life, that I know of,' replied Squeers.

'To be sure,' rejoined Mrs Squeers, 'and he didn't take anything to eat with him; that I'll answer for. Ha! ha! ha!'

'Ha! ha! ha!' laughed Squeers.

'Then, of course,' said Mrs S., 'he must beg his way, and he could do that, nowhere, but on the public road.'

'That's true,' exclaimed Squeers, clapping his hands.

'True! Yes; but you would never have thought of it, for all that, if I hadn't said so,' replied his wife. 'Now, if you take the chaise and go one road, and I borrow Swallow's chaise, and go the other, what with keeping our eyes open, and asking questions, one or other of us is pretty certain to lay hold of him.'

The worthy lady's plan was adopted and put in execution without a moment's delay. After a very hasty breakfast, and the prosecution of some inquiries in the village, the result of which seemed to show that he was on the right track, Squeers started forth in the pony-chaise, intent upon discovery and vengeance. Shortly afterwards, Mrs Squeers, arrayed in the white top-coat, and tied up in various shawls and handkerchiefs, issued forth in another chaise and another direction, taking with her a good-sized bludgeon, several odd pieces of strong cord, and a stout labouring man: all provided and carried upon the expedition, with the sole object of assisting in the capture, and (once caught) insuring the safe custody of the unfortunate Smike.

Nicholas remained behind, in a tumult of feeling, sensible that whatever might be the upshot of the boy's flight, nothing but painful and deplorable consequences were likely to ensue from it. Death, from want and exposure to the weather, was the best that could be expected from the protracted wandering of so poor and helpless a creature, alone and unfriended, through a country of which he was wholly ignorant. There was little, perhaps, to choose between this fate and a return to the tender mercies of the Yorkshire school; but the unhappy being had established a hold upon his sympathy and compassion, which made his heart ache at the prospect of the suffering he was destined to undergo. He lingered on, in restless anxiety, picturing a thousand possibilities, until the evening of next day, when Squeers returned, alone, and unsuccessful.

'No news of the scamp!' said the schoolmaster, who had evidently been stretching his legs, on the old principle, not a few times during the journey. 'I'll have consolation for this out of somebody, Nickleby, if Mrs Squeers don't hunt him down; so I give you warning.'

'It is not in my power to console you, sir,' said Nicholas. 'It is nothing to me.'

'Isn't it?' said Squeers in a threatening manner. 'We shall see!'

'We shall,' rejoined Nicholas.

'Here's the pony run right off his legs, and me obliged to come home with a hack cob, that'll cost fifteen shillings besides other expenses,' said Squeers; 'who's to pay for that, do you hear?'

Nicholas shrugged his shoulders and remained silent.

'I'll have it out of somebody, I tell you,' said Squeers, his usual harsh crafty manner changed to open bullying 'None of your whining vapourings here, Mr Puppy, but be off to your kennel, for it's past your bedtime! Come! Get out!'

Nicholas bit his lip and knit his hands involuntarily, for his fingerends tingled to avenge the insult; but remembering that the man was drunk, and that it could come to little but a noisy brawl, he contented himself with darting a contemptuous look at the tyrant, and walked, as majestically as he could, upstairs: not a little nettled, however, to observe that Miss Squeers and Master Squeers, and the servant girl, were enjoying the scene from a snug corner; the two former indulging in many edifying remarks about the presumption of poor upstarts, which occasioned a vast deal of laughter, in which even the most miserable of all miserable servant girls joined: while Nicholas, stung to the quick, drew over his head such bedclothes as he had, and sternly resolved that the outstanding account between himself and Mr Squeers should be settled rather more speedily than the latter anticipated.

Another day came, and Nicholas was scarcely awake when he heard the wheels of a chaise approaching the house. It stopped. The voice of Mrs Squeers was heard, and in exultation, ordering a glass of spirits for somebody, which was in itself a sufficient sign that something extraordinary had happened. Nicholas hardly dared to look out of the window; but he did so, and the very first object that met his eyes was the wretched Smike: so bedabbled with mud and rain, so haggard and worn, and wild, that, but for his garments being such as no scarecrow was ever seen to wear, he might have been doubtful, even then, of his identity.

'Lift him out,' said Squeers, after he had literally feasted his eyes, in silence, upon the culprit. 'Bring him in; bring him in!'

'Take care,' cried Mrs Squeers, as her husband proffered his assistance. 'We tied his legs under the apron and made'em fast to the chaise, to prevent his giving us the slip again.'

With hands trembling with delight, Squeers unloosened the cord; and Smike, to all appearance more dead than alive, was brought into the house and securely locked up in a cellar, until such time as Mr Squeers should deem it expedient to operate upon him, in presence of the assembled school.

Upon a hasty consideration of the circumstances, it may be matter of surprise to some persons, that Mr and Mrs Squeers should have taken so much trouble to repossess themselves of an incumbrance of which it was their wont to complain so loudly; but their surprise will cease when they are informed that the manifold services of the drudge, if performed by anybody else, would have cost the establishment some ten or twelve shillings per week in the shape of wages; and furthermore, that all runaways were, as a matter of policy, made severe examples of, at Dotheboys Hall, inasmuch as, in consequence of the limited extent of its attractions, there was but little inducement, beyond the powerful impulse of fear, for any pupil, provided with the usual number of legs and the power of using them, to remain.

The news that Smike had been caught and brought back in triumph, ran like wild-fire through the hungry community, and expectation was on tiptoe all the morning. On tiptoe it was destined to remain, however, until afternoon; when Squeers, having refreshed himself with his dinner, and further strengthened himself by an extra libation or so, made his appearance (accompanied by his amiable partner) with a countenance of portentous import, and a fearful instrument of flagellation, strong, supple, wax-ended, and new,—in short, purchased that morning, expressly for the occasion.

'Is every boy here?' asked Squeers, in a tremendous voice.

Every boy was there, but every boy was afraid to speak, so Squeers glared along the lines to assure himself; and every eye drooped, and every head cowered down, as he did so.

'Each boy keep his place,' said Squeers, administering his favourite blow to the desk, and regarding with gloomy satisfaction the universal start which it never failed to occasion. 'Nickleby! to your desk, sir.'

It was remarked by more than one small observer, that there was a very curious and unusual expression in the usher's face; but he took his seat, without opening his lips in reply. Squeers, casting a triumphant glance at his assistant and a look of most comprehensive despotism on the boys, left the room, and shortly afterwards returned, dragging Smike by the collar—or rather by that fragment of his jacket which was nearest the place where his collar would have been, had he boasted such a decoration.

In any other place, the appearance of the wretched, jaded, spiritless object would have occasioned a murmur of compassion and remonstrance. It had some effect, even there; for the lookers-on moved uneasily in their seats; and a few of the boldest ventured to steal looks at each other, expressive of indignation and pity.

They were lost on Squeers, however, whose gaze was fastened on the luckless Smike, as he inquired, according to custom in such cases, whether he had anything to say for himself.

'Nothing, I suppose?' said Squeers, with a diabolical grin.

Smike glanced round, and his eye rested, for an instant, on Nicholas, as if he had expected him to intercede; but his look was riveted on his desk.

'Have you anything to say?' demanded Squeers again: giving his right arm two or three flourishes to try its power and suppleness. 'Stand a little out of the way, Mrs Squeers, my dear; I've hardly got room enough.'

'Spare me, sir!' cried Smike.

'Oh! that's all, is it?' said Squeers. 'Yes, I'll flog you within an inch of your life, and spare you that.'

'Ha, ha, ha,' laughed Mrs Squeers, 'that's a good 'un!'

'I was driven to do it,' said Smike faintly; and casting another imploring look about him.

'Driven to do it, were you?' said Squeers. 'Oh! it wasn't your fault; it was mine, I suppose—eh?'

'A nasty, ungrateful, pig-headed, brutish, obstinate, sneaking dog,' exclaimed Mrs Squeers, taking Smike's head under her arm, and administering a cuff at every epithet; 'what does he mean by that?'

'Stand aside, my dear,' replied Squeers. 'We'll try and find out.'

Mrs Squeers, being out of breath with her exertions, complied. Squeers caught the boy firmly in his grip; one desperate cut had fallen on his body—he was wincing from the lash and uttering a scream of pain—it was raised again, and again about to fall—when Nicholas Nickleby, suddenly starting up, cried 'Stop!' in a voice that made the rafters ring.

'Who cried stop?' said Squeers, turning savagely round.

'I,' said Nicholas, stepping forward. 'This must not go on.'

'Must not go on!' cried Squeers, almost in a shriek.

'No!' thundered Nicholas.

Aghast and stupefied by the boldness of the interference, Squeers released his hold of Smike, and, falling back a pace or two, gazed upon Nicholas with looks that were positively frightful.

'I say must not,' repeated Nicholas, nothing daunted; 'shall not. I will prevent it.'

Squeers continued to gaze upon him, with his eyes starting out of his head; but astonishment had actually, for the moment, bereft him of speech.

'You have disregarded all my quiet interference in the miserable lad's behalf,' said Nicholas; 'you have returned no answer to the letter in which I begged forgiveness for him, and offered to be responsible that he would remain quietly here. Don't blame me for this public interference. You have brought it upon yourself; not I.'

'Sit down, beggar!' screamed Squeers, almost beside himself with rage, and seizing Smike as he spoke.

'Wretch,' rejoined Nicholas, fiercely, 'touch him at your peril! I will not stand by, and see it done. My blood is up, and I have the strength of ten such men as you. Look to yourself, for by Heaven I will not spare you, if you drive me on!'

'Stand back,' cried Squeers, brandishing his weapon.

'I have a long series of insults to avenge,' said Nicholas, flushed with passion; 'and my indignation is aggravated by the dastardly cruelties practised on helpless infancy in this foul den. Have a care; for if you do raise the devil within me, the consequences shall fall heavily upon your own head!'

He had scarcely spoken, when Squeers, in a violent outbreak of wrath, and with a cry like the howl of a wild beast, spat upon him, and struck him a blow across the face with his instrument of torture, which raised up a bar of livid flesh as it was inflicted. Smarting with the agony of the blow, and concentrating into that one moment all his feelings of rage, scorn, and indignation, Nicholas sprang upon him, wrested the weapon from his hand, and pinning him by the throat, beat the ruffian till he roared for mercy.

The boys—with the exception of Master Squeers, who, coming to his father's assistance, harassed the enemy in the rear—moved not, hand or foot; but Mrs Squeers, with many shrieks for aid, hung on to the tail of her partner's coat, and endeavoured to drag him from his infuriated adversary; while Miss Squeers, who had been peeping through the keyhole in expectation of a very different scene, darted in at the very beginning of the attack, and after launching a shower of inkstands at the usher's head, beat Nicholas to her heart's content; animating herself, at every blow, with the recollection of his having refused her proffered love, and thus imparting additional strength to an arm which (as she took after her mother in this respect) was, at no time, one of the weakest.

Nicholas, in the full torrent of his violence, felt the blows no more than if they had been dealt with feathers; but, becoming tired of the noise and uproar, and feeling that his arm grew weak besides, he threw all his remaining strength into half-a-dozen finishing cuts, and flung Squeers from him with all the force he could muster. The violence of his fall precipitated Mrs Squeers completely over an adjacent form; and Squeers striking his head against it in his descent, lay at his full length on the ground, stunned and motionless.

Having brought affairs to this happy termination, and ascertained, to his thorough satisfaction, that Squeers was only stunned, and not dead (upon which point he had had some unpleasant doubts at first), Nicholas left his family to restore him, and retired to consider what course he had better adopt. He looked anxiously round for Smike, as he left the room, but he was nowhere to be seen.

After a brief consideration, he packed up a few clothes in a small leathern valise, and, finding that nobody offered to oppose his progress, marched boldly out by the front-door, and shortly afterwards, struck into the road which led to Greta Bridge.

When he had cooled sufficiently to be enabled to give his present circumstances some little reflection, they did not appear in a very encouraging light; he had only four shillings and a few pence in his pocket, and was something more than two hundred and fifty miles from London, whither he resolved to direct his steps, that he might ascertain, among other things, what account of the morning's proceedings Mr Squeers transmitted to his most affectionate uncle.

Lifting up his eyes, as he arrived at the conclusion that there was no remedy for this unfortunate state of things, he beheld a horseman coming towards him, whom, on nearer approach, he discovered, to his infinite chagrin, to be no other than Mr John Browdie, who, clad in cords and leather leggings, was urging his animal forward by means of a thick ash stick, which seemed to have been recently cut from some stout sapling.

'I am in no mood for more noise and riot,' thought Nicholas, 'and yet, do what I will, I shall have an altercation with this honest blockhead, and perhaps a blow or two from yonder staff.'

In truth, there appeared some reason to expect that such a result would follow from the encounter, for John Browdie no sooner saw Nicholas advancing, than he reined in his horse by the footpath, and waited until such time as he should come up; looking meanwhile, very sternly between the horse's ears, at Nicholas, as he came on at his leisure.

'Servant, young genelman,' said John.

'Yours,' said Nicholas.

'Weel; we ha' met at last,' observed John, making the stirrup ring under a smart touch of the ash stick.

'Yes,' replied Nicholas, hesitating. 'Come!' he said, frankly, after a moment's pause, 'we parted on no very good terms the last time we met; it was my fault, I believe; but I had no intention of offending you, and no idea that I was doing so. I was very sorry for it, afterwards. Will you shake hands?'

'Shake honds!' cried the good-humoured Yorkshireman; 'ah! that I weel;' at the same time, he bent down from the saddle, and gave Nicholas's fist a huge wrench: 'but wa'at be the matther wi' thy feace, mun? it be all brokken loike.'

'It is a cut,' said Nicholas, turning scarlet as he spoke,—'a blow; but I returned it to the giver, and with good interest too.'

'Noa, did 'ee though?' exclaimed John Browdie. 'Well deane! I loike 'un for thot.'

'The fact is,' said Nicholas, not very well knowing how to make the avowal, 'the fact is, that I have been ill-treated.'

'Noa!' interposed John Browdie, in a tone of compassion; for he was a giant in strength and stature, and Nicholas, very likely, in his eyes, seemed a mere dwarf; 'dean't say thot.'

'Yes, I have,' replied Nicholas, 'by that man Squeers, and I have beaten him soundly, and am leaving this place in consequence.'

'What!' cried John Browdie, with such an ecstatic shout, that the horse quite shied at it. 'Beatten the schoolmeasther! Ho! ho! ho! Beatten the schoolmeasther! who ever heard o' the loike o' that noo! Giv' us thee hond agean, yoongster. Beatten the schoolmeasther! Dang it, I loov' thee for't.'

With these expressions of delight, John Browdie laughed and laughed again—so loud that the echoes, far and wide, sent back nothing but jovial peals of merriment—and shook Nicholas by the hand meanwhile, no less heartily. When his mirth had subsided, he inquired what Nicholas meant to do; on his informing him, to go straight to London, he shook his head doubtfully, and inquired if he knew how much the coaches charged to carry passengers so far.

'No, I do not,' said Nicholas; 'but it is of no great consequence to me, for I intend walking.'

'Gang awa' to Lunnun afoot!' cried John, in amazement.

'Every step of the way,' replied Nicholas. 'I should be many steps further on by this time, and so goodbye!'

'Nay noo,' replied the honest countryman, reining in his impatient horse, 'stan' still, tellee. Hoo much cash hast thee gotten?'

'Not much,' said Nicholas, colouring, 'but I can make it enough. Where there's a will, there's a way, you know.'

John Browdie made no verbal answer to this remark, but putting his hand in his pocket, pulled out an old purse of solid leather, and insisted that Nicholas should borrow from him whatever he required for his present necessities.

'Dean't be afeard, mun,' he said; 'tak' eneaf to carry thee whoam. Thee'lt pay me yan day, a' warrant.'

Nicholas could by no means be prevailed upon to borrow more than a sovereign, with which loan Mr Browdie, after many entreaties that he would accept of more (observing, with a touch of Yorkshire caution, that if he didn't spend it all, he could put the surplus by, till he had an opportunity of remitting it carriage free), was fain to content himself.

'Tak' that bit o' timber to help thee on wi', mun,' he added, pressing his stick on Nicholas, and giving his hand another squeeze; 'keep a good heart, and bless thee. Beatten the schoolmeasther! 'Cod it's the best thing a've heerd this twonty year!'

So saying, and indulging, with more delicacy than might have been expected from him, in another series of loud laughs, for the purpose of avoiding the thanks which Nicholas poured forth, John Browdie set spurs to his horse, and went off at a smart canter: looking back, from time to time, as Nicholas stood gazing after him, and waving his hand cheerily, as if to encourage him on his way. Nicholas watched the horse and rider until they disappeared over the brow of a distant hill, and then set forward on his journey.

He did not travel far that afternoon, for by this time it was nearly dark, and there had been a heavy fall of snow, which not only rendered the way toilsome, but the track uncertain and difficult to find, after daylight, save by experienced wayfarers. He lay, that night, at a cottage, where beds were let at a cheap rate to the more humble class of travellers; and, rising betimes next morning, made his way before night to Boroughbridge. Passing through that town in search of some cheap resting-place, he stumbled upon an empty barn within a couple of hundred yards of the roadside; in a warm corner of which, he stretched his weary limbs, and soon fell asleep.

When he awoke next morning, and tried to recollect his dreams, which had been all connected with his recent sojourn at Dotheboys Hall, he sat up, rubbed his eyes and stared—not with the most composed countenance possible—at some motionless object which seemed to be stationed within a few yards in front of him.

'Strange!' cried Nicholas; 'can this be some lingering creation of the visions that have scarcely left me! It cannot be real—and yet I—I am awake! Smike!'

The form moved, rose, advanced, and dropped upon its knees at his feet. It was Smike indeed.

'Why do you kneel to me?' said Nicholas, hastily raising him.

'To go with you—anywhere—everywhere—to the world's end—to the churchyard grave,' replied Smike, clinging to his hand. 'Let me, oh do let me. You are my home—my kind friend—take me with you, pray.'

'I am a friend who can do little for you,' said Nicholas, kindly. 'How came you here?'

He had followed him, it seemed; had never lost sight of him all the way; had watched while he slept, and when he halted for refreshment; and had feared to appear before, lest he should be sent back. He had not intended to appear now, but Nicholas had awakened more suddenly than he looked for, and he had had no time to conceal himself.

'Poor fellow!' said Nicholas, 'your hard fate denies you any friend but one, and he is nearly as poor and helpless as yourself.'

'May I—may I go with you?' asked Smike, timidly. 'I will be your faithful hard-working servant, I will, indeed. I want no clothes,' added the poor creature, drawing his rags together; 'these will do very well. I only want to be near you.'

'And you shall,' cried Nicholas. 'And the world shall deal by you as it does by me, till one or both of us shall quit it for a better. Come!'

With these words, he strapped his burden on his shoulders, and, taking his stick in one hand, extended the other to his delighted charge; and so they passed out of the old barn, together.

CHAPTER 14

Having the Misfortune to treat of none but Common People, is necessarily of a Mean and Vulgar Character

In that quarter of London in which Golden Square is situated, there is a bygone, faded, tumble-down street, with two irregular rows of tall meagre houses, which seem to have stared each other out of countenance years ago. The very chimneys appear to have grown dismal and melancholy, from having had nothing better to look at than the chimneys over the way. Their tops are battered, and broken, and blackened with smoke; and, here and there, some taller stack than the rest, inclining heavily to one side, and toppling over the roof, seems to mediate taking revenge for half a century's neglect, by crushing the inhabitants of the garrets beneath.

The fowls who peck about the kennels, jerking their bodies hither and thither with a gait which none but town fowls are ever seen to adopt, and which any country cock or hen would be puzzled to understand, are perfectly in keeping with the crazy habitations of their owners. Dingy, ill-plumed, drowsy flutterers, sent, like many of the neighbouring children, to get a livelihood in the streets, they hop, from stone to stone, in forlorn search of some hidden eatable in the mud, and can scarcely raise a crow among them. The only one with anything approaching to a voice, is an aged bantam at the baker's; and even he is hoarse, in consequence of bad living in his last place.

To judge from the size of the houses, they have been, at one time, tenanted by persons of better condition than their present occupants; but they are now let off, by the week, in floors or rooms, and every door has almost as many plates or bell-handles as there are apartments within. The windows are, for the same reason, sufficiently diversified in appearance, being ornamented with every variety of common blind and curtain that can easily be imagined; while every doorway is blocked up, and rendered nearly impassable, by a motley collection of children and porter pots of all sizes, from the baby in arms and the half-pint pot, to the full-grown girl and half-gallon can.

In the parlour of one of these houses, which was perhaps a thought dirtier than any of its neighbours; which exhibited more bell-handles, children, and porter pots, and caught in all its freshness the first gust of the thick black smoke that poured forth, night and day, from a large brewery hard by; hung a bill, announcing that there was yet one room to let within its walls, though on what story the vacant room could be—regard being had to the outward tokens of many lodgers which the whole front displayed, from the mangle in the kitchen window to the flower-pots on the parapet—it would have been beyond the power of a calculating boy to discover.

The common stairs of this mansion were bare and carpetless; but a curious visitor who had to climb his way to the top, might have observed that there were not wanting indications of the progressive poverty of the inmates, although their rooms were shut. Thus, the first-floor lodgers, being flush of furniture, kept an old mahogany table—real mahogany—on the landing-place outside, which was only taken in, when occasion required. On the second story, the spare furniture dwindled down to a couple of old deal chairs, of which one, belonging to the back-room, was shorn of a leg, and bottomless. The story above, boasted no greater excess than a worm-eaten wash-tub; and the garret landing-place displayed no costlier articles than two crippled pitchers, and some broken blacking-bottles.

It was on this garret landing-place that a hard-featured square-faced man, elderly and shabby, stopped to unlock the door of the front attic, into which, having surmounted the task of turning the rusty key in its still more rusty wards, he walked with the air of legal owner.

This person wore a wig of short, coarse, red hair, which he took off with his hat, and hung upon a nail. Having adopted in its place a dirty cotton nightcap, and groped about in the dark till he found a remnant of candle, he knocked at the partition which divided the two garrets, and inquired, in a loud voice, whether Mr Noggs had a light.

The sounds that came back were stifled by the lath and plaster, and it seemed moreover as though the speaker had uttered them from the interior of a mug or other drinking vessel; but they were in the voice of Newman, and conveyed a reply in the affirmative.

'A nasty night, Mr Noggs!' said the man in the nightcap, stepping in to light his candle.

'Does it rain?' asked Newman.

'Does it?' replied the other pettishly. 'I am wet through.'

'It doesn't take much to wet you and me through, Mr Crowl,' said Newman, laying his hand upon the lappel of his threadbare coat.

'Well; and that makes it the more vexatious,' observed Mr Crowl, in the same pettish tone.

Uttering a low querulous growl, the speaker, whose harsh countenance was the very epitome of selfishness, raked the scanty fire nearly out of the grate, and, emptying the glass which Noggs had pushed towards him, inquired where he kept his coals.

Newman Noggs pointed to the bottom of a cupboard, and Mr Crowl, seizing the shovel, threw on half the stock: which Noggs very deliberately took off again, without saying a word.

'You have not turned saving, at this time of day, I hope?' said Crowl.

Newman pointed to the empty glass, as though it were a sufficient refutation of the charge, and briefly said that he was going downstairs to supper.

'To the Kenwigses?' asked Crowl.

Newman nodded assent.

'Think of that now!' said Crowl. 'If I didn't—thinking that you were certain not to go, because you said you wouldn't—tell Kenwigs I couldn't come, and make up my mind to spend the evening with you!'

'I was obliged to go,' said Newman. 'They would have me.'

'Well; but what's to become of me?' urged the selfish man, who never thought of anybody else. 'It's all your fault. I'll tell you what—I'll sit by your fire till you come back again.'

Newman cast a despairing glance at his small store of fuel, but, not having the courage to say no—a word which in all his life he never had said at the right time, either to himself or anyone else—gave way to the proposed arrangement. Mr Crowl immediately went about making himself as comfortable, with Newman Nogg's means, as circumstances would admit of his being made.

The lodgers to whom Crowl had made allusion under the designation of 'the Kenwigses,' were the wife and olive branches of one Mr Kenwigs, a turner in ivory, who was looked upon as a person of some consideration on the premises, inasmuch as he occupied the whole of the first floor, comprising a suite of two rooms. Mrs Kenwigs, too, was quite a lady in her manners, and of a very genteel family, having an uncle who collected a water-rate; besides which distinction, the two eldest of her little girls went twice a week to a dancing school in the neighbourhood, and had flaxen hair, tied with blue ribbons, hanging in luxuriant pigtails down their backs; and wore little white trousers with frills round the ankles—for all of which reasons, and many more equally valid but too numerous to mention, Mrs Kenwigs was considered a very desirable person to know, and was the constant theme of all the gossips in the street, and even three or four doors round the corner at both ends.

It was the anniversary of that happy day on which the Church of England as by law established, had bestowed Mrs Kenwigs upon Mr Kenwigs; and in grateful commemoration of the same, Mrs Kenwigs had invited a few select friends to cards and a supper in the first floor, and had put on a new gown to receive them in: which gown, being of a flaming colour and made upon a juvenile principle, was so successful that Mr Kenwigs said the eight years of matrimony and the five children seemed all a dream, and Mrs Kenwigs younger and more blooming than on the very first Sunday he had kept company with her.

Beautiful as Mrs Kenwigs looked when she was dressed though, and so stately that you would have supposed she had a cook and housemaid at least, and nothing to do but order them about, she had a world of trouble with the preparations; more, indeed, than she, being of a delicate and genteel constitution, could have sustained, had not the pride of housewifery upheld her. At last, however, all the things that had to be got together were got together, and all the things that had to be got out of the way were got out of the way, and everything was ready, and the collector himself having promised to come, fortune smiled upon the occasion.

The party was admirably selected. There were, first of all, Mr Kenwigs and Mrs Kenwigs, and four olive Kenwigses who sat up to supper; firstly, because it was but right that they should have a treat on such a day; and secondly, because their going to bed, in presence of the company, would have been inconvenient, not to say improper. Then, there was a young lady who had made Mrs Kenwigs's dress, and who—it was the most convenient thing in the world—living in the two-pair back, gave up her bed to the baby, and got a little girl to watch it. Then, to match this young lady, was a young man, who had known Mr Kenwigs when he was a bachelor, and was much esteemed by the ladies, as bearing the reputation of a rake. To these were added a newly-married couple, who had visited Mr and Mrs Kenwigs in their courtship; and a sister of Mrs Kenwigs's, who was quite a beauty; besides whom, there was another young man, supposed to entertain honourable designs upon the lady last mentioned; and Mr Noggs, who was a genteel person to ask, because he had been a gentleman once. There were also an elderly lady from the back-parlour, and one more young lady, who, next to the collector, perhaps was the great lion of the party, being the daughter of a theatrical fireman, who 'went on' in the pantomime, and had the greatest turn for the stage that was ever known, being able to sing and recite in a manner that brought the tears into Mrs Kenwigs's eyes. There was only one drawback upon the pleasure of seeing such friends, and that was, that the lady in the back-parlour, who was very fat, and turned of sixty, came in a low book-muslin dress and short kid gloves, which so exasperated Mrs Kenwigs, that that lady assured her visitors, in private, that if it hadn't happened that the supper was cooking at the back-parlour grate at that moment, she certainly would have requested its representative to withdraw.

'My dear,' said Mr Kenwigs, 'wouldn't it be better to begin a round game?'

'Kenwigs, my dear,' returned his wife, 'I am surprised at you. Would you begin without my uncle?'

'I forgot the collector,' said Kenwigs; 'oh no, that would never do.'

'He's so particular,' said Mrs Kenwigs, turning to the other married lady, 'that if we began without him, I should be out of his will for ever.'

'Dear!' cried the married lady.

'You've no idea what he is,' replied Mrs Kenwigs; 'and yet as good a creature as ever breathed.'

'The kindest-hearted man as ever was,' said Kenwigs.

'It goes to his heart, I believe, to be forced to cut the water off, when the people don't pay,' observed the bachelor friend, intending a joke.

'George,' said Mr Kenwigs, solemnly, 'none of that, if you please.'

'It was only my joke,' said the friend, abashed.

'George,' rejoined Mr Kenwigs, 'a joke is a wery good thing—a wery good thing—but when that joke is made at the expense of Mrs Kenwigs's feelings, I set my face against it. A man in public life expects to be sneered at—it is the fault of his elewated sitiwation, and not of himself. Mrs Kenwigs's relation is a public man, and that he knows, George, and that he can bear; but putting Mrs Kenwigs out of the question (if I COULD put Mrs Kenwigs out of the question on such an occasion as this), I have the honour to be connected with the collector by marriage; and I cannot allow these remarks in my—' Mr Kenwigs was going to say 'house,' but he rounded the sentence with 'apartments'.

At the conclusion of these observations, which drew forth evidences of acute feeling from Mrs Kenwigs, and had the intended effect of impressing the company with a deep sense of the collector's dignity, a ring was heard at the bell.

'That's him,' whispered Mr Kenwigs, greatly excited. 'Morleena, my dear, run down and let your uncle in, and kiss him directly you get the door open. Hem! Let's be talking.'

Adopting Mr Kenwigs's suggestion, the company spoke very loudly, to look easy and unembarrassed; and almost as soon as they had begun to do so, a short old gentleman in drabs and gaiters, with a face that might have been carved out of LIGNUM VITAE, for anything that appeared to the contrary, was led playfully in by Miss Morleena Kenwigs, regarding whose uncommon Christian name it may be here remarked that it had been invented and composed by Mrs Kenwigs previous to her first lying-in, for the special distinction of her eldest child, in case it should prove a daughter.

'Oh, uncle, I am SO glad to see you,' said Mrs Kenwigs, kissing the collector affectionately on both cheeks. 'So glad!'

'Many happy returns of the day, my dear,' replied the collector, returning the compliment.

Now, this was an interesting thing. Here was a collector of water-rates, without his book, without his pen and ink, without his double knock, without his intimidation, kissing—actually kissing—an agreeable female, and leaving taxes, summonses, notices that he had called, or announcements that he would never call again, for two quarters' due, wholly out of the question. It was pleasant to see how the company looked on, quite absorbed in the sight, and to behold the nods and winks with which they expressed their gratification at finding so much humanity in a tax-gatherer.

'Where will you sit, uncle?' said Mrs Kenwigs, in the full glow of family pride, which the appearance of her distinguished relation occasioned.

'Anywheres, my dear,' said the collector, 'I am not particular.'

Not particular! What a meek collector! If he had been an author, who knew his place, he couldn't have been more humble.

'Mr Lillyvick,' said Kenwigs, addressing the collector, 'some friends here, sir, are very anxious for the honour of—thank you—Mr and Mrs Cutler, Mr Lillyvick.'

'Proud to know you, sir,' said Mr Cutler; 'I've heerd of you very often.' These were not mere words of ceremony; for, Mr Cutler, having kept house in Mr Lillyvick's parish, had heard of him very often indeed. His attention in calling had been quite extraordinary.

'George, you know, I think, Mr Lillyvick,' said Kenwigs; 'lady from downstairs—Mr Lillyvick. Mr Snewkes—Mr Lillyvick. Miss Green—Mr Lillyvick. Mr Lillyvick—Miss Petowker of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. Very glad to make two public characters acquainted! Mrs Kenwigs, my dear, will you sort the counters?'

Mrs Kenwigs, with the assistance of Newman Noggs, (who, as he performed sundry little acts of kindness for the children, at all times and seasons, was humoured in his request to be taken no notice of, and was merely spoken about, in a whisper, as the decayed gentleman), did as he was desired; and the greater part of the guests sat down to speculation, while Newman himself, Mrs Kenwigs, and Miss Petowker of the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, looked after the supper-table.

While the ladies were thus busying themselves, Mr Lillyvick was intent upon the game in progress, and as all should be fish that comes to a water-collector's net, the dear old gentleman was by no means scrupulous in appropriating to himself the property of his neighbours, which, on the contrary, he abstracted whenever an opportunity presented itself, smiling good-humouredly all the while, and making so many condescending speeches to the owners, that they were delighted with his amiability, and thought in their hearts that he deserved to be Chancellor of the Exchequer at least.

After a great deal of trouble, and the administration of many slaps on the head to the infant Kenwigses, whereof two of the most rebellious were summarily banished, the cloth was laid with much elegance, and a pair of boiled fowls, a large piece of pork, apple-pie, potatoes and greens, were served; at sight of which, the worthy Mr Lillyvick vented a great many witticisms, and plucked up amazingly: to the immense delight and satisfaction of the whole body of admirers.

Very well and very fast the supper went off; no more serious difficulties occurring, than those which arose from the incessant demand for clean knives and forks; which made poor Mrs Kenwigs wish, more than once, that private society adopted the principle of schools, and required that every guest should bring his own knife, fork, and spoon; which doubtless would be a great accommodation in many cases, and to no one more so than to the lady and gentleman of the house, especially if the school principle were carried out to the full extent, and the articles were expected, as a matter of delicacy, not to be taken away again.

Everybody having eaten everything, the table was cleared in a most alarming hurry, and with great noise; and the spirits, whereat the eyes of Newman Noggs glistened, being arranged in order, with water both hot and cold, the party composed themselves for conviviality; Mr Lillyvick being stationed in a large armchair by the fireside, and the four little Kenwigses disposed on a small form in front of the company with their flaxen tails towards them, and their faces to the fire; an arrangement which was no sooner perfected, than Mrs Kenwigs was overpowered by the feelings of a mother, and fell upon the left shoulder of Mr Kenwigs dissolved in tears.

'They are so beautiful!' said Mrs Kenwigs, sobbing.

'Oh, dear,' said all the ladies, 'so they are! it's very natural you should feel proud of that; but don't give way, don't.'

'I can—not help it, and it don't signify,' sobbed Mrs Kenwigs; 'oh! they're too beautiful to live, much too beautiful!'

On hearing this alarming presentiment of their being doomed to an early death in the flower of their infancy, all four little girls raised a hideous cry, and burying their heads in their mother's lap simultaneously, screamed until the eight flaxen tails vibrated again; Mrs Kenwigs meanwhile clasping them alternately to her bosom, with attitudes expressive of distraction, which Miss Petowker herself might have copied.

At length, the anxious mother permitted herself to be soothed into a more tranquil state, and the little Kenwigses, being also composed, were distributed among the company, to prevent the possibility of Mrs Kenwigs being again overcome by the blaze of their combined beauty. This done, the ladies and gentlemen united in prophesying that they would live for many, many years, and that there was no occasion at all for Mrs Kenwigs to distress herself; which, in good truth, there did not appear to be; the loveliness of the children by no means justifying her apprehensions.

'This day eight year,' said Mr Kenwigs after a pause. 'Dear me—ah!'

This reflection was echoed by all present, who said 'Ah!' first, and 'dear me,' afterwards.

'I was younger then,' tittered Mrs Kenwigs.

'No,' said the collector.

'Certainly not,' added everybody.

'I remember my niece,' said Mr Lillyvick, surveying his audience with a grave air; 'I remember her, on that very afternoon, when she first acknowledged to her mother a partiality for Kenwigs. "Mother," she says, "I love him."'

'"Adore him," I said, uncle,' interposed Mrs Kenwigs.

'"Love him," I think, my dear,' said the collector, firmly.

'Perhaps you are right, uncle,' replied Mrs Kenwigs, submissively. 'I thought it was "adore."'

'"Love," my dear,' retorted Mr Lillyvick. '"Mother," she says, "I love him!" "What do I hear?" cries her mother; and instantly falls into strong conwulsions.'

A general exclamation of astonishment burst from the company.

'Into strong conwulsions,' repeated Mr Lillyvick, regarding them with a rigid look. 'Kenwigs will excuse my saying, in the presence of friends, that there was a very great objection to him, on the ground that he was beneath the family, and would disgrace it. You remember, Kenwigs?'

'Certainly,' replied that gentleman, in no way displeased at the reminiscence, inasmuch as it proved, beyond all doubt, what a high family Mrs Kenwigs came of.

'I shared in that feeling,' said Mr Lillyvick: 'perhaps it was natural; perhaps it wasn't.'

A gentle murmur seemed to say, that, in one of Mr Lillyvick's station, the objection was not only natural, but highly praiseworthy.

'I came round to him in time,' said Mr Lillyvick. 'After they were married, and there was no help for it, I was one of the first to say that Kenwigs must be taken notice of. The family DID take notice of him, in consequence, and on my representation; and I am bound to say—and proud to say—that I have always found him a very honest, well-behaved, upright, respectable sort of man. Kenwigs, shake hands.'

'I am proud to do it, sir,' said Mr Kenwigs.

'So am I, Kenwigs,' rejoined Mr Lillyvick.

'A very happy life I have led with your niece, sir,' said Kenwigs.

'It would have been your own fault if you had not, sir,' remarked Mr Lillyvick.

'Morleena Kenwigs,' cried her mother, at this crisis, much affected, 'kiss your dear uncle!'

The young lady did as she was requested, and the three other little girls were successively hoisted up to the collector's countenance, and subjected to the same process, which was afterwards repeated on them by the majority of those present.

'Oh dear, Mrs Kenwigs,' said Miss Petowker, 'while Mr Noggs is making that punch to drink happy returns in, do let Morleena go through that figure dance before Mr Lillyvick.'

'No, no, my dear,' replied Mrs Kenwigs, 'it will only worry my uncle.'

'It can't worry him, I am sure,' said Miss Petowker. 'You will be very much pleased, won't you, sir?'

'That I am sure I shall' replied the collector, glancing at the punch-mixer.

'Well then, I'll tell you what,' said Mrs Kenwigs, 'Morleena shall do the steps, if uncle can persuade Miss Petowker to recite us the Blood-Drinker's Burial, afterwards.'

There was a great clapping of hands and stamping of feet, at this proposition; the subject whereof, gently inclined her head several times, in acknowledgment of the reception.

'You know,' said Miss Petowker, reproachfully, 'that I dislike doing anything professional in private parties.'

'Oh, but not here!' said Mrs Kenwigs. 'We are all so very friendly and pleasant, that you might as well be going through it in your own room; besides, the occasion—'

'I can't resist that,' interrupted Miss Petowker; 'anything in my humble power I shall be delighted to do.'

Mrs Kenwigs and Miss Petowker had arranged a small PROGRAMME of the entertainments between them, of which this was the prescribed order, but they had settled to have a little pressing on both sides, because it looked more natural. The company being all ready, Miss Petowker hummed a tune, and Morleena danced a dance; having previously had the soles of her shoes chalked, with as much care as if she were going on the tight-rope. It was a very beautiful figure, comprising a great deal of work for the arms, and was received with unbounded applause.

'If I was blessed with a—a child—' said Miss Petowker, blushing, 'of such genius as that, I would have her out at the Opera instantly.'

Mrs Kenwigs sighed, and looked at Mr Kenwigs, who shook his head, and observed that he was doubtful about it.

'Kenwigs is afraid,' said Mrs K.

'What of?' inquired Miss Petowker, 'not of her failing?'

'Oh no,' replied Mrs Kenwigs, 'but if she grew up what she is now,—only think of the young dukes and marquises.'

'Very right,' said the collector.

'Still,' submitted Miss Petowker, 'if she took a proper pride in herself, you know—'

'There's a good deal in that,' observed Mrs Kenwigs, looking at her husband.

'I only know—' faltered Miss Petowker,—'it may be no rule to be sure—but I have never found any inconvenience or unpleasantness of that sort.'

Mr Kenwigs, with becoming gallantry, said that settled the question at once, and that he would take the subject into his serious consideration. This being resolved upon, Miss Petowker was entreated to begin the Blood-Drinker's Burial; to which end, that young lady let down her back hair, and taking up her position at the other end of the room, with the bachelor friend posted in a corner, to rush out at the cue 'in death expire,' and catch her in his arms when she died raving mad, went through the performance with extraordinary spirit, and to the great terror of the little Kenwigses, who were all but frightened into fits.

The ecstasies consequent upon the effort had not yet subsided, and Newman (who had not been thoroughly sober at so late an hour for a long long time,) had not yet been able to put in a word of announcement, that the punch was ready, when a hasty knock was heard at the room-door, which elicited a shriek from Mrs Kenwigs, who immediately divined that the baby had fallen out of bed.

'Who is that?' demanded Mr Kenwigs, sharply.

'Don't be alarmed, it's only me,' said Crowl, looking in, in his nightcap. 'The baby is very comfortable, for I peeped into the room as I came down, and it's fast asleep, and so is the girl; and I don't think the candle will set fire to the bed-curtain, unless a draught was to get into the room—it's Mr Noggs that's wanted.'

'Me!' cried Newman, much astonished.

'Why, it IS a queer hour, isn't it?' replied Crowl, who was not best pleased at the prospect of losing his fire; 'and they are queer-looking people, too, all covered with rain and mud. Shall I tell them to go away?'

'No,' said Newman, rising. 'People? How many?'

'Two,' rejoined Crowl.

'Want me? By name?' asked Newman.

'By name,' replied Crowl. 'Mr Newman Noggs, as pat as need be.'

Newman reflected for a few seconds, and then hurried away, muttering that he would be back directly. He was as good as his word; for, in an exceedingly short time, he burst into the room, and seizing, without a word of apology or explanation, a lighted candle and tumbler of hot punch from the table, darted away like a madman.

'What the deuce is the matter with him?' exclaimed Crowl, throwing the door open. 'Hark! Is there any noise above?'

The guests rose in great confusion, and, looking in each other's faces with much perplexity and some fear, stretched their necks forward, and listened attentively.

CHAPTER 15

Acquaints the Reader with the Cause and Origin of the Interruption described in the last Chapter, and with some other Matters necessary to be known

Newman Noggs scrambled in violent haste upstairs with the steaming beverage, which he had so unceremoniously snatched from the table of Mr Kenwigs, and indeed from the very grasp of the water-rate collector, who was eyeing the contents of the tumbler, at the moment of its unexpected abstraction, with lively marks of pleasure visible in his countenance. He bore his prize straight to his own back-garret, where, footsore and nearly shoeless, wet, dirty, jaded, and disfigured with every mark of fatiguing travel, sat Nicholas and Smike, at once the cause and partner of his toil; both perfectly worn out by their unwonted and protracted exertion.

Newman's first act was to compel Nicholas, with gentle force, to swallow half of the punch at a breath, nearly boiling as it was; and his next, to pour the remainder down the throat of Smike, who, never having tasted anything stronger than aperient medicine in his whole life, exhibited various odd manifestations of surprise and delight, during the passage of the liquor down his throat, and turned up his eyes most emphatically when it was all gone.

'You are wet through,' said Newman, passing his hand hastily over the coat which Nicholas had thrown off; 'and I—I—haven't even a change,' he added, with a wistful glance at the shabby clothes he wore himself.

'I have dry clothes, or at least such as will serve my turn well, in my bundle,' replied Nicholas. 'If you look so distressed to see me, you will add to the pain I feel already, at being compelled, for one night, to cast myself upon your slender means for aid and shelter.'

Newman did not look the less distressed to hear Nicholas talking in this strain; but, upon his young friend grasping him heartily by the hand, and assuring him that nothing but implicit confidence in the sincerity of his professions, and kindness of feeling towards himself, would have induced him, on any consideration, even to have made him acquainted with his arrival in London, Mr Noggs brightened up again, and went about making such arrangements as were in his power for the comfort of his visitors, with extreme alacrity.

These were simple enough; poor Newman's means halting at a very considerable distance short of his inclinations; but, slight as they were, they were not made without much bustling and running about. As Nicholas had husbanded his scanty stock of money, so well that it was not yet quite expended, a supper of bread and cheese, with some cold beef from the cook's shop, was soon placed upon the table; and these viands being flanked by a bottle of spirits and a pot of porter, there was no ground for apprehension on the score of hunger or thirst, at all events. Such preparations as Newman had it in his power to make, for the accommodation of his guests during the night, occupied no very great time in completing; and as he had insisted, as an express preliminary, that Nicholas should change his clothes, and that Smike should invest himself in his solitary coat (which no entreaties would dissuade him from stripping off for the purpose), the travellers partook of their frugal fare, with more satisfaction than one of them at least had derived from many a better meal.

They then drew near the fire, which Newman Noggs had made up as well as he could, after the inroads of Crowl upon the fuel; and Nicholas, who had hitherto been restrained by the extreme anxiety of his friend that he should refresh himself after his journey, now pressed him with earnest questions concerning his mother and sister.

'Well,' replied Newman, with his accustomed taciturnity; 'both well.'

'They are living in the city still?' inquired Nicholas.

'They are,' said Newman.

'And my sister,'—added Nicholas. 'Is she still engaged in the business which she wrote to tell me she thought she should like so much?'

Newman opened his eyes rather wider than usual, but merely replied by a gasp, which, according to the action of the head that accompanied it, was interpreted by his friends as meaning yes or no. In the present instance, the pantomime consisted of a nod, and not a shake; so Nicholas took the answer as a favourable one.

'Now listen to me,' said Nicholas, laying his hand on Newman's shoulder. 'Before I would make an effort to see them, I deemed it expedient to come to you, lest, by gratifying my own selfish desire, I should inflict an injury upon them which I can never repair. What has my uncle heard from Yorkshire?'

Newman opened and shut his mouth, several times, as though he were trying his utmost to speak, but could make nothing of it, and finally fixed his eyes on Nicholas with a grim and ghastly stare.

'What has he heard?' urged Nicholas, colouring. 'You see that I am prepared to hear the very worst that malice can have suggested. Why should you conceal it from me? I must know it sooner or later; and what purpose can be gained by trifling with the matter for a few minutes, when half the time would put me in possession of all that has occurred? Tell me at once, pray.'

'Tomorrow morning,' said Newman; 'hear it tomorrow.'

'What purpose would that answer?' urged Nicholas.

'You would sleep the better,' replied Newman.

'I should sleep the worse,' answered Nicholas, impatiently. 'Sleep! Exhausted as I am, and standing in no common need of rest, I cannot hope to close my eyes all night, unless you tell me everything.'

'And if I should tell you everything,' said Newman, hesitating.

'Why, then you may rouse my indignation or wound my pride,' rejoined Nicholas; 'but you will not break my rest; for if the scene were acted over again, I could take no other part than I have taken; and whatever consequences may accrue to myself from it, I shall never regret doing as I have done—never, if I starve or beg in consequence. What is a little poverty or suffering, to the disgrace of the basest and most inhuman cowardice! I tell you, if I had stood by, tamely and passively, I should have hated myself, and merited the contempt of every man in existence. The black-hearted scoundrel!'

With this gentle allusion to the absent Mr Squeers, Nicholas repressed his rising wrath, and relating to Newman exactly what had passed at Dotheboys Hall, entreated him to speak out without more pressing. Thus adjured, Mr Noggs took, from an old trunk, a sheet of paper, which appeared to have been scrawled over in great haste; and after sundry extraordinary demonstrations of reluctance, delivered himself in the following terms.

'My dear young man, you mustn't give way to—this sort of thing will never do, you know—as to getting on in the world, if you take everybody's part that's ill-treated—Damn it, I am proud to hear of it; and would have done it myself!'

Newman accompanied this very unusual outbreak with a violent blow upon the table, as if, in the heat of the moment, he had mistaken it for the chest or ribs of Mr Wackford Squeers. Having, by this open declaration of his feelings, quite precluded himself from offering Nicholas any cautious worldly advice (which had been his first intention), Mr Noggs went straight to the point.

'The day before yesterday,' said Newman, 'your uncle received this letter. I took a hasty copy of it, while he was out. Shall I read it?'

'If you please,' replied Nicholas. Newman Noggs accordingly read as follows:

'DOTHEBOYS HALL, 'THURSDAY MORNING.

'SIR,

'My pa requests me to write to you, the doctors considering it doubtful whether he will ever recuvver the use of his legs which prevents his holding a pen.

'We are in a state of mind beyond everything, and my pa is one mask of brooses both blue and green likewise two forms are steepled in his Goar. We were kimpelled to have him carried down into the kitchen where he now lays. You will judge from this that he has been brought very low.

'When your nevew that you recommended for a teacher had done this to my pa and jumped upon his body with his feet and also langwedge which I will not pollewt my pen with describing, he assaulted my ma with dreadful violence, dashed her to the earth, and drove her back comb several inches into her head. A very little more and it must have entered her skull. We have a medical certifiket that if it had, the tortershell would have affected the brain.

'Me and my brother were then the victims of his feury since which we have suffered very much which leads us to the arrowing belief that we have received some injury in our insides, especially as no marks of violence are visible externally. I am screaming out loud all the time I write and so is my brother which takes off my attention rather and I hope will excuse mistakes.

'The monster having sasiated his thirst for blood ran away, taking with him a boy of desperate character that he had excited to rebellyon, and a garnet ring belonging to my ma, and not having been apprehended by the constables is supposed to have been took up by some stage-coach. My pa begs that if he comes to you the ring may be returned, and that you will let the thief and assassin go, as if we prosecuted him he would only be transported, and if he is let go he is sure to be hung before long which will save us trouble and be much more satisfactory. Hoping to hear from you when convenient

'I remain 'Yours and cetrer 'FANNY SQUEERS.

'P.S. I pity his ignorance and despise him.'

A profound silence succeeded to the reading of this choice epistle, during which Newman Noggs, as he folded it up, gazed with a kind of grotesque pity at the boy of desperate character therein referred to; who, having no more distinct perception of the matter in hand, than that he had been the unfortunate cause of heaping trouble and falsehood upon Nicholas, sat mute and dispirited, with a most woe-begone and heart-stricken look.

'Mr Noggs,' said Nicholas, after a few moments' reflection, 'I must go out at once.'

'Go out!' cried Newman.

'Yes,' said Nicholas, 'to Golden Square. Nobody who knows me would believe this story of the ring; but it may suit the purpose, or gratify the hatred of Mr Ralph Nickleby to feign to attach credence to it. It is due—not to him, but to myself—that I should state the truth; and moreover, I have a word or two to exchange with him, which will not keep cool.'

'They must,' said Newman.

'They must not, indeed,' rejoined Nicholas firmly, as he prepared to leave the house.

'Hear me speak,' said Newman, planting himself before his impetuous young friend. 'He is not there. He is away from town. He will not be back for three days; and I know that letter will not be answered before he returns.'

'Are you sure of this?' asked Nicholas, chafing violently, and pacing the narrow room with rapid strides.

'Quite,' rejoined Newman. 'He had hardly read it when he was called away. Its contents are known to nobody but himself and us.'

'Are you certain?' demanded Nicholas, precipitately; 'not even to my mother or sister? If I thought that they—I will go there—I must see them. Which is the way? Where is it?'

'Now, be advised by me,' said Newman, speaking for the moment, in his earnestness, like any other man—'make no effort to see even them, till he comes home. I know the man. Do not seem to have been tampering with anybody. When he returns, go straight to him, and speak as boldly as you like. Guessing at the real truth, he knows it as well as you or I. Trust him for that.'

'You mean well to me, and should know him better than I can,' replied Nicholas, after some consideration. 'Well; let it be so.'

Newman, who had stood during the foregoing conversation with his back planted against the door, ready to oppose any egress from the apartment by force, if necessary, resumed his seat with much satisfaction; and as the water in the kettle was by this time boiling, made a glassful of spirits and water for Nicholas, and a cracked mug-full for the joint accommodation of himself and Smike, of which the two partook in great harmony, while Nicholas, leaning his head upon his hand, remained buried in melancholy meditation.

Meanwhile, the company below stairs, after listening attentively and not hearing any noise which would justify them in interfering for the gratification of their curiosity, returned to the chamber of the Kenwigses, and employed themselves in hazarding a great variety of conjectures relative to the cause of Mr Noggs' sudden disappearance and detention.

'Lor, I'll tell you what,' said Mrs Kenwigs. 'Suppose it should be an express sent up to say that his property has all come back again!'

'Dear me,' said Mr Kenwigs; 'it's not impossible. Perhaps, in that case, we'd better send up and ask if he won't take a little more punch.'

'Kenwigs!' said Mr Lillyvick, in a loud voice, 'I'm surprised at you.'

'What's the matter, sir?' asked Mr Kenwigs, with becoming submission to the collector of water-rates.

'Making such a remark as that, sir,' replied Mr Lillyvick, angrily. 'He has had punch already, has he not, sir? I consider the way in which that punch was cut off, if I may use the expression, highly disrespectful to this company; scandalous, perfectly scandalous. It may be the custom to allow such things in this house, but it's not the kind of behaviour that I've been used to see displayed, and so I don't mind telling you, Kenwigs. A gentleman has a glass of punch before him to which he is just about to set his lips, when another gentleman comes and collars that glass of punch, without a "with your leave", or "by your leave", and carries that glass of punch away. This may be good manners—I dare say it is—but I don't understand it, that's all; and what's more, I don't care if I never do. It's my way to speak my mind, Kenwigs, and that is my mind; and if you don't like it, it's past my regular time for going to bed, and I can find my way home without making it later.'

Here was an untoward event! The collector had sat swelling and fuming in offended dignity for some minutes, and had now fairly burst out. The great man—the rich relation—the unmarried uncle—who had it in his power to make Morleena an heiress, and the very baby a legatee—was offended. Gracious Powers, where was this to end!

'I am very sorry, sir,' said Mr Kenwigs, humbly.

'Don't tell me you're sorry,' retorted Mr Lillyvick, with much sharpness. 'You should have prevented it, then.'

The company were quite paralysed by this domestic crash. The back-parlour sat with her mouth wide open, staring vacantly at the collector, in a stupor of dismay; the other guests were scarcely less overpowered by the great man's irritation. Mr Kenwigs, not being skilful in such matters, only fanned the flame in attempting to extinguish it.

'I didn't think of it, I am sure, sir,' said that gentleman. 'I didn't suppose that such a little thing as a glass of punch would have put you out of temper.'

'Out of temper! What the devil do you mean by that piece of impertinence, Mr Kenwigs?' said the collector. 'Morleena, child—give me my hat.'

'Oh, you're not going, Mr Lillyvick, sir,' interposed Miss Petowker, with her most bewitching smile.

But still Mr Lillyvick, regardless of the siren, cried obdurately, 'Morleena, my hat!' upon the fourth repetition of which demand, Mrs Kenwigs sunk back in her chair, with a cry that might have softened a water-butt, not to say a water-collector; while the four little girls (privately instructed to that effect) clasped their uncle's drab shorts in their arms, and prayed him, in imperfect English, to remain.

'Why should I stop here, my dears?' said Mr Lillyvick; 'I'm not wanted here.'

'Oh, do not speak so cruelly, uncle,' sobbed Mrs Kenwigs, 'unless you wish to kill me.'

'I shouldn't wonder if some people were to say I did,' replied Mr Lillyvick, glancing angrily at Kenwigs. 'Out of temper!'

'Oh! I cannot bear to see him look so, at my husband,' cried Mrs Kenwigs. 'It's so dreadful in families. Oh!'

'Mr Lillyvick,' said Kenwigs, 'I hope, for the sake of your niece, that you won't object to be reconciled.'

The collector's features relaxed, as the company added their entreaties to those of his nephew-in-law. He gave up his hat, and held out his hand.

'There, Kenwigs,' said Mr Lillyvick; 'and let me tell you, at the same time, to show you how much out of temper I was, that if I had gone away without another word, it would have made no difference respecting that pound or two which I shall leave among your children when I die.'

'Morleena Kenwigs,' cried her mother, in a torrent of affection. 'Go down upon your knees to your dear uncle, and beg him to love you all his life through, for he's more a angel than a man, and I've always said so.'

Miss Morleena approaching to do homage, in compliance with this injunction, was summarily caught up and kissed by Mr Lillyvick; and thereupon Mrs Kenwigs darted forward and kissed the collector, and an irrepressible murmur of applause broke from the company who had witnessed his magnanimity.

The worthy gentleman then became once more the life and soul of the society; being again reinstated in his old post of lion, from which high station the temporary distraction of their thoughts had for a moment dispossessed him. Quadruped lions are said to be savage, only when they are hungry; biped lions are rarely sulky longer than when their appetite for distinction remains unappeased. Mr Lillyvick stood higher than ever; for he had shown his power; hinted at his property and testamentary intentions; gained great credit for disinterestedness and virtue; and, in addition to all, was finally accommodated with a much larger tumbler of punch than that which Newman Noggs had so feloniously made off with.

'I say! I beg everybody's pardon for intruding again,' said Crowl, looking in at this happy juncture; 'but what a queer business this is, isn't it? Noggs has lived in this house, now going on for five years, and nobody has ever been to see him before, within the memory of the oldest inhabitant.'

'It's a strange time of night to be called away, sir, certainly,' said the collector; 'and the behaviour of Mr Noggs himself, is, to say the least of it, mysterious.'

'Well, so it is,' rejoined Growl; 'and I'll tell you what's more—I think these two geniuses, whoever they are, have run away from somewhere.'

'What makes you think that, sir?' demanded the collector, who seemed, by a tacit understanding, to have been chosen and elected mouthpiece to the company. 'You have no reason to suppose that they have run away from anywhere without paying the rates and taxes due, I hope?'

Mr Crowl, with a look of some contempt, was about to enter a general protest against the payment of rates or taxes, under any circumstances, when he was checked by a timely whisper from Kenwigs, and several frowns and winks from Mrs K., which providentially stopped him.

'Why the fact is,' said Crowl, who had been listening at Newman's door with all his might and main; 'the fact is, that they have been talking so loud, that they quite disturbed me in my room, and so I couldn't help catching a word here, and a word there; and all I heard, certainly seemed to refer to their having bolted from some place or other. I don't wish to alarm Mrs Kenwigs; but I hope they haven't come from any jail or hospital, and brought away a fever or some unpleasantness of that sort, which might be catching for the children.'

Mrs Kenwigs was so overpowered by this supposition, that it needed all the tender attentions of Miss Petowker, of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, to restore her to anything like a state of calmness; not to mention the assiduity of Mr Kenwigs, who held a fat smelling-bottle to his lady's nose, until it became matter of some doubt whether the tears which coursed down her face were the result of feelings or SAL VOLATILE.

The ladies, having expressed their sympathy, singly and separately, fell, according to custom, into a little chorus of soothing expressions, among which, such condolences as 'Poor dear!'—'I should feel just the same, if I was her'—'To be sure, it's a very trying thing'—and 'Nobody but a mother knows what a mother's feelings is,' were among the most prominent, and most frequently repeated. In short, the opinion of the company was so clearly manifested, that Mr Kenwigs was on the point of repairing to Mr Noggs's room, to demand an explanation, and had indeed swallowed a preparatory glass of punch, with great inflexibility and steadiness of purpose, when the attention of all present was diverted by a new and terrible surprise.

This was nothing less than the sudden pouring forth of a rapid succession of the shrillest and most piercing screams, from an upper story; and to all appearance from the very two-pair back, in which the infant Kenwigs was at that moment enshrined. They were no sooner audible, than Mrs Kenwigs, opining that a strange cat had come in, and sucked the baby's breath while the girl was asleep, made for the door, wringing her hands, and shrieking dismally; to the great consternation and confusion of the company.

'Mr Kenwigs, see what it is; make haste!' cried the sister, laying violent hands upon Mrs Kenwigs, and holding her back by force. 'Oh don't twist about so, dear, or I can never hold you.'

'My baby, my blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed baby!' screamed Mrs Kenwigs, making every blessed louder than the last. 'My own darling, sweet, innocent Lillyvick—Oh let me go to him. Let me go-o-o-o!'

Pending the utterance of these frantic cries, and the wails and lamentations of the four little girls, Mr Kenwigs rushed upstairs to the room whence the sounds proceeded; at the door of which, he encountered Nicholas, with the child in his arms, who darted out with such violence, that the anxious father was thrown down six stairs, and alighted on the nearest landing-place, before he had found time to open his mouth to ask what was the matter.

'Don't be alarmed,' cried Nicholas, running down; 'here it is; it's all out, it's all over; pray compose yourselves; there's no harm done;' and with these, and a thousand other assurances, he delivered the baby (whom, in his hurry, he had carried upside down), to Mrs Kenwigs, and ran back to assist Mr Kenwigs, who was rubbing his head very hard, and looking much bewildered by his tumble.

Reassured by this cheering intelligence, the company in some degree recovered from their fears, which had been productive of some most singular instances of a total want of presence of mind; thus, the bachelor friend had, for a long time, supported in his arms Mrs Kenwigs's sister, instead of Mrs Kenwigs; and the worthy Mr Lillyvick had been actually seen, in the perturbation of his spirits, to kiss Miss Petowker several times, behind the room-door, as calmly as if nothing distressing were going forward.

'It is a mere nothing,' said Nicholas, returning to Mrs Kenwigs; 'the little girl, who was watching the child, being tired I suppose, fell asleep, and set her hair on fire.'

'Oh you malicious little wretch!' cried Mrs Kenwigs, impressively shaking her forefinger at the small unfortunate, who might be thirteen years old, and was looking on with a singed head and a frightened face.

'I heard her cries,' continued Nicholas, 'and ran down, in time to prevent her setting fire to anything else. You may depend upon it that the child is not hurt; for I took it off the bed myself, and brought it here to convince you.'

This brief explanation over, the infant, who, as he was christened after the collector! rejoiced in the names of Lillyvick Kenwigs, was partially suffocated under the caresses of the audience, and squeezed to his mother's bosom, until he roared again. The attention of the company was then directed, by a natural transition, to the little girl who had had the audacity to burn her hair off, and who, after receiving sundry small slaps and pushes from the more energetic of the ladies, was mercifully sent home: the ninepence, with which she was to have been rewarded, being escheated to the Kenwigs family.

'And whatever we are to say to you, sir,' exclaimed Mrs Kenwigs, addressing young Lillyvick's deliverer, 'I am sure I don't know.'

'You need say nothing at all,' replied Nicholas. 'I have done nothing to found any very strong claim upon your eloquence, I am sure.'

'He might have been burnt to death, if it hadn't been for you, sir,' simpered Miss Petowker.

'Not very likely, I think,' replied Nicholas; 'for there was abundance of assistance here, which must have reached him before he had been in any danger.'

'You will let us drink your health, anyvays, sir!' said Mr Kenwigs motioning towards the table.

'—In my absence, by all means,' rejoined Nicholas, with a smile. 'I have had a very fatiguing journey, and should be most indifferent company—a far greater check upon your merriment, than a promoter of it, even if I kept awake, which I think very doubtful. If you will allow me, I'll return to my friend, Mr Noggs, who went upstairs again, when he found nothing serious had occurred. Good-night.'

Excusing himself, in these terms, from joining in the festivities, Nicholas took a most winning farewell of Mrs Kenwigs and the other ladies, and retired, after making a very extraordinary impression upon the company.

'What a delightful young man!' cried Mrs Kenwigs.

'Uncommon gentlemanly, really,' said Mr Kenwigs. 'Don't you think so, Mr Lillyvick?'

'Yes,' said the collector, with a dubious shrug of his shoulders, 'He is gentlemanly, very gentlemanly—in appearance.'

'I hope you don't see anything against him, uncle?' inquired Mrs Kenwigs.

'No, my dear,' replied the collector, 'no. I trust he may not turn out—well—no matter—my love to you, my dear, and long life to the baby!'

'Your namesake,' said Mrs Kenwigs, with a sweet smile.

'And I hope a worthy namesake,' observed Mr Kenwigs, willing to propitiate the collector. 'I hope a baby as will never disgrace his godfather, and as may be considered, in arter years, of a piece with the Lillyvicks whose name he bears. I do say—and Mrs Kenwigs is of the same sentiment, and feels it as strong as I do—that I consider his being called Lillyvick one of the greatest blessings and Honours of my existence.'

'THE greatest blessing, Kenwigs,' murmured his lady.

'THE greatest blessing,' said Mr Kenwigs, correcting himself. 'A blessing that I hope, one of these days, I may be able to deserve.'

This was a politic stroke of the Kenwigses, because it made Mr Lillyvick the great head and fountain of the baby's importance. The good gentleman felt the delicacy and dexterity of the touch, and at once proposed the health of the gentleman, name unknown, who had signalised himself, that night, by his coolness and alacrity.

'Who, I don't mind saying,' observed Mr Lillyvick, as a great concession, 'is a good-looking young man enough, with manners that I hope his character may be equal to.'

'He has a very nice face and style, really,' said Mrs Kenwigs.

'He certainly has,' added Miss Petowker. 'There's something in his appearance quite—dear, dear, what's that word again?'

'What word?' inquired Mr Lillyvick.

'Why—dear me, how stupid I am,' replied Miss Petowker, hesitating. 'What do you call it, when Lords break off door-knockers and beat policemen, and play at coaches with other people's money, and all that sort of thing?'

'Aristocratic?' suggested the collector.

'Ah! aristocratic,' replied Miss Petowker; 'something very aristocratic about him, isn't there?'

The gentleman held their peace, and smiled at each other, as who should say, 'Well! there's no accounting for tastes;' but the ladies resolved unanimously that Nicholas had an aristocratic air; and nobody caring to dispute the position, it was established triumphantly.

The punch being, by this time, drunk out, and the little Kenwigses (who had for some time previously held their little eyes open with their little forefingers) becoming fractious, and requesting rather urgently to be put to bed, the collector made a move by pulling out his watch, and acquainting the company that it was nigh two o'clock; whereat some of the guests were surprised and others shocked, and hats and bonnets being groped for under the tables, and in course of time found, their owners went away, after a vast deal of shaking of hands, and many remarks how they had never spent such a delightful evening, and how they marvelled to find it so late, expecting to have heard that it was half-past ten at the very latest, and how they wished that Mr and Mrs Kenwigs had a wedding-day once a week, and how they wondered by what hidden agency Mrs Kenwigs could possibly have managed so well; and a great deal more of the same kind. To all of which flattering expressions, Mr and Mrs Kenwigs replied, by thanking every lady and gentleman, SERIATIM, for the favour of their company, and hoping they might have enjoyed themselves only half as well as they said they had.

As to Nicholas, quite unconscious of the impression he had produced, he had long since fallen asleep, leaving Mr Newman Noggs and Smike to empty the spirit bottle between them; and this office they performed with such extreme good-will, that Newman was equally at a loss to determine whether he himself was quite sober, and whether he had ever seen any gentleman so heavily, drowsily, and completely intoxicated as his new acquaintance.

CHAPTER 16

Nicholas seeks to employ himself in a New Capacity, and being unsuccessful, accepts an engagement as Tutor in a Private Family

The first care of Nicholas, next morning, was, to look after some room in which, until better times dawned upon him, he could contrive to exist, without trenching upon the hospitality of Newman Noggs, who would have slept upon the stairs with pleasure, so that his young friend was accommodated.

The vacant apartment to which the bill in the parlour window bore reference, appeared, on inquiry, to be a small back-room on the second floor, reclaimed from the leads, and overlooking a soot-bespeckled prospect of tiles and chimney-pots. For the letting of this portion of the house from week to week, on reasonable terms, the parlour lodger was empowered to treat; he being deputed by the landlord to dispose of the rooms as they became vacant, and to keep a sharp look-out that the lodgers didn't run away. As a means of securing the punctual discharge of which last service he was permitted to live rent-free, lest he should at any time be tempted to run away himself.

Of this chamber, Nicholas became the tenant; and having hired a few common articles of furniture from a neighbouring broker, and paid the first week's hire in advance, out of a small fund raised by the conversion of some spare clothes into ready money, he sat himself down to ruminate upon his prospects, which, like the prospect outside his window, were sufficiently confined and dingy. As they by no means improved on better acquaintance, and as familiarity breeds contempt, he resolved to banish them from his thoughts by dint of hard walking. So, taking up his hat, and leaving poor Smike to arrange and rearrange the room with as much delight as if it had been the costliest palace, he betook himself to the streets, and mingled with the crowd which thronged them.

Although a man may lose a sense of his own importance when he is a mere unit among a busy throng, all utterly regardless of him, it by no means follows that he can dispossess himself, with equal facility, of a very strong sense of the importance and magnitude of his cares. The unhappy state of his own affairs was the one idea which occupied the brain of Nicholas, walk as fast as he would; and when he tried to dislodge it by speculating on the situation and prospects of the people who surrounded him, he caught himself, in a few seconds, contrasting their condition with his own, and gliding almost imperceptibly back into his old train of thought again.

Occupied in these reflections, as he was making his way along one of the great public thoroughfares of London, he chanced to raise his eyes to a blue board, whereon was inscribed, in characters of gold, 'General Agency Office; for places and situations of all kinds inquire within.' It was a shop-front, fitted up with a gauze blind and an inner door; and in the window hung a long and tempting array of written placards, announcing vacant places of every grade, from a secretary's to a foot-boy's.

Nicholas halted, instinctively, before this temple of promise, and ran his eye over the capital-text openings in life which were so profusely displayed. When he had completed his survey he walked on a little way, and then back, and then on again; at length, after pausing irresolutely several times before the door of the General Agency Office, he made up his mind, and stepped in.

He found himself in a little floor-clothed room, with a high desk railed off in one corner, behind which sat a lean youth with cunning eyes and a protruding chin, whose performances in capital-text darkened the window. He had a thick ledger lying open before him, and with the fingers of his right hand inserted between the leaves, and his eyes fixed on a very fat old lady in a mob-cap—evidently the proprietress of the establishment—who was airing herself at the fire, seemed to be only waiting her directions to refer to some entries contained within its rusty clasps.

As there was a board outside, which acquainted the public that servants-of-all-work were perpetually in waiting to be hired from ten till four, Nicholas knew at once that some half-dozen strong young women, each with pattens and an umbrella, who were sitting upon a form in one corner, were in attendance for that purpose: especially as the poor things looked anxious and weary. He was not quite so certain of the callings and stations of two smart young ladies who were in conversation with the fat lady before the fire, until—having sat himself down in a corner, and remarked that he would wait until the other customers had been served—the fat lady resumed the dialogue which his entrance had interrupted.

'Cook, Tom,' said the fat lady, still airing herself as aforesaid.

'Cook,' said Tom, turning over some leaves of the ledger. 'Well!'

'Read out an easy place or two,' said the fat lady.

'Pick out very light ones, if you please, young man,' interposed a genteel female, in shepherd's-plaid boots, who appeared to be the client.

'"Mrs Marker,"' said Tom, reading, '"Russell Place, Russell Square; offers eighteen guineas; tea and sugar found. Two in family, and see very little company. Five servants kept. No man. No followers."'

'Oh Lor!' tittered the client. 'THAT won't do. Read another, young man, will you?'

'"Mrs Wrymug,"' said Tom, '"Pleasant Place, Finsbury. Wages, twelve guineas. No tea, no sugar. Serious family—"'

'Ah! you needn't mind reading that,' interrupted the client.

'"Three serious footmen,"' said Tom, impressively.

'Three? did you say?' asked the client in an altered tone.

'Three serious footmen,' replied Tom. '"Cook, housemaid, and nursemaid; each female servant required to join the Little Bethel Congregation three times every Sunday—with a serious footman. If the cook is more serious than the footman, she will be expected to improve the footman; if the footman is more serious than the cook, he will be expected to improve the cook."'

'I'll take the address of that place,' said the client; 'I don't know but what it mightn't suit me pretty well.'

'Here's another,' remarked Tom, turning over the leaves. '"Family of Mr Gallanbile, MP. Fifteen guineas, tea and sugar, and servants allowed to see male cousins, if godly. Note. Cold dinner in the kitchen on the Sabbath, Mr Gallanbile being devoted to the Observance question. No victuals whatever cooked on the Lord's Day, with the exception of dinner for Mr and Mrs Gallanbile, which, being a work of piety and necessity, is exempted. Mr Gallanbile dines late on the day of rest, in order to prevent the sinfulness of the cook's dressing herself."'

'I don't think that'll answer as well as the other,' said the client, after a little whispering with her friend. 'I'll take the other direction, if you please, young man. I can but come back again, if it don't do.'

Tom made out the address, as requested, and the genteel client, having satisfied the fat lady with a small fee, meanwhile, went away accompanied by her friend.

As Nicholas opened his mouth, to request the young man to turn to letter S, and let him know what secretaryships remained undisposed of, there came into the office an applicant, in whose favour he immediately retired, and whose appearance both surprised and interested him.

This was a young lady who could be scarcely eighteen, of very slight and delicate figure, but exquisitely shaped, who, walking timidly up to the desk, made an inquiry, in a very low tone of voice, relative to some situation as governess, or companion to a lady. She raised her veil, for an instant, while she preferred the inquiry, and disclosed a countenance of most uncommon beauty, though shaded by a cloud of sadness, which, in one so young, was doubly remarkable. Having received a card of reference to some person on the books, she made the usual acknowledgment, and glided away.

She was neatly, but very quietly attired; so much so, indeed, that it seemed as though her dress, if it had been worn by one who imparted fewer graces of her own to it, might have looked poor and shabby. Her attendant—for she had one—was a red-faced, round-eyed, slovenly girl, who, from a certain roughness about the bare arms that peeped from under her draggled shawl, and the half-washed-out traces of smut and blacklead which tattooed her countenance, was clearly of a kin with the servants-of-all-work on the form: between whom and herself there had passed various grins and glances, indicative of the freemasonry of the craft.

This girl followed her mistress; and, before Nicholas had recovered from the first effects of his surprise and admiration, the young lady was gone. It is not a matter of such complete and utter improbability as some sober people may think, that he would have followed them out, had he not been restrained by what passed between the fat lady and her book-keeper.

'When is she coming again, Tom?' asked the fat lady.

'Tomorrow morning,' replied Tom, mending his pen.

'Where have you sent her to?' asked the fat lady.

'Mrs Clark's,' replied Tom.

'She'll have a nice life of it, if she goes there,' observed the fat lady, taking a pinch of snuff from a tin box.

Tom made no other reply than thrusting his tongue into his cheek, and pointing the feather of his pen towards Nicholas—reminders which elicited from the fat lady an inquiry, of 'Now, sir, what can we do for YOU?'

Nicholas briefly replied, that he wanted to know whether there was any such post to be had, as secretary or amanuensis to a gentleman.

'Any such!' rejoined the mistress; 'a-dozen-such. An't there, Tom?'

'I should think so,' answered that young gentleman; and as he said it, he winked towards Nicholas, with a degree of familiarity which he, no doubt, intended for a rather flattering compliment, but with which Nicholas was most ungratefully disgusted.

Upon reference to the book, it appeared that the dozen secretaryships had dwindled down to one. Mr Gregsbury, the great member of parliament, of Manchester Buildings, Westminster, wanted a young man, to keep his papers and correspondence in order; and Nicholas was exactly the sort of young man that Mr Gregsbury wanted.

'I don't know what the terms are, as he said he'd settle them himself with the party,' observed the fat lady; 'but they must be pretty good ones, because he's a member of parliament.'

Inexperienced as he was, Nicholas did not feel quite assured of the force of this reasoning, or the justice of this conclusion; but without troubling himself to question it, he took down the address, and resolved to wait upon Mr Gregsbury without delay.

'I don't know what the number is,' said Tom; 'but Manchester Buildings isn't a large place; and if the worst comes to the worst it won't take you very long to knock at all the doors on both sides of the way till you find him out. I say, what a good-looking gal that was, wasn't she?'

'What girl?' demanded Nicholas, sternly.

'Oh yes. I know—what gal, eh?' whispered Tom, shutting one eye, and cocking his chin in the air. 'You didn't see her, you didn't—I say, don't you wish you was me, when she comes tomorrow morning?'

Nicholas looked at the ugly clerk, as if he had a mind to reward his admiration of the young lady by beating the ledger about his ears, but he refrained, and strode haughtily out of the office; setting at defiance, in his indignation, those ancient laws of chivalry, which not only made it proper and lawful for all good knights to hear the praise of the ladies to whom they were devoted, but rendered it incumbent upon them to roam about the world, and knock at head all such matter-of-fact and un-poetical characters, as declined to exalt, above all the earth, damsels whom they had never chanced to look upon or hear of—as if that were any excuse!

Thinking no longer of his own misfortunes, but wondering what could be those of the beautiful girl he had seen, Nicholas, with many wrong turns, and many inquiries, and almost as many misdirections, bent his steps towards the place whither he had been directed.

Within the precincts of the ancient city of Westminster, and within half a quarter of a mile of its ancient sanctuary, is a narrow and dirty region, the sanctuary of the smaller members of Parliament in modern days. It is all comprised in one street of gloomy lodging-houses, from whose windows, in vacation-time, there frown long melancholy rows of bills, which say, as plainly as did the countenances of their occupiers, ranged on ministerial and opposition benches in the session which slumbers with its fathers, 'To Let', 'To Let'. In busier periods of the year these bills disappear, and the houses swarm with legislators. There are legislators in the parlours, in the first floor, in the second, in the third, in the garrets; the small apartments reek with the breath of deputations and delegates. In damp weather, the place is rendered close, by the steams of moist acts of parliament and frouzy petitions; general postmen grow faint as they enter its infected limits, and shabby figures in quest of franks, flit restlessly to and fro like the troubled ghosts of Complete Letter-writers departed. This is Manchester Buildings; and here, at all hours of the night, may be heard the rattling of latch-keys in their respective keyholes: with now and then—when a gust of wind sweeping across the water which washes the Buildings' feet, impels the sound towards its entrance—the weak, shrill voice of some young member practising tomorrow's speech. All the livelong day, there is a grinding of organs and clashing and clanging of little boxes of music; for Manchester Buildings is an eel-pot, which has no outlet but its awkward mouth—a case-bottle which has no thoroughfare, and a short and narrow neck—and in this respect it may be typical of the fate of some few among its more adventurous residents, who, after wriggling themselves into Parliament by violent efforts and contortions, find that it, too, is no thoroughfare for them; that, like Manchester Buildings, it leads to nothing beyond itself; and that they are fain at last to back out, no wiser, no richer, not one whit more famous, than they went in.

Into Manchester Buildings Nicholas turned, with the address of the great Mr Gregsbury in his hand. As there was a stream of people pouring into a shabby house not far from the entrance, he waited until they had made their way in, and then making up to the servant, ventured to inquire if he knew where Mr Gregsbury lived.

The servant was a very pale, shabby boy, who looked as if he had slept underground from his infancy, as very likely he had. 'Mr Gregsbury?' said he; 'Mr Gregsbury lodges here. It's all right. Come in!'

Nicholas thought he might as well get in while he could, so in he walked; and he had no sooner done so, than the boy shut the door, and made off.

This was odd enough: but what was more embarrassing was, that all along the passage, and all along the narrow stairs, blocking up the window, and making the dark entry darker still, was a confused crowd of persons with great importance depicted in their looks; who were, to all appearance, waiting in silent expectation of some coming event. From time to time, one man would whisper his neighbour, or a little group would whisper together, and then the whisperers would nod fiercely to each other, or give their heads a relentless shake, as if they were bent upon doing something very desperate, and were determined not to be put off, whatever happened.

As a few minutes elapsed without anything occurring to explain this phenomenon, and as he felt his own position a peculiarly uncomfortable one, Nicholas was on the point of seeking some information from the man next him, when a sudden move was visible on the stairs, and a voice was heard to cry, 'Now, gentleman, have the goodness to walk up!'

So far from walking up, the gentlemen on the stairs began to walk down with great alacrity, and to entreat, with extraordinary politeness, that the gentlemen nearest the street would go first; the gentlemen nearest the street retorted, with equal courtesy, that they couldn't think of such a thing on any account; but they did it, without thinking of it, inasmuch as the other gentlemen pressing some half-dozen (among whom was Nicholas) forward, and closing up behind, pushed them, not merely up the stairs, but into the very sitting-room of Mr Gregsbury, which they were thus compelled to enter with most unseemly precipitation, and without the means of retreat; the press behind them, more than filling the apartment.

'Gentlemen,' said Mr Gregsbury, 'you are welcome. I am rejoiced to see you.'

For a gentleman who was rejoiced to see a body of visitors, Mr Gregsbury looked as uncomfortable as might be; but perhaps this was occasioned by senatorial gravity, and a statesmanlike habit of keeping his feelings under control. He was a tough, burly, thick-headed gentleman, with a loud voice, a pompous manner, a tolerable command of sentences with no meaning in them, and, in short, every requisite for a very good member indeed.

'Now, gentlemen,' said Mr Gregsbury, tossing a great bundle of papers into a wicker basket at his feet, and throwing himself back in his chair with his arms over the elbows, 'you are dissatisfied with my conduct, I see by the newspapers.'

'Yes, Mr Gregsbury, we are,' said a plump old gentleman in a violent heat, bursting out of the throng, and planting himself in the front.

'Do my eyes deceive me,' said Mr Gregsbury, looking towards the speaker, 'or is that my old friend Pugstyles?'

'I am that man, and no other, sir,' replied the plump old gentleman.

'Give me your hand, my worthy friend,' said Mr Gregsbury. 'Pugstyles, my dear friend, I am very sorry to see you here.'

'I am very sorry to be here, sir,' said Mr Pugstyles; 'but your conduct, Mr Gregsbury, has rendered this deputation from your constituents imperatively necessary.'

'My conduct, Pugstyles,' said Mr Gregsbury, looking round upon the deputation with gracious magnanimity—'my conduct has been, and ever will be, regulated by a sincere regard for the true and real interests of this great and happy country. Whether I look at home, or abroad; whether I behold the peaceful industrious communities of our island home: her rivers covered with steamboats, her roads with locomotives, her streets with cabs, her skies with balloons of a power and magnitude hitherto unknown in the history of aeronautics in this or any other nation—I say, whether I look merely at home, or, stretching my eyes farther, contemplate the boundless prospect of conquest and possession—achieved by British perseverance and British valour—which is outspread before me, I clasp my hands, and turning my eyes to the broad expanse above my head, exclaim, "Thank Heaven, I am a Briton!"'

The time had been, when this burst of enthusiasm would have been cheered to the very echo; but now, the deputation received it with chilling coldness. The general impression seemed to be, that as an explanation of Mr Gregsbury's political conduct, it did not enter quite enough into detail; and one gentleman in the rear did not scruple to remark aloud, that, for his purpose, it savoured rather too much of a 'gammon' tendency.

'The meaning of that term—gammon,' said Mr Gregsbury, 'is unknown to me. If it means that I grow a little too fervid, or perhaps even hyperbolical, in extolling my native land, I admit the full justice of the remark. I AM proud of this free and happy country. My form dilates, my eye glistens, my breast heaves, my heart swells, my bosom burns, when I call to mind her greatness and her glory.'

'We wish, sir,' remarked Mr Pugstyles, calmly, 'to ask you a few questions.'

'If you please, gentlemen; my time is yours—and my country's—and my country's—' said Mr Gregsbury.

This permission being conceded, Mr Pugstyles put on his spectacles, and referred to a written paper which he drew from his pocket; whereupon nearly every other member of the deputation pulled a written paper from HIS pocket, to check Mr Pugstyles off, as he read the questions.

This done, Mr Pugstyles proceeded to business.

'Question number one.—Whether, sir, you did not give a voluntary pledge previous to your election, that in event of your being returned, you would immediately put down the practice of coughing and groaning in the House of Commons. And whether you did not submit to be coughed and groaned down in the very first debate of the session, and have since made no effort to effect a reform in this respect? Whether you did not also pledge yourself to astonish the government, and make them shrink in their shoes? And whether you have astonished them, and made them shrink in their shoes, or not?'

'Go on to the next one, my dear Pugstyles,' said Mr Gregsbury.

'Have you any explanation to offer with reference to that question, sir?' asked Mr Pugstyles.

'Certainly not,' said Mr Gregsbury.

The members of the deputation looked fiercely at each other, and afterwards at the member. 'Dear Pugstyles' having taken a very long stare at Mr Gregsbury over the tops of his spectacles, resumed his list of inquiries.

'Question number two.—Whether, sir, you did not likewise give a voluntary pledge that you would support your colleague on every occasion; and whether you did not, the night before last, desert him and vote upon the other side, because the wife of a leader on that other side had invited Mrs Gregsbury to an evening party?'

'Go on,' said Mr Gregsbury.

'Nothing to say on that, either, sir?' asked the spokesman.

'Nothing whatever,' replied Mr Gregsbury. The deputation, who had only seen him at canvassing or election time, were struck dumb by his coolness. He didn't appear like the same man; then he was all milk and honey; now he was all starch and vinegar. But men ARE so different at different times!

'Question number three—and last,' said Mr Pugstyles, emphatically. 'Whether, sir, you did not state upon the hustings, that it was your firm and determined intention to oppose everything proposed; to divide the house upon every question, to move for returns on every subject, to place a motion on the books every day, and, in short, in your own memorable words, to play the very devil with everything and everybody?' With this comprehensive inquiry, Mr Pugstyles folded up his list of questions, as did all his backers.

Mr Gregsbury reflected, blew his nose, threw himself further back in his chair, came forward again, leaning his elbows on the table, made a triangle with his two thumbs and his two forefingers, and tapping his nose with the apex thereof, replied (smiling as he said it), 'I deny everything.'

At this unexpected answer, a hoarse murmur arose from the deputation; and the same gentleman who had expressed an opinion relative to the gammoning nature of the introductory speech, again made a monosyllabic demonstration, by growling out 'Resign!' Which growl being taken up by his fellows, swelled into a very earnest and general remonstrance.

'I am requested, sir, to express a hope,' said Mr Pugstyles, with a distant bow, 'that on receiving a requisition to that effect from a great majority of your constituents, you will not object at once to resign your seat in favour of some candidate whom they think they can better trust.'

To this, Mr Gregsbury read the following reply, which, anticipating the request, he had composed in the form of a letter, whereof copies had been made to send round to the newspapers.

'MY DEAR MR PUGSTYLES,

'Next to the welfare of our beloved island—this great and free and happy country, whose powers and resources are, I sincerely believe, illimitable—I value that noble independence which is an Englishman's proudest boast, and which I fondly hope to bequeath to my children, untarnished and unsullied. Actuated by no personal motives, but moved only by high and great constitutional considerations; which I will not attempt to explain, for they are really beneath the comprehension of those who have not made themselves masters, as I have, of the intricate and arduous study of politics; I would rather keep my seat, and intend doing so.

'Will you do me the favour to present my compliments to the constituent body, and acquaint them with this circumstance?

'With great esteem, 'My dear Mr Pugstyles, '&c.&c.'

'Then you will not resign, under any circumstances?' asked the spokesman.

Mr Gregsbury smiled, and shook his head.

'Then, good-morning, sir,' said Pugstyles, angrily.

'Heaven bless you!' said Mr Gregsbury. And the deputation, with many growls and scowls, filed off as quickly as the narrowness of the staircase would allow of their getting down.

The last man being gone, Mr Gregsbury rubbed his hands and chuckled, as merry fellows will, when they think they have said or done a more than commonly good thing; he was so engrossed in this self-congratulation, that he did not observe that Nicholas had been left behind in the shadow of the window-curtains, until that young gentleman, fearing he might otherwise overhear some soliloquy intended to have no listeners, coughed twice or thrice, to attract the member's notice.

'What's that?' said Mr Gregsbury, in sharp accents.

Nicholas stepped forward, and bowed.

'What do you do here, sir?' asked Mr Gregsbury; 'a spy upon my privacy! A concealed voter! You have heard my answer, sir. Pray follow the deputation.'

'I should have done so, if I had belonged to it, but I do not,' said Nicholas.

'Then how came you here, sir?' was the natural inquiry of Mr Gregsbury, MP. 'And where the devil have you come from, sir?' was the question which followed it.

'I brought this card from the General Agency Office, sir,' said Nicholas, 'wishing to offer myself as your secretary, and understanding that you stood in need of one.'

'That's all you have come for, is it?' said Mr Gregsbury, eyeing him in some doubt.

Nicholas replied in the affirmative.

'You have no connection with any of those rascally papers have you?' said Mr Gregsbury. 'You didn't get into the room, to hear what was going forward, and put it in print, eh?'

'I have no connection, I am sorry to say, with anything at present,' rejoined Nicholas,—politely enough, but quite at his ease.

'Oh!' said Mr Gregsbury. 'How did you find your way up here, then?'

Nicholas related how he had been forced up by the deputation.

'That was the way, was it?' said Mr Gregsbury. 'Sit down.'

Nicholas took a chair, and Mr Gregsbury stared at him for a long time, as if to make certain, before he asked any further questions, that there were no objections to his outward appearance.

'You want to be my secretary, do you?' he said at length.

'I wish to be employed in that capacity, sir,' replied Nicholas.

'Well,' said Mr Gregsbury; 'now what can you do?'

'I suppose,' replied Nicholas, smiling, 'that I can do what usually falls to the lot of other secretaries.'

'What's that?' inquired Mr Gregsbury.

'What is it?' replied Nicholas.

'Ah! What is it?' retorted the member, looking shrewdly at him, with his head on one side.

'A secretary's duties are rather difficult to define, perhaps,' said Nicholas, considering. 'They include, I presume, correspondence?'

'Good,' interposed Mr Gregsbury.

'The arrangement of papers and documents?'

'Very good.'

'Occasionally, perhaps, the writing from your dictation; and possibly, sir,' said Nicholas, with a half-smile, 'the copying of your speech for some public journal, when you have made one of more than usual importance.'

'Certainly,' rejoined Mr Gregsbury. 'What else?'

'Really,' said Nicholas, after a moment's reflection, 'I am not able, at this instant, to recapitulate any other duty of a secretary, beyond the general one of making himself as agreeable and useful to his employer as he can, consistently with his own respectability, and without overstepping that line of duties which he undertakes to perform, and which the designation of his office is usually understood to imply.'

Mr Gregsbury looked fixedly at Nicholas for a short time, and then glancing warily round the room, said in a suppressed voice:

'This is all very well, Mr—what is your name?'

'Nickleby.'

'This is all very well, Mr Nickleby, and very proper, so far as it goes—so far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. There are other duties, Mr Nickleby, which a secretary to a parliamentary gentleman must never lose sight of. I should require to be crammed, sir.'

'I beg your pardon,' interposed Nicholas, doubtful whether he had heard aright.

'—To be crammed, sir,' repeated Mr Gregsbury.

'May I beg your pardon again, if I inquire what you mean, sir?' said Nicholas.

'My meaning, sir, is perfectly plain,' replied Mr Gregsbury with a solemn aspect. 'My secretary would have to make himself master of the foreign policy of the world, as it is mirrored in the newspapers; to run his eye over all accounts of public meetings, all leading articles, and accounts of the proceedings of public bodies; and to make notes of anything which it appeared to him might be made a point of, in any little speech upon the question of some petition lying on the table, or anything of that kind. Do you understand?'

'I think I do, sir,' replied Nicholas.

'Then,' said Mr Gregsbury, 'it would be necessary for him to make himself acquainted, from day to day, with newspaper paragraphs on passing events; such as "Mysterious disappearance, and supposed suicide of a potboy," or anything of that sort, upon which I might found a question to the Secretary of State for the Home Department. Then, he would have to copy the question, and as much as I remembered of the answer (including a little compliment about independence and good sense); and to send the manuscript in a frank to the local paper, with perhaps half-a-dozen lines of leader, to the effect, that I was always to be found in my place in parliament, and never shrunk from the responsible and arduous duties, and so forth. You see?'

Nicholas bowed.

'Besides which,' continued Mr Gregsbury, 'I should expect him, now and then, to go through a few figures in the printed tables, and to pick out a few results, so that I might come out pretty well on timber duty questions, and finance questions, and so on; and I should like him to get up a few little arguments about the disastrous effects of a return to cash payments and a metallic currency, with a touch now and then about the exportation of bullion, and the Emperor of Russia, and bank notes, and all that kind of thing, which it's only necessary to talk fluently about, because nobody understands it. Do you take me?'

'I think I understand,' said Nicholas.

'With regard to such questions as are not political,' continued Mr Gregsbury, warming; 'and which one can't be expected to care a curse about, beyond the natural care of not allowing inferior people to be as well off as ourselves—else where are our privileges?—I should wish my secretary to get together a few little flourishing speeches, of a patriotic cast. For instance, if any preposterous bill were brought forward, for giving poor grubbing devils of authors a right to their own property, I should like to say, that I for one would never consent to opposing an insurmountable bar to the diffusion of literature among THE PEOPLE,—you understand?—that the creations of the pocket, being man's, might belong to one man, or one family; but that the creations of the brain, being God's, ought as a matter of course to belong to the people at large—and if I was pleasantly disposed, I should like to make a joke about posterity, and say that those who wrote for posterity should be content to be rewarded by the approbation OF posterity; it might take with the house, and could never do me any harm, because posterity can't be expected to know anything about me or my jokes either—do you see?'

'I see that, sir,' replied Nicholas.

'You must always bear in mind, in such cases as this, where our interests are not affected,' said Mr Gregsbury, 'to put it very strong about the people, because it comes out very well at election-time; and you could be as funny as you liked about the authors; because I believe the greater part of them live in lodgings, and are not voters. This is a hasty outline of the chief things you'd have to do, except waiting in the lobby every night, in case I forgot anything, and should want fresh cramming; and, now and then, during great debates, sitting in the front row of the gallery, and saying to the people about—'You see that gentleman, with his hand to his face, and his arm twisted round the pillar—that's Mr Gregsbury—the celebrated Mr Gregsbury,'—with any other little eulogium that might strike you at the moment. And for salary,' said Mr Gregsbury, winding up with great rapidity; for he was out of breath—'and for salary, I don't mind saying at once in round numbers, to prevent any dissatisfaction—though it's more than I've been accustomed to give—fifteen shillings a week, and find yourself. There!'

With this handsome offer, Mr Gregsbury once more threw himself back in his chair, and looked like a man who had been most profligately liberal, but is determined not to repent of it notwithstanding.

'Fifteen shillings a week is not much,' said Nicholas, mildly.

'Not much! Fifteen shillings a week not much, young man?' cried Mr Gregsbury. 'Fifteen shillings a—'

'Pray do not suppose that I quarrel with the sum, sir,' replied Nicholas; 'for I am not ashamed to confess, that whatever it may be in itself, to me it is a great deal. But the duties and responsibilities make the recompense small, and they are so very heavy that I fear to undertake them.'

'Do you decline to undertake them, sir?' inquired Mr Gregsbury, with his hand on the bell-rope.

'I fear they are too great for my powers, however good my will may be, sir,' replied Nicholas.

'That is as much as to say that you had rather not accept the place, and that you consider fifteen shillings a week too little,' said Mr Gregsbury, ringing. 'Do you decline it, sir?'

'I have no alternative but to do so,' replied Nicholas.

'Door, Matthews!' said Mr Gregsbury, as the boy appeared.

'I am sorry I have troubled you unnecessarily, sir,' said Nicholas.

'I am sorry you have,' rejoined Mr Gregsbury, turning his back upon him. 'Door, Matthews!'

'Good-morning, sir,' said Nicholas.

'Door, Matthews!' cried Mr Gregsbury.

The boy beckoned Nicholas, and tumbling lazily downstairs before him, opened the door, and ushered him into the street. With a sad and pensive air, he retraced his steps homewards.

Smike had scraped a meal together from the remnant of last night's supper, and was anxiously awaiting his return. The occurrences of the morning had not improved Nicholas's appetite, and, by him, the dinner remained untasted. He was sitting in a thoughtful attitude, with the plate which the poor fellow had assiduously filled with the choicest morsels, untouched, by his side, when Newman Noggs looked into the room.

'Come back?' asked Newman.

'Yes,' replied Nicholas, 'tired to death: and, what is worse, might have remained at home for all the good I have done.'

'Couldn't expect to do much in one morning,' said Newman.

'Maybe so, but I am sanguine, and did expect,' said Nicholas, 'and am proportionately disappointed.' Saying which, he gave Newman an account of his proceedings.

'If I could do anything,' said Nicholas, 'anything, however slight, until Ralph Nickleby returns, and I have eased my mind by confronting him, I should feel happier. I should think it no disgrace to work, Heaven knows. Lying indolently here, like a half-tamed sullen beast, distracts me.'

'I don't know,' said Newman; 'small things offer—they would pay the rent, and more—but you wouldn't like them; no, you could hardly be expected to undergo it—no, no.'

'What could I hardly be expected to undergo?' asked Nicholas, raising his eyes. 'Show me, in this wide waste of London, any honest means by which I could even defray the weekly hire of this poor room, and see if I shrink from resorting to them! Undergo! I have undergone too much, my friend, to feel pride or squeamishness now. Except—' added Nicholas hastily, after a short silence, 'except such squeamishness as is common honesty, and so much pride as constitutes self-respect. I see little to choose, between assistant to a brutal pedagogue, and toad-eater to a mean and ignorant upstart, be he member or no member.'

'I hardly know whether I should tell you what I heard this morning, or not,' said Newman.

'Has it reference to what you said just now?' asked Nicholas.

'It has.'

'Then in Heaven's name, my good friend, tell it me,' said Nicholas. 'For God's sake consider my deplorable condition; and, while I promise to take no step without taking counsel with you, give me, at least, a vote in my own behalf.'

Moved by this entreaty, Newman stammered forth a variety of most unaccountable and entangled sentences, the upshot of which was, that Mrs Kenwigs had examined him, at great length that morning, touching the origin of his acquaintance with, and the whole life, adventures, and pedigree of, Nicholas; that Newman had parried these questions as long as he could, but being, at length, hard pressed and driven into a corner, had gone so far as to admit, that Nicholas was a tutor of great accomplishments, involved in some misfortunes which he was not at liberty to explain, and bearing the name of Johnson. That Mrs Kenwigs, impelled by gratitude, or ambition, or maternal pride, or maternal love, or all four powerful motives conjointly, had taken secret conference with Mr Kenwigs, and had finally returned to propose that Mr Johnson should instruct the four Miss Kenwigses in the French language as spoken by natives, at the weekly stipend of five shillings, current coin of the realm; being at the rate of one shilling per week, per each Miss Kenwigs, and one shilling over, until such time as the baby might be able to take it out in grammar.

'Which, unless I am very much mistaken,' observed Mrs Kenwigs in making the proposition, 'will not be very long; for such clever children, Mr Noggs, never were born into this world, I do believe.'

'There,' said Newman, 'that's all. It's beneath you, I know; but I thought that perhaps you might—'

'Might!' cried Nicholas, with great alacrity; 'of course I shall. I accept the offer at once. Tell the worthy mother so, without delay, my dear fellow; and that I am ready to begin whenever she pleases.'

Newman hastened, with joyful steps, to inform Mrs Kenwigs of his friend's acquiescence, and soon returning, brought back word that they would be happy to see him in the first floor as soon as convenient; that Mrs Kenwigs had, upon the instant, sent out to secure a second-hand French grammar and dialogues, which had long been fluttering in the sixpenny box at the bookstall round the corner; and that the family, highly excited at the prospect of this addition to their gentility, wished the initiatory lesson to come off immediately.

And here it may be observed, that Nicholas was not, in the ordinary sense of the word, a young man of high spirit. He would resent an affront to himself, or interpose to redress a wrong offered to another, as boldly and freely as any knight that ever set lance in rest; but he lacked that peculiar excess of coolness and great-minded selfishness, which invariably distinguish gentlemen of high spirit. In truth, for our own part, we are disposed to look upon such gentleman as being rather incumbrances than otherwise in rising families: happening to be acquainted with several whose spirit prevents their settling down to any grovelling occupation, and only displays itself in a tendency to cultivate moustachios, and look fierce; and although moustachios and ferocity are both very pretty things in their way, and very much to be commended, we confess to a desire to see them bred at the owner's proper cost, rather than at the expense of low-spirited people.

Nicholas, therefore, not being a high-spirited young man according to common parlance, and deeming it a greater degradation to borrow, for the supply of his necessities, from Newman Noggs, than to teach French to the little Kenwigses for five shillings a week, accepted the offer with the alacrity already described, and betook himself to the first floor with all convenient speed.

Here, he was received by Mrs Kenwigs with a genteel air, kindly intended to assure him of her protection and support; and here, too, he found Mr Lillyvick and Miss Petowker; the four Miss Kenwigses on their form of audience; and the baby in a dwarf porter's chair with a deal tray before it, amusing himself with a toy horse without a head; the said horse being composed of a small wooden cylinder, not unlike an Italian iron, supported on four crooked pegs, and painted in ingenious resemblance of red wafers set in blacking.

'How do you do, Mr Johnson?' said Mrs Kenwigs. 'Uncle—Mr Johnson.'

'How do you do, sir?' said Mr Lillyvick—rather sharply; for he had not known what Nicholas was, on the previous night, and it was rather an aggravating circumstance if a tax collector had been too polite to a teacher.

'Mr Johnson is engaged as private master to the children, uncle,' said Mrs Kenwigs.

'So you said just now, my dear,' replied Mr Lillyvick.

'But I hope,' said Mrs Kenwigs, drawing herself up, 'that that will not make them proud; but that they will bless their own good fortune, which has born them superior to common people's children. Do you hear, Morleena?'

'Yes, ma,' replied Miss Kenwigs.

'And when you go out in the streets, or elsewhere, I desire that you don't boast of it to the other children,' said Mrs Kenwigs; 'and that if you must say anything about it, you don't say no more than "We've got a private master comes to teach us at home, but we ain't proud, because ma says it's sinful." Do you hear, Morleena?'

'Yes, ma,' replied Miss Kenwigs again.

'Then mind you recollect, and do as I tell you,' said Mrs Kenwigs. 'Shall Mr Johnson begin, uncle?'

'I am ready to hear, if Mr Johnson is ready to commence, my dear,' said the collector, assuming the air of a profound critic. 'What sort of language do you consider French, sir?'

'How do you mean?' asked Nicholas.

'Do you consider it a good language, sir?' said the collector; 'a pretty language, a sensible language?'

'A pretty language, certainly,' replied Nicholas; 'and as it has a name for everything, and admits of elegant conversation about everything, I presume it is a sensible one.'

'I don't know,' said Mr Lillyvick, doubtfully. 'Do you call it a cheerful language, now?'

'Yes,' replied Nicholas, 'I should say it was, certainly.'

'It's very much changed since my time, then,' said the collector, 'very much.'

'Was it a dismal one in your time?' asked Nicholas, scarcely able to repress a smile.

'Very,' replied Mr Lillyvick, with some vehemence of manner. 'It's the war time that I speak of; the last war. It may be a cheerful language. I should be sorry to contradict anybody; but I can only say that I've heard the French prisoners, who were natives, and ought to know how to speak it, talking in such a dismal manner, that it made one miserable to hear them. Ay, that I have, fifty times, sir—fifty times!'

Mr Lillyvick was waxing so cross, that Mrs Kenwigs thought it expedient to motion to Nicholas not to say anything; and it was not until Miss Petowker had practised several blandishments, to soften the excellent old gentleman, that he deigned to break silence by asking,

'What's the water in French, sir?'

'L'EAU,' replied Nicholas.

'Ah!' said Mr Lillyvick, shaking his head mournfully, 'I thought as much. Lo, eh? I don't think anything of that language—nothing at all.'

'I suppose the children may begin, uncle?' said Mrs Kenwigs.

'Oh yes; they may begin, my dear,' replied the collector, discontentedly. 'I have no wish to prevent them.'

This permission being conceded, the four Miss Kenwigses sat in a row, with their tails all one way, and Morleena at the top: while Nicholas, taking the book, began his preliminary explanations. Miss Petowker and Mrs Kenwigs looked on, in silent admiration, broken only by the whispered assurances of the latter, that Morleena would have it all by heart in no time; and Mr Lillyvick regarded the group with frowning and attentive eyes, lying in wait for something upon which he could open a fresh discussion on the language.

CHAPTER 17

Follows the Fortunes of Miss Nickleby

It was with a heavy heart, and many sad forebodings which no effort could banish, that Kate Nickleby, on the morning appointed for the commencement of her engagement with Madame Mantalini, left the city when its clocks yet wanted a quarter of an hour of eight, and threaded her way alone, amid the noise and bustle of the streets, towards the west end of London.

At this early hour many sickly girls, whose business, like that of the poor worm, is to produce, with patient toil, the finery that bedecks the thoughtless and luxurious, traverse our streets, making towards the scene of their daily labour, and catching, as if by stealth, in their hurried walk, the only gasp of wholesome air and glimpse of sunlight which cheer their monotonous existence during the long train of hours that make a working day. As she drew nigh to the more fashionable quarter of the town, Kate marked many of this class as they passed by, hurrying like herself to their painful occupation, and saw, in their unhealthy looks and feeble gait, but too clear an evidence that her misgivings were not wholly groundless.

She arrived at Madame Mantalini's some minutes before the appointed hour, and after walking a few times up and down, in the hope that some other female might arrive and spare her the embarrassment of stating her business to the servant, knocked timidly at the door: which, after some delay, was opened by the footman, who had been putting on his striped jacket as he came upstairs, and was now intent on fastening his apron.

'Is Madame Mantalini in?' faltered Kate.

'Not often out at this time, miss,' replied the man in a tone which rendered "Miss," something more offensive than "My dear."

'Can I see her?' asked Kate.

'Eh?' replied the man, holding the door in his hand, and honouring the inquirer with a stare and a broad grin, 'Lord, no.'

'I came by her own appointment,' said Kate; 'I am—I am—to be employed here.'

'Oh! you should have rung the worker's bell,' said the footman, touching the handle of one in the door-post. 'Let me see, though, I forgot—Miss Nickleby, is it?'

'Yes,' replied Kate.

'You're to walk upstairs then, please,' said the man. 'Madame Mantalini wants to see you—this way—take care of these things on the floor.'

Cautioning her, in these terms, not to trip over a heterogeneous litter of pastry-cook's trays, lamps, waiters full of glasses, and piles of rout seats which were strewn about the hall, plainly bespeaking a late party on the previous night, the man led the way to the second story, and ushered Kate into a back-room, communicating by folding-doors with the apartment in which she had first seen the mistress of the establishment.

'If you'll wait here a minute,' said the man, 'I'll tell her presently.' Having made this promise with much affability, he retired and left Kate alone.

There was not much to amuse in the room; of which the most attractive feature was, a half-length portrait in oil, of Mr Mantalini, whom the artist had depicted scratching his head in an easy manner, and thus displaying to advantage a diamond ring, the gift of Madame Mantalini before her marriage. There was, however, the sound of voices in conversation in the next room; and as the conversation was loud and the partition thin, Kate could not help discovering that they belonged to Mr and Mrs Mantalini.

'If you will be odiously, demnebly, outrIgeously jealous, my soul,' said Mr Mantalini, 'you will be very miserable—horrid miserable—demnition miserable.' And then, there was a sound as though Mr Mantalini were sipping his coffee.

'I AM miserable,' returned Madame Mantalini, evidently pouting.

'Then you are an ungrateful, unworthy, demd unthankful little fairy,' said Mr Mantalini.

'I am not,' returned Madame, with a sob.

'Do not put itself out of humour,' said Mr Mantalini, breaking an egg. 'It is a pretty, bewitching little demd countenance, and it should not be out of humour, for it spoils its loveliness, and makes it cross and gloomy like a frightful, naughty, demd hobgoblin.'

'I am not to be brought round in that way, always,' rejoined Madame, sulkily.

'It shall be brought round in any way it likes best, and not brought round at all if it likes that better,' retorted Mr Mantalini, with his egg-spoon in his mouth.

'It's very easy to talk,' said Mrs Mantalini.

'Not so easy when one is eating a demnition egg,' replied Mr Mantalini; 'for the yolk runs down the waistcoat, and yolk of egg does not match any waistcoat but a yellow waistcoat, demmit.'

'You were flirting with her during the whole night,' said Madame Mantalini, apparently desirous to lead the conversation back to the point from which it had strayed.

'No, no, my life.'

'You were,' said Madame; 'I had my eye upon you all the time.'

'Bless the little winking twinkling eye; was it on me all the time!' cried Mantalini, in a sort of lazy rapture. 'Oh, demmit!'

'And I say once more,' resumed Madame, 'that you ought not to waltz with anybody but your own wife; and I will not bear it, Mantalini, if I take poison first.'

'She will not take poison and have horrid pains, will she?' said Mantalini; who, by the altered sound of his voice, seemed to have moved his chair, and taken up his position nearer to his wife. 'She will not take poison, because she had a demd fine husband who might have married two countesses and a dowager—'

'Two countesses,' interposed Madame. 'You told me one before!'

'Two!' cried Mantalini. 'Two demd fine women, real countesses and splendid fortunes, demmit.'

'And why didn't you?' asked Madame, playfully.

'Why didn't I!' replied her husband. 'Had I not seen, at a morning concert, the demdest little fascinator in all the world, and while that little fascinator is my wife, may not all the countesses and dowagers in England be—'

Mr Mantalini did not finish the sentence, but he gave Madame Mantalini a very loud kiss, which Madame Mantalini returned; after which, there seemed to be some more kissing mixed up with the progress of the breakfast.

'And what about the cash, my existence's jewel?' said Mantalini, when these endearments ceased. 'How much have we in hand?'

'Very little indeed,' replied Madame.

'We must have some more,' said Mantalini; 'we must have some discount out of old Nickleby to carry on the war with, demmit.'

'You can't want any more just now,' said Madame coaxingly.

'My life and soul,' returned her husband, 'there is a horse for sale at Scrubbs's, which it would be a sin and a crime to lose—going, my senses' joy, for nothing.'

'For nothing,' cried Madame, 'I am glad of that.'

'For actually nothing,' replied Mantalini. 'A hundred guineas down will buy him; mane, and crest, and legs, and tail, all of the demdest beauty. I will ride him in the park before the very chariots of the rejected countesses. The demd old dowager will faint with grief and rage; the other two will say "He is married, he has made away with himself, it is a demd thing, it is all up!" They will hate each other demnebly, and wish you dead and buried. Ha! ha! Demmit.'

Madame Mantalini's prudence, if she had any, was not proof against these triumphal pictures; after a little jingling of keys, she observed that she would see what her desk contained, and rising for that purpose, opened the folding-door, and walked into the room where Kate was seated.

'Dear me, child!' exclaimed Madame Mantalini, recoiling in surprise. 'How came you here?'

'Child!' cried Mantalini, hurrying in. 'How came—eh!—oh—demmit, how d'ye do?'

'I have been waiting, here some time, ma'am,' said Kate, addressing Madame Mantalini. 'The servant must have forgotten to let you know that I was here, I think.'

'You really must see to that man,' said Madame, turning to her husband. 'He forgets everything.'

'I will twist his demd nose off his countenance for leaving such a very pretty creature all alone by herself,' said her husband.

'Mantalini,' cried Madame, 'you forget yourself.'

'I don't forget you, my soul, and never shall, and never can,' said Mantalini, kissing his wife's hand, and grimacing aside, to Miss Nickleby, who turned away.

Appeased by this compliment, the lady of the business took some papers from her desk which she handed over to Mr Mantalini, who received them with great delight. She then requested Kate to follow her, and after several feints on the part of Mr Mantalini to attract the young lady's attention, they went away: leaving that gentleman extended at full length on the sofa, with his heels in the air and a newspaper in his hand.

Madame Mantalini led the way down a flight of stairs, and through a passage, to a large room at the back of the premises where were a number of young women employed in sewing, cutting out, making up, altering, and various other processes known only to those who are cunning in the arts of millinery and dressmaking. It was a close room with a skylight, and as dull and quiet as a room need be.

On Madame Mantalini calling aloud for Miss Knag, a short, bustling, over-dressed female, full of importance, presented herself, and all the young ladies suspending their operations for the moment, whispered to each other sundry criticisms upon the make and texture of Miss Nickleby's dress, her complexion, cast of features, and personal appearance, with as much good breeding as could have been displayed by the very best society in a crowded ball-room.

'Oh, Miss Knag,' said Madame Mantalini, 'this is the young person I spoke to you about.'

Miss Knag bestowed a reverential smile upon Madame Mantalini, which she dexterously transformed into a gracious one for Kate, and said that certainly, although it was a great deal of trouble to have young people who were wholly unused to the business, still, she was sure the young person would try to do her best—impressed with which conviction she (Miss Knag) felt an interest in her, already.

'I think that, for the present at all events, it will be better for Miss Nickleby to come into the show-room with you, and try things on for people,' said Madame Mantalini. 'She will not be able for the present to be of much use in any other way; and her appearance will—'

'Suit very well with mine, Madame Mantalini,' interrupted Miss Knag. 'So it will; and to be sure I might have known that you would not be long in finding that out; for you have so much taste in all those matters, that really, as I often say to the young ladies, I do not know how, when, or where, you possibly could have acquired all you know—hem—Miss Nickleby and I are quite a pair, Madame Mantalini, only I am a little darker than Miss Nickleby, and—hem—I think my foot may be a little smaller. Miss Nickleby, I am sure, will not be offended at my saying that, when she hears that our family always have been celebrated for small feet ever since—hem—ever since our family had any feet at all, indeed, I think. I had an uncle once, Madame Mantalini, who lived in Cheltenham, and had a most excellent business as a tobacconist—hem—who had such small feet, that they were no bigger than those which are usually joined to wooden legs—the most symmetrical feet, Madame Mantalini, that even you can imagine.'

'They must have had something of the appearance of club feet, Miss Knag,' said Madame.

'Well now, that is so like you,' returned Miss Knag, 'Ha! ha! ha! Of club feet! Oh very good! As I often remark to the young ladies, "Well I must say, and I do not care who knows it, of all the ready humour—hem—I ever heard anywhere"—and I have heard a good deal; for when my dear brother was alive (I kept house for him, Miss Nickleby), we had to supper once a week two or three young men, highly celebrated in those days for their humour, Madame Mantalini—"Of all the ready humour," I say to the young ladies, "I ever heard, Madame Mantalini's is the most remarkable—hem. It is so gentle, so sarcastic, and yet so good-natured (as I was observing to Miss Simmonds only this morning), that how, or when, or by what means she acquired it, is to me a mystery indeed."'

Here Miss Knag paused to take breath, and while she pauses it may be observed—not that she was marvellously loquacious and marvellously deferential to Madame Mantalini, since these are facts which require no comment; but that every now and then, she was accustomed, in the torrent of her discourse, to introduce a loud, shrill, clear 'hem!' the import and meaning of which, was variously interpreted by her acquaintance; some holding that Miss Knag dealt in exaggeration, and introduced the monosyllable when any fresh invention was in course of coinage in her brain; others, that when she wanted a word, she threw it in to gain time, and prevent anybody else from striking into the conversation. It may be further remarked, that Miss Knag still aimed at youth, although she had shot beyond it, years ago; and that she was weak and vain, and one of those people who are best described by the axiom, that you may trust them as far as you can see them, and no farther.

'You'll take care that Miss Nickleby understands her hours, and so forth,' said Madame Mantalini; 'and so I'll leave her with you. You'll not forget my directions, Miss Knag?'

Miss Knag of course replied, that to forget anything Madame Mantalini had directed, was a moral impossibility; and that lady, dispensing a general good-morning among her assistants, sailed away.

'Charming creature, isn't she, Miss Nickleby?' said Miss Knag, rubbing her hands together.

'I have seen very little of her,' said Kate. 'I hardly know yet.'

'Have you seen Mr Mantalini?' inquired Miss Knag.

'Yes; I have seen him twice.'

'Isn't HE a charming creature?'

'Indeed he does not strike me as being so, by any means,' replied Kate.

'No, my dear!' cried Miss Knag, elevating her hands. 'Why, goodness gracious mercy, where's your taste? Such a fine tall, full-whiskered dashing gentlemanly man, with such teeth and hair, and—hem—well now, you DO astonish me.'

'I dare say I am very foolish,' replied Kate, laying aside her bonnet; 'but as my opinion is of very little importance to him or anyone else, I do not regret having formed it, and shall be slow to change it, I think.'

'He is a very fine man, don't you think so?' asked one of the young ladies.

'Indeed he may be, for anything I could say to the contrary,' replied Kate.

'And drives very beautiful horses, doesn't he?' inquired another.

'I dare say he may, but I never saw them,' answered Kate.

'Never saw them!' interposed Miss Knag. 'Oh, well! There it is at once you know; how can you possibly pronounce an opinion about a gentleman—hem—if you don't see him as he turns out altogether?'

There was so much of the world—even of the little world of the country girl—in this idea of the old milliner, that Kate, who was anxious, for every reason, to change the subject, made no further remark, and left Miss Knag in possession of the field.

After a short silence, during which most of the young people made a closer inspection of Kate's appearance, and compared notes respecting it, one of them offered to help her off with her shawl, and the offer being accepted, inquired whether she did not find black very uncomfortable wear.

'I do indeed,' replied Kate, with a bitter sigh.

'So dusty and hot,' observed the same speaker, adjusting her dress for her.

Kate might have said, that mourning is sometimes the coldest wear which mortals can assume; that it not only chills the breasts of those it clothes, but extending its influence to summer friends, freezes up their sources of good-will and kindness, and withering all the buds of promise they once so liberally put forth, leaves nothing but bared and rotten hearts exposed. There are few who have lost a friend or relative constituting in life their sole dependence, who have not keenly felt this chilling influence of their sable garb. She had felt it acutely, and feeling it at the moment, could not quite restrain her tears.

'I am very sorry to have wounded you by my thoughtless speech,' said her companion. 'I did not think of it. You are in mourning for some near relation?'

'For my father,' answered Kate.

'For what relation, Miss Simmonds?' asked Miss Knag, in an audible voice.

'Her father,' replied the other softly.

'Her father, eh?' said Miss Knag, without the slightest depression of her voice. 'Ah! A long illness, Miss Simmonds?'

'Hush,' replied the girl; 'I don't know.'

'Our misfortune was very sudden,' said Kate, turning away, 'or I might perhaps, at a time like this, be enabled to support it better.'

There had existed not a little desire in the room, according to invariable custom, when any new 'young person' came, to know who Kate was, and what she was, and all about her; but, although it might have been very naturally increased by her appearance and emotion, the knowledge that it pained her to be questioned, was sufficient to repress even this curiosity; and Miss Knag, finding it hopeless to attempt extracting any further particulars just then, reluctantly commanded silence, and bade the work proceed.

In silence, then, the tasks were plied until half-past one, when a baked leg of mutton, with potatoes to correspond, were served in the kitchen. The meal over, and the young ladies having enjoyed the additional relaxation of washing their hands, the work began again, and was again performed in silence, until the noise of carriages rattling through the streets, and of loud double knocks at doors, gave token that the day's work of the more fortunate members of society was proceeding in its turn.

One of these double knocks at Madame Mantalini's door, announced the equipage of some great lady—or rather rich one, for there is occasionally a distinction between riches and greatness—who had come with her daughter to approve of some court-dresses which had been a long time preparing, and upon whom Kate was deputed to wait, accompanied by Miss Knag, and officered of course by Madame Mantalini.

Kate's part in the pageant was humble enough, her duties being limited to holding articles of costume until Miss Knag was ready to try them on, and now and then tying a string, or fastening a hook-and-eye. She might, not unreasonably, have supposed herself beneath the reach of any arrogance, or bad humour; but it happened that the lady and daughter were both out of temper that day, and the poor girl came in for her share of their revilings. She was awkward—her hands were cold—dirty—coarse—she could do nothing right; they wondered how Madame Mantalini could have such people about her; requested they might see some other young woman the next time they came; and so forth.

So common an occurrence would be hardly deserving of mention, but for its effect. Kate shed many bitter tears when these people were gone, and felt, for the first time, humbled by her occupation. She had, it is true, quailed at the prospect of drudgery and hard service; but she had felt no degradation in working for her bread, until she found herself exposed to insolence and pride. Philosophy would have taught her that the degradation was on the side of those who had sunk so low as to display such passions habitually, and without cause: but she was too young for such consolation, and her honest feeling was hurt. May not the complaint, that common people are above their station, often take its rise in the fact of UNcommon people being below theirs?

In such scenes and occupations the time wore on until nine o'clock, when Kate, jaded and dispirited with the occurrences of the day, hastened from the confinement of the workroom, to join her mother at the street corner, and walk home:—the more sadly, from having to disguise her real feelings, and feign to participate in all the sanguine visions of her companion.

'Bless my soul, Kate,' said Mrs Nickleby; 'I've been thinking all day what a delightful thing it would be for Madame Mantalini to take you into partnership—such a likely thing too, you know! Why, your poor dear papa's cousin's sister-in-law—a Miss Browndock—was taken into partnership by a lady that kept a school at Hammersmith, and made her fortune in no time at all. I forget, by-the-bye, whether that Miss Browndock was the same lady that got the ten thousand pounds prize in the lottery, but I think she was; indeed, now I come to think of it, I am sure she was. "Mantalini and Nickleby", how well it would sound!—and if Nicholas has any good fortune, you might have Doctor Nickleby, the head-master of Westminster School, living in the same street.'

'Dear Nicholas!' cried Kate, taking from her reticule her brother's letter from Dotheboys Hall. 'In all our misfortunes, how happy it makes me, mama, to hear he is doing well, and to find him writing in such good spirits! It consoles me for all we may undergo, to think that he is comfortable and happy.'

Poor Kate! she little thought how weak her consolation was, and how soon she would be undeceived.

CHAPTER 18

Miss Knag, after doting on Kate Nickleby for three whole Days, makes up her Mind to hate her for evermore. The Causes which led Miss Knag to form this Resolution

There are many lives of much pain, hardship, and suffering, which, having no stirring interest for any but those who lead them, are disregarded by persons who do not want thought or feeling, but who pamper their compassion and need high stimulants to rouse it.

There are not a few among the disciples of charity who require, in their vocation, scarcely less excitement than the votaries of pleasure in theirs; and hence it is that diseased sympathy and compassion are every day expended on out-of-the-way objects, when only too many demands upon the legitimate exercise of the same virtues in a healthy state, are constantly within the sight and hearing of the most unobservant person alive. In short, charity must have its romance, as the novelist or playwright must have his. A thief in fustian is a vulgar character, scarcely to be thought of by persons of refinement; but dress him in green velvet, with a high-crowned hat, and change the scene of his operations, from a thickly-peopled city, to a mountain road, and you shall find in him the very soul of poetry and adventure. So it is with the one great cardinal virtue, which, properly nourished and exercised, leads to, if it does not necessarily include, all the others. It must have its romance; and the less of real, hard, struggling work-a-day life there is in that romance, the better.

The life to which poor Kate Nickleby was devoted, in consequence of the unforeseen train of circumstances already developed in this narrative, was a hard one; but lest the very dulness, unhealthy confinement, and bodily fatigue, which made up its sum and substance, should deprive it of any interest with the mass of the charitable and sympathetic, I would rather keep Miss Nickleby herself in view just now, than chill them in the outset, by a minute and lengthened description of the establishment presided over by Madame Mantalini.

'Well, now, indeed, Madame Mantalini,' said Miss Knag, as Kate was taking her weary way homewards on the first night of her novitiate; 'that Miss Nickleby is a very creditable young person—a very creditable young person indeed—hem—upon my word, Madame Mantalini, it does very extraordinary credit even to your discrimination that you should have found such a very excellent, very well-behaved, very—hem—very unassuming young woman to assist in the fitting on. I have seen some young women when they had the opportunity of displaying before their betters, behave in such a—oh, dear—well—but you're always right, Madame Mantalini, always; and as I very often tell the young ladies, how you do contrive to be always right, when so many people are so often wrong, is to me a mystery indeed.'

'Beyond putting a very excellent client out of humour, Miss Nickleby has not done anything very remarkable today—that I am aware of, at least,' said Madame Mantalini in reply.

'Oh, dear!' said Miss Knag; 'but you must allow a great deal for inexperience, you know.'

'And youth?' inquired Madame.

'Oh, I say nothing about that, Madame Mantalini,' replied Miss Knag, reddening; 'because if youth were any excuse, you wouldn't have—'

'Quite so good a forewoman as I have, I suppose,' suggested Madame.

'Well, I never did know anybody like you, Madame Mantalini,' rejoined Miss Knag most complacently, 'and that's the fact, for you know what one's going to say, before it has time to rise to one's lips. Oh, very good! Ha, ha, ha!'

'For myself,' observed Madame Mantalini, glancing with affected carelessness at her assistant, and laughing heartily in her sleeve, 'I consider Miss Nickleby the most awkward girl I ever saw in my life.'

'Poor dear thing,' said Miss Knag, 'it's not her fault. If it was, we might hope to cure it; but as it's her misfortune, Madame Mantalini, why really you know, as the man said about the blind horse, we ought to respect it.'

'Her uncle told me she had been considered pretty,' remarked Madame Mantalini. 'I think her one of the most ordinary girls I ever met with.'

'Ordinary!' cried Miss Knag with a countenance beaming delight; 'and awkward! Well, all I can say is, Madame Mantalini, that I quite love the poor girl; and that if she was twice as indifferent-looking, and twice as awkward as she is, I should be only so much the more her friend, and that's the truth of it.'

In fact, Miss Knag had conceived an incipient affection for Kate Nickleby, after witnessing her failure that morning, and this short conversation with her superior increased the favourable prepossession to a most surprising extent; which was the more remarkable, as when she first scanned that young lady's face and figure, she had entertained certain inward misgivings that they would never agree.

'But now,' said Miss Knag, glancing at the reflection of herself in a mirror at no great distance, 'I love her—I quite love her—I declare I do!'

Of such a highly disinterested quality was this devoted friendship, and so superior was it to the little weaknesses of flattery or ill-nature, that the kind-hearted Miss Knag candidly informed Kate Nickleby, next day, that she saw she would never do for the business, but that she need not give herself the slightest uneasiness on this account, for that she (Miss Knag), by increased exertions on her own part, would keep her as much as possible in the background, and that all she would have to do, would be to remain perfectly quiet before company, and to shrink from attracting notice by every means in her power. This last suggestion was so much in accordance with the timid girl's own feelings and wishes, that she readily promised implicit reliance on the excellent spinster's advice: without questioning, or indeed bestowing a moment's reflection upon, the motives that dictated it.

'I take quite a lively interest in you, my dear soul, upon my word,' said Miss Knag; 'a sister's interest, actually. It's the most singular circumstance I ever knew.'

Undoubtedly it was singular, that if Miss Knag did feel a strong interest in Kate Nickleby, it should not rather have been the interest of a maiden aunt or grandmother; that being the conclusion to which the difference in their respective ages would have naturally tended. But Miss Knag wore clothes of a very youthful pattern, and perhaps her feelings took the same shape.

'Bless you!' said Miss Knag, bestowing a kiss upon Kate at the conclusion of the second day's work, 'how very awkward you have been all day.'

'I fear your kind and open communication, which has rendered me more painfully conscious of my own defects, has not improved me,' sighed Kate.

'No, no, I dare say not,' rejoined Miss Knag, in a most uncommon flow of good humour. 'But how much better that you should know it at first, and so be able to go on, straight and comfortable! Which way are you walking, my love?'

'Towards the city,' replied Kate.

'The city!' cried Miss Knag, regarding herself with great favour in the glass as she tied her bonnet. 'Goodness gracious me! now do you really live in the city?'

'Is it so very unusual for anybody to live there?' asked Kate, half smiling.

'I couldn't have believed it possible that any young woman could have lived there, under any circumstances whatever, for three days together,' replied Miss Knag.

'Reduced—I should say poor people,' answered Kate, correcting herself hastily, for she was afraid of appearing proud, 'must live where they can.'

'Ah! very true, so they must; very proper indeed!' rejoined Miss Knag with that sort of half-sigh, which, accompanied by two or three slight nods of the head, is pity's small change in general society; 'and that's what I very often tell my brother, when our servants go away ill, one after another, and he thinks the back-kitchen's rather too damp for 'em to sleep in. These sort of people, I tell him, are glad to sleep anywhere! Heaven suits the back to the burden. What a nice thing it is to think that it should be so, isn't it?'

'Very,' replied Kate.

'I'll walk with you part of the way, my dear,' said Miss Knag, 'for you must go very near our house; and as it's quite dark, and our last servant went to the hospital a week ago, with St Anthony's fire in her face, I shall be glad of your company.'

Kate would willingly have excused herself from this flattering companionship; but Miss Knag having adjusted her bonnet to her entire satisfaction, took her arm with an air which plainly showed how much she felt the compliment she was conferring, and they were in the street before she could say another word.

'I fear,' said Kate, hesitating, 'that mama—my mother, I mean—is waiting for me.'

'You needn't make the least apology, my dear,' said Miss Knag, smiling sweetly as she spoke; 'I dare say she is a very respectable old person, and I shall be quite—hem—quite pleased to know her.'

As poor Mrs Nickleby was cooling—not her heels alone, but her limbs generally at the street corner, Kate had no alternative but to make her known to Miss Knag, who, doing the last new carriage customer at second-hand, acknowledged the introduction with condescending politeness. The three then walked away, arm in arm: with Miss Knag in the middle, in a special state of amiability.

'I have taken such a fancy to your daughter, Mrs Nickleby, you can't think,' said Miss Knag, after she had proceeded a little distance in dignified silence.

'I am delighted to hear it,' said Mrs Nickleby; 'though it is nothing new to me, that even strangers should like Kate.'

'Hem!' cried Miss Knag.

'You will like her better when you know how good she is,' said Mrs Nickleby. 'It is a great blessing to me, in my misfortunes, to have a child, who knows neither pride nor vanity, and whose bringing-up might very well have excused a little of both at first. You don't know what it is to lose a husband, Miss Knag.'

As Miss Knag had never yet known what it was to gain one, it followed, very nearly as a matter of course, that she didn't know what it was to lose one; so she said, in some haste, 'No, indeed I don't,' and said it with an air intending to signify that she should like to catch herself marrying anybody—no, no, she knew better than that.

'Kate has improved even in this little time, I have no doubt,' said Mrs Nickleby, glancing proudly at her daughter.

'Oh! of course,' said Miss Knag.

'And will improve still more,' added Mrs Nickleby.

'That she will, I'll be bound,' replied Miss Knag, squeezing Kate's arm in her own, to point the joke.

'She always was clever,' said poor Mrs Nickleby, brightening up, 'always, from a baby. I recollect when she was only two years and a half old, that a gentleman who used to visit very much at our house—Mr Watkins, you know, Kate, my dear, that your poor papa went bail for, who afterwards ran away to the United States, and sent us a pair of snow shoes, with such an affectionate letter that it made your poor dear father cry for a week. You remember the letter? In which he said that he was very sorry he couldn't repay the fifty pounds just then, because his capital was all out at interest, and he was very busy making his fortune, but that he didn't forget you were his god-daughter, and he should take it very unkind if we didn't buy you a silver coral and put it down to his old account? Dear me, yes, my dear, how stupid you are! and spoke so affectionately of the old port wine that he used to drink a bottle and a half of every time he came. You must remember, Kate?'

'Yes, yes, mama; what of him?'

'Why, that Mr Watkins, my dear,' said Mrs Nickleby slowly, as if she were making a tremendous effort to recollect something of paramount importance; 'that Mr Watkins—he wasn't any relation, Miss Knag will understand, to the Watkins who kept the Old Boar in the village; by-the-bye, I don't remember whether it was the Old Boar or the George the Third, but it was one of the two, I know, and it's much the same—that Mr Watkins said, when you were only two years and a half old, that you were one of the most astonishing children he ever saw. He did indeed, Miss Knag, and he wasn't at all fond of children, and couldn't have had the slightest motive for doing it. I know it was he who said so, because I recollect, as well as if it was only yesterday, his borrowing twenty pounds of her poor dear papa the very moment afterwards.'

Having quoted this extraordinary and most disinterested testimony to her daughter's excellence, Mrs Nickleby stopped to breathe; and Miss Knag, finding that the discourse was turning upon family greatness, lost no time in striking in, with a small reminiscence on her own account.

'Don't talk of lending money, Mrs Nickleby,' said Miss Knag, 'or you'll drive me crazy, perfectly crazy. My mama—hem—was the most lovely and beautiful creature, with the most striking and exquisite—hem—the most exquisite nose that ever was put upon a human face, I do believe, Mrs Nickleby (here Miss Knag rubbed her own nose sympathetically); the most delightful and accomplished woman, perhaps, that ever was seen; but she had that one failing of lending money, and carried it to such an extent that she lent—hem—oh! thousands of pounds, all our little fortunes, and what's more, Mrs Nickleby, I don't think, if we were to live till—till—hem—till the very end of time, that we should ever get them back again. I don't indeed.'

After concluding this effort of invention without being interrupted, Miss Knag fell into many more recollections, no less interesting than true, the full tide of which, Mrs Nickleby in vain attempting to stem, at length sailed smoothly down by adding an under-current of her own recollections; and so both ladies went on talking together in perfect contentment; the only difference between them being, that whereas Miss Knag addressed herself to Kate, and talked very loud, Mrs Nickleby kept on in one unbroken monotonous flow, perfectly satisfied to be talking and caring very little whether anybody listened or not.

In this manner they walked on, very amicably, until they arrived at Miss Knag's brother's, who was an ornamental stationer and small circulating library keeper, in a by-street off Tottenham Court Road; and who let out by the day, week, month, or year, the newest old novels, whereof the titles were displayed in pen-and-ink characters on a sheet of pasteboard, swinging at his door-post. As Miss Knag happened, at the moment, to be in the middle of an account of her twenty-second offer from a gentleman of large property, she insisted upon their all going in to supper together; and in they went.

'Don't go away, Mortimer,' said Miss Knag as they entered the shop. 'It's only one of our young ladies and her mother. Mrs and Miss Nickleby.'

'Oh, indeed!' said Mr Mortimer Knag. 'Ah!'

Having given utterance to these ejaculations with a very profound and thoughtful air, Mr Knag slowly snuffed two kitchen candles on the counter, and two more in the window, and then snuffed himself from a box in his waistcoat pocket.

There was something very impressive in the ghostly air with which all this was done; and as Mr Knag was a tall lank gentleman of solemn features, wearing spectacles, and garnished with much less hair than a gentleman bordering on forty, or thereabouts, usually boasts, Mrs Nickleby whispered her daughter that she thought he must be literary.

'Past ten,' said Mr Knag, consulting his watch. 'Thomas, close the warehouse.'

Thomas was a boy nearly half as tall as a shutter, and the warehouse was a shop about the size of three hackney coaches.

'Ah!' said Mr Knag once more, heaving a deep sigh as he restored to its parent shelf the book he had been reading. 'Well—yes—I believe supper is ready, sister.'

With another sigh Mr Knag took up the kitchen candles from the counter, and preceded the ladies with mournful steps to a back-parlour, where a charwoman, employed in the absence of the sick servant, and remunerated with certain eighteenpences to be deducted from her wages due, was putting the supper out.

'Mrs Blockson,' said Miss Knag, reproachfully, 'how very often I have begged you not to come into the room with your bonnet on!'

'I can't help it, Miss Knag,' said the charwoman, bridling up on the shortest notice. 'There's been a deal o'cleaning to do in this house, and if you don't like it, I must trouble you to look out for somebody else, for it don't hardly pay me, and that's the truth, if I was to be hung this minute.'

'I don't want any remarks if YOU please,' said Miss Knag, with a strong emphasis on the personal pronoun. 'Is there any fire downstairs for some hot water presently?'

'No there is not, indeed, Miss Knag,' replied the substitute; 'and so I won't tell you no stories about it.'

'Then why isn't there?' said Miss Knag.

'Because there arn't no coals left out, and if I could make coals I would, but as I can't I won't, and so I make bold to tell you, Mem,' replied Mrs Blockson.

'Will you hold your tongue—female?' said Mr Mortimer Knag, plunging violently into this dialogue.

'By your leave, Mr Knag,' retorted the charwoman, turning sharp round. 'I'm only too glad not to speak in this house, excepting when and where I'm spoke to, sir; and with regard to being a female, sir, I should wish to know what you considered yourself?'

'A miserable wretch,' exclaimed Mr Knag, striking his forehead. 'A miserable wretch.'

'I'm very glad to find that you don't call yourself out of your name, sir,' said Mrs Blockson; 'and as I had two twin children the day before yesterday was only seven weeks, and my little Charley fell down a airy and put his elber out, last Monday, I shall take it as a favour if you'll send nine shillings, for one week's work, to my house, afore the clock strikes ten tomorrow.'

With these parting words, the good woman quitted the room with great ease of manner, leaving the door wide open; Mr Knag, at the same moment, flung himself into the 'warehouse,' and groaned aloud.

'What is the matter with that gentleman, pray?' inquired Mrs Nickleby, greatly disturbed by the sound.

'Is he ill?' inquired Kate, really alarmed.

'Hush!' replied Miss Knag; 'a most melancholy history. He was once most devotedly attached to—hem—to Madame Mantalini.'

'Bless me!' exclaimed Mrs Nickleby.

'Yes,' continued Miss Knag, 'and received great encouragement too, and confidently hoped to marry her. He has a most romantic heart, Mrs Nickleby, as indeed—hem—as indeed all our family have, and the disappointment was a dreadful blow. He is a wonderfully accomplished man—most extraordinarily accomplished—reads—hem—reads every novel that comes out; I mean every novel that—hem—that has any fashion in it, of course. The fact is, that he did find so much in the books he read, applicable to his own misfortunes, and did find himself in every respect so much like the heroes—because of course he is conscious of his own superiority, as we all are, and very naturally—that he took to scorning everything, and became a genius; and I am quite sure that he is, at this very present moment, writing another book.'

'Another book!' repeated Kate, finding that a pause was left for somebody to say something.

'Yes,' said Miss Knag, nodding in great triumph; 'another book, in three volumes post octavo. Of course it's a great advantage to him, in all his little fashionable descriptions, to have the benefit of my—hem—of my experience, because, of course, few authors who write about such things can have such opportunities of knowing them as I have. He's so wrapped up in high life, that the least allusion to business or worldly matters—like that woman just now, for instance—quite distracts him; but, as I often say, I think his disappointment a great thing for him, because if he hadn't been disappointed he couldn't have written about blighted hopes and all that; and the fact is, if it hadn't happened as it has, I don't believe his genius would ever have come out at all.'

How much more communicative Miss Knag might have become under more favourable circumstances, it is impossible to divine, but as the gloomy one was within ear-shot, and the fire wanted making up, her disclosures stopped here. To judge from all appearances, and the difficulty of making the water warm, the last servant could not have been much accustomed to any other fire than St Anthony's; but a little brandy and water was made at last, and the guests, having been previously regaled with cold leg of mutton and bread and cheese, soon afterwards took leave; Kate amusing herself, all the way home, with the recollection of her last glimpse of Mr Mortimer Knag deeply abstracted in the shop; and Mrs Nickleby by debating within herself whether the dressmaking firm would ultimately become 'Mantalini, Knag, and Nickleby', or 'Mantalini, Nickleby, and Knag'.

At this high point, Miss Knag's friendship remained for three whole days, much to the wonderment of Madame Mantalini's young ladies who had never beheld such constancy in that quarter, before; but on the fourth, it received a check no less violent than sudden, which thus occurred.

It happened that an old lord of great family, who was going to marry a young lady of no family in particular, came with the young lady, and the young lady's sister, to witness the ceremony of trying on two nuptial bonnets which had been ordered the day before, and Madame Mantalini announcing the fact, in a shrill treble, through the speaking-pipe, which communicated with the workroom, Miss Knag darted hastily upstairs with a bonnet in each hand, and presented herself in the show-room, in a charming state of palpitation, intended to demonstrate her enthusiasm in the cause. The bonnets were no sooner fairly on, than Miss Knag and Madame Mantalini fell into convulsions of admiration.

'A most elegant appearance,' said Madame Mantalini.

'I never saw anything so exquisite in all my life,' said Miss Knag.

Now, the old lord, who was a VERY old lord, said nothing, but mumbled and chuckled in a state of great delight, no less with the nuptial bonnets and their wearers, than with his own address in getting such a fine woman for his wife; and the young lady, who was a very lively young lady, seeing the old lord in this rapturous condition, chased the old lord behind a cheval-glass, and then and there kissed him, while Madame Mantalini and the other young lady looked, discreetly, another way.

But, pending the salutation, Miss Knag, who was tinged with curiosity, stepped accidentally behind the glass, and encountered the lively young lady's eye just at the very moment when she kissed the old lord; upon which the young lady, in a pouting manner, murmured something about 'an old thing,' and 'great impertinence,' and finished by darting a look of displeasure at Miss Knag, and smiling contemptuously.

'Madame Mantalini,' said the young lady.

'Ma'am,' said Madame Mantalini.

'Pray have up that pretty young creature we saw yesterday.'

'Oh yes, do,' said the sister.

'Of all things in the world, Madame Mantalini,' said the lord's intended, throwing herself languidly on a sofa, 'I hate being waited upon by frights or elderly persons. Let me always see that young creature, I beg, whenever I come.'

'By all means,' said the old lord; 'the lovely young creature, by all means.'

'Everybody is talking about her,' said the young lady, in the same careless manner; 'and my lord, being a great admirer of beauty, must positively see her.'

'She IS universally admired,' replied Madame Mantalini. 'Miss Knag, send up Miss Nickleby. You needn't return.'

'I beg your pardon, Madame Mantalini, what did you say last?' asked Miss Knag, trembling.

'You needn't return,' repeated the superior, sharply. Miss Knag vanished without another word, and in all reasonable time was replaced by Kate, who took off the new bonnets and put on the old ones: blushing very much to find that the old lord and the two young ladies were staring her out of countenance all the time.

'Why, how you colour, child!' said the lord's chosen bride.

'She is not quite so accustomed to her business, as she will be in a week or two,' interposed Madame Mantalini with a gracious smile.

'I am afraid you have been giving her some of your wicked looks, my lord,' said the intended.

'No, no, no,' replied the old lord, 'no, no, I'm going to be married, and lead a new life. Ha, ha, ha! a new life, a new life! ha, ha, ha!'

It was a satisfactory thing to hear that the old gentleman was going to lead a new life, for it was pretty evident that his old one would not last him much longer. The mere exertion of protracted chuckling reduced him to a fearful ebb of coughing and gasping; it was some minutes before he could find breath to remark that the girl was too pretty for a milliner.

'I hope you don't think good looks a disqualification for the business, my lord,' said Madame Mantalini, simpering.

'Not by any means,' replied the old lord, 'or you would have left it long ago.'

'You naughty creature,' said the lively lady, poking the peer with her parasol; 'I won't have you talk so. How dare you?'

This playful inquiry was accompanied with another poke, and another, and then the old lord caught the parasol, and wouldn't give it up again, which induced the other lady to come to the rescue, and some very pretty sportiveness ensued.

'You will see that those little alterations are made, Madame Mantalini,' said the lady. 'Nay, you bad man, you positively shall go first; I wouldn't leave you behind with that pretty girl, not for half a second. I know you too well. Jane, my dear, let him go first, and we shall be quite sure of him.'

The old lord, evidently much flattered by this suspicion, bestowed a grotesque leer upon Kate as he passed; and, receiving another tap with the parasol for his wickedness, tottered downstairs to the door, where his sprightly body was hoisted into the carriage by two stout footmen.

'Foh!' said Madame Mantalini, 'how he ever gets into a carriage without thinking of a hearse, I can't think. There, take the things away, my dear, take them away.'

Kate, who had remained during the whole scene with her eyes modestly fixed upon the ground, was only too happy to avail herself of the permission to retire, and hasten joyfully downstairs to Miss Knag's dominion.

The circumstances of the little kingdom had greatly changed, however, during the short period of her absence. In place of Miss Knag being stationed in her accustomed seat, preserving all the dignity and greatness of Madame Mantalini's representative, that worthy soul was reposing on a large box, bathed in tears, while three or four of the young ladies in close attendance upon her, together with the presence of hartshorn, vinegar, and other restoratives, would have borne ample testimony, even without the derangement of the head-dress and front row of curls, to her having fainted desperately.

'Bless me!' said Kate, stepping hastily forward, 'what is the matter?'

This inquiry produced in Miss Knag violent symptoms of a relapse; and several young ladies, darting angry looks at Kate, applied more vinegar and hartshorn, and said it was 'a shame.'

'What is a shame?' demanded Kate. 'What is the matter? What has happened? tell me.'

'Matter!' cried Miss Knag, coming, all at once, bolt upright, to the great consternation of the assembled maidens; 'matter! Fie upon you, you nasty creature!'

'Gracious!' cried Kate, almost paralysed by the violence with which the adjective had been jerked out from between Miss Knag's closed teeth; 'have I offended you?'

'YOU offended me!' retorted Miss Knag, 'YOU! a chit, a child, an upstart nobody! Oh, indeed! Ha, ha!'

Now, it was evident, as Miss Knag laughed, that something struck her as being exceedingly funny; and as the young ladies took their tone from Miss Knag—she being the chief—they all got up a laugh without a moment's delay, and nodded their heads a little, and smiled sarcastically to each other, as much as to say how very good that was!

'Here she is,' continued Miss Knag, getting off the box, and introducing Kate with much ceremony and many low curtseys to the delighted throng; 'here she is—everybody is talking about her—the belle, ladies—the beauty, the—oh, you bold-faced thing!'

At this crisis, Miss Knag was unable to repress a virtuous shudder, which immediately communicated itself to all the young ladies; after which, Miss Knag laughed, and after that, cried.

'For fifteen years,' exclaimed Miss Knag, sobbing in a most affecting manner, 'for fifteen years have I been the credit and ornament of this room and the one upstairs. Thank God,' said Miss Knag, stamping first her right foot and then her left with remarkable energy, 'I have never in all that time, till now, been exposed to the arts, the vile arts, of a creature, who disgraces us with all her proceedings, and makes proper people blush for themselves. But I feel it, I do feel it, although I am disgusted.'

Miss Knag here relapsed into softness, and the young ladies renewing their attentions, murmured that she ought to be superior to such things, and that for their part they despised them, and considered them beneath their notice; in witness whereof, they called out, more emphatically than before, that it was a shame, and that they felt so angry, they did, they hardly knew what to do with themselves.

'Have I lived to this day to be called a fright!' cried Miss Knag, suddenly becoming convulsive, and making an effort to tear her front off.

'Oh no, no,' replied the chorus, 'pray don't say so; don't now!'

'Have I deserved to be called an elderly person?' screamed Miss Knag, wrestling with the supernumeraries.

'Don't think of such things, dear,' answered the chorus.

'I hate her,' cried Miss Knag; 'I detest and hate her. Never let her speak to me again; never let anybody who is a friend of mine speak to her; a slut, a hussy, an impudent artful hussy!' Having denounced the object of her wrath, in these terms, Miss Knag screamed once, hiccuped thrice, gurgled in her throat several times, slumbered, shivered, woke, came to, composed her head-dress, and declared herself quite well again.

Poor Kate had regarded these proceedings, at first, in perfect bewilderment. She had then turned red and pale by turns, and once or twice essayed to speak; but, as the true motives of this altered behaviour developed themselves, she retired a few paces, and looked calmly on without deigning a reply. Nevertheless, although she walked proudly to her seat, and turned her back upon the group of little satellites who clustered round their ruling planet in the remotest corner of the room, she gave way, in secret, to some such bitter tears as would have gladdened Miss Knag's inmost soul, if she could have seen them fall.

CHAPTER 19

Descriptive of a Dinner at Mr Ralph Nickleby's, and of the Manner in which the Company entertained themselves, before Dinner, at Dinner, and after Dinner.

The bile and rancour of the worthy Miss Knag undergoing no diminution during the remainder of the week, but rather augmenting with every successive hour; and the honest ire of all the young ladies rising, or seeming to rise, in exact proportion to the good spinster's indignation, and both waxing very hot every time Miss Nickleby was called upstairs; it will be readily imagined that that young lady's daily life was none of the most cheerful or enviable kind. She hailed the arrival of Saturday night, as a prisoner would a few delicious hours' respite from slow and wearing torture, and felt that the poor pittance for her first week's labour would have been dearly and hardly earned, had its amount been trebled.

When she joined her mother, as usual, at the street corner, she was not a little surprised to find her in conversation with Mr Ralph Nickleby; but her surprise was soon redoubled, no less by the matter of their conversation, than by the smoothed and altered manner of Mr Nickleby himself.

'Ah! my dear!' said Ralph; 'we were at that moment talking about you.'

'Indeed!' replied Kate, shrinking, though she scarce knew why, from her uncle's cold glistening eye.

'That instant,' said Ralph. 'I was coming to call for you, making sure to catch you before you left; but your mother and I have been talking over family affairs, and the time has slipped away so rapidly—'

'Well, now, hasn't it?' interposed Mrs Nickleby, quite insensible to the sarcastic tone of Ralph's last remark. 'Upon my word, I couldn't have believed it possible, that such a—Kate, my dear, you're to dine with your uncle at half-past six o'clock tomorrow.'

Triumphing in having been the first to communicate this extraordinary intelligence, Mrs Nickleby nodded and smiled a great many times, to impress its full magnificence on Kate's wondering mind, and then flew off, at an acute angle, to a committee of ways and means.

'Let me see,' said the good lady. 'Your black silk frock will be quite dress enough, my dear, with that pretty little scarf, and a plain band in your hair, and a pair of black silk stock—Dear, dear,' cried Mrs Nickleby, flying off at another angle, 'if I had but those unfortunate amethysts of mine—you recollect them, Kate, my love—how they used to sparkle, you know—but your papa, your poor dear papa—ah! there never was anything so cruelly sacrificed as those jewels were, never!' Overpowered by this agonising thought, Mrs Nickleby shook her head, in a melancholy manner, and applied her handkerchief to her eyes.

I don't want them, mama, indeed,' said Kate. 'Forget that you ever had them.'

'Lord, Kate, my dear,' rejoined Mrs Nickleby, pettishly, 'how like a child you talk! Four-and-twenty silver tea-spoons, brother-in-law, two gravies, four salts, all the amethysts—necklace, brooch, and ear-rings—all made away with, at the same time, and I saying, almost on my bended knees, to that poor good soul, "Why don't you do something, Nicholas? Why don't you make some arrangement?" I am sure that anybody who was about us at that time, will do me the justice to own, that if I said that once, I said it fifty times a day. Didn't I, Kate, my dear? Did I ever lose an opportunity of impressing it on your poor papa?'

'No, no, mama, never,' replied Kate. And to do Mrs Nickleby justice, she never had lost—and to do married ladies as a body justice, they seldom do lose—any occasion of inculcating similar golden percepts, whose only blemish is, the slight degree of vagueness and uncertainty in which they are usually enveloped.

'Ah!' said Mrs Nickleby, with great fervour, 'if my advice had been taken at the beginning—Well, I have always done MY duty, and that's some comfort.'

When she had arrived at this reflection, Mrs Nickleby sighed, rubbed her hands, cast up her eyes, and finally assumed a look of meek composure; thus importing that she was a persecuted saint, but that she wouldn't trouble her hearers by mentioning a circumstance which must be so obvious to everybody.

'Now,' said Ralph, with a smile, which, in common with all other tokens of emotion, seemed to skulk under his face, rather than play boldly over it—'to return to the point from which we have strayed. I have a little party of—of—gentlemen with whom I am connected in business just now, at my house tomorrow; and your mother has promised that you shall keep house for me. I am not much used to parties; but this is one of business, and such fooleries are an important part of it sometimes. You don't mind obliging me?'

'Mind!' cried Mrs Nickleby. 'My dear Kate, why—'

'Pray,' interrupted Ralph, motioning her to be silent. 'I spoke to my niece.'

'I shall be very glad, of course, uncle,' replied Kate; 'but I am afraid you will find me awkward and embarrassed.'

'Oh no,' said Ralph; 'come when you like, in a hackney coach—I'll pay for it. Good-night—a—a—God bless you.'

The blessing seemed to stick in Mr Ralph Nickleby's throat, as if it were not used to the thoroughfare, and didn't know the way out. But it got out somehow, though awkwardly enough; and having disposed of it, he shook hands with his two relatives, and abruptly left them.

'What a very strongly marked countenance your uncle has!' said Mrs Nickleby, quite struck with his parting look. 'I don't see the slightest resemblance to his poor brother.'

'Mama!' said Kate reprovingly. 'To think of such a thing!'

'No,' said Mrs Nickleby, musing. 'There certainly is none. But it's a very honest face.'

The worthy matron made this remark with great emphasis and elocution, as if it comprised no small quantity of ingenuity and research; and, in truth, it was not unworthy of being classed among the extraordinary discoveries of the age. Kate looked up hastily, and as hastily looked down again.

'What has come over you, my dear, in the name of goodness?' asked Mrs Nickleby, when they had walked on, for some time, in silence.

'I was only thinking, mama,' answered Kate.

'Thinking!' repeated Mrs Nickleby. 'Ay, and indeed plenty to think about, too. Your uncle has taken a strong fancy to you, that's quite clear; and if some extraordinary good fortune doesn't come to you, after this, I shall be a little surprised, that's all.'

With this she launched out into sundry anecdotes of young ladies, who had had thousand-pound notes given them in reticules, by eccentric uncles; and of young ladies who had accidentally met amiable gentlemen of enormous wealth at their uncles' houses, and married them, after short but ardent courtships; and Kate, listening first in apathy, and afterwards in amusement, felt, as they walked home, something of her mother's sanguine complexion gradually awakening in her own bosom, and began to think that her prospects might be brightening, and that better days might be dawning upon them. Such is hope, Heaven's own gift to struggling mortals; pervading, like some subtle essence from the skies, all things, both good and bad; as universal as death, and more infectious than disease!

The feeble winter's sun—and winter's suns in the city are very feeble indeed—might have brightened up, as he shone through the dim windows of the large old house, on witnessing the unusual sight which one half-furnished room displayed. In a gloomy corner, where, for years, had stood a silent dusty pile of merchandise, sheltering its colony of mice, and frowning, a dull and lifeless mass, upon the panelled room, save when, responding to the roll of heavy waggons in the street without, it quaked with sturdy tremblings and caused the bright eyes of its tiny citizens to grow brighter still with fear, and struck them motionless, with attentive ear and palpitating heart, until the alarm had passed away—in this dark corner, was arranged, with scrupulous care, all Kate's little finery for the day; each article of dress partaking of that indescribable air of jauntiness and individuality which empty garments—whether by association, or that they become moulded, as it were, to the owner's form—will take, in eyes accustomed to, or picturing, the wearer's smartness. In place of a bale of musty goods, there lay the black silk dress: the neatest possible figure in itself. The small shoes, with toes delicately turned out, stood upon the very pressure of some old iron weight; and a pile of harsh discoloured leather had unconsciously given place to the very same little pair of black silk stockings, which had been the objects of Mrs Nickleby's peculiar care. Rats and mice, and such small gear, had long ago been starved, or had emigrated to better quarters: and, in their stead, appeared gloves, bands, scarfs, hair-pins, and many other little devices, almost as ingenious in their way as rats and mice themselves, for the tantalisation of mankind. About and among them all, moved Kate herself, not the least beautiful or unwonted relief to the stern, old, gloomy building.

In good time, or in bad time, as the reader likes to take it—for Mrs Nickleby's impatience went a great deal faster than the clocks at that end of the town, and Kate was dressed to the very last hair-pin a full hour and a half before it was at all necessary to begin to think about it—in good time, or in bad time, the toilet was completed; and it being at length the hour agreed upon for starting, the milkman fetched a coach from the nearest stand, and Kate, with many adieux to her mother, and many kind messages to Miss La Creevy, who was to come to tea, seated herself in it, and went away in state, if ever anybody went away in state in a hackney coach yet. And the coach, and the coachman, and the horses, rattled, and jangled, and whipped, and cursed, and swore, and tumbled on together, until they came to Golden Square.

The coachman gave a tremendous double knock at the door, which was opened long before he had done, as quickly as if there had been a man behind it, with his hand tied to the latch. Kate, who had expected no more uncommon appearance than Newman Noggs in a clean shirt, was not a little astonished to see that the opener was a man in handsome livery, and that there were two or three others in the hall. There was no doubt about its being the right house, however, for there was the name upon the door; so she accepted the laced coat-sleeve which was tendered her, and entering the house, was ushered upstairs, into a back drawing-room, where she was left alone.

If she had been surprised at the apparition of the footman, she was perfectly absorbed in amazement at the richness and splendour of the furniture. The softest and most elegant carpets, the most exquisite pictures, the costliest mirrors; articles of richest ornament, quite dazzling from their beauty and perplexing from the prodigality with which they were scattered around; encountered her on every side. The very staircase nearly down to the hall-door, was crammed with beautiful and luxurious things, as though the house were brimful of riches, which, with a very trifling addition, would fairly run over into the street.

Presently, she heard a series of loud double knocks at the street-door, and after every knock some new voice in the next room; the tones of Mr Ralph Nickleby were easily distinguishable at first, but by degrees they merged into the general buzz of conversation, and all she could ascertain was, that there were several gentlemen with no very musical voices, who talked very loud, laughed very heartily, and swore more than she would have thought quite necessary. But this was a question of taste.

At length, the door opened, and Ralph himself, divested of his boots, and ceremoniously embellished with black silks and shoes, presented his crafty face.

'I couldn't see you before, my dear,' he said, in a low tone, and pointing, as he spoke, to the next room. 'I was engaged in receiving them. Now—

shall I take you in?'

'Pray, uncle,' said Kate, a little flurried, as people much more conversant with society often are, when they are about to enter a room full of strangers, and have had time to think of it previously, 'are there any ladies here?'

'No,' said Ralph, shortly, 'I don't know any.'

'Must I go in immediately?' asked Kate, drawing back a little.

'As you please,' said Ralph, shrugging his shoulders. 'They are all come, and dinner will be announced directly afterwards—that's all.'

Kate would have entreated a few minutes' respite, but reflecting that her uncle might consider the payment of the hackney-coach fare a sort of bargain for her punctuality, she suffered him to draw her arm through his, and to lead her away.

Seven or eight gentlemen were standing round the fire when they went in, and, as they were talking very loud, were not aware of their entrance until Mr Ralph Nickleby, touching one on the coat-sleeve, said in a harsh emphatic voice, as if to attract general attention—

'Lord Frederick Verisopht, my niece, Miss Nickleby.'

The group dispersed, as if in great surprise, and the gentleman addressed, turning round, exhibited a suit of clothes of the most superlative cut, a pair of whiskers of similar quality, a moustache, a head of hair, and a young face.

'Eh!' said the gentleman. 'What—the—deyvle!'

With which broken ejaculations, he fixed his glass in his eye, and stared at Miss Nickleby in great surprise.

'My niece, my lord,' said Ralph.

'Then my ears did not deceive me, and it's not wa-a-x work,' said his lordship. 'How de do? I'm very happy.' And then his lordship turned to another superlative gentleman, something older, something stouter, something redder in the face, and something longer upon town, and said in a loud whisper that the girl was 'deyvlish pitty.'

'Introduce me, Nickleby,' said this second gentleman, who was lounging with his back to the fire, and both elbows on the chimneypiece.

'Sir Mulberry Hawk,' said Ralph.

'Otherwise the most knowing card in the pa-ack, Miss Nickleby,' said Lord Frederick Verisopht.

'Don't leave me out, Nickleby,' cried a sharp-faced gentleman, who was sitting on a low chair with a high back, reading the paper.

'Mr Pyke,' said Ralph.

'Nor me, Nickleby,' cried a gentleman with a flushed face and a flash air, from the elbow of Sir Mulberry Hawk.

'Mr Pluck,' said Ralph. Then wheeling about again, towards a gentleman with the neck of a stork and the legs of no animal in particular, Ralph introduced him as the Honourable Mr Snobb; and a white-headed person at the table as Colonel Chowser. The colonel was in conversation with somebody, who appeared to be a make-weight, and was not introduced at all.

There were two circumstances which, in this early stage of the party, struck home to Kate's bosom, and brought the blood tingling to her face. One was the flippant contempt with which the guests evidently regarded her uncle, and the other, the easy insolence of their manner towards herself. That the first symptom was very likely to lead to the aggravation of the second, it needed no great penetration to foresee. And here Mr Ralph Nickleby had reckoned without his host; for however fresh from the country a young lady (by nature) may be, and however unacquainted with conventional behaviour, the chances are, that she will have quite as strong an innate sense of the decencies and proprieties of life as if she had run the gauntlet of a dozen London seasons—possibly a stronger one, for such senses have been known to blunt in this improving process.

When Ralph had completed the ceremonial of introduction, he led his blushing niece to a seat. As he did so, he glanced warily round as though to assure himself of the impression which her unlooked-for appearance had created.

'An unexpected playsure, Nickleby,' said Lord Frederick Verisopht, taking his glass out of his right eye, where it had, until now, done duty on Kate, and fixing it in his left, to bring it to bear on Ralph.

'Designed to surprise you, Lord Frederick,' said Mr Pluck.

'Not a bad idea,' said his lordship, 'and one that would almost warrant the addition of an extra two and a half per cent.'

'Nickleby,' said Sir Mulberry Hawk, in a thick coarse voice, 'take the hint, and tack it on the other five-and-twenty, or whatever it is, and give me half for the advice.'

Sir Mulberry garnished this speech with a hoarse laugh, and terminated it with a pleasant oath regarding Mr Nickleby's limbs, whereat Messrs Pyke and Pluck laughed consumedly.

These gentlemen had not yet quite recovered the jest, when dinner was announced, and then they were thrown into fresh ecstasies by a similar cause; for Sir Mulberry Hawk, in an excess of humour, shot dexterously past Lord Frederick Verisopht who was about to lead Kate downstairs, and drew her arm through his up to the elbow.

'No, damn it, Verisopht,' said Sir Mulberry, 'fair play's a jewel, and Miss Nickleby and I settled the matter with our eyes ten minutes ago.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed the honourable Mr Snobb, 'very good, very good.'

Rendered additionally witty by this applause, Sir Mulberry Hawk leered upon his friends most facetiously, and led Kate downstairs with an air of familiarity, which roused in her gentle breast such burning indignation, as she felt it almost impossible to repress. Nor was the intensity of these feelings at all diminished, when she found herself placed at the top of the table, with Sir Mulberry Hawk and Lord Frederick Verisopht on either side.

'Oh, you've found your way into our neighbourhood, have you?' said Sir Mulberry as his lordship sat down.

'Of course,' replied Lord Frederick, fixing his eyes on Miss Nickleby, 'how can you a-ask me?'

'Well, you attend to your dinner,' said Sir Mulberry, 'and don't mind Miss Nickleby and me, for we shall prove very indifferent company, I dare say.'

'I wish you'd interfere here, Nickleby,' said Lord Frederick.

'What is the matter, my lord?' demanded Ralph from the bottom of the table, where he was supported by Messrs Pyke and Pluck.

'This fellow, Hawk, is monopolising your niece,' said Lord Frederick.

'He has a tolerable share of everything that you lay claim to, my lord,' said Ralph with a sneer.

''Gad, so he has,' replied the young man; 'deyvle take me if I know which is master in my house, he or I.'

'I know,' muttered Ralph.

'I think I shall cut him off with a shilling,' said the young nobleman, jocosely.

'No, no, curse it,' said Sir Mulberry. 'When you come to the shilling—the last shilling—I'll cut you fast enough; but till then, I'll never leave you—you may take your oath of it.'

This sally (which was strictly founded on fact) was received with a general roar, above which, was plainly distinguishable the laughter of Mr

Pyke and Mr Pluck, who were, evidently, Sir Mulberry's toads in ordinary. Indeed, it was not difficult to see, that the majority of the company preyed upon the unfortunate young lord, who, weak and silly as he was, appeared by far the least vicious of the party. Sir Mulberry Hawk was remarkable for his tact in ruining, by himself and his creatures, young gentlemen of fortune—a genteel and elegant profession, of which he had undoubtedly gained the head. With all the boldness of an original genius, he had struck out an entirely new course of treatment quite opposed to the usual method; his custom being, when he had gained the ascendancy over those he took in hand, rather to keep them down than to give them their own way; and to exercise his vivacity upon them openly, and without reserve. Thus, he made them butts, in a double sense, and while he emptied them with great address, caused them to ring with sundry well-administered taps, for the diversion of society.

The dinner was as remarkable for the splendour and completeness of its appointments as the mansion itself, and the company were remarkable for doing it ample justice, in which respect Messrs Pyke and Pluck particularly signalised themselves; these two gentlemen eating of every dish, and drinking of every bottle, with a capacity and perseverance truly astonishing. They were remarkably fresh, too, notwithstanding their great exertions: for, on the appearance of the dessert, they broke out again, as if nothing serious had taken place since breakfast.

'Well,' said Lord Frederick, sipping his first glass of port, 'if this is a discounting dinner, all I have to say is, deyvle take me, if it wouldn't be a good pla-an to get discount every day.'

'You'll have plenty of it, in your time,' returned Sir Mulberry Hawk; 'Nickleby will tell you that.'

'What do you say, Nickleby?' inquired the young man; 'am I to be a good customer?'

'It depends entirely on circumstances, my lord,' replied Ralph.

'On your lordship's circumstances,' interposed Colonel Chowser of the Militia—and the race-courses.

The gallant colonel glanced at Messrs Pyke and Pluck as if he thought they ought to laugh at his joke; but those gentlemen, being only engaged to laugh for Sir Mulberry Hawk, were, to his signal discomfiture, as grave as a pair of undertakers. To add to his defeat, Sir Mulberry, considering any such efforts an invasion of his peculiar privilege, eyed the offender steadily, through his glass, as if astonished at his presumption, and audibly stated his impression that it was an 'infernal liberty,' which being a hint to Lord Frederick, he put up HIS glass, and surveyed the object of censure as if he were some extraordinary wild animal then exhibiting for the first time. As a matter of course, Messrs Pyke and Pluck stared at the individual whom Sir Mulberry Hawk stared at; so, the poor colonel, to hide his confusion, was reduced to the necessity of holding his port before his right eye and affecting to scrutinise its colour with the most lively interest.

All this while, Kate had sat as silently as she could, scarcely daring to raise her eyes, lest they should encounter the admiring gaze of Lord Frederick Verisopht, or, what was still more embarrassing, the bold looks of his friend Sir Mulberry. The latter gentleman was obliging enough to direct general attention towards her.

'Here is Miss Nickleby,' observed Sir Mulberry, 'wondering why the deuce somebody doesn't make love to her.'

'No, indeed,' said Kate, looking hastily up, 'I—' and then she stopped, feeling it would have been better to have said nothing at all.

'I'll hold any man fifty pounds,' said Sir Mulberry, 'that Miss Nickleby can't look in my face, and tell me she wasn't thinking so.'

'Done!' cried the noble gull. 'Within ten minutes.'

'Done!' responded Sir Mulberry. The money was produced on both sides, and the Honourable Mr Snobb was elected to the double office of stake-holder and time-keeper.

'Pray,' said Kate, in great confusion, while these preliminaries were in course of completion. 'Pray do not make me the subject of any bets. Uncle, I cannot really—'

'Why not, my dear?' replied Ralph, in whose grating voice, however, there was an unusual huskiness, as though he spoke unwillingly, and would rather that the proposition had not been broached. 'It is done in a moment; there is nothing in it. If the gentlemen insist on it—'

'I don't insist on it,' said Sir Mulberry, with a loud laugh. 'That is, I by no means insist upon Miss Nickleby's making the denial, for if she does, I lose; but I shall be glad to see her bright eyes, especially as she favours the mahogany so much.'

'So she does, and it's too ba-a-d of you, Miss Nickleby,' said the noble youth.

'Quite cruel,' said Mr Pyke.

'Horrid cruel,' said Mr Pluck.

'I don't care if I do lose,' said Sir Mulberry; 'for one tolerable look at Miss Nickleby's eyes is worth double the money.'

'More,' said Mr Pyke.

'Far more,' said Mr Pluck.

'How goes the enemy, Snobb?' asked Sir Mulberry Hawk.

'Four minutes gone.'

'Bravo!'

'Won't you ma-ake one effort for me, Miss Nickleby?' asked Lord Frederick, after a short interval.

'You needn't trouble yourself to inquire, my buck,' said Sir Mulberry; 'Miss Nickleby and I understand each other; she declares on my side, and shows her taste. You haven't a chance, old fellow. Time, Snobb?'

'Eight minutes gone.'

'Get the money ready,' said Sir Mulberry; 'you'll soon hand over.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed Mr Pyke.

Mr Pluck, who always came second, and topped his companion if he could, screamed outright.

The poor girl, who was so overwhelmed with confusion that she scarcely knew what she did, had determined to remain perfectly quiet; but fearing that by so doing she might seem to countenance Sir Mulberry's boast, which had been uttered with great coarseness and vulgarity of manner, raised her eyes, and looked him in the face. There was something so odious, so insolent, so repulsive in the look which met her, that, without the power to stammer forth a syllable, she rose and hurried from the room. She restrained her tears by a great effort until she was alone upstairs, and then gave them vent.

'Capital!' said Sir Mulberry Hawk, putting the stakes in his pocket.

'That's a girl of spirit, and we'll drink her health.'

It is needless to say, that Pyke and Co. responded, with great warmth of manner, to this proposal, or that the toast was drunk with many little insinuations from the firm, relative to the completeness of Sir Mulberry's conquest. Ralph, who, while the attention of the other guests was attracted to the principals in the preceding scene, had eyed them like a wolf, appeared to breathe more freely now his niece was gone; the decanters passing quickly round, he leaned back in his chair, and turned his eyes from speaker to speaker, as they warmed with wine, with looks that seemed to search their hearts, and lay bare, for his distempered sport, every idle thought within them.

Meanwhile Kate, left wholly to herself, had, in some degree, recovered her composure. She had learnt from a female attendant, that her uncle wished to see her before she left, and had also gleaned the satisfactory intelligence, that the gentlemen would take coffee at table. The prospect of seeing them no more, contributed greatly to calm her agitation, and, taking up a book, she composed herself to read.

She started sometimes, when the sudden opening of the dining-room door let loose a wild shout of noisy revelry, and more than once rose in great alarm, as a fancied footstep on the staircase impressed her with the fear that some stray member of the party was returning alone. Nothing occurring, however, to realise her apprehensions, she endeavoured to fix her attention more closely on her book, in which by degrees she became so much interested, that she had read on through several chapters without heed of time or place, when she was terrified by suddenly hearing her name pronounced by a man's voice close at her ear.

The book fell from her hand. Lounging on an ottoman close beside her, was Sir Mulberry Hawk, evidently the worse—if a man be a ruffian at heart, he is never the better—for wine.

'What a delightful studiousness!' said this accomplished gentleman. 'Was it real, now, or only to display the eyelashes?'

Kate, looking anxiously towards the door, made no reply.

'I have looked at 'em for five minutes,' said Sir Mulberry. 'Upon my soul, they're perfect. Why did I speak, and destroy such a pretty little picture?'

'Do me the favour to be silent now, sir,' replied Kate.

'No, don't,' said Sir Mulberry, folding his crushed hat to lay his elbow on, and bringing himself still closer to the young lady; 'upon my life, you oughtn't to. Such a devoted slave of yours, Miss Nickleby—it's an infernal thing to treat him so harshly, upon my soul it is.'

'I wish you to understand, sir,' said Kate, trembling in spite of herself, but speaking with great indignation, 'that your behaviour offends and disgusts me. If you have a spark of gentlemanly feeling remaining, you will leave me.'

'Now why,' said Sir Mulberry, 'why will you keep up this appearance of excessive rigour, my sweet creature? Now, be more natural—my dear Miss

Nickleby, be more natural—do.'

Kate hastily rose; but as she rose, Sir Mulberry caught her dress, and forcibly detained her.

'Let me go, sir,' she cried, her heart swelling with anger. 'Do you hear? Instantly—this moment.'

'Sit down, sit down,' said Sir Mulberry; 'I want to talk to you.'

'Unhand me, sir, this instant,' cried Kate.

'Not for the world,' rejoined Sir Mulberry. Thus speaking, he leaned over, as if to replace her in her chair; but the young lady, making a violent effort to disengage herself, he lost his balance, and measured his length upon the ground. As Kate sprung forward to leave the room, Mr Ralph Nickleby appeared in the doorway, and confronted her.

'What is this?' said Ralph.

'It is this, sir,' replied Kate, violently agitated: 'that beneath the roof where I, a helpless girl, your dead brother's child, should most have found protection, I have been exposed to insult which should make you shrink to look upon me. Let me pass you.'

Ralph DID shrink, as the indignant girl fixed her kindling eye upon him; but he did not comply with her injunction, nevertheless: for he led her to a distant seat, and returning, and approaching Sir Mulberry Hawk, who had by this time risen, motioned towards the door.

'Your way lies there, sir,' said Ralph, in a suppressed voice, that some devil might have owned with pride.

'What do you mean by that?' demanded his friend, fiercely.

The swoln veins stood out like sinews on Ralph's wrinkled forehead, and the nerves about his mouth worked as though some unendurable emotion wrung them; but he smiled disdainfully, and again pointed to the door.

'Do you know me, you old madman?' asked Sir Mulberry.

'Well,' said Ralph. The fashionable vagabond for the moment quite quailed under the steady look of the older sinner, and walked towards the door, muttering as he went.

'You wanted the lord, did you?' he said, stopping short when he reached the door, as if a new light had broken in upon him, and confronting Ralph again. 'Damme, I was in the way, was I?'

Ralph smiled again, but made no answer.

'Who brought him to you first?' pursued Sir Mulberry; 'and how, without me, could you ever have wound him in your net as you have?'

'The net is a large one, and rather full,' said Ralph. 'Take care that it chokes nobody in the meshes.'

'You would sell your flesh and blood for money; yourself, if you have not already made a bargain with the devil,' retorted the other. 'Do you mean to tell me that your pretty niece was not brought here as a decoy for the drunken boy downstairs?'

Although this hurried dialogue was carried on in a suppressed tone on both sides, Ralph looked involuntarily round to ascertain that Kate had not moved her position so as to be within hearing. His adversary saw the advantage he had gained, and followed it up.

'Do you mean to tell me,' he asked again, 'that it is not so? Do you mean to say that if he had found his way up here instead of me, you wouldn't have been a little more blind, and a little more deaf, and a little less flourishing, than you have been? Come, Nickleby, answer me that.'

'I tell you this,' replied Ralph, 'that if I brought her here, as a matter of business—'

'Ay, that's the word,' interposed Sir Mulberry, with a laugh. 'You're coming to yourself again now.'

'—As a matter of business,' pursued Ralph, speaking slowly and firmly, as a man who has made up his mind to say no more, 'because I thought she might make some impression on the silly youth you have taken in hand and are lending good help to ruin, I knew—knowing him—that it would be long before he outraged her girl's feelings, and that unless he offended by mere puppyism and emptiness, he would, with a little management, respect the sex and conduct even of his usurer's niece. But if I thought to draw him on more gently by this device, I did not think of subjecting the girl to the licentiousness and brutality of so old a hand as you. And now we understand each other.'

'Especially as there was nothing to be got by it—eh?' sneered Sir Mulberry.

'Exactly so,' said Ralph. He had turned away, and looked over his shoulder to make this last reply. The eyes of the two worthies met, with an expression as if each rascal felt that there was no disguising himself from the other; and Sir Mulberry Hawk shrugged his shoulders and walked slowly out.

His friend closed the door, and looked restlessly towards the spot where his niece still remained in the attitude in which he had left her. She had flung herself heavily upon the couch, and with her head drooping over the cushion, and her face hidden in her hands, seemed to be still weeping in an agony of shame and grief.

Ralph would have walked into any poverty-stricken debtor's house, and pointed him out to a bailiff, though in attendance upon a young child's death-bed, without the smallest concern, because it would have been a matter quite in the ordinary course of business, and the man would have been an offender against his only code of morality. But, here was a young girl, who had done no wrong save that of coming into the world alive; who had patiently yielded to all his wishes; who had tried hard to please him—above all, who didn't owe him money—and he felt awkward and nervous.

Ralph took a chair at some distance; then, another chair a little nearer; then, moved a little nearer still; then, nearer again, and finally sat himself on the same sofa, and laid his hand on Kate's arm.

'Hush, my dear!' he said, as she drew it back, and her sobs burst out afresh. 'Hush, hush! Don't mind it, now; don't think of it.'

'Oh, for pity's sake, let me go home,' cried Kate. 'Let me leave this house, and go home.'

'Yes, yes,' said Ralph. 'You shall. But you must dry your eyes first, and compose yourself. Let me raise your head. There—there.'

'Oh, uncle!' exclaimed Kate, clasping her hands. 'What have I done—what have I done—that you should subject me to this? If I had wronged you in thought, or word, or deed, it would have been most cruel to me, and the memory of one you must have loved in some old time; but—'

'Only listen to me for a moment,' interrupted Ralph, seriously alarmed by the violence of her emotions. 'I didn't know it would be so; it was impossible for me to foresee it. I did all I could.—Come, let us walk about. You are faint with the closeness of the room, and the heat of these lamps. You will be better now, if you make the slightest effort.'

'I will do anything,' replied Kate, 'if you will only send me home.'

'Well, well, I will,' said Ralph; 'but you must get back your own looks; for those you have, will frighten them, and nobody must know of this but you and I. Now let us walk the other way. There. You look better even now.'

With such encouragements as these, Ralph Nickleby walked to and fro, with his niece leaning on his arm; actually trembling beneath her touch.

In the same manner, when he judged it prudent to allow her to depart, he supported her downstairs, after adjusting her shawl and performing such little offices, most probably for the first time in his life. Across the hall, and down the steps, Ralph led her too; nor did he withdraw his hand until she was seated in the coach.

As the door of the vehicle was roughly closed, a comb fell from Kate's hair, close at her uncle's feet; and as he picked it up, and returned it into her hand, the light from a neighbouring lamp shone upon her face. The lock of hair that had escaped and curled loosely over her brow, the traces of tears yet scarcely dry, the flushed cheek, the look of sorrow, all fired some dormant train of recollection in the old man's breast; and the face of his dead brother seemed present before him, with the very look it bore on some occasion of boyish grief, of which every minutest circumstance flashed upon his mind, with the distinctness of a scene of yesterday.

Ralph Nickleby, who was proof against all appeals of blood and kindred—who was steeled against every tale of sorrow and distress—staggered while he looked, and went back into his house, as a man who had seen a spirit from some world beyond the grave.

CHAPTER 20

Wherein Nicholas at length encounters his Uncle, to whom he expresses his Sentiments with much Candour. His Resolution.

Little Miss La Creevy trotted briskly through divers streets at the west end of the town, early on Monday morning—the day after the dinner—charged with the important commission of acquainting Madame Mantalini that Miss Nickleby was too unwell to attend that day, but hoped to be enabled to resume her duties on the morrow. And as Miss La Creevy walked along, revolving in her mind various genteel forms and elegant turns of expression, with a view to the selection of the very best in which to couch her communication, she cogitated a good deal upon the probable causes of her young friend's indisposition.

'I don't know what to make of it,' said Miss La Creevy. 'Her eyes were decidedly red last night. She said she had a headache; headaches don't occasion red eyes. She must have been crying.'

Arriving at this conclusion, which, indeed, she had established to her perfect satisfaction on the previous evening, Miss La Creevy went on to consider—as she had done nearly all night—what new cause of unhappiness her young friend could possibly have had.

'I can't think of anything,' said the little portrait painter. 'Nothing at all, unless it was the behaviour of that old bear. Cross to her, I suppose? Unpleasant brute!'

Relieved by this expression of opinion, albeit it was vented upon empty air, Miss La Creevy trotted on to Madame Mantalini's; and being informed that the governing power was not yet out of bed, requested an interview with the second in command; whereupon Miss Knag appeared.

'So far as I am concerned,' said Miss Knag, when the message had been delivered, with many ornaments of speech; 'I could spare Miss Nickleby for evermore.'

'Oh, indeed, ma'am!' rejoined Miss La Creevy, highly offended. 'But, you see, you are not mistress of the business, and therefore it's of no great consequence.'

'Very good, ma'am,' said Miss Knag. 'Have you any further commands for me?'

'No, I have not, ma'am,' rejoined Miss La Creevy.

'Then good-morning, ma'am,' said Miss Knag.

'Good-morning to you, ma'am; and many obligations for your extreme politeness and good breeding,' rejoined Miss La Creevy.

Thus terminating the interview, during which both ladies had trembled very much, and been marvellously polite—certain indications that they were within an inch of a very desperate quarrel—Miss La Creevy bounced out of the room, and into the street.

'I wonder who that is,' said the queer little soul. 'A nice person to know, I should think! I wish I had the painting of her: I'D do her justice.' So, feeling quite satisfied that she had said a very cutting thing at Miss Knag's expense, Miss La Creevy had a hearty laugh, and went home to breakfast in great good humour.

Here was one of the advantages of having lived alone so long! The little bustling, active, cheerful creature existed entirely within herself, talked to herself, made a confidante of herself, was as sarcastic as she could be, on people who offended her, by herself; pleased herself, and did no harm. If she indulged in scandal, nobody's reputation suffered; and if she enjoyed a little bit of revenge, no living soul was one atom the worse. One of the many to whom, from straitened circumstances, a consequent inability to form the associations they would wish, and a disinclination to mix with the society they could obtain, London is as complete a solitude as the plains of Syria, the humble artist had pursued her lonely, but contented way for many years; and, until the peculiar misfortunes of the Nickleby family attracted her attention, had made no friends, though brimful of the friendliest feelings to all mankind. There are many warm hearts in the same solitary guise as poor little Miss La Creevy's.

However, that's neither here nor there, just now. She went home to breakfast, and had scarcely caught the full flavour of her first sip of tea, when the servant announced a gentleman, whereat Miss La Creevy, at once imagining a new sitter transfixed by admiration at the street-door case, was in unspeakable consternation at the presence of the tea-things.

'Here, take 'em away; run with 'em into the bedroom; anywhere,' said Miss La Creevy. 'Dear, dear; to think that I should be late on this particular morning, of all others, after being ready for three weeks by half-past eight o'clock, and not a soul coming near the place!'

'Don't let me put you out of the way,' said a voice Miss La Creevy knew. 'I told the servant not to mention my name, because I wished to surprise you.'

'Mr Nicholas!' cried Miss La Creevy, starting in great astonishment. 'You have not forgotten me, I see,' replied Nicholas, extending his hand.

'Why, I think I should even have known you if I had met you in the street,' said Miss La Creevy, with a smile. 'Hannah, another cup and saucer. Now, I'll tell you what, young man; I'll trouble you not to repeat the impertinence you were guilty of, on the morning you went away.'

'You would not be very angry, would you?' asked Nicholas.

'Wouldn't I!' said Miss La Creevy. 'You had better try; that's all!'

Nicholas, with becoming gallantry, immediately took Miss La Creevy at her word, who uttered a faint scream and slapped his face; but it was not a very hard slap, and that's the truth.

'I never saw such a rude creature!' exclaimed Miss La Creevy.

'You told me to try,' said Nicholas.

'Well; but I was speaking ironically,' rejoined Miss La Creevy.

'Oh! that's another thing,' said Nicholas; 'you should have told me that, too.'

'I dare say you didn't know, indeed!' retorted Miss La Creevy. 'But, now I look at you again, you seem thinner than when I saw you last, and your face is haggard and pale. And how come you to have left Yorkshire?'

She stopped here; for there was so much heart in her altered tone and manner, that Nicholas was quite moved.

'I need look somewhat changed,' he said, after a short silence; 'for I have undergone some suffering, both of mind and body, since I left London. I have been very poor, too, and have even suffered from want.'

'Good Heaven, Mr Nicholas!' exclaimed Miss La Creevy, 'what are you telling me?'

'Nothing which need distress you quite so much,' answered Nicholas, with a more sprightly air; 'neither did I come here to bewail my lot, but on matter more to the purpose. I wish to meet my uncle face to face. I should tell you that first.'

'Then all I have to say about that is,' interposed Miss La Creevy, 'that I don't envy you your taste; and that sitting in the same room with his very boots, would put me out of humour for a fortnight.'

'In the main,' said Nicholas, 'there may be no great difference of opinion between you and me, so far; but you will understand, that I desire to confront him, to justify myself, and to cast his duplicity and malice in his throat.'

'That's quite another matter,' rejoined Miss La Creevy. 'Heaven forgive me; but I shouldn't cry my eyes quite out of my head, if they choked him. Well?'

'To this end, I called upon him this morning,' said Nicholas. 'He only returned to town on Saturday, and I knew nothing of his arrival until late last night.'

'And did you see him?' asked Miss La Creevy.

'No,' replied Nicholas. 'He had gone out.'

'Hah!' said Miss La Creevy; 'on some kind, charitable business, I dare say.'

'I have reason to believe,' pursued Nicholas, 'from what has been told me, by a friend of mine who is acquainted with his movements, that he intends seeing my mother and sister today, and giving them his version of the occurrences that have befallen me. I will meet him there.'

'That's right,' said Miss La Creevy, rubbing her hands. 'And yet, I don't know,' she added, 'there is much to be thought of—others to be considered.'

'I have considered others,' rejoined Nicholas; 'but as honesty and honour are both at issue, nothing shall deter me.'

'You should know best,' said Miss La Creevy.

'In this case I hope so,' answered Nicholas. 'And all I want you to do for me, is, to prepare them for my coming. They think me a long way off, and if I went wholly unexpected, I should frighten them. If you can spare time to tell them that you have seen me, and that I shall be with them in a quarter of an hour afterwards, you will do me a great service.'

'I wish I could do you, or any of you, a greater,' said Miss La Creevy; 'but the power to serve, is as seldom joined with the will, as the will is with the power, I think.'

Talking on very fast and very much, Miss La Creevy finished her breakfast with great expedition, put away the tea-caddy and hid the key under the fender, resumed her bonnet, and, taking Nicholas's arm, sallied forth at once to the city. Nicholas left her near the door of his mother's house, and promised to return within a quarter of an hour.

It so chanced that Ralph Nickleby, at length seeing fit, for his own purposes, to communicate the atrocities of which Nicholas had been guilty, had (instead of first proceeding to another quarter of the town on business, as Newman Noggs supposed he would) gone straight to his sister-in-law. Hence, when Miss La Creevy, admitted by a girl who was cleaning the house, made her way to the sitting-room, she found Mrs Nickleby and Kate in tears, and Ralph just concluding his statement of his nephew's misdemeanours. Kate beckoned her not to retire, and Miss La Creevy took a seat in silence.

'You are here already, are you, my gentleman?' thought the little woman. 'Then he shall announce himself, and see what effect that has on you.'

'This is pretty,' said Ralph, folding up Miss Squeers's note; 'very pretty. I recommend him—against all my previous conviction, for I knew he would never do any good—to a man with whom, behaving himself properly, he might have remained, in comfort, for years. What is the result? Conduct for which he might hold up his hand at the Old Bailey.'

'I never will believe it,' said Kate, indignantly; 'never. It is some base conspiracy, which carries its own falsehood with it.'

'My dear,' said Ralph, 'you wrong the worthy man. These are not inventions. The man is assaulted, your brother is not to be found; this boy, of whom they speak, goes with him—remember, remember.'

'It is impossible,' said Kate. 'Nicholas!—and a thief too! Mama, how can you sit and hear such statements?'

Poor Mrs Nickleby, who had, at no time, been remarkable for the possession of a very clear understanding, and who had been reduced by the late changes in her affairs to a most complicated state of perplexity, made no other reply to this earnest remonstrance than exclaiming from behind a mass of pocket-handkerchief, that she never could have believed it—thereby most ingeniously leaving her hearers to suppose that she did believe it.

'It would be my duty, if he came in my way, to deliver him up to justice,' said Ralph, 'my bounden duty; I should have no other course, as a man of the world and a man of business, to pursue. And yet,' said Ralph, speaking in a very marked manner, and looking furtively, but fixedly, at Kate, 'and yet I would not. I would spare the feelings of his—of his sister. And his mother of course,' added Ralph, as though by an afterthought, and with far less emphasis.

Kate very well understood that this was held out as an additional inducement to her to preserve the strictest silence regarding the events of the preceding night. She looked involuntarily towards Ralph as he ceased to speak, but he had turned his eyes another way, and seemed for the moment quite unconscious of her presence.

'Everything,' said Ralph, after a long silence, broken only by Mrs Nickleby's sobs, 'everything combines to prove the truth of this letter, if indeed there were any possibility of disputing it. Do innocent men steal away from the sight of honest folks, and skulk in hiding-places, like outlaws? Do innocent men inveigle nameless vagabonds, and prowl with them about the country as idle robbers do? Assault, riot, theft, what do you call these?'

'A lie!' cried a voice, as the door was dashed open, and Nicholas came into the room.

In the first moment of surprise, and possibly of alarm, Ralph rose from his seat, and fell back a few paces, quite taken off his guard by this unexpected apparition. In another moment, he stood, fixed and immovable with folded arms, regarding his nephew with a scowl; while Kate and Miss La Creevy threw themselves between the two, to prevent the personal violence which the fierce excitement of Nicholas appeared to threaten.

'Dear Nicholas,' cried his sister, clinging to him. 'Be calm, consider—'

'Consider, Kate!' cried Nicholas, clasping her hand so tight in the tumult of his anger, that she could scarcely bear the pain. 'When I consider all, and think of what has passed, I need be made of iron to stand before him.'

'Or bronze,' said Ralph, quietly; 'there is not hardihood enough in flesh and blood to face it out.'

'Oh dear, dear!' cried Mrs Nickleby, 'that things should have come to such a pass as this!'

'Who speaks in a tone, as if I had done wrong, and brought disgrace on them?' said Nicholas, looking round.

'Your mother, sir,' replied Ralph, motioning towards her.

'Whose ears have been poisoned by you,' said Nicholas; 'by you—who, under pretence of deserving the thanks she poured upon you, heaped every insult, wrong, and indignity upon my head. You, who sent me to a den where sordid cruelty, worthy of yourself, runs wanton, and youthful misery stalks precocious; where the lightness of childhood shrinks into the heaviness of age, and its every promise blights, and withers as it grows. I call Heaven to witness,' said Nicholas, looking eagerly round, 'that I have seen all this, and that he knows it.'

'Refute these calumnies,' said Kate, 'and be more patient, so that you may give them no advantage. Tell us what you really did, and show that they are untrue.'

'Of what do they—or of what does he—accuse me?' said Nicholas.

'First, of attacking your master, and being within an ace of qualifying yourself to be tried for murder,' interposed Ralph. 'I speak plainly, young man, bluster as you will.'

'I interfered,' said Nicholas, 'to save a miserable creature from the vilest cruelty. In so doing, I inflicted such punishment upon a wretch as he will not readily forget, though far less than he deserved from me. If the same scene were renewed before me now, I would take the same part; but I would strike harder and heavier, and brand him with such marks as he should carry to his grave, go to it when he would.'

'You hear?' said Ralph, turning to Mrs Nickleby. 'Penitence, this!'

'Oh dear me!' cried Mrs Nickleby, 'I don't know what to think, I really don't.'

'Do not speak just now, mama, I entreat you,' said Kate. 'Dear Nicholas, I only tell you, that you may know what wickedness can prompt, but they accuse you of—a ring is missing, and they dare to say that—'

'The woman,' said Nicholas, haughtily, 'the wife of the fellow from whom these charges come, dropped—as I suppose—a worthless ring among some clothes of mine, early in the morning on which I left the house. At least, I know that she was in the bedroom where they lay, struggling with an unhappy child, and that I found it when I opened my bundle on the road. I returned it, at once, by coach, and they have it now.'

'I knew, I knew,' said Kate, looking towards her uncle. 'About this boy, love, in whose company they say you left?'

'The boy, a silly, helpless creature, from brutality and hard usage, is with me now,' rejoined Nicholas.

'You hear?' said Ralph, appealing to the mother again, 'everything proved, even upon his own confession. Do you choose to restore that boy, sir?'

'No, I do not,' replied Nicholas.

'You do not?' sneered Ralph.

'No,' repeated Nicholas, 'not to the man with whom I found him. I would that I knew on whom he has the claim of birth: I might wring something from his sense of shame, if he were dead to every tie of nature.'

'Indeed!' said Ralph. 'Now, sir, will you hear a word or two from me?'

'You can speak when and what you please,' replied Nicholas, embracing his sister. 'I take little heed of what you say or threaten.'

'Mighty well, sir,' retorted Ralph; 'but perhaps it may concern others, who may think it worth their while to listen, and consider what I tell them. I will address your mother, sir, who knows the world.'

'Ah! and I only too dearly wish I didn't,' sobbed Mrs Nickleby.

There really was no necessity for the good lady to be much distressed upon this particular head; the extent of her worldly knowledge being, to say the least, very questionable; and so Ralph seemed to think, for he smiled as she spoke. He then glanced steadily at her and Nicholas by turns, as he delivered himself in these words:

'Of what I have done, or what I meant to do, for you, ma'am, and my niece, I say not one syllable. I held out no promise, and leave you to judge for yourself. I hold out no threat now, but I say that this boy, headstrong, wilful and disorderly as he is, should not have one penny of my money, or one crust of my bread, or one grasp of my hand, to save him from the loftiest gallows in all Europe. I will not meet him, come where he comes, or hear his name. I will not help him, or those who help him. With a full knowledge of what he brought upon you by so doing, he has come back in his selfish sloth, to be an aggravation of your wants, and a burden upon his sister's scanty wages. I regret to leave you, and more to leave her, now, but I will not encourage this compound of meanness and cruelty, and, as I will not ask you to renounce him, I see you no more.'

If Ralph had not known and felt his power in wounding those he hated, his glances at Nicholas would have shown it him, in all its force, as he proceeded in the above address. Innocent as the young man was of all wrong, every artful insinuation stung, every well-considered sarcasm cut him to the quick; and when Ralph noted his pale face and quivering lip, he hugged himself to mark how well he had chosen the taunts best calculated to strike deep into a young and ardent spirit.

'I can't help it,' cried Mrs Nickleby. 'I know you have been very good to us, and meant to do a good deal for my dear daughter. I am quite sure of that; I know you did, and it was very kind of you, having her at your house and all—and of course it would have been a great thing for her and for me too. But I can't, you know, brother-in-law, I can't renounce my own son, even if he has done all you say he has—it's not possible; I couldn't do it; so we must go to rack and ruin, Kate, my dear. I can bear it, I dare say.' Pouring forth these and a perfectly wonderful train of other disjointed expressions of regret, which no mortal power but Mrs Nickleby's could ever have strung together, that lady wrung her hands, and her tears fell faster.

'Why do you say "IF Nicholas has done what they say he has," mama?' asked Kate, with honest anger. 'You know he has not.'

'I don't know what to think, one way or other, my dear,' said Mrs Nickleby; 'Nicholas is so violent, and your uncle has so much composure, that I can only hear what he says, and not what Nicholas does. Never mind, don't let us talk any more about it. We can go to the Workhouse, or the Refuge for the Destitute, or the Magdalen Hospital, I dare say; and the sooner we go the better.' With this extraordinary jumble of charitable institutions, Mrs Nickleby again gave way to her tears.

'Stay,' said Nicholas, as Ralph turned to go. 'You need not leave this place, sir, for it will be relieved of my presence in one minute, and it will be long, very long, before I darken these doors again.'

'Nicholas,' cried Kate, throwing herself on her brother's shoulder, 'do not say so. My dear brother, you will break my heart. Mama, speak to him. Do not mind her, Nicholas; she does not mean it, you should know her better. Uncle, somebody, for Heaven's sake speak to him.'

'I never meant, Kate,' said Nicholas, tenderly, 'I never meant to stay among you; think better of me than to suppose it possible. I may turn my back on this town a few hours sooner than I intended, but what of that? We shall not forget each other apart, and better days will come when we shall part no more. Be a woman, Kate,' he whispered, proudly, 'and do not make me one, while HE looks on.'

'No, no, I will not,' said Kate, eagerly, 'but you will not leave us. Oh! think of all the happy days we have had together, before these terrible misfortunes came upon us; of all the comfort and happiness of home, and the trials we have to bear now; of our having no protector under all the slights and wrongs that poverty so much favours, and you cannot leave us to bear them alone, without one hand to help us.'

'You will be helped when I am away,' replied Nicholas hurriedly. 'I am no help to you, no protector; I should bring you nothing but sorrow, and want, and suffering. My own mother sees it, and her fondness and fears for you, point to the course that I should take. And so all good angels bless you, Kate, till I can carry you to some home of mine, where we may revive the happiness denied to us now, and talk of these trials as of things gone by. Do not keep me here, but let me go at once. There. Dear girl—dear girl.'

The grasp which had detained him relaxed, and Kate swooned in his arms. Nicholas stooped over her for a few seconds, and placing her gently in a chair, confided her to their honest friend.

'I need not entreat your sympathy,' he said, wringing her hand, 'for I know your nature. You will never forget them.'

He stepped up to Ralph, who remained in the same attitude which he had preserved throughout the interview, and moved not a finger.

'Whatever step you take, sir,' he said, in a voice inaudible beyond themselves, 'I shall keep a strict account of. I leave them to you, at your desire. There will be a day of reckoning sooner or later, and it will be a heavy one for you if they are wronged.'

Ralph did not allow a muscle of his face to indicate that he heard one word of this parting address. He hardly knew that it was concluded, and Mrs Nickleby had scarcely made up her mind to detain her son by force if necessary, when Nicholas was gone.

As he hurried through the streets to his obscure lodging, seeking to keep pace, as it were, with the rapidity of the thoughts which crowded upon him, many doubts and hesitations arose in his mind, and almost tempted him to return. But what would they gain by this? Supposing he were to put Ralph Nickleby at defiance, and were even fortunate enough to obtain some small employment, his being with them could only render their present condition worse, and might greatly impair their future prospects; for his mother had spoken of some new kindnesses towards Kate which she had not denied. 'No,' thought Nicholas, 'I have acted for the best.'

But, before he had gone five hundred yards, some other and different feeling would come upon him, and then he would lag again, and pulling his hat over his eyes, give way to the melancholy reflections which pressed thickly upon him. To have committed no fault, and yet to be so entirely alone in the world; to be separated from the only persons he loved, and to be proscribed like a criminal, when six months ago he had been surrounded by every comfort, and looked up to, as the chief hope of his family—this was hard to bear. He had not deserved it either. Well, there was comfort in that; and poor Nicholas would brighten up again, to be again depressed, as his quickly shifting thoughts presented every variety of light and shade before him.

Undergoing these alternations of hope and misgiving, which no one, placed in a situation of ordinary trial, can fail to have experienced, Nicholas at length reached his poor room, where, no longer borne up by the excitement which had hitherto sustained him, but depressed by the revulsion of feeling it left behind, he threw himself on the bed, and turning his face to the wall, gave free vent to the emotions he had so long stifled.

He had not heard anybody enter, and was unconscious of the presence of Smike, until, happening to raise his head, he saw him, standing at the upper end of the room, looking wistfully towards him. He withdrew his eyes when he saw that he was observed, and affected to be busied with some scanty preparations for dinner.

'Well, Smike,' said Nicholas, as cheerfully as he could speak, 'let me hear what new acquaintances you have made this morning, or what new wonder you have found out, in the compass of this street and the next one.'

'No,' said Smike, shaking his head mournfully; 'I must talk of something else today.'

'Of what you like,' replied Nicholas, good-humouredly.

'Of this,' said Smike. 'I know you are unhappy, and have got into great trouble by bringing me away. I ought to have known that, and stopped behind—I would, indeed, if I had thought it then. You—you—are not rich; you have not enough for yourself, and I should not be here. You grow,' said the lad, laying his hand timidly on that of Nicholas, 'you grow thinner every day; your cheek is paler, and your eye more sunk. Indeed I cannot bear to see you so, and think how I am burdening you. I tried to go away today, but the thought of your kind face drew me back. I could not leave you without a word.' The poor fellow could say no more, for his eyes filled with tears, and his voice was gone.

'The word which separates us,' said Nicholas, grasping him heartily by the shoulder, 'shall never be said by me, for you are my only comfort and stay. I would not lose you now, Smike, for all the world could give. The thought of you has upheld me through all I have endured today, and shall, through fifty times such trouble. Give me your hand. My heart is linked to yours. We will journey from this place together, before the week is out.

What, if I am steeped in poverty? You lighten it, and we will be poor together.'

CHAPTER 21

Madam Mantalini finds herself in a Situation of some Difficulty, and Miss Nickleby finds herself in no Situation at all

The agitation she had undergone, rendered Kate Nickleby unable to resume her duties at the dressmaker's for three days, at the expiration of which interval she betook herself at the accustomed hour, and with languid steps, to the temple of fashion where Madame Mantalini reigned paramount and supreme.

The ill-will of Miss Knag had lost nothing of its virulence in the interval. The young ladies still scrupulously shrunk from all companionship with their denounced associate; and when that exemplary female arrived a few minutes afterwards, she was at no pains to conceal the displeasure with which she regarded Kate's return.

'Upon my word!' said Miss Knag, as the satellites flocked round, to relieve her of her bonnet and shawl; 'I should have thought some people would have had spirit enough to stop away altogether, when they know what an incumbrance their presence is to right-minded persons. But it's a queer world; oh! it's a queer world!'

Miss Knag, having passed this comment on the world, in the tone in which most people do pass comments on the world when they are out of temper, that is to say, as if they by no means belonged to it, concluded by heaving a sigh, wherewith she seemed meekly to compassionate the wickedness of mankind.

The attendants were not slow to echo the sigh, and Miss Knag was apparently on the eve of favouring them with some further moral reflections, when the voice of Madame Mantalini, conveyed through the speaking-tube, ordered Miss Nickleby upstairs to assist in the arrangement of the show-room; a distinction which caused Miss Knag to toss her head so much, and bite her lips so hard, that her powers of conversation were, for the time, annihilated.

'Well, Miss Nickleby, child,' said Madame Mantalini, when Kate presented herself; 'are you quite well again?'

'A great deal better, thank you,' replied Kate.

'I wish I could say the same,' remarked Madame Mantalini, seating herself with an air of weariness.

'Are you ill?' asked Kate. 'I am very sorry for that.'

'Not exactly ill, but worried, child—worried,' rejoined Madame.

'I am still more sorry to hear that,' said Kate, gently. 'Bodily illness is more easy to bear than mental.'

'Ah! and it's much easier to talk than to bear either,' said Madame, rubbing her nose with much irritability of manner. 'There, get to your work, child, and put the things in order, do.'

While Kate was wondering within herself what these symptoms of unusual vexation portended, Mr Mantalini put the tips of his whiskers, and, by degrees, his head, through the half-opened door, and cried in a soft voice—

'Is my life and soul there?'

'No,' replied his wife.

'How can it say so, when it is blooming in the front room like a little rose in a demnition flower-pot?' urged Mantalini. 'May its poppet come in and talk?'

'Certainly not,' replied Madame: 'you know I never allow you here. Go along!'

The poppet, however, encouraged perhaps by the relenting tone of this reply, ventured to rebel, and, stealing into the room, made towards Madame Mantalini on tiptoe, blowing her a kiss as he came along.

'Why will it vex itself, and twist its little face into bewitching nutcrackers?' said Mantalini, putting his left arm round the waist of his life and soul, and drawing her towards him with his right.

'Oh! I can't bear you,' replied his wife.

'Not—eh, not bear ME!' exclaimed Mantalini. 'Fibs, fibs. It couldn't be. There's not a woman alive, that could tell me such a thing to my face—to my own face.' Mr Mantalini stroked his chin, as he said this, and glanced complacently at an opposite mirror.

'Such destructive extravagance,' reasoned his wife, in a low tone.

'All in its joy at having gained such a lovely creature, such a little Venus, such a demd, enchanting, bewitching, engrossing, captivating little Venus,' said Mantalini.

'See what a situation you have placed me in!' urged Madame.

'No harm will come, no harm shall come, to its own darling,' rejoined Mr Mantalini. 'It is all over; there will be nothing the matter; money shall be got in; and if it don't come in fast enough, old Nickleby shall stump up again, or have his jugular separated if he dares to vex and hurt the little—'

'Hush!' interposed Madame. 'Don't you see?'

Mr Mantalini, who, in his eagerness to make up matters with his wife, had overlooked, or feigned to overlook, Miss Nickleby hitherto, took the hint, and laying his finger on his lip, sunk his voice still lower. There was, then, a great deal of whispering, during which Madame Mantalini appeared to make reference, more than once, to certain debts incurred by Mr Mantalini previous to her coverture; and also to an unexpected outlay of money in payment of the aforesaid debts; and furthermore, to certain agreeable weaknesses on that gentleman's part, such as gaming, wasting, idling, and a tendency to horse-flesh; each of which matters of accusation Mr Mantalini disposed of, by one kiss or more, as its relative importance demanded. The upshot of it all was, that Madame Mantalini was in raptures with him, and that they went upstairs to breakfast.

Kate busied herself in what she had to do, and was silently arranging the various articles of decoration in the best taste she could display, when she started to hear a strange man's voice in the room, and started again, to observe, on looking round, that a white hat, and a red neckerchief, and a broad round face, and a large head, and part of a green coat were in the room too.

'Don't alarm yourself, miss,' said the proprietor of these appearances. 'I say; this here's the mantie-making consarn, an't it?'

'Yes,' rejoined Kate, greatly astonished. 'What did you want?'

The stranger answered not; but, first looking back, as though to beckon to some unseen person outside, came, very deliberately, into the room, and was closely followed by a little man in brown, very much the worse for wear, who brought with him a mingled fumigation of stale tobacco and fresh onions. The clothes of this gentleman were much bespeckled with flue; and his shoes, stockings, and nether garments, from his heels to the waist buttons of his coat inclusive, were profusely embroidered with splashes of mud, caught a fortnight previously—before the setting-in of the fine weather.

Kate's very natural impression was, that these engaging individuals had called with the view of possessing themselves, unlawfully, of any portable articles that chanced to strike their fancy. She did not attempt to disguise her apprehensions, and made a move towards the door.

'Wait a minnit,' said the man in the green coat, closing it softly, and standing with his back against it. 'This is a unpleasant bisness. Vere's your govvernor?'

'My what—did you say?' asked Kate, trembling; for she thought 'governor' might be slang for watch or money.

'Mister Muntlehiney,' said the man. 'Wot's come on him? Is he at home?'

'He is above stairs, I believe,' replied Kate, a little reassured by this inquiry. 'Do you want him?'

'No,' replied the visitor. 'I don't ezactly want him, if it's made a favour on. You can jist give him that 'ere card, and tell him if he wants to speak to ME, and save trouble, here I am; that's all.'

With these words, the stranger put a thick square card into Kate's hand, and, turning to his friend, remarked, with an easy air, 'that the rooms was a good high pitch;' to which the friend assented, adding, by way of illustration, 'that there was lots of room for a little boy to grow up a man in either on 'em, vithout much fear of his ever bringing his head into contract vith the ceiling.'

After ringing the bell which would summon Madame Mantalini, Kate glanced at the card, and saw that it displayed the name of 'Scaley,' together with some other information to which she had not had time to refer, when her attention was attracted by Mr Scaley himself, who, walking up to one of the cheval-glasses, gave it a hard poke in the centre with his stick, as coolly as if it had been made of cast iron.

'Good plate this here, Tix,' said Mr Scaley to his friend.

'Ah!' rejoined Mr Tix, placing the marks of his four fingers, and a duplicate impression of his thumb, on a piece of sky-blue silk; 'and this here article warn't made for nothing, mind you.'

From the silk, Mr Tix transferred his admiration to some elegant articles of wearing apparel, while Mr Scaley adjusted his neckcloth, at leisure, before the glass, and afterwards, aided by its reflection, proceeded to the minute consideration of a pimple on his chin; in which absorbing occupation he was yet engaged, when Madame Mantalini, entering the room, uttered an exclamation of surprise which roused him.

'Oh! Is this the missis?' inquired Scaley.

'It is Madame Mantalini,' said Kate.

'Then,' said Mr Scaley, producing a small document from his pocket and unfolding it very slowly, 'this is a writ of execution, and if it's not conwenient to settle we'll go over the house at wunst, please, and take the inwentory.'

Poor Madame Mantalini wrung her hands for grief, and rung the bell for her husband; which done, she fell into a chair and a fainting fit, simultaneously. The professional gentlemen, however, were not at all discomposed by this event, for Mr Scaley, leaning upon a stand on which a handsome dress was displayed (so that his shoulders appeared above it, in nearly the same manner as the shoulders of the lady for whom it was designed would have done if she had had it on), pushed his hat on one side and scratched his head with perfect unconcern, while his friend Mr Tix, taking that opportunity for a general survey of the apartment preparatory to entering on business, stood with his inventory-book under his arm and his hat in his hand, mentally occupied in putting a price upon every object within his range of vision.

Such was the posture of affairs when Mr Mantalini hurried in; and as that distinguished specimen had had a pretty extensive intercourse with Mr Scaley's fraternity in his bachelor days, and was, besides, very far from being taken by surprise on the present agitating occasion, he merely shrugged his shoulders, thrust his hands down to the bottom of his pockets, elevated his eyebrows, whistled a bar or two, swore an oath or two, and, sitting astride upon a chair, put the best face upon the matter with great composure and decency.

'What's the demd total?' was the first question he asked.

'Fifteen hundred and twenty-seven pound, four and ninepence ha'penny,' replied Mr Scaley, without moving a limb.

'The halfpenny be demd,' said Mr Mantalini, impatiently.

'By all means if you vish it,' retorted Mr Scaley; 'and the ninepence.'

'It don't matter to us if the fifteen hundred and twenty-seven pound went along with it, that I know on,' observed Mr Tix.

'Not a button,' said Scaley.

'Well,' said the same gentleman, after a pause, 'wot's to be done—anything? Is it only a small crack, or a out-and-out smash? A break-up of the constitootion is it?—werry good. Then Mr Tom Tix, esk-vire, you must inform your angel wife and lovely family as you won't sleep at home for three nights to come, along of being in possession here. Wot's the good of the lady a fretting herself?' continued Mr Scaley, as Madame Mantalini sobbed. 'A good half of wot's here isn't paid for, I des-say, and wot a consolation oughtn't that to be to her feelings!'

With these remarks, combining great pleasantry with sound moral encouragement under difficulties, Mr Scaley proceeded to take the inventory, in which delicate task he was materially assisted by the uncommon tact and experience of Mr Tix, the broker.

'My cup of happiness's sweetener,' said Mantalini, approaching his wife with a penitent air; 'will you listen to me for two minutes?'

'Oh! don't speak to me,' replied his wife, sobbing. 'You have ruined me, and that's enough.'

Mr Mantalini, who had doubtless well considered his part, no sooner heard these words pronounced in a tone of grief and severity, than he recoiled several paces, assumed an expression of consuming mental agony, rushed headlong from the room, and was, soon afterwards, heard to slam the door of an upstairs dressing-room with great violence.

'Miss Nickleby,' cried Madame Mantalini, when this sound met her ear, 'make haste, for Heaven's sake, he will destroy himself! I spoke unkindly to him, and he cannot bear it from me. Alfred, my darling Alfred.'

With such exclamations, she hurried upstairs, followed by Kate who, although she did not quite participate in the fond wife's apprehensions, was a little flurried, nevertheless. The dressing-room door being hastily flung open, Mr Mantalini was disclosed to view, with his shirt-collar symmetrically thrown back: putting a fine edge to a breakfast knife by means of his razor strop.

'Ah!' cried Mr Mantalini, 'interrupted!' and whisk went the breakfast knife into Mr Mantalini's dressing-gown pocket, while Mr Mantalini's eyes rolled wildly, and his hair floating in wild disorder, mingled with his whiskers.

'Alfred,' cried his wife, flinging her arms about him, 'I didn't mean to say it, I didn't mean to say it!'

'Ruined!' cried Mr Mantalini. 'Have I brought ruin upon the best and purest creature that ever blessed a demnition vagabond! Demmit, let me go.' At this crisis of his ravings Mr Mantalini made a pluck at the breakfast knife, and being restrained by his wife's grasp, attempted to dash his head against the wall—taking very good care to be at least six feet from it.

'Compose yourself, my own angel,' said Madame. 'It was nobody's fault; it was mine as much as yours, we shall do very well yet. Come, Alfred, come.'

Mr Mantalini did not think proper to come to, all at once; but, after calling several times for poison, and requesting some lady or gentleman to blow his brains out, gentler feelings came upon him, and he wept pathetically. In this softened frame of mind he did not oppose the capture of the knife—which, to tell the truth, he was rather glad to be rid of, as an inconvenient and dangerous article for a skirt pocket—and finally he suffered himself to be led away by his affectionate partner.

After a delay of two or three hours, the young ladies were informed that their services would be dispensed with until further notice, and at the expiration of two days, the name of Mantalini appeared in the list of bankrupts: Miss Nickleby received an intimation per post, on the same morning, that the business would be, in future, carried on under the name of Miss Knag, and that her assistance would no longer be required—a piece of intelligence with which Mrs Nickleby was no sooner made acquainted, than that good lady declared she had expected it all along and cited divers unknown occasions on which she had prophesied to that precise effect.

'And I say again,' remarked Mrs Nickleby (who, it is scarcely necessary to observe, had never said so before), 'I say again, that a milliner's and dressmaker's is the very last description of business, Kate, that you should have thought of attaching yourself to. I don't make it a reproach to you, my love; but still I will say, that if you had consulted your own mother—'

'Well, well, mama,' said Kate, mildly: 'what would you recommend now?'

'Recommend!' cried Mrs Nickleby, 'isn't it obvious, my dear, that of all occupations in this world for a young lady situated as you are, that of companion to some amiable lady is the very thing for which your education, and manners, and personal appearance, and everything else, exactly qualify you? Did you never hear your poor dear papa speak of the young lady who was the daughter of the old lady who boarded in the same house that he boarded in once, when he was a bachelor—what was her name again? I know it began with a B, and ended with g, but whether it was Waters or—no, it couldn't have been that, either; but whatever her name was, don't you know that that young lady went as companion to a married lady who died soon afterwards, and that she married the husband, and had one of the finest little boys that the medical man had ever seen—all within eighteen months?'

Kate knew, perfectly well, that this torrent of favourable recollection was occasioned by some opening, real or imaginary, which her mother had discovered, in the companionship walk of life. She therefore waited, very patiently, until all reminiscences and anecdotes, bearing or not bearing upon the subject, had been exhausted, and at last ventured to inquire what discovery had been made. The truth then came out. Mrs Nickleby had, that morning, had a yesterday's newspaper of the very first respectability from the public-house where the porter came from; and in this yesterday's newspaper was an advertisement, couched in the purest and most grammatical English, announcing that a married lady was in want of a genteel young person as companion, and that the married lady's name and address were to be known, on application at a certain library at the west end of the town, therein mentioned.

'And I say,' exclaimed Mrs Nickleby, laying the paper down in triumph, 'that if your uncle don't object, it's well worth the trial.'

Kate was too sick at heart, after the rough jostling she had already had with the world, and really cared too little at the moment what fate was reserved for her, to make any objection. Mr Ralph Nickleby offered none, but, on the contrary, highly approved of the suggestion; neither did he express any great surprise at Madame Mantalini's sudden failure, indeed it would have been strange if he had, inasmuch as it had been procured and brought about chiefly by himself. So, the name and address were obtained without loss of time, and Miss Nickleby and her mama went off in quest of Mrs Wititterly, of Cadogan Place, Sloane Street, that same forenoon.

Cadogan Place is the one slight bond that joins two great extremes; it is the connecting link between the aristocratic pavements of Belgrave Square, and the barbarism of Chelsea. It is in Sloane Street, but not of it. The people in Cadogan Place look down upon Sloane Street, and think Brompton low. They affect fashion too, and wonder where the New Road is. Not that they claim to be on precisely the same footing as the high folks of Belgrave Square and Grosvenor Place, but that they stand, with reference to them, rather in the light of those illegitimate children of the great who are content to boast of their connections, although their connections disavow them. Wearing as much as they can of the airs and semblances of loftiest rank, the people of Cadogan Place have the realities of middle station. It is the conductor which communicates to the inhabitants of regions beyond its limit, the shock of pride of birth and rank, which it has not within itself, but derives from a fountain-head beyond; or, like the ligament which unites the Siamese twins, it contains something of the life and essence of two distinct bodies, and yet belongs to neither.

Upon this doubtful ground, lived Mrs Wititterly, and at Mrs Wititterly's door Kate Nickleby knocked with trembling hand. The door was opened by a big footman with his head floured, or chalked, or painted in some way (it didn't look genuine powder), and the big footman, receiving the card of introduction, gave it to a little page; so little, indeed, that his body would not hold, in ordinary array, the number of small buttons which are indispensable to a page's costume, and they were consequently obliged to be stuck on four abreast. This young gentleman took the card upstairs on a salver, and pending his return, Kate and her mother were shown into a dining-room of rather dirty and shabby aspect, and so comfortably arranged as to be adapted to almost any purpose rather than eating and drinking.

Now, in the ordinary course of things, and according to all authentic descriptions of high life, as set forth in books, Mrs Wititterly ought to have been in her BOUDOIR; but whether it was that Mr Wititterly was at that moment shaving himself in the BOUDOIR or what not, certain it is that Mrs Wititterly gave audience in the drawing-room, where was everything proper and necessary, including curtains and furniture coverings of a roseate hue, to shed a delicate bloom on Mrs Wititterly's complexion, and a little dog to snap at strangers' legs for Mrs Wititterly's amusement, and the afore-mentioned page, to hand chocolate for Mrs Wititterly's refreshment.

The lady had an air of sweet insipidity, and a face of engaging paleness; there was a faded look about her, and about the furniture, and about the house. She was reclining on a sofa in such a very unstudied attitude, that she might have been taken for an actress all ready for the first scene in a ballet, and only waiting for the drop curtain to go up.

'Place chairs.'

The page placed them.

'Leave the room, Alphonse.'

The page left it; but if ever an Alphonse carried plain Bill in his face and figure, that page was the boy.

'I have ventured to call, ma'am,' said Kate, after a few seconds of awkward silence, 'from having seen your advertisement.'

'Yes,' replied Mrs Wititterly, 'one of my people put it in the paper—Yes.'

'I thought, perhaps,' said Kate, modestly, 'that if you had not already made a final choice, you would forgive my troubling you with an application.'

'Yes,' drawled Mrs Wititterly again.

'If you have already made a selection—'

'Oh dear no,' interrupted the lady, 'I am not so easily suited. I really don't know what to say. You have never been a companion before, have you?'

Mrs Nickleby, who had been eagerly watching her opportunity, came dexterously in, before Kate could reply. 'Not to any stranger, ma'am,' said the good lady; 'but she has been a companion to me for some years. I am her mother, ma'am.'

'Oh!' said Mrs Wititterly, 'I apprehend you.'

'I assure you, ma'am,' said Mrs Nickleby, 'that I very little thought, at one time, that it would be necessary for my daughter to go out into the world at all, for her poor dear papa was an independent gentleman, and would have been at this moment if he had but listened in time to my constant entreaties and—'

'Dear mama,' said Kate, in a low voice.

'My dear Kate, if you will allow me to speak,' said Mrs Nickleby, 'I shall take the liberty of explaining to this lady—'

'I think it is almost unnecessary, mama.'

And notwithstanding all the frowns and winks with which Mrs Nickleby intimated that she was going to say something which would clench the business at once, Kate maintained her point by an expressive look, and for once Mrs Nickleby was stopped upon the very brink of an oration.

'What are your accomplishments?' asked Mrs Wititterly, with her eyes shut.

Kate blushed as she mentioned her principal acquirements, and Mrs Nickleby checked them all off, one by one, on her fingers; having calculated the number before she came out. Luckily the two calculations agreed, so Mrs Nickleby had no excuse for talking.

'You are a good temper?' asked Mrs Wititterly, opening her eyes for an instant, and shutting them again.

'I hope so,' rejoined Kate.

'And have a highly respectable reference for everything, have you?'

Kate replied that she had, and laid her uncle's card upon the table.

'Have the goodness to draw your chair a little nearer, and let me look at you,' said Mrs Wititterly; 'I am so very nearsighted that I can't quite discern your features.'

Kate complied, though not without some embarrassment, with this request, and Mrs Wititterly took a languid survey of her countenance, which lasted some two or three minutes.

'I like your appearance,' said that lady, ringing a little bell. 'Alphonse, request your master to come here.'

The page disappeared on this errand, and after a short interval, during which not a word was spoken on either side, opened the door for an important gentleman of about eight-and-thirty, of rather plebeian countenance, and with a very light head of hair, who leant over Mrs Wititterly for a little time, and conversed with her in whispers.

'Oh!' he said, turning round, 'yes. This is a most important matter. Mrs Wititterly is of a very excitable nature; very delicate, very fragile; a hothouse plant, an exotic.'

'Oh! Henry, my dear,' interposed Mrs Wititterly.

'You are, my love, you know you are; one breath—' said Mr W., blowing an imaginary feather away. 'Pho! you're gone!'

The lady sighed.

'Your soul is too large for your body,' said Mr Wititterly. 'Your intellect wears you out; all the medical men say so; you know that there is not a physician who is not proud of being called in to you. What is their unanimous declaration? "My dear doctor," said I to Sir Tumley Snuffim, in this very room, the very last time he came. "My dear doctor, what is my wife's complaint? Tell me all. I can bear it. Is it nerves?" "My dear fellow," he said, "be proud of that woman; make much of her; she is an ornament to the fashionable world, and to you. Her complaint is soul. It swells, expands, dilates—the blood fires, the pulse quickens, the excitement increases—Whew!"' Here Mr Wititterly, who, in the ardour of his description, had flourished his right hand to within something less than an inch of Mrs Nickleby's bonnet, drew it hastily back again, and blew his nose as fiercely as if it had been done by some violent machinery.

'You make me out worse than I am, Henry,' said Mrs Wititterly, with a faint smile.

'I do not, Julia, I do not,' said Mr W. 'The society in which you move—necessarily move, from your station, connection, and endowments—is one vortex and whirlpool of the most frightful excitement. Bless my heart and body, can I ever forget the night you danced with the baronet's nephew at the election ball, at Exeter! It was tremendous.'

'I always suffer for these triumphs afterwards,' said Mrs Wititterly.

'And for that very reason,' rejoined her husband, 'you must have a companion, in whom there is great gentleness, great sweetness, excessive sympathy, and perfect repose.'

Here, both Mr and Mrs Wititterly, who had talked rather at the Nicklebys than to each other, left off speaking, and looked at their two hearers, with an expression of countenance which seemed to say, 'What do you think of all this?'

'Mrs Wititterly,' said her husband, addressing himself to Mrs Nickleby, 'is sought after and courted by glittering crowds and brilliant circles. She is excited by the opera, the drama, the fine arts, the—the—the—'

'The nobility, my love,' interposed Mrs Wititterly.

'The nobility, of course,' said Mr Wititterly. 'And the military. She forms and expresses an immense variety of opinions on an immense variety of subjects. If some people in public life were acquainted with Mrs Wititterly's real opinion of them, they would not hold their heads, perhaps, quite as high as they do.'

'Hush, Henry,' said the lady; 'this is scarcely fair.'

'I mention no names, Julia,' replied Mr Wititterly; 'and nobody is injured. I merely mention the circumstance to show that you are no ordinary person, that there is a constant friction perpetually going on between your mind and your body; and that you must be soothed and tended. Now let me hear, dispassionately and calmly, what are this young lady's qualifications for the office.'

In obedience to this request, the qualifications were all gone through again, with the addition of many interruptions and cross-questionings from Mr Wititterly. It was finally arranged that inquiries should be made, and a decisive answer addressed to Miss Nickleby under cover of her uncle, within two days. These conditions agreed upon, the page showed them down as far as the staircase window; and the big footman, relieving guard at that point, piloted them in perfect safety to the street-door.

'They are very distinguished people, evidently,' said Mrs Nickleby, as she took her daughter's arm. 'What a superior person Mrs Wititterly is!'

'Do you think so, mama?' was all Kate's reply.

'Why, who can help thinking so, Kate, my love?' rejoined her mother. 'She is pale though, and looks much exhausted. I hope she may not be wearing herself out, but I am very much afraid.'

These considerations led the deep-sighted lady into a calculation of the probable duration of Mrs Wititterly's life, and the chances of the disconsolate widower bestowing his hand on her daughter. Before reaching home, she had freed Mrs Wititterly's soul from all bodily restraint; married Kate with great splendour at St George's, Hanover Square; and only left undecided the minor question, whether a splendid French-polished mahogany bedstead should be erected for herself in the two-pair back of the house in Cadogan Place, or in the three-pair front: between which apartments she could not quite balance the advantages, and therefore adjusted the question at last, by determining to leave it to the decision of her son-in-law.

The inquiries were made. The answer—not to Kate's very great joy—was favourable; and at the expiration of a week she betook herself, with all her movables and valuables, to Mrs Wititterly's mansion, where for the present we will leave her.

CHAPTER 22

Nicholas, accompanied by Smike, sallies forth to seek his Fortune. He encounters Mr Vincent Crummles; and who he was, is herein made manifest

The whole capital which Nicholas found himself entitled to, either in possession, reversion, remainder, or expectancy, after paying his rent and settling with the broker from whom he had hired his poor furniture, did not exceed, by more than a few halfpence, the sum of twenty shillings. And yet he hailed the morning on which he had resolved to quit London, with a light heart, and sprang from his bed with an elasticity of spirit which is happily the lot of young persons, or the world would never be stocked with old ones.

It was a cold, dry, foggy morning in early spring. A few meagre shadows flitted to and fro in the misty streets, and occasionally there loomed through the dull vapour, the heavy outline of some hackney coach wending homewards, which, drawing slowly nearer, rolled jangling by, scattering the thin crust of frost from its whitened roof, and soon was lost again in the cloud. At intervals were heard the tread of slipshod feet, and the chilly cry of the poor sweep as he crept, shivering, to his early toil; the heavy footfall of the official watcher of the night, pacing slowly up and down and cursing the tardy hours that still intervened between him and sleep; the rambling of ponderous carts and waggons; the roll of the lighter vehicles which carried buyers and sellers to the different markets; the sound of ineffectual knocking at the doors of heavy sleepers—all these noises fell upon the ear from time to time, but all seemed muffled by the fog, and to be rendered almost as indistinct to the ear as was every object to the sight. The sluggish darkness thickened as the day came on; and those who had the courage to rise and peep at the gloomy street from their curtained windows, crept back to bed again, and coiled themselves up to sleep.

Before even these indications of approaching morning were rife in busy London, Nicholas had made his way alone to the city, and stood beneath the windows of his mother's house. It was dull and bare to see, but it had light and life for him; for there was at least one heart within its old walls to which insult or dishonour would bring the same blood rushing, that flowed in his own veins.

He crossed the road, and raised his eyes to the window of the room where he knew his sister slept. It was closed and dark. 'Poor girl,' thought Nicholas, 'she little thinks who lingers here!'

He looked again, and felt, for the moment, almost vexed that Kate was not there to exchange one word at parting. 'Good God!' he thought, suddenly correcting himself, 'what a boy I am!'

'It is better as it is,' said Nicholas, after he had lounged on, a few paces, and returned to the same spot. 'When I left them before, and could have said goodbye a thousand times if I had chosen, I spared them the pain of leave-taking, and why not now?' As he spoke, some fancied motion of the curtain almost persuaded him, for the instant, that Kate was at the window, and by one of those strange contradictions of feeling which are common to us all, he shrunk involuntarily into a doorway, that she might not see him. He smiled at his own weakness; said 'God bless them!' and walked away with a lighter step.

Smike was anxiously expecting him when he reached his old lodgings, and so was Newman, who had expended a day's income in a can of rum and milk to prepare them for the journey. They had tied up the luggage, Smike shouldered it, and away they went, with Newman Noggs in company; for he had insisted on walking as far as he could with them, overnight.

'Which way?' asked Newman, wistfully.

'To Kingston first,' replied Nicholas.

'And where afterwards?' asked Newman. 'Why won't you tell me?'

'Because I scarcely know myself, good friend,' rejoined Nicholas, laying his hand upon his shoulder; 'and if I did, I have neither plan nor prospect yet, and might shift my quarters a hundred times before you could possibly communicate with me.'

'I am afraid you have some deep scheme in your head,' said Newman, doubtfully.

'So deep,' replied his young friend, 'that even I can't fathom it. Whatever I resolve upon, depend upon it I will write you soon.'

'You won't forget?' said Newman.

'I am not very likely to,' rejoined Nicholas. 'I have not so many friends that I shall grow confused among the number, and forget my best one.'

Occupied in such discourse, they walked on for a couple of hours, as they might have done for a couple of days if Nicholas had not sat himself down on a stone by the wayside, and resolutely declared his intention of not moving another step until Newman Noggs turned back. Having pleaded ineffectually first for another half-mile, and afterwards for another quarter, Newman was fain to comply, and to shape his course towards Golden Square, after interchanging many hearty and affectionate farewells, and many times turning back to wave his hat to the two wayfarers when they had become mere specks in the distance.

'Now listen to me, Smike,' said Nicholas, as they trudged with stout hearts onwards. 'We are bound for Portsmouth.'

Smike nodded his head and smiled, but expressed no other emotion; for whether they had been bound for Portsmouth or Port Royal would have been alike to him, so they had been bound together.

'I don't know much of these matters,' resumed Nicholas; 'but Portsmouth is a seaport town, and if no other employment is to be obtained, I should think we might get on board some ship. I am young and active, and could be useful in many ways. So could you.'

'I hope so,' replied Smike. 'When I was at that—you know where I mean?'

'Yes, I know,' said Nicholas. 'You needn't name the place.'

'Well, when I was there,' resumed Smike; his eyes sparkling at the prospect of displaying his abilities; 'I could milk a cow, and groom a horse, with anybody.'

'Ha!' said Nicholas, gravely. 'I am afraid they don't keep many animals of either kind on board ship, Smike, and even when they have horses, that they are not very particular about rubbing them down; still you can learn to do something else, you know. Where there's a will, there's a way.'

'And I am very willing,' said Smike, brightening up again.

'God knows you are,' rejoined Nicholas; 'and if you fail, it shall go hard but I'll do enough for us both.'

'Do we go all the way today?' asked Smike, after a short silence.

'That would be too severe a trial, even for your willing legs,' said Nicholas, with a good-humoured smile. 'No. Godalming is some thirty and odd miles from London—as I found from a map I borrowed—and I purpose to rest there. We must push on again tomorrow, for we are not rich enough to loiter. Let me relieve you of that bundle! Come!'

'No, no,' rejoined Smike, falling back a few steps. 'Don't ask me to give it up to you.'

'Why not?' asked Nicholas.

'Let me do something for you, at least,' said Smike. 'You will never let me serve you as I ought. You will never know how I think, day and night, of ways to please you.'

'You are a foolish fellow to say it, for I know it well, and see it, or I should be a blind and senseless beast,' rejoined Nicholas. 'Let me ask you a question while I think of it, and there is no one by,' he added, looking him steadily in the face. 'Have you a good memory?'

'I don't know,' said Smike, shaking his head sorrowfully. 'I think I had once; but it's all gone now—all gone.'

'Why do you think you had once?' asked Nicholas, turning quickly upon him as though the answer in some way helped out the purport of his question.

'Because I could remember, when I was a child,' said Smike, 'but that is very, very long ago, or at least it seems so. I was always confused and giddy at that place you took me from; and could never remember, and sometimes couldn't even understand, what they said to me. I—let me see—let me see!'

'You are wandering now,' said Nicholas, touching him on the arm.

'No,' replied his companion, with a vacant look 'I was only thinking how —' He shivered involuntarily as he spoke.

'Think no more of that place, for it is all over,' retorted Nicholas, fixing his eyes full upon that of his companion, which was fast settling into an unmeaning stupefied gaze, once habitual to him, and common even then. 'What of the first day you went to Yorkshire?'

'Eh!' cried the lad.

'That was before you began to lose your recollection, you know,' said Nicholas quietly. 'Was the weather hot or cold?'

'Wet,' replied the boy. 'Very wet. I have always said, when it has rained hard, that it was like the night I came: and they used to crowd round and laugh to see me cry when the rain fell heavily. It was like a child, they said, and that made me think of it more. I turned cold all over sometimes, for I could see myself as I was then, coming in at the very same door.'

'As you were then,' repeated Nicholas, with assumed carelessness; 'how was that?'

'Such a little creature,' said Smike, 'that they might have had pity and mercy upon me, only to remember it.'

'You didn't find your way there, alone!' remarked Nicholas.

'No,' rejoined Smike, 'oh no.'

'Who was with you?'

'A man—a dark, withered man. I have heard them say so, at the school, and I remembered that before. I was glad to leave him, I was afraid of him; but they made me more afraid of them, and used me harder too.'

'Look at me,' said Nicholas, wishing to attract his full attention. 'There; don't turn away. Do you remember no woman, no kind woman, who hung over you once, and kissed your lips, and called you her child?'

'No,' said the poor creature, shaking his head, 'no, never.'

'Nor any house but that house in Yorkshire?'

'No,' rejoined the youth, with a melancholy look; 'a room—I remember I slept in a room, a large lonesome room at the top of a house, where there was a trap-door in the ceiling. I have covered my head with the clothes often, not to see it, for it frightened me: a young child with no one near at night: and I used to wonder what was on the other side. There was a clock too, an old clock, in one corner. I remember that. I have never forgotten that room; for when I have terrible dreams, it comes back, just as it was. I see things and people in it that I had never seen then, but there is the room just as it used to be; THAT never changes.'

'Will you let me take the bundle now?' asked Nicholas, abruptly changing the theme.

'No,' said Smike, 'no. Come, let us walk on.'

He quickened his pace as he said this, apparently under the impression that they had been standing still during the whole of the previous dialogue. Nicholas marked him closely, and every word of this conversation remained upon his memory.

It was, by this time, within an hour of noon, and although a dense vapour still enveloped the city they had left, as if the very breath of its busy people hung over their schemes of gain and profit, and found greater attraction there than in the quiet region above, in the open country it was clear and fair. Occasionally, in some low spots they came upon patches of mist which the sun had not yet driven from their strongholds; but these were soon passed, and as they laboured up the hills beyond, it was pleasant to look down, and see how the sluggish mass rolled heavily off, before the cheering influence of day. A broad, fine, honest sun lighted up the green pastures and dimpled water with the semblance of summer, while it left the travellers all the invigorating freshness of that early time of year. The ground seemed elastic under their feet; the sheep-bells were music to their ears; and exhilarated by exercise, and stimulated by hope, they pushed onward with the strength of lions.

The day wore on, and all these bright colours subsided, and assumed a quieter tint, like young hopes softened down by time, or youthful features by degrees resolving into the calm and serenity of age. But they were scarcely less beautiful in their slow decline, than they had been in their prime; for nature gives to every time and season some beauties of its own; and from morning to night, as from the cradle to the grave, is but a succession of changes so gentle and easy, that we can scarcely mark their progress.

To Godalming they came at last, and here they bargained for two humble beds, and slept soundly. In the morning they were astir: though not quite so early as the sun: and again afoot; if not with all the freshness of yesterday, still, with enough of hope and spirit to bear them cheerily on.

It was a harder day's journey than yesterday's, for there were long and weary hills to climb; and in journeys, as in life, it is a great deal easier to go down hill than up. However, they kept on, with unabated perseverance, and the hill has not yet lifted its face to heaven that perseverance will not gain the summit of at last.

They walked upon the rim of the Devil's Punch Bowl; and Smike listened with greedy interest as Nicholas read the inscription upon the stone which, reared upon that wild spot, tells of a murder committed there by night. The grass on which they stood, had once been dyed with gore; and the blood of the murdered man had run down, drop by drop, into the hollow which gives the place its name. 'The Devil's Bowl,' thought Nicholas, as he looked into the void, 'never held fitter liquor than that!'

Onward they kept, with steady purpose, and entered at length upon a wide and spacious tract of downs, with every variety of little hill and plain to change their verdant surface. Here, there shot up, almost perpendicularly, into the sky, a height so steep, as to be hardly accessible to any but the sheep and goats that fed upon its sides, and there, stood a mound of green, sloping and tapering off so delicately, and merging so gently into the level ground, that you could scarce define its limits. Hills swelling above each other; and undulations shapely and uncouth, smooth and rugged, graceful and grotesque, thrown negligently side by side, bounded the view in each direction; while frequently, with unexpected noise, there uprose from the ground a flight of crows, who, cawing and wheeling round the nearest hills, as if uncertain of their course, suddenly poised themselves upon the wing and skimmed down the long vista of some opening valley, with the speed of light itself.

By degrees, the prospect receded more and more on either hand, and as they had been shut out from rich and extensive scenery, so they emerged once again upon the open country. The knowledge that they were drawing near their place of destination, gave them fresh courage to proceed; but the way had been difficult, and they had loitered on the road, and Smike was tired. Thus, twilight had already closed in, when they turned off the path to the door of a roadside inn, yet twelve miles short of Portsmouth.

'Twelve miles,' said Nicholas, leaning with both hands on his stick, and looking doubtfully at Smike.

'Twelve long miles,' repeated the landlord.

'Is it a good road?' inquired Nicholas.

'Very bad,' said the landlord. As of course, being a landlord, he would say.

'I want to get on,' observed Nicholas, hesitating. 'I scarcely know what to do.'

'Don't let me influence you,' rejoined the landlord. 'I wouldn't go on if it was me.'

'Wouldn't you?' asked Nicholas, with the same uncertainty.

'Not if I knew when I was well off,' said the landlord. And having said it he pulled up his apron, put his hands into his pockets, and, taking a step or two outside the door, looked down the dark road with an assumption of great indifference.

A glance at the toil-worn face of Smike determined Nicholas, so without any further consideration he made up his mind to stay where he was.

The landlord led them into the kitchen, and as there was a good fire he remarked that it was very cold. If there had happened to be a bad one he would have observed that it was very warm.

'What can you give us for supper?' was Nicholas's natural question.

'Why—what would you like?' was the landlord's no less natural answer.

Nicholas suggested cold meat, but there was no cold meat—poached eggs, but there were no eggs—mutton chops, but there wasn't a mutton chop within three miles, though there had been more last week than they knew what to do with, and would be an extraordinary supply the day after tomorrow.

'Then,' said Nicholas, 'I must leave it entirely to you, as I would have done, at first, if you had allowed me.'

'Why, then I'll tell you what,' rejoined the landlord. 'There's a gentleman in the parlour that's ordered a hot beef-steak pudding and potatoes, at nine. There's more of it than he can manage, and I have very little doubt that if I ask leave, you can sup with him. I'll do that, in a minute.'

'No, no,' said Nicholas, detaining him. 'I would rather not. I—at least—pshaw! why cannot I speak out? Here; you see that I am travelling in a very humble manner, and have made my way hither on foot. It is more than probable, I think, that the gentleman may not relish my company; and although I am the dusty figure you see, I am too proud to thrust myself into his.'

'Lord love you,' said the landlord, 'it's only Mr Crummles; HE isn't particular.'

'Is he not?' asked Nicholas, on whose mind, to tell the truth, the prospect of the savoury pudding was making some impression.

'Not he,' replied the landlord. 'He'll like your way of talking, I know. But we'll soon see all about that. Just wait a minute.'

The landlord hurried into the parlour, without staying for further permission, nor did Nicholas strive to prevent him: wisely considering that supper, under the circumstances, was too serious a matter to be trifled with. It was not long before the host returned, in a condition of much excitement.

'All right,' he said in a low voice. 'I knew he would. You'll see something rather worth seeing, in there. Ecod, how they are a-going of it!'

There was no time to inquire to what this exclamation, which was delivered in a very rapturous tone, referred; for he had already thrown open the door of the room; into which Nicholas, followed by Smike with the bundle on his shoulder (he carried it about with him as vigilantly as if it had been a sack of gold), straightway repaired.

Nicholas was prepared for something odd, but not for something quite so odd as the sight he encountered. At the upper end of the room, were a couple of boys, one of them very tall and the other very short, both dressed as sailors—or at least as theatrical sailors, with belts, buckles, pigtails, and pistols complete—fighting what is called in play-bills a terrific combat, with two of those short broad-swords with basket hilts which are commonly used at our minor theatres. The short boy had gained a great advantage over the tall boy, who was reduced to mortal strait, and both were overlooked by a large heavy man, perched against the corner of a table, who emphatically adjured them to strike a little more fire out of the swords, and they couldn't fail to bring the house down, on the very first night.

'Mr Vincent Crummles,' said the landlord with an air of great deference. 'This is the young gentleman.'

Mr Vincent Crummles received Nicholas with an inclination of the head, something between the courtesy of a Roman emperor and the nod of a pot companion; and bade the landlord shut the door and begone.

'There's a picture,' said Mr Crummles, motioning Nicholas not to advance and spoil it. 'The little 'un has him; if the big 'un doesn't knock under, in three seconds, he's a dead man. Do that again, boys.'

The two combatants went to work afresh, and chopped away until the swords emitted a shower of sparks: to the great satisfaction of Mr Crummles, who appeared to consider this a very great point indeed. The engagement commenced with about two hundred chops administered by the short sailor and the tall sailor alternately, without producing any particular result, until the short sailor was chopped down on one knee; but this was nothing to him, for he worked himself about on the one knee with the assistance of his left hand, and fought most desperately until the tall sailor chopped his sword out of his grasp. Now, the inference was, that the short sailor, reduced to this extremity, would give in at once and cry quarter, but, instead of that, he all of a sudden drew a large pistol from his belt and presented it at the face of the tall sailor, who was so overcome at this (not expecting it) that he let the short sailor pick up his sword and begin again. Then, the chopping recommenced, and a variety of fancy chops were administered on both sides; such as chops dealt with the left hand, and under the leg, and over the right shoulder, and over the left; and when the short sailor made a vigorous cut at the tall sailor's legs, which would have shaved them clean off if it had taken effect, the tall sailor jumped over the short sailor's sword, wherefore to balance the matter, and make it all fair, the tall sailor administered the same cut, and the short sailor jumped over HIS sword. After this, there was a good deal of dodging about, and hitching up of the inexpressibles in the absence of braces, and then the short sailor (who was the moral character evidently, for he always had the best of it) made a violent demonstration and closed with the tall sailor, who, after a few unavailing struggles, went down, and expired in great torture as the short sailor put his foot upon his breast, and bored a hole in him through and through.

'That'll be a double ENCORE if you take care, boys,' said Mr Crummles. 'You had better get your wind now and change your clothes.'

Having addressed these words to the combatants, he saluted Nicholas, who then observed that the face of Mr Crummles was quite proportionate in size to his body; that he had a very full under-lip, a hoarse voice, as though he were in the habit of shouting very much, and very short black hair, shaved off nearly to the crown of his head—to admit (as he afterwards learnt) of his more easily wearing character wigs of any shape or pattern.

'What did you think of that, sir?' inquired Mr Crummles.

'Very good, indeed—capital,' answered Nicholas.

'You won't see such boys as those very often, I think,' said Mr Crummles.

Nicholas assented—observing that if they were a little better match—

'Match!' cried Mr Crummles.

'I mean if they were a little more of a size,' said Nicholas, explaining himself.

'Size!' repeated Mr Crummles; 'why, it's the essence of the combat that there should be a foot or two between them. How are you to get up the sympathies of the audience in a legitimate manner, if there isn't a little man contending against a big one?—unless there's at least five to one, and we haven't hands enough for that business in our company.'

'I see,' replied Nicholas. 'I beg your pardon. That didn't occur to me, I confess.'

'It's the main point,' said Mr Crummles. 'I open at Portsmouth the day after tomorrow. If you're going there, look into the theatre, and see how that'll tell.'

Nicholas promised to do so, if he could, and drawing a chair near the fire, fell into conversation with the manager at once. He was very talkative and communicative, stimulated perhaps, not only by his natural disposition, but by the spirits and water he sipped very plentifully, or the snuff he took in large quantities from a piece of whitey-brown paper in his waistcoat pocket. He laid open his affairs without the smallest reserve, and descanted at some length upon the merits of his company, and the acquirements of his family; of both of which, the two broad-sword boys formed an honourable portion. There was to be a gathering, it seemed, of the different ladies and gentlemen at Portsmouth on the morrow, whither the father and sons were proceeding (not for the regular season, but in the course of a wandering speculation), after fulfilling an engagement at Guildford with the greatest applause.

'You are going that way?' asked the manager.

'Ye-yes,' said Nicholas. 'Yes, I am.'

'Do you know the town at all?' inquired the manager, who seemed to consider himself entitled to the same degree of confidence as he had himself exhibited.

'No,' replied Nicholas.

'Never there?'

'Never.'

Mr Vincent Crummles gave a short dry cough, as much as to say, 'If you won't be communicative, you won't;' and took so many pinches of snuff from the piece of paper, one after another, that Nicholas quite wondered where it all went to.

While he was thus engaged, Mr Crummles looked, from time to time, with great interest at Smike, with whom he had appeared considerably struck from the first. He had now fallen asleep, and was nodding in his chair.

'Excuse my saying so,' said the manager, leaning over to Nicholas, and sinking his voice, 'but what a capital countenance your friend has got!'

'Poor fellow!' said Nicholas, with a half-smile, 'I wish it were a little more plump, and less haggard.'

'Plump!' exclaimed the manager, quite horrified, 'you'd spoil it for ever.'

'Do you think so?'

'Think so, sir! Why, as he is now,' said the manager, striking his knee emphatically; 'without a pad upon his body, and hardly a touch of paint upon his face, he'd make such an actor for the starved business as was never seen in this country. Only let him be tolerably well up in the Apothecary in Romeo and Juliet, with the slightest possible dab of red on the tip of his nose, and he'd be certain of three rounds the moment he put his head out of the practicable door in the front grooves O.P.'

'You view him with a professional eye,' said Nicholas, laughing.

'And well I may,' rejoined the manager. 'I never saw a young fellow so regularly cut out for that line, since I've been in the profession. And I played the heavy children when I was eighteen months old.'

The appearance of the beef-steak pudding, which came in simultaneously with the junior Vincent Crummleses, turned the conversation to other matters, and indeed, for a time, stopped it altogether. These two young gentlemen wielded their knives and forks with scarcely less address than their broad-swords, and as the whole party were quite as sharp set as either class of weapons, there was no time for talking until the supper had been disposed of.

The Master Crummleses had no sooner swallowed the last procurable morsel of food, than they evinced, by various half-suppressed yawns and stretchings of their limbs, an obvious inclination to retire for the night, which Smike had betrayed still more strongly: he having, in the course of the meal, fallen asleep several times while in the very act of eating. Nicholas therefore proposed that they should break up at once, but the manager would by no means hear of it; vowing that he had promised himself the pleasure of inviting his new acquaintance to share a bowl of punch, and that if he declined, he should deem it very unhandsome behaviour.

'Let them go,' said Mr Vincent Crummles, 'and we'll have it snugly and cosily together by the fire.'

Nicholas was not much disposed to sleep—being in truth too anxious—so, after a little demur, he accepted the offer, and having exchanged a shake of the hand with the young Crummleses, and the manager having on his part bestowed a most affectionate benediction on Smike, he sat himself down opposite to that gentleman by the fireside to assist in emptying the bowl, which soon afterwards appeared, steaming in a manner which was quite exhilarating to behold, and sending forth a most grateful and inviting fragrance.

But, despite the punch and the manager, who told a variety of stories, and smoked tobacco from a pipe, and inhaled it in the shape of snuff, with a most astonishing power, Nicholas was absent and dispirited. His thoughts were in his old home, and when they reverted to his present condition, the uncertainty of the morrow cast a gloom upon him, which his utmost efforts were unable to dispel. His attention wandered; although he heard the manager's voice, he was deaf to what he said; and when Mr Vincent Crummles concluded the history of some long adventure with a loud laugh, and an inquiry what Nicholas would have done under the same circumstances, he was obliged to make the best apology in his power, and to confess his entire ignorance of all he had been talking about.

'Why, so I saw,' observed Mr Crummles. 'You're uneasy in your mind. What's the matter?'

Nicholas could not refrain from smiling at the abruptness of the question; but, thinking it scarcely worth while to parry it, owned that he was under some apprehensions lest he might not succeed in the object which had brought him to that part of the country.

'And what's that?' asked the manager.

'Getting something to do which will keep me and my poor fellow-traveller in the common necessaries of life,' said Nicholas. 'That's the truth. You guessed it long ago, I dare say, so I may as well have the credit of telling it you with a good grace.'

'What's to be got to do at Portsmouth more than anywhere else?' asked Mr Vincent Crummles, melting the sealing-wax on the stem of his pipe in the candle, and rolling it out afresh with his little finger.

'There are many vessels leaving the port, I suppose,' replied Nicholas. 'I shall try for a berth in some ship or other. There is meat and drink there at all events.'

'Salt meat and new rum; pease-pudding and chaff-biscuits,' said the manager, taking a whiff at his pipe to keep it alight, and returning to his work of embellishment.

'One may do worse than that,' said Nicholas. 'I can rough it, I believe, as well as most young men of my age and previous habits.'

'You need be able to,' said the manager, 'if you go on board ship; but you won't.'

'Why not?'

'Because there's not a skipper or mate that would think you worth your salt, when he could get a practised hand,' replied the manager; 'and they as plentiful there, as the oysters in the streets.'

'What do you mean?' asked Nicholas, alarmed by this prediction, and the confident tone in which it had been uttered. 'Men are not born able seamen. They must be reared, I suppose?'

Mr Vincent Crummles nodded his head. 'They must; but not at your age, or from young gentlemen like you.'

There was a pause. The countenance of Nicholas fell, and he gazed ruefully at the fire.

'Does no other profession occur to you, which a young man of your figure and address could take up easily, and see the world to advantage in?' asked the manager.

'No,' said Nicholas, shaking his head.

'Why, then, I'll tell you one,' said Mr Crummles, throwing his pipe into the fire, and raising his voice. 'The stage.'

'The stage!' cried Nicholas, in a voice almost as loud.

'The theatrical profession,' said Mr Vincent Crummles. 'I am in the theatrical profession myself, my wife is in the theatrical profession, my children are in the theatrical profession. I had a dog that lived and died in it from a puppy; and my chaise-pony goes on, in Timour the Tartar. I'll bring you out, and your friend too. Say the word. I want a novelty.'

'I don't know anything about it,' rejoined Nicholas, whose breath had been almost taken away by this sudden proposal. 'I never acted a part in my life, except at school.'

'There's genteel comedy in your walk and manner, juvenile tragedy in your eye, and touch-and-go farce in your laugh,' said Mr Vincent Crummles. 'You'll do as well as if you had thought of nothing else but the lamps, from your birth downwards.'

Nicholas thought of the small amount of small change that would remain in his pocket after paying the tavern bill; and he hesitated.

'You can be useful to us in a hundred ways,' said Mr Crummles. 'Think what capital bills a man of your education could write for the shop-windows.'

'Well, I think I could manage that department,' said Nicholas.

'To be sure you could,' replied Mr Crummles. '"For further particulars see small hand-bills"—we might have half a volume in every one of 'em. Pieces too; why, you could write us a piece to bring out the whole strength of the company, whenever we wanted one.'

'I am not quite so confident about that,' replied Nicholas. 'But I dare say I could scribble something now and then, that would suit you.'

'We'll have a new show-piece out directly,' said the manager. 'Let me see—peculiar resources of this establishment—new and splendid scenery—

you must manage to introduce a real pump and two washing-tubs.'

'Into the piece?' said Nicholas.

'Yes,' replied the manager. 'I bought 'em cheap, at a sale the other day, and they'll come in admirably. That's the London plan. They look up some dresses, and properties, and have a piece written to fit 'em. Most of the theatres keep an author on purpose.'

'Indeed!' cried Nicholas.

'Oh, yes,' said the manager; 'a common thing. It'll look very well in the bills in separate lines—Real pump!—Splendid tubs!—Great attraction! You don't happen to be anything of an artist, do you?'

'That is not one of my accomplishments,' rejoined Nicholas.

'Ah! Then it can't be helped,' said the manager. 'If you had been, we might have had a large woodcut of the last scene for the posters, showing the whole depth of the stage, with the pump and tubs in the middle; but, however, if you're not, it can't be helped.'

'What should I get for all this?' inquired Nicholas, after a few moments' reflection. 'Could I live by it?'

'Live by it!' said the manager. 'Like a prince! With your own salary, and your friend's, and your writings, you'd make—ah! you'd make a pound a week!'

'You don't say so!'

'I do indeed, and if we had a run of good houses, nearly double the money.'

Nicholas shrugged his shoulders; but sheer destitution was before him; and if he could summon fortitude to undergo the extremes of want and hardship, for what had he rescued his helpless charge if it were only to bear as hard a fate as that from which he had wrested him? It was easy to think of seventy miles as nothing, when he was in the same town with the man who had treated him so ill and roused his bitterest thoughts; but now, it seemed far enough. What if he went abroad, and his mother or Kate were to die the while?

Without more deliberation, he hastily declared that it was a bargain, and gave Mr Vincent Crummles his hand upon it.

CHAPTER 23

Treats of the Company of Mr Vincent Crummles, and of his Affairs, Domestic and Theatrical

As Mr Crummles had a strange four-legged animal in the inn stables, which he called a pony, and a vehicle of unknown design, on which he bestowed the appellation of a four-wheeled phaeton, Nicholas proceeded on his journey next morning with greater ease than he had expected: the manager and himself occupying the front seat: and the Master Crummleses and Smike being packed together behind, in company with a wicker basket defended from wet by a stout oilskin, in which were the broad-swords, pistols, pigtails, nautical costumes, and other professional necessaries of the aforesaid young gentlemen.

The pony took his time upon the road, and—possibly in consequence of his theatrical education—evinced, every now and then, a strong inclination to lie down. However, Mr Vincent Crummles kept him up pretty well, by jerking the rein, and plying the whip; and when these means failed, and the animal came to a stand, the elder Master Crummles got out and kicked him. By dint of these encouragements, he was persuaded to move from time to time, and they jogged on (as Mr Crummles truly observed) very comfortably for all parties.

'He's a good pony at bottom,' said Mr Crummles, turning to Nicholas.

He might have been at bottom, but he certainly was not at top, seeing that his coat was of the roughest and most ill-favoured kind. So, Nicholas merely observed that he shouldn't wonder if he was.

'Many and many is the circuit this pony has gone,' said Mr Crummles, flicking him skilfully on the eyelid for old acquaintance' sake. 'He is quite one of us. His mother was on the stage.'

'Was she?' rejoined Nicholas.

'She ate apple-pie at a circus for upwards of fourteen years,' said the manager; 'fired pistols, and went to bed in a nightcap; and, in short, took the low comedy entirely. His father was a dancer.'

'Was he at all distinguished?'

'Not very,' said the manager. 'He was rather a low sort of pony. The fact is, he had been originally jobbed out by the day, and he never quite got over his old habits. He was clever in melodrama too, but too broad—too broad. When the mother died, he took the port-wine business.'

'The port-wine business!' cried Nicholas.

'Drinking port-wine with the clown,' said the manager; 'but he was greedy, and one night bit off the bowl of the glass, and choked himself, so his vulgarity was the death of him at last.'

The descendant of this ill-starred animal requiring increased attention from Mr Crummles as he progressed in his day's work, that gentleman had very little time for conversation. Nicholas was thus left at leisure to entertain himself with his own thoughts, until they arrived at the drawbridge at Portsmouth, when Mr Crummles pulled up.

'We'll get down here,' said the manager, 'and the boys will take him round to the stable, and call at my lodgings with the luggage. You had better let yours be taken there, for the present.'

Thanking Mr Vincent Crummles for his obliging offer, Nicholas jumped out, and, giving Smike his arm, accompanied the manager up High Street on their way to the theatre; feeling nervous and uncomfortable enough at the prospect of an immediate introduction to a scene so new to him.

They passed a great many bills, pasted against the walls and displayed in windows, wherein the names of Mr Vincent Crummles, Mrs Vincent Crummles, Master Crummles, Master P. Crummles, and Miss Crummles, were printed in very large letters, and everything else in very small ones; and, turning at length into an entry, in which was a strong smell of orange-peel and lamp-oil, with an under-current of sawdust, groped their way through a dark passage, and, descending a step or two, threaded a little maze of canvas screens and paint pots, and emerged upon the stage of the Portsmouth Theatre.

'Here we are,' said Mr Crummles.

It was not very light, but Nicholas found himself close to the first entrance on the prompt side, among bare walls, dusty scenes, mildewed clouds, heavily daubed draperies, and dirty floors. He looked about him; ceiling, pit, boxes, gallery, orchestra, fittings, and decorations of every kind,—all looked coarse, cold, gloomy, and wretched.

'Is this a theatre?' whispered Smike, in amazement; 'I thought it was a blaze of light and finery.'

'Why, so it is,' replied Nicholas, hardly less surprised; 'but not by day, Smike—not by day.'

The manager's voice recalled him from a more careful inspection of the building, to the opposite side of the proscenium, where, at a small mahogany table with rickety legs and of an oblong shape, sat a stout, portly female, apparently between forty and fifty, in a tarnished silk cloak, with her bonnet dangling by the strings in her hand, and her hair (of which she had a great quantity) braided in a large festoon over each temple.

'Mr Johnson,' said the manager (for Nicholas had given the name which Newman Noggs had bestowed upon him in his conversation with Mrs Kenwigs), 'let me introduce Mrs Vincent Crummles.'

'I am glad to see you, sir,' said Mrs Vincent Crummles, in a sepulchral voice. 'I am very glad to see you, and still more happy to hail you as a promising member of our corps.'

The lady shook Nicholas by the hand as she addressed him in these terms; he saw it was a large one, but had not expected quite such an iron grip as that with which she honoured him.

'And this,' said the lady, crossing to Smike, as tragic actresses cross when they obey a stage direction, 'and this is the other. You too, are welcome, sir.'

'He'll do, I think, my dear?' said the manager, taking a pinch of snuff.

'He is admirable,' replied the lady. 'An acquisition indeed.'

As Mrs Vincent Crummles recrossed back to the table, there bounded on to the stage from some mysterious inlet, a little girl in a dirty white frock with tucks up to the knees, short trousers, sandaled shoes, white spencer, pink gauze bonnet, green veil and curl papers; who turned a pirouette, cut twice in the air, turned another pirouette, then, looking off at the opposite wing, shrieked, bounded forward to within six inches of the footlights, and fell into a beautiful attitude of terror, as a shabby gentleman in an old pair of buff slippers came in at one powerful slide, and chattering his teeth, fiercely brandished a walking-stick.

'They are going through the Indian Savage and the Maiden,' said Mrs Crummles.

'Oh!' said the manager, 'the little ballet interlude. Very good, go on. A little this way, if you please, Mr Johnson. That'll do. Now!'

The manager clapped his hands as a signal to proceed, and the savage, becoming ferocious, made a slide towards the maiden; but the maiden avoided him in six twirls, and came down, at the end of the last one, upon the very points of her toes. This seemed to make some impression upon the savage; for, after a little more ferocity and chasing of the maiden into corners, he began to relent, and stroked his face several times with his right thumb and four fingers, thereby intimating that he was struck with admiration of the maiden's beauty. Acting upon the impulse of this passion, he (the savage) began to hit himself severe thumps in the chest, and to exhibit other indications of being desperately in love, which being rather a prosy proceeding, was very likely the cause of the maiden's falling asleep; whether it was or no, asleep she did fall, sound as a church, on a sloping bank, and the savage perceiving it, leant his left ear on his left hand, and nodded sideways, to intimate to all whom it might concern that she WAS asleep, and no shamming. Being left to himself, the savage had a dance, all alone. Just as he left off, the maiden woke up, rubbed her eyes, got off the bank, and had a dance all alone too—such a dance that the savage looked on in ecstasy all the while, and when it was done, plucked from a neighbouring tree some botanical curiosity, resembling a small pickled cabbage, and offered it to the maiden, who at first wouldn't have it, but on the savage shedding tears relented. Then the savage jumped for joy; then the maiden jumped for rapture at the sweet smell of the pickled cabbage. Then the savage and the maiden danced violently together, and, finally, the savage dropped down on one knee, and the maiden stood on one leg upon his other knee; thus concluding the ballet, and leaving the spectators in a state of pleasing uncertainty, whether she would ultimately marry the savage, or return to her friends.

'Very well indeed,' said Mr Crummles; 'bravo!'

'Bravo!' cried Nicholas, resolved to make the best of everything. 'Beautiful!'

'This, sir,' said Mr Vincent Crummles, bringing the maiden forward, 'this is the infant phenomenon—Miss Ninetta Crummles.'

'Your daughter?' inquired Nicholas.

'My daughter—my daughter,' replied Mr Vincent Crummles; 'the idol of every place we go into, sir. We have had complimentary letters about this girl, sir, from the nobility and gentry of almost every town in England.'

'I am not surprised at that,' said Nicholas; 'she must be quite a natural genius.'

'Quite a—!' Mr Crummles stopped: language was not powerful enough to describe the infant phenomenon. 'I'll tell you what, sir,' he said; 'the talent of this child is not to be imagined. She must be seen, sir—seen—to be ever so faintly appreciated. There; go to your mother, my dear.'

'May I ask how old she is?' inquired Nicholas.

'You may, sir,' replied Mr Crummles, looking steadily in his questioner's face, as some men do when they have doubts about being implicitly believed in what they are going to say. 'She is ten years of age, sir.'

'Not more!'

'Not a day.'

'Dear me!' said Nicholas, 'it's extraordinary.'

It was; for the infant phenomenon, though of short stature, had a comparatively aged countenance, and had moreover been precisely the same age—not perhaps to the full extent of the memory of the oldest inhabitant, but certainly for five good years. But she had been kept up late every night, and put upon an unlimited allowance of gin-and-water from infancy, to prevent her growing tall, and perhaps this system of training had produced in the infant phenomenon these additional phenomena.

While this short dialogue was going on, the gentleman who had enacted the savage, came up, with his walking shoes on his feet, and his slippers in his hand, to within a few paces, as if desirous to join in the conversation. Deeming this a good opportunity, he put in his word.

'Talent there, sir!' said the savage, nodding towards Miss Crummles.

Nicholas assented.

'Ah!' said the actor, setting his teeth together, and drawing in his breath with a hissing sound, 'she oughtn't to be in the provinces, she oughtn't.'

'What do you mean?' asked the manager.

'I mean to say,' replied the other, warmly, 'that she is too good for country boards, and that she ought to be in one of the large houses in London, or nowhere; and I tell you more, without mincing the matter, that if it wasn't for envy and jealousy in some quarter that you know of, she would be. Perhaps you'll introduce me here, Mr Crummles.'

'Mr Folair,' said the manager, presenting him to Nicholas.

'Happy to know you, sir.' Mr Folair touched the brim of his hat with his forefinger, and then shook hands. 'A recruit, sir, I understand?'

'An unworthy one,' replied Nicholas.

'Did you ever see such a set-out as that?' whispered the actor, drawing him away, as Crummles left them to speak to his wife.

'As what?'

Mr Folair made a funny face from his pantomime collection, and pointed over his shoulder.

'You don't mean the infant phenomenon?'

'Infant humbug, sir,' replied Mr Folair. 'There isn't a female child of common sharpness in a charity school, that couldn't do better than that. She may thank her stars she was born a manager's daughter.'

'You seem to take it to heart,' observed Nicholas, with a smile.

'Yes, by Jove, and well I may,' said Mr Folair, drawing his arm through his, and walking him up and down the stage. 'Isn't it enough to make a man crusty to see that little sprawler put up in the best business every night, and actually keeping money out of the house, by being forced down the people's throats, while other people are passed over? Isn't it extraordinary to see a man's confounded family conceit blinding him, even to his own interest? Why I KNOW of fifteen and sixpence that came to Southampton one night last month, to see me dance the Highland Fling; and what's the consequence? I've never been put up in it since—never once—while the "infant phenomenon" has been grinning through artificial flowers at five people and a baby in the pit, and two boys in the gallery, every night.'

'If I may judge from what I have seen of you,' said Nicholas, 'you must be a valuable member of the company.'

'Oh!' replied Mr Folair, beating his slippers together, to knock the dust out; 'I CAN come it pretty well—nobody better, perhaps, in my own line—but having such business as one gets here, is like putting lead on one's feet instead of chalk, and dancing in fetters without the credit of it. Holloa, old fellow, how are you?'

The gentleman addressed in these latter words was a dark-complexioned man, inclining indeed to sallow, with long thick black hair, and very evident inclinations (although he was close shaved) of a stiff beard, and whiskers of the same deep shade. His age did not appear to exceed thirty, though many at first sight would have considered him much older, as his face was long, and very pale, from the constant application of stage paint. He wore a checked shirt, an old green coat with new gilt buttons, a neckerchief of broad red and green stripes, and full blue trousers; he carried, too, a common ash walking-stick, apparently more for show than use, as he flourished it about, with the hooked end downwards, except when he raised it for a few seconds, and throwing himself into a fencing attitude, made a pass or two at the side-scenes, or at any other object, animate or inanimate, that chanced to afford him a pretty good mark at the moment.

'Well, Tommy,' said this gentleman, making a thrust at his friend, who parried it dexterously with his slipper, 'what's the news?'

'A new appearance, that's all,' replied Mr Folair, looking at Nicholas.

'Do the honours, Tommy, do the honours,' said the other gentleman, tapping him reproachfully on the crown of the hat with his stick.

'This is Mr Lenville, who does our first tragedy, Mr Johnson,' said the pantomimist.

'Except when old bricks and mortar takes it into his head to do it himself, you should add, Tommy,' remarked Mr Lenville. 'You know who bricks and mortar is, I suppose, sir?'

'I do not, indeed,' replied Nicholas.

'We call Crummles that, because his style of acting is rather in the heavy and ponderous way,' said Mr Lenville. 'I mustn't be cracking jokes though, for I've got a part of twelve lengths here, which I must be up in tomorrow night, and I haven't had time to look at it yet; I'm a confounded quick study, that's one comfort.'

Consoling himself with this reflection, Mr Lenville drew from his coat pocket a greasy and crumpled manuscript, and, having made another pass at his friend, proceeded to walk to and fro, conning it to himself and indulging occasionally in such appropriate action as his imagination and the text suggested.

A pretty general muster of the company had by this time taken place; for besides Mr Lenville and his friend Tommy, there were present, a slim young gentleman with weak eyes, who played the low-spirited lovers and sang tenor songs, and who had come arm-in-arm with the comic countryman—a man with a turned-up nose, large mouth, broad face, and staring eyes. Making himself very amiable to the infant phenomenon, was an inebriated elderly gentleman in the last depths of shabbiness, who played the calm and virtuous old men; and paying especial court to Mrs Crummles was another elderly gentleman, a shade more respectable, who played the irascible old men—those funny fellows who have nephews in the army and perpetually run about with thick sticks to compel them to marry heiresses. Besides these, there was a roving-looking person in a rough great-coat, who strode up and down in front of the lamps, flourishing a dress cane, and rattling away, in an undertone, with great vivacity for the amusement of an ideal audience. He was not quite so young as he had been, and his figure was rather running to seed; but there was an air of exaggerated gentility about him, which bespoke the hero of swaggering comedy. There was, also, a little group of three or four young men with lantern jaws and thick eyebrows, who were conversing in one corner; but they seemed to be of secondary importance, and laughed and talked together without attracting any attention.

The ladies were gathered in a little knot by themselves round the rickety table before mentioned. There was Miss Snevellicci—who could do anything, from a medley dance to Lady Macbeth, and also always played some part in blue silk knee-smalls at her benefit—glancing, from the depths of her coal-scuttle straw bonnet, at Nicholas, and affecting to be absorbed in the recital of a diverting story to her friend Miss Ledrook, who had brought her work, and was making up a ruff in the most natural manner possible. There was Miss Belvawney—who seldom aspired to speaking parts, and usually went on as a page in white silk hose, to stand with one leg bent, and contemplate the audience, or to go in and out after Mr Crummles in stately tragedy—twisting up the ringlets of the beautiful Miss Bravassa, who had once had her likeness taken 'in character' by an engraver's apprentice, whereof impressions were hung up for sale in the pastry-cook's window, and the greengrocer's, and at the circulating library, and the box-office, whenever the announce bills came out for her annual night. There was Mrs Lenville, in a very limp bonnet and veil, decidedly in that way in which she would wish to be if she truly loved Mr Lenville; there was Miss Gazingi, with an imitation ermine boa tied in a loose knot round her neck, flogging Mr Crummles, junior, with both ends, in fun. Lastly, there was Mrs Grudden in a brown cloth pelisse and a beaver bonnet, who assisted Mrs Crummles in her domestic affairs, and took money at the doors, and dressed the ladies, and swept the house, and held the prompt book when everybody else was on for the last scene, and acted any kind of part on any emergency without ever learning it, and was put down in the bills under my name or names whatever, that occurred to Mr Crummles as looking well in print.

Mr Folair having obligingly confided these particulars to Nicholas, left him to mingle with his fellows; the work of personal introduction was completed by Mr Vincent Crummles, who publicly heralded the new actor as a prodigy of genius and learning.

'I beg your pardon,' said Miss Snevellicci, sidling towards Nicholas, 'but did you ever play at Canterbury?'

'I never did,' replied Nicholas.

'I recollect meeting a gentleman at Canterbury,' said Miss Snevellicci, 'only for a few moments, for I was leaving the company as he joined it, so like you that I felt almost certain it was the same.'

'I see you now for the first time,' rejoined Nicholas with all due gallantry. 'I am sure I never saw you before; I couldn't have forgotten it.'

'Oh, I'm sure—it's very flattering of you to say so,' retorted Miss Snevellicci with a graceful bend. 'Now I look at you again, I see that the gentleman at Canterbury hadn't the same eyes as you—you'll think me very foolish for taking notice of such things, won't you?'

'Not at all,' said Nicholas. 'How can I feel otherwise than flattered by your notice in any way?'

'Oh! you men are such vain creatures!' cried Miss Snevellicci. Whereupon, she became charmingly confused, and, pulling out her pocket-handkerchief from a faded pink silk reticule with a gilt clasp, called to Miss Ledrook—

'Led, my dear,' said Miss Snevellicci.

'Well, what is the matter?' said Miss Ledrook.

'It's not the same.'

'Not the same what?'

'Canterbury—you know what I mean. Come here! I want to speak to you.'

But Miss Ledrook wouldn't come to Miss Snevellicci, so Miss Snevellicci was obliged to go to Miss Ledrook, which she did, in a skipping manner that was quite fascinating; and Miss Ledrook evidently joked Miss Snevellicci about being struck with Nicholas; for, after some playful whispering, Miss Snevellicci hit Miss Ledrook very hard on the backs of her hands, and retired up, in a state of pleasing confusion.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' said Mr Vincent Crummles, who had been writing on a piece of paper, 'we'll call the Mortal Struggle tomorrow at ten; everybody for the procession. Intrigue, and Ways and Means, you're all up in, so we shall only want one rehearsal. Everybody at ten, if you please.'

'Everybody at ten,' repeated Mrs Grudden, looking about her.

'On Monday morning we shall read a new piece,' said Mr Crummles; 'the name's not known yet, but everybody will have a good part. Mr

Johnson will take care of that.'

'Hallo!' said Nicholas, starting. 'I—'

'On Monday morning,' repeated Mr Crummles, raising his voice, to drown the unfortunate Mr Johnson's remonstrance; 'that'll do, ladies and gentlemen.'

The ladies and gentlemen required no second notice to quit; and, in a few minutes, the theatre was deserted, save by the Crummles family, Nicholas, and Smike.

'Upon my word,' said Nicholas, taking the manager aside, 'I don't think I can be ready by Monday.'

'Pooh, pooh,' replied Mr Crummles.

'But really I can't,' returned Nicholas; 'my invention is not accustomed to these demands, or possibly I might produce—'

'Invention! what the devil's that got to do with it!' cried the manager hastily.

'Everything, my dear sir.'

'Nothing, my dear sir,' retorted the manager, with evident impatience. 'Do you understand French?'

'Perfectly well.'

'Very good,' said the manager, opening the table drawer, and giving a roll of paper from it to Nicholas. 'There! Just turn that into English, and put your name on the title-page. Damn me,' said Mr Crummles, angrily, 'if I haven't often said that I wouldn't have a man or woman in my company that wasn't master of the language, so that they might learn it from the original, and play it in English, and save all this trouble and expense.'

Nicholas smiled and pocketed the play.

'What are you going to do about your lodgings?' said Mr Crummles.

Nicholas could not help thinking that, for the first week, it would be an uncommon convenience to have a turn-up bedstead in the pit, but he merely remarked that he had not turned his thoughts that way.

'Come home with me then,' said Mr Crummles, 'and my boys shall go with you after dinner, and show you the most likely place.'

The offer was not to be refused; Nicholas and Mr Crummles gave Mrs Crummles an arm each, and walked up the street in stately array. Smike, the boys, and the phenomenon, went home by a shorter cut, and Mrs Grudden remained behind to take some cold Irish stew and a pint of porter in the box-office.

Mrs Crummles trod the pavement as if she were going to immediate execution with an animating consciousness of innocence, and that heroic fortitude which virtue alone inspires. Mr Crummles, on the other hand, assumed the look and gait of a hardened despot; but they both attracted some notice from many of the passers-by, and when they heard a whisper of 'Mr and Mrs Crummles!' or saw a little boy run back to stare them in the face, the severe expression of their countenances relaxed, for they felt it was popularity.

Mr Crummles lived in St Thomas's Street, at the house of one Bulph, a pilot, who sported a boat-green door, with window-frames of the same colour, and had the little finger of a drowned man on his parlour mantelshelf, with other maritime and natural curiosities. He displayed also a brass knocker, a brass plate, and a brass bell-handle, all very bright and shining; and had a mast, with a vane on the top of it, in his back yard.

'You are welcome,' said Mrs Crummles, turning round to Nicholas when they reached the bow-windowed front room on the first floor.

Nicholas bowed his acknowledgments, and was unfeignedly glad to see the cloth laid.

'We have but a shoulder of mutton with onion sauce,' said Mrs Crummles, in the same charnel-house voice; 'but such as our dinner is, we beg you to partake of it.'

'You are very good,' replied Nicholas, 'I shall do it ample justice.'

'Vincent,' said Mrs Crummles, 'what is the hour?'

'Five minutes past dinner-time,' said Mr Crummles.

Mrs Crummles rang the bell. 'Let the mutton and onion sauce appear.'

The slave who attended upon Mr Bulph's lodgers, disappeared, and after a short interval reappeared with the festive banquet. Nicholas and the infant phenomenon opposed each other at the pembroke-table, and Smike and the master Crummleses dined on the sofa bedstead.

'Are they very theatrical people here?' asked Nicholas.

'No,' replied Mr Crummles, shaking his head, 'far from it—far from it.'

'I pity them,' observed Mrs Crummles.

'So do I,' said Nicholas; 'if they have no relish for theatrical entertainments, properly conducted.'

'Then they have none, sir,' rejoined Mr Crummles. 'To the infant's benefit, last year, on which occasion she repeated three of her most popular characters, and also appeared in the Fairy Porcupine, as originally performed by her, there was a house of no more than four pound twelve.'

'Is it possible?' cried Nicholas.

'And two pound of that was trust, pa,' said the phenomenon.

'And two pound of that was trust,' repeated Mr Crummles. 'Mrs Crummles herself has played to mere handfuls.'

'But they are always a taking audience, Vincent,' said the manager's wife.

'Most audiences are, when they have good acting—real good acting—the regular thing,' replied Mr Crummles, forcibly.

'Do you give lessons, ma'am?' inquired Nicholas.

'I do,' said Mrs Crummles.

'There is no teaching here, I suppose?'

'There has been,' said Mrs Crummles. 'I have received pupils here. I imparted tuition to the daughter of a dealer in ships' provision; but it afterwards appeared that she was insane when she first came to me. It was very extraordinary that she should come, under such circumstances.'

Not feeling quite so sure of that, Nicholas thought it best to hold his peace.

'Let me see,' said the manager cogitating after dinner. 'Would you like some nice little part with the infant?'

'You are very good,' replied Nicholas hastily; 'but I think perhaps it would be better if I had somebody of my own size at first, in case I should turn out awkward. I should feel more at home, perhaps.'

'True,' said the manager. 'Perhaps you would. And you could play up to the infant, in time, you know.'

'Certainly,' replied Nicholas: devoutly hoping that it would be a very long time before he was honoured with this distinction.

'Then I'll tell you what we'll do,' said Mr Crummles. 'You shall study Romeo when you've done that piece—don't forget to throw the pump and tubs in by-the-bye—Juliet Miss Snevellicci, old Grudden the nurse.—Yes, that'll do very well. Rover too;—you might get up Rover while you were about it, and Cassio, and Jeremy Diddler. You can easily knock them off; one part helps the other so much. Here they are, cues and all.'

With these hasty general directions Mr Crummles thrust a number of little books into the faltering hands of Nicholas, and bidding his eldest son go with him and show where lodgings were to be had, shook him by the hand, and wished him good night.

There is no lack of comfortable furnished apartments in Portsmouth, and no difficulty in finding some that are proportionate to very slender finances; but the former were too good, and the latter too bad, and they went into so many houses, and came out unsuited, that Nicholas seriously began to think he should be obliged to ask permission to spend the night in the theatre, after all.

Eventually, however, they stumbled upon two small rooms up three pair of stairs, or rather two pair and a ladder, at a tobacconist's shop, on the Common Hard: a dirty street leading down to the dockyard. These Nicholas engaged, only too happy to have escaped any request for payment of a week's rent beforehand.

'There! Lay down our personal property, Smike,' he said, after showing young Crummles downstairs. 'We have fallen upon strange times, and Heaven only knows the end of them; but I am tired with the events of these three days, and will postpone reflection till tomorrow—if I can.'

CHAPTER 24

Of the Great Bespeak for Miss Snevellicci, and the first Appearance of Nicholas upon any Stage

Nicholas was up betimes in the morning; but he had scarcely begun to dress, notwithstanding, when he heard footsteps ascending the stairs, and was presently saluted by the voices of Mr Folair the pantomimist, and Mr Lenville, the tragedian.

'House, house, house!' cried Mr Folair.

'What, ho! within there,' said Mr Lenville, in a deep voice.

'Confound these fellows!' thought Nicholas; 'they have come to breakfast, I suppose. I'll open the door directly, if you'll wait an instant.'

The gentlemen entreated him not to hurry himself; and, to beguile the interval, had a fencing bout with their walking-sticks on the very small landing-place: to the unspeakable discomposure of all the other lodgers downstairs.

'Here, come in,' said Nicholas, when he had completed his toilet. 'In the name of all that's horrible, don't make that noise outside.'

'An uncommon snug little box this,' said Mr Lenville, stepping into the front room, and taking his hat off, before he could get in at all. 'Pernicious snug.'

'For a man at all particular in such matters, it might be a trifle too snug,' said Nicholas; 'for, although it is, undoubtedly, a great convenience to be able to reach anything you want from the ceiling or the floor, or either side of the room, without having to move from your chair, still these advantages can only be had in an apartment of the most limited size.'

'It isn't a bit too confined for a single man,' returned Mr Lenville. 'That reminds me,—my wife, Mr Johnson,—I hope she'll have some good part in this piece of yours?'

'I glanced at the French copy last night,' said Nicholas. 'It looks very good, I think.'

'What do you mean to do for me, old fellow?' asked Mr Lenville, poking the struggling fire with his walking-stick, and afterwards wiping it on the skirt of his coat. 'Anything in the gruff and grumble way?'

'You turn your wife and child out of doors,' said Nicholas; 'and, in a fit of rage and jealousy, stab your eldest son in the library.'

'Do I though!' exclaimed Mr Lenville. 'That's very good business.'

'After which,' said Nicholas, 'you are troubled with remorse till the last act, and then you make up your mind to destroy yourself. But, just as you are raising the pistol to your head, a clock strikes—ten.'

'I see,' cried Mr Lenville. 'Very good.'

'You pause,' said Nicholas; 'you recollect to have heard a clock strike ten in your infancy. The pistol falls from your hand—you are overcome—you burst into tears, and become a virtuous and exemplary character for ever afterwards.'

'Capital!' said Mr Lenville: 'that's a sure card, a sure card. Get the curtain down with a touch of nature like that, and it'll be a triumphant success.'

'Is there anything good for me?' inquired Mr Folair, anxiously.

'Let me see,' said Nicholas. 'You play the faithful and attached servant; you are turned out of doors with the wife and child.'

'Always coupled with that infernal phenomenon,' sighed Mr Folair; 'and we go into poor lodgings, where I won't take any wages, and talk sentiment, I suppose?'

'Why—yes,' replied Nicholas: 'that is the course of the piece.'

'I must have a dance of some kind, you know,' said Mr Folair. 'You'll have to introduce one for the phenomenon, so you'd better make a PAS DE DEUX, and save time.'

'There's nothing easier than that,' said Mr Lenville, observing the disturbed looks of the young dramatist.

'Upon my word I don't see how it's to be done,' rejoined Nicholas.

'Why, isn't it obvious?' reasoned Mr Lenville. 'Gadzooks, who can help seeing the way to do it?—you astonish me! You get the distressed lady, and the little child, and the attached servant, into the poor lodgings, don't you?—Well, look here. The distressed lady sinks into a chair, and buries her face in her pocket-handkerchief. "What makes you weep, mama?" says the child. "Don't weep, mama, or you'll make me weep too!"—"And me!" says the favourite servant, rubbing his eyes with his arm. "What can we do to raise your spirits, dear mama?" says the little child. "Ay, what CAN we do?" says the faithful servant. "Oh, Pierre!" says the distressed lady; "would that I could shake off these painful thoughts."—"Try, ma'am, try," says the faithful servant; "rouse yourself, ma'am; be amused."—"I will," says the lady, "I will learn to suffer with fortitude. Do you remember that dance, my honest friend, which, in happier days, you practised with this sweet angel? It never failed to calm my spirits then. Oh! let me see it once again before I die!"—There it is—cue for the band, BEFORE I DIE,—and off they go. That's the regular thing; isn't it, Tommy?'

'That's it,' replied Mr Folair. 'The distressed lady, overpowered by old recollections, faints at the end of the dance, and you close in with a picture.'

Profiting by these and other lessons, which were the result of the personal experience of the two actors, Nicholas willingly gave them the best breakfast he could, and, when he at length got rid of them, applied himself to his task: by no means displeased to find that it was so much easier than he had at first supposed. He worked very hard all day, and did not leave his room until the evening, when he went down to the theatre, whither Smike had repaired before him to go on with another gentleman as a general rebellion.

Here all the people were so much changed, that he scarcely knew them. False hair, false colour, false calves, false muscles—they had become different beings. Mr Lenville was a blooming warrior of most exquisite proportions; Mr Crummles, his large face shaded by a profusion of black hair, a Highland outlaw of most majestic bearing; one of the old gentlemen a jailer, and the other a venerable patriarch; the comic countryman, a fighting-man of great valour, relieved by a touch of humour; each of the Master Crummleses a prince in his own right; and the low-spirited lover, a desponding captive. There was a gorgeous banquet ready spread for the third act, consisting of two pasteboard vases, one plate of biscuits, a black bottle, and a vinegar cruet; and, in short, everything was on a scale of the utmost splendour and preparation.

Nicholas was standing with his back to the curtain, now contemplating the first scene, which was a Gothic archway, about two feet shorter than Mr Crummles, through which that gentleman was to make his first entrance, and now listening to a couple of people who were cracking nuts in the gallery, wondering whether they made the whole audience, when the manager himself walked familiarly up and accosted him.

'Been in front tonight?' said Mr Crummles.

'No,' replied Nicholas, 'not yet. I am going to see the play.'

'We've had a pretty good Let,' said Mr Crummles. 'Four front places in the centre, and the whole of the stage-box.'

'Oh, indeed!' said Nicholas; 'a family, I suppose?'

'Yes,' replied Mr Crummles, 'yes. It's an affecting thing. There are six children, and they never come unless the phenomenon plays.'

It would have been difficult for any party, family, or otherwise, to have visited the theatre on a night when the phenomenon did NOT play, inasmuch as she always sustained one, and not uncommonly two or three, characters, every night; but Nicholas, sympathising with the feelings of a father, refrained from hinting at this trifling circumstance, and Mr Crummles continued to talk, uninterrupted by him.

'Six,' said that gentleman; 'pa and ma eight, aunt nine, governess ten, grandfather and grandmother twelve. Then, there's the footman, who stands outside, with a bag of oranges and a jug of toast-and-water, and sees the play for nothing through the little pane of glass in the box-door—it's cheap at a guinea; they gain by taking a box.'

'I wonder you allow so many,' observed Nicholas.

'There's no help for it,' replied Mr Crummles; 'it's always expected in the country. If there are six children, six people come to hold them in their laps. A family-box carries double always. Ring in the orchestra, Grudden!'

That useful lady did as she was requested, and shortly afterwards the tuning of three fiddles was heard. Which process having been protracted as long as it was supposed that the patience of the audience could possibly bear it, was put a stop to by another jerk of the bell, which, being the signal to begin in earnest, set the orchestra playing a variety of popular airs, with involuntary variations.

If Nicholas had been astonished at the alteration for the better which the gentlemen displayed, the transformation of the ladies was still more extraordinary. When, from a snug corner of the manager's box, he beheld Miss Snevellicci in all the glories of white muslin with a golden hem, and Mrs Crummles in all the dignity of the outlaw's wife, and Miss Bravassa in all the sweetness of Miss Snevellicci's confidential friend, and Miss Belvawney in the white silks of a page doing duty everywhere and swearing to live and die in the service of everybody, he could scarcely contain his admiration, which testified itself in great applause, and the closest possible attention to the business of the scene. The plot was most interesting. It belonged to no particular age, people, or country, and was perhaps the more delightful on that account, as nobody's previous information could afford the remotest glimmering of what would ever come of it. An outlaw had been very successful in doing something somewhere, and came home, in triumph, to the sound of shouts and fiddles, to greet his wife—a lady of masculine mind, who talked a good deal about her father's bones, which it seemed were unburied, though whether from a peculiar taste on the part of the old gentleman himself, or the reprehensible neglect of his relations, did not appear. This outlaw's wife was, somehow or other, mixed up with a patriarch, living in a castle a long way off, and this patriarch was the father of several of the characters, but he didn't exactly know which, and was uncertain whether he had brought up the right ones in his castle, or the wrong ones; he rather inclined to the latter opinion, and, being uneasy, relieved his mind with a banquet, during which solemnity somebody in a cloak said 'Beware!' which somebody was known by nobody (except the audience) to be the outlaw himself, who had come there, for reasons unexplained, but possibly with an eye to the spoons. There was an agreeable little surprise in the way of certain love passages between the desponding captive and Miss Snevellicci, and the comic fighting-man and Miss Bravassa; besides which, Mr Lenville had several very tragic scenes in the dark, while on throat-cutting expeditions, which were all baffled by the skill and bravery of the comic fighting-man (who overheard whatever was said all through the piece) and the intrepidity of Miss Snevellicci, who adopted tights, and therein repaired to the prison of her captive lover, with a small basket of refreshments and a dark lantern. At last, it came out that the patriarch was the man who had treated the bones of the outlaw's father-in-law with so much disrespect, for which cause and reason the outlaw's wife repaired to his castle to kill him, and so got into a dark room, where, after a good deal of groping in the dark, everybody got hold of everybody else, and took them for somebody besides, which occasioned a vast quantity of confusion, with some pistolling, loss of life, and torchlight; after which, the patriarch came forward, and observing, with a knowing look, that he knew all about his children now, and would tell them when they got inside, said that there could not be a more appropriate occasion for marrying the young people than that; and therefore he joined their hands, with the full consent of the indefatigable page, who (being the only other person surviving) pointed with his cap into the clouds, and his right hand to the ground;

thereby invoking a blessing and giving the cue for the curtain to come down, which it did, amidst general applause.

'What did you think of that?' asked Mr Crummles, when Nicholas went round to the stage again. Mr Crummles was very red and hot, for your outlaws are desperate fellows to shout.

'I think it was very capital indeed,' replied Nicholas; 'Miss Snevellicci in particular was uncommonly good.'

'She's a genius,' said Mr Crummles; 'quite a genius, that girl. By-the-bye, I've been thinking of bringing out that piece of yours on her bespeak night.'

'When?' asked Nicholas.

'The night of her bespeak. Her benefit night, when her friends and patrons bespeak the play,' said Mr Crummles.

'Oh! I understand,' replied Nicholas.

'You see,' said Mr. Crummles, 'it's sure to go, on such an occasion, and even if it should not work up quite as well as we expect, why it will be her risk, you know, and not ours.'

'Yours, you mean,' said Nicholas.

'I said mine, didn't I?' returned Mr Crummles. 'Next Monday week. What do you say? You'll have done it, and are sure to be up in the lover's part, long before that time.'

'I don't know about "long before,"' replied Nicholas; 'but BY that time I think I can undertake to be ready.'

'Very good,' pursued Mr Crummles, 'then we'll call that settled. Now, I want to ask you something else. There's a little—what shall I call it?—a little canvassing takes place on these occasions.'

'Among the patrons, I suppose?' said Nicholas.

'Among the patrons; and the fact is, that Snevellicci has had so many bespeaks in this place, that she wants an attraction. She had a bespeak when her mother-in-law died, and a bespeak when her uncle died; and Mrs Crummles and myself have had bespeaks on the anniversary of the phenomenon's birthday, and our wedding-day, and occasions of that description, so that, in fact, there's some difficulty in getting a good one. Now, won't you help this poor girl, Mr Johnson?' said Crummles, sitting himself down on a drum, and taking a great pinch of snuff, as he looked him steadily in the face.

'How do you mean?' rejoined Nicholas.

'Don't you think you could spare half an hour tomorrow morning, to call with her at the houses of one or two of the principal people?' murmured the manager in a persuasive tone.

'Oh dear me,' said Nicholas, with an air of very strong objection, 'I shouldn't like to do that.'

'The infant will accompany her,' said Mr Crummles. 'The moment it was suggested to me, I gave permission for the infant to go. There will not be the smallest impropriety—Miss Snevellicci, sir, is the very soul of honour. It would be of material service—the gentleman from London—author of the new piece—actor in the new piece—first appearance on any boards—it would lead to a great bespeak, Mr Johnson.'

'I am very sorry to throw a damp upon the prospects of anybody, and more especially a lady,' replied Nicholas; 'but really I must decidedly object to making one of the canvassing party.'

'What does Mr Johnson say, Vincent?' inquired a voice close to his ear; and, looking round, he found Mrs Crummles and Miss Snevellicci herself standing behind him.

'He has some objection, my dear,' replied Mr Crummles, looking at Nicholas.

'Objection!' exclaimed Mrs Crummles. 'Can it be possible?'

'Oh, I hope not!' cried Miss Snevellicci. 'You surely are not so cruel—oh, dear me!—Well, I—to think of that now, after all one's looking forward to it!'

'Mr Johnson will not persist, my dear,' said Mrs Crummles. 'Think better of him than to suppose it. Gallantry, humanity, all the best feelings of his nature, must be enlisted in this interesting cause.'

'Which moves even a manager,' said Mr Crummles, smiling.

'And a manager's wife,' added Mrs Crummles, in her accustomed tragedy tones. 'Come, come, you will relent, I know you will.'

'It is not in my nature,' said Nicholas, moved by these appeals, 'to resist any entreaty, unless it is to do something positively wrong; and, beyond a feeling of pride, I know nothing which should prevent my doing this. I know nobody here, and nobody knows me. So be it then. I yield.'

Miss Snevellicci was at once overwhelmed with blushes and expressions of gratitude, of which latter commodity neither Mr nor Mrs Crummles was by any means sparing. It was arranged that Nicholas should call upon her, at her lodgings, at eleven next morning, and soon after they parted: he to return home to his authorship: Miss Snevellicci to dress for the after-piece: and the disinterested manager and his wife to discuss the probable gains of the forthcoming bespeak, of which they were to have two-thirds of the profits by solemn treaty of agreement.

At the stipulated hour next morning, Nicholas repaired to the lodgings of Miss Snevellicci, which were in a place called Lombard Street, at the house of a tailor. A strong smell of ironing pervaded the little passage; and the tailor's daughter, who opened the door, appeared in that flutter of spirits which is so often attendant upon the periodical getting up of a family's linen.

'Miss Snevellicci lives here, I believe?' said Nicholas, when the door was opened.

The tailor's daughter replied in the affirmative.

'Will you have the goodness to let her know that Mr Johnson is here?' said Nicholas.

'Oh, if you please, you're to come upstairs,' replied the tailor's daughter, with a smile.

Nicholas followed the young lady, and was shown into a small apartment on the first floor, communicating with a back-room; in which, as he judged from a certain half-subdued clinking sound, as of cups and saucers, Miss Snevellicci was then taking her breakfast in bed.

'You're to wait, if you please,' said the tailor's daughter, after a short period of absence, during which the clinking in the back-room had ceased, and been succeeded by whispering—'She won't be long.'

As she spoke, she pulled up the window-blind, and having by this means (as she thought) diverted Mr Johnson's attention from the room to the street, caught up some articles which were airing on the fender, and had very much the appearance of stockings, and darted off.

As there were not many objects of interest outside the window, Nicholas looked about the room with more curiosity than he might otherwise have bestowed upon it. On the sofa lay an old guitar, several thumbed pieces of music, and a scattered litter of curl-papers; together with a confused heap of play-bills, and a pair of soiled white satin shoes with large blue rosettes. Hanging over the back of a chair was a half-finished muslin apron with little pockets ornamented with red ribbons, such as waiting-women wear on the stage, and (by consequence) are never seen with anywhere else. In one corner stood the diminutive pair of top-boots in which Miss Snevellicci was accustomed to enact the little jockey, and, folded on a chair hard by, was a small parcel, which bore a very suspicious resemblance to the companion smalls.

But the most interesting object of all was, perhaps, the open scrapbook, displayed in the midst of some theatrical duodecimos that were strewn upon the table; and pasted into which scrapbook were various critical notices of Miss Snevellicci's acting, extracted from different provincial journals, together with one poetic address in her honour, commencing—

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Sing, God of Love, and tell me in what dearth
Thrice-gifted SNEVELLICCI came on earth,
To thrill us with her smile, her tear, her eye,
Sing, God of Love, and tell me quickly why.
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Besides this effusion, there were innumerable complimentary allusions, also extracted from newspapers, such as—'We observe from an advertisement in another part of our paper of today, that the charming and highly-talented Miss Snevellicci takes her benefit on Wednesday, for which occasion she has put forth a bill of fare that might kindle exhilaration in the breast of a misanthrope. In the confidence that our fellow-townsmen have not lost that high appreciation of public utility and private worth, for which they have long been so pre-eminently distinguished, we predict that this charming actress will be greeted with a bumper.' 'To Correspondents.—J.S. is misinformed when he supposes that the highly-gifted and beautiful Miss Snevellicci, nightly captivating all hearts at our pretty and commodious little theatre, is NOT the same lady to whom the young gentleman of immense fortune, residing within a hundred miles of the good city of York, lately made honourable proposals. We have reason to know that Miss Snevellicci IS the lady who was implicated in that mysterious and romantic affair, and whose conduct on that occasion did no less honour to her head and heart, than do her histrionic triumphs to her brilliant genius.' A copious assortment of such paragraphs as these, with long bills of benefits all ending with 'Come Early', in large capitals, formed the principal contents of Miss Snevellicci's scrapbook.

Nicholas had read a great many of these scraps, and was absorbed in a circumstantial and melancholy account of the train of events which had led to Miss Snevellicci's spraining her ankle by slipping on a piece of orange-peel flung by a monster in human form, (so the paper said,) upon the stage at Winchester,—when that young lady herself, attired in the coal-scuttle bonnet and walking-dress complete, tripped into the room, with a thousand apologies for having detained him so long after the appointed time.

'But really,' said Miss Snevellicci, 'my darling Led, who lives with me here, was taken so very ill in the night that I thought she would have expired in my arms.'

'Such a fate is almost to be envied,' returned Nicholas, 'but I am very sorry to hear it nevertheless.'

'What a creature you are to flatter!' said Miss Snevellicci, buttoning her glove in much confusion.

'If it be flattery to admire your charms and accomplishments,' rejoined Nicholas, laying his hand upon the scrapbook, 'you have better specimens of it here.'

'Oh you cruel creature, to read such things as those! I'm almost ashamed to look you in the face afterwards, positively I am,' said Miss Snevellicci, seizing the book and putting it away in a closet. 'How careless of Led! How could she be so naughty!'

'I thought you had kindly left it here, on purpose for me to read,' said Nicholas. And really it did seem possible.

'I wouldn't have had you see it for the world!' rejoined Miss Snevellicci. 'I never was so vexed—never! But she is such a careless thing, there's no trusting her.'

The conversation was here interrupted by the entrance of the phenomenon, who had discreetly remained in the bedroom up to this moment, and now presented herself, with much grace and lightness, bearing in her hand a very little green parasol with a broad fringe border, and no handle. After a few words of course, they sallied into the street.

The phenomenon was rather a troublesome companion, for first the right sandal came down, and then the left, and these mischances being repaired, one leg of the little white trousers was discovered to be longer than the other; besides these accidents, the green parasol was dropped down an iron grating, and only fished up again with great difficulty and by dint of much exertion. However, it was impossible to scold her, as she was the manager's daughter, so Nicholas took it all in perfect good humour, and walked on, with Miss Snevellicci, arm-in-arm on one side, and the offending infant on the other.

The first house to which they bent their steps, was situated in a terrace of respectable appearance. Miss Snevellicci's modest double-knock was answered by a foot-boy, who, in reply to her inquiry whether Mrs Curdle was at home, opened his eyes very wide, grinned very much, and said he didn't know, but he'd inquire. With this he showed them into a parlour where he kept them waiting, until the two women-servants had repaired thither, under false pretences, to see the play-actors; and having compared notes with them in the passage, and joined in a vast quantity of whispering and giggling, he at length went upstairs with Miss Snevellicci's name.

Now, Mrs Curdle was supposed, by those who were best informed on such points, to possess quite the London taste in matters relating to literature and the drama; and as to Mr Curdle, he had written a pamphlet of sixty-four pages, post octavo, on the character of the Nurse's deceased husband in Romeo and Juliet, with an inquiry whether he really had been a 'merry man' in his lifetime, or whether it was merely his widow's affectionate partiality that induced her so to report him. He had likewise proved, that by altering the received mode of punctuation, any one of Shakespeare's plays could be made quite different, and the sense completely changed; it is needless to say, therefore, that he was a great critic, and a very profound and most original thinker.

'Well, Miss Snevellicci,' said Mrs Curdle, entering the parlour, 'and how do YOU do?'

Miss Snevellicci made a graceful obeisance, and hoped Mrs Curdle was well, as also Mr Curdle, who at the same time appeared. Mrs Curdle was dressed in a morning wrapper, with a little cap stuck upon the top of her head. Mr Curdle wore a loose robe on his back, and his right forefinger on his forehead after the portraits of Sterne, to whom somebody or other had once said he bore a striking resemblance.

'I venture to call, for the purpose of asking whether you would put your name to my bespeak, ma'am,' said Miss Snevellicci, producing documents.

'Oh! I really don't know what to say,' replied Mrs Curdle. 'It's not as if the theatre was in its high and palmy days—you needn't stand, Miss Snevellicci—the drama is gone, perfectly gone.'

'As an exquisite embodiment of the poet's visions, and a realisation of human intellectuality, gilding with refulgent light our dreamy moments, and laying open a new and magic world before the mental eye, the drama is gone, perfectly gone,' said Mr Curdle.

'What man is there, now living, who can present before us all those changing and prismatic colours with which the character of Hamlet is invested?' exclaimed Mrs Curdle.

'What man indeed—upon the stage,' said Mr Curdle, with a small reservation in favour of himself. 'Hamlet! Pooh! ridiculous! Hamlet is gone, perfectly gone.'

Quite overcome by these dismal reflections, Mr and Mrs Curdle sighed, and sat for some short time without speaking. At length, the lady, turning to Miss Snevellicci, inquired what play she proposed to have.

'Quite a new one,' said Miss Snevellicci, 'of which this gentleman is the author, and in which he plays; being his first appearance on any stage. Mr Johnson is the gentleman's name.'

'I hope you have preserved the unities, sir?' said Mr Curdle.

'The original piece is a French one,' said Nicholas. 'There is abundance of incident, sprightly dialogue, strongly-marked characters—'

'—All unavailing without a strict observance of the unities, sir,' returned Mr Curdle. 'The unities of the drama, before everything.'

'Might I ask you,' said Nicholas, hesitating between the respect he ought to assume, and his love of the whimsical, 'might I ask you what the unities are?'

Mr Curdle coughed and considered. 'The unities, sir,' he said, 'are a completeness—a kind of universal dovetailedness with regard to place and time—a sort of a general oneness, if I may be allowed to use so strong an expression. I take those to be the dramatic unities, so far as I have been enabled to bestow attention upon them, and I have read much upon the subject, and thought much. I find, running through the performances of this child,' said Mr Curdle, turning to the phenomenon, 'a unity of feeling, a breadth, a light and shade, a warmth of colouring, a tone, a harmony, a glow, an artistical development of original conceptions, which I look for, in vain, among older performers—I don't know whether I make myself understood?'

'Perfectly,' replied Nicholas.

'Just so,' said Mr Curdle, pulling up his neckcloth. 'That is my definition of the unities of the drama.'

Mrs Curdle had sat listening to this lucid explanation with great complacency. It being finished, she inquired what Mr Curdle thought, about putting down their names.

'I don't know, my dear; upon my word I don't know,' said Mr Curdle. 'If we do, it must be distinctly understood that we do not pledge ourselves to the quality of the performances. Let it go forth to the world, that we do not give THEM the sanction of our names, but that we confer the distinction merely upon Miss Snevellicci. That being clearly stated, I take it to be, as it were, a duty, that we should extend our patronage to a degraded stage, even for the sake of the associations with which it is entwined. Have you got two-and-sixpence for half-a-crown, Miss Snevellicci?' said Mr Curdle, turning over four of those pieces of money.

Miss Snevellicci felt in all the corners of the pink reticule, but there was nothing in any of them. Nicholas murmured a jest about his being an author, and thought it best not to go through the form of feeling in his own pockets at all.

'Let me see,' said Mr Curdle; 'twice four's eight—four shillings a-piece to the boxes, Miss Snevellicci, is exceedingly dear in the present state of the drama—three half-crowns is seven-and-six; we shall not differ about sixpence, I suppose? Sixpence will not part us, Miss Snevellicci?'

Poor Miss Snevellicci took the three half-crowns, with many smiles and bends, and Mrs Curdle, adding several supplementary directions relative to keeping the places for them, and dusting the seat, and sending two clean bills as soon as they came out, rang the bell, as a signal for breaking up the conference.

'Odd people those,' said Nicholas, when they got clear of the house.

'I assure you,' said Miss Snevellicci, taking his arm, 'that I think myself very lucky they did not owe all the money instead of being sixpence short. Now, if you were to succeed, they would give people to understand that they had always patronised you; and if you were to fail, they would have been quite certain of that from the very beginning.'

At the next house they visited, they were in great glory; for, there, resided the six children who were so enraptured with the public actions of the phenomenon, and who, being called down from the nursery to be treated with a private view of that young lady, proceeded to poke their fingers into her eyes, and tread upon her toes, and show her many other little attentions peculiar to their time of life.

'I shall certainly persuade Mr Borum to take a private box,' said the lady of the house, after a most gracious reception. 'I shall only take two of the children, and will make up the rest of the party, of gentlemen—your admirers, Miss Snevellicci. Augustus, you naughty boy, leave the little girl alone.'

This was addressed to a young gentleman who was pinching the phenomenon behind, apparently with a view of ascertaining whether she was real.

'I am sure you must be very tired,' said the mama, turning to Miss Snevellicci. 'I cannot think of allowing you to go, without first taking a glass of wine. Fie, Charlotte, I am ashamed of you! Miss Lane, my dear, pray see to the children.'

Miss Lane was the governess, and this entreaty was rendered necessary by the abrupt behaviour of the youngest Miss Borum, who, having filched the phenomenon's little green parasol, was now carrying it bodily off, while the distracted infant looked helplessly on.

'I am sure, where you ever learnt to act as you do,' said good-natured Mrs Borum, turning again to Miss Snevellicci, 'I cannot understand (Emma, don't stare so); laughing in one piece, and crying in the next, and so natural in all—oh, dear!'

'I am very happy to hear you express so favourable an opinion,' said Miss Snevellicci. 'It's quite delightful to think you like it.'

'Like it!' cried Mrs Borum. 'Who can help liking it? I would go to the play, twice a week if I could: I dote upon it—only you're too affecting sometimes. You do put me in such a state—into such fits of crying! Goodness gracious me, Miss Lane, how can you let them torment that poor child so!'

The phenomenon was really in a fair way of being torn limb from limb; for two strong little boys, one holding on by each of her hands, were dragging her in different directions as a trial of strength. However, Miss Lane (who had herself been too much occupied in contemplating the grown-up actors, to pay the necessary attention to these proceedings) rescued the unhappy infant at this juncture, who, being recruited with a glass of wine, was shortly afterwards taken away by her friends, after sustaining no more serious damage than a flattening of the pink gauze bonnet, and a rather extensive creasing of the white frock and trousers.

It was a trying morning; for there were a great many calls to make, and everybody wanted a different thing. Some wanted tragedies, and others comedies; some objected to dancing; some wanted scarcely anything else. Some thought the comic singer decidedly low, and others hoped he would have more to do than he usually had. Some people wouldn't promise to go, because other people wouldn't promise to go; and other people wouldn't go at all, because other people went. At length, and by little and little, omitting something in this place, and adding something in that, Miss Snevellicci pledged herself to a bill of fare which was comprehensive enough, if it had no other merit (it included among other trifles, four pieces, divers songs, a few combats, and several dances); and they returned home, pretty well exhausted with the business of the day.

Nicholas worked away at the piece, which was speedily put into rehearsal, and then worked away at his own part, which he studied with great perseverance and acted—as the whole company said—to perfection. And at length the great day arrived. The crier was sent round, in the morning, to proclaim the entertainments with the sound of bell in all the thoroughfares; and extra bills of three feet long by nine inches wide, were dispersed in all directions, flung down all the areas, thrust under all the knockers, and developed in all the shops. They were placarded on all the walls too, though not with complete success, for an illiterate person having undertaken this office during the indisposition of the regular bill-sticker, a part were posted sideways, and the remainder upside down.

At half-past five, there was a rush of four people to the gallery-door; at a quarter before six, there were at least a dozen; at six o'clock the kicks were terrific; and when the elder Master Crummles opened the door, he was obliged to run behind it for his life. Fifteen shillings were taken by Mrs Grudden in the first ten minutes.

Behind the scenes, the same unwonted excitement prevailed. Miss Snevellicci was in such a perspiration that the paint would scarcely stay on her face. Mrs Crummles was so nervous that she could hardly remember her part. Miss Bravassa's ringlets came out of curl with the heat and anxiety; even Mr Crummles himself kept peeping through the hole in the curtain, and running back, every now and then, to announce that another man had come into the pit.

At last, the orchestra left off, and the curtain rose upon the new piece. The first scene, in which there was nobody particular, passed off calmly enough, but when Miss Snevellicci went on in the second, accompanied by the phenomenon as child, what a roar of applause broke out! The people in the Borum box rose as one man, waving their hats and handkerchiefs, and uttering shouts of 'Bravo!' Mrs Borum and the governess cast wreaths upon the stage, of which, some fluttered into the lamps, and one crowned the temples of a fat gentleman in the pit, who, looking eagerly towards the scene, remained unconscious of the honour; the tailor and his family kicked at the panels of the upper boxes till they threatened to come out altogether; the very ginger-beer boy remained transfixed in the centre of the house; a young officer, supposed to entertain a passion for Miss Snevellicci, stuck his glass in his eye as though to hide a tear. Again and again Miss Snevellicci curtseyed lower and lower, and again and again the applause came down, louder and louder. At length, when the phenomenon picked up one of the smoking wreaths and put it on, sideways, over Miss Snevellicci's eye, it reached its climax, and the play proceeded.

But when Nicholas came on for his crack scene with Mrs Crummles, what a clapping of hands there was! When Mrs Crummles (who was his unworthy mother), sneered, and called him 'presumptuous boy,' and he defied her, what a tumult of applause came on! When he quarrelled with the other gentleman about the young lady, and producing a case of pistols, said, that if he WAS a gentleman, he would fight him in that drawing-room, until the furniture was sprinkled with the blood of one, if not of two—how boxes, pit, and gallery, joined in one most vigorous cheer! When he called his mother names, because she wouldn't give up the young lady's property, and she relenting, caused him to relent likewise, and fall down on one knee and ask her blessing, how the ladies in the audience sobbed! When he was hid behind the curtain in the dark, and the wicked relation poked a sharp sword in every direction, save where his legs were plainly visible, what a thrill of anxious fear ran through the house! His air, his figure, his walk, his look, everything he said or did, was the subject of commendation. There was a round of applause every time he spoke. And when, at last, in the pump-and-tub scene, Mrs Grudden lighted the blue fire, and all the unemployed members of the company came in, and tumbled down in various directions—not because that had anything to do with the plot, but in order to finish off with a tableau—the audience (who had by this time increased considerably) gave vent to such a shout of enthusiasm as had not been heard in those walls for many and many a day.

In short, the success both of new piece and new actor was complete, and when Miss Snevellicci was called for at the end of the play, Nicholas led her on, and divided the applause.

CHAPTER 25

Concerning a young Lady from London, who joins the Company, and an elderly Admirer who follows in her Train; with an affecting Ceremony consequent on their Arrival

The new piece being a decided hit, was announced for every evening of performance until further notice, and the evenings when the theatre was closed, were reduced from three in the week to two. Nor were these the only tokens of extraordinary success; for, on the succeeding Saturday, Nicholas received, by favour of the indefatigable Mrs Grudden, no less a sum than thirty shillings; besides which substantial reward, he enjoyed considerable fame and honour: having a presentation copy of Mr Curdle's pamphlet forwarded to the theatre, with that gentleman's own autograph (in itself an inestimable treasure) on the fly-leaf, accompanied with a note, containing many expressions of approval, and an unsolicited assurance that Mr Curdle would be very happy to read Shakespeare to him for three hours every morning before breakfast during his stay in the town.

'I've got another novelty, Johnson,' said Mr Crummles one morning in great glee.

'What's that?' rejoined Nicholas. 'The pony?'

'No, no, we never come to the pony till everything else has failed,' said Mr Crummles. 'I don't think we shall come to the pony at all, this season. No, no, not the pony.'

'A boy phenomenon, perhaps?' suggested Nicholas.

'There is only one phenomenon, sir,' replied Mr Crummles impressively, 'and that's a girl.'

'Very true,' said Nicholas. 'I beg your pardon. Then I don't know what it is, I am sure.'

'What should you say to a young lady from London?' inquired Mr Crummles. 'Miss So-and-so, of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane?'

'I should say she would look very well in the bills,' said Nicholas.

'You're about right there,' said Mr Crummles; 'and if you had said she would look very well upon the stage too, you wouldn't have been far out. Look here; what do you think of this?'

With this inquiry Mr Crummles unfolded a red poster, and a blue poster, and a yellow poster, at the top of each of which public notification was inscribed in enormous characters—'First appearance of the unrivalled Miss Petowker of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane!'

'Dear me!' said Nicholas, 'I know that lady.'

'Then you are acquainted with as much talent as was ever compressed into one young person's body,' retorted Mr Crummles, rolling up the bills again; 'that is, talent of a certain sort—of a certain sort. "The Blood Drinker,"' added Mr Crummles with a prophetic sigh, '"The Blood Drinker" will die with that girl; and she's the only sylph I ever saw, who could stand upon one leg, and play the tambourine on her other knee, LIKE a sylph.'

'When does she come down?' asked Nicholas.

'We expect her today,' replied Mr Crummles. 'She is an old friend of Mrs Crummles's. Mrs Crummles saw what she could do—always knew it from the first. She taught her, indeed, nearly all she knows. Mrs Crummles was the original Blood Drinker.'

'Was she, indeed?'

'Yes. She was obliged to give it up though.'

'Did it disagree with her?' asked Nicholas.

'Not so much with her, as with her audiences,' replied Mr Crummles. 'Nobody could stand it. It was too tremendous. You don't quite know what Mrs Crummles is yet.'

Nicholas ventured to insinuate that he thought he did.

'No, no, you don't,' said Mr Crummles; 'you don't, indeed. I don't, and that's a fact. I don't think her country will, till she is dead. Some new proof of talent bursts from that astonishing woman every year of her life. Look at her—mother of six children—three of 'em alive, and all upon the stage!'

'Extraordinary!' cried Nicholas.

'Ah! extraordinary indeed,' rejoined Mr Crummles, taking a complacent pinch of snuff, and shaking his head gravely. 'I pledge you my professional word I didn't even know she could dance, till her last benefit, and then she played Juliet, and Helen Macgregor, and did the skipping-rope hornpipe between the pieces. The very first time I saw that admirable woman, Johnson,' said Mr Crummles, drawing a little nearer, and speaking in the tone of confidential friendship, 'she stood upon her head on the butt-end of a spear, surrounded with blazing fireworks.'

'You astonish me!' said Nicholas.

'SHE astonished ME!' returned Mr Crummles, with a very serious countenance. 'Such grace, coupled with such dignity! I adored her from that moment!'

The arrival of the gifted subject of these remarks put an abrupt termination to Mr Crummles's eulogium. Almost immediately afterwards, Master Percy Crummles entered with a letter, which had arrived by the General Post, and was directed to his gracious mother; at sight of the superscription whereof, Mrs Crummles exclaimed, 'From Henrietta Petowker, I do declare!' and instantly became absorbed in the contents.

'Is it—?' inquired Mr Crummles, hesitating.

'Oh, yes, it's all right,' replied Mrs Crummles, anticipating the question. 'What an excellent thing for her, to be sure!'

'It's the best thing altogether, that I ever heard of, I think,' said Mr Crummles; and then Mr Crummles, Mrs Crummles, and Master Percy Crummles, all fell to laughing violently. Nicholas left them to enjoy their mirth together, and walked to his lodgings; wondering very much what mystery connected with Miss Petowker could provoke such merriment, and pondering still more on the extreme surprise with which that lady would regard his sudden enlistment in a profession of which she was such a distinguished and brilliant ornament.

But, in this latter respect he was mistaken; for—whether Mr Vincent Crummles had paved the way, or Miss Petowker had some special reason for treating him with even more than her usual amiability—their meeting at the theatre next day was more like that of two dear friends who had been inseparable from infancy, than a recognition passing between a lady and gentleman who had only met some half-dozen times, and then by mere chance. Nay, Miss Petowker even whispered that she had wholly dropped the Kenwigses in her conversations with the manager's family, and had represented herself as having encountered Mr Johnson in the very first and most fashionable circles; and on Nicholas receiving this intelligence with unfeigned surprise, she added, with a sweet glance, that she had a claim on his good nature now, and might tax it before long.

Nicholas had the honour of playing in a slight piece with Miss Petowker that night, and could not but observe that the warmth of her reception was mainly attributable to a most persevering umbrella in the upper boxes; he saw, too, that the enchanting actress cast many sweet looks towards the quarter whence these sounds proceeded; and that every time she did so, the umbrella broke out afresh. Once, he thought that a peculiarly shaped hat in the same corner was not wholly unknown to him; but, being occupied with his share of the stage business, he bestowed no great attention upon this circumstance, and it had quite vanished from his memory by the time he reached home.

He had just sat down to supper with Smike, when one of the people of the house came outside the door, and announced that a gentleman below stairs wished to speak to Mr Johnson.

'Well, if he does, you must tell him to come up; that's all I know,' replied Nicholas. 'One of our hungry brethren, I suppose, Smike.'

His fellow-lodger looked at the cold meat in silent calculation of the quantity that would be left for dinner next day, and put back a slice he had cut for himself, in order that the visitor's encroachments might be less formidable in their effects.

'It is not anybody who has been here before,' said Nicholas, 'for he is tumbling up every stair. Come in, come in. In the name of wonder! Mr Lillyvick?'

It was, indeed, the collector of water-rates who, regarding Nicholas with a fixed look and immovable countenance, shook hands with most portentous solemnity, and sat himself down in a seat by the chimney-corner.

'Why, when did you come here?' asked Nicholas.

'This morning, sir,' replied Mr Lillyvick.

'Oh! I see; then you were at the theatre tonight, and it was your umb—'

'This umbrella,' said Mr Lillyvick, producing a fat green cotton one with a battered ferrule. 'What did you think of that performance?'

'So far as I could judge, being on the stage,' replied Nicholas, 'I thought it very agreeable.'

'Agreeable!' cried the collector. 'I mean to say, sir, that it was delicious.'

Mr Lillyvick bent forward to pronounce the last word with greater emphasis; and having done so, drew himself up, and frowned and nodded a great many times.

'I say, delicious,' repeated Mr Lillyvick. 'Absorbing, fairy-like, toomultuous,' and again Mr Lillyvick drew himself up, and again he frowned and nodded.

'Ah!' said Nicholas, a little surprised at these symptoms of ecstatic approbation. 'Yes—she is a clever girl.'

'She is a divinity,' returned Mr Lillyvick, giving a collector's double knock on the ground with the umbrella before-mentioned. 'I have known divine actresses before now, sir, I used to collect—at least I used to CALL for—and very often call for—the water-rate at the house of a divine actress, who lived in my beat for upwards of four year but never—no, never, sir of all divine creatures, actresses or no actresses, did I see a diviner one than is Henrietta Petowker.'

Nicholas had much ado to prevent himself from laughing; not trusting himself to speak, he merely nodded in accordance with Mr Lillyvick's nods, and remained silent.

'Let me speak a word with you in private,' said Mr Lillyvick.

Nicholas looked good-humouredly at Smike, who, taking the hint, disappeared.

'A bachelor is a miserable wretch, sir,' said Mr Lillyvick.

'Is he?' asked Nicholas.

'He is,' rejoined the collector. 'I have lived in the world for nigh sixty year, and I ought to know what it is.'

'You OUGHT to know, certainly,' thought Nicholas; 'but whether you do or not, is another question.'

'If a bachelor happens to have saved a little matter of money,' said Mr Lillyvick, 'his sisters and brothers, and nephews and nieces, look TO that money, and not to him; even if, by being a public character, he is the head of the family, or, as it may be, the main from which all the other little branches are turned on, they still wish him dead all the while, and get low-spirited every time they see him looking in good health, because they want to come into his little property. You see that?'

'Oh yes,' replied Nicholas: 'it's very true, no doubt.'

'The great reason for not being married,' resumed Mr Lillyvick, 'is the expense; that's what's kept me off, or else—Lord!' said Mr Lillyvick, snapping his fingers, 'I might have had fifty women.'

'Fine women?' asked Nicholas.

'Fine women, sir!' replied the collector; 'ay! not so fine as Henrietta Petowker, for she is an uncommon specimen, but such women as don't fall into every man's way, I can tell you. Now suppose a man can get a fortune IN a wife instead of with her—eh?'

'Why, then, he's a lucky fellow,' replied Nicholas.

'That's what I say,' retorted the collector, patting him benignantly on the side of the head with his umbrella; 'just what I say. Henrietta Petowker, the talented Henrietta Petowker has a fortune in herself, and I am going to—'

'To make her Mrs Lillyvick?' suggested Nicholas.

'No, sir, not to make her Mrs Lillyvick,' replied the collector. 'Actresses, sir, always keep their maiden names—that's the regular thing—but I'm going to marry her; and the day after tomorrow, too.'

'I congratulate you, sir,' said Nicholas.

'Thank you, sir,' replied the collector, buttoning his waistcoat. 'I shall draw her salary, of course, and I hope after all that it's nearly as cheap to keep two as it is to keep one; that's a consolation.'

'Surely you don't want any consolation at such a moment?' observed Nicholas.

'No,' replied Mr Lillyvick, shaking his head nervously: 'no—of course not.'

'But how come you both here, if you're going to be married, Mr Lillyvick?' asked Nicholas.

'Why, that's what I came to explain to you,' replied the collector of water-rate. 'The fact is, we have thought it best to keep it secret from the family.'

'Family!' said Nicholas. 'What family?'

'The Kenwigses of course,' rejoined Mr Lillyvick. 'If my niece and the children had known a word about it before I came away, they'd have gone into fits at my feet, and never have come out of 'em till I took an oath not to marry anybody—or they'd have got out a commission of lunacy, or some dreadful thing,' said the collector, quite trembling as he spoke.

'To be sure,' said Nicholas. 'Yes; they would have been jealous, no doubt.'

'To prevent which,' said Mr Lillyvick, 'Henrietta Petowker (it was settled between us) should come down here to her friends, the Crummleses, under pretence of this engagement, and I should go down to Guildford the day before, and join her on the coach there, which I did, and we came down from Guildford yesterday together. Now, for fear you should be writing to Mr Noggs, and might say anything about us, we have thought it best to let you into the secret. We shall be married from the Crummleses' lodgings, and shall be delighted to see you—either before church or at breakfast-time, which you like. It won't be expensive, you know,' said the collector, highly anxious to prevent any misunderstanding on this point; 'just muffins and coffee, with perhaps a shrimp or something of that sort for a relish, you know.'

'Yes, yes, I understand,' replied Nicholas. 'Oh, I shall be most happy to come; it will give me the greatest pleasure. Where's the lady stopping—with Mrs Crummles?'

'Why, no,' said the collector; 'they couldn't very well dispose of her at night, and so she is staying with an acquaintance of hers, and another young lady; they both belong to the theatre.'

'Miss Snevellicci, I suppose?' said Nicholas.

'Yes, that's the name.'

'And they'll be bridesmaids, I presume?' said Nicholas.

'Why,' said the collector, with a rueful face, 'they WILL have four bridesmaids; I'm afraid they'll make it rather theatrical.'

'Oh no, not at all,' replied Nicholas, with an awkward attempt to convert a laugh into a cough. 'Who may the four be? Miss Snevellicci of course—Miss Ledrook—'

'The—the phenomenon,' groaned the collector.

'Ha, ha!' cried Nicholas. 'I beg your pardon, I don't know what I'm laughing at—yes, that'll be very pretty—the phenomenon—who else?'

'Some young woman or other,' replied the collector, rising; 'some other friend of Henrietta Petowker's. Well, you'll be careful not to say anything about it, will you?'

'You may safely depend upon me,' replied Nicholas. 'Won't you take anything to eat or drink?'

'No,' said the collector; 'I haven't any appetite. I should think it was a very pleasant life, the married one, eh?'

'I have not the least doubt of it,' rejoined Nicholas.

'Yes,' said the collector; 'certainly. Oh yes. No doubt. Good night.'

With these words, Mr Lillyvick, whose manner had exhibited through the whole of this interview a most extraordinary compound of precipitation, hesitation, confidence and doubt, fondness, misgiving, meanness, and self-importance, turned his back upon the room, and left Nicholas to enjoy a laugh by himself if he felt so disposed.

Without stopping to inquire whether the intervening day appeared to Nicholas to consist of the usual number of hours of the ordinary length, it may be remarked that, to the parties more directly interested in the forthcoming ceremony, it passed with great rapidity, insomuch that when Miss Petowker awoke on the succeeding morning in the chamber of Miss Snevellicci, she declared that nothing should ever persuade her that that really was the day which was to behold a change in her condition.

'I never will believe it,' said Miss Petowker; 'I cannot really. It's of no use talking, I never can make up my mind to go through with such a trial!'

On hearing this, Miss Snevellicci and Miss Ledrook, who knew perfectly well that their fair friend's mind had been made up for three or four years, at any period of which time she would have cheerfully undergone the desperate trial now approaching if she could have found any eligible gentleman disposed for the venture, began to preach comfort and firmness, and to say how very proud she ought to feel that it was in her power to confer lasting bliss on a deserving object, and how necessary it was for the happiness of mankind in general that women should possess fortitude and resignation on such occasions; and that although for their parts they held true happiness to consist in a single life, which they would not willingly exchange—no, not for any worldly consideration—still (thank God), if ever the time SHOULD come, they hoped they knew their duty too well to repine, but would the rather submit with meekness and humility of spirit to a fate for which Providence had clearly designed them with a view to the contentment and reward of their fellow-creatures.

'I might feel it was a great blow,' said Miss Snevellicci, 'to break up old associations and what-do-you-callems of that kind, but I would submit, my dear, I would indeed.'

'So would I,' said Miss Ledrook; 'I would rather court the yoke than shun it. I have broken hearts before now, and I'm very sorry for it: for it's a terrible thing to reflect upon.'

'It is indeed,' said Miss Snevellicci. 'Now Led, my dear, we must positively get her ready, or we shall be too late, we shall indeed.'

This pious reasoning, and perhaps the fear of being too late, supported the bride through the ceremony of robing, after which, strong tea and brandy were administered in alternate doses as a means of strengthening her feeble limbs and causing her to walk steadier.

'How do you feel now, my love?' inquired Miss Snevellicci.

'Oh Lillyvick!' cried the bride. 'If you knew what I am undergoing for you!'

'Of course he knows it, love, and will never forget it,' said Miss Ledrook.

'Do you think he won't?' cried Miss Petowker, really showing great capability for the stage. 'Oh, do you think he won't? Do you think Lillyvick will always remember it—always, always, always?'

There is no knowing in what this burst of feeling might have ended, if Miss Snevellicci had not at that moment proclaimed the arrival of the fly, which so astounded the bride that she shook off divers alarming symptoms which were coming on very strong, and running to the glass adjusted her dress, and calmly declared that she was ready for the sacrifice.

She was accordingly supported into the coach, and there 'kept up' (as Miss Snevellicci said) with perpetual sniffs of SAL VOLATILE and sips of brandy and other gentle stimulants, until they reached the manager's door, which was already opened by the two Master Crummleses, who wore white cockades, and were decorated with the choicest and most resplendent waistcoats in the theatrical wardrobe. By the combined exertions of these young gentlemen and the bridesmaids, assisted by the coachman, Miss Petowker was at length supported in a condition of much exhaustion to the first floor, where she no sooner encountered the youthful bridegroom than she fainted with great decorum.

'Henrietta Petowker!' said the collector; 'cheer up, my lovely one.'

Miss Petowker grasped the collector's hand, but emotion choked her utterance.

'Is the sight of me so dreadful, Henrietta Petowker?' said the collector.

'Oh no, no, no,' rejoined the bride; 'but all the friends—the darling friends—of my youthful days—to leave them all—it is such a shock!'

With such expressions of sorrow, Miss Petowker went on to enumerate the dear friends of her youthful days one by one, and to call upon such of them as were present to come and embrace her. This done, she remembered that Mrs Crummles had been more than a mother to her, and after that, that Mr Crummles had been more than a father to her, and after that, that the Master Crummleses and Miss Ninetta Crummles had been more than brothers and sisters to her. These various remembrances being each accompanied with a series of hugs, occupied a long time, and they were obliged to drive to church very fast, for fear they should be too late.

The procession consisted of two flys; in the first of which were Miss Bravassa (the fourth bridesmaid), Mrs Crummles, the collector, and Mr

Folair, who had been chosen as his second on the occasion. In the other were the bride, Mr Crummles, Miss Snevellicci, Miss Ledrook, and the phenomenon. The costumes were beautiful. The bridesmaids were quite covered with artificial flowers, and the phenomenon, in particular, was rendered almost invisible by the portable arbour in which she was enshrined. Miss Ledrook, who was of a romantic turn, wore in her breast the miniature of some field-officer unknown, which she had purchased, a great bargain, not very long before; the other ladies displayed several dazzling articles of imitative jewellery, almost equal to real, and Mrs Crummles came out in a stern and gloomy majesty, which attracted the admiration of all beholders.

But, perhaps the appearance of Mr Crummles was more striking and appropriate than that of any member of the party. This gentleman, who personated the bride's father, had, in pursuance of a happy and original conception, 'made up' for the part by arraying himself in a theatrical wig, of a style and pattern commonly known as a brown George, and moreover assuming a snuff-coloured suit, of the previous century, with grey silk stockings, and buckles to his shoes. The better to support his assumed character he had determined to be greatly overcome, and, consequently, when they entered the church, the sobs of the affectionate parent were so heart-rending that the pew-opener suggested the propriety of his retiring to the vestry, and comforting himself with a glass of water before the ceremony began.

The procession up the aisle was beautiful. The bride, with the four bridesmaids, forming a group previously arranged and rehearsed; the collector, followed by his second, imitating his walk and gestures to the indescribable amusement of some theatrical friends in the gallery; Mr Crummles, with an infirm and feeble gait; Mrs Crummles advancing with that stage walk, which consists of a stride and a stop alternately—it was the completest thing ever witnessed. The ceremony was very quickly disposed of, and all parties present having signed the register (for which purpose, when it came to his turn, Mr Crummles carefully wiped and put on an immense pair of spectacles), they went back to breakfast in high spirits. And here they found Nicholas awaiting their arrival.

'Now then,' said Crummles, who had been assisting Mrs Grudden in the preparations, which were on a more extensive scale than was quite agreeable to the collector. 'Breakfast, breakfast.'

No second invitation was required. The company crowded and squeezed themselves at the table as well as they could, and fell to, immediately: Miss Petowker blushing very much when anybody was looking, and eating very much when anybody was NOT looking; and Mr Lillyvick going to work as though with the cool resolve, that since the good things must be paid for by him, he would leave as little as possible for the Crummleses to eat up afterwards.

'It's very soon done, sir, isn't it?' inquired Mr Folair of the collector, leaning over the table to address him.

'What is soon done, sir?' returned Mr Lillyvick.

'The tying up—the fixing oneself with a wife,' replied Mr Folair. 'It don't take long, does it?'

'No, sir,' replied Mr Lillyvick, colouring. 'It does not take long. And what then, sir?'

'Oh! nothing,' said the actor. 'It don't take a man long to hang himself, either, eh? ha, ha!'

Mr Lillyvick laid down his knife and fork, and looked round the table with indignant astonishment.

'To hang himself!' repeated Mr Lillyvick.

A profound silence came upon all, for Mr Lillyvick was dignified beyond expression.

'To hang himself!' cried Mr Lillyvick again. 'Is any parallel attempted to be drawn in this company between matrimony and hanging?'

'The noose, you know,' said Mr Folair, a little crest-fallen.

'The noose, sir?' retorted Mr Lillyvick. 'Does any man dare to speak to me of a noose, and Henrietta Pe—'

'Lillyvick,' suggested Mr Crummles.

'—And Henrietta Lillyvick in the same breath?' said the collector. 'In this house, in the presence of Mr and Mrs Crummles, who have brought up a talented and virtuous family, to be blessings and phenomenons, and what not, are we to hear talk of nooses?'

'Folair,' said Mr Crummles, deeming it a matter of decency to be affected by this allusion to himself and partner, 'I'm astonished at you.'

'What are you going on in this way at me for?' urged the unfortunate actor. 'What have I done?'

'Done, sir!' cried Mr Lillyvick, 'aimed a blow at the whole framework of society—'

'And the best and tenderest feelings,' added Crummles, relapsing into the old man.

'And the highest and most estimable of social ties,' said the collector. 'Noose! As if one was caught, trapped into the married state, pinned by the leg, instead of going into it of one's own accord and glorying in the act!'

'I didn't mean to make it out, that you were caught and trapped, and pinned by the leg,' replied the actor. 'I'm sorry for it; I can't say any more.'

'So you ought to be, sir,' returned Mr Lillyvick; 'and I am glad to hear that you have enough of feeling left to be so.'

The quarrel appearing to terminate with this reply, Mrs Lillyvick considered that the fittest occasion (the attention of the company being no longer distracted) to burst into tears, and require the assistance of all four bridesmaids, which was immediately rendered, though not without some confusion, for the room being small and the table-cloth long, a whole detachment of plates were swept off the board at the very first move. Regardless of this circumstance, however, Mrs Lillyvick refused to be comforted until the belligerents had passed their words that the dispute should be carried no further, which, after a sufficient show of reluctance, they did, and from that time Mr Folair sat in moody silence, contenting himself with pinching Nicholas's leg when anything was said, and so expressing his contempt both for the speaker and the sentiments to which he gave utterance.

There were a great number of speeches made; some by Nicholas, and some by Crummles, and some by the collector; two by the Master Crummleses in returning thanks for themselves, and one by the phenomenon on behalf of the bridesmaids, at which Mrs Crummles shed tears. There was some singing, too, from Miss Ledrook and Miss Bravassa, and very likely there might have been more, if the fly-driver, who stopped to drive the happy pair to the spot where they proposed to take steamboat to Ryde, had not sent in a peremptory message intimating, that if they didn't come directly he should infallibly demand eighteen-pence over and above his agreement.

This desperate threat effectually broke up the party. After a most pathetic leave-taking, Mr Lillyvick and his bride departed for Ryde, where they were to spend the next two days in profound retirement, and whither they were accompanied by the infant, who had been appointed travelling bridesmaid on Mr Lillyvick's express stipulation: as the steamboat people, deceived by her size, would (he had previously ascertained) transport her at half-price.

As there was no performance that night, Mr Crummles declared his intention of keeping it up till everything to drink was disposed of; but Nicholas having to play Romeo for the first time on the ensuing evening, contrived to slip away in the midst of a temporary confusion, occasioned by the unexpected development of strong symptoms of inebriety in the conduct of Mrs Grudden.

To this act of desertion he was led, not only by his own inclinations, but by his anxiety on account of Smike, who, having to sustain the character of the Apothecary, had been as yet wholly unable to get any more of the part into his head than the general idea that he was very hungry, which—perhaps from old recollections—he had acquired with great aptitude.

'I don't know what's to be done, Smike,' said Nicholas, laying down the book. 'I am afraid you can't learn it, my poor fellow.'

'I am afraid not,' said Smike, shaking his head. 'I think if you—but that would give you so much trouble.'

'What?' inquired Nicholas. 'Never mind me.'

'I think,' said Smike, 'if you were to keep saying it to me in little bits, over and over again, I should be able to recollect it from hearing you.'

'Do you think so?' exclaimed Nicholas. 'Well said. Let us see who tires first. Not I, Smike, trust me. Now then. Who calls so loud?'

'"Who calls so loud?"' said Smike.

'"Who calls so loud?"' repeated Nicholas.

'"Who calls so loud?"' cried Smike.

Thus they continued to ask each other who called so loud, over and over again; and when Smike had that by heart Nicholas went to another sentence, and then to two at a time, and then to three, and so on, until at midnight poor Smike found to his unspeakable joy that he really began to remember something about the text.

Early in the morning they went to it again, and Smike, rendered more confident by the progress he had already made, got on faster and with better heart. As soon as he began to acquire the words pretty freely, Nicholas showed him how he must come in with both hands spread out upon his stomach, and how he must occasionally rub it, in compliance with the established form by which people on the stage always denote that they want something to eat. After the morning's rehearsal they went to work again, nor did they stop, except for a hasty dinner, until it was time to repair to the theatre at night.

Never had master a more anxious, humble, docile pupil. Never had pupil a more patient, unwearying, considerate, kindhearted master.

As soon as they were dressed, and at every interval when he was not upon the stage, Nicholas renewed his instructions. They prospered well. The Romeo was received with hearty plaudits and unbounded favour, and Smike was pronounced unanimously, alike by audience and actors, the very prince and prodigy of Apothecaries.

CHAPTER 26

Is fraught with some Danger to Miss Nickleby's Peace of Mind

The place was a handsome suite of private apartments in Regent Street; the time was three o'clock in the afternoon to the dull and plodding, and the first hour of morning to the gay and spirited; the persons were Lord Frederick Verisopht, and his friend Sir Mulberry Hawk.

These distinguished gentlemen were reclining listlessly on a couple of sofas, with a table between them, on which were scattered in rich confusion the materials of an untasted breakfast. Newspapers lay strewn about the room, but these, like the meal, were neglected and unnoticed; not, however, because any flow of conversation prevented the attractions of the journals from being called into request, for not a word was exchanged between the two, nor was any sound uttered, save when one, in tossing about to find an easier resting-place for his aching head, uttered an exclamation of impatience, and seemed for a moment to communicate a new restlessness to his companion.

These appearances would in themselves have furnished a pretty strong clue to the extent of the debauch of the previous night, even if there had not been other indications of the amusements in which it had been passed. A couple of billiard balls, all mud and dirt, two battered hats, a champagne bottle with a soiled glove twisted round the neck, to allow of its being grasped more surely in its capacity of an offensive weapon; a broken cane; a card-case without the top; an empty purse; a watch-guard snapped asunder; a handful of silver, mingled with fragments of half-smoked cigars, and their stale and crumbled ashes;—these, and many other tokens of riot and disorder, hinted very intelligibly at the nature of last night's gentlemanly frolics.

Lord Frederick Verisopht was the first to speak. Dropping his slippered foot on the ground, and, yawning heavily, he struggled into a sitting posture, and turned his dull languid eyes towards his friend, to whom he called in a drowsy voice.

'Hallo!' replied Sir Mulberry, turning round.

'Are we going to lie here all da-a-y?' said the lord.

'I don't know that we're fit for anything else,' replied Sir Mulberry; 'yet awhile, at least. I haven't a grain of life in me this morning.'

'Life!' cried Lord Verisopht. 'I feel as if there would be nothing so snug and comfortable as to die at once.'

'Then why don't you die?' said Sir Mulberry.

With which inquiry he turned his face away, and seemed to occupy himself in an attempt to fall asleep.

His hopeful fiend and pupil drew a chair to the breakfast-table, and essayed to eat; but, finding that impossible, lounged to the window, then loitered up and down the room with his hand to his fevered head, and finally threw himself again on his sofa, and roused his friend once more.

'What the devil's the matter?' groaned Sir Mulberry, sitting upright on the couch.

Although Sir Mulberry said this with sufficient ill-humour, he did not seem to feel himself quite at liberty to remain silent; for, after stretching himself very often, and declaring with a shiver that it was 'infernal cold,' he made an experiment at the breakfast-table, and proving more successful in it than his less-seasoned friend, remained there.

'Suppose,' said Sir Mulberry, pausing with a morsel on the point of his fork, 'suppose we go back to the subject of little Nickleby, eh?'

'Which little Nickleby; the money-lender or the ga-a-l?' asked Lord Verisopht.

'You take me, I see,' replied Sir Mulberry. 'The girl, of course.'

'You promised me you'd find her out,' said Lord Verisopht.

'So I did,' rejoined his friend; 'but I have thought further of the matter since then. You distrust me in the business—you shall find her out yourself.'

'Na-ay,' remonstrated Lord Verisopht.

'But I say yes,' returned his friend. 'You shall find her out yourself. Don't think that I mean, when you can—I know as well as you that if I did, you could never get sight of her without me. No. I say you shall find her out—SHALL—and I'll put you in the way.'

'Now, curse me, if you ain't a real, deyvlish, downright, thorough-paced friend,' said the young lord, on whom this speech had produced a most reviving effect.

'I'll tell you how,' said Sir Mulberry. 'She was at that dinner as a bait for you.'

'No!' cried the young lord. 'What the dey—'

'As a bait for you,' repeated his friend; 'old Nickleby told me so himself.'

'What a fine old cock it is!' exclaimed Lord Verisopht; 'a noble rascal!'

'Yes,' said Sir Mulberry, 'he knew she was a smart little creature—'

'Smart!' interposed the young lord. 'Upon my soul, Hawk, she's a perfect beauty—a—a picture, a statue, a—a—upon my soul she is!'

'Well,' replied Sir Mulberry, shrugging his shoulders and manifesting an indifference, whether he felt it or not; 'that's a matter of taste; if mine doesn't agree with yours, so much the better.'

'Confound it!' reasoned the lord, 'you were thick enough with her that day, anyhow. I could hardly get in a word.'

'Well enough for once, well enough for once,' replied Sir Mulberry; 'but not worth the trouble of being agreeable to again. If you seriously want to follow up the niece, tell the uncle that you must know where she lives and how she lives, and with whom, or you are no longer a customer of his. He'll tell you fast enough.'

'Why didn't you say this before?' asked Lord Verisopht, 'instead of letting me go on burning, consuming, dragging out a miserable existence for an a-age!'

'I didn't know it, in the first place,' answered Sir Mulberry carelessly; 'and in the second, I didn't believe you were so very much in earnest.'

Now, the truth was, that in the interval which had elapsed since the dinner at Ralph Nickleby's, Sir Mulberry Hawk had been furtively trying by every means in his power to discover whence Kate had so suddenly appeared, and whither she had disappeared. Unassisted by Ralph, however, with whom he had held no communication since their angry parting on that occasion, all his efforts were wholly unavailing, and he had therefore arrived at the determination of communicating to the young lord the substance of the admission he had gleaned from that worthy. To this he was impelled by various considerations; among which the certainty of knowing whatever the weak young man knew was decidedly not the least, as the desire of encountering the usurer's niece again, and using his utmost arts to reduce her pride, and revenge himself for her contempt, was uppermost in his thoughts. It was a politic course of proceeding, and one which could not fail to redound to his advantage in every point of view, since the very circumstance of his having extorted from Ralph Nickleby his real design in introducing his niece to such society, coupled with his extreme disinterestedness in communicating it so freely to his friend, could not but advance his interests in that quarter, and greatly facilitate the passage of coin (pretty frequent and speedy already) from the pockets of Lord Frederick Verisopht to those of Sir Mulberry Hawk.

Thus reasoned Sir Mulberry, and in pursuance of this reasoning he and his friend soon afterwards repaired to Ralph Nickleby's, there to execute a plan of operations concerted by Sir Mulberry himself, avowedly to promote his friend's object, and really to attain his own.

They found Ralph at home, and alone. As he led them into the drawing-room, the recollection of the scene which had taken place there seemed to occur to him, for he cast a curious look at Sir Mulberry, who bestowed upon it no other acknowledgment than a careless smile.

They had a short conference upon some money matters then in progress, which were scarcely disposed of when the lordly dupe (in pursuance of his friend's instructions) requested with some embarrassment to speak to Ralph alone.

'Alone, eh?' cried Sir Mulberry, affecting surprise. 'Oh, very good. I'll walk into the next room here. Don't keep me long, that's all.'

So saying, Sir Mulberry took up his hat, and humming a fragment of a song disappeared through the door of communication between the two drawing-rooms, and closed it after him.

'Now, my lord,' said Ralph, 'what is it?'

'Nickleby,' said his client, throwing himself along the sofa on which he had been previously seated, so as to bring his lips nearer to the old man's ear, 'what a pretty creature your niece is!'

'Is she, my lord?' replied Ralph. 'Maybe—maybe—I don't trouble my head with such matters.'

'You know she's a deyvlish fine girl,' said the client. 'You must know that, Nickleby. Come, don't deny that.'

'Yes, I believe she is considered so,' replied Ralph. 'Indeed, I know she is. If I did not, you are an authority on such points, and your taste, my lord—on all points, indeed—is undeniable.'

Nobody but the young man to whom these words were addressed could have been deaf to the sneering tone in which they were spoken, or blind to the look of contempt by which they were accompanied. But Lord Frederick Verisopht was both, and took them to be complimentary.

'Well,' he said, 'p'raps you're a little right, and p'raps you're a little wrong—a little of both, Nickleby. I want to know where this beauty lives, that I may have another peep at her, Nickleby.'

'Really—' Ralph began in his usual tones.

'Don't talk so loud,' cried the other, achieving the great point of his lesson to a miracle. 'I don't want Hawk to hear.'

'You know he is your rival, do you?' said Ralph, looking sharply at him.

'He always is, d-a-amn him,' replied the client; 'and I want to steal a march upon him. Ha, ha, ha! He'll cut up so rough, Nickleby, at our talking together without him. Where does she live, Nickleby, that's all? Only tell me where she lives, Nickleby.'

'He bites,' thought Ralph. 'He bites.'

'Eh, Nickleby, eh?' pursued the client. 'Where does she live?'

'Really, my lord,' said Ralph, rubbing his hands slowly over each other, 'I must think before I tell you.'

'No, not a bit of it, Nickleby; you mustn't think at all,' replied Verisopht. 'Where is it?'

'No good can come of your knowing,' replied Ralph. 'She has been virtuously and well brought up; to be sure she is handsome, poor, unprotected! Poor girl, poor girl.'

Ralph ran over this brief summary of Kate's condition as if it were merely passing through his own mind, and he had no intention to speak aloud; but the shrewd sly look which he directed at his companion as he delivered it, gave this poor assumption the lie.

'I tell you I only want to see her,' cried his client. 'A ma-an may look at a pretty woman without harm, mayn't he? Now, where DOES she live? You know you're making a fortune out of me, Nickleby, and upon my soul nobody shall ever take me to anybody else, if you only tell me this.'

'As you promise that, my lord,' said Ralph, with feigned reluctance, 'and as I am most anxious to oblige you, and as there's no harm in it—no harm—I'll tell you. But you had better keep it to yourself, my lord; strictly to yourself.' Ralph pointed to the adjoining room as he spoke, and nodded expressively.

The young lord, feigning to be equally impressed with the necessity of this precaution, Ralph disclosed the present address and occupation of his niece, observing that from what he heard of the family they appeared very ambitious to have distinguished acquaintances, and that a lord could, doubtless, introduce himself with great ease, if he felt disposed.

'Your object being only to see her again,' said Ralph, 'you could effect it at any time you chose by that means.'

Lord Verisopht acknowledged the hint with a great many squeezes of Ralph's hard, horny hand, and whispering that they would now do well to close the conversation, called to Sir Mulberry Hawk that he might come back.

'I thought you had gone to sleep,' said Sir Mulberry, reappearing with an ill-tempered air.

'Sorry to detain you,' replied the gull; 'but Nickleby has been so ama-azingly funny that I couldn't tear myself away.'

'No, no,' said Ralph; 'it was all his lordship. You know what a witty, humorous, elegant, accomplished man Lord Frederick is. Mind the step, my lord—Sir Mulberry, pray give way.'

With such courtesies as these, and many low bows, and the same cold sneer upon his face all the while, Ralph busied himself in showing his visitors downstairs, and otherwise than by the slightest possible motion about the corners of his mouth, returned no show of answer to the look of admiration with which Sir Mulberry Hawk seemed to compliment him on being such an accomplished and most consummate scoundrel.

There had been a ring at the bell a few minutes before, which was answered by Newman Noggs just as they reached the hall. In the ordinary course of business Newman would have either admitted the new-comer in silence, or have requested him or her to stand aside while the gentlemen passed out. But he no sooner saw who it was, than as if for some private reason of his own, he boldly departed from the established custom of Ralph's mansion in business hours, and looking towards the respectable trio who were approaching, cried in a loud and sonorous voice, 'Mrs Nickleby!'

'Mrs Nickleby!' cried Sir Mulberry Hawk, as his friend looked back, and stared him in the face.

It was, indeed, that well-intentioned lady, who, having received an offer for the empty house in the city directed to the landlord, had brought it post-haste to Mr Nickleby without delay.

'Nobody YOU know,' said Ralph. 'Step into the office, my—my—dear. I'll be with you directly.'

'Nobody I know!' cried Sir Mulberry Hawk, advancing to the astonished lady. 'Is this Mrs Nickleby—the mother of Miss Nickleby—the delightful creature that I had the happiness of meeting in this house the very last time I dined here? But no;' said Sir Mulberry, stopping short. 'No, it can't be. There is the same cast of features, the same indescribable air of—But no; no. This lady is too young for that.'

'I think you can tell the gentleman, brother-in-law, if it concerns him to know,' said Mrs Nickleby, acknowledging the compliment with a graceful bend, 'that Kate Nickleby is my daughter.'

'Her daughter, my lord!' cried Sir Mulberry, turning to his friend. 'This lady's daughter, my lord.'

'My lord!' thought Mrs Nickleby. 'Well, I never did—'

'This, then, my lord,' said Sir Mulberry, 'is the lady to whose obliging marriage we owe so much happiness. This lady is the mother of sweet Miss Nickleby. Do you observe the extraordinary likeness, my lord? Nickleby—introduce us.'

Ralph did so, in a kind of desperation.

'Upon my soul, it's a most delightful thing,' said Lord Frederick, pressing forward. 'How de do?'

Mrs Nickleby was too much flurried by these uncommonly kind salutations, and her regrets at not having on her other bonnet, to make any immediate reply, so she merely continued to bend and smile, and betray great agitation.

'A—and how is Miss Nickleby?' said Lord Frederick. 'Well, I hope?'

'She is quite well, I'm obliged to you, my lord,' returned Mrs Nickleby, recovering. 'Quite well. She wasn't well for some days after that day she dined here, and I can't help thinking, that she caught cold in that hackney coach coming home. Hackney coaches, my lord, are such nasty things, that it's almost better to walk at any time, for although I believe a hackney coachman can be transported for life, if he has a broken window, still they are so reckless, that they nearly all have broken windows. I once had a swelled face for six weeks, my lord, from riding in a hackney coach—I think it was a hackney coach,' said Mrs Nickleby reflecting, 'though I'm not quite certain whether it wasn't a chariot; at all events I know it was a dark green, with a very long number, beginning with a nought and ending with a nine—no, beginning with a nine, and ending with a nought, that was it, and of course the stamp-office people would know at once whether it was a coach or a chariot if any inquiries were made there—however that was, there it was with a broken window and there was I for six weeks with a swelled face—I think that was the very same hackney coach, that we found out afterwards, had the top open all the time, and we should never even have known it, if they hadn't charged us a shilling an hour extra for having it open, which it seems is the law, or was then, and a most shameful law it appears to be—I don't understand the subject, but I should say the Corn Laws could be nothing to THAT act of Parliament.'

Having pretty well run herself out by this time, Mrs Nickleby stopped as suddenly as she had started off; and repeated that Kate was quite well. 'Indeed,' said Mrs Nickleby, 'I don't think she ever was better, since she had the hooping-cough, scarlet-fever, and measles, all at the same time, and that's the fact.'

'Is that letter for me?' growled Ralph, pointing to the little packet Mrs Nickleby held in her hand.

'For you, brother-in-law,' replied Mrs Nickleby, 'and I walked all the way up here on purpose to give it you.'

'All the way up here!' cried Sir Mulberry, seizing upon the chance of discovering where Mrs Nickleby had come from. 'What a confounded distance! How far do you call it now?'

'How far do I call it?' said Mrs Nickleby. 'Let me see. It's just a mile from our door to the Old Bailey.'

'No, no. Not so much as that,' urged Sir Mulberry.

'Oh! It is indeed,' said Mrs Nickleby. 'I appeal to his lordship.'

'I should decidedly say it was a mile,' remarked Lord Frederick, with a solemn aspect.

'It must be; it can't be a yard less,' said Mrs Nickleby. 'All down Newgate Street, all down Cheapside, all up Lombard Street, down Gracechurch Street, and along Thames Street, as far as Spigwiffin's Wharf. Oh! It's a mile.'

'Yes, on second thoughts I should say it was,' replied Sir Mulberry. 'But you don't surely mean to walk all the way back?'

'Oh, no,' rejoined Mrs Nickleby. 'I shall go back in an omnibus. I didn't travel about in omnibuses, when my poor dear Nicholas was alive, brother-in-law. But as it is, you know—'

'Yes, yes,' replied Ralph impatiently, 'and you had better get back before dark.'

'Thank you, brother-in-law, so I had,' returned Mrs Nickleby. 'I think I had better say goodbye, at once.'

'Not stop and—rest?' said Ralph, who seldom offered refreshments unless something was to be got by it.

'Oh dear me no,' returned Mrs Nickleby, glancing at the dial.

'Lord Frederick,' said Sir Mulberry, 'we are going Mrs Nickleby's way. We'll see her safe to the omnibus?'

'By all means. Ye-es.'

'Oh! I really couldn't think of it!' said Mrs Nickleby.

But Sir Mulberry Hawk and Lord Verisopht were peremptory in their politeness, and leaving Ralph, who seemed to think, not unwisely, that he looked less ridiculous as a mere spectator, than he would have done if he had taken any part in these proceedings, they quitted the house with Mrs Nickleby between them; that good lady in a perfect ecstasy of satisfaction, no less with the attentions shown her by two titled gentlemen, than with the conviction that Kate might now pick and choose, at least between two large fortunes, and most unexceptionable husbands.

As she was carried away for the moment by an irresistible train of thought, all connected with her daughter's future greatness, Sir Mulberry Hawk and his friend exchanged glances over the top of the bonnet which the poor lady so much regretted not having left at home, and proceeded to dilate with great rapture, but much respect on the manifold perfections of Miss Nickleby.

'What a delight, what a comfort, what a happiness, this amiable creature must be to you,' said Sir Mulberry, throwing into his voice an indication of the warmest feeling.

'She is indeed, sir,' replied Mrs Nickleby; 'she is the sweetest-tempered, kindest-hearted creature—and so clever!'

'She looks clayver,' said Lord Verisopht, with the air of a judge of cleverness.

'I assure you she is, my lord,' returned Mrs Nickleby. 'When she was at school in Devonshire, she was universally allowed to be beyond all exception the very cleverest girl there, and there were a great many very clever ones too, and that's the truth—twenty-five young ladies, fifty guineas a year without the et-ceteras, both the Miss Dowdles the most accomplished, elegant, fascinating creatures—Oh dear me!' said Mrs Nickleby, 'I never shall forget what pleasure she used to give me and her poor dear papa, when she was at that school, never—such a delightful letter every half-year, telling us that she was the first pupil in the whole establishment, and had made more progress than anybody else! I can scarcely bear to think of it even now. The girls wrote all the letters themselves,' added Mrs Nickleby, 'and the writing-master touched them up afterwards with a magnifying glass and a silver pen; at least I think they wrote them, though Kate was never quite certain about that, because she didn't know the handwriting of hers again; but anyway, I know it was a circular which they all copied, and of course it was a very gratifying thing—very gratifying.'

With similar recollections Mrs Nickleby beguiled the tediousness of the way, until they reached the omnibus, which the extreme politeness of her new friends would not allow them to leave until it actually started, when they took their hats, as Mrs Nickleby solemnly assured her hearers on many subsequent occasions, 'completely off,' and kissed their straw-coloured kid gloves till they were no longer visible.

Mrs Nickleby leant back in the furthest corner of the conveyance, and, closing her eyes, resigned herself to a host of most pleasing meditations. Kate had never said a word about having met either of these gentlemen; 'that,' she thought, 'argues that she is strongly prepossessed in favour of one of them.' Then the question arose, which one could it be. The lord was the youngest, and his title was certainly the grandest; still Kate was not the girl to be swayed by such considerations as these. 'I will never put any constraint upon her inclinations,' said Mrs Nickleby to herself; 'but upon my word I think there's no comparison between his lordship and Sir Mulberry—Sir Mulberry is such an attentive gentlemanly creature, so much manner, such a fine man, and has so much to say for himself. I hope it's Sir Mulberry—I think it must be Sir Mulberry!' And then her thoughts flew back to her old predictions, and the number of times she had said, that Kate with no fortune would marry better than other people's daughters with thousands; and, as she pictured with the brightness of a mother's fancy all the beauty and grace of the poor girl who had struggled so cheerfully with her new life of hardship and trial, her heart grew too full, and the tears trickled down her face.

Meanwhile, Ralph walked to and fro in his little back-office, troubled in mind by what had just occurred. To say that Ralph loved or cared for—in the most ordinary acceptation of those terms—any one of God's creatures, would be the wildest fiction. Still, there had somehow stolen upon him from time to time a thought of his niece which was tinged with compassion and pity; breaking through the dull cloud of dislike or indifference which darkened men and women in his eyes, there was, in her case, the faintest gleam of light—a most feeble and sickly ray at the best of times—but there it was, and it showed the poor girl in a better and purer aspect than any in which he had looked on human nature yet.

'I wish,' thought Ralph, 'I had never done this. And yet it will keep this boy to me, while there is money to be made. Selling a girl—throwing her in the way of temptation, and insult, and coarse speech. Nearly two thousand pounds profit from him already though. Pshaw! match-making mothers do the same thing every day.'

He sat down, and told the chances, for and against, on his fingers.

'If I had not put them in the right track today,' thought Ralph, 'this foolish woman would have done so. Well. If her daughter is as true to herself as she should be from what I have seen, what harm ensues? A little teasing, a little humbling, a few tears. Yes,' said Ralph, aloud, as he locked his iron safe. 'She must take her chance. She must take her chance.'

CHAPTER 27

Mrs Nickleby becomes acquainted with Messrs Pyke and Pluck, whose Affection and Interest are beyond all Bounds

Mrs Nickleby had not felt so proud and important for many a day, as when, on reaching home, she gave herself wholly up to the pleasant visions which had accompanied her on her way thither. Lady Mulberry Hawk—that was the prevalent idea. Lady Mulberry Hawk!—On Tuesday last, at St George's, Hanover Square, by the Right Reverend the Bishop of Llandaff, Sir Mulberry Hawk, of Mulberry Castle, North Wales, to Catherine, only daughter of the late Nicholas Nickleby, Esquire, of Devonshire. 'Upon my word!' cried Mrs Nicholas Nickleby, 'it sounds very well.'

Having dispatched the ceremony, with its attendant festivities, to the perfect satisfaction of her own mind, the sanguine mother pictured to her imagination a long train of honours and distinctions which could not fail to accompany Kate in her new and brilliant sphere. She would be presented at court, of course. On the anniversary of her birthday, which was upon the nineteenth of July ('at ten minutes past three o'clock in the morning,' thought Mrs Nickleby in a parenthesis, 'for I recollect asking what o'clock it was'), Sir Mulberry would give a great feast to all his tenants, and would return them three and a half per cent on the amount of their last half-year's rent, as would be fully described and recorded in the fashionable intelligence, to the immeasurable delight and admiration of all the readers thereof. Kate's picture, too, would be in at least half-a-dozen of the annuals, and on the opposite page would appear, in delicate type, 'Lines on contemplating the Portrait of Lady Mulberry Hawk. By Sir Dingleby Dabber.' Perhaps some one annual, of more comprehensive design than its fellows, might even contain a portrait of the mother of Lady Mulberry Hawk, with lines by the father of Sir Dingleby Dabber. More unlikely things had come to pass. Less interesting portraits had appeared. As this thought occurred to the good lady, her countenance unconsciously assumed that compound expression of simpering and sleepiness which, being common to all such portraits, is perhaps one reason why they are always so charming and agreeable.

With such triumphs of aerial architecture did Mrs Nickleby occupy the whole evening after her accidental introduction to Ralph's titled friends; and dreams, no less prophetic and equally promising, haunted her sleep that night. She was preparing for her frugal dinner next day, still occupied with the same ideas—a little softened down perhaps by sleep and daylight—when the girl who attended her, partly for company, and partly to assist in the household affairs, rushed into the room in unwonted agitation, and announced that two gentlemen were waiting in the passage for permission to walk upstairs.

'Bless my heart!' cried Mrs Nickleby, hastily arranging her cap and front, 'if it should be—dear me, standing in the passage all this time—why don't you go and ask them to walk up, you stupid thing?'

While the girl was gone on this errand, Mrs Nickleby hastily swept into a cupboard all vestiges of eating and drinking; which she had scarcely done, and seated herself with looks as collected as she could assume, when two gentlemen, both perfect strangers, presented themselves.

'How do you DO?' said one gentleman, laying great stress on the last word of the inquiry.

'HOW do you do?' said the other gentleman, altering the emphasis, as if to give variety to the salutation.

Mrs Nickleby curtseyed and smiled, and curtseyed again, and remarked, rubbing her hands as she did so, that she hadn't the—really—the honour to—

'To know us,' said the first gentleman. 'The loss has been ours, Mrs Nickleby. Has the loss been ours, Pyke?'

'It has, Pluck,' answered the other gentleman.

'We have regretted it very often, I believe, Pyke?' said the first gentleman.

'Very often, Pluck,' answered the second.

'But now,' said the first gentleman, 'now we have the happiness we have pined and languished for. Have we pined and languished for this happiness, Pyke, or have we not?'

'You know we have, Pluck,' said Pyke, reproachfully.

'You hear him, ma'am?' said Mr Pluck, looking round; 'you hear the unimpeachable testimony of my friend Pyke—that reminds me,—formalities, formalities, must not be neglected in civilised society. Pyke—Mrs Nickleby.'

Mr Pyke laid his hand upon his heart, and bowed low.

'Whether I shall introduce myself with the same formality,' said Mr Pluck—'whether I shall say myself that my name is Pluck, or whether I shall ask my friend Pyke (who being now regularly introduced, is competent to the office) to state for me, Mrs Nickleby, that my name is Pluck; whether I shall claim your acquaintance on the plain ground of the strong interest I take in your welfare, or whether I shall make myself known to you as the friend of Sir Mulberry Hawk—these, Mrs Nickleby, are considerations which I leave to you to determine.'

'Any friend of Sir Mulberry Hawk's requires no better introduction to me,' observed Mrs Nickleby, graciously.

'It is delightful to hear you say so,' said Mr Pluck, drawing a chair close to Mrs Nickleby, and sitting himself down. 'It is refreshing to know that you hold my excellent friend, Sir Mulberry, in such high esteem. A word in your ear, Mrs Nickleby. When Sir Mulberry knows it, he will be a happy man—I say, Mrs Nickleby, a happy man. Pyke, be seated.'

'MY good opinion,' said Mrs Nickleby, and the poor lady exulted in the idea that she was marvellously sly,—'my good opinion can be of very little consequence to a gentleman like Sir Mulberry.'

'Of little consequence!' exclaimed Mr Pluck. 'Pyke, of what consequence to our friend, Sir Mulberry, is the good opinion of Mrs Nickleby?'

'Of what consequence?' echoed Pyke.

'Ay,' repeated Pluck; 'is it of the greatest consequence?'

'Of the very greatest consequence,' replied Pyke.

'Mrs Nickleby cannot be ignorant,' said Mr Pluck, 'of the immense impression which that sweet girl has—'

'Pluck!' said his friend, 'beware!'

'Pyke is right,' muttered Mr Pluck, after a short pause; 'I was not to mention it. Pyke is very right. Thank you, Pyke.'

'Well now, really,' thought Mrs Nickleby within herself. 'Such delicacy as that, I never saw!'

Mr Pluck, after feigning to be in a condition of great embarrassment for some minutes, resumed the conversation by entreating Mrs Nickleby to take no heed of what he had inadvertently said—to consider him imprudent, rash, injudicious. The only stipulation he would make in his own favour was, that she should give him credit for the best intentions.

'But when,' said Mr Pluck, 'when I see so much sweetness and beauty on the one hand, and so much ardour and devotion on the other, I—pardon me, Pyke, I didn't intend to resume that theme. Change the subject, Pyke.'

'We promised Sir Mulberry and Lord Frederick,' said Pyke, 'that we'd call this morning and inquire whether you took any cold last night.'

'Not the least in the world last night, sir,' replied Mrs Nickleby, 'with many thanks to his lordship and Sir Mulberry for doing me the honour to inquire; not the least—which is the more singular, as I really am very subject to colds, indeed—very subject. I had a cold once,' said Mrs Nickleby, 'I think it was in the year eighteen hundred and seventeen; let me see, four and five are nine, and—yes, eighteen hundred and seventeen, that I thought I never should get rid of; actually and seriously, that I thought I never should get rid of. I was only cured at last by a remedy that I don't know whether you ever happened to hear of, Mr Pluck. You have a gallon of water as hot as you can possibly bear it, with a pound of salt, and sixpen'orth of the finest bran, and sit with your head in it for twenty minutes every night just before going to bed; at least, I don't mean your head—your feet. It's a most extraordinary cure—a most extraordinary cure. I used it for the first time, I recollect, the day after Christmas Day, and by the middle of April following the cold was gone. It seems quite a miracle when you come to think of it, for I had it ever since the beginning of September.'

'What an afflicting calamity!' said Mr Pyke.

'Perfectly horrid!' exclaimed Mr Pluck.

'But it's worth the pain of hearing, only to know that Mrs Nickleby recovered it, isn't it, Pluck?' cried Mr Pyke.

'That is the circumstance which gives it such a thrilling interest,' replied Mr Pluck.

'But come,' said Pyke, as if suddenly recollecting himself; 'we must not forget our mission in the pleasure of this interview. We come on a mission, Mrs Nickleby.'

'On a mission,' exclaimed that good lady, to whose mind a definite proposal of marriage for Kate at once presented itself in lively colours.

'From Sir Mulberry,' replied Pyke. 'You must be very dull here.'

'Rather dull, I confess,' said Mrs Nickleby.

'We bring the compliments of Sir Mulberry Hawk, and a thousand entreaties that you'll take a seat in a private box at the play tonight,' said Mr Pluck.

'Oh dear!' said Mrs Nickleby, 'I never go out at all, never.'

'And that is the very reason, my dear Mrs Nickleby, why you should go out tonight,' retorted Mr Pluck. 'Pyke, entreat Mrs Nickleby.'

'Oh, pray do,' said Pyke.

'You positively must,' urged Pluck.

'You are very kind,' said Mrs Nickleby, hesitating; 'but—'

'There's not a but in the case, my dear Mrs Nickleby,' remonstrated Mr Pluck; 'not such a word in the vocabulary. Your brother-in-law joins us, Lord Frederick joins us, Sir Mulberry joins us, Pyke joins us—a refusal is out of the question. Sir Mulberry sends a carriage for you—twenty minutes before seven to the moment—you'll not be so cruel as to disappoint the whole party, Mrs Nickleby?'

'You are so very pressing, that I scarcely know what to say,' replied the worthy lady.

'Say nothing; not a word, not a word, my dearest madam,' urged Mr Pluck. 'Mrs Nickleby,' said that excellent gentleman, lowering his voice, 'there is the most trifling, the most excusable breach of confidence in what I am about to say; and yet if my friend Pyke there overheard it—such is that man's delicate sense of honour, Mrs Nickleby—he'd have me out before dinner-time.'

Mrs Nickleby cast an apprehensive glance at the warlike Pyke, who had walked to the window; and Mr Pluck, squeezing her hand, went on:

'Your daughter has made a conquest—a conquest on which I may congratulate you. Sir Mulberry, my dear ma'am, Sir Mulberry is her devoted slave. Hem!'

'Hah!' cried Mr Pyke at this juncture, snatching something from the chimney-piece with a theatrical air. 'What is this! what do I behold!'

'What DO you behold, my dear fellow?' asked Mr Pluck.

'It is the face, the countenance, the expression,' cried Mr Pyke, falling into his chair with a miniature in his hand; 'feebly portrayed, imperfectly caught, but still THE face, THE countenance, THE expression.'

'I recognise it at this distance!' exclaimed Mr Pluck in a fit of enthusiasm. 'Is it not, my dear madam, the faint similitude of—'

'It is my daughter's portrait,' said Mrs Nickleby, with great pride. And so it was. And little Miss La Creevy had brought it home for inspection only two nights before.

Mr Pyke no sooner ascertained that he was quite right in his conjecture, than he launched into the most extravagant encomiums of the divine original; and in the warmth of his enthusiasm kissed the picture a thousand times, while Mr Pluck pressed Mrs Nickleby's hand to his heart, and congratulated her on the possession of such a daughter, with so much earnestness and affection, that the tears stood, or seemed to stand, in his eyes. Poor Mrs Nickleby, who had listened in a state of enviable complacency at first, became at length quite overpowered by these tokens of regard for, and attachment to, the family; and even the servant girl, who had peeped in at the door, remained rooted to the spot in astonishment at the ecstasies of the two friendly visitors.

By degrees these raptures subsided, and Mrs Nickleby went on to entertain her guests with a lament over her fallen fortunes, and a picturesque account of her old house in the country: comprising a full description of the different apartments, not forgetting the little store-room, and a lively recollection of how many steps you went down to get into the garden, and which way you turned when you came out at the parlour door, and what capital fixtures there were in the kitchen. This last reflection naturally conducted her into the wash-house, where she stumbled upon the brewing utensils, among which she might have wandered for an hour, if the mere mention of those implements had not, by an association of ideas, instantly reminded Mr Pyke that he was 'amazing thirsty.'

'And I'll tell you what,' said Mr Pyke; 'if you'll send round to the public-house for a pot of milk half-and-half, positively and actually I'll drink it.'

And positively and actually Mr Pyke DID drink it, and Mr Pluck helped him, while Mrs Nickleby looked on in divided admiration of the condescension of the two, and the aptitude with which they accommodated themselves to the pewter-pot; in explanation of which seeming marvel it may be here observed, that gentlemen who, like Messrs Pyke and Pluck, live upon their wits (or not so much, perhaps, upon the presence of their own wits as upon the absence of wits in other people) are occasionally reduced to very narrow shifts and straits, and are at such periods accustomed to regale themselves in a very simple and primitive manner.

'At twenty minutes before seven, then,' said Mr Pyke, rising, 'the coach will be here. One more look—one little look—at that sweet face. Ah! here it is. Unmoved, unchanged!' This, by the way, was a very remarkable circumstance, miniatures being liable to so many changes of expression—'Oh, Pluck! Pluck!'

Mr Pluck made no other reply than kissing Mrs Nickleby's hand with a great show of feeling and attachment; Mr Pyke having done the same, both gentlemen hastily withdrew.

Mrs Nickleby was commonly in the habit of giving herself credit for a pretty tolerable share of penetration and acuteness, but she had never felt so satisfied with her own sharp-sightedness as she did that day. She had found it all out the night before. She had never seen Sir Mulberry and Kate together—never even heard Sir Mulberry's name—and yet hadn't she said to herself from the very first, that she saw how the case stood? and what a triumph it was, for there was now no doubt about it. If these flattering attentions to herself were not sufficient proofs, Sir Mulberry's confidential friend had suffered the secret to escape him in so many words. 'I am quite in love with that dear Mr Pluck, I declare I am,' said Mrs Nickleby.

There was one great source of uneasiness in the midst of this good fortune, and that was the having nobody by, to whom she could confide it. Once or twice she almost resolved to walk straight to Miss La Creevy's and tell it all to her. 'But I don't know,' thought Mrs Nickleby; 'she is a very worthy person, but I am afraid too much beneath Sir Mulberry's station for us to make a companion of. Poor thing!' Acting upon this grave consideration she rejected the idea of taking the little portrait painter into her confidence, and contented herself with holding out sundry vague and mysterious hopes of preferment to the servant girl, who received these obscure hints of dawning greatness with much veneration and respect.

Punctual to its time came the promised vehicle, which was no hackney coach, but a private chariot, having behind it a footman, whose legs, although somewhat large for his body, might, as mere abstract legs, have set themselves up for models at the Royal Academy. It was quite exhilarating to hear the clash and bustle with which he banged the door and jumped up behind after Mrs Nickleby was in; and as that good lady was perfectly unconscious that he applied the gold-headed end of his long stick to his nose, and so telegraphed most disrespectfully to the coachman over her very head, she sat in a state of much stiffness and dignity, not a little proud of her position.

At the theatre entrance there was more banging and more bustle, and there were also Messrs Pyke and Pluck waiting to escort her to her box; and so polite were they, that Mr Pyke threatened with many oaths to 'smifligate' a very old man with a lantern who accidentally stumbled in her way—to the great terror of Mrs Nickleby, who, conjecturing more from Mr Pyke's excitement than any previous acquaintance with the etymology of the word that smifligation and bloodshed must be in the main one and the same thing, was alarmed beyond expression, lest something should occur. Fortunately, however, Mr Pyke confined himself to mere verbal smifligation, and they reached their box with no more serious interruption by the way, than a desire on the part of the same pugnacious gentleman to 'smash' the assistant box-keeper for happening to mistake the number.

Mrs Nickleby had scarcely been put away behind the curtain of the box in an armchair, when Sir Mulberry and Lord Verisopht arrived, arrayed from the crowns of their heads to the tips of their gloves, and from the tips of their gloves to the toes of their boots, in the most elegant and costly manner. Sir Mulberry was a little hoarser than on the previous day, and Lord Verisopht looked rather sleepy and queer; from which tokens, as well as from the circumstance of their both being to a trifling extent unsteady upon their legs, Mrs Nickleby justly concluded that they had taken dinner.

'We have been—we have been—toasting your lovely daughter, Mrs Nickleby,' whispered Sir Mulberry, sitting down behind her.

'Oh, ho!' thought that knowing lady; 'wine in, truth out.—You are very kind, Sir Mulberry.'

'No, no upon my soul!' replied Sir Mulberry Hawk. 'It's you that's kind, upon my soul it is. It was so kind of you to come tonight.'

'So very kind of you to invite me, you mean, Sir Mulberry,' replied Mrs Nickleby, tossing her head, and looking prodigiously sly.

'I am so anxious to know you, so anxious to cultivate your good opinion, so desirous that there should be a delicious kind of harmonious family understanding between us,' said Sir Mulberry, 'that you mustn't think I'm disinterested in what I do. I'm infernal selfish; I am—upon my soul I am.'

'I am sure you can't be selfish, Sir Mulberry!' replied Mrs Nickleby. 'You have much too open and generous a countenance for that.'

'What an extraordinary observer you are!' said Sir Mulberry Hawk.

'Oh no, indeed, I don't see very far into things, Sir Mulberry,' replied Mrs Nickleby, in a tone of voice which left the baronet to infer that she saw very far indeed.

'I am quite afraid of you,' said the baronet. 'Upon my soul,' repeated Sir Mulberry, looking round to his companions; 'I am afraid of Mrs Nickleby. She is so immensely sharp.'

Messrs Pyke and Pluck shook their heads mysteriously, and observed together that they had found that out long ago; upon which Mrs Nickleby tittered, and Sir Mulberry laughed, and Pyke and Pluck roared.

'But where's my brother-in-law, Sir Mulberry?' inquired Mrs Nickleby. 'I shouldn't be here without him. I hope he's coming.'

'Pyke,' said Sir Mulberry, taking out his toothpick and lolling back in his chair, as if he were too lazy to invent a reply to this question. 'Where's Ralph Nickleby?'

'Pluck,' said Pyke, imitating the baronet's action, and turning the lie over to his friend, 'where's Ralph Nickleby?'

Mr Pluck was about to return some evasive reply, when the hustle caused by a party entering the next box seemed to attract the attention of all four gentlemen, who exchanged glances of much meaning. The new party beginning to converse together, Sir Mulberry suddenly assumed the character of a most attentive listener, and implored his friends not to breathe—not to breathe.

'Why not?' said Mrs Nickleby. 'What is the matter?'

'Hush!' replied Sir Mulberry, laying his hand on her arm. 'Lord Frederick, do you recognise the tones of that voice?'

'Deyvle take me if I didn't think it was the voice of Miss Nickleby.'

'Lor, my lord!' cried Miss Nickleby's mama, thrusting her head round the curtain. 'Why actually—Kate, my dear, Kate.'

'YOU here, mama! Is it possible!'

'Possible, my dear? Yes.'

'Why who—who on earth is that you have with you, mama?' said Kate, shrinking back as she caught sight of a man smiling and kissing his hand.

'Who do you suppose, my dear?' replied Mrs Nickleby, bending towards Mrs Wititterly, and speaking a little louder for that lady's edification. 'There's Mr Pyke, Mr Pluck, Sir Mulberry Hawk, and Lord Frederick Verisopht.'

'Gracious Heaven!' thought Kate hurriedly. 'How comes she in such society?'

Now, Kate thought thus SO hurriedly, and the surprise was so great, and moreover brought back so forcibly the recollection of what had passed at

Ralph's delectable dinner, that she turned extremely pale and appeared greatly agitated, which symptoms being observed by Mrs Nickleby, were at once set down by that acute lady as being caused and occasioned by violent love. But, although she was in no small degree delighted by this discovery, which reflected so much credit on her own quickness of perception, it did not lessen her motherly anxiety in Kate's behalf; and accordingly, with a vast quantity of trepidation, she quitted her own box to hasten into that of Mrs Wititterly. Mrs Wititterly, keenly alive to the glory of having a lord and a baronet among her visiting acquaintance, lost no time in signing to Mr Wititterly to open the door, and thus it was that in less than thirty seconds Mrs Nickleby's party had made an irruption into Mrs Wititterly's box, which it filled to the very door, there being in fact only room for Messrs Pyke and Pluck to get in their heads and waistcoats.

'My dear Kate,' said Mrs Nickleby, kissing her daughter affectionately. 'How ill you looked a moment ago! You quite frightened me, I declare!'

'It was mere fancy, mama,—the—the—reflection of the lights perhaps,' replied Kate, glancing nervously round, and finding it impossible to whisper any caution or explanation.

'Don't you see Sir Mulberry Hawk, my dear?'

Kate bowed slightly, and biting her lip turned her head towards the stage.

But Sir Mulberry Hawk was not to be so easily repulsed, for he advanced with extended hand; and Mrs Nickleby officiously informing Kate of this circumstance, she was obliged to extend her own. Sir Mulberry detained it while he murmured a profusion of compliments, which Kate, remembering what had passed between them, rightly considered as so many aggravations of the insult he had already put upon her. Then followed the recognition of Lord Verisopht, and then the greeting of Mr Pyke, and then that of Mr Pluck, and finally, to complete the young lady's mortification, she was compelled at Mrs Wititterly's request to perform the ceremony of introducing the odious persons, whom she regarded with the utmost indignation and abhorrence.

'Mrs Wititterly is delighted,' said Mr Wititterly, rubbing his hands; 'delighted, my lord, I am sure, with this opportunity of contracting an acquaintance which, I trust, my lord, we shall improve. Julia, my dear, you must not allow yourself to be too much excited, you must not. Indeed you must not. Mrs Wititterly is of a most excitable nature, Sir Mulberry. The snuff of a candle, the wick of a lamp, the bloom on a peach, the down on a butterfly. You might blow her away, my lord; you might blow her away.'

Sir Mulberry seemed to think that it would be a great convenience if the lady could be blown away. He said, however, that the delight was mutual, and Lord Verisopht added that it was mutual, whereupon Messrs Pyke and Pluck were heard to murmur from the distance that it was very mutual indeed.

'I take an interest, my lord,' said Mrs Wititterly, with a faint smile, 'such an interest in the drama.'

'Ye—es. It's very interesting,' replied Lord Verisopht.

'I'm always ill after Shakespeare,' said Mrs Wititterly. 'I scarcely exist the next day; I find the reaction so very great after a tragedy, my lord, and Shakespeare is such a delicious creature.'

'Ye—es!' replied Lord Verisopht. 'He was a clayver man.'

'Do you know, my lord,' said Mrs Wititterly, after a long silence, 'I find I take so much more interest in his plays, after having been to that dear little dull house he was born in! Were you ever there, my lord?'

'No, nayver,' replied Verisopht.

'Then really you ought to go, my lord,' returned Mrs Wititterly, in very languid and drawling accents. 'I don't know how it is, but after you've seen the place and written your name in the little book, somehow or other you seem to be inspired; it kindles up quite a fire within one.'

'Ye—es!' replied Lord Verisopht, 'I shall certainly go there.'

'Julia, my life,' interposed Mr Wititterly, 'you are deceiving his lordship—unintentionally, my lord, she is deceiving you. It is your poetical temperament, my dear—your ethereal soul—your fervid imagination, which throws you into a glow of genius and excitement. There is nothing in the place, my dear—nothing, nothing.'

'I think there must be something in the place,' said Mrs Nickleby, who had been listening in silence; 'for, soon after I was married, I went to Stratford with my poor dear Mr Nickleby, in a post-chaise from Birmingham—was it a post-chaise though?' said Mrs Nickleby, considering; 'yes, it must have been a post-chaise, because I recollect remarking at the time that the driver had a green shade over his left eye;—in a post-chaise from Birmingham, and after we had seen Shakespeare's tomb and birthplace, we went back to the inn there, where we slept that night, and I recollect that all night long I dreamt of nothing but a black gentleman, at full length, in plaster-of-Paris, with a lay-down collar tied with two tassels, leaning against a post and thinking; and when I woke in the morning and described him to Mr Nickleby, he said it was Shakespeare just as he had been when he was alive, which was very curious indeed. Stratford—Stratford,' continued Mrs Nickleby, considering. 'Yes, I am positive about that, because I recollect I was in the family way with my son Nicholas at the time, and I had been very much frightened by an Italian image boy that very morning. In fact, it was quite a mercy, ma'am,' added Mrs Nickleby, in a whisper to Mrs Wititterly, 'that my son didn't turn out to be a Shakespeare, and what a dreadful thing that would have been!'

When Mrs Nickleby had brought this interesting anecdote to a close, Pyke and Pluck, ever zealous in their patron's cause, proposed the adjournment of a detachment of the party into the next box; and with so much skill were the preliminaries adjusted, that Kate, despite all she could say or do to the contrary, had no alternative but to suffer herself to be led away by Sir Mulberry Hawk. Her mother and Mr Pluck accompanied them, but the worthy lady, pluming herself upon her discretion, took particular care not so much as to look at her daughter during the whole evening, and to seem wholly absorbed in the jokes and conversation of Mr Pluck, who, having been appointed sentry over Mrs Nickleby for that especial purpose, neglected, on his side, no possible opportunity of engrossing her attention.

Lord Frederick Verisopht remained in the next box to be talked to by Mrs Wititterly, and Mr Pyke was in attendance to throw in a word or two when necessary. As to Mr Wititterly, he was sufficiently busy in the body of the house, informing such of his friends and acquaintance as happened to be there, that those two gentlemen upstairs, whom they had seen in conversation with Mrs W., were the distinguished Lord Frederick Verisopht and his most intimate friend, the gay Sir Mulberry Hawk—a communication which inflamed several respectable house-keepers with the utmost jealousy and rage, and reduced sixteen unmarried daughters to the very brink of despair.

The evening came to an end at last, but Kate had yet to be handed downstairs by the detested Sir Mulberry; and so skilfully were the manoeuvres of Messrs Pyke and Pluck conducted, that she and the baronet were the last of the party, and were even—without an appearance of effort or design—left at some little distance behind.

'Don't hurry, don't hurry,' said Sir Mulberry, as Kate hastened on, and attempted to release her arm.

She made no reply, but still pressed forward.

'Nay, then—' coolly observed Sir Mulberry, stopping her outright.

'You had best not seek to detain me, sir!' said Kate, angrily.

'And why not?' retorted Sir Mulberry. 'My dear creature, now why do you keep up this show of displeasure?'

'SHOW!' repeated Kate, indignantly. 'How dare you presume to speak to me, sir—to address me—to come into my presence?'

'You look prettier in a passion, Miss Nickleby,' said Sir Mulberry Hawk, stooping down, the better to see her face.

'I hold you in the bitterest detestation and contempt, sir,' said Kate. 'If you find any attraction in looks of disgust and aversion, you—let me rejoin my friends, sir, instantly. Whatever considerations may have withheld me thus far, I will disregard them all, and take a course that even YOU might feel, if you do not immediately suffer me to proceed.'

Sir Mulberry smiled, and still looking in her face and retaining her arm, walked towards the door.

'If no regard for my sex or helpless situation will induce you to desist from this coarse and unmanly persecution,' said Kate, scarcely knowing, in the tumult of her passions, what she said,—'I have a brother who will resent it dearly, one day.'

'Upon my soul!' exclaimed Sir Mulberry, as though quietly communing with himself; passing his arm round her waist as he spoke, 'she looks more beautiful, and I like her better in this mood, than when her eyes are cast down, and she is in perfect repose!'

How Kate reached the lobby where her friends were waiting she never knew, but she hurried across it without at all regarding them, and disengaged herself suddenly from her companion, sprang into the coach, and throwing herself into its darkest corner burst into tears.

Messrs Pyke and Pluck, knowing their cue, at once threw the party into great commotion by shouting for the carriages, and getting up a violent quarrel with sundry inoffensive bystanders; in the midst of which tumult they put the affrighted Mrs Nickleby in her chariot, and having got her safely off, turned their thoughts to Mrs Wititterly, whose attention also they had now effectually distracted from the young lady, by throwing her into a state of the utmost bewilderment and consternation. At length, the conveyance in which she had come rolled off too with its load, and the four worthies, being left alone under the portico, enjoyed a hearty laugh together.

'There,' said Sir Mulberry, turning to his noble friend. 'Didn't I tell you last night that if we could find where they were going by bribing a servant through my fellow, and then established ourselves close by with the mother, these people's honour would be our own? Why here it is, done in four-and-twenty hours.'

'Ye—es,' replied the dupe. 'But I have been tied to the old woman all ni-ight.'

'Hear him,' said Sir Mulberry, turning to his two friends. 'Hear this discontented grumbler. Isn't it enough to make a man swear never to help him in his plots and schemes again? Isn't it an infernal shame?'

Pyke asked Pluck whether it was not an infernal shame, and Pluck asked Pyke; but neither answered.

'Isn't it the truth?' demanded Verisopht. 'Wasn't it so?'

'Wasn't it so!' repeated Sir Mulberry. 'How would you have had it? How could we have got a general invitation at first sight—come when you like, go when you like, stop as long as you like, do what you like—if you, the lord, had not made yourself agreeable to the foolish mistress of the house? Do I care for this girl, except as your friend? Haven't I been sounding your praises in her ears, and bearing her pretty sulks and peevishness all night for you? What sort of stuff do you think I'm made of? Would I do this for every man? Don't I deserve even gratitude in return?'

'You're a deyvlish good fellow,' said the poor young lord, taking his friend's arm. 'Upon my life you're a deyvlish good fellow, Hawk.'

'And I have done right, have I?' demanded Sir Mulberry.

'Quite ri-ght.'

'And like a poor, silly, good-natured, friendly dog as I am, eh?'

'Ye—es, ye—es; like a friend,' replied the other.

'Well then,' replied Sir Mulberry, 'I'm satisfied. And now let's go and have our revenge on the German baron and the Frenchman, who cleaned you out so handsomely last night.'

With these words the friendly creature took his companion's arm and led him away, turning half round as he did so, and bestowing a wink and a contemptuous smile on Messrs Pyke and Pluck, who, cramming their handkerchiefs into their mouths to denote their silent enjoyment of the whole proceedings, followed their patron and his victim at a little distance.

CHAPTER 28

Miss Nickleby, rendered desperate by the Persecution of Sir Mulberry Hawk, and the Complicated Difficulties and Distresses which surround her, appeals, as a last resource, to her Uncle for Protection

The ensuing morning brought reflection with it, as morning usually does; but widely different was the train of thought it awakened in the different persons who had been so unexpectedly brought together on the preceding evening, by the active agency of Messrs Pyke and Pluck.

The reflections of Sir Mulberry Hawk—if such a term can be applied to the thoughts of the systematic and calculating man of dissipation, whose joys, regrets, pains, and pleasures, are all of self, and who would seem to retain nothing of the intellectual faculty but the power to debase himself, and to degrade the very nature whose outward semblance he wears—the reflections of Sir Mulberry Hawk turned upon Kate Nickleby, and were, in brief, that she was undoubtedly handsome; that her coyness MUST be easily conquerable by a man of his address and experience, and that the pursuit was one which could not fail to redound to his credit, and greatly to enhance his reputation with the world. And lest this last consideration—no mean or secondary one with Sir Mulberry—should sound strangely in the ears of some, let it be remembered that most men live in a world of their own, and that in that limited circle alone are they ambitious for distinction and applause. Sir Mulberry's world was peopled with profligates, and he acted accordingly.

Thus, cases of injustice, and oppression, and tyranny, and the most extravagant bigotry, are in constant occurrence among us every day. It is the custom to trumpet forth much wonder and astonishment at the chief actors therein setting at defiance so completely the opinion of the world; but there is no greater fallacy; it is precisely because they do consult the opinion of their own little world that such things take place at all, and strike the great world dumb with amazement.

The reflections of Mrs Nickleby were of the proudest and most complacent kind; and under the influence of her very agreeable delusion she straightway sat down and indited a long letter to Kate, in which she expressed her entire approval of the admirable choice she had made, and extolled Sir Mulberry to the skies; asserting, for the more complete satisfaction of her daughter's feelings, that he was precisely the individual whom she (Mrs Nickleby) would have chosen for her son-in-law, if she had had the picking and choosing from all mankind. The good lady then, with the preliminary observation that she might be fairly supposed not to have lived in the world so long without knowing its ways, communicated a great many subtle precepts applicable to the state of courtship, and confirmed in their wisdom by her own personal experience. Above all things she commended a strict maidenly reserve, as being not only a very laudable thing in itself, but as tending materially to strengthen and increase a lover's ardour. 'And I never,' added Mrs Nickleby, 'was more delighted in my life than to observe last night, my dear, that your good sense had already told you this.' With which sentiment, and various hints of the pleasure she derived from the knowledge that her daughter inherited so large an instalment of her own excellent sense and discretion (to nearly the full measure of which she might hope, with care, to succeed in time), Mrs Nickleby concluded a very long and rather illegible letter.

Poor Kate was well-nigh distracted on the receipt of four closely-written and closely-crossed sides of congratulation on the very subject which had prevented her closing her eyes all night, and kept her weeping and watching in her chamber; still worse and more trying was the necessity of rendering herself agreeable to Mrs Wititterly, who, being in low spirits after the fatigue of the preceding night, of course expected her companion (else wherefore had she board and salary?) to be in the best spirits possible. As to Mr Wititterly, he went about all day in a tremor of delight at having shaken hands with a lord, and having actually asked him to come and see him in his own house. The lord himself, not being troubled to any inconvenient extent with the power of thinking, regaled himself with the conversation of Messrs Pyke and Pluck, who sharpened their wit by a plentiful indulgence in various costly stimulants at his expense.

It was four in the afternoon—that is, the vulgar afternoon of the sun and the clock—and Mrs Wititterly reclined, according to custom, on the drawing-room sofa, while Kate read aloud a new novel in three volumes, entitled 'The Lady Flabella,' which Alphonse the doubtful had procured from the library that very morning. And it was a production admirably suited to a lady labouring under Mrs Wititterly's complaint, seeing that there was not a line in it, from beginning to end, which could, by the most remote contingency, awaken the smallest excitement in any person breathing.

Kate read on.

'"Cherizette," said the Lady Flabella, inserting her mouse-like feet in the blue satin slippers, which had unwittingly occasioned the half-playful half-angry altercation between herself and the youthful Colonel Befillaire, in the Duke of Mincefenille's SALON DE DANSE on the previous night. "CHERIZETTE, MA CHERE, DONNEZ-MOI DE L'EAU-DE-COLOGNE, S'IL VOUS PLAIT, MON ENFANT."

'"MERCIE—thank you," said the Lady Flabella, as the lively but devoted Cherizette plentifully besprinkled with the fragrant compound the Lady Flabella's MOUCHOIR of finest cambric, edged with richest lace, and emblazoned at the four corners with the Flabella crest, and gorgeous heraldic bearings of that noble family. "MERCIE—that will do."

'At this instant, while the Lady Flabella yet inhaled that delicious fragrance by holding the MOUCHOIR to her exquisite, but thoughtfully-chiselled nose, the door of the BOUDOIR (artfully concealed by rich hangings of silken damask, the hue of Italy's firmament) was thrown open, and with noiseless tread two VALETS-DE-CHAMBRE, clad in sumptuous liveries of peach-blossom and gold, advanced into the room followed by a page in BAS DE SOIE—silk stockings—who, while they remained at some distance making the most graceful obeisances, advanced to the feet of his lovely mistress, and dropping on one knee presented, on a golden salver gorgeously chased, a scented BILLET.

'The Lady Flabella, with an agitation she could not repress, hastily tore off the ENVELOPE and broke the scented seal. It WAS from Befillaire—the young, the slim, the low-voiced—HER OWN Befillaire.'

'Oh, charming!' interrupted Kate's patroness, who was sometimes taken literary. 'Poetic, really. Read that description again, Miss Nickleby.'

Kate complied.

'Sweet, indeed!' said Mrs Wititterly, with a sigh. 'So voluptuous, is it not—so soft?'

'Yes, I think it is,' replied Kate, gently; 'very soft.'

'Close the book, Miss Nickleby,' said Mrs Wititterly. 'I can hear nothing more today; I should be sorry to disturb the impression of that sweet description. Close the book.'

Kate complied, not unwillingly; and, as she did so, Mrs Wititterly raising her glass with a languid hand, remarked, that she looked pale.

'It was the fright of that—that noise and confusion last night,' said Kate.

'How very odd!' exclaimed Mrs Wititterly, with a look of surprise. And certainly, when one comes to think of it, it WAS very odd that anything should have disturbed a companion. A steam-engine, or other ingenious piece of mechanism out of order, would have been nothing to it.

'How did you come to know Lord Frederick, and those other delightful creatures, child?' asked Mrs Wititterly, still eyeing Kate through her glass.

'I met them at my uncle's,' said Kate, vexed to feel that she was colouring deeply, but unable to keep down the blood which rushed to her face whenever she thought of that man.

'Have you known them long?'

'No,' rejoined Kate. 'Not long.'

'I was very glad of the opportunity which that respectable person, your mother, gave us of being known to them,' said Mrs Wititterly, in a lofty manner. 'Some friends of ours were on the very point of introducing us, which makes it quite remarkable.'

This was said lest Miss Nickleby should grow conceited on the honour and dignity of having known four great people (for Pyke and Pluck were included among the delightful creatures), whom Mrs Wititterly did not know. But as the circumstance had made no impression one way or other upon Kate's mind, the force of the observation was quite lost upon her.

'They asked permission to call,' said Mrs Wititterly. 'I gave it them of course.'

'Do you expect them today?' Kate ventured to inquire.

Mrs Wititterly's answer was lost in the noise of a tremendous rapping at the street-door, and before it had ceased to vibrate, there drove up a handsome cabriolet, out of which leaped Sir Mulberry Hawk and his friend Lord Verisopht.

'They are here now,' said Kate, rising and hurrying away.

'Miss Nickleby!' cried Mrs Wititterly, perfectly aghast at a companion's attempting to quit the room, without her permission first had and obtained. 'Pray don't think of going.'

'You are very good!' replied Kate. 'But—'

'For goodness' sake, don't agitate me by making me speak so much,' said Mrs Wititterly, with great sharpness. 'Dear me, Miss Nickleby, I beg—'

It was in vain for Kate to protest that she was unwell, for the footsteps of the knockers, whoever they were, were already on the stairs. She resumed her seat, and had scarcely done so, when the doubtful page darted into the room and announced, Mr Pyke, and Mr Pluck, and Lord Verisopht, and Sir Mulberry Hawk, all at one burst.

'The most extraordinary thing in the world,' said Mr Pluck, saluting both ladies with the utmost cordiality; 'the most extraordinary thing. As Lord Frederick and Sir Mulberry drove up to the door, Pyke and I had that instant knocked.'

'That instant knocked,' said Pyke.

'No matter how you came, so that you are here,' said Mrs Wititterly, who, by dint of lying on the same sofa for three years and a half, had got up quite a little pantomime of graceful attitudes, and now threw herself into the most striking of the whole series, to astonish the visitors. 'I am delighted, I am sure.'

'And how is Miss Nickleby?' said Sir Mulberry Hawk, accosting Kate, in a low voice—not so low, however, but that it reached the ears of Mrs Wititterly.

'Why, she complains of suffering from the fright of last night,' said the lady. 'I am sure I don't wonder at it, for my nerves are quite torn to pieces.'

'And yet you look,' observed Sir Mulberry, turning round; 'and yet you look—'

'Beyond everything,' said Mr Pyke, coming to his patron's assistance. Of course Mr Pluck said the same.

'I am afraid Sir Mulberry is a flatterer, my lord,' said Mrs Wititterly, turning to that young gentleman, who had been sucking the head of his cane in silence, and staring at Kate.

'Oh, deyvlish!' replied Verisopht. Having given utterance to which remarkable sentiment, he occupied himself as before.

'Neither does Miss Nickleby look the worse,' said Sir Mulberry, bending his bold gaze upon her. 'She was always handsome, but upon my soul, ma'am, you seem to have imparted some of your own good looks to her besides.'

To judge from the glow which suffused the poor girl's countenance after this speech, Mrs Wititterly might, with some show of reason, have been supposed to have imparted to it some of that artificial bloom which decorated her own. Mrs Wititterly admitted, though not with the best grace in the world, that Kate DID look pretty. She began to think, too, that Sir Mulberry was not quite so agreeable a creature as she had at first supposed him; for, although a skilful flatterer is a most delightful companion if you can keep him all to yourself, his taste becomes very doubtful when he takes to complimenting other people.

'Pyke,' said the watchful Mr Pluck, observing the effect which the praise of Miss Nickleby had produced.

'Well, Pluck,' said Pyke.

'Is there anybody,' demanded Mr Pluck, mysteriously, 'anybody you know, that Mrs Wititterly's profile reminds you of?'

'Reminds me of!' answered Pyke. 'Of course there is.'

'Who do you mean?' said Pluck, in the same mysterious manner. 'The D. of B.?'

'The C. of B.,' replied Pyke, with the faintest trace of a grin lingering in his countenance. 'The beautiful sister is the countess; not the duchess.'

'True,' said Pluck, 'the C. of B. The resemblance is wonderful!'

'Perfectly startling,' said Mr Pyke.

Here was a state of things! Mrs Wititterly was declared, upon the testimony of two veracious and competent witnesses, to be the very picture of a countess! This was one of the consequences of getting into good society. Why, she might have moved among grovelling people for twenty years, and never heard of it. How could she, indeed? what did THEY know about countesses?

The two gentlemen having, by the greediness with which this little bait was swallowed, tested the extent of Mrs Wititterly's appetite for adulation, proceeded to administer that commodity in very large doses, thus affording to Sir Mulberry Hawk an opportunity of pestering Miss Nickleby with questions and remarks, to which she was absolutely obliged to make some reply. Meanwhile, Lord Verisopht enjoyed unmolested the full flavour of the gold knob at the top of his cane, as he would have done to the end of the interview if Mr Wititterly had not come home, and caused the conversation to turn to his favourite topic.

'My lord,' said Mr Wititterly, 'I am delighted—honoured—proud. Be seated again, my lord, pray. I am proud, indeed—most proud.'

It was to the secret annoyance of his wife that Mr Wititterly said all this, for, although she was bursting with pride and arrogance, she would have had the illustrious guests believe that their visit was quite a common occurrence, and that they had lords and baronets to see them every day in the week. But Mr Wititterly's feelings were beyond the power of suppression.

'It is an honour, indeed!' said Mr Wititterly. 'Julia, my soul, you will suffer for this tomorrow.'

'Suffer!' cried Lord Verisopht.

'The reaction, my lord, the reaction,' said Mr Wititterly. 'This violent strain upon the nervous system over, my lord, what ensues? A sinking, a depression, a lowness, a lassitude, a debility. My lord, if Sir Tumley Snuffim was to see that delicate creature at this moment, he would not give a—a—THIS for her life.' In illustration of which remark, Mr Wititterly took a pinch of snuff from his box, and jerked it lightly into the air as an emblem of instability.

'Not THAT,' said Mr Wititterly, looking about him with a serious countenance. 'Sir Tumley Snuffim would not give that for Mrs Wititterly's existence.'

Mr Wititterly told this with a kind of sober exultation, as if it were no trifling distinction for a man to have a wife in such a desperate state, and Mrs Wititterly sighed and looked on, as if she felt the honour, but had determined to bear it as meekly as might be.

'Mrs Wititterly,' said her husband, 'is Sir Tumley Snuffim's favourite patient. I believe I may venture to say, that Mrs Wititterly is the first person who took the new medicine which is supposed to have destroyed a family at Kensington Gravel Pits. I believe she was. If I am wrong, Julia, my dear, you will correct me.'

'I believe I was,' said Mrs Wititterly, in a faint voice.

As there appeared to be some doubt in the mind of his patron how he could best join in this conversation, the indefatigable Mr Pyke threw himself into the breach, and, by way of saying something to the point, inquired—with reference to the aforesaid medicine—whether it was nice.

'No, sir, it was not. It had not even that recommendation,' said Mr W.

'Mrs Wititterly is quite a martyr,' observed Pyke, with a complimentary bow.

'I THINK I am,' said Mrs Wititterly, smiling.

'I think you are, my dear Julia,' replied her husband, in a tone which seemed to say that he was not vain, but still must insist upon their privileges. 'If anybody, my lord,' added Mr Wititterly, wheeling round to the nobleman, 'will produce to me a greater martyr than Mrs Wititterly, all I can say is, that I shall be glad to see that martyr, whether male or female—that's all, my lord.'

Pyke and Pluck promptly remarked that certainly nothing could be fairer than that; and the call having been by this time protracted to a very great length, they obeyed Sir Mulberry's look, and rose to go. This brought Sir Mulberry himself and Lord Verisopht on their legs also. Many protestations of friendship, and expressions anticipative of the pleasure which must inevitably flow from so happy an acquaintance, were exchanged, and the visitors departed, with renewed assurances that at all times and seasons the mansion of the Wititterlys would be honoured by receiving them beneath its roof.

That they came at all times and seasons—that they dined there one day, supped the next, dined again on the next, and were constantly to and fro on all—that they made parties to visit public places, and met by accident at lounges—that upon all these occasions Miss Nickleby was exposed to the constant and unremitting persecution of Sir Mulberry Hawk, who now began to feel his character, even in the estimation of his two dependants, involved in the successful reduction of her pride—that she had no intervals of peace or rest, except at those hours when she could sit in her solitary room, and weep over the trials of the day—all these were consequences naturally flowing from the well-laid plans of Sir Mulberry, and their able execution by the auxiliaries, Pyke and Pluck.

And thus for a fortnight matters went on. That any but the weakest and silliest of people could have seen in one interview that Lord Verisopht, though he was a lord, and Sir Mulberry Hawk, though he was a baronet, were not persons accustomed to be the best possible companions, and were certainly not calculated by habits, manners, tastes, or conversation, to shine with any very great lustre in the society of ladies, need scarcely be remarked. But with Mrs Wititterly the two titles were all sufficient; coarseness became humour, vulgarity softened itself down into the most charming eccentricity; insolence took the guise of an easy absence of reserve, attainable only by those who had had the good fortune to mix with high folks.

If the mistress put such a construction upon the behaviour of her new friends, what could the companion urge against them? If they accustomed themselves to very little restraint before the lady of the house, with how much more freedom could they address her paid dependent! Nor was even this the worst. As the odious Sir Mulberry Hawk attached himself to Kate with less and less of disguise, Mrs Wititterly began to grow jealous of the superior attractions of Miss Nickleby. If this feeling had led to her banishment from the drawing-room when such company was there, Kate would have been only too happy and willing that it should have existed, but unfortunately for her she possessed that native grace and true gentility of manner, and those thousand nameless accomplishments which give to female society its greatest charm; if these be valuable anywhere, they were especially so where the lady of the house was a mere animated doll. The consequence was, that Kate had the double mortification of being an indispensable part of the circle when Sir Mulberry and his friends were there, and of being exposed, on that very account, to all Mrs Wititterly's ill-humours and caprices when they were gone. She became utterly and completely miserable.

Mrs Wititterly had never thrown off the mask with regard to Sir Mulberry, but when she was more than usually out of temper, attributed the circumstance, as ladies sometimes do, to nervous indisposition. However, as the dreadful idea that Lord Verisopht also was somewhat taken with Kate, and that she, Mrs Wititterly, was quite a secondary person, dawned upon that lady's mind and gradually developed itself, she became possessed with a large quantity of highly proper and most virtuous indignation, and felt it her duty, as a married lady and a moral member of society, to mention the circumstance to 'the young person' without delay.

Accordingly Mrs Wititterly broke ground next morning, during a pause in the novel-reading.

'Miss Nickleby,' said Mrs Wititterly, 'I wish to speak to you very gravely. I am sorry to have to do it, upon my word I am very sorry, but you leave me no alternative, Miss Nickleby.' Here Mrs Wititterly tossed her head—not passionately, only virtuously—and remarked, with some appearance of excitement, that she feared that palpitation of the heart was coming on again.

'Your behaviour, Miss Nickleby,' resumed the lady, 'is very far from pleasing me—very far. I am very anxious indeed that you should do well, but you may depend upon it, Miss Nickleby, you will not, if you go on as you do.'

'Ma'am!' exclaimed Kate, proudly.

'Don't agitate me by speaking in that way, Miss Nickleby, don't,' said Mrs Wititterly, with some violence, 'or you'll compel me to ring the bell.'

Kate looked at her, but said nothing.

'You needn't suppose,' resumed Mrs Wititterly, 'that your looking at me in that way, Miss Nickleby, will prevent my saying what I am going to say, which I feel to be a religious duty. You needn't direct your glances towards me,' said Mrs Wititterly, with a sudden burst of spite; 'I am not Sir Mulberry, no, nor Lord Frederick Verisopht, Miss Nickleby, nor am I Mr Pyke, nor Mr Pluck either.'

Kate looked at her again, but less steadily than before; and resting her elbow on the table, covered her eyes with her hand.

'If such things had been done when I was a young girl,' said Mrs Wititterly (this, by the way, must have been some little time before), 'I don't suppose anybody would have believed it.'

'I don't think they would,' murmured Kate. 'I do not think anybody would believe, without actually knowing it, what I seem doomed to undergo!'

'Don't talk to me of being doomed to undergo, Miss Nickleby, if you please,' said Mrs Wititterly, with a shrillness of tone quite surprising in so great an invalid. 'I will not be answered, Miss Nickleby. I am not accustomed to be answered, nor will I permit it for an instant. Do you hear?' she added, waiting with some apparent inconsistency FOR an answer.

'I do hear you, ma'am,' replied Kate, 'with surprise—with greater surprise than I can express.'

'I have always considered you a particularly well-behaved young person for your station in life,' said Mrs Wititterly; 'and as you are a person of healthy appearance, and neat in your dress and so forth, I have taken an interest in you, as I do still, considering that I owe a sort of duty to that respectable old female, your mother. For these reasons, Miss Nickleby, I must tell you once for all, and begging you to mind what I say, that I must insist upon your immediately altering your very forward behaviour to the gentleman who visit at this house. It really is not becoming,' said Mrs Wititterly, closing her chaste eyes as she spoke; 'it is improper—quite improper.'

'Oh!' cried Kate, looking upwards and clasping her hands; 'is not this, is not this, too cruel, too hard to bear! Is it not enough that I should have suffered as I have, night and day; that I should almost have sunk in my own estimation from very shame of having been brought into contact with such people; but must I also be exposed to this unjust and most unfounded charge!'

'You will have the goodness to recollect, Miss Nickleby,' said Mrs Wititterly, 'that when you use such terms as "unjust", and "unfounded", you charge me, in effect, with stating that which is untrue.'

'I do,' said Kate with honest indignation. 'Whether you make this accusation of yourself, or at the prompting of others, is alike to me. I say it IS vilely, grossly, wilfully untrue. Is it possible!' cried Kate, 'that anyone of my own sex can have sat by, and not have seen the misery these men have caused me? Is it possible that you, ma'am, can have been present, and failed to mark the insulting freedom that their every look bespoke? Is it possible that you can have avoided seeing, that these libertines, in their utter disrespect for you, and utter disregard of all gentlemanly behaviour, and almost of decency, have had but one object in introducing themselves here, and that the furtherance of their designs upon a friendless, helpless girl, who, without this humiliating confession, might have hoped to receive from one so much her senior something like womanly aid and sympathy? I do not —I cannot believe it!'

If poor Kate had possessed the slightest knowledge of the world, she certainly would not have ventured, even in the excitement into which she had been lashed, upon such an injudicious speech as this. Its effect was precisely what a more experienced observer would have foreseen. Mrs Wititterly received the attack upon her veracity with exemplary calmness, and listened with the most heroic fortitude to Kate's account of her own sufferings. But allusion being made to her being held in disregard by the gentlemen, she evinced violent emotion, and this blow was no sooner followed up by the remark concerning her seniority, than she fell back upon the sofa, uttering dismal screams.

'What is the matter?' cried Mr Wititterly, bouncing into the room. 'Heavens, what do I see? Julia! Julia! look up, my life, look up!'

But Julia looked down most perseveringly, and screamed still louder; so Mr Wititterly rang the bell, and danced in a frenzied manner round the sofa on which Mrs Wititterly lay; uttering perpetual cries for Sir Tumley Snuffim, and never once leaving off to ask for any explanation of the scene before him.

'Run for Sir Tumley,' cried Mr Wititterly, menacing the page with both fists. 'I knew it, Miss Nickleby,' he said, looking round with an air of melancholy triumph, 'that society has been too much for her. This is all soul, you know, every bit of it.' With this assurance Mr Wititterly took up the prostrate form of Mrs Wititterly, and carried her bodily off to bed.

Kate waited until Sir Tumley Snuffim had paid his visit and looked in with a report, that, through the special interposition of a merciful Providence (thus spake Sir Tumley), Mrs Wititterly had gone to sleep. She then hastily attired herself for walking, and leaving word that she should return within a couple of hours, hurried away towards her uncle's house.

It had been a good day with Ralph Nickleby—quite a lucky day; and as he walked to and fro in his little back-room with his hands clasped behind him, adding up in his own mind all the sums that had been, or would be, netted from the business done since morning, his mouth was drawn into a hard stern smile; while the firmness of the lines and curves that made it up, as well as the cunning glance of his cold, bright eye, seemed to tell, that if any resolution or cunning would increase the profits, they would not fail to be excited for the purpose.

'Very good!' said Ralph, in allusion, no doubt, to some proceeding of the day. 'He defies the usurer, does he? Well, we shall see. "Honesty is the best policy," is it? We'll try that too.'

He stopped, and then walked on again.

'He is content,' said Ralph, relaxing into a smile, 'to set his known character and conduct against the power of money—dross, as he calls it. Why, what a dull blockhead this fellow must be! Dross to, dross! Who's that?'

'Me,' said Newman Noggs, looking in. 'Your niece.'

'What of her?' asked Ralph sharply.

'She's here.'

'Here!'

Newman jerked his head towards his little room, to signify that she was waiting there.

'What does she want?' asked Ralph.

'I don't know,' rejoined Newman. 'Shall I ask?' he added quickly.

'No,' replied Ralph. 'Show her in! Stay.' He hastily put away a padlocked cash-box that was on the table, and substituted in its stead an empty purse. 'There,' said Ralph. 'NOW she may come in.'

Newman, with a grim smile at this manoeuvre, beckoned the young lady to advance, and having placed a chair for her, retired; looking stealthily over his shoulder at Ralph as he limped slowly out.

'Well,' said Ralph, roughly enough; but still with something more of kindness in his manner than he would have exhibited towards anybody else. 'Well, my—dear. What now?'

Kate raised her eyes, which were filled with tears; and with an effort to master her emotion strove to speak, but in vain. So drooping her head again, she remained silent. Her face was hidden from his view, but Ralph could see that she was weeping.

'I can guess the cause of this!' thought Ralph, after looking at her for some time in silence. 'I can—I can—guess the cause. Well! Well!' thought Ralph—for the moment quite disconcerted, as he watched the anguish of his beautiful niece. 'Where is the harm? only a few tears; and it's an excellent lesson for her, an excellent lesson.'

'What is the matter?' asked Ralph, drawing a chair opposite, and sitting down.

He was rather taken aback by the sudden firmness with which Kate looked up and answered him.

'The matter which brings me to you, sir,' she said, 'is one which should call the blood up into your cheeks, and make you burn to hear, as it does me to tell. I have been wronged; my feelings have been outraged, insulted, wounded past all healing, and by your friends.'

'Friends!' cried Ralph, sternly. 'I have no friends, girl.'

'By the men I saw here, then,' returned Kate, quickly. 'If they were no friends of yours, and you knew what they were,—oh, the more shame on you, uncle, for bringing me among them. To have subjected me to what I was exposed to here, through any misplaced confidence or imperfect knowledge of your guests, would have required some strong excuse; but if you did it—as I now believe you did—knowing them well, it was most dastardly and cruel.'

Ralph drew back in utter amazement at this plain speaking, and regarded Kate with the sternest look. But she met his gaze proudly and firmly, and although her face was very pale, it looked more noble and handsome, lighted up as it was, than it had ever appeared before.

'There is some of that boy's blood in you, I see,' said Ralph, speaking in his harshest tones, as something in the flashing eye reminded him of

Nicholas at their last meeting.

'I hope there is!' replied Kate. 'I should be proud to know it. I am young, uncle, and all the difficulties and miseries of my situation have kept it down, but I have been roused today beyond all endurance, and come what may, I WILL NOT, as I am your brother's child, bear these insults longer.'

'What insults, girl?' demanded Ralph, sharply.

'Remember what took place here, and ask yourself,' replied Kate, colouring deeply. 'Uncle, you must—I am sure you will—release me from such vile and degrading companionship as I am exposed to now. I do not mean,' said Kate, hurrying to the old man, and laying her arm upon his shoulder; 'I do not mean to be angry and violent—I beg your pardon if I have seemed so, dear uncle,—but you do not know what I have suffered, you do not indeed. You cannot tell what the heart of a young girl is—I have no right to expect you should; but when I tell you that I am wretched, and that my heart is breaking, I am sure you will help me. I am sure, I am sure you will!'

Ralph looked at her for an instant; then turned away his head, and beat his foot nervously upon the ground.

'I have gone on day after day,' said Kate, bending over him, and timidly placing her little hand in his, 'in the hope that this persecution would cease; I have gone on day after day, compelled to assume the appearance of cheerfulness, when I was most unhappy. I have had no counsellor, no adviser, no one to protect me. Mama supposes that these are honourable men, rich and distinguished, and how CAN I—how can I undeceive her—when she is so happy in these little delusions, which are the only happiness she has? The lady with whom you placed me, is not the person to whom I could confide matters of so much delicacy, and I have come at last to you, the only friend I have at hand—almost the only friend I have at all—to entreat and implore you to assist me.'

'How can I assist you, child?' said Ralph, rising from his chair, and pacing up and down the room in his old attitude.

'You have influence with one of these men, I KNOW,' rejoined Kate, emphatically. 'Would not a word from you induce them to desist from this unmanly course?'

'No,' said Ralph, suddenly turning; 'at least—that—I can't say it, if it would.'

'Can't say it!'

'No,' said Ralph, coming to a dead stop, and clasping his hands more tightly behind him. 'I can't say it.'

Kate fell back a step or two, and looked at him, as if in doubt whether she had heard aright.

'We are connected in business,' said Ralph, poising himself alternately on his toes and heels, and looking coolly in his niece's face, 'in business, and I can't afford to offend them. What is it after all? We have all our trials, and this is one of yours. Some girls would be proud to have such gallants at their feet.'

'Proud!' cried Kate.

'I don't say,' rejoined Ralph, raising his forefinger, 'but that you do right to despise them; no, you show your good sense in that, as indeed I knew from the first you would. Well. In all other respects you are comfortably bestowed. It's not much to bear. If this young lord does dog your footsteps, and whisper his drivelling inanities in your ears, what of it? It's a dishonourable passion. So be it; it won't last long. Some other novelty will spring up one day, and you will be released. In the mean time—'

'In the mean time,' interrupted Kate, with becoming pride and indignation, 'I am to be the scorn of my own sex, and the toy of the other; justly condemned by all women of right feeling, and despised by all honest and honourable men; sunken in my own esteem, and degraded in every eye that looks upon me. No, not if I work my fingers to the bone, not if I am driven to the roughest and hardest labour. Do not mistake me. I will not disgrace your recommendation. I will remain in the house in which it placed me, until I am entitled to leave it by the terms of my engagement; though, mind, I see these men no more. When I quit it, I will hide myself from them and you, and, striving to support my mother by hard service, I will live, at least, in peace, and trust in God to help me.'

With these words, she waved her hand, and quitted the room, leaving Ralph Nickleby motionless as a statue.

The surprise with which Kate, as she closed the room-door, beheld, close beside it, Newman Noggs standing bolt upright in a little niche in the wall like some scarecrow or Guy Faux laid up in winter quarters, almost occasioned her to call aloud. But, Newman laying his finger upon his lips, she had the presence of mind to refrain.

'Don't,' said Newman, gliding out of his recess, and accompanying her across the hall. 'Don't cry, don't cry.' Two very large tears, by-the-bye, were running down Newman's face as he spoke.

'I see how it is,' said poor Noggs, drawing from his pocket what seemed to be a very old duster, and wiping Kate's eyes with it, as gently as if she were an infant. 'You're giving way now. Yes, yes, very good; that's right, I like that. It was right not to give way before him. Yes, yes! Ha, ha, ha! Oh, yes. Poor thing!'

With these disjointed exclamations, Newman wiped his own eyes with the afore-mentioned duster, and, limping to the street-door, opened it to let her out.

'Don't cry any more,' whispered Newman. 'I shall see you soon. Ha! ha! ha! And so shall somebody else too. Yes, yes. Ho! ho!'

'God bless you,' answered Kate, hurrying out, 'God bless you.'

'Same to you,' rejoined Newman, opening the door again a little way to say so. 'Ha, ha, ha! Ho! ho! ho!'

And Newman Noggs opened the door once again to nod cheerfully, and laugh—and shut it, to shake his head mournfully, and cry.

Ralph remained in the same attitude till he heard the noise of the closing door, when he shrugged his shoulders, and after a few turns about the room—hasty at first, but gradually becoming slower, as he relapsed into himself—sat down before his desk.

It is one of those problems of human nature, which may be noted down, but not solved;—although Ralph felt no remorse at that moment for his conduct towards the innocent, true-hearted girl; although his libertine clients had done precisely what he had expected, precisely what he most wished, and precisely what would tend most to his advantage, still he hated them for doing it, from the very bottom of his soul.

'Ugh!' said Ralph, scowling round, and shaking his clenched hand as the faces of the two profligates rose up before his mind; 'you shall pay for this. Oh! you shall pay for this!'

As the usurer turned for consolation to his books and papers, a performance was going on outside his office door, which would have occasioned him no small surprise, if he could by any means have become acquainted with it.

Newman Noggs was the sole actor. He stood at a little distance from the door, with his face towards it; and with the sleeves of his coat turned back at the wrists, was occupied in bestowing the most vigorous, scientific, and straightforward blows upon the empty air.

At first sight, this would have appeared merely a wise precaution in a man of sedentary habits, with the view of opening the chest and strengthening the muscles of the arms. But the intense eagerness and joy depicted in the face of Newman Noggs, which was suffused with perspiration; the surprising energy with which he directed a constant succession of blows towards a particular panel about five feet eight from the ground, and still worked away in the most untiring and persevering manner, would have sufficiently explained to the attentive observer, that his imagination was thrashing, to within an inch of his life, his body's most active employer, Mr Ralph Nickleby.

CHAPTER 29

Of the Proceedings of Nicholas, and certain Internal Divisions in the Company of Mr Vincent Crummles

The unexpected success and favour with which his experiment at Portsmouth had been received, induced Mr Crummles to prolong his stay in that town for a fortnight beyond the period he had originally assigned for the duration of his visit, during which time Nicholas personated a vast variety of characters with undiminished success, and attracted so many people to the theatre who had never been seen there before, that a benefit was considered by the manager a very promising speculation. Nicholas assenting to the terms proposed, the benefit was had, and by it he realised no less a sum than twenty pounds.

Possessed of this unexpected wealth, his first act was to enclose to honest John Browdie the amount of his friendly loan, which he accompanied with many expressions of gratitude and esteem, and many cordial wishes for his matrimonial happiness. To Newman Noggs he forwarded one half of the sum he had realised, entreating him to take an opportunity of handing it to Kate in secret, and conveying to her the warmest assurances of his love and affection. He made no mention of the way in which he had employed himself; merely informing Newman that a letter addressed to him under his assumed name at the Post Office, Portsmouth, would readily find him, and entreating that worthy friend to write full particulars of the situation of his mother and sister, and an account of all the grand things that Ralph Nickleby had done for them since his departure from London.

'You are out of spirits,' said Smike, on the night after the letter had been dispatched.

'Not I!' rejoined Nicholas, with assumed gaiety, for the confession would have made the boy miserable all night; 'I was thinking about my sister, Smike.'

'Sister!'

'Ay.'

'Is she like you?' inquired Smike.

'Why, so they say,' replied Nicholas, laughing, 'only a great deal handsomer.'

'She must be VERY beautiful,' said Smike, after thinking a little while with his hands folded together, and his eyes bent upon his friend.

'Anybody who didn't know you as well as I do, my dear fellow, would say you were an accomplished courtier,' said Nicholas.

'I don't even know what that is,' replied Smike, shaking his head. 'Shall I ever see your sister?'

'To be sure,' cried Nicholas; 'we shall all be together one of these days—when we are rich, Smike.'

'How is it that you, who are so kind and good to me, have nobody to be kind to you?' asked Smike. 'I cannot make that out.'

'Why, it is a long story,' replied Nicholas, 'and one you would have some difficulty in comprehending, I fear. I have an enemy—you understand what that is?'

'Oh, yes, I understand that,' said Smike.

'Well, it is owing to him,' returned Nicholas. 'He is rich, and not so easily punished as YOUR old enemy, Mr Squeers. He is my uncle, but he is a villain, and has done me wrong.'

'Has he though?' asked Smike, bending eagerly forward. 'What is his name? Tell me his name.'

'Ralph—Ralph Nickleby.'

'Ralph Nickleby,' repeated Smike. 'Ralph. I'll get that name by heart.'

He had muttered it over to himself some twenty times, when a loud knock at the door disturbed him from his occupation. Before he could open it, Mr Folair, the pantomimist, thrust in his head.

Mr Folair's head was usually decorated with a very round hat, unusually high in the crown, and curled up quite tight in the brims. On the present occasion he wore it very much on one side, with the back part forward in consequence of its being the least rusty; round his neck he wore a flaming red worsted comforter, whereof the straggling ends peeped out beneath his threadbare Newmarket coat, which was very tight and buttoned all the way up. He carried in his hand one very dirty glove, and a cheap dress cane with a glass handle; in short, his whole appearance was unusually dashing, and demonstrated a far more scrupulous attention to his toilet than he was in the habit of bestowing upon it.

'Good-evening, sir,' said Mr Folair, taking off the tall hat, and running his fingers through his hair. 'I bring a communication. Hem!'

'From whom and what about?' inquired Nicholas. 'You are unusually mysterious tonight.'

'Cold, perhaps,' returned Mr Folair; 'cold, perhaps. That is the fault of my position—not of myself, Mr Johnson. My position as a mutual friend requires it, sir.' Mr Folair paused with a most impressive look, and diving into the hat before noticed, drew from thence a small piece of whity-brown paper curiously folded, whence he brought forth a note which it had served to keep clean, and handing it over to Nicholas, said—

'Have the goodness to read that, sir.'

Nicholas, in a state of much amazement, took the note and broke the seal, glancing at Mr Folair as he did so, who, knitting his brow and pursing up his mouth with great dignity, was sitting with his eyes steadily fixed upon the ceiling.

It was directed to blank Johnson, Esq., by favour of Augustus Folair, Esq.; and the astonishment of Nicholas was in no degree lessened, when he found it to be couched in the following laconic terms:—

"Mr Lenville presents his kind regards to Mr Johnson, and will feel obliged if he will inform him at what hour tomorrow morning it will be most convenient to him to meet Mr L. at the Theatre, for the purpose of having his nose pulled in the presence of the company.

"Mr Lenville requests Mr Johnson not to neglect making an appointment, as he has invited two or three professional friends to witness the ceremony, and cannot disappoint them upon any account whatever.

"PORTSMOUTH, TUESDAY NIGHT."

Indignant as he was at this impertinence, there was something so exquisitely absurd in such a cartel of defiance, that Nicholas was obliged to bite his lip and read the note over two or three times before he could muster sufficient gravity and sternness to address the hostile messenger, who had not taken his eyes from the ceiling, nor altered the expression of his face in the slightest degree.

'Do you know the contents of this note, sir?' he asked, at length.

'Yes,' rejoined Mr Folair, looking round for an instant, and immediately carrying his eyes back again to the ceiling.

'And how dare you bring it here, sir?' asked Nicholas, tearing it into very little pieces, and jerking it in a shower towards the messenger. 'Had you no fear of being kicked downstairs, sir?'

Mr Folair turned his head—now ornamented with several fragments of the note—towards Nicholas, and with the same imperturbable dignity, briefly replied 'No.'

'Then,' said Nicholas, taking up the tall hat and tossing it towards the door, 'you had better follow that article of your dress, sir, or you may find yourself very disagreeably deceived, and that within a dozen seconds.'

'I say, Johnson,' remonstrated Mr Folair, suddenly losing all his dignity, 'none of that, you know. No tricks with a gentleman's wardrobe.'

'Leave the room,' returned Nicholas. 'How could you presume to come here on such an errand, you scoundrel?'

'Pooh! pooh!' said Mr Folair, unwinding his comforter, and gradually getting himself out of it. 'There—that's enough.'

'Enough!' cried Nicholas, advancing towards him. 'Take yourself off, sir.'

'Pooh! pooh! I tell you,' returned Mr Folair, waving his hand in deprecation of any further wrath; 'I wasn't in earnest. I only brought it in joke.'

'You had better be careful how you indulge in such jokes again,' said Nicholas, 'or you may find an allusion to pulling noses rather a dangerous reminder for the subject of your facetiousness. Was it written in joke, too, pray?'

'No, no, that's the best of it,' returned the actor; 'right down earnest—honour bright.'

Nicholas could not repress a smile at the odd figure before him, which, at all times more calculated to provoke mirth than anger, was especially so at that moment, when with one knee upon the ground, Mr Folair twirled his old hat round upon his hand, and affected the extremest agony lest any of the nap should have been knocked off—an ornament which it is almost superfluous to say, it had not boasted for many months.

'Come, sir,' said Nicholas, laughing in spite of himself. 'Have the goodness to explain.'

'Why, I'll tell you how it is,' said Mr Folair, sitting himself down in a chair with great coolness. 'Since you came here Lenville has done nothing but second business, and, instead of having a reception every night as he used to have, they have let him come on as if he was nobody.'

'What do you mean by a reception?' asked Nicholas.

'Jupiter!' exclaimed Mr Folair, 'what an unsophisticated shepherd you are, Johnson! Why, applause from the house when you first come on. So he has gone on night after night, never getting a hand, and you getting a couple of rounds at least, and sometimes three, till at length he got quite desperate, and had half a mind last night to play Tybalt with a real sword, and pink you—not dangerously, but just enough to lay you up for a month or two.'

'Very considerate,' remarked Nicholas.

'Yes, I think it was under the circumstances; his professional reputation being at stake,' said Mr Folair, quite seriously. 'But his heart failed him, and he cast about for some other way of annoying you, and making himself popular at the same time—for that's the point. Notoriety, notoriety, is the thing. Bless you, if he had pinked you,' said Mr Folair, stopping to make a calculation in his mind, 'it would have been worth—ah, it would have been worth eight or ten shillings a week to him. All the town would have come to see the actor who nearly killed a man by mistake; I shouldn't wonder if it had got him an engagement in London. However, he was obliged to try some other mode of getting popular, and this one occurred to him. It's clever idea, really. If you had shown the white feather, and let him pull your nose, he'd have got it into the paper; if you had sworn the peace against him, it would have been in the paper too, and he'd have been just as much talked about as you—don't you see?'

'Oh, certainly,' rejoined Nicholas; 'but suppose I were to turn the tables, and pull HIS nose, what then? Would that make his fortune?'

'Why, I don't think it would,' replied Mr Folair, scratching his head, 'because there wouldn't be any romance about it, and he wouldn't be favourably known. To tell you the truth though, he didn't calculate much upon that, for you're always so mild-spoken, and are so popular among the women, that we didn't suspect you of showing fight. If you did, however, he has a way of getting out of it easily, depend upon that.'

'Has he?' rejoined Nicholas. 'We will try, tomorrow morning. In the meantime, you can give whatever account of our interview you like best. Good-night.'

As Mr Folair was pretty well known among his fellow-actors for a man who delighted in mischief, and was by no means scrupulous, Nicholas had not much doubt but that he had secretly prompted the tragedian in the course he had taken, and, moreover, that he would have carried his mission with a very high hand if he had not been disconcerted by the very unexpected demonstrations with which it had been received. It was not worth his while to be serious with him, however, so he dismissed the pantomimist, with a gentle hint that if he offended again it would be under the penalty of a broken head; and Mr Folair, taking the caution in exceedingly good part, walked away to confer with his principal, and give such an account of his proceedings as he might think best calculated to carry on the joke.

He had no doubt reported that Nicholas was in a state of extreme bodily fear; for when that young gentleman walked with much deliberation down to the theatre next morning at the usual hour, he found all the company assembled in evident expectation, and Mr Lenville, with his severest stage face, sitting majestically on a table, whistling defiance.

Now the ladies were on the side of Nicholas, and the gentlemen (being jealous) were on the side of the disappointed tragedian; so that the latter formed a little group about the redoubtable Mr Lenville, and the former looked on at a little distance in some trepidation and anxiety. On Nicholas stopping to salute them, Mr Lenville laughed a scornful laugh, and made some general remark touching the natural history of puppies.

'Oh!' said Nicholas, looking quietly round, 'are you there?'

'Slave!' returned Mr Lenville, flourishing his right arm, and approaching Nicholas with a theatrical stride. But somehow he appeared just at that moment a little startled, as if Nicholas did not look quite so frightened as he had expected, and came all at once to an awkward halt, at which the assembled ladies burst into a shrill laugh.

'Object of my scorn and hatred!' said Mr Lenville, 'I hold ye in contempt.'

Nicholas laughed in very unexpected enjoyment of this performance; and the ladies, by way of encouragement, laughed louder than before; whereat Mr Lenville assumed his bitterest smile, and expressed his opinion that they were 'minions'.

'But they shall not protect ye!' said the tragedian, taking an upward look at Nicholas, beginning at his boots and ending at the crown of his head, and then a downward one, beginning at the crown of his head, and ending at his boots—which two looks, as everybody knows, express defiance on the stage. 'They shall not protect ye—boy!'

Thus speaking, Mr Lenville folded his arms, and treated Nicholas to that expression of face with which, in melodramatic performances, he was in the habit of regarding the tyrannical kings when they said, 'Away with him to the deepest dungeon beneath the castle moat;' and which, accompanied with a little jingling of fetters, had been known to produce great effects in its time.

Whether it was the absence of the fetters or not, it made no very deep impression on Mr Lenville's adversary, however, but rather seemed to increase the good-humour expressed in his countenance; in which stage of the contest, one or two gentlemen, who had come out expressly to witness the pulling of Nicholas's nose, grew impatient, murmuring that if it were to be done at all it had better be done at once, and that if Mr Lenville didn't mean to do it he had better say so, and not keep them waiting there. Thus urged, the tragedian adjusted the cuff of his right coat sleeve for the performance of the operation, and walked in a very stately manner up to Nicholas, who suffered him to approach to within the requisite distance, and then, without the smallest discomposure, knocked him down.

Before the discomfited tragedian could raise his head from the boards, Mrs Lenville (who, as has been before hinted, was in an interesting state) rushed from the rear rank of ladies, and uttering a piercing scream threw herself upon the body.

'Do you see this, monster? Do you see THIS?' cried Mr Lenville, sitting up, and pointing to his prostrate lady, who was holding him very tight round the waist.

'Come,' said Nicholas, nodding his head, 'apologise for the insolent note you wrote to me last night, and waste no more time in talking.'

'Never!' cried Mr Lenville.

'Yes—yes—yes!' screamed his wife. 'For my sake—for mine, Lenville—forego all idle forms, unless you would see me a blighted corse at your feet.'

'This is affecting!' said Mr Lenville, looking round him, and drawing the back of his hand across his eyes. 'The ties of nature are strong. The weak husband and the father—the father that is yet to be—relents. I apologise.'

'Humbly and submissively?' said Nicholas.

'Humbly and submissively,' returned the tragedian, scowling upwards. 'But only to save her,—for a time will come—'

'Very good,' said Nicholas; 'I hope Mrs Lenville may have a good one; and when it does come, and you are a father, you shall retract it if you have the courage. There. Be careful, sir, to what lengths your jealousy carries you another time; and be careful, also, before you venture too far, to ascertain your rival's temper.' With this parting advice Nicholas picked up Mr Lenville's ash stick which had flown out of his hand, and breaking it in half, threw him the pieces and withdrew, bowing slightly to the spectators as he walked out.

The profoundest deference was paid to Nicholas that night, and the people who had been most anxious to have his nose pulled in the morning, embraced occasions of taking him aside, and telling him with great feeling, how very friendly they took it that he should have treated that Lenville so properly, who was a most unbearable fellow, and on whom they had all, by a remarkable coincidence, at one time or other contemplated the infliction of condign punishment, which they had only been restrained from administering by considerations of mercy; indeed, to judge from the invariable termination of all these stories, there never was such a charitable and kind-hearted set of people as the male members of Mr Crummles's company.

Nicholas bore his triumph, as he had his success in the little world of the theatre, with the utmost moderation and good humour. The crestfallen Mr Lenville made an expiring effort to obtain revenge by sending a boy into the gallery to hiss, but he fell a sacrifice to popular indignation, and was promptly turned out without having his money back.

'Well, Smike,' said Nicholas when the first piece was over, and he had almost finished dressing to go home, 'is there any letter yet?'

'Yes,' replied Smike, 'I got this one from the post-office.'

'From Newman Noggs,' said Nicholas, casting his eye upon the cramped direction; 'it's no easy matter to make his writing out. Let me see—let me see.'

By dint of poring over the letter for half an hour, he contrived to make himself master of the contents, which were certainly not of a nature to set his mind at ease. Newman took upon himself to send back the ten pounds, observing that he had ascertained that neither Mrs Nickleby nor Kate was in actual want of money at the moment, and that a time might shortly come when Nicholas might want it more. He entreated him not to be alarmed at what he was about to say;—there was no bad news—they were in good health—but he thought circumstances might occur, or were occurring, which would render it absolutely necessary that Kate should have her brother's protection, and if so, Newman said, he would write to him to that effect, either by the next post or the next but one.

Nicholas read this passage very often, and the more he thought of it the more he began to fear some treachery upon the part of Ralph. Once or twice he felt tempted to repair to London at all hazards without an hour's delay, but a little reflection assured him that if such a step were necessary, Newman would have spoken out and told him so at once.

'At all events I should prepare them here for the possibility of my going away suddenly,' said Nicholas; 'I should lose no time in doing that.' As the thought occurred to him, he took up his hat and hurried to the green-room.

'Well, Mr Johnson,' said Mrs Crummles, who was seated there in full regal costume, with the phenomenon as the Maiden in her maternal arms, 'next week for Ryde, then for Winchester, then for—'

'I have some reason to fear,' interrupted Nicholas, 'that before you leave here my career with you will have closed.'

'Closed!' cried Mrs Crummles, raising her hands in astonishment.

'Closed!' cried Miss Snevellicci, trembling so much in her tights that she actually laid her hand upon the shoulder of the manageress for support.

'Why he don't mean to say he's going!' exclaimed Mrs Grudden, making her way towards Mrs Crummles. 'Hoity toity! Nonsense.'

The phenomenon, being of an affectionate nature and moreover excitable, raised a loud cry, and Miss Belvawney and Miss Bravassa actually shed tears. Even the male performers stopped in their conversation, and echoed the word 'Going!' although some among them (and they had been the loudest in their congratulations that day) winked at each other as though they would not be sorry to lose such a favoured rival; an opinion, indeed, which the honest Mr Folair, who was ready dressed for the savage, openly stated in so many words to a demon with whom he was sharing a pot of porter.

Nicholas briefly said that he feared it would be so, although he could not yet speak with any degree of certainty; and getting away as soon as he could, went home to con Newman's letter once more, and speculate upon it afresh.

How trifling all that had been occupying his time and thoughts for many weeks seemed to him during that sleepless night, and how constantly and incessantly present to his imagination was the one idea that Kate in the midst of some great trouble and distress might even then be looking—and vainly too—for him!

CHAPTER 30

Festivities are held in honour of Nicholas, who suddenly withdraws himself from the Society of Mr Vincent Crummles and his Theatrical Companions

Mr Vincent Crummles was no sooner acquainted with the public announcement which Nicholas had made relative to the probability of his shortly ceasing to be a member of the company, than he evinced many tokens of grief and consternation; and, in the extremity of his despair, even held out certain vague promises of a speedy improvement not only in the amount of his regular salary, but also in the contingent emoluments appertaining to his authorship. Finding Nicholas bent upon quitting the society—for he had now determined that, even if no further tidings came from Newman, he would, at all hazards, ease his mind by repairing to London and ascertaining the exact position of his sister—Mr Crummles was fain to content himself by calculating the chances of his coming back again, and taking prompt and energetic measures to make the most of him before he went away.

'Let me see,' said Mr Crummles, taking off his outlaw's wig, the better to arrive at a cool-headed view of the whole case. 'Let me see. This is Wednesday night. We'll have posters out the first thing in the morning, announcing positively your last appearance for tomorrow.'

'But perhaps it may not be my last appearance, you know,' said Nicholas. 'Unless I am summoned away, I should be sorry to inconvenience you by leaving before the end of the week.'

'So much the better,' returned Mr Crummles. 'We can have positively your last appearance, on Thursday—re-engagement for one night more, on Friday—and, yielding to the wishes of numerous influential patrons, who were disappointed in obtaining seats, on Saturday. That ought to bring three very decent houses.'

'Then I am to make three last appearances, am I?' inquired Nicholas, smiling.

'Yes,' rejoined the manager, scratching his head with an air of some vexation; 'three is not enough, and it's very bungling and irregular not to have more, but if we can't help it we can't, so there's no use in talking. A novelty would be very desirable. You couldn't sing a comic song on the pony's back, could you?'

'No,' replied Nicholas, 'I couldn't indeed.'

'It has drawn money before now,' said Mr Crummles, with a look of disappointment. 'What do you think of a brilliant display of fireworks?'

'That it would be rather expensive,' replied Nicholas, drily.

'Eighteen-pence would do it,' said Mr Crummles. 'You on the top of a pair of steps with the phenomenon in an attitude; "Farewell!" on a transparency behind; and nine people at the wings with a squib in each hand—all the dozen and a half going off at once—it would be very grand—awful from the front, quite awful.'

As Nicholas appeared by no means impressed with the solemnity of the proposed effect, but, on the contrary, received the proposition in a most irreverent manner, and laughed at it very heartily, Mr Crummles abandoned the project in its birth, and gloomily observed that they must make up the best bill they could with combats and hornpipes, and so stick to the legitimate drama.

For the purpose of carrying this object into instant execution, the manager at once repaired to a small dressing-room, adjacent, where Mrs Crummles was then occupied in exchanging the habiliments of a melodramatic empress for the ordinary attire of matrons in the nineteenth century. And with the assistance of this lady, and the accomplished Mrs Grudden (who had quite a genius for making out bills, being a great hand at throwing in the notes of admiration, and knowing from long experience exactly where the largest capitals ought to go), he seriously applied himself to the composition of the poster.

'Heigho!' sighed Nicholas, as he threw himself back in the prompter's chair, after telegraphing the needful directions to Smike, who had been playing a meagre tailor in the interlude, with one skirt to his coat, and a little pocket-handkerchief with a large hole in it, and a woollen nightcap, and a red nose, and other distinctive marks peculiar to tailors on the stage. 'Heigho! I wish all this were over.'

'Over, Mr Johnson!' repeated a female voice behind him, in a kind of plaintive surprise.

'It was an ungallant speech, certainly,' said Nicholas, looking up to see who the speaker was, and recognising Miss Snevellicci. 'I would not have made it if I had known you had been within hearing.'

'What a dear that Mr Digby is!' said Miss Snevellicci, as the tailor went off on the opposite side, at the end of the piece, with great applause. (Smike's theatrical name was Digby.)

'I'll tell him presently, for his gratification, that you said so,' returned Nicholas.

'Oh you naughty thing!' rejoined Miss Snevellicci. 'I don't know though, that I should much mind HIS knowing my opinion of him; with some other people, indeed, it might be—' Here Miss Snevellicci stopped, as though waiting to be questioned, but no questioning came, for Nicholas was thinking about more serious matters.

'How kind it is of you,' resumed Miss Snevellicci, after a short silence, 'to sit waiting here for him night after night, night after night, no matter how tired you are; and taking so much pains with him, and doing it all with as much delight and readiness as if you were coining gold by it!'

'He well deserves all the kindness I can show him, and a great deal more,' said Nicholas. 'He is the most grateful, single-hearted, affectionate creature that ever breathed.'

'So odd, too,' remarked Miss Snevellicci, 'isn't he?'

'God help him, and those who have made him so; he is indeed,' rejoined Nicholas, shaking his head.

'He is such a devilish close chap,' said Mr Folair, who had come up a little before, and now joined in the conversation. 'Nobody can ever get anything out of him.'

'What SHOULD they get out of him?' asked Nicholas, turning round with some abruptness.

'Zooks! what a fire-eater you are, Johnson!' returned Mr Folair, pulling up the heel of his dancing shoe. 'I'm only talking of the natural curiosity of the people here, to know what he has been about all his life.'

'Poor fellow! it is pretty plain, I should think, that he has not the intellect to have been about anything of much importance to them or anybody else,' said Nicholas.

'Ay,' rejoined the actor, contemplating the effect of his face in a lamp reflector, 'but that involves the whole question, you know.'

'What question?' asked Nicholas.

'Why, the who he is and what he is, and how you two, who are so different, came to be such close companions,' replied Mr Folair, delighted with the opportunity of saying something disagreeable. 'That's in everybody's mouth.'

'The "everybody" of the theatre, I suppose?' said Nicholas, contemptuously.

'In it and out of it too,' replied the actor. 'Why, you know, Lenville says —'

'I thought I had silenced him effectually,' interrupted Nicholas, reddening.

'Perhaps you have,' rejoined the immovable Mr Folair; 'if you have, he said this before he was silenced: Lenville says that you're a regular stick of an actor, and that it's only the mystery about you that has caused you to go down with the people here, and that Crummles keeps it up for his own sake; though Lenville says he don't believe there's anything at all in it, except your having got into a scrape and run away from somewhere, for doing something or other.'

'Oh!' said Nicholas, forcing a smile.

'That's a part of what he says,' added Mr Folair. 'I mention it as the friend of both parties, and in strict confidence. I don't agree with him, you know. He says he takes Digby to be more knave than fool; and old Fluggers, who does the heavy business you know, HE says that when he delivered messages at Covent Garden the season before last, there used to be a pickpocket hovering about the coach-stand who had exactly the face of Digby; though, as he very properly says, Digby may not be the same, but only his brother, or some near relation.'

'Oh!' cried Nicholas again.

'Yes,' said Mr Folair, with undisturbed calmness, 'that's what they say. I thought I'd tell you, because really you ought to know. Oh! here's this blessed phenomenon at last. Ugh, you little imposition, I should like to—quite ready, my darling,—humbug—Ring up, Mrs G., and let the favourite wake 'em.'

Uttering in a loud voice such of the latter allusions as were complimentary to the unconscious phenomenon, and giving the rest in a confidential 'aside' to Nicholas, Mr Folair followed the ascent of the curtain with his eyes, regarded with a sneer the reception of Miss Crummles as the Maiden, and, falling back a step or two to advance with the better effect, uttered a preliminary howl, and 'went on' chattering his teeth and brandishing his tin tomahawk as the Indian Savage.

'So these are some of the stories they invent about us, and bandy from mouth to mouth!' thought Nicholas. 'If a man would commit an inexpiable offence against any society, large or small, let him be successful. They will forgive him any crime but that.'

'You surely don't mind what that malicious creature says, Mr Johnson?' observed Miss Snevellicci in her most winning tones.

'Not I,' replied Nicholas. 'If I were going to remain here, I might think it worth my while to embroil myself. As it is, let them talk till they are hoarse. But here,' added Nicholas, as Smike approached, 'here comes the subject of a portion of their good-nature, so let he and I say good night together.'

'No, I will not let either of you say anything of the kind,' returned Miss Snevellicci. 'You must come home and see mama, who only came to Portsmouth today, and is dying to behold you. Led, my dear, persuade Mr Johnson.'

'Oh, I'm sure,' returned Miss Ledrook, with considerable vivacity, 'if YOU can't persuade him—' Miss Ledrook said no more, but intimated, by a dexterous playfulness, that if Miss Snevellicci couldn't persuade him, nobody could.

'Mr and Mrs Lillyvick have taken lodgings in our house, and share our sitting-room for the present,' said Miss Snevellicci. 'Won't that induce you?'

'Surely,' returned Nicholas, 'I can require no possible inducement beyond your invitation.'

'Oh no! I dare say,' rejoined Miss Snevellicci. And Miss Ledrook said, 'Upon my word!' Upon which Miss Snevellicci said that Miss Ledrook was a giddy thing; and Miss Ledrook said that Miss Snevellicci needn't colour up quite so much; and Miss Snevellicci beat Miss Ledrook, and Miss Ledrook beat Miss Snevellicci.

'Come,' said Miss Ledrook, 'it's high time we were there, or we shall have poor Mrs Snevellicci thinking that you have run away with her daughter, Mr Johnson; and then we should have a pretty to-do.'

'My dear Led,' remonstrated Miss Snevellicci, 'how you do talk!'

Miss Ledrook made no answer, but taking Smike's arm in hers, left her friend and Nicholas to follow at their pleasure; which it pleased them, or rather pleased Nicholas, who had no great fancy for a TETE-A-TETE under the circumstances, to do at once.

There were not wanting matters of conversation when they reached the street, for it turned out that Miss Snevellicci had a small basket to carry home, and Miss Ledrook a small bandbox, both containing such minor articles of theatrical costume as the lady performers usually carried to and fro every evening. Nicholas would insist upon carrying the basket, and Miss Snevellicci would insist upon carrying it herself, which gave rise to a struggle, in which Nicholas captured the basket and the bandbox likewise. Then Nicholas said, that he wondered what could possibly be inside the basket, and attempted to peep in, whereat Miss Snevellicci screamed, and declared that if she thought he had seen, she was sure she should faint away. This declaration was followed by a similar attempt on the bandbox, and similar demonstrations on the part of Miss Ledrook, and then both ladies vowed that they wouldn't move a step further until Nicholas had promised that he wouldn't offer to peep again. At last Nicholas pledged himself to betray no further curiosity, and they walked on: both ladies giggling very much, and declaring that they never had seen such a wicked creature in all their born days—never.

Lightening the way with such pleasantry as this, they arrived at the tailor's house in no time; and here they made quite a little party, there being present besides Mr Lillyvick and Mrs Lillyvick, not only Miss Snevellicci's mama, but her papa also. And an uncommonly fine man Miss Snevellicci's papa was, with a hook nose, and a white forehead, and curly black hair, and high cheek bones, and altogether quite a handsome face, only a little pimply as though with drinking. He had a very broad chest had Miss Snevellicci's papa, and he wore a threadbare blue dress-coat buttoned with gilt buttons tight across it; and he no sooner saw Nicholas come into the room, than he whipped the two forefingers of his right hand in between the two centre buttons, and sticking his other arm gracefully a-kimbo seemed to say, 'Now, here I am, my buck, and what have you got to say to me?'

Such was, and in such an attitude sat Miss Snevellicci's papa, who had been in the profession ever since he had first played the ten-year-old imps in the Christmas pantomimes; who could sing a little, dance a little, fence a little, act a little, and do everything a little, but not much; who had been sometimes in the ballet, and sometimes in the chorus, at every theatre in London; who was always selected in virtue of his figure to play the military visitors and the speechless noblemen; who always wore a smart dress, and came on arm-in-arm with a smart lady in short petticoats,—and always did it too with such an air that people in the pit had been several times known to cry out 'Bravo!' under the impression that he was somebody. Such was Miss

Snevellicci's papa, upon whom some envious persons cast the imputation that he occasionally beat Miss Snevellicci's mama, who was still a dancer, with a neat little figure and some remains of good looks; and who now sat, as she danced,—being rather too old for the full glare of the foot-lights,—in the background.

To these good people Nicholas was presented with much formality. The introduction being completed, Miss Snevellicci's papa (who was scented with rum-and-water) said that he was delighted to make the acquaintance of a gentleman so highly talented; and furthermore remarked, that there hadn't been such a hit made—no, not since the first appearance of his friend Mr Glavormelly, at the Coburg.

'You have seen him, sir?' said Miss Snevellicci's papa.

'No, really I never did,' replied Nicholas.

'You never saw my friend Glavormelly, sir!' said Miss Snevellicci's papa. 'Then you have never seen acting yet. If he had lived—'

'Oh, he is dead, is he?' interrupted Nicholas.

'He is,' said Mr Snevellicci, 'but he isn't in Westminster Abbey, more's the shame. He was a—. Well, no matter. He is gone to that bourne from whence no traveller returns. I hope he is appreciated THERE.'

So saying Miss Snevellicci's papa rubbed the tip of his nose with a very yellow silk handkerchief, and gave the company to understand that these recollections overcame him.

'Well, Mr Lillyvick,' said Nicholas, 'and how are you?'

'Quite well, sir,' replied the collector. 'There is nothing like the married state, sir, depend upon it.'

'Indeed!' said Nicholas, laughing.

'Ah! nothing like it, sir,' replied Mr Lillyvick solemnly. 'How do you think,' whispered the collector, drawing him aside, 'how do you think she looks tonight?'

'As handsome as ever,' replied Nicholas, glancing at the late Miss Petowker.

'Why, there's air about her, sir,' whispered the collector, 'that I never saw in anybody. Look at her, now she moves to put the kettle on. There! Isn't it fascination, sir?'

'You're a lucky man,' said Nicholas.

'Ha, ha, ha!' rejoined the collector. 'No. Do you think I am though, eh? Perhaps I may be, perhaps I may be. I say, I couldn't have done much better if I had been a young man, could I? You couldn't have done much better yourself, could you—eh—could you?' With such inquires, and many more such, Mr Lillyvick jerked his elbow into Nicholas's side, and chuckled till his face became quite purple in the attempt to keep down his satisfaction.

By this time the cloth had been laid under the joint superintendence of all the ladies, upon two tables put together, one being high and narrow, and the other low and broad. There were oysters at the top, sausages at the bottom, a pair of snuffers in the centre, and baked potatoes wherever it was most convenient to put them. Two additional chairs were brought in from the bedroom: Miss Snevellicci sat at the head of the table, and Mr Lillyvick at the foot; and Nicholas had not only the honour of sitting next Miss Snevellicci, but of having Miss Snevellicci's mama on his right hand, and Miss Snevellicci's papa over the way. In short, he was the hero of the feast; and when the table was cleared and something warm introduced, Miss Snevellicci's papa got up and proposed his health in a speech containing such affecting allusions to his coming departure, that Miss Snevellicci wept, and was compelled to retire into the bedroom.

'Hush! Don't take any notice of it,' said Miss Ledrook, peeping in from the bedroom. 'Say, when she comes back, that she exerts herself too much.'

Miss Ledrook eked out this speech with so many mysterious nods and frowns before she shut the door again, that a profound silence came upon all the company, during which Miss Snevellicci's papa looked very big indeed—several sizes larger than life—at everybody in turn, but particularly at Nicholas, and kept on perpetually emptying his tumbler and filling it again, until the ladies returned in a cluster, with Miss Snevellicci among them.

'You needn't alarm yourself a bit, Mr Snevellicci,' said Mrs Lillyvick. 'She is only a little weak and nervous; she has been so ever since the morning.'

'Oh,' said Mr Snevellicci, 'that's all, is it?'

'Oh yes, that's all. Don't make a fuss about it,' cried all the ladies together.

Now this was not exactly the kind of reply suited to Mr Snevellicci's importance as a man and a father, so he picked out the unfortunate Mrs Snevellicci, and asked her what the devil she meant by talking to him in that way.

'Dear me, my dear!' said Mrs Snevellicci.

'Don't call me your dear, ma'am,' said Mr Snevellicci, 'if you please.'

'Pray, pa, don't,' interposed Miss Snevellicci.

'Don't what, my child?'

'Talk in that way.'

'Why not?' said Mr Snevellicci. 'I hope you don't suppose there's anybody here who is to prevent my talking as I like?'

'Nobody wants to, pa,' rejoined his daughter.

'Nobody would if they did want to,' said Mr Snevellicci. 'I am not ashamed of myself, Snevellicci is my name; I'm to be found in Broad Court, Bow Street, when I'm in town. If I'm not at home, let any man ask for me at the stage-door. Damme, they know me at the stage-door I suppose. Most men have seen my portrait at the cigar shop round the corner. I've been mentioned in the newspapers before now, haven't I? Talk! I'll tell you what; if I found out that any man had been tampering with the affections of my daughter, I wouldn't talk. I'd astonish him without talking; that's my way.'

So saying, Mr Snevellicci struck the palm of his left hand three smart blows with his clenched fist; pulled a phantom nose with his right thumb and forefinger, and swallowed another glassful at a draught. 'That's my way,' repeated Mr Snevellicci.

Most public characters have their failings; and the truth is that Mr Snevellicci was a little addicted to drinking; or, if the whole truth must be told, that he was scarcely ever sober. He knew in his cups three distinct stages of intoxication,—the dignified—the quarrelsome—the amorous. When professionally engaged he never got beyond the dignified; in private circles he went through all three, passing from one to another with a rapidity of transition often rather perplexing to those who had not the honour of his acquaintance.

Thus Mr Snevellicci had no sooner swallowed another glassful than he smiled upon all present in happy forgetfulness of having exhibited symptoms of pugnacity, and proposed 'The ladies! Bless their hearts!' in a most vivacious manner.

'I love 'em,' said Mr Snevellicci, looking round the table, 'I love 'em, every one.'

'Not every one,' reasoned Mr Lillyvick, mildly.

'Yes, every one,' repeated Mr Snevellicci.

'That would include the married ladies, you know,' said Mr Lillyvick.

'I love them too, sir,' said Mr Snevellicci.

The collector looked into the surrounding faces with an aspect of grave astonishment, seeming to say, 'This is a nice man!' and appeared a little surprised that Mrs Lillyvick's manner yielded no evidences of horror and indignation.

'One good turn deserves another,' said Mr Snevellicci. 'I love them and they love me.' And as if this avowal were not made in sufficient disregard and defiance of all moral obligations, what did Mr Snevellicci do? He winked—winked openly and undisguisedly; winked with his right eye—upon Henrietta Lillyvick!

The collector fell back in his chair in the intensity of his astonishment. If anybody had winked at her as Henrietta Petowker, it would have been indecorous in the last degree; but as Mrs Lillyvick! While he thought of it in a cold perspiration, and wondered whether it was possible that he could be dreaming, Mr Snevellicci repeated the wink, and drinking to Mrs Lillyvick in dumb show, actually blew her a kiss! Mr Lillyvick left his chair, walked straight up to the other end of the table, and fell upon him—literally fell upon him—instantaneously. Mr Lillyvick was no light weight, and consequently when he fell upon Mr Snevellicci, Mr Snevellicci fell under the table. Mr Lillyvick followed him, and the ladies screamed.

'What is the matter with the men! Are they mad?' cried Nicholas, diving under the table, dragging up the collector by main force, and thrusting him, all doubled up, into a chair, as if he had been a stuffed figure. 'What do you mean to do? What do you want to do? What is the matter with you?'

While Nicholas raised up the collector, Smike had performed the same office for Mr Snevellicci, who now regarded his late adversary in tipsy amazement.

'Look here, sir,' replied Mr Lillyvick, pointing to his astonished wife, 'here is purity and elegance combined, whose feelings have been outraged—violated, sir!'

'Lor, what nonsense he talks!' exclaimed Mrs Lillyvick in answer to the inquiring look of Nicholas. 'Nobody has said anything to me.'

'Said, Henrietta!' cried the collector. 'Didn't I see him—' Mr Lillyvick couldn't bring himself to utter the word, but he counterfeited the motion of the eye.

'Well!' cried Mrs Lillyvick. 'Do you suppose nobody is ever to look at me? A pretty thing to be married indeed, if that was law!'

'You didn't mind it?' cried the collector.

'Mind it!' repeated Mrs Lillyvick contemptuously. 'You ought to go down on your knees and beg everybody's pardon, that you ought.'

'Pardon, my dear?' said the dismayed collector.

'Yes, and mine first,' replied Mrs Lillyvick. 'Do you suppose I ain't the best judge of what's proper and what's improper?'

'To be sure,' cried all the ladies. 'Do you suppose WE shouldn't be the first to speak, if there was anything that ought to be taken notice of?'

'Do you suppose THEY don't know, sir?' said Miss Snevellicci's papa, pulling up his collar, and muttering something about a punching of heads, and being only withheld by considerations of age. With which Miss Snevellicci's papa looked steadily and sternly at Mr Lillyvick for some seconds, and then rising deliberately from his chair, kissed the ladies all round, beginning with Mrs Lillyvick.

The unhappy collector looked piteously at his wife, as if to see whether there was any one trait of Miss Petowker left in Mrs Lillyvick, and finding too surely that there was not, begged pardon of all the company with great humility, and sat down such a crest-fallen, dispirited, disenchanted man, that despite all his selfishness and dotage, he was quite an object of compassion.

Miss Snevellicci's papa being greatly exalted by this triumph, and incontestable proof of his popularity with the fair sex, quickly grew convivial, not to say uproarious; volunteering more than one song of no inconsiderable length, and regaling the social circle between-whiles with recollections of divers splendid women who had been supposed to entertain a passion for himself, several of whom he toasted by name, taking occasion to remark at the same time that if he had been a little more alive to his own interest, he might have been rolling at that moment in his chariot-and-four. These reminiscences appeared to awaken no very torturing pangs in the breast of Mrs Snevellicci, who was sufficiently occupied in descanting to Nicholas upon the manifold accomplishments and merits of her daughter. Nor was the young lady herself at all behind-hand in displaying her choicest allurements; but these, heightened as they were by the artifices of Miss Ledrook, had no effect whatever in increasing the attentions of Nicholas, who, with the precedent of Miss Squeers still fresh in his memory, steadily resisted every fascination, and placed so strict a guard upon his behaviour that when he had taken his leave the ladies were unanimous in pronouncing him quite a monster of insensibility.

Next day the posters appeared in due course, and the public were informed, in all the colours of the rainbow, and in letters afflicted with every possible variation of spinal deformity, how that Mr Johnson would have the honour of making his last appearance that evening, and how that an early application for places was requested, in consequence of the extraordinary overflow attendant on his performances,—it being a remarkable fact in theatrical history, but one long since established beyond dispute, that it is a hopeless endeavour to attract people to a theatre unless they can be first brought to believe that they will never get into it.

Nicholas was somewhat at a loss, on entering the theatre at night, to account for the unusual perturbation and excitement visible in the countenances of all the company, but he was not long in doubt as to the cause, for before he could make any inquiry respecting it Mr Crummles approached, and in an agitated tone of voice, informed him that there was a London manager in the boxes.

'It's the phenomenon, depend upon it, sir,' said Crummles, dragging Nicholas to the little hole in the curtain that he might look through at the London manager. 'I have not the smallest doubt it's the fame of the phenomenon—that's the man; him in the great-coat and no shirt-collar. She shall have ten pound a week, Johnson; she shall not appear on the London boards for a farthing less. They shan't engage her either, unless they engage Mrs Crummles too—twenty pound a week for the pair; or I'll tell you what, I'll throw in myself and the two boys, and they shall have the family for thirty. I can't say fairer than that. They must take us all, if none of us will go without the others. That's the way some of the London people do, and it always answers. Thirty pound a week—it's too cheap, Johnson. It's dirt cheap.'

Nicholas replied, that it certainly was; and Mr Vincent Crummles taking several huge pinches of snuff to compose his feelings, hurried away to tell Mrs Crummles that he had quite settled the only terms that could be accepted, and had resolved not to abate one single farthing.

When everybody was dressed and the curtain went up, the excitement occasioned by the presence of the London manager increased a thousand-fold. Everybody happened to know that the London manager had come down specially to witness his or her own performance, and all were in a flutter of anxiety and expectation. Some of those who were not on in the first scene, hurried to the wings, and there stretched their necks to have a peep at him; others stole up into the two little private boxes over the stage-doors, and from that position reconnoitred the London manager. Once the London manager was seen to smile—he smiled at the comic countryman's pretending to catch a blue-bottle, while Mrs Crummles was making her greatest effect. 'Very good, my fine fellow,' said Mr Crummles, shaking his fist at the comic countryman when he came off, 'you leave this company next Saturday night.'

In the same way, everybody who was on the stage beheld no audience but one individual; everybody played to the London manager. When Mr Lenville in a sudden burst of passion called the emperor a miscreant, and then biting his glove, said, 'But I must dissemble,' instead of looking gloomily at the boards and so waiting for his cue, as is proper in such cases, he kept his eye fixed upon the London manager. When Miss Bravassa sang her song at her lover, who according to custom stood ready to shake hands with her between the verses, they looked, not at each other, but at the London manager. Mr Crummles died point blank at him; and when the two guards came in to take the body off after a very hard death, it was seen to open its eyes and glance at the London manager. At length the London manager was discovered to be asleep, and shortly after that he woke up and went away, whereupon all the company fell foul of the unhappy comic countryman, declaring that his buffoonery was the sole cause; and Mr Crummles said, that he had put up with it a long time, but that he really couldn't stand it any longer, and therefore would feel obliged by his looking out for another engagement.

All this was the occasion of much amusement to Nicholas, whose only feeling upon the subject was one of sincere satisfaction that the great man went away before he appeared. He went through his part in the two last pieces as briskly as he could, and having been received with unbounded favour and unprecedented applause—so said the bills for next day, which had been printed an hour or two before—he took Smike's arm and walked home to bed.

With the post next morning came a letter from Newman Noggs, very inky, very short, very dirty, very small, and very mysterious, urging Nicholas to return to London instantly; not to lose an instant; to be there that night if possible.

'I will,' said Nicholas. 'Heaven knows I have remained here for the best, and sorely against my own will; but even now I may have dallied too long.

What can have happened? Smike, my good fellow, here—take my purse. Put our things together, and pay what little debts we owe—quick, and we shall be in time for the morning coach. I will only tell them that we are going, and will return to you immediately.'

So saying, he took his hat, and hurrying away to the lodgings of Mr Crummles, applied his hand to the knocker with such hearty good-will, that he awakened that gentleman, who was still in bed, and caused Mr Bulph the pilot to take his morning's pipe very nearly out of his mouth in the extremity of his surprise.

The door being opened, Nicholas ran upstairs without any ceremony, and bursting into the darkened sitting-room on the one-pair front, found that the two Master Crummleses had sprung out of the sofa-bedstead and were putting on their clothes with great rapidity, under the impression that it was the middle of the night, and the next house was on fire.

Before he could undeceive them, Mr Crummles came down in a flannel gown and nightcap; and to him Nicholas briefly explained that circumstances had occurred which rendered it necessary for him to repair to London immediately.

'So goodbye,' said Nicholas; 'goodbye, goodbye.'

He was half-way downstairs before Mr Crummles had sufficiently recovered his surprise to gasp out something about the posters.

'I can't help it,' replied Nicholas. 'Set whatever I may have earned this week against them, or if that will not repay you, say at once what will. Quick, quick.'

'We'll cry quits about that,' returned Crummles. 'But can't we have one last night more?'

'Not an hour—not a minute,' replied Nicholas, impatiently.

'Won't you stop to say something to Mrs Crummles?' asked the manager, following him down to the door.

'I couldn't stop if it were to prolong my life a score of years,' rejoined Nicholas. 'Here, take my hand, and with it my hearty thanks.—Oh! that I should have been fooling here!'

Accompanying these words with an impatient stamp upon the ground, he tore himself from the manager's detaining grasp, and darting rapidly down the street was out of sight in an instant.

'Dear me, dear me,' said Mr Crummles, looking wistfully towards the point at which he had just disappeared; 'if he only acted like that, what a deal of money he'd draw! He should have kept upon this circuit; he'd have been very useful to me. But he don't know what's good for him. He is an impetuous youth. Young men are rash, very rash.'

Mr Crummles being in a moralising mood, might possibly have moralised for some minutes longer if he had not mechanically put his hand towards his waistcoat pocket, where he was accustomed to keep his snuff. The absence of any pocket at all in the usual direction, suddenly recalled to his recollection the fact that he had no waistcoat on; and this leading him to a contemplation of the extreme scantiness of his attire, he shut the door abruptly, and retired upstairs with great precipitation.

Smike had made good speed while Nicholas was absent, and with his help everything was soon ready for their departure. They scarcely stopped to take a morsel of breakfast, and in less than half an hour arrived at the coach-office: quite out of breath with the haste they had made to reach it in time. There were yet a few minutes to spare, so, having secured the places, Nicholas hurried into a slopseller's hard by, and bought Smike a great-coat. It would have been rather large for a substantial yeoman, but the shopman averring (and with considerable truth) that it was a most uncommon fit, Nicholas would have purchased it in his impatience if it had been twice the size.

As they hurried up to the coach, which was now in the open street and all ready for starting, Nicholas was not a little astonished to find himself suddenly clutched in a close and violent embrace, which nearly took him off his legs; nor was his amazement at all lessened by hearing the voice of Mr Crummles exclaim, 'It is he—my friend, my friend!'

'Bless my heart,' cried Nicholas, struggling in the manager's arms, 'what are you about?'

The manager made no reply, but strained him to his breast again, exclaiming as he did so, 'Farewell, my noble, my lion-hearted boy!'

In fact, Mr Crummles, who could never lose any opportunity for professional display, had turned out for the express purpose of taking a public farewell of Nicholas; and to render it the more imposing, he was now, to that young gentleman's most profound annoyance, inflicting upon him a rapid succession of stage embraces, which, as everybody knows, are performed by the embracer's laying his or her chin on the shoulder of the object of affection, and looking over it. This Mr Crummles did in the highest style of melodrama, pouring forth at the same time all the most dismal forms of farewell he could think of, out of the stock pieces. Nor was this all, for the elder Master Crummles was going through a similar ceremony with Smike; while Master Percy Crummles, with a very little second-hand camlet cloak, worn theatrically over his left shoulder, stood by, in the attitude of an attendant officer, waiting to convey the two victims to the scaffold.

The lookers-on laughed very heartily, and as it was as well to put a good face upon the matter, Nicholas laughed too when he had succeeded in disengaging himself; and rescuing the astonished Smike, climbed up to the coach roof after him, and kissed his hand in honour of the absent Mrs Crummles as they rolled away.

CHAPTER 31

Of Ralph Nickleby and Newman Noggs, and some wise Precautions, the success or failure of which will appear in the Sequel

In blissful unconsciousness that his nephew was hastening at the utmost speed of four good horses towards his sphere of action, and that every passing minute diminished the distance between them, Ralph Nickleby sat that morning occupied in his customary avocations, and yet unable to prevent his thoughts wandering from time to time back to the interview which had taken place between himself and his niece on the previous day. At such intervals, after a few moments of abstraction, Ralph would mutter some peevish interjection, and apply himself with renewed steadiness of purpose to the ledger before him, but again and again the same train of thought came back despite all his efforts to prevent it, confusing him in his calculations, and utterly distracting his attention from the figures over which he bent. At length Ralph laid down his pen, and threw himself back in his chair as though he had made up his mind to allow the obtrusive current of reflection to take its own course, and, by giving it full scope, to rid himself of it effectually.

'I am not a man to be moved by a pretty face,' muttered Ralph sternly. 'There is a grinning skull beneath it, and men like me who look and work below the surface see that, and not its delicate covering. And yet I almost like the girl, or should if she had been less proudly and squeamishly brought up. If the boy were drowned or hanged, and the mother dead, this house should be her home. I wish they were, with all my soul.'

Notwithstanding the deadly hatred which Ralph felt towards Nicholas, and the bitter contempt with which he sneered at poor Mrs Nickleby—notwithstanding the baseness with which he had behaved, and was then behaving, and would behave again if his interest prompted him, towards Kate herself—still there was, strange though it may seem, something humanising and even gentle in his thoughts at that moment. He thought of what his home might be if Kate were there; he placed her in the empty chair, looked upon her, heard her speak; he felt again upon his arm the gentle pressure of the trembling hand; he strewed his costly rooms with the hundred silent tokens of feminine presence and occupation; he came back again to the cold fireside and the silent dreary splendour; and in that one glimpse of a better nature, born as it was in selfish thoughts, the rich man felt himself friendless, childless, and alone. Gold, for the instant, lost its lustre in his eyes, for there were countless treasures of the heart which it could never purchase.

A very slight circumstance was sufficient to banish such reflections from the mind of such a man. As Ralph looked vacantly out across the yard towards the window of the other office, he became suddenly aware of the earnest observation of Newman Noggs, who, with his red nose almost touching the glass, feigned to be mending a pen with a rusty fragment of a knife, but was in reality staring at his employer with a countenance of the closest and most eager scrutiny.

Ralph exchanged his dreamy posture for his accustomed business attitude: the face of Newman disappeared, and the train of thought took to flight, all simultaneously, and in an instant.

After a few minutes, Ralph rang his bell. Newman answered the summons, and Ralph raised his eyes stealthily to his face, as if he almost feared to read there, a knowledge of his recent thoughts.

There was not the smallest speculation, however, in the countenance of Newman Noggs. If it be possible to imagine a man, with two eyes in his head, and both wide open, looking in no direction whatever, and seeing nothing, Newman appeared to be that man while Ralph Nickleby regarded him.

'How now?' growled Ralph.

'Oh!' said Newman, throwing some intelligence into his eyes all at once, and dropping them on his master, 'I thought you rang.' With which laconic remark Newman turned round and hobbled away.

'Stop!' said Ralph.

Newman stopped; not at all disconcerted.

'I did ring.'

'I knew you did.'

'Then why do you offer to go if you know that?'

'I thought you rang to say you didn't ring,' replied Newman. 'You often do.'

'How dare you pry, and peer, and stare at me, sirrah?' demanded Ralph.

'Stare!' cried Newman, 'at YOU! Ha, ha!' which was all the explanation Newman deigned to offer.

'Be careful, sir,' said Ralph, looking steadily at him. 'Let me have no drunken fooling here. Do you see this parcel?'

'It's big enough,' rejoined Newman.

'Carry it into the city; to Cross, in Broad Street, and leave it there—quick. Do you hear?'

Newman gave a dogged kind of nod to express an affirmative reply, and, leaving the room for a few seconds, returned with his hat. Having made various ineffective attempts to fit the parcel (which was some two feet square) into the crown thereof, Newman took it under his arm, and after putting on his fingerless gloves with great precision and nicety, keeping his eyes fixed upon Mr Ralph Nickleby all the time, he adjusted his hat upon his head with as much care, real or pretended, as if it were a bran-new one of the most expensive quality, and at last departed on his errand.

He executed his commission with great promptitude and dispatch, only calling at one public-house for half a minute, and even that might be said to be in his way, for he went in at one door and came out at the other; but as he returned and had got so far homewards as the Strand, Newman began to loiter with the uncertain air of a man who has not quite made up his mind whether to halt or go straight forwards. After a very short consideration, the former inclination prevailed, and making towards the point he had had in his mind, Newman knocked a modest double knock, or rather a nervous single one, at Miss La Creevy's door.

It was opened by a strange servant, on whom the odd figure of the visitor did not appear to make the most favourable impression possible, inasmuch as she no sooner saw him than she very nearly closed it, and placing herself in the narrow gap, inquired what he wanted. But Newman merely uttering the monosyllable 'Noggs,' as if it were some cabalistic word, at sound of which bolts would fly back and doors open, pushed briskly past and gained the door of Miss La Creevy's sitting-room, before the astonished servant could offer any opposition.

'Walk in if you please,' said Miss La Creevy in reply to the sound of Newman's knuckles; and in he walked accordingly.

'Bless us!' cried Miss La Creevy, starting as Newman bolted in; 'what did you want, sir?'

'You have forgotten me,' said Newman, with an inclination of the head. 'I wonder at that. That nobody should remember me who knew me in other days, is natural enough; but there are few people who, seeing me once, forget me NOW.' He glanced, as he spoke, at his shabby clothes and paralytic limb, and slightly shook his head.

'I did forget you, I declare,' said Miss La Creevy, rising to receive Newman, who met her half-way, 'and I am ashamed of myself for doing so; for you are a kind, good creature, Mr Noggs. Sit down and tell me all about Miss Nickleby. Poor dear thing! I haven't seen her for this many a week.'

'How's that?' asked Newman.

'Why, the truth is, Mr Noggs,' said Miss La Creevy, 'that I have been out on a visit—the first visit I have made for fifteen years.'

'That is a long time,' said Newman, sadly.

'So it is a very long time to look back upon in years, though, somehow or other, thank Heaven, the solitary days roll away peacefully and happily enough,' replied the miniature painter. 'I have a brother, Mr Noggs—the only relation I have—and all that time I never saw him once. Not that we ever quarrelled, but he was apprenticed down in the country, and he got married there; and new ties and affections springing up about him, he forgot a poor little woman like me, as it was very reasonable he should, you know. Don't suppose that I complain about that, because I always said to myself, "It is very natural; poor dear John is making his way in the world, and has a wife to tell his cares and troubles to, and children now to play about him, so God bless him and them, and send we may all meet together one day where we shall part no more." But what do you think, Mr Noggs,' said the miniature painter, brightening up and clapping her hands, 'of that very same brother coming up to London at last, and never resting till he found me out; what do you think of his coming here and sitting down in that very chair, and crying like a child because he was so glad to see me—what do you think of his insisting on taking me down all the way into the country to his own house (quite a sumptuous place, Mr Noggs, with a large garden and I don't know how many fields, and a man in livery waiting at table, and cows and horses and pigs and I don't know what besides), and making me stay a whole month, and pressing me to stop there all my life—yes, all my life—and so did his wife, and so did the children—and there were four of them, and one, the eldest girl of all, they—they had named her after me eight good years before, they had indeed. I never was so happy; in all my life I never was!' The worthy soul hid her face in her handkerchief, and sobbed aloud; for it was the first opportunity she had had of unburdening her heart, and it would have its way.

'But bless my life,' said Miss La Creevy, wiping her eyes after a short pause, and cramming her handkerchief into her pocket with great bustle and dispatch; 'what a foolish creature I must seem to you, Mr Noggs! I shouldn't have said anything about it, only I wanted to explain to you how it was I hadn't seen Miss Nickleby.'

'Have you seen the old lady?' asked Newman.

'You mean Mrs Nickleby?' said Miss La Creevy. 'Then I tell you what, Mr Noggs, if you want to keep in the good books in that quarter, you had better not call her the old lady any more, for I suspect she wouldn't be best pleased to hear you. Yes, I went there the night before last, but she was quite on the high ropes about something, and was so grand and mysterious, that I couldn't make anything of her: so, to tell you the truth, I took it into my head to be grand too, and came away in state. I thought she would have come round again before this, but she hasn't been here.'

'About Miss Nickleby—' said Newman.

'Why, she was here twice while I was away,' returned Miss La Creevy. 'I was afraid she mightn't like to have me calling on her among those great folks in what's-its-name Place, so I thought I'd wait a day or two, and if I didn't see her, write.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Newman, cracking his fingers.

'However, I want to hear all the news about them from you,' said Miss La Creevy. 'How is the old rough and tough monster of Golden Square? Well, of course; such people always are. I don't mean how is he in health, but how is he going on: how is he behaving himself?'

'Damn him!' cried Newman, dashing his cherished hat on the floor; 'like a false hound.'

'Gracious, Mr Noggs, you quite terrify me!' exclaimed Miss La Creevy, turning pale.

'I should have spoilt his features yesterday afternoon if I could have afforded it,' said Newman, moving restlessly about, and shaking his fist at a portrait of Mr Canning over the mantelpiece. 'I was very near it. I was obliged to put my hands in my pockets, and keep 'em there very tight. I shall do it some day in that little back-parlour, I know I shall. I should have done it before now, if I hadn't been afraid of making bad worse. I shall double-lock myself in with him and have it out before I die, I'm quite certain of it.'

'I shall scream if you don't compose yourself, Mr Noggs,' said Miss La Creevy; 'I'm sure I shan't be able to help it.'

'Never mind,' rejoined Newman, darting violently to and fro. 'He's coming up tonight: I wrote to tell him. He little thinks I know; he little thinks I care. Cunning scoundrel! he don't think that. Not he, not he. Never mind, I'll thwart him—I, Newman Noggs. Ho, ho, the rascal!'

Lashing himself up to an extravagant pitch of fury, Newman Noggs jerked himself about the room with the most eccentric motion ever beheld in a human being: now sparring at the little miniatures on the wall, and now giving himself violent thumps on the head, as if to heighten the delusion, until he sank down in his former seat quite breathless and exhausted.

'There,' said Newman, picking up his hat; 'that's done me good. Now I'm better, and I'll tell you all about it.'

It took some little time to reassure Miss La Creevy, who had been almost frightened out of her senses by this remarkable demonstration; but that done, Newman faithfully related all that had passed in the interview between Kate and her uncle, prefacing his narrative with a statement of his previous suspicions on the subject, and his reasons for forming them; and concluding with a communication of the step he had taken in secretly writing to Nicholas.

Though little Miss La Creevy's indignation was not so singularly displayed as Newman's, it was scarcely inferior in violence and intensity. Indeed, if Ralph Nickleby had happened to make his appearance in the room at that moment, there is some doubt whether he would not have found Miss La Creevy a more dangerous opponent than even Newman Noggs himself.

'God forgive me for saying so,' said Miss La Creevy, as a wind-up to all her expressions of anger, 'but I really feel as if I could stick this into him with pleasure.'

It was not a very awful weapon that Miss La Creevy held, it being in fact nothing more nor less than a black-lead pencil; but discovering her mistake, the little portrait painter exchanged it for a mother-of-pearl fruit knife, wherewith, in proof of her desperate thoughts, she made a lunge as she spoke, which would have scarcely disturbed the crumb of a half-quartern loaf.

'She won't stop where she is after tonight,' said Newman. 'That's a comfort.'

'Stop!' cried Miss La Creevy, 'she should have left there, weeks ago.'

'—If we had known of this,' rejoined Newman. 'But we didn't. Nobody could properly interfere but her mother or brother. The mother's weak—poor thing—weak. The dear young man will be here tonight.'

'Heart alive!' cried Miss La Creevy. 'He will do something desperate, Mr Noggs, if you tell him all at once.'

Newman left off rubbing his hands, and assumed a thoughtful look.

'Depend upon it,' said Miss La Creevy, earnestly, 'if you are not very careful in breaking out the truth to him, he will do some violence upon his uncle or one of these men that will bring some terrible calamity upon his own head, and grief and sorrow to us all.'

'I never thought of that,' rejoined Newman, his countenance falling more and more. 'I came to ask you to receive his sister in case he brought her here, but—'

'But this is a matter of much greater importance,' interrupted Miss La Creevy; 'that you might have been sure of before you came, but the end of this, nobody can foresee, unless you are very guarded and careful.'

'What CAN I do?' cried Newman, scratching his head with an air of great vexation and perplexity. 'If he was to talk of pistoling 'em all, I should be obliged to say, "Certainly—serve 'em right."'

Miss La Creevy could not suppress a small shriek on hearing this, and instantly set about extorting a solemn pledge from Newman that he would use his utmost endeavours to pacify the wrath of Nicholas; which, after some demur, was conceded. They then consulted together on the safest and surest mode of communicating to him the circumstances which had rendered his presence necessary.

'He must have time to cool before he can possibly do anything,' said Miss La Creevy. 'That is of the greatest consequence. He must not be told until late at night.'

'But he'll be in town between six and seven this evening,' replied Newman. 'I can't keep it from him when he asks me.'

'Then you must go out, Mr Noggs,' said Miss La Creevy. 'You can easily have been kept away by business, and must not return till nearly midnight.'

'Then he will come straight here,' retorted Newman.

'So I suppose,' observed Miss La Creevy; 'but he won't find me at home, for I'll go straight to the city the instant you leave me, make up matters with

Mrs Nickleby, and take her away to the theatre, so that he may not even know where his sister lives.'

Upon further discussion, this appeared the safest and most feasible mode of proceeding that could possibly be adopted. Therefore it was finally determined that matters should be so arranged, and Newman, after listening to many supplementary cautions and entreaties, took his leave of Miss La Creevy and trudged back to Golden Square; ruminating as he went upon a vast number of possibilities and impossibilities which crowded upon his brain, and arose out of the conversation that had just terminated.

CHAPTER 32

Relating chiefly to some remarkable Conversation, and some remarkable Proceedings to which it gives rise

'London at last!' cried Nicholas, throwing back his greatcoat and rousing Smike from a long nap. 'It seemed to me as though we should never reach it.'

'And yet you came along at a tidy pace too,' observed the coachman, looking over his shoulder at Nicholas with no very pleasant expression of countenance.

'Ay, I know that,' was the reply; 'but I have been very anxious to be at my journey's end, and that makes the way seem long.'

'Well,' remarked the coachman, 'if the way seemed long with such cattle as you've sat behind, you MUST have been most uncommon anxious;' and so saying, he let out his whip-lash and touched up a little boy on the calves of his legs by way of emphasis.

They rattled on through the noisy, bustling, crowded street of London, now displaying long double rows of brightly-burning lamps, dotted here and there with the chemists' glaring lights, and illuminated besides with the brilliant flood that streamed from the windows of the shops, where sparkling jewellery, silks and velvets of the richest colours, the most inviting delicacies, and most sumptuous articles of luxurious ornament, succeeded each other in rich and glittering profusion. Streams of people apparently without end poured on and on, jostling each other in the crowd and hurrying forward, scarcely seeming to notice the riches that surrounded them on every side; while vehicles of all shapes and makes, mingled up together in one moving mass, like running water, lent their ceaseless roar to swell the noise and tumult.

As they dashed by the quickly-changing and ever-varying objects, it was curious to observe in what a strange procession they passed before the eye. Emporiums of splendid dresses, the materials brought from every quarter of the world; tempting stores of everything to stimulate and pamper the sated appetite and give new relish to the oft-repeated feast; vessels of burnished gold and silver, wrought into every exquisite form of vase, and dish, and goblet; guns, swords, pistols, and patent engines of destruction;

screws and irons for the crooked, clothes for the newly-born, drugs for the sick, coffins for the dead, and churchyards for the buried—all these jumbled each with the other and flocking side by side, seemed to flit by in motley dance like the fantastic groups of the old Dutch painter, and with the same stern moral for the unheeding restless crowd.

Nor were there wanting objects in the crowd itself to give new point and purpose to the shifting scene. The rags of the squalid ballad-singer fluttered in the rich light that showed the goldsmith's treasures, pale and pinched-up faces hovered about the windows where was tempting food, hungry eyes wandered over the profusion guarded by one thin sheet of brittle glass—an iron wall to them; half-naked shivering figures stopped to gaze at Chinese shawls and golden stuffs of India. There was a christening party at the largest coffin-maker's and a funeral hatchment had stopped some great improvements in the bravest mansion. Life and death went hand in hand; wealth and poverty stood side by side; repletion and starvation laid them down together.

But it was London; and the old country lady inside, who had put her head out of the coach-window a mile or two this side Kingston, and cried out to the driver that she was sure he must have passed it and forgotten to set her down, was satisfied at last.

Nicholas engaged beds for himself and Smike at the inn where the coach stopped, and repaired, without the delay of another moment, to the lodgings of Newman Noggs; for his anxiety and impatience had increased with every succeeding minute, and were almost beyond control.

There was a fire in Newman's garret; and a candle had been left burning; the floor was cleanly swept, the room was as comfortably arranged as such a room could be, and meat and drink were placed in order upon the table. Everything bespoke the affectionate care and attention of Newman Noggs, but Newman himself was not there.

'Do you know what time he will be home?' inquired Nicholas, tapping at the door of Newman's front neighbour.

'Ah, Mr Johnson!' said Crowl, presenting himself. 'Welcome, sir. How well you're looking! I never could have believed—'

'Pardon me,' interposed Nicholas. 'My question—I am extremely anxious to know.'

'Why, he has a troublesome affair of business,' replied Crowl, 'and will not be home before twelve o'clock. He was very unwilling to go, I can tell you, but there was no help for it. However, he left word that you were to make yourself comfortable till he came back, and that I was to entertain you, which I shall be very glad to do.'

In proof of his extreme readiness to exert himself for the general entertainment, Mr Crowl drew a chair to the table as he spoke, and helping himself plentifully to the cold meat, invited Nicholas and Smike to follow his example.

Disappointed and uneasy, Nicholas could touch no food, so, after he had seen Smike comfortably established at the table, he walked out (despite a great many dissuasions uttered by Mr Crowl with his mouth full), and left Smike to detain Newman in case he returned first.

As Miss La Creevy had anticipated, Nicholas betook himself straight to her house. Finding her from home, he debated within himself for some time whether he should go to his mother's residence, and so compromise her with Ralph Nickleby. Fully persuaded, however, that Newman would not have solicited him to return unless there was some strong reason which required his presence at home, he resolved to go there, and hastened eastwards with all speed.

Mrs Nickleby would not be at home, the girl said, until past twelve, or later. She believed Miss Nickleby was well, but she didn't live at home now, nor did she come home except very seldom. She couldn't say where she was stopping, but it was not at Madame Mantalini's. She was sure of that.

With his heart beating violently, and apprehending he knew not what disaster, Nicholas returned to where he had left Smike. Newman had not been home. He wouldn't be, till twelve o'clock; there was no chance of it. Was there no possibility of sending to fetch him if it were only for an instant, or forwarding to him one line of writing to which he might return a verbal reply? That was quite impracticable. He was not at Golden Square, and probably had been sent to execute some commission at a distance.

Nicholas tried to remain quietly where he was, but he felt so nervous and excited that he could not sit still. He seemed to be losing time unless he was moving. It was an absurd fancy, he knew, but he was wholly unable to resist it. So, he took up his hat and rambled out again.

He strolled westward this time, pacing the long streets with hurried footsteps, and agitated by a thousand misgivings and apprehensions which he could not overcome. He passed into Hyde Park, now silent and deserted, and increased his rate of walking as if in the hope of leaving his thoughts behind. They crowded upon him more thickly, however, now there were no passing objects to attract his attention; and the one idea was always uppermost, that some stroke of ill-fortune must have occurred so calamitous in its nature that all were fearful of disclosing it to him. The old question arose again and again—What could it be? Nicholas walked till he was weary, but was not one bit the wiser; and indeed he came out of the Park at last a great deal more confused and perplexed than when he went in.

He had taken scarcely anything to eat or drink since early in the morning, and felt quite worn out and exhausted. As he returned languidly towards the point from which he had started, along one of the thoroughfares which lie between Park Lane and Bond Street, he passed a handsome hotel, before which he stopped mechanically.

'An expensive place, I dare say,' thought Nicholas; 'but a pint of wine and a biscuit are no great debauch wherever they are had. And yet I don't know.'

He walked on a few steps, but looking wistfully down the long vista of gas-lamps before him, and thinking how long it would take to reach the end of it and being besides in that kind of mood in which a man is most disposed to yield to his first impulse—and being, besides, strongly attracted to the hotel, in part by curiosity, and in part by some odd mixture of feelings which he would have been troubled to define—Nicholas turned back again, and walked into the coffee-room.

It was very handsomely furnished. The walls were ornamented with the choicest specimens of French paper, enriched with a gilded cornice of elegant design. The floor was covered with a rich carpet; and two superb mirrors, one above the chimneypiece and one at the opposite end of the room reaching from floor to ceiling, multiplied the other beauties and added new ones of their own to enhance the general effect. There was a rather noisy party of four gentlemen in a box by the fire-place, and only two other persons present—both elderly gentlemen, and both alone.

Observing all this in the first comprehensive glance with which a stranger surveys a place that is new to him, Nicholas sat himself down in the box next to the noisy party, with his back towards them, and postponing his order for a pint of claret until such time as the waiter and one of the elderly gentlemen should have settled a disputed question relative to the price of an item in the bill of fare, took up a newspaper and began to read.

He had not read twenty lines, and was in truth himself dozing, when he was startled by the mention of his sister's name. 'Little Kate Nickleby' were the words that caught his ear. He raised his head in amazement, and as he did so, saw by the reflection in the opposite glass, that two of the party behind him had risen and were standing before the fire. 'It must have come from one of them,' thought Nicholas. He waited to hear more with a countenance of some indignation, for the tone of speech had been anything but respectful, and the appearance of the individual whom he presumed to have been the speaker was coarse and swaggering.

This person—so Nicholas observed in the same glance at the mirror which had enabled him to see his face—was standing with his back to the fire conversing with a younger man, who stood with his back to the company, wore his hat, and was adjusting his shirt-collar by the aid of the glass. They spoke in whispers, now and then bursting into a loud laugh, but Nicholas could catch no repetition of the words, nor anything sounding at all like the words, which had attracted his attention.

At length the two resumed their seats, and more wine being ordered, the party grew louder in their mirth. Still there was no reference made to anybody with whom he was acquainted, and Nicholas became persuaded that his excited fancy had either imagined the sounds altogether, or converted some other words into the name which had been so much in his thoughts.

'It is remarkable too,' thought Nicholas: 'if it had been "Kate" or "Kate Nickleby," I should not have been so much surprised: but "little Kate Nickleby!"'

The wine coming at the moment prevented his finishing the sentence. He swallowed a glassful and took up the paper again. At that instant—

'Little Kate Nickleby!' cried the voice behind him.

'I was right,' muttered Nicholas as the paper fell from his hand. 'And it was the man I supposed.'

'As there was a proper objection to drinking her in heel-taps,' said the voice, 'we'll give her the first glass in the new magnum. Little Kate Nickleby!'

'Little Kate Nickleby,' cried the other three. And the glasses were set down empty.

Keenly alive to the tone and manner of this slight and careless mention of his sister's name in a public place, Nicholas fired at once; but he kept himself quiet by a great effort, and did not even turn his head.

'The jade!' said the same voice which had spoken before. 'She's a true Nickleby—a worthy imitator of her old uncle Ralph—she hangs back to be more sought after—so does he; nothing to be got out of Ralph unless you follow him up, and then the money comes doubly welcome, and the bargain doubly hard, for you're impatient and he isn't. Oh! infernal cunning.'

'Infernal cunning,' echoed two voices.

Nicholas was in a perfect agony as the two elderly gentlemen opposite, rose one after the other and went away, lest they should be the means of his losing one word of what was said. But the conversation was suspended as they withdrew, and resumed with even greater freedom when they had left the room.

'I am afraid,' said the younger gentleman, 'that the old woman has grown jea-a-lous, and locked her up. Upon my soul it looks like it.'

'If they quarrel and little Nickleby goes home to her mother, so much the better,' said the first. 'I can do anything with the old lady. She'll believe anything I tell her.'

'Egad that's true,' returned the other voice. 'Ha, ha, ha! Poor deyvle!'

The laugh was taken up by the two voices which always came in together, and became general at Mrs Nickleby's expense. Nicholas turned burning hot with rage, but he commanded himself for the moment, and waited to hear more.

What he heard need not be repeated here. Suffice it that as the wine went round he heard enough to acquaint him with the characters and designs of those whose conversation he overhead; to possess him with the full extent of Ralph's villainy, and the real reason of his own presence being required in London. He heard all this and more. He heard his sister's sufferings derided, and her virtuous conduct jeered at and brutally misconstrued; he heard her name bandied from mouth to mouth, and herself made the subject of coarse and insolent wagers, free speech, and licentious jesting.

The man who had spoken first, led the conversation, and indeed almost engrossed it, being only stimulated from time to time by some slight observation from one or other of his companions. To him then Nicholas addressed himself when he was sufficiently composed to stand before the party, and force the words from his parched and scorching throat.

'Let me have a word with you, sir,' said Nicholas.

'With me, sir?' retorted Sir Mulberry Hawk, eyeing him in disdainful surprise.

'I said with you,' replied Nicholas, speaking with great difficulty, for his passion choked him.

'A mysterious stranger, upon my soul!' exclaimed Sir Mulberry, raising his wine-glass to his lips, and looking round upon his friends.

'Will you step apart with me for a few minutes, or do you refuse?' said Nicholas sternly.

Sir Mulberry merely paused in the act of drinking, and bade him either name his business or leave the table.

Nicholas drew a card from his pocket, and threw it before him.

'There, sir,' said Nicholas; 'my business you will guess.'

A momentary expression of astonishment, not unmixed with some confusion, appeared in the face of Sir Mulberry as he read the name; but he subdued it in an instant, and tossing the card to Lord Verisopht, who sat opposite, drew a toothpick from a glass before him, and very leisurely applied it to his mouth.

'Your name and address?' said Nicholas, turning paler as his passion kindled.

'I shall give you neither,' replied Sir Mulberry.

'If there is a gentleman in this party,' said Nicholas, looking round and scarcely able to make his white lips form the words, 'he will acquaint me with the name and residence of this man.'

There was a dead silence.

'I am the brother of the young lady who has been the subject of conversation here,' said Nicholas. 'I denounce this person as a liar, and impeach him as a coward. If he has a friend here, he will save him the disgrace of the paltry attempt to conceal his name—and utterly useless one—for I will find it out, nor leave him until I have.'

Sir Mulberry looked at him contemptuously, and, addressing his companions, said—

'Let the fellow talk, I have nothing serious to say to boys of his station; and his pretty sister shall save him a broken head, if he talks till midnight.'

'You are a base and spiritless scoundrel!' said Nicholas, 'and shall be proclaimed so to the world. I WILL know you; I will follow you home if you walk the streets till morning.'

Sir Mulberry's hand involuntarily closed upon the decanter, and he seemed for an instant about to launch it at the head of his challenger. But he only filled his glass, and laughed in derision.

Nicholas sat himself down, directly opposite to the party, and, summoning the waiter, paid his bill.

'Do you know that person's name?' he inquired of the man in an audible voice; pointing out Sir Mulberry as he put the question.

Sir Mulberry laughed again, and the two voices which had always spoken together, echoed the laugh; but rather feebly.

'That gentleman, sir?' replied the waiter, who, no doubt, knew his cue, and answered with just as little respect, and just as much impertinence as he could safely show: 'no, sir, I do not, sir.'

'Here, you sir,' cried Sir Mulberry, as the man was retiring; 'do you know THAT person's name?'

'Name, sir? No, sir.'

'Then you'll find it there,' said Sir Mulberry, throwing Nicholas's card towards him; 'and when you have made yourself master of it, put that piece of pasteboard in the fire—do you hear me?'

The man grinned, and, looking doubtfully at Nicholas, compromised the matter by sticking the card in the chimney-glass. Having done this, he retired.

Nicholas folded his arms, and biting his lip, sat perfectly quiet; sufficiently expressing by his manner, however, a firm determination to carry his threat of following Sir Mulberry home, into steady execution.

It was evident from the tone in which the younger member of the party appeared to remonstrate with his friend, that he objected to this course of proceeding, and urged him to comply with the request which Nicholas had made. Sir Mulberry, however, who was not quite sober, and who was in a sullen and dogged state of obstinacy, soon silenced the representations of his weak young friend, and further seemed—as if to save himself from a repetition of them—to insist on being left alone. However this might have been, the young gentleman and the two who had always spoken together, actually rose to go after a short interval, and presently retired, leaving their friend alone with Nicholas.

It will be very readily supposed that to one in the condition of Nicholas, the minutes appeared to move with leaden wings indeed, and that their progress did not seem the more rapid from the monotonous ticking of a

French clock, or the shrill sound of its little bell which told the quarters. But there he sat; and in his old seat on the opposite side of the room reclined Sir Mulberry Hawk, with his legs upon the cushion, and his handkerchief thrown negligently over his knees: finishing his magnum of claret with the utmost coolness and indifference.

Thus they remained in perfect silence for upwards of an hour—Nicholas would have thought for three hours at least, but that the little bell had only gone four times. Twice or thrice he looked angrily and impatiently round; but there was Sir Mulberry in the same attitude, putting his glass to his lips from time to time, and looking vacantly at the wall, as if he were wholly ignorant of the presence of any living person.

At length he yawned, stretched himself, and rose; walked coolly to the glass, and having surveyed himself therein, turned round and honoured Nicholas with a long and contemptuous stare. Nicholas stared again with right good-will; Sir Mulberry shrugged his shoulders, smiled slightly, rang the bell, and ordered the waiter to help him on with his greatcoat.

The man did so, and held the door open.

'Don't wait,' said Sir Mulberry; and they were alone again.

Sir Mulberry took several turns up and down the room, whistling carelessly all the time; stopped to finish the last glass of claret which he had poured out a few minutes before, walked again, put on his hat, adjusted it by the glass, drew on his gloves, and, at last, walked slowly out. Nicholas, who had been fuming and chafing until he was nearly wild, darted from his seat, and followed him: so closely, that before the door had swung upon its hinges after Sir Mulberry's passing out, they stood side by side in the street together.

There was a private cabriolet in waiting; the groom opened the apron, and jumped out to the horse's head.

'Will you make yourself known to me?' asked Nicholas in a suppressed voice.

'No,' replied the other fiercely, and confirming the refusal with an oath. 'No.'

'If you trust to your horse's speed, you will find yourself mistaken,' said Nicholas. 'I will accompany you. By Heaven I will, if I hang on to the foot-board.'

'You shall be horsewhipped if you do,' returned Sir Mulberry.

'You are a villain,' said Nicholas.

'You are an errand-boy for aught I know,' said Sir Mulberry Hawk.

'I am the son of a country gentleman,' returned Nicholas, 'your equal in birth and education, and your superior I trust in everything besides. I tell you again, Miss Nickleby is my sister. Will you or will you not answer for your unmanly and brutal conduct?'

'To a proper champion—yes. To you—no,' returned Sir Mulberry, taking the reins in his hand. 'Stand out of the way, dog. William, let go her head.'

'You had better not,' cried Nicholas, springing on the step as Sir Mulberry jumped in, and catching at the reins. 'He has no command over the horse, mind. You shall not go—you shall not, I swear—till you have told me who you are.'

The groom hesitated, for the mare, who was a high-spirited animal and thorough-bred, plunged so violently that he could scarcely hold her.

'Leave go, I tell you!' thundered his master.

The man obeyed. The animal reared and plunged as though it would dash the carriage into a thousand pieces, but Nicholas, blind to all sense of danger, and conscious of nothing but his fury, still maintained his place and his hold upon the reins.

'Will you unclasp your hand?'

'Will you tell me who you are?'

'No!'

'No!'

In less time than the quickest tongue could tell it, these words were exchanged, and Sir Mulberry shortening his whip, applied it furiously to the head and shoulders of Nicholas. It was broken in the struggle; Nicholas gained the heavy handle, and with it laid open one side of his antagonist's face from the eye to the lip. He saw the gash; knew that the mare had darted off at a wild mad gallop; a hundred lights danced in his eyes, and he felt himself flung violently upon the ground.

He was giddy and sick, but staggered to his feet directly, roused by the loud shouts of the men who were tearing up the street, and screaming to those ahead to clear the way. He was conscious of a torrent of people rushing quickly by—looking up, could discern the cabriolet whirled along the foot-pavement with frightful rapidity—then heard a loud cry, the smashing of some heavy body, and the breaking of glass—and then the crowd closed in in the distance, and he could see or hear no more.

The general attention had been entirely directed from himself to the person in the carriage, and he was quite alone. Rightly judging that under such circumstances it would be madness to follow, he turned down a bye-street in search of the nearest coach-stand, finding after a minute or two that he was reeling like a drunken man, and aware for the first time of a stream of blood that was trickling down his face and breast.

CHAPTER 33

In which Mr Ralph Nickleby is relieved, by a very expeditious Process, from all Commerce with his Relations

Smike and Newman Noggs, who in his impatience had returned home long before the time agreed upon, sat before the fire, listening anxiously to every footstep on the stairs, and the slightest sound that stirred within the house, for the approach of Nicholas. Time had worn on, and it was growing late. He had promised to be back in an hour; and his prolonged absence began to excite considerable alarm in the minds of both, as was abundantly testified by the blank looks they cast upon each other at every new disappointment.

At length a coach was heard to stop, and Newman ran out to light Nicholas up the stairs. Beholding him in the trim described at the conclusion of the last chapter, he stood aghast in wonder and consternation.

'Don't be alarmed,' said Nicholas, hurrying him back into the room. 'There is no harm done, beyond what a basin of water can repair.'

'No harm!' cried Newman, passing his hands hastily over the back and arms of Nicholas, as if to assure himself that he had broken no bones. 'What have you been doing?'

'I know all,' interrupted Nicholas; 'I have heard a part, and guessed the rest. But before I remove one jot of these stains, I must hear the whole from you. You see I am collected. My resolution is taken. Now, my good friend, speak out; for the time for any palliation or concealment is past, and nothing will avail Ralph Nickleby now.'

'Your dress is torn in several places; you walk lame, and I am sure you are suffering pain,' said Newman. 'Let me see to your hurts first.'

'I have no hurts to see to, beyond a little soreness and stiffness that will soon pass off,' said Nicholas, seating himself with some difficulty. 'But if I had fractured every limb, and still preserved my senses, you should not bandage one till you had told me what I have the right to know. Come,' said Nicholas, giving his hand to Noggs. 'You had a sister of your own, you told me once, who died before you fell into misfortune. Now think of her, and tell me, Newman.'

'Yes, I will, I will,' said Noggs. 'I'll tell you the whole truth.'

Newman did so. Nicholas nodded his head from time to time, as it corroborated the particulars he had already gleaned; but he fixed his eyes upon the fire, and did not look round once.

His recital ended, Newman insisted upon his young friend's stripping off his coat and allowing whatever injuries he had received to be properly tended. Nicholas, after some opposition, at length consented, and, while some pretty severe bruises on his arms and shoulders were being rubbed with oil and vinegar, and various other efficacious remedies which Newman borrowed from the different lodgers, related in what manner they had been received. The recital made a strong impression on the warm imagination of Newman; for when Nicholas came to the violent part of the quarrel, he rubbed so hard, as to occasion him the most exquisite pain, which he would not have exhibited, however, for the world, it being perfectly clear that, for the moment, Newman was operating on Sir Mulberry Hawk, and had quite lost sight of his real patient.

This martyrdom over, Nicholas arranged with Newman that while he was otherwise occupied next morning, arrangements should be made for his mother's immediately quitting her present residence, and also for dispatching Miss La Creevy to break the intelligence to her. He then wrapped himself in Smike's greatcoat, and repaired to the inn where they were to pass the night, and where (after writing a few lines to Ralph, the delivery of which was to be intrusted to Newman next day), he endeavoured to obtain the repose of which he stood so much in need.

Drunken men, they say, may roll down precipices, and be quite unconscious of any serious personal inconvenience when their reason returns. The remark may possibly apply to injuries received in other kinds of violent excitement: certain it is, that although Nicholas experienced some pain on first awakening next morning, he sprung out of bed as the clock struck seven, with very little difficulty, and was soon as much on the alert as if nothing had occurred.

Merely looking into Smike's room, and telling him that Newman Noggs would call for him very shortly, Nicholas descended into the street, and calling a hackney coach, bade the man drive to Mrs Wititterly's, according to the direction which Newman had given him on the previous night.

It wanted a quarter to eight when they reached Cadogan Place. Nicholas began to fear that no one might be stirring at that early hour, when he was relieved by the sight of a female servant, employed in cleaning the door-steps. By this functionary he was referred to the doubtful page, who appeared with dishevelled hair and a very warm and glossy face, as of a page who had just got out of bed.

By this young gentleman he was informed that Miss Nickleby was then taking her morning's walk in the gardens before the house. On the question being propounded whether he could go and find her, the page desponded and thought not; but being stimulated with a shilling, the page grew sanguine and thought he could.

'Say to Miss Nickleby that her brother is here, and in great haste to see her,' said Nicholas.

The plated buttons disappeared with an alacrity most unusual to them, and Nicholas paced the room in a state of feverish agitation which made the delay even of a minute insupportable. He soon heard a light footstep which he well knew, and before he could advance to meet her, Kate had fallen on his neck and burst into tears.

'My darling girl,' said Nicholas as he embraced her. 'How pale you are!'

'I have been so unhappy here, dear brother,' sobbed poor Kate; 'so very, very miserable. Do not leave me here, dear Nicholas, or I shall die of a broken heart.'

'I will leave you nowhere,' answered Nicholas—'never again, Kate,' he cried, moved in spite of himself as he folded her to his heart. 'Tell me that I acted for the best. Tell me that we parted because I feared to bring misfortune on your head; that it was a trial to me no less than to yourself, and that if I did wrong it was in ignorance of the world and unknowingly.'

'Why should I tell you what we know so well?' returned Kate soothingly. 'Nicholas—dear Nicholas—how can you give way thus?'

'It is such bitter reproach to me to know what you have undergone,' returned her brother; 'to see you so much altered, and yet so kind and patient—God!' cried Nicholas, clenching his fist and suddenly changing his tone and manner, 'it sets my whole blood on fire again. You must leave here with me directly; you should not have slept here last night, but that I knew all this too late. To whom can I speak, before we drive away?'

This question was most opportunely put, for at that instant Mr Wititterly walked in, and to him Kate introduced her brother, who at once announced his purpose, and the impossibility of deferring it.

'The quarter's notice,' said Mr Wititterly, with the gravity of a man on the right side, 'is not yet half expired. Therefore—'

'Therefore,' interposed Nicholas, 'the quarter's salary must be lost, sir. You will excuse this extreme haste, but circumstances require that I should immediately remove my sister, and I have not a moment's time to lose. Whatever she brought here I will send for, if you will allow me, in the course of the day.'

Mr Wititterly bowed, but offered no opposition to Kate's immediate departure; with which, indeed, he was rather gratified than otherwise, Sir Tumley Snuffim having given it as his opinion, that she rather disagreed with Mrs Wititterly's constitution.

'With regard to the trifle of salary that is due,' said Mr Wititterly, 'I will'—here he was interrupted by a violent fit of coughing—'I will—owe it to Miss Nickleby.'

Mr Wititterly, it should be observed, was accustomed to owe small accounts, and to leave them owing. All men have some little pleasant way of their own; and this was Mr Wititterly's.

'If you please,' said Nicholas. And once more offering a hurried apology for so sudden a departure, he hurried Kate into the vehicle, and bade the man drive with all speed into the city.

To the city they went accordingly, with all the speed the hackney coach could make; and as the horses happened to live at Whitechapel and to be in the habit of taking their breakfast there, when they breakfasted at all, they performed the journey with greater expedition than could reasonably have been expected.

Nicholas sent Kate upstairs a few minutes before him, that his unlooked-for appearance might not alarm his mother, and when the way had been paved, presented himself with much duty and affection. Newman had not been idle, for there was a little cart at the door, and the effects were hurrying out already.

Now, Mrs Nickleby was not the sort of person to be told anything in a hurry, or rather to comprehend anything of peculiar delicacy or importance on a short notice. Wherefore, although the good lady had been subjected to a full hour's preparation by little Miss La Creevy, and was now addressed in most lucid terms both by Nicholas and his sister, she was in a state of singular bewilderment and confusion, and could by no means be made to comprehend the necessity of such hurried proceedings.

'Why don't you ask your uncle, my dear Nicholas, what he can possibly mean by it?' said Mrs Nickleby.

'My dear mother,' returned Nicholas, 'the time for talking has gone by. There is but one step to take, and that is to cast him off with the scorn and indignation he deserves. Your own honour and good name demand that, after the discovery of his vile proceedings, you should not be beholden to him one hour, even for the shelter of these bare walls.'

'To be sure,' said Mrs Nickleby, crying bitterly, 'he is a brute, a monster; and the walls are very bare, and want painting too, and I have had this ceiling whitewashed at the expense of eighteen-pence, which is a very distressing thing, considering that it is so much gone into your uncle's pocket. I never could have believed it—never.'

'Nor I, nor anybody else,' said Nicholas.

'Lord bless my life!' exclaimed Mrs Nickleby. 'To think that that Sir Mulberry Hawk should be such an abandoned wretch as Miss La Creevy says he is, Nicholas, my dear; when I was congratulating myself every day on his being an admirer of our dear Kate's, and thinking what a thing it would be for the family if he was to become connected with us, and use his interest to get you some profitable government place. There are very good places to be got about the court, I know; for a friend of ours (Miss Cropley, at Exeter, my dear Kate, you recollect), he had one, and I know that it was the chief part of his duty to wear silk stockings, and a bag wig like a black watch-pocket; and to think that it should come to this after all—oh, dear, dear, it's enough to kill one, that it is!' With which expressions of sorrow, Mrs Nickleby gave fresh vent to her grief, and wept piteously.

As Nicholas and his sister were by this time compelled to superintend the removal of the few articles of furniture, Miss La Creevy devoted herself to the consolation of the matron, and observed with great kindness of manner that she must really make an effort, and cheer up.

'Oh I dare say, Miss La Creevy,' returned Mrs Nickleby, with a petulance not unnatural in her unhappy circumstances, 'it's very easy to say cheer up, but if you had as many occasions to cheer up as I have had—and there,' said Mrs Nickleby, stopping short. 'Think of Mr Pyke and Mr Pluck, two of the most perfect gentlemen that ever lived, what am I too say to them—what can I say to them? Why, if I was to say to them, "I'm told your friend Sir Mulberry is a base wretch," they'd laugh at me.'

'They will laugh no more at us, I take it,' said Nicholas, advancing. 'Come, mother, there is a coach at the door, and until Monday, at all events, we will return to our old quarters.'

'—Where everything is ready, and a hearty welcome into the bargain,' added Miss La Creevy. 'Now, let me go with you downstairs.'

But Mrs Nickleby was not to be so easily moved, for first she insisted on going upstairs to see that nothing had been left, and then on going downstairs to see that everything had been taken away; and when she was getting into the coach she had a vision of a forgotten coffee-pot on the back-kitchen hob, and after she was shut in, a dismal recollection of a green umbrella behind some unknown door. At last Nicholas, in a condition of absolute despair, ordered the coachman to drive away, and in the unexpected jerk of a sudden starting, Mrs Nickleby lost a shilling among the straw, which fortunately confined her attention to the coach until it was too late to remember anything else.

Having seen everything safely out, discharged the servant, and locked the door, Nicholas jumped into a cabriolet and drove to a bye place near Golden Square where he had appointed to meet Noggs; and so quickly had everything been done, that it was barely half-past nine when he reached the place of meeting.

'Here is the letter for Ralph,' said Nicholas, 'and here the key. When you come to me this evening, not a word of last night. Ill news travels fast, and they will know it soon enough. Have you heard if he was much hurt?'

Newman shook his head.

'I will ascertain that myself without loss of time,' said Nicholas.

'You had better take some rest,' returned Newman. 'You are fevered and ill.'

Nicholas waved his hand carelessly, and concealing the indisposition he really felt, now that the excitement which had sustained him was over, took a hurried farewell of Newman Noggs, and left him.

Newman was not three minutes' walk from Golden Square, but in the course of that three minutes he took the letter out of his hat and put it in again twenty times at least. First the front, then the back, then the sides, then the superscription, then the seal, were objects of Newman's admiration. Then he held it at arm's length as if to take in the whole at one delicious survey, and then he rubbed his hands in a perfect ecstasy with his commission.

He reached the office, hung his hat on its accustomed peg, laid the letter and key upon the desk, and waited impatiently until Ralph Nickleby should appear. After a few minutes, the well-known creaking of his boots was heard on the stairs, and then the bell rung.

'Has the post come in?'

'No.'

'Any other letters?'

'One.' Newman eyed him closely, and laid it on the desk.

'What's this?' asked Ralph, taking up the key.

'Left with the letter;—a boy brought them—quarter of an hour ago, or less.'

Ralph glanced at the direction, opened the letter, and read as follows:—

'You are known to me now. There are no reproaches I could heap upon your head which would carry with them one thousandth part of the grovelling shame that this assurance will awaken even in your breast.

'Your brother's widow and her orphan child spurn the shelter of your roof, and shun you with disgust and loathing. Your kindred renounce you, for they know no shame but the ties of blood which bind them in name with you.

'You are an old man, and I leave you to the grave. May every recollection of your life cling to your false heart, and cast their darkness on your death-bed.'

Ralph Nickleby read this letter twice, and frowning heavily, fell into a fit of musing; the paper fluttered from his hand and dropped upon the floor, but he clasped his fingers, as if he held it still.

Suddenly, he started from his seat, and thrusting it all crumpled into his pocket, turned furiously to Newman Noggs, as though to ask him why he lingered. But Newman stood unmoved, with his back towards him, following up, with the worn and blackened stump of an old pen, some figures in an Interest-table which was pasted against the wall, and apparently quite abstracted from every other object.

CHAPTER 34

Wherein Mr Ralph Nickleby is visited by Persons with whom the Reader has been already made acquainted

'What a demnition long time you have kept me ringing at this confounded old cracked tea-kettle of a bell, every tinkle of which is enough to throw a strong man into blue convulsions, upon my life and soul, oh demmit,'—said Mr Mantalini to Newman Noggs, scraping his boots, as he spoke, on Ralph Nickleby's scraper.

'I didn't hear the bell more than once,' replied Newman.

'Then you are most immensely and outr-i-geously deaf,' said Mr Mantalini, 'as deaf as a demnition post.'

Mr Mantalini had got by this time into the passage, and was making his way to the door of Ralph's office with very little ceremony, when Newman interposed his body; and hinting that Mr Nickleby was unwilling to be disturbed, inquired whether the client's business was of a pressing nature.

'It is most demnebly particular,' said Mr Mantalini. 'It is to melt some scraps of dirty paper into bright, shining, chinking, tinkling, demd mint sauce.'

Newman uttered a significant grunt, and taking Mr Mantalini's proffered card, limped with it into his master's office. As he thrust his head in at the door, he saw that Ralph had resumed the thoughtful posture into which he had fallen after perusing his nephew's letter, and that he seemed to have been reading it again, as he once more held it open in his hand. The glance was but momentary, for Ralph, being disturbed, turned to demand the cause of the interruption.

As Newman stated it, the cause himself swaggered into the room, and grasping Ralph's horny hand with uncommon affection, vowed that he had never seen him looking so well in all his life.

'There is quite a bloom upon your demd countenance,' said Mr Mantalini, seating himself unbidden, and arranging his hair and whiskers. 'You look quite juvenile and jolly, demmit!'

'We are alone,' returned Ralph, tartly. 'What do you want with me?'

'Good!' cried Mr Mantalini, displaying his teeth. 'What did I want! Yes. Ha, ha! Very good. WHAT did I want. Ha, ha. Oh dem!'

'What DO you want, man?' demanded Ralph, sternly.

'Demnition discount,' returned Mr Mantalini, with a grin, and shaking his head waggishly.

'Money is scarce,' said Ralph.

'Demd scarce, or I shouldn't want it,' interrupted Mr Mantalini.

'The times are bad, and one scarcely knows whom to trust,' continued Ralph. 'I don't want to do business just now, in fact I would rather not; but as you are a friend—how many bills have you there?'

'Two,' returned Mr Mantalini.

'What is the gross amount?'

'Demd trifling—five-and-seventy.'

'And the dates?'

'Two months, and four.'

'I'll do them for you—mind, for YOU; I wouldn't for many people—for five-and-twenty pounds,' said Ralph, deliberately.

'Oh demmit!' cried Mr Mantalini, whose face lengthened considerably at this handsome proposal.

'Why, that leaves you fifty,' retorted Ralph. 'What would you have? Let me see the names.'

'You are so demd hard, Nickleby,' remonstrated Mr Mantalini.

'Let me see the names,' replied Ralph, impatiently extending his hand for the bills. 'Well! They are not sure, but they are safe enough. Do you consent to the terms, and will you take the money? I don't want you to do so. I would rather you didn't.'

'Demmit, Nickleby, can't you—' began Mr Mantalini.

'No,' replied Ralph, interrupting him. 'I can't. Will you take the money—down, mind; no delay, no going into the city and pretending to negotiate with some other party who has no existence, and never had. Is it a bargain, or is it not?'

Ralph pushed some papers from him as he spoke, and carelessly rattled his cash-box, as though by mere accident. The sound was too much for Mr Mantalini. He closed the bargain directly it reached his ears, and Ralph told the money out upon the table.

He had scarcely done so, and Mr Mantalini had not yet gathered it all up, when a ring was heard at the bell, and immediately afterwards Newman ushered in no less a person than Madame Mantalini, at sight of whom Mr

Mantalini evinced considerable discomposure, and swept the cash into his pocket with remarkable alacrity.

'Oh, you ARE here,' said Madame Mantalini, tossing her head.

'Yes, my life and soul, I am,' replied her husband, dropping on his knees, and pouncing with kitten-like playfulness upon a stray sovereign. 'I am here, my soul's delight, upon Tom Tiddler's ground, picking up the demnition gold and silver.'

'I am ashamed of you,' said Madame Mantalini, with much indignation.

'Ashamed—of ME, my joy? It knows it is talking demd charming sweetness, but naughty fibs,' returned Mr Mantalini. 'It knows it is not ashamed of its own popolorum tibby.'

Whatever were the circumstances which had led to such a result, it certainly appeared as though the popolorum tibby had rather miscalculated, for the nonce, the extent of his lady's affection. Madame Mantalini only looked scornful in reply; and, turning to Ralph, begged him to excuse her intrusion.

'Which is entirely attributable,' said Madame, 'to the gross misconduct and most improper behaviour of Mr Mantalini.'

'Of me, my essential juice of pineapple!'

'Of you,' returned his wife. 'But I will not allow it. I will not submit to be ruined by the extravagance and profligacy of any man. I call Mr Nickleby to witness the course I intend to pursue with you.'

'Pray don't call me to witness anything, ma'am,' said Ralph. 'Settle it between yourselves, settle it between yourselves.'

'No, but I must beg you as a favour,' said Madame Mantalini, 'to hear me give him notice of what it is my fixed intention to do—my fixed intention, sir,' repeated Madame Mantalini, darting an angry look at her husband.

'Will she call me "Sir"?' cried Mantalini. 'Me who dote upon her with the demdest ardour! She, who coils her fascinations round me like a pure angelic rattlesnake! It will be all up with my feelings; she will throw me into a demd state.'

'Don't talk of feelings, sir,' rejoined Madame Mantalini, seating herself, and turning her back upon him. 'You don't consider mine.'

'I do not consider yours, my soul!' exclaimed Mr Mantalini.

'No,' replied his wife.

And notwithstanding various blandishments on the part of Mr Mantalini, Madame Mantalini still said no, and said it too with such determined and resolute ill-temper, that Mr Mantalini was clearly taken aback.

'His extravagance, Mr Nickleby,' said Madame Mantalini, addressing herself to Ralph, who leant against his easy-chair with his hands behind him, and regarded the amiable couple with a smile of the supremest and most unmitigated contempt,—'his extravagance is beyond all bounds.'

'I should scarcely have supposed it,' answered Ralph, sarcastically.

'I assure you, Mr Nickleby, however, that it is,' returned Madame Mantalini. 'It makes me miserable! I am under constant apprehensions, and in constant difficulty. And even this,' said Madame Mantalini, wiping her eyes, 'is not the worst. He took some papers of value out of my desk this morning without asking my permission.'

Mr Mantalini groaned slightly, and buttoned his trousers pocket.

'I am obliged,' continued Madame Mantalini, 'since our late misfortunes, to pay Miss Knag a great deal of money for having her name in the business, and I really cannot afford to encourage him in all his wastefulness. As I have no doubt that he came straight here, Mr Nickleby, to convert the papers I have spoken of, into money, and as you have assisted us very often before, and are very much connected with us in this kind of matters, I wish you to know the determination at which his conduct has compelled me to arrive.'

Mr Mantalini groaned once more from behind his wife's bonnet, and fitting a sovereign into one of his eyes, winked with the other at Ralph. Having achieved this performance with great dexterity, he whipped the coin into his pocket, and groaned again with increased penitence.

'I have made up my mind,' said Madame Mantalini, as tokens of impatience manifested themselves in Ralph's countenance, 'to allowance him.'

'To do that, my joy?' inquired Mr Mantalini, who did not seem to have caught the words.

'To put him,' said Madame Mantalini, looking at Ralph, and prudently abstaining from the slightest glance at her husband, lest his many graces should induce her to falter in her resolution, 'to put him upon a fixed allowance; and I say that if he has a hundred and twenty pounds a year for his clothes and pocket-money, he may consider himself a very fortunate man.'

Mr Mantalini waited, with much decorum, to hear the amount of the proposed stipend, but when it reached his ears, he cast his hat and cane upon the floor, and drawing out his pocket-handkerchief, gave vent to his feelings in a dismal moan.

'Demnition!' cried Mr Mantalini, suddenly skipping out of his chair, and as suddenly skipping into it again, to the great discomposure of his lady's nerves. 'But no. It is a demd horrid dream. It is not reality. No!'

Comforting himself with this assurance, Mr Mantalini closed his eyes and waited patiently till such time as he should wake up.

'A very judicious arrangement,' observed Ralph with a sneer, 'if your husband will keep within it, ma'am—as no doubt he will.'

'Demmit!' exclaimed Mr Mantalini, opening his eyes at the sound of Ralph's voice, 'it is a horrid reality. She is sitting there before me. There is the graceful outline of her form; it cannot be mistaken—there is nothing like it. The two countesses had no outlines at all, and the dowager's was a demd outline. Why is she so excruciatingly beautiful that I cannot be angry with her, even now?'

'You have brought it upon yourself, Alfred,' returned Madame Mantalini—still reproachfully, but in a softened tone.

'I am a demd villain!' cried Mr Mantalini, smiting himself on the head. 'I will fill my pockets with change for a sovereign in halfpence and drown myself in the Thames; but I will not be angry with her, even then, for I will put a note in the twopenny-post as I go along, to tell her where the body is. She will be a lovely widow. I shall be a body. Some handsome women will cry; she will laugh demnebly.'

'Alfred, you cruel, cruel creature,' said Madame Mantalini, sobbing at the dreadful picture.

'She calls me cruel—me—me—who for her sake will become a demd, damp, moist, unpleasant body!' exclaimed Mr Mantalini.

'You know it almost breaks my heart, even to hear you talk of such a thing,' replied Madame Mantalini.

'Can I live to be mistrusted?' cried her husband. 'Have I cut my heart into a demd extraordinary number of little pieces, and given them all away, one after another, to the same little engrossing demnition captivater, and can I live to be suspected by her? Demmit, no I can't.'

'Ask Mr Nickleby whether the sum I have mentioned is not a proper one,' reasoned Madame Mantalini.

'I don't want any sum,' replied her disconsolate husband; 'I shall require no demd allowance. I will be a body.'

On this repetition of Mr Mantalini's fatal threat, Madame Mantalini wrung her hands, and implored the interference of Ralph Nickleby; and after a great quantity of tears and talking, and several attempts on the part of Mr Mantalini to reach the door, preparatory to straightway committing violence upon himself, that gentleman was prevailed upon, with difficulty, to promise that he wouldn't be a body. This great point attained, Madame Mantalini argued the question of the allowance, and Mr Mantalini did the same, taking occasion to show that he could live with uncommon satisfaction upon bread and water, and go clad in rags, but that he could not support existence with the additional burden of being mistrusted by the object of his most devoted and disinterested affection. This brought fresh tears into Madame Mantalini's eyes, which having just begun to open to some few of the demerits of Mr Mantalini, were only open a very little way, and could be easily closed again. The result was, that without quite giving up the allowance question, Madame Mantalini, postponed its further consideration; and Ralph saw, clearly enough, that Mr Mantalini had gained a fresh lease of his easy life, and that, for some time longer at all events, his degradation and downfall were postponed.

'But it will come soon enough,' thought Ralph; 'all love—bah! that I should use the cant of boys and girls—is fleeting enough; though that which has its sole root in the admiration of a whiskered face like that of yonder baboon, perhaps lasts the longest, as it originates in the greater blindness and is fed by vanity. Meantime the fools bring grist to my mill, so let them live out their day, and the longer it is, the better.'

These agreeable reflections occurred to Ralph Nickleby, as sundry small caresses and endearments, supposed to be unseen, were exchanged between the objects of his thoughts.

'If you have nothing more to say, my dear, to Mr Nickleby,' said Madame Mantalini, 'we will take our leaves. I am sure we have detained him much too long already.'

Mr Mantalini answered, in the first instance, by tapping Madame Mantalini several times on the nose, and then, by remarking in words that he had nothing more to say.

'Demmit! I have, though,' he added almost immediately, drawing Ralph into a corner. 'Here's an affair about your friend Sir Mulberry. Such a demd extraordinary out-of-the-way kind of thing as never was—eh?'

'What do you mean?' asked Ralph.

'Don't you know, demmit?' asked Mr Mantalini.

'I see by the paper that he was thrown from his cabriolet last night, and severely injured, and that his life is in some danger,' answered Ralph with great composure; 'but I see nothing extraordinary in that—accidents are not miraculous events, when men live hard, and drive after dinner.'

'Whew!' cried Mr Mantalini in a long shrill whistle. 'Then don't you know how it was?'

'Not unless it was as I have just supposed,' replied Ralph, shrugging his shoulders carelessly, as if to give his questioner to understand that he had no curiosity upon the subject.

'Demmit, you amaze me,' cried Mantalini.

Ralph shrugged his shoulders again, as if it were no great feat to amaze Mr Mantalini, and cast a wistful glance at the face of Newman Noggs, which had several times appeared behind a couple of panes of glass in the room door; it being a part of Newman's duty, when unimportant people called, to make various feints of supposing that the bell had rung for him to show them out: by way of a gentle hint to such visitors that it was time to go.

'Don't you know,' said Mr Mantalini, taking Ralph by the button, 'that it wasn't an accident at all, but a demd, furious, manslaughtering attack made upon him by your nephew?'

'What!' snarled Ralph, clenching his fists and turning a livid white.

'Demmit, Nickleby, you're as great a tiger as he is,' said Mantalini, alarmed at these demonstrations.

'Go on,' cried Ralph. 'Tell me what you mean. What is this story? Who told you? Speak,' growled Ralph. 'Do you hear me?'

''Gad, Nickleby,' said Mr Mantalini, retreating towards his wife, 'what a demneble fierce old evil genius you are! You're enough to frighten the life and soul out of her little delicious wits—flying all at once into such a blazing, ravaging, raging passion as never was, demmit!'

'Pshaw,' rejoined Ralph, forcing a smile. 'It is but manner.'

'It is a demd uncomfortable, private-madhouse-sort of a manner,' said Mr Mantalini, picking up his cane.

Ralph affected to smile, and once more inquired from whom Mr Mantalini had derived his information.

'From Pyke; and a demd, fine, pleasant, gentlemanly dog it is,' replied Mantalini. 'Demnition pleasant, and a tip-top sawyer.'

'And what said he?' asked Ralph, knitting his brows.

'That it happened this way—that your nephew met him at a coffeehouse, fell upon him with the most demneble ferocity, followed him to his cab, swore he would ride home with him, if he rode upon the horse's back or hooked himself on to the horse's tail; smashed his countenance, which is a demd fine countenance in its natural state; frightened the horse, pitched out Sir Mulberry and himself, and—'

'And was killed?' interposed Ralph with gleaming eyes. 'Was he? Is he dead?'

Mantalini shook his head.

'Ugh,' said Ralph, turning away. 'Then he has done nothing. Stay,' he added, looking round again. 'He broke a leg or an arm, or put his shoulder out, or fractured his collar-bone, or ground a rib or two? His neck was saved for the halter, but he got some painful and slow-healing injury for his trouble? Did he? You must have heard that, at least.'

'No,' rejoined Mantalini, shaking his head again. 'Unless he was dashed into such little pieces that they blew away, he wasn't hurt, for he went off as quiet and comfortable as—as—as demnition,' said Mr Mantalini, rather at a loss for a simile.

'And what,' said Ralph, hesitating a little, 'what was the cause of quarrel?'

'You are the demdest, knowing hand,' replied Mr Mantalini, in an admiring tone, 'the cunningest, rummest, superlativest old fox—oh dem!—to pretend now not to know that it was the little bright-eyed niece—the softest, sweetest, prettiest—'

'Alfred!' interposed Madame Mantalini.

'She is always right,' rejoined Mr Mantalini soothingly, 'and when she says it is time to go, it is time, and go she shall; and when she walks along the streets with her own tulip, the women shall say, with envy, she has got a demd fine husband; and the men shall say with rapture, he has got a demd fine wife; and they shall both be right and neither wrong, upon my life and soul—oh demmit!'

With which remarks, and many more, no less intellectual and to the purpose, Mr Mantalini kissed the fingers of his gloves to Ralph Nickleby, and drawing his lady's arm through his, led her mincingly away.

'So, so,' muttered Ralph, dropping into his chair; 'this devil is loose again, and thwarting me, as he was born to do, at every turn. He told me once there should be a day of reckoning between us, sooner or later. I'll make him a true prophet, for it shall surely come.'

'Are you at home?' asked Newman, suddenly popping in his head.

'No,' replied Ralph, with equal abruptness.

Newman withdrew his head, but thrust it in again.

'You're quite sure you're not at home, are you?' said Newman.

'What does the idiot mean?' cried Ralph, testily.

'He has been waiting nearly ever since they first came in, and may have heard your voice—that's all,' said Newman, rubbing his hands.

'Who has?' demanded Ralph, wrought by the intelligence he had just heard, and his clerk's provoking coolness, to an intense pitch of irritation.

The necessity of a reply was superseded by the unlooked-for entrance of a third party—the individual in question—who, bringing his one eye (for he had but one) to bear on Ralph Nickleby, made a great many shambling bows, and sat himself down in an armchair, with his hands on his knees, and his short black trousers drawn up so high in the legs by the exertion of seating himself, that they scarcely reached below the tops of his Wellington boots.'

'Why, this IS a surprise!' said Ralph, bending his gaze upon the visitor, and half smiling as he scrutinised him attentively; 'I should know your face, Mr Squeers.'

'Ah!' replied that worthy, 'and you'd have know'd it better, sir, if it hadn't been for all that I've been a-going through. Just lift that little boy off the tall stool in the back-office, and tell him to come in here, will you, my man?' said Squeers, addressing himself to Newman. 'Oh, he's lifted his-self off. My son, sir, little Wackford. What do you think of him, sir, for a specimen of the Dotheboys Hall feeding? Ain't he fit to bust out of his clothes, and start the seams, and make the very buttons fly off with his fatness? Here's flesh!' cried Squeers, turning the boy about, and indenting the plumpest parts of his figure with divers pokes and punches, to the great discomposure of his son and heir. 'Here's firmness, here's solidness! Why you can hardly get up enough of him between your finger and thumb to pinch him anywheres.'

In however good condition Master Squeers might have been, he certainly did not present this remarkable compactness of person, for on his father's closing his finger and thumb in illustration of his remark, he uttered a sharp cry, and rubbed the place in the most natural manner possible.

'Well,' remarked Squeers, a little disconcerted, 'I had him there; but that's because we breakfasted early this morning, and he hasn't had his lunch yet. Why you couldn't shut a bit of him in a door, when he's had his dinner. Look at them tears, sir,' said Squeers, with a triumphant air, as Master Wackford wiped his eyes with the cuff of his jacket, 'there's oiliness!'

'He looks well, indeed,' returned Ralph, who, for some purposes of his own, seemed desirous to conciliate the schoolmaster. 'But how is Mrs Squeers, and how are you?'

'Mrs Squeers, sir,' replied the proprietor of Dotheboys, 'is as she always is—a mother to them lads, and a blessing, and a comfort, and a joy to all them as knows her. One of our boys—gorging his-self with vittles, and then turning in; that's their way—got a abscess on him last week. To see how she operated upon him with a pen-knife! Oh Lor!' said Squeers, heaving a sigh, and nodding his head a great many times, 'what a member of society that woman is!'

Mr Squeers indulged in a retrospective look, for some quarter of a minute, as if this allusion to his lady's excellences had naturally led his mind to the peaceful village of Dotheboys near Greta Bridge in Yorkshire; and then looked at Ralph, as if waiting for him to say something.

'Have you quite recovered that scoundrel's attack?' asked Ralph.

'I've only just done it, if I've done it now,' replied Squeers. 'I was one blessed bruise, sir,' said Squeers, touching first the roots of his hair, and then the toes of his boots, 'from HERE to THERE. Vinegar and brown paper, vinegar and brown paper, from morning to night. I suppose there was a matter of half a ream of brown paper stuck upon me, from first to last. As I laid all of a heap in our kitchen, plastered all over, you might have thought I was a large brown-paper parcel, chock full of nothing but groans. Did I groan loud, Wackford, or did I groan soft?' asked Mr Squeers, appealing to his son.

'Loud,' replied Wackford.

'Was the boys sorry to see me in such a dreadful condition, Wackford, or was they glad?' asked Mr Squeers, in a sentimental manner.

'Gl—'

'Eh?' cried Squeers, turning sharp round.

'Sorry,' rejoined his son.

'Oh!' said Squeers, catching him a smart box on the ear. 'Then take your hands out of your pockets, and don't stammer when you're asked a question. Hold your noise, sir, in a gentleman's office, or I'll run away from my family and never come back any more; and then what would become of all them precious and forlorn lads as would be let loose on the world, without their best friend at their elbers?'

'Were you obliged to have medical attendance?' inquired Ralph.

'Ay, was I,' rejoined Squeers, 'and a precious bill the medical attendant brought in too; but I paid it though.'

Ralph elevated his eyebrows in a manner which might be expressive of either sympathy or astonishment—just as the beholder was pleased to take it.

'Yes, I paid it, every farthing,' replied Squeers, who seemed to know the man he had to deal with, too well to suppose that any blinking of the question would induce him to subscribe towards the expenses; 'I wasn't out of pocket by it after all, either.'

'No!' said Ralph.

'Not a halfpenny,' replied Squeers. 'The fact is, we have only one extra with our boys, and that is for doctors when required—and not then, unless we're sure of our customers. Do you see?'

'I understand,' said Ralph.

'Very good,' rejoined Squeers. 'Then, after my bill was run up, we picked out five little boys (sons of small tradesmen, as was sure pay) that had never had the scarlet fever, and we sent one to a cottage where they'd got it, and he took it, and then we put the four others to sleep with him, and THEY took it, and then the doctor came and attended 'em once all round, and we divided my total among 'em, and added it on to their little bills, and the parents paid it. Ha! ha! ha!'

'And a good plan too,' said Ralph, eyeing the schoolmaster stealthily.

'I believe you,' rejoined Squeers. 'We always do it. Why, when Mrs Squeers was brought to bed with little Wackford here, we ran the hooping-cough through half-a-dozen boys, and charged her expenses among 'em, monthly nurse included. Ha! ha! ha!'

Ralph never laughed, but on this occasion he produced the nearest approach to it that he could, and waiting until Mr Squeers had enjoyed the professional joke to his heart's content, inquired what had brought him to town.

'Some bothering law business,' replied Squeers, scratching his head, 'connected with an action, for what they call neglect of a boy. I don't know what they would have. He had as good grazing, that boy had, as there is about us.'

Ralph looked as if he did not quite understand the observation.

'Grazing,' said Squeers, raising his voice, under the impression that as Ralph failed to comprehend him, he must be deaf. 'When a boy gets weak and ill and don't relish his meals, we give him a change of diet—turn him out, for an hour or so every day, into a neighbour's turnip field, or sometimes, if it's a delicate case, a turnip field and a piece of carrots alternately, and let him eat as many as he likes. There an't better land in the country than this perwerse lad grazed on, and yet he goes and catches cold and indigestion and what not, and then his friends brings a lawsuit against ME! Now, you'd hardly suppose,' added Squeers, moving in his chair with the impatience of an ill-used man, 'that people's ingratitude would carry them quite as far as that; would you?'

'A hard case, indeed,' observed Ralph.

'You don't say more than the truth when you say that,' replied Squeers. 'I don't suppose there's a man going, as possesses the fondness for youth that I do. There's youth to the amount of eight hundred pound a year at Dotheboys Hall at this present time. I'd take sixteen hundred pound worth if I could get 'em, and be as fond of every individual twenty pound among 'em as nothing should equal it!'

'Are you stopping at your old quarters?' asked Ralph.

'Yes, we are at the Saracen,' replied Squeers, 'and as it don't want very long to the end of the half-year, we shall continney to stop there till I've collected the money, and some new boys too, I hope. I've brought little Wackford up, on purpose to show to parents and guardians. I shall put him in the advertisement, this time. Look at that boy—himself a pupil. Why he's a miracle of high feeding, that boy is!'

'I should like to have a word with you,' said Ralph, who had both spoken and listened mechanically for some time, and seemed to have been thinking.

'As many words as you like, sir,' rejoined Squeers. 'Wackford, you go and play in the back office, and don't move about too much or you'll get thin, and that won't do. You haven't got such a thing as twopence, Mr Nickleby, have you?' said Squeers, rattling a bunch of keys in his coat pocket, and muttering something about its being all silver.

'I—think I have,' said Ralph, very slowly, and producing, after much rummaging in an old drawer, a penny, a halfpenny, and two farthings.

'Thankee,' said Squeers, bestowing it upon his son. 'Here! You go and buy a tart—Mr Nickleby's man will show you where—and mind you buy a rich one. Pastry,' added Squeers, closing the door on Master Wackford, 'makes his flesh shine a good deal, and parents thinks that a healthy sign.'

With this explanation, and a peculiarly knowing look to eke it out, Mr Squeers moved his chair so as to bring himself opposite to Ralph Nickleby at no great distance off; and having planted it to his entire satisfaction, sat down.

'Attend to me,' said Ralph, bending forward a little.

Squeers nodded.

'I am not to suppose,' said Ralph, 'that you are dolt enough to forgive or forget, very readily, the violence that was committed upon you, or the exposure which accompanied it?'

'Devil a bit,' replied Squeers, tartly.

'Or to lose an opportunity of repaying it with interest, if you could get one?' said Ralph.

'Show me one, and try,' rejoined Squeers.

'Some such object it was, that induced you to call on me?' said Ralph, raising his eyes to the schoolmaster's face.

'N-n-no, I don't know that,' replied Squeers. 'I thought that if it was in your power to make me, besides the trifle of money you sent, any compensation—'

'Ah!' cried Ralph, interrupting him. 'You needn't go on.'

After a long pause, during which Ralph appeared absorbed in contemplation, he again broke silence by asking:

'Who is this boy that he took with him?'

Squeers stated his name.

'Was he young or old, healthy or sickly, tractable or rebellious? Speak out, man,' retorted Ralph.

'Why, he wasn't young,' answered Squeers; 'that is, not young for a boy, you know.'

'That is, he was not a boy at all, I suppose?' interrupted Ralph.

'Well,' returned Squeers, briskly, as if he felt relieved by the suggestion, 'he might have been nigh twenty. He wouldn't seem so old, though, to them as didn't know him, for he was a little wanting here,' touching his forehead; 'nobody at home, you know, if you knocked ever so often.'

'And you DID knock pretty often, I dare say?' muttered Ralph.

'Pretty well,' returned Squeers with a grin.

'When you wrote to acknowledge the receipt of this trifle of money as you call it,' said Ralph, 'you told me his friends had deserted him long ago, and that you had not the faintest clue or trace to tell you who he was. Is that the truth?'

'It is, worse luck!' replied Squeers, becoming more and more easy and familiar in his manner, as Ralph pursued his inquiries with the less reserve. 'It's fourteen years ago, by the entry in my book, since a strange man brought him to my place, one autumn night, and left him there; paying five pound five, for his first quarter in advance. He might have been five or six year old at that time—not more.'

'What more do you know about him?' demanded Ralph.

'Devilish little, I'm sorry to say,' replied Squeers. 'The money was paid for some six or eight year, and then it stopped. He had given an address in London, had this chap; but when it came to the point, of course nobody knowed anything about him. So I kept the lad out of—out of—'

'Charity?' suggested Ralph drily.

'Charity, to be sure,' returned Squeers, rubbing his knees, 'and when he begins to be useful in a certain sort of way, this young scoundrel of a Nickleby comes and carries him off. But the most vexatious and aggeravating part of the whole affair is,' said Squeers, dropping his voice, and drawing his chair still closer to Ralph, 'that some questions have been asked about him at last—not of me, but, in a roundabout kind of way, of people in our village. So, that just when I might have had all arrears paid up, perhaps, and perhaps—who knows? such things have happened in our business before—a present besides for putting him out to a farmer, or sending him to sea, so that he might never turn up to disgrace his parents, supposing him to be a natural boy, as many of our boys are—damme, if that villain of a Nickleby don't collar him in open day, and commit as good as highway robbery upon my pocket.'

'We will both cry quits with him before long,' said Ralph, laying his hand on the arm of the Yorkshire schoolmaster.

'Quits!' echoed Squeers. 'Ah! and I should like to leave a small balance in his favour, to be settled when he can. I only wish Mrs Squeers could catch hold of him. Bless her heart! She'd murder him, Mr Nickleby—she would, as soon as eat her dinner.'

'We will talk of this again,' said Ralph. 'I must have time to think of it. To wound him through his own affections and fancies—. If I could strike him through this boy—'

'Strike him how you like, sir,' interrupted Squeers, 'only hit him hard enough, that's all—and with that, I'll say good-morning. Here!—just chuck that little boy's hat off that corner peg, and lift him off the stool will you?'

Bawling these requests to Newman Noggs, Mr Squeers betook himself to the little back-office, and fitted on his child's hat with parental anxiety, while Newman, with his pen behind his ear, sat, stiff and immovable, on his stool, regarding the father and son by turns with a broad stare.

'He's a fine boy, an't he?' said Squeers, throwing his head a little on one side, and falling back to the desk, the better to estimate the proportions of little Wackford.

'Very,' said Newman.

'Pretty well swelled out, an't he?' pursued Squeers. 'He has the fatness of twenty boys, he has.'

'Ah!' replied Newman, suddenly thrusting his face into that of Squeers, 'he has;—the fatness of twenty!—more! He's got it all. God help that others. Ha! ha! Oh Lord!'

Having uttered these fragmentary observations, Newman dropped upon his desk and began to write with most marvellous rapidity.

'Why, what does the man mean?' cried Squeers, colouring. 'Is he drunk?'

Newman made no reply.

'Is he mad?' said Squeers.

But, still Newman betrayed no consciousness of any presence save his own; so, Mr Squeers comforted himself by saying that he was both drunk AND mad; and, with this parting observation, he led his hopeful son away.

In exact proportion as Ralph Nickleby became conscious of a struggling and lingering regard for Kate, had his detestation of Nicholas augmented. It might be, that to atone for the weakness of inclining to any one person, he held it necessary to hate some other more intensely than before; but such had been the course of his feelings. And now, to be defied and spurned, to be held up to her in the worst and most repulsive colours, to know that she was taught to hate and despise him: to feel that there was infection in his touch, and taint in his companionship—to know all this, and to know that the mover of it all was that same boyish poor relation who had twitted him in their very first interview, and openly bearded and braved him since, wrought his quiet and stealthy malignity to such a pitch, that there was scarcely anything he would not have hazarded to gratify it, if he could have seen his way to some immediate retaliation.

But, fortunately for Nicholas, Ralph Nickleby did not; and although he cast about all that day, and kept a corner of his brain working on the one anxious subject through all the round of schemes and business that came with it, night found him at last, still harping on the same theme, and still pursuing the same unprofitable reflections.

'When my brother was such as he,' said Ralph, 'the first comparisons were drawn between us—always in my disfavour. HE was open, liberal, gallant, gay; I a crafty hunks of cold and stagnant blood, with no passion but love of saving, and no spirit beyond a thirst for gain. I recollected it well when I first saw this whipster; but I remember it better now.'

He had been occupied in tearing Nicholas's letter into atoms; and as he spoke, he scattered it in a tiny shower about him.

'Recollections like these,' pursued Ralph, with a bitter smile, 'flock upon me—when I resign myself to them—in crowds, and from countless quarters. As a portion of the world affect to despise the power of money, I must try and show them what it is.'

And being, by this time, in a pleasant frame of mind for slumber, Ralph Nickleby went to bed.

CHAPTER 35

Smike becomes known to Mrs Nickleby and Kate. Nicholas also meets with new Acquaintances. Brighter Days seem to dawn upon the Family

Having established his mother and sister in the apartments of the kind-hearted miniature painter, and ascertained that Sir Mulberry Hawk was in no danger of losing his life, Nicholas turned his thoughts to poor Smike, who, after breakfasting with Newman Noggs, had remained, in a disconsolate state, at that worthy creature's lodgings, waiting, with much anxiety, for further intelligence of his protector.

'As he will be one of our own little household, wherever we live, or whatever fortune is in reserve for us,' thought Nicholas, 'I must present the poor fellow in due form. They will be kind to him for his own sake, and if not (on that account solely) to the full extent I could wish, they will stretch a point, I am sure, for mine.'

Nicholas said 'they', but his misgivings were confined to one person. He was sure of Kate, but he knew his mother's peculiarities, and was not quite so certain that Smike would find favour in the eyes of Mrs Nickleby.

'However,' thought Nicholas as he departed on his benevolent errand; 'she cannot fail to become attached to him, when she knows what a devoted creature he is, and as she must quickly make the discovery, his probation will be a short one.'

'I was afraid,' said Smike, overjoyed to see his friend again, 'that you had fallen into some fresh trouble; the time seemed so long, at last, that I almost feared you were lost.'

'Lost!' replied Nicholas gaily. 'You will not be rid of me so easily, I promise you. I shall rise to the surface many thousand times yet, and the harder the thrust that pushes me down, the more quickly I shall rebound, Smike. But come; my errand here is to take you home.'

'Home!' faltered Smike, drawing timidly back.

'Ay,' rejoined Nicholas, taking his arm. 'Why not?'

'I had such hopes once,' said Smike; 'day and night, day and night, for many years. I longed for home till I was weary, and pined away with grief, but now—'

'And what now?' asked Nicholas, looking kindly in his face. 'What now, old friend?'

'I could not part from you to go to any home on earth,' replied Smike, pressing his hand; 'except one, except one. I shall never be an old man; and if your hand placed me in the grave, and I could think, before I died, that you would come and look upon it sometimes with one of your kind smiles, and in the summer weather, when everything was alive—not dead like me—I could go to that home almost without a tear.'

'Why do you talk thus, poor boy, if your life is a happy one with me?' said Nicholas.

'Because I should change; not those about me. And if they forgot me, I should never know it,' replied Smike. 'In the churchyard we are all alike, but here there are none like me. I am a poor creature, but I know that.'

'You are a foolish, silly creature,' said Nicholas cheerfully. 'If that is what you mean, I grant you that. Why, here's a dismal face for ladies' company!—my pretty sister too, whom you have so often asked me about. Is this your Yorkshire gallantry? For shame! for shame!'

Smike brightened up and smiled.

'When I talk of home,' pursued Nicholas, 'I talk of mine—which is yours of course. If it were defined by any particular four walls and a roof, God knows I should be sufficiently puzzled to say whereabouts it lay; but that is not what I mean. When I speak of home, I speak of the place where—in default of a better—those I love are gathered together; and if that place were a gypsy's tent, or a barn, I should call it by the same good name notwithstanding. And now, for what is my present home, which, however alarming your expectations may be, will neither terrify you by its extent nor its magnificence!'

So saying, Nicholas took his companion by the arm, and saying a great deal more to the same purpose, and pointing out various things to amuse and interest him as they went along, led the way to Miss La Creevy's house.

'And this, Kate,' said Nicholas, entering the room where his sister sat alone, 'is the faithful friend and affectionate fellow-traveller whom I prepared you to receive.'

Poor Smike was bashful, and awkward, and frightened enough, at first, but Kate advanced towards him so kindly, and said, in such a sweet voice, how anxious she had been to see him after all her brother had told her, and how much she had to thank him for having comforted Nicholas so greatly in their very trying reverses, that he began to be very doubtful whether he should shed tears or not, and became still more flurried. However, he managed to say, in a broken voice, that Nicholas was his only friend, and that he would lay down his life to help him; and Kate, although she was so kind and considerate, seemed to be so wholly unconscious of his distress and embarrassment, that he recovered almost immediately and felt quite at home.

Then, Miss La Creevy came in; and to her Smike had to be presented also. And Miss La Creevy was very kind too, and wonderfully talkative: not to Smike, for that would have made him uneasy at first, but to Nicholas and his sister. Then, after a time, she would speak to Smike himself now and then, asking him whether he was a judge of likenesses, and whether he thought that picture in the corner was like herself, and whether he didn't think it would have looked better if she had made herself ten years younger, and whether he didn't think, as a matter of general observation, that young ladies looked better not only in pictures, but out of them too, than old ones; with many more small jokes and facetious remarks, which were delivered with such good-humour and merriment, that Smike thought, within himself, she was the nicest lady he had ever seen; even nicer than Mrs Grudden, of Mr Vincent Crummles's theatre; and she was a nice lady too, and talked, perhaps more, but certainly louder, than Miss La Creevy.

At length the door opened again, and a lady in mourning came in; and Nicholas kissing the lady in mourning affectionately, and calling her his mother, led her towards the chair from which Smike had risen when she entered the room.

'You are always kind-hearted, and anxious to help the oppressed, my dear mother,' said Nicholas, 'so you will be favourably disposed towards him, I know.'

'I am sure, my dear Nicholas,' replied Mrs Nickleby, looking very hard at her new friend, and bending to him with something more of majesty than the occasion seemed to require: 'I am sure any friend of yours has, as indeed he naturally ought to have, and must have, of course, you know, a great claim upon me, and of course, it is a very great pleasure to me to be introduced to anybody you take an interest in. There can he no doubt about that; none at all; not the least in the world,' said Mrs Nickleby. 'At the same time I must say, Nicholas, my dear, as I used to say to your poor dear papa, when he WOULD bring gentlemen home to dinner, and there was nothing in the house, that if he had come the day before yesterday—no, I don't mean the day before yesterday now; I should have said, perhaps, the year before last—we should have been better able to entertain him.'

With which remarks, Mrs Nickleby turned to her daughter, and inquired, in an audible whisper, whether the gentleman was going to stop all night.

'Because, if he is, Kate, my dear,' said Mrs Nickleby, 'I don't see that it's possible for him to sleep anywhere, and that's the truth.'

Kate stepped gracefully forward, and without any show of annoyance or irritation, breathed a few words into her mother's ear.

'La, Kate, my dear,' said Mrs Nickleby, shrinking back, 'how you do tickle one! Of course, I understand THAT, my love, without your telling me; and I said the same to Nicholas, and I AM very much pleased. You didn't tell me, Nicholas, my dear,' added Mrs Nickleby, turning round with an air of less reserve than she had before assumed, 'what your friend's name is.'

'His name, mother,' replied Nicholas, 'is Smike.'

The effect of this communication was by no means anticipated; but the name was no sooner pronounced, than Mrs Nickleby dropped upon a chair, and burst into a fit of crying.

'What is the matter?' exclaimed Nicholas, running to support her.

'It's so like Pyke,' cried Mrs Nickleby; 'so exactly like Pyke. Oh! don't speak to me—I shall be better presently.'

And after exhibiting every symptom of slow suffocation in all its stages, and drinking about a tea-spoonful of water from a full tumbler, and spilling the remainder, Mrs Nickleby WAS better, and remarked, with a feeble smile, that she was very foolish, she knew.

'It's a weakness in our family,' said Mrs Nickleby, 'so, of course, I can't be blamed for it. Your grandmama, Kate, was exactly the same—precisely. The least excitement, the slightest surprise—she fainted away directly. I have heard her say, often and often, that when she was a young lady, and before she was married, she was turning a corner into Oxford Street one day, when she ran against her own hairdresser, who, it seems, was escaping from a bear;—the mere suddenness of the encounter made her faint away directly. Wait, though,' added Mrs Nickleby, pausing to consider. 'Let me be sure I'm right. Was it her hairdresser who had escaped from a bear, or was it a bear who had escaped from her hairdresser's? I declare I can't remember just now, but the hairdresser was a very handsome man, I know, and quite a gentleman in his manners; so that it has nothing to do with the point of the story.'

Mrs Nickleby having fallen imperceptibly into one of her retrospective moods, improved in temper from that moment, and glided, by an easy change of the conversation occasionally, into various other anecdotes, no less remarkable for their strict application to the subject in hand.

'Mr Smike is from Yorkshire, Nicholas, my dear?' said Mrs Nickleby, after dinner, and when she had been silent for some time.

'Certainly, mother,' replied Nicholas. 'I see you have not forgotten his melancholy history.'

'O dear no,' cried Mrs Nickleby. 'Ah! melancholy, indeed. You don't happen, Mr Smike, ever to have dined with the Grimbles of Grimble Hall, somewhere in the North Riding, do you?' said the good lady, addressing herself to him. 'A very proud man, Sir Thomas Grimble, with six grown-up and most lovely daughters, and the finest park in the county.'

'My dear mother,' reasoned Nicholas, 'do you suppose that the unfortunate outcast of a Yorkshire school was likely to receive many cards of invitation from the nobility and gentry in the neighbourhood?'

'Really, my dear, I don't know why it should be so very extraordinary,' said Mrs Nickleby. 'I know that when I was at school, I always went at least twice every half-year to the Hawkinses at Taunton Vale, and they are much richer than the Grimbles, and connected with them in marriage; so you see it's not so very unlikely, after all.'

Having put down Nicholas in this triumphant manner, Mrs Nickleby was suddenly seized with a forgetfulness of Smike's real name, and an irresistible tendency to call him Mr Slammons; which circumstance she attributed to the remarkable similarity of the two names in point of sound both beginning with an S, and moreover being spelt with an M. But whatever doubt there might be on this point, there was none as to his being a most excellent listener; which circumstance had considerable influence in placing them on the very best terms, and inducing Mrs Nickleby to express the highest opinion of his general deportment and disposition.

Thus, the little circle remained, on the most amicable and agreeable footing, until the Monday morning, when Nicholas withdrew himself from it for a short time, seriously to reflect upon the state of his affairs, and to determine, if he could, upon some course of life, which would enable him to support those who were so entirely dependent upon his exertions.

Mr Crummles occurred to him more than once; but although Kate was acquainted with the whole history of his connection with that gentleman, his mother was not; and he foresaw a thousand fretful objections, on her part, to his seeking a livelihood upon the stage. There were graver reasons, too, against his returning to that mode of life. Independently of those arising out of its spare and precarious earnings, and his own internal conviction that he could never hope to aspire to any great distinction, even as a provincial actor, how could he carry his sister from town to town, and place to place, and debar her from any other associates than those with whom he would be compelled, almost without distinction, to mingle? 'It won't do,' said Nicholas, shaking his head; 'I must try something else.'

It was much easier to make this resolution than to carry it into effect. With no greater experience of the world than he had acquired for himself in his short trials; with a sufficient share of headlong rashness and precipitation (qualities not altogether unnatural at his time of life); with a very slender stock of money, and a still more scanty stock of friends; what could he do? 'Egad!' said Nicholas, 'I'll try that Register Office again.'

He smiled at himself as he walked away with a quick step; for, an instant before, he had been internally blaming his own precipitation. He did not laugh himself out of the intention, however, for on he went: picturing to himself, as he approached the place, all kinds of splendid possibilities, and impossibilities too, for that matter, and thinking himself, perhaps with good reason, very fortunate to be endowed with so buoyant and sanguine a temperament.

The office looked just the same as when he had left it last, and, indeed, with one or two exceptions, there seemed to be the very same placards in the window that he had seen before. There were the same unimpeachable masters and mistresses in want of virtuous servants, and the same virtuous servants in want of unimpeachable masters and mistresses, and the same magnificent estates for the investment of capital, and the same enormous quantities of capital to be invested in estates, and, in short, the same opportunities of all sorts for people who wanted to make their fortunes. And a most extraordinary proof it was of the national prosperity, that people had not been found to avail themselves of such advantages long ago.

As Nicholas stopped to look in at the window, an old gentleman happened to stop too; and Nicholas, carrying his eye along the window-panes from left to right in search of some capital-text placard which should be applicable to his own case, caught sight of this old gentleman's figure, and instinctively withdrew his eyes from the window, to observe the same more closely.

He was a sturdy old fellow in a broad-skirted blue coat, made pretty large, to fit easily, and with no particular waist; his bulky legs clothed in drab breeches and high gaiters, and his head protected by a low-crowned broad-brimmed white hat, such as a wealthy grazier might wear. He wore his coat buttoned; and his dimpled double chin rested in the folds of a white neckerchief—not one of your stiff-starched apoplectic cravats, but a good, easy, old-fashioned white neckcloth that a man might go to bed in and be none the worse for. But what principally attracted the attention of Nicholas was the old gentleman's eye,—never was such a clear, twinkling, honest, merry, happy eye, as that. And there he stood, looking a little upward, with one hand thrust into the breast of his coat, and the other playing with his old-fashioned gold watch-chain: his head thrown a little on one side, and his hat a little more on one side than his head, (but that was evidently accident; not his ordinary way of wearing it,) with such a pleasant smile playing about his mouth, and such a comical expression of mingled slyness, simplicity, kind-heartedness, and good-humour, lighting up his jolly old face, that Nicholas would have been content to have stood there and looked at him until evening, and to have forgotten, meanwhile, that there was such a thing as a soured mind or a crabbed countenance to be met with in the whole wide world.

But, even a very remote approach to this gratification was not to be made, for although he seemed quite unconscious of having been the subject of observation, he looked casually at Nicholas; and the latter, fearful of giving offence, resumed his scrutiny of the window instantly.

Still, the old gentleman stood there, glancing from placard to placard, and Nicholas could not forbear raising his eyes to his face again. Grafted upon the quaintness and oddity of his appearance, was something so indescribably engaging, and bespeaking so much worth, and there were so many little lights hovering about the corners of his mouth and eyes, that it was not a mere amusement, but a positive pleasure and delight to look at him.

This being the case, it is no wonder that the old man caught Nicholas in the fact, more than once. At such times, Nicholas coloured and looked embarrassed: for the truth is, that he had begun to wonder whether the stranger could, by any possibility, be looking for a clerk or secretary; and thinking this, he felt as if the old gentleman must know it.

Long as all this takes to tell, it was not more than a couple of minutes in passing. As the stranger was moving away, Nicholas caught his eye again, and, in the awkwardness of the moment, stammered out an apology.

'No offence. Oh no offence!' said the old man.

This was said in such a hearty tone, and the voice was so exactly what it should have been from such a speaker, and there was such a cordiality in the manner, that Nicholas was emboldened to speak again.

'A great many opportunities here, sir,' he said, half smiling as he motioned towards the window.

'A great many people willing and anxious to be employed have seriously thought so very often, I dare say,' replied the old man. 'Poor fellows, poor fellows!'

He moved away as he said this; but seeing that Nicholas was about to speak, good-naturedly slackened his pace, as if he were unwilling to cut him short. After a little of that hesitation which may be sometimes observed between two people in the street who have exchanged a nod, and are both uncertain whether they shall turn back and speak, or not, Nicholas found himself at the old man's side.

'You were about to speak, young gentleman; what were you going to say?'

'Merely that I almost hoped—I mean to say, thought—you had some object in consulting those advertisements,' said Nicholas.

'Ay, ay? what object now—what object?' returned the old man, looking slyly at Nicholas. 'Did you think I wanted a situation now—eh? Did you think I did?'

Nicholas shook his head.

'Ha! ha!' laughed the old gentleman, rubbing his hands and wrists as if he were washing them. 'A very natural thought, at all events, after seeing me gazing at those bills. I thought the same of you, at first; upon my word I did.'

'If you had thought so at last, too, sir, you would not have been far from the truth,' rejoined Nicholas.

'Eh?' cried the old man, surveying him from head to foot. 'What! Dear me! No, no. Well-behaved young gentleman reduced to such a necessity! No no, no no.'

Nicholas bowed, and bidding him good-morning, turned upon his heel.

'Stay,' said the old man, beckoning him into a bye street, where they could converse with less interruption. 'What d'ye mean, eh?'

'Merely that your kind face and manner—both so unlike any I have ever seen—tempted me into an avowal, which, to any other stranger in this wilderness of London, I should not have dreamt of making,' returned Nicholas.

'Wilderness! Yes, it is, it is. Good! It IS a wilderness,' said the old man with much animation. 'It was a wilderness to me once. I came here barefoot. I have never forgotten it. Thank God!' and he raised his hat from his head, and looked very grave.

'What's the matter? What is it? How did it all come about?' said the old man, laying his hand on the shoulder of Nicholas, and walking him up the street. 'You're—Eh?' laying his finger on the sleeve of his black coat. 'Who's it for, eh?'

'My father,' replied Nicholas.

'Ah!' said the old gentleman quickly. 'Bad thing for a young man to lose his father. Widowed mother, perhaps?'

Nicholas sighed.

'Brothers and sisters too? Eh?'

'One sister,' rejoined Nicholas.

'Poor thing, poor thing! You are a scholar too, I dare say?' said the old man, looking wistfully into the face of the young one.

'I have been tolerably well educated,' said Nicholas.

'Fine thing,' said the old gentleman, 'education a great thing: a very great thing! I never had any. I admire it the more in others. A very fine thing. Yes, yes. Tell me more of your history. Let me hear it all. No impertinent curiosity—no, no, no.'

There was something so earnest and guileless in the way in which all this was said, and such a complete disregard of all conventional restraints and coldnesses, that Nicholas could not resist it. Among men who have any sound and sterling qualities, there is nothing so contagious as pure openness of heart. Nicholas took the infection instantly, and ran over the main points of his little history without reserve: merely suppressing names, and touching as lightly as possible upon his uncle's treatment of Kate. The old man listened with great attention, and when he had concluded, drew his arm eagerly through his own.

'Don't say another word. Not another word' said he. 'Come along with me. We mustn't lose a minute.'

So saying, the old gentleman dragged him back into Oxford Street, and hailing an omnibus on its way to the city, pushed Nicholas in before him, and followed himself.

As he appeared in a most extraordinary condition of restless excitement, and whenever Nicholas offered to speak, immediately interposed with: 'Don't say another word, my dear sir, on any account—not another word,' the young man thought it better to attempt no further interruption. Into the city they journeyed accordingly, without interchanging any conversation; and the farther they went, the more Nicholas wondered what the end of the adventure could possibly be.

The old gentleman got out, with great alacrity, when they reached the Bank, and once more taking Nicholas by the arm, hurried him along Threadneedle Street, and through some lanes and passages on the right, until they, at length, emerged in a quiet shady little square. Into the oldest and cleanest-looking house of business in the square, he led the way. The only inscription on the door-post was 'Cheeryble, Brothers;' but from a hasty glance at the directions of some packages which were lying about, Nicholas supposed that the brothers Cheeryble were German merchants.

Passing through a warehouse which presented every indication of a thriving business, Mr Cheeryble (for such Nicholas supposed him to be, from the respect which had been shown him by the warehousemen and porters whom they passed) led him into a little partitioned-off counting-house like a large glass case, in which counting-house there sat—as free from dust and blemish as if he had been fixed into the glass case before the top was put on, and had never come out since—a fat, elderly, large-faced clerk, with silver spectacles and a powdered head.

'Is my brother in his room, Tim?' said Mr Cheeryble, with no less kindness of manner than he had shown to Nicholas.

'Yes, he is, sir,' replied the fat clerk, turning his spectacle-glasses towards his principal, and his eyes towards Nicholas, 'but Mr Trimmers is with him.'

'Ay! And what has he come about, Tim?' said Mr Cheeryble.

'He is getting up a subscription for the widow and family of a man who was killed in the East India Docks this morning, sir,' rejoined Tim. 'Smashed, sir, by a cask of sugar.'

'He is a good creature,' said Mr Cheeryble, with great earnestness. 'He is a kind soul. I am very much obliged to Trimmers. Trimmers is one of the best friends we have. He makes a thousand cases known to us that we should never discover of ourselves. I am VERY much obliged to Trimmers.' Saying which, Mr Cheeryble rubbed his hands with infinite delight, and Mr Trimmers happening to pass the door that instant, on his way out, shot out after him and caught him by the hand.

'I owe you a thousand thanks, Trimmers, ten thousand thanks. I take it very friendly of you, very friendly indeed,' said Mr Cheeryble, dragging him into a corner to get out of hearing. 'How many children are there, and what has my brother Ned given, Trimmers?'

'There are six children,' replied the gentleman, 'and your brother has given us twenty pounds.'

'My brother Ned is a good fellow, and you're a good fellow too, Trimmers,' said the old man, shaking him by both hands with trembling eagerness. 'Put me down for another twenty—or—stop a minute, stop a minute. We mustn't look ostentatious; put me down ten pound, and Tim Linkinwater ten pound. A cheque for twenty pound for Mr Trimmers, Tim. God bless you, Trimmers—and come and dine with us some day this week; you'll always find a knife and fork, and we shall be delighted. Now, my dear sir—cheque from Mr Linkinwater, Tim. Smashed by a cask of sugar, and six poor children—oh dear, dear, dear!'

Talking on in this strain, as fast as he could, to prevent any friendly remonstrances from the collector of the subscription on the large amount of his donation, Mr Cheeryble led Nicholas, equally astonished and affected by what he had seen and heard in this short space, to the half-opened door of another room.

'Brother Ned,' said Mr Cheeryble, tapping with his knuckles, and stooping to listen, 'are you busy, my dear brother, or can you spare time for a word or two with me?'

'Brother Charles, my dear fellow,' replied a voice from the inside, so like in its tones to that which had just spoken, that Nicholas started, and almost thought it was the same, 'don't ask me such a question, but come in directly.'

They went in, without further parley. What was the amazement of Nicholas when his conductor advanced, and exchanged a warm greeting with another old gentleman, the very type and model of himself—the same face, the same figure, the same coat, waistcoat, and neckcloth, the same breeches and gaiters—nay, there was the very same white hat hanging against the wall!

As they shook each other by the hand: the face of each lighted up by beaming looks of affection, which would have been most delightful to behold in infants, and which, in men so old, was inexpressibly touching: Nicholas could observe that the last old gentleman was something stouter than his brother; this, and a slight additional shade of clumsiness in his gait and stature, formed the only perceptible difference between them. Nobody could have doubted their being twin brothers.

'Brother Ned,' said Nicholas's friend, closing the room-door, 'here is a young friend of mine whom we must assist. We must make proper inquiries into his statements, in justice to him as well as to ourselves, and if they are confirmed—as I feel assured they will be—we must assist him, we must assist him, brother Ned.'

'It is enough, my dear brother, that you say we should,' returned the other. 'When you say that, no further inquiries are needed. He SHALL be assisted. What are his necessities, and what does he require? Where is Tim Linkinwater? Let us have him here.'

Both the brothers, it may be here remarked, had a very emphatic and earnest delivery; both had lost nearly the same teeth, which imparted the same peculiarity to their speech; and both spoke as if, besides possessing the utmost serenity of mind that the kindliest and most unsuspecting nature could bestow, they had, in collecting the plums from Fortune's choicest pudding, retained a few for present use, and kept them in their mouths.

'Where is Tim Linkinwater?' said brother Ned.

'Stop, stop, stop!' said brother Charles, taking the other aside. 'I've a plan, my dear brother, I've a plan. Tim is getting old, and Tim has been a faithful servant, brother Ned; and I don't think pensioning Tim's mother and sister, and buying a little tomb for the family when his poor brother died, was a sufficient recompense for his faithful services.'

'No, no, no,' replied the other. 'Certainly not. Not half enough, not half.'

'If we could lighten Tim's duties,' said the old gentleman, 'and prevail upon him to go into the country, now and then, and sleep in the fresh air, besides, two or three times a week (which he could, if he began business an hour later in the morning), old Tim Linkinwater would grow young again in time; and he's three good years our senior now. Old Tim Linkinwater young again! Eh, brother Ned, eh? Why, I recollect old Tim Linkinwater quite a little boy, don't you? Ha, ha, ha! Poor Tim, poor Tim!'

And the fine old fellows laughed pleasantly together: each with a tear of regard for old Tim Linkinwater standing in his eye.

'But hear this first—hear this first, brother Ned,' said the old man, hastily, placing two chairs, one on each side of Nicholas: 'I'll tell it you myself, brother Ned, because the young gentleman is modest, and is a scholar, Ned, and I shouldn't feel it right that he should tell us his story over and over again as if he was a beggar, or as if we doubted him. No, no no.'

'No, no, no,' returned the other, nodding his head gravely. 'Very right, my dear brother, very right.'

'He will tell me I'm wrong, if I make a mistake,' said Nicholas's friend. 'But whether I do or not, you'll be very much affected, brother Ned, remembering the time when we were two friendless lads, and earned our first shilling in this great city.'

The twins pressed each other's hands in silence; and in his own homely manner, brother Charles related the particulars he had heard from Nicholas. The conversation which ensued was a long one, and when it was over, a secret conference of almost equal duration took place between brother Ned and Tim Linkinwater in another room. It is no disparagement to Nicholas to say, that before he had been closeted with the two brothers ten minutes, he could only wave his hand at every fresh expression of kindness and sympathy, and sob like a little child.

At length brother Ned and Tim Linkinwater came back together, when Tim instantly walked up to Nicholas and whispered in his ear in a very brief sentence (for Tim was ordinarily a man of few words), that he had taken down the address in the Strand, and would call upon him that evening, at eight. Having done which, Tim wiped his spectacles and put them on, preparatory to hearing what more the brothers Cheeryble had got to say.

'Tim,' said brother Charles, 'you understand that we have an intention of taking this young gentleman into the counting-house?'

Brother Ned remarked that Tim was aware of that intention, and quite approved of it; and Tim having nodded, and said he did, drew himself up and looked particularly fat, and very important. After which, there was a profound silence.

'I'm not coming an hour later in the morning, you know,' said Tim, breaking out all at once, and looking very resolute. 'I'm not going to sleep in the fresh air; no, nor I'm not going into the country either. A pretty thing at this time of day, certainly. Pho!'

'Damn your obstinacy, Tim Linkinwater,' said brother Charles, looking at him without the faintest spark of anger, and with a countenance radiant with attachment to the old clerk. 'Damn your obstinacy, Tim Linkinwater, what do you mean, sir?'

'It's forty-four year,' said Tim, making a calculation in the air with his pen, and drawing an imaginary line before he cast it up, 'forty-four year, next May, since I first kept the books of Cheeryble, Brothers. I've opened the safe every morning all that time (Sundays excepted) as the clock struck nine, and gone over the house every night at half-past ten (except on Foreign Post nights, and then twenty minutes before twelve) to see the doors fastened, and the fires out. I've never slept out of the back-attic one single night. There's the same mignonette box in the middle of the window, and the same four flower-pots, two on each side, that I brought with me when I first came. There an't—I've said it again and again, and I'll maintain it—there an't such a square as this in the world. I KNOW there an't,' said Tim, with sudden energy, and looking sternly about him. 'Not one. For business or pleasure, in summer-time or winter—I don't care which—there's nothing like it. There's not such a spring in England as the pump under the archway. There's not such a view in England as the view out of my window; I've seen it every morning before I shaved, and I ought to know something about it. I have slept in that room,' added Tim, sinking his voice a little, 'for four-and-forty year; and if it wasn't inconvenient, and didn't interfere with business, I should request leave to die there.'

'Damn you, Tim Linkinwater, how dare you talk about dying?' roared the twins by one impulse, and blowing their old noses violently.

'That's what I've got to say, Mr Edwin and Mr Charles,' said Tim, squaring his shoulders again. 'This isn't the first time you've talked about superannuating me; but, if you please, we'll make it the last, and drop the subject for evermore.'

With these words, Tim Linkinwater stalked out, and shut himself up in his glass case, with the air of a man who had had his say, and was thoroughly resolved not to be put down.

The brothers interchanged looks, and coughed some half-dozen times without speaking.

'He must be done something with, brother Ned,' said the other, warmly; 'we must disregard his old scruples; they can't be tolerated, or borne. He must be made a partner, brother Ned; and if he won't submit to it peaceably, we must have recourse to violence.'

'Quite right,' replied brother Ned, nodding his head as a man thoroughly determined; 'quite right, my dear brother. If he won't listen to reason, we must do it against his will, and show him that we are determined to exert our authority. We must quarrel with him, brother Charles.'

'We must. We certainly must have a quarrel with Tim Linkinwater,' said the other. 'But in the meantime, my dear brother, we are keeping our young friend; and the poor lady and her daughter will be anxious for his return. So let us say goodbye for the present, and—there, there—take care of that box, my dear sir—and—no, no, not a word now; but be careful of the crossings and—'

And with any disjointed and unconnected words which would prevent Nicholas from pouring forth his thanks, the brothers hurried him out: shaking hands with him all the way, and affecting very unsuccessfully—they were poor hands at deception!—to be wholly unconscious of the feelings that completely mastered him.

Nicholas's heart was too full to allow of his turning into the street until he had recovered some composure. When he at last glided out of the dark doorway corner in which he had been compelled to halt, he caught a glimpse of the twins stealthily peeping in at one corner of the glass case, evidently undecided whether they should follow up their late attack without delay, or for the present postpone laying further siege to the inflexible Tim Linkinwater.

To recount all the delight and wonder which the circumstances just detailed awakened at Miss La Creevy's, and all the things that were done, said, thought, expected, hoped, and prophesied in consequence, is beside the present course and purpose of these adventures. It is sufficient to state, in brief, that Mr Timothy Linkinwater arrived, punctual to his appointment; that, oddity as he was, and jealous, as he was bound to be, of the proper exercise of his employers' most comprehensive liberality, he reported strongly and warmly in favour of Nicholas; and that, next day, he was appointed to the vacant stool in the counting-house of Cheeryble, Brothers, with a present salary of one hundred and twenty pounds a year.

'And I think, my dear brother,' said Nicholas's first friend, 'that if we were to let them that little cottage at Bow which is empty, at something under the usual rent, now? Eh, brother Ned?'

'For nothing at all,' said brother Ned. 'We are rich, and should be ashamed to touch the rent under such circumstances as these. Where is Tim Linkinwater?—for nothing at all, my dear brother, for nothing at all.'

'Perhaps it would be better to say something, brother Ned,' suggested the other, mildly; 'it would help to preserve habits of frugality, you know, and remove any painful sense of overwhelming obligations. We might say fifteen pound, or twenty pound, and if it was punctually paid, make it up to them in some other way. And I might secretly advance a small loan towards a little furniture, and you might secretly advance another small loan, brother Ned; and if we find them doing well—as we shall; there's no fear, no fear—we can change the loans into gifts. Carefully, brother Ned, and by degrees, and without pressing upon them too much; what do you say now, brother?'

Brother Ned gave his hand upon it, and not only said it should be done, but had it done too; and, in one short week, Nicholas took possession of the stool, and Mrs Nickleby and Kate took possession of the house, and all was hope, bustle, and light-heartedness.

There surely never was such a week of discoveries and surprises as the first week of that cottage. Every night when Nicholas came home, something new had been found out. One day it was a grapevine, and another day it was a boiler, and another day it was the key of the front-parlour closet at the bottom of the water-butt, and so on through a hundred items. Then, this room was embellished with a muslin curtain, and that room was rendered quite elegant by a window-blind, and such improvements were made, as no one would have supposed possible. Then there was Miss La Creevy, who had come out in the omnibus to stop a day or two and help, and who was perpetually losing a very small brown-paper parcel of tin tacks and a very large hammer, and running about with her sleeves tucked up at the wrists, and falling off pairs of steps and hurting herself very much—and Mrs Nickleby, who talked incessantly, and did something now and then, but not often—and Kate, who busied herself noiselessly everywhere, and was pleased with everything—and Smike, who made the garden a perfect wonder to look upon—and Nicholas, who helped and encouraged them every one—all the peace and cheerfulness of home restored, with such new zest imparted to every frugal pleasure, and such delight to every hour of meeting, as misfortune and separation alone could give!

In short, the poor Nicklebys were social and happy; while the rich Nickleby was alone and miserable.

CHAPTER 36

Private and confidential; relating to Family Matters. Showing how Mr Kenwigs underwent violent Agitation, and how Mrs Kenwigs was as well as could be expected

It might have been seven o'clock in the evening, and it was growing dark in the narrow streets near Golden Square, when Mr Kenwigs sent out for a pair of the cheapest white kid gloves—those at fourteen-pence—and selecting the strongest, which happened to be the right-hand one, walked downstairs with an air of pomp and much excitement, and proceeded to muffle the knob of the street-door knocker therein. Having executed this task with great nicety, Mr Kenwigs pulled the door to, after him, and just stepped across the road to try the effect from the opposite side of the street. Satisfied that nothing could possibly look better in its way, Mr Kenwigs then stepped back again, and calling through the keyhole to Morleena to open the door, vanished into the house, and was seen no longer.

Now, considered as an abstract circumstance, there was no more obvious cause or reason why Mr Kenwigs should take the trouble of muffling this particular knocker, than there would have been for his muffling the knocker of any nobleman or gentleman resident ten miles off; because, for the greater convenience of the numerous lodgers, the street-door always stood wide open, and the knocker was never used at all. The first floor, the second floor, and the third floor, had each a bell of its own. As to the attics, no one ever called on them; if anybody wanted the parlours, they were close at hand, and all he had to do was to walk straight into them; while the kitchen had a separate entrance down the area steps. As a question of mere necessity and usefulness, therefore, this muffling of the knocker was thoroughly incomprehensible.

But knockers may be muffled for other purposes than those of mere utilitarianism, as, in the present instance, was clearly shown. There are certain polite forms and ceremonies which must be observed in civilised life, or mankind relapse into their original barbarism. No genteel lady was ever yet confined—indeed, no genteel confinement can possibly take place—without the accompanying symbol of a muffled knocker. Mrs Kenwigs was a lady of some pretensions to gentility; Mrs Kenwigs was confined.

And, therefore, Mr Kenwigs tied up the silent knocker on the premises in a white kid glove.

'I'm not quite certain neither,' said Mr Kenwigs, arranging his shirt-collar, and walking slowly upstairs, 'whether, as it's a boy, I won't have it in the papers.'

Pondering upon the advisability of this step, and the sensation it was likely to create in the neighbourhood, Mr Kenwigs betook himself to the sitting-room, where various extremely diminutive articles of clothing were airing on a horse before the fire, and Mr Lumbey, the doctor, was dandling the baby—that is, the old baby—not the new one.

'It's a fine boy, Mr Kenwigs,' said Mr Lumbey, the doctor.

'You consider him a fine boy, do you, sir?' returned Mr Kenwigs.

'It's the finest boy I ever saw in all my life,' said the doctor. 'I never saw such a baby.'

It is a pleasant thing to reflect upon, and furnishes a complete answer to those who contend for the gradual degeneration of the human species, that every baby born into the world is a finer one than the last.

'I ne—ver saw such a baby,' said Mr Lumbey, the doctor.

'Morleena was a fine baby,' remarked Mr Kenwigs; as if this were rather an attack, by implication, upon the family.

'They were all fine babies,' said Mr Lumbey. And Mr Lumbey went on nursing the baby with a thoughtful look. Whether he was considering under what head he could best charge the nursing in the bill, was best known to himself.

During this short conversation, Miss Morleena, as the eldest of the family, and natural representative of her mother during her indisposition, had been hustling and slapping the three younger Miss Kenwigses, without intermission; which considerate and affectionate conduct brought tears into the eyes of Mr Kenwigs, and caused him to declare that, in understanding and behaviour, that child was a woman.

'She will be a treasure to the man she marries, sir,' said Mr Kenwigs, half aside; 'I think she'll marry above her station, Mr Lumbey.'

'I shouldn't wonder at all,' replied the doctor.

'You never see her dance, sir, did you?' asked Mr Kenwigs.

The doctor shook his head.

'Ay!' said Mr Kenwigs, as though he pitied him from his heart, 'then you don't know what she's capable of.'

All this time there had been a great whisking in and out of the other room; the door had been opened and shut very softly about twenty times a minute (for it was necessary to keep Mrs Kenwigs quiet); and the baby had been exhibited to a score or two of deputations from a select body of female friends, who had assembled in the passage, and about the street-door, to discuss the event in all its bearings. Indeed, the excitement extended itself over the whole street, and groups of ladies might be seen standing at the doors, (some in the interesting condition in which Mrs Kenwigs had last appeared in public,) relating their experiences of similar occurrences. Some few acquired great credit from having prophesied, the day before yesterday, exactly when it would come to pass; others, again, related, how that they guessed what it was, directly they saw Mr Kenwigs turn pale and run up the street as hard as ever he could go. Some said one thing, and some another; but all talked together, and all agreed upon two points: first, that it was very meritorious and highly praiseworthy in Mrs Kenwigs to do as she had done: and secondly, that there never was such a skilful and scientific doctor as that Dr Lumbey.

In the midst of this general hubbub, Dr Lumbey sat in the first-floor front, as before related, nursing the deposed baby, and talking to Mr Kenwigs. He was a stout bluff-looking gentleman, with no shirt-collar to speak of, and a beard that had been growing since yesterday morning; for Dr Lumbey was popular, and the neighbourhood was prolific; and there had been no less than three other knockers muffled, one after the other within the last forty-eight hours.

'Well, Mr Kenwigs,' said Dr Lumbey, 'this makes six. You'll have a fine family in time, sir.'

'I think six is almost enough, sir,' returned Mr Kenwigs.

'Pooh! pooh!' said the doctor. 'Nonsense! not half enough.'

With this, the doctor laughed; but he didn't laugh half as much as a married friend of Mrs Kenwigs's, who had just come in from the sick chamber to report progress, and take a small sip of brandy-and-water: and who seemed to consider it one of the best jokes ever launched upon society.

'They're not altogether dependent upon good fortune, neither,' said Mr Kenwigs, taking his second daughter on his knee; 'they have expectations.'

'Oh, indeed!' said Mr Lumbey, the doctor.

'And very good ones too, I believe, haven't they?' asked the married lady.

'Why, ma'am,' said Mr Kenwigs, 'it's not exactly for me to say what they may be, or what they may not be. It's not for me to boast of any family with which I have the honour to be connected; at the same time, Mrs Kenwigs's is—I should say,' said Mr Kenwigs, abruptly, and raising his voice as he spoke, 'that my children might come into a matter of a hundred pound apiece, perhaps. Perhaps more, but certainly that.'

'And a very pretty little fortune,' said the married lady.

'There are some relations of Mrs Kenwigs's,' said Mr Kenwigs, taking a pinch of snuff from the doctor's box, and then sneezing very hard, for he wasn't used to it, 'that might leave their hundred pound apiece to ten people, and yet not go begging when they had done it.'

'Ah! I know who you mean,' observed the married lady, nodding her head.

'I made mention of no names, and I wish to make mention of no names,' said Mr Kenwigs, with a portentous look. 'Many of my friends have met a relation of Mrs Kenwigs's in this very room, as would do honour to any company; that's all.'

'I've met him,' said the married lady, with a glance towards Dr Lumbey.

'It's naterally very gratifying to my feelings as a father, to see such a man as that, a kissing and taking notice of my children,' pursued Mr Kenwigs. 'It's naterally very gratifying to my feelings as a man, to know that man. It will be naterally very gratifying to my feelings as a husband, to make that man acquainted with this ewent.'

Having delivered his sentiments in this form of words, Mr Kenwigs arranged his second daughter's flaxen tail, and bade her be a good girl and mind what her sister, Morleena, said.

'That girl grows more like her mother every day,' said Mr Lumbey, suddenly stricken with an enthusiastic admiration of Morleena.

'There!' rejoined the married lady. 'What I always say; what I always did say! She's the very picter of her.' Having thus directed the general attention to the young lady in question, the married lady embraced the opportunity of taking another sip of the brandy-and-water—and a pretty long sip too.

'Yes! there is a likeness,' said Mr Kenwigs, after some reflection. 'But such a woman as Mrs Kenwigs was, afore she was married! Good gracious, such a woman!'

Mr Lumbey shook his head with great solemnity, as though to imply that he supposed she must have been rather a dazzler.

'Talk of fairies!' cried Mr Kenwigs 'I never see anybody so light to be alive, never. Such manners too; so playful, and yet so sewerely proper! As for her figure! It isn't generally known,' said Mr Kenwigs, dropping his voice; 'but her figure was such, at that time, that the sign of the Britannia, over in the Holloway Road, was painted from it!'

'But only see what it is now,' urged the married lady. 'Does SHE look like the mother of six?'

'Quite ridiculous,' cried the doctor.

'She looks a deal more like her own daughter,' said the married lady.

'So she does,' assented Mr Lumbey. 'A great deal more.'

Mr Kenwigs was about to make some further observations, most probably in confirmation of this opinion, when another married lady, who had looked in to keep up Mrs Kenwigs's spirits, and help to clear off anything in the eating and drinking way that might be going about, put in her head to announce that she had just been down to answer the bell, and that there was a gentleman at the door who wanted to see Mr Kenwigs 'most particular.'

Shadowy visions of his distinguished relation flitted through the brain of Mr Kenwigs, as this message was delivered; and under their influence, he dispatched Morleena to show the gentleman up straightway.

'Why, I do declare,' said Mr Kenwigs, standing opposite the door so as to get the earliest glimpse of the visitor, as he came upstairs, 'it's Mr Johnson! How do you find yourself, sir?'

Nicholas shook hands, kissed his old pupils all round, intrusted a large parcel of toys to the guardianship of Morleena, bowed to the doctor and the married ladies, and inquired after Mrs Kenwigs in a tone of interest, which went to the very heart and soul of the nurse, who had come in to warm some mysterious compound, in a little saucepan over the fire.

'I ought to make a hundred apologies to you for calling at such a season,' said Nicholas, 'but I was not aware of it until I had rung the bell, and my time is so fully occupied now, that I feared it might be some days before I could possibly come again.'

'No time like the present, sir,' said Mr Kenwigs. 'The sitiwation of Mrs Kenwigs, sir, is no obstacle to a little conversation between you and me, I hope?'

'You are very good,' said Nicholas.

At this juncture, proclamation was made by another married lady, that the baby had begun to eat like anything; whereupon the two married ladies, already mentioned, rushed tumultuously into the bedroom to behold him in the act.

'The fact is,' resumed Nicholas, 'that before I left the country, where I have been for some time past, I undertook to deliver a message to you.'

'Ay, ay?' said Mr Kenwigs.

'And I have been,' added Nicholas, 'already in town for some days, without having had an opportunity of doing so.'

'It's no matter, sir,' said Mr Kenwigs. 'I dare say it's none the worse for keeping cold. Message from the country!' said Mr Kenwigs, ruminating; 'that's curious. I don't know anybody in the country.'

'Miss Petowker,' suggested Nicholas.

'Oh! from her, is it?' said Mr Kenwigs. 'Oh dear, yes. Ah! Mrs Kenwigs will be glad to hear from her. Henrietta Petowker, eh? How odd things come about, now! That you should have met her in the country! Well!'

Hearing this mention of their old friend's name, the four Miss Kenwigses gathered round Nicholas, open eyed and mouthed, to hear more. Mr Kenwigs looked a little curious too, but quite comfortable and unsuspecting.

'The message relates to family matters,' said Nicholas, hesitating.

'Oh, never mind,' said Kenwigs, glancing at Mr Lumbey, who, having rashly taken charge of little Lillyvick, found nobody disposed to relieve him of his precious burden. 'All friends here.'

Nicholas hemmed once or twice, and seemed to have some difficulty in proceeding.

'At Portsmouth, Henrietta Petowker is,' observed Mr Kenwigs.

'Yes,' said Nicholas, 'Mr Lillyvick is there.'

Mr Kenwigs turned pale, but he recovered, and said, THAT was an odd coincidence also.

'The message is from him,' said Nicholas.

Mr Kenwigs appeared to revive. He knew that his niece was in a delicate state, and had, no doubt, sent word that they were to forward full particulars. Yes. That was very kind of him; so like him too!

'He desired me to give his kindest love,' said Nicholas.

'Very much obliged to him, I'm sure. Your great-uncle, Lillyvick, my dears!' interposed Mr Kenwigs, condescendingly explaining it to the children.

'His kindest love,' resumed Nicholas; 'and to say that he had no time to write, but that he was married to Miss Petowker.'

Mr Kenwigs started from his seat with a petrified stare, caught his second daughter by her flaxen tail, and covered his face with his pocket-handkerchief. Morleena fell, all stiff and rigid, into the baby's chair, as she had seen her mother fall when she fainted away, and the two remaining little Kenwigses shrieked in affright.

'My children, my defrauded, swindled infants!' cried Mr Kenwigs, pulling so hard, in his vehemence, at the flaxen tail of his second daughter, that he lifted her up on tiptoe, and kept her, for some seconds, in that attitude. 'Villain, ass, traitor!'

'Drat the man!' cried the nurse, looking angrily around. 'What does he mean by making that noise here?'

'Silence, woman!' said Mr Kenwigs, fiercely.

'I won't be silent,' returned the nurse. 'Be silent yourself, you wretch. Have you no regard for your baby?'

'No!' returned Mr Kenwigs.

'More shame for you,' retorted the nurse. 'Ugh! you unnatural monster.'

'Let him die,' cried Mr Kenwigs, in the torrent of his wrath. 'Let him die! He has no expectations, no property to come into. We want no babies here,' said Mr Kenwigs recklessly. 'Take 'em away, take 'em away to the Fondling!'

With these awful remarks, Mr Kenwigs sat himself down in a chair, and defied the nurse, who made the best of her way into the adjoining room, and returned with a stream of matrons: declaring that Mr Kenwigs had spoken blasphemy against his family, and must be raving mad.

Appearances were certainly not in Mr Kenwigs's favour, for the exertion of speaking with so much vehemence, and yet in such a tone as should prevent his lamentations reaching the ears of Mrs Kenwigs, had made him very black in the face; besides which, the excitement of the occasion, and an unwonted indulgence in various strong cordials to celebrate it, had swollen and dilated his features to a most unusual extent. But, Nicholas and the doctor—who had been passive at first, doubting very much whether Mr Kenwigs could be in earnest—interfering to explain the immediate cause of his condition, the indignation of the matrons was changed to pity, and they implored him, with much feeling, to go quietly to bed.

'The attention,' said Mr Kenwigs, looking around with a plaintive air, 'the attention that I've shown to that man! The hyseters he has eat, and the pints of ale he has drank, in this house—!'

'It's very trying, and very hard to bear, we know,' said one of the married ladies; 'but think of your dear darling wife.'

'Oh yes, and what she's been a undergoing of, only this day,' cried a great many voices. 'There's a good man, do.'

'The presents that have been made to him,' said Mr Kenwigs, reverting to his calamity, 'the pipes, the snuff-boxes—a pair of india-rubber goloshes, that cost six-and-six—'

'Ah! it won't bear thinking of, indeed,' cried the matrons generally; 'but it'll all come home to him, never fear.'

Mr Kenwigs looked darkly upon the ladies, as if he would prefer its all coming home to HIM, as there was nothing to be got by it; but he said nothing, and resting his head upon his hand, subsided into a kind of doze.

Then, the matrons again expatiated on the expediency of taking the good gentleman to bed; observing that he would be better tomorrow, and that they knew what was the wear and tear of some men's minds when their wives were taken as Mrs Kenwigs had been that day, and that it did him great credit, and there was nothing to be ashamed of in it; far from it; they liked to see it, they did, for it showed a good heart. And one lady observed, as a case bearing upon the present, that her husband was often quite light-headed from anxiety on similar occasions, and that once, when her little Johnny was born, it was nearly a week before he came to himself again, during the whole of which time he did nothing but cry 'Is it a boy, is it a boy?' in a manner which went to the hearts of all his hearers.

At length, Morleena (who quite forgot she had fainted, when she found she was not noticed) announced that a chamber was ready for her afflicted parent; and Mr Kenwigs, having partially smothered his four daughters in the closeness of his embrace, accepted the doctor's arm on one side, and the support of Nicholas on the other, and was conducted upstairs to a bedroom which been secured for the occasion.

Having seen him sound asleep, and heard him snore most satisfactorily, and having further presided over the distribution of the toys, to the perfect contentment of all the little Kenwigses, Nicholas took his leave. The matrons dropped off one by one, with the exception of six or eight particular friends, who had determined to stop all night; the lights in the houses gradually disappeared; the last bulletin was issued that Mrs Kenwigs was as well as could be expected; and the whole family were left to their repose.

CHAPTER 37

Nicholas finds further Favour in the Eyes of the brothers Cheeryble and Mr Timothy Linkinwater. The brothers give a Banquet on a great Annual Occasion. Nicholas, on returning Home from it, receives a mysterious and important Disclosure from the Lips of Mrs Nickleby

The square in which the counting-house of the brothers Cheeryble was situated, although it might not wholly realise the very sanguine expectations which a stranger would be disposed to form on hearing the fervent encomiums bestowed upon it by Tim Linkinwater, was, nevertheless, a sufficiently desirable nook in the heart of a busy town like London, and one which occupied a high place in the affectionate remembrances of several grave persons domiciled in the neighbourhood, whose recollections, however, dated from a much more recent period, and whose attachment to the spot was far less absorbing, than were the recollections and attachment of the enthusiastic Tim.

And let not those whose eyes have been accustomed to the aristocratic gravity of Grosvenor Square and Hanover Square, the dowager barrenness and frigidity of Fitzroy Square, or the gravel walks and garden seats of the Squares of Russell and Euston, suppose that the affections of Tim Linkinwater, or the inferior lovers of this particular locality, had been awakened and kept alive by any refreshing associations with leaves, however dingy, or grass, however bare and thin. The city square has no enclosure, save the lamp-post in the middle: and no grass, but the weeds which spring up round its base. It is a quiet, little-frequented, retired spot, favourable to melancholy and contemplation, and appointments of long-waiting; and up and down its every side the Appointed saunters idly by the hour together wakening the echoes with the monotonous sound of his footsteps on the smooth worn stones, and counting, first the windows, and then the very bricks of the tall silent houses that hem him round about. In winter-time, the snow will linger there, long after it has melted from the busy streets and highways. The summer's sun holds it in some respect, and while he darts his cheerful rays sparingly into the square, keeps his fiery heat and glare for noisier and less-imposing precincts. It is so quiet, that you can almost hear the ticking of your own watch when you stop to cool in its refreshing atmosphere. There is a distant hum—of coaches, not of insects—but no other sound disturbs the stillness of the square. The ticket porter leans idly against the post at the corner: comfortably warm, but not hot, although the day is broiling. His white apron flaps languidly in the air, his head gradually droops upon his breast, he takes very long winks with both eyes at once; even he is unable to withstand the soporific influence of the place, and is gradually falling asleep. But now, he starts into full wakefulness, recoils a step or two, and gazes out before him with eager wildness in his eye. Is it a job, or a boy at marbles? Does he see a ghost, or hear an organ? No; sight more unwonted still—there is a butterfly in the square—a real, live butterfly! astray from flowers and sweets, and fluttering among the iron heads of the dusty area railings.

But if there were not many matters immediately without the doors of Cheeryble Brothers, to engage the attention or distract the thoughts of the young clerk, there were not a few within, to interest and amuse him. There was scarcely an object in the place, animate or inanimate, which did not partake in some degree of the scrupulous method and punctuality of Mr Timothy Linkinwater. Punctual as the counting-house dial, which he maintained to be the best time-keeper in London next after the clock of some old, hidden, unknown church hard by, (for Tim held the fabled goodness of that at the Horse Guards to be a pleasant fiction, invented by jealous West-enders,) the old clerk performed the minutest actions of the day, and arranged the minutest articles in the little room, in a precise and regular order, which could not have been exceeded if it had actually been a real glass case, fitted with the choicest curiosities. Paper, pens, ink, ruler, sealing-wax, wafers, pounce-box, string-box, fire-box, Tim's hat, Tim's scrupulously-folded gloves, Tim's other coat—looking precisely like a back view of himself as it hung against the wall—all had their accustomed inches of space. Except the clock, there was not such an accurate and unimpeachable instrument in existence as the little thermometer which hung behind the door. There was not a bird of such methodical and business-like habits in all the world, as the blind blackbird, who dreamed and dozed away his days in a large snug cage, and had lost his voice, from old age, years before Tim first bought him. There was not such an eventful story in the whole range of anecdote, as Tim could tell concerning the acquisition of that very bird; how, compassionating his starved and suffering condition, he had purchased him, with the view of humanely terminating his wretched life; how he determined to wait three days and see whether the bird revived; how, before half the time was out, the bird did revive; and how he went on reviving and picking up his appetite and good looks until he gradually became what—'what you see him now, sir,'—Tim would say, glancing proudly at the cage. And with that, Tim would utter a melodious chirrup, and cry 'Dick;' and Dick, who, for any sign of life he had previously given, might have been a wooden or stuffed representation of a blackbird indifferently executed, would come to the side of the cage in three small jumps, and, thrusting his bill between the bars, turn his sightless head towards his old master—and at that moment it would be very difficult to determine which of the two was the happier, the bird or Tim Linkinwater.

Nor was this all. Everything gave back, besides, some reflection of the kindly spirit of the brothers. The warehousemen and porters were such sturdy, jolly fellows, that it was a treat to see them. Among the shipping announcements and steam-packet list's which decorated the counting-house wall, were designs for almshouses, statements of charities, and plans for new hospitals. A blunderbuss and two swords hung above the chimney-piece, for the terror of evil-doers, but the blunderbuss was rusty and shattered, and the swords were broken and edgeless. Elsewhere, their open display in such a condition would have realised a smile; but, there, it seemed as though even violent and offensive weapons partook of the reigning influence, and became emblems of mercy and forbearance.

Such thoughts as these occurred to Nicholas very strongly, on the morning when he first took possession of the vacant stool, and looked about him, more freely and at ease, than he had before enjoyed an opportunity of doing. Perhaps they encouraged and stimulated him to exertion, for, during the next two weeks, all his spare hours, late at night and early in the morning, were incessantly devoted to acquiring the mysteries of book-keeping and some other forms of mercantile account. To these, he applied himself with such steadiness and perseverance that, although he brought no greater amount of previous knowledge to the subject than certain dim recollections of two or three very long sums entered into a ciphering-book at school, and relieved for parental inspection by the effigy of a fat swan tastefully flourished by the writing-master's own hand, he found himself, at the end of a fortnight, in a condition to report his proficiency to Mr Linkinwater, and to claim his promise that he, Nicholas Nickleby, should now be allowed to assist him in his graver labours.

It was a sight to behold Tim Linkinwater slowly bring out a massive ledger and day-book, and, after turning them over and over, and affectionately dusting their backs and sides, open the leaves here and there, and cast his eyes, half mournfully, half proudly, upon the fair and unblotted entries.

'Four-and-forty year, next May!' said Tim. 'Many new ledgers since then. Four-and-forty year!'

Tim closed the book again.

'Come, come,' said Nicholas, 'I am all impatience to begin.'

Tim Linkinwater shook his head with an air of mild reproof. Mr Nickleby was not sufficiently impressed with the deep and awful nature of his undertaking. Suppose there should be any mistake—any scratching out!

Young men are adventurous. It is extraordinary what they will rush upon, sometimes. Without even taking the precaution of sitting himself down upon his stool, but standing leisurely at the desk, and with a smile upon his face—actually a smile—there was no mistake about it; Mr Linkinwater often mentioned it afterwards—Nicholas dipped his pen into the inkstand before him, and plunged into the books of Cheeryble Brothers!

Tim Linkinwater turned pale, and tilting up his stool on the two legs nearest Nicholas, looked over his shoulder in breathless anxiety. Brother Charles and brother Ned entered the counting-house together; but Tim Linkinwater, without looking round, impatiently waved his hand as a caution that profound silence must be observed, and followed the nib of the inexperienced pen with strained and eager eyes.

The brothers looked on with smiling faces, but Tim Linkinwater smiled not, nor moved for some minutes. At length, he drew a long slow breath, and still maintaining his position on the tilted stool, glanced at brother Charles, secretly pointed with the feather of his pen towards Nicholas, and nodded his head in a grave and resolute manner, plainly signifying 'He'll do.'

Brother Charles nodded again, and exchanged a laughing look with brother Ned; but, just then, Nicholas stopped to refer to some other page, and Tim Linkinwater, unable to contain his satisfaction any longer, descended from his stool, and caught him rapturously by the hand.

'He has done it!' said Tim, looking round at his employers and shaking his head triumphantly. 'His capital B's and D's are exactly like mine; he dots all his small i's and crosses every t as he writes it. There an't such a young man as this in all London,' said Tim, clapping Nicholas on the back; 'not one. Don't tell me! The city can't produce his equal. I challenge the city to do it!'

With this casting down of his gauntlet, Tim Linkinwater struck the desk such a blow with his clenched fist, that the old blackbird tumbled off his perch with the start it gave him, and actually uttered a feeble croak, in the extremity of his astonishment.

'Well said, Tim—well said, Tim Linkinwater!' cried brother Charles, scarcely less pleased than Tim himself, and clapping his hands gently as he spoke. 'I knew our young friend would take great pains, and I was quite certain he would succeed, in no time. Didn't I say so, brother Ned?'

'You did, my dear brother; certainly, my dear brother, you said so, and you were quite right,' replied Ned. 'Quite right. Tim Linkinwater is excited, but he is justly excited, properly excited. Tim is a fine fellow. Tim Linkinwater, sir—you're a fine fellow.'

'Here's a pleasant thing to think of!' said Tim, wholly regardless of this address to himself, and raising his spectacles from the ledger to the brothers. 'Here's a pleasant thing. Do you suppose I haven't often thought of what would become of these books when I was gone? Do you suppose I haven't often thought that things might go on irregular and untidy here, after I was taken away? But now,' said Tim, extending his forefinger towards Nicholas, 'now, when I've shown him a little more, I'm satisfied. The business will go on, when I'm dead, as well as it did when I was alive—just the same—and I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that there never were such books—never were such books! No, nor never will be such books—as the books of Cheeryble Brothers.'

Having thus expressed his sentiments, Mr Linkinwater gave vent to a short laugh, indicative of defiance to the cities of London and Westminster, and, turning again to his desk, quietly carried seventy-six from the last column he had added up, and went on with his work.

'Tim Linkinwater, sir,' said brother Charles; 'give me your hand, sir. This is your birthday. How dare you talk about anything else till you have been wished many happy returns of the day, Tim Linkinwater? God bless you, Tim! God bless you!'

'My dear brother,' said the other, seizing Tim's disengaged fist, 'Tim Linkinwater looks ten years younger than he did on his last birthday.'

'Brother Ned, my dear boy,' returned the other old fellow, 'I believe that Tim Linkinwater was born a hundred and fifty years old, and is gradually coming down to five-and-twenty; for he's younger every birthday than he was the year before.'

'So he is, brother Charles, so he is,' replied brother Ned. 'There's not a doubt about it.'

'Remember, Tim,' said brother Charles, 'that we dine at half-past five today instead of two o'clock; we always depart from our usual custom on this anniversary, as you very well know, Tim Linkinwater. Mr Nickleby, my dear sir, you will make one. Tim Linkinwater, give me your snuff-box as a remembrance to brother Charles and myself of an attached and faithful rascal, and take that, in exchange, as a feeble mark of our respect and esteem, and don't open it until you go to bed, and never say another word upon the subject, or I'll kill the blackbird. A dog! He should have had a golden cage half-a-dozen years ago, if it would have made him or his master a bit the happier. Now, brother Ned, my dear fellow, I'm ready. At half-past five, remember, Mr Nickleby! Tim Linkinwater, sir, take care of Mr Nickleby at half-past five. Now, brother Ned.'

Chattering away thus, according to custom, to prevent the possibility of any thanks or acknowledgment being expressed on the other side, the twins trotted off, arm-in-arm; having endowed Tim Linkinwater with a costly gold snuff-box, enclosing a bank note worth more than its value ten times told.

At a quarter past five o'clock, punctual to the minute, arrived, according to annual usage, Tim Linkinwater's sister; and a great to-do there was, between Tim Linkinwater's sister and the old housekeeper, respecting Tim Linkinwater's sister's cap, which had been dispatched, per boy, from the house of the family where Tim Linkinwater's sister boarded, and had not yet come to hand: notwithstanding that it had been packed up in a bandbox, and the bandbox in a handkerchief, and the handkerchief tied on to the boy's arm; and notwithstanding, too, that the place of its consignment had been duly set forth, at full length, on the back of an old letter, and the boy enjoined, under pain of divers horrible penalties, the full extent of which the eye of man could not foresee, to deliver the same with all possible speed, and not to loiter by the way. Tim Linkinwater's sister lamented; the housekeeper condoled; and both kept thrusting their heads out of the second-floor window to see if the boy was 'coming'—which would have been highly satisfactory, and, upon the whole, tantamount to his being come, as the distance to the corner was not quite five yards—when, all of a sudden, and when he was least expected, the messenger, carrying the bandbox with elaborate caution, appeared in an exactly opposite direction, puffing and panting for breath, and flushed with recent exercise; as well he might be; for he had taken the air, in the first instance, behind a hackney coach that went to Camberwell, and had followed two Punches afterwards and had seen the Stilts home to their own door. The cap was all safe, however—that was one comfort—and it was no use scolding him—that was another; so the boy went upon his way rejoicing, and Tim Linkinwater's sister presented herself to the company below-stairs, just five minutes after the half-hour had struck by Tim Linkinwater's own infallible clock.

The company consisted of the brothers Cheeryble, Tim Linkinwater, a ruddy-faced white-headed friend of Tim's (who was a superannuated bank clerk), and Nicholas, who was presented to Tim Linkinwater's sister with much gravity and solemnity. The party being now completed, brother Ned rang for dinner, and, dinner being shortly afterwards announced, led Tim Linkinwater's sister into the next room, where it was set forth with great preparation. Then, brother Ned took the head of the table, and brother Charles the foot; and Tim Linkinwater's sister sat on the left hand of brother Ned, and Tim Linkinwater himself on his right: and an ancient butler of apoplectic appearance, and with very short legs, took up his position at the back of brother Ned's armchair, and, waving his right arm preparatory to taking off the covers with a flourish, stood bolt upright and motionless.

'For these and all other blessings, brother Charles,' said Ned.

'Lord, make us truly thankful, brother Ned,' said Charles.

Whereupon the apoplectic butler whisked off the top of the soup tureen, and shot, all at once, into a state of violent activity.

There was abundance of conversation, and little fear of its ever flagging, for the good-humour of the glorious old twins drew everybody out, and Tim Linkinwater's sister went off into a long and circumstantial account of Tim Linkinwater's infancy, immediately after the very first glass of champagne—taking care to premise that she was very much Tim's junior, and had only become acquainted with the facts from their being preserved and handed down in the family. This history concluded, brother Ned related how that, exactly thirty-five years ago, Tim Linkinwater was suspected to have received a love-letter, and how that vague information had been brought to the counting-house of his having been seen walking down Cheapside with an uncommonly handsome spinster; at which there was a roar of laughter, and Tim Linkinwater being charged with blushing, and called upon to explain, denied that the accusation was true; and further, that there would have been any harm in it if it had been; which last position occasioned the superannuated bank clerk to laugh tremendously, and to declare that it was the very best thing he had ever heard in his life, and that Tim Linkinwater might say a great many things before he said anything which would beat THAT.

There was one little ceremony peculiar to the day, both the matter and manner of which made a very strong impression upon Nicholas. The cloth having been removed and the decanters sent round for the first time, a profound silence succeeded, and in the cheerful faces of the brothers there appeared an expression, not of absolute melancholy, but of quiet thoughtfulness very unusual at a festive table. As Nicholas, struck by this sudden alteration, was wondering what it could portend, the brothers rose together, and the one at the top of the table leaning forward towards the other, and speaking in a low voice as if he were addressing him individually, said:

'Brother Charles, my dear fellow, there is another association connected with this day which must never be forgotten, and never can be forgotten, by you and me. This day, which brought into the world a most faithful and excellent and exemplary fellow, took from it the kindest and very best of parents, the very best of parents to us both. I wish that she could have seen us in our prosperity, and shared it, and had the happiness of knowing how dearly we loved her in it, as we did when we were two poor boys; but that was not to be. My dear brother—The Memory of our Mother.'

'Good Lord!' thought Nicholas, 'and there are scores of people of their own station, knowing all this, and twenty thousand times more, who wouldn't ask these men to dinner because they eat with their knives and never went to school!'

But there was no time to moralise, for the joviality again became very brisk, and the decanter of port being nearly out, brother Ned pulled the bell, which was instantly answered by the apoplectic butler.

'David,' said brother Ned.

'Sir,' replied the butler.

'A magnum of the double-diamond, David, to drink the health of Mr Linkinwater.'

Instantly, by a feat of dexterity, which was the admiration of all the company, and had been, annually, for some years past, the apoplectic butler, bringing his left hand from behind the small of his back, produced the bottle with the corkscrew already inserted; uncorked it at a jerk; and placed the magnum and the cork before his master with the dignity of conscious cleverness.

'Ha!' said brother Ned, first examining the cork and afterwards filling his glass, while the old butler looked complacently and amiably on, as if it were all his own property, but the company were quite welcome to make free with it, 'this looks well, David.'

'It ought to, sir,' replied David. 'You'd be troubled to find such a glass of wine as is our double-diamond, and that Mr Linkinwater knows very well. That was laid down when Mr Linkinwater first come: that wine was, gentlemen.'

'Nay, David, nay,' interposed brother Charles.

'I wrote the entry in the cellar-book myself, sir, if you please,' said David, in the tone of a man, quite confident in the strength of his facts. 'Mr Linkinwater had only been here twenty year, sir, when that pipe of double-diamond was laid down.'

'David is quite right, quite right, brother Charles,' said Ned: 'are the people here, David?'

'Outside the door, sir,' replied the butler.

'Show 'em in, David, show 'em in.'

At this bidding, the older butler placed before his master a small tray of clean glasses, and opening the door admitted the jolly porters and warehousemen whom Nicholas had seen below. They were four in all, and as they came in, bowing, and grinning, and blushing, the housekeeper, and cook, and housemaid, brought up the rear.

'Seven,' said brother Ned, filling a corresponding number of glasses with the double-diamond, 'and David, eight. There! Now, you're all of you to drink the health of your best friend Mr Timothy Linkinwater, and wish him health and long life and many happy returns of this day, both for his own sake and that of your old masters, who consider him an inestimable treasure. Tim Linkinwater, sir, your health. Devil take you, Tim Linkinwater, sir, God bless you.'

With this singular contradiction of terms, brother Ned gave Tim Linkinwater a slap on the back, which made him look, for the moment, almost as apoplectic as the butler: and tossed off the contents of his glass in a twinkling.

The toast was scarcely drunk with all honour to Tim Linkinwater, when the sturdiest and jolliest subordinate elbowed himself a little in advance of his fellows, and exhibiting a very hot and flushed countenance, pulled a single lock of grey hair in the middle of his forehead as a respectful salute to the company, and delivered himself as follows—rubbing the palms of his hands very hard on a blue cotton handkerchief as he did so:

'We're allowed to take a liberty once a year, gen'lemen, and if you please we'll take it now; there being no time like the present, and no two birds in the hand worth one in the bush, as is well known—leastways in a contrairy sense, which the meaning is the same. (A pause—the butler unconvinced.) What we mean to say is, that there never was (looking at the butler)—such—(looking at the cook) noble—excellent—(looking everywhere and seeing nobody) free, generous-spirited masters as them as has treated us so handsome this day. And here's thanking of 'em for all their goodness as is so constancy a diffusing of itself over everywhere, and wishing they may live long and die happy!'

When the foregoing speech was over—and it might have been much more elegant and much less to the purpose—the whole body of subordinates under command of the apoplectic butler gave three soft cheers; which, to that gentleman's great indignation, were not very regular, inasmuch as the women persisted in giving an immense number of little shrill hurrahs among themselves, in utter disregard of the time. This done, they withdrew; shortly afterwards, Tim Linkinwater's sister withdrew; in reasonable time after that, the sitting was broken up for tea and coffee, and a round game of cards.

At half-past ten—late hours for the square—there appeared a little tray of sandwiches and a bowl of bishop, which bishop coming on the top of the double-diamond, and other excitements, had such an effect upon Tim Linkinwater, that he drew Nicholas aside, and gave him to understand, confidentially, that it was quite true about the uncommonly handsome spinster, and that she was to the full as good-looking as she had been described—more so, indeed—but that she was in too much of a hurry to change her condition, and consequently, while Tim was courting her and thinking of changing his, got married to somebody else. 'After all, I dare say it was my fault,' said Tim. 'I'll show you a print I have got upstairs, one of these days. It cost me five-and-twenty shillings. I bought it soon after we were cool to each other. Don't mention it, but it's the most extraordinary accidental likeness you ever saw—her very portrait, sir!'

By this time it was past eleven o'clock; and Tim Linkinwater's sister declaring that she ought to have been at home a full hour ago, a coach was procured, into which she was handed with great ceremony by brother Ned, while brother Charles imparted the fullest directions to the coachman, and besides paying the man a shilling over and above his fare, in order that he might take the utmost care of the lady, all but choked him with a glass of spirits of uncommon strength, and then nearly knocked all the breath out of his body in his energetic endeavours to knock it in again.

At length the coach rumbled off, and Tim Linkinwater's sister being now fairly on her way home, Nicholas and Tim Linkinwater's friend took their leaves together, and left old Tim and the worthy brothers to their repose.

As Nicholas had some distance to walk, it was considerably past midnight by the time he reached home, where he found his mother and Smike sitting up to receive him. It was long after their usual hour of retiring, and they had expected him, at the very latest, two hours ago; but the time had not hung heavily on their hands, for Mrs Nickleby had entertained Smike with a genealogical account of her family by the mother's side, comprising biographical sketches of the principal members, and Smike had sat wondering what it was all about, and whether it was learnt from a book, or said out of Mrs Nickleby's own head; so that they got on together very pleasantly.

Nicholas could not go to bed without expatiating on the excellences and munificence of the brothers Cheeryble, and relating the great success which had attended his efforts that day. But before he had said a dozen words, Mrs Nickleby, with many sly winks and nods, observed, that she was sure Mr Smike must be quite tired out, and that she positively must insist on his not sitting up a minute longer.

'A most biddable creature he is, to be sure,' said Mrs Nickleby, when Smike had wished them good-night and left the room. 'I know you'll excuse me, Nicholas, my dear, but I don't like to do this before a third person; indeed, before a young man it would not be quite proper, though really, after all, I don't know what harm there is in it, except that to be sure it's not a very becoming thing, though some people say it is very much so, and really I don't know why it should not be, if it's well got up, and the borders are small-plaited; of course, a good deal depends upon that.'

With which preface, Mrs Nickleby took her nightcap from between the leaves of a very large prayer-book where it had been folded up small, and proceeded to tie it on: talking away in her usual discursive manner, all the time.

'People may say what they like,' observed Mrs Nickleby, 'but there's a great deal of comfort in a nightcap, as I'm sure you would confess, Nicholas my dear, if you would only have strings to yours, and wear it like a Christian, instead of sticking it upon the very top of your head like a blue-coat boy. You needn't think it an unmanly or quizzical thing to be particular about your nightcap, for I have often heard your poor dear papa, and the Reverend Mr What's-his-name, who used to read prayers in that old church with the curious little steeple that the weathercock was blown off the night week before you were born,—I have often heard them say, that the young men at college are uncommonly particular about their nightcaps, and that the Oxford nightcaps are quite celebrated for their strength and goodness; so much so, indeed, that the young men never dream of going to bed without 'em, and I believe it's admitted on all hands that THEY know what's good, and don't coddle themselves.'

Nicholas laughed, and entering no further into the subject of this lengthened harangue, reverted to the pleasant tone of the little birthday party. And as Mrs Nickleby instantly became very curious respecting it, and made a great number of inquiries touching what they had had for dinner, and how it was put on table, and whether it was overdone or underdone, and who was there, and what 'the Mr Cherrybles' said, and what Nicholas said, and what the Mr Cherrybles said when he said that; Nicholas described the festivities at full length, and also the occurrences of the morning.

'Late as it is,' said Nicholas, 'I am almost selfish enough to wish that Kate had been up to hear all this. I was all impatience, as I came along, to tell her.'

'Why, Kate,' said Mrs Nickleby, putting her feet upon the fender, and drawing her chair close to it, as if settling herself for a long talk. 'Kate has been in bed—oh! a couple of hours—and I'm very glad, Nicholas my dear, that I prevailed upon her not to sit up, for I wished very much to have an opportunity of saying a few words to you. I am naturally anxious about it, and of course it's a very delightful and consoling thing to have a grown-up son that one can put confidence in, and advise with; indeed I don't know any use there would be in having sons at all, unless people could put confidence in them.'

Nicholas stopped in the middle of a sleepy yawn, as his mother began to speak: and looked at her with fixed attention.

'There was a lady in our neighbourhood,' said Mrs Nickleby, 'speaking of sons puts me in mind of it—a lady in our neighbourhood when we lived near Dawlish, I think her name was Rogers; indeed I am sure it was if it wasn't Murphy, which is the only doubt I have—'

'Is it about her, mother, that you wished to speak to me?' said Nicholas quietly.

'About HER!' cried Mrs Nickleby. 'Good gracious, Nicholas, my dear, how CAN you be so ridiculous! But that was always the way with your poor dear papa,—just his way—always wandering, never able to fix his thoughts on any one subject for two minutes together. I think I see him now!' said Mrs Nickleby, wiping her eyes, 'looking at me while I was talking to him about his affairs, just as if his ideas were in a state of perfect conglomeration! Anybody who had come in upon us suddenly, would have supposed I was confusing and distracting him instead of making things plainer; upon my word they would.'

'I am very sorry, mother, that I should inherit this unfortunate slowness of apprehension,' said Nicholas, kindly; 'but I'll do my best to understand you, if you'll only go straight on: indeed I will.'

'Your poor pa!' said Mrs Nickleby, pondering. 'He never knew, till it was too late, what I would have had him do!'

This was undoubtedly the case, inasmuch as the deceased Mr Nickleby had not arrived at the knowledge. Then he died. Neither had Mrs Nickleby herself; which is, in some sort, an explanation of the circumstance.

'However,' said Mrs Nickleby, drying her tears, 'this has nothing to do—certainly nothing whatever to do—with the gentleman in the next house.'

'I should suppose that the gentleman in the next house has as little to do with us,' returned Nicholas.

'There can be no doubt,' said Mrs Nickleby, 'that he IS a gentleman, and has the manners of a gentleman, and the appearance of a gentleman, although he does wear smalls and grey worsted stockings. That may be eccentricity, or he may be proud of his legs. I don't see why he shouldn't be. The Prince Regent was proud of his legs, and so was Daniel Lambert, who was also a fat man; HE was proud of his legs. So was Miss Biffin: she was—no,' added Mrs Nickleby, correcting, herself, 'I think she had only toes, but the principle is the same.'

Nicholas looked on, quite amazed at the introduction of this new theme. Which seemed just what Mrs Nickleby had expected him to be.

'You may well be surprised, Nicholas, my dear,' she said, 'I am sure I was. It came upon me like a flash of fire, and almost froze my blood. The bottom of his garden joins the bottom of ours, and of course I had several times seen him sitting among the scarlet-beans in his little arbour, or working at his little hot-beds. I used to think he stared rather, but I didn't take any particular notice of that, as we were newcomers, and he might be curious to see what we were like. But when he began to throw his cucumbers over our wall—'

'To throw his cucumbers over our wall!' repeated Nicholas, in great astonishment.

'Yes, Nicholas, my dear,' replied Mrs Nickleby in a very serious tone; 'his cucumbers over our wall. And vegetable marrows likewise.'

'Confound his impudence!' said Nicholas, firing immediately. 'What does he mean by that?'

'I don't think he means it impertinently at all,' replied Mrs Nickleby.

'What!' said Nicholas, 'cucumbers and vegetable marrows flying at the heads of the family as they walk in their own garden, and not meant impertinently! Why, mother—'

Nicholas stopped short; for there was an indescribable expression of placid triumph, mingled with a modest confusion, lingering between the borders of Mrs Nickleby's nightcap, which arrested his attention suddenly.

'He must be a very weak, and foolish, and inconsiderate man,' said Mrs Nickleby; 'blamable indeed—at least I suppose other people would consider him so; of course I can't be expected to express any opinion on that point, especially after always defending your poor dear papa when other people blamed him for making proposals to me; and to be sure there can be no doubt that he has taken a very singular way of showing it. Still at the same time, his attentions are—that is, as far as it goes, and to a certain extent of course—a flattering sort of thing; and although I should never dream of marrying again with a dear girl like Kate still unsettled in life—'

'Surely, mother, such an idea never entered your brain for an instant?' said Nicholas.

'Bless my heart, Nicholas my dear,' returned his mother in a peevish tone, 'isn't that precisely what I am saying, if you would only let me speak? Of course, I never gave it a second thought, and I am surprised and astonished that you should suppose me capable of such a thing. All I say is, what step is the best to take, so as to reject these advances civilly and delicately, and without hurting his feelings too much, and driving him to despair, or anything of that kind? My goodness me!' exclaimed Mrs Nickleby, with a half-simper, 'suppose he was to go doing anything rash to himself. Could I ever be happy again, Nicholas?'

Despite his vexation and concern, Nicholas could scarcely help smiling, as he rejoined, 'Now, do you think, mother, that such a result would be likely to ensue from the most cruel repulse?'

'Upon my word, my dear, I don't know,' returned Mrs Nickleby; 'really, I don't know. I am sure there was a case in the day before yesterday's paper, extracted from one of the French newspapers, about a journeyman shoemaker who was jealous of a young girl in an adjoining village, because she wouldn't shut herself up in an air-tight three-pair-of-stairs, and charcoal herself to death with him; and who went and hid himself in a wood with a sharp-pointed knife, and rushed out, as she was passing by with a few friends, and killed himself first, and then all the friends, and then her—no, killed all the friends first, and then herself, and then HIMself—which it is quite frightful to think of. Somehow or other,' added Mrs Nickleby, after a momentary pause, 'they always ARE journeyman shoemakers who do these things in France, according to the papers. I don't know how it is—something in the leather, I suppose.'

'But this man, who is not a shoemaker—what has he done, mother, what has he said?' inquired Nicholas, fretted almost beyond endurance, but looking nearly as resigned and patient as Mrs Nickleby herself. 'You know, there is no language of vegetables, which converts a cucumber into a formal declaration of attachment.'

'My dear,' replied Mrs Nickleby, tossing her head and looking at the ashes in the grate, 'he has done and said all sorts of things.'

'Is there no mistake on your part?' asked Nicholas.

'Mistake!' cried Mrs Nickleby. 'Lord, Nicholas my dear, do you suppose I don't know when a man's in earnest?'

'Well, well!' muttered Nicholas.

'Every time I go to the window,' said Mrs Nickleby, 'he kisses one hand, and lays the other upon his heart—of course it's very foolish of him to do so, and I dare say you'll say it's very wrong, but he does it very respectfully—very respectfully indeed—and very tenderly, extremely tenderly. So far, he deserves the greatest credit; there can be no doubt about that. Then, there are the presents which come pouring over the wall every day, and very fine they certainly are, very fine; we had one of the cucumbers at dinner yesterday, and think of pickling the rest for next winter. And last evening,' added Mrs Nickleby, with increased confusion, 'he called gently over the wall, as I was walking in the garden, and proposed marriage, and an elopement. His voice is as clear as a bell or a musical glass—very like a musical glass indeed—but of course I didn't listen to it. Then, the question is, Nicholas my dear, what am I to do?'

'Does Kate know of this?' asked Nicholas.

'I have not said a word about it yet,' answered his mother.

'Then, for Heaven's sake,' rejoined Nicholas, rising, 'do not, for it would make her very unhappy. And with regard to what you should do, my dear mother, do what your good sense and feeling, and respect for my father's memory, would prompt. There are a thousand ways in which you can show your dislike of these preposterous and doting attentions. If you act as decidedly as you ought and they are still continued, and to your annoyance, I can speedily put a stop to them. But I should not interfere in a matter so ridiculous, and attach importance to it, until you have vindicated yourself. Most women can do that, but especially one of your age and condition, in circumstances like these, which are unworthy of a serious thought. I would not shame you by seeming to take them to heart, or treat them earnestly for an instant. Absurd old idiot!'

So saying, Nicholas kissed his mother, and bade her good-night, and they retired to their respective chambers.

To do Mrs Nickleby justice, her attachment to her children would have prevented her seriously contemplating a second marriage, even if she could have so far conquered her recollections of her late husband as to have any strong inclinations that way. But, although there was no evil and little real selfishness in Mrs Nickleby's heart, she had a weak head and a vain one; and there was something so flattering in being sought (and vainly sought) in marriage at this time of day, that she could not dismiss the passion of the unknown gentleman quite so summarily or lightly as Nicholas appeared to deem becoming.

'As to its being preposterous, and doting, and ridiculous,' thought Mrs Nickleby, communing with herself in her own room, 'I don't see that, at all. It's hopeless on his part, certainly; but why he should be an absurd old idiot, I confess I don't see. He is not to be supposed to know it's hopeless. Poor fellow! He is to be pitied, I think!'

Having made these reflections, Mrs Nickleby looked in her little dressing-glass, and walking backward a few steps from it, tried to remember who it was who used to say that when Nicholas was one-and-twenty he would have more the appearance of her brother than her son. Not being able to call the authority to mind, she extinguished her candle, and drew up the window-blind to admit the light of morning, which had, by this time, begun to dawn.

'It's a bad light to distinguish objects in,' murmured Mrs Nickleby, peering into the garden, 'and my eyes are not very good—I was short-sighted from a child—but, upon my word, I think there's another large vegetable marrow sticking, at this moment, on the broken glass bottles at the top of the wall!'

CHAPTER 38

Comprises certain Particulars arising out of a Visit of Condolence, which may prove important hereafter. Smike unexpectedly encounters a very old Friend, who invites him to his House, and will take no Denial

Quite unconscious of the demonstrations of their amorous neighbour, or their effects upon the susceptible bosom of her mama, Kate Nickleby had, by this time, begun to enjoy a settled feeling of tranquillity and happiness, to which, even in occasional and transitory glimpses, she had long been a stranger. Living under the same roof with the beloved brother from whom she had been so suddenly and hardly separated: with a mind at ease, and free from any persecutions which could call a blush into her cheek, or a pang into her heart, she seemed to have passed into a new state of being. Her former cheerfulness was restored, her step regained its elasticity and lightness, the colour which had forsaken her cheek visited it once again, and Kate Nickleby looked more beautiful than ever.

Such was the result to which Miss La Creevy's ruminations and observations led her, when the cottage had been, as she emphatically said, 'thoroughly got to rights, from the chimney-pots to the street-door scraper,' and the busy little woman had at length a moment's time to think about its inmates.

'Which I declare I haven't had since I first came down here,' said Miss La Creevy; 'for I have thought of nothing but hammers, nails, screwdrivers, and gimlets, morning, noon, and night.'

'You never bestowed one thought upon yourself, I believe,' returned Kate, smiling.

'Upon my word, my dear, when there are so many pleasanter things to think of, I should be a goose if I did,' said Miss La Creevy. 'By-the-bye, I HAVE thought of somebody too. Do you know, that I observe a great change in one of this family—a very extraordinary change?'

'In whom?' asked Kate, anxiously. 'Not in—'

'Not in your brother, my dear,' returned Miss La Creevy, anticipating the close of the sentence, 'for he is always the same affectionate good-natured clever creature, with a spice of the—I won't say who—in him when there's any occasion, that he was when I first knew you. No. Smike, as he WILL be called, poor fellow! for he won't hear of a MR before his name, is greatly altered, even in this short time.'

'How?' asked Kate. 'Not in health?'

'N—n—o; perhaps not in health exactly,' said Miss La Creevy, pausing to consider, 'although he is a worn and feeble creature, and has that in his face which it would wring my heart to see in yours. No; not in health.'

'How then?'

'I scarcely know,' said the miniature painter. 'But I have watched him, and he has brought the tears into my eyes many times. It is not a very difficult matter to do that, certainly, for I am easily melted; still I think these came with good cause and reason. I am sure that since he has been here, he has grown, from some strong cause, more conscious of his weak intellect. He feels it more. It gives him greater pain to know that he wanders sometimes, and cannot understand very simple things. I have watched him when you have not been by, my dear, sit brooding by himself, with such a look of pain as I could scarcely bear to see, and then get up and leave the room: so sorrowfully, and in such dejection, that I cannot tell you how it has hurt me. Not three weeks ago, he was a light-hearted busy creature, overjoyed to be in a bustle, and as happy as the day was long. Now, he is another being—the same willing, harmless, faithful, loving creature—but the same in nothing else.'

'Surely this will all pass off,' said Kate. 'Poor fellow!'

'I hope,' returned her little friend, with a gravity very unusual in her, 'it may. I hope, for the sake of that poor lad, it may. However,' said Miss La Creevy, relapsing into the cheerful, chattering tone, which was habitual to her, 'I have said my say, and a very long say it is, and a very wrong say too, I shouldn't wonder at all. I shall cheer him up tonight, at all events, for if he is to be my squire all the way to the Strand, I shall talk on, and on, and on, and never leave off, till I have roused him into a laugh at something. So the sooner he goes, the better for him, and the sooner I go, the better for me, I am sure, or else I shall have my maid gallivanting with somebody who may rob the house—though what there is to take away, besides tables and chairs, I don't know, except the miniatures: and he is a clever thief who can dispose of them to any great advantage, for I can't, I know, and that's the honest truth.'

So saying, little Miss La Creevy hid her face in a very flat bonnet, and herself in a very big shawl; and fixing herself tightly into the latter, by means of a large pin, declared that the omnibus might come as soon as it pleased, for she was quite ready.

But there was still Mrs Nickleby to take leave of; and long before that good lady had concluded some reminiscences bearing upon, and appropriate to, the occasion, the omnibus arrived. This put Miss La Creevy in a great bustle, in consequence whereof, as she secretly rewarded the servant girl with eighteen-pence behind the street-door, she pulled out of her reticule ten-pennyworth of halfpence, which rolled into all possible corners of the passage, and occupied some considerable time in the picking up. This ceremony had, of course, to be succeeded by a second kissing of Kate and Mrs Nickleby, and a gathering together of the little basket and the brown-paper parcel, during which proceedings, 'the omnibus,' as Miss La Creevy protested, 'swore so dreadfully, that it was quite awful to hear it.' At length and at last, it made a feint of going away, and then Miss La Creevy darted out, and darted in, apologising with great volubility to all the passengers, and declaring that she wouldn't purposely have kept them waiting on any account whatever. While she was looking about for a convenient seat, the conductor pushed Smike in, and cried that it was all right—though it wasn't—and away went the huge vehicle, with the noise of half-a-dozen brewers' drays at least.

Leaving it to pursue its journey at the pleasure of the conductor aforementioned, who lounged gracefully on his little shelf behind, smoking an odoriferous cigar; and leaving it to stop, or go on, or gallop, or crawl, as that gentleman deemed expedient and advisable; this narrative may embrace the opportunity of ascertaining the condition of Sir Mulberry Hawk, and to what extent he had, by this time, recovered from the injuries consequent on being flung violently from his cabriolet, under the circumstances already detailed.

With a shattered limb, a body severely bruised, a face disfigured by half-healed scars, and pallid from the exhaustion of recent pain and fever, Sir Mulberry Hawk lay stretched upon his back, on the couch to which he was doomed to be a prisoner for some weeks yet to come. Mr Pyke and Mr Pluck sat drinking hard in the next room, now and then varying the monotonous murmurs of their conversation with a half-smothered laugh, while the young lord—the only member of the party who was not thoroughly irredeemable, and who really had a kind heart—sat beside his Mentor, with a cigar in his mouth, and read to him, by the light of a lamp, such scraps of intelligence from a paper of the day, as were most likely to yield him interest or amusement.

'Curse those hounds!' said the invalid, turning his head impatiently towards the adjoining room; 'will nothing stop their infernal throats?'

Messrs Pyke and Pluck heard the exclamation, and stopped immediately: winking to each other as they did so, and filling their glasses to the brim, as some recompense for the deprivation of speech.

'Damn!' muttered the sick man between his teeth, and writhing impatiently in his bed. 'Isn't this mattress hard enough, and the room dull enough, and pain bad enough, but THEY must torture me? What's the time?'

'Half-past eight,' replied his friend.

'Here, draw the table nearer, and let us have the cards again,' said Sir Mulberry. 'More piquet. Come.'

It was curious to see how eagerly the sick man, debarred from any change of position save the mere turning of his head from side to side, watched every motion of his friend in the progress of the game; and with what eagerness and interest he played, and yet how warily and coolly. His address and skill were more than twenty times a match for his adversary, who could make little head against them, even when fortune favoured him with good cards, which was not often the case. Sir Mulberry won every game; and when his companion threw down the cards, and refused to play any longer, thrust forth his wasted arm and caught up the stakes with a boastful oath, and the same hoarse laugh, though considerably lowered in tone, that had resounded in Ralph Nickleby's dining-room, months before.

While he was thus occupied, his man appeared, to announce that Mr Ralph Nickleby was below, and wished to know how he was, tonight.

'Better,' said Sir Mulberry, impatiently.

'Mr Nickleby wishes to know, sir—'

'I tell you, better,' replied Sir Mulberry, striking his hand upon the table.

The man hesitated for a moment or two, and then said that Mr Nickleby had requested permission to see Sir Mulberry Hawk, if it was not inconvenient.

'It IS inconvenient. I can't see him. I can't see anybody,' said his master, more violently than before. 'You know that, you blockhead.'

'I am very sorry, sir,' returned the man. 'But Mr Nickleby pressed so much, sir—'

The fact was, that Ralph Nickleby had bribed the man, who, being anxious to earn his money with a view to future favours, held the door in his hand, and ventured to linger still.

'Did he say whether he had any business to speak about?' inquired Sir Mulberry, after a little impatient consideration.

'No, sir. He said he wished to see you, sir. Particularly, Mr Nickleby said, sir.'

'Tell him to come up. Here,' cried Sir Mulberry, calling the man back, as he passed his hand over his disfigured face, 'move that lamp, and put it on the stand behind me. Wheel that table away, and place a chair there—further off. Leave it so.'

The man obeyed these directions as if he quite comprehended the motive with which they were dictated, and left the room. Lord Frederick Verisopht, remarking that he would look in presently, strolled into the adjoining apartment, and closed the folding door behind him.

Then was heard a subdued footstep on the stairs; and Ralph Nickleby, hat in hand, crept softly into the room, with his body bent forward as if in profound respect, and his eyes fixed upon the face of his worthy client.

'Well, Nickleby,' said Sir Mulberry, motioning him to the chair by the couch side, and waving his hand in assumed carelessness, 'I have had a bad accident, you see.'

'I see,' rejoined Ralph, with the same steady gaze. 'Bad, indeed! I should not have known you, Sir Mulberry. Dear, dear! This IS bad.'

Ralph's manner was one of profound humility and respect; and the low tone of voice was that, which the gentlest consideration for a sick man would have taught a visitor to assume. But the expression of his face, Sir Mulberry's being averted, was in extraordinary contrast; and as he stood, in his usual attitude, calmly looking on the prostrate form before him, all that part of his features which was not cast into shadow by his protruding and contracted brows, bore the impress of a sarcastic smile.

'Sit down,' said Sir Mulberry, turning towards him, as though by a violent effort. 'Am I a sight, that you stand gazing there?'

As he turned his face, Ralph recoiled a step or two, and making as though he were irresistibly impelled to express astonishment, but was determined not to do so, sat down with well-acted confusion.

'I have inquired at the door, Sir Mulberry, every day,' said Ralph, 'twice a day, indeed, at first—and tonight, presuming upon old acquaintance, and past transactions by which we have mutually benefited in some degree, I could not resist soliciting admission to your chamber. Have you—have you suffered much?' said Ralph, bending forward, and allowing the same harsh smile to gather upon his face, as the other closed his eyes.

'More than enough to please me, and less than enough to please some broken-down hacks that you and I know of, and who lay their ruin between us, I dare say,' returned Sir Mulberry, tossing his arm restlessly upon the coverlet.

Ralph shrugged his shoulders in deprecation of the intense irritation with which this had been said; for there was an aggravating, cold distinctness in his speech and manner which so grated on the sick man that he could scarcely endure it.

'And what is it in these "past transactions," that brought you here tonight?' asked Sir Mulberry.

'Nothing,' replied Ralph. 'There are some bills of my lord's which need renewal; but let them be till you are well. I—I—came,' said Ralph, speaking more slowly, and with harsher emphasis, 'I came to say how grieved I am that any relative of mine, although disowned by me, should have inflicted such punishment on you as—'

'Punishment!' interposed Sir Mulberry.

'I know it has been a severe one,' said Ralph, wilfully mistaking the meaning of the interruption, 'and that has made me the more anxious to tell you that I disown this vagabond—that I acknowledge him as no kin of mine—and that I leave him to take his deserts from you, and every man besides. You may wring his neck if you please. I shall not interfere.'

'This story that they tell me here, has got abroad then, has it?' asked Sir Mulberry, clenching his hands and teeth.

'Noised in all directions,' replied Ralph. 'Every club and gaming-room has rung with it. There has been a good song made about it, as I am told,' said Ralph, looking eagerly at his questioner. 'I have not heard it myself, not being in the way of such things, but I have been told it's even printed—for private circulation—but that's all over town, of course.'

'It's a lie!' said Sir Mulberry; 'I tell you it's all a lie. The mare took fright.'

'They SAY he frightened her,' observed Ralph, in the same unmoved and quiet manner. 'Some say he frightened you, but THAT'S a lie, I know. I have said that boldly—oh, a score of times! I am a peaceable man, but I can't hear folks tell that of you. No, no.'

When Sir Mulberry found coherent words to utter, Ralph bent forward with his hand to his ear, and a face as calm as if its every line of sternness had been cast in iron.

'When I am off this cursed bed,' said the invalid, actually striking at his broken leg in the ecstasy of his passion, 'I'll have such revenge as never man had yet. By God, I will. Accident favouring him, he has marked me for a week or two, but I'll put a mark on him that he shall carry to his grave. I'll slit his nose and ears, flog him, maim him for life. I'll do more than that; I'll drag that pattern of chastity, that pink of prudery, the delicate sister, through—'

It might have been that even Ralph's cold blood tingled in his cheeks at that moment. It might have been that Sir Mulberry remembered, that, knave and usurer as he was, he must, in some early time of infancy, have twined his arm about her father's neck. He stopped, and menacing with his hand, confirmed the unuttered threat with a tremendous oath.

'It is a galling thing,' said Ralph, after a short term of silence, during which he had eyed the sufferer keenly, 'to think that the man about town, the rake, the ROUE, the rook of twenty seasons should be brought to this pass by a mere boy!'

Sir Mulberry darted a wrathful look at him, but Ralph's eyes were bent upon the ground, and his face wore no other expression than one of thoughtfulness.

'A raw, slight stripling,' continued Ralph, 'against a man whose very weight might crush him; to say nothing of his skill in—I am right, I think,' said Ralph, raising his eyes, 'you WERE a patron of the ring once, were you not?'

The sick man made an impatient gesture, which Ralph chose to consider as one of acquiescence.

'Ha!' he said, 'I thought so. That was before I knew you, but I was pretty sure I couldn't be mistaken. He is light and active, I suppose. But those were slight advantages compared with yours. Luck, luck! These hang-dog outcasts have it.'

'He'll need the most he has, when I am well again,' said Sir Mulberry Hawk, 'let him fly where he will.'

'Oh!' returned Ralph quickly, 'he doesn't dream of that. He is here, good sir, waiting your pleasure, here in London, walking the streets at noonday; carrying it off jauntily; looking for you, I swear,' said Ralph, his face darkening, and his own hatred getting the upper hand of him, for the first time, as this gay picture of Nicholas presented itself; 'if we were only citizens of a country where it could be safely done, I'd give good money to have him stabbed to the heart and rolled into the kennel for the dogs to tear.'

As Ralph, somewhat to the surprise of his old client, vented this little piece of sound family feeling, and took up his hat preparatory to departing, Lord Frederick Verisopht looked in.

'Why what in the deyvle's name, Hawk, have you and Nickleby been talking about?' said the young man. 'I neyver heard such an insufferable riot. Croak, croak, croak. Bow, wow, wow. What has it all been about?'

'Sir Mulberry has been angry, my Lord,' said Ralph, looking towards the couch.

'Not about money, I hope? Nothing has gone wrong in business, has it, Nickleby?'

'No, my Lord, no,' returned Ralph. 'On that point we always agree. Sir Mulberry has been calling to mind the cause of—'

There was neither necessity nor opportunity for Ralph to proceed; for Sir Mulberry took up the theme, and vented his threats and oaths against Nicholas, almost as ferociously as before.

Ralph, who was no common observer, was surprised to see that as this tirade proceeded, the manner of Lord Frederick Verisopht, who at the commencement had been twirling his whiskers with a most dandified and listless air, underwent a complete alteration. He was still more surprised when, Sir Mulberry ceasing to speak, the young lord angrily, and almost unaffectedly, requested never to have the subject renewed in his presence.

'Mind that, Hawk!' he added, with unusual energy. 'I never will be a party to, or permit, if I can help it, a cowardly attack upon this young fellow.'

'Cowardly!' interrupted his friend.

'Ye-es,' said the other, turning full upon him. 'If you had told him who you were; if you had given him your card, and found out, afterwards, that his station or character prevented your fighting him, it would have been bad enough then; upon my soul it would have been bad enough then. As it is, you did wrong. I did wrong too, not to interfere, and I am sorry for it. What happened to you afterwards, was as much the consequence of accident as design, and more your fault than his; and it shall not, with my knowledge, be cruelly visited upon him, it shall not indeed.'

With this emphatic repetition of his concluding words, the young lord turned upon his heel; but before he had reached the adjoining room he turned back again, and said, with even greater vehemence than he had displayed before,

'I do believe, now; upon my honour I do believe, that the sister is as virtuous and modest a young lady as she is a handsome one; and of the brother, I say this, that he acted as her brother should, and in a manly and spirited manner. And I only wish, with all my heart and soul, that any one of us came out of this matter half as well as he does.'

So saying, Lord Frederick Verisopht walked out of the room, leaving Ralph Nickleby and Sir Mulberry in most unpleasant astonishment.

'Is this your pupil?' asked Ralph, softly, 'or has he come fresh from some country parson?'

'Green fools take these fits sometimes,' replied Sir Mulberry Hawk, biting his lip, and pointing to the door. 'Leave him to me.'

Ralph exchanged a familiar look with his old acquaintance; for they had suddenly grown confidential again in this alarming surprise; and took his way home, thoughtfully and slowly.

While these things were being said and done, and long before they were concluded, the omnibus had disgorged Miss La Creevy and her escort, and they had arrived at her own door. Now, the good-nature of the little miniature painter would by no means allow of Smike's walking back again, until he had been previously refreshed with just a sip of something comfortable and a mixed biscuit or so; and Smike, entertaining no objection either to the sip of something comfortable, or the mixed biscuit, but, considering on the contrary that they would be a very pleasant preparation for a walk to Bow, it fell out that he delayed much longer than he originally intended, and that it was some half-hour after dusk when he set forth on his journey home.

There was no likelihood of his losing his way, for it lay quite straight before him, and he had walked into town with Nicholas, and back alone, almost every day. So, Miss La Creevy and he shook hands with mutual confidence, and, being charged with more kind remembrances to Mrs and Miss Nickleby, Smike started off.

At the foot of Ludgate Hill, he turned a little out of the road to satisfy his curiosity by having a look at Newgate. After staring up at the sombre walls, from the opposite side of the way, with great care and dread for some minutes, he turned back again into the old track, and walked briskly through the city; stopping now and then to gaze in at the window of some particularly attractive shop, then running for a little way, then stopping again, and so on, as any other country lad might do.

He had been gazing for a long time through a jeweller's window, wishing he could take some of the beautiful trinkets home as a present, and imagining what delight they would afford if he could, when the clocks struck three-quarters past eight; roused by the sound, he hurried on at a very quick pace, and was crossing the corner of a by-street when he felt himself violently brought to, with a jerk so sudden that he was obliged to cling to a lamp-post to save himself from falling. At the same moment, a small boy clung tight round his leg, and a shrill cry of 'Here he is, father! Hooray!' vibrated in his ears.

Smike knew that voice too well. He cast his despairing eyes downward towards the form from which it had proceeded, and, shuddering from head to foot, looked round. Mr Squeers had hooked him in the coat collar with the handle of his umbrella, and was hanging on at the other end with all his might and main. The cry of triumph proceeded from Master Wackford, who, regardless of all his kicks and struggles, clung to him with the tenacity of a bull-dog!

One glance showed him this; and in that one glance the terrified creature became utterly powerless and unable to utter a sound.

'Here's a go!' cried Mr Squeers, gradually coming hand-over-hand down the umbrella, and only unhooking it when he had got tight hold of the victim's collar. 'Here's a delicious go! Wackford, my boy, call up one of them coaches.'

'A coach, father!' cried little Wackford.

'Yes, a coach, sir,' replied Squeers, feasting his eyes upon the countenance of Smike. 'Damn the expense. Let's have him in a coach.'

'What's he been a doing of?' asked a labourer with a hod of bricks, against whom and a fellow-labourer Mr Squeers had backed, on the first jerk of the umbrella.

'Everything!' replied Mr Squeers, looking fixedly at his old pupil in a sort of rapturous trance. 'Everything—running away, sir—joining in bloodthirsty attacks upon his master—there's nothing that's bad that he hasn't done. Oh, what a delicious go is this here, good Lord!'

The man looked from Squeers to Smike; but such mental faculties as the poor fellow possessed, had utterly deserted him. The coach came up; Master Wackford entered; Squeers pushed in his prize, and following close at his heels, pulled up the glasses. The coachman mounted his box and drove slowly off, leaving the two bricklayers, and an old apple-woman, and a town-made little boy returning from an evening school, who had been the only witnesses of the scene, to meditate upon it at their leisure.

Mr Squeers sat himself down on the opposite seat to the unfortunate Smike, and, planting his hands firmly on his knees, looked at him for some five minutes, when, seeming to recover from his trance, he uttered a loud laugh, and slapped his old pupil's face several times—taking the right and left sides alternately.

'It isn't a dream!' said Squeers. 'That's real flesh and blood! I know the feel of it!' and being quite assured of his good fortune by these experiments, Mr Squeers administered a few boxes on the ear, lest the entertainments should seem to partake of sameness, and laughed louder and longer at every one.

'Your mother will be fit to jump out of her skin, my boy, when she hears of this,' said Squeers to his son.

'Oh, won't she though, father?' replied Master Wackford.

'To think,' said Squeers, 'that you and me should be turning out of a street, and come upon him at the very nick; and that I should have him tight, at only one cast of the umbrella, as if I had hooked him with a grappling-iron! Ha, ha!'

'Didn't I catch hold of his leg, neither, father?' said little Wackford.

'You did; like a good 'un, my boy,' said Mr Squeers, patting his son's head, 'and you shall have the best button-over jacket and waistcoat that the next new boy brings down, as a reward of merit. Mind that. You always keep on in the same path, and do them things that you see your father do, and when you die you'll go right slap to Heaven and no questions asked.'

Improving the occasion in these words, Mr Squeers patted his son's head again, and then patted Smike's—but harder; and inquired in a bantering tone how he found himself by this time.

'I must go home,' replied Smike, looking wildly round.

'To be sure you must. You're about right there,' replied Mr Squeers. 'You'll go home very soon, you will. You'll find yourself at the peaceful village of Dotheboys, in Yorkshire, in something under a week's time, my young friend; and the next time you get away from there, I give you leave to keep away. Where's the clothes you run off in, you ungrateful robber?' said Mr Squeers, in a severe voice.

Smike glanced at the neat attire which the care of Nicholas had provided for him; and wrung his hands.

'Do you know that I could hang you up, outside of the Old Bailey, for making away with them articles of property?' said Squeers. 'Do you know that it's a hanging matter—and I an't quite certain whether it an't an anatomy one besides—to walk off with up'ards of the valley of five pound from a dwelling-house? Eh? Do you know that? What do you suppose was the worth of them clothes you had? Do you know that that Wellington boot you wore, cost eight-and-twenty shillings when it was a pair, and the shoe seven-and-six? But you came to the right shop for mercy when you came to me, and thank your stars that it IS me as has got to serve you with the article.'

Anybody not in Mr Squeers's confidence would have supposed that he was quite out of the article in question, instead of having a large stock on hand ready for all comers; nor would the opinion of sceptical persons have undergone much alteration when he followed up the remark by poking Smike in the chest with the ferrule of his umbrella, and dealing a smart shower of blows, with the ribs of the same instrument, upon his head and shoulders.

'I never threshed a boy in a hackney coach before,' said Mr Squeers, when he stopped to rest. 'There's inconveniency in it, but the novelty gives it a sort of relish, too!'

Poor Smike! He warded off the blows, as well as he could, and now shrunk into a corner of the coach, with his head resting on his hands, and his elbows on his knees; he was stunned and stupefied, and had no more idea that any act of his, would enable him to escape from the all-powerful Squeers, now that he had no friend to speak to or to advise with, than he had had in all the weary years of his Yorkshire life which preceded the arrival of Nicholas.

The journey seemed endless; street after street was entered and left behind; and still they went jolting on. At last Mr Squeers began to thrust his head out of the widow every half-minute, and to bawl a variety of directions to the coachman; and after passing, with some difficulty, through several mean streets which the appearance of the houses and the bad state of the road denoted to have been recently built, Mr Squeers suddenly tugged at the check string with all his might, and cried, 'Stop!'

'What are you pulling a man's arm off for?' said the coachman looking angrily down.

'That's the house,' replied Squeers. 'The second of them four little houses, one story high, with the green shutters. There's brass plate on the door, with the name of Snawley.'

'Couldn't you say that without wrenching a man's limbs off his body?' inquired the coachman.

'No!' bawled Mr Squeers. 'Say another word, and I'll summons you for having a broken winder. Stop!'

Obedient to this direction, the coach stopped at Mr Snawley's door. Mr Snawley may be remembered as the sleek and sanctified gentleman who confided two sons (in law) to the parental care of Mr Squeers, as narrated in the fourth chapter of this history. Mr Snawley's house was on the extreme borders of some new settlements adjoining Somers Town, and Mr Squeers had taken lodgings therein for a short time, as his stay was longer than usual, and the Saracen, having experience of Master Wackford's appetite, had declined to receive him on any other terms than as a full-grown customer.

'Here we are!' said Squeers, hurrying Smike into the little parlour, where Mr Snawley and his wife were taking a lobster supper. 'Here's the vagrant—the felon—the rebel—the monster of unthankfulness.'

'What! The boy that run away!' cried Snawley, resting his knife and fork upright on the table, and opening his eyes to their full width.

'The very boy', said Squeers, putting his fist close to Smike's nose, and drawing it away again, and repeating the process several times, with a vicious aspect. 'If there wasn't a lady present, I'd fetch him such a—: never mind, I'll owe it him.'

And here Mr Squeers related how, and in what manner, and when and where, he had picked up the runaway.

'It's clear that there has been a Providence in it, sir,' said Mr Snawley, casting down his eyes with an air of humility, and elevating his fork, with a bit of lobster on the top of it, towards the ceiling.

'Providence is against him, no doubt,' replied Mr Squeers, scratching his nose. 'Of course; that was to be expected. Anybody might have known that.'

'Hard-heartedness and evil-doing will never prosper, sir,' said Mr Snawley.

'Never was such a thing known,' rejoined Squeers, taking a little roll of notes from his pocket-book, to see that they were all safe.

'I have been, Mr Snawley,' said Mr Squeers, when he had satisfied himself upon this point, 'I have been that chap's benefactor, feeder, teacher, and clother. I have been that chap's classical, commercial, mathematical, philosophical, and trigonomical friend. My son—my only son, Wackford—has been his brother; Mrs Squeers has been his mother, grandmother, aunt,—ah! and I may say uncle too, all in one. She never cottoned to anybody, except them two engaging and delightful boys of yours, as she cottoned to this chap. What's my return? What's come of my milk of human kindness? It turns into curds and whey when I look at him.'

'Well it may, sir,' said Mrs Snawley. 'Oh! Well it may, sir.'

'Where has he been all this time?' inquired Snawley. 'Has he been living with—?'

'Ah, sir!' interposed Squeers, confronting him again. 'Have you been a living with that there devilish Nickleby, sir?'

But no threats or cuffs could elicit from Smike one word of reply to this question; for he had internally resolved that he would rather perish in the wretched prison to which he was again about to be consigned, than utter one syllable which could involve his first and true friend. He had already called to mind the strict injunctions of secrecy as to his past life, which Nicholas had laid upon him when they travelled from Yorkshire; and a confused and perplexed idea that his benefactor might have committed some terrible crime in bringing him away, which would render him liable to heavy punishment if detected, had contributed, in some degree, to reduce him to his present state of apathy and terror.

Such were the thoughts—if to visions so imperfect and undefined as those which wandered through his enfeebled brain, the term can be applied—which were present to the mind of Smike, and rendered him deaf alike to intimidation and persuasion. Finding every effort useless, Mr Squeers conducted him to a little back room up-stairs, where he was to pass the night; and, taking the precaution of removing his shoes, and coat and waistcoat, and also of locking the door on the outside, lest he should muster up sufficient energy to make an attempt at escape, that worthy gentleman left him to his meditations.

What those meditations were, and how the poor creature's heart sunk within him when he thought—when did he, for a moment, cease to think?—of his late home, and the dear friends and familiar faces with which it was associated, cannot be told. To prepare the mind for such a heavy sleep, its growth must be stopped by rigour and cruelty in childhood; there must be years of misery and suffering, lightened by no ray of hope; the chords of the heart, which beat a quick response to the voice of gentleness and affection, must have rusted and broken in their secret places, and bear the lingering echo of no old word of love or kindness. Gloomy, indeed, must have been the short day, and dull the long, long twilight, preceding such a night of intellect as his.

There were voices which would have roused him, even then; but their welcome tones could not penetrate there; and he crept to bed the same listless, hopeless, blighted creature, that Nicholas had first found him at the Yorkshire school.

CHAPTER 39

In which another old Friend encounters Smike, very opportunely and to some Purpose

The night, fraught with so much bitterness to one poor soul, had given place to a bright and cloudless summer morning, when a north-country mail-coach traversed, with cheerful noise, the yet silent streets of Islington, and, giving brisk note of its approach with the lively winding of the guard's horn, clattered onward to its halting-place hard by the Post Office.

The only outside passenger was a burly, honest-looking countryman on the box, who, with his eyes fixed upon the dome of St Paul's Cathedral, appeared so wrapt in admiring wonder, as to be quite insensible to all the bustle of getting out the bags and parcels, until one of the coach windows being let sharply down, he looked round, and encountered a pretty female face which was just then thrust out.

'See there, lass!' bawled the countryman, pointing towards the object of his admiration. 'There be Paul's Church. 'Ecod, he be a soizable 'un, he be.'

'Goodness, John! I shouldn't have thought it could have been half the size. What a monster!'

'Monsther!—Ye're aboot right theer, I reckon, Mrs Browdie,' said the countryman good-humouredly, as he came slowly down in his huge top-coat; 'and wa'at dost thee tak yon place to be noo—thot'un owor the wa'? Ye'd never coom near it 'gin you thried for twolve moonths. It's na' but a Poast Office! Ho! ho! They need to charge for dooble-latthers. A Poast Office! Wa'at dost thee think o' thot? 'Ecod, if thot's on'y a Poast Office, I'd loike to see where the Lord Mayor o' Lunnun lives.'

So saying, John Browdie—for he it was—opened the coach-door, and tapping Mrs Browdie, late Miss Price, on the cheek as he looked in, burst into a boisterous fit of laughter.

'Weel!' said John. 'Dang my bootuns if she bean't asleep agean!'

'She's been asleep all night, and was, all yesterday, except for a minute or two now and then,' replied John Browdie's choice, 'and I was very sorry when she woke, for she has been SO cross!'

The subject of these remarks was a slumbering figure, so muffled in shawl and cloak, that it would have been matter of impossibility to guess at its sex but for a brown beaver bonnet and green veil which ornamented the head, and which, having been crushed and flattened, for two hundred and fifty miles, in that particular angle of the vehicle from which the lady's snores now proceeded, presented an appearance sufficiently ludicrous to have moved less risible muscles than those of John Browdie's ruddy face.

'Hollo!' cried John, twitching one end of the dragged veil. 'Coom, wakken oop, will 'ee?'

After several burrowings into the old corner, and many exclamations of impatience and fatigue, the figure struggled into a sitting posture; and there, under a mass of crumpled beaver, and surrounded by a semicircle of blue curl-papers, were the delicate features of Miss Fanny Squeers.

'Oh, 'Tilda!' cried Miss Squeers, 'how you have been kicking of me through this blessed night!'

'Well, I do like that,' replied her friend, laughing, 'when you have had nearly the whole coach to yourself.'

'Don't deny it, 'Tilda,' said Miss Squeers, impressively, 'because you have, and it's no use to go attempting to say you haven't. You mightn't have known it in your sleep, 'Tilda, but I haven't closed my eyes for a single wink, and so I THINK I am to be believed.'

With which reply, Miss Squeers adjusted the bonnet and veil, which nothing but supernatural interference and an utter suspension of nature's laws could have reduced to any shape or form; and evidently flattering herself that it looked uncommonly neat, brushed off the sandwich-crumbs and bits of biscuit which had accumulated in her lap, and availing herself of John Browdie's proffered arm, descended from the coach.

'Noo,' said John, when a hackney coach had been called, and the ladies and the luggage hurried in, 'gang to the Sarah's Head, mun.'

'To the VERE?' cried the coachman.

'Lawk, Mr Browdie!' interrupted Miss Squeers. 'The idea! Saracen's Head.'

'Sure-ly,' said John, 'I know'd it was something aboot Sarah's Son's Head. Dost thou know thot?'

'Oh, ah! I know that,' replied the coachman gruffly, as he banged the door.

''Tilda, dear, really,' remonstrated Miss Squeers, 'we shall be taken for I don't know what.'

'Let them tak' us as they foind us,' said John Browdie; 'we dean't come to Lunnun to do nought but 'joy oursel, do we?'

'I hope not, Mr Browdie,' replied Miss Squeers, looking singularly dismal.

'Well, then,' said John, 'it's no matther. I've only been a married man fower days, 'account of poor old feyther deein, and puttin' it off. Here be a weddin' party—broide and broide's-maid, and the groom—if a mun dean't 'joy himsel noo, when ought he, hey? Drat it all, thot's what I want to know.'

So, in order that he might begin to enjoy himself at once, and lose no time, Mr Browdie gave his wife a hearty kiss, and succeeded in wresting another from Miss Squeers, after a maidenly resistance of scratching and struggling on the part of that young lady, which was not quite over when they reached the Saracen's Head.

Here, the party straightway retired to rest; the refreshment of sleep being necessary after so long a journey; and here they met again about noon, to a substantial breakfast, spread by direction of Mr John Browdie, in a small private room upstairs commanding an uninterrupted view of the stables.

To have seen Miss Squeers now, divested of the brown beaver, the green veil, and the blue curl-papers, and arrayed in all the virgin splendour of a white frock and spencer, with a white muslin bonnet, and an imitative damask rose in full bloom on the inside thereof—her luxuriant crop of hair arranged in curls so tight that it was impossible they could come out by any accident, and her bonnet-cap trimmed with little damask roses, which might be supposed to be so many promising scions of the big rose—to have seen all this, and to have seen the broad damask belt, matching both the family rose and the little roses, which encircled her slender waist, and by a happy ingenuity took off from the shortness of the spencer behind,—to have beheld all this, and to have taken further into account the coral bracelets (rather short of beads, and with a very visible black string) which clasped her wrists, and the coral necklace which rested on her neck, supporting, outside her frock, a lonely cornelian heart, typical of her own disengaged affections—to have contemplated all these mute but expressive appeals to the purest feelings of our nature, might have thawed the frost of age, and added new and inextinguishable fuel to the fire of youth.

The waiter was touched. Waiter as he was, he had human passions and feelings, and he looked very hard at Miss Squeers as he handed the muffins.

'Is my pa in, do you know?' asked Miss Squeers with dignity.

'Beg your pardon, miss?'

'My pa,' repeated Miss Squeers; 'is he in?'

'In where, miss?'

'In here—in the house!' replied Miss Squeers. 'My pa—Mr Wackford Squeers—he's stopping here. Is he at home?'

'I didn't know there was any gen'l'man of that name in the house, miss' replied the waiter. 'There may be, in the coffee-room.'

MAY BE. Very pretty this, indeed! Here was Miss Squeers, who had been depending, all the way to London, upon showing her friends how much at home she would be, and how much respectful notice her name and connections would excite, told that her father MIGHT be there! 'As if he was a feller!' observed Miss Squeers, with emphatic indignation.

'Ye'd betther inquire, mun,' said John Browdie. 'An' hond up another pigeon-pie, will 'ee? Dang the chap,' muttered John, looking into the empty dish as the waiter retired; 'does he ca' this a pie—three yoong pigeons and a troifling matther o' steak, and a crust so loight that you doant know when it's in your mooth and when it's gane? I wonder hoo many pies goes to a breakfast!'

After a short interval, which John Browdie employed upon the ham and a cold round of beef, the waiter returned with another pie, and the information that Mr Squeers was not stopping in the house, but that he came there every day and that directly he arrived, he should be shown upstairs. With this, he retired; and he had not retired two minutes, when he returned with Mr Squeers and his hopeful son.

'Why, who'd have thought of this?' said Mr Squeers, when he had saluted the party and received some private family intelligence from his daughter.

'Who, indeed, pa!' replied that young lady, spitefully. 'But you see 'Tilda IS married at last.'

'And I stond threat for a soight o' Lunnun, schoolmeasther,' said John, vigorously attacking the pie.

'One of them things that young men do when they get married,' returned Squeers; 'and as runs through with their money like nothing at all! How much better wouldn't it be now, to save it up for the eddication of any little boys, for instance! They come on you,' said Mr Squeers in a moralising way, 'before you're aware of it; mine did upon me.'

'Will 'ee pick a bit?' said John.

'I won't myself,' returned Squeers; 'but if you'll just let little Wackford tuck into something fat, I'll be obliged to you. Give it him in his fingers, else the waiter charges it on, and there's lot of profit on this sort of vittles without that. If you hear the waiter coming, sir, shove it in your pocket and look out of the window, d'ye hear?'

'I'm awake, father,' replied the dutiful Wackford.

'Well,' said Squeers, turning to his daughter, 'it's your turn to be married next. You must make haste.'

'Oh, I'm in no hurry,' said Miss Squeers, very sharply.

'No, Fanny?' cried her old friend with some archness.

'No, 'Tilda,' replied Miss Squeers, shaking her head vehemently. 'I can wait.'

'So can the young men, it seems, Fanny,' observed Mrs Browdie.

'They an't draw'd into it by ME, 'Tilda,' retorted Miss Squeers.

'No,' returned her friend; 'that's exceedingly true.'

The sarcastic tone of this reply might have provoked a rather acrimonious retort from Miss Squeers, who, besides being of a constitutionally vicious temper—aggravated, just now, by travel and recent jolting—was somewhat irritated by old recollections and the failure of her own designs upon Mr Browdie; and the acrimonious retort might have led to a great many other retorts, which might have led to Heaven knows what, if the subject of conversation had not been, at that precise moment, accidentally changed by Mr Squeers himself

'What do you think?' said that gentleman; 'who do you suppose we have laid hands on, Wackford and me?'

'Pa! not Mr—?' Miss Squeers was unable to finish the sentence, but Mrs Browdie did it for her, and added, 'Nickleby?'

'No,' said Squeers. 'But next door to him though.'

'You can't mean Smike?' cried Miss Squeers, clapping her hands.

'Yes, I can though,' rejoined her father. 'I've got him, hard and fast.'

'Wa'at!' exclaimed John Browdie, pushing away his plate. 'Got that poor—dom'd scoondrel? Where?'

'Why, in the top back room, at my lodging,' replied Squeers, 'with him on one side, and the key on the other.'

'At thy loodgin'! Thee'st gotten him at thy loodgin'? Ho! ho! The schoolmeasther agin all England. Give us thee hond, mun; I'm darned but I must shak thee by the hond for thot.—Gotten him at thy loodgin'?'

'Yes,' replied Squeers, staggering in his chair under the congratulatory blow on the chest which the stout Yorkshireman dealt him; 'thankee. Don't do it again. You mean it kindly, I know, but it hurts rather. Yes, there he is. That's not so bad, is it?'

'Ba'ad!' repeated John Browdie. 'It's eneaf to scare a mun to hear tell on.'

'I thought it would surprise you a bit,' said Squeers, rubbing his hands. 'It was pretty neatly done, and pretty quick too.'

'Hoo wor it?' inquired John, sitting down close to him. 'Tell us all aboot it, mun; coom, quick!'

Although he could not keep pace with John Browdie's impatience, Mr Squeers related the lucky chance by which Smike had fallen into his hands, as quickly as he could, and, except when he was interrupted by the admiring remarks of his auditors, paused not in the recital until he had brought it to an end.

'For fear he should give me the slip, by any chance,' observed Squeers, when he had finished, looking very cunning, 'I've taken three outsides for tomorrow morning—for Wackford and him and me—and have arranged to leave the accounts and the new boys to the agent, don't you see? So it's very lucky you come today, or you'd have missed us; and as it is, unless you could come and tea with me tonight, we shan't see anything more of you before we go away.'

'Dean't say anoother wurd,' returned the Yorkshireman, shaking him by the hand. 'We'd coom, if it was twonty mile.'

'No, would you though?' returned Mr Squeers, who had not expected quite such a ready acceptance of his invitation, or he would have considered twice before he gave it.

John Browdie's only reply was another squeeze of the hand, and an assurance that they would not begin to see London till tomorrow, so that they might be at Mr Snawley's at six o'clock without fail; and after some further conversation, Mr Squeers and his son departed.

During the remainder of the day, Mr Browdie was in a very odd and excitable state; bursting occasionally into an explosion of laughter, and then taking up his hat and running into the coach-yard to have it out by himself. He was very restless too, constantly walking in and out, and snapping his fingers, and dancing scraps of uncouth country dances, and, in short, conducting himself in such a very extraordinary manner, that Miss Squeers opined he was going mad, and, begging her dear 'Tilda not to distress herself, communicated her suspicions in so many words. Mrs Browdie, however, without discovering any great alarm, observed that she had seen him so once before, and that although he was almost sure to be ill after it, it would not be anything very serious, and therefore he was better left alone.

The result proved her to be perfectly correct for, while they were all sitting in Mr Snawley's parlour that night, and just as it was beginning to get dusk, John Browdie was taken so ill, and seized with such an alarming dizziness in the head, that the whole company were thrown into the utmost consternation. His good lady, indeed, was the only person present, who retained presence of mind enough to observe that if he were allowed to lie down on Mr Squeers's bed for an hour or so, and left entirely to himself, he would be sure to recover again almost as quickly as he had been taken ill. Nobody could refuse to try the effect of so reasonable a proposal, before sending for a surgeon. Accordingly, John was supported upstairs, with great difficulty; being a monstrous weight, and regularly tumbling down two steps every time they hoisted him up three; and, being laid on the bed, was left in charge of his wife, who, after a short interval, reappeared in the parlour, with the gratifying intelligence that he had fallen fast asleep.

Now, the fact was, that at that particular moment, John Browdie was sitting on the bed with the reddest face ever seen, cramming the corner of the pillow into his mouth, to prevent his roaring out loud with laughter. He had no sooner succeeded in suppressing this emotion, than he slipped off his shoes, and creeping to the adjoining room where the prisoner was confined, turned the key, which was on the outside, and darting in, covered Smike's mouth with his huge hand before he could utter a sound.

'Ods-bobs, dost thee not know me, mun?' whispered the Yorkshireman to the bewildered lad. 'Browdie. Chap as met thee efther schoolmeasther was banged?'

'Yes, yes,' cried Smike. 'Oh! help me.'

'Help thee!' replied John, stopping his mouth again, the instant he had said this much. 'Thee didn't need help, if thee warn't as silly yoongster as ever draw'd breath. Wa'at did 'ee come here for, then?'

'He brought me; oh! he brought me,' cried Smike.

'Brout thee!' replied John. 'Why didn't 'ee punch his head, or lay theeself doon and kick, and squeal out for the pollis? I'd ha' licked a doozen such as him when I was yoong as thee. But thee be'est a poor broken-doon chap,' said John, sadly, 'and God forgi' me for bragging ower yan o' his weakest creeturs!'

Smike opened his mouth to speak, but John Browdie stopped him.

'Stan' still,' said the Yorkshireman, 'and doant'ee speak a morsel o' talk till I tell'ee.'

With this caution, John Browdie shook his head significantly, and drawing a screwdriver from his pocket, took off the box of the lock in a very deliberate and workmanlike manner, and laid it, together with the implement, on the floor.

'See thot?' said John 'Thot be thy doin'. Noo, coot awa'!'

Smike looked vacantly at him, as if unable to comprehend his meaning.

'I say, coot awa',' repeated John, hastily. 'Dost thee know where thee livest? Thee dost? Weel. Are yon thy clothes, or schoolmeasther's?'

'Mine,' replied Smike, as the Yorkshireman hurried him to the adjoining room, and pointed out a pair of shoes and a coat which were lying on a chair.

'On wi' 'em,' said John, forcing the wrong arm into the wrong sleeve, and winding the tails of the coat round the fugitive's neck. 'Noo, foller me, and when thee get'st ootside door, turn to the right, and they wean't see thee pass.'

'But—but—he'll hear me shut the door,' replied Smike, trembling from head to foot.

'Then dean't shut it at all,' retorted John Browdie. 'Dang it, thee bean't afeard o' schoolmeasther's takkin cold, I hope?'

'N-no,' said Smike, his teeth chattering in his head. 'But he brought me back before, and will again. He will, he will indeed.'

'He wull, he wull!' replied John impatiently. 'He wean't, he wean't. Look'ee! I wont to do this neighbourly loike, and let them think thee's gotten awa' o' theeself, but if he cooms oot o' thot parlour awhiles theer't clearing off, he mun' have mercy on his oun boans, for I wean't. If he foinds it oot, soon efther, I'll put 'un on a wrong scent, I warrant 'ee. But if thee keep'st a good hart, thee'lt be at whoam afore they know thee'st gotten off. Coom!'

Smike, who comprehended just enough of this to know it was intended as encouragement, prepared to follow with tottering steps, when John whispered in his ear.

'Thee'lt just tell yoong Measther that I'm sploiced to 'Tilly Price, and to be heerd on at the Saracen by latther, and that I bean't jealous of 'un—dang it, I'm loike to boost when I think o' that neight! 'Cod, I think I see 'un now, a powderin' awa' at the thin bread an' butther!'

It was rather a ticklish recollection for John just then, for he was within an ace of breaking out into a loud guffaw. Restraining himself, however, just in time, by a great effort, he glided downstairs, hauling Smike behind him; and placing himself close to the parlour door, to confront the first person that might come out, signed to him to make off.

Having got so far, Smike needed no second bidding. Opening the house-door gently, and casting a look of mingled gratitude and terror at his deliverer, he took the direction which had been indicated to him, and sped away like the wind.

The Yorkshireman remained on his post for a few minutes, but, finding that there was no pause in the conversation inside, crept back again unheard, and stood, listening over the stair-rail, for a full hour. Everything remaining perfectly quiet, he got into Mr Squeers's bed, once more, and drawing the clothes over his head, laughed till he was nearly smothered.

If there could only have been somebody by, to see how the bedclothes shook, and to see the Yorkshireman's great red face and round head appear above the sheets, every now and then, like some jovial monster coming to the surface to breathe, and once more dive down convulsed with the laughter which came bursting forth afresh—that somebody would have been scarcely less amused than John Browdie himself.

CHAPTER 40

In which Nicholas falls in Love. He employs a Mediator, whose Proceedings are crowned with unexpected Success, excepting in one solitary Particular

Once more out of the clutches of his old persecutor, it needed no fresh stimulation to call forth the utmost energy and exertion that Smike was capable of summoning to his aid. Without pausing for a moment to reflect upon the course he was taking, or the probability of its leading him homewards or the reverse, he fled away with surprising swiftness and constancy of purpose, borne upon such wings as only Fear can wear, and impelled by imaginary shouts in the well remembered voice of Squeers, who, with a host of pursuers, seemed to the poor fellow's disordered senses to press hard upon his track; now left at a greater distance in the rear, and now gaining faster and faster upon him, as the alternations of hope and terror agitated him by turns. Long after he had become assured that these sounds were but the creation of his excited brain, he still held on, at a pace which even weakness and exhaustion could scarcely retard. It was not until the darkness and quiet of a country road, recalled him to a sense of external objects, and the starry sky, above, warned him of the rapid flight of time, that, covered with dust and panting for breath, he stopped to listen and look about him.

All was still and silent. A glare of light in the distance, casting a warm glow upon the sky, marked where the huge city lay. Solitary fields, divided by hedges and ditches, through many of which he had crashed and scrambled in his flight, skirted the road, both by the way he had come and upon the opposite side. It was late now. They could scarcely trace him by such paths as he had taken, and if he could hope to regain his own dwelling, it must surely be at such a time as that, and under cover of the darkness. This, by degrees, became pretty plain, even to the mind of Smike. He had, at first, entertained some vague and childish idea of travelling into the country for ten or a dozen miles, and then returning homewards by a wide circuit, which should keep him clear of London—so great was his apprehension of traversing the streets alone, lest he should again encounter his dreaded enemy—but, yielding to the conviction which these thoughts inspired, he turned back, and taking the open road, though not without many fears and misgivings, made for London again, with scarcely less speed of foot than that with which he had left the temporary abode of Mr Squeers.

By the time he re-entered it, at the western extremity, the greater part of the shops were closed. Of the throngs of people who had been tempted abroad after the heat of the day, but few remained in the streets, and they were lounging home. But of these he asked his way from time to time, and by dint of repeated inquiries, he at length reached the dwelling of Newman Noggs.

All that evening, Newman had been hunting and searching in byways and corners for the very person who now knocked at his door, while Nicholas had been pursuing the same inquiry in other directions. He was sitting, with a melancholy air, at his poor supper, when Smike's timorous and uncertain knock reached his ears. Alive to every sound, in his anxious and expectant state, Newman hurried downstairs, and, uttering a cry of joyful surprise, dragged the welcome visitor into the passage and up the stairs, and said not a word until he had him safe in his own garret and the door was shut behind them, when he mixed a great mug-full of gin-and-water, and holding it to Smike's mouth, as one might hold a bowl of medicine to the lips of a refractory child, commanded him to drain it to the last drop.

Newman looked uncommonly blank when he found that Smike did little more than put his lips to the precious mixture; he was in the act of raising the mug to his own mouth with a deep sigh of compassion for his poor friend's weakness, when Smike, beginning to relate the adventures which had befallen him, arrested him half-way, and he stood listening, with the mug in his hand.

It was odd enough to see the change that came over Newman as Smike proceeded. At first he stood, rubbing his lips with the back of his hand, as a preparatory ceremony towards composing himself for a draught; then, at the mention of Squeers, he took the mug under his arm, and opening his eyes very wide, looked on, in the utmost astonishment. When Smike came to the assault upon himself in the hackney coach, he hastily deposited the mug upon the table, and limped up and down the room in a state of the greatest excitement, stopping himself with a jerk, every now and then, as if to listen more attentively. When John Browdie came to be spoken of, he dropped, by slow and gradual degrees, into a chair, and rubbing, his hands upon his knees—quicker and quicker as the story reached its climax—burst, at last, into a laugh composed of one loud sonorous 'Ha! ha!' having given vent to which, his countenance immediately fell again as he inquired, with the utmost anxiety, whether it was probable that John Browdie and Squeers had come to blows.

'No! I think not,' replied Smike. 'I don't think he could have missed me till I had got quite away.'

Newman scratched his head with a shout of great disappointment, and once more lifting up the mug, applied himself to the contents; smiling meanwhile, over the rim, with a grim and ghastly smile at Smike.

'You shall stay here,' said Newman; 'you're tired—fagged. I'll tell them you're come back. They have been half mad about you. Mr Nicholas—'

'God bless him!' cried Smike.

'Amen!' returned Newman. 'He hasn't had a minute's rest or peace; no more has the old lady, nor Miss Nickleby.'

'No, no. Has SHE thought about me?' said Smike. 'Has she though? oh, has she, has she? Don't tell me so if she has not.'

'She has,' cried Newman. 'She is as noble-hearted as she is beautiful.'

'Yes, yes!' cried Smike. 'Well said!'

'So mild and gentle,' said Newman.

'Yes, yes!' cried Smike, with increasing eagerness.

'And yet with such a true and gallant spirit,' pursued Newman.

He was going on, in his enthusiasm, when, chancing to look at his companion, he saw that he had covered his face with his hands, and that tears were stealing out between his fingers.

A moment before, the boy's eyes were sparkling with unwonted fire, and every feature had been lighted up with an excitement which made him appear, for the moment, quite a different being.

'Well, well,' muttered Newman, as if he were a little puzzled. 'It has touched ME, more than once, to think such a nature should have been exposed to such trials; this poor fellow—yes, yes,—he feels that too—it softens him—makes him think of his former misery. Hah! That's it? Yes, that's—hum!'

It was by no means clear, from the tone of these broken reflections, that Newman Noggs considered them as explaining, at all satisfactorily, the emotion which had suggested them. He sat, in a musing attitude, for some time, regarding Smike occasionally with an anxious and doubtful glance, which sufficiently showed that he was not very remotely connected with his thoughts.

At length he repeated his proposition that Smike should remain where he was for that night, and that he (Noggs) should straightway repair to the cottage to relieve the suspense of the family. But, as Smike would not hear of this—pleading his anxiety to see his friends again—they eventually sallied forth together; and the night being, by this time, far advanced, and Smike being, besides, so footsore that he could hardly crawl along, it was within an hour of sunrise when they reached their destination.

At the first sound of their voices outside the house, Nicholas, who had passed a sleepless night, devising schemes for the recovery of his lost charge, started from his bed, and joyfully admitted them. There was so much noisy conversation, and congratulation, and indignation, that the remainder of the family were soon awakened, and Smike received a warm and cordial welcome, not only from Kate, but from Mrs Nickleby also, who assured him of her future favour and regard, and was so obliging as to relate, for his entertainment and that of the assembled circle, a most remarkable account extracted from some work the name of which she had never known, of a miraculous escape from some prison, but what one she couldn't remember, effected by an officer whose name she had forgotten, confined for some crime which she didn't clearly recollect.

At first Nicholas was disposed to give his uncle credit for some portion of this bold attempt (which had so nearly proved successful) to carry off Smike; but on more mature consideration, he was inclined to think that the full merit of it rested with Mr Squeers. Determined to ascertain, if he could, through John Browdie, how the case really stood, he betook himself to his daily occupation: meditating, as he went, on a great variety of schemes for the punishment of the Yorkshire schoolmaster, all of which had their foundation in the strictest principles of retributive justice, and had but the one drawback of being wholly impracticable.

'A fine morning, Mr Linkinwater!' said Nicholas, entering the office.

'Ah!' replied Tim, 'talk of the country, indeed! What do you think of this, now, for a day—a London day—eh?'

'It's a little clearer out of town,' said Nicholas.

'Clearer!' echoed Tim Linkinwater. 'You should see it from my bedroom window.'

'You should see it from MINE,' replied Nicholas, with a smile.

'Pooh! pooh!' said Tim Linkinwater, 'don't tell me. Country!' (Bow was quite a rustic place to Tim.) 'Nonsense! What can you get in the country but new-laid eggs and flowers? I can buy new-laid eggs in Leadenhall Market, any morning before breakfast; and as to flowers, it's worth a run upstairs to smell my mignonette, or to see the double wallflower in the back-attic window, at No. 6, in the court.'

'There is a double wallflower at No. 6, in the court, is there?' said Nicholas.

'Yes, is there!' replied Tim, 'and planted in a cracked jug, without a spout. There were hyacinths there, this last spring, blossoming, in—but you'll laugh at that, of course.'

'At what?'

'At their blossoming in old blacking-bottles,' said Tim.

'Not I, indeed,' returned Nicholas.

Tim looked wistfully at him, for a moment, as if he were encouraged by the tone of this reply to be more communicative on the subject; and sticking behind his ear, a pen that he had been making, and shutting up his knife with a smart click, said,

'They belong to a sickly bedridden hump-backed boy, and seem to be the only pleasure, Mr Nickleby, of his sad existence. How many years is it,' said Tim, pondering, 'since I first noticed him, quite a little child, dragging himself about on a pair of tiny crutches? Well! Well! Not many; but though they would appear nothing, if I thought of other things, they seem a long, long time, when I think of him. It is a sad thing,' said Tim, breaking off, 'to see a little deformed child sitting apart from other children, who are active and merry, watching the games he is denied the power to share in. He made my heart ache very often.'

'It is a good heart,' said Nicholas, 'that disentangles itself from the close avocations of every day, to heed such things. You were saying—'

'That the flowers belonged to this poor boy,' said Tim; 'that's all. When it is fine weather, and he can crawl out of bed, he draws a chair close to the window, and sits there, looking at them and arranging them, all day long. He used to nod, at first, and then we came to speak. Formerly, when I called to him of a morning, and asked him how he was, he would smile, and say, "Better!" but now he shakes his head, and only bends more closely over his old plants. It must be dull to watch the dark housetops and the flying clouds, for so many months; but he is very patient.'

'Is there nobody in the house to cheer or help him?' asked Nicholas.

'His father lives there, I believe,' replied Tim, 'and other people too; but no one seems to care much for the poor sickly cripple. I have asked him, very often, if I can do nothing for him; his answer is always the same. "Nothing." His voice is growing weak of late, but I can SEE that he makes the old reply. He can't leave his bed now, so they have moved it close beside the window, and there he lies, all day: now looking at the sky, and now at his flowers, which he still makes shift to trim and water, with his own thin hands. At night, when he sees my candle, he draws back his curtain, and leaves it so, till I am in bed. It seems such company to him to know that I am there, that I often sit at my window for an hour or more, that he may see I am still awake; and sometimes I get up in the night to look at the dull melancholy light in his little room, and wonder whether he is awake or sleeping.

'The night will not be long coming,' said Tim, 'when he will sleep, and never wake again on earth. We have never so much as shaken hands in all our lives; and yet I shall miss him like an old friend. Are there any country flowers that could interest me like these, do you think? Or do you suppose that the withering of a hundred kinds of the choicest flowers that blow, called by the hardest Latin names that were ever invented, would give me one fraction of the pain that I shall feel when these old jugs and bottles are swept away as lumber? Country!' cried Tim, with a contemptuous emphasis; 'don't you know that I couldn't have such a court under my bedroom window, anywhere, but in London?'

With which inquiry, Tim turned his back, and pretending to be absorbed in his accounts, took an opportunity of hastily wiping his eyes when he supposed Nicholas was looking another way.

Whether it was that Tim's accounts were more than usually intricate that morning, or whether it was that his habitual serenity had been a little disturbed by these recollections, it so happened that when Nicholas returned from executing some commission, and inquired whether Mr Charles Cheeryble was alone in his room, Tim promptly, and without the smallest hesitation, replied in the affirmative, although somebody had passed into the room not ten minutes before, and Tim took especial and particular pride in preventing any intrusion on either of the brothers when they were engaged with any visitor whatever.

'I'll take this letter to him at once,' said Nicholas, 'if that's the case.' And with that, he walked to the room and knocked at the door.

No answer.

Another knock, and still no answer.

'He can't be here,' thought Nicholas. 'I'll lay it on his table.'

So, Nicholas opened the door and walked in; and very quickly he turned to walk out again, when he saw, to his great astonishment and discomfiture, a young lady upon her knees at Mr Cheeryble's feet, and Mr Cheeryble beseeching her to rise, and entreating a third person, who had the appearance of the young lady's female attendant, to add her persuasions to his to induce her to do so.

Nicholas stammered out an awkward apology, and was precipitately retiring, when the young lady, turning her head a little, presented to his view the features of the lovely girl whom he had seen at the register-office on his first visit long before. Glancing from her to the attendant, he recognised the same clumsy servant who had accompanied her then; and between his admiration of the young lady's beauty, and the confusion and surprise of this unexpected recognition, he stood stock-still, in such a bewildered state of surprise and embarrassment that, for the moment, he was quite bereft of the power either to speak or move.

'My dear ma'am—my dear young lady,' cried brother Charles in violent agitation, 'pray don't—not another word, I beseech and entreat you! I implore you—I beg of you—to rise. We—we—are not alone.'

As he spoke, he raised the young lady, who staggered to a chair and swooned away.

'She has fainted, sir,' said Nicholas, darting eagerly forward.

'Poor dear, poor dear!' cried brother Charles 'Where is my brother Ned? Ned, my dear brother, come here pray.'

'Brother Charles, my dear fellow,' replied his brother, hurrying into the room, 'what is the—ah! what—'

'Hush! hush!—not a word for your life, brother Ned,' returned the other. 'Ring for the housekeeper, my dear brother—call Tim Linkinwater! Here, Tim Linkinwater, sir—Mr Nickleby, my dear sir, leave the room, I beg and beseech of you.'

'I think she is better now,' said Nicholas, who had been watching the patient so eagerly, that he had not heard the request.

'Poor bird!' cried brother Charles, gently taking her hand in his, and laying her head upon his arm. 'Brother Ned, my dear fellow, you will be surprised, I know, to witness this, in business hours; but—' here he was again reminded of the presence of Nicholas, and shaking him by the hand, earnestly requested him to leave the room, and to send Tim Linkinwater without an instant's delay.

Nicholas immediately withdrew and, on his way to the counting-house, met both the old housekeeper and Tim Linkinwater, jostling each other in the passage, and hurrying to the scene of action with extraordinary speed. Without waiting to hear his message, Tim Linkinwater darted into the room, and presently afterwards Nicholas heard the door shut and locked on the inside.

He had abundance of time to ruminate on this discovery, for Tim Linkinwater was absent during the greater part of an hour, during the whole of which time Nicholas thought of nothing but the young lady, and her exceeding beauty, and what could possibly have brought her there, and why they made such a mystery of it. The more he thought of all this, the more it perplexed him, and the more anxious he became to know who and what she was. 'I should have known her among ten thousand,' thought Nicholas. And with that he walked up and down the room, and recalling her face and figure (of which he had a peculiarly vivid remembrance), discarded all other subjects of reflection and dwelt upon that alone.

At length Tim Linkinwater came back—provokingly cool, and with papers in his hand, and a pen in his mouth, as if nothing had happened.

'Is she quite recovered?' said Nicholas, impetuously.

'Who?' returned Tim Linkinwater.

'Who!' repeated Nicholas. 'The young lady.'

'What do you make, Mr Nickleby,' said Tim, taking his pen out of his mouth, 'what do you make of four hundred and twenty-seven times three thousand two hundred and thirty-eight?'

'Nay,' returned Nicholas, 'what do you make of my question first? I asked you—'

'About the young lady,' said Tim Linkinwater, putting on his spectacles. 'To be sure. Yes. Oh! she's very well.'

'Very well, is she?' returned Nicholas.

'Very well,' replied Mr Linkinwater, gravely.

'Will she be able to go home today?' asked Nicholas.

'She's gone,' said Tim.

'Gone!'

'Yes.'

'I hope she has not far to go?' said Nicholas, looking earnestly at the other.

'Ay,' replied the immovable Tim, 'I hope she hasn't.'

Nicholas hazarded one or two further remarks, but it was evident that Tim Linkinwater had his own reasons for evading the subject, and that he was determined to afford no further information respecting the fair unknown, who had awakened so much curiosity in the breast of his young friend. Nothing daunted by this repulse, Nicholas returned to the charge next day, emboldened by the circumstance of Mr Linkinwater being in a very talkative and communicative mood; but, directly he resumed the theme, Tim relapsed into a state of most provoking taciturnity, and from answering in monosyllables, came to returning no answers at all, save such as were to be inferred from several grave nods and shrugs, which only served to whet that appetite for intelligence in Nicholas, which had already attained a most unreasonable height.

Foiled in these attempts, he was fain to content himself with watching for the young lady's next visit, but here again he was disappointed. Day after day passed, and she did not return. He looked eagerly at the superscription of all the notes and letters, but there was not one among them which he could fancy to be in her handwriting. On two or three occasions he was employed on business which took him to a distance, and had formerly been transacted by Tim Linkinwater. Nicholas could not help suspecting that, for some reason or other, he was sent out of the way on purpose, and that the young lady was there in his absence. Nothing transpired, however, to confirm this suspicion, and Tim could not be entrapped into any confession or admission tending to support it in the smallest degree.

Mystery and disappointment are not absolutely indispensable to the growth of love, but they are, very often, its powerful auxiliaries. 'Out of sight, out of mind,' is well enough as a proverb applicable to cases of friendship, though absence is not always necessary to hollowness of heart, even between friends, and truth and honesty, like precious stones, are perhaps most easily imitated at a distance, when the counterfeits often pass for real. Love, however, is very materially assisted by a warm and active imagination: which has a long memory, and will thrive, for a considerable time, on very slight and sparing food. Thus it is, that it often attains its most luxuriant growth in separation and under circumstances of the utmost difficulty; and thus it was, that Nicholas, thinking of nothing but the unknown young lady, from day to day and from hour to hour, began, at last, to think that he was very desperately in love with her, and that never was such an ill-used and persecuted lover as he.

Still, though he loved and languished after the most orthodox models, and was only deterred from making a confidante of Kate by the slight considerations of having never, in all his life, spoken to the object of his passion, and having never set eyes upon her, except on two occasions, on both of which she had come and gone like a flash of lightning—or, as Nicholas himself said, in the numerous conversations he held with himself, like a vision of youth and beauty much too bright to last—his ardour and devotion remained without its reward. The young lady appeared no more; so there was a great deal of love wasted (enough indeed to have set up half-a-dozen young gentlemen, as times go, with the utmost decency), and nobody was a bit the wiser for it; not even Nicholas himself, who, on the contrary, became more dull, sentimental, and lackadaisical, every day.

While matters were in this state, the failure of a correspondent of the brothers Cheeryble, in Germany, imposed upon Tim Linkinwater and Nicholas the necessity of going through some very long and complicated accounts, extending over a considerable space of time. To get through them with the greater dispatch, Tim Linkinwater proposed that they should remain at the counting-house, for a week or so, until ten o'clock at night; to this, as nothing damped the zeal of Nicholas in the service of his kind patrons—not even romance, which has seldom business habits—he cheerfully assented. On the very first night of these later hours, at nine exactly, there came: not the young lady herself, but her servant, who, being closeted with brother Charles for some time, went away, and returned next night at the same hour, and on the next, and on the next again.

These repeated visits inflamed the curiosity of Nicholas to the very highest pitch. Tantalised and excited, beyond all bearing, and unable to fathom the mystery without neglecting his duty, he confided the whole secret to Newman Noggs, imploring him to be on the watch next night; to follow the girl home; to set on foot such inquiries relative to the name, condition, and history of her mistress, as he could, without exciting suspicion; and to report the result to him with the least possible delay.

Beyond all measure proud of this commission, Newman Noggs took up his post, in the square, on the following evening, a full hour before the needful time, and planting himself behind the pump and pulling his hat over his eyes, began his watch with an elaborate appearance of mystery, admirably calculated to excite the suspicion of all beholders. Indeed, divers servant girls who came to draw water, and sundry little boys who stopped to drink at the ladle, were almost scared out of their senses, by the apparition of Newman Noggs looking stealthily round the pump, with nothing of him visible but his face, and that wearing the expression of a meditative Ogre.

Punctual to her time, the messenger came again, and, after an interview of rather longer duration than usual, departed. Newman had made two appointments with Nicholas: one for the next evening, conditional on his success: and one the next night following, which was to be kept under all circumstances. The first night he was not at the place of meeting (a certain tavern about half-way between the city and Golden Square), but on the second night he was there before Nicholas, and received him with open arms.

'It's all right,' whispered Newman. 'Sit down. Sit down, there's a dear young man, and let me tell you all about it.'

Nicholas needed no second invitation, and eagerly inquired what was the news.

'There's a great deal of news,' said Newman, in a flutter of exultation. 'It's all right. Don't be anxious. I don't know where to begin. Never mind that. Keep up your spirits. It's all right.'

'Well?' said Nicholas eagerly. 'Yes?'

'Yes,' replied Newman. 'That's it.'

'What's it?' said Nicholas. 'The name—the name, my dear fellow!'

'The name's Bobster,' replied Newman.

'Bobster!' repeated Nicholas, indignantly.

'That's the name,' said Newman. 'I remember it by lobster.'

'Bobster!' repeated Nicholas, more emphatically than before. 'That must be the servant's name.'

'No, it an't,' said Newman, shaking his head with great positiveness. 'Miss Cecilia Bobster.'

'Cecilia, eh?' returned Nicholas, muttering the two names together over and over again in every variety of tone, to try the effect. 'Well, Cecilia is a pretty name.'

'Very. And a pretty creature too,' said Newman.

'Who?' said Nicholas.

'Miss Bobster.'

'Why, where have you seen her?' demanded Nicholas.

'Never mind, my dear boy,' retorted Noggs, clapping him on the shoulder. 'I HAVE seen her. You shall see her. I've managed it all.'

'My dear Newman,' cried Nicholas, grasping his hand, 'are you serious?'

'I am,' replied Newman. 'I mean it all. Every word. You shall see her tomorrow night. She consents to hear you speak for yourself. I persuaded her. She is all affability, goodness, sweetness, and beauty.'

'I know she is; I know she must be, Newman!' said Nicholas, wringing his hand.

'You are right,' returned Newman.

'Where does she live?' cried Nicholas. 'What have you learnt of her history? Has she a father—mother—any brothers—sisters? What did she say? How came you to see her? Was she not very much surprised? Did you say how passionately I have longed to speak to her? Did you tell her where I had seen her? Did you tell her how, and when, and where, and how long, and how often, I have thought of that sweet face which came upon me in my bitterest distress like a glimpse of some better world—did you, Newman—did you?'

Poor Noggs literally gasped for breath as this flood of questions rushed upon him, and moved spasmodically in his chair at every fresh inquiry, staring at Nicholas meanwhile with a most ludicrous expression of perplexity.

'No,' said Newman, 'I didn't tell her that.'

'Didn't tell her which?' asked Nicholas.

'About the glimpse of the better world,' said Newman. 'I didn't tell her who you were, either, or where you'd seen her. I said you loved her to distraction.'

'That's true, Newman,' replied Nicholas, with his characteristic vehemence. 'Heaven knows I do!'

'I said too, that you had admired her for a long time in secret,' said Newman.

'Yes, yes. What did she say to that?' asked Nicholas.

'Blushed,' said Newman.

'To be sure. Of course she would,' said Nicholas approvingly. Newman then went on to say, that the young lady was an only child, that her mother was dead, that she resided with her father, and that she had been induced to allow her lover a secret interview, at the intercession of her servant, who had great influence with her. He further related how it required much moving and great eloquence to bring the young lady to this pass; how it was expressly understood that she merely afforded Nicholas an opportunity of declaring his passion; and how she by no means pledged herself to be favourably impressed with his attentions. The mystery of her visits to the brothers Cheeryble remained wholly unexplained, for Newman had not alluded to them, either in his preliminary conversations with the servant or his subsequent interview with the mistress, merely remarking that he had been instructed to watch the girl home and plead his young friend's cause, and not saying how far he had followed her, or from what point. But Newman hinted that from what had fallen from the confidante, he had been led to suspect that the young lady led a very miserable and unhappy life, under the strict control of her only parent, who was of a violent and brutal temper; a circumstance which he thought might in some degree account, both for her having sought the protection and friendship of the brothers, and her suffering herself to be prevailed upon to grant the promised interview. The last he held to be a very logical deduction from the premises, inasmuch as it was but natural to suppose that a young lady, whose present condition was so unenviable, would be more than commonly desirous to change it.

It appeared, on further questioning—for it was only by a very long and arduous process that all this could be got out of Newman Noggs—that Newman, in explanation of his shabby appearance, had represented himself as being, for certain wise and indispensable purposes connected with that intrigue, in disguise; and, being questioned how he had come to exceed his commission so far as to procure an interview, he responded, that the lady appearing willing to grant it, he considered himself bound, both in duty and gallantry, to avail himself of such a golden means of enabling Nicholas to prosecute his addresses. After these and all possible questions had been asked and answered twenty times over, they parted, undertaking to meet on the following night at half-past ten, for the purpose of fulfilling the appointment; which was for eleven o'clock.

'Things come about very strangely!' thought Nicholas, as he walked home. 'I never contemplated anything of this kind; never dreamt of the possibility of it. To know something of the life of one in whom I felt such interest; to see her in the street, to pass the house in which she lived, to meet her sometimes in her walks, to hope that a day might come when I might be in a condition to tell her of my love, this was the utmost extent of my thoughts. Now, however—but I should be a fool, indeed, to repine at my own good fortune!'

Still, Nicholas was dissatisfied; and there was more in the dissatisfaction than mere revulsion of feeling. He was angry with the young lady for being so easily won, 'because,' reasoned Nicholas, 'it is not as if she knew it was I, but it might have been anybody,'—which was certainly not pleasant. The next moment, he was angry with himself for entertaining such thoughts, arguing that nothing but goodness could dwell in such a temple, and that the behaviour of the brothers sufficiently showed the estimation in which they held her. 'The fact is, she's a mystery altogether,' said Nicholas. This was not more satisfactory than his previous course of reflection, and only drove him out upon a new sea of speculation and conjecture, where he tossed and tumbled, in great discomfort of mind, until the clock struck ten, and the hour of meeting drew nigh.

Nicholas had dressed himself with great care, and even Newman Noggs had trimmed himself up a little; his coat presenting the phenomenon of two consecutive buttons, and the supplementary pins being inserted at tolerably regular intervals. He wore his hat, too, in the newest taste, with a pocket-handkerchief in the crown, and a twisted end of it straggling out behind after the fashion of a pigtail, though he could scarcely lay claim to the ingenuity of inventing this latter decoration, inasmuch as he was utterly unconscious of it: being in a nervous and excited condition which rendered him quite insensible to everything but the great object of the expedition.

They traversed the streets in profound silence; and after walking at a round pace for some distance, arrived in one, of a gloomy appearance and very little frequented, near the Edgeware Road.

'Number twelve,' said Newman.

'Oh!' replied Nicholas, looking about him.

'Good street?' said Newman.

'Yes,' returned Nicholas. 'Rather dull.'

Newman made no answer to this remark, but, halting abruptly, planted Nicholas with his back to some area railings, and gave him to understand that he was to wait there, without moving hand or foot, until it was satisfactorily ascertained that the coast was clear. This done, Noggs limped away with great alacrity; looking over his shoulder every instant, to make quite certain that Nicholas was obeying his directions; and, ascending the steps of a house some half-dozen doors off, was lost to view.

After a short delay, he reappeared, and limping back again, halted midway, and beckoned Nicholas to follow him.

'Well?' said Nicholas, advancing towards him on tiptoe.

'All right,' replied Newman, in high glee. 'All ready; nobody at home. Couldn't be better. Ha! ha!'

With this fortifying assurance, he stole past a street-door, on which Nicholas caught a glimpse of a brass plate, with 'BOBSTER,' in very large letters; and, stopping at the area-gate, which was open, signed to his young friend to descend.

'What the devil!' cried Nicholas, drawing back. 'Are we to sneak into the kitchen, as if we came after the forks?'

'Hush!' replied Newman. 'Old Bobster—ferocious Turk. He'd kill 'em all—box the young lady's ears—he does—often.'

'What!' cried Nicholas, in high wrath, 'do you mean to tell me that any man would dare to box the ears of such a—'

He had no time to sing the praises of his mistress, just then, for Newman gave him a gentle push which had nearly precipitated him to the bottom of the area steps. Thinking it best to take the hint in good part, Nicholas descended, without further remonstrance, but with a countenance bespeaking anything rather than the hope and rapture of a passionate lover. Newman followed—he would have followed head first, but for the timely assistance of Nicholas—and, taking his hand, led him through a stone passage, profoundly dark, into a back-kitchen or cellar, of the blackest and most pitchy obscurity, where they stopped.

'Well!' said Nicholas, in a discontented whisper, 'this is not all, I suppose, is it?'

'No, no,' rejoined Noggs; 'they'll be here directly. It's all right.'

'I am glad to hear it,' said Nicholas. 'I shouldn't have thought it, I confess.'

They exchanged no further words, and there Nicholas stood, listening to the loud breathing of Newman Noggs, and imagining that his nose seemed to glow like a red-hot coal, even in the midst of the darkness which enshrouded them. Suddenly the sound of cautious footsteps attracted his ear, and directly afterwards a female voice inquired if the gentleman was there.

'Yes,' replied Nicholas, turning towards the corner from which the voice proceeded. 'Who is that?'

'Only me, sir,' replied the voice. 'Now if you please, ma'am.'

A gleam of light shone into the place, and presently the servant girl appeared, bearing a light, and followed by her young mistress, who seemed to be overwhelmed by modesty and confusion.

At sight of the young lady, Nicholas started and changed colour; his heart beat violently, and he stood rooted to the spot. At that instant, and almost simultaneously with her arrival and that of the candle, there was heard a loud and furious knocking at the street-door, which caused Newman Noggs to jump up, with great agility, from a beer-barrel on which he had been seated astride, and to exclaim abruptly, and with a face of ashy paleness, 'Bobster, by the Lord!'

The young lady shrieked, the attendant wrung her hands, Nicholas gazed from one to the other in apparent stupefaction, and Newman hurried to and fro, thrusting his hands into all his pockets successively, and drawing out the linings of every one in the excess of his irresolution. It was but a moment, but the confusion crowded into that one moment no imagination can exaggerate.

'Leave the house, for Heaven's sake! We have done wrong, we deserve it all,' cried the young lady. 'Leave the house, or I am ruined and undone for ever.'

'Will you hear me say but one word?' cried Nicholas. 'Only one. I will not detain you. Will you hear me say one word, in explanation of this mischance?'

But Nicholas might as well have spoken to the wind, for the young lady, with distracted looks, hurried up the stairs. He would have followed her, but Newman, twisting his hand in his coat collar, dragged him towards the passage by which they had entered.

'Let me go, Newman, in the Devil's name!' cried Nicholas. 'I must speak to her. I will! I will not leave this house without.'

'Reputation—character—violence—consider,' said Newman, clinging round him with both arms, and hurrying him away. 'Let them open the door. We'll go, as we came, directly it's shut. Come. This way. Here.'

Overpowered by the remonstrances of Newman, and the tears and prayers of the girl, and the tremendous knocking above, which had never ceased, Nicholas allowed himself to be hurried off; and, precisely as Mr Bobster made his entrance by the street-door, he and Noggs made their exit by the area-gate.

They hurried away, through several streets, without stopping or speaking. At last, they halted and confronted each other with blank and rueful faces.

'Never mind,' said Newman, gasping for breath. 'Don't be cast down. It's all right. More fortunate next time. It couldn't be helped. I did MY part.'

'Excellently,' replied Nicholas, taking his hand. 'Excellently, and like the true and zealous friend you are. Only—mind, I am not disappointed, Newman, and feel just as much indebted to you—only IT WAS THE WRONG LADY.'

'Eh?' cried Newman Noggs. 'Taken in by the servant?'

'Newman, Newman,' said Nicholas, laying his hand upon his shoulder: 'it was the wrong servant too.'

Newman's under-jaw dropped, and he gazed at Nicholas, with his sound eye fixed fast and motionless in his head.

'Don't take it to heart,' said Nicholas; 'it's of no consequence; you see I don't care about it; you followed the wrong person, that's all.'

That WAS all. Whether Newman Noggs had looked round the pump, in a slanting direction, so long, that his sight became impaired; or whether, finding that there was time to spare, he had recruited himself with a few drops of something stronger than the pump could yield—by whatsoever means it had come to pass, this was his mistake. And Nicholas went home to brood upon it, and to meditate upon the charms of the unknown young lady, now as far beyond his reach as ever.

CHAPTER 41

Containing some Romantic Passages between Mrs Nickleby and the Gentleman in the Small-clothes next Door

Ever since her last momentous conversation with her son, Mrs Nickleby had begun to display unusual care in the adornment of her person, gradually superadding to those staid and matronly habiliments, which had, up to that time, formed her ordinary attire, a variety of embellishments and decorations, slight perhaps in themselves, but, taken together, and considered with reference to the subject of her disclosure, of no mean importance. Even her black dress assumed something of a deadly-lively air from the jaunty style in which it was worn; and, eked out as its lingering attractions were; by a prudent disposal, here and there, of certain juvenile ornaments of little or no value, which had, for that reason alone, escaped the general wreck and been permitted to slumber peacefully in odd corners of old drawers and boxes where daylight seldom shone, her mourning garments assumed quite a new character. From being the outward tokens of respect and sorrow for the dead, they became converted into signals of very slaughterous and killing designs upon the living.

Mrs Nickleby might have been stimulated to this proceeding by a lofty sense of duty, and impulses of unquestionable excellence. She might, by this time, have become impressed with the sinfulness of long indulgence in unavailing woe, or the necessity of setting a proper example of neatness and decorum to her blooming daughter. Considerations of duty and responsibility apart, the change might have taken its rise in feelings of the purest and most disinterested charity. The gentleman next door had been vilified by Nicholas; rudely stigmatised as a dotard and an idiot; and for these attacks upon his understanding, Mrs Nickleby was, in some sort, accountable. She might have felt that it was the act of a good Christian to show by all means in her power, that the abused gentleman was neither the one nor the other. And what better means could she adopt, towards so virtuous and laudable an end, than proving to all men, in her own person, that his passion was the most rational and reasonable in the world, and just the very result, of all others, which discreet and thinking persons might have foreseen, from her incautiously displaying her matured charms, without reserve, under the very eye, as it were, of an ardent and too-susceptible man?

'Ah!' said Mrs Nickleby, gravely shaking her head; 'if Nicholas knew what his poor dear papa suffered before we were engaged, when I used to hate him, he would have a little more feeling. Shall I ever forget the morning I looked scornfully at him when he offered to carry my parasol? Or that night, when I frowned at him? It was a mercy he didn't emigrate. It very nearly drove him to it.'

Whether the deceased might not have been better off if he had emigrated in his bachelor days, was a question which his relict did not stop to consider; for Kate entered the room, with her workbox, in this stage of her reflections; and a much slighter interruption, or no interruption at all, would have diverted Mrs Nickleby's thoughts into a new channel at any time.

'Kate, my dear,' said Mrs Nickleby; 'I don't know how it is, but a fine warm summer day like this, with the birds singing in every direction, always puts me in mind of roast pig, with sage and onion sauce, and made gravy.'

'That's a curious association of ideas, is it not, mama?'

'Upon my word, my dear, I don't know,' replied Mrs Nickleby. 'Roast pig; let me see. On the day five weeks after you were christened, we had a roast—no, that couldn't have been a pig, either, because I recollect there were a pair of them to carve, and your poor papa and I could never have thought of sitting down to two pigs—they must have been partridges. Roast pig! I hardly think we ever could have had one, now I come to remember, for your papa could never bear the sight of them in the shops, and used to say that they always put him in mind of very little babies, only the pigs had much fairer complexions; and he had a horror of little babies, to, because he couldn't very well afford any increase to his family, and had a natural dislike to the subject. It's very odd now, what can have put that in my head! I recollect dining once at Mrs Bevan's, in that broad street round the corner by the coachmaker's, where the tipsy man fell through the cellar-flap of an empty house nearly a week before the quarter-day, and wasn't found till the new tenant went in—and we had roast pig there. It must be that, I think, that reminds me of it, especially as there was a little bird in the room that would keep on singing all the time of dinner—at least, not a little bird, for it was a parrot, and he didn't sing exactly, for he talked and swore dreadfully: but I think it must be that. Indeed I am sure it must. Shouldn't you say so, my dear?'

'I should say there was not a doubt about it, mama,' returned Kate, with a cheerful smile.

'No; but DO you think so, Kate?' said Mrs Nickleby, with as much gravity as if it were a question of the most imminent and thrilling interest. 'If you don't, say so at once, you know; because it's just as well to be correct, particularly on a point of this kind, which is very curious and worth settling while one thinks about it.'

Kate laughingly replied that she was quite convinced; and as her mama still appeared undetermined whether it was not absolutely essential that the subject should be renewed, proposed that they should take their work into the summer-house, and enjoy the beauty of the afternoon. Mrs Nickleby readily assented, and to the summer-house they repaired, without further discussion.

'Well, I will say,' observed Mrs Nickleby, as she took her seat, 'that there never was such a good creature as Smike. Upon my word, the pains he has taken in putting this little arbour to rights, and training the sweetest flowers about it, are beyond anything I could have—I wish he wouldn't put ALL the gravel on your side, Kate, my dear, though, and leave nothing but mould for me.'

'Dear mama,' returned Kate, hastily, 'take this seat—do—to oblige me, mama.'

'No, indeed, my dear. I shall keep my own side,' said Mrs Nickleby. 'Well! I declare!'

Kate looked up inquiringly.

'If he hasn't been,' said Mrs Nickleby, 'and got, from somewhere or other, a couple of roots of those flowers that I said I was so fond of, the other night, and asked you if you were not—no, that YOU said YOU were so fond of, the other night, and asked me if I wasn't—it's the same thing. Now, upon my word, I take that as very kind and attentive indeed! I don't see,' added Mrs Nickleby, looking narrowly about her, 'any of them on my side, but I suppose they grow best near the gravel. You may depend upon it they do, Kate, and that's the reason they are all near you, and he has put the gravel there, because it's the sunny side. Upon my word, that's very clever now! I shouldn't have had half as much thought myself!'

'Mama,' said Kate, bending over her work so that her face was almost hidden, 'before you were married—'

'Dear me, Kate,' interrupted Mrs Nickleby, 'what in the name of goodness graciousness makes you fly off to the time before I was married, when I'm talking to you about his thoughtfulness and attention to me? You don't seem to take the smallest interest in the garden.'

'Oh! mama,' said Kate, raising her face again, 'you know I do.'

'Well then, my dear, why don't you praise the neatness and prettiness with which it's kept?' said Mrs Nickleby. 'How very odd you are, Kate!'

'I do praise it, mama,' answered Kate, gently. 'Poor fellow!'

'I scarcely ever hear you, my dear,' retorted Mrs Nickleby; 'that's all I've got to say.' By this time the good lady had been a long while upon one topic, so she fell at once into her daughter's little trap, if trap it were, and inquired what she had been going to say.

'About what, mama?' said Kate, who had apparently quite forgotten her diversion.

'Lor, Kate, my dear,' returned her mother, 'why, you're asleep or stupid! About the time before I was married.'

'Oh yes!' said Kate, 'I remember. I was going to ask, mama, before you were married, had you many suitors?'

'Suitors, my dear!' cried Mrs Nickleby, with a smile of wonderful complacency. 'First and last, Kate, I must have had a dozen at least.'

'Mama!' returned Kate, in a tone of remonstrance.

'I had indeed, my dear,' said Mrs Nickleby; 'not including your poor papa, or a young gentleman who used to go, at that time, to the same dancing school, and who WOULD send gold watches and bracelets to our house in gilt-edged paper, (which were always returned,) and who afterwards unfortunately went out to Botany Bay in a cadet ship—a convict ship I mean—and escaped into a bush and killed sheep, (I don't know how they got there,) and was going to be hung, only he accidentally choked himself, and the government pardoned him. Then there was young Lukin,' said Mrs Nickleby, beginning with her left thumb and checking off the names on her fingers—'Mogley—Tipslark—Cabbery—Smifser—'

Having now reached her little finger, Mrs Nickleby was carrying the account over to the other hand, when a loud 'Hem!' which appeared to come from the very foundation of the garden-wall, gave both herself and her daughter a violent start.

'Mama! what was that?' said Kate, in a low tone of voice.

'Upon my word, my dear,' returned Mrs Nickleby, considerably startled, 'unless it was the gentleman belonging to the next house, I don't know what it could possibly—'

'A—hem!' cried the same voice; and that, not in the tone of an ordinary clearing of the throat, but in a kind of bellow, which woke up all the echoes in the neighbourhood, and was prolonged to an extent which must have made the unseen bellower quite black in the face.

'I understand it now, my dear,' said Mrs Nickleby, laying her hand on Kate's; 'don't be alarmed, my love, it's not directed to you, and is not intended to frighten anybody. Let us give everybody their due, Kate; I am bound to say that.'

So saying, Mrs Nickleby nodded her head, and patted the back of her daughter's hand, a great many times, and looked as if she could tell something vastly important if she chose, but had self-denial, thank Heaven; and wouldn't do it.

'What do you mean, mama?' demanded Kate, in evident surprise.

'Don't be flurried, my dear,' replied Mrs Nickleby, looking towards the garden-wall, 'for you see I'm not, and if it would be excusable in anybody to be flurried, it certainly would—under all the circumstances—be excusable in me, but I am not, Kate—not at all.'

'It seems designed to attract our attention, mama,' said Kate.

'It is designed to attract our attention, my dear; at least,' rejoined Mrs Nickleby, drawing herself up, and patting her daughter's hand more blandly than before, 'to attract the attention of one of us. Hem! you needn't be at all uneasy, my dear.'

Kate looked very much perplexed, and was apparently about to ask for further explanation, when a shouting and scuffling noise, as of an elderly gentleman whooping, and kicking up his legs on loose gravel, with great violence, was heard to proceed from the same direction as the former sounds; and before they had subsided, a large cucumber was seen to shoot up in the air with the velocity of a sky-rocket, whence it descended, tumbling over and over, until it fell at Mrs Nickleby's feet.

This remarkable appearance was succeeded by another of a precisely similar description; then a fine vegetable marrow, of unusually large dimensions, was seen to whirl aloft, and come toppling down; then, several cucumbers shot up together; and, finally, the air was darkened by a shower of onions, turnip-radishes, and other small vegetables, which fell rolling and scattering, and bumping about, in all directions.

As Kate rose from her seat, in some alarm, and caught her mother's hand to run with her into the house, she felt herself rather retarded than assisted in her intention; and following the direction of Mrs Nickleby's eyes, was quite terrified by the apparition of an old black velvet cap, which, by slow degrees, as if its wearer were ascending a ladder or pair of steps, rose above the wall dividing their garden from that of the next cottage, (which, like their own, was a detached building,) and was gradually followed by a very large head, and an old face, in which were a pair of most extraordinary grey eyes: very wild, very wide open, and rolling in their sockets, with a dull, languishing, leering look, most ugly to behold.

'Mama!' cried Kate, really terrified for the moment, 'why do you stop, why do you lose an instant? Mama, pray come in!'

'Kate, my dear,' returned her mother, still holding back, 'how can you be so foolish? I'm ashamed of you. How do you suppose you are ever to get through life, if you're such a coward as this? What do you want, sir?' said Mrs Nickleby, addressing the intruder with a sort of simpering displeasure. 'How dare you look into this garden?'

'Queen of my soul,' replied the stranger, folding his hands together, 'this goblet sip!'

'Nonsense, sir,' said Mrs Nickleby. 'Kate, my love, pray be quiet.'

'Won't you sip the goblet?' urged the stranger, with his head imploringly on one side, and his right hand on his breast. 'Oh, do sip the goblet!'

'I shall not consent to do anything of the kind, sir,' said Mrs Nickleby. 'Pray, begone.'

'Why is it,' said the old gentleman, coming up a step higher, and leaning his elbows on the wall, with as much complacency as if he were looking out of window, 'why is it that beauty is always obdurate, even when admiration is as honourable and respectful as mine?' Here he smiled, kissed his hand, and made several low bows. 'Is it owing to the bees, who, when the honey season is over, and they are supposed to have been killed with brimstone, in reality fly to Barbary and lull the captive Moors to sleep with their drowsy songs? Or is it,' he added, dropping his voice almost to a whisper, 'in consequence of the statue at Charing Cross having been lately seen, on the Stock Exchange at midnight, walking arm-in-arm with the Pump from Aldgate, in a riding-habit?'

'Mama,' murmured Kate, 'do you hear him?'

'Hush, my dear!' replied Mrs Nickleby, in the same tone of voice, 'he is very polite, and I think that was a quotation from the poets. Pray, don't worry me so—you'll pinch my arm black and blue. Go away, sir!'

'Quite away?' said the gentleman, with a languishing look. 'Oh! quite away?'

'Yes,' returned Mrs Nickleby, 'certainly. You have no business here. This is private property, sir; you ought to know that.'

'I do know,' said the old gentleman, laying his finger on his nose, with an air of familiarity, most reprehensible, 'that this is a sacred and enchanted spot, where the most divine charms'—here he kissed his hand and bowed again—'waft mellifluousness over the neighbours' gardens, and force the fruit and vegetables into premature existence. That fact I am acquainted with. But will you permit me, fairest creature, to ask you one question, in the absence of the planet Venus, who has gone on business to the Horse Guards, and would otherwise—jealous of your superior charms—interpose between us?'

'Kate,' observed Mrs Nickleby, turning to her daughter, 'it's very awkward, positively. I really don't know what to say to this gentleman. One ought to be civil, you know.'

'Dear mama,' rejoined Kate, 'don't say a word to him, but let us run away as fast as we can, and shut ourselves up till Nicholas comes home.'

Mrs Nickleby looked very grand, not to say contemptuous, at this humiliating proposal; and, turning to the old gentleman, who had watched them during these whispers with absorbing eagerness, said:

'If you will conduct yourself, sir, like the gentleman I should imagine you to be, from your language and—and—appearance, (quite the counterpart of your grandpapa, Kate, my dear, in his best days,) and will put your question to me in plain words, I will answer it.'

If Mrs Nickleby's excellent papa had borne, in his best days, a resemblance to the neighbour now looking over the wall, he must have been, to say the least, a very queer-looking old gentleman in his prime. Perhaps Kate thought so, for she ventured to glance at his living portrait with some attention, as he took off his black velvet cap, and, exhibiting a perfectly bald head, made a long series of bows, each accompanied with a fresh kiss of the hand. After exhausting himself, to all appearance, with this fatiguing performance, he covered his head once more, pulled the cap very carefully over the tips of his ears, and resuming his former attitude, said,

'The question is—'

Here he broke off to look round in every direction, and satisfy himself beyond all doubt that there were no listeners near. Assured that there were not, he tapped his nose several times, accompanying the action with a cunning look, as though congratulating himself on his caution; and stretching out his neck, said in a loud whisper,

'Are you a princess?'

'You are mocking me, sir,' replied Mrs Nickleby, making a feint of retreating towards the house.

'No, but are you?' said the old gentleman.

'You know I am not, sir,' replied Mrs Nickleby.

'Then are you any relation to the Archbishop of Canterbury?' inquired the old gentleman with great anxiety, 'or to the Pope of Rome? Or the Speaker of the House of Commons? Forgive me, if I am wrong, but I was told you were niece to the Commissioners of Paving, and daughter-in-law to the Lord Mayor and Court of Common Council, which would account for your relationship to all three.'

'Whoever has spread such reports, sir,' returned Mrs Nickleby, with some warmth, 'has taken great liberties with my name, and one which I am sure my son Nicholas, if he was aware of it, would not allow for an instant. The idea!' said Mrs Nickleby, drawing herself up, 'niece to the Commissioners of Paving!'

'Pray, mama, come away!' whispered Kate.

'"Pray mama!" Nonsense, Kate,' said Mrs Nickleby, angrily, 'but that's just the way. If they had said I was niece to a piping bullfinch, what would you care? But I have no sympathy,' whimpered Mrs Nickleby. 'I don't expect it, that's one thing.'

'Tears!' cried the old gentleman, with such an energetic jump, that he fell down two or three steps and grated his chin against the wall. 'Catch the crystal globules—catch 'em—bottle 'em up—cork 'em tight—put sealing wax on the top—seal 'em with a cupid—label 'em "Best quality"—and stow 'em away in the fourteen binn, with a bar of iron on the top to keep the thunder off!'

Issuing these commands, as if there were a dozen attendants all actively engaged in their execution, he turned his velvet cap inside out, put it on with great dignity so as to obscure his right eye and three-fourths of his nose, and sticking his arms a-kimbo, looked very fiercely at a sparrow hard by, till the bird flew away, when he put his cap in his pocket with an air of great satisfaction, and addressed himself with respectful demeanour to Mrs Nickleby.

'Beautiful madam,' such were his words, 'if I have made any mistake with regard to your family or connections, I humbly beseech you to pardon me. If I supposed you to be related to Foreign Powers or Native Boards, it is because you have a manner, a carriage, a dignity, which you will excuse my saying that none but yourself (with the single exception perhaps of the tragic muse, when playing extemporaneously on the barrel organ before the East India Company) can parallel. I am not a youth, ma'am, as you see; and although beings like you can never grow old, I venture to presume that we are fitted for each other.'

'Really, Kate, my love!' said Mrs Nickleby faintly, and looking another way.

'I have estates, ma'am,' said the old gentleman, flourishing his right hand negligently, as if he made very light of such matters, and speaking very fast; 'jewels, lighthouses, fish-ponds, a whalery of my own in the North Sea, and several oyster-beds of great profit in the Pacific Ocean. If you will have the kindness to step down to the Royal Exchange and to take the cocked-hat off the stoutest beadle's head, you will find my card in the lining of the crown, wrapped up in a piece of blue paper. My walking-stick is also to be seen on application to the chaplain of the House of Commons, who is strictly forbidden to take any money for showing it. I have enemies about me, ma'am,' he looked towards his house and spoke very low, 'who attack me on all occasions, and wish to secure my property. If you bless me with your hand and heart, you can apply to the Lord Chancellor or call out the military if necessary—sending my toothpick to the commander-in-chief will be sufficient—and so clear the house of them before the ceremony is performed. After that, love, bliss and rapture; rapture, love and bliss. Be mine, be mine!'

Repeating these last words with great rapture and enthusiasm, the old gentleman put on his black velvet cap again, and looking up into the sky in a hasty manner, said something that was not quite intelligible concerning a balloon he expected, and which was rather after its time.

'Be mine, be mine!' repeated the old gentleman.

'Kate, my dear,' said Mrs Nickleby, 'I have hardly the power to speak; but it is necessary for the happiness of all parties that this matter should be set at rest for ever.'

'Surely there is no necessity for you to say one word, mama?' reasoned Kate.

'You will allow me, my dear, if you please, to judge for myself,' said Mrs Nickleby.

'Be mine, be mine!' cried the old gentleman.

'It can scarcely be expected, sir,' said Mrs Nickleby, fixing her eyes modestly on the ground, 'that I should tell a stranger whether I feel flattered and obliged by such proposals, or not. They certainly are made under very singular circumstances; still at the same time, as far as it goes, and to a certain extent of course' (Mrs Nickleby's customary qualification), 'they must be gratifying and agreeable to one's feelings.'

'Be mine, be mine,' cried the old gentleman. 'Gog and Magog, Gog and Magog. Be mine, be mine!'

'It will be sufficient for me to say, sir,' resumed Mrs Nickleby, with perfect seriousness—'and I'm sure you'll see the propriety of taking an answer and going away—that I have made up my mind to remain a widow, and to devote myself to my children. You may not suppose I am the mother of two children—indeed many people have doubted it, and said that nothing on earth could ever make 'em believe it possible—but it is the case, and they are both grown up. We shall be very glad to have you for a neighbour—very glad; delighted, I'm sure—but in any other character it's quite impossible, quite. As to my being young enough to marry again, that perhaps may be so, or it may not be; but I couldn't think of it for an instant, not on any account whatever. I said I never would, and I never will. It's a very painful thing to have to reject proposals, and I would much rather that none were made; at the same time this is the answer that I determined long ago to make, and this is the answer I shall always give.'

These observations were partly addressed to the old gentleman, partly to Kate, and partly delivered in soliloquy. Towards their conclusion, the suitor evinced a very irreverent degree of inattention, and Mrs Nickleby had scarcely finished speaking, when, to the great terror both of that lady and her daughter, he suddenly flung off his coat, and springing on the top of the wall, threw himself into an attitude which displayed his small-clothes and grey worsteds to the fullest advantage, and concluded by standing on one leg, and repeating his favourite bellow with increased vehemence.

While he was still dwelling on the last note, and embellishing it with a prolonged flourish, a dirty hand was observed to glide stealthily and swiftly along the top of the wall, as if in pursuit of a fly, and then to clasp with the utmost dexterity one of the old gentleman's ankles. This done, the companion hand appeared, and clasped the other ankle.

Thus encumbered the old gentleman lifted his legs awkwardly once or twice, as if they were very clumsy and imperfect pieces of machinery, and then looking down on his own side of the wall, burst into a loud laugh.

'It's you, is it?' said the old gentleman.

'Yes, it's me,' replied a gruff voice.

'How's the Emperor of Tartary?' said the old gentleman.

'Oh! he's much the same as usual,' was the reply. 'No better and no worse.'

'The young Prince of China,' said the old gentleman, with much interest. 'Is he reconciled to his father-in-law, the great potato salesman?'

'No,' answered the gruff voice; 'and he says he never will be, that's more.'

'If that's the case,' observed the old gentleman, 'perhaps I'd better come down.'

'Well,' said the man on the other side, 'I think you had, perhaps.'

One of the hands being then cautiously unclasped, the old gentleman dropped into a sitting posture, and was looking round to smile and bow to Mrs Nickleby, when he disappeared with some precipitation, as if his legs had been pulled from below.

Very much relieved by his disappearance, Kate was turning to speak to her mama, when the dirty hands again became visible, and were immediately followed by the figure of a coarse squat man, who ascended by the steps which had been recently occupied by their singular neighbour.

'Beg your pardon, ladies,' said this new comer, grinning and touching his hat. 'Has he been making love to either of you?'

'Yes,' said Kate.

'Ah!' rejoined the man, taking his handkerchief out of his hat and wiping his face, 'he always will, you know. Nothing will prevent his making love.'

'I need not ask you if he is out of his mind, poor creature,' said Kate.

'Why no,' replied the man, looking into his hat, throwing his handkerchief in at one dab, and putting it on again. 'That's pretty plain, that is.'

'Has he been long so?' asked Kate.

'A long while.'

'And is there no hope for him?' said Kate, compassionately

'Not a bit, and don't deserve to be,' replied the keeper. 'He's a deal pleasanter without his senses than with 'em. He was the cruellest, wickedest, out-and-outerest old flint that ever drawed breath.'

'Indeed!' said Kate.

'By George!' replied the keeper, shaking his head so emphatically that he was obliged to frown to keep his hat on. 'I never come across such a vagabond, and my mate says the same. Broke his poor wife's heart, turned his daughters out of doors, drove his sons into the streets; it was a blessing he went mad at last, through evil tempers, and covetousness, and selfishness, and guzzling, and drinking, or he'd have drove many others so. Hope for HIM, an old rip! There isn't too much hope going' but I'll bet a crown that what there is, is saved for more deserving chaps than him, anyhow.'

With which confession of his faith, the keeper shook his head again, as much as to say that nothing short of this would do, if things were to go on at all; and touching his hat sulkily—not that he was in an ill humour, but that his subject ruffled him—descended the ladder, and took it away.

During this conversation, Mrs Nickleby had regarded the man with a severe and steadfast look. She now heaved a profound sigh, and pursing up her lips, shook her head in a slow and doubtful manner.

'Poor creature!' said Kate.

'Ah! poor indeed!' rejoined Mrs Nickleby. 'It's shameful that such things should be allowed. Shameful!'

'How can they be helped, mama?' said Kate, mournfully. 'The infirmities of nature—'

'Nature!' said Mrs Nickleby. 'What! Do YOU suppose this poor gentleman is out of his mind?'

'Can anybody who sees him entertain any other opinion, mama?'

'Why then, I just tell you this, Kate,' returned Mrs Nickleby, 'that, he is nothing of the kind, and I am surprised you can be so imposed upon. It's some plot of these people to possess themselves of his property—didn't he say so himself? He may be a little odd and flighty, perhaps, many of us are that; but downright mad! and express himself as he does, respectfully, and in quite poetical language, and making offers with so much thought, and care, and prudence—not as if he ran into the streets, and went down upon his knees to the first chit of a girl he met, as a madman would! No, no, Kate, there's a great deal too much method in HIS madness; depend upon that, my dear.'

CHAPTER 42

Illustrative of the convivial Sentiment, that the best of Friends must sometimes part

The pavement of Snow Hill had been baking and frying all day in the heat, and the twain Saracens' heads guarding the entrance to the hostelry of whose name and sign they are the duplicate presentments, looked—or seemed, in the eyes of jaded and footsore passers-by, to look—more vicious than usual, after blistering and scorching in the sun, when, in one of the inn's smallest sitting-rooms, through whose open window there rose, in a palpable steam, wholesome exhalations from reeking coach-horses, the usual furniture of a tea-table was displayed in neat and inviting order, flanked by large joints of roast and boiled, a tongue, a pigeon pie, a cold fowl, a tankard of ale, and other little matters of the like kind, which, in degenerate towns and cities, are generally understood to belong more particularly to solid lunches, stage-coach dinners, or unusually substantial breakfasts.

Mr John Browdie, with his hands in his pockets, hovered restlessly about these delicacies, stopping occasionally to whisk the flies out of the sugar-basin with his wife's pocket-handkerchief, or to dip a teaspoon in the milk-pot and carry it to his mouth, or to cut off a little knob of crust, and a little corner of meat, and swallow them at two gulps like a couple of pills. After every one of these flirtations with the eatables, he pulled out his watch, and declared with an earnestness quite pathetic that he couldn't undertake to hold out two minutes longer.

'Tilly!' said John to his lady, who was reclining half awake and half asleep upon a sofa.

'Well, John!'

'Well, John!' retorted her husband, impatiently. 'Dost thou feel hoongry, lass?'

'Not very,' said Mrs Browdie.

'Not vary!' repeated John, raising his eyes to the ceiling. 'Hear her say not vary, and us dining at three, and loonching off pasthry thot aggravates a mon 'stead of pacifying him! Not vary!'

'Here's a gen'l'man for you, sir,' said the waiter, looking in.

'A wa'at for me?' cried John, as though he thought it must be a letter, or a parcel.

'A gen'l'man, sir.'

'Stars and garthers, chap!' said John, 'wa'at dost thou coom and say thot for? In wi' 'un.'

'Are you at home, sir?'

'At whoam!' cried John, 'I wish I wur; I'd ha tea'd two hour ago. Why, I told t'oother chap to look sharp ootside door, and tell 'un d'rectly he coom, thot we war faint wi' hoonger. In wi' 'un. Aha! Thee hond, Misther Nickleby. This is nigh to be the proodest day o' my life, sir. Hoo be all wi' ye? Ding! But, I'm glod o' this!'

Quite forgetting even his hunger in the heartiness of his salutation, John Browdie shook Nicholas by the hand again and again, slapping his palm with great violence between each shake, to add warmth to the reception.

'Ah! there she be,' said John, observing the look which Nicholas directed towards his wife. 'There she be—we shan't quarrel about her noo—eh? Ecod, when I think o' thot—but thou want'st soom'at to eat. Fall to, mun, fall to, and for wa'at we're aboot to receive—'

No doubt the grace was properly finished, but nothing more was heard, for John had already begun to play such a knife and fork, that his speech was, for the time, gone.

'I shall take the usual licence, Mr Browdie,' said Nicholas, as he placed a chair for the bride.

'Tak' whatever thou like'st,' said John, 'and when a's gane, ca' for more.'

Without stopping to explain, Nicholas kissed the blushing Mrs Browdie, and handed her to her seat.

'I say,' said John, rather astounded for the moment, 'mak' theeself quite at whoam, will 'ee?'

'You may depend upon that,' replied Nicholas; 'on one condition.'

'And wa'at may thot be?' asked John.

'That you make me a godfather the very first time you have occasion for one.'

'Eh! d'ye hear thot?' cried John, laying down his knife and fork. 'A godfeyther! Ha! ha! ha! Tilly—hear till 'un—a godfeyther! Divn't say a word more, ye'll never beat thot. Occasion for 'un—a godfeyther! Ha! ha! ha!'

Never was man so tickled with a respectable old joke, as John Browdie was with this. He chuckled, roared, half suffocated himself by laughing large pieces of beef into his windpipe, roared again, persisted in eating at the same time, got red in the face and black in the forehead, coughed, cried, got better, went off again laughing inwardly, got worse, choked, had his back thumped, stamped about, frightened his wife, and at last recovered in a state of the last exhaustion and with the water streaming from his eyes, but still faintly ejaculating, 'A godfeyther—a godfeyther, Tilly!' in a tone bespeaking an exquisite relish of the sally, which no suffering could diminish.

'You remember the night of our first tea-drinking?' said Nicholas.

'Shall I e'er forget it, mun?' replied John Browdie.

'He was a desperate fellow that night though, was he not, Mrs Browdie?' said Nicholas. 'Quite a monster!'

'If you had only heard him as we were going home, Mr Nickleby, you'd have said so indeed,' returned the bride. 'I never was so frightened in all my life.'

'Coom, coom,' said John, with a broad grin; 'thou know'st betther than thot, Tilly.'

'So I was,' replied Mrs Browdie. 'I almost made up my mind never to speak to you again.'

'A'most!' said John, with a broader grin than the last. 'A'most made up her mind! And she wur coaxin', and coaxin', and wheedlin', and wheedlin' a' the blessed wa'. "Wa'at didst thou let yon chap mak' oop tiv'ee for?" says I. "I deedn't, John," says she, a squeedgin my arm. "You deedn't?" says I. "Noa," says she, a squeedgin of me agean.'

'Lor, John!' interposed his pretty wife, colouring very much. 'How can you talk such nonsense? As if I should have dreamt of such a thing!'

'I dinnot know whether thou'd ever dreamt of it, though I think that's loike eneaf, mind,' retorted John; 'but thou didst it. "Ye're a feeckle, changeable weathercock, lass," says I. "Not feeckle, John," says she. "Yes," says I, "feeckle, dom'd feeckle. Dinnot tell me thou bean't, efther yon chap at schoolmeasther's," says I. "Him!" says she, quite screeching. "Ah! him!" says I. "Why, John," says she—and she coom a deal closer and squeedged a deal harder than she'd deane afore—"dost thou think it's nat'ral noo, that having such a proper mun as thou to keep company wi', I'd ever tak' opp wi' such a leetle scanty whipper-snapper as yon?" she says. Ha! ha! ha! She said whipper-snapper! "Ecod!" I says, "efther thot, neame the day, and let's have it ower!" Ha! ha! ha!'

Nicholas laughed very heartily at this story, both on account of its telling against himself, and his being desirous to spare the blushes of Mrs Browdie, whose protestations were drowned in peals of laughter from her husband. His good-nature soon put her at her ease; and although she still denied the charge, she laughed so heartily at it, that Nicholas had the satisfaction of feeling assured that in all essential respects it was strictly true.

'This is the second time,' said Nicholas, 'that we have ever taken a meal together, and only third I have ever seen you; and yet it really seems to me as if I were among old friends.'

'Weel!' observed the Yorkshireman, 'so I say.'

'And I am sure I do,' added his young wife.

'I have the best reason to be impressed with the feeling, mind,' said Nicholas; 'for if it had not been for your kindness of heart, my good friend, when I had no right or reason to expect it, I know not what might have become of me or what plight I should have been in by this time.'

'Talk aboot soom'at else,' replied John, gruffly, 'and dinnot bother.'

'It must be a new song to the same tune then,' said Nicholas, smiling. 'I told you in my letter that I deeply felt and admired your sympathy with that poor lad, whom you released at the risk of involving yourself in trouble and difficulty; but I can never tell you how greateful he and I, and others whom you don't know, are to you for taking pity on him.'

'Ecod!' rejoined John Browdie, drawing up his chair; 'and I can never tell YOU hoo gratful soom folks that we do know would be loikewise, if THEY know'd I had takken pity on him.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Mrs Browdie, 'what a state I was in that night!'

'Were they at all disposed to give you credit for assisting in the escape?' inquired Nicholas of John Browdie.

'Not a bit,' replied the Yorkshireman, extending his mouth from ear to ear. 'There I lay, snoog in schoolmeasther's bed long efther it was dark, and nobody coom nigh the pleace. "Weel!" thinks I, "he's got a pretty good start, and if he bean't whoam by noo, he never will be; so you may coom as quick as you loike, and foind us reddy"—that is, you know, schoolmeasther might coom.'

'I understand,' said Nicholas.

'Presently,' resumed John, 'he DID coom. I heerd door shut doonstairs, and him a warking, oop in the daark. "Slow and steddy," I says to myself, "tak' your time, sir—no hurry." He cooms to the door, turns the key—turns the key when there warn't nothing to hoold the lock—and ca's oot "Hallo, there!"—"Yes," thinks I, "you may do thot agean, and not wakken anybody, sir." "Hallo, there," he says, and then he stops. "Thou'd betther not aggravate me," says schoolmeasther, efther a little time. "I'll brak' every boan in your boddy, Smike," he says, efther another little time. Then all of a soodden, he sings oot for a loight, and when it cooms—ecod, such a hoorly-boorly! "Wa'at's the matter?" says I. "He's gane," says he,—stark mad wi' vengeance. "Have you heerd nought?" "Ees," says I, "I heerd street-door shut, no time at a' ago. I heerd a person run doon there" (pointing t'other wa'—eh?) "Help!" he cries. "I'll help you," says I; and off we set—the wrong wa'! Ho! ho! ho!'

'Did you go far?' asked Nicholas.

'Far!' replied John; 'I run him clean off his legs in quarther of an hoor. To see old schoolmeasther wi'out his hat, skimming along oop to his knees in mud and wather, tumbling over fences, and rowling into ditches, and bawling oot like mad, wi' his one eye looking sharp out for the lad, and his coat-tails flying out behind, and him spattered wi' mud all ower, face and all! I tho't I should ha' dropped doon, and killed myself wi' laughing.'

John laughed so heartily at the mere recollection, that he communicated the contagion to both his hearers, and all three burst into peals of laughter, which were renewed again and again, until they could laugh no longer.

'He's a bad 'un,' said John, wiping his eyes; 'a very bad 'un, is schoolmeasther.'

'I can't bear the sight of him, John,' said his wife.

'Coom,' retorted John, 'thot's tidy in you, thot is. If it wa'nt along o' you, we shouldn't know nought aboot 'un. Thou know'd 'un first, Tilly, didn't thou?'

'I couldn't help knowing Fanny Squeers, John,' returned his wife; 'she was an old playmate of mine, you know.'

'Weel,' replied John, 'dean't I say so, lass? It's best to be neighbourly, and keep up old acquaintance loike; and what I say is, dean't quarrel if 'ee can help it. Dinnot think so, Mr Nickleby?'

'Certainly,' returned Nicholas; 'and you acted upon that principle when I meet you on horseback on the road, after our memorable evening.'

'Sure-ly,' said John. 'Wa'at I say, I stick by.'

'And that's a fine thing to do, and manly too,' said Nicholas, 'though it's not exactly what we understand by "coming Yorkshire over us" in London. Miss Squeers is stopping with you, you said in your note.'

'Yes,' replied John, 'Tilly's bridesmaid; and a queer bridesmaid she be, too. She wean't be a bride in a hurry, I reckon.'

'For shame, John,' said Mrs Browdie; with an acute perception of the joke though, being a bride herself.

'The groom will be a blessed mun,' said John, his eyes twinkling at the idea. 'He'll be in luck, he will.'

'You see, Mr Nickleby,' said his wife, 'that it was in consequence of her being here, that John wrote to you and fixed tonight, because we thought that it wouldn't be pleasant for you to meet, after what has passed.'

'Unquestionably. You were quite right in that,' said Nicholas, interrupting.

'Especially,' observed Mrs Browdie, looking very sly, 'after what we know about past and gone love matters.'

'We know, indeed!' said Nicholas, shaking his head. 'You behaved rather wickedly there, I suspect.'

'O' course she did,' said John Browdie, passing his huge forefinger through one of his wife's pretty ringlets, and looking very proud of her. 'She wur always as skittish and full o' tricks as a—'

'Well, as a what?' said his wife.

'As a woman,' returned John. 'Ding! But I dinnot know ought else that cooms near it.'

'You were speaking about Miss Squeers,' said Nicholas, with the view of stopping some slight connubialities which had begun to pass between Mr and Mrs Browdie, and which rendered the position of a third party in some degree embarrassing, as occasioning him to feel rather in the way than otherwise.

'Oh yes,' rejoined Mrs Browdie. 'John ha' done. John fixed tonight, because she had settled that she would go and drink tea with her father. And to make quite sure of there being nothing amiss, and of your being quite alone with us, he settled to go out there and fetch her home.'

'That was a very good arrangement,' said Nicholas, 'though I am sorry to be the occasion of so much trouble.'

'Not the least in the world,' returned Mrs Browdie; 'for we have looked forward to see you—John and I have—with the greatest possible pleasure. Do you know, Mr Nickleby,' said Mrs Browdie, with her archest smile, 'that I really think Fanny Squeers was very fond of you?'

'I am very much obliged to her,' said Nicholas; 'but upon my word, I never aspired to making any impression upon her virgin heart.'

'How you talk!' tittered Mrs Browdie. 'No, but do you know that really—seriously now and without any joking—I was given to understand by Fanny herself, that you had made an offer to her, and that you two were going to be engaged quite solemn and regular.'

'Was you, ma'am—was you?' cried a shrill female voice, 'was you given to understand that I—I—was going to be engaged to an assassinating thief that shed the gore of my pa? Do you—do you think, ma'am—that I was very fond of such dirt beneath my feet, as I couldn't condescend to touch with kitchen tongs, without blacking and crocking myself by the contract? Do you, ma'am—do you? Oh! base and degrading 'Tilda!'

With these reproaches Miss Squeers flung the door wide open, and disclosed to the eyes of the astonished Browdies and Nicholas, not only her own symmetrical form, arrayed in the chaste white garments before described (a little dirtier), but the form of her brother and father, the pair of Wackfords.

'This is the hend, is it?' continued Miss Squeers, who, being excited, aspirated her h's strongly; 'this is the hend, is it, of all my forbearance and friendship for that double-faced thing—that viper, that—that—mermaid?' (Miss Squeers hesitated a long time for this last epithet, and brought it out triumphantly as last, as if it quite clinched the business.) 'This is the hend, is it, of all my bearing with her deceitfulness, her lowness, her falseness, her laying herself out to catch the admiration of vulgar minds, in a way which made me blush for my—for my—'

'Gender,' suggested Mr Squeers, regarding the spectators with a malevolent eye—literally A malevolent eye.

'Yes,' said Miss Squeers; 'but I thank my stars that my ma is of the same—'

'Hear, hear!' remarked Mr Squeers; 'and I wish she was here to have a scratch at this company.'

'This is the hend, is it,' said Miss Squeers, tossing her head, and looking contemptuously at the floor, 'of my taking notice of that rubbishing creature, and demeaning myself to patronise her?'

'Oh, come,' rejoined Mrs Browdie, disregarding all the endeavours of her spouse to restrain her, and forcing herself into a front row, 'don't talk such nonsense as that.'

'Have I not patronised you, ma'am?' demanded Miss Squeers.

'No,' returned Mrs Browdie.

'I will not look for blushes in such a quarter,' said Miss Squeers, haughtily, 'for that countenance is a stranger to everything but hignominiousness and red-faced boldness.'

'I say,' interposed John Browdie, nettled by these accumulated attacks on his wife, 'dra' it mild, dra' it mild.'

'You, Mr Browdie,' said Miss Squeers, taking him up very quickly, 'I pity. I have no feeling for you, sir, but one of unliquidated pity.'

'Oh!' said John.

'No,' said Miss Squeers, looking sideways at her parent, 'although I AM a queer bridesmaid, and SHAN'T be a bride in a hurry, and although my husband WILL be in luck, I entertain no sentiments towards you, sir, but sentiments of pity.'

Here Miss Squeers looked sideways at her father again, who looked sideways at her, as much as to say, 'There you had him.'

'I know what you've got to go through,' said Miss Squeers, shaking her curls violently. 'I know what life is before you, and if you was my bitterest and deadliest enemy, I could wish you nothing worse.'

'Couldn't you wish to be married to him yourself, if that was the case?' inquired Mrs Browdie, with great suavity of manner.

'Oh, ma'am, how witty you are,' retorted Miss Squeers with a low curtsy, 'almost as witty, ma'am, as you are clever. How very clever it was in you, ma'am, to choose a time when I had gone to tea with my pa, and was sure not to come back without being fetched! What a pity you never thought that other people might be as clever as yourself and spoil your plans!'

'You won't vex me, child, with such airs as these,' said the late Miss Price, assuming the matron.

'Don't MISSIS me, ma'am, if you please,' returned Miss Squeers, sharply. 'I'll not bear it. Is THIS the hend—'

'Dang it a',' cried John Browdie, impatiently. 'Say thee say out, Fanny, and mak' sure it's the end, and dinnot ask nobody whether it is or not.'

'Thanking you for your advice which was not required, Mr Browdie,' returned Miss Squeers, with laborious politeness, 'have the goodness not to presume to meddle with my Christian name. Even my pity shall never make me forget what's due to myself, Mr Browdie. 'Tilda,' said Miss Squeers, with such a sudden accession of violence that John started in his boots, 'I throw you off for ever, miss. I abandon you. I renounce you. I wouldn't,' cried Miss Squeers in a solemn voice, 'have a child named 'Tilda, not to save it from its grave.'

'As for the matther o' that,' observed John, 'it'll be time eneaf to think aboot neaming of it when it cooms.'

'John!' interposed his wife, 'don't tease her.'

'Oh! Tease, indeed!' cried Miss Squeers, bridling up. 'Tease, indeed! He, he! Tease, too! No, don't tease her. Consider her feelings, pray!'

'If it's fated that listeners are never to hear any good of themselves,' said Mrs Browdie, 'I can't help it, and I am very sorry for it. But I will say, Fanny, that times out of number I have spoken so kindly of you behind your back, that even you could have found no fault with what I said.'

'Oh, I dare say not, ma'am!' cried Miss Squeers, with another curtsy. 'Best thanks to you for your goodness, and begging and praying you not to be hard upon me another time!'

'I don't know,' resumed Mrs Browdie, 'that I have said anything very bad of you, even now. At all events, what I did say was quite true; but if I have, I am very sorry for it, and I beg your pardon. You have said much worse of me, scores of times, Fanny; but I have never borne any malice to you, and I hope you'll not bear any to me.'

Miss Squeers made no more direct reply than surveying her former friend from top to toe, and elevating her nose in the air with ineffable disdain. But some indistinct allusions to a 'puss,' and a 'minx,' and a 'contemptible creature,' escaped her; and this, together with a severe biting of the lips, great difficulty in swallowing, and very frequent comings and goings of breath, seemed to imply that feelings were swelling in Miss Squeers's bosom too great for utterance.

While the foregoing conversation was proceeding, Master Wackford, finding himself unnoticed, and feeling his preponderating inclinations strong upon him, had by little and little sidled up to the table and attacked the food with such slight skirmishing as drawing his fingers round and round the inside of the plates, and afterwards sucking them with infinite relish; picking the bread, and dragging the pieces over the surface of the butter; pocketing lumps of sugar, pretending all the time to be absorbed in thought; and so forth. Finding that no interference was attempted with these small liberties, he gradually mounted to greater, and, after helping himself to a moderately good cold collation, was, by this time, deep in the pie.

Nothing of this had been unobserved by Mr Squeers, who, so long as the attention of the company was fixed upon other objects, hugged himself to think that his son and heir should be fattening at the enemy's expense. But there being now an appearance of a temporary calm, in which the proceedings of little Wackford could scarcely fail to be observed, he feigned to be aware of the circumstance for the first time, and inflicted upon the face of that young gentleman a slap that made the very tea-cups ring.

'Eating!' cried Mr Squeers, 'of what his father's enemies has left! It's fit to go and poison you, you unnat'ral boy.'

'It wean't hurt him,' said John, apparently very much relieved by the prospect of having a man in the quarrel; 'let' un eat. I wish the whole school was here. I'd give'em soom'at to stay their unfort'nate stomachs wi', if I spent the last penny I had!'

Squeers scowled at him with the worst and most malicious expression of which his face was capable—it was a face of remarkable capability, too, in that way—and shook his fist stealthily.

'Coom, coom, schoolmeasther,' said John, 'dinnot make a fool o' thyself; for if I was to sheake mine—only once—thou'd fa' doon wi' the wind o' it.'

'It was you, was it,' returned Squeers, 'that helped off my runaway boy? It was you, was it?'

'Me!' returned John, in a loud tone. 'Yes, it wa' me, coom; wa'at o' that? It wa' me. Noo then!'

'You hear him say he did it, my child!' said Squeers, appealing to his daughter. 'You hear him say he did it!'

'Did it!' cried John. 'I'll tell 'ee more; hear this, too. If thou'd got another roonaway boy, I'd do it agean. If thou'd got twonty roonaway boys, I'd do it twonty times ower, and twonty more to thot; and I tell thee more,' said John, 'noo my blood is oop, that thou'rt an old ra'ascal; and that it's weel for thou, thou be'est an old 'un, or I'd ha' poonded thee to flour when thou told an honest mun hoo thou'd licked that poor chap in t' coorch.'

'An honest man!' cried Squeers, with a sneer.

'Ah! an honest man,' replied John; 'honest in ought but ever putting legs under seame table wi' such as thou.'

'Scandal!' said Squeers, exultingly. 'Two witnesses to it; Wackford knows the nature of an oath, he does; we shall have you there, sir. Rascal, eh?' Mr Squeers took out his pocketbook and made a note of it. 'Very good. I should say that was worth full twenty pound at the next assizes, without the honesty, sir.'

''Soizes,' cried John, 'thou'd betther not talk to me o' 'Soizes. Yorkshire schools have been shown up at 'Soizes afore noo, mun, and it's a ticklish soobjact to revive, I can tell ye.'

Mr Squeers shook his head in a threatening manner, looking very white with passion; and taking his daughter's arm, and dragging little Wackford by the hand, retreated towards the door.

'As for you,' said Squeers, turning round and addressing Nicholas, who, as he had caused him to smart pretty soundly on a former occasion, purposely abstained from taking any part in the discussion, 'see if I ain't down upon you before long. You'll go a kidnapping of boys, will you? Take care their fathers don't turn up—mark that—take care their fathers don't turn up, and send 'em back to me to do as I like with, in spite of you.'

'I am not afraid of that,' replied Nicholas, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously, and turning away.

'Ain't you!' retorted Squeers, with a diabolical look. 'Now then, come along.'

'I leave such society, with my pa, for Hever,' said Miss Squeers, looking contemptuously and loftily round. 'I am defiled by breathing the air with such creatures. Poor Mr Browdie! He! he! he! I do pity him, that I do; he's so deluded. He! he! he!—Artful and designing 'Tilda!'

With this sudden relapse into the sternest and most majestic wrath, Miss Squeers swept from the room; and having sustained her dignity until the last possible moment, was heard to sob and scream and struggle in the passage.

John Browdie remained standing behind the table, looking from his wife to Nicholas, and back again, with his mouth wide open, until his hand accidentally fell upon the tankard of ale, when he took it up, and having obscured his features therewith for some time, drew a long breath, handed it over to Nicholas, and rang the bell.

'Here, waither,' said John, briskly. 'Look alive here. Tak' these things awa', and let's have soomat broiled for sooper—vary comfortable and plenty o' it—at ten o'clock. Bring soom brandy and soom wather, and a pair o' slippers—the largest pair in the house—and be quick aboot it. Dash ma wig!' said John, rubbing his hands, 'there's no ganging oot to neeght, noo, to fetch anybody whoam, and ecod, we'll begin to spend the evening in airnest.'

CHAPTER 43

Officiates as a kind of Gentleman Usher, in bringing various People together

The storm had long given place to a calm the most profound, and the evening was pretty far advanced—indeed supper was over, and the process of digestion proceeding as favourably as, under the influence of complete tranquillity, cheerful conversation, and a moderate allowance of brandy-and-water, most wise men conversant with the anatomy and functions of the human frame will consider that it ought to have proceeded, when the three friends, or as one might say, both in a civil and religious sense, and with proper deference and regard to the holy state of matrimony, the two friends, (Mr and Mrs Browdie counting as no more than one,) were startled by the noise of loud and angry threatenings below stairs, which presently attained so high a pitch, and were conveyed besides in language so towering, sanguinary, and ferocious, that it could hardly have been surpassed, if there had actually been a Saracen's head then present in the establishment, supported on the shoulders and surmounting the trunk of a real, live, furious, and most unappeasable Saracen.

This turmoil, instead of quickly subsiding after the first outburst, (as turmoils not unfrequently do, whether in taverns, legislative assemblies, or elsewhere,) into a mere grumbling and growling squabble, increased every moment; and although the whole din appeared to be raised by but one pair of lungs, yet that one pair was of so powerful a quality, and repeated such words as 'scoundrel,' 'rascal,' 'insolent puppy,' and a variety of expletives no less flattering to the party addressed, with such great relish and strength of tone, that a dozen voices raised in concert under any ordinary circumstances would have made far less uproar and created much smaller consternation.

'Why, what's the matter?' said Nicholas, moving hastily towards the door.

John Browdie was striding in the same direction when Mrs Browdie turned pale, and, leaning back in her chair, requested him with a faint voice to take notice, that if he ran into any danger it was her intention to fall into hysterics immediately, and that the consequences might be more serious than he thought for. John looked rather disconcerted by this intelligence, though there was a lurking grin on his face at the same time; but, being quite unable to keep out of the fray, he compromised the matter by tucking his wife's arm under his own, and, thus accompanied, following Nicholas downstairs with all speed.

The passage outside the coffee-room door was the scene of disturbance, and here were congregated the coffee-room customers and waiters, together with two or three coachmen and helpers from the yard. These had hastily assembled round a young man who from his appearance might have been a year or two older than Nicholas, and who, besides having given utterance to the defiances just now described, seemed to have proceeded to even greater lengths in his indignation, inasmuch as his feet had no other covering than a pair of stockings, while a couple of slippers lay at no great distance from the head of a prostrate figure in an opposite corner, who bore the appearance of having been shot into his present retreat by means of a kick, and complimented by having the slippers flung about his ears afterwards.

The coffee-room customers, and the waiters, and the coachmen, and the helpers—not to mention a barmaid who was looking on from behind an open sash window—seemed at that moment, if a spectator might judge from their winks, nods, and muttered exclamations, strongly disposed to take part against the young gentleman in the stockings. Observing this, and that the young gentleman was nearly of his own age and had in nothing the appearance of an habitual brawler, Nicholas, impelled by such feelings as will influence young men sometimes, felt a very strong disposition to side with the weaker party, and so thrust himself at once into the centre of the group, and in a more emphatic tone, perhaps, than circumstances might seem to warrant, demanded what all that noise was about.

'Hallo!' said one of the men from the yard, 'this is somebody in disguise, this is.'

'Room for the eldest son of the Emperor of Roosher, gen'l'men!' cried another fellow.

Disregarding these sallies, which were uncommonly well received, as sallies at the expense of the best-dressed persons in a crowd usually are, Nicholas glanced carelessly round, and addressing the young gentleman, who had by this time picked up his slippers and thrust his feet into them, repeated his inquiries with a courteous air.

'A mere nothing!' he replied.

At this a murmur was raised by the lookers-on, and some of the boldest cried, 'Oh, indeed!—Wasn't it though?—Nothing, eh?—He called that nothing, did he? Lucky for him if he found it nothing.' These and many other expressions of ironical disapprobation having been exhausted, two or three of the out-of-door fellows began to hustle Nicholas and the young gentleman who had made the noise: stumbling against them by accident, and treading on their toes, and so forth. But this being a round game, and one not necessarily limited to three or four players, was open to John Browdie too, who, bursting into the little crowd—to the great terror of his wife—and falling about in all directions, now to the right, now to the left, now forwards, now backwards, and accidentally driving his elbow through the hat of the tallest helper, who had been particularly active, speedily caused the odds to wear a very different appearance; while more than one stout fellow limped away to a respectful distance, anathematising with tears in his eyes the heavy tread and ponderous feet of the burly Yorkshireman.

'Let me see him do it again,' said he who had been kicked into the corner, rising as he spoke, apparently more from the fear of John Browdie's inadvertently treading upon him, than from any desire to place himself on equal terms with his late adversary. 'Let me see him do it again. That's all.'

'Let me hear you make those remarks again,' said the young man, 'and I'll knock that head of yours in among the wine-glasses behind you there.'

Here a waiter who had been rubbing his hands in excessive enjoyment of the scene, so long as only the breaking of heads was in question, adjured the spectators with great earnestness to fetch the police, declaring that otherwise murder would be surely done, and that he was responsible for all the glass and china on the premises.

'No one need trouble himself to stir,' said the young gentleman, 'I am going to remain in the house all night, and shall be found here in the morning if there is any assault to answer for.'

'What did you strike him for?' asked one of the bystanders.

'Ah! what did you strike him for?' demanded the others.

The unpopular gentleman looked coolly round, and addressing himself to Nicholas, said:

'You inquired just now what was the matter here. The matter is simply this. Yonder person, who was drinking with a friend in the coffee-room when I took my seat there for half an hour before going to bed, (for I have just come off a journey, and preferred stopping here tonight, to going home at this hour, where I was not expected until tomorrow,) chose to express himself in very disrespectful, and insolently familiar terms, of a young lady, whom I recognised from his description and other circumstances, and whom I have the honour to know. As he spoke loud enough to be overheard by the other guests who were present, I informed him most civilly that he was mistaken in his conjectures, which were of an offensive nature, and requested him to forbear. He did so for a little time, but as he chose to renew his conversation when leaving the room, in a more offensive strain than before, I could not refrain from making after him, and facilitating his departure by a kick, which reduced him to the posture in which you saw him just now. I am the best judge of my own affairs, I take it,' said the young man, who had certainly not quite recovered from his recent heat; 'if anybody here thinks proper to make this quarrel his own, I have not the smallest earthly objection, I do assure him.'

Of all possible courses of proceeding under the circumstances detailed, there was certainly not one which, in his then state of mind, could have appeared more laudable to Nicholas than this. There were not many subjects of dispute which at that moment could have come home to his own breast more powerfully, for having the unknown uppermost in his thoughts, it naturally occurred to him that he would have done just the same if any audacious gossiper durst have presumed in his hearing to speak lightly of her. Influenced by these considerations, he espoused the young gentleman's quarrel with great warmth, protesting that he had done quite right, and that he respected him for it; which John Browdie (albeit not quite clear as to the merits) immediately protested too, with not inferior vehemence.

'Let him take care, that's all,' said the defeated party, who was being rubbed down by a waiter, after his recent fall on the dusty boards. 'He don't knock me about for nothing, I can tell him that. A pretty state of things, if a man isn't to admire a handsome girl without being beat to pieces for it!'

This reflection appeared to have great weight with the young lady in the bar, who (adjusting her cap as she spoke, and glancing at a mirror) declared that it would be a very pretty state of things indeed; and that if people were to be punished for actions so innocent and natural as that, there would be more people to be knocked down than there would be people to knock them down, and that she wondered what the gentleman meant by it, that she did.

'My dear girl,' said the young gentleman in a low voice, advancing towards the sash window.

'Nonsense, sir!' replied the young lady sharply, smiling though as she turned aside, and biting her lip, (whereat Mrs Browdie, who was still standing on the stairs, glanced at her with disdain, and called to her husband to come away).

'No, but listen to me,' said the young man. 'If admiration of a pretty face were criminal, I should be the most hopeless person alive, for I cannot resist one. It has the most extraordinary effect upon me, checks and controls me in the most furious and obstinate mood. You see what an effect yours has had upon me already.'

'Oh, that's very pretty,' replied the young lady, tossing her head, 'but—'

'Yes, I know it's very pretty,' said the young man, looking with an air of admiration in the barmaid's face; 'I said so, you know, just this moment. But beauty should be spoken of respectfully—respectfully, and in proper terms, and with a becoming sense of its worth and excellence, whereas this fellow has no more notion—'

The young lady interrupted the conversation at this point, by thrusting her head out of the bar-window, and inquiring of the waiter in a shrill voice whether that young man who had been knocked down was going to stand in the passage all night, or whether the entrance was to be left clear for other people. The waiters taking the hint, and communicating it to the hostlers, were not slow to change their tone too, and the result was, that the unfortunate victim was bundled out in a twinkling.

'I am sure I have seen that fellow before,' said Nicholas.

'Indeed!' replied his new acquaintance.

'I am certain of it,' said Nicholas, pausing to reflect. 'Where can I have —stop!—yes, to be sure—he belongs to a register-office up at the west end of the town. I knew I recollected the face.'

It was, indeed, Tom, the ugly clerk.

'That's odd enough!' said Nicholas, ruminating upon the strange manner in which the register-office seemed to start up and stare him in the face every now and then, and when he least expected it.

'I am much obliged to you for your kind advocacy of my cause when it most needed an advocate,' said the young man, laughing, and drawing a card from his pocket. 'Perhaps you'll do me the favour to let me know where I can thank you.'

Nicholas took the card, and glancing at it involuntarily as he returned the compliment, evinced very great surprise.

'Mr Frank Cheeryble!' said Nicholas. 'Surely not the nephew of Cheeryble Brothers, who is expected tomorrow!'

'I don't usually call myself the nephew of the firm,' returned Mr Frank, good-humouredly; 'but of the two excellent individuals who compose it, I am proud to say I AM the nephew. And you, I see, are Mr Nickleby, of whom I have heard so much! This is a most unexpected meeting, but not the less welcome, I assure you.'

Nicholas responded to these compliments with others of the same kind, and they shook hands warmly. Then he introduced John Browdie, who had remained in a state of great admiration ever since the young lady in the bar had been so skilfully won over to the right side. Then Mrs John Browdie was introduced, and finally they all went upstairs together and spent the next half-hour with great satisfaction and mutual entertainment; Mrs John Browdie beginning the conversation by declaring that of all the made-up things she ever saw, that young woman below-stairs was the vainest and the plainest.

This Mr Frank Cheeryble, although, to judge from what had recently taken place, a hot-headed young man (which is not an absolute miracle and phenomenon in nature), was a sprightly, good-humoured, pleasant fellow, with much both in his countenance and disposition that reminded Nicholas very strongly of the kind-hearted brothers. His manner was as unaffected as theirs, and his demeanour full of that heartiness which, to most people who have anything generous in their composition, is peculiarly prepossessing. Add to this, that he was good-looking and intelligent, had a plentiful share of vivacity, was extremely cheerful, and accommodated himself in five minutes' time to all John Browdie's oddities with as much ease as if he had known him from a boy; and it will be a source of no great wonder that, when they parted for the night, he had produced a most favourable impression, not only upon the worthy Yorkshireman and his wife, but upon Nicholas also, who, revolving all these things in his mind as he made the best of his way home, arrived at the conclusion that he had laid the foundation of a most agreeable and desirable acquaintance.

'But it's a most extraordinary thing about that register-office fellow!' thought Nicholas. 'Is it likely that this nephew can know anything about that beautiful girl? When Tim Linkinwater gave me to understand the other day that he was coming to take a share in the business here, he said he had been superintending it in Germany for four years, and that during the last six months he had been engaged in establishing an agency in the north of England. That's four years and a half—four years and a half. She can't be more than seventeen—say eighteen at the outside. She was quite a child when he went away, then. I should say he knew nothing about her and had never seen her, so HE can give me no information. At all events,' thought Nicholas, coming to the real point in his mind, 'there can be no danger of any prior occupation of her affections in that quarter; that's quite clear.'

Is selfishness a necessary ingredient in the composition of that passion called love, or does it deserve all the fine things which poets, in the exercise of their undoubted vocation, have said of it? There are, no doubt, authenticated instances of gentlemen having given up ladies and ladies having given up gentlemen to meritorious rivals, under circumstances of great high-mindedness; but is it quite established that the majority of such ladies and gentlemen have not made a virtue of necessity, and nobly resigned what was beyond their reach; as a private soldier might register a vow never to accept the order of the Garter, or a poor curate of great piety and learning, but of no family—save a very large family of children—might renounce a bishopric?

Here was Nicholas Nickleby, who would have scorned the thought of counting how the chances stood of his rising in favour or fortune with the brothers Cheeryble, now that their nephew had returned, already deep in calculations whether that same nephew was likely to rival him in the affections of the fair unknown—discussing the matter with himself too, as gravely as if, with that one exception, it were all settled; and recurring to the subject again and again, and feeling quite indignant and ill-used at the notion of anybody else making love to one with whom he had never exchanged a word in all his life. To be sure, he exaggerated rather than depreciated the merits of his new acquaintance; but still he took it as a kind of personal offence that he should have any merits at all—in the eyes of this particular young lady, that is; for elsewhere he was quite welcome to have as many as he pleased. There was undoubted selfishness in all this, and yet Nicholas was of a most free and generous nature, with as few mean or sordid thoughts, perhaps, as ever fell to the lot of any man; and there is no reason to suppose that, being in love, he felt and thought differently from other people in the like sublime condition.

He did not stop to set on foot an inquiry into his train of thought or state of feeling, however; but went thinking on all the way home, and continued to dream on in the same strain all night. For, having satisfied himself that Frank Cheeryble could have no knowledge of, or acquaintance with, the mysterious young lady, it began to occur to him that even he himself might never see her again; upon which hypothesis he built up a very ingenious succession of tormenting ideas which answered his purpose even better than the vision of Mr Frank Cheeryble, and tantalised and worried him, waking and sleeping.

Notwithstanding all that has been said and sung to the contrary, there is no well-established case of morning having either deferred or hastened its approach by the term of an hour or so for the mere gratification of a splenetic feeling against some unoffending lover: the sun having, in the discharge of his public duty, as the books of precedent report, invariably risen according to the almanacs, and without suffering himself to be swayed by any private considerations. So, morning came as usual, and with it business-hours, and with them Mr Frank Cheeryble, and with him a long train of smiles and welcomes from the worthy brothers, and a more grave and clerk-like, but scarcely less hearty reception from Mr Timothy Linkinwater.

'That Mr Frank and Mr Nickleby should have met last night,' said Tim Linkinwater, getting slowly off his stool, and looking round the counting-house with his back planted against the desk, as was his custom when he had anything very particular to say: 'that those two young men should have met last night in that manner is, I say, a coincidence, a remarkable coincidence. Why, I don't believe now,' added Tim, taking off his spectacles, and smiling as with gentle pride, 'that there's such a place in all the world for coincidences as London is!'

'I don't know about that,' said Mr Frank; 'but—'

'Don't know about it, Mr Francis!' interrupted Tim, with an obstinate air. 'Well, but let us know. If there is any better place for such things, where is it? Is it in Europe? No, that it isn't. Is it in Asia? Why, of course it's not. Is it in Africa? Not a bit of it. Is it in America? YOU know better than that, at all events. Well, then,' said Tim, folding his arms resolutely, 'where is it?'

'I was not about to dispute the point, Tim,' said young Cheeryble, laughing. 'I am not such a heretic as that. All I was going to say was, that I hold myself under an obligation to the coincidence, that's all.'

'Oh! if you don't dispute it,' said Tim, quite satisfied, 'that's another thing. I'll tell you what though. I wish you had. I wish you or anybody would. I would so put that man down,' said Tim, tapping the forefinger of his left hand emphatically with his spectacles, 'so put that man down by argument—'

It was quite impossible to find language to express the degree of mental prostration to which such an adventurous wight would be reduced in the keen encounter with Tim Linkinwater, so Tim gave up the rest of his declaration in pure lack of words, and mounted his stool again.

'We may consider ourselves, brother Ned,' said Charles, after he had patted Tim Linkinwater approvingly on the back, 'very fortunate in having two such young men about us as our nephew Frank and Mr Nickleby. It should be a source of great satisfaction and pleasure to us.'

'Certainly, Charles, certainly,' returned the other.

'Of Tim,' added brother Ned, 'I say nothing whatever, because Tim is a mere child—an infant—a nobody that we never think of or take into account at all. Tim, you villain, what do you say to that, sir?'

'I am jealous of both of 'em,' said Tim, 'and mean to look out for another situation; so provide yourselves, gentlemen, if you please.'

Tim thought this such an exquisite, unparalleled, and most extraordinary joke, that he laid his pen upon the inkstand, and rather tumbling off his stool than getting down with his usual deliberation, laughed till he was quite faint, shaking his head all the time so that little particles of powder flew palpably about the office. Nor were the brothers at all behind-hand, for they laughed almost as heartily at the ludicrous idea of any voluntary separation between themselves and old Tim. Nicholas and Mr Frank laughed quite boisterously, perhaps to conceal some other emotion awakened by this little incident, (and so, indeed, did the three old fellows after the first burst,) so perhaps there was as much keen enjoyment and relish in that laugh, altogether, as the politest assembly ever derived from the most poignant witticism uttered at any one person's expense.

'Mr Nickleby,' said brother Charles, calling him aside, and taking him kindly by the hand, 'I—I—am anxious, my dear sir, to see that you are properly and comfortably settled in the cottage. We cannot allow those who serve us well to labour under any privation or discomfort that it is in our power to remove. I wish, too, to see your mother and sister: to know them, Mr Nickleby, and have an opportunity of relieving their minds by assuring them that any trifling service we have been able to do them is a great deal more than repaid by the zeal and ardour you display.—Not a word, my dear sir, I beg. Tomorrow is Sunday. I shall make bold to come out at teatime, and take the chance of finding you at home; if you are not, you know, or the ladies should feel a delicacy in being intruded on, and would rather not be known to me just now, why I can come again another time, any other time would do for me. Let it remain upon that understanding. Brother Ned, my dear fellow, let me have a word with you this way.'

The twins went out of the office arm-in-arm, and Nicholas, who saw in this act of kindness, and many others of which he had been the subject that morning, only so many delicate renewals on the arrival of their nephew of the kind assurance which the brothers had given him in his absence, could scarcely feel sufficient admiration and gratitude for such extraordinary consideration.

The intelligence that they were to have visitor—and such a visitor—next day, awakened in the breast of Mrs Nickleby mingled feelings of exultation and regret; for whereas on the one hand she hailed it as an omen of her speedy restoration to good society and the almost-forgotten pleasures of morning calls and evening tea-drinkings, she could not, on the other, but reflect with bitterness of spirit on the absence of a silver teapot with an ivory knob on the lid, and a milk-jug to match, which had been the pride of her heart in days of yore, and had been kept from year's end to year's end wrapped up in wash-leather on a certain top shelf which now presented itself in lively colours to her sorrowing imagination.

'I wonder who's got that spice-box,' said Mrs Nickleby, shaking her head. 'It used to stand in the left-hand corner, next but two to the pickled onions. You remember that spice-box, Kate?'

'Perfectly well, mama.'

'I shouldn't think you did, Kate,' returned Mrs Nickleby, in a severe manner, 'talking about it in that cold and unfeeling way! If there is any one thing that vexes me in these losses more than the losses themselves, I do protest and declare,' said Mrs Nickleby, rubbing her nose with an impassioned air, 'that it is to have people about me who take things with such provoking calmness.'

'My dear mama,' said Kate, stealing her arm round her mother's neck, 'why do you say what I know you cannot seriously mean or think, or why be angry with me for being happy and content? You and Nicholas are left to me, we are together once again, and what regard can I have for a few trifling things of which we never feel the want? When I have seen all the misery and desolation that death can bring, and known the lonesome feeling of being solitary and alone in crowds, and all the agony of separation in grief and poverty when we most needed comfort and support from each other, can you wonder that I look upon this as a place of such delicious quiet and rest, that with you beside me I have nothing to wish for or regret? There was a time, and not long since, when all the comforts of our old home did come back upon me, I own, very often—oftener than you would think perhaps—but I affected to care nothing for them, in the hope that you would so be brought to regret them the less. I was not insensible, indeed. I might have felt happier if I had been. Dear mama,' said Kate, in great agitation, 'I know no difference between this home and that in which we were all so happy for so many years, except that the kindest and gentlest heart that ever ached on earth has passed in peace to heaven.'

'Kate my dear, Kate,' cried Mrs Nickleby, folding her in her arms.

'I have so often thought,' sobbed Kate, 'of all his kind words—of the last time he looked into my little room, as he passed upstairs to bed, and said "God bless you, darling." There was a paleness in his face, mama—the broken heart—I know it was—I little thought so—then—'

A gush of tears came to her relief, and Kate laid her head upon her mother's breast, and wept like a little child.

It is an exquisite and beautiful thing in our nature, that when the heart is touched and softened by some tranquil happiness or affectionate feeling, the memory of the dead comes over it most powerfully and irresistibly. It would almost seem as though our better thoughts and sympathies were charms, in virtue of which the soul is enabled to hold some vague and mysterious intercourse with the spirits of those whom we dearly loved in life. Alas! how often and how long may those patient angels hover above us, watching for the spell which is so seldom uttered, and so soon forgotten!

Poor Mrs Nickleby, accustomed to give ready utterance to whatever came uppermost in her mind, had never conceived the possibility of her daughter's dwelling upon these thoughts in secret, the more especially as no hard trial or querulous reproach had ever drawn them from her. But now, when the happiness of all that Nicholas had just told them, and of their new and peaceful life, brought these recollections so strongly upon Kate that she could not suppress them, Mrs Nickleby began to have a glimmering that she had been rather thoughtless now and then, and was conscious of something like self-reproach as she embraced her daughter, and yielded to the emotions which such a conversation naturally awakened.

There was a mighty bustle that night, and a vast quantity of preparation for the expected visitor, and a very large nosegay was brought from a gardener's hard by, and cut up into a number of very small ones, with which Mrs Nickleby would have garnished the little sitting-room, in a style that certainly could not have failed to attract anybody's attention, if Kate had not offered to spare her the trouble, and arranged them in the prettiest and neatest manner possible. If the cottage ever looked pretty, it must have been on such a bright and sunshiny day as the next day was. But Smike's pride in the garden, or Mrs Nickleby's in the condition of the furniture, or Kate's in everything, was nothing to the pride with which Nicholas looked at Kate herself; and surely the costliest mansion in all England might have found in her beautiful face and graceful form its most exquisite and peerless ornament.

About six o'clock in the afternoon Mrs Nickleby was thrown into a great flutter of spirits by the long-expected knock at the door, nor was this flutter at all composed by the audible tread of two pair of boots in the passage, which Mrs Nickleby augured, in a breathless state, must be 'the two Mr Cheerybles;' as it certainly was, though not the two Mrs Nickleby expected, because it was Mr Charles Cheeryble, and his nephew, Mr Frank, who made a thousand apologies for his intrusion, which Mrs Nickleby (having tea-spoons enough and to spare for all) most graciously received. Nor did the appearance of this unexpected visitor occasion the least embarrassment, (save in Kate, and that only to the extent of a blush or two at first,) for the old gentleman was so kind and cordial, and the young gentleman imitated him in this respect so well, that the usual stiffness and formality of a first meeting showed no signs of appearing, and Kate really more than once detected herself in the very act of wondering when it was going to begin.

At the tea-table there was plenty of conversation on a great variety of subjects, nor were there wanting jocose matters of discussion, such as they were; for young Mr Cheeryble's recent stay in Germany happening to be alluded to, old Mr Cheeryble informed the company that the aforesaid young Mr Cheeryble was suspected to have fallen deeply in love with the daughter of a certain German burgomaster. This accusation young Mr Cheeryble most indignantly repelled, upon which Mrs Nickleby slyly remarked, that she suspected, from the very warmth of the denial, there must be something in it. Young Mr Cheeryble then earnestly entreated old Mr Cheeryble to confess that it was all a jest, which old Mr Cheeryble at last did, young Mr Cheeryble being so much in earnest about it, that—as Mrs Nickleby said many thousand times afterwards in recalling the scene—he 'quite coloured,' which she rightly considered a memorable circumstance, and one worthy of remark, young men not being as a class remarkable for modesty or self-denial, especially when there is a lady in the case, when, if they colour at all, it is rather their practice to colour the story, and not themselves.

After tea there was a walk in the garden, and the evening being very fine they strolled out at the garden-gate into some lanes and bye-roads, and sauntered up and down until it grew quite dark. The time seemed to pass very quickly with all the party. Kate went first, leaning upon her brother's arm, and talking with him and Mr Frank Cheeryble; and Mrs Nickleby and the elder gentleman followed at a short distance, the kindness of the good merchant, his interest in the welfare of Nicholas, and his admiration of Kate, so operating upon the good lady's feelings, that the usual current of her speech was confined within very narrow and circumscribed limits. Smike (who, if he had ever been an object of interest in his life, had been one that day) accompanied them, joining sometimes one group and sometimes the other, as brother Charles, laying his hand upon his shoulder, bade him walk with him, or Nicholas, looking smilingly round, beckoned him to come and talk with the old friend who understood him best, and who could win a smile into his careworn face when none else could.

Pride is one of the seven deadly sins; but it cannot be the pride of a mother in her children, for that is a compound of two cardinal virtues—faith and hope. This was the pride which swelled Mrs Nickleby's heart that night, and this it was which left upon her face, glistening in the light when they returned home, traces of the most grateful tears she had ever shed.

There was a quiet mirth about the little supper, which harmonised exactly with this tone of feeling, and at length the two gentlemen took their leave. There was one circumstance in the leave-taking which occasioned a vast deal of smiling and pleasantry, and that was, that Mr Frank Cheeryble offered his hand to Kate twice over, quite forgetting that he had bade her adieu already. This was held by the elder Mr Cheeryble to be a convincing proof that he was thinking of his German flame, and the jest occasioned immense laughter. So easy is it to move light hearts.

In short, it was a day of serene and tranquil happiness; and as we all have some bright day—many of us, let us hope, among a crowd of others—to which we revert with particular delight, so this one was often looked back to afterwards, as holding a conspicuous place in the calendar of those who shared it.

Was there one exception, and that one he who needed to have been most happy?

Who was that who, in the silence of his own chamber, sunk upon his knees to pray as his first friend had taught him, and folding his hands and stretching them wildly in the air, fell upon his face in a passion of bitter grief?

CHAPTER 44

Mr Ralph Nickleby cuts an old Acquaintance. It would also appear from the Contents hereof, that a Joke, even between Husband and Wife, may be sometimes carried too far

There are some men who, living with the one object of enriching themselves, no matter by what means, and being perfectly conscious of the baseness and rascality of the means which they will use every day towards this end, affect nevertheless—even to themselves—a high tone of moral rectitude, and shake their heads and sigh over the depravity of the world. Some of the craftiest scoundrels that ever walked this earth, or rather—for walking implies, at least, an erect position and the bearing of a man—that ever crawled and crept through life by its dirtiest and narrowest ways, will gravely jot down in diaries the events of every day, and keep a regular debtor and creditor account with Heaven, which shall always show a floating balance in their own favour. Whether this is a gratuitous (the only gratuitous) part of the falsehood and trickery of such men's lives, or whether they really hope to cheat Heaven itself, and lay up treasure in the next world by the same process which has enabled them to lay up treasure in this—not to question how it is, so it is. And, doubtless, such book-keeping (like certain autobiographies which have enlightened the world) cannot fail to prove serviceable, in the one respect of sparing the recording Angel some time and labour.

Ralph Nickleby was not a man of this stamp. Stern, unyielding, dogged, and impenetrable, Ralph cared for nothing in life, or beyond it, save the gratification of two passions, avarice, the first and predominant appetite of his nature, and hatred, the second. Affecting to consider himself but a type of all humanity, he was at little pains to conceal his true character from the world in general, and in his own heart he exulted over and cherished every bad design as it had birth. The only scriptural admonition that Ralph Nickleby heeded, in the letter, was 'know thyself.' He knew himself well, and choosing to imagine that all mankind were cast in the same mould, hated them; for, though no man hates himself, the coldest among us having too much self-love for that, yet most men unconsciously judge the world from themselves, and it will be very generally found that those who sneer habitually at human nature, and affect to despise it, are among its worst and least pleasant samples.

But the present business of these adventures is with Ralph himself, who stood regarding Newman Noggs with a heavy frown, while that worthy took off his fingerless gloves, and spreading them carefully on the palm of his left hand, and flattening them with his right to take the creases out, proceeded to roll them up with an absent air as if he were utterly regardless of all things else, in the deep interest of the ceremonial.

'Gone out of town!' said Ralph, slowly. 'A mistake of yours. Go back again.'

'No mistake,' returned Newman. 'Not even going; gone.'

'Has he turned girl or baby?' muttered Ralph, with a fretful gesture.

'I don't know,' said Newman, 'but he's gone.'

The repetition of the word 'gone' seemed to afford Newman Noggs inexpressible delight, in proportion as it annoyed Ralph Nickleby. He uttered the word with a full round emphasis, dwelling upon it as long as he decently could, and when he could hold out no longer without attracting observation, stood gasping it to himself as if even that were a satisfaction.

'And WHERE has he gone?' said Ralph.

'France,' replied Newman. 'Danger of another attack of erysipelas—a worse attack—in the head. So the doctors ordered him off. And he's gone.'

'And Lord Frederick—?' began Ralph.

'He's gone too,' replied Newman.

'And he carries his drubbing with him, does he?' said Ralph, turning away; 'pockets his bruises, and sneaks off without the retaliation of a word, or seeking the smallest reparation!'

'He's too ill,' said Newman.

'Too ill!' repeated Ralph. 'Why I would have it if I were dying; in that case I should only be the more determined to have it, and that without delay—I mean if I were he. But he's too ill! Poor Sir Mulberry! Too ill!'

Uttering these words with supreme contempt and great irritation of manner, Ralph signed hastily to Newman to leave the room; and throwing himself into his chair, beat his foot impatiently upon the ground.

'There is some spell about that boy,' said Ralph, grinding his teeth. 'Circumstances conspire to help him. Talk of fortune's favours! What is even money to such Devil's luck as this?'

He thrust his hands impatiently into his pockets, but notwithstanding his previous reflection there was some consolation there, for his face relaxed a little; and although there was still a deep frown upon the contracted brow, it was one of calculation, and not of disappointment.

'This Hawk will come back, however,' muttered Ralph; 'and if I know the man (and I should by this time) his wrath will have lost nothing of its violence in the meanwhile. Obliged to live in retirement—the monotony of a sick-room to a man of his habits—no life—no drink—no play—nothing that he likes and lives by. He is not likely to forget his obligations to the cause of all this. Few men would; but he of all others? No, no!'

He smiled and shook his head, and resting his chin upon his hand, fell a musing, and smiled again. After a time he rose and rang the bell.

'That Mr Squeers; has he been here?' said Ralph.

'He was here last night. I left him here when I went home,' returned Newman.

'I know that, fool, do I not?' said Ralph, irascibly. 'Has he been here since? Was he here this morning?'

'No,' bawled Newman, in a very loud key.

'If he comes while I am out—he is pretty sure to be here by nine tonight—let him wait. And if there's another man with him, as there will be—perhaps,' said Ralph, checking himself, 'let him wait too.'

'Let 'em both wait?' said Newman.

'Ay,' replied Ralph, turning upon him with an angry look. 'Help me on with this spencer, and don't repeat after me, like a croaking parrot.'

'I wish I was a parrot,' Newman, sulkily.

'I wish you were,' rejoined Ralph, drawing his spencer on; 'I'd have wrung your neck long ago.'

Newman returned no answer to this compliment, but looked over Ralph's shoulder for an instant, (he was adjusting the collar of the spencer behind, just then,) as if he were strongly disposed to tweak him by the nose. Meeting Ralph's eye, however, he suddenly recalled his wandering fingers, and rubbed his own red nose with a vehemence quite astonishing.

Bestowing no further notice upon his eccentric follower than a threatening look, and an admonition to be careful and make no mistake, Ralph took his hat and gloves, and walked out.

He appeared to have a very extraordinary and miscellaneous connection, and very odd calls he made, some at great rich houses, and some at small poor ones, but all upon one subject: money. His face was a talisman to the porters and servants of his more dashing clients, and procured him ready admission, though he trudged on foot, and others, who were denied, rattled to the door in carriages. Here he was all softness and cringing civility; his step so light, that it scarcely produced a sound upon the thick carpets; his voice so soft that it was not audible beyond the person to whom it was addressed. But in the poorer habitations Ralph was another man; his boots creaked upon the passage floor as he walked boldly in; his voice was harsh and loud as he demanded the money that was overdue; his threats were coarse and angry. With another class of customers, Ralph was again another man. These were attorneys of more than doubtful reputation, who helped him to new business, or raised fresh profits upon old. With them Ralph was familiar and jocose, humorous upon the topics of the day, and especially pleasant upon bankruptcies and pecuniary difficulties that made good for trade. In short, it would have been difficult to have recognised the same man under these various aspects, but for the bulky leather case full of bills and notes which he drew from his pocket at every house, and the constant repetition of the same complaint, (varied only in tone and style of delivery,) that the world thought him rich, and that perhaps he might be if he had his own; but there was no getting money in when it was once out, either principal or interest, and it was a hard matter to live; even to live from day to day.

It was evening before a long round of such visits (interrupted only by a scanty dinner at an eating-house) terminated at Pimlico, and Ralph walked along St James's Park, on his way home.

There were some deep schemes in his head, as the puckered brow and firmly-set mouth would have abundantly testified, even if they had been unaccompanied by a complete indifference to, or unconsciousness of, the objects about him. So complete was his abstraction, however, that Ralph, usually as quick-sighted as any man, did not observe that he was followed by a shambling figure, which at one time stole behind him with noiseless footsteps, at another crept a few paces before him, and at another glided along by his side; at all times regarding him with an eye so keen, and a look so eager and attentive, that it was more like the expression of an intrusive face in some powerful picture or strongly marked dream, than the scrutiny even of a most interested and anxious observer.

The sky had been lowering and dark for some time, and the commencement of a violent storm of rain drove Ralph for shelter to a tree. He was leaning against it with folded arms, still buried in thought, when, happening to raise his eyes, he suddenly met those of a man who, creeping round the trunk, peered into his face with a searching look. There was something in the usurer's expression at the moment, which the man appeared to remember well, for it decided him; and stepping close up to Ralph, he pronounced his name.

Astonished for the moment, Ralph fell back a couple of paces and surveyed him from head to foot. A spare, dark, withered man, of about his own age, with a stooping body, and a very sinister face rendered more ill-favoured by hollow and hungry cheeks, deeply sunburnt, and thick black eyebrows, blacker in contrast with the perfect whiteness of his hair; roughly clothed in shabby garments, of a strange and uncouth make; and having about him an indefinable manner of depression and degradation—this, for a moment, was all he saw. But he looked again, and the face and person seemed gradually to grow less strange; to change as he looked, to subside and soften into lineaments that were familiar, until at last they resolved themselves, as if by some strange optical illusion, into those of one whom he had known for many years, and forgotten and lost sight of for nearly as many more.

The man saw that the recognition was mutual, and beckoning to Ralph to take his former place under the tree, and not to stand in the falling rain, of which, in his first surprise, he had been quite regardless, addressed him in a hoarse, faint tone.

'You would hardly have known me from my voice, I suppose, Mr Nickleby?' he said.

'No,' returned Ralph, bending a severe look upon him. 'Though there is something in that, that I remember now.'

'There is little in me that you can call to mind as having been there eight years ago, I dare say?' observed the other.

'Quite enough,' said Ralph, carelessly, and averting his face. 'More than enough.'

'If I had remained in doubt about YOU, Mr Nickleby,' said the other, 'this reception, and YOUR manner, would have decided me very soon.'

'Did you expect any other?' asked Ralph, sharply.

'No!' said the man.

'You were right,' retorted Ralph; 'and as you feel no surprise, need express none.'

'Mr Nickleby,' said the man, bluntly, after a brief pause, during which he had seemed to struggle with an inclination to answer him by some reproach, 'will you hear a few words that I have to say?'

'I am obliged to wait here till the rain holds a little,' said Ralph, looking abroad. 'If you talk, sir, I shall not put my fingers in my ears, though your talking may have as much effect as if I did.'

'I was once in your confidence—' thus his companion began. Ralph looked round, and smiled involuntarily.

'Well,' said the other, 'as much in your confidence as you ever chose to let anybody be.'

'Ah!' rejoined Ralph, folding his arms; 'that's another thing, quite another thing.'

'Don't let us play upon words, Mr Nickleby, in the name of humanity.'

'Of what?' said Ralph.

'Of humanity,' replied the other, sternly. 'I am hungry and in want. If the change that you must see in me after so long an absence—must see, for I, upon whom it has come by slow and hard degrees, see it and know it well—will not move you to pity, let the knowledge that bread; not the daily bread of the Lord's Prayer, which, as it is offered up in cities like this, is understood to include half the luxuries of the world for the rich, and just as much coarse food as will support life for the poor—not that, but bread, a crust of dry hard bread, is beyond my reach today—let that have some weight with you, if nothing else has.'

'If this is the usual form in which you beg, sir,' said Ralph, 'you have studied your part well; but if you will take advice from one who knows something of the world and its ways, I should recommend a lower tone; a little lower tone, or you stand a fair chance of being starved in good earnest.'

As he said this, Ralph clenched his left wrist tightly with his right hand, and inclining his head a little on one side and dropping his chin upon his breast, looked at him whom he addressed with a frowning, sullen face. The very picture of a man whom nothing could move or soften.

'Yesterday was my first day in London,' said the old man, glancing at his travel-stained dress and worn shoes.

'It would have been better for you, I think, if it had been your last also,' replied Ralph.

'I have been seeking you these two days, where I thought you were most likely to be found,' resumed the other more humbly, 'and I met you here at last, when I had almost given up the hope of encountering you, Mr Nickleby.'

He seemed to wait for some reply, but Ralph giving him none, he continued:

'I am a most miserable and wretched outcast, nearly sixty years old, and as destitute and helpless as a child of six.'

'I am sixty years old, too,' replied Ralph, 'and am neither destitute nor helpless. Work. Don't make fine play-acting speeches about bread, but earn it.'

'How?' cried the other. 'Where? Show me the means. Will you give them to me—will you?'

'I did once,' replied Ralph, composedly; 'you scarcely need ask me whether I will again.'

'It's twenty years ago, or more,' said the man, in a suppressed voice, 'since you and I fell out. You remember that? I claimed a share in the profits of some business I brought to you, and, as I persisted, you arrested me for an old advance of ten pounds, odd shillings, including interest at fifty per cent, or so.'

'I remember something of it,' replied Ralph, carelessly. 'What then?'

'That didn't part us,' said the man. 'I made submission, being on the wrong side of the bolts and bars; and as you were not the made man then that you are now, you were glad enough to take back a clerk who wasn't over nice, and who knew something of the trade you drove.'

'You begged and prayed, and I consented,' returned Ralph. 'That was kind of me. Perhaps I did want you. I forget. I should think I did, or you would have begged in vain. You were useful; not too honest, not too delicate, not too nice of hand or heart; but useful.'

'Useful, indeed!' said the man. 'Come. You had pinched and ground me down for some years before that, but I had served you faithfully up to that time, in spite of all your dog's usage. Had I?'

Ralph made no reply.

'Had I?' said the man again.

'You had had your wages,' rejoined Ralph, 'and had done your work. We stood on equal ground so far, and could both cry quits.'

'Then, but not afterwards,' said the other.

'Not afterwards, certainly, nor even then, for (as you have just said) you owed me money, and do still,' replied Ralph.

'That's not all,' said the man, eagerly. 'That's not all. Mark that. I didn't forget that old sore, trust me. Partly in remembrance of that, and partly in the hope of making money someday by the scheme, I took advantage of my position about you, and possessed myself of a hold upon you, which you would give half of all you have to know, and never can know but through me. I left you—long after that time, remember—and, for some poor trickery that came within the law, but was nothing to what you money-makers daily practise just outside its bounds, was sent away a convict for seven years. I have returned what you see me. Now, Mr Nickleby,' said the man, with a strange mixture of humility and sense of power, 'what help and assistance will you give me; what bribe, to speak out plainly? My expectations are not monstrous, but I must live, and to live I must eat and drink. Money is on your side, and hunger and thirst on mine. You may drive an easy bargain.'

'Is that all?' said Ralph, still eyeing his companion with the same steady look, and moving nothing but his lips.

'It depends on you, Mr Nickleby, whether that's all or not,' was the rejoinder.

'Why then, harkye, Mr—, I don't know by what name I am to call you,' said Ralph.

'By my old one, if you like.'

'Why then, harkye, Mr Brooker,' said Ralph, in his harshest accents, 'and don't expect to draw another speech from me. Harkye, sir. I know you of old for a ready scoundrel, but you never had a stout heart; and hard work, with (maybe) chains upon those legs of yours, and shorter food than when I "pinched" and "ground" you, has blunted your wits, or you would not come with such a tale as this to me. You a hold upon me! Keep it, or publish it to the world, if you like.'

'I can't do that,' interposed Brooker. 'That wouldn't serve me.'

'Wouldn't it?' said Ralph. 'It will serve you as much as bringing it to me, I promise you. To be plain with you, I am a careful man, and know my affairs thoroughly. I know the world, and the world knows me. Whatever you gleaned, or heard, or saw, when you served me, the world knows and magnifies already. You could tell it nothing that would surprise it, unless, indeed, it redounded to my credit or honour, and then it would scout you for a liar. And yet I don't find business slack, or clients scrupulous. Quite the contrary. I am reviled or threatened every day by one man or another,' said Ralph; 'but things roll on just the same, and I don't grow poorer either.'

'I neither revile nor threaten,' rejoined the man. 'I can tell you of what you have lost by my act, what I only can restore, and what, if I die without restoring, dies with me, and never can be regained.'

'I tell my money pretty accurately, and generally keep it in my own custody,' said Ralph. 'I look sharply after most men that I deal with, and most of all I looked sharply after you. You are welcome to all you have kept from me.'

'Are those of your own name dear to you?' said the man emphatically. 'If they are—'

'They are not,' returned Ralph, exasperated at this perseverance, and the thought of Nicholas, which the last question awakened. 'They are not. If you had come as a common beggar, I might have thrown a sixpence to you in remembrance of the clever knave you used to be; but since you try to palm these stale tricks upon one you might have known better, I'll not part with a halfpenny—nor would I to save you from rotting. And remember this, 'scape-gallows,' said Ralph, menacing him with his hand, 'that if we meet again, and you so much as notice me by one begging gesture, you shall see the inside of a jail once more, and tighten this hold upon me in intervals of the hard labour that vagabonds are put to. There's my answer to your trash. Take it.'

With a disdainful scowl at the object of his anger, who met his eye but uttered not a word, Ralph walked away at his usual pace, without manifesting the slightest curiosity to see what became of his late companion, or indeed once looking behind him. The man remained on the same spot with his eyes fixed upon his retreating figure until it was lost to view, and then drawing his arm about his chest, as if the damp and lack of food struck coldly to him, lingered with slouching steps by the wayside, and begged of those who passed along.

Ralph, in no-wise moved by what had lately passed, further than as he had already expressed himself, walked deliberately on, and turning out of the Park and leaving Golden Square on his right, took his way through some streets at the west end of the town until he arrived in that particular one in which stood the residence of Madame Mantalini. The name of that lady no longer appeared on the flaming door-plate, that of Miss Knag being substituted in its stead; but the bonnets and dresses were still dimly visible in the first-floor windows by the decaying light of a summer's evening, and excepting this ostensible alteration in the proprietorship, the establishment wore its old appearance.

'Humph!' muttered Ralph, drawing his hand across his mouth with a connoisseur-like air, and surveying the house from top to bottom; 'these people look pretty well. They can't last long; but if I know of their going in good time, I am safe, and a fair profit too. I must keep them closely in view; that's all.'

So, nodding his head very complacently, Ralph was leaving the spot, when his quick ear caught the sound of a confused noise and hubbub of voices, mingled with a great running up and down stairs, in the very house which had been the subject of his scrutiny; and while he was hesitating whether to knock at the door or listen at the keyhole a little longer, a female servant of Madame Mantalini's (whom he had often seen) opened it abruptly and bounced out, with her blue cap-ribbons streaming in the air.

'Hallo here. Stop!' cried Ralph. 'What's the matter? Here am I. Didn't you hear me knock?'

'Oh! Mr Nickleby, sir,' said the girl. 'Go up, for the love of Gracious. Master's been and done it again.'

'Done what?' said Ralph, tartly; 'what d'ye mean?'

'I knew he would if he was drove to it,' cried the girl. 'I said so all along.'

'Come here, you silly wench,' said Ralph, catching her by the wrist; 'and don't carry family matters to the neighbours, destroying the credit of the establishment. Come here; do you hear me, girl?'

Without any further expostulation, he led or rather pulled the frightened handmaid into the house, and shut the door; then bidding her walk upstairs before him, followed without more ceremony.

Guided by the noise of a great many voices all talking together, and passing the girl in his impatience, before they had ascended many steps, Ralph quickly reached the private sitting-room, when he was rather amazed by the confused and inexplicable scene in which he suddenly found himself.

There were all the young-lady workers, some with bonnets and some without, in various attitudes expressive of alarm and consternation; some gathered round Madame Mantalini, who was in tears upon one chair; and others round Miss Knag, who was in opposition tears upon another; and others round Mr Mantalini, who was perhaps the most striking figure in the whole group, for Mr Mantalini's legs were extended at full length upon the floor, and his head and shoulders were supported by a very tall footman, who didn't seem to know what to do with them, and Mr Mantalini's eyes were closed, and his face was pale and his hair was comparatively straight, and his whiskers and moustache were limp, and his teeth were clenched, and he had a little bottle in his right hand, and a little tea-spoon in his left; and his hands, arms, legs, and shoulders, were all stiff and powerless. And yet Madame Mantalini was not weeping upon the body, but was scolding violently upon her chair; and all this amidst a clamour of tongues perfectly deafening, and which really appeared to have driven the unfortunate footman to the utmost verge of distraction.

'What is the matter here?' said Ralph, pressing forward.

At this inquiry, the clamour was increased twenty-fold, and an astounding string of such shrill contradictions as 'He's poisoned himself'—'He hasn't'—'Send for a doctor'—'Don't'—'He's dying'—'He isn't, he's only pretending'—with various other cries, poured forth with bewildering volubility, until Madame Mantalini was seen to address herself to Ralph, when female curiosity to know what she would say, prevailed, and, as if by general consent, a dead silence, unbroken by a single whisper, instantaneously succeeded.

'Mr Nickleby,' said Madame Mantalini; 'by what chance you came here, I don't know.'

Here a gurgling voice was heard to ejaculate, as part of the wanderings of a sick man, the words 'Demnition sweetness!' but nobody heeded them except the footman, who, being startled to hear such awful tones proceeding, as it were, from between his very fingers, dropped his master's head upon the floor with a pretty loud crash, and then, without an effort to lift it up, gazed upon the bystanders, as if he had done something rather clever than otherwise.

'I will, however,' continued Madame Mantalini, drying her eyes, and speaking with great indignation, 'say before you, and before everybody here, for the first time, and once for all, that I never will supply that man's extravagances and viciousness again. I have been a dupe and a fool to him long enough. In future, he shall support himself if he can, and then he may spend what money he pleases, upon whom and how he pleases; but it shall not be mine, and therefore you had better pause before you trust him further.'

Thereupon Madame Mantalini, quite unmoved by some most pathetic lamentations on the part of her husband, that the apothecary had not mixed the prussic acid strong enough, and that he must take another bottle or two to finish the work he had in hand, entered into a catalogue of that amiable gentleman's gallantries, deceptions, extravagances, and infidelities (especially the last), winding up with a protest against being supposed to entertain the smallest remnant of regard for him; and adducing, in proof of the altered state of her affections, the circumstance of his having poisoned himself in private no less than six times within the last fortnight, and her not having once interfered by word or deed to save his life.

'And I insist on being separated and left to myself,' said Madame Mantalini, sobbing. 'If he dares to refuse me a separation, I'll have one in law—I can—and I hope this will be a warning to all girls who have seen this disgraceful exhibition.'

Miss Knag, who was unquestionably the oldest girl in company, said with great solemnity, that it would be a warning to HER, and so did the young ladies generally, with the exception of one or two who appeared to entertain some doubts whether such whispers could do wrong.

'Why do you say all this before so many listeners?' said Ralph, in a low voice. 'You know you are not in earnest.'

'I AM in earnest,' replied Madame Mantalini, aloud, and retreating towards Miss Knag.

'Well, but consider,' reasoned Ralph, who had a great interest in the matter. 'It would be well to reflect. A married woman has no property.'

'Not a solitary single individual dem, my soul,' and Mr Mantalini, raising himself upon his elbow.

'I am quite aware of that,' retorted Madame Mantalini, tossing her head; 'and I have none. The business, the stock, this house, and everything in it, all belong to Miss Knag.'

'That's quite true, Madame Mantalini,' said Miss Knag, with whom her late employer had secretly come to an amicable understanding on this point. 'Very true, indeed, Madame Mantalini—hem—very true. And I never was more glad in all my life, that I had strength of mind to resist matrimonial offers, no matter how advantageous, than I am when I think of my present position as compared with your most unfortunate and most undeserved one, Madame Mantalini.'

'Demmit!' cried Mr Mantalini, turning his head towards his wife. 'Will it not slap and pinch the envious dowager, that dares to reflect upon its own delicious?'

But the day of Mr Mantalini's blandishments had departed. 'Miss Knag, sir,' said his wife, 'is my particular friend;' and although Mr Mantalini leered till his eyes seemed in danger of never coming back to their right places again, Madame Mantalini showed no signs of softening.

To do the excellent Miss Knag justice, she had been mainly instrumental in bringing about this altered state of things, for, finding by daily experience, that there was no chance of the business thriving, or even continuing to exist, while Mr Mantalini had any hand in the expenditure, and having now a considerable interest in its well-doing, she had sedulously applied herself to the investigation of some little matters connected with that gentleman's private character, which she had so well elucidated, and artfully imparted to Madame Mantalini, as to open her eyes more effectually than the closest and most philosophical reasoning could have done in a series of years. To which end, the accidental discovery by Miss Knag of some tender correspondence, in which Madame Mantalini was described as 'old' and 'ordinary,' had most providentially contributed.

However, notwithstanding her firmness, Madame Mantalini wept very piteously; and as she leant upon Miss Knag, and signed towards the door, that young lady and all the other young ladies with sympathising faces, proceeded to bear her out.

'Nickleby,' said Mr Mantalini in tears, 'you have been made a witness to this demnition cruelty, on the part of the demdest enslaver and captivator that never was, oh dem! I forgive that woman.'

'Forgive!' repeated Madame Mantalini, angrily.

'I do forgive her, Nickleby,' said Mr Mantalini. 'You will blame me, the world will blame me, the women will blame me; everybody will laugh, and scoff, and smile, and grin most demnebly. They will say, "She had a blessing. She did not know it. He was too weak; he was too good; he was a dem'd fine fellow, but he loved too strong; he could not bear her to be cross, and call him wicked names. It was a dem'd case, there never was a demder." But I forgive her.'

With this affecting speech Mr Mantalini fell down again very flat, and lay to all appearance without sense or motion, until all the females had left the room, when he came cautiously into a sitting posture, and confronted Ralph with a very blank face, and the little bottle still in one hand and the tea-spoon in the other.

'You may put away those fooleries now, and live by your wits again,' said Ralph, coolly putting on his hat.

'Demmit, Nickleby, you're not serious?'

'I seldom joke,' said Ralph. 'Good-night.'

'No, but Nickleby—' said Mantalini.

'I am wrong, perhaps,' rejoined Ralph. 'I hope so. You should know best. Good-night.'

Affecting not to hear his entreaties that he would stay and advise with him, Ralph left the crest-fallen Mr Mantalini to his meditations, and left the house quietly.

'Oho!' he said, 'sets the wind that way so soon? Half knave and half fool, and detected in both characters? I think your day is over, sir.'

As he said this, he made some memorandum in his pocket-book in which Mr Mantalini's name figured conspicuously, and finding by his watch that it was between nine and ten o'clock, made all speed home.

'Are they here?' was the first question he asked of Newman.

Newman nodded. 'Been here half an hour.'

'Two of them? One a fat sleek man?'

'Ay,' said Newman. 'In your room now.'

'Good,' rejoined Ralph. 'Get me a coach.'

'A coach! What, you—going to—eh?' stammered Newman.

Ralph angrily repeated his orders, and Noggs, who might well have been excused for wondering at such an unusual and extraordinary circumstance (for he had never seen Ralph in a coach in his life) departed on his errand, and presently returned with the conveyance.

Into it went Mr Squeers, and Ralph, and the third man, whom Newman Noggs had never seen. Newman stood upon the door-step to see them off, not troubling himself to wonder where or upon what business they were going, until he chanced by mere accident to hear Ralph name the address whither the coachman was to drive.

Quick as lightning and in a state of the most extreme wonder, Newman darted into his little office for his hat, and limped after the coach as if with the intention of getting up behind; but in this design he was balked, for it had too much the start of him and was soon hopelessly ahead, leaving him gaping in the empty street.

'I don't know though,' said Noggs, stopping for breath, 'any good that I could have done by going too. He would have seen me if I had. Drive THERE! What can come of this? If I had only known it yesterday I could have told—drive there! There's mischief in it. There must be.'

His reflections were interrupted by a grey-haired man of a very remarkable, though far from prepossessing appearance, who, coming stealthily towards him, solicited relief.

Newman, still cogitating deeply, turned away; but the man followed him, and pressed him with such a tale of misery that Newman (who might have been considered a hopeless person to beg from, and who had little enough to give) looked into his hat for some halfpence which he usually kept screwed up, when he had any, in a corner of his pocket-handkerchief.

While he was busily untwisting the knot with his teeth, the man said something which attracted his attention; whatever that something was, it led to something else, and in the end he and Newman walked away side by side—the strange man talking earnestly, and Newman listening.

CHAPTER 45

Containing Matter of a surprising Kind

'As we gang awa' fra' Lunnun tomorrow neeght, and as I dinnot know that I was e'er so happy in a' my days, Misther Nickleby, Ding! but I WILL tak' anoother glass to our next merry meeting!'

So said John Browdie, rubbing his hands with great joyousness, and looking round him with a ruddy shining face, quite in keeping with the declaration.

The time at which John found himself in this enviable condition was the same evening to which the last chapter bore reference; the place was the cottage; and the assembled company were Nicholas, Mrs Nickleby, Mrs Browdie, Kate Nickleby, and Smike.

A very merry party they had been. Mrs Nickleby, knowing of her son's obligations to the honest Yorkshireman, had, after some demur, yielded her consent to Mr and Mrs Browdie being invited out to tea; in the way of which arrangement, there were at first sundry difficulties and obstacles, arising out of her not having had an opportunity of 'calling' upon Mrs Browdie first; for although Mrs Nickleby very often observed with much complacency (as most punctilious people do), that she had not an atom of pride or formality about her, still she was a great stickler for dignity and ceremonies; and as it was manifest that, until a call had been made, she could not be (politely speaking, and according to the laws of society) even cognisant of the fact of Mrs Browdie's existence, she felt her situation to be one of peculiar delicacy and difficulty.

'The call MUST originate with me, my dear,' said Mrs Nickleby, 'that's indispensable. The fact is, my dear, that it's necessary there should be a sort of condescension on my part, and that I should show this young person that I am willing to take notice of her. There's a very respectable-looking young man,' added Mrs Nickleby, after a short consideration, 'who is conductor to one of the omnibuses that go by here, and who wears a glazed hat—your sister and I have noticed him very often—he has a wart upon his nose, Kate, you know, exactly like a gentleman's servant.'

'Have all gentlemen's servants warts upon their noses, mother?' asked Nicholas.

'Nicholas, my dear, how very absurd you are,' returned his mother; 'of course I mean that his glazed hat looks like a gentleman's servant, and not the wart upon his nose; though even that is not so ridiculous as it may seem to you, for we had a footboy once, who had not only a wart, but a wen also, and a very large wen too, and he demanded to have his wages raised in consequence, because he found it came very expensive. Let me see, what was I—oh yes, I know. The best way that I can think of would be to send a card, and my compliments, (I've no doubt he'd take 'em for a pot of porter,) by this young man, to the Saracen with Two Necks. If the waiter took him for a gentleman's servant, so much the better. Then all Mrs Browdie would have to do would be to send her card back by the carrier (he could easily come with a double knock), and there's an end of it.'

'My dear mother,' said Nicholas, 'I don't suppose such unsophisticated people as these ever had a card of their own, or ever will have.'

'Oh that, indeed, Nicholas, my dear,' returned Mrs Nickleby, 'that's another thing. If you put it upon that ground, why, of course, I have no more to say, than that I have no doubt they are very good sort of persons, and that I have no kind of objection to their coming here to tea if they like, and shall make a point of being very civil to them if they do.'

The point being thus effectually set at rest, and Mrs Nickleby duly placed in the patronising and mildly-condescending position which became her rank and matrimonial years, Mr and Mrs Browdie were invited and came; and as they were very deferential to Mrs Nickleby, and seemed to have a becoming appreciation of her greatness, and were very much pleased with everything, the good lady had more than once given Kate to understand, in a whisper, that she thought they were the very best-meaning people she had ever seen, and perfectly well behaved.

And thus it came to pass, that John Browdie declared, in the parlour after supper, to wit, and twenty minutes before eleven o'clock p.m., that he had never been so happy in all his days.

Nor was Mrs Browdie much behind her husband in this respect, for that young matron, whose rustic beauty contrasted very prettily with the more delicate loveliness of Kate, and without suffering by the contrast either, for each served as it were to set off and decorate the other, could not sufficiently admire the gentle and winning manners of the young lady, or the engaging affability of the elder one. Then Kate had the art of turning the conversation to subjects upon which the country girl, bashful at first in strange company, could feel herself at home; and if Mrs Nickleby was not quite so felicitous at times in the selection of topics of discourse, or if she did seem, as Mrs Browdie expressed it, 'rather high in her notions,' still nothing could be kinder, and that she took considerable interest in the young couple was manifest from the very long lectures on housewifery with which she was so obliging as to entertain Mrs Browdie's private ear, which were illustrated by various references to the domestic economy of the cottage, in which (those duties falling exclusively upon Kate) the good lady had about as much share, either in theory or practice, as any one of the statues of the Twelve Apostles which embellish the exterior of St Paul's Cathedral.

'Mr Browdie,' said Kate, addressing his young wife, 'is the best-humoured, the kindest and heartiest creature I ever saw. If I were oppressed with I don't know how many cares, it would make me happy only to look at him.'

'He does seem indeed, upon my word, a most excellent creature, Kate,' said Mrs Nickleby; 'most excellent. And I am sure that at all times it will give me pleasure—really pleasure now—to have you, Mrs Browdie, to see me in this plain and homely manner. We make no display,' said Mrs Nickleby, with an air which seemed to insinuate that they could make a vast deal if they were so disposed; 'no fuss, no preparation; I wouldn't allow it. I said, "Kate, my dear, you will only make Mrs Browdie feel uncomfortable, and how very foolish and inconsiderate that would be!"'

'I am very much obliged to you, I am sure, ma'am,' returned Mrs Browdie, gratefully. 'It's nearly eleven o'clock, John. I am afraid we are keeping you up very late, ma'am.'

'Late!' cried Mrs Nickleby, with a sharp thin laugh, and one little cough at the end, like a note of admiration expressed. 'This is quite early for us. We used to keep such hours! Twelve, one, two, three o'clock was nothing to us. Balls, dinners, card-parties! Never were such rakes as the people about where we used to live. I often think now, I am sure, that how we ever could go through with it is quite astonishing, and that is just the evil of having a large connection and being a great deal sought after, which I would recommend all young married people steadily to resist; though of course, and it's perfectly clear, and a very happy thing too, I think, that very few young married people can be exposed to such temptations. There was one family in particular, that used to live about a mile from us—not straight down the road, but turning sharp off to the left by the turnpike where the Plymouth mail ran over the donkey—that were quite extraordinary people for giving the most extravagant parties, with artificial flowers and champagne, and variegated lamps, and, in short, every delicacy of eating and drinking that the most singular epicure could possibly require. I don't think that there ever were such people as those Peltiroguses. You remember the Peltiroguses, Kate?'

Kate saw that for the ease and comfort of the visitors it was high time to stay this flood of recollection, so answered that she entertained of the Peltiroguses a most vivid and distinct remembrance; and then said that Mr Browdie had half promised, early in the evening, that he would sing a Yorkshire song, and that she was most impatient that he should redeem his promise, because she was sure it would afford her mama more amusement and pleasure than it was possible to express.

Mrs Nickleby confirming her daughter with the best possible grace—for there was patronage in that too, and a kind of implication that she had a discerning taste in such matters, and was something of a critic—John Browdie proceeded to consider the words of some north-country ditty, and to take his wife's recollection respecting the same. This done, he made divers ungainly movements in his chair, and singling out one particular fly on the ceiling from the other flies there asleep, fixed his eyes upon him, and began to roar a meek sentiment (supposed to be uttered by a gentle swain fast pining away with love and despair) in a voice of thunder.

At the end of the first verse, as though some person without had waited until then to make himself audible, was heard a loud and violent knocking at the street-door; so loud and so violent, indeed, that the ladies started as by one accord, and John Browdie stopped.

'It must be some mistake,' said Nicholas, carelessly. 'We know nobody who would come here at this hour.'

Mrs Nickleby surmised, however, that perhaps the counting-house was burnt down, or perhaps 'the Mr Cheerybles' had sent to take Nicholas into partnership (which certainly appeared highly probable at that time of night), or perhaps Mr Linkinwater had run away with the property, or perhaps Miss La Creevy was taken in, or perhaps—

But a hasty exclamation from Kate stopped her abruptly in her conjectures, and Ralph Nickleby walked into the room.

'Stay,' said Ralph, as Nicholas rose, and Kate, making her way towards him, threw herself upon his arm. 'Before that boy says a word, hear me.'

Nicholas bit his lip and shook his head in a threatening manner, but appeared for the moment unable to articulate a syllable. Kate clung closer to his arm, Smike retreated behind them, and John Browdie, who had heard of Ralph, and appeared to have no great difficulty in recognising him, stepped between the old man and his young friend, as if with the intention of preventing either of them from advancing a step further.

'Hear me, I say,' said Ralph, 'and not him.'

'Say what thou'st gotten to say then, sir,' retorted John; 'and tak' care thou dinnot put up angry bluid which thou'dst betther try to quiet.'

'I should know YOU,' said Ralph, 'by your tongue; and HIM' (pointing to Smike) 'by his looks.'

'Don't speak to him,' said Nicholas, recovering his voice. 'I will not have it. I will not hear him. I do not know that man. I cannot breathe the air that he corrupts. His presence is an insult to my sister. It is shame to see him. I will not bear it.'

'Stand!' cried John, laying his heavy hand upon his chest.

'Then let him instantly retire,' said Nicholas, struggling. 'I am not going to lay hands upon him, but he shall withdraw. I will not have him here. John, John Browdie, is this my house, am I a child? If he stands there,' cried Nicholas, burning with fury, 'looking so calmly upon those who know his black and dastardly heart, he'll drive me mad.'

To all these exclamations John Browdie answered not a word, but he retained his hold upon Nicholas; and when he was silent again, spoke.

'There's more to say and hear than thou think'st for,' said John. 'I tell'ee I ha' gotten scent o' thot already. Wa'at be that shadow ootside door there? Noo, schoolmeasther, show thyself, mun; dinnot be sheame-feaced. Noo, auld gen'l'man, let's have schoolmeasther, coom.'

Hearing this adjuration, Mr Squeers, who had been lingering in the passage until such time as it should be expedient for him to enter and he could appear with effect, was fain to present himself in a somewhat undignified and sneaking way; at which John Browdie laughed with such keen and heartfelt delight, that even Kate, in all the pain, anxiety, and surprise of the scene, and though the tears were in her eyes, felt a disposition to join him.

'Have you done enjoying yourself, sir?' said Ralph, at length.

'Pratty nigh for the prasant time, sir,' replied John.

'I can wait,' said Ralph. 'Take your own time, pray.'

Ralph waited until there was a perfect silence, and then turning to Mrs Nickleby, but directing an eager glance at Kate, as if more anxious to watch his effect upon her, said:

'Now, ma'am, listen to me. I don't imagine that you were a party to a very fine tirade of words sent me by that boy of yours, because I don't believe that under his control, you have the slightest will of your own, or that your advice, your opinion, your wants, your wishes, anything which in nature and reason (or of what use is your great experience?) ought to weigh with him, has the slightest influence or weight whatever, or is taken for a moment into account.'

Mrs Nickleby shook her head and sighed, as if there were a good deal in that, certainly.

'For this reason,' resumed Ralph, 'I address myself to you, ma'am. For this reason, partly, and partly because I do not wish to be disgraced by the acts of a vicious stripling whom I was obliged to disown, and who, afterwards, in his boyish majesty, feigns to—ha! ha!—to disown ME, I present myself here tonight. I have another motive in coming: a motive of humanity. I come here,' said Ralph, looking round with a biting and triumphant smile, and gloating and dwelling upon the words as if he were loath to lose the pleasure of saying them, 'to restore a parent his child. Ay, sir,' he continued, bending eagerly forward, and addressing Nicholas, as he marked the change of his countenance, 'to restore a parent his child; his son, sir; trepanned, waylaid, and guarded at every turn by you, with the base design of robbing him some day of any little wretched pittance of which he might become possessed.'

'In that, you know you lie,' said Nicholas, proudly.

'In this, I know I speak the truth. I have his father here,' retorted Ralph.

'Here!' sneered Squeers, stepping forward. 'Do you hear that? Here! Didn't I tell you to be careful that his father didn't turn up and send him back to me? Why, his father's my friend; he's to come back to me directly, he is. Now, what do you say—eh!—now—come—what do you say to that—an't you sorry you took so much trouble for nothing? an't you? an't you?'

'You bear upon your body certain marks I gave you,' said Nicholas, looking quietly away, 'and may talk in acknowledgment of them as much as you please. You'll talk a long time before you rub them out, Mr Squeers.'

The estimable gentleman last named cast a hasty look at the table, as if he were prompted by this retort to throw a jug or bottle at the head of Nicholas, but he was interrupted in this design (if such design he had) by Ralph, who, touching him on the elbow, bade him tell the father that he might now appear and claim his son.

This being purely a labour of love, Mr Squeers readily complied, and leaving the room for the purpose, almost immediately returned, supporting a sleek personage with an oily face, who, bursting from him, and giving to view the form and face of Mr Snawley, made straight up to Smike, and tucking that poor fellow's head under his arm in a most uncouth and awkward embrace, elevated his broad-brimmed hat at arm's length in the air as a token of devout thanksgiving, exclaiming, meanwhile, 'How little did I think of this here joyful meeting, when I saw him last! Oh, how little did I think it!'

'Be composed, sir,' said Ralph, with a gruff expression of sympathy, 'you have got him now.'

'Got him! Oh, haven't I got him! Have I got him, though?' cried Mr Snawley, scarcely able to believe it. 'Yes, here he is, flesh and blood, flesh and blood.'

'Vary little flesh,' said John Browdie.

Mr Snawley was too much occupied by his parental feelings to notice this remark; and, to assure himself more completely of the restoration of his child, tucked his head under his arm again, and kept it there.

'What was it,' said Snawley, 'that made me take such a strong interest in him, when that worthy instructor of youth brought him to my house? What was it that made me burn all over with a wish to chastise him severely for cutting away from his best friends, his pastors and masters?'

'It was parental instinct, sir,' observed Squeers.

'That's what it was, sir,' rejoined Snawley; 'the elevated feeling, the feeling of the ancient Romans and Grecians, and of the beasts of the field and birds of the air, with the exception of rabbits and tom-cats, which sometimes devour their offspring. My heart yearned towards him. I could have—I don't know what I couldn't have done to him in the anger of a father.'

'It only shows what Natur is, sir,' said Mr Squeers. 'She's rum 'un, is Natur.'

'She is a holy thing, sir,' remarked Snawley.

'I believe you,' added Mr Squeers, with a moral sigh. 'I should like to know how we should ever get on without her. Natur,' said Mr Squeers, solemnly, 'is more easier conceived than described. Oh what a blessed thing, sir, to be in a state of natur!'

Pending this philosophical discourse, the bystanders had been quite stupefied with amazement, while Nicholas had looked keenly from Snawley to Squeers, and from Squeers to Ralph, divided between his feelings of disgust, doubt, and surprise. At this juncture, Smike escaping from his father fled to Nicholas, and implored him, in most moving terms, never to give him up, but to let him live and die beside him.

'If you are this boy's father,' said Nicholas, 'look at the wreck he is, and tell me that you purpose to send him back to that loathsome den from which I brought him.'

'Scandal again!' cried Squeers. 'Recollect, you an't worth powder and shot, but I'll be even with you one way or another.'

'Stop,' interposed Ralph, as Snawley was about to speak. 'Let us cut this matter short, and not bandy words here with hare-brained profligates. This is your son, as you can prove. And you, Mr Squeers, you know this boy to be the same that was with you for so many years under the name of Smike. Do you?'

'Do I!' returned Squeers. 'Don't I?'

'Good,' said Ralph; 'a very few words will be sufficient here. You had a son by your first wife, Mr Snawley?'

'I had,' replied that person, 'and there he stands.'

'We'll show that presently,' said Ralph. 'You and your wife were separated, and she had the boy to live with her, when he was a year old. You received a communication from her, when you had lived apart a year or two, that the boy was dead; and you believed it?'

'Of course I did!' returned Snawley. 'Oh the joy of—'

'Be rational, sir, pray,' said Ralph. 'This is business, and transports interfere with it. This wife died a year and a half ago, or thereabouts—not more—in some obscure place, where she was housekeeper in a family. Is that the case?'

'That's the case,' replied Snawley.

'Having written on her death-bed a letter or confession to you, about this very boy, which, as it was not directed otherwise than in your name, only reached you, and that by a circuitous course, a few days since?'

'Just so,' said Snawley. 'Correct in every particular, sir.'

'And this confession,' resumed Ralph, 'is to the effect that his death was an invention of hers to wound you—was a part of a system of annoyance, in short, which you seem to have adopted towards each other—that the boy lived, but was of weak and imperfect intellect—that she sent him by a trusty hand to a cheap school in Yorkshire—that she had paid for his education for some years, and then, being poor, and going a long way off, gradually deserted him, for which she prayed forgiveness?'

Snawley nodded his head, and wiped his eyes; the first slightly, the last violently.

'The school was Mr Squeers's,' continued Ralph; 'the boy was left there in the name of Smike; every description was fully given, dates tally exactly with Mr Squeers's books, Mr Squeers is lodging with you at this time; you have two other boys at his school: you communicated the whole discovery to him, he brought you to me as the person who had recommended to him the kidnapper of his child; and I brought you here. Is that so?'

'You talk like a good book, sir, that's got nothing in its inside but what's the truth,' replied Snawley.

'This is your pocket-book,' said Ralph, producing one from his coat; 'the certificates of your first marriage and of the boy's birth, and your wife's two letters, and every other paper that can support these statements directly or by implication, are here, are they?'

'Every one of 'em, sir.'

'And you don't object to their being looked at here, so that these people may be convinced of your power to substantiate your claim at once in law and reason, and you may resume your control over your own son without more delay. Do I understand you?'

'I couldn't have understood myself better, sir.'

'There, then,' said Ralph, tossing the pocket-book upon the table. 'Let them see them if they like; and as those are the original papers, I should recommend you to stand near while they are being examined, or you may chance to lose some.'

With these words Ralph sat down unbidden, and compressing his lips, which were for the moment slightly parted by a smile, folded his arms, and looked for the first time at his nephew.

Nicholas, stung by the concluding taunt, darted an indignant glance at him; but commanding himself as well as he could, entered upon a close examination of the documents, at which John Browdie assisted. There was nothing about them which could be called in question. The certificates were regularly signed as extracts from the parish books, the first letter had a genuine appearance of having been written and preserved for some years, the handwriting of the second tallied with it exactly, (making proper allowance for its having been written by a person in extremity,) and there were several other corroboratory scraps of entries and memoranda which it was equally difficult to question.

'Dear Nicholas,' whispered Kate, who had been looking anxiously over his shoulder, 'can this be really the case? Is this statement true?'

'I fear it is,' answered Nicholas. 'What say you, John?'

'John scratched his head and shook it, but said nothing at all.

'You will observe, ma'am,' said Ralph, addressing himself to Mrs Nickleby, 'that this boy being a minor and not of strong mind, we might have come here tonight, armed with the powers of the law, and backed by a troop of its myrmidons. I should have done so, ma'am, unquestionably, but for my regard for the feelings of yourself, and your daughter.'

'You have shown your regard for HER feelings well,' said Nicholas, drawing his sister towards him.

'Thank you,' replied Ralph. 'Your praise, sir, is commendation, indeed.'

'Well,' said Squeers, 'what's to be done? Them hackney-coach horses will catch cold if we don't think of moving; there's one of 'em a sneezing now, so that he blows the street door right open. What's the order of the day? Is Master Snawley to come along with us?'

'No, no, no,' replied Smike, drawing back, and clinging to Nicholas.

'No. Pray, no. I will not go from you with him. No, no.'

'This is a cruel thing,' said Snawley, looking to his friends for support. 'Do parents bring children into the world for this?'

'Do parents bring children into the world for THOT?' said John Browdie bluntly, pointing, as he spoke, to Squeers.

'Never you mind,' retorted that gentleman, tapping his nose derisively.

'Never I mind!' said John, 'no, nor never nobody mind, say'st thou, schoolmeasther. It's nobody's minding that keeps sike men as thou afloat.

Noo then, where be'est thou coomin' to? Dang it, dinnot coom treadin' ower me, mun.'

Suiting the action to the word, John Browdie just jerked his elbow into the chest of Mr Squeers who was advancing upon Smike; with so much dexterity that the schoolmaster reeled and staggered back upon Ralph Nickleby, and being unable to recover his balance, knocked that gentleman off his chair, and stumbled heavily upon him.

This accidental circumstance was the signal for some very decisive proceedings. In the midst of a great noise, occasioned by the prayers and entreaties of Smike, the cries and exclamations of the women, and the vehemence of the men, demonstrations were made of carrying off the lost son by violence. Squeers had actually begun to haul him out, when Nicholas (who, until then, had been evidently undecided how to act) took him by the collar, and shaking him so that such teeth as he had, chattered in his head, politely escorted him to the room-door, and thrusting him into the passage, shut it upon him.

'Now,' said Nicholas to the other two, 'have the goodness to follow your friend.'

'I want my son,' said Snawley.

'Your son,' replied Nicholas, 'chooses for himself. He chooses to remain here, and he shall.'

'You won't give him up?' said Snawley.

'I would not give him up against his will, to be the victim of such brutality as that to which you would consign him,' replied Nicholas, 'if he were a dog or a rat.'

'Knock that Nickleby down with a candlestick,' cried Mr Squeers, through the keyhole, 'and bring out my hat, somebody, will you, unless he wants to steal it.'

'I am very sorry, indeed,' said Mrs Nickleby, who, with Mrs Browdie, had stood crying and biting her fingers in a corner, while Kate (very pale, but perfectly quiet) had kept as near her brother as she could. 'I am very sorry, indeed, for all this. I really don't know what would be best to do, and that's the truth. Nicholas ought to be the best judge, and I hope he is. Of course, it's a hard thing to have to keep other people's children, though young Mr Snawley is certainly as useful and willing as it's possible for anybody to be; but, if it could be settled in any friendly manner—if old Mr Snawley, for instance, would settle to pay something certain for his board and lodging, and some fair arrangement was come to, so that we undertook to have fish twice a week, and a pudding twice, or a dumpling, or something of that sort—I do think that it might be very satisfactory and pleasant for all parties.'

This compromise, which was proposed with abundance of tears and sighs, not exactly meeting the point at issue, nobody took any notice of it; and poor Mrs Nickleby accordingly proceeded to enlighten Mrs Browdie upon the advantages of such a scheme, and the unhappy results flowing, on all occasions, from her not being attended to when she proffered her advice.

'You, sir,' said Snawley, addressing the terrified Smike, 'are an unnatural, ungrateful, unlovable boy. You won't let me love you when I want to. Won't you come home, won't you?'

'No, no, no,' cried Smike, shrinking back.

'He never loved nobody,' bawled Squeers, through the keyhole. 'He never loved me; he never loved Wackford, who is next door but one to a cherubim. How can you expect that he'll love his father? He'll never love his father, he won't. He don't know what it is to have a father. He don't understand it. It an't in him.'

Mr Snawley looked steadfastly at his son for a full minute, and then covering his eyes with his hand, and once more raising his hat in the air, appeared deeply occupied in deploring his black ingratitude. Then drawing his arm across his eyes, he picked up Mr Squeers's hat, and taking it under one arm, and his own under the other, walked slowly and sadly out.

'Your romance, sir,' said Ralph, lingering for a moment, 'is destroyed, I take it. No unknown; no persecuted descendant of a man of high degree; but the weak, imbecile son of a poor, petty tradesman. We shall see how your sympathy melts before plain matter of fact.'

'You shall,' said Nicholas, motioning towards the door.

'And trust me, sir,' added Ralph, 'that I never supposed you would give him up tonight. Pride, obstinacy, reputation for fine feeling, were all against it. These must be brought down, sir, lowered, crushed, as they shall be soon. The protracted and wearing anxiety and expense of the law in its most oppressive form, its torture from hour to hour, its weary days and sleepless nights, with these I'll prove you, and break your haughty spirit, strong as you deem it now. And when you make this house a hell, and visit these trials upon yonder wretched object (as you will; I know you), and those who think you now a young-fledged hero, we'll go into old accounts between us two, and see who stands the debtor, and comes out best at last, even before the world.'

Ralph Nickleby withdrew. But Mr Squeers, who had heard a portion of this closing address, and was by this time wound up to a pitch of impotent malignity almost unprecedented, could not refrain from returning to the parlour door, and actually cutting some dozen capers with various wry faces and hideous grimaces, expressive of his triumphant confidence in the downfall and defeat of Nicholas.

Having concluded this war-dance, in which his short trousers and large boots had borne a very conspicuous figure, Mr Squeers followed his friends, and the family were left to meditate upon recent occurrences.

CHAPTER 46

Throws some Light upon Nicholas's Love; but whether for Good or Evil the Reader must determine

After an anxious consideration of the painful and embarrassing position in which he was placed, Nicholas decided that he ought to lose no time in frankly stating it to the kind brothers. Availing himself of the first opportunity of being alone with Mr Charles Cheeryble at the close of next day, he accordingly related Smike's little history, and modestly but firmly expressed his hope that the good old gentleman would, under such circumstances as he described, hold him justified in adopting the extreme course of interfering between parent and child, and upholding the latter in his disobedience; even though his horror and dread of his father might seem, and would doubtless be represented as, a thing so repulsive and unnatural, as to render those who countenanced him in it, fit objects of general detestation and abhorrence.

'So deeply rooted does this horror of the man appear to be,' said Nicholas, 'that I can hardly believe he really is his son. Nature does not seem to have implanted in his breast one lingering feeling of affection for him, and surely she can never err.'

'My dear sir,' replied brother Charles, 'you fall into the very common mistake of charging upon Nature, matters with which she has not the smallest connection, and for which she is in no way responsible. Men talk of Nature as an abstract thing, and lose sight of what is natural while they do so. Here is a poor lad who has never felt a parent's care, who has scarcely known anything all his life but suffering and sorrow, presented to a man who he is told is his father, and whose first act is to signify his intention of putting an end to his short term of happiness, of consigning him to his old fate, and taking him from the only friend he has ever had—which is yourself. If Nature, in such a case, put into that lad's breast but one secret prompting which urged him towards his father and away from you, she would be a liar and an idiot.'

Nicholas was delighted to find that the old gentleman spoke so warmly, and in the hope that he might say something more to the same purpose, made no reply.

'The same mistake presents itself to me, in one shape or other, at every turn,' said brother Charles. 'Parents who never showed their love, complain of want of natural affection in their children; children who never showed their duty, complain of want of natural feeling in their parents; law-makers who find both so miserable that their affections have never had enough of life's sun to develop them, are loud in their moralisings over parents and children too, and cry that the very ties of nature are disregarded. Natural affections and instincts, my dear sir, are the most beautiful of the Almighty's works, but like other beautiful works of His, they must be reared and fostered, or it is as natural that they should be wholly obscured, and that new feelings should usurp their place, as it is that the sweetest productions of the earth, left untended, should be choked with weeds and briers. I wish we could be brought to consider this, and remembering natural obligations a little more at the right time, talk about them a little less at the wrong one.'

After this, brother Charles, who had talked himself into a great heat, stopped to cool a little, and then continued:

'I dare say you are surprised, my dear sir, that I have listened to your recital with so little astonishment. That is easily explained. Your uncle has been here this morning.'

Nicholas coloured, and drew back a step or two.

'Yes,' said the old gentleman, tapping his desk emphatically, 'here, in this room. He would listen neither to reason, feeling, nor justice. But brother Ned was hard upon him; brother Ned, sir, might have melted a paving-stone.'

'He came to—' said Nicholas.

'To complain of you,' returned brother Charles, 'to poison our ears with calumnies and falsehoods; but he came on a fruitless errand, and went away with some wholesome truths in his ear besides. Brother Ned, my dear My Nickleby—brother Ned, sir, is a perfect lion. So is Tim Linkinwater; Tim is quite a lion. We had Tim in to face him at first, and Tim was at him, sir, before you could say "Jack Robinson."'

'How can I ever thank you for all the deep obligations you impose upon me every day?' said Nicholas.

'By keeping silence upon the subject, my dear sir,' returned brother Charles. 'You shall be righted. At least you shall not be wronged. Nobody belonging to you shall be wronged. They shall not hurt a hair of your head, or the boy's head, or your mother's head, or your sister's head. I have said it, brother Ned has said it, Tim Linkinwater has said it. We have all said it, and we'll all do it. I have seen the father—if he is the father—and I suppose he must be. He is a barbarian and a hypocrite, Mr Nickleby. I told him, "You are a barbarian, sir." I did. I said, "You're a barbarian, sir." And I'm glad of it, I am VERY glad I told him he was a barbarian, very glad indeed!'

By this time brother Charles was in such a very warm state of indignation, that Nicholas thought he might venture to put in a word, but the moment he essayed to do so, Mr Cheeryble laid his hand softly upon his arm, and pointed to a chair.

'The subject is at an end for the present,' said the old gentleman, wiping his face. 'Don't revive it by a single word. I am going to speak upon another subject, a confidential subject, Mr Nickleby. We must be cool again, we must be cool.'

After two or three turns across the room he resumed his seat, and drawing his chair nearer to that on which Nicholas was seated, said:

'I am about to employ you, my dear sir, on a confidential and delicate mission.'

'You might employ many a more able messenger, sir,' said Nicholas, 'but a more trustworthy or zealous one, I may be bold to say, you could not find.'

'Of that I am well assured,' returned brother Charles, 'well assured. You will give me credit for thinking so, when I tell you that the object of this mission is a young lady.'

'A young lady, sir!' cried Nicholas, quite trembling for the moment with his eagerness to hear more.

'A very beautiful young lady,' said Mr Cheeryble, gravely.

'Pray go on, sir,' returned Nicholas.

'I am thinking how to do so,' said brother Charles; sadly, as it seemed to his young friend, and with an expression allied to pain. 'You accidentally saw a young lady in this room one morning, my dear sir, in a fainting fit. Do you remember? Perhaps you have forgotten.'

'Oh no,' replied Nicholas, hurriedly. 'I—I—remember it very well indeed.'

'SHE is the lady I speak of,' said brother Charles. Like the famous parrot, Nicholas thought a great deal, but was unable to utter a word.

'She is the daughter,' said Mr Cheeryble, 'of a lady who, when she was a beautiful girl herself, and I was very many years younger, I—it seems a strange word for me to utter now—I loved very dearly. You will smile, perhaps, to hear a grey-headed man talk about such things. You will not offend me, for when I was as young as you, I dare say I should have done the same.'

'I have no such inclination, indeed,' said Nicholas.

'My dear brother Ned,' continued Mr Cheeryble, 'was to have married her sister, but she died. She is dead too now, and has been for many years. She married her choice; and I wish I could add that her after-life was as happy as God knows I ever prayed it might be!'

A short silence intervened, which Nicholas made no effort to break.

'If trial and calamity had fallen as lightly on his head, as in the deepest truth of my own heart I ever hoped (for her sake) it would, his life would have been one of peace and happiness,' said the old gentleman calmly. 'It will be enough to say that this was not the case; that she was not happy; that they fell into complicated distresses and difficulties; that she came, twelve months before her death, to appeal to my old friendship; sadly changed, sadly altered, broken-spirited from suffering and ill-usage, and almost broken-hearted. He readily availed himself of the money which, to give her but one hour's peace of mind, I would have poured out as freely as water—nay, he often sent her back for more—and yet even while he squandered it, he made the very success of these, her applications to me, the groundwork of cruel taunts and jeers, protesting that he knew she thought with bitter remorse of the choice she had made, that she had married him from motives of interest and vanity (he was a gay young man with great friends about him when she chose him for her husband), and venting in short upon her, by every unjust and unkind means, the bitterness of that ruin and disappointment which had been brought about by his profligacy alone. In those times this young lady was a mere child. I never saw her again until that morning when you saw her also, but my nephew, Frank—'

Nicholas started, and indistinctly apologising for the interruption, begged his patron to proceed.

'—My nephew, Frank, I say,' resumed Mr Cheeryble, 'encountered her by accident, and lost sight of her almost in a minute afterwards, within two days after he returned to England. Her father lay in some secret place to avoid his creditors, reduced, between sickness and poverty, to the verge of death, and she, a child,—we might almost think, if we did not know the wisdom of all Heaven's decrees—who should have blessed a better man, was steadily braving privation, degradation, and everything most terrible to such a young and delicate creature's heart, for the purpose of supporting him. She was attended, sir,' said brother Charles, 'in these reverses, by one faithful creature, who had been, in old times, a poor kitchen wench in the family, who was then their solitary servant, but who might have been, for the truth and fidelity of her heart—who might have been—ah! the wife of Tim Linkinwater himself, sir!'

Pursuing this encomium upon the poor follower with such energy and relish as no words can describe, brother Charles leant back in his chair, and delivered the remainder of his relation with greater composure.

It was in substance this: That proudly resisting all offers of permanent aid and support from her late mother's friends, because they were made conditional upon her quitting the wretched man, her father, who had no friends left, and shrinking with instinctive delicacy from appealing in their behalf to that true and noble heart which he hated, and had, through its greatest and purest goodness, deeply wronged by misconstruction and ill report, this young girl had struggled alone and unassisted to maintain him by the labour of her hands. That through the utmost depths of poverty and affliction she had toiled, never turning aside for an instant from her task, never wearied by the petulant gloom of a sick man sustained by no consoling recollections of the past or hopes of the future; never repining for the comforts she had rejected, or bewailing the hard lot she had voluntarily incurred. That every little accomplishment she had acquired in happier days had been put into requisition for this purpose, and directed to this one end. That for two long years, toiling by day and often too by night, working at the needle, the pencil, and the pen, and submitting, as a daily governess, to such caprices and indignities as women (with daughters too) too often love to inflict upon their own sex when they serve in such capacities, as though in jealousy of the superior intelligence which they are necessitated to employ,—indignities, in ninety-nine cases out of every hundred, heaped upon persons immeasurably and incalculably their betters, but outweighing in comparison any that the most heartless blackleg would put upon his groom—that for two long years, by dint of labouring in all these capacities and wearying in none, she had not succeeded in the sole aim and object of her life, but that, overwhelmed by accumulated difficulties and disappointments, she had been compelled to seek out her mother's old friend, and, with a bursting heart, to confide in him at last.

'If I had been poor,' said brother Charles, with sparkling eyes; 'if I had been poor, Mr Nickleby, my dear sir, which thank God I am not, I would have denied myself (of course anybody would under such circumstances) the commonest necessaries of life, to help her. As it is, the task is a difficult one. If her father were dead, nothing could be easier, for then she should share and cheer the happiest home that brother Ned and I could have, as if she were our child or sister. But he is still alive. Nobody can help him; that has been tried a thousand times; he was not abandoned by all without good cause, I know.'

'Cannot she be persuaded to—' Nicholas hesitated when he had got thus far.

'To leave him?' said brother Charles. 'Who could entreat a child to desert her parent? Such entreaties, limited to her seeing him occasionally, have been urged upon her—not by me—but always with the same result.'

'Is he kind to her?' said Nicholas. 'Does he requite her affection?'

'True kindness, considerate self-denying kindness, is not in his nature,' returned Mr Cheeryble. 'Such kindness as he knows, he regards her with, I believe. The mother was a gentle, loving, confiding creature, and although he wounded her from their marriage till her death as cruelly and wantonly as ever man did, she never ceased to love him. She commended him on her death-bed to her child's care. Her child has never forgotten it, and never will.'

'Have you no influence over him?' asked Nicholas.

'I, my dear sir! The last man in the world. Such are his jealousy and hatred of me, that if he knew his daughter had opened her heart to me, he would render her life miserable with his reproaches; although—this is the inconsistency and selfishness of his character—although if he knew that every penny she had came from me, he would not relinquish one personal desire that the most reckless expenditure of her scanty stock could gratify.'

'An unnatural scoundrel!' said Nicholas, indignantly.

'We will use no harsh terms,' said brother Charles, in a gentle voice; 'but accommodate ourselves to the circumstances in which this young lady is placed. Such assistance as I have prevailed upon her to accept, I have been obliged, at her own earnest request, to dole out in the smallest portions, lest he, finding how easily money was procured, should squander it even more lightly than he is accustomed to do. She has come to and fro, to and fro, secretly and by night, to take even this; and I cannot bear that things should go on in this way, Mr Nickleby, I really cannot bear it.'

Then it came out by little and little, how that the twins had been revolving in their good old heads manifold plans and schemes for helping this young lady in the most delicate and considerate way, and so that her father should not suspect the source whence the aid was derived; and how they had at last come to the conclusion, that the best course would be to make a feint of purchasing her little drawings and ornamental work at a high price, and keeping up a constant demand for the same. For the furtherance of which end and object it was necessary that somebody should represent the dealer in such commodities, and after great deliberation they had pitched upon Nicholas to support this character.

'He knows me,' said brother Charles, 'and he knows my brother Ned. Neither of us would do. Frank is a very good fellow—a very fine fellow—but we are afraid that he might be a little flighty and thoughtless in such a delicate matter, and that he might, perhaps—that he might, in short, be too susceptible (for she is a beautiful creature, sir; just what her poor mother was), and falling in love with her before he knew well his own mind, carry pain and sorrow into that innocent breast, which we would be the humble instruments of gradually making happy. He took an extraordinary interest in her fortunes when he first happened to encounter her; and we gather from the inquiries we have made of him, that it was she in whose behalf he made that turmoil which led to your first acquaintance.'

Nicholas stammered out that he had before suspected the possibility of such a thing; and in explanation of its having occurred to him, described when and where he had seen the young lady himself.

'Well; then you see,' continued brother Charles, 'that HE wouldn't do. Tim Linkinwater is out of the question; for Tim, sir, is such a tremendous fellow, that he could never contain himself, but would go to loggerheads with the father before he had been in the place five minutes. You don't know what Tim is, sir, when he is aroused by anything that appeals to his feelings very strongly; then he is terrific, sir, is Tim Linkinwater, absolutely terrific. Now, in you we can repose the strictest confidence; in you we have seen—or at least I have seen, and that's the same thing, for there's no difference between me and my brother Ned, except that he is the finest creature that ever lived, and that there is not, and never will be, anybody like him in all the world—in you we have seen domestic virtues and affections, and delicacy of feeling, which exactly qualify you for such an office. And you are the man, sir.'

'The young lady, sir,' said Nicholas, who felt so embarrassed that he had no small difficulty in saying anything at all—'Does—is—is she a party to this innocent deceit?'

'Yes, yes,' returned Mr Cheeryble; 'at least she knows you come from us; she does NOT know, however, but that we shall dispose of these little productions that you'll purchase from time to time; and, perhaps, if you did it very well (that is, VERY well indeed), perhaps she might be brought to believe that we—that we made a profit of them. Eh? Eh?'

In this guileless and most kind simplicity, brother Charles was so happy, and in this possibility of the young lady being led to think that she was under no obligation to him, he evidently felt so sanguine and had so much delight, that Nicholas would not breathe a doubt upon the subject.

All this time, however, there hovered upon the tip of his tongue a confession that the very same objections which Mr Cheeryble had stated to the employment of his nephew in this commission applied with at least equal force and validity to himself, and a hundred times had he been upon the point of avowing the real state of his feelings, and entreating to be released from it. But as often, treading upon the heels of this impulse, came another which urged him to refrain, and to keep his secret to his own breast. 'Why should I,' thought Nicholas, 'why should I throw difficulties in the way of this benevolent and high-minded design? What if I do love and reverence this good and lovely creature. Should I not appear a most arrogant and shallow coxcomb if I gravely represented that there was any danger of her falling in love with me? Besides, have I no confidence in myself? Am I not now bound in honour to repress these thoughts? Has not this excellent man a right to my best and heartiest services, and should any considerations of self deter me from rendering them?'

Asking himself such questions as these, Nicholas mentally answered with great emphasis 'No!' and persuading himself that he was a most conscientious and glorious martyr, nobly resolved to do what, if he had examined his own heart a little more carefully, he would have found he could not resist. Such is the sleight of hand by which we juggle with ourselves, and change our very weaknesses into stanch and most magnanimous virtues!

Mr Cheeryble, being of course wholly unsuspicious that such reflections were presenting themselves to his young friend, proceeded to give him the needful credentials and directions for his first visit, which was to be made next morning; and all preliminaries being arranged, and the strictest secrecy enjoined, Nicholas walked home for the night very thoughtfully indeed.

The place to which Mr Cheeryble had directed him was a row of mean and not over-cleanly houses, situated within 'the Rules' of the King's Bench Prison, and not many hundred paces distant from the obelisk in St George's Fields. The Rules are a certain liberty adjoining the prison, and comprising some dozen streets in which debtors who can raise money to pay large fees, from which their creditors do NOT derive any benefit, are permitted to reside by the wise provisions of the same enlightened laws which leave the debtor who can raise no money to starve in jail, without the food, clothing, lodging, or warmth, which are provided for felons convicted of the most atrocious crimes that can disgrace humanity. There are many pleasant fictions of the law in constant operation, but there is not one so pleasant or practically humorous as that which supposes every man to be of equal value in its impartial eye, and the benefits of all laws to be equally attainable by all men, without the smallest reference to the furniture of their pockets.

To the row of houses indicated to him by Mr Charles Cheeryble, Nicholas directed his steps, without much troubling his head with such matters as these; and at this row of houses—after traversing a very dirty and dusty suburb, of which minor theatricals, shell-fish, ginger-beer, spring vans, greengrocery, and brokers' shops, appeared to compose the main and most prominent features—he at length arrived with a palpitating heart. There were small gardens in front which, being wholly neglected in all other respects, served as little pens for the dust to collect in, until the wind came round the corner and blew it down the road. Opening the rickety gate which, dangling on its broken hinges before one of these, half admitted and half repulsed the visitor, Nicholas knocked at the street door with a faltering hand.

It was in truth a shabby house outside, with very dim parlour windows and very small show of blinds, and very dirty muslin curtains dangling across the lower panes on very loose and limp strings. Neither, when the door was opened, did the inside appear to belie the outward promise, as there was faded carpeting on the stairs and faded oil-cloth in the passage; in addition to which discomforts a gentleman Ruler was smoking hard in the front parlour (though it was not yet noon), while the lady of the house was busily engaged in turpentining the disjointed fragments of a tent-bedstead at the door of the back parlour, as if in preparation for the reception of some new lodger who had been fortunate enough to engage it.

Nicholas had ample time to make these observations while the little boy, who went on errands for the lodgers, clattered down the kitchen stairs and was heard to scream, as in some remote cellar, for Miss Bray's servant, who, presently appearing and requesting him to follow her, caused him to evince greater symptoms of nervousness and disorder than so natural a consequence of his having inquired for that young lady would seem calculated to occasion.

Upstairs he went, however, and into a front room he was shown, and there, seated at a little table by the window, on which were drawing materials with which she was occupied, sat the beautiful girl who had so engrossed his thoughts, and who, surrounded by all the new and strong interest which Nicholas attached to her story, seemed now, in his eyes, a thousand times more beautiful than he had ever yet supposed her.

But how the graces and elegancies which she had dispersed about the poorly-furnished room went to the heart of Nicholas! Flowers, plants, birds, the harp, the old piano whose notes had sounded so much sweeter in bygone times; how many struggles had it cost her to keep these two last links of that broken chain which bound her yet to home! With every slender ornament, the occupation of her leisure hours, replete with that graceful charm which lingers in every little tasteful work of woman's hands, how much patient endurance and how many gentle affections were entwined! He felt as though the smile of Heaven were on the little chamber; as though the beautiful devotion of so young and weak a creature had shed a ray of its own on the inanimate things around, and made them beautiful as itself; as though the halo with which old painters surround the bright angels of a sinless world played about a being akin in spirit to them, and its light were visibly before him.

And yet Nicholas was in the Rules of the King's Bench Prison! If he had been in Italy indeed, and the time had been sunset, and the scene a stately terrace! But, there is one broad sky over all the world, and whether it be blue or cloudy, the same heaven beyond it; so, perhaps, he had no need of compunction for thinking as he did.

It is not to be supposed that he took in everything at one glance, for he had as yet been unconscious of the presence of a sick man propped up with pillows in an easy-chair, who, moving restlessly and impatiently in his seat, attracted his attention.

He was scarce fifty, perhaps, but so emaciated as to appear much older. His features presented the remains of a handsome countenance, but one in which the embers of strong and impetuous passions were easier to be traced than any expression which would have rendered a far plainer face much more prepossessing. His looks were very haggard, and his limbs and body literally worn to the bone, but there was something of the old fire in the large sunken eye notwithstanding, and it seemed to kindle afresh as he struck a thick stick, with which he seemed to have supported himself in his seat, impatiently on the floor twice or thrice, and called his daughter by her name.

'Madeline, who is this? What does anybody want here? Who told a stranger we could be seen? What is it?'

'I believe—' the young lady began, as she inclined her head with an air of some confusion, in reply to the salutation of Nicholas.

'You always believe,' returned her father, petulantly. 'What is it?'

By this time Nicholas had recovered sufficient presence of mind to speak for himself, so he said (as it had been agreed he should say) that he had called about a pair of hand-screens, and some painted velvet for an ottoman, both of which were required to be of the most elegant design possible, neither time nor expense being of the smallest consideration. He had also to pay for the two drawings, with many thanks, and, advancing to the little table, he laid upon it a bank note, folded in an envelope and sealed.

'See that the money is right, Madeline,' said the father. 'Open the paper, my dear.'

'It's quite right, papa, I'm sure.'

'Here!' said Mr Bray, putting out his hand, and opening and shutting his bony fingers with irritable impatience. 'Let me see. What are you talking about, Madeline? You're sure? How can you be sure of any such thing? Five pounds—well, is THAT right?'

'Quite,' said Madeline, bending over him. She was so busily employed in arranging the pillows that Nicholas could not see her face, but as she stooped he thought he saw a tear fall.

'Ring the bell, ring the bell,' said the sick man, with the same nervous eagerness, and motioning towards it with such a quivering hand that the bank note rustled in the air. 'Tell her to get it changed, to get me a newspaper, to buy me some grapes, another bottle of the wine that I had last week—and—and—I forget half I want just now, but she can go out again. Let her get those first, those first. Now, Madeline, my love, quick, quick! Good God, how slow you are!'

'He remembers nothing that SHE wants!' thought Nicholas. Perhaps something of what he thought was expressed in his countenance, for the sick man, turning towards him with great asperity, demanded to know if he waited for a receipt.

'It is no matter at all,' said Nicholas.

'No matter! what do you mean, sir?' was the tart rejoinder. 'No matter! Do you think you bring your paltry money here as a favour or a gift; or as a matter of business, and in return for value received? D—n you, sir, because you can't appreciate the time and taste which are bestowed upon the goods you deal in, do you think you give your money away? Do you know that you are talking to a gentleman, sir, who at one time could have bought up fifty such men as you and all you have? What do you mean?'

'I merely mean that as I shall have many dealings with this lady, if she will kindly allow me, I will not trouble her with such forms,' said Nicholas.

'Then I mean, if you please, that we'll have as many forms as we can, returned the father. 'My daughter, sir, requires no kindness from you or anybody else. Have the goodness to confine your dealings strictly to trade and business, and not to travel beyond it. Every petty tradesman is to begin to pity her now, is he? Upon my soul! Very pretty. Madeline, my dear, give him a receipt; and mind you always do so.'

While she was feigning to write it, and Nicholas was ruminating upon the extraordinary but by no means uncommon character thus presented to his observation, the invalid, who appeared at times to suffer great bodily pain, sank back in his chair and moaned out a feeble complaint that the girl had been gone an hour, and that everybody conspired to goad him.

'When,' said Nicholas, as he took the piece of paper, 'when shall I call again?'

This was addressed to the daughter, but the father answered immediately.

'When you're requested to call, sir, and not before. Don't worry and persecute. Madeline, my dear, when is this person to call again?'

'Oh, not for a long time, not for three or four weeks; it is not necessary, indeed; I can do without,' said the young lady, with great eagerness.

'Why, how are we to do without?' urged her father, not speaking above his breath. 'Three or four weeks, Madeline! Three or four weeks!'

'Then sooner, sooner, if you please,' said the young lady, turning to Nicholas.

'Three or four weeks!' muttered the father. 'Madeline, what on earth—do nothing for three or four weeks!'

'It is a long time, ma'am,' said Nicholas.

'YOU think so, do you?' retorted the father, angrily. 'If I chose to beg, sir, and stoop to ask assistance from people I despise, three or four months would not be a long time; three or four years would not be a long time. Understand, sir, that is if I chose to be dependent; but as I don't, you may call in a week.'

Nicholas bowed low to the young lady and retired, pondering upon Mr Bray's ideas of independence, and devoutly hoping that there might be few such independent spirits as he mingling with the baser clay of humanity.

He heard a light footstep above him as he descended the stairs, and looking round saw that the young lady was standing there, and glancing timidly towards him, seemed to hesitate whether she should call him back or no. The best way of settling the question was to turn back at once, which Nicholas did.

'I don't know whether I do right in asking you, sir,' said Madeline, hurriedly, 'but pray, pray, do not mention to my poor mother's dear friends what has passed here today. He has suffered much, and is worse this morning. I beg you, sir, as a boon, a favour to myself.'

'You have but to hint a wish,' returned Nicholas fervently, 'and I would hazard my life to gratify it.'

'You speak hastily, sir.'

'Truly and sincerely,' rejoined Nicholas, his lips trembling as he formed the words, 'if ever man spoke truly yet. I am not skilled in disguising my feelings, and if I were, I could not hide my heart from you. Dear madam, as I know your history, and feel as men and angels must who hear and see such things, I do entreat you to believe that I would die to serve you.'

The young lady turned away her head, and was plainly weeping.

'Forgive me,' said Nicholas, with respectful earnestness, 'if I seem to say too much, or to presume upon the confidence which has been intrusted to me. But I could not leave you as if my interest and sympathy expired with the commission of the day. I am your faithful servant, humbly devoted to you from this hour, devoted in strict truth and honour to him who sent me here, and in pure integrity of heart, and distant respect for you. If I meant more or less than this, I should be unworthy his regard, and false to the very nature that prompts the honest words I utter.'

She waved her hand, entreating him to be gone, but answered not a word. Nicholas could say no more, and silently withdrew. And thus ended his first interview with Madeline Bray.

CHAPTER 47

Mr Ralph Nickleby has some confidential Intercourse with another old Friend. They concert between them a Project, which promises well for both

'There go the three-quarters past!' muttered Newman Noggs, listening to the chimes of some neighbouring church 'and my dinner time's two. He does it on purpose. He makes a point of it. It's just like him.'

It was in his own little den of an office and on the top of his official stool that Newman thus soliloquised; and the soliloquy referred, as Newman's grumbling soliloquies usually did, to Ralph Nickleby.

'I don't believe he ever had an appetite,' said Newman, 'except for pounds, shillings, and pence, and with them he's as greedy as a wolf. I should like to have him compelled to swallow one of every English coin. The penny would be an awkward morsel—but the crown—ha! ha!'

His good-humour being in some degree restored by the vision of Ralph Nickleby swallowing, perforce, a five-shilling piece, Newman slowly brought forth from his desk one of those portable bottles, currently known as pocket-pistols, and shaking the same close to his ear so as to produce a rippling sound very cool and pleasant to listen to, suffered his features to relax, and took a gurgling drink, which relaxed them still more. Replacing the cork, he smacked his lips twice or thrice with an air of great relish, and, the taste of the liquor having by this time evaporated, recurred to his grievance again.

'Five minutes to three,' growled Newman; 'it can't want more by this time; and I had my breakfast at eight o'clock, and SUCH a breakfast! and my right dinner-time two! And I might have a nice little bit of hot roast meat spoiling at home all this time—how does HE know I haven't? "Don't go till I come back," "Don't go till I come back," day after day. What do you always go out at my dinner-time for then—eh? Don't you know it's nothing but aggravation—eh?'

These words, though uttered in a very loud key, were addressed to nothing but empty air. The recital of his wrongs, however, seemed to have the effect of making Newman Noggs desperate; for he flattened his old hat upon his head, and drawing on the everlasting gloves, declared with great vehemence, that come what might, he would go to dinner that very minute.

Carrying this resolution into instant effect, he had advanced as far as the passage, when the sound of the latch-key in the street door caused him to make a precipitate retreat into his own office again.

'Here he is,' growled Newman, 'and somebody with him. Now it'll be "Stop till this gentleman's gone." But I won't. That's flat.'

So saying, Newman slipped into a tall empty closet which opened with two half doors, and shut himself up; intending to slip out directly Ralph was safe inside his own room.

'Noggs!' cried Ralph, 'where is that fellow, Noggs?'

But not a word said Newman.

'The dog has gone to his dinner, though I told him not,' muttered Ralph, looking into the office, and pulling out his watch. 'Humph!' You had better come in here, Gride. My man's out, and the sun is hot upon my room. This is cool and in the shade, if you don't mind roughing it.'

'Not at all, Mr Nickleby, oh not at all! All places are alike to me, sir. Ah! very nice indeed. Oh! very nice!'

The parson who made this reply was a little old man, of about seventy or seventy-five years of age, of a very lean figure, much bent and slightly twisted. He wore a grey coat with a very narrow collar, an old-fashioned waistcoat of ribbed black silk, and such scanty trousers as displayed his shrunken spindle-shanks in their full ugliness. The only articles of display or ornament in his dress were a steel watch-chain to which were attached some large gold seals; and a black ribbon into which, in compliance with an old fashion scarcely ever observed in these days, his grey hair was gathered behind. His nose and chin were sharp and prominent, his jaws had fallen inwards from loss of teeth, his face was shrivelled and yellow, save where the cheeks were streaked with the colour of a dry winter apple; and where his beard had been, there lingered yet a few grey tufts which seemed, like the ragged eyebrows, to denote the badness of the soil from which they sprung. The whole air and attitude of the form was one of stealthy cat-like obsequiousness; the whole expression of the face was concentrated in a wrinkled leer, compounded of cunning, lecherousness, slyness, and avarice.

Such was old Arthur Gride, in whose face there was not a wrinkle, in whose dress there was not one spare fold or plait, but expressed the most covetous and griping penury, and sufficiently indicated his belonging to that class of which Ralph Nickleby was a member. Such was old Arthur Gride, as he sat in a low chair looking up into the face of Ralph Nickleby, who, lounging upon the tall office stool, with his arms upon his knees, looked down into his; a match for him on whatever errand he had come.

'And how have you been?' said Gride, feigning great interest in Ralph's state of health. 'I haven't seen you for—oh! not for—'

'Not for a long time,' said Ralph, with a peculiar smile, importing that he very well knew it was not on a mere visit of compliment that his friend had come. 'It was a narrow chance that you saw me now, for I had only just come up to the door as you turned the corner.'

'I am very lucky,' observed Gride.

'So men say,' replied Ralph, drily.

The older money-lender wagged his chin and smiled, but he originated no new remark, and they sat for some little time without speaking. Each was looking out to take the other at a disadvantage.

'Come, Gride,' said Ralph, at length; 'what's in the wind today?'

'Aha! you're a bold man, Mr Nickleby,' cried the other, apparently very much relieved by Ralph's leading the way to business. 'Oh dear, dear, what a bold man you are!'

'Why, you have a sleek and slinking way with you that makes me seem so by contrast,' returned Ralph. 'I don't know but that yours may answer better, but I want the patience for it.'

'You were born a genius, Mr Nickleby,' said old Arthur. 'Deep, deep, deep. Ah!'

'Deep enough,' retorted Ralph, 'to know that I shall need all the depth I have, when men like you begin to compliment. You know I have stood by when you fawned and flattered other people, and I remember pretty well what THAT always led to.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' rejoined Arthur, rubbing his hands. 'So you do, so you do, no doubt. Not a man knows it better. Well, it's a pleasant thing now to think that you remember old times. Oh dear!'

'Now then,' said Ralph, composedly; 'what's in the wind, I ask again? What is it?'

'See that now!' cried the other. 'He can't even keep from business while we're chatting over bygones. Oh dear, dear, what a man it is!'

'WHICH of the bygones do you want to revive?' said Ralph. 'One of them, I know, or you wouldn't talk about them.'

'He suspects even me!' cried old Arthur, holding up his hands. 'Even me! Oh dear, even me. What a man it is! Ha, ha, ha! What a man it is! Mr

Nickleby against all the world. There's nobody like him. A giant among pigmies, a giant, a giant!'

Ralph looked at the old dog with a quiet smile as he chuckled on in this strain, and Newman Noggs in the closet felt his heart sink within him as the prospect of dinner grew fainter and fainter.

'I must humour him though,' cried old Arthur; 'he must have his way—a wilful man, as the Scotch say—well, well, they're a wise people, the Scotch. He will talk about business, and won't give away his time for nothing. He's very right. Time is money, time is money.'

'He was one of us who made that saying, I should think,' said Ralph. 'Time is money, and very good money too, to those who reckon interest by it. Time IS money! Yes, and time costs money; it's rather an expensive article to some people we could name, or I forget my trade.'

In rejoinder to this sally, old Arthur again raised his hands, again chuckled, and again ejaculated 'What a man it is!' which done, he dragged the low chair a little nearer to Ralph's high stool, and looking upwards into his immovable face, said,

'What would you say to me, if I was to tell you that I was—that I was—going to be married?'

'I should tell you,' replied Ralph, looking coldly down upon him, 'that for some purpose of your own you told a lie, and that it wasn't the first time and wouldn't be the last; that I wasn't surprised and wasn't to be taken in.'

'Then I tell you seriously that I am,' said old Arthur.

'And I tell you seriously,' rejoined Ralph, 'what I told you this minute. Stay. Let me look at you. There's a liquorish devilry in your face. What is this?'

'I wouldn't deceive YOU, you know,' whined Arthur Gride; 'I couldn't do it, I should be mad to try. I, I, to deceive Mr Nickleby! The pigmy to impose upon the giant. I ask again—he, he, he!—what should you say to me if I was to tell you that I was going to be married?'

'To some old hag?' said Ralph.

'No, No,' cried Arthur, interrupting him, and rubbing his hands in an ecstasy. 'Wrong, wrong again. Mr Nickleby for once at fault; out, quite out! To a young and beautiful girl; fresh, lovely, bewitching, and not nineteen. Dark eyes, long eyelashes, ripe and ruddy lips that to look at is to long to kiss, beautiful clustering hair that one's fingers itch to play with, such a waist as might make a man clasp the air involuntarily, thinking of twining his arm about it, little feet that tread so lightly they hardly seem to walk upon the ground—to marry all this, sir, this—hey, hey!'

'This is something more than common drivelling,' said Ralph, after listening with a curled lip to the old sinner's raptures. 'The girl's name?'

'Oh deep, deep! See now how deep that is!' exclaimed old Arthur. 'He knows I want his help, he knows he can give it me, he knows it must all turn to his advantage, he sees the thing already. Her name—is there nobody within hearing?'

'Why, who the devil should there be?' retorted Ralph, testily.

'I didn't know but that perhaps somebody might be passing up or down the stairs,' said Arthur Gride, after looking out at the door and carefully reclosing it; 'or but that your man might have come back and might have been listening outside. Clerks and servants have a trick of listening, and I should have been very uncomfortable if Mr Noggs—'

'Curse Mr Noggs,' said Ralph, sharply, 'and go on with what you have to say.'

'Curse Mr Noggs, by all means,' rejoined old Arthur; 'I am sure I have not the least objection to that. Her name is—'

'Well,' said Ralph, rendered very irritable by old Arthur's pausing again 'what is it?'

'Madeline Bray.'

Whatever reasons there might have been—and Arthur Gride appeared to have anticipated some—for the mention of this name producing an effect upon Ralph, or whatever effect it really did produce upon him, he permitted none to manifest itself, but calmly repeated the name several times, as if reflecting when and where he had heard it before.

'Bray,' said Ralph. 'Bray—there was young Bray of—no, he never had a daughter.'

'You remember Bray?' rejoined Arthur Gride.

'No,' said Ralph, looking vacantly at him.

'Not Walter Bray! The dashing man, who used his handsome wife so ill?'

'If you seek to recall any particular dashing man to my recollection by such a trait as that,' said Ralph, shrugging his shoulders, 'I shall confound him with nine-tenths of the dashing men I have ever known.'

'Tut, tut. That Bray who is now in the Rules of the Bench,' said old Arthur. 'You can't have forgotten Bray. Both of us did business with him.

Why, he owes you money!'

'Oh HIM!' rejoined Ralph. 'Ay, ay. Now you speak. Oh! It's HIS daughter, is it?'

Naturally as this was said, it was not said so naturally but that a kindred spirit like old Arthur Gride might have discerned a design upon the part of Ralph to lead him on to much more explicit statements and explanations than he would have volunteered, or that Ralph could in all likelihood have obtained by any other means. Old Arthur, however, was so intent upon his own designs, that he suffered himself to be overreached, and had no suspicion but that his good friend was in earnest.

'I knew you couldn't forget him, when you came to think for a moment,' he said.

'You were right,' answered Ralph. 'But old Arthur Gride and matrimony is a most anomalous conjunction of words; old Arthur Gride and dark eyes and eyelashes, and lips that to look at is to long to kiss, and clustering hair that he wants to play with, and waists that he wants to span, and little feet that don't tread upon anything—old Arthur Gride and such things as these is more monstrous still; but old Arthur Gride marrying the daughter of a ruined "dashing man" in the Rules of the Bench, is the most monstrous and incredible of all. Plainly, friend Arthur Gride, if you want any help from me in this business (which of course you do, or you would not be here), speak out, and to the purpose. And, above all, don't talk to me of its turning to my advantage, for I know it must turn to yours also, and to a good round tune too, or you would have no finger in such a pie as this.'

There was enough acerbity and sarcasm not only in the matter of Ralph's speech, but in the tone of voice in which he uttered it, and the looks with which he eked it out, to have fired even the ancient usurer's cold blood and flushed even his withered cheek. But he gave vent to no demonstration of anger, contenting himself with exclaiming as before, 'What a man it is!' and rolling his head from side to side, as if in unrestrained enjoyment of his freedom and drollery. Clearly observing, however, from the expression in Ralph's features, that he had best come to the point as speedily as might be, he composed himself for more serious business, and entered upon the pith and marrow of his negotiation.

First, he dwelt upon the fact that Madeline Bray was devoted to the support and maintenance, and was a slave to every wish, of her only parent, who had no other friend on earth; to which Ralph rejoined that he had heard something of the kind before, and that if she had known a little more of the world, she wouldn't have been such a fool.

Secondly, he enlarged upon the character of her father, arguing, that even taking it for granted that he loved her in return with the utmost affection of which he was capable, yet he loved himself a great deal better; which Ralph said it was quite unnecessary to say anything more about, as that was very natural, and probable enough.

And, thirdly, old Arthur premised that the girl was a delicate and beautiful creature, and that he had really a hankering to have her for his wife. To this Ralph deigned no other rejoinder than a harsh smile, and a glance at the shrivelled old creature before him, which were, however, sufficiently expressive.

'Now,' said Gride, 'for the little plan I have in my mind to bring this about; because, I haven't offered myself even to the father yet, I should have told you. But that you have gathered already? Ah! oh dear, oh dear, what an edged tool you are!'

'Don't play with me then,' said Ralph impatiently. 'You know the proverb.'

'A reply always on the tip of his tongue!' cried old Arthur, raising his hands and eyes in admiration. 'He is always prepared! Oh dear, what a blessing to have such a ready wit, and so much ready money to back it!' Then, suddenly changing his tone, he went on: 'I have been backwards and forwards to Bray's lodgings several times within the last six months. It is just half a year since I first saw this delicate morsel, and, oh dear, what a delicate morsel it is! But that is neither here nor there. I am his detaining creditor for seventeen hundred pounds!'

'You talk as if you were the only detaining creditor,' said Ralph, pulling out his pocket-book. 'I am another for nine hundred and seventy-five pounds four and threepence.'

'The only other, Mr Nickleby,' said old Arthur, eagerly. 'The only other. Nobody else went to the expense of lodging a detainer, trusting to our holding him fast enough, I warrant you. We both fell into the same snare; oh dear, what a pitfall it was; it almost ruined me! And lent him our money upon bills, with only one name besides his own, which to be sure everybody supposed to be a good one, and was as negotiable as money, but which turned out you know how. Just as we should have come upon him, he died insolvent. Ah! it went very nigh to ruin me, that loss did!'

'Go on with your scheme,' said Ralph. 'It's of no use raising the cry of our trade just now; there's nobody to hear us!'

'It's always as well to talk that way,' returned old Arthur, with a chuckle, 'whether there's anybody to hear us or not. Practice makes perfect, you know. Now, if I offer myself to Bray as his son-in-law, upon one simple condition that the moment I am fast married he shall be quietly released, and have an allowance to live just t'other side the water like a gentleman (he can't live long, for I have asked his doctor, and he declares that his complaint is one of the Heart and it is impossible), and if all the advantages of this condition are properly stated and dwelt upon to him, do you think he could resist me? And if he could not resist ME, do you think his daughter could resist HIM? Shouldn't I have her Mrs Arthur Gride—pretty Mrs Arthur Gride—a tit-bit—a dainty chick—shouldn't I have her Mrs Arthur Gride in a week, a month, a day—any time I chose to name?'

'Go on,' said Ralph, nodding his head deliberately, and speaking in a tone whose studied coldness presented a strange contrast to the rapturous squeak to which his friend had gradually mounted. 'Go on. You didn't come here to ask me that.'

'Oh dear, how you talk!' cried old Arthur, edging himself closer still to Ralph. 'Of course I didn't, I don't pretend I did! I came to ask what you would take from me, if I prospered with the father, for this debt of yours. Five shillings in the pound, six and-eightpence, ten shillings? I WOULD go as far as ten for such a friend as you, we have always been on such good terms, but you won't be so hard upon me as that, I know. Now, will you?'

'There's something more to be told,' said Ralph, as stony and immovable as ever.

'Yes, yes, there is, but you won't give me time,' returned Arthur Gride. 'I want a backer in this matter; one who can talk, and urge, and press a point, which you can do as no man can. I can't do that, for I am a poor, timid, nervous creature. Now, if you get a good composition for this debt, which you long ago gave up for lost, you'll stand my friend, and help me. Won't you?'

'There's something more,' said Ralph.

'No, no, indeed,' cried Arthur Gride.

'Yes, yes, indeed. I tell you yes,' said Ralph.

'Oh!' returned old Arthur feigning to be suddenly enlightened. 'You mean something more, as concerns myself and my intention. Ay, surely,

surely. Shall I mention that?'

'I think you had better,' rejoined Ralph, drily.

'I didn't like to trouble you with that, because I supposed your interest would cease with your own concern in the affair,' said Arthur Gride. 'That's kind of you to ask. Oh dear, how very kind of you! Why, supposing I had a knowledge of some property—some little property—very little—to which this pretty chick was entitled; which nobody does or can know of at this time, but which her husband could sweep into his pouch, if he knew as much as I do, would that account for—'

'For the whole proceeding,' rejoined Ralph, abruptly. 'Now, let me turn this matter over, and consider what I ought to have if I should help you to success.'

'But don't be hard,' cried old Arthur, raising his hands with an imploring gesture, and speaking, in a tremulous voice. 'Don't be too hard upon me. It's a very small property, it is indeed. Say the ten shillings, and we'll close the bargain. It's more than I ought to give, but you're so kind—shall we say the ten? Do now, do.'

Ralph took no notice of these supplications, but sat for three or four minutes in a brown study, looking thoughtfully at the person from whom they proceeded. After sufficient cogitation he broke silence, and it certainly could not be objected that he used any needless circumlocution, or failed to speak directly to the purpose.

'If you married this girl without me,' said Ralph, 'you must pay my debt in full, because you couldn't set her father free otherwise. It's plain, then, that I must have the whole amount, clear of all deduction or incumbrance, or I should lose from being honoured with your confidence, instead of gaining by it. That's the first article of the treaty. For the second, I shall stipulate that for my trouble in negotiation and persuasion, and helping you to this fortune, I have five hundred pounds. That's very little, because you have the ripe lips, and the clustering hair, and what not, all to yourself. For the third and last article, I require that you execute a bond to me, this day, binding yourself in the payment of these two sums, before noon of the day of your marriage with Madeline Bray. You have told me I can urge and press a point. I press this one, and will take nothing less than these terms. Accept them if you like. If not, marry her without me if you can. I shall still get my debt.'

To all entreaties, protestations, and offers of compromise between his own proposals and those which Arthur Gride had first suggested, Ralph was deaf as an adder. He would enter into no further discussion of the subject, and while old Arthur dilated upon the enormity of his demands and proposed modifications of them, approaching by degrees nearer and nearer to the terms he resisted, sat perfectly mute, looking with an air of quiet abstraction over the entries and papers in his pocket-book. Finding that it was impossible to make any impression upon his staunch friend, Arthur Gride, who had prepared himself for some such result before he came, consented with a heavy heart to the proposed treaty, and upon the spot filled up the bond required (Ralph kept such instruments handy), after exacting the condition that Mr Nickleby should accompany him to Bray's lodgings that very hour, and open the negotiation at once, should circumstances appear auspicious and favourable to their designs.

In pursuance of this last understanding the worthy gentlemen went out together shortly afterwards, and Newman Noggs emerged, bottle in hand, from the cupboard, out of the upper door of which, at the imminent risk of detection, he had more than once thrust his red nose when such parts of the subject were under discussion as interested him most.

'I have no appetite now,' said Newman, putting the flask in his pocket. 'I've had MY dinner.'

Having delivered this observation in a very grievous and doleful tone, Newman reached the door in one long limp, and came back again in another.

'I don't know who she may be, or what she may be,' he said: 'but I pity her with all my heart and soul; and I can't help her, nor can I any of the people against whom a hundred tricks, but none so vile as this, are plotted every day! Well, that adds to my pain, but not to theirs. The thing is no worse because I know it, and it tortures me as well as them. Gride and Nickleby! Good pair for a curricle. Oh roguery! roguery! roguery!'

With these reflections, and a very hard knock on the crown of his unfortunate hat at each repetition of the last word, Newman Noggs, whose brain was a little muddled by so much of the contents of the pocket-pistol as had found their way there during his recent concealment, went forth to seek such consolation as might be derivable from the beef and greens of some cheap eating-house.

Meanwhile the two plotters had betaken themselves to the same house whither Nicholas had repaired for the first time but a few mornings before, and having obtained access to Mr Bray, and found his daughter from home, had by a train of the most masterly approaches that Ralph's utmost skill could frame, at length laid open the real object of their visit.

'There he sits, Mr Bray,' said Ralph, as the invalid, not yet recovered from his surprise, reclined in his chair, looking alternately at him and Arthur Gride. 'What if he has had the ill-fortune to be one cause of your detention in this place? I have been another; men must live; you are too much a man of the world not to see that in its true light. We offer the best reparation in our power. Reparation! Here is an offer of marriage, that many a titled father would leap at, for his child. Mr Arthur Gride, with the fortune of a prince. Think what a haul it is!'

'My daughter, sir,' returned Bray, haughtily, 'as I have brought her up, would be a rich recompense for the largest fortune that a man could bestow in exchange for her hand.'

'Precisely what I told you,' said the artful Ralph, turning to his friend, old Arthur. 'Precisely what made me consider the thing so fair and easy. There is no obligation on either side. You have money, and Miss Madeline has beauty and worth. She has youth, you have money. She has not money, you have not youth. Tit for tat, quits, a match of Heaven's own making!'

'Matches are made in Heaven, they say,' added Arthur Gride, leering hideously at the father-in-law he wanted. 'If we are married, it will be destiny, according to that.'

'Then think, Mr Bray,' said Ralph, hastily substituting for this argument considerations more nearly allied to earth, 'think what a stake is involved in the acceptance or rejection of these proposals of my friend.'

'How can I accept or reject,' interrupted Mr Bray, with an irritable consciousness that it really rested with him to decide. 'It is for my daughter to accept or reject; it is for my daughter. You know that.'

'True,' said Ralph, emphatically; 'but you have still the power to advise; to state the reasons for and against; to hint a wish.'

'To hint a wish, sir!' returned the debtor, proud and mean by turns, and selfish at all times. 'I am her father, am I not? Why should I hint, and beat about the bush? Do you suppose, like her mother's friends and my enemies—a curse upon them all!—that there is anything in what she has done for me but duty, sir, but duty? Or do you think that my having been unfortunate is a sufficient reason why our relative positions should be changed, and that she should command and I should obey? Hint a wish, too! Perhaps you think, because you see me in this place and scarcely able to leave this chair without assistance, that I am some broken-spirited dependent creature, without the courage or power to do what I may think best for my own child. Still the power to hint a wish! I hope so!'

'Pardon me,' returned Ralph, who thoroughly knew his man, and had taken his ground accordingly; 'you do not hear me out. I was about to say that your hinting a wish, even hinting a wish, would surely be equivalent to commanding.'

'Why, of course it would,' retorted Mr Bray, in an exasperated tone. 'If you don't happen to have heard of the time, sir, I tell you that there was a time, when I carried every point in triumph against her mother's whole family, although they had power and wealth on their side, by my will alone.'

'Still,' rejoined Ralph, as mildly as his nature would allow him, 'you have not heard me out. You are a man yet qualified to shine in society, with many years of life before you; that is, if you lived in freer air, and under brighter skies, and chose your own companions. Gaiety is your element, you have shone in it before. Fashion and freedom for you. France, and an annuity that would support you there in luxury, would give you a new lease of life, would transfer you to a new existence. The town rang with your expensive pleasures once, and you could blaze up on a new scene again, profiting by experience, and living a little at others' cost, instead of letting others live at yours. What is there on the reverse side of the picture? What is there? I don't know which is the nearest churchyard, but a gravestone there, wherever it is, and a date, perhaps two years hence, perhaps twenty. That's all.'

Mr Bray rested his elbow on the arm of his chair, and shaded his face with his hand.

'I speak plainly,' said Ralph, sitting down beside him, 'because I feel strongly. It's my interest that you should marry your daughter to my friend Gride, because then he sees me paid—in part, that is. I don't disguise it. I acknowledge it openly. But what interest have you in recommending her to such a step? Keep that in view. She might object, remonstrate, shed tears, talk of his being too old, and plead that her life would be rendered miserable. But what is it now?'

Several slight gestures on the part of the invalid showed that these arguments were no more lost upon him, than the smallest iota of his demeanour was upon Ralph.

'What is it now, I say,' pursued the wily usurer, 'or what has it a chance of being? If you died, indeed, the people you hate would make her happy. But can you bear the thought of that?'

'No!' returned Bray, urged by a vindictive impulse he could not repress.

'I should imagine not, indeed!' said Ralph, quietly. 'If she profits by anybody's death,' this was said in a lower tone, 'let it be by her husband's. Don't let her have to look back to yours, as the event from which to date a happier life. Where is the objection? Let me hear it stated. What is it? That her suitor is an old man? Why, how often do men of family and fortune, who haven't your excuse, but have all the means and superfluities of life within their reach, how often do they marry their daughters to old men, or (worse still) to young men without heads or hearts, to tickle some idle vanity, strengthen some family interest, or secure some seat in Parliament! Judge for her, sir, judge for her. You must know best, and she will live to thank you.'

'Hush! hush!' cried Mr Bray, suddenly starting up, and covering Ralph's mouth with his trembling hand. 'I hear her at the door!'

There was a gleam of conscience in the shame and terror of this hasty action, which, in one short moment, tore the thin covering of sophistry from the cruel design, and laid it bare in all its meanness and heartless deformity. The father fell into his chair pale and trembling; Arthur Gride plucked and fumbled at his hat, and durst not raise his eyes from the floor; even Ralph crouched for the moment like a beaten hound, cowed by the presence of one young innocent girl!

The effect was almost as brief as sudden. Ralph was the first to recover himself, and observing Madeline's looks of alarm, entreated the poor girl to be composed, assuring her that there was no cause for fear.

'A sudden spasm,' said Ralph, glancing at Mr Bray. 'He is quite well now.'

It might have moved a very hard and worldly heart to see the young and beautiful creature, whose certain misery they had been contriving but a minute before, throw her arms about her father's neck, and pour forth words of tender sympathy and love, the sweetest a father's ear can know, or child's lips form. But Ralph looked coldly on; and Arthur Gride, whose bleared eyes gloated only over the outward beauties, and were blind to the spirit which reigned within, evinced—a fantastic kind of warmth certainly, but not exactly that kind of warmth of feeling which the contemplation of virtue usually inspires.

'Madeline,' said her father, gently disengaging himself, 'it was nothing.'

'But you had that spasm yesterday, and it is terrible to see you in such pain. Can I do nothing for you?'

'Nothing just now. Here are two gentlemen, Madeline, one of whom you have seen before. She used to say,' added Mr Bray, addressing Arthur Gride, 'that the sight of you always made me worse. That was natural, knowing what she did, and only what she did, of our connection and its results. Well, well. Perhaps she may change her mind on that point; girls have leave to change their minds, you know. You are very tired, my dear.'

'I am not, indeed.'

'Indeed you are. You do too much.'

'I wish I could do more.'

'I know you do, but you overtask your strength. This wretched life, my love, of daily labour and fatigue, is more than you can bear, I am sure it is. Poor Madeline!'

With these and many more kind words, Mr Bray drew his daughter to him and kissed her cheek affectionately. Ralph, watching him sharply and closely in the meantime, made his way towards the door, and signed to Gride to follow him.

'You will communicate with us again?' said Ralph.

'Yes, yes,' returned Mr Bray, hastily thrusting his daughter aside. 'In a week. Give me a week.'

'One week,' said Ralph, turning to his companion, 'from today. Good-morning. Miss Madeline, I kiss your hand.'

'We will shake hands, Gride,' said Mr Bray, extending his, as old Arthur bowed. 'You mean well, no doubt. I an bound to say so now. If I owed you money, that was not your fault. Madeline, my love, your hand here.'

'Oh dear! If the young lady would condescent! Only the tips of her fingers,' said Arthur, hesitating and half retreating.

Madeline shrunk involuntarily from the goblin figure, but she placed the tips of her fingers in his hand and instantly withdrew them. After an ineffectual clutch, intended to detain and carry them to his lips, old Arthur gave his own fingers a mumbling kiss, and with many amorous distortions of visage went in pursuit of his friend, who was by this time in the street.

'What does he say, what does he say? What does the giant say to the pigmy?' inquired Arthur Gride, hobbling up to Ralph.

'What does the pigmy say to the giant?' rejoined Ralph, elevating his eyebrows and looking down upon his questioner.

'He doesn't know what to say,' replied Arthur Gride. 'He hopes and fears. But is she not a dainty morsel?'

'I have no great taste for beauty,' growled Ralph.

'But I have,' rejoined Arthur, rubbing his hands. 'Oh dear! How handsome her eyes looked when she was stooping over him! Such long lashes, such delicate fringe! She—she—looked at me so soft.'

'Not over-lovingly, I think,' said Ralph. 'Did she?'

'No, you think not?' replied old Arthur. 'But don't you think it can be brought about? Don't you think it can?'

Ralph looked at him with a contemptuous frown, and replied with a sneer, and between his teeth:

'Did you mark his telling her she was tired and did too much, and overtasked her strength?'

'Ay, ay. What of it?'

'When do you think he ever told her that before? The life is more than she can bear. Yes, yes. He'll change it for her.'

'D'ye think it's done?' inquired old Arthur, peering into his companion's face with half-closed eyes.

'I am sure it's done,' said Ralph. 'He is trying to deceive himself, even before our eyes, already. He is making believe that he thinks of her good and not his own. He is acting a virtuous part, and so considerate and affectionate, sir, that the daughter scarcely knew him. I saw a tear of surprise in her eye. There'll be a few more tears of surprise there before long, though of a different kind. Oh! we may wait with confidence for this day week.'

CHAPTER 48

Being for the Benefit of Mr Vincent Crummles, and positively his last Appearance on this Stage

It was with a very sad and heavy heart, oppressed by many painful ideas, that Nicholas retraced his steps eastward and betook himself to the counting-house of Cheeryble Brothers. Whatever the idle hopes he had suffered himself to entertain, whatever the pleasant visions which had sprung up in his mind and grouped themselves round the fair image of Madeline Bray, they were now dispelled, and not a vestige of their gaiety and brightness remained.

It would be a poor compliment to Nicholas's better nature, and one which he was very far from deserving, to insinuate that the solution, and such a solution, of the mystery which had seemed to surround Madeline Bray, when he was ignorant even of her name, had damped his ardour or cooled the fervour of his admiration. If he had regarded her before, with such a passion as young men attracted by mere beauty and elegance may entertain, he was now conscious of much deeper and stronger feelings. But, reverence for the truth and purity of her heart, respect for the helplessness and loneliness of her situation, sympathy with the trials of one so young and fair and admiration of her great and noble spirit, all seemed to raise her far above his reach, and, while they imparted new depth and dignity to his love, to whisper that it was hopeless.

'I will keep my word, as I have pledged it to her,' said Nicholas, manfully. 'This is no common trust that I have to discharge, and I will perform the double duty that is imposed upon me most scrupulously and strictly. My secret feelings deserve no consideration in such a case as this, and they shall have none.'

Still, there were the secret feelings in existence just the same, and in secret Nicholas rather encouraged them than otherwise; reasoning (if he reasoned at all) that there they could do no harm to anybody but himself, and that if he kept them to himself from a sense of duty, he had an additional right to entertain himself with them as a reward for his heroism.

All these thoughts, coupled with what he had seen that morning and the anticipation of his next visit, rendered him a very dull and abstracted companion; so much so, indeed, that Tim Linkinwater suspected he must have made the mistake of a figure somewhere, which was preying upon his mind, and seriously conjured him, if such were the case, to make a clean breast and scratch it out, rather than have his whole life embittered by the tortures of remorse.

But in reply to these considerate representations, and many others both from Tim and Mr Frank, Nicholas could only be brought to state that he was never merrier in his life; and so went on all day, and so went towards home at night, still turning over and over again the same subjects, thinking over and over again the same things, and arriving over and over again at the same conclusions.

In this pensive, wayward, and uncertain state, people are apt to lounge and loiter without knowing why, to read placards on the walls with great attention and without the smallest idea of one word of their contents, and to stare most earnestly through shop-windows at things which they don't see. It was thus that Nicholas found himself poring with the utmost interest over a large play-bill hanging outside a Minor Theatre which he had to pass on his way home, and reading a list of the actors and actresses who had promised to do honour to some approaching benefit, with as much gravity as if it had been a catalogue of the names of those ladies and gentlemen who stood highest upon the Book of Fate, and he had been looking anxiously for his own. He glanced at the top of the bill, with a smile at his own dulness, as he prepared to resume his walk, and there saw announced, in large letters with a large space between each of them, 'Positively the last appearance of Mr Vincent Crummles of Provincial Celebrity!!!'

'Nonsense!' said Nicholas, turning back again. 'It can't be.'

But there it was. In one line by itself was an announcement of the first night of a new melodrama; in another line by itself was an announcement of the last six nights of an old one; a third line was devoted to the re-engagement of the unrivalled African Knife-swallower, who had kindly suffered himself to be prevailed upon to forego his country engagements for one week longer; a fourth line announced that Mr Snittle Timberry, having recovered from his late severe indisposition, would have the honour of appearing that evening; a fifth line said that there were 'Cheers, Tears, and Laughter!' every night; a sixth, that that was positively the last appearance of Mr Vincent Crummles of Provincial Celebrity.

'Surely it must be the same man,' thought Nicholas. 'There can't be two Vincent Crummleses.'

The better to settle this question he referred to the bill again, and finding that there was a Baron in the first piece, and that Roberto (his son) was enacted by one Master Crummles, and Spaletro (his nephew) by one Master Percy Crummles—THEIR last appearances—and that, incidental to the piece, was a characteristic dance by the characters, and a castanet pas seul by the Infant Phenomenon—HER last appearance—he no longer entertained any doubt; and presenting himself at the stage-door, and sending in a scrap of paper with 'Mr Johnson' written thereon in pencil, was presently conducted by a Robber, with a very large belt and buckle round his waist, and very large leather gauntlets on his hands, into the presence of his former manager.

Mr Crummles was unfeignedly glad to see him, and starting up from before a small dressing-glass, with one very bushy eyebrow stuck on crooked over his left eye, and the fellow eyebrow and the calf of one of his legs in his hand, embraced him cordially; at the same time observing, that it would do Mrs Crummles's heart good to bid him goodbye before they went.

'You were always a favourite of hers, Johnson,' said Crummles, 'always were from the first. I was quite easy in my mind about you from that first day you dined with us. One that Mrs Crummles took a fancy to, was sure to turn out right. Ah! Johnson, what a woman that is!'

'I am sincerely obliged to her for her kindness in this and all other respects,' said Nicholas. 'But where are you going,' that you talk about bidding goodbye?'

'Haven't you seen it in the papers?' said Crummles, with some dignity.

'No,' replied Nicholas.

'I wonder at that,' said the manager. 'It was among the varieties. I had the paragraph here somewhere—but I don't know—oh, yes, here it is.'

So saying, Mr Crummles, after pretending that he thought he must have lost it, produced a square inch of newspaper from the pocket of the pantaloons he wore in private life (which, together with the plain clothes of several other gentlemen, lay scattered about on a kind of dresser in the room), and gave it to Nicholas to read:

'The talented Vincent Crummles, long favourably known to fame as a country manager and actor of no ordinary pretensions, is about to cross the Atlantic on a histrionic expedition. Crummles is to be accompanied, we hear, by his lady and gifted family. We know no man superior to Crummles in his particular line of character, or one who, whether as a public or private individual, could carry with him the best wishes of a larger circle of friends. Crummles is certain to succeed.'

'Here's another bit,' said Mr Crummles, handing over a still smaller scrap. 'This is from the notices to correspondents, this one.'

Nicholas read it aloud. '"Philo-Dramaticus. Crummles, the country manager and actor, cannot be more than forty-three, or forty-four years of age. Crummles is NOT a Prussian, having been born at Chelsea." Humph!' said Nicholas, 'that's an odd paragraph.'

'Very,' returned Crummles, scratching the side of his nose, and looking at Nicholas with an assumption of great unconcern. 'I can't think who puts these things in. I didn't.'

Still keeping his eye on Nicholas, Mr Crummles shook his head twice or thrice with profound gravity, and remarking, that he could not for the life of him imagine how the newspapers found out the things they did, folded up the extracts and put them in his pocket again.

'I am astonished to hear this news,' said Nicholas. 'Going to America! You had no such thing in contemplation when I was with you.'

'No,' replied Crummles, 'I hadn't then. The fact is that Mrs Crummles—most extraordinary woman, Johnson.' Here he broke off and whispered something in his ear.

'Oh!' said Nicholas, smiling. 'The prospect of an addition to your family?'

'The seventh addition, Johnson,' returned Mr Crummles, solemnly. 'I thought such a child as the Phenomenon must have been a closer; but it seems we are to have another. She is a very remarkable woman.'

'I congratulate you,' said Nicholas, 'and I hope this may prove a phenomenon too.'

'Why, it's pretty sure to be something uncommon, I suppose,' rejoined Mr Crummles. 'The talent of the other three is principally in combat and serious pantomime. I should like this one to have a turn for juvenile tragedy; I understand they want something of that sort in America very much. However, we must take it as it comes. Perhaps it may have a genius for the tight-rope. It may have any sort of genius, in short, if it takes after its mother, Johnson, for she is an universal genius; but, whatever its genius is, that genius shall be developed.'

Expressing himself after these terms, Mr Crummles put on his other eyebrow, and the calves of his legs, and then put on his legs, which were of a yellowish flesh-colour, and rather soiled about the knees, from frequent going down upon those joints, in curses, prayers, last struggles, and other strong passages.

While the ex-manager completed his toilet, he informed Nicholas that as he should have a fair start in America from the proceeds of a tolerably good engagement which he had been fortunate enough to obtain, and as he and Mrs Crummles could scarcely hope to act for ever (not being immortal, except in the breath of Fame and in a figurative sense) he had made up his mind to settle there permanently, in the hope of acquiring some land of his own which would support them in their old age, and which they could afterwards bequeath to their children. Nicholas, having highly commended the resolution, Mr Crummles went on to impart such further intelligence relative to their mutual friends as he thought might prove interesting; informing Nicholas, among other things, that Miss Snevellicci was happily married to an affluent young wax-chandler who had supplied the theatre with candles, and that Mr Lillyvick didn't dare to say his soul was his own, such was the tyrannical sway of Mrs Lillyvick, who reigned paramount and supreme.

Nicholas responded to this confidence on the part of Mr Crummles, by confiding to him his own name, situation, and prospects, and informing him, in as few general words as he could, of the circumstances which had led to their first acquaintance. After congratulating him with great heartiness on the improved state of his fortunes, Mr Crummles gave him to understand that next morning he and his were to start for Liverpool, where the vessel lay which was to carry them from the shores of England, and that if Nicholas wished to take a last adieu of Mrs Crummles, he must repair with him that night to a farewell supper, given in honour of the family at a neighbouring tavern; at which Mr Snittle Timberry would preside, while the honours of the vice-chair would be sustained by the African Swallower.

The room being by this time very warm and somewhat crowded, in consequence of the influx of four gentlemen, who had just killed each other in the piece under representation, Nicholas accepted the invitation, and promised to return at the conclusion of the performances; preferring the cool air and twilight out of doors to the mingled perfume of gas, orange-peel, and gunpowder, which pervaded the hot and glaring theatre.

He availed himself of this interval to buy a silver snuff-box—the best his funds would afford—as a token of remembrance for Mr Crummles, and having purchased besides a pair of ear-rings for Mrs Crummles, a necklace for the Phenomenon, and a flaming shirt-pin for each of the young gentlemen, he refreshed himself with a walk, and returning a little after the appointed time, found the lights out, the theatre empty, the curtain raised for the night, and Mr Crummles walking up and down the stage expecting his arrival.

'Timberry won't be long,' said Mr Crummles. 'He played the audience out tonight. He does a faithful black in the last piece, and it takes him a little longer to wash himself.'

'A very unpleasant line of character, I should think?' said Nicholas.

'No, I don't know,' replied Mr Crummles; 'it comes off easily enough, and there's only the face and neck. We had a first-tragedy man in our company once, who, when he played Othello, used to black himself all over. But that's feeling a part and going into it as if you meant it; it isn't usual; more's the pity.'

Mr Snittle Timberry now appeared, arm-in-arm with the African Swallower, and, being introduced to Nicholas, raised his hat half a foot, and said he was proud to know him. The Swallower said the same, and looked and spoke remarkably like an Irishman.

'I see by the bills that you have been ill, sir,' said Nicholas to Mr Timberry. 'I hope you are none the worse for your exertions tonight?'

Mr Timberry, in reply, shook his head with a gloomy air, tapped his chest several times with great significancy, and drawing his cloak more closely about him, said, 'But no matter, no matter. Come!'

It is observable that when people upon the stage are in any strait involving the very last extremity of weakness and exhaustion, they invariably perform feats of strength requiring great ingenuity and muscular power. Thus, a wounded prince or bandit chief, who is bleeding to death and too faint to move, except to the softest music (and then only upon his hands and knees), shall be seen to approach a cottage door for aid in such a series of writhings and twistings, and with such curlings up of the legs, and such rollings over and over, and such gettings up and tumblings down again, as could never be achieved save by a very strong man skilled in posture-making. And so natural did this sort of performance come to Mr Snittle Timberry, that on their way out of the theatre and towards the tavern where the supper was to be holden, he testified the severity of his recent indisposition and its wasting effects upon the nervous system, by a series of gymnastic performances which were the admiration of all witnesses.

'Why this is indeed a joy I had not looked for!' said Mrs Crummles, when Nicholas was presented.

'Nor I,' replied Nicholas. 'It is by a mere chance that I have this opportunity of seeing you, although I would have made a great exertion to have availed myself of it.'

'Here is one whom you know,' said Mrs Crummles, thrusting forward the Phenomenon in a blue gauze frock, extensively flounced, and trousers of the same; 'and here another—and another,' presenting the Master Crummleses. 'And how is your friend, the faithful Digby?'

'Digby!' said Nicholas, forgetting at the instant that this had been Smike's theatrical name. 'Oh yes. He's quite—what am I saying?—he is very far from well.'

'How!' exclaimed Mrs Crummles, with a tragic recoil.

'I fear,' said Nicholas, shaking his head, and making an attempt to smile, 'that your better-half would be more struck with him now than ever.'

'What mean you?' rejoined Mrs Crummles, in her most popular manner. 'Whence comes this altered tone?'

'I mean that a dastardly enemy of mine has struck at me through him, and that while he thinks to torture me, he inflicts on him such agonies of terror and suspense as—You will excuse me, I am sure,' said Nicholas, checking himself. 'I should never speak of this, and never do, except to those who know the facts, but for a moment I forgot myself.'

With this hasty apology Nicholas stooped down to salute the Phenomenon, and changed the subject; inwardly cursing his precipitation, and very much wondering what Mrs Crummles must think of so sudden an explosion.

That lady seemed to think very little about it, for the supper being by this time on table, she gave her hand to Nicholas and repaired with a stately step to the left hand of Mr Snittle Timberry. Nicholas had the honour to support her, and Mr Crummles was placed upon the chairman's right; the Phenomenon and the Master Crummleses sustained the vice.

The company amounted in number to some twenty-five or thirty, being composed of such members of the theatrical profession, then engaged or disengaged in London, as were numbered among the most intimate friends of Mr and Mrs Crummles. The ladies and gentlemen were pretty equally balanced; the expenses of the entertainment being defrayed by the latter, each of whom had the privilege of inviting one of the former as his guest.

It was upon the whole a very distinguished party, for independently of the lesser theatrical lights who clustered on this occasion round Mr Snittle Timberry, there was a literary gentleman present who had dramatised in his time two hundred and forty-seven novels as fast as they had come out—some of them faster than they had come out—and who WAS a literary gentleman in consequence.

This gentleman sat on the left hand of Nicholas, to whom he was introduced by his friend the African Swallower, from the bottom of the table, with a high eulogium upon his fame and reputation.

'I am happy to know a gentleman of such great distinction,' said Nicholas, politely.

'Sir,' replied the wit, 'you're very welcome, I'm sure. The honour is reciprocal, sir, as I usually say when I dramatise a book. Did you ever hear a definition of fame, sir?'

'I have heard several,' replied Nicholas, with a smile. 'What is yours?'

'When I dramatise a book, sir,' said the literary gentleman, 'THAT'S fame. For its author.'

'Oh, indeed!' rejoined Nicholas.

'That's fame, sir,' said the literary gentleman.

'So Richard Turpin, Tom King, and Jerry Abershaw have handed down to fame the names of those on whom they committed their most impudent robberies?' said Nicholas.

'I don't know anything about that, sir,' answered the literary gentleman.

'Shakespeare dramatised stories which had previously appeared in print, it is true,' observed Nicholas.

'Meaning Bill, sir?' said the literary gentleman. 'So he did. Bill was an adapter, certainly, so he was—and very well he adapted too—considering.'

'I was about to say,' rejoined Nicholas, 'that Shakespeare derived some of his plots from old tales and legends in general circulation; but it seems to me, that some of the gentlemen of your craft, at the present day, have shot very far beyond him—'

'You're quite right, sir,' interrupted the literary gentleman, leaning back in his chair and exercising his toothpick. 'Human intellect, sir, has progressed since his time, is progressing, will progress.'

'Shot beyond him, I mean,' resumed Nicholas, 'in quite another respect, for, whereas he brought within the magic circle of his genius, traditions peculiarly adapted for his purpose, and turned familiar things into constellations which should enlighten the world for ages, you drag within the magic circle of your dulness, subjects not at all adapted to the purposes of the stage, and debase as he exalted. For instance, you take the uncompleted books of living authors, fresh from their hands, wet from the press, cut, hack, and carve them to the powers and capacities of your actors, and the capability of your theatres, finish unfinished works, hastily and crudely vamp up ideas not yet worked out by their original projector, but which have doubtless cost him many thoughtful days and sleepless nights; by a comparison of incidents and dialogue, down to the very last word he may have written a fortnight before, do your utmost to anticipate his plot—all this without his permission, and against his will; and then, to crown the whole proceeding, publish in some mean pamphlet, an unmeaning farrago of garbled extracts from his work, to which your name as author, with the honourable distinction annexed, of having perpetrated a hundred other outrages of the same description. Now, show me the distinction between such pilfering as this, and picking a man's pocket in the street: unless, indeed, it be, that the legislature has a regard for pocket-handkerchiefs, and leaves men's brains, except when they are knocked out by violence, to take care of themselves.'

'Men must live, sir,' said the literary gentleman, shrugging his shoulders.

'That would be an equally fair plea in both cases,' replied Nicholas; 'but if you put it upon that ground, I have nothing more to say, than, that if I were a writer of books, and you a thirsty dramatist, I would rather pay your tavern score for six months, large as it might be, than have a niche in the Temple of Fame with you for the humblest corner of my pedestal, through six hundred generations.'

The conversation threatened to take a somewhat angry tone when it had arrived thus far, but Mrs Crummles opportunely interposed to prevent its leading to any violent outbreak, by making some inquiries of the literary gentleman relative to the plots of the six new pieces which he had written by contract to introduce the African Knife-swallower in his various unrivalled performances. This speedily engaged him in an animated conversation with that lady, in the interest of which, all recollection of his recent discussion with Nicholas very quickly evaporated.

The board being now clear of the more substantial articles of food, and punch, wine, and spirits being placed upon it and handed about, the guests, who had been previously conversing in little groups of three or four, gradually fell off into a dead silence, while the majority of those present glanced from time to time at Mr Snittle Timberry, and the bolder spirits did not even hesitate to strike the table with their knuckles, and plainly intimate their expectations, by uttering such encouragements as 'Now, Tim,' 'Wake up, Mr Chairman,' 'All charged, sir, and waiting for a toast,' and so forth.

To these remonstrances Mr Timberry deigned no other rejoinder than striking his chest and gasping for breath, and giving many other indications of being still the victim of indisposition—for a man must not make himself too cheap either on the stage or off—while Mr Crummles, who knew full well that he would be the subject of the forthcoming toast, sat gracefully in his chair with his arm thrown carelessly over the back, and now and then lifted his glass to his mouth and drank a little punch, with the same air with which he was accustomed to take long draughts of nothing, out of the pasteboard goblets in banquet scenes.

At length Mr Snittle Timberry rose in the most approved attitude, with one hand in the breast of his waistcoat and the other on the nearest snuff-box, and having been received with great enthusiasm, proposed, with abundance of quotations, his friend Mr Vincent Crummles: ending a pretty long speech by extending his right hand on one side and his left on the other, and severally calling upon Mr and Mrs Crummles to grasp the same. This done, Mr Vincent Crummles returned thanks, and that done, the African Swallower proposed Mrs Vincent Crummles, in affecting terms. Then were heard loud moans and sobs from Mrs Crummles and the ladies, despite of which that heroic woman insisted upon returning thanks herself, which she did, in a manner and in a speech which has never been surpassed and seldom equalled. It then became the duty of Mr Snittle Timberry to give the young Crummleses, which he did; after which Mr Vincent Crummles, as their father, addressed the company in a supplementary speech, enlarging on their virtues, amiabilities, and excellences, and wishing that they were the sons and daughter of every lady and gentleman present. These solemnities having been succeeded by a decent interval, enlivened by musical and other entertainments, Mr Crummles proposed that ornament of the profession, the African Swallower, his very dear friend, if he would allow him to call him so; which liberty (there being no particular reason why he should not allow it) the African Swallower graciously permitted. The literary gentleman was then about to be drunk, but it being discovered that he had been drunk for some time in another acceptation of the term, and was then asleep on the stairs, the intention was abandoned, and the honour transferred to the ladies. Finally, after a very long sitting, Mr Snittle Timberry vacated the chair, and the company with many adieux and embraces dispersed.

Nicholas waited to the last to give his little presents. When he had said goodbye all round and came to Mr Crummles, he could not but mark the difference between their present separation and their parting at Portsmouth. Not a jot of his theatrical manner remained; he put out his hand with an air which, if he could have summoned it at will, would have made him the best actor of his day in homely parts, and when Nicholas shook it with the warmth he honestly felt, appeared thoroughly melted.

'We were a very happy little company, Johnson,' said poor Crummles. 'You and I never had a word. I shall be very glad tomorrow morning to think that I saw you again, but now I almost wish you hadn't come.'

Nicholas was about to return a cheerful reply, when he was greatly disconcerted by the sudden apparition of Mrs Grudden, who it seemed had declined to attend the supper in order that she might rise earlier in the morning, and who now burst out of an adjoining bedroom, habited in very extraordinary white robes; and throwing her arms about his neck, hugged him with great affection.

'What! Are you going too?' said Nicholas, submitting with as good a grace as if she had been the finest young creature in the world.

'Going?' returned Mrs Grudden. 'Lord ha' mercy, what do you think they'd do without me?'

Nicholas submitted to another hug with even a better grace than before, if that were possible, and waving his hat as cheerfully as he could, took farewell of the Vincent Crummleses.

CHAPTER 49

Chronicles the further Proceedings of the Nickleby Family, and the Sequel of the Adventure of the Gentleman in the Small-clothes

While Nicholas, absorbed in the one engrossing subject of interest which had recently opened upon him, occupied his leisure hours with thoughts of Madeline Bray, and in execution of the commissions which the anxiety of brother Charles in her behalf imposed upon him, saw her again and again, and each time with greater danger to his peace of mind and a more weakening effect upon the lofty resolutions he had formed, Mrs Nickleby and Kate continued to live in peace and quiet, agitated by no other cares than those which were connected with certain harassing proceedings taken by Mr Snawley for the recovery of his son, and their anxiety for Smike himself, whose health, long upon the wane, began to be so much affected by apprehension and uncertainty as sometimes to occasion both them and Nicholas considerable uneasiness, and even alarm.

It was no complaint or murmur on the part of the poor fellow himself that thus disturbed them. Ever eager to be employed in such slight services as he could render, and always anxious to repay his benefactors with cheerful and happy looks, less friendly eyes might have seen in him no cause for any misgiving. But there were times, and often too, when the sunken eye was too bright, the hollow cheek too flushed, the breath too thick and heavy in its course, the frame too feeble and exhausted, to escape their regard and notice.

There is a dread disease which so prepares its victim, as it were, for death; which so refines it of its grosser aspect, and throws around familiar looks unearthly indications of the coming change; a dread disease, in which the struggle between soul and body is so gradual, quiet, and solemn, and the result so sure, that day by day, and grain by grain, the mortal part wastes and withers away, so that the spirit grows light and sanguine with its lightening load, and, feeling immortality at hand, deems it but a new term of mortal life; a disease in which death and life are so strangely blended, that death takes the glow and hue of life, and life the gaunt and grisly form of death; a disease which medicine never cured, wealth never warded off, or poverty could boast exemption from; which sometimes moves in giant strides, and sometimes at a tardy sluggish pace, but, slow or quick, is ever sure and certain.

It was with some faint reference in his own mind to this disorder, though he would by no means admit it, even to himself, that Nicholas had already carried his faithful companion to a physician of great repute. There was no cause for immediate alarm, he said. There were no present symptoms which could be deemed conclusive. The constitution had been greatly tried and injured in childhood, but still it MIGHT not be—and that was all.

But he seemed to grow no worse, and, as it was not difficult to find a reason for these symptoms of illness in the shock and agitation he had recently undergone, Nicholas comforted himself with the hope that his poor friend would soon recover. This hope his mother and sister shared with him; and as the object of their joint solicitude seemed to have no uneasiness or despondency for himself, but each day answered with a quiet smile that he felt better than he had upon the day before, their fears abated, and the general happiness was by degrees restored.

Many and many a time in after years did Nicholas look back to this period of his life, and tread again the humble quiet homely scenes that rose up as of old before him. Many and many a time, in the twilight of a summer evening, or beside the flickering winter's fire—but not so often or so sadly then—would his thoughts wander back to these old days, and dwell with a pleasant sorrow upon every slight remembrance which they brought crowding home. The little room in which they had so often sat long after it was dark, figuring such happy futures; Kate's cheerful voice and merry laugh; how, if she were from home, they used to sit and watch for her return scarcely breaking silence but to say how dull it seemed without her; the glee with which poor Smike would start from the darkened corner where he used to sit, and hurry to admit her, and the tears they often saw upon his face, half wondering to see them too, and he so pleased and happy; every little incident, and even slight words and looks of those old days little heeded then, but well remembered when busy cares and trials were quite forgotten, came fresh and thick before him many and many a time, and, rustling above the dusty growth of years, came back green boughs of yesterday.

But there were other persons associated with these recollections, and many changes came about before they had being. A necessary reflection for the purposes of these adventures, which at once subside into their accustomed train, and shunning all flighty anticipations or wayward wanderings, pursue their steady and decorous course.

If the brothers Cheeryble, as they found Nicholas worthy of trust and confidence, bestowed upon him every day some new and substantial mark of kindness, they were not less mindful of those who depended on him. Various little presents to Mrs Nickleby, always of the very things they most required, tended in no slight degree to the improvement and embellishment of the cottage. Kate's little store of trinkets became quite dazzling; and for company! If brother Charles and brother Ned failed to look in for at least a few minutes every Sunday, or one evening in the week, there was Mr Tim Linkinwater (who had never made half-a-dozen other acquaintances in all his life, and who took such delight in his new friends as no words can express) constantly coming and going in his evening walks, and stopping to rest; while Mr Frank Cheeryble happened, by some strange conjunction of circumstances, to be passing the door on some business or other at least three nights in the week.

'He is the most attentive young man I ever saw, Kate,' said Mrs Nickleby to her daughter one evening, when this last-named gentleman had been the subject of the worthy lady's eulogium for some time, and Kate had sat perfectly silent.

'Attentive, mama!' rejoined Kate.

'Bless my heart, Kate!' cried Mrs Nickleby, with her wonted suddenness, 'what a colour you have got; why, you're quite flushed!'

'Oh, mama! what strange things you fancy!'

'It wasn't fancy, Kate, my dear, I'm certain of that,' returned her mother. 'However, it's gone now at any rate, so it don't much matter whether it was or not. What was it we were talking about? Oh! Mr Frank. I never saw such attention in MY life, never.'

'Surely you are not serious,' returned Kate, colouring again; and this time beyond all dispute.

'Not serious!' returned Mrs Nickleby; 'why shouldn't I be serious? I'm sure I never was more serious. I will say that his politeness and attention to me is one of the most becoming, gratifying, pleasant things I have seen for a very long time. You don't often meet with such behaviour in young men, and it strikes one more when one does meet with it.'

'Oh! attention to YOU, mama,' rejoined Kate quickly—'oh yes.'

'Dear me, Kate,' retorted Mrs Nickleby, 'what an extraordinary girl you are! Was it likely I should be talking of his attention to anybody else? I declare I'm quite sorry to think he should be in love with a German lady, that I am.'

'He said very positively that it was no such thing, mama,' returned Kate. 'Don't you remember his saying so that very first night he came here? Besides,' she added, in a more gentle tone, 'why should WE be sorry if it is the case? What is it to us, mama?'

'Nothing to US, Kate, perhaps,' said Mrs Nickleby, emphatically; 'but something to ME, I confess. I like English people to be thorough English people, and not half English and half I don't know what. I shall tell him point-blank next time he comes, that I wish he would marry one of his own country-women; and see what he says to that.'

'Pray don't think of such a thing, mama,' returned Kate, hastily; 'not for the world. Consider. How very—'

'Well, my dear, how very what?' said Mrs Nickleby, opening her eyes in great astonishment.

Before Kate had returned any reply, a queer little double knock announced that Miss La Creevy had called to see them; and when Miss La Creevy presented herself, Mrs Nickleby, though strongly disposed to be argumentative on the previous question, forgot all about it in a gush of supposes about the coach she had come by; supposing that the man who drove must have been either the man in the shirt-sleeves or the man with the black eye; that whoever he was, he hadn't found that parasol she left inside last week; that no doubt they had stopped a long while at the Halfway House, coming down; or that perhaps being full, they had come straight on; and, lastly, that they, surely, must have passed Nicholas on the road.

'I saw nothing of him,' answered Miss La Creevy; 'but I saw that dear old soul Mr Linkinwater.'

'Taking his evening walk, and coming on to rest here, before he turns back to the city, I'll be bound!' said Mrs Nickleby.

'I should think he was,' returned Miss La Creevy; 'especially as young Mr Cheeryble was with him.'

'Surely that is no reason why Mr Linkinwater should be coming here,' said Kate.

'Why I think it is, my dear,' said Miss La Creevy. 'For a young man, Mr Frank is not a very great walker; and I observe that he generally falls tired, and requires a good long rest, when he has come as far as this. But where is my friend?' said the little woman, looking about, after having glanced slyly at Kate. 'He has not been run away with again, has he?'

'Ah! where is Mr Smike?' said Mrs Nickleby; 'he was here this instant.'

Upon further inquiry, it turned out, to the good lady's unbounded astonishment, that Smike had, that moment, gone upstairs to bed.

'Well now,' said Mrs Nickleby, 'he is the strangest creature! Last Tuesday—was it Tuesday? Yes, to be sure it was; you recollect, Kate, my dear, the very last time young Mr Cheeryble was here—last Tuesday night he went off in just the same strange way, at the very moment the knock came to the door. It cannot be that he don't like company, because he is always fond of people who are fond of Nicholas, and I am sure young Mr Cheeryble is. And the strangest thing is, that he does not go to bed; therefore it cannot be because he is tired. I know he doesn't go to bed, because my room is the next one, and when I went upstairs last Tuesday, hours after him, I found that he had not even taken his shoes off; and he had no candle, so he must have sat moping in the dark all the time. Now, upon my word,' said Mrs Nickleby, 'when I come to think of it, that's very extraordinary!'

As the hearers did not echo this sentiment, but remained profoundly silent, either as not knowing what to say, or as being unwilling to interrupt, Mrs Nickleby pursued the thread of her discourse after her own fashion.

'I hope,' said that lady, 'that this unaccountable conduct may not be the beginning of his taking to his bed and living there all his life, like the Thirsty Woman of Tutbury, or the Cock-lane Ghost, or some of those extraordinary creatures. One of them had some connection with our family. I forget, without looking back to some old letters I have upstairs, whether it was my great-grandfather who went to school with the Cock-lane Ghost, or the Thirsty Woman of Tutbury who went to school with my grandmother. Miss La Creevy, you know, of course. Which was it that didn't mind what the clergyman said? The Cock-lane Ghost or the Thirsty Woman of Tutbury?'

'The Cock-lane Ghost, I believe.'

'Then I have no doubt,' said Mrs Nickleby, 'that it was with him my great-grandfather went to school; for I know the master of his school was a dissenter, and that would, in a great measure, account for the Cock-lane

Ghost's behaving in such an improper manner to the clergyman when he grew up. Ah! Train up a Ghost—child, I mean—'

Any further reflections on this fruitful theme were abruptly cut short by the arrival of Tim Linkinwater and Mr Frank Cheeryble; in the hurry of receiving whom, Mrs Nickleby speedily lost sight of everything else.

'I am so sorry Nicholas is not at home,' said Mrs Nickleby. 'Kate, my dear, you must be both Nicholas and yourself.'

'Miss Nickleby need be but herself,' said Frank. 'I—if I may venture to say so—oppose all change in her.'

'Then at all events she shall press you to stay,' returned Mrs Nickleby. 'Mr Linkinwater says ten minutes, but I cannot let you go so soon; Nicholas would be very much vexed, I am sure. Kate, my dear!'

In obedience to a great number of nods, and winks, and frowns of extra significance, Kate added her entreaties that the visitors would remain; but it was observable that she addressed them exclusively to Tim Linkinwater; and there was, besides, a certain embarrassment in her manner, which, although it was as far from impairing its graceful character as the tinge it communicated to her cheek was from diminishing her beauty, was obvious at a glance even to Mrs Nickleby. Not being of a very speculative character, however, save under circumstances when her speculations could be put into words and uttered aloud, that discreet matron attributed the emotion to the circumstance of her daughter's not happening to have her best frock on: 'though I never saw her look better, certainly,' she reflected at the same time. Having settled the question in this way, and being most complacently satisfied that in this, and in all other instances, her conjecture could not fail to be the right one, Mrs Nickleby dismissed it from her thoughts, and inwardly congratulated herself on being so shrewd and knowing.

Nicholas did not come home nor did Smike reappear; but neither circumstance, to say the truth, had any great effect upon the little party, who were all in the best humour possible. Indeed, there sprung up quite a flirtation between Miss La Creevy and Tim Linkinwater, who said a thousand jocose and facetious things, and became, by degrees, quite gallant, not to say tender. Little Miss La Creevy, on her part, was in high spirits, and rallied Tim on having remained a bachelor all his life with so much success, that Tim was actually induced to declare, that if he could get anybody to have him, he didn't know but what he might change his condition even yet. Miss La Creevy earnestly recommended a lady she knew, who would exactly suit Mr Linkinwater, and had a very comfortable property of her own; but this latter qualification had very little effect upon Tim, who manfully protested that fortune would be no object with him, but that true worth and cheerfulness of disposition were what a man should look for in a wife, and that if he had these, he could find money enough for the moderate wants of both. This avowal was considered so honourable to Tim, that neither Mrs Nickleby nor Miss La Creevy could sufficiently extol it; and stimulated by their praises, Tim launched out into several other declarations also manifesting the disinterestedness of his heart, and a great devotion to the fair sex: which were received with no less approbation. This was done and said with a comical mixture of jest and earnest, and, leading to a great amount of laughter, made them very merry indeed.

Kate was commonly the life and soul of the conversation at home; but she was more silent than usual upon this occasion (perhaps because Tim and Miss La Creevy engrossed so much of it), and, keeping aloof from the talkers, sat at the window watching the shadows as the evening closed in, and enjoying the quiet beauty of the night, which seemed to have scarcely less attractions to Frank, who first lingered near, and then sat down beside, her. No doubt, there are a great many things to be said appropriate to a summer evening, and no doubt they are best said in a low voice, as being most suitable to the peace and serenity of the hour; long pauses, too, at times, and then an earnest word or so, and then another interval of silence which, somehow, does not seem like silence either, and perhaps now and then a hasty turning away of the head, or drooping of the eyes towards the ground, all these minor circumstances, with a disinclination to have candles introduced and a tendency to confuse hours with minutes, are doubtless mere influences of the time, as many lovely lips can clearly testify. Neither is there the slightest reason why Mrs Nickleby should have expressed surprise when, candles being at length brought in, Kate's bright eyes were unable to bear the light which obliged her to avert her face, and even to leave the room for some short time; because, when one has sat in the dark so long, candles ARE dazzling, and nothing can be more strictly natural than that such results should be produced, as all well-informed young people know. For that matter, old people know it too, or did know it once, but they forget these things sometimes, and more's the pity.

The good lady's surprise, however, did not end here. It was greatly increased when it was discovered that Kate had not the least appetite for supper: a discovery so alarming that there is no knowing in what unaccountable efforts of oratory Mrs Nickleby's apprehensions might have been vented, if the general attention had not been attracted, at the moment, by a very strange and uncommon noise, proceeding, as the pale and trembling servant girl affirmed, and as everybody's sense of hearing seemed to affirm also, 'right down' the chimney of the adjoining room.

It being quite plain to the comprehension of all present that, however extraordinary and improbable it might appear, the noise did nevertheless proceed from the chimney in question; and the noise (which was a strange compound of various shuffling, sliding, rumbling, and struggling sounds, all muffled by the chimney) still continuing, Frank Cheeryble caught up a candle, and Tim Linkinwater the tongs, and they would have very quickly ascertained the cause of this disturbance if Mrs Nickleby had not been taken very faint, and declined being left behind, on any account. This produced a short remonstrance, which terminated in their all proceeding to the troubled chamber in a body, excepting only Miss La Creevy, who, as the servant girl volunteered a confession of having been subject to fits in her infancy, remained with her to give the alarm and apply restoratives, in case of extremity.

Advancing to the door of the mysterious apartment, they were not a little surprised to hear a human voice, chanting with a highly elaborated expression of melancholy, and in tones of suffocation which a human voice might have produced from under five or six feather-beds of the best quality, the once popular air of 'Has she then failed in her truth, the beautiful maid I adore?' Nor, on bursting into the room without demanding a parley, was their astonishment lessened by the discovery that these romantic sounds certainly proceeded from the throat of some man up the chimney, of whom nothing was visible but a pair of legs, which were dangling above the grate; apparently feeling, with extreme anxiety, for the top bar whereon to effect a landing.

A sight so unusual and unbusiness-like as this, completely paralysed Tim Linkinwater, who, after one or two gentle pinches at the stranger's ankles, which were productive of no effect, stood clapping the tongs together, as if he were sharpening them for another assault, and did nothing else.

'This must be some drunken fellow,' said Frank. 'No thief would announce his presence thus.'

As he said this, with great indignation, he raised the candle to obtain a better view of the legs, and was darting forward to pull them down with very little ceremony, when Mrs Nickleby, clasping her hands, uttered a sharp sound, something between a scream and an exclamation, and demanded to know whether the mysterious limbs were not clad in small-clothes and grey worsted stockings, or whether her eyes had deceived her.

'Yes,' cried Frank, looking a little closer. 'Small-clothes certainly, and—and—rough grey stockings, too. Do you know him, ma'am?'

'Kate, my dear,' said Mrs Nickleby, deliberately sitting herself down in a chair with that sort of desperate resignation which seemed to imply that now matters had come to a crisis, and all disguise was useless, 'you will have the goodness, my love, to explain precisely how this matter stands. I have given him no encouragement—none whatever—not the least in the world. You know that, my dear, perfectly well. He was very respectful, exceedingly respectful, when he declared, as you were a witness to; still at the same time, if I am to be persecuted in this way, if vegetable what's-his-names and all kinds of garden-stuff are to strew my path out of doors, and gentlemen are to come choking up our chimneys at home, I really don't know—upon my word I do NOT know—what is to become of me. It's a very hard case—harder than anything I was ever exposed to, before I married your poor dear papa, though I suffered a good deal of annoyance then—but that, of course, I expected, and made up my mind for. When I was not nearly so old as you, my dear, there was a young gentleman who sat next us at church, who used, almost every Sunday, to cut my name in large letters in the front of his pew while the sermon was going on. It was gratifying, of course, naturally so, but still it was an annoyance, because the pew was in a very conspicuous place, and he was several times publicly taken out by the beadle for doing it. But that was nothing to this. This is a great deal worse, and a great deal more embarrassing. I would rather, Kate, my dear,' said Mrs Nickleby, with great solemnity, and an effusion of tears: 'I would rather, I declare, have been a pig-faced lady, than be exposed to such a life as this!'

Frank Cheeryble and Tim Linkinwater looked, in irrepressible astonishment, first at each other and then at Kate, who felt that some explanation was necessary, but who, between her terror at the apparition of the legs, her fear lest their owner should be smothered, and her anxiety to give the least ridiculous solution of the mystery that it was capable of bearing, was quite unable to utter a single word.

'He gives me great pain,' continued Mrs Nickleby, drying her eyes, 'great pain; but don't hurt a hair of his head, I beg. On no account hurt a hair of his head.'

It would not, under existing circumstances, have been quite so easy to hurt a hair of the gentleman's head as Mrs Nickleby seemed to imagine, inasmuch as that part of his person was some feet up the chimney, which was by no means a wide one. But, as all this time he had never left off singing about the bankruptcy of the beautiful maid in respect of truth, and now began not only to croak very feebly, but to kick with great violence as if respiration became a task of difficulty, Frank Cheeryble, without further hesitation, pulled at the shorts and worsteds with such heartiness as to bring him floundering into the room with greater precipitation than he had quite calculated upon.

'Oh! yes, yes,' said Kate, directly the whole figure of this singular visitor appeared in this abrupt manner. 'I know who it is. Pray don't be rough with him. Is he hurt? I hope not. Oh, pray see if he is hurt.'

'He is not, I assure you,' replied Frank, handling the object of his surprise, after this appeal, with sudden tenderness and respect. 'He is not hurt in the least.'

'Don't let him come any nearer,' said Kate, retiring as far as she could.

'Oh, no, he shall not,' rejoined Frank. 'You see I have him secure here. But may I ask you what this means, and whether you expected, this old gentleman?'

'Oh, no,' said Kate, 'of course not; but he—mama does not think so, I believe—but he is a mad gentleman who has escaped from the next house, and must have found an opportunity of secreting himself here.'

'Kate,' interposed Mrs Nickleby with severe dignity, 'I am surprised at you.'

'Dear mama,' Kate gently remonstrated.

'I am surprised at you,' repeated Mrs Nickleby; 'upon my word, Kate, I am quite astonished that you should join the persecutors of this unfortunate gentleman, when you know very well that they have the basest designs upon his property, and that that is the whole secret of it. It would be much kinder of you, Kate, to ask Mr Linkinwater or Mr Cheeryble to interfere in his behalf, and see him righted. You ought not to allow your feelings to influence you; it's not right, very far from it. What should my feelings be, do you suppose? If anybody ought to be indignant, who is it? I, of course, and very properly so. Still, at the same time, I wouldn't commit such an injustice for the world. No,' continued Mrs Nickleby, drawing herself up, and looking another way with a kind of bashful stateliness; 'this gentleman will understand me when I tell him that I repeat the answer I gave him the other day; that I always will repeat it, though I do believe him to be sincere when I find him placing himself in such dreadful situations on my account; and that I request him to have the goodness to go away directly, or it will be impossible to keep his behaviour a secret from my son Nicholas. I am obliged to him, very much obliged to him, but I cannot listen to his addresses for a moment. It's quite impossible.'

While this address was in course of delivery, the old gentleman, with his nose and cheeks embellished with large patches of soot, sat upon the ground with his arms folded, eyeing the spectators in profound silence, and with a very majestic demeanour. He did not appear to take the smallest notice of what Mrs Nickleby said, but when she ceased to speak he honoured her with a long stare, and inquired if she had quite finished.

'I have nothing more to say,' replied that lady modestly. 'I really cannot say anything more.'

'Very good,' said the old gentleman, raising his voice, 'then bring in the bottled lightning, a clean tumbler, and a corkscrew.'

Nobody executing this order, the old gentleman, after a short pause, raised his voice again and demanded a thunder sandwich. This article not being forthcoming either, he requested to be served with a fricassee of boot-tops and goldfish sauce, and then laughing heartily, gratified his hearers with a very long, very loud, and most melodious bellow.

But still Mrs Nickleby, in reply to the significant looks of all about her, shook her head as though to assure them that she saw nothing whatever in all this, unless, indeed, it were a slight degree of eccentricity. She might have remained impressed with these opinions down to the latest moment of her life, but for a slight train of circumstances, which, trivial as they were, altered the whole complexion of the case.

It happened that Miss La Creevy, finding her patient in no very threatening condition, and being strongly impelled by curiosity to see what was going forward, bustled into the room while the old gentleman was in the very act of bellowing. It happened, too, that the instant the old gentleman saw her, he stopped short, skipped suddenly on his feet, and fell to kissing his hand violently: a change of demeanour which almost terrified the little portrait painter out of her senses, and caused her to retreat behind Tim Linkinwater with the utmost expedition.

'Aha!' cried the old gentleman, folding his hands, and squeezing them with great force against each other. 'I see her now; I see her now! My love, my life, my bride, my peerless beauty. She is come at last—at last—and all is gas and gaiters!'

Mrs Nickleby looked rather disconcerted for a moment, but immediately recovering, nodded to Miss La Creevy and the other spectators several times, and frowned, and smiled gravely, giving them to understand that she saw where the mistake was, and would set it all to rights in a minute or two.

'She is come!' said the old gentleman, laying his hand upon his heart. 'Cormoran and Blunderbore! She is come! All the wealth I have is hers if she will take me for her slave. Where are grace, beauty, and blandishments, like those? In the Empress of Madagascar? No. In the Queen of Diamonds? No. In Mrs Rowland, who every morning bathes in Kalydor for nothing? No. Melt all these down into one, with the three Graces, the nine Muses, and fourteen biscuit-bakers' daughters from Oxford Street, and make a woman half as lovely. Pho! I defy you.'

After uttering this rhapsody, the old gentleman snapped his fingers twenty or thirty times, and then subsided into an ecstatic contemplation of Miss La Creevy's charms. This affording Mrs Nickleby a favourable opportunity of explanation, she went about it straight.

'I am sure,' said the worthy lady, with a prefatory cough, 'that it's a great relief, under such trying circumstances as these, to have anybody else mistaken for me—a very great relief; and it's a circumstance that never occurred before, although I have several times been mistaken for my daughter Kate. I have no doubt the people were very foolish, and perhaps ought to have known better, but still they did take me for her, and of course that was no fault of mine, and it would be very hard indeed if I was to be made responsible for it. However, in this instance, of course, I must feel that I should do exceedingly wrong if I suffered anybody—especially anybody that I am under great obligations to—to be made uncomfortable on my account. And therefore I think it my duty to tell that gentleman that he is mistaken, that I am the lady who he was told by some impertinent person was niece to the Council of Paving-stones, and that I do beg and entreat of him to go quietly away, if it's only for,' here Mrs Nickleby simpered and hesitated, 'for MY sake.'

It might have been expected that the old gentleman would have been penetrated to the heart by the delicacy and condescension of this appeal, and that he would at least have returned a courteous and suitable reply. What, then, was the shock which Mrs Nickleby received, when, accosting HER in the most unmistakable manner, he replied in a loud and sonourous voice: 'Avaunt! Cat!'

'Sir!' cried Mrs Nickleby, in a faint tone.

'Cat!' repeated the old gentleman. 'Puss, Kit, Tit, Grimalkin, Tabby, Brindle! Whoosh!' with which last sound, uttered in a hissing manner between his teeth, the old gentleman swung his arms violently round and round, and at the same time alternately advanced on Mrs Nickleby, and retreated from her, in that species of savage dance with which boys on market-days may be seen to frighten pigs, sheep, and other animals, when they give out obstinate indications of turning down a wrong street.

Mrs Nickleby wasted no words, but uttered an exclamation of horror and surprise, and immediately fainted away.

'I'll attend to mama,' said Kate, hastily; 'I am not at all frightened. But pray take him away: pray take him away!'

Frank was not at all confident of his power of complying with this request, until he bethought himself of the stratagem of sending Miss La Creevy on a few paces in advance, and urging the old gentleman to follow her. It succeeded to a miracle; and he went away in a rapture of admiration, strongly guarded by Tim Linkinwater on one side, and Frank himself on the other.

'Kate,' murmured Mrs Nickleby, reviving when the coast was clear, 'is he gone?'

She was assured that he was.

'I shall never forgive myself, Kate,' said Mrs Nickleby. 'Never! That gentleman has lost his senses, and I am the unhappy cause.'

'YOU the cause!' said Kate, greatly astonished.

'I, my love,' replied Mrs Nickleby, with a desperate calmness. 'You saw what he was the other day; you see what he is now. I told your brother, weeks and weeks ago, Kate, that I hoped a disappointment might not be too much for him. You see what a wreck he is. Making allowance for his being a little flighty, you know how rationally, and sensibly, and honourably he talked, when we saw him in the garden. You have heard the dreadful nonsense he has been guilty of this night, and the manner in which he has gone on with that poor unfortunate little old maid. Can anybody doubt how all this has been brought about?'

'I should scarcely think they could,' said Kate mildly.

'I should scarcely think so, either,' rejoined her mother. 'Well! if I am the unfortunate cause of this, I have the satisfaction of knowing that I am not to blame. I told Nicholas, I said to him, "Nicholas, my dear, we should be very careful how we proceed." He would scarcely hear me. If the matter had only been properly taken up at first, as I wished it to be! But you are both of you so like your poor papa. However, I have MY consolation, and that should be enough for me!'

Washing her hands, thus, of all responsibility under this head, past, present, or to come, Mrs Nickleby kindly added that she hoped her children might never have greater cause to reproach themselves than she had, and prepared herself to receive the escort, who soon returned with the intelligence that the old gentleman was safely housed, and that they found his custodians, who had been making merry with some friends, wholly ignorant of his absence.

Quiet being again restored, a delicious half-hour—so Frank called it, in the course of subsequent conversation with Tim Linkinwater as they were walking home—was spent in conversation, and Tim's watch at length apprising him that it was high time to depart, the ladies were left alone, though not without many offers on the part of Frank to remain until Nicholas arrived, no matter what hour of the night it might be, if, after the late neighbourly irruption, they entertained the least fear of being left to themselves. As their freedom from all further apprehension, however, left no pretext for his insisting on mounting guard, he was obliged to abandon the citadel, and to retire with the trusty Tim.

Nearly three hours of silence passed away. Kate blushed to find, when Nicholas returned, how long she had been sitting alone, occupied with her own thoughts.

'I really thought it had not been half an hour,' she said.

'They must have been pleasant thoughts, Kate,' rejoined Nicholas gaily, 'to make time pass away like that. What were they now?'

Kate was confused; she toyed with some trifle on the table, looked up and smiled, looked down and dropped a tear.

'Why, Kate,' said Nicholas, drawing his sister towards him and kissing her, 'let me see your face. No? Ah! that was but a glimpse; that's scarcely fair. A longer look than that, Kate. Come—and I'll read your thoughts for you.'

There was something in this proposition, albeit it was said without the slightest consciousness or application, which so alarmed his sister, that Nicholas laughingly changed the subject to domestic matters, and thus gathered, by degrees, as they left the room and went upstairs together, how lonely Smike had been all night—and by very slow degrees, too; for on this subject also, Kate seemed to speak with some reluctance.

'Poor fellow,' said Nicholas, tapping gently at his door, 'what can be the cause of all this?'

Kate was hanging on her brother's arm. The door being quickly opened, she had not time to disengage herself, before Smike, very pale and haggard, and completely dressed, confronted them.

'And have you not been to bed?' said Nicholas.

'N—n—no,' was the reply.

Nicholas gently detained his sister, who made an effort to retire; and asked, 'Why not?'

'I could not sleep,' said Smike, grasping the hand which his friend extended to him.

'You are not well?' rejoined Nicholas.

'I am better, indeed. A great deal better,' said Smike quickly.

'Then why do you give way to these fits of melancholy?' inquired Nicholas, in his kindest manner; 'or why not tell us the cause? You grow a different creature, Smike.'

'I do; I know I do,' he replied. 'I will tell you the reason one day, but not now. I hate myself for this; you are all so good and kind. But I cannot help it. My heart is very full; you do not know how full it is.'

He wrung Nicholas's hand before he released it; and glancing, for a moment, at the brother and sister as they stood together, as if there were something in their strong affection which touched him very deeply, withdrew into his chamber, and was soon the only watcher under that quiet roof.

CHAPTER 50

Involves a serious Catastrophe

The little race-course at Hampton was in the full tide and height of its gaiety; the day as dazzling as day could be; the sun high in the cloudless sky, and shining in its fullest splendour. Every gaudy colour that fluttered in the air from carriage seat and garish tent top, shone out in its gaudiest hues. Old dingy flags grew new again, faded gilding was re-burnished, stained rotten canvas looked a snowy white, the very beggars' rags were freshened up, and sentiment quite forgot its charity in its fervent admiration of poverty so picturesque.

It was one of those scenes of life and animation, caught in its very brightest and freshest moments, which can scarcely fail to please; for if the eye be tired of show and glare, or the ear be weary with a ceaseless round of noise, the one may repose, turn almost where it will, on eager, happy, and expectant faces, and the other deaden all consciousness of more annoying sounds in those of mirth and exhilaration. Even the sunburnt faces of gypsy children, half naked though they be, suggest a drop of comfort. It is a pleasant thing to see that the sun has been there; to know that the air and light are on them every day; to feel that they ARE children, and lead children's lives; that if their pillows be damp, it is with the dews of Heaven, and not with tears; that the limbs of their girls are free, and that they are not crippled by distortions, imposing an unnatural and horrible penance upon their sex; that their lives are spent, from day to day, at least among the waving trees, and not in the midst of dreadful engines which make young children old before they know what childhood is, and give them the exhaustion and infirmity of age, without, like age, the privilege to die. God send that old nursery tales were true, and that gypsies stole such children by the score!

The great race of the day had just been run; and the close lines of people, on either side of the course, suddenly breaking up and pouring into it, imparted a new liveliness to the scene, which was again all busy movement. Some hurried eagerly to catch a glimpse of the winning horse;

others darted to and fro, searching, no less eagerly, for the carriages they had left in quest of better stations. Here, a little knot gathered round a pea and thimble table to watch the plucking of some unhappy greenhorn; and there, another proprietor with his confederates in various disguises—one man in spectacles; another, with an eyeglass and a stylish hat; a third, dressed as a farmer well to do in the world, with his top-coat over his arm and his flash notes in a large leathern pocket-book; and all with heavy-handled whips to represent most innocent country fellows who had trotted there on horseback—sought, by loud and noisy talk and pretended play, to entrap some unwary customer, while the gentlemen confederates (of more villainous aspect still, in clean linen and good clothes), betrayed their close interest in the concern by the anxious furtive glance they cast on all new comers. These would be hanging on the outskirts of a wide circle of people assembled round some itinerant juggler, opposed, in his turn, by a noisy band of music, or the classic game of 'Ring the Bull,' while ventriloquists holding dialogues with wooden dolls, and fortune-telling women smothering the cries of real babies, divided with them, and many more, the general attention of the company. Drinking-tents were full, glasses began to clink in carriages, hampers to be unpacked, tempting provisions to be set forth, knives and forks to rattle, champagne corks to fly, eyes to brighten that were not dull before, and pickpockets to count their gains during the last heat. The attention so recently strained on one object of interest, was now divided among a hundred; and look where you would, there was a motley assemblage of feasting, laughing, talking, begging, gambling, and mummery.

Of the gambling-booths there was a plentiful show, flourishing in all the splendour of carpeted ground, striped hangings, crimson cloth, pinnacled roofs, geranium pots, and livery servants. There were the Stranger's club-house, the Athenaeum club-house, the Hampton club-house, the St James's club-house, and half a mile of club-houses to play IN; and there were ROUGE-ET-NOIR, French hazard, and other games to play AT. It is into one of these booths that our story takes its way.

Fitted up with three tables for the purposes of play, and crowded with players and lookers on, it was, although the largest place of the kind upon the course, intensely hot, notwithstanding that a portion of the canvas roof was rolled back to admit more air, and there were two doors for a free passage in and out. Excepting one or two men who, each with a long roll of half-crowns, chequered with a few stray sovereigns, in his left hand, staked their money at every roll of the ball with a business-like sedateness which showed that they were used to it, and had been playing all day, and most probably all the day before, there was no very distinctive character about the players, who were chiefly young men, apparently attracted by curiosity, or staking small sums as part of the amusement of the day, with no very great interest in winning or losing. There were two persons present, however, who, as peculiarly good specimens of a class, deserve a passing notice.

Of these, one was a man of six or eight and fifty, who sat on a chair near one of the entrances of the booth, with his hands folded on the top of his stick, and his chin appearing above them. He was a tall, fat, long-bodied man, buttoned up to the throat in a light green coat, which made his body look still longer than it was. He wore, besides, drab breeches and gaiters, a white neckerchief, and a broad-brimmed white hat. Amid all the buzzing noise of the games, and the perpetual passing in and out of the people, he seemed perfectly calm and abstracted, without the smallest particle of excitement in his composition. He exhibited no indication of weariness, nor, to a casual observer, of interest either. There he sat, quite still and collected. Sometimes, but very rarely, he nodded to some passing face, or beckoned to a waiter to obey a call from one of the tables. The next instant he subsided into his old state. He might have been some profoundly deaf old gentleman, who had come in to take a rest, or he might have been patiently waiting for a friend, without the least consciousness of anybody's presence, or fixed in a trance, or under the influence of opium. People turned round and looked at him; he made no gesture, caught nobody's eye, let them pass away, and others come on and be succeeded by others, and took no notice. When he did move, it seemed wonderful how he could have seen anything to occasion it. And so, in truth, it was. But there was not a face that passed in or out, which this man failed to see; not a gesture at any one of the three tables that was lost upon him; not a word, spoken by the bankers, but reached his ear; not a winner or loser he could not have marked. And he was the proprietor of the place.

The other presided over the ROUGE-ET-NOIR table. He was probably some ten years younger, and was a plump, paunchy, sturdy-looking fellow, with his under-lip a little pursed, from a habit of counting money inwardly as he paid it, but with no decidedly bad expression in his face, which was rather an honest and jolly one than otherwise. He wore no coat, the weather being hot, and stood behind the table with a huge mound of crowns and half-crowns before him, and a cash-box for notes. This game was constantly playing. Perhaps twenty people would be staking at the same time. This man had to roll the ball, to watch the stakes as they were laid down, to gather them off the colour which lost, to pay those who won, to do it all with the utmost dispatch, to roll the ball again, and to keep this game perpetually alive. He did it all with a rapidity absolutely marvellous; never hesitating, never making a mistake, never stopping, and never ceasing to repeat such unconnected phrases as the following, which, partly from habit, and partly to have something appropriate and business-like to say, he constantly poured out with the same monotonous emphasis, and in nearly the same order, all day long:

'Rooge-a-nore from Paris! Gentlemen, make your game and back your own opinions—any time while the ball rolls—rooge-a-nore from Paris, gentlemen, it's a French game, gentlemen, I brought it over myself, I did indeed!—Rooge-a-nore from Paris—black wins—black—stop a minute, sir, and I'll pay you, directly—two there, half a pound there, three there—and one there—gentlemen, the ball's a rolling—any time, sir, while the ball rolls!—The beauty of this game is, that you can double your stakes or put down your money, gentlemen, any time while the ball rolls—black again—black wins—I never saw such a thing—I never did, in all my life, upon my word I never did; if any gentleman had been backing the black in the last five minutes he must have won five-and-forty pound in four rolls of the ball, he must indeed. Gentlemen, we've port, sherry, cigars, and most excellent champagne. Here, wai-ter, bring a bottle of champagne, and let's have a dozen or fifteen cigars here—and let's be comfortable, gentlemen—and bring some clean glasses—any time while the ball rolls!—I lost one hundred and thirty-seven pound yesterday, gentlemen, at one roll of the ball, I did indeed!—how do you do, sir?' (recognising some knowing gentleman without any halt or change of voice, and giving a wink so slight that it seems an accident), 'will you take a glass of sherry, sir?—here, waiter! bring a clean glass, and hand the sherry to this gentleman—and hand it round, will you, waiter?—this is the rooge-a-nore from Paris, gentlemen—any time while the ball rolls!—gentlemen, make your game, and back your own opinions—it's the rooge-a-nore from Paris—quite a new game, I brought it over myself, I did indeed—gentlemen, the ball's a-rolling!'

This officer was busily plying his vocation when half-a-dozen persons sauntered through the booth, to whom, but without stopping either in his speech or work, he bowed respectfully; at the same time directing, by a look, the attention of a man beside him to the tallest figure in the group, in recognition of whom the proprietor pulled off his hat. This was Sir Mulberry Hawk, with whom were his friend and pupil, and a small train of gentlemanly-dressed men, of characters more doubtful than obscure.

The proprietor, in a low voice, bade Sir Mulberry good-day. Sir Mulberry, in the same tone, bade the proprietor go to the devil, and turned to speak with his friends.

There was evidently an irritable consciousness about him that he was an object of curiosity, on this first occasion of showing himself in public after the accident that had befallen him; and it was easy to perceive that he appeared on the race-course, that day, more in the hope of meeting with a great many people who knew him, and so getting over as much as possible of the annoyance at once, than with any purpose of enjoying the sport. There yet remained a slight scar upon his face, and whenever he was recognised, as he was almost every minute by people sauntering in and out, he made a restless effort to conceal it with his glove; showing how keenly he felt the disgrace he had undergone.

'Ah! Hawk,' said one very sprucely-dressed personage in a Newmarket coat, a choice neckerchief, and all other accessories of the most unexceptionable kind. 'How d'ye do, old fellow?'

This was a rival trainer of young noblemen and gentlemen, and the person of all others whom Sir Mulberry most hated and dreaded to meet. They shook hands with excessive cordiality.

'And how are you now, old fellow, hey?'

'Quite well, quite well,' said Sir Mulberry.

'That's right,' said the other. 'How d'ye do, Verisopht? He's a little pulled down, our friend here. Rather out of condition still, hey?'

It should be observed that the gentleman had very white teeth, and that when there was no excuse for laughing, he generally finished with the same monosyllable, which he uttered so as to display them.

'He's in very good condition; there's nothing the matter with him,' said the young man carelessly.

'Upon my soul I'm glad to hear it,' rejoined the other. 'Have you just returned from Brussels?'

'We only reached town late last night,' said Lord Frederick. Sir Mulberry turned away to speak to one of his own party, and feigned not to hear.

'Now, upon my life,' said the friend, affecting to speak in a whisper, 'it's an uncommonly bold and game thing in Hawk to show himself so soon. I say it advisedly; there's a vast deal of courage in it. You see he has just rusticated long enough to excite curiosity, and not long enough for men to have forgotten that deuced unpleasant—by-the-bye—you know the rights of the affair, of course? Why did you never give those confounded papers the lie? I seldom read the papers, but I looked in the papers for that, and may I be—'

'Look in the papers,' interrupted Sir Mulberry, turning suddenly round, 'tomorrow—no, next day, will you?'

'Upon my life, my dear fellow, I seldom or never read the papers,' said the other, shrugging his shoulders, 'but I will, at your recommendation. What shall I look for?'

'Good day,' said Sir Mulberry, turning abruptly on his heel, and drawing his pupil with him. Falling, again, into the loitering, careless pace at which they had entered, they lounged out, arm in arm.

'I won't give him a case of murder to read,' muttered Sir Mulberry with an oath; 'but it shall be something very near it if whipcord cuts and bludgeons bruise.'

His companion said nothing, but there was something in his manner which galled Sir Mulberry to add, with nearly as much ferocity as if his friend had been Nicholas himself:

'I sent Jenkins to old Nickleby before eight o'clock this morning. He's a staunch one; he was back with me before the messenger. I had it all from him in the first five minutes. I know where this hound is to be met with; time and place both. But there's no need to talk; tomorrow will soon be here.'

'And wha-at's to be done tomorrow?' inquired Lord Frederick.

Sir Mulberry Hawk honoured him with an angry glance, but condescended to return no verbal answer to this inquiry. Both walked sullenly on, as though their thoughts were busily occupied, until they were quite clear of the crowd, and almost alone, when Sir Mulberry wheeled round to return.

'Stop,' said his companion, 'I want to speak to you in earnest. Don't turn back. Let us walk here, a few minutes.'

'What have you to say to me, that you could not say yonder as well as here?' returned his Mentor, disengaging his arm.

'Hawk,' rejoined the other, 'tell me; I must know.'

'MUST know,' interrupted the other disdainfully. 'Whew! Go on. If you must know, of course there's no escape for me. Must know!'

'Must ask then,' returned Lord Frederick, 'and must press you for a plain and straightforward answer. Is what you have just said only a mere whim of the moment, occasioned by your being out of humour and irritated, or is it your serious intention, and one that you have actually contemplated?'

'Why, don't you remember what passed on the subject one night, when I was laid up with a broken limb?' said Sir Mulberry, with a sneer.

'Perfectly well.'

'Then take that for an answer, in the devil's name,' replied Sir Mulberry, 'and ask me for no other.'

Such was the ascendancy he had acquired over his dupe, and such the latter's general habit of submission, that, for the moment, the young man seemed half afraid to pursue the subject. He soon overcame this feeling, however, if it had restrained him at all, and retorted angrily:

'If I remember what passed at the time you speak of, I expressed a strong opinion on this subject, and said that, with my knowledge or consent, you never should do what you threaten now.'

'Will you prevent me?' asked Sir Mulberry, with a laugh.

'Ye-es, if I can,' returned the other, promptly.

'A very proper saving clause, that last,' said Sir Mulberry; 'and one you stand in need of. Oh! look to your own business, and leave me to look to mine.'

'This IS mine,' retorted Lord Frederick. 'I make it mine; I will make it mine. It's mine already. I am more compromised than I should be, as it is.'

'Do as you please, and what you please, for yourself,' said Sir Mulberry, affecting an easy good-humour. 'Surely that must content you! Do nothing for me; that's all. I advise no man to interfere in proceedings that I choose to take. I am sure you know me better than to do so. The fact is, I see, you mean to offer me advice. It is well meant, I have no doubt, but I reject it. Now, if you please, we will return to the carriage. I find no entertainment here, but quite the reverse. If we prolong this conversation, we might quarrel, which would be no proof of wisdom in either you or me.'

With this rejoinder, and waiting for no further discussion, Sir Mulberry Hawk yawned, and very leisurely turned back.

There was not a little tact and knowledge of the young lord's disposition in this mode of treating him. Sir Mulberry clearly saw that if his dominion were to last, it must be established now. He knew that the moment he became violent, the young man would become violent too. He had, many times, been enabled to strengthen his influence, when any circumstance had occurred to weaken it, by adopting this cool and laconic style; and he trusted to it now, with very little doubt of its entire success.

But while he did this, and wore the most careless and indifferent deportment that his practised arts enabled him to assume, he inwardly resolved, not only to visit all the mortification of being compelled to suppress his feelings, with additional severity upon Nicholas, but also to make the young lord pay dearly for it, one day, in some shape or other. So long as he had been a passive instrument in his hands, Sir Mulberry had regarded him with no other feeling than contempt; but, now that he presumed to avow opinions in opposition to his, and even to turn upon him with a lofty tone and an air of superiority, he began to hate him. Conscious that, in the vilest and most worthless sense of the term, he was dependent upon the weak young lord, Sir Mulberry could the less brook humiliation at his hands; and when he began to dislike him he measured his dislike—as men often do—by the extent of the injuries he had inflicted upon its object. When it is remembered that Sir Mulberry Hawk had plundered, duped, deceived, and fooled his pupil in every possible way, it will not be wondered at, that, beginning to hate him, he began to hate him cordially.

On the other hand, the young lord having thought—which he very seldom did about anything—and seriously too, upon the affair with Nicholas, and the circumstances which led to it, had arrived at a manly and honest conclusion. Sir Mulberry's coarse and insulting behaviour on the occasion in question had produced a deep impression on his mind; a strong suspicion of his having led him on to pursue Miss Nickleby for purposes of his own, had been lurking there for some time; he was really ashamed of his share in the transaction, and deeply mortified by the misgiving that he had been gulled. He had had sufficient leisure to reflect upon these things, during their late retirement; and, at times, when his careless and indolent nature would permit, had availed himself of the opportunity. Slight circumstances, too, had occurred to increase his suspicion. It wanted but a very slight circumstance to kindle his wrath against Sir Mulberry. This his disdainful and insolent tone in their recent conversation (the only one they had held upon the subject since the period to which Sir Mulberry referred), effected.

Thus they rejoined their friends: each with causes of dislike against the other rankling in his breast: and the young man haunted, besides, with thoughts of the vindictive retaliation which was threatened against Nicholas, and the determination to prevent it by some strong step, if possible. But this was not all. Sir Mulberry, conceiving that he had silenced him effectually, could not suppress his triumph, or forbear from following up what he conceived to be his advantage. Mr Pyke was there, and Mr Pluck was there, and Colonel Chowser, and other gentlemen of the same caste, and it was a great point for Sir Mulberry to show them that he had not lost his influence. At first, the young lord contented himself with a silent determination to take measures for withdrawing himself from the connection immediately. By degrees, he grew more angry, and was exasperated by jests and familiarities which, a few hours before, would have been a source of amusement to him. This did not serve him; for, at such bantering or retort as suited the company, he was no match for Sir Mulberry. Still, no violent rupture took place. They returned to town; Messrs Pyke and Pluck and other gentlemen frequently protesting, on the way thither, that Sir Mulberry had never been in such tiptop spirits in all his life.

They dined together, sumptuously. The wine flowed freely, as indeed it had done all day. Sir Mulberry drank to recompense himself for his recent abstinence; the young lord, to drown his indignation; and the remainder of the party, because the wine was of the best and they had nothing to pay. It was nearly midnight when they rushed out, wild, burning with wine, their blood boiling, and their brains on fire, to the gaming-table.

Here, they encountered another party, mad like themselves. The excitement of play, hot rooms, and glaring lights was not calculated to allay the fever of the time. In that giddy whirl of noise and confusion, the men were delirious. Who thought of money, ruin, or the morrow, in the savage intoxication of the moment? More wine was called for, glass after glass was drained, their parched and scalding mouths were cracked with thirst. Down poured the wine like oil on blazing fire. And still the riot went on. The debauchery gained its height; glasses were dashed upon the floor by hands that could not carry them to lips; oaths were shouted out by lips which could scarcely form the words to vent them in; drunken losers cursed and roared; some mounted on the tables, waving bottles above their heads and bidding defiance to the rest; some danced, some sang, some tore the cards and raved. Tumult and frenzy reigned supreme; when a noise arose that drowned all others, and two men, seizing each other by the throat, struggled into the middle of the room.

A dozen voices, until now unheard, called aloud to part them. Those who had kept themselves cool, to win, and who earned their living in such scenes, threw themselves upon the combatants, and, forcing them asunder, dragged them some space apart.

'Let me go!' cried Sir Mulberry, in a thick hoarse voice; 'he struck me! Do you hear? I say, he struck me. Have I a friend here? Who is this? Westwood. Do you hear me say he struck me?'

'I hear, I hear,' replied one of those who held him. 'Come away for tonight!'

'I will not, by G—,' he replied. 'A dozen men about us saw the blow.'

'Tomorrow will be ample time,' said the friend.

'It will not be ample time!' cried Sir Mulberry. 'Tonight, at once, here!' His passion was so great, that he could not articulate, but stood clenching his fist, tearing his hair, and stamping upon the ground.

'What is this, my lord?' said one of those who surrounded him. 'Have blows passed?'

'ONE blow has,' was the panting reply. 'I struck him. I proclaim it to all here! I struck him, and he knows why. I say, with him, let this quarrel be adjusted now. Captain Adams,' said the young lord, looking hurriedly about him, and addressing one of those who had interposed, 'let me speak with you, I beg.'

The person addressed stepped forward, and taking the young man's arm, they retired together, followed shortly afterwards by Sir Mulberry and his friend.

It was a profligate haunt of the worst repute, and not a place in which such an affair was likely to awaken any sympathy for either party, or to call forth any further remonstrance or interposition. Elsewhere, its further progress would have been instantly prevented, and time allowed for sober and cool reflection; but not there. Disturbed in their orgies, the party broke up; some reeled away with looks of tipsy gravity; others withdrew noisily discussing what had just occurred; the gentlemen of honour who lived upon their winnings remarked to each other, as they went out, that Hawk was a good shot; and those who had been most noisy, fell fast asleep upon the sofas, and thought no more about it.

Meanwhile, the two seconds, as they may be called now, after a long conference, each with his principal, met together in another room. Both utterly heartless, both men upon town, both thoroughly initiated in its worst vices, both deeply in debt, both fallen from some higher estate, both addicted to every depravity for which society can find some genteel name and plead its most depraving conventionalities as an excuse, they were naturally gentlemen of most unblemished honour themselves, and of great nicety concerning the honour of other people.

These two gentlemen were unusually cheerful just now; for the affair was pretty certain to make some noise, and could scarcely fail to enhance their reputations.

'This is an awkward affair, Adams,' said Mr Westwood, drawing himself up.

'Very,' returned the captain; 'a blow has been struck, and there is but one course, OF course.'

'No apology, I suppose?' said Mr Westwood.

'Not a syllable, sir, from my man, if we talk till doomsday,' returned the captain. 'The original cause of dispute, I understand, was some girl or other, to whom your principal applied certain terms, which Lord Frederick, defending the girl, repelled. But this led to a long recrimination upon a great many sore subjects, charges, and counter-charges. Sir Mulberry was sarcastic; Lord Frederick was excited, and struck him in the heat of provocation, and under circumstances of great aggravation. That blow, unless there is a full retraction on the part of Sir Mulberry, Lord Frederick is ready to justify.'

'There is no more to be said,' returned the other, 'but to settle the hour and the place of meeting. It's a responsibility; but there is a strong feeling to have it over. Do you object to say at sunrise?'

'Sharp work,' replied the captain, referring to his watch; 'however, as this seems to have been a long time breeding, and negotiation is only a waste of words, no.'

'Something may possibly be said, out of doors, after what passed in the other room, which renders it desirable that we should be off without delay, and quite clear of town,' said Mr Westwood. 'What do you say to one of the meadows opposite Twickenham, by the river-side?'

The captain saw no objection.

'Shall we join company in the avenue of trees which leads from Petersham to Ham House, and settle the exact spot when we arrive there?' said Mr Westwood.

To this the captain also assented. After a few other preliminaries, equally brief, and having settled the road each party should take to avoid suspicion, they separated.

'We shall just have comfortable time, my lord,' said the captain, when he had communicated the arrangements, 'to call at my rooms for a case of pistols, and then jog coolly down. If you will allow me to dismiss your servant, we'll take my cab; for yours, perhaps, might be recognised.'

What a contrast, when they reached the street, to the scene they had just left! It was already daybreak. For the flaring yellow light within, was substituted the clear, bright, glorious morning; for a hot, close atmosphere, tainted with the smell of expiring lamps, and reeking with the steams of riot and dissipation, the free, fresh, wholesome air. But to the fevered head on which that cool air blew, it seemed to come laden with remorse for time misspent and countless opportunities neglected. With throbbing veins and burning skin, eyes wild and heavy, thoughts hurried and disordered, he felt as though the light were a reproach, and shrunk involuntarily from the day as if he were some foul and hideous thing.

'Shivering?' said the captain. 'You are cold.'

'Rather.'

'It does strike cool, coming out of those hot rooms. Wrap that cloak about you. So, so; now we're off.'

They rattled through the quiet streets, made their call at the captain's lodgings, cleared the town, and emerged upon the open road, without hindrance or molestation.

Fields, trees, gardens, hedges, everything looked very beautiful; the young man scarcely seemed to have noticed them before, though he had passed the same objects a thousand times. There was a peace and serenity upon them all, strangely at variance with the bewilderment and confusion of his own half-sobered thoughts, and yet impressive and welcome. He had no fear upon his mind; but, as he looked about him, he had less anger; and though all old delusions, relative to his worthless late companion, were now cleared away, he rather wished he had never known him than thought of its having come to this.

The past night, the day before, and many other days and nights beside, all mingled themselves up in one unintelligible and senseless whirl; he could not separate the transactions of one time from those of another. Now, the noise of the wheels resolved itself into some wild tune in which he could recognise scraps of airs he knew; now, there was nothing in his ears but a stunning and bewildering sound, like rushing water. But his companion rallied him on being so silent, and they talked and laughed boisterously. When they stopped, he was a little surprised to find himself in the act of smoking; but, on reflection, he remembered when and where he had taken the cigar.

They stopped at the avenue gate and alighted, leaving the carriage to the care of the servant, who was a smart fellow, and nearly as well accustomed to such proceedings as his master. Sir Mulberry and his friend were already there. All four walked in profound silence up the aisle of stately elm trees, which, meeting far above their heads, formed a long green perspective of Gothic arches, terminating, like some old ruin, in the open sky.

After a pause, and a brief conference between the seconds, they, at length, turned to the right, and taking a track across a little meadow, passed Ham House and came into some fields beyond. In one of these, they stopped. The ground was measured, some usual forms gone through, the two principals were placed front to front at the distance agreed upon, and Sir Mulberry turned his face towards his young adversary for the first time. He was very pale, his eyes were bloodshot, his dress disordered, and his hair dishevelled. For the face, it expressed nothing but violent and evil passions. He shaded his eyes with his hand; grazed at his opponent, steadfastly, for a few moments; and, then taking the weapon which was tendered to him, bent his eyes upon that, and looked up no more until the word was given, when he instantly fired.

The two shots were fired, as nearly as possible, at the same instant. In that instant, the young lord turned his head sharply round, fixed upon his adversary a ghastly stare, and without a groan or stagger, fell down dead.

'He's gone!' cried Westwood, who, with the other second, had run up to the body, and fallen on one knee beside it.

'His blood on his own head,' said Sir Mulberry. 'He brought this upon himself, and forced it upon me.'

'Captain Adams,' cried Westwood, hastily, 'I call you to witness that this was fairly done. Hawk, we have not a moment to lose. We must leave this place immediately, push for Brighton, and cross to France with all speed. This has been a bad business, and may be worse, if we delay a moment. Adams, consult your own safety, and don't remain here; the living before the dead; goodbye!'

With these words, he seized Sir Mulberry by the arm, and hurried him away. Captain Adams—only pausing to convince himself, beyond all question, of the fatal result—sped off in the same direction, to concert measures with his servant for removing the body, and securing his own safety likewise.

So died Lord Frederick Verisopht, by the hand which he had loaded with gifts, and clasped a thousand times; by the act of him, but for whom, and others like him, he might have lived a happy man, and died with children's faces round his bed.

The sun came proudly up in all his majesty, the noble river ran its winding course, the leaves quivered and rustled in the air, the birds poured their cheerful songs from every tree, the short-lived butterfly fluttered its little wings; all the light and life of day came on; and, amidst it all, and pressing down the grass whose every blade bore twenty tiny lives, lay the dead man, with his stark and rigid face turned upwards to the sky.

CHAPTER 51

The Project of Mr Ralph Nickleby and his Friend approaching a successful Issue, becomes unexpectedly known to another Party, not admitted into their Confidence

In an old house, dismal dark and dusty, which seemed to have withered, like himself, and to have grown yellow and shrivelled in hoarding him from the light of day, as he had in hoarding his money, lived Arthur Gride. Meagre old chairs and tables, of spare and bony make, and hard and cold as misers' hearts, were ranged, in grim array, against the gloomy walls; attenuated presses, grown lank and lantern-jawed in guarding the treasures they enclosed, and tottering, as though from constant fear and dread of thieves, shrunk up in dark corners, whence they cast no shadows on the ground, and seemed to hide and cower from observation. A tall grim clock upon the stairs, with long lean hands and famished face, ticked in cautious whispers; and when it struck the time, in thin and piping sounds, like an old man's voice, rattled, as if it were pinched with hunger.

No fireside couch was there, to invite repose and comfort. Elbow-chairs there were, but they looked uneasy in their minds, cocked their arms suspiciously and timidly, and kept upon their guard. Others, were fantastically grim and gaunt, as having drawn themselves up to their utmost height, and put on their fiercest looks to stare all comers out of countenance. Others, again, knocked up against their neighbours, or leant for support against the wall—somewhat ostentatiously, as if to call all men to witness that they were not worth the taking. The dark square lumbering bedsteads seemed built for restless dreams; the musty hangings seemed to creep in scanty folds together, whispering among themselves, when rustled by the wind, their trembling knowledge of the tempting wares that lurked within the dark and tight-locked closets.

From out the most spare and hungry room in all this spare and hungry house there came, one morning, the tremulous tones of old Gride's voice, as it feebly chirruped forth the fag end of some forgotten song, of which the burden ran:

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Ta—ran—tan—too,
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Throw the old shoe,
And may the wedding be lucky!

which he repeated, in the same shrill quavering notes, again and again, until a violent fit of coughing obliged him to desist, and to pursue in silence, the occupation upon which he was engaged.

This occupation was, to take down from the shelves of a worm-eaten wardrobe a quantity of frouzy garments, one by one; to subject each to a careful and minute inspection by holding it up against the light, and after folding it with great exactness, to lay it on one or other of two little heaps beside him. He never took two articles of clothing out together, but always brought them forth, singly, and never failed to shut the wardrobe door, and turn the key, between each visit to its shelves.

'The snuff-coloured suit,' said Arthur Gride, surveying a threadbare coat. 'Did I look well in snuff-colour? Let me think.'

The result of his cogitations appeared to be unfavourable, for he folded the garment once more, laid it aside, and mounted on a chair to get down another, chirping while he did so:

Young, loving, and fair,
Oh what happiness there!
The wedding is sure to be lucky!

'They always put in "young,"' said old Arthur, 'but songs are only written for the sake of rhyme, and this is a silly one that the poor country-people sang, when I was a little boy. Though stop—young is quite right too—it means the bride—yes. He, he, he! It means the bride. Oh dear, that's good. That's very good. And true besides, quite true!'

In the satisfaction of this discovery, he went over the verse again, with increased expression, and a shake or two here and there. He then resumed his employment.

'The bottle-green,' said old Arthur; 'the bottle-green was a famous suit to wear, and I bought it very cheap at a pawnbroker's, and there was—he, he, he!—a tarnished shilling in the waistcoat pocket. To think that the pawnbroker shouldn't have known there was a shilling in it! I knew it! I felt it when I was examining the quality. Oh, what a dull dog of a pawnbroker! It was a lucky suit too, this bottle-green. The very day I put it on first, old Lord Mallowford was burnt to death in his bed, and all the post-obits fell in.

I'll be married in the bottle-green. Peg. Peg Sliderskew—I'll wear the bottle-green!'

This call, loudly repeated twice or thrice at the room-door, brought into the apartment a short, thin, weasen, blear-eyed old woman, palsy-stricken and hideously ugly, who, wiping her shrivelled face upon her dirty apron, inquired, in that subdued tone in which deaf people commonly speak:

'Was that you a calling, or only the clock a striking? My hearing gets so bad, I never know which is which; but when I hear a noise, I know it must be one of you, because nothing else never stirs in the house.'

'Me, Peg, me,' said Arthur Gride, tapping himself on the breast to render the reply more intelligible.

'You, eh?' returned Peg. 'And what do YOU want?'

'I'll be married in the bottle-green,' cried Arthur Gride.

'It's a deal too good to be married in, master,' rejoined Peg, after a short inspection of the suit. 'Haven't you got anything worse than this?'

'Nothing that'll do,' replied old Arthur.

'Why not do?' retorted Peg. 'Why don't you wear your every-day clothes, like a man—eh?'

'They an't becoming enough, Peg,' returned her master.

'Not what enough?' said Peg.

'Becoming.'

'Becoming what?' said Peg, sharply. 'Not becoming too old to wear?'

Arthur Gride muttered an imprecation on his housekeeper's deafness, as he roared in her ear:

'Not smart enough! I want to look as well as I can.'

'Look?' cried Peg. 'If she's as handsome as you say she is, she won't look much at you, master, take your oath of that; and as to how you look yourself—pepper-and-salt, bottle-green, sky-blue, or tartan-plaid will make no difference in you.'

With which consolatory assurance, Peg Sliderskew gathered up the chosen suit, and folding her skinny arms upon the bundle, stood, mouthing, and grinning, and blinking her watery eyes, like an uncouth figure in some monstrous piece of carving.

'You're in a funny humour, an't you, Peg?' said Arthur, with not the best possible grace.

'Why, isn't it enough to make me?' rejoined the old woman. 'I shall, soon enough, be put out, though, if anybody tries to domineer it over me: and so

I give you notice, master. Nobody shall be put over Peg Sliderskew's head, after so many years; you know that, and so I needn't tell you! That won't do for me—no, no, nor for you. Try that once, and come to ruin—ruin—ruin!'

'Oh dear, dear, I shall never try it,' said Arthur Gride, appalled by the mention of the word, 'not for the world. It would be very easy to ruin me; we must be very careful; more saving than ever, with another mouth to feed. Only we—we mustn't let her lose her good looks, Peg, because I like to see 'em.'

'Take care you don't find good looks come expensive,' returned Peg, shaking her forefinger.

'But she can earn money herself, Peg,' said Arthur Gride, eagerly watching what effect his communication produced upon the old woman's countenance: 'she can draw, paint, work all manner of pretty things for ornamenting stools and chairs: slippers, Peg, watch-guards, hair-chains, and a thousand little dainty trifles that I couldn't give you half the names of. Then she can play the piano, (and, what's more, she's got one), and sing like a little bird. She'll be very cheap to dress and keep, Peg; don't you think she will?'

'If you don't let her make a fool of you, she may,' returned Peg.

'A fool of ME!' exclaimed Arthur. 'Trust your old master not to be fooled by pretty faces, Peg; no, no, no—nor by ugly ones neither, Mrs Sliderskew,' he softly added by way of soliloquy.

'You're a saying something you don't want me to hear,' said Peg; 'I know you are.'

'Oh dear! the devil's in this woman,' muttered Arthur; adding with an ugly leer, 'I said I trusted everything to you, Peg. That was all.'

'You do that, master, and all your cares are over,' said Peg approvingly.

'WHEN I do that, Peg Sliderskew,' thought Arthur Gride, 'they will be.'

Although he thought this very distinctly, he durst not move his lips lest the old woman should detect him. He even seemed half afraid that she might have read his thoughts; for he leered coaxingly upon her, as he said aloud:

'Take up all loose stitches in the bottle-green with the best black silk. Have a skein of the best, and some new buttons for the coat, and—this is a good idea, Peg, and one you'll like, I know—as I have never given her anything yet, and girls like such attentions, you shall polish up a sparking necklace that I have got upstairs, and I'll give it her upon the wedding morning—clasp it round her charming little neck myself—and take it away again next day. He, he, he! I'll lock it up for her, Peg, and lose it. Who'll be made the fool of there, I wonder, to begin with—eh, Peg?'

Mrs Sliderskew appeared to approve highly of this ingenious scheme, and expressed her satisfaction by various rackings and twitchings of her head and body, which by no means enhanced her charms. These she prolonged until she had hobbled to the door, when she exchanged them for a sour malignant look, and twisting her under-jaw from side to side, muttered hearty curses upon the future Mrs Gride, as she crept slowly down the stairs, and paused for breath at nearly every one.

'She's half a witch, I think,' said Arthur Gride, when he found himself again alone. 'But she's very frugal, and she's very deaf. Her living costs me next to nothing; and it's no use her listening at keyholes; for she can't hear. She's a charming woman—for the purpose; a most discreet old housekeeper, and worth her weight in—copper.'

Having extolled the merits of his domestic in these high terms, old Arthur went back to the burden of his song. The suit destined to grace his approaching nuptials being now selected, he replaced the others with no less care than he had displayed in drawing them from the musty nooks where they had silently reposed for many years.

Startled by a ring at the door, he hastily concluded this operation, and locked the press; but there was no need for any particular hurry, as the discreet Peg seldom knew the bell was rung unless she happened to cast her dim eyes upwards, and to see it shaking against the kitchen ceiling. After a short delay, however, Peg tottered in, followed by Newman Noggs.

'Ah! Mr Noggs!' cried Arthur Gride, rubbing his hands. 'My good friend, Mr Noggs, what news do you bring for me?'

Newman, with a steadfast and immovable aspect, and his fixed eye very fixed indeed, replied, suiting the action to the word, 'A letter. From Mr Nickleby. Bearer waits.'

'Won't you take a—a—'

Newman looked up, and smacked his lips.

'—A chair?' said Arthur Gride.

'No,' replied Newman. 'Thankee.'

Arthur opened the letter with trembling hands, and devoured its contents with the utmost greediness; chuckling rapturously over it, and reading it several times, before he could take it from before his eyes. So many times did he peruse and re-peruse it, that Newman considered it expedient to remind him of his presence.

'Answer,' said Newman. 'Bearer waits.'

'True,' replied old Arthur. 'Yes—yes; I almost forgot, I do declare.'

'I thought you were forgetting,' said Newman.

'Quite right to remind me, Mr Noggs. Oh, very right indeed,' said Arthur. 'Yes. I'll write a line. I'm—I'm—rather flurried, Mr Noggs. The news is—'

'Bad?' interrupted Newman.

'No, Mr Noggs, thank you; good, good. The very best of news. Sit down. I'll get the pen and ink, and write a line in answer. I'll not detain you long. I know you're a treasure to your master, Mr Noggs. He speaks of you in such terms, sometimes, that, oh dear! you'd be astonished. I may say that I do too, and always did. I always say the same of you.'

'That's "Curse Mr Noggs with all my heart!" then, if you do,' thought Newman, as Gride hurried out.

The letter had fallen on the ground. Looking carefully about him for an instant, Newman, impelled by curiosity to know the result of the design he had overheard from his office closet, caught it up and rapidly read as follows:

'GRIDE.

'I saw Bray again this morning, and proposed the day after tomorrow (as you suggested) for the marriage. There is no objection on his part, and all days are alike to his daughter. We will go together, and you must be with me by seven in the morning. I need not tell you to be punctual.

'Make no further visits to the girl in the meantime. You have been there, of late, much oftener than you should. She does not languish for you, and it might have been dangerous. Restrain your youthful ardour for eight-and-forty hours, and leave her to the father. You only undo what he does, and does well.

'Yours,

'RALPH NICKLEBY.'

A footstep was heard without. Newman dropped the letter on the same spot again, pressed it with his foot to prevent its fluttering away, regained his seat in a single stride, and looked as vacant and unconscious as ever mortal looked. Arthur Gride, after peering nervously about him, spied it on the ground, picked it up, and sitting down to write, glanced at Newman

Noggs, who was staring at the wall with an intensity so remarkable, that Arthur was quite alarmed.

'Do you see anything particular, Mr Noggs?' said Arthur, trying to follow the direction of Newman's eyes—which was an impossibility, and a thing no man had ever done.

'Only a cobweb,' replied Newman.

'Oh! is that all?'

'No,' said Newman. 'There's a fly in it.'

'There are a good many cobwebs here,' observed Arthur Gride.

'So there are in our place,' returned Newman; 'and flies too.'

Newman appeared to derive great entertainment from this repartee, and to the great discomposure of Arthur Gride's nerves, produced a series of sharp cracks from his finger-joints, resembling the noise of a distant discharge of small artillery. Arthur succeeded in finishing his reply to Ralph's note, nevertheless, and at length handed it over to the eccentric messenger for delivery.

'That's it, Mr Noggs,' said Gride.

Newman gave a nod, put it in his hat, and was shuffling away, when Gride, whose doting delight knew no bounds, beckoned him back again, and said, in a shrill whisper, and with a grin which puckered up his whole face, and almost obscured his eyes:

'Will you—will you take a little drop of something—just a taste?'

In good fellowship (if Arthur Gride had been capable of it) Newman would not have drunk with him one bubble of the richest wine that was ever made; but to see what he would be at, and to punish him as much as he could, he accepted the offer immediately.

Arthur Gride, therefore, again applied himself to the press, and from a shelf laden with tall Flemish drinking-glasses, and quaint bottles: some with necks like so many storks, and others with square Dutch-built bodies and short fat apoplectic throats: took down one dusty bottle of promising appearance, and two glasses of curiously small size.

'You never tasted this,' said Arthur. 'It's EAU-D'OR—golden water. I like it on account of its name. It's a delicious name. Water of gold, golden water! O dear me, it seems quite a sin to drink it!'

As his courage appeared to be fast failing him, and he trifled with the stopper in a manner which threatened the dismissal of the bottle to its old place, Newman took up one of the little glasses, and clinked it, twice or thrice, against the bottle, as a gentle reminder that he had not been helped yet. With a deep sigh, Arthur Gride slowly filled it—though not to the brim—and then filled his own.

'Stop, stop; don't drink it yet,' he said, laying his hand on Newman's; 'it was given to me, twenty years ago, and when I take a little taste, which is ve—ry seldom, I like to think of it beforehand, and tease myself. We'll drink a toast. Shall we drink a toast, Mr Noggs?'

'Ah!' said Newman, eyeing his little glass impatiently. 'Look sharp. Bearer waits.'

'Why, then, I'll tell you what,' tittered Arthur, 'we'll drink—he, he, he!—we'll drink a lady.'

'THE ladies?' said Newman.

'No, no, Mr Noggs,' replied Gride, arresting his hand, 'A lady. You wonder to hear me say A lady. I know you do, I know you do. Here's little Madeline. That's the toast. Mr Noggs. Little Madeline!'

'Madeline!' said Newman; inwardly adding, 'and God help her!'

The rapidity and unconcern with which Newman dismissed his portion of the golden water, had a great effect upon the old man, who sat upright in his chair, and gazed at him, open-mouthed, as if the sight had taken away his breath. Quite unmoved, however, Newman left him to sip his own at leisure, or to pour it back again into the bottle, if he chose, and departed; after greatly outraging the dignity of Peg Sliderskew by brushing past her, in the passage, without a word of apology or recognition.

Mr Gride and his housekeeper, immediately on being left alone, resolved themselves into a committee of ways and means, and discussed the arrangements which should be made for the reception of the young bride. As they were, like some other committees, extremely dull and prolix in debate, this history may pursue the footsteps of Newman Noggs; thereby combining advantage with necessity; for it would have been necessary to do so under any circumstances, and necessity has no law, as all the world knows.

'You've been a long time,' said Ralph, when Newman returned.

'HE was a long time,' replied Newman.

'Bah!' cried Ralph impatiently. 'Give me his note, if he gave you one: his message, if he didn't. And don't go away. I want a word with you, sir.'

Newman handed in the note, and looked very virtuous and innocent while his employer broke the seal, and glanced his eye over it.

'He'll be sure to come,' muttered Ralph, as he tore it to pieces; 'why of course, I know he'll be sure to come. What need to say that? Noggs! Pray, sir, what man was that, with whom I saw you in the street last night?'

'I don't know,' replied Newman.

'You had better refresh your memory, sir,' said Ralph, with a threatening look.

'I tell you,' returned Newman boldly, 'that I don't know. He came here twice, and asked for you. You were out. He came again. You packed him off, yourself. He gave the name of Brooker.'

'I know he did,' said Ralph; 'what then?'

'What then? Why, then he lurked about and dogged me in the street. He follows me, night after night, and urges me to bring him face to face with you; as he says he has been once, and not long ago either. He wants to see you face to face, he says, and you'll soon hear him out, he warrants.'

'And what say you to that?' inquired Ralph, looking keenly at his drudge.

'That it's no business of mine, and I won't. I told him he might catch you in the street, if that was all he wanted, but no! that wouldn't do. You wouldn't hear a word there, he said. He must have you alone in a room with the door locked, where he could speak without fear, and you'd soon change your tone, and hear him patiently.'

'An audacious dog!' Ralph muttered.

'That's all I know,' said Newman. 'I say again, I don't know what man he is. I don't believe he knows himself. You have seen him; perhaps YOU do.'

'I think I do,' replied Ralph.

'Well,' retored Newman, sulkily, 'don't expect me to know him too; that's all. You'll ask me, next, why I never told you this before. What would you say, if I was to tell you all that people say of you? What do you call me when I sometimes do? "Brute, ass!" and snap at me like a dragon.'

This was true enough; though the question which Newman anticipated, was, in fact, upon Ralph's lips at the moment.

'He is an idle ruffian,' said Ralph; 'a vagabond from beyond the sea where he travelled for his crimes; a felon let loose to run his neck into the halter; a swindler, who has the audacity to try his schemes on me who know him well. The next time he tampers with you, hand him over to the police, for attempting to extort money by lies and threats,—d'ye hear?—and leave the rest to me. He shall cool his heels in jail a little time, and I'll be bound he looks for other folks to fleece, when he comes out. You mind what I say, do you?'

'I hear,' said Newman.

'Do it then,' returned Ralph, 'and I'll reward you. Now, you may go.'

Newman readily availed himself of the permission, and, shutting himself up in his little office, remained there, in very serious cogitation, all day. When he was released at night, he proceeded, with all the expedition he could use, to the city, and took up his old position behind the pump, to watch for Nicholas. For Newman Noggs was proud in his way, and could not bear to appear as his friend, before the brothers Cheeryble, in the shabby and degraded state to which he was reduced.

He had not occupied this position many minutes, when he was rejoiced to see Nicholas approaching, and darted out from his ambuscade to meet him. Nicholas, on his part, was no less pleased to encounter his friend, whom he had not seen for some time; so, their greeting was a warm one.

'I was thinking of you, at that moment,' said Nicholas.

'That's right,' rejoined Newman, 'and I of you. I couldn't help coming up, tonight. I say, I think I am going to find out something.'

'And what may that be?' returned Nicholas, smiling at this odd communication.

'I don't know what it may be, I don't know what it may not be,' said Newman; 'it's some secret in which your uncle is concerned, but what, I've not yet been able to discover, although I have my strong suspicions. I'll not hint 'em now, in case you should be disappointed.'

'I disappointed!' cried Nicholas; 'am I interested?'

'I think you are,' replied Newman. 'I have a crotchet in my head that it must be so. I have found out a man, who plainly knows more than he cares to tell at once. And he has already dropped such hints to me as puzzle me—I say, as puzzle me,' said Newman, scratching his red nose into a state of violent inflammation, and staring at Nicholas with all his might and main meanwhile.

Admiring what could have wound his friend up to such a pitch of mystery, Nicholas endeavoured, by a series of questions, to elucidate the cause; but in vain. Newman could not be drawn into any more explicit statement than a repetition of the perplexities he had already thrown out, and a confused oration, showing, How it was necessary to use the utmost caution; how the lynx-eyed Ralph had already seen him in company with his unknown correspondent; and how he had baffled the said Ralph by extreme guardedness of manner and ingenuity of speech; having prepared himself for such a contingency from the first.

Remembering his companion's propensity,—of which his nose, indeed, perpetually warned all beholders like a beacon,—Nicholas had drawn him into a sequestered tavern. Here, they fell to reviewing the origin and progress of their acquaintance, as men sometimes do, and tracing out the little events by which it was most strongly marked, came at last to Miss Cecilia Bobster.

'And that reminds me,' said Newman, 'that you never told me the young lady's real name.'

'Madeline!' said Nicholas.

'Madeline!' cried Newman. 'What Madeline? Her other name. Say her other name.'

'Bray,' said Nicholas, in great astonishment.

'It's the same!' cried Newman. 'Sad story! Can you stand idly by, and let that unnatural marriage take place without one attempt to save her?'

'What do you mean?' exclaimed Nicholas, starting up; 'marriage! are you mad?'

'Are you? Is she? Are you blind, deaf, senseless, dead?' said Newman. 'Do you know that within one day, by means of your uncle Ralph, she will be married to a man as bad as he, and worse, if worse there is? Do you know that, within one day, she will be sacrificed, as sure as you stand there alive, to a hoary wretch—a devil born and bred, and grey in devils' ways?'

'Be careful what you say,' replied Nicholas. 'For Heaven's sake be careful! I am left here alone, and those who could stretch out a hand to rescue her are far away. What is it that you mean?'

'I never heard her name,' said Newman, choking with his energy. 'Why didn't you tell me? How was I to know? We might, at least, have had some time to think!'

'What is it that you mean?' cried Nicholas.

It was not an easy task to arrive at this information; but, after a great quantity of extraordinary pantomime, which in no way assisted it, Nicholas, who was almost as wild as Newman Noggs himself, forced the latter down upon his seat and held him down until he began his tale.

Rage, astonishment, indignation, and a storm of passions, rushed through the listener's heart, as the plot was laid bare. He no sooner understood it all, than with a face of ashy paleness, and trembling in every limb, he darted from the house.

'Stop him!' cried Newman, bolting out in pursuit. 'He'll be doing something desperate; he'll murder somebody. Hallo! there, stop him. Stop thief! stop thief!'

CHAPTER 52

Nicholas despairs of rescuing Madeline Bray, but plucks up his Spirits again, and determines to attempt it. Domestic Intelligence of the Kenwigses and Lillyvicks

Finding that Newman was determined to arrest his progress at any hazard, and apprehensive that some well-intentioned passenger, attracted by the cry of 'Stop thief,' might lay violent hands upon his person, and place him in a disagreeable predicament from which he might have some difficulty in extricating himself, Nicholas soon slackened his pace, and suffered Newman Noggs to come up with him: which he did, in so breathless a condition, that it seemed impossible he could have held out for a minute longer.

'I will go straight to Bray's,' said Nicholas. 'I will see this man. If there is a feeling of humanity lingering in his breast, a spark of consideration for his own child, motherless and friendless as she is, I will awaken it.'

'You will not,' replied Newman. 'You will not, indeed.'

'Then,' said Nicholas, pressing onward, 'I will act upon my first impulse, and go straight to Ralph Nickleby.'

'By the time you reach his house he will be in bed,' said Newman.

'I'll drag him from it,' cried Nicholas.

'Tut, tut,' said Noggs. 'Be yourself.'

'You are the best of friends to me, Newman,' rejoined Nicholas after a pause, and taking his hand as he spoke. 'I have made head against many trials; but the misery of another, and such misery, is involved in this one, that I declare to you I am rendered desperate, and know not how to act.'

In truth, it did seem a hopeless case. It was impossible to make any use of such intelligence as Newman Noggs had gleaned, when he lay concealed in the closet. The mere circumstance of the compact between Ralph Nickleby and Gride would not invalidate the marriage, or render Bray averse to it, who, if he did not actually know of the existence of some such understanding, doubtless suspected it. What had been hinted with reference to some fraud on Madeline, had been put, with sufficient obscurity by Arthur Gride, but coming from Newman Noggs, and obscured still further by the smoke of his pocket-pistol, it became wholly unintelligible, and involved in utter darkness.

'There seems no ray of hope,' said Nicholas.

'The greater necessity for coolness, for reason, for consideration, for thought,' said Newman, pausing at every alternate word, to look anxiously in his friend's face. 'Where are the brothers?'

'Both absent on urgent business, as they will be for a week to come.'

'Is there no way of communicating with them? No way of getting one of them here by tomorrow night?'

'Impossible!' said Nicholas, 'the sea is between us and them. With the fairest winds that ever blew, to go and return would take three days and nights.'

'Their nephew,' said Newman, 'their old clerk.'

'What could either do, that I cannot?' rejoined Nicholas. 'With reference to them, especially, I am enjoined to the strictest silence on this subject. What right have I to betray the confidence reposed in me, when nothing but a miracle can prevent this sacrifice?'

'Think,' urged Newman. 'Is there no way.'

'There is none,' said Nicholas, in utter dejection. 'Not one. The father urges, the daughter consents. These demons have her in their toils; legal right, might, power, money, and every influence are on their side. How can I hope to save her?'

'Hope to the last!' said Newman, clapping him on the back. 'Always hope; that's a dear boy. Never leave off hoping; it don't answer. Do you mind me, Nick? It don't answer. Don't leave a stone unturned. It's always something, to know you've done the most you could. But, don't leave off hoping, or it's of no use doing anything. Hope, hope, to the last!'

Nicholas needed encouragement. The suddenness with which intelligence of the two usurers' plans had come upon him, the little time which remained for exertion, the probability, almost amounting to certainty itself, that a few hours would place Madeline Bray for ever beyond his reach, consign her to unspeakable misery, and perhaps to an untimely death; all this quite stunned and overwhelmed him. Every hope connected with her that he had suffered himself to form, or had entertained unconsciously, seemed to fall at his feet, withered and dead. Every charm with which his memory or imagination had surrounded her, presented itself before him, only to heighten his anguish and add new bitterness to his despair. Every feeling of sympathy for her forlorn condition, and of admiration for her heroism and fortitude, aggravated the indignation which shook him in every limb, and swelled his heart almost to bursting.

But, if Nicholas's own heart embarrassed him, Newman's came to his relief. There was so much earnestness in his remonstrance, and such sincerity and fervour in his manner, odd and ludicrous as it always was, that it imparted to Nicholas new firmness, and enabled him to say, after he had walked on for some little way in silence:

'You read me a good lesson, Newman, and I will profit by it. One step, at least, I may take—am bound to take indeed—and to that I will apply myself tomorrow.'

'What is that?' asked Noggs wistfully. 'Not to threaten Ralph? Not to see the father?'

'To see the daughter, Newman,' replied Nicholas. 'To do what, after all, is the utmost that the brothers could do, if they were here, as Heaven send they were! To reason with her upon this hideous union, to point out to her all the horrors to which she is hastening; rashly, it may be, and without due reflection. To entreat her, at least, to pause. She can have had no counsellor for her good. Perhaps even I may move her so far yet, though it is the eleventh hour, and she upon the very brink of ruin.'

'Bravely spoken!' said Newman. 'Well done, well done! Yes. Very good.'

'And I do declare,' cried Nicholas, with honest enthusiasm, 'that in this effort I am influenced by no selfish or personal considerations, but by pity for her, and detestation and abhorrence of this scheme; and that I would do the same, were there twenty rivals in the field, and I the last and least favoured of them all.'

'You would, I believe,' said Newman. 'But where are you hurrying now?'

'Homewards,' answered Nicholas. 'Do you come with me, or I shall say good-night?'

'I'll come a little way, if you will but walk: not run,' said Noggs.

'I cannot walk tonight, Newman,' returned Nicholas, hurriedly. 'I must move rapidly, or I could not draw my breath. I'll tell you what I've said and done tomorrow.'

Without waiting for a reply, he darted off at a rapid pace, and, plunging into the crowds which thronged the street, was quickly lost to view.

'He's a violent youth at times,' said Newman, looking after him; 'and yet like him for it. There's cause enough now, or the deuce is in it. Hope! I

SAID hope, I think! Ralph Nickleby and Gride with their heads together! And hope for the opposite party! Ho! ho!'

It was with a very melancholy laugh that Newman Noggs concluded this soliloquy; and it was with a very melancholy shake of the head, and a very rueful countenance, that he turned about, and went plodding on his way.

This, under ordinary circumstances, would have been to some small tavern or dram-shop; that being his way, in more senses than one. But, Newman was too much interested, and too anxious, to betake himself even to this resource, and so, with many desponding and dismal reflections, went straight home.

It had come to pass, that afternoon, that Miss Morleena Kenwigs had received an invitation to repair next day, per steamer from Westminster Bridge, unto the Eel-pie Island at Twickenham: there to make merry upon a cold collation, bottled beer, shrub, and shrimps, and to dance in the open air to the music of a locomotive band, conveyed thither for the purpose: the steamer being specially engaged by a dancing-master of extensive connection for the accommodation of his numerous pupils, and the pupils displaying their appreciation of the dancing-master's services, by purchasing themselves, and inducing their friends to do the like, divers light-blue tickets, entitling them to join the expedition. Of these light-blue tickets, one had been presented by an ambitious neighbour to Miss Morleena Kenwigs, with an invitation to join her daughters; and Mrs Kenwigs, rightly deeming that the honour of the family was involved in Miss Morleena's making the most splendid appearance possible on so short a notice, and testifying to the dancing-master that there were other dancing-masters besides him, and to all fathers and mothers present that other people's children could learn to be genteel besides theirs, had fainted away twice under the magnitude of her preparations, but, upheld by a determination to sustain the family name or perish in the attempt, was still hard at work when Newman Noggs came home.

Now, between the italian-ironing of frills, the flouncing of trousers, the trimming of frocks, the faintings and the comings-to again, incidental to the occasion, Mrs Kenwigs had been so entirely occupied, that she had not observed, until within half an hour before, that the flaxen tails of Miss Morleena's hair were, in a manner, run to seed; and that, unless she were put under the hands of a skilful hairdresser, she never could achieve that signal triumph over the daughters of all other people, anything less than which would be tantamount to defeat. This discovery drove Mrs Kenwigs to despair; for the hairdresser lived three streets and eight dangerous crossings off; Morleena could not be trusted to go there alone, even if such a proceeding were strictly proper: of which Mrs Kenwigs had her doubts; Mr Kenwigs had not returned from business; and there was nobody to take her. So, Mrs Kenwigs first slapped Miss Kenwigs for being the cause of her vexation, and then shed tears.

'You ungrateful child!' said Mrs Kenwigs, 'after I have gone through what I have, this night, for your good.'

'I can't help it, ma,' replied Morleena, also in tears; 'my hair WILL grow.'

'Don't talk to me, you naughty thing!' said Mrs Kenwigs, 'don't! Even if I was to trust you by yourself and you were to escape being run over, I know you'd run in to Laura Chopkins,' who was the daughter of the ambitious neighbour, 'and tell her what you're going to wear tomorrow, I know you would. You've no proper pride in yourself, and are not to be trusted out of sight for an instant.'

Deploring the evil-mindedness of her eldest daughter in these terms, Mrs Kenwigs distilled fresh drops of vexation from her eyes, and declared that she did believe there never was anybody so tried as she was. Thereupon, Morleena Kenwigs wept afresh, and they bemoaned themselves together.

Matters were at this point, as Newman Noggs was heard to limp past the door on his way upstairs; when Mrs Kenwigs, gaining new hope from the sound of his footsteps, hastily removed from her countenance as many traces of her late emotion as were effaceable on so short a notice: and presenting herself before him, and representing their dilemma, entreated that he would escort Morleena to the hairdresser's shop.

'I wouldn't ask you, Mr Noggs,' said Mrs Kenwigs, 'if I didn't know what a good, kind-hearted creature you are; no, not for worlds. I am a weak constitution, Mr Noggs, but my spirit would no more let me ask a favour where I thought there was a chance of its being refused, than it would let me submit to see my children trampled down and trod upon, by envy and lowness!'

Newman was too good-natured not to have consented, even without this avowal of confidence on the part of Mrs Kenwigs. Accordingly, a very few minutes had elapsed, when he and Miss Morleena were on their way to the hairdresser's.

It was not exactly a hairdresser's; that is to say, people of a coarse and vulgar turn of mind might have called it a barber's; for they not only cut and curled ladies elegantly, and children carefully, but shaved gentlemen easily. Still, it was a highly genteel establishment—quite first-rate in fact—and there were displayed in the window, besides other elegancies, waxen busts of a light lady and a dark gentleman which were the admiration of the whole neighbourhood. Indeed, some ladies had gone so far as to assert, that the dark gentleman was actually a portrait of the spirted young proprietor; and the great similarity between their head-dresses—both wore very glossy hair, with a narrow walk straight down the middle, and a profusion of flat circular curls on both sides—encouraged the idea. The better informed among the sex, however, made light of this assertion, for however willing they were (and they were very willing) to do full justice to the handsome face and figure of the proprietor, they held the countenance of the dark gentleman in the window to be an exquisite and abstract idea of masculine beauty, realised sometimes, perhaps, among angels and military men, but very rarely embodied to gladden the eyes of mortals.

It was to this establishment that Newman Noggs led Miss Kenwigs in safety. The proprietor, knowing that Miss Kenwigs had three sisters, each with two flaxen tails, and all good for sixpence apiece, once a month at least, promptly deserted an old gentleman whom he had just lathered for shaving, and handing him over to the journeyman, (who was not very popular among the ladies, by reason of his obesity and middle age,) waited on the young lady himself.

Just as this change had been effected, there presented himself for shaving, a big, burly, good-humoured coal-heaver with a pipe in his mouth, who, drawing his hand across his chin, requested to know when a shaver would be disengaged.

The journeyman, to whom this question was put, looked doubtfully at the young proprietor, and the young proprietor looked scornfully at the coal-heaver: observing at the same time:

'You won't get shaved here, my man.'

'Why not?' said the coal-heaver.

'We don't shave gentlemen in your line,' remarked the young proprietor.

'Why, I see you a shaving of a baker, when I was a looking through the winder, last week,' said the coal-heaver.

'It's necessary to draw the line somewheres, my fine feller,' replied the principal. 'We draw the line there. We can't go beyond bakers. If we was to get any lower than bakers, our customers would desert us, and we might shut up shop. You must try some other establishment, sir. We couldn't do it here.'

The applicant stared; grinned at Newman Noggs, who appeared highly entertained; looked slightly round the shop, as if in depreciation of the pomatum pots and other articles of stock; took his pipe out of his mouth and gave a very loud whistle; and then put it in again, and walked out.

The old gentleman who had just been lathered, and who was sitting in a melancholy manner with his face turned towards the wall, appeared quite unconscious of this incident, and to be insensible to everything around him in the depth of a reverie—a very mournful one, to judge from the sighs he occasionally vented—in which he was absorbed. Affected by this example, the proprietor began to clip Miss Kenwigs, the journeyman to scrape the old gentleman, and Newman Noggs to read last Sunday's paper, all three in silence: when Miss Kenwigs uttered a shrill little scream, and Newman, raising his eyes, saw that it had been elicited by the circumstance of the old gentleman turning his head, and disclosing the features of Mr Lillyvick the collector.

The features of Mr Lillyvick they were, but strangely altered. If ever an old gentleman had made a point of appearing in public, shaved close and clean, that old gentleman was Mr Lillyvick. If ever a collector had borne himself like a collector, and assumed, before all men, a solemn and portentous dignity as if he had the world on his books and it was all two quarters in arrear, that collector was Mr Lillyvick. And now, there he sat, with the remains of a beard at least a week old encumbering his chin; a soiled and crumpled shirt-frill crouching, as it were, upon his breast, instead of standing boldly out; a demeanour so abashed and drooping, so despondent, and expressive of such humiliation, grief, and shame; that if the souls of forty unsubstantial housekeepers, all of whom had had their water cut off for non-payment of the rate, could have been concentrated in one body, that one body could hardly have expressed such mortification and defeat as were now expressed in the person of Mr Lillyvick the collector.

Newman Noggs uttered his name, and Mr Lillyvick groaned: then coughed to hide it. But the groan was a full-sized groan, and the cough was but a wheeze.

'Is anything the matter?' said Newman Noggs.

'Matter, sir!' cried Mr Lillyvick. 'The plug of life is dry, sir, and but the mud is left.'

This speech—the style of which Newman attributed to Mr Lillyvick's recent association with theatrical characters—not being quite explanatory, Newman looked as if he were about to ask another question, when Mr Lillyvick prevented him by shaking his hand mournfully, and then waving his own.

'Let me be shaved!' said Mr Lillyvick. 'It shall be done before Morleena; it IS Morleena, isn't it?'

'Yes,' said Newman.

'Kenwigses have got a boy, haven't they?' inquired the collector.

Again Newman said 'Yes.'

'Is it a nice boy?' demanded the collector.

'It ain't a very nasty one,' returned Newman, rather embarrassed by the question.

'Susan Kenwigs used to say,' observed the collector, 'that if ever she had another boy, she hoped it might be like me. Is this one like me, Mr Noggs?'

This was a puzzling inquiry; but Newman evaded it, by replying to Mr Lillyvick, that he thought the baby might possibly come like him in time.

'I should be glad to have somebody like me, somehow,' said Mr Lillyvick, 'before I die.'

'You don't mean to do that, yet awhile?' said Newman.

Unto which Mr Lillyvick replied in a solemn voice, 'Let me be shaved!' and again consigning himself to the hands of the journeyman, said no more.

This was remarkable behaviour. So remarkable did it seem to Miss Morleena, that that young lady, at the imminent hazard of having her ear sliced off, had not been able to forbear looking round, some score of times, during the foregoing colloquy. Of her, however, Mr Lillyvick took no notice: rather striving (so, at least, it seemed to Newman Noggs) to evade her observation, and to shrink into himself whenever he attracted her regards. Newman wondered very much what could have occasioned this altered behaviour on the part of the collector; but, philosophically reflecting that he would most likely know, sooner or later, and that he could perfectly afford to wait, he was very little disturbed by the singularity of the old gentleman's deportment.

The cutting and curling being at last concluded, the old gentleman, who had been some time waiting, rose to go, and, walking out with Newman and his charge, took Newman's arm, and proceeded for some time without making any observation. Newman, who in power of taciturnity was excelled by few people, made no attempt to break silence; and so they went on, until they had very nearly reached Miss Morleena's home, when Mr Lillyvick said:

'Were the Kenwigses very much overpowered, Mr Noggs, by that news?'

'What news?' returned Newman.

'That about—my—being—'

'Married?' suggested Newman.

'Ah!' replied Mr Lillyvick, with another groan; this time not even disguised by a wheeze.

'It made ma cry when she knew it,' interposed Miss Morleena, 'but we kept it from her for a long time; and pa was very low in his spirits, but he is better now; and I was very ill, but I am better too.'

'Would you give your great-uncle Lillyvick a kiss if he was to ask you, Morleena?' said the collector, with some hesitation.

'Yes; uncle Lillyvick, I would,' returned Miss Morleena, with the energy of both her parents combined; 'but not aunt Lillyvick. She's not an aunt of mine, and I'll never call her one.'

Immediately upon the utterance of these words, Mr Lillyvick caught Miss Morleena up in his arms, and kissed her; and, being by this time at the door of the house where Mr Kenwigs lodged (which, as has been before mentioned, usually stood wide open), he walked straight up into Mr Kenwigs's sitting-room, and put Miss Morleena down in the midst. Mr and Mrs Kenwigs were at supper. At sight of their perjured relative, Mrs Kenwigs turned faint and pale, and Mr Kenwigs rose majestically.

'Kenwigs,' said the collector, 'shake hands.'

'Sir,' said Mr Kenwigs, 'the time has been, when I was proud to shake hands with such a man as that man as now surweys me. The time has been, sir,' said Mr Kenwigs, 'when a wisit from that man has excited in me and my family's boozums sensations both nateral and awakening. But, now, I look upon that man with emotions totally surpassing everythink, and I ask myself where is his Honour, where is his straight-for'ardness, and where is his human natur?'

'Susan Kenwigs,' said Mr Lillyvick, turning humbly to his niece, 'don't you say anything to me?'

'She is not equal to it, sir,' said Mr Kenwigs, striking the table emphatically. 'What with the nursing of a healthy babby, and the reflections upon your cruel conduct, four pints of malt liquor a day is hardly able to sustain her.'

'I am glad,' said the poor collector meekly, 'that the baby is a healthy one. I am very glad of that.'

This was touching the Kenwigses on their tenderest point. Mrs Kenwigs instantly burst into tears, and Mr Kenwigs evinced great emotion.

'My pleasantest feeling, all the time that child was expected,' said Mr Kenwigs, mournfully, 'was a thinking, "If it's a boy, as I hope it may be; for I have heard its uncle Lillyvick say again and again he would prefer our having a boy next, if it's a boy, what will his uncle Lillyvick say? What will he like him to be called? Will he be Peter, or Alexander, or Pompey, or Diorgeenes, or what will he be?" And now when I look at him; a precious, unconscious, helpless infant, with no use in his little arms but to tear his little cap, and no use in his little legs but to kick his little self—when I see him a lying on his mother's lap, cooing and cooing, and, in his innocent state, almost a choking hisself with his little fist—when I see him such a infant as he is, and think that that uncle Lillyvick, as was once a-going to be so fond of him, has withdrawed himself away, such a feeling of wengeance comes over me as no language can depicter, and I feel as if even that holy babe was a telling me to hate him.'

This affecting picture moved Mrs Kenwigs deeply. After several imperfect words, which vainly attempted to struggle to the surface, but were drowned and washed away by the strong tide of her tears, she spake.

'Uncle,' said Mrs Kenwigs, 'to think that you should have turned your back upon me and my dear children, and upon Kenwigs which is the author of their being—you who was once so kind and affectionate, and who, if anybody had told us such a thing of, we should have withered with scorn like lightning—you that little Lillyvick, our first and earliest boy, was named after at the very altar! Oh gracious!'

'Was it money that we cared for?' said Mr Kenwigs. 'Was it property that we ever thought of?'

'No,' cried Mrs Kenwigs, 'I scorn it.'

'So do I,' said Mr Kenwigs, 'and always did.'

'My feelings have been lancerated,' said Mrs Kenwigs, 'my heart has been torn asunder with anguish, I have been thrown back in my confinement, my unoffending infant has been rendered uncomfortable and fractious, Morleena has pined herself away to nothing; all this I forget and forgive, and with you, uncle, I never can quarrel. But never ask me to receive HER, never do it, uncle. For I will not, I will not, I won't, I won't, I won't!'

'Susan, my dear,' said Mr Kenwigs, 'consider your child.'

'Yes,' shrieked Mrs Kenwigs, 'I will consider my child! I will consider my child! My own child, that no uncles can deprive me of; my own hated, despised, deserted, cut-off little child.' And, here, the emotions of Mrs Kenwigs became so violent, that Mr Kenwigs was fain to administer hartshorn internally, and vinegar externally, and to destroy a staylace, four petticoat strings, and several small buttons.

Newman had been a silent spectator of this scene; for Mr Lillyvick had signed to him not to withdraw, and Mr Kenwigs had further solicited his presence by a nod of invitation. When Mrs Kenwigs had been, in some degree, restored, and Newman, as a person possessed of some influence with her, had remonstrated and begged her to compose herself, Mr Lillyvick said in a faltering voice:

'I never shall ask anybody here to receive my—I needn't mention the word; you know what I mean. Kenwigs and Susan, yesterday was a week she eloped with a half-pay captain!'

Mr and Mrs Kenwigs started together.

'Eloped with a half-pay captain,' repeated Mr Lillyvick, 'basely and falsely eloped with a half-pay captain. With a bottle-nosed captain that any man might have considered himself safe from. It was in this room,' said Mr Lillyvick, looking sternly round, 'that I first see Henrietta Petowker. It is in this room that I turn her off, for ever.'

This declaration completely changed the whole posture of affairs. Mrs Kenwigs threw herself upon the old gentleman's neck, bitterly reproaching herself for her late harshness, and exclaiming, if she had suffered, what must his sufferings have been! Mr Kenwigs grasped his hand, and vowed eternal friendship and remorse. Mrs Kenwigs was horror-stricken to think that she should ever have nourished in her bosom such a snake, adder, viper, serpent, and base crocodile as Henrietta Petowker. Mr Kenwigs argued that she must have been bad indeed not to have improved by so long a contemplation of Mrs Kenwigs's virtue. Mrs Kenwigs remembered that Mr Kenwigs had often said that he was not quite satisfied of the propriety of Miss Petowker's conduct, and wondered how it was that she could have been blinded by such a wretch. Mr Kenwigs remembered that he had had his suspicions, but did not wonder why Mrs Kenwigs had not had hers, as she was all chastity, purity, and truth, and Henrietta all baseness, falsehood, and deceit. And Mr and Mrs Kenwigs both said, with strong feelings and tears of sympathy, that everything happened for the best; and conjured the good collector not to give way to unavailing grief, but to seek consolation in the society of those affectionate relations whose arms and hearts were ever open to him.

'Out of affection and regard for you, Susan and Kenwigs,' said Mr Lillyvick, 'and not out of revenge and spite against her, for she is below it, I shall, tomorrow morning, settle upon your children, and make payable to the survivors of them when they come of age of marry, that money that I once meant to leave 'em in my will. The deed shall be executed tomorrow, and Mr Noggs shall be one of the witnesses. He hears me promise this, and he shall see it done.'

Overpowered by this noble and generous offer, Mr Kenwigs, Mrs Kenwigs, and Miss Morleena Kenwigs, all began to sob together; and the noise of their sobbing, communicating itself to the next room, where the children lay a-bed, and causing them to cry too, Mr Kenwigs rushed wildly in, and bringing them out in his arms, by two and two, tumbled them down in their nightcaps and gowns at the feet of Mr Lillyvick, and called upon them to thank and bless him.

'And now,' said Mr Lillyvick, when a heart-rending scene had ensued and the children were cleared away again, 'give me some supper. This took place twenty mile from town. I came up this morning, and have being lingering about all day, without being able to make up my mind to come and see you. I humoured her in everything, she had her own way, she did just as she pleased, and now she has done this. There was twelve teaspoons and twenty-four pound in sovereigns—I missed them first—it's a trial—I feel I shall never be able to knock a double knock again, when I go my rounds—don't say anything more about it, please—the spoons were worth—never mind—never mind!'

With such muttered outpourings as these, the old gentleman shed a few tears; but, they got him into the elbow-chair, and prevailed upon him, without much pressing, to make a hearty supper, and by the time he had finished his first pipe, and disposed of half-a-dozen glasses out of a crown bowl of punch, ordered by Mr Kenwigs, in celebration of his return to the bosom of his family, he seemed, though still very humble, quite resigned to his fate, and rather relieved than otherwise by the flight of his wife.

'When I see that man,' said Mr Kenwigs, with one hand round Mrs Kenwigs's waist: his other hand supporting his pipe (which made him wink and cough very much, for he was no smoker): and his eyes on Morleena, who sat upon her uncle's knee, 'when I see that man as mingling, once again, in the spear which he adorns, and see his affections deweloping themselves in legitimate sitiwations, I feel that his nature is as elewated and expanded, as his standing afore society as a public character is unimpeached, and the woices of my infant children purvided for in life, seem to whisper to me softly, "This is an ewent at which Evins itself looks down!"'

CHAPTER 53

Containing the further Progress of the Plot contrived by Mr Ralph Nickleby and Mr Arthur Gride

With that settled resolution, and steadiness of purpose to which extreme circumstances so often give birth, acting upon far less excitable and more sluggish temperaments than that which was the lot of Madeline Bray's admirer, Nicholas started, at dawn of day, from the restless couch which no sleep had visited on the previous night, and prepared to make that last appeal, by whose slight and fragile thread her only remaining hope of escape depended.

Although, to restless and ardent minds, morning may be the fitting season for exertion and activity, it is not always at that time that hope is strongest or the spirit most sanguine and buoyant. In trying and doubtful positions, youth, custom, a steady contemplation of the difficulties which surround us, and a familiarity with them, imperceptibly diminish our apprehensions and beget comparative indifference, if not a vague and reckless confidence in some relief, the means or nature of which we care not to foresee. But when we come, fresh, upon such things in the morning, with that dark and silent gap between us and yesterday; with every link in the brittle chain of hope, to rivet afresh; our hot enthusiasm subdued, and cool calm reason substituted in its stead; doubt and misgiving revive. As the traveller sees farthest by day, and becomes aware of rugged mountains and trackless plains which the friendly darkness had shrouded from his sight and mind together, so, the wayfarer in the toilsome path of human life sees, with each returning sun, some new obstacle to surmount, some new height to be attained. Distances stretch out before him which, last night, were scarcely taken into account, and the light which gilds all nature with its cheerful beams, seems but to shine upon the weary obstacles that yet lie strewn between him and the grave.

So thought Nicholas, when, with the impatience natural to a situation like his, he softly left the house, and, feeling as though to remain in bed were to lose most precious time, and to be up and stirring were in some way to promote the end he had in view, wandered into London; perfectly well knowing that for hours to come he could not obtain speech with Madeline, and could do nothing but wish the intervening time away.

And, even now, as he paced the streets, and listlessly looked round on the gradually increasing bustle and preparation for the day, everything appeared to yield him some new occasion for despondency. Last night, the sacrifice of a young, affectionate, and beautiful creature, to such a wretch, and in such a cause, had seemed a thing too monstrous to succeed; and the warmer he grew, the more confident he felt that some interposition must save her from his clutches. But now, when he thought how regularly things went on, from day to day, in the same unvarying round; how youth and beauty died, and ugly griping age lived tottering on; how crafty avarice grew rich, and manly honest hearts were poor and sad; how few they were who tenanted the stately houses, and how many of those who lay in noisome pens, or rose each day and laid them down each night, and lived and died, father and son, mother and child, race upon race, and generation upon generation, without a home to shelter them or the energies of one single man directed to their aid; how, in seeking, not a luxurious and splendid life, but the bare means of a most wretched and inadequate subsistence, there were women and children in that one town, divided into classes, numbered and estimated as regularly as the noble families and folks of great degree, and reared from infancy to drive most criminal and dreadful trades; how ignorance was punished and never taught; how jail-doors gaped, and gallows loomed, for thousands urged towards them by circumstances darkly curtaining their very cradles' heads, and but for which they might have earned their honest bread and lived in peace; how many died in soul, and had no chance of life; how many who could scarcely go astray, be they vicious as they would, turned haughtily from the crushed and stricken wretch who could scarce do otherwise, and who would have been a greater wonder had he or she done well, than even they had they done ill; how much injustice, misery, and wrong, there was, and yet how the world rolled on, from year to year, alike careless and indifferent, and no man seeking to remedy or redress it; when he thought of all this, and selected from the mass the one slight case on which his thoughts were bent, he felt, indeed, that there was little ground for hope, and little reason why it should not form an atom in the huge aggregate of distress and sorrow, and add one small and unimportant unit to swell the great amount.

But youth is not prone to contemplate the darkest side of a picture it can shift at will. By dint of reflecting on what he had to do, and reviving the train of thought which night had interrupted, Nicholas gradually summoned up his utmost energy, and when the morning was sufficiently advanced for his purpose, had no thought but that of using it to the best advantage. A hasty breakfast taken, and such affairs of business as required prompt attention disposed of, he directed his steps to the residence of Madeline Bray: whither he lost no time in arriving.

It had occurred to him that, very possibly, the young lady might be denied, although to him she never had been; and he was still pondering upon the surest method of obtaining access to her in that case, when, coming to the door of the house, he found it had been left ajar—probably by the last person who had gone out. The occasion was not one upon which to observe the nicest ceremony; therefore, availing himself of this advantage, Nicholas walked gently upstairs and knocked at the door of the room into which he had been accustomed to be shown. Receiving permission to enter, from some person on the other side, he opened the door and walked in.

Bray and his daughter were sitting there alone. It was nearly three weeks since he had seen her last, but there was a change in the lovely girl before him which told Nicholas, in startling terms, how much mental suffering had been compressed into that short time. There are no words which can express, nothing with which can be compared, the perfect pallor, the clear transparent whiteness, of the beautiful face which turned towards him when he entered. Her hair was a rich deep brown, but shading that face, and straying upon a neck that rivalled it in whiteness, it seemed by the strong contrast raven black. Something of wildness and restlessness there was in the dark eye, but there was the same patient look, the same expression of gentle mournfulness which he well remembered, and no trace of a single tear. Most beautiful—more beautiful, perhaps, than ever—there was something in her face which quite unmanned him, and appeared far more touching than the wildest agony of grief. It was not merely calm and composed, but fixed and rigid, as though the violent effort which had summoned that composure beneath her father's eye, while it mastered all other thoughts, had prevented even the momentary expression they had communicated to the features from subsiding, and had fastened it there, as an evidence of its triumph.

The father sat opposite to her; not looking directly in her face, but glancing at her, as he talked with a gay air which ill disguised the anxiety of his thoughts. The drawing materials were not on their accustomed table, nor were any of the other tokens of her usual occupations to be seen. The little vases which Nicholas had always seen filled with fresh flowers were empty, or supplied only with a few withered stalks and leaves. The bird was silent. The cloth that covered his cage at night was not removed. His mistress had forgotten him.

There are times when, the mind being painfully alive to receive impressions, a great deal may be noted at a glance. This was one, for Nicholas had but glanced round him when he was recognised by Mr Bray, who said impatiently:

'Now, sir, what do you want? Name your errand here, quickly, if you please, for my daughter and I are busily engaged with other and more important matters than those you come about. Come, sir, address yourself to your business at once.'

Nicholas could very well discern that the irritability and impatience of this speech were assumed, and that Bray, in his heart, was rejoiced at any interruption which promised to engage the attention of his daughter. He bent his eyes involuntarily upon the father as he spoke, and marked his uneasiness; for he coloured and turned his head away.

The device, however, so far as it was a device for causing Madeline to interfere, was successful. She rose, and advancing towards Nicholas paused half-way, and stretched out her hand as expecting a letter.

'Madeline,' said her father impatiently, 'my love, what are you doing?'

'Miss Bray expects an inclosure perhaps,' said Nicholas, speaking very distinctly, and with an emphasis she could scarcely misunderstand. 'My employer is absent from England, or I should have brought a letter with me. I hope she will give me time—a little time. I ask a very little time.'

'If that is all you come about, sir,' said Mr Bray, 'you may make yourself easy on that head. Madeline, my dear, I didn't know this person was in your debt?'

'A—a trifle, I believe,' returned Madeline, faintly.

'I suppose you think now,' said Bray, wheeling his chair round and confronting Nicholas, 'that, but for such pitiful sums as you bring here, because my daughter has chosen to employ her time as she has, we should starve?'

'I have not thought about it,' returned Nicholas.

'You have not thought about it!' sneered the invalid. 'You know you HAVE thought about it, and have thought that, and think so every time you come here. Do you suppose, young man, that I don't know what little purse-proud tradesmen are, when, through some fortunate circumstances, they get the upper hand for a brief day—or think they get the upper hand—of a gentleman?'

'My business,' said Nicholas respectfully, 'is with a lady.'

'With a gentleman's daughter, sir,' returned the sick man, 'and the pettifogging spirit is the same. But perhaps you bring ORDERS, eh? Have you any fresh ORDERS for my daughter, sir?'

Nicholas understood the tone of triumph in which this interrogatory was put; but remembering the necessity of supporting his assumed character, produced a scrap of paper purporting to contain a list of some subjects for drawings which his employer desired to have executed; and with which he had prepared himself in case of any such contingency.

'Oh!' said Mr Bray. 'These are the orders, are they?'

'Since you insist upon the term, sir, yes,' replied Nicholas.

'Then you may tell your master,' said Bray, tossing the paper back again, with an exulting smile, 'that my daughter, Miss Madeline Bray, condescends to employ herself no longer in such labours as these; that she is not at his beck and call, as he supposes her to be; that we don't live upon his money, as he flatters himself we do; that he may give whatever he owes us, to the first beggar that passes his shop, or add it to his own profits next time he calculates them; and that he may go to the devil for me. That's my acknowledgment of his orders, sir!'

'And this is the independence of a man who sells his daughter as he has sold that weeping girl!' thought Nicholas.

The father was too much absorbed with his own exultation to mark the look of scorn which, for an instant, Nicholas could not have suppressed had he been upon the rack. 'There,' he continued, after a short silence, 'you have your message and can retire—unless you have any further—ha!—any further orders.'

'I have none,' said Nicholas; 'nor, in the consideration of the station you once held, have I used that or any other word which, however harmless in itself, could be supposed to imply authority on my part or dependence on yours. I have no orders, but I have fears—fears that I will express, chafe as you may—fears that you may be consigning that young lady to something worse than supporting you by the labour of her hands, had she worked herself dead. These are my fears, and these fears I found upon your own demeanour. Your conscience will tell you, sir, whether I construe it well or not.'

'For Heaven's sake!' cried Madeline, interposing in alarm between them. 'Remember, sir, he is ill.'

'Ill!' cried the invalid, gasping and catching for breath. 'Ill! Ill! I am bearded and bullied by a shop-boy, and she beseeches him to pity me and remember I am ill!'

He fell into a paroxysm of his disorder, so violent that for a few moments Nicholas was alarmed for his life; but finding that he began to recover, he withdrew, after signifying by a gesture to the young lady that he had something important to communicate, and would wait for her outside the room. He could hear that the sick man came gradually, but slowly, to himself, and that without any reference to what had just occurred, as though he had no distinct recollection of it as yet, he requested to be left alone.

'Oh!' thought Nicholas, 'that this slender chance might not be lost, and that I might prevail, if it were but for one week's time and reconsideration!'

'You are charged with some commission to me, sir,' said Madeline, presenting herself in great agitation. 'Do not press it now, I beg and pray you. The day after tomorrow; come here then.'

'It will be too late—too late for what I have to say,' rejoined Nicholas, 'and you will not be here. Oh, madam, if you have but one thought of him who sent me here, but one last lingering care for your own peace of mind and heart, I do for God's sake urge you to give me a hearing.'

She attempted to pass him, but Nicholas gently detained her.

'A hearing,' said Nicholas. 'I ask you but to hear me: not me alone, but him for whom I speak, who is far away and does not know your danger. In the name of Heaven hear me!'

The poor attendant, with her eyes swollen and red with weeping, stood by; and to her Nicholas appealed in such passionate terms that she opened a side-door, and, supporting her mistress into an adjoining room, beckoned Nicholas to follow them.

'Leave me, sir, pray,' said the young lady.

'I cannot, will not leave you thus,' returned Nicholas. 'I have a duty to discharge; and, either here, or in the room from which we have just now come, at whatever risk or hazard to Mr Bray, I must beseech you to contemplate again the fearful course to which you have been impelled.'

'What course is this you speak of, and impelled by whom, sir?' demanded the young lady, with an effort to speak proudly.

'I speak of this marriage,' returned Nicholas, 'of this marriage, fixed for tomorrow, by one who never faltered in a bad purpose, or lent his aid to any good design; of this marriage, the history of which is known to me, better, far better, than it is to you. I know what web is wound about you. I know what men they are from whom these schemes have come. You are betrayed and sold for money; for gold, whose every coin is rusted with tears, if not red with the blood of ruined men, who have fallen desperately by their own mad hands.'

'You say you have a duty to discharge,' said Madeline, 'and so have I. And with the help of Heaven I will perform it.'

'Say rather with the help of devils,' replied Nicholas, 'with the help of men, one of them your destined husband, who are—'

'I must not hear this,' cried the young lady, striving to repress a shudder, occasioned, as it seemed, even by this slight allusion to Arthur Gride. 'This evil, if evil it be, has been of my own seeking. I am impelled to this course by no one, but follow it of my own free will. You see I am not constrained or forced. Report this,' said Madeline, 'to my dear friend and benefactor, and, taking with you my prayers and thanks for him and for yourself, leave me for ever!'

'Not until I have besought you, with all the earnestness and fervour by which I am animated,' cried Nicholas, 'to postpone this marriage for one short week. Not until I have besought you to think more deeply than you can have done, influenced as you are, upon the step you are about to take. Although you cannot be fully conscious of the villainy of this man to whom you are about to give your hand, some of his deeds you know. You have heard him speak, and have looked upon his face. Reflect, reflect, before it is too late, on the mockery of plighting to him at the altar, faith in which your heart can have no share—of uttering solemn words, against which nature and reason must rebel—of the degradation of yourself in your own esteem, which must ensue, and must be aggravated every day, as his detested character opens upon you more and more. Shrink from the loathsome companionship of this wretch as you would from corruption and disease. Suffer toil and labour if you will, but shun him, shun him, and be happy.

For, believe me, I speak the truth; the most abject poverty, the most wretched condition of human life, with a pure and upright mind, would be happiness to that which you must undergo as the wife of such a man as this!'

Long before Nicholas ceased to speak, the young lady buried her face in her hands, and gave her tears free way. In a voice at first inarticulate with emotion, but gradually recovering strength as she proceeded, she answered him:

'I will not disguise from you, sir—though perhaps I ought—that I have undergone great pain of mind, and have been nearly broken-hearted since I saw you last. I do NOT love this gentleman. The difference between our ages, tastes, and habits, forbids it. This he knows, and knowing, still offers me his hand. By accepting it, and by that step alone, I can release my father who is dying in this place; prolong his life, perhaps, for many years; restore him to comfort—I may almost call it affluence; and relieve a generous man from the burden of assisting one, by whom, I grieve to say, his noble heart is little understood. Do not think so poorly of me as to believe that I feign a love I do not feel. Do not report so ill of me, for THAT I could not bear. If I cannot, in reason or in nature, love the man who pays this price for my poor hand, I can discharge the duties of a wife: I can be all he seeks in me, and will. He is content to take me as I am. I have passed my word, and should rejoice, not weep, that it is so. I do. The interest you take in one so friendless and forlorn as I, the delicacy with which you have discharged your trust, the faith you have kept with me, have my warmest thanks: and, while I make this last feeble acknowledgment, move me to tears, as you see. But I do not repent, nor am I unhappy. I am happy in the prospect of all I can achieve so easily. I shall be more so when I look back upon it, and all is done, I know.'

'Your tears fall faster as you talk of happiness,' said Nicholas, 'and you shun the contemplation of that dark future which must be laden with so much misery to you. Defer this marriage for a week. For but one week!'

'He was talking, when you came upon us just now, with such smiles as I remember to have seen of old, and have not seen for many and many a day, of the freedom that was to come tomorrow,' said Madeline, with momentary firmness, 'of the welcome change, the fresh air: all the new scenes and objects that would bring fresh life to his exhausted frame. His eye grew bright, and his face lightened at the thought. I will not defer it for an hour.'

'These are but tricks and wiles to urge you on,' cried Nicholas.

'I'll hear no more,' said Madeline, hurriedly; 'I have heard too much—more than I should—already. What I have said to you, sir, I have said as to that dear friend to whom I trust in you honourably to repeat it. Some time hence, when I am more composed and reconciled to my new mode of life, if I should live so long, I will write to him. Meantime, all holy angels shower blessings on his head, and prosper and preserve him.'

She was hurrying past Nicholas, when he threw himself before her, and implored her to think, but once again, upon the fate to which she was precipitately hastening.

'There is no retreat,' said Nicholas, in an agony of supplication; 'no withdrawing! All regret will be unavailing, and deep and bitter it must be. What can I say, that will induce you to pause at this last moment? What can I do to save you?'

'Nothing,' she incoherently replied. 'This is the hardest trial I have had. Have mercy on me, sir, I beseech, and do not pierce my heart with such appeals as these. I—I hear him calling. I—I—must not, will not, remain here for another instant.'

'If this were a plot,' said Nicholas, with the same violent rapidity with which she spoke, 'a plot, not yet laid bare by me, but which, with time, I might unravel; if you were (not knowing it) entitled to fortune of your own, which, being recovered, would do all that this marriage can accomplish, would you not retract?'

'No, no, no! It is impossible; it is a child's tale. Time would bring his death. He is calling again!'

'It may be the last time we shall ever meet on earth,' said Nicholas, 'it may be better for me that we should never meet more.'

'For both, for both,' replied Madeline, not heeding what she said. 'The time will come when to recall the memory of this one interview might drive me mad. Be sure to tell them, that you left me calm and happy. And God be with you, sir, and my grateful heart and blessing!'

She was gone. Nicholas, staggering from the house, thought of the hurried scene which had just closed upon him, as if it were the phantom of some wild, unquiet dream. The day wore on; at night, having been enabled in some measure to collect his thoughts, he issued forth again.

That night, being the last of Arthur Gride's bachelorship, found him in tiptop spirits and great glee. The bottle-green suit had been brushed, ready for the morrow. Peg Sliderskew had rendered the accounts of her past housekeeping; the eighteen-pence had been rigidly accounted for (she was never trusted with a larger sum at once, and the accounts were not usually balanced more than twice a day); every preparation had been made for the coming festival; and Arthur might have sat down and contemplated his approaching happiness, but that he preferred sitting down and contemplating the entries in a dirty old vellum-book with rusty clasps.

'Well-a-day!' he chuckled, as sinking on his knees before a strong chest screwed down to the floor, he thrust in his arm nearly up to the shoulder, and slowly drew forth this greasy volume. 'Well-a-day now, this is all my library, but it's one of the most entertaining books that were ever written! It's a delightful book, and all true and real—that's the best of it—true as the Bank of England, and real as its gold and silver. Written by Arthur Gride. He, he, he! None of your storybook writers will ever make as good a book as this, I warrant me. It's composed for private circulation, for my own particular reading, and nobody else's. He, he, he!'

Muttering this soliloquy, Arthur carried his precious volume to the table, and, adjusting it upon a dusty desk, put on his spectacles, and began to pore among the leaves.

'It's a large sum to Mr Nickleby,' he said, in a dolorous voice. 'Debt to be paid in full, nine hundred and seventy-five, four, three. Additional sum as per bond, five hundred pound. One thousand, four hundred and seventy-five pounds, four shillings, and threepence, tomorrow at twelve o'clock. On the other side, though, there's the PER CONTRA, by means of this pretty chick. But, again, there's the question whether I mightn't have brought all this about, myself. "Faint heart never won fair lady." Why was my heart so faint? Why didn't I boldly open it to Bray myself, and save one thousand four hundred and seventy-five, four, three?'

These reflections depressed the old usurer so much, as to wring a feeble groan or two from his breast, and cause him to declare, with uplifted hands, that he would die in a workhouse. Remembering on further cogitation, however, that under any circumstances he must have paid, or handsomely compounded for, Ralph's debt, and being by no means confident that he would have succeeded had he undertaken his enterprise alone, he regained his equanimity, and chattered and mowed over more satisfactory items, until the entrance of Peg Sliderskew interrupted him.

'Aha, Peg!' said Arthur, 'what is it? What is it now, Peg?'

'It's the fowl,' replied Peg, holding up a plate containing a little, a very little one. Quite a phenomenon of a fowl. So very small and skinny.

'A beautiful bird!' said Arthur, after inquiring the price, and finding it proportionate to the size. 'With a rasher of ham, and an egg made into sauce, and potatoes, and greens, and an apple pudding, Peg, and a little bit of cheese, we shall have a dinner for an emperor. There'll only be she and me—and you, Peg, when we've done.'

'Don't you complain of the expense afterwards,' said Mrs Sliderskew, sulkily.

'I am afraid we must live expensively for the first week,' returned Arthur, with a groan, 'and then we must make up for it. I won't eat more than I can help, and I know you love your old master too much to eat more than YOU can help, don't you, Peg?'

'Don't I what?' said Peg.

'Love your old master too much—'

'No, not a bit too much,' said Peg.

'Oh, dear, I wish the devil had this woman!' cried Arthur: 'love him too much to eat more than you can help at his expense.'

'At his what?' said Peg.

'Oh dear! she can never hear the most important word, and hears all the others!' whined Gride. 'At his expense—you catamaran!'

The last-mentioned tribute to the charms of Mrs Sliderskew being uttered in a whisper, that lady assented to the general proposition by a harsh growl, which was accompanied by a ring at the street-door.

'There's the bell,' said Arthur.

'Ay, ay; I know that,' rejoined Peg.

'Then why don't you go?' bawled Arthur.

'Go where?' retorted Peg. 'I ain't doing any harm here, am I?'

Arthur Gride in reply repeated the word 'bell' as loud as he could roar; and, his meaning being rendered further intelligible to Mrs Sliderskew's dull sense of hearing by pantomime expressive of ringing at a street-door, Peg hobbled out, after sharply demanding why he hadn't said there was a ring before, instead of talking about all manner of things that had nothing to do with it, and keeping her half-pint of beer waiting on the steps.

'There's a change come over you, Mrs Peg,' said Arthur, following her out with his eyes. 'What it means I don't quite know; but, if it lasts, we shan't agree together long I see. You are turning crazy, I think. If you are, you must take yourself off, Mrs Peg—or be taken off. All's one to me.' Turning over the leaves of his book as he muttered this, he soon lighted upon something which attracted his attention, and forgot Peg Sliderskew and everything else in the engrossing interest of its pages.

The room had no other light than that which it derived from a dim and dirt-clogged lamp, whose lazy wick, being still further obscured by a dark shade, cast its feeble rays over a very little space, and left all beyond in heavy shadow. This lamp the money-lender had drawn so close to him, that there was only room between it and himself for the book over which he bent; and as he sat, with his elbows on the desk, and his sharp cheek-bones resting on his hands, it only served to bring out his ugly features in strong relief, together with the little table at which he sat, and to shroud all the rest of the chamber in a deep sullen gloom. Raising his eyes, and looking vacantly into this gloom as he made some mental calculation, Arthur Gride suddenly met the fixed gaze of a man.

'Thieves! thieves!' shrieked the usurer, starting up and folding his book to his breast. 'Robbers! Murder!'

'What is the matter?' said the form, advancing.

'Keep off!' cried the trembling wretch. 'Is it a man or a—a—'

'For what do you take me, if not for a man?' was the inquiry.

'Yes, yes,' cried Arthur Gride, shading his eyes with his hand, 'it is a man, and not a spirit. It is a man. Robbers! robbers!'

'For what are these cries raised? Unless indeed you know me, and have some purpose in your brain?' said the stranger, coming close up to him. 'I am no thief.'

'What then, and how come you here?' cried Gride, somewhat reassured, but still retreating from his visitor: 'what is your name, and what do you want?'

'My name you need not know,' was the reply. 'I came here, because I was shown the way by your servant. I have addressed you twice or thrice, but you were too profoundly engaged with your book to hear me, and I have been silently waiting until you should be less abstracted. What I want I will tell you, when you can summon up courage enough to hear and understand me.'

Arthur Gride, venturing to regard his visitor more attentively, and perceiving that he was a young man of good mien and bearing, returned to his seat, and muttering that there were bad characters about, and that this, with former attempts upon his house, had made him nervous, requested his visitor to sit down. This, however, he declined.

'Good God! I don't stand up to have you at an advantage,' said Nicholas (for Nicholas it was), as he observed a gesture of alarm on the part of Gride. 'Listen to me. You are to be married tomorrow morning.'

'N—n—no,' rejoined Gride. 'Who said I was? How do you know that?'

'No matter how,' replied Nicholas, 'I know it. The young lady who is to give you her hand hates and despises you. Her blood runs cold at the mention of your name; the vulture and the lamb, the rat and the dove, could not be worse matched than you and she. You see I know her.'

Gride looked at him as if he were petrified with astonishment, but did not speak; perhaps lacking the power.

'You and another man, Ralph Nickleby by name, have hatched this plot between you,' pursued Nicholas. 'You pay him for his share in bringing about this sale of Madeline Bray. You do. A lie is trembling on your lips, I see.'

He paused; but, Arthur making no reply, resumed again.

'You pay yourself by defrauding her. How or by what means—for I scorn to sully her cause by falsehood or deceit—I do not know; at present I do not know, but I am not alone or single-handed in this business. If the energy of man can compass the discovery of your fraud and treachery before your death; if wealth, revenge, and just hatred, can hunt and track you through your windings; you will yet be called to a dear account for this. We are on the scent already; judge you, who know what we do not, when we shall have you down!'

He paused again, and still Arthur Gride glared upon him in silence.

'If you were a man to whom I could appeal with any hope of touching his compassion or humanity,' said Nicholas, 'I would urge upon you to remember the helplessness, the innocence, the youth, of this lady; her worth and beauty, her filial excellence, and last, and more than all, as concerning you more nearly, the appeal she has made to your mercy and your manly feeling. But, I take the only ground that can be taken with men like you, and ask what money will buy you off. Remember the danger to which you are exposed. You see I know enough to know much more with very little help. Bate some expected gain for the risk you save, and say what is your price.'

Old Arthur Gride moved his lips, but they only formed an ugly smile and were motionless again.

'You think,' said Nicholas, 'that the price would not be paid. Miss Bray has wealthy friends who would coin their very hearts to save her in such a strait as this. Name your price, defer these nuptials for but a few days, and see whether those I speak of, shrink from the payment. Do you hear me?'

When Nicholas began, Arthur Gride's impression was, that Ralph Nickleby had betrayed him; but, as he proceeded, he felt convinced that however he had come by the knowledge he possessed, the part he acted was a genuine one, and that with Ralph he had no concern. All he seemed to know, for certain, was, that he, Gride, paid Ralph's debt; but that, to anybody who knew the circumstances of Bray's detention—even to Bray himself, on Ralph's own statement—must be perfectly notorious. As to the fraud on Madeline herself, his visitor knew so little about its nature or extent, that it might be a lucky guess, or a hap-hazard accusation. Whether or no, he had clearly no key to the mystery, and could not hurt him who kept it close within his own breast. The allusion to friends, and the offer of money, Gride held to be mere empty vapouring, for purposes of delay. 'And even if money were to be had,' thought Arthur Glide, as he glanced at Nicholas, and trembled with passion at his boldness and audacity, 'I'd have that dainty chick for my wife, and cheat YOU of her, young smooth-face!'

Long habit of weighing and noting well what clients said, and nicely balancing chances in his mind and calculating odds to their faces, without the least appearance of being so engaged, had rendered Gride quick in forming conclusions, and arriving, from puzzling, intricate, and often contradictory premises, at very cunning deductions. Hence it was that, as Nicholas went on, he followed him closely with his own constructions, and, when he ceased to speak, was as well prepared as if he had deliberated for a fortnight.

'I hear you,' he cried, starting from his seat, casting back the fastenings of the window-shutters, and throwing up the sash. 'Help here! Help! Help!'

'What are you doing?' said Nicholas, seizing him by the arm.

'I'll cry robbers, thieves, murder, alarm the neighbourhood, struggle with you, let loose some blood, and swear you came to rob me, if you don't quit my house,' replied Gride, drawing in his head with a frightful grin, 'I will!'

'Wretch!' cried Nicholas.

'YOU'LL bring your threats here, will you?' said Gride, whom jealousy of Nicholas and a sense of his own triumph had converted into a perfect fiend. 'You, the disappointed lover? Oh dear! He! he! he! But you shan't have her, nor she you. She's my wife, my doting little wife. Do you think she'll miss you? Do you think she'll weep? I shall like to see her weep, I shan't mind it. She looks prettier in tears.'

'Villain!' said Nicholas, choking with his rage.

'One minute more,' cried Arthur Gride, 'and I'll rouse the street with such screams, as, if they were raised by anybody else, should wake me even in the arms of pretty Madeline.'

'You hound!' said Nicholas. 'If you were but a younger man—'

'Oh yes!' sneered Arthur Gride, 'If I was but a younger man it wouldn't be so bad; but for me, so old and ugly! To be jilted by little Madeline for me!'

'Hear me,' said Nicholas, 'and be thankful I have enough command over myself not to fling you into the street, which no aid could prevent my doing if I once grappled with you. I have been no lover of this lady's. No contract or engagement, no word of love, has ever passed between us. She does not even know my name.'

'I'll ask it for all that. I'll beg it of her with kisses,' said Arthur Gride. 'Yes, and she'll tell me, and pay them back, and we'll laugh together, and hug ourselves, and be very merry, when we think of the poor youth that wanted to have her, but couldn't because she was bespoke by me!'

This taunt brought such an expression into the face of Nicholas, that Arthur Gride plainly apprehended it to be the forerunner of his putting his threat of throwing him into the street in immediate execution; for he thrust his head out of the window, and holding tight on with both hands, raised a pretty brisk alarm. Not thinking it necessary to abide the issue of the noise, Nicholas gave vent to an indignant defiance, and stalked from the room and from the house. Arthur Gride watched him across the street, and then, drawing in his head, fastened the window as before, and sat down to take breath.

'If she ever turns pettish or ill-humoured, I'll taunt her with that spark,' he said, when he had recovered. 'She'll little think I know about him; and, if I manage it well, I can break her spirit by this means and have her under my thumb. I'm glad nobody came. I didn't call too loud. The audacity to enter my house, and open upon me! But I shall have a very good triumph tomorrow, and he'll be gnawing his fingers off: perhaps drown himself or cut his throat! I shouldn't wonder! That would make it quite complete, that would: quite.'

When he had become restored to his usual condition by these and other comments on his approaching triumph, Arthur Gride put away his book, and, having locked the chest with great caution, descended into the kitchen to warn Peg Sliderskew to bed, and scold her for having afforded such ready admission to a stranger.

The unconscious Peg, however, not being able to comprehend the offence of which she had been guilty, he summoned her to hold the light, while he made a tour of the fastenings, and secured the street-door with his own hands.

'Top bolt,' muttered Arthur, fastening as he spoke, 'bottom bolt, chain, bar, double lock, and key out to put under my pillow! So, if any more rejected admirers come, they may come through the keyhole. And now I'll go to sleep till half-past five, when I must get up to be married, Peg!'

With that, he jocularly tapped Mrs Sliderskew under the chin, and appeared, for the moment, inclined to celebrate the close of his bachelor days by imprinting a kiss on her shrivelled lips. Thinking better of it, however, he gave her chin another tap, in lieu of that warmer familiarity, and stole away to bed.

CHAPTER 54

The Crisis of the Project and its Result

There are not many men who lie abed too late, or oversleep themselves, on their wedding morning. A legend there is of somebody remarkable for absence of mind, who opened his eyes upon the day which was to give him a young wife, and forgetting all about the matter, rated his servants for providing him with such fine clothes as had been prepared for the festival. There is also a legend of a young gentleman, who, not having before his eyes the fear of the canons of the church for such cases made and provided, conceived a passion for his grandmother. Both cases are of a singular and special kind and it is very doubtful whether either can be considered as a precedent likely to be extensively followed by succeeding generations.

Arthur Gride had enrobed himself in his marriage garments of bottle-green, a full hour before Mrs Sliderskew, shaking off her more heavy slumbers, knocked at his chamber door; and he had hobbled downstairs in full array and smacked his lips over a scanty taste of his favourite cordial, ere that delicate piece of antiquity enlightened the kitchen with her presence.

'Faugh!' said Peg, grubbing, in the discharge of her domestic functions, among a scanty heap of ashes in the rusty grate. 'Wedding indeed! A precious wedding! He wants somebody better than his old Peg to take care of him, does he? And what has he said to me, many and many a time, to keep me content with short food, small wages, and little fire? "My will, Peg! my will!" says he: "I'm a bachelor—no friends—no relations, Peg." Lies! And now he's to bring home a new mistress, a baby-faced chit of a girl! If he wanted a wife, the fool, why couldn't he have one suitable to his age, and that knew his ways? She won't come in MY way, he says. No, that she won't, but you little think why, Arthur boy!'

While Mrs Sliderskew, influenced possibly by some lingering feelings of disappointment and personal slight, occasioned by her old master's preference for another, was giving loose to these grumblings below stairs, Arthur Gride was cogitating in the parlour upon what had taken place last night.

'I can't think how he can have picked up what he knows,' said Arthur, 'unless I have committed myself—let something drop at Bray's, for instance—which has been overheard. Perhaps I may. I shouldn't be surprised if that was it. Mr Nickleby was often angry at my talking to him before we got outside the door. I mustn't tell him that part of the business, or he'll put me out of sorts, and make me nervous for the day.'

Ralph was universally looked up to, and recognised among his fellows as a superior genius, but upon Arthur Gride his stern unyielding character and consummate art had made so deep an impression, that he was actually afraid of him. Cringing and cowardly to the core by nature, Arthur Gride humbled himself in the dust before Ralph Nickleby, and, even when they had not this stake in common, would have licked his shoes and crawled upon the ground before him rather than venture to return him word for word, or retort upon him in any other spirit than one of the most slavish and abject sycophancy.

To Ralph Nickleby's, Arthur Gride now betook himself according to appointment; and to Ralph Nickleby he related how, last night, some young blustering blade, whom he had never seen, forced his way into his house, and tried to frighten him from the proposed nuptials. Told, in short, what Nicholas had said and done, with the slight reservation upon which he had determined.

'Well, and what then?' said Ralph.

'Oh! nothing more,' rejoined Gride.

'He tried to frighten you,' said Ralph, 'and you WERE frightened I suppose; is that it?'

'I frightened HIM by crying thieves and murder,' replied Gride. 'Once I was in earnest, I tell you that, for I had more than half a mind to swear he uttered threats, and demanded my life or my money.'

'Oho!' said Ralph, eyeing him askew. 'Jealous too!'

'Dear now, see that!' cried Arthur, rubbing his hands and affecting to laugh.

'Why do you make those grimaces, man?' said Ralph; 'you ARE jealous—and with good cause I think.'

'No, no, no; not with good cause, hey? You don't think with good cause, do you?' cried Arthur, faltering. 'Do you though, hey?'

'Why, how stands the fact?' returned Ralph. 'Here is an old man about to be forced in marriage upon a girl; and to this old man there comes a handsome young fellow—you said he was handsome, didn't you?'

'No!' snarled Arthur Gride.

'Oh!' rejoined Ralph, 'I thought you did. Well! Handsome or not handsome, to this old man there comes a young fellow who casts all manner of fierce defiances in his teeth—gums I should rather say—and tells him in plain terms that his mistress hates him. What does he do that for? Philanthropy's sake?'

'Not for love of the lady,' replied Gride, 'for he said that no word of love—his very words—had ever passed between 'em.'

'He said!' repeated Ralph, contemptuously. 'But I like him for one thing, and that is, his giving you this fair warning to keep your—what is it?—Tit-tit or dainty chick—which?—under lock and key. Be careful, Gride, be careful. It's a triumph, too, to tear her away from a gallant young rival: a great triumph for an old man! It only remains to keep her safe when you have her—that's all.'

'What a man it is!' cried Arthur Gride, affecting, in the extremity of his torture, to be highly amused. And then he added, anxiously, 'Yes; to keep her safe, that's all. And that isn't much, is it?'

'Much!' said Ralph, with a sneer. 'Why, everybody knows what easy things to understand and to control, women are. But come, it's very nearly time for you to be made happy. You'll pay the bond now, I suppose, to save us trouble afterwards.'

'Oh what a man you are!' croaked Arthur.

'Why not?' said Ralph. 'Nobody will pay you interest for the money, I suppose, between this and twelve o'clock; will they?'

'But nobody would pay you interest for it either, you know,' returned Arthur, leering at Ralph with all the cunning and slyness he could throw into his face.

'Besides which,' said Ralph, suffering his lip to curl into a smile, 'you haven't the money about you, and you weren't prepared for this, or you'd have brought it with you; and there's nobody you'd so much like to accommodate as me. I see. We trust each other in about an equal degree. Are you ready?'

Gride, who had done nothing but grin, and nod, and chatter, during this last speech of Ralph's, answered in the affirmative; and, producing from his hat a couple of large white favours, pinned one on his breast, and with considerable difficulty induced his friend to do the like. Thus accoutred, they got into a hired coach which Ralph had in waiting, and drove to the residence of the fair and most wretched bride.

Gride, whose spirits and courage had gradually failed him more and more as they approached nearer and nearer to the house, was utterly dismayed and cowed by the mournful silence which pervaded it. The face of the poor servant girl, the only person they saw, was disfigured with tears and want of sleep. There was nobody to receive or welcome them; and they stole upstairs into the usual sitting-room, more like two burglars than the bridegroom and his friend.

'One would think,' said Ralph, speaking, in spite of himself, in a low and subdued voice, 'that there was a funeral going on here, and not a wedding.'

'He, he!' tittered his friend, 'you are so—so very funny!'

'I need be,' remarked Ralph, drily, 'for this is rather dull and chilling. Look a little brisker, man, and not so hangdog like!'

'Yes, yes, I will,' said Gride. 'But—but—you don't think she's coming just yet, do you?'

'Why, I suppose she'll not come till she is obliged,' returned Ralph, looking at his watch, 'and she has a good half-hour to spare yet. Curb your impatience.'

'I—I—am not impatient,' stammered Arthur. 'I wouldn't be hard with her for the world. Oh dear, dear, not on any account. Let her take her time—her own time. Her time shall be ours by all means.'

While Ralph bent upon his trembling friend a keen look, which showed that he perfectly understood the reason of this great consideration and regard, a footstep was heard upon the stairs, and Bray himself came into the room on tiptoe, and holding up his hand with a cautious gesture, as if there were some sick person near, who must not be disturbed.

'Hush!' he said, in a low voice. 'She was very ill last night. I thought she would have broken her heart. She is dressed, and crying bitterly in her own room; but she's better, and quite quiet. That's everything!'

'She is ready, is she?' said Ralph.

'Quite ready,' returned the father.

'And not likely to delay us by any young-lady weaknesses—fainting, or so forth?' said Ralph.

'She may be safely trusted now,' returned Bray. 'I have been talking to her this morning. Here! Come a little this way.'

He drew Ralph Nickleby to the further end of the room, and pointed towards Gride, who sat huddled together in a corner, fumbling nervously with the buttons of his coat, and exhibiting a face, of which every skulking and base expression was sharpened and aggravated to the utmost by his anxiety and trepidation.

'Look at that man,' whispered Bray, emphatically. 'This seems a cruel thing, after all.'

'What seems a cruel thing?' inquired Ralph, with as much stolidity of face, as if he really were in utter ignorance of the other's meaning.

'This marriage,' answered Bray. 'Don't ask me what. You know as well as I do.'

Ralph shrugged his shoulders, in silent deprecation of Bray's impatience, and elevated his eyebrows, and pursed his lips, as men do when they are prepared with a sufficient answer to some remark, but wait for a more favourable opportunity of advancing it, or think it scarcely worth while to answer their adversary at all.

'Look at him. Does it not seem cruel?' said Bray.

'No!' replied Ralph, boldly.

'I say it does,' retorted Bray, with a show of much irritation. 'It is a cruel thing, by all that's bad and treacherous!'

When men are about to commit, or to sanction the commission of some injustice, it is not uncommon for them to express pity for the object either of that or some parallel proceeding, and to feel themselves, at the time, quite virtuous and moral, and immensely superior to those who express no pity at all. This is a kind of upholding of faith above works, and is very comfortable. To do Ralph Nickleby justice, he seldom practised this sort of dissimulation; but he understood those who did, and therefore suffered Bray to say, again and again, with great vehemence, that they were jointly doing a very cruel thing, before he again offered to interpose a word.

'You see what a dry, shrivelled, withered old chip it is,' returned Ralph, when the other was at length silent. 'If he were younger, it might be cruel, but as it is—harkee, Mr Bray, he'll die soon, and leave her a rich young widow! Miss Madeline consults your tastes this time; let her consult her own next.'

'True, true,' said Bray, biting his nails, and plainly very ill at ease. 'I couldn't do anything better for her than advise her to accept these proposals, could I? Now, I ask you, Nickleby, as a man of the world; could I?'

'Surely not,' answered Ralph. 'I tell you what, sir; there are a hundred fathers, within a circuit of five miles from this place; well off; good, rich, substantial men; who would gladly give their daughters, and their own ears with them, to that very man yonder, ape and mummy as he looks.'

'So there are!' exclaimed Bray, eagerly catching at anything which seemed a justification of himself. 'And so I told her, both last night and today.'

'You told her truth,' said Ralph, 'and did well to do so; though I must say, at the same time, that if I had a daughter, and my freedom, pleasure, nay, my very health and life, depended on her taking a husband whom I pointed out, I should hope it would not be necessary to advance any other arguments to induce her to consent to my wishes.'

Bray looked at Ralph as if to see whether he spoke in earnest, and having nodded twice or thrice in unqualified assent to what had fallen from him, said:

'I must go upstairs for a few minutes, to finish dressing. When I come down, I'll bring Madeline with me. Do you know, I had a very strange dream last night, which I have not remembered till this instant. I dreamt that it was this morning, and you and I had been talking as we have been this minute; that I went upstairs, for the very purpose for which I am going now; and that as I stretched out my hand to take Madeline's, and lead her down, the floor sunk with me, and after falling from such an indescribable and tremendous height as the imagination scarcely conceives, except in dreams, I alighted in a grave.'

'And you awoke, and found you were lying on your back, or with your head hanging over the bedside, or suffering some pain from indigestion?' said Ralph. 'Pshaw, Mr Bray! Do as I do (you will have the opportunity, now that a constant round of pleasure and enjoyment opens upon you), and, occupying yourself a little more by day, have no time to think of what you dream by night.'

Ralph followed him, with a steady look, to the door; and, turning to the bridegroom, when they were again alone, said,

'Mark my words, Gride, you won't have to pay HIS annuity very long. You have the devil's luck in bargains, always. If he is not booked to make the long voyage before many months are past and gone, I wear an orange for a head!'

To this prophecy, so agreeable to his ears, Arthur returned no answer than a cackle of great delight. Ralph, throwing himself into a chair, they both sat waiting in profound silence. Ralph was thinking, with a sneer upon his lips, on the altered manner of Bray that day, and how soon their fellowship in a bad design had lowered his pride and established a familiarity between them, when his attentive ear caught the rustling of a female dress upon the stairs, and the footstep of a man.

'Wake up,' he said, stamping his foot impatiently upon the ground, 'and be something like life, man, will you? They are here. Urge those dry old bones of yours this way. Quick, man, quick!'

Gride shambled forward, and stood, leering and bowing, close by Ralph's side, when the door opened and there entered in haste—not Bray and his daughter, but Nicholas and his sister Kate.

If some tremendous apparition from the world of shadows had suddenly presented itself before him, Ralph Nickleby could not have been more thunder-stricken than he was by this surprise. His hands fell powerless by his side, he reeled back; and with open mouth, and a face of ashy paleness, stood gazing at them in speechless rage: his eyes so prominent, and his face so convulsed and changed by the passions which raged within him, that it would have been difficult to recognise in him the same stern, composed, hard-featured man he had been not a minute ago.

'The man that came to me last night,' whispered Gride, plucking at his elbow. 'The man that came to me last night!'

'I see,' muttered Ralph, 'I know! I might have guessed as much before. Across my every path, at every turn, go where I will, do what I may, he comes!'

The absence of all colour from the face; the dilated nostril; the quivering of the lips which, though set firmly against each other, would not be still; showed what emotions were struggling for the mastery with Nicholas. But he kept them down, and gently pressing Kate's arm to reassure her, stood erect and undaunted, front to front with his unworthy relative.

As the brother and sister stood side by side, with a gallant bearing which became them well, a close likeness between them was apparent, which many, had they only seen them apart, might have failed to remark.

The air, carriage, and very look and expression of the brother were all reflected in the sister, but softened and refined to the nicest limit of feminine delicacy and attraction. More striking still was some indefinable resemblance, in the face of Ralph, to both. While they had never looked more handsome, nor he more ugly; while they had never held themselves more proudly, nor he shrunk half so low; there never had been a time when this resemblance was so perceptible, or when all the worst characteristics of a face rendered coarse and harsh by evil thoughts were half so manifest as now.

'Away!' was the first word he could utter as he literally gnashed his teeth. 'Away! What brings you here? Liar, scoundrel, dastard, thief!'

'I come here,' said Nicholas in a low deep voice, 'to save your victim if I can. Liar and scoundrel you are, in every action of your life; theft is your trade; and double dastard you must be, or you were not here today. Hard words will not move me, nor would hard blows. Here I stand, and will, till I have done my errand.'

'Girl!' said Ralph, 'retire! We can use force to him, but I would not hurt you if I could help it. Retire, you weak and silly wench, and leave this dog to be dealt with as he deserves.'

'I will not retire,' cried Kate, with flashing eyes and the red blood mantling in her cheeks. 'You will do him no hurt that he will not repay. You may use force with me; I think you will, for I AM a girl, and that would well become you. But if I have a girl's weakness, I have a woman's heart, and it is not you who in a cause like this can turn that from its purpose.'

'And what may your purpose be, most lofty lady?' said Ralph.

'To offer to the unhappy subject of your treachery, at this last moment,' replied Nicholas, 'a refuge and a home. If the near prospect of such a husband as you have provided will not prevail upon her, I hope she may be moved by the prayers and entreaties of one of her own sex. At all events they shall be tried. I myself, avowing to her father from whom I come and by whom I am commissioned, will render it an act of greater baseness, meanness, and cruelty in him if he still dares to force this marriage on. Here I wait to see him and his daughter. For this I came and brought my sister even into your presence. Our purpose is not to see or speak with you; therefore to you we stoop to say no more.'

'Indeed!' said Ralph. 'You persist in remaining here, ma'am, do you?'

His niece's bosom heaved with the indignant excitement into which he had lashed her, but she gave him no reply.

'Now, Gride, see here,' said Ralph. 'This fellow—I grieve to say my brother's son: a reprobate and profligate, stained with every mean and selfish crime—this fellow, coming here today to disturb a solemn ceremony, and knowing that the consequence of his presenting himself in another man's house at such a time, and persisting in remaining there, must be his being kicked into the streets and dragged through them like the vagabond he is—this fellow, mark you, brings with him his sister as a protection, thinking we would not expose a silly girl to the degradation and indignity which is no novelty to him; and, even after I have warned her of what must ensue, he still keeps her by him, as you see, and clings to her apron-strings like a cowardly boy to his mother's. Is not this a pretty fellow to talk as big as you have heard him now?'

'And as I heard him last night,' said Arthur Gride; 'as I heard him last night when he sneaked into my house, and—he! he! he!—very soon sneaked out again, when I nearly frightened him to death. And HE wanting to marry Miss Madeline too! Oh dear! Is there anything else he'd like? Anything else we can do for him, besides giving her up? Would he like his debts paid and his house furnished, and a few bank notes for shaving paper if he shaves at all? He! he! he!'

'You will remain, girl, will you?' said Ralph, turning upon Kate again, 'to be hauled downstairs like a drunken drab, as I swear you shall if you stop here? No answer! Thank your brother for what follows. Gride, call down Bray—and not his daughter. Let them keep her above.'

'If you value your head,' said Nicholas, taking up a position before the door, and speaking in the same low voice in which he had spoken before, and with no more outward passion than he had before displayed; 'stay where you are!'

'Mind me, and not him, and call down Bray,' said Ralph.

'Mind yourself rather than either of us, and stay where you are!' said Nicholas.

'Will you call down Bray?' cried Ralph.

'Remember that you come near me at your peril,' said Nicholas.

Gride hesitated. Ralph being, by this time, as furious as a baffled tiger, made for the door, and, attempting to pass Kate, clasped her arm roughly with his hand. Nicholas, with his eyes darting fire, seized him by the collar.

At that moment, a heavy body fell with great violence on the floor above, and, in an instant afterwards, was heard a most appalling and terrific scream.

They all stood still, and gazed upon each other. Scream succeeded scream; a heavy pattering of feet succeeded; and many shrill voices clamouring together were heard to cry, 'He is dead!'

'Stand off!' cried Nicholas, letting loose all the passion he had restrained till now; 'if this is what I scarcely dare to hope it is, you are caught, villains, in your own toils.'

He burst from the room, and, darting upstairs to the quarter from whence the noise proceeded, forced his way through a crowd of persons who quite filled a small bed-chamber, and found Bray lying on the floor quite dead; his daughter clinging to the body.

'How did this happen?' he cried, looking wildly about him.

Several voices answered together, that he had been observed, through the half-opened door, reclining in a strange and uneasy position upon a chair; that he had been spoken to several times, and not answering, was supposed to be asleep, until some person going in and shaking him by the arm, he fell heavily to the ground and was discovered to be dead.

'Who is the owner of this house?' said Nicholas, hastily.

An elderly woman was pointed out to him; and to her he said, as he knelt down and gently unwound Madeline's arms from the lifeless mass round which they were entwined: 'I represent this lady's nearest friends, as her servant here knows, and must remove her from this dreadful scene. This is my sister to whose charge you confide her. My name and address are upon that card, and you shall receive from me all necessary directions for the arrangements that must be made. Stand aside, every one of you, and give me room and air for God's sake!'

The people fell back, scarce wondering more at what had just occurred, than at the excitement and impetuosity of him who spoke. Nicholas, taking the insensible girl in his arms, bore her from the chamber and downstairs into the room he had just quitted, followed by his sister and the faithful servant, whom he charged to procure a coach directly, while he and Kate bent over their beautiful charge and endeavoured, but in vain, to restore her to animation. The girl performed her office with such expedition, that in a very few minutes the coach was ready.

Ralph Nickleby and Gride, stunned and paralysed by the awful event which had so suddenly overthrown their schemes (it would not otherwise, perhaps, have made much impression on them), and carried away by the extraordinary energy and precipitation of Nicholas, which bore down all before him, looked on at these proceedings like men in a dream or trance. It was not until every preparation was made for Madeline's immediate removal that Ralph broke silence by declaring she should not be taken away.

'Who says so?' cried Nicholas, rising from his knee and confronting them, but still retaining Madeline's lifeless hand in his.

'I!' answered Ralph, hoarsely.

'Hush, hush!' cried the terrified Gride, catching him by the arm again. 'Hear what he says.'

'Ay!' said Nicholas, extending his disengaged hand in the air, 'hear what he says. That both your debts are paid in the one great debt of nature. That the bond, due today at twelve, is now waste paper. That your contemplated fraud shall be discovered yet. That your schemes are known to man, and overthrown by Heaven. Wretches, that he defies you both to do your worst.'

'This man,' said Ralph, in a voice scarcely intelligible, 'this man claims his wife, and he shall have her.'

'That man claims what is not his, and he should not have her if he were fifty men, with fifty more to back him,' said Nicholas.

'Who shall prevent him?'

'I will.'

'By what right I should like to know,' said Ralph. 'By what right I ask?'

'By this right. That, knowing what I do, you dare not tempt me further,' said Nicholas, 'and by this better right; that those I serve, and with whom you would have done me base wrong and injury, are her nearest and her dearest friends. In their name I bear her hence. Give way!'

'One word!' cried Ralph, foaming at the mouth.

'Not one,' replied Nicholas, 'I will not hear of one—save this. Look to yourself, and heed this warning that I give you! Your day is past, and night is comin' on.'

'My curse, my bitter, deadly curse, upon you, boy!'

'Whence will curses come at your command? Or what avails a curse or blessing from a man like you? I tell you, that misfortune and discovery are thickening about your head; that the structures you have raised, through all your ill-spent life, are crumbling into dust; that your path is beset with spies; that this very day, ten thousand pounds of your hoarded wealth have gone in one great crash!'

''Tis false!' cried Ralph, shrinking back.

''Tis true, and you shall find it so. I have no more words to waste. Stand from the door. Kate, do you go first. Lay not a hand on her, or on that woman, or on me, or so much a brush their garments as they pass you by!—You let them pass, and he blocks the door again!'

Arthur Gride happened to be in the doorway, but whether intentionally or from confusion was not quite apparent. Nicholas swung him away, with such violence as to cause him to spin round the room until he was caught by a sharp angle of the wall, and there knocked down; and then taking his beautiful burden in his arms rushed out. No one cared to stop him, if any were so disposed. Making his way through a mob of people, whom a report of the circumstances had attracted round the house, and carrying Madeline, in his excitement, as easily as if she were an infant, he reached the coach in which Kate and the girl were already waiting, and, confiding his charge to them, jumped up beside the coachman and bade him drive away.

CHAPTER 55

Of Family Matters, Cares, Hopes, Disappointments, and Sorrows

Although Mrs Nickleby had been made acquainted by her son and daughter with every circumstance of Madeline Bray's history which was known to them; although the responsible situation in which Nicholas stood had been carefully explained to her, and she had been prepared, even for the possible contingency of having to receive the young lady in her own house, improbable as such a result had appeared only a few minutes before it came about, still, Mrs Nickleby, from the moment when this confidence was first reposed in her, late on the previous evening, had remained in an unsatisfactory and profoundly mystified state, from which no explanations or arguments could relieve her, and which every fresh soliloquy and reflection only aggravated more and more.

'Bless my heart, Kate!' so the good lady argued; 'if the Mr Cheerybles don't want this young lady to be married, why don't they file a bill against the Lord Chancellor, make her a Chancery ward, and shut her up in the Fleet prison for safety?—I have read of such things in the newspapers a hundred times. Or, if they are so very fond of her as Nicholas says they are, why don't they marry her themselves—one of them I mean? And even supposing they don't want her to be married, and don't want to marry her themselves, why in the name of wonder should Nicholas go about the world, forbidding people's banns?'

'I don't think you quite understand,' said Kate, gently.

'Well I am sure, Kate, my dear, you're very polite!' replied Mrs Nickleby. 'I have been married myself I hope, and I have seen other people married. Not understand, indeed!'

'I know you have had great experience, dear mama,' said Kate; 'I mean that perhaps you don't quite understand all the circumstances in this instance. We have stated them awkwardly, I dare say.'

'That I dare say you have,' retorted her mother, briskly. 'That's very likely. I am not to be held accountable for that; though, at the same time, as the circumstances speak for themselves, I shall take the liberty, my love, of saying that I do understand them, and perfectly well too; whatever you and Nicholas may choose to think to the contrary. Why is such a great fuss made because this Miss Magdalen is going to marry somebody who is older than herself? Your poor papa was older than I was, four years and a half older. Jane Dibabs—the Dibabses lived in the beautiful little thatched white house one story high, covered all over with ivy and creeping plants, with an exquisite little porch with twining honysuckles and all sorts of things: where the earwigs used to fall into one's tea on a summer evening, and always fell upon their backs and kicked dreadfully, and where the frogs used to get into the rushlight shades when one stopped all night, and sit up and look through the little holes like Christians—Jane Dibabs, SHE married a man who was a great deal older than herself, and WOULD marry him, notwithstanding all that could be said to the contrary, and she was so fond of him that nothing was ever equal to it. There was no fuss made about Jane Dibabs, and her husband was a most honourable and excellent man, and everybody spoke well of him. Then why should there by any fuss about this Magdalen?'

'Her husband is much older; he is not her own choice; his character is the very reverse of that which you have just described. Don't you see a broad destinction between the two cases?' said Kate.

To this, Mrs Nickleby only replied that she durst say she was very stupid, indeed she had no doubt she was, for her own children almost as much as told her so, every day of her life; to be sure she was a little older than they, and perhaps some foolish people might think she ought reasonably to know best. However, no doubt she was wrong; of course she was; she always was, she couldn't be right, she couldn't be expected to be; so she had better not expose herself any more; and to all Kate's conciliations and concessions for an hour ensuing, the good lady gave no other replies than Oh, certainly, why did they ask HER?, HER opinion was of no consequence, it didn't matter what SHE said, with many other rejoinders of the same class.

In this frame of mind (expressed, when she had become too resigned for speech, by nods of the head, upliftings of the eyes, and little beginnings of groans, converted, as they attracted attention, into short coughs), Mrs Nickleby remained until Nicholas and Kate returned with the object of their solicitude; when, having by this time asserted her own importance, and becoming besides interested in the trials of one so young and beautiful, she not only displayed the utmost zeal and solicitude, but took great credit to herself for recommending the course of procedure which her son had adopted: frequently declaring, with an expressive look, that it was very fortunate things were AS they were: and hinting, that but for great encouragement and wisdom on her own part, they never could have been brought to that pass.

Not to strain the question whether Mrs Nickleby had or had not any great hand in bringing matters about, it is unquestionable that she had strong ground for exultation. The brothers, on their return, bestowed such commendations on Nicholas for the part he had taken, and evinced so much joy at the altered state of events and the recovery of their young friend from trials so great and dangers so threatening, that, as she more than once informed her daughter, she now considered the fortunes of the family 'as good as' made. Mr Charles Cheeryble, indeed, Mrs Nickleby positively asserted, had, in the first transports of his surprise and delight, 'as good as' said so. Without precisely explaining what this qualification meant, she subsided, whenever she mentioned the subject, into such a mysterious and important state, and had such visions of wealth and dignity in perspective, that (vague and clouded though they were) she was, at such times, almost as happy as if she had really been permanently provided for, on a scale of great splendour.

The sudden and terrible shock she had received, combined with the great affliction and anxiety of mind which she had, for a long time, endured, proved too much for Madeline's strength. Recovering from the state of stupefaction into which the sudden death of her father happily plunged her, she only exchanged that condition for one of dangerous and active illness. When the delicate physical powers which have been sustained by an unnatural strain upon the mental energies and a resolute determination not to yield, at last give way, their degree of prostration is usually proportionate to the strength of the effort which has previously upheld them. Thus it was that the illness which fell on Madeline was of no slight or temporary nature, but one which, for a time, threatened her reason, and—scarcely worse—her life itself.

Who, slowly recovering from a disorder so severe and dangerous, could be insensible to the unremitting attentions of such a nurse as gentle, tender, earnest Kate? On whom could the sweet soft voice, the light step, the delicate hand, the quiet, cheerful, noiseless discharge of those thousand little offices of kindness and relief which we feel so deeply when we are ill, and forget so lightly when we are well—on whom could they make so deep an impression as on a young heart stored with every pure and true affection that women cherish; almost a stranger to the endearments and devotion of its own sex, save as it learnt them from itself; and rendered, by calamity and suffering, keenly susceptible of the sympathy so long unknown and so long sought in vain? What wonder that days became as years in knitting them together! What wonder, if with every hour of returning health, there came some stronger and sweeter recognition of the praises which Kate, when they recalled old scenes—they seemed old now, and to have been acted years ago—would lavish on her brother! Where would have been the wonder, even, if those praises had found a quick response in the breast of Madeline, and if, with the image of Nicholas so constantly recurring in the features of his sister that she could scarcely separate the two, she had sometimes found it equally difficult to assign to each the feelings they had first inspired, and had imperceptibly mingled with her gratitude to Nicholas, some of that warmer feeling which she had assigned to Kate?

'My dear,' Mrs Nickleby would say, coming into the room with an elaborate caution, calculated to discompose the nerves of an invalid rather more than the entry of a horse-soldier at full gallop; 'how do you find yourself tonight? I hope you are better.'

'Almost well, mama,' Kate would reply, laying down her work, and taking Madeline's hand in hers.

'Kate!' Mrs Nickleby would say, reprovingly, 'don't talk so loud' (the worthy lady herself talking in a whisper that would have made the blood of the stoutest man run cold in his veins).

Kate would take this reproof very quietly, and Mrs Nickleby, making every board creak and every thread rustle as she moved stealthily about, would add:

'My son Nicholas has just come home, and I have come, according to custom, my dear, to know, from your own lips, exactly how you are; for he won't take my account, and never will.'

'He is later than usual to-night,' perhaps Madeline would reply. 'Nearly half an hour.'

'Well, I never saw such people in all my life as you are, for time, up here!' Mrs Nickleby would exclaim in great astonishment; 'I declare I never did! I had not the least idea that Nicholas was after his time, not the smallest. Mr Nickleby used to say—your poor papa, I am speaking of, Kate my dear—used to say, that appetite was the best clock in the world, but you have no appetite, my dear Miss Bray, I wish you had, and upon my word I really think you ought to take something that would give you one. I am sure I don't know, but I have heard that two or three dozen native lobsters give an appetite, though that comes to the same thing after all, for I suppose you must have an appetite before you can take 'em. If I said lobsters, I meant oysters, but of course it's all the same, though really how you came to know about Nicholas—'

'We happened to be just talking about him, mama; that was it.'

'You never seem to me to be talking about anything else, Kate, and upon my word I am quite surprised at your being so very thoughtless. You can find subjects enough to talk about sometimes, and when you know how important it is to keep up Miss Bray's spirits, and interest her, and all that, it really is quite extraordinary to me what can induce you to keep on prose, prose, prose, din, din, din, everlastingly, upon the same theme. You are a very kind nurse, Kate, and a very good one, and I know you mean very well; but I will say this—that if it wasn't for me, I really don't know what would become of Miss Bray's spirits, and so I tell the doctor every day. He says he wonders how I sustain my own, and I am sure I very often wonder myself how I can contrive to keep up as I do. Of course it's an exertion, but still, when I know how much depends upon me in this house, I am obliged to make it. There's nothing praiseworthy in that, but it's necessary, and I do it.'

With that, Mrs Nickleby would draw up a chair, and for some three-quarters of an hour run through a great variety of distracting topics in the most distracting manner possible; tearing herself away, at length, on the plea that she must now go and amuse Nicholas while he took his supper. After a preliminary raising of his spirits with the information that she considered the patient decidedly worse, she would further cheer him up by relating how dull, listless, and low-spirited Miss Bray was, because Kate foolishly talked about nothing else but him and family matters. When she had made Nicholas thoroughly comfortable with these and other inspiriting remarks, she would discourse at length on the arduous duties she had performed that day; and, sometimes, be moved to tears in wondering how, if anything were to happen to herself, the family would ever get on without her.

At other times, when Nicholas came home at night, he would be accompanied by Mr Frank Cheeryble, who was commissioned by the brothers to inquire how Madeline was that evening. On such occasions (and they were of very frequent occurrence), Mrs Nickleby deemed it of particular importance that she should have her wits about her; for, from certain signs and tokens which had attracted her attention, she shrewdly suspected that Mr Frank, interested as his uncles were in Madeline, came quite as much to see Kate as to inquire after her; the more especially as the brothers were in constant communication with the medical man, came backwards and forwards very frequently themselves, and received a full report from Nicholas every morning. These were proud times for Mrs Nickleby; never was anybody half so discreet and sage as she, or half so mysterious withal; and never were there such cunning generalship, and such unfathomable designs, as she brought to bear upon Mr Frank, with the view of ascertaining whether her suspicions were well founded: and if so, of tantalising him into taking her into his confidence and throwing himself upon her merciful consideration. Extensive was the artillery, heavy and light, which Mrs Nickleby brought into play for the furtherance of these great schemes; various and opposite the means which she employed to bring about the end she had in view. At one time, she was all cordiality and ease; at another, all stiffness and frigidity. Now, she would seem to open her whole heart to her unhappy victim; the next time they met, she would receive him with the most distant and studious reserve, as if a new light had broken in upon her, and, guessing his intentions, she had resolved to check them in the bud; as if she felt it her bounden duty to act with Spartan firmness, and at once and for ever to discourage hopes which never could be realised. At other times, when Nicholas was not there to overhear, and Kate was upstairs busily tending her sick friend, the worthy lady would throw out dark hints of an intention to send her daughter to France for three or four years, or to Scotland for the improvement of her health impaired by her late fatigues, or to America on a visit, or anywhere that threatened a long and tedious separation. Nay, she even went so far as to hint, obscurely, at an attachment entertained for her daughter by the son of an old neighbour of theirs, one Horatio Peltirogus (a young gentleman who might have been, at that time, four years old, or thereabouts), and to represent it, indeed, as almost a settled thing between the families—only waiting for her daughter's final decision, to come off with the sanction of the church, and to the unspeakable happiness and content of all parties.

It was in the full pride and glory of having sprung this last mine one night with extraordinary success, that Mrs Nickleby took the opportunity of being left alone with her son before retiring to rest, to sound him on the subject which so occupied her thoughts: not doubting that they could have but one opinion respecting it. To this end, she approached the question with divers laudatory and appropriate remarks touching the general amiability of Mr Frank Cheeryble.

'You are quite right, mother,' said Nicholas, 'quite right. He is a fine fellow.'

'Good-looking, too,' said Mrs Nickleby.

'Decidedly good-looking,' answered Nicholas.

'What may you call his nose, now, my dear?' pursued Mrs Nickleby, wishing to interest Nicholas in the subject to the utmost.

'Call it?' repeated Nicholas.

'Ah!' returned his mother, 'what style of nose? What order of architecture, if one may say so. I am not very learned in noses. Do you call it a Roman or a Grecian?'

'Upon my word, mother,' said Nicholas, laughing, 'as well as I remember, I should call it a kind of Composite, or mixed nose. But I have no very strong recollection on the subject. If it will afford you any gratification, I'll observe it more closely, and let you know.'

'I wish you would, my dear,' said Mrs Nickleby, with an earnest look.

'Very well,' returned Nicholas. 'I will.'

Nicholas returned to the perusal of the book he had been reading, when the dialogue had gone thus far. Mrs Nickleby, after stopping a little for consideration, resumed.

'He is very much attached to you, Nicholas, my dear.'

Nicholas laughingly said, as he closed his book, that he was glad to hear it, and observed that his mother seemed deep in their new friend's confidence already.

'Hem!' said Mrs Nickleby. 'I don't know about that, my dear, but I think it is very necessary that somebody should be in his confidence; highly necessary.'

Elated by a look of curiosity from her son, and the consciousness of possessing a great secret, all to herself, Mrs Nickleby went on with great animation:

'I am sure, my dear Nicholas, how you can have failed to notice it, is, to me, quite extraordinary; though I don't know why I should say that, either, because, of course, as far as it goes, and to a certain extent, there is a great deal in this sort of thing, especially in this early stage, which, however clear it may be to females, can scarcely be expected to be so evident to men. I don't say that I have any particular penetration in such matters. I may have; those about me should know best about that, and perhaps do know. Upon that point I shall express no opinion, it wouldn't become me to do so, it's quite out of the question, quite.'

Nicholas snuffed the candles, put his hands in his pockets, and, leaning back in his chair, assumed a look of patient suffering and melancholy resignation.

'I think it my duty, Nicholas, my dear,' resumed his mother, 'to tell you what I know: not only because you have a right to know it too, and to know everything that happens in this family, but because you have it in your power to promote and assist the thing very much; and there is no doubt that the sooner one can come to a clear understanding on such subjects, it is always better, every way. There are a great many things you might do; such as taking a walk in the garden sometimes, or sitting upstairs in your own room for a little while, or making believe to fall asleep occasionally, or pretending that you recollected some business, and going out for an hour or so, and taking Mr Smike with you. These seem very slight things, and I dare say you will be amused at my making them of so much importance; at the same time, my dear, I can assure you (and you'll find this out, Nicholas, for yourself one of these days, if you ever fall in love with anybody; as I trust and hope you will, provided she is respectable and well conducted, and of course you'd never dream of falling in love with anybody who was not), I say, I can assure you that a great deal more depends upon these little things than you would suppose possible. If your poor papa was alive, he would tell you how much depended on the parties being left alone. Of course, you are not to go out of the room as if you meant it and did it on purpose, but as if it was quite an accident, and to come back again in the same way. If you cough in the passage before you open the door, or whistle carelessly, or hum a tune, or something of that sort, to let them know you're coming, it's always better; because, of course, though it's not only natural but perfectly correct and proper under the circumstances, still it is very confusing if you interrupt young people when they are—when they are sitting on the sofa, and—and all that sort of thing: which is very nonsensical, perhaps, but still they will do it.'

The profound astonishment with which her son regarded her during this long address, gradually increasing as it approached its climax in no way discomposed Mrs Nickleby, but rather exalted her opinion of her own cleverness; therefore, merely stopping to remark, with much complacency, that she had fully expected him to be surprised, she entered on a vast quantity of circumstantial evidence of a particularly incoherent and perplexing kind; the upshot of which was, to establish, beyond the possibility of doubt, that Mr Frank Cheeryble had fallen desperately in love with Kate.

'With whom?' cried Nicholas.

Mrs Nickleby repeated, with Kate.

'What! OUR Kate! My sister!'

'Lord, Nicholas!' returned Mrs Nickleby, 'whose Kate should it be, if not ours; or what should I care about it, or take any interest in it for, if it was anybody but your sister?'

'Dear mother,' said Nicholas, 'surely it can't be!'

'Very good, my dear,' replied Mrs Nickleby, with great confidence. 'Wait and see.'

Nicholas had never, until that moment, bestowed a thought upon the remote possibility of such an occurrence as that which was now communicated to him; for, besides that he had been much from home of late and closely occupied with other matters, his own jealous fears had prompted the suspicion that some secret interest in Madeline, akin to that which he felt himself, occasioned those visits of Frank Cheeryble which had recently become so frequent. Even now, although he knew that the observation of an anxious mother was much more likely to be correct in such a case than his own, and although she reminded him of many little circumstances which, taken together, were certainly susceptible of the construction she triumphantly put upon them, he was not quite convinced but that they arose from mere good-natured thoughtless gallantry, which would have dictated the same conduct towards any other girl who was young and pleasing. At all events, he hoped so, and therefore tried to believe it.

'I am very much disturbed by what you tell me,' said Nicholas, after a little reflection, 'though I yet hope you may be mistaken.'

'I don't understand why you should hope so,' said Mrs Nickleby, 'I confess; but you may depend upon it I am not.'

'What of Kate?' inquired Nicholas.

'Why that, my dear,' returned Mrs Nickleby, 'is just the point upon which I am not yet satisfied. During this sickness, she has been constantly at Madeline's bedside—never were two people so fond of each other as they have grown—and to tell you the truth, Nicholas, I have rather kept her away now and then, because I think it's a good plan, and urges a young man on. He doesn't get too sure, you know.'

She said this with such a mingling of high delight and self-congratulation, that it was inexpressibly painful to Nicholas to dash her hopes; but he felt that there was only one honourable course before him, and that he was bound to take it.

'Dear mother,' he said kindly, 'don't you see that if there were really any serious inclination on the part of Mr Frank towards Kate, and we suffered ourselves for a moment to encourage it, we should be acting a most dishonourable and ungrateful part? I ask you if you don't see it, but I need not say that I know you don't, or you would have been more strictly on your guard. Let me explain my meaning to you. Remember how poor we are.'

Mrs Nickleby shook her head, and said, through her tears, that poverty was not a crime.

'No,' said Nicholas, 'and for that reason poverty should engender an honest pride, that it may not lead and tempt us to unworthy actions, and that we may preserve the self-respect which a hewer of wood and drawer of water may maintain, and does better in maintaining than a monarch in preserving his. Think what we owe to these two brothers: remember what they have done, and what they do every day for us with a generosity and delicacy for which the devotion of our whole lives would be a most imperfect and inadequate return. What kind of return would that be which would be comprised in our permitting their nephew, their only relative, whom they regard as a son, and for whom it would be mere childishness to suppose they have not formed plans suitably adapted to the education he has had, and the fortune he will inherit—in our permitting him to marry a portionless girl: so closely connected with us, that the irresistible inference must be, that he was entrapped by a plot; that it was a deliberate scheme, and a speculation amongst us three? Bring the matter clearly before yourself, mother. Now, how would you feel, if they were married, and the brothers, coming here on one of those kind errands which bring them here so often, you had to break out to them the truth? Would you be at ease, and feel that you had played an open part?'

Poor Mrs Nickleby, crying more and more, murmured that of course Mr Frank would ask the consent of his uncles first.

'Why, to be sure, that would place HIM in a better situation with them,' said Nicholas, 'but we should still be open to the same suspicions; the distance between us would still be as great; the advantages to be gained would still be as manifest as now. We may be reckoning without our host in all this,' he added more cheerfully, 'and I trust, and almost believe we are. If it be otherwise, I have that confidence in Kate that I know she will feel as I do—and in you, dear mother, to be assured that after a little consideration you will do the same.'

After many more representations and entreaties, Nicholas obtained a promise from Mrs Nickleby that she would try all she could to think as he did; and that if Mr Frank persevered in his attentions she would endeavour to discourage them, or, at the least, would render him no countenance or assistance. He determined to forbear mentioning the subject to Kate until he was quite convinced that there existed a real necessity for his doing so; and resolved to assure himself, as well as he could by close personal observation, of the exact position of affairs. This was a very wise resolution, but he was prevented from putting it in practice by a new source of anxiety and uneasiness.

Smike became alarmingly ill; so reduced and exhausted that he could scarcely move from room to room without assistance; and so worn and emaciated, that it was painful to look upon him. Nicholas was warned, by the same medical authority to whom he had at first appealed, that the last chance and hope of his life depended on his being instantly removed from London. That part of Devonshire in which Nicholas had been himself bred was named as the most favourable spot; but this advice was cautiously coupled with the information, that whoever accompanied him thither must be prepared for the worst; for every token of rapid consumption had appeared, and he might never return alive.

The kind brothers, who were acquainted with the poor creature's sad history, dispatched old Tim to be present at this consultation. That same morning, Nicholas was summoned by brother Charles into his private room, and thus addressed:

'My dear sir, no time must be lost. This lad shall not die, if such human means as we can use can save his life; neither shall he die alone, and in a strange place. Remove him tomorrow morning, see that he has every comfort that his situation requires, and don't leave him; don't leave him, my dear sir, until you know that there is no longer any immediate danger. It would be hard, indeed, to part you now. No, no, no! Tim shall wait upon you tonight, sir; Tim shall wait upon you tonight with a parting word or two. Brother Ned, my dear fellow, Mr Nickleby waits to shake hands and say goodbye; Mr Nickleby won't be long gone; this poor chap will soon get better, very soon get better; and then he'll find out some nice homely country-people to leave him with, and will go backwards and forwards sometimes—backwards and forwards you know, Ned. And there's no cause to be downhearted, for he'll very soon get better, very soon. Won't he, won't he, Ned?'

What Tim Linkinwater said, or what he brought with him that night, needs not to be told. Next morning Nicholas and his feeble companion began their journey.

And who but one—and that one he who, but for those who crowded round him then, had never met a look of kindness, or known a word of pity—could tell what agony of mind, what blighted thoughts, what unavailing sorrow, were involved in that sad parting?

'See,' cried Nicholas eagerly, as he looked from the coach window, 'they are at the corner of the lane still! And now there's Kate, poor Kate, whom you said you couldn't bear to say goodbye to, waving her handkerchief. Don't go without one gesture of farewell to Kate!'

'I cannot make it!' cried his trembling companion, falling back in his seat and covering his eyes. 'Do you see her now? Is she there still?'

'Yes, yes!' said Nicholas earnestly. 'There! She waves her hand again! I have answered it for you—and now they are out of sight. Do not give way so bitterly, dear friend, don't. You will meet them all again.'

He whom he thus encouraged, raised his withered hands and clasped them fervently together.

'In heaven. I humbly pray to God in heaven.'

It sounded like the prayer of a broken heart.

CHAPTER 56

Ralph Nickleby, baffled by his Nephew in his late Design, hatches a Scheme of Retaliation which Accident suggests to him, and takes into his Counsels a tried Auxiliary

The course which these adventures shape out for themselves, and imperatively call upon the historian to observe, now demands that they should revert to the point they attained previously to the commencement of the last chapter, when Ralph Nickleby and Arthur Gride were left together in the house where death had so suddenly reared his dark and heavy banner.

With clenched hands, and teeth ground together so firm and tight that no locking of the jaws could have fixed and riveted them more securely, Ralph stood, for some minutes, in the attitude in which he had last addressed his nephew: breathing heavily, but as rigid and motionless in other respects as if he had been a brazen statue. After a time, he began, by slow degrees, as a man rousing himself from heavy slumber, to relax. For a moment he shook his clasped fist towards the door by which Nicholas had disappeared; and then thrusting it into his breast, as if to repress by force even this show of passion, turned round and confronted the less hardy usurer, who had not yet risen from the ground.

The cowering wretch, who still shook in every limb, and whose few grey hairs trembled and quivered on his head with abject dismay, tottered to his feet as he met Ralph's eye, and, shielding his face with both hands, protested, while he crept towards the door, that it was no fault of his.

'Who said it was, man?' returned Ralph, in a suppressed voice. 'Who said it was?'

'You looked as if you thought I was to blame,' said Gride, timidly.

'Pshaw!' Ralph muttered, forcing a laugh. 'I blame him for not living an hour longer. One hour longer would have been long enough. I blame no one else.'

'N—n—no one else?' said Gride.

'Not for this mischance,' replied Ralph. 'I have an old score to clear with that young fellow who has carried off your mistress; but that has nothing to do with his blustering just now, for we should soon have been quit of him, but for this cursed accident.'

There was something so unnatural in the calmness with which Ralph Nickleby spoke, when coupled with his face, the expression of the features, to which every nerve and muscle, as it twitched and throbbed with a spasm whose workings no effort could conceal, gave, every instant, some new and frightful aspect—there was something so unnatural and ghastly in the contrast between his harsh, slow, steady voice (only altered by a certain halting of the breath which made him pause between almost every word like a drunken man bent upon speaking plainly), and these evidences of the most intense and violent passion, and the struggle he made to keep them under; that if the dead body which lay above had stood, instead of him, before the cowering Gride, it could scarcely have presented a spectacle which would have terrified him more.

'The coach,' said Ralph after a time, during which he had struggled like some strong man against a fit. 'We came in a coach. Is it waiting?'

Gride gladly availed himself of the pretext for going to the window to see. Ralph, keeping his face steadily the other way, tore at his shirt with the hand which he had thrust into his breast, and muttered in a hoarse whisper:

'Ten thousand pounds! He said ten thousand! The precise sum paid in but yesterday for the two mortgages, and which would have gone out again, at heavy interest, tomorrow. If that house has failed, and he the first to bring the news!—Is the coach there?'

'Yes, yes,' said Gride, startled by the fierce tone of the inquiry. 'It's here. Dear, dear, what a fiery man you are!'

'Come here,' said Ralph, beckoning to him. 'We mustn't make a show of being disturbed. We'll go down arm in arm.'

'But you pinch me black and blue,' urged Gride.

Ralph let him go impatiently, and descending the stairs with his usual firm and heavy tread, got into the coach. Arthur Gride followed. After looking doubtfully at Ralph when the man asked where he was to drive, and finding that he remained silent, and expressed no wish upon the subject, Arthur mentioned his own house, and thither they proceeded.

On their way, Ralph sat in the furthest corner with folded arms, and uttered not a word. With his chin sunk upon his breast, and his downcast eyes quite hidden by the contraction of his knotted brows, he might have been asleep for any sign of consciousness he gave until the coach stopped, when he raised his head, and glancing through the window, inquired what place that was.

'My house,' answered the disconsolate Gride, affected perhaps by its loneliness. 'Oh dear! my house.'

'True,' said Ralph 'I have not observed the way we came. I should like a glass of water. You have that in the house, I suppose?'

'You shall have a glass of—of anything you like,' answered Gride, with a groan. 'It's no use knocking, coachman. Ring the bell!'

The man rang, and rang, and rang again; then, knocked until the street re-echoed with the sounds; then, listened at the keyhole of the door. Nobody came. The house was silent as the grave.

'How's this?' said Ralph impatiently.

'Peg is so very deaf,' answered Gride with a look of anxiety and alarm. 'Oh dear! Ring again, coachman. She SEES the bell.'

Again the man rang and knocked, and knocked and rang again. Some of the neighbours threw up their windows, and called across the street to each other that old Gride's housekeeper must have dropped down dead. Others collected round the coach, and gave vent to various surmises; some held that she had fallen asleep; some, that she had burnt herself to death; some, that she had got drunk; and one very fat man that she had seen something to eat which had frightened her so much (not being used to it) that she had fallen into a fit. This last suggestion particularly delighted the bystanders, who cheered it rather uproariously, and were, with some difficulty, deterred from dropping down the area and breaking open the kitchen door to ascertain the fact. Nor was this all. Rumours having gone abroad that Arthur was to be married that morning, very particular inquiries were made after the bride, who was held by the majority to be disguised in the person of Mr Ralph Nickleby, which gave rise to much jocose indignation at the public appearance of a bride in boots and pantaloons, and called forth a great many hoots and groans. At length, the two money-lenders obtained shelter in a house next door, and, being accommodated with a ladder, clambered over the wall of the back-yard—which was not a high one—and descended in safety on the other side.

'I am almost afraid to go in, I declare,' said Arthur, turning to Ralph when they were alone. 'Suppose she should be murdered. Lying with her brains knocked out by a poker, eh?'

'Suppose she were,' said Ralph. 'I tell you, I wish such things were more common than they are, and more easily done. You may stare and shiver. I do!'

He applied himself to a pump in the yard; and, having taken a deep draught of water and flung a quantity on his head and face, regained his accustomed manner and led the way into the house: Gride following close at his heels.

It was the same dark place as ever: every room dismal and silent as it was wont to be, and every ghostly article of furniture in its customary place. The iron heart of the grim old clock, undisturbed by all the noise without, still beat heavily within its dusty case; the tottering presses slunk from the sight, as usual, in their melancholy corners; the echoes of footsteps returned the same dreary sound; the long-legged spider paused in his nimble run, and, scared by the sight of men in that his dull domain, hung motionless on the wall, counterfeiting death until they should have passed him by.

From cellar to garret went the two usurers, opening every creaking door and looking into every deserted room. But no Peg was there. At last, they sat them down in the apartment which Arthur Gride usually inhabited, to rest after their search.

'The hag is out, on some preparation for your wedding festivities, I suppose,' said Ralph, preparing to depart. 'See here! I destroy the bond; we shall never need it now.'

Gride, who had been peering narrowly about the room, fell, at that moment, upon his knees before a large chest, and uttered a terrible yell.

'How now?' said Ralph, looking sternly round.

'Robbed! robbed!' screamed Arthur Gride.

'Robbed! of money?'

'No, no, no. Worse! far worse!'

'Of what then?' demanded Ralph.

'Worse than money, worse than money!' cried the old man, casting the papers out of the chest, like some beast tearing up the earth. 'She had better have stolen money—all my money—I haven't much! She had better have made me a beggar than have done this!'

'Done what?' said Ralph. 'Done what, you devil's dotard?'

Still Gride made no answer, but tore and scratched among the papers, and yelled and screeched like a fiend in torment.

'There is something missing, you say,' said Ralph, shaking him furiously by the collar. 'What is it?'

'Papers, deeds. I am a ruined man. Lost, lost! I am robbed, I am ruined! She saw me reading it—reading it of late—I did very often—She watched me, saw me put it in the box that fitted into this, the box is gone, she has stolen it. Damnation seize her, she has robbed me!'

'Of WHAT?' cried Ralph, on whom a sudden light appeared to break, for his eyes flashed and his frame trembled with agitation as he clutched Gride by his bony arm. 'Of what?'

'She don't know what it is; she can't read!' shrieked Gride, not heeding the inquiry. 'There's only one way in which money can be made of it, and that is by taking it to her. Somebody will read it for her, and tell her what to do. She and her accomplice will get money for it and be let off besides; they'll make a merit of it—say they found it—knew it—and be evidence against me. The only person it will fall upon is me, me, me!'

'Patience!' said Ralph, clutching him still tighter and eyeing him with a sidelong look, so fixed and eager as sufficiently to denote that he had some hidden purpose in what he was about to say. 'Hear reason. She can't have been gone long. I'll call the police. Do you but give information of what she has stolen, and they'll lay hands upon her, trust me. Here! Help!'

'No, no, no!' screamed the old man, putting his hand on Ralph's mouth. 'I can't, I daren't.'

'Help! help!' cried Ralph.

'No, no, no!' shrieked the other, stamping on the ground with the energy of a madman. 'I tell you no. I daren't, I daren't!'

'Daren't make this robbery public?' said Ralph.

'No!' rejoined Gride, wringing his hands. 'Hush! Hush! Not a word of this; not a word must be said. I am undone. Whichever way I turn, I am undone. I am betrayed. I shall be given up. I shall die in Newgate!'

With frantic exclamations such as these, and with many others in which fear, grief, and rage, were strangely blended, the panic-stricken wretch gradually subdued his first loud outcry, until it had softened down into a low despairing moan, chequered now and then by a howl, as, going over such papers as were left in the chest, he discovered some new loss. With very little excuse for departing so abruptly, Ralph left him, and, greatly disappointing the loiterers outside the house by telling them there was nothing the matter, got into the coach, and was driven to his own home.

A letter lay on his table. He let it lie there for some time, as if he had not the courage to open it, but at length did so and turned deadly pale.

'The worst has happened,' he said; 'the house has failed. I see. The rumour was abroad in the city last night, and reached the ears of those merchants. Well, well!'

He strode violently up and down the room and stopped again.

'Ten thousand pounds! And only lying there for a day—for one day! How many anxious years, how many pinching days and sleepless nights, before I scraped together that ten thousand pounds!—Ten thousand pounds! How many proud painted dames would have fawned and smiled, and how many spendthrift blockheads done me lip-service to my face and cursed me in their hearts, while I turned that ten thousand pounds into twenty! While I ground, and pinched, and used these needy borrowers for my pleasure and profit, what smooth-tongued speeches, and courteous looks, and civil letters, they would have given me! The cant of the lying world is, that men like me compass our riches by dissimulation and treachery: by fawning, cringing, and stooping. Why, how many lies, what mean and abject evasions, what humbled behaviour from upstarts who, but for my money, would spurn me aside as they do their betters every day, would that ten thousand pounds have brought me in! Grant that I had doubled it—made cent. per cent.—for every sovereign told another—there would not be one piece of money in all the heap which wouldn't represent ten thousand mean and paltry lies, told, not by the money-lender, oh no! but by the money-borrowers, your liberal, thoughtless, generous, dashing folks, who wouldn't be so mean as save a sixpence for the world!'

Striving, as it would seem, to lose part of the bitterness of his regrets in the bitterness of these other thoughts, Ralph continued to pace the room. There was less and less of resolution in his manner as his mind gradually reverted to his loss; at length, dropping into his elbow-chair and grasping its sides so firmly that they creaked again, he said:

'The time has been when nothing could have moved me like the loss of this great sum. Nothing. For births, deaths, marriages, and all the events which are of interest to most men, have (unless they are connected with gain or loss of money) no interest for me. But now, I swear, I mix up with the loss, his triumph in telling it. If he had brought it about,—I almost feel as if he had,—I couldn't hate him more. Let me but retaliate upon him, by degrees, however slow—let me but begin to get the better of him, let me but turn the scale—and I can bear it.'

His meditations were long and deep. They terminated in his dispatching a letter by Newman, addressed to Mr Squeers at the Saracen's Head, with instructions to inquire whether he had arrived in town, and, if so, to wait an answer. Newman brought back the information that Mr Squeers had come by mail that morning, and had received the letter in bed; but that he sent his duty, and word that he would get up and wait upon Mr Nickleby directly.

The interval between the delivery of this message, and the arrival of Mr Squeers, was very short; but, before he came, Ralph had suppressed every sign of emotion, and once more regained the hard, immovable, inflexible manner which was habitual to him, and to which, perhaps, was ascribable no small part of the influence which, over many men of no very strong prejudices on the score of morality, he could exert, almost at will.

'Well, Mr Squeers,' he said, welcoming that worthy with his accustomed smile, of which a sharp look and a thoughtful frown were part and parcel: 'how do YOU do?'

'Why, sir,' said Mr Squeers, 'I'm pretty well. So's the family, and so's the boys, except for a sort of rash as is a running through the school, and rather puts 'em off their feed. But it's a ill wind as blows no good to nobody; that's what I always say when them lads has a wisitation. A wisitation, sir, is the lot of mortality. Mortality itself, sir, is a wisitation. The world is chock full of wisitations; and if a boy repines at a wisitation and makes you uncomfortable with his noise, he must have his head punched. That's going according to the Scripter, that is.'

'Mr Squeers,' said Ralph, drily.

'Sir.'

'We'll avoid these precious morsels of morality if you please, and talk of business.'

'With all my heart, sir,' rejoined Squeers, 'and first let me say—'

'First let ME say, if you please.—Noggs!'

Newman presented himself when the summons had been twice or thrice repeated, and asked if his master called.

'I did. Go to your dinner. And go at once. Do you hear?'

'It an't time,' said Newman, doggedly.

'My time is yours, and I say it is,' returned Ralph.

'You alter it every day,' said Newman. 'It isn't fair.'

'You don't keep many cooks, and can easily apologise to them for the trouble,' retorted Ralph. 'Begone, sir!'

Ralph not only issued this order in his most peremptory manner, but, under pretence of fetching some papers from the little office, saw it obeyed, and, when Newman had left the house, chained the door, to prevent the possibility of his returning secretly, by means of his latch-key.

'I have reason to suspect that fellow,' said Ralph, when he returned to his own office. 'Therefore, until I have thought of the shortest and least troublesome way of ruining him, I hold it best to keep him at a distance.'

'It wouldn't take much to ruin him, I should think,' said Squeers, with a grin.

'Perhaps not,' answered Ralph. 'Nor to ruin a great many people whom I know. You were going to say—?'

Ralph's summary and matter-of-course way of holding up this example, and throwing out the hint that followed it, had evidently an effect (as doubtless it was designed to have) upon Mr Squeers, who said, after a little hesitation and in a much more subdued tone:

'Why, what I was a-going to say, sir, is, that this here business regarding of that ungrateful and hard-hearted chap, Snawley senior, puts me out of my way, and occasions a inconveniency quite unparalleled, besides, as I may say, making, for whole weeks together, Mrs Squeers a perfect widder. It's a pleasure to me to act with you, of course.'

'Of course,' said Ralph, drily.

'Yes, I say of course,' resumed Mr Squeers, rubbing his knees, 'but at the same time, when one comes, as I do now, better than two hundred and fifty mile to take a afferdavid, it does put a man out a good deal, letting alone the risk.'

'And where may the risk be, Mr Squeers?' said Ralph.

'I said, letting alone the risk,' replied Squeers, evasively.

'And I said, where was the risk?'

'I wasn't complaining, you know, Mr Nickleby,' pleaded Squeers. 'Upon my word I never see such a—'

'I ask you where is the risk?' repeated Ralph, emphatically.

'Where the risk?' returned Squeers, rubbing his knees still harder. 'Why, it an't necessary to mention. Certain subjects is best awoided. Oh, you know what risk I mean.'

'How often have I told you,' said Ralph, 'and how often am I to tell you, that you run no risk? What have you sworn, or what are you asked to swear, but that at such and such a time a boy was left with you in the name of Smike; that he was at your school for a given number of years, was lost under such and such circumstances, is now found, and has been identified by you in such and such keeping? This is all true; is it not?'

'Yes,' replied Squeers, 'that's all true.'

'Well, then,' said Ralph, 'what risk do you run? Who swears to a lie but Snawley; a man whom I have paid much less than I have you?'

'He certainly did it cheap, did Snawley,' observed Squeers.

'He did it cheap!' retorted Ralph, testily; 'yes, and he did it well, and carries it off with a hypocritical face and a sanctified air, but you! Risk! What do you mean by risk? The certificates are all genuine, Snawley HAD another son, he HAS been married twice, his first wife IS dead, none but her ghost could tell that she didn't write that letter, none but Snawley himself can tell that this is not his son, and that his son is food for worms! The only perjury is Snawley's, and I fancy he is pretty well used to it. Where's your risk?'

'Why, you know,' said Squeers, fidgeting in his chair, 'if you come to that, I might say where's yours?'

'You might say where's mine!' returned Ralph; 'you may say where's mine. I don't appear in the business, neither do you. All Snawley's interest is to stick well to the story he has told; and all his risk is, to depart from it in the least. Talk of YOUR risk in the conspiracy!'

'I say,' remonstrated Squeers, looking uneasily round: 'don't call it that! Just as a favour, don't.'

'Call it what you like,' said Ralph, irritably, 'but attend to me. This tale was originally fabricated as a means of annoyance against one who hurt your trade and half cudgelled you to death, and to enable you to obtain repossession of a half-dead drudge, whom you wished to regain, because, while you wreaked your vengeance on him for his share in the business, you knew that the knowledge that he was again in your power would be the best punishment you could inflict upon your enemy. Is that so, Mr Squeers?'

'Why, sir,' returned Squeers, almost overpowered by the determination which Ralph displayed to make everything tell against him, and by his stern unyielding manner, 'in a measure it was.'

'What does that mean?' said Ralph.

'Why, in a measure means,' returned Squeers, 'as it may be, that it wasn't all on my account, because you had some old grudge to satisfy, too.'

'If I had not had,' said Ralph, in no way abashed by the reminder, 'do you think I should have helped you?'

'Why no, I don't suppose you would,' Squeers replied. 'I only wanted that point to be all square and straight between us.'

'How can it ever be otherwise?' retorted Ralph. 'Except that the account is against me, for I spend money to gratify my hatred, and you pocket it, and gratify yours at the same time. You are, at least, as avaricious as you are revengeful. So am I. Which is best off? You, who win money and revenge, at the same time and by the same process, and who are, at all events, sure of money, if not of revenge; or I, who am only sure of spending money in any case, and can but win bare revenge at last?'

As Mr Squeers could only answer this proposition by shrugs and smiles, Ralph bade him be silent, and thankful that he was so well off; and then, fixing his eyes steadily upon him, proceeded to say:

First, that Nicholas had thwarted him in a plan he had formed for the disposal in marriage of a certain young lady, and had, in the confusion attendant on her father's sudden death, secured that lady himself, and borne her off in triumph.

Secondly, that by some will or settlement—certainly by some instrument in writing, which must contain the young lady's name, and could be, therefore, easily selected from others, if access to the place where it was deposited were once secured—she was entitled to property which, if the existence of this deed ever became known to her, would make her husband (and Ralph represented that Nicholas was certain to marry her) a rich and prosperous man, and most formidable enemy.

Thirdly, that this deed had been, with others, stolen from one who had himself obtained or concealed it fraudulently, and who feared to take any steps for its recovery; and that he (Ralph) knew the thief.

To all this Mr Squeers listened, with greedy ears that devoured every syllable, and with his one eye and his mouth wide open: marvelling for what special reason he was honoured with so much of Ralph's confidence, and to what it all tended.

'Now,' said Ralph, leaning forward, and placing his hand on Squeers's arm, 'hear the design which I have conceived, and which I must—I say, must, if I can ripen it—have carried into execution. No advantage can be reaped from this deed, whatever it is, save by the girl herself, or her husband; and the possession of this deed by one or other of them is indispensable to any advantage being gained. THAT I have discovered beyond the possibility of doubt. I want that deed brought here, that I may give the man who brings it fifty pounds in gold, and burn it to ashes before his face.'

Mr Squeers, after following with his eye the action of Ralph's hand towards the fire-place as if he were at that moment consuming the paper, drew a long breath, and said:

'Yes; but who's to bring it?'

'Nobody, perhaps, for much is to be done before it can be got at,' said Ralph. 'But if anybody—you!'

Mr Squeers's first tokens of consternation, and his flat relinquishment of the task, would have staggered most men, if they had not immediately occasioned an utter abandonment of the proposition. On Ralph they produced not the slightest effect. Resuming, when the schoolmaster had quite talked himself out of breath, as coolly as if he had never been interrupted, Ralph proceeded to expatiate on such features of the case as he deemed it most advisable to lay the greatest stress on.

These were, the age, decrepitude, and weakness of Mrs Sliderskew; the great improbability of her having any accomplice or even acquaintance: taking into account her secluded habits, and her long residence in such a house as Gride's; the strong reason there was to suppose that the robbery was not the result of a concerted plan: otherwise she would have watched an opportunity of carrying off a sum of money; the difficulty she would be placed in when she began to think on what she had done, and found herself encumbered with documents of whose nature she was utterly ignorant; and the comparative ease with which somebody, with a full knowledge of her position, obtaining access to her, and working on her fears, if necessary, might worm himself into her confidence and obtain, under one pretence or another, free possession of the deed. To these were added such considerations as the constant residence of Mr Squeers at a long distance from London, which rendered his association with Mrs Sliderskew a mere masquerading frolic, in which nobody was likely to recognise him, either at the time or afterwards; the impossibility of Ralph's undertaking the task himself, he being already known to her by sight; and various comments on the uncommon tact and experience of Mr Squeers: which would make his overreaching one old woman a mere matter of child's play and amusement. In addition to these influences and persuasions, Ralph drew, with his utmost skill and power, a vivid picture of the defeat which Nicholas would sustain, should they succeed, in linking himself to a beggar, where he expected to wed an heiress—glanced at the immeasurable importance it must be to a man situated as Squeers, to preserve such a friend as himself—dwelt on a long train of benefits, conferred since their first acquaintance, when he had reported favourably of his treatment of a sickly boy who had died under his hands (and whose death was very convenient to Ralph and his clients, but this he did NOT say), and finally hinted that the fifty pounds might be increased to seventy-five, or, in the event of very great success, even to a hundred.

These arguments at length concluded, Mr Squeers crossed his legs, uncrossed them, scratched his head, rubbed his eye, examined the palms of his hands, and bit his nails, and after exhibiting many other signs of restlessness and indecision, asked 'whether one hundred pound was the highest that Mr Nickleby could go.' Being answered in the affirmative, he became restless again, and, after some thought, and an unsuccessful inquiry 'whether he couldn't go another fifty,' said he supposed he must try and do the most he could for a friend: which was always his maxim, and therefore he undertook the job.

'But how are you to get at the woman?' he said; 'that's what it is as puzzles me.'

'I may not get at her at all,' replied Ralph, 'but I'll try. I have hunted people in this city, before now, who have been better hid than she; and I know quarters in which a guinea or two, carefully spent, will often solve darker riddles than this. Ay, and keep them close too, if need be! I hear my man ringing at the door. We may as well part. You had better not come to and fro, but wait till you hear from me.'

'Good!' returned Squeers. 'I say! If you shouldn't find her out, you'll pay expenses at the Saracen, and something for loss of time?'

'Well,' said Ralph, testily; 'yes! You have nothing more to say?'

Squeers shaking his head, Ralph accompanied him to the streetdoor, and audibly wondering, for the edification of Newman, why it was fastened as if it were night, let him in and Squeers out, and returned to his own room.

'Now!' he muttered, 'come what come may, for the present I am firm and unshaken. Let me but retrieve this one small portion of my loss and disgrace; let me but defeat him in this one hope, dear to his heart as I know it must be; let me but do this; and it shall be the first link in such a chain which I will wind about him, as never man forged yet.'

CHAPTER 57

How Ralph Nickleby's Auxiliary went about his Work, and how he prospered with it

It was a dark, wet, gloomy night in autumn, when in an upper room of a mean house situated in an obscure street, or rather court, near Lambeth, there sat, all alone, a one-eyed man grotesquely habited, either for lack of better garments or for purposes of disguise, in a loose greatcoat, with arms half as long again as his own, and a capacity of breadth and length which would have admitted of his winding himself in it, head and all, with the utmost ease, and without any risk of straining the old and greasy material of which it was composed.

So attired, and in a place so far removed from his usual haunts and occupations, and so very poor and wretched in its character, perhaps Mrs Squeers herself would have had some difficulty in recognising her lord: quickened though her natural sagacity doubtless would have been by the affectionate yearnings and impulses of a tender wife. But Mrs Squeers's lord it was; and in a tolerably disconsolate mood Mrs Squeers's lord appeared to be, as, helping himself from a black bottle which stood on the table beside him, he cast round the chamber a look, in which very slight regard for the objects within view was plainly mingled with some regretful and impatient recollection of distant scenes and persons.

There were, certainly, no particular attractions, either in the room over which the glance of Mr Squeers so discontentedly wandered, or in the narrow street into which it might have penetrated, if he had thought fit to approach the window. The attic chamber in which he sat was bare and mean; the bedstead, and such few other articles of necessary furniture as it contained, were of the commonest description, in a most crazy state, and of a most uninviting appearance. The street was muddy, dirty, and deserted. Having but one outlet, it was traversed by few but the inhabitants at any time; and the night being one of those on which most people are glad to be within doors, it now presented no other signs of life than the dull glimmering of poor candles from the dirty windows, and few sounds but the pattering of the rain, and occasionally the heavy closing of some creaking door.

Mr Squeers continued to look disconsolately about him, and to listen to these noises in profound silence, broken only by the rustling of his large coat, as he now and then moved his arm to raise his glass to his lips. Mr Squeers continued to do this for some time, until the increasing gloom warned him to snuff the candle. Seeming to be slightly roused by this exertion, he raised his eye to the ceiling, and fixing it upon some uncouth and fantastic figures, traced upon it by the wet and damp which had penetrated through the roof, broke into the following soliloquy:

'Well, this is a pretty go, is this here! An uncommon pretty go! Here have I been, a matter of how many weeks—hard upon six—a follering up this here blessed old dowager petty larcenerer,'—Mr Squeers delivered himself of this epithet with great difficulty and effort,—'and Dotheboys Hall a-running itself regularly to seed the while! That's the worst of ever being in with a owdacious chap like that old Nickleby. You never know when he's done with you, and if you're in for a penny, you're in for a pound.'

This remark, perhaps, reminded Mr Squeers that he was in for a hundred pound at any rate. His countenance relaxed, and he raised his glass to his mouth with an air of greater enjoyment of its contents than he had before evinced.

'I never see,' soliloquised Mr Squeers in continuation, 'I never see nor come across such a file as that old Nickleby. Never! He's out of everybody's depth, he is. He's what you may call a rasper, is Nickleby. To see how sly and cunning he grubbed on, day after day, a-worming and plodding and tracing and turning and twining of hisself about, till he found out where this precious Mrs Peg was hid, and cleared the ground for me to work upon. Creeping and crawling and gliding, like a ugly, old, bright-eyed, stagnation-blooded adder! Ah! He'd have made a good 'un in our line, but it would have been too limited for him; his genius would have busted all bonds, and coming over every obstacle, broke down all before it, till it erected itself into a monneyment of—Well, I'll think of the rest, and say it when conwenient.'

Making a halt in his reflections at this place, Mr Squeers again put his glass to his lips, and drawing a dirty letter from his pocket, proceeded to con over its contents with the air of a man who had read it very often, and now refreshed his memory rather in the absence of better amusement than for any specific information.

'The pigs is well,' said Mr Squeers, 'the cows is well, and the boys is bobbish. Young Sprouter has been a-winking, has he? I'll wink him when I get back. "Cobbey would persist in sniffing while he was a-eating his dinner, and said that the beef was so strong it made him."—Very good, Cobbey, we'll see if we can't make you sniff a little without beef. "Pitcher was took with another fever,"—of course he was—"and being fetched by his friends, died the day after he got home,"—of course he did, and out of aggravation; it's part of a deep-laid system. There an't another chap in the school but that boy as would have died exactly at the end of the quarter: taking it out of me to the very last, and then carrying his spite to the utmost extremity. "The juniorest Palmer said he wished he was in Heaven." I really don't know, I do NOT know what's to be done with that young fellow; he's always a-wishing something horrid. He said once, he wished he was a donkey, because then he wouldn't have a father as didn't love him! Pretty wicious that for a child of six!'

Mr Squeers was so much moved by the contemplation of this hardened nature in one so young, that he angrily put up the letter, and sought, in a new train of ideas, a subject of consolation.

'It's a long time to have been a-lingering in London,' he said; 'and this is a precious hole to come and live in, even if it has been only for a week or so. Still, one hundred pound is five boys, and five boys takes a whole year to pay one hundred pounds, and there's their keep to be substracted, besides. There's nothing lost, neither, by one's being here; because the boys' money comes in just the same as if I was at home, and Mrs Squeers she keeps them in order. There'll be some lost time to make up, of course. There'll be an arrear of flogging as'll have to be gone through: still, a couple of days makes that all right, and one don't mind a little extra work for one hundred pound. It's pretty nigh the time to wait upon the old woman. From what she said last night, I suspect that if I'm to succeed at all, I shall succeed tonight; so I'll have half a glass more, to wish myself success, and put myself in spirits. Mrs Squeers, my dear, your health!'

Leering with his one eye as if the lady to whom he drank had been actually present, Mr Squeers—in his enthusiasm, no doubt—poured out a full glass, and emptied it; and as the liquor was raw spirits, and he had applied himself to the same bottle more than once already, it is not surprising that he found himself, by this time, in an extremely cheerful state, and quite enough excited for his purpose.

What this purpose was soon appeared; for, after a few turns about the room to steady himself, he took the bottle under his arm and the glass in his hand, and blowing out the candle as if he purposed being gone some time, stole out upon the staircase, and creeping softly to a door opposite his own, tapped gently at it.

'But what's the use of tapping?' he said, 'She'll never hear. I suppose she isn't doing anything very particular; and if she is, it don't much matter, that I see.'

With this brief preface, Mr Squeers applied his hand to the latch of the door, and thrusting his head into a garret far more deplorable than that he had just left, and seeing that there was nobody there but an old woman, who was bending over a wretched fire (for although the weather was still warm, the evening was chilly), walked in, and tapped her on the shoulder.

'Well, my Slider,' said Mr Squeers, jocularly.

'Is that you?' inquired Peg.

'Ah! it's me, and me's the first person singular, nominative case, agreeing with the verb "it's", and governed by Squeers understood, as a acorn, a hour; but when the h is sounded, the a only is to be used, as a and, a art, a ighway,' replied Mr Squeers, quoting at random from the grammar. 'At least, if it isn't, you don't know any better, and if it is, I've done it accidentally.'

Delivering this reply in his accustomed tone of voice, in which of course it was inaudible to Peg, Mr Squeers drew a stool to the fire, and placing himself over against her, and the bottle and glass on the floor between them, roared out again, very loud,

'Well, my Slider!'

'I hear you,' said Peg, receiving him very graciously.

'I've come according to promise,' roared Squeers.

'So they used to say in that part of the country I come from,' observed Peg, complacently, 'but I think oil's better.'

'Better than what?' roared Squeers, adding some rather strong language in an undertone.

'No,' said Peg, 'of course not.'

'I never saw such a monster as you are!' muttered Squeers, looking as amiable as he possibly could the while; for Peg's eye was upon him, and she was chuckling fearfully, as though in delight at having made a choice repartee, 'Do you see this? This is a bottle.'

'I see it,' answered Peg.

'Well, and do you see THIS?' bawled Squeers. 'This is a glass.' Peg saw that too.

'See here, then,' said Squeers, accompanying his remarks with appropriate action, 'I fill the glass from the bottle, and I say "Your health, Slider," and empty it; then I rinse it genteelly with a little drop, which I'm forced to throw into the fire—hallo! we shall have the chimbley alight next—fill it again, and hand it over to you.'

'YOUR health,' said Peg.

'She understands that, anyways,' muttered Squeers, watching Mrs Sliderskew as she dispatched her portion, and choked and gasped in a most awful manner after so doing. 'Now then, let's have a talk. How's the rheumatics?'

Mrs Sliderskew, with much blinking and chuckling, and with looks expressive of her strong admiration of Mr Squeers, his person, manners, and conversation, replied that the rheumatics were better.

'What's the reason,' said Mr Squeers, deriving fresh facetiousness from the bottle; 'what's the reason of rheumatics? What do they mean? What do people have'em for—eh?'

Mrs Sliderskew didn't know, but suggested that it was possibly because they couldn't help it.

'Measles, rheumatics, hooping-cough, fevers, agers, and lumbagers,' said Mr Squeers, 'is all philosophy together; that's what it is. The heavenly bodies is philosophy, and the earthly bodies is philosophy. If there's a screw loose in a heavenly body, that's philosophy; and if there's screw loose in a earthly body, that's philosophy too; or it may be that sometimes there's a little metaphysics in it, but that's not often. Philosophy's the chap for me. If a parent asks a question in the classical, commercial, or mathematical line, says I, gravely, "Why, sir, in the first place, are you a philosopher?"—"No, Mr Squeers," he says, "I an't." "Then, sir," says I, "I am sorry for you, for I shan't be able to explain it." Naturally, the parent goes away and wishes he was a philosopher, and, equally naturally, thinks I'm one.'

Saying this, and a great deal more, with tipsy profundity and a serio-comic air, and keeping his eye all the time on Mrs Sliderskew, who was unable to hear one word, Mr Squeers concluded by helping himself and passing the bottle: to which Peg did becoming reverence.

'That's the time of day!' said Mr Squeers. 'You look twenty pound ten better than you did.'

Again Mrs Sliderskew chuckled, but modesty forbade her assenting verbally to the compliment.

'Twenty pound ten better,' repeated Mr Squeers, 'than you did that day when I first introduced myself. Don't you know?'

'Ah!' said Peg, shaking her head, 'but you frightened me that day.'

'Did I?' said Squeers; 'well, it was rather a startling thing for a stranger to come and recommend himself by saying that he knew all about you, and what your name was, and why you were living so quiet here, and what you had boned, and who you boned it from, wasn't it?'

Peg nodded her head in strong assent.

'But I know everything that happens in that way, you see,' continued Squeers. 'Nothing takes place, of that kind, that I an't up to entirely. I'm a sort of a lawyer, Slider, of first-rate standing, and understanding too; I'm the intimate friend and confidential adwiser of pretty nigh every man, woman, and child that gets themselves into difficulties by being too nimble with their fingers, I'm—'

Mr Squeers's catalogue of his own merits and accomplishments, which was partly the result of a concerted plan between himself and Ralph Nickleby, and flowed, in part, from the black bottle, was here interrupted by Mrs Sliderskew.

'Ha, ha, ha!' she cried, folding her arms and wagging her head; 'and so he wasn't married after all, wasn't he. Not married after all?'

'No,' replied Squeers, 'that he wasn't!'

'And a young lover come and carried off the bride, eh?' said Peg.

'From under his very nose,' replied Squeers; 'and I'm told the young chap cut up rough besides, and broke the winders, and forced him to swaller his wedding favour which nearly choked him.'

'Tell me all about it again,' cried Peg, with a malicious relish of her old master's defeat, which made her natural hideousness something quite fearful; 'let's hear it all again, beginning at the beginning now, as if you'd never told me. Let's have it every word—now—now—beginning at the very first, you know, when he went to the house that morning!'

Mr Squeers, plying Mrs Sliderskew freely with the liquor, and sustaining himself under the exertion of speaking so loud by frequent applications to it himself, complied with this request by describing the discomfiture of Arthur Gride, with such improvements on the truth as happened to occur to him, and the ingenious invention and application of which had been very instrumental in recommending him to her notice in the beginning of their acquaintance. Mrs Sliderskew was in an ecstasy of delight, rolling her head about, drawing up her skinny shoulders, and wrinkling her cadaverous face into so many and such complicated forms of ugliness, as awakened the unbounded astonishment and disgust even of Mr Squeers.

'He's a treacherous old goat,' said Peg, 'and cozened me with cunning tricks and lying promises, but never mind. I'm even with him. I'm even with him.'

'More than even, Slider,' returned Squeers; 'you'd have been even with him if he'd got married; but with the disappointment besides, you're a long way ahead. Out of sight, Slider, quite out of sight. And that reminds me,' he added, handing her the glass, 'if you want me to give you my opinion of them deeds, and tell you what you'd better keep and what you'd better burn, why, now's your time, Slider.'

'There an't no hurry for that,' said Peg, with several knowing looks and winks.

'Oh! very well!' observed Squeers, 'it don't matter to me; you asked me, you know. I shouldn't charge you nothing, being a friend. You're the best judge of course. But you're a bold woman, Slider.'

'How do you mean, bold?' said Peg.

'Why, I only mean that if it was me, I wouldn't keep papers as might hang me, littering about when they might be turned into money—them as wasn't useful made away with, and them as was, laid by somewheres, safe; that's all,' returned Squeers; 'but everybody's the best judge of their own affairs. All I say is, Slider, I wouldn't do it.'

'Come,' said Peg, 'then you shall see 'em.'

'I don't want to see 'em,' replied Squeers, affecting to be out of humour; 'don't talk as if it was a treat. Show 'em to somebody else, and take their advice.'

Mr Squeers would, very likely, have carried on the farce of being offended a little longer, if Mrs Sliderskew, in her anxiety to restore herself to her former high position in his good graces, had not become so extremely affectionate that he stood at some risk of being smothered by her caresses. Repressing, with as good a grace as possible, these little familiarities—for which, there is reason to believe, the black bottle was at least as much to blame as any constitutional infirmity on the part of Mrs Sliderskew—he protested that he had only been joking: and, in proof of his unimpaired good-humour, that he was ready to examine the deeds at once, if, by so doing, he could afford any satisfaction or relief of mind to his fair friend.

'And now you're up, my Slider,' bawled Squeers, as she rose to fetch them, 'bolt the door.'

Peg trotted to the door, and after fumbling at the bolt, crept to the other end of the room, and from beneath the coals which filled the bottom of the cupboard, drew forth a small deal box. Having placed this on the floor at Squeers's feet, she brought, from under the pillow of her bed, a small key, with which she signed to that gentleman to open it. Mr Squeers, who had eagerly followed her every motion, lost no time in obeying this hint: and, throwing back the lid, gazed with rapture on the documents which lay within.

'Now you see,' said Peg, kneeling down on the floor beside him, and staying his impatient hand; 'what's of no use we'll burn; what we can get any money by, we'll keep; and if there's any we could get him into trouble by, and fret and waste away his heart to shreds, those we'll take particular care of; for that's what I want to do, and what I hoped to do when I left him.'

'I thought,' said Squeers, 'that you didn't bear him any particular good-will. But, I say, why didn't you take some money besides?'

'Some what?' asked Peg.

'Some money,' roared Squeers. 'I do believe the woman hears me, and wants to make me break a wessel, so that she may have the pleasure of nursing me. Some money, Slider, money!'

'Why, what a man you are to ask!' cried Peg, with some contempt. 'If I had taken money from Arthur Gride, he'd have scoured the whole earth to find me—aye, and he'd have smelt it out, and raked it up, somehow, if I had buried it at the bottom of the deepest well in England. No, no! I knew better than that. I took what I thought his secrets were hid in: and them he couldn't afford to make public, let'em be worth ever so much money. He's an old dog; a sly, old, cunning, thankless dog! He first starved, and then tricked me; and if I could I'd kill him.'

'All right, and very laudable,' said Squeers. 'But, first and foremost, Slider, burn the box. You should never keep things as may lead to discovery. Always mind that. So while you pull it to pieces (which you can easily do, for it's very old and rickety) and burn it in little bits, I'll look over the papers and tell you what they are.'

Peg, expressing her acquiescence in this arrangement, Mr Squeers turned the box bottom upwards, and tumbling the contents upon the floor, handed it to her; the destruction of the box being an extemporary device for engaging her attention, in case it should prove desirable to distract it from his own proceedings.

'There!' said Squeers; 'you poke the pieces between the bars, and make up a good fire, and I'll read the while. Let me see, let me see.' And taking the candle down beside him, Mr Squeers, with great eagerness and a cunning grin overspreading his face, entered upon his task of examination.

If the old woman had not been very deaf, she must have heard, when she last went to the door, the breathing of two persons close behind it: and if those two persons had been unacquainted with her infirmity, they must probably have chosen that moment either for presenting themselves or taking to flight. But, knowing with whom they had to deal, they remained quite still, and now, not only appeared unobserved at the door—which was not bolted, for the bolt had no hasp—but warily, and with noiseless footsteps, advanced into the room.

As they stole farther and farther in by slight and scarcely perceptible degrees, and with such caution that they scarcely seemed to breathe, the old hag and Squeers little dreaming of any such invasion, and utterly unconscious of there being any soul near but themselves, were busily occupied with their tasks. The old woman, with her wrinkled face close to the bars of the stove, puffing at the dull embers which had not yet caught the wood; Squeers stooping down to the candle, which brought out the full ugliness of his face, as the light of the fire did that of his companion; both intently engaged, and wearing faces of exultation which contrasted strongly with the anxious looks of those behind, who took advantage of the slightest sound to cover their advance, and, almost before they had moved an inch, and all was silent, stopped again. This, with the large bare room, damp walls, and flickering doubtful light, combined to form a scene which the most careless and indifferent spectator (could any have been present) could scarcely have failed to derive some interest from, and would not readily have forgotten.

Of the stealthy comers, Frank Cheeryble was one, and Newman Noggs the other. Newman had caught up, by the rusty nozzle, an old pair of bellows, which were just undergoing a flourish in the air preparatory to a descent upon the head of Mr Squeers, when Frank, with an earnest gesture, stayed his arm, and, taking another step in advance, came so close behind the schoolmaster that, by leaning slightly forward, he could plainly distinguish the writing which he held up to his eye.

Mr Squeers, not being remarkably erudite, appeared to be considerably puzzled by this first prize, which was in an engrossing hand, and not very legible except to a practised eye. Having tried it by reading from left to right, and from right to left, and finding it equally clear both ways, he turned it upside down with no better success.

'Ha, ha, ha!' chuckled Peg, who, on her knees before the fire, was feeding it with fragments of the box, and grinning in most devilish exultation. 'What's that writing about, eh?'

'Nothing particular,' replied Squeers, tossing it towards her. 'It's only an old lease, as well as I can make out. Throw it in the fire.'

Mrs Sliderskew complied, and inquired what the next one was.

'This,' said Squeers, 'is a bundle of overdue acceptances and renewed bills of six or eight young gentlemen, but they're all MPs, so it's of no use to anybody. Throw it in the fire!' Peg did as she was bidden, and waited for the next.

'This,' said Squeers, 'seems to be some deed of sale of the right of presentation to the rectory of Purechurch, in the valley of Cashup. Take care of that, Slider, literally for God's sake. It'll fetch its price at the Auction Mart.'

'What's the next?' inquired Peg.

'Why, this,' said Squeers, 'seems, from the two letters that's with it, to be a bond from a curate down in the country, to pay half a year's wages of forty pound for borrowing twenty. Take care of that, for if he don't pay it, his bishop will very soon be down upon him. We know what the camel and the needle's eye means; no man as can't live upon his income, whatever it is, must expect to go to heaven at any price. It's very odd; I don't see anything like it yet.'

'What's the matter?' said Peg.

'Nothing,' replied Squeers, 'only I'm looking for—'

Newman raised the bellows again. Once more, Frank, by a rapid motion of his arm, unaccompanied by any noise, checked him in his purpose.

'Here you are,' said Squeers, 'bonds—take care of them. Warrant of attorney—take care of that. Two cognovits—take care of them. Lease and release—burn that. Ah! "Madeline Bray—come of age or marry—the said Madeline"—here, burn THAT!'

Eagerly throwing towards the old woman a parchment that he caught up for the purpose, Squeers, as she turned her head, thrust into the breast of his large coat, the deed in which these words had caught his eye, and burst into a shout of triumph.

'I've got it!' said Squeers. 'I've got it! Hurrah! The plan was a good one, though the chance was desperate, and the day's our own at last!'

Peg demanded what he laughed at, but no answer was returned. Newman's arm could no longer be restrained; the bellows, descending heavily and with unerring aim on the very centre of Mr Squeers's head, felled him to the floor, and stretched him on it flat and senseless.

CHAPTER 58

In which one Scene of this History is closed

Dividing the distance into two days' journey, in order that his charge might sustain the less exhaustion and fatigue from travelling so far, Nicholas, at the end of the second day from their leaving home, found himself within a very few miles of the spot where the happiest years of his life had been passed, and which, while it filled his mind with pleasant and peaceful thoughts, brought back many painful and vivid recollections of the circumstances in which he and his had wandered forth from their old home, cast upon the rough world and the mercy of strangers.

It needed no such reflections as those which the memory of old days, and wanderings among scenes where our childhood has been passed, usually awaken in the most insensible minds, to soften the heart of Nicholas, and render him more than usually mindful of his drooping friend. By night and day, at all times and seasons: always watchful, attentive, and solicitous, and never varying in the discharge of his self-imposed duty to one so friendless and helpless as he whose sands of life were now fast running out and dwindling rapidly away: he was ever at his side. He never left him. To encourage and animate him, administer to his wants, support and cheer him to the utmost of his power, was now his constant and unceasing occupation.

They procured a humble lodging in a small farmhouse, surrounded by meadows where Nicholas had often revelled when a child with a troop of merry schoolfellows; and here they took up their rest.

At first, Smike was strong enough to walk about, for short distances at a time, with no other support or aid than that which Nicholas could afford him. At this time, nothing appeared to interest him so much as visiting those places which had been most familiar to his friend in bygone days. Yielding to this fancy, and pleased to find that its indulgence beguiled the sick boy of many tedious hours, and never failed to afford him matter for thought and conversation afterwards, Nicholas made such spots the scenes of their daily rambles: driving him from place to place in a little pony-chair, and supporting him on his arm while they walked slowly among these old haunts, or lingered in the sunlight to take long parting looks of those which were most quiet and beautiful.

It was on such occasions as these, that Nicholas, yielding almost unconsciously to the interest of old associations, would point out some tree that he had climbed, a hundred times, to peep at the young birds in their nest; and the branch from which he used to shout to little Kate, who stood below terrified at the height he had gained, and yet urging him higher still by the intensity of her admiration. There was the old house too, which they would pass every day, looking up at the tiny window through which the sun used to stream in and wake him on the summer mornings—they were all summer mornings then—and climbing up the garden-wall and looking over, Nicholas could see the very rose-bush which had come, a present to Kate, from some little lover, and she had planted with her own hands. There were the hedgerows where the brother and sister had so often gathered wild flowers together, and the green fields and shady paths where they had so often strayed. There was not a lane, or brook, or copse, or cottage near, with which some childish event was not entwined, and back it came upon the mind—as events of childhood do—nothing in itself: perhaps a word, a laugh, a look, some slight distress, a passing thought or fear: and yet more strongly and distinctly marked, and better remembered, than the hardest trials or severest sorrows of a year ago.

One of these expeditions led them through the churchyard where was his father's grave. 'Even here,' said Nicholas softly, 'we used to loiter before we knew what death was, and when we little thought whose ashes would rest beneath; and, wondering at the silence, sit down to rest and speak below our breath. Once, Kate was lost, and after an hour of fruitless search, they found her, fast asleep, under that tree which shades my father's grave. He was very fond of her, and said when he took her up in his arms, still sleeping, that whenever he died he would wish to be buried where his dear little child had laid her head. You see his wish was not forgotten.'

Nothing more passed at the time, but that night, as Nicholas sat beside his bed, Smike started from what had seemed to be a slumber, and laying his hand in his, prayed, as the tears coursed down his face, that he would make him one solemn promise.

'What is that?' said Nicholas, kindly. 'If I can redeem it, or hope to do so, you know I will.'

'I am sure you will,' was the reply. 'Promise me that when I die, I shall be buried near—as near as they can make my grave—to the tree we saw today.'

Nicholas gave the promise; he had few words to give it in, but they were solemn and earnest. His poor friend kept his hand in his, and turned as if to sleep. But there were stifled sobs; and the hand was pressed more than once, or twice, or thrice, before he sank to rest, and slowly loosed his hold.

In a fortnight's time, he became too ill to move about. Once or twice, Nicholas drove him out, propped up with pillows; but the motion of the chaise was painful to him, and brought on fits of fainting, which, in his weakened state, were dangerous. There was an old couch in the house, which was his favourite resting-place by day; and when the sun shone, and the weather was warm, Nicholas had this wheeled into a little orchard which was close at hand, and his charge being well wrapped up and carried out to it, they used to sit there sometimes for hours together.

It was on one of these occasions that a circumstance took place, which Nicholas, at the time, thoroughly believed to be the mere delusion of an imagination affected by disease; but which he had, afterwards, too good reason to know was of real and actual occurrence.

He had brought Smike out in his arms—poor fellow! a child might have carried him then—to see the sunset, and, having arranged his couch, had taken his seat beside it. He had been watching the whole of the night before, and being greatly fatigued both in mind and body, gradually fell asleep.

He could not have closed his eyes five minutes, when he was awakened by a scream, and starting up in that kind of terror which affects a person suddenly roused, saw, to his great astonishment, that his charge had struggled into a sitting posture, and with eyes almost starting from their sockets, cold dew standing on his forehead, and in a fit of trembling which quite convulsed his frame, was calling to him for help.

'Good Heaven, what is this?' said Nicholas, bending over him. 'Be calm; you have been dreaming.'

'No, no, no!' cried Smike, clinging to him. 'Hold me tight. Don't let me go. There, there. Behind the tree!'

Nicholas followed his eyes, which were directed to some distance behind the chair from which he himself had just risen. But, there was nothing there.

'This is nothing but your fancy,' he said, as he strove to compose him; 'nothing else, indeed.'

'I know better. I saw as plain as I see now,' was the answer. 'Oh! say you'll keep me with you. Swear you won't leave me for an instant!'

'Do I ever leave you?' returned Nicholas. 'Lie down again—there! You see I'm here. Now, tell me; what was it?'

'Do you remember,' said Smike, in a low voice, and glancing fearfully round, 'do you remember my telling you of the man who first took me to the school?'

'Yes, surely.'

'I raised my eyes, just now, towards that tree—that one with the thick trunk—and there, with his eyes fixed on me, he stood!'

'Only reflect for one moment,' said Nicholas; 'granting, for an instant, that it's likely he is alive and wandering about a lonely place like this, so far removed from the public road, do you think that at this distance of time you could possibly know that man again?'

'Anywhere—in any dress,' returned Smike; 'but, just now, he stood leaning upon his stick and looking at me, exactly as I told you I remembered him. He was dusty with walking, and poorly dressed—I think his clothes were ragged—but directly I saw him, the wet night, his face when he left me, the parlour I was left in, and the people that were there, all seemed to come back together. When he knew I saw him, he looked frightened; for he started, and shrunk away. I have thought of him by day, and dreamt of him by night. He looked in my sleep, when I was quite a little child, and has looked in my sleep ever since, as he did just now.'

Nicholas endeavoured, by every persuasion and argument he could think of, to convince the terrified creature that his imagination had deceived him, and that this close resemblance between the creation of his dreams and the man he supposed he had seen was but a proof of it; but all in vain. When he could persuade him to remain, for a few moments, in the care of the people to whom the house belonged, he instituted a strict inquiry whether any stranger had been seen, and searched himself behind the tree, and through the orchard, and upon the land immediately adjoining, and in every place near, where it was possible for a man to lie concealed; but all in vain. Satisfied that he was right in his original conjecture, he applied himself to calming the fears of Smike, which, after some time, he partially succeeded in doing, though not in removing the impression upon his mind;

for he still declared, again and again, in the most solemn and fervid manner, that he had positively seen what he had described, and that nothing could ever remove his conviction of its reality.

And now, Nicholas began to see that hope was gone, and that, upon the partner of his poverty, and the sharer of his better fortune, the world was closing fast. There was little pain, little uneasiness, but there was no rallying, no effort, no struggle for life. He was worn and wasted to the last degree; his voice had sunk so low, that he could scarce be heard to speak. Nature was thoroughly exhausted, and he had lain him down to die.

On a fine, mild autumn day, when all was tranquil and at peace: when the soft sweet air crept in at the open window of the quiet room, and not a sound was heard but the gentle rustling of the leaves: Nicholas sat in his old place by the bedside, and knew that the time was nearly come. So very still it was, that, every now and then, he bent down his ear to listen for the breathing of him who lay asleep, as if to assure himself that life was still there, and that he had not fallen into that deep slumber from which on earth there is no waking.

While he was thus employed, the closed eyes opened, and on the pale face there came a placid smile.

'That's well!' said Nicholas. 'The sleep has done you good.'

'I have had such pleasant dreams,' was the answer. 'Such pleasant, happy dreams!'

'Of what?' said Nicholas.

The dying boy turned towards him, and, putting his arm about his neck, made answer, 'I shall soon be there!'

After a short silence, he spoke again.

'I am not afraid to die,' he said. 'I am quite contented. I almost think that if I could rise from this bed quite well I would not wish to do so, now. You have so often told me we shall meet again—so very often lately, and now I feel the truth of that so strongly—that I can even bear to part from you.'

The trembling voice and tearful eye, and the closer grasp of the arm which accompanied these latter words, showed how they filled the speaker's heart; nor were there wanting indications of how deeply they had touched the heart of him to whom they were addressed.

'You say well,' returned Nicholas at length, 'and comfort me very much, dear fellow. Let me hear you say you are happy, if you can.'

'I must tell you something, first. I should not have a secret from you. You would not blame me, at a time like this, I know.'

'I blame you!' exclaimed Nicholas.

'I am sure you would not. You asked me why I was so changed, and—and sat so much alone. Shall I tell you why?'

'Not if it pains you,' said Nicholas. 'I only asked that I might make you happier, if I could.'

'I know. I felt that, at the time.' He drew his friend closer to him. 'You will forgive me; I could not help it, but though I would have died to make her happy, it broke my heart to see—I know he loves her dearly—Oh! who could find that out so soon as I?'

The words which followed were feebly and faintly uttered, and broken by long pauses; but, from them, Nicholas learnt, for the first time, that the dying boy, with all the ardour of a nature concentrated on one absorbing, hopeless, secret passion, loved his sister Kate.

He had procured a lock of her hair, which hung at his breast, folded in one or two slight ribbons she had worn. He prayed that, when he was dead, Nicholas would take it off, so that no eyes but his might see it, and that when he was laid in his coffin and about to be placed in the earth, he would hang it round his neck again, that it might rest with him in the grave.

Upon his knees Nicholas gave him this pledge, and promised again that he should rest in the spot he had pointed out. They embraced, and kissed each other on the cheek.

'Now,' he murmured, 'I am happy.'

He fell into a light slumber, and waking smiled as before; then, spoke of beautiful gardens, which he said stretched out before him, and were filled with figures of men, women, and many children, all with light upon their faces; then, whispered that it was Eden—and so died.

CHAPTER 59

The Plots begin to fail, and Doubts and Dangers to disturb the Plotter

Ralph sat alone, in the solitary room where he was accustomed to take his meals, and to sit of nights when no profitable occupation called him abroad. Before him was an untasted breakfast, and near to where his fingers beat restlessly upon the table, lay his watch. It was long past the time at which, for many years, he had put it in his pocket and gone with measured steps downstairs to the business of the day, but he took as little heed of its monotonous warning, as of the meat and drink before him, and remained with his head resting on one hand, and his eyes fixed moodily on the ground.

This departure from his regular and constant habit, in one so regular and unvarying in all that appertained to the daily pursuit of riches, would almost of itself have told that the usurer was not well. That he laboured under some mental or bodily indisposition, and that it was one of no slight kind so to affect a man like him, was sufficiently shown by his haggard face, jaded air, and hollow languid eyes: which he raised at last with a start and a hasty glance around him, as one who suddenly awakes from sleep, and cannot immediately recognise the place in which he finds himself.

'What is this,' he said, 'that hangs over me, and I cannot shake off? I have never pampered myself, and should not be ill. I have never moped, and pined, and yielded to fancies; but what CAN a man do without rest?'

He pressed his hand upon his forehead.

'Night after night comes and goes, and I have no rest. If I sleep, what rest is that which is disturbed by constant dreams of the same detested faces crowding round me—of the same detested people, in every variety of action, mingling with all I say and do, and always to my defeat? Waking, what rest have I, constantly haunted by this heavy shadow of—I know not what—which is its worst character? I must have rest. One night's unbroken rest, and I should be a man again.'

Pushing the table from him while he spoke, as though he loathed the sight of food, he encountered the watch: the hands of which were almost upon noon.

'This is strange!' he said; 'noon, and Noggs not here! What drunken brawl keeps him away? I would give something now—something in money even after that dreadful loss—if he had stabbed a man in a tavern scuffle, or broken into a house, or picked a pocket, or done anything that would send him abroad with an iron ring upon his leg, and rid me of him. Better still, if I could throw temptation in his way, and lure him on to rob me. He should be welcome to what he took, so I brought the law upon him; for he is a traitor, I swear! How, or when, or where, I don't know, though I suspect.'

After waiting for another half-hour, he dispatched the woman who kept his house to Newman's lodging, to inquire if he were ill, and why he had not come or sent. She brought back answer that he had not been home all night, and that no one could tell her anything about him.

'But there is a gentleman, sir,' she said, 'below, who was standing at the door when I came in, and he says—'

'What says he?' demanded Ralph, turning angrily upon her. 'I told you I would see nobody.'

'He says,' replied the woman, abashed by his harshness, 'that he comes on very particular business which admits of no excuse; and I thought perhaps it might be about—'

'About what, in the devil's name?' said Ralph. 'You spy and speculate on people's business with me, do you?'

'Dear, no, sir! I saw you were anxious, and thought it might be about Mr Noggs; that's all.'

'Saw I was anxious!' muttered Ralph; 'they all watch me, now. Where is this person? You did not say I was not down yet, I hope?'

The woman replied that he was in the little office, and that she had said her master was engaged, but she would take the message.

'Well,' said Ralph, 'I'll see him. Go you to your kitchen, and keep there. Do you mind me?'

Glad to be released, the woman quickly disappeared. Collecting himself, and assuming as much of his accustomed manner as his utmost resolution could summon, Ralph descended the stairs. After pausing for a few moments, with his hand upon the lock, he entered Newman's room, and confronted Mr Charles Cheeryble.

Of all men alive, this was one of the last he would have wished to meet at any time; but, now that he recognised in him only the patron and protector of Nicholas, he would rather have seen a spectre. One beneficial effect, however, the encounter had upon him. It instantly roused all his dormant energies; rekindled in his breast the passions that, for many years, had found an improving home there; called up all his wrath, hatred, and malice; restored the sneer to his lip, and the scowl to his brow; and made him again, in all outward appearance, the same Ralph Nickleby whom so many had bitter cause to remember.

'Humph!' said Ralph, pausing at the door. 'This is an unexpected favour, sir.'

'And an unwelcome one,' said brother Charles; 'an unwelcome one, I know.'

'Men say you are truth itself, sir,' replied Ralph. 'You speak truth now, at all events, and I'll not contradict you. The favour is, at least, as unwelcome as it is unexpected. I can scarcely say more.'

'Plainly, sir—' began brother Charles.

'Plainly, sir,' interrupted Ralph, 'I wish this conference to be a short one, and to end where it begins. I guess the subject upon which you are about to speak, and I'll not hear you. You like plainness, I believe; there it is. Here is the door as you see. Our way lies in very different directions. Take yours, I beg of you, and leave me to pursue mine in quiet.'

'In quiet!' repeated brother Charles mildly, and looking at him with more of pity than reproach. 'To pursue HIS way in quiet!'

'You will scarcely remain in my house, I presume, sir, against my will,' said Ralph; 'or you can scarcely hope to make an impression upon a man who closes his ears to all that you can say, and is firmly and resolutely determined not to hear you.'

'Mr Nickleby, sir,' returned brother Charles: no less mildly than before, but firmly too: 'I come here against my will, sorely and grievously against my will. I have never been in this house before; and, to speak my mind, sir, I don't feel at home or easy in it, and have no wish ever to be here again. You do not guess the subject on which I come to speak to you; you do not indeed. I am sure of that, or your manner would be a very different one.'

Ralph glanced keenly at him, but the clear eye and open countenance of the honest old merchant underwent no change of expression, and met his look without reserve.

'Shall I go on?' said Mr Cheeryble.

'Oh, by all means, if you please,' returned Ralph drily. 'Here are walls to speak to, sir, a desk, and two stools: most attentive auditors, and certain not to interrupt you. Go on, I beg; make my house yours, and perhaps by the time I return from my walk, you will have finished what you have to say, and will yield me up possession again.'

So saying, he buttoned his coat, and turning into the passage, took down his hat. The old gentleman followed, and was about to speak, when Ralph waved him off impatiently, and said:

'Not a word. I tell you, sir, not a word. Virtuous as you are, you are not an angel yet, to appear in men's houses whether they will or no, and pour your speech into unwilling ears. Preach to the walls I tell you; not to me!'

'I am no angel, Heaven knows,' returned brother Charles, shaking his head, 'but an erring and imperfect man; nevertheless, there is one quality which all men have, in common with the angels, blessed opportunities of exercising, if they will; mercy. It is an errand of mercy that brings me here. Pray let me discharge it.'

'I show no mercy,' retorted Ralph with a triumphant smile, 'and I ask none. Seek no mercy from me, sir, in behalf of the fellow who has imposed upon your childish credulity, but let him expect the worst that I can do.'

'HE ask mercy at your hands!' exclaimed the old merchant warmly; 'ask it at his, sir; ask it at his. If you will not hear me now, when you may, hear me when you must, or anticipate what I would say, and take measures to prevent our ever meeting again. Your nephew is a noble lad, sir, an honest, noble lad. What you are, Mr Nickleby, I will not say; but what you have done, I know. Now, sir, when you go about the business in which you have been recently engaged, and find it difficult of pursuing, come to me and my brother Ned, and Tim Linkinwater, sir, and we'll explain it for you—and come soon, or it may be too late, and you may have it explained with a little more roughness, and a little less delicacy—and never forget, sir, that I came here this morning, in mercy to you, and am still ready to talk to you in the same spirit.'

With these words, uttered with great emphasis and emotion, brother Charles put on his broad-brimmed hat, and, passing Ralph Nickleby without any other remark, trotted nimbly into the street. Ralph looked after him, but neither moved nor spoke for some time: when he broke what almost seemed the silence of stupefaction, by a scornful laugh.

'This,' he said, 'from its wildness, should be another of those dreams that have so broken my rest of late. In mercy to me! Pho! The old simpleton has gone mad.'

Although he expressed himself in this derisive and contemptuous manner, it was plain that, the more Ralph pondered, the more ill at ease he became, and the more he laboured under some vague anxiety and alarm, which increased as the time passed on and no tidings of Newman Noggs arrived. After waiting until late in the afternoon, tortured by various apprehensions and misgivings, and the recollection of the warning which his nephew had given him when they last met: the further confirmation of which now presented itself in one shape of probability, now in another, and haunted him perpetually: he left home, and, scarcely knowing why, save that he was in a suspicious and agitated mood, betook himself to Snawley's house. His wife presented herself; and, of her, Ralph inquired whether her husband was at home.

'No,' she said sharply, 'he is not indeed, and I don't think he will be at home for a very long time; that's more.'

'Do you know who I am?' asked Ralph.

'Oh yes, I know you very well; too well, perhaps, and perhaps he does too, and sorry am I that I should have to say it.'

'Tell him that I saw him through the window-blind above, as I crossed the road just now, and that I would speak to him on business,' said Ralph. 'Do you hear?'

'I hear,' rejoined Mrs Snawley, taking no further notice of the request.

'I knew this woman was a hypocrite, in the way of psalms and Scripture phrases,' said Ralph, passing quietly by, 'but I never knew she drank before.'

'Stop! You don't come in here,' said Mr Snawley's better-half, interposing her person, which was a robust one, in the doorway. 'You have said more than enough to him on business, before now. I always told him what dealing with you and working out your schemes would come to. It was either you or the schoolmaster—one of you, or the two between you—that got the forged letter done; remember that! That wasn't his doing, so don't lay it at his door.'

'Hold your tongue, you Jezebel,' said Ralph, looking fearfully round.

'Ah, I know when to hold my tongue, and when to speak, Mr Nickleby,' retorted the dame. 'Take care that other people know when to hold theirs.'

'You jade,' said Ralph, 'if your husband has been idiot enough to trust you with his secrets, keep them; keep them, she-devil that you are!'

'Not so much his secrets as other people's secrets, perhaps,' retorted the woman; 'not so much his secrets as yours. None of your black looks at me! You'll want 'em all, perhaps, for another time. You had better keep 'em.'

'Will you,' said Ralph, suppressing his passion as well as he could, and clutching her tightly by the wrist; 'will you go to your husband and tell him that I know he is at home, and that I must see him? And will you tell me what it is that you and he mean by this new style of behaviour?'

'No,' replied the woman, violently disengaging herself, 'I'll do neither.'

'You set me at defiance, do you?' said Ralph.

'Yes,' was the answer. I do.'

For an instant Ralph had his hand raised, as though he were about to strike her; but, checking himself, and nodding his head and muttering as though to assure her he would not forget this, walked away.

Thence, he went straight to the inn which Mr Squeers frequented, and inquired when he had been there last; in the vague hope that, successful or unsuccessful, he might, by this time, have returned from his mission and be able to assure him that all was safe. But Mr Squeers had not been there for ten days, and all that the people could tell about him was, that he had left his luggage and his bill.

Disturbed by a thousand fears and surmises, and bent upon ascertaining whether Squeers had any suspicion of Snawley, or was, in any way, a party to this altered behaviour, Ralph determined to hazard the extreme step of inquiring for him at the Lambeth lodging, and having an interview with him even there. Bent upon this purpose, and in that mood in which delay is insupportable, he repaired at once to the place; and being, by description, perfectly acquainted with the situation of his room, crept upstairs and knocked gently at the door.

Not one, nor two, nor three, nor yet a dozen knocks, served to convince Ralph, against his wish, that there was nobody inside. He reasoned that he might be asleep; and, listening, almost persuaded himself that he could hear him breathe. Even when he was satisfied that he could not be there, he sat patiently on a broken stair and waited; arguing, that he had gone out upon some slight errand, and must soon return.

Many feet came up the creaking stairs; and the step of some seemed to his listening ear so like that of the man for whom he waited, that Ralph often stood up to be ready to address him when he reached the top; but, one by one, each person turned off into some room short of the place where he was stationed: and at every such disappointment he felt quite chilled and lonely.

At length he felt it was hopeless to remain, and going downstairs again, inquired of one of the lodgers if he knew anything of Mr Squeers's movements—mentioning that worthy by an assumed name which had been agreed upon between them. By this lodger he was referred to another, and by him to someone else, from whom he learnt, that, late on the previous night, he had gone out hastily with two men, who had shortly afterwards returned for the old woman who lived on the same floor; and that, although the circumstance had attracted the attention of the informant, he had not spoken to them at the time, nor made any inquiry afterwards.

This possessed him with the idea that, perhaps, Peg Sliderskew had been apprehended for the robbery, and that Mr Squeers, being with her at the time, had been apprehended also, on suspicion of being a confederate. If this were so, the fact must be known to Gride; and to Gride's house he directed his steps; now thoroughly alarmed, and fearful that there were indeed plots afoot, tending to his discomfiture and ruin.

Arrived at the usurer's house, he found the windows close shut, the dingy blinds drawn down; all was silent, melancholy, and deserted. But this was its usual aspect. He knocked—gently at first—then loud and vigorously. Nobody came. He wrote a few words in pencil on a card, and having thrust it under the door was going away, when a noise above, as though a window-sash were stealthily raised, caught his ear, and looking up he could just discern the face of Gride himself, cautiously peering over the house parapet from the window of the garret. Seeing who was below, he drew it in again; not so quickly, however, but that Ralph let him know he was observed, and called to him to come down.

The call being repeated, Gride looked out again, so cautiously that no part of the old man's body was visible. The sharp features and white hair appearing alone, above the parapet, looked like a severed head garnishing the wall.

'Hush!' he cried. 'Go away, go away!'

'Come down,' said Ralph, beckoning him.

'Go a—way!' squeaked Gride, shaking his head in a sort of ecstasy of impatience. 'Don't speak to me, don't knock, don't call attention to the house, but go away.'

'I'll knock, I swear, till I have your neighbours up in arms,' said Ralph, 'if you don't tell me what you mean by lurking there, you whining cur.'

'I can't hear what you say—don't talk to me—it isn't safe—go away—go away!' returned Gride.

'Come down, I say. Will you come down?' said Ralph fiercely.

'No—o—o—oo,' snarled Gride. He drew in his head; and Ralph, left standing in the street, could hear the sash closed, as gently and carefully as it had been opened.

'How is this,' said he, 'that they all fall from me, and shun me like the plague, these men who have licked the dust from my feet? IS my day past, and is this indeed the coming on of night? I'll know what it means! I will, at any cost. I am firmer and more myself, just now, than I have been these many days.'

Turning from the door, which, in the first transport of his rage, he had meditated battering upon until Gride's very fears should impel him to open it, he turned his face towards the city, and working his way steadily through the crowd which was pouring from it (it was by this time between five and six o'clock in the afternoon) went straight to the house of business of the brothers Cheeryble, and putting his head into the glass case, found Tim Linkinwater alone.

'My name's Nickleby,' said Ralph.

'I know it,' replied Tim, surveying him through his spectacles.

'Which of your firm was it who called on me this morning?' demanded Ralph.

'Mr Charles.'

'Then, tell Mr Charles I want to see him.'

'You shall see,' said Tim, getting off his stool with great agility, 'you shall see, not only Mr Charles, but Mr Ned likewise.'

Tim stopped, looked steadily and severely at Ralph, nodded his head once, in a curt manner which seemed to say there was a little more behind, and vanished. After a short interval, he returned, and, ushering Ralph into the presence of the two brothers, remained in the room himself.

'I want to speak to you, who spoke to me this morning,' said Ralph, pointing out with his finger the man whom he addressed.

'I have no secrets from my brother Ned, or from Tim Linkinwater,' observed brother Charles quietly.

'I have,' said Ralph.

'Mr Nickleby, sir,' said brother Ned, 'the matter upon which my brother Charles called upon you this morning is one which is already perfectly well known to us three, and to others besides, and must unhappily soon become known to a great many more. He waited upon you, sir, this morning, alone, as a matter of delicacy and consideration. We feel, now, that further delicacy and consideration would be misplaced; and, if we confer together, it must be as we are or not at all.'

'Well, gentlemen,' said Ralph with a curl of the lip, 'talking in riddles would seem to be the peculiar forte of you two, and I suppose your clerk, like a prudent man, has studied the art also with a view to your good graces. Talk in company, gentlemen, in God's name. I'll humour you.'

'Humour!' cried Tim Linkinwater, suddenly growing very red in the face. 'He'll humour us! He'll humour Cheeryble Brothers! Do you hear that? Do you hear him? DO you hear him say he'll humour Cheeryble Brothers?'

'Tim,' said Charles and Ned together, 'pray, Tim, pray now, don't.'

Tim, taking the hint, stifled his indignation as well as he could, and suffered it to escape through his spectacles, with the additional safety-valve of a short hysterical laugh now and then, which seemed to relieve him mightily.

'As nobody bids me to a seat,' said Ralph, looking round, 'I'll take one, for I am fatigued with walking. And now, if you please, gentlemen, I wish to know—I demand to know; I have the right—what you have to say to me, which justifies such a tone as you have assumed, and that underhand interference in my affairs which, I have reason to suppose, you have been practising. I tell you plainly, gentlemen, that little as I care for the opinion of the world (as the slang goes), I don't choose to submit quietly to slander and malice. Whether you suffer yourselves to be imposed upon too easily, or wilfully make yourselves parties to it, the result to me is the same. In either case, you can't expect from a plain man like myself much consideration or forbearance.'

So coolly and deliberately was this said, that nine men out of ten, ignorant of the circumstances, would have supposed Ralph to be really an injured man. There he sat, with folded arms; paler than usual, certainly, and sufficiently ill-favoured, but quite collected—far more so than the brothers or the exasperated Tim—and ready to face out the worst.

'Very well, sir,' said brother Charles. 'Very well. Brother Ned, will you ring the bell?'

'Charles, my dear fellow! stop one instant,' returned the other. 'It will be better for Mr Nickleby and for our object that he should remain silent, if he can, till we have said what we have to say. I wish him to understand that.'

'Quite right, quite right,' said brother Charles.

Ralph smiled, but made no reply. The bell was rung; the room-door opened; a man came in, with a halting walk; and, looking round, Ralph's eyes met those of Newman Noggs. From that moment, his heart began to fail him.

'This is a good beginning,' he said bitterly. 'Oh! this is a good beginning. You are candid, honest, open-hearted, fair-dealing men! I always knew the real worth of such characters as yours! To tamper with a fellow like this, who would sell his soul (if he had one) for drink, and whose every word is a lie. What men are safe if this is done? Oh, it's a good beginning!'

'I WILL speak,' cried Newman, standing on tiptoe to look over Tim's head, who had interposed to prevent him. 'Hallo, you sir—old Nickleby!—what do you mean when you talk of "a fellow like this"? Who made me "a fellow like this"? If I would sell my soul for drink, why wasn't I a thief, swindler, housebreaker, area sneak, robber of pence out of the trays of blind men's dogs, rather than your drudge and packhorse? If my every word was a lie, why wasn't I a pet and favourite of yours? Lie! When did I ever cringe and fawn to you. Tell me that! I served you faithfully. I did more work, because I was poor, and took more hard words from you because I despised you and them, than any man you could have got from the parish workhouse. I did. I served you because I was proud; because I was a lonely man with you, and there were no other drudges to see my degradation; and because nobody knew, better than you, that I was a ruined man: that I hadn't always been what I am: and that I might have been better off, if I hadn't been a fool and fallen into the hands of you and others who were knaves. Do you deny that?'

'Gently,' reasoned Tim; 'you said you wouldn't.'

'I said I wouldn't!' cried Newman, thrusting him aside, and moving his hand as Tim moved, so as to keep him at arm's length; 'don't tell me! Here, you Nickleby! Don't pretend not to mind me; it won't do; I know better. You were talking of tampering, just now. Who tampered with Yorkshire schoolmasters, and, while they sent the drudge out, that he shouldn't overhear, forgot that such great caution might render him suspicious, and that he might watch his master out at nights, and might set other eyes to watch the schoolmaster? Who tampered with a selfish father, urging him to sell his daughter to old Arthur Gride, and tampered with Gride too, and did so in the little office, WITH A CLOSET IN THE ROOM?'

Ralph had put a great command upon himself; but he could not have suppressed a slight start, if he had been certain to be beheaded for it next moment.

'Aha!' cried Newman, 'you mind me now, do you? What first set this fag to be jealous of his master's actions, and to feel that, if he hadn't crossed him when he might, he would have been as bad as he, or worse? That master's cruel treatment of his own flesh and blood, and vile designs upon a young girl who interested even his broken-down, drunken, miserable hack, and made him linger in his service, in the hope of doing her some good (as, thank God, he had done others once or twice before), when he would, otherwise, have relieved his feelings by pummelling his master soundly, and then going to the Devil. He would—mark that; and mark this—that I'm here now, because these gentlemen thought it best. When I sought them out (as I did; there was no tampering with me), I told them I wanted help to find you out, to trace you down, to go through with what I had begun, to help the right; and that when I had done it, I'd burst into your room and tell you all, face to face, man to man, and like a man. Now I've said my say, and let anybody else say theirs, and fire away!'

With this concluding sentiment, Newman Noggs, who had been perpetually sitting down and getting up again all through his speech, which he had delivered in a series of jerks; and who was, from the violent exercise and the excitement combined, in a state of most intense and fiery heat; became, without passing through any intermediate stage, stiff, upright, and motionless, and so remained, staring at Ralph Nickleby with all his might and main.

Ralph looked at him for an instant, and for an instant only; then, waved his hand, and beating the ground with his foot, said in a choking voice:

'Go on, gentlemen, go on! I'm patient, you see. There's law to be had, there's law. I shall call you to an account for this. Take care what you say; I shall make you prove it.'

'The proof is ready,' returned brother Charles, 'quite ready to our hands. The man Snawley, last night, made a confession.'

'Who may "the man Snawley" be,' returned Ralph, 'and what may his "confession" have to do with my affairs?'

To this inquiry, put with a dogged inflexibility of manner, the old gentleman returned no answer, but went on to say, that to show him how much they were in earnest, it would be necessary to tell him, not only what accusations were made against him, but what proof of them they had, and how that proof had been acquired. This laying open of the whole question brought up brother Ned, Tim Linkinwater, and Newman Noggs, all three at once; who, after a vast deal of talking together, and a scene of great confusion, laid before Ralph, in distinct terms, the following statement.

That, Newman, having been solemnly assured by one not then producible that Smike was not the son of Snawley, and this person having offered to make oath to that effect, if necessary, they had by this communication been first led to doubt the claim set up, which they would otherwise have seen no reason to dispute, supported as it was by evidence which they had no power of disproving. That, once suspecting the existence of a conspiracy, they had no difficulty in tracing back its origin to the malice of Ralph, and the vindictiveness and avarice of Squeers. That, suspicion and proof being two very different things, they had been advised by a lawyer, eminent for his sagacity and acuteness in such practice, to resist the proceedings taken on the other side for the recovery of the youth as slowly and artfully as possible, and meanwhile to beset Snawley (with whom it was clear the main falsehood must rest); to lead him, if possible, into contradictory and conflicting statements; to harass him by all available means; and so to practise on his fears, and regard for his own safety, as to induce him to divulge the whole scheme, and to give up his employer and whomsoever else he could implicate. That, all this had been skilfully done; but that Snawley, who was well practised in the arts of low cunning and intrigue, had successfully baffled all their attempts, until an unexpected circumstance had brought him, last night, upon his knees.

It thus arose. When Newman Noggs reported that Squeers was again in town, and that an interview of such secrecy had taken place between him and Ralph that he had been sent out of the house, plainly lest he should overhear a word, a watch was set upon the schoolmaster, in the hope that something might be discovered which would throw some light upon the suspected plot. It being found, however, that he held no further communication with Ralph, nor any with Snawley, and lived quite alone, they were completely at fault; the watch was withdrawn, and they would have observed his motions no longer, if it had not happened that, one night, Newman stumbled unobserved on him and Ralph in the street together. Following them, he discovered, to his surprise, that they repaired to various low lodging-houses, and taverns kept by broken gamblers, to more than one of whom Ralph was known, and that they were in pursuit—so he found by inquiries when they had left—of an old woman, whose description exactly tallied with that of deaf Mrs Sliderskew. Affairs now appearing to assume a more serious complexion, the watch was renewed with increased vigilance; an officer was procured, who took up his abode in the same tavern with Squeers: and by him and Frank Cheeryble the footsteps of the unconscious schoolmaster were dogged, until he was safely housed in the lodging at Lambeth. Mr Squeers having shifted his lodging, the officer shifted his, and lying concealed in the same street, and, indeed, in the opposite house, soon found that Mr Squeers and Mrs Sliderskew were in constant communication.

In this state of things, Arthur Gride was appealed to. The robbery, partly owing to the inquisitiveness of the neighbours, and partly to his own grief and rage, had, long ago, become known; but he positively refused to give his sanction or yield any assistance to the old woman's capture, and was seized with such a panic at the idea of being called upon to give evidence against her, that he shut himself up close in his house, and refused to hold communication with anybody. Upon this, the pursuers took counsel together, and, coming so near the truth as to arrive at the conclusion that Gride and Ralph, with Squeers for their instrument, were negotiating for the recovery of some of the stolen papers which would not bear the light, and might possibly explain the hints relative to Madeline which Newman had overheard, resolved that Mrs Sliderskew should be taken into custody before she had parted with them: and Squeers too, if anything suspicious could be attached to him. Accordingly, a search-warrant being procured, and all prepared, Mr Squeers's window was watched, until his light was put out, and the time arrived when, as had been previously ascertained, he usually visited Mrs Sliderskew. This done, Frank Cheeryble and Newman stole upstairs to listen to their discourse, and to give the signal to the officer at the most favourable time. At what an opportune moment they arrived, how they listened, and what they heard, is already known to the reader. Mr Squeers, still half stunned, was hurried off with a stolen deed in his possession, and Mrs Sliderskew was apprehended likewise. The information being promptly carried to Snawley that Squeers was in custody—he was not told for what—that worthy, first extorting a promise that he should be kept harmless, declared the whole tale concerning Smike to be a fiction and forgery, and implicated Ralph Nickleby to the fullest extent. As to Mr Squeers, he had, that morning, undergone a private examination before a magistrate; and, being unable to account satisfactorily for his possession of the deed or his companionship with Mrs Sliderskew, had been, with her, remanded for a week.

All these discoveries were now related to Ralph, circumstantially, and in detail. Whatever impression they secretly produced, he suffered no sign of emotion to escape him, but sat perfectly still, not raising his frowning eyes from the ground, and covering his mouth with his hand. When the narrative was concluded; he raised his head hastily, as if about to speak, but on brother Charles resuming, fell into his old attitude again.

'I told you this morning,' said the old gentleman, laying his hand upon his brother's shoulder, 'that I came to you in mercy. How far you may be implicated in this last transaction, or how far the person who is now in custody may criminate you, you best know. But, justice must take its course against the parties implicated in the plot against this poor, unoffending, injured lad. It is not in my power, or in the power of my brother Ned, to save you from the consequences. The utmost we can do is, to warn you in time, and to give you an opportunity of escaping them. We would not have an old man like you disgraced and punished by your near relation; nor would we have him forget, like you, all ties of blood and nature. We entreat you—brother Ned, you join me, I know, in this entreaty, and so, Tim Linkinwater, do you, although you pretend to be an obstinate dog, sir, and sit there frowning as if you didn't—we entreat you to retire from London, to take shelter in some place where you will be safe from the consequences of these wicked designs, and where you may have time, sir, to atone for them, and to become a better man.'

'And do you think,' returned Ralph, rising, 'and do you think, you will so easily crush ME? Do you think that a hundred well-arranged plans, or a hundred suborned witnesses, or a hundred false curs at my heels, or a hundred canting speeches full of oily words, will move me? I thank you for disclosing your schemes, which I am now prepared for. You have not the man to deal with that you think; try me! and remember that I spit upon your fair words and false dealings, and dare you—provoke you—taunt you—to do to me the very worst you can!'

Thus they parted, for that time; but the worst had not come yet.

CHAPTER 60

The Dangers thicken, and the Worst is told

Instead of going home, Ralph threw himself into the first street cabriolet he could find, and, directing the driver towards the police-office of the district in which Mr Squeers's misfortunes had occurred, alighted at a short distance from it, and, discharging the man, went the rest of his way thither on foot. Inquiring for the object of his solicitude, he learnt that he had timed his visit well; for Mr Squeers was, in fact, at that moment waiting for a hackney coach he had ordered, and in which he purposed proceeding to his week's retirement, like a gentleman.

Demanding speech with the prisoner, he was ushered into a kind of waiting-room in which, by reason of his scholastic profession and superior respectability, Mr Squeers had been permitted to pass the day. Here, by the light of a guttering and blackened candle, he could barely discern the schoolmaster, fast asleep on a bench in a remote corner. An empty glass stood on a table before him, which, with his somnolent condition and a very strong smell of brandy and water, forewarned the visitor that Mr Squeers had been seeking, in creature comforts, a temporary forgetfulness of his unpleasant situation.

It was not a very easy matter to rouse him: so lethargic and heavy were his slumbers. Regaining his faculties by slow and faint glimmerings, he at length sat upright; and, displaying a very yellow face, a very red nose, and a very bristly beard: the joint effect of which was considerably heightened by a dirty white handkerchief, spotted with blood, drawn over the crown of his head and tied under his chin: stared ruefully at Ralph in silence, until his feelings found a vent in this pithy sentence:

'I say, young fellow, you've been and done it now; you have!'

'What's the matter with your head?' asked Ralph.

'Why, your man, your informing kidnapping man, has been and broke it,' rejoined Squeers sulkily; 'that's what's the matter with it. You've come at last, have you?'

'Why have you not sent to me?' said Ralph. 'How could I come till I knew what had befallen you?'

'My family!' hiccuped Mr Squeers, raising his eye to the ceiling: 'my daughter, as is at that age when all the sensibilities is a-coming out strong in blow—my son as is the young Norval of private life, and the pride and ornament of a doting willage—here's a shock for my family! The coat-of-arms of the Squeerses is tore, and their sun is gone down into the ocean wave!'

'You have been drinking,' said Ralph, 'and have not yet slept yourself sober.'

'I haven't been drinking YOUR health, my codger,' replied Mr Squeers; 'so you have nothing to do with that.'

Ralph suppressed the indignation which the schoolmaster's altered and insolent manner awakened, and asked again why he had not sent to him.

'What should I get by sending to you?' returned Squeers. 'To be known to be in with you wouldn't do me a deal of good, and they won't take bail till they know something more of the case, so here am I hard and fast: and there are you, loose and comfortable.'

'And so must you be in a few days,' retorted Ralph, with affected good-humour. 'They can't hurt you, man.'

'Why, I suppose they can't do much to me, if I explain how it was that I got into the good company of that there ca-daverous old Slider,' replied Squeers viciously, 'who I wish was dead and buried, and resurrected and dissected, and hung upon wires in a anatomical museum, before ever I'd had anything to do with her. This is what him with the powdered head says this morning, in so many words: "Prisoner! As you have been found in company with this woman; as you were detected in possession of this document; as you were engaged with her in fraudulently destroying others, and can give no satisfactory account of yourself; I shall remand you for a week, in order that inquiries may be made, and evidence got. And meanwhile I can't take any bail for your appearance." Well then, what I say now is, that I CAN give a satisfactory account of myself; I can hand in the card of my establishment and say, "I am the Wackford Squeers as is therein named, sir. I am the man as is guaranteed, by unimpeachable references, to be a out-and-outer in morals and uprightness of principle. Whatever is wrong in this business is no fault of mine. I had no evil design in it, sir. I was not aware that anything was wrong. I was merely employed by a friend, my friend Mr

Ralph Nickleby, of Golden Square. Send for him, sir, and ask him what he has to say; he's the man; not me!"'

'What document was it that you had?' asked Ralph, evading, for the moment, the point just raised.

'What document? Why, THE document,' replied Squeers. 'The Madeline What's-her-name one. It was a will; that's what it was.'

'Of what nature, whose will, when dated, how benefiting her, to what extent?' asked Ralph hurriedly.

'A will in her favour; that's all I know,' rejoined Squeers, 'and that's more than you'd have known, if you'd had them bellows on your head. It's all owing to your precious caution that they got hold of it. If you had let me burn it, and taken my word that it was gone, it would have been a heap of ashes behind the fire, instead of being whole and sound, inside of my great-coat.'

'Beaten at every point!' muttered Ralph.

'Ah!' sighed Squeers, who, between the brandy and water and his broken head, wandered strangely, 'at the delightful village of Dotheboys near Greta Bridge in Yorkshire, youth are boarded, clothed, booked, washed, furnished with pocket-money, provided with all necessaries, instructed in all languages living and dead, mathematics, orthography, geometry, astronomy, trigonometry—this is a altered state of trigonomics, this is! A double 1—all, everything—a cobbler's weapon. U-p-up, adjective, not down. S-q-u-double e-r-s-Squeers, noun substantive, a educator of youth. Total, all up with Squeers!'

His running on, in this way, had afforded Ralph an opportunity of recovering his presence of mind, which at once suggested to him the necessity of removing, as far as possible, the schoolmaster's misgivings, and leading him to believe that his safety and best policy lay in the preservation of a rigid silence.

'I tell you, once again,' he said, 'they can't hurt you. You shall have an action for false imprisonment, and make a profit of this, yet. We will devise a story for you that should carry you through twenty times such a trivial scrape as this; and if they want security in a thousand pounds for your reappearance in case you should be called upon, you shall have it. All you have to do is, to keep back the truth. You're a little fuddled tonight, and may not be able to see this as clearly as you would at another time; but this is what you must do, and you'll need all your senses about you; for a slip might be awkward.'

'Oh!' said Squeers, who had looked cunningly at him, with his head stuck on one side, like an old raven. 'That's what I'm to do, is it? Now then, just you hear a word or two from me. I an't a-going to have any stories made for me, and I an't a-going to stick to any. If I find matters going again me, I shall expect you to take your share, and I'll take care you do. You never said anything about danger. I never bargained for being brought into such a plight as this, and I don't mean to take it as quiet as you think. I let you lead me on, from one thing to another, because we had been mixed up together in a certain sort of a way, and if you had liked to be ill-natured you might perhaps have hurt the business, and if you liked to be good-natured you might throw a good deal in my way. Well; if all goes right now, that's quite correct, and I don't mind it; but if anything goes wrong, then times are altered, and I shall just say and do whatever I think may serve me most, and take advice from nobody. My moral influence with them lads,' added Mr Squeers, with deeper gravity, 'is a tottering to its basis. The images of Mrs Squeers, my daughter, and my son Wackford, all short of vittles, is perpetually before me; every other consideration melts away and vanishes, in front of these; the only number in all arithmetic that I know of, as a husband and a father, is number one, under this here most fatal go!'

How long Mr Squeers might have declaimed, or how stormy a discussion his declamation might have led to, nobody knows. Being interrupted, at this point, by the arrival of the coach and an attendant who was to bear him company, he perched his hat with great dignity on the top of the handkerchief that bound his head; and, thrusting one hand in his pocket, and taking the attendant's arm with the other, suffered himself to be led forth.

'As I supposed from his not sending!' thought Ralph. 'This fellow, I plainly see through all his tipsy fooling, has made up his mind to turn upon me. I am so beset and hemmed in, that they are not only all struck with fear, but, like the beasts in the fable, have their fling at me now, though time was, and no longer ago than yesterday too, when they were all civility and compliance. But they shall not move me. I'll not give way. I will not budge one inch!'

He went home, and was glad to find his housekeeper complaining of illness, that he might have an excuse for being alone and sending her away to where she lived: which was hard by. Then, he sat down by the light of a single candle, and began to think, for the first time, on all that had taken place that day.

He had neither eaten nor drunk since last night, and, in addition to the anxiety of mind he had undergone, had been travelling about, from place to place almost incessantly, for many hours. He felt sick and exhausted, but could taste nothing save a glass of water, and continued to sit with his head upon his hand; not resting nor thinking, but laboriously trying to do both, and feeling that every sense but one of weariness and desolation, was for the time benumbed.

It was nearly ten o'clock when he heard a knocking at the door, and still sat quiet as before, as if he could not even bring his thoughts to bear upon that. It had been often repeated, and he had, several times, heard a voice outside, saying there was a light in the window (meaning, as he knew, his own candle), before he could rouse himself and go downstairs.

'Mr Nickleby, there is terrible news for you, and I am sent to beg you will come with me directly,' said a voice he seemed to recognise. He held his hand above his eyes, and, looking out, saw Tim Linkinwater on the steps.

'Come where?' demanded Ralph.

'To our house, where you came this morning. I have a coach here.'

'Why should I go there?' said Ralph.

'Don't ask me why, but pray come with me.'

'Another edition of today!' returned Ralph, making as though he would shut the door.

'No, no!' cried Tim, catching him by the arm and speaking most earnestly; 'it is only that you may hear something that has occurred: something very dreadful, Mr Nickleby, which concerns you nearly. Do you think I would tell you so or come to you like this, if it were not the case?'

Ralph looked at him more closely. Seeing that he was indeed greatly excited, he faltered, and could not tell what to say or think.

'You had better hear this now, than at any other time,' said Tim; 'it may have some influence with you. For Heaven's sake come!'

Perhaps, at, another time, Ralph's obstinacy and dislike would have been proof against any appeal from such a quarter, however emphatically urged; but now, after a moment's hesitation, he went into the hall for his hat, and returning, got into the coach without speaking a word.

Tim well remembered afterwards, and often said, that as Ralph Nickleby went into the house for this purpose, he saw him, by the light of the candle which he had set down upon a chair, reel and stagger like a drunken man. He well remembered, too, that when he had placed his foot upon the coach-steps, he turned round and looked upon him with a face so ashy pale and so very wild and vacant that it made him shudder, and for the moment almost afraid to follow. People were fond of saying that he had some dark presentiment upon him then, but his emotion might, perhaps, with greater show of reason, be referred to what he had undergone that day.

A profound silence was observed during the ride. Arrived at their place of destination, Ralph followed his conductor into the house, and into a room where the two brothers were. He was so astounded, not to say awed, by something of a mute compassion for himself which was visible in their manner and in that of the old clerk, that he could scarcely speak.

Having taken a seat, however, he contrived to say, though in broken words, 'What—what have you to say to me—more than has been said already?'

The room was old and large, very imperfectly lighted, and terminated in a bay window, about which hung some heavy drapery. Casting his eyes in this direction as he spoke, he thought he made out the dusky figure of a man. He was confirmed in this impression by seeing that the object moved, as if uneasy under his scrutiny.

'Who's that yonder?' he said.

'One who has conveyed to us, within these two hours, the intelligence which caused our sending to you,' replied brother Charles. 'Let him be, sir, let him be for the present.'

'More riddles!' said Ralph, faintly. 'Well, sir?'

In turning his face towards the brothers he was obliged to avert it from the window; but, before either of them could speak, he had looked round again. It was evident that he was rendered restless and uncomfortable by the presence of the unseen person; for he repeated this action several times, and at length, as if in a nervous state which rendered him positively unable to turn away from the place, sat so as to have it opposite him, muttering as an excuse that he could not bear the light.

The brothers conferred apart for a short time: their manner showing that they were agitated. Ralph glanced at them twice or thrice, and ultimately said, with a great effort to recover his self-possession, 'Now, what is this? If

I am brought from home at this time of night, let it be for something. What have you got to tell me?' After a short pause, he added, 'Is my niece dead?'

He had struck upon a key which rendered the task of commencement an easier one. Brother Charles turned, and said that it was a death of which they had to tell him, but that his niece was well.

'You don't mean to tell me,' said Ralph, as his eyes brightened, 'that her brother's dead? No, that's too good. I'd not believe it, if you told me so. It would be too welcome news to be true.'

'Shame on you, you hardened and unnatural man,' cried the other brother, warmly. 'Prepare yourself for intelligence which, if you have any human feeling in your breast, will make even you shrink and tremble. What if we tell you that a poor unfortunate boy: a child in everything but never having known one of those tender endearments, or one of those lightsome hours which make our childhood a time to be remembered like a happy dream through all our after life: a warm-hearted, harmless, affectionate creature, who never offended you, or did you wrong, but on whom you have vented the malice and hatred you have conceived for your nephew, and whom you have made an instrument for wreaking your bad passions upon him: what if we tell you that, sinking under your persecution, sir, and the misery and ill-usage of a life short in years but long in suffering, this poor creature has gone to tell his sad tale where, for your part in it, you must surely answer?'

'If you tell me,' said Ralph; 'if you tell me that he is dead, I forgive you all else. If you tell me that he is dead, I am in your debt and bound to you for life. He is! I see it in your faces. Who triumphs now? Is this your dreadful news; this your terrible intelligence? You see how it moves me. You did well to send. I would have travelled a hundred miles afoot, through mud, mire, and darkness, to hear this news just at this time.'

Even then, moved as he was by this savage joy, Ralph could see in the faces of the two brothers, mingling with their look of disgust and horror, something of that indefinable compassion for himself which he had noticed before.

'And HE brought you the intelligence, did he?' said Ralph, pointing with his finger towards the recess already mentioned; 'and sat there, no doubt, to see me prostrated and overwhelmed by it! Ha, ha, ha! But I tell him that I'll be a sharp thorn in his side for many a long day to come; and I tell you two, again, that you don't know him yet; and that you'll rue the day you took compassion on the vagabond.'

'You take me for your nephew,' said a hollow voice; 'it would be better for you, and for me too, if I were he indeed.'

The figure that he had seen so dimly, rose, and came slowly down. He started back, for he found that he confronted—not Nicholas, as he had supposed, but Brooker.

Ralph had no reason, that he knew, to fear this man; he had never feared him before; but the pallor which had been observed in his face when he issued forth that night, came upon him again. He was seen to tremble, and his voice changed as he said, keeping his eyes upon him,

'What does this fellow here? Do you know he is a convict, a felon, a common thief?'

'Hear what he has to tell you. Oh, Mr Nickleby, hear what he has to tell you, be he what he may!' cried the brothers, with such emphatic earnestness, that Ralph turned to them in wonder. They pointed to Brooker. Ralph again gazed at him: as it seemed mechanically.

'That boy,' said the man, 'that these gentlemen have been talking of—'

'That boy,' repeated Ralph, looking vacantly at him.

'Whom I saw, stretched dead and cold upon his bed, and who is now in his grave—'

'Who is now in his grave,' echoed Ralph, like one who talks in his sleep.

The man raised his eyes, and clasped his hands solemnly together:

'—Was your only son, so help me God in heaven!'

In the midst of a dead silence, Ralph sat down, pressing his two hands upon his temples. He removed them, after a minute, and never was there seen, part of a living man undisfigured by any wound, such a ghastly face as he then disclosed. He looked at Brooker, who was by this time standing at a short distance from him; but did not say one word, or make the slightest sound or gesture.

'Gentlemen,' said the man, 'I offer no excuses for myself. I am long past that. If, in telling you how this has happened, I tell you that I was harshly used, and perhaps driven out of my real nature, I do it only as a necessary part of my story, and not to shield myself. I am a guilty man.'

He stopped, as if to recollect, and looking away from Ralph, and addressing himself to the brothers, proceeded in a subdued and humble tone:

'Among those who once had dealings with this man, gentlemen—that's from twenty to five-and-twenty years ago—there was one: a rough fox-hunting, hard-drinking gentleman, who had run through his own fortune, and wanted to squander away that of his sister: they were both orphans, and she lived with him and managed his house. I don't know whether it was, originally, to back his influence and try to over-persuade the young woman or not, but he,' pointing, to Ralph, 'used to go down to the house in Leicestershire pretty often, and stop there many days at a time. They had had a great many dealings together, and he may have gone on some of those, or to patch up his client's affairs, which were in a ruinous state; of course he went for profit. The gentlewoman was not a girl, but she was, I have heard say, handsome, and entitled to a pretty large property. In course of time, he married her. The same love of gain which led him to contract this marriage, led to its being kept strictly private; for a clause in her father's will declared that if she married without her brother's consent, the property, in which she had only some life interest while she remained single, should pass away altogether to another branch of the family. The brother would give no consent that the sister didn't buy, and pay for handsomely; Mr Nickleby would consent to no such sacrifice; and so they went on, keeping their marriage secret, and waiting for him to break his neck or die of a fever. He did neither, and meanwhile the result of this private marriage was a son. The child was put out to nurse, a long way off; his mother never saw him but once or twice, and then by stealth; and his father—so eagerly did he thirst after the money which seemed to come almost within his grasp now, for his brother-in-law was very ill, and breaking more and more every day—never went near him, to avoid raising any suspicion. The brother lingered on; Mr Nickleby's wife constantly urged him to avow their marriage; he peremptorily refused. She remained alone in a dull country house: seeing little or no company but riotous, drunken sportsmen. He lived in London and clung to his business. Angry quarrels and recriminations took place, and when they had been married nearly seven years, and were within a few weeks of the time when the brother's death would have adjusted all, she eloped with a younger man, and left him.'

Here he paused, but Ralph did not stir, and the brothers signed to him to proceed.

'It was then that I became acquainted with these circumstances from his own lips. They were no secrets then; for the brother, and others, knew them;

but they were communicated to me, not on this account, but because I was wanted. He followed the fugitives. Some said to make money of his wife's shame, but, I believe, to take some violent revenge, for that was as much his character as the other; perhaps more. He didn't find them, and she died not long after. I don't know whether he began to think he might like the child, or whether he wished to make sure that it should never fall into its mother's hands; but, before he went, he intrusted me with the charge of bringing it home. And I did so.'

He went on, from this point, in a still more humble tone, and spoke in a very low voice; pointing to Ralph as he resumed.

'He had used me ill—cruelly—I reminded him in what, not long ago when I met him in the street—and I hated him. I brought the child home to his own house, and lodged him in the front garret. Neglect had made him very sickly, and I was obliged to call in a doctor, who said he must be removed for change of air, or he would die. I think that first put it in my head. I did it then. He was gone six weeks, and when he came back, I told him—with every circumstance well planned and proved; nobody could have suspected me—that the child was dead and buried. He might have been disappointed in some intention he had formed, or he might have had some natural affection, but he WAS grieved at THAT, and I was confirmed in my design of opening up the secret one day, and making it a means of getting money from him. I had heard, like most other men, of Yorkshire schools. I took the child to one kept by a man named Squeers, and left it there. I gave him the name of Smike. Year by year, I paid twenty pounds a-year for him for six years; never breathing the secret all the time; for I had left his father's service after more hard usage, and quarrelled with him again. I was sent away from this country. I have been away nearly eight years. Directly I came home again, I travelled down into Yorkshire, and, skulking in the village of an evening-time, made inquiries about the boys at the school, and found that this one, whom I had placed there, had run away with a young man bearing the name of his own father. I sought his father out in London, and hinting at what I could tell him, tried for a little money to support life; but he repulsed me with threats. I then found out his clerk, and, going on from little to little, and showing him that there were good reasons for communicating with me, learnt what was going on; and it was I who told him that the boy was no son of the man who claimed to be his father. All this time I had never seen the boy. At length, I heard from this same source that he was very ill, and where he was. I travelled down there, that I might recall myself, if possible, to his recollection and confirm my story. I came upon him unexpectedly; but before I could speak he knew me—he had good cause to remember me, poor lad!—and I would have sworn to him if I had met him in the Indies. I knew the piteous face I had seen in the little child. After a few days' indecision, I applied to the young gentleman in whose care he was, and I found that he was dead. He knows how quickly he recognised me again, how often he had described me and my leaving him at the school, and how he told him of a garret he recollected: which is the one I have spoken of, and in his father's house to this day. This is my story. I demand to be brought face to face with the schoolmaster, and put to any possible proof of any part of it, and I will show that it's too true, and that I have this guilt upon my soul.'

'Unhappy man!' said the brothers. 'What reparation can you make for this?'

'None, gentlemen, none! I have none to make, and nothing to hope now. I am old in years, and older still in misery and care. This confession can bring nothing upon me but new suffering and punishment; but I make it, and will abide by it whatever comes. I have been made the instrument of working out this dreadful retribution upon the head of a man who, in the hot pursuit of his bad ends, has persecuted and hunted down his own child to death. It must descend upon me too. I know it must fall. My reparation comes too late; and, neither in this world nor in the next, can I have hope again!'

He had hardly spoken, when the lamp, which stood upon the table close to where Ralph was seated, and which was the only one in the room, was thrown to the ground, and left them in darkness. There was some trifling confusion in obtaining another light; the interval was a mere nothing; but when the light appeared, Ralph Nickleby was gone.

The good brothers and Tim Linkinwater occupied some time in discussing the probability of his return; and, when it became apparent that he would not come back, they hesitated whether or no to send after him. At length, remembering how strangely and silently he had sat in one immovable position during the interview, and thinking he might possibly be ill, they determined, although it was now very late, to send to his house on some pretence. Finding an excuse in the presence of Brooker, whom they knew not how to dispose of without consulting his wishes, they concluded to act upon this resolution before going to bed.

CHAPTER 61

Wherein Nicholas and his Sister forfeit the good Opinion of all worldly and prudent People

On the next morning after Brooker's disclosure had been made, Nicholas returned home. The meeting between him and those whom he had left there was not without strong emotion on both sides; for they had been informed by his letters of what had occurred: and, besides that his griefs were theirs, they mourned with him the death of one whose forlorn and helpless state had first established a claim upon their compassion, and whose truth of heart and grateful earnest nature had, every day, endeared him to them more and more.

'I am sure,' said Mrs Nickleby, wiping her eyes, and sobbing bitterly, 'I have lost the best, the most zealous, and most attentive creature that has ever been a companion to me in my life—putting you, my dear Nicholas, and Kate, and your poor papa, and that well-behaved nurse who ran away with the linen and the twelve small forks, out of the question, of course. Of all the tractable, equal-tempered, attached, and faithful beings that ever lived, I believe he was the most so. To look round upon the garden, now, that he took so much pride in, or to go into his room and see it filled with so many of those little contrivances for our comfort that he was so fond of making, and made so well, and so little thought he would leave unfinished—I can't bear it, I cannot really. Ah! This is a great trial to me, a great trial. It will be comfort to you, my dear Nicholas, to the end of your life, to recollect how kind and good you always were to him—so it will be to me, to think what excellent terms we were always upon, and how fond he always was of me, poor fellow! It was very natural you should have been attached to him, my dear—very—and of course you were, and are very much cut up by this. I am sure it's only necessary to look at you and see how changed you are, to see that; but nobody knows what my feelings are—nobody can—it's quite impossible!'

While Mrs Nickleby, with the utmost sincerity, gave vent to her sorrows after her own peculiar fashion of considering herself foremost, she was not the only one who indulged such feelings. Kate, although well accustomed to forget herself when others were to be considered, could not repress her grief; Madeline was scarcely less moved than she; and poor, hearty, honest little Miss La Creevy, who had come upon one of her visits while Nicholas was away, and had done nothing, since the sad news arrived, but console and cheer them all, no sooner beheld him coming in at the door, than she sat herself down upon the stairs, and bursting into a flood of tears, refused for a long time to be comforted.

'It hurts me so,' cried the poor body, 'to see him come back alone. I can't help thinking what he must have suffered himself. I wouldn't mind so much if he gave way a little more; but he bears it so manfully.'

'Why, so I should,' said Nicholas, 'should I not?'

'Yes, yes,' replied the little woman, 'and bless you for a good creature! but this does seem at first to a simple soul like me—I know it's wrong to say so, and I shall be sorry for it presently—this does seem such a poor reward for all you have done.'

'Nay,' said Nicholas gently, 'what better reward could I have, than the knowledge that his last days were peaceful and happy, and the recollection that I was his constant companion, and was not prevented, as I might have been by a hundred circumstances, from being beside him?'

'To be sure,' sobbed Miss La Creevy; 'it's very true, and I'm an ungrateful, impious, wicked little fool, I know.'

With that, the good soul fell to crying afresh, and, endeavouring to recover herself, tried to laugh. The laugh and the cry, meeting each other thus abruptly, had a struggle for the mastery; the result was, that it was a drawn battle, and Miss La Creevy went into hysterics.

Waiting until they were all tolerably quiet and composed again, Nicholas, who stood in need of some rest after his long journey, retired to his own room, and throwing himself, dressed as he was, upon the bed, fell into a sound sleep. When he awoke, he found Kate sitting by his bedside, who, seeing that he had opened his eyes, stooped down to kiss him.

'I came to tell you how glad I am to see you home again.'

'But I can't tell you how glad I am to see you, Kate.'

'We have been wearying so for your return,' said Kate, 'mama and I, and—and Madeline.'

'You said in your last letter that she was quite well,' said Nicholas, rather hastily, and colouring as he spoke. 'Has nothing been said, since I have been away, about any future arrangements that the brothers have in contemplation for her?'

'Oh, not a word,' replied Kate. 'I can't think of parting from her without sorrow; and surely, Nicholas, YOU don't wish it!'

Nicholas coloured again, and, sitting down beside his sister on a little couch near the window, said:

'No, Kate, no, I do not. I might strive to disguise my real feelings from anybody but you; but I will tell you that—briefly and plainly, Kate—that I love her.'

Kate's eyes brightened, and she was going to make some reply, when Nicholas laid his hand upon her arm, and went on:

'Nobody must know this but you. She, last of all.'

'Dear Nicholas!'

'Last of all; never, though never is a long day. Sometimes, I try to think that the time may come when I may honestly tell her this; but it is so far off; in such distant perspective, so many years must elapse before it comes, and when it does come (if ever) I shall be so unlike what I am now, and shall have so outlived my days of youth and romance—though not, I am sure, of love for her—that even I feel how visionary all such hopes must be, and try to crush them rudely myself, and have the pain over, rather than suffer time to wither them, and keep the disappointment in store. No, Kate! Since I have been absent, I have had, in that poor fellow who is gone, perpetually before my eyes, another instance of the munificent liberality of these noble brothers. As far as in me lies, I will deserve it, and if I have wavered in my bounden duty to them before, I am now determined to discharge it rigidly, and to put further delays and temptations beyond my reach.'

'Before you say another word, dear Nicholas,' said Kate, turning pale, 'you must hear what I have to tell you. I came on purpose, but I had not the courage. What you say now, gives me new heart.' She faltered, and burst into tears.

There was that in her manner which prepared Nicholas for what was coming. Kate tried to speak, but her tears prevented her.

'Come, you foolish girl,' said Nicholas; 'why, Kate, Kate, be a woman! I think I know what you would tell me. It concerns Mr Frank, does it not?'

Kate sunk her head upon his shoulder, and sobbed out 'Yes.'

'And he has offered you his hand, perhaps, since I have been away,' said Nicholas; 'is that it? Yes. Well, well; it is not so difficult, you see, to tell me, after all. He offered you his hand?'

'Which I refused,' said Kate.

'Yes; and why?'

'I told him,' she said, in a trembling voice, 'all that I have since found you told mama; and while I could not conceal from him, and cannot from you, that—that it was a pang and a great trial, I did so firmly, and begged him not to see me any more.'

'That's my own brave Kate!' said Nicholas, pressing her to his breast. 'I knew you would.'

'He tried to alter my resolution,' said Kate, 'and declared that, be my decision what it might, he would not only inform his uncles of the step he had taken, but would communicate it to you also, directly you returned. I am afraid,' she added, her momentary composure forsaking her, 'I am afraid I may not have said, strongly enough, how deeply I felt such disinterested love, and how earnestly I prayed for his future happiness. If you do talk together, I should—I should like him to know that.'

'And did you suppose, Kate, when you had made this sacrifice to what you knew was right and honourable, that I should shrink from mine?' said Nicholas tenderly.

'Oh no! not if your position had been the same, but—'

'But it is the same,' interrupted Nicholas. 'Madeline is not the near relation of our benefactors, but she is closely bound to them by ties as dear; and I was first intrusted with her history, specially because they reposed unbounded confidence in me, and believed that I was as true as steel. How base would it be of me to take advantage of the circumstances which placed her here, or of the slight service I was happily able to render her, and to seek to engage her affections when the result must be, if I succeeded, that the brothers would be disappointed in their darling wish of establishing her as their own child, and that I must seem to hope to build my fortunes on their compassion for the young creature whom I had so meanly and unworthily entrapped: turning her very gratitude and warmth of heart to my own purpose and account, and trading in her misfortunes! I, too, whose duty, and pride, and pleasure, Kate, it is to have other claims upon me which I will never forget; and who have the means of a comfortable and happy life already, and have no right to look beyond it! I have determined to remove this weight from my mind. I doubt whether I have not done wrong, even now; and today I will, without reserve or equivocation, disclose my real reasons to Mr Cherryble, and implore him to take immediate measures for removing this young lady to the shelter of some other roof.'

'Today? so very soon?'

'I have thought of this for weeks, and why should I postpone it? If the scene through which I have just passed has taught me to reflect, and has awakened me to a more anxious and careful sense of duty, why should I wait until the impression has cooled? You would not dissuade me, Kate; now would you?'

'You may grow rich, you know,' said Kate.

'I may grow rich!' repeated Nicholas, with a mournful smile, 'ay, and I may grow old! But rich or poor, or old or young, we shall ever be the same to each other, and in that our comfort lies. What if we have but one home? It can never be a solitary one to you and me. What if we were to remain so true to these first impressions as to form no others? It is but one more link to the strong chain that binds us together. It seems but yesterday that we were playfellows, Kate, and it will seem but tomorrow when we are staid old people, looking back to these cares as we look back, now, to those of our childish days: and recollecting with a melancholy pleasure that the time was, when they could move us. Perhaps then, when we are quaint old folks and talk of the times when our step was lighter and our hair not grey, we may be even thankful for the trials that so endeared us to each other, and turned our lives into that current, down which we shall have glided so peacefully and calmly. And having caught some inkling of our story, the young people about us—as young as you and I are now, Kate—may come to us for sympathy, and pour distresses which hope and inexperience could scarcely feel enough for, into the compassionate ears of the old bachelor brother and his maiden sister.'

Kate smiled through her tears as Nicholas drew this picture; but they were not tears of sorrow, although they continued to fall when he had ceased to speak.

'Am I not right, Kate?' he said, after a short silence.

'Quite, quite, dear brother; and I cannot tell you how happy I am that I have acted as you would have had me.'

'You don't regret?'

'N—n—no,' said Kate timidly, tracing some pattern upon the ground with her little foot. 'I don't regret having done what was honourable and right, of course; but I do regret that this should have ever happened—at least sometimes I regret it, and sometimes I—I don't know what I say; I am but a weak girl, Nicholas, and it has agitated me very much.'

It is no vaunt to affirm that if Nicholas had had ten thousand pounds at the minute, he would, in his generous affection for the owner of the blushing cheek and downcast eye, have bestowed its utmost farthing, in perfect forgetfulness of himself, to secure her happiness. But all he could do was to comfort and console her by kind words; and words they were of such love and kindness, and cheerful encouragement, that poor Kate threw her arms about his neck, and declared she would weep no more.

'What man,' thought Nicholas proudly, while on his way, soon afterwards, to the brothers' house, 'would not be sufficiently rewarded for any sacrifice of fortune by the possession of such a heart as Kate's, which, but that hearts weigh light, and gold and silver heavy, is beyond all praise? Frank has money, and wants no more. Where would it buy him such a treasure as Kate? And yet, in unequal marriages, the rich party is always supposed to make a great sacrifice, and the other to get a good bargain! But I am thinking like a lover, or like an ass: which I suppose is pretty nearly the same.'

Checking thoughts so little adapted to the business on which he was bound, by such self-reproofs as this and many others no less sturdy, he proceeded on his way and presented himself before Tim Linkinwater.

'Ah! Mr Nickleby!' cried Tim, 'God bless you! how d'ye do? Well? Say you're quite well and never better. Do now.'

'Quite,' said Nicholas, shaking him by both hands.

'Ah!' said Tim, 'you look tired though, now I come to look at you. Hark! there he is, d'ye hear him? That was Dick, the blackbird. He hasn't been himself since you've been gone. He'd never get on without you, now; he takes as naturally to you as he does to me.'

'Dick is a far less sagacious fellow than I supposed him, if he thinks I am half so well worthy of his notice as you,' replied Nicholas.

'Why, I'll tell you what, sir,' said Tim, standing in his favourite attitude and pointing to the cage with the feather of his pen, 'it's a very extraordinary thing about that bird, that the only people he ever takes the smallest notice of, are Mr Charles, and Mr Ned, and you, and me.'

Here, Tim stopped and glanced anxiously at Nicholas; then unexpectedly catching his eye repeated, 'And you and me, sir, and you and me.' And then he glanced at Nicholas again, and, squeezing his hand, said, 'I am a bad one at putting off anything I am interested in. I didn't mean to ask you, but I should like to hear a few particulars about that poor boy. Did he mention Cheeryble Brothers at all?'

'Yes,' said Nicholas, 'many and many a time.'

'That was right of him,' returned Tim, wiping his eyes; 'that was very right of him.'

'And he mentioned your name a score of times,' said Nicholas, 'and often bade me carry back his love to Mr Linkinwater.'

'No, no, did he though?' rejoined Tim, sobbing outright. 'Poor fellow! I wish we could have had him buried in town. There isn't such a burying-ground in all London as that little one on the other side of the square—there are counting-houses all round it, and if you go in there, on a fine day, you can see the books and safes through the open windows. And he sent his love to me, did he? I didn't expect he would have thought of me. Poor fellow, poor fellow! His love too!'

Tim was so completely overcome by this little mark of recollection, that he was quite unequal to any more conversation at the moment. Nicholas therefore slipped quietly out, and went to brother Charles's room.

If he had previously sustained his firmness and fortitude, it had been by an effort which had cost him no little pain; but the warm welcome, the hearty manner, the homely unaffected commiseration, of the good old man, went to his heart, and no inward struggle could prevent his showing it.

'Come, come, my dear sir,' said the benevolent merchant; 'we must not be cast down; no, no. We must learn to bear misfortune, and we must remember that there are many sources of consolation even in death. Every day that this poor lad had lived, he must have been less and less qualified for the world, and more and more unhappy in is own deficiencies. It is better as it is, my dear sir. Yes, yes, yes, it's better as it is.'

'I have thought of all that, sir,' replied Nicholas, clearing his throat. 'I feel it, I assure you.'

'Yes, that's well,' replied Mr Cheeryble, who, in the midst of all his comforting, was quite as much taken aback as honest old Tim; 'that's well. Where is my brother Ned? Tim Linkinwater, sir, where is my brother Ned?'

'Gone out with Mr Trimmers, about getting that unfortunate man into the hospital, and sending a nurse to his children,' said Tim.

'My brother Ned is a fine fellow, a great fellow!' exclaimed brother Charles as he shut the door and returned to Nicholas. 'He will be overjoyed to see you, my dear sir. We have been speaking of you every day.'

'To tell you the truth, sir, I am glad to find you alone,' said Nicholas, with some natural hesitation; 'for I am anxious to say something to you. Can you spare me a very few minutes?'

'Surely, surely,' returned brother Charles, looking at him with an anxious countenance. 'Say on, my dear sir, say on.'

'I scarcely know how, or where, to begin,' said Nicholas. 'If ever one mortal had reason to be penetrated with love and reverence for another: with such attachment as would make the hardest service in his behalf a pleasure and delight: with such grateful recollections as must rouse the utmost zeal and fidelity of his nature: those are the feelings which I should entertain for you, and do, from my heart and soul, believe me!'

'I do believe you,' replied the old gentleman, 'and I am happy in the belief. I have never doubted it; I never shall. I am sure I never shall.'

'Your telling me that so kindly,' said Nicholas, 'emboldens me to proceed. When you first took me into your confidence, and dispatched me on those missions to Miss Bray, I should have told you that I had seen her long before; that her beauty had made an impression upon me which I could not efface; and that I had fruitlessly endeavoured to trace her, and become acquainted with her history. I did not tell you so, because I vainly thought I could conquer my weaker feelings, and render every consideration subservient to my duty to you.'

'Mr Nickleby,' said brother Charles, 'you did not violate the confidence I placed in you, or take an unworthy advantage of it. I am sure you did not.'

'I did not,' said Nicholas, firmly. 'Although I found that the necessity for self-command and restraint became every day more imperious, and the difficulty greater, I never, for one instant, spoke or looked but as I would have done had you been by. I never, for one moment, deserted my trust, nor have I to this instant. But I find that constant association and companionship with this sweet girl is fatal to my peace of mind, and may prove destructive to the resolutions I made in the beginning, and up to this time have faithfully kept. In short, sir, I cannot trust myself, and I implore and beseech you to remove this young lady from under the charge of my mother and sister without delay. I know that to anyone but myself—to you, who consider the immeasurable distance between me and this young lady, who is now your ward, and the object of your peculiar care—my loving her, even in thought, must appear the height of rashness and presumption. I know it is so. But who can see her as I have seen, who can know what her life has been, and not love her? I have no excuse but that; and as I cannot fly from this temptation, and cannot repress this passion, with its object constantly before me, what can I do but pray and beseech you to remove it, and to leave me to forget her?'

'Mr Nickleby,' said the old man, after a short silence, 'you can do no more. I was wrong to expose a young man like you to this trial. I might have foreseen what would happen. Thank you, sir, thank you. Madeline shall be removed.'

'If you would grant me one favour, dear sir, and suffer her to remember me with esteem, by never revealing to her this confession—'

'I will take care,' said Mr Cheeryble. 'And now, is this all you have to tell me?'

'No!' returned Nicholas, meeting his eye, 'it is not.'

'I know the rest,' said Mr Cheeryble, apparently very much relieved by this prompt reply. 'When did it come to your knowledge?'

'When I reached home this morning.'

'You felt it your duty immediately to come to me, and tell me what your sister no doubt acquainted you with?'

'I did,' said Nicholas, 'though I could have wished to have spoken to Mr Frank first.'

'Frank was with me last night,' replied the old gentleman. 'You have done well, Mr Nickleby—very well, sir—and I thank you again.'

Upon this head, Nicholas requested permission to add a few words. He ventured to hope that nothing he had said would lead to the estrangement of Kate and Madeline, who had formed an attachment for each other, any interruption of which would, he knew, be attended with great pain to them, and, most of all, with remorse and pain to him, as its unhappy cause. When these things were all forgotten, he hoped that Frank and he might still be warm friends, and that no word or thought of his humble home, or of her who was well contented to remain there and share his quiet fortunes, would ever again disturb the harmony between them. He recounted, as nearly as he could, what had passed between himself and Kate that morning: speaking of her with such warmth of pride and affection, and dwelling so cheerfully upon the confidence they had of overcoming any selfish regrets and living contented and happy in each other's love, that few could have heard him unmoved. More moved himself than he had been yet, he expressed in a few hurried words—as expressive, perhaps, as the most eloquent phrases—his devotion to the brothers, and his hope that he might live and die in their service.

To all this, brother Charles listened in profound silence, and with his chair so turned from Nicholas that his face could not be seen. He had not spoken either, in his accustomed manner, but with a certain stiffness and embarrassment very foreign to it. Nicholas feared he had offended him. He said, 'No, no, he had done quite right,' but that was all.

'Frank is a heedless, foolish fellow,' he said, after Nicholas had paused for some time; 'a very heedless, foolish fellow. I will take care that this is brought to a close without delay. Let us say no more upon the subject; it's a very painful one to me. Come to me in half an hour; I have strange things to tell you, my dear sir, and your uncle has appointed this afternoon for your waiting upon him with me.'

'Waiting upon him! With you, sir!' cried Nicholas.

'Ay, with me,' replied the old gentleman. 'Return to me in half an hour, and I'll tell you more.'

Nicholas waited upon him at the time mentioned, and then learnt all that had taken place on the previous day, and all that was known of the appointment Ralph had made with the brothers; which was for that night; and for the better understanding of which it will be requisite to return and follow his own footsteps from the house of the twin brothers. Therefore, we leave Nicholas somewhat reassured by the restored kindness of their manner towards him, and yet sensible that it was different from what it had been (though he scarcely knew in what respect): so he was full of uneasiness, uncertainty, and disquiet.

CHAPTER 62

Ralph makes one last Appointment—and keeps it

Creeping from the house, and slinking off like a thief; groping with his hands, when first he got into the street, as if he were a blind man; and looking often over his shoulder while he hurried away, as though he were followed in imagination or reality by someone anxious to question or detain him; Ralph Nickleby left the city behind him, and took the road to his own home.

The night was dark, and a cold wind blew, driving the clouds, furiously and fast, before it. There was one black, gloomy mass that seemed to follow him: not hurrying in the wild chase with the others, but lingering sullenly behind, and gliding darkly and stealthily on. He often looked back at this, and, more than once, stopped to let it pass over; but, somehow, when he went forward again, it was still behind him, coming mournfully and slowly up, like a shadowy funeral train.

He had to pass a poor, mean burial-ground—a dismal place, raised a few feet above the level of the street, and parted from it by a low parapet-wall and an iron railing; a rank, unwholesome, rotten spot, where the very grass and weeds seemed, in their frouzy growth, to tell that they had sprung from paupers' bodies, and had struck their roots in the graves of men, sodden, while alive, in steaming courts and drunken hungry dens. And here, in truth, they lay, parted from the living by a little earth and a board or two—lay thick and close—corrupting in body as they had in mind—a dense and squalid crowd. Here they lay, cheek by jowl with life: no deeper down than the feet of the throng that passed there every day, and piled high as their throats. Here they lay, a grisly family, all these dear departed brothers and sisters of the ruddy clergyman who did his task so speedily when they were hidden in the ground!

As he passed here, Ralph called to mind that he had been one of a jury, long before, on the body of a man who had cut his throat; and that he was buried in this place. He could not tell how he came to recollect it now, when he had so often passed and never thought about him, or how it was that he felt an interest in the circumstance; but he did both; and stopping, and clasping the iron railings with his hands, looked eagerly in, wondering which might be his grave.

While he was thus engaged, there came towards him, with noise of shouts and singing, some fellows full of drink, followed by others, who were remonstrating with them and urging them to go home in quiet. They were in high good-humour; and one of them, a little, weazen, hump-backed man, began to dance. He was a grotesque, fantastic figure, and the few bystanders laughed. Ralph himself was moved to mirth, and echoed the laugh of one who stood near and who looked round in his face. When they had passed on, and he was left alone again, he resumed his speculation with a new kind of interest; for he recollected that the last person who had seen the suicide alive, had left him very merry, and he remembered how strange he and the other jurors had thought that at the time.

He could not fix upon the spot among such a heap of graves, but he conjured up a strong and vivid idea of the man himself, and how he looked, and what had led him to do it; all of which he recalled with ease. By dint of dwelling upon this theme, he carried the impression with him when he went away; as he remembered, when a child, to have had frequently before him the figure of some goblin he had once seen chalked upon a door. But as he drew nearer and nearer home he forgot it again, and began to think how very dull and solitary the house would be inside.

This feeling became so strong at last, that when he reached his own door, he could hardly make up his mind to turn the key and open it. When he had done that, and gone into the passage, he felt as though to shut it again would be to shut out the world. But he let it go, and it closed with a loud noise. There was no light. How very dreary, cold, and still it was!

Shivering from head to foot, he made his way upstairs into the room where he had been last disturbed. He had made a kind of compact with himself that he would not think of what had happened until he got home. He was at home now, and suffered himself to consider it.

His own child, his own child! He never doubted the tale; he felt it was true; knew it as well, now, as if he had been privy to it all along. His own child! And dead too. Dying beside Nicholas, loving him, and looking upon him as something like an angel. That was the worst!

They had all turned from him and deserted him in his very first need. Even money could not buy them now; everything must come out, and everybody must know all. Here was the young lord dead, his companion abroad and beyond his reach, ten thousand pounds gone at one blow, his plot with Gride overset at the very moment of triumph, his after-schemes discovered, himself in danger, the object of his persecution and Nicholas's love, his own wretched boy; everything crumbled and fallen upon him, and he beaten down beneath the ruins and grovelling in the dust.

If he had known his child to be alive; if no deceit had been ever practised, and he had grown up beneath his eye; he might have been a careless, indifferent, rough, harsh father—like enough—he felt that; but the thought would come that he might have been otherwise, and that his son might have been a comfort to him, and they two happy together. He began to think now, that his supposed death and his wife's flight had had some share in making him the morose, hard man he was. He seemed to remember a time when he was not quite so rough and obdurate; and almost thought that he had first hated Nicholas because he was young and gallant, and perhaps like the stripling who had brought dishonour and loss of fortune on his head.

But one tender thought, or one of natural regret, in his whirlwind of passion and remorse, was as a drop of calm water in a stormy maddened sea. His hatred of Nicholas had been fed upon his own defeat, nourished on his interference with his schemes, fattened upon his old defiance and success. There were reasons for its increase; it had grown and strengthened gradually. Now it attained a height which was sheer wild lunacy. That his, of all others, should have been the hands to rescue his miserable child; that he should have been his protector and faithful friend; that he should have shown him that love and tenderness which, from the wretched moment of his birth, he had never known; that he should have taught him to hate his own parent and execrate his very name; that he should now know and feel all this, and triumph in the recollection; was gall and madness to the usurer's heart. The dead boy's love for Nicholas, and the attachment of Nicholas to him, was insupportable agony. The picture of his deathbed, with Nicholas at his side, tending and supporting him, and he breathing out his thanks, and expiring in his arms, when he would have had them mortal enemies and hating each other to the last, drove him frantic. He gnashed his teeth and smote the air, and looking wildly round, with eyes which gleamed through the darkness, cried aloud:

'I am trampled down and ruined. The wretch told me true. The night has come! Is there no way to rob them of further triumph, and spurn their mercy and compassion? Is there no devil to help me?'

Swiftly, there glided again into his brain the figure he had raised that night. It seemed to lie before him. The head was covered now. So it was when he first saw it. The rigid, upturned, marble feet too, he remembered well. Then came before him the pale and trembling relatives who had told their tale upon the inquest—the shrieks of women—the silent dread of men—the consternation and disquiet—the victory achieved by that heap of clay, which, with one motion of its hand, had let out the life and made this stir among them—

He spoke no more; but, after a pause, softly groped his way out of the room, and up the echoing stairs—up to the top—to the front garret—where he closed the door behind him, and remained.

It was a mere lumber-room now, but it yet contained an old dismantled bedstead; the one on which his son had slept; for no other had ever been there. He avoided it hastily, and sat down as far from it as he could.

The weakened glare of the lights in the street below, shining through the window which had no blind or curtain to intercept it, was enough to show the character of the room, though not sufficient fully to reveal the various articles of lumber, old corded trunks and broken furniture, which were scattered about. It had a shelving roof; high in one part, and at another descending almost to the floor. It was towards the highest part that Ralph directed his eyes; and upon it he kept them fixed steadily for some minutes, when he rose, and dragging thither an old chest upon which he had been seated, mounted on it, and felt along the wall above his head with both hands. At length, they touched a large iron hook, firmly driven into one of the beams.

At that moment, he was interrupted by a loud knocking at the door below. After a little hesitation he opened the window, and demanded who it was.

'I want Mr Nickleby,' replied a voice.

'What with him?'

'That's not Mr Nickleby's voice, surely?' was the rejoinder.

It was not like it; but it was Ralph who spoke, and so he said.

The voice made answer that the twin brothers wished to know whether the man whom he had seen that night was to be detained; and that although it was now midnight they had sent, in their anxiety to do right.

'Yes,' cried Ralph, 'detain him till tomorrow; then let them bring him here—him and my nephew—and come themselves, and be sure that I will be ready to receive them.'

'At what hour?' asked the voice.

'At any hour,' replied Ralph fiercely. 'In the afternoon, tell them. At any hour, at any minute. All times will be alike to me.'

He listened to the man's retreating footsteps until the sound had passed, and then, gazing up into the sky, saw, or thought he saw, the same black cloud that had seemed to follow him home, and which now appeared to hover directly above the house.

'I know its meaning now,' he muttered, 'and the restless nights, the dreams, and why I have quailed of late. All pointed to this. Oh! if men by selling their own souls could ride rampant for a term, for how short a term would I barter mine tonight!'

The sound of a deep bell came along the wind. One.

'Lie on!' cried the usurer, 'with your iron tongue! Ring merrily for births that make expectants writhe, and marriages that are made in hell, and toll ruefully for the dead whose shoes are worn already! Call men to prayers who are godly because not found out, and ring chimes for the coming in of every year that brings this cursed world nearer to its end. No bell or book for me! Throw me on a dunghill, and let me rot there, to infect the air!'

With a wild look around, in which frenzy, hatred, and despair were horribly mingled, he shook his clenched hand at the sky above him, which was still dark and threatening, and closed the window.

The rain and hail pattered against the glass; the chimneys quaked and rocked; the crazy casement rattled with the wind, as though an impatient hand inside were striving to burst it open. But no hand was there, and it opened no more.

'How's this?' cried one. 'The gentleman say they can't make anybody hear, and have been trying these two hours.'

'And yet he came home last night,' said another; 'for he spoke to somebody out of that window upstairs.'

They were a little knot of men, and, the window being mentioned, went out into the road to look up at it. This occasioned their observing that the house was still close shut, as the housekeeper had said she had left it on the previous night, and led to a great many suggestions: which terminated in two or three of the boldest getting round to the back, and so entering by a window, while the others remained outside, in impatient expectation.

They looked into all the rooms below: opening the shutters as they went, to admit the fading light: and still finding nobody, and everything quiet and in its place, doubted whether they should go farther. One man, however, remarking that they had not yet been into the garret, and that it was there he had been last seen, they agreed to look there too, and went up softly; for the mystery and silence made them timid.

After they had stood for an instant, on the landing, eyeing each other, he who had proposed their carrying the search so far, turned the handle of the door, and, pushing it open, looked through the chink, and fell back directly.

'It's very odd,' he whispered, 'he's hiding behind the door! Look!'

They pressed forward to see; but one among them thrusting the others aside with a loud exclamation, drew a clasp-knife from his pocket, and dashing into the room, cut down the body.

He had torn a rope from one of the old trunks, and hung himself on an iron hook immediately below the trap-door in the ceiling—in the very place to which the eyes of his son, a lonely, desolate, little creature, had so often been directed in childish terror, fourteen years before.

CHAPTER 63

The Brothers Cheeryble make various Declarations for themselves and others. Tim Linkinwater makes a Declaration for himself

Some weeks had passed, and the first shock of these events had subsided. Madeline had been removed; Frank had been absent; and Nicholas and Kate had begun to try in good earnest to stifle their own regrets, and to live for each other and for their mother—who, poor lady, could in nowise be reconciled to this dull and altered state of affairs—when there came one evening, per favour of Mr Linkinwater, an invitation from the brothers to dinner on the next day but one: comprehending, not only Mrs Nickleby, Kate, and Nicholas, but little Miss La Creevy, who was most particularly mentioned.

'Now, my dears,' said Mrs Nickleby, when they had rendered becoming honour to the bidding, and Tim had taken his departure, 'what does THIS mean?'

'What do YOU mean, mother?' asked Nicholas, smiling.

'I say, my dear,' rejoined that lady, with a face of unfathomable mystery, 'what does this invitation to dinner mean? What is its intention and object?'

'I conclude it means, that on such a day we are to eat and drink in their house, and that its intent and object is to confer pleasure upon us,' said Nicholas.

'And that's all you conclude it is, my dear?'

'I have not yet arrived at anything deeper, mother.'

'Then I'll just tell you one thing,' said Mrs Nickleby, you'll find yourself a little surprised; that's all. You may depend upon it that this means something besides dinner.'

'Tea and supper, perhaps,' suggested Nicholas.

'I wouldn't be absurd, my dear, if I were you,' replied Mrs Nickleby, in a lofty manner, 'because it's not by any means becoming, and doesn't suit you at all. What I mean to say is, that the Mr Cheerybles don't ask us to dinner with all this ceremony for nothing. Never mind; wait and see. You won't believe anything I say, of course. It's much better to wait; a great deal better; it's satisfactory to all parties, and there can be no disputing. All I say is, remember what I say now, and when I say I said so, don't say I didn't.'

With this stipulation, Mrs Nickleby, who was troubled, night and day, with a vision of a hot messenger tearing up to the door to announce that Nicholas had been taken into partnership, quitted that branch of the subject, and entered upon a new one.

'It's a very extraordinary thing,' she said, 'a most extraordinary thing, that they should have invited Miss La Creevy. It quite astonishes me, upon my word it does. Of course it's very pleasant that she should be invited, very pleasant, and I have no doubt that she'll conduct herself extremely well; she always does. It's very gratifying to think that we should have been the means of introducing her into such society, and I'm quite glad of it—quite rejoiced—for she certainly is an exceedingly well-behaved and good-natured little person. I could wish that some friend would mention to her how very badly she has her cap trimmed, and what very preposterous bows those are, but of course that's impossible, and if she likes to make a fright of herself, no doubt she has a perfect right to do so. We never see ourselves—never do, and never did—and I suppose we never shall.'

This moral reflection reminding her of the necessity of being peculiarly smart on the occasion, so as to counterbalance Miss La Creevy, and be herself an effectual set-off and atonement, led Mrs Nickleby into a consultation with her daughter relative to certain ribbons, gloves, and trimmings: which, being a complicated question, and one of paramount importance, soon routed the previous one, and put it to flight.

The great day arriving, the good lady put herself under Kate's hands an hour or so after breakfast, and, dressing by easy stages, completed her toilette in sufficient time to allow of her daughter's making hers, which was very simple, and not very long, though so satisfactory that she had never appeared more charming or looked more lovely. Miss La Creevy, too, arrived with two bandboxes (whereof the bottoms fell out as they were handed from the coach) and something in a newspaper, which a gentleman had sat upon, coming down, and which was obliged to be ironed again, before it was fit for service. At last, everybody was dressed, including Nicholas, who had come home to fetch them, and they went away in a coach sent by the brothers for the purpose: Mrs Nickleby wondering very much what they would have for dinner, and cross-examining Nicholas as to the extent of his discoveries in the morning; whether he had smelt anything cooking at all like turtle, and if not, what he had smelt; and diversifying the conversation with reminiscences of dinners to which she had gone some twenty years ago, concerning which she particularised not only the dishes but the guests, in whom her hearers did not feel a very absorbing interest, as not one of them had ever chanced to hear their names before.

The old butler received them with profound respect and many smiles, and ushered them into the drawing-room, where they were received by the brothers with so much cordiality and kindness that Mrs Nickleby was quite in a flutter, and had scarcely presence of mind enough, even to patronise Miss La Creevy. Kate was still more affected by the reception: for, knowing that the brothers were acquainted with all that had passed between her and Frank, she felt her position a most delicate and trying one, and was trembling on the arm of Nicholas, when Mr Charles took her in his, and led her to another part of the room.

'Have you seen Madeline, my dear,' he said, 'since she left your house?'

'No, sir!' replied Kate. 'Not once.'

'And not heard from her, eh? Not heard from her?'

'I have only had one letter,' rejoined Kate, gently. 'I thought she would not have forgotten me quite so soon.'

'Ah,' said the old man, patting her on the head, and speaking as affectionately as if she had been his favourite child. 'Poor dear! what do you think of this, brother Ned? Madeline has only written to her once, only once, Ned, and she didn't think she would have forgotten her quite so soon, Ned.'

'Oh! sad, sad; very sad!' said Ned.

The brothers interchanged a glance, and looking at Kate for a little time without speaking, shook hands, and nodded as if they were congratulating each other on something very delightful.

'Well, well,' said brother Charles, 'go into that room, my dear—that door yonder—and see if there's not a letter for you from her. I think there's one upon the table. You needn't hurry back, my love, if there is, for we don't dine just yet, and there's plenty of time. Plenty of time.'

Kate retired as she was directed. Brother Charles, having followed her graceful figure with his eyes, turned to Mrs Nickleby, and said:

'We took the liberty of naming one hour before the real dinner-time, ma'am, because we had a little business to speak about, which would occupy the interval. Ned, my dear fellow, will you mention what we agreed upon? Mr Nickleby, sir, have the goodness to follow me.'

Without any further explanation, Mrs Nickleby, Miss La Creevy, and brother Ned, were left alone together, and Nicholas followed brother Charles into his private room; where, to his great astonishment, he encountered Frank, whom he supposed to be abroad.

'Young men,' said Mr Cheeryble, 'shake hands!'

'I need no bidding to do that,' said Nicholas, extending his.

'Nor I,' rejoined Frank, as he clasped it heartily.

The old gentleman thought that two handsomer or finer young fellows could scarcely stand side by side than those on whom he looked with so much pleasure. Suffering his eyes to rest upon them, for a short time in silence, he said, while he seated himself at his desk:

'I wish to see you friends—close and firm friends—and if I thought you otherwise, I should hesitate in what I am about to say. Frank, look here! Mr Nickleby, will you come on the other side?'

The young men stepped up on either hand of brother Charles, who produced a paper from his desk, and unfolded it.

'This,' he said, 'is a copy of the will of Madeline's maternal grandfather, bequeathing her the sum of twelve thousand pounds, payable either upon her coming of age or marrying. It would appear that this gentleman, angry with her (his only relation) because she would not put herself under his protection, and detach herself from the society of her father, in compliance with his repeated overtures, made a will leaving this property (which was all he possessed) to a charitable institution. He would seem to have repented this determination, however, for three weeks afterwards, and in the same month, he executed this. By some fraud, it was abstracted immediately after his decease, and the other—the only will found—was proved and administered. Friendly negotiations, which have only just now terminated, have been proceeding since this instrument came into our hands, and, as there is no doubt of its authenticity, and the witnesses have been discovered (after some trouble), the money has been refunded. Madeline has therefore obtained her right, and is, or will be, when either of the contingencies which I have mentioned has arisen, mistress of this fortune. You understand me?'

Frank replied in the affirmative. Nicholas, who could not trust himself to speak lest his voice should be heard to falter, bowed his head.

'Now, Frank,' said the old gentleman, 'you were the immediate means of recovering this deed. The fortune is but a small one; but we love Madeline; and such as it is, we would rather see you allied to her with that, than to any other girl we know who has three times the money. Will you become a suitor to her for her hand?'

'No, sir. I interested myself in the recovery of that instrument, believing that her hand was already pledged to one who has a thousand times the claims upon her gratitude, and, if I mistake not, upon her heart, that I or any other man can ever urge. In this it seems I judged hastily.'

'As you always, do, sir,' cried brother Charles, utterly forgetting his assumed dignity, 'as you always do. How dare you think, Frank, that we would have you marry for money, when youth, beauty, and every amiable virtue and excellence were to be had for love? How dared you, Frank, go and make love to Mr Nickleby's sister without telling us first what you meant to do, and letting us speak for you?'

'I hardly dared to hope—'

'You hardly dared to hope! Then, so much the greater reason for having our assistance! Mr Nickleby, sir, Frank, although he judged hastily, judged, for once, correctly. Madeline's heart IS occupied. Give me your hand, sir; it is occupied by you, and worthily and naturally. This fortune is destined to be yours, but you have a greater fortune in her, sir, than you would have in money were it forty times told. She chooses you, Mr Nickleby. She chooses as we, her dearest friends, would have her choose. Frank chooses as we would have HIM choose. He should have your sister's little hand, sir, if she had refused it a score of times; ay, he should, and he shall! You acted nobly, not knowing our sentiments, but now you know them, sir, you must do as you are bid. What! You are the children of a worthy gentleman! The time was, sir, when my dear brother Ned and I were two poor simple-hearted boys, wandering, almost barefoot, to seek our fortunes: are we changed in anything but years and worldly circumstances since that time? No, God forbid! Oh, Ned, Ned, Ned, what a happy day this is for you and me! If our poor mother had only lived to see us now, Ned, how proud it would have made her dear heart at last!'

Thus apostrophised, brother Ned, who had entered with Mrs Nickleby, and who had been before unobserved by the young men, darted forward, and fairly hugged brother Charles in his arms.

'Bring in my little Kate,' said the latter, after a short silence. 'Bring her in, Ned. Let me see Kate, let me kiss her. I have a right to do so now; I was very near it when she first came; I have often been very near it. Ah! Did you find the letter, my bird? Did you find Madeline herself, waiting for you and expecting you? Did you find that she had not quite forgotten her friend and nurse and sweet companion? Why, this is almost the best of all!'

'Come, come,' said Ned, 'Frank will be jealous, and we shall have some cutting of throats before dinner.'

'Then let him take her away, Ned, let him take her away. Madeline's in the next room. Let all the lovers get out of the way, and talk among themselves, if they've anything to say. Turn 'em out, Ned, every one!'

Brother Charles began the clearance by leading the blushing girl to the door, and dismissing her with a kiss. Frank was not very slow to follow, and Nicholas had disappeared first of all. So there only remained Mrs Nickleby and Miss La Creevy, who were both sobbing heartily; the two brothers; and Tim Linkinwater, who now came in to shake hands with everybody: his round face all radiant and beaming with smiles.

'Well, Tim Linkinwater, sir,' said brother Charles, who was always spokesman, 'now the young folks are happy, sir.'

'You didn't keep 'em in suspense as long as you said you would, though,' returned Tim, archly. 'Why, Mr Nickleby and Mr Frank were to have been in your room for I don't know how long; and I don't know what you weren't to have told them before you came out with the truth.'

'Now, did you ever know such a villain as this, Ned?' said the old gentleman; 'did you ever know such a villain as Tim Linkinwater? He accusing me of being impatient, and he the very man who has been wearying us morning, noon, and night, and torturing us for leave to go and tell 'em what was in store, before our plans were half complete, or we had arranged a single thing. A treacherous dog!'

'So he is, brother Charles,' returned Ned; 'Tim is a treacherous dog. Tim is not to be trusted. Tim is a wild young fellow. He wants gravity and steadiness; he must sow his wild oats, and then perhaps he'll become in time a respectable member of society.'

This being one of the standing jokes between the old fellows and Tim, they all three laughed very heartily, and might have laughed much longer, but that the brothers, seeing that Mrs Nickleby was labouring to express her feelings, and was really overwhelmed by the happiness of the time, took her between them, and led her from the room under pretence of having to consult her on some most important arrangements.

Now, Tim and Miss La Creevy had met very often, and had always been very chatty and pleasant together—had always been great friends—and consequently it was the most natural thing in the world that Tim, finding that she still sobbed, should endeavour to console her. As Miss La Creevy sat on a large old-fashioned window-seat, where there was ample room for two, it was also natural that Tim should sit down beside her; and as to Tim's being unusually spruce and particular in his attire that day, why it was a high festival and a great occasion, and that was the most natural thing of all.

Tim sat down beside Miss La Creevy, and, crossing one leg over the other so that his foot—he had very comely feet and happened to be wearing the neatest shoes and black silk stockings possible—should come easily within the range of her eye, said in a soothing way:

'Don't cry!'

'I must,' rejoined Miss La Creevy.

'No, don't,' said Tim. 'Please don't; pray don't.'

'I am so happy!' sobbed the little woman.

'Then laugh,' said Tim. 'Do laugh.'

What in the world Tim was doing with his arm, it is impossible to conjecture, but he knocked his elbow against that part of the window which was quite on the other side of Miss La Creevy; and it is clear that it could have no business there.

'Do laugh,' said Tim, 'or I'll cry.'

'Why should you cry?' asked Miss La Creevy, smiling.

'Because I'm happy too,' said Tim. 'We are both happy, and I should like to do as you do.'

Surely, there never was a man who fidgeted as Tim must have done then; for he knocked the window again—almost in the same place—and Miss La Creevy said she was sure he'd break it.

'I knew,' said Tim, 'that you would be pleased with this scene.'

'It was very thoughtful and kind to remember me,' returned Miss La Creevy. 'Nothing could have delighted me half so much.'

Why on earth should Miss La Creevy and Tim Linkinwater have said all this in a whisper? It was no secret. And why should Tim Linkinwater have looked so hard at Miss La Creevy, and why should Miss La Creevy have looked so hard at the ground?

'It's a pleasant thing,' said Tim, 'to people like us, who have passed all our lives in the world alone, to see young folks that we are fond of, brought together with so many years of happiness before them.'

'Ah!' cried the little woman with all her heart, 'that it is!'

'Although,' pursued Tim 'although it makes one feel quite solitary and cast away. Now don't it?'

Miss La Creevy said she didn't know. And why should she say she didn't know? Because she must have known whether it did or not.

'It's almost enough to make us get married after all, isn't it?' said Tim.

'Oh, nonsense!' replied Miss La Creevy, laughing. 'We are too old.'

'Not a bit,' said Tim; 'we are too old to be single. Why shouldn't we both be married, instead of sitting through the long winter evenings by our solitary firesides? Why shouldn't we make one fireside of it, and marry each other?'

'Oh, Mr Linkinwater, you're joking!'

'No, no, I'm not. I'm not indeed,' said Tim. 'I will, if you will. Do, my dear!'

'It would make people laugh so.'

'Let 'em laugh,' cried Tim stoutly; 'we have good tempers I know, and we'll laugh too. Why, what hearty laughs we have had since we've known each other!'

'So we have,' cried' Miss La Creevy—giving way a little, as Tim thought.

'It has been the happiest time in all my life; at least, away from the counting-house and Cheeryble Brothers,' said Tim. 'Do, my dear! Now say you will.'

'No, no, we mustn't think of it,' returned Miss La Creevy. 'What would the brothers say?'

'Why, God bless your soul!' cried Tim, innocently, 'you don't suppose I should think of such a thing without their knowing it! Why they left us here on purpose.'

'I can never look 'em in the face again!' exclaimed Miss La Creevy, faintly.

'Come,' said Tim, 'let's be a comfortable couple. We shall live in the old house here, where I have been for four-and-forty year; we shall go to the old church, where I've been, every Sunday morning, all through that time; we shall have all my old friends about us—Dick, the archway, the pump, the flower-pots, and Mr Frank's children, and Mr Nickleby's children, that we shall seem like grandfather and grandmother to. Let's be a comfortable couple, and take care of each other! And if we should get deaf, or lame, or blind, or bed-ridden, how glad we shall be that we have somebody we are fond of, always to talk to and sit with! Let's be a comfortable couple. Now, do, my dear!'

Five minutes after this honest and straightforward speech, little Miss La Creevy and Tim were talking as pleasantly as if they had been married for a score of years, and had never once quarrelled all the time; and five minutes after that, when Miss La Creevy had bustled out to see if her eyes were red and put her hair to rights, Tim moved with a stately step towards the drawing-room, exclaiming as he went, 'There an't such another woman in all London! I KNOW there an't!'

By this time, the apoplectic butler was nearly in fits, in consequence of the unheard-of postponement of dinner. Nicholas, who had been engaged in a manner in which every reader may imagine for himself or herself, was hurrying downstairs in obedience to his angry summons, when he encountered a new surprise.

On his way down, he overtook, in one of the passages, a stranger genteelly dressed in black, who was also moving towards the dining-room. As he was rather lame, and walked slowly, Nicholas lingered behind, and was following him step by step, wondering who he was, when he suddenly turned round and caught him by both hands.

'Newman Noggs!' cried Nicholas joyfully

'Ah! Newman, your own Newman, your own old faithful Newman! My dear boy, my dear Nick, I give you joy—health, happiness, every blessing! I can't bear it—it's too much, my dear boy—it makes a child of me!'

'Where have you been?' said Nicholas. 'What have you been doing? How often have I inquired for you, and been told that I should hear before long!'

'I know, I know!' returned Newman. 'They wanted all the happiness to come together. I've been helping 'em. I—I—look at me, Nick, look at me!'

'You would never let ME do that,' said Nicholas in a tone of gentle reproach.

'I didn't mind what I was, then. I shouldn't have had the heart to put on gentleman's clothes. They would have reminded me of old times and made me miserable. I am another man now, Nick. My dear boy, I can't speak. Don't say anything to me. Don't think the worse of me for these tears. You don't know what I feel today; you can't, and never will!'

They walked in to dinner arm-in-arm, and sat down side by side.

Never was such a dinner as that, since the world began. There was the superannuated bank clerk, Tim Linkinwater's friend; and there was the chubby old lady, Tim Linkinwater's sister; and there was so much attention from Tim Linkinwater's sister to Miss La Creevy, and there were so many jokes from the superannuated bank clerk, and Tim Linkinwater himself was in such tiptop spirits, and little Miss La Creevy was in such a comical state, that of themselves they would have composed the pleasantest party conceivable. Then, there was Mrs Nickleby, so grand and complacent; Madeline and Kate, so blushing and beautiful; Nicholas and Frank, so devoted and proud; and all four so silently and tremblingly happy; there was Newman so subdued yet so overjoyed, and there were the twin brothers so delighted and interchanging such looks, that the old servant stood transfixed behind his master's chair, and felt his eyes grow dim as they wandered round the table.

When the first novelty of the meeting had worn off, and they began truly to feel how happy they were, the conversation became more general, and the harmony and pleasure if possible increased. The brothers were in a perfect ecstasy; and their insisting on saluting the ladies all round, before they would permit them to retire, gave occasion to the superannuated bank clerk to say so many good things, that he quite outshone himself, and was looked upon as a prodigy of humour.

'Kate, my dear,' said Mrs Nickleby, taking her daughter aside, as soon as they got upstairs, 'you don't really mean to tell me that this is actually true about Miss La Creevy and Mr Linkinwater?'

'Indeed it is, mama.'

'Why, I never heard such a thing in my life!' exclaimed Mrs Nickleby.

'Mr Linkinwater is a most excellent creature,' reasoned Kate, 'and, for his age, quite young still.'

'For HIS age, my dear!' returned Mrs Nickleby, 'yes; nobody says anything against him, except that I think he is the weakest and most foolish man I ever knew. It's HER age I speak of. That he should have gone and offered himself to a woman who must be—ah, half as old again as I am—and that she should have dared to accept him! It don't signify, Kate; I'm disgusted with her!'

Shaking her head very emphatically indeed, Mrs Nickleby swept away; and all the evening, in the midst of the merriment and enjoyment that ensued, and in which with that exception she freely participated, conducted herself towards Miss La Creevy in a stately and distant manner, designed to mark her sense of the impropriety of her conduct, and to signify her extreme and cutting disapprobation of the misdemeanour she had so flagrantly committed.

CHAPTER 64

An old Acquaintance is recognised under melancholy Circumstances, and Dotheboys Hall breaks up for ever

Nicholas was one of those whose joy is incomplete unless it is shared by the friends of adverse and less fortunate days. Surrounded by every fascination of love and hope, his warm heart yearned towards plain John Browdie. He remembered their first meeting with a smile, and their second with a tear; saw poor Smike once again with the bundle on his shoulder trudging patiently by his side; and heard the honest Yorkshireman's rough words of encouragement as he left them on their road to London.

Madeline and he sat down, very many times, jointly to produce a letter which should acquaint John at full length with his altered fortunes, and assure him of his friendship and gratitude. It so happened, however, that the letter could never be written. Although they applied themselves to it with the best intentions in the world, it chanced that they always fell to talking about something else, and when Nicholas tried it by himself, he found it impossible to write one-half of what he wished to say, or to pen anything, indeed, which on reperusal did not appear cold and unsatisfactory compared with what he had in his mind. At last, after going on thus from day to day, and reproaching himself more and more, he resolved (the more readily as Madeline strongly urged him) to make a hasty trip into Yorkshire, and present himself before Mr and Mrs Browdie without a word of notice.

Thus it was that between seven and eight o'clock one evening, he and Kate found themselves in the Saracen's Head booking-office, securing a place to Greta Bridge by the next morning's coach. They had to go westward, to procure some little necessaries for his journey, and, as it was a fine night, they agreed to walk there, and ride home.

The place they had just been in called up so many recollections, and Kate had so many anecdotes of Madeline, and Nicholas so many anecdotes of Frank, and each was so interested in what the other said, and both were so happy and confiding, and had so much to talk about, that it was not until they had plunged for a full half-hour into that labyrinth of streets which lies between Seven Dials and Soho, without emerging into any large thoroughfare, that Nicholas began to think it just possible they might have lost their way.

The possibility was soon converted into a certainty; for, on looking about, and walking first to one end of the street and then to the other, he could find no landmark he could recognise, and was fain to turn back again in quest of some place at which he could seek a direction.

It was a by-street, and there was nobody about, or in the few wretched shops they passed. Making towards a faint gleam of light which streamed across the pavement from a cellar, Nicholas was about to descend two or three steps so as to render himself visible to those below and make his inquiry, when he was arrested by a loud noise of scolding in a woman's voice.

'Oh come away!' said Kate, 'they are quarrelling. You'll be hurt.'

'Wait one instant, Kate. Let us hear if there's anything the matter,' returned her brother. 'Hush!'

'You nasty, idle, vicious, good-for-nothing brute,' cried the woman, stamping on the ground, 'why don't you turn the mangle?'

'So I am, my life and soul!' replied the man's voice. 'I am always turning. I am perpetually turning, like a demd old horse in a demnition mill. My life is one demd horrid grind!'

'Then why don't you go and list for a soldier?' retorted the woman; 'you're welcome to.'

'For a soldier!' cried the man. 'For a soldier! Would his joy and gladness see him in a coarse red coat with a little tail? Would she hear of his being slapped and beat by drummers demnebly? Would she have him fire off real guns, and have his hair cut, and his whiskers shaved, and his eyes turned right and left, and his trousers pipeclayed?'

'Dear Nicholas,' whispered Kate, 'you don't know who that is. It's Mr Mantalini I am confident.'

'Do make sure! Peep at him while I ask the way,' said Nicholas. 'Come down a step or two. Come!'

Drawing her after him, Nicholas crept down the steps and looked into a small boarded cellar. There, amidst clothes-baskets and clothes, stripped up to his shirt-sleeves, but wearing still an old patched pair of pantaloons of superlative make, a once brilliant waistcoat, and moustache and whiskers as of yore, but lacking their lustrous dye—there, endeavouring to mollify the wrath of a buxom female—not the lawful Madame Mantalini, but the proprietress of the concern—and grinding meanwhile as if for very life at the mangle, whose creaking noise, mingled with her shrill tones, appeared almost to deafen him—there was the graceful, elegant, fascinating, and once dashing Mantalini.

'Oh you false traitor!' cried the lady, threatening personal violence on Mr Mantalini's face.

'False! Oh dem! Now my soul, my gentle, captivating, bewitching, and most demnebly enslaving chick-a-biddy, be calm,' said Mr Mantalini, humbly.

'I won't!' screamed the woman. 'I'll tear your eyes out!'

'Oh! What a demd savage lamb!' cried Mr Mantalini.

'You're never to be trusted,' screamed the woman; 'you were out all day yesterday, and gallivanting somewhere I know. You know you were! Isn't it enough that I paid two pound fourteen for you, and took you out of prison and let you live here like a gentleman, but must you go on like this: breaking, my heart besides?'

'I will never break its heart, I will be a good boy, and never do so any more; I will never be naughty again; I beg its little pardon,' said Mr Mantalini, dropping the handle of the mangle, and folding his palms together; 'it is all up with its handsome friend! He has gone to the demnition bow-wows. It will have pity? It will not scratch and claw, but pet and comfort? Oh, demmit!'

Very little affected, to judge from her action, by this tender appeal, the lady was on the point of returning some angry reply, when Nicholas, raising his voice, asked his way to Piccadilly.

Mr Mantalini turned round, caught sight of Kate, and, without another word, leapt at one bound into a bed which stood behind the door, and drew the counterpane over his face: kicking meanwhile convulsively.

'Demmit,' he cried, in a suffocating voice, 'it's little Nickleby! Shut the door, put out the candle, turn me up in the bedstead! Oh, dem, dem, dem!'

The woman looked, first at Nicholas, and then at Mr Mantalini, as if uncertain on whom to visit this extraordinary behaviour; but Mr Mantalini happening by ill-luck to thrust his nose from under the bedclothes, in his anxiety to ascertain whether the visitors were gone, she suddenly, and with a dexterity which could only have been acquired by long practice, flung a pretty heavy clothes-basket at him, with so good an aim that he kicked more violently than before, though without venturing to make any effort to disengage his head, which was quite extinguished. Thinking this a favourable opportunity for departing before any of the torrent of her wrath discharged itself upon him, Nicholas hurried Kate off, and left the unfortunate subject of this unexpected recognition to explain his conduct as he best could.

The next morning he began his journey. It was now cold, winter weather: forcibly recalling to his mind under what circumstances he had first travelled that road, and how many vicissitudes and changes he had since undergone. He was alone inside the greater part of the way, and sometimes, when he had fallen into a doze, and, rousing himself, looked out of the window, and recognised some place which he well remembered as having passed, either on his journey down, or in the long walk back with poor Smike, he could hardly believe but that all which had since happened had been a dream, and that they were still plodding wearily on towards London, with the world before them.

To render these recollections the more vivid, it came on to snow as night set in; and, passing through Stamford and Grantham, and by the little alehouse where he had heard the story of the bold Baron of Grogzwig, everything looked as if he had seen it but yesterday, and not even a flake of the white crust on the roofs had melted away. Encouraging the train of ideas which flocked upon him, he could almost persuade himself that he sat again outside the coach, with Squeers and the boys; that he heard their voices in the air; and that he felt again, but with a mingled sensation of pain and pleasure now, that old sinking of the heart, and longing after home. While he was yet yielding himself up to these fancies he fell asleep, and, dreaming of Madeline, forgot them.

He slept at the inn at Greta Bridge on the night of his arrival, and, rising at a very early hour next morning, walked to the market town, and inquired for John Browdie's house. John lived in the outskirts, now he was a family man; and as everbody knew him, Nicholas had no difficulty in finding a boy who undertook to guide him to his residence.

Dismissing his guide at the gate, and in his impatience not even stopping to admire the thriving look of cottage or garden either, Nicholas made his way to the kitchen door, and knocked lustily with his stick.

'Halloa!' cried a voice inside. 'Wa'et be the matther noo? Be the toon a-fire? Ding, but thou mak'st noise eneaf!'

With these words, John Browdie opened the door himself, and opening his eyes too to their utmost width, cried, as he clapped his hands together, and burst into a hearty roar:

'Ecod, it be the godfeyther, it be the godfeyther! Tilly, here be Misther Nickleby. Gi' us thee hond, mun. Coom awa', coom awa'. In wi 'un, doon beside the fire; tak' a soop o' thot. Dinnot say a word till thou'st droonk it a'! Oop wi' it, mun. Ding! but I'm reeght glod to see thee.'

Adapting his action to his text, John dragged Nicholas into the kitchen, forced him down upon a huge settle beside a blazing fire, poured out from an enormous bottle about a quarter of a pint of spirits, thrust it into his hand, opened his mouth and threw back his head as a sign to him to drink it instantly, and stood with a broad grin of welcome overspreading his great red face like a jolly giant.

'I might ha' knowa'd,' said John, 'that nobody but thou would ha' coom wi' sike a knock as you. Thot was the wa' thou knocked at schoolmeasther's door, eh? Ha, ha, ha! But I say; wa'at be a' this aboot schoolmeasther?'

'You know it then?' said Nicholas.

'They were talking aboot it, doon toon, last neeght,' replied John, 'but neane on 'em seemed quite to un'erstan' it, loike.'

'After various shiftings and delays,' said Nicholas, 'he has been sentenced to be transported for seven years, for being in the unlawful possession of a stolen will; and, after that, he has to suffer the consequence of a conspiracy.'

'Whew!' cried John, 'a conspiracy! Soom'at in the pooder-plot wa'? Eh? Soom'at in the Guy Faux line?'

'No, no, no, a conspiracy connected with his school; I'll explain it presently.'

'Thot's reeght!' said John, 'explain it arter breakfast, not noo, for thou be'est hoongry, and so am I; and Tilly she mun' be at the bottom o' a' explanations, for she says thot's the mutual confidence. Ha, ha, ha! Ecod, it's a room start, is the mutual confidence!'

The entrance of Mrs Browdie, with a smart cap on, and very many apologies for their having been detected in the act of breakfasting in the kitchen, stopped John in his discussion of this grave subject, and hastened the breakfast: which, being composed of vast mounds of toast, new-laid eggs, boiled ham, Yorkshire pie, and other cold substantials (of which heavy relays were constantly appearing from another kitchen under the direction of a very plump servant), was admirably adapted to the cold bleak morning, and received the utmost justice from all parties. At last, it came to a close; and the fire which had been lighted in the best parlour having by this time burnt up, they adjourned thither, to hear what Nicholas had to tell.

Nicholas told them all, and never was there a story which awakened so many emotions in the breasts of two eager listeners. At one time, honest John groaned in sympathy, and at another roared with joy; at one time he vowed to go up to London on purpose to get a sight of the brothers Cheeryble; and, at another, swore that Tim Linkinwater should receive such a ham by coach, and carriage free, as mortal knife had never carved. When Nicholas began to describe Madeline, he sat with his mouth wide open, nudging Mrs Browdie from time to time, and exclaiming under his breath that she must be 'raa'ther a tidy sart,' and when he heard at last that his young friend had come down purposely to communicate his good fortune, and to convey to him all those assurances of friendship which he could not state with sufficient warmth in writing—that the only object of his journey was to share his happiness with them, and to tell them that when he was married they must come up to see him, and that Madeline insisted on it as well as he—John could hold out no longer, but after looking indignantly at his wife, and demanding to know what she was whimpering for, drew his coat sleeve over his eyes and blubbered outright.

'Tell'ee wa'at though,' said John seriously, when a great deal had been said on both sides, 'to return to schoolmeasther. If this news aboot 'un has reached school today, the old 'ooman wean't have a whole boan in her boddy, nor Fanny neither.'

'Oh, John!' cried Mrs Browdie.

'Ah! and Oh, John agean,' replied the Yorkshireman. 'I dinnot know what they lads mightn't do. When it first got aboot that schoolmeasther was in trouble, some feythers and moothers sent and took their young chaps awa'. If them as is left, should know waat's coom tiv'un, there'll be sike a revolution and rebel!—Ding! But I think they'll a' gang daft, and spill bluid like wather!'

In fact, John Browdie's apprehensions were so strong that he determined to ride over to the school without delay, and invited Nicholas to accompany him, which, however, he declined, pleading that his presence might perhaps aggravate the bitterness of their adversity.

'Thot's true!' said John; 'I should ne'er ha' thought o' thot.'

'I must return tomorrow,' said Nicholas, 'but I mean to dine with you today, and if Mrs Browdie can give me a bed—'

'Bed!' cried John, 'I wish thou couldst sleep in fower beds at once. Ecod, thou shouldst have 'em a'. Bide till I coom back; on'y bide till I coom back, and ecod we'll make a day of it.'

Giving his wife a hearty kiss, and Nicholas a no less hearty shake of the hand, John mounted his horse and rode off: leaving Mrs Browdie to apply herself to hospitable preparations, and his young friend to stroll about the neighbourhood, and revisit spots which were rendered familiar to him by many a miserable association.

John cantered away, and arriving at Dotheboys Hall, tied his horse to a gate and made his way to the schoolroom door, which he found locked on the inside. A tremendous noise and riot arose from within, and, applying his eye to a convenient crevice in the wall, he did not remain long in ignorance of its meaning.

The news of Mr Squeers's downfall had reached Dotheboys; that was quite clear. To all appearance, it had very recently become known to the young gentlemen; for the rebellion had just broken out.

It was one of the brimstone-and-treacle mornings, and Mrs Squeers had entered school according to custom with the large bowl and spoon, followed by Miss Squeers and the amiable Wackford: who, during his father's absence, had taken upon him such minor branches of the executive as kicking the pupils with his nailed boots, pulling the hair of some of the smaller boys, pinching the others in aggravating places, and rendering himself, in various similar ways, a great comfort and happiness to his mother. Their entrance, whether by premeditation or a simultaneous impulse, was the signal of revolt. While one detachment rushed to the door and locked it, and another mounted on the desks and forms, the stoutest (and consequently the newest) boy seized the cane, and confronting Mrs Squeers with a stern countenance, snatched off her cap and beaver bonnet, put them on his own head, armed himself with the wooden spoon, and bade her, on pain of death, go down upon her knees and take a dose directly. Before that estimable lady could recover herself, or offer the slightest retaliation, she was forced into a kneeling posture by a crowd of shouting tormentors, and compelled to swallow a spoonful of the odious mixture, rendered more than usually savoury by the immersion in the bowl of Master Wackford's head, whose ducking was intrusted to another rebel. The success of this first achievement prompted the malicious crowd, whose faces were clustered together in every variety of lank and half-starved ugliness, to further acts of outrage. The leader was insisting upon Mrs Squeers repeating her dose, Master Squeers was undergoing another dip in the treacle, and a violent assault had been commenced on Miss Squeers, when John Browdie, bursting open the door with a vigorous kick, rushed to the rescue. The shouts, screams, groans, hoots, and clapping of hands, suddenly ceased, and a dead silence ensued.

'Ye be noice chaps,' said John, looking steadily round. 'What's to do here, thou yoong dogs?'

'Squeers is in prison, and we are going to run away!' cried a score of shrill voices. 'We won't stop, we won't stop!'

'Weel then, dinnot stop,' replied John; 'who waants thee to stop? Roon awa' loike men, but dinnot hurt the women.'

'Hurrah!' cried the shrill voices, more shrilly still.

'Hurrah?' repeated John. 'Weel, hurrah loike men too. Noo then, look out. Hip—hip,—hip—hurrah!'

'Hurrah!' cried the voices.

'Hurrah! Agean;' said John. 'Looder still.'

The boys obeyed.

'Anoother!' said John. 'Dinnot be afeared on it. Let's have a good 'un!'

'Hurrah!'

'Noo then,' said John, 'let's have yan more to end wi', and then coot off as quick as you loike. Tak'a good breath noo—Squeers be in jail—the school's brokken oop—it's a' ower—past and gane—think o' thot, and let it be a hearty 'un! Hurrah!'

Such a cheer arose as the walls of Dotheboys Hall had never echoed before, and were destined never to respond to again. When the sound had died away, the school was empty; and of the busy noisy crowd which had peopled it but five minutes before, not one remained.

'Very well, Mr Browdie!' said Miss Squeers, hot and flushed from the recent encounter, but vixenish to the last; 'you've been and excited our boys to run away. Now see if we don't pay you out for that, sir! If my pa IS unfortunate and trod down by henemies, we're not going to be basely crowed and conquered over by you and 'Tilda.'

'Noa!' replied John bluntly, 'thou bean't. Tak' thy oath o' thot. Think betther o' us, Fanny. I tell 'ee both, that I'm glod the auld man has been caught out at last—dom'd glod—but ye'll sooffer eneaf wi'out any crowin' fra' me, and I be not the mun to crow, nor be Tilly the lass, so I tell 'ee flat. More than thot, I tell 'ee noo, that if thou need'st friends to help thee awa' from this place—dinnot turn up thy nose, Fanny, thou may'st—thou'lt foind Tilly and I wi' a thout o' old times aboot us, ready to lend thee a hond. And when I say thot, dinnot think I be asheamed of waa't I've deane, for I say again, Hurrah! and dom the schoolmeasther. There!'

His parting words concluded, John Browdie strode heavily out, remounted his nag, put him once more into a smart canter, and, carolling lustily forth some fragments of an old song, to which the horse's hoofs rang a merry accompaniment, sped back to his pretty wife and to Nicholas.

For some days afterwards, the neighbouring country was overrun with boys, who, the report went, had been secretly furnished by Mr and Mrs Browdie, not only with a hearty meal of bread and meat, but with sundry shillings and sixpences to help them on their way. To this rumour John always returned a stout denial, which he accompanied, however, with a lurking grin, that rendered the suspicious doubtful, and fully confirmed all previous believers.

There were a few timid young children, who, miserable as they had been, and many as were the tears they had shed in the wretched school, still knew no other home, and had formed for it a sort of attachment, which made them weep when the bolder spirits fled, and cling to it as a refuge. Of these, some were found crying under hedges and in such places, frightened at the solitude. One had a dead bird in a little cage; he had wandered nearly twenty miles, and when his poor favourite died, lost courage, and lay down beside him. Another was discovered in a yard hard by the school, sleeping with a dog, who bit at those who came to remove him, and licked the sleeping child's pale face.

They were taken back, and some other stragglers were recovered, but by degrees they were claimed, or lost again; and, in course of time, Dotheboys Hall and its last breaking-up began to be forgotten by the neighbours, or to be only spoken of as among the things that had been.

CHAPTER 65

Conclusion

When her term of mourning had expired, Madeline gave her hand and fortune to Nicholas; and, on the same day and at the same time, Kate became Mrs Frank Cheeryble. It was expected that Tim Linkinwater and Miss La Creevy would have made a third couple on the occasion, but they declined, and two or three weeks afterwards went out together one morning before breakfast, and, coming back with merry faces, were found to have been quietly married that day.

The money which Nicholas acquired in right of his wife he invested in the firm of Cheeryble Brothers, in which Frank had become a partner. Before many years elapsed, the business began to be carried on in the names of 'Cheeryble and Nickleby,' so that Mrs Nickleby's prophetic anticipations were realised at last.

The twin brothers retired. Who needs to be told that THEY were happy? They were surrounded by happiness of their own creation, and lived but to increase it.

Tim Linkinwater condescended, after much entreaty and brow-beating, to accept a share in the house; but he could never be prevailed upon to suffer the publication of his name as a partner, and always persisted in the punctual and regular discharge of his clerkly duties.

He and his wife lived in the old house, and occupied the very bedchamber in which he had slept for four-and-forty years. As his wife grew older, she became even a more cheerful and light-hearted little creature; and it was a common saying among their friends, that it was impossible to say which looked the happier, Tim as he sat calmly smiling in his elbow-chair on one side of the fire, or his brisk little wife chatting and laughing, and constantly bustling in and out of hers, on the other.

Dick, the blackbird, was removed from the counting-house and promoted to a warm corner in the common sitting-room. Beneath his cage hung two miniatures, of Mrs Linkinwater's execution; one representing herself, and the other Tim; and both smiling very hard at all beholders. Tim's head being powdered like a twelfth cake, and his spectacles copied with great nicety, strangers detected a close resemblance to him at the first glance, and this leading them to suspect that the other must be his wife, and emboldening them to say so without scruple, Mrs Linkinwater grew very proud of these achievements in time, and considered them among the most successful likenesses she had ever painted. Tim had the profoundest faith in them, likewise; for on this, as on all other subjects, they held but one opinion; and if ever there were a 'comfortable couple' in the world, it was Mr and Mrs Linkinwater.

Ralph, having died intestate, and having no relations but those with whom he had lived in such enmity, they would have become in legal course his heirs. But they could not bear the thought of growing rich on money so acquired, and felt as though they could never hope to prosper with it. They made no claim to his wealth; and the riches for which he had toiled all his days, and burdened his soul with so many evil deeds, were swept at last into the coffers of the state, and no man was the better or the happier for them.

Arthur Gride was tried for the unlawful possession of the will, which he had either procured to be stolen, or had dishonestly acquired and retained by other means as bad. By dint of an ingenious counsel, and a legal flaw, he escaped; but only to undergo a worse punishment; for, some years afterwards, his house was broken open in the night by robbers, tempted by the rumours of his great wealth, and he was found murdered in his bed.

Mrs Sliderskew went beyond the seas at nearly the same time as Mr Squeers, and in the course of nature never returned. Brooker died penitent. Sir Mulberry Hawk lived abroad for some years, courted and caressed, and in high repute as a fine dashing fellow. Ultimately, returning to this country, he was thrown into jail for debt, and there perished miserably, as such high spirits generally do.

The first act of Nicholas, when he became a rich and prosperous merchant, was to buy his father's old house. As time crept on, and there came gradually about him a group of lovely children, it was altered and enlarged; but none of the old rooms were ever pulled down, no old tree was ever rooted up, nothing with which there was any association of bygone times was ever removed or changed.

Within a stone's throw was another retreat, enlivened by children's pleasant voices too; and here was Kate, with many new cares and occupations, and many new faces courting her sweet smile (and one so like her own, that to her mother she seemed a child again), the same true gentle creature, the same fond sister, the same in the love of all about her, as in her girlish days.

Mrs Nickleby lived, sometimes with her daughter, and sometimes with her son, accompanying one or other of them to London at those periods when the cares of business obliged both families to reside there, and always preserving a great appearance of dignity, and relating her experiences (especially on points connected with the management and bringing-up of children) with much solemnity and importance. It was a very long time before she could be induced to receive Mrs Linkinwater into favour, and it is even doubtful whether she ever thoroughly forgave her.

There was one grey-haired, quiet, harmless gentleman, who, winter and summer, lived in a little cottage hard by Nicholas's house, and, when he was not there, assumed the superintendence of affairs. His chief pleasure and delight was in the children, with whom he was a child himself, and master of the revels. The little people could do nothing without dear Newman Noggs.

The grass was green above the dead boy's grave, and trodden by feet so small and light, that not a daisy drooped its head beneath their pressure. Through all the spring and summertime, garlands of fresh flowers, wreathed by infant hands, rested on the stone; and, when the children came to change them lest they should wither and be pleasant to him no longer, their eyes filled with tears, and they spoke low and softly of their poor dead cousin.

THE END OF
The Life and Adventures
# of Nicholas Nickleby

NO THOROUGHFARE

THE OVERTURE.

Day of the month and year, November the thirtieth, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-five. London Time by the great clock of Saint Paul’s, ten at night. All the lesser London churches strain their metallic throats. Some, flippantly begin before the heavy bell of the great cathedral; some, tardily begin three, four, half a dozen, strokes behind it; all are in sufficiently near accord, to leave a resonance in the air, as if the winged father who devours his children, had made a sounding sweep with his gigantic scythe in flying over the city.

What is this clock lower than most of the rest, and nearer to the ear, that lags so far behind to-night as to strike into the vibration alone? This is the clock of the Hospital for Foundling Children. Time was, when the Foundlings were received without question in a cradle at the gate. Time is, when inquiries are made respecting them, and they are taken as by favour from the mothers who relinquish all natural knowledge of them and claim to them for evermore.

The moon is at the full, and the night is fair with light clouds. The day has been otherwise than fair, for slush and mud, thickened with the droppings of heavy fog, lie black in the streets. The veiled lady who flutters up and down near the postern-gate of the Hospital for Foundling Children has need to be well shod to-night.

She flutters to and fro, avoiding the stand of hackney-coaches, and often pausing in the shadow of the western end of the great quadrangle wall, with her face turned towards the gate. As above her there is the purity of the moonlit sky, and below her there are the defilements of the pavement, so may she, haply, be divided in her mind between two vistas of reflection or experience. As her footprints crossing and recrossing one another have made a labyrinth in the mire, so may her track in life have involved itself in an intricate and unravellable tangle.

The postern-gate of the Hospital for Foundling Children opens, and a young woman comes out. The lady stands aside, observes closely, sees that the gate is quietly closed again from within, and follows the young woman.

Two or three streets have been traversed in silence before she, following close behind the object of her attention, stretches out her hand and touches her. Then the young woman stops and looks round, startled.

"You touched me last night, and, when I turned my head, you would not speak. Why do you follow me like a silent ghost?"

"It was not," returned the lady, in a low voice, "that I would not speak, but that I could not when I tried."

"What do you want of me? I have never done you any harm?"

"Never."

"Do I know you?"

"No."

"Then what can you want of me?"

"Here are two guineas in this paper. Take my poor little present, and I will tell you."

Into the young woman's face, which is honest and comely, comes a flush as she replies: "There is neither grown person nor child in all the large establishment that I belong to, who hasn't a good word for Sally. I am Sally. Could I be so well thought of, if I was to be bought?"

"I do not mean to buy you; I mean only to reward you very slightly."

Sally firmly, but not ungently, closes and puts back the offering hand. "If there is anything I can do for you, ma'am, that I will not do for its own sake, you are much mistaken in me if you think that I will do it for money. What is it you want?"

"You are one of the nurses or attendants at the Hospital; I saw you leave to-night and last night."

"Yes, I am. I am Sally."

"There is a pleasant patience in your face which makes me believe that very young children would take readily to you."

"God bless 'em! So they do."

The lady lifts her veil, and shows a face no older than the nurse's. A face far more refined and capable than hers, but wild and worn with sorrow.

"I am the miserable mother of a baby lately received under your care. I have a prayer to make to you."

Instinctively respecting the confidence which has drawn aside the veil, Sally—whose ways are all ways of simplicity and spontaneity—replaces it, and begins to cry.

"You will listen to my prayer?" the lady urges. "You will not be deaf to the agonised entreaty of such a broken suppliant as I am?"

"O dear, dear, dear!" cries Sally. "What shall I say, or can say! Don't talk of prayers. Prayers are to be put up to the Good Father of All, and not to nurses and such. And there! I am only to hold my place for half a year longer, till another young woman can be trained up to it. I am going to be married. I shouldn't have been out last night, and I shouldn't have been out to-night, but that my Dick (he is the young man I am going to be married to) lies ill, and I help his mother and sister to watch him. Don't take on so, don't take on so!"

"O good Sally, dear Sally," moans the lady, catching at her dress entreatingly. "As you are hopeful, and I am hopeless; as a fair way in life is before you, which can never, never, be before me; as you can aspire to become a respected wife, and as you can aspire to become a proud mother, as you are a living loving woman, and must die; for GOD'S sake hear my distracted petition!"

"Deary, deary, deary ME!" cries Sally, her desperation culminating in the pronoun, "what am I ever to do? And there! See how you turn my own words back upon me. I tell you I am going to be married, on purpose to make it clearer to you that I am going to leave, and therefore couldn't help you if I would, Poor Thing, and you make it seem to my own self as if I was cruel in going to be married and not helping you. It ain't kind. Now, is it kind, Poor Thing?"

"Sally! Hear me, my dear. My entreaty is for no help in the future. It applies to what is past. It is only to be told in two words."

"There! This is worse and worse," cries Sally, "supposing that I understand what two words you mean."

"You do understand. What are the names they have given my poor baby? I ask no more than that. I have read of the customs of the place. He has been christened in the chapel, and registered by some surname in the book. He was received last Monday evening. What have they called him?"

Down upon her knees in the foul mud of the by-way into which they have strayed—an empty street without a thoroughfare giving on the dark gardens of the Hospital—the lady would drop in her passionate entreaty, but that Sally prevents her.

"Don't! Don't! You make me feel as if I was setting myself up to be good. Let me look in your pretty face again. Put your two hands in mine. Now, promise. You will never ask me anything more than the two words?"

"Never! Never!"

“You will never put them to a bad use, if I say them?”

“Never! Never!”

“Walter Wilding.”

The lady lays her face upon the nurse’s breast, draws her close in her embrace with both arms, murmurs a blessing and the words, “Kiss him for me!” and is gone.

* * * * *

Day of the month and year, the first Sunday in October, one thousand eight hundred and forty-seven. London Time by the great clock of Saint Paul’s, half-past one in the afternoon. The clock of the Hospital for Foundling Children is well up with the Cathedral to-day. Service in the chapel is over, and the Foundling children are at dinner.

There are numerous lookers-on at the dinner, as the custom is. There are two or three governors, whole families from the congregation, smaller groups of both sexes, individual stragglers of various degrees. The bright autumnal sun strikes freshly into the wards; and the heavy-framed windows through which it shines, and the panelled walls on which it strikes, are such windows and such walls as pervade Hogarth’s pictures. The girls’ refectory (including that of the younger children) is the principal attraction. Neat attendants silently glide about the orderly and silent tables; the lookers-on move or stop as the fancy takes them; comments in whispers on face such a number from such a window are not unfrequent; many of the faces are of a character to fix attention. Some of the visitors from the outside public are accustomed visitors. They have established a speaking acquaintance with the occupants of particular seats at the tables, and halt at those points to bend down and say a word or two. It is no disparagement to their kindness that those points are generally points where personal attractions are. The monotony of the long spacious rooms and the double lines of faces is agreeably relieved by these incidents, although so slight.

A veiled lady, who has no companion, goes among the company. It would seem that curiosity and opportunity have never brought her there before. She has the air of being a little troubled by the sight, and, as she goes the length of the tables, it is with a hesitating step and an uneasy manner. At length she comes to the refectory of the boys. They are so much less popular than the girls that it is bare of visitors when she looks in at the doorway.

But just within the doorway, chances to stand, inspecting, an elderly female attendant: some order of matron or housekeeper. To whom the lady addresses natural questions: As, how many boys? At what age are they usually put out in life? Do they often take a fancy to the sea? So, lower and lower in tone until the lady puts the question: “Which is Walter Wilding?”

Attendant’s head shaken. Against the rules.

“You know which is Walter Wilding?”

So keenly does the attendant feel the closeness with which the lady’s eyes examine her face, that she keeps her own eyes fast upon the floor, lest by wandering in the right direction they should betray her.

“I know which is Walter Wilding, but it is not my place, ma’am, to tell names to visitors.”

“But you can show me without telling me.”

The lady’s hand moves quietly to the attendant’s hand. Pause and silence.

“I am going to pass round the tables,” says the lady’s interlocutor, without seeming to address her. “Follow me with your eyes. The boy that I stop at and speak to, will not matter to you. But the boy that I touch, will be Walter Wilding. Say nothing more to me, and move a little away.”

Quickly acting on the hint, the lady passes on into the room, and looks about her. After a few moments, the attendant, in a staid official way, walks down outside the line of tables commencing on her left hand. She goes the whole length of the line, turns, and comes back on the inside. Very slightly glancing in the lady’s direction, she stops, bends forward, and speaks. The boy whom she addresses, lifts his head and replies. Good humouredly and easily, as she listens to what he says, she lays her hand upon the shoulder of the next boy on his right. That the action may be well noted, she keeps her hand on the shoulder while speaking in return, and pats it twice or thrice before moving away. She completes her tour of the tables, touching no one else, and passes out by a door at the opposite end of the long room.

Dinner is done, and the lady, too, walks down outside the line of tables commencing on her left hand, goes the whole length of the line, turns, and comes back on the inside. Other people have strolled in, fortunately for her, and stand sprinkled about. She lifts her veil, and, stopping at the touched boy, asks how old he is?

“I am twelve, ma’am,” he answers, with his bright eyes fixed on hers.

“Are you well and happy?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“May you take these sweetmeats from my hand?”

“If you please to give them to me.”

In stooping low for the purpose, the lady touches the boy’s face with her forehead and with her hair. Then, lowering her veil again, she passes on, and passes out without looking back.

ACT I.

THE CURTAIN RISES

In a court-yard in the City of London, which was No Thoroughfare either for vehicles or foot-passengers; a court-yard diverging from a steep, a slippery, and a winding street connecting Tower Street with the Middlesex shore of the Thames; stood the place of business of Wilding & Co., Wine Merchants. Probably as a jocose acknowledgment of the obstructive character of this main approach, the point nearest to its base at which one could take the river (if so inodorously minded) bore the appellation Break-Neck-Stairs. The court-yard itself had likewise been descriptively entitled in old time, Cripple Corner.

Years before the year one thousand eight hundred and sixty-one, people had left off taking boat at Break-Neck-Stairs, and watermen had ceased to ply there. The slimy little causeway had dropped into the river by a slow process of suicide, and two or three stumps of piles and a rusty iron mooring-ring were all that remained of the departed Break-Neck glories. Sometimes, indeed, a laden coal barge would bump itself into the place, and certain laborious heavers, seemingly mud-engendered, would arise, deliver the cargo in the neighbourhood, shove off, and vanish; but at most times the only commerce of Break-Neck-Stairs arose out of the conveyance of casks and bottles, both full and empty, both to and from the cellars of Wilding & Co., Wine Merchants. Even that commerce was but occasional, and through three-fourths of its rising tides the dirty indecorous drab of a river would come solitarily oozing and lapping at the rusty ring, as if it had heard of the Doge and the Adriatic, and wanted to be married to the great conserver of its filthiness, the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor.

Some two hundred and fifty yards on the right, up the opposite hill (approaching it from the low ground of Break-Neck-Stairs) was Cripple Corner. There was a pump in Cripple Corner, there was a tree in Cripple Corner. All Cripple Corner belonged to Wilding and Co., Wine Merchants. Their cellars burrowed under it, their mansion towered over it. It really had been a mansion in the days when merchants inhabited the City, and had a ceremonious shelter to the doorway without visible support, like the sounding-board over an old pulpit. It had also a number of long narrow strips of window, so disposed in its grave brick front as to render it symmetrically ugly. It had also, on its roof, a cupola with a bell in it.

"When a man at five-and-twenty can put his hat on, and can say 'this hat covers the owner of this property and of the business which is transacted on this property,' I consider, Mr. Bintrey, that, without being boastful, he may be allowed to be deeply thankful. I don't know how it may appear to you, but so it appears to me."

Thus Mr. Walter Wilding to his man of law, in his own counting-house; taking his hat down from its peg to suit the action to the word, and hanging it up again when he had done so, not to overstep the modesty of nature.

An innocent, open-speaking, unused-looking man, Mr. Walter Wilding, with a remarkably pink and white complexion, and a figure much too bulky for so young a man, though of a good stature. With crispy curling brown hair, and amiable bright blue eyes. An extremely communicative man: a man with whom loquacity was the irrestrainable outpouring of contentment and gratitude. Mr. Bintrey, on the other hand, a cautious man, with twinkling beads of eyes in a large overhanging bald head, who inwardly but intensely enjoyed the comicality of openness of speech, or hand, or heart.

"Yes," said Mr. Bintrey. "Yes. Ha, ha!"

A decanter, two wine-glasses, and a plate of biscuits, stood on the desk.

"You like this forty-five year old port-wine?" said Mr. Wilding.

"Like it?" repeated Mr. Bintrey. "Rather, sir!"

"It's from the best corner of our best forty-five year old bin," said Mr. Wilding.

"Thank you, sir," said Mr. Bintrey. "It's most excellent."

He laughed again, as he held up his glass and ogled it, at the highly ludicrous idea of giving away such wine.

"And now," said Wilding, with a childish enjoyment in the discussion of affairs, "I think we have got everything straight, Mr. Bintrey."

"Everything straight," said Bintrey.

"A partner secured—"

"Partner secured," said Bintrey.

"A housekeeper advertised for—"

"Housekeeper advertised for," said Bintrey, "'apply personally at Cripple Corner, Great Tower Street, from ten to twelve'—to-morrow, by the bye."

"My late dear mother's affairs wound up—"

"Wound up," said Bintrey.

"And all charges paid."

"And all charges paid," said Bintrey, with a chuckle: probably occasioned by the droll circumstance that they had been paid without a haggle.

"The mention of my late dear mother," Mr. Wilding continued, his eyes filling with tears and his pocket-handkerchief drying them, "unmans me still, Mr. Bintrey. You know how I loved her; you (her lawyer) know how she loved me. The utmost love of mother and child was cherished between us, and we never experienced one moment's division or unhappiness from the time when she took me under her care. Thirteen years in all! Thirteen years under my late dear mother's care, Mr. Bintrey, and eight of them her confidentially acknowledged son! You know the story, Mr. Bintrey, who but you, sir!" Mr. Wilding sobbed and dried his eyes, without attempt at concealment, during these remarks.

Mr. Bintrey enjoyed his comical port, and said, after rolling it in his mouth: "I know the story."

"My late dear mother, Mr. Bintrey," pursued the wine-merchant, "had been deeply deceived, and had cruelly suffered. But on that subject my late dear mother's lips were for ever sealed. By whom deceived, or under what circumstances, Heaven only knows. My late dear mother never betrayed her betrayer."

"She had made up her mind," said Mr. Bintrey, again turning his wine on his palate, "and she could hold her peace." An amused twinkle in his eyes pretty plainly added—"A devilish deal better than *you* ever will!"

"'Honour,'" said Mr. Wilding, sobbing as he quoted from the Commandments, "'thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land.' When I was in the Foundling, Mr. Bintrey, I was at such a loss how to do it, that I apprehended my days would be short in the land. But I afterwards came to honour my mother deeply, profoundly. And I honour and revere her memory. For seven happy years, Mr. Bintrey," pursued Wilding, still with the same innocent catching in his breath, and the same unabashed tears, "did my excellent mother article me to my predecessors in this business, Pebbleson Nephew. Her affectionate forethought likewise apprenticed me to the Vintners' Company, and made me in time a free

Vintner, and—and—everything else that the best of mothers could desire. When I came of age, she bestowed her inherited share in this business upon me; it was her money that afterwards bought out Pebbleson Nephew, and painted in Wilding and Co.; it was she who left me everything she possessed, but the mourning ring you wear. And yet, Mr. Bintrey," with a fresh burst of honest affection, "she is no more. It is little over half a year since she came into the Corner to read on that door-post with her own eyes, WILDING AND CO., WINE MERCHANTS. And yet she is no more!"

"Sad. But the common lot, Mr. Wilding," observed Bintrey. "At some time or other we must all be no more." He placed the forty-five year old port-wine in the universal condition, with a relishing sigh.

"So now, Mr. Bintrey," pursued Wilding, putting away his pocket-handkerchief, and smoothing his eyelids with his fingers, "now that I can no longer show my love and honour for the dear parent to whom my heart was mysteriously turned by Nature when she first spoke to me, a strange lady, I sitting at our Sunday dinner-table in the Foundling, I can at least show that I am not ashamed of having been a Foundling, and that I, who never knew a father of my own, wish to be a father to all in my employment. Therefore," continued Wilding, becoming enthusiastic in his loquacity, "therefore, I want a thoroughly good housekeeper to undertake this dwelling-house of Wilding and Co., Wine Merchants, Cripple Corner, so that I may restore in it some of the old relations betwixt employer and employed! So that I may live in it on the spot where my money is made! So that I may daily sit at the head of the table at which the people in my employment eat together, and may eat of the same roast and boiled, and drink of the same beer! So that the people in my employment may lodge under the same roof with me! So that we may one and all—I beg your pardon, Mr. Bintrey, but that old singing in my head has suddenly come on, and I shall feel obliged if you will lead me to the pump."

Alarmed by the excessive pinkness of his client, Mr. Bintrey lost not a moment in leading him forth into the court-yard. It was easily done; for the counting-house in which they talked together opened on to it, at one side of the dwelling-house. There the attorney pumped with a will, obedient to a sign from the client, and the client laved his head and face with both hands, and took a hearty drink. After these remedies, he declared himself much better.

"Don't let your good feelings excite you," said Bintrey, as they returned to the counting-house, and Mr. Wilding dried himself on a jack-towel behind an inner door.

"No, no. I won't," he returned, looking out of the towel. "I won't. I have not been confused, have I?"

"Not at all. Perfectly clear."

"Where did I leave off, Mr. Bintrey?"

"Well, you left off—but I wouldn't excite myself, if I was you, by taking it up again just yet."

"I'll take care. I'll take care. The singing in my head came on at where, Mr. Bintrey?"

"At roast, and boiled, and beer," answered the lawyer,—"prompting lodging under the same roof—and one and all—"

"Ah! And one and all singing in the head together—"

"Do you know, I really *would not* let my good feelings excite me, if I was you," hinted the lawyer again, anxiously. "Try some more pump."

"No occasion, no occasion. All right, Mr. Bintrey. And one and all forming a kind of family! You see, Mr. Bintrey, I was not used in my childhood to that sort of individual existence which most individuals have led, more or less, in their childhood. After that time I became absorbed in my late dear mother. Having lost her, I find that I am more fit for being one of a body than one by myself one. To be that, and at the same time to do my duty to those dependent on me, and attach them to me, has a patriarchal and pleasant air about it. I don't know how it may appear to you, Mr Bintrey, but so it appears to me."

"It is not I who am all-important in the case, but you," returned Bintrey. "Consequently, how it may appear to me is of very small importance."

"It appears to me," said Mr. Wilding, in a glow, "hopeful, useful, delightful!"

"Do you know," hinted the lawyer again, "I really would not ex—"

"I am not going to. Then there's Handel."

"There's who?" asked Bintrey.

"Handel, Mozart, Haydn, Kent, Purcell, Doctor Arne, Greene, Mendelssohn. I know the choruses to those anthems by heart. Foundling Chapel Collection. Why shouldn't we learn them together?"

"Who learn them together?" asked the lawyer, rather shortly.

"Employer and employed."

"Ay, ay," returned Bintrey, mollified; as if he had half expected the answer to be, Lawyer and client. "That's another thing."

"Not another thing, Mr. Bintrey! The same thing. A part of the bond among us. We will form a Choir in some quiet church near the Corner here, and, having sung together of a Sunday with a relish, we will come home and take an early dinner together with a relish. The object that I have at heart now is, to get this system well in action without delay, so that my new partner may find it founded when he enters on his partnership."

"All good be with it!" exclaimed Bintrey, rising. "May it prosper! Is Joey Ladle to take a share in Handel, Mozart, Haydn, Kent, Purcell, Doctor Arne, Greene, and Mendelssohn?

"I hope so."

"I wish them all well out of it," returned Bintrey, with much heartiness. "Good-bye, sir."

They shook hands and parted. Then (first knocking with his knuckles for leave) entered to Mr. Wilding from a door of communication between his private counting-house and that in which his clerks sat, the Head Cellarman of the cellars of Wilding and Co., Wine Merchants, and erst Head Cellarman of the cellars of Pebbleson Nephew. The Joey Ladle in question. A slow and ponderous man, of the drayman order of human architecture, dressed in a corrugated suit and bibbed apron, apparently a composite of door-mat and rhinoceros-hide.

"Respecting this same boarding and lodging, Young Master Wilding," said he.

"Yes, Joey?"

"Speaking for myself, Young Master Wilding—and I never did speak and I never do speak for no one else—*I* don't want no boarding nor yet no lodging. But if you wish to board me and to lodge me, take me. I can peck as well as most men. Where I peck ain't so high a object with me as What I peck. Nor even so high a object with me as How Much I peck. Is all to live in the house, Young Master Wilding? The two other cellarmen, the three porters, the two 'prentices, and the odd men?"

"Yes. I hope we shall all be an united family, Joey."

"Ah!" said Joey. "I hope they may be."

"They? Rather say we, Joey."

Joey Ladle shook his held. "Don't look to me to make we on it, Young Master Wilding, not at my time of life and under the circumstances which has formed my disposition. I have said to Pebbleson Nephew many a time, when they have said to me, ‘Put a livelier face upon it, Joey’—I have said to them, ‘Gentlemen, it is all wery well for you that has been accustomed to take your wine into your systems by the conwivial channel of your throttles, to put a lively face upon it; but,’ I says, ‘I have been accustomed to take *my* wine in at the pores of the skin, and, took that way, it acts different. It acts depressing. It’s one thing, gentlemen,’ I says to Pebbleson Nephew, ‘to charge your glasses in a dining-room with a Hip Hurrah and a Jolly Companions Every One, and it’s another thing to be charged yourself, through the pores, in a low dark cellar and a mouldy atmosphere. It makes all the difference betwixt bubbles and wapours,’ I tells Pebbleson Nephew. And so it do. I’ve been a cellarman my life through, with my mind fully given to the business. What’s the consequence? I’m as muddled a man as lives—you won’t find a muddleder man than me—nor yet you won’t find my equal in molloncolly. Sing of Filling the bumper fair, Every drop you sprinkle, O’er the brow of care, Smooths away a wrinkle? Yes. P’raps so. But try filling yourself through the pores, underground, when you don’t want to it!”

“I am sorry to hear this, Joey. I had even thought that you might join a singing-class in the house.”

“Me, sir? No, no, Young Master Wilding, you won’t catch Joey Ladle muddling the Armony. A pecking-machine, sir, is all that I am capable of proving myself, out of my cellars; but that you’re welcome to, if you think it is worth your while to keep such a thing on your premises.”

“I do, Joey.”

“Say no more, sir. The Business’s word is my law. And you’re a going to take Young Master George Vendale partner into the old Business?”

“I am, Joey.”

“More changes, you see! But don’t change the name of the Firm again. Don’t do it, Young Master Wilding. It was bad luck enough to make it Yourself and Co. Better by far have left it Pebbleson Nephew that good luck always stuck to. You should never change luck when it’s good, sir.”

“At all events, I have no intention of changing the name of the House again, Joey.”

“Glad to hear it, and wish you good-day, Young Master Wilding. But you had better by half,” muttered Joey Ladle inaudibly, as he closed the door and shook his head, “have let the name alone from the first. You had better by half have followed the luck instead of crossing it.”

ENTER THE HOUSEKEEPER

The wine merchant sat in his dining-room next morning, to receive the personal applicants for the vacant post in his establishment. It was an old-fashioned wainscoted room; the panels ornamented with festoons of flowers carved in wood; with an oaken floor, a well-worn Turkey carpet, and dark mahogany furniture, all of which had seen service and polish under Pebbleson Nephew. The great sideboard had assisted at many business-dinners given by Pebbleson Nephew to their connection, on the principle of throwing sprats overboard to catch whales; and Pebbleson Nephew’s comprehensive three-sided plate-warmer, made to fit the whole front of the large fireplace, kept watch beneath it over a sarcophagus-shaped cellaret that had in its time held many a dozen of Pebbleson Nephew’s wine. But the little rubicund old bachelor with a pigtail, whose portrait was over the sideboard (and who could easily be identified as decidedly Pebbleson and decidedly not Nephew), had retired into another sarcophagus, and the plate-warmer had grown as cold as he. So, the golden and black griffins that supported the candelabra, with black balls in their mouths at the end of gilded chains, looked as if in their old age they had lost all heart for playing at ball, and were dolefully exhibiting their chains in the Missionary line of inquiry, whether they had not earned emancipation by this time, and were not griffins and brothers.

Such a Columbus of a morning was the summer morning, that it discovered Cripple Corner. The light and warmth pierced in at the open windows, and irradiated the picture of a lady hanging over the chimney-piece, the only other decoration of the walls.

“My mother at five-and-twenty,” said Mr. Wilding to himself, as his eyes enthusiastically followed the light to the portrait’s face, “I hang up here, in order that visitors may admire my mother in the bloom of her youth and beauty. My mother at fifty I hang in the seclusion of my own chamber, as a remembrance sacred to me. O! It’s you, Jarvis!”

These latter words he addressed to a clerk who had tapped at the door, and now looked in.

“Yes, sir. I merely wished to mention that it’s gone ten, sir, and that there are several females in the Counting-house.”

“Dear me!” said the wine-merchant, deepening in the pink of his complexion and whitening in the white, “are there several? So many as several? I had better begin before there are more. I’ll see them one by one, Jarvis, in the order of their arrival.”

Hastily entrenching himself in his easy-chair at the table behind a great inkstand, having first placed a chair on the other side of the table opposite his own seat, Mr. Wilding entered on his task with considerable trepidation.

He ran the gauntlet that must be run on any such occasion. There were the usual species of profoundly unsympathetic women, and the usual species of much too sympathetic women. There were buccaneering widows who came to seize him, and who griped umbrellas under their arms, as if each umbrella were he, and each griper had got him. There were towering maiden ladies who had seen better days, and who came armed with clerical testimonials to their theology, as if he were Saint Peter with his keys. There were gentle maiden ladies who came to marry him. There were professional housekeepers, like non-commissioned officers, who put him through his domestic exercise, instead of submitting themselves to catechism. There were languid invalids, to whom salary was not so much an object as the comforts of a private hospital. There were sensitive creatures who burst into tears on being addressed, and had to be restored with glasses of cold water. There were some respondents who came two together, a highly promising one and a wholly unpromising one: of whom the promising one answered all questions charmingly, until it would at last appear that she was not a candidate at all, but only the friend of the unpromising one, who had glowered in absolute silence and apparent injury.

At last, when the good wine-merchant’s simple heart was failing him, there entered an applicant quite different from all the rest. A woman, perhaps fifty, but looking younger, with a face remarkable for placid cheerfulness, and a manner no less remarkable for its quiet expression of equability of temper. Nothing in her dress could have been changed to her advantage. Nothing in the noiseless self-possession of her manner could have been changed to her advantage. Nothing could have been in better unison with both, than her voice when she answered the question: “What name shall I have the pleasure of noting down?” with the words, “My name is Sarah Goldstraw. Mrs. Goldstraw. My husband has been dead many years, and we had no family.”

Half-a-dozen questions had scarcely extracted as much to the purpose from any one else. The voice dwelt so agreeably on Mr. Wilding’s ear as he made his note, that he was rather long about it. When he looked up again, Mrs. Goldstraw’s glance had naturally gone round the room, and now returned to him from the chimney-piece. Its expression was one of frank readiness to be questioned, and to answer straight.

“You will excuse my asking you a few questions?” said the modest wine-merchant.

“O, surely, sir. Or I should have no business here.”

“Have you filled the station of housekeeper before?”

“Only once. I have lived with the same widow lady for twelve years. Ever since I lost my husband. She was an invalid, and is lately dead: which is the occasion of my now wearing black.”

“I do not doubt that she has left you the best credentials?” said Mr. Wilding.

“I hope I may say, the very best. I thought it would save trouble, sir, if I wrote down the name and address of her representatives, and brought it with me.” Laying a card on the table.

“You singularly remind me, Mrs. Goldstraw,” said Wilding, taking the card beside him, “of a manner and tone of voice that I was once acquainted with. Not of an individual—I feel sure of that, though I cannot recall what it is I have in my mind—but of a general bearing. I ought to add, it was a kind and pleasant one.”

She smiled, as she rejoined: “At least, I am very glad of that, sir.”

“Yes,” said the wine-merchant, thoughtfully repeating his last phrase, with a momentary glance at his future housekeeper, “it was a kind and pleasant one. But that is the most I can make of it. Memory is sometimes like a half-forgotten dream. I don’t know how it may appear to you, Mrs. Goldstraw, but so it appears to me.”

Probably it appeared to Mrs. Goldstraw in a similar light, for she quietly assented to the proposition. Mr. Wilding then offered to put himself at once in communication with the gentlemen named upon the card: a firm of proctors in Doctors’ Commons. To this, Mrs. Goldstraw thankfully assented. Doctors’ Commons not being far off, Mr. Wilding suggested the feasibility of Mrs. Goldstraw’s looking in again, say in three hours’ time.

Mrs. Goldstraw readily undertook to do so. In fine, the result of Mr. Wilding's inquiries being eminently satisfactory, Mrs. Goldstraw was that afternoon engaged (on her own perfectly fair terms) to come to-morrow and set up her rest as housekeeper in Cripple Corner.

THE HOUSEKEEPER SPEAKS

On the next day Mrs. Goldstraw arrived, to enter on her domestic duties.

Having settled herself in her own room, without troubling the servants, and without wasting time, the new housekeeper announced herself as waiting to be favoured with any instructions which her master might wish to give her. The wine-merchant received Mrs. Goldstraw in the dining-room, in which he had seen her on the previous day; and, the usual preliminary civilities having passed on either side, the two sat down to take counsel together on the affairs of the house.

"About the meals, sir?" said Mrs. Goldstraw. "Have I a large, or a small, number to provide for?"

"If I can carry out a certain old-fashioned plan of mine," replied Mr. Wilding, "you will have a large number to provide for. I am a lonely single man, Mrs. Goldstraw; and I hope to live with all the persons in my employment as if they were members of my family. Until that time comes, you will only have me, and the new partner whom I expect immediately, to provide for. What my partner's habits may be, I cannot yet say. But I may describe myself as a man of regular hours, with an invariable appetite that you may depend upon to an ounce."

"About breakfast, sir?" asked Mrs. Goldstraw. "Is there anything particular—?"

She hesitated, and left the sentence unfinished. Her eyes turned slowly away from her master, and looked towards the chimney-piece. If she had been a less excellent and experienced housekeeper, Mr. Wilding might have fancied that her attention was beginning to wander at the very outset of the interview.

"Eight o'clock is my breakfast-hour," he resumed. "It is one of my virtues to be never tired of broiled bacon, and it is one of my vices to be habitually suspicious of the freshness of eggs." Mrs. Goldstraw looked back at him, still a little divided between her master's chimney-piece and her master. "I take tea," Mr. Wilding went on; "and I am perhaps rather nervous and fidgety about drinking it, within a certain time after it is made. If my tea stands too long—"

He hesitated, on his side, and left the sentence unfinished. If he had not been engaged in discussing a subject of such paramount interest to himself as his breakfast, Mrs. Goldstraw might have fancied that his attention was beginning to wander at the very outset of the interview.

"If your tea stands too long, sir—?" said the housekeeper, politely taking up her master's lost thread.

"If my tea stands too long," repeated the wine-merchant mechanically, his mind getting farther and farther away from his breakfast, and his eyes fixing themselves more and more inquiringly on his housekeeper's face. "If my tea—Dear, dear me, Mrs. Goldstraw! what *is* the manner and tone of voice that you remind me of? It strikes me even more strongly to-day, than it did when I saw you yesterday. What can it be?"

"What can it be?" repeated Mrs. Goldstraw.

She said the words, evidently thinking while she spoke them of something else. The wine-merchant, still looking at her inquiringly, observed that her eyes wandered towards the chimney-piece once more. They fixed on the portrait of his mother, which hung there, and looked at it with that slight contraction of the brow which accompanies a scarcely conscious effort of memory. Mr. Wilding remarked.

"My late dear mother, when she was five-and-twenty."

Mrs. Goldstraw thanked him with a movement of the head for being at the pains to explain the picture, and said, with a cleared brow, that it was the portrait of a very beautiful lady.

Mr. Wilding, falling back into his former perplexity, tried once more to recover that lost recollection, associated so closely, and yet so undiscoverably, with his new housekeeper's voice and manner.

"Excuse my asking you a question which has nothing to do with me or my breakfast," he said. "May I inquire if you have ever occupied any other situation than the situation of housekeeper?"

"O yes, sir. I began life as one of the nurses at the Foundling."

"Why, that's it!" cried the wine-merchant, pushing back his chair. "By heaven! Their manner is the manner you remind me of!"

In an astonished look at him, Mrs. Goldstraw changed colour, checked herself, turned her eyes upon the ground, and sat still and silent.

“What is the matter?” asked Mr. Wilding.

“Do I understand that you were in the Foundling, sir?”

“Certainly. I am not ashamed to own it.”

“Under the name you now bear?”

“Under the name of Walter Wilding.”

“And the lady—?” Mrs. Goldstraw stopped short with a look at the portrait which was now unmistakably a look of alarm.

“You mean my mother,” interrupted Mr. Wilding.

“Your—mother,” repeated the housekeeper, a little constrainedly, “removed you from the Foundling? At what age, sir?”

“At between eleven and twelve years old. It’s quite a romantic adventure, Mrs. Goldstraw.”

He told the story of the lady having spoken to him, while he sat at dinner with the other boys in the Foundling, and of all that had followed in his innocently communicative way. “My poor mother could never have discovered me,” he added, “if she had not met with one of the matrons who pitied her. The matron consented to touch the boy whose name was ‘Walter Wilding’ as she went round the dinner-tables—and so my mother discovered me again, after having parted from me as an infant at the Foundling doors.”

At those words Mrs. Goldstraw’s hand, resting on the table, dropped helplessly into her lap. She sat, looking at her new master, with a face that had turned deadly pale, and with eyes that expressed an unutterable dismay.

“What does this mean?” asked the wine-merchant. “Stop!” he cried. “Is there something else in the past time which I ought to associate with you? I remember my mother telling me of another person at the Foundling, to whose kindness she owed a debt of gratitude. When she first parted with me, as an infant, one of the nurses informed her of the name that had been given to me in the institution. You were that nurse?”

“God forgive me, sir—I was that nurse!”

“God forgive you?”

“We had better get back, sir (if I may make so bold as to say so), to my duties in the house,” said Mrs. Goldstraw. “Your breakfast-hour is eight. Do you lunch, or dine, in the middle of the day?”

The excessive pinkness which Mr. Bintrey had noticed in his client’s face began to appear there once more. Mr. Wilding put his hand to his head, and mastered some momentary confusion in that quarter, before he spoke again.

"Mrs. Goldstraw," he said, "you are concealing something from me!"

The housekeeper obstinately repeated, "Please to favour me, sir, by saying whether you lunch, or dine, in the middle of the day?"

"I don't know what I do in the middle of the day. I can't enter into my household affairs, Mrs. Goldstraw, till I know why you regret an act of kindness to my mother, which she always spoke of gratefully to the end of her life. You are not doing me a service by your silence. You are agitating me, you are alarming me, you are bringing on the singing in my head."

His hand went up to his head again, and the pink in his face deepened by a shade or two.

"It's hard, sir, on just entering your service," said the housekeeper, "to say what may cost me the loss of your good will. Please to remember, end how it may, that I only speak because you have insisted on my speaking, and because I see that I am alarming you by my silence. When I told the poor lady, whose portrait you have got there, the name by which her infant was christened in the Foundling, I allowed myself to forget my duty, and dreadful consequences, I am afraid, have followed from it. I'll tell you the truth, as plainly as I can. A few months from the time when I had informed the lady of her baby's name, there came to our institution in the country another lady (a stranger), whose object was to adopt one of our children. She brought the needful permission with her, and after looking at a great many of the children, without being able to make up her mind, she took a sudden fancy to one of the babies—a boy—under my care. Try, pray try, to compose yourself, sir! It's no use disguising it any longer. The child the stranger took away was the child of that lady whose portrait hangs there!"

Mr. Wilding started to his feet. "Impossible!" he cried out, vehemently. "What are you talking about? What absurd story are you telling me now? There's her portrait! Haven't I told you so already? The portrait of my mother!"

"When that unhappy lady removed you from the Foundling, in after years," said Mrs. Goldstraw, gently, "she was the victim, and you were the victim, sir, of a dreadful mistake."

He dropped back into his chair. "The room goes round with me," he said. "My head! my head!" The housekeeper rose in alarm, and opened the windows. Before she could get to the door to call for help, a sudden burst of tears relieved the oppression which had at first almost appeared to threaten his life. He signed entreatingly to Mrs. Goldstraw not to leave him. She waited until the paroxysm of weeping had worn itself out. He raised his head as he recovered himself, and looked at her with the angry unreasoning suspicion of a weak man.

“Mistake?” he said, wildly repeating her last word. “How do I know you are not mistaken yourself?”

“There is no hope that I am mistaken, sir. I will tell you why, when you are better fit to hear it.”

“Now! now!”

The tone in which he spoke warned Mrs. Goldstraw that it would be cruel kindness to let him comfort himself a moment longer with the vain hope that she might be wrong. A few words more would end it, and those few words she determined to speak.

“I have told you,” she said, “that the child of the lady whose portrait hangs there, was adopted in its infancy, and taken away by a stranger. I am as certain of what I say as that I am now sitting here, obliged to distress you, sir, sorely against my will. Please to carry your mind on, now, to about three months after that time. I was then at the Foundling, in London, waiting to take some children to our institution in the country. There was a question that day about naming an infant—a boy—who had just been received. We generally named them out of the Directory. On this occasion, one of the gentlemen who managed the Hospital happened to be looking over the Register. He noticed that the name of the baby who had been adopted (‘Walter Wilding’) was scratched out—for the reason, of course, that the child had been removed for good from our care. ‘Here’s a name to let,’ he said. ‘Give it to the new foundling who has been received to-day.’ The name was given, and the child was christened. You, sir, were that child.”

The wine-merchant’s head dropped on his breast. “I was that child!” he said to himself, trying helplessly to fix the idea in his mind. “I was that child!”

“Not very long after you had been received into the Institution, sir,” pursued Mrs. Goldstraw, “I left my situation there, to be married. If you will remember that, and if you can give your mind to it, you will see for yourself how the mistake happened. Between eleven and twelve years passed before the lady, whom you have believed to be your mother, returned to the Foundling, to find her son, and to remove him to her own home. The lady only knew that her infant had been called ‘Walter Wilding.’ The matron who took pity on her, could but point out the only ‘Walter Wilding’ known in the Institution. I, who might have set the matter right, was far away from the Foundling and all that belonged to it. There was nothing—there was really nothing that could prevent this terrible mistake from taking place. I feel for you—I do indeed, sir! You must think—and with reason—that it was in an evil hour that I came here (innocently enough, I’m sure), to apply for your housekeeper’s place. I feel as if I was to blame—I feel as if I ought to have had more self-command. If I had only been able to keep my face from showing you what that portrait and what your own words put into my mind, you need never, to your dying day, have known what you know now.”

Mr. Wilding looked up suddenly. The inbred honesty of the man rose in protest against the housekeeper’s last words. His mind seemed to steady itself, for the moment, under the shock that had fallen on it.

“Do you mean to say that you would have concealed this from me if you could?” he exclaimed.

“I hope I should always tell the truth, sir, if I was asked,” said Mrs. Goldstraw. “And I know it is better for *me* that I should not have a secret of this sort weighing on my mind. But is it better for *you*? What use can it serve now—?”

“What use? Why, good Lord! if your story is true—”

“Should I have told it, sir, as I am now situated, if it had not been true?”

“I beg your pardon,” said the wine-merchant. “You must make allowance for me. This dreadful discovery is something I can’t realise even yet. We loved each other so dearly—I felt so fondly that I was her son. She died, Mrs. Goldstraw, in my arms—she died blessing me as only a mother *could* have blessed me. And now, after all these years, to be told she was *not* my mother! O me, O me! I don’t know what I am saying!” he cried, as the impulse of self-control under which he had spoken a moment since, flickered, and died out. “It was not this dreadful grief—it was something else that I had it in my mind to speak of. Yes, yes. You surprised me—you wounded me just now. You talked as if you would have hidden this from me, if you could. Don’t talk in that way again. It would have been a crime to have hidden it. You mean well, I know. I don’t want to distress you—you are a kind-hearted woman. But you don’t remember what my position is. She left me all that I possess, in the firm persuasion that I was her son. I am not her son. I have taken the place, I have innocently got the inheritance of another man. He must be found! How do I know he is not at this moment in misery, without bread to eat? He must be found! My only hope of bearing up against the shock that has fallen on me, is the hope of doing something which *she* would have approved. You must know more, Mrs. Goldstraw, than you have told me yet. Who was the stranger who adopted the child? You must have heard the lady's name?"

"I never heard it, sir. I have never seen her, or heard of her, since."

"Did she say nothing when she took the child away? Search your memory. She must have said something."

"Only one thing, sir, that I can remember. It was a miserably bad season, that year; and many of the children were suffering from it. When she took the baby away, the lady said to me, laughing, 'Don't be alarmed about his health. He will be brought up in a better climate than this—I am going to take him to Switzerland.'"

"To Switzerland? What part of Switzerland?"

"She didn't say, sir."

"Only that faint clue!" said Mr. Wilding. "And a quarter of a century has passed since the child was taken away! What am I to do?"

"I hope you won't take offence at my freedom, sir," said Mrs. Goldstraw; "but why should you distress yourself about what is to be done? He may not be alive now, for anything you know. And, if he is alive, it's not likely he can be in any distress. The, lady who adopted him was a bred and born lady—it was easy to see that. And she must have satisfied them at the Foundling that she could provide for the child, or they would never have let her take him away. If I was in your place, sir—please to excuse my saying so—I should comfort myself with remembering that I had loved that poor lady whose portrait you have got there—truly loved her as my mother, and that she had truly loved me as her son. All she gave to you, she gave for the sake of that love. It never altered while she lived; and it won't alter, I'm sure, as long as *you* live. How can you have a better right, sir, to keep what you have got than that?"

Mr. Wilding's immovable honesty saw the fallacy in his housekeeper's point of view at a glance.

"You don't understand me," he said. "It's *because* I loved her that I feel it a duty—a sacred duty—to do justice to her son. If he is a living man, I must find him: for my own sake, as well as for his. I shall break down under this dreadful trial, unless I employ myself—actively, instantly employ myself—in doing what my conscience tells me ought to be done. I must speak to my lawyer; I must set my lawyer at work before I sleep to-night." He approached a tube in the wall of the room, and called down through it to the office below. "Leave me for a little, Mrs. Goldstraw," he resumed; "I shall be more composed, I shall be better able to speak to you later in the day. We shall get on well—I hope we shall get on well together—in spite of what has happened. It isn't your fault; I know it isn't your fault. There! there! shake hands; and—and do the best you can in the house—I can't talk about it now."

The door opened as Mrs. Goldstraw advanced towards it; and Mr. Jarvis appeared.

"Send for Mr. Bintrey," said the wine-merchant. "Say I want to see him directly."

The clerk unconsciously suspended the execution of the order, by announcing "Mr. Vendale," and showing in the new partner in the firm of Wilding and Co.

"Pray excuse me for one moment, George Vendale," said Wilding. "I have a word to say to Jarvis. Send for Mr. Bintrey," he repeated—"send at once."

Mr. Jarvis laid a letter on the table before he left the room.

"From our correspondents at Neuchâtel, I think, sir. The letter has got the Swiss postmark."

NEW CHARACTERS ON THE SCENE

The words, "The Swiss Postmark," following so soon upon the housekeeper's reference to Switzerland, wrought Mr. Wilding's agitation to such a remarkable height, that his new partner could not decently make a pretence of letting it pass unnoticed.

"Wilding," he asked hurriedly, and yet stopping short and glancing around as if for some visible cause of his state of mind: "what is the matter?"

"My good George Vendale," returned the wine-merchant, giving his hand with an appealing look, rather as if he wanted help to get over some obstacle, than as if he gave it in welcome or salutation: “my good George Vendale, so much is the matter, that I shall never be myself again. It is impossible that I can ever be myself again. For, in fact, I am not myself.”

The new partner, a brown-cheeked handsome fellow, of about his own age, with a quick determined eye and an impulsive manner, retorted with natural astonishment: “Not yourself?”

“Not what I supposed myself to be,” said Wilding.

“What, in the name of wonder, *did* you suppose yourself to be that you are not?” was the rejoinder, delivered with a cheerful frankness, inviting confidence from a more reticent man. “I may ask without impertinence, now that we are partners.”

“There again!” cried Wilding, leaning back in his chair, with a lost look at the other. “Partners! I had no right to come into this business. It was never meant for me. My mother never meant it should be mine. I mean, his mother meant it should be his—if I mean anything—or if I am anybody.”

“Come, come,” urged his partner, after a moment’s pause, and taking possession of him with that calm confidence which inspires a strong nature when it honestly desires to aid a weak one. “Whatever has gone wrong, has gone wrong through no fault of yours, I am very sure. I was not in this counting-house with you, under the old *régime*, for three years, to doubt you, Wilding. We were not younger men than we are, together, for that. Let me begin our partnership by being a serviceable partner, and setting right whatever is wrong. Has that letter anything to do with it?”

“Hah!” said Wilding, with his hand to his temple. “There again! My head! I was forgetting the coincidence. The Swiss postmark.”

“At a second glance I see that the letter is unopened, so it is not very likely to have much to do with the matter,” said Vendale, with comforting composure. “Is it for you, or for us?”

“For us,” said Wilding.

“Suppose I open it and read it aloud, to get it out of our way?”

“Thank you, thank you.”

“The letter is only from our champagne-making friends, the house at Neuchâtel. ‘Dear Sir. We are in receipt of yours of the 28th ult., informing us that you have taken your Mr. Vendale into partnership, whereon we beg you to receive the assurance of our felicitations. Permit us to embrace the occasion of specially commanding to you M. Jules Obenreizer.’ Impossible!”

Wilding looked up in quick apprehension, and cried, “Eh?”

“Impossible sort of name,” returned his partner, slightly—“Obenreizer. ‘—Of specially commanding to you M. Jules Obenreizer, of Soho Square, London (north side), henceforth fully accredited as our agent, and who has already had the honour of making the acquaintance of your Mr. Vendale, in his (said M. Obenreizer’s) native country, Switzerland.’ To be sure! pooh pooh, what have I been thinking of! I remember now; ‘when travelling with his niece.’”

“With his—?” Vendale had so slurred the last word, that Wilding had not heard it.

“When travelling with his Niece. Obenreizer’s Niece,” said Vendale, in a somewhat superfluously lucid manner. “Niece of Obenreizer. (I met them in my first Swiss tour, travelled a little with them, and lost them for two years; met them again, my Swiss tour before last, and have lost them ever since.) Obenreizer. Niece of Obenreizer. To be sure! Possible sort of name, after all! ‘M. Obenreizer is in possession of our absolute confidence, and we do not doubt you will esteem his merits.’ Duly signed by the House, ‘Defresnier et Cie.’ Very well. I undertake to see M. Obenreizer presently, and clear him out of the way. That clears the Swiss postmark out of the way. So now, my dear Wilding, tell me what I can clear out of *your* way, and I’ll find a way to clear it.”

More than ready and grateful to be thus taken charge of, the honest wine-merchant wrung his partner’s hand, and, beginning his tale by pathetically declaring himself an Impostor, told it.

“It was on this matter, no doubt, that you were sending for Bintrey when I came in?” said his partner, after reflecting.

“It was.”

“He has experience and a shrewd head; I shall be anxious to know his opinion. It is bold and hazardous in me to give you mine before I know his, but I am not good at holding back. Plainly, then, I do not see these circumstances as you see them. I do not see your position as you see it. As to your being an Impostor, my dear Wilding, that is simply absurd, because no man can be that without being a consenting party to an imposition. Clearly you never were so. As to your enrichment by the lady who believed you to be her son, and whom you were forced to believe, on her showing, to be your mother, consider whether that did not arise out of the personal relations between you. You gradually became much attached to her; she gradually became much attached to you. It was on you, personally you, as I see the case, that she conferred these worldly advantages; it was from her, personally her, that you took them."

"She supposed me," objected Wilding, shaking his head, "to have a natural claim upon her, which I had not."

"I must admit that," replied his partner, "to be true. But if she had made the discovery that you have made, six months before she died, do you think it would have cancelled the years you were together, and the tenderness that each of you had conceived for the other, each on increasing knowledge of the other?"

"What I think," said Wilding, simply but stoutly holding to the bare fact, "can no more change the truth than it can bring down the sky. The truth is that I stand possessed of what was meant for another man."

"He may be dead," said Vendale.

"He may be alive," said Wilding. "And if he is alive, have I not—innocently, I grant you innocently—robbed him of enough? Have I not robbed him of all the happy time that I enjoyed in his stead? Have I not robbed him of the exquisite delight that filled my soul when that dear lady," stretching his hand towards the picture, "told me she was my mother? Have I not robbed him of all the care she lavished on me? Have I not even robbed him of all the devotion and duty that I so proudly gave to her? Therefore it is that I ask myself, George Vendale, and I ask you, where is he? What has become of him?"

"Who can tell!"

"I must try to find out who can tell. I must institute inquiries. I must never desist from prosecuting inquiries. I will live upon the interest of my share—I ought to say his share—in this business, and will lay up the rest for him. When I find him, I may perhaps throw myself upon his generosity; but I will yield up all to him. I will, I swear. As I loved and honoured her," said Wilding, reverently kissing his hand towards the picture, and then covering his eyes with it. "As I loved and honoured her, and have a world of reasons to be grateful to her!" And so broke down again.

His partner rose from the chair he had occupied, and stood beside him with a hand softly laid upon his shoulder. "Walter, I knew you before to-day to be an upright man, with a pure conscience and a fine heart. It is very fortunate for me that I have the privilege to travel on in life so near to so trustworthy a man. I am thankful for it. Use me as your right hand, and rely upon me to the death. Don’t think the worse of me if I protest to you that my uppermost feeling at present is a confused, you may call it an unreasonable, one. I feel far more pity for the lady and for you, because you did not stand in your supposed relations, than I can feel for the unknown man (if he ever became a man), because he was unconsciously displaced. You have done well in sending for Mr. Bintrey. What I think will be a part of his advice, I know is the whole of mine. Do not move a step in this serious matter precipitately. The secret must be kept among us with great strictness, for to part with it lightly would be to invite fraudulent claims, to encourage a host of knaves, to let loose a flood of perjury and plotting. I have no more to say now, Walter, than to remind you that you sold me a share in your business, expressly to save yourself from more work than your present health is fit for, and that I bought it expressly to do work, and mean to do it.”

With these words, and a parting grip of his partner’s shoulder that gave them the best emphasis they could have had, George Vendale betook himself presently to the counting-house, and presently afterwards to the address of M. Jules Obenreizer.

As he turned into Soho Square, and directed his steps towards its north side, a deepened colour shot across his sun-browned face, which Wilding, if he had been a better observer, or had been less occupied with his own trouble, might have noticed when his partner read aloud a certain passage in their Swiss correspondent’s letter, which he had not read so distinctly as the rest.

A curious colony of mountaineers has long been enclosed within that small flat London district of Soho. Swiss watchmakers, Swiss silver-chasers, Swiss jewellers, Swiss importers of Swiss musical boxes and Swiss toys of various kinds, draw close together there. Swiss professors of music, painting, and languages; Swiss artificers in steady work; Swiss couriers, and other Swiss servants chronically out of place; industrious Swiss laundresses and clear-starchers; mysteriously existing Swiss of both sexes; Swiss creditable and Swiss discreditable; Swiss to be trusted by all means, and Swiss to be trusted by no means; these diverse Swiss particles are attracted to a centre in the district of Soho. Shabby Swiss eating-houses, coffee-houses, and lodging-houses, Swiss drinks and dishes, Swiss service for Sundays, and Swiss schools for week-days, are all to be found there. Even the native-born English taverns drive a sort of broken-English trade;

announcing in their windows Swiss whets and drams, and sheltering in their bars Swiss skirmishes of love and animosity on most nights in the year.

When the new partner in Wilding and Co. rang the bell of a door bearing the blunt inscription OBENREIZER on a brass plate—the inner door of a substantial house, whose ground story was devoted to the sale of Swiss clocks—he passed at once into domestic Switzerland. A white-tiled stove for winter-time filled the fireplace of the room into which he was shown, the room's bare floor was laid together in a neat pattern of several ordinary woods, the room had a prevalent air of surface bareness and much scrubbing; and the little square of flowery carpet by the sofa, and the velvet chimney-board with its capacious clock and vases of artificial flowers, contended with that tone, as if, in bringing out the whole effect, a Parisian had adapted a dairy to domestic purposes.

Mimic water was dropping off a mill-wheel under the clock. The visitor had not stood before it, following it with his eyes, a minute, when M. Obenreizer, at his elbow, startled him by saying, in very good English, very slightly clipped: "How do you do? So glad!"

"I beg your pardon. I didn't hear you come in."

"Not at all! Sit, please."

Releasing his visitor's two arms, which he had lightly pinioned at the elbows by way of embrace, M. Obenreizer also sat, remarking, with a smile: "You are well? So glad!" and touching his elbows again.

"I don't know," said Vendale, after exchange of salutations, "whether you may yet have heard of me from your House at Neuchâtel?"

"Ah, yes!"

"In connection with Wilding and Co.?"

"Ah, surely!"

"Is it not odd that I should come to you, in London here, as one of the Firm of Wilding and Co., to pay the Firm's respects?"

"Not at all! What did I always observe when we were on the mountains? We call them vast; but the world is so little. So little is the world, that one cannot keep away from persons. There are so few persons in the world, that they continually cross and re-cross. So very little is the world, that one cannot get rid of a person. Not," touching his elbows again, with an ingratiatory smile, "that one would desire to get rid of you."

"I hope not, M. Obenreizer."

"Please call me, in your country, Mr. I call myself so, for I love your country. If I *could* be English! But I am born. And you? Though descended from so fine a family, you have had the condescension to come into trade? Stop though. Wines? Is it trade in England or profession? Not fine art?"

"Mr. Obenreizer," returned Vendale, somewhat out of countenance, "I was but a silly young fellow, just of age, when I first had the pleasure of travelling with you, and when you and I and Mademoiselle your niece—who is well?"

"Thank you. Who is well."

"—Shared some slight glacier dangers together. If, with a boy's vanity, I rather vaunted my family, I hope I did so as a kind of introduction of myself. It was very weak, and in very bad taste; but perhaps you know our English proverb, 'Live and Learn.'"

"You make too much of it," returned the Swiss. "And what the devil! After all, yours *was* a fine family."

George Vendale's laugh betrayed a little vexation as he rejoined: "Well! I was strongly attached to my parents, and when we first travelled together, Mr. Obenreizer, I was in the first flush of coming into what my father and mother left me. So I hope it may have been, after all, more youthful openness of speech and heart than boastfulness."

"All openness of speech and heart! No boastfulness!" cried Obenreizer. "You tax yourself too heavily. You tax yourself, my faith! as if you was your Government taxing you! Besides, it commenced with me. I remember, that evening in the boat upon the lake, floating among the reflections of the mountains and valleys, the crags and pine woods, which were my earliest remembrance, I drew a word-picture of my sordid childhood. Of our poor hut, by the waterfall which my mother showed to travellers; of the cow-shed where I slept with the cow; of my idiot half-brother always sitting at the door, or limping down the Pass to beg; of my half-sister always spinning, and resting her enormous goître on a great stone; of my being a famished naked little wretch of two or three years, when they were men and women with hard hands to beat me, I, the only child of my father's second marriage—if it even was a marriage. What more natural than for you to compare notes with me, and say, 'We are as one by age; at that same time I sat upon my mother's lap in my father's carriage, rolling through the rich English streets, all luxury surrounding me, all squalid poverty kept far from me. Such is *my* earliest remembrance as opposed to yours!'"

Mr. Obenreizer was a black-haired young man of a dark complexion, through whose swarthy skin no red glow ever shone. When colour would have come into another cheek, a hardly discernible beat would come into his, as if the machinery for bringing up the ardent blood were there, but the machinery were dry. He was robustly made, well proportioned, and had handsome features. Many would have perceived that some surface change in him would have set them more at their ease with him, without being able to define what change. If his lips could have been made much thicker, and his neck much thinner, they would have found their want supplied.

But the great Obenreizer peculiarity was, that a certain nameless film would come over his eyes—apparently by the action of his own will—which would impenetrably veil, not only from those tellers of tales, but from his face at large, every expression save one of attention. It by no means followed that his attention should be wholly given to the person with whom he spoke, or even wholly bestowed on present sounds and objects. Rather, it was a comprehensive watchfulness of everything he had in his own mind, and everything that he knew to be, or suspected to be, in the minds of other men.

At this stage of the conversation, Mr. Obenreizer's film came over him.

"The object of my present visit," said Vendale, "is, I need hardly say, to assure you of the friendliness of Wilding and Co., and of the goodness of your credit with us, and of our desire to be of service to you. We hope shortly to offer you our hospitality. Things are not quite in train with us yet, for my partner, Mr. Wilding, is reorganising the domestic part of our establishment, and is interrupted by some private affairs. You don't know Mr. Wilding, I believe?"

Mr. Obenreizer did not.

"You must come together soon. He will be glad to have made your acquaintance, and I think I may predict that you will be glad to have made his. You have not been long established in London, I suppose, Mr. Obenreizer?"

"It is only now that I have undertaken this agency."

"Mademoiselle your niece—is—not married?"

"Not married."

George Vendale glanced about him, as if for any tokens of her.

"She has been in London?"

"She *is* in London."

"When, and where, might I have the honour of recalling myself to her remembrance?"

Mr. Obenreizer, discarding his film and touching his visitor's elbows as before, said lightly: "Come up-stairs."

Fluttered enough by the suddenness with which the interview he had sought was coming upon him after all, George Vendale followed up-stairs. In a room over the chamber he had just quitted—a room also Swiss-appointed—a young lady sat near one of three windows, working at an embroidery-frame; and an older lady sat with her face turned close to another white-tiled stove (though it was summer, and the stove was not lighted), cleaning gloves. The young lady wore an unusual quantity of fair bright hair, very prettily braided about a rather rounder white forehead than the average English type, and so her face might have been a shade—or say a light—rounder than the average English face, and her figure slightly rounder than the figure of the average English girl at nineteen. A remarkable indication of freedom and grace of limb, in her quiet attitude, and a wonderful purity and freshness of colour in her dimpled face and bright gray eyes, seemed fraught with mountain air. Switzerland too, though the general fashion of her dress was English, peeped out of the fanciful bodice she wore, and lurked in the curious clocked red stocking, and in its little silver-buckled shoe. As to the elder lady, sitting with her feet apart upon the lower brass ledge of the stove, supporting a lap-full of gloves while she cleaned one stretched on her left hand, she was a true Swiss impersonation of another kind; from the breadth of her cushion-like back, and the ponderosity of her respectable legs (if the word be admissible), to the black velvet band tied tightly round her throat for the repression of a rising tendency to goître; or, higher still, to her great copper-coloured gold ear-rings; or, higher still, to her head-dress of black gauze stretched on wire.

"Miss Marguerite," said Obenreizer to the young lady, "do you recollect this gentleman?"

"I think," she answered, rising from her seat, surprised and a little confused: "it is Mr. Vendale?"

"I think it is," said Obenreizer, dryly. "Permit me, Mr. Vendale. Madame Dor."

The elder lady by the stove, with the glove stretched on her left hand, like a glover's sign, half got up, half looked over her broad shoulder, and wholly plumped down again and rubbed away.

"Madame Dor," said Obenreizer, smiling, "is so kind as to keep me free from stain or tear. Madame Dor humours my weakness for being always neat, and devotes her time to removing every one of my specks and spots."

Madame Dor, with the stretched glove in the air, and her eyes closely scrutinizing its palm, discovered a tough spot in Mr. Obenreizer at that instant, and rubbed hard at him. George Vendale took his seat by the embroidery-frame (having first taken the fair right hand that his entrance had checked), and glanced at the gold cross that dipped into the bodice, with something of the devotion of a pilgrim who had reached his shrine at last. Obenreizer stood in the middle of the room with his thumbs in his waistcoat-pockets, and became filmy.

"He was saying down-stairs, Miss Obenreizer," observed Vendale, "that the world is so small a place, that people cannot escape one another. I have found it much too large for me since I saw you last."

"Have you travelled so far, then?" she inquired.

"Not so far, for I have only gone back to Switzerland each year; but I could have wished—and indeed I have wished very often—that the little world did not afford such opportunities for long escapes as it does. If it had been less, I might have found my follow-travellers sooner, you know."

The pretty Marguerite coloured, and very slightly glanced in the direction of Madame Dor.

"You find us at length, Mr. Vendale. Perhaps you may lose us again."

"I trust not. The curious coincidence that has enabled me to find you, encourages me to hope not."

"What is that coincidence, sir, if you please?" A dainty little native touch in this turn of speech, and in its tone, made it perfectly captivating, thought George Vendale, when again he noticed an instantaneous glance towards Madame Dor. A caution seemed to be conveyed in it, rapid flash though it was; so he quietly took heed of Madame Dor from that time forth.

"It is that I happen to have become a partner in a House of business in London, to which Mr. Obenreizer happens this very day to be expressly recommended: and that, too, by another house of business in Switzerland, in which (as it turns out) we both have a commercial interest. He has not told you?"

"Ah!" cried Obenreizer, striking in, filmless. "No. I had not told Miss Marguerite. The world is so small and so monotonous that a surprise is worth having in such a little jog-trot place. It is as he tells you, Miss Marguerite. He, of so fine a family, and so proudly bred, has condescended to trade. To trade! Like us poor peasants who have risen from ditches!"

A cloud crept over the fair brow, and she cast down her eyes.

"Why, it is good for trade!" pursued Obenreizer, enthusiastically. "It ennobles trade! It is the misfortune of trade, it is its vulgarity, that any low people—for example, we poor peasants—may take to it and climb by it. See you, my dear Vendale!" He spoke with great energy. "The father of Miss Marguerite, my eldest half-brother, more than two times your age or mine, if living now, wandered without shoes, almost without rags, from that wretched Pass—wandered—wandered—got to be fed with the mules and dogs at an Inn in the main valley far away—got to be Boy there—got to be Ostler—got to be Waiter—got to be Cook—got to be Landlord. As Landlord, he took me (could he take the idiot beggar his brother, or the spinning monstrosity his sister?) to put as pupil to the famous watchmaker, his neighbour and friend. His wife dies when Miss Marguerite is born. What is his will, and what are his words to me, when he dies, she being between girl and woman? 'All for Marguerite, except so much by the year for you. You are young, but I make her your ward, for you were of the obscurest and the poorest peasantry, and so was I, and so was her mother; we were abject peasants all, and you will remember it.' The thing is equally true of most of my countrymen, now in trade in this your London quarter of Soho. Peasants once; low-born drudging Swiss Peasants. Then how good and great for trade:" here, from having been warm, he became playfully jubilant, and touched the young wine-merchant's elbows again with his light embrace: "to be exalted by gentlemen."

"I do not think so," said Marguerite, with a flushed cheek, and a look away from the visitor, that was almost defiant. "I think it is as much exalted by us peasants."

"Fie, fie, Miss Marguerite," said Obenreizer. "You speak in proud England."

"I speak in proud earnest," she answered, quietly resuming her work, "and I am not English, but a Swiss peasant's daughter."

There was a dismissal of the subject in her words, which Vendale could not contend against. He only said in an earnest manner, "I most heartily agree with you, Miss Obenreizer, and I have already said so, as Mr. Obenreizer will bear witness," which he by no means did, "in this house."

Now, Vendale's eyes were quick eyes, and sharply watching Madame Dor by times, noted something in the broad back view of that lady. There was considerable pantomimic expression in her glove-cleaning. It had been very softly done when he spoke with Marguerite, or it had altogether stopped, like the action of a listener. When Obenreizer's peasant-speech came to an end, she rubbed most vigorously, as if applauding it. And once or twice, as the glove (which she always held before her a little above her face) turned in the air, or as this finger went down, or that went up, he even fancied that it made some telegraphic communication to Obenreizer: whose back was certainly never turned upon it, though he did not seem at all to heed it.

Vendale observed too, that in Marguerite's dismissal of the subject twice forced upon him to his misrepresentation, there was an indignant treatment of her guardian which she tried to cheek: as though she would have flamed out against him, but for the influence of fear. He also observed—though this was not much—that he never advanced within the distance of her at which he first placed himself: as though there were limits fixed between them. Neither had he ever spoken of her without the prefix "Miss," though whenever he uttered it, it was with the faintest trace of an air of mockery. And now it occurred to Vendale for the first time that something curious in the man, which he had never before been able to define, was definable as a certain subtle essence of mockery that eluded touch or analysis. He felt convinced that Marguerite was in some sort a prisoner as to her freewill—though she held her own against those two combined, by the force of her character, which was nevertheless inadequate to her release. To feel convinced of this, was not to feel less disposed to love her than he had always been. In a word, he was desperately in love with her, and thoroughly determined to pursue the opportunity which had opened at last.

For the present, he merely touched upon the pleasure that Wilding and Co. would soon have in entreating Miss Obenreizer to honour their establishment with her presence—a curious old place, though a bachelor house withal—and so did not protract his visit beyond such a visit's ordinary length. Going down-stairs, conducted by his host, he found the Obenreizer counting-house at the back of the entrance-hall, and several shabby men in outlandish garments hanging about, whom Obenreizer put aside that he might pass, with a few words in *patois*.

"Countrymen," he explained, as he attended Vendale to the door. "Poor compatriots. Grateful and attached, like dogs! Good-bye. To meet again. So glad!"

Two more light touches on his elbows dismissed him into the street.

Sweet Marguerite at her frame, and Madame Dor's broad back at her telegraph, floated before him to Cripple Corner. On his arrival there, Wilding was closeted with Bintrey. The cellar doors happening to be open, Vendale lighted a candle in a cleft stick, and went down for a cellarous stroll. Graceful Marguerite floated before him faithfully, but Madame Dor's broad back remained outside.

The vaults were very spacious, and very old. There had been a stone crypt down there, when bygones were not bygones; some said, part of a monkish refectory; some said, of a chapel; some said, of a Pagan temple. It was all one now. Let who would make what he liked of a crumbled pillar and a broken arch or so. Old Time had made what *he* liked of it, and was quite indifferent to contradiction.

The close air, the musty smell, and the thunderous rumbling in the streets above, as being, out of the routine of ordinary life, went well enough with the picture of pretty Marguerite holding her own against those two. So Vendale went on until, at a turning in the vaults, he saw a light like the light he carried.

"O! You are here, are you, Joey?"

"Oughtn't it rather to go, 'O! *You're* here, are you, Master George?' For it's my business to be here. But it ain't yourn."

"Don't grumble, Joey."

"O! *I* don't grumble," returned the Cellarman. "If anything grumbles, it's what I've took in through the pores; it ain't me. Have a care as something in you don't begin a grumbling, Master George. Stop here long enough for the wapours to work, and they'll be at it."

His present occupation consisted of poking his head into the bins, making measurements and mental calculations, and entering them in a rhinoceros-hide-looking note-book, like a piece of himself.

"They'll be at it," he resumed, laying the wooden rod that he measured with across two casks, entering his last calculation, and straightening his back, "trust 'em! And so you've regularly come into the business, Master George?"

"Regularly. I hope you don't object, Joey?"

"*I* don't, bless you. But Wapours objects that you're too young. You're both on you too young."

"We shall got over that objection day by day, Joey."

"Ay, Master George; but I shall day by day get over the objection that I'm too old, and so I shan't be capable of seeing much improvement in you."

The retort so tickled Joey Ladle that he grunted forth a laugh and delivered it again, grunting forth another laugh after the second edition of "improvement in you."

"But what's no laughing matter, Master George," he resumed, straightening his back once more, "is, that young Master Wilding has gone and changed the luck. Mark my words. He has changed the luck, and he'll find it out. *I* ain't been down here all my life for nothing! *I* know by what I notices down here, when it's a-going to rain, when it's a-going to hold up, when it's a-going to blow, when it's a-going to be calm. *I* know, by what I notices down here, when the luck's changed, quite as well."

"Has this growth on the roof anything to do with your divination?" asked Vendale, holding his light towards a gloomy ragged growth of dark fungus, pendent from the arches with a very disagreeable and repellent effect. "We are famous for this growth in this vault, aren't we?"

"We are Master George," replied Joey Ladle, moving a step or two away, "and if you'll be advised by me, you'll let it alone."

Taking up the rod just now laid across the two casks, and faintly moving the languid fungus with it, Vendale asked, "Ay, indeed? Why so?"

"Why, not so much because it rises from the casks of wine, and may leave you to judge what sort of stuff a Cellarman takes into himself when he walks in the same all the days of his life, nor yet so much because at a stage of its growth it's maggots, and you'll fetch 'em down upon you," returned Joey Ladle, still keeping away, "as for another reason, Master George."

"What other reason?"

"(I wouldn't keep on touchin' it, if I was you, sir.) I'll tell you if you'll come out of the place. First, take a look at its colour, Master George."

"I am doing so."

"Done, sir. Now, come out of the place."

He moved away with his light, and Vendale followed with his. When Vendale came up with him, and they were going back together, Vendale, eyeing him as they walked through the arches, said: “Well, Joey? The colour.”

“Is it like clotted blood, Master George?”

“Like enough, perhaps.”

“More than enough, I think,” muttered Joey Ladle, shaking his head solemnly.

“Well, say it is like; say it is exactly like. What then?”

“Master George, they do say—”

“Who?”

“How should I know who?” rejoined the Cellarman, apparently much exasperated by the unreasonable nature of the question. “Them! Them as says pretty well everything, you know. How should I know who They are, if you don’t?”

“True. Go on.”

“They do say that the man that gets by any accident a piece of that dark growth right upon his breast, will, for sure and certain, die by murder.”

As Vendale laughingly stopped to meet the Cellarman’s eyes, which he had fastened on his light while dreamily saying those words, he suddenly became conscious of being struck upon his own breast by a heavy hand. Instantly following with his eyes the action of the hand that struck him—which was his companion’s—he saw that it had beaten off his breast a web or clot of the fungus even then floating to the ground.

For a moment he turned upon the Cellarman almost as scared a look as the Cellarman turned upon him. But in another moment they had reached the daylight at the foot of the cellar-steps, and before he cheerfully sprang up them, he blew out his candle and the superstition together.

EXIT WILDING

On the morning of the next day, Wilding went out alone, after leaving a message with his clerk. “If Mr. Vendale should ask for me,” he said, “or if Mr. Bintrey should call, tell them I am gone to the Foundling.” All that his partner had said to him, all that his lawyer, following on the same side, could urge, had left him persisting unshaken in his own point of view. To find the lost man, whose place he had usurped, was now the paramount interest of his life, and to inquire at the Foundling was plainly to take the first step in the direction of discovery. To the Foundling, accordingly, the wine-merchant now went.

The once familiar aspect of the building was altered to him, as the look of the portrait over the chimney-piece was altered to him. His one dearest association with the place which had sheltered his childhood had been broken away from it for ever. A strange reluctance possessed him, when he stated his business at the door. His heart ached as he sat alone in the waiting-room while the Treasurer of the institution was being sent for to see him. When the interview began, it was only by a painful effort that he could compose himself sufficiently to mention the nature of his errand.

The Treasurer listened with a face which promised all needful attention, and promised nothing more.

"We are obliged to be cautious," he said, when it came to his turn to speak, "about all inquiries which are made by strangers."

"You can hardly consider me a stranger," answered Wilding, simply. "I was one of your poor lost children here, in the bygone time."

The Treasurer politely rejoined that this circumstance inspired him with a special interest in his visitor. But he pressed, nevertheless for that visitor's motive in making his inquiry. Without further preface, Wilding told him his motive, suppressing nothing. The Treasurer rose, and led the way into the room in which the registers of the institution were kept. "All the information which our books can give is heartily at your service," he said. "After the time that has elapsed, I am afraid it is the only information we have to offer you."

The books were consulted, and the entry was found expressed as follows:

"3d March, 1836. Adopted, and removed from the Foundling Hospital, a male infant, named Walter Wilding. Name and condition of the person adopting the child—Mrs. Jane Ann Miller, widow. Address—Lime-Tree Lodge, Groombridge Wells. References—the Reverend John Harker, Groombridge Wells; and Messrs. Giles, Jeremie, and Giles, bankers, Lombard Street."

"Is that all?" asked the wine-merchant. "Had you no after-communication with Mrs. Miller?"

"None—or some reference to it must have appeared in this book."

"May I take a copy of the entry?"

"Certainly! You are a little agitated. Let me make a copy for you."

"My only chance, I suppose," said Wilding, looking sadly at the copy, "is to inquire at Mrs. Miller's residence, and to try if her references can help me?"

"That is the only chance I see at present," answered the Treasurer. "I heartily wish I could have been of some further assistance to you."

With those farewell words to comfort him Wilding set forth on the journey of investigation which began from the Foundling doors. The first stage to make for, was plainly the house of business of the bankers in Lombard Street. Two of the partners in the firm were inaccessible to chance-visitors when he asked for them. The third, after raising certain inevitable difficulties, consented to let a clerk examine the ledger marked with the initial letter "M." The account of Mrs. Miller, widow, of Groombridge Wells, was found. Two long lines, in faded ink, were drawn across it; and at the bottom of the page there appeared this note: "Account closed, September 30th, 1837."

So the first stage of the journey was reached—and so it ended in No Thoroughfare! After sending a note to Cripple Corner to inform his partner that his absence might be prolonged for some hours, Wilding took his place in the train, and started for the second stage on the journey—Mrs. Miller's residence at Groombridge Wells.

Mothers and children travelled with him; mothers and children met each other at the station; mothers and children were in the shops when he entered them to inquire for Lime-Tree Lodge. Everywhere, the nearest and dearest of human relations showed itself happily in the happy light of day. Everywhere, he was reminded of the treasured delusion from which he had been awakened so cruelly—of the lost memory which had passed from him like a reflection from a glass.

Inquiring here, inquiring there, he could hear of no such place as Lime-Tree Lodge. Passing a house-agent's office, he went in wearily, and put the question for the last time. The house-agent pointed across the street to a dreary mansion of many windows, which might have been a manufactory, but which was an hotel. "That's where Lime-Tree Lodge stood, sir," said the man, "ten years ago."

The second stage reached, and No Thoroughfare again!

But one chance was left. The clerical reference, Mr. Harker, still remained to be found. Customers coming in at the moment to occupy the house-agent's attention, Wilding went down the street, and entering a bookseller's shop, asked if he could be informed of the Reverend John Harker's present address.

The bookseller looked unaffectedly shocked and astonished, and made no answer.

Wilding repeated his question.

The bookseller took up from his counter a prim little volume in a binding of sober gray. He handed it to his visitor, open at the title-page. Wilding read:

"The martyrdom of the Reverend John Harker in New Zealand. Related by a former member of his flock."

Wilding put the book down on the counter. "I beg your pardon," he said thinking a little, perhaps, of his own present martyrdom while he spoke. The silent bookseller acknowledged the apology by a bow. Wilding went out.

Third and last stage, and No Thoroughfare for the third and last time.

There was nothing more to be done; there was absolutely no choice but to go back to London, defeated at all points. From time to time on the return journey, the wine-merchant looked at his copy of the entry in the Foundling Register. There is one among the many forms of despair—perhaps the most pitiable of all—which persists in disguising itself as Hope. Wilding checked himself in the act of throwing the useless morsel of paper out of the carriage window. "It may lead to something yet," he thought. "While I live, I won't part with it. When I die, my executors shall find it sealed up with my will."

Now, the mention of his will set the good wine-merchant on a new track of thought, without diverting his mind from its engrossing subject. He must make his will immediately.

The application of the phrase No Thoroughfare to the case had originated with Mr. Bintrey. In their first long conference following the discovery, that sagacious personage had a hundred times repeated, with an obstructive shake of the head, "No Thoroughfare, Sir, No Thoroughfare. My belief is that there is no way out of this at this time of day, and my advice is, make yourself comfortable where you are."

In the course of the protracted consultation, a magnum of the forty-five year old port-wine had been produced for the wetting of Mr. Bintrey's legal whistle; but the more clearly he saw his way through the wine, the more emphatically he did not see his way through the case; repeating as often as he set his glass down empty. "Mr. Wilding, No Thoroughfare. Rest and be thankful."

It is certain that the honest wine-merchant's anxiety to make a will originated in profound conscientiousness; though it is possible (and quite consistent with his rectitude) that he may unconsciously have derived some feeling of relief from the prospect of delegating his own difficulty to two other men who were to come after him. Be that as it may, he pursued his new track of thought with great ardour, and lost no time in begging George Vendale and Mr. Bintrey to meet him in Cripple Corner and share his confidence.

"Being all three assembled with closed doors," said Mr. Bintrey, addressing the new partner on the occasion, "I wish to observe, before our friend (and my client) entrusts us with his further views, that I have endorsed what I understand from him to have been your advice, Mr. Vendale, and what would be the advice of every sensible man. I have told him that he positively must keep his secret. I have spoken with Mrs. Goldstraw, both in his presence and in his absence; and if anybody is to be trusted (which is a very large IF), I think she is to be trusted to that extent. I have pointed out to our friend (and my client), that to set on foot random inquiries would not only be to raise the Devil, in the likeness of all the swindlers in the kingdom, but would also be to waste the estate. Now, you see, Mr. Vendale, our friend (and my client) does not desire to waste the estate, but, on the contrary, desires to husband it for what he considers—but I can't say I do—the rightful owner, if such rightful owner should ever be found. I am very much mistaken if he ever will be, but never mind that. Mr. Wilding and I are, at least, agreed that the estate is not to be wasted. Now, I have yielded to Mr. Wilding's desire to keep an advertisement at intervals flowing through the newspapers, cautiously inviting any person who may know anything about that adopted infant, taken from the Foundling Hospital, to come to my office; and I have pledged myself that such advertisement shall regularly appear. I have gathered from our friend (and my client) that I meet you here to-day to take his instructions, not to give him advice. I am prepared to receive his instructions, and to respect his wishes; but you will please observe that this does not imply my approval of either as a matter of professional opinion."

Thus Mr. Bintrey; talking quite is much *at* Wilding as *to* Vendale. And yet, in spite of his care for his client, he was so amused by his client's Quixotic conduct, as to eye him from time to time with twinkling eyes, in the light of a highly comical curiosity.

"Nothing," observed Wilding, "can be clearer. I only wish my head were as clear as yours, Mr. Bintrey."

"If you feel that singing in it coming on," hinted the lawyer, with an alarmed glance, "put it off.—I mean the interview."

"Not at all, I thank you," said Wilding. "What was I going to—"

"Don't excite yourself, Mr. Wilding," urged the lawyer.

"No; I *wasn't* going to," said the wine-merchant. "Mr. Bintrey and George Vendale, would you have any hesitation or objection to become my joint trustees and executors, or can you at once consent?"

"*I* consent," replied George Vendale, readily.

"*I* consent," said Bintrey, not so readily.

"Thank you both. Mr. Bintrey, my instructions for my last will and testament are short and plain. Perhaps you will now have the goodness to take them down. I leave the whole of my real and personal estate, without any exception or reservation whatsoever, to you two, my joint trustees and executors, in trust to pay over the whole to the true Walter Wilding, if he shall be found and identified within two years after the day of my death. Failing that, in trust to you two to pay over the whole as a benefaction and legacy to the Foundling Hospital."

"Those are all your instructions, are they, Mr. Wilding?" demanded Bintrey, after a blank silence, during which nobody had looked at anybody.

"The whole."

"And as to those instructions, you have absolutely made up your mind, Mr. Wilding?"

"Absolutely, decidedly, finally."

"It only remains," said the lawyer, with one shrug of his shoulders, "to get them into technical and binding form, and to execute and attest. Now, does that press? Is there any hurry about it? You are not going to die yet, sir."

"Mr. Bintrey," answered Wilding, gravely, "when I am going to die is within other knowledge than yours or mine. I shall be glad to have this matter off my mind, if you please."

"We are lawyer and client again," rejoined Bintrey, who, for the nonce, had become almost sympathetic. "If this day week—here, at the same hour—will suit Mr. Vendale and yourself, I will enter in my Diary that I attend you accordingly."

The appointment was made, and in due sequence, kept. The will was formally signed, sealed, delivered, and witnessed, and was carried off by Mr. Bintrey for safe storage among the papers of his clients, ranged in their respective iron boxes, with their respective owners' names outside, on iron tiers in his consulting-room, as if that legal sanctuary were a condensed Family Vault of Clients.

With more heart than he had lately had for former subjects of interest, Wilding then set about completing his patriarchal establishment, being much assisted not only by Mrs. Goldstraw but by Vendale too: who, perhaps, had in his mind the giving of an Obenreizer dinner as soon as possible. Anyhow, the establishment being reported in sound working order, the Obenreizers, Guardian and Ward, were asked to dinner, and Madame Dor was included in the invitation. If Vendale had been over head and ears in love before—a phrase not to be taken as implying the faintest doubt about it—this dinner plunged him down in love ten thousand fathoms deep. Yet, for the life of him, he could not get one word alone with charming Marguerite. So surely as a blessed moment seemed to come, Obenreizer, in his filmy state, would stand at Vendale's elbow, or the broad back of Madame Dor would appear before his eyes. That speechless matron was never seen in a front view, from the moment of her arrival to that of her departure—except at dinner. And from the instant of her retirement to the drawing-room, after a hearty participation in that meal, she turned her face to the wall again.

Yet, through four or five delightful though distracting hours, Marguerite was to be seen, Marguerite was to be heard, Marguerite was to be occasionally touched. When they made the round of the old dark cellars, Vendale led her by the hand; when she sang to him in the lighted room at night, Vendale, standing by her, held her relinquished gloves, and would have bartered against them every drop of the forty-five year old, though it had been forty-five times forty-five years old, and its nett price forty-five times forty-five pounds per dozen. And still, when she was gone, and a great gap of an extinguisher was clapped on Cripple Corner, he tormented himself by wondering, Did she think that he admired her! Did she think that he adored her! Did she suspect that she had won him, heart and soul! Did she care to think at all about it! And so, Did she and Didn’t she, up and down the gamut, and above the line and below the line, dear, dear! Poor restless heart of humanity! To think that the men who were mummies thousands of years ago, did the same, and ever found the secret how to be quiet after it!

“What do you think, George,” Wilding asked him next day, “of Mr. Obenreizer? (I won’t ask you what you think of Miss Obenreizer.)”

“I don’t know,” said Vendale, “and I never did know, what to think of him.”

“He is well informed and clever,” said Wilding.

“Certainly clever.”

“A good musician.” (He had played very well, and sung very well, overnight.)

“Unquestionably a good musician.”

“And talks well.”

“Yes,” said George Vendale, ruminating, “and talks well. Do you know, Wilding, it oddly occurs to me, as I think about him, that he doesn’t keep silence well!”

“How do you mean? He is not obtrusively talkative.”

“No, and I don’t mean that. But when he is silent, you can hardly help vaguely, though perhaps most unjustly, mistrusting him. Take people whom you know and like. Take any one you know and like.”

“Soon done, my good fellow,” said Wilding. “I take you.”

“I didn’t bargain for that, or foresee it,” returned Vendale, laughing. “However, take me. Reflect for a moment. Is your approving knowledge of my interesting face mainly founded (however various the momentary expressions it may include) on my face when I am silent?”

“I think it is,” said Wilding.

“I think so too. Now, you see, when Obenreizer speaks—in other words, when he is allowed to explain himself away—he comes out right enough; but when he has not the opportunity of explaining himself away, he comes out rather wrong. Therefore it is, that I say he does not keep silence well. And passing hastily in review such faces as I know, and don’t trust, I am inclined to think, now I give my mind to it, that none of them keep silence well.”

This proposition in Physiognomy being new to Wilding, he was at first slow to admit it, until asking himself the question whether Mrs. Goldstraw kept silence well, and remembering that her face in repose decidedly invited trustfulness, he was as glad as men usually are to believe what they desire to believe.

But, as he was very slow to regain his spirits or his health, his partner, as another means of setting him up—and perhaps also with contingent Obenreizer views—reminded him of those musical schemes of his in connection with his family, and how a singing-class was to be formed in the house, and a Choir in a neighbouring church. The class was established speedily, and, two or three of the people having already some musical knowledge, and singing tolerably, the Choir soon followed. The latter was led, and chiefly taught, by Wilding himself: who had hopes of converting his dependents into so many Foundlings, in respect of their capacity to sing sacred choruses.

Now, the Obenreizers being skilled musicians, it was easily brought to pass that they should be asked to join these musical unions. Guardian and Ward consenting, or Guardian consenting for both, it was necessarily brought to pass that Vendale's life became a life of absolute thraldom and enchantment. For, in the mouldy Christopher-Wren church on Sundays, with its dearly beloved brethren assembled and met together, five-and-twenty strong, was not that Her voice that shot like light into the darkest places, thrilling the walls and pillars as though they were pieces of his heart! What time, too, Madame Dor in a corner of the high pew, turning her back upon everybody and everything, could not fail to be Ritualistically right at some moment of the service; like the man whom the doctors recommended to get drunk once a month, and who, that he might not overlook it, got drunk every day.

But, even those seraphic Sundays were surpassed by the Wednesday concerts established for the patriarchal family. At those concerts she would sit down to the piano and sing them, in her own tongue, songs of her own land, songs calling from the mountain-tops to Vendale, "Rise above the grovelling level country; come far away from the crowd; pursue me as I mount higher; higher, higher, melting into the azure distance; rise to my supremest height of all, and love me here!" Then would the pretty bodice, the clocked stocking, and the silver-buckled shoe be, like the broad forehead and the bright eyes, fraught with the spring of a very chamois, until the strain was over.

Not even over Vendale himself did these songs of hers cast a more potent spell than over Joey Ladle in his different way. Steadily refusing to muddle the harmony by taking any share in it, and evincing the supremest contempt for scales and such-like rudiments of music—which, indeed, seldom captivate mere listeners—Joey did at first give up the whole business for a bad job, and the whole of the performers for a set of howling Dervishes. But, descrying traces of unmuddled harmony in a part-song one day, he gave his two under cellarmen faint hopes of getting on towards something in course of time. An anthem of Handel's led to further encouragement from him: though he objected that that great musician must have been down in some of them foreign cellars pretty much, for to go and say the same thing so many times over; which, took it in how you might, he considered a certain sign of your having took it in somehow. On a third occasion, the public appearance of Mr. Jarvis with a flute, and of an odd man with a violin, and the performance of a duet by the two, did so astonish him that, solely of his own impulse and motion, he became inspired with the words, "Ann Koar!" repeatedly pronouncing them as if calling in a familiar manner for some lady who had distinguished herself in the orchestra. But this was his final testimony to the merits of his mates, for, the instrumental duet being performed at the first Wednesday concert, and being presently followed by the voice of Marguerite Obenreizer, he sat with his mouth wide open, entranced, until she had finished; when, rising in his place with much solemnity, and prefacing what he was about to say with a bow that specially included Mr. Wilding in it, he delivered himself of the gratifying sentiment: "Arter that, ye may all on ye get to bed!" And ever afterwards declined to render homage in any other words to the musical powers of the family.

Thus began a separate personal acquaintance between Marguerite Obenreizer and Joey Ladle. She laughed so heartily at his compliment, and yet was so abashed by it, that Joey made bold to say to her, after the concert was over, he hoped he wasn't so muddled in his head as to have took a liberty? She made him a gracious reply, and Joey ducked in return.

"You'll change the luck time about, Miss," said Joey, ducking again. "It's such as you in the place that can bring round the luck of the place."

"Can I? Round the luck?" she answered, in her pretty English, and with a pretty wonder. "I fear I do not understand. I am so stupid."

"Young Master Wilding, Miss," Joey explained confidentially, though not much to her enlightenment, "changed the luck, afore he took in young Master George. So I say, and so they'll find. Lord! Only come into the place and sing over the luck a few times, Miss, and it won't be able to help itself!"

With this, and with a whole brood of ducks, Joey backed out of the presence. But Joey being a privileged person, and even an involuntary conquest being pleasant to youth and beauty, Marguerite merrily looked out for him next time.

"Where is my Mr. Joey, please?" she asked Vendale.

So Joey was produced, and shaken hands with, and that became an Institution.

Another Institution arose in this wise. Joey was a little hard of hearing. He himself said it was "Wapours," and perhaps it might have been; but whatever the cause of the effect, there the effect was, upon him. On this first occasion he had been seen to sidle along the wall, with his left hand to his left ear, until he had sidled himself into a seat pretty near the singer, in which place and position he had remained, until addressing to his friends the amateurs the compliment before mentioned. It was observed on the following Wednesday that Joey's action as a Pecking Machine was impaired at dinner, and it was rumoured about the table that this was explainable by his high-strung expectations of Miss Obenreizer's singing, and his fears of not getting a place where he could hear every note and syllable. The rumour reaching Wilding's ears, he in his good nature called Joey to the front at night before Marguerite began. Thus the Institution came into being that on succeeding nights, Marguerite, running her hands over the keys before singing, always said to Vendale, "Where is my Mr. Joey, please?" and that Vendale always brought him forth, and stationed him near by. That he should then, when all eyes were upon him, express in his face the utmost contempt for the exertions of his friends and confidence in Marguerite alone, whom he would stand contemplating, not unlike the rhinocerous out of the spelling-book, tamed and on his hind legs, was a part of the Institution. Also that when he remained after the singing in his most ecstatic state, some bold spirit from the back should say, "What do you think of it, Joey?" and he should be goaded to reply, as having that instant conceived the retort, “Arter that ye may all on ye get to bed!” These were other parts of the Institution.

But, the simple pleasures and small jests of Cripple Corner were not destined to have a long life. Underlying them from the first was a serious matter, which every member of the patriarchal family knew of, but which, by tacit agreement, all forbore to speak of. Mr. Wilding’s health was in a bad way.

He might have overcome the shock he had sustained in the one great affection of his life, or he might have overcome his consciousness of being in the enjoyment of another man’s property; but the two together were too much for him. A man haunted by twin ghosts, he became deeply depressed. The inseparable spectres sat at the board with him, ate from his platter, drank from his cup, and stood by his bedside at night. When he recalled his supposed mother’s love, he felt as though he had stolen it. When he rallied a little under the respect and attachment of his dependants, he felt as though he were even fraudulent in making them happy, for that should have been the unknown man’s duty and gratification.

Gradually, under the pressure of his brooding mind, his body stooped, his step lost its elasticity, his eyes were seldom lifted from the ground. He knew he could not help the deplorable mistake that had been made, but he knew he could not mend it; for the days and weeks went by, and no one claimed his name or his possessions. And now there began to creep over him a cloudy consciousness of often-recurring confusion in his head. He would unaccountably lose, sometimes whole hours, sometimes a whole day and night. Once, his remembrance stopped as he sat at the head of the dinner-table, and was blank until daybreak. Another time, it stopped as he was beating time to their singing, and went on again when he and his partner were walking in the court-yard by the light of the moon, half the night later. He asked Vendale (always full of consideration, work, and help) how this was? Vendale only replied, “You have not been quite well; that’s all.” He looked for explanation into the faces of his people. But they would put it off with “Glad to see you looking so much better, sir;” or “Hope you’re doing nicely now, sir;” in which was no information at all.

At length, when the partnership was but five months old, Walter Wilding took to his bed, and his housekeeper became his nurse.

“Lying here, perhaps you will not mind my calling you Sally, Mrs. Goldstraw?” said the poor wine-merchant.

"It sounds more natural to me, sir, than any other name, and I like it better."

"Thank you, Sally. I think, Sally, I must of late have been subject to fits. Is that so, Sally? Don't mind telling me now."

"It has happened, sir."

"Ah! That is the explanation!" he quietly remarked. "Mr. Obenreizer, Sally, talks of the world being so small that it is not strange how often the same people come together, and come together at various places, and in various stages of life. But it does seem strange, Sally, that I should, as I may say, come round to the Foundling to die."

He extended his hand to her, and she gently took it.

"You are not going to die, dear Mr. Wilding."

"So Mr. Bintrey said, but I think he was wrong. The old child-feeling is coming back upon me, Sally. The old hush and rest, as I used to fall asleep."

After an interval he said, in a placid voice, "Please kiss me, Nurse," and, it was evident, believed himself to be lying in the old Dormitory.

As she had been used to bend over the fatherless and motherless children, Sally bent over the fatherless and motherless man, and put her lips to his forehead, murmuring:

"God bless you!"

"God bless you!" he replied, in the same tone.

After another interval, he opened his eyes in his own character, and said: "Don't move me, Sally, because of what I am going to say; I lie quite easily. I think my time is come, I don't know how it may appear to you, Sally, but—"

Insensibility fell upon him for a few minutes; he emerged from it once more.

"—I don't know how it may appear to you, Sally, but so it appears to me."

When he had thus conscientiously finished his favourite sentence, his time came, and he died.

ACT II.

VENDALE MAKES LOVE

The summer and the autumn passed. Christmas and the New Year were at hand.

As executors honestly bent on performing their duty towards the dead, Vendale and Bintrey had held more than one anxious consultation on the subject of Wilding's will. The lawyer had declared, from the first, that it was simply impossible to take any useful action in the matter at all. The only obvious inquiries to make, in relation to the lost man, had been made already by Wilding himself; with this result, that time and death together had not left a trace of him discoverable. To advertise for the claimant to the property, it would be necessary to mention particulars—a course of proceeding which would invite half the impostors in England to present themselves in the character of the true Walter Wilding. "If we find a chance of tracing the lost man, we will take it. If we don't, let us meet for another consultation on the first anniversary of Wilding's death." So Bintrey advised. And so, with the most earnest desire to fulfil his dead friend's wishes, Vendale was fain to let the matter rest for the present.

Turning from his interest in the past to his interest in the future, Vendale still found himself confronting a doubtful prospect. Months on months had passed since his first visit to Soho Square—and through all that time, the one language in which he had told Marguerite that he loved her was the language of the eyes, assisted, at convenient opportunities, by the language of the hand.

What was the obstacle in his way? The one immovable obstacle which had been in his way from the first. No matter how fairly the opportunities looked, Vendale's efforts to speak with Marguerite alone ended invariably in one and the same result. Under the most accidental circumstances, in the most innocent manner possible, Obenreizer was always in the way.

With the last days of the old year came an unexpected chance of spending an evening with Marguerite, which Vendale resolved should be a chance of speaking privately to her as well. A cordial note from Obenreizer invited him, on New Year's Day, to a little family dinner in Soho Square. "We shall be only four," the note said. "We shall be only two," Vendale determined, "before the evening is out!"

New Year's Day, among the English, is associated with the giving and receiving of dinners, and with nothing more. New Year's Day, among the foreigners, is the grand opportunity of the year for the giving and receiving of presents. It is occasionally possible to acclimatise a foreign custom. In this instance Vendale felt no hesitation about making the attempt. His one difficulty was to decide what his New Year's gift to Marguerite should be. The defensive pride of the peasant's daughter—morbidly sensitive to the inequality between her social position and his—would be secretly roused against him if he ventured on a rich offering. A gift, which a poor man's purse might purchase, was the one gift that could be trusted to find its way to her heart, for the giver's sake. Stoutly resisting temptation, in the form of diamonds and rubies, Vendale bought a brooch of the filagree-work of Genoa—the simplest and most unpretending ornament that he could find in the jeweller's shop.

He slipped his gift into Marguerite's hand as she held it out to welcome him on the day of the dinner.

"This is your first New Year's Day in England," he said. "Will you let me help to make it like a New Year's Day at home?"

She thanked him, a little constrainedly, as she looked at the jeweller's box, uncertain what it might contain. Opening the box, and discovering the studiously simple form under which Vendale's little keepsake offered itself to her, she penetrated his motive on the spot. Her face turned on him brightly, with a look which said, "I own you have pleased and flattered me." Never had she been so charming, in Vendale's eyes, as she was at that moment. Her winter dress—a petticoat of dark silk, with a bodice of black velvet rising to her neck, and enclosing it softly in a little circle of swansdown—heightened, by all the force of contrast, the dazzling fairness of her hair and her complexion. It was only when she turned aside from him to the glass, and, taking out the brooch that she wore, put his New Year's gift in its place, that Vendale's attention wandered far enough away from her to discover the presence of other persons in the room. He now became conscious that the hands of Obenreizer were affectionately in possession of his elbows. He now heard the voice of Obenreizer thanking him for his attention to Marguerite, with the faintest possible ring of mockery in its tone. (“Such a simple present, dear sir! and showing such nice tact!”) He now discovered, for the first time, that there was one other guest, and but one, besides himself, whom Obenreizer presented as a compatriot and friend. The friend’s face was mouldy, and the friend’s figure was fat. His age was suggestive of the autumnal period of human life. In the course of the evening he developed two extraordinary capacities. One was a capacity for silence; the other was a capacity for emptying bottles.

Madame Dor was not in the room. Neither was there any visible place reserved for her when they sat down to table. Obenreizer explained that it was “the good Dor’s simple habit to dine always in the middle of the day. She would make her excuses later in the evening.” Vendale wondered whether the good Dor had, on this occasion, varied her domestic employment from cleaning Obenreizer’s gloves to cooking Obenreizer’s dinner. This at least was certain—the dishes served were, one and all, as achievements in cookery, high above the reach of the rude elementary art of England. The dinner was unobtrusively perfect. As for the wine, the eyes of the speechless friend rolled over it, as in solemn ecstasy. Sometimes he said “Good!” when a bottle came in full; and sometimes he said “Ah!” when a bottle went out empty—and there his contributions to the gaiety of the evening ended.

Silence is occasionally infectious. Oppressed by private anxieties of their own, Marguerite and Vendale appeared to feel the influence of the speechless friend. The whole responsibility of keeping the talk going rested on Obenreizer’s shoulders, and manfully did Obenreizer sustain it. He opened his heart in the character of an enlightened foreigner, and sang the praises of England. When other topics ran dry, he returned to this inexhaustible source, and always set the stream running again as copiously as ever. Obenreizer would have given an arm, an eye, or a leg to have been born an Englishman. Out of England there was no such institution as a home, no such thing as a fireside, no such object as a beautiful woman. His dear Miss Marguerite would excuse him, if he accounted for *her* attractions on the theory that English blood must have mixed at some former time with their obscure and unknown ancestry. Survey this English nation, and behold a tall, clean, plump, and solid people! Look at their cities! What magnificence in their public buildings! What admirable order and propriety in their streets! Admire their laws, combining the eternal principle of justice with the other eternal principle of pounds, shillings, and pence; and applying the product to all civil injuries, from an injury to a man's honour, to an injury to a man's nose! You have ruined my daughter—pounds, shillings, and pence! You have knocked me down with a blow in my face—pounds, shillings, and pence! Where was the material prosperity of such a country as *that* to stop? Obenreizer, projecting himself into the future, failed to see the end of it. Obenreizer's enthusiasm entreated permission to exhale itself, English fashion, in a toast. Here is our modest little dinner over, here is our frugal dessert on the table, and here is the admirer of England conforming to national customs, and making a speech! A toast to your white cliffs of Albion, Mr. Vendale! to your national virtues, your charming climate, and your fascinating women! to your Hearths, to your Homes, to your Habeas Corpus, and to all your other institutions! In one word—to England! Heep-heep-heep! hooray!

Obenreizer's voice had barely chanted the last note of the English cheer, the speechless friend had barely drained the last drop out of his glass, when the festive proceedings were interrupted by a modest tap at the door. A woman-servant came in, and approached her master with a little note in her hand. Obenreizer opened the note with a frown; and, after reading it with an expression of genuine annoyance, passed it on to his compatriot and friend. Vendale's spirits rose as he watched these proceedings. Had he found an ally in the annoying little note? Was the long-looked-for chance actually coming at last?

"I am afraid there is no help for it?" said Obenreizer, addressing his fellow-countryman. "I am afraid we must go."

The speechless friend handed back the letter, shrugged his heavy shoulders, and poured himself out a last glass of wine. His fat fingers lingered fondly round the neck of the bottle. They pressed it with a little amatory squeeze at parting. His globular eyes looked dimly, as through an intervening haze, at Vendale and Marguerite. His heavy articulation laboured, and brought forth a whole sentence at a birth. "I think," he said, "I should have liked a little more wine." His breath failed him after that effort; he gasped, and walked to the door.

Obenreizer addressed himself to Vendale with an appearance of the deepest distress.

"I am so shocked, so confused, so distressed," he began. "A misfortune has happened to one of my compatriots. He is alone, he is ignorant of your language—I and my good friend, here, have no choice but to go and help him. What can I say in my excuse? How can I describe my affliction at depriving myself in this way of the honour of your company?"

He paused, evidently expecting to see Vendale take up his hat and retire. Discerning his opportunity at last, Vendale determined to do nothing of the kind. He met Obenreizer dexterously, with Obenreizer's own weapons.

"Pray don't distress yourself," he said. "I'll wait here with the greatest pleasure till you come back."

Marguerite blushed deeply, and turned away to her embroidery-frame in a corner by the window. The film showed itself in Obenreizer's eyes, and the smile came something sourly to Obenreizer's lips. To have told Vendale that there was no reasonable prospect of his coming back in good time, would have been to risk offending a man whose favourable opinion was of solid commercial importance to him. Accepting his defeat with the best possible grace, he declared himself to be equally honoured and delighted by Vendale's proposal. "So frank, so friendly, so English!" He bustled about, apparently looking for something he wanted, disappeared for a moment through the folding-doors communicating with the next room, came back with his hat and coat, and protesting that he would return at the earliest possible moment, embraced Vendale's elbows, and vanished from the scene in company with the speechless friend.

Vendale turned to the corner by the window, in which Marguerite had placed herself with her work. There, as if she had dropped from the ceiling, or come up through the floor—there, in the old attitude, with her face to the stove—sat an Obstacle that had not been foreseen, in the person of Madame Dor! She half got up, half looked over her broad shoulder at Vendale, and plumped down again. Was she at work? Yes. Cleaning Obenreizer's gloves, as before? No; darning Obenreizer's stockings.

The case was now desperate. Two serious considerations presented themselves to Vendale. Was it possible to put Madame Dor into the stove? The stove wouldn't hold her. Was it possible to treat Madame Dor, not as a living woman, but as an article of furniture? Could the mind be brought to contemplate this respectable matron purely in the light of a chest of drawers, with a black gauze held-dress accidentally left on the top of it? Yes, the mind could be brought to do that. With a comparatively trifling effort, Vendale's mind did it. As he took his place on the old-fashioned window-seat, close by Marguerite and her embroidery, a slight movement appeared in the chest of drawers, but no remark issued from it. Let it be remembered that solid furniture is not easy to move, and that it has this advantage in consequence—there is no fear of upsetting it.

Unusually silent and unusually constrained—with the bright colour fast fading from her face, with a feverish energy possessing her fingers—the pretty Marguerite bent over her embroidery, and worked as if her life depended on it. Hardly less agitated himself, Vendale felt the importance of leading her very gently to the avowal which he was eager to make—to the other sweeter avowal still, which he was longing to hear. A woman's love is never to be taken by storm; it yields insensibly to a system of gradual approach. It ventures by the roundabout way, and listens to the low voice. Vendale led her memory back to their past meetings when they were travelling together in Switzerland. They revived the impressions, they recalled the events, of the happy bygone time. Little by little, Marguerite's constraint vanished. She smiled, she was interested, she looked at Vendale, she grew idle with her needle, she made false stitches in her work. Their voices sank lower and lower; their faces bent nearer and nearer to each other as they spoke. And Madame Dor? Madame Dor behaved like an angel. She never looked round; she never said a word; she went on with Obenreizer's stockings. Pulling each stocking up tight over her left arm, and holding that arm aloft from time to time, to catch the light on her work, there were moments—delicate and indescribable moments—when Madame Dor appeared to be sitting upside down, and contemplating one of her own respectable legs, elevated in the air. As the minutes wore on, these elevations followed each other at longer and longer intervals. Now and again, the black gauze head-dress nodded, dropped forward, recovered itself. A little heap of stockings slid softly from Madame Dor's lap, and remained unnoticed on the floor. A prodigious ball of worsted followed the stockings, and rolled lazily under the table. The black gauze head-dress nodded, dropped forward, recovered itself, nodded again, dropped forward again, and recovered itself no more. A composite sound, partly as of the purring of an immense cat, partly as of the planing of a soft board, rose over the hushed voices of the lovers, and hummed at regular intervals through the room. Nature and Madame Dor had combined together in Vendale's interests. The best of women was asleep.

Marguerite rose to stop—not the snoring—let us say, the audible repose of Madame Dor. Vendale laid his hand on her arm, and pressed her back gently into her chair.

"Don't disturb her," he whispered. "I have been waiting to tell you a secret. Let me tell it now."

Marguerite resumed her seat. She tried to resume her needle. It was useless; her eyes failed her; her hand failed her; she could find nothing.

"We have been talking," said Vendale, "of the happy time when we first met, and first travelled together. I have a confession to make. I have been concealing something. When we spoke of my first visit to Switzerland, I told you of all the impressions I had brought back with me to England—except one. Can you guess what that one is?"

Her eyes looked stedfastly at the embroidery, and her face turned a little away from him. Signs of disturbance began to appear in her neat velvet bodice, round the region of the brooch. She made no reply. Vendale pressed the question without mercy.

"Can you guess what the one Swiss impression is which I have not told you yet?"

Her face turned back towards him, and a faint smile trembled on her lips.

"An impression of the mountains, perhaps?" she said slyly.

"No; a much more precious impression than that."

"Of the lakes?"

"No. The lakes have not grown dearer and dearer in remembrance to me every day. The lakes are not associated with my happiness in the present, and my hopes in the future. Marguerite! all that makes life worth having hangs, for me, on a word from your lips. Marguerite! I love you!"

Her head drooped as he took her hand. He drew her to him, and looked at her. The tears escaped from her downcast eyes, and fell slowly over her cheeks.

"O, Mr. Vendale," she said sadly, "it would have been kinder to have kept your secret. Have you forgotten the distance between us? It can never, never be!"

"There can be but one distance between us, Marguerite—a distance of your making. My love, my darling, there is no higher rank in goodness, there is no higher rank in beauty, than yours! Come! whisper the one little word which tells me you will be my wife!"

She sighed bitterly. “Think of your family,” she murmured; “and think of mine!”

Vendale drew her a little nearer to him.

“If you dwell on such an obstacle as that,” he said, “I shall think but one thought—I shall think I have offended you.”

She started, and looked up. “O, no!” she exclaimed innocently. The instant the words passed her lips, she saw the construction that might be placed on them. Her confession had escaped her in spite of herself. A lovely flush of colour overspread her face. She made a momentary effort to disengage herself from her lover’s embrace. She looked up at him entreatingly. She tried to speak. The words died on her lips in the kiss that Vendale pressed on them. “Let me go, Mr. Vendale!” she said faintly.

“Call me George.”

She laid her head on his bosom. All her heart went out to him at last. “George!” she whispered.

“Say you love me!”

Her arms twined themselves gently round his neck. Her lips, timidly touching his cheek, murmured the delicious words—“I love you!”

In the moment of silence that followed, the sound of the opening and closing of the house-door came clear to them through the wintry stillness of the street.

Marguerite started to her feet.

“Let me go!” she said. “He has come back!”

She hurried from the room, and touched Madame Dor’s shoulder in passing. Madame Dor woke up with a loud snort, looked first over one shoulder and then over the other, peered down into her lap, and discovered neither stockings, worsted, nor darning-needle in it. At the same moment, footsteps became audible ascending the stairs. “Mon Dieu!” said Madame Dor, addressing herself to the stove, and trembling violently. Vendale picked up the stockings and the ball, and huddled them all back in a heap over her shoulder. “Mon Dieu!” said Madame Dor, for the second time, as the avalanche of worsted poured into her capacious lap.

The door opened, and Obenreizer came in. His first glance round the room showed him that Marguerite was absent.

“What!” he exclaimed, “my niece is away? My niece is not here to entertain you in my absence? This is unpardonable. I shall bring her back instantly.”

Vendale stopped him.

"I beg you will not disturb Miss Obenreizer," he said. "You have returned, I see, without your friend?"

"My friend remains, and consoles our afflicted compatriot. A heart-rending scene, Mr. Vendale! The household gods at the pawnbroker's—the family immersed in tears. We all embraced in silence. My admirable friend alone possessed his composure. He sent out, on the spot, for a bottle of wine."

"Can I say a word to you in private, Mr. Obenreizer?"

"Assuredly." He turned to Madame Dor. "My good creature, you are sinking for want of repose. Mr. Vendale will excuse you."

Madame Dor rose, and set forth sideways on her journey from the stove to bed. She dropped a stocking. Vendale picked it up for her, and opened one of the folding-doors. She advanced a step, and dropped three more stockings. Vendale stooping to recover them as before, Obenreizer interfered with profuse apologies, and with a warning look at Madame Dor. Madame Dor acknowledged the look by dropping the whole of the stockings in a heap, and then shuffling away panic-stricken from the scene of disaster. Obenreizer swept up the complete collection fiercely in both hands. "Go!" he cried, giving his prodigious handful a preparatory swing in the air. Madame Dor said, "Mon Dieu," and vanished into the next room, pursued by a shower of stockings.

"What must you think, Mr. Vendale," said Obenreizer, closing the door, "of this deplorable intrusion of domestic details? For myself, I blush at it. We are beginning the New Year as badly as possible; everything has gone wrong to-night. Be seated, pray—and say, what may I offer you? Shall we pay our best respects to another of your noble English institutions? It is my study to be, what you call, jolly. I propose a grog."

Vendale declined the grog with all needful respect for that noble institution.

"I wish to speak to you on a subject in which I am deeply interested," he said. "You must have observed, Mr. Obenreizer, that I have, from the first, felt no ordinary admiration for your charming niece?"

"You are very good. In my niece's name, I thank you."

"Perhaps you may have noticed, latterly, that my admiration for Miss Obenreizer has grown into a tenderer and deeper feeling—?"

"Shall we say friendship, Mr. Vendale?"

“Say love—and we shall be nearer to the truth.”

Obenreizer started out of his chair. The faintly discernible beat, which was his nearest approach to a change of colour, showed itself suddenly in his cheeks.

“You are Miss Obenreizer’s guardian,” pursued Vendale. “I ask you to confer upon me the greatest of all favours—I ask you to give me her hand in marriage.”

Obenreizer dropped back into his chair. “Mr. Vendale,” he said, “you petrify me.”

“I will wait,” rejoined Vendale, “until you have recovered yourself.”

“One word before I recover myself. You have said nothing about this to my niece?”

“I have opened my whole heart to your niece. And I have reason to hope—”

“What!” interposed Obenreizer. “You have made a proposal to my niece, without first asking for my authority to pay your addresses to her?” He struck his hand on the table, and lost his hold over himself for the first time in Vendale’s experience of him. “Sir!” he exclaimed, indignantly, “what sort of conduct is this? As a man of honour, speaking to a man of honour, how can you justify it?”

“I can only justify it as one of our English institutions,” said Vendale quietly. “You admire our English institutions. I can’t honestly tell you, Mr. Obenreizer, that I regret what I have done. I can only assure you that I have not acted in the matter with any intentional disrespect towards yourself. This said, may I ask you to tell me plainly what objection you see to favouring my suit?”

“I see this immense objection,” answered Obenreizer, “that my niece and you are not on a social equality together. My niece is the daughter of a poor peasant; and you are the son of a gentleman. You do us an honour,” he added, lowering himself again gradually to his customary polite level, “which deserves, and has, our most grateful acknowledgments. But the inequality is too glaring; the sacrifice is too great. You English are a proud people, Mr. Vendale. I have observed enough of this country to see that such a marriage as you propose would be a scandal here. Not a hand would be held out to your peasant-wife; and all your best friends would desert you.”

"One moment," said Vendale, interposing on his side. "I may claim, without any great arrogance, to know more of my country people in general, and of my own friends in particular, than you do. In the estimation of everybody whose opinion is worth having, my wife herself would be the one sufficient justification of my marriage. If I did not feel certain—observe, I say certain—that I am offering her a position which she can accept without so much as the shadow of a humiliation—I would never (cost me what it might) have asked her to be my wife. Is there any other obstacle that you see? Have you any personal objection to me?"

Obenreizer spread out both his hands in courteous protest. "Personal objection!" he exclaimed. "Dear sir, the bare question is painful to me."

"We are both men of business," pursued Vendale, "and you naturally expect me to satisfy you that I have the means of supporting a wife. I can explain my pecuniary position in two words. I inherit from my parents a fortune of twenty thousand pounds. In half of that sum I have only a life-interest, to which, if I die, leaving a widow, my widow succeeds. If I die, leaving children, the money itself is divided among them, as they come of age. The other half of my fortune is at my own disposal, and is invested in the wine-business. I see my way to greatly improving that business. As it stands at present, I cannot state my return from my capital embarked at more than twelve hundred a year. Add the yearly value of my life-interest—and the total reaches a present annual income of fifteen hundred pounds. I have the fairest prospect of soon making it more. In the meantime, do you object to me on pecuniary grounds?"

Driven back to his last entrenchment, Obenreizer rose, and took a turn backwards and forwards in the room. For the moment, he was plainly at a loss what to say or do next.

"Before I answer that last question," he said, after a little close consideration with himself, "I beg leave to revert for a moment to Miss Marguerite. You said something just now which seemed to imply that she returns the sentiment with which you are pleased to regard her?"

"I have the inestimable happiness," said Vendale, "of knowing that she loves me."

Obenreizer stood silent for a moment, with the film over his eyes, and the faintly perceptible beat becoming visible again in his cheeks.

"If you will excuse me for a few minutes," he said, with ceremonious politeness, "I should like to have the opportunity of speaking to my niece."

With those words, he bowed, and quitted the room.

Left by himself, Vendale's thoughts (as a necessary result of the interview, thus far) turned instinctively to the consideration of Obenreizer's motives. He had put obstacles in the way of the courtship; he was now putting obstacles in the way of the marriage—a marriage offering advantages which even his ingenuity could not dispute. On the face of it, his conduct was incomprehensible. What did it mean?

Seeking, under the surface, for the answer to that question—and remembering that Obenreizer was a man of about his own age; also, that Marguerite was, strictly speaking, his half-niece only—Vendale asked himself, with a lover's ready jealousy, whether he had a rival to fear, as well as a guardian to conciliate. The thought just crossed his mind, and no more. The sense of Marguerite's kiss still lingering on his cheek reminded him gently that even the jealousy of a moment was now a treason to *her*.

On reflection, it seemed most likely that a personal motive of another kind might suggest the true explanation of Obenreizer's conduct. Marguerite's grace and beauty were precious ornaments in that little household. They gave it a special social attraction and a special social importance. They armed Obenreizer with a certain influence in reserve, which he could always depend upon to make his house attractive, and which he might always bring more or less to bear on the forwarding of his own private ends. Was he the sort of man to resign such advantages as were here implied, without obtaining the fullest possible compensation for the loss? A connection by marriage with Vendale offered him solid advantages, beyond all doubt. But there were hundreds of men in London with far greater power and far wider influence than Vendale possessed. Was it possible that this man's ambition secretly looked higher than the highest prospects that could be offered to him by the alliance now proposed for his niece? As the question passed through Vendale's mind, the man himself reappeared—to answer it, or not to answer it, as the event might prove.

A marked change was visible in Obenreizer when he resumed his place. His manner was less assured, and there were plain traces about his mouth of recent agitation which had not been successfully composed. Had he said something, referring either to Vendale or to himself, which had raised Marguerite's spirit, and which had placed him, for the first time, face to face with a resolute assertion of his niece's will? It might or might not be. This only was certain—he looked like a man who had met with a repulse.

“I have spoken to my niece,” he began. “I find, Mr. Vendale, that even your influence has not entirely blinded her to the social objections to your proposal.”

“May I ask,” returned Vendale, “if that is the only result of your interview with Miss Obenreizer?”

A momentary flash leapt out through the Obenreizer film.

“You are master of the situation,” he answered, in a tone of sardonic submission. “If you insist on my admitting it, I do admit it in those words. My niece’s will and mine used to be one, Mr. Vendale. You have come between us, and her will is now yours. In my country, we know when we are beaten, and we submit with our best grace. I submit, with my best grace, on certain conditions. Let us revert to the statement of your pecuniary position. I have an objection to you, my dear sir—a most amazing, a most audacious objection, from a man in my position to a man in yours.”

“What is it?”

“You have honoured me by making a proposal for my niece’s hand. For the present (with best thanks and respects), I beg to decline it.”

“Why?”

“Because you are not rich enough.”

The objection, as the speaker had foreseen, took Vendale completely by surprise. For the moment he was speechless.

“Your income is fifteen hundred a year,” pursued Obenreizer. “In my miserable country I should fall on my knees before your income, and say, ‘What a princely fortune!’ In wealthy England, I sit as I am, and say, ‘A modest independence, dear sir; nothing more. Enough, perhaps, for a wife in your own rank of life who has no social prejudices to conquer. Not more than half enough for a wife who is a meanly born foreigner, and who has all your social prejudices against her.’ Sir! if my niece is ever to marry you, she will have what you call uphill work of it in taking her place at starting. Yes, yes; this is not your view, but it remains, immovably remains, my view for all that. For my niece’s sake, I claim that this uphill work shall be made as smooth as possible. Whatever material advantages she can have to help her, ought, in common justice, to be hers. Now, tell me, Mr. Vendale, on your fifteen hundred a year can your wife have a house in a fashionable quarter, a footman to open her door, a butler to wait at her table, and a carriage and horses to drive about in? I see the answer in your face—your face says, No. Very good. Tell me one more thing, and I have done. Take the mass of your educated, accomplished, and lovely country-women, is it, or is it not, the fact that a lady who has a house in a fashionable quarter, a footman to open her door, a butler to wait at her table, and a carriage and horses to drive about in, is a lady who has gained four steps, in female estimation, at starting? Yes? or No?"

"Come to the point," said Vendale. "You view this question as a question of terms. What are your terms?"

"The lowest terms, dear sir, on which you can provide your wife with those four steps at starting. Double your present income—the most rigid economy cannot do it in England on less. You said just now that you expected greatly to increase the value of your business. To work—and increase it! I am a good devil after all! On the day when you satisfy me, by plain proofs, that your income has risen to three thousand a year, ask me for my niece's hand, and it is yours."

"May I inquire if you have mentioned this arrangement to Miss Obenreizer?"

"Certainly. She has a last little morsel of regard still left for me, Mr. Vendale, which is not yours yet; and she accepts my terms. In other words, she submits to be guided by her guardian's regard for her welfare, and by her guardian's superior knowledge of the world." He threw himself back in his chair, in firm reliance on his position, and in full possession of his excellent temper.

Any open assertion of his own interests, in the situation in which Vendale was now placed, seemed to be (for the present at least) hopeless. He found himself literally left with no ground to stand on. Whether Obenreizer's objections were the genuine product of Obenreizer's own view of the case, or whether he was simply delaying the marriage in the hope of ultimately breaking it off altogether—in either of these events, any present resistance on Vendale's part would be equally useless. There was no help for it but to yield, making the best terms that he could on his own side.

"I protest against the conditions you impose on me," he began.

"Naturally," said Obenreizer; "I dare say I should protest, myself, in your place."

"Say, however," pursued Vendale, "that I accept your terms. In that case, I must be permitted to make two stipulations on my part. In the first place, I shall expect to be allowed to see your niece."

"Aha! to see my niece? and to make her in as great a hurry to be married as you are yourself? Suppose I say, No? you would see her perhaps without my permission?"

"Decidedly!"

"How delightfully frank! How exquisitely English! You shall see her, Mr. Vendale, on certain days, which we will appoint together. What next?"

"Your objection to my income," proceeded Vendale, "has taken me completely by surprise. I wish to be assured against any repetition of that surprise. Your present views of my qualification for marriage require me to have an income of three thousand a year. Can I be certain, in the future, as your experience of England enlarges, that your estimate will rise no higher?"

"In plain English," said Obenreizer, "you doubt my word?"

"Do you purpose to take *my* word for it when I inform you that I have doubled my income?" asked Vendale. "If my memory does not deceive me, you stipulated, a minute since, for plain proofs?"

"Well played, Mr. Vendale! You combine the foreign quickness with the English solidity. Accept my best congratulations. Accept, also, my written guarantee."

He rose; seated himself at a writing-desk at a side-table, wrote a few lines, and presented them to Vendale with a low bow. The engagement was perfectly explicit, and was signed and dated with scrupulous care.

"Are you satisfied with your guarantee?"

"I am satisfied."

"Charmed to hear it, I am sure. We have had our little skirmish—we have really been wonderfully clever on both sides. For the present our affairs are settled. I bear no malice. You bear no malice. Come, Mr. Vendale, a good English shake hands."

Vendale gave his hand, a little bewildered by Obenreizer's sudden transitions from one humour to another.

"When may I expect to see Miss Obenreizer again?" he asked, as he rose to go.

"Honour me with a visit to-morrow," said Obenreizer, "and we will settle it then. Do have a grog before you go! No? Well! well! we will reserve the grog till you have your three thousand a year, and are ready to be married. Aha! When will that be?"

"I made an estimate, some months since, of the capacities of my business," said Vendale. "If that estimate is correct, I shall double my present income—"

"And be married!" added Obenreizer.

"And be married," repeated Vendale, "within a year from this time. Good-night."

VENDALE MAKES MISCHIEF

When Vendale entered his office the next morning, the dull commercial routine at Cripple Corner met him with a new face. Marguerite had an interest in it now! The whole machinery which Wilding's death had set in motion, to realise the value of the business—the balancing of ledgers, the estimating of debts, the taking of stock, and the rest of it—was now transformed into machinery which indicated the chances for and against a speedy marriage. After looking over results, as presented by his accountant, and checking additions and subtractions, as rendered by the clerks, Vendale turned his attention to the stock-taking department next, and sent a message to the cellars, desiring to see the report.

The Cellarman's appearance, the moment he put his head in at the door of his master's private room, suggested that something very extraordinary must have happened that morning. There was an approach to alacrity in Joey Ladle's movements! There was something which actually simulated cheerfulness in Joey Ladle's face

"What's the matter?" asked Vendale. "Anything wrong?"

"I should wish to mention one thing," answered Joey. "Young Mr. Vendale, I have never set myself up for a prophet."

"Who ever said you did?"

"No prophet, as far as I've heard I tell of that profession," proceeded Joey, "ever lived principally underground. No prophet, whatever else he might take in at the pores, ever took in wine from morning to night, for a number of years together. When I said to young Master Wilding, respecting his changing the name of the firm, that one of these days he might find he'd changed the luck of the firm—did I put myself forward as a prophet? No, I didn't. Has what I said to him come true? Yes, it has. In the time of Pebbleson Nephew, Young Mr. Vendale, no such thing was ever known as a mistake made in a consignment delivered at these doors. There's a mistake been made now. Please to remark that it happened before Miss Margaret came here. For which reason it don't go against what I've said respecting Miss Margaret singing round the luck. Read that, sir," concluded Joey, pointing attention to a special passage in the report, with a forefinger which appeared to be in process of taking in through the pores nothing more remarkable than dirt. "It's foreign to my nature to crow over the house I serve, but I feel it a kind of solemn duty to ask you to read that."

Vendale read as follows:—"Note, respecting the Swiss champagne. An irregularity has been discovered in the last consignment received from the firm of Defresnier and Co." Vendale stopped, and referred to a memorandum-book by his side. "That was in Mr. Wilding's time," he said. "The vintage was a particularly good one, and he took the whole of it. The Swiss champagne has done very well, hasn't it?"

"I don't say it's done badly," answered the Cellarman. "It may have got sick in our customers' bins, or it may have bust in our customers' hands. But I don't say it's done badly with us."

Vendale resumed the reading of the note: "We find the number of the cases to be quite correct by the books. But six of them, which present a slight difference from the rest in the brand, have been opened, and have been found to contain a red wine instead of champagne. The similarity in the brands, we suppose, caused a mistake to be made in sending the consignment from Neuchâtel. The error has not been found to extend beyond six cases."

"Is that all!" exclaimed Vendale, tossing the note away from him.

Joey Ladle's eye followed the flying morsel of paper drearily.

"I'm glad to see you take it easy, sir," he said. "Whatever happens, it will be always a comfort to you to remember that you took it easy at first. Sometimes one mistake leads to another. A man drops a bit of orange-peel on the pavement by mistake, and another man treads on it by mistake, and there's a job at the hospital, and a party crippled for life. I'm glad you take it easy, sir. In Pebbleson Nephew's time we shouldn't have taken it easy till we had seen the end of it. Without desiring to crow over the house, young Mr. Vendale, I wish you well through it. No offence, sir," said the Cellarman, opening the door to go out, and looking in again ominously before he shut it. "I'm muddled and molloncolly, I grant you. But I'm an old servant of Pebbleson Nephew, and I wish you well through them six cases of red wine."

Left by himself, Vendale laughed, and took up his pen. "I may as well send a line to Defresnier and Company," he thought, "before I forget it." He wrote at once in these terms:

> "Dear Sirs. We are taking stock, and a trifling mistake has been discovered in the last consignment of champagne sent by your house to ours. Six of the cases contain red wine—which we hereby return to you. The matter can easily be set right, either by your sending us six cases of the champagne, if they can be produced, or, if not, by your crediting us with the value of six cases on the amount last paid (five hundred pounds) by our firm to yours. Your faithful servants,
>
> "WILDING AND CO."

This letter despatched to the post, the subject dropped at once out of Vendale's mind. He had other and far more interesting matters to think of. Later in the day he paid the visit to Obenreizer which had been agreed on between them. Certain evenings in the week were set apart which he was privileged to spend with Marguerite—always, however, in the presence of a third person. On this stipulation Obenreizer politely but positively insisted. The one concession he made was to give Vendale his choice of who the third person should be. Confiding in past experience, his choice fell unhesitatingly upon the excellent woman who mended Obenreizer's stockings. On hearing of the responsibility entrusted to her, Madame Dor's intellectual nature burst suddenly into a new stage of development. She waited till Obenreizer's eye was off her—and then she looked at Vendale, and dimly winked.

The time passed—the happy evenings with Marguerite came and went. It was the tenth morning since Vendale had written to the Swiss firm, when the answer appeared, on his desk, with the other letters of the day:

> "Dear Sirs. We beg to offer our excuses for the little mistake which has happened. At the same time, we regret to add that the statement of our error, with which you have favoured us, has led to a very unexpected discovery. The affair is a most serious one for you and for us. The particulars are as follows:
>
> "Having no more champagne of the vintage last sent to you, we made arrangements to credit your firm to the value of six cases, as suggested by yourself. On taking this step, certain forms observed in

our mode of doing business necessitated a reference to our bankers' book, as well as to our ledger. The result is a moral certainty that no such remittance as you mention can have reached our house, and a literal certainty that no such remittance has been paid to our account at the bank.

"It is needless, at this stage of the proceedings, to trouble you with details. The money has unquestionably been stolen in the course of its transit from you to us. Certain peculiarities which we observe, relating to the manner in which the fraud has been perpetrated, lead us to conclude that the thief may have calculated on being able to pay the missing sum to our bankers, before an inevitable discovery followed the annual striking of our balance. This would not have happened, in the usual course, for another three months. During that period, but for your letter, we might have remained perfectly unconscious of the robbery that has been committed.

"We mention this last circumstance, as it may help to show you that we have to do, in this case, with no ordinary thief. Thus far we have not even a suspicion of who that thief is. But we believe you will assist us in making some advance towards discovery, by examining the receipt (forged, of course) which has no doubt purported to come to you from our house. Be pleased to look and see whether it is a receipt entirely in manuscript, or whether it is a numbered and printed form which merely requires the filling in of the amount. The settlement of this apparently trivial question is, we assure you, a matter of vital importance. Anxiously awaiting your reply, we remain, with high esteem and consideration,

"DEFRESNIER & CIE."

Vendale had the letter on his desk, and waited a moment to steady his mind under the shock that had fallen on it. At the time of all others when it was most important to him to increase the value of his business, that business was threatened with a loss of five hundred pounds. He thought of Marguerite, as he took the key from his pocket and opened the iron chamber in the wall in which the books and papers of the firm were kept.

He was still in the chamber, searching for the forged receipt, when he was startled by a voice speaking close behind him.

"A thousand pardons," said the voice; "I am afraid I disturb you."

He turned, and found himself face to face with Marguerite's guardian.

"I have called," pursued Obenreizer, "to know if I can be of any use. Business of my own takes me away for some days to Manchester and Liverpool. Can I combine any business of yours with it? I am entirely at your disposal, in the character of commercial traveller for the firm of Wilding and Co."

"Excuse me for one moment," said Vendale; "I will speak to you directly." He turned round again, and continued his search among the papers. "You come at a time when friendly offers are more than usually precious to me," he resumed. "I have had very bad news this morning from Neuchâtel."

"Bad news," exclaimed Obenreizer. "From Defresnier and Company?"

"Yes. A remittance we sent to them has been stolen. I am threatened with a loss of five hundred pounds. What's that?"

Turning sharply, and looking into the room for the second time, Vendale discovered his envelope case overthrown on the floor, and Obenreizer on his knees picking up the contents.

"All my awkwardness," said Obenreizer. "This dreadful news of yours startled me; I stepped back—" He became too deeply interested in collecting the scattered envelopes to finish the sentence.

"Don't trouble yourself," said Vendale. "The clerk will pick the things up."

"This dreadful news!" repeated Obenreizer, persisting in collecting the envelopes. "This dreadful news!"

"If you will read the letter," said Vendale, "you will find I have exaggerated nothing. There it is, open on my desk."

He resumed his search, and in a moment more discovered the forged receipt. It was on the numbered and printed form, described by the Swiss firm. Vendale made a memorandum of the number and the date. Having replaced the receipt and locked up the iron chamber, he had leisure to notice Obenreizer, reading the letter in the recess of a window at the far end of the room.

"Come to the fire," said Vendale. "You look perished with the cold out there. I will ring for some more coals."

Obenreizer rose, and came slowly back to the desk. "Marguerite will be as sorry to hear of this as I am," he said, kindly. "What do you mean to do?"

"I am in the hands of Defresnier and Company," answered Vendale. "In my total ignorance of the circumstances, I can only do what they recommend. The receipt which I have just found, turns out to be the numbered and printed form. They seem to attach some special importance to its discovery. You have had experience, when you were in the Swiss house, of their way of doing business. Can you guess what object they have in view?"

Obenreizer offered a suggestion.

"Suppose I examine the receipt?" he said.

"Are you ill?" asked Vendale, startled by the change in his face, which now showed itself plainly for the first time. "Pray go to the fire. You seem to be shivering—I hope you are not going to be ill?"

"Not I!" said Obenreizer. "Perhaps I have caught cold. Your English climate might have spared an admirer of your English institutions. Let me look at the receipt."

Vendale opened the iron chamber. Obenreizer took a chair, and drew it close to the fire. He held both hands over the flames. "Let me look at the receipt," he repeated, eagerly, as Vendale reappeared with the paper in his hand. At the same moment a porter entered the room with a fresh supply of coals. Vendale told him to make a good fire. The man obeyed the order with a disastrous alacrity. As he stepped forward and raised the scuttle, his foot caught in a fold of the rug, and he discharged his entire cargo of coals into the grate. The result was an instant smothering of the flame, and the production of a stream of yellow smoke, without a visible morsel of fire to account for it.

"Imbecile!" whispered Obenreizer to himself, with a look at the man which the man remembered for many a long day afterwards.

"Will you come into the clerks' room?" asked Vendale. "They have a stove there."

"No, no. No matter."

Vendale handed him the receipt. Obenreizer's interest in examining it appeared to have been quenched as suddenly and as effectually as the fire itself. He just glanced over the document, and said, "No; I don't understand it! I am sorry to be of no use."

"I will write to Neuchâtel by to-night's post," said Vendale, putting away the receipt for the second time. "We must wait, and see what comes of it."

“By to-night’s post,” repeated Obenreizer. “Let me see. You will get the answer in eight or nine days’ time. I shall be back before that. If I can be of any service, as commercial traveller, perhaps you will let me know between this and then. You will send me written instructions? My best thanks. I shall be most anxious for your answer from Neuchâtel. Who knows? It may be a mistake, my dear friend, after all. Courage! courage! courage!” He had entered the room with no appearance of being pressed for time. He now snatched up his hat, and took his leave with the air of a man who had not another moment to lose.

Left by himself, Vendale took a turn thoughtfully in the room.

His previous impression of Obenreizer was shaken by what he had heard and seen at the interview which had just taken place. He was disposed, for the first time, to doubt whether, in this case, he had not been a little hasty and hard in his judgment on another man. Obenreizer’s surprise and regret, on hearing the news from Neuchâtel, bore the plainest marks of being honestly felt—not politely assumed for the occasion. With troubles of his own to encounter, suffering, to all appearance, from the first insidious attack of a serious illness, he had looked and spoken like a man who really deplored the disaster that had fallen on his friend. Hitherto Vendale had tried vainly to alter his first opinion of Marguerite’s guardian, for Marguerite’s sake. All the generous instincts in his nature now combined together and shook the evidence which had seemed unanswerable up to this time. “Who knows?” he thought. “I may have read that man’s face wrongly, after all.”

The time passed—the happy evenings with Marguerite came and went. It was again the tenth morning since Vendale had written to the Swiss firm; and again the answer appeared on his desk with the other letters of the day:

> “Dear Sir. My senior partner, M. Defresnier, has been called away, by urgent business, to Milan. In his absence (and with his full concurrence and authority), I now write to you again on the subject of the missing five hundred pounds.
>
> “Your discovery that the forged receipt is executed upon one of our numbered and printed forms has caused inexpressible surprise and distress to my partner and to myself. At the time when your remittance was stolen, but three keys were in existence opening the strong-box in which our receipt-forms are invariably kept. My partner had one key; I had the other. The third was in the possession of a

gentleman who, at that period, occupied a position of trust in our house. We should as soon have thought of suspecting one of ourselves as of suspecting this person. Suspicion now points at him, nevertheless. I cannot prevail on myself to inform you who the person is, so long as there is the shadow of a chance that he may come innocently out of the inquiry which must now be instituted. Forgive my silence; the motive of it is good.

"The form our investigation must now take is simple enough. The handwriting of your receipt must be compared, by competent persons whom we have at our disposal, with certain specimens of handwriting in our possession. I cannot send you the specimens for business reasons, which, when you hear them, you are sure to approve. I must beg you to send me the receipt to Neuchâtel—and, in making this request, I must accompany it by a word of necessary warning.

"If the person, at whom suspicion now points, really proves to be the person who has committed this forger and theft, I have reason to fear that circumstances may have already put him on his guard. The only evidence against him is the evidence in your hands, and he will move heaven and earth to obtain and destroy it. I strongly urge you not to trust the receipt to the post. Send it to me, without loss of time, by a private hand, and choose nobody for your messenger but a person long established in your own employment, accustomed to travelling, capable of speaking French; a man of courage, a man of honesty, and, above all things, a man who can be trusted to let no stranger scrape acquaintance with him on the route. Tell no one—absolutely no one—but your messenger of the turn this matter has now taken. The safe transit of the receipt may depend on your interpreting *literally* the advice which I give you at the end of this letter.

"I have only to add that every possible saving of time is now of the last importance. More than one of our receipt-forms is missing—and it is impossible to say what new frauds may not be committed if we fail to lay our hands on the thief.

Your faithful servant
ROLLAND,
(Signing for Defresnier and Cie.)

Who was the suspected man? In Vendale's position, it seemed useless to inquire.

Who was to be sent to Neuchâtel with the receipt? Men of courage and men of honesty were to be had at Cripple Corner for the asking. But where was the man who was accustomed to foreign travelling, who could speak the French language, and who could be really relied on to let no stranger scrape acquaintance with him on his route? There was but one man at hand who combined all those requisites in his own person, and that man was Vendale himself.

It was a sacrifice to leave his business; it was a greater sacrifice to leave Marguerite. But a matter of five hundred pounds was involved in the pending inquiry; and a literal interpretation of M. Rolland's advice was insisted on in terms which there was no trifling with. The more Vendale thought of it, the more plainly the necessity faced him, and said, "Go!"

As he locked up the letter with the receipt, the association of ideas reminded him of Obenreizer. A guess at the identity of the suspected man looked more possible now. Obenreizer might know.

The thought had barely passed through his mind, when the door opened, and Obenreizer entered the room.

"They told me at Soho Square you were expected back last night," said Vendale, greeting him. "Have you done well in the country? Are you better?"

A thousand thanks. Obenreizer had done admirably well; Obenreizer was infinitely better. And now, what news? Any letter from Neuchâtel?

"A very strange letter," answered Vendale. "The matter has taken a new turn, and the letter insists—without excepting anybody—on my keeping our next proceedings a profound secret."

"Without excepting anybody?" repeated Obenreizer. As he said the words, he walked away again, thoughtfully, to the window at the other end of the room, looked out for a moment, and suddenly came back to Vendale. "Surely they must have forgotten?" he resumed, "or they would have excepted me?"

"It is Monsieur Rolland who writes," said Vendale. "And, as you say, he must certainly have forgotten. That view of the matter quite escaped me. I was just wishing I had you to consult, when you came into the room. And here I am tried by a formal prohibition, which cannot possibly have been intended to include you. How very annoying!"

Obenreizer's filmy eyes fixed on Vendale attentively.

"Perhaps it is more than annoying!" he said. "I came this morning not only to hear the news, but to offer myself as messenger, negotiator—what you will. Would you believe it? I have letters which oblige me to go to Switzerland immediately. Messages, documents, anything—I could have taken them all to Defresnier and Rolland for you."

"You are the very man I wanted," returned Vendale. "I had decided, most unwillingly, on going to Neuchâtel myself, not five minutes since, because I could find no one here capable of taking my place. Let me look at the letter again."

He opened the strong room to get at the letter. Obenreizer, after first glancing round him to make sure that they were alone, followed a step or two and waited, measuring Vendale with his eye. Vendale was the tallest man, and unmistakably the strongest man also of the two. Obenreizer turned away, and warmed himself at the fire.

Meanwhile, Vendale read the last paragraph in the letter for the third time. There was the plain warning—there was the closing sentence, which insisted on a literal interpretation of it. The hand, which was leading Vendale in the dark, led him on that condition only. A large sum was at stake: a terrible suspicion remained to be verified. If he acted on his own responsibility, and if anything happened to defeat the object in view, who would be blamed? As a man of business, Vendale had but one course to follow. He locked the letter up again.

"It is most annoying," he said to Obenreizer—"it is a piece of forgetfulness on Monsieur Rolland's part which puts me to serious inconvenience, and places me in an absurdly false position towards you. What am I to do? I am acting in a very serious matter, and acting entirely in the dark. I have no choice but to be guided, not by the spirit, but by the letter of my instructions. You understand me, I am sure? You know, if I had not been fettered in this way, how gladly I should have accepted your services?"

"Say no more!" returned Obenreizer. "In your place I should have done the same. My good friend, I take no offence. I thank you for your compliment. We shall be travelling companions, at any rate," added Obenreizer. "You go, as I go, at once?"

"At once. I must speak to Marguerite first, of course!"

"Surely! surely! Speak to her this evening. Come, and pick me up on the way to the station. We go together by the mail train to-night?"

"By the mail train to-night."

* * * * *

It was later than Vendale had anticipated when he drove up to the house in Soho Square. Business difficulties, occasioned by his sudden departure, had presented themselves by dozens. A cruelly large share of the time which he had hoped to devote to Marguerite had been claimed by duties at his office which it was impossible to neglect.

To his surprise and delight, she was alone in the drawing-room when he entered it.

"We have only a few minutes, George," she said. "But Madame Dor has been good to me—and we can have those few minutes alone." She threw her arms round his neck, and whispered eagerly, "Have you done anything to offend Mr. Obenreizer?"

"I!" exclaimed Vendale, in amazement.

"Hush!" she said, "I want to whisper it. You know the little photograph I have got of you. This afternoon it happened to be on the chimney-piece. He took it up and looked at it—and I saw his face in the glass. I know you have offended him! He is merciless; he is revengeful; he is as secret as the grave. Don't go with him, George—don't go with him!"

"My own love," returned Vendale, "you are letting your fancy frighten you! Obenreizer and I were never better friends than we are at this moment."

Before a word more could be said, the sudden movement of some ponderous body shook the floor of the next room. The shock was followed by the appearance of Madame Dor. "Obenreizer" exclaimed this excellent person in a whisper, and plumped down instantly in her regular place by the stove.

Obenreizer came in with a courier's big strapped over his shoulder. "Are you ready?" he asked, addressing Vendale. "Can I take anything for you? You have no travelling-bag. I have got one. Here is the compartment for papers, open at your service."

"Thank you," said Vendale. "I have only one paper of importance with me; and that paper I am bound to take charge of myself. Here it is," he added, touching the breast-pocket of his coat, "and here it must remain till we get to Neuchâtel."

As he said those words, Marguerite's hand caught his, and pressed it significantly. She was looking towards Obenreizer. Before Vendale could look, in his turn, Obenreizer had wheeled round, and was taking leave of Madame Dor.

"Adieu, my charming niece!" he said, turning to Marguerite next. "En route, my friend, for Neuchâtel!" He tapped Vendale lightly over the breast-pocket of his coat and led the way to the door.

Vendale's last look was for Marguerite. Marguerite's last words to him were, "Don't go!"

ACT III.

IN THE VALLEY

It was about the middle of the month of February when Vendale and Obenreizer set forth on their expedition. The winter being a hard one, the time was bad for travellers. So bad was it that these two travellers, coming to Strasbourg, found its great inns almost empty. And even the few people they did encounter in that city, who had started from England or from Paris on business journeys towards the interior of Switzerland, were turning back.

Many of the railroads in Switzerland that tourists pass easily enough now, were almost or quite impracticable then. Some were not begun; more were not completed. On such as were open, there were still large gaps of old road where communication in the winter season was often stopped; on others, there were weak points where the new work was not safe, either under conditions of severe frost, or of rapid thaw. The running of trains on this last class was not to be counted on in the worst time of the year, was contingent upon weather, or was wholly abandoned through the months considered the most dangerous.

At Strasbourg there were more travellers' stories afloat, respecting the difficulties of the way further on, than there were travellers to relate them. Many of these tales were as wild as usual; but the more modestly marvellous did derive some colour from the circumstance that people were indisputably turning back. However, as the road to Basle was open, Vendale's resolution to push on was in no wise disturbed. Obenreizer's resolution was necessarily Vendale's, seeing that he stood at bay thus desperately: He must be ruined, or must destroy the evidence that Vendale carried about him, even if he destroyed Vendale with it.

The state of mind of each of these two fellow-travellers towards the other was this. Obenreizer, encircled by impending ruin through Vendale's quickness of action, and seeing the circle narrowed every hour by Vendale's energy, hated him with the animosity of a fierce cunning lower animal. He had always had instinctive movements in his breast against him; perhaps, because of that old sore of gentleman and peasant; perhaps, because of the openness of his nature, perhaps, because of his better looks; perhaps, because of his success with Marguerite; perhaps, on all those grounds, the two last not the least. And now he saw in him, besides, the hunter who was tracking him down. Vendale, on the other hand, always contending generously against his first vague mistrust, now felt bound to contend against it more than ever: reminding himself, "He is Marguerite's guardian. We are on perfectly friendly terms; he is my companion of his own proposal, and can have no interested motive in sharing this undesirable journey." To which pleas in behalf of Obenreizer, chance added one consideration more, when they came to Basle after a journey of more than twice the average duration.

They had had a late dinner, and were alone in an inn room there, overhanging the Rhine: at that place rapid and deep, swollen and loud. Vendale lounged upon a couch, and Obenreizer walked to and fro: now, stopping at the window, looking at the crooked reflection of the town lights in the dark water (and peradventure thinking, "If I could fling him into it!"); now, resuming his walk with his eyes upon the floor.

"Where shall I rob him, if I can? Where shall I murder him, if I must?" So, as he paced the room, ran the river, ran the river, ran the river.

The burden seemed to him, at last, to be growing so plain, that he stopped; thinking it as well to suggest another burden to his companion.

"The Rhine sounds to-night," he said with a smile, "like the old waterfall at home. That waterfall which my mother showed to travellers (I told you of it once). The sound of it changed with the weather, as does the sound of all falling waters and flowing waters. When I was pupil of the watchmaker, I remembered it as sometimes saying to me for whole days, 'Who are you, my little wretch? Who are you, my little wretch?' I remembered it as saying, other times, when its sound was hollow, and storm was coming up the Pass: 'Boom, boom, boom. Beat him, beat him, beat him.' Like my mother enraged—if she was my mother."

"If she was?" said Vendale, gradually changing his attitude to a sitting one. "If she was? Why do you say 'if'?"

"What do I know?" replied the other negligently, throwing up his hands and letting them fall as they would. "What would you have? I am so obscurely born, that how can I say? I was very young, and all the rest of the family were men and women, and my so-called parents were old. Anything is possible of a case like that."

“Did you ever doubt—”

“I told you once, I doubt the marriage of those two,” he replied, throwing up his hands again, as if he were throwing the unprofitable subject away. “But here I am in Creation. *I* come of no fine family. What does it matter?”

“At least you are Swiss,” said Vendale, after following him with his eyes to and fro.

“How do I know?” he retorted abruptly, and stopping to look back over his shoulder. “I say to you, at least you are English. How do you know?”

“By what I have been told from infancy.”

“Ah! I know of myself that way.”

“And,” added Vendale, pursuing the thought that he could not drive back, “by my earliest recollections.”

“I also. I know of myself that way—if that way satisfies.”

“Does it not satisfy you?”

“It must. There is nothing like ‘it must’ in this little world. It must. Two short words those, but stronger than long proof or reasoning.”

“You and poor Wilding were born in the same year. You were nearly of an age,” said Vendale, again thoughtfully looking after him as he resumed his pacing up and down.

“Yes. Very nearly.”

Could Obenreizer be the missing man? In the unknown associations of things, was there a subtler meaning than he himself thought, in that theory so often on his lips about the smallness of the world? Had the Swiss letter presenting him followed so close on Mrs. Goldstraw’s revelation concerning the infant who had been taken away to Switzerland, because he was that infant grown a man? In a world where so many depths lie unsounded, it might be. The chances, or the laws—call them either—that had wrought out the revival of Vendale’s own acquaintance with Obenreizer, and had ripened it into intimacy, and had brought them here together this present winter night, were hardly less curious; while read by such a light, they were seen to cohere towards the furtherance of a continuous and an intelligible purpose.

Vendale’s awakened thoughts ran high while his eyes musingly followed Obenreizer pacing up and down the room, the river ever running to the tune: “Where shall I rob him, if I can? Where shall I murder him, if I must?” The secret of his dead friend was in no hazard from Vendale’s lips;

but just as his friend had died of its weight, so did he in his lighter succession feel the burden of the trust, and the obligation to follow any clue, however obscure. He rapidly asked himself, would he like this man to be the real Wilding? No. Argue down his mistrust as he might, he was unwilling to put such a substitute in the place of his late guileless, outspoken childlike partner. He rapidly asked himself, would he like this man to be rich? No. He had more power than enough over Marguerite as it was, and wealth might invest him with more. Would he like this man to be Marguerite's Guardian, and yet proved to stand in no degree of relationship towards her, however disconnected and distant? No. But these were not considerations to come between him and fidelity to the dead. Let him see to it that they passed him with no other notice than the knowledge that they *had* passed him, and left him bent on the discharge of a solemn duty. And he did see to it, so soon that he followed his companion with ungrudging eyes, while he still paced the room; that companion, whom he supposed to be moodily reflecting on his own birth, and not on another man's—least of all what man's—violent Death.

The road in advance from Basle to Neuchâtel was better than had been represented. The latest weather had done it good. Drivers, both of horses and mules, had come in that evening after dark, and had reported nothing more difficult to be overcome than trials of patience, harness, wheels, axles, and whipcord. A bargain was soon struck for a carriage and horses, to take them on in the morning, and to start before daylight.

"Do you lock your door at night when travelling?" asked Obenreizer, standing warming his hands by the wood fire in Vendale's chamber, before going to his own.

"Not I. I sleep too soundly."

"You are so sound a sleeper?" he retorted, with an admiring look. "What a blessing!"

"Anything but a blessing to the rest of the house," rejoined Vendale, "if I had to be knocked up in the morning from the outside of my bedroom door."

"I, too," said Obenreizer, "leave open my room. But let me advise you, as a Swiss who knows: always, when you travel in my country, put your papers—and, of course, your money—under your pillow. Always the same place."

"You are not complimentary to your countrymen," laughed Vendale.

“My countrymen,” said Obenreizer, with that light touch of his friend’s elbows by way of Good-Night and benediction, “I suppose are like the majority of men. And the majority of men will take what they can get. Adieu! At four in the morning.”

“Adieu! At four.”

Left to himself, Vendale raked the logs together, sprinkled over them the white wood-ashes lying on the hearth, and sat down to compose his thoughts. But they still ran high on their latest theme, and the running of the river tended to agitate rather than to quiet them. As he sat thinking, what little disposition he had had to sleep departed. He felt it hopeless to lie down yet, and sat dressed by the fire. Marguerite, Wilding, Obenreizer, the business he was then upon, and a thousand hopes and doubts that had nothing to do with it, occupied his mind at once. Everything seemed to have power over him but slumber. The departed disposition to sleep kept far away.

He had sat for a long time thinking, on the hearth, when his candle burned down and its light went out. It was of little moment; there was light enough in the fire. He changed his attitude, and, leaning his arm on the chair-back, and his chin upon that hand, sat thinking still.

But he sat between the fire and the bed, and, as the fire flickered in the play of air from the fast-flowing river, his enlarged shadow fluttered on the white wall by the bedside. His attitude gave it an air, half of mourning and half of bending over the bed imploring. His eyes were observant of it, when he became troubled by the disagreeable fancy that it was like Wilding’s shadow, and not his own.

A slight change of place would cause it to disappear. He made the change, and the apparition of his disturbed fancy vanished. He now sat in the shade of a little nook beside the fire, and the door of the room was before him.

It had a long cumbrous iron latch. He saw the latch slowly and softly rise. The door opened a very little, and came to again, as though only the air had moved it. But he saw that the latch was out of the hasp.

The door opened again very slowly, until it opened wide enough to admit some one. It afterwards remained still for a while, as though cautiously held open on the other side. The figure of a man then entered, with its face turned towards the bed, and stood quiet just within the door.

Until it said, in a low half-whisper, at the same time taking one stop forward: “Vendale!”

“What now?” he answered, springing from his seat; “who is it?”

It was Obenreizer, and he uttered a cry of surprise as Vendale came upon him from that unexpected direction. “Not in bed?” he said, catching him by both shoulders with an instinctive tendency to a struggle. “Then something *is* wrong!”

“What do you mean?” said Vendale, releasing himself.

“First tell me; you are not ill?”

“Ill? No.”

“I have had a bad dream about you. How is it that I see you up and dressed?”

“My good fellow, I may as well ask you how it is that I see *you* up and undressed?”

“I have told you why. I have had a bad dream about you. I tried to rest after it, but it was impossible. I could not make up my mind to stay where I was without knowing you were safe; and yet I could not make up my mind to come in here. I have been minutes hesitating at the door. It is so easy to laugh at a dream that you have not dreamed. Where is your candle?”

“Burnt out.”

“I have a whole one in my room. Shall I fetch it?”

“Do so.”

His room was very near, and he was absent for but a few seconds. Coming back with the candle in his hand, he kneeled down on the hearth and lighted it. As he blew with his breath a charred billet into flame for the purpose, Vendale, looking down at him, saw that his lips were white and not easy of control.

“Yes!” said Obenreizer, setting the lighted candle on the table, “it was a bad dream. Only look at me!”

His feet were bare; his red-flannel shirt was thrown back at the throat, and its sleeves were rolled above the elbows; his only other garment, a pair of under pantaloons or drawers, reaching to the ankles, fitted him close and tight. A certain lithe and savage appearance was on his figure, and his eyes were very bright.

“If there had been a wrestle with a robber, as I dreamed,” said Obenreizer, “you see, I was stripped for it.”

“And armed too,” said Vendale, glancing at his girdle.

"A traveller's dagger, that I always carry on the road," he answered carelessly, half drawing it from its sheath with his left hand, and putting it back again. "Do you carry no such thing?"

"Nothing of the kind."

"No pistols?" said Obenreizer, glancing at the table, and from it to the untouched pillow.

"Nothing of the sort."

"You Englishmen are so confident! You wish to sleep?"

"I have wished to sleep this long time, but I can't do it."

"I neither, after the bad dream. My fire has gone the way of your candle. May I come and sit by yours? Two o'clock! It will so soon be four, that it is not worth the trouble to go to bed again."

"I shall not take the trouble to go to bed at all, now," said Vendale; "sit here and keep me company, and welcome."

Going back to his room to arrange his dress, Obenreizer soon returned in a loose cloak and slippers, and they sat down on opposite sides of the hearth. In the interval Vendale had replenished the fire from the wood-basket in his room, and Obenreizer had put upon the table a flask and cup from his.

"Common cabaret brandy, I am afraid," he said, pouring out; "bought upon the road, and not like yours from Cripple Corner. But yours is exhausted; so much the worse. A cold night, a cold time of night, a cold country, and a cold house. This may be better than nothing; try it."

Vendale took the cup, and did so.

"How do you find it?"

"It has a coarse after-flavour," said Vendale, giving back the cup with a slight shudder, "and I don't like it."

"You are right," said Obenreizer, tasting, and smacking his lips; "it *has* a coarse after-flavour, and *I* don't like it. Booh! It burns, though!" He had flung what remained in the cup upon the fire.

Each of them leaned an elbow on the table, reclined his head upon his hand, and sat looking at the flaring logs. Obenreizer remained watchful and still; but Vendale, after certain nervous twitches and starts, in one of which he rose to his feet and looked wildly about him, fell into the strangest confusion of dreams. He carried his papers in a leather case or pocket-book, in an inner breast-pocket of his buttoned travelling-coat; and whatever he dreamed of, in the lethargy that got possession of him, something importunate in those papers called him out of that dream, though he could not wake from it. He was berated on the steppes of Russia (some shadowy person gave that name to the place) with Marguerite; and yet the sensation of a hand at his breast, softly feeling the outline of the packet-book as he lay asleep before the fire, was present to him. He was ship-wrecked in an open boat at sea, and having lost his clothes, had no other covering than an old sail; and yet a creeping hand, tracing outside all the other pockets of the dress he actually wore, for papers, and finding none answer its touch, warned him to rouse himself. He was in the ancient vault at Cripple Corner, to which was transferred the very bed substantial and present in that very room at Basle; and Wilding (not dead, as he had supposed, and yet he did not wonder much) shook him, and whispered, "Look at that man! Don't you see he has risen, and is turning the pillow? Why should he turn the pillow, if not to seek those papers that are in your breast? Awake!" And yet he slept, and wandered off into other dreams.

Watchful and still, with his elbow on the table, and his head upon that hand, his companion at length said: "Vendale! We are called. Past Four!" Then, opening his eyes, he saw, turned sideways on him, the filmy face of Obenreizer.

"You have been in a heavy sleep," he said. "The fatigue of constant travelling and the cold!"

"I am broad awake now," cried Vendale, springing up, but with an unsteady footing. "Haven't you slept at all?"

"I may have dozed, but I seem to have been patiently looking at the fire. Whether or no, we must wash, and breakfast, and turn out. Past four, Vendale; past four!"

It was said in a tone to rouse him, for already he was half asleep again. In his preparation for the day, too, and at his breakfast, he was often virtually asleep while in mechanical action. It was not until the cold dark day was closing in, that he had any distincter impressions of the ride than jingling bells, bitter weather, slipping horses, frowning hill-sides, bleak woods, and a stoppage at some wayside house of entertainment, where they had passed through a cow-house to reach the travellers' room above. He had been conscious of little more, except of Obenreizer sitting thoughtful at his side all day, and eyeing him much.

But when he shook off his stupor, Obenreizer was not at his side. The carriage was stopping to bait at another wayside house; and a line of long narrow carts, laden with casks of wine, and drawn by horses with a quantity of blue collar and head-gear, were baiting too. These came from the direction in which the travellers were going, and Obenreizer (not thoughtful now, but cheerful and alert) was talking with the foremost driver. As Vendale stretched his limbs, circulated his blood, and cleared off the lees of his lethargy, with a sharp run to and fro in the bracing air, the line of carts moved on: the drivers all saluting Obenreizer as they passed him.

"Who are those?" asked Vendale.

"They are our carriers—Defresnier and Company's," replied Obenreizer. "Those are our casks of wine." He was singing to himself, and lighting a cigar.

"I have been drearily dull company to-day," said Vendale. "I don't know what has been the matter with me."

"You had no sleep last night; and a kind of brain-congestion frequently comes, at first, of such cold," said Obenreizer. "I have seen it often. After all, we shall have our journey for nothing, it seems."

"How for nothing?"

"The House is at Milan. You know, we are a Wine House at Neuchâtel, and a Silk House at Milan? Well, Silk happening to press of a sudden, more than Wine, Defresnier was summoned to Milan. Rolland, the other partner, has been taken ill since his departure, and the doctors will allow him to see no one. A letter awaits you at Neuchâtel to tell you so. I have it from our chief carrier whom you saw me talking with. He was surprised to see me, and said he had that word for you if he met you. What do you do? Go back?"

"Go on," said Vendale.

"On?"

"On? Yes. Across the Alps, and down to Milan."

Obenreizer stopped in his smoking to look at Vendale, and then smoked heavily, looked up the road, looked down the road, looked down at the stones in the road at his feet.

"I have a very serious matter in charge," said Vendale; "more of these missing forms may be turned to as bad account, or worse: I am urged to lose no time in helping the House to take the thief; and nothing shall turn me back."

"No?" cried Obenreizer, taking out his cigar to smile, and giving his hand to his fellow-traveller. "Then nothing shall turn *me* back. Ho, driver!

Despatch. Quick there! Let us push on!”

They travelled through the night. There had been snow, and there was a partial thaw, and they mostly travelled at a foot-pace, and always with many stoppages to breathe the splashed and floundering horses. After an hour’s broad daylight, they drew rein at the inn-door at Neuchâtel, having been some eight-and-twenty hours in conquering some eighty English miles.

When they had hurriedly refreshed and changed, they went together to the house of business of Defresnier and Company. There they found the letter which the wine-carrier had described, enclosing the tests and comparisons of handwriting essential to the discovery of the Forger. Vendale’s determination to press forward, without resting, being already taken, the only question to delay them was by what Pass could they cross the Alps? Respecting the state of the two Passes of the St. Gotthard and the Simplon, the guides and mule-drivers differed greatly; and both passes were still far enough off, to prevent the travellers from having the benefit of any recent experience of either. Besides which, they well knew that a fall of snow might altogether change the described conditions in a single hour, even if they were correctly stated. But, on the whole, the Simplon appearing to be the hopefuller route, Vendale decided to take it. Obenreizer bore little or no part in the discussion, and scarcely spoke.

To Geneva, to Lausanne, along the level margin of the lake to Vevay, so into the winding valley between the spurs of the mountains, and into the valley of the Rhone. The sound of the carriage-wheels, as they rattled on, through the day, through the night, became as the wheels of a great clock, recording the hours. No change of weather varied the journey, after it had hardened into a sullen frost. In a sombre-yellow sky, they saw the Alpine ranges; and they saw enough of snow on nearer and much lower hill-tops and hill-sides, to sully, by contrast, the purity of lake, torrent, and waterfall, and make the villages look discoloured and dirty. But no snow fell, nor was there any snow-drift on the road. The stalking along the valley of more or less of white mist, changing on their hair and dress into icicles, was the only variety between them and the gloomy sky. And still by day, and still by night, the wheels. And still they rolled, in the hearing of one of them, to the burden, altered from the burden of the Rhine: “The time is gone for robbing him alive, and I must murder him.”

They came, at length, to the poor little town of Brieg, at the foot of the Simplon. They came there after dark, but yet could see how dwarfed men’s works and men became with the immense mountains towering over them. Here they must lie for the night; and here was warmth of fire, and lamp, and dinner, and wine, and after-conference resounding, with guides and drivers. No human creature had come across the Pass for four days. The snow above the snow-line was too soft for wheeled carriage, and not hard enough for sledge. There was snow in the sky. There had been snow in the sky for days past, and the marvel was that it had not fallen, and the certainty was that it must fall. No vehicle could cross. The journey might be tried on mules, or it might be tried on foot; but the best guides must be paid danger-price in either case, and that, too, whether they succeeded in taking the two travellers across, or turned for safety and brought them back.

In this discussion, Obenreizer bore no part whatever. He sat silently smoking by the fire until the room was cleared and Vendale referred to him.

“Bah! I am weary of these poor devils and their trade,” he said, in reply. “Always the same story. It is the story of their trade to-day, as it was the story of their trade when I was a ragged boy. What do you and I want? We want a knapsack each, and a mountain-staff each. We want no guide; we should guide him; he would not guide us. We leave our portmanteaus here, and we cross together. We have been on the mountains together before now, and I am mountain-born, and I know this Pass—Pass!—rather High Road!—by heart. We will leave these poor devils, in pity, to trade with others; but they must not delay us to make a pretence of earning money. Which is all they mean.”

Vendale, glad to be quit of the dispute, and to cut the knot: active, adventurous, bent on getting forward, and therefore very susceptible to the last hint: readily assented. Within two hours, they had purchased what they wanted for the expedition, had packed their knapsacks, and lay down to sleep.

At break of day, they found half the town collected in the narrow street to see them depart. The people talked together in groups; the guides and drivers whispered apart, and looked up at the sky; no one wished them a good journey.

As they began the ascent, a gleam of run shone from the otherwise unaltered sky, and for a moment turned the tin spires of the town to silver.

“A good omen!” said Vendale (though it died out while he spoke). “Perhaps our example will open the Pass on this side.”

"No; we shall not be followed," returned Obenreizer, looking up at the sky and back at the valley. "We shall be alone up yonder."

ON THE MOUNTAIN

The road was fair enough for stout walkers, and the air grew lighter and easier to breathe as the two ascended. But the settled gloom remained as it had remained for days back. Nature seemed to have come to a pause. The sense of hearing, no less than the sense of sight, was troubled by having to wait so long for the change, whatever it might be, that impended. The silence was as palpable and heavy as the lowering clouds—or rather cloud, for there seemed to be but one in all the sky, and that one covering the whole of it.

Although the light was thus dismally shrouded, the prospect was not obscured. Down in the valley of the Rhone behind them, the stream could be traced through all its many windings, oppressively sombre and solemn in its one leaden hue, a colourless waste. Far and high above them, glaciers and suspended avalanches overhung the spots where they must pass, by-and-by; deep and dark below them on their right, were awful precipice and roaring torrent; tremendous mountains arose in every vista. The gigantic landscape, uncheered by a touch of changing light or a solitary ray of sun, was yet terribly distinct in its ferocity. The hearts of two lonely men might shrink a little, if they had to win their way for miles and hours among a legion of silent and motionless men—mere men like themselves—all looking at them with fixed and frowning front. But how much more, when the legion is of Nature's mightiest works, and the frown may turn to fury in an instant!

As they ascended, the road became gradually more rugged and difficult. But the spirits of Vendale rose as they mounted higher, leaving so much more of the road behind them conquered. Obenreizer spoke little, and held on with a determined purpose. Both, in respect of agility and endurance, were well qualified for the expedition. Whatever the born mountaineer read in the weather-tokens that was illegible to the other, he kept to himself.

"Shall we get across to-day?" asked Vendale.

"No," replied the other. "You see how much deeper the snow lies here than it lay half a league lower. The higher we mount the deeper the snow will lie. Walking is half wading even now. And the days are so short! If we get as high as the fifth Refuge, and lie to-night at the Hospice, we shall do well."

"Is there no danger of the weather rising in the night," asked Vendale, anxiously, "and snowing us up?"

"There is danger enough about us," said Obenreizer, with a cautious glance onward and upward, "to render silence our best policy. You have heard of the Bridge of the Ganther?"

"I have crossed it once."

"In the summer?"

"Yes; in the travelling season."

"Yes; but it is another thing at this season;" with a sneer, as though he were out of temper. "This is not a time of year, or a state of things, on an Alpine Pass, that you gentlemen holiday-travellers know much about."

"You are my Guide," said Vendale, good humouredly. "I trust to you."

"I am your Guide," said Obenreizer, "and I will guide you to your journey's end. There is the Bridge before us."

They had made a turn into a desolate and dismal ravine, where the snow lay deep below them, deep above them, deep on every side. While speaking, Obenreizer stood pointing at the Bridge, and observing Vendale's face, with a very singular expression on his own.

"If I, as Guide, had sent you over there, in advance, and encouraged you to give a shout or two, you might have brought down upon yourself tons and tons and tons of snow, that would not only have struck you dead, but buried you deep, at a blow."

"No doubt," said Vendale.

"No doubt. But that is not what I have to do, as Guide. So pass silently. Or, going as we go, our indiscretion might else crush and bury *me*. Let us get on!"

There was a great accumulation of snow on the Bridge; and such enormous accumulations of snow overhung them from protecting masses of rock, that they might have been making their way through a stormy sky of white clouds. Using his staff skilfully, sounding as he went, and looking upward, with bent shoulders, as it were to resist the mere idea of a fall from above, Obenreizer softly led. Vendale closely followed. They were yet in the midst of their dangerous way, when there came a mighty rush, followed by a sound as of thunder. Obenreizer clapped his hand on Vendale's mouth and pointed to the track behind them. Its aspect had been wholly changed in a moment. An avalanche had swept over it, and plunged into the torrent at the bottom of the gulf below.

Their appearance at the solitary Inn not far beyond this terrible Bridge, elicited many expressions of astonishment from the people shut up in the house. "We stay but to rest," said Obenreizer, shaking the snow from his dress at the fire. "This gentleman has very pressing occasion to get across; tell them, Vendale."

"Assuredly, I have very pressing occasion. I must cross."

"You hear, all of you. My friend has very pressing occasion to get across, and we want no advice and no help. I am as good a guide, my fellow-countrymen, as any of you. Now, give us to eat and drink."

In exactly the same way, and in nearly the same words, when it was coming on dark and they had struggled through the greatly increased difficulties of the road, and had at last reached their destination for the night, Obenreizer said to the astonished people of the Hospice, gathering about them at the fire, while they were yet in the act of getting their wet shoes off, and shaking the snow from their clothes:

"It is well to understand one another, friends all. This gentleman—"

"—Has," said Vendale, readily taking him up with a smile, "very pressing occasion to get across. Must cross."

"You hear?—has very pressing occasion to get across, must cross. We want no advice and no help. I am mountain-born, and act as Guide. Do not worry us by talking about it, but let us have supper, and wine, and bed."

All through the intense cold of the night, the same awful stillness. Again at sunrise, no sunny tinge to gild or redden the snow. The same interminable waste of deathly white; the same immovable air; the same monotonous gloom in the sky.

"Travellers!" a friendly voice called to them from the door, after they were afoot, knapsack on back and staff in hand, as yesterday; "recollect! There are five places of shelter, near together, on the dangerous road before you; and there is the wooden cross, and there is the next Hospice. Do not stray from the track. If the *Tourmente* comes on, take shelter instantly!"

"The trade of these poor devils!" said Obenreizer to his friend, with a contemptuous backward wave of his hand towards the voice. "How they stick to their trade! You Englishmen say we Swiss are mercenary. Truly, it does look like it."

They had divided between the two knapsacks such refreshments as they had been able to obtain that morning, and as they deemed it prudent to take. Obenreizer carried the wine as his share of the burden; Vendale, the bread and meat and cheese, and the flask of brandy.

They had for some time laboured upward and onward through the snow—which was now above their knees in the track, and of unknown depth elsewhere—and they were still labouring upward and onward through the most frightful part of that tremendous desolation, when snow begin to fall. At first, but a few flakes descended slowly and steadily. After a little while the fall grew much denser, and suddenly it began without apparent cause to whirl itself into spiral shapes. Instantly ensuing upon this last change, an icy blast came roaring at them, and every sound and force imprisoned until now was let loose.

One of the dismal galleries through which the road is carried at that perilous point, a cave eked out by arches of great strength, was near at hand. They struggled into it, and the storm raged wildly. The noise of the wind, the noise of the water, the thundering down of displaced masses of rock and snow, the awful voices with which not only that gorge but every gorge in the whole monstrous range seemed to be suddenly endowed, the darkness as of night, the violent revolving of the snow which beat and broke it into spray and blinded them, the madness of everything around insatiate for destruction, the rapid substitution of furious violence for unnatural calm, and hosts of appalling sounds for silence: these were things, on the edge of a deep abyss, to chill the blood, though the fierce wind, made actually solid by ice and snow, had failed to chill it.

Obenreizer, walking to and fro in the gallery without ceasing, signed to Vendale to help him unbuckle his knapsack. They could see each other, but could not have heard each other speak. Vendale complying, Obenreizer produced his bottle of wine, and poured some out, motioning Vendale to take that for warmth's sake, and not brandy. Vendale again complying, Obenreizer seemed to drink after him, and the two walked backwards and forwards side by side; both well knowing that to rest or sleep would be to die.

The snow came driving heavily into the gallery by the upper end at which they would pass out of it, if they ever passed out; for greater dangers lay on the road behind them than before. The snow soon began to choke the arch. An hour more, and it lay so high as to block out half the returning daylight. But it froze hard now, as it fell, and could be clambered through or over. The violence of the mountain storm was gradually yielding to steady snowfall. The wind still raged at intervals, but not incessantly; and when it paused, the snow fell in heavy flakes.

They might have been two hours in their frightful prison, when Obenreizer, now crunching into the mound, now creeping over it with his head bowed down and his body touching the top of the arch, made his way out. Vendale followed close upon him, but followed without clear motive or calculation. For the lethargy of Basle was creeping over him again, and mastering his senses.

How far he had followed out of the gallery, or with what obstacles he had since contended, he knew not. He became roused to the knowledge that Obenreizer had set upon him, and that they were struggling desperately in the snow. He became roused to the remembrance of what his assailant carried in a girdle. He felt for it, drew it, struck at him, struggled again, struck at him again, cast him off, and stood face to face with him.

“I promised to guide you to your journey’s end,” said Obenreizer, “and I have kept my promise. The journey of your life ends here. Nothing can prolong it. You are sleeping as you stand.”

“You are a villain. What have you done to me?”

“You are a fool. I have drugged you. You are doubly a fool, for I drugged you once before upon the journey, to try you. You are trebly a fool, for I am the thief and forger, and in a few moments I shall take those proofs against the thief and forger from your insensible body.”

The entrapped man tried to throw off the lethargy, but its fatal hold upon him was so sure that, even while he heard those words, he stupidly wondered which of them had been wounded, and whose blood it was that he saw sprinkled on the snow.

“What have I done to you,” he asked, heavily and thickly, “that you should be—so base—a murderer?”

“Done to me? You would have destroyed me, but that you have come to your journey’s end. Your cursed activity interposed between me, and the time I had counted on in which I might have replaced the money. Done to me? You have come in my way—not once, not twice, but again and again and again. Did I try to shake you off in the beginning, or no? You were not to be shaken off. Therefore you die here."

Vendale tried to think coherently, tried to speak coherently, tried to pick up the iron-shod staff he had let fall; failing to touch it, tried to stagger on without its aid. All in vain, all in vain! He stumbled, and fell heavily forward on the brink of the deep chasm.

Stupefied, dozing, unable to stand upon his feet, a veil before his eyes, his sense of hearing deadened, he made such a vigorous rally that, supporting himself on his hands, he saw his enemy standing calmly over him, and heard him speak. "You call me murderer," said Obenreizer, with a grim laugh. "The name matters very little. But at least I have set my life against yours, for I am surrounded by dangers, and may never make my way out of this place. The *Tourmente* is rising again. The snow is on the whirl. I must have the papers now. Every moment has my life in it."

"Stop!" cried Vendale, in a terrible voice, staggering up with a last flash of fire breaking out of him, and clutching the thievish hands at his breast, in both of his. "Stop! Stand away from me! God bless my Marguerite! Happily she will never know how I died. Stand off from me, and let me look at your murderous face. Let it remind me—of something—left to say."

The sight of him fighting so hard for his senses, and the doubt whether he might not for the instant be possessed by the strength of a dozen men, kept his opponent still. Wildly glaring at him, Vendale faltered out the broken words:

"It shall not be—the trust—of the dead—betrayed by me—reputed parents—misinherited fortune—see to it!"

As his head dropped on his breast, and he stumbled on the brink of the chasm as before, the thievish hands went once more, quick and busy, to his breast. He made a convulsive attempt to cry "No!" desperately rolled himself over into the gulf; and sank away from his enemy's touch, like a phantom in a dreadful dream.

* * * * *

The mountain storm raged again, and passed again. The awful mountain-voices died away, the moon rose, and the soft and silent snow fell.

Two men and two large dogs came out at the door of the Hospice. The men looked carefully around them, and up at the sky. The dogs rolled in the snow, and took it into their mouths, and cast it up with their paws.

One of the men said to the other: “We may venture now. We may find them in one of the five Refuges.” Each fastened on his back a basket; each took in his hand a strong spiked pole; each girded under his arms a looped end of a stout rope, so that they were tied together.

Suddenly the dogs desisted from their gambols in the snow, stood looking down the ascent, put their noses up, put their noses down, became greatly excited, and broke into a deep loud bay together.

The two men looked in the faces of the two dogs. The two dogs looked, with at least equal intelligence, in the faces of the two men.

“Au secours, then! Help! To the rescue!” cried the two men. The two dogs, with a glad, deep, generous bark, bounded away.

“Two more mad ones!” said the men, stricken motionless, and looking away in the moonlight. “Is it possible in such weather! And one of them a woman!”

Each of the dogs had the corner of a woman’s dress in its mouth, and drew her along. She fondled their heads as she came up, and she came up through the snow with an accustomed tread. Not so the large man with her, who was spent and winded.

“Dear guides, dear friends of travellers! I am of your country. We seek two gentlemen crossing the Pass, who should have reached the Hospice this evening.”

“They have reached it, ma’amselle.”

“Thank Heaven! O thank Heaven!”

“But, unhappily, they have gone on again. We are setting forth to seek them even now. We had to wait until the *Tourmente* passed. It has been fearful up here.”

“Dear guides, dear friends of travellers! Let me go with you. Let me go with you for the love of GOD! One of those gentlemen is to be my husband. I love him, O, so dearly. O so dearly! You see I am not faint, you see I am not tired. I am born a peasant girl. I will show you that I know well how to fasten myself to your ropes. I will do it with my own hands. I will swear to be brave and good. But let me go with you, let me go with you! If any mischance should have befallen him, my love would find him, when nothing else could. On my knees, dear friends of travellers! By the love your dear mothers had for your fathers!”

The good rough fellows were moved. "After all," they murmured to one another, "she speaks but the truth. She knows the ways of the mountains. See how marvellously she has come here. But as to Monsieur there, ma'amselle?"

"Dear Mr. Joey," said Marguerite, addressing him in his own tongue, "you will remain at the house, and wait for me; will you not?"

"If I know'd which o' you two recommended it," growled Joey Ladle, eyeing the two men with great indignation, "I'd fight you for sixpence, and give you half-a-crown towards your expenses. No, Miss. I'll stick by you as long as there's any sticking left in me, and I'll die for you when I can't do better."

The state of the moon rendering it highly important that no time should be lost, and the dogs showing signs of great uneasiness, the two men quickly took their resolution. The rope that yoked them together was exchanged for a longer one; the party were secured, Marguerite second, and the Cellarman last; and they set out for the Refuges. The actual distance of those places was nothing: the whole five, and the next Hospice to boot, being within two miles; but the ghastly way was whitened out and sheeted over.

They made no miss in reaching the Gallery where the two had taken shelter. The second storm of wind and snow had so wildly swept over it since, that their tracks were gone. But the dogs went to and fro with their noses down, and were confident. The party stopping, however, at the further arch, where the second storm had been especially furious, and where the drift was deep, the dogs became troubled, and went about and about, in quest of a lost purpose.

The great abyss being known to lie on the right, they wandered too much to the left, and had to regain the way with infinite labour through a deep field of snow. The leader of the line had stopped it, and was taking note of the landmarks, when one of the dogs fell to tearing up the snow a little before them. Advancing and stooping to look at it, thinking that some one might be overwhelmed there, they saw that it was stained, and that the stain was red.

The other dog was now seen to look over the brink of the gulf, with his fore legs straightened out, lest he should fall into it, and to tremble in every limb. Then the dog who had found the stained snow joined him, and then they ran to and fro, distressed and whining. Finally, they both stopped on the brink together, and setting up their heads, howled dolefully.

"There is some one lying below," said Marguerite.

"I think so," said the foremost man. "Stand well inward, the two last, and let us look over."

The last man kindled two torches from his basket, and handed them forward. The leader taking one, and Marguerite the other, they looked down; now shading the torches, now moving them to the right or left, now raising them, now depressing them, as moonlight far below contended with black shadows. A piercing cry from Marguerite broke a long silence.

"My God! On a projecting point, where a wall of ice stretches forward over the torrent, I see a human form!"

"Where, ma'amselle, where?"

"See, there! On the shelf of ice below the dogs!"

The leader, with a sickened aspect, drew inward, and they were all silent. But they were not all inactive, for Marguerite, with swift and skilful fingers, had detached both herself and him from the rope in a few seconds.

"Show me the baskets. These two are the only ropes?"

"The only ropes here, ma'amselle; but at the Hospice—"

"If he is alive—I know it is my lover—he will be dead before you can return. Dear Guides! Blessed friends of travellers! Look at me. Watch my hands. If they falter or go wrong, make me your prisoner by force. If they are steady and go right, help me to save him!"

She girded herself with a cord under the breast and arms, she formed it into a kind of jacket, she drew it into knots, she laid its end side by side with the end of the other cord, she twisted and twined the two together, she knotted them together, she set her foot upon the knots, she strained them, she held them for the two men to strain at.

"She is inspired," they said to one another.

"By the Almighty's mercy!" she exclaimed. "You both know that I am by far the lightest here. Give me the brandy and the wine, and lower me down to him. Then go for assistance and a stronger rope. You see that when it is lowered to me—look at this about me now—I can make it fast and safe to his body. Alive or dead, I will bring him up, or die with him. I love him passionately. Can I say more?"

They turned to her companion, but he was lying senseless on the snow.

“Lower me down to him,” she said, taking two little kegs they had brought, and hanging them about her, “or I will dash myself to pieces! I am a peasant, and I know no giddiness or fear; and this is nothing to me, and I passionately love him. Lower me down!”

“Ma’amselle, ma’amselle, he must be dying or dead.”

“Dying or dead, my husband’s head shall lie upon my breast, or I will dash myself to pieces.”

They yielded, overborne. With such precautions as their skill and the circumstances admitted, they let her slip from the summit, guiding herself down the precipitous icy wall with her hand, and they lowered down, and lowered down, and lowered down, until the cry came up: “Enough!”

“Is it really he, and is he dead?” they called down, looking over.

The cry came up: “He is insensible; but his heart beats. It beats against mine.”

“How does he lie?”

The cry came up: “Upon a ledge of ice. It has thawed beneath him, and it will thaw beneath me. Hasten. If we die, I am content.”

One of the two men hurried off with the dogs at such topmost speed as he could make; the other set up the lighted torches in the snow, and applied himself to recovering the Englishman. Much snow-chafing and some brandy got him on his legs, but delirious and quite unconscious where he was.

The watch remained upon the brink, and his cry went down continually: “Courage! They will soon be here. How goes it?” And the cry came up: “His heart still beats against mine. I warm him in my arms. I have cast off the rope, for the ice melts under us, and the rope would separate me from him; but I am not afraid.”

The moon went down behind the mountain tops, and all the abyss lay in darkness. The cry went down: “How goes it?” The cry came up: “We are sinking lower, but his heart still beats against mine.”

At length the eager barking of the dogs, and a flare of light upon the snow, proclaimed that help was coming on. Twenty or thirty men, lamps, torches, litters, ropes, blankets, wood to kindle a great fire, restoratives and stimulants, came in fast. The dogs ran from one man to another, and from this thing to that, and ran to the edge of the abyss, dumbly entreating Speed, speed, speed!

The cry went down: “Thanks to God, all is ready. How goes it?”

The cry came up: “We are sinking still, and we are deadly cold. His heart no longer beats against mine. Let no one come down, to add to our weight. Lower the rope only.”

The fire was kindled high, a great glare of torches lighted the sides of the precipice, lamps were lowered, a strong rope was lowered. She could be seen passing it round him, and making it secure.

The cry came up into a deathly silence: “Raise! Softly!” They could see her diminished figure shrink, as he was swung into the air.

They gave no shout when some of them laid him on a litter, and others lowered another strong rope. The cry again came up into a deathly silence: “Raise! Softly!” But when they caught her at the brink, then they shouted, then they wept, then they gave thanks to Heaven, then they kissed her feet, then they kissed her dress, then the dogs caressed her, licked her icy hands, and with their honest faces warmed her frozen bosom!

She broke from them all, and sank over him on his litter, with both her loving hands upon the heart that stood still.

ACT IV.

THE CLOCK-LOCK

The pleasant scene was Neuchâtel; the pleasant month was April; the pleasant place was a notary's office; the pleasant person in it was the notary: a rosy, hearty, handsome old man, chief notary of Neuchâtel, known far and wide in the canton as Maître Voigt. Professionally and personally, the notary was a popular citizen. His innumerable kindnesses and his innumerable oddities had for years made him one of the recognised public characters of the pleasant Swiss town. His long brown frock-coat and his black skull-cap, were among the institutions of the place: and he carried a snuff-box which, in point of size, was popularly believed to be without a parallel in Europe.

There was another person in the notary's office, not so pleasant as the notary. This was Obenreizer.

An oddly pastoral kind of office it was, and one that would never have answered in England. It stood in a neat back yard, fenced off from a pretty flower-garden. Goats browsed in the doorway, and a cow was within half-a-dozen feet of keeping company with the clerk. Maître Voigt's room was a bright and varnished little room, with panelled walls, like a toy-chamber. According to the seasons of the year, roses, sunflowers, hollyhocks, peeped in at the windows. Maître Voigt's bees hummed through the office all the summer, in at this window and out at that, taking it frequently in their day's work, as if honey were to be made from Maître Voigt's sweet disposition. A large musical box on the chimney-piece often trilled away at the Overture to Fra Diavolo, or a Selection from William Tell, with a chirruping liveliness that had to be stopped by force on the entrance of a client, and irrepressibly broke out again the moment his back was turned.

"Courage, courage, my good fellow!" said Maître Voigt, patting Obenreizer on the knee, in a fatherly and comforting way. "You will begin a new life to-morrow morning in my office here."

Obenreizer—dressed in mourning, and subdued in manner—lifted his hand, with a white handkerchief in it, to the region of his heart. "The gratitude is here," he said. "But the words to express it are not here."

"Ta-ta-ta! Don't talk to me about gratitude!" said Maître Voigt. "I hate to see a man oppressed. I see you oppressed, and I hold out my hand to you by instinct. Besides, I am not too old yet, to remember my young days. Your father sent me my first client. (It was on a question of half an acre of vineyard that seldom bore any grapes.) Do I owe nothing to your father's son? I owe him a debt of friendly obligation, and I pay it to you. That's rather neatly expressed, I think," added Maître Voigt, in high good humour with himself. "Permit me to reward my own merit with a pinch of snuff!"

Obenreizer dropped his eyes to the ground, as though he were not even worthy to see the notary take snuff.

"Do me one last favour, sir," he said, when he raised his eyes. "Do not act on impulse. Thus far, you have only a general knowledge of my position. Hear the case for and against me, in its details, before you take me into your office. Let my claim on your benevolence be recognised by your sound reason as well as by your excellent heart. In *that* case, I may hold up my head against the bitterest of my enemies, and build myself a new reputation on the ruins of the character I have lost."

"As you will," said Maître Voigt. "You speak well, my son. You will be a fine lawyer one of these days."

"The details are not many," pursued Obenreizer. "My troubles begin with the accidental death of my late travelling companion, my lost dear friend Mr. Vendale."

"Mr. Vendale," repeated the notary. "Just so. I have heard and read of the name, several times within these two months. The name of the unfortunate English gentleman who was killed on the Simplon. When you got that scar upon your cheek and neck."

"—From my own knife," said Obenreizer, touching what must have been an ugly gash at the time of its infliction.

"From your own knife," assented the notary, "and in trying to save him. Good, good, good. That was very good. Vendale. Yes. I have several times, lately, thought it droll that I should once have had a client of that name."

"But the world, sir," returned Obenreizer, "is *so* small!" Nevertheless he made a mental note that the notary had once had a client of that name.

"As I was saying, sir, the death of that dear travelling comrade begins my troubles. What follows? I save myself. I go down to Milan. I am received with coldness by Defresnier and Company. Shortly afterwards, I am discharged by Defresnier and Company. Why? They give no reason why. I ask, do they assail my honour? No answer. I ask, what is the imputation against me? No answer. I ask, where are their proofs against me? No answer. I ask, what am I to think? The reply is, 'M. Obenreizer is free to think what he will. What M. Obenreizer thinks, is of no importance to Defresnier and Company.' And that is all."

"Perfectly. That is all," asserted the notary, taking a large pinch of snuff.

"But is that enough, sir?"

"That is not enough," said Maître Voigt. "The House of Defresnier are my fellow townsmen—much respected, much esteemed—but the House of Defresnier must not silently destroy a man's character. You can rebut assertion. But how can you rebut silence?"

"Your sense of justice, my dear patron," answered Obenreizer, "states in a word the cruelty of the case. Does it stop there? No. For, what follows upon that?"

"True, my poor boy," said the notary, with a comforting nod or two; "your ward rebels upon that."

"Rebels is too soft a word," retorted Obenreizer. "My ward revolts from me with horror. My ward defies me. My ward withdraws herself from my authority, and takes shelter (Madame Dor with her) in the house of that English lawyer, Mr. Bintrey, who replies to your summons to her to submit herself to my authority, that she will not do so."

"—And who afterwards writes," said the notary, moving his large snuff-box to look among the papers underneath it for the letter, "that he is coming to confer with me."

"Indeed?" replied Obenreizer, rather checked. "Well, sir. Have I no legal rights?"

"Assuredly, my poor boy," returned the notary. "All but felons have their legal rights."

"And who calls me felon?" said Obenreizer, fiercely.

"No one. Be calm under your wrongs. If the House of Defresnier would call you felon, indeed, we should know how to deal with them."

While saying these words, he had handed Bintrey's very short letter to Obenreizer, who now read it and gave it back.

“In saying,” observed Obenreizer, with recovered composure, “that he is coming to confer with you, this English lawyer means that he is coming to deny my authority over my ward.”

“You think so?”

“I am sure of it. I know him. He is obstinate and contentious. You will tell me, my dear sir, whether my authority is unassailable, until my ward is of age?”

“Absolutely unassailable.”

“I will enforce it. I will make her submit herself to it. For,” said Obenreizer, changing his angry tone to one of grateful submission, “I owe it to you, sir; to you, who have so confidingly taken an injured man under your protection, and into your employment.”

“Make your mind easy,” said Maître Voigt. “No more of this now, and no thanks! Be here to-morrow morning, before the other clerk comes—between seven and eight. You will find me in this room; and I will myself initiate you in your work. Go away! go away! I have letters to write. I won’t hear a word more.”

Dismissed with this generous abruptness, and satisfied with the favourable impression he had left on the old man’s mind, Obenreizer was at leisure to revert to the mental note he had made that Maître Voigt once had a client whose name was Vendale.

“I ought to know England well enough by this time;” so his meditations ran, as he sat on a bench in the yard; “and it is not a name I ever encountered there, except—” he looked involuntarily over his shoulder—“as *his* name. Is the world so small that I cannot get away from him, even now when he is dead? He confessed at the last that he had betrayed the trust of the dead, and misinherited a fortune. And I was to see to it. And I was to stand off, that my face might remind him of it. Why *my* face, unless it concerned *me*? I am sure of his words, for they have been in my ears ever since. Can there be anything bearing on them, in the keeping of this old idiot? Anything to repair my fortunes, and blacken his memory? He dwelt upon my earliest remembrances, that night at Basle. Why, unless he had a purpose in it?”

Maître Voigt’s two largest he-goats were butting at him to butt him out of the place, as if for that disrespectful mention of their master. So he got up and left the place. But he walked alone for a long time on the border of the lake, with his head drooped in deep thought.

Between seven and eight next morning, he presented himself again at the office. He found the notary ready for him, at work on some papers which had come in on the previous evening. In a few clear words, Maître Voigt explained the routine of the office, and the duties Obenreizer would be expected to perform. It still wanted five minutes to eight, when the preliminary instructions were declared to be complete.

"I will show you over the house and the offices," said Maître Voigt, "but I must put away these papers first. They come from the municipal authorities, and they must be taken special care of."

Obenreizer saw his chance, here, of finding out the repository in which his employer's private papers were kept.

"Can't I save you the trouble, sir?" he asked. "Can't I put those documents away under your directions?"

Maître Voigt laughed softly to himself; closed the portfolio in which the papers had been sent to him; handed it to Obenreizer.

"Suppose you try," he said. "All my papers of importance are kept yonder."

He pointed to a heavy oaken door, thickly studded with nails, at the lower end of the room. Approaching the door, with the portfolio, Obenreizer discovered, to his astonishment, that there were no means whatever of opening it from the outside. There was no handle, no bolt, no key, and (climax of passive obstruction!) no keyhole.

"There is a second door to this room?" said Obenreizer, appealing to the notary.

"No," said Maître Voigt. "Guess again."

"There is a window?"

"Nothing of the sort. The window has been bricked up. The only way in, is the way by that door. Do you give it up?" cried Maître Voigt, in high triumph. "Listen, my good fellow, and tell me if you hear nothing inside?"

Obenreizer listened for a moment, and started back from the door.

"I know!" he exclaimed. "I heard of this when I was apprenticed here at the watchmaker's. Perrin Brothers have finished their famous clock-lock at last—and you have got it?"

"Bravo!" said Maître Voigt. "The clock-lock it is! There, my son! There you have one more of what the good people of this town call, 'Daddy Voigt's follies.' With all my heart! Let those laugh who win. No thief can steal *my* keys. No burglar can pick *my* lock. No power on earth, short of a battering-ram or a barrel of gunpowder, can move that door, till my little sentinel inside—my worthy friend who goes ‘Tick, Tick,’ as I tell him—says, ‘Open!’ The big door obeys the little Tick, Tick, and the little Tick, Tick, obeys *me*. That!” cried Daddy Voigt, snapping his fingers, “for all the thieves in Christendom!”

“May I see it in action?” asked Obenreizer. “Pardon my curiosity, dear sir! You know that I was once a tolerable worker in the clock trade.”

“Certainly you shall see it in action,” said Maître Voigt. “What is the time now? One minute to eight. Watch, and in one minute you will see the door open of itself.”

In one minute, smoothly and slowly and silently, as if invisible hands had set it free, the heavy door opened inward, and disclosed a dark chamber beyond. On three sides, shelves filled the walls, from floor to ceiling. Arranged on the shelves, were rows upon rows of boxes made in the pretty inlaid woodwork of Switzerland, and bearing inscribed on their fronts (for the most part in fanciful coloured letters) the names of the notary’s clients.

Maître Voigt lighted a taper, and led the way into the room.

“You shall see the clock,” he said proudly. “I possess the greatest curiosity in Europe. It is only a privileged few whose eyes can look at it. I give the privilege to your good father’s son—you shall be one of the favoured few who enter the room with me. See! here it is, on the right-hand wall at the side of the door.”

“An ordinary clock,” exclaimed Obenreizer. “No! Not an ordinary clock. It has only one hand.”

“Aha!” said Maître Voigt. “Not an ordinary clock, my friend. No, no. That one hand goes round the dial. As I put it, so it regulates the hour at which the door shall open. See! The hand points to eight. At eight the door opened, as you saw for yourself.”

“Does it open more than once in the four-and-twenty hours?” asked Obenreizer.

“More than once?” repeated the notary, with great scorn. “You don’t know my good friend, Tick-Tick! He will open the door as often as I ask him. All he wants is his directions, and he gets them here. Look below the dial. Here is a half-circle of steel let into the wall, and here is a hand (called the regulator) that travels round it, just as *my* hand chooses. Notice, if you please, that there are figures to guide me on the half-circle of steel. Figure I. means: Open once in the four-and-twenty hours. Figure II. means: Open twice; and so on to the end. I set the regulator every morning, after I have read my letters, and when I know what my day's work is to be. Would you like to see me set it now? What is to-day? Wednesday. Good! This is the day of our rifle-club; there is little business to do; I grant a half-holiday. No work here to-day, after three o'clock. Let us first put away this portfolio of municipal papers. There! No need to trouble Tick-Tick to open the door until eight to-morrow. Good! I leave the dial-hand at eight; I put back the regulator to I.; I close the door; and closed the door remains, past all opening by anybody, till to-morrow morning at eight."

Obenreizer's quickness instantly saw the means by which he might make the clock-lock betray its master's confidence, and place its master's papers at his disposal.

"Stop, sir!" he cried, at the moment when the notary was closing the door. "Don't I see something moving among the boxes—on the floor there?"

(Maître Voigt turned his back for a moment to look. In that moment, Obenreizer's ready hand put the regulator on, from the figure "I." to the figure "II." Unless the notary looked again at the half-circle of steel, the door would open at eight that evening, as well as at eight next morning, and nobody but Obenreizer would know it.)

"There is nothing!" said Maître Voigt. "Your troubles have shaken your nerves, my son. Some shadow thrown by my taper; or some poor little beetle, who lives among the old lawyer's secrets, running away from the light. Hark! I hear your fellow-clerk in the office. To work! to work! and build to-day the first step that leads to your new fortunes!"

He good-humouredly pushed Obenreizer out before him; extinguished the taper, with a last fond glance at his clock which passed harmlessly over the regulator beneath; and closed the oaken door.

At three, the office was shut up. The notary and everybody in the notary's employment, with one exception, went to see the rifle-shooting. Obenreizer had pleaded that he was not in spirits for a public festival. Nobody knew what had become of him. It was believed that he had slipped away for a solitary walk.

The house and offices had been closed but a few minutes, when the door of a shining wardrobe in the notary's shining room opened, and Obenreizer stopped out. He walked to a window, unclosed the shutters, satisfied himself that he could escape unseen by way of the garden, turned back into the room, and took his place in the notary's easy-chair. He was locked up in the house, and there were five hours to wait before eight o'clock came.

He wore his way through the five hours: sometimes reading the books and newspapers that lay on the table: sometimes thinking: sometimes walking to and fro. Sunset came on. He closed the window-shutters before he kindled a light. The candle lighted, and the time drawing nearer and nearer, he sat, watch in hand, with his eyes on the oaken door.

At eight, smoothly and softly and silently the door opened.

One after another, he read the names on the outer rows of boxes. No such name as Vendale! He removed the outer row, and looked at the row behind. These were older boxes, and shabbier boxes. The four first that he examined, were inscribed with French and German names. The fifth bore a name which was almost illegible. He brought it out into the room, and examined it closely. There, covered thickly with time-stains and dust, was the name: "Vendale."

The key hung to the box by a string. He unlocked the box, took out four loose papers that were in it, spread them open on the table, and began to read them. He had not so occupied a minute, when his face fell from its expression of eagerness and avidity, to one of haggard astonishment and disappointment. But, after a little consideration, he copied the papers. He then replaced the papers, replaced the box, closed the door, extinguished the candle, and stole away.

As his murderous and thievish footfall passed out of the garden, the steps of the notary and some one accompanying him stopped at the front door of the house. The lamps were lighted in the little street, and the notary had his door-key in his hand.

"Pray do not pass my house, Mr. Bintrey," he said. "Do me the honour to come in. It is one of our town half-holidays—our Tir—but my people will be back directly. It is droll that you should ask your way to the Hotel of me. Let us eat and drink before you go there."

"Thank you; not to-night," said Bintrey. "Shall I come to you at ten to-morrow?"

"I shall be enchanted, sir, to take so early an opportunity of redressing the wrongs of my injured client," returned the good notary.

"Yes," retorted Bintrey; "your injured client is all very well—but—a word in your ear."

He whispered to the notary and walked off. When the notary’s housekeeper came home, she found him standing at his door motionless, with the key still in his hand, and the door unopened.

OBENREIZER’S VICTORY

The scene shifts again—to the foot of the Simplon, on the Swiss side.

In one of the dreary rooms of the dreary little inn at Brieg, Mr. Bintrey and Maître Voigt sat together at a professional council of two. Mr. Bintrey was searching in his despatch-box. Maître Voigt was looking towards a closed door, painted brown to imitate mahogany, and communicating with an inner room.

“Isn’t it time he was here?” asked the notary, shifting his position, and glancing at a second door at the other end of the room, painted yellow to imitate deal.

“He *is* here,” answered Bintrey, after listening for a moment.

The yellow door was opened by a waiter, and Obenreizer walked in.

After greeting Maître Voigt with a cordiality which appeared to cause the notary no little embarrassment, Obenreizer bowed with grave and distant politeness to Bintrey. “For what reason have I been brought from Neuchâtel to the foot of the mountain?” he inquired, taking the seat which the English lawyer had indicated to him.

“You shall be quite satisfied on that head before our interview is over,” returned Bintrey. “For the present, permit me to suggest proceeding at once to business. There has been a correspondence, Mr. Obenreizer, between you and your niece. I am here to represent your niece.”

“In other words, you, a lawyer, are here to represent an infraction of the law.”

“Admirably put!” said Bintrey. “If all the people I have to deal with were only like you, what an easy profession mine would be! I am here to represent an infraction of the law—that is your point of view. I am here to make a compromise between you and your niece—that is my point of view.”

“There must be two parties to a compromise,” rejoined Obenreizer. “I decline, in this case, to be one of them. The law gives me authority to control my niece's actions, until she comes of age. She is not yet of age; and I claim my authority."

At this point Maître attempted to speak. Bintrey silenced him with a compassionate indulgence of tone and manner, as if he was silencing a favourite child.

"No, my worthy friend, not a word. Don't excite yourself unnecessarily; leave it to me." He turned, and addressed himself again to Obenreizer. "I can think of nothing comparable to you, Mr. Obenreizer, but granite—and even that wears out in course of time. In the interests of peace and quietness—for the sake of your own dignity—relax a little. If you will only delegate your authority to another person whom I know of, that person may be trusted never to lose sight of your niece, night or day!"

"You are wasting your time and mine," returned Obenreizer. "If my niece is not rendered up to my authority within one week from this day, I invoke the law. If you resist the law, I take her by force."

He rose to his feet as he said the last word. Maître Voigt looked round again towards the brown door which led into the inner room.

"Have some pity on the poor girl," pleaded Bintrey. "Remember how lately she lost her lover by a dreadful death! Will nothing move you?"

"Nothing."

Bintrey, in his turn, rose to his feet, and looked at Maître Voigt. Maître Voigt's hand, resting on the table, began to tremble. Maître Voigt's eyes remained fixed, as if by irresistible fascination, on the brown door. Obenreizer, suspiciously observing him, looked that way too.

"There is somebody listening in there!" he exclaimed, with a sharp backward glance at Bintrey.

"There are two people listening," answered Bintrey.

"Who are they?"

"You shall see."

With this answer, he raised his voice and spoke the next words—the two common words which are on everybody's lips, at every hour of the day: "Come in!"

The brown door opened. Supported on Marguerite's arm—his sun-burnt colour gone, his right arm bandaged and clung over his breast—Vendale stood before the murderer, a man risen from the dead.

In the moment of silence that followed, the singing of a caged bird in the court-yard outside was the one sound stirring in the room. Maître Voigt touched Bintrey, and pointed to Obenreizer. “Look at him!” said the notary, in a whisper.

The shock had paralysed every movement in the villain’s body, but the movement of the blood. His face was like the face of a corpse. The one vestige of colour left in it was a livid purple streak which marked the course of the scar where his victim had wounded him on the cheek and neck. Speechless, breathless, motionless alike in eye and limb, it seemed as if, at the sight of Vendale, the death to which he had doomed Vendale had struck him where he stood.

“Somebody ought to speak to him,” said Maître Voigt. “Shall I?”

Even at that moment Bintrey persisted in silencing the notary, and in keeping the lead in the proceedings to himself. Checking Maître Voigt by a gesture, he dismissed Marguerite and Vendale in these words:—“The object of your appearance here is answered,” he said. “If you will withdraw for the present, it may help Mr. Obenreizer to recover himself.”

It did help him. As the two passed through the door and closed it behind them, he drew a deep breath of relief. He looked round him for the chair from which he had risen, and dropped into it.

“Give him time!” pleaded Maître Voigt.

“No,” said Bintrey. “I don’t know what use he may make of it if I do.” He turned once more to Obenreizer, and went on. “I owe it to myself,” he said—“I don’t admit, mind, that I owe it to you—to account for my appearance in these proceedings, and to state what has been done under my advice, and on my sole responsibility. Can you listen to me?”

“I can listen to you.”

“Recall the time when you started for Switzerland with Mr. Vendale,” Bintrey begin. “You had not left England four-and-twenty hours before your niece committed an act of imprudence which not even your penetration could foresee. She followed her promised husband on his journey, without asking anybody’s advice or permission, and without any better companion to protect her than a Cellarman in Mr. Vendale’s employment.”

“Why did she follow me on the journey? and how came the Cellarman to be the person who accompanied her?”

“She followed you on the journey,” answered Bintrey, “because she suspected there had been some serious collision between you and Mr. Vendale, which had been kept secret from her; and because she rightly believed you to be capable of serving your interests, or of satisfying your enmity, at the price of a crime. As for the Cellarman, he was one, among the other people in Mr. Vendale's establishment, to whom she had applied (the moment your back was turned) to know if anything had happened between their master and you. The Cellarman alone had something to tell her. A senseless superstition, and a common accident which had happened to his master, in his master's cellar, had connected Mr. Vendale in this man's mind with the idea of danger by murder. Your niece surprised him into a confession, which aggravated tenfold the terrors that possessed her. Aroused to a sense of the mischief he had done, the man, of his own accord, made the one atonement in his power. 'If my master is in danger, miss,' he said, 'it's my duty to follow him, too; and it's more than my duty to take care of *you*.' The two set forth together—and, for once, a superstition has had its use. It decided your niece on taking the journey; and it led the way to saving a man's life. Do you understand me, so far?"

"I understand you, so far."

"My first knowledge of the crime that you had committed," pursued Bintrey, "came to me in the form of a letter from your niece. All you need know is that her love and her courage recovered the body of your victim, and aided the after-efforts which brought him back to life. While he lay helpless at Brieg, under her care, she wrote to me to come out to him. Before starting, I informed Madame Dor that I knew Miss Obenreizer to be safe, and knew where she was. Madame Dor informed me, in return, that a letter had come for your niece, which she knew to be in your handwriting. I took possession of it, and arranged for the forwarding of any other letters which might follow. Arrived at Brieg, I found Mr. Vendale out of danger, and at once devoted myself to hastening the day of reckoning with you. Defresnier and Company turned you off on suspicion; acting on information privately supplied by me. Having stripped you of your false character, the next thing to do was to strip you of your authority over your niece. To reach this end, I not only had no scruple in digging the pitfall under your feet in the dark—I felt a certain professional pleasure in fighting you with your own weapons. By my advice the truth has been carefully concealed from you up to this day. By my advice the trap into which you have walked was set for you (you know why, now, as well as I do) in this place. There was but one certain way of shaking the devilish self-control which has hitherto made you a formidable man. That way has been tried, and (look at me as you may) that way has succeeded. The last thing that remains to be done," concluded Bintrey, producing two little slips of manuscript from his despatch-box, "is to set your niece free. You have attempted murder, and you have committed forgery and theft. We have the evidence ready against you in both cases. If you are convicted as a felon, you know as well as I do what becomes of your authority over your niece. Personally, I should have preferred taking that way out of it. But considerations are pressed on me which I am not able to resist, and this interview must end, as I have told you already, in a compromise. Sign those lines, resigning all authority over Miss Obenreizer, and pledging yourself never to be seen in England or in Switzerland again; and I will sign an indemnity which secures you against further proceedings on our part."

Obenreizer took the pen in silence, and signed his niece's release. On receiving the indemnity in return, he rose, but made no movement to leave the room. He stood looking at Maître Voigt with a strange smile gathering at his lips, and a strange light flashing in his filmy eyes.

"What are you waiting for?" asked Bintrey.

Obenreizer pointed to the brown door. "Call them back," he answered. "I have something to say in their presence before I go."

"Say it in my presence," retorted Bintrey. "I decline to call them back."

Obenreizer turned to Maître Voigt. "Do you remember telling me that you once had an English client named Vendale?" he asked.

"Well," answered the notary. "And what of that?"

"Maître Voigt, your clock-lock has betrayed you."

"What do you mean?"

"I have read the letters and certificates in your client's box. I have taken copies of them. I have got the copies here. Is there, or is there not, a reason for calling them back?"

For a moment the notary looked to and fro, between Obenreizer and Bintrey, in helpless astonishment. Recovering himself, he drew his brother-lawyer aside, and hurriedly spoke a few words close at his ear. The face of Bintrey—after first faithfully reflecting the astonishment on the face of Maître Voigt—suddenly altered its expression. He sprang, with the activity of a young man, to the door of the inner room, entered it, remained inside for a minute, and returned followed by Marguerite and Vendale. "Now, Mr. Obenreizer," said Bintrey, "the last move in the game is yours. Play it."

"Before I resign my position as that young lady's guardian," said Obenreizer, "I have a secret to reveal in which she is interested. In making my disclosure, I am not claiming her attention for a narrative which she, or any other person present, is expected to take on trust. I am possessed of written proofs, copies of originals, the authenticity of which Maître Voigt himself can attest. Bear that in mind, and permit me to refer you, at starting, to a date long past—the month of February, in the year one thousand eight hundred and thirty-six."

"Mark the date, Mr. Vendale," said Bintrey.

"My first proof," said Obenreizer, taking a paper from his pocket-book. "Copy of a letter, written by an English lady (married) to her sister, a widow. The name of the person writing the letter I shall keep suppressed until I have done. The name of the person to whom the letter is written I am willing to reveal. It is addressed to 'Mrs. Jane Anne Miller, of Groombridge Wells, England.'"

Vendale started, and opened his lips to speak. Bintrey instantly stopped him, as he had stopped Maître Voigt. "No," said the pertinacious lawyer. "Leave it to me."

Obenreizer went on:

"It is needless to trouble you with the first half of the letter," he said. "I can give the substance of it in two words. The writer's position at the time is this. She has been long living in Switzerland with her husband—obliged to live there for the sake of her husband's health. They are about to move to a new residence on the Lake of Neuchâtel in a week, and they will be ready to receive Mrs. Miller as visitor in a fortnight from that time. This said, the writer next enters into an important domestic detail. She has been childless for years—she and her husband have now no hope of children; they are lonely; they want an interest in life; they have decided on adopting a child. Here the important part of the letter begins; and here, therefore, I read it to you word for word."

He folded back the first page of the letter and read as follows.

> "* * * Will you help us, my dear sister, to realise our new project? As English people, we wish to adopt an English child. This may be done, I believe, at the Foundling: my husband's lawyers in London will tell you how. I leave the choice to you, with only these conditions attached to it—that the child is to be an infant under a year old, and is to be a boy. Will you pardon the trouble I am giving you, for my sake;

> and will you bring our adopted child to us, with your own children, when you come to Neuchâtel?
>
> "I must add a word as to my husband's wishes in this matter. He is resolved to spare the child whom we make our own any future mortification and loss of self-respect which might be caused by a discovery of his true origin. He will bear my husband's name, and he will be brought up in the belief that he is really our son. His inheritance of what we have to leave will be secured to him—not only according to the laws of England in such cases, but according to the laws of Switzerland also; for we have lived so long in this country, that there is a doubt whether we may not be considered as I domiciled, in Switzerland. The one precaution left to take is to prevent any after-discovery at the Foundling. Now, our name is a very uncommon one; and if we appear on the Register of the Institution as the persons adopting the child, there is just a chance that something might result from it. Your name, my dear, is the name of thousands of other people; and if you will consent to appear on the Register, there need be no fear of any discoveries in that quarter. We are moving, by the doctor's orders, to a part of Switzerland in which our circumstances are quite unknown; and you, as I understand, are about to engage a new nurse for the journey when you come to see us. Under these circumstances, the child may appear as my child, brought back to me under my sister's care. The only servant we take with us from our old home is my own maid, who can be safely trusted. As for the lawyers in England and in Switzerland, it is their profession to keep secrets—and we may feel quite easy in that direction. So there you have our harmless little conspiracy! Write by return of post, my love, and tell me you will join it." * * *

"Do you still conceal the name of the writer of that letter?" asked Vendale.

"I keep the name of the writer till the last," answered Obenreizer, "and I proceed to my second proof—a mere slip of paper this time, as you see. Memorandum given to the Swiss lawyer, who drew the documents referred to in the letter I have just read, expressed as follows:—'Adopted from the Foundling Hospital of England, 3d March, 1836, a male infant, called, in the Institution, Walter Wilding. Person appearing on the register, as adopting the child, Mrs. Jane Anne Miller, widow, acting in this matter for her married sister, domiciled in Switzerland.' Patience!" resumed Obenreizer, as Vendale, breaking loose from Bintrey, started to his feet. "I shall not keep the name concealed much longer. Two more little slips of paper, and I have done. Third proof! Certificate of Doctor Ganz, still living in practice at Neuchâtel, dated July, 1838. The doctor certifies (you shall read it for yourselves directly), first, that he attended the adopted child in its infant maladies; second, that, three months before the date of the certificate, the gentleman adopting the child as his son died; third, that on the date of the certificate, his widow and her maid, taking the adopted child with them, left Neuchâtel on their return to England. One more link now added to this, and my chain of evidence is complete. The maid remained with her mistress till her mistress's death, only a few years since. The maid can swear to the identity of the adopted infant, from his childhood to his youth—from his youth to his manhood, as he is now. There is her address in England—and there, Mr. Vendale, is the fourth, and final proof!"

"Why do you address yourself to *me*?" said Vendale, as Obenreizer threw the written address on the table.

Obenreizer turned on him, in a sudden frenzy of triumph.

"*Because you are the man*! If my niece marries you, she marries a bastard, brought up by public charity. If my niece marries you, she marries an impostor, without name or lineage, disguised in the character of a gentleman of rank and family."

"Bravo!" cried Bintrey. "Admirably put, Mr. Obenreizer! It only wants one word more to complete it. She marries—thanks entirely to your exertions—a man who inherits a handsome fortune, and a man whose origin will make him prouder than ever of his peasant-wife. George Vendale, as brother-executors, let us congratulate each other! Our dear dead friend's last wish on earth is accomplished. We have found the lost Walter Wilding. As Mr. Obenreizer said just now—you are the man!"

The words passed by Vendale unheeded. For the moment he was conscious of but one sensation; he heard but one voice. Marguerite's hand was clasping his. Marguerite's voice was whispering to him:

"I never loved you, George, as I love you now!"

THE CURTAIN FALLS

May-day. There is merry-making in Cripple Corner, the chimneys smoke, the patriarchal dining-hall is hung with garlands, and Mrs. Goldstraw, the respected housekeeper, is very busy. For, on this bright morning the young master of Cripple Corner is married to its young mistress, far away: to wit, in the little town of Brieg, in Switzerland, lying at the foot of the Simplon Pass where she saved his life.

The bells ring gaily in the little town of Brieg, and flags are stretched across the street, and rifle shots are heard, and sounding music from brass instruments. Streamer-decorated casks of wine have been rolled out under a gay awning in the public way before the Inn, and there will be free feasting and revelry. What with bells and banners, draperies hanging from windows, explosion of gunpowder, and reverberation of brass music, the little town of Brieg is all in a flutter, like the hearts of its simple people.

It was a stormy night last night, and the mountains are covered with snow. But the sun is bright to-day, the sweet air is fresh, the tin spires of the little town of Brieg are burnished silver, and the Alps are ranges of far-off white cloud in a deep blue sky.

The primitive people of the little town of Brieg have built a greenwood arch across the street, under which the newly married pair shall pass in triumph from the church. It is inscribed, on that side, "HONOUR AND LOVE TO MARGUERITE VENDALE!" for the people are proud of her to enthusiasm. This greeting of the bride under her new name is affectionately meant as a surprise, and therefore the arrangement has been made that she, unconscious why, shall be taken to the church by a tortuous back way. A scheme not difficult to carry into execution in the crooked little town of Brieg.

So, all things are in readiness, and they are to go and come on foot. Assembled in the Inn's best chamber, festively adorned, are the bride and bridegroom, the Neuchâtel notary, the London lawyer, Madame Dor, and a certain large mysterious Englishman, popularly known as Monsieur Zhoé-Ladelle. And behold Madame Dor, arrayed in a spotless pair of gloves of her own, with no hand in the air, but both hands clasped round the neck of the bride; to embrace whom Madame Dor has turned her broad back on the company, consistent to the last.

"Forgive me, my beautiful," pleads Madame Dor, "for that I ever was his she-cat!"

"She-cat, Madame Dor?

“Engaged to sit watching my so charming mouse,” are the explanatory words of Madame Dor, delivered with a penitential sob.

“Why, you were our best friend! George, dearest, tell Madame Dor. Was she not our best friend?”

“Undoubtedly, darling. What should we have done without her?”

“You are both so generous,” cries Madame Dor, accepting consolation, and immediately relapsing. “But I commenced as a she-cat.”

“Ah! But like the cat in the fairy-story, good Madame Dor,” says Vendale, saluting her cheek, “you were a true woman. And, being a true woman, the sympathy of your heart was with true love.”

“I don’t wish to deprive Madame Dor of her share in the embraces that are going on,” Mr. Bintrey puts in, watch in hand, “and I don’t presume to offer any objection to your having got yourselves mixed together, in the corner there, like the three Graces. I merely remark that I think it’s time we were moving. What are *your* sentiments on that subject, Mr. Ladle?”

“Clear, sir,” replies Joey, with a gracious grin. “I’m clearer altogether, sir, for having lived so many weeks upon the surface. I never was half so long upon the surface afore, and it’s done me a power of good. At Cripple Corner, I was too much below it. Atop of the Simpleton, I was a deal too high above it. I’ve found the medium here, sir. And if ever I take it in convivial, in all the rest of my days, I mean to do it this day, to the toast of ‘Bless ‘em both.’”

“I, too!” says Bintrey. “And now, Monsieur Voigt, let you and me be two men of Marseilles, and allons, marchons, arm-in-arm!”

They go down to the door, where others are waiting for them, and they go quietly to the church, and the happy marriage takes place. While the ceremony is yet in progress, the notary is called out. When it is finished, he has returned, is standing behind Vendale, and touches him on the shoulder.

“Go to the side door, one moment, Monsieur Vendale. Alone. Leave Madame to me.”

At the side door of the church, are the same two men from the Hospice. They are snow-stained and travel-worn. They wish him joy, and then each lays his broad hand upon Vendale’s breast, and one says in a low voice, while the other steadfastly regards him:

“It is here, Monsieur. Your litter. The very same.”

“My litter is here? Why?”

“Hush! For the sake of Madame. Your companion of that day—”

“What of him?”

The man looks at his comrade, and his comrade takes him up. Each keeps his hand laid earnestly on Vendale’s breast.

“He had been living at the first Refuge, monsieur, for some days. The weather was now good, now bad.”

“Yes?”

“He arrived at our Hospice the day before yesterday, and, having refreshed himself with sleep on the floor before the fire, wrapped in his cloak, was resolute to go on, before dark, to the next Hospice. He had a great fear of that part of the way, and thought it would be worse to-morrow.”

“Yes?”

“He went on alone. He had passed the gallery when an avalanche—like that which fell behind you near the Bridge of the Ganther—”

“Killed him?”

“We dug him out, suffocated and broken all to pieces! But, monsieur, as to Madame. We have brought him here on the litter, to be buried. We must ascend the street outside. Madame must not see. It would be an accursed thing to bring the litter through the arch across the street, until Madame has passed through. As you descend, we who accompany the litter will set it down on the stones of the street the second to the right, and will stand before it. But do not let Madame turn her head towards the street the second to the right. There is no time to lose. Madame will be alarmed by your absence. Adieu!”

Vendale returns to his bride, and draws her hand through his unmainied arm. A pretty procession awaits them at the main door of the church. They take their station in it, and descend the street amidst the ringing of the bells, the firing of the guns, the waving of the flags, the playing of the music, the shouts, the smiles, and tears, of the excited town. Heads are uncovered as she passes, hands are kissed to her, all the people bless her. “Heaven’s benediction on the dear girl! See where she goes in her youth and beauty; she who so nobly saved his life!”

Near the corner of the street the second to the right, he speaks to her, and calls her attention to the windows on the opposite side. The corner well passed, he says: “Do not look round, my darling, for a reason that I have,” and turns his head. Then, looking back along the street, he sees the litter and its bearers passing up alone under the arch, as he and she and their marriage train go down towards the shining valley.

THE END OF
No Thoroughfare

The Old Curiosity Shop

By Charles Dickens

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CHAPTER 1

Night is generally my time for walking. In the summer I often leave home early in the morning, and roam about fields and lanes all day, or even escape for days or weeks together; but, saving in the country, I seldom go out until after dark, though, Heaven be thanked, I love its light and feel the cheerfulness it sheds upon the earth, as much as any creature living.

I have fallen insensibly into this habit, both because it favours my infirmity and because it affords me greater opportunity of speculating on the characters and occupations of those who fill the streets. The glare and hurry of broad noon are not adapted to idle pursuits like mine; a glimpse of passing faces caught by the light of a street-lamp or a shop window is often better for my purpose than their full revelation in the daylight; and, if I must add the truth, night is kinder in this respect than day, which too often destroys an air-built castle at the moment of its completion, without the least ceremony or remorse.

That constant pacing to and fro, that never-ending restlessness, that incessant tread of feet wearing the rough stones smooth and glossy—is it not a wonder how the dwellers in narrows ways can bear to hear it! Think of a sick man in such a place as Saint Martin's Court, listening to the footsteps, and in the midst of pain and weariness obliged, despite himself (as though it were a task he must perform) to detect the child's step from the man's, the slipshod beggar from the booted exquisite, the lounging from the busy, the dull heel of the sauntering outcast from the quick tread of an expectant pleasure-seeker—think of the hum and noise always being present to his sense, and of the stream of life that will not stop, pouring on, on, on, through all his restless dreams, as if he were condemned to lie, dead but conscious, in a noisy churchyard, and had no hope of rest for centuries to come.

Then, the crowds for ever passing and repassing on the bridges (on those which are free of toil at last), where many stop on fine evenings looking listlessly down upon the water with some vague idea that by and by it runs between green banks which grow wider and wider until at last it joins the broad vast sea—where some halt to rest from heavy loads and think as they look over the parapet that to smoke and lounge away one's life, and lie sleeping in the sun upon a hot tarpaulin, in a dull, slow, sluggish barge, must be happiness unalloyed—and where some, and a very different class, pause with heaver loads than they, remembering to have heard or read in old time that drowning was not a hard death, but of all means of suicide the easiest and best.

Covent Garden Market at sunrise too, in the spring or summer, when the fragrance of sweet flowers is in the air, over-powering even the unwholesome streams of last night's debauchery, and driving the dusky thrust, whose cage has hung outside a garret window all night long, half mad with joy! Poor bird! the only neighbouring thing at all akin to the other little captives, some of whom, shrinking from the hot hands of drunken purchasers, lie drooping on the path already, while others, soddened by close contact, await the time when they shall be watered and freshened up to please more sober company, and make old clerks who pass them on their road to business, wonder what has filled their breasts with visions of the country.

But my present purpose is not to expatiate upon my walks. The story I am about to relate, and to which I shall recur at intervals, arose out of one of these rambles; and thus I have been led to speak of them by way of preface.

One night I had roamed into the City, and was walking slowly on in my usual way, musing upon a great many things, when I was arrested by an inquiry, the purport of which did not reach me, but which seemed to be addressed to myself, and was preferred in a soft sweet voice that struck me very pleasantly. I turned hastily round and found at my elbow a pretty little girl, who begged to be directed to a certain street at a considerable distance, and indeed in quite another quarter of the town.

It is a very long way from here,' said I, 'my child.'

'I know that, sir,' she replied timidly. 'I am afraid it is a very long way, for I came from there to-night.'

'Alone?' said I, in some surprise.

'Oh, yes, I don't mind that, but I am a little frightened now, for I had lost my road.'

'And what made you ask it of me? Suppose I should tell you wrong?'

'I am sure you will not do that,' said the little creature,' you are such a very old gentleman, and walk so slow yourself.'

I cannot describe how much I was impressed by this appeal and the energy with which it was made, which brought a tear into the child's clear eye, and made her slight figure tremble as she looked up into my face.

'Come,' said I, 'I'll take you there.'

She put her hand in mind as confidingly as if she had known me from her cradle, and we trudged away together; the little creature accommodating her pace to mine, and rather seeming to lead and take care of me than I to be protecting her. I observed that every now and then she stole a curious look at my face, as if to make quite sure that I was not deceiving her, and that these glances (very sharp and keen they were too) seemed to increase her confidence at every repetition.

For my part, my curiosity and interest were at least equal to the child's, for child she certainly was, although I thought it probably from what I could make out, that her very small and delicate frame imparted a peculiar youthfulness to her appearance. Though more scantily attired than she might have been she was dressed with perfect neatness, and betrayed no marks of poverty or neglect.

'Who has sent you so far by yourself?' said I.

'Someone who is very kind to me, sir.'

'And what have you been doing?'

'That, I must not tell,' said the child firmly.

There was something in the manner of this reply which caused me to look at the little creature with an involuntary expression of surprise; for I wondered what kind of errand it might be that occasioned her to be prepared for questioning. Her quick eye seemed to read my thoughts, for as it met mine she added that there was no harm in what she had been doing, but it was a great secret—a secret which she did not even know herself.

This was said with no appearance of cunning or deceit, but with an unsuspicious frankness that bore the impress of truth. She walked on as before, growing more familiar with me as we proceeded and talking cheerfully by the way, but she said no more about her home, beyond remarking that we were going quite a new road and asking if it were a short one.

While we were thus engaged, I revolved in my mind a hundred different explanations of the riddle and rejected them every one. I really felt ashamed to take advantage of the ingenuousness or grateful feeling of the child for the purpose of gratifying my curiosity. I love these little people; and it is not a slight thing when they, who are so fresh from God, love us. As I had felt pleased at first by her confidence I determined to deserve it, and to do credit to the nature which had prompted her to repose it in me.

There was no reason, however, why I should refrain from seeing the person who had inconsiderately sent her to so great a distance by night and alone, and as it was not improbable that if she found herself near home she might take farewell of me and deprive me of the opportunity, I avoided the most frequented ways and took the most intricate, and thus it was not until we arrived in the street itself that she knew where we were. Clapping her hands with pleasure and running on before me for a short distance, my little acquaintance stopped at a door and remaining on the step till I came up knocked at it when I joined her.

A part of this door was of glass unprotected by any shutter, which I did not observe at first, for all was very dark and silent within, and I was anxious (as indeed the child was also) for an answer to our summons. When she had knocked twice or thrice there was a noise as if some person were moving inside, and at length a faint light appeared through the glass which, as it approached very slowly, the bearer having to make his way through a great many scattered articles, enabled me to see both what kind of person it was who advanced and what kind of place it was through which he came.

It was an old man with long grey hair, whose face and figure as he held the light above his head and looked before him as he approached, I could plainly see. Though much altered by age, I fancied I could recognize in his spare and slender form something of that delicate mould which I had noticed in a child. Their bright blue eyes were certainly alike, but his face was so deeply furrowed and so very full of care, that here all resemblance ceased.

The place through which he made his way at leisure was one of those receptacles for old and curious things which seem to crouch in odd corners of this town and to hide their musty treasures from the public eye in jealousy and distrust. There were suits of mail standing like ghosts in armour here and there, fantastic carvings brought from monkish cloisters, rusty weapons of various kinds, distorted figures in china and wood and iron and ivory: tapestry and strange furniture that might have been designed in dreams. The haggard aspect of the little old man was wonderfully suited to the place; he might have groped among old churches and tombs and deserted houses and gathered all the spoils with his own hands. There was nothing in the whole collection but was in keeping with himself nothing that looked older or more worn than he.

As he turned the key in the lock, he surveyed me with some astonishment which was not diminished when he looked from me to my companion. The door being opened, the child addressed him as grandfather, and told him the little story of our companionship.

'Why, bless thee, child,' said the old man, patting her on the head, 'how couldst thou miss thy way? What if I had lost thee, Nell!'

'I would have found my way back to YOU, grandfather,' said the child boldly; 'never fear.'

The old man kissed her, then turning to me and begging me to walk in, I did so. The door was closed and locked. Preceding me with the light, he led me through the place I had already seen from without, into a small sitting-room behind, in which was another door opening into a kind of closet, where I saw a little bed that a fairy might have slept in, it looked so very small and was so prettily arranged. The child took a candle and tripped into this little room, leaving the old man and me together.

'You must be tired, sir,' said he as he placed a chair near the fire, 'how can I thank you?'

'By taking more care of your grandchild another time, my good friend,' I replied.

'More care!' said the old man in a shrill voice, 'more care of Nelly! Why, who ever loved a child as I love Nell?'

He said this with such evident surprise that I was perplexed what answer to make, and the more so because coupled with something feeble and wandering in his manner, there were in his face marks of deep and anxious thought which convinced me that he could not be, as I had been at first inclined to suppose, in a state of dotage or imbecility.

'I don't think you consider—' I began.

'I don't consider!' cried the old man interrupting me, 'I don't consider her! Ah, how little you know of the truth! Little Nelly, little Nelly!'

It would be impossible for any man, I care not what his form of speech might be, to express more affection than the dealer in curiosities did, in these four words. I waited for him to speak again, but he rested his chin upon his hand and shaking his head twice or thrice fixed his eyes upon the fire.

While we were sitting thus in silence, the door of the closet opened, and the child returned, her light brown hair hanging loose about her neck, and her face flushed with the haste she had made to rejoin us. She busied herself immediately in preparing supper, and while she was thus engaged I remarked that the old man took an opportunity of observing me more closely than he had done yet. I was surprised to see that all this time everything was done by the child, and that there appeared to be no other persons but ourselves in the house. I took advantage of a moment when she was absent to venture a hint on this point, to which the old man replied that there were few grown persons as trustworthy or as careful as she.

'It always grieves me,' I observed, roused by what I took to be his selfishness, 'it always grieves me to contemplate the initiation of children into the ways of life, when they are scarcely more than infants. It checks their confidence and simplicity—two of the best qualities that Heaven gives them—and demands that they share our sorrows before they are capable of entering into our enjoyments.'

'It will never check hers,' said the old man looking steadily at me, 'the springs are too deep. Besides, the children of the poor know but few pleasures. Even the cheap delights of childhood must be bought and paid for.

'But—forgive me for saying this—you are surely not so very poor'—said I.

'She is not my child, sir,' returned the old man. 'Her mother was, and she was poor. I save nothing—not a penny—though I live as you see, but'—he laid his hand upon my arm and leant forward to whisper—'she shall be rich one of these days, and a fine lady. Don't you think ill of me because I use her help. She gives it cheerfully as you see, and it would break her heart if she knew that I suffered anybody else to do for me what her little hands could undertake. I don't consider!'—he cried with sudden querulousness, 'why, God knows that this one child is there thought and object of my life, and yet he never prospers me—no, never!'

At this juncture, the subject of our conversation again returned, and the old men motioning to me to approach the table, broke off, and said no more.

We had scarcely begun our repast when there was a knock at the door by which I had entered, and Nell bursting into a hearty laugh, which I was rejoiced to hear, for it was childlike and full of hilarity, said it was no doubt dear old Kit coming back at last.

'Foolish Nell!' said the old man fondling with her hair. 'She always laughs at poor Kit.'

The child laughed again more heartily than before, I could not help smiling from pure sympathy. The little old man took up a candle and went to open the door. When he came back, Kit was at his heels.

Kit was a shock-headed, shambling, awkward lad with an uncommonly wide mouth, very red cheeks, a turned-up nose, and certainly the most comical expression of face I ever saw. He stopped short at the door on seeing a stranger, twirled in his hand a perfectly round old hat without any vestige of a brim, and resting himself now on one leg and now on the other and changing them constantly, stood in the doorway, looking into the parlour with the most extraordinary leer I ever beheld. I entertained a grateful feeling towards the boy from that minute, for I felt that he was the comedy of the child's life.

'A long way, wasn't it, Kit?' said the little old man.

'Why, then, it was a goodish stretch, master,' returned Kit.

'Of course you have come back hungry?'

'Why, then, I do consider myself rather so, master,' was the answer.

The lad had a remarkable manner of standing sideways as he spoke, and thrusting his head forward over his shoulder, as if he could not get at his voice without that accompanying action. I think he would have amused one anywhere, but the child's exquisite enjoyment of his oddity, and the relief it was to find that there was something she associated with merriment in a place that appeared so unsuited to her, were quite irresistible. It was a great point too that Kit himself was flattered by the sensation he created, and after several efforts to preserve his gravity, burst into a loud roar, and so stood with his mouth wide open and his eyes nearly shut, laughing violently.

The old man had again relapsed into his former abstraction and took no notice of what passed, but I remarked that when her laugh was over, the child's bright eyes were dimmed with tears, called forth by the fullness of heart with which she welcomed her uncouth favourite after the little anxiety of the night. As for Kit himself (whose laugh had been all the time one of that sort which very little would change into a cry) he carried a large slice of bread and meat and a mug of beer into a corner, and applied himself to disposing of them with great voracity.

'Ah!' said the old man turning to me with a sigh, as if I had spoken to him but that moment, 'you don't know what you say when you tell me that I don't consider her.'

'You must not attach too great weight to a remark founded on first appearances, my friend,' said I.

'No,' returned the old man thoughtfully, 'no. Come hither, Nell.'

The little girl hastened from her seat, and put her arm about his neck.

'Do I love thee, Nell?' said he. 'Say—do I love thee, Nell, or no?'

The child only answered by her caresses, and laid her head upon his breast.

'Why dost thou sob?' said the grandfather, pressing her closer to him and glancing towards me. 'Is it because thou know'st I love thee, and dost not like that I should seem to doubt it by my question? Well, well—then let us say I love thee dearly.'

'Indeed, indeed you do,' replied the child with great earnestness, 'Kit knows you do.'

Kit, who in despatching his bread and meat had been swallowing two-thirds of his knife at every mouthful with the coolness of a juggler, stopped short in his operations on being thus appealed to, and bawled 'Nobody isn't such a fool as to say he doosn't,' after which he incapacitated himself for further conversation by taking a most prodigious sandwich at one bite.

'She is poor now'—said the old men, patting the child's cheek, 'but I say again that the time is coming when she shall be rich. It has been a long time coming, but it must come at last; a very long time, but it surely must come. It has come to other men who do nothing but waste and riot. When WILL it come to me!'

'I am very happy as I am, grandfather,' said the child.

'Tush, tush!' returned the old man, 'thou dost not know—how should'st thou!' then he muttered again between his teeth, 'The time must come, I am very sure it must. It will be all the better for coming late'; and then he sighed and fell into his former musing state, and still holding the child between his knees appeared to be insensible to everything around him. By this time it wanted but a few minutes of midnight and I rose to go, which recalled him to himself.

'One moment, sir,' he said, 'Now, Kit—near midnight, boy, and you still here! Get home, get home, and be true to your time in the morning, for there's work to do. Good night! There, bid him good night, Nell, and let him be gone!'

'Good night, Kit,' said the child, her eyes lighting up with merriment and kindness.'

'Good night, Miss Nell,' returned the boy.

'And thank this gentleman,' interposed the old man, 'but for whose care I might have lost my little girl to-night.'

'No, no, master,' said Kit, 'that won't do, that won't.'

'What do you mean?' cried the old man.

'I'd have found her, master,' said Kit, 'I'd have found her. I'll bet that I'd find her if she was above ground, I would, as quick as anybody, master. Ha, ha, ha!'

Once more opening his mouth and shutting his eyes, and laughing like a stentor, Kit gradually backed to the door, and roared himself out.

Free of the room, the boy was not slow in taking his departure; when he had gone, and the child was occupied in clearing the table, the old man said:

'I haven't seemed to thank you, sir, for what you have done to-night, but I do thank you humbly and heartily, and so does she, and her thanks are better worth than mine. I should be sorry that you went away, and thought I was unmindful of your goodness, or careless of her—I am not indeed.'

I was sure of that, I said, from what I had seen. 'But,' I added, 'may I ask you a question?'

'Ay, sir,' replied the old man, 'What is it?'

'This delicate child,' said I, 'with so much beauty and intelligence—has she nobody to care for her but you? Has she no other companion or advisor?'

'No,' he returned, looking anxiously in my face, 'no, and she wants no other.'

'But are you not fearful,' said I, 'that you may misunderstand a charge so tender? I am sure you mean well, but are you quite certain that you know how to execute such a trust as this? I am an old man, like you, and I am actuated by an old man's concern in all that is young and promising. Do you not think that what I have seen of you and this little creature to-night must have an interest not wholly free from pain?'

'Sir,' rejoined the old man after a moment's silence.' I have no right to feel hurt at what you say. It is true that in many respects I am the child, and she the grown person—that you have seen already. But waking or sleeping, by night or day, in sickness or health, she is the one object of my care, and if you knew of how much care, you would look on me with different eyes, you would indeed. Ah! It's a weary life for an old man—a weary, weary life—but there is a great end to gain and that I keep before me.'

Seeing that he was in a state of excitement and impatience, I turned to put on an outer coat which I had thrown off on entering the room, purposing to say no more. I was surprised to see the child standing patiently by with a cloak upon her arm, and in her hand a hat, and stick.

'Those are not mine, my dear,' said I.

'No,' returned the child, 'they are grandfather's.'

'But he is not going out to-night.'

'Oh, yes, he is,' said the child, with a smile.

'And what becomes of you, my pretty one?'

'Me! I stay here of course. I always do.'

I looked in astonishment towards the old man, but he was, or feigned to be, busied in the arrangement of his dress. From him I looked back to the slight gentle figure of the child. Alone! In that gloomy place all the long, dreary night.

She evinced no consciousness of my surprise, but cheerfully helped the old man with his cloak, and when he was ready took a candle to light us out. Finding that we did not follow as she expected, she looked back with a smile and waited for us. The old man showed by his face that he plainly understood the cause of my hesitation, but he merely signed to me with an inclination of the head to pass out of the room before him, and remained silent. I had no resource but to comply.

When we reached the door, the child setting down the candle, turned to say good night and raised her face to kiss me. Then she ran to the old man, who folded her in his arms and bade God bless her.

'Sleep soundly, Nell,' he said in a low voice, 'and angels guard thy bed! Do not forget thy prayers, my sweet.'

'No, indeed,' answered the child fervently, 'they make me feel so happy!'

'That's well; I know they do; they should,' said the old man. 'Bless thee a hundred times! Early in the morning I shall be home.'

'You'll not ring twice,' returned the child. 'The bell wakes me, even in the middle of a dream.'

With this, they separated. The child opened the door (now guarded by a shutter which I had heard the boy put up before he left the house) and with another farewell whose clear and tender note I have recalled a thousand times, held it until we had passed out. The old man paused a moment while it was gently closed and fastened on the inside, and satisfied that this was done, walked on at a slow pace. At the street-corner he stopped, and regarding me with a troubled countenance said that our ways were widely different and that he must take his leave. I would have spoken, but summoning up more alacrity than might have been expected in one of his appearance, he hurried away. I could see that twice or thrice he looked back as if to ascertain if I were still watching him, or perhaps to assure himself that I was not following at a distance. The obscurity of the night favoured his disappearance, and his figure was soon beyond my sight.

I remained standing on the spot where he had left me, unwilling to depart, and yet unknowing why I should loiter there. I looked wistfully into the street we had lately quitted, and after a time directed my steps that way. I passed and repassed the house, and stopped and listened at the door; all was dark, and silent as the grave.

Yet I lingered about, and could not tear myself away, thinking of all possible harm that might happen to the child—of fires and robberies and even murder—and feeling as if some evil must ensure if I turned my back upon the place. The closing of a door or window in the street brought me before the curiosity-dealer's once more; I crossed the road and looked up at the house to assure myself that the noise had not come from there. No, it was black, cold, and lifeless as before.

There were few passengers astir; the street was sad and dismal, and pretty well my own. A few stragglers from the theatres hurried by, and now and then I turned aside to avoid some noisy drunkard as he reeled homewards, but these interruptions were not frequent and soon ceased. The clocks struck one. Still I paced up and down, promising myself that every time should be the last, and breaking faith with myself on some new plea as often as I did so.

The more I thought of what the old man had said, and of his looks and bearing, the less I could account for what I had seen and heard. I had a strong misgiving that his nightly absence was for no good purpose. I had only come to know the fact through the innocence of the child, and though the old man was by at the time, and saw my undisguised surprise, he had preserved a strange mystery upon the subject and offered no word of explanation. These reflections naturally recalled again more strongly than before his haggard face, his wandering manner, his restless anxious looks. His affection for the child might not be inconsistent with villany of the worst kind; even that very affection was in itself an extraordinary contradiction, or how could he leave her thus? Disposed as I was to think badly of him, I never doubted that his love for her was real. I could not admit the thought, remembering what had passed between us, and the tone of voice in which he had called her by her name.

'Stay here of course,' the child had said in answer to my question, 'I always do!' What could take him from home by night, and every night! I called up all the strange tales I had ever heard of dark and secret deeds committed in great towns and escaping detection for a long series of years; wild as many of these stories were, I could not find one adapted to this mystery, which only became the more impenetrable, in proportion as I sought to solve it.

Occupied with such thoughts as these, and a crowd of others all tending to the same point, I continued to pace the street for two long hours; at length the rain began to descend heavily, and then over-powered by fatigue though no less interested than I had been at first, I engaged the nearest coach and so got home. A cheerful fire was blazing on the hearth, the lamp burnt brightly, my clock received me with its old familiar welcome; everything was quiet, warm and cheering, and in happy contrast to the gloom and darkness I had quitted.

But all that night, waking or in my sleep, the same thoughts recurred and the same images retained possession of my brain. I had ever before me the old dark murky rooms—the gaunt suits of mail with their ghostly silent air—the faces all awry, grinning from wood and stone—the dust and rust and worm that lives in wood—and alone in the midst of all this lumber and decay and ugly age, the beautiful child in her gentle slumber, smiling through her light and sunny dreams.

CHAPTER 2

After combating, for nearly a week, the feeling which impelled me to revisit the place I had quitted under the circumstances already detailed, I yielded to it at length; and determining that this time I would present myself by the light of day, bent my steps thither early in the morning.

I walked past the house, and took several turns in the street, with that kind of hesitation which is natural to a man who is conscious that the visit he is about to pay is unexpected, and may not be very acceptable. However, as the door of the shop was shut, and it did not appear likely that I should be recognized by those within, if I continued merely to pass up and down before it, I soon conquered this irresolution, and found myself in the Curiosity Dealer's warehouse.

The old man and another person were together in the back part, and there seemed to have been high words between them, for their voices which were raised to a very high pitch suddenly stopped on my entering, and the old man advancing hastily towards me, said in a tremulous tone that he was very glad I had come.

'You interrupted us at a critical moment,' said he, pointing to the man whom I had found in company with him; 'this fellow will murder me one of these days. He would have done so, long ago, if he had dared.'

'Bah! You would swear away my life if you could,' returned the other, after bestowing a stare and a frown on me; 'we all know that!'

'I almost think I could,' cried the old man, turning feebly upon him. 'If oaths, or prayers, or words, could rid me of you, they should. I would be quit of you, and would be relieved if you were dead.'

'I know it,' returned the other. 'I said so, didn't I? But neither oaths, or prayers, nor words, WILL kill me, and therefore I live, and mean to live.'

'And his mother died!' cried the old man, passionately clasping his hands and looking upward; 'and this is Heaven's justice!'

The other stood lunging with his foot upon a chair, and regarded him with a contemptuous sneer. He was a young man of one-and-twenty or thereabouts; well made, and certainly handsome, though the expression of his face was far from prepossessing, having in common with his manner and even his dress, a dissipated, insolent air which repelled one.

'Justice or no justice,' said the young fellow, 'here I am and here I shall stop till such time as I think fit to go, unless you send for assistance to put me out—which you won't do, I know. I tell you again that I want to see my sister.'

'YOUR sister!' said the old man bitterly.

'Ah! You can't change the relationship,' returned the other. 'If you could, you'd have done it long ago. I want to see my sister, that you keep cooped up here, poisoning her mind with your sly secrets and pretending an affection for her that you may work her to death, and add a few scraped shillings every week to the money you can hardly count. I want to see her; and I will.'

'Here's a moralist to talk of poisoned minds! Here's a generous spirit to scorn scraped-up shillings!' cried the old man, turning from him to me. 'A profligate, sir, who has forfeited every claim not only upon those who have the misfortune to be of his blood, but upon society which knows nothing of him but his misdeeds. A liar too,' he added, in a lower voice as he drew closer to me, 'who knows how dear she is to me, and seeks to wound me even there, because there is a stranger nearby.'

'Strangers are nothing to me, grandfather,' said the young fellow catching at the word, 'nor I to them, I hope. The best they can do, is to keep an eye to their business and leave me to mind. There's a friend of mine waiting outside, and as it seems that I may have to wait some time, I'll call him in, with your leave.'

Saying this, he stepped to the door, and looking down the street beckoned several times to some unseen person, who, to judge from the air of impatience with which these signals were accompanied, required a great quantity of persuasion to induce him to advance. At length there sauntered up, on the opposite side of the way—with a bad pretense of passing by accident—a figure conspicuous for its dirty smartness, which after a great many frowns and jerks of the head, in resistance of the invitation, ultimately crossed the road and was brought into the shop.

'There. It's Dick Swiveller,' said the young fellow, pushing him in. 'Sit down, Swiveller.'

'But is the old min agreeable?' said Mr Swiveller in an undertone.

Mr Swiveller complied, and looking about him with a propitiatory smile, observed that last week was a fine week for the ducks, and this week was a fine week for the dust; he also observed that whilst standing by the post at the street-corner, he had observed a pig with a straw in his mouth issuing out of the tobacco-shop, from which appearance he augured that another fine week for the ducks was approaching, and that rain would certainly ensue. He furthermore took occasion to apologize for any negligence that might be perceptible in his dress, on the ground that last night he had had 'the sun very strong in his eyes'; by which expression he was understood to convey to his hearers in the most delicate manner possible, the information that he had been extremely drunk.

'But what,' said Mr Swiveller with a sigh, 'what is the odds so long as the fire of soul is kindled at the taper of conwiviality, and the wing of friendship never moults a feather! What is the odds so long as the spirit is expanded by means of rosy wine, and the present moment is the least happiest of our existence!'

'You needn't act the chairman here,' said his friend, half aside.

'Fred!' cried Mr Swiveller, tapping his nose, 'a word to the wise is sufficient for them—we may be good and happy without riches, Fred. Say not another syllable. I know my cue; smart is the word. Only one little whisper, Fred—is the old min friendly?'

'Never you mind,' replied his friend.

'Right again, quite right,' said Mr Swiveller, 'caution is the word, and caution is the act.' with that, he winked as if in preservation of some deep secret, and folding his arms and leaning back in his chair, looked up at the ceiling with profound gravity.

It was perhaps not very unreasonable to suspect from what had already passed, that Mr Swiveller was not quite recovered from the effects of the powerful sunlight to which he had made allusion; but if no such suspicion had been awakened by his speech, his wiry hair, dull eyes, and sallow face would still have been strong witnesses against him. His attire was not, as he had himself hinted, remarkable for the nicest arrangement, but was in a state of disorder which strongly induced the idea that he had gone to bed in it. It consisted of a brown body-coat with a great many brass buttons up the front and only one behind, a bright check neckerchief, a plaid waistcoat, soiled white trousers, and a very limp hat, worn with the wrong side foremost, to hide a hole in the brim. The breast of his coat was ornamented with an outside pocket from which there peeped forth the cleanest end of a very large and very ill-favoured handkerchief; his dirty wristbands were pulled on as far as possible and ostentatiously folded back over his cuffs; he displayed no gloves, and carried a yellow cane having at the top a bone hand with the semblance of a ring on its little finger and a black ball in its grasp. With all these personal advantages (to which may be added a strong savour of tobacco-smoke, and a prevailing greasiness of appearance) Mr Swiveller leant back in his chair with his eyes fixed on the ceiling, and occasionally pitching his voice to the needful key, obliged the company with a few bars of an intensely dismal air, and then, in the middle of a note, relapsed into his former silence.

The old man sat himself down in a chair, and with folded hands, looked sometimes at his grandson and sometimes at his strange companion, as if he were utterly powerless and had no resource but to leave them to do as they pleased. The young man reclined against a table at no great distance from his friend, in apparent indifference to everything that had passed; and I—who felt the difficulty of any interference, notwithstanding that the old man had appealed to me, both by words and looks—made the best feint I could of being occupied in examining some of the goods that were disposed for sale, and paying very little attention to a person before me.

The silence was not of long duration, for Mr Swiveller, after favouring us with several melodious assurances that his heart was in the Highlands, and that he wanted but his Arab steed as a preliminary to the achievement of great feats of valour and loyalty, removed his eyes from the ceiling and subsided into prose again.

'Fred,' said Mr Swiveller stopping short, as if the idea had suddenly occurred to him, and speaking in the same audible whisper as before, 'is the old min friendly?'

'What does it matter?' returned his friend peevishly.

'No, but IS he?' said Dick.

'Yes, of course. What do I care whether he is or not?'

Emboldened as it seemed by this reply to enter into a more general conversation, Mr Swiveller plainly laid himself out to captivate our attention.

He began by remarking that soda-water, though a good thing in the abstract, was apt to lie cold upon the stomach unless qualified with ginger, or a small infusion of brandy, which latter article he held to be preferable in all cases, saving for the one consideration of expense. Nobody venturing to dispute these positions, he proceeded to observe that the human hair was a great retainer of tobacco-smoke, and that the young gentlemen of Westminster and Eton, after eating vast quantities of apples to conceal any scent of cigars from their anxious friends, were usually detected in consequence of their heads possessing this remarkable property; when he concluded that if the Royal Society would turn their attention to the circumstance, and endeavour to find in the resources of science a means of preventing such untoward revelations, they might indeed be looked upon as benefactors to mankind. These opinions being equally incontrovertible with those he had already pronounced, he went on to inform us that Jamaica rum, though unquestionably an agreeable spirit of great richness and flavour, had the drawback of remaining constantly present to the taste next day; and nobody being venturous enough to argue this point either, he increased in confidence and became yet more companionable and communicative.

'It's a devil of a thing, gentlemen,' said Mr Swiveller, 'when relations fall out and disagree. If the wing of friendship should never moult a feather, the wing of relationship should never be clipped, but be always expanded and serene. Why should a grandson and grandfather peg away at each other with mutual wiolence when all might be bliss and concord. Why not jine hands and forgit it?'

'Hold your tongue,' said his friend.

'Sir,' replied Mr Swiveller, 'don't you interrupt the chair. Gentlemen, how does the case stand, upon the present occasion? Here is a jolly old grandfather—I say it with the utmost respect—and here is a wild, young grandson. The jolly old grandfather says to the wild young grandson, 'I have brought you up and educated you, Fred; I have put you in the way of getting on in life; you have bolted a little out of course, as young fellows often do; and you shall never have another chance, nor the ghost of half a one.' The wild young grandson makes answer to this and says, 'You're as rich as rich can be; you have been at no uncommon expense on my account, you're saving up piles of money for my little sister that lives with you in a secret, stealthy, hugger-muggering kind of way and with no manner of enjoyment—why can't you stand a trifle for your grown-up relation?' The jolly old grandfather unto this, retorts, not only that he declines to fork out with that cheerful readiness which is always so agreeable and pleasant in a gentleman of his time of life, but that he will bow up, and call names, and make reflections whenever they meet. Then the plain question is, an't it a pity that this state of things should continue, and how much better would it be for the gentleman to hand over a reasonable amount of tin, and make it all right and comfortable?'

Having delivered this oration with a great many waves and flourishes of the hand, Mr Swiveller abruptly thrust the head of his cane into his mouth as if to prevent himself from impairing the effect of his speech by adding one other word.

'Why do you hunt and persecute me, God help me!' said the old man turning to his grandson. 'Why do you bring your profligate companions here? How often am I to tell you that my life is one of care and self-denial, and that I am poor?'

'How often am I to tell you,' returned the other, looking coldly at him, 'that I know better?'

'You have chosen your own path,' said the old man. 'Follow it. Leave Nell and me to toil and work.'

'Nell will be a woman soon,' returned the other, 'and, bred in your faith, she'll forget her brother unless he shows himself sometimes.'

'Take care,' said the old man with sparkling eyes, 'that she does not forget you when you would have her memory keenest. Take care that the day don't come when you walk barefoot in the streets, and she rides by in a gay carriage of her own.'

'You mean when she has your money?' retorted the other. 'How like a poor man he talks!'

'And yet,' said the old man dropping his voice and speaking like one who thinks aloud, 'how poor we are, and what a life it is! The cause is a young child's guiltless of all harm or wrong, but nothing goes well with it! Hope and patience, hope and patience!'

These words were uttered in too low a tone to reach the ears of the young men. Mr Swiveller appeared to think the they implied some mental struggle consequent upon the powerful effect of his address, for he poked his friend with his cane and whispered his conviction that he had administered 'a clincher,' and that he expected a commission on the profits. Discovering his mistake after a while, he appeared to grow rather sleepy and discontented, and had more than once suggested the propriety of an immediate departure, when the door opened, and the child herself appeared.

CHAPTER 3

The child was closely followed by an elderly man of remarkably hard features and forbidding aspect, and so low in stature as to be quite a dwarf, though his head and face were large enough for the body of a giant. His black eyes were restless, sly, and cunning; his mouth and chin, bristly with the stubble of a coarse hard beard; and his complexion was one of that kind which never looks clean or wholesome. But what added most to the grotesque expression of his face was a ghastly smile, which, appearing to be the mere result of habit and to have no connection with any mirthful or complacent feeling, constantly revealed the few discoloured fangs that were yet scattered in his mouth, and gave him the aspect of a panting dog. His dress consisted of a large high-crowned hat, a worn dark suit, a pair of capacious shoes, and a dirty white neckerchief sufficiently limp and crumpled to disclose the greater portion of his wiry throat. Such hair as he had was of a grizzled black, cut short and straight upon his temples, and hanging in a frowzy fringe about his ears. His hands, which were of a rough, coarse grain, were very dirty; his fingernails were crooked, long, and yellow.

There was ample time to note these particulars, for besides that they were sufficiently obvious without very close observation, some moments elapsed before any one broke silence. The child advanced timidly towards her brother and put her hand in his, the dwarf (if we may call him so) glanced keenly at all present, and the curiosity-dealer, who plainly had not expected his uncouth visitor, seemed disconcerted and embarrassed.

'Ah!' said the dwarf, who with his hand stretched out above his eyes had been surveying the young man attentively, 'that should be your grandson, neighbour!'

'Say rather that he should not be,' replied the old man. 'But he is.'

'And that?' said the dwarf, pointing to Dick Swiveller.

'Some friend of his, as welcome here as he,' said the old man.

'And that?' inquired the dwarf, wheeling round and pointing straight at me.

'A gentleman who was so good as to bring Nell home the other night when she lost her way, coming from your house.'

The little man turned to the child as if to chide her or express his wonder, but as she was talking to the young man, held his peace, and bent his head to listen.

'Well, Nelly,' said the young fellow aloud. 'Do they teach you to hate me, eh?'

'No, no. For shame. Oh, no!' cried the child.

'To love me, perhaps?' pursued her brother with a sneer.

'To do neither,' she returned. 'They never speak to me about you. Indeed they never do.'

'I dare be bound for that,' he said, darting a bitter look at the grandfather. 'I dare be bound for that Nell. Oh! I believe you there!'

'But I love you dearly, Fred,' said the child.

'No doubt!'

'I do indeed, and always will,' the child repeated with great emotion, 'but oh! If you would leave off vexing him and making him unhappy, then I could love you more.'

'I see!' said the young man, as he stooped carelessly over the child, and having kissed her, pushed her from him: 'There—get you away now you have said your lesson. You needn't whimper. We part good friends enough, if that's the matter.'

He remained silent, following her with his eyes, until she had gained her little room and closed the door; and then turning to the dwarf, said abruptly,

'Harkee, Mr—'

'Meaning me?' returned the dwarf. 'Quilp is my name. You might remember. It's not a long one—Daniel Quilp.'

'Harkee, Mr Quilp, then,' pursued the other, 'You have some influence with my grandfather there.'

'Some,' said Mr Quilp emphatically.

'And are in a few of his mysteries and secrets.'

'A few,' replied Quilp, with equal dryness.

'Then let me tell him once for all, through you, that I will come into and go out of this place as often as I like, so long as he keeps Nell here; and that if he wants to be quit of me, he must first be quit of her. What have I done to be made a bugbear of, and to be shunned and dreaded as if I brought the plague? He'll tell you that I have no natural affection; and that I care no more for Nell, for her own sake, than I do for him. Let him say so. I care for the whim, then, of coming to and fro and reminding her of my existence. I WILL see her when I please. That's my point. I came here to-day to maintain it, and I'll come here again fifty times with the same object and always with the same success. I said I would stop till I had gained it. I have done so, and now my visit's ended. Come Dick.'

'Stop!' cried Mr Swiveller, as his companion turned toward the door. 'Sir!'

'Sir, I am your humble servant,' said Mr Quilp, to whom the monosyllable was addressed.

'Before I leave the gay and festive scene, and halls of dazzling light, sir,' said Mr Swiveller, 'I will with your permission, attempt a slight remark. I came here, sir, this day, under the impression that the old min was friendly.'

'Proceed, sir,' said Daniel Quilp; for the orator had made a sudden stop.

'Inspired by this idea and the sentiments it awakened, sir, and feeling as a mutual friend that badgering, baiting, and bullying, was not the sort of thing calculated to expand the souls and promote the social harmony of the contending parties, I took upon myself to suggest a course which is THE course to be adopted to the present occasion. Will you allow me to whisper half a syllable, sir?'

Without waiting for the permission he sought, Mr Swiveller stepped up to the dwarf, and leaning on his shoulder and stooping down to get at his ear, said in a voice which was perfectly audible to all present,

'The watch-word to the old min is—fork.'

'Is what?' demanded Quilp.

'Is fork, sir, fork,' replied Mr Swiveller slapping his picket. 'You are awake, sir?'

The dwarf nodded. Mr Swiveller drew back and nodded likewise, then drew a little further back and nodded again, and so on. By these means he in time reached the door, where he gave a great cough to attract the dwarf's attention and gain an opportunity of expressing in dumb show, the closest confidence and most inviolable secrecy. Having performed the serious pantomime that was necessary for the due conveyance of these idea, he cast himself upon his friend's track, and vanished.

'Humph!' said the dwarf with a sour look and a shrug of his shoulders, 'so much for dear relations. Thank God I acknowledge none! Nor need you either,' he added, turning to the old man, 'if you were not as weak as a reed, and nearly as senseless.'

'What would you have me do?' he retorted in a kind of helpless desperation. 'It is easy to talk and sneer. What would you have me do?'

'What would I do if I was in your case?' said the dwarf.

'Something violent, no doubt.'

'You're right there,' returned the little man, highly gratified by the compliment, for such he evidently considered it; and grinning like a devil as he rubbed his dirty hands together. 'Ask Mrs Quilp, pretty Mrs Quilp, obedient, timid, loving Mrs Quilp. But that reminds me—I have left her all alone, and she will be anxious and know not a moment's peace till I return. I know she's always in that condition when I'm away, thought she doesn't dare to say so, unless I lead her on and tell her she may speak freely and I won't be angry with her. Oh! well-trained Mrs Quilp.

The creature appeared quite horrible with his monstrous head and little body, as he rubbed his hands slowly round, and round, and round again—with something fantastic even in his manner of performing this slight action—and, dropping his shaggy brows and cocking his chin in the air, glanced upward with a stealthy look of exultation that an imp might have copied and appropriated to himself.

'Here,' he said, putting his hand into his breast and sidling up to the old man as he spoke; 'I brought it myself for fear of accidents, as, being in gold, it was something large and heavy for Nell to carry in her bag. She need be accustomed to such loads betimes thought, neighbor, for she will carry weight when you are dead.'

'Heaven send she may! I hope so,' said the old man with something like a groan.'

'Hope so!' echoed the dwarf, approaching close to his ear; 'neighbour, I would I knew in what good investment all these supplies are sunk. But you are a deep man, and keep your secret close.'

'My secret!' said the other with a haggard look. 'Yes, you're right—I—I—keep it close—very close.'

He said no more, but taking the money turned away with a slow, uncertain step, and pressed his hand upon his head like a weary and dejected man. The dwarf watched him sharply, while he passed into the little sitting-room and locked it in an iron safe above the chimney-piece; and after musing for a short space, prepared to take his leave, observing that unless he made good haste, Mrs Quilp would certainly be in fits on his return.

'And so, neighbour,' he added, 'I'll turn my face homewards, leaving my love for Nelly and hoping she may never lose her way again, though her doing so HAS procured me an honour I didn't expect.' With that he bowed and leered at me, and with a keen glance around which seemed to comprehend every object within his range of vision, however, small or trivial, went his way.

I had several times essayed to go myself, but the old man had always opposed it and entreated me to remain. As he renewed his entreaties on our being left along, and adverted with many thanks to the former occasion of our being together, I willingly yielded to his persuasions, and sat down, pretending to examine some curious miniatures and a few old medals which he placed before me. It needed no great pressing to induce me to stay, for if my curiosity has been excited on the occasion of my first visit, it certainly was not diminished now.

Nell joined us before long, and bringing some needle-work to the table, sat by the old man's side. It was pleasant to observe the fresh flowers in the room, the pet bird with a green bough shading his little cage, the breath of freshness and youth which seemed to rustle through the old dull house and hover round the child. It was curious, but not so pleasant, to turn from the beauty and grace of the girl, to the stooping figure, care-worn face, and jaded aspect of the old man. As he grew weaker and more feeble, what would become of this lonely little creature; poor protector as he was, say that he died—what we be her fate, then?

The old man almost answered my thoughts, as he laid his hand on hers, and spoke aloud.

'I'll be of better cheer, Nell,' he said; 'there must be good fortune in store for thee—I do not ask it for myself, but thee. Such miseries must fall on thy innocent head without it, that I cannot believe but that, being tempted, it will come at last!'

She looked cheerfully into his face, but made no answer.

'When I think,' said he, 'of the many years—many in thy short life—that thou has lived with me; of my monotonous existence, knowing no companions of thy own age nor any childish pleasures; of the solitude in which thou has grown to be what thou art, and in which thou hast lived apart from nearly all thy kind but one old man; I sometimes fear I have dealt hardly by thee, Nell.'

'Grandfather!' cried the child in unfeigned surprise.

'Not in intention—no no,' said he. 'I have ever looked forward to the time that should enable thee to mix among the gayest and prettiest, and take thy station with the best. But I still look forward, Nell, I still look forward, and if I should be forced to leave thee, meanwhile, how have I fitted thee for struggles with the world? The poor bird yonder is as well qualified to encounter it, and be turned adrift upon its mercies—Hark! I hear Kit outside. Go to him, Nell, go to him.'

She rose, and hurrying away, stopped, turned back, and put her arms about the old man's neck, then left him and hurried away again—but faster this time, to hide her falling tears.

'A word in your ear, sir,' said the old man in a hurried whisper. 'I have been rendered uneasy by what you said the other night, and can only plead that I have done all for the best—that it is too late to retract, if I could (though I cannot)—and that I hope to triumph yet. All is for her sake. I have borne great poverty myself, and would spare her the sufferings that poverty carries with it. I would spare her the miseries that brought her mother, my own dear child, to an early grave. I would leave her—not with resources which could be easily spent or squandered away, but with what would place her beyond the reach of want for ever. You mark me sir? She shall have no pittance, but a fortune—Hush! I can say no more than that, now or at any other time, and she is here again!'

The eagerness with which all this was poured into my ear, the trembling of the hand with which he clasped my arm, the strained and starting eyes he fixed upon me, the wild vehemence and agitation of his manner, filled me with amazement. All that I had heard and seen, and a great part of what he had said himself, led me to suppose that he was a wealthy man. I could form no comprehension of his character, unless he were one of those miserable wretches who, having made gain the sole end and object of their lives and having succeeded in amassing great riches, are constantly tortured by the dread of poverty, and best by fears of loss and ruin. Many things he had said which I had been at a loss to understand, were quite reconcilable with the idea thus presented to me, and at length I concluded that beyond all doubt he was one of this unhappy race.

The opinion was not the result of hasty consideration, for which indeed there was no opportunity at that time, as the child came directly, and soon occupied herself in preparations for giving Kit a writing lesson, of which it seemed he had a couple every week, and one regularly on that evening, to the great mirth and enjoyment both of himself and his instructress. To relate how it was a long time before his modesty could be so far prevailed upon as it admit of his sitting down in the parlour, in the presence of an unknown gentleman—how, when he did set down, he tucked up his sleeves and squared his elbows and put his face close to the copy-book and squinted horribly at the lines—how, from the very first moment of having the pen in his hand, he began to wallow in blots, and to daub himself with ink up to the very roots of his hair—how, if he did by accident form a letter properly, he immediately smeared it out again with his arm in his preparations to make another—how, at every fresh mistake, there was a fresh burst of merriment from the child and louder and not less hearty laugh from poor Kit himself—and how there was all the way through, notwithstanding, a gentle wish on her part to teach, and an anxious desire on his to learn—to relate all these particulars would no doubt occupy more space and time than they deserve. It will be sufficient to say that the lesson was given—that evening passed and night came on—that the old man again grew restless and impatient—that he quitted the house secretly at the same hour as before—and that the child was once more left alone within its gloomy walls.

And now that I have carried this history so far in my own character and introduced these personages to the reader, I shall for the convenience of the narrative detach myself from its further course, and leave those who have prominent and necessary parts in it to speak and act for themselves.

CHAPTER 4

Mr and Mrs Quilp resided on Tower Hill; and in her bower on Tower Hill. Mrs Quilp was left to pine the absence of her lord, when he quitted her on the business which he had already seen to transact.

Mr Quilp could scarcely be said to be of any particular trade or calling, though his pursuits were diversified and his occupations numerous. He collected the rents of whole colonies of filthy streets and alleys by the waterside, advanced money to the seamen and petty officers of merchant vessels, had a share in the ventures of divers mates of East Indiamen, smoked his smuggled cigars under the very nose of the Custom House, and made appointments on 'Change with men in glazed hats and round jackets pretty well every day. On the Surrey side of the river was a small rat-infested dreary yard called 'Quilp's Wharf,' in which were a little wooden counting-house burrowing all awry in the dust as if it had fallen from the clouds and ploughed into the ground; a few fragments of rusty anchors;

several large iron rings; some piles of rotten wood; and two or three heaps of old sheet copper, crumpled, cracked, and battered. On Quilp's Wharf, Daniel Quilp was a ship-breaker, yet to judge from these appearances he must either have been a ship-breaker on a very small scale, or have broken his ships up very small indeed. Neither did the place present any extraordinary aspect of life or activity, as its only human occupant was an amphibious boy in a canvas suit, whose sole change of occupation was from sitting on the head of a pile and throwing stones into the mud when the tide was out, to standing with his hands in his pockets gazing listlessly on the motion and on the bustle of the river at high-water.

The dwarf's lodging on Tower hill comprised, besides the needful accommodation for himself and Mrs Quilp, a small sleeping-closet for that lady's mother, who resided with the couple and waged perpetual war with Daniel; of whom, notwithstanding, she stood in no slight dread. Indeed, the ugly creature contrived by some means or other—whether by his ugliness or his ferocity or his natural cunning is no great matter—to impress with a wholesome fear of his anger, most of those with whom he was brought into daily contact and communication. Over nobody had he such complete ascendance as Mrs Quilp herself—a pretty little, mild-spoken, blue-eyed woman, who having allied herself in wedlock to the dwarf in one of those strange infatuations of which examples are by no means scarce, performed a sound practical penance for her folly, every day of her life.

It has been said that Mrs Quilp was pining in her bower. In her bower she was, but not alone, for besides the old lady her mother of whom mention has recently been made, there were present some half-dozen ladies of the neighborhood who had happened by a strange accident (and also by a little understanding among themselves) to drop in one after another, just about tea-time. This being a season favourable to conversation, and the room being a cool, shady, lazy kind of place, with some plants at the open window shutting out the dust, and interposing pleasantly enough between the tea table within and the old Tower without, it is no wonder that the ladies felt an inclination to talk and linger, especially when there are taken into account the additional inducements of fresh butter, new bread, shrimps, and watercresses.

Now, the ladies being together under these circumstances, it was extremely natural that the discourse should turn upon the propensity of mankind to tyrannize over the weaker sex, and the duty that developed upon the weaker sex to resist that tyranny and assert their rights and dignity. It was natural for four reasons: firstly, because Mrs Quilp being a young woman and notoriously under the dominion of her husband ought to be excited to rebel; secondly, because Mrs Quilp's parent was known to be laudably shrewish in her disposition and inclined to resist male authority; thirdly, because each visitor wished to show for herself how superior she was in this respect to the generality of her sex; and fourthly, because the company being accustomed to scandalise each other in pairs, were deprived of their usual subject of conversation now that they were all assembled in close friendship, and had consequently no better employment than to attack the common enemy.

Moved by these considerations, a stout lady opened the proceedings by inquiring, with an air of great concern and sympathy, how Mr Quilp was; whereunto Mr Quilp's wife's mother replied sharply, 'Oh! He was well enough—nothing much was every the matter with him—and ill weeds were sure to thrive.' All the ladies then sighed in concert, shook their heads gravely, and looked at Mrs Quilp as a martyr.

'Ah!' said the spokeswoman, 'I wish you'd give her a little of your advice, Mrs Jiniwin'—Mrs Quilp had been a Miss Jiniwin it should be observed—'nobody knows better than you, ma'am, what us women owe to ourselves.'

'Owe indeed, ma'am!' replied Mrs Jiniwin. 'When my poor husband, her dear father, was alive, if he had ever ventured a cross word to me, I'd have —' The good old lady did not finish the sentence, but she twisted off the head of a shrimp with a vindictiveness which seemed to imply that the action was in some degree a substitute for words. In this light it was clearly understood by the other party, who immediately replied with great approbation, 'You quite enter into my feelings, ma'am, and it's jist what I'd do myself.'

'But you have no call to do it,' said Mrs Jiniwin. 'Luckily for you, you have no more occasion to do it than I had.'

'No woman need have, if she was true to herself,' rejoined the stout lady.

'Do you hear that, Betsy?' said Mrs Jiniwin, in a warning voice. 'How often have I said the same words to you, and almost gone down my knees when I spoke 'em!'

Poor Mrs Quilp, who had looked in a state of helplessness from one face of condolence to another, coloured, smiled, and shook her head doubtfully. This was the signal for a general clamour, which beginning in a low murmur gradually swelled into a great noise in which everybody spoke at once, and all said that she being a young woman had no right to set up her opinions against the experiences of those who knew so much better; that it was very wrong of her not to take the advice of people who had nothing at heart but her good; that it was next door to being downright ungrateful to conduct herself in that manner; that if she had no respect for herself she ought to have some for other women, all of whom she compromised by her meekness; and that if she had no respect for other women, the time would come when other women would have no respect for her; and she would be very sorry for that, they could tell her. Having dealt out these admonitions, the ladies fell to a more powerful assault than they had yet made upon the mixed tea, new bread, fresh butter, shrimps, and watercresses, and said that their vexation was so great to see her going on like that, that they could hardly bring themselves to eat a single morsel.

It's all very fine to talk,' said Mrs Quilp with much simplicity, 'but I know that if I was to die to-morrow, Quilp could marry anybody he pleased—now that he could, I know!'

There was quite a scream of indignation at this idea. Marry whom he pleased! They would like to see him dare to think of marrying any of them; they would like to see the faintest approach to such a thing. One lady (a widow) was quite certain she should stab him if he hinted at it.

'Very well,' said Mrs Quilp, nodding her head, 'as I said just now, it's very easy to talk, but I say again that I know—that I'm sure—Quilp has such a way with him when he likes, that the best looking woman here couldn't refuse him if I was dead, and she was free, and he chose to make love to him. Come!'

Everybody bridled up at this remark, as much as to say, 'I know you mean me. Let him try—that's all.' and yet for some hidden reason they were all angry with the widow, and each lady whispered in her neighbour's ear that it was very plain that said widow thought herself the person referred to, and what a puss she was!

'Mother knows,' said Mrs Quilp, 'that what I say is quite correct, for she often said so before we were married. Didn't you say so, mother?'

This inquiry involved the respected lady in rather a delicate position, for she certainly had been an active party in making her daughter Mrs Quilp, and, besides, it was not supporting the family credit to encourage the idea that she had married a man whom nobody else would have. On the other hand, to exaggerate the captivating qualities of her son-in-law would be to weaken the cause of revolt, in which all her energies were deeply engaged. Beset by these opposing considerations, Mrs Jiniwin admitted the powers of insinuation, but denied the right to govern, and with a timely compliment to the stout lady brought back the discussion to the point from which it had strayed.

'Oh! It's a sensible and proper thing indeed, what Mrs George has said!' exclaimed the old lady. 'If women are only true to themselves!—But Betsy isn't, and more's the shame and pity.'

'Before I'd let a man order me about as Quilp orders her,' said Mrs George, 'before I'd consent to stand in awe of a man as she does of him, I'd—I'd kill myself, and write a letter first to say he did it!'

This remark being loudly commended and approved of, another lady (from the Minories) put in her word:

'Mr Quilp may be a very nice man,' said this lady, 'and I supposed there's no doubt he is, because Mrs Quilp says he is, and Mrs Jiniwin says he is, and they ought to know, or nobody does. But still he is not quite a—what one calls a handsome man, nor quite a young man neither, which might be a little excuse for him if anything could be; whereas his wife is young, and is good-looking, and is a woman—which is the greatest thing after all.'

This last clause being delivered with extraordinary pathos, elicited a corresponding murmer from the hearers, stimulated by which the lady went on to remark that if such a husband was cross and unreasonable with such a wife, then—

'If he is!' interposed the mother, putting down her tea-cup and brushing the crumbs out of her lap, preparatory to making a solemn declaration. 'If he is! He is the greatest tyrant that every lived, she daren't call her soul her own, he makes her tremble with a word and even with a look, he frightens her to death, and she hasn't the spirit to give him a word back, no, not a single word.'

Notwithstanding that the fact had been notorious beforehand to all the tea-drinkers, and had been discussed and expatiated on at every tea-drinking in the neighbourhood for the last twelve months, this official communication was no sooner made than they all began to talk at once and to vie with each other in vehemence and volubility. Mrs George remarked that people would talk, that people had often said this to her before, that Mrs Simmons then and there present had told her so twenty times, that she had always said, 'No, Henrietta Simmons, unless I see it with my own eyes and hear it with my own ears, I never will believe it.' Mrs Simmons corroborated this testimony and added strong evidence of her own. The lady from the Minories recounted a successful course of treatment under which she had placed her own husband, who, from manifesting one month after marriage unequivocal symptoms of the tiger, had by this means become subdued into a perfect lamb. Another lady recounted her own personal struggle and final triumph, in the course whereof she had found it necessary to call in her mother and two aunts, and to weep incessantly night and day for six weeks. A third, who in the general confusion could secure no other listener, fastened herself upon a young woman still unmarried who happened to be amongst them, and conjured her, as she valued her own peace of mind and happiness to profit by this solemn occasion, to take example from the weakness of Mrs Quilp, and from that time forth to direct her whole thoughts to taming and subduing the rebellious spirit of man. The noise was at its height, and half the company had elevated their voices into a perfect shriek in order to drown the voices of the other half, when Mrs Jiniwin was seen to change colour and shake her forefinger stealthily, as if exhorting them to silence. Then, and not until then, Daniel Quilp himself, the cause and occasion of all this clamour, was observed to be in the room, looking on and listening with profound attention.

'Go on, ladies, go on,' said Daniel. 'Mrs Quilp, pray ask the ladies to stop to supper, and have a couple of lobsters and something light and palatable.'

'I—I—didn't ask them to tea, Quilp,' stammered his wife. It's quite an accident.'

'So much the better, Mrs Quilp; these accidental parties are always the pleasantest,' said the dwarf, rubbing his hands so hard that he seemed to be engaged in manufacturing, of the dirt with which they were encrusted, little charges for popguns. 'What! Not going, ladies, you are not going, surely!'

His fair enemies tossed their heads slightly as they sought their respective bonnets and shawls, but left all verbal contention to Mrs Jiniwin, who finding herself in the position of champion, made a faint struggle to sustain the character.

'And why not stop to supper, Quilp,' said the old lady, 'if my daughter had a mind?'

'To be sure,' rejoined Daniel. 'Why not?'

'There's nothing dishonest or wrong in a supper, I hope?' said Mrs Jiniwin.

'Surely not,' returned the dwarf. 'Why should there be? Nor anything unwholesome, either, unless there's lobster-salad or prawns, which I'm told are not good for digestion.'

'And you wouldn't like your wife to be attacked with that, or anything else that would make her uneasy would you?' said Mrs Jiniwin.

'Not for a score of worlds,' replied the dwarf with a grin. 'Not even to have a score of mothers-in-law at the same time—and what a blessing that would be!'

'My daughter's your wife, Mr Quilp, certainly,' said the old lady with a giggle, meant for satirical and to imply that he needed to be reminded of the fact; 'your wedded wife.'

'So she is, certainly. So she is,' observed the dwarf.

'And she has has a right to do as she likes, I hope, Quilp,' said the old lady trembling, partly with anger and partly with a secret fear of her impish son-in-law.

'Hope she has!' he replied. 'Oh! Don't you know she has? Don't you know she has, Mrs Jiniwin?

'I know she ought to have, Quilp, and would have, if she was of my way of thinking.'

'Why an't you of your mother's way of thinking, my dear?' said the dwarf, turing round and addressing his wife, 'why don't you always imitate your mother, my dear? She's the ornament of her sex—your father said so every day of his life. I am sure he did.'

'Her father was a blessed creetur, Quilp, and worthy twenty thousand of some people,' said Mrs Jiniwin; 'twenty hundred million thousand.'

'I should like to have known him,' remarked the dwarf. 'I dare say he was a blessed creature then; but I'm sure he is now. It was a happy release. I believe he had suffered a long time?'

The old lady gave a gasp, but nothing came of it; Quilp resumed, with the same malice in his eye and the same sarcastic politeness on his tongue.

'You look ill, Mrs Jiniwin; I know you have been exciting yourself too much—talking perhaps, for it is your weakness. Go to bed. Do go to bed.'

'I shall go when I please, Quilp, and not before.'

'But please to do now. Do please to go now,' said the dwarf.

The old woman looked angrily at him, but retreated as he advanced, and falling back before him, suffered him to shut the door upon her and bolt her out among the guests, who were by this time crowding downstairs. Being left along with his wife, who sat trembling in a corner with her eyes fixed upon the ground, the little man planted himself before her, and folding his arms looked steadily at her for a long time without speaking.

'Mrs Quilp,' he said at last.

'Yes, Quilp,' she replead meekly.

Instead of pursing the theme he had in his mind, Quilp folded his arms again, and looked at her more sternly than before, while she averted her eyes and kept them on the ground.

'Mrs Quilp.'

'Yes, Quilp.'

'If ever you listen to these beldames again, I'll bite you.'

With this laconic threat, which he accompanied with a snarl that gave him the appearance of being particularly in earnest, Mr Quilp bade her clear the teaboard away, and bring the rum. The spirit being set before him in a huge case-bottle, which had originally come out of some ship's locker, he settled himself in an arm-chair with his large head and face squeezed up against the back, and his little legs planted on the table.

'Now, Mrs Quilp,' he said; 'I feel in a smoking humour, and shall probably blaze away all night. But sit where you are, if you please, in case I want you.'

His wife returned no other reply than the necessary 'Yes, Quilp,' and the small lord of the creation took his first cigar and mixed his first glass of grog. The sun went down and the stars peeped out, the Tower turned from its own proper colours to grey and from grey to black, the room became perfectly dark and the end of the cigar a deep fiery red, but still Mr Quilp went on smoking and drinking in the same position, and staring listlessly out of window with the doglike smile always on his face, save when Mrs Quilp made some involuntary movement of restlessness or fatigue; and then it expanded into a grin of delight.

CHAPTER 5

Whether Mr Quilp took any sleep by snatches of a few winks at a time, or whether he sat with his eyes wide open all night long, certain it is that he kept his cigar alight, and kindled every fresh one from the ashes of that which was nearly consumed, without requiring the assistance of a candle. Nor did the striking of the clocks, hour after hour, appear to inspire him with any sense of drowsiness or any natural desire to go to rest, but rather to increase his wakefulness, which he showed, at every such indication of the progress of the night, by a suppressed cackling in his throat, and a motion of his shoulders, like one who laughs heartily but the same time slyly and by stealth.

At length the day broke, and poor Mrs Quilp, shivering with cold of early morning and harassed by fatigue and want of sleep, was discovered sitting patiently on her chair, raising her eyes at intervals in mute appeal to the compassion and clemency of her lord, and gently reminding him by an occasion cough that she was still unpardoned and that her penance had been of long duration. But her dwarfish spouse still smoked his cigar and drank his rum without heeding her; and it was not until the sun had some time risen, and the activity and noise of city day were rife in the street, that he deigned to recognize her presence by any word or sign. He might not have done so even then, but for certain impatient tapping at the door he seemed to denote that some pretty hard knuckles were actively engaged upon the other side.

'Why dear me!' he said looking round with a malicious grin, 'it's day. Open the door, sweet Mrs Quilp!'

His obedient wife withdrew the bolt, and her lady mother entered.

Now, Mrs Jiniwin bounced into the room with great impetuosity; for, supposing her son-in-law to be still a-bed, she had come to relieve her feelings by pronouncing a strong opinion upon his general conduct and character. Seeing that he was up and dressed, and that the room appeared to have been occupied ever since she quitted it on the previous evening, she stopped short, in some embarrassment.

Nothing escaped the hawk's eye of the ugly little man, who, perfectly understanding what passed in the old lady's mind, turned uglier still in the fulness of his satisfaction, and bade her good morning, with a leer or triumph.

'Why, Betsy,' said the old woman, 'you haven't been—you don't mean to say you've been a—'

'Sitting up all night?' said Quilp, supplying the conclusion of the sentence. 'Yes she has!'

'All night?' cried Mrs Jiniwin.

'Ay, all night. Is the dear old lady deaf?' said Quilp, with a smile of which a frown was part. 'Who says man and wife are bad company? Ha ha! The time has flown.'

'You're a brute!' exclaimed Mrs Jiniwin.

'Come come,' said Quilp, wilfully misunderstanding her, of course, 'you mustn't call her names. She's married now, you know. And though she did beguile the time and keep me from my bed, you must not be so tenderly careful of me as to be out of humour with her. Bless you for a dear old lady. Here's to your health!'

'I am much obliged to you,' returned the old woman, testifying by a certain restlessness in her hands a vehement desire to shake her matronly fist at her son-in-law. 'Oh! I'm very much obliged to you!'

'Grateful soul!' cried the dwarf. 'Mrs Quilp.'

'Yes, Quilp,' said the timid sufferer.

'Help your mother to get breakfast, Mrs Quilp. I am going to the wharf this morning—the earlier the better, so be quick.'

Mrs Jiniwin made a faint demonstration of rebellion by sitting down in a chair near the door and folding her arms as if in a resolute determination to do nothing. But a few whispered words from her daughter, and a kind inquiry from her son-in-law whether she felt faint, with a hint that there was abundance of cold water in the next apartment, routed these symptoms effectually, and she applied herself to the prescribed preparations with sullen diligence.

While they were in progress, Mr Quilp withdrew to the adjoining room, and, turning back his coat-collar, proceeded to smear his countenance with a damp towel of very unwholesome appearance, which made his complexion rather more cloudy than it was before. But, while he was thus engaged, his caution and inquisitiveness did not forsake him, for with a face as sharp and cunning as ever, he often stopped, even in this short process, and stood listening for any conversation in the next room, of which he might be the theme.

'Ah!' he said after a short effort of attention, 'it was not the towel over my ears, I thought it wasn't. I'm a little hunchy villain and a monster, am I, Mrs Jiniwin? Oh!'

The pleasure of this discovery called up the old doglike smile in full force. When he had quite done with it, he shook himself in a very doglike manner, and rejoined the ladies.

Mr Quilp now walked up to front of a looking-glass, and was standing there putting on his neckerchief, when Mrs Jiniwin happening to be behind him, could not resist the inclination she felt to shake her fist at her tyrant son-in-law. It was the gesture of an instant, but as she did so and accompanied the action with a menacing look, she met his eye in the glass, catching her in the very act. The same glance at the mirror conveyed to her the reflection of a horribly grotesque and distorted face with the tongue lolling out; and the next instant the dwarf, turning about with a perfectly bland and placid look, inquired in a tone of great affection.

'How are you now, my dear old darling?'

Slight and ridiculous as the incident was, it made him appear such a little fiend, and withal such a keen and knowing one, that the old woman felt too much afraid of him to utter a single word, and suffered herself to be led with extraordinary politeness to the breakfast-table. Here he by no means diminished the impression he had just produced, for he ate hard eggs, shell and all, devoured gigantic prawns with the heads and tails on, chewed tobacco and water-cresses at the same time and with extraordinary greediness, drank boiling tea without winking, bit his fork and spoon till they bent again, and in short performed so many horrifying and uncommon acts that the women were nearly frightened out of their wits, and began to doubt if he were really a human creature. At last, having gone through these proceedings and many others which were equally a part of his system, Mr Quilp left them, reduced to a very obedient and humbled state, and betook himself to the river-side, where he took boat for the wharf on which he had bestowed his name.

It was flood tide when Daniel Quilp sat himself down in the ferry to cross to the opposite shore. A fleet of barges were coming lazily on, some sideways, some head first, some stern first; all in a wrong-headed, dogged, obstinate way, bumping up against the larger craft, running under the bows of steamboats, getting into every kind of nook and corner where they had no business, and being crunched on all sides like so many walnut-shells; while each with its pair of long sweeps struggling and splashing in the water looked like some lumbering fish in pain. In some of the vessels at anchor all hands were busily engaged in coiling ropes, spreading out sails to dry, taking in or discharging their cargoes; in others no life was visible but two or three tarry boys, and perhaps a barking dog running to and fro upon the deck or scrambling up to look over the side and bark the louder for the view. Coming slowly on through the forests of masts was a great steamship, beating the water in short impatient strokes with her heavy paddles as though she wanted room to breathe, and advancing in her huge bulk like a sea monster among the minnows of the Thames. On either hand were long black tiers of colliers; between them vessels slowly working out of harbour with sails glistening in the sun, and creaking noise on board, re-echoed from a hundred quarters. The water and all upon it was in active motion, dancing and buoyant and bubbling up; while the old grey Tower and piles of building on the shore, with many a church-spire shooting up between, looked coldly on, and seemed to disdain their chafing, restless neighbour.

Daniel Quilp, who was not much affected by a bright morning save in so far as it spared him the trouble of carrying an umbrella, caused himself to be put ashore hard by the wharf, and proceeded thither through a narrow lane which, partaking of the amphibious character of its frequenters, had as much water as mud in its composition, and a very liberal supply of both. Arrived at his destination, the first object that presented itself to his view was a pair of very imperfectly shod feet elevated in the air with the soles upwards, which remarkable appearance was referable to the boy, who being of an eccentric spirit and having a natural taste for tumbling, was now standing on his head and contemplating the aspect of the river under these uncommon circumstances. He was speedily brought on his heels by the sound of his master's voice, and as soon as his head was in its right position, Mr Quilp, to speak expressively in the absence of a better verb, 'punched it' for him.

'Come, you let me alone,' said the boy, parrying Quilp's hand with both his elbows alternatively. 'You'll get something you won't like if you don't and so I tell you.'

'You dog,' snarled Quilp, 'I'll beat you with an iron rod, I'll scratch you with a rusty nail, I'll pinch your eyes, if you talk to me—I will.'

With these threats he clenched his hand again, and dexterously diving in between the elbows and catching the boy's head as it dodged from side to side, gave it three or four good hard knocks. Having now carried his point and insisted on it, he left off.

'You won't do it agin,' said the boy, nodding his head and drawing back, with the elbows ready in case of the worst; 'now—'

'Stand still, you dog,' said Quilp. 'I won't do it again, because I've done it as often as I want. Here. Take the key.'

'Why don't you hit one of your size?' said the boy approaching very slowly.

'Where is there one of my size, you dog?' returned Quilp. 'Take the key, or I'll brain you with it'—indeed he gave him a smart tap with the handle as he spoke. 'Now, open the counting-house.'

The boy sulkily complied, muttering at first, but desisting when he looked round and saw that Quilp was following him with a steady look. And here it may be remarked, that between this boy and the dwarf that existed a strange kind of mutual liking. How born or bred, and or nourished upon blows and threats on one side, and retorts and defiances on the other, is not to the purpose. Quilp would certainly suffer nobody to contract him but the boy, and the boy would assuredly not have submitted to be so knocked about by anybody but Quilp, when he had the power to run away at any time he chose.

'Now,' said Quilp, passing into the wooden counting-house, 'you mind the wharf. Stand upon your head agin, and I'll cut one of your feet off.'

The boy made no answer, but directly Quilp had shut himself in, stood on his head before the door, then walked on his hands to the back and stood on his head there, and then to the opposite side and repeated the performance. There were indeed four sides to the counting-house, but he avoided that one where the window was, deeming it probable that Quilp would be looking out of it. This was prudent, for in point of fact, the dwarf, knowing his disposition, was lying in wait at a little distance from the sash armed with a large piece of wood, which, being rough and jagged and studded in many parts with broken nails, might possibly have hurt him.

It was a dirty little box, this counting-house, with nothing in it but an old ricketty desk and two stools, a hat-peg, an ancient almanack, an inkstand with no ink, and the stump of one pen, and an eight-day clock which hadn't gone for eighteen years at least, and of which the minute-hand had been twisted off for a tooth-pick. Daniel Quilp pulled his hat over his brows, climbed on to the desk (which had a flat top) and stretching his short length upon it went to sleep with ease of an old practitioner; intending, no doubt, to compensate himself for the deprivation of last night's rest, by a long and sound nap.

Sound it might have been, but long it was not, for he had not been asleep a quarter of an hour when the boy opened the door and thrust in his head, which was like a bundle of badly-picked oakum. Quilp was a light sleeper and started up directly.

'Here's somebody for you,' said the boy.

'Who?'

'I don't know.'

'Ask!' said Quilp, seizing the trifle of wood before mentioned and throwing it at him with such dexterity that it was well the boy disappeared before it reached the spot on which he had stood. 'Ask, you dog.'

Not caring to venture within range of such missles again, the boy discreetly sent in his stead the first cause of the interruption, who now presented herself at the door.

'What, Nelly!' cried Quilp.

'Yes,' said the child, hesitating whether to enter or retreat, for the dwarf just roused, with his dishevelled hair hanging all about him and a yellow handkerchief over his head, was something fearful to behold; it's only me, sir.'

'Come in,' said Quilp, without getting off the desk. 'Come in. Stay. Just look out into the yard, and see whether there's a boy standing on his head.'

'No, sir,' replied Nell. 'He's on his feet.'

'You're sure he is?' said Quilp. 'Well. Now, come in and shut the door. What's your message, Nelly?'

The child handed him a letter. Mr Quilp, without changing his position further than to turn over a little more on his side and rest his chin on his hand, proceeded to make himself acquainted with its contents.

CHAPTER 6

Little Nell stood timidly by, with her eyes raised to the countenance of Mr Quilp as he read the letter, plainly showing by her looks that while she entertained some fear and distrust of the little man, she was much inclined to laugh at his uncouth appearance and grotesque attitude. And yet there was visible on the part of the child a painful anxiety for his reply, and consciousness of his power to render it disagreeable or distressing, which was strongly at variance with this impulse and restrained it more effectually than she could possibly have done by any efforts of her own.

That Mr Quilp was himself perplexed, and that in no small degree, by the contents of the letter, was sufficiently obvious. Before he had got through the first two or three lines he began to open his eyes very wide and to frown most horribly, the next two or three caused him to scratch his head in an uncommonly vicious manner, and when he came to the conclusion he gave a long dismal whistle indicative of surprise and dismay. After folding and laying it down beside him, he bit the nails of all of his ten fingers with extreme voracity; and taking it up sharply, read it again. The second perusal was to all appearance as unsatisfactory as the first, and plunged him into a profound reverie from which he awakened to another assault upon his nails and a long stare at the child, who with her eyes turned towards the ground awaited his further pleasure.

'Halloa here!' he said at length, in a voice, and with a suddenness, which made the child start as though a gun had been fired off at her ear. 'Nelly!'

'Yes, sir.'

'Do you know what's inside this letter, Nell?'

'No, sir!'

'Are you sure, quite sure, quite certain, upon your soul?'

'Quite sure, sir.'

'Do you wish you may die if you do know, hey?' said the dwarf.

'Indeed I don't know,' returned the child.

'Well!' muttered Quilp as he marked her earnest look. 'I believe you. Humph! Gone already? Gone in four-and-twenty hours! What the devil has he done with it, that's the mystery!'

This reflection set him scratching his head and biting his nails once more. While he was thus employed his features gradually relaxed into what was with him a cheerful smile, but which in any other man would have been a ghastly grin of pain, and when the child looked up again she found that he was regarding her with extraordinary favour and complacency.

'You look very pretty to-day, Nelly, charmingly pretty. Are you tired, Nelly?'

'No, sir. I'm in a hurry to get back, for he will be anxious while I am away.'

'There's no hurry, little Nell, no hurry at all,' said Quilp. 'How should you like to be my number two, Nelly?'

'To be what, sir?'

'My number two, Nelly, my second, my Mrs Quilp,' said the dwarf.

The child looked frightened, but seemed not to understand him, which Mr Quilp observing, hastened to make his meaning more distinctly.

'To be Mrs Quilp the second, when Mrs Quilp the first is dead, sweet Nell,' said Quilp, wrinkling up his eyes and luring her towards him with his bent forefinger, 'to be my wife, my little cherry-cheeked, red-lipped wife. Say that Mrs Quilp lives five year, or only four, you'll be just the proper age for me. Ha ha! Be a good girl, Nelly, a very good girl, and see if one of these days you don't come to be Mrs Quilp of Tower Hill.'

So far from being sustained and stimulated by this delightful prospect, the child shrank from him in great agitation, and trembled violently. Mr Quilp, either because frightening anybody afforded him a constitutional delight, or because it was pleasant to contemplate the death of Mrs Quilp number one, and the elevation of Mrs Quilp number two to her post and title, or because he was determined from purposes of his own to be agreeable and good-humoured at that particular time, only laughed and feigned to take no heed of her alarm.

'You shall home with me to Tower Hill and see Mrs Quilp that is, directly,' said the dwarf. 'She's very fond of you, Nell, though not so fond as I am. You shall come home with me.'

'I must go back indeed,' said the child. 'He told me to return directly I had the answer.'

'But you haven't it, Nelly,' retorted the dwarf, 'and won't have it, and can't have it, until I have been home, so you see that to do your errand, you must go with me. Reach me yonder hat, my dear, and we'll go directly.' With that, Mr Quilp suffered himself to roll gradually off the desk until his short legs touched the ground, when he got upon them and led the way from the counting-house to the wharf outside, when the first objects that presented themselves were the boy who had stood on his head and another young gentleman of about his own stature, rolling in the mud together, locked in a tight embrace, and cuffing each other with mutual heartiness.

'It's Kit!' cried Nelly, clasping her hand, 'poor Kit who came with me! Oh, pray stop them, Mr Quilp!'

'I'll stop 'em,' cried Quilp, diving into the little counting-house and returning with a thick stick, 'I'll stop 'em. Now, my boys, fight away. I'll fight you both. I'll take bot of you, both together, both together!'

With which defiances the dwarf flourished his cudgel, and dancing round the combatants and treading upon them and skipping over them, in a kind of frenzy, laid about him, now on one and now on the other, in a most desperate manner, always aiming at their heads and dealing such blows as none but the veriest little savage would have inflicted. This being warmer work than they had calculated upon, speedily cooled the courage of the belligerents, who scrambled to their feet and called for quarter.

'I'll beat you to a pulp, you dogs,' said Quilp, vainly endeavoring to get near either of them for a parting blow. 'I'll bruise you until you're copper-coloured, I'll break your faces till you haven't a profile between you, I will.'

'Come, you drop that stick or it'll be worse for you,' said his boy, dodging round him and watching an opportunity to rush in; 'you drop that stick.'

'Come a little nearer, and I'll drop it on your skull, you dog,' said Quilp, with gleaming eyes; 'a little nearer—nearer yet.'

But the boy declined the invitation until his master was apparently a little off his guard, when he darted in and seizing the weapon tried to wrest it from his grasp. Quilp, who was as strong as a lion, easily kept his hold until the boy was tugging at it with his utmost power, when he suddenly let it go and sent him reeling backwards, so that he fell violently upon his head. The success of this manoeuvre tickled Mr Quilp beyond description, and he laughed and stamped upon the ground as at a most irresistible jest.

'Never mind,' said the boy, nodding his head and rubbing it at the same time; 'you see if ever I offer to strike anybody again because they say you're an uglier dwarf than can be seen anywheres for a penny, that's all.'

'Do you mean to say, I'm not, you dog?' returned Quilp.

'No!' retorted the boy.

'Then what do you fight on my wharf for, you villain?' said Quilp.

'Because he said so,' replied to boy, pointing to Kit, 'not because you an't.'

'Then why did he say,' bawled Kit, 'that Miss Nelly was ugly, and that she and my master was obliged to do whatever his master liked? Why did he say that?'

'He said what he did because he's a fool, and you said what you did because you're very wise and clever—almost too clever to live, unless you're very careful of yourself, Kit.' said Quilp, with great suavity in his manner, but still more of quiet malice about his eyes and mouth. 'Here's sixpence for you, Kit. Always speak the truth. At all times, Kit, speak the truth. Lock the counting-house, you dog, and bring me the key.'

The other boy, to whom this order was addressed, did as he was told, and was rewarded for his partizanship in behalf of his master, by a dexterous rap on the nose with the key, which brought the water into his eyes. Then Mr Quilp departed with the child and Kit in a boat, and the boy revenged himself by dancing on his head at intervals on the extreme verge of the wharf, during the whole time they crossed the river.

There was only Mrs Quilp at home, and she, little expecting the return of her lord, was just composing herself for a refreshing slumber when the sound of his footsteps roused her. She had barely time to seem to be occupied in some needle-work, when he entered, accompanied by the child; having left Kit downstairs.

'Here's Nelly Trent, dear Mrs Quilp,' said her husband. 'A glass of wine, my dear, and a biscuit, for she has had a long walk. She'll sit with you, my soul, while I write a letter.'

Mrs Quilp looked tremblingly in her spouse's face to know what this unusual courtesy might portend, and obedient to the summons she saw in his gesture, followed him into the next room.

'Mind what I say to you,' whispered Quilp. 'See if you can get out of her anything about her grandfather, or what they do, or how they live, or what he tells her. I've my reasons for knowing, if I can. You women talk more freely to one another than you do to us, and you have a soft, mild way with you that'll win upon her. Do you hear?'

'Yes, Quilp.'

'Go then. What's the matter now?'

'Dear Quilp,' faltered his wife. 'I love the child—if you could do without making me deceive her—'

The dwarf muttering a terrible oath looked round as if for some weapon with which to inflict condign punishment upon his disobedient wife. The submissive little woman hurriedly entreated him not to be angry, and promised to do as he bade her.

'Do you hear me,' whispered Quilp, nipping and pinching her arm; 'worm yourself into her secrets; I know you can. I'm listening, recollect. If you're not sharp enough, I'll creak the door, and woe betide you if I have to creak it much. Go!'

Mrs Quilp departed according to order, and her amiable husband, ensconcing himself behind the partly opened door, and applying his ear close to it, began to listen with a face of great craftiness and attention.

Poor Mrs Quilp was thinking, however, in what manner to begin or what kind of inquiries she could make; and it was not until the door, creaking in a very urgent manner, warned her to proceed without further consideration, that the sound of her voice was heard.

'How very often you have come backwards and forwards lately to Mr Quilp, my dear.'

'I have said so to grandfather, a hundred times,' returned Nell innocently.

'And what has he said to that?'

'Only sighed, and dropped his head, and seemed so sad and wretched that if you could have seen him I am sure you must have cried; you could not have helped it more than I, I know. How that door creaks!'

'It often does.' returned Mrs Quilp, with an uneasy glance towards it. 'But your grandfather—he used not to be so wretched?'

'Oh, no!' said the child eagerly, 'so different! We were once so happy and he so cheerful and contented! You cannot think what a sad change has fallen on us since.'

'I am very, very sorry, to hear you speak like this, my dear!' said Mrs Quilp. And she spoke the truth.

'Thank you,' returned the child, kissing her cheek, 'you are always kind to me, and it is a pleasure to talk to you. I can speak to no one else about him, but poor Kit. I am very happy still, I ought to feel happier perhaps than I do, but you cannot think how it grieves me sometimes to see him alter so.'

'He'll alter again, Nelly,' said Mrs Quilp, 'and be what he was before.'

'Oh, if God would only let that come about!' said the child with streaming eyes; 'but it is a long time now, since he first began to—I thought I saw that door moving!'

'It's the wind,' said Mrs Quilp, faintly. 'Began to—'

'To be so thoughtful and dejected, and to forget our old way of spending the time in the long evenings,' said the child. 'I used to read to him by the fireside, and he sat listening, and when I stopped and we began to talk, he told me about my mother, and how she once looked and spoke just like me when she was a little child. Then he used to take me on his knee, and try to make me understand that she was not lying in her grave, but had flown to a beautiful country beyond the sky where nothing died or ever grew old—we were very happy once!'

'Nelly, Nelly!' said the poor woman, 'I can't bear to see one as young as you so sorrowful. Pray don't cry.'

'I do so very seldom,' said Nell,' but I have kept this to myself a long time, and I am not quite well, I think, for the tears come into my eyes and I cannot keep them back. I don't mind telling you my grief, for I know you will not tell it to any one again.'

Mrs Quilp turned away her head and made no answer.

'Then,' said the child, 'we often walked in the fields and among the green trees, and when we came home at night, we liked it better for being tired, and said what a happy place it was. And if it was dark and rather dull, we used to say, what did it matter to us, for it only made us remember our last walk with greater pleasure, and look forward to our next one. But now we never have these walks, and though it is the same house it is darker and much more gloomy than it used to be, indeed!'

She paused here, but though the door creaked more than once, Mrs Quilp said nothing.

'Mind you don't suppose,' said the child earnestly, 'that grandfather is less kind to me than he was. I think he loves me better every day, and is kinder and more affectionate than he was the day before. You do not know how fond he is of me!'

'I am sure he loves you dearly,' said Mrs Quilp.

'Indeed, indeed he does!' cried Nell, 'as dearly as I love him. But I have not told you the greatest change of all, and this you must never breathe again to any one. He has no sleep or rest, but that which he takes by day in his easy chair; for every night and nearly all night long he is away from home.'

'Nelly!'

'Hush!' said the child, laying her finger on her lip and looking round. 'When he comes home in the morning, which is generally just before day, I let him in. Last night he was very late, and it was quite light. I saw that his face was deadly pale, that his eyes were bloodshot, and that his legs trembled as he walked. When I had gone to bed again, I heard him groan. I got up and ran back to him, and heard him say, before he knew that I was there, that he could not bear his life much longer, and if it was not for the child, would wish to die. What shall I do! Oh! What shall I do!'

The fountains of her heart were opened; the child, overpowered by the weight of her sorrows and anxieties, by the first confidence she had ever shown, and the sympathy with which her little tale had been received, hid her face in the arms of her helpless friend, and burst into a passion of tears.

In a few minutes Mr Quilp returned, and expressed the utmost surprise to find her in this condition, which he did very naturally and with admirable effect, for that kind of acting had been rendered familiar to him by long practice, and he was quite at home in it.

'She's tired you see, Mrs Quilp,' said the dwarf, squinting in a hideous manner to imply that his wife was to follow his lead. 'It's a long way from her home to the wharf, and then she was alarmed to see a couple of young scoundrels fighting, and was timorous on the water besides. All this together has been too much for her. Poor Nell!'

Mr Quilp unintentionally adopted the very best means he could have devised for the recovery of his young visitor, by patting her on the head. Such an application from any other hand might not have produced a remarkable effect, but the child shrank so quickly from his touch and felt such an instinctive desire to get out of his reach, that she rose directly and declared herself ready to return.

'But you'd better wait, and dine with Mrs Quilp and me.' said the dwarf.

'I have been away too long, sir, already,' returned Nell, drying her eyes.

'Well,' said Mr Quilp, 'if you will go, you will, Nelly. Here's the note. It's only to say that I shall see him to-morrow or maybe next day, and that I couldn't do that little business for him this morning. Good-bye, Nelly. Here, you sir; take care of her, d'ye hear?'

Kit, who appeared at the summons, deigned to make no reply to so needless an injunction, and after staring at Quilp in a threatening manner, as if he doubted whether he might not have been the cause of Nelly shedding tears, and felt more than half disposed to revenge the fact upon him on the mere suspicion, turned about and followed his young mistress, who had by this time taken her leave of Mrs Quilp and departed.

'You're a keen questioner, an't you, Mrs Quilp?' said the dwarf, turning upon her as soon as they were left alone.

'What more could I do?' returned his wife mildly?

'What more could you do!' sneered Quilp, 'couldn't you have done something less? Couldn't you have done what you had to do, without appearing in your favourite part of the crocodile, you minx?'

'I am very sorry for the child, Quilp,' said his wife. 'Surely I've done enough. I've led her on to tell her secret she supposed we were alone; and you were by, God forgive me.'

'You led her on! You did a great deal truly!' said Quilp. 'What did I tell you about making me creak the door? It's lucky for you that from what she let fall, I've got the clue I want, for if I hadn't, I'd have visited the failure upon you, I can tell you.'

Mrs Quilp being fully persuaded of this, made no reply. Her husband added with some exultation,

'But you may thank your fortunate stars—the same stars that made you Mrs Quilp—you may thank them that I'm upon the old gentleman's track, and have got a new light. So let me hear no more about this matter now or at any other time, and don't get anything too nice for dinner, for I shan't be home to it.'

So saying, Mr Quilp put his hat on and took himself off, and Mrs Quilp, who was afflicted beyond measure by the recollection of the part she had just acted, shut herself up in her chamber, and smothering her head in the bed-clothes bemoaned her fault more bitterly than many less tender-hearted persons would have mourned a much greater offence; for, in the majority of cases, conscience is an elastic and very flexible article, which will bear a deal of stretching and adapt itself to a great variety of circumstances. Some people by prudent management and leaving it off piece by piece like a flannel waistcoat in warm weather, even contrive, in time, to dispense with it altogether; but there be others who can assume the garment and throw it off at pleasure; and this, being the greatest and most convenient improvement, is the one most in vogue.

CHAPTER 7

'Fred,' said Mr Swiveller, 'remember the once popular melody of Begone dull care; fan the sinking flame of hilarity with the wing of friendship; and pass the rosy wine.'

Mr Richard Swiveller's apartments were in the neighbourhood of Drury Lane, and in addition to this convenience of situation had the advantage of being over a tobacconist's shop, so that he was enabled to procure a refreshing sneeze at any time by merely stepping out upon the staircase, and was saved the trouble and expense of maintaining a snuff-box. It was in these apartments that Mr Swiveller made use of the expressions above recorded for the consolation and encouragement of his desponding friend; and it may not be uninteresting or improper to remark that even these brief observations partook in a double sense of the figurative and poetical character of Mr Swiveller's mind, as the rosy wine was in fact represented by one glass of cold gin-and-water, which was replenished as occasion required from a bottle and jug upon the table, and was passed from one to another, in a scarcity of tumblers which, as Mr Swiveller's was a bachelor's establishment, may be acknowledged without a blush. By a like pleasant fiction his single chamber was always mentioned in a plural number. In its disengaged times, the tobacconist had announced it in his window as 'apartments' for a single gentleman, and Mr Swiveller, following up the hint, never failed to speak of it as his rooms, his lodgings, or his chambers, conveying to his hearers a notion of indefinite space, and leaving their imaginations to wander through long suites of lofty halls, at pleasure.

In this flight of fancy, Mr Swiveller was assisted by a deceptive piece of furniture, in reality a bedstead, but in semblance a bookcase, which occupied a prominent situation in his chamber and seemed to defy suspicion and challenge inquiry. There is no doubt that by day Mr Swiveller firmly believed this secret convenience to be a bookcase and nothing more; that he closed his eyes to the bed, resolutely denied the existence of the blankets, and spurned the bolster from his thoughts. No word of its real use, no hint of its nightly service, no allusion to its peculiar properties, had ever passed between him and his most intimate friends. Implicit faith in the deception was the first article of his creed. To be the friend of Swiveller you must reject all circumstantial evidence, all reason, observation, and experience, and repose a blind belief in the bookcase. It was his pet weakness, and he cherished it.

'Fred!' said Mr Swiveller, finding that his former adjuration had been productive of no effect. 'Pass the rosy.'

Young Trent with an impatient gesture pushed the glass towards him, and fell again in the the moody attitude from which he had been unwillingly roused.

'I'll give you, Fred,' said his friend, stirring the mixture, 'a little sentiment appropriate to the occasion. Here's May the—'

'Pshaw!' interposed the other. 'You worry me to death with your chattering. You can be merry under any circumstances.'

'Why, Mr Trent,' returned Dick, 'there is a proverb which talks about being merry and wise. There are some people who can be merry and can't be wise, and some who can be wise (or think they can) and can't be merry. I'm one of the first sort. If the proverb's a good 'un, I suppose it's better to keep to half of it than none; at all events, I'd rather be merry and not wise, than like you, neither one nor t'other.'

'Bah!' muttered his friend, peevishly.

'With all my heart,' said Mr Swiveller. 'In the polite circles I believe this sort of thing isn't usually said to a gentleman in his own apartments, but never mind that. Make yourself at home,' adding to this retort an observation to the effect that his friend appeared to be rather 'cranky' in point of temper, Richards Swiveller finished the rosy and applied himself to the composition of another glassful, in which, after tasting it with great relish, he proposed a toast to an imaginary company.

'Gentlemen, I'll give you, if you please, Success to the ancient family of the Swivellers, and good luck to Mr Richard in particular—Mr Richard, gentlemen,' said Dick with great emphasis, 'who spends all his money on his friends and is Bah!'d for his pains. Hear, hear!'

'Dick!' said the other, returning to his seat after having paced the room twice or thrice, 'will you talk seriously for two minutes, if I show you a way to make your fortune with very little trouble?'

'You've shown me so many,' returned Dick; 'and nothing has come of any one of 'em but empty pockets—'

'You'll tell a different story of this one, before a very long time is over,' said his companion, drawing his chair to the table. 'You saw my sister Nell?'

'What about her?' returned Dick.

'She has a pretty face, has she not?'

'Why, certainly,' replied Dick. 'I must say for her that there's not any very strong family likeness between her and you.'

'Has she a pretty face,' repeated his friend impatiently.

'Yes,' said Dick, 'she has a pretty face, a very pretty face. What of that?'

'I'll tell you,' returned his friend. 'It's very plain that the old man and I will remain at daggers drawn to the end of our lives, and that I have nothing to expect from him. You see that, I suppose?'

'A bat might see that, with the sun shining,' said Dick.

'It's equally plain that the money which the old flint—rot him—first taught me to expect that I should share with her at his death, will all be hers, is it not?'

'I should said it was,' replied Dick; 'unless the way in which I put the case to him, made an impression. It may have done so. It was powerful, Fred. 'Here is a jolly old grandfather'—that was strong, I thought—very friendly and natural. Did it strike you in that way?'

It didn't strike him,' returned the other, 'so we needn't discuss it. Now look here. Nell is nearly fourteen.'

'Fine girl of her age, but small,' observed Richard Swiveller parenthetically.

'If I am to go on, be quiet for one minute,' returned Trent, fretting at the slight interest the other appeared to take in the conversation. 'Now I'm coming to the point.'

'That's right,' said Dick.

'The girl has strong affections, and brought up as she has been, may, at her age, be easily influenced and persuaded. If I take her in hand, I will be bound by a very little coaxing and threatening to bend her to my will. Not to beat about the bush (for the advantages of the scheme would take a week to tell) what's to prevent your marrying her?'

Richard Swiveller, who had been looking over the rim of the tumbler while his companion addressed the foregoing remarks to him with great energy and earnestness of manner, no sooner heard these words than he evinced the utmost consternation, and with difficulty ejaculated the monosyllable:

'What!'

'I say, what's to prevent,' repeated the other with a steadiness of manner, of the effect of which upon his companion he was well assured by long experience, 'what's to prevent your marrying her?'

'And she 'nearly fourteen'!' cried Dick.

'I don't mean marrying her now'—returned the brother angrily; 'say in two year's time, in three, in four. Does the old man look like a long-liver?'

'He don't look like it,' said Dick shaking his head, 'but these old people—there's no trusting them, Fred. There's an aunt of mind down in Dorsetshire that was going to die when I was eight years old, and hasn't kept her word yet. They're so aggravating, so unprincipled, so spiteful—unless there's apoplexy in the family, Fred, you can't calculate upon 'em, and even then they deceive you just as often as not.'

'Look at the worst side of the question then,' said Trent as steadily as before, and keeping his eyes upon his friend. 'Suppose he lives.'

'To be sure,' said Dick. 'There's the rub.'

'I say,' resumed his friend, 'suppose he lives, and I persuaded, or if the word sounds more feasible, forced Nell to a secret marriage with you. What do you think would come of that?'

'A family and an annual income of nothing, to keep 'em on,' said Richard Swiveller after some reflection.

'I tell you,' returned the other with an increased earnestness, which, whether it were real or assumed, had the same effect on his companion, 'that he lives for her, that his whole energies and thoughts are bound up in her, that he would no more disinherit her for an act of disobedience than he would take me into his favour again for any act of obedience or virtue that I could possibly be guilty of. He could not do it. You or any other man with eyes in his head may see that, if he chooses.'

'It seems improbable certainly,' said Dick, musing.

'It seems improbable because it is improbable,' his friend returned. 'If you would furnish him with an additional inducement to forgive you, let there be an irreconcilable breach, a most deadly quarrel, between you and me—let there be a pretense of such a thing, I mean, of course—and he'll do fast enough. As to Nell, constant dropping will wear away a stone; you know you may trust to me as far as she is concerned. So, whether he lives or dies, what does it come to? That you become the sole inheritor of the wealth of this rich old hunks, that you and I spend it together, and that you get into the bargain a beautiful young wife.'

'I suppose there's no doubt about his being rich'—said Dick.

'Doubt! Did you hear what he left fall the other day when we were there? Doubt! What will you doubt next, Dick?'

It would be tedious to pursue the conversation through all its artful windings, or to develope the gradual approaches by which the heart of Richard Swiveller was gained. It is sufficient to know that vanity, interest, poverty, and every spendthrift consideration urged him to look upon the proposal with favour, and that where all other inducements were wanting, the habitual carelessness of his disposition stepped in and still weighed down the scale on the same side. To these impulses must be added the complete ascendancy which his friend had long been accustomed to exercise over him—an ascendancy exerted in the beginning sorely at the expense of his friend's vices, and was in nine cases out of ten looked upon as his designing tempter when he was indeed nothing but his thoughtless, light-headed tool.

The motives on the other side were something deeper than any which Richard Swiveller entertained or understood, but these being left to their own development, require no present elucidation. The negotiation was concluded very pleasantly, and Mr Swiveller was in the act of stating in flowery terms that he had no insurmountable objection to marrying anybody plentifully endowed with money or moveables, who could be induced to take him, when he was interrupted in his observations by a knock at the door, and the consequent necessity of crying 'Come in.'

The door was opened, but nothing came in except a soapy arm and a strong gush of tobacco. The gush of tobacco came from the shop downstairs, and the soapy arm proceeded from the body of a servant-girl, who being then and there engaged in cleaning the stars had just drawn it out of a warm pail to take in a letter, which letter she now held in her hand, proclaiming aloud with that quick perception of surnames peculiar to her class that it was for Mister Snivelling.

Dick looked rather pale and foolish when he glanced at the direction, and still more so when he came to look at the inside, observing that it was one of the inconveniences of being a lady's man, and that it was very easy to talk as they had been talking, but he had quite forgotten her.

'Her. Who?' demanded Trent.

'Sophy Wackles,' said Dick.

'Who's she?'

'She's all my fancy painted her, sir, that's what she is,' said Mr Swiveller, taking a long pull at 'the rosy' and looking gravely at his friend. 'She's lovely, she's divine. You know her.'

'I remember,' said his companion carelessly. 'What of her?'

'Why, sir,' returned Dick, 'between Miss Sophia Wackles and the humble individual who has now the honor to address you, warm and tender sentiments have been engendered, sentiments of the most honourable and inspiring kind. The Goddess Diana, sir, that calls aloud for the chase, is not more particular in her behavior than Sophia Wackles; I can tell you that.'

'Am I to believe there's anything real in what you say?' demanded his friend; 'you don't mean to say that any love-making has been going on?'

'Love-making, yes. Promising, no,' said Dick. 'There can be no action for breach, that's one comfort. I've never committed myself in writing, Fred.'

'And what's in the letter, pray?'

'A reminder, Fred, for to-night—a small party of twenty, making two hundred light fantastic toes in all, supposing every lady and gentleman to have the proper complement. It must go, if it's only to begin breaking off the affair—I'll do it, don't you be afraid. I should like to know whether she left this herself. If she did, unconscious of any bar to her happiness, it's affecting, Fred.'

To solve this question, Mr Swiveller summoned the handmaid and ascertained that Miss Sophy Wackles had indeed left the letter with her own hands; and that she had come accompanied, for decorum's sake no doubt, by a younger Miss Wackles; and that on learning that Mr Swiveller was at home and being requested to walk upstairs, she was extremely shocked and professed that she would rather die. Mr Swiveller heard this account with a degree of admiration not altogether consistent with the project in which he had just concurred, but his friend attached very little importance to his behavior in this respect, probably because he knew that he had influence sufficient to control Richard Swiveller's proceedings in this or any other matter, whenever he deemed it necessary, for the advancement of his own purposes, to exert it.

CHAPTER 8

Business disposed of, Mr Swiveller was inwardly reminded of its being nigh dinner-time, and to the intent that his health might not be endangered by longer abstinence, dispatched a message to the nearest eating-house requiring an immediate supply of boiled beef and greens for two. With this demand, however, the eating-house (having experience of its customer) declined to comply, churlishly sending back for answer that if Mr Swiveller stood in need of beef perhaps he would be so obliging as to come there and eat it, bringing with him, as grace before meat, the amount of a certain small account which had long been outstanding. Not at all intimidated by this rebuff, but rather sharpened in wits and appetite, Mr Swiveller forwarded the same message to another and more distant eating-house, adding to it by way of rider that the gentleman was induced to send so far, not only by the great fame and popularity its beef had acquired, but in consequence of the extreme toughness of the beef retailed at the obdurant cook's shop, which rendered it quite unfit not merely for gentlemanly food, but for any human consumption. The good effect of this politic course was demonstrated by the speedy arrive of a small pewter pyramid, curiously constructed of platters and covers, whereof the boiled-beef-plates formed the base, and a foaming quart-pot the apex; the structure being resolved into its component parts afforded all things requisite and necessary for a hearty meal, to which Mr Swiveller and his friend applied themselves with great keenness and enjoyment.

'May the present moment,' said Dick, sticking his fork into a large carbuncular potato, 'be the worst of our lives! I like the plan of sending 'em with the peel on; there's a charm in drawing a potato from its native element (if I may so express it) to which the rich and powerful are strangers. Ah! 'Man wants but little here below, nor wants that little long!' How true that it!—after dinner.'

'I hope the eating-house keeper will want but little and that he may not want that little long,' returned his companion; but I suspect you've no means of paying for this!'

'I shall be passing present, and I'll call,' said Dick, winking his eye significantly. 'The waiter's quite helpless. The goods are gone, Fred, and there's an end of it.'

In point of fact, it would seem that the waiter felt this wholesome truth, for when he returned for the empty plates and dishes and was informed by Mr Swiveller with dignified carelessness that he would call and settle when he should be passing presently, he displayed some perturbation of spirit and muttered a few remarks about 'payment on delivery' and 'no trust,' and other unpleasant subjects, but was fain to content himself with inquiring at what hour it was likely that the gentleman would call, in order that being presently responsible for the beef, greens, and sundries, he might take to be in the way at the time. Mr Swiveller, after mentally calculating his engagements to a nicety, replied that he should look in at from two minutes before six and seven minutes past; and the man disappearing with this feeble consolation, Richards Swiveller took a greasy memorandum-book from his pocket and made an entry therein.

'Is that a reminder, in case you should forget to call?' said Trent with a sneer.

'Not exactly, Fred,' replied the imperturbable Richard, continuing to write with a businesslike air. 'I enter in this little book the names of the streets that I can't go down while the shops are open. This dinner today closes Long Acre. I bought a pair of boots in Great Queen Street last week, and made that no throughfare too. There's only one avenue to the Strand left often now, and I shall have to stop up that to-night with a pair of gloves. The roads are closing so fast in every direction, that in a month's time, unless my aunt sends me a remittance, I shall have to go three or four miles out of town to get over the way.'

'There's no fear of failing, in the end?' said Trent.

'Why, I hope not,' returned Mr Swiveller, 'but the average number of letters it take to soften her is six, and this time we have got as far as eight without any effect at all. I'll write another tom-morrow morning. I mean to blot it a good deal and shake some water over it out of the pepper-castor to make it look penitent. 'I'm in such a state of mind that I hardly know what I write'—blot—' if you could see me at this minute shedding tears for my past misconduct'—pepper-castor—my hand trembles when I think'—blot again—if that don't produce the effect, it's all over.'

By this time, Mr Swiveller had finished his entry, and he now replaced his pencil in its little sheath and closed the book, in a perfectly grave and serious frame of mind. His friend discovered that it was time for him to fulfil some other engagement, and Richard Swiveller was accordingly left alone, in company with the rosy wine and his own meditations touching Miss Sophy Wackles.

'It's rather sudden,' said Dick shaking his head with a look of infinite wisdom, and running on (as he was accustomed to do) with scraps of verse as if they were only prose in a hurry; 'when the heart of a man is depressed with fears, the mist is dispelled when Miss Wackles appears; she's a very nice girl. She's like the red red rose that's newly sprung in June—there's no denying that—she's also like a melody that's sweetly played in tune. It's really very sudden. Not that there's any need, on account of Fred's little sister, to turn cool directly, but its better not to go too far. If I begin to cool at all I must begin at once, I see that. There's the chance of an action for breach, that's another. There's the chance of—no, there's no chance of that, but it's as well to be on the safe side.'

This undeveloped was the possibility, which Richard Swiveller sought to conceal even from himself, of his not being proof against the charms of Miss Wackles, and in some unguarded moment, by linking his fortunes to hers forever, of putting it out of his own power to further their notable scheme to which he had so readily become a party. For all these reasons, he decided to pick a quarrel with Miss Wackles without delay, and casting about for a pretext determined in favour of groundless jealousy. Having made up his mind on this important point, he circulated the glass (from his right hand to left, and back again) pretty freely, to enable him to act his part with the greater discretion, and then, after making some slight improvements in his toilet, bent his steps towards the spot hallowed by the fair object of his meditations.

The spot was at Chelsea, for there Miss Sophia Wackles resided with her widowed mother and two sisters, in conjunction with whom she maintained a very small day-school for young ladies of proportionate dimensions; a circumstance which was made known to the neighbourhood by an oval board over the front first-floor windows, whereupon appeared in circumambient flourishes the words 'Ladies' Seminary'; and which was further published and proclaimed at intervals between the hours of half-past nine and ten in the morning, by a straggling and solitary young lady of tender years standing on the scraper on the tips of her toes and making futile attempts to reach the knocker with spelling-book. The several duties of instruction in this establishment were this discharged. English grammar, composition, geography, and the use of the dumb-bells, by Miss Melissa Wackles; writing, arithmetic, dancing, music, and general fascination, by Miss Sophia Wackles; the art of needle-work, marking, and samplery, by

Miss Jane Wackles; corporal punishment, fasting, and other tortures and terrors, by Mrs Wackles. Miss Melissa Wackles was the eldest daughter, Miss Sophy the next, and Miss Jane the youngest. Miss Melissa might have seen five-and-thirty summers or thereabouts, and verged on the autumnal; Miss Sophy was a fresh, good humoured, buxom girl of twenty; and Miss Jane numbered scarcely sixteen years. Mrs Wackles was an excellent but rather venomous old lady of three-score.

To this Ladies' Seminary, then, Richard Swiveller hied, with designs obnoxious to the peace of the fair Sophia, who, arrayed in virgin white, embellished by no ornament but one blushing rose, received him on his arrival, in the midst of very elegant not to say brilliant preparations; such as the embellishment of the room with the little flower-pots which always stood on the window-sill outside, save in windy weather when they blew into the area; the choice attire of the day-scholars who were allowed to grace the festival; the unwonted curls of Miss Jane Wackles who had kept her head during the whole of the preceding day screwed up tight in a yellow play-bill; and the solemn gentility and stately bearing of the old lady and her eldest daughter, which struck Mr Swiveller as being uncommon but made no further impression upon him.

The truth is—and, as there is no accounting for tastes, even a taste so strange as this may be recorded without being looked upon as a wilful and malicious invention—the truth is that neither Mrs Wackles nor her eldest daughter had at any time greatly favoured the pretensions of Mr Swiveller, being accustomed to make slight mention of him as 'a gay young man' and to sigh and shake their heads ominously whenever his name was mentioned. Mr Swiveller's conduct in respect to Miss Sophy having been of that vague and dilatory kind which is usually looked upon as betokening no fixed matrimonial intentions, the young lady herself began in course of time to deem it highly desirable, that it should be brought to an issue one way or other. Hence she had at last consented to play off against Richard Swiveller a stricken market-gardner known to be ready with his offer on the smallest encouragement, and hence—as this occasion had been specially assigned for the purpose—that great anxiety on her part for Richard Swiveller's presence which had occasioned her to leave the note he has ben seen to receive. 'If he has any expectations at all or any means of keeping a wife well,' said Mrs Wackles to her eldest daughter, 'he'll state 'em to us now or never.'—'If he really cares about me,' thought Miss Sophy, 'he must tell me so, to-night.'

But all these sayings and doings and thinkings being unknown to Mr Swiveller, affected him not in the least; he was debating in his mind how he could best turn jealous, and wishing that Sophy were for that occasion only far less pretty than she was, or that she were her own sister, which would have served his turn as well, when the company came, and among them the market-gardener, whose name was Cheggs. But Mr Cheggs came not alone or unsupported, for he prudently brought along with him his sister, Miss Cheggs, who making straight to Miss Sophy and taking her by both hands, and kissing her on both cheeks, hoped in an audible whisper that they had not come too early.

'Too early, no!' replied Miss Sophy.

'Oh, my dear,' rejoined Miss Cheggs in the same whisper as before, 'I've been so tormented, so worried, that it's a mercy we were not here at four o'clock in the afternoon. Alick has been in such a state of impatience to come! You'd hardly believe that he was dressed before dinner-time and has been looking at the clock and teasing me ever since. It's all your fault, you naughty thing.'

Hereupon Miss Sophy blushed, and Mr Cheggs (who was bashful before ladies) blushed too, and Miss Sophy's mother and sisters, to prevent Mr Cheggs from blushing more, lavished civilities and attentions upon him, and left Richard Swiveller to take care of himself. Here was the very thing he wanted, here was good cause reason and foundation for pretending to be angry; but having this cause reason and foundation which he had come expressly to seek, not expecting to find, Richard Swiveller was angry in sound earnest, and wondered what the devil Cheggs meant by his impudence.

However, Mr Swiveller had Miss Sophy's hand for the first quadrille (country-dances being low, were utterly proscribed) and so gained an advantage over his rival, who sat despondingly in a corner and contemplated the glorious figure of the young lady as she moved through the mazy dance. Nor was this the only start Mr Swiveller had of the market-gardener, for determining to show the family what quality of man they trifled with, and influenced perhaps by his late libations, he performed such feats of agility and such spins and twirls as filled the company with astonishment, and in particular caused a very long gentleman who was dancing with a very short scholar, to stand quite transfixed by wonder and admiration. Even Mrs Wackles forgot for the moment to snub three small young ladies who were inclined to be happy, and could not repress a rising thought that to have such a dancer as that in the family would be a pride indeed.

At this momentous crisis, Miss Cheggs proved herself a vigourous and useful ally, for not confining herself to expressing by scornful smiles a contempt for Mr Swiveller's accomplishments, she took every opportunity of whispering into Miss Sophy's ear expressions of condolence and sympathy on her being worried by such a ridiculous creature, declaring that she was frightened to death lest Alick should fall upon, and beat him, in the fulness of his wrath, and entreating Miss Sophy to observe how the eyes of the said Alick gleamed with love and fury; passions, it may be observed, which being too much for his eyes rushed into his nose also, and suffused it with a crimson glow.

'You must dance with Miss Chegs,' said Miss Sophy to Dick Swiviller, after she had herself danced twice with Mr Cheggs and made great show of encouraging his advances. 'She's a nice girl—and her brother's quite delightful.'

'Quite delightful, is he?' muttered Dick. 'Quite delighted too, I should say, from the manner in which he's looking this way.'

Here Miss Jane (previously instructed for the purpose) interposed her many curls and whispered her sister to observe how jealous Mr Cheggs was.

'Jealous! Like his impudence!' said Richard Swiviller.

'His impudence, Mr Swiviller!' said Miss Jane, tossing her head. 'Take care he don't hear you, sir, or you may be sorry for it.'

'Oh, pray, Jane—' said Miss Sophy.

'Nonsense!' replied her sister. 'Why shouldn't Mr Cheggs be jealous if he likes? I like that, certainly. Mr Cheggs has a good a right to be jealous as anyone else has, and perhaps he may have a better right soon if he hasn't already. You know best about that, Sophy!'

Though this was a concerted plot between Miss Sophy and her sister, originating in humane intentions and having for its object the inducing Mr Swiviller to declare himself in time, it failed in its effect; for Miss Jane being one of those young ladies who are prematurely shrill and shrewish, gave such undue importance to her part that Mr Swiviller retired in dudgeon, resigning his mistress to Mr Cheggs and conveying a defiance into his looks which that gentleman indignantly returned.

'Did you speak to me, sir?' said Mr Cheggs, following him into a corner. 'Have the kindness to smile, sir, in order that we may not be suspected. Did you speak to me, sir'?

Mr Swiviller looked with a supercilious smile at Mr Chegg's toes, then raised his eyes from them to his ankles, from that to his shin, from that to his knee, and so on very gradually, keeping up his right leg, until he reached his waistcoat, when he raised his eyes from button to button until he reached his chin, and travelling straight up the middle of his nose came at last to his eyes, when he said abruptly,

'No, sir, I didn't.'

`'Hem!' said Mr Cheggs, glancing over his shoulder, 'have the goodness to smile again, sir. Perhaps you wished to speak to me, sir.'

'No, sir, I didn't do that, either.'

'Perhaps you may have nothing to say to me now, sir,' said Mr Cheggs fiercely.

At these words Richard Swiviller withdrew his eyes from Mr Chegg's face, and travelling down the middle of his nose and down his waistcoat and down his right leg, reached his toes again, and carefully surveyed him; this done, he crossed over, and coming up the other leg, and thence approaching by the waistcoat as before, said when had got to his eyes, 'No sir, I haven't.'

'Oh, indeed, sir!' said Mr Cheggs. 'I'm glad to hear it. You know where I'm to be found, I suppose, sir, in case you should have anything to say to me?'

'I can easily inquire, sir, when I want to know.'

'There's nothing more we need say, I believe, sir?'

'Nothing more, sir'—With that they closed the tremendous dialog by frowning mutually. Mr Cheggs hastened to tender his hand to Miss Sophy, and Mr Swiviller sat himself down in a corner in a very moody state.

Hard by this corner, Mrs Wackles and Miss Wackles were seated, looking on at the dance; and unto Mrs and Miss Wackles, Miss Cheggs occasionally darted when her partner was occupied with his share of the figure, and made some remark or other which was gall and wormwood to Richard Swiviller's soul. Looking into the eyes of Mrs and Miss Wackles for encouragement, and sitting very upright and uncomfortable on a couple of hard stools, were two of the day-scholars; and when Miss Wackles smiled, and Mrs Wackles smiled, the two little girls on the stools sought to curry favour by smiling likewise, in gracious acknowledgement of which attention the old lady frowned them down instantly, and said that if they dared to be guilty of such an impertinence again, they should be sent under convoy to their respective homes. This threat caused one of the young ladies, she being of a weak and trembling temperament, to shed tears, and for this offense they were both filed off immediately, with a dreadful promptitude that struck terror into the souls of all the pupils.

'I've got such news for you,' said Miss Cheggs approaching once more, 'Alick has been saying such things to Sophy. Upon my word, you know, it's quite serious and in earnest, that's clear.'

'What's he been saying, my dear?' demanded Mrs Wackles.

'All manner of things,' replied Miss Cheggs, 'you can't think how out he has been speaking!'

Richard Swiviller considered it advisable to hear no more, but taking advantage of a pause in the dancing, and the approach of Mr Cheggs to pay his court to the old lady, swaggered with an extremely careful assumption of extreme carelessness toward the door, passing on the way Miss Jane Wackles, who in all the glory of her curls was holding a flirtation, (as good practice when no better was to be had) with a feeble old gentleman who lodged in the parlour. Near the door sat Miss Sophy, still fluttered and confused by the attentions of Mr Cheggs, and by her side Richard Swiveller lingered for a moment to exchange a few parting words.

'My boat is on the shore and my bark is on the sea, but before I pass this door I will say farewell to thee,' murmured Dick, looking gloomily upon her.

'Are you going?' said Miss Sophy, whose heart sank within her at the result of her stratagem, but who affected a light indifference notwithstanding.

'Am I going!' echoed Dick bitterly. 'Yes, I am. What then?'

'Nothing, except that it's very early,' said Miss Sophy; 'but you are your own master, of course.'

'I would that I had been my own mistress too,' said Dick, 'before I had ever entertained a thought of you. Miss Wackles, I believed you true, and I was blest in so believing, but now I mourn that e'er I knew, a girl so fair yet so deceiving.'

Miss Sophy bit her lip and affected to look with great interest after Mr Cheggs, who was quaffing lemonade in the distance.

'I came here,' said Dick, rather oblivious of the purpose with which he had really come, 'with my bosom expanded, my heart dilated, and my sentiments of a corresponding description. I go away with feelings that may be conceived but cannot be described, feeling within myself that desolating truth that my best affections have experienced this night a stifler!'

'I am sure I don't know what you mean, Mr Swiviller,' said Miss Sophy with downcast eyes. 'I'm very sorry if—'

'Sorry, Ma'am!' said Dick, 'sorry in the possession of a Cheegs! But I wish you a very good night, concluding with this slight remark, that there is a young lady growing up at this present moment for me, who has not only great personal attractions but great wealth, and who has requested her next of kin to propose for my hand, which, having a regard for some members of her family, I have consented to promise. It's a gratifying circumstance which you'll be glad to hear, that a young and lovely girl is growing into a woman expressly on my account, and is now saving up for me. I thought I'd mention it. I have now merely to apologize for trespassing so long upon your attention. Good night.'

'There's one good thing springs out of all this,' said Richard Swiviller to himself when he had reached home and was hanging over the candle with the extinguisher in his hand, 'which is, that I now go heart and soul, neck and heels, with Fred in all his scheme about little Nelly, and right glad he'll be to find me so strong upon it. He shall know all about that to-morrow, and in the mean time, as it's rather late, I'll try and get a wink of the balmy.'

'The balmy' came almost as soon as it was courted. In a very few minutes Mr Swiviller was fast asleep, dreaming that he had married Nelly Trent and come into the property, and that his first act of power was to lay waste the market-garden of Mr Cheggs and turn it into a brick-field.

CHAPTER 9

The child, in her confidence with Mrs Quilp, had but feebly described the sadness and sorrow of her thoughts, or the heaviness of the cloud which overhung her home, and cast dark shadows on its hearth. Besides that it was very difficult to impart to any person not intimately acquainted with the life she led, an adequate sense of its gloom and loneliness, a constant fear of in some way committing or injuring the old man to whom she was so tenderly attached, had restrained her, even in the midst of her heart's overflowing, and made her timid of allusion to the main cause of her anxiety and distress.

For, it was not the monotonous days unchequered by variety and uncheered by pleasant companionship, it was not the dark dreary evenings or the long solitary nights, it was not the absence of every slight and easy pleasure for which young hearts beat high, or the knowing nothing of childhood but its weakness and its easily wounded spirit, that had wrung such tears from Nell. To see the old man struck down beneath the pressure of some hidden grief, to mark his wavering and unsettled state, to be agitated at times with a dreadful fear that his mind was wandering, and to trace in his words and looks the dawning of despondent madness; to watch and wait and listen for confirmation of these things day after day, and to feel and know that, come what might, they were alone in the world with no one to help or advise or care about them—these were causes of depression and anxiety that might have sat heavily on an older breast with many influences at work to cheer and gladden it, but how heavily on the mind of a young child to whom they were ever present, and who was constantly surrounded by all that could keep such thoughts in restless action!

And yet, to the old man's vision, Nell was still the same. When he could, for a moment, disengage his mind from the phantom that haunted and brooded on it always, there was his young companion with the same smile for him, the same earnest words, the same merry laugh, the same love and care that, sinking deep into his soul, seemed to have been present to him through his whole life. And so he went on, content to read the book of her heart from the page first presented to him, little dreaming of the story that lay hidden in its other leaves, and murmuring within himself that at least the child was happy.

She had been once. She had gone singing through the dim rooms, and moving with gay and lightsome step among their dusty treasures, making them older by her young life, and sterner and more grim by her gay and cheerful presence. But, now, the chambers were cold and gloomy, and when she left her own little room to while away the tedious hours, and sat in one of them, she was still and motionless as their inanimate occupants, and had no heart to startle the echoes—hoarse from their long silence—with her voice.

In one of these rooms, was a window looking into the street, where the child sat, many and many a long evening, and often far into the night, alone and thoughtful. None are so anxious as those who watch and wait; at these times, mournful fancies came flocking on her mind, in crowds.

She would take her station here, at dusk, and watch the people as they passed up and down the street, or appeared at the windows of the opposite houses; wondering whether those rooms were as lonesome as that in which she sat, and whether those people felt it company to see her sitting there, as she did only to see them look out and draw in their heads again. There was a crooked stack of chimneys on one of the roofs, in which, by often looking at them, she had fancied ugly faces that were frowning over at her and trying to peer into the room; and she felt glad when it grew too dark to make them out, though she was sorry too, when the man came to light the lamps in the street—for it made it late, and very dull inside. Then, she would draw in her head to look round the room and see that everything was in its place and hadn't moved; and looking out into the street again, would perhaps see a man passing with a coffin on his back, and two or three others silently following him to a house where somebody lay dead; which made her shudder and think of such things until they suggested afresh the old man's altered face and manner, and a new train of fears and speculations. If he were to die—if sudden illness had happened to him, and he were never to come home again, alive—if, one night, he should come home, and kiss and bless her as usual, and after she had gone to bed and had fallen asleep and was perhaps dreaming pleasantly, and smiling in her sleep, he should kill himself and his blood come creeping, creeping, on the ground to her own bed-room door! These thoughts were too terrible to dwell upon, and again she would have recourse to the street, now trodden by fewer feet, and darker and more silent than before. The shops were closing fast, and lights began to shine from the upper windows, as the neighbours went to bed. By degrees, these dwindled away and disappeared or were replaced, here and there, by a feeble rush-candle which was to burn all night. Still, there was one late shop at no great distance which sent forth a ruddy glare upon the pavement even yet, and looked bright and companionable. But, in a little time, this closed, the light was extinguished, and all was gloomy and quiet, except when some stray footsteps sounded on the pavement, or a neighbour, out later than his wont, knocked lustily at his house-door to rouse the sleeping inmates.

When the night had worn away thus far (and seldom now until it had) the child would close the window, and steal softly down stairs, thinking as she went that if one of those hideous faces below, which often mingled with her dreams, were to meet her by the way, rendering itself visible by some strange light of its own, how terrified she would be. But these fears vanished before a well-trimmed lamp and the familiar aspect of her own room. After praying fervently, and with many bursting tears, for the old man, and the restoration of his peace of mind and the happiness they had once enjoyed, she would lay her head upon the pillow and sob herself to sleep: often starting up again, before the day-light came, to listen for the bell and respond to the imaginary summons which had roused her from her slumber.

One night, the third after Nelly's interview with Mrs Quilp, the old man, who had been weak and ill all day, said he should not leave home. The child's eyes sparkled at the intelligence, but her joy subsided when they reverted to his worn and sickly face.

'Two days,' he said, 'two whole, clear, days have passed, and there is no reply. What did he tell thee, Nell?'

'Exactly what I told you, dear grandfather, indeed.'

'True,' said the old man, faintly. 'Yes. But tell me again, Nell. My head fails me. What was it that he told thee? Nothing more than that he would see me to-morrow or next day? That was in the note.'

'Nothing more,' said the child. 'Shall I go to him again to-morrow, dear grandfather? Very early? I will be there and back, before breakfast.'

The old man shook his head, and sighing mournfully, drew her towards him.

''Twould be of no use, my dear, no earthly use. But if he deserts me, Nell, at this moment—if he deserts me now, when I should, with his assistance, be recompensed for all the time and money I have lost, and all the agony of mind I have undergone, which makes me what you see, I am ruined, and—worse, far worse than that—have ruined thee, for whom I ventured all. If we are beggars—!'

'What if we are?' said the child boldly. 'Let us be beggars, and be happy.'

'Beggars—and happy!' said the old man. 'Poor child!'

'Dear grandfather,' cried the girl with an energy which shone in her flushed face, trembling voice, and impassioned gesture, 'I am not a child in that I think, but even if I am, oh hear me pray that we may beg, or work in open roads or fields, to earn a scanty living, rather than live as we do now.'

'Nelly!' said the old man.

'Yes, yes, rather than live as we do now,' the child repeated, more earnestly than before. 'If you are sorrowful, let me know why and be sorrowful too; if you waste away and are paler and weaker every day, let me be your nurse and try to comfort you. If you are poor, let us be poor together; but let me be with you, do let me be with you; do not let me see such change and not know why, or I shall break my heart and die. Dear grandfather, let us leave this sad place to-morrow, and beg our way from door to door.'

The old man covered his face with his hands, and hid it in the pillow of the couch on which he lay.

'Let us be beggars,' said the child passing an arm round his neck, 'I have no fear but we shall have enough, I am sure we shall. Let us walk through country places, and sleep in fields and under trees, and never think of money again, or anything that can make you sad, but rest at nights, and have the sun and wind upon our faces in the day, and thank God together! Let us never set foot in dark rooms or melancholy houses, any more, but wander up and down wherever we like to go; and when you are tired, you shall stop to rest in the pleasantest place that we can find, and I will go and beg for both.'

The child's voice was lost in sobs as she dropped upon the old man's neck; nor did she weep alone.

These were not words for other ears, nor was it a scene for other eyes. And yet other ears and eyes were there and greedily taking in all that passed, and moreover they were the ears and eyes of no less a person than Mr Daniel Quilp, who, having entered unseen when the child first placed herself at the old man's side, refrained—actuated, no doubt, by motives of the purest delicacy—from interrupting the conversation, and stood looking on with his accustomed grin. Standing, however, being a tiresome attitude to a gentleman already fatigued with walking, and the dwarf being one of that kind of persons who usually make themselves at home, he soon cast his eyes upon a chair, into which he skipped with uncommon agility, and perching himself on the back with his feet upon the seat, was thus enabled to look on and listen with greater comfort to himself, besides gratifying at the same time that taste for doing something fantastic and monkey-like, which on all occasions had strong possession of him. Here, then, he sat, one leg cocked carelessly over the other, his chin resting on the palm of his hand, his head turned a little on one side, and his ugly features twisted into a complacent grimace. And in this position the old man, happening in course of time to look that way, at length chanced to see him: to his unbounded astonishment.

The child uttered a suppressed shriek on beholding this agreeable figure; in their first surprise both she and the old man, not knowing what to say, and half doubting its reality, looked shrinkingly at it. Not at all disconcerted by this reception, Daniel Quilp preserved the same attitude, merely nodding twice or thrice with great condescension. At length, the old man pronounced his name, and inquired how he came there.

'Through the door,' said Quilp pointing over his shoulder with his thumb. 'I'm not quite small enough to get through key-holes. I wish I was. I want to have some talk with you, particularly, and in private. With nobody present, neighbour. Good-bye, little Nelly.'

Nell looked at the old man, who nodded to her to retire, and kissed her cheek.

'Ah!' said the dwarf, smacking his lips, 'what a nice kiss that was—just upon the rosy part. What a capital kiss!'

Nell was none the slower in going away, for this remark. Quilp looked after her with an admiring leer, and when she had closed the door, fell to complimenting the old man upon her charms.

'Such a fresh, blooming, modest little bud, neighbour,' said Quilp, nursing his short leg, and making his eyes twinkle very much; 'such a chubby, rosy, cosy, little Nell!'

The old man answered by a forced smile, and was plainly struggling with a feeling of the keenest and most exquisite impatience. It was not lost upon Quilp, who delighted in torturing him, or indeed anybody else, when he could.

'She's so,' said Quilp, speaking very slowly, and feigning to be quite absorbed in the subject, 'so small, so compact, so beautifully modelled, so fair, with such blue veins and such a transparent skin, and such little feet, and such winning ways—but bless me, you're nervous! Why neighbour, what's the matter? I swear to you,' continued the dwarf dismounting from the chair and sitting down in it, with a careful slowness of gesture very different from the rapidity with which he had sprung up unheard, 'I swear to you that I had no idea old blood ran so fast or kept so warm. I thought it was sluggish in its course, and cool, quite cool. I am pretty sure it ought to be. Yours must be out of order, neighbour.'

'I believe it is,' groaned the old man, clasping his head with both hands. 'There's burning fever here, and something now and then to which I fear to give a name.'

The dwarf said never a word, but watched his companion as he paced restlessly up and down the room, and presently returned to his seat. Here he remained, with his head bowed upon his breast for some time, and then suddenly raising it, said,

'Once, and once for all, have you brought me any money?'

'No!' returned Quilp.

'Then,' said the old man, clenching his hands desperately, and looking upwards, 'the child and I are lost!'

'Neighbour,' said Quilp glancing sternly at him, and beating his hand twice or thrice upon the table to attract his wandering attention, 'let me be plain with you, and play a fairer game than when you held all the cards, and I saw but the backs and nothing more. You have no secret from me now.'

The old man looked up, trembling.

'You are surprised,' said Quilp. 'Well, perhaps that's natural. You have no secret from me now, I say; no, not one. For now, I know, that all those sums of money, that all those loans, advances, and supplies that you have had from me, have found their way to—shall I say the word?'

'Aye!' replied the old man, 'say it, if you will.'

'To the gaming-table,' rejoined Quilp, 'your nightly haunt. This was the precious scheme to make your fortune, was it; this was the secret certain source of wealth in which I was to have sunk my money (if I had been the fool you took me for); this was your inexhaustible mine of gold, your El Dorado, eh?'

'Yes,' cried the old man, turning upon him with gleaming eyes, 'it was. It is. It will be, till I die.'

'That I should have been blinded,' said Quilp looking contemptuously at him, 'by a mere shallow gambler!'

'I am no gambler,' cried the old man fiercely. 'I call Heaven to witness that I never played for gain of mine, or love of play; that at every piece I staked, I whispered to myself that orphan's name and called on Heaven to bless the venture;—which it never did. Whom did it prosper? Who were those with whom I played? Men who lived by plunder, profligacy, and riot; squandering their gold in doing ill, and propagating vice and evil. My winnings would have been from them, my winnings would have been bestowed to the last farthing on a young sinless child whose life they would have sweetened and made happy. What would they have contracted? The means of corruption, wretchedness, and misery. Who would not have hoped in such a cause? Tell me that! Who would not have hoped as I did?'

'When did you first begin this mad career?' asked Quilp, his taunting inclination subdued, for a moment, by the old man's grief and wildness.

'When did I first begin?' he rejoined, passing his hand across his brow. 'When was it, that I first began? When should it be, but when I began to think how little I had saved, how long a time it took to save at all, how short a time I might have at my age to live, and how she would be left to the rough mercies of the world, with barely enough to keep her from the sorrows that wait on poverty; then it was that I began to think about it.'

'After you first came to me to get your precious grandson packed off to sea?' said Quilp.

'Shortly after that,' replied the old man. 'I thought of it a long time, and had it in my sleep for months. Then I began. I found no pleasure in it, I expected none. What has it ever brought me but anxious days and sleepless nights; but loss of health and peace of mind, and gain of feebleness and sorrow!'

'You lost what money you had laid by, first, and then came to me. While I thought you were making your fortune (as you said you were) you were making yourself a beggar, eh? Dear me! And so it comes to pass that I hold every security you could scrape together, and a bill of sale upon the—upon the stock and property,' said Quilp standing up and looking about him, as if to assure himself that none of it had been taken away. 'But did you never win?'

'Never!' groaned the old man. 'Never won back my loss!'

'I thought,' sneered the dwarf, 'that if a man played long enough he was sure to win at last, or, at the worst, not to come off a loser.'

'And so he is,' cried the old man, suddenly rousing himself from his state of despondency, and lashed into the most violent excitement, 'so he is; I have felt that from the first, I have always known it, I've seen it, I never felt it half so strongly as I feel it now. Quilp, I have dreamed, three nights, of winning the same large sum, I never could dream that dream before, though I have often tried. Do not desert me, now I have this chance. I have no resource but you, give me some help, let me try this one last hope.'

The dwarf shrugged his shoulders and shook his head.

'See, Quilp, good tender-hearted Quilp,' said the old man, drawing some scraps of paper from his pocket with a trembling hand, and clasping the dwarf's arm, 'only see here. Look at these figures, the result of long calculation, and painful and hard experience. I MUST win. I only want a little help once more, a few pounds, but two score pounds, dear Quilp.'

'The last advance was seventy,' said the dwarf; 'and it went in one night.'

'I know it did,' answered the old man, 'but that was the very worst fortune of all, and the time had not come then. Quilp, consider, consider,' the old man cried, trembling so much the while, that the papers in his hand fluttered as if they were shaken by the wind, 'that orphan child! If I were alone, I could die with gladness—perhaps even anticipate that doom which is dealt out so unequally: coming, as it does, on the proud and happy in their strength, and shunning the needy and afflicted, and all who court it in their despair—but what I have done, has been for her. Help me for her sake I implore you; not for mine; for hers!'

'I'm sorry I've got an appointment in the city,' said Quilp, looking at his watch with perfect self-possession, 'or I should have been very glad to have spent half an hour with you while you composed yourself, very glad.'

'Nay, Quilp, good Quilp,' gasped the old man, catching at his skirts, 'you and I have talked together, more than once, of her poor mother's story. The fear of her coming to poverty has perhaps been bred in me by that. Do not be hard upon me, but take that into account. You are a great gainer by me. Oh spare me the money for this one last hope!'

'I couldn't do it really,' said Quilp with unusual politeness, 'though I tell you what—and this is a circumstance worth bearing in mind as showing how the sharpest among us may be taken in sometimes—I was so deceived by the penurious way in which you lived, alone with Nelly—'

'All done to save money for tempting fortune, and to make her triumph greater,' cried the old man.

'Yes, yes, I understand that now,' said Quilp; 'but I was going to say, I was so deceived by that, your miserly way, the reputation you had among those who knew you of being rich, and your repeated assurances that you would make of my advances treble and quadruple the interest you paid me, that I'd have advanced you, even now, what you want, on your simple note of hand, if I hadn't unexpectedly become acquainted with your secret way of life.'

'Who is it,' retorted the old man desperately, 'that, notwithstanding all my caution, told you? Come. Let me know the name—the person.'

The crafty dwarf, bethinking himself that his giving up the child would lead to the disclosure of the artifice he had employed, which, as nothing was to be gained by it, it was well to conceal, stopped short in his answer and said, 'Now, who do you think?'

'It was Kit, it must have been the boy; he played the spy, and you tampered with him?' said the old man.

'How came you to think of him?' said the dwarf in a tone of great commiseration. 'Yes, it was Kit. Poor Kit!'

So saying, he nodded in a friendly manner, and took his leave: stopping when he had passed the outer door a little distance, and grinning with extraordinary delight.

'Poor Kit!' muttered Quilp. 'I think it was Kit who said I was an uglier dwarf than could be seen anywhere for a penny, wasn't it. Ha ha ha! Poor Kit!' And with that he went his way, still chuckling as he went.

CHAPTER 10

Daniel Quilp neither entered nor left the old man's house, unobserved. In the shadow of an archway nearly opposite, leading to one of the many passages which diverged from the main street, there lingered one, who, having taken up his position when the twilight first came on, still maintained it with undiminished patience, and leaning against the wall with the manner of a person who had a long time to wait, and being well used to it was quite resigned, scarcely changed his attitude for the hour together.

This patient lounger attracted little attention from any of those who passed, and bestowed as little upon them. His eyes were constantly directed towards one object; the window at which the child was accustomed to sit. If he withdrew them for a moment, it was only to glance at a clock in some neighbouring shop, and then to strain his sight once more in the old quarter with increased earnestness and attention.

It had been remarked that this personage evinced no weariness in his place of concealment; nor did he, long as his waiting was. But as the time went on, he manifested some anxiety and surprise, glancing at the clock more frequently and at the window less hopefully than before. At length, the clock was hidden from his sight by some envious shutters, then the church steeples proclaimed eleven at night, then the quarter past, and then the conviction seemed to obtrude itself on his mind that it was no use tarrying there any longer.

That the conviction was an unwelcome one, and that he was by no means willing to yield to it, was apparent from his reluctance to quit the spot; from the tardy steps with which he often left it, still looking over his shoulder at the same window; and from the precipitation with which he as often returned, when a fancied noise or the changing and imperfect light induced him to suppose it had been softly raised. At length, he gave the matter up, as hopeless for that night, and suddenly breaking into a run as though to force himself away, scampered off at his utmost speed, nor once ventured to look behind him lest he should be tempted back again.

Without relaxing his pace, or stopping to take breath, this mysterious individual dashed on through a great many alleys and narrow ways until he at length arrived in a square paved court, when he subsided into a walk, and making for a small house from the window of which a light was shining, lifted the latch of the door and passed in.

'Bless us!' cried a woman turning sharply round, 'who's that? Oh! It's you, Kit!'

'Yes, mother, it's me.'

'Why, how tired you look, my dear!'

'Old master an't gone out to-night,' said Kit; 'and so she hasn't been at the window at all.' With which words, he sat down by the fire and looked very mournful and discontented.

The room in which Kit sat himself down, in this condition, was an extremely poor and homely place, but with that air of comfort about it, nevertheless, which—or the spot must be a wretched one indeed—cleanliness and order can always impart in some degree. Late as the Dutch clock' showed it to be, the poor woman was still hard at work at an ironing-table; a young child lay sleeping in a cradle near the fire; and another, a sturdy boy of two or three years old, very wide awake, with a very tight night-cap on his head, and a night-gown very much too small for him on his body, was sitting bolt upright in a clothes-basket, staring over the rim with his great round eyes, and looking as if he had thoroughly made up his mind never to go to sleep any more; which, as he had already declined to take his natural rest and had been brought out of bed in consequence, opened a cheerful prospect for his relations and friends. It was rather a queer-looking family: Kit, his mother, and the children, being all strongly alike.

Kit was disposed to be out of temper, as the best of us are too often—but he looked at the youngest child who was sleeping soundly, and from him to his other brother in the clothes-basket, and from him to their mother, who had been at work without complaint since morning, and thought it would be a better and kinder thing to be good-humoured. So he rocked the cradle with his foot; made a face at the rebel in the clothes-basket, which put him in high good-humour directly; and stoutly determined to be talkative and make himself agreeable.

'Ah, mother!' said Kit, taking out his clasp-knife, and falling upon a great piece of bread and meat which she had had ready for him, hours before, 'what a one you are! There an't many such as you, I know.'

'I hope there are many a great deal better, Kit,' said Mrs Nubbles; 'and that there are, or ought to be, accordin' to what the parson at chapel says.'

'Much he knows about it,' returned Kit contemptuously. 'Wait till he's a widder and works like you do, and gets as little, and does as much, and keeps his spirit up the same, and then I'll ask him what's o'clock and trust him for being right to half a second.'

'Well,' said Mrs Nubbles, evading the point, 'your beer's down there by the fender, Kit.'

'I see,' replied her son, taking up the porter pot, 'my love to you, mother. And the parson's health too if you like. I don't bear him any malice, not I!'

'Did you tell me, just now, that your master hadn't gone out to-night?' inquired Mrs Nubbles.

'Yes,' said Kit, 'worse luck!'

'You should say better luck, I think,' returned his mother, 'because Miss Nelly won't have been left alone.'

'Ah!' said Kit, 'I forgot that. I said worse luck, because I've been watching ever since eight o'clock, and seen nothing of her.'

'I wonder what she'd say,' cried his mother, stopping in her work and looking round, 'if she knew that every night, when she—poor thing—is sitting alone at that window, you are watching in the open street for fear any harm should come to her, and that you never leave the place or come home to your bed though you're ever so tired, till such time as you think she's safe in hers.'

'Never mind what she'd say,' replied Kit, with something like a blush on his uncouth face; 'she'll never know nothing, and consequently, she'll never say nothing.'

Mrs Nubbles ironed away in silence for a minute or two, and coming to the fireplace for another iron, glanced stealthily at Kit while she rubbed it on a board and dusted it with a duster, but said nothing until she had returned to her table again: when, holding the iron at an alarmingly short distance from her cheek, to test its temperature, and looking round with a smile, she observed:

'I know what some people would say, Kit—'

'Nonsense,' interposed Kit with a perfect apprehension of what was to follow.

'No, but they would indeed. Some people would say that you'd fallen in love with her, I know they would.'

To this, Kit only replied by bashfully bidding his mother 'get out,' and forming sundry strange figures with his legs and arms, accompanied by sympathetic contortions of his face. Not deriving from these means the relief which he sought, he bit off an immense mouthful from the bread and meat, and took a quick drink of the porter; by which artificial aids he choked himself and effected a diversion of the subject.

'Speaking seriously though, Kit,' said his mother, taking up the theme afresh, after a time, 'for of course I was only in joke just now, it's very good and thoughtful, and like you, to do this, and never let anybody know it, though some day I hope she may come to know it, for I'm sure she would be very grateful to you and feel it very much. It's a cruel thing to keep the dear child shut up there. I don't wonder that the old gentleman wants to keep it from you.'

'He don't think it's cruel, bless you,' said Kit, 'and don't mean it to be so, or he wouldn't do it—I do consider, mother, that he wouldn't do it for all the gold and silver in the world. No, no, that he wouldn't. I know him better than that.'

'Then what does he do it for, and why does he keep it so close from you?' said Mrs Nubbles.

'That I don't know,' returned her son. 'If he hadn't tried to keep it so close though, I should never have found it out, for it was his getting me away at night and sending me off so much earlier than he used to, that first made me curious to know what was going on. Hark! what's that?'

'It's only somebody outside.'

'It's somebody crossing over here,' said Kit, standing up to listen, 'and coming very fast too. He can't have gone out after I left, and the house caught fire, mother!'

The boy stood, for a moment, really bereft, by the apprehension he had conjured up, of the power to move. The footsteps drew nearer, the door was opened with a hasty hand, and the child herself, pale and breathless, and hastily wrapped in a few disordered garments, hurried into the room.

'Miss Nelly! What is the matter!' cried mother and son together.

'I must not stay a moment,' she returned, 'grandfather has been taken very ill. I found him in a fit upon the floor—'

'I'll run for a doctor'—said Kit, seizing his brimless hat. 'I'll be there directly, I'll—'

'No, no,' cried Nell, 'there is one there, you're not wanted, you—you—must never come near us any more!'

'What!' roared Kit.

'Never again,' said the child. 'Don't ask me why, for I don't know. Pray don't ask me why, pray don't be sorry, pray don't be vexed with me! I have nothing to do with it indeed!'

Kit looked at her with his eyes stretched wide; and opened and shut his mouth a great many times; but couldn't get out one word.

'He complains and raves of you,' said the child, 'I don't know what you have done, but I hope it's nothing very bad.'

'I done!' roared Kit.

'He cries that you're the cause of all his misery,' returned the child with tearful eyes; 'he screamed and called for you; they say you must not come near him or he will die. You must not return to us any more. I came to tell you. I thought it would be better that I should come than somebody quite strange. Oh, Kit, what have you done? You, in whom I trusted so much, and who were almost the only friend I had!'

The unfortunate Kit looked at his young mistress harder and harder, and with eyes growing wider and wider, but was perfectly motionless and silent.

'I have brought his money for the week,' said the child, looking to the woman and laying it on the table—'and—and—a little more, for he was always good and kind to me. I hope he will be sorry and do well somewhere else and not take this to heart too much. It grieves me very much to part with him like this, but there is no help. It must be done. Good night!'

With the tears streaming down her face, and her slight figure trembling with the agitation of the scene she had left, the shock she had received, the errand she had just discharged, and a thousand painful and affectionate feelings, the child hastened to the door, and disappeared as rapidly as she had come.

The poor woman, who had no cause to doubt her son, but every reason for relying on his honesty and truth, was staggered, notwithstanding, by his not having advanced one word in his defence. Visions of gallantry, knavery, robbery; and of the nightly absences from home for which he had accounted so strangely, having been occasioned by some unlawful pursuit; flocked into her brain and rendered her afraid to question him. She rocked herself upon a chair, wringing her hands and weeping bitterly, but Kit made no attempt to comfort her and remained quite bewildered. The baby in the cradle woke up and cried; the boy in the clothes-basket fell over on his back with the basket upon him, and was seen no more; the mother wept louder yet and rocked faster; but Kit, insensible to all the din and tumult, remained in a state of utter stupefaction.

CHAPTER 11

Quiet and solitude were destined to hold uninterrupted rule no longer, beneath the roof that sheltered the child. Next morning, the old man was in a raging fever accompanied with delirium; and sinking under the influence of this disorder he lay for many weeks in imminent peril of his life. There was watching enough, now, but it was the watching of strangers who made a greedy trade of it, and who, in the intervals in their attendance upon the sick man huddled together with a ghastly good-fellowship, and ate and drank and made merry; for disease and death were their ordinary household gods.

Yet, in all the hurry and crowding of such a time, the child was more alone than she had ever been before; alone in spirit, alone in her devotion to him who was wasting away upon his burning bed; alone in her unfeigned sorrow, and her unpurchased sympathy. Day after day, and night after night, found her still by the pillow of the unconscious sufferer, still anticipating his every want, still listening to those repetitions of her name and those anxieties and cares for her, which were ever uppermost among his feverish wanderings.

The house was no longer theirs. Even the sick chamber seemed to be retained, on the uncertain tenure of Mr Quilp's favour. The old man's illness had not lasted many days when he took formal possession of the premises and all upon them, in virtue of certain legal powers to that effect, which few understood and none presumed to call in question. This important step secured, with the assistance of a man of law whom he brought with him for the purpose, the dwarf proceeded to establish himself and his coadjutor in the house, as an assertion of his claim against all comers; and then set about making his quarters comfortable, after his own fashion.

To this end, Mr Quilp encamped in the back parlour, having first put an effectual stop to any further business by shutting up the shop. Having looked out, from among the old furniture, the handsomest and most commodious chair he could possibly find (which he reserved for his own use) and an especially hideous and uncomfortable one (which he considerately appropriated to the accommodation of his friend) he caused them to be carried into this room, and took up his position in great state. The apartment was very far removed from the old man's chamber, but Mr Quilp deemed it prudent, as a precaution against infection from fever, and a means of wholesome fumigation, not only to smoke, himself, without cessation, but to insist upon it that his legal friend did the like. Moreover, he sent an express to the wharf for the tumbling boy, who arriving with all despatch was enjoined to sit himself down in another chair just inside the door, continually to smoke a great pipe which the dwarf had provided for the purpose, and to take it from his lips under any pretence whatever, were it only for one minute at a time, if he dared. These arrangements completed, Mr Quilp looked round him with chuckling satisfaction, and remarked that he called that comfort.

The legal gentleman, whose melodious name was Brass, might have called it comfort also but for two drawbacks: one was, that he could by no exertion sit easy in his chair, the seat of which was very hard, angular, slippery, and sloping; the other, that tobacco-smoke always caused him great internal discomposure and annoyance. But as he was quite a creature of Mr Quilp's and had a thousand reasons for conciliating his good opinion, he tried to smile, and nodded his acquiescence with the best grace he could assume.

This Brass was an attorney of no very good repute, from Bevis Marks in the city of London; he was a tall, meagre man, with a nose like a wen, a protruding forehead, retreating eyes, and hair of a deep red. He wore a long black surtout reaching nearly to his ankles, short black trousers, high shoes, and cotton stockings of a bluish grey. He had a cringing manner, but a very harsh voice; and his blandest smiles were so extremely forbidding, that to have had his company under the least repulsive circumstances, one would have wished him to be out of temper that he might only scowl.

Quilp looked at his legal adviser, and seeing that he was winking very much in the anguish of his pipe, that he sometimes shuddered when he happened to inhale its full flavour, and that he constantly fanned the smoke from him, was quite overjoyed and rubbed his hands with glee.

'Smoke away, you dog,' said Quilp, turning to the boy; 'fill your pipe again and smoke it fast, down to the last whiff, or I'll put the sealing-waxed end of it in the fire and rub it red hot upon your tongue.'

Luckily the boy was case-hardened, and would have smoked a small lime-kiln if anybody had treated him with it. Wherefore, he only muttered a brief defiance of his master, and did as he was ordered.

'Is it good, Brass, is it nice, is it fragrant, do you feel like the Grand Turk?' said Quilp.

Mr Brass thought that if he did, the Grand Turk's feelings were by no means to be envied, but he said it was famous, and he had no doubt he felt very like that Potentate.

'This is the way to keep off fever,' said Quilp, 'this is the way to keep off every calamity of life! We'll never leave off, all the time we stop here—smoke away, you dog, or you shall swallow the pipe!'

'Shall we stop here long, Mr Quilp?' inquired his legal friend, when the dwarf had given his boy this gentle admonition.

'We must stop, I suppose, till the old gentleman up stairs is dead,' returned Quilp.

'He he he!' laughed Mr Brass, 'oh! very good!'

'Smoke away!' cried Quilp. 'Never stop! You can talk as you smoke. Don't lose time.'

'He he he!' cried Brass faintly, as he again applied himself to the odious pipe. 'But if he should get better, Mr Quilp?'

'Then we shall stop till he does, and no longer,' returned the dwarf.

'How kind it is of you, Sir, to wait till then!' said Brass. 'Some people, Sir, would have sold or removed the goods—oh dear, the very instant the law allowed 'em. Some people, Sir, would have been all flintiness and granite. Some people, sir, would have—'

'Some people would have spared themselves the jabbering of such a parrot as you,' interposed the dwarf.

'He he he!' cried Brass. 'You have such spirits!'

The smoking sentinel at the door interposed in this place, and without taking his pipe from his lips, growled,

'Here's the gal a comin' down.'

'The what, you dog?' said Quilp.

'The gal,' returned the boy. 'Are you deaf?'

'Oh!' said Quilp, drawing in his breath with great relish as if he were taking soup, 'you and I will have such a settling presently; there's such a scratching and bruising in store for you, my dear young friend! Aha! Nelly! How is he now, my duck of diamonds?'

'He's very bad,' replied the weeping child.

'What a pretty little Nell!' cried Quilp.

'Oh beautiful, sir, beautiful indeed,' said Brass. 'Quite charming.'

'Has she come to sit upon Quilp's knee,' said the dwarf, in what he meant to be a soothing tone, 'or is she going to bed in her own little room inside here? Which is poor Nelly going to do?'

'What a remarkable pleasant way he has with children!' muttered Brass, as if in confidence between himself and the ceiling; 'upon my word it's quite a treat to hear him.'

'I'm not going to stay at all,' faltered Nell. 'I want a few things out of that room, and then I—I—won't come down here any more.'

'And a very nice little room it is!' said the dwarf looking into it as the child entered. 'Quite a bower! You're sure you're not going to use it; you're sure you're not coming back, Nelly?'

'No,' replied the child, hurrying away, with the few articles of dress she had come to remove; 'never again! Never again.'

'She's very sensitive,' said Quilp, looking after her. 'Very sensitive; that's a pity. The bedstead is much about my size. I think I shall make it MY little room.'

Mr Brass encouraging this idea, as he would have encouraged any other emanating from the same source, the dwarf walked in to try the effect. This he did, by throwing himself on his back upon the bed with his pipe in his mouth, and then kicking up his legs and smoking violently. Mr Brass applauding this picture very much, and the bed being soft and comfortable, Mr Quilp determined to use it, both as a sleeping place by night and as a kind of Divan by day; and in order that it might be converted to the latter purpose at once, remained where he was, and smoked his pipe out. The legal gentleman being by this time rather giddy and perplexed in his ideas (for this was one of the operations of the tobacco on his nervous system), took the opportunity of slinking away into the open air, where, in course of time, he recovered sufficiently to return with a countenance of tolerable composure. He was soon led on by the malicious dwarf to smoke himself into a relapse, and in that state stumbled upon a settee where he slept till morning.

Such were Mr Quilp's first proceedings on entering upon his new property. He was, for some days, restrained by business from performing any particular pranks, as his time was pretty well occupied between taking, with the assistance of Mr Brass, a minute inventory of all the goods in the place, and going abroad upon his other concerns which happily engaged him for several hours at a time. His avarice and caution being, now, thoroughly awakened, however, he was never absent from the house one night; and his eagerness for some termination, good or bad, to the old man's disorder, increasing rapidly, as the time passed by, soon began to vent itself in open murmurs and exclamations of impatience.

Nell shrank timidly from all the dwarf's advances towards conversation, and fled from the very sound of his voice; nor were the lawyer's smiles less terrible to her than Quilp's grimaces. She lived in such continual dread and apprehension of meeting one or other of them on the stairs or in the passages if she stirred from her grandfather's chamber, that she seldom left it, for a moment, until late at night, when the silence encouraged her to venture forth and breathe the purer air of some empty room.

One night, she had stolen to her usual window, and was sitting there very sorrowfully—for the old man had been worse that day—when she thought she heard her name pronounced by a voice in the street. Looking down, she recognised Kit, whose endeavours to attract her attention had roused her from her sad reflections.

'Miss Nell!' said the boy in a low voice.

'Yes,' replied the child, doubtful whether she ought to hold any communication with the supposed culprit, but inclining to her old favourite still; 'what do you want?'

'I have wanted to say a word to you, for a long time,' the boy replied, 'but the people below have driven me away and wouldn't let me see you. You don't believe—I hope you don't really believe—that I deserve to be cast off as I have been; do you, miss?'

'I must believe it,' returned the child. 'Or why would grandfather have been so angry with you?'

'I don't know,' replied Kit. 'I'm sure I never deserved it from him, no, nor from you. I can say that, with a true and honest heart, any way. And then to be driven from the door, when I only came to ask how old master was—!'

'They never told me that,' said the child. 'I didn't know it indeed. I wouldn't have had them do it for the world.'

'Thank'ee, miss,' returned Kit, 'it's comfortable to hear you say that. I said I never would believe that it was your doing.' 'That was right!' said the child eagerly.

'Miss Nell,' cried the boy coming under the window, and speaking in a lower tone, 'there are new masters down stairs. It's a change for you.'

'It is indeed,' replied the child.

'And so it will be for him when he gets better,' said the boy, pointing towards the sick room.

'—If he ever does,' added the child, unable to restrain her tears.

'Oh, he'll do that, he'll do that,' said Kit. 'I'm sure he will. You mustn't be cast down, Miss Nell. Now don't be, pray!'

These words of encouragement and consolation were few and roughly said, but they affected the child and made her, for the moment, weep the more.

'He'll be sure to get better now,' said the boy anxiously, 'if you don't give way to low spirits and turn ill yourself, which would make him worse and throw him back, just as he was recovering. When he does, say a good word—say a kind word for me, Miss Nell!'

'They tell me I must not even mention your name to him for a long, long time,' rejoined the child, 'I dare not; and even if I might, what good would a kind word do you, Kit? We shall be very poor. We shall scarcely have bread to eat.'

'It's not that I may be taken back,' said the boy, 'that I ask the favour of you. It isn't for the sake of food and wages that I've been waiting about so long in hopes to see you. Don't think that I'd come in a time of trouble to talk of such things as them.'

The child looked gratefully and kindly at him, but waited that he might speak again.

'No, it's not that,' said Kit hesitating, 'it's something very different from that. I haven't got much sense, I know, but if he could be brought to believe that I'd been a faithful servant to him, doing the best I could, and never meaning harm, perhaps he mightn't—'

Here Kit faltered so long that the child entreated him to speak out, and quickly, for it was very late, and time to shut the window.

'Perhaps he mightn't think it over venturesome of me to say—well then, to say this,' cried Kit with sudden boldness. 'This home is gone from you and him. Mother and I have got a poor one, but that's better than this with all these people here; and why not come there, till he's had time to look about, and find a better!'

The child did not speak. Kit, in the relief of having made his proposition, found his tongue loosened, and spoke out in its favour with his utmost eloquence.

'You think,' said the boy, 'that it's very small and inconvenient. So it is, but it's very clean. Perhaps you think it would be noisy, but there's not a quieter court than ours in all the town. Don't be afraid of the children; the baby hardly ever cries, and the other one is very good—besides, I'd mind 'em. They wouldn't vex you much, I'm sure. Do try, Miss Nell, do try. The little front room up stairs is very pleasant. You can see a piece of the church-clock, through the chimneys, and almost tell the time; mother says it would be just the thing for you, and so it would, and you'd have her to wait upon you both, and me to run of errands. We don't mean money, bless you; you're not to think of that! Will you try him, Miss Nell? Only say you'll try him. Do try to make old master come, and ask him first what I have done. Will you only promise that, Miss Nell?'

Before the child could reply to this earnest solicitation, the street-door opened, and Mr Brass thrusting out his night-capped head called in a surly voice, 'Who's there!' Kit immediately glided away, and Nell, closing the window softly, drew back into the room.

Before Mr Brass had repeated his inquiry many times, Mr Quilp, also embellished with a night-cap, emerged from the same door and looked carefully up and down the street, and up at all the windows of the house, from the opposite side. Finding that there was nobody in sight, he presently returned into the house with his legal friend, protesting (as the child heard from the staircase), that there was a league and plot against him; that he was in danger of being robbed and plundered by a band of conspirators who prowled about the house at all seasons; and that he would delay no longer but take immediate steps for disposing of the property and returning to his own peaceful roof. Having growled forth these, and a great many other threats of the same nature, he coiled himself once more in the child's little bed, and Nell crept softly up the stairs.

It was natural enough that her short and unfinished dialogue with Kit should leave a strong impression on her mind, and influence her dreams that night and her recollections for a long, long time. Surrounded by unfeeling creditors, and mercenary attendants upon the sick, and meeting in the height of her anxiety and sorrow with little regard or sympathy even from the women about her, it is not surprising that the affectionate heart of the child should have been touched to the quick by one kind and generous spirit, however uncouth the temple in which it dwelt. Thank Heaven that the temples of such spirits are not made with hands, and that they may be even more worthily hung with poor patch-work than with purple and fine linen!

CHAPTER 12

At length, the crisis of the old man's disorder was past, and he began to mend. By very slow and feeble degrees his consciousness came back; but the mind was weakened and its functions were impaired. He was patient, and quiet; often sat brooding, but not despondently, for a long space; was easily amused, even by a sun-beam on the wall or ceiling; made no complaint that the days were long, or the nights tedious; and appeared indeed to have lost all count of time, and every sense of care or weariness. He would sit, for hours together, with Nell's small hand in his, playing with the fingers and stopping sometimes to smooth her hair or kiss her brow; and, when he saw that tears were glistening in her eyes, would look, amazed, about him for the cause, and forget his wonder even while he looked.

The child and he rode out; the old man propped up with pillows, and the child beside him. They were hand in hand as usual. The noise and motion in the streets fatigued his brain at first, but he was not surprised, or curious, or pleased, or irritated. He was asked if he remembered this, or that. 'O yes,' he said, 'quite well—why not?' Sometimes he turned his head, and looked, with earnest gaze and outstretched neck, after some stranger in the crowd, until he disappeared from sight; but, to the question why he did this, he answered not a word.

He was sitting in his easy chair one day, and Nell upon a stool beside him, when a man outside the door inquired if he might enter. 'Yes,' he said without emotion, 'it was Quilp, he knew. Quilp was master there. Of course he might come in.' And so he did.

'I'm glad to see you well again at last, neighbour,' said the dwarf, sitting down opposite him. 'You're quite strong now?'

'Yes,' said the old man feebly, 'yes.'

'I don't want to hurry you, you know, neighbour,' said the dwarf, raising his voice, for the old man's senses were duller than they had been; 'but, as soon as you can arrange your future proceedings, the better.'

'Surely,' said the old man. 'The better for all parties.'

'You see,' pursued Quilp after a short pause, 'the goods being once removed, this house would be uncomfortable; uninhabitable in fact.'

'You say true,' returned the old man. 'Poor Nell too, what would she do?'

'Exactly,' bawled the dwarf nodding his head; 'that's very well observed. Then will you consider about it, neighbour?'

'I will, certainly,' replied the old man. 'We shall not stop here.'

'So I supposed,' said the dwarf. 'I have sold the things. They have not yielded quite as much as they might have done, but pretty well—pretty well. To-day's Tuesday. When shall they be moved? There's no hurry—shall we say this afternoon?'

'Say Friday morning,' returned the old man.

'Very good,' said the dwarf. 'So be it—with the understanding that I can't go beyond that day, neighbour, on any account.'

'Good,' returned the old man. 'I shall remember it.'

Mr Quilp seemed rather puzzled by the strange, even spiritless way in which all this was said; but as the old man nodded his head and repeated 'on Friday morning. I shall remember it,' he had no excuse for dwelling on the subject any further, and so took a friendly leave with many expressions of good-will and many compliments to his friend on his looking so remarkably well; and went below stairs to report progress to Mr Brass.

All that day, and all the next, the old man remained in this state. He wandered up and down the house and into and out of the various rooms, as if with some vague intent of bidding them adieu, but he referred neither by direct allusions nor in any other manner to the interview of the morning or the necessity of finding some other shelter. An indistinct idea he had, that the child was desolate and in want of help; for he often drew her to his bosom and bade her be of good cheer, saying that they would not desert each other; but he seemed unable to contemplate their real position more distinctly, and was still the listless, passionless creature that suffering of mind and body had left him.

We call this a state of childishness, but it is the same poor hollow mockery of it, that death is of sleep. Where, in the dull eyes of doating men, are the laughing light and life of childhood, the gaiety that has known no check, the frankness that has felt no chill, the hope that has never withered, the joys that fade in blossoming? Where, in the sharp lineaments of rigid and unsightly death, is the calm beauty of slumber, telling of rest for the waking hours that are past, and gentle hopes and loves for those which are to come? Lay death and sleep down, side by side, and say who shall find the two akin. Send forth the child and childish man together, and blush for the pride that libels our own old happy state, and gives its title to an ugly and distorted image.

Thursday arrived, and there was no alteration in the old man. But a change came upon him that evening as he and the child sat silently together.

In a small dull yard below his window, there was a tree—green and flourishing enough, for such a place—and as the air stirred among its leaves, it threw a rippling shadow on the white wall. The old man sat watching the shadows as they trembled in this patch of light, until the sun went down; and when it was night, and the moon was slowly rising, he still sat in the same spot.

To one who had been tossing on a restless bed so long, even these few green leaves and this tranquil light, although it languished among chimneys and house-tops, were pleasant things. They suggested quiet places afar off, and rest, and peace. The child thought, more than once that he was moved: and had forborne to speak. But now he shed tears—tears that it lightened her aching heart to see—and making as though he would fall upon his knees, besought her to forgive him.

'Forgive you—what?' said Nell, interposing to prevent his purpose. 'Oh grandfather, what should I forgive?'

'All that is past, all that has come upon thee, Nell, all that was done in that uneasy dream,' returned the old man.

'Do not talk so,' said the child. 'Pray do not. Let us speak of something else.'

'Yes, yes, we will,' he rejoined. 'And it shall be of what we talked of long ago—many months—months is it, or weeks, or days? which is it Nell?'

'I do not understand you,' said the child.

'It has come back upon me to-day, it has all come back since we have been sitting here. I bless thee for it, Nell!'

'For what, dear grandfather?'

'For what you said when we were first made beggars, Nell. Let us speak softly. Hush! for if they knew our purpose down stairs, they would cry that I was mad and take thee from me. We will not stop here another day. We will go far away from here.'

'Yes, let us go,' said the child earnestly. 'Let us begone from this place, and never turn back or think of it again. Let us wander barefoot through the world, rather than linger here.'

'We will,' answered the old man, 'we will travel afoot through the fields and woods, and by the side of rivers, and trust ourselves to God in the places where He dwells. It is far better to lie down at night beneath an open sky like that yonder—see how bright it is—than to rest in close rooms which are always full of care and weary dreams. Thou and I together, Nell, may be cheerful and happy yet, and learn to forget this time, as if it had never been.'

'We will be happy,' cried the child. 'We never can be here.'

'No, we never can again—never again—that's truly said,' rejoined the old man. 'Let us steal away to-morrow morning—early and softly, that we may not be seen or heard—and leave no trace or track for them to follow by. Poor Nell! Thy cheek is pale, and thy eyes are heavy with watching and weeping for me—I know—for me; but thou wilt be well again, and merry too, when we are far away. To-morrow morning, dear, we'll turn our faces from this scene of sorrow, and be as free and happy as the birds.'

And then the old man clasped his hands above her head, and said, in a few broken words, that from that time forth they would wander up and down together, and never part more until Death took one or other of the twain.

The child's heart beat high with hope and confidence. She had no thought of hunger, or cold, or thirst, or suffering. She saw in this, but a return of the simple pleasures they had once enjoyed, a relief from the gloomy solitude in which she had lived, an escape from the heartless people by whom she had been surrounded in her late time of trial, the restoration of the old man's health and peace, and a life of tranquil happiness. Sun, and stream, and meadow, and summer days, shone brightly in her view, and there was no dark tint in all the sparkling picture.

The old man had slept, for some hours, soundly in his bed, and she was yet busily engaged in preparing for their flight. There were a few articles of clothing for herself to carry, and a few for him; old garments, such as became their fallen fortunes, laid out to wear; and a staff to support his feeble steps, put ready for his use. But this was not all her task; for now she must visit the old rooms for the last time.

And how different the parting with them was, from any she had expected, and most of all from that which she had oftenest pictured to herself. How could she ever have thought of bidding them farewell in triumph, when the recollection of the many hours she had passed among them rose to her swelling heart, and made her feel the wish a cruelty: lonely and sad though many of those hours had been! She sat down at the window where she had spent so many evenings—darker far than this—and every thought of hope or cheerfulness that had occurred to her in that place came vividly upon her mind, and blotted out all its dull and mournful associations in an instant.

Her own little room too, where she had so often knelt down and prayed at night—prayed for the time which she hoped was dawning now—the little room where she had slept so peacefully, and dreamed such pleasant dreams! It was hard not to be able to glance round it once more, and to be forced to leave it without one kind look or grateful tear. There were some trifles there—poor useless things—that she would have liked to take away; but that was impossible.

This brought to mind her bird, her poor bird, who hung there yet. She wept bitterly for the loss of this little creature—until the idea occurred to her—she did not know how, or why, it came into her head—that it might, by some means, fall into the hands of Kit who would keep it for her sake, and think, perhaps, that she had left it behind in the hope that he might have it, and as an assurance that she was grateful to him. She was calmed and comforted by the thought, and went to rest with a lighter heart.

From many dreams of rambling through light and sunny places, but with some vague object unattained which ran indistinctly through them all, she awoke to find that it was yet night, and that the stars were shining brightly in the sky. At length, the day began to glimmer, and the stars to grow pale and dim. As soon as she was sure of this, she arose, and dressed herself for the journey.

The old man was yet asleep, and as she was unwilling to disturb him, she left him to slumber on, until the sun rose. He was anxious that they should leave the house without a minute's loss of time, and was soon ready.

The child then took him by the hand, and they trod lightly and cautiously down the stairs, trembling whenever a board creaked, and often stopping to listen. The old man had forgotten a kind of wallet which contained the light burden he had to carry; and the going back a few steps to fetch it seemed an interminable delay.

At last they reached the passage on the ground floor, where the snoring of Mr Quilp and his legal friend sounded more terrible in their ears than the roars of lions. The bolts of the door were rusty, and difficult to unfasten without noise. When they were all drawn back, it was found to be locked, and worst of all, the key was gone. Then the child remembered, for the first time, one of the nurses having told her that Quilp always locked both the house-doors at night, and kept the keys on the table in his bedroom.

It was not without great fear and trepidation that little Nell slipped off her shoes and gliding through the store-room of old curiosities, where Mr Brass—the ugliest piece of goods in all the stock—lay sleeping on a mattress, passed into her own little chamber.

Here she stood, for a few moments, quite transfixed with terror at the sight of Mr Quilp, who was hanging so far out of bed that he almost seemed to be standing on his head, and who, either from the uneasiness of this posture, or in one of his agreeable habits, was gasping and growling with his mouth wide open, and the whites (or rather the dirty yellows) of his eyes distinctly visible. It was no time, however, to ask whether anything ailed him; so, possessing herself of the key after one hasty glance about the room, and repassing the prostrate Mr Brass, she rejoined the old man in safety. They got the door open without noise, and passing into the street, stood still.

'Which way?' said the child.

The old man looked, irresolutely and helplessly, first at her, then to the right and left, then at her again, and shook his head. It was plain that she was thenceforth his guide and leader. The child felt it, but had no doubts or misgiving, and putting her hand in his, led him gently away.

It was the beginning of a day in June; the deep blue sky unsullied by a cloud, and teeming with brilliant light. The streets were, as yet, nearly free from passengers, the houses and shops were closed, and the healthy air of morning fell like breath from angels, on the sleeping town.

The old man and the child passed on through the glad silence, elate with hope and pleasure. They were alone together, once again; every object was bright and fresh; nothing reminded them, otherwise than by contrast, of the monotony and constraint they had left behind; church towers and steeples, frowning and dark at other times, now shone in the sun; each humble nook and corner rejoiced in light; and the sky, dimmed only by excessive distance, shed its placid smile on everything beneath.

Forth from the city, while it yet slumbered, went the two poor adventurers, wandering they knew not whither.

CHAPTER 13

Daniel Quilp of Tower Hill, and Sampson Brass of Bevis Marks in the city of London, Gentleman, one of her Majesty's attornies of the Courts of the King's Bench and Common Pleas at Westminster and a solicitor of the High Court of Chancery, slumbered on, unconscious and unsuspicious of any mischance, until a knocking on the street door, often repeated and gradually mounting up from a modest single rap to a perfect battery of knocks, fired in long discharges with a very short interval between, caused the said Daniel Quilp to struggle into a horizontal position, and to stare at the ceiling with a drowsy indifference, betokening that he heard the noise and rather wondered at the same, and couldn't be at the trouble of bestowing any further thought upon the subject.

As the knocking, however, instead of accommodating itself to his lazy state, increased in vigour and became more importunate, as if in earnest remonstrance against his falling asleep again, now that he had once opened his eyes, Daniel Quilp began by degrees to comprehend the possibility of there being somebody at the door; and thus he gradually came to recollect that it was Friday morning, and he had ordered Mrs Quilp to be in waiting upon him at an early hour.

Mr Brass, after writhing about, in a great many strange attitudes, and often twisting his face and eyes into an expression like that which is usually produced by eating gooseberries very early in the season, was by this time awake also. Seeing that Mr Quilp invested himself in his every-day garments, he hastened to do the like, putting on his shoes before his stockings, and thrusting his legs into his coat sleeves, and making such other small mistakes in his toilet as are not uncommon to those who dress in a hurry, and labour under the agitation of having been suddenly roused. While the attorney was thus engaged, the dwarf was groping under the table, muttering desperate imprecations on himself, and mankind in general, and all inanimate objects to boot, which suggested to Mr Brass the question, 'what's the matter?'

'The key,' said the dwarf, looking viciously about him, 'the door-key—that's the matter. D'ye know anything of it?'

'How should I know anything of it, sir?' returned Mr Brass.

'How should you?' repeated Quilp with a sneer. 'You're a nice lawyer, an't you? Ugh, you idiot!'

Not caring to represent to the dwarf in his present humour, that the loss of a key by another person could scarcely be said to affect his (Brass's) legal knowledge in any material degree, Mr Brass humbly suggested that it must have been forgotten over night, and was, doubtless, at that moment in its native key-hole. Notwithstanding that Mr Quilp had a strong conviction to the contrary, founded on his recollection of having carefully taken it out, he was fain to admit that this was possible, and therefore went grumbling to the door where, sure enough, he found it.

Now, just as Mr Quilp laid his hand upon the lock, and saw with great astonishment that the fastenings were undone, the knocking came again with the most irritating violence, and the daylight which had been shining through the key-hole was intercepted on the outside by a human eye. The dwarf was very much exasperated, and wanting somebody to wreak his ill-humour upon, determined to dart out suddenly, and favour Mrs Quilp with a gentle acknowledgment of her attention in making that hideous uproar.

With this view, he drew back the lock very silently and softly, and opening the door all at once, pounced out upon the person on the other side, who had at that moment raised the knocker for another application, and at whom the dwarf ran head first: throwing out his hands and feet together, and biting the air in the fulness of his malice.

So far, however, from rushing upon somebody who offered no resistance and implored his mercy, Mr Quilp was no sooner in the arms of the individual whom he had taken for his wife than he found himself complimented with two staggering blows on the head, and two more, of the same quality, in the chest; and closing with his assailant, such a shower of buffets rained down upon his person as sufficed to convince him that he was in skilful and experienced hands. Nothing daunted by this reception, he clung tight to his opponent, and bit and hammered away with such good-will and heartiness, that it was at least a couple of minutes before he was dislodged. Then, and not until then, Daniel Quilp found himself, all flushed and dishevelled, in the middle of the street, with Mr Richard Swiveller performing a kind of dance round him and requiring to know 'whether he wanted any more?'

'There's plenty more of it at the same shop,' said Mr Swiveller, by turns advancing and retreating in a threatening attitude, 'a large and extensive assortment always on hand—country orders executed with promptitude and despatch—will you have a little more, Sir—don't say no, if you'd rather not.'

'I thought it was somebody else,' said Quilp, rubbing his shoulders, 'why didn't you say who you were?'

'Why didn't you say who YOU were?' returned Dick, 'instead of flying out of the house like a Bedlamite?'

'It was you that—that knocked,' said the dwarf, getting up with a short groan, 'was it?'

'Yes, I am the man,' replied Dick. 'That lady had begun when I came, but she knocked too soft, so I relieved her.' As he said this, he pointed towards Mrs Quilp, who stood trembling at a little distance.

'Humph!' muttered the dwarf, darting an angry look at his wife, 'I thought it was your fault! And you, sir—don't you know there has been somebody ill here, that you knock as if you'd beat the door down?'

'Damme!' answered Dick, 'that's why I did it. I thought there was somebody dead here.'

'You came for some purpose, I suppose,' said Quilp. 'What is it you want?'

'I want to know how the old gentleman is,' rejoined Mr Swiveller, 'and to hear from Nell herself, with whom I should like to have a little talk. I'm a friend of the family, sir—at least I'm the friend of one of the family, and that's the same thing.'

'You'd better walk in then,' said the dwarf. 'Go on, sir, go on. Now, Mrs Quilp—after you, ma'am.'

Mrs Quilp hesitated, but Mr Quilp insisted. And it was not a contest of politeness, or by any means a matter of form, for she knew very well that her husband wished to enter the house in this order, that he might have a favourable opportunity of inflicting a few pinches on her arms, which were seldom free from impressions of his fingers in black and blue colours. Mr Swiveller, who was not in the secret, was a little surprised to hear a suppressed scream, and, looking round, to see Mrs Quilp following him with a sudden jerk; but he did not remark on these appearances, and soon forgot them.

'Now, Mrs Quilp,' said the dwarf when they had entered the shop, 'go you up stairs, if you please, to Nelly's room, and tell her that she's wanted.'

'You seem to make yourself at home here,' said Dick, who was unacquainted with Mr Quilp's authority.

'I AM at home, young gentleman,' returned the dwarf.

Dick was pondering what these words might mean, and still more what the presence of Mr Brass might mean, when Mrs Quilp came hurrying down stairs, declaring that the rooms above were empty.

'Empty, you fool!' said the dwarf.

'I give you my word, Quilp,' answered his trembling wife, 'that I have been into every room and there's not a soul in any of them.'

'And that,' said Mr Brass, clapping his hands once, with an emphasis, 'explains the mystery of the key!'

Quilp looked frowningly at him, and frowningly at his wife, and frowningly at Richard Swiveller; but, receiving no enlightenment from any of them, hurried up stairs, whence he soon hurried down again, confirming the report which had already been made.

'It's a strange way of going,' he said, glancing at Swiveller, 'very strange not to communicate with me who am such a close and intimate friend of his! Ah! he'll write to me no doubt, or he'll bid Nelly write—yes, yes, that's what he'll do. Nelly's very fond of me. Pretty Nell!'

Mr Swiveller looked, as he was, all open-mouthed astonishment. Still glancing furtively at him, Quilp turned to Mr Brass and observed, with assumed carelessness, that this need not interfere with the removal of the goods.

'For indeed,' he added, 'we knew that they'd go away to-day, but not that they'd go so early, or so quietly. But they have their reasons, they have their reasons.'

'Where in the devil's name are they gone?' said the wondering Dick.

Quilp shook his head, and pursed up his lips, in a manner which implied that he knew very well, but was not at liberty to say.

'And what,' said Dick, looking at the confusion about him, 'what do you mean by moving the goods?'

'That I have bought 'em, Sir,' rejoined Quilp. 'Eh? What then?'

'Has the sly old fox made his fortune then, and gone to live in a tranquil cot in a pleasant spot with a distant view of the changing sea?' said Dick, in great bewilderment.

'Keeping his place of retirement very close, that he may not be visited too often by affectionate grandsons and their devoted friends, eh?' added the dwarf, rubbing his hands hard; 'I say nothing, but is that your meaning?'

Richard Swiveller was utterly aghast at this unexpected alteration of circumstances, which threatened the complete overthrow of the project in which he bore so conspicuous a part, and seemed to nip his prospects in the bud. Having only received from Frederick Trent, late on the previous night, information of the old man's illness, he had come upon a visit of condolence and inquiry to Nell, prepared with the first instalment of that long train of fascinations which was to fire her heart at last. And here, when he had been thinking of all kinds of graceful and insinuating approaches, and meditating on the fearful retaliation which was slowly working against Sophy Wackles—here were Nell, the old man, and all the money gone, melted away, decamped he knew not whither, as if with a fore-knowledge of the scheme and a resolution to defeat it in the very outset, before a step was taken.

In his secret heart, Daniel Quilp was both surprised and troubled by the flight which had been made. It had not escaped his keen eye that some indispensable articles of clothing were gone with the fugitives, and knowing the old man's weak state of mind, he marvelled what that course of proceeding might be in which he had so readily procured the concurrence of the child. It must not be supposed (or it would be a gross injustice to Mr Quilp) that he was tortured by any disinterested anxiety on behalf of either. His uneasiness arose from a misgiving that the old man had some secret store of money which he had not suspected; and the idea of its escaping his clutches, overwhelmed him with mortification and self-reproach.

In this frame of mind, it was some consolation to him to find that Richard Swiveller was, for different reasons, evidently irritated and disappointed by the same cause. It was plain, thought the dwarf, that he had come there, on behalf of his friend, to cajole or frighten the old man out of some small fraction of that wealth of which they supposed him to have an abundance. Therefore, it was a relief to vex his heart with a picture of the riches the old man hoarded, and to expatiate on his cunning in removing himself even beyond the reach of importunity.

'Well,' said Dick, with a blank look, 'I suppose it's of no use my staying here.'

'Not the least in the world,' rejoined the dwarf.

'You'll mention that I called, perhaps?' said Dick.

Mr Quilp nodded, and said he certainly would, the very first time he saw them.

'And say,' added Mr Swiveller, 'say, sir, that I was wafted here upon the pinions of concord; that I came to remove, with the rake of friendship, the seeds of mutual violence and heart-burning, and to sow in their place, the germs of social harmony. Will you have the goodness to charge yourself with that commission, Sir?'

'Certainly!' rejoined Quilp.

'Will you be kind enough to add to it, Sir,' said Dick, producing a very small limp card, 'that that is my address, and that I am to be found at home every morning. Two distinct knocks, sir, will produce the slavey at any time. My particular friends, Sir, are accustomed to sneeze when the door is opened, to give her to understand that they ARE my friends and have no interested motives in asking if I'm at home. I beg your pardon; will you allow me to look at that card again?'

'Oh! by all means,' rejoined Quilp.

'By a slight and not unnatural mistake, sir,' said Dick, substituting another in its stead, 'I had handed you the pass-ticket of a select convivial circle called the Glorious Apollers of which I have the honour to be Perpetual Grand. That is the proper document, Sir. Good morning.'

Quilp bade him good day; the perpetual Grand Master of the Glorious Apollers, elevating his hat in honour of Mrs Quilp, dropped it carelessly on the side of his head again, and disappeared with a flourish.

By this time, certain vans had arrived for the conveyance of the goods, and divers strong men in caps were balancing chests of drawers and other trifles of that nature upon their heads, and performing muscular feats which heightened their complexions considerably. Not to be behind-hand in the bustle, Mr Quilp went to work with surprising vigour; hustling and driving the people about, like an evil spirit; setting Mrs Quilp upon all kinds of arduous and impracticable tasks; carrying great weights up and down, with no apparent effort; kicking the boy from the wharf, whenever he could get near him; and inflicting, with his loads, a great many sly bumps and blows on the shoulders of Mr Brass, as he stood upon the door-steps to answer all the inquiries of curious neighbours, which was his department. His presence and example diffused such alacrity among the persons employed, that, in a few hours, the house was emptied of everything, but pieces of matting, empty porter-pots, and scattered fragments of straw.

Seated, like an African chief, on one of these pieces of matting, the dwarf was regaling himself in the parlour, with bread and cheese and beer, when he observed without appearing to do so, that a boy was prying in at the outer door. Assured that it was Kit, though he saw little more than his nose, Mr Quilp hailed him by his name; whereupon Kit came in and demanded what he wanted.

'Come here, you sir,' said the dwarf. 'Well, so your old master and young mistress have gone?'

'Where?' rejoined Kit, looking round.

'Do you mean to say you don't know where?' answered Quilp sharply. 'Where have they gone, eh?'

'I don't know,' said Kit.

'Come,' retorted Quilp, 'let's have no more of this! Do you mean to say that you don't know they went away by stealth, as soon as it was light this morning?'

'No,' said the boy, in evident surprise.

'You don't know that?' cried Quilp. 'Don't I know that you were hanging about the house the other night, like a thief, eh? Weren't you told then?'

'No,' replied the boy.

'You were not?' said Quilp. 'What were you told then; what were you talking about?'

Kit, who knew no particular reason why he should keep the matter secret now, related the purpose for which he had come on that occasion, and the proposal he had made.

'Oh!' said the dwarf after a little consideration. 'Then, I think they'll come to you yet.'

'Do you think they will?' cried Kit eagerly.

'Aye, I think they will,' returned the dwarf. 'Now, when they do, let me know; d'ye hear? Let me know, and I'll give you something. I want to do 'em a kindness, and I can't do 'em a kindness unless I know where they are. You hear what I say?'

Kit might have returned some answer which would not have been agreeable to his irascible questioner, if the boy from the wharf, who had been skulking about the room in search of anything that might have been left about by accident, had not happened to cry, 'Here's a bird! What's to be done with this?'

'Wring its neck,' rejoined Quilp.

'Oh no, don't do that,' said Kit, stepping forward. 'Give it to me.'

'Oh yes, I dare say,' cried the other boy. 'Come! You let the cage alone, and let me wring its neck will you? He said I was to do it. You let the cage alone will you.'

'Give it here, give it to me, you dogs,' roared Quilp. 'Fight for it, you dogs, or I'll wring its neck myself!'

Without further persuasion, the two boys fell upon each other, tooth and nail, while Quilp, holding up the cage in one hand, and chopping the ground with his knife in an ecstasy, urged them on by his taunts and cries to fight more fiercely. They were a pretty equal match, and rolled about together, exchanging blows which were by no means child's play, until at length Kit, planting a well-directed hit in his adversary's chest, disengaged himself, sprung nimbly up, and snatching the cage from Quilp's hands made off with his prize.

He did not stop once until he reached home, where his bleeding face occasioned great consternation, and caused the elder child to howl dreadfully.

'Goodness gracious, Kit, what is the matter, what have you been doing?' cried Mrs Nubbles.

'Never you mind, mother,' answered her son, wiping his face on the jack-towel behind the door. 'I'm not hurt, don't you be afraid for me. I've been a fightin' for a bird and won him, that's all. Hold your noise, little Jacob. I never see such a naughty boy in all my days!'

'You have been fighting for a bird!' exclaimed his mother.

'Ah! Fightin' for a bird!' replied Kit, 'and here he is—Miss Nelly's bird, mother, that they was agoin' to wring the neck of! I stopped that though—ha ha ha! They wouldn't wring his neck and me by, no, no. It wouldn't do, mother, it wouldn't do at all. Ha ha ha!'

Kit laughing so heartily, with his swoln and bruised face looking out of the towel, made little Jacob laugh, and then his mother laughed, and then the baby crowed and kicked with great glee, and then they all laughed in concert: partly because of Kit's triumph, and partly because they were very fond of each other. When this fit was over, Kit exhibited the bird to both children, as a great and precious rarity—it was only a poor linnet—and looking about the wall for an old nail, made a scaffolding of a chair and table and twisted it out with great exultation.

'Let me see,' said the boy, 'I think I'll hang him in the winder, because it's more light and cheerful, and he can see the sky there, if he looks up very much. He's such a one to sing, I can tell you!'

So, the scaffolding was made again, and Kit, climbing up with the poker for a hammer, knocked in the nail and hung up the cage, to the immeasurable delight of the whole family. When it had been adjusted and straightened a great many times, and he had walked backwards into the fire-place in his admiration of it, the arrangement was pronounced to be perfect.

'And now, mother,' said the boy, 'before I rest any more, I'll go out and see if I can find a horse to hold, and then I can buy some birdseed, and a bit of something nice for you, into the bargain.'

CHAPTER 14

As it was very easy for Kit to persuade himself that the old house was in his way, his way being anywhere, he tried to look upon his passing it once more as a matter of imperative and disagreeable necessity, quite apart from any desire of his own, to which he could not choose but yield. It is not uncommon for people who are much better fed and taught than Christopher Nubbles had ever been, to make duties of their inclinations in matters of more doubtful propriety, and to take great credit for the self-denial with which they gratify themselves.

There was no need of any caution this time, and no fear of being detained by having to play out a return match with Daniel Quilp's boy. The place was entirely deserted, and looked as dusty and dingy as if it had been so for months. A rusty padlock was fastened on the door, ends of discoloured blinds and curtains flapped drearily against the half-opened upper windows, and the crooked holes cut in the closed shutters below, were black with the darkness of the inside. Some of the glass in the window he had so often watched, had been broken in the rough hurry of the morning, and that room looked more deserted and dull than any. A group of idle urchins had taken possession of the door-steps; some were plying the knocker and listening with delighted dread to the hollow sounds it spread through the dismantled house; others were clustered about the keyhole, watching half in jest and half in earnest for 'the ghost,' which an hour's gloom, added to the mystery that hung about the late inhabitants, had already raised. Standing all alone in the midst of the business and bustle of the street, the house looked a picture of cold desolation; and Kit, who remembered the cheerful fire that used to burn there on a winter's night and the no less cheerful laugh that made the small room ring, turned quite mournfully away.

It must be especially observed in justice to poor Kit that he was by no means of a sentimental turn, and perhaps had never heard that adjective in all his life. He was only a soft-hearted grateful fellow, and had nothing genteel or polite about him; consequently, instead of going home again, in his grief, to kick the children and abuse his mother (for, when your finely strung people are out of sorts, they must have everybody else unhappy likewise), he turned his thoughts to the vulgar expedient of making them more comfortable if he could.

Bless us, what a number of gentlemen on horseback there were riding up and down, and how few of them wanted their horses held! A good city speculator or a parliamentary commissioner could have told to a fraction, from the crowds that were cantering about, what sum of money was realised in London, in the course of a year, by holding horses alone. And undoubtedly it would have been a very large one, if only a twentieth part of the gentlemen without grooms had had occasion to alight; but they had not; and it is often an ill-natured circumstance like this, which spoils the most ingenious estimate in the world.

Kit walked about, now with quick steps and now with slow; now lingering as some rider slackened his horse's pace and looked about him; and now darting at full speed up a bye-street as he caught a glimpse of some distant horseman going lazily up the shady side of the road, and promising to stop, at every door. But on they all went, one after another, and there was not a penny stirring. 'I wonder,' thought the boy, 'if one of these gentlemen knew there was nothing in the cupboard at home, whether he'd stop on purpose, and make believe that he wanted to call somewhere, that I might earn a trifle?'

He was quite tired out with pacing the streets, to say nothing of repeated disappointments, and was sitting down upon a step to rest, when there approached towards him a little clattering jingling four-wheeled chaise' drawn by a little obstinate-looking rough-coated pony, and driven by a little fat placid-faced old gentleman. Beside the little old gentleman sat a little old lady, plump and placid like himself, and the pony was coming along at his own pace and doing exactly as he pleased with the whole concern. If the old gentleman remonstrated by shaking the reins, the pony replied by shaking his head. It was plain that the utmost the pony would consent to do, was to go in his own way up any street that the old gentleman particularly wished to traverse, but that it was an understanding between them that he must do this after his own fashion or not at all.

As they passed where he sat, Kit looked so wistfully at the little turn-out, that the old gentleman looked at him. Kit rising and putting his hand to his hat, the old gentleman intimated to the pony that he wished to stop, to which proposal the pony (who seldom objected to that part of his duty) graciously acceded.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said Kit. 'I'm sorry you stopped, sir. I only meant did you want your horse minded.'

'I'm going to get down in the next street,' returned the old gentleman. 'If you like to come on after us, you may have the job.'

Kit thanked him, and joyfully obeyed. The pony ran off at a sharp angle to inspect a lamp-post on the opposite side of the way, and then went off at a tangent to another lamp-post on the other side. Having satisfied himself that they were of the same pattern and materials, he came to a stop apparently absorbed in meditation. 'Will you go on, sir,' said the old gentleman, gravely, 'or are we to wait here for you till it's too late for our appointment?'

The pony remained immoveable.

'Oh you naughty Whisker,' said the old lady. 'Fie upon you! I'm ashamed of such conduct.'

The pony appeared to be touched by this appeal to his feelings, for he trotted on directly, though in a sulky manner, and stopped no more until he came to a door whereon was a brass plate with the words 'Witherden—Notary.' Here the old gentleman got out and helped out the old lady, and then took from under the seat a nosegay resembling in shape and dimensions a full-sized warming-pan with the handle cut short off. This, the old lady carried into the house with a staid and stately air, and the old gentleman (who had a club-foot) followed close upon her.

They went, as it was easy to tell from the sound of their voices, into the front parlour, which seemed to be a kind of office. The day being very warm and the street a quiet one, the windows were wide open; and it was easy to hear through the Venetian blinds all that passed inside.

At first there was a great shaking of hands and shuffling of feet, succeeded by the presentation of the nosegay; for a voice, supposed by the listener to be that of Mr Witherden the Notary, was heard to exclaim a great many times, 'oh, delicious!' 'oh, fragrant, indeed!' and a nose, also supposed to be the property of that gentleman, was heard to inhale the scent with a snuffle of exceeding pleasure.

'I brought it in honour of the occasion, Sir,' said the old lady.

'Ah! an occasion indeed, ma'am, an occasion which does honour to me, ma'am, honour to me,' rejoined Mr Witherden, the notary. 'I have had many a gentleman articled to me, ma'am, many a one. Some of them are now rolling in riches, unmindful of their old companion and friend, ma'am, others are in the habit of calling upon me to this day and saying, "Mr Witherden, some of the pleasantest hours I ever spent in my life were spent in this office—were spent, Sir, upon this very stool"; but there was never one among the number, ma'am, attached as I have been to many of them, of whom I augured such bright things as I do of your only son.'

'Oh dear!' said the old lady. 'How happy you do make us when you tell us that, to be sure!'

'I tell you, ma'am,' said Mr Witherden, 'what I think as an honest man, which, as the poet observes, is the noblest work of God. I agree with the poet in every particular, ma'am. The mountainous Alps on the one hand, or a humming-bird on the other, is nothing, in point of workmanship, to an honest man—or woman—or woman.'

'Anything that Mr Witherden can say of me,' observed a small quiet voice, 'I can say, with interest, of him, I am sure.'

'It's a happy circumstance, a truly happy circumstance,' said the Notary, 'to happen too upon his eight-and-twentieth birthday, and I hope I know how to appreciate it. I trust, Mr Garland, my dear Sir, that we may mutually congratulate each other upon this auspicious occasion.'

To this the old gentleman replied that he felt assured they might. There appeared to be another shaking of hands in consequence, and when it was over, the old gentleman said that, though he said it who should not, he believed no son had ever been a greater comfort to his parents than Abel Garland had been to his.

'Marrying as his mother and I did, late in life, sir, after waiting for a great many years, until we were well enough off—coming together when we were no longer young, and then being blessed with one child who has always been dutiful and affectionate—why, it's a source of great happiness to us both, sir.'

'Of course it is, I have no doubt of it,' returned the Notary in a sympathising voice. 'It's the contemplation of this sort of thing, that makes me deplore my fate in being a bachelor. There was a young lady once, sir, the daughter of an outfitting warehouse of the first respectability—but that's a weakness. Chuckster, bring in Mr Abel's articles.'

'You see, Mr Witherden,' said the old lady, 'that Abel has not been brought up like the run of young men. He has always had a pleasure in our society, and always been with us. Abel has never been absent from us, for a day; has he, my dear?'

'Never, my dear,' returned the old gentleman, 'except when he went to Margate one Saturday with Mr Tomkinley that had been a teacher at that school he went to, and came back upon the Monday; but he was very ill after that, you remember, my dear; it was quite a dissipation.'

'He was not used to it, you know,' said the old lady, 'and he couldn't bear it, that's the truth. Besides he had no comfort in being there without us, and had nobody to talk to or enjoy himself with.'

'That was it, you know,' interposed the same small quiet voice that had spoken once before. 'I was quite abroad, mother, quite desolate, and to think that the sea was between us—oh, I never shall forget what I felt when I first thought that the sea was between us!'

'Very natural under the circumstances,' observed the Notary. 'Mr Abel's feelings did credit to his nature, and credit to your nature, ma'am, and his father's nature, and human nature. I trace the same current now, flowing through all his quiet and unobtrusive proceedings.—I am about to sign my name, you observe, at the foot of the articles which Mr Chuckster will witness; and placing my finger upon this blue wafer with the vandyked corners, I am constrained to remark in a distinct tone of voice—don't be alarmed, ma'am, it is merely a form of law—that I deliver this, as my act and deed. Mr Abel will place his name against the other wafer, repeating the same cabalistic words, and the business is over. Ha ha ha! You see how easily these things are done!'

There was a short silence, apparently, while Mr Abel went through the prescribed form, and then the shaking of hands and shuffling of feet were renewed, and shortly afterwards there was a clinking of wine-glasses and a great talkativeness on the part of everybody. In about a quarter of an hour Mr Chuckster (with a pen behind his ear and his face inflamed with wine) appeared at the door, and condescending to address Kit by the jocose appellation of 'Young Snob,' informed him that the visitors were coming out.

Out they came forthwith; Mr Witherden, who was short, chubby, fresh-coloured, brisk, and pompous, leading the old lady with extreme politeness, and the father and son following them, arm in arm. Mr Abel, who had a quaint old-fashioned air about him, looked nearly of the same age as his father, and bore a wonderful resemblance to him in face and figure, though wanting something of his full, round, cheerfulness, and substituting in its place a timid reserve. In all other respects, in the neatness of the dress, and even in the club-foot, he and the old gentleman were precisely alike.

Having seen the old lady safely in her seat, and assisted in the arrangement of her cloak and a small basket which formed an indispensable portion of her equipage, Mr Abel got into a little box behind which had evidently been made for his express accommodation, and smiled at everybody present by turns, beginning with his mother and ending with the pony. There was then a great to-do to make the pony hold up his head that the bearing-rein might be fastened; at last even this was effected; and the old gentleman, taking his seat and the reins, put his hand in his pocket to find a sixpence for Kit.

He had no sixpence, neither had the old lady, nor Mr Abel, nor the Notary, nor Mr Chuckster. The old gentleman thought a shilling too much, but there was no shop in the street to get change at, so he gave it to the boy.

'There,' he said jokingly, 'I'm coming here again next Monday at the same time, and mind you're here, my lad, to work it out.'

'Thank you, Sir,' said Kit. 'I'll be sure to be here.'

He was quite serious, but they all laughed heartily at his saying so, especially Mr Chuckster, who roared outright and appeared to relish the joke amazingly. As the pony, with a presentiment that he was going home, or a determination that he would not go anywhere else (which was the same thing) trotted away pretty nimbly, Kit had no time to justify himself, and went his way also. Having expended his treasure in such purchases as he knew would be most acceptable at home, not forgetting some seed for the wonderful bird, he hastened back as fast as he could, so elated with his success and great good fortune, that he more than half expected Nell and the old man would have arrived before him.

CHAPTER 15

Often, while they were yet pacing the silent streets of the town on the morning of their departure, the child trembled with a mingled sensation of hope and fear as in some far-off figure imperfectly seen in the clear distance, her fancy traced a likeness to honest Kit. But although she would gladly have given him her hand and thanked him for what he had said at their last meeting, it was always a relief to find, when they came nearer to each other, that the person who approached was not he, but a stranger; for even if she had not dreaded the effect which the sight of him might have wrought upon her fellow-traveller, she felt that to bid farewell to anybody now, and most of all to him who had been so faithful and so true, was more than she could bear. It was enough to leave dumb things behind, and objects that were insensible both to her love and sorrow. To have parted from her only other friend upon the threshold of that wild journey, would have wrung her heart indeed.

Why is it that we can better bear to part in spirit than in body, and while we have the fortitude to act farewell have not the nerve to say it? On the eve of long voyages or an absence of many years, friends who are tenderly attached will separate with the usual look, the usual pressure of the hand, planning one final interview for the morrow, while each well knows that it is but a poor feint to save the pain of uttering that one word, and that the meeting will never be. Should possibilities be worse to bear than certainties? We do not shun our dying friends; the not having distinctly taken leave of one among them, whom we left in all kindness and affection, will often embitter the whole remainder of a life.

The town was glad with morning light; places that had shown ugly and distrustful all night long, now wore a smile; and sparkling sunbeams dancing on chamber windows, and twinkling through blind and curtain before sleepers' eyes, shed light even into dreams, and chased away the shadows of the night. Birds in hot rooms, covered up close and dark, felt it was morning, and chafed and grew restless in their little cells; bright-eyed mice crept back to their tiny homes and nestled timidly together; the sleek house-cat, forgetful of her prey, sat winking at the rays of sun starting through keyhole and cranny in the door, and longed for her stealthy run and warm sleek bask outside. The nobler beasts confined in dens, stood motionless behind their bars and gazed on fluttering boughs, and sunshine peeping through some little window, with eyes in which old forests gleamed—then trod impatiently the track their prisoned feet had worn—and stopped and gazed again. Men in their dungeons stretched their cramp cold limbs and cursed the stone that no bright sky could warm. The flowers that sleep by night, opened their gentle eyes and turned them to the day. The light, creation's mind, was everywhere, and all things owned its power.

The two pilgrims, often pressing each other's hands, or exchanging a smile or cheerful look, pursued their way in silence. Bright and happy as it was, there was something solemn in the long, deserted streets, from which, like bodies without souls, all habitual character and expression had departed, leaving but one dead uniform repose, that made them all alike. All was so still at that early hour, that the few pale people whom they met seemed as much unsuited to the scene, as the sickly lamp which had been here and there left burning, was powerless and faint in the full glory of the sun.

Before they had penetrated very far into the labyrinth of men's abodes which yet lay between them and the outskirts, this aspect began to melt away, and noise and bustle to usurp its place. Some straggling carts and coaches rumbling by, first broke the charm, then others came, then others yet more active, then a crowd. The wonder was, at first, to see a tradesman's window open, but it was a rare thing soon to see one closed; then, smoke rose slowly from the chimneys, and sashes were thrown up to let in air, and doors were opened, and servant girls, looking lazily in all directions but their brooms, scattered brown clouds of dust into the eyes of shrinking passengers, or listened disconsolately to milkmen who spoke of country fairs, and told of waggons in the mews, with awnings and all things complete, and gallant swains to boot, which another hour would see upon their journey.

This quarter passed, they came upon the haunts of commerce and great traffic, where many people were resorting, and business was already rife. The old man looked about him with a startled and bewildered gaze, for these were places that he hoped to shun. He pressed his finger on his lip, and drew the child along by narrow courts and winding ways, nor did he seem at ease until they had left it far behind, often casting a backward look towards it, murmuring that ruin and self-murder were crouching in every street, and would follow if they scented them; and that they could not fly too fast.

Again this quarter passed, they came upon a straggling neighbourhood, where the mean houses parcelled off in rooms, and windows patched with rags and paper, told of the populous poverty that sheltered there. The shops sold goods that only poverty could buy, and sellers and buyers were pinched and griped alike. Here were poor streets where faded gentility essayed with scanty space and shipwrecked means to make its last feeble stand, but tax-gatherer and creditor came there as elsewhere, and the poverty that yet faintly struggled was hardly less squalid and manifest than that which had long ago submitted and given up the game.

This was a wide, wide track—for the humble followers of the camp of wealth pitch their tents round about it for many a mile—but its character was still the same. Damp rotten houses, many to let, many yet building, many half-built and mouldering away—lodgings, where it would be hard to tell which needed pity most, those who let or those who came to take—children, scantily fed and clothed, spread over every street, and sprawling in the dust—scolding mothers, stamping their slipshod feet with noisy threats upon the pavement—shabby fathers, hurrying with dispirited looks to the occupation which brought them 'daily bread' and little more—mangling-women, washer-women, cobblers, tailors, chandlers, driving their trades in parlours and kitchens and back room and garrets, and sometimes all of them under the same roof—brick-fields skirting gardens paled with staves of old casks, or timber pillaged from houses burnt down, and blackened and blistered by the flames—mounds of dock-weed, nettles, coarse grass and oyster-shells, heaped in rank confusion—small dissenting chapels to teach, with no lack of illustration, the miseries of Earth, and plenty of new churches, erected with a little superfluous wealth, to show the way to Heaven.

At length these streets becoming more straggling yet, dwindled and dwindled away, until there were only small garden patches bordering the road, with many a summer house innocent of paint and built of old timber or some fragments of a boat, green as the tough cabbage-stalks that grew about it, and grottoed at the seams with toad-stools and tight-sticking snails. To these succeeded pert cottages, two and two with plots of ground in front, laid out in angular beds with stiff box borders and narrow paths between, where footstep never strayed to make the gravel rough. Then came the public-house, freshly painted in green and white, with tea-gardens and a bowling green, spurning its old neighbour with the horse-trough where the waggons stopped; then, fields; and then, some houses, one by one, of goodly size with lawns, some even with a lodge where dwelt a porter and his wife. Then came a turnpike; then fields again with trees and hay-stacks; then, a hill, and on the top of that, the traveller might stop, and—looking back at old Saint Paul's looming through the smoke, its cross peeping above the cloud (if the day were clear), and glittering in the sun; and casting his eyes upon the Babel out of which it grew until he traced it down to the furthest outposts of the invading army of bricks and mortar whose station lay for the present nearly at his feet—might feel at last that he was clear of London.

Near such a spot as this, and in a pleasant field, the old man and his little guide (if guide she were, who knew not whither they were bound) sat down to rest. She had had the precaution to furnish her basket with some slices of bread and meat, and here they made their frugal breakfast.

The freshness of the day, the singing of the birds, the beauty of the waving grass, the deep green leaves, the wild flowers, and the thousand exquisite scents and sounds that floated in the air—deep joys to most of us, but most of all to those whose life is in a crowd or who live solitarily in great cities as in the bucket of a human well—sunk into their breasts and made them very glad. The child had repeated her artless prayers once that morning, more earnestly perhaps than she had ever done in all her life, but as she felt all this, they rose to her lips again. The old man took off his hat—he had no memory for the words—but he said amen, and that they were very good.

There had been an old copy of the Pilgrim's Progress, with strange plates, upon a shelf at home, over which she had often pored whole evenings, wondering whether it was true in every word, and where those distant countries with the curious names might be. As she looked back upon the place they had left, one part of it came strongly on her mind.

'Dear grandfather,' she said, 'only that this place is prettier and a great deal better than the real one, if that in the book is like it, I feel as if we were both Christian, and laid down on this grass all the cares and troubles we brought with us; never to take them up again.'

'No—never to return—never to return'—replied the old man, waving his hand towards the city. 'Thou and I are free of it now, Nell. They shall never lure us back.'

'Are you tired?' said the child, 'are you sure you don't feel ill from this long walk?'

'I shall never feel ill again, now that we are once away,' was his reply. 'Let us be stirring, Nell. We must be further away—a long, long way further. We are too near to stop, and be at rest. Come!'

There was a pool of clear water in the field, in which the child laved her hands and face, and cooled her feet before setting forth to walk again. She would have the old man refresh himself in this way too, and making him sit down upon the grass, cast the water on him with her hands, and dried it with her simple dress.

'I can do nothing for myself, my darling,' said the grandfather; 'I don't know how it is, I could once, but the time's gone. Don't leave me, Nell; say that thou'lt not leave me. I loved thee all the while, indeed I did. If I lose thee too, my dear, I must die!'

He laid his head upon her shoulder and moaned piteously. The time had been, and a very few days before, when the child could not have restrained her tears and must have wept with him. But now she soothed him with gentle and tender words, smiled at his thinking they could ever part, and rallied him cheerfully upon the jest. He was soon calmed and fell asleep, singing to himself in a low voice, like a little child.

He awoke refreshed, and they continued their journey. The road was pleasant, lying between beautiful pastures and fields of corn, about which, poised high in the clear blue sky, the lark trilled out her happy song. The air came laden with the fragrance it caught upon its way, and the bees, upborne upon its scented breath, hummed forth their drowsy satisfaction as they floated by.

They were now in the open country; the houses were very few and scattered at long intervals, often miles apart. Occasionally they came upon a cluster of poor cottages, some with a chair or low board put across the open door to keep the scrambling children from the road, others shut up close while all the family were working in the fields. These were often the commencement of a little village: and after an interval came a wheelwright's shed or perhaps a blacksmith's forge; then a thriving farm with sleepy cows lying about the yard, and horses peering over the low wall and scampering away when harnessed horses passed upon the road, as though in triumph at their freedom. There were dull pigs too, turning up the ground in search of dainty food, and grunting their monotonous grumblings as they prowled about, or crossed each other in their quest; plump pigeons skimming round the roof or strutting on the eaves; and ducks and geese, far more graceful in their own conceit, waddling awkwardly about the edges of the pond or sailing glibly on its surface. The farm-yard passed, then came the little inn; the humbler beer-shop; and the village tradesman's; then the lawyer's and the parson's, at whose dread names the beer-shop trembled; the church then peeped out modestly from a clump of trees; then there were a few more cottages; then the cage, and pound, and not unfrequently, on a bank by the way-side, a deep old dusty well. Then came the trim-hedged fields on either hand, and the open road again.

They walked all day, and slept that night at a small cottage where beds were let to travellers. Next morning they were afoot again, and though jaded at first, and very tired, recovered before long and proceeded briskly forward.

They often stopped to rest, but only for a short space at a time, and still kept on, having had but slight refreshment since the morning. It was nearly five o'clock in the afternoon, when drawing near another cluster of labourers' huts, the child looked wistfully in each, doubtful at which to ask for permission to rest awhile, and buy a draught of milk.

It was not easy to determine, for she was timid and fearful of being repulsed. Here was a crying child, and there a noisy wife. In this, the people seemed too poor; in that, too many. At length she stopped at one where the family were seated round the table—chiefly because there was an old man sitting in a cushioned chair beside the hearth, and she thought he was a grandfather and would feel for hers.

There were besides, the cottager and his wife, and three young sturdy children, brown as berries. The request was no sooner preferred, than granted. The eldest boy ran out to fetch some milk, the second dragged two stools towards the door, and the youngest crept to his mother's gown, and looked at the strangers from beneath his sunburnt hand.

'God save you, master,' said the old cottager in a thin piping voice; 'are you travelling far?'

'Yes, Sir, a long way'—replied the child; for her grandfather appealed to her.

'From London?' inquired the old man.

The child said yes.

Ah! He had been in London many a time—used to go there often once, with waggons. It was nigh two-and-thirty year since he had been there last, and he did hear say there were great changes. Like enough! He had changed, himself, since then. Two-and-thirty year was a long time and eighty-four a great age, though there was some he had known that had lived to very hard upon a hundred—and not so hearty as he, neither—no, nothing like it.

'Sit thee down, master, in the elbow chair,' said the old man, knocking his stick upon the brick floor, and trying to do so sharply. 'Take a pinch out o' that box; I don't take much myself, for it comes dear, but I find it wakes me up sometimes, and ye're but a boy to me. I should have a son pretty nigh as old as you if he'd lived, but they listed him for a so'ger—he come back home though, for all he had but one poor leg. He always said he'd be buried near the sun-dial he used to climb upon when he was a baby, did my poor boy, and his words come true—you can see the place with your own eyes; we've kept the turf up, ever since.'

He shook his head, and looking at his daughter with watery eyes, said she needn't be afraid that he was going to talk about that, any more. He didn't wish to trouble nobody, and if he had troubled anybody by what he said, he asked pardon, that was all.

The milk arrived, and the child producing her little basket, and selecting its best fragments for her grandfather, they made a hearty meal. The furniture of the room was very homely of course—a few rough chairs and a table, a corner cupboard with their little stock of crockery and delf, a gaudy tea-tray, representing a lady in bright red, walking out with a very blue parasol, a few common, coloured scripture subjects in frames upon the wall and chimney, an old dwarf clothes-press and an eight-day clock, with a few bright saucepans and a kettle, comprised the whole. But everything was clean and neat, and as the child glanced round, she felt a tranquil air of comfort and content to which she had long been unaccustomed.

'How far is it to any town or village?' she asked of the husband.

'A matter of good five mile, my dear,' was the reply, 'but you're not going on to-night?'

'Yes, yes, Nell,' said the old man hastily, urging her too by signs. 'Further on, further on, darling, further away if we walk till midnight.'

'There's a good barn hard by, master,' said the man, 'or there's travellers' lodging, I know, at the Plow an' Harrer. Excuse me, but you do seem a little tired, and unless you're very anxious to get on—'

'Yes, yes, we are,' returned the old man fretfully. 'Further away, dear Nell, pray further away.'

'We must go on, indeed,' said the child, yielding to his restless wish. 'We thank you very much, but we cannot stop so soon. I'm quite ready, grandfather.'

But the woman had observed, from the young wanderer's gait, that one of her little feet was blistered and sore, and being a woman and a mother too, she would not suffer her to go until she had washed the place and applied some simple remedy, which she did so carefully and with such a gentle hand—rough-grained and hard though it was, with work—that the child's heart was too full to admit of her saying more than a fervent 'God bless you!' nor could she look back nor trust herself to speak, until they had left the cottage some distance behind. When she turned her head, she saw that the whole family, even the old grandfather, were standing in the road watching them as they went, and so, with many waves of the hand, and cheering nods, and on one side at least not without tears, they parted company.

They trudged forward, more slowly and painfully than they had done yet, for another mile or thereabouts, when they heard the sound of wheels behind them, and looking round observed an empty cart approaching pretty briskly. The driver on coming up to them stopped his horse and looked earnestly at Nell.

'Didn't you stop to rest at a cottage yonder?' he said.

'Yes, sir,' replied the child.

'Ah! They asked me to look out for you,' said the man. 'I'm going your way. Give me your hand—jump up, master.'

This was a great relief, for they were very much fatigued and could scarcely crawl along. To them the jolting cart was a luxurious carriage, and the ride the most delicious in the world. Nell had scarcely settled herself on a little heap of straw in one corner, when she fell asleep, for the first time that day.

She was awakened by the stopping of the cart, which was about to turn up a bye-lane. The driver kindly got down to help her out, and pointing to some trees at a very short distance before them, said that the town lay there, and that they had better take the path which they would see leading through the churchyard. Accordingly, towards this spot, they directed their weary steps.

CHAPTER 16

The sun was setting when they reached the wicket-gate at which the path began, and, as the rain falls upon the just and unjust alike, it shed its warm tint even upon the resting-places of the dead, and bade them be of good hope for its rising on the morrow. The church was old and grey, with ivy clinging to the walls, and round the porch. Shunning the tombs, it crept about the mounds, beneath which slept poor humble men: twining for them the first wreaths they had ever won, but wreaths less liable to wither and far more lasting in their kind, than some which were graven deep in stone and marble, and told in pompous terms of virtues meekly hidden for many a year, and only revealed at last to executors and mourning legatees.

The clergyman's horse, stumbling with a dull blunt sound among the graves, was cropping the grass; at once deriving orthodox consolation from the dead parishioners, and enforcing last Sunday's text that this was what all flesh came to; a lean ass who had sought to expound it also, without being qualified and ordained, was pricking his ears in an empty pound hard by, and looking with hungry eyes upon his priestly neighbour.

The old man and the child quitted the gravel path, and strayed among the tombs; for there the ground was soft, and easy to their tired feet. As they passed behind the church, they heard voices near at hand, and presently came on those who had spoken.

They were two men who were seated in easy attitudes upon the grass, and so busily engaged as to be at first unconscious of intruders. It was not difficult to divine that they were of a class of itinerant showmen—exhibitors of the freaks of Punch—for, perched cross-legged upon a tombstone behind them, was a figure of that hero himself, his nose and chin as hooked and his face as beaming as usual. Perhaps his imperturbable character was never more strikingly developed, for he preserved his usual equable smile notwithstanding that his body was dangling in a most uncomfortable position, all loose and limp and shapeless, while his long peaked cap, unequally balanced against his exceedingly slight legs, threatened every instant to bring him toppling down.

In part scattered upon the ground at the feet of the two men, and in part jumbled together in a long flat box, were the other persons of the Drama. The hero's wife and one child, the hobby-horse, the doctor, the foreign gentleman who not being familiar with the language is unable in the representation to express his ideas otherwise than by the utterance of the word 'Shallabalah' three distinct times, the radical neighbour who will by no means admit that a tin bell is an organ, the executioner, and the devil, were all here. Their owners had evidently come to that spot to make some needful repairs in the stage arrangements, for one of them was engaged in binding together a small gallows with thread, while the other was intent upon fixing a new black wig, with the aid of a small hammer and some tacks, upon the head of the radical neighbour, who had been beaten bald.

They raised their eyes when the old man and his young companion were close upon them, and pausing in their work, returned their looks of curiosity. One of them, the actual exhibitor no doubt, was a little merry-faced man with a twinkling eye and a red nose, who seemed to have unconsciously imbibed something of his hero's character. The other—that was he who took the money—had rather a careful and cautious look, which was perhaps inseparable from his occupation also.

The merry man was the first to greet the strangers with a nod; and following the old man's eyes, he observed that perhaps that was the first time he had ever seen a Punch off the stage. (Punch, it may be remarked, seemed to be pointing with the tip of his cap to a most flourishing epitaph, and to be chuckling over it with all his heart.)

'Why do you come here to do this?' said the old man, sitting down beside them, and looking at the figures with extreme delight.

'Why you see,' rejoined the little man, 'we're putting up for to-night at the public-house yonder, and it wouldn't do to let 'em see the present company undergoing repair.'

'No!' cried the old man, making signs to Nell to listen, 'why not, eh? why not?'

'Because it would destroy all the delusion, and take away all the interest, wouldn't it?' replied the little man. 'Would you care a ha'penny for the Lord Chancellor if you know'd him in private and without his wig?—certainly not.'

'Good!' said the old man, venturing to touch one of the puppets, and drawing away his hand with a shrill laugh. 'Are you going to show 'em to-night? are you?'

'That is the intention, governor,' replied the other, 'and unless I'm much mistaken, Tommy Codlin is a calculating at this minute what we've lost through your coming upon us. Cheer up, Tommy, it can't be much.'

The little man accompanied these latter words with a wink, expressive of the estimate he had formed of the travellers' finances.

To this Mr Codlin, who had a surly, grumbling manner, replied, as he twitched Punch off the tombstone and flung him into the box, 'I don't care if we haven't lost a farden, but you're too free. If you stood in front of the curtain and see the public's faces as I do, you'd know human natur' better.'

'Ah! it's been the spoiling of you, Tommy, your taking to that branch,' rejoined his companion. 'When you played the ghost in the reg'lar drama in the fairs, you believed in everything—except ghosts. But now you're a universal mistruster. I never see a man so changed.'

'Never mind,' said Mr Codlin, with the air of a discontented philosopher. 'I know better now, and p'raps I'm sorry for it.'

Turning over the figures in the box like one who knew and despised them, Mr Codlin drew one forth and held it up for the inspection of his friend:

'Look here; here's all this judy's clothes falling to pieces again. You haven't got a needle and thread I suppose?'

The little man shook his head, and scratched it ruefully as he contemplated this severe indisposition of a principal performer. Seeing that they were at a loss, the child said timidly:

'I have a needle, Sir, in my basket, and thread too. Will you let me try to mend it for you? I think I could do it neater than you could.'

Even Mr Codlin had nothing to urge against a proposal so seasonable. Nelly, kneeling down beside the box, was soon busily engaged in her task, and accomplishing it to a miracle.

While she was thus engaged, the merry little man looked at her with an interest which did not appear to be diminished when he glanced at her helpless companion. When she had finished her work he thanked her, and inquired whither they were travelling.

'N—no further to-night, I think,' said the child, looking towards her grandfather.

'If you're wanting a place to stop at,' the man remarked, 'I should advise you to take up at the same house with us. That's it. The long, low, white house there. It's very cheap.'

The old man, notwithstanding his fatigue, would have remained in the churchyard all night if his new acquaintances had remained there too. As he yielded to this suggestion a ready and rapturous assent, they all rose and walked away together; he keeping close to the box of puppets in which he was quite absorbed, the merry little man carrying it slung over his arm by a strap attached to it for the purpose, Nelly having hold of her grandfather's hand, and Mr Codlin sauntering slowly behind, casting up at the church tower and neighbouring trees such looks as he was accustomed in town-practice to direct to drawing-room and nursery windows, when seeking for a profitable spot on which to plant the show.

The public-house was kept by a fat old landlord and landlady who made no objection to receiving their new guests, but praised Nelly's beauty and were at once prepossessed in her behalf. There was no other company in the kitchen but the two showmen, and the child felt very thankful that they had fallen upon such good quarters. The landlady was very much astonished to learn that they had come all the way from London, and appeared to have no little curiosity touching their farther destination. The child parried her inquiries as well as she could, and with no great trouble, for finding that they appeared to give her pain, the old lady desisted.

'These two gentlemen have ordered supper in an hour's time,' she said, taking her into the bar; 'and your best plan will be to sup with them. Meanwhile you shall have a little taste of something that'll do you good, for I'm sure you must want it after all you've gone through to-day. Now, don't look after the old gentleman, because when you've drank that, he shall have some too.'

As nothing could induce the child to leave him alone, however, or to touch anything in which he was not the first and greatest sharer, the old lady was obliged to help him first. When they had been thus refreshed, the whole house hurried away into an empty stable where the show stood, and where, by the light of a few flaring candles stuck round a hoop which hung by a line from the ceiling, it was to be forthwith exhibited.

And now Mr Thomas Codlin, the misanthrope, after blowing away at the Pan's pipes until he was intensely wretched, took his station on one side of the checked drapery which concealed the mover of the figures, and putting his hands in his pockets prepared to reply to all questions and remarks of Punch, and to make a dismal feint of being his most intimate private friend, of believing in him to the fullest and most unlimited extent, of knowing that he enjoyed day and night a merry and glorious existence in that temple, and that he was at all times and under every circumstance the same intelligent and joyful person that the spectators then beheld him. All this Mr Codlin did with the air of a man who had made up his mind for the worst and was quite resigned; his eye slowly wandering about during the briskest repartee to observe the effect upon the audience, and particularly the impression made upon the landlord and landlady, which might be productive of very important results in connexion with the supper.

Upon this head, however, he had no cause for any anxiety, for the whole performance was applauded to the echo, and voluntary contributions were showered in with a liberality which testified yet more strongly to the general delight. Among the laughter none was more loud and frequent than the old man's. Nell's was unheard, for she, poor child, with her head drooping on his shoulder, had fallen asleep, and slept too soundly to be roused by any of his efforts to awaken her to a participation in his glee.

The supper was very good, but she was too tired to eat, and yet would not leave the old man until she had kissed him in his bed. He, happily insensible to every care and anxiety, sat listening with a vacant smile and admiring face to all that his new friend said; and it was not until they retired yawning to their room, that he followed the child up stairs.

It was but a loft partitioned into two compartments, where they were to rest, but they were well pleased with their lodging and had hoped for none so good. The old man was uneasy when he had lain down, and begged that Nell would come and sit at his bedside as she had done for so many nights. She hastened to him, and sat there till he slept.

There was a little window, hardly more than a chink in the wall, in her room, and when she left him, she opened it, quite wondering at the silence. The sight of the old church, and the graves about it in the moonlight, and the dark trees whispering among themselves, made her more thoughtful than before. She closed the window again, and sitting down upon the bed, thought of the life that was before them.

She had a little money, but it was very little, and when that was gone, they must begin to beg. There was one piece of gold among it, and an emergency might come when its worth to them would be increased a hundred fold. It would be best to hide this coin, and never produce it unless their case was absolutely desperate, and no other resource was left them.

Her resolution taken, she sewed the piece of gold into her dress, and going to bed with a lighter heart sunk into a deep slumber.

CHAPTER 17

Another bright day shining in through the small casement, and claiming fellowship with the kindred eyes of the child, awoke her. At sight of the strange room and its unaccustomed objects she started up in alarm, wondering how she had been moved from the familiar chamber in which she seemed to have fallen asleep last night, and whither she had been conveyed. But, another glance around called to her mind all that had lately passed, and she sprung from her bed, hoping and trustful.

It was yet early, and the old man being still asleep, she walked out into the churchyard, brushing the dew from the long grass with her feet, and often turning aside into places where it grew longer than in others, that she might not tread upon the graves. She felt a curious kind of pleasure in lingering among these houses of the dead, and read the inscriptions on the tombs of the good people (a great number of good people were buried there), passing on from one to another with increasing interest.

It was a very quiet place, as such a place should be, save for the cawing of the rooks who had built their nests among the branches of some tall old trees, and were calling to one another, high up in the air. First, one sleek bird, hovering near his ragged house as it swung and dangled in the wind, uttered his hoarse cry, quite by chance as it would seem, and in a sober tone as though he were but talking to himself. Another answered, and he called again, but louder than before; then another spoke and then another; and each time the first, aggravated by contradiction, insisted on his case more strongly. Other voices, silent till now, struck in from boughs lower down and higher up and midway, and to the right and left, and from the tree-tops; and others, arriving hastily from the grey church turrets and old belfry window, joined the clamour which rose and fell, and swelled and dropped again, and still went on; and all this noisy contention amidst a skimming to and fro, and lighting on fresh branches, and frequent change of place, which satirised the old restlessness of those who lay so still beneath the moss and turf below, and the strife in which they had worn away their lives.

Frequently raising her eyes to the trees whence these sounds came down, and feeling as though they made the place more quiet than perfect silence would have done, the child loitered from grave to grave, now stopping to replace with careful hands the bramble which had started from some green mound it helped to keep in shape, and now peeping through one of the low latticed windows into the church, with its worm-eaten books upon the desks, and baize of whitened-green mouldering from the pew sides and leaving the naked wood to view. There were the seats where the poor old people sat, worn spare, and yellow like themselves; the rugged font where children had their names, the homely altar where they knelt in after life, the plain black tressels that bore their weight on their last visit to the cool old shady church. Everything told of long use and quiet slow decay; the very bell-rope in the porch was frayed into a fringe, and hoary with old age.

She was looking at a humble stone which told of a young man who had died at twenty-three years old, fifty-five years ago, when she heard a faltering step approaching, and looking round saw a feeble woman bent with the weight of years, who tottered to the foot of that same grave and asked her to read the writing on the stone. The old woman thanked her when she had done, saying that she had had the words by heart for many a long, long year, but could not see them now.

'Were you his mother?' said the child.

'I was his wife, my dear.'

She the wife of a young man of three-and-twenty! Ah, true! It was fifty-five years ago.

'You wonder to hear me say that,' remarked the old woman, shaking her head. 'You're not the first. Older folk than you have wondered at the same thing before now. Yes, I was his wife. Death doesn't change us more than life, my dear.'

'Do you come here often?' asked the child.

'I sit here very often in the summer time,' she answered, 'I used to come here once to cry and mourn, but that was a weary while ago, bless God!'

'I pluck the daisies as they grow, and take them home,' said the old woman after a short silence. 'I like no flowers so well as these, and haven't for five-and-fifty years. It's a long time, and I'm getting very old.'

Then growing garrulous upon a theme which was new to one listener though it were but a child, she told her how she had wept and moaned and prayed to die herself, when this happened; and how when she first came to that place, a young creature strong in love and grief, she had hoped that her heart was breaking as it seemed to be. But that time passed by, and although she continued to be sad when she came there, still she could bear to come, and so went on until it was pain no longer, but a solemn pleasure, and a duty she had learned to like. And now that five-and-fifty years were gone, she spoke of the dead man as if he had been her son or grandson, with a kind of pity for his youth, growing out of her own old age, and an exalting of his strength and manly beauty as compared with her own weakness and decay; and yet she spoke about him as her husband too, and thinking of herself in connexion with him, as she used to be and not as she was now, talked of their meeting in another world, as if he were dead but yesterday, and she, separated from her former self, were thinking of the happiness of that comely girl who seemed to have died with him.

The child left her gathering the flowers that grew upon the grave, and thoughtfully retraced her steps.

The old man was by this time up and dressed. Mr Codlin, still doomed to contemplate the harsh realities of existence, was packing among his linen the candle-ends which had been saved from the previous night's performance; while his companion received the compliments of all the loungers in the stable-yard, who, unable to separate him from the master-mind of Punch, set him down as next in importance to that merry outlaw, and loved him scarcely less. When he had sufficiently acknowledged his popularity he came in to breakfast, at which meal they all sat down together.

'And where are you going to-day?' said the little man, addressing himself to Nell.

'Indeed I hardly know—we have not determined yet,' replied the child.

'We're going on to the races,' said the little man. 'If that's your way and you like to have us for company, let us travel together. If you prefer going alone, only say the word and you'll find that we shan't trouble you.'

'We'll go with you,' said the old man. 'Nell—with them, with them.'

The child considered for a moment, and reflecting that she must shortly beg, and could scarcely hope to do so at a better place than where crowds of rich ladies and gentlemen were assembled together for purposes of enjoyment and festivity, determined to accompany these men so far. She therefore thanked the little man for his offer, and said, glancing timidly towards his friend, that if there was no objection to their accompanying them as far as the race town—

'Objection!' said the little man. 'Now be gracious for once, Tommy, and say that you'd rather they went with us. I know you would. Be gracious, Tommy.'

'Trotters,' said Mr Codlin, who talked very slowly and ate very greedily, as is not uncommon with philosophers and misanthropes; 'you're too free.'

'Why what harm can it do?' urged the other. 'No harm at all in this particular case, perhaps,' replied Mr Codlin; 'but the principle's a dangerous one, and you're too free I tell you.'

'Well, are they to go with us or not?'

'Yes, they are,' said Mr Codlin; 'but you might have made a favour of it, mightn't you?'

The real name of the little man was Harris, but it had gradually merged into the less euphonious one of Trotters, which, with the prefatory adjective, Short, had been conferred upon him by reason of the small size of his legs. Short Trotters however, being a compound name, inconvenient of use in friendly dialogue, the gentleman on whom it had been bestowed was known among his intimates either as 'Short,' or 'Trotters,' and was seldom accosted at full length as Short Trotters, except in formal conversations and on occasions of ceremony.

Short, then, or Trotters, as the reader pleases, returned unto the remonstrance of his friend Mr Thomas Codlin a jocose answer calculated to turn aside his discontent; and applying himself with great relish to the cold boiled beef, the tea, and bread and butter, strongly impressed upon his companions that they should do the like. Mr Codlin indeed required no such persuasion, as he had already eaten as much as he could possibly carry and was now moistening his clay with strong ale, whereof he took deep draughts with a silent relish and invited nobody to partake—thus again strongly indicating his misanthropical turn of mind.

Breakfast being at length over, Mr Codlin called the bill, and charging the ale to the company generally (a practice also savouring of misanthropy) divided the sum-total into two fair and equal parts, assigning one moiety to himself and friend, and the other to Nelly and her grandfather. These being duly discharged and all things ready for their departure, they took farewell of the landlord and landlady and resumed their journey.

And here Mr Codlin's false position in society and the effect it wrought upon his wounded spirit, were strongly illustrated; for whereas he had been last night accosted by Mr Punch as 'master,' and had by inference left the audience to understand that he maintained that individual for his own luxurious entertainment and delight, here he was, now, painfully walking beneath the burden of that same Punch's temple, and bearing it bodily upon his shoulders on a sultry day and along a dusty road. In place of enlivening his patron with a constant fire of wit or the cheerful rattle of his quarter-staff on the heads of his relations and acquaintance, here was that beaming Punch utterly devoid of spine, all slack and drooping in a dark box, with his legs doubled up round his neck, and not one of his social qualities remaining.

Mr Codlin trudged heavily on, exchanging a word or two at intervals with Short, and stopping to rest and growl occasionally. Short led the way; with the flat box, the private luggage (which was not extensive) tied up in a bundle, and a brazen trumpet slung from his shoulder-blade. Nell and her grandfather walked next him on either hand, and Thomas Codlin brought up the rear.

When they came to any town or village, or even to a detached house of good appearance, Short blew a blast upon the brazen trumpet and carolled a fragment of a song in that hilarious tone common to Punches and their consorts. If people hurried to the windows, Mr Codlin pitched the temple, and hastily unfurling the drapery and concealing Short therewith, flourished hysterically on the pipes and performed an air. Then the entertainment began as soon as might be; Mr Codlin having the responsibility of deciding on its length and of protracting or expediting the time for the hero's final triumph over the enemy of mankind, according as he judged that the after-crop of half-pence would be plentiful or scant. When it had been gathered in to the last farthing, he resumed his load and on they went again.

Sometimes they played out the toll across a bridge or ferry, and once exhibited by particular desire at a turnpike, where the collector, being drunk in his solitude, paid down a shilling to have it to himself. There was one small place of rich promise in which their hopes were blighted, for a favourite character in the play having gold-lace upon his coat and being a meddling wooden-headed fellow was held to be a libel on the beadle, for which reason the authorities enforced a quick retreat; but they were generally well received, and seldom left a town without a troop of ragged children shouting at their heels.

They made a long day's journey, despite these interruptions, and were yet upon the road when the moon was shining in the sky. Short beguiled the time with songs and jests, and made the best of everything that happened. Mr Codlin on the other hand, cursed his fate, and all the hollow things of earth (but Punch especially), and limped along with the theatre on his back, a prey to the bitterest chagrin.

They had stopped to rest beneath a finger-post where four roads met, and Mr Codlin in his deep misanthropy had let down the drapery and seated himself in the bottom of the show, invisible to mortal eyes and disdainful of the company of his fellow creatures, when two monstrous shadows were seen stalking towards them from a turning in the road by which they had come. The child was at first quite terrified by the sight of these gaunt giants—for such they looked as they advanced with lofty strides beneath the shadow of the trees—but Short, telling her there was nothing to fear, blew a blast upon the trumpet, which was answered by a cheerful shout.

'It's Grinder's lot, an't it?' cried Mr Short in a loud key.

'Yes,' replied a couple of shrill voices.

'Come on then,' said Short. 'Let's have a look at you. I thought it was you.'

Thus invited, 'Grinder's lot' approached with redoubled speed and soon came up with the little party.

Mr Grinder's company, familiarly termed a lot, consisted of a young gentleman and a young lady on stilts, and Mr Grinder himself, who used his natural legs for pedestrian purposes and carried at his back a drum. The public costume of the young people was of the Highland kind, but the night being damp and cold, the young gentleman wore over his kilt a man's pea jacket reaching to his ankles, and a glazed hat; the young lady too was muffled in an old cloth pelisse and had a handkerchief tied about her head. Their Scotch bonnets, ornamented with plumes of jet black feathers, Mr Grinder carried on his instrument.

'Bound for the races, I see,' said Mr Grinder coming up out of breath. 'So are we. How are you, Short?' With that they shook hands in a very friendly manner. The young people being too high up for the ordinary salutations, saluted Short after their own fashion. The young gentleman twisted up his right stilt and patted him on the shoulder, and the young lady rattled her tambourine.

'Practice?' said Short, pointing to the stilts.

'No,' returned Grinder. 'It comes either to walkin' in 'em or carryin' of 'em, and they like walkin' in 'em best. It's wery pleasant for the prospects. Which road are you takin'? We go the nighest.'

'Why, the fact is,' said Short, 'that we are going the longest way, because then we could stop for the night, a mile and a half on. But three or four mile gained to-night is so many saved to-morrow, and if you keep on, I think our best way is to do the same.'

'Where's your partner?' inquired Grinder.

'Here he is,' cried Mr Thomas Codlin, presenting his head and face in the proscenium of the stage, and exhibiting an expression of countenance not often seen there; 'and he'll see his partner boiled alive before he'll go on to-night. That's what he says.'

'Well, don't say such things as them, in a spear which is dewoted to something pleasanter,' urged Short. 'Respect associations, Tommy, even if you do cut up rough.'

'Rough or smooth,' said Mr Codlin, beating his hand on the little footboard where Punch, when suddenly struck with the symmetry of his legs and their capacity for silk stockings, is accustomed to exhibit them to popular admiration, 'rough or smooth, I won't go further than the mile and a half to-night. I put up at the Jolly Sandboys and nowhere else. If you like to come there, come there. If you like to go on by yourself, go on by yourself, and do without me if you can.'

So saying, Mr Codlin disappeared from the scene and immediately presented himself outside the theatre, took it on his shoulders at a jerk, and made off with most remarkable agility.

Any further controversy being now out of the question, Short was fain to part with Mr Grinder and his pupils and to follow his morose companion. After lingering at the finger-post for a few minutes to see the stilts frisking away in the moonlight and the bearer of the drum toiling slowly after them, he blew a few notes upon the trumpet as a parting salute, and hastened with all speed to follow Mr Codlin. With this view he gave his unoccupied hand to Nell, and bidding her be of good cheer as they would soon be at the end of their journey for that night, and stimulating the old man with a similar assurance, led them at a pretty swift pace towards their destination, which he was the less unwilling to make for, as the moon was now overcast and the clouds were threatening rain.

CHAPTER 18

The Jolly Sandboys was a small road-side inn of pretty ancient date, with a sign, representing three Sandboys increasing their jollity with as many jugs of ale and bags of gold, creaking and swinging on its post on the opposite side of the road. As the travellers had observed that day many indications of their drawing nearer and nearer to the race town, such as gipsy camps, carts laden with gambling booths and their appurtenances, itinerant showmen of various kinds, and beggars and trampers of every degree, all wending their way in the same direction, Mr Codlin was fearful of finding the accommodations forestalled; this fear increasing as he diminished the distance between himself and the hostelry, he quickened his pace, and notwithstanding the burden he had to carry, maintained a round trot until he reached the threshold. Here he had the gratification of finding that his fears were without foundation, for the landlord was leaning against the door-post looking lazily at the rain, which had by this time begun to descend heavily, and no tinkling of cracked bell, nor boisterous shout, nor noisy chorus, gave note of company within.

'All alone?' said Mr Codlin, putting down his burden and wiping his forehead.

'All alone as yet,' rejoined the landlord, glancing at the sky, 'but we shall have more company to-night I expect. Here one of you boys, carry that show into the barn. Make haste in out of the wet, Tom; when it came on to rain I told 'em to make the fire up, and there's a glorious blaze in the kitchen, I can tell you.'

Mr Codlin followed with a willing mind, and soon found that the landlord had not commended his preparations without good reason. A mighty fire was blazing on the hearth and roaring up the wide chimney with a cheerful sound, which a large iron cauldron, bubbling and simmering in the heat, lent its pleasant aid to swell. There was a deep red ruddy blush upon the room, and when the landlord stirred the fire, sending the flames skipping and leaping up—when he took off the lid of the iron pot and there rushed out a savoury smell, while the bubbling sound grew deeper and more rich, and an unctuous steam came floating out, hanging in a delicious mist above their heads—when he did this, Mr Codlin's heart was touched. He sat down in the chimney-corner and smiled.

Mr Codlin sat smiling in the chimney-corner, eyeing the landlord as with a roguish look he held the cover in his hand, and, feigning that his doing so was needful to the welfare of the cookery, suffered the delightful steam to tickle the nostrils of his guest. The glow of the fire was upon the landlord's bald head, and upon his twinkling eye, and upon his watering mouth, and upon his pimpled face, and upon his round fat figure. Mr Codlin drew his sleeve across his lips, and said in a murmuring voice, 'What is it?'

'It's a stew of tripe,' said the landlord smacking his lips, 'and cow-heel,' smacking them again, 'and bacon,' smacking them once more, 'and steak,' smacking them for the fourth time, 'and peas, cauliflowers, new potatoes, and sparrow-grass, all working up together in one delicious gravy.' Having come to the climax, he smacked his lips a great many times, and taking a long hearty sniff of the fragrance that was hovering about, put on the cover again with the air of one whose toils on earth were over.

'At what time will it be ready?' asked Mr Codlin faintly.

'It'll be done to a turn,' said the landlord looking up to the clock—and the very clock had a colour in its fat white face, and looked a clock for jolly Sandboys to consult—'it'll be done to a turn at twenty-two minutes before eleven.'

'Then,' said Mr Codlin, 'fetch me a pint of warm ale, and don't let nobody bring into the room even so much as a biscuit till the time arrives.'

Nodding his approval of this decisive and manly course of procedure, the landlord retired to draw the beer, and presently returning with it, applied himself to warm the same in a small tin vessel shaped funnel-wise, for the convenience of sticking it far down in the fire and getting at the bright places. This was soon done, and he handed it over to Mr Codlin with that creamy froth upon the surface which is one of the happy circumstances attendant on mulled malt.

Greatly softened by this soothing beverage, Mr Codlin now bethought him of his companions, and acquainted mine host of the Sandboys that their arrival might be shortly looked for. The rain was rattling against the windows and pouring down in torrents, and such was Mr Codlin's extreme amiability of mind, that he more than once expressed his earnest hope that they would not be so foolish as to get wet.

At length they arrived, drenched with the rain and presenting a most miserable appearance, notwithstanding that Short had sheltered the child as well as he could under the skirts of his own coat, and they were nearly breathless from the haste they had made. But their steps were no sooner heard upon the road than the landlord, who had been at the outer door anxiously watching for their coming, rushed into the kitchen and took the cover off. The effect was electrical. They all came in with smiling faces though the wet was dripping from their clothes upon the floor, and Short's first remark was, 'What a delicious smell!'

It is not very difficult to forget rain and mud by the side of a cheerful fire, and in a bright room. They were furnished with slippers and such dry garments as the house or their own bundles afforded, and ensconcing themselves, as Mr Codlin had already done, in the warm chimney-corner, soon forgot their late troubles or only remembered them as enhancing the delights of the present time. Overpowered by the warmth and comfort and the fatigue they had undergone, Nelly and the old man had not long taken their seats here, when they fell asleep.

'Who are they?' whispered the landlord. Short shook his head, and wished he knew himself. 'Don't you know?' asked the host, turning to Mr Codlin. 'Not I,' he replied. 'They're no good, I suppose.'

'They're no harm,' said Short. 'Depend upon that. I tell you what—it's plain that the old man an't in his right mind—'

'If you haven't got anything newer than that to say,' growled Mr Codlin, glancing at the clock, 'you'd better let us fix our minds upon the supper, and not disturb us.'

'Here me out, won't you?' retorted his friend. 'It's very plain to me, besides, that they're not used to this way of life. Don't tell me that that handsome child has been in the habit of prowling about as she's done these last two or three days. I know better.'

'Well, who DOES tell you she has?' growled Mr Codlin, again glancing at the clock and from it to the cauldron, 'can't you think of anything more suitable to present circumstances than saying things and then contradicting 'em?'

'I wish somebody would give you your supper,' returned Short, 'for there'll be no peace till you've got it. Have you seen how anxious the old man is to get on—always wanting to be furder away—furder away. Have you seen that?'

'Ah! what then?' muttered Thomas Codlin.

'This, then,' said Short. 'He has given his friends the slip. Mind what I say—he has given his friends the slip, and persuaded this delicate young creetur all along of her fondness for him to be his guide and travelling companion—where to, he knows no more than the man in the moon. Now I'm not a going to stand that.'

'YOU'RE not a going to stand that!' cried Mr Codlin, glancing at the clock again and pulling his hair with both hands in a kind of frenzy, but whether occasioned by his companion's observation or the tardy pace of Time, it was difficult to determine. 'Here's a world to live in!'

'I,' repeated Short emphatically and slowly, 'am not a-going to stand it. I am not a-going to see this fair young child a falling into bad hands, and getting among people that she's no more fit for, than they are to get among angels as their ordinary chums. Therefore when they dewelope an intention of parting company from us, I shall take measures for detaining of 'em, and restoring 'em to their friends, who I dare say have had their disconsolation pasted up on every wall in London by this time.'

'Short,' said Mr Codlin, who with his head upon his hands, and his elbows on his knees, had been shaking himself impatiently from side to side up to this point and occasionally stamping on the ground, but who now looked up with eager eyes; 'it's possible that there may be uncommon good sense in what you've said. If there is, and there should be a reward, Short, remember that we're partners in everything!'

His companion had only time to nod a brief assent to this position, for the child awoke at the instant. They had drawn close together during the previous whispering, and now hastily separated and were rather awkwardly endeavouring to exchange some casual remarks in their usual tone, when strange footsteps were heard without, and fresh company entered.

These were no other than four very dismal dogs, who came pattering in one after the other, headed by an old bandy dog of particularly mournful aspect, who, stopping when the last of his followers had got as far as the door, erected himself upon his hind legs and looked round at his companions, who immediately stood upon their hind legs, in a grave and melancholy row. Nor was this the only remarkable circumstance about these dogs, for each of them wore a kind of little coat of some gaudy colour trimmed with tarnished spangles, and one of them had a cap upon his head, tied very carefully under his chin, which had fallen down upon his nose and completely obscured one eye; add to this, that the gaudy coats were all wet through and discoloured with rain, and that the wearers were splashed and dirty, and some idea may be formed of the unusual appearance of these new visitors to the Jolly Sandboys.

Neither Short nor the landlord nor Thomas Codlin, however, was in the least surprised, merely remarking that these were Jerry's dogs and that Jerry could not be far behind. So there the dogs stood, patiently winking and gaping and looking extremely hard at the boiling pot, until Jerry himself appeared, when they all dropped down at once and walked about the room in their natural manner. This posture it must be confessed did not much improve their appearance, as their own personal tails and their coat tails—both capital things in their way—did not agree together.

Jerry, the manager of these dancing dogs, was a tall black-whiskered man in a velveteen coat, who seemed well known to the landlord and his guests and accosted them with great cordiality. Disencumbering himself of a barrel organ which he placed upon a chair, and retaining in his hand a small whip wherewith to awe his company of comedians, he came up to the fire to dry himself, and entered into conversation.

'Your people don't usually travel in character, do they?' said Short, pointing to the dresses of the dogs. 'It must come expensive if they do?'

'No,' replied Jerry, 'no, it's not the custom with us. But we've been playing a little on the road to-day, and we come out with a new wardrobe at the races, so I didn't think it worth while to stop to undress. Down, Pedro!'

This was addressed to the dog with the cap on, who being a new member of the company, and not quite certain of his duty, kept his unobscured eye anxiously on his master, and was perpetually starting upon his hind legs when there was no occasion, and falling down again.

'I've got a animal here,' said Jerry, putting his hand into the capacious pocket of his coat, and diving into one corner as if he were feeling for a small orange or an apple or some such article, 'a animal here, wot I think you know something of, Short.'

'Ah!' cried Short, 'let's have a look at him.'

'Here he is,' said Jerry, producing a little terrier from his pocket. 'He was once a Toby of yours, warn't he!'

In some versions of the great drama of Punch there is a small dog—a modern innovation—supposed to be the private property of that gentleman, whose name is always Toby. This Toby has been stolen in youth from another gentleman, and fraudulently sold to the confiding hero, who having no guile himself has no suspicion that it lurks in others; but Toby, entertaining a grateful recollection of his old master, and scorning to attach himself to any new patrons, not only refuses to smoke a pipe at the bidding of Punch, but to mark his old fidelity more strongly, seizes him by the nose and wrings the same with violence, at which instance of canine attachment the spectators are deeply affected. This was the character which the little terrier in question had once sustained; if there had been any doubt upon the subject he would speedily have resolved it by his conduct; for not only did he, on seeing Short, give the strongest tokens of recognition, but catching sight of the flat box he barked so furiously at the pasteboard nose which he knew was inside, that his master was obliged to gather him up and put him into his pocket again, to the great relief of the whole company.

The landlord now busied himself in laying the cloth, in which process Mr Codlin obligingly assisted by setting forth his own knife and fork in the most convenient place and establishing himself behind them. When everything was ready, the landlord took off the cover for the last time, and then indeed there burst forth such a goodly promise of supper, that if he had offered to put it on again or had hinted at postponement, he would certainly have been sacrificed on his own hearth.

However, he did nothing of the kind, but instead thereof assisted a stout servant girl in turning the contents of the cauldron into a large tureen; a proceeding which the dogs, proof against various hot splashes which fell upon their noses, watched with terrible eagerness. At length the dish was lifted on the table, and mugs of ale having been previously set round, little Nell ventured to say grace, and supper began.

At this juncture the poor dogs were standing on their hind legs quite surprisingly; the child, having pity on them, was about to cast some morsels of food to them before she tasted it herself, hungry though she was, when their master interposed.

'No, my dear, no, not an atom from anybody's hand but mine if you please. That dog,' said Jerry, pointing out the old leader of the troop, and speaking in a terrible voice, 'lost a halfpenny to-day. He goes without his supper.'

The unfortunate creature dropped upon his fore-legs directly, wagged his tail, and looked imploringly at his master.

'You must be more careful, Sir,' said Jerry, walking coolly to the chair where he had placed the organ, and setting the stop. 'Come here. Now, Sir, you play away at that, while we have supper, and leave off if you dare.'

The dog immediately began to grind most mournful music. His master having shown him the whip resumed his seat and called up the others, who, at his directions, formed in a row, standing upright as a file of soldiers.

'Now, gentlemen,' said Jerry, looking at them attentively. 'The dog whose name's called, eats. The dogs whose names an't called, keep quiet. Carlo!'

The lucky individual whose name was called, snapped up the morsel thrown towards him, but none of the others moved a muscle. In this manner they were fed at the discretion of their master. Meanwhile the dog in disgrace ground hard at the organ, sometimes in quick time, sometimes in slow, but never leaving off for an instant. When the knives and forks rattled very much, or any of his fellows got an unusually large piece of fat, he accompanied the music with a short howl, but he immediately checked it on his master looking round, and applied himself with increased diligence to the Old Hundredth.

CHAPTER 19

Supper was not yet over, when there arrived at the Jolly Sandboys two more travellers bound for the same haven as the rest, who had been walking in the rain for some hours, and came in shining and heavy with water. One of these was the proprietor of a giant, and a little lady without legs or arms, who had jogged forward in a van; the other, a silent gentleman who earned his living by showing tricks upon the cards, and who had rather deranged the natural expression of his countenance by putting small leaden lozenges into his eyes and bringing them out at his mouth, which was one of his professional accomplishments. The name of the first of these newcomers was Vuffin; the other, probably as a pleasant satire upon his ugliness, was called Sweet William. To render them as comfortable as he could, the landlord bestirred himself nimbly, and in a very short time both gentlemen were perfectly at their ease.

'How's the Giant?' said Short, when they all sat smoking round the fire.

'Rather weak upon his legs,' returned Mr Vuffin. 'I begin to be afraid he's going at the knees.'

'That's a bad look-out,' said Short.

'Aye! Bad indeed,' replied Mr Vuffin, contemplating the fire with a sigh. 'Once get a giant shaky on his legs, and the public care no more about him than they do for a dead cabbage stalk.'

'What becomes of old giants?' said Short, turning to him again after a little reflection.

'They're usually kept in carawans to wait upon the dwarfs,' said Mr Vuffin.

'The maintaining of 'em must come expensive, when they can't be shown, eh?' remarked Short, eyeing him doubtfully.

'It's better that, than letting 'em go upon the parish or about the streets,' said Mr Vuffin. 'Once make a giant common and giants will never draw again. Look at wooden legs. If there was only one man with a wooden leg what a property he'd be!'

'So he would!' observed the landlord and Short both together. 'That's very true.'

'Instead of which,' pursued Mr Vuffin, 'if you was to advertise Shakspeare played entirely by wooden legs,' it's my belief you wouldn't draw a sixpence.'

'I don't suppose you would,' said Short. And the landlord said so too.

'This shows, you see,' said Mr Vuffin, waving his pipe with an argumentative air, 'this shows the policy of keeping the used-up giants still in the carawans, where they get food and lodging for nothing, all their lives, and in general very glad they are to stop there. There was one giant—a black 'un—as left his carawan some year ago and took to carrying coach-bills about London, making himself as cheap as crossing-sweepers. He died. I make no insinuation against anybody in particular,' said Mr Vuffin, looking solemnly round, 'but he was ruining the trade;—and he died.'

The landlord drew his breath hard, and looked at the owner of the dogs, who nodded and said gruffly that he remembered.

'I know you do, Jerry,' said Mr Vuffin with profound meaning. 'I know you remember it, Jerry, and the universal opinion was, that it served him right. Why, I remember the time when old Maunders as had three-and-twenty wans—I remember the time when old Maunders had in his cottage in Spa Fields in the winter time, when the season was over, eight male and female dwarfs setting down to dinner every day, who was waited on by eight old giants in green coats, red smalls, blue cotton stockings, and high-lows: and there was one dwarf as had grown elderly and wicious who whenever his giant wasn't quick enough to please him, used to stick pins in his legs, not being able to reach up any higher. I know that's a fact, for Maunders told it me himself.'

'What about the dwarfs when they get old?' inquired the landlord.

'The older a dwarf is, the better worth he is,' returned Mr Vuffin; 'a grey-headed dwarf, well wrinkled, is beyond all suspicion. But a giant weak in the legs and not standing upright!—keep him in the carawan, but never show him, never show him, for any persuasion that can be offered.'

While Mr Vuffin and his two friends smoked their pipes and beguiled the time with such conversation as this, the silent gentleman sat in a warm corner, swallowing, or seeming to swallow, sixpennyworth of halfpence for practice, balancing a feather upon his nose, and rehearsing other feats of dexterity of that kind, without paying any regard whatever to the company, who in their turn left him utterly unnoticed. At length the weary child prevailed upon her grandfather to retire, and they withdrew, leaving the company yet seated round the fire, and the dogs fast asleep at a humble distance.

After bidding the old man good night, Nell retired to her poor garret, but had scarcely closed the door, when it was gently tapped at. She opened it directly, and was a little startled by the sight of Mr Thomas Codlin, whom she had left, to all appearance, fast asleep down stairs.

'What is the matter?' said the child.

'Nothing's the matter, my dear,' returned her visitor. 'I'm your friend. Perhaps you haven't thought so, but it's me that's your friend—not him.'

'Not who?' the child inquired.

'Short, my dear. I tell you what,' said Codlin, 'for all his having a kind of way with him that you'd be very apt to like, I'm the real, open-hearted man. I mayn't look it, but I am indeed.'

The child began to be alarmed, considering that the ale had taken effect upon Mr Codlin, and that this commendation of himself was the consequence.

'Short's very well, and seems kind,' resumed the misanthrope, 'but he overdoes it. Now I don't.'

Certainly if there were any fault in Mr Codlin's usual deportment, it was that he rather underdid his kindness to those about him, than overdid it. But the child was puzzled, and could not tell what to say.

'Take my advice,' said Codlin: 'don't ask me why, but take it. As long as you travel with us, keep as near me as you can. Don't offer to leave us—not on any account—but always stick to me and say that I'm your friend. Will you bear that in mind, my dear, and always say that it was me that was your friend?'

'Say so where—and when?' inquired the child innocently.

'O, nowhere in particular,' replied Codlin, a little put out as it seemed by the question; 'I'm only anxious that you should think me so, and do me justice. You can't think what an interest I have in you. Why didn't you tell me your little history—that about you and the poor old gentleman? I'm the best adviser that ever was, and so interested in you—so much more interested than Short. I think they're breaking up down stairs; you needn't tell Short, you know, that we've had this little talk together. God bless you. Recollect the friend. Codlin's the friend, not Short. Short's very well as far as he goes, but the real friend is Codlin—not Short.'

Eking out these professions with a number of benevolent and protecting looks and great fervour of manner, Thomas Codlin stole away on tiptoe, leaving the child in a state of extreme surprise. She was still ruminating upon his curious behaviour, when the floor of the crazy stairs and landing cracked beneath the tread of the other travellers who were passing to their beds. When they had all passed, and the sound of their footsteps had died away, one of them returned, and after a little hesitation and rustling in the passage, as if he were doubtful what door to knock at, knocked at hers.

'Yes,' said the child from within.

'It's me—Short'—a voice called through the keyhole. 'I only wanted to say that we must be off early to-morrow morning, my dear, because unless we get the start of the dogs and the conjuror, the villages won't be worth a penny. You'll be sure to be stirring early and go with us? I'll call you.'

The child answered in the affirmative, and returning his 'good night' heard him creep away. She felt some uneasiness at the anxiety of these men, increased by the recollection of their whispering together down stairs and their slight confusion when she awoke, nor was she quite free from a misgiving that they were not the fittest companions she could have stumbled on. Her uneasiness, however, was nothing, weighed against her fatigue; and she soon forgot it in sleep. Very early next morning, Short fulfilled his promise, and knocking softly at her door, entreated that she would get up directly, as the proprietor of the dogs was still snoring, and if they lost no time they might get a good deal in advance both of him and the conjuror, who was talking in his sleep, and from what he could be heard to say, appeared to be balancing a donkey in his dreams. She started from her bed without delay, and roused the old man with so much expedition that they were both ready as soon as Short himself, to that gentleman's unspeakable gratification and relief.

After a very unceremonious and scrambling breakfast, of which the staple commodities were bacon and bread, and beer, they took leave of the landlord and issued from the door of the jolly Sandboys. The morning was fine and warm, the ground cool to the feet after the late rain, the hedges gayer and more green, the air clear, and everything fresh and healthful. Surrounded by these influences, they walked on pleasantly enough.

They had not gone very far, when the child was again struck by the altered behaviour of Mr Thomas Codlin, who instead of plodding on sulkily by himself as he had heretofore done, kept close to her, and when he had an opportunity of looking at her unseen by his companion, warned her by certain wry faces and jerks of the head not to put any trust in Short, but to reserve all confidences for Codlin. Neither did he confine himself to looks and gestures, for when she and her grandfather were walking on beside the aforesaid Short, and that little man was talking with his accustomed cheerfulness on a variety of indifferent subjects, Thomas Codlin testified his jealousy and distrust by following close at her heels, and occasionally admonishing her ankles with the legs of the theatre in a very abrupt and painful manner.

All these proceedings naturally made the child more watchful and suspicious, and she soon observed that whenever they halted to perform outside a village alehouse or other place, Mr Codlin while he went through his share of the entertainments kept his eye steadily upon her and the old man, or with a show of great friendship and consideration invited the latter to lean upon his arm, and so held him tight until the representation was over and they again went forward. Even Short seemed to change in this respect, and to mingle with his good-nature something of a desire to keep them in safe custody. This increased the child's misgivings, and made her yet more anxious and uneasy.

Meanwhile, they were drawing near the town where the races were to begin next day; for, from passing numerous groups of gipsies and trampers on the road, wending their way towards it, and straggling out from every by-way and cross-country lane, they gradually fell into a stream of people, some walking by the side of covered carts, others with horses, others with donkeys, others toiling on with heavy loads upon their backs, but all tending to the same point. The public-houses by the wayside, from being empty and noiseless as those in the remoter parts had been, now sent out boisterous shouts and clouds of smoke; and, from the misty windows, clusters of broad red faces looked down upon the road. On every piece of waste or common ground, some small gambler drove his noisy trade, and bellowed to the idle passersby to stop and try their chance; the crowd grew thicker and more noisy; gilt gingerbread in blanket-stalls exposed its glories to the dust; and often a four-horse carriage, dashing by, obscured all objects in the gritty cloud it raised, and left them, stunned and blinded, far behind.

It was dark before they reached the town itself, and long indeed the few last miles had been. Here all was tumult and confusion; the streets were filled with throngs of people—many strangers were there, it seemed, by the looks they cast about—the church-bells rang out their noisy peals, and flags streamed from windows and house-tops. In the large inn-yards waiters flitted to and fro and ran against each other, horses clattered on the uneven stones, carriage steps fell rattling down, and sickening smells from many dinners came in a heavy lukewarm breath upon the sense. In the smaller public-houses, fiddles with all their might and main were squeaking out the tune to staggering feet; drunken men, oblivious of the burden of their song, joined in a senseless howl, which drowned the tinkling of the feeble bell and made them savage for their drink; vagabond groups assembled round the doors to see the stroller woman dance, and add their uproar to the shrill flageolet and deafening drum.

Through this delirious scene, the child, frightened and repelled by all she saw, led on her bewildered charge, clinging close to her conductor, and trembling lest in the press she should be separated from him and left to find her way alone. Quickening their steps to get clear of all the roar and riot, they at length passed through the town and made for the race-course, which was upon an open heath, situated on an eminence, a full mile distant from its furthest bounds.

Although there were many people here, none of the best favoured or best clad, busily erecting tents and driving stakes in the ground, and hurrying to and fro with dusty feet and many a grumbled oath—although there were tired children cradled on heaps of straw between the wheels of carts, crying themselves to sleep—and poor lean horses and donkeys just turned loose, grazing among the men and women, and pots and kettles, and half-lighted fires, and ends of candles flaring and wasting in the air—for all this, the child felt it an escape from the town and drew her breath more freely. After a scanty supper, the purchase of which reduced her little stock so low, that she had only a few halfpence with which to buy a breakfast on the morrow, she and the old man lay down to rest in a corner of a tent, and slept, despite the busy preparations that were going on around them all night long.

And now they had come to the time when they must beg their bread. Soon after sunrise in the morning she stole out from the tent, and rambling into some fields at a short distance, plucked a few wild roses and such humble flowers, purposing to make them into little nosegays and offer them to the ladies in the carriages when the company arrived. Her thoughts were not idle while she was thus employed; when she returned and was seated beside the old man in one corner of the tent, tying her flowers together, while the two men lay dozing in another corner, she plucked him by the sleeve, and slightly glancing towards them, said, in a low voice—

'Grandfather, don't look at those I talk of, and don't seem as if I spoke of anything but what I am about. What was that you told me before we left the old house? That if they knew what we were going to do, they would say that you were mad, and part us?'

The old man turned to her with an aspect of wild terror; but she checked him by a look, and bidding him hold some flowers while she tied them up, and so bringing her lips closer to his ear, said—

'I know that was what you told me. You needn't speak, dear. I recollect it very well. It was not likely that I should forget it. Grandfather, these men suspect that we have secretly left our friends, and mean to carry us before some gentleman and have us taken care of and sent back. If you let your hand tremble so, we can never get away from them, but if you're only quiet now, we shall do so, easily.'

'How?' muttered the old man. 'Dear Nelly, how? They will shut me up in a stone room, dark and cold, and chain me up to the wall, Nell—flog me with whips, and never let me see thee more!'

'You're trembling again,' said the child. 'Keep close to me all day. Never mind them, don't look at them, but me. I shall find a time when we can steal away. When I do, mind you come with me, and do not stop or speak a word. Hush! That's all.'

'Halloa! what are you up to, my dear?' said Mr Codlin, raising his head, and yawning. Then observing that his companion was fast asleep, he added in an earnest whisper, 'Codlin's the friend, remember—not Short.'

'Making some nosegays,' the child replied; 'I am going to try and sell some, these three days of the races. Will you have one—as a present I mean?'

Mr Codlin would have risen to receive it, but the child hurried towards him and placed it in his hand. He stuck it in his buttonhole with an air of ineffable complacency for a misanthrope, and leering exultingly at the unconscious Short, muttered, as he laid himself down again, 'Tom Codlin's the friend, by G—!'

As the morning wore on, the tents assumed a gayer and more brilliant appearance, and long lines of carriages came rolling softly on the turf. Men who had lounged about all night in smock-frocks and leather leggings, came out in silken vests and hats and plumes, as jugglers or mountebanks; or in gorgeous liveries as soft-spoken servants at gambling booths; or in sturdy yeoman dress as decoys at unlawful games. Black-eyed gipsy girls, hooded in showy handkerchiefs, sallied forth to tell fortunes, and pale slender women with consumptive faces lingered upon the footsteps of ventriloquists and conjurors, and counted the sixpences with anxious eyes long before they were gained. As many of the children as could be kept within bounds, were stowed away, with all the other signs of dirt and poverty, among the donkeys, carts, and horses; and as many as could not be thus disposed of ran in and out in all intricate spots, crept between people's legs and carriage wheels, and came forth unharmed from under horses' hoofs. The dancing-dogs, the stilts, the little lady and the tall man, and all the other attractions, with organs out of number and bands innumerable, emerged from the holes and corners in which they had passed the night, and flourished boldly in the sun.

Along the uncleared course, Short led his party, sounding the brazen trumpet and revelling in the voice of Punch; and at his heels went Thomas Codlin, bearing the show as usual, and keeping his eye on Nelly and her grandfather, as they rather lingered in the rear. The child bore upon her arm the little basket with her flowers, and sometimes stopped, with timid and modest looks, to offer them at some gay carriage; but alas! there were many bolder beggars there, gipsies who promised husbands, and other adepts in their trade, and although some ladies smiled gently as they shook their heads, and others cried to the gentlemen beside them 'See, what a pretty face!' they let the pretty face pass on, and never thought that it looked tired or hungry.

There was but one lady who seemed to understand the child, and she was one who sat alone in a handsome carriage, while two young men in dashing clothes, who had just dismounted from it, talked and laughed loudly at a little distance, appearing to forget her, quite. There were many ladies all around, but they turned their backs, or looked another way, or at the two young men (not unfavourably at them), and left her to herself. She motioned away a gipsy-woman urgent to tell her fortune, saying that it was told already and had been for some years, but called the child towards her, and taking her flowers put money into her trembling hand, and bade her go home and keep at home for God's sake.

Many a time they went up and down those long, long lines, seeing everything but the horses and the race; when the bell rang to clear the course, going back to rest among the carts and donkeys, and not coming out again until the heat was over. Many a time, too, was Punch displayed in the full zenith of his humour, but all this while the eye of Thomas Codlin was upon them, and to escape without notice was impracticable.

At length, late in the day, Mr Codlin pitched the show in a convenient spot, and the spectators were soon in the very triumph of the scene. The child, sitting down with the old man close behind it, had been thinking how strange it was that horses who were such fine honest creatures should seem to make vagabonds of all the men they drew about them, when a loud laugh at some extemporaneous witticism of Mr Short's, having allusion to the circumstances of the day, roused her from her meditation and caused her to look around.

If they were ever to get away unseen, that was the very moment. Short was plying the quarter-staves vigorously and knocking the characters in the fury of the combat against the sides of the show, the people were looking on with laughing faces, and Mr Codlin had relaxed into a grim smile as his roving eye detected hands going into waistcoat pockets and groping secretly for sixpences. If they were ever to get away unseen, that was the very moment. They seized it, and fled.

They made a path through booths and carriages and throngs of people, and never once stopped to look behind. The bell was ringing and the course was cleared by the time they reached the ropes, but they dashed across it insensible to the shouts and screeching that assailed them for breaking in upon its sanctity, and creeping under the brow of the hill at a quick pace, made for the open fields.

CHAPTER 20

Day after day as he bent his steps homeward, returning from some new effort to procure employment, Kit raised his eyes to the window of the little room he had so much commended to the child, and hoped to see some indication of her presence. His own earnest wish, coupled with the assurance he had received from Quilp, filled him with the belief that she would yet arrive to claim the humble shelter he had offered, and from the death of each day's hope another hope sprung up to live to-morrow.

'I think they must certainly come to-morrow, eh mother?' said Kit, laying aside his hat with a weary air and sighing as he spoke. 'They have been gone a week. They surely couldn't stop away more than a week, could they now?'

The mother shook her head, and reminded him how often he had been disappointed already.

'For the matter of that,' said Kit, 'you speak true and sensible enough, as you always do, mother. Still, I do consider that a week is quite long enough for 'em to be rambling about; don't you say so?'

'Quite long enough, Kit, longer than enough, but they may not come back for all that.'

Kit was for a moment disposed to be vexed by this contradiction, and not the less so from having anticipated it in his own mind and knowing how just it was. But the impulse was only momentary, and the vexed look became a kind one before it had crossed the room.

'Then what do you think, mother, has become of 'em? You don't think they've gone to sea, anyhow?'

'Not gone for sailors, certainly,' returned the mother with a smile. 'But I can't help thinking that they have gone to some foreign country.'

'I say,' cried Kit with a rueful face, 'don't talk like that, mother.'

'I am afraid they have, and that's the truth,' she said. 'It's the talk of all the neighbours, and there are some even that know of their having been seen on board ship, and can tell you the name of the place they've gone to, which is more than I can, my dear, for it's a very hard one.'

'I don't believe it,' said Kit. 'Not a word of it. A set of idle chatterboxes, how should they know!'

'They may be wrong of course,' returned the mother, 'I can't tell about that, though I don't think it's at all unlikely that they're in the right, for the talk is that the old gentleman had put by a little money that nobody knew of, not even that ugly little man you talk to me about—what's his name—Quilp; and that he and Miss Nell have gone to live abroad where it can't be taken from them, and they will never be disturbed. That don't seem very far out of the way now, do it?'

Kit scratched his head mournfully, in reluctant admission that it did not, and clambering up to the old nail took down the cage and set himself to clean it and to feed the bird. His thoughts reverting from this occupation to the little old gentleman who had given him the shilling, he suddenly recollected that that was the very day—nay, nearly the very hour—at which the little old gentleman had said he should be at the Notary's house again. He no sooner remembered this, than he hung up the cage with great precipitation, and hastily explaining the nature of his errand, went off at full speed to the appointed place.

It was some two minutes after the time when he reached the spot, which was a considerable distance from his home, but by great good luck the little old gentleman had not yet arrived; at least there was no pony-chaise to be seen, and it was not likely that he had come and gone again in so short a space. Greatly relieved to find that he was not too late, Kit leant against a lamp-post to take breath, and waited the advent of the pony and his charge.

Sure enough, before long the pony came trotting round the corner of the street, looking as obstinate as pony might, and picking his steps as if he were spying about for the cleanest places, and would by no means dirty his feet or hurry himself inconveniently. Behind the pony sat the little old gentleman, and by the old gentleman's side sat the little old lady, carrying just such a nosegay as she had brought before.

The old gentleman, the old lady, the pony, and the chaise, came up the street in perfect unanimity, until they arrived within some half a dozen doors of the Notary's house, when the pony, deceived by a brass-plate beneath a tailor's knocker, came to a halt, and maintained by a sturdy silence, that that was the house they wanted.

'Now, Sir, will you ha' the goodness to go on; this is not the place,' said the old gentleman.

The pony looked with great attention into a fire-plug which was near him, and appeared to be quite absorbed in contemplating it.

'Oh dear, such a naughty Whisker!' cried the old lady. 'After being so good too, and coming along so well! I am quite ashamed of him. I don't know what we are to do with him, I really don't.'

The pony having thoroughly satisfied himself as to the nature and properties of the fire-plug, looked into the air after his old enemies the flies, and as there happened to be one of them tickling his ear at that moment he shook his head and whisked his tail, after which he appeared full of thought but quite comfortable and collected. The old gentleman having exhausted his powers of persuasion, alighted to lead him; whereupon the pony, perhaps because he held this to be a sufficient concession, perhaps because he happened to catch sight of the other brass-plate, or perhaps because he was in a spiteful humour, darted off with the old lady and stopped at the right house, leaving the old gentleman to come panting on behind.

It was then that Kit presented himself at the pony's head, and touched his hat with a smile.

'Why, bless me,' cried the old gentleman, 'the lad is here! My dear, do you see?'

'I said I'd be here, Sir,' said Kit, patting Whisker's neck. 'I hope you've had a pleasant ride, sir. He's a very nice little pony.'

'My dear,' said the old gentleman. 'This is an uncommon lad; a good lad, I'm sure.'

'I'm sure he is,' rejoined the old lady. 'A very good lad, and I am sure he is a good son.'

Kit acknowledged these expressions of confidence by touching his hat again and blushing very much. The old gentleman then handed the old lady out, and after looking at him with an approving smile, they went into the house—talking about him as they went, Kit could not help feeling. Presently Mr Witherden, smelling very hard at the nosegay, came to the window and looked at him, and after that Mr Abel came and looked at him, and after that the old gentleman and lady came and looked at him again, and after that they all came and looked at him together, which Kit, feeling very much embarrassed by, made a pretence of not observing. Therefore he patted the pony more and more; and this liberty the pony most handsomely permitted.

The faces had not disappeared from the window many moments, when Mr Chuckster in his official coat, and with his hat hanging on his head just as it happened to fall from its peg, appeared upon the pavement, and telling him he was wanted inside, bade him go in and he would mind the chaise the while. In giving him this direction Mr Chuckster remarked that he wished that he might be blessed if he could make out whether he (Kit) was 'precious raw' or 'precious deep,' but intimated by a distrustful shake of the head, that he inclined to the latter opinion.

Kit entered the office in a great tremor, for he was not used to going among strange ladies and gentlemen, and the tin boxes and bundles of dusty papers had in his eyes an awful and venerable air. Mr Witherden too was a bustling gentleman who talked loud and fast, and all eyes were upon him, and he was very shabby.

'Well, boy,' said Mr Witherden, 'you came to work out that shilling;—not to get another, hey?'

'No indeed, sir,' replied Kit, taking courage to look up. 'I never thought of such a thing.'

'Father alive?' said the Notary.

'Dead, sir.'

'Mother?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Married again—eh?'

Kit made answer, not without some indignation, that she was a widow with three children, and that as to her marrying again, if the gentleman knew her he wouldn't think of such a thing. At this reply Mr Witherden buried his nose in the flowers again, and whispered behind the nosegay to the old gentleman that he believed the lad was as honest a lad as need be.

'Now,' said Mr Garland when they had made some further inquiries of him, 'I am not going to give you anything—'

'Thank you, sir,' Kit replied; and quite seriously too, for this announcement seemed to free him from the suspicion which the Notary had hinted.

'—But,' resumed the old gentleman, 'perhaps I may want to know something more about you, so tell me where you live, and I'll put it down in my pocket-book.'

Kit told him, and the old gentleman wrote down the address with his pencil. He had scarcely done so, when there was a great uproar in the street, and the old lady hurrying to the window cried that Whisker had run away, upon which Kit darted out to the rescue, and the others followed.

It seemed that Mr Chuckster had been standing with his hands in his pockets looking carelessly at the pony, and occasionally insulting him with such admonitions as 'Stand still,'—'Be quiet,'—'Wo-a-a,' and the like, which by a pony of spirit cannot be borne. Consequently, the pony being deterred by no considerations of duty or obedience, and not having before him the slightest fear of the human eye, had at length started off, and was at that moment rattling down the street—Mr Chuckster, with his hat off and a pen behind his ear, hanging on in the rear of the chaise and making futile attempts to draw it the other way, to the unspeakable admiration of all beholders. Even in running away, however, Whisker was perverse, for he had not gone very far when he suddenly stopped, and before assistance could be rendered, commenced backing at nearly as quick a pace as he had gone forward. By these means Mr Chuckster was pushed and hustled to the office again, in a most inglorious manner, and arrived in a state of great exhaustion and discomfiture.

The old lady then stepped into her seat, and Mr Abel (whom they had come to fetch) into his. The old gentleman, after reasoning with the pony on the extreme impropriety of his conduct, and making the best amends in his power to Mr Chuckster, took his place also, and they drove away, waving a farewell to the Notary and his clerk, and more than once turning to nod kindly to Kit as he watched them from the road.

CHAPTER 21

Kit turned away and very soon forgot the pony, and the chaise, and the little old lady, and the little old gentleman, and the little young gentleman to boot, in thinking what could have become of his late master and his lovely grandchild, who were the fountain-head of all his meditations. Still casting about for some plausible means of accounting for their non-appearance, and of persuading himself that they must soon return, he bent his steps towards home, intending to finish the task which the sudden recollection of his contract had interrupted, and then to sally forth once more to seek his fortune for the day.

When he came to the corner of the court in which he lived, lo and behold there was the pony again! Yes, there he was, looking more obstinate than ever; and alone in the chaise, keeping a steady watch upon his every wink, sat Mr Abel, who, lifting up his eyes by chance and seeing Kit pass by, nodded to him as though he would have nodded his head off.

Kit wondered to see the pony again, so near his own home too, but it never occurred to him for what purpose the pony might have come there, or where the old lady and the old gentleman had gone, until he lifted the latch of the door, and walking in, found them seated in the room in conversation with his mother, at which unexpected sight he pulled off his hat and made his best bow in some confusion.

'We are here before you, you see, Christopher,' said Mr Garland smiling.

'Yes, sir,' said Kit; and as he said it, he looked towards his mother for an explanation of the visit.

'The gentleman's been kind enough, my dear,' said she, in reply to this mute interrogation, 'to ask me whether you were in a good place, or in any place at all, and when I told him no, you were not in any, he was so good as to say that—'

'—That we wanted a good lad in our house,' said the old gentleman and the old lady both together, 'and that perhaps we might think of it, if we found everything as we would wish it to be.'

As this thinking of it, plainly meant the thinking of engaging Kit, he immediately partook of his mother's anxiety and fell into a great flutter; for the little old couple were very methodical and cautious, and asked so many questions that he began to be afraid there was no chance of his success.

'You see, my good woman,' said Mrs Garland to Kit's mother, 'that it's necessary to be very careful and particular in such a matter as this, for we're only three in family, and are very quiet regular folks, and it would be a sad thing if we made any kind of mistake, and found things different from what we hoped and expected.'

To this, Kit's mother replied, that certainly it was quite true, and quite right, and quite proper, and Heaven forbid that she should shrink, or have cause to shrink, from any inquiry into her character or that of her son, who was a very good son though she was his mother, in which respect, she was bold to say, he took after his father, who was not only a good son to HIS mother, but the best of husbands and the best of fathers besides, which Kit could and would corroborate she knew, and so would little Jacob and the baby likewise if they were old enough, which unfortunately they were not, though as they didn't know what a loss they had had, perhaps it was a great deal better that they should be as young as they were; and so Kit's mother wound up a long story by wiping her eyes with her apron, and patting little Jacob's head, who was rocking the cradle and staring with all his might at the strange lady and gentleman.

When Kit's mother had done speaking, the old lady struck in again, and said that she was quite sure she was a very honest and very respectable person or she never would have expressed herself in that manner, and that certainly the appearance of the children and the cleanliness of the house deserved great praise and did her the utmost credit, whereat Kit's mother dropped a curtsey and became consoled. Then the good woman entered in a long and minute account of Kit's life and history from the earliest period down to that time, not omitting to make mention of his miraculous fall out of a back-parlour window when an infant of tender years, or his uncommon sufferings in a state of measles, which were illustrated by correct imitations of the plaintive manner in which he called for toast and water, day and night, and said, 'don't cry, mother, I shall soon be better;' for proof of which statements reference was made to Mrs Green, lodger, at the cheesemonger's round the corner, and divers other ladies and gentlemen in various parts of England and Wales (and one Mr Brown who was supposed to be then a corporal in the East Indies, and who could of course be found with very little trouble), within whose personal knowledge the circumstances had occurred. This narration ended, Mr Garland put some questions to Kit respecting his qualifications and general acquirements, while Mrs Garland noticed the children, and hearing from Kit's mother certain remarkable circumstances which had attended the birth of each, related certain other remarkable circumstances which had attended the birth of her own son, Mr

Abel, from which it appeared that both Kit's mother and herself had been, above and beyond all other women of what condition or age soever, peculiarly hemmed in with perils and dangers. Lastly, inquiry was made into the nature and extent of Kit's wardrobe, and a small advance being made to improve the same, he was formally hired at an annual income of Six Pounds, over and above his board and lodging, by Mr and Mrs Garland, of Abel Cottage, Finchley.

It would be difficult to say which party appeared most pleased with this arrangement, the conclusion of which was hailed with nothing but pleasant looks and cheerful smiles on both sides. It was settled that Kit should repair to his new abode on the next day but one, in the morning; and finally, the little old couple, after bestowing a bright half-crown on little Jacob and another on the baby, took their leaves; being escorted as far as the street by their new attendant, who held the obdurate pony by the bridle while they took their seats, and saw them drive away with a lightened heart.

'Well, mother,' said Kit, hurrying back into the house, 'I think my fortune's about made now.'

'I should think it was indeed, Kit,' rejoined his mother. 'Six pound a year! Only think!'

'Ah!' said Kit, trying to maintain the gravity which the consideration of such a sum demanded, but grinning with delight in spite of himself. 'There's a property!'

Kit drew a long breath when he had said this, and putting his hands deep into his pockets as if there were one year's wages at least in each, looked at his mother, as though he saw through her, and down an immense perspective of sovereigns beyond.

'Please God we'll make such a lady of you for Sundays, mother! such a scholar of Jacob, such a child of the baby, such a room of the one up stairs! Six pound a year!'

'Hem!' croaked a strange voice. 'What's that about six pound a year? What about six pound a year?' And as the voice made this inquiry, Daniel Quilp walked in with Richard Swiveller at his heels.

'Who said he was to have six pound a year?' said Quilp, looking sharply round. 'Did the old man say it, or did little Nell say it? And what's he to have it for, and where are they, eh!' The good woman was so much alarmed by the sudden apparition of this unknown piece of ugliness, that she hastily caught the baby from its cradle and retreated into the furthest corner of the room; while little Jacob, sitting upon his stool with his hands on his knees, looked full at him in a species of fascination, roaring lustily all the time. Richard Swiveller took an easy observation of the family over Mr Quilp's head, and Quilp himself, with his hands in his pockets, smiled in an exquisite enjoyment of the commotion he occasioned.

'Don't be frightened, mistress,' said Quilp, after a pause. 'Your son knows me; I don't eat babies; I don't like 'em. It will be as well to stop that young screamer though, in case I should be tempted to do him a mischief. Holloa, sir! Will you be quiet?'

Little Jacob stemmed the course of two tears which he was squeezing out of his eyes, and instantly subsided into a silent horror.

'Mind you don't break out again, you villain,' said Quilp, looking sternly at him, 'or I'll make faces at you and throw you into fits, I will. Now you sir, why haven't you been to me as you promised?'

'What should I come for?' retorted Kit. 'I hadn't any business with you, no more than you had with me.'

'Here, mistress,' said Quilp, turning quickly away, and appealing from Kit to his mother. 'When did his old master come or send here last? Is he here now? If not, where's he gone?'

'He has not been here at all,' she replied. 'I wish we knew where they have gone, for it would make my son a good deal easier in his mind, and me too. If you're the gentleman named Mr Quilp, I should have thought you'd have known, and so I told him only this very day.'

'Humph!' muttered Quilp, evidently disappointed to believe that this was true. 'That's what you tell this gentleman too, is it?'

'If the gentleman comes to ask the same question, I can't tell him anything else, sir; and I only wish I could, for our own sakes,' was the reply.

Quilp glanced at Richard Swiveller, and observed that having met him on the threshold, he assumed that he had come in search of some intelligence of the fugitives. He supposed he was right?

'Yes,' said Dick, 'that was the object of the present expedition. I fancied it possible—but let us go ring fancy's knell. I'll begin it.'

'You seem disappointed,' observed Quilp.

'A baffler, Sir, a baffler, that's all,' returned Dick. 'I have entered upon a speculation which has proved a baffler; and a Being of brightness and beauty will be offered up a sacrifice at Cheggs's altar. That's all, sir.'

The dwarf eyed Richard with a sarcastic smile, but Richard, who had been taking a rather strong lunch with a friend, observed him not, and continued to deplore his fate with mournful and despondent looks. Quilp plainly discerned that there was some secret reason for this visit and his uncommon disappointment, and, in the hope that there might be means of mischief lurking beneath it, resolved to worm it out. He had no sooner adopted this resolution, than he conveyed as much honesty into his face as it was capable of expressing, and sympathised with Mr Swiveller exceedingly.

'I am disappointed myself,' said Quilp, 'out of mere friendly feeling for them; but you have real reasons, private reasons I have no doubt, for your disappointment, and therefore it comes heavier than mine.'

'Why, of course it does,' Dick observed, testily.

'Upon my word, I'm very sorry, very sorry. I'm rather cast down myself. As we are companions in adversity, shall we be companions in the surest way of forgetting it? If you had no particular business, now, to lead you in another direction,' urged Quilp, plucking him by the sleeve and looking slyly up into his face out of the corners of his eyes, 'there is a house by the water-side where they have some of the noblest Schiedam—reputed to be smuggled, but that's between ourselves—that can be got in all the world. The landlord knows me. There's a little summer-house overlooking the river, where we might take a glass of this delicious liquor with a whiff of the best tobacco—it's in this case, and of the rarest quality, to my certain knowledge—and be perfectly snug and happy, could we possibly contrive it; or is there any very particular engagement that peremptorily takes you another way, Mr Swiveller, eh?'

As the dwarf spoke, Dick's face relaxed into a compliant smile, and his brows slowly unbent. By the time he had finished, Dick was looking down at Quilp in the same sly manner as Quilp was looking up at him, and there remained nothing more to be done but to set out for the house in question. This they did, straightway. The moment their backs were turned, little Jacob thawed, and resumed his crying from the point where Quilp had frozen him.

The summer-house of which Mr Quilp had spoken was a rugged wooden box, rotten and bare to see, which overhung the river's mud, and threatened to slide down into it. The tavern to which it belonged was a crazy building, sapped and undermined by the rats, and only upheld by great bars of wood which were reared against its walls, and had propped it up so long that even they were decaying and yielding with their load, and of a windy night might be heard to creak and crack as if the whole fabric were about to come toppling down. The house stood—if anything so old and feeble could be said to stand—on a piece of waste ground, blighted with the unwholesome smoke of factory chimneys, and echoing the clank of iron wheels and rush of troubled water. Its internal accommodations amply fulfilled the promise of the outside. The rooms were low and damp, the clammy walls were pierced with chinks and holes, the rotten floors had sunk from their level, the very beams started from their places and warned the timid stranger from their neighbourhood.

To this inviting spot, entreating him to observe its beauties as they passed along, Mr Quilp led Richard Swiveller, and on the table of the summer-house, scored deep with many a gallows and initial letter, there soon appeared a wooden keg, full of the vaunted liquor. Drawing it off into the glasses with the skill of a practised hand, and mixing it with about a third part of water, Mr Quilp assigned to Richard Swiveller his portion, and lighting his pipe from an end of a candle in a very old and battered lantern, drew himself together upon a seat and puffed away.

'Is it good?' said Quilp, as Richard Swiveller smacked his lips, 'is it strong and fiery? Does it make you wink, and choke, and your eyes water, and your breath come short—does it?'

'Does it?' cried Dick, throwing away part of the contents of his glass, and filling it up with water, 'why, man, you don't mean to tell me that you drink such fire as this?'

'No!' rejoined Quilp, 'Not drink it! Look here. And here. And here again. Not drink it!'

As he spoke, Daniel Quilp drew off and drank three small glassfuls of the raw spirit, and then with a horrible grimace took a great many pulls at his pipe, and swallowing the smoke, discharged it in a heavy cloud from his nose. This feat accomplished he drew himself together in his former position, and laughed excessively.

'Give us a toast!' cried Quilp, rattling on the table in a dexterous manner with his fist and elbow alternately, in a kind of tune, 'a woman, a beauty. Let's have a beauty for our toast and empty our glasses to the last drop. Her name, come!'

'If you want a name,' said Dick, 'here's Sophy Wackles.'

'Sophy Wackles,' screamed the dwarf, 'Miss Sophy Wackles that is—Mrs Richard Swiveller that shall be—that shall be—ha ha ha!'

'Ah!' said Dick, 'you might have said that a few weeks ago, but it won't do now, my buck. Immolating herself upon the shrine of Cheggs—'

'Poison Cheggs, cut Cheggs's ears off,' rejoined Quilp. 'I won't hear of Cheggs. Her name is Swiveller or nothing. I'll drink her health again, and her father's, and her mother's; and to all her sisters and brothers—the glorious family of the Wackleses—all the Wackleses in one glass—down with it to the dregs!'

'Well,' said Richard Swiveller, stopping short in the act of raising the glass to his lips and looking at the dwarf in a species of stupor as he flourished his arms and legs about: 'you're a jolly fellow, but of all the jolly fellows I ever saw or heard of, you have the queerest and most extraordinary way with you, upon my life you have.'

This candid declaration tended rather to increase than restrain Mr Quilp's eccentricities, and Richard Swiveller, astonished to see him in such a roystering vein, and drinking not a little himself, for company—began imperceptibly to become more companionable and confiding, so that, being judiciously led on by Mr Quilp, he grew at last very confiding indeed. Having once got him into this mood, and knowing now the key-note to strike whenever he was at a loss, Daniel Quilp's task was comparatively an easy one, and he was soon in possession of the whole details of the scheme contrived between the easy Dick and his more designing friend.

'Stop!' said Quilp. 'That's the thing, that's the thing. It can be brought about, it shall be brought about. There's my hand upon it; I am your friend from this minute.'

'What! do you think there's still a chance?' inquired Dick, in surprise at this encouragement.

'A chance!' echoed the dwarf, 'a certainty! Sophy Wackles may become a Cheggs or anything else she likes, but not a Swiveller. Oh you lucky dog! He's richer than any Jew alive; you're a made man. I see in you now nothing but Nelly's husband, rolling in gold and silver. I'll help you. It shall be done. Mind my words, it shall be done.'

'But how?' said Dick.

'There's plenty of time,' rejoined the dwarf, 'and it shall be done. We'll sit down and talk it over again all the way through. Fill your glass while I'm gone. I shall be back directly—directly.' With these hasty words, Daniel

Quilp withdrew into a dismantled skittle-ground behind the public-house, and, throwing himself upon the ground actually screamed and rolled about in uncontrollable delight.

'Here's sport!' he cried, 'sport ready to my hand, all invented and arranged, and only to be enjoyed. It was this shallow-pated fellow who made my bones ache t'other day, was it? It was his friend and fellow-plotter, Mr Trent, that once made eyes at Mrs Quilp, and leered and looked, was it? After labouring for two or three years in their precious scheme, to find that they've got a beggar at last, and one of them tied for life. Ha ha ha! He shall marry Nell. He shall have her, and I'll be the first man, when the knot's tied hard and fast, to tell 'em what they've gained and what I've helped 'em to. Here will be a clearing of old scores, here will be a time to remind 'em what a capital friend I was, and how I helped them to the heiress. Ha ha ha!'

In the height of his ecstasy, Mr Quilp had like to have met with a disagreeable check, for rolling very near a broken dog-kennel, there leapt forth a large fierce dog, who, but that his chain was of the shortest, would have given him a disagreeable salute. As it was, the dwarf remained upon his back in perfect safety, taunting the dog with hideous faces, and triumphing over him in his inability to advance another inch, though there were not a couple of feet between them.

'Why don't you come and bite me, why don't you come and tear me to pieces, you coward?' said Quilp, hissing and worrying the animal till he was nearly mad. 'You're afraid, you bully, you're afraid, you know you are.'

The dog tore and strained at his chain with starting eyes and furious bark, but there the dwarf lay, snapping his fingers with gestures of defiance and contempt. When he had sufficiently recovered from his delight, he rose, and with his arms a-kimbo, achieved a kind of demon-dance round the kennel, just without the limits of the chain, driving the dog quite wild. Having by this means composed his spirits and put himself in a pleasant train, he returned to his unsuspicious companion, whom he found looking at the tide with exceeding gravity, and thinking of that same gold and silver which Mr Quilp had mentioned.

CHAPTER 22

The remainder of that day and the whole of the next were a busy time for the Nubbles family, to whom everything connected with Kit's outfit and departure was matter of as great moment as if he had been about to penetrate into the interior of Africa, or to take a cruise round the world. It would be difficult to suppose that there ever was a box which was opened and shut so many times within four-and-twenty hours, as that which contained his wardrobe and necessaries; and certainly there never was one which to two small eyes presented such a mine of clothing, as this mighty chest with its three shirts and proportionate allowance of stockings and pocket-handkerchiefs, disclosed to the astonished vision of little Jacob. At last it was conveyed to the carrier's, at whose house at Finchley Kit was to find it next day; and the box being gone, there remained but two questions for consideration: firstly, whether the carrier would lose, or dishonestly feign to lose, the box upon the road; secondly, whether Kit's mother perfectly understood how to take care of herself in the absence of her son.

'I don't think there's hardly a chance of his really losing it, but carriers are under great temptation to pretend they lose things, no doubt,' said Mrs Nubbles apprehensively, in reference to the first point.

'No doubt about it,' returned Kit, with a serious look; 'upon my word, mother, I don't think it was right to trust it to itself. Somebody ought to have gone with it, I'm afraid.'

'We can't help it now,' said his mother; 'but it was foolish and wrong. People oughtn't to be tempted.'

Kit inwardly resolved that he would never tempt a carrier any more, save with an empty box; and having formed this Christian determination, he turned his thoughts to the second question.

'YOU know you must keep up your spirits, mother, and not be lonesome because I'm not at home. I shall very often be able to look in when I come into town I dare say, and I shall send you a letter sometimes, and when the quarter comes round, I can get a holiday of course; and then see if we don't take little Jacob to the play, and let him know what oysters means.'

'I hope plays mayn't be sinful, Kit, but I'm a'most afraid,' said Mrs Nubbles.

'I know who has been putting that in your head,' rejoined her son disconsolately; 'that's Little Bethel again. Now I say, mother, pray don't take to going there regularly, for if I was to see your good-humoured face that has always made home cheerful, turned into a grievous one, and the baby trained to look grievous too, and to call itself a young sinner (bless its heart) and a child of the devil (which is calling its dead father names); if I was to see this, and see little Jacob looking grievous likewise, I should so take it to heart that I'm sure I should go and list for a soldier, and run my head on purpose against the first cannon-ball I saw coming my way.'

'Oh, Kit, don't talk like that.'

'I would, indeed, mother, and unless you want to make me feel very wretched and uncomfortable, you'll keep that bow on your bonnet, which you'd more than half a mind to pull off last week. Can you suppose there's any harm in looking as cheerful and being as cheerful as our poor circumstances will permit? Do I see anything in the way I'm made, which calls upon me to be a snivelling, solemn, whispering chap, sneaking about as if I couldn't help it, and expressing myself in a most unpleasant snuffle? on the contrary, don't I see every reason why I shouldn't? just hear this! Ha ha ha! An't that as nat'ral as walking, and as good for the health? Ha ha ha! An't that as nat'ral as a sheep's bleating, or a pig's grunting, or a horse's neighing, or a bird's singing? Ha ha ha! Isn't it, mother?'

There was something contagious in Kit's laugh, for his mother, who had looked grave before, first subsided into a smile, and then fell to joining in it heartily, which occasioned Kit to say that he knew it was natural, and to laugh the more. Kit and his mother, laughing together in a pretty loud key, woke the baby, who, finding that there was something very jovial and agreeable in progress, was no sooner in its mother's arms than it began to kick and laugh, most vigorously. This new illustration of his argument so tickled Kit, that he fell backward in his chair in a state of exhaustion, pointing at the baby and shaking his sides till he rocked again. After recovering twice or thrice, and as often relapsing, he wiped his eyes and said grace; and a very cheerful meal their scanty supper was.

With more kisses, and hugs, and tears, than many young gentlemen who start upon their travels, and leave well-stocked homes behind them, would deem within the bounds of probability (if matter so low could be herein set down), Kit left the house at an early hour next morning, and set out to walk to Finchley; feeling a sufficient pride in his appearance to have warranted his excommunication from Little Bethel from that time forth, if he had ever been one of that mournful congregation.

Lest anybody should feel a curiosity to know how Kit was clad, it may be briefly remarked that he wore no livery, but was dressed in a coat of pepper-and-salt with waistcoat of canary colour, and nether garments of iron-grey; besides these glories, he shone in the lustre of a new pair of boots and an extremely stiff and shiny hat, which on being struck anywhere with the knuckles, sounded like a drum. And in this attire, rather wondering that he attracted so little attention, and attributing the circumstance to the insensibility of those who got up early, he made his way towards Abel Cottage.

Without encountering any more remarkable adventure on the road, than meeting a lad in a brimless hat, the exact counterpart of his old one, on whom he bestowed half the sixpence he possessed, Kit arrived in course of time at the carrier's house, where, to the lasting honour of human nature, he found the box in safety. Receiving from the wife of this immaculate man, a direction to Mr Garland's, he took the box upon his shoulder and repaired thither directly.

To be sure, it was a beautiful little cottage with a thatched roof and little spires at the gable-ends, and pieces of stained glass in some of the windows, almost as large as pocket-books. On one side of the house was a little stable, just the size for the pony, with a little room over it, just the size for Kit. White curtains were fluttering, and birds in cages that looked as bright as if they were made of gold, were singing at the windows; plants were arranged on either side of the path, and clustered about the door; and the garden was bright with flowers in full bloom, which shed a sweet odour all round, and had a charming and elegant appearance. Everything within the house and without, seemed to be the perfection of neatness and order. In the garden there was not a weed to be seen, and to judge from some dapper gardening-tools, a basket, and a pair of gloves which were lying in one of the walks, old Mr Garland had been at work in it that very morning.

Kit looked about him, and admired, and looked again, and this a great many times before he could make up his mind to turn his head another way and ring the bell. There was abundance of time to look about him again though, when he had rung it, for nobody came, so after ringing it twice or thrice he sat down upon his box, and waited.

He rang the bell a great many times, and yet nobody came. But at last, as he was sitting upon the box thinking about giants' castles, and princesses tied up to pegs by the hair of their heads, and dragons bursting out from behind gates, and other incidents of the like nature, common in story-books to youths of low degree on their first visit to strange houses, the door was gently opened, and a little servant-girl, very tidy, modest, and demure, but very pretty too, appeared. 'I suppose you're Christopher, sir,' said the servant-girl.

Kit got off the box, and said yes, he was.

'I'm afraid you've rung a good many times perhaps,' she rejoined, 'but we couldn't hear you, because we've been catching the pony.'

Kit rather wondered what this meant, but as he couldn't stop there, asking questions, he shouldered the box again and followed the girl into the hall, where through a back-door he descried Mr Garland leading Whisker in triumph up the garden, after that self-willed pony had (as he afterwards learned) dodged the family round a small paddock in the rear, for one hour and three quarters.

The old gentleman received him very kindly and so did the old lady, whose previous good opinion of him was greatly enhanced by his wiping his boots on the mat until the soles of his feet burnt again. He was then taken into the parlour to be inspected in his new clothes; and when he had been surveyed several times, and had afforded by his appearance unlimited satisfaction, he was taken into the stable (where the pony received him with uncommon complaisance); and thence into the little chamber he had already observed, which was very clean and comfortable: and thence into the garden, in which the old gentleman told him he would be taught to employ himself, and where he told him, besides, what great things he meant to do to make him comfortable, and happy, if he found he deserved it. All these kindnesses, Kit acknowledged with various expressions of gratitude, and so many touches of the new hat, that the brim suffered considerably. When the old gentleman had said all he had to say in the way of promise and advice, and Kit had said all he had to say in the way of assurance and thankfulness, he was handed over again to the old lady, who, summoning the little servant-girl (whose name was Barbara) instructed her to take him down stairs and give him something to eat and drink, after his walk.

Down stairs, therefore, Kit went; and at the bottom of the stairs there was such a kitchen as was never before seen or heard of out of a toy-shop window, with everything in it as bright and glowing, and as precisely ordered too, as Barbara herself. And in this kitchen, Kit sat himself down at a table as white as a tablecloth, to eat cold meat, and drink small ale, and use his knife and fork the more awkwardly, because there was an unknown Barbara looking on and observing him.

It did not appear, however, that there was anything remarkably tremendous about this strange Barbara, who having lived a very quiet life, blushed very much and was quite as embarrassed and uncertain what she ought to say or do, as Kit could possibly be. When he had sat for some little time, attentive to the ticking of the sober clock, he ventured to glance curiously at the dresser, and there, among the plates and dishes, were Barbara's little work-box with a sliding lid to shut in the balls of cotton, and Barbara's prayer-book, and Barbara's hymn-book, and Barbara's Bible. Barbara's little looking-glass hung in a good light near the window, and Barbara's bonnet was on a nail behind the door. From all these mute signs and tokens of her presence, he naturally glanced at Barbara herself, who sat as mute as they, shelling peas into a dish; and just when Kit was looking at her eyelashes and wondering—quite in the simplicity of his heart—what colour her eyes might be, it perversely happened that Barbara raised her head a little to look at him, when both pair of eyes were hastily withdrawn, and Kit leant over his plate, and Barbara over her pea-shells, each in extreme confusion at having been detected by the other.

CHAPTER 23

Mr Richard Swiveller wending homeward from the Wilderness (for such was the appropriate name of Quilp's choice retreat), after a sinuous and corkscrew fashion, with many checks and stumbles; after stopping suddenly and staring about him, then as suddenly running forward for a few paces, and as suddenly halting again and shaking his head; doing everything with a jerk and nothing by premeditation;—Mr Richard Swiveller wending his way homeward after this fashion, which is considered by evil-minded men to be symbolical of intoxication, and is not held by such persons to denote that state of deep wisdom and reflection in which the actor knows himself to be, began to think that possibly he had misplaced his confidence and that the dwarf might not be precisely the sort of person to whom to entrust a secret of such delicacy and importance. And being led and tempted on by this remorseful thought into a condition which the evil-minded class before referred to would term the maudlin state or stage of drunkenness, it occurred to Mr Swiveller to cast his hat upon the ground, and moan, crying aloud that he was an unhappy orphan, and that if he had not been an unhappy orphan things had never come to this.

'Left an infant by my parents, at an early age,' said Mr Swiveller, bewailing his hard lot, 'cast upon the world in my tenderest period, and thrown upon the mercies of a deluding dwarf, who can wonder at my weakness! Here's a miserable orphan for you. Here,' said Mr Swiveller raising his voice to a high pitch, and looking sleepily round, 'is a miserable orphan!'

'Then,' said somebody hard by, 'let me be a father to you.'

Mr Swiveller swayed himself to and fro to preserve his balance, and, looking into a kind of haze which seemed to surround him, at last perceived two eyes dimly twinkling through the mist, which he observed after a short time were in the neighbourhood of a nose and mouth. Casting his eyes down towards that quarter in which, with reference to a man's face, his legs are usually to be found, he observed that the face had a body attached; and when he looked more intently he was satisfied that the person was Mr Quilp, who indeed had been in his company all the time, but whom he had some vague idea of having left a mile or two behind.

'You have deceived an orphan, Sir,' said Mr Swiveller solemnly.'

'I! I'm a second father to you,' replied Quilp.

'You my father, Sir!' retorted Dick. 'Being all right myself, Sir, I request to be left alone—instantly, Sir.'

'What a funny fellow you are!' cried Quilp.

'Go, Sir,' returned Dick, leaning against a post and waving his hand. 'Go, deceiver, go, some day, Sir, p'r'aps you'll waken, from pleasure's dream to know, the grief of orphans forsaken. Will you go, Sir?'

The dwarf taking no heed of this adjuration, Mr Swiveller advanced with the view of inflicting upon him condign chastisement. But forgetting his purpose or changing his mind before he came close to him, he seized his hand and vowed eternal friendship, declaring with an agreeable frankness that from that time forth they were brothers in everything but personal appearance. Then he told his secret over again, with the addition of being pathetic on the subject of Miss Wackles, who, he gave Mr Quilp to understand, was the occasion of any slight incoherency he might observe in his speech at that moment, which was attributable solely to the strength of his affection and not to rosy wine or other fermented liquor. And then they went on arm-in-arm, very lovingly together.

'I'm as sharp,' said Quilp to him, at parting, 'as sharp as a ferret, and as cunning as a weazel. You bring Trent to me; assure him that I'm his friend though I fear he a little distrusts me (I don't know why, I have not deserved it); and you've both of you made your fortunes—in perspective.'

'That's the worst of it,' returned Dick. 'These fortunes in perspective look such a long way off.'

'But they look smaller than they really are, on that account,' said Quilp, pressing his arm. 'You'll have no conception of the value of your prize until you draw close to it. Mark that.'

'D'ye think not?' said Dick.

'Aye, I do; and I am certain of what I say, that's better,' returned the dwarf. 'You bring Trent to me. Tell him I am his friend and yours—why shouldn't I be?'

'There's no reason why you shouldn't, certainly,' replied Dick, 'and perhaps there are a great many why you should—at least there would be nothing strange in your wanting to be my friend, if you were a choice spirit, but then you know you're not a choice spirit.'

'I not a choice spirit?' cried Quilp.

'Devil a bit, sir,' returned Dick. 'A man of your appearance couldn't be. If you're any spirit at all, sir, you're an evil spirit. Choice spirits,' added Dick, smiting himself on the breast, 'are quite a different looking sort of people, you may take your oath of that, sir.'

Quilp glanced at his free-spoken friend with a mingled expression of cunning and dislike, and wringing his hand almost at the same moment, declared that he was an uncommon character and had his warmest esteem. With that they parted; Mr Swiveller to make the best of his way home and sleep himself sober; and Quilp to cogitate upon the discovery he had made, and exult in the prospect of the rich field of enjoyment and reprisal it opened to him.

It was not without great reluctance and misgiving that Mr Swiveller, next morning, his head racked by the fumes of the renowned Schiedam, repaired to the lodging of his friend Trent (which was in the roof of an old house in an old ghostly inn), and recounted by very slow degrees what had yesterday taken place between him and Quilp. Nor was it without great surprise and much speculation on Quilp's probable motives, nor without many bitter comments on Dick Swiveller's folly, that his friend received the tale.

'I don't defend myself, Fred,' said the penitent Richard; 'but the fellow has such a queer way with him and is such an artful dog, that first of all he set me upon thinking whether there was any harm in telling him, and while I was thinking, screwed it out of me. If you had seen him drink and smoke, as I did, you couldn't have kept anything from him. He's a Salamander you know, that's what he is.'

Without inquiring whether Salamanders were of necessity good confidential agents, or whether a fire-proof man was as a matter of course trustworthy, Frederick Trent threw himself into a chair, and, burying his head in his hands, endeavoured to fathom the motives which had led Quilp to insinuate himself into Richard Swiveller's confidence;—for that the disclosure was of his seeking, and had not been spontaneously revealed by Dick, was sufficiently plain from Quilp's seeking his company and enticing him away.

The dwarf had twice encountered him when he was endeavouring to obtain intelligence of the fugitives. This, perhaps, as he had not shown any previous anxiety about them, was enough to awaken suspicion in the breast of a creature so jealous and distrustful by nature, setting aside any additional impulse to curiosity that he might have derived from Dick's incautious manner. But knowing the scheme they had planned, why should he offer to assist it? This was a question more difficult of solution; but as knaves generally overreach themselves by imputing their own designs to others, the idea immediately presented itself that some circumstances of irritation between Quilp and the old man, arising out of their secret transactions and not unconnected perhaps with his sudden disappearance, now rendered the former desirous of revenging himself upon him by seeking to entrap the sole object of his love and anxiety into a connexion of which he knew he had a dread and hatred. As Frederick Trent himself, utterly regardless of his sister, had this object at heart, only second to the hope of gain, it seemed to him the more likely to be Quilp's main principle of action. Once investing the dwarf with a design of his own in abetting them, which the attainment of their purpose would serve, it was easy to believe him sincere and hearty in the cause; and as there could be no doubt of his proving a powerful and useful auxiliary, Trent determined to accept his invitation and go to his house that night, and if what he said and did confirmed him in the impression he had formed, to let him share the labour of their plan, but not the profit.

Having revolved these things in his mind and arrived at this conclusion, he communicated to Mr Swiveller as much of his meditations as he thought proper (Dick would have been perfectly satisfied with less), and giving him the day to recover himself from his late salamandering, accompanied him at evening to Mr Quilp's house.

Mighty glad Mr Quilp was to see them, or mightily glad he seemed to be; and fearfully polite Mr Quilp was to Mrs Quilp and Mrs jiniwin; and very sharp was the look he cast on his wife to observe how she was affected by the recognition of young Trent. Mrs Quilp was as innocent as her own mother of any emotion, painful or pleasant, which the sight of him awakened, but as her husband's glance made her timid and confused, and uncertain what to do or what was required of her, Mr Quilp did not fail to assign her embarrassment to the cause he had in his mind, and while he chuckled at his penetration was secretly exasperated by his jealousy.

Nothing of this appeared, however. On the contrary, Mr Quilp was all blandness and suavity, and presided over the case-bottle of rum with extraordinary open-heartedness.

'Why, let me see,' said Quilp. 'It must be a matter of nearly two years since we were first acquainted.'

'Nearer three, I think,' said Trent.

'Nearer three!' cried Quilp. 'How fast time flies. Does it seem as long as that to you, Mrs Quilp?'

'Yes, I think it seems full three years, Quilp,' was the unfortunate reply.

'Oh indeed, ma'am,' thought Quilp, 'you have been pining, have you? Very good, ma'am.'

'It seems to me but yesterday that you went out to Demerara in the Mary Anne,' said Quilp; 'but yesterday, I declare. Well, I like a little wildness. I was wild myself once.'

Mr Quilp accompanied this admission with such an awful wink, indicative of old rovings and backslidings, that Mrs Jiniwin was indignant, and could not forbear from remarking under her breath that he might at least put off his confessions until his wife was absent; for which act of boldness and insubordination Mr Quilp first stared her out of countenance and then drank her health ceremoniously.

'I thought you'd come back directly, Fred. I always thought that,' said Quilp setting down his glass. 'And when the Mary Anne returned with you on board, instead of a letter to say what a contrite heart you had, and how happy you were in the situation that had been provided for you, I was amused—exceedingly amused. Ha ha ha!'

The young man smiled, but not as though the theme was the most agreeable one that could have been selected for his entertainment; and for that reason Quilp pursued it.

'I always will say,' he resumed, 'that when a rich relation having two young people—sisters or brothers, or brother and sister—dependent on him, attaches himself exclusively to one, and casts off the other, he does wrong.'

The young man made a movement of impatience, but Quilp went on as calmly as if he were discussing some abstract question in which nobody present had the slightest personal interest.

'It's very true,' said Quilp, 'that your grandfather urged repeated forgiveness, ingratitude, riot, and extravagance, and all that; but as I told him "these are common faults." "But he's a scoundrel," said he. "Granting that," said I (for the sake of argument of course), "a great many young noblemen and gentlemen are scoundrels too!" But he wouldn't be convinced.'

'I wonder at that, Mr Quilp,' said the young man sarcastically.

'Well, so did I at the time,' returned Quilp, 'but he was always obstinate. He was in a manner a friend of mine, but he was always obstinate and wrong-headed. Little Nell is a nice girl, a charming girl, but you're her brother, Frederick. You're her brother after all; as you told him the last time you met, he can't alter that.'

'He would if he could, confound him for that and all other kindnesses,' said the young man impatiently. 'But nothing can come of this subject now, and let us have done with it in the Devil's name.'

'Agreed,' returned Quilp, 'agreed on my part readily. Why have I alluded to it? Just to show you, Frederick, that I have always stood your friend. You little knew who was your friend, and who your foe; now did you? You thought I was against you, and so there has been a coolness between us; but it was all on your side, entirely on your side. Let's shake hands again, Fred.'

With his head sunk down between his shoulders, and a hideous grin over-spreading his face, the dwarf stood up and stretched his short arm across the table. After a moment's hesitation, the young man stretched out his to meet it; Quilp clutched his fingers in a grip that for the moment stopped the current of the blood within them, and pressing his other hand upon his lip and frowning towards the unsuspicious Richard, released them and sat down.

This action was not lost upon Trent, who, knowing that Richard Swiveller was a mere tool in his hands and knew no more of his designs than he thought proper to communicate, saw that the dwarf perfectly understood their relative position, and fully entered into the character of his friend. It is something to be appreciated, even in knavery. This silent homage to his superior abilities, no less than a sense of the power with which the dwarf's quick perception had already invested him, inclined the young man towards that ugly worthy, and determined him to profit by his aid.

It being now Mr Quilp's cue to change the subject with all convenient expedition, lest Richard Swiveller in his heedlessness should reveal anything which it was inexpedient for the women to know, he proposed a game at four-handed cribbage, and partners being cut for, Mrs Quilp fell to Frederick Trent, and Dick himself to Quilp. Mrs Jiniwin being very fond of cards was carefully excluded by her son-in-law from any participation in the game, and had assigned to her the duty of occasionally replenishing the glasses from the case-bottle; Mr Quilp from that moment keeping one eye constantly upon her, lest she should by any means procure a taste of the same, and thereby tantalising the wretched old lady (who was as much attached to the case-bottle as the cards) in a double degree and most ingenious manner.

But it was not to Mrs Jiniwin alone that Mr Quilp's attention was restricted, as several other matters required his constant vigilance. Among his various eccentric habits he had a humorous one of always cheating at cards, which rendered necessary on his part, not only a close observance of the game, and a sleight-of-hand in counting and scoring, but also involved the constant correction, by looks, and frowns, and kicks under the table, of Richard Swiveller, who being bewildered by the rapidity with which his cards were told, and the rate at which the pegs travelled down the board, could not be prevented from sometimes expressing his surprise and incredulity. Mrs Quilp too was the partner of young Trent, and for every look that passed between them, and every word they spoke, and every card they played, the dwarf had eyes and ears; not occupied alone with what was passing above the table, but with signals that might be exchanging beneath it, which he laid all kinds of traps to detect; besides often treading on his wife's toes to see whether she cried out or remained silent under the infliction, in which latter case it would have been quite clear that Trent had been treading on her toes before. Yet, in the most of all these distractions, the one eye was upon the old lady always, and if she so much as stealthily advanced a tea-spoon towards a neighbouring glass (which she often did), for the purpose of abstracting but one sup of its sweet contents, Quilp's hand would overset it in the very moment of her triumph, and Quilp's mocking voice implore her to regard her precious health. And in any one of these his many cares, from first to last, Quilp never flagged nor faltered.

At length, when they had played a great many rubbers and drawn pretty freely upon the case-bottle, Mr Quilp warned his lady to retire to rest, and that submissive wife complying, and being followed by her indignant mother, Mr Swiveller fell asleep. The dwarf beckoning his remaining companion to the other end of the room, held a short conference with him in whispers.

'It's as well not to say more than one can help before our worthy friend,' said Quilp, making a grimace towards the slumbering Dick. 'Is it a bargain between us, Fred? Shall he marry little rosy Nell by-and-by?'

'You have some end of your own to answer, of course,' returned the other.

'Of course I have, dear Fred,' said Quilp, grinning to think how little he suspected what the real end was. 'It's retaliation perhaps; perhaps whim. I have influence, Fred, to help or oppose. Which way shall I use it? There are a pair of scales, and it goes into one.'

'Throw it into mine then,' said Trent.

'It's done, Fred,' rejoined Quilp, stretching out his clenched hand and opening it as if he had let some weight fall out. 'It's in the scale from this time, and turns it, Fred. Mind that.'

'Where have they gone?' asked Trent.

Quilp shook his head, and said that point remained to be discovered, which it might be, easily. When it was, they would begin their preliminary advances. He would visit the old man, or even Richard Swiveller might visit him, and by affecting a deep concern in his behalf, and imploring him to settle in some worthy home, lead to the child's remembering him with gratitude and favour. Once impressed to this extent, it would be easy, he said, to win her in a year or two, for she supposed the old man to be poor, as it was a part of his jealous policy (in common with many other misers) to feign to be so, to those about him.

'He has feigned it often enough to me, of late,' said Trent.

'Oh! and to me too!' replied the dwarf. 'Which is more extraordinary, as I know how rich he really is.'

'I suppose you should,' said Trent.

'I think I should indeed,' rejoined the dwarf; and in that, at least, he spoke the truth.

After a few more whispered words, they returned to the table, and the young man rousing Richard Swiveller informed him that he was waiting to depart. This was welcome news to Dick, who started up directly. After a few words of confidence in the result of their project had been exchanged, they bade the grinning Quilp good night.

Quilp crept to the window as they passed in the street below, and listened. Trent was pronouncing an encomium upon his wife, and they were both wondering by what enchantment she had been brought to marry such a misshapen wretch as he. The dwarf after watching their retreating shadows with a wider grin than his face had yet displayed, stole softly in the dark to bed.

In this hatching of their scheme, neither Trent nor Quilp had had one thought about the happiness or misery of poor innocent Nell. It would have been strange if the careless profligate, who was the butt of both, had been harassed by any such consideration; for his high opinion of his own merits and deserts rendered the project rather a laudable one than otherwise; and if he had been visited by so unwonted a guest as reflection, he would—being a brute only in the gratification of his appetites—have soothed his conscience with the plea that he did not mean to beat or kill his wife, and would therefore, after all said and done, be a very tolerable, average husband.

CHAPTER 24

It was not until they were quite exhausted and could no longer maintain the pace at which they had fled from the race-ground, that the old man and the child ventured to stop, and sit down to rest upon the borders of a little wood. Here, though the course was hidden from their view, they could yet faintly distinguish the noise of distant shouts, the hum of voices, and the beating of drums. Climbing the eminence which lay between them and the spot they had left, the child could even discern the fluttering flags and white tops of booths; but no person was approaching towards them, and their resting-place was solitary and still.

Some time elapsed before she could reassure her trembling companion, or restore him to a state of moderate tranquillity. His disordered imagination represented to him a crowd of persons stealing towards them beneath the cover of the bushes, lurking in every ditch, and peeping from the boughs of every rustling tree. He was haunted by apprehensions of being led captive to some gloomy place where he would be chained and scourged, and worse than all, where Nell could never come to see him, save through iron bars and gratings in the wall. His terrors affected the child. Separation from her grandfather was the greatest evil she could dread; and feeling for the time as though, go where they would, they were to be hunted down, and could never be safe but in hiding, her heart failed her, and her courage drooped.

In one so young, and so unused to the scenes in which she had lately moved, this sinking of the spirit was not surprising. But, Nature often enshrines gallant and noble hearts in weak bosoms—oftenest, God bless her, in female breasts—and when the child, casting her tearful eyes upon the old man, remembered how weak he was, and how destitute and helpless he would be if she failed him, her heart swelled within her, and animated her with new strength and fortitude.

'We are quite safe now, and have nothing to fear indeed, dear grandfather,' she said.

'Nothing to fear!' returned the old man. 'Nothing to fear if they took me from thee! Nothing to fear if they parted us! Nobody is true to me. No, not one. Not even Nell!'

'Oh! do not say that,' replied the child, 'for if ever anybody was true at heart, and earnest, I am. I am sure you know I am.'

'Then how,' said the old man, looking fearfully round, 'how can you bear to think that we are safe, when they are searching for me everywhere, and may come here, and steal upon us, even while we're talking?'

'Because I'm sure we have not been followed,' said the child. 'Judge for yourself, dear grandfather: look round, and see how quiet and still it is. We are alone together, and may ramble where we like. Not safe! Could I feel easy—did I feel at ease—when any danger threatened you?'

'True, too,' he answered, pressing her hand, but still looking anxiously about. 'What noise was that?'

'A bird,' said the child, 'flying into the wood, and leading the way for us to follow.' You remember that we said we would walk in woods and fields, and by the side of rivers, and how happy we would be—you remember that? But here, while the sun shines above our heads, and everything is bright and happy, we are sitting sadly down, and losing time. See what a pleasant path; and there's the bird—the same bird—now he flies to another tree, and stays to sing. Come!'

When they rose up from the ground, and took the shady track which led them through the wood, she bounded on before, printing her tiny footsteps in the moss, which rose elastic from so light a pressure and gave it back as mirrors throw off breath; and thus she lured the old man on, with many a backward look and merry beck, now pointing stealthily to some lone bird as it perched and twittered on a branch that strayed across their path, now stopping to listen to the songs that broke the happy silence, or watch the sun as it trembled through the leaves, and stealing in among the ivied trunks of stout old trees, opened long paths of light. As they passed onward, parting the boughs that clustered in their way, the serenity which the child had first assumed, stole into her breast in earnest; the old man cast no longer fearful looks behind, but felt at ease and cheerful, for the further they passed into the deep green shade, the more they felt that the tranquil mind of God was there, and shed its peace on them.

At length the path becoming clearer and less intricate, brought them to the end of the wood, and into a public road. Taking their way along it for a short distance, they came to a lane, so shaded by the trees on either hand that they met together over-head, and arched the narrow way. A broken finger-post announced that this led to a village three miles off; and thither they resolved to bend their steps.

The miles appeared so long that they sometimes thought they must have missed their road. But at last, to their great joy, it led downwards in a steep descent, with overhanging banks over which the footpaths led; and the clustered houses of the village peeped from the woody hollow below.

It was a very small place. The men and boys were playing at cricket on the green; and as the other folks were looking on, they wandered up and down, uncertain where to seek a humble lodging. There was but one old man in the little garden before his cottage, and him they were timid of approaching, for he was the schoolmaster, and had 'School' written up over his window in black letters on a white board. He was a pale, simple-looking man, of a spare and meagre habit, and sat among his flowers and beehives, smoking his pipe, in the little porch before his door.

'Speak to him, dear,' the old man whispered.

'I am almost afraid to disturb him,' said the child timidly. 'He does not seem to see us. Perhaps if we wait a little, he may look this way.'

They waited, but the schoolmaster cast no look towards them, and still sat, thoughtful and silent, in the little porch. He had a kind face. In his plain old suit of black, he looked pale and meagre. They fancied, too, a lonely air about him and his house, but perhaps that was because the other people formed a merry company upon the green, and he seemed the only solitary man in all the place.

They were very tired, and the child would have been bold enough to address even a schoolmaster, but for something in his manner which seemed to denote that he was uneasy or distressed. As they stood hesitating at a little distance, they saw that he sat for a few minutes at a time like one in a brown study, then laid aside his pipe and took a few turns in his garden, then approached the gate and looked towards the green, then took up his pipe again with a sigh, and sat down thoughtfully as before.

As nobody else appeared and it would soon be dark, Nell at length took courage, and when he had resumed his pipe and seat, ventured to draw near, leading her grandfather by the hand. The slight noise they made in raising the latch of the wicket-gate, caught his attention. He looked at them kindly but seemed disappointed too, and slightly shook his head.

Nell dropped a curtsey, and told him they were poor travellers who sought a shelter for the night which they would gladly pay for, so far as their means allowed. The schoolmaster looked earnestly at her as she spoke, laid aside his pipe, and rose up directly.

'If you could direct us anywhere, sir,' said the child, 'we should take it very kindly.'

'You have been walking a long way,' said the schoolmaster.

'A long way, Sir,' the child replied.

'You're a young traveller, my child,' he said, laying his hand gently on her head. 'Your grandchild, friend?'

'Aye, Sir,' cried the old man, 'and the stay and comfort of my life.'

'Come in,' said the schoolmaster.

Without further preface he conducted them into his little school-room, which was parlour and kitchen likewise, and told them that they were welcome to remain under his roof till morning. Before they had done thanking him, he spread a coarse white cloth upon the table, with knives and platters; and bringing out some bread and cold meat and a jug of beer, besought them to eat and drink.

The child looked round the room as she took her seat. There were a couple of forms, notched and cut and inked all over; a small deal desk perched on four legs, at which no doubt the master sat; a few dog's-eared books upon a high shelf; and beside them a motley collection of peg-tops, balls, kites, fishing-lines, marbles, half-eaten apples, and other confiscated property of idle urchins. Displayed on hooks upon the wall in all their terrors, were the cane and ruler; and near them, on a small shelf of its own, the dunce's cap, made of old newspapers and decorated with glaring wafers of the largest size. But, the great ornaments of the walls were certain moral sentences fairly copied in good round text, and well-worked sums in simple addition and multiplication, evidently achieved by the same hand, which were plentifully pasted all round the room: for the double purpose, as it seemed, of bearing testimony to the excellence of the school, and kindling a worthy emulation in the bosoms of the scholars.

'Yes,' said the old schoolmaster, observing that her attention was caught by these latter specimens. 'That's beautiful writing, my dear.'

'Very, Sir,' replied the child modestly, 'is it yours?'

'Mine!' he returned, taking out his spectacles and putting them on, to have a better view of the triumphs so dear to his heart. 'I couldn't write like that, now-a-days. No. They're all done by one hand; a little hand it is, not so old as yours, but a very clever one.'

As the schoolmaster said this, he saw that a small blot of ink had been thrown on one of the copies, so he took a penknife from his pocket, and going up to the wall, carefully scraped it out. When he had finished, he walked slowly backward from the writing, admiring it as one might contemplate a beautiful picture, but with something of sadness in his voice and manner which quite touched the child, though she was unacquainted with its cause.

'A little hand indeed,' said the poor schoolmaster. 'Far beyond all his companions, in his learning and his sports too, how did he ever come to be so fond of me! That I should love him is no wonder, but that he should love me—' and there the schoolmaster stopped, and took off his spectacles to wipe them, as though they had grown dim.

'I hope there is nothing the matter, sir,' said Nell anxiously.

'Not much, my dear,' returned the schoolmaster. 'I hoped to have seen him on the green to-night. He was always foremost among them. But he'll be there to-morrow.'

'Has he been ill?' asked the child, with a child's quick sympathy.

'Not very. They said he was wandering in his head yesterday, dear boy, and so they said the day before. But that's a part of that kind of disorder; it's not a bad sign—not at all a bad sign.' The child was silent. He walked to the door, and looked wistfully out. The shadows of night were gathering, and all was still.

'If he could lean upon anybody's arm, he would come to me, I know,' he said, returning into the room. 'He always came into the garden to say good night. But perhaps his illness has only just taken a favourable turn, and it's too late for him to come out, for it's very damp and there's a heavy dew. It's much better he shouldn't come to-night.'

The schoolmaster lighted a candle, fastened the window-shutter, and closed the door. But after he had done this, and sat silent a little time, he took down his hat, and said he would go and satisfy himself, if Nell would sit up till he returned. The child readily complied, and he went out.

She sat there half-an-hour or more, feeling the place very strange and lonely, for she had prevailed upon the old man to go to bed, and there was nothing to be heard but the ticking of an old clock, and the whistling of the wind among the trees. When he returned, he took his seat in the chimney corner, but remained silent for a long time. At length he turned to her, and speaking very gently, hoped she would say a prayer that night for a sick child.

'My favourite scholar!' said the poor schoolmaster, smoking a pipe he had forgotten to light, and looking mournfully round upon the walls. 'It is a little hand to have done all that, and waste away with sickness. It is a very, very little hand!'

CHAPTER 25

After a sound night's rest in a chamber in the thatched roof, in which it seemed the sexton had for some years been a lodger, but which he had lately deserted for a wife and a cottage of his own, the child rose early in the morning and descended to the room where she had supped last night. As the schoolmaster had already left his bed and gone out, she bestirred herself to make it neat and comfortable, and had just finished its arrangement when the kind host returned.

He thanked her many times, and said that the old dame who usually did such offices for him had gone to nurse the little scholar whom he had told her of. The child asked how he was, and hoped he was better.

'No,' rejoined the schoolmaster shaking his head sorrowfully, 'no better. They even say he is worse.'

'I am very sorry for that, Sir,' said the child.

The poor schoolmaster appeared to be gratified by her earnest manner, but yet rendered more uneasy by it, for he added hastily that anxious people often magnified an evil and thought it greater than it was; 'for my part,' he said, in his quiet, patient way, 'I hope it's not so. I don't think he can be worse.'

The child asked his leave to prepare breakfast, and her grandfather coming down stairs, they all three partook of it together. While the meal was in progress, their host remarked that the old man seemed much fatigued, and evidently stood in need of rest.

'If the journey you have before you is a long one,' he said, 'and don't press you for one day, you're very welcome to pass another night here. I should really be glad if you would, friend.'

He saw that the old man looked at Nell, uncertain whether to accept or decline his offer; and added,

'I shall be glad to have your young companion with me for one day. If you can do a charity to a lone man, and rest yourself at the same time, do so. If you must proceed upon your journey, I wish you well through it, and will walk a little way with you before school begins.'

'What are we to do, Nell?' said the old man irresolutely, 'say what we're to do, dear.'

It required no great persuasion to induce the child to answer that they had better accept the invitation and remain. She was happy to show her gratitude to the kind schoolmaster by busying herself in the performance of such household duties as his little cottage stood in need of. When these were done, she took some needle-work from her basket, and sat herself down upon a stool beside the lattice, where the honeysuckle and woodbine entwined their tender stems, and stealing into the room filled it with their delicious breath. Her grandfather was basking in the sun outside, breathing the perfume of the flowers, and idly watching the clouds as they floated on before the light summer wind.

As the schoolmaster, after arranging the two forms in due order, took his seat behind his desk and made other preparations for school, the child was apprehensive that she might be in the way, and offered to withdraw to her little bedroom. But this he would not allow, and as he seemed pleased to have her there, she remained, busying herself with her work.

'Have you many scholars, sir?' she asked.

The poor schoolmaster shook his head, and said that they barely filled the two forms.

'Are the others clever, sir?' asked the child, glancing at the trophies on the wall.

'Good boys,' returned the schoolmaster, 'good boys enough, my dear, but they'll never do like that.'

A small white-headed boy with a sunburnt face appeared at the door while he was speaking, and stopping there to make a rustic bow, came in and took his seat upon one of the forms. The white-headed boy then put an open book, astonishingly dog's-eared upon his knees, and thrusting his hands into his pockets began counting the marbles with which they were filled; displaying in the expression of his face a remarkable capacity of totally abstracting his mind from the spelling on which his eyes were fixed. Soon afterwards another white-headed little boy came straggling in, and after him a red-headed lad, and after him two more with white heads, and then one with a flaxen poll, and so on until the forms were occupied by a dozen boys or thereabouts, with heads of every colour but grey, and ranging in their ages from four years old to fourteen years or more; for the legs of the youngest were a long way from the floor when he sat upon the form, and the eldest was a heavy good-tempered foolish fellow, about half a head taller than the schoolmaster.

At the top of the first form—the post of honour in the school—was the vacant place of the little sick scholar, and at the head of the row of pegs on which those who came in hats or caps were wont to hang them up, one was left empty. No boy attempted to violate the sanctity of seat or peg, but many a one looked from the empty spaces to the schoolmaster, and whispered his idle neighbour behind his hand.

Then began the hum of conning over lessons and getting them by heart, the whispered jest and stealthy game, and all the noise and drawl of school; and in the midst of the din sat the poor schoolmaster, the very image of meekness and simplicity, vainly attempting to fix his mind upon the duties of the day, and to forget his little friend. But the tedium of his office reminded him more strongly of the willing scholar, and his thoughts were rambling from his pupils—it was plain.

None knew this better than the idlest boys, who, growing bolder with impunity, waxed louder and more daring; playing odd-or-even under the master's eye, eating apples openly and without rebuke, pinching each other in sport or malice without the least reserve, and cutting their autographs in the very legs of his desk. The puzzled dunce, who stood beside it to say his lesson out of book, looked no longer at the ceiling for forgotten words, but drew closer to the master's elbow and boldly cast his eye upon the page; the wag of the little troop squinted and made grimaces (at the smallest boy of course), holding no book before his face, and his approving audience knew no constraint in their delight. If the master did chance to rouse himself and seem alive to what was going on, the noise subsided for a moment and no eyes met his but wore a studious and a deeply humble look; but the instant he relapsed again, it broke out afresh, and ten times louder than before.

Oh! how some of those idle fellows longed to be outside, and how they looked at the open door and window, as if they half meditated rushing violently out, plunging into the woods, and being wild boys and savages from that time forth. What rebellious thoughts of the cool river, and some shady bathing-place beneath willow trees with branches dipping in the water, kept tempting and urging that sturdy boy, who, with his shirt-collar unbuttoned and flung back as far as it could go, sat fanning his flushed face with a spelling-book, wishing himself a whale, or a tittlebat, or a fly, or anything but a boy at school on that hot, broiling day! Heat! ask that other boy, whose seat being nearest to the door gave him opportunities of gliding out into the garden and driving his companions to madness by dipping his face into the bucket of the well and then rolling on the grass—ask him if there were ever such a day as that, when even the bees were diving deep down into the cups of flowers and stopping there, as if they had made up their minds to retire from business and be manufacturers of honey no more. The day was made for laziness, and lying on one's back in green places, and staring at the sky till its brightness forced one to shut one's eyes and go to sleep; and was this a time to be poring over musty books in a dark room, slighted by the very sun itself? Monstrous!

Nell sat by the window occupied with her work, but attentive still to all that passed, though sometimes rather timid of the boisterous boys. The lessons over, writing time began; and there being but one desk and that the master's, each boy sat at it in turn and laboured at his crooked copy, while the master walked about. This was a quieter time; for he would come and look over the writer's shoulder, and tell him mildly to observe how such a letter was turned in such a copy on the wall, praise such an up-stroke here and such a down-stroke there, and bid him take it for his model. Then he would stop and tell them what the sick child had said last night, and how he had longed to be among them once again; and such was the poor schoolmaster's gentle and affectionate manner, that the boys seemed quite remorseful that they had worried him so much, and were absolutely quiet; eating no apples, cutting no names, inflicting no pinches, and making no grimaces, for full two minutes afterwards.

'I think, boys,' said the schoolmaster when the clock struck twelve, 'that I shall give an extra half-holiday this afternoon.'

At this intelligence, the boys, led on and headed by the tall boy, raised a great shout, in the midst of which the master was seen to speak, but could not be heard. As he held up his hand, however, in token of his wish that they should be silent, they were considerate enough to leave off, as soon as the longest-winded among them were quite out of breath.

'You must promise me first,' said the schoolmaster, 'that you'll not be noisy, or at least, if you are, that you'll go away and be so—away out of the village I mean. I'm sure you wouldn't disturb your old playmate and companion.'

There was a general murmur (and perhaps a very sincere one, for they were but boys) in the negative; and the tall boy, perhaps as sincerely as any of them, called those about him to witness that he had only shouted in a whisper.

'Then pray don't forget, there's my dear scholars,' said the schoolmaster, 'what I have asked you, and do it as a favour to me. Be as happy as you can, and don't be unmindful that you are blessed with health. Good-bye all!'

'Thank'ee, Sir,' and 'good-bye, Sir,' were said a good many times in a variety of voices, and the boys went out very slowly and softly. But there was the sun shining and there were the birds singing, as the sun only shines and the birds only sing on holidays and half-holidays; there were the trees waving to all free boys to climb and nestle among their leafy branches; the hay, entreating them to come and scatter it to the pure air; the green corn, gently beckoning towards wood and stream; the smooth ground, rendered smoother still by blending lights and shadows, inviting to runs and leaps, and long walks God knows whither. It was more than boy could bear, and with a joyous whoop the whole cluster took to their heels and spread themselves about, shouting and laughing as they went.

'It's natural, thank Heaven!' said the poor schoolmaster, looking after them. 'I'm very glad they didn't mind me!'

It is difficult, however, to please everybody, as most of us would have discovered, even without the fable which bears that moral, and in the course of the afternoon several mothers and aunts of pupils looked in to express their entire disapproval of the schoolmaster's proceeding. A few confined themselves to hints, such as politely inquiring what red-letter day or saint's day the almanack said it was; a few (these were the profound village politicians) argued that it was a slight to the throne and an affront to church and state, and savoured of revolutionary principles, to grant a half-holiday upon any lighter occasion than the birthday of the Monarch; but the majority expressed their displeasure on private grounds and in plain terms, arguing that to put the pupils on this short allowance of learning was nothing but an act of downright robbery and fraud: and one old lady, finding that she could not inflame or irritate the peaceable schoolmaster by talking to him, bounced out of his house and talked at him for half-an-hour outside his own window, to another old lady, saying that of course he would deduct this half-holiday from his weekly charge, or of course he would naturally expect to have an opposition started against him; there was no want of idle chaps in that neighbourhood (here the old lady raised her voice), and some chaps who were too idle even to be schoolmasters, might soon find that there were other chaps put over their heads, and so she would have them take care, and look pretty sharp about them. But all these taunts and vexations failed to elicit one word from the meek schoolmaster, who sat with the child by his side—a little more dejected perhaps, but quite silent and uncomplaining.

Towards night an old woman came tottering up the garden as speedily as she could, and meeting the schoolmaster at the door, said he was to go to Dame West's directly, and had best run on before her. He and the child were on the point of going out together for a walk, and without relinquishing her hand, the schoolmaster hurried away, leaving the messenger to follow as she might.

They stopped at a cottage-door, and the schoolmaster knocked softly at it with his hand. It was opened without loss of time. They entered a room where a little group of women were gathered about one, older than the rest, who was crying very bitterly, and sat wringing her hands and rocking herself to and fro.

'Oh, dame!' said the schoolmaster, drawing near her chair, 'is it so bad as this?'

'He's going fast,' cried the old woman; 'my grandson's dying. It's all along of you. You shouldn't see him now, but for his being so earnest on it. This is what his learning has brought him to. Oh dear, dear, dear, what can I do!'

'Do not say that I am in any fault,' urged the gentle school-master. 'I am not hurt, dame. No, no. You are in great distress of mind, and don't mean what you say. I am sure you don't.'

'I do,' returned the old woman. 'I mean it all. If he hadn't been poring over his books out of fear of you, he would have been well and merry now, I know he would.'

The schoolmaster looked round upon the other women as if to entreat some one among them to say a kind word for him, but they shook their heads, and murmured to each other that they never thought there was much good in learning, and that this convinced them. Without saying a word in reply, or giving them a look of reproach, he followed the old woman who had summoned him (and who had now rejoined them) into another room, where his infant friend, half-dressed, lay stretched upon a bed.

He was a very young boy; quite a little child. His hair still hung in curls about his face, and his eyes were very bright; but their light was of Heaven, not earth. The schoolmaster took a seat beside him, and stooping over the pillow, whispered his name. The boy sprung up, stroked his face with his hand, and threw his wasted arms round his neck, crying out that he was his dear kind friend.

'I hope I always was. I meant to be, God knows,' said the poor schoolmaster.

'Who is that?' said the boy, seeing Nell. 'I am afraid to kiss her, lest I should make her ill. Ask her to shake hands with me.' The sobbing child came closer up, and took the little languid hand in hers. Releasing his again after a time, the sick boy laid him gently down.

'You remember the garden, Harry,' whispered the schoolmaster, anxious to rouse him, for a dulness seemed gathering upon the child, 'and how pleasant it used to be in the evening time? You must make haste to visit it again, for I think the very flowers have missed you, and are less gay than they used to be. You will come soon, my dear, very soon now—won't you?'

The boy smiled faintly—so very, very faintly—and put his hand upon his friend's grey head. He moved his lips too, but no voice came from them; no, not a sound.

In the silence that ensued, the hum of distant voices borne upon the evening air came floating through the open window. 'What's that?' said the sick child, opening his eyes.

'The boys at play upon the green.'

He took a handkerchief from his pillow, and tried to wave it above his head. But the feeble arm dropped powerless down.

'Shall I do it?' said the schoolmaster.

'Please wave it at the window,' was the faint reply. 'Tie it to the lattice. Some of them may see it there. Perhaps they'll think of me, and look this way.'

He raised his head, and glanced from the fluttering signal to his idle bat, that lay with slate and book and other boyish property upon a table in the room. And then he laid him softly down once more, and asked if the little girl were there, for he could not see her.

She stepped forward, and pressed the passive hand that lay upon the coverlet. The two old friends and companions—for such they were, though they were man and child—held each other in a long embrace, and then the little scholar turned his face towards the wall, and fell asleep.

The poor schoolmaster sat in the same place, holding the small cold hand in his, and chafing it. It was but the hand of a dead child. He felt that; and yet he chafed it still, and could not lay it down.

CHAPTER 26

Almost broken-hearted, Nell withdrew with the schoolmaster from the bedside and returned to his cottage. In the midst of her grief and tears she was yet careful to conceal their real cause from the old man, for the dead boy had been a grandchild, and left but one aged relative to mourn his premature decay.

She stole away to bed as quickly as she could, and when she was alone, gave free vent to the sorrow with which her breast was overcharged. But the sad scene she had witnessed, was not without its lesson of content and gratitude; of content with the lot which left her health and freedom; and gratitude that she was spared to the one relative and friend she loved, and to live and move in a beautiful world, when so many young creatures—as young and full of hope as she—were stricken down and gathered to their graves. How many of the mounds in that old churchyard where she had lately strayed, grew green above the graves of children! And though she thought as a child herself, and did not perhaps sufficiently consider to what a bright and happy existence those who die young are borne, and how in death they lose the pain of seeing others die around them, bearing to the tomb some strong affection of their hearts (which makes the old die many times in one long life), still she thought wisely enough, to draw a plain and easy moral from what she had seen that night, and to store it, deep in her mind.

Her dreams were of the little scholar: not coffined and covered up, but mingling with angels, and smiling happily. The sun darting his cheerful rays into the room, awoke her; and now there remained but to take leave of the poor schoolmaster and wander forth once more.

By the time they were ready to depart, school had begun. In the darkened room, the din of yesterday was going on again: a little sobered and softened down, perhaps, but only a very little, if at all. The schoolmaster rose from his desk and walked with them to the gate.

It was with a trembling and reluctant hand, that the child held out to him the money which the lady had given her at the races for her flowers: faltering in her thanks as she thought how small the sum was, and blushing as she offered it. But he bade her put it up, and stooping to kiss her cheek, turned back into his house.

They had not gone half-a-dozen paces when he was at the door again; the old man retraced his steps to shake hands, and the child did the same.

'Good fortune and happiness go with you!' said the poor schoolmaster. 'I am quite a solitary man now. If you ever pass this way again, you'll not forget the little village-school.'

'We shall never forget it, sir,' rejoined Nell; 'nor ever forget to be grateful to you for your kindness to us.'

'I have heard such words from the lips of children very often,' said the schoolmaster, shaking his head, and smiling thoughtfully, 'but they were soon forgotten. I had attached one young friend to me, the better friend for being young—but that's over—God bless you!'

They bade him farewell very many times, and turned away, walking slowly and often looking back, until they could see him no more. At length they had left the village far behind, and even lost sight of the smoke among the trees. They trudged onward now, at a quicker pace, resolving to keep the main road, and go wherever it might lead them.

But main roads stretch a long, long way. With the exception of two or three inconsiderable clusters of cottages which they passed, without stopping, and one lonely road-side public-house where they had some bread and cheese, this highway had led them to nothing—late in the afternoon—and still lengthened out, far in the distance, the same dull, tedious, winding course, that they had been pursuing all day. As they had no resource, however, but to go forward, they still kept on, though at a much slower pace, being very weary and fatigued.

The afternoon had worn away into a beautiful evening, when they arrived at a point where the road made a sharp turn and struck across a common. On the border of this common, and close to the hedge which divided it from the cultivated fields, a caravan was drawn up to rest; upon which, by reason of its situation, they came so suddenly that they could not have avoided it if they would.

It was not a shabby, dingy, dusty cart, but a smart little house upon wheels, with white dimity curtains festooning the windows, and window-shutters of green picked out with panels of a staring red, in which happily-contrasted colours the whole concern shone brilliant. Neither was it a poor caravan drawn by a single donkey or emaciated horse, for a pair of horses in pretty good condition were released from the shafts and grazing on the frouzy grass. Neither was it a gipsy caravan, for at the open door (graced with a bright brass knocker) sat a Christian lady, stout and comfortable to look upon, who wore a large bonnet trembling with bows. And that it was not an unprovided or destitute caravan was clear from this lady's occupation, which was the very pleasant and refreshing one of taking tea. The tea-things, including a bottle of rather suspicious character and a cold knuckle of ham, were set forth upon a drum, covered with a white napkin; and there, as if at the most convenient round-table in all the world, sat this roving lady, taking her tea and enjoying the prospect.

It happened that at that moment the lady of the caravan had her cup (which, that everything about her might be of a stout and comfortable kind, was a breakfast cup) to her lips, and that having her eyes lifted to the sky in her enjoyment of the full flavour of the tea, not unmingled possibly with just the slightest dash or gleam of something out of the suspicious bottle—but this is mere speculation and not distinct matter of history—it happened that being thus agreeably engaged, she did not see the travellers when they first came up. It was not until she was in the act of getting down the cup, and drawing a long breath after the exertion of causing its contents to disappear, that the lady of the caravan beheld an old man and a young child walking slowly by, and glancing at her proceedings with eyes of modest but hungry admiration.

'Hey!' cried the lady of the caravan, scooping the crumbs out of her lap and swallowing the same before wiping her lips. 'Yes, to be sure—Who won the Helter-Skelter Plate, child?'

'Won what, ma'am?' asked Nell.

'The Helter-Skelter Plate at the races, child—the plate that was run for on the second day.'

'On the second day, ma'am?'

'Second day! Yes, second day,' repeated the lady with an air of impatience. 'Can't you say who won the Helter-Skelter Plate when you're asked the question civilly?'

'I don't know, ma'am.'

'Don't know!' repeated the lady of the caravan; 'why, you were there. I saw you with my own eyes.'

Nell was not a little alarmed to hear this, supposing that the lady might be intimately acquainted with the firm of Short and Codlin; but what followed tended to reassure her.

'And very sorry I was,' said the lady of the caravan, 'to see you in company with a Punch; a low, practical, wulgar wretch, that people should scorn to look at.'

'I was not there by choice,' returned the child; 'we didn't know our way, and the two men were very kind to us, and let us travel with them. Do you—do you know them, ma'am?'

'Know 'em, child!' cried the lady of the caravan in a sort of shriek. 'Know them! But you're young and inexperienced, and that's your excuse for asking sich a question. Do I look as if I know'd 'em, does the caravan look as if it know'd 'em?'

'No, ma'am, no,' said the child, fearing she had committed some grievous fault. 'I beg your pardon.'

It was granted immediately, though the lady still appeared much ruffled and discomposed by the degrading supposition. The child then explained that they had left the races on the first day, and were travelling to the next town on that road, where they purposed to spend the night. As the countenance of the stout lady began to clear up, she ventured to inquire how far it was. The reply—which the stout lady did not come to, until she had thoroughly explained that she went to the races on the first day in a gig, and as an expedition of pleasure, and that her presence there had no connexion with any matters of business or profit—was, that the town was eight miles off.

This discouraging information a little dashed the child, who could scarcely repress a tear as she glanced along the darkening road. Her grandfather made no complaint, but he sighed heavily as he leaned upon his staff, and vainly tried to pierce the dusty distance.

The lady of the caravan was in the act of gathering her tea equipage together preparatory to clearing the table, but noting the child's anxious manner she hesitated and stopped. The child curtseyed, thanked her for her information, and giving her hand to the old man had already got some fifty yards or so away, when the lady of the caravan called to her to return.

'Come nearer, nearer still,' said she, beckoning to her to ascend the steps. 'Are you hungry, child?'

'Not very, but we are tired, and it's—it IS a long way.'

'Well, hungry or not, you had better have some tea,' rejoined her new acquaintance. 'I suppose you are agreeable to that, old gentleman?'

The grandfather humbly pulled off his hat and thanked her. The lady of the caravan then bade him come up the steps likewise, but the drum proving an inconvenient table for two, they descended again, and sat upon the grass, where she handed down to them the tea-tray, the bread and butter, the knuckle of ham, and in short everything of which she had partaken herself, except the bottle which she had already embraced an opportunity of slipping into her pocket.

'Set 'em out near the hind wheels, child, that's the best place,' said their friend, superintending the arrangements from above. 'Now hand up the teapot for a little more hot water, and a pinch of fresh tea, and then both of you eat and drink as much as you can, and don't spare anything; that's all I ask of you.'

They might perhaps have carried out the lady's wish, if it had been less freely expressed, or even if it had not been expressed at all. But as this direction relieved them from any shadow of delicacy or uneasiness, they made a hearty meal and enjoyed it to the utmost.

While they were thus engaged, the lady of the caravan alighted on the earth, and with her hands clasped behind her, and her large bonnet trembling excessively, walked up and down in a measured tread and very stately manner, surveying the caravan from time to time with an air of calm delight, and deriving particular gratification from the red panels and the brass knocker. When she had taken this gentle exercise for some time, she sat down upon the steps and called 'George'; whereupon a man in a carter's frock, who had been so shrouded in a hedge up to this time as to see everything that passed without being seen himself, parted the twigs that concealed him, and appeared in a sitting attitude, supporting on his legs a baking-dish and a half-gallon stone bottle, and bearing in his right hand a knife, and in his left a fork.

'Yes, Missus,' said George.

'How did you find the cold pie, George?'

'It warn't amiss, mum.'

'And the beer,' said the lady of the caravan, with an appearance of being more interested in this question than the last; 'is it passable, George?'

'It's more flatterer than it might be,' George returned, 'but it an't so bad for all that.'

To set the mind of his mistress at rest, he took a sip (amounting in quantity to a pint or thereabouts) from the stone bottle, and then smacked his lips, winked his eye, and nodded his head. No doubt with the same amiable desire, he immediately resumed his knife and fork, as a practical assurance that the beer had wrought no bad effect upon his appetite.

The lady of the caravan looked on approvingly for some time, and then said,

'Have you nearly finished?'

'Wery nigh, mum.' And indeed, after scraping the dish all round with his knife and carrying the choice brown morsels to his mouth, and after taking such a scientific pull at the stone bottle that, by degrees almost imperceptible to the sight, his head went further and further back until he lay nearly at his full length upon the ground, this gentleman declared himself quite disengaged, and came forth from his retreat.

'I hope I haven't hurried you, George,' said his mistress, who appeared to have a great sympathy with his late pursuit.

'If you have,' returned the follower, wisely reserving himself for any favourable contingency that might occur, 'we must make up for it next time, that's all.'

'We are not a heavy load, George?'

'That's always what the ladies say,' replied the man, looking a long way round, as if he were appealing to Nature in general against such monstrous propositions. 'If you see a woman a driving, you'll always perceive that she never will keep her whip still; the horse can't go fast enough for her. If cattle have got their proper load, you never can persuade a woman that they'll not bear something more. What is the cause of this here?'

'Would these two travellers make much difference to the horses, if we took them with us?' asked his mistress, offering no reply to the philosophical inquiry, and pointing to Nell and the old man, who were painfully preparing to resume their journey on foot.

'They'd make a difference in course,' said George doggedly.

'Would they make much difference?' repeated his mistress. 'They can't be very heavy.'

'The weight o' the pair, mum,' said George, eyeing them with the look of a man who was calculating within half an ounce or so, 'would be a trifle under that of Oliver Cromwell.'

Nell was very much surprised that the man should be so accurately acquainted with the weight of one whom she had read of in books as having lived considerably before their time, but speedily forgot the subject in the joy of hearing that they were to go forward in the caravan, for which she thanked its lady with unaffected earnestness. She helped with great readiness and alacrity to put away the tea-things and other matters that were lying about, and, the horses being by that time harnessed, mounted into the vehicle, followed by her delighted grandfather. Their patroness then shut the door and sat herself down by her drum at an open window; and, the steps being struck by George and stowed under the carriage, away they went, with a great noise of flapping and creaking and straining, and the bright brass knocker, which nobody ever knocked at, knocking one perpetual double knock of its own accord as they jolted heavily along.

CHAPTER 27

When they had travelled slowly forward for some short distance, Nell ventured to steal a look round the caravan and observe it more closely. One half of it—that moiety in which the comfortable proprietress was then seated—was carpeted, and so partitioned off at the further end as to accommodate a sleeping-place, constructed after the fashion of a berth on board ship, which was shaded, like the little windows, with fair white curtains, and looked comfortable enough, though by what kind of gymnastic exercise the lady of the caravan ever contrived to get into it, was an unfathomable mystery. The other half served for a kitchen, and was fitted up with a stove whose small chimney passed through the roof. It held also a closet or larder, several chests, a great pitcher of water, and a few cooking-utensils and articles of crockery. These latter necessaries hung upon the walls, which, in that portion of the establishment devoted to the lady of the caravan, were ornamented with such gayer and lighter decorations as a triangle and a couple of well-thumbed tambourines.

The lady of the caravan sat at one window in all the pride and poetry of the musical instruments, and little Nell and her grandfather sat at the other in all the humility of the kettle and saucepans, while the machine jogged on and shifted the darkening prospect very slowly. At first the two travellers spoke little, and only in whispers, but as they grew more familiar with the place they ventured to converse with greater freedom, and talked about the country through which they were passing, and the different objects that presented themselves, until the old man fell asleep; which the lady of the caravan observing, invited Nell to come and sit beside her.

'Well, child,' she said, 'how do you like this way of travelling?'

Nell replied that she thought it was very pleasant indeed, to which the lady assented in the case of people who had their spirits. For herself, she said, she was troubled with a lowness in that respect which required a constant stimulant; though whether the aforesaid stimulant was derived from the suspicious bottle of which mention has been already made or from other sources, she did not say.

'That's the happiness of you young people,' she continued. 'You don't know what it is to be low in your feelings. You always have your appetites too, and what a comfort that is.'

Nell thought that she could sometimes dispense with her own appetite very conveniently; and thought, moreover, that there was nothing either in the lady's personal appearance or in her manner of taking tea, to lead to the conclusion that her natural relish for meat and drink had at all failed her. She silently assented, however, as in duty bound, to what the lady had said, and waited until she should speak again.

Instead of speaking, however, she sat looking at the child for a long time in silence, and then getting up, brought out from a corner a large roll of canvas about a yard in width, which she laid upon the floor and spread open with her foot until it nearly reached from one end of the caravan to the other.

'There, child,' she said, 'read that.'

Nell walked down it, and read aloud, in enormous black letters, the inscription, 'Jarley's WAX-WORK.'

'Read it again,' said the lady, complacently.

'Jarley's Wax-Work,' repeated Nell.

'That's me,' said the lady. 'I am Mrs Jarley.'

Giving the child an encouraging look, intended to reassure her and let her know, that, although she stood in the presence of the original Jarley, she must not allow herself to be utterly overwhelmed and borne down, the lady of the caravan unfolded another scroll, whereon was the inscription, 'One hundred figures the full size of life,' and then another scroll, on which was written, 'The only stupendous collection of real wax-work in the world,' and then several smaller scrolls with such inscriptions as 'Now exhibiting within'—'The genuine and only Jarley'—'Jarley's unrivalled collection'—'Jarley is the delight of the Nobility and Gentry'—'The Royal Family are the patrons of Jarley.' When she had exhibited these leviathans of public announcement to the astonished child, she brought forth specimens of the lesser fry in the shape of hand-bills, some of which were couched in the form of parodies on popular melodies, as 'Believe me if all Jarley's wax-work so rare'—'I saw thy show in youthful prime'—'Over the water to Jarley;' while, to consult all tastes, others were composed with a view to the lighter and more facetious spirits, as a parody on the favourite air of 'If I had a donkey,' beginning

If I know'd a donkey wot wouldn't go
To see Mrs JARLEY'S wax-work show,
Do you think I'd acknowledge him? Oh no no!
Then run to Jarley's—

—besides several compositions in prose, purporting to be dialogues between the Emperor of China and an oyster, or the Archbishop of Canterbury and a dissenter on the subject of church-rates, but all having the same moral, namely, that the reader must make haste to Jarley's, and that children and servants were admitted at half-price. When she had brought all these testimonials of her important position in society to bear upon her young companion, Mrs Jarley rolled them up, and having put them carefully away, sat down again, and looked at the child in triumph.

'Never go into the company of a filthy Punch any more,' said Mrs Jarley, 'after this.'

'I never saw any wax-work, ma'am,' said Nell. 'Is it funnier than Punch?'

'Funnier!' said Mrs Jarley in a shrill voice. 'It is not funny at all.'

'Oh!' said Nell, with all possible humility.

'It isn't funny at all,' repeated Mrs Jarley. 'It's calm and—what's that word again—critical?—no—classical, that's it—it's calm and classical. No low beatings and knockings about, no jokings and squeakings like your precious Punches, but always the same, with a constantly unchanging air of coldness and gentility; and so like life, that if wax-work only spoke and walked about, you'd hardly know the difference. I won't go so far as to say, that, as it is, I've seen wax-work quite like life, but I've certainly seen some life that was exactly like wax-work.'

'Is it here, ma'am?' asked Nell, whose curiosity was awakened by this description.

'Is what here, child?'

'The wax-work, ma'am.'

'Why, bless you, child, what are you thinking of? How could such a collection be here, where you see everything except the inside of one little cupboard and a few boxes? It's gone on in the other wans to the assembly-rooms, and there it'll be exhibited the day after to-morrow. You are going to the same town, and you'll see it I dare say. It's natural to expect that you'll see it, and I've no doubt you will. I suppose you couldn't stop away if you was to try ever so much.'

'I shall not be in the town, I think, ma'am,' said the child.

'Not there!' cried Mrs Jarley. 'Then where will you be?'

'I—I—don't quite know. I am not certain.'

'You don't mean to say that you're travelling about the country without knowing where you're going to?' said the lady of the caravan. 'What curious people you are! What line are you in? You looked to me at the races, child, as if you were quite out of your element, and had got there by accident.'

'We were there quite by accident,' returned Nell, confused by this abrupt questioning. 'We are poor people, ma'am, and are only wandering about. We have nothing to do;—I wish we had.'

'You amaze me more and more,' said Mrs Jarley, after remaining for some time as mute as one of her own figures. 'Why, what do you call yourselves? Not beggars?'

'Indeed, ma'am, I don't know what else we are,' returned the child.

'Lord bless me,' said the lady of the caravan. 'I never heard of such a thing. Who'd have thought it!'

She remained so long silent after this exclamation, that Nell feared she felt her having been induced to bestow her protection and conversation upon one so poor, to be an outrage upon her dignity that nothing could repair. This persuasion was rather confirmed than otherwise by the tone in which she at length broke silence and said, 'And yet you can read. And write too, I shouldn't wonder?'

'Yes, ma'am,' said the child, fearful of giving new offence by the confession.

'Well, and what a thing that is,' returned Mrs Jarley. 'I can't!'

Nell said 'indeed' in a tone which might imply, either that she was reasonably surprised to find the genuine and only Jarley, who was the delight of the Nobility and Gentry and the peculiar pet of the Royal Family, destitute of these familiar arts; or that she presumed so great a lady could scarcely stand in need of such ordinary accomplishments. In whatever way Mrs Jarley received the response, it did not provoke her to further questioning, or tempt her into any more remarks at the time, for she relapsed into a thoughtful silence, and remained in that state so long that Nell withdrew to the other window and rejoined her grandfather, who was now awake.

At length the lady of the caravan shook off her fit of meditation, and, summoning the driver to come under the window at which she was seated, held a long conversation with him in a low tone of voice, as if she were asking his advice on an important point, and discussing the pros and cons of some very weighty matter. This conference at length concluded, she drew in her head again, and beckoned Nell to approach.

'And the old gentleman too,' said Mrs Jarley; 'for I want to have a word with him. Do you want a good situation for your grand-daughter, master? If you do, I can put her in the way of getting one. What do you say?'

'I can't leave her,' answered the old man. 'We can't separate. What would become of me without her?'

'I should have thought you were old enough to take care of yourself, if you ever will be,' retorted Mrs Jarley sharply.

'But he never will be,' said the child in an earnest whisper. 'I fear he never will be again. Pray do not speak harshly to him. We are very thankful to you,' she added aloud; 'but neither of us could part from the other if all the wealth of the world were halved between us.'

Mrs Jarley was a little disconcerted by this reception of her proposal, and looked at the old man, who tenderly took Nell's hand and detained it in his own, as if she could have very well dispensed with his company or even his earthly existence. After an awkward pause, she thrust her head out of the window again, and had another conference with the driver upon some point on which they did not seem to agree quite so readily as on their former topic of discussion; but they concluded at last, and she addressed the grandfather again.

'If you're really disposed to employ yourself,' said Mrs Jarley, 'there would be plenty for you to do in the way of helping to dust the figures, and take the checks, and so forth. What I want your grand-daughter for, is to point 'em out to the company; they would be soon learnt, and she has a way with her that people wouldn't think unpleasant, though she does come after me; for I've been always accustomed to go round with visitors myself, which I should keep on doing now, only that my spirits make a little ease absolutely necessary. It's not a common offer, bear in mind,' said the lady, rising into the tone and manner in which she was accustomed to address her audiences; 'it's Jarley's wax-work, remember. The duty's very light and genteel, the company particularly select, the exhibition takes place in assembly-rooms, town-halls, large rooms at inns, or auction galleries. There is none of your open-air wagrancy at Jarley's, recollect; there is no tarpaulin and sawdust at Jarley's, remember. Every expectation held out in the handbills is realised to the utmost, and the whole forms an effect of imposing brilliancy hitherto unrivalled in this kingdom. Remember that the price of admission is only sixpence, and that this is an opportunity which may never occur again!'

Descending from the sublime when she had reached this point, to the details of common life, Mrs Jarley remarked that with reference to salary she could pledge herself to no specific sum until she had sufficiently tested Nell's abilities, and narrowly watched her in the performance of her duties. But board and lodging, both for her and her grandfather, she bound herself to provide, and she furthermore passed her word that the board should always be good in quality, and in quantity plentiful.

Nell and her grandfather consulted together, and while they were so engaged, Mrs Jarley with her hands behind her walked up and down the caravan, as she had walked after tea on the dull earth, with uncommon dignity and self-esteem. Nor will this appear so slight a circumstance as to be unworthy of mention, when it is remembered that the caravan was in uneasy motion all the time, and that none but a person of great natural stateliness and acquired grace could have forborne to stagger.

'Now, child?' cried Mrs Jarley, coming to a halt as Nell turned towards her.

'We are very much obliged to you, ma'am,' said Nell, 'and thankfully accept your offer.'

'And you'll never be sorry for it,' returned Mrs Jarley. 'I'm pretty sure of that. So as that's all settled, let us have a bit of supper.'

In the meanwhile, the caravan blundered on as if it too had been drinking strong beer and was drowsy, and came at last upon the paved streets of a town which were clear of passengers, and quiet, for it was by this time near midnight, and the townspeople were all abed. As it was too late an hour to repair to the exhibition room, they turned aside into a piece of waste ground that lay just within the old town-gate, and drew up there for the night, near to another caravan, which, notwithstanding that it bore on the lawful panel the great name of Jarley, and was employed besides in conveying from place to place the wax-work which was its country's pride, was designated by a grovelling stamp-office as a 'Common Stage Waggon,' and numbered too—seven thousand odd hundred—as though its precious freight were mere flour or coals!

This ill-used machine being empty (for it had deposited its burden at the place of exhibition, and lingered here until its services were again required) was assigned to the old man as his sleeping-place for the night; and within its wooden walls, Nell made him up the best bed she could, from the materials at hand. For herself, she was to sleep in Mrs Jarley's own travelling-carriage, as a signal mark of that lady's favour and confidence.

She had taken leave of her grandfather and was returning to the other waggon, when she was tempted by the coolness of the night to linger for a little while in the air. The moon was shining down upon the old gateway of the town, leaving the low archway very black and dark; and with a mingled sensation of curiosity and fear, she slowly approached the gate, and stood still to look up at it, wondering to see how dark, and grim, and old, and cold, it looked.

There was an empty niche from which some old statue had fallen or been carried away hundreds of years ago, and she was thinking what strange people it must have looked down upon when it stood there, and how many hard struggles might have taken place, and how many murders might have been done, upon that silent spot, when there suddenly emerged from the black shade of the arch, a man. The instant he appeared, she recognised him—Who could have failed to recognise, in that instant, the ugly misshapen Quilp!

The street beyond was so narrow, and the shadow of the houses on one side of the way so deep, that he seemed to have risen out of the earth. But there he was. The child withdrew into a dark corner, and saw him pass close to her. He had a stick in his hand, and, when he had got clear of the shadow of the gateway, he leant upon it, looked back—directly, as it seemed, towards where she stood—and beckoned.

To her? oh no, thank God, not to her; for as she stood, in an extremity of fear, hesitating whether to scream for help, or come from her hiding-place and fly, before he should draw nearer, there issued slowly forth from the arch another figure—that of a boy—who carried on his back a trunk.

'Faster, sirrah!' cried Quilp, looking up at the old gateway, and showing in the moonlight like some monstrous image that had come down from its niche and was casting a backward glance at its old house, 'faster!'

'It's a dreadful heavy load, Sir,' the boy pleaded. 'I've come on very fast, considering.'

'YOU have come fast, considering!' retorted Quilp; 'you creep, you dog, you crawl, you measure distance like a worm. There are the chimes now, half-past twelve.'

He stopped to listen, and then turning upon the boy with a suddenness and ferocity that made him start, asked at what hour that London coach passed the corner of the road. The boy replied, at one.

'Come on then,' said Quilp, 'or I shall be too late. Faster—do you hear me? Faster.'

The boy made all the speed he could, and Quilp led onward, constantly turning back to threaten him, and urge him to greater haste. Nell did not dare to move until they were out of sight and hearing, and then hurried to where she had left her grandfather, feeling as if the very passing of the dwarf so near him must have filled him with alarm and terror. But he was sleeping soundly, and she softly withdrew.

As she was making her way to her own bed, she determined to say nothing of this adventure, as upon whatever errand the dwarf had come (and she feared it must have been in search of them) it was clear by his inquiry about the London coach that he was on his way homeward, and as he had passed through that place, it was but reasonable to suppose that they were safer from his inquiries there, than they could be elsewhere. These reflections did not remove her own alarm, for she had been too much terrified to be easily composed, and felt as if she were hemmed in by a legion of Quilps, and the very air itself were filled with them.

The delight of the Nobility and Gentry and the patronised of Royalty had, by some process of self-abridgment known only to herself, got into her travelling bed, where she was snoring peacefully, while the large bonnet, carefully disposed upon the drum, was revealing its glories by the light of a dim lamp that swung from the roof. The child's bed was already made upon the floor, and it was a great comfort to her to hear the steps removed as soon as she had entered, and to know that all easy communication between persons outside and the brass knocker was by this means effectually prevented. Certain guttural sounds, too, which from time to time ascended through the floor of the caravan, and a rustling of straw in the same direction, apprised her that the driver was couched upon the ground beneath, and gave her an additional feeling of security.

Notwithstanding these protections, she could get none but broken sleep by fits and starts all night, for fear of Quilp, who throughout her uneasy dreams was somehow connected with the wax-work, or was wax-work himself, or was Mrs Jarley and wax-work too, or was himself, Mrs Jarley, wax-work, and a barrel organ all in one, and yet not exactly any of them either. At length, towards break of day, that deep sleep came upon her which succeeds to weariness and over-watching, and which has no consciousness but one of overpowering and irresistible enjoyment.

CHAPTER 28

Sleep hung upon the eyelids of the child so long, that, when she awoke, Mrs Jarley was already decorated with her large bonnet, and actively engaged in preparing breakfast. She received Nell's apology for being so late with perfect good humour, and said that she should not have roused her if she had slept on until noon.

'Because it does you good,' said the lady of the caravan, 'when you're tired, to sleep as long as ever you can, and get the fatigue quite off; and that's another blessing of your time of life—you can sleep so very sound.'

'Have you had a bad night, ma'am?' asked Nell.

'I seldom have anything else, child,' replied Mrs Jarley, with the air of a martyr. 'I sometimes wonder how I bear it.'

Remembering the snores which had proceeded from that cleft in the caravan in which the proprietress of the wax-work passed the night, Nell rather thought she must have been dreaming of lying awake. However, she expressed herself very sorry to hear such a dismal account of her state of health, and shortly afterwards sat down with her grandfather and Mrs Jarley to breakfast. The meal finished, Nell assisted to wash the cups and saucers, and put them in their proper places, and these household duties performed, Mrs Jarley arrayed herself in an exceedingly bright shawl for the purpose of making a progress through the streets of the town.

'The wan will come on to bring the boxes,' said Mrs Jarley, and you had better come in it, child. I am obliged to walk, very much against my will; but the people expect it of me, and public characters can't be their own masters and mistresses in such matters as these. How do I look, child?'

Nell returned a satisfactory reply, and Mrs Jarley, after sticking a great many pins into various parts of her figure, and making several abortive attempts to obtain a full view of her own back, was at last satisfied with her appearance, and went forth majestically.

The caravan followed at no great distance. As it went jolting through the streets, Nell peeped from the window, curious to see in what kind of place they were, and yet fearful of encountering at every turn the dreaded face of Quilp. It was a pretty large town, with an open square which they were crawling slowly across, and in the middle of which was the Town-Hall, with a clock-tower and a weather-cock. There were houses of stone, houses of red brick, houses of yellow brick, houses of lath and plaster; and houses of wood, many of them very old, with withered faces carved upon the beams, and staring down into the street. These had very little winking windows, and low-arched doors, and, in some of the narrower ways, quite overhung the pavement. The streets were very clean, very sunny, very empty, and very dull. A few idle men lounged about the two inns, and the empty market-place, and the tradesmen's doors, and some old people were dozing in chairs outside an alms-house wall; but scarcely any passengers who seemed bent on going anywhere, or to have any object in view, went by; and if perchance some straggler did, his footsteps echoed on the hot bright pavement for minutes afterwards. Nothing seemed to be going on but the clocks, and they had such drowzy faces, such heavy lazy hands, and such cracked voices that they surely must have been too slow. The very dogs were all asleep, and the flies, drunk with moist sugar in the grocer's shop, forgot their wings and briskness, and baked to death in dusty corners of the window.

Rumbling along with most unwonted noise, the caravan stopped at last at the place of exhibition, where Nell dismounted amidst an admiring group of children, who evidently supposed her to be an important item of the curiosities, and were fully impressed with the belief that her grandfather was a cunning device in wax. The chests were taken out with all convenient despatch, and taken in to be unlocked by Mrs Jarley, who, attended by George and another man in velveteen shorts and a drab hat ornamented with turnpike tickets, were waiting to dispose their contents (consisting of red festoons and other ornamental devices in upholstery work) to the best advantage in the decoration of the room.

They all got to work without loss of time, and very busy they were. As the stupendous collection were yet concealed by cloths, lest the envious dust should injure their complexions, Nell bestirred herself to assist in the embellishment of the room, in which her grandfather also was of great service. The two men being well used to it, did a great deal in a short time; and Mrs Jarley served out the tin tacks from a linen pocket like a toll-collector's which she wore for the purpose, and encouraged her assistants to renewed exertion.

While they were thus employed, a tallish gentleman with a hook nose and black hair, dressed in a military surtout very short and tight in the sleeves, and which had once been frogged and braided all over, but was now sadly shorn of its garniture and quite threadbare—dressed too in ancient grey pantaloons fitting tight to the leg, and a pair of pumps in the winter of their existence—looked in at the door and smiled affably. Mrs Jarley's back being then towards him, the military gentleman shook his forefinger as a sign that her myrmidons were not to apprise her of his presence, and stealing up close behind her, tapped her on the neck, and cried playfully 'Boh!'

'What, Mr Slum!' cried the lady of the wax-work. 'Lot! who'd have thought of seeing you here!'

''Pon my soul and honour,' said Mr Slum, 'that's a good remark. 'Pon my soul and honour that's a wise remark. Who would have thought it! George, my faithful feller, how are you?'

George received this advance with a surly indifference, observing that he was well enough for the matter of that, and hammering lustily all the time.

'I came here,' said the military gentleman turning to Mrs Jarley—''pon my soul and honour I hardly know what I came here for. It would puzzle me to tell you, it would by Gad. I wanted a little inspiration, a little freshening up, a little change of ideas, and— 'Pon my soul and honour,' said the military gentleman, checking himself and looking round the room, 'what a devilish classical thing this is! by Gad, it's quite Minervian.'

'It'll look well enough when it comes to be finished,' observed Mrs Jarley.

'Well enough!' said Mr Slum. 'Will you believe me when I say it's the delight of my life to have dabbled in poetry, when I think I've exercised my pen upon this charming theme? By the way—any orders? Is there any little thing I can do for you?'

'It comes so very expensive, sir,' replied Mrs Jarley, 'and I really don't think it does much good.'

'Hush! No, no!' returned Mr Slum, elevating his hand. 'No fibs. I'll not hear it. Don't say it don't do good. Don't say it. I know better!'

'I don't think it does,' said Mrs Jarley.

'Ha, ha!' cried Mr Slum, 'you're giving way, you're coming down. Ask the perfumers, ask the blacking-makers, ask the hatters, ask the old lottery-office-keepers—ask any man among 'em what my poetry has done for him, and mark my words, he blesses the name of Slum. If he's an honest man, he raises his eyes to heaven, and blesses the name of Slum—mark that! You are acquainted with Westminster Abbey, Mrs Jarley?'

'Yes, surely.'

'Then upon my soul and honour, ma'am, you'll find in a certain angle of that dreary pile, called Poets' Corner, a few smaller names than Slum,' retorted that gentleman, tapping himself expressively on the forehead to imply that there was some slight quantity of brain behind it. 'I've got a little trifle here, now,' said Mr Slum, taking off his hat which was full of scraps of paper, 'a little trifle here, thrown off in the heat of the moment, which I should say was exactly the thing you wanted to set this place on fire with. It's an acrostic—the name at this moment is Warren, and the idea's a convertible one, and a positive inspiration for Jarley. Have the acrostic.'

'I suppose it's very dear,' said Mrs Jarley.

'Five shillings,' returned Mr Slum, using his pencil as a toothpick. 'Cheaper than any prose.'

'I couldn't give more than three,' said Mrs Jarley.

'—And six,' retorted Slum. 'Come. Three-and-six.'

Mrs Jarley was not proof against the poet's insinuating manner, and Mr Slum entered the order in a small note-book as a three-and-sixpenny one. Mr Slum then withdrew to alter the acrostic, after taking a most affectionate leave of his patroness, and promising to return, as soon as he possibly could, with a fair copy for the printer.

As his presence had not interfered with or interrupted the preparations, they were now far advanced, and were completed shortly after his departure. When the festoons were all put up as tastily as they might be, the stupendous collection was uncovered, and there were displayed, on a raised platform some two feet from the floor, running round the room and parted from the rude public by a crimson rope breast high, divers sprightly effigies of celebrated characters, singly and in groups, clad in glittering dresses of various climes and times, and standing more or less unsteadily upon their legs, with their eyes very wide open, and their nostrils very much inflated, and the muscles of their legs and arms very strongly developed, and all their countenances expressing great surprise. All the gentlemen were very pigeon-breasted and very blue about the beards; and all the ladies were miraculous figures; and all the ladies and all the gentlemen were looking intensely nowhere, and staring with extraordinary earnestness at nothing.

When Nell had exhausted her first raptures at this glorious sight, Mrs Jarley ordered the room to be cleared of all but herself and the child, and, sitting herself down in an arm-chair in the centre, formally invested Nell with a willow wand, long used by herself for pointing out the characters, and was at great pains to instruct her in her duty.

'That,' said Mrs Jarley in her exhibition tone, as Nell touched a figure at the beginning of the platform, 'is an unfortunate Maid of Honour in the Time of Queen Elizabeth, who died from pricking her finger in consequence of working upon a Sunday. Observe the blood which is trickling from her finger; also the gold-eyed needle of the period, with which she is at work.'

All this, Nell repeated twice or thrice: pointing to the finger and the needle at the right times: and then passed on to the next.

'That, ladies and gentlemen,' said Mrs Jarley, 'is jasper Packlemerton of atrocious memory, who courted and married fourteen wives, and destroyed them all, by tickling the soles of their feet when they were sleeping in the consciousness of innocence and virtue. On being brought to the scaffold and asked if he was sorry for what he had done, he replied yes, he was sorry for having let 'em off so easy, and hoped all Christian husbands would pardon him the offence. Let this be a warning to all young ladies to be particular in the character of the gentlemen of their choice. Observe that his fingers are curled as if in the act of tickling, and that his face is represented with a wink, as he appeared when committing his barbarous murders.'

When Nell knew all about Mr Packlemerton, and could say it without faltering, Mrs Jarley passed on to the fat man, and then to the thin man, the tall man, the short man, the old lady who died of dancing at a hundred and thirty-two, the wild boy of the woods, the woman who poisoned fourteen families with pickled walnuts, and other historical characters and interesting but misguided individuals. And so well did Nell profit by her instructions, and so apt was she to remember them, that by the time they had been shut up together for a couple of hours, she was in full possession of the history of the whole establishment, and perfectly competent to the enlightenment of visitors.

Mrs Jarley was not slow to express her admiration at this happy result, and carried her young friend and pupil to inspect the remaining arrangements within doors, by virtue of which the passage had been already converted into a grove of green-baize hung with the inscription she had already seen (Mr Slum's productions), and a highly ornamented table placed at the upper end for Mrs Jarley herself, at which she was to preside and take the money, in company with his Majesty King George the Third, Mr Grimaldi as clown, Mary Queen of Scots, an anonymous gentleman of the Quaker persuasion, and Mr Pitt holding in his hand a correct model of the bill for the imposition of the window duty. The preparations without doors had not been neglected either; a nun of great personal attractions was telling her beads on the little portico over the door; and a brigand with the blackest possible head of hair, and the clearest possible complexion, was at that moment going round the town in a cart, consulting the miniature of a lady.

It now only remained that Mr Slum's compositions should be judiciously distributed; that the pathetic effusions should find their way to all private houses and tradespeople; and that the parody commencing 'If I know'd a donkey,' should be confined to the taverns, and circulated only among the lawyers' clerks and choice spirits of the place. When this had been done, and Mrs Jarley had waited upon the boarding-schools in person, with a handbill composed expressly for them, in which it was distinctly proved that wax-work refined the mind, cultivated the taste, and enlarged the sphere of the human understanding, that indefatigable lady sat down to dinner, and drank out of the suspicious bottle to a flourishing campaign.

CHAPTER 29

Unquestionably Mrs Jarley had an inventive genius. In the midst of the various devices for attracting visitors to the exhibition, little Nell was not forgotten. The light cart in which the Brigand usually made his perambulations being gaily dressed with flags and streamers, and the Brigand placed therein, contemplating the miniature of his beloved as usual, Nell was accommodated with a seat beside him, decorated with artificial flowers, and in this state and ceremony rode slowly through the town every morning, dispersing handbills from a basket, to the sound of drum and trumpet. The beauty of the child, coupled with her gentle and timid bearing, produced quite a sensation in the little country place. The Brigand, heretofore a source of exclusive interest in the streets, became a mere secondary consideration, and to be important only as a part of the show of which she was the chief attraction. Grown-up folks began to be interested in the bright-eyed girl, and some score of little boys fell desperately in love, and constantly left enclosures of nuts and apples, directed in small-text, at the wax-work door.

This desirable impression was not lost on Mrs Jarley, who, lest Nell should become too cheap, soon sent the Brigand out alone again, and kept her in the exhibition room, where she described the figures every half-hour to the great satisfaction of admiring audiences. And these audiences were of a very superior description, including a great many young ladies' boarding-schools, whose favour Mrs Jarley had been at great pains to conciliate, by altering the face and costume of Mr Grimaldi as clown to represent Mr Lindley Murray as he appeared when engaged in the composition of his English Grammar, and turning a murderess of great renown into Mrs Hannah More—both of which likenesses were admitted by Miss Monflathers, who was at the head of the head Boarding and Day Establishment in the town, and who condescended to take a Private View with eight chosen young ladies, to be quite startling from their extreme correctness. Mr Pitt in a nightcap and bedgown, and without his boots, represented the poet Cowper with perfect exactness; and Mary Queen of Scots in a dark wig, white shirt-collar, and male attire, was such a complete image of Lord Byron that the young ladies quite screamed when they saw it. Miss Monflathers, however, rebuked this enthusiasm, and took occasion to reprove Mrs Jarley for not keeping her collection more select: observing that His Lordship had held certain opinions quite incompatible with wax-work honours, and adding something about a Dean and Chapter, which Mrs Jarley did not understand.

Although her duties were sufficiently laborious, Nell found in the lady of the caravan a very kind and considerate person, who had not only a peculiar relish for being comfortable herself, but for making everybody about her comfortable also; which latter taste, it may be remarked, is, even in persons who live in much finer places than caravans, a far more rare and uncommon one than the first, and is not by any means its necessary consequence. As her popularity procured her various little fees from the visitors on which her patroness never demanded any toll, and as her grandfather too was well-treated and useful, she had no cause of anxiety in connexion with the wax-work, beyond that which sprung from her recollection of Quilp, and her fears that he might return and one day suddenly encounter them.

Quilp indeed was a perpetual night-mare to the child, who was constantly haunted by a vision of his ugly face and stunted figure. She slept, for their better security, in the room where the wax-work figures were, and she never retired to this place at night but she tortured herself—she could not help it—with imagining a resemblance, in some one or other of their death-like faces, to the dwarf, and this fancy would sometimes so gain upon her that she would almost believe he had removed the figure and stood within the clothes. Then there were so many of them with their great glassy eyes—and, as they stood one behind the other all about her bed, they looked so like living creatures, and yet so unlike in their grim stillness and silence, that she had a kind of terror of them for their own sakes, and would often lie watching their dusky figures until she was obliged to rise and light a candle, or go and sit at the open window and feel a companionship in the bright stars. At these times, she would recall the old house and the window at which she used to sit alone; and then she would think of poor Kit and all his kindness, until the tears came into her eyes, and she would weep and smile together.

Often and anxiously at this silent hour, her thoughts reverted to her grandfather, and she would wonder how much he remembered of their former life, and whether he was ever really mindful of the change in their condition and of their late helplessness and destitution. When they were wandering about, she seldom thought of this, but now she could not help considering what would become of them if he fell sick, or her own strength were to fail her. He was very patient and willing, happy to execute any little task, and glad to be of use; but he was in the same listless state, with no prospect of improvement—a mere child—a poor, thoughtless, vacant creature—a harmless fond old man, susceptible of tender love and regard for her, and of pleasant and painful impressions, but alive to nothing more. It made her very sad to know that this was so—so sad to see it that sometimes when he sat idly by, smiling and nodding to her when she looked round, or when he caressed some little child and carried it to and fro, as he was fond of doing by the hour together, perplexed by its simple questions, yet patient under his own infirmity, and seeming almost conscious of it too, and humbled even before the mind of an infant—so sad it made her to see him thus, that she would burst into tears, and, withdrawing into some secret place, fall down upon her knees and pray that he might be restored.

But, the bitterness of her grief was not in beholding him in this condition, when he was at least content and tranquil, nor in her solitary meditations on his altered state, though these were trials for a young heart. Cause for deeper and heavier sorrow was yet to come.

One evening, a holiday night with them, Nell and her grandfather went out to walk. They had been rather closely confined for some days, and the weather being warm, they strolled a long distance. Clear of the town, they took a footpath which struck through some pleasant fields, judging that it would terminate in the road they quitted and enable them to return that way. It made, however, a much wider circuit than they had supposed, and thus they were tempted onward until sunset, when they reached the track of which they were in search, and stopped to rest.

It had been gradually getting overcast, and now the sky was dark and lowering, save where the glory of the departing sun piled up masses of gold and burning fire, decaying embers of which gleamed here and there through the black veil, and shone redly down upon the earth. The wind began to moan in hollow murmurs, as the sun went down carrying glad day elsewhere; and a train of dull clouds coming up against it, menaced thunder and lightning. Large drops of rain soon began to fall, and, as the storm clouds came sailing onward, others supplied the void they left behind and spread over all the sky. Then was heard the low rumbling of distant thunder, then the lightning quivered, and then the darkness of an hour seemed to have gathered in an instant.

Fearful of taking shelter beneath a tree or hedge, the old man and the child hurried along the high road, hoping to find some house in which they could seek a refuge from the storm, which had now burst forth in earnest, and every moment increased in violence. Drenched with the pelting rain, confused by the deafening thunder, and bewildered by the glare of the forked lightning, they would have passed a solitary house without being aware of its vicinity, had not a man, who was standing at the door, called lustily to them to enter.

'Your ears ought to be better than other folks' at any rate, if you make so little of the chance of being struck blind,' he said, retreating from the door and shading his eyes with his hands as the jagged lightning came again.

'What were you going past for, eh?' he added, as he closed the door and led the way along a passage to a room behind.

'We didn't see the house, sir, till we heard you calling,' Nell replied.

'No wonder,' said the man, 'with this lightning in one's eyes, by-the-by. You had better stand by the fire here, and dry yourselves a bit. You can call for what you like if you want anything. If you don't want anything, you are not obliged to give an order. Don't be afraid of that. This is a public-house, that's all. The Valiant Soldier is pretty well known hereabouts.'

'Is this house called the Valiant Soldier, Sir?' asked Nell.

'I thought everybody knew that,' replied the landlord. 'Where have you come from, if you don't know the Valiant Soldier as well as the church catechism? This is the Valiant Soldier, by James Groves—Jem Groves—honest Jem Groves, as is a man of unblemished moral character, and has a good dry skittle-ground. If any man has got anything to say again Jem Groves, let him say it TO Jem Groves, and Jem Groves can accommodate him with a customer on any terms from four pound a side to forty.

With these words, the speaker tapped himself on the waistcoat to intimate that he was the Jem Groves so highly eulogized; sparred scientifically at a counterfeit Jem Groves, who was sparring at society in general from a black frame over the chimney-piece; and, applying a half-emptied glass of spirits and water to his lips, drank Jem Groves's health.

The night being warm, there was a large screen drawn across the room, for a barrier against the heat of the fire. It seemed as if somebody on the other side of this screen had been insinuating doubts of Mr Groves's prowess, and had thereby given rise to these egotistical expressions, for Mr Groves wound up his defiance by giving a loud knock upon it with his knuckles and pausing for a reply from the other side.

'There an't many men,' said Mr Groves, no answer being returned, 'who would ventur' to cross Jem Groves under his own roof. There's only one man, I know, that has nerve enough for that, and that man's not a hundred mile from here neither. But he's worth a dozen men, and I let him say of me whatever he likes in consequence—he knows that.'

In return for this complimentary address, a very gruff hoarse voice bade Mr Groves 'hold his noise and light a candle.' And the same voice remarked that the same gentleman 'needn't waste his breath in brag, for most people knew pretty well what sort of stuff he was made of.'

'Nell, they're—they're playing cards,' whispered the old man, suddenly interested. 'Don't you hear them?'

'Look sharp with that candle,' said the voice; 'it's as much as I can do to see the pips on the cards as it is; and get this shutter closed as quick as you can, will you? Your beer will be the worse for to-night's thunder I expect.—Game! Seven-and-sixpence to me, old Isaac. Hand over.'

'Do you hear, Nell, do you hear them?' whispered the old man again, with increased earnestness, as the money chinked upon the table.

'I haven't seen such a storm as this,' said a sharp cracked voice of most disagreeable quality, when a tremendous peal of thunder had died away, 'since the night when old Luke Withers won thirteen times running on the red. We all said he had the Devil's luck and his own, and as it was the kind of night for the Devil to be out and busy, I suppose he was looking over his shoulder, if anybody could have seen him.'

'Ah!' returned the gruff voice; 'for all old Luke's winning through thick and thin of late years, I remember the time when he was the unluckiest and unfortunatest of men. He never took a dice-box in his hand, or held a card, but he was plucked, pigeoned, and cleaned out completely.'

'Do you hear what he says?' whispered the old man. 'Do you hear that, Nell?'

The child saw with astonishment and alarm that his whole appearance had undergone a complete change. His face was flushed and eager, his eyes were strained, his teeth set, his breath came short and thick, and the hand he laid upon her arm trembled so violently that she shook beneath its grasp.

'Bear witness,' he muttered, looking upward, 'that I always said it; that I knew it, dreamed of it, felt it was the truth, and that it must be so! What money have we, Nell? Come! I saw you with money yesterday. What money have we? Give it to me.'

'No, no, let me keep it, grandfather,' said the frightened child. 'Let us go away from here. Do not mind the rain. Pray let us go.'

'Give it to me, I say,' returned the old man fiercely. 'Hush, hush, don't cry, Nell. If I spoke sharply, dear, I didn't mean it. It's for thy good. I have wronged thee, Nell, but I will right thee yet, I will indeed. Where is the money?'

'Do not take it,' said the child. 'Pray do not take it, dear. For both our sakes let me keep it, or let me throw it away—better let me throw it away, than you take it now. Let us go; do let us go.'

'Give me the money,' returned the old man, 'I must have it. There—there—that's my dear Nell. I'll right thee one day, child, I'll right thee, never fear!'

She took from her pocket a little purse. He seized it with the same rapid impatience which had characterised his speech, and hastily made his way to the other side of the screen. It was impossible to restrain him, and the trembling child followed close behind.

The landlord had placed a light upon the table, and was engaged in drawing the curtain of the window. The speakers whom they had heard were two men, who had a pack of cards and some silver money between them, while upon the screen itself the games they had played were scored in chalk. The man with the rough voice was a burly fellow of middle age, with large black whiskers, broad cheeks, a coarse wide mouth, and bull neck, which was pretty freely displayed as his shirt collar was only confined by a loose red neckerchief. He wore his hat, which was of a brownish-white, and had beside him a thick knotted stick. The other man, whom his companion had called Isaac, was of a more slender figure—stooping, and high in the shoulders—with a very ill-favoured face, and a most sinister and villainous squint.

'Now old gentleman,' said Isaac, looking round. 'Do you know either of us? This side of the screen is private, sir.'

'No offence, I hope,' returned the old man.

'But by G—, sir, there is offence,' said the other, interrupting him, 'when you intrude yourself upon a couple of gentlemen who are particularly engaged.'

'I had no intention to offend,' said the old man, looking anxiously at the cards. 'I thought that—'

'But you had no right to think, sir,' retorted the other. 'What the devil has a man at your time of life to do with thinking?'

'Now bully boy,' said the stout man, raising his eyes from his cards for the first time, 'can't you let him speak?'

The landlord, who had apparently resolved to remain neutral until he knew which side of the question the stout man would espouse, chimed in at this place with 'Ah, to be sure, can't you let him speak, Isaac List?'

'Can't I let him speak,' sneered Isaac in reply, mimicking as nearly as he could, in his shrill voice, the tones of the landlord. 'Yes, I can let him speak, Jemmy Groves.'

'Well then, do it, will you?' said the landlord.

Mr List's squint assumed a portentous character, which seemed to threaten a prolongation of this controversy, when his companion, who had been looking sharply at the old man, put a timely stop to it.

'Who knows,' said he, with a cunning look, 'but the gentleman may have civilly meant to ask if he might have the honour to take a hand with us!'

'I did mean it,' cried the old man. 'That is what I mean. That is what I want now!'

'I thought so,' returned the same man. 'Then who knows but the gentleman, anticipating our objection to play for love, civilly desired to play for money?'

The old man replied by shaking the little purse in his eager hand, and then throwing it down upon the table, and gathering up the cards as a miser would clutch at gold.

'Oh! That indeed,' said Isaac; 'if that's what the gentleman meant, I beg the gentleman's pardon. Is this the gentleman's little purse? A very pretty little purse. Rather a light purse,' added Isaac, throwing it into the air and catching it dexterously, 'but enough to amuse a gentleman for half an hour or so.'

'We'll make a four-handed game of it, and take in Groves,' said the stout man. 'Come, Jemmy.'

The landlord, who conducted himself like one who was well used to such little parties, approached the table and took his seat. The child, in a perfect agony, drew her grandfather aside, and implored him, even then, to come away.

'Come; and we may be so happy,' said the child.

'We WILL be happy,' replied the old man hastily. 'Let me go, Nell. The means of happiness are on the cards and the dice. We must rise from little winnings to great. There's little to be won here; but great will come in time. I shall but win back my own, and it's all for thee, my darling.'

'God help us!' cried the child. 'Oh! what hard fortune brought us here?'

'Hush!' rejoined the old man laying his hand upon her mouth, 'Fortune will not bear chiding. We must not reproach her, or she shuns us; I have found that out.'

'Now, mister,' said the stout man. 'If you're not coming yourself, give us the cards, will you?'

'I am coming,' cried the old man. 'Sit thee down, Nell, sit thee down and look on. Be of good heart, it's all for thee—all—every penny. I don't tell them, no, no, or else they wouldn't play, dreading the chance that such a cause must give me. Look at them. See what they are and what thou art. Who doubts that we must win!'

'The gentleman has thought better of it, and isn't coming,' said Isaac, making as though he would rise from the table. 'I'm sorry the gentleman's daunted—nothing venture, nothing have—but the gentleman knows best.'

'Why I am ready. You have all been slow but me,' said the old man. 'I wonder who is more anxious to begin than I.'

As he spoke he drew a chair to the table; and the other three closing round it at the same time, the game commenced.

The child sat by, and watched its progress with a troubled mind. Regardless of the run of luck, and mindful only of the desperate passion which had its hold upon her grandfather, losses and gains were to her alike. Exulting in some brief triumph, or cast down by a defeat, there he sat so wild and restless, so feverishly and intensely anxious, so terribly eager, so ravenous for the paltry stakes, that she could have almost better borne to see him dead. And yet she was the innocent cause of all this torture, and he, gambling with such a savage thirst for gain as the most insatiable gambler never felt, had not one selfish thought!

On the contrary, the other three—knaves and gamesters by their trade—while intent upon their game, were yet as cool and quiet as if every virtue had been centered in their breasts. Sometimes one would look up to smile to another, or to snuff the feeble candle, or to glance at the lightning as it shot through the open window and fluttering curtain, or to listen to some louder peal of thunder than the rest, with a kind of momentary impatience, as if it put him out; but there they sat, with a calm indifference to everything but their cards, perfect philosophers in appearance, and with no greater show of passion or excitement than if they had been made of stone.

The storm had raged for full three hours; the lightning had grown fainter and less frequent; the thunder, from seeming to roll and break above their heads, had gradually died away into a deep hoarse distance; and still the game went on, and still the anxious child was quite forgotten.

CHAPTER 30

At length the play came to an end, and Mr Isaac List rose the only winner. Mat and the landlord bore their losses with professional fortitude. Isaac pocketed his gains with the air of a man who had quite made up his mind to win, all along, and was neither surprised nor pleased.

Nell's little purse was exhausted; but although it lay empty by his side, and the other players had now risen from the table, the old man sat poring over the cards, dealing them as they had been dealt before, and turning up the different hands to see what each man would have held if they had still been playing. He was quite absorbed in this occupation, when the child drew near and laid her hand upon his shoulder, telling him it was near midnight.

'See the curse of poverty, Nell,' he said, pointing to the packs he had spread out upon the table. 'If I could have gone on a little longer, only a little longer, the luck would have turned on my side. Yes, it's as plain as the marks upon the cards. See here—and there—and here again.'

'Put them away,' urged the child. 'Try to forget them.'

'Try to forget them!' he rejoined, raising his haggard face to hers, and regarding her with an incredulous stare. 'To forget them! How are we ever to grow rich if I forget them?'

The child could only shake her head.

'No, no, Nell,' said the old man, patting her cheek; 'they must not be forgotten. We must make amends for this as soon as we can. Patience—patience, and we'll right thee yet, I promise thee. Lose to-day, win to-morrow. And nothing can be won without anxiety and care—nothing. Come, I am ready.'

'Do you know what the time is?' said Mr Groves, who was smoking with his friends. 'Past twelve o'clock—'

'—And a rainy night,' added the stout man.

'The Valiant Soldier, by James Groves. Good beds. Cheap entertainment for man and beast,' said Mr Groves, quoting his sign-board. 'Half-past twelve o'clock.'

'It's very late,' said the uneasy child. 'I wish we had gone before. What will they think of us! It will be two o'clock by the time we get back. What would it cost, sir, if we stopped here?'

'Two good beds, one-and-sixpence; supper and beer one shilling; total two shillings and sixpence,' replied the Valiant Soldier.

Now, Nell had still the piece of gold sewn in her dress; and when she came to consider the lateness of the hour, and the somnolent habits of Mrs Jarley, and to imagine the state of consternation in which they would certainly throw that good lady by knocking her up in the middle of the night—and when she reflected, on the other hand, that if they remained where they were, and rose early in the morning, they might get back before she awoke, and could plead the violence of the storm by which they had been overtaken, as a good apology for their absence—she decided, after a great deal of hesitation, to remain. She therefore took her grandfather aside, and telling him that she had still enough left to defray the cost of their lodging, proposed that they should stay there for the night.

'If I had had but that money before—If I had only known of it a few minutes ago!' muttered the old man.

'We will decide to stop here if you please,' said Nell, turning hastily to the landlord.

'I think that's prudent,' returned Mr Groves. 'You shall have your suppers directly.'

Accordingly, when Mr Groves had smoked his pipe out, knocked out the ashes, and placed it carefully in a corner of the fire-place, with the bowl downwards, he brought in the bread and cheese, and beer, with many high encomiums upon their excellence, and bade his guests fall to, and make themselves at home. Nell and her grandfather ate sparingly, for both were occupied with their own reflections; the other gentlemen, for whose constitutions beer was too weak and tame a liquid, consoled themselves with spirits and tobacco.

As they would leave the house very early in the morning, the child was anxious to pay for their entertainment before they retired to bed. But as she felt the necessity of concealing her little hoard from her grandfather, and had to change the piece of gold, she took it secretly from its place of concealment, and embraced an opportunity of following the landlord when he went out of the room, and tendered it to him in the little bar.

'Will you give me the change here, if you please?' said the child.

Mr James Groves was evidently surprised, and looked at the money, and rang it, and looked at the child, and at the money again, as though he had a mind to inquire how she came by it. The coin being genuine, however, and changed at his house, he probably felt, like a wise landlord, that it was no business of his. At any rate, he counted out the change, and gave it her. The child was returning to the room where they had passed the evening, when she fancied she saw a figure just gliding in at the door. There was nothing but a long dark passage between this door and the place where she had changed the money, and, being very certain that no person had passed in or out while she stood there, the thought struck her that she had been watched.

But by whom? When she re-entered the room, she found its inmates exactly as she had left them. The stout fellow lay upon two chairs, resting his head on his hand, and the squinting man reposed in a similar attitude on the opposite side of the table. Between them sat her grandfather, looking intently at the winner with a kind of hungry admiration, and hanging upon his words as if he were some superior being. She was puzzled for a moment, and looked round to see if any else were there. No. Then she asked her grandfather in a whisper whether anybody had left the room while she was absent. 'No,' he said, 'nobody.'

It must have been her fancy then; and yet it was strange, that, without anything in her previous thoughts to lead to it, she should have imagined this figure so very distinctly. She was still wondering and thinking of it, when a girl came to light her to bed.

The old man took leave of the company at the same time, and they went up stairs together. It was a great, rambling house, with dull corridors and wide staircases which the flaring candles seemed to make more gloomy. She left her grandfather in his chamber, and followed her guide to another, which was at the end of a passage, and approached by some half-dozen crazy steps. This was prepared for her. The girl lingered a little while to talk, and tell her grievances. She had not a good place, she said; the wages were low, and the work was hard. She was going to leave it in a fortnight; the child couldn't recommend her to another, she supposed? Instead she was afraid another would be difficult to get after living there, for the house had a very indifferent character; there was far too much card-playing, and such like. She was very much mistaken if some of the people who came there oftenest were quite as honest as they might be, but she wouldn't have it known that she had said so, for the world. Then there were some rambling allusions to a rejected sweetheart, who had threatened to go a soldiering—a final promise of knocking at the door early in the morning—and 'Good night.'

The child did not feel comfortable when she was left alone. She could not help thinking of the figure stealing through the passage down stairs; and what the girl had said did not tend to reassure her. The men were very ill-looking. They might get their living by robbing and murdering travellers. Who could tell?

Reasoning herself out of these fears, or losing sight of them for a little while, there came the anxiety to which the adventures of the night gave rise. Here was the old passion awakened again in her grandfather's breast, and to what further distraction it might tempt him Heaven only knew. What fears their absence might have occasioned already! Persons might be seeking for them even then. Would they be forgiven in the morning, or turned adrift again! Oh! why had they stopped in that strange place? It would have been better, under any circumstances, to have gone on!

At last, sleep gradually stole upon her—a broken, fitful sleep, troubled by dreams of falling from high towers, and waking with a start and in great terror. A deeper slumber followed this—and then—What! That figure in the room.

A figure was there. Yes, she had drawn up the blind to admit the light when it should be dawn, and there, between the foot of the bed and the dark casement, it crouched and slunk along, groping its way with noiseless hands, and stealing round the bed. She had no voice to cry for help, no power to move, but lay still, watching it.

On it came—on, silently and stealthily, to the bed's head. The breath so near her pillow, that she shrunk back into it, lest those wandering hands should light upon her face. Back again it stole to the window—then turned its head towards her.

The dark form was a mere blot upon the lighter darkness of the room, but she saw the turning of the head, and felt and knew how the eyes looked and the ears listened. There it remained, motionless as she. At length, still keeping the face towards her, it busied its hands in something, and she heard the chink of money.

Then, on it came again, silent and stealthy as before, and replacing the garments it had taken from the bedside, dropped upon its hands and knees, and crawled away. How slowly it seemed to move, now that she could hear but not see it, creeping along the floor! It reached the door at last, and stood upon its feet. The steps creaked beneath its noiseless tread, and it was gone.

The first impulse of the child was to fly from the terror of being by herself in that room—to have somebody by—not to be alone—and then her power of speech would be restored. With no consciousness of having moved, she gained the door.

There was the dreadful shadow, pausing at the bottom of the steps.

She could not pass it; she might have done so, perhaps, in the darkness without being seized, but her blood curdled at the thought. The figure stood quite still, and so did she; not boldly, but of necessity; for going back into the room was hardly less terrible than going on.

The rain beat fast and furiously without, and ran down in plashing streams from the thatched roof. Some summer insect, with no escape into the air, flew blindly to and fro, beating its body against the walls and ceiling, and filling the silent place with murmurs. The figure moved again. The child involuntarily did the same. Once in her grandfather's room, she would be safe.

It crept along the passage until it came to the very door she longed so ardently to reach. The child, in the agony of being so near, had almost darted forward with the design of bursting into the room and closing it behind her, when the figure stopped again.

The idea flashed suddenly upon her—what if it entered there, and had a design upon the old man's life! She turned faint and sick. It did. It went in. There was a light inside. The figure was now within the chamber, and she, still dumb—quite dumb, and almost senseless—stood looking on.

The door was partly open. Not knowing what she meant to do, but meaning to preserve him or be killed herself, she staggered forward and looked in.

What sight was that which met her view!

The bed had not been lain on, but was smooth and empty. And at a table sat the old man himself; the only living creature there; his white face pinched and sharpened by the greediness which made his eyes unnaturally bright—counting the money of which his hands had robbed her.

CHAPTER 31

With steps more faltering and unsteady than those with which she had approached the room, the child withdrew from the door, and groped her way back to her own chamber. The terror she had lately felt was nothing compared with that which now oppressed her. No strange robber, no treacherous host conniving at the plunder of his guests, or stealing to their beds to kill them in their sleep, no nightly prowler, however terrible and cruel, could have awakened in her bosom half the dread which the recognition of her silent visitor inspired. The grey-headed old man gliding like a ghost into her room and acting the thief while he supposed her fast asleep, then bearing off his prize and hanging over it with the ghastly exultation she had witnessed, was worse—immeasurably worse, and far more dreadful, for the moment, to reflect upon—than anything her wildest fancy could have suggested. If he should return—there was no lock or bolt upon the door, and if, distrustful of having left some money yet behind, he should come back to seek for more—a vague awe and horror surrounded the idea of his slinking in again with stealthy tread, and turning his face toward the empty bed, while she shrank down close at his feet to avoid his touch, which was almost insupportable. She sat and listened. Hark! A footstep on the stairs, and now the door was slowly opening. It was but imagination, yet imagination had all the terrors of reality; nay, it was worse, for the reality would have come and gone, and there an end, but in imagination it was always coming, and never went away.

The feeling which beset the child was one of dim uncertain horror. She had no fear of the dear old grandfather, in whose love for her this disease of the brain had been engendered; but the man she had seen that night, wrapt in the game of chance, lurking in her room, and counting the money by the glimmering light, seemed like another creature in his shape, a monstrous distortion of his image, a something to recoil from, and be the more afraid of, because it bore a likeness to him, and kept close about her, as he did. She could scarcely connect her own affectionate companion, save by his loss, with this old man, so like yet so unlike him. She had wept to see him dull and quiet. How much greater cause she had for weeping now!

The child sat watching and thinking of these things, until the phantom in her mind so increased in gloom and terror, that she felt it would be a relief to hear the old man's voice, or, if he were asleep, even to see him, and banish some of the fears that clustered round his image. She stole down the stairs and passage again. The door was still ajar as she had left it, and the candle burning as before.

She had her own candle in her hand, prepared to say, if he were waking, that she was uneasy and could not rest, and had come to see if his were still alight. Looking into the room, she saw him lying calmly on his bed, and so took courage to enter.

Fast asleep. No passion in the face, no avarice, no anxiety, no wild desire; all gentle, tranquil, and at peace. This was not the gambler, or the shadow in her room; this was not even the worn and jaded man whose face had so often met her own in the grey morning light; this was her dear old friend, her harmless fellow-traveller, her good, kind grandfather.

She had no fear as she looked upon his slumbering features, but she had a deep and weighty sorrow, and it found its relief in tears.

'God bless him!' said the child, stooping softly to kiss his placid cheek. 'I see too well now, that they would indeed part us if they found us out, and shut him up from the light of the sun and sky. He has only me to help him. God bless us both!'

Lighting her candle, she retreated as silently as she had come, and, gaining her own room once more, sat up during the remainder of that long, long, miserable night.

At last the day turned her waning candle pale, and she fell asleep. She was quickly roused by the girl who had shown her up to bed; and, as soon as she was dressed, prepared to go down to her grandfather. But first she searched her pocket and found that her money was all gone—not a sixpence remained.

The old man was ready, and in a few seconds they were on their road. The child thought he rather avoided her eye, and appeared to expect that she would tell him of her loss. She felt she must do that, or he might suspect the truth.

'Grandfather,' she said in a tremulous voice, after they had walked about a mile in silence, 'do you think they are honest people at the house yonder?'

'Why?' returned the old man trembling. 'Do I think them honest—yes, they played honestly.'

'I'll tell you why I ask,' rejoined Nell. 'I lost some money last night—out of my bedroom, I am sure. Unless it was taken by somebody in jest—only in jest, dear grandfather, which would make me laugh heartily if I could but know it—'

'Who would take money in jest?' returned the old man in a hurried manner. 'Those who take money, take it to keep. Don't talk of jest.'

'Then it was stolen out of my room, dear,' said the child, whose last hope was destroyed by the manner of this reply.

'But is there no more, Nell?' said the old man; 'no more anywhere? Was it all taken—every farthing of it—was there nothing left?'

'Nothing,' replied the child.

'We must get more,' said the old man, 'we must earn it, Nell, hoard it up, scrape it together, come by it somehow. Never mind this loss. Tell nobody of it, and perhaps we may regain it. Don't ask how;—we may regain it, and a great deal more;—but tell nobody, or trouble may come of it. And so they took it out of thy room, when thou wert asleep!' he added in a compassionate tone, very different from the secret, cunning way in which he had spoken until now. 'Poor Nell, poor little Nell!'

The child hung down her head and wept. The sympathising tone in which he spoke, was quite sincere; she was sure of that. It was not the lightest part of her sorrow to know that this was done for her.

'Not a word about it to any one but me,' said the old man, 'no, not even to me,' he added hastily, 'for it can do no good. All the losses that ever were, are not worth tears from thy eyes, darling. Why should they be, when we will win them back?'

'Let them go,' said the child looking up. 'Let them go, once and for ever, and I would never shed another tear if every penny had been a thousand pounds.'

'Well, well,' returned the old man, checking himself as some impetuous answer rose to his lips, 'she knows no better. I ought to be thankful of it.'

'But listen to me,' said the child earnestly, 'will you listen to me?'

'Aye, aye, I'll listen,' returned the old man, still without looking at her; 'a pretty voice. It has always a sweet sound to me. It always had when it was her mother's, poor child.'

'Let me persuade you, then—oh, do let me persuade you,' said the child, 'to think no more of gains or losses, and to try no fortune but the fortune we pursue together.'

'We pursue this aim together,' retorted her grandfather, still looking away and seeming to confer with himself. 'Whose image sanctifies the game?'

'Have we been worse off,' resumed the child, 'since you forgot these cares, and we have been travelling on together? Have we not been much better and happier without a home to shelter us, than ever we were in that unhappy house, when they were on your mind?'

'She speaks the truth,' murmured the old man in the same tone as before. 'It must not turn me, but it is the truth; no doubt it is.'

'Only remember what we have been since that bright morning when we turned our backs upon it for the last time,' said Nell, 'only remember what we have been since we have been free of all those miseries—what peaceful days and quiet nights we have had—what pleasant times we have known—what happiness we have enjoyed. If we have been tired or hungry, we have been soon refreshed, and slept the sounder for it. Think what beautiful things we have seen, and how contented we have felt. And why was this blessed change?'

He stopped her with a motion of his hand, and bade her talk to him no more just then, for he was busy. After a time he kissed her cheek, still motioning her to silence, and walked on, looking far before him, and sometimes stopping and gazing with a puckered brow upon the ground, as if he were painfully trying to collect his disordered thoughts. Once she saw tears in his eyes. When he had gone on thus for some time, he took her hand in his as he was accustomed to do, with nothing of the violence or animation of his late manner; and so, by degrees so fine that the child could not trace them, he settled down into his usual quiet way, and suffered her to lead him where she would.

When they presented themselves in the midst of the stupendous collection, they found, as Nell had anticipated, that Mrs Jarley was not yet out of bed, and that, although she had suffered some uneasiness on their account overnight, and had indeed sat up for them until past eleven o'clock, she had retired in the persuasion, that, being overtaken by storm at some distance from home, they had sought the nearest shelter, and would not return before morning. Nell immediately applied herself with great assiduity to the decoration and preparation of the room, and had the satisfaction of completing her task, and dressing herself neatly, before the beloved of the Royal Family came down to breakfast.

'We haven't had,' said Mrs Jarley when the meal was over, 'more than eight of Miss Monflathers's young ladies all the time we've been here, and there's twenty-six of 'em, as I was told by the cook when I asked her a question or two and put her on the free-list. We must try 'em with a parcel of new bills, and you shall take it, my dear, and see what effect that has upon 'em.'

The proposed expedition being one of paramount importance, Mrs Jarley adjusted Nell's bonnet with her own hands, and declaring that she certainly did look very pretty, and reflected credit on the establishment, dismissed her with many commendations, and certain needful directions as to the turnings on the right which she was to take, and the turnings on the left which she was to avoid. Thus instructed, Nell had no difficulty in finding out Miss Monflathers's Boarding and Day Establishment, which was a large house, with a high wall, and a large garden-gate with a large brass plate, and a small grating through which Miss Monflathers's parlour-maid inspected all visitors before admitting them; for nothing in the shape of a man—no, not even a milkman—was suffered, without special license, to pass that gate. Even the tax-gatherer, who was stout, and wore spectacles and a broad-brimmed hat, had the taxes handed through the grating. More obdurate than gate of adamant or brass, this gate of Miss Monflathers's frowned on all mankind. The very butcher respected it as a gate of mystery, and left off whistling when he rang the bell.

As Nell approached the awful door, it turned slowly upon its hinges with a creaking noise, and, forth from the solemn grove beyond, came a long file of young ladies, two and two, all with open books in their hands, and some with parasols likewise. And last of the goodly procession came Miss Monflathers, bearing herself a parasol of lilac silk, and supported by two smiling teachers, each mortally envious of the other, and devoted unto Miss Monflathers.

Confused by the looks and whispers of the girls, Nell stood with downcast eyes and suffered the procession to pass on, until Miss Monflathers, bringing up the rear, approached her, when she curtseyed and presented her little packet; on receipt whereof Miss Monflathers commanded that the line should halt.

'You're the wax-work child, are you not?' said Miss Monflathers.

'Yes, ma'am,' replied Nell, colouring deeply, for the young ladies had collected about her, and she was the centre on which all eyes were fixed.

'And don't you think you must be a very wicked little child,' said Miss Monflathers, who was of rather uncertain temper, and lost no opportunity of impressing moral truths upon the tender minds of the young ladies, 'to be a wax-work child at all?'

Poor Nell had never viewed her position in this light, and not knowing what to say, remained silent, blushing more deeply than before.

'Don't you know,' said Miss Monflathers, 'that it's very naughty and unfeminine, and a perversion of the properties wisely and benignantly transmitted to us, with expansive powers to be roused from their dormant state through the medium of cultivation?'

The two teachers murmured their respectful approval of this home-thrust, and looked at Nell as though they would have said that there indeed Miss Monflathers had hit her very hard. Then they smiled and glanced at Miss Monflathers, and then, their eyes meeting, they exchanged looks which plainly said that each considered herself smiler in ordinary to Miss Monflathers, and regarded the other as having no right to smile, and that her so doing was an act of presumption and impertinence.

'Don't you feel how naughty it is of you,' resumed Miss Monflathers, 'to be a wax-work child, when you might have the proud consciousness of assisting, to the extent of your infant powers, the manufactures of your country; of improving your mind by the constant contemplation of the steam-engine; and of earning a comfortable and independent subsistence of from two-and-ninepence to three shillings per week? Don't you know that the harder you are at work, the happier you are?'

'"How doth the little—"' murmured one of the teachers, in quotation from Doctor Watts.

'Eh?' said Miss Monflathers, turning smartly round. 'Who said that?'

Of course the teacher who had not said it, indicated the rival who had, whom Miss Monflathers frowningly requested to hold her peace; by that means throwing the informing teacher into raptures of joy.

'The little busy bee,' said Miss Monflathers, drawing herself up, 'is applicable only to genteel children.

"In books, or work, or healthful play"

is quite right as far as they are concerned; and the work means painting on velvet, fancy needle-work, or embroidery. In such cases as these,' pointing to Nell, with her parasol, 'and in the case of all poor people's children, we should read it thus:

"In work, work, work. In work alway
Let my first years be past,
That I may give for ev'ry day
Some good account at last."'

A deep hum of applause rose not only from the two teachers, but from all the pupils, who were equally astonished to hear Miss Monflathers improvising after this brilliant style; for although she had been long known as a politician, she had never appeared before as an original poet. Just then somebody happened to discover that Nell was crying, and all eyes were again turned towards her.

There were indeed tears in her eyes, and drawing out her handkerchief to brush them away, she happened to let it fall. Before she could stoop to pick it up, one young lady of about fifteen or sixteen, who had been standing a little apart from the others, as though she had no recognised place among them, sprang forward and put it in her hand. She was gliding timidly away again, when she was arrested by the governess.

'It was Miss Edwards who did that, I KNOW,' said Miss Monflathers predictively. 'Now I am sure that was Miss Edwards.'

It was Miss Edwards, and everybody said it was Miss Edwards, and Miss Edwards herself admitted that it was.

'Is it not,' said Miss Monflathers, putting down her parasol to take a severer view of the offender, 'a most remarkable thing, Miss Edwards, that you have an attachment to the lower classes which always draws you to their sides; or, rather, is it not a most extraordinary thing that all I say and do will not wean you from propensities which your original station in life have unhappily rendered habitual to you, you extremely vulgar-minded girl?'

'I really intended no harm, ma'am,' said a sweet voice. 'It was a momentary impulse, indeed.'

'An impulse!' repeated Miss Monflathers scornfully. 'I wonder that you presume to speak of impulses to me'—both the teachers assented—'I am astonished'—both the teachers were astonished—'I suppose it is an impulse which induces you to take the part of every grovelling and debased person that comes in your way'—both the teachers supposed so too.

'But I would have you know, Miss Edwards,' resumed the governess in a tone of increased severity, 'that you cannot be permitted—if it be only for the sake of preserving a proper example and decorum in this establishment—that you cannot be permitted, and that you shall not be permitted, to fly in the face of your superiors in this exceedingly gross manner. If you have no reason to feel a becoming pride before wax-work children, there are young ladies here who have, and you must either defer to those young ladies or leave the establishment, Miss Edwards.'

This young lady, being motherless and poor, was apprenticed at the school—taught for nothing—teaching others what she learnt, for nothing—boarded for nothing—lodged for nothing—and set down and rated as something immeasurably less than nothing, by all the dwellers in the house. The servant-maids felt her inferiority, for they were better treated; free to come and go, and regarded in their stations with much more respect. The teachers were infinitely superior, for they had paid to go to school in their time, and were paid now. The pupils cared little for a companion who had no grand stories to tell about home; no friends to come with post-horses, and be received in all humility, with cake and wine, by the governess; no deferential servant to attend and bear her home for the holidays; nothing genteel to talk about, and nothing to display. But why was Miss Monflathers always vexed and irritated with the poor apprentice—how did that come to pass?

Why, the gayest feather in Miss Monflathers's cap, and the brightest glory of Miss Monflathers's school, was a baronet's daughter—the real live daughter of a real live baronet—who, by some extraordinary reversal of the Laws of Nature, was not only plain in features but dull in intellect, while the poor apprentice had both a ready wit, and a handsome face and figure. It seems incredible. Here was Miss Edwards, who only paid a small premium which had been spent long ago, every day outshining and excelling the baronet's daughter, who learned all the extras (or was taught them all) and whose half-yearly bill came to double that of any other young lady's in the school, making no account of the honour and reputation of her pupilage. Therefore, and because she was a dependent, Miss Monflathers had a great dislike to Miss Edwards, and was spiteful to her, and aggravated by her, and, when she had compassion on little Nell, verbally fell upon and maltreated her as we have already seen.

'You will not take the air to-day, Miss Edwards,' said Miss Monflathers. 'Have the goodness to retire to your own room, and not to leave it without permission.'

The poor girl was moving hastily away, when she was suddenly, in nautical phrase, 'brought to' by a subdued shriek from Miss Monflathers.

'She has passed me without any salute!' cried the governess, raising her eyes to the sky. 'She has actually passed me without the slightest acknowledgment of my presence!'

The young lady turned and curtsied. Nell could see that she raised her dark eyes to the face of her superior, and that their expression, and that of her whole attitude for the instant, was one of mute but most touching appeal against this ungenerous usage. Miss Monflathers only tossed her head in reply, and the great gate closed upon a bursting heart.

'As for you, you wicked child,' said Miss Monflathers, turning to Nell, 'tell your mistress that if she presumes to take the liberty of sending to me any more, I will write to the legislative authorities and have her put in the stocks, or compelled to do penance in a white sheet; and you may depend upon it that you shall certainly experience the treadmill if you dare to come here again. Now ladies, on.'

The procession filed off, two and two, with the books and parasols, and Miss Monflathers, calling the Baronet's daughter to walk with her and smooth her ruffled feelings, discarded the two teachers—who by this time had exchanged their smiles for looks of sympathy—and left them to bring up the rear, and hate each other a little more for being obliged to walk together.

CHAPTER 32

Mrs Jarley's wrath on first learning that she had been threatened with the indignity of Stocks and Penance, passed all description. The genuine and only Jarley exposed to public scorn, jeered by children, and flouted by beadles! The delight of the Nobility and Gentry shorn of a bonnet which a Lady Mayoress might have sighed to wear, and arrayed in a white sheet as a spectacle of mortification and humility! And Miss Monflathers, the audacious creature who presumed, even in the dimmest and remotest distance of her imagination, to conjure up the degrading picture, 'I am a'most inclined,' said Mrs Jarley, bursting with the fulness of her anger and the weakness of her means of revenge, 'to turn atheist when I think of it!'

But instead of adopting this course of retaliation, Mrs Jarley, on second thoughts, brought out the suspicious bottle, and ordering glasses to be set forth upon her favourite drum, and sinking into a chair behind it, called her satellites about her, and to them several times recounted, word for word, the affronts she had received. This done, she begged them in a kind of deep despair to drink; then laughed, then cried, then took a little sip herself, then laughed and cried again, and took a little more; and so, by degrees, the worthy lady went on, increasing in smiles and decreasing in tears, until at last she could not laugh enough at Miss Monflathers, who, from being an object of dire vexation, became one of sheer ridicule and absurdity.

'For which of us is best off, I wonder,' quoth Mrs Jarley, 'she or me! It's only talking, when all is said and done, and if she talks of me in the stocks, why I can talk of her in the stocks, which is a good deal funnier if we come to that. Lord, what does it matter, after all!'

Having arrived at this comfortable frame of mind (to which she had been greatly assisted by certain short interjectional remarks of the philosophical George), Mrs Jarley consoled Nell with many kind words, and requested as a personal favour that whenever she thought of Miss Monflathers, she would do nothing else but laugh at her, all the days of her life.

So ended Mrs Jarley's wrath, which subsided long before the going down of the sun. Nell's anxieties, however, were of a deeper kind, and the checks they imposed upon her cheerfulness were not so easily removed.

That evening, as she had dreaded, her grandfather stole away, and did not come back until the night was far spent. Worn out as she was, and fatigued in mind and body, she sat up alone, counting the minutes, until he returned—penniless, broken-spirited, and wretched, but still hotly bent upon his infatuation.

'Get me money,' he said wildly, as they parted for the night. 'I must have money, Nell. It shall be paid thee back with gallant interest one day, but all the money that comes into thy hands, must be mine—not for myself, but to use for thee. Remember, Nell, to use for thee!'

What could the child do with the knowledge she had, but give him every penny that came into her hands, lest he should be tempted on to rob their benefactress? If she told the truth (so thought the child) he would be treated as a madman; if she did not supply him with money, he would supply himself; supplying him, she fed the fire that burnt him up, and put him perhaps beyond recovery. Distracted by these thoughts, borne down by the weight of the sorrow which she dared not tell, tortured by a crowd of apprehensions whenever the old man was absent, and dreading alike his stay and his return, the colour forsook her cheek, her eye grew dim, and her heart was oppressed and heavy. All her old sorrows had come back upon her, augmented by new fears and doubts; by day they were ever present to her mind; by night they hovered round her pillow, and haunted her in dreams.

It was natural that, in the midst of her affliction, she should often revert to that sweet young lady of whom she had only caught a hasty glance, but whose sympathy, expressed in one slight brief action, dwelt in her memory like the kindnesses of years. She would often think, if she had such a friend as that to whom to tell her griefs, how much lighter her heart would be—that if she were but free to hear that voice, she would be happier. Then she would wish that she were something better, that she were not quite so poor and humble, that she dared address her without fearing a repulse; and then feel that there was an immeasurable distance between them, and have no hope that the young lady thought of her any more.

It was now holiday-time at the schools, and the young ladies had gone home, and Miss Monflathers was reported to be flourishing in London, and damaging the hearts of middle-aged gentlemen, but nobody said anything about Miss Edwards, whether she had gone home, or whether she had any home to go to, whether she was still at the school, or anything about her. But one evening, as Nell was returning from a lonely walk, she happened to pass the inn where the stage-coaches stopped, just as one drove up, and there was the beautiful girl she so well remembered, pressing forward to embrace a young child whom they were helping down from the roof.

Well, this was her sister, her little sister, much younger than Nell, whom she had not seen (so the story went afterwards) for five years, and to bring whom to that place on a short visit, she had been saving her poor means all that time. Nell felt as if her heart would break when she saw them meet. They went a little apart from the knot of people who had congregated about the coach, and fell upon each other's neck, and sobbed, and wept with joy. Their plain and simple dress, the distance which the child had come alone, their agitation and delight, and the tears they shed, would have told their history by themselves.

They became a little more composed in a short time, and went away, not so much hand in hand as clinging to each other. 'Are you sure you're happy, sister?' said the child as they passed where Nell was standing. 'Quite happy now,' she answered. 'But always?' said the child. 'Ah, sister, why do you turn away your face?'

Nell could not help following at a little distance. They went to the house of an old nurse, where the elder sister had engaged a bed-room for the child. 'I shall come to you early every morning,' she said, 'and we can be together all the day.-'-'Why not at night-time too? Dear sister, would they be angry with you for that?'

Why were the eyes of little Nell wet, that night, with tears like those of the two sisters? Why did she bear a grateful heart because they had met, and feel it pain to think that they would shortly part? Let us not believe that any selfish reference—unconscious though it might have been—to her own trials awoke this sympathy, but thank God that the innocent joys of others can strongly move us, and that we, even in our fallen nature, have one source of pure emotion which must be prized in Heaven!

By morning's cheerful glow, but oftener still by evening's gentle light, the child, with a respect for the short and happy intercourse of these two sisters which forbade her to approach and say a thankful word, although she yearned to do so, followed them at a distance in their walks and rambles, stopping when they stopped, sitting on the grass when they sat down, rising when they went on, and feeling it a companionship and delight to be so near them. Their evening walk was by a river's side. Here, every night, the child was too, unseen by them, unthought of, unregarded; but feeling as if they were her friends, as if they had confidences and trusts together, as if her load were lightened and less hard to bear; as if they mingled their sorrows, and found mutual consolation. It was a weak fancy perhaps, the childish fancy of a young and lonely creature; but night after night, and still the sisters loitered in the same place, and still the child followed with a mild and softened heart.

She was much startled, on returning home one night, to find that Mrs Jarley had commanded an announcement to be prepared, to the effect that the stupendous collection would only remain in its present quarters one day longer; in fulfilment of which threat (for all announcements connected with public amusements are well known to be irrevocable and most exact), the stupendous collection shut up next day.

'Are we going from this place directly, ma'am?' said Nell.

'Look here, child,' returned Mrs Jarley. 'That'll inform you.' And so saying Mrs Jarley produced another announcement, wherein it was stated, that, in consequence of numerous inquiries at the wax-work door, and in consequence of crowds having been disappointed in obtaining admission, the Exhibition would be continued for one week longer, and would re-open next day.

'For now that the schools are gone, and the regular sight-seers exhausted,' said Mrs Jarley, 'we come to the General Public, and they want stimulating.'

Upon the following day at noon, Mrs Jarley established herself behind the highly-ornamented table, attended by the distinguished effigies before mentioned, and ordered the doors to be thrown open for the readmission of a discerning and enlightened public. But the first day's operations were by no means of a successful character, inasmuch as the general public, though they manifested a lively interest in Mrs Jarley personally, and such of her waxen satellites as were to be seen for nothing, were not affected by any impulses moving them to the payment of sixpence a head. Thus, notwithstanding that a great many people continued to stare at the entry and the figures therein displayed; and remained there with great perseverance, by the hour at a time, to hear the barrel-organ played and to read the bills; and notwithstanding that they were kind enough to recommend their friends to patronise the exhibition in the like manner, until the door-way was regularly blockaded by half the population of the town, who, when they went off duty, were relieved by the other half; it was not found that the treasury was any the richer, or that the prospects of the establishment were at all encouraging.

In this depressed state of the classical market, Mrs Jarley made extraordinary efforts to stimulate the popular taste, and whet the popular curiosity. Certain machinery in the body of the nun on the leads over the door was cleaned up and put in motion, so that the figure shook its head paralytically all day long, to the great admiration of a drunken, but very Protestant, barber over the way, who looked upon the said paralytic motion as typical of the degrading effect wrought upon the human mind by the ceremonies of the Romish Church and discoursed upon that theme with great eloquence and morality. The two carters constantly passed in and out of the exhibition-room, under various disguises, protesting aloud that the sight was better worth the money than anything they had beheld in all their lives, and urging the bystanders, with tears in their eyes, not to neglect such a brilliant gratification. Mrs Jarley sat in the pay-place, chinking silver moneys from noon till night, and solemnly calling upon the crowd to take notice that the price of admission was only sixpence, and that the departure of the whole collection, on a short tour among the Crowned Heads of Europe, was positively fixed for that day week.

'So be in time, be in time, be in time,' said Mrs Jarley at the close of every such address. 'Remember that this is Jarley's stupendous collection of upwards of One Hundred Figures, and that it is the only collection in the world; all others being imposters and deceptions. Be in time, be in time, be in time!'

CHAPTER 33

As the course of this tale requires that we should become acquainted, somewhere hereabouts, with a few particulars connected with the domestic economy of Mr Sampson Brass, and as a more convenient place than the present is not likely to occur for that purpose, the historian takes the friendly reader by the hand, and springing with him into the air, and cleaving the same at a greater rate than ever Don Cleophas Leandro Perez Zambullo and his familiar travelled through that pleasant region in company, alights with him upon the pavement of Bevis Marks.

The intrepid aeronauts alight before a small dark house, once the residence of Mr Sampson Brass.

In the parlour window of this little habitation, which is so close upon the footway that the passenger who takes the wall brushes the dim glass with his coat sleeve—much to its improvement, for it is very dirty—in this parlour window in the days of its occupation by Sampson Brass, there hung, all awry and slack, and discoloured by the sun, a curtain of faded green, so threadbare from long service as by no means to intercept the view of the little dark room, but rather to afford a favourable medium through which to observe it accurately. There was not much to look at. A rickety table, with spare bundles of papers, yellow and ragged from long carriage in the pocket, ostentatiously displayed upon its top; a couple of stools set face to face on opposite sides of this crazy piece of furniture; a treacherous old chair by the fire-place, whose withered arms had hugged full many a client and helped to squeeze him dry; a second-hand wig box, used as a depository for blank writs and declarations and other small forms of law, once the sole contents of the head which belonged to the wig which belonged to the box, as they were now of the box itself; two or three common books of practice; a jar of ink, a pounce box, a stunted hearth-broom, a carpet trodden to shreds but still clinging with the tightness of desperation to its tacks—these, with the yellow wainscot of the walls, the smoke-discoloured ceiling, the dust and cobwebs, were among the most prominent decorations of the office of Mr Sampson Brass.

But this was mere still-life, of no greater importance than the plate, 'BRASS, Solicitor,' upon the door, and the bill, 'First floor to let to a single gentleman,' which was tied to the knocker. The office commonly held two examples of animated nature, more to the purpose of this history, and in whom it has a stronger interest and more particular concern.

Of these, one was Mr Brass himself, who has already appeared in these pages. The other was his clerk, assistant, housekeeper, secretary, confidential plotter, adviser, intriguer, and bill of cost increaser, Miss Brass—a kind of amazon at common law, of whom it may be desirable to offer a brief description.

Miss Sally Brass, then, was a lady of thirty-five or thereabouts, of a gaunt and bony figure, and a resolute bearing, which if it repressed the softer emotions of love, and kept admirers at a distance, certainly inspired a feeling akin to awe in the breasts of those male strangers who had the happiness to approach her. In face she bore a striking resemblance to her brother, Sampson—so exact, indeed, was the likeness between them, that had it consorted with Miss Brass's maiden modesty and gentle womanhood to have assumed her brother's clothes in a frolic and sat down beside him, it would have been difficult for the oldest friend of the family to determine which was Sampson and which Sally, especially as the lady carried upon her upper lip certain reddish demonstrations, which, if the imagination had been assisted by her attire, might have been mistaken for a beard. These were, however, in all probability, nothing more than eyelashes in a wrong place, as the eyes of Miss Brass were quite free from any such natural impertinencies. In complexion Miss Brass was sallow—rather a dirty sallow, so to speak—but this hue was agreeably relieved by the healthy glow which mantled in the extreme tip of her laughing nose. Her voice was exceedingly impressive—deep and rich in quality, and, once heard, not easily forgotten. Her usual dress was a green gown, in colour not unlike the curtain of the office window, made tight to the figure, and terminating at the throat, where it was fastened behind by a peculiarly large and massive button. Feeling, no doubt, that simplicity and plainness are the soul of elegance, Miss Brass wore no collar or kerchief except upon her head, which was invariably ornamented with a brown gauze scarf, like the wing of the fabled vampire, and which, twisted into any form that happened to suggest itself, formed an easy and graceful head-dress.

Such was Miss Brass in person. In mind, she was of a strong and vigorous turn, having from her earliest youth devoted herself with uncommon ardour to the study of law; not wasting her speculations upon its eagle flights, which are rare, but tracing it attentively through all the slippery and eel-like crawlings in which it commonly pursues its way. Nor had she, like many persons of great intellect, confined herself to theory, or stopped short where practical usefulness begins; inasmuch as she could ingross, fair-copy, fill up printed forms with perfect accuracy, and, in short, transact any ordinary duty of the office down to pouncing a skin of parchment or mending a pen. It is difficult to understand how, possessed of these combined attractions, she should remain Miss Brass; but whether she had steeled her heart against mankind, or whether those who might have wooed and won her, were deterred by fears that, being learned in the law, she might have too near her fingers' ends those particular statutes which regulate what are familiarly termed actions for breach, certain it is that she was still in a state of celibacy, and still in daily occupation of her old stool opposite to that of her brother Sampson. And equally certain it is, by the way, that between these two stools a great many people had come to the ground.

One morning Mr Sampson Brass sat upon his stool copying some legal process, and viciously digging his pen deep into the paper, as if he were writing upon the very heart of the party against whom it was directed; and Miss Sally Brass sat upon her stool making a new pen preparatory to drawing out a little bill, which was her favourite occupation; and so they sat in silence for a long time, until Miss Brass broke silence.

'Have you nearly done, Sammy?' said Miss Brass; for in her mild and feminine lips, Sampson became Sammy, and all things were softened down.

'No,' returned her brother. 'It would have been all done though, if you had helped at the right time.'

'Oh yes, indeed,' cried Miss Sally; 'you want my help, don't you?—YOU, too, that are going to keep a clerk!'

'Am I going to keep a clerk for my own pleasure, or because of my own wish, you provoking rascal!' said Mr Brass, putting his pen in his mouth, and grinning spitefully at his sister. 'What do you taunt me about going to keep a clerk for?'

It may be observed in this place, lest the fact of Mr Brass calling a lady a rascal, should occasion any wonderment or surprise, that he was so habituated to having her near him in a man's capacity, that he had gradually accustomed himself to talk to her as though she were really a man. And this feeling was so perfectly reciprocal, that not only did Mr Brass often call Miss Brass a rascal, or even put an adjective before the rascal, but Miss Brass looked upon it as quite a matter of course, and was as little moved as any other lady would be by being called an angel.

'What do you taunt me, after three hours' talk last night, with going to keep a clerk for?' repeated Mr Brass, grinning again with the pen in his mouth, like some nobleman's or gentleman's crest. Is it my fault?'

'All I know is,' said Miss Sally, smiling drily, for she delighted in nothing so much as irritating her brother, 'that if every one of your clients is to force us to keep a clerk, whether we want to or not, you had better leave off business, strike yourself off the roll, and get taken in execution, as soon as you can.'

'Have we got any other client like him?' said Brass. 'Have we got another client like him now—will you answer me that?'

'Do you mean in the face!' said his sister.

'Do I mean in the face!' sneered Sampson Brass, reaching over to take up the bill-book, and fluttering its leaves rapidly. 'Look here—Daniel Quilp, Esquire—Daniel Quilp, Esquire—Daniel Quilp, Esquire—all through. Whether should I take a clerk that he recommends, and says, "this is the man for you," or lose all this, eh?'

Miss Sally deigned to make no reply, but smiled again, and went on with her work.

'But I know what it is,' resumed Brass after a short silence. 'You're afraid you won't have as long a finger in the business as you've been used to have. Do you think I don't see through that?'

'The business wouldn't go on very long, I expect, without me,' returned his sister composedly. 'Don't you be a fool and provoke me, Sammy, but mind what you're doing, and do it.'

Sampson Brass, who was at heart in great fear of his sister, sulkily bent over his writing again, and listened as she said:

'If I determined that the clerk ought not to come, of course he wouldn't be allowed to come. You know that well enough, so don't talk nonsense.'

Mr Brass received this observation with increased meekness, merely remarking, under his breath, that he didn't like that kind of joking, and that Miss Sally would be 'a much better fellow' if she forbore to aggravate him. To this compliment Miss Sally replied, that she had a relish for the amusement, and had no intention to forego its gratification. Mr Brass not caring, as it seemed, to pursue the subject any further, they both plied their pens at a great pace, and there the discussion ended.

While they were thus employed, the window was suddenly darkened, as by some person standing close against it. As Mr Brass and Miss Sally looked up to ascertain the cause, the top sash was nimbly lowered from without, and Quilp thrust in his head.

'Hallo!' he said, standing on tip-toe on the window-sill, and looking down into the room. 'Is there anybody at home? Is there any of the Devil's ware here? Is Brass at a premium, eh?'

'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed the lawyer in an affected ecstasy. 'Oh, very good, Sir! Oh, very good indeed! Quite eccentric! Dear me, what humour he has!'

'Is that my Sally?' croaked the dwarf, ogling the fair Miss Brass. 'Is it Justice with the bandage off her eyes, and without the sword and scales? Is it the Strong Arm of the Law? Is it the Virgin of Bevis?'

'What an amazing flow of spirits!' cried Brass. 'Upon my word, it's quite extraordinary!'

'Open the door,' said Quilp, 'I've got him here. Such a clerk for you, Brass, such a prize, such an ace of trumps. Be quick and open the door, or if there's another lawyer near and he should happen to look out of window, he'll snap him up before your eyes, he will.'

It is probable that the loss of the phoenix of clerks, even to a rival practitioner, would not have broken Mr Brass's heart; but, pretending great alacrity, he rose from his seat, and going to the door, returned, introducing his client, who led by the hand no less a person than Mr Richard Swiveller.

'There she is,' said Quilp, stopping short at the door, and wrinkling up his eyebrows as he looked towards Miss Sally; 'there is the woman I ought to have married—there is the beautiful Sarah—there is the female who has all the charms of her sex and none of their weaknesses. Oh Sally, Sally!'

To this amorous address Miss Brass briefly responded 'Bother!'

'Hard-hearted as the metal from which she takes her name,' said Quilp. 'Why don't she change it—melt down the brass, and take another name?'

'Hold your nonsense, Mr Quilp, do,' returned Miss Sally, with a grim smile. 'I wonder you're not ashamed of yourself before a strange young man.'

'The strange young man,' said Quilp, handing Dick Swiveller forward, 'is too susceptible himself not to understand me well. This is Mr Swiveller, my intimate friend—a gentleman of good family and great expectations, but who, having rather involved himself by youthful indiscretion, is content for a time to fill the humble station of a clerk—humble, but here most enviable. What a delicious atmosphere!'

If Mr Quilp spoke figuratively, and meant to imply that the air breathed by Miss Sally Brass was sweetened and rarefied by that dainty creature, he had doubtless good reason for what he said. But if he spoke of the delights of the atmosphere of Mr Brass's office in a literal sense, he had certainly a peculiar taste, as it was of a close and earthy kind, and, besides being frequently impregnated with strong whiffs of the second-hand wearing apparel exposed for sale in Duke's Place and Houndsditch, had a decided flavour of rats and mice, and a taint of mouldiness. Perhaps some doubts of its pure delight presented themselves to Mr Swiveller, as he gave vent to one or two short abrupt sniffs, and looked incredulously at the grinning dwarf.

'Mr Swiveller,' said Quilp, 'being pretty well accustomed to the agricultural pursuits of sowing wild oats, Miss Sally, prudently considers that half a loaf is better than no bread. To be out of harm's way he prudently thinks is something too, and therefore he accepts your brother's offer. Brass, Mr Swiveller is yours.'

'I am very glad, Sir,' said Mr Brass, 'very glad indeed. Mr Swiveller, Sir, is fortunate enough to have your friendship. You may be very proud, Sir, to have the friendship of Mr Quilp.'

Dick murmured something about never wanting a friend or a bottle to give him, and also gasped forth his favourite allusion to the wing of friendship and its never moulting a feather; but his faculties appeared to be absorbed in the contemplation of Miss Sally Brass, at whom he stared with blank and rueful looks, which delighted the watchful dwarf beyond measure. As to the divine Miss Sally herself, she rubbed her hands as men of business do, and took a few turns up and down the office with her pen behind her ear.

'I suppose,' said the dwarf, turning briskly to his legal friend, 'that Mr Swiveller enters upon his duties at once? It's Monday morning.'

'At once, if you please, Sir, by all means,' returned Brass.

'Miss Sally will teach him law, the delightful study of the law,' said Quilp; 'she'll be his guide, his friend, his companion, his Blackstone, his Coke upon Littleton, his Young Lawyer's Best Companion.'

'He is exceedingly eloquent,' said Brass, like a man abstracted, and looking at the roofs of the opposite houses, with his hands in his pockets; 'he has an extraordinary flow of language. Beautiful, really.'

'With Miss Sally,' Quilp went on, 'and the beautiful fictions of the law, his days will pass like minutes. Those charming creations of the poet, John Doe and Richard Roe, when they first dawn upon him, will open a new world for the enlargement of his mind and the improvement of his heart.'

'Oh, beautiful, beautiful! Beau-ti-ful indeed!' cried Brass. 'It's a treat to hear him!'

'Where will Mr Swiveller sit?' said Quilp, looking round.

'Why, we'll buy another stool, sir,' returned Brass. 'We hadn't any thoughts of having a gentleman with us, sir, until you were kind enough to suggest it, and our accommodation's not extensive. We'll look about for a second-hand stool, sir. In the meantime, if Mr Swiveller will take my seat, and try his hand at a fair copy of this ejectment, as I shall be out pretty well all the morning—'

'Walk with me,' said Quilp. 'I have a word or two to say to you on points of business. Can you spare the time?'

'Can I spare the time to walk with you, sir? You're joking, sir, you're joking with me,' replied the lawyer, putting on his hat. 'I'm ready, sir, quite ready. My time must be fully occupied indeed, sir, not to leave me time to walk with you. It's not everybody, sir, who has an opportunity of improving himself by the conversation of Mr Quilp.'

The dwarf glanced sarcastically at his brazen friend, and, with a short dry cough, turned upon his heel to bid adieu to Miss Sally. After a very gallant parting on his side, and a very cool and gentlemanly sort of one on hers, he nodded to Dick Swiveller, and withdrew with the attorney.

Dick stood at the desk in a state of utter stupefaction, staring with all his might at the beauteous Sally, as if she had been some curious animal whose like had never lived. When the dwarf got into the street, he mounted again upon the window-sill, and looked into the office for a moment with a grinning face, as a man might peep into a cage. Dick glanced upward at him, but without any token of recognition; and long after he had disappeared, still stood gazing upon Miss Sally Brass, seeing or thinking of nothing else, and rooted to the spot.

Miss Brass being by this time deep in the bill of costs, took no notice whatever of Dick, but went scratching on, with a noisy pen, scoring down the figures with evident delight, and working like a steam-engine. There stood Dick, gazing now at the green gown, now at the brown head-dress, now at the face, and now at the rapid pen, in a state of stupid perplexity, wondering how he got into the company of that strange monster, and whether it was a dream and he would ever wake. At last he heaved a deep sigh, and began slowly pulling off his coat.

Mr Swiveller pulled off his coat, and folded it up with great elaboration, staring at Miss Sally all the time; then put on a blue jacket with a double row of gilt buttons, which he had originally ordered for aquatic expeditions, but had brought with him that morning for office purposes; and, still keeping his eye upon her, suffered himself to drop down silently upon Mr Brass's stool. Then he underwent a relapse, and becoming powerless again, rested his chin upon his hand, and opened his eyes so wide, that it appeared quite out of the question that he could ever close them any more.

When he had looked so long that he could see nothing, Dick took his eyes off the fair object of his amazement, turned over the leaves of the draft he was to copy, dipped his pen into the inkstand, and at last, and by slow approaches, began to write. But he had not written half-a-dozen words when, reaching over to the inkstand to take a fresh dip, he happened to raise his eyes. There was the intolerable brown head-dress—there was the green gown—there, in short, was Miss Sally Brass, arrayed in all her charms, and more tremendous than ever.

This happened so often, that Mr Swiveller by degrees began to feel strange influences creeping over him—horrible desires to annihilate this Sally Brass—mysterious promptings to knock her head-dress off and try how she looked without it. There was a very large ruler on the table; a large, black, shining ruler. Mr Swiveller took it up and began to rub his nose with it.

From rubbing his nose with the ruler, to poising it in his hand and giving it an occasional flourish after the tomahawk manner, the transition was easy and natural. In some of these flourishes it went close to Miss Sally's head; the ragged edges of the head-dress fluttered with the wind it raised; advance it but an inch, and that great brown knot was on the ground: yet still the unconscious maiden worked away, and never raised her eyes.

Well, this was a great relief. It was a good thing to write doggedly and obstinately until he was desperate, and then snatch up the ruler and whirl it about the brown head-dress with the consciousness that he could have it off if he liked. It was a good thing to draw it back, and rub his nose very hard with it, if he thought Miss Sally was going to look up, and to recompense himself with more hardy flourishes when he found she was still absorbed. By these means Mr Swiveller calmed the agitation of his feelings, until his applications to the ruler became less fierce and frequent, and he could even write as many as half-a-dozen consecutive lines without having recourse to it—which was a great victory.

CHAPTER 34

In course of time, that is to say, after a couple of hours or so, of diligent application, Miss Brass arrived at the conclusion of her task, and recorded the fact by wiping her pen upon the green gown, and taking a pinch of snuff from a little round tin box which she carried in her pocket. Having disposed of this temperate refreshment, she arose from her stool, tied her papers into a formal packet with red tape, and taking them under her arm, marched out of the office.

Mr Swiveller had scarcely sprung off his seat and commenced the performance of a maniac hornpipe, when he was interrupted, in the fulness of his joy at being again alone, by the opening of the door, and the reappearance of Miss Sally's head.

'I am going out,' said Miss Brass.

'Very good, ma'am,' returned Dick. 'And don't hurry yourself on my account to come back, ma'am,' he added inwardly.

'If anybody comes on office business, take their messages, and say that the gentleman who attends to that matter isn't in at present, will you?' said Miss Brass.

'I will, ma'am,' replied Dick.

'I shan't be very long,' said Miss Brass, retiring.

'I'm sorry to hear it, ma'am,' rejoined Dick when she had shut the door. 'I hope you may be unexpectedly detained, ma'am. If you could manage to be run over, ma'am, but not seriously, so much the better.'

Uttering these expressions of good-will with extreme gravity, Mr Swiveller sat down in the client's chair and pondered; then took a few turns up and down the room and fell into the chair again.

'So I'm Brass's clerk, am I?' said Dick. 'Brass's clerk, eh? And the clerk of Brass's sister—clerk to a female Dragon. Very good, very good! What shall I be next? Shall I be a convict in a felt hat and a grey suit, trotting about a dockyard with my number neatly embroidered on my uniform, and the order of the garter on my leg, restrained from chafing my ankle by a twisted belcher handkerchief? Shall I be that? Will that do, or is it too genteel? Whatever you please, have it your own way, of course.'

As he was entirely alone, it may be presumed that, in these remarks, Mr Swiveller addressed himself to his fate or destiny, whom, as we learn by the precedents, it is the custom of heroes to taunt in a very bitter and ironical manner when they find themselves in situations of an unpleasant nature. This is the more probable from the circumstance of Mr Swiveller directing his observations to the ceiling, which these bodily personages are usually supposed to inhabit—except in theatrical cases, when they live in the heart of the great chandelier.

'Quilp offers me this place, which he says he can insure me,' resumed Dick after a thoughtful silence, and telling off the circumstances of his position, one by one, upon his fingers; 'Fred, who, I could have taken my affidavit, would not have heard of such a thing, backs Quilp to my astonishment, and urges me to take it also—staggerer, number one! My aunt in the country stops the supplies, and writes an affectionate note to say that she has made a new will, and left me out of it—staggerer, number two. No money; no credit; no support from Fred, who seems to turn steady all at once; notice to quit the old lodgings—staggerers, three, four, five, and six! Under an accumulation of staggerers, no man can be considered a free agent. No man knocks himself down; if his destiny knocks him down, his destiny must pick him up again. Then I'm very glad that mine has brought all this upon itself, and I shall be as careless as I can, and make myself quite at home to spite it. So go on my buck,' said Mr Swiveller, taking his leave of the ceiling with a significant nod, 'and let us see which of us will be tired first!'

Dismissing the subject of his downfall with these reflections, which were no doubt very profound, and are indeed not altogether unknown in certain systems of moral philosophy, Mr Swiveller shook off his despondency and assumed the cheerful ease of an irresponsible clerk.

As a means towards his composure and self-possession, he entered into a more minute examination of the office than he had yet had time to make; looked into the wig-box, the books, and ink-bottle; untied and inspected all the papers; carved a few devices on the table with a sharp blade of Mr Brass's penknife; and wrote his name on the inside of the wooden coal-scuttle. Having, as it were, taken formal possession of his clerkship in virtue of these proceedings, he opened the window and leaned negligently out of it until a beer-boy happened to pass, whom he commanded to set down his tray and to serve him with a pint of mild porter, which he drank upon the spot and promptly paid for, with the view of breaking ground for a system of future credit and opening a correspondence tending thereto, without loss of time. Then, three or four little boys dropped in, on legal errands from three or four attorneys of the Brass grade: whom Mr Swiveller received and dismissed with about as professional a manner, and as correct and comprehensive an understanding of their business, as would have been shown by a clown in a pantomime under similar circumstances. These things done and over, he got upon his stool again and tried his hand at drawing caricatures of Miss Brass with a pen and ink, whistling very cheerfully all the time.

He was occupied in this diversion when a coach stopped near the door, and presently afterwards there was a loud double-knock. As this was no business of Mr Swiveller's, the person not ringing the office bell, he pursued his diversion with perfect composure, notwithstanding that he rather thought there was nobody else in the house.

In this, however, he was mistaken; for, after the knock had been repeated with increased impatience, the door was opened, and somebody with a very heavy tread went up the stairs and into the room above. Mr Swiveller was wondering whether this might be another Miss Brass, twin sister to the Dragon, when there came a rapping of knuckles at the office door.

'Come in!' said Dick. 'Don't stand upon ceremony. The business will get rather complicated if I've many more customers. Come in!'

'Oh, please,' said a little voice very low down in the doorway, 'will you come and show the lodgings?'

Dick leant over the table, and descried a small slipshod girl in a dirty coarse apron and bib, which left nothing of her visible but her face and feet. She might as well have been dressed in a violin-case.

'Why, who are you?' said Dick.

To which the only reply was, 'Oh, please will you come and show the lodgings?'

There never was such an old-fashioned child in her looks and manner. She must have been at work from her cradle. She seemed as much afraid of Dick, as Dick was amazed at her.

'I hav'n't got anything to do with the lodgings,' said Dick. 'Tell 'em to call again.'

'Oh, but please will you come and show the lodgings,' returned the girl; 'It's eighteen shillings a week and us finding plate and linen. Boots and clothes is extra, and fires in winter-time is eightpence a day.'

'Why don't you show 'em yourself? You seem to know all about 'em,' said Dick.

'Miss Sally said I wasn't to, because people wouldn't believe the attendance was good if they saw how small I was first.'

'Well, but they'll see how small you are afterwards, won't they?' said Dick.

'Ah! But then they'll have taken 'em for a fortnight certain,' replied the child with a shrewd look; 'and people don't like moving when they're once settled.'

'This is a queer sort of thing,' muttered Dick, rising. 'What do you mean to say you are—the cook?'

'Yes, I do plain cooking;' replied the child. 'I'm housemaid too; I do all the work of the house.'

'I suppose Brass and the Dragon and I do the dirtiest part of it,' thought Dick. And he might have thought much more, being in a doubtful and hesitating mood, but that the girl again urged her request, and certain mysterious bumping sounds on the passage and staircase seemed to give note of the applicant's impatience. Richard Swiveller, therefore, sticking a pen behind each ear, and carrying another in his mouth as a token of his great importance and devotion to business, hurried out to meet and treat with the single gentleman.

He was a little surprised to perceive that the bumping sounds were occasioned by the progress up-stairs of the single gentleman's trunk, which, being nearly twice as wide as the staircase, and exceedingly heavy withal, it was no easy matter for the united exertions of the single gentleman and the coachman to convey up the steep ascent. But there they were, crushing each other, and pushing and pulling with all their might, and getting the trunk tight and fast in all kinds of impossible angles, and to pass them was out of the question; for which sufficient reason, Mr Swiveller followed slowly behind, entering a new protest on every stair against the house of Mr Sampson Brass being thus taken by storm.

To these remonstrances, the single gentleman answered not a word, but when the trunk was at last got into the bed-room, sat down upon it and wiped his bald head and face with his handkerchief. He was very warm, and well he might be; for, not to mention the exertion of getting the trunk up stairs, he was closely muffled in winter garments, though the thermometer had stood all day at eighty-one in the shade.

'I believe, sir,' said Richard Swiveller, taking his pen out of his mouth, 'that you desire to look at these apartments. They are very charming apartments, sir. They command an uninterrupted view of—of over the way, and they are within one minute's walk of—of the corner of the street. There is exceedingly mild porter, sir, in the immediate vicinity, and the contingent advantages are extraordinary.'

'What's the rent?' said the single gentleman.

'One pound per week,' replied Dick, improving on the terms.

'I'll take 'em.'

'The boots and clothes are extras,' said Dick; 'and the fires in winter time are—'

'Are all agreed to,' answered the single gentleman.

'Two weeks certain,' said Dick, 'are the—'

'Two weeks!' cried the single gentleman gruffly, eyeing him from top to toe. 'Two years. I shall live here for two years. Here. Ten pounds down. The bargain's made.'

'Why you see,' said Dick, 'my name is not Brass, and—'

'Who said it was? My name's not Brass. What then?'

'The name of the master of the house is,' said Dick.

'I'm glad of it,' returned the single gentleman; 'it's a good name for a lawyer. Coachman, you may go. So may you, Sir.'

Mr Swiveller was so much confounded by the single gentleman riding roughshod over him at this rate, that he stood looking at him almost as hard as he had looked at Miss Sally. The single gentleman, however, was not in the slightest degree affected by this circumstance, but proceeded with perfect composure to unwind the shawl which was tied round his neck, and then to pull off his boots. Freed of these encumbrances, he went on to divest himself of his other clothing, which he folded up, piece by piece, and ranged in order on the trunk. Then, he pulled down the window-blinds, drew the curtains, wound up his watch, and, quite leisurely and methodically, got into bed.

'Take down the bill,' were his parting words, as he looked out from between the curtains; 'and let nobody call me till I ring the bell.'

With that the curtains closed, and he seemed to snore immediately.

'This is a most remarkable and supernatural sort of house!' said Mr Swiveller, as he walked into the office with the bill in his hand. 'She-dragons in the business, conducting themselves like professional gentlemen; plain cooks of three feet high appearing mysteriously from under ground; strangers walking in and going to bed without leave or licence in the middle of the day! If he should be one of the miraculous fellows that turn up now and then, and has gone to sleep for two years, I shall be in a pleasant situation. It's my destiny, however, and I hope Brass may like it. I shall be sorry if he don't. But it's no business of mine—I have nothing whatever to do with it!'

CHAPTER 35

Mr Brass on returning home received the report of his clerk with much complacency and satisfaction, and was particular in inquiring after the ten-pound note, which, proving on examination to be a good and lawful note of the Governor and Company of the Bank of England, increased his good-humour considerably. Indeed he so overflowed with liberality and condescension, that, in the fulness of his heart, he invited Mr Swiveller to partake of a bowl of punch with him at that remote and indefinite period which is currently denominated 'one of these days,' and paid him many handsome compliments on the uncommon aptitude for business which his conduct on the first day of his devotion to it had so plainly evinced.

It was a maxim with Mr Brass that the habit of paying compliments kept a man's tongue oiled without any expense; and, as that useful member ought never to grow rusty or creak in turning on its hinges in the case of a practitioner of the law, in whom it should be always glib and easy, he lost few opportunities of improving himself by the utterance of handsome speeches and eulogistic expressions. And this had passed into such a habit with him, that, if he could not be correctly said to have his tongue at his fingers' ends, he might certainly be said to have it anywhere but in his face: which being, as we have already seen, of a harsh and repulsive character, was not oiled so easily, but frowned above all the smooth speeches—one of nature's beacons, warning off those who navigated the shoals and breakers of the World, or of that dangerous strait the Law, and admonishing them to seek less treacherous harbours and try their fortune elsewhere.

While Mr Brass by turns overwhelmed his clerk with compliments and inspected the ten-pound note, Miss Sally showed little emotion and that of no pleasurable kind, for as the tendency of her legal practice had been to fix her thoughts on small gains and gripings, and to whet and sharpen her natural wisdom, she was not a little disappointed that the single gentleman had obtained the lodgings at such an easy rate, arguing that when he was seen to have set his mind upon them, he should have been at the least charged double or treble the usual terms, and that, in exact proportion as he pressed forward, Mr Swiveller should have hung back. But neither the good opinion of Mr Brass, nor the dissatisfaction of Miss Sally, wrought any impression upon that young gentleman, who, throwing the responsibility of this and all other acts and deeds thereafter to be done by him, upon his unlucky destiny, was quite resigned and comfortable: fully prepared for the worst, and philosophically indifferent to the best.

'Good morning, Mr Richard,' said Brass, on the second day of Mr Swiveller's clerkship. 'Sally found you a second-hand stool, Sir, yesterday evening, in Whitechapel. She's a rare fellow at a bargain, I can tell you, Mr Richard. You'll find that a first-rate stool, Sir, take my word for it.'

'It's rather a crazy one to look at,' said Dick.

'You'll find it a most amazing stool to sit down upon, you may depend,' returned Mr Brass. 'It was bought in the open street just opposite the hospital, and as it has been standing there a month of two, it has got rather dusty and a little brown from being in the sun, that's all.'

'I hope it hasn't got any fevers or anything of that sort in it,' said Dick, sitting himself down discontentedly, between Mr Sampson and the chaste Sally. 'One of the legs is longer than the others.'

'Then we get a bit of timber in, Sir,' retorted Brass. 'Ha, ha, ha! We get a bit of timber in, Sir, and that's another advantage of my sister's going to market for us. Miss Brass, Mr Richard is the—'

'Will you keep quiet?' interrupted the fair subject of these remarks, looking up from her papers. 'How am I to work if you keep on chattering?'

'What an uncertain chap you are!' returned the lawyer. 'Sometimes you're all for a chat. At another time you're all for work. A man never knows what humour he'll find you in.'

'I'm in a working humour now,' said Sally, 'so don't disturb me, if you please. And don't take him,' Miss Sally pointed with the feather of her pen to Richard, 'off his business. He won't do more than he can help, I dare say.'

Mr Brass had evidently a strong inclination to make an angry reply, but was deterred by prudent or timid considerations, as he only muttered something about aggravation and a vagabond; not associating the terms with any individual, but mentioning them as connected with some abstract ideas which happened to occur to him. They went on writing for a long time in silence after this—in such a dull silence that Mr Swiveller (who required excitement) had several times fallen asleep, and written divers strange words in an unknown character with his eyes shut, when Miss Sally at length broke in upon the monotony of the office by pulling out the little tin box, taking a noisy pinch of snuff, and then expressing her opinion that Mr Richard Swiveller had 'done it.'

'Done what, ma'am?' said Richard.

'Do you know,' returned Miss Brass, 'that the lodger isn't up yet— that nothing has been seen or heard of him since he went to bed yesterday afternoon?'

'Well, ma'am,' said Dick, 'I suppose he may sleep his ten pound out, in peace and quietness, if he likes.'

'Ah! I begin to think he'll never wake,' observed Miss Sally.

'It's a very remarkable circumstance,' said Brass, laying down his pen; 'really, very remarkable. Mr Richard, you'll remember, if this gentleman should be found to have hung himself to the bed-post, or any unpleasant accident of that kind should happen—you'll remember, Mr Richard, that this ten pound note was given to you in part payment of two years' rent? You'll bear that in mind, Mr Richard; you had better make a note of it, sir, in case you should ever be called upon to give evidence.'

Mr Swiveller took a large sheet of foolscap, and with a countenance of profound gravity, began to make a very small note in one corner.

'We can never be too cautious,' said Mr Brass. 'There is a deal of wickedness going about the world, a deal of wickedness. Did the gentleman happen to say, Sir—but never mind that at present, sir; finish that little memorandum first.'

Dick did so, and handed it to Mr Brass, who had dismounted from his stool, and was walking up and down the office.

'Oh, this is the memorandum, is it?' said Brass, running his eye over the document. 'Very good. Now, Mr Richard, did the gentleman say anything else?'

'No.'

'Are you sure, Mr Richard,' said Brass, solemnly, 'that the gentleman said nothing else?'

'Devil a word, Sir,' replied Dick.

'Think again, Sir,' said Brass; 'it's my duty, Sir, in the position in which I stand, and as an honourable member of the legal profession—the first profession in this country, Sir, or in any other country, or in any of the planets that shine above us at night and are supposed to be inhabited—it's my duty, Sir, as an honourable member of that profession, not to put to you a leading question in a matter of this delicacy and importance. Did the gentleman, Sir, who took the first floor of you yesterday afternoon, and who brought with him a box of property—a box of property—say anything more than is set down in this memorandum?'

'Come, don't be a fool,' said Miss Sally.

Dick looked at her, and then at Brass, and then at Miss Sally again, and still said 'No.'

'Pooh, pooh! Deuce take it, Mr Richard, how dull you are!' cried Brass, relaxing into a smile. 'Did he say anything about his property?—there!'

'That's the way to put it,' said Miss Sally, nodding to her brother.

'Did he say, for instance,' added Brass, in a kind of comfortable, cozy tone—'I don't assert that he did say so, mind; I only ask you, to refresh your memory—did he say, for instance, that he was a stranger in London—that it was not his humour or within his ability to give any references—that he felt we had a right to require them—and that, in case anything should happen to him, at any time, he particularly desired that whatever property he had upon the premises should be considered mine, as some slight recompense for the trouble and annoyance I should sustain—and were you, in short,' added Brass, still more comfortably and cozily than before, 'were you induced to accept him on my behalf, as a tenant, upon those conditions?'

'Certainly not,' replied Dick.

'Why then, Mr Richard,' said Brass, darting at him a supercilious and reproachful look, 'it's my opinion that you've mistaken your calling, and will never make a lawyer.'

'Not if you live a thousand years,' added Miss Sally. Whereupon the brother and sister took each a noisy pinch of snuff from the little tin box, and fell into a gloomy thoughtfulness.

Nothing further passed up to Mr Swiveller's dinner-time, which was at three o'clock, and seemed about three weeks in coming. At the first stroke of the hour, the new clerk disappeared. At the last stroke of five, he reappeared, and the office, as if by magic, became fragrant with the smell of gin and water and lemon-peel.

'Mr Richard,' said Brass, 'this man's not up yet. Nothing will wake him, sir. What's to be done?'

'I should let him have his sleep out,' returned Dick.

'Sleep out!' cried Brass; 'why he has been asleep now, six-and-twenty hours. We have been moving chests of drawers over his head, we have knocked double knocks at the street-door, we have made the servant-girl fall down stairs several times (she's a light weight, and it don't hurt her much,) but nothing wakes him.'

'Perhaps a ladder,' suggested Dick, 'and getting in at the first-floor window—'

'But then there's a door between; besides, the neighbours would be up in arms,' said Brass.

'What do you say to getting on the roof of the house through the trap-door, and dropping down the chimney?' suggested Dick.

'That would be an excellent plan,' said Brass, 'if anybody would be—' and here he looked very hard at Mr Swiveller—'would be kind, and friendly, and generous enough, to undertake it. I dare say it would not be anything like as disagreeable as one supposes.'

Dick had made the suggestion, thinking that the duty might possibly fall within Miss Sally's department. As he said nothing further, and declined taking the hint, Mr Brass was fain to propose that they should go up stairs together, and make a last effort to awaken the sleeper by some less violent means, which, if they failed on this last trial, must positively be succeeded by stronger measures. Mr Swiveller, assenting, armed himself with his stool and the large ruler, and repaired with his employer to the scene of action, where Miss Brass was already ringing a hand-bell with all her might, and yet without producing the smallest effect upon their mysterious lodger.

'There are his boots, Mr Richard!' said Brass.

'Very obstinate-looking articles they are too,' quoth Richard Swiveller. And truly, they were as sturdy and bluff a pair of boots as one would wish to see; as firmly planted on the ground as if their owner's legs and feet had been in them; and seeming, with their broad soles and blunt toes, to hold possession of their place by main force.

'I can't see anything but the curtain of the bed,' said Brass, applying his eye to the keyhole of the door. 'Is he a strong man, Mr Richard?'

Very,' answered Dick.

It would be an extremely unpleasant circumstance if he was to bounce out suddenly,' said Brass. 'Keep the stairs clear. I should be more than a match for him, of course, but I'm the master of the house, and the laws of hospitality must be respected.—Hallo there! Hallo, hallo!'

While Mr Brass, with his eye curiously twisted into the keyhole, uttered these sounds as a means of attracting the lodger's attention, and while Miss

Brass plied the hand-bell, Mr Swiveller put his stool close against the wall by the side of the door, and mounting on the top and standing bolt upright, so that if the lodger did make a rush, he would most probably pass him in its onward fury, began a violent battery with the ruler upon the upper panels of the door. Captivated with his own ingenuity, and confident in the strength of his position, which he had taken up after the method of those hardy individuals who open the pit and gallery doors of theatres on crowded nights, Mr Swiveller rained down such a shower of blows, that the noise of the bell was drowned; and the small servant, who lingered on the stairs below, ready to fly at a moment's notice, was obliged to hold her ears lest she should be rendered deaf for life.

Suddenly the door was unlocked on the inside, and flung violently open. The small servant flew to the coal-cellar; Miss Sally dived into her own bed-room; Mr Brass, who was not remarkable for personal courage, ran into the next street, and finding that nobody followed him, armed with a poker or other offensive weapon, put his hands in his pockets, walked very slowly all at once, and whistled.

Meanwhile, Mr Swiveller, on the top of the stool, drew himself into as flat a shape as possible against the wall, and looked, not unconcernedly, down upon the single gentleman, who appeared at the door growling and cursing in a very awful manner, and, with the boots in his hand, seemed to have an intention of hurling them down stairs on speculation. This idea, however, he abandoned. He was turning into his room again, still growling vengefully, when his eyes met those of the watchful Richard.

'Have YOU been making that horrible noise?' said the single gentleman.

'I have been helping, sir,' returned Dick, keeping his eye upon him, and waving the ruler gently in his right hand, as an indication of what the single gentleman had to expect if he attempted any violence.

'How dare you then,' said the lodger, 'Eh?'

To this, Dick made no other reply than by inquiring whether the lodger held it to be consistent with the conduct and character of a gentleman to go to sleep for six-and-twenty hours at a stretch, and whether the peace of an amiable and virtuous family was to weigh as nothing in the balance.

'Is my peace nothing?' said the single gentleman.

'Is their peace nothing, sir?' returned Dick. 'I don't wish to hold out any threats, sir—indeed the law does not allow of threats, for to threaten is an indictable offence—but if ever you do that again, take care you're not sat upon by the coroner and buried in a cross road before you wake. We have been distracted with fears that you were dead, Sir,' said Dick, gently sliding to the ground, 'and the short and the long of it is, that we cannot allow single gentlemen to come into this establishment and sleep like double gentlemen without paying extra for it.'

'Indeed!' cried the lodger.

'Yes, Sir, indeed,' returned Dick, yielding to his destiny and saying whatever came uppermost; 'an equal quantity of slumber was never got out of one bed and bedstead, and if you're going to sleep in that way, you must pay for a double-bedded room.'

Instead of being thrown into a greater passion by these remarks, the lodger lapsed into a broad grin and looked at Mr Swiveller with twinkling eyes. He was a brown-faced sun-burnt man, and appeared browner and more sun-burnt from having a white nightcap on. As it was clear that he was a choleric fellow in some respects, Mr Swiveller was relieved to find him in such good humour, and, to encourage him in it, smiled himself.

The lodger, in the testiness of being so rudely roused, had pushed his nightcap very much on one side of his bald head. This gave him a rakish eccentric air which, now that he had leisure to observe it, charmed Mr Swiveller exceedingly; therefore, by way of propitiation, he expressed his hope that the gentleman was going to get up, and further that he would never do so any more.

'Come here, you impudent rascal!' was the lodger's answer as he re-entered his room.

Mr Swiveller followed him in, leaving the stool outside, but reserving the ruler in case of a surprise. He rather congratulated himself on his prudence when the single gentleman, without notice or explanation of any kind, double-locked the door.

'Can you drink anything?' was his next inquiry.

Mr Swiveller replied that he had very recently been assuaging the pangs of thirst, but that he was still open to 'a modest quencher,' if the materials were at hand. Without another word spoken on either side, the lodger took from his great trunk, a kind of temple, shining as of polished silver, and placed it carefully on the table.

Greatly interested in his proceedings, Mr Swiveller observed him closely. Into one little chamber of this temple, he dropped an egg; into another some coffee; into a third a compact piece of raw steak from a neat tin case; into a fourth, he poured some water. Then, with the aid of a phosphorus-box and some matches, he procured a light and applied it to a spirit-lamp which had a place of its own below the temple; then, he shut down the lids of all the little chambers; then he opened them; and then, by some wonderful and unseen agency, the steak was done, the egg was boiled, the coffee was accurately prepared, and his breakfast was ready.

'Hot water—' said the lodger, handing it to Mr Swiveller with as much coolness as if he had a kitchen fire before him—'extraordinary rum—sugar—and a travelling glass. Mix for yourself. And make haste.'

Dick complied, his eyes wandering all the time from the temple on the table, which seemed to do everything, to the great trunk which seemed to hold everything. The lodger took his breakfast like a man who was used to work these miracles, and thought nothing of them.

'The man of the house is a lawyer, is he not?' said the lodger.

Dick nodded. The rum was amazing.

'The woman of the house—what's she?'

'A dragon,' said Dick.

The single gentleman, perhaps because he had met with such things in his travels, or perhaps because he WAS a single gentleman, evinced no surprise, but merely inquired 'Wife or Sister?'—'Sister,' said Dick.—'So much the better,' said the single gentleman, 'he can get rid of her when he likes.'

'I want to do as I like, young man,' he added after a short silence; 'to go to bed when I like, get up when I like, come in when I like, go out when I like—to be asked no questions and be surrounded by no spies. In this last respect, servants are the devil. There's only one here.'

'And a very little one,' said Dick.

'And a very little one,' repeated the lodger. 'Well, the place will suit me, will it?'

'Yes,' said Dick.

'Sharks, I suppose?' said the lodger.

Dick nodded assent, and drained his glass.

'Let them know my humour,' said the single gentleman, rising. 'If they disturb me, they lose a good tenant. If they know me to be that, they know enough. If they try to know more, it's a notice to quit. It's better to understand these things at once. Good day.'

'I beg your pardon,' said Dick, halting in his passage to the door, which the lodger prepared to open. 'When he who adores thee has left but the name—'

'What do you mean?'

'—But the name,' said Dick—'has left but the name—in case of letters or parcels—'

'I never have any,' returned the lodger.

'Or in the case anybody should call.'

'Nobody ever calls on me.'

'If any mistake should arise from not having the name, don't say it was my fault, Sir,' added Dick, still lingering.—'Oh blame not the bard—'

'I'll blame nobody,' said the lodger, with such irascibility that in a moment Dick found himself on the staircase, and the locked door between them.

Mr Brass and Miss Sally were lurking hard by, having been, indeed, only routed from the keyhole by Mr Swiveller's abrupt exit. As their utmost exertions had not enabled them to overhear a word of the interview, however, in consequence of a quarrel for precedence, which, though limited of necessity to pushes and pinches and such quiet pantomime, had lasted the whole time, they hurried him down to the office to hear his account of the conversation.

This Mr Swiveller gave them—faithfully as regarded the wishes and character of the single gentleman, and poetically as concerned the great trunk, of which he gave a description more remarkable for brilliancy of imagination than a strict adherence to truth; declaring, with many strong asseverations, that it contained a specimen of every kind of rich food and wine, known in these times, and in particular that it was of a self-acting kind and served up whatever was required, as he supposed by clock-work. He also gave them to understand that the cooking apparatus roasted a fine piece of sirloin of beef, weighing about six pounds avoir-dupoise, in two minutes and a quarter, as he had himself witnessed, and proved by his sense of taste; and further, that, however the effect was produced, he had distinctly seen water boil and bubble up when the single gentleman winked; from which facts he (Mr Swiveller) was led to infer that the lodger was some great conjuror or chemist, or both, whose residence under that roof could not fail at some future days to shed a great credit and distinction on the name of Brass, and add a new interest to the history of Bevis Marks.

There was one point which Mr Swiveller deemed it unnecessary to enlarge upon, and that was the fact of the modest quencher, which, by reason of its intrinsic strength and its coming close upon the heels of the temperate beverage he had discussed at dinner, awakened a slight degree of fever, and rendered necessary two or three other modest quenchers at the public-house in the course of the evening.

CHAPTER 36

As the single gentleman after some weeks' occupation of his lodgings, still declined to correspond, by word or gesture, either with Mr Brass or his sister Sally, but invariably chose Richard Swiveller as his channel of communication; and as he proved himself in all respects a highly desirable inmate, paying for everything beforehand, giving very little trouble, making no noise, and keeping early hours; Mr Richard imperceptibly rose to an important position in the family, as one who had influence over this mysterious lodger, and could negotiate with him, for good or evil, when nobody else durst approach his person.

If the truth must be told, even Mr Swiveller's approaches to the single gentleman were of a very distant kind, and met with small encouragement; but, as he never returned from a monosyllabic conference with the unknown, without quoting such expressions as 'Swiveller, I know I can rely upon you,'—'I have no hesitation in saying, Swiveller, that I entertain a regard for you,'—'Swiveller, you are my friend, and will stand by me I am sure,' with many other short speeches of the same familiar and confiding kind, purporting to have been addressed by the single gentleman to himself, and to form the staple of their ordinary discourse, neither Mr Brass nor Miss Sally for a moment questioned the extent of his influence, but accorded to him their fullest and most unqualified belief. But quite apart from, and independent of, this source of popularity, Mr Swiveller had another, which promised to be equally enduring, and to lighten his position considerably.

He found favour in the eyes of Miss Sally Brass. Let not the light scorners of female fascination erect their ears to listen to a new tale of love which shall serve them for a jest; for Miss Brass, however accurately formed to be beloved, was not of the loving kind. That amiable virgin, having clung to the skirts of the Law from her earliest youth; having sustained herself by their aid, as it were, in her first running alone, and maintained a firm grasp upon them ever since; had passed her life in a kind of legal childhood. She had been remarkable, when a tender prattler for an uncommon talent in counterfeiting the walk and manner of a bailiff: in which character she had learned to tap her little playfellows on the shoulder, and to carry them off to imaginary sponging-houses, with a correctness of imitation which was the surprise and delight of all who witnessed her performances, and which was only to be exceeded by her exquisite manner of putting an execution into her doll's house, and taking an exact inventory of the chairs and tables. These artless sports had naturally soothed and cheered the decline of her widowed father: a most exemplary gentleman (called 'old Foxey' by his friends from his extreme sagacity,) who encouraged them to the utmost, and whose chief regret, on finding that he drew near to Houndsditch churchyard, was, that his daughter could not take out an attorney's certificate and hold a place upon the roll. Filled with this affectionate and touching sorrow, he had solemnly confided her to his son Sampson as an invaluable auxiliary; and from the old gentleman's decease to the period of which we treat, Miss Sally Brass had been the prop and pillar of his business.

It is obvious that, having devoted herself from infancy to this one pursuit and study, Miss Brass could know but little of the world, otherwise than in connection with the law; and that from a lady gifted with such high tastes, proficiency in those gentler and softer arts in which women usually excel, was scarcely to be looked for. Miss Sally's accomplishments were all of a masculine and strictly legal kind. They began with the practice of an attorney and they ended with it. She was in a state of lawful innocence, so to speak. The law had been her nurse. And, as bandy-legs or such physical deformities in children are held to be the consequence of bad nursing, so, if in a mind so beautiful any moral twist or handiness could be found, Miss Sally Brass's nurse was alone to blame.

It was on this lady, then, that Mr Swiveller burst in full freshness as something new and hitherto undreamed of, lighting up the office with scraps of song and merriment, conjuring with inkstands and boxes of wafers, catching three oranges in one hand, balancing stools upon his chin and penknives on his nose, and constantly performing a hundred other feats with equal ingenuity; for with such unbendings did Richard, in Mr Brass's absence, relieve the tedium of his confinement. These social qualities, which Miss Sally first discovered by accident, gradually made such an impression upon her, that she would entreat Mr Swiveller to relax as though she were not by, which Mr Swiveller, nothing loth, would readily consent to do. By these means a friendship sprung up between them. Mr Swiveller gradually came to look upon her as her brother Sampson did, and as he would have looked upon any other clerk. He imparted to her the mystery of going the odd man or plain Newmarket for fruit, ginger-beer, baked potatoes, or even a modest quencher, of which Miss Brass did not scruple to partake. He would often persuade her to undertake his share of writing in addition to her own; nay, he would sometimes reward her with a hearty slap on the back, and protest that she was a devilish good fellow, a jolly dog, and so forth; all of which compliments Miss Sally would receive in entire good part and with perfect satisfaction.

One circumstance troubled Mr Swiveller's mind very much, and that was that the small servant always remained somewhere in the bowels of the earth under Bevis Marks, and never came to the surface unless the single gentleman rang his bell, when she would answer it and immediately disappear again. She never went out, or came into the office, or had a clean face, or took off the coarse apron, or looked out of any one of the windows, or stood at the street-door for a breath of air, or had any rest or enjoyment whatever. Nobody ever came to see her, nobody spoke of her, nobody cared about her. Mr Brass had said once, that he believed she was a 'love-child' (which means anything but a child of love), and that was all the information Richard Swiveller could obtain.

'It's of no use asking the dragon,' thought Dick one day, as he sat contemplating the features of Miss Sally Brass. 'I suspect if I asked any questions on that head, our alliance would be at an end. I wonder whether she is a dragon by-the-bye, or something in the mermaid way. She has rather a scaly appearance. But mermaids are fond of looking at themselves in the glass, which she can't be. And they have a habit of combing their hair, which she hasn't. No, she's a dragon.'

'Where are you going, old fellow?' said Dick aloud, as Miss Sally wiped her pen as usual on the green dress, and uprose from her seat.

'To dinner,' answered the dragon.

'To dinner!' thought Dick, 'that's another circumstance. I don't believe that small servant ever has anything to eat.'

'Sammy won't be home,' said Miss Brass. 'Stop till I come back. I sha'n't be long.'

Dick nodded, and followed Miss Brass—with his eyes to the door, and with his ears to a little back parlour, where she and her brother took their meals.

'Now,' said Dick, walking up and down with his hands in his pockets, 'I'd give something—if I had it—to know how they use that child, and where they keep her. My mother must have been a very inquisitive woman; I have no doubt I'm marked with a note of interrogation somewhere. My feelings I smother, but thou hast been the cause of this anguish, my—upon my word,' said Mr Swiveller, checking himself and falling thoughtfully into the client's chair, 'I should like to know how they use her!'

After running on, in this way, for some time, Mr Swiveller softly opened the office door, with the intention of darting across the street for a glass of the mild porter. At that moment he caught a parting glimpse of the brown head-dress of Miss Brass flitting down the kitchen stairs. 'And by Jove!' thought Dick, 'she's going to feed the small servant. Now or never!'

First peeping over the handrail and allowing the head-dress to disappear in the darkness below, he groped his way down, and arrived at the door of a back kitchen immediately after Miss Brass had entered the same, bearing in her hand a cold leg of mutton. It was a very dark miserable place, very low and very damp: the walls disfigured by a thousand rents and blotches. The water was trickling out of a leaky butt, and a most wretched cat was lapping up the drops with the sickly eagerness of starvation. The grate, which was a wide one, was wound and screwed up tight, so as to hold no more than a little thin sandwich of fire. Everything was locked up; the coal-cellar, the candle-box, the salt-box, the meat-safe, were all padlocked. There was nothing that a beetle could have lunched upon. The pinched and meagre aspect of the place would have killed a chameleon. He would have known, at the first mouthful, that the air was not eatable, and must have given up the ghost in despair.

The small servant stood with humility in presence of Miss Sally, and hung her head.

'Are you there?' said Miss Sally.

'Yes, ma'am,' was the answer in a weak voice.

'Go further away from the leg of mutton, or you'll be picking it, I know,' said Miss Sally.

The girl withdrew into a corner, while Miss Brass took a key from her pocket, and opening the safe, brought from it a dreary waste of cold potatoes, looking as eatable as Stonehenge. This she placed before the small servant, ordering her to sit down before it, and then, taking up a great carving-knife, made a mighty show of sharpening it upon the carving-fork.

'Do you see this?' said Miss Brass, slicing off about two square inches of cold mutton, after all this preparation, and holding it out on the point of the fork.

The small servant looked hard enough at it with her hungry eyes to see every shred of it, small as it was, and answered, 'yes.'

'Then don't you ever go and say,' retorted Miss Sally, 'that you hadn't meat here. There, eat it up.'

This was soon done. 'Now, do you want any more?' said Miss Sally.

The hungry creature answered with a faint 'No.' They were evidently going through an established form.

'You've been helped once to meat,' said Miss Brass, summing up the facts; 'you have had as much as you can eat, you're asked if you want any more, and you answer, 'no!' Then don't you ever go and say you were allowanced, mind that.'

With those words, Miss Sally put the meat away and locked the safe, and then drawing near to the small servant, overlooked her while she finished the potatoes.

It was plain that some extraordinary grudge was working in Miss Brass's gentle breast, and that it was that which impelled her, without the smallest present cause, to rap the child with the blade of the knife, now on her hand, now on her head, and now on her back, as if she found it quite impossible to stand so close to her without administering a few slight knocks. But Mr Swiveller was not a little surprised to see his fellow-clerk, after walking slowly backwards towards the door, as if she were trying to withdraw herself from the room but could not accomplish it, dart suddenly forward, and falling on the small servant give her some hard blows with her clenched hand. The victim cried, but in a subdued manner as if she feared to raise her voice, and Miss Sally, comforting herself with a pinch of snuff, ascended the stairs, just as Richard had safely reached the office.

CHAPTER 37

The single gentleman among his other peculiarities—and he had a very plentiful stock, of which he every day furnished some new specimen—took a most extraordinary and remarkable interest in the exhibition of Punch. If the sound of a Punch's voice, at ever so remote a distance, reached Bevis Marks, the single gentleman, though in bed and asleep, would start up, and, hurrying on his clothes, make for the spot with all speed, and presently return at the head of a long procession of idlers, having in the midst the theatre and its proprietors. Straightway, the stage would be set up in front of Mr Brass's house; the single gentleman would establish himself at the first floor window; and the entertainment would proceed, with all its exciting accompaniments of fife and drum and shout, to the excessive consternation of all sober votaries of business in that silent thoroughfare. It might have been expected that when the play was done, both players and audience would have dispersed; but the epilogue was as bad as the play, for no sooner was the Devil dead, than the manager of the puppets and his partner were summoned by the single gentleman to his chamber, where they were regaled with strong waters from his private store, and where they held with him long conversations, the purport of which no human being could fathom. But the secret of these discussions was of little importance. It was sufficient to know that while they were proceeding, the concourse without still lingered round the house; that boys beat upon the drum with their fists, and imitated Punch with their tender voices; that the office-window was rendered opaque by flattened noses, and the key-hole of the street-door luminous with eyes; that every time the single gentleman or either of his guests was seen at the upper window, or so much as the end of one of their noses was visible, there was a great shout of execration from the excluded mob, who remained howling and yelling, and refusing consolation, until the exhibitors were delivered up to them to be attended elsewhere. It was sufficient, in short, to know that Bevis Marks was revolutionised by these popular movements, and that peace and quietness fled from its precincts.

Nobody was rendered more indignant by these proceedings than Mr Sampson Brass, who, as he could by no means afford to lose so profitable an inmate, deemed it prudent to pocket his lodger's affront along with his cash, and to annoy the audiences who clustered round his door by such imperfect means of retaliation as were open to him, and which were confined to the trickling down of foul water on their heads from unseen watering pots, pelting them with fragments of tile and mortar from the roof of the house, and bribing the drivers of hackney cabriolets to come suddenly round the corner and dash in among them precipitately. It may, at first sight, be matter of surprise to the thoughtless few that Mr Brass, being a professional gentleman, should not have legally indicted some party or parties, active in the promotion of the nuisance, but they will be good enough to remember, that as Doctors seldom take their own prescriptions, and Divines do not always practise what they preach, so lawyers are shy of meddling with the Law on their own account: knowing it to be an edged tool of uncertain application, very expensive in the working, and rather remarkable for its properties of close shaving, than for its always shaving the right person.

'Come,' said Mr Brass one afternoon, 'this is two days without a Punch. I'm in hopes he has run through 'em all, at last.'

'Why are you in hopes?' returned Miss Sally. 'What harm do they do?'

'Here's a pretty sort of a fellow!' cried Brass, laying down his pen in despair. 'Now here's an aggravating animal!'

'Well, what harm do they do?' retorted Sally.

'What harm!' cried Brass. 'Is it no harm to have a constant hallooing and hooting under one's very nose, distracting one from business, and making one grind one's teeth with vexation? Is it no harm to be blinded and choked up, and have the king's highway stopped with a set of screamers and roarers whose throats must be made of—of—'

'Brass,' suggested Mr Swiveller.

'Ah! of brass,' said the lawyer, glancing at his clerk, to assure himself that he had suggested the word in good faith and without any sinister intention. 'Is that no harm?'

The lawyer stopped short in his invective, and listening for a moment, and recognising the well-known voice, rested his head upon his hand, raised his eyes to the ceiling, and muttered faintly,

'There's another!'

Up went the single gentleman's window directly.

'There's another,' repeated Brass; 'and if I could get a break and four blood horses to cut into the Marks when the crowd is at its thickest, I'd give eighteen-pence and never grudge it!'

The distant squeak was heard again. The single gentleman's door burst open. He ran violently down the stairs, out into the street, and so past the window, without any hat, towards the quarter whence the sound proceeded—bent, no doubt, upon securing the strangers' services directly.

'I wish I only knew who his friends were,' muttered Sampson, filling his pocket with papers; 'if they'd just get up a pretty little Commission de lunatico at the Gray's Inn Coffee House and give me the job, I'd be content to have the lodgings empty for one while, at all events.'

With which words, and knocking his hat over his eyes as if for the purpose of shutting out even a glimpse of the dreadful visitation, Mr Brass rushed from the house and hurried away.

As Mr Swiveller was decidedly favourable to these performances, upon the ground that looking at a Punch, or indeed looking at anything out of window, was better than working; and as he had been, for this reason, at some pains to awaken in his fellow clerk a sense of their beauties and manifold deserts; both he and Miss Sally rose as with one accord and took up their positions at the window: upon the sill whereof, as in a post of honour, sundry young ladies and gentlemen who were employed in the dry nurture of babies, and who made a point of being present, with their young charges, on such occasions, had already established themselves as comfortably as the circumstances would allow.

The glass being dim, Mr Swiveller, agreeably to a friendly custom which he had established between them, hitched off the brown head-dress from Miss Sally's head, and dusted it carefully therewith. By the time he had handed it back, and its beautiful wearer had put it on again (which she did with perfect composure and indifference), the lodger returned with the show and showmen at his heels, and a strong addition to the body of spectators. The exhibitor disappeared with all speed behind the drapery; and his partner, stationing himself by the side of the Theatre, surveyed the audience with a remarkable expression of melancholy, which became more remarkable still when he breathed a hornpipe tune into that sweet musical instrument which is popularly termed a mouth-organ, without at all changing the mournful expression of the upper part of his face, though his mouth and chin were, of necessity, in lively spasms.

The drama proceeded to its close, and held the spectators enchained in the customary manner. The sensation which kindles in large assemblies, when they are relieved from a state of breathless suspense and are again free to speak and move, was yet rife, when the lodger, as usual, summoned the men up stairs.

'Both of you,' he called from the window; for only the actual exhibitor —a little fat man—prepared to obey the summons. 'I want to talk to you. Come both of you!'

Come, Tommy,' said the little man.

I an't a talker,' replied the other. 'Tell him so. What should I go and talk for?'

'Don't you see the gentleman's got a bottle and glass up there?' returned the little man.

'And couldn't you have said so at first?' retorted the other with sudden alacrity. 'Now, what are you waiting for? Are you going to keep the gentleman expecting us all day? haven't you no manners?'

With this remonstrance, the melancholy man, who was no other than Mr Thomas Codlin, pushed past his friend and brother in the craft, Mr Harris, otherwise Short or Trotters, and hurried before him to the single gentleman's apartment.

'Now, my men,' said the single gentleman; 'you have done very well. What will you take? Tell that little man behind, to shut the door.'

'Shut the door, can't you?' said Mr Codlin, turning gruffly to his friend. 'You might have knowed that the gentleman wanted the door shut, without being told, I think.'

Mr Short obeyed, observing under his breath that his friend seemed unusually 'cranky,' and expressing a hope that there was no dairy in the neighbourhood, or his temper would certainly spoil its contents.

The gentleman pointed to a couple of chairs, and intimated by an emphatic nod of his head that he expected them to be seated. Messrs Codlin and Short, after looking at each other with considerable doubt and indecision, at length sat down—each on the extreme edge of the chair pointed out to him—and held their hats very tight, while the single gentleman filled a couple of glasses from a bottle on the table beside him, and presented them in due form.

'You're pretty well browned by the sun, both of you,' said their entertainer. 'Have you been travelling?'

Mr Short replied in the affirmative with a nod and a smile. Mr Codlin added a corroborative nod and a short groan, as if he still felt the weight of the Temple on his shoulders.

'To fairs, markets, races, and so forth, I suppose?' pursued the single gentleman.

'Yes, sir,' returned Short, 'pretty nigh all over the West of England.'

'I have talked to men of your craft from North, East, and South,' returned their host, in rather a hasty manner; 'but I never lighted on any from the West before.'

'It's our reg'lar summer circuit is the West, master,' said Short; 'that's where it is. We takes the East of London in the spring and winter, and the West of England in the summer time. Many's the hard day's walking in rain and mud, and with never a penny earned, we've had down in the West.'

'Let me fill your glass again.'

'Much obleeged to you sir, I think I will,' said Mr Codlin, suddenly thrusting in his own and turning Short's aside. 'I'm the sufferer, sir, in all the travelling, and in all the staying at home. In town or country, wet or dry, hot or cold, Tom Codlin suffers. But Tom Codlin isn't to complain for all that. Oh, no! Short may complain, but if Codlin grumbles by so much as a word—oh dear, down with him, down with him directly. It isn't his place to grumble. That's quite out of the question.'

'Codlin an't without his usefulness,' observed Short with an arch look, 'but he don't always keep his eyes open. He falls asleep sometimes, you know. Remember them last races, Tommy.'

'Will you never leave off aggravating a man?' said Codlin. 'It's very like I was asleep when five-and-tenpence was collected, in one round, isn't it? I was attending to my business, and couldn't have my eyes in twenty places at once, like a peacock, no more than you could. If I an't a match for an old man and a young child, you an't neither, so don't throw that out against me, for the cap fits your head quite as correct as it fits mine.'

'You may as well drop the subject, Tom,' said Short. 'It isn't particular agreeable to the gentleman, I dare say.'

'Then you shouldn't have brought it up,' returned Mr Codlin; 'and I ask the gentleman's pardon on your account, as a giddy chap that likes to hear himself talk, and don't much care what he talks about, so that he does talk.'

Their entertainer had sat perfectly quiet in the beginning of this dispute, looking first at one man and then at the other, as if he were lying in wait for an opportunity of putting some further question, or reverting to that from which the discourse had strayed. But, from the point where Mr Codlin was charged with sleepiness, he had shown an increasing interest in the discussion: which now attained a very high pitch.

'You are the two men I want,' he said, 'the two men I have been looking for, and searching after! Where are that old man and that child you speak of?'

'Sir?' said Short, hesitating, and looking towards his friend.

'The old man and his grandchild who travelled with you—where are they? It will be worth your while to speak out, I assure you; much better worth your while than you believe. They left you, you say—at those races, as I understand. They have been traced to that place, and there lost sight of. Have you no clue, can you suggest no clue, to their recovery?'

'Did I always say, Thomas,' cried Short, turning with a look of amazement to his friend, 'that there was sure to be an inquiry after them two travellers?'

'YOU said!' returned Mr Codlin. 'Did I always say that that 'ere blessed child was the most interesting I ever see? Did I always say I loved her, and doated on her? Pretty creetur, I think I hear her now. "Codlin's my friend," she says, with a tear of gratitude a trickling down her little eye; "Codlin's my friend," she says—"not Short. Short's very well," she says; "I've no quarrel with Short; he means kind, I dare say; but Codlin," she says, "has the feelings for my money, though he mayn't look it."'

Repeating these words with great emotion, Mr Codlin rubbed the bridge of his nose with his coat-sleeve, and shaking his head mournfully from side to side, left the single gentleman to infer that, from the moment when he lost sight of his dear young charge, his peace of mind and happiness had fled.

'Good Heaven!' said the single gentleman, pacing up and down the room, 'have I found these men at last, only to discover that they can give me no information or assistance! It would have been better to have lived on, in hope, from day to day, and never to have lighted on them, than to have my expectations scattered thus.'

'Stay a minute,' said Short. 'A man of the name of Jerry—you know Jerry, Thomas?'

'Oh, don't talk to me of Jerrys,' replied Mr Codlin. 'How can I care a pinch of snuff for Jerrys, when I think of that 'ere darling child? "Codlin's my friend," she says, "dear, good, kind Codlin, as is always a devising pleasures for me! I don't object to Short," she says, "but I cotton to Codlin."

Once,' said that gentleman reflectively, 'she called me Father Codlin. I thought I should have bust!'

'A man of the name of Jerry, sir,' said Short, turning from his selfish colleague to their new acquaintance, 'wot keeps a company of dancing dogs, told me, in a accidental sort of way, that he had seen the old gentleman in connexion with a travelling wax-work, unbeknown to him. As they'd given us the slip, and nothing had come of it, and this was down in the country that he'd been seen, I took no measures about it, and asked no questions—But I can, if you like.'

'Is this man in town?' said the impatient single gentleman. 'Speak faster.'

'No he isn't, but he will be to-morrow, for he lodges in our house,' replied Mr Short rapidly.

'Then bring him here,' said the single gentleman. 'Here's a sovereign a-piece. If I can find these people through your means, it is but a prelude to twenty more. Return to me to-morrow, and keep your own counsel on this subject—though I need hardly tell you that; for you'll do so for your own sakes. Now, give me your address, and leave me.'

The address was given, the two men departed, the crowd went with them, and the single gentleman for two mortal hours walked in uncommon agitation up and down his room, over the wondering heads of Mr Swiveller and Miss Sally Brass.

CHAPTER 38

Kit—for it happens at this juncture, not only that we have breathing time to follow his fortunes, but that the necessities of these adventures so adapt themselves to our ease and inclination as to call upon us imperatively to pursue the track we most desire to take—Kit, while the matters treated of in the last fifteen chapters were yet in progress, was, as the reader may suppose, gradually familiarising himself more and more with Mr and Mrs Garland, Mr Abel, the pony, and Barbara, and gradually coming to consider them one and all as his particular private friends, and Abel Cottage, Finchley, as his own proper home.

Stay—the words are written, and may go, but if they convey any notion that Kit, in the plentiful board and comfortable lodging of his new abode, began to think slightingly of the poor fare and furniture of his old dwelling, they do their office badly and commit injustice. Who so mindful of those he left at home—albeit they were but a mother and two young babies—as Kit? What boastful father in the fulness of his heart ever related such wonders of his infant prodigy, as Kit never wearied of telling Barbara in the evening time, concerning little Jacob? Was there ever such a mother as Kit's mother, on her son's showing; or was there ever such comfort in poverty as in the poverty of Kit's family, if any correct judgment might be arrived at, from his own glowing account!

And let me linger in this place, for an instant, to remark that if ever household affections and loves are graceful things, they are graceful in the poor. The ties that bind the wealthy and the proud to home may be forged on earth, but those which link the poor man to his humble hearth are of the truer metal and bear the stamp of Heaven. The man of high descent may love the halls and lands of his inheritance as part of himself: as trophies of his birth and power; his associations with them are associations of pride and wealth and triumph; the poor man's attachment to the tenements he holds, which strangers have held before, and may to-morrow occupy again, has a worthier root, struck deep into a purer soil. His household gods are of flesh and blood, with no alloy of silver, gold, or precious stone; he has no property but in the affections of his own heart; and when they endear bare floors and walls, despite of rags and toil and scanty fare, that man has his love of home from God, and his rude hut becomes a solemn place.

Oh! if those who rule the destinies of nations would but remember this—if they would but think how hard it is for the very poor to have engendered in their hearts, that love of home from which all domestic virtues spring, when they live in dense and squalid masses where social decency is lost, or rather never found—if they would but turn aside from the wide thoroughfares and great houses, and strive to improve the wretched dwellings in bye-ways where only Poverty may walk—many low roofs would point more truly to the sky, than the loftiest steeple that now rears proudly up from the midst of guilt, and crime, and horrible disease, to mock them by its contrast. In hollow voices from Workhouse, Hospital, and jail, this truth is preached from day to day, and has been proclaimed for years. It is no light matter—no outcry from the working vulgar—no mere question of the people's health and comforts that may be whistled down on Wednesday nights. In love of home, the love of country has its rise; and who are the truer patriots or the better in time of need—those who venerate the land, owning its wood, and stream, and earth, and all that they produce? or those who love their country, boasting not a foot of ground in all its wide domain!

Kit knew nothing about such questions, but he knew that his old home was a very poor place, and that his new one was very unlike it, and yet he was constantly looking back with grateful satisfaction and affectionate anxiety, and often indited square-folded letters to his mother, enclosing a shilling or eighteenpence or such other small remittance, which Mr Abel's liberality enabled him to make. Sometimes being in the neighbourhood, he had leisure to call upon her, and then great was the joy and pride of Kit's mother, and extremely noisy the satisfaction of little Jacob and the baby, and cordial the congratulations of the whole court, who listened with admiring ears to the accounts of Abel Cottage, and could never be told too much of its wonders and magnificence.

Although Kit was in the very highest favour with the old lady and gentleman, and Mr Abel, and Barbara, it is certain that no member of the family evinced such a remarkable partiality for him as the self-willed pony, who, from being the most obstinate and opinionated pony on the face of the earth, was, in his hands, the meekest and most tractable of animals. It is true that in exact proportion as he became manageable by Kit he became utterly ungovernable by anybody else (as if he had determined to keep him in the family at all risks and hazards), and that, even under the guidance of his favourite, he would sometimes perform a great variety of strange freaks and capers, to the extreme discomposure of the old lady's nerves; but as Kit always represented that this was only his fun, or a way he had of showing his attachment to his employers, Mrs Garland gradually suffered herself to be persuaded into the belief, in which she at last became so strongly confirmed, that if, in one of these ebullitions, he had overturned the chaise, she would have been quite satisfied that he did it with the very best intentions.

Besides becoming in a short time a perfect marvel in all stable matters, Kit soon made himself a very tolerable gardener, a handy fellow within doors, and an indispensable attendant on Mr Abel, who every day gave him some new proof of his confidence and approbation. Mr Witherden the notary, too, regarded him with a friendly eye; and even Mr Chuckster would sometimes condescend to give him a slight nod, or to honour him with that peculiar form of recognition which is called 'taking a sight,' or to favour him with some other salute combining pleasantry with patronage.

One morning Kit drove Mr Abel to the Notary's office, as he sometimes did, and having set him down at the house, was about to drive off to a livery stable hard by, when this same Mr Chuckster emerged from the office door, and cried 'Woa-a-a-a-a-a!'—dwelling upon the note a long time, for the purpose of striking terror into the pony's heart, and asserting the supremacy of man over the inferior animals.

'Pull up, Snobby,' cried Mr Chuckster, addressing himself to Kit. 'You're wanted inside here.'

'Has Mr Abel forgotten anything, I wonder?' said Kit as he dismounted.

'Ask no questions, Snobby,' returned Mr Chuckster, 'but go and see. Woa-a-a then, will you? If that pony was mine, I'd break him.'

'You must be very gentle with him, if you please,' said Kit, 'or you'll find him troublesome. You'd better not keep on pulling his ears, please. I know he won't like it.'

To this remonstrance Mr Chuckster deigned no other answer, than addressing Kit with a lofty and distant air as 'young feller,' and requesting him to cut and come again with all speed. The 'young feller' complying, Mr Chuckster put his hands in his pockets, and tried to look as if he were not minding the pony, but happened to be lounging there by accident.

Kit scraped his shoes very carefully (for he had not yet lost his reverence for the bundles of papers and the tin boxes,) and tapped at the office-door, which was quickly opened by the Notary himself.

'Oh! come in, Christopher,' said Mr Witherden.

'Is that the lad?' asked an elderly gentleman, but of a stout, bluff figure—who was in the room.

'That's the lad,' said Mr Witherden. 'He fell in with my client, Mr Garland, sir, at this very door. I have reason to think he is a good lad, sir, and that you may believe what he says. Let me introduce Mr Abel Garland, sir—his young master; my articled pupil, sir, and most particular friend:—my most particular friend, sir,' repeated the Notary, drawing out his silk handkerchief and flourishing it about his face.

'Your servant, sir,' said the stranger gentleman.

'Yours, sir, I'm sure,' replied Mr Abel mildly. 'You were wishing to speak to Christopher, sir?'

'Yes, I was. Have I your permission?'

'By all means.'

'My business is no secret; or I should rather say it need be no secret here,' said the stranger, observing that Mr Abel and the Notary were preparing to retire. 'It relates to a dealer in curiosities with whom he lived, and in whom I am earnestly and warmly interested. I have been a stranger to this country, gentlemen, for very many years, and if I am deficient in form and ceremony, I hope you will forgive me.'

'No forgiveness is necessary, sir;—none whatever,' replied the Notary. And so said Mr Abel.

'I have been making inquiries in the neighbourhood in which his old master lived,' said the stranger, 'and I learn that he was served by this lad. I have found out his mother's house, and have been directed by her to this place as the nearest in which I should be likely to find him. That's the cause of my presenting myself here this morning.'

'I am very glad of any cause, sir,' said the Notary, 'which procures me the honour of this visit.'

'Sir,' retorted the stranger, 'you speak like a mere man of the world, and I think you something better. Therefore, pray do not sink your real character in paying unmeaning compliments to me.'

'Hem!' coughed the Notary. 'You're a plain speaker, sir.'

'And a plain dealer,' returned the stranger. 'It may be my long absence and inexperience that lead me to the conclusion; but if plain speakers are scarce in this part of the world, I fancy plain dealers are still scarcer. If my speaking should offend you, sir, my dealing, I hope, will make amends.'

Mr Witherden seemed a little disconcerted by the elderly gentleman's mode of conducting the dialogue; and as for Kit, he looked at him in open-mouthed astonishment: wondering what kind of language he would address to him, if he talked in that free and easy way to a Notary. It was with no harshness, however, though with something of constitutional irritability and haste, that he turned to Kit and said:

'If you think, my lad, that I am pursuing these inquiries with any other view than that of serving and reclaiming those I am in search of, you do me a very great wrong, and deceive yourself. Don't be deceived, I beg of you, but rely upon my assurance. The fact is, gentlemen,' he added, turning again to the Notary and his pupil, 'that I am in a very painful and wholly unexpected position. I came to this city with a darling object at my heart, expecting to find no obstacle or difficulty in the way of its attainment. I find myself suddenly checked and stopped short, in the execution of my design, by a mystery which I cannot penetrate. Every effort I have made to penetrate it, has only served to render it darker and more obscure; and I am afraid to stir openly in the matter, lest those whom I anxiously pursue, should fly still farther from me. I assure you that if you could give me any assistance, you would not be sorry to do so, if you knew how greatly I stand in need of it, and what a load it would relieve me from.'

There was a simplicity in this confidence which occasioned it to find a quick response in the breast of the good-natured Notary, who replied, in the same spirit, that the stranger had not mistaken his desire, and that if he could be of service to him, he would, most readily.

Kit was then put under examination and closely questioned by the unknown gentleman, touching his old master and the child, their lonely way of life, their retired habits, and strict seclusion. The nightly absence of the old man, the solitary existence of the child at those times, his illness and recovery, Quilp's possession of the house, and their sudden disappearance, were all the subjects of much questioning and answer. Finally, Kit informed the gentleman that the premises were now to let, and that a board upon the door referred all inquirers to Mr Sampson Brass, Solicitor, of Bevis Marks, from whom he might perhaps learn some further particulars.

'Not by inquiry,' said the gentleman shaking his head. 'I live there.'

'Live at Brass's the attorney's!' cried Mr Witherden in some surprise: having professional knowledge of the gentleman in question.

'Aye,' was the reply. 'I entered on his lodgings t'other day, chiefly because I had seen this very board. It matters little to me where I live, and I had a desperate hope that some intelligence might be cast in my way there, which would not reach me elsewhere. Yes, I live at Brass's—more shame for me, I suppose?'

'That's a mere matter of opinion,' said the Notary, shrugging his shoulders. 'He is looked upon as rather a doubtful character.'

'Doubtful?' echoed the other. 'I am glad to hear there's any doubt about it. I supposed that had been thoroughly settled, long ago. But will you let me speak a word or two with you in private?'

Mr Witherden consenting, they walked into that gentleman's private closet, and remained there, in close conversation, for some quarter of an hour, when they returned into the outer office. The stranger had left his hat in Mr Witherden's room, and seemed to have established himself in this short interval on quite a friendly footing.

'I'll not detain you any longer now,' he said, putting a crown into Kit's hand, and looking towards the Notary. 'You shall hear from me again. Not a word of this, you know, except to your master and mistress.'

'Mother, sir, would be glad to know—' said Kit, faltering.

'Glad to know what?'

'Anything—so that it was no harm—about Miss Nell.'

'Would she? Well then, you may tell her if she can keep a secret. But mind, not a word of this to anybody else. Don't forget that. Be particular.'

'I'll take care, sir,' said Kit. 'Thankee, sir, and good morning.'

Now, it happened that the gentleman, in his anxiety to impress upon Kit that he was not to tell anybody what had passed between them, followed him out to the door to repeat his caution, and it further happened that at that moment the eyes of Mr Richard Swiveller were turned in that direction, and beheld his mysterious friend and Kit together.

It was quite an accident, and the way in which it came about was this. Mr Chuckster, being a gentleman of a cultivated taste and refined spirit, was one of that Lodge of Glorious Apollos whereof Mr Swiveller was Perpetual Grand. Mr Swiveller, passing through the street in the execution of some Brazen errand, and beholding one of his Glorious Brotherhood intently gazing on a pony, crossed over to give him that fraternal greeting with which Perpetual Grands are, by the very constitution of their office, bound to cheer and encourage their disciples. He had scarcely bestowed upon him his blessing, and followed it with a general remark touching the present state and prospects of the weather, when, lifting up his eyes, he beheld the single gentleman of Bevis Marks in earnest conversation with Christopher Nubbles.

'Hallo!' said Dick, 'who is that?'

'He called to see my Governor this morning,' replied Mr Chuckster; 'beyond that, I don't know him from Adam.'

'At least you know his name?' said Dick.

To which Mr Chuckster replied, with an elevation of speech becoming a Glorious Apollo, that he was 'everlastingly blessed' if he did.

'All I know, my dear feller,' said Mr Chuckster, running his fingers through his hair, 'is, that he is the cause of my having stood here twenty minutes, for which I hate him with a mortal and undying hatred, and would pursue him to the confines of eternity if I could afford the time.'

While they were thus discoursing, the subject of their conversation (who had not appeared to recognise Mr Richard Swiveller) re-entered the house, and Kit came down the steps and joined them; to whom Mr Swiveller again propounded his inquiry with no better success.

'He is a very nice gentleman, Sir,' said Kit, 'and that's all I know about him.'

Mr Chuckster waxed wroth at this answer, and without applying the remark to any particular case, mentioned, as a general truth, that it was expedient to break the heads of Snobs, and to tweak their noses. Without expressing his concurrence in this sentiment, Mr Swiveller after a few moments of abstraction inquired which way Kit was driving, and, being informed, declared it was his way, and that he would trespass on him for a lift. Kit would gladly have declined the proffered honour, but as Mr Swiveller was already established in the seat beside him, he had no means of doing so, otherwise than by a forcible ejectment, and therefore, drove briskly off—so briskly indeed, as to cut short the leave-taking between Mr Chuckster and his Grand Master, and to occasion the former gentleman some inconvenience from having his corns squeezed by the impatient pony.

As Whisker was tired of standing, and Mr Swiveller was kind enough to stimulate him by shrill whistles, and various sporting cries, they rattled off at too sharp a pace to admit of much conversation: especially as the pony, incensed by Mr Swiveller's admonitions, took a particular fancy for the lamp-posts and cart-wheels, and evinced a strong desire to run on the pavement and rasp himself against the brick walls. It was not, therefore, until they had arrived at the stable, and the chaise had been extricated from a very small doorway, into which the pony dragged it under the impression that he could take it along with him into his usual stall, that Mr Swiveller found time to talk.

'It's hard work,' said Richard. 'What do you say to some beer?'

Kit at first declined, but presently consented, and they adjourned to the neighbouring bar together.

'We'll drink our friend what's-his-name,' said Dick, holding up the bright frothy pot; '—that was talking to you this morning, you know—I know him

—a good fellow, but eccentric—very—here's what's-his-name!'

Kit pledged him.

'He lives in my house,' said Dick; 'at least in the house occupied by the firm in which I'm a sort of a—of a managing partner—a difficult fellow to get anything out of, but we like him—we like him.'

'I must be going, sir, if you please,' said Kit, moving away.

'Don't be in a hurry, Christopher,' replied his patron, 'we'll drink your mother.'

'Thank you, sir.'

'An excellent woman that mother of yours, Christopher,' said Mr Swiveller. 'Who ran to catch me when I fell, and kissed the place to make it well? My mother. A charming woman. He's a liberal sort of fellow. We must get him to do something for your mother. Does he know her, Christopher?'

Kit shook his head, and glancing slyly at his questioner, thanked him, and made off before he could say another word.

'Humph!' said Mr Swiveller pondering, 'this is queer. Nothing but mysteries in connection with Brass's house. I'll keep my own counsel, however. Everybody and anybody has been in my confidence as yet, but now I think I'll set up in business for myself. Queer—very queer!'

After pondering deeply and with a face of exceeding wisdom for some time, Mr Swiveller drank some more of the beer, and summoning a small boy who had been watching his proceedings, poured forth the few remaining drops as a libation on the gravel, and bade him carry the empty vessel to the bar with his compliments, and above all things to lead a sober and temperate life, and abstain from all intoxicating and exciting liquors. Having given him this piece of moral advice for his trouble (which, as he wisely observed, was far better than half-pence) the Perpetual Grand Master of the Glorious Apollos thrust his hands into his pockets and sauntered away: still pondering as he went.

CHAPTER 39

All that day, though he waited for Mr Abel until evening, Kit kept clear of his mother's house, determined not to anticipate the pleasures of the morrow, but to let them come in their full rush of delight; for to-morrow was the great and long looked-for epoch in his life—to-morrow was the end of his first quarter—the day of receiving, for the first time, one fourth part of his annual income of Six Pounds in one vast sum of Thirty Shillings—to-morrow was to be a half-holiday devoted to a whirl of entertainments, and little Jacob was to know what oysters meant, and to see a play.

All manner of incidents combined in favour of the occasion: not only had Mr and Mrs Garland forewarned him that they intended to make no deduction for his outfit from the great amount, but to pay it him unbroken in all its gigantic grandeur; not only had the unknown gentleman increased the stock by the sum of five shillings, which was a perfect god-send and in itself a fortune; not only had these things come to pass which nobody could have calculated upon, or in their wildest dreams have hoped; but it was Barbara's quarter too—Barbara's quarter, that very day—and Barbara had a half-holiday as well as Kit, and Barbara's mother was going to make one of the party, and to take tea with Kit's mother, and cultivate her acquaintance.

To be sure Kit looked out of his window very early that morning to see which way the clouds were flying, and to be sure Barbara would have been at hers too, if she had not sat up so late over-night, starching and ironing small pieces of muslin, and crimping them into frills, and sewing them on to other pieces to form magnificent wholes for next day's wear. But they were both up very early for all that, and had small appetites for breakfast and less for dinner, and were in a state of great excitement when Barbara's mother came in, with astonishing accounts of the fineness of the weather out of doors (but with a very large umbrella notwithstanding, for people like Barbara's mother seldom make holiday without one), and when the bell rang for them to go up stairs and receive their quarter's money in gold and silver.

Well, wasn't Mr Garland kind when he said 'Christopher, here's your money, and you have earned it well;' and wasn't Mrs Garland kind when she said 'Barbara, here's yours, and I'm much pleased with you;' and didn't Kit sign his name bold to his receipt, and didn't Barbara sign her name all a trembling to hers; and wasn't it beautiful to see how Mrs Garland poured out Barbara's mother a glass of wine; and didn't Barbara's mother speak up when she said 'Here's blessing you, ma'am, as a good lady, and you, sir, as a good gentleman, and Barbara, my love to you, and here's towards you, Mr Christopher;' and wasn't she as long drinking it as if it had been a tumblerful; and didn't she look genteel, standing there with her gloves on; and wasn't there plenty of laughing and talking among them as they reviewed all these things upon the top of the coach, and didn't they pity the people who hadn't got a holiday!

But Kit's mother, again—wouldn't anybody have supposed she had come of a good stock and been a lady all her life! There she was, quite ready to receive them, with a display of tea-things that might have warmed the heart of a china-shop; and little Jacob and the baby in such a state of perfection that their clothes looked as good as new, though Heaven knows they were old enough! Didn't she say before they had sat down five minutes that Barbara's mother was exactly the sort of lady she expected, and didn't Barbara's mother say that Kit's mother was the very picture of what she had expected, and didn't Kit's mother compliment Barbara's mother on Barbara, and didn't Barbara's mother compliment Kit's mother on Kit, and wasn't Barbara herself quite fascinated with little Jacob, and did ever a child show off when he was wanted, as that child did, or make such friends as he made!

'And we are both widows too!' said Barbara's mother. 'We must have been made to know each other.'

'I haven't a doubt about it,' returned Mrs Nubbles. 'And what a pity it is we didn't know each other sooner.'

'But then, you know, it's such a pleasure,' said Barbara's mother, 'to have it brought about by one's son and daughter, that it's fully made up for. Now, an't it?'

To this, Kit's mother yielded her full assent, and tracing things back from effects to causes, they naturally reverted to their deceased husbands, respecting whose lives, deaths, and burials, they compared notes, and discovered sundry circumstances that tallied with wonderful exactness; such as Barbara's father having been exactly four years and ten months older than Kit's father, and one of them having died on a Wednesday and the other on a Thursday, and both of them having been of a very fine make and remarkably good-looking, with other extraordinary coincidences. These recollections being of a kind calculated to cast a shadow on the brightness of the holiday, Kit diverted the conversation to general topics, and they were soon in great force again, and as merry as before. Among other things, Kit told them about his old place, and the extraordinary beauty of Nell (of whom he had talked to Barbara a thousand times already); but the last-named circumstance failed to interest his hearers to anything like the extent he had supposed, and even his mother said (looking accidentally at Barbara at the same time) that there was no doubt Miss Nell was very pretty, but she was but a child after all, and there were many young women quite as pretty as she; and Barbara mildly observed that she should think so, and that she never could help believing Mr Christopher must be under a mistake—which Kit wondered at very much, not being able to conceive what reason she had for doubting him. Barbara's mother too, observed that it was very common for young folks to change at about fourteen or fifteen, and whereas they had been very pretty before, to grow up quite plain; which truth she illustrated by many forcible examples, especially one of a young man, who, being a builder with great prospects, had been particular in his attentions to Barbara, but whom Barbara would have nothing to say to; which (though everything happened for the best) she almost thought was a pity. Kit said he thought so too, and so he did honestly, and he wondered what made Barbara so silent all at once, and why his mother looked at him as if he shouldn't have said it.

However, it was high time now to be thinking of the play; for which great preparation was required, in the way of shawls and bonnets, not to mention one handkerchief full of oranges and another of apples, which took some time tying up, in consequence of the fruit having a tendency to roll out at the corners. At length, everything was ready, and they went off very fast; Kit's mother carrying the baby, who was dreadfully wide awake, and Kit holding little Jacob in one hand, and escorting Barbara with the other—a state of things which occasioned the two mothers, who walked behind, to declare that they looked quite family folks, and caused Barbara to blush and say, 'Now don't, mother!' But Kit said she had no call to mind what they said; and indeed she need not have had, if she had known how very far from Kit's thoughts any love-making was. Poor Barbara!

At last they got to the theatre, which was Astley's: and in some two minutes after they had reached the yet unopened door, little Jacob was squeezed flat, and the baby had received divers concussions, and Barbara's mother's umbrella had been carried several yards off and passed back to her over the shoulders of the people, and Kit had hit a man on the head with the handkerchief of apples for 'scrowdging' his parent with unnecessary violence, and there was a great uproar. But, when they were once past the pay-place and tearing away for very life with their checks in their hands, and, above all, when they were fairly in the theatre, and seated in such places that they couldn't have had better if they had picked them out, and taken them beforehand, all this was looked upon as quite a capital joke, and an essential part of the entertainment.

Dear, dear, what a place it looked, that Astley's; with all the paint, gilding, and looking-glass; the vague smell of horses suggestive of coming wonders; the curtain that hid such gorgeous mysteries; the clean white sawdust down in the circus; the company coming in and taking their places; the fiddlers looking carelessly up at them while they tuned their instruments, as if they didn't want the play to begin, and knew it all beforehand! What a glow was that, which burst upon them all, when that long, clear, brilliant row of lights came slowly up; and what the feverish excitement when the little bell rang and the music began in good earnest, with strong parts for the drums, and sweet effects for the triangles! Well might Barbara's mother say to Kit's mother that the gallery was the place to see from, and wonder it wasn't much dearer than the boxes; well might Barbara feel doubtful whether to laugh or cry, in her flutter of delight.

Then the play itself! the horses which little Jacob believed from the first to be alive, and the ladies and gentlemen of whose reality he could be by no means persuaded, having never seen or heard anything at all like them—the firing, which made Barbara wink—the forlorn lady, who made her cry—the tyrant, who made her tremble—the man who sang the song with the lady's-maid and danced the chorus, who made her laugh—the pony who reared up on his hind legs when he saw the murderer, and wouldn't hear of walking on all fours again until he was taken into custody—the clown who ventured on such familiarities with the military man in boots—the lady who jumped over the nine-and-twenty ribbons and came down safe upon the horse's back—everything was delightful, splendid, and surprising! Little Jacob applauded till his hands were sore; Kit cried 'an-kor' at the end of everything, the three-act piece included; and Barbara's mother beat her umbrella on the floor, in her ecstasies, until it was nearly worn down to the gingham.

In the midst of all these fascinations, Barbara's thoughts seemed to have been still running on what Kit had said at tea-time; for, when they were coming out of the play, she asked him, with an hysterical simper, if Miss Nell was as handsome as the lady who jumped over the ribbons.

'As handsome as her?' said Kit. 'Double as handsome.'

'Oh Christopher! I'm sure she was the beautifullest creature ever was,' said Barbara.

'Nonsense!' returned Kit. 'She was well enough, I don't deny that; but think how she was dressed and painted, and what a difference that made. Why YOU are a good deal better looking than her, Barbara.'

'Oh Christopher!' said Barbara, looking down.

'You are, any day,' said Kit, '—and so's your mother.'

Poor Barbara!

What was all this though—even all this—to the extraordinary dissipation that ensued, when Kit, walking into an oyster-shop as bold as if he lived there, and not so much as looking at the counter or the man behind it, led his party into a box—a private box, fitted up with red curtains, white table-cloth, and cruet-stand complete—and ordered a fierce gentleman with whiskers, who acted as waiter and called him, him Christopher Nubbles, 'sir,' to bring three dozen of his largest-sized oysters, and to look sharp about it! Yes, Kit told this gentleman to look sharp, and he not only said he would look sharp, but he actually did, and presently came running back with the newest loaves, and the freshest butter, and the largest oysters, ever seen. Then said Kit to this gentleman, 'a pot of beer'—just so—and the gentleman, instead of replying, 'Sir, did you address that language to me?' only said, 'Pot o' beer, sir? Yes, sir,' and went off and fetched it, and put it on the table in a small decanter-stand, like those which blind-men's dogs carry about the streets in their mouths, to catch the half-pence in; and both Kit's mother and Barbara's mother declared as he turned away that he was one of the slimmest and gracefullest young men she had ever looked upon.

Then they fell to work upon the supper in earnest; and there was Barbara, that foolish Barbara, declaring that she could not eat more than two, and wanting more pressing than you would believe before she would eat four: though her mother and Kit's mother made up for it pretty well, and ate and laughed and enjoyed themselves so thoroughly that it did Kit good to see them, and made him laugh and eat likewise from strong sympathy. But the greatest miracle of the night was little Jacob, who ate oysters as if he had been born and bred to the business—sprinkled the pepper and the vinegar with a discretion beyond his years—and afterwards built a grotto on the table with the shells. There was the baby too, who had never closed an eye all night, but had sat as good as gold, trying to force a large orange into his mouth, and gazing intently at the lights in the chandelier—there he was, sitting up in his mother's lap, staring at the gas without winking, and making indentations in his soft visage with an oyster-shell, to that degree that a heart of iron must have loved him! In short, there never was a more successful supper; and when Kit ordered in a glass of something hot to finish with, and proposed Mr and Mrs Garland before sending it round, there were not six happier people in all the world.

But all happiness has an end—hence the chief pleasure of its next beginning—and as it was now growing late, they agreed it was time to turn their faces homewards. So, after going a little out of their way to see Barbara and Barbara's mother safe to a friend's house where they were to pass the night, Kit and his mother left them at the door, with an early appointment for returning to Finchley next morning, and a great many plans for next quarter's enjoyment. Then, Kit took little Jacob on his back, and giving his arm to his mother, and a kiss to the baby, they all trudged merrily home together.

CHAPTER 40

Full of that vague kind of penitence which holidays awaken next morning, Kit turned out at sunrise, and, with his faith in last night's enjoyments a little shaken by cool daylight and the return to every-day duties and occupations, went to meet Barbara and her mother at the appointed place. And being careful not to awaken any of the little household, who were yet resting from their unusual fatigues, Kit left his money on the chimney-piece, with an inscription in chalk calling his mother's attention to the circumstance, and informing her that it came from her dutiful son; and went his way, with a heart something heavier than his pockets, but free from any very great oppression notwithstanding.

Oh these holidays! why will they leave us some regret? why cannot we push them back, only a week or two in our memories, so as to put them at once at that convenient distance whence they may be regarded either with a calm indifference or a pleasant effort of recollection! why will they hang about us, like the flavour of yesterday's wine, suggestive of headaches and lassitude, and those good intentions for the future, which, under the earth, form the everlasting pavement of a large estate, and, upon it, usually endure until dinner-time or thereabouts!

Who will wonder that Barbara had a headache, or that Barbara's mother was disposed to be cross, or that she slightly underrated Astley's, and thought the clown was older than they had taken him to be last night? Kit was not surprised to hear her say so—not he. He had already had a misgiving that the inconstant actors in that dazzling vision had been doing the same thing the night before last, and would do it again that night, and the next, and for weeks and months to come, though he would not be there. Such is the difference between yesterday and today. We are all going to the play, or coming home from it.

However, the Sun himself is weak when he first rises, and gathers strength and courage as the day gets on. By degrees, they began to recall circumstances more and more pleasant in their nature, until, what between talking, walking, and laughing, they reached Finchley in such good heart, that Barbara's mother declared she never felt less tired or in better spirits. And so said Kit. Barbara had been silent all the way, but she said so too. Poor little Barbara! She was very quiet.

They were at home in such good time that Kit had rubbed down the pony and made him as spruce as a race-horse, before Mr Garland came down to breakfast; which punctual and industrious conduct the old lady, and the old gentleman, and Mr Abel, highly extolled. At his usual hour (or rather at his usual minute and second, for he was the soul of punctuality) Mr Abel walked out, to be overtaken by the London coach, and Kit and the old gentleman went to work in the garden.

This was not the least pleasant of Kit's employments. On a fine day they were quite a family party; the old lady sitting hard by with her work-basket on a little table; the old gentleman digging, or pruning, or clipping about with a large pair of shears, or helping Kit in some way or other with great assiduity; and Whisker looking on from his paddock in placid contemplation of them all. To-day they were to trim the grape-vine, so Kit mounted half-way up a short ladder, and began to snip and hammer away, while the old gentleman, with a great interest in his proceedings, handed up the nails and shreds of cloth as he wanted them. The old lady and Whisker looked on as usual.

'Well, Christopher,' said Mr Garland, 'and so you have made a new friend, eh?'

'I beg your pardon, Sir?' returned Kit, looking down from the ladder.

'You have made a new friend, I hear from Mr Abel,' said the old gentleman, 'at the office!'

'Oh! Yes Sir, yes. He behaved very handsome, Sir.'

'I'm glad to hear it,' returned the old gentlemen with a smile. 'He is disposed to behave more handsomely still, though, Christopher.'

'Indeed, Sir! It's very kind in him, but I don't want him to, I'm sure,' said Kit, hammering stoutly at an obdurate nail.

'He is rather anxious,' pursued the old gentleman, 'to have you in his own service—take care what you're doing, or you will fall down and hurt yourself.'

'To have me in his service, Sir?' cried Kit, who had stopped short in his work and faced about on the ladder like some dexterous tumbler. 'Why, Sir, I don't think he can be in earnest when he says that.'

'Oh! But he is indeed,' said Mr Garland. 'And he has told Mr Abel so.'

'I never heard of such a thing!' muttered Kit, looking ruefully at his master and mistress. 'I wonder at him; that I do.'

'You see, Christopher,' said Mr Garland, 'this is a point of much importance to you, and you should understand and consider it in that light. This gentleman is able to give you more money than I—not, I hope, to carry through the various relations of master and servant, more kindness and confidence, but certainly, Christopher, to give you more money.'

'Well,' said Kit, 'after that, Sir—'

'Wait a moment,' interposed Mr Garland. 'That is not all. You were a very faithful servant to your old employers, as I understand, and should this gentleman recover them, as it is his purpose to attempt doing by every means in his power, I have no doubt that you, being in his service, would meet with your reward. Besides,' added the old gentleman with stronger emphasis, 'besides having the pleasure of being again brought into communication with those to whom you seem to be very strongly and disinterestedly attached. You must think of all this, Christopher, and not be rash or hasty in your choice.'

Kit did suffer one twinge, one momentary pang, in keeping the resolution he had already formed, when this last argument passed swiftly into his thoughts, and conjured up the realization of all his hopes and fancies. But it was gone in a minute, and he sturdily rejoined that the gentleman must look out for somebody else, as he did think he might have done at first.

'He has no right to think that I'd be led away to go to him, sir,' said Kit, turning round again after half a minute's hammering. 'Does he think I'm a fool?'

'He may, perhaps, Christopher, if you refuse his offer,' said Mr Garland gravely.

'Then let him, sir,' retorted Kit; 'what do I care, sir, what he thinks? why should I care for his thinking, sir, when I know that I should be a fool, and worse than a fool, sir, to leave the kindest master and mistress that ever was or can be, who took me out of the streets a very poor and hungry lad indeed—poorer and hungrier perhaps than even you think for, sir—to go to him or anybody? If Miss Nell was to come back, ma'am,' added Kit, turning suddenly to his mistress, 'why that would be another thing, and perhaps if she wanted me, I might ask you now and then to let me work for her when all was done at home. But when she comes back, I see now that she'll be rich as old master always said she would, and being a rich young lady, what could she want of me? No, no,' added Kit, shaking his head sorrowfully, 'she'll never want me any more, and bless her, I hope she never may, though I should like to see her too!'

Here Kit drove a nail into the wall, very hard—much harder than was necessary—and having done so, faced about again.

'There's the pony, sir,' said Kit—'Whisker, ma'am (and he knows so well I'm talking about him that he begins to neigh directly, Sir)—would he let anybody come near him but me, ma'am? Here's the garden, sir, and Mr Abel, ma'am. Would Mr Abel part with me, Sir, or is there anybody that could be fonder of the garden, ma'am? It would break mother's heart, Sir, and even little Jacob would have sense enough to cry his eyes out, ma'am, if he thought that Mr Abel could wish to part with me so soon, after having told me, only the other day, that he hoped we might be together for years to come—'

There is no telling how long Kit might have stood upon the ladder, addressing his master and mistress by turns, and generally turning towards the wrong person, if Barbara had not at that moment come running up to say that a messenger from the office had brought a note, which, with an expression of some surprise at Kit's oratorical appearance, she put into her master's hand.

'Oh!' said the old gentleman after reading it, 'ask the messenger to walk this way.' Barbara tripping off to do as she was bid, he turned to Kit and said that they would not pursue the subject any further, and that Kit could not be more unwilling to part with them, than they would be to part with Kit; a sentiment which the old lady very generously echoed.

'At the same time, Christopher,' added Mr Garland, glancing at the note in his hand, 'if the gentleman should want to borrow you now and then for an hour or so, or even a day or so, at a time, we must consent to lend you, and you must consent to be lent.—Oh! here is the young gentleman. How do you do, Sir?'

This salutation was addressed to Mr Chuckster, who, with his hat extremely on one side, and his hair a long way beyond it, came swaggering up the walk.

'Hope I see you well sir,' returned that gentleman. 'Hope I see YOU well, ma'am. Charming box' this, sir. Delicious country to be sure.'

'You want to take Kit back with you, I find?' observed Mr Garland.

'I have got a chariot-cab waiting on purpose,' replied the clerk. 'A very spanking grey in that cab, sir, if you're a judge of horse-flesh.'

Declining to inspect the spanking grey, on the plea that he was but poorly acquainted with such matters, and would but imperfectly appreciate his beauties, Mr Garland invited Mr Chuckster to partake of a slight repast in the way of lunch. That gentleman readily consenting, certain cold viands, flanked with ale and wine, were speedily prepared for his refreshment.

At this repast, Mr Chuckster exerted his utmost abilities to enchant his entertainers, and impress them with a conviction of the mental superiority of those who dwelt in town; with which view he led the discourse to the small scandal of the day, in which he was justly considered by his friends to shine prodigiously. Thus, he was in a condition to relate the exact circumstances of the difference between the Marquis of Mizzler and Lord Bobby, which it appeared originated in a disputed bottle of champagne, and not in a pigeon-pie, as erroneously reported in the newspapers; neither had Lord Bobby said to the Marquis of Mizzler, 'Mizzler, one of us two tells a lie, and I'm not the man,' as incorrectly stated by the same authorities; but 'Mizzler, you know where I'm to be found, and damme, sir, find me if you want me'—which, of course, entirely changed the aspect of this interesting question, and placed it in a very different light. He also acquainted them with the precise amount of the income guaranteed by the Duke of Thigsberry to Violetta Stetta of the Italian Opera, which it appeared was payable quarterly, and not half-yearly, as the public had been given to understand, and which was EXclusive, and not INclusive (as had been monstrously stated,) of jewellery, perfumery, hair-powder for five footmen, and two daily changes of kid-gloves for a page. Having entreated the old lady and gentleman to set their minds at rest on these absorbing points, for they might rely on his statement being the correct one, Mr Chuckster entertained them with theatrical chit-chat and the court circular; and so wound up a brilliant and fascinating conversation which he had maintained alone, and without any assistance whatever, for upwards of three-quarters of an hour.

'And now that the nag has got his wind again,' said Mr Chuckster rising in a graceful manner, 'I'm afraid I must cut my stick.'

Neither Mr nor Mrs Garland offered any opposition to his tearing himself away (feeling, no doubt, that such a man could ill be spared from his proper sphere of action), and therefore Mr Chuckster and Kit were shortly afterwards upon their way to town; Kit being perched upon the box of the cabriolet beside the driver, and Mr Chuckster seated in solitary state inside, with one of his boots sticking out at each of the front windows.

When they reached the Notary's house, Kit followed into the office, and was desired by Mr Abel to sit down and wait, for the gentleman who wanted him had gone out, and perhaps might not return for some time. This anticipation was strictly verified, for Kit had had his dinner, and his tea, and had read all the lighter matter in the Law-List, and the Post-Office Directory, and had fallen asleep a great many times, before the gentleman whom he had seen before, came in; which he did at last in a very great hurry.

He was closeted with Mr Witherden for some little time, and Mr Abel had been called in to assist at the conference, before Kit, wondering very much what he was wanted for, was summoned to attend them.

'Christopher,' said the gentleman, turning to him directly he entered the room, 'I have found your old master and young mistress.'

'No, Sir! Have you, though?' returned Kit, his eyes sparkling with delight. 'Where are they, Sir? How are they, Sir? Are they—are they near here?'

'A long way from here,' returned the gentleman, shaking his head. 'But I am going away to-night to bring them back, and I want you to go with me.'

'Me, Sir?' cried Kit, full of joy and surprise.

'The place,' said the strange gentleman, turning thoughtfully to the Notary, 'indicated by this man of the dogs, is—how far from here—sixty miles?'

'From sixty to seventy.'

'Humph! If we travel post all night, we shall reach there in good time to-morrow morning. Now, the only question is, as they will not know me, and the child, God bless her, would think that any stranger pursuing them had a design upon her grandfather's liberty—can I do better than take this lad, whom they both know and will readily remember, as an assurance to them of my friendly intentions?'

'Certainly not,' replied the Notary. 'Take Christopher by all means.'

'I beg your pardon, Sir,' said Kit, who had listened to this discourse with a lengthening countenance, 'but if that's the reason, I'm afraid I should do more harm than good—Miss Nell, Sir, she knows me, and would trust in me, I am sure; but old master—I don't know why, gentlemen; nobody does—would not bear me in his sight after he had been ill, and Miss Nell herself told me that I must not go near him or let him see me any more. I should spoil all that you were doing if I went, I'm afraid. I'd give the world to go, but you had better not take me, Sir.'

'Another difficulty!' cried the impetuous gentleman. 'Was ever man so beset as I? Is there nobody else that knew them, nobody else in whom they had any confidence? Solitary as their lives were, is there no one person who would serve my purpose?'

'IS there, Christopher?' said the Notary.

'Not one, Sir,' replied Kit.—'Yes, though—there's my mother.'

'Did they know her?' said the single gentleman.

'Know her, Sir! why, she was always coming backwards and forwards. They were as kind to her as they were to me. Bless you, Sir, she expected they'd come back to her house.'

'Then where the devil is the woman?' said the impatient gentleman, catching up his hat. 'Why isn't she here? Why is that woman always out of the way when she is most wanted?'

In a word, the single gentleman was bursting out of the office, bent upon laying violent hands on Kit's mother, forcing her into a post-chaise, and carrying her off, when this novel kind of abduction was with some difficulty prevented by the joint efforts of Mr Abel and the Notary, who restrained him by dint of their remonstrances, and persuaded him to sound Kit upon the probability of her being able and willing to undertake such a journey on so short a notice.

This occasioned some doubts on the part of Kit, and some violent demonstrations on that of the single gentleman, and a great many soothing speeches on that of the Notary and Mr Abel. The upshot of the business was, that Kit, after weighing the matter in his mind and considering it carefully, promised, on behalf of his mother, that she should be ready within two hours from that time to undertake the expedition, and engaged to produce her in that place, in all respects equipped and prepared for the journey, before the specified period had expired.

Having given this pledge, which was rather a bold one, and not particularly easy of redemption, Kit lost no time in sallying forth, and taking measures for its immediate fulfilment.

CHAPTER 41

Kit made his way through the crowded streets, dividing the stream of people, dashing across the busy road-ways, diving into lanes and alleys, and stopping or turning aside for nothing, until he came in front of the Old Curiosity Shop, when he came to a stand; partly from habit and partly from being out of breath.

It was a gloomy autumn evening, and he thought the old place had never looked so dismal as in its dreary twilight. The windows broken, the rusty sashes rattling in their frames, the deserted house a dull barrier dividing the glaring lights and bustle of the street into two long lines, and standing in the midst, cold, dark, and empty—presented a cheerless spectacle which mingled harshly with the bright prospects the boy had been building up for its late inmates, and came like a disappointment or misfortune. Kit would have had a good fire roaring up the empty chimneys, lights sparkling and shining through the windows, people moving briskly to and fro, voices in cheerful conversation, something in unison with the new hopes that were astir. He had not expected that the house would wear any different aspect—had known indeed that it could not—but coming upon it in the midst of eager thoughts and expectations, it checked the current in its flow, and darkened it with a mournful shadow.

Kit, however, fortunately for himself, was not learned enough or contemplative enough to be troubled with presages of evil afar off, and, having no mental spectacles to assist his vision in this respect, saw nothing but the dull house, which jarred uncomfortably upon his previous thoughts. So, almost wishing that he had not passed it, though hardly knowing why, he hurried on again, making up by his increased speed for the few moments he had lost.

'Now, if she should be out,' thought Kit, as he approached the poor dwelling of his mother, 'and I not able to find her, this impatient gentleman would be in a pretty taking. And sure enough there's no light, and the door's fast. Now, God forgive me for saying so, but if this is Little Bethel's doing, I wish Little Bethel was—was farther off,' said Kit checking himself, and knocking at the door.

A second knock brought no reply from within the house; but caused a woman over the way to look out and inquire who that was, awanting Mrs Nubbles.

'Me,' said Kit. 'She's at—at Little Bethel, I suppose?'—getting out the name of the obnoxious conventicle with some reluctance, and laying a spiteful emphasis upon the words.

The neighbour nodded assent.

'Then pray tell me where it is,' said Kit, 'for I have come on a pressing matter, and must fetch her out, even if she was in the pulpit.'

It was not very easy to procure a direction to the fold in question, as none of the neighbours were of the flock that resorted thither, and few knew anything more of it than the name. At last, a gossip of Mrs Nubbles's, who had accompanied her to chapel on one or two occasions when a comfortable cup of tea had preceded her devotions, furnished the needful information, which Kit had no sooner obtained than he started off again.

Little Bethel might have been nearer, and might have been in a straighter road, though in that case the reverend gentleman who presided over its congregation would have lost his favourite allusion to the crooked ways by which it was approached, and which enabled him to liken it to Paradise itself, in contradistinction to the parish church and the broad thoroughfare leading thereunto. Kit found it, at last, after some trouble, and pausing at the door to take breath that he might enter with becoming decency, passed into the chapel.

It was not badly named in one respect, being in truth a particularly little Bethel—a Bethel of the smallest dimensions—with a small number of small pews, and a small pulpit, in which a small gentleman (by trade a Shoemaker, and by calling a Divine) was delivering in a by no means small voice, a by no means small sermon, judging of its dimensions by the condition of his audience, which, if their gross amount were but small, comprised a still smaller number of hearers, as the majority were slumbering.

Among these was Kit's mother, who, finding it matter of extreme difficulty to keep her eyes open after the fatigues of last night, and feeling their inclination to close strongly backed and seconded by the arguments of the preacher, had yielded to the drowsiness that overpowered her, and fallen asleep; though not so soundly but that she could, from time to time, utter a slight and almost inaudible groan, as if in recognition of the orator's doctrines. The baby in her arms was as fast asleep as she; and little Jacob, whose youth prevented him from recognising in this prolonged spiritual nourishment anything half as interesting as oysters, was alternately very fast asleep and very wide awake, as his inclination to slumber, or his terror of being personally alluded to in the discourse, gained the mastery over him.

'And now I'm here,' thought Kit, gliding into the nearest empty pew which was opposite his mother's, and on the other side of the little aisle, 'how am I ever to get at her, or persuade her to come out! I might as well be twenty miles off. She'll never wake till it's all over, and there goes the clock again! If he would but leave off for a minute, or if they'd only sing!'

But there was little encouragement to believe that either event would happen for a couple of hours to come. The preacher went on telling them what he meant to convince them of before he had done, and it was clear that if he only kept to one-half of his promises and forgot the other, he was good for that time at least.

In his desperation and restlessness Kit cast his eyes about the chapel, and happening to let them fall upon a little seat in front of the clerk's desk, could scarcely believe them when they showed him—Quilp!

He rubbed them twice or thrice, but still they insisted that Quilp was there, and there indeed he was, sitting with his hands upon his knees, and his hat between them on a little wooden bracket, with the accustomed grin on his dirty face, and his eyes fixed upon the ceiling. He certainly did not glance at Kit or at his mother, and appeared utterly unconscious of their presence; still Kit could not help feeling, directly, that the attention of the sly little fiend was fastened upon them, and upon nothing else.

But, astounded as he was by the apparition of the dwarf among the Little Bethelites, and not free from a misgiving that it was the forerunner of some trouble or annoyance, he was compelled to subdue his wonder and to take active measures for the withdrawal of his parent, as the evening was now creeping on, and the matter grew serious. Therefore, the next time little Jacob woke, Kit set himself to attract his wandering attention, and this not being a very difficult task (one sneeze effected it), he signed to him to rouse his mother.

Ill-luck would have it, however, that, just then, the preacher, in a forcible exposition of one head of his discourse, leaned over upon the pulpit-desk so that very little more of him than his legs remained inside; and, while he made vehement gestures with his right hand, and held on with his left, stared, or seemed to stare, straight into little Jacob's eyes, threatening him by his strained look and attitude—so it appeared to the child—that if he so much as moved a muscle, he, the preacher, would be literally, and not figuratively, 'down upon him' that instant. In this fearful state of things, distracted by the sudden appearance of Kit, and fascinated by the eyes of the preacher, the miserable Jacob sat bolt upright, wholly incapable of motion, strongly disposed to cry but afraid to do so, and returning his pastor's gaze until his infant eyes seemed starting from their sockets.

'If I must do it openly, I must,' thought Kit. With that he walked softly out of his pew and into his mother's, and as Mr Swiveller would have observed if he had been present, 'collared' the baby without speaking a word.

'Hush, mother!' whispered Kit. 'Come along with me, I've got something to tell you.'

'Where am I?' said Mrs Nubbles.

'In this blessed Little Bethel,' returned her son, peevishly.

'Blessed indeed!' cried Mrs Nubbles, catching at the word. 'Oh, Christopher, how have I been edified this night!'

'Yes, yes, I know,' said Kit hastily; 'but come along, mother, everybody's looking at us. Don't make a noise—bring Jacob—that's right!'

'Stay, Satan, stay!' cried the preacher, as Kit was moving off.

'This gentleman says you're to stay, Christopher,' whispered his mother.

'Stay, Satan, stay!' roared the preacher again. 'Tempt not the woman that doth incline her ear to thee, but harken to the voice of him that calleth. He hath a lamb from the fold!' cried the preacher, raising his voice still higher and pointing to the baby. 'He beareth off a lamb, a precious lamb! He goeth about, like a wolf in the night season, and inveigleth the tender lambs!'

Kit was the best-tempered fellow in the world, but considering this strong language, and being somewhat excited by the circumstances in which he was placed, he faced round to the pulpit with the baby in his arms, and replied aloud, 'No, I don't. He's my brother.'

'He's MY brother!' cried the preacher.

'He isn't,' said Kit indignantly. 'How can you say such a thing? And don't call me names if you please; what harm have I done? I shouldn't have come to take 'em away, unless I was obliged, you may depend upon that. I wanted to do it very quiet, but you wouldn't let me. Now, you have the goodness to abuse Satan and them, as much as you like, Sir, and to let me alone if you please.'

So saying, Kit marched out of the chapel, followed by his mother and little Jacob, and found himself in the open air, with an indistinct recollection of having seen the people wake up and look surprised, and of Quilp having remained, throughout the interruption, in his old attitude, without moving his eyes from the ceiling, or appearing to take the smallest notice of anything that passed.

'Oh Kit!' said his mother, with her handkerchief to her eyes, 'what have you done! I never can go there again—never!'

'I'm glad of it, mother. What was there in the little bit of pleasure you took last night that made it necessary for you to be low-spirited and sorrowful tonight? That's the way you do. If you're happy or merry ever, you come here to say, along with that chap, that you're sorry for it. More shame for you, mother, I was going to say.'

'Hush, dear!' said Mrs Nubbles; 'you don't mean what you say I know, but you're talking sinfulness.'

'Don't mean it? But I do mean it!' retorted Kit. 'I don't believe, mother, that harmless cheerfulness and good humour are thought greater sins in Heaven than shirt-collars are, and I do believe that those chaps are just about as right and sensible in putting down the one as in leaving off the other—that's my belief. But I won't say anything more about it, if you'll promise not to cry, that's all; and you take the baby that's a lighter weight, and give me little Jacob; and as we go along (which we must do pretty quick) I'll give you the news I bring, which will surprise you a little, I can tell you. There—that's right. Now you look as if you'd never seen Little Bethel in all your life, as I hope you never will again; and here's the baby; and little Jacob, you get atop of my back and catch hold of me tight round the neck, and whenever a Little Bethel parson calls you a precious lamb or says your brother's one, you tell him it's the truest things he's said for a twelvemonth, and that if he'd got a little more of the lamb himself, and less of the mint-sauce—not being quite so sharp and sour over it—I should like him all the better. That's what you've got to say to him, Jacob.'

Talking on in this way, half in jest and half in earnest, and cheering up his mother, the children, and himself, by the one simple process of determining to be in a good humour, Kit led them briskly forward; and on the road home, he related what had passed at the Notary's house, and the purpose with which he had intruded on the solemnities of Little Bethel.

His mother was not a little startled on learning what service was required of her, and presently fell into a confusion of ideas, of which the most prominent were that it was a great honour and dignity to ride in a post-chaise, and that it was a moral impossibility to leave the children behind. But this objection, and a great many others, founded on certain articles of dress being at the wash, and certain other articles having no existence in the wardrobe of Mrs Nubbles, were overcome by Kit, who opposed to each and every of them, the pleasure of recovering Nell, and the delight it would be to bring her back in triumph.

'There's only ten minutes now, mother,' said Kit when they reached home. 'There's a bandbox. Throw in what you want, and we'll be off directly.'

To tell how Kit then hustled into the box all sorts of things which could, by no remote contingency, be wanted, and how he left out everything likely to be of the smallest use; how a neighbour was persuaded to come and stop with the children, and how the children at first cried dismally, and then laughed heartily on being promised all kinds of impossible and unheard-of toys; how Kit's mother wouldn't leave off kissing them, and how Kit couldn't make up his mind to be vexed with her for doing it; would take more time and room than you and I can spare. So, passing over all such matters, it is sufficient to say that within a few minutes after the two hours had expired, Kit and his mother arrived at the Notary's door, where a post-chaise was already waiting.

'With four horses I declare!' said Kit, quite aghast at the preparations. 'Well you ARE going to do it, mother! Here she is, Sir. Here's my mother. She's quite ready, sir.'

'That's well,' returned the gentleman. 'Now, don't be in a flutter, ma'am; you'll be taken great care of. Where's the box with the new clothing and necessaries for them?'

'Here it is,' said the Notary. 'In with it, Christopher.'

'All right, Sir,' replied Kit. 'Quite ready now, sir.'

'Then come along,' said the single gentleman. And thereupon he gave his arm to Kit's mother, handed her into the carriage as politely as you please, and took his seat beside her.

Up went the steps, bang went the door, round whirled the wheels, and off they rattled, with Kit's mother hanging out at one window waving a damp pocket-handkerchief and screaming out a great many messages to little Jacob and the baby, of which nobody heard a word.

Kit stood in the middle of the road, and looked after them with tears in his eyes—not brought there by the departure he witnessed, but by the return to which he looked forward. 'They went away,' he thought, 'on foot with nobody to speak to them or say a kind word at parting, and they'll come back, drawn by four horses, with this rich gentleman for their friend, and all their troubles over! She'll forget that she taught me to write—'

Whatever Kit thought about after this, took some time to think of, for he stood gazing up the lines of shining lamps, long after the chaise had disappeared, and did not return into the house until the Notary and Mr Abel, who had themselves lingered outside till the sound of the wheels was no longer distinguishable, had several times wondered what could possibly detain him.

CHAPTER 42

It behoves us to leave Kit for a while, thoughtful and expectant, and to follow the fortunes of little Nell; resuming the thread of the narrative at the point where it was left, some chapters back.

In one of those wanderings in the evening time, when, following the two sisters at a humble distance, she felt, in her sympathy with them and her recognition in their trials of something akin to her own loneliness of spirit, a comfort and consolation which made such moments a time of deep delight, though the softened pleasure they yielded was of that kind which lives and dies in tears—in one of those wanderings at the quiet hour of twilight, when sky, and earth, and air, and rippling water, and sound of distant bells, claimed kindred with the emotions of the solitary child, and inspired her with soothing thoughts, but not of a child's world or its easy joys—in one of those rambles which had now become her only pleasure or relief from care, light had faded into darkness and evening deepened into night, and still the young creature lingered in the gloom; feeling a companionship in Nature so serene and still, when noise of tongues and glare of garish lights would have been solitude indeed.

The sisters had gone home, and she was alone. She raised her eyes to the bright stars, looking down so mildly from the wide worlds of air, and, gazing on them, found new stars burst upon her view, and more beyond, and more beyond again, until the whole great expanse sparkled with shining spheres, rising higher and higher in immeasurable space, eternal in their numbers as in their changeless and incorruptible existence. She bent over the calm river, and saw them shining in the same majestic order as when the dove beheld them gleaming through the swollen waters, upon the mountain tops down far below, and dead mankind, a million fathoms deep.

The child sat silently beneath a tree, hushed in her very breath by the stillness of the night, and all its attendant wonders. The time and place awoke reflection, and she thought with a quiet hope—less hope, perhaps, than resignation—on the past, and present, and what was yet before her. Between the old man and herself there had come a gradual separation, harder to bear than any former sorrow. Every evening, and often in the day-time too, he was absent, alone; and although she well knew where he went, and why—too well from the constant drain upon her scanty purse and from his haggard looks—he evaded all inquiry, maintained a strict reserve, and even shunned her presence.

She sat meditating sorrowfully upon this change, and mingling it, as it were, with everything about her, when the distant church-clock bell struck nine. Rising at the sound, she retraced her steps, and turned thoughtfully towards the town.

She had gained a little wooden bridge, which, thrown across the stream, led into a meadow in her way, when she came suddenly upon a ruddy light, and looking forward more attentively, discerned that it proceeded from what appeared to be an encampment of gipsies, who had made a fire in one corner at no great distance from the path, and were sitting or lying round it. As she was too poor to have any fear of them, she did not alter her course (which, indeed, she could not have done without going a long way round), but quickened her pace a little, and kept straight on.

A movement of timid curiosity impelled her, when she approached the spot, to glance towards the fire. There was a form between it and her, the outline strongly developed against the light, which caused her to stop abruptly. Then, as if she had reasoned with herself and were assured that it could not be, or had satisfied herself that it was not that of the person she had supposed, she went on again.

But at that instant the conversation, whatever it was, which had been carrying on near this fire was resumed, and the tones of the voice that spoke—she could not distinguish words—sounded as familiar to her as her own.

She turned, and looked back. The person had been seated before, but was now in a standing posture, and leaning forward on a stick on which he rested both hands. The attitude was no less familiar to her than the tone of voice had been. It was her grandfather.

Her first impulse was to call to him; her next to wonder who his associates could be, and for what purpose they were together. Some vague apprehension succeeded, and, yielding to the strong inclination it awakened, she drew nearer to the place; not advancing across the open field, however, but creeping towards it by the hedge.

In this way she advanced within a few feet of the fire, and standing among a few young trees, could both see and hear, without much danger of being observed.

There were no women or children, as she had seen in other gipsy camps they had passed in their wayfaring, and but one gipsy—a tall athletic man, who stood with his arms folded, leaning against a tree at a little distance off, looking now at the fire, and now, under his black eyelashes, at three other men who were there, with a watchful but half-concealed interest in their conversation. Of these, her grandfather was one; the others she recognised as the first card-players at the public-house on the eventful night of the storm—the man whom they had called Isaac List, and his gruff companion. One of the low, arched gipsy-tents, common to that people, was pitched hard by, but it either was, or appeared to be, empty.

'Well, are you going?' said the stout man, looking up from the ground where he was lying at his ease, into her grandfather's face. 'You were in a mighty hurry a minute ago. Go, if you like. You're your own master, I hope?'

'Don't vex him,' returned Isaac List, who was squatting like a frog on the other side of the fire, and had so screwed himself up that he seemed to be squinting all over; 'he didn't mean any offence.'

'You keep me poor, and plunder me, and make a sport and jest of me besides,' said the old man, turning from one to the other. 'Ye'll drive me mad among ye.'

The utter irresolution and feebleness of the grey-haired child, contrasted with the keen and cunning looks of those in whose hands he was, smote upon the little listener's heart. But she constrained herself to attend to all that passed, and to note each look and word.

'Confound you, what do you mean?' said the stout man rising a little, and supporting himself on his elbow. 'Keep you poor! You'd keep us poor if you could, wouldn't you? That's the way with you whining, puny, pitiful players. When you lose, you're martyrs; but I don't find that when you win, you look upon the other losers in that light. As to plunder!' cried the fellow, raising his voice—'Damme, what do you mean by such ungentlemanly language as plunder, eh?'

The speaker laid himself down again at full length, and gave one or two short, angry kicks, as if in further expression of his unbounded indignation. It was quite plain that he acted the bully, and his friend the peacemaker, for some particular purpose; or rather, it would have been to any one but the weak old man; for they exchanged glances quite openly, both with each other and with the gipsy, who grinned his approval of the jest until his white teeth shone again.

The old man stood helplessly among them for a little time, and then said, turning to his assailant:

'You yourself were speaking of plunder just now, you know. Don't be so violent with me. You were, were you not?'

'Not of plundering among present company! Honour among—among gentlemen, Sir,' returned the other, who seemed to have been very near giving an awkward termination to the sentence.

'Don't be hard upon him, Jowl,' said Isaac List. 'He's very sorry for giving offence. There—go on with what you were saying—go on.'

'I'm a jolly old tender-hearted lamb, I am,' cried Mr Jowl, 'to be sitting here at my time of life giving advice when I know it won't be taken, and that I shall get nothing but abuse for my pains. But that's the way I've gone through life. Experience has never put a chill upon my warm-heartedness.'

'I tell you he's very sorry, don't I?' remonstrated Isaac List, 'and that he wishes you'd go on.'

'Does he wish it?' said the other.

'Ay,' groaned the old man sitting down, and rocking himself to and fro. 'Go on, go on. It's in vain to fight with it; I can't do it; go on.'

'I go on then,' said Jowl, 'where I left off, when you got up so quick. If you're persuaded that it's time for luck to turn, as it certainly is, and find that you haven't means enough to try it (and that's where it is, for you know, yourself, that you never have the funds to keep on long enough at a sitting), help yourself to what seems put in your way on purpose. Borrow it, I say, and, when you're able, pay it back again.'

'Certainly,' Isaac List struck in, 'if this good lady as keeps the wax-works has money, and does keep it in a tin box when she goes to bed, and doesn't lock her door for fear of fire, it seems a easy thing; quite a Providence, I should call it—but then I've been religiously brought up.'

'You see, Isaac,' said his friend, growing more eager, and drawing himself closer to the old man, while he signed to the gipsy not to come between them; 'you see, Isaac, strangers are going in and out every hour of the day; nothing would be more likely than for one of these strangers to get under the good lady's bed, or lock himself in the cupboard; suspicion would be very wide, and would fall a long way from the mark, no doubt. I'd give him his revenge to the last farthing he brought, whatever the amount was.'

'But could you?' urged Isaac List. 'Is your bank strong enough?'

'Strong enough!' answered the other, with assumed disdain. 'Here, you Sir, give me that box out of the straw!'

This was addressed to the gipsy, who crawled into the low tent on all fours, and after some rummaging and rustling returned with a cash-box, which the man who had spoken opened with a key he wore about his person.

'Do you see this?' he said, gathering up the money in his hand and letting it drop back into the box, between his fingers, like water. 'Do you hear it? Do you know the sound of gold? There, put it back—and don't talk about banks again, Isaac, till you've got one of your own.'

Isaac List, with great apparent humility, protested that he had never doubted the credit of a gentleman so notorious for his honourable dealing as Mr Jowl, and that he had hinted at the production of the box, not for the satisfaction of his doubts, for he could have none, but with a view to being regaled with a sight of so much wealth, which, though it might be deemed by some but an unsubstantial and visionary pleasure, was to one in his circumstances a source of extreme delight, only to be surpassed by its safe depository in his own personal pockets. Although Mr List and Mr Jowl addressed themselves to each other, it was remarkable that they both looked narrowly at the old man, who, with his eyes fixed upon the fire, sat brooding over it, yet listening eagerly—as it seemed from a certain involuntary motion of the head, or twitching of the face from time to time—to all they said.

'My advice,' said Jowl, lying down again with a careless air, 'is plain—I have given it, in fact. I act as a friend. Why should I help a man to the means perhaps of winning all I have, unless I considered him my friend? It's foolish, I dare say, to be so thoughtful of the welfare of other people, but that's my constitution, and I can't help it; so don't blame me, Isaac List.'

'I blame you!' returned the person addressed; 'not for the world, Mr Jowl. I wish I could afford to be as liberal as you; and, as you say, he might pay it back if he won—and if he lost—'

'You're not to take that into consideration at all,' said Jowl.

'But suppose he did (and nothing's less likely, from all I know of chances), why, it's better to lose other people's money than one's own, I hope?'

'Ah!' cried Isaac List rapturously, 'the pleasures of winning! The delight of picking up the money—the bright, shining yellow-boys—and sweeping 'em into one's pocket! The deliciousness of having a triumph at last, and thinking that one didn't stop short and turn back, but went half-way to meet it! The—but you're not going, old gentleman?'

'I'll do it,' said the old man, who had risen and taken two or three hurried steps away, and now returned as hurriedly. 'I'll have it, every penny.'

'Why, that's brave,' cried Isaac, jumping up and slapping him on the shoulder; 'and I respect you for having so much young blood left. Ha, ha, ha! Joe Jowl's half sorry he advised you now. We've got the laugh against him. Ha, ha, ha!'

'He gives me my revenge, mind,' said the old man, pointing to him eagerly with his shrivelled hand: 'mind—he stakes coin against coin, down to the last one in the box, be there many or few. Remember that!'

'I'm witness,' returned Isaac. 'I'll see fair between you.'

'I have passed my word,' said Jowl with feigned reluctance, 'and I'll keep it. When does this match come off? I wish it was over.— To-night?'

'I must have the money first,' said the old man; 'and that I'll have to-morrow—'

'Why not to-night?' urged Jowl.

'It's late now, and I should be flushed and flurried,' said the old man. 'It must be softly done. No, to-morrow night.'

'Then to-morrow be it,' said Jowl. 'A drop of comfort here. Luck to the best man! Fill!' The gipsy produced three tin cups, and filled them to the brim with brandy. The old man turned aside and muttered to himself before he drank. Her own name struck upon the listener's ear, coupled with some wish so fervent, that he seemed to breathe it in an agony of supplication.

'God be merciful to us!' cried the child within herself, 'and help us in this trying hour! What shall I do to save him!'

The remainder of their conversation was carried on in a lower tone of voice, and was sufficiently concise; relating merely to the execution of the project, and the best precautions for diverting suspicion. The old man then shook hands with his tempters, and withdrew.

They watched his bowed and stooping figure as it retreated slowly, and when he turned his head to look back, which he often did, waved their hands, or shouted some brief encouragement. It was not until they had seen him gradually diminish into a mere speck upon the distant road, that they turned to each other, and ventured to laugh aloud.

'So,' said Jowl, warming his hands at the fire, 'it's done at last. He wanted more persuading than I expected. It's three weeks ago, since we first put this in his head. What'll he bring, do you think?'

'Whatever he brings, it's halved between us,' returned Isaac List.

The other man nodded. 'We must make quick work of it,' he said, 'and then cut his acquaintance, or we may be suspected. Sharp's the word.'

List and the gipsy acquiesced. When they had all three amused themselves a little with their victim's infatuation, they dismissed the subject as one which had been sufficiently discussed, and began to talk in a jargon which the child did not understand. As their discourse appeared to relate to matters in which they were warmly interested, however, she deemed it the best time for escaping unobserved; and crept away with slow and cautious steps, keeping in the shadow of the hedges, or forcing a path through them or the dry ditches, until she could emerge upon the road at a point beyond their range of vision. Then she fled homeward as quickly as she could, torn and bleeding from the wounds of thorns and briars, but more lacerated in mind, and threw herself upon her bed, distracted.

The first idea that flashed upon her mind was flight, instant flight; dragging him from that place, and rather dying of want upon the roadside, than ever exposing him again to such terrible temptations. Then, she remembered that the crime was not to be committed until next night, and there was the intermediate time for thinking, and resolving what to do. Then, she was distracted with a horrible fear that he might be committing it at that moment; with a dread of hearing shrieks and cries piercing the silence of the night; with fearful thoughts of what he might be tempted and led on to do, if he were detected in the act, and had but a woman to struggle with. It was impossible to bear such torture. She stole to the room where the money was, opened the door, and looked in. God be praised! He was not there, and she was sleeping soundly.

She went back to her own room, and tried to prepare herself for bed. But who could sleep—sleep! who could lie passively down, distracted by such terrors? They came upon her more and more strongly yet. Half undressed, and with her hair in wild disorder, she flew to the old man's bedside, clasped him by the wrist, and roused him from his sleep.

'What's this!' he cried, starting up in bed, and fixing his eyes upon her spectral face.

'I have had a dreadful dream,' said the child, with an energy that nothing but such terrors could have inspired. 'A dreadful, horrible dream. I have had it once before. It is a dream of grey-haired men like you, in darkened rooms by night, robbing sleepers of their gold. Up, up!'

The old man shook in every joint, and folded his hands like one who prays.

'Not to me,' said the child, 'not to me—to Heaven, to save us from such deeds! This dream is too real. I cannot sleep, I cannot stay here, I cannot leave you alone under the roof where such dreams come. Up! We must fly.'

He looked at her as if she were a spirit—she might have been for all the look of earth she had—and trembled more and more.

'There is no time to lose; I will not lose one minute,' said the child. 'Up! and away with me!'

'To-night?' murmured the old man.

'Yes, to-night,' replied the child. 'To-morrow night will be too late. The dream will have come again. Nothing but flight can save us. Up!'

The old man rose from his bed: his forehead bedewed with the cold sweat of fear: and, bending before the child as if she had been an angel messenger sent to lead him where she would, made ready to follow her. She took him by the hand and led him on. As they passed the door of the room he had proposed to rob, she shuddered and looked up into his face. What a white face was that, and with what a look did he meet hers!

She took him to her own chamber, and, still holding him by the hand as if she feared to lose him for an instant, gathered together the little stock she had, and hung her basket on her arm. The old man took his wallet from her hands and strapped it on his shoulders—his staff, too, she had brought away—and then she led him forth.

Through the strait streets, and narrow crooked outskirts, their trembling feet passed quickly. Up the steep hill too, crowned by the old grey castle, they toiled with rapid steps, and had not once looked behind.

But as they drew nearer the ruined walls, the moon rose in all her gentle glory, and, from their venerable age, garlanded with ivy, moss, and waving grass, the child looked back upon the sleeping town, deep in the valley's shade: and on the far-off river with its winding track of light: and on the distant hills; and as she did so, she clasped the hand she held, less firmly, and bursting into tears, fell upon the old man's neck.

CHAPTER 43

Her momentary weakness past, the child again summoned the resolution which had until now sustained her, and, endeavouring to keep steadily in her view the one idea that they were flying from disgrace and crime, and that her grandfather's preservation must depend solely on her firmness, unaided by one word of advice or any helping hand, urged him onward and looked back no more.

While he, subdued and abashed, seemed to crouch before her, and to shrink and cower down, as if in the presence of some superior creature, the child herself was sensible of a new feeling within her, which elevated her nature, and inspired her with an energy and confidence she had never known. There was no divided responsibility now; the whole burden of their two lives had fallen upon her, and henceforth she must think and act for both. 'I have saved him,' she thought. 'In all dangers and distresses, I will remember that.'

At any other time, the recollection of having deserted the friend who had shown them so much homely kindness, without a word of justification—the thought that they were guilty, in appearance, of treachery and ingratitude—even the having parted from the two sisters—would have filled her with sorrow and regret. But now, all other considerations were lost in the new uncertainties and anxieties of their wild and wandering life; and the very desperation of their condition roused and stimulated her.

In the pale moonlight, which lent a wanness of its own to the delicate face where thoughtful care already mingled with the winning grace and loveliness of youth, the too bright eye, the spiritual head, the lips that pressed each other with such high resolve and courage of the heart, the slight figure firm in its bearing and yet so very weak, told their silent tale; but told it only to the wind that rustled by, which, taking up its burden, carried, perhaps to some mother's pillow, faint dreams of childhood fading in its bloom, and resting in the sleep that knows no waking.

The night crept on apace, the moon went down, the stars grew pale and dim, and morning, cold as they, slowly approached. Then, from behind a distant hill, the noble sun rose up, driving the mists in phantom shapes before it, and clearing the earth of their ghostly forms till darkness came again. When it had climbed higher into the sky, and there was warmth in its cheerful beams, they laid them down to sleep, upon a bank, hard by some water.

But Nell retained her grasp upon the old man's arm, and long after he was slumbering soundly, watched him with untiring eyes. Fatigue stole over her at last; her grasp relaxed, tightened, relaxed again, and they slept side by side.

A confused sound of voices, mingling with her dreams, awoke her. A man of very uncouth and rough appearance was standing over them, and two of his companions were looking on, from a long heavy boat which had come close to the bank while they were sleeping. The boat had neither oar nor sail, but was towed by a couple of horses, who, with the rope to which they were harnessed slack and dripping in the water, were resting on the path.

'Holloa!' said the man roughly. 'What's the matter here?'

'We were only asleep, Sir,' said Nell. 'We have been walking all night.'

'A pair of queer travellers to be walking all night,' observed the man who had first accosted them. 'One of you is a trifle too old for that sort of work, and the other a trifle too young. Where are you going?'

Nell faltered, and pointed at hazard towards the West, upon which the man inquired if she meant a certain town which he named. Nell, to avoid more questioning, said 'Yes, that was the place.'

'Where have you come from?' was the next question; and this being an easier one to answer, Nell mentioned the name of the village in which their friend the schoolmaster dwelt, as being less likely to be known to the men or to provoke further inquiry.

'I thought somebody had been robbing and ill-using you, might be,' said the man. 'That's all. Good day.'

Returning his salute and feeling greatly relieved by his departure, Nell looked after him as he mounted one of the horses, and the boat went on. It had not gone very far, when it stopped again, and she saw the men beckoning to her.

'Did you call to me?' said Nell, running up to them.

'You may go with us if you like,' replied one of those in the boat. 'We're going to the same place.'

The child hesitated for a moment. Thinking, as she had thought with great trepidation more than once before, that the men whom she had seen with her grandfather might, perhaps, in their eagerness for the booty, follow them, and regaining their influence over him, set hers at nought; and that if they went with these men, all traces of them must surely be lost at that spot; determined to accept the offer. The boat came close to the bank again, and before she had had any more time for consideration, she and her grandfather were on board, and gliding smoothly down the canal.

The sun shone pleasantly on the bright water, which was sometimes shaded by trees, and sometimes open to a wide extent of country, intersected by running streams, and rich with wooded hills, cultivated land, and sheltered farms. Now and then, a village with its modest spire, thatched roofs, and gable-ends, would peep out from among the trees; and, more than once, a distant town, with great church towers looming through its smoke, and high factories or workshops rising above the mass of houses, would come in view, and, by the length of time it lingered in the distance, show them how slowly they travelled. Their way lay, for the most part, through the low grounds, and open plains; and except these distant places, and occasionally some men working in the fields, or lounging on the bridges under which they passed, to see them creep along, nothing encroached on their monotonous and secluded track.

Nell was rather disheartened, when they stopped at a kind of wharf late in the afternoon, to learn from one of the men that they would not reach their place of destination until next day, and that, if she had no provision with her, she had better buy it there. She had but a few pence, having already bargained with them for some bread, but even of these it was necessary to be very careful, as they were on their way to an utterly strange place, with no resource whatever. A small loaf and a morsel of cheese, therefore, were all she could afford, and with these she took her place in the boat again, and, after half an hour's delay during which the men were drinking at the public-house, proceeded on the journey.

They brought some beer and spirits into the boat with them, and what with drinking freely before, and again now, were soon in a fair way of being quarrelsome and intoxicated. Avoiding the small cabin, therefore, which was very dark and filthy, and to which they often invited both her and her grandfather, Nell sat in the open air with the old man by her side: listening to their boisterous hosts with a palpitating heart, and almost wishing herself safe on shore again though she should have to walk all night.

They were, in truth, very rugged, noisy fellows, and quite brutal among themselves, though civil enough to their two passengers. Thus, when a quarrel arose between the man who was steering and his friend in the cabin, upon the question who had first suggested the propriety of offering Nell some beer, and when the quarrel led to a scuffle in which they beat each other fearfully, to her inexpressible terror, neither visited his displeasure upon her, but each contented himself with venting it on his adversary, on whom, in addition to blows, he bestowed a variety of compliments, which, happily for the child, were conveyed in terms, to her quite unintelligible. The difference was finally adjusted, by the man who had come out of the cabin knocking the other into it head first, and taking the helm into his own hands, without evincing the least discomposure himself, or causing any in his friend, who, being of a tolerably strong constitution and perfectly inured to such trifles, went to sleep as he was, with his heels upwards, and in a couple of minutes or so was snoring comfortably.

By this time it was night again, and though the child felt cold, being but poorly clad, her anxious thoughts were far removed from her own suffering or uneasiness, and busily engaged in endeavouring to devise some scheme for their joint subsistence. The same spirit which had supported her on the previous night, upheld and sustained her now. Her grandfather lay sleeping safely at her side, and the crime to which his madness urged him, was not committed. That was her comfort.

How every circumstance of her short, eventful life, came thronging into her mind, as they travelled on! Slight incidents, never thought of or remembered until now; faces, seen once and ever since forgotten; words scarcely heeded at the time; scenes, of a year ago and those of yesterday, mixing up and linking themselves together; familiar places shaping themselves out in the darkness from things which, when approached, were, of all others, the most remote and most unlike them; sometimes, a strange confusion in her mind relative to the occasion of her being there, and the place to which she was going, and the people she was with; and imagination suggesting remarks and questions which sounded so plainly in her ears, that she would start, and turn, and be almost tempted to reply;—all the fancies and contradictions common in watching and excitement and restless change of place, beset the child.

She happened, while she was thus engaged, to encounter the face of the man on deck, in whom the sentimental stage of drunkenness had now succeeded to the boisterous, and who, taking from his mouth a short pipe, quilted over with string for its longer preservation, requested that she would oblige him with a song.

'You've got a very pretty voice, a very soft eye, and a very strong memory,' said this gentleman; 'the voice and eye I've got evidence for, and the memory's an opinion of my own. And I'm never wrong. Let me hear a song this minute.'

'I don't think I know one, sir,' returned Nell.

'You know forty-seven songs,' said the man, with a gravity which admitted of no altercation on the subject. 'Forty-seven's your number. Let me hear one of 'em—the best. Give me a song this minute.'

Not knowing what might be the consequences of irritating her friend, and trembling with the fear of doing so, poor Nell sang him some little ditty which she had learned in happier times, and which was so agreeable to his ear, that on its conclusion he in the same peremptory manner requested to be favoured with another, to which he was so obliging as to roar a chorus to no particular tune, and with no words at all, but which amply made up in its amazing energy for its deficiency in other respects. The noise of this vocal performance awakened the other man, who, staggering upon deck and shaking his late opponent by the hand, swore that singing was his pride and joy and chief delight, and that he desired no better entertainment. With a third call, more imperative than either of the two former, Nell felt obliged to comply, and this time a chorus was maintained not only by the two men together, but also by the third man on horseback, who being by his position debarred from a nearer participation in the revels of the night, roared when his companions roared, and rent the very air. In this way, with little cessation, and singing the same songs again and again, the tired and exhausted child kept them in good humour all that night; and many a cottager, who was roused from his soundest sleep by the discordant chorus as it floated away upon the wind, hid his head beneath the bed-clothes and trembled at the sounds.

At length the morning dawned. It was no sooner light than it began to rain heavily. As the child could not endure the intolerable vapours of the cabin, they covered her, in return for her exertions, with some pieces of sail-cloth and ends of tarpaulin, which sufficed to keep her tolerably dry and to shelter her grandfather besides. As the day advanced the rain increased. At noon it poured down more hopelessly and heavily than ever without the faintest promise of abatement.

They had, for some time, been gradually approaching the place for which they were bound. The water had become thicker and dirtier; other barges, coming from it, passed them frequently; the paths of coal-ash and huts of staring brick, marked the vicinity of some great manufacturing town; while scattered streets and houses, and smoke from distant furnaces, indicated that they were already in the outskirts. Now, the clustered roofs, and piles of buildings, trembling with the working of engines, and dimly resounding with their shrieks and throbbings; the tall chimneys vomiting forth a black vapour, which hung in a dense ill-favoured cloud above the housetops and filled the air with gloom; the clank of hammers beating upon iron, the roar of busy streets and noisy crowds, gradually augmenting until all the various sounds blended into one and none was distinguishable for itself, announced the termination of their journey.

The boat floated into the wharf to which it belonged. The men were occupied directly. The child and her grandfather, after waiting in vain to thank them or ask them whither they should go, passed through a dirty lane into a crowded street, and stood, amid its din and tumult, and in the pouring rain, as strange, bewildered, and confused, as if they had lived a thousand years before, and were raised from the dead and placed there by a miracle.

CHAPTER 44

The throng of people hurried by, in two opposite streams, with no symptom of cessation or exhaustion; intent upon their own affairs; and undisturbed in their business speculations, by the roar of carts and waggons laden with clashing wares, the slipping of horses' feet upon the wet and greasy pavement, the rattling of the rain on windows and umbrella-tops, the jostling of the more impatient passengers, and all the noise and tumult of a crowded street in the high tide of its occupation: while the two poor strangers, stunned and bewildered by the hurry they beheld but had no part in, looked mournfully on; feeling, amidst the crowd, a solitude which has no parallel but in the thirst of the shipwrecked mariner, who, tost to and fro upon the billows of a mighty ocean, his red eyes blinded by looking on the water which hems him in on every side, has not one drop to cool his burning tongue.

They withdrew into a low archway for shelter from the rain, and watched the faces of those who passed, to find in one among them a ray of encouragement or hope. Some frowned, some smiled, some muttered to themselves, some made slight gestures, as if anticipating the conversation in which they would shortly be engaged, some wore the cunning look of bargaining and plotting, some were anxious and eager, some slow and dull; in some countenances, were written gain; in others, loss. It was like being in the confidence of all these people to stand quietly there, looking into their faces as they flitted past. In busy places, where each man has an object of his own, and feels assured that every other man has his, his character and purpose are written broadly in his face. In the public walks and lounges of a town, people go to see and to be seen, and there the same expression, with little variety, is repeated a hundred times. The working-day faces come nearer to the truth, and let it out more plainly.

Falling into that kind of abstraction which such a solitude awakens, the child continued to gaze upon the passing crowd with a wondering interest, amounting almost to a temporary forgetfulness of her own condition. But cold, wet, hunger, want of rest, and lack of any place in which to lay her aching head, soon brought her thoughts back to the point whence they had strayed. No one passed who seemed to notice them, or to whom she durst appeal. After some time, they left their place of refuge from the weather, and mingled with the concourse.

Evening came on. They were still wandering up and down, with fewer people about them, but with the same sense of solitude in their own breasts, and the same indifference from all around. The lights in the streets and shops made them feel yet more desolate, for with their help, night and darkness seemed to come on faster. Shivering with the cold and damp, ill in body, and sick to death at heart, the child needed her utmost firmness and resolution even to creep along.

Why had they ever come to this noisy town, when there were peaceful country places, in which, at least, they might have hungered and thirsted, with less suffering than in its squalid strife! They were but an atom, here, in a mountain heap of misery, the very sight of which increased their hopelessness and suffering.

The child had not only to endure the accumulated hardships of their destitute condition, but to bear the reproaches of her grandfather, who began to murmur at having been led away from their late abode, and demand that they should return to it. Being now penniless, and no relief or prospect of relief appearing, they retraced their steps through the deserted streets, and went back to the wharf, hoping to find the boat in which they had come, and to be allowed to sleep on board that night. But here again they were disappointed, for the gate was closed, and some fierce dogs, barking at their approach, obliged them to retreat.

'We must sleep in the open air to-night, dear,' said the child in a weak voice, as they turned away from this last repulse; 'and to-morrow we will beg our way to some quiet part of the country, and try to earn our bread in very humble work.'

'Why did you bring me here?' returned the old man fiercely. 'I cannot bear these close eternal streets. We came from a quiet part. Why did you force me to leave it?'

'Because I must have that dream I told you of, no more,' said the child, with a momentary firmness that lost itself in tears; 'and we must live among poor people, or it will come again. Dear grandfather, you are old and weak, I know; but look at me. I never will complain if you will not, but I have some suffering indeed.'

'Ah! poor, houseless, wandering, motherless child!' cried the old man, clasping his hands and gazing as if for the first time upon her anxious face, her travel-stained dress, and bruised and swollen feet; 'has all my agony of care brought her to this at last! Was I a happy man once, and have I lost happiness and all I had, for this!'

'If we were in the country now,' said the child, with assumed cheerfulness, as they walked on looking about them for a shelter, we should find some good old tree, stretching out his green arms as if he loved us, and nodding and rustling as if he would have us fall asleep, thinking of him while he watched. Please God, we shall be there soon—to-morrow or next day at the farthest—and in the meantime let us think, dear, that it was a good thing we came here; for we are lost in the crowd and hurry of this place, and if any cruel people should pursue us, they could surely never trace us further. There's comfort in that. And here's a deep old doorway—

very dark, but quite dry, and warm too, for the wind don't blow in here—What's that!'

Uttering a half shriek, she recoiled from a black figure which came suddenly out of the dark recess in which they were about to take refuge, and stood still, looking at them.

'Speak again,' it said; 'do I know the voice?'

'No,' replied the child timidly; 'we are strangers, and having no money for a night's lodging, were going to rest here.'

There was a feeble lamp at no great distance; the only one in the place, which was a kind of square yard, but sufficient to show how poor and mean it was. To this, the figure beckoned them; at the same time drawing within its rays, as if to show that it had no desire to conceal itself or take them at an advantage. The form was that of a man, miserably clad and begrimed with smoke, which, perhaps by its contrast with the natural colour of his skin, made him look paler than he really was. That he was naturally of a very wan and pallid aspect, however, his hollow cheeks, sharp features, and sunken eyes, no less than a certain look of patient endurance, sufficiently testified. His voice was harsh by nature, but not brutal; and though his face, besides possessing the characteristics already mentioned, was overshadowed by a quantity of long dark hair, its expression was neither ferocious nor bad.

'How came you to think of resting there?' he said. 'Or how,' he added, looking more attentively at the child, 'do you come to want a place of rest at this time of night?'

'Our misfortunes,' the grandfather answered, 'are the cause.'

'Do you know,' said the man, looking still more earnestly at Nell, 'how wet she is, and that the damp streets are not a place for her?'

'I know it well, God help me,' he replied. 'What can I do!'

The man looked at Nell again, and gently touched her garments, from which the rain was running off in little streams. 'I can give you warmth,' he said, after a pause; 'nothing else. Such lodging as I have, is in that house,' pointing to the doorway from which he had emerged, 'but she is safer and better there than here. The fire is in a rough place, but you can pass the night beside it safely, if you'll trust yourselves to me. You see that red light yonder?'

They raised their eyes, and saw a lurid glare hanging in the dark sky; the dull reflection of some distant fire.

'It's not far,' said the man. 'Shall I take you there? You were going to sleep upon cold bricks; I can give you a bed of warm ashes—nothing better.'

Without waiting for any further reply than he saw in their looks, he took Nell in his arms, and bade the old man follow.

Carrying her as tenderly, and as easily too, as if she had been an infant, and showing himself both swift and sure of foot, he led the way through what appeared to be the poorest and most wretched quarter of the town; and turning aside to avoid the overflowing kennels or running waterspouts, but holding his course, regardless of such obstructions, and making his way straight through them. They had proceeded thus, in silence, for some quarter of an hour, and had lost sight of the glare to which he had pointed, in the dark and narrow ways by which they had come, when it suddenly burst upon them again, streaming up from the high chimney of a building close before them.

'This is the place,' he said, pausing at a door to put Nell down and take her hand. 'Don't be afraid. There's nobody here will harm you.'

It needed a strong confidence in this assurance to induce them to enter, and what they saw inside did not diminish their apprehension and alarm. In a large and lofty building, supported by pillars of iron, with great black apertures in the upper walls, open to the external air; echoing to the roof with the beating of hammers and roar of furnaces, mingled with the hissing of red-hot metal plunged in water, and a hundred strange unearthly noises never heard elsewhere; in this gloomy place, moving like demons among the flame and smoke, dimly and fitfully seen, flushed and tormented by the burning fires, and wielding great weapons, a faulty blow from any one of which must have crushed some workman's skull, a number of men laboured like giants. Others, reposing upon heaps of coals or ashes, with their faces turned to the black vault above, slept or rested from their toil. Others again, opening the white-hot furnace-doors, cast fuel on the flames, which came rushing and roaring forth to meet it, and licked it up like oil. Others drew forth, with clashing noise, upon the ground, great sheets of glowing steel, emitting an insupportable heat, and a dull deep light like that which reddens in the eyes of savage beasts.

Through these bewildering sights and deafening sounds, their conductor led them to where, in a dark portion of the building, one furnace burnt by night and day—so, at least, they gathered from the motion of his lips, for as yet they could only see him speak: not hear him. The man who had been watching this fire, and whose task was ended for the present, gladly withdrew, and left them with their friend, who, spreading Nell's little cloak upon a heap of ashes, and showing her where she could hang her outer-clothes to dry, signed to her and the old man to lie down and sleep. For himself, he took his station on a rugged mat before the furnace-door, and resting his chin upon his hands, watched the flame as it shone through the iron chinks, and the white ashes as they fell into their bright hot grave below.

The warmth of her bed, hard and humble as it was, combined with the great fatigue she had undergone, soon caused the tumult of the place to fall with a gentler sound upon the child's tired ears, and was not long in lulling her to sleep. The old man was stretched beside her, and with her hand upon his neck she lay and dreamed.

It was yet night when she awoke, nor did she know how long, or for how short a time, she had slept. But she found herself protected, both from any cold air that might find its way into the building, and from the scorching heat, by some of the workmen's clothes; and glancing at their friend saw that he sat in exactly the same attitude, looking with a fixed earnestness of attention towards the fire, and keeping so very still that he did not even seem to breathe. She lay in the state between sleeping and waking, looking so long at his motionless figure that at length she almost feared he had died as he sat there; and softly rising and drawing close to him, ventured to whisper in his ear.

He moved, and glancing from her to the place she had lately occupied, as if to assure himself that it was really the child so near him, looked inquiringly into her face.

'I feared you were ill,' she said. 'The other men are all in motion, and you are so very quiet.'

'They leave me to myself,' he replied. 'They know my humour. They laugh at me, but don't harm me in it. See yonder there—that's my friend.'

'The fire?' said the child.

'It has been alive as long as I have,' the man made answer. 'We talk and think together all night long.'

The child glanced quickly at him in her surprise, but he had turned his eyes in their former direction, and was musing as before.

'It's like a book to me,' he said—'the only book I ever learned to read; and many an old story it tells me. It's music, for I should know its voice among a thousand, and there are other voices in its roar. It has its pictures too. You don't know how many strange faces and different scenes I trace in the red-hot coals. It's my memory, that fire, and shows me all my life.'

The child, bending down to listen to his words, could not help remarking with what brightened eyes he continued to speak and muse.

'Yes,' he said, with a faint smile, 'it was the same when I was quite a baby, and crawled about it, till I fell asleep. My father watched it then.'

'Had you no mother?' asked the child.

'No, she was dead. Women work hard in these parts. She worked herself to death they told me, and, as they said so then, the fire has gone on saying the same thing ever since. I suppose it was true. I have always believed it.'

'Were you brought up here, then?' said the child.

'Summer and winter,' he replied. 'Secretly at first, but when they found it out, they let him keep me here. So the fire nursed me—the same fire. It has never gone out.'

'You are fond of it?' said the child.

'Of course I am. He died before it. I saw him fall down—just there, where those ashes are burning now—and wondered, I remember, why it didn't help him.'

'Have you been here ever since?' asked the child.

'Ever since I came to watch it; but there was a while between, and a very cold dreary while it was. It burned all the time though, and roared and leaped when I came back, as it used to do in our play days. You may guess, from looking at me, what kind of child I was, but for all the difference between us I was a child, and when I saw you in the street to-night, you put me in mind of myself, as I was after he died, and made me wish to bring you to the fire. I thought of those old times again, when I saw you sleeping by it. You should be sleeping now. Lie down again, poor child, lie down again!'

With that, he led her to her rude couch, and covering her with the clothes with which she had found herself enveloped when she woke, returned to his seat, whence he moved no more unless to feed the furnace, but remained motionless as a statue. The child continued to watch him for a little time, but soon yielded to the drowsiness that came upon her, and, in the dark strange place and on the heap of ashes, slept as peacefully as if the room had been a palace chamber, and the bed, a bed of down.

When she awoke again, broad day was shining through the lofty openings in the walls, and, stealing in slanting rays but midway down, seemed to make the building darker than it had been at night. The clang and tumult were still going on, and the remorseless fires were burning fiercely as before; for few changes of night and day brought rest or quiet there.

Her friend parted his breakfast—a scanty mess of coffee and some coarse bread—with the child and her grandfather, and inquired whither they were going. She told him that they sought some distant country place remote from towns or even other villages, and with a faltering tongue inquired what road they would do best to take.

'I know little of the country,' he said, shaking his head, 'for such as I, pass all our lives before our furnace doors, and seldom go forth to breathe. But there are such places yonder.'

'And far from here?' said Nell.

'Aye surely. How could they be near us, and be green and fresh? The road lies, too, through miles and miles, all lighted up by fires like ours—a strange black road, and one that would frighten you by night.'

'We are here and must go on,' said the child boldly; for she saw that the old man listened with anxious ears to this account.

'Rough people—paths never made for little feet like yours—a dismal blighted way—is there no turning back, my child!'

'There is none,' cried Nell, pressing forward. 'If you can direct us, do. If not, pray do not seek to turn us from our purpose. Indeed you do not know the danger that we shun, and how right and true we are in flying from it, or you would not try to stop us, I am sure you would not.'

'God forbid, if it is so!' said their uncouth protector, glancing from the eager child to her grandfather, who hung his head and bent his eyes upon the ground. 'I'll direct you from the door, the best I can. I wish I could do more.'

He showed them, then, by which road they must leave the town, and what course they should hold when they had gained it. He lingered so long on these instructions, that the child, with a fervent blessing, tore herself away, and stayed to hear no more.

But, before they had reached the corner of the lane, the man came running after them, and, pressing her hand, left something in it—two old, battered, smoke-encrusted penny pieces. Who knows but they shone as brightly in the eyes of angels, as golden gifts that have been chronicled on tombs?

And thus they separated; the child to lead her sacred charge farther from guilt and shame; the labourer to attach a fresh interest to the spot where his guests had slept, and read new histories in his furnace fire.

CHAPTER 45

In all their journeying, they had never longed so ardently, they had never so pined and wearied, for the freedom of pure air and open country, as now. No, not even on that memorable morning, when, deserting their old home, they abandoned themselves to the mercies of a strange world, and left all the dumb and senseless things they had known and loved, behind—not even then, had they so yearned for the fresh solitudes of wood, hillside, and field, as now, when the noise and dirt and vapour, of the great manufacturing town reeking with lean misery and hungry wretchedness, hemmed them in on every side, and seemed to shut out hope, and render escape impossible.

'Two days and nights!' thought the child. 'He said two days and nights we should have to spend among such scenes as these. Oh! if we live to reach the country once again, if we get clear of these dreadful places, though it is only to lie down and die, with what a grateful heart I shall thank God for so much mercy!'

With thoughts like this, and with some vague design of travelling to a great distance among streams and mountains, where only very poor and simple people lived, and where they might maintain themselves by very humble helping work in farms, free from such terrors as that from which they fled—the child, with no resource but the poor man's gift, and no encouragement but that which flowed from her own heart, and its sense of the truth and right of what she did, nerved herself to this last journey and boldly pursued her task.

'We shall be very slow to-day, dear,' she said, as they toiled painfully through the streets; 'my feet are sore, and I have pains in all my limbs from the wet of yesterday. I saw that he looked at us and thought of that, when he said how long we should be upon the road.'

'It was a dreary way he told us of,' returned her grandfather, piteously. 'Is there no other road? Will you not let me go some other way than this?'

'Places lie beyond these,' said the child, firmly, 'where we may live in peace, and be tempted to do no harm. We will take the road that promises to have that end, and we would not turn out of it, if it were a hundred times worse than our fears lead us to expect. We would not, dear, would we?'

'No,' replied the old man, wavering in his voice, no less than in his manner. 'No. Let us go on. I am ready. I am quite ready, Nell.'

The child walked with more difficulty than she had led her companion to expect, for the pains that racked her joints were of no common severity, and every exertion increased them. But they wrung from her no complaint, or look of suffering; and, though the two travellers proceeded very slowly, they did proceed. Clearing the town in course of time, they began to feel that they were fairly on their way.

A long suburb of red brick houses—some with patches of garden-ground, where coal-dust and factory smoke darkened the shrinking leaves, and coarse rank flowers, and where the struggling vegetation sickened and sank under the hot breath of kiln and furnace, making them by its presence seem yet more blighting and unwholesome than in the town itself—a long, flat, straggling suburb passed, they came, by slow degrees, upon a cheerless region, where not a blade of grass was seen to grow, where not a bud put forth its promise in the spring, where nothing green could live but on the surface of the stagnant pools, which here and there lay idly sweltering by the black road-side.

Advancing more and more into the shadow of this mournful place, its dark depressing influence stole upon their spirits, and filled them with a dismal gloom. On every side, and far as the eye could see into the heavy distance, tall chimneys, crowding on each other, and presenting that endless repetition of the same dull, ugly form, which is the horror of oppressive dreams, poured out their plague of smoke, obscured the light, and made foul the melancholy air. On mounds of ashes by the wayside, sheltered only by a few rough boards, or rotten pent-house roofs, strange engines spun and writhed like tortured creatures; clanking their iron chains, shrieking in their rapid whirl from time to time as though in torment unendurable, and making the ground tremble with their agonies. Dismantled houses here and there appeared, tottering to the earth, propped up by fragments of others that had fallen down, unroofed, windowless, blackened, desolate, but yet inhabited. Men, women, children, wan in their looks and ragged in attire, tended the engines, fed their tributary fire, begged upon the road, or scowled half-naked from the doorless houses. Then came more of the wrathful monsters, whose like they almost seemed to be in their wildness and their untamed air, screeching and turning round and round again; and still, before, behind, and to the right and left, was the same interminable perspective of brick towers, never ceasing in their black vomit, blasting all things living or inanimate, shutting out the face of day, and closing in on all these horrors with a dense dark cloud.

But night-time in this dreadful spot!—night, when the smoke was changed to fire; when every chimney spirited up its flame; and places, that had been dark vaults all day, now shone red-hot, with figures moving to and fro within their blazing jaws, and calling to one another with hoarse cries—night, when the noise of every strange machine was aggravated by the darkness; when the people near them looked wilder and more savage; when bands of unemployed labourers paraded the roads, or clustered by torch-light round their leaders, who told them, in stern language, of their wrongs, and urged them on to frightful cries and threats; when maddened men, armed with sword and firebrand, spurning the tears and prayers of women who would restrain them, rushed forth on errands of terror and destruction, to work no ruin half so surely as their own—night, when carts came rumbling by, filled with rude coffins (for contagious disease and death had been busy with the living crops); when orphans cried, and distracted women shrieked and followed in their wake—night, when some called for bread, and some for drink to drown their cares, and some with tears, and some with staggering feet, and some with bloodshot eyes, went brooding home—night, which, unlike the night that Heaven sends on earth, brought with it no peace, nor quiet, nor signs of blessed sleep—who shall tell the terrors of the night to the young wandering child!

And yet she lay down, with nothing between her and the sky; and, with no fear for herself, for she was past it now, put up a prayer for the poor old man. So very weak and spent, she felt, so very calm and unresisting, that she had no thought of any wants of her own, but prayed that God would raise up some friend for him. She tried to recall the way they had come, and to look in the direction where the fire by which they had slept last night was burning. She had forgotten to ask the name of the poor man, their friend, and when she had remembered him in her prayers, it seemed ungrateful not to turn one look towards the spot where he was watching.

A penny loaf was all they had had that day. It was very little, but even hunger was forgotten in the strange tranquillity that crept over her senses. She lay down, very gently, and, with a quiet smile upon her face, fell into a slumber. It was not like sleep—and yet it must have been, or why those pleasant dreams of the little scholar all night long! Morning came. Much weaker, diminished powers even of sight and hearing, and yet the child made no complaint—perhaps would have made none, even if she had not had that inducement to be silent, travelling by her side. She felt a hopelessness of their ever being extricated together from that forlorn place; a dull conviction that she was very ill, perhaps dying; but no fear or anxiety.

A loathing of food that she was not conscious of until they expended their last penny in the purchase of another loaf, prevented her partaking even of this poor repast. Her grandfather ate greedily, which she was glad to see.

Their way lay through the same scenes as yesterday, with no variety or improvement. There was the same thick air, difficult to breathe; the same blighted ground, the same hopeless prospect, the same misery and distress. Objects appeared more dim, the noise less, the path more rugged and uneven, for sometimes she stumbled, and became roused, as it were, in the effort to prevent herself from falling. Poor child! the cause was in her tottering feet.

Towards the afternoon, her grandfather complained bitterly of hunger. She approached one of the wretched hovels by the way-side, and knocked with her hand upon the door.

'What would you have here?' said a gaunt man, opening it.

'Charity. A morsel of bread.'

'Do you see that?' returned the man hoarsely, pointing to a kind of bundle on the ground. 'That's a dead child. I and five hundred other men were thrown out of work, three months ago. That is my third dead child, and last. Do you think I have charity to bestow, or a morsel of bread to spare?'

The child recoiled from the door, and it closed upon her. Impelled by strong necessity, she knocked at another: a neighbouring one, which, yielding to the slight pressure of her hand, flew open.

It seemed that a couple of poor families lived in this hovel, for two women, each among children of her own, occupied different portions of the room. In the centre, stood a grave gentleman in black who appeared to have just entered, and who held by the arm a boy.

'Here, woman,' he said, 'here's your deaf and dumb son. You may thank me for restoring him to you. He was brought before me, this morning, charged with theft; and with any other boy it would have gone hard, I assure you. But, as I had compassion on his infirmities, and thought he might have learnt no better, I have managed to bring him back to you. Take more care of him for the future.'

'And won't you give me back MY son!' said the other woman, hastily rising and confronting him. 'Won't you give me back MY son, Sir, who was transported for the same offence!'

'Was he deaf and dumb, woman?' asked the gentleman sternly.

'Was he not, Sir?'

'You know he was not.'

'He was,' cried the woman. 'He was deaf, dumb, and blind, to all that was good and right, from his cradle. Her boy may have learnt no better! where did mine learn better? where could he? who was there to teach him better, or where was it to be learnt?'

'Peace, woman,' said the gentleman, 'your boy was in possession of all his senses.'

'He was,' cried the mother; 'and he was the more easy to be led astray because he had them. If you save this boy because he may not know right from wrong, why did you not save mine who was never taught the difference? You gentlemen have as good a right to punish her boy, that God has kept in ignorance of sound and speech, as you have to punish mine, that you kept in ignorance yourselves. How many of the girls and boys—ah, men and women too—that are brought before you and you don't pity, are deaf and dumb in their minds, and go wrong in that state, and are punished in that state, body and soul, while you gentlemen are quarrelling among yourselves whether they ought to learn this or that?—Be a just man, Sir, and give me back my son.'

'You are desperate,' said the gentleman, taking out his snuff-box, 'and I am sorry for you.'

'I AM desperate,' returned the woman, 'and you have made me so. Give me back my son, to work for these helpless children. Be a just man, Sir, and, as you have had mercy upon this boy, give me back my son!'

The child had seen and heard enough to know that this was not a place at which to ask for alms. She led the old man softly from the door, and they pursued their journey.

With less and less of hope or strength, as they went on, but with an undiminished resolution not to betray by any word or sigh her sinking state, so long as she had energy to move, the child, throughout the remainder of that hard day, compelled herself to proceed: not even stopping to rest as frequently as usual, to compensate in some measure for the tardy pace at which she was obliged to walk. Evening was drawing on, but had not closed in, when—still travelling among the same dismal objects—they came to a busy town.

Faint and spiritless as they were, its streets were insupportable. After humbly asking for relief at some few doors, and being repulsed, they agreed to make their way out of it as speedily as they could, and try if the inmates of any lone house beyond, would have more pity on their exhausted state.

They were dragging themselves along through the last street, and the child felt that the time was close at hand when her enfeebled powers would bear no more. There appeared before them, at this juncture, going in the same direction as themselves, a traveller on foot, who, with a portmanteau strapped to his back, leaned upon a stout stick as he walked, and read from a book which he held in his other hand.

It was not an easy matter to come up with him, and beseech his aid, for he walked fast, and was a little distance in advance. At length, he stopped, to look more attentively at some passage in his book. Animated with a ray of hope, the child shot on before her grandfather, and, going close to the stranger without rousing him by the sound of her footsteps, began, in a few faint words, to implore his help.

He turned his head. The child clapped her hands together, uttered a wild shriek, and fell senseless at his feet.

CHAPTER 46

It was the poor schoolmaster. No other than the poor schoolmaster. Scarcely less moved and surprised by the sight of the child than she had been on recognising him, he stood, for a moment, silent and confounded by this unexpected apparition, without even the presence of mind to raise her from the ground.

But, quickly recovering his self-possession, he threw down his stick and book, and dropping on one knee beside her, endeavoured, by such simple means as occurred to him, to restore her to herself; while her grandfather, standing idly by, wrung his hands, and implored her with many endearing expressions to speak to him, were it only a word.

'She is quite exhausted,' said the schoolmaster, glancing upward into his face. 'You have taxed her powers too far, friend.'

'She is perishing of want,' rejoined the old man. 'I never thought how weak and ill she was, till now.'

Casting a look upon him, half-reproachful and half-compassionate, the schoolmaster took the child in his arms, and, bidding the old man gather up her little basket and follow him directly, bore her away at his utmost speed.

There was a small inn within sight, to which, it would seem, he had been directing his steps when so unexpectedly overtaken. Towards this place he hurried with his unconscious burden, and rushing into the kitchen, and calling upon the company there assembled to make way for God's sake, deposited it on a chair before the fire.

The company, who rose in confusion on the schoolmaster's entrance, did as people usually do under such circumstances. Everybody called for his or her favourite remedy, which nobody brought; each cried for more air, at the same time carefully excluding what air there was, by closing round the object of sympathy; and all wondered why somebody else didn't do what it never appeared to occur to them might be done by themselves.

The landlady, however, who possessed more readiness and activity than any of them, and who had withal a quicker perception of the merits of the case, soon came running in, with a little hot brandy and water, followed by her servant-girl, carrying vinegar, hartshorn, smelling-salts, and such other restoratives; which, being duly administered, recovered the child so far as to enable her to thank them in a faint voice, and to extend her hand to the poor schoolmaster, who stood, with an anxious face, hard by. Without suffering her to speak another word, or so much as to stir a finger any more, the women straightway carried her off to bed; and, having covered her up warm, bathed her cold feet, and wrapped them in flannel, they despatched a messenger for the doctor.

The doctor, who was a red-nosed gentleman with a great bunch of seals dangling below a waistcoat of ribbed black satin, arrived with all speed, and taking his seat by the bedside of poor Nell, drew out his watch, and felt her pulse. Then he looked at her tongue, then he felt her pulse again, and while he did so, he eyed the half-emptied wine-glass as if in profound abstraction.

'I should give her,' said the doctor at length, 'a tea-spoonful, every now and then, of hot brandy and water.'

'Why, that's exactly what we've done, sir!' said the delighted landlady.

'I should also,' observed the doctor, who had passed the foot-bath on the stairs, 'I should also,' said the doctor, in the voice of an oracle, 'put her feet in hot water, and wrap them up in flannel. I should likewise,' said the doctor with increased solemnity, 'give her something light for supper—the wing of a roasted fowl now—'

'Why, goodness gracious me, sir, it's cooking at the kitchen fire this instant!' cried the landlady. And so indeed it was, for the schoolmaster had ordered it to be put down, and it was getting on so well that the doctor might have smelt it if he had tried; perhaps he did.

'You may then,' said the doctor, rising gravely, 'give her a glass of hot mulled port wine, if she likes wine—'

'And a toast, Sir?' suggested the landlady. 'Ay,' said the doctor, in the tone of a man who makes a dignified concession. 'And a toast—of bread. But be very particular to make it of bread, if you please, ma'am.'

With which parting injunction, slowly and portentously delivered, the doctor departed, leaving the whole house in admiration of that wisdom which tallied so closely with their own. Everybody said he was a very shrewd doctor indeed, and knew perfectly what people's constitutions were; which there appears some reason to suppose he did.

While her supper was preparing, the child fell into a refreshing sleep, from which they were obliged to rouse her when it was ready. As she evinced extraordinary uneasiness on learning that her grandfather was below stairs, and as she was greatly troubled at the thought of their being apart, he took his supper with her. Finding her still very restless on this head, they made him up a bed in an inner room, to which he presently retired. The key of this chamber happened by good fortune to be on that side of the door which was in Nell's room; she turned it on him when the landlady had withdrawn, and crept to bed again with a thankful heart.

The schoolmaster sat for a long time smoking his pipe by the kitchen fire, which was now deserted, thinking, with a very happy face, on the fortunate chance which had brought him so opportunely to the child's assistance, and parrying, as well as in his simple way he could, the inquisitive cross-examination of the landlady, who had a great curiosity to be made acquainted with every particular of Nell's life and history. The poor schoolmaster was so open-hearted, and so little versed in the most ordinary cunning or deceit, that she could not have failed to succeed in the first five minutes, but that he happened to be unacquainted with what she wished to know; and so he told her. The landlady, by no means satisfied with this assurance, which she considered an ingenious evasion of the question, rejoined that he had his reasons of course. Heaven forbid that she should wish to pry into the affairs of her customers, which indeed were no business of hers, who had so many of her own. She had merely asked a civil question, and to be sure she knew it would meet with a civil answer. She was quite satisfied—quite. She had rather perhaps that he would have said at once that he didn't choose to be communicative, because that would have been plain and intelligible. However, she had no right to be offended of course. He was the best judge, and had a perfect right to say what he pleased; nobody could dispute that for a moment. Oh dear, no!

'I assure you, my good lady,' said the mild schoolmaster, 'that I have told you the plain truth. As I hope to be saved, I have told you the truth.'

'Why then, I do believe you are in earnest,' rejoined the landlady, with ready good-humour, 'and I'm very sorry I have teazed you. But curiosity you know is the curse of our sex, and that's the fact.' The landlord scratched his head, as if he thought the curse sometimes involved the other sex likewise; but he was prevented from making any remark to that effect, if he had it in contemplation to do so, by the schoolmaster's rejoinder.

'You should question me for half-a-dozen hours at a sitting, and welcome, and I would answer you patiently for the kindness of heart you have shown to-night, if I could,' he said. 'As it is, please to take care of her in the morning, and let me know early how she is; and to understand that I am paymaster for the three.'

So, parting with them on most friendly terms (not the less cordial perhaps for this last direction), the schoolmaster went to his bed, and the host and hostess to theirs.

The report in the morning was, that the child was better, but was extremely weak, and would at least require a day's rest, and careful nursing, before she could proceed upon her journey. The schoolmaster received this communication with perfect cheerfulness, observing that he had a day to spare—two days for that matter—and could very well afford to wait. As the patient was to sit up in the evening, he appointed to visit her in her room at a certain hour, and rambling out with his book, did not return until the hour arrived.

Nell could not help weeping when they were left alone; whereat, and at sight of her pale face and wasted figure, the simple schoolmaster shed a few tears himself, at the same time showing in very energetic language how foolish it was to do so, and how very easily it could be avoided, if one tried.

'It makes me unhappy even in the midst of all this kindness' said the child, 'to think that we should be a burden upon you. How can I ever thank you? If I had not met you so far from home, I must have died, and he would have been left alone.'

'We'll not talk about dying,' said the schoolmaster; 'and as to burdens, I have made my fortune since you slept at my cottage.'

'Indeed!' cried the child joyfully.

'Oh yes,' returned her friend. 'I have been appointed clerk and schoolmaster to a village a long way from here—and a long way from the old one as you may suppose—at five-and-thirty pounds a year. Five-and-thirty pounds!'

'I am very glad,' said the child, 'so very, very glad.'

'I am on my way there now,' resumed the schoolmaster. 'They allowed me the stage-coach-hire—outside stage-coach-hire all the way. Bless you, they grudge me nothing. But as the time at which I am expected there, left me ample leisure, I determined to walk instead. How glad I am, to think I did so!'

'How glad should we be!'

'Yes, yes,' said the schoolmaster, moving restlessly in his chair, 'certainly, that's very true. But you—where are you going, where are you coming from, what have you been doing since you left me, what had you been doing before? Now, tell me—do tell me. I know very little of the world, and perhaps you are better fitted to advise me in its affairs than I am qualified to give advice to you; but I am very sincere, and I have a reason (you have not forgotten it) for loving you. I have felt since that time as if my love for him who died, had been transferred to you who stood beside his bed. If this,' he added, looking upwards, 'is the beautiful creation that springs from ashes, let its peace prosper with me, as I deal tenderly and compassionately by this young child!'

The plain, frank kindness of the honest schoolmaster, the affectionate earnestness of his speech and manner, the truth which was stamped upon his every word and look, gave the child a confidence in him, which the utmost arts of treachery and dissimulation could never have awakened in her breast. She told him all—that they had no friend or relative—that she had fled with the old man, to save him from a madhouse and all the miseries he dreaded—that she was flying now, to save him from himself—and that she sought an asylum in some remote and primitive place, where the temptation before which he fell would never enter, and her late sorrows and distresses could have no place.

The schoolmaster heard her with astonishment. 'This child!'—he thought—'Has this child heroically persevered under all doubts and dangers, struggled with poverty and suffering, upheld and sustained by strong affection and the consciousness of rectitude alone! And yet the world is full of such heroism. Have I yet to learn that the hardest and best-borne trials are those which are never chronicled in any earthly record, and are suffered every day! And should I be surprised to hear the story of this child!'

What more he thought or said, matters not. It was concluded that Nell and her grandfather should accompany him to the village whither he was bound, and that he should endeavour to find them some humble occupation by which they could subsist. 'We shall be sure to succeed,' said the schoolmaster, heartily. 'The cause is too good a one to fail.'

They arranged to proceed upon their journey next evening, as a stage-waggon, which travelled for some distance on the same road as they must take, would stop at the inn to change horses, and the driver for a small gratuity would give Nell a place inside. A bargain was soon struck when the waggon came; and in due time it rolled away; with the child comfortably bestowed among the softer packages, her grandfather and the schoolmaster walking on beside the driver, and the landlady and all the good folks of the inn screaming out their good wishes and farewells.

What a soothing, luxurious, drowsy way of travelling, to lie inside that slowly-moving mountain, listening to the tinkling of the horses' bells, the occasional smacking of the carter's whip, the smooth rolling of the great broad wheels, the rattle of the harness, the cheery good-nights of passing travellers jogging past on little short-stepped horses—all made pleasantly indistinct by the thick awning, which seemed made for lazy listening under, till one fell asleep! The very going to sleep, still with an indistinct idea, as the head jogged to and fro upon the pillow, of moving onward with no trouble or fatigue, and hearing all these sounds like dreamy music, lulling to the senses—and the slow waking up, and finding one's self staring out through the breezy curtain half-opened in the front, far up into the cold bright sky with its countless stars, and downward at the driver's lantern dancing on like its namesake Jack of the swamps and marshes, and sideways at the dark grim trees, and forward at the long bare road rising up, up, up, until it stopped abruptly at a sharp high ridge as if there were no more road, and all beyond was sky—and the stopping at the inn to bait, and being helped out, and going into a room with fire and candles, and winking very much, and being agreeably reminded that the night was cold, and anxious for very comfort's sake to think it colder than it was!—What a delicious journey was that journey in the waggon.

Then the going on again—so fresh at first, and shortly afterwards so sleepy. The waking from a sound nap as the mail came dashing past like a highway comet, with gleaming lamps and rattling hoofs, and visions of a guard behind, standing up to keep his feet warm, and of a gentleman in a fur cap opening his eyes and looking wild and stupefied—the stopping at the turnpike where the man was gone to bed, and knocking at the door until he answered with a smothered shout from under the bed-clothes in the little room above, where the faint light was burning, and presently came down, night-capped and shivering, to throw the gate wide open, and wish all waggons off the road except by day. The cold sharp interval between night and morning—the distant streak of light widening and spreading, and turning from grey to white, and from white to yellow, and from yellow to burning red—the presence of day, with all its cheerfulness and life—men and horses at the plough—birds in the trees and hedges, and boys in solitary fields, frightening them away with rattles. The coming to a town—people busy in the markets; light carts and chaises round the tavern yard; tradesmen standing at their doors; men running horses up and down the street for sale; pigs plunging and grunting in the dirty distance, getting off with long strings at their legs, running into clean chemists' shops and being dislodged with brooms by 'prentices; the night coach changing horses—the passengers cheerless, cold, ugly, and discontented, with three months' growth of hair in one night—the coachman fresh as from a band-box, and exquisitely beautiful by contrast:—so much bustle, so many things in motion, such a variety of incidents—when was there a journey with so many delights as that journey in the waggon!

Sometimes walking for a mile or two while her grandfather rode inside, and sometimes even prevailing upon the schoolmaster to take her place and lie down to rest, Nell travelled on very happily until they came to a large town, where the waggon stopped, and where they spent a night. They passed a large church; and in the streets were a number of old houses, built of a kind of earth or plaster, crossed and re-crossed in a great many directions with black beams, which gave them a remarkable and very ancient look. The doors, too, were arched and low, some with oaken portals and quaint benches, where the former inhabitants had sat on summer evenings. The windows were latticed in little diamond panes, that seemed to wink and blink upon the passengers as if they were dim of sight. They had long since got clear of the smoke and furnaces, except in one or two solitary instances, where a factory planted among fields withered the space about it, like a burning mountain. When they had passed through this town, they entered again upon the country, and began to draw near their place of destination.

It was not so near, however, but that they spent another night upon the road; not that their doing so was quite an act of necessity, but that the schoolmaster, when they approached within a few miles of his village, had a fidgety sense of his dignity as the new clerk, and was unwilling to make his entry in dusty shoes, and travel-disordered dress. It was a fine, clear, autumn morning, when they came upon the scene of his promotion, and stopped to contemplate its beauties.

'See—here's the church!' cried the delighted schoolmaster in a low voice; 'and that old building close beside it, is the schoolhouse, I'll be sworn. Five-and-thirty pounds a-year in this beautiful place!'

They admired everything—the old grey porch, the mullioned windows, the venerable gravestones dotting the green churchyard, the ancient tower, the very weathercock; the brown thatched roofs of cottage, barn, and homestead, peeping from among the trees; the stream that rippled by the distant water-mill; the blue Welsh mountains far away. It was for such a spot the child had wearied in the dense, dark, miserable haunts of labour. Upon her bed of ashes, and amidst the squalid horrors through which they had forced their way, visions of such scenes—beautiful indeed, but not more beautiful than this sweet reality—had been always present to her mind. They had seemed to melt into a dim and airy distance, as the prospect of ever beholding them again grew fainter; but, as they receded, she had loved and panted for them more.

'I must leave you somewhere for a few minutes,' said the schoolmaster, at length breaking the silence into which they had fallen in their gladness. 'I have a letter to present, and inquiries to make, you know. Where shall I take you? To the little inn yonder?'

'Let us wait here,' rejoined Nell. 'The gate is open. We will sit in the church porch till you come back.'

'A good place too,' said the schoolmaster, leading the way towards it, disencumbering himself of his portmanteau, and placing it on the stone seat. 'Be sure that I come back with good news, and am not long gone!'

So, the happy schoolmaster put on a bran-new pair of gloves which he had carried in a little parcel in his pocket all the way, and hurried off, full of ardour and excitement.

The child watched him from the porch until the intervening foliage hid him from her view, and then stepped softly out into the old churchyard—so solemn and quiet that every rustle of her dress upon the fallen leaves, which strewed the path and made her footsteps noiseless, seemed an invasion of its silence. It was a very aged, ghostly place; the church had been built many hundreds of years ago, and had once had a convent or monastery attached; for arches in ruins, remains of oriel windows, and fragments of blackened walls, were yet standing-, while other portions of the old building, which had crumbled away and fallen down, were mingled with the churchyard earth and overgrown with grass, as if they too claimed a burying-place and sought to mix their ashes with the dust of men. Hard by these gravestones of dead years, and forming a part of the ruin which some pains had been taken to render habitable in modern times, were two small dwellings with sunken windows and oaken doors, fast hastening to decay, empty and desolate.

Upon these tenements, the attention of the child became exclusively riveted. She knew not why. The church, the ruin, the antiquated graves, had equal claims at least upon a stranger's thoughts, but from the moment when her eyes first rested on these two dwellings, she could turn to nothing else. Even when she had made the circuit of the enclosure, and, returning to the porch, sat pensively waiting for their friend, she took her station where she could still look upon them, and felt as if fascinated towards that spot.

CHAPTER 47

Kit's mother and the single gentleman—upon whose track it is expedient to follow with hurried steps, lest this history should be chargeable with inconstancy, and the offence of leaving its characters in situations of uncertainty and doubt—Kit's mother and the single gentleman, speeding onward in the post-chaise-and-four whose departure from the Notary's door we have already witnessed, soon left the town behind them, and struck fire from the flints of the broad highway.

The good woman, being not a little embarrassed by the novelty of her situation, and certain material apprehensions that perhaps by this time little Jacob, or the baby, or both, had fallen into the fire, or tumbled down stairs, or had been squeezed behind doors, or had scalded their windpipes in endeavouring to allay their thirst at the spouts of tea-kettles, preserved an uneasy silence; and meeting from the window the eyes of turnpike-men, omnibus-drivers, and others, felt in the new dignity of her position like a mourner at a funeral, who, not being greatly afflicted by the loss of the departed, recognizes his every-day acquaintance from the window of the mourning coach, but is constrained to preserve a decent solemnity, and the appearance of being indifferent to all external objects.

To have been indifferent to the companionship of the single gentleman would have been tantamount to being gifted with nerves of steel. Never did chaise inclose, or horses draw, such a restless gentleman as he. He never sat in the same position for two minutes together, but was perpetually tossing his arms and legs about, pulling up the sashes and letting them violently down, or thrusting his head out of one window to draw it in again and thrust it out of another. He carried in his pocket, too, a fire-box of mysterious and unknown construction; and as sure as ever Kit's mother closed her eyes, so surely—whisk, rattle, fizz—there was the single gentleman consulting his watch by a flame of fire, and letting the sparks fall down among the straw as if there were no such thing as a possibility of himself and Kit's mother being roasted alive before the boys could stop their horses. Whenever they halted to change, there he was—out of the carriage without letting down the steps, bursting about the inn-yard like a lighted cracker, pulling out his watch by lamp-light and forgetting to look at it before he put it up again, and in short committing so many extravagances that Kit's mother was quite afraid of him. Then, when the horses were to, in he came like a Harlequin, and before they had gone a mile, out came the watch and the fire-box together, and Kit's mother as wide awake again, with no hope of a wink of sleep for that stage.

'Are you comfortable?' the single gentleman would say after one of these exploits, turning sharply round.

'Quite, Sir, thank you.'

'Are you sure? An't you cold?'

'It is a little chilly, Sir,' Kit's mother would reply.

'I knew it!' cried the single gentleman, letting down one of the front glasses. 'She wants some brandy and water! Of course she does. How could I forget it? Hallo! Stop at the next inn, and call out for a glass of hot brandy and water.'

It was in vain for Kit's mother to protest that she stood in need of nothing of the kind. The single gentleman was inexorable; and whenever he had exhausted all other modes and fashions of restlessness, it invariably occurred to him that Kit's mother wanted brandy and water.

In this way they travelled on until near midnight, when they stopped to supper, for which meal the single gentleman ordered everything eatable that the house contained; and because Kit's mother didn't eat everything at once, and eat it all, he took it into his head that she must be ill.

'You're faint,' said the single gentleman, who did nothing himself but walk about the room. 'I see what's the matter with you, ma'am. You're faint.'

'Thank you, sir, I'm not indeed.'

'I know you are. I'm sure of it. I drag this poor woman from the bosom of her family at a minute's notice, and she goes on getting fainter and fainter before my eyes. I'm a pretty fellow! How many children have you got, ma'am?'

'Two, sir, besides Kit.'

'Boys, ma'am?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Are they christened?'

'Only half baptised as yet, sir.'

'I'm godfather to both of 'em. Remember that, if you please, ma'am. You had better have some mulled wine.'

'I couldn't touch a drop indeed, sir.'

'You must,' said the single gentleman. 'I see you want it. I ought to have thought of it before.'

Immediately flying to the bell, and calling for mulled wine as impetuously as if it had been wanted for instant use in the recovery of some person apparently drowned, the single gentleman made Kit's mother swallow a bumper of it at such a high temperature that the tears ran down her face, and then hustled her off to the chaise again, where—not impossibly from the effects of this agreeable sedative—she soon became insensible to his restlessness, and fell fast asleep. Nor were the happy effects of this prescription of a transitory nature, as, notwithstanding that the distance was greater, and the journey longer, than the single gentleman had anticipated, she did not awake until it was broad day, and they were clattering over the pavement of a town.

'This is the place!' cried her companion, letting down all the glasses. 'Drive to the wax-work!'

The boy on the wheeler touched his hat, and setting spurs to his horse, to the end that they might go in brilliantly, all four broke into a smart canter, and dashed through the streets with a noise that brought the good folks wondering to their doors and windows, and drowned the sober voices of the town-clocks as they chimed out half-past eight. They drove up to a door round which a crowd of persons were collected, and there stopped.

'What's this?' said the single gentleman thrusting out his head. 'Is anything the matter here?'

'A wedding Sir, a wedding!' cried several voices. 'Hurrah!'

The single gentleman, rather bewildered by finding himself the centre of this noisy throng, alighted with the assistance of one of the postilions, and handed out Kit's mother, at sight of whom the populace cried out, 'Here's another wedding!' and roared and leaped for joy.

'The world has gone mad, I think,' said the single gentleman, pressing through the concourse with his supposed bride. 'Stand back here, will you, and let me knock.'

Anything that makes a noise is satisfactory to a crowd. A score of dirty hands were raised directly to knock for him, and seldom has a knocker of equal powers been made to produce more deafening sounds than this particular engine on the occasion in question. Having rendered these voluntary services, the throng modestly retired a little, preferring that the single gentleman should bear their consequences alone.

'Now, sir, what do you want!' said a man with a large white bow at his button-hole, opening the door, and confronting him with a very stoical aspect.

'Who has been married here, my friend?' said the single gentleman.

'I have.'

'You! and to whom in the devil's name?'

'What right have you to ask?' returned the bridegroom, eyeing him from top to toe.

'What right!' cried the single gentleman, drawing the arm of Kit's mother more tightly through his own, for that good woman evidently had it in contemplation to run away. 'A right you little dream of. Mind, good people, if this fellow has been marrying a minor—tut, tut, that can't be. Where is the child you have here, my good fellow. You call her Nell. Where is she?'

As he propounded this question, which Kit's mother echoed, somebody in a room near at hand, uttered a great shriek, and a stout lady in a white dress came running to the door, and supported herself upon the bridegroom's arm.

'Where is she!' cried this lady. 'What news have you brought me? What has become of her?'

The single gentleman started back, and gazed upon the face of the late Mrs Jarley (that morning wedded to the philosophic George, to the eternal wrath and despair of Mr Slum the poet), with looks of conflicting apprehension, disappointment, and incredulity. At length he stammered out,

'I ask YOU where she is? What do you mean?'

'Oh sir!' cried the bride, 'If you have come here to do her any good, why weren't you here a week ago?'

'She is not—not dead?' said the person to whom she addressed herself, turning very pale.

'No, not so bad as that.'

'I thank God!' cried the single gentleman feebly. 'Let me come in.'

They drew back to admit him, and when he had entered, closed the door.

'You see in me, good people,' he said, turning to the newly-married couple, 'one to whom life itself is not dearer than the two persons whom I seek. They would not know me. My features are strange to them, but if they or either of them are here, take this good woman with you, and let them see her first, for her they both know. If you deny them from any mistaken regard or fear for them, judge of my intentions by their recognition of this person as their old humble friend.'

'I always said it!' cried the bride, 'I knew she was not a common child! Alas, sir! we have no power to help you, for all that we could do, has been tried in vain.'

With that, they related to him, without disguise or concealment, all that they knew of Nell and her grandfather, from their first meeting with them, down to the time of their sudden disappearance; adding (which was quite true) that they had made every possible effort to trace them, but without success; having been at first in great alarm for their safety, as well as on account of the suspicions to which they themselves might one day be exposed in consequence of their abrupt departure. They dwelt upon the old man's imbecility of mind, upon the uneasiness the child had always testified when he was absent, upon the company he had been supposed to keep, and upon the increased depression which had gradually crept over her and changed her both in health and spirits. Whether she had missed the old man in the night, and knowing or conjecturing whither he had bent his steps, had gone in pursuit, or whether they had left the house together, they had no means of determining. Certain they considered it, that there was but slender prospect left of hearing of them again, and that whether their flight originated with the old man, or with the child, there was now no hope of their return. To all this, the single gentleman listened with the air of a man quite borne down by grief and disappointment. He shed tears when they spoke of the grandfather, and appeared in deep affliction.

Not to protract this portion of our narrative, and to make short work of a long story, let it be briefly written that before the interview came to a close, the single gentleman deemed he had sufficient evidence of having been told the truth, and that he endeavoured to force upon the bride and bridegroom an acknowledgment of their kindness to the unfriended child, which, however, they steadily declined accepting. In the end, the happy couple jolted away in the caravan to spend their honeymoon in a country excursion; and the single gentleman and Kit's mother stood ruefully before their carriage-door.

'Where shall we drive you, sir?' said the post-boy.

'You may drive me,' said the single gentleman, 'to the—' He was not going to add 'inn,' but he added it for the sake of Kit's mother; and to the inn they went.

Rumours had already got abroad that the little girl who used to show the wax-work, was the child of great people who had been stolen from her parents in infancy, and had only just been traced. Opinion was divided whether she was the daughter of a prince, a duke, an earl, a viscount, or a baron, but all agreed upon the main fact, and that the single gentleman was her father; and all bent forward to catch a glimpse, though it were only of the tip of his noble nose, as he rode away, desponding, in his four-horse chaise.

What would he have given to know, and what sorrow would have been saved if he had only known, that at that moment both child and grandfather were seated in the old church porch, patiently awaiting the schoolmaster's return!

CHAPTER 48

Popular rumour concerning the single gentleman and his errand, travelling from mouth to mouth, and waxing stronger in the marvellous as it was bandied about—for your popular rumour, unlike the rolling stone of the proverb, is one which gathers a deal of moss in its wanderings up and down—occasioned his dismounting at the inn-door to be looked upon as an exciting and attractive spectacle, which could scarcely be enough admired; and drew together a large concourse of idlers, who having recently been, as it were, thrown out of employment by the closing of the wax-work and the completion of the nuptial ceremonies, considered his arrival as little else than a special providence, and hailed it with demonstrations of the liveliest joy.

Not at all participating in the general sensation, but wearing the depressed and wearied look of one who sought to meditate on his disappointment in silence and privacy, the single gentleman alighted, and handed out Kit's mother with a gloomy politeness which impressed the lookers-on extremely. That done, he gave her his arm and escorted her into the house, while several active waiters ran on before as a skirmishing party, to clear the way and to show the room which was ready for their reception.

'Any room will do,' said the single gentleman. 'Let it be near at hand, that's all.'

'Close here, sir, if you please to walk this way.'

'Would the gentleman like this room?' said a voice, as a little out-of-the-way door at the foot of the well staircase flew briskly open and a head popped out. 'He's quite welcome to it. He's as welcome as flowers in May, or coals at Christmas. Would you like this room, sir? Honour me by walking in. Do me the favour, pray.'

'Goodness gracious me!' cried Kit's mother, falling back in extreme surprise, 'only think of this!'

She had some reason to be astonished, for the person who proffered the gracious invitation was no other than Daniel Quilp. The little door out of which he had thrust his head was close to the inn larder; and there he stood, bowing with grotesque politeness; as much at his ease as if the door were that of his own house; blighting all the legs of mutton and cold roast fowls by his close companionship, and looking like the evil genius of the cellars come from underground upon some work of mischief.

'Would you do me the honour?' said Quilp.

'I prefer being alone,' replied the single gentleman.

'Oh!' said Quilp. And with that, he darted in again with one jerk and clapped the little door to, like a figure in a Dutch clock when the hour strikes.

'Why it was only last night, sir,' whispered Kit's mother, 'that I left him in Little Bethel.'

'Indeed!' said her fellow-passenger. 'When did that person come here, waiter?'

'Come down by the night-coach, this morning, sir.'

'Humph! And when is he going?'

'Can't say, sir, really. When the chambermaid asked him just now if he should want a bed, sir, he first made faces at her, and then wanted to kiss her.'

'Beg him to walk this way,' said the single gentleman. 'I should be glad to exchange a word with him, tell him. Beg him to come at once, do you hear?'

The man stared on receiving these instructions, for the single gentleman had not only displayed as much astonishment as Kit's mother at sight of the dwarf, but, standing in no fear of him, had been at less pains to conceal his dislike and repugnance. He departed on his errand, however, and immediately returned, ushering in its object.

'Your servant, sir,' said the dwarf, 'I encountered your messenger half-way. I thought you'd allow me to pay my compliments to you. I hope you're well. I hope you're very well.'

There was a short pause, while the dwarf, with half-shut eyes and puckered face, stood waiting for an answer. Receiving none, he turned towards his more familiar acquaintance.

'Christopher's mother!' he cried. 'Such a dear lady, such a worthy woman, so blest in her honest son! How is Christopher's mother? Have change of air and scene improved her? Her little family too, and Christopher? Do they thrive? Do they flourish? Are they growing into worthy citizens, eh?'

Making his voice ascend in the scale with every succeeding question, Mr Quilp finished in a shrill squeak, and subsided into the panting look which was customary with him, and which, whether it were assumed or natural, had equally the effect of banishing all expression from his face, and rendering it, as far as it afforded any index to his mood or meaning, a perfect blank.

'Mr Quilp,' said the single gentleman.

The dwarf put his hand to his great flapped ear, and counterfeited the closest attention.

'We two have met before—'

'Surely,' cried Quilp, nodding his head. 'Oh surely, sir. Such an honour and pleasure—it's both, Christopher's mother, it's both—is not to be forgotten so soon. By no means!'

'You may remember that the day I arrived in London, and found the house to which I drove, empty and deserted, I was directed by some of the neighbours to you, and waited upon you without stopping for rest or refreshment?'

'How precipitate that was, and yet what an earnest and vigorous measure!' said Quilp, conferring with himself, in imitation of his friend Mr Sampson Brass.

'I found,' said the single gentleman, 'you most unaccountably, in possession of everything that had so recently belonged to another man, and that other man, who up to the time of your entering upon his property had been looked upon as affluent, reduced to sudden beggary, and driven from house and home.'

'We had warrant for what we did, my good sir,' rejoined Quilp, 'we had our warrant. Don't say driven either. He went of his own accord—vanished in the night, sir.'

'No matter,' said the single gentleman angrily. 'He was gone.'

'Yes, he was gone,' said Quilp, with the same exasperating composure. 'No doubt he was gone. The only question was, where. And it's a question still.'

'Now, what am I to think,' said the single gentleman, sternly regarding him, 'of you, who, plainly indisposed to give me any information then—nay, obviously holding back, and sheltering yourself with all kinds of cunning, trickery, and evasion—are dogging my footsteps now?'

'I dogging!' cried Quilp.

'Why, are you not?' returned his questioner, fretted into a state of the utmost irritation. 'Were you not a few hours since, sixty miles off, and in the chapel to which this good woman goes to say her prayers?'

'She was there too, I think?' said Quilp, still perfectly unmoved. 'I might say, if I was inclined to be rude, how do I know but you are dogging MY footsteps. Yes, I was at chapel. What then? I've read in books that pilgrims were used to go to chapel before they went on journeys, to put up petitions for their safe return. Wise men! journeys are very perilous—especially outside the coach. Wheels come off, horses take fright, coachmen drive too fast, coaches overturn. I always go to chapel before I start on journeys. It's the last thing I do on such occasions, indeed.'

That Quilp lied most heartily in this speech, it needed no very great penetration to discover, although for anything that he suffered to appear in his face, voice, or manner, he might have been clinging to the truth with the quiet constancy of a martyr.

'In the name of all that's calculated to drive one crazy, man,' said the unfortunate single gentleman, 'have you not, for some reason of your own, taken upon yourself my errand? don't you know with what object I have come here, and if you do know, can you throw no light upon it?'

'You think I'm a conjuror, sir,' replied Quilp, shrugging up his shoulders. 'If I was, I should tell my own fortune—and make it.'

'Ah! we have said all we need say, I see,' returned the other, throwing himself impatiently upon a sofa. 'Pray leave us, if you please.'

'Willingly,' returned Quilp. 'Most willingly. Christopher's mother, my good soul, farewell. A pleasant journey—back, sir. Ahem!'

With these parting words, and with a grin upon his features altogether indescribable, but which seemed to be compounded of every monstrous grimace of which men or monkeys are capable, the dwarf slowly retreated and closed the door behind him.

'Oho!' he said when he had regained his own room, and sat himself down in a chair with his arms akimbo. 'Oho! Are you there, my friend? Indeed!'

Chuckling as though in very great glee, and recompensing himself for the restraint he had lately put upon his countenance by twisting it into all imaginable varieties of ugliness, Mr Quilp, rocking himself to and fro in his chair and nursing his left leg at the same time, fell into certain meditations, of which it may be necessary to relate the substance.

First, he reviewed the circumstances which had led to his repairing to that spot, which were briefly these. Dropping in at Mr Sampson Brass's office on the previous evening, in the absence of that gentleman and his learned sister, he had lighted upon Mr Swiveller, who chanced at the moment to be sprinkling a glass of warm gin and water on the dust of the law, and to be moistening his clay, as the phrase goes, rather copiously. But as clay in the abstract, when too much moistened, becomes of a weak and uncertain consistency, breaking down in unexpected places, retaining impressions but faintly, and preserving no strength or steadiness of character, so Mr Swiveller's clay, having imbibed a considerable quantity of moisture, was in a very loose and slippery state, insomuch that the various ideas impressed upon it were fast losing their distinctive character, and running into each other. It is not uncommon for human clay in this condition to value itself above all things upon its great prudence and sagacity; and Mr Swiveller, especially prizing himself upon these qualities, took occasion to remark that he had made strange discoveries in connection with the single gentleman who lodged above, which he had determined to keep within his own bosom, and which neither tortures nor cajolery should ever induce him to reveal. Of this determination Mr Quilp expressed his high approval, and setting himself in the same breath to goad Mr Swiveller on to further hints, soon made out that the single gentleman had been seen in communication with Kit, and that this was the secret which was never to be disclosed.

Possessed of this piece of information, Mr Quilp directly supposed that the single gentleman above stairs must be the same individual who had waited on him, and having assured himself by further inquiries that this surmise was correct, had no difficulty in arriving at the conclusion that the intent and object of his correspondence with Kit was the recovery of his old client and the child. Burning with curiosity to know what proceedings were afoot, he resolved to pounce upon Kit's mother as the person least able to resist his arts, and consequently the most likely to be entrapped into such revelations as he sought; so taking an abrupt leave of Mr Swiveller, he hurried to her house. The good woman being from home, he made inquiries of a neighbour, as Kit himself did soon afterwards, and being directed to the chapel be took himself there, in order to waylay her, at the conclusion of the service.

He had not sat in the chapel more than a quarter of an hour, and with his eyes piously fixed upon the ceiling was chuckling inwardly over the joke of his being there at all, when Kit himself appeared. Watchful as a lynx, one glance showed the dwarf that he had come on business. Absorbed in appearance, as we have seen, and feigning a profound abstraction, he noted every circumstance of his behaviour, and when he withdrew with his family, shot out after him. In fine, he traced them to the notary's house; learnt the destination of the carriage from one of the postilions; and knowing that a fast night-coach started for the same place, at the very hour which was on the point of striking, from a street hard by, darted round to the coach-office without more ado, and took his seat upon the roof. After passing and repassing the carriage on the road, and being passed and repassed by it sundry times in the course of the night, according as their stoppages were longer or shorter; or their rate of travelling varied, they reached the town almost together. Quilp kept the chaise in sight, mingled with the crowd, learnt the single gentleman's errand, and its failure, and having possessed himself of all that it was material to know, hurried off, reached the inn before him, had the interview just now detailed, and shut himself up in the little room in which he hastily reviewed all these occurrences.

'You are there, are you, my friend?' he repeated, greedily biting his nails. 'I am suspected and thrown aside, and Kit's the confidential agent, is he? I shall have to dispose of him, I fear. If we had come up with them this morning,' he continued, after a thoughtful pause, 'I was ready to prove a pretty good claim. I could have made my profit. But for these canting hypocrites, the lad and his mother, I could get this fiery gentleman as comfortably into my net as our old friend—our mutual friend, ha! ha!—and chubby, rosy Nell. At the worst, it's a golden opportunity, not to be lost. Let us find them first, and I'll find means of draining you of some of your superfluous cash, sir, while there are prison bars, and bolts, and locks, to keep your friend or kinsman safely. I hate your virtuous people!' said the dwarf, throwing off a bumper of brandy, and smacking his lips, 'ah! I hate 'em every one!'

This was not a mere empty vaunt, but a deliberate avowal of his real sentiments; for Mr Quilp, who loved nobody, had by little and little come to hate everybody nearly or remotely connected with his ruined client:—the old man himself, because he had been able to deceive him and elude his vigilance—the child, because she was the object of Mrs Quilp's commiseration and constant self-reproach—the single gentleman, because of his unconcealed aversion to himself—Kit and his mother, most mortally, for the reasons shown. Above and beyond that general feeling of opposition to them, which would have been inseparable from his ravenous desire to enrich himself by these altered circumstances, Daniel Quilp hated them every one.

In this amiable mood, Mr Quilp enlivened himself and his hatreds with more brandy, and then, changing his quarters, withdrew to an obscure alehouse, under cover of which seclusion he instituted all possible inquiries that might lead to the discovery of the old man and his grandchild. But all was in vain. Not the slightest trace or clue could be obtained. They had left the town by night; no one had seen them go; no one had met them on the road; the driver of no coach, cart, or waggon, had seen any travellers answering their description; nobody had fallen in with them, or heard of them. Convinced at last that for the present all such attempts were hopeless, he appointed two or three scouts, with promises of large rewards in case of their forwarding him any intelligence, and returned to London by next day's coach.

It was some gratification to Mr Quilp to find, as he took his place upon the roof, that Kit's mother was alone inside; from which circumstance he derived in the course of the journey much cheerfulness of spirit, inasmuch as her solitary condition enabled him to terrify her with many extraordinary annoyances; such as hanging over the side of the coach at the risk of his life, and staring in with his great goggle eyes, which seemed in hers the more horrible from his face being upside down; dodging her in this way from one window to another; getting nimbly down whenever they changed horses and thrusting his head in at the window with a dismal squint: which ingenious tortures had such an effect upon Mrs Nubbles, that she was quite unable for the time to resist the belief that Mr Quilp did in his own person represent and embody that Evil Power, who was so vigorously attacked at Little Bethel, and who, by reason of her backslidings in respect of Astley's and oysters, was now frolicsome and rampant.

Kit, having been apprised by letter of his mother's intended return, was waiting for her at the coach-office; and great was his surprise when he saw, leering over the coachman's shoulder like some familiar demon, invisible to all eyes but his, the well-known face of Quilp.

'How are you, Christopher?' croaked the dwarf from the coach-top. 'All right, Christopher. Mother's inside.'

'Why, how did he come here, mother?' whispered Kit.

'I don't know how he came or why, my dear,' rejoined Mrs Nubbles, dismounting with her son's assistance, 'but he has been a terrifying of me out of my seven senses all this blessed day.'

'He has?' cried Kit.

'You wouldn't believe it, that you wouldn't,' replied his mother, 'but don't say a word to him, for I really don't believe he's human. Hush! Don't turn round as if I was talking of him, but he's a squinting at me now in the full blaze of the coach-lamp, quite awful!'

In spite of his mother's injunction, Kit turned sharply round to look. Mr Quilp was serenely gazing at the stars, quite absorbed in celestial contemplation.

'Oh, he's the artfullest creetur!' cried Mrs Nubbles. 'But come away. Don't speak to him for the world.'

'Yes I will, mother. What nonsense. I say, sir—'

Mr Quilp affected to start, and looked smilingly round.

'You let my mother alone, will you?' said Kit. 'How dare you tease a poor lone woman like her, making her miserable and melancholy as if she hadn't got enough to make her so, without you. An't you ashamed of yourself, you little monster?'

'Monster!' said Quilp inwardly, with a smile. 'Ugliest dwarf that could be seen anywhere for a penny—monster—ah!'

'You show her any of your impudence again,' resumed Kit, shouldering the bandbox, 'and I tell you what, Mr Quilp, I won't bear with you any more. You have no right to do it; I'm sure we never interfered with you. This isn't the first time; and if ever you worry or frighten her again, you'll oblige me (though I should be very sorry to do it, on account of your size) to beat you.'

Quilp said not a word in reply, but walking so close to Kit as to bring his eyes within two or three inches of his face, looked fixedly at him, retreated a little distance without averting his gaze, approached again, again withdrew, and so on for half-a-dozen times, like a head in a phantasmagoria. Kit stood his ground as if in expectation of an immediate assault, but finding that nothing came of these gestures, snapped his fingers and walked away; his mother dragging him off as fast as she could, and, even in the midst of his news of little Jacob and the baby, looking anxiously over her shoulder to see if Quilp were following.

CHAPTER 49

Kit's mother might have spared herself the trouble of looking back so often, for nothing was further from Mr Quilp's thoughts than any intention of pursuing her and her son, or renewing the quarrel with which they had parted. He went his way, whistling from time to time some fragments of a tune; and with a face quite tranquil and composed, jogged pleasantly towards home; entertaining himself as he went with visions of the fears and terrors of Mrs Quilp, who, having received no intelligence of him for three whole days and two nights, and having had no previous notice of his absence, was doubtless by that time in a state of distraction, and constantly fainting away with anxiety and grief.

This facetious probability was so congenial to the dwarf's humour, and so exquisitely amusing to him, that he laughed as he went along until the tears ran down his cheeks; and more than once, when he found himself in a bye-street, vented his delight in a shrill scream, which greatly terrifying any lonely passenger, who happened to be walking on before him expecting nothing so little, increased his mirth, and made him remarkably cheerful and light-hearted.

In this happy flow of spirits, Mr Quilp reached Tower Hill, when, gazing up at the window of his own sitting-room, he thought he descried more light than is usual in a house of mourning. Drawing nearer, and listening attentively, he could hear several voices in earnest conversation, among which he could distinguish, not only those of his wife and mother-in-law, but the tongues of men.

'Ha!' cried the jealous dwarf, 'What's this! Do they entertain visitors while I'm away!'

A smothered cough from above, was the reply. He felt in his pockets for his latch-key, but had forgotten it. There was no resource but to knock at the door.

'A light in the passage,' said Quilp, peeping through the keyhole. 'A very soft knock; and, by your leave, my lady, I may yet steal upon you unawares. Soho!'

A very low and gentle rap received no answer from within. But after a second application to the knocker, no louder than the first, the door was softly opened by the boy from the wharf, whom Quilp instantly gagged with one hand, and dragged into the street with the other.

'You'll throttle me, master,' whispered the boy. 'Let go, will you.'

'Who's up stairs, you dog?' retorted Quilp in the same tone. 'Tell me. And don't speak above your breath, or I'll choke you in good earnest.'

The boy could only point to the window, and reply with a stifled giggle, expressive of such intense enjoyment, that Quilp clutched him by the throat and might have carried his threat into execution, or at least have made very good progress towards that end, but for the boy's nimbly extricating himself from his grasp, and fortifying himself behind the nearest post, at which, after some fruitless attempts to catch him by the hair of the head, his master was obliged to come to a parley.

'Will you answer me?' said Quilp. 'What's going on, above?'

'You won't let one speak,' replied the boy. 'They—ha, ha, ha!—they think you're—you're dead. Ha ha ha!'

'Dead!' cried Quilp, relaxing into a grim laugh himself. 'No. Do they? Do they really, you dog?'

'They think you're—you're drowned,' replied the boy, who in his malicious nature had a strong infusion of his master. 'You was last seen on the brink of the wharf, and they think you tumbled over. Ha ha!'

The prospect of playing the spy under such delicious circumstances, and of disappointing them all by walking in alive, gave more delight to Quilp than the greatest stroke of good fortune could possibly have inspired him with. He was no less tickled than his hopeful assistant, and they both stood for some seconds, grinning and gasping and wagging their heads at each other, on either side of the post, like an unmatchable pair of Chinese idols.

'Not a word,' said Quilp, making towards the door on tiptoe. 'Not a sound, not so much as a creaking board, or a stumble against a cobweb. Drowned, eh, Mrs Quilp! Drowned!'

So saying, he blew out the candle, kicked off his shoes, and groped his way up stairs; leaving his delighted young friend in an ecstasy of summersets on the pavement.

The bedroom-door on the staircase being unlocked, Mr Quilp slipped in, and planted himself behind the door of communication between that chamber and the sitting-room, which standing ajar to render both more airy, and having a very convenient chink (of which he had often availed himself for purposes of espial, and had indeed enlarged with his pocket-knife), enabled him not only to hear, but to see distinctly, what was passing.

Applying his eye to this convenient place, he descried Mr Brass seated at the table with pen, ink, and paper, and the case-bottle of rum—his own case-bottle, and his own particular Jamaica—convenient to his hand; with hot water, fragrant lemons, white lump sugar, and all things fitting; from which choice materials, Sampson, by no means insensible to their claims upon his attention, had compounded a mighty glass of punch reeking hot; which he was at that very moment stirring up with a teaspoon, and contemplating with looks in which a faint assumption of sentimental regret, struggled but weakly with a bland and comfortable joy. At the same table, with both her elbows upon it, was Mrs Jiniwin; no longer sipping other people's punch feloniously with teaspoons, but taking deep draughts from a jorum of her own; while her daughter—not exactly with ashes on her head, or sackcloth on her back, but preserving a very decent and becoming appearance of sorrow nevertheless—was reclining in an easy chair, and soothing her grief with a smaller allowance of the same glib liquid. There were also present, a couple of water-side men, bearing between them certain machines called drags; even these fellows were accommodated with a stiff glass a-piece; and as they drank with a great relish, and were naturally of a red-nosed, pimple-faced, convivial look, their presence rather increased than detracted from that decided appearance of comfort, which was the great characteristic of the party.

'If I could poison that dear old lady's rum and water,' murmured Quilp, 'I'd die happy.'

'Ah!' said Mr Brass, breaking the silence, and raising his eyes to the ceiling with a sigh, 'Who knows but he may be looking down upon us now! Who knows but he may be surveying of us from—from somewheres or another, and contemplating us with a watchful eye! Oh Lor!'

Here Mr Brass stopped to drink half his punch, and then resumed; looking at the other half, as he spoke, with a dejected smile.

'I can almost fancy,' said the lawyer shaking his head, 'that I see his eye glistening down at the very bottom of my liquor. When shall we look upon his like again? Never, never!' One minute we are here'—holding his tumbler before his eyes—'the next we are there'—gulping down its contents, and striking himself emphatically a little below the chest—'in the silent tomb. To think that I should be drinking his very rum! It seems like a dream.'

With the view, no doubt, of testing the reality of his position, Mr Brass pushed his tumbler as he spoke towards Mrs Jiniwin for the purpose of being replenished; and turned towards the attendant mariners.

'The search has been quite unsuccessful then?'

'Quite, master. But I should say that if he turns up anywhere, he'll come ashore somewhere about Grinidge to-morrow, at ebb tide, eh, mate?'

The other gentleman assented, observing that he was expected at the Hospital, and that several pensioners would be ready to receive him whenever he arrived.

'Then we have nothing for it but resignation,' said Mr Brass; 'nothing but resignation and expectation. It would be a comfort to have his body; it would be a dreary comfort.'

'Oh, beyond a doubt,' assented Mrs Jiniwin hastily; 'if we once had that, we should be quite sure.'

'With regard to the descriptive advertisement,' said Sampson Brass, taking up his pen. 'It is a melancholy pleasure to recall his traits. Respecting his legs now—?'

'Crooked, certainly,' said Mrs Jiniwin. 'Do you think they WERE crooked?' said Brass, in an insinuating tone. 'I think I see them now coming up the street very wide apart, in nankeen' pantaloons a little shrunk and without straps. Ah! what a vale of tears we live in. Do we say crooked?'

'I think they were a little so,' observed Mrs Quilp with a sob.

'Legs crooked,' said Brass, writing as he spoke. 'Large head, short body, legs crooked—'

Very crooked,' suggested Mrs Jiniwin.

'We'll not say very crooked, ma'am,' said Brass piously. 'Let us not bear hard upon the weaknesses of the deceased. He is gone, ma'am, to where his legs will never come in question.—We will content ourselves with crooked, Mrs Jiniwin.'

'I thought you wanted the truth,' said the old lady. 'That's all.'

'Bless your eyes, how I love you,' muttered Quilp. 'There she goes again. Nothing but punch!'

'This is an occupation,' said the lawyer, laying down his pen and emptying his glass, 'which seems to bring him before my eyes like the Ghost of Hamlet's father, in the very clothes that he wore on work-a-days. His coat, his waistcoat, his shoes and stockings, his trousers, his hat, his wit and humour, his pathos and his umbrella, all come before me like visions of my youth. His linen!' said Mr Brass smiling fondly at the wall, 'his linen which was always of a particular colour, for such was his whim and fancy—how plain I see his linen now!'

'You had better go on, sir,' said Mrs Jiniwin impatiently.

'True, ma'am, true,' cried Mr Brass. 'Our faculties must not freeze with grief. I'll trouble you for a little more of that, ma'am. A question now arises, with relation to his nose.'

'Flat,' said Mrs Jiniwin.

'Aquiline!' cried Quilp, thrusting in his head, and striking the feature with his fist. 'Aquiline, you hag. Do you see it? Do you call this flat? Do you? Eh?'

'Oh capital, capital!' shouted Brass, from the mere force of habit. 'Excellent! How very good he is! He's a most remarkable man—so extremely whimsical! Such an amazing power of taking people by surprise!'

Quilp paid no regard whatever to these compliments, nor to the dubious and frightened look into which the lawyer gradually subsided, nor to the shrieks of his wife and mother-in-law, nor to the latter's running from the room, nor to the former's fainting away. Keeping his eye fixed on Sampson Brass, he walked up to the table, and beginning with his glass, drank off the contents, and went regularly round until he had emptied the other two, when he seized the case-bottle, and hugging it under his arm, surveyed him with a most extraordinary leer.

'Not yet, Sampson,' said Quilp. 'Not just yet!'

'Oh very good indeed!' cried Brass, recovering his spirits a little. 'Ha ha ha! Oh exceedingly good! There's not another man alive who could carry it off like that. A most difficult position to carry off. But he has such a flow of good-humour, such an amazing flow!'

'Good night,' said the dwarf, nodding expressively.

'Good night, sir, good night,' cried the lawyer, retreating backwards towards the door. 'This is a joyful occasion indeed, extremely joyful. Ha ha ha! oh very rich, very rich indeed, remarkably so!'

Waiting until Mr Brass's ejaculations died away in the distance (for he continued to pour them out, all the way down stairs), Quilp advanced towards the two men, who yet lingered in a kind of stupid amazement.

'Have you been dragging the river all day, gentlemen?' said the dwarf, holding the door open with great politeness.

'And yesterday too, master.'

'Dear me, you've had a deal of trouble. Pray consider everything yours that you find upon the—upon the body. Good night!'

The men looked at each other, but had evidently no inclination to argue the point just then, and shuffled out of the room. The speedy clearance effected, Quilp locked the doors; and still embracing the case-bottle with shrugged-up shoulders and folded arms, stood looking at his insensible wife like a dismounted nightmare.

CHAPTER 50

Matrimonial differences are usually discussed by the parties concerned in the form of dialogue, in which the lady bears at least her full half share. Those of Mr and Mrs Quilp, however, were an exception to the general rule; the remarks which they occasioned being limited to a long soliloquy on the part of the gentleman, with perhaps a few deprecatory observations from the lady, not extending beyond a trembling monosyllable uttered at long intervals, and in a very submissive and humble tone. On the present occasion, Mrs Quilp did not for a long time venture even on this gentle defence, but when she had recovered from her fainting-fit, sat in a tearful silence, meekly listening to the reproaches of her lord and master.

Of these Mr Quilp delivered himself with the utmost animation and rapidity, and with so many distortions of limb and feature, that even his wife, although tolerably well accustomed to his proficiency in these respects, was well-nigh beside herself with alarm. But the Jamaica rum, and the joy of having occasioned a heavy disappointment, by degrees cooled Mr Quilp's wrath; which from being at savage heat, dropped slowly to the bantering or chuckling point, at which it steadily remained.

'So you thought I was dead and gone, did you?' said Quilp. 'You thought you were a widow, eh? Ha, ha, ha, you jade.'

'Indeed, Quilp,' returned his wife. 'I'm very sorry—'

'Who doubts it!' cried the dwarf. 'You very sorry! to be sure you are. Who doubts that you're VERY sorry!'

'I don't mean sorry that you have come home again alive and well,' said his wife, 'but sorry that I should have been led into such a belief. I am glad to see you, Quilp; indeed I am.'

In truth Mrs Quilp did seem a great deal more glad to behold her lord than might have been expected, and did evince a degree of interest in his safety which, all things considered, was rather unaccountable. Upon Quilp, however, this circumstance made no impression, farther than as it moved him to snap his fingers close to his wife's eyes, with divers grins of triumph and derision.

'How could you go away so long, without saying a word to me or letting me hear of you or know anything about you?' asked the poor little woman, sobbing. 'How could you be so cruel, Quilp?'

'How could I be so cruel! cruel!' cried the dwarf. 'Because I was in the humour. I'm in the humour now. I shall be cruel when I like. I'm going away again.'

'Not again!'

'Yes, again. I'm going away now. I'm off directly. I mean to go and live wherever the fancy seizes me—at the wharf—at the counting-house—and be a jolly bachelor. You were a widow in anticipation. Damme,' screamed the dwarf, 'I'll be a bachelor in earnest.'

'You can't be serious, Quilp,' sobbed his wife.

'I tell you,' said the dwarf, exulting in his project, 'that I'll be a bachelor, a devil-may-care bachelor; and I'll have my bachelor's hall at the counting-house, and at such times come near it if you dare. And mind too that I don't pounce in upon you at unseasonable hours again, for I'll be a spy upon you, and come and go like a mole or a weazel. Tom Scott—where's Tom Scott?'

'Here I am, master,' cried the voice of the boy, as Quilp threw up the window.

'Wait there, you dog,' returned the dwarf, 'to carry a bachelor's portmanteau. Pack it up, Mrs Quilp. Knock up the dear old lady to help; knock her up. Halloa there! Halloa!'

With these exclamations, Mr Quilp caught up the poker, and hurrying to the door of the good lady's sleeping-closet, beat upon it therewith until she awoke in inexpressible terror, thinking that her amiable son-in-law surely intended to murder her in justification of the legs she had slandered. Impressed with this idea, she was no sooner fairly awake than she screamed violently, and would have quickly precipitated herself out of the window and through a neighbouring skylight, if her daughter had not hastened in to undeceive her, and implore her assistance. Somewhat reassured by her account of the service she was required to render, Mrs Jiniwin made her appearance in a flannel dressing-gown; and both mother and daughter, trembling with terror and cold—for the night was now far advanced—obeyed Mr Quilp's directions in submissive silence. Prolonging his preparations as much as possible, for their greater comfort, that eccentric gentleman superintended the packing of his wardrobe, and having added to it with his own hands, a plate, knife and fork, spoon, teacup and saucer, and other small household matters of that nature, strapped up the portmanteau, took it on his shoulders, and actually marched off without another word, and with the case-bottle (which he had never once put down) still tightly clasped under his arm. Consigning his heavier burden to the care of Tom Scott when he reached the street, taking a dram from the bottle for his own encouragement, and giving the boy a rap on the head with it as a small taste for himself, Quilp very deliberately led the way to the wharf, and reached it at between three and four o'clock in the morning.

'Snug!' said Quilp, when he had groped his way to the wooden counting-house, and opened the door with a key he carried about with him. 'Beautifully snug! Call me at eight, you dog.'

With no more formal leave-taking or explanation, he clutched the portmanteau, shut the door on his attendant, and climbing on the desk, and rolling himself up as round as a hedgehog, in an old boat-cloak, fell fast asleep.

Being roused in the morning at the appointed time, and roused with difficulty, after his late fatigues, Quilp instructed Tom Scott to make a fire in the yard of sundry pieces of old timber, and to prepare some coffee for breakfast; for the better furnishing of which repast he entrusted him with certain small moneys, to be expended in the purchase of hot rolls, butter, sugar, Yarmouth bloaters, and other articles of housekeeping; so that in a few minutes a savoury meal was smoking on the board. With this substantial comfort, the dwarf regaled himself to his heart's content; and being highly satisfied with this free and gipsy mode of life (which he had often meditated, as offering, whenever he chose to avail himself of it, an agreeable freedom from the restraints of matrimony, and a choice means of keeping Mrs Quilp and her mother in a state of incessant agitation and suspense), bestirred himself to improve his retreat, and render it more commodious and comfortable.

With this view, he issued forth to a place hard by, where sea-stores were sold, purchased a second-hand hammock, and had it slung in seamanlike fashion from the ceiling of the counting-house. He also caused to be erected, in the same mouldy cabin, an old ship's stove with a rusty funnel to carry the smoke through the roof; and these arrangements completed, surveyed them with ineffable delight.

'I've got a country-house like Robinson Crusoe,' said the dwarf, ogling the accommodations; 'a solitary, sequestered, desolate-island sort of spot, where I can be quite alone when I have business on hand, and be secure from all spies and listeners. Nobody near me here, but rats, and they are fine stealthy secret fellows. I shall be as merry as a grig among these gentry. I'll look out for one like Christopher, and poison him—ha, ha, ha! Business though—business—we must be mindful of business in the midst of pleasure, and the time has flown this morning, I declare.'

Enjoining Tom Scott to await his return, and not to stand upon his head, or throw a summerset, or so much as walk upon his hands meanwhile, on pain of lingering torments, the dwarf threw himself into a boat, and crossing to the other side of the river, and then speeding away on foot, reached Mr

Swiveller's usual house of entertainment in Bevis Marks, just as that gentleman sat down alone to dinner in its dusky parlour.

'Dick,' said the dwarf, thrusting his head in at the door, 'my pet, my pupil, the apple of my eye, hey, hey!'

'Oh you're there, are you?' returned Mr Swiveller; 'how are you?'

'How's Dick?' retorted Quilp. 'How's the cream of clerkship, eh?'

'Why, rather sour, sir,' replied Mr Swiveller. 'Beginning to border upon cheesiness, in fact.'

'What's the matter?' said the dwarf, advancing. 'Has Sally proved unkind. "Of all the girls that are so smart, there's none like—" eh, Dick!'

'Certainly not,' replied Mr Swiveller, eating his dinner with great gravity, 'none like her. She's the sphynx of private life, is Sally B.'

'You're out of spirits,' said Quilp, drawing up a chair. 'What's the matter?'

'The law don't agree with me,' returned Dick. 'It isn't moist enough, and there's too much confinement. I have been thinking of running away.'

'Bah!' said the dwarf. 'Where would you run to, Dick?'

'I don't know' returned Mr Swiveller. 'Towards Highgate, I suppose. Perhaps the bells might strike up "Turn again Swiveller, Lord Mayor of London." Whittington's name was Dick. I wish cats were scarcer.'

Quilp looked at his companion with his eyes screwed up into a comical expression of curiosity, and patiently awaited his further explanation; upon which, however, Mr Swiveller appeared in no hurry to enter, as he ate a very long dinner in profound silence, finally pushed away his plate, threw himself back into his chair, folded his arms, and stared ruefully at the fire, in which some ends of cigars were smoking on their own account, and sending up a fragrant odour.

'Perhaps you'd like a bit of cake'—said Dick, at last turning to the dwarf. 'You're quite welcome to it. You ought to be, for it's of your making.'

'What do you mean?' said Quilp.

Mr Swiveller replied by taking from his pocket a small and very greasy parcel, slowly unfolding it, and displaying a little slab of plum-cake extremely indigestible in appearance, and bordered with a paste of white sugar an inch and a half deep.

'What should you say this was?' demanded Mr Swiveller.

'It looks like bride-cake,' replied the dwarf, grinning.

'And whose should you say it was?' inquired Mr Swiveller, rubbing the pastry against his nose with a dreadful calmness. 'Whose?'

'Not—'

'Yes,' said Dick, 'the same. You needn't mention her name. There's no such name now. Her name is Cheggs now, Sophy Cheggs. Yet loved I as man never loved that hadn't wooden legs, and my heart, my heart is breaking for the love of Sophy Cheggs.'

With this extemporary adaptation of a popular ballad to the distressing circumstances of his own case, Mr Swiveller folded up the parcel again, beat it very flat between the palms of his hands, thrust it into his breast, buttoned his coat over it, and folded his arms upon the whole.

'Now, I hope you're satisfied, sir,' said Dick; 'and I hope Fred's satisfied. You went partners in the mischief, and I hope you like it. This is the triumph I was to have, is it? It's like the old country-dance of that name, where there are two gentlemen to one lady, and one has her, and the other hasn't, but comes limping up behind to make out the figure. But it's Destiny, and mine's a crusher.'

Disguising his secret joy in Mr Swiveller's defeat, Daniel Quilp adopted the surest means of soothing him, by ringing the bell, and ordering in a supply of rosy wine (that is to say, of its usual representative), which he put about with great alacrity, calling upon Mr Swiveller to pledge him in various toasts derisive of Cheggs, and eulogistic of the happiness of single men. Such was their impression on Mr Swiveller, coupled with the reflection that no man could oppose his destiny, that in a very short space of time his spirits rose surprisingly, and he was enabled to give the dwarf an account of the receipt of the cake, which, it appeared, had been brought to Bevis Marks by the two surviving Miss Wackleses in person, and delivered at the office door with much giggling and joyfulness.

'Ha!' said Quilp. 'It will be our turn to giggle soon. And that reminds me—you spoke of young Trent—where is he?'

Mr Swiveller explained that his respectable friend had recently accepted a responsible situation in a locomotive gaming-house, and was at that time absent on a professional tour among the adventurous spirits of Great Britain.

'That's unfortunate,' said the dwarf, 'for I came, in fact, to ask you about him. A thought has occurred to me, Dick; your friend over the way—'

'Which friend?'

'In the first floor.'

'Yes?'

'Your friend in the first floor, Dick, may know him.'

'No, he don't,' said Mr Swiveller, shaking his head.

'Don't! No, because he has never seen him,' rejoined Quilp; 'but if we were to bring them together, who knows, Dick, but Fred, properly introduced, would serve his turn almost as well as little Nell or her grandfather—who knows but it might make the young fellow's fortune, and, through him, yours, eh?'

'Why, the fact is, you see,' said Mr Swiveller, 'that they HAVE been brought together.'

'Have been!' cried the dwarf, looking suspiciously at his companion. 'Through whose means?' 'Through mine,' said Dick, slightly confused. 'Didn't I mention it to you the last time you called over yonder?'

'You know you didn't,' returned the dwarf.

'I believe you're right,' said Dick. 'No. I didn't, I recollect. Oh yes, I brought 'em together that very day. It was Fred's suggestion.'

'And what came of it?'

'Why, instead of my friend's bursting into tears when he knew who Fred was, embracing him kindly, and telling him that he was his grandfather, or his grandmother in disguise (which we fully expected), he flew into a tremendous passion; called him all manner of names; said it was in a great measure his fault that little Nell and the old gentleman had ever been brought to poverty; didn't hint at our taking anything to drink; and—and in short rather turned us out of the room than otherwise.'

'That's strange,' said the dwarf, musing.

'So we remarked to each other at the time,' returned Dick coolly, 'but quite true.'

Quilp was plainly staggered by this intelligence, over which he brooded for some time in moody silence, often raising his eyes to Mr Swiveller's face, and sharply scanning its expression. As he could read in it, however, no additional information or anything to lead him to believe he had spoken falsely; and as Mr Swiveller, left to his own meditations, sighed deeply, and was evidently growing maudlin on the subject of Mrs Cheggs; the dwarf soon broke up the conference and took his departure, leaving the bereaved one to his melancholy ruminations.

'Have been brought together, eh?' said the dwarf as he walked the streets alone. 'My friend has stolen a march upon me. It led him to nothing, and therefore is no great matter, save in the intention. I'm glad he has lost his mistress. Ha ha! The blockhead mustn't leave the law at present. I'm sure of him where he is, whenever I want him for my own purposes, and, besides, he's a good unconscious spy on Brass, and tells, in his cups, all that he sees and hears. You're useful to me, Dick, and cost nothing but a little treating now and then. I am not sure that it may not be worth while, before long, to take credit with the stranger, Dick, by discovering your designs upon the child; but for the present we'll remain the best friends in the world, with your good leave.'

Pursuing these thoughts, and gasping as he went along, after his own peculiar fashion, Mr Quilp once more crossed the Thames, and shut himself up in his Bachelor's Hall, which, by reason of its newly-erected chimney depositing the smoke inside the room and carrying none of it off, was not quite so agreeable as more fastidious people might have desired. Such inconveniences, however, instead of disgusting the dwarf with his new abode, rather suited his humour; so, after dining luxuriously from the public-house, he lighted his pipe, and smoked against the chimney until nothing of him was visible through the mist but a pair of red and highly inflamed eyes, with sometimes a dim vision of his head and face, as, in a violent fit of coughing, he slightly stirred the smoke and scattered the heavy wreaths by which they were obscured. In the midst of this atmosphere, which must infallibly have smothered any other man, Mr Quilp passed the evening with great cheerfulness; solacing himself all the time with the pipe and the case-bottle; and occasionally entertaining himself with a melodious howl, intended for a song, but bearing not the faintest resemblance to any scrap of any piece of music, vocal or instrumental, ever invented by man. Thus he amused himself until nearly midnight, when he turned into his hammock with the utmost satisfaction.

The first sound that met his ears in the morning—as he half opened his eyes, and, finding himself so unusually near the ceiling, entertained a drowsy idea that he must have been transformed into a fly or blue-bottle in the course of the night,—was that of a stifled sobbing and weeping in the room. Peeping cautiously over the side of his hammock, he descried Mrs Quilp, to whom, after contemplating her for some time in silence, he communicated a violent start by suddenly yelling out—'Halloa!'

'Oh, Quilp!' cried his poor little wife, looking up. 'How you frightened me!'

'I meant to, you jade,' returned the dwarf. 'What do you want here? I'm dead, an't I?'

'Oh, please come home, do come home,' said Mrs Quilp, sobbing; 'we'll never do so any more, Quilp, and after all it was only a mistake that grew out of our anxiety.'

'Out of your anxiety,' grinned the dwarf. 'Yes, I know that—out of your anxiety for my death. I shall come home when I please, I tell you. I shall come home when I please, and go when I please. I'll be a Will o' the Wisp, now here, now there, dancing about you always, starting up when you least expect me, and keeping you in a constant state of restlessness and irritation. Will you begone?'

Mrs Quilp durst only make a gesture of entreaty.

'I tell you no,' cried the dwarf. 'No. If you dare to come here again unless you're sent for, I'll keep watch-dogs in the yard that'll growl and bite—I'll have man-traps, cunningly altered and improved for catching women—I'll have spring guns, that shall explode when you tread upon the wires, and blow you into little pieces. Will you begone?'

'Do forgive me. Do come back,' said his wife, earnestly.

'No-o-o-o-o!' roared Quilp. 'Not till my own good time, and then I'll return again as often as I choose, and be accountable to nobody for my goings or comings. You see the door there. Will you go?'

Mr Quilp delivered this last command in such a very energetic voice, and moreover accompanied it with such a sudden gesture, indicative of an intention to spring out of his hammock, and, night-capped as he was, bear his wife home again through the public streets, that she sped away like an arrow. Her worthy lord stretched his neck and eyes until she had crossed the yard, and then, not at all sorry to have had this opportunity of carrying his point, and asserting the sanctity of his castle, fell into an immoderate fit of laughter, and laid himself down to sleep again.

CHAPTER 51

The bland and open-hearted proprietor of Bachelor's Hall slept on amidst the congenial accompaniments of rain, mud, dirt, damp, fog, and rats, until late in the day; when, summoning his valet Tom Scott to assist him to rise, and to prepare breakfast, he quitted his couch, and made his toilet. This duty performed, and his repast ended, he again betook himself to Bevis Marks.

This visit was not intended for Mr Swiveller, but for his friend and employer Mr Sampson Brass. Both gentlemen however were from home, nor was the life and light of law, Miss Sally, at her post either. The fact of their joint desertion of the office was made known to all comers by a scrap of paper in the hand-writing of Mr Swiveller, which was attached to the bell-handle, and which, giving the reader no clue to the time of day when it was first posted, furnished him with the rather vague and unsatisfactory information that that gentleman would 'return in an hour.'

'There's a servant, I suppose,' said the dwarf, knocking at the house-door. 'She'll do.'

After a sufficiently long interval, the door was opened, and a small voice immediately accosted him with, 'Oh please will you leave a card or message?'

'Eh?' said the dwarf, looking down, (it was something quite new to him) upon the small servant.

To this, the child, conducting her conversation as upon the occasion of her first interview with Mr Swiveller, again replied, 'Oh please will you leave a card or message?'

'I'll write a note,' said the dwarf, pushing past her into the office; 'and mind your master has it directly he comes home.' So Mr Quilp climbed up to the top of a tall stool to write the note, and the small servant, carefully tutored for such emergencies, looked on with her eyes wide open, ready, if he so much as abstracted a wafer, to rush into the street and give the alarm to the police.

As Mr Quilp folded his note (which was soon written: being a very short one) he encountered the gaze of the small servant. He looked at her, long and earnestly.

'How are you?' said the dwarf, moistening a wafer with horrible grimaces.

The small servant, perhaps frightened by his looks, returned no audible reply; but it appeared from the motion of her lips that she was inwardly repeating the same form of expression concerning the note or message.

'Do they use you ill here? is your mistress a Tartar?' said Quilp with a chuckle.

In reply to the last interrogation, the small servant, with a look of infinite cunning mingled with fear, screwed up her mouth very tight and round, and nodded violently. Whether there was anything in the peculiar slyness of her action which fascinated Mr Quilp, or anything in the expression of her features at the moment which attracted his attention for some other reason; or whether it merely occurred to him as a pleasant whim to stare the small servant out of countenance; certain it is, that he planted his elbows square and firmly on the desk, and squeezing up his cheeks with his hands, looked at her fixedly.

'Where do you come from?' he said after a long pause, stroking his chin.

'I don't know.'

'What's your name?'

'Nothing.'

'Nonsense!' retorted Quilp. 'What does your mistress call you when she wants you?'

'A little devil,' said the child.

She added in the same breath, as if fearful of any further questioning, 'But please will you leave a card or message?'

These unusual answers might naturally have provoked some more inquiries. Quilp, however, without uttering another word, withdrew his eyes from the small servant, stroked his chin more thoughtfully than before, and then, bending over the note as if to direct it with scrupulous and hair-breadth nicety, looked at her, covertly but very narrowly, from under his bushy eyebrows. The result of this secret survey was, that he shaded his face with his hands, and laughed slyly and noiselessly, until every vein in it was swollen almost to bursting. Pulling his hat over his brow to conceal his mirth and its effects, he tossed the letter to the child, and hastily withdrew.

Once in the street, moved by some secret impulse, he laughed, and held his sides, and laughed again, and tried to peer through the dusty area railings as if to catch another glimpse of the child, until he was quite tired out. At last, he travelled back to the Wilderness, which was within rifle-shot of his bachelor retreat, and ordered tea in the wooden summer-house that afternoon for three persons; an invitation to Miss Sally Brass and her brother to partake of that entertainment at that place, having been the object both of his journey and his note.

It was not precisely the kind of weather in which people usually take tea in summer-houses, far less in summer-houses in an advanced state of decay, and overlooking the slimy banks of a great river at low water. Nevertheless, it was in this choice retreat that Mr Quilp ordered a cold collation to be prepared, and it was beneath its cracked and leaky roof that he, in due course of time, received Mr Sampson and his sister Sally.

'You're fond of the beauties of nature,' said Quilp with a grin. 'Is this charming, Brass? Is it unusual, unsophisticated, primitive?'

'It's delightful indeed, sir,' replied the lawyer.

'Cool?' said Quilp.

'N-not particularly so, I think, sir,' rejoined Brass, with his teeth chattering in his head.

'Perhaps a little damp and ague-ish?' said Quilp.

'Just damp enough to be cheerful, sir,' rejoined Brass. 'Nothing more, sir, nothing more.'

'And Sally?' said the delighted dwarf. 'Does she like it?'

'She'll like it better,' returned that strong-minded lady, 'when she has tea; so let us have it, and don't bother.'

'Sweet Sally!' cried Quilp, extending his arms as if about to embrace her. 'Gentle, charming, overwhelming Sally.'

'He's a very remarkable man indeed!' soliloquised Mr Brass. 'He's quite a Troubadour, you know; quite a Troubadour!'

These complimentary expressions were uttered in a somewhat absent and distracted manner; for the unfortunate lawyer, besides having a bad cold in his head, had got wet in coming, and would have willingly borne some pecuniary sacrifice if he could have shifted his present raw quarters to a warm room, and dried himself at a fire. Quilp, however—who, beyond the gratification of his demon whims, owed Sampson some acknowledgment of the part he had played in the mourning scene of which he had been a hidden witness, marked these symptoms of uneasiness with a delight past all expression, and derived from them a secret joy which the costliest banquet could never have afforded him.

It is worthy of remark, too, as illustrating a little feature in the character of Miss Sally Brass, that, although on her own account she would have borne the discomforts of the Wilderness with a very ill grace, and would probably, indeed, have walked off before the tea appeared, she no sooner beheld the latent uneasiness and misery of her brother than she developed a grim satisfaction, and began to enjoy herself after her own manner. Though the wet came stealing through the roof and trickling down upon their heads, Miss Brass uttered no complaint, but presided over the tea equipage with imperturbable composure. While Mr Quilp, in his uproarious hospitality, seated himself upon an empty beer-barrel, vaunted the place as the most beautiful and comfortable in the three kingdoms, and elevating his glass, drank to their next merry-meeting in that jovial spot; and Mr Brass, with the rain plashing down into his tea-cup, made a dismal attempt to pluck up his spirits and appear at his ease; and Tom Scott, who was in waiting at the door under an old umbrella, exulted in his agonies, and bade fair to split his sides with laughing; while all this was passing, Miss Sally Brass, unmindful of the wet which dripped down upon her own feminine person and fair apparel, sat placidly behind the tea-board, erect and grizzly, contemplating the unhappiness of her brother with a mind at ease, and content, in her amiable disregard of self, to sit there all night, witnessing the torments which his avaricious and grovelling nature compelled him to endure and forbade him to resent. And this, it must be observed, or the illustration would be incomplete, although in a business point of view she had the strongest sympathy with Mr Sampson, and would have been beyond measure indignant if he had thwarted their client in any one respect.

In the height of his boisterous merriment, Mr Quilp, having on some pretence dismissed his attendant sprite for the moment, resumed his usual manner all at once, dismounted from his cask, and laid his hand upon the lawyer's sleeve.

'A word,' said the dwarf, 'before we go farther. Sally, hark'ee for a minute.'

Miss Sally drew closer, as if accustomed to business conferences with their host which were the better for not having air.

'Business,' said the dwarf, glancing from brother to sister. 'Very private business. Lay your heads together when you're by yourselves.'

'Certainly, sir,' returned Brass, taking out his pocket-book and pencil. 'I'll take down the heads if you please, sir. Remarkable documents,' added the lawyer, raising his eyes to the ceiling, 'most remarkable documents. He states his points so clearly that it's a treat to have 'em! I don't know any act of parliament that's equal to him in clearness.'

'I shall deprive you of a treat,' said Quilp. 'Put up your book. We don't want any documents. So. There's a lad named Kit—'

Miss Sally nodded, implying that she knew of him.

'Kit!' said Mr Sampson.—'Kit! Ha! I've heard the name before, but I don't exactly call to mind—I don't exactly—'

'You're as slow as a tortoise, and more thick-headed than a rhinoceros,' returned his obliging client with an impatient gesture.

'He's extremely pleasant!' cried the obsequious Sampson. 'His acquaintance with Natural History too is surprising. Quite a Buffoon, quite!'

There is no doubt that Mr Brass intended some compliment or other; and it has been argued with show of reason that he would have said Buffon, but made use of a superfluous vowel. Be this as it may, Quilp gave him no time for correction, as he performed that office himself by more than tapping him on the head with the handle of his umbrella.

'Don't let's have any wrangling,' said Miss Sally, staying his hand. 'I've showed you that I know him, and that's enough.'

'She's always foremost!' said the dwarf, patting her on the back and looking contemptuously at Sampson. 'I don't like Kit, Sally.'

'Nor I,' rejoined Miss Brass.

'Nor I,' said Sampson.

'Why, that's right!' cried Quilp. 'Half our work is done already. This Kit is one of your honest people; one of your fair characters; a prowling prying hound; a hypocrite; a double-faced, white-livered, sneaking spy; a crouching cur to those that feed and coax him, and a barking yelping dog to all besides.'

'Fearfully eloquent!' cried Brass with a sneeze. 'Quite appalling!'

'Come to the point,' said Miss Sally, 'and don't talk so much.'

'Right again!' exclaimed Quilp, with another contemptuous look at Sampson, 'always foremost! I say, Sally, he is a yelping, insolent dog to all besides, and most of all, to me. In short, I owe him a grudge.' 'That's enough, sir,' said Sampson.

'No, it's not enough, sir,' sneered Quilp; 'will you hear me out? Besides that I owe him a grudge on that account, he thwarts me at this minute, and stands between me and an end which might otherwise prove a golden one to us all. Apart from that, I repeat that he crosses my humour, and I hate him. Now, you know the lad, and can guess the rest. Devise your own means of putting him out of my way, and execute them. Shall it be done?'

'It shall, sir,' said Sampson.

'Then give me your hand,' retorted Quilp. 'Sally, girl, yours. I rely as much, or more, on you than him. Tom Scott comes back. Lantern, pipes, more grog, and a jolly night of it!'

No other word was spoken, no other look exchanged, which had the slightest reference to this, the real occasion of their meeting. The trio were well accustomed to act together, and were linked to each other by ties of mutual interest and advantage, and nothing more was needed. Resuming his boisterous manner with the same ease with which he had thrown it off, Quilp was in an instant the same uproarious, reckless little savage he had been a few seconds before. It was ten o'clock at night before the amiable Sally supported her beloved and loving brother from the Wilderness, by which time he needed the utmost support her tender frame could render; his walk being from some unknown reason anything but steady, and his legs constantly doubling up in unexpected places.

Overpowered, notwithstanding his late prolonged slumbers, by the fatigues of the last few days, the dwarf lost no time in creeping to his dainty house, and was soon dreaming in his hammock. Leaving him to visions, in which perhaps the quiet figures we quitted in the old church porch were not without their share, be it our task to rejoin them as they sat and watched.

CHAPTER 52

After a long time, the schoolmaster appeared at the wicket-gate of the churchyard, and hurried towards them, Tingling in his hand, as he came along, a bundle of rusty keys. He was quite breathless with pleasure and haste when he reached the porch, and at first could only point towards the old building which the child had been contemplating so earnestly.

'You see those two old houses,' he said at last.

'Yes, surely,' replied Nell. 'I have been looking at them nearly all the time you have been away.'

'And you would have looked at them more curiously yet, if you could have guessed what I have to tell you,' said her friend. 'One of those houses is mine.'

Without saying any more, or giving the child time to reply, the schoolmaster took her hand, and, his honest face quite radiant with exultation, led her to the place of which he spoke.

They stopped before its low arched door. After trying several of the keys in vain, the schoolmaster found one to fit the huge lock, which turned back, creaking, and admitted them into the house.

The room into which they entered was a vaulted chamber once nobly ornamented by cunning architects, and still retaining, in its beautiful groined roof and rich stone tracery, choice remnants of its ancient splendour. Foliage carved in the stone, and emulating the mastery of Nature's hand, yet remained to tell how many times the leaves outside had come and gone, while it lived on unchanged. The broken figures supporting the burden of the chimney-piece, though mutilated, were still distinguishable for what they had been—far different from the dust without—and showed sadly by the empty hearth, like creatures who had outlived their kind, and mourned their own too slow decay.

In some old time—for even change was old in that old place—a wooden partition had been constructed in one part of the chamber to form a sleeping-closet, into which the light was admitted at the same period by a rude window, or rather niche, cut in the solid wall. This screen, together with two seats in the broad chimney, had at some forgotten date been part of the church or convent; for the oak, hastily appropriated to its present purpose, had been little altered from its former shape, and presented to the eye a pile of fragments of rich carving from old monkish stalls.

An open door leading to a small room or cell, dim with the light that came through leaves of ivy, completed the interior of this portion of the ruin. It was not quite destitute of furniture. A few strange chairs, whose arms and legs looked as though they had dwindled away with age; a table, the very spectre of its race: a great old chest that had once held records in the church, with other quaintly-fashioned domestic necessaries, and store of fire-wood for the winter, were scattered around, and gave evident tokens of its occupation as a dwelling-place at no very distant time.

The child looked around her, with that solemn feeling with which we contemplate the work of ages that have become but drops of water in the great ocean of eternity. The old man had followed them, but they were all three hushed for a space, and drew their breath softly, as if they feared to break the silence even by so slight a sound.

'It is a very beautiful place!' said the child, in a low voice.

'I almost feared you thought otherwise,' returned the schoolmaster. 'You shivered when we first came in, as if you felt it cold or gloomy.'

'It was not that,' said Nell, glancing round with a slight shudder. 'Indeed I cannot tell you what it was, but when I saw the outside, from the church porch, the same feeling came over me. It is its being so old and grey perhaps.'

'A peaceful place to live in, don't you think so?' said her friend.

'Oh yes,' rejoined the child, clasping her hands earnestly. 'A quiet, happy place—a place to live and learn to die in!' She would have said more, but that the energy of her thoughts caused her voice to falter, and come in trembling whispers from her lips.

'A place to live, and learn to live, and gather health of mind and body in,' said the schoolmaster; 'for this old house is yours.'

'Ours!' cried the child.

'Ay,' returned the schoolmaster gaily, 'for many a merry year to come, I hope. I shall be a close neighbour—only next door—but this house is yours.'

Having now disburdened himself of his great surprise, the schoolmaster sat down, and drawing Nell to his side, told her how he had learnt that ancient tenement had been occupied for a very long time by an old person, nearly a hundred years of age, who kept the keys of the church, opened and closed it for the services, and showed it to strangers; how she had died not many weeks ago, and nobody had yet been found to fill the office; how, learning all this in an interview with the sexton, who was confined to his bed by rheumatism, he had been bold to make mention of his fellow-traveller, which had been so favourably received by that high authority, that he had taken courage, acting on his advice, to propound the matter to the clergyman. In a word, the result of his exertions was, that Nell and her grandfather were to be carried before the last-named gentleman next day; and, his approval of their conduct and appearance reserved as a matter of form, that they were already appointed to the vacant post.

'There's a small allowance of money,' said the schoolmaster. 'It is not much, but still enough to live upon in this retired spot. By clubbing our funds together, we shall do bravely; no fear of that.'

'Heaven bless and prosper you!' sobbed the child.

'Amen, my dear,' returned her friend cheerfully; 'and all of us, as it will, and has, in leading us through sorrow and trouble to this tranquil life. But we must look at MY house now. Come!'

They repaired to the other tenement; tried the rusty keys as before; at length found the right one; and opened the worm-eaten door. It led into a chamber, vaulted and old, like that from which they had come, but not so spacious, and having only one other little room attached. It was not difficult to divine that the other house was of right the schoolmaster's, and that he had chosen for himself the least commodious, in his care and regard for them. Like the adjoining habitation, it held such old articles of furniture as were absolutely necessary, and had its stack of fire-wood.

To make these dwellings as habitable and full of comfort as they could, was now their pleasant care. In a short time, each had its cheerful fire glowing and crackling on the hearth, and reddening the pale old wall with a hale and healthy blush. Nell, busily plying her needle, repaired the tattered window-hangings, drew together the rents that time had worn in the threadbare scraps of carpet, and made them whole and decent. The schoolmaster swept and smoothed the ground before the door, trimmed the long grass, trained the ivy and creeping plants which hung their drooping heads in melancholy neglect; and gave to the outer walls a cheery air of home. The old man, sometimes by his side and sometimes with the child, lent his aid to both, went here and there on little patient services, and was happy. Neighbours, too, as they came from work, proffered their help; or sent their children with such small presents or loans as the strangers needed most. It was a busy day; and night came on, and found them wondering that there was yet so much to do, and that it should be dark so soon.

They took their supper together, in the house which may be henceforth called the child's; and, when they had finished their meal, drew round the fire, and almost in whispers—their hearts were too quiet and glad for loud expression—discussed their future plans. Before they separated, the schoolmaster read some prayers aloud; and then, full of gratitude and happiness, they parted for the night.

At that silent hour, when her grandfather was sleeping peacefully in his bed, and every sound was hushed, the child lingered before the dying embers, and thought of her past fortunes as if they had been a dream And she only now awoke. The glare of the sinking flame, reflected in the oaken panels whose carved tops were dimly seen in the dusky roof—the aged walls, where strange shadows came and went with every flickering of the fire—the solemn presence, within, of that decay which falls on senseless things the most enduring in their nature: and, without, and round about on every side, of Death—filled her with deep and thoughtful feelings, but with none of terror or alarm. A change had been gradually stealing over her, in the time of her loneliness and sorrow. With failing strength and heightening resolution, there had sprung up a purified and altered mind; there had grown in her bosom blessed thoughts and hopes, which are the portion of few but the weak and drooping. There were none to see the frail, perishable figure, as it glided from the fire and leaned pensively at the open casement; none but the stars, to look into the upturned face and read its history. The old church bell rang out the hour with a mournful sound, as if it had grown sad from so much communing with the dead and unheeded warning to the living; the fallen leaves rustled; the grass stirred upon the graves; all else was still and sleeping.

Some of those dreamless sleepers lay close within the shadow of the church—touching the wall, as if they clung to it for comfort and protection. Others had chosen to lie beneath the changing shade of trees; others by the path, that footsteps might come near them; others, among the graves of little children. Some had desired to rest beneath the very ground they had trodden in their daily walks; some, where the setting sun might shine upon their beds; some, where its light would fall upon them when it rose. Perhaps not one of the imprisoned souls had been able quite to separate itself in living thought from its old companion. If any had, it had still felt for it a love like that which captives have been known to bear towards the cell in which they have been long confined, and, even at parting, hung upon its narrow bounds affectionately.

It was long before the child closed the window, and approached her bed. Again something of the same sensation as before—an involuntary chill—a momentary feeling akin to fear—but vanishing directly, and leaving no alarm behind. Again, too, dreams of the little scholar; of the roof opening, and a column of bright faces, rising far away into the sky, as she had seen in some old scriptural picture once, and looking down on her, asleep. It was a sweet and happy dream. The quiet spot, outside, seemed to remain the same, saving that there was music in the air, and a sound of angels' wings. After a time the sisters came there, hand in hand, and stood among the graves. And then the dream grew dim, and faded.

With the brightness and joy of morning, came the renewal of yesterday's labours, the revival of its pleasant thoughts, the restoration of its energies, cheerfulness, and hope. They worked gaily in ordering and arranging their houses until noon, and then went to visit the clergyman.

He was a simple-hearted old gentleman, of a shrinking, subdued spirit, accustomed to retirement, and very little acquainted with the world, which he had left many years before to come and settle in that place. His wife had died in the house in which he still lived, and he had long since lost sight of any earthly cares or hopes beyond it.

He received them very kindly, and at once showed an interest in Nell; asking her name, and age, her birthplace, the circumstances which had led her there, and so forth. The schoolmaster had already told her story. They had no other friends or home to leave, he said, and had come to share his fortunes. He loved the child as though she were his own.

'Well, well,' said the clergyman. 'Let it be as you desire. She is very young.' 'Old in adversity and trial, sir,' replied the schoolmaster.

'God help her. Let her rest, and forget them,' said the old gentleman. 'But an old church is a dull and gloomy place for one so young as you, my child.'

'Oh no, sir,' returned Nell. 'I have no such thoughts, indeed.'

'I would rather see her dancing on the green at nights,' said the old gentleman, laying his hand upon her head, and smiling sadly, 'than have her sitting in the shadow of our mouldering arches. You must look to this, and see that her heart does not grow heavy among these solemn ruins. Your request is granted, friend.'

After more kind words, they withdrew, and repaired to the child's house; where they were yet in conversation on their happy fortune, when another friend appeared.

This was a little old gentleman, who lived in the parsonage-house, and had resided there (so they learnt soon afterwards) ever since the death of the clergyman's wife, which had happened fifteen years before. He had been his college friend and always his close companion; in the first shock of his grief he had come to console and comfort him; and from that time they had never parted company. The little old gentleman was the active spirit of the place, the adjuster of all differences, the promoter of all merry-makings, the dispenser of his friend's bounty, and of no small charity of his own besides; the universal mediator, comforter, and friend. None of the simple villagers had cared to ask his name, or, when they knew it, to store it in their memory. Perhaps from some vague rumour of his college honours which had been whispered abroad on his first arrival, perhaps because he was an unmarried, unencumbered gentleman, he had been called the bachelor. The name pleased him, or suited him as well as any other, and the Bachelor he had ever since remained. And the bachelor it was, it may be added, who with his own hands had laid in the stock of fuel which the wanderers had found in their new habitation.

The bachelor, then—to call him by his usual appellation—lifted the latch, showed his little round mild face for a moment at the door, and stepped into the room like one who was no stranger to it.

'You are Mr Marton, the new schoolmaster?' he said, greeting Nell's kind friend.

'I am, sir.'

'You come well recommended, and I am glad to see you. I should have been in the way yesterday, expecting you, but I rode across the country to carry a message from a sick mother to her daughter in service some miles off, and have but just now returned. This is our young church-keeper? You are not the less welcome, friend, for her sake, or for this old man's; nor the worse teacher for having learnt humanity.' 'She has been ill, sir, very lately,' said the schoolmaster, in answer to the look with which their visitor regarded Nell when he had kissed her cheek.

'Yes, yes. I know she has,' he rejoined. 'There have been suffering and heartache here.'

'Indeed there have, sir.'

The little old gentleman glanced at the grandfather, and back again at the child, whose hand he took tenderly in his, and held.

'You will be happier here,' he said; 'we will try, at least, to make you so. You have made great improvements here already. Are they the work of your hands?'

'Yes, sir.'

'We may make some others—not better in themselves, but with better means perhaps,' said the bachelor. 'Let us see now, let us see.'

Nell accompanied him into the other little rooms, and over both the houses, in which he found various small comforts wanting, which he engaged to supply from a certain collection of odds and ends he had at home, and which must have been a very miscellaneous and extensive one, as it comprehended the most opposite articles imaginable. They all came, however, and came without loss of time; for the little old gentleman, disappearing for some five or ten minutes, presently returned, laden with old shelves, rugs, blankets, and other household gear, and followed by a boy bearing a similar load. These being cast on the floor in a promiscuous heap, yielded a quantity of occupation in arranging, erecting, and putting away; the superintendence of which task evidently afforded the old gentleman extreme delight, and engaged him for some time with great briskness and activity. When nothing more was left to be done, he charged the boy to run off and bring his schoolmates to be marshalled before their new master, and solemnly reviewed.

'As good a set of fellows, Marton, as you'd wish to see,' he said, turning to the schoolmaster when the boy was gone; 'but I don't let 'em know I think so. That wouldn't do, at all.'

The messenger soon returned at the head of a long row of urchins, great and small, who, being confronted by the bachelor at the house door, fell into various convulsions of politeness; clutching their hats and caps, squeezing them into the smallest possible dimensions, and making all manner of bows and scrapes, which the little old gentleman contemplated with excessive satisfaction, and expressed his approval of by a great many nods and smiles. Indeed, his approbation of the boys was by no means so scrupulously disguised as he had led the schoolmaster to suppose, inasmuch as it broke out in sundry loud whispers and confidential remarks which were perfectly audible to them every one. 'This first boy, schoolmaster,' said the bachelor, 'is John Owen; a lad of good parts, sir, and frank, honest temper; but too thoughtless, too playful, too light-headed by far. That boy, my good sir, would break his neck with pleasure, and deprive his parents of their chief comfort—and between ourselves, when you come to see him at hare and hounds, taking the fence and ditch by the finger-post, and sliding down the face of the little quarry, you'll never forget it. It's beautiful!'

John Owen having been thus rebuked, and being in perfect possession of the speech aside, the bachelor singled out another boy.

'Now, look at that lad, sir,' said the bachelor. 'You see that fellow? Richard Evans his name is, sir. An amazing boy to learn, blessed with a good memory, and a ready understanding, and moreover with a good voice and ear for psalm-singing, in which he is the best among us. Yet, sir, that boy will come to a bad end; he'll never die in his bed; he's always falling asleep in sermon-time—and to tell you the truth, Mr Marton, I always did the same at his age, and feel quite certain that it was natural to my constitution and I couldn't help it.'

This hopeful pupil edified by the above terrible reproval, the bachelor turned to another.

'But if we talk of examples to be shunned,' said he, 'if we come to boys that should be a warning and a beacon to all their fellows, here's the one, and I hope you won't spare him. This is the lad, sir; this one with the blue eyes and light hair. This is a swimmer, sir, this fellow—a diver, Lord save us! This is a boy, sir, who had a fancy for plunging into eighteen feet of water, with his clothes on, and bringing up a blind man's dog, who was being drowned by the weight of his chain and collar, while his master stood wringing his hands upon the bank, bewailing the loss of his guide and friend. I sent the boy two guineas anonymously, sir,' added the bachelor, in his peculiar whisper, 'directly I heard of it; but never mention it on any account, for he hasn't the least idea that it came from me.'

Having disposed of this culprit, the bachelor turned to another, and from him to another, and so on through the whole array, laying, for their wholesome restriction within due bounds, the same cutting emphasis on such of their propensities as were dearest to his heart and were unquestionably referrable to his own precept and example. Thoroughly persuaded, in the end, that he had made them miserable by his severity, he dismissed them with a small present, and an admonition to walk quietly home, without any leapings, scufflings, or turnings out of the way; which injunction, he informed the schoolmaster in the same audible confidence, he did not think he could have obeyed when he was a boy, had his life depended on it.

Hailing these little tokens of the bachelor's disposition as so many assurances of his own welcome course from that time, the schoolmaster parted from him with a light heart and joyous spirits, and deemed himself one of the happiest men on earth. The windows of the two old houses were ruddy again, that night, with the reflection of the cheerful fires that burnt within; and the bachelor and his friend, pausing to look upon them as they returned from their evening walk, spoke softly together of the beautiful child, and looked round upon the churchyard with a sigh.

CHAPTER 53

Nell was stirring early in the morning, and having discharged her household tasks, and put everything in order for the good schoolmaster (though sorely against his will, for he would have spared her the pains), took down, from its nail by the fireside, a little bundle of keys with which the bachelor had formally invested her on the previous day, and went out alone to visit the old church.

The sky was serene and bright, the air clear, perfumed with the fresh scent of newly fallen leaves, and grateful to every sense. The neighbouring stream sparkled, and rolled onward with a tuneful sound; the dew glistened on the green mounds, like tears shed by Good Spirits over the dead. Some young children sported among the tombs, and hid from each other, with laughing faces. They had an infant with them, and had laid it down asleep upon a child's grave, in a little bed of leaves. It was a new grave—the resting-place, perhaps, of some little creature, who, meek and patient in its illness, had often sat and watched them, and now seemed, to their minds, scarcely changed.

She drew near and asked one of them whose grave it was. The child answered that that was not its name; it was a garden—his brother's. It was greener, he said, than all the other gardens, and the birds loved it better because he had been used to feed them. When he had done speaking, he looked at her with a smile, and kneeling down and nestling for a moment with his cheek against the turf, bounded merrily away.

She passed the church, gazing upward at its old tower, went through the wicket gate, and so into the village. The old sexton, leaning on a crutch, was taking the air at his cottage door, and gave her good morrow.

'You are better?' said the child, stopping to speak with him.

'Ay surely,' returned the old man. 'I'm thankful to say, much better.'

'YOU will be quite well soon.'

'With Heaven's leave, and a little patience. But come in, come in!' The old man limped on before, and warning her of the downward step, which he achieved himself with no small difficulty, led the way into his little cottage.

'It is but one room you see. There is another up above, but the stair has got harder to climb o' late years, and I never use it. I'm thinking of taking to it again, next summer, though.'

The child wondered how a grey-headed man like him—one of his trade too—could talk of time so easily. He saw her eyes wandering to the tools that hung upon the wall, and smiled.

'I warrant now,' he said, 'that you think all those are used in making graves.'

'Indeed, I wondered that you wanted so many.'

'And well you might. I am a gardener. I dig the ground, and plant things that are to live and grow. My works don't all moulder away, and rot in the earth. You see that spade in the centre?'

'The very old one—so notched and worn? Yes.'

'That's the sexton's spade, and it's a well-used one, as you see. We're healthy people here, but it has done a power of work. If it could speak now, that spade, it would tell you of many an unexpected job that it and I have done together; but I forget 'em, for my memory's a poor one.—That's nothing new,' he added hastily. 'It always was.'

'There are flowers and shrubs to speak to your other work,' said the child.

'Oh yes. And tall trees. But they are not so separate from the sexton's labours as you think.'

'No!'

'Not in my mind, and recollection—such as it is,' said the old man. 'Indeed they often help it. For say that I planted such a tree for such a man. There it stands, to remind me that he died. When I look at its broad shadow, and remember what it was in his time, it helps me to the age of my other work, and I can tell you pretty nearly when I made his grave.'

'But it may remind you of one who is still alive,' said the child.

'Of twenty that are dead, in connexion with that one who lives, then,' rejoined the old man; 'wife, husband, parents, brothers, sisters, children, friends—a score at least. So it happens that the sexton's spade gets worn and battered. I shall need a new one—next summer.'

The child looked quickly towards him, thinking that he jested with his age and infirmity: but the unconscious sexton was quite in earnest.

'Ah!' he said, after a brief silence. 'People never learn. They never learn. It's only we who turn up the ground, where nothing grows and everything decays, who think of such things as these—who think of them properly, I mean. You have been into the church?'

'I am going there now,' the child replied.

'There's an old well there,' said the sexton, 'right underneath the belfry; a deep, dark, echoing well. Forty year ago, you had only to let down the bucket till the first knot in the rope was free of the windlass, and you heard it splashing in the cold dull water. By little and little the water fell away, so that in ten year after that, a second knot was made, and you must unwind so much rope, or the bucket swung tight and empty at the end. In ten years' time, the water fell again, and a third knot was made. In ten years more, the well dried up; and now, if you lower the bucket till your arms are tired, and let out nearly all the cord, you'll hear it, of a sudden, clanking and rattling on the ground below; with a sound of being so deep and so far down, that your heart leaps into your mouth, and you start away as if you were falling in.'

'A dreadful place to come on in the dark!' exclaimed the child, who had followed the old man's looks and words until she seemed to stand upon its brink.

'What is it but a grave!' said the sexton. 'What else! And which of our old folks, knowing all this, thought, as the spring subsided, of their own failing strength, and lessening life? Not one!'

'Are you very old yourself?' asked the child, involuntarily.

'I shall be seventy-nine—next summer.'

'You still work when you are well?'

'Work! To be sure. You shall see my gardens hereabout. Look at the window there. I made, and have kept, that plot of ground entirely with my own hands. By this time next year I shall hardly see the sky, the boughs will have grown so thick. I have my winter work at night besides.'

He opened, as he spoke, a cupboard close to where he sat, and produced some miniature boxes, carved in a homely manner and made of old wood.

'Some gentlefolks who are fond of ancient days, and what belongs to them,' he said, 'like to buy these keepsakes from our church and ruins. Sometimes, I make them of scraps of oak, that turn up here and there; sometimes of bits of coffins which the vaults have long preserved. See here—this is a little chest of the last kind, clasped at the edges with fragments of brass plates that had writing on 'em once, though it would be hard to read it now. I haven't many by me at this time of year, but these shelves will be full—next summer.'

The child admired and praised his work, and shortly afterwards departed; thinking, as she went, how strange it was, that this old man, drawing from his pursuits, and everything around him, one stern moral, never contemplated its application to himself; and, while he dwelt upon the uncertainty of human life, seemed both in word and deed to deem himself immortal. But her musings did not stop here, for she was wise enough to think that by a good and merciful adjustment this must be human nature, and that the old sexton, with his plans for next summer, was but a type of all mankind.

Full of these meditations, she reached the church. It was easy to find the key belonging to the outer door, for each was labelled on a scrap of yellow parchment. Its very turning in the lock awoke a hollow sound, and when she entered with a faltering step, the echoes that it raised in closing, made her start.

If the peace of the simple village had moved the child more strongly, because of the dark and troubled ways that lay beyond, and through which she had journeyed with such failing feet, what was the deep impression of finding herself alone in that solemn building, where the very light, coming through sunken windows, seemed old and grey, and the air, redolent of earth and mould, seemed laden with decay, purified by time of all its grosser particles, and sighing through arch and aisle, and clustered pillars, like the breath of ages gone! Here was the broken pavement, worn, so long ago, by pious feet, that Time, stealing on the pilgrims' steps, had trodden out their track, and left but crumbling stones. Here were the rotten beam, the sinking arch, the sapped and mouldering wall, the lowly trench of earth, the stately tomb on which no epitaph remained—all—marble, stone, iron, wood, and dust—one common monument of ruin. The best work and the worst, the plainest and the richest, the stateliest and the least imposing—both of Heaven's work and Man's—all found one common level here, and told one common tale.

Some part of the edifice had been a baronial chapel, and here were effigies of warriors stretched upon their beds of stone with folded hands—cross-legged, those who had fought in the Holy Wars—girded with their swords, and cased in armour as they had lived. Some of these knights had their own weapons, helmets, coats of mail, hanging upon the walls hard by, and dangling from rusty hooks. Broken and dilapidated as they were, they yet retained their ancient form, and something of their ancient aspect. Thus violent deeds live after men upon the earth, and traces of war and bloodshed will survive in mournful shapes long after those who worked the desolation are but atoms of earth themselves.

The child sat down, in this old, silent place, among the stark figures on the tombs—they made it more quiet there, than elsewhere, to her fancy—and gazing round with a feeling of awe, tempered with a calm delight, felt that now she was happy, and at rest. She took a Bible from the shelf, and read; then, laying it down, thought of the summer days and the bright springtime that would come—of the rays of sun that would fall in aslant, upon the sleeping forms—of the leaves that would flutter at the window, and play in glistening shadows on the pavement—of the songs of birds, and growth of buds and blossoms out of doors—of the sweet air, that would steal in, and gently wave the tattered banners overhead. What if the spot awakened thoughts of death! Die who would, it would still remain the same; these sights and sounds would still go on, as happily as ever. It would be no pain to sleep amidst them.

She left the chapel—very slowly and often turning back to gaze again—and coming to a low door, which plainly led into the tower, opened it, and climbed the winding stair in darkness; save where she looked down, through narrow loopholes, on the place she had left, or caught a glimmering vision of the dusty bells. At length she gained the end of the ascent and stood upon the turret top.

Oh! the glory of the sudden burst of light; the freshness of the fields and woods, stretching away on every side, and meeting the bright blue sky; the cattle grazing in the pasturage; the smoke, that, coming from among the trees, seemed to rise upward from the green earth; the children yet at their gambols down below—all, everything, so beautiful and happy! It was like passing from death to life; it was drawing nearer Heaven.

The children were gone, when she emerged into the porch, and locked the door. As she passed the school-house she could hear the busy hum of voices. Her friend had begun his labours only on that day. The noise grew louder, and, looking back, she saw the boys come trooping out and disperse themselves with merry shouts and play. 'It's a good thing,' thought the child, 'I am very glad they pass the church.' And then she stopped, to fancy how the noise would sound inside, and how gently it would seem to die away upon the ear.

Again that day, yes, twice again, she stole back to the old chapel, and in her former seat read from the same book, or indulged the same quiet train of thought. Even when it had grown dusk, and the shadows of coming night made it more solemn still, the child remained, like one rooted to the spot, and had no fear or thought of stirring.

They found her there, at last, and took her home. She looked pale but very happy, until they separated for the night; and then, as the poor schoolmaster stooped down to kiss her cheek, he thought he felt a tear upon his face.

CHAPTER 54

The bachelor, among his various occupations, found in the old church a constant source of interest and amusement. Taking that pride in it which men conceive for the wonders of their own little world, he had made its history his study; and many a summer day within its walls, and many a winter's night beside the parsonage fire, had found the bachelor still poring over, and adding to, his goodly store of tale and legend.

As he was not one of those rough spirits who would strip fair Truth of every little shadowy vestment in which time and teeming fancies love to array her—and some of which become her pleasantly enough, serving, like the waters of her well, to add new graces to the charms they half conceal and half suggest, and to awaken interest and pursuit rather than languor and indifference—as, unlike this stern and obdurate class, he loved to see the goddess crowned with those garlands of wild flowers which tradition wreathes for her gentle wearing, and which are often freshest in their homeliest shapes—he trod with a light step and bore with a light hand upon the dust of centuries, unwilling to demolish any of the airy shrines that had been raised above it, if any good feeling or affection of the human heart were hiding thereabouts. Thus, in the case of an ancient coffin of rough stone, supposed, for many generations, to contain the bones of a certain baron, who, after ravaging, with cut, and thrust, and plunder, in foreign lands, came back with a penitent and sorrowing heart to die at home, but which had been lately shown by learned antiquaries to be no such thing, as the baron in question (so they contended) had died hard in battle, gnashing his teeth and cursing with his latest breath—the bachelor stoutly maintained that the old tale was the true one; that the baron, repenting him of the evil, had done great charities and meekly given up the ghost; and that, if ever baron went to heaven, that baron was then at peace. In like manner, when the aforesaid antiquaries did argue and contend that a certain secret vault was not the tomb of a grey-haired lady who had been hanged and drawn and quartered by glorious Queen Bess for succouring a wretched priest who fainted of thirst and hunger at her door, the bachelor did solemnly maintain, against all comers, that the church was hallowed by the said poor lady's ashes; that her remains had been collected in the night from four of the city's gates, and thither in secret brought, and there deposited; and the bachelor did further (being highly excited at such times) deny the glory of Queen Bess, and assert the immeasurably greater glory of the meanest woman in her realm, who had a merciful and tender heart. As to the assertion that the flat stone near the door was not the grave of the miser who had disowned his only child and left a sum of money to the church to buy a peal of bells, the bachelor did readily admit the same, and that the place had given birth to no such man. In a word, he would have had every stone, and plate of brass, the monument only of deeds whose memory should survive. All others he was willing to forget. They might be buried in consecrated ground, but he would have had them buried deep, and never brought to light again.

It was from the lips of such a tutor, that the child learnt her easy task. Already impressed, beyond all telling, by the silent building and the peaceful beauty of the spot in which it stood—majestic age surrounded by perpetual youth—it seemed to her, when she heard these things, sacred to all goodness and virtue. It was another world, where sin and sorrow never came; a tranquil place of rest, where nothing evil entered.

When the bachelor had given her in connection with almost every tomb and flat grave-stone some history of its own, he took her down into the old crypt, now a mere dull vault, and showed her how it had been lighted up in the time of the monks, and how, amid lamps depending from the roof, and swinging censers exhaling scented odours, and habits glittering with gold and silver, and pictures, and precious stuffs, and jewels all flashing and glistening through the low arches, the chaunt of aged voices had been many a time heard there, at midnight, in old days, while hooded figures knelt and prayed around, and told their rosaries of beads. Thence, he took her above ground again, and showed her, high up in the old walls, small galleries, where the nuns had been wont to glide along—dimly seen in their dark dresses so far off—or to pause like gloomy shadows, listening to the prayers. He showed her too, how the warriors, whose figures rested on the tombs, had worn those rotting scraps of armour up above—how this had been a helmet, and that a shield, and that a gauntlet—and how they had wielded the great two-handed swords, and beaten men down, with yonder iron mace. All that he told the child she treasured in her mind; and sometimes, when she awoke at night from dreams of those old times, and rising from her bed looked out at the dark church, she almost hoped to see the windows lighted up, and hear the organ's swell, and sound of voices, on the rushing wind.

The old sexton soon got better, and was about again. From him the child learnt many other things, though of a different kind. He was not able to work, but one day there was a grave to be made, and he came to overlook the man who dug it. He was in a talkative mood; and the child, at first standing by his side, and afterwards sitting on the grass at his feet, with her thoughtful face raised towards his, began to converse with him.

Now, the man who did the sexton's duty was a little older than he, though much more active. But he was deaf; and when the sexton (who peradventure, on a pinch, might have walked a mile with great difficulty in half-a-dozen hours) exchanged a remark with him about his work, the child could not help noticing that he did so with an impatient kind of pity for his infirmity, as if he were himself the strongest and heartiest man alive.

'I'm sorry to see there is this to do,' said the child when she approached. 'I heard of no one having died.'

'She lived in another hamlet, my dear,' returned the sexton. 'Three mile away.'

'Was she young?'

'Ye-yes' said the sexton; not more than sixty-four, I think. David, was she more than sixty-four?'

David, who was digging hard, heard nothing of the question. The sexton, as he could not reach to touch him with his crutch, and was too infirm to rise without assistance, called his attention by throwing a little mould upon his red nightcap.

'What's the matter now?' said David, looking up.

'How old was Becky Morgan?' asked the sexton.

'Becky Morgan?' repeated David.

'Yes,' replied the sexton; adding in a half compassionate, half irritable tone, which the old man couldn't hear, 'you're getting very deaf, Davy, very deaf to be sure!'

The old man stopped in his work, and cleansing his spade with a piece of slate he had by him for the purpose—and scraping off, in the process, the essence of Heaven knows how many Becky Morgans—set himself to consider the subject.

'Let me think' quoth he. 'I saw last night what they had put upon the coffin—was it seventy-nine?'

'No, no,' said the sexton.

'Ah yes, it was though,' returned the old man with a sigh. 'For I remember thinking she was very near our age. Yes, it was seventy-nine.'

'Are you sure you didn't mistake a figure, Davy?' asked the sexton, with signs of some emotion.

'What?' said the old man. 'Say that again.'

'He's very deaf. He's very deaf indeed,' cried the sexton petulantly; 'are you sure you're right about the figures?'

'Oh quite,' replied the old man. 'Why not?'

'He's exceedingly deaf,' muttered the sexton to himself. 'I think he's getting foolish.'

The child rather wondered what had led him to this belief, as, to say the truth, the old man seemed quite as sharp as he, and was infinitely more robust. As the sexton said nothing more just then, however, she forgot it for the time, and spoke again.

'You were telling me,' she said, 'about your gardening. Do you ever plant things here?'

'In the churchyard?' returned the sexton, 'Not I.'

'I have seen some flowers and little shrubs about,' the child rejoined; 'there are some over there, you see. I thought they were of your rearing, though indeed they grow but poorly.'

'They grow as Heaven wills,' said the old man; 'and it kindly ordains that they shall never flourish here.'

'I do not understand you.'

'Why, this it is,' said the sexton. 'They mark the graves of those who had very tender, loving friends.'

'I was sure they did!' the child exclaimed. 'I am very glad to know they do!'

'Aye,' returned the old man, 'but stay. Look at them. See how they hang their heads, and droop, and wither. Do you guess the reason?'

'No,' the child replied.

'Because the memory of those who lie below, passes away so soon. At first they tend them, morning, noon, and night; they soon begin to come less frequently; from once a day, to once a week; from once a week to once a month; then, at long and uncertain intervals; then, not at all. Such tokens seldom flourish long. I have known the briefest summer flowers outlive them.'

'I grieve to hear it,' said the child.

'Ah! so say the gentlefolks who come down here to look about them,' returned the old man, shaking his head, 'but I say otherwise. "It's a pretty custom you have in this part of the country," they say to me sometimes, "to plant the graves, but it's melancholy to see these things all withering or dead." I crave their pardon and tell them that, as I take it, 'tis a good sign for the happiness of the living. And so it is. It's nature.'

'Perhaps the mourners learn to look to the blue sky by day, and to the stars by night, and to think that the dead are there, and not in graves,' said the child in an earnest voice.

'Perhaps so,' replied the old man doubtfully. 'It may be.'

'Whether it be as I believe it is, or no,' thought the child within herself, 'I'll make this place my garden. It will be no harm at least to work here day by day, and pleasant thoughts will come of it, I am sure.'

Her glowing cheek and moistened eye passed unnoticed by the sexton, who turned towards old David, and called him by his name. It was plain that Becky Morgan's age still troubled him; though why, the child could scarcely understand.

The second or third repetition of his name attracted the old man's attention. Pausing from his work, he leant on his spade, and put his hand to his dull ear.

'Did you call?' he said.

'I have been thinking, Davy,' replied the sexton, 'that she,' he pointed to the grave, 'must have been a deal older than you or me.'

'Seventy-nine,' answered the old man with a shake of the head, 'I tell you that I saw it.'

'Saw it?' replied the sexton; 'aye, but, Davy, women don't always tell the truth about their age.'

'That's true indeed,' said the other old man, with a sudden sparkle in his eye. 'She might have been older.'

'I'm sure she must have been. Why, only think how old she looked. You and I seemed but boys to her.'

'She did look old,' rejoined David. 'You're right. She did look old.'

'Call to mind how old she looked for many a long, long year, and say if she could be but seventy-nine at last—only our age,' said the sexton.

'Five year older at the very least!' cried the other.

'Five!' retorted the sexton. 'Ten. Good eighty-nine. I call to mind the time her daughter died. She was eighty-nine if she was a day, and tries to pass upon us now, for ten year younger. Oh! human vanity!'

The other old man was not behindhand with some moral reflections on this fruitful theme, and both adduced a mass of evidence, of such weight as to render it doubtful—not whether the deceased was of the age suggested, but whether she had not almost reached the patriarchal term of a hundred. When they had settled this question to their mutual satisfaction, the sexton, with his friend's assistance, rose to go.

'It's chilly, sitting here, and I must be careful—till the summer,' he said, as he prepared to limp away.

'What?' asked old David.

'He's very deaf, poor fellow!' cried the sexton. 'Good-bye!' 'Ah!' said old David, looking after him. 'He's failing very fast. He ages every day.'

And so they parted; each persuaded that the other had less life in him than himself; and both greatly consoled and comforted by the little fiction they had agreed upon, respecting Becky Morgan, whose decease was no longer a precedent of uncomfortable application, and would be no business of theirs for half a score of years to come.

The child remained, for some minutes, watching the deaf old man as he threw out the earth with his shovel, and, often stopping to cough and fetch his breath, still muttered to himself, with a kind of sober chuckle, that the sexton was wearing fast. At length she turned away, and walking thoughtfully through the churchyard, came unexpectedly upon the schoolmaster, who was sitting on a green grave in the sun, reading.

'Nell here?' he said cheerfully, as he closed his book. 'It does me good to see you in the air and light. I feared you were again in the church, where you so often are.'

'Feared!' replied the child, sitting down beside him. 'Is it not a good place?'

'Yes, yes,' said the schoolmaster. 'But you must be gay sometimes—nay, don't shake your head and smile so sadly.'

'Not sadly, if you knew my heart. Do not look at me as if you thought me sorrowful. There is not a happier creature on earth, than I am now.'

Full of grateful tenderness, the child took his hand, and folded it between her own. 'It's God's will!' she said, when they had been silent for some time.

'What?'

'All this,' she rejoined; 'all this about us. But which of us is sad now? You see that I am smiling.'

'And so am I,' said the schoolmaster; 'smiling to think how often we shall laugh in this same place. Were you not talking yonder?'

'Yes,'the child rejoined.

'Of something that has made you sorrowful?'

There was a long pause.

'What was it?' said the schoolmaster, tenderly. 'Come. Tell me what it was.'

'I rather grieve—I do rather grieve to think,' said the child, bursting into tears, 'that those who die about us, are so soon forgotten.'

'And do you think,' said the schoolmaster, marking the glance she had thrown around, 'that an unvisited grave, a withered tree, a faded flower or two, are tokens of forgetfulness or cold neglect? Do you think there are no deeds, far away from here, in which these dead may be best remembered? Nell, Nell, there may be people busy in the world, at this instant, in whose good actions and good thoughts these very graves—neglected as they look to us—are the chief instruments.'

'Tell me no more,' said the child quickly. 'Tell me no more. I feel, I know it. How could I be unmindful of it, when I thought of you?'

'There is nothing,' cried her friend, 'no, nothing innocent or good, that dies, and is forgotten. Let us hold to that faith, or none. An infant, a prattling child, dying in its cradle, will live again in the better thoughts of those who loved it, and will play its part, through them, in the redeeming actions of the world, though its body be burnt to ashes or drowned in the deepest sea. There is not an angel added to the Host of Heaven but does its blessed work on earth in those that loved it here. Forgotten! oh, if the good deeds of human creatures could be traced to their source, how beautiful would even death appear; for how much charity, mercy, and purified affection, would be seen to have their growth in dusty graves!'

'Yes,' said the child, 'it is the truth; I know it is. Who should feel its force so much as I, in whom your little scholar lives again! Dear, dear, good friend, if you knew the comfort you have given me!'

The poor schoolmaster made her no answer, but bent over her in silence; for his heart was full.

They were yet seated in the same place, when the grandfather approached. Before they had spoken many words together, the church clock struck the hour of school, and their friend withdrew.

'A good man,' said the grandfather, looking after him; 'a kind man. Surely he will never harm us, Nell. We are safe here, at last, eh? We will never go away from here?'

The child shook her head and smiled.

'She needs rest,' said the old man, patting her cheek; 'too pale—too pale. She is not like what she was.'

When?' asked the child.

'Ha!' said the old man, 'to be sure—when? How many weeks ago? Could I count them on my fingers? Let them rest though; they're better gone.' 'Much better, dear,' replied the child. 'We will forget them; or, if we ever call them to mind, it shall be only as some uneasy dream that has passed away.'

'Hush!' said the old man, motioning hastily to her with his hand and looking over his shoulder; 'no more talk of the dream, and all the miseries it brought. There are no dreams here. 'Tis a quiet place, and they keep away. Let us never think about them, lest they should pursue us again. Sunken eyes and hollow cheeks—wet, cold, and famine—and horrors before them all, that were even worse—we must forget such things if we would be tranquil here.'

'Thank Heaven!' inwardly exclaimed the child, 'for this most happy change!'

'I will be patient,' said the old man, 'humble, very thankful, and obedient, if you will let me stay. But do not hide from me; do not steal away alone; let me keep beside you. Indeed, I will be very true and faithful, Nell.'

'I steal away alone! why that,' replied the child, with assumed gaiety, 'would be a pleasant jest indeed. See here, dear grandfather, we'll make this place our garden—why not! It is a very good one—and to-morrow we'll begin, and work together, side by side.'

'It is a brave thought!' cried her grandfather. 'Mind, darling—we begin to-morrow!'

Who so delighted as the old man, when they next day began their labour! Who so unconscious of all associations connected with the spot, as he! They plucked the long grass and nettles from the tombs, thinned the poor shrubs and roots, made the turf smooth, and cleared it of the leaves and weeds. They were yet in the ardour of their work, when the child, raising her head from the ground over which she bent, observed that the bachelor was sitting on the stile close by, watching them in silence.

'A kind office,' said the little gentleman, nodding to Nell as she curtseyed to him. 'Have you done all that, this morning?'

'It is very little, sir,' returned the child, with downcast eyes, 'to what we mean to do.'

'Good work, good work,' said the bachelor. 'But do you only labour at the graves of children, and young people?'

'We shall come to the others in good time, sir,' replied Nell, turning her head aside, and speaking softly.

It was a slight incident, and might have been design or accident, or the child's unconscious sympathy with youth. But it seemed to strike upon her grandfather, though he had not noticed it before. He looked in @ hurried manner at the graves, then anxiously at the child, then pressed her to his side, and bade her stop to rest. Something he had long forgotten, appeared to struggle faintly in his mind. It did not pass away, as weightier things had done; but came uppermost again, and yet again, and many times that day, and often afterwards. Once, while they were yet at work, the child, seeing that he often turned and looked uneasily at her, as though he were trying to resolve some painful doubts or collect some scattered thoughts, urged him to tell the reason. But he said it was nothing—nothing—and, laying her head upon his arm, patted her fair cheek with his hand, and muttered that she grew stronger every day, and would be a woman, soon.

CHAPTER 55

From that time, there sprung up in the old man's mind, a solicitude about the child which never slept or left him. There are chords in the human heart—strange, varying strings—which are only struck by accident; which will remain mute and senseless to appeals the most passionate and earnest, and respond at last to the slightest casual touch. In the most insensible or childish minds, there is some train of reflection which art can seldom lead, or skill assist, but which will reveal itself, as great truths have done, by chance, and when the discoverer has the plainest end in view. From that time, the old man never, for a moment, forgot the weakness and devotion of the child; from the time of that slight incident, he who had seen her toiling by his side through so much difficulty and suffering, and had scarcely thought of her otherwise than as the partner of miseries which he felt severely in his own person, and deplored for his own sake at least as much as hers, awoke to a sense of what he owed her, and what those miseries had made her. Never, no, never once, in one unguarded moment from that time to the end, did any care for himself, any thought of his own comfort, any selfish consideration or regard distract his thoughts from the gentle object of his love.

He would follow her up and down, waiting till she should tire and lean upon his arm—he would sit opposite to her in the chimney-corner, content to watch, and look, until she raised her head and smiled upon him as of old—he would discharge by stealth, those household duties which tasked her powers too heavily—he would rise, in the cold dark nights, to listen to her breathing in her sleep, and sometimes crouch for hours by her bedside only to touch her hand. He who knows all, can only know what hopes, and fears, and thoughts of deep affection, were in that one disordered brain, and what a change had fallen on the poor old man. Sometimes—weeks had crept on, then—the child, exhausted, though with little fatigue, would pass whole evenings on a couch beside the fire. At such times, the schoolmaster would bring in books, and read to her aloud; and seldom an evening passed, but the bachelor came in, and took his turn of reading. The old man sat and listened—with little understanding for the words, but with his eyes fixed upon the child—and if she smiled or brightened with the story, he would say it was a good one, and conceive a fondness for the very book. When, in their evening talk, the bachelor told some tale that pleased her (as his tales were sure to do), the old man would painfully try to store it in his mind; nay, when the bachelor left them, he would sometimes slip out after him, and humbly beg that he would tell him such a part again, that he might learn to win a smile from Nell.

But these were rare occasions, happily; for the child yearned to be out of doors, and walking in her solemn garden. Parties, too, would come to see the church; and those who came, speaking to others of the child, sent more; so even at that season of the year they had visitors almost daily. The old man would follow them at a little distance through the building, listening to the voice he loved so well; and when the strangers left, and parted from Nell, he would mingle with them to catch up fragments of their conversation; or he would stand for the same purpose, with his grey head uncovered, at the gate as they passed through.

They always praised the child, her sense and beauty, and he was proud to hear them! But what was that, so often added, which wrung his heart, and made him sob and weep alone, in some dull corner! Alas! even careless strangers—they who had no feeling for her, but the interest of the moment—they who would go away and forget next week that such a being lived—even they saw it—even they pitied her—even they bade him good day compassionately, and whispered as they passed.

The people of the village, too, of whom there was not one but grew to have a fondness for poor Nell; even among them, there was the same feeling; a tenderness towards her—a compassionate regard for her, increasing every day. The very schoolboys, light-hearted and thoughtless as they were, even they cared for her. The roughest among them was sorry if he missed her in the usual place upon his way to school, and would turn out of the path to ask for her at the latticed window. If she were sitting in the church, they perhaps might peep in softly at the open door; but they never spoke to her, unless she rose and went to speak to them. Some feeling was abroad which raised the child above them all.

So, when Sunday came. They were all poor country people in the church, for the castle in which the old family had lived, was an empty ruin, and there were none but humble folks for seven miles around. There, as elsewhere, they had an interest in Nell. They would gather round her in the porch, before and after service; young children would cluster at her skirts; and aged men and women forsake their gossips, to give her kindly greeting. None of them, young or old, thought of passing the child without a friendly word. Many who came from three or four miles distant, brought her little presents; the humblest and rudest had good wishes to bestow.

She had sought out the young children whom she first saw playing in the churchyard. One of these—he who had spoken of his brother—was her little favourite and friend, and often sat by her side in the church, or climbed with her to the tower-top. It was his delight to help her, or to fancy that he did so, and they soon became close companions.

It happened, that, as she was reading in the old spot by herself one day, this child came running in with his eyes full of tears, and after holding her from him, and looking at her eagerly for a moment, clasped his little arms passionately about her neck.

'What now?' said Nell, soothing him. 'What is the matter?'

'She is not one yet!' cried the boy, embracing her still more closely. 'No, no. Not yet.'

She looked at him wonderingly, and putting his hair back from his face, and kissing him, asked what he meant.

'You must not be one, dear Nell,' cried the boy. 'We can't see them. They never come to play with us, or talk to us. Be what you are. You are better so.'

'I do not understand you,' said the child. 'Tell me what you mean.'

'Why, they say,' replied the boy, looking up into her face, that you will be an Angel, before the birds sing again. But you won't be, will you? Don't leave us Nell, though the sky is bright. Do not leave us!'

The child dropped her head, and put her hands before her face.

'She cannot bear the thought!' cried the boy, exulting through his tears. 'You will not go. You know how sorry we should be. Dear Nell, tell me that you'll stay amongst us. Oh! Pray, pray, tell me that you will.'

The little creature folded his hands, and knelt down at her feet.

'Only look at me, Nell,' said the boy, 'and tell me that you'll stop, and then I shall know that they are wrong, and will cry no more. Won't you say yes, Nell?'

Still the drooping head and hidden face, and the child quite silent—save for her sobs.

'After a time,' pursued the boy, trying to draw away her hand, the kind angels will be glad to think that you are not among them, and that you stayed here to be with us. Willy went away, to join them; but if he had known how I should miss him in our little bed at night, he never would have left me, I am sure.'

Yet the child could make him no answer, and sobbed as though her heart were bursting. 'Why would you go, dear Nell? I know you would not be happy when you heard that we were crying for your loss. They say that Willy is in Heaven now, and that it's always summer there, and yet I'm sure he grieves when I lie down upon his garden bed, and he cannot turn to kiss me. But if you do go, Nell,' said the boy, caressing her, and pressing his face to hers, 'be fond of him for my sake. Tell him how I love him still, and how much I loved you; and when I think that you two are together, and are happy, I'll try to bear it, and never give you pain by doing wrong—indeed I never will!'

The child suffered him to move her hands, and put them round his neck. There was a tearful silence, but it was not long before she looked upon him with a smile, and promised him, in a very gentle, quiet voice, that she would stay, and be his friend, as long as Heaven would let her. He clapped his hands for joy, and thanked her many times; and being charged to tell no person what had passed between them, gave her an earnest promise that he never would.

Nor did he, so far as the child could learn; but was her quiet companion in all her walks and musings, and never again adverted to the theme, which he felt had given her pain, although he was unconscious of its cause. Something of distrust lingered about him still; for he would often come, even in the dark evenings, and call in a timid voice outside the door to know if she were safe within; and being answered yes, and bade to enter, would take his station on a low stool at her feet, and sit there patiently until they came to seek, and take him home. Sure as the morning came, it found him lingering near the house to ask if she were well; and, morning, noon, or night, go where she would, he would forsake his playmates and his sports to bear her company.

'And a good little friend he is, too,' said the old sexton to her once. 'When his elder brother died—elder seems a strange word, for he was only seven years old—I remember this one took it sorely to heart.'

The child thought of what the schoolmaster had told her, and felt how its truth was shadowed out even in this infant.

'It has given him something of a quiet way, I think,' said the old man, 'though for that he is merry enough at times. I'd wager now that you and he have been listening by the old well.'

'Indeed we have not,' the child replied. 'I have been afraid to go near it; for I am not often down in that part of the church, and do not know the ground.'

'Come down with me,' said the old man. 'I have known it from a boy. Come!'

They descended the narrow steps which led into the crypt, and paused among the gloomy arches, in a dim and murky spot.

'This is the place,' said the old man. 'Give me your hand while you throw back the cover, lest you should stumble and fall in. I am too old—I mean rheumatic—to stoop, myself.'

'A black and dreadful place!' exclaimed the child.

'Look in,' said the old man, pointing downward with his finger.

The child complied, and gazed down into the pit.

'It looks like a grave itself,' said the old man.

'It does,' replied the child.

'I have often had the fancy,' said the sexton, 'that it might have been dug at first to make the old place more gloomy, and the old monks more religious. It's to be closed up, and built over.'

The child still stood, looking thoughtfully into the vault.

'We shall see,' said the sexton, 'on what gay heads other earth will have closed, when the light is shut out from here. God knows! They'll close it up, next spring.'

'The birds sing again in spring,' thought the child, as she leaned at her casement window, and gazed at the declining sun. 'Spring! a beautiful and happy time!'

CHAPTER 56

A day or two after the Quilp tea-party at the Wilderness, Mr Swiveller walked into Sampson Brass's office at the usual hour, and being alone in that Temple of Probity, placed his hat upon the desk, and taking from his pocket a small parcel of black crape, applied himself to folding and pinning the same upon it, after the manner of a hatband. Having completed the construction of this appendage, he surveyed his work with great complacency, and put his hat on again—very much over one eye, to increase the mournfulness of the effect. These arrangements perfected to his entire satisfaction, he thrust his hands into his pockets, and walked up and down the office with measured steps.

'It has always been the same with me,' said Mr Swiveller, 'always. 'Twas ever thus—from childhood's hour I've seen my fondest hopes decay, I never loved a tree or flower but 'twas the first to fade away; I never nursed a dear Gazelle, to glad me with its soft black eye, but when it came to know me well, and love me, it was sure to marry a market-gardener.'

Overpowered by these reflections, Mr Swiveller stopped short at the clients' chair, and flung himself into its open arms.

'And this,' said Mr Swiveller, with a kind of bantering composure, 'is life, I believe. Oh, certainly. Why not! I'm quite satisfied. I shall wear,' added Richard, taking off his hat again and looking hard at it, as if he were only deterred by pecuniary considerations from spurning it with his foot, 'I shall wear this emblem of woman's perfidy, in remembrance of her with whom I shall never again thread the windings of the mazy; whom I shall never more pledge in the rosy; who, during the short remainder of my existence, will murder the balmy. Ha, ha, ha!'

It may be necessary to observe, lest there should appear any incongruity in the close of this soliloquy, that Mr Swiveller did not wind up with a cheerful hilarious laugh, which would have been undoubtedly at variance with his solemn reflections, but that, being in a theatrical mood, he merely achieved that performance which is designated in melodramas 'laughing like a fiend,'—for it seems that your fiends always laugh in syllables, and always in three syllables, never more nor less, which is a remarkable property in such gentry, and one worthy of remembrance.

The baleful sounds had hardly died away, and Mr Swiveller was still sitting in a very grim state in the clients' chair, when there came a ring—or, if we may adapt the sound to his then humour, a knell—at the office bell. Opening the door with all speed, he beheld the expressive countenance of Mr Chuckster, between whom and himself a fraternal greeting ensued.

'You're devilish early at this pestiferous old slaughter-house,' said that gentleman, poising himself on one leg, and shaking the other in an easy manner.

'Rather,' returned Dick.

'Rather!' retorted Mr Chuckster, with that air of graceful trifling which so well became him. 'I should think so. Why, my good feller, do you know what o'clock it is—half-past nine a.m. in the morning?'

'Won't you come in?' said Dick. 'All alone. Swiveller solus. 'Tis now the witching—'

'"Hour of night!"'

'"When churchyards yawn,"'

'"And graves give up their dead."'

At the end of this quotation in dialogue, each gentleman struck an attitude, and immediately subsiding into prose walked into the office. Such morsels of enthusiasm are common among the Glorious Apollos, and were indeed the links that bound them together, and raised them above the cold dull earth.

'Well, and how are you my buck?' said Mr Chuckster, taking a stool. 'I was forced to come into the City upon some little private matters of my own, and couldn't pass the corner of the street without looking in, but upon my soul I didn't expect to find you. It is so everlastingly early.'

Mr Swiveller expressed his acknowledgments; and it appearing on further conversation that he was in good health, and that Mr Chuckster was in the like enviable condition, both gentlemen, in compliance with a solemn custom of the ancient Brotherhood to which they belonged, joined in a fragment of the popular duet of 'All's Well,' with a long shake' at the end.

'And what's the news?' said Richard.

'The town's as flat, my dear feller,' replied Mr Chuckster, 'as the surface of a Dutch oven. There's no news. By-the-bye, that lodger of yours is a most extraordinary person. He quite eludes the most vigorous comprehension, you know. Never was such a feller!'

'What has he been doing now?' said Dick.

'By Jove, Sir,' returned Mr Chuckster, taking out an oblong snuff-box, the lid whereof was ornamented with a fox's head curiously carved in brass, 'that man is an unfathomable. Sir, that man has made friends with our articled clerk. There's no harm in him, but he is so amazingly slow and soft. Now, if he wanted a friend, why couldn't he have one that knew a thing or two, and could do him some good by his manners and conversation. I have my faults, sir,' said Mr Chuckster—

'No, no,' interposed Mr Swiveller.

'Oh yes I have, I have my faults, no man knows his faults better than I know mine. But,' said Mr Chuckster, 'I'm not meek. My worst enemies—every man has his enemies, Sir, and I have mine—never accused me of being meek. And I tell you what, Sir, if I hadn't more of these qualities that commonly endear man to man, than our articled clerk has, I'd steal a Cheshire cheese, tie it round my neck, and drown myself. I'd die degraded, as I had lived. I would upon my honour.'

Mr Chuckster paused, rapped the fox's head exactly on the nose with the knuckle of the fore-finger, took a pinch of snuff, and looked steadily at Mr Swiveller, as much as to say that if he thought he was going to sneeze, he would find himself mistaken.

'Not contented, Sir,' said Mr Chuckster, 'with making friends with Abel, he has cultivated the acquaintance of his father and mother. Since he came home from that wild-goose chase, he has been there— actually been there. He patronises young Snobby besides; you'll find, Sir, that he'll be constantly coming backwards and forwards to this place: yet I don't suppose that beyond the common forms of civility, he has ever exchanged half-a-dozen words with me. Now, upon my soul, you know,' said Mr Chuckster, shaking his head gravely, as men are wont to do when they consider things are going a little too far, 'this is altogether such a low-minded affair, that if I didn't feel for the governor, and know that he could never get on without me, I should be obliged to cut the connection. I should have no alternative.'

Mr Swiveller, who sat on another stool opposite to his friend, stirred the fire in an excess of sympathy, but said nothing.

'As to young Snob, sir,' pursued Mr Chuckster with a prophetic look, 'you'll find he'll turn out bad. In our profession we know something of human nature, and take my word for it, that the feller that came back to work out that shilling, will show himself one of these days in his true colours. He's a low thief, sir. He must be.'

Mr Chuckster being roused, would probably have pursued this subject further, and in more emphatic language, but for a tap at the door, which seeming to announce the arrival of somebody on business, caused him to assume a greater appearance of meekness than was perhaps quite consistent with his late declaration. Mr Swiveller, hearing the same sound, caused his stool to revolve rapidly on one leg until it brought him to his desk, into which, having forgotten in the sudden flurry of his spirits to part with the poker, he thrust it as he cried 'Come in!'

Who should present himself but that very Kit who had been the theme of Mr Chuckster's wrath! Never did man pluck up his courage so quickly, or look so fierce, as Mr Chuckster when he found it was he. Mr Swiveller stared at him for a moment, and then leaping from his stool, and drawing out the poker from its place of concealment, performed the broad-sword exercise with all the cuts and guards complete, in a species of frenzy.

'Is the gentleman at home?' said Kit, rather astonished by this uncommon reception.

Before Mr Swiveller could make any reply, Mr Chuckster took occasion to enter his indignant protest against this form of inquiry; which he held to be of a disrespectful and snobbish tendency, inasmuch as the inquirer, seeing two gentlemen then and there present, should have spoken of the other gentleman; or rather (for it was not impossible that the object of his search might be of inferior quality) should have mentioned his name, leaving it to his hearers to determine his degree as they thought proper. Mr Chuckster likewise remarked, that he had some reason to believe this form of address was personal to himself, and that he was not a man to be trifled with—as certain snobs (whom he did not more particularly mention or describe) might find to their cost.

'I mean the gentleman up-stairs,' said Kit, turning to Richard Swiveller. 'Is he at home?'

'Why?' rejoined Dick.

'Because if he is, I have a letter for him.'

'From whom?' said Dick.

'From Mr Garland.'

'Oh!' said Dick, with extreme politeness. 'Then you may hand it over, Sir. And if you're to wait for an answer, Sir, you may wait in the passage, Sir, which is an airy and well-ventilated apartment, sir.'

'Thank you,' returned Kit. 'But I am to give it to himself, if you please.'

The excessive audacity of this retort so overpowered Mr Chuckster, and so moved his tender regard for his friend's honour, that he declared, if he were not restrained by official considerations, he must certainly have annihilated Kit upon the spot; a resentment of the affront which he did consider, under the extraordinary circumstances of aggravation attending it, could but have met with the proper sanction and approval of a jury of Englishmen, who, he had no doubt, would have returned a verdict of justifiable Homicide, coupled with a high testimony to the morals and character of the Avenger. Mr Swiveller, without being quite so hot upon the matter, was rather shamed by his friend's excitement, and not a little puzzled how to act (Kit being quite cool and good-humoured), when the single gentleman was heard to call violently down the stairs.

'Didn't I see somebody for me, come in?' cried the lodger.

'Yes, Sir,' replied Dick. 'Certainly, Sir.'

'Then where is he?' roared the single gentleman.

'He's here, sir,' rejoined Mr Swiveller. 'Now young man, don't you hear you're to go up-stairs? Are you deaf?'

Kit did not appear to think it worth his while to enter into any altercation, but hurried off and left the Glorious Apollos gazing at each other in silence.

'Didn't I tell you so?' said Mr Chuckster. 'What do you think of that?'

Mr Swiveller being in the main a good-natured fellow, and not perceiving in the conduct of Kit any villany of enormous magnitude, scarcely knew what answer to return. He was relieved from his perplexity, however, by the entrance of Mr Sampson and his sister, Sally, at sight of whom Mr Chuckster precipitately retired.

Mr Brass and his lovely companion appeared to have been holding a consultation over their temperate breakfast, upon some matter of great interest and importance. On the occasion of such conferences, they generally appeared in the office some half an hour after their usual time, and in a very smiling state, as though their late plots and designs had tranquillised their minds and shed a light upon their toilsome way. In the present instance, they seemed particularly gay; Miss Sally's aspect being of a most oily kind, and Mr Brass rubbing his hands in an exceedingly jocose and light-hearted manner. 'Well, Mr Richard,' said Brass. 'How are we this morning? Are we pretty fresh and cheerful sir—eh, Mr Richard?'

'Pretty well, sir,' replied Dick.

'That's well,' said Brass. 'Ha ha! We should be as gay as larks, Mr Richard—why not? It's a pleasant world we live in sir, a very pleasant world. There are bad people in it, Mr Richard, but if there were no bad people, there would be no good lawyers. Ha ha! Any letters by the post this morning, Mr Richard?'

Mr Swiveller answered in the negative.

'Ha!' said Brass, 'no matter. If there's little business to-day, there'll be more to-morrow. A contented spirit, Mr Richard, is the sweetness of existence. Anybody been here, sir?'

'Only my friend'—replied Dick. 'May we ne'er want a—'

'Friend,' Brass chimed in quickly, 'or a bottle to give him.' Ha ha! That's the way the song runs, isn't it? A very good song, Mr Richard, very good. I like the sentiment of it. Ha ha! Your friend's the young man from Witherden's office I think—yes—May we ne'er want a— Nobody else at all, been, Mr Richard?'

'Only somebody to the lodger,' replied Mr Swiveller.

'Oh indeed!' cried Brass. 'Somebody to the lodger eh? Ha ha! May we ne'er want a friend, or a— Somebody to the lodger, eh, Mr Richard?'

'Yes,' said Dick, a little disconcerted by the excessive buoyancy of spirits which his employer displayed. 'With him now.'

'With him now!' cried Brass; 'Ha ha! There let 'em be, merry and free, toor rul rol le. Eh, Mr Richard? Ha ha!'

'Oh certainly,' replied Dick.

'And who,' said Brass, shuffling among his papers, 'who is the lodger's visitor—not a lady visitor, I hope, eh, Mr Richard? The morals of the Marks you know, sir—"when lovely women stoops to folly"—and all that—eh, Mr Richard?'

'Another young man, who belongs to Witherden's too, or half belongs there,' returned Richard. 'Kit, they call him.'

'Kit, eh!' said Brass. 'Strange name—name of a dancing-master's fiddle, eh, Mr Richard? Ha ha! Kit's there, is he? Oh!'

Dick looked at Miss Sally, wondering that she didn't check this uncommon exuberance on the part of Mr Sampson; but as she made no attempt to do so, and rather appeared to exhibit a tacit acquiescence in it, he concluded that they had just been cheating somebody, and receiving the bill.

'Will you have the goodness, Mr Richard,' said Brass, taking a letter from his desk, 'just to step over to Peckham Rye with that? There's no answer, but it's rather particular and should go by hand. Charge the office with your coach-hire back, you know; don't spare the office; get as much out of it as you can—clerk's motto—Eh, Mr Richard? Ha ha!'

Mr Swiveller solemnly doffed the aquatic jacket, put on his coat, took down his hat from its peg, pocketed the letter, and departed. As soon as he was gone, up rose Miss Sally Brass, and smiling sweetly at her brother (who nodded and smote his nose in return) withdrew also.

Sampson Brass was no sooner left alone, than he set the office-door wide open, and establishing himself at his desk directly opposite, so that he could not fail to see anybody who came down-stairs and passed out at the street door, began to write with extreme cheerfulness and assiduity; humming as he did so, in a voice that was anything but musical, certain vocal snatches which appeared to have reference to the union between Church and State, inasmuch as they were compounded of the Evening Hymn and God save the King.

Thus, the attorney of Bevis Marks sat, and wrote, and hummed, for a long time, except when he stopped to listen with a very cunning face, and hearing nothing, went on humming louder, and writing slower than ever. At length, in one of these pauses, he heard his lodger's door opened and shut, and footsteps coming down the stairs. Then, Mr Brass left off writing entirely, and, with his pen in his hand, hummed his very loudest; shaking his head meanwhile from side to side, like a man whose whole soul was in the music, and smiling in a manner quite seraphic.

It was towards this moving spectacle that the staircase and the sweet sounds guided Kit; on whose arrival before his door, Mr Brass stopped his singing, but not his smiling, and nodded affably: at the same time beckoning to him with his pen.

'Kit,' said Mr Brass, in the pleasantest way imaginable, 'how do you do?'

Kit, being rather shy of his friend, made a suitable reply, and had his hand upon the lock of the street door when Mr Brass called him softly back.

'You are not to go, if you please, Kit,' said the attorney in a mysterious and yet business-like way. 'You are to step in here, if you please. Dear me, dear me! When I look at you,' said the lawyer, quitting his stool, and standing before the fire with his back towards it, 'I am reminded of the sweetest little face that ever my eyes beheld. I remember your coming there, twice or thrice, when we were in possession. Ah Kit, my dear fellow, gentleman in my profession have such painful duties to perform sometimes, that you needn't envy us—you needn't indeed!'

'I don't, sir,' said Kit, 'though it isn't for the like of me to judge.'

'Our only consolation, Kit,' pursued the lawyer, looking at him in a sort of pensive abstraction, 'is, that although we cannot turn away the wind, we can soften it; we can temper it, if I may say so, to the shorn lambs.'

'Shorn indeed!' thought Kit. 'Pretty close!' But he didn't say SO.

'On that occasion, Kit,' said Mr Brass, 'on that occasion that I have just alluded to, I had a hard battle with Mr Quilp (for Mr Quilp is a very hard man) to obtain them the indulgence they had. It might have cost me a client. But suffering virtue inspired me, and I prevailed.'

'He's not so bad after all,' thought honest Kit, as the attorney pursed up his lips and looked like a man who was struggling with his better feelings.

'I respect you, Kit,' said Brass with emotion. 'I saw enough of your conduct, at that time, to respect you, though your station is humble, and your fortune lowly. It isn't the waistcoat that I look at. It is the heart. The checks in the waistcoat are but the wires of the cage. But the heart is the bird. Ah! How many sich birds are perpetually moulting, and putting their beaks through the wires to peck at all mankind!'

This poetic figure, which Kit took to be in a special allusion to his own checked waistcoat, quite overcame him; Mr Brass's voice and manner added not a little to its effect, for he discoursed with all the mild austerity of a hermit, and wanted but a cord round the waist of his rusty surtout, and a skull on the chimney-piece, to be completely set up in that line of business.

'Well, well,' said Sampson, smiling as good men smile when they compassionate their own weakness or that of their fellow-creatures, 'this is wide of the bull's-eye. You're to take that, if you please.' As he spoke, he pointed to a couple of half-crowns on the desk.

Kit looked at the coins, and then at Sampson, and hesitated.

'For yourself,' said Brass. 'From—'

'No matter about the person they came from,' replied the lawyer. 'Say me, if you like. We have eccentric friends overhead, Kit, and we mustn't ask questions or talk too much—you understand? You're to take them, that's all; and between you and me, I don't think they'll be the last you'll have to take from the same place. I hope not. Good bye, Kit. Good bye!'

With many thanks, and many more self-reproaches for having on such slight grounds suspected one who in their very first conversation turned out such a different man from what he had supposed, Kit took the money and made the best of his way home. Mr Brass remained airing himself at the fire, and resumed his vocal exercise, and his seraphic smile, simultaneously.

'May I come in?' said Miss Sally, peeping.

'Oh yes, you may come in,' returned her brother.

'Ahem!' coughed Miss Brass interrogatively.

'Why, yes,' returned Sampson, 'I should say as good as done.'

CHAPTER 57

Mr Chuckster's indignant apprehensions were not without foundation. Certainly the friendship between the single gentleman and Mr Garland was not suffered to cool, but had a rapid growth and flourished exceedingly. They were soon in habits of constant intercourse and communication; and the single gentleman labouring at this time under a slight attack of illness—the consequence most probably of his late excited feelings and subsequent disappointment—furnished a reason for their holding yet more frequent correspondence; so that some one of the inmates of Abel Cottage, Finchley, came backwards and forwards between that place and Bevis Marks, almost every day.

As the pony had now thrown off all disguise, and without any mincing of the matter or beating about the bush, sturdily refused to be driven by anybody but Kit, it generally happened that whether old Mr Garland came, or Mr Abel, Kit was of the party. Of all messages and inquiries, Kit was, in right of his position, the bearer; thus it came about that, while the single gentleman remained indisposed, Kit turned into Bevis Marks every morning with nearly as much regularity as the General Postman.

Mr Sampson Brass, who no doubt had his reasons for looking sharply about him, soon learnt to distinguish the pony's trot and the clatter of the little chaise at the corner of the street. Whenever the sound reached his ears, he would immediately lay down his pen and fall to rubbing his hands and exhibiting the greatest glee.

'Ha ha!' he would cry. 'Here's the pony again! Most remarkable pony, extremely docile, eh, Mr Richard, eh sir?'

Dick would return some matter-of-course reply, and Mr Brass standing on the bottom rail of his stool, so as to get a view of the street over the top of the window-blind, would take an observation of the visitors.

'The old gentleman again!' he would exclaim, 'a very prepossessing old gentleman, Mr Richard—charming countenance sir—extremely calm—benevolence in every feature, sir. He quite realises my idea of King Lear, as he appeared when in possession of his kingdom, Mr Richard—the same good humour, the same white hair and partial baldness, the same liability to be imposed upon. Ah! A sweet subject for contemplation, sir, very sweet!'

Then Mr Garland having alighted and gone up-stairs, Sampson would nod and smile to Kit from the window, and presently walk out into the street to greet him, when some such conversation as the following would ensue.

'Admirably groomed, Kit'—Mr Brass is patting the pony—'does you great credit—amazingly sleek and bright to be sure. He literally looks as if he had been varnished all over.'

Kit touches his hat, smiles, pats the pony himself, and expresses his conviction, 'that Mr Brass will not find many like him.'

'A beautiful animal indeed!' cries Brass. 'Sagacious too?'

'Bless you!' replies Kit, 'he knows what you say to him as well as a Christian does.'

'Does he indeed!' cries Brass, who has heard the same thing in the same place from the same person in the same words a dozen times, but is paralysed with astonishment notwithstanding. 'Dear me!'

'I little thought the first time I saw him, Sir,' says Kit, pleased with the attorney's strong interest in his favourite, 'that I should come to be as intimate with him as I am now.'

'Ah!' rejoins Mr Brass, brim-full of moral precepts and love of virtue. 'A charming subject of reflection for you, very charming. A subject of proper pride and congratulation, Christopher. Honesty is the best policy.—I always find it so myself. I lost forty-seven pound ten by being honest this morning. But it's all gain, it's gain!'

Mr Brass slyly tickles his nose with his pen, and looks at Kit with the water standing in his eyes. Kit thinks that if ever there was a good man who belied his appearance, that man is Sampson Brass.

'A man,' says Sampson, 'who loses forty-seven pound ten in one morning by his honesty, is a man to be envied. If it had been eighty pound, the luxuriousness of feeling would have been increased. Every pound lost, would have been a hundredweight of happiness gained. The still small voice, Christopher,' cries Brass, smiling, and tapping himself on the bosom, 'is a-singing comic songs within me, and all is happiness and joy!'

Kit is so improved by the conversation, and finds it go so completely home to his feelings, that he is considering what he shall say, when Mr Garland appears. The old gentleman is helped into the chaise with great obsequiousness by Mr Sampson Brass; and the pony, after shaking his head several times, and standing for three or four minutes with all his four legs planted firmly on the ground, as if he had made up his mind never to stir from that spot, but there to live and die, suddenly darts off, without the smallest notice, at the rate of twelve English miles an hour. Then, Mr Brass and his sister (who has joined him at the door) exchange an odd kind of smile—not at all a pleasant one in its expression—and return to the society of Mr Richard Swiveller, who, during their absence, has been regaling himself with various feats of pantomime, and is discovered at his desk, in a very flushed and heated condition, violently scratching out nothing with half a penknife.

Whenever Kit came alone, and without the chaise, it always happened that Sampson Brass was reminded of some mission, calling Mr Swiveller, if not to Peckham Rye again, at all events to some pretty distant place from Which he could not be expected to return for two or three hours, or in all probability a much longer period, as that gentleman was not, to say the truth, renowned for using great expedition on such occasions, but rather for protracting and spinning out the time to the very utmost limit of possibility. Mr Swiveller out of sight, Miss Sally immediately withdrew. Mr Brass would then set the office-door wide open, hum his old tune with great gaiety of heart, and smile seraphically as before. Kit coming down-stairs would be called in; entertained with some moral and agreeable conversation; perhaps entreated to mind the office for an instant while Mr Brass stepped over the way; and afterwards presented with one or two half-crowns as the case might be. This occurred so often, that Kit, nothing doubting but that they came from the single gentleman who had already rewarded his mother with great liberality, could not enough admire his generosity; and bought so many cheap presents for her, and for little Jacob, and for the baby, and for Barbara to boot, that one or other of them was having some new trifle every day of their lives.

While these acts and deeds were in progress in and out of the office of Sampson Brass, Richard Swiveller, being often left alone therein, began to find the time hang heavy on his hands. For the better preservation of his cheerfulness therefore, and to prevent his faculties from rusting, he provided himself with a cribbage-board and pack of cards, and accustomed himself to play at cribbage with a dummy, for twenty, thirty, or sometimes even fifty thousand pounds aside, besides many hazardous bets to a considerable amount.

As these games were very silently conducted, notwithstanding the magnitude of the interests involved, Mr Swiveller began to think that on those evenings when Mr and Miss Brass were out (and they often went out now) he heard a kind of snorting or hard-breathing sound in the direction of the door, which it occurred to him, after some reflection, must proceed from the small servant, who always had a cold from damp living. Looking intently that way one night, he plainly distinguished an eye gleaming and glistening at the keyhole; and having now no doubt that his suspicions were correct, he stole softly to the door, and pounced upon her before she was aware of his approach.

'Oh! I didn't mean any harm indeed, upon my word I didn't,' cried the small servant, struggling like a much larger one. 'It's so very dull, down-stairs, Please don't you tell upon me, please don't.'

'Tell upon you!' said Dick. 'Do you mean to say you were looking through the keyhole for company?'

'Yes, upon my word I was,' replied the small servant.

'How long have you been cooling your eye there?' said Dick.

'Oh ever since you first began to play them cards, and long before.'

Vague recollections of several fantastic exercises with which he had refreshed himself after the fatigues of business, and to all of which, no doubt, the small servant was a party, rather disconcerted Mr Swiveller; but he was not very sensitive on such points, and recovered himself speedily.

'Well—come in'—he said, after a little consideration. 'Here—sit down, and I'll teach you how to play.'

'Oh! I durstn't do it,' rejoined the small servant; 'Miss Sally 'ud kill me, if she know'd I come up here.'

'Have you got a fire down-stairs?' said Dick.

'A very little one,' replied the small servant.

'Miss Sally couldn't kill me if she know'd I went down there, so I'll come,' said Richard, putting the cards into his pocket. 'Why, how thin you are! What do you mean by it?'

'It ain't my fault.'

'Could you eat any bread and meat?' said Dick, taking down his hat. 'Yes? Ah! I thought so. Did you ever taste beer?' 'I had a sip of it once,' said the small servant.

'Here's a state of things!' cried Mr Swiveller, raising his eyes to the ceiling. 'She never tasted it—it can't be tasted in a sip! Why, how old are you?'

'I don't know.'

Mr Swiveller opened his eyes very wide, and appeared thoughtful for a moment; then, bidding the child mind the door until he came back, vanished straightway.

Presently, he returned, followed by the boy from the public-house, who bore in one hand a plate of bread and beef, and in the other a great pot, filled with some very fragrant compound, which sent forth a grateful steam, and was indeed choice purl, made after a particular recipe which Mr Swiveller had imparted to the landlord, at a period when he was deep in his books and desirous to conciliate his friendship. Relieving the boy of his burden at the door, and charging his little companion to fasten it to prevent surprise, Mr Swiveller followed her into the kitchen.

'There!' said Richard, putting the plate before her. 'First of all clear that off, and then you'll see what's next.'

The small servant needed no second bidding, and the plate was soon empty.

'Next,' said Dick, handing the purl, 'take a pull at that; but moderate your transports, you know, for you're not used to it. Well, is it good?'

'Oh! isn't it?' said the small servant.

Mr Swiveller appeared gratified beyond all expression by this reply, and took a long draught himself, steadfastly regarding his companion while he did so. These preliminaries disposed of, he applied himself to teaching her the game, which she soon learnt tolerably well, being both sharp-witted and cunning.

'Now,' said Mr Swiveller, putting two sixpences into a saucer, and trimming the wretched candle, when the cards had been cut and dealt, 'those are the stakes. If you win, you get 'em all. If I win, I get 'em. To make it seem more real and pleasant, I shall call you the Marchioness, do you hear?'

The small servant nodded.

'Then, Marchioness,' said Mr Swiveller, 'fire away!'

The Marchioness, holding her cards very tight in both hands, considered which to play, and Mr Swiveller, assuming the gay and fashionable air which such society required, took another pull at the tankard, and waited for her lead.

CHAPTER 58

Mr Swiveller and his partner played several rubbers with varying success, until the loss of three sixpences, the gradual sinking of the purl, and the striking of ten o'clock, combined to render that gentleman mindful of the flight of Time, and the expediency of withdrawing before Mr Sampson and Miss Sally Brass returned.

'With which object in view, Marchioness,' said Mr Swiveller gravely, 'I shall ask your ladyship's permission to put the board in my pocket, and to retire from the presence when I have finished this tankard; merely observing, Marchioness, that since life like a river is flowing, I care not how fast it rolls on, ma'am, on, while such purl on the bank still is growing, and such eyes light the waves as they run. Marchioness, your health. You will excuse my wearing my hat, but the palace is damp, and the marble floor is—if I may be allowed the expression—sloppy.'

As a precaution against this latter inconvenience, Mr Swiveller had been sitting for some time with his feet on the hob, in which attitude he now gave utterance to these apologetic observations, and slowly sipped the last choice drops of nectar.

'The Baron Sampsono Brasso and his fair sister are (you tell me) at the Play?' said Mr Swiveller, leaning his left arm heavily upon the table, and raising his voice and his right leg after the manner of a theatrical bandit.

The Marchioness nodded.

'Ha!' said Mr Swiveller, with a portentous frown. "Tis well. Marchioness!—but no matter. Some wine there. Ho!' He illustrated these melodramatic morsels by handing the tankard to himself with great humility, receiving it haughtily, drinking from it thirstily, and smacking his lips fiercely.

The small servant, who was not so well acquainted with theatrical conventionalities as Mr Swiveller (having indeed never seen a play, or heard one spoken of, except by chance through chinks of doors and in other forbidden places), was rather alarmed by demonstrations so novel in their nature, and showed her concern so plainly in her looks, that Mr Swiveller felt it necessary to discharge his brigand manner for one more suitable to private life, as he asked,

'Do they often go where glory waits 'em, and leave you here?'

'Oh, yes; I believe you they do,' returned the small servant. 'Miss Sally's such a one-er for that, she is.'

'Such a what?' said Dick.

'Such a one-er,' returned the Marchioness.

After a moment's reflection, Mr Swiveller determined to forego his responsible duty of setting her right, and to suffer her to talk on; as it was evident that her tongue was loosened by the purl, and her opportunities for conversation were not so frequent as to render a momentary check of little consequence.

'They sometimes go to see Mr Quilp,' said the small servant with a shrewd look; 'they go to a many places, bless you!'

'Is Mr Brass a wunner?' said Dick.

'Not half what Miss Sally is, he isn't,' replied the small servant, shaking her head. 'Bless you, he'd never do anything without her.'

'Oh! He wouldn't, wouldn't he?' said Dick.

'Miss Sally keeps him in such order,' said the small servant; 'he always asks her advice, he does; and he catches it sometimes. Bless you, you wouldn't believe how much he catches it.'

'I suppose,' said Dick, 'that they consult together, a good deal, and talk about a great many people—about me for instance, sometimes, eh, Marchioness?'

The Marchioness nodded amazingly.

'Complimentary?' said Mr Swiveller.

The Marchioness changed the motion of her head, which had not yet left off nodding, and suddenly began to shake it from side to side, with a vehemence which threatened to dislocate her neck.

'Humph!' Dick muttered. 'Would it be any breach of confidence, Marchioness, to relate what they say of the humble individual who has now the honour to—?'

'Miss Sally says you're a funny chap,' replied his friend.

'Well, Marchioness,' said Mr Swiveller, 'that's not uncomplimentary. Merriment, Marchioness, is not a bad or a degrading quality. Old King Cole was himself a merry old soul, if we may put any faith in the pages of history.'

'But she says,' pursued his companion, 'that you an't to be trusted.'

'Why, really Marchioness,' said Mr Swiveller, thoughtfully; 'several ladies and gentlemen—not exactly professional persons, but tradespeople, ma'am, tradespeople—have made the same remark. The obscure citizen who keeps the hotel over the way, inclined strongly to that opinion to-night when I ordered him to prepare the banquet. It's a popular prejudice, Marchioness; and yet I am sure I don't know why, for I have been trusted in my time to a considerable amount, and I can safely say that I never forsook my trust until it deserted me—never. Mr Brass is of the same opinion, I suppose?'

His friend nodded again, with a cunning look which seemed to hint that Mr Brass held stronger opinions on the subject than his sister; and seeming to recollect herself, added imploringly, 'But don't you ever tell upon me, or I shall be beat to death.'

'Marchioness,' said Mr Swiveller, rising, 'the word of a gentleman is as good as his bond—sometimes better, as in the present case, where his bond might prove but a doubtful sort of security. I am your friend, and I hope we shall play many more rubbers together in this same saloon. But, Marchioness,' added Richard, stopping in his way to the door, and wheeling slowly round upon the small servant, who was following with the candle; 'it occurs to me that you must be in the constant habit of airing your eye at keyholes, to know all this.'

'I only wanted,' replied the trembling Marchioness, 'to know where the key of the safe was hid; that was all; and I wouldn't have taken much, if I had found it—only enough to squench my hunger.'

'You didn't find it then?' said Dick. 'But of course you didn't, or you'd be plumper. Good night, Marchioness. Fare thee well, and if for ever, then for ever fare thee well—and put up the chain, Marchioness, in case of accidents.'

With this parting injunction, Mr Swiveller emerged from the house; and feeling that he had by this time taken quite as much to drink as promised to be good for his constitution (purl being a rather strong and heady compound), wisely resolved to betake himself to his lodgings, and to bed at once. Homeward he went therefore; and his apartments (for he still retained the plural fiction) being at no great distance from the office, he was soon seated in his own bed-chamber, where, having pulled off one boot and forgotten the other, he fell into deep cogitation.

'This Marchioness,' said Mr Swiveller, folding his arms, 'is a very extraordinary person—surrounded by mysteries, ignorant of the taste of beer, unacquainted with her own name (which is less remarkable), and taking a limited view of society through the keyholes of doors—can these things be her destiny, or has some unknown person started an opposition to the decrees of fate? It is a most inscrutable and unmitigated staggerer!'

When his meditations had attained this satisfactory point, he became aware of his remaining boot, of which, with unimpaired solemnity he proceeded to divest himself; shaking his head with exceeding gravity all the time, and sighing deeply.

'These rubbers,' said Mr Swiveller, putting on his nightcap in exactly the same style as he wore his hat, 'remind me of the matrimonial fireside. Cheggs's wife plays cribbage; all-fours likewise. She rings the changes on 'em now. From sport to sport they hurry her to banish her regrets, and when they win a smile from her, they think that she forgets—but she don't. By this time, I should say,' added Richard, getting his left cheek into profile, and looking complacently at the reflection of a very little scrap of whisker in the looking-glass; 'by this time, I should say, the iron has entered into her soul. It serves her right!'

Melting from this stern and obdurate, into the tender and pathetic mood, Mr Swiveller groaned a little, walked wildly up and down, and even made a show of tearing his hair, which, however, he thought better of, and wrenched the tassel from his nightcap instead. At last, undressing himself with a gloomy resolution, he got into bed.

Some men in his blighted position would have taken to drinking; but as Mr Swiveller had taken to that before, he only took, on receiving the news that Sophy Wackles was lost to him for ever, to playing the flute; thinking after mature consideration that it was a good, sound, dismal occupation, not only in unison with his own sad thoughts, but calculated to awaken a fellow-feeling in the bosoms of his neighbours. In pursuance of this resolution, he now drew a little table to his bedside, and arranging the light and a small oblong music-book to the best advantage, took his flute from its box, and began to play most mournfully.

The air was 'Away with melancholy'—a composition, which, when it is played very slowly on the flute, in bed, with the further disadvantage of being performed by a gentleman but imperfectly acquainted with the instrument, who repeats one note a great many times before he can find the next, has not a lively effect. Yet, for half the night, or more, Mr Swiveller, lying sometimes on his back with his eyes upon the ceiling, and sometimes half out of bed to correct himself by the book, played this unhappy tune over and over again; never leaving off, save for a minute or two at a time to take breath and soliloquise about the Marchioness, and then beginning again with renewed vigour. It was not until he had quite exhausted his several subjects of meditation, and had breathed into the flute the whole sentiment of the purl down to its very dregs, and had nearly maddened the people of the house, and at both the next doors, and over the way—that he shut up the music-book, extinguished the candle, and finding himself greatly lightened and relieved in his mind, turned round and fell asleep.

He awoke in the morning, much refreshed; and having taken half an hour's exercise at the flute, and graciously received a notice to quit from his landlady, who had been in waiting on the stairs for that purpose since the dawn of day, repaired to Bevis Marks; where the beautiful Sally was already at her post, bearing in her looks a radiance, mild as that which beameth from the virgin moon.

Mr Swiveller acknowledged her presence by a nod, and exchanged his coat for the aquatic jacket; which usually took some time fitting on, for in consequence of a tightness in the sleeves, it was only to be got into by a series of struggles. This difficulty overcome, he took his seat at the desk.

'I say'—quoth Miss Brass, abruptly breaking silence, 'you haven't seen a silver pencil-case this morning, have you?'

'I didn't meet many in the street,' rejoined Mr Swiveller. 'I saw one—a stout pencil-case of respectable appearance—but as he was in company with an elderly penknife, and a young toothpick with whom he was in earnest conversation, I felt a delicacy in speaking to him.'

'No, but have you?' returned Miss Brass. 'Seriously, you know.'

'What a dull dog you must be to ask me such a question seriously,' said Mr Swiveller. 'Haven't I this moment come?'

'Well, all I know is,' replied Miss Sally, 'that it's not to be found, and that it disappeared one day this week, when I left it on the desk.'

'Halloa!' thought Richard, 'I hope the Marchioness hasn't been at work here.'

'There was a knife too,' said Miss Sally, 'of the same pattern. They were given to me by my father, years ago, and are both gone. You haven't missed anything yourself, have you?'

Mr Swiveller involuntarily clapped his hands to the jacket to be quite sure that it WAS a jacket and not a skirted coat; and having satisfied himself of the safety of this, his only moveable in Bevis Marks, made answer in the negative.

'It's a very unpleasant thing, Dick,' said Miss Brass, pulling out the tin box and refreshing herself with a pinch of snuff; 'but between you and me—between friends you know, for if Sammy knew it, I should never hear the last of it—some of the office-money, too, that has been left about, has gone in the same way. In particular, I have missed three half-crowns at three different times.'

'You don't mean that?' cried Dick. 'Be careful what you say, old boy, for this is a serious matter. Are you quite sure? Is there no mistake?'

'It is so, and there can't be any mistake at all,' rejoined Miss Brass emphatically.

'Then by Jove,' thought Richard, laying down his pen, 'I am afraid the Marchioness is done for!'

The more he discussed the subject in his thoughts, the more probable it appeared to Dick that the miserable little servant was the culprit. When he considered on what a spare allowance of food she lived, how neglected and untaught she was, and how her natural cunning had been sharpened by necessity and privation, he scarcely doubted it. And yet he pitied her so much, and felt so unwilling to have a matter of such gravity disturbing the oddity of their acquaintance, that he thought, and thought truly, that rather than receive fifty pounds down, he would have the Marchioness proved innocent.

While he was plunged in very profound and serious meditation upon this theme, Miss Sally sat shaking her head with an air of great mystery and doubt; when the voice of her brother Sampson, carolling a cheerful strain, was heard in the passage, and that gentleman himself, beaming with virtuous smiles, appeared.

'Mr Richard, sir, good morning! Here we are again, sir, entering upon another day, with our bodies strengthened by slumber and breakfast, and our spirits fresh and flowing. Here we are, Mr Richard, rising with the sun to run our little course—our course of duty, sir—and, like him, to get through our day's work with credit to ourselves and advantage to our fellow-creatures. A charming reflection sir, very charming!'

While he addressed his clerk in these words, Mr Brass was, somewhat ostentatiously, engaged in minutely examining and holding up against the light a five-pound bank note, which he had brought in, in his hand.

Mr Richard not receiving his remarks with anything like enthusiasm, his employer turned his eyes to his face, and observed that it wore a troubled expression.

'You're out of spirits, sir,' said Brass. 'Mr Richard, sir, we should fall to work cheerfully, and not in a despondent state. It becomes us, Mr Richard, sir, to—'

Here the chaste Sarah heaved a loud sigh.

'Dear me!' said Mr Sampson, 'you too! Is anything the matter? Mr Richard, sir—'

Dick, glancing at Miss Sally, saw that she was making signals to him, to acquaint her brother with the subject of their recent conversation. As his own position was not a very pleasant one until the matter was set at rest one way or other, he did so; and Miss Brass, plying her snuff-box at a most wasteful rate, corroborated his account.

The countenance of Sampson fell, and anxiety overspread his features. Instead of passionately bewailing the loss of his money, as Miss Sally had expected, he walked on tiptoe to the door, opened it, looked outside, shut it softly, returned on tiptoe, and said in a whisper,

'This is a most extraordinary and painful circumstance—Mr Richard, sir, a most painful circumstance. The fact is, that I myself have missed several small sums from the desk, of late, and have refrained from mentioning it, hoping that accident would discover the offender; but it has not done so—it has not done so. Sally—Mr Richard, sir—this is a particularly distressing affair!'

As Sampson spoke, he laid the bank-note upon the desk among some papers, in an absent manner, and thrust his hands into his pockets. Richard

Swiveller pointed to it, and admonished him to take it up.

'No, Mr Richard, sir,' rejoined Brass with emotion, 'I will not take it up. I will let it lie there, sir. To take it up, Mr Richard, sir, would imply a doubt of you; and in you, sir, I have unlimited confidence. We will let it lie there, Sir, if you please, and we will not take it up by any means.' With that, Mr Brass patted him twice or thrice on the shoulder, in a most friendly manner, and entreated him to believe that he had as much faith in his honesty as he had in his own.

Although at another time Mr Swiveller might have looked upon this as a doubtful compliment, he felt it, under the then-existing circumstances, a great relief to be assured that he was not wrongfully suspected. When he had made a suitable reply, Mr Brass wrung him by the hand, and fell into a brown study, as did Miss Sally likewise. Richard too remained in a thoughtful state; fearing every moment to hear the Marchioness impeached, and unable to resist the conviction that she must be guilty.

When they had severally remained in this condition for some minutes, Miss Sally all at once gave a loud rap upon the desk with her clenched fist, and cried, 'I've hit it!'—as indeed she had, and chipped a piece out of it too; but that was not her meaning.

'Well,' cried Brass anxiously. 'Go on, will you!'

'Why,' replied his sister with an air of triumph, 'hasn't there been somebody always coming in and out of this office for the last three or four weeks; hasn't that somebody been left alone in it sometimes—thanks to you; and do you mean to tell me that that somebody isn't the thief!'

'What somebody?' blustered Brass.

'Why, what do you call him—Kit.'

'Mr Garland's young man?'

'To be sure.'

'Never!' cried Brass. 'Never. I'll not hear of it. Don't tell me'—said Sampson, shaking his head, and working with both his hands as if he were clearing away ten thousand cobwebs. 'I'll never believe it of him. Never!'

'I say,' repeated Miss Brass, taking another pinch of snuff, 'that he's the thief.'

'I say,' returned Sampson violently, 'that he is not. What do you mean? How dare you? Are characters to be whispered away like this? Do you know that he's the honestest and faithfullest fellow that ever lived, and that he has an irreproachable good name? Come in, come in!'

These last words were not addressed to Miss Sally, though they partook of the tone in which the indignant remonstrances that preceded them had been uttered. They were addressed to some person who had knocked at the office-door; and they had hardly passed the lips of Mr Brass, when this very Kit himself looked in.

'Is the gentleman up-stairs, sir, if you please?'

'Yes, Kit,' said Brass, still fired with an honest indignation, and frowning with knotted brows upon his sister; 'Yes Kit, he is. I am glad to see you Kit, I am rejoiced to see you. Look in again, as you come down-stairs, Kit. That lad a robber!' cried Brass when he had withdrawn, 'with that frank and open countenance! I'd trust him with untold gold. Mr Richard, sir, have the goodness to step directly to Wrasp and Co.'s in Broad Street, and inquire if they have had instructions to appear in Carkem and Painter. THAT lad a robber,' sneered Sampson, flushed and heated with his wrath. 'Am I blind, deaf, silly; do I know nothing of human nature when I see it before me? Kit a robber! Bah!'

Flinging this final interjection at Miss Sally with immeasurable scorn and contempt, Sampson Brass thrust his head into his desk, as if to shut the base world from his view, and breathed defiance from under its half-closed lid.

CHAPTER 59

When Kit, having discharged his errand, came down-stairs from the single gentleman's apartment after the lapse of a quarter of an hour or so, Mr Sampson Brass was alone in the office. He was not singing as usual, nor was he seated at his desk. The open door showed him standing before the fire with his back towards it, and looking so very strange that Kit supposed he must have been suddenly taken ill.

'Is anything the matter, sir?' said Kit.

'Matter!' cried Brass. 'No. Why anything the matter?'

'You are so very pale,' said Kit, 'that I should hardly have known you.'

'Pooh pooh! mere fancy,' cried Brass, stooping to throw up the cinders. 'Never better, Kit, never better in all my life. Merry too. Ha ha! How's our friend above-stairs, eh?'

'A great deal better,' said Kit.

'I'm glad to hear it,' rejoined Brass; 'thankful, I may say. An excellent gentleman—worthy, liberal, generous, gives very little trouble—an admirable lodger. Ha ha! Mr Garland—he's well I hope, Kit—and the pony—my friend, my particular friend you know. Ha ha!'

Kit gave a satisfactory account of all the little household at Abel Cottage. Mr Brass, who seemed remarkably inattentive and impatient, mounted on his stool, and beckoning him to come nearer, took him by the button-hole.

'I have been thinking, Kit,' said the lawyer, 'that I could throw some little emoluments in your mother's way—You have a mother, I think? If I recollect right, you told me—'

'Oh yes, Sir, yes certainly.'

'A widow, I think? an industrious widow?'

'A harder-working woman or a better mother never lived, Sir.'

'Ah!' cried Brass. 'That's affecting, truly affecting. A poor widow struggling to maintain her orphans in decency and comfort, is a delicious picture of human goodness.—Put down your hat, Kit.'

'Thank you Sir, I must be going directly.'

'Put it down while you stay, at any rate,' said Brass, taking it from him and making some confusion among the papers, in finding a place for it on the desk. 'I was thinking, Kit, that we have often houses to let for people we are concerned for, and matters of that sort. Now you know we're obliged to put people into those houses to take care of 'em—very often undeserving people that we can't depend upon. What's to prevent our having a person that we CAN depend upon, and enjoying the delight of doing a good action at the same time? I say, what's to prevent our employing this worthy woman, your mother? What with one job and another, there's lodging—and good lodging too—pretty well all the year round, rent free, and a weekly allowance besides, Kit, that would provide her with a great many comforts she don't at present enjoy. Now what do you think of that? Do you see any objection? My only desire is to serve you, Kit; therefore if you do, say so freely.'

As Brass spoke, he moved the hat twice or thrice, and shuffled among the papers again, as if in search of something.

'How can I see any objection to such a kind offer, sir?' replied Kit with his whole heart. 'I don't know how to thank you sir, I don't indeed.'

'Why then,' said Brass, suddenly turning upon him and thrusting his face close to Kit's with such a repulsive smile that the latter, even in the very height of his gratitude, drew back, quite startled. 'Why then, it's done.'

Kit looked at him in some confusion.

'Done, I say,' added Sampson, rubbing his hands and veiling himself again in his usual oily manner. 'Ha ha! and so you shall find Kit, so you shall find. But dear me,' said Brass, 'what a time Mr Richard is gone! A sad loiterer to be sure! Will you mind the office one minute, while I run upstairs? Only one minute. I'll not detain you an instant longer, on any account, Kit.'

Talking as he went, Mr Brass bustled out of the office, and in a very short time returned. Mr Swiveller came back, almost at the same instant; and as Kit was leaving the room hastily, to make up for lost time, Miss Brass herself encountered him in the doorway.

'Oh!' sneered Sally, looking after him as she entered. 'There goes your pet, Sammy, eh?'

'Ah! There he goes,' replied Brass. 'My pet, if you please. An honest fellow, Mr Richard, sir—a worthy fellow indeed!'

'Hem!' coughed Miss Brass.

'I tell you, you aggravating vagabond,' said the angry Sampson, 'that I'd stake my life upon his honesty. Am I never to hear the last of this? Am I always to be baited, and beset, by your mean suspicions? Have you no regard for true merit, you malignant fellow? If you come to that, I'd sooner suspect your honesty than his.'

Miss Sally pulled out the tin snuff-box, and took a long, slow pinch, regarding her brother with a steady gaze all the time.

'She drives me wild, Mr Richard, sir,' said Brass, 'she exasperates me beyond all bearing. I am heated and excited, sir, I know I am. These are not business manners, sir, nor business looks, but she carries me out of myself.'

'Why don't you leave him alone?' said Dick.

'Because she can't, sir,' retorted Brass; 'because to chafe and vex me is a part of her nature, Sir, and she will and must do it, or I don't believe she'd have her health. But never mind,' said Brass, 'never mind. I've carried my point. I've shown my confidence in the lad. He has minded the office again. Ha ha! Ugh, you viper!'

The beautiful virgin took another pinch, and put the snuff-box in her pocket; still looking at her brother with perfect composure.

'He has minded the office again,' said Brass triumphantly; 'he has had my confidence, and he shall continue to have it; he—why, where's the—'

'What have you lost?' inquired Mr Swiveller.

'Dear me!' said Brass, slapping all his pockets, one after another, and looking into his desk, and under it, and upon it, and wildly tossing the papers about, 'the note, Mr Richard, sir, the five-pound note—what can have become of it? I laid it down here—God bless me!'

'What!' cried Miss Sally, starting up, clapping her hands, and scattering the papers on the floor. 'Gone! Now who's right? Now who's got it? Never mind five pounds—what's five pounds? He's honest, you know, quite honest. It would be mean to suspect him. Don't run after him. No, no, not for the world!'

'Is it really gone though?' said Dick, looking at Brass with a face as pale as his own.

'Upon my word, Mr Richard, Sir,' replied the lawyer, feeling in all his pockets with looks of the greatest agitation, 'I fear this is a black business. It's certainly gone, Sir. What's to be done?'

'Don't run after him,' said Miss Sally, taking more snuff. 'Don't run after him on any account. Give him time to get rid of it, you know. It would be cruel to find him out!'

Mr Swiveller and Sampson Brass looked from Miss Sally to each other, in a state of bewilderment, and then, as by one impulse, caught up their hats and rushed out into the street—darting along in the middle of the road, and dashing aside all obstructions, as though they were running for their lives.

It happened that Kit had been running too, though not so fast, and having the start of them by some few minutes, was a good distance ahead. As they were pretty certain of the road he must have taken, however, and kept on at a great pace, they came up with him, at the very moment when he had taken breath, and was breaking into a run again.

'Stop!' cried Sampson, laying his hand on one shoulder, while Mr Swiveller pounced upon the other. 'Not so fast sir. You're in a hurry?'

'Yes, I am,' said Kit, looking from one to the other in great surprise.

'I—I—can hardly believe it,' panted Sampson, 'but something of value is missing from the office. I hope you don't know what.'

'Know what! good Heaven, Mr Brass!' cried Kit, trembling from head to foot; 'you don't suppose—'

'No, no,' rejoined Brass quickly, 'I don't suppose anything. Don't say I said you did. You'll come back quietly, I hope?'

'Of course I will,' returned Kit. 'Why not?'

'To be sure!' said Brass. 'Why not? I hope there may turn out to be no why not. If you knew the trouble I've been in, this morning, through taking your part, Christopher, you'd be sorry for it.'

'And I am sure you'll be sorry for having suspected me sir,' replied Kit. 'Come. Let us make haste back.'

'Certainly!' cried Brass, 'the quicker, the better. Mr Richard—have the goodness, sir, to take that arm. I'll take this one. It's not easy walking three abreast, but under these circumstances it must be done, sir; there's no help for it.'

Kit did turn from white to red, and from red to white again, when they secured him thus, and for a moment seemed disposed to resist. But, quickly recollecting himself, and remembering that if he made any struggle, he would perhaps be dragged by the collar through the public streets, he only repeated, with great earnestness and with the tears standing in his eyes, that they would be sorry for this—and suffered them to lead him off. While they were on the way back, Mr Swiveller, upon whom his present functions sat very irksomely, took an opportunity of whispering in his ear that if he would confess his guilt, even by so much as a nod, and promise not to do so any more, he would connive at his kicking Sampson Brass on the shins and escaping up a court; but Kit indignantly rejecting this proposal, Mr Richard had nothing for it, but to hold him tight until they reached Bevis Marks, and ushered him into the presence of the charming Sarah, who immediately took the precaution of locking the door.

'Now, you know,' said Brass, 'if this is a case of innocence, it is a case of that description, Christopher, where the fullest disclosure is the best satisfaction for everybody. Therefore if you'll consent to an examination,' he demonstrated what kind of examination he meant by turning back the cuffs of his coat, 'it will be a comfortable and pleasant thing for all parties.'

'Search me,' said Kit, proudly holding up his arms. 'But mind, sir—I know you'll be sorry for this, to the last day of your life.'

'It is certainly a very painful occurrence,' said Brass with a sigh, as he dived into one of Kit's pockets, and fished up a miscellaneous collection of small articles; 'very painful. Nothing here, Mr Richard, Sir, all perfectly satisfactory. Nor here, sir. Nor in the waistcoat, Mr Richard, nor in the coat tails. So far, I am rejoiced, I am sure.'

Richard Swiveller, holding Kit's hat in his hand, was watching the proceedings with great interest, and bore upon his face the slightest possible indication of a smile, as Brass, shutting one of his eyes, looked with the other up the inside of one of the poor fellow's sleeves as if it were a telescope—when Sampson turning hastily to him, bade him search the hat.

'Here's a handkerchief,' said Dick.

'No harm in that sir,' rejoined Brass, applying his eye to the other sleeve, and speaking in the voice of one who was contemplating an immense extent of prospect. 'No harm in a handkerchief Sir, whatever. The faculty don't consider it a healthy custom, I believe, Mr Richard, to carry one's handkerchief in one's hat—I have heard that it keeps the head too warm—but in every other point of view, its being there, is extremely satisfactory—extremely so.'

An exclamation, at once from Richard Swiveller, Miss Sally, and Kit himself, cut the lawyer short. He turned his head, and saw Dick standing with the bank-note in his hand.

'In the hat?' cried Brass in a sort of shriek.

'Under the handkerchief, and tucked beneath the lining,' said Dick, aghast at the discovery.

Mr Brass looked at him, at his sister, at the walls, at the ceiling, at the floor—everywhere but at Kit, who stood quite stupefied and motionless.

'And this,' cried Sampson, clasping his hands, 'is the world that turns upon its own axis, and has Lunar influences, and revolutions round Heavenly Bodies, and various games of that sort! This is human natur, is it! Oh natur, natur! This is the miscreant that I was going to benefit with all my little arts, and that, even now, I feel so much for, as to wish to let him go! But,' added Mr Brass with greater fortitude, 'I am myself a lawyer, and bound to set an example in carrying the laws of my happy country into effect. Sally my dear, forgive me, and catch hold of him on the other side. Mr Richard, sir, have the goodness to run and fetch a constable. The weakness is past and over sir, and moral strength returns. A constable, sir, if you please!'

CHAPTER 60

Kit stood as one entranced, with his eyes opened wide and fixed upon the ground, regardless alike of the tremulous hold which Mr Brass maintained on one side of his cravat, and of the firmer grasp of Miss Sally upon the other; although this latter detention was in itself no small inconvenience, as that fascinating woman, besides screwing her knuckles inconveniently into his throat from time to time, had fastened upon him in the first instance with so tight a grip that even in the disorder and distraction of his thoughts he could not divest himself of an uneasy sense of choking. Between the brother and sister he remained in this posture, quite unresisting and passive, until Mr Swiveller returned, with a police constable at his heels.

This functionary, being, of course, well used to such scenes; looking upon all kinds of robbery, from petty larceny up to housebreaking or ventures on the highway, as matters in the regular course of business; and regarding the perpetrators in the light of so many customers coming to be served at the wholesale and retail shop of criminal law where he stood behind the counter; received Mr Brass's statement of facts with about as much interest and surprise, as an undertaker might evince if required to listen to a circumstantial account of the last illness of a person whom he was called in to wait upon professionally; and took Kit into custody with a decent indifference.

'We had better,' said this subordinate minister of justice, 'get to the office while there's a magistrate sitting. I shall want you to come along with us, Mr Brass, and the—' he looked at Miss Sally as if in some doubt whether she might not be a griffin or other fabulous monster.

'The lady, eh?' said Sampson.

'Ah!' replied the constable. 'Yes—the lady. Likewise the young man that found the property.'

'Mr Richard, Sir,' said Brass in a mournful voice. 'A sad necessity. But the altar of our country sir—'

'You'll have a hackney-coach, I suppose?' interrupted the constable, holding Kit (whom his other captors had released) carelessly by the arm, a little above the elbow. 'Be so good as send for one, will you?'

'But, hear me speak a word,' cried Kit, raising his eyes and looking imploringly about him. 'Hear me speak a word. I am no more guilty than any one of you. Upon my soul I am not. I a thief! Oh, Mr Brass, you know me better. I am sure you know me better. This is not right of you, indeed.'

'I give you my word, constable—' said Brass. But here the constable interposed with the constitutional principle 'words be blowed;' observing that words were but spoon-meat for babes and sucklings, and that oaths were the food for strong men.

'Quite true, constable,' assented Brass in the same mournful tone. 'Strictly correct. I give you my oath, constable, that down to a few minutes ago, when this fatal discovery was made, I had such confidence in that lad, that I'd have trusted him with—a hackney-coach, Mr Richard, sir; you're very slow, Sir.'

'Who is there that knows me,' cried Kit, 'that would not trust me— that does not? ask anybody whether they have ever doubted me; whether I have ever wronged them of a farthing. Was I ever once dishonest when I was poor and hungry, and is it likely I would begin now! Oh consider what you do. How can I meet the kindest friends that ever human creature had, with this dreadful charge upon me!'

Mr Brass rejoined that it would have been well for the prisoner if he had thought of that, before, and was about to make some other gloomy observations when the voice of the single gentleman was heard, demanding from above-stairs what was the matter, and what was the cause of all that noise and hurry. Kit made an involuntary start towards the door in his anxiety to answer for himself, but being speedily detained by the constable, had the agony of seeing Sampson Brass run out alone to tell the story in his own way.

'And he can hardly believe it, either,' said Sampson, when he returned, 'nor nobody will. I wish I could doubt the evidence of my senses, but their depositions are unimpeachable. It's of no use cross-examining my eyes,' cried Sampson, winking and rubbing them, 'they stick to their first account, and will. Now, Sarah, I hear the coach in the Marks; get on your bonnet, and we'll be off. A sad errand! a moral funeral, quite!'

'Mr Brass,' said Kit. 'Do me one favour. Take me to Mr Witherden's first.'

Sampson shook his head irresolutely.

'Do,' said Kit. 'My master's there. For Heaven's sake, take me there, first.'

'Well, I don't know,' stammered Brass, who perhaps had his reasons for wishing to show as fair as possible in the eyes of the notary. 'How do we stand in point of time, constable, eh?'

The constable, who had been chewing a straw all this while with great philosophy, replied that if they went away at once they would have time enough, but that if they stood shilly-shallying there, any longer, they must go straight to the Mansion House; and finally expressed his opinion that that was where it was, and that was all about it.

Mr Richard Swiveller having arrived inside the coach, and still remaining immoveable in the most commodious corner with his face to the horses, Mr Brass instructed the officer to remove his prisoner, and declared himself quite ready. Therefore, the constable, still holding Kit in the same manner, and pushing him on a little before him, so as to keep him at about three-quarters of an arm's length in advance (which is the professional mode), thrust him into the vehicle and followed himself. Miss Sally entered next; and there being now four inside, Sampson Brass got upon the box, and made the coachman drive on.

Still completely stunned by the sudden and terrible change which had taken place in his affairs, Kit sat gazing out of the coach window, almost hoping to see some monstrous phenomenon in the streets which might give him reason to believe he was in a dream. Alas! Everything was too real and familiar: the same succession of turnings, the same houses, the same streams of people running side by side in different directions upon the pavement, the same bustle of carts and carriages in the road, the same well-remembered objects in the shop windows: a regularity in the very noise and hurry which no dream ever mirrored. Dream-like as the story was, it was true. He stood charged with robbery; the note had been found upon him, though he was innocent in thought and deed; and they were carrying him back, a prisoner.

Absorbed in these painful ruminations, thinking with a drooping heart of his mother and little Jacob, feeling as though even the consciousness of innocence would be insufficient to support him in the presence of his friends if they believed him guilty, and sinking in hope and courage more and more as they drew nearer to the notary's, poor Kit was looking earnestly out of the window, observant of nothing,—when all at once, as though it had been conjured up by magic, he became aware of the face of Quilp.

And what a leer there was upon the face! It was from the open window of a tavern that it looked out; and the dwarf had so spread himself over it, with his elbows on the window-sill and his head resting on both his hands, that what between this attitude and his being swoln with suppressed laughter, he looked puffed and bloated into twice his usual breadth. Mr Brass, on recognising him, immediately stopped the coach. As it came to a halt directly opposite to where he stood, the dwarf pulled off his hat, and saluted the party with a hideous and grotesque politeness. 'Aha!' he cried. 'Where now, Brass? where now? Sally with you too? Sweet Sally! And Dick? Pleasant Dick! And Kit! Honest Kit!'

'He's extremely cheerful!' said Brass to the coachman. 'Very much so! Ah, sir—a sad business! Never believe in honesty any more, sir.'

'Why not?' returned the dwarf. 'Why not, you rogue of a lawyer, why not?'

'Bank-note lost in our office sir,' said Brass, shaking his head. 'Found in his hat sir—he previously left alone there—no mistake at all sir—chain of evidence complete—not a link wanting.'

'What!' cried the dwarf, leaning half his body out of window. 'Kit a thief! Kit a thief! Ha ha ha! Why, he's an uglier-looking thief than can be seen anywhere for a penny. Eh, Kit—eh? Ha ha ha! Have you taken Kit into custody before he had time and opportunity to beat me! Eh, Kit, eh?' And with that, he burst into a yell of laughter, manifestly to the great terror of the coachman, and pointed to a dyer's pole hard by, where a dangling suit of clothes bore some resemblance to a man upon a gibbet.

'Is it coming to that, Kit!' cried the dwarf, rubbing his hands violently. 'Ha ha ha ha! What a disappointment for little Jacob, and for his darling mother! Let him have the Bethel minister to comfort and console him, Brass. Eh, Kit, eh? Drive on coachey, drive on. Bye bye, Kit; all good go with you; keep up your spirits; my love to the Garlands—the dear old lady and gentleman. Say I inquired after 'em, will you? Blessings on 'em, on you, and on everybody, Kit. Blessings on all the world!'

With such good wishes and farewells, poured out in a rapid torrent until they were out of hearing, Quilp suffered them to depart; and when he could see the coach no longer, drew in his head, and rolled upon the ground in an ecstacy of enjoyment.

When they reached the notary's, which they were not long in doing, for they had encountered the dwarf in a bye street at a very little distance from the house, Mr Brass dismounted; and opening the coach door with a melancholy visage, requested his sister to accompany him into the office, with the view of preparing the good people within, for the mournful intelligence that awaited them. Miss Sally complying, he desired Mr Swiveller to accompany them. So, into the office they went; Mr Sampson and his sister arm-in-arm; and Mr Swiveller following, alone.

The notary was standing before the fire in the outer office, talking to Mr Abel and the elder Mr Garland, while Mr Chuckster sat writing at the desk, picking up such crumbs of their conversation as happened to fall in his way. This posture of affairs Mr Brass observed through the glass-door as he was turning the handle, and seeing that the notary recognised him, he began to shake his head and sigh deeply while that partition yet divided them.

'Sir,' said Sampson, taking off his hat, and kissing the two fore-fingers of his right hand beaver glove, 'my name is Brass—Brass of Bevis Marks, Sir. I have had the honour and pleasure, Sir, of being concerned against you in some little testamentary matters. How do you do, sir?'

'My clerk will attend to any business you may have come upon, Mr Brass,' said the notary, turning away.

'Thank you Sir,' said Brass, 'thank you, I am sure. Allow me, Sir, to introduce my sister—quite one of us Sir, although of the weaker sex—of great use in my business Sir, I assure you. Mr Richard, sir, have the goodness to come foward if you please—No really,' said Brass, stepping between the notary and his private office (towards which he had begun to retreat), and speaking in the tone of an injured man, 'really Sir, I must, under favour, request a word or two with you, indeed.'

'Mr Brass,' said the other, in a decided tone, 'I am engaged. You see that I am occupied with these gentlemen. If you will communicate your business to Mr Chuckster yonder, you will receive every attention.'

'Gentlemen,' said Brass, laying his right hand on his waistcoat, and looking towards the father and son with a smooth smile—'Gentlemen, I appeal to you—really, gentlemen—consider, I beg of you. I am of the law. I am styled "gentleman" by Act of Parliament. I maintain the title by the annual payment of twelve pound sterling for a certificate. I am not one of your players of music, stage actors, writers of books, or painters of pictures, who assume a station that the laws of their country don't recognise. I am none of your strollers or vagabonds. If any man brings his action against me, he must describe me as a gentleman, or his action is null and void. I appeal to you—is this quite respectful? Really gentlemen—'

'Well, will you have the goodness to state your business then, Mr Brass?' said the notary.

'Sir,' rejoined Brass, 'I will. Ah Mr Witherden! you little know the—but I will not be tempted to travel from the point, sir, I believe the name of one of these gentlemen is Garland.'

'Of both,' said the notary.

'In-deed!' rejoined Brass, cringing excessively. 'But I might have known that, from the uncommon likeness. Extremely happy, I am sure, to have the honour of an introduction to two such gentlemen, although the occasion is a most painful one. One of you gentlemen has a servant called Kit?'

'Both,' replied the notary. 'Two Kits?' said Brass smiling. 'Dear me!'

'One Kit, sir,' returned Mr Witherden angrily, 'who is employed by both gentlemen. What of him?'

'This of him, sir,' rejoined Brass, dropping his voice impressively. 'That young man, sir, that I have felt unbounded and unlimited confidence in, and always behaved to as if he was my equal—that young man has this morning committed a robbery in my office, and been taken almost in the fact.'

'This must be some falsehood!' cried the notary.

'It is not possible,' said Mr Abel.

'I'll not believe one word of it,' exclaimed the old gentleman.

Mr Brass looked mildly round upon them, and rejoined,

'Mr Witherden, sir, YOUR words are actionable, and if I was a man of low and mean standing, who couldn't afford to be slandered, I should proceed for damages. Hows'ever, sir, being what I am, I merely scorn such expressions. The honest warmth of the other gentleman I respect, and I'm truly sorry to be the messenger of such unpleasant news. I shouldn't have put myself in this painful position, I assure you, but that the lad himself desired to be brought here in the first instance, and I yielded to his prayers. Mr Chuckster, sir, will you have the goodness to tap at the window for the constable that's waiting in the coach?'

The three gentlemen looked at each other with blank faces when these words were uttered, and Mr Chuckster, doing as he was desired, and leaping off his stool with something of the excitement of an inspired prophet whose foretellings had in the fulness of time been realised, held the door open for the entrance of the wretched captive.

Such a scene as there was, when Kit came in, and bursting into the rude eloquence with which Truth at length inspired him, called Heaven to witness that he was innocent, and that how the property came to be found upon him he knew not! Such a confusion of tongues, before the circumstances were related, and the proofs disclosed! Such a dead silence when all was told, and his three friends exchanged looks of doubt and amazement!

'Is it not possible,' said Mr Witherden, after a long pause, 'that this note may have found its way into the hat by some accident,—such as the removal of papers on the desk, for instance?'

But this was clearly shown to be quite impossible. Mr Swiveller, though an unwilling witness, could not help proving to demonstration, from the position in which it was found, that it must have been designedly secreted.

'It's very distressing,' said Brass, 'immensely distressing, I am sure. When he comes to be tried, I shall be very happy to recommend him to mercy on account of his previous good character. I did lose money before, certainly, but it doesn't quite follow that he took it. The presumption's against him—strongly against him—but we're Christians, I hope?'

'I suppose,' said the constable, looking round, 'that no gentleman here can give evidence as to whether he's been flush of money of late, Do you happen to know, Sir?'

'He has had money from time to time, certainly,' returned Mr Garland, to whom the man had put the question. 'But that, as he always told me, was given him by Mr Brass himself.'

'Yes to be sure,' said Kit eagerly. 'You can bear me out in that, Sir?'

'Eh?' cried Brass, looking from face to face with an expression of stupid amazement.

'The money you know, the half-crowns, that you gave me—from the lodger,' said Kit.

'Oh dear me!' cried Brass, shaking his head and frowning heavily. 'This is a bad case, I find; a very bad case indeed.'

'What! Did you give him no money on account of anybody, Sir?' asked Mr Garland, with great anxiety.

'I give him money, Sir!' returned Sampson. 'Oh, come you know, this is too barefaced. Constable, my good fellow, we had better be going.'

'What!' shrieked Kit. 'Does he deny that he did? ask him, somebody, pray. Ask him to tell you whether he did or not!'

'Did you, sir?' asked the notary.

'I tell you what, gentlemen,' replied Brass, in a very grave manner, 'he'll not serve his case this way, and really, if you feel any interest in him, you had better advise him to go upon some other tack. Did I, sir? Of course I never did.'

'Gentlemen,' cried Kit, on whom a light broke suddenly, 'Master, Mr Abel, Mr Witherden, every one of you—he did it! What I have done to offend him, I don't know, but this is a plot to ruin me. Mind, gentlemen, it's a plot, and whatever comes of it, I will say with my dying breath that he put that note in my hat himself! Look at him, gentlemen! see how he changes colour. Which of us looks the guilty person—he, or I?'

'You hear him, gentlemen?' said Brass, smiling, 'you hear him. Now, does this case strike you as assuming rather a black complexion, or does it not? Is it at all a treacherous case, do you think, or is it one of mere ordinary guilt? Perhaps, gentlemen, if he had not said this in your presence and I had reported it, you'd have held this to be impossible likewise, eh?'

With such pacific and bantering remarks did Mr Brass refute the foul aspersion on his character; but the virtuous Sarah, moved by stronger feelings, and having at heart, perhaps, a more jealous regard for the honour of her family, flew from her brother's side, without any previous intimation of her design, and darted at the prisoner with the utmost fury. It would undoubtedly have gone hard with Kit's face, but that the wary constable, foreseeing her design, drew him aside at the critical moment, and thus placed Mr Chuckster in circumstances of some jeopardy; for that gentleman happening to be next the object of Miss Brass's wrath; and rage being, like love and fortune, blind; was pounced upon by the fair enslaver, and had a false collar plucked up by the roots, and his hair very much dishevelled, before the exertions of the company could make her sensible of her mistake.

The constable, taking warning by this desperate attack, and thinking perhaps that it would be more satisfactory to the ends of justice if the prisoner were taken before a magistrate, whole, rather than in small pieces, led him back to the hackney-coach without more ado, and moreover insisted on Miss Brass becoming an outside passenger; to which proposal the charming creature, after a little angry discussion, yielded her consent; and so took her brother Sampson's place upon the box: Mr Brass with some reluctance agreeing to occupy her seat inside. These arrangements perfected, they drove to the justice-room with all speed, followed by the notary and his two friends in another coach. Mr Chuckster alone was left behind—greatly to his indignation; for he held the evidence he could have given, relative to Kit's returning to work out the shilling, to be so very material as bearing upon his hypocritical and designing character, that he considered its suppression little better than a compromise of felony.

At the justice-room, they found the single gentleman, who had gone straight there, and was expecting them with desperate impatience. But not fifty single gentlemen rolled into one could have helped poor Kit, who in half an hour afterwards was committed for trial, and was assured by a friendly officer on his way to prison that there was no occasion to be cast down, for the sessions would soon be on, and he would, in all likelihood, get his little affair disposed of, and be comfortably transported, in less than a fortnight.

CHAPTER 61

Let moralists and philosophers say what they may, it is very questionable whether a guilty man would have felt half as much misery that night, as Kit did, being innocent. The world, being in the constant commission of vast quantities of injustice, is a little too apt to comfort itself with the idea that if the victim of its falsehood and malice have a clear conscience, he cannot fail to be sustained under his trials, and somehow or other to come right at last; 'in which case,' say they who have hunted him down, '—though we certainly don't expect it—nobody will be better pleased than we.' Whereas, the world would do well to reflect, that injustice is in itself, to every generous and properly constituted mind, an injury, of all others the most insufferable, the most torturing, and the most hard to bear; and that many clear consciences have gone to their account elsewhere, and many sound hearts have broken, because of this very reason; the knowledge of their own deserts only aggravating their sufferings, and rendering them the less endurable.

The world, however, was not in fault in Kit's case. But Kit was innocent; and knowing this, and feeling that his best friends deemed him guilty—that Mr and Mrs Garland would look upon him as a monster of ingratitude—that Barbara would associate him with all that was bad and criminal—that the pony would consider himself forsaken—and that even his own mother might perhaps yield to the strong appearances against him, and believe him to be the wretch he seemed—knowing and feeling all this, he experienced, at first, an agony of mind which no words can describe, and walked up and down the little cell in which he was locked up for the night, almost beside himself with grief.

Even when the violence of these emotions had in some degree subsided, and he was beginning to grow more calm, there came into his mind a new thought, the anguish of which was scarcely less. The child—the bright star of the simple fellow's life—she, who always came back upon him like a beautiful dream—who had made the poorest part of his existence, the happiest and best—who had ever been so gentle, and considerate, and good—if she were ever to hear of this, what would she think! As this idea occurred to him, the walls of the prison seemed to melt away, and the old place to reveal itself in their stead, as it was wont to be on winter nights—the fireside, the little supper table, the old man's hat, and coat, and stick—the half-opened door, leading to her little room—they were all there. And Nell herself was there, and he—both laughing heartily as they had often done—and when he had got as far as this, Kit could go no farther, but flung himself upon his poor bedstead and wept.

It was a long night, which seemed as though it would have no end; but he slept too, and dreamed—always of being at liberty, and roving about, now with one person and now with another, but ever with a vague dread of being recalled to prison; not that prison, but one which was in itself a dim idea—not of a place, but of a care and sorrow: of something oppressive and always present, and yet impossible to define. At last, the morning dawned, and there was the jail itself—cold, black, and dreary, and very real indeed. He was left to himself, however, and there was comfort in that. He had liberty to walk in a small paved yard at a certain hour, and learnt from the turnkey, who came to unlock his cell and show him where to wash, that there was a regular time for visiting, every day, and that if any of his friends came to see him, he would be fetched down to the grate. When he had given him this information, and a tin porringer containing his breakfast, the man locked him up again; and went clattering along the stone passage, opening and shutting a great many other doors, and raising numberless loud echoes which resounded through the building for a long time, as if they were in prison too, and unable to get out.

This turnkey had given him to understand that he was lodged, like some few others in the jail, apart from the mass of prisoners; because he was not supposed to be utterly depraved and irreclaimable, and had never occupied apartments in that mansion before. Kit was thankful for this indulgence, and sat reading the church catechism very attentively (though he had known it by heart from a little child), until he heard the key in the lock, and the man entered again.

'Now then,' he said, 'come on!'

'Where to, Sir?' asked Kit.

The man contented himself by briefly replying 'Wisitors;' and taking him by the arm in exactly the same manner as the constable had done the day before, led him, through several winding ways and strong gates, into a passage, where he placed him at a grating and turned upon his heel. Beyond this grating, at the distance of about four or five feet, was another exactly like it. In the space between, sat a turnkey reading a newspaper, and outside the further railing, Kit saw, with a palpitating heart, his mother with the baby in her arms; Barbara's mother with her never-failing umbrella; and poor little Jacob, staring in with all his might, as though he were looking for the bird, or the wild beast, and thought the men were mere accidents with whom the bars could have no possible concern.

But when little Jacob saw his brother, and, thrusting his arms between the rails to hug him, found that he came no nearer, but still stood afar off with his head resting on the arm by which he held to one of the bars, he began to cry most piteously; whereupon, Kit's mother and Barbara's mother, who had restrained themselves as much as possible, burst out sobbing and weeping afresh. Poor Kit could not help joining them, and not one of them could speak a word. During this melancholy pause, the turnkey read his newspaper with a waggish look (he had evidently got among the facetious paragraphs) until, happening to take his eyes off for an instant, as if to get by dint of contemplation at the very marrow of some joke of a deeper sort than the rest, it appeared to occur to him, for the first time, that somebody was crying.

'Now, ladies, ladies,' he said, looking round with surprise, 'I'd advise you not to waste time like this. It's allowanced here, you know. You mustn't let that child make that noise either. It's against all rules.'

'I'm his poor mother, sir,'—sobbed Mrs Nubbles, curtseying humbly, 'and this is his brother, sir. Oh dear me, dear me!'

'Well!' replied the turnkey, folding his paper on his knee, so as to get with greater convenience at the top of the next column. 'It can't be helped you know. He ain't the only one in the same fix. You mustn't make a noise about it!'

With that he went on reading. The man was not unnaturally cruel or hard-hearted. He had come to look upon felony as a kind of disorder, like the scarlet fever or erysipelas: some people had it—some hadn't—just as it might be.

'Oh! my darling Kit,' said his mother, whom Barbara's mother had charitably relieved of the baby, 'that I should see my poor boy here!'

'You don't believe that I did what they accuse me of, mother dear?' cried Kit, in a choking voice.

'I believe it!' exclaimed the poor woman, 'I that never knew you tell a lie, or do a bad action from your cradle—that have never had a moment's sorrow on your account, except it was the poor meals that you have taken with such good humour and content, that I forgot how little there was, when I thought how kind and thoughtful you were, though you were but a child!—I believe it of the son that's been a comfort to me from the hour of his birth until this time, and that I never laid down one night in anger with! I believe it of you Kit!—'

'Why then, thank God!' said Kit, clutching the bars with an earnestness that shook them, 'and I can bear it, mother! Come what may, I shall always have one drop of happiness in my heart when I think that you said that.'

At this the poor woman fell a-crying again, and Barbara's mother too. And little Jacob, whose disjointed thoughts had by this time resolved themselves into a pretty distinct impression that Kit couldn't go out for a walk if he wanted, and that there were no birds, lions, tigers or other natural curiosities behind those bars—nothing indeed, but a caged brother—added his tears to theirs with as little noise as possible.

Kit's mother, drying her eyes (and moistening them, poor soul, more than she dried them), now took from the ground a small basket, and submissively addressed herself to the turnkey, saying, would he please to listen to her for a minute? The turnkey, being in the very crisis and passion of a joke, motioned to her with his hand to keep silent one minute longer, for her life. Nor did he remove his hand into its former posture, but kept it in the same warning attitude until he had finished the paragraph, when he paused for a few seconds, with a smile upon his face, as who should say 'this editor is a comical blade—a funny dog,' and then asked her what she wanted.

'I have brought him a little something to eat,' said the good woman. 'If you please, Sir, might he have it?'

'Yes,—he may have it. There's no rule against that. Give it to me when you go, and I'll take care he has it.'

'No, but if you please sir—don't be angry with me sir—I am his mother, and you had a mother once—if I might only see him eat a little bit, I should go away, so much more satisfied that he was all comfortable.'

And again the tears of Kit's mother burst forth, and of Barbara's mother, and of little Jacob. As to the baby, it was crowing and laughing with its might—under the idea, apparently, that the whole scene had been invented and got up for its particular satisfaction.

The turnkey looked as if he thought the request a strange one and rather out of the common way, but nevertheless he laid down his paper, and coming round where Kit's mother stood, took the basket from her, and after inspecting its contents, handed it to Kit, and went back to his place. It may be easily conceived that the prisoner had no great appetite, but he sat down on the ground, and ate as hard as he could, while, at every morsel he put into his mouth, his mother sobbed and wept afresh, though with a softened grief that bespoke the satisfaction the sight afforded her.

While he was thus engaged, Kit made some anxious inquiries about his employers, and whether they had expressed any opinion concerning him; but all he could learn was that Mr Abel had himself broken the intelligence to his mother, with great kindness and delicacy, late on the previous night, but had himself expressed no opinion of his innocence or guilt. Kit was on the point of mustering courage to ask Barbara's mother about Barbara, when the turnkey who had conducted him, reappeared, a second turnkey appeared behind his visitors, and the third turnkey with the newspaper cried 'Time's up!'—adding in the same breath 'Now for the next party!' and then plunging deep into his newspaper again. Kit was taken off in an instant, with a blessing from his mother, and a scream from little Jacob, ringing in his ears.

As he was crossing the next yard with the basket in his hand, under the guidance of his former conductor, another officer called to them to stop, and came up with a pint pot of porter in his hand.

'This is Christopher Nubbles, isn't it, that come in last night for felony?' said the man.

His comrade replied that this was the chicken in question.

'Then here's your beer,' said the other man to Christopher. 'What are you looking at? There an't a discharge in it.'

'I beg your pardon,' said Kit. 'Who sent it me?'

'Why, your friend,' replied the man. 'You're to have it every day, he says. And so you will, if he pays for it.'

'My friend!' repeated Kit.

'You're all abroad, seemingly,' returned the other man. 'There's his letter. Take hold!'

Kit took it, and when he was locked up again, read as follows.

'Drink of this cup, you'll find there's a spell in its every drop 'gainst the ills of mortality. Talk of the cordial that sparkled for Helen! HER cup was a fiction, but this is reality (Barclay and Co.'s).—If they ever send it in a flat state, complain to the Governor. Yours, R. S.'

'R. S.!' said Kit, after some consideration. 'It must be Mr Richard Swiveller. Well, its very kind of him, and I thank him heartily.'

CHAPTER 62

A faint light, twinkling from the window of the counting-house on Quilp's wharf, and looking inflamed and red through the night-fog, as though it suffered from it like an eye, forewarned Mr Sampson Brass, as he approached the wooden cabin with a cautious step, that the excellent proprietor, his esteemed client, was inside, and probably waiting with his accustomed patience and sweetness of temper the fulfilment of the appointment which now brought Mr Brass within his fair domain.

'A treacherous place to pick one's steps in, of a dark night,' muttered Sampson, as he stumbled for the twentieth time over some stray lumber, and limped in pain. 'I believe that boy strews the ground differently every day, on purpose to bruise and maim one; unless his master does it with his own hands, which is more than likely. I hate to come to this place without Sally. She's more protection than a dozen men.'

As he paid this compliment to the merit of the absent charmer, Mr Brass came to a halt; looking doubtfully towards the light, and over his shoulder.

'What's he about, I wonder?' murmured the lawyer, standing on tiptoe, and endeavouring to obtain a glimpse of what was passing inside, which at that distance was impossible—'drinking, I suppose,—making himself more fiery and furious, and heating his malice and mischievousness till they boil. I'm always afraid to come here by myself, when his account's a pretty large one. I don't believe he'd mind throttling me, and dropping me softly into the river when the tide was at its strongest, any more than he'd mind killing a rat—indeed I don't know whether he wouldn't consider it a pleasant joke. Hark! Now he's singing!'

Mr Quilp was certainly entertaining himself with vocal exercise, but it was rather a kind of chant than a song; being a monotonous repetition of one sentence in a very rapid manner, with a long stress upon the last word, which he swelled into a dismal roar. Nor did the burden of this performance bear any reference to love, or war, or wine, or loyalty, or any other, the standard topics of song, but to a subject not often set to music or generally known in ballads; the words being these:—'The worthy magistrate, after remarking that the prisoner would find some difficulty in persuading a jury to believe his tale, committed him to take his trial at the approaching sessions; and directed the customary recognisances to be entered into for the pros-e-cu-tion.'

Every time he came to this concluding word, and had exhausted all possible stress upon it, Quilp burst into a shriek of laughter, and began again.

'He's dreadfully imprudent,' muttered Brass, after he had listened to two or three repetitions of the chant. 'Horribly imprudent. I wish he was dumb. I wish he was deaf. I wish he was blind. Hang him,' cried Brass, as the chant began again. 'I wish he was dead!'

Giving utterance to these friendly aspirations in behalf of his client, Mr Sampson composed his face into its usual state of smoothness, and waiting until the shriek came again and was dying away, went up to the wooden house, and knocked at the door.

'Come in!' cried the dwarf.

'How do you do to-night sir?' said Sampson, peeping in. 'Ha ha ha! How do you do sir? Oh dear me, how very whimsical! Amazingly whimsical to be sure!'

'Come in, you fool!' returned the dwarf, 'and don't stand there shaking your head and showing your teeth. Come in, you false witness, you perjurer, you suborner of evidence, come in!'

'He has the richest humour!' cried Brass, shutting the door behind him; 'the most amazing vein of comicality! But isn't it rather injudicious, sir—?'

'What?' demanded Quilp. 'What, Judas?'

'Judas!' cried Brass. 'He has such extraordinary spirits! His humour is so extremely playful! Judas! Oh yes—dear me, how very good! Ha ha ha!' All this time, Sampson was rubbing his hands, and staring, with ludicrous surprise and dismay, at a great, goggle-eyed, blunt-nosed figure-head of some old ship, which was reared up against the wall in a corner near the stove, looking like a goblin or hideous idol whom the dwarf worshipped. A mass of timber on its head, carved into the dim and distant semblance of a cocked hat, together with a representation of a star on the left breast and epaulettes on the shoulders, denoted that it was intended for the effigy of some famous admiral; but, without those helps, any observer might have supposed it the authentic portrait of a distinguished merman, or great sea-monster. Being originally much too large for the apartment which it was now employed to decorate, it had been sawn short off at the waist. Even in this state it reached from floor to ceiling; and thrusting itself forward, with that excessively wide-awake aspect, and air of somewhat obtrusive politeness, by which figure-heads are usually characterised, seemed to reduce everything else to mere pigmy proportions.

'Do you know it?' said the dwarf, watching Sampson's eyes. 'Do you see the likeness?'

'Eh?' said Brass, holding his head on one side, and throwing it a little back, as connoisseurs do. 'Now I look at it again, I fancy I see a—yes, there certainly is something in the smile that reminds me of—and yet upon my word I—'

Now, the fact was, that Sampson, having never seen anything in the smallest degree resembling this substantial phantom, was much perplexed; being uncertain whether Mr Quilp considered it like himself, and had therefore bought it for a family portrait; or whether he was pleased to consider it as the likeness of some enemy. He was not very long in doubt;

for, while he was surveying it with that knowing look which people assume when they are contemplating for the first time portraits which they ought to recognise but don't, the dwarf threw down the newspaper from which he had been chanting the words already quoted, and seizing a rusty iron bar, which he used in lieu of poker, dealt the figure such a stroke on the nose that it rocked again.

'Is it like Kit—is it his picture, his image, his very self?' cried the dwarf, aiming a shower of blows at the insensible countenance, and covering it with deep dimples. 'Is it the exact model and counterpart of the dog—is it—is it—is it?' And with every repetition of the question, he battered the great image, until the perspiration streamed down his face with the violence of the exercise.

Although this might have been a very comical thing to look at from a secure gallery, as a bull-fight is found to be a comfortable spectacle by those who are not in the arena, and a house on fire is better than a play to people who don't live near it, there was something in the earnestness of Mr Quilp's manner which made his legal adviser feel that the counting-house was a little too small, and a deal too lonely, for the complete enjoyment of these humours. Therefore, he stood as far off as he could, while the dwarf was thus engaged; whimpering out but feeble applause; and when Quilp left off and sat down again from pure exhaustion, approached with more obsequiousness than ever.

'Excellent indeed!' cried Brass. 'He he! Oh, very good Sir. You know,' said Sampson, looking round as if in appeal to the bruised animal, 'he's quite a remarkable man—quite!'

'Sit down,' said the dwarf. 'I bought the dog yesterday. I've been screwing gimlets into him, and sticking forks in his eyes, and cutting my name on him. I mean to burn him at last.'

'Ha ha!' cried Brass. 'Extremely entertaining, indeed!'

'Come here,' said Quilp, beckoning him to draw near. 'What's injudicious, hey?'

'Nothing Sir—nothing. Scarcely worth mentioning Sir; but I thought that song—admirably humorous in itself you know—was perhaps rather—'

'Yes,' said Quilp, 'rather what?'

'Just bordering, or as one may say remotely verging, upon the confines of injudiciousness perhaps, Sir,' returned Brass, looking timidly at the dwarf's cunning eyes, which were turned towards the fire and reflected its red light.

'Why?' inquired Quilp, without looking up.

'Why, you know, sir,' returned Brass, venturing to be more familiar: '—the fact is, sir, that any allusion to these little combinings together, of friends, for objects in themselves extremely laudable, but which the law terms conspiracies, are—you take me, sir?—best kept snug and among friends, you know.'

'Eh!' said Quilp, looking up with a perfectly vacant countenance. 'What do you mean?'

'Cautious, exceedingly cautious, very right and proper!' cried Brass, nodding his head. 'Mum, sir, even here—my meaning, sir, exactly.'

'YOUR meaning exactly, you brazen scarecrow,—what's your meaning?' retorted Quilp. 'Why do you talk to me of combining together? Do I combine? Do I know anything about your combinings?'

'No no, sir—certainly not; not by any means,' returned Brass.

'If you so wink and nod at me,' said the dwarf, looking about him as if for his poker, 'I'll spoil the expression of your monkey's face, I will.' 'Don't put yourself out of the way I beg, sir,' rejoined Brass, checking himself with great alacrity. 'You're quite right, sir, quite right. I shouldn't have mentioned the subject, sir. It's much better not to. You're quite right, sir. Let us change it, if you please. You were asking, sir, Sally told me, about our lodger. He has not returned, sir.'

'No?' said Quilp, heating some rum in a little saucepan, and watching it to prevent its boiling over. 'Why not?'

'Why, sir,' returned Brass, 'he—dear me, Mr Quilp, sir—'

'What's the matter?' said the dwarf, stopping his hand in the act of carrying the saucepan to his mouth.

'You have forgotten the water, sir,' said Brass. 'And—excuse me, sir—but it's burning hot.'

Deigning no other than a practical answer to this remonstrance, Mr Quilp raised the hot saucepan to his lips, and deliberately drank off all the spirit it contained, which might have been in quantity about half a pint, and had been but a moment before, when he took it off the fire, bubbling and hissing fiercely. Having swallowed this gentle stimulant, and shaken his fist at the admiral, he bade Mr Brass proceed.

'But first,' said Quilp, with his accustomed grin, 'have a drop yourself—a nice drop—a good, warm, fiery drop.'

'Why, sir,' replied Brass, 'if there was such a thing as a mouthful of water that could be got without trouble—'

'There's no such thing to be had here,' cried the dwarf. 'Water for lawyers! Melted lead and brimstone, you mean, nice hot blistering pitch and tar—that's the thing for them—eh, Brass, eh?'

'Ha ha ha!' laughed Mr Brass. 'Oh very biting! and yet it's like being tickled—there's a pleasure in it too, sir!'

'Drink that,' said the dwarf, who had by this time heated some more. 'Toss it off, don't leave any heeltap, scorch your throat and be happy!'

The wretched Sampson took a few short sips of the liquor, which immediately distilled itself into burning tears, and in that form came rolling down his cheeks into the pipkin again, turning the colour of his face and eyelids to a deep red, and giving rise to a violent fit of coughing, in the midst of which he was still heard to declare, with the constancy of a martyr, that it was 'beautiful indeed!' While he was yet in unspeakable agonies, the dwarf renewed their conversation.

'The lodger,' said Quilp, '—what about him?' 'He is still, sir,' returned Brass, with intervals of coughing, 'stopping with the Garland family. He has only been home once, Sir, since the day of the examination of that culprit. He informed Mr Richard, sir, that he couldn't bear the house after what had taken place; that he was wretched in it; and that he looked upon himself as being in a certain kind of way the cause of the occurrence.—A very excellent lodger Sir. I hope we may not lose him.'

'Yah!' cried the dwarf. 'Never thinking of anybody but yourself—why don't you retrench then—scrape up, hoard, economise, eh?'

'Why, sir,' replied Brass, 'upon my word I think Sarah's as good an economiser as any going. I do indeed, Mr Quilp.'

'Moisten your clay, wet the other eye, drink, man!' cried the dwarf. 'You took a clerk to oblige me.'

'Delighted, sir, I am sure, at any time,' replied Sampson. 'Yes, Sir, I did.'

'Then now you may discharge him,' said Quilp. 'There's a means of retrenchment for you at once.'

'Discharge Mr Richard, sir?' cried Brass.

'Have you more than one clerk, you parrot, that you ask the question? Yes.'

'Upon my word, Sir,' said Brass, 'I wasn't prepared for this-'

'How could you be?' sneered the dwarf, 'when I wasn't? How often am I to tell you that I brought him to you that I might always have my eye on him and know where he was—and that I had a plot, a scheme, a little quiet piece of enjoyment afoot, of which the very cream and essence was, that this old man and grandchild (who have sunk underground I think) should be, while he and his precious friend believed them rich, in reality as poor as frozen rats?'

'I quite understood that, sir,' rejoined Brass. 'Thoroughly.'

'Well, Sir,' retorted Quilp, 'and do you understand now, that they're not poor—that they can't be, if they have such men as your lodger searching for them, and scouring the country far and wide?'

'Of course I do, Sir,' said Sampson.

'Of course you do,' retorted the dwarf, viciously snapping at his words. 'Of course do you understand then, that it's no matter what comes of this fellow? of course do you understand that for any other purpose he's no man for me, nor for you?'

'I have frequently said to Sarah, sir,' returned Brass, 'that he was of no use at all in the business. You can't put any confidence in him, sir. If you'll believe me I've found that fellow, in the commonest little matters of the office that have been trusted to him, blurting out the truth, though expressly cautioned. The aggravation of that chap sir, has exceeded anything you can imagine, it has indeed. Nothing but the respect and obligation I owe to you, sir—'

As it was plain that Sampson was bent on a complimentary harangue, unless he received a timely interruption, Mr Quilp politely tapped him on the crown of his head with the little saucepan, and requested that he would be so obliging as to hold his peace.

'Practical, sir, practical,' said Brass, rubbing the place and smiling; 'but still extremely pleasant—immensely so!'

'Hearken to me, will you?' returned Quilp, 'or I'll be a little more pleasant, presently. There's no chance of his comrade and friend returning. The scamp has been obliged to fly, as I learn, for some knavery, and has found his way abroad. Let him rot there.'

'Certainly, sir. Quite proper.—Forcible!' cried Brass, glancing at the admiral again, as if he made a third in company. 'Extremely forcible!'

'I hate him,' said Quilp between his teeth, 'and have always hated him, for family reasons. Besides, he was an intractable ruffian; otherwise he would have been of use. This fellow is pigeon-hearted and light-headed. I don't want him any longer. Let him hang or drown—starve—go to the devil.'

'By all means, sir,' returned Brass. 'When would you wish him, sir, to—ha, ha!—to make that little excursion?'

'When this trial's over,' said Quilp. 'As soon as that's ended, send him about his business.'

'It shall be done, sir,' returned Brass; 'by all means. It will be rather a blow to Sarah, sir, but she has all her feelings under control. Ah, Mr Quilp, I often think, sir, if it had only pleased Providence to bring you and Sarah together, in earlier life, what blessed results would have flowed from such a union! You never saw our dear father, sir?—A charming gentleman. Sarah was his pride and joy, sir. He would have closed his eyes in bliss, would Foxey, Mr Quilp, if he could have found her such a partner. You esteem her, sir?'

'I love her,' croaked the dwarf.

'You're very good, Sir,' returned Brass, 'I am sure. Is there any other order, sir, that I can take a note of, besides this little matter of Mr Richard?'

'None,' replied the dwarf, seizing the saucepan. 'Let us drink the lovely Sarah.'

'If we could do it in something, sir, that wasn't quite boiling,' suggested Brass humbly, 'perhaps it would be better. I think it will be more agreeable to Sarah's feelings, when she comes to hear from me of the honour you have done her, if she learns it was in liquor rather cooler than the last, Sir.'

But to these remonstrances, Mr Quilp turned a deaf ear. Sampson Brass, who was, by this time, anything but sober, being compelled to take further draughts of the same strong bowl, found that, instead of at all contributing to his recovery, they had the novel effect of making the counting-house spin round and round with extreme velocity, and causing the floor and ceiling to heave in a very distressing manner. After a brief stupor, he awoke to a consciousness of being partly under the table and partly under the grate. This position not being the most comfortable one he could have chosen for himself, he managed to stagger to his feet, and, holding on by the admiral, looked round for his host.

Mr Brass's first impression was, that his host was gone and had left him there alone—perhaps locked him in for the night. A strong smell of tobacco, however, suggested a new train of ideas, he looked upward, and saw that the dwarf was smoking in his hammock.

'Good bye, Sir,' cried Brass faintly. 'Good bye, Sir.'

'Won't you stop all night?' said the dwarf, peeping out. 'Do stop all night!'

'I couldn't indeed, Sir,' replied Brass, who was almost dead from nausea and the closeness of the room. 'If you'd have the goodness to show me a light, so that I may see my way across the yard, sir—'

Quilp was out in an instant; not with his legs first, or his head first, or his arms first, but bodily—altogether.

'To be sure,' he said, taking up a lantern, which was now the only light in the place. 'Be careful how you go, my dear friend. Be sure to pick your way among the timber, for all the rusty nails are upwards. There's a dog in the lane. He bit a man last night, and a woman the night before, and last Tuesday he killed a child—but that was in play. Don't go too near him.'

'Which side of the road is he, sir?' asked Brass, in great dismay.

'He lives on the right hand,' said Quilp, 'but sometimes he hides on the left, ready for a spring. He's uncertain in that respect. Mind you take care of yourself. I'll never forgive you if you don't. There's the light out—never mind—you know the way—straight on!' Quilp had slily shaded the light by holding it against his breast, and now stood chuckling and shaking from head to foot in a rapture of delight, as he heard the lawyer stumbling up the yard, and now and then falling heavily down. At length, however, he got quit of the place, and was out of hearing.

The dwarf shut himself up again, and sprang once more into his hammock.

CHAPTER 63

The professional gentleman who had given Kit the consolatory piece of information relative to the settlement of his trifle of business at the Old Bailey, and the probability of its being very soon disposed of, turned out to be quite correct in his prognostications. In eight days' time, the sessions commenced. In one day afterwards, the Grand jury found a True Bill against Christopher Nubbles for felony; and in two days from that finding, the aforesaid Christopher Nubbles was called upon to plead Guilty or Not Guilty to an Indictment for that he the said Christopher did feloniously abstract and steal from the dwelling-house and office of one Sampson Brass, gentleman, one Bank Note for Five Pounds issued by the Governor and Company of the Bank of England; in contravention of the Statutes in that case made and provided, and against the peace of our Sovereign Lord the King, his crown and dignity.

To this indictment, Christopher Nubbles, in a low and trembling voice, pleaded Not Guilty; and here, let those who are in the habit of forming hasty judgments from appearances, and who would have had Christopher, if innocent, speak out very strong and loud, observe, that confinement and anxiety will subdue the stoutest hearts; and that to one who has been close shut up, though it be only for ten or eleven days, seeing but stone walls and a very few stony faces, the sudden entrance into a great hall filled with life, is a rather disconcerting and startling circumstance. To this, it must be added, that life in a wig is to a large class of people much more terrifying and impressive than life with its own head of hair; and if, in addition to these considerations, there be taken into account Kit's natural emotion on seeing the two Mr Garlands and the little Notary looking on with pale and anxious faces, it will perhaps seem matter of no very great wonder that he should have been rather out of sorts, and unable to make himself quite at home.

Although he had never seen either of the Mr Garlands, or Mr Witherden, since the time of his arrest, he had been given to understand that they had employed counsel for him. Therefore, when one of the gentlemen in wigs got up and said 'I am for the prisoner, my Lord,' Kit made him a bow; and when another gentleman in a wig got up and said 'And I'm against him, my Lord,' Kit trembled very much, and bowed to him too. And didn't he hope in his own heart that his gentleman was a match for the other gentleman, and would make him ashamed of himself in no time!

The gentleman who was against him had to speak first, and being in dreadfully good spirits (for he had, in the last trial, very nearly procured the acquittal of a young gentleman who had had the misfortune to murder his father) he spoke up, you may be sure; telling the jury that if they acquitted this prisoner they must expect to suffer no less pangs and agonies than he had told the other jury they would certainly undergo if they convicted that prisoner. And when he had told them all about the case, and that he had never known a worse case, he stopped a little while, like a man who had something terrible to tell them, and then said that he understood an attempt would be made by his learned friend (and here he looked sideways at Kit's gentleman) to impeach the testimony of those immaculate witnesses whom he should call before them; but he did hope and trust that his learned friend would have a greater respect and veneration for the character of the prosecutor; than whom, as he well knew, there did not exist, and never had existed, a more honourable member of that most honourable profession to which he was attached. And then he said, did the jury know Bevis Marks? And if they did know Bevis Marks (as he trusted for their own character, they did) did they know the historical and elevating associations connected with that most remarkable spot? Did they believe that a man like Brass could reside in a place like Bevis Marks, and not be a virtuous and most upright character? And when he had said a great deal to them on this point, he remembered that it was an insult to their understandings to make any remarks on what they must have felt so strongly without him, and therefore called Sampson Brass into the witness-box, straightway.

Then up comes Mr Brass, very brisk and fresh; and, having bowed to the judge, like a man who has had the pleasure of seeing him before, and who hopes he has been pretty well since their last meeting, folds his arms, and looks at his gentleman as much as to say 'Here I am—full of evidence—Tap me!' And the gentleman does tap him presently, and with great discretion too; drawing off the evidence by little and little, and making it run quite clear and bright in the eyes of all present. Then, Kit's gentleman takes him in hand, but can make nothing of him; and after a great many very long questions and very short answers, Mr Sampson Brass goes down in glory.

To him succeeds Sarah, who in like manner is easy to be managed by Mr Brass's gentleman, but very obdurate to Kit's. In short, Kit's gentleman can get nothing out of her but a repetition of what she has said before (only a little stronger this time, as against his client), and therefore lets her go, in some confusion. Then, Mr Brass's gentleman calls Richard Swiveller, and Richard Swiveller appears accordingly.

Now, Mr Brass's gentleman has it whispered in his ear that this witness is disposed to be friendly to the prisoner—which, to say the truth, he is rather glad to hear, as his strength is considered to lie in what is familiarly termed badgering. Wherefore, he begins by requesting the officer to be quite sure that this witness kisses the book, then goes to work at him, tooth and nail.

'Mr Swiveller,' says this gentleman to Dick, when he had told his tale with evident reluctance and a desire to make the best of it: 'Pray sir, where did you dine yesterday?'—'Where did I dine yesterday?'—'Aye, sir, where did you dine yesterday—was it near here, sir?'—'Oh to be sure—yes—just over the way.'—'To be sure. Yes. Just over the way,' repeats Mr Brass's gentleman, with a glance at the court.—'Alone, sir?'—'I beg your pardon,' says Mr Swiveller, who has not caught the question—'Alone, sir?' repeats Mr Brass's gentleman in a voice of thunder, 'did you dine alone? Did you treat anybody, sir? Come!'—'Oh yes, to be sure—yes, I did,' says Mr Swiveller with a smile.—'Have the goodness to banish a levity, sir, which is very ill-suited to the place in which you stand (though perhaps you have reason to be thankful that it's only that place),' says Mr Brass's gentleman, with a nod of the head, insinuating that the dock is Mr Swiveller's legitimate sphere of action; 'and attend to me. You were waiting about here, yesterday, in expectation that this trial was coming on. You dined over the way. You treated somebody. Now, was that somebody brother to the prisoner at the bar?'—Mr Swiveller is proceeding to explain—'Yes or No, sir,' cries Mr Brass's gentleman—'But will you allow me—'—'Yes or No, sir'—'Yes it was, but—'—'Yes it was,' cries the gentleman, taking him up short. 'And a very pretty witness YOU are!'

Down sits Mr Brass's gentleman. Kit's gentleman, not knowing how the matter really stands, is afraid to pursue the subject. Richard Swiveller retires abashed. Judge, jury and spectators have visions of his lounging about, with an ill-looking, large-whiskered, dissolute young fellow of six feet high. The reality is, little Jacob, with the calves of his legs exposed to the open air, and himself tied up in a shawl. Nobody knows the truth; everybody believes a falsehood; and all because of the ingenuity of Mr Brass's gentleman.

Then come the witnesses to character, and here Mr Brass's gentleman shines again. It turns out that Mr Garland has had no character with Kit, no recommendation of him but from his own mother, and that he was suddenly dismissed by his former master for unknown reasons. 'Really Mr Garland,' says Mr Brass's gentleman, 'for a person who has arrived at your time of life, you are, to say the least of it, singularly indiscreet, I think.' The jury think so too, and find Kit guilty. He is taken off, humbly protesting his innocence. The spectators settle themselves in their places with renewed attention, for there are several female witnesses to be examined in the next case, and it has been rumoured that Mr Brass's gentleman will make great fun in cross-examining them for the prisoner.

Kit's mother, poor woman, is waiting at the grate below stairs, accompanied by Barbara's mother (who, honest soul! never does anything but cry, and hold the baby), and a sad interview ensues. The newspaper-reading turnkey has told them all. He don't think it will be transportation for life, because there's time to prove the good character yet, and that is sure to serve him. He wonders what he did it for. 'He never did it!' cries Kit's mother. 'Well,' says the turnkey, 'I won't contradict you. It's all one, now, whether he did it or not.'

Kit's mother can reach his hand through the bars, and she clasps it—God, and those to whom he has given such tenderness, only know in how much agony. Kit bids her keep a good heart, and, under pretence of having the children lifted up to kiss him, prays Barbara's mother in a whisper to take her home.

'Some friend will rise up for us, mother,' cried Kit, 'I am sure. If not now, before long. My innocence will come out, mother, and I shall be brought back again; I feel confidence in that. You must teach little Jacob and the baby how all this was, for if they thought I had ever been dishonest, when they grew old enough to understand, it would break my heart to know it, if I was thousands of miles away.—Oh! is there no good gentleman here, who will take care of her!'

The hand slips out of his, for the poor creature sinks down upon the earth, insensible. Richard Swiveller comes hastily up, elbows the bystanders out of the way, takes her (after some trouble) in one arm after the manner of theatrical ravishers, and, nodding to Kit, and commanding Barbara's mother to follow, for he has a coach waiting, bears her swiftly off.

Well; Richard took her home. And what astonishing absurdities in the way of quotation from song and poem he perpetrated on the road, no man knows. He took her home, and stayed till she was recovered; and, having no money to pay the coach, went back in state to Bevis Marks, bidding the driver (for it was Saturday night) wait at the door while he went in for 'change.'

'Mr Richard, sir,' said Brass cheerfully, 'Good evening!'

Monstrous as Kit's tale had appeared, at first, Mr Richard did, that night, half suspect his affable employer of some deep villany. Perhaps it was but the misery he had just witnessed which gave his careless nature this impulse; but, be that as it may, it was very strong upon him, and he said in as few words as possible, what he wanted.

'Money?' cried Brass, taking out his purse. 'Ha ha! To be sure, Mr Richard, to be sure, sir. All men must live. You haven't change for a five-pound note, have you sir?'

'No,' returned Dick, shortly.

'Oh!' said Brass, 'here's the very sum. That saves trouble. You're very welcome I'm sure.—Mr Richard, sir—' Dick, who had by this time reached the door, turned round.

'You needn't,' said Brass, 'trouble yourself to come back any more, Sir.'

'Eh?'

'You see, Mr Richard,' said Brass, thrusting his hands in his pockets, and rocking himself to and fro on his stool, 'the fact is, that a man of your abilities is lost, Sir, quite lost, in our dry and mouldy line. It's terrible drudgery—shocking. I should say, now, that the stage, or the—or the army, Mr Richard—or something very superior in the licensed victualling way—was the kind of thing that would call out the genius of such a man as you. I hope you'll look in to see us now and then. Sally, Sir, will be delighted I'm sure. She's extremely sorry to lose you, Mr Richard, but a sense of her duty to society reconciles her. An amazing creature that, sir! You'll find the money quite correct, I think. There's a cracked window sir, but I've not made any deduction on that account. Whenever we part with friends, Mr Richard, let us part liberally. A delightful sentiment, sir!'

To all these rambling observations, Mr Swiveller answered not one word, but, returning for the aquatic jacket, rolled it into a tight round ball: looking steadily at Brass meanwhile as if he had some intention of bowling him down with it. He only took it under his arm, however, and marched out of the office in profound silence. When he had closed the door, he re-opened it, stared in again for a few moments with the same portentous gravity, and nodding his head once, in a slow and ghost-like manner, vanished.

He paid the coachman, and turned his back on Bevis Marks, big with great designs for the comforting of Kit's mother and the aid of Kit himself.

But the lives of gentlemen devoted to such pleasures as Richard Swiveller, are extremely precarious. The spiritual excitement of the last fortnight, working upon a system affected in no slight degree by the spirituous excitement of some years, proved a little too much for him. That very night, Mr Richard was seized with an alarming illness, and in twenty-four hours was stricken with a raging fever.

CHAPTER 64

Tossing to and fro upon his hot, uneasy bed; tormented by a fierce thirst which nothing could appease; unable to find, in any change of posture, a moment's peace or ease; and rambling, ever, through deserts of thought where there was no resting-place, no sight or sound suggestive of refreshment or repose, nothing but a dull eternal weariness, with no change but the restless shiftings of his miserable body, and the weary wandering of his mind, constant still to one ever-present anxiety—to a sense of something left undone, of some fearful obstacle to be surmounted, of some carking care that would not be driven away, and which haunted the distempered brain, now in this form, now in that, always shadowy and dim, but recognisable for the same phantom in every shape it took: darkening every vision like an evil conscience, and making slumber horrible—in these slow tortures of his dread disease, the unfortunate Richard lay wasting and consuming inch by inch, until, at last, when he seemed to fight and struggle to rise up, and to be held down by devils, he sank into a deep sleep, and dreamed no more.

He awoke. With a sensation of most blissful rest, better than sleep itself, he began gradually to remember something of these sufferings, and to think what a long night it had been, and whether he had not been delirious twice or thrice. Happening, in the midst of these cogitations, to raise his hand, he was astonished to find how heavy it seemed, and yet how thin and light it really was. Still, he felt indifferent and happy; and having no curiosity to pursue the subject, remained in the same waking slumber until his attention was attracted by a cough. This made him doubt whether he had locked his door last night, and feel a little surprised at having a companion in the room. Still, he lacked energy to follow up this train of thought; and unconsciously fell, in a luxury of repose, to staring at some green stripes on the bed-furniture, and associating them strangely with patches of fresh turf, while the yellow ground between made gravel-walks, and so helped out a long perspective of trim gardens.

He was rambling in imagination on these terraces, and had quite lost himself among them indeed, when he heard the cough once more. The walks shrunk into stripes again at the sound, and raising himself a little in the bed, and holding the curtain open with one hand, he looked out.

The same room certainly, and still by candlelight; but with what unbounded astonishment did he see all those bottles, and basins, and articles of linen airing by the fire, and such-like furniture of a sick chamber—all very clean and neat, but all quite different from anything he had left there, when he went to bed! The atmosphere, too, filled with a cool smell of herbs and vinegar; the floor newly sprinkled; the—the what? The Marchioness?

Yes; playing cribbage with herself at the table. There she sat, intent upon her game, coughing now and then in a subdued manner as if she feared to disturb him—shuffling the cards, cutting, dealing, playing, counting, pegging—going through all the mysteries of cribbage as if she had been in full practice from her cradle! Mr Swiveller contemplated these things for a short time, and suffering the curtain to fall into its former position, laid his head on the pillow again.

'I'm dreaming,' thought Richard, 'that's clear. When I went to bed, my hands were not made of egg-shells; and now I can almost see through 'em. If this is not a dream, I have woke up, by mistake, in an Arabian Night, instead of a London one. But I have no doubt I'm asleep. Not the least.'

Here the small servant had another cough.

'Very remarkable!' thought Mr Swiveller. 'I never dreamt such a real cough as that before. I don't know, indeed, that I ever dreamt either a cough or a sneeze. Perhaps it's part of the philosophy of dreams that one never does. There's another—and another—I say!—I'm dreaming rather fast!'

For the purpose of testing his real condition, Mr Swiveller, after some reflection, pinched himself in the arm.

'Queerer still!' he thought. 'I came to bed rather plump than otherwise, and now there's nothing to lay hold of. I'll take another survey.'

The result of this additional inspection was, to convince Mr Swiveller that the objects by which he was surrounded were real, and that he saw them, beyond all question, with his waking eyes.

'It's an Arabian Night; that's what it is,' said Richard. 'I'm in Damascus or Grand Cairo. The Marchioness is a Genie, and having had a wager with another Genie about who is the handsomest young man alive, and the worthiest to be the husband of the Princess of China, has brought me away, room and all, to compare us together. Perhaps,' said Mr Swiveller, turning languidly round on his pillow, and looking on that side of his bed which was next the wall, 'the Princess may be still—No, she's gone.'

Not feeling quite satisfied with this explanation, as, even taking it to be the correct one, it still involved a little mystery and doubt, Mr Swiveller raised the curtain again, determined to take the first favourable opportunity of addressing his companion. An occasion presented itself. The Marchioness dealt, turned up a knave, and omitted to take the usual advantage; upon which Mr Swiveller called out as loud as he could—'Two for his heels!'

The Marchioness jumped up quickly and clapped her hands. 'Arabian Night, certainly,' thought Mr Swiveller; 'they always clap their hands instead of ringing the bell. Now for the two thousand black slaves, with jars of jewels on their heads!'

It appeared, however, that she had only clapped her hands for joy; for directly afterward she began to laugh, and then to cry; declaring, not in choice Arabic but in familiar English, that she was 'so glad, she didn't know what to do.'

'Marchioness,' said Mr Swiveller, thoughtfully, 'be pleased to draw nearer. First of all, will you have the goodness to inform me where I shall find my voice; and secondly, what has become of my flesh?'

The Marchioness only shook her head mournfully, and cried again; whereupon Mr Swiveller (being very weak) felt his own eyes affected likewise.

'I begin to infer, from your manner, and these appearances, Marchioness,' said Richard after a pause, and smiling with a trembling lip, 'that I have been ill.'

'You just have!' replied the small servant, wiping her eyes. 'And haven't you been a talking nonsense!'

'Oh!' said Dick. 'Very ill, Marchioness, have I been?'

'Dead, all but,' replied the small servant. 'I never thought you'd get better. Thank Heaven you have!'

Mr Swiveller was silent for a long while. By and bye, he began to talk again, inquiring how long he had been there.

'Three weeks to-morrow,' replied the servant.

'Three what?' said Dick.

'Weeks,' returned the Marchioness emphatically; 'three long, slow weeks.'

The bare thought of having been in such extremity, caused Richard to fall into another silence, and to lie flat down again, at his full length. The Marchioness, having arranged the bed-clothes more comfortably, and felt that his hands and forehead were quite cool—a discovery that filled her with delight—cried a little more, and then applied herself to getting tea ready, and making some thin dry toast.

While she was thus engaged, Mr Swiveller looked on with a grateful heart, very much astonished to see how thoroughly at home she made herself, and attributing this attention, in its origin, to Sally Brass, whom, in his own mind, he could not thank enough. When the Marchioness had finished her toasting, she spread a clean cloth on a tray, and brought him some crisp slices and a great basin of weak tea, with which (she said) the doctor had left word he might refresh himself when he awoke. She propped him up with pillows, if not as skilfully as if she had been a professional nurse all her life, at least as tenderly; and looked on with unutterable satisfaction while the patient—stopping every now and then to shake her by the hand—took his poor meal with an appetite and relish, which the greatest dainties of the earth, under any other circumstances, would have failed to provoke. Having cleared away, and disposed everything comfortably about him again, she sat down at the table to take her own tea.

'Marchioness,' said Mr Swiveller, 'how's Sally?'

The small servant screwed her face into an expression of the very uttermost entanglement of slyness, and shook her head.

'What, haven't you seen her lately?' said Dick.

'Seen her!' cried the small servant. 'Bless you, I've run away!'

Mr Swiveller immediately laid himself down again quite flat, and so remained for about five minutes. By slow degrees he resumed his sitting posture after that lapse of time, and inquired:

'And where do you live, Marchioness?'

'Live!' cried the small servant. 'Here!'

'Oh!' said Mr Swiveller.

And with that he fell down flat again, as suddenly as if he had been shot. Thus he remained, motionless and bereft of speech, until she had finished her meal, put everything in its place, and swept the hearth; when he motioned her to bring a chair to the bedside, and, being propped up again, opened a farther conversation.

'And so,' said Dick, 'you have run away?'

'Yes,' said the Marchioness, 'and they've been a tizing of me.'

'Been—I beg your pardon,' said Dick—'what have they been doing?'

'Been a tizing of me—tizing you know—in the newspapers,' rejoined the Marchioness.

'Aye, aye,' said Dick, 'advertising?'

The small servant nodded, and winked. Her eyes were so red with waking and crying, that the Tragic Muse might have winked with greater consistency. And so Dick felt.

'Tell me,' said he, 'how it was that you thought of coming here.'

'Why, you see,' returned the Marchioness, 'when you was gone, I hadn't any friend at all, because the lodger he never come back, and I didn't know where either him or you was to be found, you know. But one morning, when I was-'

'Was near a keyhole?' suggested Mr Swiveller, observing that she faltered.

'Well then,' said the small servant, nodding; 'when I was near the office keyhole—as you see me through, you know—I heard somebody saying that she lived here, and was the lady whose house you lodged at, and that you was took very bad, and wouldn't nobody come and take care of you. Mr Brass, he says, "It's no business of mine," he says; and Miss Sally, she says, "He's a funny chap, but it's no business of mine;" and the lady went away, and slammed the door to, when she went out, I can tell you. So I run away that night, and come here, and told 'em you was my brother, and they believed me, and I've been here ever since.'

'This poor little Marchioness has been wearing herself to death!' cried Dick.

'No I haven't,' she returned, 'not a bit of it. Don't you mind about me. I like sitting up, and I've often had a sleep, bless you, in one of them chairs. But if you could have seen how you tried to jump out o' winder, and if you could have heard how you used to keep on singing and making speeches, you wouldn't have believed it—I'm so glad you're better, Mr Liverer.'

'Liverer indeed!' said Dick thoughtfully. 'It's well I am a liverer. I strongly suspect I should have died, Marchioness, but for you.'

At this point, Mr Swiveller took the small servant's hand in his again, and being, as we have seen, but poorly, might in struggling to express his thanks have made his eyes as red as hers, but that she quickly changed the theme by making him lie down, and urging him to keep very quiet.

'The doctor,' she told him, 'said you was to be kept quite still, and there was to be no noise nor nothing. Now, take a rest, and then we'll talk again. I'll sit by you, you know. If you shut your eyes, perhaps you'll go to sleep. You'll be all the better for it, if you do.'

The Marchioness, in saying these words, brought a little table to the bedside, took her seat at it, and began to work away at the concoction of some cooling drink, with the address of a score of chemists. Richard Swiveller being indeed fatigued, fell into a slumber, and waking in about half an hour, inquired what time it was.

'Just gone half after six,' replied his small friend, helping him to sit up again.

'Marchioness,' said Richard, passing his hand over his forehead and turning suddenly round, as though the subject but that moment flashed upon him, 'what has become of Kit?'

He had been sentenced to transportation for a great many years, she said.

'Has he gone?' asked Dick—'his mother—how is she,—what has become of her?'

His nurse shook her head, and answered that she knew nothing about them. 'But, if I thought,' said she, very slowly, 'that you'd keep quiet, and not put yourself into another fever, I could tell you—but I won't now.'

'Yes, do,' said Dick. 'It will amuse me.'

'Oh! would it though!' rejoined the small servant, with a horrified look. 'I know better than that. Wait till you're better and then I'll tell you.'

Dick looked very earnestly at his little friend: and his eyes, being large and hollow from illness, assisted the expression so much, that she was quite frightened, and besought him not to think any more about it. What had already fallen from her, however, had not only piqued his curiosity, but seriously alarmed him, wherefore he urged her to tell him the worst at once.

'Oh there's no worst in it,' said the small servant. 'It hasn't anything to do with you.'

'Has it anything to do with—is it anything you heard through chinks or keyholes—and that you were not intended to hear?' asked Dick, in a breathless state.

'Yes,' replied the small servant.

'In—in Bevis Marks?' pursued Dick hastily. 'Conversations between Brass and Sally?'

'Yes,' cried the small servant again.

Richard Swiveller thrust his lank arm out of bed, and, gripping her by the wrist and drawing her close to him, bade her out with it, and freely too, or he would not answer for the consequences; being wholly unable to endure the state of excitement and expectation. She, seeing that he was greatly agitated, and that the effects of postponing her revelation might be much more injurious than any that were likely to ensue from its being made at once, promised compliance, on condition that the patient kept himself perfectly quiet, and abstained from starting up or tossing about.

'But if you begin to do that,' said the small servant, 'I'll leave off. And so I tell you.'

'You can't leave off, till you have gone on,' said Dick. 'And do go on, there's a darling. Speak, sister, speak. Pretty Polly say. Oh tell me when, and tell me where, pray Marchioness, I beseech you!'

Unable to resist these fervent adjurations, which Richard Swiveller poured out as passionately as if they had been of the most solemn and tremendous nature, his companion spoke thus:

'Well! Before I run away, I used to sleep in the kitchen—where we played cards, you know. Miss Sally used to keep the key of the kitchen door in her pocket, and she always come down at night to take away the candle and rake out the fire. When she had done that, she left me to go to bed in the dark, locked the door on the outside, put the key in her pocket again, and kept me locked up till she come down in the morning—very early I can tell you—and let me out. I was terrible afraid of being kept like this, because if there was a fire, I thought they might forget me and only take care of themselves you know. So, whenever I see an old rusty key anywhere, I picked it up and tried if it would fit the door, and at last I found in the dust cellar a key that did fit it.'

Here, Mr Swiveller made a violent demonstration with his legs. But the small servant immediately pausing in her talk, he subsided again, and pleading a momentary forgetfulness of their compact, entreated her to proceed.

'They kept me very short,' said the small servant. 'Oh! you can't think how short they kept me! So I used to come out at night after they'd gone to bed, and feel about in the dark for bits of biscuit, or sangwitches that you'd left in the office, or even pieces of orange peel to put into cold water and make believe it was wine. Did you ever taste orange peel and water?'

Mr Swiveller replied that he had never tasted that ardent liquor; and once more urged his friend to resume the thread of her narrative.

'If you make believe very much, it's quite nice,' said the small servant, 'but if you don't, you know, it seems as if it would bear a little more seasoning, certainly. Well, sometimes I used to come out after they'd gone to bed, and sometimes before, you know; and one or two nights before there was all that precious noise in the office—when the young man was took, I mean—I come upstairs while Mr Brass and Miss Sally was a-sittin' at the office fire; and I tell you the truth, that I come to listen again, about the key of the safe.'

Mr Swiveller gathered up his knees so as to make a great cone of the bedclothes, and conveyed into his countenance an expression of the utmost concern. But the small servant pausing, and holding up her finger, the cone gently disappeared, though the look of concern did not.

'There was him and her,' said the small servant, 'a-sittin' by the fire, and talking softly together. Mr Brass says to Miss Sally, "Upon my word," he says "it's a dangerous thing, and it might get us into a world of trouble, and I don't half like it." She says—you know her way—she says, "You're the chickenest-hearted, feeblest, faintest man I ever see, and I think," she says, "that I ought to have been the brother, and you the sister. Isn't Quilp," she says, "our principal support?" "He certainly is," says Mr Brass, "And an't we," she says, "constantly ruining somebody or other in the way of business?" "We certainly are," says Mr Brass. "Then does it signify," she says, "about ruining this Kit when Quilp desires it?" "It certainly does not signify," says Mr Brass. Then they whispered and laughed for a long time about there being no danger if it was well done, and then Mr Brass pulls out his pocket-book, and says, "Well," he says, "here it is—Quilp's own five-pound note. We'll agree that way, then," he says. "Kit's coming to-morrow morning, I know. While he's up-stairs, you'll get out of the way, and I'll clear off Mr Richard. Having Kit alone, I'll hold him in conversation, and put this property in his hat. I'll manage so, besides," he says, "that Mr Richard shall find it there, and be the evidence. And if that don't get Christopher out of Mr Quilp's way, and satisfy Mr Quilp's grudges," he says, "the Devil's in it." Miss Sally laughed, and said that was the plan, and as they seemed to be moving away, and I was afraid to stop any longer, I went down-stairs again.—There!'

The small servant had gradually worked herself into as much agitation as Mr Swiveller, and therefore made no effort to restrain him when he sat up in bed and hastily demanded whether this story had been told to anybody.

'How could it be?' replied his nurse. 'I was almost afraid to think about it, and hoped the young man would be let off. When I heard 'em say they had found him guilty of what he didn't do, you was gone, and so was the lodger—though I think I should have been frightened to tell him, even if he'd been there. Ever since I come here, you've been out of your senses, and what would have been the good of telling you then?'

'Marchioness,' said Mr Swiveller, plucking off his nightcap and flinging it to the other end of the room; 'if you'll do me the favour to retire for a few minutes and see what sort of a night it is, I'll get up.'

'You mustn't think of such a thing,' cried his nurse.

'I must indeed,' said the patient, looking round the room. 'Whereabouts are my clothes?'

'Oh, I'm so glad—you haven't got any,' replied the Marchioness.

'Ma'am!' said Mr Swiveller, in great astonishment.

'I've been obliged to sell them, every one, to get the things that was ordered for you. But don't take on about that,' urged the Marchioness, as Dick fell back upon his pillow. 'You're too weak to stand, indeed.'

'I am afraid,' said Richard dolefully, 'that you're right. What ought I to do! what is to be done!'

It naturally occurred to him on very little reflection, that the first step to take would be to communicate with one of the Mr Garlands instantly. It was very possible that Mr Abel had not yet left the office. In as little time as it takes to tell it, the small servant had the address in pencil on a piece of paper; a verbal description of father and son, which would enable her to recognise either, without difficulty; and a special caution to be shy of Mr Chuckster, in consequence of that gentleman's known antipathy to Kit. Armed with these slender powers, she hurried away, commissioned to bring either old Mr Garland or Mr Abel, bodily, to that apartment.

'I suppose,' said Dick, as she closed the door slowly, and peeped into the room again, to make sure that he was comfortable, 'I suppose there's nothing left—not so much as a waistcoat even?'

'No, nothing.'

'It's embarrassing,' said Mr Swiveller, 'in case of fire—even an umbrella would be something—but you did quite right, dear Marchioness. I should have died without you!'

CHAPTER 65

It was well for the small servant that she was of a sharp, quick nature, or the consequence of sending her out alone, from the very neighbourhood in which it was most dangerous for her to appear, would probably have been the restoration of Miss Sally Brass to the supreme authority over her person. Not unmindful of the risk she ran, however, the Marchioness no sooner left the house than she dived into the first dark by-way that presented itself, and, without any present reference to the point to which her journey tended, made it her first business to put two good miles of brick and mortar between herself and Bevis Marks.

When she had accomplished this object, she began to shape her course for the notary's office, to which—shrewdly inquiring of apple-women and oyster-sellers at street-corners, rather than in lighted shops or of well-dressed people, at the hazard of attracting notice—she easily procured a direction. As carrier-pigeons, on being first let loose in a strange place, beat the air at random for a short time before darting off towards the spot for which they are designed, so did the Marchioness flutter round and round until she believed herself in safety, and then bear swiftly down upon the port for which she was bound.

She had no bonnet—nothing on her head but a great cap which, in some old time, had been worn by Sally Brass, whose taste in head-dresses was, as we have seen, peculiar—and her speed was rather retarded than assisted by her shoes, which, being extremely large and slipshod, flew off every now and then, and were difficult to find again, among the crowd of passengers. Indeed, the poor little creature experienced so much trouble and delay from having to grope for these articles of dress in mud and kennel, and suffered in these researches so much jostling, pushing, squeezing and bandying from hand to hand, that by the time she reached the street in which the notary lived, she was fairly worn out and exhausted, and could not refrain from tears.

But to have got there at last was a great comfort, especially as there were lights still burning in the office window, and therefore some hope that she was not too late. So the Marchioness dried her eyes with the backs of her hands, and, stealing softly up the steps, peeped in through the glass door.

Mr Chuckster was standing behind the lid of his desk, making such preparations towards finishing off for the night, as pulling down his wristbands and pulling up his shirt-collar, settling his neck more gracefully in his stock, and secretly arranging his whiskers by the aid of a little triangular bit of looking glass. Before the ashes of the fire stood two gentlemen, one of whom she rightly judged to be the notary, and the other (who was buttoning his great-coat and was evidently about to depart immediately) Mr Abel Garland.

Having made these observations, the small spy took counsel with herself, and resolved to wait in the street until Mr Abel came out, as there would be then no fear of having to speak before Mr Chuckster, and less difficulty in delivering her message. With this purpose she slipped out again, and crossing the road, sat down upon a door-step just opposite.

She had hardly taken this position, when there came dancing up the street, with his legs all wrong, and his head everywhere by turns, a pony. This pony had a little phaeton behind him, and a man in it; but neither man nor phaeton seemed to embarrass him in the least, as he reared up on his hind legs, or stopped, or went on, or stood still again, or backed, or went side-ways, without the smallest reference to them—just as the fancy seized him, and as if he were the freest animal in creation. When they came to the notary's door, the man called out in a very respectful manner, 'Woa then'—

intimating that if he might venture to express a wish, it would be that they stopped there. The pony made a moment's pause; but, as if it occurred to him that to stop when he was required might be to establish an inconvenient and dangerous precedent, he immediately started off again, rattled at a fast trot to the street corner, wheeled round, came back, and then stopped of his own accord.

'Oh! you're a precious creatur!' said the man—who didn't venture by the bye to come out in his true colours until he was safe on the pavement. 'I wish I had the rewarding of you—I do.'

'What has he been doing?' said Mr Abel, tying a shawl round his neck as he came down the steps.

'He's enough to fret a man's heart out,' replied the hostler. 'He is the most wicious rascal—Woa then, will you?'

'He'll never stand still, if you call him names,' said Mr Abel, getting in, and taking the reins. 'He's a very good fellow if you know how to manage him. This is the first time he has been out, this long while, for he has lost his old driver and wouldn't stir for anybody else, till this morning. The lamps are right, are they? That's well. Be here to take him to-morrow, if you please. Good night!'

And, after one or two strange plunges, quite of his own invention, the pony yielded to Mr Abel's mildness, and trotted gently off.

All this time Mr Chuckster had been standing at the door, and the small servant had been afraid to approach. She had nothing for it now, therefore, but to run after the chaise, and to call to Mr Abel to stop. Being out of breath when she came up with it, she was unable to make him hear. The case was desperate; for the pony was quickening his pace. The Marchioness hung on behind for a few moments, and, feeling that she could go no farther, and must soon yield, clambered by a vigorous effort into the hinder seat, and in so doing lost one of the shoes for ever.

Mr Abel being in a thoughtful frame of mind, and having quite enough to do to keep the pony going, went jogging on without looking round: little dreaming of the strange figure that was close behind him, until the Marchioness, having in some degree recovered her breath, and the loss of her shoe, and the novelty of her position, uttered close into his ear, the words—'I say, Sir'—

He turned his head quickly enough then, and stopping the pony, cried, with some trepidation, 'God bless me, what is this!'

'Don't be frightened, Sir,' replied the still panting messenger. 'Oh I've run such a way after you!'

'What do you want with me?' said Mr Abel. 'How did you come here?'

'I got in behind,' replied the Marchioness. 'Oh please drive on, sir—don't stop—and go towards the City, will you? And oh do please make haste, because it's of consequence. There's somebody wants to see you there. He sent me to say would you come directly, and that he knowed all about Kit, and could save him yet, and prove his innocence.'

'What do you tell me, child?'

'The truth, upon my word and honour I do. But please to drive on—quick, please! I've been such a time gone, he'll think I'm lost.'

Mr Abel involuntarily urged the pony forward. The pony, impelled by some secret sympathy or some new caprice, burst into a great pace, and neither slackened it, nor indulged in any eccentric performances, until they arrived at the door of Mr Swiveller's lodging, where, marvellous to relate, he consented to stop when Mr Abel checked him.

'See! It's the room up there,' said the Marchioness, pointing to one where there was a faint light. 'Come!'

Mr Abel, who was one of the simplest and most retiring creatures in existence, and naturally timid withal, hesitated; for he had heard of people being decoyed into strange places to be robbed and murdered, under circumstances very like the present, and, for anything he knew to the contrary, by guides very like the Marchioness. His regard for Kit, however, overcame every other consideration. So, entrusting Whisker to the charge of a man who was lingering hard by in expectation of the Job, he suffered his companion to take his hand, and to lead him up the dark and narrow stairs.

He was not a little surprised to find himself conducted into a dimly-lighted sick chamber, where a man was sleeping tranquilly in bed.

'An't it nice to see him lying there so quiet?' said his guide, in an earnest whisper. 'Oh! you'd say it was, if you had only seen him two or three days ago.'

Mr Abel made no answer, and, to say the truth, kept a long way from the bed and very near the door. His guide, who appeared to understand his reluctance, trimmed the candle, and taking it in her hand, approached the bed. As she did so, the sleeper started up, and he recognised in the wasted face the features of Richard Swiveller.

'Why, how is this?' said Mr Abel kindly, as he hurried towards him. 'You have been ill?'

'Very,' replied Dick. 'Nearly dead. You might have chanced to hear of your Richard on his bier, but for the friend I sent to fetch you. Another shake of the hand, Marchioness, if you please. Sit down, Sir.'

Mr Abel seemed rather astonished to hear of the quality of his guide, and took a chair by the bedside.

'I have sent for you, Sir,' said Dick—'but she told you on what account?'

'She did. I am quite bewildered by all this. I really don't know what to say or think,' replied Mr Abel.

'You'll say that presently,' retorted Dick. 'Marchioness, take a seat on the bed, will you? Now, tell this gentleman all that you told me; and be particular. Don't you speak another word, Sir.'

The story was repeated; it was, in effect, exactly the same as before, without any deviation or omission. Richard Swiveller kept his eyes fixed on his visitor during its narration, and directly it was concluded, took the word again.

'You have heard it all, and you'll not forget it. I'm too giddy and too queer to suggest anything; but you and your friends will know what to do. After this long delay, every minute is an age. If ever you went home fast in your life, go home fast to-night. Don't stop to say one word to me, but go. She will be found here, whenever she's wanted; and as to me, you're pretty sure to find me at home, for a week or two. There are more reasons than one for that. Marchioness, a light! If you lose another minute in looking at me, sir, I'll never forgive you!'

Mr Abel needed no more remonstrance or persuasion. He was gone in an instant; and the Marchioness, returning from lighting him down-stairs, reported that the pony, without any preliminary objection whatever, had dashed away at full gallop.

'That's right!' said Dick; 'and hearty of him; and I honour him from this time. But get some supper and a mug of beer, for I am sure you must be tired. Do have a mug of beer. It will do me as much good to see you take it as if I might drink it myself.'

Nothing but this assurance could have prevailed upon the small nurse to indulge in such a luxury. Having eaten and drunk to Mr Swiveller's extreme contentment, given him his drink, and put everything in neat order, she wrapped herself in an old coverlet and lay down upon the rug before the fire.

Mr Swiveller was by that time murmuring in his sleep, 'Strew then, oh strew, a bed of rushes. Here will we stay, till morning blushes. Good night, Marchioness!'

CHAPTER 66

On awaking in the morning, Richard Swiveller became conscious, by slow degrees, of whispering voices in his room. Looking out between the curtains, he espied Mr Garland, Mr Abel, the notary, and the single gentleman, gathered round the Marchioness, and talking to her with great earnestness but in very subdued tones—fearing, no doubt, to disturb him. He lost no time in letting them know that this precaution was unnecessary, and all four gentlemen directly approached his bedside. Old Mr Garland was the first to stretch out his hand, and inquire how he felt.

Dick was about to answer that he felt much better, though still as weak as need be, when his little nurse, pushing the visitors aside and pressing up to his pillow as if in jealousy of their interference, set his breakfast before him, and insisted on his taking it before he underwent the fatigue of speaking or of being spoken to. Mr Swiveller, who was perfectly ravenous, and had had, all night, amazingly distinct and consistent dreams of mutton chops, double stout, and similar delicacies, felt even the weak tea and dry toast such irresistible temptations, that he consented to eat and drink on one condition.

'And that is,' said Dick, returning the pressure of Mr Garland's hand, 'that you answer me this question truly, before I take a bit or drop. Is it too late?'

'For completing the work you began so well last night?' returned the old gentleman. 'No. Set your mind at rest on that point. It is not, I assure you.'

Comforted by this intelligence, the patient applied himself to his food with a keen appetite, though evidently not with a greater zest in the eating than his nurse appeared to have in seeing him eat. The manner of this meal was this:—Mr Swiveller, holding the slice of toast or cup of tea in his left hand, and taking a bite or drink, as the case might be, constantly kept, in his right, one palm of the Marchioness tight locked; and to shake, or even to kiss this imprisoned hand, he would stop every now and then, in the very act of swallowing, with perfect seriousness of intention, and the utmost gravity. As often as he put anything into his mouth, whether for eating or drinking, the face of the Marchioness lighted up beyond all description; but whenever he gave her one or other of these tokens of recognition, her countenance became overshadowed, and she began to sob. Now, whether she was in her laughing joy, or in her crying one, the Marchioness could not help turning to the visitors with an appealing look, which seemed to say, 'You see this fellow—can I help this?'—and they, being thus made, as it were, parties to the scene, as regularly answered by another look, 'No. Certainly not.' This dumb-show, taking place during the whole time of the invalid's breakfast, and the invalid himself, pale and emaciated, performing no small part in the same, it may be fairly questioned whether at any meal, where no word, good or bad, was spoken from beginning to end, so much was expressed by gestures in themselves so slight and unimportant.

At length—and to say the truth before very long—Mr Swiveller had despatched as much toast and tea as in that stage of his recovery it was discreet to let him have. But the cares of the Marchioness did not stop here; for, disappearing for an instant and presently returning with a basin of fair water, she laved his face and hands, brushed his hair, and in short made him as spruce and smart as anybody under such circumstances could be made; and all this, in as brisk and business-like a manner, as if he were a very little boy, and she his grown-up nurse. To these various attentions, Mr Swiveller submitted in a kind of grateful astonishment beyond the reach of language. When they were at last brought to an end, and the Marchioness had withdrawn into a distant corner to take her own poor breakfast (cold enough by that time), he turned his face away for some few moments, and shook hands heartily with the air.

'Gentlemen,' said Dick, rousing himself from this pause, and turning round again, 'you'll excuse me. Men who have been brought so low as I have been, are easily fatigued. I am fresh again now, and fit for talking. We're short of chairs here, among other trifles, but if you'll do me the favour to sit upon the bed—'

'What can we do for you?' said Mr Garland, kindly.

'If you could make the Marchioness yonder, a Marchioness, in real, sober earnest,' returned Dick, 'I'd thank you to get it done off-hand. But as you can't, and as the question is not what you will do for me, but what you will do for somebody else who has a better claim upon you, pray sir let me know what you intend doing.'

'It's chiefly on that account that we have come just now,' said the single gentleman, 'for you will have another visitor presently. We feared you would be anxious unless you knew from ourselves what steps we intended to take, and therefore came to you before we stirred in the matter.'

'Gentlemen,' returned Dick, 'I thank you. Anybody in the helpless state that you see me in, is naturally anxious. Don't let me interrupt you, sir.'

'Then, you see, my good fellow,' said the single gentleman, 'that while we have no doubt whatever of the truth of this disclosure, which has so providentially come to light—'

'Meaning hers?' said Dick, pointing towards the Marchioness.

'—Meaning hers, of course. While we have no doubt of that, or that a proper use of it would procure the poor lad's immediate pardon and liberation, we have a great doubt whether it would, by itself, enable us to reach Quilp, the chief agent in this villany. I should tell you that this doubt has been confirmed into something very nearly approaching certainty by the best opinions we have been enabled, in this short space of time, to take upon the subject. You'll agree with us, that to give him even the most distant chance of escape, if we could help it, would be monstrous. You say with us, no doubt, if somebody must escape, let it be any one but he.'

'Yes,' returned Dick, 'certainly. That is if somebody must—but upon my word, I'm unwilling that Anybody should. Since laws were made for every degree, to curb vice in others as well as in me—and so forth you know—doesn't it strike you in that light?'

The single gentleman smiled as if the light in which Mr Swiveller had put the question were not the clearest in the world, and proceeded to explain that they contemplated proceeding by stratagem in the first instance; and that their design was to endeavour to extort a confession from the gentle Sarah.

'When she finds how much we know, and how we know it,' he said, 'and that she is clearly compromised already, we are not without strong hopes that we may be enabled through her means to punish the other two effectually. If we could do that, she might go scot-free for aught I cared.'

Dick received this project in anything but a gracious manner, representing with as much warmth as he was then capable of showing, that they would find the old buck (meaning Sarah) more difficult to manage than Quilp himself—that, for any tampering, terrifying, or cajolery, she was a very unpromising and unyielding subject—that she was of a kind of brass not easily melted or moulded into shape—in short, that they were no match for her, and would be signally defeated. But it was in vain to urge them to adopt some other course. The single gentleman has been described as explaining their joint intentions, but it should have been written that they all spoke together; that if any one of them by chance held his peace for a moment, he stood gasping and panting for an opportunity to strike in again: in a word, that they had reached that pitch of impatience and anxiety where men can neither be persuaded nor reasoned with; and that it would have been as easy to turn the most impetuous wind that ever blew, as to prevail on them to reconsider their determination. So, after telling Mr Swiveller how they had not lost sight of Kit's mother and the children; how they had never once even lost sight of Kit himself, but had been unremitting in their endeavours to procure a mitigation of his sentence; how they had been perfectly distracted between the strong proofs of his guilt, and their own fading hopes of his innocence; and how he, Richard Swiveller, might keep his mind at rest, for everything should be happily adjusted between that time and night;—after telling him all this, and adding a great many kind and cordial expressions, personal to himself, which it is unnecessary to recite, Mr Garland, the notary, and the single gentleman, took their leaves at a very critical time, or Richard Swiveller must assuredly have been driven into another fever, whereof the results might have been fatal.

Mr Abel remained behind, very often looking at his watch and at the room door, until Mr Swiveller was roused from a short nap, by the setting-down on the landing-place outside, as from the shoulders of a porter, of some giant load, which seemed to shake the house, and made the little physic bottles on the mantel-shelf ring again. Directly this sound reached his ears, Mr Abel started up, and hobbled to the door, and opened it; and behold! there stood a strong man, with a mighty hamper, which, being hauled into the room and presently unpacked, disgorged such treasures as tea, and coffee, and wine, and rusks, and oranges, and grapes, and fowls ready trussed for boiling, and calves'-foot jelly, and arrow-root, and sago, and other delicate restoratives, that the small servant, who had never thought it possible that such things could be, except in shops, stood rooted to the spot in her one shoe, with her mouth and eyes watering in unison, and her power of speech quite gone. But, not so Mr Abel; or the strong man who emptied the hamper, big as it was, in a twinkling; and not so the nice old lady, who appeared so suddenly that she might have come out of the hamper too (it was quite large enough), and who, bustling about on tiptoe and without noise—now here, now there, now everywhere at once—began to fill out the jelly in tea-cups, and to make chicken broth in small saucepans, and to peel oranges for the sick man and to cut them up in little pieces, and to ply the small servant with glasses of wine and choice bits of everything until more substantial meat could be prepared for her refreshment. The whole of which appearances were so unexpected and bewildering, that Mr Swiveller, when he had taken two oranges and a little jelly, and had seen the strong man walk off with the empty basket, plainly leaving all that abundance for his use and benefit, was fain to lie down and fall asleep again, from sheer inability to entertain such wonders in his mind.

Meanwhile, the single gentleman, the Notary, and Mr Garland, repaired to a certain coffee-house, and from that place indited and sent a letter to Miss Sally Brass, requesting her, in terms mysterious and brief, to favour an unknown friend who wished to consult her, with her company there, as speedily as possible. The communication performed its errand so well, that within ten minutes of the messenger's return and report of its delivery, Miss Brass herself was announced.

'Pray ma'am,' said the single gentleman, whom she found alone in the room, 'take a chair.'

Miss Brass sat herself down, in a very stiff and frigid state, and seemed—as indeed she was—not a little astonished to find that the lodger and her mysterious correspondent were one and the same person.

'You did not expect to see me?' said the single gentleman.

'I didn't think much about it,' returned the beauty. 'I supposed it was business of some kind or other. If it's about the apartments, of course you'll give my brother regular notice, you know—or money. That's very easily settled. You're a responsible party, and in such a case lawful money and lawful notice are pretty much the same.'

'I am obliged to you for your good opinion,' retorted the single gentleman, 'and quite concur in these sentiments. But that is not the subject on which I wish to speak with you.'

'Oh!' said Sally. 'Then just state the particulars, will you? I suppose it's professional business?'

'Why, it is connected with the law, certainly.'

'Very well,' returned Miss Brass. 'My brother and I are just the same. I can take any instructions, or give you any advice.'

'As there are other parties interested besides myself,' said the single gentleman, rising and opening the door of an inner room, 'we had better confer together. Miss Brass is here, gentlemen.' Mr Garland and the Notary walked in, looking very grave; and, drawing up two chairs, one on each side of the single gentleman, formed a kind of fence round the gentle Sarah, and penned her into a corner. Her brother Sampson under such circumstances would certainly have evinced some confusion or anxiety, but she—all composure—pulled out the tin box, and calmly took a pinch of snuff.

'Miss Brass,' said the Notary, taking the word at this crisis, 'we professional people understand each other, and, when we choose, can say what we have to say, in very few words. You advertised a runaway servant, the other day?'

'Well,' returned Miss Sally, with a sudden flush overspreading her features, 'what of that?'

'She is found, ma'am,' said the Notary, pulling out his pocket-handkerchief with a flourish. 'She is found.'

'Who found her?' demanded Sarah hastily.

'We did, ma'am—we three. Only last night, or you would have heard from us before.'

'And now I have heard from you,' said Miss Brass, folding her arms as though she were about to deny something to the death, 'what have you got to say? Something you have got into your heads about her, of course. Prove it, will you—that's all. Prove it. You have found her, you say. I can tell you (if you don't know it) that you have found the most artful, lying, pilfering, devilish little minx that was ever born.—Have you got her here?' she added, looking sharply round.

'No, she is not here at present,' returned the Notary. 'But she is quite safe.'

'Ha!' cried Sally, twitching a pinch of snuff out of her box, as spitefully as if she were in the very act of wrenching off the small servant's nose; 'she shall be safe enough from this time, I warrant you.'

'I hope so,' replied the Notary. 'Did it occur to you for the first time, when you found she had run away, that there were two keys to your kitchen door?'

Miss Sally took another pinch, and putting her head on one side, looked at her questioner, with a curious kind of spasm about her mouth, but with a cunning aspect of immense expression.

'Two keys,' repeated the Notary; 'one of which gave her the opportunities of roaming through the house at nights when you supposed her fast locked up, and of overhearing confidential consultations—among others, that particular conference, to be described to-day before a justice, which you will have an opportunity of hearing her relate; that conference which you and Mr Brass held together, on the night before that most unfortunate and innocent young man was accused of robbery, by a horrible device of which I will only say that it may be characterised by the epithets which you have applied to this wretched little witness, and by a few stronger ones besides.'

Sally took another pinch. Although her face was wonderfully composed, it was apparent that she was wholly taken by surprise, and that what she had expected to be taxed with, in connection with her small servant, was something very different from this.

'Come, come, Miss Brass,' said the Notary, 'you have great command of feature, but you feel, I see, that by a chance which never entered your imagination, this base design is revealed, and two of its plotters must be brought to justice. Now, you know the pains and penalties you are liable to, and so I need not dilate upon them, but I have a proposal to make to you. You have the honour of being sister to one of the greatest scoundrels unhung; and, if I may venture to say so to a lady, you are in every respect quite worthy of him. But connected with you two is a third party, a villain of the name of Quilp, the prime mover of the whole diabolical device, who I believe to be worse than either. For his sake, Miss Brass, do us the favour to reveal the whole history of this affair. Let me remind you that your doing so, at our instance, will place you in a safe and comfortable position—your present one is not desirable—and cannot injure your brother; for against him and you we have quite sufficient evidence (as you hear) already. I will not say to you that we suggest this course in mercy (for, to tell you the truth, we do not entertain any regard for you), but it is a necessity to which we are reduced, and I recommend it to you as a matter of the very best policy. Time,' said Mr Witherden, pulling out his watch, 'in a business like this, is exceedingly precious. Favour us with your decision as speedily as possible, ma'am.'

With a smile upon her face, and looking at each of the three by turns, Miss Brass took two or three more pinches of snuff, and having by this time very little left, travelled round and round the box with her forefinger and thumb, scraping up another. Having disposed of this likewise and put the box carefully in her pocket, she said,—

'I am to accept or reject at once, am I?'

'Yes,' said Mr Witherden.

The charming creature was opening her lips to speak in reply, when the door was hastily opened too, and the head of Sampson Brass was thrust into the room.

'Excuse me,' said the gentleman hastily. 'Wait a bit!'

So saying, and quite indifferent to the astonishment his presence occasioned, he crept in, shut the door, kissed his greasy glove as servilely as if it were the dust, and made a most abject bow.

'Sarah,' said Brass, 'hold your tongue if you please, and let me speak. Gentlemen, if I could express the pleasure it gives me to see three such men in a happy unity of feeling and concord of sentiment, I think you would hardly believe me. But though I am unfortunate—nay, gentlemen, criminal, if we are to use harsh expressions in a company like this—still, I have my feelings like other men. I have heard of a poet, who remarked that feelings were the common lot of all. If he could have been a pig, gentlemen, and have uttered that sentiment, he would still have been immortal.'

'If you're not an idiot,' said Miss Brass harshly, 'hold your peace.'

'Sarah, my dear,' returned her brother, 'thank you. But I know what I am about, my love, and will take the liberty of expressing myself accordingly. Mr Witherden, Sir, your handkerchief is hanging out of your pocket—would you allow me to—,

As Mr Brass advanced to remedy this accident, the Notary shrunk from him with an air of disgust. Brass, who over and above his usual prepossessing qualities, had a scratched face, a green shade over one eye, and a hat grievously crushed, stopped short, and looked round with a pitiful smile.

'He shuns me,' said Sampson, 'even when I would, as I may say, heap coals of fire upon his head. Well! Ah! But I am a falling house, and the rats (if I may be allowed the expression in reference to a gentleman I respect and love beyond everything) fly from me! Gentlemen—regarding your conversation just now, I happened to see my sister on her way here, and, wondering where she could be going to, and being—may I venture to say?—naturally of a suspicious turn, followed her. Since then, I have been listening.'

'If you're not mad,' interposed Miss Sally, 'stop there, and say no more.'

'Sarah, my dear,' rejoined Brass with undiminished politeness, 'I thank you kindly, but will still proceed. Mr Witherden, sir, as we have the honour to be members of the same profession—to say nothing of that other gentleman having been my lodger, and having partaken, as one may say, of the hospitality of my roof—I think you might have given me the refusal of this offer in the first instance. I do indeed. Now, my dear Sir,' cried Brass, seeing that the Notary was about to interrupt him, 'suffer me to speak, I beg.'

Mr Witherden was silent, and Brass went on.

'If you will do me the favour,' he said, holding up the green shade, and revealing an eye most horribly discoloured, 'to look at this, you will naturally inquire, in your own minds, how did I get it. If you look from that, to my face, you will wonder what could have been the cause of all these scratches. And if from them to my hat, how it came into the state in which you see it. Gentlemen,' said Brass, striking the hat fiercely with his clenched hand, 'to all these questions I answer—Quilp!'

The three gentlemen looked at each other, but said nothing.

'I say,' pursued Brass, glancing aside at his sister, as though he were talking for her information, and speaking with a snarling malignity, in violent contrast to his usual smoothness, 'that I answer to all these questions,—Quilp—Quilp, who deludes me into his infernal den, and takes a delight in looking on and chuckling while I scorch, and burn, and bruise, and maim myself—Quilp, who never once, no never once, in all our communications together, has treated me otherwise than as a dog—Quilp, whom I have always hated with my whole heart, but never so much as lately. He gives me the cold shoulder on this very matter as if he had had nothing to do with it, instead of being the first to propose it. I can't trust him. In one of his howling, raving, blazing humours, I believe he'd let it out, if it was murder, and never think of himself so long as he could terrify me. Now,' said Brass, picking up his hat again and replacing the shade over his eye, and actually crouching down, in the excess of his servility, 'What does all this lead to?—what should you say it led me to, gentlemen?—could you guess at all near the mark?'

Nobody spoke. Brass stood smirking for a little while, as if he had propounded some choice conundrum; and then said:

'To be short with you, then, it leads me to this. If the truth has come out, as it plainly has in a manner that there's no standing up against—and a very sublime and grand thing is Truth, gentlemen, in its way, though like other sublime and grand things, such as thunder-storms and that, we're not always over and above glad to see it—I had better turn upon this man than let this man turn upon me. It's clear to me that I am done for. Therefore, if anybody is to split, I had better be the person and have the advantage of it. Sarah, my dear, comparatively speaking you're safe. I relate these circumstances for my own profit.'

With that, Mr Brass, in a great hurry, revealed the whole story; bearing as heavily as possible on his amiable employer, and making himself out to be rather a saint-like and holy character, though subject—he acknowledged—to human weaknesses. He concluded thus:

'Now, gentlemen, I am not a man who does things by halves. Being in for a penny, I am ready, as the saying is, to be in for a pound. You must do with me what you please, and take me where you please. If you wish to have this in writing, we'll reduce it into manuscript immediately. You will be tender with me, I am sure. I am quite confident you will be tender with me. You are men of honour, and have feeling hearts. I yielded from necessity to Quilp, for though necessity has no law, she has her lawyers. I yield to you from necessity too; from policy besides; and because of feelings that have been a pretty long time working within me. Punish Quilp, gentlemen. Weigh heavily upon him. Grind him down. Tread him under foot. He has done as much by me, for many and many a day.'

Having now arrived at the conclusion of his discourse, Sampson checked the current of his wrath, kissed his glove again, and smiled as only parasites and cowards can.

'And this,' said Miss Brass, raising her head, with which she had hitherto sat resting on her hands, and surveying him from head to foot with a bitter sneer, 'this is my brother, is it! This is my brother, that I have worked and toiled for, and believed to have had something of the man in him!'

'Sarah, my dear,' returned Sampson, rubbing his hands feebly; you disturb our friends. Besides you—you're disappointed, Sarah, and, not knowing what you say, expose yourself.'

'Yes, you pitiful dastard,' retorted the lovely damsel, 'I understand you. You feared that I should be beforehand with you. But do you think that I would have been enticed to say a word! I'd have scorned it, if they had tried and tempted me for twenty years.'

'He he!' simpered Brass, who, in his deep debasement, really seemed to have changed sexes with his sister, and to have made over to her any spark of manliness he might have possessed. 'You think so, Sarah, you think so perhaps; but you would have acted quite different, my good fellow. You will not have forgotten that it was a maxim with Foxey—our revered father, gentlemen—"Always suspect everybody." That's the maxim to go through life with! If you were not actually about to purchase your own safety when I showed myself, I suspect you'd have done it by this time. And therefore I've done it myself, and spared you the trouble as well as the shame. The shame, gentlemen,' added Brass, allowing himself to be slightly overcome, 'if there is any, is mine. It's better that a female should be spared it.'

With deference to the better opinion of Mr Brass, and more particularly to the authority of his Great Ancestor, it may be doubted, with humility, whether the elevating principle laid down by the latter gentleman, and acted upon by his descendant, is always a prudent one, or attended in practice with the desired results. This is, beyond question, a bold and presumptuous doubt, inasmuch as many distinguished characters, called men of the world, long-headed customers, knowing dogs, shrewd fellows, capital hands at business, and the like, have made, and do daily make, this axiom their polar star and compass. Still, the doubt may be gently insinuated. And in illustration it may be observed, that if Mr Brass, not being over-suspicious, had, without prying and listening, left his sister to manage the conference on their joint behalf, or prying and listening, had not been in such a mighty hurry to anticipate her (which he would not have been, but for his distrust and jealousy), he would probably have found himself much better off in the end. Thus, it will always happen that these men of the world, who go through it in armour, defend themselves from quite as much good as evil; to say nothing of the inconvenience and absurdity of mounting guard with a microscope at all times, and of wearing a coat of mail on the most innocent occasions.

The three gentlemen spoke together apart, for a few moments. At the end of their consultation, which was very brief, the Notary pointed to the writing materials on the table, and informed Mr Brass that if he wished to make any statement in writing, he had the opportunity of doing so. At the same time he felt bound to tell him that they would require his attendance, presently, before a justice of the peace, and that in what he did or said, he was guided entirely by his own discretion.

'Gentlemen,' said Brass, drawing off his glove, and crawling in spirit upon the ground before them, 'I will justify the tenderness with which I know I shall be treated; and as, without tenderness, I should, now that this discovery has been made, stand in the worst position of the three, you may depend upon it I will make a clean breast. Mr Witherden, sir, a kind of faintness is upon my spirits—if you would do me the favour to ring the bell and order up a glass of something warm and spicy, I shall, notwithstanding what has passed, have a melancholy pleasure in drinking your good health. I had hoped,' said Brass, looking round with a mournful smile, 'to have seen you three gentlemen, one day or another, with your legs under the mahogany in my humble parlour in the Marks. But hopes are fleeting. Dear me!'

Mr Brass found himself so exceedingly affected, at this point, that he could say or do nothing more until some refreshment arrived. Having partaken of it, pretty freely for one in his agitated state, he sat down to write.

The lovely Sarah, now with her arms folded, and now with her hands clasped behind her, paced the room with manly strides while her brother was thus employed, and sometimes stopped to pull out her snuff-box and bite the lid. She continued to pace up and down until she was quite tired, and then fell asleep on a chair near the door.

It has been since supposed, with some reason, that this slumber was a sham or feint, as she contrived to slip away unobserved in the dusk of the afternoon. Whether this was an intentional and waking departure, or a somnambulistic leave-taking and walking in her sleep, may remain a subject of contention; but, on one point (and indeed the main one) all parties are agreed. In whatever state she walked away, she certainly did not walk back again.

Mention having been made of the dusk of the afternoon, it will be inferred that Mr Brass's task occupied some time in the completion. It was not finished until evening; but, being done at last, that worthy person and the three friends adjourned in a hackney-coach to the private office of a justice, who, giving Mr Brass a warm reception and detaining him in a secure place that he might insure to himself the pleasure of seeing him on the morrow, dismissed the others with the cheering assurance that a warrant could not fail to be granted next day for the apprehension of Mr Quilp, and that a proper application and statement of all the circumstances to the secretary of state (who was fortunately in town), would no doubt procure Kit's free pardon and liberation without delay.

And now, indeed, it seemed that Quilp's malignant career was drawing to a close, and that retribution, which often travels slowly—especially when heaviest—had tracked his footsteps with a sure and certain scent and was gaining on him fast. Unmindful of her stealthy tread, her victim holds his course in fancied triumph. Still at his heels she comes, and once afoot, is never turned aside!

Their business ended, the three gentlemen hastened back to the lodgings of Mr Swiveller, whom they found progressing so favourably in his recovery as to have been able to sit up for half an hour, and to have conversed with cheerfulness. Mrs Garland had gone home some time since, but Mr Abel was still sitting with him. After telling him all they had done, the two Mr Garlands and the single gentleman, as if by some previous understanding, took their leaves for the night, leaving the invalid alone with the Notary and the small servant.

'As you are so much better,' said Mr Witherden, sitting down at the bedside, 'I may venture to communicate to you a piece of news which has come to me professionally.'

The idea of any professional intelligence from a gentleman connected with legal matters, appeared to afford Richard any-thing but a pleasing anticipation. Perhaps he connected it in his own mind with one or two outstanding accounts, in reference to which he had already received divers threatening letters. His countenance fell as he replied,

'Certainly, sir. I hope it's not anything of a very disagreeable nature, though?'

'If I thought it so, I should choose some better time for communicating it,' replied the Notary. 'Let me tell you, first, that my friends who have been here to-day, know nothing of it, and that their kindness to you has been quite spontaneous and with no hope of return. It may do a thoughtless, careless man, good, to know that.'

Dick thanked him, and said he hoped it would.

'I have been making some inquiries about you,' said Mr Witherden, 'little thinking that I should find you under such circumstances as those which have brought us together. You are the nephew of Rebecca Swiveller, spinster, deceased, of Cheselbourne in Dorsetshire.'

'Deceased!' cried Dick.

'Deceased. If you had been another sort of nephew, you would have come into possession (so says the will, and I see no reason to doubt it) of five-and-twenty thousand pounds. As it is, you have fallen into an annuity of one hundred and fifty pounds a year; but I think I may congratulate you even upon that.'

'Sir,' said Dick, sobbing and laughing together, 'you may. For, please God, we'll make a scholar of the poor Marchioness yet! And she shall walk in silk attire, and siller have to spare, or may I never rise from this bed again!'

CHAPTER 67

Unconscious of the proceedings faithfully narrated in the last chapter, and little dreaming of the mine which had been sprung beneath him (for, to the end that he should have no warning of the business a-foot, the profoundest secrecy was observed in the whole transaction), Mr Quilp remained shut up in his hermitage, undisturbed by any suspicion, and extremely well satisfied with the result of his machinations. Being engaged in the adjustment of some accounts—an occupation to which the silence and solitude of his retreat were very favourable—he had not strayed from his den for two whole days. The third day of his devotion to this pursuit found him still hard at work, and little disposed to stir abroad.

It was the day next after Mr Brass's confession, and consequently, that which threatened the restriction of Mr Quilp's liberty, and the abrupt communication to him of some very unpleasant and unwelcome facts. Having no intuitive perception of the cloud which lowered upon his house, the dwarf was in his ordinary state of cheerfulness; and, when he found he was becoming too much engrossed by business with a due regard to his health and spirits, he varied its monotonous routine with a little screeching, or howling, or some other innocent relaxation of that nature.

He was attended, as usual, by Tom Scott, who sat crouching over the fire after the manner of a toad, and, from time to time, when his master's back was turned, imitating his grimaces with a fearful exactness. The figure-head had not yet disappeared, but remained in its old place. The face, horribly seared by the frequent application of the red-hot poker, and further ornamented by the insertion, in the tip of the nose, of a tenpenny nail, yet smiled blandly in its less lacerated parts, and seemed, like a sturdy martyr, to provoke its tormentor to the commission of new outrages and insults. The day, in the highest and brightest quarters of the town, was damp, dark, cold and gloomy. In that low and marshy spot, the fog filled every nook and corner with a thick dense cloud. Every object was obscure at one or two yards' distance. The warning lights and fires upon the river were powerless beneath this pall, and, but for a raw and piercing chillness in the air, and now and then the cry of some bewildered boatman as he rested on his oars and tried to make out where he was, the river itself might have been miles away.

The mist, though sluggish and slow to move, was of a keenly searching kind. No muffling up in furs and broadcloth kept it out. It seemed to penetrate into the very bones of the shrinking wayfarers, and to rack them with cold and pains. Everything was wet and clammy to the touch. The warm blaze alone defied it, and leaped and sparkled merrily. It was a day to be at home, crowding about the fire, telling stories of travellers who had lost their way in such weather on heaths and moors; and to love a warm hearth more than ever.

The dwarf's humour, as we know, was to have a fireside to himself; and when he was disposed to be convivial, to enjoy himself alone. By no means insensible to the comfort of being within doors, he ordered Tom Scott to pile the little stove with coals, and, dismissing his work for that day, determined to be jovial.

To this end, he lighted up fresh candles and heaped more fuel on the fire; and having dined off a beefsteak, which he cooked himself in somewhat of a savage and cannibal-like manner, brewed a great bowl of hot punch, lighted his pipe, and sat down to spend the evening.

At this moment, a low knocking at the cabin-door arrested his attention. When it had been twice or thrice repeated, he softly opened the little window, and thrusting his head out, demanded who was there.

'Only me, Quilp,' replied a woman's voice.

'Only you!' cried the dwarf, stretching his neck to obtain a better view of his visitor. 'And what brings you here, you jade? How dare you approach the ogre's castle, eh?'

'I have come with some news,' rejoined his spouse. 'Don't be angry with me.'

'Is it good news, pleasant news, news to make a man skip and snap his fingers?' said the dwarf. 'Is the dear old lady dead?'

'I don't know what news it is, or whether it's good or bad,' rejoined his wife.

'Then she's alive,' said Quilp, 'and there's nothing the matter with her. Go home again, you bird of evil note, go home!' 'I have brought a letter,' cried the meek little woman.

'Toss it in at the window here, and go your ways,' said Quilp, interrupting her, 'or I'll come out and scratch you.'

'No, but please, Quilp—do hear me speak,' urged his submissive wife, in tears. 'Please do!'

'Speak then,' growled the dwarf with a malicious grin. 'Be quick and short about it. Speak, will you?'

'It was left at our house this afternoon,' said Mrs Quilp, trembling, 'by a boy who said he didn't know from whom it came, but that it was given to him to leave, and that he was told to say it must be brought on to you directly, for it was of the very greatest consequence.—But please,' she added, as her husband stretched out his hand for it, 'please let me in. You don't know how wet and cold I am, or how many times I have lost my way in coming here through this thick fog. Let me dry myself at the fire for five minutes. I'll go away directly you tell me to, Quilp. Upon my word I will.'

Her amiable husband hesitated for a few moments; but, bethinking himself that the letter might require some answer, of which she could be the bearer, closed the window, opened the door, and bade her enter. Mrs Quilp obeyed right willingly, and, kneeling down before the fire to warm her hands, delivered into his a little packet.

'I'm glad you're wet,' said Quilp, snatching it, and squinting at her. 'I'm glad you're cold. I'm glad you lost your way. I'm glad your eyes are red with crying. It does my heart good to see your little nose so pinched and frosty.'

'Oh Quilp!' sobbed his wife. 'How cruel it is of you!'

'Did she think I was dead?' said Quilp, wrinkling his face into a most extraordinary series of grimaces. 'Did she think she was going to have all the money, and to marry somebody she liked? Ha ha ha! Did she?'

These taunts elicited no reply from the poor little woman, who remained on her knees, warming her hands, and sobbing, to Mr Quilp's great delight.

But, just as he was contemplating her, and chuckling excessively, he happened to observe that Tom Scott was delighted too; wherefore, that he might have no presumptuous partner in his glee, the dwarf instantly collared him, dragged him to the door, and after a short scuffle, kicked him into the yard. In return for this mark of attention, Tom immediately walked upon his hands to the window, and—if the expression be allowable—looked in with his shoes: besides rattling his feet upon the glass like a Banshee upside down. As a matter of course, Mr Quilp lost no time in resorting to the infallible poker, with which, after some dodging and lying in ambush, he paid his young friend one or two such unequivocal compliments that he vanished precipitately, and left him in quiet possession of the field.

'So! That little job being disposed of,' said the dwarf, coolly, 'I'll read my letter. Humph!' he muttered, looking at the direction. 'I ought to know this writing. Beautiful Sally!'

Opening it, he read, in a fair, round, legal hand, as follows:

'Sammy has been practised upon, and has broken confidence. It has all come out. You had better not be in the way, for strangers are going to call upon you. They have been very quiet as yet, because they mean to surprise you. Don't lose time. I didn't. I am not to be found anywhere. If I was you, I wouldn't either. S. B., late of B. M.'

To describe the changes that passed over Quilp's face, as he read this letter half-a-dozen times, would require some new language: such, for power of expression, as was never written, read, or spoken. For a long time he did not utter one word; but, after a considerable interval, during which Mrs Quilp was almost paralysed with the alarm his looks engendered, he contrived to gasp out,

'If I had him here. If I only had him here—'

'Oh Quilp!' said his wife, 'what's the matter? Who are you angry with?'

'—I should drown him,' said the dwarf, not heeding her. 'Too easy a death, too short, too quick—but the river runs close at hand. Oh! if I had him here! just to take him to the brink coaxingly and pleasantly,—holding him by the button-hole—joking with him,—and, with a sudden push, to send him splashing down! Drowning men come to the surface three times they say. Ah! To see him those three times, and mock him as his face came bobbing up,—oh, what a rich treat that would be!'

'Quilp!' stammered his wife, venturing at the same time to touch him on the shoulder: 'what has gone wrong?'

She was so terrified by the relish with which he pictured this pleasure to himself that she could scarcely make herself intelligible.

'Such a bloodless cur!' said Quilp, rubbing his hands very slowly, and pressing them tight together. 'I thought his cowardice and servility were the best guarantee for his keeping silence. Oh Brass, Brass—my dear, good, affectionate, faithful, complimentary, charming friend—if I only had you here!'

His wife, who had retreated lest she should seem to listen to these mutterings, ventured to approach him again, and was about to speak, when he hurried to the door, and called Tom Scott, who, remembering his late gentle admonition, deemed it prudent to appear immediately.

'There!' said the dwarf, pulling him in. 'Take her home. Don't come here to-morrow, for this place will be shut up. Come back no more till you hear from me or see me. Do you mind?'

Tom nodded sulkily, and beckoned Mrs Quilp to lead the way.

'As for you,' said the dwarf, addressing himself to her, 'ask no questions about me, make no search for me, say nothing concerning me. I shall not be dead, mistress, and that'll comfort you. He'll take care of you.'

'But, Quilp? What is the matter? Where are you going? Do say something more?'

'I'll say that,' said the dwarf, seizing her by the arm, 'and do that too, which undone and unsaid would be best for you, unless you go directly.'

'Has anything happened?' cried his wife. 'Oh! Do tell me that?'

'Yes,' snarled the dwarf. 'No. What matter which? I have told you what to do. Woe betide you if you fail to do it, or disobey me by a hair's breadth. Will you go!'

'I am going, I'll go directly; but,' faltered his wife, 'answer me one question first. Has this letter any connexion with dear little Nell? I must ask you that—I must indeed, Quilp. You cannot think what days and nights of sorrow I have had through having once deceived that child. I don't know what harm I may have brought about, but, great or little, I did it for you, Quilp. My conscience misgave me when I did it. Do answer me this question, if you please?'

The exasperated dwarf returned no answer, but turned round and caught up his usual weapon with such vehemence, that Tom Scott dragged his charge away, by main force, and as swiftly as he could. It was well he did so, for Quilp, who was nearly mad with rage, pursued them to the neighbouring lane, and might have prolonged the chase but for the dense mist which obscured them from his view and appeared to thicken every moment.

'It will be a good night for travelling anonymously,' he said, as he returned slowly, being pretty well breathed with his run. 'Stay. We may look better here. This is too hospitable and free.'

By a great exertion of strength, he closed the two old gates, which were deeply sunken in the mud, and barred them with a heavy beam. That done, he shook his matted hair from about his eyes, and tried them.—Strong and fast.

'The fence between this wharf and the next is easily climbed,' said the dwarf, when he had taken these precautions. 'There's a back lane, too, from there. That shall be my way out. A man need know his road well, to find it in this lovely place to-night. I need fear no unwelcome visitors while this lasts, I think.'

Almost reduced to the necessity of groping his way with his hands (it had grown so dark and the fog had so much increased), he returned to his lair; and, after musing for some time over the fire, busied himself in preparations for a speedy departure.

While he was collecting a few necessaries and cramming them into his pockets, he never once ceased communing with himself in a low voice, or unclenched his teeth, which he had ground together on finishing Miss Brass's note.

'Oh Sampson!' he muttered, 'good worthy creature—if I could but hug you! If I could only fold you in my arms, and squeeze your ribs, as I COULD squeeze them if I once had you tight—what a meeting there would be between us! If we ever do cross each other again, Sampson, we'll have a greeting not easily to be forgotten, trust me. This time, Sampson, this moment when all had gone on so well, was so nicely chosen! It was so thoughtful of you, so penitent, so good. Oh, if we were face to face in this room again, my white-livered man of law, how well contented one of us would be!'

There he stopped; and raising the bowl of punch to his lips, drank a long deep draught, as if it were fair water and cooling to his parched mouth. Setting it down abruptly, and resuming his preparations, he went on with his soliloquy.

'There's Sally,' he said, with flashing eyes; 'the woman has spirit, determination, purpose—was she asleep, or petrified? She could have stabbed him—poisoned him safely. She might have seen this coming on. Why does she give me notice when it's too late? When he sat there,—yonder there, over there,—with his white face, and red head, and sickly smile, why didn't I know what was passing in his heart? It should have stopped beating, that night, if I had been in his secret, or there are no drugs to lull a man to sleep, or no fire to burn him!'

Another draught from the bowl; and, cowering over the fire with a ferocious aspect, he muttered to himself again.

'And this, like every other trouble and anxiety I have had of late times, springs from that old dotard and his darling child—two wretched feeble wanderers! I'll be their evil genius yet. And you, sweet Kit, honest Kit, virtuous, innocent Kit, look to yourself. Where I hate, I bite. I hate you, my darling fellow, with good cause, and proud as you are to-night, I'll have my turn. —What's that?'

A knocking at the gate he had closed. A loud and violent knocking. Then, a pause; as if those who knocked had stopped to listen. Then, the noise again, more clamorous and importunate than before. 'So soon!' said the dwarf. 'And so eager! I am afraid I shall disappoint you. It's well I'm quite prepared. Sally, I thank you!'

As he spoke, he extinguished the candle. In his impetuous attempts to subdue the brightness of the fire, he overset the stove, which came tumbling forward, and fell with a crash upon the burning embers it had shot forth in its descent, leaving the room in pitchy darkness. The noise at the gate still continuing, he felt his way to the door, and stepped into the open air.

At that moment the knocking ceased. It was about eight o'clock; but the dead of the darkest night would have been as noon-day in comparison with the thick cloud which then rested upon the earth, and shrouded everything from view. He darted forward for a few paces, as if into the mouth of some dim, yawning cavern; then, thinking he had gone wrong, changed the direction of his steps; then stood still, not knowing where to turn.

'If they would knock again,' said Quilp, trying to peer into the gloom by which he was surrounded, 'the sound might guide me! Come! Batter the gate once more!'

He stood listening intently, but the noise was not renewed. Nothing was to be heard in that deserted place, but, at intervals, the distant barkings of dogs. The sound was far away—now in one quarter, now answered in another—nor was it any guide, for it often came from shipboard, as he knew.

'If I could find a wall or fence,' said the dwarf, stretching out his arms, and walking slowly on, 'I should know which way to turn. A good, black, devil's night this, to have my dear friend here! If I had but that wish, it might, for anything I cared, never be day again.'

As the word passed his lips, he staggered and fell—and next moment was fighting with the cold dark water!

For all its bubbling up and rushing in his ears, he could hear the knocking at the gate again—could hear a shout that followed it—could recognise the voice. For all his struggling and plashing, he could understand that they had lost their way, and had wandered back to the point from which they started; that they were all but looking on, while he was drowned; that they were close at hand, but could not make an effort to save him; that he himself had shut and barred them out. He answered the shout—with a yell, which seemed to make the hundred fires that danced before his eyes tremble and flicker, as if a gust of wind had stirred them. It was of no avail. The strong tide filled his throat, and bore him on, upon its rapid current.

Another mortal struggle, and he was up again, beating the water with his hands, and looking out, with wild and glaring eyes that showed him some black object he was drifting close upon. The hull of a ship! He could touch its smooth and slippery surface with his hand. One loud cry, now—but the resistless water bore him down before he could give it utterance, and, driving him under it, carried away a corpse.

It toyed and sported with its ghastly freight, now bruising it against the slimy piles, now hiding it in mud or long rank grass, now dragging it heavily over rough stones and gravel, now feigning to yield it to its own element, and in the same action luring it away, until, tired of the ugly plaything, it flung it on a swamp—a dismal place where pirates had swung in chains through many a wintry night—and left it there to bleach.

And there it lay alone. The sky was red with flame, and the water that bore it there had been tinged with the sullen light as it flowed along. The place the deserted carcass had left so recently, a living man, was now a blazing ruin. There was something of the glare upon its face. The hair, stirred by the damp breeze, played in a kind of mockery of death—such a mockery as the dead man himself would have delighted in when alive—about its head, and its dress fluttered idly in the night wind.

CHAPTER 68

Lighted rooms, bright fires, cheerful faces, the music of glad voices, words of love and welcome, warm hearts, and tears of happiness—what a change is this! But it is to such delights that Kit is hastening. They are awaiting him, he knows. He fears he will die of joy, before he gets among them.

They have prepared him for this, all day. He is not to be carried off to-morrow with the rest, they tell him first. By degrees they let him know that doubts have arisen, that inquiries are to be made, and perhaps he may be pardoned after all. At last, the evening being come, they bring him to a room where some gentlemen are assembled. Foremost among them is his good old master, who comes and takes him by the hand. He hears that his innocence is established, and that he is pardoned. He cannot see the speaker, but he turns towards the voice, and in trying to answer, falls down insensible.

They recover him again, and tell him he must be composed, and bear this like a man. Somebody says he must think of his poor mother. It is because he does think of her so much, that the happy news had overpowered him. They crowd about him, and tell him that the truth has gone abroad, and that all the town and country ring with sympathy for his misfortunes. He has no ears for this. His thoughts, as yet, have no wider range than home. Does she know it? what did she say? who told her? He can speak of nothing else.

They make him drink a little wine, and talk kindly to him for a while, until he is more collected, and can listen, and thank them. He is free to go. Mr Garland thinks, if he feels better, it is time they went away. The gentlemen cluster round him, and shake hands with him. He feels very grateful to them for the interest they have in him, and for the kind promises they make; but the power of speech is gone again, and he has much ado to keep his feet, even though leaning on his master's arm.

As they come through the dismal passages, some officers of the jail who are in waiting there, congratulate him, in their rough way, on his release. The newsmonger is of the number, but his manner is not quite hearty—there is something of surliness in his compliments. He looks upon Kit as an intruder, as one who has obtained admission to that place on false pretences, who has enjoyed a privilege without being duly qualified. He may be a very good sort of young man, he thinks, but he has no business there, and the sooner he is gone, the better.

The last door shuts behind them. They have passed the outer wall, and stand in the open air—in the street he has so often pictured to himself when hemmed in by the gloomy stones, and which has been in all his dreams. It seems wider and more busy than it used to be. The night is bad, and yet how cheerful and gay in his eyes! One of the gentlemen, in taking leave of him, pressed some money into his hand. He has not counted it; but when they have gone a few paces beyond the box for poor Prisoners, he hastily returns and drops it in.

Mr Garland has a coach waiting in a neighbouring street, and, taking Kit inside with him, bids the man drive home. At first, they can only travel at a foot pace, and then with torches going on before, because of the heavy fog. But, as they get farther from the river, and leave the closer portions of the town behind, they are able to dispense with this precaution and to proceed at a brisker rate. On the road, hard galloping would be too slow for Kit; but, when they are drawing near their journey's end, he begs they may go more slowly, and, when the house appears in sight, that they may stop—only for a minute or two, to give him time to breathe.

But there is no stopping then, for the old gentleman speaks stoutly to him, the horses mend their pace, and they are already at the garden-gate. Next minute, they are at the door. There is a noise of tongues, and tread of feet, inside. It opens. Kit rushes in, and finds his mother clinging round his neck.

And there, too, is the ever faithful Barbara's mother, still holding the baby as if she had never put it down since that sad day when they little hoped to have such joy as this—there she is, Heaven bless her, crying her eyes out, and sobbing as never woman sobbed before; and there is little Barbara—poor little Barbara, so much thinner and so much paler, and yet so very pretty—trembling like a leaf and supporting herself against the wall; and there is Mrs Garland, neater and nicer than ever, fainting away stone dead with nobody to help her; and there is Mr Abel, violently blowing his nose, and wanting to embrace everybody; and there is the single gentleman hovering round them all, and constant to nothing for an instant; and there is that good, dear, thoughtful little Jacob, sitting all alone by himself on the bottom stair, with his hands on his knees like an old man, roaring fearfully without giving any trouble to anybody; and each and all of them are for the time clean out of their wits, and do jointly and severally commit all manner of follies.

And even when the rest have in some measure come to themselves again, and can find words and smiles, Barbara—that soft-hearted, gentle, foolish little Barbara—is suddenly missed, and found to be in a swoon by herself in the back parlour, from which swoon she falls into hysterics, and from which hysterics into a swoon again, and is, indeed, so bad, that despite a mortal quantity of vinegar and cold water she is hardly a bit better at last than she was at first. Then, Kit's mother comes in and says, will he come and speak to her; and Kit says 'Yes,' and goes; and he says in a kind voice 'Barbara!' and Barbara's mother tells her that 'it's only Kit;' and Barbara says (with her eyes closed all the time) 'Oh! but is it him indeed?' and Barbara's mother says 'To be sure it is, my dear; there's nothing the matter now.' And in further assurance that he's safe and sound, Kit speaks to her again; and then Barbara goes off into another fit of laughter, and then into another fit of crying; and then Barbara's mother and Kit's mother nod to each other and pretend to scold her—but only to bring her to herself the faster, bless you!—and being experienced matrons, and acute at perceiving the first dawning symptoms of recovery, they comfort Kit with the assurance that 'she'll do now,' and so dismiss him to the place from whence he came.

Well! In that place (which is the next room) there are decanters of wine, and all that sort of thing, set out as grand as if Kit and his friends were first-rate company; and there is little Jacob, walking, as the popular phrase is, into a home-made plum-cake, at a most surprising pace, and keeping his eye on the figs and oranges which are to follow, and making the best use of his time, you may believe. Kit no sooner comes in, than that single gentleman (never was such a busy gentleman) charges all the glasses—bumpers—and drinks his health, and tells him he shall never want a friend while he lives; and so does Mr Garland, and so does Mrs Garland, and so does Mr Abel. But even this honour and distinction is not all, for the single gentleman forthwith pulls out of his pocket a massive silver watch—going hard, and right to half a second—and upon the back of this watch is engraved Kit's name, with flourishes all over; and in short it is Kit's watch, bought expressly for him, and presented to him on the spot. You may rest assured that Mr and Mrs Garland can't help hinting about their present, in store, and that Mr Abel tells outright that he has his; and that Kit is the happiest of the happy.

There is one friend he has not seen yet, and as he cannot be conveniently introduced into the family circle, by reason of his being an iron-shod quadruped, Kit takes the first opportunity of slipping away and hurrying to the stable. The moment he lays his hand upon the latch, the pony neighs the loudest pony's greeting; before he has crossed the threshold, the pony is capering about his loose box (for he brooks not the indignity of a halter), mad to give him welcome; and when Kit goes up to caress and pat him, the pony rubs his nose against his coat, and fondles him more lovingly than ever pony fondled man. It is the crowning circumstance of his earnest, heartfelt reception; and Kit fairly puts his arm round Whisker's neck and hugs him.

But how comes Barbara to trip in there? and how smart she is again! she has been at her glass since she recovered. How comes Barbara in the stable, of all places in the world? Why, since Kit has been away, the pony would take his food from nobody but her, and Barbara, you see, not dreaming that Christopher was there, and just looking in, to see that everything was right, has come upon him unawares. Blushing little Barbara!

It may be that Kit has caressed the pony enough; it may be that there are even better things to caress than ponies. He leaves him for Barbara at any rate, and hopes she is better. Yes. Barbara is a great deal better. She is afraid —and here Barbara looks down and blushes more—that he must have thought her very foolish. 'Not at all,' says Kit. Barbara is glad of that, and coughs—Hem!—just the slightest cough possible—not more than that.

What a discreet pony when he chooses! He is as quiet now as if he were of marble. He has a very knowing look, but that he always has. 'We have hardly had time to shake hands, Barbara,' says Kit. Barbara gives him hers. Why, she is trembling now! Foolish, fluttering Barbara!

Arm's length? The length of an arm is not much. Barbara's was not a long arm, by any means, and besides, she didn't hold it out straight, but bent a little. Kit was so near her when they shook hands, that he could see a small tiny tear, yet trembling on an eyelash. It was natural that he should look at it, unknown to Barbara. It was natural that Barbara should raise her eyes unconsciously, and find him out. Was it natural that at that instant, without any previous impulse or design, Kit should kiss Barbara? He did it, whether or no. Barbara said 'for shame,' but let him do it too—twice. He might have done it thrice, but the pony kicked up his heels and shook his head, as if he were suddenly taken with convulsions of delight, and Barbara being frightened, ran away—not straight to where her mother and Kit's mother were, though, lest they should see how red her cheeks were, and should ask her why. Sly little Barbara!

When the first transports of the whole party had subsided, and Kit and his mother, and Barbara and her mother, with little Jacob and the baby to boot, had had their suppers together—which there was no hurrying over, for they were going to stop there all night—Mr Garland called Kit to him, and taking him into a room where they could be alone, told him that he had something yet to say, which would surprise him greatly. Kit looked so anxious and turned so pale on hearing this, that the old gentleman hastened to add, he would be agreeably surprised; and asked him if he would be ready next morning for a journey.

'For a journey, sir!' cried Kit.

'In company with me and my friend in the next room. Can you guess its purpose?'

Kit turned paler yet, and shook his head.

'Oh yes. I think you do already,' said his master. 'Try.'

Kit murmured something rather rambling and unintelligible, but he plainly pronounced the words 'Miss Nell,' three or four times—shaking his head while he did so, as if he would add that there was no hope of that.

But Mr Garland, instead of saying 'Try again,' as Kit had made sure he would, told him very seriously, that he had guessed right.

'The place of their retreat is indeed discovered,' he said, 'at last. And that is our journey's end.'

Kit faltered out such questions as, where was it, and how had it been found, and how long since, and was she well and happy?

'Happy she is, beyond all doubt,' said Mr Garland. 'And well, I—I trust she will be soon. She has been weak and ailing, as I learn, but she was better when I heard this morning, and they were full of hope. Sit you down, and you shall hear the rest.'

Scarcely venturing to draw his breath, Kit did as he was told. Mr Garland then related to him, how he had a brother (of whom he would remember to have heard him speak, and whose picture, taken when he was a young man, hung in the best room), and how this brother lived a long way off, in a country-place, with an old clergyman who had been his early friend. How, although they loved each other as brothers should, they had not met for many years, but had communicated by letter from time to time, always looking forward to some period when they would take each other by the hand once more, and still letting the Present time steal on, as it was the habit for men to do, and suffering the Future to melt into the Past. How this brother, whose temper was very mild and quiet and retiring—such as Mr Abel's—was greatly beloved by the simple people among whom he dwelt, who quite revered the Bachelor (for so they called him), and had every one experienced his charity and benevolence. How even those slight circumstances had come to his knowledge, very slowly and in course of years, for the Bachelor was one of those whose goodness shuns the light, and who have more pleasure in discovering and extolling the good deeds of others, than in trumpeting their own, be they never so commendable. How, for that reason, he seldom told them of his village friends; but how, for all that, his mind had become so full of two among them—a child and an old man, to whom he had been very kind—that, in a letter received a few days before, he had dwelt upon them from first to last, and had told such a tale of their wandering, and mutual love, that few could read it without being moved to tears. How he, the recipient of that letter, was directly led to the belief that these must be the very wanderers for whom so much search had been made, and whom Heaven had directed to his brother's care. How he had written for such further information as would put the fact beyond all doubt; how it had that morning arrived; had confirmed his first impression into a certainty; and was the immediate cause of that journey being planned, which they were to take to-morrow.

'In the meantime,' said the old gentleman rising, and laying his hand on Kit's shoulder, 'you have a great need of rest; for such a day as this would wear out the strongest man. Good night, and Heaven send our journey may have a prosperous ending!'

CHAPTER 69

Kit was no sluggard next morning, but, springing from his bed some time before day, began to prepare for his welcome expedition. The hurry of spirits consequent upon the events of yesterday, and the unexpected intelligence he had heard at night, had troubled his sleep through the long dark hours, and summoned such uneasy dreams about his pillow that it was rest to rise.

But, had it been the beginning of some great labour with the same end in view—had it been the commencement of a long journey, to be performed on foot in that inclement season of the year, to be pursued under very privation and difficulty, and to be achieved only with great distress, fatigue, and suffering—had it been the dawn of some painful enterprise, certain to task his utmost powers of resolution and endurance, and to need his utmost fortitude, but only likely to end, if happily achieved, in good fortune and delight to Nell—Kit's cheerful zeal would have been as highly roused: Kit's ardour and impatience would have been, at least, the same.

Nor was he alone excited and eager. Before he had been up a quarter of an hour the whole house were astir and busy. Everybody hurried to do something towards facilitating the preparations. The single gentleman, it is true, could do nothing himself, but he overlooked everybody else and was more locomotive than anybody. The work of packing and making ready went briskly on, and by daybreak every preparation for the journey was completed. Then Kit began to wish they had not been quite so nimble; for the travelling-carriage which had been hired for the occasion was not to arrive until nine o'clock, and there was nothing but breakfast to fill up the intervening blank of one hour and a half. Yes there was, though. There was Barbara. Barbara was busy, to be sure, but so much the better—Kit could help her, and that would pass away the time better than any means that could be devised. Barbara had no objection to this arrangement, and Kit, tracking out the idea which had come upon him so suddenly overnight, began to think that surely Barbara was fond of him, and surely he was fond of Barbara.

Now, Barbara, if the truth must be told—as it must and ought to be—Barbara seemed, of all the little household, to take least pleasure in the bustle of the occasion; and when Kit, in the openness of his heart, told her how glad and overjoyed it made him, Barbara became more downcast still, and seemed to have even less pleasure in it than before!

'You have not been home so long, Christopher,' said Barbara—and it is impossible to tell how carelessly she said it—'You have not been home so long, that you need to be glad to go away again, I should think.'

'But for such a purpose,' returned Kit. 'To bring back Miss Nell! To see her again! Only think of that! I am so pleased too, to think that you will see her, Barbara, at last.'

Barbara did not absolutely say that she felt no gratification on this point, but she expressed the sentiment so plainly by one little toss of her head, that Kit was quite disconcerted, and wondered, in his simplicity, why she was so cool about it.

'You'll say she has the sweetest and beautifullest face you ever saw, I know,' said Kit, rubbing his hands. 'I'm sure you'll say that.'

Barbara tossed her head again.

'What's the matter, Barbara?' said Kit.

'Nothing,' cried Barbara. And Barbara pouted—not sulkily, or in an ugly manner, but just enough to make her look more cherry-lipped than ever.

There is no school in which a pupil gets on so fast, as that in which Kit became a scholar when he gave Barbara the kiss. He saw what Barbara meant now—he had his lesson by heart all at once—she was the book—there it was before him, as plain as print.

'Barbara,' said Kit, 'you're not cross with me?'

Oh dear no! Why should Barbara be cross? And what right had she to be cross? And what did it matter whether she was cross or not? Who minded her!

'Why, I do,' said Kit. 'Of course I do.'

Barbara didn't see why it was of course, at all.

Kit was sure she must. Would she think again?

Certainly, Barbara would think again. No, she didn't see why it was of course. She didn't understand what Christopher meant. And besides she was sure they wanted her up stairs by this time, and she must go, indeed—

'No, but Barbara,' said Kit, detaining her gently, 'let us part friends. I was always thinking of you, in my troubles. I should have been a great deal more miserable than I was, if it hadn't been for you.'

Goodness gracious, how pretty Barbara was when she coloured—and when she trembled, like a little shrinking bird!

'I am telling you the truth, Barbara, upon my word, but not half so strong as I could wish,' said Kit. 'When I want you to be pleased to see Miss Nell, it's only because I like you to be pleased with what pleases me—that's all. As to her, Barbara, I think I could almost die to do her service, but you would think so too, if you knew her as I do. I am sure you would.'

Barbara was touched, and sorry to have appeared indifferent.

'I have been used, you see,' said Kit, 'to talk and think of her, almost as if she was an angel. When I look forward to meeting her again, I think of her smiling as she used to do, and being glad to see me, and putting out her hand and saying, "It's my own old Kit," or some such words as those—like what she used to say. I think of seeing her happy, and with friends about her, and brought up as she deserves, and as she ought to be. When I think of myself, it's as her old servant, and one that loved her dearly, as his kind, good, gentle mistress; and who would have gone—yes, and still would go—through any harm to serve her. Once, I couldn't help being afraid that if she came back with friends about her she might forget, or be ashamed of having known, a humble lad like me, and so might speak coldly, which would have cut me, Barbara, deeper than I can tell. But when I came to think again, I felt sure that I was doing her wrong in this; and so I went on, as I did at first, hoping to see her once more, just as she used to be. Hoping this, and remembering what she was, has made me feel as if I would always try to please her, and always be what I should like to seem to her if I was still her servant. If I'm the better for that—and I don't think I'm the worse—I am grateful to her for it, and love and honour her the more. That's the plain honest truth, dear Barbara, upon my word it is!'

Little Barbara was not of a wayward or capricious nature, and, being full of remorse, melted into tears. To what more conversation this might have led, we need not stop to inquire; for the wheels of the carriage were heard at that moment, and, being followed by a smart ring at the garden gate, caused the bustle in the house, which had laid dormant for a short time, to burst again into tenfold life and vigour.

Simultaneously with the travelling equipage, arrived Mr Chuckster in a hackney cab, with certain papers and supplies of money for the single gentleman, into whose hands he delivered them. This duty discharged, he subsided into the bosom of the family; and, entertaining himself with a strolling or peripatetic breakfast, watched, with genteel indifference, the process of loading the carriage.

'Snobby's in this, I see, Sir?' he said to Mr Abel Garland. 'I thought he wasn't in the last trip because it was expected that his presence wouldn't be acceptable to the ancient buffalo.'

'To whom, Sir?' demanded Mr Abel.

'To the old gentleman,' returned Mr Chuckster, slightly abashed.

'Our client prefers to take him now,' said Mr Abel, drily. 'There is no longer any need for that precaution, as my father's relationship to a gentleman in whom the objects of his search have full confidence, will be a sufficient guarantee for the friendly nature of their errand.'

'Ah!' thought Mr Chuckster, looking out of window, 'anybody but me! Snobby before me, of course. He didn't happen to take that particular five-pound note, but I have not the smallest doubt that he's always up to something of that sort. I always said it, long before this came out. Devilish pretty girl that! 'Pon my soul, an amazing little creature!'

Barbara was the subject of Mr Chuckster's commendations; and as she was lingering near the carriage (all being now ready for its departure), that gentleman was suddenly seized with a strong interest in the proceedings, which impelled him to swagger down the garden, and take up his position at a convenient ogling distance. Having had great experience of the sex, and being perfectly acquainted with all those little artifices which find the readiest road to their hearts, Mr Chuckster, on taking his ground, planted one hand on his hip, and with the other adjusted his flowing hair. This is a favourite attitude in the polite circles, and, accompanied with a graceful whistling, has been known to do immense execution.

Such, however, is the difference between town and country, that nobody took the smallest notice of this insinuating figure; the wretches being wholly engaged in bidding the travellers farewell, in kissing hands to each other, waving handkerchiefs, and the like tame and vulgar practices. For now the single gentleman and Mr Garland were in the carriage, and the post-boy was in the saddle, and Kit, well wrapped and muffled up, was in the rumble behind; and Mrs Garland was there, and Mr Abel was there, and Kit's mother was there, and little Jacob was there, and Barbara's mother was visible in remote perspective, nursing the ever-wakeful baby; and all were nodding, beckoning, curtseying, or crying out, 'Good bye!' with all the energy they could express. In another minute, the carriage was out of sight; and Mr Chuckster remained alone on the spot where it had lately been, with a vision of Kit standing up in the rumble waving his hand to Barbara, and of

Barbara in the full light and lustre of his eyes—his eyes—Chuckster's—Chuckster the successful—on whom ladies of quality had looked with favour from phaetons in the parks on Sundays—waving hers to Kit!

How Mr Chuckster, entranced by this monstrous fact, stood for some time rooted to the earth, protesting within himself that Kit was the Prince of felonious characters, and very Emperor or Great Mogul of Snobs, and how he clearly traced this revolting circumstance back to that old villany of the shilling, are matters foreign to our purpose; which is to track the rolling wheels, and bear the travellers company on their cold, bleak journey.

It was a bitter day. A keen wind was blowing, and rushed against them fiercely: bleaching the hard ground, shaking the white frost from the trees and hedges, and whirling it away like dust. But little cared Kit for weather. There was a freedom and freshness in the wind, as it came howling by, which, let it cut never so sharp, was welcome. As it swept on with its cloud of frost, bearing down the dry twigs and boughs and withered leaves, and carrying them away pell-mell, it seemed as though some general sympathy had got abroad, and everything was in a hurry, like themselves. The harder the gusts, the better progress they appeared to make. It was a good thing to go struggling and fighting forward, vanquishing them one by one; to watch them driving up, gathering strength and fury as they came along; to bend for a moment, as they whistled past; and then to look back and see them speed away, their hoarse noise dying in the distance, and the stout trees cowering down before them.

All day long, it blew without cessation. The night was clear and starlight, but the wind had not fallen, and the cold was piercing. Sometimes—towards the end of a long stage—Kit could not help wishing it were a little warmer: but when they stopped to change horses, and he had had a good run, and what with that, and the bustle of paying the old postilion, and rousing the new one, and running to and fro again until the horses were put to, he was so warm that the blood tingled and smarted in his fingers' ends—then, he felt as if to have it one degree less cold would be to lose half the delight and glory of the journey: and up he jumped again, right cheerily, singing to the merry music of the wheels as they rolled away, and, leaving the townspeople in their warm beds, pursued their course along the lonely road.

Meantime the two gentlemen inside, who were little disposed to sleep, beguiled the time with conversation. As both were anxious and expectant, it naturally turned upon the subject of their expedition, on the manner in which it had been brought about, and on the hopes and fears they entertained respecting it. Of the former they had many, of the latter few—none perhaps beyond that indefinable uneasiness which is inseparable from suddenly awakened hope, and protracted expectation.

In one of the pauses of their discourse, and when half the night had worn away, the single gentleman, who had gradually become more and more silent and thoughtful, turned to his companion and said abruptly:

'Are you a good listener?'

'Like most other men, I suppose,' returned Mr Garland, smiling. 'I can be, if I am interested; and if not interested, I should still try to appear so. Why do you ask?'

'I have a short narrative on my lips,' rejoined his friend, 'and will try you with it. It is very brief.'

Pausing for no reply, he laid his hand on the old gentleman's sleeve, and proceeded thus:

'There were once two brothers, who loved each other dearly. There was a disparity in their ages—some twelve years. I am not sure but they may insensibly have loved each other the better for that reason. Wide as the interval between them was, however, they became rivals too soon. The deepest and strongest affection of both their hearts settled upon one object.

'The youngest—there were reasons for his being sensitive and watchful—was the first to find this out. I will not tell you what misery he underwent, what agony of soul he knew, how great his mental struggle was. He had been a sickly child. His brother, patient and considerate in the midst of his own high health and strength, had many and many a day denied himself the sports he loved, to sit beside his couch, telling him old stories till his pale face lighted up with an unwonted glow; to carry him in his arms to some green spot, where he could tend the poor pensive boy as he looked upon the bright summer day, and saw all nature healthy but himself; to be, in any way, his fond and faithful nurse. I may not dwell on all he did, to make the poor, weak creature love him, or my tale would have no end. But when the time of trial came, the younger brother's heart was full of those old days. Heaven strengthened it to repay the sacrifices of inconsiderate youth by one of thoughtful manhood. He left his brother to be happy. The truth never passed his lips, and he quitted the country, hoping to die abroad.

'The elder brother married her. She was in Heaven before long, and left him with an infant daughter.

'If you have seen the picture-gallery of any one old family, you will remember how the same face and figure—often the fairest and slightest of them all—come upon you in different generations; and how you trace the same sweet girl through a long line of portraits—never growing old or changing—the Good Angel of the race—abiding by them in all reverses—redeeming all their sins—

'In this daughter the mother lived again. You may judge with what devotion he who lost that mother almost in the winning, clung to this girl, her breathing image. She grew to womanhood, and gave her heart to one who could not know its worth. Well! Her fond father could not see her pine and droop. He might be more deserving than he thought him. He surely might become so, with a wife like her. He joined their hands, and they were married.

'Through all the misery that followed this union; through all the cold neglect and undeserved reproach; through all the poverty he brought upon her; through all the struggles of their daily life, too mean and pitiful to tell, but dreadful to endure; she toiled on, in the deep devotion of her spirit, and in her better nature, as only women can. Her means and substance wasted; her father nearly beggared by her husband's hand, and the hourly witness (for they lived now under one roof) of her ill-usage and unhappiness,—she never, but for him, bewailed her fate. Patient, and upheld by strong affection to the last, she died a widow of some three weeks' date, leaving to her father's care two orphans; one a son of ten or twelve years old; the other a girl—such another infant child—the same in helplessness, in age, in form, in feature—as she had been herself when her young mother died.

'The elder brother, grandfather to these two children, was now a broken man; crushed and borne down, less by the weight of years than by the heavy hand of sorrow. With the wreck of his possessions, he began to trade—in pictures first, and then in curious ancient things. He had entertained a fondness for such matters from a boy, and the tastes he had cultivated were now to yield him an anxious and precarious subsistence.

'The boy grew like his father in mind and person; the girl so like her mother, that when the old man had her on his knee, and looked into her mild blue eyes, he felt as if awakening from a wretched dream, and his daughter were a little child again. The wayward boy soon spurned the shelter of his roof, and sought associates more congenial to his taste. The old man and the child dwelt alone together.

'It was then, when the love of two dead people who had been nearest and dearest to his heart, was all transferred to this slight creature; when her face, constantly before him, reminded him, from hour to hour, of the too early change he had seen in such another—of all the sufferings he had watched and known, and all his child had undergone; when the young man's profligate and hardened course drained him of money as his father's had, and even sometimes occasioned them temporary privation and distress; it was then that there began to beset him, and to be ever in his mind, a gloomy dread of poverty and want. He had no thought for himself in this. His fear was for the child. It was a spectre in his house, and haunted him night and day.

'The younger brother had been a traveller in many countries, and had made his pilgrimage through life alone. His voluntary banishment had been misconstrued, and he had borne (not without pain) reproach and slight for doing that which had wrung his heart, and cast a mournful shadow on his path. Apart from this, communication between him and the elder was difficult, and uncertain, and often failed; still, it was not so wholly broken off but that he learnt—with long blanks and gaps between each interval of information—all that I have told you now.

'Then, dreams of their young, happy life—happy to him though laden with pain and early care—visited his pillow yet oftener than before; and every night, a boy again, he was at his brother's side. With the utmost speed he could exert, he settled his affairs; converted into money all the goods he had; and, with honourable wealth enough for both, with open heart and hand, with limbs that trembled as they bore him on, with emotion such as men can hardly bear and live, arrived one evening at his brother's door!'

The narrator, whose voice had faltered lately, stopped.

'The rest,' said Mr Garland, pressing his hand after a pause, 'I know.'

'Yes,' rejoined his friend, 'we may spare ourselves the sequel. You know the poor result of all my search. Even when by dint of such inquiries as the utmost vigilance and sagacity could set on foot, we found they had been seen with two poor travelling showmen—and in time discovered the men themselves—and in time, the actual place of their retreat; even then, we were too late. Pray God, we are not too late again!'

'We cannot be,' said Mr Garland. 'This time we must succeed.'

'I have believed and hoped so,' returned the other. 'I try to believe and hope so still. But a heavy weight has fallen on my spirits, my good friend, and the sadness that gathers over me, will yield to neither hope nor reason.'

'That does not surprise me,' said Mr Garland; 'it is a natural consequence of the events you have recalled; of this dreary time and place; and above all, of this wild and dismal night. A dismal night, indeed! Hark! how the wind is howling!'

CHAPTER 70

Day broke, and found them still upon their way. Since leaving home, they had halted here and there for necessary refreshment, and had frequently been delayed, especially in the night time, by waiting for fresh horses. They had made no other stoppages, but the weather continued rough, and the roads were often steep and heavy. It would be night again before they reached their place of destination.

Kit, all bluff and hardened with the cold, went on manfully; and, having enough to do to keep his blood circulating, to picture to himself the happy end of this adventurous journey, and to look about him and be amazed at everything, had little spare time for thinking of discomforts. Though his impatience, and that of his fellow-travellers, rapidly increased as the day waned, the hours did not stand still. The short daylight of winter soon faded away, and it was dark again when they had yet many miles to travel.

As it grew dusk, the wind fell; its distant moanings were more low and mournful; and, as it came creeping up the road, and rattling covertly among the dry brambles on either hand, it seemed like some great phantom for whom the way was narrow, whose garments rustled as it stalked along. By degrees it lulled and died away, and then it came on to snow.

The flakes fell fast and thick, soon covering the ground some inches deep, and spreading abroad a solemn stillness. The rolling wheels were noiseless, and the sharp ring and clatter of the horses' hoofs, became a dull, muffled tramp. The life of their progress seemed to be slowly hushed, and something death-like to usurp its place.

Shading his eyes from the falling snow, which froze upon their lashes and obscured his sight, Kit often tried to catch the earliest glimpse of twinkling lights, denoting their approach to some not distant town. He could descry objects enough at such times, but none correctly. Now, a tall church spire appeared in view, which presently became a tree, a barn, a shadow on the ground, thrown on it by their own bright lamps. Now, there were horsemen, foot-passengers, carriages, going on before, or meeting them in narrow ways; which, when they were close upon them, turned to shadows too. A wall, a ruin, a sturdy gable end, would rise up in the road; and, when they were plunging headlong at it, would be the road itself. Strange turnings too, bridges, and sheets of water, appeared to start up here and there, making the way doubtful and uncertain; and yet they were on the same bare road, and these things, like the others, as they were passed, turned into dim illusions.

He descended slowly from his seat—for his limbs were numbed—when they arrived at a lone posting-house, and inquired how far they had to go to reach their journey's end. It was a late hour in such by-places, and the people were abed; but a voice answered from an upper window, Ten miles. The ten minutes that ensued appeared an hour; but at the end of that time, a shivering figure led out the horses they required, and after another brief delay they were again in motion. It was a cross-country road, full, after the first three or four miles, of holes and cart-ruts, which, being covered by the snow, were so many pitfalls to the trembling horses, and obliged them to keep a footpace. As it was next to impossible for men so much agitated as they were by this time, to sit still and move so slowly, all three got out and plodded on behind the carriage. The distance seemed interminable, and the walk was most laborious. As each was thinking within himself that the driver must have lost his way, a church bell, close at hand, struck the hour of midnight, and the carriage stopped. It had moved softly enough, but when it ceased to crunch the snow, the silence was as startling as if some great noise had been replaced by perfect stillness.

'This is the place, gentlemen,' said the driver, dismounting from his horse, and knocking at the door of a little inn. 'Halloa! Past twelve o'clock is the dead of night here.'

The knocking was loud and long, but it failed to rouse the drowsy inmates. All continued dark and silent as before. They fell back a little, and looked up at the windows, which were mere black patches in the whitened house front. No light appeared. The house might have been deserted, or the sleepers dead, for any air of life it had about it.

They spoke together with a strange inconsistency, in whispers; unwilling to disturb again the dreary echoes they had just now raised.

'Let us go on,' said the younger brother, 'and leave this good fellow to wake them, if he can. I cannot rest until I know that we are not too late. Let us go on, in the name of Heaven!'

They did so, leaving the postilion to order such accommodation as the house afforded, and to renew his knocking. Kit accompanied them with a little bundle, which he had hung in the carriage when they left home, and had not forgotten since—the bird in his old cage—just as she had left him. She would be glad to see her bird, he knew.

The road wound gently downward. As they proceeded, they lost sight of the church whose clock they had heard, and of the small village clustering round it. The knocking, which was now renewed, and which in that stillness they could plainly hear, troubled them. They wished the man would forbear, or that they had told him not to break the silence until they returned.

The old church tower, clad in a ghostly garb of pure cold white, again rose up before them, and a few moments brought them close beside it. A venerable building—grey, even in the midst of the hoary landscape. An ancient sun-dial on the belfry wall was nearly hidden by the snow-drift, and scarcely to be known for what it was. Time itself seemed to have grown dull and old, as if no day were ever to displace the melancholy night.

A wicket gate was close at hand, but there was more than one path across the churchyard to which it led, and, uncertain which to take, they came to a stand again.

The village street—if street that could be called which was an irregular cluster of poor cottages of many heights and ages, some with their fronts, some with their backs, and some with gable ends towards the road, with here and there a signpost, or a shed encroaching on the path—was close at hand. There was a faint light in a chamber window not far off, and Kit ran towards that house to ask their way.

His first shout was answered by an old man within, who presently appeared at the casement, wrapping some garment round his throat as a protection from the cold, and demanded who was abroad at that unseasonable hour, wanting him.

''Tis hard weather this,' he grumbled, 'and not a night to call me up in. My trade is not of that kind that I need be roused from bed. The business on which folks want me, will keep cold, especially at this season. What do you want?'

'I would not have roused you, if I had known you were old and ill,' said Kit.

'Old!' repeated the other peevishly. 'How do you know I am old? Not so old as you think, friend, perhaps. As to being ill, you will find many young people in worse case than I am. More's the pity that it should be so—not that I should be strong and hearty for my years, I mean, but that they should be weak and tender. I ask your pardon though,' said the old man, 'if I spoke rather rough at first. My eyes are not good at night—that's neither age nor illness; they never were—and I didn't see you were a stranger.'

'I am sorry to call you from your bed,' said Kit, 'but those gentlemen you may see by the churchyard gate, are strangers too, who have just arrived from a long journey, and seek the parsonage-house. You can direct us?'

'I should be able to,' answered the old man, in a trembling voice, 'for, come next summer, I have been sexton here, good fifty years. The right hand path, friend, is the road.—There is no ill news for our good gentleman, I hope?'

Kit thanked him, and made him a hasty answer in the negative; he was turning back, when his attention was caught by the voice of a child. Looking up, he saw a very little creature at a neighbouring window.

'What is that?' cried the child, earnestly. 'Has my dream come true? Pray speak to me, whoever that is, awake and up.'

'Poor boy!' said the sexton, before Kit could answer, 'how goes it, darling?' 'Has my dream come true?' exclaimed the child again, in a voice so fervent that it might have thrilled to the heart of any listener. 'But no, that can never be! How could it be—Oh! how could it!'

'I guess his meaning,' said the sexton. 'To bed again, poor boy!'

'Ay!' cried the child, in a burst of despair. 'I knew it could never be, I felt too sure of that, before I asked! But, all to-night, and last night too, it was the same. I never fall asleep, but that cruel dream comes back.'

'Try to sleep again,' said the old man, soothingly. 'It will go in time.'

'No no, I would rather that it staid—cruel as it is, I would rather that it staid,' rejoined the child. 'I am not afraid to have it in my sleep, but I am so sad—so very, very sad.'

The old man blessed him, the child in tears replied Good night, and Kit was again alone.

He hurried back, moved by what he had heard, though more by the child's manner than by anything he had said, as his meaning was hidden from him. They took the path indicated by the sexton, and soon arrived before the parsonage wall. Turning round to look about them when they had got thus far, they saw, among some ruined buildings at a distance, one single solitary light.

It shone from what appeared to be an old oriel window, and being surrounded by the deep shadows of overhanging walls, sparkled like a star. Bright and glimmering as the stars above their heads, lonely and motionless as they, it seemed to claim some kindred with the eternal lamps of Heaven, and to burn in fellowship with them.

'What light is that!' said the younger brother.

'It is surely,' said Mr Garland, 'in the ruin where they live. I see no other ruin hereabouts.'

'They cannot,' returned the brother hastily, 'be waking at this late hour —'

Kit interposed directly, and begged that, while they rang and waited at the gate, they would let him make his way to where this light was shining, and try to ascertain if any people were about. Obtaining the permission he desired, he darted off with breathless eagerness, and, still carrying the birdcage in his hand, made straight towards the spot.

It was not easy to hold that pace among the graves, and at another time he might have gone more slowly, or round by the path. Unmindful of all obstacles, however, he pressed forward without slackening his speed, and soon arrived within a few yards of the window. He approached as softly as he could, and advancing so near the wall as to brush the whitened ivy with his dress, listened. There was no sound inside. The church itself was not more quiet. Touching the glass with his cheek, he listened again. No. And yet there was such a silence all around, that he felt sure he could have heard even the breathing of a sleeper, if there had been one there.

A strange circumstance, a light in such a place at that time of night, with no one near it.

A curtain was drawn across the lower portion of the window, and he could not see into the room. But there was no shadow thrown upon it from within. To have gained a footing on the wall and tried to look in from above, would have been attended with some danger—certainly with some noise, and the chance of terrifying the child, if that really were her habitation. Again and again he listened; again and again the same wearisome blank.

Leaving the spot with slow and cautious steps, and skirting the ruin for a few paces, he came at length to a door. He knocked. No answer. But there was a curious noise inside. It was difficult to determine what it was. It bore a resemblance to the low moaning of one in pain, but it was not that, being far too regular and constant. Now it seemed a kind of song, now a wail—seemed, that is, to his changing fancy, for the sound itself was never changed or checked. It was unlike anything he had ever heard; and in its tone there was something fearful, chilling, and unearthly.

The listener's blood ran colder now than ever it had done in frost and snow, but he knocked again. There was no answer, and the sound went on without any interruption. He laid his hand softly upon the latch, and put his knee against the door. It was secured on the inside, but yielded to the pressure, and turned upon its hinges. He saw the glimmering of a fire upon the old walls, and entered.

CHAPTER 71

The dull, red glow of a wood fire—for no lamp or candle burnt within the room—showed him a figure, seated on the hearth with its back towards him, bending over the fitful light. The attitude was that of one who sought the heat. It was, and yet was not. The stooping posture and the cowering form were there, but no hands were stretched out to meet the grateful warmth, no shrug or shiver compared its luxury with the piercing cold outside. With limbs huddled together, head bowed down, arms crossed upon the breast, and fingers tightly clenched, it rocked to and fro upon its seat without a moment's pause, accompanying the action with the mournful sound he had heard.

The heavy door had closed behind him on his entrance, with a crash that made him start. The figure neither spoke, nor turned to look, nor gave in any other way the faintest sign of having heard the noise. The form was that of an old man, his white head akin in colour to the mouldering embers upon which he gazed. He, and the failing light and dying fire, the time-worn room, the solitude, the wasted life, and gloom, were all in fellowship. Ashes, and dust, and ruin!

Kit tried to speak, and did pronounce some words, though what they were he scarcely knew. Still the same terrible low cry went on—still the same rocking in the chair—the same stricken figure was there, unchanged and heedless of his presence.

He had his hand upon the latch, when something in the form—distinctly seen as one log broke and fell, and, as it fell, blazed up—arrested it. He returned to where he had stood before—advanced a pace—another—another still. Another, and he saw the face. Yes! Changed as it was, he knew it well.

'Master!' he cried, stooping on one knee and catching at his hand. 'Dear master. Speak to me!'

The old man turned slowly towards him; and muttered in a hollow voice,

'This is another!—How many of these spirits there have been to-night!'

'No spirit, master. No one but your old servant. You know me now, I am sure? Miss Nell—where is she—where is she?'

'They all say that!' cried the old man. 'They all ask the same question. A spirit!'

'Where is she?' demanded Kit. 'Oh tell me but that,—but that, dear master!'

'She is asleep—yonder—in there.'

'Thank God!'

'Aye! Thank God!' returned the old man. 'I have prayed to Him, many, and many, and many a livelong night, when she has been asleep, He knows. Hark! Did she call?'

'I heard no voice.'

'You did. You hear her now. Do you tell me that you don't hear THAT?'

He started up, and listened again.

'Nor that?' he cried, with a triumphant smile, 'Can any body know that voice so well as I? Hush! Hush!' Motioning to him to be silent, he stole away into another chamber. After a short absence (during which he could be heard to speak in a softened soothing tone) he returned, bearing in his hand a lamp.

'She is still asleep,' he whispered. 'You were right. She did not call—unless she did so in her slumber. She has called to me in her sleep before now, sir; as I have sat by, watching, I have seen her lips move, and have known, though no sound came from them, that she spoke of me. I feared the light might dazzle her eyes and wake her, so I brought it here.'

He spoke rather to himself than to the visitor, but when he had put the lamp upon the table, he took it up, as if impelled by some momentary recollection or curiosity, and held it near his face. Then, as if forgetting his motive in the very action, he turned away and put it down again.

'She is sleeping soundly,' he said; 'but no wonder. Angel hands have strewn the ground deep with snow, that the lightest footstep may be lighter yet; and the very birds are dead, that they may not wake her. She used to feed them, Sir. Though never so cold and hungry, the timid things would fly from us. They never flew from her!'

Again he stopped to listen, and scarcely drawing breath, listened for a long, long time. That fancy past, he opened an old chest, took out some clothes as fondly as if they had been living things, and began to smooth and brush them with his hand.

'Why dost thou lie so idle there, dear Nell,' he murmured, 'when there are bright red berries out of doors waiting for thee to pluck them! Why dost thou lie so idle there, when thy little friends come creeping to the door, crying "where is Nell—sweet Nell?"—and sob, and weep, because they do not see thee. She was always gentle with children. The wildest would do her bidding—she had a tender way with them, indeed she had!'

Kit had no power to speak. His eyes were filled with tears.

'Her little homely dress,—her favourite!' cried the old man, pressing it to his breast, and patting it with his shrivelled hand. 'She will miss it when she wakes. They have hid it here in sport, but she shall have it—she shall have it. I would not vex my darling, for the wide world's riches. See here—these shoes—how worn they are—she kept them to remind her of our last long journey. You see where the little feet went bare upon the ground. They told me, afterwards, that the stones had cut and bruised them. She never told me that. No, no, God bless her! and, I have remembered since, she walked behind me, sir, that I might not see how lame she was—but yet she had my hand in hers, and seemed to lead me still.'

He pressed them to his lips, and having carefully put them back again, went on communing with himself—looking wistfully from time to time towards the chamber he had lately visited.

'She was not wont to be a lie-abed; but she was well then. We must have patience. When she is well again, she will rise early, as she used to do, and ramble abroad in the healthy morning time. I often tried to track the way she had gone, but her small footstep left no print upon the dewy ground, to guide me. Who is that? Shut the door. Quick!—Have we not enough to do to drive away that marble cold, and keep her warm!'

The door was indeed opened, for the entrance of Mr Garland and his friend, accompanied by two other persons. These were the schoolmaster, and the bachelor. The former held a light in his hand. He had, it seemed, but gone to his own cottage to replenish the exhausted lamp, at the moment when Kit came up and found the old man alone.

He softened again at sight of these two friends, and, laying aside the angry manner—if to anything so feeble and so sad the term can be applied—in which he had spoken when the door opened, resumed his former seat, and subsided, by little and little into the old action, and the old, dull, wandering sound.

Of the strangers, he took no heed whatever. He had seen them, but appeared quite incapable of interest or curiosity. The younger brother stood apart. The bachelor drew a chair towards the old man, and sat down close beside him. After a long silence, he ventured to speak.

'Another night, and not in bed!' he said softly; 'I hoped you would be more mindful of your promise to me. Why do you not take some rest?'

'Sleep has left me,' returned the old man. 'It is all with her!'

'It would pain her very much to know that you were watching thus,' said the bachelor. 'You would not give her pain?'

'I am not so sure of that, if it would only rouse her. She has slept so very long. And yet I am rash to say so. It is a good and happy sleep—eh?'

'Indeed it is,' returned the bachelor. 'Indeed, indeed, it is!'

'That's well!—and the waking—' faltered the old man.

'Happy too. Happier than tongue can tell, or heart of man conceive.'

They watched him as he rose and stole on tiptoe to the other chamber where the lamp had been replaced. They listened as he spoke again within its silent walls. They looked into the faces of each other, and no man's cheek was free from tears. He came back, whispering that she was still asleep, but that he thought she had moved. It was her hand, he said—a little—a very, very little—but he was pretty sure she had moved it—perhaps in seeking his. He had known her do that, before now, though in the deepest sleep the while. And when he had said this, he dropped into his chair again, and clasping his hands above his head, uttered a cry never to be forgotten.

The poor schoolmaster motioned to the bachelor that he would come on the other side, and speak to him. They gently unlocked his fingers, which he had twisted in his grey hair, and pressed them in their own.

'He will hear me,' said the schoolmaster, 'I am sure. He will hear either me or you if we beseech him. She would, at all times.'

'I will hear any voice she liked to hear,' cried the old man. 'I love all she loved!'

'I know you do,' returned the schoolmaster. 'I am certain of it. Think of her; think of all the sorrows and afflictions you have shared together; of all the trials, and all the peaceful pleasures, you have jointly known.'

'I do. I do. I think of nothing else.'

'I would have you think of nothing else to-night—of nothing but those things which will soften your heart, dear friend, and open it to old affections and old times. It is so that she would speak to you herself, and in her name it is that I speak now.'

'You do well to speak softly,' said the old man. 'We will not wake her. I should be glad to see her eyes again, and to see her smile. There is a smile upon her young face now, but it is fixed and changeless. I would have it come and go. That shall be in Heaven's good time. We will not wake her.'

'Let us not talk of her in her sleep, but as she used to be when you were Journeying together, far away—as she was at home, in the old house from which you fled together—as she was, in the old cheerful time,' said the schoolmaster.

'She was always cheerful—very cheerful,' cried the old man, looking steadfastly at him. 'There was ever something mild and quiet about her, I remember, from the first; but she was of a happy nature.'

'We have heard you say,' pursued the schoolmaster, 'that in this and in all goodness, she was like her mother. You can think of, and remember her?'

He maintained his steadfast look, but gave no answer.

'Or even one before her,' said the bachelor. 'It is many years ago, and affliction makes the time longer, but you have not forgotten her whose death contributed to make this child so dear to you, even before you knew her worth or could read her heart? Say, that you could carry back your thoughts to very distant days—to the time of your early life—when, unlike this fair flower, you did not pass your youth alone. Say, that you could remember, long ago, another child who loved you dearly, you being but a child yourself. Say, that you had a brother, long forgotten, long unseen, long separated from you, who now, at last, in your utmost need came back to comfort and console you—'

'To be to you what you were once to him,' cried the younger, falling on his knee before him; 'to repay your old affection, brother dear, by constant care, solicitude, and love; to be, at your right hand, what he has never ceased to be when oceans rolled between us; to call to witness his unchanging truth and mindfulness of bygone days, whole years of desolation. Give me but one word of recognition, brother—and never—no never, in the brightest moment of our youngest days, when, poor silly boys, we thought to pass our lives together—have we been half as dear and precious to each other as we shall be from this time hence!'

The old man looked from face to face, and his lips moved; but no sound came from them in reply.

'If we were knit together then,' pursued the younger brother, 'what will be the bond between us now! Our love and fellowship began in childhood, when life was all before us, and will be resumed when we have proved it, and are but children at the last. As many restless spirits, who have hunted fortune, fame, or pleasure through the world, retire in their decline to where they first drew breath, vainly seeking to be children once again before they die, so we, less fortunate than they in early life, but happier in its closing scenes, will set up our rest again among our boyish haunts, and going home with no hope realised, that had its growth in manhood—carrying back nothing that we brought away, but our old yearnings to each other—saving no fragment from the wreck of life, but that which first endeared it—may be, indeed, but children as at first. And even,' he added in an altered voice, 'even if what I dread to name has come to pass—even if that be so, or is to be (which Heaven forbid and spare us!)—still, dear brother, we are not apart, and have that comfort in our great affliction.'

By little and little, the old man had drawn back towards the inner chamber, while these words were spoken. He pointed there, as he replied, with trembling lips.

'You plot among you to wean my heart from her. You never will do that—never while I have life. I have no relative or friend but her—I never had—I never will have. She is all in all to me. It is too late to part us now.'

Waving them off with his hand, and calling softly to her as he went, he stole into the room. They who were left behind, drew close together, and after a few whispered words—not unbroken by emotion, or easily uttered—followed him. They moved so gently, that their footsteps made no noise; but there were sobs from among the group, and sounds of grief and mourning.

For she was dead. There, upon her little bed, she lay at rest. The solemn stillness was no marvel now.

She was dead. No sleep so beautiful and calm, so free from trace of pain, so fair to look upon. She seemed a creature fresh from the hand of God, and waiting for the breath of life; not one who had lived and suffered death.

Her couch was dressed with here and there some winter berries and green leaves, gathered in a spot she had been used to favour. 'When I die, put near me something that has loved the light, and had the sky above it always.' Those were her words.

She was dead. Dear, gentle, patient, noble Nell was dead. Her little bird—a poor slight thing the pressure of a finger would have crushed—was stirring nimbly in its cage; and the strong heart of its child mistress was mute and motionless for ever.

Where were the traces of her early cares, her sufferings, and fatigues? All gone. Sorrow was dead indeed in her, but peace and perfect happiness were born; imaged in her tranquil beauty and profound repose.

And still her former self lay there, unaltered in this change. Yes. The old fireside had smiled upon that same sweet face; it had passed, like a dream, through haunts of misery and care; at the door of the poor schoolmaster on the summer evening, before the furnace fire upon the cold wet night, at the still bedside of the dying boy, there had been the same mild lovely look. So shall we know the angels in their majesty, after death.

The old man held one languid arm in his, and had the small hand tight folded to his breast, for warmth. It was the hand she had stretched out to him with her last smile—the hand that had led him on, through all their wanderings. Ever and anon he pressed it to his lips; then hugged it to his breast again, murmuring that it was warmer now; and, as he said it, he looked, in agony, to those who stood around, as if imploring them to help her.

She was dead, and past all help, or need of it. The ancient rooms she had seemed to fill with life, even while her own was waning fast—the garden she had tended—the eyes she had gladdened—the noiseless haunts of many a thoughtful hour—the paths she had trodden as it were but yesterday—could know her never more.

'It is not,' said the schoolmaster, as he bent down to kiss her on the cheek, and gave his tears free vent, 'it is not on earth that Heaven's justice ends. Think what earth is, compared with the World to which her young spirit has winged its early flight; and say, if one deliberate wish expressed in solemn terms above this bed could call her back to life, which of us would utter it!'

CHAPTER 72

When morning came, and they could speak more calmly on the subject of their grief, they heard how her life had closed.

She had been dead two days. They were all about her at the time, knowing that the end was drawing on. She died soon after daybreak. They had read and talked to her in the earlier portion of the night, but as the hours crept on, she sunk to sleep. They could tell, by what she faintly uttered in her dreams, that they were of her journeyings with the old man; they were of no painful scenes, but of people who had helped and used them kindly, for she often said 'God bless you!' with great fervour. Waking, she never wandered in her mind but once, and that was of beautiful music which she said was in the air. God knows. It may have been.

Opening her eyes at last, from a very quiet sleep, she begged that they would kiss her once again. That done, she turned to the old man with a lovely smile upon her face—such, they said, as they had never seen, and never could forget—and clung with both her arms about his neck. They did not know that she was dead, at first.

She had spoken very often of the two sisters, who, she said, were like dear friends to her. She wished they could be told how much she thought about them, and how she had watched them as they walked together, by the river side at night. She would like to see poor Kit, she had often said of late. She wished there was somebody to take her love to Kit. And, even then, she never thought or spoke about him, but with something of her old, clear, merry laugh.

For the rest, she had never murmured or complained; but with a quiet mind, and manner quite unaltered—save that she every day became more earnest and more grateful to them—faded like the light upon a summer's evening.

The child who had been her little friend came there, almost as soon as it was day, with an offering of dried flowers which he begged them to lay upon her breast. It was he who had come to the window overnight and spoken to the sexton, and they saw in the snow traces of small feet, where he had been lingering near the room in which she lay, before he went to bed. He had a fancy, it seemed, that they had left her there alone; and could not bear the thought.

He told them of his dream again, and that it was of her being restored to them, just as she used to be. He begged hard to see her, saying that he would be very quiet, and that they need not fear his being alarmed, for he had sat alone by his young brother all day long when he was dead, and had felt glad to be so near him. They let him have his wish; and indeed he kept his word, and was, in his childish way, a lesson to them all.

Up to that time, the old man had not spoken once—except to her—or stirred from the bedside. But, when he saw her little favourite, he was moved as they had not seen him yet, and made as though he would have him come nearer. Then, pointing to the bed, he burst into tears for the first time, and they who stood by, knowing that the sight of this child had done him good, left them alone together.

Soothing him with his artless talk of her, the child persuaded him to take some rest, to walk abroad, to do almost as he desired him. And when the day came on, which must remove her in her earthly shape from earthly eyes for ever, he led him away, that he might not know when she was taken from him.

They were to gather fresh leaves and berries for her bed. It was Sunday—a bright, clear, wintry afternoon—and as they traversed the village street, those who were walking in their path drew back to make way for them, and gave them a softened greeting. Some shook the old man kindly by the hand, some stood uncovered while he tottered by, and many cried 'God help him!' as he passed along.

'Neighbour!' said the old man, stopping at the cottage where his young guide's mother dwelt, 'how is it that the folks are nearly all in black to-day? I have seen a mourning ribbon or a piece of crape on almost every one.'

She could not tell, the woman said. 'Why, you yourself—you wear the colour too?' he said. 'Windows are closed that never used to be by day. What does this mean?'

Again the woman said she could not tell.

'We must go back,' said the old man, hurriedly. 'We must see what this is.'

'No, no,' cried the child, detaining him. 'Remember what you promised. Our way is to the old green lane, where she and I so often were, and where you found us, more than once, making those garlands for her garden. Do not turn back!'

'Where is she now?' said the old man. 'Tell me that.'

'Do you not know?' returned the child. 'Did we not leave her, but just now?'

'True. True. It was her we left—was it?'

He pressed his hand upon his brow, looked vacantly round, and as if impelled by a sudden thought, crossed the road, and entered the sexton's house. He and his deaf assistant were sitting before the fire. Both rose up, on seeing who it was.

The child made a hasty sign to them with his hand. It was the action of an instant, but that, and the old man's look, were quite enough.

'Do you—do you bury any one to-day?' he said, eagerly.

'No, no! Who should we bury, Sir?' returned the sexton.

'Aye, who indeed! I say with you, who indeed!'

'It is a holiday with us, good Sir,' returned the sexton mildly. 'We have no work to do to-day.'

'Why then, I'll go where you will,' said the old man, turning to the child. 'You're sure of what you tell me? You would not deceive me? I am changed, even in the little time since you last saw me.'

'Go thy ways with him, Sir,' cried the sexton, 'and Heaven be with ye both!'

'I am quite ready,' said the old man, meekly. 'Come, boy, come—' and so submitted to be led away.

And now the bell—the bell she had so often heard, by night and day, and listened to with solemn pleasure almost as a living voice—rung its remorseless toll, for her, so young, so beautiful, so good. Decrepit age, and vigorous life, and blooming youth, and helpless infancy, poured forth—on crutches, in the pride of strength and health, in the full blush of promise, in the mere dawn of life—to gather round her tomb. Old men were there, whose eyes were dim and senses failing—grandmothers, who might have died ten years ago, and still been old—the deaf, the blind, the lame, the palsied, the living dead in many shapes and forms, to see the closing of that early grave. What was the death it would shut in, to that which still could crawl and creep above it!

Along the crowded path they bore her now; pure as the newly-fallen snow that covered it; whose day on earth had been as fleeting. Under the porch, where she had sat when Heaven in its mercy brought her to that peaceful spot, she passed again; and the old church received her in its quiet shade.

They carried her to one old nook, where she had many and many a time sat musing, and laid their burden softly on the pavement. The light streamed on it through the coloured window—a window, where the boughs of trees were ever rustling in the summer, and where the birds sang sweetly all day long. With every breath of air that stirred among those branches in the sunshine, some trembling, changing light, would fall upon her grave.

Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust! Many a young hand dropped in its little wreath, many a stifled sob was heard. Some—and they were not a few—knelt down. All were sincere and truthful in their sorrow.

The service done, the mourners stood apart, and the villagers closed round to look into the grave before the pavement-stone should be replaced. One called to mind how he had seen her sitting on that very spot, and how her book had fallen on her lap, and she was gazing with a pensive face upon the sky. Another told, how he had wondered much that one so delicate as she, should be so bold; how she had never feared to enter the church alone at night, but had loved to linger there when all was quiet, and even to climb the tower stair, with no more light than that of the moon rays stealing through the loopholes in the thick old wall. A whisper went about among the oldest, that she had seen and talked with angels; and when they called to mind how she had looked, and spoken, and her early death, some thought it might be so, indeed. Thus, coming to the grave in little knots, and glancing down, and giving place to others, and falling off in whispering groups of three or four, the church was cleared in time, of all but the sexton and the mourning friends.

They saw the vault covered, and the stone fixed down. Then, when the dusk of evening had come on, and not a sound disturbed the sacred stillness of the place—when the bright moon poured in her light on tomb and monument, on pillar, wall, and arch, and most of all (it seemed to them) upon her quiet grave—in that calm time, when outward things and inward thoughts teem with assurances of immortality, and worldly hopes and fears are humbled in the dust before them—then, with tranquil and submissive hearts they turned away, and left the child with God.

Oh! it is hard to take to heart the lesson that such deaths will teach, but let no man reject it, for it is one that all must learn, and is a mighty, universal Truth. When Death strikes down the innocent and young, for every fragile form from which he lets the panting spirit free, a hundred virtues rise, in shapes of mercy, charity, and love, to walk the world, and bless it. Of every tear that sorrowing mortals shed on such green graves, some good is born, some gentler nature comes. In the Destroyer's steps there spring up bright creations that defy his power, and his dark path becomes a way of light to Heaven.

It was late when the old man came home. The boy had led him to his own dwelling, under some pretence, on their way back; and, rendered drowsy by his long ramble and late want of rest, he had sunk into a deep sleep by the fireside. He was perfectly exhausted, and they were careful not to rouse him. The slumber held him a long time, and when he at length awoke the moon was shining.

The younger brother, uneasy at his protracted absence, was watching at the door for his coming, when he appeared in the pathway with his little guide. He advanced to meet them, and tenderly obliging the old man to lean upon his arm, conducted him with slow and trembling steps towards the house.

He repaired to her chamber, straight. Not finding what he had left there, he returned with distracted looks to the room in which they were assembled. From that, he rushed into the schoolmaster's cottage, calling her name. They followed close upon him, and when he had vainly searched it, brought him home.

With such persuasive words as pity and affection could suggest, they prevailed upon him to sit among them and hear what they should tell him.

Then endeavouring by every little artifice to prepare his mind for what must come, and dwelling with many fervent words upon the happy lot to which she had been removed, they told him, at last, the truth. The moment it had passed their lips, he fell down among them like a murdered man.

For many hours, they had little hope of his surviving; but grief is strong, and he recovered.

If there be any who have never known the blank that follows death—the weary void—the sense of desolation that will come upon the strongest minds, when something familiar and beloved is missed at every turn—the connection between inanimate and senseless things, and the object of recollection, when every household god becomes a monument and every room a grave—if there be any who have not known this, and proved it by their own experience, they can never faintly guess how, for many days, the old man pined and moped away the time, and wandered here and there as seeking something, and had no comfort.

Whatever power of thought or memory he retained, was all bound up in her. He never understood, or seemed to care to understand, about his brother. To every endearment and attention he continued listless. If they spoke to him on this, or any other theme—save one—he would hear them patiently for awhile, then turn away, and go on seeking as before.

On that one theme, which was in his and all their minds, it was impossible to touch. Dead! He could not hear or bear the word. The slightest hint of it would throw him into a paroxysm, like that he had had when it was first spoken. In what hope he lived, no man could tell; but that he had some hope of finding her again—some faint and shadowy hope, deferred from day to day, and making him from day to day more sick and sore at heart—was plain to all.

They bethought them of a removal from the scene of this last sorrow; of trying whether change of place would rouse or cheer him. His brother sought the advice of those who were accounted skilful in such matters, and they came and saw him. Some of the number staid upon the spot, conversed with him when he would converse, and watched him as he wandered up and down, alone and silent. Move him where they might, they said, he would ever seek to get back there. His mind would run upon that spot. If they confined him closely, and kept a strict guard upon him, they might hold him prisoner, but if he could by any means escape, he would surely wander back to that place, or die upon the road.

The boy, to whom he had submitted at first, had no longer any influence with him. At times he would suffer the child to walk by his side, or would even take such notice of his presence as giving him his hand, or would stop to kiss his cheek, or pat him on the head. At other times, he would entreat him—not unkindly—to be gone, and would not brook him near. But, whether alone, or with this pliant friend, or with those who would have given him, at any cost or sacrifice, some consolation or some peace of mind, if happily the means could have been devised; he was at all times the same—with no love or care for anything in life—a broken-hearted man.

At length, they found, one day, that he had risen early, and, with his knapsack on his back, his staff in hand, her own straw hat, and little basket full of such things as she had been used to carry, was gone. As they were making ready to pursue him far and wide, a frightened schoolboy came who had seen him, but a moment before, sitting in the church—upon her grave, he said.

They hastened there, and going softly to the door, espied him in the attitude of one who waited patiently. They did not disturb him then, but kept a watch upon him all that day. When it grew quite dark, he rose and returned home, and went to bed, murmuring to himself, 'She will come to-morrow!'

Upon the morrow he was there again from sunrise until night; and still at night he laid him down to rest, and murmured, 'She will come to-morrow!'

And thenceforth, every day, and all day long, he waited at her grave, for her. How many pictures of new journeys over pleasant country, of resting-places under the free broad sky, of rambles in the fields and woods, and paths not often trodden—how many tones of that one well-remembered voice, how many glimpses of the form, the fluttering dress, the hair that waved so gaily in the wind—how many visions of what had been, and what he hoped was yet to be—rose up before him, in the old, dull, silent church! He never told them what he thought, or where he went. He would sit with them at night, pondering with a secret satisfaction, they could see, upon the flight that he and she would take before night came again; and still they would hear him whisper in his prayers, 'Lord! Let her come to-morrow!'

The last time was on a genial day in spring. He did not return at the usual hour, and they went to seek him. He was lying dead upon the stone.

They laid him by the side of her whom he had loved so well; and, in the church where they had often prayed, and mused, and lingered hand in hand, the child and the old man slept together.

CHAPTER 73

The magic reel, which, rolling on before, has led the chronicler thus far, now slackens in its pace, and stops. It lies before the goal; the pursuit is at an end.

It remains but to dismiss the leaders of the little crowd who have borne us company upon the road, and so to close the journey.

Foremost among them, smooth Sampson Brass and Sally, arm in arm, claim our polite attention.

Mr Sampson, then, being detained, as already has been shown, by the justice upon whom he called, and being so strongly pressed to protract his stay that he could by no means refuse, remained under his protection for a considerable time, during which the great attention of his entertainer kept him so extremely close, that he was quite lost to society, and never even went abroad for exercise saving into a small paved yard. So well, indeed, was his modest and retiring temper understood by those with whom he had to deal, and so jealous were they of his absence, that they required a kind of friendly bond to be entered into by two substantial housekeepers, in the sum of fifteen hundred pounds a-piece, before they would suffer him to quit their hospitable roof—doubting, it appeared, that he would return, if once let loose, on any other terms. Mr Brass, struck with the humour of this jest, and carrying out its spirit to the utmost, sought from his wide connection a pair of friends whose joint possessions fell some halfpence short of fifteen pence, and proffered them as bail—for that was the merry word agreed upon both sides. These gentlemen being rejected after twenty-four hours' pleasantry, Mr Brass consented to remain, and did remain, until a club of choice spirits called a Grand jury (who were in the joke) summoned him to a trial before twelve other wags for perjury and fraud, who in their turn found him guilty with a most facetious joy,—nay, the very populace entered into the whim, and when Mr Brass was moving in a hackney-coach towards the building where these wags assembled, saluted him with rotten eggs and carcases of kittens, and feigned to wish to tear him into shreds, which greatly increased the comicality of the thing, and made him relish it the more, no doubt.

To work this sportive vein still further, Mr Brass, by his counsel, moved in arrest of judgment that he had been led to criminate himself, by assurances of safety and promises of pardon, and claimed the leniency which the law extends to such confiding natures as are thus deluded. After solemn argument, this point (with others of a technical nature, whose humorous extravagance it would be difficult to exaggerate) was referred to the judges for their decision, Sampson being meantime removed to his former quarters. Finally, some of the points were given in Sampson's favour, and some against him; and the upshot was, that, instead of being desired to travel for a time in foreign parts, he was permitted to grace the mother country under certain insignificant restrictions.

These were, that he should, for a term of years, reside in a spacious mansion where several other gentlemen were lodged and boarded at the public charge, who went clad in a sober uniform of grey turned up with yellow, had their hair cut extremely short, and chiefly lived on gruel and light soup. It was also required of him that he should partake of their exercise of constantly ascending an endless flight of stairs; and, lest his legs, unused to such exertion, should be weakened by it, that he should wear upon one ankle an amulet or charm of iron. These conditions being arranged, he was removed one evening to his new abode, and enjoyed, in common with nine other gentlemen, and two ladies, the privilege of being taken to his place of retirement in one of Royalty's own carriages.

Over and above these trifling penalties, his name was erased and blotted out from the roll of attorneys; which erasure has been always held in these latter times to be a great degradation and reproach, and to imply the commission of some amazing villany—as indeed it would seem to be the case, when so many worthless names remain among its better records, unmolested.

Of Sally Brass, conflicting rumours went abroad. Some said with confidence that she had gone down to the docks in male attire, and had become a female sailor; others darkly whispered that she had enlisted as a private in the second regiment of Foot Guards, and had been seen in uniform, and on duty, to wit, leaning on her musket and looking out of a sentry-box in St james's Park, one evening. There were many such whispers as these in circulation; but the truth appears to be that, after the lapse of some five years (during which there is no direct evidence of her having been seen at all), two wretched people were more than once observed to crawl at dusk from the inmost recesses of St Giles's, and to take their way along the streets, with shuffling steps and cowering shivering forms, looking into the roads and kennels as they went in search of refuse food or disregarded offal. These forms were never beheld but in those nights of cold and gloom, when the terrible spectres, who lie at all other times in the obscene hiding-places of London, in archways, dark vaults and cellars, venture to creep into the streets; the embodied spirits of Disease, and Vice, and Famine. It was whispered by those who should have known, that these were Sampson and his sister Sally; and to this day, it is said, they sometimes pass, on bad nights, in the same loathsome guise, close at the elbow of the shrinking passenger.

The body of Quilp being found—though not until some days had elapsed—an inquest was held on it near the spot where it had been washed ashore. The general supposition was that he had committed suicide, and, this appearing to be favoured by all the circumstances of his death, the verdict was to that effect. He was left to be buried with a stake through his heart in the centre of four lonely roads.

It was rumoured afterwards that this horrible and barbarous ceremony had been dispensed with, and that the remains had been secretly given up to Tom Scott. But even here, opinion was divided; for some said Tom dug them up at midnight, and carried them to a place indicated to him by the widow. It is probable that both these stories may have had their origin in the simple fact of Tom's shedding tears upon the inquest—which he certainly did, extraordinary as it may appear. He manifested, besides, a strong desire to assault the jury; and being restrained and conducted out of court, darkened its only window by standing on his head upon the sill, until he was dexterously tilted upon his feet again by a cautious beadle.

Being cast upon the world by his master's death, he determined to go through it upon his head and hands, and accordingly began to tumble for his bread. Finding, however, his English birth an insurmountable obstacle to his advancement in this pursuit (notwithstanding that his art was in high repute and favour), he assumed the name of an Italian image lad, with whom he had become acquainted; and afterwards tumbled with extraordinary success, and to overflowing audiences. Little Mrs Quilp never quite forgave herself the one deceit that lay so heavy on her conscience, and never spoke or thought of it but with bitter tears. Her husband had no relations, and she was rich. He had made no will, or she would probably have been poor. Having married the first time at her mother's instigation, she consulted in her second choice nobody but herself. It fell upon a smart young fellow enough; and as he made it a preliminary condition that Mrs Jiniwin should be thenceforth an out-pensioner, they lived together after marriage with no more than the average amount of quarrelling, and led a merry life upon the dead dwarf's money.

Mr and Mrs Garland, and Mr Abel, went out as usual (except that there was a change in their household, as will be seen presently), and in due time the latter went into partnership with his friend the notary, on which occasion there was a dinner, and a ball, and great extent of dissipation. Unto this ball there happened to be invited the most bashful young lady that was ever seen, with whom Mr Abel happened to fall in love. HOW it happened, or how they found it out, or which of them first communicated the discovery to the other, nobody knows. But certain it is that in course of time they were married; and equally certain it is that they were the happiest of the happy; and no less certain it is that they deserved to be so. And it is pleasant to write down that they reared a family; because any propagation of goodness and benevolence is no small addition to the aristocracy of nature, and no small subject of rejoicing for mankind at large.

The pony preserved his character for independence and principle down to the last moment of his life; which was an unusually long one, and caused him to be looked upon, indeed, as the very Old Parr of ponies. He often went to and fro with the little phaeton between Mr Garland's and his son's, and, as the old people and the young were frequently together, had a stable of his own at the new establishment, into which he would walk of himself with surprising dignity. He condescended to play with the children, as they grew old enough to cultivate his friendship, and would run up and down the little paddock with them like a dog; but though he relaxed so far, and allowed them such small freedoms as caresses, or even to look at his shoes or hang on by his tail, he never permitted any one among them to mount his back or drive him; thus showing that even their familiarity must have its limits, and that there were points between them far too serious for trifling.

He was not unsusceptible of warm attachments in his later life, for when the good bachelor came to live with Mr Garland upon the clergyman's decease, he conceived a great friendship for him, and amiably submitted to be driven by his hands without the least resistance. He did no work for two or three years before he died, but lived in clover; and his last act (like a choleric old gentleman) was to kick his doctor.

Mr Swiveller, recovering very slowly from his illness, and entering into the receipt of his annuity, bought for the Marchioness a handsome stock of clothes, and put her to school forthwith, in redemption of the vow he had made upon his fevered bed. After casting about for some time for a name which should be worthy of her, he decided in favour of Sophronia Sphynx, as being euphonious and genteel, and furthermore indicative of mystery. Under this title the Marchioness repaired, in tears, to the school of his selection, from which, as she soon distanced all competitors, she was removed before the lapse of many quarters to one of a higher grade. It is but bare justice to Mr Swiveller to say, that, although the expenses of her education kept him in straitened circumstances for half a dozen years, he never slackened in his zeal, and always held himself sufficiently repaid by the accounts he heard (with great gravity) of her advancement, on his monthly visits to the governess, who looked upon him as a literary gentleman of eccentric habits, and of a most prodigious talent in quotation.

In a word, Mr Swiveller kept the Marchioness at this establishment until she was, at a moderate guess, full nineteen years of age— good-looking, clever, and good-humoured; when he began to consider seriously what was to be done next. On one of his periodical visits, while he was revolving this question in his mind, the Marchioness came down to him, alone, looking more smiling and more fresh than ever. Then, it occurred to him, but not for the first time, that if she would marry him, how comfortable they might be! So Richard asked her; whatever she said, it wasn't No; and they were married in good earnest that day week. Which gave Mr Swiveller frequent occasion to remark at divers subsequent periods that there had been a young lady saving up for him after all.

A little cottage at Hampstead being to let, which had in its garden a smoking-box, the envy of the civilised world, they agreed to become its tenants, and, when the honey-moon was over, entered upon its occupation. To this retreat Mr Chuckster repaired regularly every Sunday to spend the day—usually beginning with breakfast—and here he was the great purveyor of general news and fashionable intelligence. For some years he continued a deadly foe to Kit, protesting that he had a better opinion of him when he was supposed to have stolen the five-pound note, than when he was shown to be perfectly free of the crime; inasmuch as his guilt would have had in it something daring and bold, whereas his innocence was but another proof of a sneaking and crafty disposition. By slow degrees, however, he was reconciled to him in the end; and even went so far as to honour him with his patronage, as one who had in some measure reformed, and was therefore to be forgiven. But he never forgot or pardoned that circumstance of the shilling; holding that if he had come back to get another he would have done well enough, but that his returning to work out the former gift was a stain upon his moral character which no penitence or contrition could ever wash away.

Mr Swiveller, having always been in some measure of a philosophic and reflective turn, grew immensely contemplative, at times, in the smoking-box, and was accustomed at such periods to debate in his own mind the mysterious question of Sophronia's parentage. Sophronia herself supposed she was an orphan; but Mr Swiveller, putting various slight circumstances together, often thought Miss Brass must know better than that; and, having heard from his wife of her strange interview with Quilp, entertained sundry misgivings whether that person, in his lifetime, might not also have been able to solve the riddle, had he chosen. These speculations, however, gave him no uneasiness; for Sophronia was ever a most cheerful, affectionate, and provident wife to him; and Dick (excepting for an occasional outbreak with Mr Chuckster, which she had the good sense rather to encourage than oppose) was to her an attached and domesticated husband. And they played many hundred thousand games of cribbage together. And let it be added, to Dick's honour, that, though we have called her Sophronia, he called her the Marchioness from first to last; and that upon every anniversary of the day on which he found her in his sick room, Mr Chuckster came to dinner, and there was great glorification.

The gamblers, Isaac List and Jowl, with their trusty confederate Mr James Groves of unimpeachable memory, pursued their course with varying success, until the failure of a spirited enterprise in the way of their profession, dispersed them in various directions, and caused their career to receive a sudden check from the long and strong arm of the law. This defeat had its origin in the untoward detection of a new associate—young

Frederick Trent—who thus became the unconscious instrument of their punishment and his own.

For the young man himself, he rioted abroad for a brief term, living by his wits—which means by the abuse of every faculty that worthily employed raises man above the beasts, and so degraded, sinks him far below them. It was not long before his body was recognised by a stranger, who chanced to visit that hospital in Paris where the drowned are laid out to be owned; despite the bruises and disfigurements which were said to have been occasioned by some previous scuffle. But the stranger kept his own counsel until he returned home, and it was never claimed or cared for.

The younger brother, or the single gentleman, for that designation is more familiar, would have drawn the poor schoolmaster from his lone retreat, and made him his companion and friend. But the humble village teacher was timid of venturing into the noisy world, and had become fond of his dwelling in the old churchyard. Calmly happy in his school, and in the spot, and in the attachment of Her little mourner, he pursued his quiet course in peace; and was, through the righteous gratitude of his friend—let this brief mention suffice for that—a POOR school-master no more.

That friend—single gentleman, or younger brother, which you will—had at his heart a heavy sorrow; but it bred in him no misanthropy or monastic gloom. He went forth into the world, a lover of his kind. For a long, long time, it was his chief delight to travel in the steps of the old man and the child (so far as he could trace them from her last narrative), to halt where they had halted, sympathise where they had suffered, and rejoice where they had been made glad. Those who had been kind to them, did not escape his search. The sisters at the school—they who were her friends, because themselves so friendless—Mrs Jarley of the wax-work, Codlin, Short—he found them all; and trust me, the man who fed the furnace fire was not forgotten.

Kit's story having got abroad, raised him up a host of friends, and many offers of provision for his future life. He had no idea at first of ever quitting Mr Garland's service; but, after serious remonstrance and advice from that gentleman, began to contemplate the possibility of such a change being brought about in time. A good post was procured for him, with a rapidity which took away his breath, by some of the gentlemen who had believed him guilty of the offence laid to his charge, and who had acted upon that belief. Through the same kind agency, his mother was secured from want, and made quite happy. Thus, as Kit often said, his great misfortune turned out to be the source of all his subsequent prosperity.

Did Kit live a single man all his days, or did he marry? Of course he married, and who should be his wife but Barbara? And the best of it was, he married so soon that little Jacob was an uncle, before the calves of his legs, already mentioned in this history, had ever been encased in broadcloth pantaloons,—though that was not quite the best either, for of necessity the baby was an uncle too. The delight of Kit's mother and of Barbara's mother upon the great occasion is past all telling; finding they agreed so well on that, and on all other subjects, they took up their abode together, and were a most harmonious pair of friends from that time forth. And hadn't Astley's cause to bless itself for their all going together once a quarter—to the pit—and didn't Kit's mother always say, when they painted the outside, that Kit's last treat had helped to that, and wonder what the manager would feel if he but knew it as they passed his house!

When Kit had children six and seven years old, there was a Barbara among them, and a pretty Barbara she was. Nor was there wanting an exact facsimile and copy of little Jacob, as he appeared in those remote times when they taught him what oysters meant. Of course there was an Abel, own godson to the Mr Garland of that name; and there was a Dick, whom Mr Swiveller did especially favour. The little group would often gather round him of a night and beg him to tell again that story of good Miss Nell who died. This, Kit would do; and when they cried to hear it, wishing it longer too, he would teach them how she had gone to Heaven, as all good people did; and how, if they were good, like her, they might hope to be there too, one day, and to see and know her as he had done when he was quite a boy. Then, he would relate to them how needy he used to be, and how she had taught him what he was otherwise too poor to learn, and how the old man had been used to say 'she always laughs at Kit;' at which they would brush away their tears, and laugh themselves to think that she had done so, and be again quite merry.

He sometimes took them to the street where she had lived; but new improvements had altered it so much, it was not like the same. The old house had been long ago pulled down, and a fine broad road was in its place. At first he would draw with his stick a square upon the ground to show them where it used to stand. But he soon became uncertain of the spot, and could only say it was thereabouts, he thought, and these alterations were confusing.

Such are the changes which a few years bring about, and so do things pass away, like a tale that is told!

THE END OF
The Old Curiosity Shop

OLIVER TWIST

OR

THE PARISH BOY'S PROGRESS

BY

CHARLES DICKENS

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CHAPTER I

TREATS OF THE PLACE WHERE OLIVER TWIST WAS BORN AND OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES ATTENDING HIS BIRTH

Among other public buildings in a certain town, which for many reasons it will be prudent to refrain from mentioning, and to which I will assign no fictitious name, there is one anciently common to most towns, great or small: to wit, a workhouse; and in this workhouse was born; on a day and date which I need not trouble myself to repeat, inasmuch as it can be of no possible consequence to the reader, in this stage of the business at all events; the item of mortality whose name is prefixed to the head of this chapter.

For a long time after it was ushered into this world of sorrow and trouble, by the parish surgeon, it remained a matter of considerable doubt whether the child would survive to bear any name at all; in which case it is somewhat more than probable that these memoirs would never have appeared; or, if they had, that being comprised within a couple of pages, they would have possessed the inestimable merit of being the most concise and faithful specimen of biography, extant in the literature of any age or country.

Although I am not disposed to maintain that the being born in a workhouse, is in itself the most fortunate and enviable circumstance that can possibly befall a human being, I do mean to say that in this particular instance, it was the best thing for Oliver Twist that could by possibility have occurred. The fact is, that there was considerable difficulty in inducing Oliver to take upon himself the office of respiration,—a troublesome practice, but one which custom has rendered necessary to our easy existence; and for some time he lay gasping on a little flock mattress, rather unequally poised between this world and the next: the balance being decidedly in favour of the latter. Now, if, during this brief period, Oliver had been surrounded by careful grandmothers, anxious aunts, experienced nurses, and doctors of profound wisdom, he would most inevitably and indubitably have been killed in no time. There being nobody by, however, but a pauper old woman, who was rendered rather misty by an unwonted allowance of beer; and a parish surgeon who did such matters by contract; Oliver and Nature fought out the point between them. The result was, that, after a few struggles, Oliver breathed, sneezed, and proceeded to advertise to the inmates of the workhouse the fact of a new burden having been imposed upon the parish, by setting up as loud a cry as could reasonably have been expected from a male infant who had not been possessed of that very useful appendage, a voice, for a much longer space of time than three minutes and a quarter.

As Oliver gave this first proof of the free and proper action of his lungs, the patchwork coverlet which was carelessly flung over the iron bedstead, rustled; the pale face of a young woman was raised feebly from the pillow; and a faint voice imperfectly articulated the words, 'Let me see the child, and die.'

The surgeon had been sitting with his face turned towards the fire: giving the palms of his hands a warm and a rub alternately. As the young woman spoke, he rose, and advancing to the bed's head, said, with more kindness than might have been expected of him:

'Oh, you must not talk about dying yet.'

'Lor bless her dear heart, no!' interposed the nurse, hastily depositing in her pocket a green glass bottle, the contents of which she had been tasting in a corner with evident satisfaction.

'Lor bless her dear heart, when she has lived as long as I have, sir, and had thirteen children of her own, and all on 'em dead except two, and them in the wurkus with me, she'll know better than to take on in that way, bless her dear heart! Think what it is to be a mother, there's a dear young lamb do.'

Apparently this consolatory perspective of a mother's prospects failed in producing its due effect. The patient shook her head, and stretched out her hand towards the child.

The surgeon deposited it in her arms. She imprinted her cold white lips passionately on its forehead; passed her hands over her face; gazed wildly round; shuddered; fell back—and died. They chafed her breast, hands, and temples; but the blood had stopped forever. They talked of hope and comfort. They had been strangers too long.

'It's all over, Mrs. Thingummy!' said the surgeon at last.

'Ah, poor dear, so it is!' said the nurse, picking up the cork of the green bottle, which had fallen out on the pillow, as she stooped to take up the child. 'Poor dear!'

'You needn't mind sending up to me, if the child cries, nurse,' said the surgeon, putting on his gloves with great deliberation. 'It's very likely it *will* be troublesome. Give it a little gruel if it is.' He put on his hat, and, pausing by the bed-side on his way to the door, added, 'She was a good-looking girl, too; where did she come from?'

'She was brought here last night,' replied the old woman, 'by the overseer's order. She was found lying in the street. She had walked some distance, for her shoes were worn to pieces; but where she came from, or where she was going to, nobody knows.'

The surgeon leaned over the body, and raised the left hand. 'The old story,' he said, shaking his head: 'no wedding-ring, I see. Ah! Good-night!'

The medical gentleman walked away to dinner; and the nurse, having once more applied herself to the green bottle, sat down on a low chair before the fire, and proceeded to dress the infant.

What an excellent example of the power of dress, young Oliver Twist was! Wrapped in the blanket which had hitherto formed his only covering, he might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar; it would have been hard for the haughtiest stranger to have assigned him his proper station in society. But now that he was enveloped in the old calico robes which had grown yellow in the same service, he was badged and ticketed, and fell into his place at once—a parish child—the orphan of a workhouse—the humble, half-starved drudge—to be cuffed and buffeted through the world—despised by all, and pitied by none.

Oliver cried lustily. If he could have known that he was an orphan, left to the tender mercies of church-wardens and overseers, perhaps he would have cried the louder.

CHAPTER II

TREATS OF OLIVER TWIST'S GROWTH, EDUCATION, AND BOARD

For the next eight or ten months, Oliver was the victim of a systematic course of treachery and deception. He was brought up by hand. The hungry and destitute situation of the infant orphan was duly reported by the workhouse authorities to the parish authorities. The parish authorities inquired with dignity of the workhouse authorities, whether there was no female then domiciled in 'the house' who was in a situation to impart to Oliver Twist, the consolation and nourishment of which he stood in need. The workhouse authorities replied with humility, that there was not. Upon this, the parish authorities magnanimously and humanely resolved, that Oliver should be 'farmed,' or, in other words, that he should be dispatched to a branch-workhouse some three miles off, where twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders against the poor-laws, rolled about the floor all day, without the inconvenience of too much food or too much clothing, under the parental superintendence of an elderly female, who received the culprits at and for the consideration of sevenpence-halfpenny per small head per week. Sevenpence-halfpenny's worth per week is a good round diet for a child; a great deal may be got for sevenpence-halfpenny, quite enough to overload its stomach, and make it uncomfortable. The elderly female was a woman of wisdom and experience; she knew what was good for children; and she had a very accurate perception of what was good for herself. So, she appropriated the greater part of the weekly stipend to her own use, and consigned the rising parochial generation to even a shorter allowance than was originally provided for them. Thereby finding in the lowest depth a deeper still; and proving herself a very great experimental philosopher.

Everybody knows the story of another experimental philosopher who had a great theory about a horse being able to live without eating, and who demonstrated it so well, that he had got his own horse down to a straw a day, and would unquestionably have rendered him a very spirited and rampacious animal on nothing at all, if he had not died, four-and-twenty hours before he was to have had his first comfortable bait of air. Unfortunately for, the experimental philosophy of the female to whose protecting care Oliver Twist was delivered over, a similar result usually attended the operation of *her* system; for at the very moment when the child had contrived to exist upon the smallest possible portion of the weakest possible food, it did perversely happen in eight and a half cases out of ten, either that it sickened from want and cold, or fell into the fire from neglect, or got half-smothered by accident; in any one of which cases, the miserable little being was usually summoned into another world, and there gathered to the fathers it had never known in this.

Occasionally, when there was some more than usually interesting inquest upon a parish child who had been overlooked in turning up a bedstead, or inadvertently scalded to death when there happened to be a washing—though the latter accident was very scarce, anything approaching to a washing being of rare occurrence in the farm—the jury would take it into their heads to ask troublesome questions, or the parishioners would rebelliously affix their signatures to a remonstrance. But these impertinences were speedily checked by the evidence of the surgeon, and the testimony of the beadle; the former of whom had always opened the body and found nothing inside (which was very probable indeed), and the latter of whom invariably swore whatever the parish wanted; which was very self-devotional. Besides, the board made periodical pilgrimages to the farm, and always sent the beadle the day before, to say they were going. The children were neat and clean to behold, when *they* went; and what more would the people have!

It cannot be expected that this system of farming would produce any very extraordinary or luxuriant crop. Oliver Twist's ninth birthday found him a pale thin child, somewhat diminutive in stature, and decidedly small in circumference. But nature or inheritance had implanted a good sturdy spirit in Oliver's breast. It had had plenty of room to expand, thanks to the spare diet of the establishment; and perhaps to this circumstance may be attributed his having any ninth birth-day at all. Be this as it may, however, it was his ninth birthday; and he was keeping it in the coal-cellar with a select party of two other young gentleman, who, after participating with him in a sound thrashing, had been locked up for atrociously presuming to be hungry, when Mrs. Mann, the good lady of the house, was unexpectedly startled by the apparition of Mr. Bumble, the beadle, striving to undo the wicket of the garden-gate.

'Goodness gracious! Is that you, Mr. Bumble, sir?' said Mrs. Mann, thrusting her head out of the window in well-affected ecstasies of joy. '(Susan, take Oliver and them two brats upstairs, and wash 'em directly.)—My heart alive! Mr. Bumble, how glad I am to see you, sure-ly!'

Now, Mr. Bumble was a fat man, and a choleric; so, instead of responding to this open-hearted salutation in a kindred spirit, he gave the little wicket a tremendous shake, and then bestowed upon it a kick which could have emanated from no leg but a beadle's.

'Lor, only think,' said Mrs. Mann, running out,—for the three boys had been removed by this time,—'only think of that! That I should have forgotten that the gate was bolted on the inside, on account of them dear children! Walk in sir; walk in, pray, Mr. Bumble, do, sir.'

Although this invitation was accompanied with a curtsey that might have softened the heart of a church-warden, it by no means mollified the beadle.

'Do you think this respectful or proper conduct, Mrs. Mann,' inquired Mr. Bumble, grasping his cane, 'to keep the parish officers a waiting at your garden-gate, when they come here upon porochial business with the porochial orphans? Are you aweer, Mrs. Mann, that you are, as I may say, a porochial delegate, and a stipendiary?'

'I'm sure Mr. Bumble, that I was only a telling one or two of the dear children as is so fond of you, that it was you a coming,' replied Mrs. Mann with great humility.

Mr. Bumble had a great idea of his oratorical powers and his importance. He had displayed the one, and vindicated the other. He relaxed.

'Well, well, Mrs. Mann,' he replied in a calmer tone; 'it may be as you say; it may be. Lead the way in, Mrs. Mann, for I come on business, and have something to say.'

Mrs. Mann ushered the beadle into a small parlour with a brick floor; placed a seat for him; and officiously deposited his cocked hat and cane on the table before him. Mr. Bumble wiped from his forehead the perspiration which his walk had engendered, glanced complacently at the cocked hat, and smiled. Yes, he smiled. Beadles are but men: and Mr. Bumble smiled.

'Now don't you be offended at what I'm a going to say,' observed Mrs. Mann, with captivating sweetness. 'You've had a long walk, you know, or I wouldn't mention it. Now, will you take a little drop of somethink, Mr. Bumble?'

'Not a drop. Nor a drop,' said Mr. Bumble, waving his right hand in a dignified, but placid manner.

'I think you will,' said Mrs. Mann, who had noticed the tone of the refusal, and the gesture that had accompanied it. 'Just a leetle drop, with a little cold water, and a lump of sugar.'

Mr. Bumble coughed.

'Now, just a leetle drop,' said Mrs. Mann persuasively.

'What is it?' inquired the beadle.

'Why, it's what I'm obliged to keep a little of in the house, to put into the blessed infants' Daffy, when they ain't well, Mr. Bumble,' replied Mrs. Mann as she opened a corner cupboard, and took down a bottle and glass. 'It's gin. I'll not deceive you, Mr. B. It's gin.'

'Do you give the children Daffy, Mrs. Mann?' inquired Bumble, following with his eyes the interesting process of mixing.

'Ah, bless 'em, that I do, dear as it is,' replied the nurse. 'I couldn't see 'em suffer before my very eyes, you know sir.'

'No'; said Mr. Bumble approvingly; 'no, you could not. You are a humane woman, Mrs. Mann.' (Here she set down the glass.) 'I shall take a early opportunity of mentioning it to the board, Mrs. Mann.' (He drew it towards him.) 'You feel as a mother, Mrs. Mann.' (He stirred the gin-and-water.) 'I—I drink your health with cheerfulness, Mrs. Mann'; and he swallowed half of it.

'And now about business,' said the beadle, taking out a leathern pocket-book. 'The child that was half-baptized Oliver Twist, is nine year old to-day.'

'Bless him!' interposed Mrs. Mann, inflaming her left eye with the corner of her apron.

'And notwithstanding a offered reward of ten pound, which was afterwards increased to twenty pound. Notwithstanding the most superlative, and, I may say, supernat'ral exertions on the part of this parish,' said Bumble, 'we have never been able to discover who is his father, or what was his mother's settlement, name, or condition.'

Mrs. Mann raised her hands in astonishment; but added, after a moment's reflection, 'How comes he to have any name at all, then?'

The beadle drew himself up with great pride, and said, 'I inwented it.'

'You, Mr. Bumble!'

'I, Mrs. Mann. We name our fondlings in alphabetical order. The last was a S,—Swubble, I named him. This was a T,—Twist, I named *him*. The next one comes will be Unwin, and the next Vilkins. I have got names ready made to the end of the alphabet, and all the way through it again, when we come to Z.'

'Why, you're quite a literary character, sir!' said Mrs. Mann.

'Well, well,' said the beadle, evidently gratified with the compliment; 'perhaps I may be. Perhaps I may be, Mrs. Mann.' He finished the gin-and-water, and added, 'Oliver being now too old to remain here, the board have determined to have him back into the house. I have come out myself to take him there. So let me see him at once.'

'I'll fetch him directly,' said Mrs. Mann, leaving the room for that purpose. Oliver, having had by this time as much of the outer coat of dirt which encrusted his face and hands, removed, as could be scrubbed off in one washing, was led into the room by his benevolent protectress.

'Make a bow to the gentleman, Oliver,' said Mrs. Mann.

Oliver made a bow, which was divided between the beadle on the chair, and the cocked hat on the table.

'Will you go along with me, Oliver?' said Mr. Bumble, in a majestic voice.

Oliver was about to say that he would go along with anybody with great readiness, when, glancing upward, he caught sight of Mrs. Mann, who had got behind the beadle's chair, and was shaking her fist at him with a furious countenance. He took the hint at once, for the fist had been too often impressed upon his body not to be deeply impressed upon his recollection.

'Will she go with me?' inquired poor Oliver.

'No, she can't,' replied Mr. Bumble. 'But she'll come and see you sometimes.'

This was no very great consolation to the child. Young as he was, however, he had sense enough to make a feint of feeling great regret at going away. It was no very difficult matter for the boy to call tears into his eyes. Hunger and recent ill-usage are great assistants if you want to cry; and Oliver cried very naturally indeed. Mrs. Mann gave him a thousand embraces, and what Oliver wanted a great deal more, a piece of bread and butter, less he should seem too hungry when he got to the workhouse. With the slice of bread in his hand, and the little brown-cloth parish cap on his head, Oliver was then led away by Mr. Bumble from the wretched home where one kind word or look had never lighted the gloom of his infant years. And yet he burst into an agony of childish grief, as the cottage-gate closed after him. Wretched as were the little companions in misery he was leaving behind, they were the only friends he had ever known; and a sense of his loneliness in the great wide world, sank into the child's heart for the first time.

Mr. Bumble walked on with long strides; little Oliver, firmly grasping his gold-laced cuff, trotted beside him, inquiring at the end of every quarter of a mile whether they were 'nearly there.' To these interrogations Mr. Bumble returned very brief and snappish replies; for the temporary blandness which gin-and-water awakens in some bosoms had by this time evaporated; and he was once again a beadle.

Oliver had not been within the walls of the workhouse a quarter of an hour, and had scarcely completed the demolition of a second slice of bread, when Mr. Bumble, who had handed him over to the care of an old woman, returned; and, telling him it was a board night, informed him that the board had said he was to appear before it forthwith.

Not having a very clearly defined notion of what a live board was, Oliver was rather astounded by this intelligence, and was not quite certain whether he ought to laugh or cry. He had no time to think about the matter, however; for Mr. Bumble gave him a tap on the head, with his cane, to wake him up: and another on the back to make him lively: and bidding him to follow, conducted him into a large white-washed room, where eight or ten fat gentlemen were sitting round a table. At the top of the table, seated in an arm-chair rather higher than the rest, was a particularly fat gentleman with a very round, red face.

'Bow to the board,' said Bumble. Oliver brushed away two or three tears that were lingering in his eyes; and seeing no board but the table, fortunately bowed to that.

'What's your name, boy?' said the gentleman in the high chair.

Oliver was frightened at the sight of so many gentlemen, which made him tremble: and the beadle gave him another tap behind, which made him cry. These two causes made him answer in a very low and hesitating voice; whereupon a gentleman in a white waistcoat said he was a fool. Which was a capital way of raising his spirits, and putting him quite at his ease.

'Boy,' said the gentleman in the high chair, 'listen to me. You know you're an orphan, I suppose?'

'What's that, sir?' inquired poor Oliver.

'The boy *is* a fool—I thought he was,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat.

'Hush!' said the gentleman who had spoken first. 'You know you've got no father or mother, and that you were brought up by the parish, don't you?'

'Yes, sir,' replied Oliver, weeping bitterly.

'What are you crying for?' inquired the gentleman in the white waistcoat. And to be sure it was very extraordinary. What *could* the boy be crying for?

'I hope you say your prayers every night,' said another gentleman in a gruff voice; 'and pray for the people who feed you, and take care of you—like a Christian.'

'Yes, sir,' stammered the boy. The gentleman who spoke last was unconsciously right. It would have been very like a Christian, and a marvellously good Christian too, if Oliver had prayed for the people who fed and took care of *him*. But he hadn't, because nobody had taught him.

'Well! You have come here to be educated, and taught a useful trade,' said the red-faced gentleman in the high chair.

'So you'll begin to pick oakum to-morrow morning at six o'clock,' added the surly one in the white waistcoat.

For the combination of both these blessings in the one simple process of picking oakum, Oliver bowed low by the direction of the beadle, and was then hurried away to a large ward; where, on a rough, hard bed, he sobbed himself to sleep. What a novel illustration of the tender laws of England! They let the paupers go to sleep!

Poor Oliver! He little thought, as he lay sleeping in happy unconsciousness of all around him, that the board had that very day arrived at a decision which would exercise the most material influence over all his future fortunes. But they had. And this was it:

The members of this board were very sage, deep, philosophical men; and when they came to turn their attention to the workhouse, they found out at once, what ordinary folks would never have discovered—the poor people liked it! It was a regular place of public entertainment for the poorer classes; a tavern where there was nothing to pay; a public breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper all the year round; a brick and mortar elysium, where it was all play and no work. 'Oho!' said the board, looking very knowing; 'we are the fellows to set this to rights; we'll stop it all, in no time.' So, they established the rule, that all poor people should have the alternative (for they would compel nobody, not they), of being starved by a gradual process in the house, or by a quick one out of it. With this view, they contracted with the water-works to lay on an unlimited supply of water; and with a corn-factor to supply periodically small quantities of oatmeal; and issued three meals of thin gruel a day, with an onion twice a week, and half a roll of Sundays. They made a great many other wise and humane regulations, having reference to the ladies, which it is not necessary to repeat; kindly undertook to divorce poor married people, in consequence of the great expense of a suit in Doctors' Commons; and, instead of compelling a man to support his family, as they had theretofore done, took his family away from him, and made him a bachelor! There is no saying how many applicants for relief, under these last two heads, might have started up in all classes of society, if it had not been coupled with the workhouse; but the board were long-headed men, and had provided for this difficulty. The relief was inseparable from the workhouse and the gruel; and that frightened people.

For the first six months after Oliver Twist was removed, the system was in full operation. It was rather expensive at first, in consequence of the increase in the undertaker's bill, and the necessity of taking in the clothes of all the paupers, which fluttered loosely on their wasted, shrunken forms, after a week or two's gruel. But the number of workhouse inmates got thin as well as the paupers; and the board were in ecstasies.

The room in which the boys were fed, was a large stone hall, with a copper at one end: out of which the master, dressed in an apron for the purpose, and assisted by one or two women, ladled the gruel at mealtimes. Of this festive composition each boy had one porringer, and no more—except on occasions of great public rejoicing, when he had two ounces and a quarter of bread besides.

The bowls never wanted washing. The boys polished them with their spoons till they shone again; and when they had performed this operation (which never took very long, the spoons being nearly as large as the bowls), they would sit staring at the copper, with such eager eyes, as if they could have devoured the very bricks of which it was composed; employing themselves, meanwhile, in sucking their fingers most assiduously, with the view of catching up any stray splashes of gruel that might have been cast thereon. Boys have generally excellent appetites. Oliver Twist and his companions suffered the tortures of slow starvation for three months: at last they got so voracious and wild with hunger, that one boy, who was tall for his age, and hadn't been used to that sort of thing (for his father had kept a small cook-shop), hinted darkly to his companions, that unless he had another basin of gruel per diem, he was afraid he might some night happen to eat the boy who slept next him, who happened to be a weakly youth of tender age. He had a wild, hungry eye; and they implicitly believed him. A council was held; lots were cast who should walk up to the master after supper that evening, and ask for more; and it fell to Oliver Twist.

The evening arrived; the boys took their places. The master, in his cook's uniform, stationed himself at the copper; his pauper assistants ranged themselves behind him; the gruel was served out; and a long grace was said over the short commons. The gruel disappeared; the boys whispered each other, and winked at Oliver; while his next neighbors nudged him. Child as he was, he was desperate with hunger, and reckless with misery. He rose from the table; and advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said: somewhat alarmed at his own temerity:

'Please, sir, I want some more.'

The master was a fat, healthy man; but he turned very pale. He gazed in stupefied astonishment on the small rebel for some seconds, and then clung for support to the copper. The assistants were paralysed with wonder; the boys with fear.

'What!' said the master at length, in a faint voice.

'Please, sir,' replied Oliver, 'I want some more.'

The master aimed a blow at Oliver's head with the ladle; pinioned him in his arm; and shrieked aloud for the beadle.

The board were sitting in solemn conclave, when Mr. Bumble rushed into the room in great excitement, and addressing the gentleman in the high chair, said,

'Mr. Limbkins, I beg your pardon, sir! Oliver Twist has asked for more!'

There was a general start. Horror was depicted on every countenance.

'For *more*!' said Mr. Limbkins. 'Compose yourself, Bumble, and answer me distinctly. Do I understand that he asked for more, after he had eaten the supper allotted by the dietary?'

'He did, sir,' replied Bumble.

'That boy will be hung,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat. 'I know that boy will be hung.'

Nobody controverted the prophetic gentleman's opinion. An animated discussion took place. Oliver was ordered into instant confinement; and a bill was next morning pasted on the outside of the gate, offering a reward of five pounds to anybody who would take Oliver Twist off the hands of the parish. In other words, five pounds and Oliver Twist were offered to any man or woman who wanted an apprentice to any trade, business, or calling.

'I never was more convinced of anything in my life,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat, as he knocked at the gate and read the bill next morning: 'I never was more convinced of anything in my life, than I am that that boy will come to be hung.'

As I purpose to show in the sequel whether the white waistcoated gentleman was right or not, I should perhaps mar the interest of this narrative (supposing it to possess any at all), if I ventured to hint just yet, whether the life of Oliver Twist had this violent termination or no.

CHAPTER III

RELATES HOW OLIVER TWIST WAS VERY NEAR GETTING A PLACE WHICH WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN A SINECURE

For a week after the commission of the impious and profane offence of asking for more, Oliver remained a close prisoner in the dark and solitary room to which he had been consigned by the wisdom and mercy of the board. It appears, at first sight not unreasonable to suppose, that, if he had entertained a becoming feeling of respect for the prediction of the gentleman in the white waistcoat, he would have established that sage individual's prophetic character, once and for ever, by tying one end of his pocket-handkerchief to a hook in the wall, and attaching himself to the other. To the performance of this feat, however, there was one obstacle: namely, that pocket-handkerchiefs being decided articles of luxury, had been, for all future times and ages, removed from the noses of paupers by the express order of the board, in council assembled: solemnly given and pronounced under their hands and seals. There was a still greater obstacle in Oliver's youth and childishness. He only cried bitterly all day; and, when the long, dismal night came on, spread his little hands before his eyes to shut out the darkness, and crouching in the corner, tried to sleep: ever and anon waking with a start and tremble, and drawing himself closer and closer to the wall, as if to feel even its cold hard surface were a protection in the gloom and loneliness which surrounded him.

Let it not be supposed by the enemies of 'the system,' that, during the period of his solitary incarceration, Oliver was denied the benefit of exercise, the pleasure of society, or the advantages of religious consolation. As for exercise, it was nice cold weather, and he was allowed to perform his ablutions every morning under the pump, in a stone yard, in the presence of Mr. Bumble, who prevented his catching cold, and caused a tingling sensation to pervade his frame, by repeated applications of the cane. As for society, he was carried every other day into the hall where the boys dined, and there sociably flogged as a public warning and example. And so far from being denied the advantages of religious consolation, he was kicked into the same apartment every evening at prayer-time, and there permitted to listen to, and console his mind with, a general supplication of the boys, containing a special clause, therein inserted by authority of the board, in which they entreated to be made good, virtuous, contented, and obedient, and to be guarded from the sins and vices of Oliver Twist: whom the supplication distinctly set forth to be under the exclusive patronage and protection of the powers of wickedness, and an article direct from the manufactory of the very Devil himself.

It chanced one morning, while Oliver's affairs were in this auspicious and comfortable state, that Mr. Gamfield, chimney-sweep, went his way down the High Street, deeply cogitating in his mind his ways and means of paying certain arrears of rent, for which his landlord had become rather pressing. Mr. Gamfield's most sanguine estimate of his finances could not raise them within full five pounds of the desired amount; and, in a species of arithmetical desperation, he was alternately cudgelling his brains and his donkey, when passing the workhouse, his eyes encountered the bill on the gate.

'Wo—o!' said Mr. Gamfield to the donkey.

The donkey was in a state of profound abstraction: wondering, probably, whether he was destined to be regaled with a cabbage-stalk or two when he had disposed of the two sacks of soot with which the little cart was laden; so, without noticing the word of command, he jogged onward.

Mr. Gamfield growled a fierce imprecation on the donkey generally, but more particularly on his eyes; and, running after him, bestowed a blow on his head, which would inevitably have beaten in any skull but a donkey's. Then, catching hold of the bridle, he gave his jaw a sharp wrench, by way of gentle reminder that he was not his own master; and by these means turned him round. He then gave him another blow on the head, just to stun him till he came back again. Having completed these arrangements, he walked up to the gate, to read the bill.

The gentleman with the white waistcoat was standing at the gate with his hands behind him, after having delivered himself of some profound sentiments in the board-room. Having witnessed the little dispute between Mr. Gamfield and the donkey, he smiled joyously when that person came up to read the bill, for he saw at once that Mr. Gamfield was exactly the sort of master Oliver Twist wanted. Mr. Gamfield smiled, too, as he perused the document; for five pounds was just the sum he had been wishing for; and, as to the boy with which it was encumbered, Mr. Gamfield, knowing what the dietary of the workhouse was, well knew he would be a nice small pattern, just the very thing for register stoves. So, he spelt the bill through again, from beginning to end; and then, touching his fur cap in token of humility, accosted the gentleman in the white waistcoat.

'This here boy, sir, wot the parish wants to 'prentis,' said Mr. Gamfield.

'Ay, my man,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat, with a condescending smile. 'What of him?'

'If the parish vould like him to learn a right pleasant trade, in a good 'spectable chimbley-sweepin' bisness,' said Mr. Gamfield, 'I wants a 'prentis, and I am ready to take him.'

'Walk in,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat. Mr. Gamfield having lingered behind, to give the donkey another blow on the head, and another wrench of the jaw, as a caution not to run away in his absence, followed the gentleman with the white waistcoat into the room where Oliver had first seen him.

'It's a nasty trade,' said Mr. Limbkins, when Gamfield had again stated his wish.

'Young boys have been smothered in chimneys before now,' said another gentleman.

'That's acause they damped the straw afore they lit it in the chimbley to make 'em come down again,' said Gamfield; 'that's all smoke, and no blaze; vereas smoke ain't o' no use at all in making a boy come down, for it only sinds him to sleep, and that's wot he likes. Boys is wery obstinit, and wery lazy, Gen'l'men, and there's nothink like a good hot blaze to make 'em come down vith a run. It's humane too, gen'l'men, acause, even if they've stuck in the chimbley, roasting their feet makes 'em struggle to hextricate theirselves.'

The gentleman in the white waistcoat appeared very much amused by this explanation; but his mirth was speedily checked by a look from Mr. Limbkins. The board then proceeded to converse among themselves for a few minutes, but in so low a tone, that the words 'saving of expenditure,' 'looked well in the accounts,' 'have a printed report published,' were alone audible. These only chanced to be heard, indeed, or account of their being very frequently repeated with great emphasis.

At length the whispering ceased; and the members of the board, having resumed their seats and their solemnity, Mr. Limbkins said:

'We have considered your proposition, and we don't approve of it.'

'Not at all,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat.

'Decidedly not,' added the other members.

As Mr. Gamfield did happen to labour under the slight imputation of having bruised three or four boys to death already, it occurred to him that the board had, perhaps, in some unaccountable freak, taken it into their heads that this extraneous circumstance ought to influence their proceedings. It was very unlike their general mode of doing business, if they had; but still, as he had no particular wish to revive the rumour, he twisted his cap in his hands, and walked slowly from the table.

'So you won't let me have him, gen'l'men?' said Mr. Gamfield, pausing near the door.

'No,' replied Mr. Limbkins; 'at least, as it's a nasty business, we think you ought to take something less than the premium we offered.'

Mr. Gamfield's countenance brightened, as, with a quick step, he returned to the table, and said,

'What'll you give, gen'l'men? Come! Don't be too hard on a poor man. What'll you give?'

'I should say, three pound ten was plenty,' said Mr. Limbkins.

'Ten shillings too much,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat.

'Come!' said Gamfield; 'say four pound, gen'l'men. Say four pound, and you've got rid of him for good and all. There!'

'Three pound ten,' repeated Mr. Limbkins, firmly.

'Come! I'll split the diff'erence, gen'l'men,' urged Gamfield. 'Three pound fifteen.'

'Not a farthing more,' was the firm reply of Mr. Limbkins.

'You're desperate hard upon me, gen'l'men,' said Gamfield, wavering.

'Pooh! pooh! nonsense!' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat. 'He'd be cheap with nothing at all, as a premium. Take him, you silly fellow! He's just the boy for you. He wants the stick, now and then: it'll do him good; and his board needn't come very expensive, for he hasn't been overfed since he was born. Ha! ha! ha!'

Mr. Gamfield gave an arch look at the faces round the table, and, observing a smile on all of them, gradually broke into a smile himself. The bargain was made. Mr. Bumble, was at once instructed that Oliver Twist and his indentures were to be conveyed before the magistrate, for signature and approval, that very afternoon.

In pursuance of this determination, little Oliver, to his excessive astonishment, was released from bondage, and ordered to put himself into a clean shirt. He had hardly achieved this very unusual gymnastic performance, when Mr. Bumble brought him, with his own hands, a basin of gruel, and the holiday allowance of two ounces and a quarter of bread. At this tremendous sight, Oliver began to cry very piteously: thinking, not unnaturally, that the board must have determined to kill him for some useful purpose, or they never would have begun to fatten him up in that way.

'Don't make your eyes red, Oliver, but eat your food and be thankful,' said Mr. Bumble, in a tone of impressive pomposity. 'You're a going to be made a 'prentice of, Oliver.'

'A prentice, sir!' said the child, trembling.

'Yes, Oliver,' said Mr. Bumble. 'The kind and blessed gentleman which is so many parents to you, Oliver, when you have none of your own: are a going to 'prentice' you: and to set you up in life, and make a man of you: although the expense to the parish is three pound ten!—three pound ten, Oliver!—seventy shillins—one hundred and forty sixpences!—and all for a naughty orphan which nobody can't love.'

As Mr. Bumble paused to take breath, after delivering this address in an awful voice, the tears rolled down the poor child's face, and he sobbed bitterly.

'Come,' said Mr. Bumble, somewhat less pompously, for it was gratifying to his feelings to observe the effect his eloquence had produced; 'Come, Oliver! Wipe your eyes with the cuffs of your jacket, and don't cry into your gruel; that's a very foolish action, Oliver.' It certainly was, for there was quite enough water in it already.

On their way to the magistrate, Mr. Bumble instructed Oliver that all he would have to do, would be to look very happy, and say, when the gentleman asked him if he wanted to be apprenticed, that he should like it very much indeed; both of which injunctions Oliver promised to obey: the rather as Mr. Bumble threw in a gentle hint, that if he failed in either particular, there was no telling what would be done to him. When they arrived at the office, he was shut up in a little room by himself, and admonished by Mr. Bumble to stay there, until he came back to fetch him.

There the boy remained, with a palpitating heart, for half an hour. At the expiration of which time Mr. Bumble thrust in his head, unadorned with the cocked hat, and said aloud:

'Now, Oliver, my dear, come to the gentleman.' As Mr. Bumble said this, he put on a grim and threatening look, and added, in a low voice, 'Mind what I told you, you young rascal!'

Oliver stared innocently in Mr. Bumble's face at this somewhat contradictory style of address; but that gentleman prevented his offering any remark thereupon, by leading him at once into an adjoining room: the door of which was open. It was a large room, with a great window. Behind a desk, sat two old gentleman with powdered heads: one of whom was reading the newspaper; while the other was perusing, with the aid of a pair of tortoise-shell spectacles, a small piece of parchment which lay before him. Mr. Limbkins was standing in front of the desk on one side; and Mr. Gamfield, with a partially washed face, on the other; while two or three bluff-looking men, in top-boots, were lounging about.

The old gentleman with the spectacles gradually dozed off, over the little bit of parchment; and there was a short pause, after Oliver had been stationed by Mr. Bumble in front of the desk.

'This is the boy, your worship,' said Mr. Bumble.

The old gentleman who was reading the newspaper raised his head for a moment, and pulled the other old gentleman by the sleeve; whereupon, the last-mentioned old gentleman woke up.

'Oh, is this the boy?' said the old gentleman.

'This is him, sir,' replied Mr. Bumble. 'Bow to the magistrate, my dear.'

Oliver roused himself, and made his best obeisance. He had been wondering, with his eyes fixed on the magistrates' powder, whether all boards were born with that white stuff on their heads, and were boards from thenceforth on that account.

'Well,' said the old gentleman, 'I suppose he's fond of chimney-sweeping?'

'He doats on it, your worship,' replied Bumble; giving Oliver a sly pinch, to intimate that he had better not say he didn't.

'And he *will* be a sweep, will he?' inquired the old gentleman.

'If we was to bind him to any other trade to-morrow, he'd run away simultaneous, your worship,' replied Bumble.

'And this man that's to be his master—you, sir—you'll treat him well, and feed him, and do all that sort of thing, will you?' said the old gentleman.

'When I says I will, I means I will,' replied Mr. Gamfield doggedly.

'You're a rough speaker, my friend, but you look an honest, open-hearted man,' said the old gentleman: turning his spectacles in the direction of the candidate for Oliver's premium, whose villainous countenance was a regular stamped receipt for cruelty. But the magistrate was half blind and half childish, so he couldn't reasonably be expected to discern what other people did.

'I hope I am, sir,' said Mr. Gamfield, with an ugly leer.

'I have no doubt you are, my friend,' replied the old gentleman: fixing his spectacles more firmly on his nose, and looking about him for the inkstand.

It was the critical moment of Oliver's fate. If the inkstand had been where the old gentleman thought it was, he would have dipped his pen into it, and signed the indentures, and Oliver would have been straightway hurried off. But, as it chanced to be immediately under his nose, it followed, as a matter of course, that he looked all over his desk for it, without finding it; and happening in the course of his search to look straight before him, his gaze encountered the pale and terrified face of Oliver Twist: who, despite all the admonitory looks and pinches of Bumble, was regarding the repulsive countenance of his future master, with a mingled expression of horror and fear, too palpable to be mistaken, even by a half-blind magistrate.

The old gentleman stopped, laid down his pen, and looked from Oliver to Mr. Limbkins; who attempted to take snuff with a cheerful and unconcerned aspect.

'My boy!' said the old gentleman, 'you look pale and alarmed. What is the matter?'

'Stand a little away from him, Beadle,' said the other magistrate: laying aside the paper, and leaning forward with an expression of interest. 'Now, boy, tell us what's the matter: don't be afraid.'

Oliver fell on his knees, and clasping his hands together, prayed that they would order him back to the dark room—that they would starve him—beat him—kill him if they pleased—rather than send him away with that dreadful man.

'Well!' said Mr. Bumble, raising his hands and eyes with most impressive solemnity. 'Well! of all the artful and designing orphans that ever I see, Oliver, you are one of the most bare-facedest.'

'Hold your tongue, Beadle,' said the second old gentleman, when Mr. Bumble had given vent to this compound adjective.

'I beg your worship's pardon,' said Mr. Bumble, incredulous of having heard aright. 'Did your worship speak to me?'

'Yes. Hold your tongue.'

Mr. Bumble was stupefied with astonishment. A beadle ordered to hold his tongue! A moral revolution!

The old gentleman in the tortoise-shell spectacles looked at his companion, he nodded significantly.

'We refuse to sanction these indentures,' said the old gentleman: tossing aside the piece of parchment as he spoke.

'I hope,' stammered Mr. Limbkins: 'I hope the magistrates will not form the opinion that the authorities have been guilty of any improper conduct, on the unsupported testimony of a child.'

'The magistrates are not called upon to pronounce any opinion on the matter,' said the second old gentleman sharply. 'Take the boy back to the workhouse, and treat him kindly. He seems to want it.'

That same evening, the gentleman in the white waistcoat most positively and decidedly affirmed, not only that Oliver would be hung, but that he would be drawn and quartered into the bargain. Mr. Bumble shook his head with gloomy mystery, and said he wished he might come to good; whereunto Mr. Gamfield replied, that he wished he might come to him; which, although he agreed with the beadle in most matters, would seem to be a wish of a totally opposite description.

The next morning, the public were once informed that Oliver Twist was again To Let, and that five pounds would be paid to anybody who would take possession of him.

CHAPTER IV

OLIVER, BEING OFFERED ANOTHER PLACE, MAKES HIS FIRST ENTRY INTO PUBLIC LIFE

In great families, when an advantageous place cannot be obtained, either in possession, reversion, remainder, or expectancy, for the young man who is growing up, it is a very general custom to send him to sea. The board, in imitation of so wise and salutary an example, took counsel together on the expediency of shipping off Oliver Twist, in some small trading vessel bound to a good unhealthy port. This suggested itself as the very best thing that could possibly be done with him: the probability being, that the skipper would flog him to death, in a playful mood, some day after dinner, or would knock his brains out with an iron bar; both pastimes being, as is pretty generally known, very favourite and common recreations among gentleman of that class. The more the case presented itself to the board, in this point of view, the more manifold the advantages of the step appeared; so, they came to the conclusion that the only way of providing for Oliver effectually, was to send him to sea without delay.

Mr. Bumble had been despatched to make various preliminary inquiries, with the view of finding out some captain or other who wanted a cabin-boy without any friends; and was returning to the workhouse to communicate the result of his mission; when he encountered at the gate, no less a person than Mr. Sowerberry, the parochial undertaker.

Mr. Sowerberry was a tall gaunt, large-jointed man, attired in a suit of threadbare black, with darned cotton stockings of the same colour, and shoes to answer. His features were not naturally intended to wear a smiling aspect, but he was in general rather given to professional jocosity. His step was elastic, and his face betokened inward pleasantry, as he advanced to Mr. Bumble, and shook him cordially by the hand.

'I have taken the measure of the two women that died last night, Mr. Bumble,' said the undertaker.

'You'll make your fortune, Mr. Sowerberry,' said the beadle, as he thrust his thumb and forefinger into the proffered snuff-box of the undertaker: which was an ingenious little model of a patent coffin. 'I say you'll make your fortune, Mr. Sowerberry,' repeated Mr. Bumble, tapping the undertaker on the shoulder, in a friendly manner, with his cane.

'Think so?' said the undertaker in a tone which half admitted and half disputed the probability of the event. 'The prices allowed by the board are very small, Mr. Bumble.'

'So are the coffins,' replied the beadle: with precisely as near an approach to a laugh as a great official ought to indulge in.

Mr. Sowerberry was much tickled at this: as of course he ought to be; and laughed a long time without cessation. 'Well, well, Mr. Bumble,' he said at length, 'there's no denying that, since the new system of feeding has come in, the coffins are something narrower and more shallow than they used to be; but we must have some profit, Mr. Bumble. Well-seasoned timber is an expensive article, sir; and all the iron handles come, by canal, from Birmingham.'

'Well, well,' said Mr. Bumble, 'every trade has its drawbacks. A fair profit is, of course, allowable.'

'Of course, of course,' replied the undertaker; 'and if I don't get a profit upon this or that particular article, why, I make it up in the long-run, you see—he! he! he!'

'Just so,' said Mr. Bumble.

'Though I must say,' continued the undertaker, resuming the current of observations which the beadle had interrupted: 'though I must say, Mr. Bumble, that I have to contend against one very great disadvantage: which is, that all the stout people go off the quickest. The people who have been better off, and have paid rates for many years, are the first to sink when they come into the house; and let me tell you, Mr. Bumble, that three or four inches over one's calculation makes a great hole in one's profits: especially when one has a family to provide for, sir.'

As Mr. Sowerberry said this, with the becoming indignation of an ill-used man; and as Mr. Bumble felt that it rather tended to convey a reflection on the honour of the parish; the latter gentleman thought it advisable to change the subject. Oliver Twist being uppermost in his mind, he made him his theme.

'By the bye,' said Mr. Bumble, 'you don't know anybody who wants a boy, do you? A porochial 'prentis, who is at present a dead-weight; a millstone, as I may say, round the porochial throat? Liberal terms, Mr. Sowerberry, liberal terms?' As Mr. Bumble spoke, he raised his cane to the bill above him, and gave three distinct raps upon the words 'five pounds': which were printed thereon in Roman capitals of gigantic size.

'Gadso!' said the undertaker: taking Mr. Bumble by the gilt-edged lappel of his official coat; 'that's just the very thing I wanted to speak to you about. You know—dear me, what a very elegant button this is, Mr. Bumble! I never noticed it before.'

'Yes, I think it rather pretty,' said the beadle, glancing proudly downwards at the large brass buttons which embellished his coat. 'The die is the same as the porochial seal—the Good Samaritan healing the sick and bruised man. The board presented it to me on Newyear's morning, Mr. Sowerberry. I put it on, I remember, for the first time, to attend the inquest on that reduced tradesman, who died in a doorway at midnight.'

'I recollect,' said the undertaker. 'The jury brought it in, "Died from exposure to the cold, and want of the common necessaries of life," didn't they?'

Mr. Bumble nodded.

'And they made it a special verdict, I think,' said the undertaker, 'by adding some words to the effect, that if the relieving officer had—'

'Tush! Foolery!' interposed the beadle. 'If the board attended to all the nonsense that ignorant jurymen talk, they'd have enough to do.'

'Very true,' said the undertaker; 'they would indeed.'

'Juries,' said Mr. Bumble, grasping his cane tightly, as was his wont when working into a passion: 'juries is ineddicated, vulgar, grovelling wretches.'

'So they are,' said the undertaker.

'They haven't no more philosophy nor political economy about 'em than that,' said the beadle, snapping his fingers contemptuously.

'No more they have,' acquiesced the undertaker.

'I despise 'em,' said the beadle, growing very red in the face.

'So do I,' rejoined the undertaker.

'And I only wish we'd a jury of the independent sort, in the house for a week or two,' said the beadle; 'the rules and regulations of the board would soon bring their spirit down for 'em.'

'Let 'em alone for that,' replied the undertaker. So saying, he smiled, approvingly: to calm the rising wrath of the indignant parish officer.

Mr Bumble lifted off his cocked hat; took a handkerchief from the inside of the crown; wiped from his forehead the perspiration which his rage had engendered; fixed the cocked hat on again; and, turning to the undertaker, said in a calmer voice:

'Well; what about the boy?'

'Oh!' replied the undertaker; 'why, you know, Mr. Bumble, I pay a good deal towards the poor's rates.'

'Hem!' said Mr. Bumble. 'Well?'

'Well,' replied the undertaker, 'I was thinking that if I pay so much towards 'em, I've a right to get as much out of 'em as I can, Mr. Bumble; and so—I think I'll take the boy myself.'

Mr. Bumble grasped the undertaker by the arm, and led him into the building. Mr. Sowerberry was closeted with the board for five minutes; and it was arranged that Oliver should go to him that evening 'upon liking'—a phrase which means, in the case of a parish apprentice, that if the master find, upon a short trial, that he can get enough work out of a boy without putting too much food into him, he shall have him for a term of years, to do what he likes with.

When little Oliver was taken before 'the gentlemen' that evening; and informed that he was to go, that night, as general house-lad to a coffin-maker's; and that if he complained of his situation, or ever came back to the parish again, he would be sent to sea, there to be drowned, or knocked on the head, as the case might be, he evinced so little emotion, that they by common consent pronounced him a hardened young rascal, and ordered Mr. Bumble to remove him forthwith.

Now, although it was very natural that the board, of all people in the world, should feel in a great state of virtuous astonishment and horror at the smallest tokens of want of feeling on the part of anybody, they were rather out, in this particular instance. The simple fact was, that Oliver, instead of possessing too little feeling, possessed rather too much; and was in a fair way of being reduced, for life, to a state of brutal stupidity and sullenness by the ill usage he had received. He heard the news of his destination, in perfect silence; and, having had his luggage put into his hand—which was not very difficult to carry, inasmuch as it was all comprised within the limits of a brown paper parcel, about half a foot square by three inches deep—he pulled his cap over his eyes; and once more attaching himself to Mr. Bumble's coat cuff, was led away by that dignitary to a new scene of suffering.

For some time, Mr. Bumble drew Oliver along, without notice or remark; for the beadle carried his head very erect, as a beadle always should: and, it being a windy day, little Oliver was completely enshrouded by the skirts of Mr. Bumble's coat as they blew open, and disclosed to great advantage his flapped waistcoat and drab plush knee-breeches. As they drew near to their destination, however, Mr. Bumble thought it expedient to look down, and see that the boy was in good order for inspection by his new master: which he accordingly did, with a fit and becoming air of gracious patronage.

'Oliver!' said Mr. Bumble.

'Yes, sir,' replied Oliver, in a low, tremulous voice.

'Pull that cap off your eyes, and hold up your head, sir.'

Although Oliver did as he was desired, at once; and passed the back of his unoccupied hand briskly across his eyes, he left a tear in them when he looked up at his conductor. As Mr. Bumble gazed sternly upon him, it rolled down his cheek. It was followed by another, and another. The child made a strong effort, but it was an unsuccessful one. Withdrawing his other hand from Mr. Bumble's he covered his face with both; and wept until the tears sprung out from between his chin and bony fingers.

'Well!' exclaimed Mr. Bumble, stopping short, and darting at his little charge a look of intense malignity. 'Well! Of *all* the ungratefullest, and worst-disposed boys as ever I see, Oliver, you are the—'

'No, no, sir,' sobbed Oliver, clinging to the hand which held the well-known cane; 'no, no, sir; I will be good indeed; indeed, indeed I will, sir! I am a very little boy, sir; and it is so—so—'

'So what?' inquired Mr. Bumble in amazement.

'So lonely, sir! So very lonely!' cried the child. 'Everybody hates me. Oh! sir, don't, don't pray be cross to me!' The child beat his hand upon his heart; and looked in his companion's face, with tears of real agony.

Mr. Bumble regarded Oliver's piteous and helpless look, with some astonishment, for a few seconds; hemmed three or four times in a husky manner; and after muttering something about 'that troublesome cough,' bade Oliver dry his eyes and be a good boy. Then once more taking his hand, he walked on with him in silence.

The undertaker, who had just put up the shutters of his shop, was making some entries in his day-book by the light of a most appropriate dismal candle, when Mr. Bumble entered.

'Aha!' said the undertaker; looking up from the book, and pausing in the middle of a word; 'is that you, Bumble?'

'No one else, Mr. Sowerberry,' replied the beadle. 'Here! I've brought the boy.' Oliver made a bow.

'Oh! that's the boy, is it?' said the undertaker: raising the candle above his head, to get a better view of Oliver. 'Mrs. Sowerberry, will you have the goodness to come here a moment, my dear?'

Mrs. Sowerberry emerged from a little room behind the shop, and presented the form of a short, then, squeezed-up woman, with a vixenish countenance.

'My dear,' said Mr. Sowerberry, deferentially, 'this is the boy from the workhouse that I told you of.' Oliver bowed again.

'Dear me!' said the undertaker's wife, 'he's very small.'

'Why, he *is* rather small,' replied Mr. Bumble: looking at Oliver as if it were his fault that he was no bigger; 'he is small. There's no denying it. But he'll grow, Mrs. Sowerberry—he'll grow.'

'Ah! I dare say he will,' replied the lady pettishly, 'on our victuals and our drink. I see no saving in parish children, not I; for they always cost more to keep, than they're worth. However, men always think they know best. There! Get downstairs, little bag o' bones.' With this, the undertaker's wife opened a side door, and pushed Oliver down a steep flight of stairs into a stone cell, damp and dark: forming the ante-room to the coal-cellar, and denominated 'kitchen'; wherein sat a slatternly girl, in shoes down at heel, and blue worsted stockings very much out of repair.

'Here, Charlotte,' said Mr. Sowerberry, who had followed Oliver down, 'give this boy some of the cold bits that were put by for Trip. He hasn't come home since the morning, so he may go without 'em. I dare say the boy isn't too dainty to eat 'em—are you, boy?'

Oliver, whose eyes had glistened at the mention of meat, and who was trembling with eagerness to devour it, replied in the negative; and a plateful of coarse broken victuals was set before him.

I wish some well-fed philosopher, whose meat and drink turn to gall within him; whose blood is ice, whose heart is iron; could have seen Oliver Twist clutching at the dainty viands that the dog had neglected. I wish he could have witnessed the horrible avidity with which Oliver tore the bits asunder with all the ferocity of famine. There is only one thing I should like better; and that would be to see the Philosopher making the same sort of meal himself, with the same relish.

'Well,' said the undertaker's wife, when Oliver had finished his supper: which she had regarded in silent horror, and with fearful auguries of his future appetite: 'have you done?'

There being nothing eatable within his reach, Oliver replied in the affirmative.

'Then come with me,' said Mrs. Sowerberry: taking up a dim and dirty lamp, and leading the way upstairs; 'your bed's under the counter. You don't mind sleeping among the coffins, I suppose? But it doesn't much matter whether you do or don't, for you can't sleep anywhere else. Come; don't keep me here all night!'

Oliver lingered no longer, but meekly followed his new mistress.

CHAPTER V

OLIVER MINGLES WITH NEW ASSOCIATES. GOING TO A FUNERAL FOR THE FIRST TIME, HE FORMS AN UNFAVOURABLE NOTION OF HIS MASTER'S BUSINESS

Oliver, being left to himself in the undertaker's shop, set the lamp down on a workman's bench, and gazed timidly about him with a feeling of awe and dread, which many people a good deal older than he will be at no loss to understand. An unfinished coffin on black tressels, which stood in the middle of the shop, looked so gloomy and death-like that a cold tremble came over him, every time his eyes wandered in the direction of the dismal object: from which he almost expected to see some frightful form slowly rear its head, to drive him mad with terror. Against the wall were ranged, in regular array, a long row of elm boards cut in the same shape: looking in the dim light, like high-shouldered ghosts with their hands in their breeches pockets. Coffin-plates, elm-chips, bright-headed nails, and shreds of black cloth, lay scattered on the floor; and the wall behind the counter was ornamented with a lively representation of two mutes in very stiff neckcloths, on duty at a large private door, with a hearse drawn by four black steeds, approaching in the distance. The shop was close and hot. The atmosphere seemed tainted with the smell of coffins. The recess beneath the counter in which his flock mattress was thrust, looked like a grave.

Nor were these the only dismal feelings which depressed Oliver. He was alone in a strange place; and we all know how chilled and desolate the best of us will sometimes feel in such a situation. The boy had no friends to care for, or to care for him. The regret of no recent separation was fresh in his mind; the absence of no loved and well-remembered face sank heavily into his heart.

But his heart was heavy, notwithstanding; and he wished, as he crept into his narrow bed, that that were his coffin, and that he could be lain in a calm and lasting sleep in the churchyard ground, with the tall grass waving gently above his head, and the sound of the old deep bell to soothe him in his sleep.

Oliver was awakened in the morning, by a loud kicking at the outside of the shop-door: which, before he could huddle on his clothes, was repeated, in an angry and impetuous manner, about twenty-five times. When he began to undo the chain, the legs desisted, and a voice began.

'Open the door, will yer?' cried the voice which belonged to the legs which had kicked at the door.

'I will, directly, sir,' replied Oliver: undoing the chain, and turning the key.

'I suppose yer the new boy, ain't yer?' said the voice through the key-hole.

'Yes, sir,' replied Oliver.

'How old are yer?' inquired the voice.

'Ten, sir,' replied Oliver.

'Then I'll whop yer when I get in,' said the voice; 'you just see if I don't, that's all, my work'us brat!' and having made this obliging promise, the voice began to whistle.

Oliver had been too often subjected to the process to which the very expressive monosyllable just recorded bears reference, to entertain the smallest doubt that the owner of the voice, whoever he might be, would redeem his pledge, most honourably. He drew back the bolts with a trembling hand, and opened the door.

For a second or two, Oliver glanced up the street, and down the street, and over the way: impressed with the belief that the unknown, who had addressed him through the key-hole, had walked a few paces off, to warm himself; for nobody did he see but a big charity-boy, sitting on a post in front of the house, eating a slice of bread and butter: which he cut into wedges, the size of his mouth, with a clasp-knife, and then consumed with great dexterity.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said Oliver at length: seeing that no other visitor made his appearance; 'did you knock?'

'I kicked,' replied the charity-boy.

'Did you want a coffin, sir?' inquired Oliver, innocently.

At this, the charity-boy looked monstrous fierce; and said that Oliver would want one before long, if he cut jokes with his superiors in that way.

'Yer don't know who I am, I suppose, Work'us?' said the charity-boy, in continuation: descending from the top of the post, meanwhile, with edifying gravity.

'No, sir,' rejoined Oliver.

'I'm Mister Noah Claypole,' said the charity-boy, 'and you're under me. Take down the shutters, yer idle young ruffian!' With this, Mr. Claypole administered a kick to Oliver, and entered the shop with a dignified air, which did him great credit. It is difficult for a large-headed, small-eyed youth, of lumbering make and heavy countenance, to look dignified under any circumstances; but it is more especially so, when superadded to these personal attractions are a red nose and yellow smalls.

Oliver, having taken down the shutters, and broken a pane of glass in his effort to stagger away beneath the weight of the first one to a small court at the side of the house in which they were kept during the day, was graciously assisted by Noah: who having consoled him with the assurance that 'he'd catch it,' condescended to help him. Mr. Sowerberry came down soon after. Shortly afterwards, Mrs. Sowerberry appeared. Oliver having 'caught it,' in fulfilment of Noah's prediction, followed that young gentleman down the stairs to breakfast.

'Come near the fire, Noah,' said Charlotte. 'I saved a nice little bit of bacon for you from master's breakfast. Oliver, shut that door at Mister

Noah's back, and take them bits that I've put out on the cover of the bread-pan. There's your tea; take it away to that box, and drink it there, and make haste, for they'll want you to mind the shop. D'ye hear?'

'D'ye hear, Work'us?' said Noah Claypole.

'Lor, Noah!' said Charlotte, 'what a rum creature you are! Why don't you let the boy alone?'

'Let him alone!' said Noah. 'Why everybody lets him alone enough, for the matter of that. Neither his father nor his mother will ever interfere with him. All his relations let him have his own way pretty well. Eh, Charlotte? He! he! he!'

'Oh, you queer soul!' said Charlotte, bursting into a hearty laugh, in which she was joined by Noah; after which they both looked scornfully at poor Oliver Twist, as he sat shivering on the box in the coldest corner of the room, and ate the stale pieces which had been specially reserved for him.

Noah was a charity-boy, but not a workhouse orphan. No chance-child was he, for he could trace his genealogy all the way back to his parents, who lived hard by; his mother being a washerwoman, and his father a drunken soldier, discharged with a wooden leg, and a diurnal pension of twopence-halfpenny and an unstateable fraction. The shop-boys in the neighbourhood had long been in the habit of branding Noah in the public streets, with the ignominious epithets of 'leathers,' 'charity,' and the like; and Noah had bourne them without reply. But, now that fortune had cast in his way a nameless orphan, at whom even the meanest could point the finger of scorn, he retorted on him with interest. This affords charming food for contemplation. It shows us what a beautiful thing human nature may be made to be; and how impartially the same amiable qualities are developed in the finest lord and the dirtiest charity-boy.

Oliver had been sojourning at the undertaker's some three weeks or a month. Mr. and Mrs. Sowerberry—the shop being shut up—were taking their supper in the little back-parlour, when Mr. Sowerberry, after several deferential glances at his wife, said,

'My dear—' He was going to say more; but, Mrs. Sowerberry looking up, with a peculiarly unpropitious aspect, he stopped short.

'Well,' said Mrs. Sowerberry, sharply.

'Nothing, my dear, nothing,' said Mr. Sowerberry.

'Ugh, you brute!' said Mrs. Sowerberry.

'Not at all, my dear,' said Mr. Sowerberry humbly. 'I thought you didn't want to hear, my dear. I was only going to say—'

'Oh, don't tell me what you were going to say,' interposed Mrs. Sowerberry. 'I am nobody; don't consult me, pray. *I* don't want to intrude upon your secrets.' As Mrs. Sowerberry said this, she gave an hysterical laugh, which threatened violent consequences.

'But, my dear,' said Sowerberry, 'I want to ask your advice.'

'No, no, don't ask mine,' replied Mrs. Sowerberry, in an affecting manner: 'ask somebody else's.' Here, there was another hysterical laugh, which frightened Mr. Sowerberry very much. This is a very common and much-approved matrimonial course of treatment, which is often very effective. It at once reduced Mr. Sowerberry to begging, as a special favour, to be allowed to say what Mrs. Sowerberry was most curious to hear. After a short duration, the permission was most graciously conceded.

'It's only about young Twist, my dear,' said Mr. Sowerberry. 'A very good-looking boy, that, my dear.'

'He need be, for he eats enough,' observed the lady.

'There's an expression of melancholy in his face, my dear,' resumed Mr. Sowerberry, 'which is very interesting. He would make a delightful mute, my love.'

Mrs. Sowerberry looked up with an expression of considerable wonderment. Mr. Sowerberry remarked it and, without allowing time for any observation on the good lady's part, proceeded.

'I don't mean a regular mute to attend grown-up people, my dear, but only for children's practice. It would be very new to have a mute in proportion, my dear. You may depend upon it, it would have a superb effect.'

Mrs. Sowerberry, who had a good deal of taste in the undertaking way, was much struck by the novelty of this idea; but, as it would have been compromising her dignity to have said so, under existing circumstances, she merely inquired, with much sharpness, why such an obvious suggestion had not presented itself to her husband's mind before? Mr. Sowerberry rightly construed this, as an acquiescence in his proposition; it was speedily determined, therefore, that Oliver should be at once initiated into the mysteries of the trade; and, with this view, that he should accompany his master on the very next occasion of his services being required.

The occasion was not long in coming. Half an hour after breakfast next morning, Mr. Bumble entered the shop; and supporting his cane against the counter, drew forth his large leathern pocket-book: from which he selected a small scrap of paper, which he handed over to Sowerberry.

'Aha!' said the undertaker, glancing over it with a lively countenance; 'an order for a coffin, eh?'

'For a coffin first, and a porochial funeral afterwards,' replied Mr. Bumble, fastening the strap of the leathern pocket-book: which, like himself, was very corpulent.

'Bayton,' said the undertaker, looking from the scrap of paper to Mr. Bumble. 'I never heard the name before.'

Bumble shook his head, as he replied, 'Obstinate people, Mr. Sowerberry; very obstinate. Proud, too, I'm afraid, sir.'

'Proud, eh?' exclaimed Mr. Sowerberry with a sneer. 'Come, that's too much.'

'Oh, it's sickening,' replied the beadle. 'Antimonial, Mr. Sowerberry!'

'So it is,' acquiesced the undertaker.

'We only heard of the family the night before last,' said the beadle; 'and we shouldn't have known anything about them, then, only a woman who lodges in the same house made an application to the porochial committee for them to send the porochial surgeon to see a woman as was very bad. He had gone out to dinner; but his 'prentice (which is a very clever lad) sent 'em some medicine in a blacking-bottle, offhand.'

'Ah, there's promptness,' said the undertaker.

'Promptness, indeed!' replied the beadle. 'But what's the consequence; what's the ungrateful behaviour of these rebels, sir? Why, the husband sends back word that the medicine won't suit his wife's complaint, and so she shan't take it—says she shan't take it, sir! Good, strong, wholesome medicine, as was given with great success to two Irish labourers and a coal-heaver, only a week before—sent 'em for nothing, with a blackin'-bottle in,—and he sends back word that she shan't take it, sir!'

As the atrocity presented itself to Mr. Bumble's mind in full force, he struck the counter sharply with his cane, and became flushed with indignation.

'Well,' said the undertaker, 'I ne—ver—did—'

'Never did, sir!' ejaculated the beadle. 'No, nor nobody never did; but now she's dead, we've got to bury her; and that's the direction; and the sooner it's done, the better.'

Thus saying, Mr. Bumble put on his cocked hat wrong side first, in a fever of parochial excitement; and flounced out of the shop.

'Why, he was so angry, Oliver, that he forgot even to ask after you!' said Mr. Sowerberry, looking after the beadle as he strode down the street.

'Yes, sir,' replied Oliver, who had carefully kept himself out of sight, during the interview; and who was shaking from head to foot at the mere recollection of the sound of Mr. Bumble's voice.

He needn't haven taken the trouble to shrink from Mr. Bumble's glance, however; for that functionary, on whom the prediction of the gentleman in the white waistcoat had made a very strong impression, thought that now the undertaker had got Oliver upon trial the subject was better avoided, until such time as he should be firmly bound for seven years, and all danger of his being returned upon the hands of the parish should be thus effectually and legally overcome.

'Well,' said Mr. Sowerberry, taking up his hat, 'the sooner this job is done, the better. Noah, look after the shop. Oliver, put on your cap, and come with me.' Oliver obeyed, and followed his master on his professional mission.

They walked on, for some time, through the most crowded and densely inhabited part of the town; and then, striking down a narrow street more dirty and miserable than any they had yet passed through, paused to look for the house which was the object of their search. The houses on either side were high and large, but very old, and tenanted by people of the poorest class: as their neglected appearance would have sufficiently denoted, without the concurrent testimony afforded by the squalid looks of the few men and women who, with folded arms and bodies half doubled, occasionally skulked along. A great many of the tenements had shop-fronts; but these were fast closed, and mouldering away; only the upper rooms being inhabited. Some houses which had become insecure from age and decay, were prevented from falling into the street, by huge beams of wood reared against the walls, and firmly planted in the road; but even these crazy dens seemed to have been selected as the nightly haunts of some houseless wretches, for many of the rough boards which supplied the place of door and window, were wrenched from their positions, to afford an aperture wide enough for the passage of a human body. The kennel was stagnant and filthy. The very rats, which here and there lay putrefying in its rottenness, were hideous with famine.

There was neither knocker nor bell-handle at the open door where Oliver and his master stopped; so, groping his way cautiously through the dark passage, and bidding Oliver keep close to him and not be afraid the undertaker mounted to the top of the first flight of stairs. Stumbling against a door on the landing, he rapped at it with his knuckles.

It was opened by a young girl of thirteen or fourteen. The undertaker at once saw enough of what the room contained, to know it was the apartment to which he had been directed. He stepped in; Oliver followed him.

There was no fire in the room; but a man was crouching, mechanically, over the empty stove. An old woman, too, had drawn a low stool to the cold hearth, and was sitting beside him. There were some ragged children in another corner; and in a small recess, opposite the door, there lay upon the ground, something covered with an old blanket. Oliver shuddered as he cast his eyes toward the place, and crept involuntarily closer to his master; for though it was covered up, the boy felt that it was a corpse.

The man's face was thin and very pale; his hair and beard were grizzly; his eyes were bloodshot. The old woman's face was wrinkled; her two remaining teeth protruded over her under lip; and her eyes were bright and piercing. Oliver was afraid to look at either her or the man. They seemed so like the rats he had seen outside.

'Nobody shall go near her,' said the man, starting fiercely up, as the undertaker approached the recess. 'Keep back! Damn you, keep back, if you've a life to lose!'

'Nonsense, my good man,' said the undertaker, who was pretty well used to misery in all its shapes. 'Nonsense!'

'I tell you,' said the man: clenching his hands, and stamping furiously on the floor,—'I tell you I won't have her put into the ground. She couldn't rest there. The worms would worry her—not eat her—she is so worn away.'

The undertaker offered no reply to this raving; but producing a tape from his pocket, knelt down for a moment by the side of the body.

'Ah!' said the man: bursting into tears, and sinking on his knees at the feet of the dead woman; 'kneel down, kneel down—kneel round her, every one of you, and mark my words! I say she was starved to death. I never knew how bad she was, till the fever came upon her; and then her bones were starting through the skin. There was neither fire nor candle; she died in the dark—in the dark! She couldn't even see her children's faces, though we heard her gasping out their names. I begged for her in the streets: and they sent me to prison. When I came back, she was dying; and all the blood in my heart has dried up, for they starved her to death. I swear it before the God that saw it! They starved her!' He twined his hands in his hair; and, with a loud scream, rolled grovelling upon the floor: his eyes fixed, and the foam covering his lips.

The terrified children cried bitterly; but the old woman, who had hitherto remained as quiet as if she had been wholly deaf to all that passed, menaced them into silence. Having unloosened the cravat of the man who still remained extended on the ground, she tottered towards the undertaker.

'She was my daughter,' said the old woman, nodding her head in the direction of the corpse; and speaking with an idiotic leer, more ghastly than even the presence of death in such a place. 'Lord, Lord! Well, it *is* strange that I who gave birth to her, and was a woman then, should be alive and merry now, and she lying there: so cold and stiff! Lord, Lord!—to think of it; it's as good as a play—as good as a play!'

As the wretched creature mumbled and chuckled in her hideous merriment, the undertaker turned to go away.

'Stop, stop!' said the old woman in a loud whisper. 'Will she be buried to-morrow, or next day, or to-night? I laid her out; and I must walk, you know. Send me a large cloak: a good warm one: for it is bitter cold. We should have cake and wine, too, before we go! Never mind; send some bread—only a loaf of bread and a cup of water. Shall we have some bread, dear?' she said eagerly: catching at the undertaker's coat, as he once more moved towards the door.

'Yes, yes,' said the undertaker,'of course. Anything you like!' He disengaged himself from the old woman's grasp; and, drawing Oliver after him, hurried away.

The next day, (the family having been meanwhile relieved with a half-quartern loaf and a piece of cheese, left with them by Mr. Bumble himself,) Oliver and his master returned to the miserable abode; where Mr. Bumble had already arrived, accompanied by four men from the workhouse, who were to act as bearers. An old black cloak had been thrown over the rags of the old woman and the man; and the bare coffin having been screwed down, was hoisted on the shoulders of the bearers, and carried into the street.

'Now, you must put your best leg foremost, old lady!' whispered Sowerberry in the old woman's ear; 'we are rather late; and it won't do, to keep the clergyman waiting. Move on, my men,—as quick as you like!'

Thus directed, the bearers trotted on under their light burden; and the two mourners kept as near them, as they could. Mr. Bumble and Sowerberry walked at a good smart pace in front; and Oliver, whose legs were not so long as his master's, ran by the side.

There was not so great a necessity for hurrying as Mr. Sowerberry had anticipated, however; for when they reached the obscure corner of the churchyard in which the nettles grew, and where the parish graves were made, the clergyman had not arrived; and the clerk, who was sitting by the vestry-room fire, seemed to think it by no means improbable that it might be an hour or so, before he came. So, they put the bier on the brink of the grave; and the two mourners waited patiently in the damp clay, with a cold rain drizzling down, while the ragged boys whom the spectacle had attracted into the churchyard played a noisy game at hide-and-seek among the tombstones, or varied their amusements by jumping backwards and forwards over the coffin. Mr. Sowerberry and Bumble, being personal friends of the clerk, sat by the fire with him, and read the paper.

At length, after a lapse of something more than an hour, Mr. Bumble, and Sowerberry, and the clerk, were seen running towards the grave. Immediately afterwards, the clergyman appeared: putting on his surplice as he came along. Mr. Bumble then thrashed a boy or two, to keep up appearances; and the reverend gentleman, having read as much of the burial service as could be compressed into four minutes, gave his surplice to the clerk, and walked away again.

'Now, Bill!' said Sowerberry to the grave-digger. 'Fill up!'

It was no very difficult task, for the grave was so full, that the uppermost coffin was within a few feet of the surface. The grave-digger shovelled in the earth; stamped it loosely down with his feet: shouldered his spade; and walked off, followed by the boys, who murmured very loud complaints at the fun being over so soon.

'Come, my good fellow!' said Bumble, tapping the man on the back. 'They want to shut up the yard.'

The man who had never once moved, since he had taken his station by the grave side, started, raised his head, stared at the person who had addressed him, walked forward for a few paces; and fell down in a swoon.

The crazy old woman was too much occupied in bewailing the loss of her cloak (which the undertaker had taken off), to pay him any attention; so they threw a can of cold water over him; and when he came to, saw him safely out of the churchyard, locked the gate, and departed on their different ways.

'Well, Oliver,' said Sowerberry, as they walked home, 'how do you like it?'

'Pretty well, thank you, sir' replied Oliver, with considerable hesitation. 'Not very much, sir.'

'Ah, you'll get used to it in time, Oliver,' said Sowerberry. 'Nothing when you *are* used to it, my boy.'

Oliver wondered, in his own mind, whether it had taken a very long time to get Mr. Sowerberry used to it. But he thought it better not to ask the question; and walked back to the shop: thinking over all he had seen and heard.

CHAPTER VI

OLIVER, BEING GOADED BY THE TAUNTS OF NOAH, ROUSES INTO ACTION, AND RATHER ASTONISHES HIM

The month's trial over, Oliver was formally apprenticed. It was a nice sickly season just at this time. In commercial phrase, coffins were looking up; and, in the course of a few weeks, Oliver acquired a great deal of experience. The success of Mr. Sowerberry's ingenious speculation, exceeded even his most sanguine hopes. The oldest inhabitants recollected no period at which measles had been so prevalent, or so fatal to infant existence; and many were the mournful processions which little Oliver headed, in a hat-band reaching down to his knees, to the indescribable admiration and emotion of all the mothers in the town. As Oliver accompanied his master in most of his adult expeditions too, in order that he might acquire that equanimity of demeanour and full command of nerve which was essential to a finished undertaker, he had many opportunities of observing the beautiful resignation and fortitude with which some strong-minded people bear their trials and losses.

For instance; when Sowerberry had an order for the burial of some rich old lady or gentleman, who was surrounded by a great number of nephews and nieces, who had been perfectly inconsolable during the previous illness, and whose grief had been wholly irrepressible even on the most public occasions, they would be as happy among themselves as need be—quite cheerful and contented—conversing together with as much freedom and gaiety, as if nothing whatever had happened to disturb them. Husbands, too, bore the loss of their wives with the most heroic calmness. Wives, again, put on weeds for their husbands, as if, so far from grieving in the garb of sorrow, they had made up their minds to render it as becoming and attractive as possible. It was observable, too, that ladies and gentlemen who were in passions of anguish during the ceremony of interment, recovered almost as soon as they reached home, and became quite composed before the tea-drinking was over. All this was very pleasant and improving to see; and Oliver beheld it with great admiration.

That Oliver Twist was moved to resignation by the example of these good people, I cannot, although I am his biographer, undertake to affirm with any degree of confidence; but I can most distinctly say, that for many months he continued meekly to submit to the domination and ill-treatment of Noah Claypole: who used him far worse than before, now that his jealousy was roused by seeing the new boy promoted to the black stick and hatband, while he, the old one, remained stationary in the muffin-cap and leathers. Charlotte treated him ill, because Noah did; and Mrs. Sowerberry was his decided enemy, because Mr. Sowerberry was disposed to be his friend; so, between these three on one side, and a glut of funerals on the other, Oliver was not altogether as comfortable as the hungry pig was, when he was shut up, by mistake, in the grain department of a brewery.

And now, I come to a very important passage in Oliver's history; for I have to record an act, slight and unimportant perhaps in appearance, but which indirectly produced a material change in all his future prospects and proceedings.

One day, Oliver and Noah had descended into the kitchen at the usual dinner-hour, to banquet upon a small joint of mutton—a pound and a half of the worst end of the neck—when Charlotte being called out of the way, there ensued a brief interval of time, which Noah Claypole, being hungry and vicious, considered he could not possibly devote to a worthier purpose than aggravating and tantalising young Oliver Twist.

Intent upon this innocent amusement, Noah put his feet on the table-cloth; and pulled Oliver's hair; and twitched his ears; and expressed his opinion that he was a 'sneak'; and furthermore announced his intention of coming to see him hanged, whenever that desirable event should take place; and entered upon various topics of petty annoyance, like a malicious and ill-conditioned charity-boy as he was. But, making Oliver cry, Noah attempted to be more facetious still; and in his attempt, did what many sometimes do to this day, when they want to be funny. He got rather personal.

'Work'us,' said Noah, 'how's your mother?'

'She's dead,' replied Oliver; 'don't you say anything about her to me!'

Oliver's colour rose as he said this; he breathed quickly; and there was a curious working of the mouth and nostrils, which Mr. Claypole thought must be the immediate precursor of a violent fit of crying. Under this impression he returned to the charge.

'What did she die of, Work'us?' said Noah.

'Of a broken heart, some of our old nurses told me,' replied Oliver: more as if he were talking to himself, than answering Noah. 'I think I know what it must be to die of that!'

'Tol de rol lol lol, right fol lairy, Work'us,' said Noah, as a tear rolled down Oliver's cheek. 'What's set you a snivelling now?'

'Not *you*,' replied Oliver, sharply. 'There; that's enough. Don't say anything more to me about her; you'd better not!'

'Better not!' exclaimed Noah. 'Well! Better not! Work'us, don't be impudent. *Your* mother, too! She was a nice 'un she was. Oh, Lor!' And here, Noah nodded his head expressively; and curled up as much of his small red nose as muscular action could collect together, for the occasion.

'Yer know, Work'us,' continued Noah, emboldened by Oliver's silence, and speaking in a jeering tone of affected pity: of all tones the most annoying: 'Yer know, Work'us, it can't be helped now; and of course yer couldn't help it then; and I am very sorry for it; and I'm sure we all are, and pity yer very much. But yer must know, Work'us, yer mother was a regular right-down bad 'un.'

'What did you say?' inquired Oliver, looking up very quickly.

'A regular right-down bad 'un, Work'us,' replied Noah, coolly. 'And it's a great deal better, Work'us, that she died when she did, or else she'd have been hard labouring in Bridewell, or transported, or hung; which is more likely than either, isn't it?'

Crimson with fury, Oliver started up; overthrew the chair and table; seized Noah by the throat; shook him, in the violence of his rage, till his teeth chattered in his head; and collecting his whole force into one heavy blow, felled him to the ground.

A minute ago, the boy had looked the quiet child, mild, dejected creature that harsh treatment had made him. But his spirit was roused at last; the cruel insult to his dead mother had set his blood on fire. His breast heaved; his attitude was erect; his eye bright and vivid; his whole person changed, as he stood glaring over the cowardly tormentor who now lay crouching at his feet; and defied him with an energy he had never known before.

'He'll murder me!' blubbered Noah. 'Charlotte! missis! Here's the new boy a murdering of me! Help! help! Oliver's gone mad! Char—lotte!'

Noah's shouts were responded to, by a loud scream from Charlotte, and a louder from Mrs. Sowerberry; the former of whom rushed into the kitchen by a side-door, while the latter paused on the staircase till she was quite certain that it was consistent with the preservation of human life, to come further down.

'Oh, you little wretch!' screamed Charlotte: seizing Oliver with her utmost force, which was about equal to that of a moderately strong man in particularly good training. 'Oh, you little un-grate-ful, mur-de-rous, hor-rid villain!' And between every syllable, Charlotte gave Oliver a blow with all her might: accompanying it with a scream, for the benefit of society.

Charlotte's fist was by no means a light one; but, lest it should not be effectual in calming Oliver's wrath, Mrs. Sowerberry plunged into the kitchen, and assisted to hold him with one hand, while she scratched his face with the other. In this favourable position of affairs, Noah rose from the ground, and pommelled him behind.

This was rather too violent exercise to last long. When they were all wearied out, and could tear and beat no longer, they dragged Oliver, struggling and shouting, but nothing daunted, into the dust-cellar, and there locked him up. This being done, Mrs. Sowerberry sunk into a chair, and burst into tears.

'Bless her, she's going off!' said Charlotte. 'A glass of water, Noah, dear. Make haste!'

'Oh! Charlotte,' said Mrs. Sowerberry: speaking as well as she could, through a deficiency of breath, and a sufficiency of cold water, which Noah had poured over her head and shoulders. 'Oh! Charlotte, what a mercy we have not all been murdered in our beds!'

'Ah! mercy indeed, ma'am,' was the reply. I only hope this'll teach master not to have any more of these dreadful creatures, that are born to be murderers and robbers from their very cradle. Poor Noah! He was all but killed, ma'am, when I come in.'

'Poor fellow!' said Mrs. Sowerberry: looking piteously on the charity-boy.

Noah, whose top waistcoat-button might have been somewhere on a level with the crown of Oliver's head, rubbed his eyes with the inside of his wrists while this commiseration was bestowed upon him, and performed some affecting tears and sniffs.

'What's to be done!' exclaimed Mrs. Sowerberry. 'Your master's not at home; there's not a man in the house, and he'll kick that door down in ten minutes.' Oliver's vigorous plunges against the bit of timber in question, rendered this occurance highly probable.

'Dear, dear! I don't know, ma'am,' said Charlotte, 'unless we send for the police-officers.'

'Or the millingtary,' suggested Mr. Claypole.

'No, no,' said Mrs. Sowerberry: bethinking herself of Oliver's old friend. 'Run to Mr. Bumble, Noah, and tell him to come here directly, and not to lose a minute; never mind your cap! Make haste! You can hold a knife to that black eye, as you run along. It'll keep the swelling down.'

Noah stopped to make no reply, but started off at his fullest speed; and very much it astonished the people who were out walking, to see a charity-boy tearing through the streets pell-mell, with no cap on his head, and a clasp-knife at his eye.

CHAPTER VII

OLIVER CONTINUES REFRACTORY

Noah Claypole ran along the streets at his swiftest pace, and paused not once for breath, until he reached the workhouse-gate. Having rested here, for a minute or so, to collect a good burst of sobs and an imposing show of tears and terror, he knocked loudly at the wicket; and presented such a rueful face to the aged pauper who opened it, that even he, who saw nothing but rueful faces about him at the best of times, started back in astonishment.

'Why, what's the matter with the boy!' said the old pauper.

'Mr. Bumble! Mr. Bumble!' cried Noah, with well-affected dismay: and in tones so loud and agitated, that they not only caught the ear of Mr. Bumble himself, who happened to be hard by, but alarmed him so much that he rushed into the yard without his cocked hat,—which is a very curious and remarkable circumstance: as showing that even a beadle, acted upon a sudden and powerful impulse, may be afflicted with a momentary visitation of loss of self-possession, and forgetfulness of personal dignity.

'Oh, Mr. Bumble, sir!' said Noah: 'Oliver, sir,—Oliver has—'

'What? What?' interposed Mr. Bumble: with a gleam of pleasure in his metallic eyes. 'Not run away; he hasn't run away, has he, Noah?'

'No, sir, no. Not run away, sir, but he's turned wicious,' replied Noah. 'He tried to murder me, sir; and then he tried to murder Charlotte; and then missis. Oh! what dreadful pain it is!

Such agony, please, sir!' And here, Noah writhed and twisted his body into an extensive variety of eel-like positions; thereby giving Mr. Bumble to understand that, from the violent and sanguinary onset of Oliver Twist, he had sustained severe internal injury and damage, from which he was at that moment suffering the acutest torture.

When Noah saw that the intelligence he communicated perfectly paralysed Mr. Bumble, he imparted additional effect thereunto, by bewailing his dreadful wounds ten times louder than before; and when he observed a gentleman in a white waistcoat crossing the yard, he was more tragic in his lamentations than ever: rightly conceiving it highly expedient to attract the notice, and rouse the indignation, of the gentleman aforesaid.

The gentleman's notice was very soon attracted; for he had not walked three paces, when he turned angrily round, and inquired what that young cur was howling for, and why Mr. Bumble did not favour him with something which would render the series of vocular exclamations so designated, an involuntary process?

'It's a poor boy from the free-school, sir,' replied Mr. Bumble, 'who has been nearly murdered—all but murdered, sir,—by young Twist.'

'By Jove!' exclaimed the gentleman in the white waistcoat, stopping short. 'I knew it! I felt a strange presentiment from the very first, that that audacious young savage would come to be hung!'

'He has likewise attempted, sir, to murder the female servant,' said Mr. Bumble, with a face of ashy paleness.

'And his missis,' interposed Mr. Claypole.

'And his master, too, I think you said, Noah?' added Mr. Bumble.

'No! he's out, or he would have murdered him,' replied Noah. 'He said he wanted to.'

'Ah! Said he wanted to, did he, my boy?' inquired the gentleman in the white waistcoat.

'Yes, sir,' replied Noah. 'And please, sir, missis wants to know whether Mr. Bumble can spare time to step up there, directly, and flog him—'cause master's out.'

'Certainly, my boy; certainly,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat: smiling benignly, and patting Noah's head, which was about three inches higher than his own. 'You're a good boy—a very good boy. Here's a penny for you. Bumble, just step up to Sowerberry's with your cane, and see what's best to be done. Don't spare him, Bumble.'

'No, I will not, sir,' replied the beadle. And the cocked hat and cane having been, by this time, adjusted to their owner's satisfaction, Mr. Bumble and Noah Claypole betook themselves with all speed to the undertaker's shop.

Here the position of affairs had not at all improved. Sowerberry had not yet returned, and Oliver continued to kick, with undiminished vigour, at the cellar-door. The accounts of his ferocity as related by Mrs. Sowerberry and Charlotte, were of so startling a nature, that Mr. Bumble judged it prudent to parley, before opening the door. With this view he gave a kick at the outside, by way of prelude; and, then, applying his mouth to the keyhole, said, in a deep and impressive tone:

'Oliver!'

'Come; you let me out!' replied Oliver, from the inside.

'Do you know this here voice, Oliver?' said Mr. Bumble.

'Yes,' replied Oliver.

'Ain't you afraid of it, sir? Ain't you a-trembling while I speak, sir?' said Mr. Bumble.

'No!' replied Oliver, boldly.

An answer so different from the one he had expected to elicit, and was in the habit of receiving, staggered Mr. Bumble not a little. He stepped back from the keyhole; drew himself up to his full height; and looked from one to another of the three bystanders, in mute astonishment.

'Oh, you know, Mr. Bumble, he must be mad,' said Mrs. Sowerberry.

'No boy in half his senses could venture to speak so to you.'

'It's not Madness, ma'am,' replied Mr. Bumble, after a few moments of deep meditation. 'It's Meat.'

'What?' exclaimed Mrs. Sowerberry.

'Meat, ma'am, meat,' replied Bumble, with stern emphasis. 'You've over-fed him, ma'am. You've raised a artificial soul and spirit in him, ma'am unbecoming a person of his condition: as the board, Mrs. Sowerberry, who are practical philosophers, will tell you. What have paupers to do with soul or spirit? It's quite enough that we let 'em have live bodies. If you had kept the boy on gruel, ma'am, this would never have happened.'

'Dear, dear!' ejaculated Mrs. Sowerberry, piously raising her eyes to the kitchen ceiling: 'this comes of being liberal!'

The liberality of Mrs. Sowerberry to Oliver, had consisted of a profuse bestowal upon him of all the dirty odds and ends which nobody else would eat; so there was a great deal of meekness and self-devotion in her voluntarily remaining under Mr. Bumble's heavy accusation. Of which, to do her justice, she was wholly innocent, in thought, word, or deed.

'Ah!' said Mr. Bumble, when the lady brought her eyes down to earth again; 'the only thing that can be done now, that I know of, is to leave him in the cellar for a day or so, till he's a little starved down; and then to take him out, and keep him on gruel all through the apprenticeship. He comes of a bad family. Excitable natures, Mrs. Sowerberry! Both the nurse and doctor said, that that mother of his made her way here, against difficulties and pain that would have killed any well-disposed woman, weeks before.'

At this point of Mr. Bumble's discourse, Oliver, just hearing enough to know that some allusion was being made to his mother, recommenced kicking, with a violence that rendered every other sound inaudible. Sowerberry returned at this juncture. Oliver's offence having been explained to him, with such exaggerations as the ladies thought best calculated to rouse his ire, he unlocked the cellar-door in a twinkling, and dragged his rebellious apprentice out, by the collar.

Oliver's clothes had been torn in the beating he had received; his face was bruised and scratched; and his hair scattered over his forehead. The angry flush had not disappeared, however; and when he was pulled out of his prison, he scowled boldly on Noah, and looked quite undismayed.

'Now, you are a nice young fellow, ain't you?' said Sowerberry; giving Oliver a shake, and a box on the ear.

'He called my mother names,' replied Oliver.

'Well, and what if he did, you little ungrateful wretch?' said Mrs. Sowerberry. 'She deserved what he said, and worse.'

'She didn't' said Oliver.

'She did,' said Mrs. Sowerberry.

'It's a lie!' said Oliver.

Mrs. Sowerberry burst into a flood of tears.

This flood of tears left Mr. Sowerberry no alternative. If he had hesitated for one instant to punish Oliver most severely, it must be quite clear to every experienced reader that he would have been, according to all precedents in disputes of matrimony established, a brute, an unnatural husband, an insulting creature, a base imitation of a man, and various other agreeable characters too numerous for recital within the limits of this chapter. To do him justice, he was, as far as his power went—it was not very extensive—kindly disposed towards the boy; perhaps, because it was his interest to be so; perhaps, because his wife disliked him. The flood of tears, however, left him no resource; so he at once gave him a drubbing, which satisfied even Mrs. Sowerberry herself, and rendered Mr. Bumble's subsequent application of the parochial cane, rather unnecessary. For the rest of the day, he was shut up in the back kitchen, in company with a pump and a slice of bread; and at night, Mrs. Sowerberry, after making various remarks outside the door, by no means complimentary to the memory of his mother, looked into the room, and, amidst the jeers and pointings of Noah and Charlotte, ordered him upstairs to his dismal bed.

It was not until he was left alone in the silence and stillness of the gloomy workshop of the undertaker, that Oliver gave way to the feelings which the day's treatment may be supposed likely to have awakened in a mere child. He had listened to their taunts with a look of contempt; he had borne the lash without a cry: for he felt that pride swelling in his heart which would have kept down a shriek to the last, though they had roasted him alive. But now, when there were none to see or hear him, he fell upon his knees on the floor; and, hiding his face in his hands, wept such tears as, God send for the credit of our nature, few so young may ever have cause to pour out before him!

For a long time, Oliver remained motionless in this attitude. The candle was burning low in the socket when he rose to his feet. Having gazed cautiously round him, and listened intently, he gently undid the fastenings of the door, and looked abroad.

It was a cold, dark night. The stars seemed, to the boy's eyes, farther from the earth than he had ever seen them before; there was no wind; and the sombre shadows thrown by the trees upon the ground, looked sepulchral and death-like, from being so still. He softly reclosed the door. Having availed himself of the expiring light of the candle to tie up in a handkerchief the few articles of wearing apparel he had, sat himself down upon a bench, to wait for morning.

With the first ray of light that struggled through the crevices in the shutters, Oliver arose, and again unbarred the door. One timid look around—one moment's pause of hesitation—he had closed it behind him, and was in the open street.

He looked to the right and to the left, uncertain whither to fly.

He remembered to have seen the waggons, as they went out, toiling up the hill. He took the same route; and arriving at a footpath across the fields: which he knew, after some distance, led out again into the road; struck into it, and walked quickly on.

Along this same footpath, Oliver well-remembered he had trotted beside Mr. Bumble, when he first carried him to the workhouse from the farm. His way lay directly in front of the cottage. His heart beat quickly when he bethought himself of this; and he half resolved to turn back. He had come a long way though, and should lose a great deal of time by doing so. Besides, it was so early that there was very little fear of his being seen; so he walked on.

He reached the house. There was no appearance of its inmates stirring at that early hour. Oliver stopped, and peeped into the garden. A child was weeding one of the little beds; as he stopped, he raised his pale face and disclosed the features of one of his former companions. Oliver felt glad to see him, before he went; for, though younger than himself, he had been his little friend and playmate. They had been beaten, and starved, and shut up together, many and many a time.

'Hush, Dick!' said Oliver, as the boy ran to the gate, and thrust his thin arm between the rails to greet him. 'Is any one up?'

'Nobody but me,' replied the child.

'You musn't say you saw me, Dick,' said Oliver. 'I am running away. They beat and ill-use me, Dick; and I am going to seek my fortune, some long way off. I don't know where. How pale you are!'

'I heard the doctor tell them I was dying,' replied the child with a faint smile. 'I am very glad to see you, dear; but don't stop, don't stop!'

'Yes, yes, I will, to say good-b'ye to you,' replied Oliver. 'I shall see you again, Dick. I know I shall! You will be well and happy!'

'I hope so,' replied the child. 'After I am dead, but not before. I know the doctor must be right, Oliver, because I dream so much of Heaven, and Angels, and kind faces that I never see when I am awake. Kiss me,' said the child, climbing up the low gate, and flinging his little arms round Oliver's neck. 'Good-b'ye, dear! God bless you!'

The blessing was from a young child's lips, but it was the first that Oliver had ever heard invoked upon his head; and through the struggles and sufferings, and troubles and changes, of his after life, he never once forgot it.

CHAPTER VIII

OLIVER WALKS TO LONDON. HE ENCOUNTERS ON THE ROAD A

STRANGE SORT OF YOUNG GENTLEMAN

Oliver reached the stile at which the by-path terminated; and once more gained the high-road. It was eight o'clock now. Though he was nearly five miles away from the town, he ran, and hid behind the hedges, by turns, till noon: fearing that he might be pursued and overtaken. Then he sat down to rest by the side of the milestone, and began to think, for the first time, where he had better go and try to live.

The stone by which he was seated, bore, in large characters, an intimation that it was just seventy miles from that spot to London. The name awakened a new train of ideas in the boy's mind.

London!—that great place!—nobody—not even Mr. Bumble—could ever find him there! He had often heard the old men in the workhouse, too, say that no lad of spirit need want in London; and that there were ways of living in that vast city, which those who had been bred up in country parts had no idea of. It was the very place for a homeless boy, who must die in the streets unless some one helped him. As these things passed through his thoughts, he jumped upon his feet, and again walked forward.

He had diminished the distance between himself and London by full four miles more, before he recollected how much he must undergo ere he could hope to reach his place of destination. As this consideration forced itself upon him, he slackened his pace a little, and meditated upon his means of getting there. He had a crust of bread, a coarse shirt, and two pairs of stockings, in his bundle. He had a penny too—a gift of Sowerberry's after some funeral in which he had acquitted himself more than ordinarily well—in his pocket. 'A clean shirt,' thought Oliver, 'is a very comfortable thing; and so are two pairs of darned stockings; and so is a penny; but they are small helps to a sixty-five miles' walk in winter time.' But Oliver's thoughts, like those of most other people, although they were extremely ready and active to point out his difficulties, were wholly at a loss to suggest any feasible mode of surmounting them; so, after a good deal of thinking to no particular purpose, he changed his little bundle over to the other shoulder, and trudged on.

Oliver walked twenty miles that day; and all that time tasted nothing but the crust of dry bread, and a few draughts of water, which he begged at the cottage-doors by the road-side. When the night came, he turned into a meadow; and, creeping close under a hay-rick, determined to lie there, till morning. He felt frightened at first, for the wind moaned dismally over the empty fields: and he was cold and hungry, and more alone than he had ever felt before. Being very tired with his walk, however, he soon fell asleep and forgot his troubles.

He felt cold and stiff, when he got up next morning, and so hungry that he was obliged to exchange the penny for a small loaf, in the very first village through which he passed. He had walked no more than twelve miles, when night closed in again. His feet were sore, and his legs so weak that they trembled beneath him. Another night passed in the bleak damp air, made him worse; when he set forward on his journey next morning he could hardly crawl along.

He waited at the bottom of a steep hill till a stage-coach came up, and then begged of the outside passengers; but there were very few who took any notice of him: and even those told him to wait till they got to the top of the hill, and then let them see how far he could run for a halfpenny. Poor Oliver tried to keep up with the coach a little way, but was unable to do it, by reason of his fatigue and sore feet. When the outsides saw this, they put their halfpence back into their pockets again, declaring that he was an idle young dog, and didn't deserve anything; and the coach rattled away and left only a cloud of dust behind.

In some villages, large painted boards were fixed up: warning all persons who begged within the district, that they would be sent to jail. This frightened Oliver very much, and made him glad to get out of those villages with all possible expedition. In others, he would stand about the inn-yards, and look mournfully at every one who passed: a proceeding which generally terminated in the landlady's ordering one of the post-boys who were lounging about, to drive that strange boy out of the place, for she was sure he had come to steal something. If he begged at a farmer's house, ten to one but they threatened to set the dog on him; and when he showed his nose in a shop, they talked about the beadle—which brought Oliver's heart into his mouth,—very often the only thing he had there, for many hours together.

In fact, if it had not been for a good-hearted turnpike-man, and a benevolent old lady, Oliver's troubles would have been shortened by the very same process which had put an end to his mother's; in other words, he would most assuredly have fallen dead upon the king's highway. But the turnpike-man gave him a meal of bread and cheese; and the old lady, who had a shipwrecked grandson wandering barefoot in some distant part of the earth, took pity upon the poor orphan, and gave him what little she could afford—and more—with such kind and gentle words, and such tears of sympathy and compassion, that they sank deeper into Oliver's soul, than all the sufferings he had ever undergone.

Early on the seventh morning after he had left his native place, Oliver limped slowly into the little town of Barnet. The window-shutters were closed; the street was empty; not a soul had awakened to the business of the day. The sun was rising in all its splendid beauty; but the light only served to show the boy his own lonesomeness and desolation, as he sat, with bleeding feet and covered with dust, upon a door-step.

By degrees, the shutters were opened; the window-blinds were drawn up; and people began passing to and fro. Some few stopped to gaze at Oliver for a moment or two, or turned round to stare at him as they hurried by; but none relieved him, or troubled themselves to inquire how he came there. He had no heart to beg. And there he sat.

He had been crouching on the step for some time: wondering at the great number of public-houses (every other house in Barnet was a tavern, large or small), gazing listlessly at the coaches as they passed through, and thinking how strange it seemed that they could do, with ease, in a few hours, what it had taken him a whole week of courage and determination beyond his years to accomplish: when he was roused by observing that a boy, who had passed him carelessly some minutes before, had returned, and was now surveying him most earnestly from the opposite side of the way. He took little heed of this at first; but the boy remained in the same attitude of close observation so long, that Oliver raised his head, and returned his steady look. Upon this, the boy crossed over; and walking close up to Oliver, said,

'Hullo, my covey! What's the row?'

The boy who addressed this inquiry to the young wayfarer, was about his own age: but one of the queerest looking boys that Oliver had even seen. He was a snub-nosed, flat-browed, common-faced boy enough; and as dirty a juvenile as one would wish to see; but he had about him all the airs and manners of a man. He was short of his age: with rather bow-legs, and little, sharp, ugly eyes. His hat was stuck on the top of his head so lightly, that it threatened to fall off every moment—and would have done so, very often, if the wearer had not had a knack of every now and then giving his head a sudden twitch, which brought it back to its old place again. He wore a man's coat, which reached nearly to his heels. He had turned the cuffs back, half-way up his arm, to get his hands out of the sleeves: apparently with the ultimate view of thrusting them into the pockets of his corduroy trousers; for there he kept them. He was, altogether, as roystering and swaggering a young gentleman as ever stood four feet six, or something less, in the bluchers.

'Hullo, my covey! What's the row?' said this strange young gentleman to Oliver.

'I am very hungry and tired,' replied Oliver: the tears standing in his eyes as he spoke. 'I have walked a long way. I have been walking these seven days.'

'Walking for sivin days!' said the young gentleman. 'Oh, I see. Beak's order, eh? But,' he added, noticing Oliver's look of surprise, 'I suppose you don't know what a beak is, my flash com-pan-i-on.'

Oliver mildly replied, that he had always heard a bird's mouth described by the term in question.

'My eyes, how green!' exclaimed the young gentleman. 'Why, a beak's a madgst'rate; and when you walk by a beak's order, it's not straight forerd, but always agoing up, and niver a coming down agin. Was you never on the mill?'

'What mill?' inquired Oliver.

'What mill! Why, *the* mill—the mill as takes up so little room that it'll work inside a Stone Jug; and always goes better when the wind's low with people, than when it's high; acos then they can't get workmen. But come,' said the young gentleman; 'you want grub, and you shall have it. I'm at low-water-mark myself—only one bob and a magpie; but, as far as it goes, I'll fork out and stump. Up with you on your pins. There! Now then! 'Morrice!'

Assisting Oliver to rise, the young gentleman took him to an adjacent chandler's shop, where he purchased a sufficiency of ready-dressed ham and a half-quartern loaf, or, as he himself expressed it, 'a fourpenny bran!' the ham being kept clean and preserved from dust, by the ingenious expedient of making a hole in the loaf by pulling out a portion of the crumb, and stuffing it therein. Taking the bread under his arm, the young gentlman turned into a small public-house, and led the way to a tap-room in the rear of the premises. Here, a pot of beer was brought in, by direction of the mysterious youth; and Oliver, falling to, at his new friend's bidding, made a long and hearty meal, during the progress of which the strange boy eyed him from time to time with great attention.

'Going to London?' said the strange boy, when Oliver had at length concluded.

'Yes.'

'Got any lodgings?'

'No.'

'Money?'

'No.'

The strange boy whistled; and put his arms into his pockets, as far as the big coat-sleeves would let them go.

'Do you live in London?' inquired Oliver.

'Yes. I do, when I'm at home,' replied the boy. 'I suppose you want some place to sleep in to-night, don't you?'

'I do, indeed,' answered Oliver. 'I have not slept under a roof since I left the country.'

'Don't fret your eyelids on that score,' said the young gentleman. 'I've got to be in London to-night; and I know a 'spectable old gentleman as lives there, wot'll give you lodgings for nothink, and never ask for the change—that is, if any genelman he knows interduces you. And don't he know me? Oh, no! Not in the least! By no means. Certainly not!'

The young gentleman smiled, as if to intimate that the latter fragments of discourse were playfully ironical; and finished the beer as he did so.

This unexpected offer of shelter was too tempting to be resisted; especially as it was immediately followed up, by the assurance that the old gentleman referred to, would doubtless provide Oliver with a comfortable place, without loss of time. This led to a more friendly and confidential dialogue; from which Oliver discovered that his friend's name was Jack Dawkins, and that he was a peculiar pet and protege of the elderly gentleman before mentioned.

Mr. Dawkin's appearance did not say a vast deal in favour of the comforts which his patron's interest obtained for those whom he took under his protection; but, as he had a rather flightly and dissolute mode of conversing, and furthermore avowed that among his intimate friends he was better known by the sobriquet of 'The Artful Dodger,' Oliver concluded that, being of a dissipated and careless turn, the moral precepts of his benefactor had hitherto been thrown away upon him. Under this impression, he secretly resolved to cultivate the good opinion of the old gentleman as quickly as possible; and, if he found the Dodger incorrigible, as he more than half suspected he should, to decline the honour of his farther acquaintance.

As John Dawkins objected to their entering London before nightfall, it was nearly eleven o'clock when they reached the turnpike at Islington. They crossed from the Angel into St. John's Road; struck down the small street which terminates at Sadler's Wells Theatre; through Exmouth Street and Coppice Row; down the little court by the side of the workhouse; across the classic ground which once bore the name of Hockley-in-the-Hole; thence into Little Saffron Hill; and so into Saffron Hill the Great: along which the Dodger scudded at a rapid pace, directing Oliver to follow close at his heels.

Although Oliver had enough to occupy his attention in keeping sight of his leader, he could not help bestowing a few hasty glances on either side of the way, as he passed along. A dirtier or more wretched place he had never seen. The street was very narrow and muddy, and the air was impregnated with filthy odours.

There were a good many small shops; but the only stock in trade appeared to be heaps of children, who, even at that time of night, were crawling in and out at the doors, or screaming from the inside. The sole places that seemed to prosper amid the general blight of the place, were the public-houses; and in them, the lowest orders of Irish were wrangling with might and main. Covered ways and yards, which here and there diverged from the main street, disclosed little knots of houses, where drunken men and women were positively wallowing in filth; and from several of the door-ways, great ill-looking fellows were cautiously emerging, bound, to all appearance, on no very well-disposed or harmless errands.

Oliver was just considering whether he hadn't better run away, when they reached the bottom of the hill. His conductor, catching him by the arm, pushed open the door of a house near Field Lane; and drawing him into the passage, closed it behind them.

'Now, then!' cried a voice from below, in reply to a whistle from the Dodger.

'Plummy and slam!' was the reply.

This seemed to be some watchword or signal that all was right; for the light of a feeble candle gleamed on the wall at the remote end of the passage; and a man's face peeped out, from where a balustrade of the old kitchen staircase had been broken away.

'There's two on you,' said the man, thrusting the candle farther out, and shielding his eyes with his hand. 'Who's the t'other one?'

'A new pal,' replied Jack Dawkins, pulling Oliver forward.

'Where did he come from?'

'Greenland. Is Fagin upstairs?'

'Yes, he's a sortin' the wipes. Up with you!' The candle was drawn back, and the face disappeared.

Oliver, groping his way with one hand, and having the other firmly grasped by his companion, ascended with much difficulty the dark and broken stairs: which his conductor mounted with an ease and expedition that showed he was well acquainted with them.

He threw open the door of a back-room, and drew Oliver in after him.

The walls and ceiling of the room were perfectly black with age and dirt. There was a deal table before the fire: upon which were a candle, stuck in a ginger-beer bottle, two or three pewter pots, a loaf and butter, and a plate. In a frying-pan, which was on the fire, and which was secured to the mantelshelf by a string, some sausages were cooking; and standing over them, with a toasting-fork in his hand, was a very old shrivelled Jew, whose villainous-looking and repulsive face was obscured by a quantity of matted red hair. He was dressed in a greasy flannel gown, with his throat bare; and seemed to be dividing his attention between the frying-pan and the clothes-horse, over which a great number of silk handkerchiefs were hanging. Several rough beds made of old sacks, were huddled side by side on the floor. Seated round the table were four or five boys, none older than the Dodger, smoking long clay pipes, and drinking spirits with the air of middle-aged men. These all crowded about their associate as he whispered a few words to the Jew; and then turned round and grinned at Oliver. So did the Jew himself, toasting-fork in hand.

'This is him, Fagin,' said Jack Dawkins;'my friend Oliver Twist.'

The Jew grinned; and, making a low obeisance to Oliver, took him by the hand, and hoped he should have the honour of his intimate acquaintance. Upon this, the young gentleman with the pipes came round him, and shook both his hands very hard—especially the one in which he held his little bundle. One young gentleman was very anxious to hang up his cap for him; and another was so obliging as to put his hands in his pockets, in order that, as he was very tired, he might not have the trouble of emptying them, himself, when he went to bed. These civilities would probably be extended much farther, but for a liberal exercise of the Jew's toasting-fork on the heads and shoulders of the affectionate youths who offered them.

'We are very glad to see you, Oliver, very,' said the Jew. 'Dodger, take off the sausages; and draw a tub near the fire for Oliver. Ah, you're a-staring at the pocket-handkerchiefs! eh, my dear. There are a good many of 'em, ain't there? We've just looked 'em out, ready for the wash; that's all, Oliver; that's all. Ha! ha! ha!'

The latter part of this speech, was hailed by a boisterous shout from all the hopeful pupils of the merry old gentleman. In the midst of which they went to supper.

Oliver ate his share, and the Jew then mixed him a glass of hot gin-and-water: telling him he must drink it off directly, because another gentleman wanted the tumbler. Oliver did as he was desired. Immediately afterwards he felt himself gently lifted on to one of the sacks; and then he sunk into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER IX

CONTAINING FURTHER PARTICULARS CONCERNING THE PLEASANT OLD GENTLEMAN, AND HIS HOPEFUL PUPILS

It was late next morning when Oliver awoke, from a sound, long sleep. There was no other person in the room but the old Jew, who was boiling some coffee in a saucepan for breakfast, and whistling softly to himself as he stirred it round and round, with an iron spoon. He would stop every now and then to listen when there was the least noise below: and when he had satisfied himself, he would go on whistling and stirring again, as before.

Although Oliver had roused himself from sleep, he was not thoroughly awake. There is a drowsy state, between sleeping and waking, when you dream more in five minutes with your eyes half open, and yourself half conscious of everything that is passing around you, than you would in five nights with your eyes fast closed, and your senses wrapt in perfect unconsciousness. At such time, a mortal knows just enough of what his mind is doing, to form some glimmering conception of its mighty powers, its bounding from earth and spurning time and space, when freed from the restraint of its corporeal associate.

Oliver was precisely in this condition. He saw the Jew with his half-closed eyes; heard his low whistling; and recognised the sound of the spoon grating against the saucepan's sides: and yet the self-same senses were mentally engaged, at the same time, in busy action with almost everybody he had ever known.

When the coffee was done, the Jew drew the saucepan to the hob. Standing, then in an irresolute attitude for a few minutes, as if he did not well know how to employ himself, he turned round and looked at Oliver, and called him by his name. He did not answer, and was to all appearances asleep.

After satisfying himself upon this head, the Jew stepped gently to the door: which he fastened. He then drew forth: as it seemed to Oliver, from some trap in the floor: a small box, which he placed carefully on the table. His eyes glistened as he raised the lid, and looked in. Dragging an old chair to the table, he sat down; and took from it a magnificent gold watch, sparkling with jewels.

'Aha!' said the Jew, shrugging up his shoulders, and distorting every feature with a hideous grin. 'Clever dogs! Clever dogs! Staunch to the last! Never told the old parson where they were. Never poached upon old Fagin! And why should they? It wouldn't have loosened the knot, or kept the drop up, a minute longer. No, no, no! Fine fellows! Fine fellows!'

With these, and other muttered reflections of the like nature, the Jew once more deposited the watch in its place of safety. At least half a dozen more were severally drawn forth from the same box, and surveyed with equal pleasure; besides rings, brooches, bracelets, and other articles of jewellery, of such magnificent materials, and costly workmanship, that Oliver had no idea, even of their names.

Having replaced these trinkets, the Jew took out another: so small that it lay in the palm of his hand. There seemed to be some very minute inscription on it; for the Jew laid it flat upon the table, and shading it with his hand, pored over it, long and earnestly. At length he put it down, as if despairing of success; and, leaning back in his chair, muttered:

'What a fine thing capital punishment is! Dead men never repent; dead men never bring awkward stories to light. Ah, it's a fine thing for the trade! Five of 'em strung up in a row, and none left to play booty, or turn white-livered!'

As the Jew uttered these words, his bright dark eyes, which had been staring vacantly before him, fell on Oliver's face; the boy's eyes were fixed on his in mute curiousity; and although the recognition was only for an instant—for the briefest space of time that can possibly be conceived—it was enough to show the old man that he had been observed.

He closed the lid of the box with a loud crash; and, laying his hand on a bread knife which was on the table, started furiously up. He trembled very much though; for, even in his terror, Oliver could see that the knife quivered in the air.

'What's that?' said the Jew. 'What do you watch me for? Why are you awake? What have you seen? Speak out, boy! Quick—quick! for your life.

'I wasn't able to sleep any longer, sir,' replied Oliver, meekly. 'I am very sorry if I have disturbed you, sir.'

'You were not awake an hour ago?' said the Jew, scowling fiercely on the boy.

'No! No, indeed!' replied Oliver.

'Are you sure?' cried the Jew: with a still fiercer look than before: and a threatening attitude.

'Upon my word I was not, sir,' replied Oliver, earnestly. 'I was not, indeed, sir.'

'Tush, tush, my dear!' said the Jew, abruptly resuming his old manner, and playing with the knife a little, before he laid it down; as if to induce the belief that he had caught it up, in mere sport. 'Of course I know that, my dear. I only tried to frighten you. You're a brave boy. Ha! ha! you're a brave boy, Oliver.' The Jew rubbed his hands with a chuckle, but glanced uneasily at the box, notwithstanding.

'Did you see any of these pretty things, my dear?' said the Jew, laying his hand upon it after a short pause.

'Yes, sir,' replied Oliver.

'Ah!' said the Jew, turning rather pale. 'They—they're mine, Oliver; my little property. All I have to live upon, in my old age. The folks call me a miser, my dear. Only a miser; that's all.'

Oliver thought the old gentleman must be a decided miser to live in such a dirty place, with so many watches; but, thinking that perhaps his fondness for the Dodger and the other boys, cost him a good deal of money, he only cast a deferential look at the Jew, and asked if he might get up.

'Certainly, my dear, certainly,' replied the old gentleman. 'Stay. There's a pitcher of water in the corner by the door. Bring it here; and I'll give you a basin to wash in, my dear.'

Oliver got up; walked across the room; and stooped for an instant to raise the pitcher. When he turned his head, the box was gone.

He had scarcely washed himself, and made everything tidy, by emptying the basin out of the window, agreeably to the Jew's directions, when the Dodger returned: accompanied by a very sprightly young friend, whom Oliver had seen smoking on the previous night, and who was now formally introduced to him as Charley Bates. The four sat down, to breakfast, on the coffee, and some hot rolls and ham which the Dodger had brought home in the crown of his hat.

'Well,' said the Jew, glancing slyly at Oliver, and addressing himself to the Dodger, 'I hope you've been at work this morning, my dears?'

'Hard,' replied the Dodger.

'As nails,' added Charley Bates.

'Good boys, good boys!' said the Jew. 'What have you got, Dodger?'

'A couple of pocket-books,' replied that young gentlman.

'Lined?' inquired the Jew, with eagerness.

'Pretty well,' replied the Dodger, producing two pocket-books; one green, and the other red.

'Not so heavy as they might be,' said the Jew, after looking at the insides carefully; 'but very neat and nicely made. Ingenious workman, ain't he, Oliver?'

'Very indeed, sir,' said Oliver. At which Mr. Charles Bates laughed uproariously; very much to the amazement of Oliver, who saw nothing to laugh at, in anything that had passed.

'And what have you got, my dear?' said Fagin to Charley Bates.

'Wipes,' replied Master Bates; at the same time producing four pocket-handkerchiefs.

'Well,' said the Jew, inspecting them closely; 'they're very good ones, very. You haven't marked them well, though, Charley; so the marks shall be picked out with a needle, and we'll teach Oliver how to do it. Shall us, Oliver, eh? Ha! ha! ha!'

'If you please, sir,' said Oliver.

'You'd like to be able to make pocket-handkerchiefs as easy as Charley Bates, wouldn't you, my dear?' said the Jew.

'Very much, indeed, if you'll teach me, sir,' replied Oliver.

Master Bates saw something so exquisitely ludicrous in this reply, that he burst into another laugh; which laugh, meeting the coffee he was drinking, and carrying it down some wrong channel, very nearly terminated in his premature suffocation.

'He is so jolly green!' said Charley when he recovered, as an apology to the company for his unpolite behaviour.

The Dodger said nothing, but he smoothed Oliver's hair over his eyes, and said he'd know better, by and by; upon which the old gentleman, observing Oliver's colour mounting, changed the subject by asking whether there had been much of a crowd at the execution that morning? This made him wonder more and more; for it was plain from the replies of the two boys that they had both been there; and Oliver naturally wondered how they could possibly have found time to be so very industrious.

When the breakfast was cleared away; the merry old gentlman and the two boys played at a very curious and uncommon game, which was performed in this way. The merry old gentleman, placing a snuff-box in one pocket of his trousers, a note-case in the other, and a watch in his waistcoat pocket, with a guard-chain round his neck, and sticking a mock diamond pin in his shirt: buttoned his coat tight round him, and putting his spectacle-case and handkerchief in his pockets, trotted up and down the room with a stick, in imitation of the manner in which old gentlemen walk about the streets any hour in the day. Sometimes he stopped at the fire-place, and sometimes at the door, making believe that he was staring with all his might into shop-windows. At such times, he would look constantly round him, for fear of thieves, and would keep slapping all his pockets in turn, to see that he hadn't lost anything, in such a very funny and natural manner, that Oliver laughed till the tears ran down his face. All this time, the two boys followed him closely about: getting out of his sight, so nimbly, every time he turned round, that it was impossible to follow their motions. At last, the Dodger trod upon his toes, or ran upon his boot accidently, while Charley Bates stumbled up against him behind; and in that one moment they took from him, with the most extraordinary rapidity, snuff-box, note-case, watch-guard, chain, shirt-pin, pocket-handkerchief, even the spectacle-case. If the old gentlman felt a hand in any one of his pockets, he cried out where it was; and then the game began all over again.

When this game had been played a great many times, a couple of young ladies called to see the young gentleman; one of whom was named Bet, and the other Nancy. They wore a good deal of hair, not very neatly turned up behind, and were rather untidy about the shoes and stockings. They were not exactly pretty, perhaps; but they had a great deal of colour in their faces, and looked quite stout and hearty. Being remarkably free and agreeable in their manners, Oliver thought them very nice girls indeed. As there is no doubt they were.

The visitors stopped a long time. Spirits were produced, in consequence of one of the young ladies complaining of a coldness in her inside; and the conversation took a very convivial and improving turn. At length, Charley Bates expressed his opinion that it was time to pad the hoof. This, it occurred to Oliver, must be French for going out; for directly afterwards, the Dodger, and Charley, and the two young ladies, went away together, having been kindly furnished by the amiable old Jew with money to spend.

'There, my dear,' said Fagin. 'That's a pleasant life, isn't it? They have gone out for the day.'

'Have they done work, sir?' inquired Oliver.

'Yes,' said the Jew; 'that is, unless they should unexpectedly come across any, when they are out; and they won't neglect it, if they do, my dear, depend upon it. Make 'em your models, my dear. Make 'em your models,' tapping the fire-shovel on the hearth to add force to his words; 'do everything they bid you, and take their advice in all matters—especially the Dodger's, my dear. He'll be a great man himself, and will make you one too, if you take pattern by him.—Is my handkerchief hanging out of my pocket, my dear?' said the Jew, stopping short.

'Yes, sir,' said Oliver.

'See if you can take it out, without my feeling it; as you saw them do, when we were at play this morning.'

Oliver held up the bottom of the pocket with one hand, as he had seen the Dodger hold it, and drew the handkerchief lightly out of it with the other.

'Is it gone?' cried the Jew.

'Here it is, sir,' said Oliver, showing it in his hand.

'You're a clever boy, my dear,' said the playful old gentleman, patting Oliver on the head approvingly. 'I never saw a sharper lad. Here's a shilling for you. If you go on, in this way, you'll be the greatest man of the time. And now come here, and I'll show you how to take the marks out of the handkerchiefs.'

Oliver wondered what picking the old gentleman's pocket in play, had to do with his chances of being a great man. But, thinking that the Jew, being so much his senior, must know best, he followed him quietly to the table, and was soon deeply involved in his new study.

CHAPTER X

OLIVER BECOMES BETTER ACQUAINTED WITH THE CHARACTERS OF HIS NEW ASSOCIATES; AND PURCHASES EXPERIENCE AT A HIGH PRICE. BEING A SHORT, BUT VERY IMPORTANT CHAPTER, IN THIS HISTORY

For many days, Oliver remained in the Jew's room, picking the marks out of the pocket-handkerchief, (of which a great number were brought home,) and sometimes taking part in the game already described: which the two boys and the Jew played, regularly, every morning. At length, he began to languish for fresh air, and took many occasions of earnestly entreating the old gentleman to allow him to go out to work with his two companions.

Oliver was rendered the more anxious to be actively employed, by what he had seen of the stern morality of the old gentleman's character. Whenever the Dodger or Charley Bates came home at night, empty-handed, he would expatiate with great vehemence on the misery of idle and lazy habits; and would enforce upon them the necessity of an active life, by sending them supperless to bed. On one occasion, indeed, he even went so far as to knock them both down a flight of stairs; but this was carrying out his virtuous precepts to an unusual extent.

At length, one morning, Oliver obtained the permission he had so eagerly sought. There had been no handkerchiefs to work upon, for two or three days, and the dinners had been rather meagre. Perhaps these were reasons for the old gentleman's giving his assent; but, whether they were or no, he told Oliver he might go, and placed him under the joint guardianship of Charley Bates, and his friend the Dodger.

The three boys sallied out; the Dodger with his coat-sleeves tucked up, and his hat cocked, as usual; Master Bates sauntering along with his hands in his pockets; and Oliver between them, wondering where they were going, and what branch of manufacture he would be instructed in, first.

The pace at which they went, was such a very lazy, ill-looking saunter, that Oliver soon began to think his companions were going to deceive the old gentleman, by not going to work at all. The Dodger had a vicious propensity, too, of pulling the caps from the heads of small boys and tossing them down areas; while Charley Bates exhibited some very loose notions concerning the rights of property, by pilfering divers apples and onions from the stalls at the kennel sides, and thrusting them into pockets which were so surprisingly capacious, that they seemed to undermine his whole suit of clothes in every direction. These things looked so bad, that Oliver was on the point of declaring his intention of seeking his way back, in the best way he could; when his thoughts were suddenly directed into another channel, by a very mysterious change of behaviour on the part of the Dodger.

They were just emerging from a narrow court not far from the open square in Clerkenwell, which is yet called, by some strange perversion of terms, 'The Green': when the Dodger made a sudden stop; and, laying his finger on his lip, drew his companions back again, with the greatest caution and circumspection.

'What's the matter?' demanded Oliver.

'Hush!' replied the Dodger. 'Do you see that old cove at the book-stall?'

'The old gentleman over the way?' said Oliver. 'Yes, I see him.'

'He'll do,' said the Doger.

'A prime plant,' observed Master Charley Bates.

Oliver looked from one to the other, with the greatest surprise; but he was not permitted to make any inquiries; for the two boys walked stealthily across the road, and slunk close behind the old gentleman towards whom his attention had been directed. Oliver walked a few paces after them; and, not knowing whether to advance or retire, stood looking on in silent amazement.

The old gentleman was a very respectable-looking personage, with a powdered head and gold spectacles. He was dressed in a bottle-green coat with a black velvet collar; wore white trousers; and carried a smart bamboo cane under his arm. He had taken up a book from the stall, and there he stood, reading away, as hard as if he were in his elbow-chair, in his own study. It is very possible that he fancied himself there, indeed; for it was plain, from his abstraction, that he saw not the book-stall, nor the street, nor the boys, nor, in short, anything but the book itself: which he was reading straight through: turning over the leaf when he got to the bottom of a page, beginning at the top line of the next one, and going regularly on, with the greatest interest and eagerness.

What was Oliver's horror and alarm as he stood a few paces off, looking on with his eyelids as wide open as they would possibly go, to see the Dodger plunge his hand into the old gentleman's pocket, and draw from thence a handkerchief! To see him hand the same to Charley Bates; and finally to behold them, both running away round the corner at full speed!

In an instant the whole mystery of the hankerchiefs, and the watches, and the jewels, and the Jew, rushed upon the boy's mind.

He stood, for a moment, with the blood so tingling through all his veins from terror, that he felt as if he were in a burning fire; then, confused and frightened, he took to his heels; and, not knowing what he did, made off as fast as he could lay his feet to the ground.

This was all done in a minute's space. In the very instant when Oliver began to run, the old gentleman, putting his hand to his pocket, and missing his handkerchief, turned sharp round. Seeing the boy scudding away at such a rapid pace, he very naturally concluded him to be the depredator; and shouting 'Stop thief!' with all his might, made off after him, book in hand.

But the old gentleman was not the only person who raised the hue-and-cry. The Dodger and Master Bates, unwilling to attract public attention by running down the open street, had merely retired into the very first doorway round the corner. They no sooner heard the cry, and saw Oliver running, than, guessing exactly how the matter stood, they issued forth with great promptitude; and, shouting 'Stop thief!' too, joined in the pursuit like good citizens.

Although Oliver had been brought up by philosophers, he was not theoretically acquainted with the beautiful axiom that self-preservation is the first law of nature. If he had been, perhaps he would have been prepared for this. Not being prepared, however, it alarmed him the more; so away he went like the wind, with the old gentleman and the two boys roaring and shouting behind him.

'Stop thief! Stop thief!' There is a magic in the sound. The tradesman leaves his counter, and the car-man his waggon; the butcher throws down his tray; the baker his basket; the milkman his pail; the errand-boy his parcels; the school-boy his marbles; the paviour his pickaxe; the child his battledore. Away they run, pell-mell, helter-skelter, slap-dash: tearing, yelling, screaming, knocking down the passengers as they turn the corners, rousing up the dogs, and astonishing the fowls: and streets, squares, and courts, re-echo with the sound.

'Stop thief! Stop thief!' The cry is taken up by a hundred voices, and the crowd accumulate at every turning. Away they fly, splashing through the mud, and rattling along the pavements: up go the windows, out run the people, onward bear the mob, a whole audience desert Punch in the very thickest of the plot, and, joining the rushing throng, swell the shout, and lend fresh vigour to the cry, 'Stop thief! Stop thief!'

'Stop thief! Stop thief!' There is a passion FOR *hunting something* deeply implanted in the human breast. One wretched breathless child, panting with exhaustion; terror in his looks; agony in his eyes; large drops of perspiration streaming down his face; strains every nerve to make head upon his pursuers; and as they follow on his track, and gain upon him every instant, they hail his decreasing strength with joy. 'Stop thief!' Ay, stop him for God's sake, were it only in mercy!

Stopped at last! A clever blow. He is down upon the pavement; and the crowd eagerly gather round him: each new comer, jostling and struggling with the others to catch a glimpse. 'Stand aside!' 'Give him a little air!' 'Nonsense! he don't deserve it.' 'Where's the gentleman?' 'Here his is, coming down the street.' 'Make room there for the gentleman!' 'Is this the boy, sir!' 'Yes.'

Oliver lay, covered with mud and dust, and bleeding from the mouth, looking wildly round upon the heap of faces that surrounded him, when the old gentleman was officiously dragged and pushed into the circle by the foremost of the pursuers.

'Yes,' said the gentleman, 'I am afraid it is the boy.'

'Afraid!' murmured the crowd. 'That's a good 'un!'

'Poor fellow!' said the gentleman, 'he has hurt himself.'

'*I* did that, sir,' said a great lubberly fellow, stepping forward; 'and preciously I cut my knuckle agin' his mouth. I stopped him, sir.'

The follow touched his hat with a grin, expecting something for his pains; but, the old gentleman, eyeing him with an expression of dislike, look anxiously round, as if he contemplated running away himself: which it is very possible he might have attempted to do, and thus have afforded another chase, had not a police officer (who is generally the last person to arrive in such cases) at that moment made his way through the crowd, and seized Oliver by the collar.

'Come, get up,' said the man, roughly.

'It wasn't me indeed, sir. Indeed, indeed, it was two other boys,' said Oliver, clasping his hands passionately, and looking round. 'They are here somewhere.'

'Oh no, they ain't,' said the officer. He meant this to be ironical, but it was true besides; for the Dodger and Charley Bates had filed off down the first convenient court they came to.

'Come, get up!'

'Don't hurt him,' said the old gentleman, compassionately.

'Oh no, I won't hurt him,' replied the officer, tearing his jacket half off his back, in proof thereof. 'Come, I know you; it won't do. Will you stand upon your legs, you young devil?'

Oliver, who could hardly stand, made a shift to raise himself on his feet, and was at once lugged along the streets by the jacket-collar, at a rapid pace. The gentleman walked on with them by the officer's side; and as many of the crowd as could achieve the feat, got a little ahead, and stared back at Oliver from time to time. The boys shouted in triumph; and on they went.

CHAPTER XI

TREATS OF MR. FANG THE POLICE MAGISTRATE; AND FURNISHES A SLIGHT SPECIMEN OF HIS MODE OF ADMINISTERING JUSTICE

The offence had been committed within the district, and indeed in the immediate neighborhood of, a very notorious metropolitan police office. The crowd had only the satisfaction of accompanying Oliver through two or three streets, and down a place called Mutton Hill, when he was led beneath a low archway, and up a dirty court, into this dispensary of summary justice, by the back way. It was a small paved yard into which they turned; and here they encountered a stout man with a bunch of whiskers on his face, and a bunch of keys in his hand.

'What's the matter now?' said the man carelessly.

'A young fogle-hunter,' replied the man who had Oliver in charge.

'Are you the party that's been robbed, sir?' inquired the man with the keys.

'Yes, I am,' replied the old gentleman; 'but I am not sure that this boy actually took the handkerchief. I—I would rather not press the case.'

'Must go before the magistrate now, sir,' replied the man. 'His worship will be disengaged in half a minute. Now, young gallows!'

This was an invitation for Oliver to enter through a door which he unlocked as he spoke, and which led into a stone cell. Here he was searched; and nothing being found upon him, locked up.

This cell was in shape and size something like an area cellar, only not so light. It was most intolerably dirty; for it was Monday morning; and it had been tenanted by six drunken people, who had been locked up, elsewhere, since Saturday night. But this is little. In our station-houses, men and women are every night confined on the most trivial charges—the word is worth noting—in dungeons, compared with which, those in Newgate, occupied by the most atrocious felons, tried, found guilty, and under sentence of death, are palaces. Let any one who doubts this, compare the two.

The old gentleman looked almost as rueful as Oliver when the key grated in the lock. He turned with a sigh to the book, which had been the innocent cause of all this disturbance.

'There is something in that boy's face,' said the old gentleman to himself as he walked slowly away, tapping his chin with the cover of the book, in a thoughtful manner; 'something that touches and interests me. *Can* he be innocent? He looked like—Bye the bye,' exclaimed the old gentleman, halting very abruptly, and staring up into the sky, 'Bless my soul!—where have I seen something like that look before?'

After musing for some minutes, the old gentleman walked, with the same meditative face, into a back anteroom opening from the yard; and there, retiring into a corner, called up before his mind's eye a vast amphitheatre of faces over which a dusky curtain had hung for many years. 'No,' said the old gentleman, shaking his head; 'it must be imagination.

He wandered over them again. He had called them into view, and it was not easy to replace the shroud that had so long concealed them. There were the faces of friends, and foes, and of many that had been almost strangers peering intrusively from the crowd; there were the faces of young and blooming girls that were now old women; there were faces that the grave had changed and closed upon, but which the mind, superior to its power, still dressed in their old freshness and beauty, calling back the lustre of the eyes, the brightness of the smile, the beaming of the soul through its mask of clay, and whispering of beauty beyond the tomb, changed but to be heightened, and taken from earth only to be set up as a light, to shed a soft and gentle glow upon the path to Heaven.

But the old gentleman could recall no one countenance of which Oliver's features bore a trace. So, he heaved a sigh over the recollections he awakened; and being, happily for himself, an absent old gentleman, buried them again in the pages of the musty book.

He was roused by a touch on the shoulder, and a request from the man with the keys to follow him into the office. He closed his book hastily; and was at once ushered into the imposing presence of the renowned Mr. Fang.

The office was a front parlour, with a panelled wall. Mr. Fang sat behind a bar, at the upper end; and on one side the door was a sort of wooden pen in which poor little Oliver was already deposited; trembling very much at the awfulness of the scene.

Mr. Fang was a lean, long-backed, stiff-necked, middle-sized man, with no great quantity of hair, and what he had, growing on the back and sides of his head. His face was stern, and much flushed. If he were really not in the habit of drinking rather more than was exactly good for him, he might have brought action against his countenance for libel, and have recovered heavy damages.

The old gentleman bowed respectfully; and advancing to the magistrate's desk, said, suiting the action to the word, 'That is my name and address, sir.' He then withdrew a pace or two; and, with another polite and gentlemanly inclination of the head, waited to be questioned.

Now, it so happened that Mr. Fang was at that moment perusing a leading article in a newspaper of the morning, adverting to some recent decision of his, and commending him, for the three hundred and fiftieth time, to the special and particular notice of the Secretary of State for the Home Department. He was out of temper; and he looked up with an angry scowl.

'Who are you?' said Mr. Fang.

The old gentleman pointed, with some surprise, to his card.

'Officer!' said Mr. Fang, tossing the card contemptuously away with the newspaper. 'Who is this fellow?'

'My name, sir,' said the old gentleman, speaking *like* a gentleman, 'my name, sir, is Brownlow. Permit me to inquire the name of the magistrate who offers a gratuitous and unprovoked insult to a respectable person, under the protection of the bench.' Saying this, Mr. Brownlow looked around the office as if in search of some person who would afford him the required information.

'Officer!' said Mr. Fang, throwing the paper on one side, 'what's this fellow charged with?'

'He's not charged at all, your worship,' replied the officer. 'He appears against this boy, your worship.'

His worship knew this perfectly well; but it was a good annoyance, and a safe one.

'Appears against the boy, does he?' said Mr. Fang, surveying Mr. Brownlow contemptuously from head to foot. 'Swear him!'

'Before I am sworn, I must beg to say one word,' said Mr. Brownlow; 'and that is, that I really never, without actual experience, could have believed—'

'Hold your tongue, sir!' said Mr. Fang, peremptorily.

'I will not, sir!' replied the old gentleman.

'Hold your tongue this instant, or I'll have you turned out of the office!' said Mr. Fang. 'You're an insolent impertinent fellow. How dare you bully a magistrate!'

'What!' exclaimed the old gentleman, reddening.

'Swear this person!' said Fang to the clerk. 'I'll not hear another word. Swear him.'

Mr. Brownlow's indignation was greatly roused; but reflecting perhaps, that he might only injure the boy by giving vent to it, he suppressed his feelings and submitted to be sworn at once.

'Now,' said Fang, 'what's the charge against this boy? What have you got to say, sir?'

'I was standing at a bookstall—' Mr. Brownlow began.

'Hold your tongue, sir,' said Mr. Fang. 'Policeman! Where's the policeman? Here, swear this policeman. Now, policeman, what is this?'

The policeman, with becoming humility, related how he had taken the charge; how he had searched Oliver, and found nothing on his person; and how that was all he knew about it.

'Are there any witnesses?' inquired Mr. Fang.

'None, your worship,' replied the policeman.

Mr. Fang sat silent for some minutes, and then, turning round to the prosecutor, said in a towering passion.

'Do you mean to state what your complaint against this boy is, man, or do you not? You have been sworn. Now, if you stand there, refusing to give evidence, I'll punish you for disrespect to the bench; I will, by—'

By what, or by whom, nobody knows, for the clerk and jailor coughed very loud, just at the right moment; and the former dropped a heavy book upon the floor, thus preventing the word from being heard—accidently, of course.

With many interruptions, and repeated insults, Mr. Brownlow contrived to state his case; observing that, in the surprise of the moment, he had run after the boy because he had saw him running away; and expressing his hope that, if the magistrate should believe him, although not actually the thief, to be connected with the thieves, he would deal as leniently with him as justice would allow.

'He has been hurt already,' said the old gentleman in conclusion. 'And I fear,' he added, with great energy, looking towards the bar, 'I really fear that he is ill.'

'Oh! yes, I dare say!' said Mr. Fang, with a sneer. 'Come, none of your tricks here, you young vagabond; they won't do. What's your name?'

Oliver tried to reply but his tongue failed him. He was deadly pale; and the whole place seemed turning round and round.

'What's your name, you hardened scoundrel?' demanded Mr. Fang. 'Officer, what's his name?'

This was addressed to a bluff old fellow, in a striped waistcoat, who was standing by the bar. He bent over Oliver, and repeated the inquiry; but finding him really incapable of understanding the question; and knowing that his not replying would only infuriate the magistrate the more, and add to the severity of his sentence; he hazarded a guess.

'He says his name's Tom White, your worship,' said the kind-hearted thief-taker.

'Oh, he won't speak out, won't he?' said Fang. 'Very well, very well. Where does he live?'

'Where he can, your worship,' replied the officer; again pretending to receive Oliver's answer.

'Has he any parents?' inquired Mr. Fang.

'He says they died in his infancy, your worship,' replied the officer: hazarding the usual reply.

At this point of the inquiry, Oliver raised his head; and, looking round with imploring eyes, murmured a feeble prayer for a draught of water.

'Stuff and nonsense!' said Mr. Fang: 'don't try to make a fool of me.'

'I think he really is ill, your worship,' remonstrated the officer.

'I know better,' said Mr. Fang.

'Take care of him, officer,' said the old gentleman, raising his hands instinctively; 'he'll fall down.'

'Stand away, officer,' cried Fang; 'let him, if he likes.'

Oliver availed himself of the kind permission, and fell to the floor in a fainting fit. The men in the office looked at each other, but no one dared to stir.

'I knew he was shamming,' said Fang, as if this were incontestable proof of the fact. 'Let him lie there; he'll soon be tired of that.'

'How do you propose to deal with the case, sir?' inquired the clerk in a low voice.

'Summarily,' replied Mr. Fang. 'He stands committed for three months—hard labour of course. Clear the office.'

The door was opened for this purpose, and a couple of men were preparing to carry the insensible boy to his cell; when an elderly man of decent but poor appearance, clad in an old suit of black, rushed hastily into the office, and advanced towards the bench.

'Stop, stop! don't take him away! For Heaven's sake stop a moment!' cried the new comer, breathless with haste.

Although the presiding Genii in such an office as this, exercise a summary and arbitrary power over the liberties, the good name, the character, almost the lives, of Her Majesty's subjects, expecially of the poorer class; and although, within such walls, enough fantastic tricks are daily played to make the angels blind with weeping; they are closed to the public, save through the medium of the daily press.[Footnote: Or were virtually, then.] Mr. Fang was consequently not a little indignant to see an unbidden guest enter in such irreverent disorder.

'What is this? Who is this? Turn this man out. Clear the office!' cried Mr. Fang.

'I *will* speak,' cried the man; 'I will not be turned out. I saw it all. I keep the book-stall. I demand to be sworn. I will not be put down. Mr. Fang, you must hear me. You must not refuse, sir.'

The man was right. His manner was determined; and the matter was growing rather too serious to be hushed up.

'Swear the man,' growled Mr. Fang, with a very ill grace. 'Now, man, what have you got to say?'

'This,' said the man: 'I saw three boys: two others and the prisoner here: loitering on the opposite side of the way, when this gentleman was reading.

The robbery was committed by another boy. I saw it done; and I saw that this boy was perfectly amazed and stupified by it.' Having by this time recovered a little breath, the worthy book-stall keeper proceeded to relate, in a more coherent manner the exact circumstances of the robbery.

'Why didn't you come here before?' said Fang, after a pause.

'I hadn't a soul to mind the shop,' replied the man. 'Everybody who could have helped me, had joined in the pursuit. I could get nobody till five minutes ago; and I've run here all the way.'

'The prosecutor was reading, was he?' inquired Fang, after another pause.

'Yes,' replied the man. 'The very book he has in his hand.'

'Oh, that book, eh?' said Fang. 'Is it paid for?'

'No, it is not,' replied the man, with a smile.

'Dear me, I forgot all about it!' exclaimed the absent old gentleman, innocently.

'A nice person to prefer a charge against a poor boy!' said Fang, with a comical effort to look humane. 'I consider, sir, that you have obtained possession of that book, under very suspicious and disreputable circumstances; and you may think yourself very fortunate that the owner of the property declines to prosecute. Let this be a lesson to you, my man, or the law will overtake you yet. The boy is discharged. Clear the office!'

'D—n me!' cried the old gentleman, bursting out with the rage he had kept down so long, 'd—n me! I'll—'

'Clear the office!' said the magistrate. 'Officers, do you hear? Clear the office!'

The mandate was obeyed; and the indignant Mr. Brownlow was conveyed out, with the book in one hand, and the bamboo cane in the other: in a perfect phrenzy of rage and defiance. He reached the yard; and his passion vanished in a moment. Little Oliver Twist lay on his back on the pavement, with his shirt unbuttoned, and his temples bathed with water; his face a deadly white; and a cold tremble convulsing his whole frame.

'Poor boy, poor boy!' said Mr. Brownlow, bending over him. 'Call a coach, somebody, pray. Directly!'

A coach was obtained, and Oliver having been carefully laid on the seat, the old gentleman got in and sat himself on the other.

'May I accompany you?' said the book-stall keeper, looking in.

'Bless me, yes, my dear sir,' said Mr. Brownlow quickly. 'I forgot you. Dear, dear! I have this unhappy book still! Jump in. Poor fellow! There's no time to lose.'

The book-stall keeper got into the coach; and away they drove.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH OLIVER IS TAKEN BETTER CARE OF THAN HE EVER WAS BEFORE. AND IN WHICH THE NARRATIVE REVERTS TO THE MERRY OLD GENTLEMAN AND HIS YOUTHFUL FRIENDS.

The coach rattled away, over nearly the same ground as that which Oliver had traversed when he first entered London in company with the Dodger; and, turning a different way when it reached the Angel at Islington, stopped at length before a neat house, in a quiet shady street near Pentonville. Here, a bed was prepared, without loss of time, in which Mr. Brownlow saw his young charge carefully and comfortably deposited; and here, he was tended with a kindness and solicitude that knew no bounds.

But, for many days, Oliver remained insensible to all the goodness of his new friends. The sun rose and sank, and rose and sank again, and many times after that; and still the boy lay stretched on his uneasy bed, dwindling away beneath the dry and wasting heat of fever. The worm does not work more surely on the dead body, than does this slow creeping fire upon the living frame.

Weak, and thin, and pallid, he awoke at last from what seemed to have been a long and troubled dream. Feebly raising himself in the bed, with his head resting on his trembling arm, he looked anxiously around.

'What room is this? Where have I been brought to?' said Oliver. 'This is not the place I went to sleep in.'

He uttered these words in a feeble voice, being very faint and weak; but they were overheard at once. The curtain at the bed's head was hastily drawn back, and a motherly old lady, very neatly and precisely dressed, rose as she undrew it, from an arm-chair close by, in which she had been sitting at needle-work.

'Hush, my dear,' said the old lady softly. 'You must be very quiet, or you will be ill again; and you have been very bad,—as bad as bad could be, pretty nigh. Lie down again; there's a dear!' With those words, the old lady very gently placed Oliver's head upon the pillow; and, smoothing back his hair from his forehead, looked so kindly and loving in his face, that he could not help placing his little withered hand in hers, and drawing it round his neck.

'Save us!' said the old lady, with tears in her eyes. 'What a grateful little dear it is. Pretty creetur! What would his mother feel if she had sat by him as I have, and could see him now!'

'Perhaps she does see me,' whispered Oliver, folding his hands together; 'perhaps she has sat by me. I almost feel as if she had.'

'That was the fever, my dear,' said the old lady mildly.

'I suppose it was,' replied Oliver, 'because heaven is a long way off; and they are too happy there, to come down to the bedside of a poor boy. But if she knew I was ill, she must have pitied me, even there; for she was very ill herself before she died. She can't know anything about me though,' added Oliver after a moment's silence. 'If she had seen me hurt, it would have made her sorrowful; and her face has always looked sweet and happy, when I have dreamed of her.'

The old lady made no reply to this; but wiping her eyes first, and her spectacles, which lay on the counterpane, afterwards, as if they were part and parcel of those features, brought some cool stuff for Oliver to drink; and then, patting him on the cheek, told him he must lie very quiet, or he would be ill again.

So, Oliver kept very still; partly because he was anxious to obey the kind old lady in all things; and partly, to tell the truth, because he was completely exhausted with what he had already said. He soon fell into a gentle doze, from which he was awakened by the light of a candle: which, being brought near the bed, showed him a gentleman with a very large and loud-ticking gold watch in his hand, who felt his pulse, and said he was a great deal better.

'You *are* a great deal better, are you not, my dear?' said the gentleman.

'Yes, thank you, sir,' replied Oliver.

'Yes, I know you are,' said the gentleman: 'You're hungry too, an't you?'

'No, sir,' answered Oliver.

'Hem!' said the gentleman. 'No, I know you're not. He is not hungry, Mrs. Bedwin,' said the gentleman: looking very wise.

The old lady made a respectful inclination of the head, which seemed to say that she thought the doctor was a very clever man. The doctor appeared much of the same opinion himself.

'You feel sleepy, don't you, my dear?' said the doctor.

'No, sir,' replied Oliver.

'No,' said the doctor, with a very shrewd and satisfied look. 'You're not sleepy. Nor thirsty. Are you?'

'Yes, sir, rather thirsty,' answered Oliver.

'Just as I expected, Mrs. Bedwin,' said the doctor. 'It's very natural that he should be thirsty. You may give him a little tea, ma'am, and some dry toast without any butter. Don't keep him too warm, ma'am; but be careful that you don't let him be too cold; will you have the goodness?'

The old lady dropped a curtsey. The doctor, after tasting the cool stuff, and expressing a qualified approval of it, hurried away: his boots creaking in a very important and wealthy manner as he went downstairs.

Oliver dozed off again, soon after this; when he awoke, it was nearly twelve o'clock. The old lady tenderly bade him good-night shortly afterwards, and left him in charge of a fat old woman who had just come: bringing with her, in a little bundle, a small Prayer Book and a large nightcap. Putting the latter on her head and the former on the table, the old woman, after telling Oliver that she had come to sit up with him, drew her chair close to the fire and went off into a series of short naps, chequered at frequent intervals with sundry tumblings forward, and divers moans and chokings. These, however, had no worse effect than causing her to rub her nose very hard, and then fall asleep again.

And thus the night crept slowly on. Oliver lay awake for some time, counting the little circles of light which the reflection of the rushlight-shade threw upon the ceiling; or tracing with his languid eyes the intricate pattern of the paper on the wall. The darkness and the deep stillness of the room were very solemn; as they brought into the boy's mind the thought that death had been hovering there, for many days and nights, and might yet fill it with the gloom and dread of his awful presence, he turned his face upon the pillow, and fervently prayed to Heaven.

Gradually, he fell into that deep tranquil sleep which ease from recent suffering alone imparts; that calm and peaceful rest which it is pain to wake from. Who, if this were death, would be roused again to all the struggles and turmoils of life; to all its cares for the present; its anxieties for the future; more than all, its weary recollections of the past!

It had been bright day, for hours, when Oliver opened his eyes; he felt cheerful and happy. The crisis of the disease was safely past. He belonged to the world again.

In three days' time he was able to sit in an easy-chair, well propped up with pillows; and, as he was still too weak to walk, Mrs. Bedwin had him carried downstairs into the little housekeeper's room, which belonged to her. Having him set, here, by the fire-side, the good old lady sat herself down too; and, being in a state of considerable delight at seeing him so much better, forthwith began to cry most violently.

'Never mind me, my dear,' said the old lady; 'I'm only having a regular good cry. There; it's all over now; and I'm quite comfortable.'

'You're very, very kind to me, ma'am,' said Oliver.

'Well, never you mind that, my dear,' said the old lady; 'that's got nothing to do with your broth; and it's full time you had it; for the doctor says Mr. Brownlow may come in to see you this morning; and we must get up our best looks, because the better we look, the more he'll be pleased.' And with this, the old lady applied herself to warming up, in a little saucepan, a basin full of broth: strong enough, Oliver thought, to furnish an ample dinner, when reduced to the regulation strength, for three hundred and fifty paupers, at the lowest computation.

'Are you fond of pictures, dear?' inquired the old lady, seeing that Oliver had fixed his eyes, most intently, on a portrait which hung against the wall; just opposite his chair.

'I don't quite know, ma'am,' said Oliver, without taking his eyes from the canvas; 'I have seen so few that I hardly know. What a beautiful, mild face that lady's is!'

'Ah!' said the old lady, 'painters always make ladies out prettier than they are, or they wouldn't get any custom, child. The man that invented the machine for taking likenesses might have known that would never succeed;

it's a deal too honest. A deal,' said the old lady, laughing very heartily at her own acuteness.

'Is—is that a likeness, ma'am?' said Oliver.

'Yes,' said the old lady, looking up for a moment from the broth; 'that's a portrait.'

'Whose, ma'am?' asked Oliver.

'Why, really, my dear, I don't know,' answered the old lady in a good-humoured manner. 'It's not a likeness of anybody that you or I know, I expect. It seems to strike your fancy, dear.'

'It is so pretty,' replied Oliver.

'Why, sure you're not afraid of it?' said the old lady: observing in great surprise, the look of awe with which the child regarded the painting.

'Oh no, no,' returned Oliver quickly; 'but the eyes look so sorrowful; and where I sit, they seem fixed upon me. It makes my heart beat,' added Oliver in a low voice, 'as if it was alive, and wanted to speak to me, but couldn't.'

'Lord save us!' exclaimed the old lady, starting; 'don't talk in that way, child. You're weak and nervous after your illness. Let me wheel your chair round to the other side; and then you won't see it. There!' said the old lady, suiting the action to the word; 'you don't see it now, at all events.'

Oliver *did* see it in his mind's eye as distinctly as if he had not altered his position; but he thought it better not to worry the kind old lady; so he smiled gently when she looked at him; and Mrs. Bedwin, satisfied that he felt more comfortable, salted and broke bits of toasted bread into the broth, with all the bustle befitting so solemn a preparation. Oliver got through it with extraordinary expedition. He had scarcely swallowed the last spoonful, when there came a soft rap at the door. 'Come in,' said the old lady; and in walked Mr. Brownlow.

Now, the old gentleman came in as brisk as need be; but, he had no sooner raised his spectacles on his forehead, and thrust his hands behind the skirts of his dressing-gown to take a good long look at Oliver, than his countenance underwent a very great variety of odd contortions. Oliver looked very worn and shadowy from sickness, and made an ineffectual attempt to stand up, out of respect to his benefactor, which terminated in his sinking back into the chair again; and the fact is, if the truth must be told, that Mr. Brownlow's heart, being large enough for any six ordinary old gentlemen of humane disposition, forced a supply of tears into his eyes, by some hydraulic process which we are not sufficiently philosophical to be in a condition to explain.

'Poor boy, poor boy!' said Mr. Brownlow, clearing his throat. 'I'm rather hoarse this morning, Mrs. Bedwin. I'm afraid I have caught cold.'

'I hope not, sir,' said Mrs. Bedwin. 'Everything you have had, has been well aired, sir.'

'I don't know, Bedwin. I don't know,' said Mr. Brownlow; 'I rather think I had a damp napkin at dinner-time yesterday; but never mind that. How do you feel, my dear?'

'Very happy, sir,' replied Oliver. 'And very grateful indeed, sir, for your goodness to me.'

'Good by,' said Mr. Brownlow, stoutly. 'Have you given him any nourishment, Bedwin? Any slops, eh?'

'He has just had a basin of beautiful strong broth, sir,' replied Mrs. Bedwin: drawing herself up slightly, and laying strong emphasis on the last word: to intimate that between slops, and broth will compounded, there existed no affinity or connection whatsoever.

'Ugh!' said Mr. Brownlow, with a slight shudder; 'a couple of glasses of port wine would have done him a great deal more good. Wouldn't they, Tom White, eh?'

'My name is Oliver, sir,' replied the little invalid: with a look of great astonishment.

'Oliver,' said Mr. Brownlow; 'Oliver what? Oliver White, eh?'

'No, sir, Twist, Oliver Twist.'

'Queer name!' said the old gentleman. 'What made you tell the magistrate your name was White?'

'I never told him so, sir,' returned Oliver in amazement.

This sounded so like a falsehood, that the old gentleman looked somewhat sternly in Oliver's face. It was impossible to doubt him; there was truth in every one of its thin and sharpened lineaments.

'Some mistake,' said Mr. Brownlow. But, although his motive for looking steadily at Oliver no longer existed, the old idea of the resemblance between his features and some familiar face came upon him so strongly, that he could not withdraw his gaze.

'I hope you are not angry with me, sir?' said Oliver, raising his eyes beseechingly.

'No, no,' replied the old gentleman. 'Why! what's this? Bedwin, look there!'

As he spoke, he pointed hastily to the picture over Oliver's head, and then to the boy's face. There was its living copy. The eyes, the head, the mouth; every feature was the same. The expression was, for the instant, so precisely alike, that the minutest line seemed copied with startling accuracy!

Oliver knew not the cause of this sudden exclamation; for, not being strong enough to bear the start it gave him, he fainted away. A weakness on his part, which affords the narrative an opportunity of relieving the reader from suspense, in behalf of the two young pupils of the Merry Old Gentleman; and of recording—

That when the Dodger, and his accomplished friend Master Bates, joined in the hue-and-cry which was raised at Oliver's heels, in consequence of their executing an illegal conveyance of Mr. Brownlow's personal property, as has been already described, they were actuated by a very laudable and becoming regard for themselves; and forasmuch as the freedom of the subject and the liberty of the individual are among the first and proudest boasts of a true-hearted Englishman, so, I need hardly beg the reader to observe, that this action should tend to exalt them in the opinion of all public and patriotic men, in almost as great a degree as this strong proof of their anxiety for their own preservation and safety goes to corroborate and confirm the little code of laws which certain profound and sound-judging philosophers have laid down as the main-springs of all Nature's deeds and actions: the said philosophers very wisely reducing the good lady's proceedings to matters of maxim and theory: and, by a very neat and pretty compliment to her exalted wisdom and understanding, putting entirely out of sight any considerations of heart, or generous impulse and feeling. For, these are matters totally beneath a female who is acknowledged by universal admission to be far above the numerous little foibles and weaknesses of her sex.

If I wanted any further proof of the strictly philosophical nature of the conduct of these young gentlemen in their very delicate predicament, I should at once find it in the fact (also recorded in a foregoing part of this narrative), of their quitting the pursuit, when the general attention was fixed upon Oliver; and making immediately for their home by the shortest possible cut. Although I do not mean to assert that it is usually the practice of renowned and learned sages, to shorten the road to any great conclusion (their course indeed being rather to lengthen the distance, by various circumlocutions and discursive staggerings, like unto those in which drunken men under the pressure of a too mighty flow of ideas, are prone to indulge); still, I do mean to say, and do say distinctly, that it is the invariable practice of many mighty philosophers, in carrying out their theories, to evince great wisdom and foresight in providing against every possible contingency which can be supposed at all likely to affect themselves. Thus, to do a great right, you may do a little wrong; and you may take any means which the end to be attained, will justify; the amount of the right, or the amount of the wrong, or indeed the distinction between the two, being left entirely to the philosopher concerned, to be settled and determined by his clear, comprehensive, and impartial view of his own particular case.

It was not until the two boys had scoured, with great rapidity, through a most intricate maze of narrow streets and courts, that they ventured to halt beneath a low and dark archway. Having remained silent here, just long enough to recover breath to speak, Master Bates uttered an exclamation of amusement and delight; and, bursting into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, flung himself upon a doorstep, and rolled thereon in a transport of mirth.

'What's the matter?' inquired the Dodger.

'Ha! ha! ha!' roared Charley Bates.

'Hold your noise,' remonstrated the Dodger, looking cautiously round. 'Do you want to be grabbed, stupid?'

'I can't help it,' said Charley, 'I can't help it! To see him splitting away at that pace, and cutting round the corners, and knocking up again' the posts, and starting on again as if he was made of iron as well as them, and me with the wipe in my pocket, singing out arter him—oh, my eye!' The vivid imagination of Master Bates presented the scene before him in too strong colours. As he arrived at this apostrophe, he again rolled upon the door-step, and laughed louder than before.

'What'll Fagin say?' inquired the Dodger; taking advantage of the next interval of breathlessness on the part of his friend to propound the question.

'What?' repeated Charley Bates.

'Ah, what?' said the Dodger.

'Why, what should he say?' inquired Charley: stopping rather suddenly in his merriment; for the Dodger's manner was impressive. 'What should he say?'

Mr. Dawkins whistled for a couple of minutes; then, taking off his hat, scratched his head, and nodded thrice.

'What do you mean?' said Charley.

'Toor rul lol loo, gammon and spinnage, the frog he wouldn't, and high cockolorum,' said the Dodger: with a slight sneer on his intellectual countenance.

This was explanatory, but not satisfactory. Master Bates felt it so; and again said, 'What do you mean?'

The Dodger made no reply; but putting his hat on again, and gathering the skirts of his long-tailed coat under his arm, thrust his tongue into his cheek, slapped the bridge of his nose some half-dozen times in a familiar but expressive manner, and turning on his heel, slunk down the court. Master Bates followed, with a thoughtful countenance.

The noise of footsteps on the creaking stairs, a few minutes after the occurrence of this conversation, roused the merry old gentleman as he sat over the fire with a saveloy and a small loaf in his hand; a pocket-knife in his right; and a pewter pot on the trivet. There was a rascally smile on his white face as he turned round, and looking sharply out from under his thick red eyebrows, bent his ear towards the door, and listened.

'Why, how's this?' muttered the Jew: changing countenance; 'only two of 'em? Where's the third? They can't have got into trouble. Hark!'

The footsteps approached nearer; they reached the landing. The door was slowly opened; and the Dodger and Charley Bates entered, closing it behind them.

CHAPTER XIII

SOME NEW ACQUAINTANCES ARE INTRODUCED TO THE INTELLIGENT READER, CONNECTED WITH WHOM VARIOUS

PLEASANT MATTERS ARE RELATED, APPERTAINING TO THIS HISTORY

'Where's Oliver?' said the Jew, rising with a menacing look. 'Where's the boy?'

The young thieves eyed their preceptor as if they were alarmed at his violence; and looked uneasily at each other. But they made no reply.

'What's become of the boy?' said the Jew, seizing the Dodger tightly by the collar, and threatening him with horrid imprecations. 'Speak out, or I'll throttle you!'

Mr. Fagin looked so very much in earnest, that Charley Bates, who deemed it prudent in all cases to be on the safe side, and who conceived it by no means improbable that it might be his turn to be throttled second, dropped upon his knees, and raised a loud, well-sustained, and continuous roar—something between a mad bull and a speaking trumpet.

'Will you speak?' thundered the Jew: shaking the Dodger so much that his keeping in the big coat at all, seemed perfectly miraculous.

'Why, the traps have got him, and that's all about it,' said the Dodger, sullenly. 'Come, let go o' me, will you!' And, swinging himself, at one jerk, clean out of the big coat, which he left in the Jew's hands, the Dodger snatched up the toasting fork, and made a pass at the merry old gentleman's waistcoat; which, if it had taken effect, would have let a little more merriment out than could have been easily replaced.

The Jew stepped back in this emergency, with more agility than could have been anticipated in a man of his apparent decrepitude; and, seizing up the pot, prepared to hurl it at his assailant's head. But Charley Bates, at this moment, calling his attention by a perfectly terrific howl, he suddenly altered its destination, and flung it full at that young gentleman.

'Why, what the blazes is in the wind now!' growled a deep voice. 'Who pitched that 'ere at me? It's well it's the beer, and not the pot, as hit me, or I'd have settled somebody. I might have know'd, as nobody but an infernal, rich, plundering, thundering old Jew could afford to throw away any drink but water—and not that, unless he done the River Company every quarter. Wot's it all about, Fagin? D—me, if my neck-handkercher an't lined with beer! Come in, you sneaking warmint; wot are you stopping outside for, as if you was ashamed of your master! Come in!'

The man who growled out these words, was a stoutly-built fellow of about five-and-thirty, in a black velveteen coat, very soiled drab breeches, lace-up half boots, and grey cotton stockings which inclosed a bulky pair of legs, with large swelling calves;—the kind of legs, which in such costume, always look in an unfinished and incomplete state without a set of fetters to garnish them. He had a brown hat on his head, and a dirty belcher handkerchief round his neck: with the long frayed ends of which he smeared the beer from his face as he spoke. He disclosed, when he had done so, a broad heavy countenance with a beard of three days' growth, and two scowling eyes; one of which displayed various parti-coloured symptoms of having been recently damaged by a blow.

'Come in, d'ye hear?' growled this engaging ruffian.

A white shaggy dog, with his face scratched and torn in twenty different places, skulked into the room.

'Why didn't you come in afore?' said the man. 'You're getting too proud to own me afore company, are you? Lie down!'

This command was accompanied with a kick, which sent the animal to the other end of the room. He appeared well used to it, however; for he coiled himself up in a corner very quietly, without uttering a sound, and winking his very ill-looking eyes twenty times in a minute, appeared to occupy himself in taking a survey of the apartment.

'What are you up to? Ill-treating the boys, you covetous, avaricious, in-sa-ti-a-ble old fence?' said the man, seating himself deliberately. 'I wonder they don't murder you! I would if I was them. If I'd been your 'prentice, I'd have done it long ago, and—no, I couldn't have sold you afterwards, for you're fit for nothing but keeping as a curiousity of ugliness in a glass bottle, and I suppose they don't blow glass bottles large enough.'

'Hush! hush! Mr. Sikes,' said the Jew, trembling; 'don't speak so loud!'

'None of your mistering,' replied the ruffian; 'you always mean mischief when you come that. You know my name: out with it! I shan't disgrace it when the time comes.'

'Well, well, then—Bill Sikes,' said the Jew, with abject humility. 'You seem out of humour, Bill.'

'Perhaps I am,' replied Sikes; 'I should think you was rather out of sorts too, unless you mean as little harm when you throw pewter pots about, as you do when you blab and—'

'Are you mad?' said the Jew, catching the man by the sleeve, and pointing towards the boys.

Mr. Sikes contented himself with tying an imaginary knot under his left ear, and jerking his head over on the right shoulder; a piece of dumb show which the Jew appeared to understand perfectly. He then, in cant terms, with which his whole conversation was plentifully besprinkled, but which would be quite unintelligible if they were recorded here, demanded a glass of liquor.

'And mind you don't poison it,' said Mr. Sikes, laying his hat upon the table.

This was said in jest; but if the speaker could have seen the evil leer with which the Jew bit his pale lip as he turned round to the cupboard, he might have thought the caution not wholly unnecessary, or the wish (at all events) to improve upon the distiller's ingenuity not very far from the old gentleman's merry heart.

After swallowing two of three glasses of spirits, Mr. Sikes condescended to take some notice of the young gentlemen; which gracious act led to a conversation, in which the cause and manner of Oliver's capture were circumstantially detailed, with such alterations and improvements on the truth, as to the Dodger appeared most advisable under the circumstances.

'I'm afraid,' said the Jew, 'that he may say something which will get us into trouble.'

'That's very likely,' returned Sikes with a malicious grin. 'You're blowed upon, Fagin.'

'And I'm afraid, you see,' added the Jew, speaking as if he had not noticed the interruption; and regarding the other closely as he did so,—'I'm afraid that, if the game was up with us, it might be up with a good many more, and that it would come out rather worse for you than it would for me, my dear.'

The man started, and turned round upon the Jew. But the old gentleman's shoulders were shrugged up to his ears; and his eyes were vacantly staring on the opposite wall.

There was a long pause. Every member of the respectable coterie appeared plunged in his own reflections; not excepting the dog, who by a certain malicious licking of his lips seemed to be meditating an attack upon the legs of the first gentleman or lady he might encounter in the streets when he went out.

'Somebody must find out wot's been done at the office,' said Mr. Sikes in a much lower tone than he had taken since he came in.

The Jew nodded assent.

'If he hasn't peached, and is committed, there's no fear till he comes out again,' said Mr. Sikes, 'and then he must be taken care on. You must get hold of him somehow.'

Again the Jew nodded.

The prudence of this line of action, indeed, was obvious; but, unfortunately, there was one very strong objection to its being adopted. This was, that the Dodger, and Charley Bates, and Fagin, and Mr. William Sikes, happened, one and all, to entertain a violent and deeply-rooted antipathy to going near a police-office on any ground or pretext whatever.

How long they might have sat and looked at each other, in a state of uncertainty not the most pleasant of its kind, it is difficult to guess. It is not necessary to make any guesses on the subject, however; for the sudden entrance of the two young ladies whom Oliver had seen on a former occasion, caused the conversation to flow afresh.

'The very thing!' said the Jew. 'Bet will go; won't you, my dear?'

'Wheres?' inquired the young lady.

'Only just up to the office, my dear,' said the Jew coaxingly.

It is due to the young lady to say that she did not positively affirm that she would not, but that she merely expressed an emphatic and earnest desire to be 'blessed' if she would; a polite and delicate evasion of the request, which shows the young lady to have been possessed of that natural good breeding which cannot bear to inflict upon a fellow-creature, the pain of a direct and pointed refusal.

The Jew's countenance fell. He turned from this young lady, who was gaily, not to say gorgeously attired, in a red gown, green boots, and yellow curl-papers, to the other female.

'Nancy, my dear,' said the Jew in a soothing manner, 'what do YOU say?'

'That it won't do; so it's no use a-trying it on, Fagin,' replied Nancy.

'What do you mean by that?' said Mr. Sikes, looking up in a surly manner.

'What I say, Bill,' replied the lady collectedly.

'Why, you're just the very person for it,' reasoned Mr. Sikes: 'nobody about here knows anything of you.'

'And as I don't want 'em to, neither,' replied Nancy in the same composed manner, 'it's rather more no than yes with me, Bill.'

'She'll go, Fagin,' said Sikes.

'No, she won't, Fagin,' said Nancy.

'Yes, she will, Fagin,' said Sikes.

And Mr. Sikes was right. By dint of alternate threats, promises, and bribes, the lady in question was ultimately prevailed upon to undertake the commission. She was not, indeed, withheld by the same considerations as her agreeable friend; for, having recently removed into the neighborhood of Field Lane from the remote but genteel suburb of Ratcliffe, she was not under the same apprehension of being recognised by any of her numerous acquaintances.

Accordingly, with a clean white apron tied over her gown, and her curl-papers tucked up under a straw bonnet,—both articles of dress being provided from the Jew's inexhaustible stock,—Miss Nancy prepared to issue forth on her errand.

'Stop a minute, my dear,' said the Jew, producing, a little covered basket. 'Carry that in one hand. It looks more respectable, my dear.'

'Give her a door-key to carry in her t'other one, Fagin,' said Sikes; 'it looks real and genivine like.'

'Yes, yes, my dear, so it does,' said the Jew, hanging a large street-door key on the forefinger of the young lady's right hand.

'There; very good! Very good indeed, my dear!' said the Jew, rubbing his hands.

'Oh, my brother! My poor, dear, sweet, innocent little brother!' exclaimed Nancy, bursting into tears, and wringing the little basket and the street-door key in an agony of distress. 'What has become of him! Where have they taken him to! Oh, do have pity, and tell me what's been done with the dear boy, gentlemen; do, gentlemen, if you please, gentlemen!'

Having uttered those words in a most lamentable and heart-broken tone: to the immeasurable delight of her hearers: Miss Nancy paused, winked to the company, nodded smilingly round, and disappeared.

'Ah, she's a clever girl, my dears,' said the Jew, turning round to his young friends, and shaking his head gravely, as if in mute admonition to them to follow the bright example they had just beheld.

'She's a honour to her sex,' said Mr. Sikes, filling his glass, and smiting the table with his enormous fist. 'Here's her health, and wishing they was all like her!'

While these, and many other encomiums, were being passed on the accomplished Nancy, that young lady made the best of her way to the police-office; whither, notwithstanding a little natural timidity consequent upon walking through the streets alone and unprotected, she arrived in perfect safety shortly afterwards.

Entering by the back way, she tapped softly with the key at one of the cell-doors, and listened. There was no sound within: so she coughed and listened again. Still there was no reply: so she spoke.

'Nolly, dear?' murmured Nancy in a gentle voice; 'Nolly?'

There was nobody inside but a miserable shoeless criminal, who had been taken up for playing the flute, and who, the offence against society having been clearly proved, had been very properly committed by Mr. Fang to the House of Correction for one month; with the appropriate and amusing remark that since he had so much breath to spare, it would be more wholesomely expended on the treadmill than in a musical instrument. He made no answer: being occupied mentally bewailing the loss of the flute, which had been confiscated for the use of the county: so Nancy passed on to the next cell, and knocked there.

'Well!' cried a faint and feeble voice.

'Is there a little boy here?' inquired Nancy, with a preliminary sob.

'No,' replied the voice; 'God forbid.'

This was a vagrant of sixty-five, who was going to prison for *not* playing the flute; or, in other words, for begging in the streets, and doing nothing for his livelihood. In the next cell was another man, who was going to the same prison for hawking tin saucepans without license; thereby doing something for his living, in defiance of the Stamp-office.

But, as neither of these criminals answered to the name of Oliver, or knew anything about him, Nancy made straight up to the bluff officer in the striped waistcoat; and with the most piteous wailings and lamentations, rendered more piteous by a prompt and efficient use of the street-door key and the little basket, demanded her own dear brother.

'I haven't got him, my dear,' said the old man.

'Where is he?' screamed Nancy, in a distracted manner.

'Why, the gentleman's got him,' replied the officer.

'What gentleman! Oh, gracious heavens! What gentleman?' exclaimed Nancy.

In reply to this incoherent questioning, the old man informed the deeply affected sister that Oliver had been taken ill in the office, and discharged in consequence of a witness having proved the robbery to have been committed by another boy, not in custody; and that the prosecutor had carried him away, in an insensible condition, to his own residence: of and concerning which, all the informant knew was, that it was somewhere in Pentonville, he having heard that word mentioned in the directions to the coachman.

In a dreadful state of doubt and uncertainty, the agonised young woman staggered to the gate, and then, exchanging her faltering walk for a swift run, returned by the most devious and complicated route she could think of, to the domicile of the Jew.

Mr. Bill Sikes no sooner heard the account of the expedition delivered, than he very hastily called up the white dog, and, putting on his hat, expeditiously departed: without devoting any time to the formality of wishing the company good-morning.

'We must know where he is, my dears; he must be found,' said the Jew greatly excited. 'Charley, do nothing but skulk about, till you bring home some news of him! Nancy, my dear, I must have him found. I trust to you, my dear,—to you and the Artful for everything! Stay, stay,' added the Jew, unlocking a drawer with a shaking hand; 'there's money, my dears. I shall shut up this shop to-night. You'll know where to find me! Don't stop here a minute. Not an instant, my dears!'

With these words, he pushed them from the room: and carefully double-locking and barring the door behind them, drew from its place of concealment the box which he had unintentionally disclosed to Oliver. Then, he hastily proceeded to dispose the watches and jewellery beneath his clothing.

A rap at the door startled him in this occupation. 'Who's there?' he cried in a shrill tone.

'Me!' replied the voice of the Dodger, through the key-hole.

'What now?' cried the Jew impatiently.

'Is he to be kidnapped to the other ken, Nancy says?' inquired the Dodger.

'Yes,' replied the Jew, 'wherever she lays hands on him. Find him, find him out, that's all. I shall know what to do next; never fear.'

The boy murmured a reply of intelligence: and hurried downstairs after his companions.

'He has not peached so far,' said the Jew as he pursued his occupation. 'If he means to blab us among his new friends, we may stop his mouth yet.'

CHAPTER XIV

COMPRISING FURTHER PARTICULARS OF OLIVER'S STAY AT MR. BROWNLOW'S, WITH THE REMARKABLE PREDICTION WHICH ONE MR. GRIMWIG UTTERED CONCERNING HIM, WHEN HE WENT OUT ON AN ERRAND

Oliver soon recovering from the fainting-fit into which Mr. Brownlow's abrupt exclamation had thrown him, the subject of the picture was carefully avoided, both by the old gentleman and Mrs. Bedwin, in the conversation that ensued: which indeed bore no reference to Oliver's history or prospects, but was confined to such topics as might amuse without exciting him. He was still too weak to get up to breakfast; but, when he came down into the housekeeper's room next day, his first act was to cast an eager glance at the wall, in the hope of again looking on the face of the beautiful lady. His expectations were disappointed, however, for the picture had been removed.

'Ah!' said the housekeeper, watching the direction of Oliver's eyes. 'It is gone, you see.'

'I see it is ma'am,' replied Oliver. 'Why have they taken it away?'

'It has been taken down, child, because Mr. Brownlow said, that as it seemed to worry you, perhaps it might prevent your getting well, you know,' rejoined the old lady.

'Oh, no, indeed. It didn't worry me, ma'am,' said Oliver. 'I liked to see it. I quite loved it.'

'Well, well!' said the old lady, good-humouredly; 'you get well as fast as ever you can, dear, and it shall be hung up again. There! I promise you that! Now, let us talk about something else.'

This was all the information Oliver could obtain about the picture at that time. As the old lady had been so kind to him in his illness, he endeavoured to think no more of the subject just then; so he listened attentively to a great many stories she told him, about an amiable and handsome daughter of hers, who was married to an amiable and handsome man, and lived in the country; and about a son, who was clerk to a merchant in the West Indies; and who was, also, such a good young man, and wrote such dutiful letters home four times a-year, that it brought the tears into her eyes to talk about them. When the old lady had expatiated, a long time, on the excellences of her children, and the merits of her kind good husband besides, who had been dead and gone, poor dear soul! just six-and-twenty years, it was time to have tea. After tea she began to teach Oliver cribbage: which he learnt as quickly as she could teach: and at which game they played, with great interest and gravity, until it was time for the invalid to have some warm wine and water, with a slice of dry toast, and then to go cosily to bed.

They were happy days, those of Oliver's recovery. Everything was so quiet, and neat, and orderly; everybody so kind and gentle; that after the noise and turbulence in the midst of which he had always lived, it seemed like Heaven itself. He was no sooner strong enough to put his clothes on, properly, than Mr. Brownlow caused a complete new suit, and a new cap, and a new pair of shoes, to be provided for him. As Oliver was told that he might do what he liked with the old clothes, he gave them to a servant who had been very kind to him, and asked her to sell them to a Jew, and keep the money for herself. This she very readily did; and, as Oliver looked out of the parlour window, and saw the Jew roll them up in his bag and walk away, he felt quite delighted to think that they were safely gone, and that there was now no possible danger of his ever being able to wear them again. They were sad rags, to tell the truth; and Oliver had never had a new suit before.

One evening, about a week after the affair of the picture, as he was sitting talking to Mrs. Bedwin, there came a message down from Mr. Brownlow, that if Oliver Twist felt pretty well, he should like to see him in his study, and talk to him a little while.

'Bless us, and save us! Wash your hands, and let me part your hair nicely for you, child,' said Mrs. Bedwin. 'Dear heart alive! If we had known he would have asked for you, we would have put you a clean collar on, and made you as smart as sixpence!'

Oliver did as the old lady bade him; and, although she lamented grievously, meanwhile, that there was not even time to crimp the little frill that bordered his shirt-collar; he looked so delicate and handsome, despite that important personal advantage, that she went so far as to say: looking at him with great complacency from head to foot, that she really didn't think it would have been possible, on the longest notice, to have made much difference in him for the better.

Thus encouraged, Oliver tapped at the study door. On Mr. Brownlow calling to him to come in, he found himself in a little back room, quite full of books, with a window, looking into some pleasant little gardens. There was a table drawn up before the window, at which Mr. Brownlow was seated reading. When he saw Oliver, he pushed the book away from him, and told him to come near the table, and sit down. Oliver complied; marvelling where the people could be found to read such a great number of books as seemed to be written to make the world wiser. Which is still a marvel to more experienced people than Oliver Twist, every day of their lives.

'There are a good many books, are there not, my boy?' said Mr. Brownlow, observing the curiosity with which Oliver surveyed the shelves that reached from the floor to the ceiling.

'A great number, sir,' replied Oliver. 'I never saw so many.'

'You shall read them, if you behave well,' said the old gentleman kindly; 'and you will like that, better than looking at the outsides,—that is, some cases; because there are books of which the backs and covers are by far the best parts.'

'I suppose they are those heavy ones, sir,' said Oliver, pointing to some large quartos, with a good deal of gilding about the binding.

'Not always those,' said the old gentleman, patting Oliver on the head, and smiling as he did so; 'there are other equally heavy ones, though of a much smaller size. How should you like to grow up a clever man, and write books, eh?'

'I think I would rather read them, sir,' replied Oliver.

'What! wouldn't you like to be a book-writer?' said the old gentleman.

Oliver considered a little while; and at last said, he should think it would be a much better thing to be a book-seller; upon which the old gentleman laughed heartily, and declared he had said a very good thing. Which Oliver felt glad to have done, though he by no means knew what it was.

'Well, well,' said the old gentleman, composing his features. 'Don't be afraid! We won't make an author of you, while there's an honest trade to be learnt, or brick-making to turn to.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Oliver. At the earnest manner of his reply, the old gentleman laughed again; and said something about a curious instinct, which Oliver, not understanding, paid no very great attention to.

'Now,' said Mr. Brownlow, speaking if possible in a kinder, but at the same time in a much more serious manner, than Oliver had ever known him assume yet, 'I want you to pay great attention, my boy, to what I am going to say. I shall talk to you without any reserve; because I am sure you are well able to understand me, as many older persons would be.'

'Oh, don't tell you are going to send me away, sir, pray!' exclaimed Oliver, alarmed at the serious tone of the old gentleman's commencement! 'Don't turn me out of doors to wander in the streets again. Let me stay here, and be a servant. Don't send me back to the wretched place I came from. Have mercy upon a poor boy, sir!'

'My dear child,' said the old gentleman, moved by the warmth of Oliver's sudden appeal; 'you need not be afraid of my deserting you, unless you give me cause.'

'I never, never will, sir,' interposed Oliver.

'I hope not,' rejoined the old gentleman. 'I do not think you ever will. I have been deceived, before, in the objects whom I have endeavoured to benefit; but I feel strongly disposed to trust you, nevertheless; and I am more interested in your behalf than I can well account for, even to myself. The persons on whom I have bestowed my dearest love, lie deep in their graves; but, although the happiness and delight of my life lie buried there too, I have not made a coffin of my heart, and sealed it up, forever, on my best affections. Deep affliction has but strengthened and refined them.'

As the old gentleman said this in a low voice: more to himself than to his companion: and as he remained silent for a short time afterwards: Oliver sat quite still.

'Well, well!' said the old gentleman at length, in a more cheerful tone, 'I only say this, because you have a young heart; and knowing that I have suffered great pain and sorrow, you will be more careful, perhaps, not to wound me again. You say you are an orphan, without a friend in the world; all the inquiries I have been able to make, confirm the statement. Let me hear your story; where you come from; who brought you up; and how you got into the company in which I found you. Speak the truth, and you shall not be friendless while I live.'

Oliver's sobs checked his utterance for some minutes; when he was on the point of beginning to relate how he had been brought up at the farm, and carried to the workhouse by Mr. Bumble, a peculiarly impatient little double-knock was heard at the street-door: and the servant, running upstairs, announced Mr. Grimwig.

'Is he coming up?' inquired Mr. Brownlow.

'Yes, sir,' replied the servant. 'He asked if there were any muffins in the house; and, when I told him yes, he said he had come to tea.'

Mr. Brownlow smiled; and, turning to Oliver, said that Mr. Grimwig was an old friend of his, and he must not mind his being a little rough in his manners; for he was a worthy creature at bottom, as he had reason to know.

'Shall I go downstairs, sir?' inquired Oliver.

'No,' replied Mr. Brownlow, 'I would rather you remained here.'

At this moment, there walked into the room: supporting himself by a thick stick: a stout old gentleman, rather lame in one leg, who was dressed in a blue coat, striped waistcoat, nankeen breeches and gaiters, and a broad-brimmed white hat, with the sides turned up with green. A very small-plaited shirt frill stuck out from his waistcoat; and a very long steel watch-chain, with nothing but a key at the end, dangled loosely below it. The ends of his white neckerchief were twisted into a ball about the size of an orange; the variety of shapes into which his countenance was twisted, defy description. He had a manner of screwing his head on one side when he spoke; and of looking out of the corners of his eyes at the same time: which irresistibly reminded the beholder of a parrot. In this attitude, he fixed himself, the moment he made his appearance; and, holding out a small piece of orange-peel at arm's length, exclaimed, in a growling, discontented voice.

'Look here! do you see this! Isn't it a most wonderful and extraordinary thing that I can't call at a man's house but I find a piece of this poor surgeon's friend on the staircase? I've been lamed with orange-peel once, and I know orange-peel will be my death, or I'll be content to eat my own head, sir!'

This was the handsome offer with which Mr. Grimwig backed and confirmed nearly every assertion he made; and it was the more singular in his case, because, even admitting for the sake of argument, the possibility of scientific improvements being brought to that pass which will enable a gentleman to eat his own head in the event of his being so disposed, Mr.

Grimwig's head was such a particularly large one, that the most sanguine man alive could hardly entertain a hope of being able to get through it at a sitting—to put entirely out of the question, a very thick coating of powder.

'I'll eat my head, sir,' repeated Mr. Grimwig, striking his stick upon the ground. 'Hallo! what's that!' looking at Oliver, and retreating a pace or two.

'This is young Oliver Twist, whom we were speaking about,' said Mr. Brownlow.

Oliver bowed.

'You don't mean to say that's the boy who had the fever, I hope?' said Mr. Grimwig, recoiling a little more. 'Wait a minute! Don't speak! Stop—' continued Mr. Grimwig, abruptly, losing all dread of the fever in his triumph at the discovery; 'that's the boy who had the orange! If that's not the boy, sir, who had the orange, and threw this bit of peel upon the staircase, I'll eat my head, and his too.'

'No, no, he has not had one,' said Mr. Brownlow, laughing. 'Come! Put down your hat; and speak to my young friend.'

'I feel strongly on this subject, sir,' said the irritable old gentleman, drawing off his gloves. 'There's always more or less orange-peel on the pavement in our street; and I *know* it's put there by the surgeon's boy at the corner. A young woman stumbled over a bit last night, and fell against my garden-railings; directly she got up I saw her look towards his infernal red lamp with the pantomime-light. "Don't go to him," I called out of the window, "he's an assassin! A man-trap!" So he is. If he is not—' Here the irascible old gentleman gave a great knock on the ground with his stick; which was always understood, by his friends, to imply the customary offer, whenever it was not expressed in words. Then, still keeping his stick in his hand, he sat down; and, opening a double eye-glass, which he wore attached to a broad black riband, took a view of Oliver: who, seeing that he was the object of inspection, coloured, and bowed again.

'That's the boy, is it?' said Mr. Grimwig, at length.

'That's the boy,' replied Mr. Brownlow.

'How are you, boy?' said Mr. Grimwig.

'A great deal better, thank you, sir,' replied Oliver.

Mr. Brownlow, seeming to apprehend that his singular friend was about to say something disagreeable, asked Oliver to step downstairs and tell Mrs. Bedwin they were ready for tea; which, as he did not half like the visitor's manner, he was very happy to do.

'He is a nice-looking boy, is he not?' inquired Mr. Brownlow.

'I don't know,' replied Mr. Grimwig, pettishly.

'Don't know?'

'No. I don't know. I never see any difference in boys. I only knew two sort of boys. Mealy boys, and beef-faced boys.'

'And which is Oliver?'

'Mealy. I know a friend who has a beef-faced boy; a fine boy, they call him; with a round head, and red cheeks, and glaring eyes; a horrid boy; with a body and limbs that appear to be swelling out of the seams of his blue clothes; with the voice of a pilot, and the appetite of a wolf. I know him! The wretch!'

'Come,' said Mr. Brownlow, 'these are not the characteristics of young Oliver Twist; so he needn't excite your wrath.'

'They are not,' replied Mr. Grimwig. 'He may have worse.'

Here, Mr. Brownlow coughed impatiently; which appeared to afford Mr. Grimwig the most exquisite delight.

'He may have worse, I say,' repeated Mr. Grimwig. 'Where does he come from! Who is he? What is he? He has had a fever. What of that? Fevers are not peculiar to good people; are they? Bad people have fevers sometimes; haven't they, eh? I knew a man who was hung in Jamaica for murdering his master. He had had a fever six times; he wasn't recommended to mercy on that account. Pooh! nonsense!'

Now, the fact was, that in the inmost recesses of his own heart, Mr. Grimwig was strongly disposed to admit that Oliver's appearance and manner were unusually prepossessing; but he had a strong appetite for contradiction, sharpened on this occasion by the finding of the orange-peel; and, inwardly determining that no man should dictate to him whether a boy was well-looking or not, he had resolved, from the first, to oppose his friend. When Mr. Brownlow admitted that on no one point of inquiry could he yet return a satisfactory answer; and that he had postponed any investigation into Oliver's previous history until he thought the boy was strong enough to hear it; Mr. Grimwig chuckled maliciously. And he demanded, with a sneer, whether the housekeeper was in the habit of counting the plate at night; because if she didn't find a table-spoon or two missing some sunshiny morning, why, he would be content to—and so forth.

All this, Mr. Brownlow, although himself somewhat of an impetuous gentleman: knowing his friend's peculiarities, bore with great good humour; as Mr. Grimwig, at tea, was graciously pleased to express his entire approval of the muffins, matters went on very smoothly; and Oliver, who made one of the party, began to feel more at his ease than he had yet done in the fierce old gentleman's presence.

'And when are you going to hear a full, true, and particular account of the life and adventures of Oliver Twist?' asked Grimwig of Mr. Brownlow, at the conclusion of the meal; looking sideways at Oliver, as he resumed his subject.

'To-morrow morning,' replied Mr. Brownlow. 'I would rather he was alone with me at the time. Come up to me to-morrow morning at ten o'clock, my dear.'

'Yes, sir,' replied Oliver. He answered with some hesitation, because he was confused by Mr. Grimwig's looking so hard at him.

'I'll tell you what,' whispered that gentleman to Mr. Brownlow; 'he won't come up to you to-morrow morning. I saw him hesitate. He is deceiving you, my good friend.'

'I'll swear he is not,' replied Mr. Brownlow, warmly.

'If he is not,' said Mr. Grimwig, 'I'll—' and down went the stick.

'I'll answer for that boy's truth with my life!' said Mr. Brownlow, knocking the table.

'And I for his falsehood with my head!' rejoined Mr. Grimwig, knocking the table also.

'We shall see,' said Mr. Brownlow, checking his rising anger.

'We will,' replied Mr. Grimwig, with a provoking smile; 'we will.'

As fate would have it, Mrs. Bedwin chanced to bring in, at this moment, a small parcel of books, which Mr. Brownlow had that morning purchased of the identical bookstall-keeper, who has already figured in this history; having laid them on the table, she prepared to leave the room.

'Stop the boy, Mrs. Bedwin!' said Mr. Brownlow; 'there is something to go back.'

'He has gone, sir,' replied Mrs. Bedwin.

'Call after him,' said Mr. Brownlow; 'it's particular. He is a poor man, and they are not paid for. There are some books to be taken back, too.'

The street-door was opened. Oliver ran one way; and the girl ran another; and Mrs. Bedwin stood on the step and screamed for the boy; but there was no boy in sight. Oliver and the girl returned, in a breathless state, to report that there were no tidings of him.

'Dear me, I am very sorry for that,' exclaimed Mr. Brownlow; 'I particularly wished those books to be returned to-night.'

'Send Oliver with them,' said Mr. Grimwig, with an ironical smile; 'he will be sure to deliver them safely, you know.'

'Yes; do let me take them, if you please, sir,' said Oliver. 'I'll run all the way, sir.'

The old gentleman was just going to say that Oliver should not go out on any account; when a most malicious cough from Mr. Grimwig determined him that he should; and that, by his prompt discharge of the commission, he should prove to him the injustice of his suspicions: on this head at least: at once.

'You *shall* go, my dear,' said the old gentleman. 'The books are on a chair by my table. Fetch them down.'

Oliver, delighted to be of use, brought down the books under his arm in a great bustle; and waited, cap in hand, to hear what message he was to take.

'You are to say,' said Mr. Brownlow, glancing steadily at Grimwig; 'you are to say that you have brought those books back; and that you have come to pay the four pound ten I owe him. This is a five-pound note, so you will have to bring me back, ten shillings change.'

'I won't be ten minutes, sir,' said Oliver, eagerly. Having buttoned up the bank-note in his jacket pocket, and placed the books carefully under his arm, he made a respectful bow, and left the room. Mrs. Bedwin followed him to the street-door, giving him many directions about the nearest way, and the name of the bookseller, and the name of the street: all of which Oliver said he clearly understood. Having superadded many injunctions to be sure and not take cold, the old lady at length permitted him to depart.

'Bless his sweet face!' said the old lady, looking after him. 'I can't bear, somehow, to let him go out of my sight.'

At this moment, Oliver looked gaily round, and nodded before he turned the corner. The old lady smilingly returned his salutation, and, closing the door, went back to her own room.

'Let me see; he'll be back in twenty minutes, at the longest,' said Mr. Brownlow, pulling out his watch, and placing it on the table. 'It will be dark by that time.'

'Oh! you really expect him to come back, do you?' inquired Mr. Grimwig.

'Don't you?' asked Mr. Brownlow, smiling.

The spirit of contradiction was strong in Mr. Grimwig's breast, at the moment; and it was rendered stronger by his friend's confident smile.

'No,' he said, smiting the table with his fist, 'I do not. The boy has a new suit of clothes on his back, a set of valuable books under his arm, and a five-pound note in his pocket. He'll join his old friends the thieves, and laugh at you. If ever that boy returns to this house, sir, I'll eat my head.'

With these words he drew his chair closer to the table; and there the two friends sat, in silent expectation, with the watch between them.

It is worthy of remark, as illustrating the importance we attach to our own judgments, and the pride with which we put forth our most rash and hasty conclusions, that, although Mr. Grimwig was not by any means a bad-hearted man, and though he would have been unfeignedly sorry to see his respected friend duped and deceived, he really did most earnestly and strongly hope at that moment, that Oliver Twist might not come back.

It grew so dark, that the figures on the dial-plate were scarcely discernible; but there the two old gentlemen continued to sit, in silence, with the watch between them.

CHAPTER XV

SHOWING HOW VERY FOND OF OLIVER TWIST, THE MERRY OLD JEW AND MISS NANCY WERE

In the obscure parlour of a low public-house, in the filthiest part of Little Saffron Hill; a dark and gloomy den, where a flaring gas-light burnt all day in the winter-time; and where no ray of sun ever shone in the summer: there sat, brooding over a little pewter measure and a small glass, strongly impregnated with the smell of liquor, a man in a velveteen coat, drab shorts, half-boots and stockings, whom even by that dim light no experienced agent of the police would have hesitated to recognise as Mr. William Sikes. At his feet, sat a white-coated, red-eyed dog; who occupied himself, alternately, in winking at his master with both eyes at the same time; and in licking a large, fresh cut on one side of his mouth, which appeared to be the result of some recent conflict.

'Keep quiet, you warmint! Keep quiet!' said Mr. Sikes, suddenly breaking silence. Whether his meditations were so intense as to be disturbed by the dog's winking, or whether his feelings were so wrought upon by his reflections that they required all the relief derivable from kicking an unoffending animal to allay them, is matter for argument and consideration. Whatever was the cause, the effect was a kick and a curse, bestowed upon the dog simultaneously.

Dogs are not generally apt to revenge injuries inflicted upon them by their masters; but Mr. Sikes's dog, having faults of temper in common with his owner, and labouring, perhaps, at this moment, under a powerful sense of injury, made no more ado but at once fixed his teeth in one of the half-boots. Having given in a hearty shake, he retired, growling, under a form; just escaping the pewter measure which Mr. Sikes levelled at his head.

'You would, would you?' said Sikes, seizing the poker in one hand, and deliberately opening with the other a large clasp-knife, which he drew from his pocket. 'Come here, you born devil! Come here! D'ye hear?'

The dog no doubt heard; because Mr. Sikes spoke in the very harshest key of a very harsh voice; but, appearing to entertain some unaccountable objection to having his throat cut, he remained where he was, and growled more fiercely than before: at the same time grasping the end of the poker between his teeth, and biting at it like a wild beast.

This resistance only infuriated Mr. Sikes the more; who, dropping on his knees, began to assail the animal most furiously. The dog jumped from right to left, and from left to right; snapping, growling, and barking; the man thrust and swore, and struck and blasphemed; and the struggle was reaching a most critical point for one or other; when, the door suddenly opening, the dog darted out: leaving Bill Sikes with the poker and the clasp-knife in his hands.

There must always be two parties to a quarrel, says the old adage. Mr. Sikes, being disappointed of the dog's participation, at once transferred his share in the quarrel to the new comer.

'What the devil do you come in between me and my dog for?' said Sikes, with a fierce gesture.

'I didn't know, my dear, I didn't know,' replied Fagin, humbly; for the Jew was the new comer.

'Didn't know, you white-livered thief!' growled Sikes. 'Couldn't you hear the noise?'

'Not a sound of it, as I'm a living man, Bill,' replied the Jew.

'Oh no! You hear nothing, you don't,' retorted Sikes with a fierce sneer. 'Sneaking in and out, so as nobody hears how you come or go! I wish you had been the dog, Fagin, half a minute ago.'

'Why?' inquired the Jew with a forced smile.

'Cause the government, as cares for the lives of such men as you, as haven't half the pluck of curs, lets a man kill a dog how he likes,' replied Sikes, shutting up the knife with a very expressive look; 'that's why.'

The Jew rubbed his hands; and, sitting down at the table, affected to laugh at the pleasantry of his friend. He was obviously very ill at ease, however.

'Grin away,' said Sikes, replacing the poker, and surveying him with savage contempt; 'grin away. You'll never have the laugh at me, though, unless it's behind a nightcap. I've got the upper hand over you, Fagin; and, d—me, I'll keep it. There! If I go, you go; so take care of me.'

'Well, well, my dear,' said the Jew, 'I know all that; we—we—have a mutual interest, Bill,—a mutual interest.'

'Humph,' said Sikes, as if he thought the interest lay rather more on the Jew's side than on his. 'Well, what have you got to say to me?'

'It's all passed safe through the melting-pot,' replied Fagin, 'and this is your share. It's rather more than it ought to be, my dear; but as I know you'll do me a good turn another time, and—'

'Stow that gammon,' interposed the robber, impatiently. 'Where is it? Hand over!'

'Yes, yes, Bill; give me time, give me time,' replied the Jew, soothingly. 'Here it is! All safe!' As he spoke, he drew forth an old cotton handkerchief from his breast; and untying a large knot in one corner, produced a small brown-paper packet. Sikes, snatching it from him, hastily opened it; and proceeded to count the sovereigns it contained.

'This is all, is it?' inquired Sikes.

'All,' replied the Jew.

'You haven't opened the parcel and swallowed one or two as you come along, have you?' inquired Sikes, suspiciously. 'Don't put on an injured look at the question; you've done it many a time. Jerk the tinkler.'

These words, in plain English, conveyed an injunction to ring the bell. It was answered by another Jew: younger than Fagin, but nearly as vile and repulsive in appearance.

Bill Sikes merely pointed to the empty measure. The Jew, perfectly understanding the hint, retired to fill it: previously exchanging a remarkable look with Fagin, who raised his eyes for an instant, as if in expectation of it, and shook his head in reply; so slightly that the action would have been almost imperceptible to an observant third person. It was lost upon Sikes, who was stooping at the moment to tie the boot-lace which the dog had torn. Possibly, if he had observed the brief interchange of signals, he might have thought that it boded no good to him.

'Is anybody here, Barney?' inquired Fagin; speaking, now that that Sikes was looking on, without raising his eyes from the ground.

'Dot a shoul,' replied Barney; whose words: whether they came from the heart or not: made their way through the nose.

'Nobody?' inquired Fagin, in a tone of surprise: which perhaps might mean that Barney was at liberty to tell the truth.

'Dobody but Biss Dadsy,' replied Barney.

'Nancy!' exclaimed Sikes. 'Where? Strike me blind, if I don't honour that 'ere girl, for her native talents.'

'She's bid havid a plate of boiled beef id the bar,' replied Barney.

'Send her here,' said Sikes, pouring out a glass of liquor. 'Send her here.'

Barney looked timidly at Fagin, as if for permission; the Jew remaining silent, and not lifting his eyes from the ground, he retired; and presently returned, ushering in Nancy; who was decorated with the bonnet, apron, basket, and street-door key, complete.

'You are on the scent, are you, Nancy?' inquired Sikes, proffering the glass.

'Yes, I am, Bill,' replied the young lady, disposing of its contents; 'and tired enough of it I am, too. The young brat's been ill and confined to the crib; and—'

'Ah, Nancy, dear!' said Fagin, looking up.

Now, whether a peculiar contraction of the Jew's red eye-brows, and a half closing of his deeply-set eyes, warned Miss Nancy that she was disposed to be too communicative, is not a matter of much importance. The fact is all we need care for here; and the fact is, that she suddenly checked herself, and with several gracious smiles upon Mr. Sikes, turned the conversation to other matters. In about ten minutes' time, Mr. Fagin was seized with a fit of coughing; upon which Nancy pulled her shawl over her shoulders, and declared it was time to go. Mr. Sikes, finding that he was walking a short part of her way himself, expressed his intention of accompanying her; they went away together, followed, at a little distant, by the dog, who slunk out of a back-yard as soon as his master was out of sight.

The Jew thrust his head out of the room door when Sikes had left it; looked after him as we walked up the dark passage; shook his clenched fist; muttered a deep curse; and then, with a horrible grin, reseated himself at the table; where he was soon deeply absorbed in the interesting pages of the Hue-and-Cry.

Meanwhile, Oliver Twist, little dreaming that he was within so very short a distance of the merry old gentleman, was on his way to the book-stall. When he got into Clerkenwell, he accidently turned down a by-street which was not exactly in his way; but not discovering his mistake until he had got half-way down it, and knowing it must lead in the right direction, he did not think it worth while to turn back; and so marched on, as quickly as he could, with the books under his arm.

He was walking along, thinking how happy and contented he ought to feel; and how much he would give for only one look at poor little Dick, who, starved and beaten, might be weeping bitterly at that very moment; when he was startled by a young woman screaming out very loud. 'Oh, my dear brother!' And he had hardly looked up, to see what the matter was, when he was stopped by having a pair of arms thrown tight round his neck.

'Don't,' cried Oliver, struggling. 'Let go of me. Who is it? What are you stopping me for?'

The only reply to this, was a great number of loud lamentations from the young woman who had embraced him; and who had a little basket and a street-door key in her hand.

'Oh my gracious!' said the young woman, 'I have found him! Oh! Oliver! Oliver! Oh you naughty boy, to make me suffer such distress on your account! Come home, dear, come. Oh, I've found him. Thank gracious goodness heavins, I've found him!' With these incoherent exclamations, the young woman burst into another fit of crying, and got so dreadfully hysterical, that a couple of women who came up at the moment asked a butcher's boy with a shiny head of hair anointed with suet, who was also looking on, whether he didn't think he had better run for the doctor. To which, the butcher's boy: who appeared of a lounging, not to say indolent disposition: replied, that he thought not.

'Oh, no, no, never mind,' said the young woman, grasping Oliver's hand; 'I'm better now. Come home directly, you cruel boy! Come!'

'Oh, ma'am,' replied the young woman, 'he ran away, near a month ago, from his parents, who are hard-working and respectable people; and went and joined a set of thieves and bad characters; and almost broke his mother's heart.'

'Young wretch!' said one woman.

'Go home, do, you little brute,' said the other.

'I am not,' replied Oliver, greatly alarmed. 'I don't know her. I haven't any sister, or father and mother either. I'm an orphan; I live at Pentonville.'

'Only hear him, how he braves it out!' cried the young woman.

'Why, it's Nancy!' exclaimed Oliver; who now saw her face for the first time; and started back, in irrepressible astonishment.

'You see he knows me!' cried Nancy, appealing to the bystanders. 'He can't help himself. Make him come home, there's good people, or he'll kill his dear mother and father, and break my heart!'

'What the devil's this?' said a man, bursting out of a beer-shop, with a white dog at his heels; 'young Oliver! Come home to your poor mother, you young dog! Come home directly.'

'I don't belong to them. I don't know them. Help! help!' cried Oliver, struggling in the man's powerful grasp.

'Help!' repeated the man. 'Yes; I'll help you, you young rascal!

What books are these? You've been a stealing 'em, have you? Give 'em here.' With these words, the man tore the volumes from his grasp, and struck him on the head.

'That's right!' cried a looker-on, from a garret-window. 'That's the only way of bringing him to his senses!'

'To be sure!' cried a sleepy-faced carpenter, casting an approving look at the garret-window.

'It'll do him good!' said the two women.

'And he shall have it, too!' rejoined the man, administering another blow, and seizing Oliver by the collar. 'Come on, you young villain! Here, Bull's-eye, mind him, boy! Mind him!'

Weak with recent illness; stupified by the blows and the suddenness of the attack; terrified by the fierce growling of the dog, and the brutality of the man; overpowered by the conviction of the bystanders that he really was the hardened little wretch he was described to be; what could one poor child do! Darkness had set in; it was a low neighborhood; no help was near; resistance was useless. In another moment he was dragged into a labyrinth of dark narrow courts, and was forced along them at a pace which rendered the few cries he dared to give utterance to, unintelligible. It was of little moment, indeed, whether they were intelligible or no; for there was nobody to care for them, had they been ever so plain.

The gas-lamps were lighted; Mrs. Bedwin was waiting anxiously at the open door; the servant had run up the street twenty times to see if there were any traces of Oliver; and still the two old gentlemen sat, perseveringly, in the dark parlour, with the watch between them.

CHAPTER XVI

RELATES WHAT BECAME OF OLIVER TWIST, AFTER HE HAD BEEN CLAIMED BY NANCY

The narrow streets and courts, at length, terminated in a large open space; scattered about which, were pens for beasts, and other indications of a cattle-market. Sikes slackened his pace when they reached this spot: the girl being quite unable to support any longer, the rapid rate at which they had hitherto walked. Turning to Oliver, he roughly commanded him to take hold of Nancy's hand.

'Do you hear?' growled Sikes, as Oliver hesitated, and looked round.

They were in a dark corner, quite out of the track of passengers.

Oliver saw, but too plainly, that resistance would be of no avail. He held out his hand, which Nancy clasped tight in hers.

'Give me the other,' said Sikes, seizing Oliver's unoccupied hand. 'Here, Bull's-Eye!'

The dog looked up, and growled.

'See here, boy!' said Sikes, putting his other hand to Oliver's throat; 'if he speaks ever so soft a word, hold him! D'ye mind!'

The dog growled again; and licking his lips, eyed Oliver as if he were anxious to attach himself to his windpipe without delay.

'He's as willing as a Christian, strike me blind if he isn't!' said Sikes, regarding the animal with a kind of grim and ferocious approval. 'Now, you know what you've got to expect, master, so call away as quick as you like; the dog will soon stop that game. Get on, young'un!'

Bull's-eye wagged his tail in acknowledgment of this unusually endearing form of speech; and, giving vent to another admonitory growl for the benefit of Oliver, led the way onward.

It was Smithfield that they were crossing, although it might have been Grosvenor Square, for anything Oliver knew to the contrary. The night was dark and foggy. The lights in the shops could scarecely struggle through the heavy mist, which thickened every moment and shrouded the streets and houses in gloom; rendering the strange place still stranger in Oliver's eyes; and making his uncertainty the more dismal and depressing.

They had hurried on a few paces, when a deep church-bell struck the hour. With its first stroke, his two conductors stopped, and turned their heads in the direction whence the sound proceeded.

'Eight o' clock, Bill,' said Nancy, when the bell ceased.

'What's the good of telling me that; I can hear it, can't I!' replied Sikes.

'I wonder whether THEY can hear it,' said Nancy.

'Of course they can,' replied Sikes. 'It was Bartlemy time when I was shopped; and there warn't a penny trumpet in the fair, as I couldn't hear the squeaking on. Arter I was locked up for the night, the row and din outside made the thundering old jail so silent, that I could almost have beat my brains out against the iron plates of the door.'

'Poor fellow!' said Nancy, who still had her face turned towards the quarter in which the bell had sounded. 'Oh, Bill, such fine young chaps as them!'

'Yes; that's all you women think of,' answered Sikes. 'Fine young chaps! Well, they're as good as dead, so it don't much matter.'

With this consolation, Mr. Sikes appeared to repress a rising tendency to jealousy, and, clasping Oliver's wrist more firmly, told him to step out again.

'Wait a minute!' said the girl: 'I wouldn't hurry by, if it was you that was coming out to be hung, the next time eight o'clock struck, Bill. I'd walk round and round the place till I dropped, if the snow was on the ground, and I hadn't a shawl to cover me.'

'And what good would that do?' inquired the unsentimental Mr. Sikes. 'Unless you could pitch over a file and twenty yards of good stout rope, you might as well be walking fifty mile off, or not walking at all, for all the good it would do me. Come on, and don't stand preaching there.'

The girl burst into a laugh; drew her shawl more closely round her; and they walked away. But Oliver felt her hand tremble, and, looking up in her face as they passed a gas-lamp, saw that it had turned a deadly white.

They walked on, by little-frequented and dirty ways, for a full half-hour: meeting very few people, and those appearing from their looks to hold much the same position in society as Mr. Sikes himself. At length they turned into a very filthy narrow street, nearly full of old-clothes shops; the dog running forward, as if conscious that there was no further occasion for his keeping on guard, stopped before the door of a shop that was closed and apparently untenanted; the house was in a ruinous condition, and on the door was nailed a board, intimating that it was to let: which looked as if it had hung there for many years.

'All right,' cried Sikes, glancing cautiously about.

Nancy stooped below the shutters, and Oliver heard the sound of a bell. They crossed to the opposite side of the street, and stood for a few moments under a lamp. A noise, as if a sash window were gently raised, was heard; and soon afterwards the door softly opened. Mr. Sikes then seized the terrified boy by the collar with very little ceremony; and all three were quickly inside the house.

The passage was perfectly dark. They waited, while the person who had let them in, chained and barred the door.

'Anybody here?' inquired Sikes.

'No,' replied a voice, which Oliver thought he had heard before.

'Is the old 'un here?' asked the robber.

'Yes,' replied the voice, 'and precious down in the mouth he has been. Won't he be glad to see you? Oh, no!'

The style of this reply, as well as the voice which delivered it, seemed familiar to Oliver's ears: but it was impossible to distinguish even the form of the speaker in the darkness.

'Let's have a glim,' said Sikes, 'or we shall go breaking our necks, or treading on the dog. Look after your legs if you do!'

'Stand still a moment, and I'll get you one,' replied the voice. The receding footsteps of the speaker were heard; and, in another minute, the form of Mr. John Dawkins, otherwise the Artful Dodger, appeared. He bore in his right hand a tallow candle stuck in the end of a cleft stick.

The young gentleman did not stop to bestow any other mark of recognition upon Oliver than a humourous grin; but, turning away, beckoned the visitors to follow him down a flight of stairs. They crossed an empty kitchen; and, opening the door of a low earthy-smelling room, which seemed to have been built in a small back-yard, were received with a shout of laughter.

'Oh, my wig, my wig!' cried Master Charles Bates, from whose lungs the laughter had proceeded: 'here he is! oh, cry, here he is! Oh, Fagin, look at him! Fagin, do look at him! I can't bear it; it is such a jolly game, I cant' bear it. Hold me, somebody, while I laugh it out.'

With this irrepressible ebullition of mirth, Master Bates laid himself flat on the floor: and kicked convulsively for five minutes, in an ectasy of facetious joy. Then jumping to his feet, he snatched the cleft stick from the Dodger; and, advancing to Oliver, viewed him round and round; while the Jew, taking off his nightcap, made a great number of low bows to the bewildered boy. The Artful, meantime, who was of a rather saturnine disposition, and seldom gave way to merriment when it interfered with business, rifled Oliver's pockets with steady assiduity.

'Look at his togs, Fagin!' said Charley, putting the light so close to his new jacket as nearly to set him on fire. 'Look at his togs! Superfine cloth, and the heavy swell cut! Oh, my eye, what a game! And his books, too! Nothing but a gentleman, Fagin!'

'Delighted to see you looking so well, my dear,' said the Jew, bowing with mock humility. 'The Artful shall give you another suit, my dear, for fear you should spoil that Sunday one. Why didn't you write, my dear, and say you were coming? We'd have got something warm for supper.'

At his, Master Bates roared again: so loud, that Fagin himself relaxed, and even the Dodger smiled; but as the Artful drew forth the five-pound note at that instant, it is doubtful whether the sally of the discovery awakened his merriment.

'Hallo, what's that?' inquired Sikes, stepping forward as the Jew seized the note. 'That's mine, Fagin.'

'No, no, my dear,' said the Jew. 'Mine, Bill, mine. You shall have the books.'

'If that ain't mine!' said Bill Sikes, putting on his hat with a determined air; 'mine and Nancy's that is; I'll take the boy back again.'

The Jew started. Oliver started too, though from a very different cause; for he hoped that the dispute might really end in his being taken back.

'Come! Hand over, will you?' said Sikes.

'This is hardly fair, Bill; hardly fair, is it, Nancy?' inquired the Jew.

'Fair, or not fair,' retorted Sikes, 'hand over, I tell you! Do you think Nancy and me has got nothing else to do with our precious time but to spend it in scouting arter, and kidnapping, every young boy as gets grabbed through you? Give it here, you avaricious old skeleton, give it here!'

With this gentle remonstrance, Mr. Sikes plucked the note from between the Jew's finger and thumb; and looking the old man coolly in the face, folded it up small, and tied it in his neckerchief.

'That's for our share of the trouble,' said Sikes; 'and not half enough, neither. You may keep the books, if you're fond of reading. If you ain't, sell 'em.'

'They're very pretty,' said Charley Bates: who, with sundry grimaces, had been affecting to read one of the volumes in question; 'beautiful writing, isn't is, Oliver?' At sight of the dismayed look with which Oliver regarded his tormentors, Master Bates, who was blessed with a lively sense of the ludicrous, fell into another ectasy, more boisterous than the first.

'They belong to the old gentleman,' said Oliver, wringing his hands; 'to the good, kind, old gentleman who took me into his house, and had me nursed, when I was near dying of the fever. Oh, pray send them back; send him back the books and money. Keep me here all my life long; but pray, pray send them back. He'll think I stole them; the old lady: all of them who were so kind to me: will think I stole them. Oh, do have mercy upon me, and send them back!'

With these words, which were uttered with all the energy of passionate grief, Oliver fell upon his knees at the Jew's feet; and beat his hands together, in perfect desperation.

'The boy's right,' remarked Fagin, looking covertly round, and knitting his shaggy eyebrows into a hard knot. 'You're right, Oliver, you're right; they WILL think you have stolen 'em. Ha! ha!' chuckled the Jew, rubbing his hands, 'it couldn't have happened better, if we had chosen our time!'

'Of course it couldn't,' replied Sikes; 'I know'd that, directly I see him coming through Clerkenwell, with the books under his arm. It's all right enough. They're soft-hearted psalm-singers, or they wouldn't have taken him in at all; and they'll ask no questions after him, fear they should be obliged to prosecute, and so get him lagged. He's safe enough.'

Oliver had looked from one to the other, while these words were being spoken, as if he were bewildered, and could scarecely understand what passed; but when Bill Sikes concluded, he jumped suddenly to his feet, and tore wildly from the room: uttering shrieks for help, which made the bare old house echo to the roof.

'Keep back the dog, Bill!' cried Nancy, springing before the door, and closing it, as the Jew and his two pupils darted out in pursuit. 'Keep back the dog; he'll tear the boy to pieces.'

'Serve him right!' cried Sikes, struggling to disengage himself from the girl's grasp. 'Stand off from me, or I'll split your head against the wall.'

'I don't care for that, Bill, I don't care for that,' screamed the girl, struggling violently with the man, 'the child shan't be torn down by the dog, unless you kill me first.'

'Shan't he!' said Sikes, setting his teeth. 'I'll soon do that, if you don't keep off.'

The housebreaker flung the girl from him to the further end of the room, just as the Jew and the two boys returned, dragging Oliver among them.

'What's the matter here!' said Fagin, looking round.

'The girl's gone mad, I think,' replied Sikes, savagely.

'No, she hasn't,' said Nancy, pale and breathless from the scuffle; 'no, she hasn't, Fagin; don't think it.'

'Then keep quiet, will you?' said the Jew, with a threatening look.

'No, I won't do that, neither,' replied Nancy, speaking very loud. 'Come! What do you think of that?'

Mr. Fagin was sufficiently well acquainted with the manners and customs of that particular species of humanity to which Nancy belonged, to feel tolerably certain that it would be rather unsafe to prolong any conversation with her, at present. With the view of diverting the attention of the company, he turned to Oliver.

'So you wanted to get away, my dear, did you?' said the Jew, taking up a jagged and knotted club which law in a corner of the fireplace; 'eh?'

Oliver made no reply. But he watched the Jew's motions, and breathed quickly.

'Wanted to get assistance; called for the police; did you?' sneered the Jew, catching the boy by the arm. 'We'll cure you of that, my young master.'

The Jew inflicted a smart blow on Oliver's shoulders with the club; and was raising it for a second, when the girl, rushing forward, wrested it from his hand. She flung it into the fire, with a force that brought some of the glowing coals whirling out into the room.

'I won't stand by and see it done, Fagin,' cried the girl. 'You've got the boy, and what more would you have?—Let him be—let him be—or I shall put that mark on some of you, that will bring me to the gallows before my time.'

The girl stamped her foot violently on the floor as she vented this threat; and with her lips compressed, and her hands clenched, looked alternately at the Jew and the other robber: her face quite colourless from the passion of rage into which she had gradually worked herself.

'Why, Nancy!' said the Jew, in a soothing tone; after a pause, during which he and Mr. Sikes had stared at one another in a disconcerted manner; 'you,—you're more clever than ever to-night. Ha! ha! my dear, you are acting beautifully.'

'Am I!' said the girl. 'Take care I don't overdo it. You will be the worse for it, Fagin, if I do; and so I tell you in good time to keep clear of me.'

There is something about a roused woman: especially if she add to all her other strong passions, the fierce impulses of recklessness and despair; which few men like to provoke. The Jew saw that it would be hopeless to affect any further mistake regarding the reality of Miss Nancy's rage; and, shrinking involuntarily back a few paces, cast a glance, half imploring and half cowardly, at Sikes: as if to hint that he was the fittest person to pursue the dialogue.

Mr. Sikes, thus mutely appealed to; and possibly feeling his personal pride and influence interested in the immediate reduction of Miss Nancy to reason; gave utterance to about a couple of score of curses and threats, the rapid production of which reflected great credit on the fertility of his invention. As they produced no visible effect on the object against whom they were discharged, however, he resorted to more tangible arguments.

'What do you mean by this?' said Sikes; backing the inquiry with a very common imprecation concerning the most beautiful of human features: which, if it were heard above, only once out of every fifty thousand times that it is uttered below, would render blindness as common a disorder as measles: 'what do you mean by it? Burn my body! Do you know who you are, and what you are?'

'Oh, yes, I know all about it,' replied the girl, laughing hysterically; and shaking her head from side to side, with a poor assumption of indifference.

'Well, then, keep quiet,' rejoined Sikes, with a growl like that he was accustomed to use when addressing his dog, 'or I'll quiet you for a good long time to come.'

The girl laughed again: even less composedly than before; and, darting a hasty look at Sikes, turned her face aside, and bit her lip till the blood came.

'You're a nice one,' added Sikes, as he surveyed her with a contemptuous air, 'to take up the humane and gen—teel side! A pretty subject for the child, as you call him, to make a friend of!'

'God Almighty help me, I am!' cried the girl passionately; 'and I wish I had been struck dead in the street, or had changed places with them we passed so near to-night, before I had lent a hand in bringing him here. He's a thief, a liar, a devil, all that's bad, from this night forth. Isn't that enough for the old wretch, without blows?'

'Come, come, Sikes,' said the Jew appealing to him in a remonstratory tone, and motioning towards the boys, who were eagerly attentive to all that passed; 'we must have civil words; civil words, Bill.'

'Civil words!' cried the girl, whose passion was frightful to see. 'Civil words, you villain! Yes, you deserve 'em from me. I thieved for you when I was a child not half as old as this!' pointing to Oliver. 'I have been in the same trade, and in the same service, for twelve years since. Don't you know it? Speak out! Don't you know it?'

'Well, well,' replied the Jew, with an attempt at pacification; 'and, if you have, it's your living!'

'Aye, it is!' returned the girl; not speaking, but pouring out the words in one continuous and vehement scream. 'It is my living; and the cold, wet, dirty streets are my home; and you're the wretch that drove me to them long ago, and that'll keep me there, day and night, day and night, till I die!'

'I shall do you a mischief!' interposed the Jew, goaded by these reproaches; 'a mischief worse than that, if you say much more!'

The girl said nothing more; but, tearing her hair and dress in a transport of passion, made such a rush at the Jew as would probably have left signal marks of her revenge upon him, had not her wrists been seized by Sikes at the right moment; upon which, she made a few ineffectual struggles, and fainted.

'She's all right now,' said Sikes, laying her down in a corner. 'She's uncommon strong in the arms, when she's up in this way.'

The Jew wiped his forehead: and smiled, as if it were a relief to have the disturbance over; but neither he, nor Sikes, nor the dog, nor the boys, seemed to consider it in any other light than a common occurance incidental to business.

'It's the worst of having to do with women,' said the Jew, replacing his club; 'but they're clever, and we can't get on, in our line, without 'em. Charley, show Oliver to bed.'

'I suppose he'd better not wear his best clothes tomorrow, Fagin, had he?' inquired Charley Bates.

'Certainly not,' replied the Jew, reciprocating the grin with which Charley put the question.

Master Bates, apparently much delighted with his commission, took the cleft stick: and led Oliver into an adjacent kitchen, where there were two or three of the beds on which he had slept before; and here, with many uncontrollable bursts of laughter, he produced the identical old suit of clothes which Oliver had so much congratulated himself upon leaving off at Mr. Brownlow's; and the accidental display of which, to Fagin, by the Jew who purchased them, had been the very first clue received, of his whereabout.

'Put off the smart ones,' said Charley, 'and I'll give 'em to Fagin to take care of. What fun it is!'

Poor Oliver unwillingly complied. Master Bates rolling up the new clothes under his arm, departed from the room, leaving Oliver in the dark, and locking the door behind him.

The noise of Charley's laughter, and the voice of Miss Betsy, who opportunely arrived to throw water over her friend, and perform other feminine offices for the promotion of her recovery, might have kept many people awake under more happy circumstances than those in which Oliver was placed. But he was sick and weary; and he soon fell sound asleep.

CHAPTER XVII

OLIVER'S DESTINY CONTINUING UNPROPITIOUS, BRINGS A GREAT MAN TO LONDON TO INJURE HIS REPUTATION

It is the custom on the stage, in all good murderous melodramas, to present the tragic and the comic scenes, in as regular alternation, as the layers of red and white in a side of streaky bacon. The hero sinks upon his straw bed, weighed down by fetters and misfortunes; in the next scene, his faithful but unconscious squire regales the audience with a comic song. We behold, with throbbing bosoms, the heroine in the grasp of a proud and ruthless baron: her virtue and her life alike in danger, drawing forth her dagger to preserve the one at the cost of the other; and just as our expectations are wrought up to the highest pitch, a whistle is heard, and we are straightway transported to the great hall of the castle; where a grey-headed seneschal sings a funny chorus with a funnier body of vassals, who are free of all sorts of places, from church vaults to palaces, and roam about in company, carolling perpetually.

Such changes appear absurd; but they are not so unnatural as they would seem at first sight. The transitions in real life from well-spread boards to death-beds, and from mourning-weeds to holiday garments, are not a whit less startling; only, there, we are busy actors, instead of passive lookers-on, which makes a vast difference. The actors in the mimic life of the theatre, are blind to violent transitions and abrupt impulses of passion or feeling, which, presented before the eyes of mere spectators, are at once condemned as outrageous and preposterous.

As sudden shiftings of the scene, and rapid changes of time and place, are not only sanctioned in books by long usage, but are by many considered as the great art of authorship: an author's skill in his craft being, by such critics, chiefly estimated with relation to the dilemmas in which he leaves his characters at the end of every chapter: this brief introduction to the present one may perhaps be deemed unnecessary. If so, let it be considered a delicate intimation on the part of the historian that he is going back to the town in which Oliver Twist was born; the reader taking it for granted that there are good and substantial reasons for making the journey, or he would not be invited to proceed upon such an expedition.

Mr. Bumble emerged at early morning from the workhouse-gate, and walked with portly carriage and commanding steps, up the High Street. He was in the full bloom and pride of beadlehood; his cocked hat and coat were dazzling in the morning sun; he clutched his cane with the vigorous tenacity of health and power. Mr. Bumble always carried his head high; but this morning it was higher than usual. There was an abstraction in his eye, an elevation in his air, which might have warned an observant stranger that thoughts were passing in the beadle's mind, too great for utterance.

Mr. Bumble stopped not to converse with the small shopkeepers and others who spoke to him, deferentially, as he passed along. He merely returned their salutations with a wave of his hand, and relaxed not in his dignified pace, until he reached the farm where Mrs. Mann tended the infant paupers with parochial care.

'Drat that beadle!' said Mrs. Mann, hearing the well-known shaking at the garden-gate. 'If it isn't him at this time in the morning! Lauk, Mr. Bumble, only think of its being you! Well, dear me, it IS a pleasure, this is! Come into the parlour, sir, please.'

The first sentence was addressed to Susan; and the exclamations of delight were uttered to Mr. Bumble: as the good lady unlocked the garden-gate: and showed him, with great attention and respect, into the house.

'Mrs. Mann,' said Mr. Bumble; not sitting upon, or dropping himself into a seat, as any common jackanapes would: but letting himself gradually and slowly down into a chair; 'Mrs. Mann, ma'am, good morning.'

'Well, and good morning to *you*, sir,' replied Mrs. Mann, with many smiles; 'and hoping you find yourself well, sir!'

'So-so, Mrs. Mann,' replied the beadle. 'A porochial life is not a bed of roses, Mrs. Mann.'

'Ah, that it isn't indeed, Mr. Bumble,' rejoined the lady. And all the infant paupers might have chorussed the rejoinder with great propriety, if they had heard it.

'A porochial life, ma'am,' continued Mr. Bumble, striking the table with his cane, 'is a life of worrit, and vexation, and hardihood; but all public characters, as I may say, must suffer prosecution.'

Mrs. Mann, not very well knowing what the beadle meant, raised her hands with a look of sympathy, and sighed.

'Ah! You may well sigh, Mrs. Mann!' said the beadle.

Finding she had done right, Mrs. Mann sighed again: evidently to the satisfaction of the public character: who, repressing a complacent smile by looking sternly at his cocked hat, said,

'Mrs. Mann, I am going to London.'

'Lauk, Mr. Bumble!' cried Mrs. Mann, starting back.

'To London, ma'am,' resumed the inflexible beadle, 'by coach. I and two paupers, Mrs. Mann! A legal action is a coming on, about a settlement; and the board has appointed me—me, Mrs. Mann—to dispose to the matter before the quarter-sessions at Clerkinwell.

And I very much question,' added Mr. Bumble, drawing himself up, 'whether the Clerkinwell Sessions will not find themselves in the wrong box before they have done with me.'

'Oh! you mustn't be too hard upon them, sir,' said Mrs. Mann, coaxingly.

'The Clerkinwell Sessions have brought it upon themselves, ma'am,' replied Mr. Bumble; 'and if the Clerkinwell Sessions find that they come off rather worse than they expected, the Clerkinwell Sessions have only themselves to thank.'

There was so much determination and depth of purpose about the menacing manner in which Mr. Bumble delivered himself of these words, that Mrs. Mann appeared quite awed by them. At length she said,

'You're going by coach, sir? I thought it was always usual to send them paupers in carts.'

'That's when they're ill, Mrs. Mann,' said the beadle. 'We put the sick paupers into open carts in the rainy weather, to prevent their taking cold.'

'Oh!' said Mrs. Mann.

'The opposition coach contracts for these two; and takes them cheap,' said Mr. Bumble. 'They are both in a very low state, and we find it would come two pound cheaper to move 'em than to bury 'em—that is, if we can throw 'em upon another parish, which I think we shall be able to do, if they don't die upon the road to spite us. Ha! ha! ha!'

When Mr. Bumble had laughed a little while, his eyes again encountered the cocked hat; and he became grave.

'We are forgetting business, ma'am,' said the beadle; 'here is your porochial stipend for the month.'

Mr. Bumble produced some silver money rolled up in paper, from his pocket-book; and requested a receipt: which Mrs. Mann wrote.

'It's very much blotted, sir,' said the farmer of infants; 'but it's formal enough, I dare say. Thank you, Mr. Bumble, sir, I am very much obliged to you, I'm sure.'

Mr. Bumble nodded, blandly, in acknowledgment of Mrs. Mann's curtsey; and inquired how the children were.

'Bless their dear little hearts!' said Mrs. Mann with emotion, 'they're as well as can be, the dears! Of course, except the two that died last week. And little Dick.'

'Isn't that boy no better?' inquired Mr. Bumble.

Mrs. Mann shook her head.

'He's a ill-conditioned, wicious, bad-disposed porochial child that,' said Mr. Bumble angrily. 'Where is he?'

'I'll bring him to you in one minute, sir,' replied Mrs. Mann. 'Here, you Dick!'

After some calling, Dick was discovered. Having had his face put under the pump, and dried upon Mrs. Mann's gown, he was led into the awful presence of Mr. Bumble, the beadle.

The child was pale and thin; his cheeks were sunken; and his eyes large and bright. The scanty parish dress, the livery of his misery, hung loosely on his feeble body; and his young limbs had wasted away, like those of an old man.

Such was the little being who stood trembling beneath Mr. Bumble's glance; not daring to lift his eyes from the floor; and dreading even to hear the beadle's voice.

'Can't you look at the gentleman, you obstinate boy?' said Mrs. Mann.

The child meekly raised his eyes, and encountered those of Mr. Bumble.

'What's the matter with you, porochial Dick?' inquired Mr. Bumble, with well-timed jocularity.

'Nothing, sir,' replied the child faintly.

'I should think not,' said Mrs. Mann, who had of course laughed very much at Mr. Bumble's humour.

'You want for nothing, I'm sure.'

'I should like—' faltered the child.

'Hey-day!' interposed Mr. Mann, 'I suppose you're going to say that you DO want for something, now? Why, you little wretch—'

'Stop, Mrs. Mann, stop!' said the beadle, raising his hand with a show of authority. 'Like what, sir, eh?'

'I should like,' faltered the child, 'if somebody that can write, would put a few words down for me on a piece of paper, and fold it up and seal it, and keep it for me, after I am laid in the ground.'

'Why, what does the boy mean?' exclaimed Mr. Bumble, on whom the earnest manner and wan aspect of the child had made some impression: accustomed as he was to such things. 'What do you mean, sir?'

'I should like,' said the child, 'to leave my dear love to poor Oliver Twist; and to let him know how often I have sat by myself and cried to think of his wandering about in the dark nights with nobody to help him. And I should like to tell him,' said the child pressing his small hands together, and speaking with great fervour, 'that I was glad to die when I was very young; for, perhaps, if I had lived to be a man, and had grown old, my little sister who is in Heaven, might forget me, or be unlike me; and it would be so much happier if we were both children there together.'

Mr. Bumble surveyed the little speaker, from head to foot, with indescribable astonishment; and, turning to his companion, said, 'They're all in one story, Mrs. Mann. That out-dacious Oliver had demogalized them all!'

'I couldn't have believed it, sir' said Mrs Mann, holding up her hands, and looking malignantly at Dick. 'I never see such a hardened little wretch!'

'Take him away, ma'am!' said Mr. Bumble imperiously. 'This must be stated to the board, Mrs. Mann.

'I hope the gentleman will understand that it isn't my fault, sir?' said Mrs. Mann, whimpering pathetically.

'They shall understand that, ma'am; they shall be acquainted with the true state of the case,' said Mr. Bumble. 'There; take him away, I can't bear the sight on him.'

Dick was immediately taken away, and locked up in the coal-cellar. Mr. Bumble shortly afterwards took himself off, to prepare for his journey.

At six o'clock next morning, Mr. Bumble: having exchanged his cocked hat for a round one, and encased his person in a blue great-coat with a cape to it: took his place on the outside of the coach, accompanied by the criminals whose settlement was disputed; with whom, in due course of time, he arrived in London.

He experienced no other crosses on the way, than those which originated in the perverse behaviour of the two paupers, who persisted in shivering, and complaining of the cold, in a manner which, Mr. Bumble declared, caused his teeth to chatter in his head, and made him feel quite uncomfortable; although he had a great-coat on.

Having disposed of these evil-minded persons for the night, Mr. Bumble sat himself down in the house at which the coach stopped; and took a temperate dinner of steaks, oyster sauce, and porter. Putting a glass of hot gin-and-water on the chimney-piece, he drew his chair to the fire; and, with sundry moral reflections on the too-prevalent sin of discontent and complaining, composed himself to read the paper.

The very first paragraph upon which Mr. Bumble's eye rested, was the following advertisement.

'FIVE GUINEAS REWARD

'Whereas a young boy, named Oliver Twist, absconded, or was enticed, on Thursday evening last, from his home, at Pentonville; and has not since been heard of. The above reward will be paid to any person who will give such information as will lead to the discovery of the said Oliver Twist, or tend to throw any light upon his previous history, in which the advertiser is, for many reasons, warmly interested.'

And then followed a full description of Oliver's dress, person, appearance, and disappearance: with the name and address of Mr. Brownlow at full length.

Mr. Bumble opened his eyes; read the advertisement, slowly and carefully, three several times; and in something more than five minutes was on his way to Pentonville: having actually, in his excitement, left the glass of hot gin-and-water, untasted.

'Is Mr. Brownlow at home?' inquired Mr. Bumble of the girl who opened the door.

To this inquiry the girl returned the not uncommon, but rather evasive reply of 'I don't know; where do you come from?'

Mr. Bumble no sooner uttered Oliver's name, in explanation of his errand, than Mrs. Bedwin, who had been listening at the parlour door, hastened into the passage in a breathless state.

'Come in, come in,' said the old lady: 'I knew we should hear of him. Poor dear! I knew we should! I was certain of it. Bless his heart! I said so all along.'

Having heard this, the worthy old lady hurried back into the parlour again; and seating herself on a sofa, burst into tears. The girl, who was not quite so susceptible, had run upstairs meanwhile; and now returned with a request that Mr. Bumble would follow her immediately: which he did.

He was shown into the little back study, where sat Mr. Brownlow and his friend Mr. Grimwig, with decanters and glasses before them. The latter gentleman at once burst into the exclamation:

'A beadle. A parish beadle, or I'll eat my head.'

'Pray don't interrupt just now,' said Mr. Brownlow. 'Take a seat, will you?'

Mr. Bumble sat himself down; quite confounded by the oddity of Mr. Grimwig's manner. Mr. Brownlow moved the lamp, so as to obtain an uninterrupted view of the beadle's countenance; and said, with a little impatience,

'Now, sir, you come in consequence of having seen the advertisement?'

'Yes, sir,' said Mr. Bumble.

'And you ARE a beadle, are you not?' inquired Mr. Grimwig.

'I am a porochial beadle, gentlemen,' rejoined Mr. Bumble proudly.

'Of course,' observed Mr. Grimwig aside to his friend, 'I knew he was. A beadle all over!'

Mr. Brownlow gently shook his head to impose silence on his friend, and resumed:

'Do you know where this poor boy is now?'

'No more than nobody,' replied Mr. Bumble.

'Well, what DO you know of him?' inquired the old gentleman. 'Speak out, my friend, if you have anything to say. What DO you know of him?'

'You don't happen to know any good of him, do you?' said Mr. Grimwig, caustically; after an attentive perusal of Mr. Bumble's features.

Mr. Bumble, catching at the inquiry very quickly, shook his head with portentous solemnity.

'You see?' said Mr. Grimwig, looking triumphantly at Mr. Brownlow.

Mr. Brownlow looked apprehensively at Mr. Bumble's pursed-up countenance; and requested him to communicate what he knew regarding Oliver, in as few words as possible.

Mr. Bumble put down his hat; unbuttoned his coat; folded his arms; inclined his head in a retrospective manner; and, after a few moments' reflection, commenced his story.

It would be tedious if given in the beadle's words: occupying, as it did, some twenty minutes in the telling; but the sum and substance of it was, that Oliver was a foundling, born of low and vicious parents. That he had, from his birth, displayed no better qualities than treachery, ingratitude, and malice. That he had terminated his brief career in the place of his birth, by making a sanguinary and cowardly attack on an unoffending lad, and running away in the night-time from his master's house. In proof of his really being the person he represented himself, Mr. Bumble laid upon the table the papers he had brought to town. Folding his arms again, he then awaited Mr. Brownlow's observations.

'I fear it is all too true,' said the old gentleman sorrowfully, after looking over the papers. 'This is not much for your intelligence; but I would gladly have given you treble the money, if it had been favourable to the boy.'

It is not improbable that if Mr. Bumble had been possessed of this information at an earlier period of the interview, he might have imparted a very different colouring to his little history. It was too late to do it now, however; so he shook his head gravely, and, pocketing the five guineas, withdrew.

Mr. Brownlow paced the room to and fro for some minutes; evidently so much disturbed by the beadle's tale, that even Mr. Grimwig forbore to vex him further.

At length he stopped, and rang the bell violently.

'Mrs. Bedwin,' said Mr. Brownlow, when the housekeeper appeared; 'that boy, Oliver, is an imposter.'

'It can't be, sir. It cannot be,' said the old lady energetically.

'I tell you he is,' retorted the old gentleman. 'What do you mean by can't be? We have just heard a full account of him from his birth; and he has been a thorough-paced little villain, all his life.'

'I never will believe it, sir,' replied the old lady, firmly. 'Never!'

'You old women never believe anything but quack-doctors, and lying story-books,' growled Mr. Grimwig. 'I knew it all along. Why didn't you take my advise in the beginning; you would if he hadn't had a fever, I suppose, eh? He was interesting, wasn't he? Interesting! Bah!' And Mr. Grimwig poked the fire with a flourish.

'He was a dear, grateful, gentle child, sir,' retorted Mrs. Bedwin, indignantly. 'I know what children are, sir; and have done these forty years; and people who can't say the same, shouldn't say anything about them. That's my opinion!'

This was a hard hit at Mr. Grimwig, who was a bachelor. As it extorted nothing from that gentleman but a smile, the old lady tossed her head, and smoothed down her apron preparatory to another speech, when she was stopped by Mr. Brownlow.

'Silence!' said the old gentleman, feigning an anger he was far from feeling. 'Never let me hear the boy's name again. I rang to tell you that. Never. Never, on any pretence, mind! You may leave the room, Mrs. Bedwin. Remember! I am in earnest.'

There were sad hearts at Mr. Brownlow's that night.

Oliver's heart sank within him, when he thought of his good friends; it was well for him that he could not know what they had heard, or it might have broken outright.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW OLIVER PASSED HIS TIME IN THE IMPROVING SOCIETY

OF HIS REPUTABLE FRIENDS

About noon next day, when the Dodger and Master Bates had gone out to pursue their customary avocations, Mr. Fagin took the opportunity of reading Oliver a long lecture on the crying sin of ingratitude; of which he clearly demonstrated he had been guilty, to no ordinary extent, in wilfully absenting himself from the society of his anxious friends; and, still more, in endeavouring to escape from them after so much trouble and expense had been incurred in his recovery. Mr. Fagin laid great stress on the fact of his having taken Oliver in, and cherished him, when, without his timely aid, he might have perished with hunger; and he related the dismal and affecting history of a young lad whom, in his philanthropy, he had succoured under parallel circumstances, but who, proving unworthy of his confidence and evincing a desire to communicate with the police, had unfortunately come to be hanged at the Old Bailey one morning. Mr. Fagin did not seek to conceal his share in the catastrophe, but lamented with tears in his eyes that the wrong-headed and treacherous behaviour of the young person in question, had rendered it necessary that he should become the victim of certain evidence for the crown: which, if it were not precisely true, was indispensably necessary for the safety of him (Mr. Fagin) and a few select friends. Mr. Fagin concluded by drawing a rather disagreeable picture of the discomforts of hanging; and, with great friendliness and politeness of manner, expressed his anxious hopes that he might never be obliged to submit Oliver Twist to that unpleasant operation.

Little Oliver's blood ran cold, as he listened to the Jew's words, and imperfectly comprehended the dark threats conveyed in them. That it was possible even for justice itself to confound the innocent with the guilty when they were in accidental companionship, he knew already; and that deeply-laid plans for the destruction of inconveniently knowing or over-communicative persons, had been really devised and carried out by the Jew on more occasions than one, he thought by no means unlikely, when he recollected the general nature of the altercations between that gentleman and Mr. Sikes: which seemed to bear reference to some foregone conspiracy of the kind. As he glanced timidly up, and met the Jew's searching look, he felt that his pale face and trembling limbs were neither unnoticed nor unrelished by that wary old gentleman.

The Jew, smiling hideously, patted Oliver on the head, and said, that if he kept himself quiet, and applied himself to business, he saw they would be very good friends yet. Then, taking his hat, and covering himself with an old patched great-coat, he went out, and locked the room-door behind him.

And so Oliver remained all that day, and for the greater part of many subsequent days, seeing nobody, between early morning and midnight, and left during the long hours to commune with his own thoughts. Which, never failing to revert to his kind friends, and the opinion they must long ago have formed of him, were sad indeed.

After the lapse of a week or so, the Jew left the room-door unlocked; and he was at liberty to wander about the house.

It was a very dirty place. The rooms upstairs had great high wooden chimney-pieces and large doors, with panelled walls and cornices to the ceiling; which, although they were black with neglect and dust, were ornamented in various ways. From all of these tokens Oliver concluded that a long time ago, before the old Jew was born, it had belonged to better people, and had perhaps been quite gay and handsome: dismal and dreary as it looked now.

Spiders had built their webs in the angles of the walls and ceilings; and sometimes, when Oliver walked softly into a room, the mice would scamper across the floor, and run back terrified to their holes. With these exceptions, there was neither sight nor sound of any living thing; and often, when it grew dark, and he was tired of wandering from room to room, he would crouch in the corner of the passage by the street-door, to be as near living people as he could; and would remain there, listening and counting the hours, until the Jew or the boys returned.

In all the rooms, the mouldering shutters were fast closed: the bars which held them were screwed tight into the wood; the only light which was admitted, stealing its way through round holes at the top: which made the rooms more gloomy, and filled them with strange shadows. There was a back-garret window with rusty bars outside, which had no shutter; and out of this, Oliver often gazed with a melancholy face for hours together; but nothing was to be descried from it but a confused and crowded mass of housetops, blackened chimneys, and gable-ends. Sometimes, indeed, a grizzly head might be seen, peering over the parapet-wall of a distant house; but it was quickly withdrawn again; and as the window of Oliver's observatory was nailed down, and dimmed with the rain and smoke of years, it was as much as he could do to make out the forms of the different objects beyond, without making any attempt to be seen or heard,—which he had as much chance of being, as if he had lived inside the ball of St. Paul's Cathedral.

One afternoon, the Dodger and Master Bates being engaged out that evening, the first-named young gentleman took it into his head to evince some anxiety regarding the decoration of his person (to do him justice, this was by no means an habitual weakness with him); and, with this end and aim, he condescendingly commanded Oliver to assist him in his toilet, straightway.

Oliver was but too glad to make himself useful; too happy to have some faces, however bad, to look upon; too desirous to conciliate those about him when he could honestly do so; to throw any objection in the way of this proposal. So he at once expressed his readiness; and, kneeling on the floor, while the Dodger sat upon the table so that he could take his foot in his laps, he applied himself to a process which Mr. Dawkins designated as 'japanning his trotter-cases.' The phrase, rendered into plain English, signifieth, cleaning his boots.

Whether it was the sense of freedom and independence which a rational animal may be supposed to feel when he sits on a table in an easy attitude smoking a pipe, swinging one leg carelessly to and fro, and having his boots cleaned all the time, without even the past trouble of having taken them off, or the prospective misery of putting them on, to disturb his reflections; or whether it was the goodness of the tobacco that soothed the feelings of the Dodger, or the mildness of the beer that mollified his thoughts; he was evidently tinctured, for the nonce, with a spice of romance and enthusiasm, foreign to his general nature. He looked down on Oliver, with a thoughtful countenance, for a brief space; and then, raising his head, and heaving a gentle sign, said, half in abstraction, and half to Master Bates:

'What a pity it is he isn't a prig!'

'Ah!' said Master Charles Bates; 'he don't know what's good for him.'

The Dodger sighed again, and resumed his pipe: as did Charley Bates. They both smoked, for some seconds, in silence.

'I suppose you don't even know what a prig is?' said the Dodger mournfully.

'I think I know that,' replied Oliver, looking up. 'It's a the—; you're one, are you not?' inquired Oliver, checking himself.

'I am,' replied the Doger. 'I'd scorn to be anything else.' Mr. Dawkins gave his hat a ferocious cock, after delivering this sentiment, and looked at Master Bates, as if to denote that he would feel obliged by his saying anything to the contrary.

'I am,' repeated the Dodger. 'So's Charley. So's Fagin. So's Sikes. So's Nancy. So's Bet. So we all are, down to the dog. And he's the downiest one of the lot!'

'And the least given to peaching,' added Charley Bates.

'He wouldn't so much as bark in a witness-box, for fear of committing himself; no, not if you tied him up in one, and left him there without wittles for a fortnight,' said the Dodger.

'Not a bit of it,' observed Charley.

'He's a rum dog. Don't he look fierce at any strange cove that laughs or sings when he's in company!' pursued the Dodger. 'Won't he growl at all, when he hears a fiddle playing! And don't he hate other dogs as ain't of his breed! Oh, no!'

'He's an out-and-out Christian,' said Charley.

This was merely intended as a tribute to the animal's abilities, but it was an appropriate remark in another sense, if Master Bates had only known it; for there are a good many ladies and gentlemen, claiming to be out-and-out Christians, between whom, and Mr. Sikes' dog, there exist strong and singular points of resemblance.

'Well, well,' said the Dodger, recurring to the point from which they had strayed: with that mindfulness of his profession which influenced all his proceedings. 'This hasn't go anything to do with young Green here.'

'No more it has,' said Charley. 'Why don't you put yourself under Fagin, Oliver?'

'And make your fortun' out of hand?' added the Dodger, with a grin.

'And so be able to retire on your property, and do the gen-teel: as I mean to, in the very next leap-year but four that ever comes, and the forty-second Tuesday in Trinity-week,' said Charley Bates.

'I don't like it,' rejoined Oliver, timidly; 'I wish they would let me go. I—I—would rather go.'

'And Fagin would RATHER not!' rejoined Charley.

Oliver knew this too well; but thinking it might be dangerous to express his feelings more openly, he only sighed, and went on with his boot-cleaning.

'Go!' exclaimed the Dodger. 'Why, where's your spirit?' Don't you take any pride out of yourself? Would you go and be dependent on your friends?'

'Oh, blow that!' said Master Bates: drawing two or three silk handkerchiefs from his pocket, and tossing them into a cupboard, 'that's too mean; that is.'

'*I* couldn't do it,' said the Dodger, with an air of haughty disgust.

'You can leave your friends, though,' said Oliver with a half smile; 'and let them be punished for what you did.'

'That,' rejoined the Dodger, with a wave of his pipe, 'That was all out of consideration for Fagin, 'cause the traps know that we work together, and he might have got into trouble if we hadn't made our lucky; that was the move, wasn't it, Charley?'

Master Bates nodded assent, and would have spoken, but the recollection of Oliver's flight came so suddenly upon him, that the smoke he was inhaling got entangled with a laugh, and went up into his head, and down into his throat: and brought on a fit of coughing and stamping, about five minutes long.

'Look here!' said the Dodger, drawing forth a handful of shillings and halfpence. 'Here's a jolly life! What's the odds where it comes from? Here, catch hold; there's plenty more where they were took from. You won't, won't you? Oh, you precious flat!'

'It's naughty, ain't it, Oliver?' inquired Charley Bates. 'He'll come to be scragged, won't he?'

'I don't know what that means,' replied Oliver.

'Something in this way, old feller,' said Charly. As he said it, Master Bates caught up an end of his neckerchief; and, holding it erect in the air, dropped his head on his shoulder, and jerked a curious sound through his teeth; thereby indicating, by a lively pantomimic representation, that scragging and hanging were one and the same thing.

'That's what it means,' said Charley. 'Look how he stares, Jack!

I never did see such prime company as that 'ere boy; he'll be the death of me, I know he will.' Master Charley Bates, having laughed heartily again, resumed his pipe with tears in his eyes.

'You've been brought up bad,' said the Dodger, surveying his boots with much satisfaction when Oliver had polished them. 'Fagin will make something of you, though, or you'll be the first he ever had that turned out unprofitable. You'd better begin at once; for you'll come to the trade long before you think of it; and you're only losing time, Oliver.'

Master Bates backed this advice with sundry moral admonitions of his own: which, being exhausted, he and his friend Mr. Dawkins launched into a glowing description of the numerous pleasures incidental to the life they led, interspersed with a variety of hints to Oliver that the best thing he could do, would be to secure Fagin's favour without more delay, by the means which they themselves had employed to gain it.

'And always put this in your pipe, Nolly,' said the Dodger, as the Jew was heard unlocking the door above, 'if you don't take fogels and tickers—'

'What's the good of talking in that way?' interposed Master Bates; 'he don't know what you mean.'

'If you don't take pocket-handkechers and watches,' said the Dodger, reducing his conversation to the level of Oliver's capacity, 'some other cove will; so that the coves that lose 'em will be all the worse, and you'll be all the worse, too, and nobody half a ha'p'orth the better, except the chaps wot gets them—and you've just as good a right to them as they have.'

'To be sure, to be sure!' said the Jew, who had entered unseen by Oliver. 'It all lies in a nutshell my dear; in a nutshell, take the Dodger's word for it. Ha! ha! ha! He understands the catechism of his trade.'

The old man rubbed his hands gleefully together, as he corroborated the Dodger's reasoning in these terms; and chuckled with delight at his pupil's proficiency.

The conversation proceeded no farther at this time, for the Jew had returned home accompanied by Miss Betsy, and a gentleman whom Oliver had never seen before, but who was accosted by the Dodger as Tom Chitling; and who, having lingered on the stairs to exchange a few gallantries with the lady, now made his appearance.

Mr. Chitling was older in years than the Dodger: having perhaps numbered eighteen winters; but there was a degree of deference in his deportment towards that young gentleman which seemed to indicate that he felt himself conscious of a slight inferiority in point of genius and professional aquirements. He had small twinkling eyes, and a pock-marked face; wore a fur cap, a dark corduroy jacket, greasy fustian trousers, and an apron. His wardrobe was, in truth, rather out of repair; but he excused himself to the company by stating that his 'time' was only out an hour before; and that, in consequence of having worn the regimentals for six weeks past, he had not been able to bestow any attention on his private clothes. Mr. Chitling added, with strong marks of irritation, that the new way of fumigating clothes up yonder was infernal unconstitutional, for it burnt holes in them, and there was no remedy against the County. The same remark he considered to apply to the regulation mode of cutting the hair: which he held to be decidedly unlawful. Mr. Chitling wound up his observations by stating that he had not touched a drop of anything for forty-two moral long hard-working days; and that he 'wished he might be busted if he warn't as dry as a lime-basket.'

'Where do you think the gentleman has come from, Oliver?' inquired the Jew, with a grin, as the other boys put a bottle of spirits on the table.

'I—I—don't know, sir,' replied Oliver.

'Who's that?' inquired Tom Chitling, casting a contemptuous look at Oliver.

'A young friend of mine, my dear,' replied the Jew.

'He's in luck, then,' said the young man, with a meaning look at Fagin. 'Never mind where I came from, young 'un; you'll find your way there, soon enough, I'll bet a crown!'

At this sally, the boys laughed. After some more jokes on the same subject, they exchanged a few short whispers with Fagin; and withdrew.

After some words apart between the last comer and Fagin, they drew their chairs towards the fire; and the Jew, telling Oliver to come and sit by him, led the conversation to the topics most calculated to interest his hearers. These were, the great advantages of the trade, the proficiency of the Dodger, the amiability of Charley Bates, and the liberality of the Jew himself. At length these subjects displayed signs of being thoroughly exhausted; and Mr. Chitling did the same: for the house of correction becomes fatiguing after a week or two. Miss Betsy accordingly withdrew; and left the party to their repose.

From this day, Oliver was seldom left alone; but was placed in almost constant communication with the two boys, who played the old game with the Jew every day: whether for their own improvement or Oliver's, Mr. Fagin best knew. At other times the old man would tell them stories of robberies he had committed in his younger days: mixed up with so much that was droll and curious, that Oliver could not help laughing heartily, and showing that he was amused in spite of all his better feelings.

In short, the wily old Jew had the boy in his toils. Having prepared his mind, by solitude and gloom, to prefer any society to the companionship of his own sad thoughts in such a dreary place, he was now slowly instilling into his soul the poison which he hoped would blacken it, and change its hue for ever.

CHAPTER XIX

IN WHICH A NOTABLE PLAN IS DISCUSSED AND DETERMINED ON

It was a chill, damp, windy night, when the Jew: buttoning his great-coat tight round his shrivelled body, and pulling the collar up over his ears so as completely to obscure the lower part of his face: emerged from his den. He paused on the step as the door was locked and chained behind him; and having listened while the boys made all secure, and until their retreating footsteps were no longer audible, slunk down the street as quickly as he could.

The house to which Oliver had been conveyed, was in the neighborhood of Whitechapel. The Jew stopped for an instant at the corner of the street; and, glancing suspiciously round, crossed the road, and struck off in the direction of the Spitalfields.

The mud lay thick upon the stones, and a black mist hung over the streets; the rain fell sluggishly down, and everything felt cold and clammy to the touch. It seemed just the night when it befitted such a being as the Jew to be abroad. As he glided stealthily along, creeping beneath the shelter of the walls and doorways, the hideous old man seemed like some loathsome reptile, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved: crawling forth, by night, in search of some rich offal for a meal.

He kept on his course, through many winding and narrow ways, until he reached Bethnal Green; then, turning suddenly off to the left, he soon became involved in a maze of the mean and dirty streets which abound in that close and densely-populated quarter.

The Jew was evidently too familiar with the ground he traversed to be at all bewildered, either by the darkness of the night, or the intricacies of the way. He hurried through several alleys and streets, and at length turned into one, lighted only by a single lamp at the farther end. At the door of a house in this street, he knocked; having exchanged a few muttered words with the person who opened it, he walked upstairs.

A dog growled as he touched the handle of a room-door; and a man's voice demanded who was there.

'Only me, Bill; only me, my dear,' said the Jew looking in.

'Bring in your body then,' said Sikes. 'Lie down, you stupid brute! Don't you know the devil when he's got a great-coat on?'

Apparently, the dog had been somewhat deceived by Mr. Fagin's outer garment; for as the Jew unbuttoned it, and threw it over the back of a chair, he retired to the corner from which he had risen: wagging his tail as he went, to show that he was as well satisfied as it was in his nature to be.

'Well!' said Sikes.

'Well, my dear,' replied the Jew.—'Ah! Nancy.'

The latter recognition was uttered with just enough of embarrassment to imply a doubt of its reception; for Mr. Fagin and his young friend had not met, since she had interfered in behalf of Oliver. All doubts upon the subject, if he had any, were speedily removed by the young lady's behaviour. She took her feet off the fender, pushed back her chair, and bade Fagin draw up his, without saying more about it: for it was a cold night, and no mistake.

'It is cold, Nancy dear,' said the Jew, as he warmed his skinny hands over the fire. 'It seems to go right through one,' added the old man, touching his side.

'It must be a piercer, if it finds its way through your heart,' said Mr. Sikes. 'Give him something to drink, Nancy. Burn my body, make haste! It's enough to turn a man ill, to see his lean old carcase shivering in that way, like a ugly ghost just rose from the grave.'

Nancy quickly brought a bottle from a cupboard, in which there were many: which, to judge from the diversity of their appearance, were filled with several kinds of liquids. Sikes pouring out a glass of brandy, bade the Jew drink it off.

'Quite enough, quite, thankye, Bill,' replied the Jew, putting down the glass after just setting his lips to it.

'What! You're afraid of our getting the better of you, are you?' inquired Sikes, fixing his eyes on the Jew. 'Ugh!'

With a hoarse grunt of contempt, Mr. Sikes seized the glass, and threw the remainder of its contents into the ashes: as a preparatory ceremony to filling it again for himself: which he did at once.

The Jew glanced round the room, as his companion tossed down the second glassful; not in curiousity, for he had seen it often before; but in a restless and suspicious manner habitual to him. It was a meanly furnished apartment, with nothing but the contents of the closet to induce the belief that its occupier was anything but a working man; and with no more suspicious articles displayed to view than two or three heavy bludgeons which stood in a corner, and a 'life-preserver' that hung over the chimney-piece.

'There,' said Sikes, smacking his lips. 'Now I'm ready.'

'For business?' inquired the Jew.

'For business,' replied Sikes; 'so say what you've got to say.'

'About the crib at Chertsey, Bill?' said the Jew, drawing his chair forward, and speaking in a very low voice.

'Yes. Wot about it?' inquired Sikes.

'Ah! you know what I mean, my dear,' said the Jew. 'He knows what I mean, Nancy; don't he?'

'No, he don't,' sneered Mr. Sikes. 'Or he won't, and that's the same thing. Speak out, and call things by their right names; don't sit there, winking and blinking, and talking to me in hints, as if you warn't the very first that thought about the robbery. Wot d'ye mean?'

'Hush, Bill, hush!' said the Jew, who had in vain attempted to stop this burst of indignation; 'somebody will hear us, my dear. Somebody will hear us.'

'Let 'em hear!' said Sikes; 'I don't care.' But as Mr. Sikes DID care, on reflection, he dropped his voice as he said the words, and grew calmer.

'There, there,' said the Jew, coaxingly. 'It was only my caution, nothing more. Now, my dear, about that crib at Chertsey; when is it to be done, Bill, eh? When is it to be done? Such plate, my dear, such plate!' said the Jew: rubbing his hands, and elevating his eyebrows in a rapture of anticipation.

'Not at all,' replied Sikes coldly.

'Not to be done at all!' echoed the Jew, leaning back in his chair.

'No, not at all,' rejoined Sikes. 'At least it can't be a put-up job, as we expected.'

'Then it hasn't been properly gone about,' said the Jew, turning pale with anger. 'Don't tell me!'

'But I will tell you,' retorted Sikes. 'Who are you that's not to be told? I tell you that Toby Crackit has been hanging about the place for a fortnight, and he can't get one of the servants in line.'

'Do you mean to tell me, Bill,' said the Jew: softening as the other grew heated: 'that neither of the two men in the house can be got over?'

'Yes, I do mean to tell you so,' replied Sikes. 'The old lady has had 'em these twenty years; and if you were to give 'em five hundred pound, they wouldn't be in it.'

'But do you mean to say, my dear,' remonstrated the Jew, 'that the women can't be got over?'

'Not a bit of it,' replied Sikes.

'Not by flash Toby Crackit?' said the Jew incredulously. 'Think what women are, Bill,'

'No; not even by flash Toby Crackit,' replied Sikes. 'He says he's worn sham whiskers, and a canary waistcoat, the whole blessed time he's been loitering down there, and it's all of no use.'

'He should have tried mustachios and a pair of military trousers, my dear,' said the Jew.

'So he did,' rejoined Sikes, 'and they warn't of no more use than the other plant.'

The Jew looked blank at this information. After ruminating for some minutes with his chin sunk on his breast, he raised his head and said, with a deep sigh, that if flash Toby Crackit reported aright, he feared the game was up.

'And yet,' said the old man, dropping his hands on his knees, 'it's a sad thing, my dear, to lose so much when we had set our hearts upon it.'

'So it is,' said Mr. Sikes. 'Worse luck!'

A long silence ensued; during which the Jew was plunged in deep thought, with his face wrinkled into an expression of villainy perfectly demoniacal. Sikes eyed him furtively from time to time. Nancy, apparently fearful of irritating the housebreaker, sat with her eyes fixed upon the fire, as if she had been deaf to all that passed.

'Fagin,' said Sikes, abruptly breaking the stillness that prevailed; 'is it worth fifty shiners extra, if it's safely done from the outside?'

'Yes,' said the Jew, as suddenly rousing himself.

'Is it a bargain?' inquired Sikes.

'Yes, my dear, yes,' rejoined the Jew; his eyes glistening, and every muscle in his face working, with the excitement that the inquiry had awakened.

'Then,' said Sikes, thrusting aside the Jew's hand, with some disdain, 'let it come off as soon as you like. Toby and me were over the garden-wall the night afore last, sounding the panels of the door and shutters. The crib's barred up at night like a jail; but there's one part we can crack, safe and softly.'

'Which is that, Bill?' asked the Jew eagerly.

'Why,' whispered Sikes, 'as you cross the lawn—'

'Yes?' said the Jew, bending his head forward, with his eyes almost starting out of it.

'Umph!' cried Sikes, stopping short, as the girl, scarcely moving her head, looked suddenly round, and pointed for an instant to the Jew's face. 'Never mind which part it is. You can't do it without me, I know; but it's best to be on the safe side when one deals with you.'

'As you like, my dear, as you like' replied the Jew. 'Is there no help wanted, but yours and Toby's?'

'None,' said Sikes. 'Cept a centre-bit and a boy. The first we've both got; the second you must find us.'

'A boy!' exclaimed the Jew. 'Oh! then it's a panel, eh?'

'Never mind wot it is!' replied Sikes. 'I want a boy, and he musn't be a big 'un. Lord!' said Mr. Sikes, reflectively, 'if I'd only got that young boy of Ned, the chimbley-sweeper's! He kept him small on purpose, and let him out by the job. But the father gets lagged; and then the Juvenile Delinquent Society comes, and takes the boy away from a trade where he was earning money, teaches him to read and write, and in time makes a 'prentice of him. And so they go on,' said Mr. Sikes, his wrath rising with the recollection of his wrongs, 'so they go on; and, if they'd got money enough (which it's a Providence they haven't,) we shouldn't have half a dozen boys left in the whole trade, in a year or two.'

'No more we should,' acquiesced the Jew, who had been considering during this speech, and had only caught the last sentence. 'Bill!'

'What now?' inquired Sikes.

The Jew nodded his head towards Nancy, who was still gazing at the fire; and intimated, by a sign, that he would have her told to leave the room. Sikes shrugged his shoulders impatiently, as if he thought the precaution unnecessary; but complied, nevertheless, by requesting Miss Nancy to fetch him a jug of beer.

'You don't want any beer,' said Nancy, folding her arms, and retaining her seat very composedly.

'I tell you I do!' replied Sikes.

'Nonsense,' rejoined the girl coolly, 'Go on, Fagin. I know what he's going to say, Bill; he needn't mind me.'

The Jew still hesitated. Sikes looked from one to the other in some surprise.

'Why, you don't mind the old girl, do you, Fagin?' he asked at length. 'You've known her long enough to trust her, or the Devil's in it. She ain't one to blab. Are you Nancy?'

'*I* should think not!' replied the young lady: drawing her chair up to the table, and putting her elbows upon it.

'No, no, my dear, I know you're not,' said the Jew; 'but—' and again the old man paused.

'But wot?' inquired Sikes.

'I didn't know whether she mightn't p'r'aps be out of sorts, you know, my dear, as she was the other night,' replied the Jew.

At this confession, Miss Nancy burst into a loud laugh; and, swallowing a glass of brandy, shook her head with an air of defiance, and burst into sundry exclamations of 'Keep the game a-going!' 'Never say die!' and the like. These seemed to have the effect of re-assuring both gentlemen; for the Jew nodded his head with a satisfied air, and resumed his seat: as did Mr. Sikes likewise.

'Now, Fagin,' said Nancy with a laugh. 'Tell Bill at once, about Oliver!'

'Ha! you're a clever one, my dear: the sharpest girl I ever saw!' said the Jew, patting her on the neck. 'It WAS about Oliver I was going to speak, sure enough. Ha! ha! ha!'

'What about him?' demanded Sikes.

'He's the boy for you, my dear,' replied the Jew in a hoarse whisper; laying his finger on the side of his nose, and grinning frightfully.

'He!' exclaimed. Sikes.

'Have him, Bill!' said Nancy. 'I would, if I was in your place. He mayn't be so much up, as any of the others; but that's not what you want, if he's only to open a door for you. Depend upon it he's a safe one, Bill.'

'I know he is,' rejoined Fagin. 'He's been in good training these last few weeks, and it's time he began to work for his bread. Besides, the others are all too big.'

'Well, he is just the size I want,' said Mr. Sikes, ruminating.

'And will do everything you want, Bill, my dear,' interposed the Jew; 'he can't help himself. That is, if you frighten him enough.'

'Frighten him!' echoed Sikes. 'It'll be no sham frightening, mind you. If there's anything queer about him when we once get into the work; in for a penny, in for a pound. You won't see him alive again, Fagin. Think of that, before you send him. Mark my words!' said the robber, poising a crowbar, which he had drawn from under the bedstead.

'I've thought of it all,' said the Jew with energy. 'I've—I've had my eye upon him, my dears, close—close. Once let him feel that he is one of us; once fill his mind with the idea that he has been a thief; and he's ours! Ours for his life. Oho! It couldn't have come about better! The old man crossed his arms upon his breast; and, drawing his head and shoulders into a heap, literally hugged himself for joy.

'Ours!' said Sikes. 'Yours, you mean.'

'Perhaps I do, my dear,' said the Jew, with a shrill chuckle. 'Mine, if you like, Bill.'

'And wot,' said Sikes, scowling fiercely on his agreeable friend, 'wot makes you take so much pains about one chalk-faced kid, when you know there are fifty boys snoozing about Common Garden every night, as you might pick and choose from?'

'Because they're of no use to me, my dear,' replied the Jew, with some confusion, 'not worth the taking. Their looks convict 'em when they get into trouble, and I lose 'em all. With this boy, properly managed, my dears, I could do what I couldn't with twenty of them. Besides,' said the Jew, recovering his self-possession, 'he has us now if he could only give us leg-bail again; and he must be in the same boat with us. Never mind how he came there; it's quite enough for my power over him that he was in a robbery; that's all I want. Now, how much better this is, than being obliged to put the poor leetle boy out of the way—which would be dangerous, and we should lose by it besides.'

'When is it to be done?' asked Nancy, stopping some turbulent exclamation on the part of Mr. Sikes, expressive of the disgust with which he received Fagin's affectation of humanity.

'Ah, to be sure,' said the Jew; 'when is it to be done, Bill?'

'I planned with Toby, the night arter to-morrow,' rejoined Sikes in a surly voice, 'if he heerd nothing from me to the contrairy.'

'Good,' said the Jew; 'there's no moon.'

'No,' rejoined Sikes.

'It's all arranged about bringing off the swag, is it?' asked the Jew.

Sikes nodded.

'And about—'

'Oh, ah, it's all planned,' rejoined Sikes, interrupting him. 'Never mind particulars. You'd better bring the boy here to-morrow night. I shall get off the stone an hour arter daybreak. Then you hold your tongue, and keep the melting-pot ready, and that's all you'll have to do.'

After some discussion, in which all three took an active part, it was decided that Nancy should repair to the Jew's next evening when the night had set in, and bring Oliver away with her; Fagin craftily observing, that, if he evinced any disinclination to the task, he would be more willing to accompany the girl who had so recently interfered in his behalf, than anybody else. It was also solemnly arranged that poor Oliver should, for the purposes of the contemplated expedition, be unreservedly consigned to the care and custody of Mr. William Sikes; and further, that the said Sikes should deal with him as he thought fit; and should not be held responsible by the Jew for any mischance or evil that might be necessary to visit him: it being understood that, to render the compact in this respect binding, any representations made by Mr. Sikes on his return should be required to be confirmed and corroborated, in all important particulars, by the testimony of flash Toby Crackit.

These preliminaries adjusted, Mr. Sikes proceeded to drink brandy at a furious rate, and to flourish the crowbar in an alarming manner; yelling forth, at the same time, most unmusical snatches of song, mingled with wild execrations. At length, in a fit of professional enthusiasm, he insisted upon producing his box of housebreaking tools: which he had no sooner stumbled in with, and opened for the purpose of explaining the nature and properties of the various implements it contained, and the peculiar beauties of their construction, than he fell over the box upon the floor, and went to sleep where he fell.

'Good-night, Nancy,' said the Jew, muffling himself up as before.

'Good-night.'

Their eyes met, and the Jew scrutinised her, narrowly. There was no flinching about the girl. She was as true and earnest in the matter as Toby Crackit himself could be.

The Jew again bade her good-night, and, bestowing a sly kick upon the prostrate form of Mr. Sikes while her back was turned, groped downstairs.

'Always the way!' muttered the Jew to himself as he turned homeward. 'The worst of these women is, that a very little thing serves to call up some long-forgotten feeling; and, the best of them is, that it never lasts. Ha! ha! The man against the child, for a bag of gold!'

Beguiling the time with these pleasant reflections, Mr. Fagin wended his way, through mud and mire, to his gloomy abode: where the Dodger was sitting up, impatiently awaiting his return.

'Is Oliver a-bed? I want to speak to him,' was his first remark as they descended the stairs.

'Hours ago,' replied the Dodger, throwing open a door. 'Here he is!'

The boy was lying, fast asleep, on a rude bed upon the floor; so pale with anxiety, and sadness, and the closeness of his prison, that he looked like death; not death as it shows in shroud and coffin, but in the guise it wears when life has just departed; when a young and gentle spirit has, but an instant, fled to Heaven, and the gross air of the world has not had time to breathe upon the changing dust it hallowed.

'Not now,' said the Jew, turning softly away. 'To-morrow. To-morrow.'

CHAPTER XX

WHEREIN OLIVER IS DELIVERED OVER TO MR. WILLIAM SIKES

When Oliver awoke in the morning, he was a good deal surprised to find that a new pair of shoes, with strong thick soles, had been placed at his bedside; and that his old shoes had been removed. At first, he was pleased with the discovery: hoping that it might be the forerunner of his release; but such thoughts were quickly dispelled, on his sitting down to breakfast along with the Jew, who told him, in a tone and manner which increased his alarm, that he was to be taken to the residence of Bill Sikes that night.

'To—to—stop there, sir?' asked Oliver, anxiously.

'No, no, my dear. Not to stop there,' replied the Jew. 'We shouldn't like to lose you. Don't be afraid, Oliver, you shall come back to us again. Ha! ha! ha! We won't be so cruel as to send you away, my dear. Oh no, no!'

The old man, who was stooping over the fire toasting a piece of bread, looked round as he bantered Oliver thus; and chuckled as if to show that he knew he would still be very glad to get away if he could.

'I suppose,' said the Jew, fixing his eyes on Oliver, 'you want to know what you're going to Bill's for—-eh, my dear?'

Oliver coloured, involuntarily, to find that the old thief had been reading his thoughts; but boldly said, Yes, he did want to know.

'Why, do you think?' inquired Fagin, parrying the question.

'Indeed I don't know, sir,' replied Oliver.

'Bah!' said the Jew, turning away with a disappointed countenance from a close perusal of the boy's face. 'Wait till Bill tells you, then.'

The Jew seemed much vexed by Oliver's not expressing any greater curiosity on the subject; but the truth is, that, although Oliver felt very anxious, he was too much confused by the earnest cunning of Fagin's looks, and his own speculations, to make any further inquiries just then. He had no other opportunity: for the Jew remained very surly and silent till night: when he prepared to go abroad.

'You may burn a candle,' said the Jew, putting one upon the table. 'And here's a book for you to read, till they come to fetch you. Good-night!'

'Good-night!' replied Oliver, softly.

The Jew walked to the door: looking over his shoulder at the boy as he went. Suddenly stopping, he called him by his name.

Oliver looked up; the Jew, pointing to the candle, motioned him to light it. He did so; and, as he placed the candlestick upon the table, saw that the Jew was gazing fixedly at him, with lowering and contracted brows, from the dark end of the room.

'Take heed, Oliver! take heed!' said the old man, shaking his right hand before him in a warning manner. 'He's a rough man, and thinks nothing of blood when his own is up. Whatever falls out, say nothing; and do what he bids you. Mind!' Placing a strong emphasis on the last word, he suffered his features gradually to resolve themselves into a ghastly grin, and, nodding his head, left the room.

Oliver leaned his head upon his hand when the old man disappeared, and pondered, with a trembling heart, on the words he had just heard. The more he thought of the Jew's admonition, the more he was at a loss to divine its real purpose and meaning.

He could think of no bad object to be attained by sending him to Sikes, which would not be equally well answered by his remaining with Fagin; and after meditating for a long time, concluded that he had been selected to perform some ordinary menial offices for the housebreaker, until another boy, better suited for his purpose could be engaged. He was too well accustomed to suffering, and had suffered too much where he was, to bewail the prospect of change very severely. He remained lost in thought for some minutes; and then, with a heavy sigh, snuffed the candle, and, taking up the book which the Jew had left with him, began to read.

He turned over the leaves. Carelessly at first; but, lighting on a passage which attracted his attention, he soon became intent upon the volume. It was a history of the lives and trials of great criminals; and the pages were soiled and thumbed with use. Here, he read of dreadful crimes that made the blood run cold; of secret murders that had been committed by the lonely wayside; of bodies hidden from the eye of man in deep pits and wells: which would not keep them down, deep as they were, but had yielded them up at last, after many years, and so maddened the murderers with the sight, that in their horror they had confessed their guilt, and yelled for the gibbet to end their agony. Here, too, he read of men who, lying in their beds at dead of night, had been tempted (so they said) and led on, by their own bad thoughts, to such dreadful bloodshed as it made the flesh creep, and the limbs quail, to think of. The terrible descriptions were so real and vivid, that the sallow pages seemed to turn red with gore; and the words upon them, to be sounded in his ears, as if they were whispered, in hollow murmurs, by the spirits of the dead.

In a paroxysm of fear, the boy closed the book, and thrust it from him. Then, falling upon his knees, he prayed Heaven to spare him from such deeds; and rather to will that he should die at once, than be reserved for crimes, so fearful and appalling. By degrees, he grew more calm, and besought, in a low and broken voice, that he might be rescued from his present dangers; and that if any aid were to be raised up for a poor outcast boy who had never known the love of friends or kindred, it might come to him now, when, desolate and deserted, he stood alone in the midst of wickedness and guilt.

He had concluded his prayer, but still remained with his head buried in his hands, when a rustling noise aroused him.

'What's that!' he cried, starting up, and catching sight of a figure standing by the door. 'Who's there?'

'Me. Only me,' replied a tremulous voice.

Oliver raised the candle above his head: and looked towards the door. It was Nancy.

'Put down the light,' said the girl, turning away her head. 'It hurts my eyes.'

Oliver saw that she was very pale, and gently inquired if she were ill. The girl threw herself into a chair, with her back towards him: and wrung her hands; but made no reply.

'God forgive me!' she cried after a while, 'I never thought of this.'

'Has anything happened?' asked Oliver. 'Can I help you? I will if I can. I will, indeed.'

She rocked herself to and fro; caught her throat; and, uttering a gurgling sound, gasped for breath.

'Nancy!' cried Oliver, 'What is it?'

The girl beat her hands upon her knees, and her feet upon the ground; and, suddenly stopping, drew her shawl close round her: and shivered with cold.

Oliver stirred the fire. Drawing her chair close to it, she sat there, for a little time, without speaking; but at length she raised her head, and looked round.

'I don't know what comes over me sometimes,' said she, affecting to busy herself in arranging her dress; 'it's this damp dirty room, I think. Now, Nolly, dear, are you ready?'

'Am I to go with you?' asked Oliver.

'Yes. I have come from Bill,' replied the girl. 'You are to go with me.'

'What for?' asked Oliver, recoiling.

'What for?' echoed the girl, raising her eyes, and averting them again, the moment they encountered the boy's face. 'Oh! For no harm.'

'I don't believe it,' said Oliver: who had watched her closely.

'Have it your own way,' rejoined the girl, affecting to laugh. 'For no good, then.'

Oliver could see that he had some power over the girl's better feelings, and, for an instant, thought of appealing to her compassion for his helpless state. But, then, the thought darted across his mind that it was barely eleven o'clock; and that many people were still in the streets: of whom surely some might be found to give credence to his tale. As the reflection occured to him, he stepped forward: and said, somewhat hastily, that he was ready.

Neither his brief consideration, nor its purport, was lost on his companion. She eyed him narrowly, while he spoke; and cast upon him a look of intelligence which sufficiently showed that she guessed what had been passing in his thoughts.

'Hush!' said the girl, stooping over him, and pointing to the door as she looked cautiously round. 'You can't help yourself. I have tried hard for you, but all to no purpose. You are hedged round and round. If ever you are to get loose from here, this is not the time.'

Struck by the energy of her manner, Oliver looked up in her face with great surprise. She seemed to speak the truth; her countenance was white and agitated; and she trembled with very earnestness.

'I have saved you from being ill-used once, and I will again, and I do now,' continued the girl aloud; 'for those who would have fetched you, if I had not, would have been far more rough than me. I have promised for your being quiet and silent; if you are not, you will only do harm to yourself and me too, and perhaps be my death. See here! I have borne all this for you already, as true as God sees me show it.'

She pointed, hastily, to some livid bruises on her neck and arms; and continued, with great rapidity:

'Remember this! And don't let me suffer more for you, just now. If I could help you, I would; but I have not the power. They don't mean to harm you; whatever they make you do, is no fault of yours. Hush! Every word from you is a blow for me. Give me your hand. Make haste! Your hand!'

She caught the hand which Oliver instinctively placed in hers, and, blowing out the light, drew him after her up the stairs. The door was opened, quickly, by some one shrouded in the darkness, and was as quickly closed, when they had passed out. A hackney-cabriolet was in waiting; with the same vehemence which she had exhibited in addressing Oliver, the girl pulled him in with her, and drew the curtains close. The driver wanted no directions, but lashed his horse into full speed, without the delay of an instant.

The girl still held Oliver fast by the hand, and continued to pour into his ear, the warnings and assurances she had already imparted. All was so quick and hurried, that he had scarcely time to recollect where he was, or how he came there, when the carriage stopped at the house to which the Jew's steps had been directed on the previous evening.

For one brief moment, Oliver cast a hurried glance along the empty street, and a cry for help hung upon his lips. But the girl's voice was in his ear, beseeching him in such tones of agony to remember her, that he had not the heart to utter it. While he hesitated, the opportunity was gone; he was already in the house, and the door was shut.

'This way,' said the girl, releasing her hold for the first time. 'Bill!'

'Hallo!' replied Sikes: appearing at the head of the stairs, with a candle. 'Oh! That's the time of day. Come on!'

This was a very strong expression of approbation, an uncommonly hearty welcome, from a person of Mr. Sikes' temperament. Nancy, appearing much gratified thereby, saluted him cordially.

'Bull's-eye's gone home with Tom,' observed Sikes, as he lighted them up. 'He'd have been in the way.'

'That's right,' rejoined Nancy.

'So you've got the kid,' said Sikes when they had all reached the room: closing the door as he spoke.

'Yes, here he is,' replied Nancy.

'Did he come quiet?' inquired Sikes.

'Like a lamb,' rejoined Nancy.

'I'm glad to hear it,' said Sikes, looking grimly at Oliver; 'for the sake of his young carcase: as would otherways have suffered for it. Come here, young 'un; and let me read you a lectur', which is as well got over at once.'

Thus addressing his new pupil, Mr. Sikes pulled off Oliver's cap and threw it into a corner; and then, taking him by the shoulder, sat himself down by the table, and stood the boy in front of him.

'Now, first: do you know wot this is?' inquired Sikes, taking up a pocket-pistol which lay on the table.

Oliver replied in the affirmative.

'Well, then, look here,' continued Sikes. 'This is powder; that 'ere's a bullet; and this is a little bit of a old hat for waddin'.'

Oliver murmured his comprehension of the different bodies referred to; and Mr. Sikes proceeded to load the pistol, with great nicety and deliberation.

'Now it's loaded,' said Mr. Sikes, when he had finished.

'Yes, I see it is, sir,' replied Oliver.

'Well,' said the robber, grasping Oliver's wrist, and putting the barrel so close to his temple that they touched; at which moment the boy could not repress a start; 'if you speak a word when you're out o'doors with me, except when I speak to you, that loading will be in your head without notice. So, if you *do* make up your mind to speak without leave, say your prayers first.'

Having bestowed a scowl upon the object of this warning, to increase its effect, Mr. Sikes continued.

'As near as I know, there isn't anybody as would be asking very partickler arter you, if you *was* disposed of; so I needn't take this devil-and-all of trouble to explain matters to you, if it warn't for your own good. D'ye hear me?'

'The short and the long of what you mean,' said Nancy: speaking very emphatically, and slightly frowning at Oliver as if to bespeak his serious attention to her words: 'is, that if you're crossed by him in this job you have on hand, you'll prevent his ever telling tales afterwards, by shooting him through the head, and will take your chance of swinging for it, as you do for a great many other things in the way of business, every month of your life.'

'That's it!' observed Mr. Sikes, approvingly; 'women can always put things in fewest words.—Except when it's blowing up; and then they lengthens it out. And now that he's thoroughly up to it, let's have some supper, and get a snooze before starting.'

In pursuance of this request, Nancy quickly laid the cloth; disappearing for a few minutes, she presently returned with a pot of porter and a dish of sheep's heads: which gave occasion to several pleasant witticisms on the part of Mr. Sikes, founded upon the singular coincidence of 'jemmies' being a can name, common to them, and also to an ingenious implement much used in his profession. Indeed, the worthy gentleman, stimulated perhaps by the immediate prospect of being on active service, was in great spirits and good humour; in proof whereof, it may be here remarked, that he humourously drank all the beer at a draught, and did not utter, on a rough calculation, more than four-score oaths during the whole progress of the meal.

Supper being ended—it may be easily conceived that Oliver had no great appetite for it—Mr. Sikes disposed of a couple of glasses of spirits and water, and threw himself on the bed; ordering Nancy, with many imprecations in case of failure, to call him at five precisely. Oliver stretched himself in his clothes, by command of the same authority, on a mattress upon the floor; and the girl, mending the fire, sat before it, in readiness to rouse them at the appointed time.

For a long time Oliver lay awake, thinking it not impossible that Nancy might seek that opportunity of whispering some further advice; but the girl sat brooding over the fire, without moving, save now and then to trim the light. Weary with watching and anxiety, he at length fell asleep.

When he awoke, the table was covered with tea-things, and Sikes was thrusting various articles into the pockets of his great-coat, which hung over the back of a chair. Nancy was busily engaged in preparing breakfast. It was not yet daylight; for the candle was still burning, and it was quite dark outside. A sharp rain, too, was beating against the window-panes; and the sky looked black and cloudy.

'Now, then!' growled Sikes, as Oliver started up; 'half-past five! Look sharp, or you'll get no breakfast; for it's late as it is.'

Oliver was not long in making his toilet; having taken some breakfast, he replied to a surly inquiry from Sikes, by saying that he was quite ready.

Nancy, scarcely looking at the boy, threw him a handkerchief to tie round his throat; Sikes gave him a large rough cape to button over his shoulders. Thus attired, he gave his hand to the robber, who, merely pausing to show him with a menacing gesture that he had that same pistol in a side-pocket of his great-coat, clasped it firmly in his, and, exchanging a farewell with Nancy, led him away.

Oliver turned, for an instant, when they reached the door, in the hope of meeting a look from the girl. But she had resumed her old seat in front of the fire, and sat, perfectly motionless before it.

CHAPTER XXI

THE EXPEDITION

It was a cheerless morning when they got into the street; blowing and raining hard; and the clouds looking dull and stormy. The night had been very wet: large pools of water had collected in the road: and the kennels were overflowing. There was a faint glimmering of the coming day in the sky; but it rather aggravated than relieved the gloom of the scene: the sombre light only serving to pale that which the street lamps afforded, without shedding any warmer or brighter tints upon the wet house-tops, and dreary streets. There appeared to be nobody stirring in that quarter of the town; the windows of the houses were all closely shut; and the streets through which they passed, were noiseless and empty.

By the time they had turned into the Bethnal Green Road, the day had fairly begun to break. Many of the lamps were already extinguished; a few country waggons were slowly toiling on, towards London; now and then, a stage-coach, covered with mud, rattled briskly by: the driver bestowing, as he passed, an admonitory lash upon the heavy waggoner who, by keeping on the wrong side of the road, had endangered his arriving at the office, a quarter of a minute after his time. The public-houses, with gas-lights burning inside, were already open. By degrees, other shops began to be unclosed, and a few scattered people were met with. Then, came straggling groups of labourers going to their work; then, men and women with fish-baskets on their heads; donkey-carts laden with vegetables; chaise-carts filled with live-stock or whole carcasses of meat; milk-women with pails; an unbroken concourse of people, trudging out with various supplies to the eastern suburbs of the town. As they approached the City, the noise and traffic gradually increased; when they threaded the streets between Shoreditch and Smithfield, it had swelled into a roar of sound and bustle. It was as light as it was likely to be, till night came on again, and the busy morning of half the London population had begun.

Turning down Sun Street and Crown Street, and crossing Finsbury square, Mr. Sikes struck, by way of Chiswell Street, into Barbican: thence into Long Lane, and so into Smithfield; from which latter place arose a tumult of discordant sounds that filled Oliver Twist with amazement.

It was market-morning. The ground was covered, nearly ankle-deep, with filth and mire; a thick steam, perpetually rising from the reeking bodies of the cattle, and mingling with the fog, which seemed to rest upon the chimney-tops, hung heavily above. All the pens in the centre of the large area, and as many temporary pens as could be crowded into the vacant space, were filled with sheep; tied up to posts by the gutter side were long lines of beasts and oxen, three or four deep. Countrymen, butchers, drovers, hawkers, boys, thieves, idlers, and vagabonds of every low grade, were mingled together in a mass; the whistling of drovers, the barking dogs, the bellowing and plunging of the oxen, the bleating of sheep, the grunting and squeaking of pigs, the cries of hawkers, the shouts, oaths, and quarrelling on all sides; the ringing of bells and roar of voices, that issued from every public-house; the crowding, pushing, driving, beating, whooping and yelling; the hideous and discordant dim that resounded from every corner of the market; and the unwashed, unshaven, squalid, and dirty figures constantly running to and fro, and bursting in and out of the throng; rendered it a stunning and bewildering scene, which quite confounded the senses.

Mr. Sikes, dragging Oliver after him, elbowed his way through the thickest of the crowd, and bestowed very little attention on the numerous sights and sounds, which so astonished the boy. He nodded, twice or thrice, to a passing friend; and, resisting as many invitations to take a morning dram, pressed steadily onward, until they were clear of the turmoil, and had made their way through Hosier Lane into Holborn.

'Now, young 'un!' said Sikes, looking up at the clock of St. Andrew's Church, 'hard upon seven! you must step out. Come, don't lag behind already, Lazy-legs!'

Mr. Sikes accompanied this speech with a jerk at his little companion's wrist; Oliver, quickening his pace into a kind of trot between a fast walk and a run, kept up with the rapid strides of the house-breaker as well as he could.

They held their course at this rate, until they had passed Hyde Park corner, and were on their way to Kensington: when Sikes relaxed his pace, until an empty cart which was at some little distance behind, came up. Seeing 'Hounslow' written on it, he asked the driver with as much civility as he could assume, if he would give them a lift as far as Isleworth.

'Jump up,' said the man. 'Is that your boy?'

'Yes; he's my boy,' replied Sikes, looking hard at Oliver, and putting his hand abstractedly into the pocket where the pistol was.

'Your father walks rather too quick for you, don't he, my man?' inquired the driver: seeing that Oliver was out of breath.

'Not a bit of it,' replied Sikes, interposing. 'He's used to it.

Here, take hold of my hand, Ned. In with you!'

Thus addressing Oliver, he helped him into the cart; and the driver, pointing to a heap of sacks, told him to lie down there, and rest himself.

As they passed the different mile-stones, Oliver wondered, more and more, where his companion meant to take him. Kensington, Hammersmith, Chiswick, Kew Bridge, Brentford, were all passed; and yet they went on as steadily as if they had only just begun their journey. At length, they came to a public-house called the Coach and Horses; a little way beyond which, another road appeared to run off. And here, the cart stopped.

Sikes dismounted with great precipitation, holding Oliver by the hand all the while; and lifting him down directly, bestowed a furious look upon him, and rapped the side-pocket with his fist, in a significant manner.

'Good-bye, boy,' said the man.

'He's sulky,' replied Sikes, giving him a shake; 'he's sulky. A young dog! Don't mind him.'

'Not I!' rejoined the other, getting into his cart. 'It's a fine day, after all.' And he drove away.

Sikes waited until he had fairly gone; and then, telling Oliver he might look about him if he wanted, once again led him onward on his journey.

They turned round to the left, a short way past the public-house; and then, taking a right-hand road, walked on for a long time: passing many large gardens and gentlemen's houses on both sides of the way, and stopping for nothing but a little beer, until they reached a town. Here against the wall of a house, Oliver saw written up in pretty large letters, 'Hampton.' They lingered about, in the fields, for some hours. At length they came back into the town; and, turning into an old public-house with a defaced sign-board, ordered some dinner by the kitchen fire.

The kitchen was an old, low-roofed room; with a great beam across the middle of the ceiling, and benches, with high backs to them, by the fire; on which were seated several rough men in smock-frocks, drinking and smoking. They took no notice of Oliver; and very little of Sikes; and, as

Sikes took very little notice of them, he and his young comrade sat in a corner by themselves, without being much troubled by their company.

They had some cold meat for dinner, and sat so long after it, while Mr. Sikes indulged himself with three or four pipes, that Oliver began to feel quite certain they were not going any further. Being much tired with the walk, and getting up so early, he dozed a little at first; then, quite overpowered by fatigue and the fumes of the tobacco, fell asleep.

It was quite dark when he was awakened by a push from Sikes. Rousing himself sufficiently to sit up and look about him, he found that worthy in close fellowship and communication with a labouring man, over a pint of ale.

'So, you're going on to Lower Halliford, are you?' inquired Sikes.

'Yes, I am,' replied the man, who seemed a little the worse—or better, as the case might be—for drinking; 'and not slow about it neither. My horse hasn't got a load behind him going back, as he had coming up in the mornin'; and he won't be long a-doing of it. Here's luck to him. Ecod! he's a good 'un!'

'Could you give my boy and me a lift as far as there?' demanded Sikes, pushing the ale towards his new friend.

'If you're going directly, I can,' replied the man, looking out of the pot. 'Are you going to Halliford?'

'Going on to Shepperton,' replied Sikes.

'I'm your man, as far as I go,' replied the other. 'Is all paid, Becky?'

'Yes, the other gentleman's paid,' replied the girl.

'I say!' said the man, with tipsy gravity; 'that won't do, you know.'

'Why not?' rejoined Sikes. 'You're a-going to accommodate us, and wot's to prevent my standing treat for a pint or so, in return?'

The stranger reflected upon this argument, with a very profound face; having done so, he seized Sikes by the hand: and declared he was a real good fellow. To which Mr. Sikes replied, he was joking; as, if he had been sober, there would have been strong reason to suppose he was.

After the exchange of a few more compliments, they bade the company good-night, and went out; the girl gathering up the pots and glasses as they did so, and lounging out to the door, with her hands full, to see the party start.

The horse, whose health had been drunk in his absence, was standing outside: ready harnessed to the cart. Oliver and Sikes got in without any further ceremony; and the man to whom he belonged, having lingered for a minute or two 'to bear him up,' and to defy the hostler and the world to produce his equal, mounted also. Then, the hostler was told to give the horse his head; and, his head being given him, he made a very unpleasant use of it: tossing it into the air with great disdain, and running into the parlour windows over the way; after performing those feats, and supporting himself for a short time on his hind-legs, he started off at great speed, and rattled out of the town right gallantly.

The night was very dark. A damp mist rose from the river, and the marshy ground about; and spread itself over the dreary fields. It was piercing cold, too; all was gloomy and black. Not a word was spoken; for the driver had grown sleepy; and Sikes was in no mood to lead him into conversation. Oliver sat huddled together, in a corner of the cart; bewildered with alarm and apprehension; and figuring strange objects in the gaunt trees, whose branches waved grimly to and fro, as if in some fantastic joy at the desolation of the scene.

As they passed Sunbury Church, the clock struck seven. There was a light in the ferry-house window opposite: which streamed across the road, and threw into more sombre shadow a dark yew-tree with graves beneath it. There was a dull sound of falling water not far off; and the leaves of the old tree stirred gently in the night wind. It seemed like quiet music for the repose of the dead.

Sunbury was passed through, and they came again into the lonely road. Two or three miles more, and the cart stopped. Sikes alighted, took Oliver by the hand, and they once again walked on.

They turned into no house at Shepperton, as the weary boy had expected; but still kept walking on, in mud and darkness, through gloomy lanes and over cold open wastes, until they came within sight of the lights of a town at no great distance. On looking intently forward, Oliver saw that the water was just below them, and that they were coming to the foot of a bridge.

Sikes kept straight on, until they were close upon the bridge; then turned suddenly down a bank upon the left.

'The water!' thought Oliver, turning sick with fear. 'He has brought me to this lonely place to murder me!'

He was about to throw himself on the ground, and make one struggle for his young life, when he saw that they stood before a solitary house: all ruinous and decayed. There was a window on each side of the dilapidated entrance; and one story above; but no light was visible. The house was dark, dismantled: and the all appearance, uninhabited.

Sikes, with Oliver's hand still in his, softly approached the low porch, and raised the latch. The door yielded to the pressure, and they passed in together.

CHAPTER XXII

THE BURGLARY

'Hallo!' cried a loud, hoarse voice, as soon as they set foot in the passage.

'Don't make such a row,' said Sikes, bolting the door. 'Show a glim, Toby.'

'Aha! my pal!' cried the same voice. 'A glim, Barney, a glim! Show the gentleman in, Barney; wake up first, if convenient.'

The speaker appeared to throw a boot-jack, or some such article, at the person he addressed, to rouse him from his slumbers: for the noise of a wooden body, falling violently, was heard; and then an indistinct muttering, as of a man between sleep and awake.

'Do you hear?' cried the same voice. 'There's Bill Sikes in the passage with nobody to do the civil to him; and you sleeping there, as if you took laudanum with your meals, and nothing stronger. Are you any fresher now, or do you want the iron candlestick to wake you thoroughly?'

A pair of slipshod feet shuffled, hastily, across the bare floor of the room, as this interrogatory was put; and there issued, from a door on the right hand; first, a feeble candle: and next, the form of the same individual who has been heretofore described as labouring under the infirmity of speaking through his nose, and officiating as waiter at the public-house on Saffron Hill.

'Bister Sikes!' exclaimed Barney, with real or counterfeit joy; 'cub id, sir; cub id.'

'Here! you get on first,' said Sikes, putting Oliver in front of him. 'Quicker! or I shall tread upon your heels.'

Muttering a curse upon his tardiness, Sikes pushed Oliver before him; and they entered a low dark room with a smoky fire, two or three broken chairs, a table, and a very old couch: on which, with his legs much higher than his head, a man was reposing at full length, smoking a long clay pipe. He was dressed in a smartly-cut snuff-coloured coat, with large brass buttons; an orange neckerchief; a coarse, staring, shawl-pattern waistcoat; and drab breeches. Mr. Crackit (for he it was) had no very great quantity of hair, either upon his head or face; but what he had, was of a reddish dye, and tortured into long corkscrew curls, through which he occasionally thrust some very dirty fingers, ornamented with large common rings. He was a trifle above the middle size, and apparently rather weak in the legs; but this circumstance by no means detracted from his own admiration of his top-boots, which he contemplated, in their elevated situation, with lively satisfaction.

'Bill, my boy!' said this figure, turning his head towards the door, 'I'm glad to see you. I was almost afraid you'd given it up: in which case I should have made a personal wentur. Hallo!'

Uttering this exclamation in a tone of great surprise, as his eyes rested on Oliver, Mr. Toby Crackit brought himself into a sitting posture, and demanded who that was.

'The boy. Only the boy!' replied Sikes, drawing a chair towards the fire.

'Wud of Bister Fagid's lads,' exclaimed Barney, with a grin.

'Fagin's, eh!' exclaimed Toby, looking at Oliver. 'Wot an inwalable boy that'll make, for the old ladies' pockets in chapels! His mug is a fortin' to him.'

'There—there's enough of that,' interposed Sikes, impatiently; and stooping over his recumbant friend, he whispered a few words in his ear: at which Mr. Crackit laughed immensely, and honoured Oliver with a long stare of astonishment.

'Now,' said Sikes, as he resumed his seat, 'if you'll give us something to eat and drink while we're waiting, you'll put some heart in us; or in me, at all events. Sit down by the fire, younker, and rest yourself; for you'll have to go out with us again to-night, though not very far off.'

Oliver looked at Sikes, in mute and timid wonder; and drawing a stool to the fire, sat with his aching head upon his hands, scarecely knowing where he was, or what was passing around him.

'Here,' said Toby, as the young Jew placed some fragments of food, and a bottle upon the table, 'Success to the crack!' He rose to honour the toast; and, carefully depositing his empty pipe in a corner, advanced to the table, filled a glass with spirits, and drank off its contents. Mr. Sikes did the same.

'A drain for the boy,' said Toby, half-filling a wine-glass. 'Down with it, innocence.'

'Indeed,' said Oliver, looking piteously up into the man's face; 'indeed, I —'

'Down with it!' echoed Toby. 'Do you think I don't know what's good for you? Tell him to drink it, Bill.'

'He had better!' said Sikes clapping his hand upon his pocket. 'Burn my body, if he isn't more trouble than a whole family of Dodgers. Drink it, you perwerse imp; drink it!'

Frightened by the menacing gestures of the two men, Oliver hastily swallowed the contents of the glass, and immediately fell into a violent fit of coughing: which delighted Toby Crackit and Barney, and even drew a smile from the surly Mr. Sikes.

This done, and Sikes having satisfied his appetite (Oliver could eat nothing but a small crust of bread which they made him swallow), the two men laid themselves down on chairs for a short nap. Oliver retained his stool by the fire; Barney wrapped in a blanket, stretched himself on the floor: close outside the fender.

They slept, or appeared to sleep, for some time; nobody stirring but Barney, who rose once or twice to throw coals on the fire. Oliver fell into a heavy doze: imagining himself straying along the gloomy lanes, or wandering about the dark churchyard, or retracing some one or other of the scenes of the past day: when he was roused by Toby Crackit jumping up and declaring it was half-past one.

In an instant, the other two were on their legs, and all were actively engaged in busy preparation. Sikes and his companion enveloped their necks and chins in large dark shawls, and drew on their great-coats; Barney, opening a cupboard, brought forth several articles, which he hastily crammed into the pockets.

'Barkers for me, Barney,' said Toby Crackit.

'Here they are,' replied Barney, producing a pair of pistols. 'You loaded them yourself.'

'All right!' replied Toby, stowing them away. 'The persuaders?'

'I've got 'em,' replied Sikes.

'Crape, keys, centre-bits, darkies—nothing forgotten?' inquired Toby: fastening a small crowbar to a loop inside the skirt of his coat.

'All right,' rejoined his companion. 'Bring them bits of timber, Barney. That's the time of day.'

With these words, he took a thick stick from Barney's hands, who, having delivered another to Toby, busied himself in fastening on Oliver's cape.

'Now then!' said Sikes, holding out his hand.

Oliver: who was completely stupified by the unwonted exercise, and the air, and the drink which had been forced upon him: put his hand mechanically into that which Sikes extended for the purpose.

'Take his other hand, Toby,' said Sikes. 'Look out, Barney.'

The man went to the door, and returned to announce that all was quiet. The two robbers issued forth with Oliver between them. Barney, having made all fast, rolled himself up as before, and was soon asleep again.

It was now intensely dark. The fog was much heavier than it had been in the early part of the night; and the atmosphere was so damp, that, although no rain fell, Oliver's hair and eyebrows, within a few minutes after leaving the house, had become stiff with the half-frozen moisture that was floating about. They crossed the bridge, and kept on towards the lights which he had seen before. They were at no great distance off; and, as they walked pretty briskly, they soon arrived at Chertsey.

'Slap through the town,' whispered Sikes; 'there'll be nobody in the way, to-night, to see us.'

Toby acquiesced; and they hurried through the main street of the little town, which at that late hour was wholly deserted. A dim light shone at intervals from some bed-room window; and the hoarse barking of dogs occasionally broke the silence of the night. But there was nobody abroad. They had cleared the town, as the church-bell struck two.

Quickening their pace, they turned up a road upon the left hand. After walking about a quarter of a mile, they stopped before a detached house surrounded by a wall: to the top of which, Toby Crackit, scarcely pausing to take breath, climbed in a twinkling.

'The boy next,' said Toby. 'Hoist him up; I'll catch hold of him.'

Before Oliver had time to look round, Sikes had caught him under the arms; and in three or four seconds he and Toby were lying on the grass on the other side. Sikes followed directly. And they stole cautiously towards the house.

And now, for the first time, Oliver, well-nigh mad with grief and terror, saw that housebreaking and robbery, if not murder, were the objects of the expedition. He clasped his hands together, and involuntarily uttered a subdued exclamation of horror. A mist came before his eyes; the cold sweat stood upon his ashy face; his limbs failed him; and he sank upon his knees.

'Get up!' murmured Sikes, trembling with rage, and drawing the pistol from his pocket; 'Get up, or I'll strew your brains upon the grass.'

'Oh! for God's sake let me go!' cried Oliver; 'let me run away and die in the fields. I will never come near London; never, never! Oh! pray have mercy on me, and do not make me steal. For the love of all the bright Angels that rest in Heaven, have mercy upon me!'

The man to whom this appeal was made, swore a dreadful oath, and had cocked the pistol, when Toby, striking it from his grasp, placed his hand upon the boy's mouth, and dragged him to the house.

'Hush!' cried the man; 'it won't answer here. Say another word, and I'll do your business myself with a crack on the head. That makes no noise, and is quite as certain, and more genteel. Here, Bill, wrench the shutter open. He's game enough now, I'll engage. I've seen older hands of his age took the same way, for a minute or two, on a cold night.'

Sikes, invoking terrific imprecations upon Fagin's head for sending Oliver on such an errand, plied the crowbar vigorously, but with little noise. After some delay, and some assistance from Toby, the shutter to which he had referred, swung open on its hinges.

It was a little lattice window, about five feet and a half above the ground, at the back of the house: which belonged to a scullery, or small brewing-place, at the end of the passage. The aperture was so small, that the inmates had probably not thought it worth while to defend it more securely; but it was large enough to admit a boy of Oliver's size, nevertheless. A very brief exercise of Mr. Sike's art, sufficed to overcome the fastening of the lattice; and it soon stood wide open also.

'Now listen, you young limb,' whispered Sikes, drawing a dark lantern from his pocket, and throwing the glare full on Oliver's face; 'I'm a going to put you through there. Take this light; go softly up the steps straight afore you, and along the little hall, to the street door; unfasten it, and let us in.'

'There's a bolt at the top, you won't be able to reach,' interposed Toby. 'Stand upon one of the hall chairs. There are three there, Bill, with a jolly large blue unicorn and gold pitchfork on 'em: which is the old lady's arms.'

'Keep quiet, can't you?' replied Sikes, with a threatening look. 'The room-door is open, is it?'

'Wide,' replied Toby, after peeping in to satisfy himself. 'The game of that is, that they always leave it open with a catch, so that the dog, who's got a bed in here, may walk up and down the passage when he feels wakeful. Ha! ha! Barney 'ticed him away to-night. So neat!'

Although Mr. Crackit spoke in a scarcely audible whisper, and laughed without noise, Sikes imperiously commanded him to be silent, and to get to work. Toby complied, by first producing his lantern, and placing it on the ground; then by planting himself firmly with his head against the wall beneath the window, and his hands upon his knees, so as to make a step of his back. This was no sooner done, than Sikes, mounting upon him, put Oliver gently through the window with his feet first; and, without leaving hold of his collar, planted him safely on the floor inside.

'Take this lantern,' said Sikes, looking into the room. 'You see the stairs afore you?'

Oliver, more dead than alive, gasped out, 'Yes.' Sikes, pointing to the street-door with the pistol-barrel, briefly advised him to take notice that he was within shot all the way; and that if he faltered, he would fall dead that instant.

'It's done in a minute,' said Sikes, in the same low whisper. 'Directly I leave go of you, do your work. Hark!'

'What's that?' whispered the other man.

They listened intently.

'Nothing,' said Sikes, releasing his hold of Oliver. 'Now!'

In the short time he had had to collect his senses, the boy had firmly resolved that, whether he died in the attempt or not, he would make one effort to dart upstairs from the hall, and alarm the family. Filled with this idea, he advanced at once, but stealthily.

'Come back!' suddenly cried Sikes aloud. 'Back! back!'

Scared by the sudden breaking of the dead stillness of the place, and by a loud cry which followed it, Oliver let his lantern fall, and knew not whether to advance or fly.

The cry was repeated—a light appeared—a vision of two terrified half-dressed men at the top of the stairs swam before his eyes—a flash—a loud noise—a smoke—a crash somewhere, but where he knew not,—and he staggered back.

Sikes had disappeared for an instant; but he was up again, and had him by the collar before the smoke had cleared away. He fired his own pistol after the men, who were already retreating; and dragged the boy up.

'Clasp your arm tighter,' said Sikes, as he drew him through the window. 'Give me a shawl here. They've hit him. Quick! How the boy bleeds!'

Then came the loud ringing of a bell, mingled with the noise of fire-arms, and the shouts of men, and the sensation of being carried over uneven ground at a rapid pace. And then, the noises grew confused in the distance; and a cold deadly feeling crept over the boy's heart; and he saw or heard no more.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHICH CONTAINS THE SUBSTANCE OF A PLEASANT CONVERSATION BETWEEN MR. BUMBLE AND A LADY; AND SHOWS THAT EVEN A BEADLE MAY BE SUSCEPTIBLE ON SOME POINTS

The night was bitter cold. The snow lay on the ground, frozen into a hard thick crust, so that only the heaps that had drifted into byways and corners were affected by the sharp wind that howled abroad: which, as if expending increased fury on such prey as it found, caught it savagely up in clouds, and, whirling it into a thousand misty eddies, scattered it in air. Bleak, dark, and piercing cold, it was a night for the well-housed and fed to draw round the bright fire and thank God they were at home; and for the homeless, starving wretch to lay him down and die. Many hunger-worn outcasts close their eyes in our bare streets, at such times, who, let their crimes have been what they may, can hardly open them in a more bitter world.

Such was the aspect of out-of-doors affairs, when Mrs. Corney, the matron of the workhouse to which our readers have been already introduced as the birthplace of Oliver Twist, sat herself down before a cheerful fire in her own little room, and glanced, with no small degree of complacency, at a small round table: on which stood a tray of corresponding size, furnished with all necessary materials for the most grateful meal that matrons enjoy. In fact, Mrs. Corney was about to solace herself with a cup of tea. As she glanced from the table to the fireplace, where the smallest of all possible kettles was singing a small song in a small voice, her inward satisfaction evidently increased,—so much so, indeed, that Mrs. Corney smiled.

'Well!' said the matron, leaning her elbow on the table, and looking reflectively at the fire; 'I'm sure we have all on us a great deal to be grateful for! A great deal, if we did but know it. Ah!'

Mrs. Corney shook her head mournfully, as if deploring the mental blindness of those paupers who did not know it; and thrusting a silver spoon (private property) into the inmost recesses of a two-ounce tin tea-caddy, proceeded to make the tea.

How slight a thing will disturb the equanimity of our frail minds! The black teapot, being very small and easily filled, ran over while Mrs. Corney was moralising; and the water slightly scalded Mrs. Corney's hand.

'Drat the pot!' said the worthy matron, setting it down very hastily on the hob; 'a little stupid thing, that only holds a couple of cups! What use is it of, to anybody! Except,' said Mrs. Corney, pausing, 'except to a poor desolate creature like me. Oh dear!'

With these words, the matron dropped into her chair, and, once more resting her elbow on the table, thought of her solitary fate. The small teapot, and the single cup, had awakened in her mind sad recollections of Mr. Corney (who had not been dead more than five-and-twenty years); and she was overpowered.

'I shall never get another!' said Mrs. Corney, pettishly; 'I shall never get another—like him.'

Whether this remark bore reference to the husband, or the teapot, is uncertain. It might have been the latter; for Mrs. Corney looked at it as she spoke; and took it up afterwards. She had just tasted her first cup, when she was disturbed by a soft tap at the room-door.

'Oh, come in with you!' said Mrs. Corney, sharply. 'Some of the old women dying, I suppose. They always die when I'm at meals. Don't stand there, letting the cold air in, don't. What's amiss now, eh?'

'Nothing, ma'am, nothing,' replied a man's voice.

'Dear me!' exclaimed the matron, in a much sweeter tone, 'is that Mr. Bumble?'

'At your service, ma'am,' said Mr. Bumble, who had been stopping outside to rub his shoes clean, and to shake the snow off his coat; and who now made his appearance, bearing the cocked hat in one hand and a bundle in the other. 'Shall I shut the door, ma'am?'

The lady modestly hesitated to reply, lest there should be any impropriety in holding an interview with Mr. Bumble, with closed doors. Mr. Bumble taking advantage of the hesitation, and being very cold himself, shut it without permission.

'Hard weather, Mr. Bumble,' said the matron.

'Hard, indeed, ma'am,' replied the beadle. 'Anti-porochial weather this, ma'am. We have given away, Mrs. Corney, we have given away a matter of twenty quartern loaves and a cheese and a half, this very blessed afternoon; and yet them paupers are not contented.'

'Of course not. When would they be, Mr. Bumble?' said the matron, sipping her tea.

'When, indeed, ma'am!' rejoined Mr. Bumble. 'Why here's one man that, in consideration of his wife and large family, has a quartern loaf and a good pound of cheese, full weight. Is he grateful, ma'am? Is he grateful? Not a copper farthing's worth of it! What does he do, ma'am, but ask for a few coals; if it's only a pocket handkerchief full, he says! Coals! What would he do with coals? Toast his cheese with 'em and then come back for more. That's the way with these people, ma'am; give 'em a apron full of coals to-day, and they'll come back for another, the day after to-morrow, as brazen as alabaster.'

The matron expressed her entire concurrence in this intelligible simile; and the beadle went on.

'I never,' said Mr. Bumble, 'see anything like the pitch it's got to. The day afore yesterday, a man—you have been a married woman, ma'am, and I may mention it to you—a man, with hardly a rag upon his back (here Mrs.

Corney looked at the floor), goes to our overseer's door when he has got company coming to dinner; and says, he must be relieved, Mrs. Corney. As he wouldn't go away, and shocked the company very much, our overseer sent him out a pound of potatoes and half a pint of oatmeal. "My heart!" says the ungrateful villain, "what's the use of *this* to me? You might as well give me a pair of iron spectacles!" "Very good," says our overseer, taking 'em away again, "you won't get anything else here." "Then I'll die in the streets!" says the vagrant. "Oh no, you won't," says our overseer.'

'Ha! ha! That was very good! So like Mr. Grannett, wasn't it?' interposed the matron. 'Well, Mr. Bumble?'

'Well, ma'am,' rejoined the beadle, 'he went away; and he *did* die in the streets. There's a obstinate pauper for you!'

'It beats anything I could have believed,' observed the matron emphatically. 'But don't you think out-of-door relief a very bad thing, any way, Mr. Bumble? You're a gentleman of experience, and ought to know. Come.'

'Mrs. Corney,' said the beadle, smiling as men smile who are conscious of superior information, 'out-of-door relief, properly managed: properly managed, ma'am: is the porochial safeguard. The great principle of out-of-door relief is, to give the paupers exactly what they don't want; and then they get tired of coming.'

'Dear me!' exclaimed Mrs. Corney. 'Well, that is a good one, too!'

'Yes. Betwixt you and me, ma'am,' returned Mr. Bumble, 'that's the great principle; and that's the reason why, if you look at any cases that get into them owdacious newspapers, you'll always observe that sick families have been relieved with slices of cheese. That's the rule now, Mrs. Corney, all over the country. But, however,' said the beadle, stopping to unpack his bundle, 'these are official secrets, ma'am; not to be spoken of; except, as I may say, among the porochial officers, such as ourselves. This is the port wine, ma'am, that the board ordered for the infirmary; real, fresh, genuine port wine; only out of the cask this forenoon; clear as a bell, and no sediment!'

Having held the first bottle up to the light, and shaken it well to test its excellence, Mr. Bumble placed them both on top of a chest of drawers; folded the handkerchief in which they had been wrapped; put it carefully in his pocket; and took up his hat, as if to go.

'You'll have a very cold walk, Mr. Bumble,' said the matron.

'It blows, ma'am,' replied Mr. Bumble, turning up his coat-collar, 'enough to cut one's ears off.'

The matron looked, from the little kettle, to the beadle, who was moving towards the door; and as the beadle coughed, preparatory to bidding her good-night, bashfully inquired whether—whether he wouldn't take a cup of tea?

Mr. Bumble instantaneously turned back his collar again; laid his hat and stick upon a chair; and drew another chair up to the table. As he slowly seated himself, he looked at the lady. She fixed her eyes upon the little teapot. Mr. Bumble coughed again, and slightly smiled.

Mrs. Corney rose to get another cup and saucer from the closet. As she sat down, her eyes once again encountered those of the gallant beadle; she coloured, and applied herself to the task of making his tea. Again Mr. Bumble coughed—louder this time than he had coughed yet.

'Sweet? Mr. Bumble?' inquired the matron, taking up the sugar-basin.

'Very sweet, indeed, ma'am,' replied Mr. Bumble. He fixed his eyes on Mrs. Corney as he said this; and if ever a beadle looked tender, Mr. Bumble was that beadle at that moment.

The tea was made, and handed in silence. Mr. Bumble, having spread a handkerchief over his knees to prevent the crumbs from sullying the splendour of his shorts, began to eat and drink; varying these amusements, occasionally, by fetching a deep sigh; which, however, had no injurious effect upon his appetite, but, on the contrary, rather seemed to facilitate his operations in the tea and toast department.

'You have a cat, ma'am, I see,' said Mr. Bumble, glancing at one who, in the centre of her family, was basking before the fire; 'and kittens too, I declare!'

'I am so fond of them, Mr. Bumble, you can't think,' replied the matron. 'They're *so* happy, *so* frolicsome, and *so* cheerful, that they are quite companions for me.'

'Very nice animals, ma'am,' replied Mr. Bumble, approvingly; 'so very domestic.'

'Oh, yes!' rejoined the matron with enthusiasm; 'so fond of their home too, that it's quite a pleasure, I'm sure.'

'Mrs. Corney, ma'am,' said Mr. Bumble, slowly, and marking the time with his teaspoon, 'I mean to say this, ma'am; that any cat, or kitten, that could live with you, ma'am, and *not* be fond of its home, must be a ass, ma'am.'

'Oh, Mr. Bumble!' remonstrated Mrs. Corney.

'It's of no use disguising facts, ma'am,' said Mr. Bumble, slowly flourishing the teaspoon with a kind of amorous dignity which made him doubly impressive; 'I would drown it myself, with pleasure.'

'Then you're a cruel man,' said the matron vivaciously, as she held out her hand for the beadle's cup; 'and a very hard-hearted man besides.'

'Hard-hearted, ma'am?' said Mr. Bumble. 'Hard?' Mr. Bumble resigned his cup without another word; squeezed Mrs. Corney's little finger as she took it; and inflicting two open-handed slaps upon his laced waistcoat, gave a mighty sigh, and hitched his chair a very little morsel farther from the fire.

It was a round table; and as Mrs. Corney and Mr. Bumble had been sitting opposite each other, with no great space between them, and fronting the fire, it will be seen that Mr. Bumble, in receding from the fire, and still keeping at the table, increased the distance between himself and Mrs. Corney; which proceeding, some prudent readers will doubtless be disposed to admire, and to consider an act of great heroism on Mr. Bumble's part: he being in some sort tempted by time, place, and opportunity, to give utterance to certain soft nothings, which however well they may become the lips of the light and thoughtless, do seem immeasurably beneath the dignity of judges of the land, members of parliament, ministers of state, lord mayors, and other great public functionaries, but more particularly beneath the stateliness and gravity of a beadle: who (as is well known) should be the sternest and most inflexible among them all.

Whatever were Mr. Bumble's intentions, however (and no doubt they were of the best): it unfortunately happened, as has been twice before remarked, that the table was a round one; consequently Mr. Bumble, moving his chair by little and little, soon began to diminish the distance between himself and the matron; and, continuing to travel round the outer edge of the circle, brought his chair, in time, close to that in which the matron was seated.

Indeed, the two chairs touched; and when they did so, Mr. Bumble stopped.

Now, if the matron had moved her chair to the right, she would have been scorched by the fire; and if to the left, she must have fallen into Mr. Bumble's arms; so (being a discreet matron, and no doubt foreseeing these consequences at a glance) she remained where she was, and handed Mr. Bumble another cup of tea.

'Hard-hearted, Mrs. Corney?' said Mr. Bumble, stirring his tea, and looking up into the matron's face; 'are *you* hard-hearted, Mrs. Corney?'

'Dear me!' exclaimed the matron, 'what a very curious question from a single man. What can you want to know for, Mr. Bumble?'

The beadle drank his tea to the last drop; finished a piece of toast; whisked the crumbs off his knees; wiped his lips; and deliberately kissed the matron.

'Mr. Bumble!' cried that discreet lady in a whisper; for the fright was so great, that she had quite lost her voice, 'Mr. Bumble, I shall scream!' Mr. Bumble made no reply; but in a slow and dignified manner, put his arm round the matron's waist.

As the lady had stated her intention of screaming, of course she would have screamed at this additional boldness, but that the exertion was rendered unnecessary by a hasty knocking at the door: which was no sooner heard, than Mr. Bumble darted, with much agility, to the wine bottles, and began dusting them with great violence: while the matron sharply demanded who was there.

It is worthy of remark, as a curious physical instance of the efficacy of a sudden surprise in counteracting the effects of extreme fear, that her voice had quite recovered all its official asperity.

'If you please, mistress,' said a withered old female pauper, hideously ugly: putting her head in at the door, 'Old Sally is a-going fast.'

'Well, what's that to me?' angrily demanded the matron. 'I can't keep her alive, can I?'

'No, no, mistress,' replied the old woman, 'nobody can; she's far beyond the reach of help. I've seen a many people die; little babes and great strong men; and I know when death's a-coming, well enough. But she's troubled in her mind: and when the fits are not on her,—and that's not often, for she is dying very hard,—she says she has got something to tell, which you must hear. She'll never die quiet till you come, mistress.'

At this intelligence, the worthy Mrs. Corney muttered a variety of invectives against old women who couldn't even die without purposely annoying their betters; and, muffling herself in a thick shawl which she hastily caught up, briefly requested Mr. Bumble to stay till she came back, lest anything particular should occur. Bidding the messenger walk fast, and not be all night hobbling up the stairs, she followed her from the room with a very ill grace, scolding all the way.

Mr. Bumble's conduct on being left to himself, was rather inexplicable. He opened the closet, counted the teaspoons, weighed the sugar-tongs, closely inspected a silver milk-pot to ascertain that it was of the genuine metal, and, having satisfied his curiosity on these points, put on his cocked hat corner-wise, and danced with much gravity four distinct times round the table.

Having gone through this very extraordinary performance, he took off the cocked hat again, and, spreading himself before the fire with his back towards it, seemed to be mentally engaged in taking an exact inventory of the furniture.

CHAPTER XXIV

TREATS ON A VERY POOR SUBJECT. BUT IS A SHORT ONE, AND MAY BE FOUND OF IMPORTANCE IN THIS HISTORY

It was no unfit messenger of death, who had disturbed the quiet of the matron's room. Her body was bent by age; her limbs trembled with palsy; her face, distorted into a mumbling leer, resembled more the grotesque shaping of some wild pencil, than the work of Nature's hand.

Alas! How few of Nature's faces are left alone to gladden us with their beauty! The cares, and sorrows, and hungerings, of the world, change them as they change hearts; and it is only when those passions sleep, and have lost their hold for ever, that the troubled clouds pass off, and leave Heaven's surface clear. It is a common thing for the countenances of the dead, even in that fixed and rigid state, to subside into the long-forgotten expression of sleeping infancy, and settle into the very look of early life; so calm, so peaceful, do they grow again, that those who knew them in their happy childhood, kneel by the coffin's side in awe, and see the Angel even upon earth.

The old crone tottered along the passages, and up the stairs, muttering some indistinct answers to the chidings of her companion; being at length compelled to pause for breath, she gave the light into her hand, and remained behind to follow as she might: while the more nimble superior made her way to the room where the sick woman lay.

It was a bare garret-room, with a dim light burning at the farther end. There was another old woman watching by the bed; the parish apothecary's apprentice was standing by the fire, making a toothpick out of a quill.

'Cold night, Mrs. Corney,' said this young gentleman, as the matron entered.

'Very cold, indeed, sir,' replied the mistress, in her most civil tones, and dropping a curtsey as she spoke.

'You should get better coals out of your contractors,' said the apothecary's deputy, breaking a lump on the top of the fire with the rusty poker; 'these are not at all the sort of thing for a cold night.'

'They're the board's choosing, sir,' returned the matron. 'The least they could do, would be to keep us pretty warm: for our places are hard enough.'

The conversation was here interrupted by a moan from the sick woman.

'Oh!' said the young mag, turning his face towards the bed, as if he had previously quite forgotten the patient, 'it's all U.P. there, Mrs. Corney.'

'It is, is it, sir?' asked the matron.

'If she lasts a couple of hours, I shall be surprised,' said the apothecary's apprentice, intent upon the toothpick's point. 'It's a break-up of the system altogether. Is she dozing, old lady?'

The attendant stooped over the bed, to ascertain; and nodded in the affirmative.

'Then perhaps she'll go off in that way, if you don't make a row,' said the young man. 'Put the light on the floor. She won't see it there.'

The attendant did as she was told: shaking her head meanwhile, to intimate that the woman would not die so easily; having done so, she resumed her seat by the side of the other nurse, who had by this time returned. The mistress, with an expression of impatience, wrapped herself in her shawl, and sat at the foot of the bed.

The apothecary's apprentice, having completed the manufacture of the toothpick, planted himself in front of the fire and made good use of it for ten minutes or so: when apparently growing rather dull, he wished Mrs. Corney joy of her job, and took himself off on tiptoe.

When they had sat in silence for some time, the two old women rose from the bed, and crouching over the fire, held out their withered hands to catch the heat. The flame threw a ghastly light on their shrivelled faces, and made their ugliness appear terrible, as, in this position, they began to converse in a low voice.

'Did she say any more, Anny dear, while I was gone?' inquired the messenger.

'Not a word,' replied the other. 'She plucked and tore at her arms for a little time; but I held her hands, and she soon dropped off. She hasn't much strength in her, so I easily kept her quiet. I ain't so weak for an old woman, although I am on parish allowance; no, no!'

'Did she drink the hot wine the doctor said she was to have?' demanded the first.

'I tried to get it down,' rejoined the other. 'But her teeth were tight set, and she clenched the mug so hard that it was as much as I could do to get it back again. So I drank it; and it did me good!'

Looking cautiously round, to ascertain that they were not overheard, the two hags cowered nearer to the fire, and chuckled heartily.

'I mind the time,' said the first speaker, 'when she would have done the same, and made rare fun of it afterwards.'

'Ay, that she would,' rejoined the other; 'she had a merry heart. 'A many, many, beautiful corpses she laid out, as nice and neat as waxwork. My old eyes have seen them—ay, and those old hands touched them too; for I have helped her, scores of times.'

Stretching forth her trembling fingers as she spoke, the old creature shook them exultingly before her face, and fumbling in her pocket, brought out an old time-discoloured tin snuff-box, from which she shook a few grains into the outstretched palm of her companion, and a few more into her own. While they were thus employed, the matron, who had been impatiently watching until the dying woman should awaken from her stupor, joined them by the fire, and sharply asked how long she was to wait?

'Not long, mistress,' replied the second woman, looking up into her face. 'We have none of us long to wait for Death. Patience, patience! He'll be here soon enough for us all.'

'Hold your tongue, you doting idiot!' said the matron sternly. 'You, Martha, tell me; has she been in this way before?'

'Often,' answered the first woman.

'But will never be again,' added the second one; 'that is, she'll never wake again but once—and mind, mistress, that won't be for long!'

'Long or short,' said the matron, snappishly, 'she won't find me here when she does wake; take care, both of you, how you worry me again for nothing. It's no part of my duty to see all the old women in the house die, and I won't—that's more. Mind that, you impudent old harridans. If you make a fool of me again, I'll soon cure you, I warrant you!'

She was bouncing away, when a cry from the two women, who had turned towards the bed, caused her to look round. The patient had raised herself upright, and was stretching her arms towards them.

'Who's that?' she cried, in a hollow voice.

'Hush, hush!' said one of the women, stooping over her. 'Lie down, lie down!'

'I'll never lie down again alive!' said the woman, struggling. 'I *will* tell her! Come here! Nearer! Let me whisper in your ear.'

She clutched the matron by the arm, and forcing her into a chair by the bedside, was about to speak, when looking round, she caught sight of the two old women bending forward in the attitude of eager listeners.

'Turn them away,' said the woman, drowsily; 'make haste! make haste!'

The two old crones, chiming in together, began pouring out many piteous lamentations that the poor dear was too far gone to know her best friends; and were uttering sundry protestations that they would never leave her, when the superior pushed them from the room, closed the door, and returned to the bedside. On being excluded, the old ladies changed their tone, and cried through the keyhole that old Sally was drunk; which, indeed, was not unlikely; since, in addition to a moderate dose of opium prescribed by the apothecary, she was labouring under the effects of a final taste of gin-and-water which had been privily administered, in the openness of their hearts, by the worthy old ladies themselves.

'Now listen to me,' said the dying woman aloud, as if making a great effort to revive one latent spark of energy. 'In this very room—in this very bed—I once nursed a pretty young creetur', that was brought into the house with her feet cut and bruised with walking, and all soiled with dust and blood. She gave birth to a boy, and died. Let me think—what was the year again!'

'Never mind the year,' said the impatient auditor; 'what about her?'

'Ay,' murmured the sick woman, relapsing into her former drowsy state, 'what about her?—what about—I know!' she cried, jumping fiercely up: her face flushed, and her eyes starting from her head—'I robbed her, so I did! She wasn't cold—I tell you she wasn't cold, when I stole it!'

'Stole what, for God's sake?' cried the matron, with a gesture as if she would call for help.

'*It*!' replied the woman, laying her hand over the other's mouth. 'The only thing she had. She wanted clothes to keep her warm, and food to eat; but she had kept it safe, and had it in her bosom. It was gold, I tell you! Rich gold, that might have saved her life!'

'Gold!' echoed the matron, bending eagerly over the woman as she fell back. 'Go on, go on—yes—what of it? Who was the mother? When was it?'

'She charge me to keep it safe,' replied the woman with a groan, 'and trusted me as the only woman about her. I stole it in my heart when she first showed it me hanging round her neck; and the child's death, perhaps, is on me besides! They would have treated him better, if they had known it all!'

'Known what?' asked the other. 'Speak!'

'The boy grew so like his mother,' said the woman, rambling on, and not heeding the question, 'that I could never forget it when I saw his face. Poor girl! poor girl! She was so young, too! Such a gentle lamb! Wait; there's more to tell. I have not told you all, have I?'

'No, no,' replied the matron, inclining her head to catch the words, as they came more faintly from the dying woman. 'Be quick, or it may be too late!'

'The mother,' said the woman, making a more violent effort than before; 'the mother, when the pains of death first came upon her, whispered in my ear that if her baby was born alive, and thrived, the day might come when it would not feel so much disgraced to hear its poor young mother named. "And oh, kind Heaven!" she said, folding her thin hands together, "whether it be boy or girl, raise up some friends for it in this troubled world, and take pity upon a lonely desolate child, abandoned to its mercy!"'

'The boy's name?' demanded the matron.

'They *called* him Oliver,' replied the woman, feebly. 'The gold I stole was—'

'Yes, yes—what?' cried the other.

She was bending eagerly over the woman to hear her reply; but drew back, instinctively, as she once again rose, slowly and stiffly, into a sitting posture; then, clutching the coverlid with both hands, muttered some indistinct sounds in her throat, and fell lifeless on the bed.

'Stone dead!' said one of the old women, hurrying in as soon as the door was opened.

'And nothing to tell, after all,' rejoined the matron, walking carelessly away.

The two crones, to all appearance, too busily occupied in the preparations for their dreadful duties to make any reply, were left alone, hovering about the body.

CHAPTER XXV

WHEREIN THIS HISTORY REVERTS TO MR. FAGIN AND COMPANY

While these things were passing in the country workhouse, Mr. Fagin sat in the old den—the same from which Oliver had been removed by the girl—brooding over a dull, smoky fire. He held a pair of bellows upon his knee, with which he had apparently been endeavouring to rouse it into more cheerful action; but he had fallen into deep thought; and with his arms folded on them, and his chin resting on his thumbs, fixed his eyes, abstractedly, on the rusty bars.

At a table behind him sat the Artful Dodger, Master Charles Bates, and Mr. Chitling: all intent upon a game of whist; the Artful taking dummy against Master Bates and Mr. Chitling. The countenance of the first-named gentleman, peculiarly intelligent at all times, acquired great additional interest from his close observance of the game, and his attentive perusal of Mr. Chitling's hand; upon which, from time to time, as occasion served, he bestowed a variety of earnest glances: wisely regulating his own play by the result of his observations upon his neighbour's cards. It being a cold night, the Dodger wore his hat, as, indeed, was often his custom within doors. He also sustained a clay pipe between his teeth, which he only removed for a brief space when he deemed it necessary to apply for refreshment to a quart pot upon the table, which stood ready filled with gin-and-water for the accommodation of the company.

Master Bates was also attentive to the play; but being of a more excitable nature than his accomplished friend, it was observable that he more frequently applied himself to the gin-and-water, and moreover indulged in many jests and irrelevant remarks, all highly unbecoming a scientific rubber. Indeed, the Artful, presuming upon their close attachment, more than once took occasion to reason gravely with his companion upon these improprieties; all of which remonstrances, Master Bates received in extremely good part; merely requesting his friend to be 'blowed,' or to insert his head in a sack, or replying with some other neatly-turned witticism of a similar kind, the happy application of which, excited considerable admiration in the mind of Mr. Chitling. It was remarkable that the latter gentleman and his partner invariably lost; and that the circumstance, so far from angering Master Bates, appeared to afford him the highest amusement, inasmuch as he laughed most uproariously at the end of every deal, and protested that he had never seen such a jolly game in all his born days.

'That's two doubles and the rub,' said Mr. Chitling, with a very long face, as he drew half-a-crown from his waistcoat-pocket. 'I never see such a feller as you, Jack; you win everything. Even when we've good cards, Charley and I can't make nothing of 'em.'

Either the master or the manner of this remark, which was made very ruefully, delighted Charley Bates so much, that his consequent shout of laughter roused the Jew from his reverie, and induced him to inquire what was the matter.

'Matter, Fagin!' cried Charley. 'I wish you had watched the play. Tommy Chitling hasn't won a point; and I went partners with him against the Artfull and dumb.'

'Ay, ay!' said the Jew, with a grin, which sufficiently demonstrated that he was at no loss to understand the reason. 'Try 'em again, Tom; try 'em again.'

'No more of it for me, thank 'ee, Fagin,' replied Mr. Chitling; 'I've had enough. That 'ere Dodger has such a run of luck that there's no standing again' him.'

'Ha! ha! my dear,' replied the Jew, 'you must get up very early in the morning, to win against the Dodger.'

'Morning!' said Charley Bates; 'you must put your boots on over-night, and have a telescope at each eye, and a opera-glass between your shoulders, if you want to come over him.'

Mr. Dawkins received these handsome compliments with much philosophy, and offered to cut any gentleman in company, for the first picture-card, at a shilling at a time. Nobody accepting the challenge, and his pipe being by this time smoked out, he proceeded to amuse himself by sketching a ground-plan of Newgate on the table with the piece of chalk which had served him in lieu of counters; whistling, meantime, with peculiar shrillness.

'How precious dull you are, Tommy!' said the Dodger, stopping short when there had been a long silence; and addressing Mr. Chitling. 'What do you think he's thinking of, Fagin?'

'How should I know, my dear?' replied the Jew, looking round as he plied the bellows. 'About his losses, maybe; or the little retirement in the country that he's just left, eh? Ha! ha! Is that it, my dear?'

'Not a bit of it,' replied the Dodger, stopping the subject of discourse as Mr. Chitling was about to reply. 'What do *you* say, Charley?'

'*I* should say,' replied Master Bates, with a grin, 'that he was uncommon sweet upon Betsy. See how he's a-blushing! Oh, my eye! here's a merry-go-rounder! Tommy Chitling's in love! Oh, Fagin, Fagin! what a spree!'

Thoroughly overpowered with the notion of Mr. Chitling being the victim of the tender passion, Master Bates threw himself back in his chair with such violence, that he lost his balance, and pitched over upon the floor; where (the accident abating nothing of his merriment) he lay at full length until his laugh was over, when he resumed his former position, and began another laugh.

'Never mind him, my dear,' said the Jew, winking at Mr. Dawkins, and giving Master Bates a reproving tap with the nozzle of the bellows. 'Betsy's a fine girl. Stick up to her, Tom. Stick up to her.'

'What I mean to say, Fagin,' replied Mr. Chitling, very red in the face, 'is, that that isn't anything to anybody here.'

'No more it is,' replied the Jew; 'Charley will talk. Don't mind him, my dear; don't mind him. Betsy's a fine girl. Do as she bids you, Tom, and you will make your fortune.'

'So I *do* do as she bids me,' replied Mr. Chitling; 'I shouldn't have been milled, if it hadn't been for her advice. But it turned out a good job for you; didn't it, Fagin! And what's six weeks of it? It must come, some time or another, and why not in the winter time when you don't want to go out a-walking so much; eh, Fagin?'

'Ah, to be sure, my dear,' replied the Jew.

'You wouldn't mind it again, Tom, would you,' asked the Dodger, winking upon Charley and the Jew, 'if Bet was all right?'

'I mean to say that I shouldn't,' replied Tom, angrily. 'There, now. Ah! Who'll say as much as that, I should like to know; eh, Fagin?'

'Nobody, my dear,' replied the Jew; 'not a soul, Tom. I don't know one of 'em that would do it besides you; not one of 'em, my dear.'

'I might have got clear off, if I'd split upon her; mightn't I, Fagin?' angrily pursued the poor half-witted dupe. 'A word from me would have done it; wouldn't it, Fagin?'

'To be sure it would, my dear,' replied the Jew.

'But I didn't blab it; did I, Fagin?' demanded Tom, pouring question upon question with great volubility.

'No, no, to be sure,' replied the Jew; 'you were too stout-hearted for that. A deal too stout, my dear!'

'Perhaps I was,' rejoined Tom, looking round; 'and if I was, what's to laugh at, in that; eh, Fagin?'

The Jew, perceiving that Mr. Chitling was considerably roused, hastened to assure him that nobody was laughing; and to prove the gravity of the company, appealed to Master Bates, the principal offender. But, unfortunately, Charley, in opening his mouth to reply that he was never more serious in his life, was unable to prevent the escape of such a violent roar, that the abused Mr. Chitling, without any preliminary ceremonies, rushed across the room and aimed a blow at the offender; who, being skilful in evading pursuit, ducked to avoid it, and chose his time so well that it lighted on the chest of the merry old gentleman, and caused him to stagger to the wall, where he stood panting for breath, while Mr. Chitling looked on in intense dismay.

'Hark!' cried the Dodger at this moment, 'I heard the tinkler.' Catching up the light, he crept softly upstairs.

The bell was rung again, with some impatience, while the party were in darkness. After a short pause, the Dodger reappeared, and whispered Fagin mysteriously.

'What!' cried the Jew, 'alone?'

The Dodger nodded in the affirmative, and, shading the flame of the candle with his hand, gave Charley Bates a private intimation, in dumb show, that he had better not be funny just then. Having performed this friendly office, he fixed his eyes on the Jew's face, and awaited his directions.

The old man bit his yellow fingers, and meditated for some seconds; his face working with agitation the while, as if he dreaded something, and feared to know the worst. At length he raised his head.

'Where is he?' he asked.

The Dodger pointed to the floor above, and made a gesture, as if to leave the room.

'Yes,' said the Jew, answering the mute inquiry; 'bring him down. Hush! Quiet, Charley! Gently, Tom! Scarce, scarce!'

This brief direction to Charley Bates, and his recent antagonist, was softly and immediately obeyed. There was no sound of their whereabout, when the Dodger descended the stairs, bearing the light in his hand, and followed by a man in a coarse smock-frock; who, after casting a hurried glance round the room, pulled off a large wrapper which had concealed the lower portion of his face, and disclosed: all haggard, unwashed, and unshorn: the features of flash Toby Crackit.

'How are you, Faguey?' said this worthy, nodding to the Jew. 'Pop that shawl away in my castor, Dodger, so that I may know where to find it when I cut; that's the time of day! You'll be a fine young cracksman afore the old file now.'

With these words he pulled up the smock-frock; and, winding it round his middle, drew a chair to the fire, and placed his feet upon the hob.

'See there, Faguey,' he said, pointing disconsolately to his top boots; 'not a drop of Day and Martin since you know when; not a bubble of blacking, by Jove! But don't look at me in that way, man. All in good time. I can't talk about business till I've eat and drank; so produce the sustainance, and let's have a quiet fill-out for the first time these three days!'

The Jew motioned to the Dodger to place what eatables there were, upon the table; and, seating himself opposite the housebreaker, waited his leisure.

To judge from appearances, Toby was by no means in a hurry to open the conversation. At first, the Jew contented himself with patiently watching his countenance, as if to gain from its expression some clue to the intelligence he brought; but in vain.

He looked tired and worn, but there was the same complacent repose upon his features that they always wore: and through dirt, and beard, and whisker, there still shone, unimpaired, the self-satisfied smirk of flash Toby Crackit. Then the Jew, in an agony of impatience, watched every morsel he put into his mouth; pacing up and down the room, meanwhile, in irrepressible excitement. It was all of no use. Toby continued to eat with the utmost outward indifference, until he could eat no more; then, ordering the Dodger out, he closed the door, mixed a glass of spirits and water, and composed himself for talking.

'First and foremost, Faguey,' said Toby.

'Yes, yes!' interposed the Jew, drawing up his chair.

Mr. Crackit stopped to take a draught of spirits and water, and to declare that the gin was excellent; then placing his feet against the low mantelpiece, so as to bring his boots to about the level of his eye, he quietly resumed.

'First and foremost, Faguey,' said the housebreaker, 'how's Bill?'

'What!' screamed the Jew, starting from his seat.

'Why, you don't mean to say—' began Toby, turning pale.

'Mean!' cried the Jew, stamping furiously on the ground. 'Where are they? Sikes and the boy! Where are they? Where have they been? Where are they hiding? Why have they not been here?'

'The crack failed,' said Toby faintly.

'I know it,' replied the Jew, tearing a newspaper from his pocket and pointing to it. 'What more?'

'They fired and hit the boy. We cut over the fields at the back, with him between us—straight as the crow flies—through hedge and ditch. They gave chase. Damme! the whole country was awake, and the dogs upon us.'

'The boy!'

'Bill had him on his back, and scudded like the wind. We stopped to take him between us; his head hung down, and he was cold. They were close upon our heels; every man for himself, and each from the gallows! We parted company, and left the youngster lying in a ditch. Alive or dead, that's all I know about him.'

The Jew stopped to hear no more; but uttering a loud yell, and twining his hands in his hair, rushed from the room, and from the house.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN WHICH A MYSTERIOUS CHARACTER APPEARS UPON THE SCENE; AND MANY THINGS, INSEPARABLE FROM THIS HISTORY, ARE DONE AND PERFORMED

The old man had gained the street corner, before he began to recover the effect of Toby Crackit's intelligence. He had relaxed nothing of his unusual speed; but was still pressing onward, in the same wild and disordered manner, when the sudden dashing past of a carriage: and a boisterous cry from the foot passengers, who saw his danger: drove him back upon the pavement. Avoiding, as much as was possible, all the main streets, and skulking only through the by-ways and alleys, he at length emerged on Snow Hill. Here he walked even faster than before; nor did he linger until he had again turned into a court; when, as if conscious that he was now in his proper element, he fell into his usual shuffling pace, and seemed to breathe more freely.

Near to the spot on which Snow Hill and Holborn Hill meet, opens, upon the right hand as you come out of the City, a narrow and dismal alley, leading to Saffron Hill. In its filthy shops are exposed for sale huge bunches of second-hand silk handkerchiefs, of all sizes and patterns; for here reside the traders who purchase them from pick-pockets. Hundreds of these handkerchiefs hang dangling from pegs outside the windows or flaunting from the door-posts; and the shelves, within, are piled with them. Confined as the limits of Field Lane are, it has its barber, its coffee-shop, its beer-shop, and its fried-fish warehouse. It is a commercial colony of itself: the emporium of petty larceny: visited at early morning, and setting-in of dusk, by silent merchants, who traffic in dark back-parlours, and who go as strangely as they come. Here, the clothesman, the shoe-vamper, and the rag-merchant, display their goods, as sign-boards to the petty thief; here, stores of old iron and bones, and heaps of mildewy fragments of woollen-stuff and linen, rust and rot in the grimy cellars.

It was into this place that the Jew turned. He was well known to the sallow denizens of the lane; for such of them as were on the look-out to buy or sell, nodded, familiarly, as he passed along. He replied to their salutations in the same way; but bestowed no closer recognition until he reached the further end of the alley; when he stopped, to address a salesman of small stature, who had squeezed as much of his person into a child's chair as the chair would hold, and was smoking a pipe at his warehouse door.

'Why, the sight of you, Mr. Fagin, would cure the hoptalmy!' said this respectable trader, in acknowledgment of the Jew's inquiry after his health.

'The neighbourhood was a little too hot, Lively,' said Fagin, elevating his eyebrows, and crossing his hands upon his shoulders.

'Well, I've heerd that complaint of it, once or twice before,' replied the trader; 'but it soon cools down again; don't you find it so?'

Fagin nodded in the affirmative. Pointing in the direction of Saffron Hill, he inquired whether any one was up yonder to-night.

'At the Cripples?' inquired the man.

The Jew nodded.

'Let me see,' pursued the merchant, reflecting.

'Yes, there's some half-dozen of 'em gone in, that I knows. I don't think your friend's there.'

'Sikes is not, I suppose?' inquired the Jew, with a disappointed countenance.

'*Non istwentus*, as the lawyers say,' replied the little man, shaking his head, and looking amazingly sly. 'Have you got anything in my line to-night?'

'Nothing to-night,' said the Jew, turning away.

'Are you going up to the Cripples, Fagin?' cried the little man, calling after him. 'Stop! I don't mind if I have a drop there with you!'

But as the Jew, looking back, waved his hand to intimate that he preferred being alone; and, moreover, as the little man could not very easily disengage himself from the chair; the sign of the Cripples was, for a time, bereft of the advantage of Mr. Lively's presence. By the time he had got upon his legs, the Jew had disappeared; so Mr. Lively, after ineffectually standing on tiptoe, in the hope of catching sight of him, again forced himself into the little chair, and, exchanging a shake of the head with a lady in the opposite shop, in which doubt and mistrust were plainly mingled, resumed his pipe with a grave demeanour.

The Three Cripples, or rather the Cripples; which was the sign by which the establishment was familiarly known to its patrons: was the public-house in which Mr. Sikes and his dog have already figured. Merely making a sign to a man at the bar, Fagin walked straight upstairs, and opening the door of a room, and softly insinuating himself into the chamber, looked anxiously about: shading his eyes with his hand, as if in search of some particular person.

The room was illuminated by two gas-lights; the glare of which was prevented by the barred shutters, and closely-drawn curtains of faded red, from being visible outside. The ceiling was blackened, to prevent its colour from being injured by the flaring of the lamps; and the place was so full of dense tobacco smoke, that at first it was scarcely possible to discern anything more. By degrees, however, as some of it cleared away through the open door, an assemblage of heads, as confused as the noises that greeted the ear, might be made out; and as the eye grew more accustomed to the scene, the spectator gradually became aware of the presence of a numerous company, male and female, crowded round a long table: at the upper end of which, sat a chairman with a hammer of office in his hand; while a professional gentleman with a bluish nose, and his face tied up for the benefit of a toothache, presided at a jingling piano in a remote corner.

As Fagin stepped softly in, the professional gentleman, running over the keys by way of prelude, occasioned a general cry of order for a song; which having subsided, a young lady proceeded to entertain the company with a ballad in four verses, between each of which the accompanyist played the melody all through, as loud as he could. When this was over, the chairman gave a sentiment, after which, the professional gentleman on the chairman's right and left volunteered a duet, and sang it, with great applause.

It was curious to observe some faces which stood out prominently from among the group. There was the chairman himself, (the landlord of the house,) a coarse, rough, heavy built fellow, who, while the songs were proceeding, rolled his eyes hither and thither, and, seeming to give himself up to joviality, had an eye for everything that was done, and an ear for everything that was said—and sharp ones, too. Near him were the singers: receiving, with professional indifference, the compliments of the company, and applying themselves, in turn, to a dozen proffered glasses of spirits and water, tendered by their more boisterous admirers; whose countenances, expressive of almost every vice in almost every grade, irresistibly attracted the attention, by their very repulsiveness. Cunning, ferocity, and drunkeness in all its stages, were there, in their strongest aspect; and women: some with the last lingering tinge of their early freshness almost fading as you looked: others with every mark and stamp of their sex utterly beaten out, and presenting but one loathsome blank of profligacy and crime; some mere girls, others but young women, and none past the prime of life; formed the darkest and saddest portion of this dreary picture.

Fagin, troubled by no grave emotions, looked eagerly from face to face while these proceedings were in progress; but apparently without meeting that of which he was in search. Succeeding, at length, in catching the eye of the man who occupied the chair, he beckoned to him slightly, and left the room, as quietly as he had entered it.

'What can I do for you, Mr. Fagin?' inquired the man, as he followed him out to the landing. 'Won't you join us? They'll be delighted, every one of 'em.'

The Jew shook his head impatiently, and said in a whisper, 'Is *he* here?'

'No,' replied the man.

'And no news of Barney?' inquired Fagin.

'None,' replied the landlord of the Cripples; for it was he. 'He won't stir till it's all safe. Depend on it, they're on the scent down there; and that if he moved, he'd blow upon the thing at once. He's all right enough, Barney is, else I should have heard of him. I'll pound it, that Barney's managing properly. Let him alone for that.'

'Will *he* be here to-night?' asked the Jew, laying the same emphasis on the pronoun as before.

'Monks, do you mean?' inquired the landlord, hesitating.

'Hush!' said the Jew. 'Yes.'

'Certain,' replied the man, drawing a gold watch from his fob; 'I expected him here before now. If you'll wait ten minutes, he'll be—'

'No, no,' said the Jew, hastily; as though, however desirous he might be to see the person in question, he was nevertheless relieved by his absence. 'Tell him I came here to see him; and that he must come to me to-night. No, say to-morrow. As he is not here, to-morrow will be time enough.'

'Good!' said the man. 'Nothing more?'

'Not a word now,' said the Jew, descending the stairs.

'I say,' said the other, looking over the rails, and speaking in a hoarse whisper; 'what a time this would be for a sell! I've got Phil Barker here: so drunk, that a boy might take him!'

'Ah! But it's not Phil Barker's time,' said the Jew, looking up.

'Phil has something more to do, before we can afford to part with him; so go back to the company, my dear, and tell them to lead merry lives—*while they last*. Ha! ha! ha!'

The landlord reciprocated the old man's laugh; and returned to his guests. The Jew was no sooner alone, than his countenance resumed its former expression of anxiety and thought. After a brief reflection, he called a hack-cabriolet, and bade the man drive towards Bethnal Green. He dismissed him within some quarter of a mile of Mr. Sikes's residence, and performed the short remainder of the distance, on foot.

'Now,' muttered the Jew, as he knocked at the door, 'if there is any deep play here, I shall have it out of you, my girl, cunning as you are.'

She was in her room, the woman said. Fagin crept softly upstairs, and entered it without any previous ceremony. The girl was alone; lying with her head upon the table, and her hair straggling over it.

'She has been drinking,' thought the Jew, cooly, 'or perhaps she is only miserable.'

The old man turned to close the door, as he made this reflection; the noise thus occasioned, roused the girl. She eyed his crafty face narrowly, as she inquired to his recital of Toby Crackit's story. When it was concluded, she sank into her former attitude, but spoke not a word. She pushed the candle impatiently away; and once or twice as she feverishly changed her position, shuffled her feet upon the ground; but this was all.

During the silence, the Jew looked restlessly about the room, as if to assure himself that there were no appearances of Sikes having covertly returned. Apparently satisfied with his inspection, he coughed twice or thrice, and made as many efforts to open a conversation; but the girl heeded him no more than if he had been made of stone. At length he made another attempt; and rubbing his hands together, said, in his most conciliatory tone,

'And where should you think Bill was now, my dear?'

The girl moaned out some half intelligible reply, that she could not tell; and seemed, from the smothered noise that escaped her, to be crying.

'And the boy, too,' said the Jew, straining his eyes to catch a glimpse of her face. 'Poor leetle child! Left in a ditch, Nance; only think!'

'The child,' said the girl, suddenly looking up, 'is better where he is, than among us; and if no harm comes to Bill from it, I hope he lies dead in the ditch and that his young bones may rot there.'

'What!' cried the Jew, in amazement.

'Ay, I do,' returned the girl, meeting his gaze. 'I shall be glad to have him away from my eyes, and to know that the worst is over. I can't bear to have him about me. The sight of him turns me against myself, and all of you.'

'Pooh!' said the Jew, scornfully. 'You're drunk.'

'Am I?' cried the girl bitterly. 'It's no fault of yours, if I am not! You'd never have me anything else, if you had your will, except now;—the humour doesn't suit you, doesn't it?'

'No!' rejoined the Jew, furiously. 'It does not.'

'Change it, then!' responded the girl, with a laugh.

'Change it!' exclaimed the Jew, exasperated beyond all bounds by his companion's unexpected obstinacy, and the vexation of the night, 'I *will* change it! Listen to me, you drab. Listen to me, who with six words, can strangle Sikes as surely as if I had his bull's throat between my fingers now. If he comes back, and leaves the boy behind him; if he gets off free, and dead or alive, fails to restore him to me; murder him yourself if you would have him escape Jack Ketch. And do it the moment he sets foot in this room, or mind me, it will be too late!'

'What is all this?' cried the girl involuntarily.

'What is it?' pursued Fagin, mad with rage. 'When the boy's worth hundreds of pounds to me, am I to lose what chance threw me in the way of getting safely, through the whims of a drunken gang that I could whistle away the lives of! And me bound, too, to a born devil that only wants the will, and has the power to, to—'

Panting for breath, the old man stammered for a word; and in that instant checked the torrent of his wrath, and changed his whole demeanour.

A moment before, his clenched hands had grasped the air; his eyes had dilated; and his face grown livid with passion; but now, he shrunk into a chair, and, cowering together, trembled with the apprehension of having himself disclosed some hidden villainy. After a short silence, he ventured to look round at his companion. He appeared somewhat reassured, on beholding her in the same listless attitude from which he had first roused her.

'Nancy, dear!' croaked the Jew, in his usual voice. 'Did you mind me, dear?'

'Don't worry me now, Fagin!' replied the girl, raising her head languidly. 'If Bill has not done it this time, he will another. He has done many a good job for you, and will do many more when he can; and when he can't he won't; so no more about that.'

'Regarding this boy, my dear?' said the Jew, rubbing the palms of his hands nervously together.

'The boy must take his chance with the rest,' interrupted Nancy, hastily; 'and I say again, I hope he is dead, and out of harm's way, and out of yours,—that is, if Bill comes to no harm. And if Toby got clear off, Bill's pretty sure to be safe; for Bill's worth two of Toby any time.'

'And about what I was saying, my dear?' observed the Jew, keeping his glistening eye steadily upon her.

'Your must say it all over again, if it's anything you want me to do,' rejoined Nancy; 'and if it is, you had better wait till to-morrow. You put me up for a minute; but now I'm stupid again.'

Fagin put several other questions: all with the same drift of ascertaining whether the girl had profited by his unguarded hints; but, she answered them so readily, and was withal so utterly unmoved by his searching looks, that his original impression of her being more than a trifle in liquor, was confirmed. Nancy, indeed, was not exempt from a failing which was very common among the Jew's female pupils; and in which, in their tenderer years, they were rather encouraged than checked. Her disordered appearance, and a wholesale perfume of Geneva which pervaded the apartment, afforded strong confirmatory evidence of the justice of the Jew's supposition; and when, after indulging in the temporary display of violence above described, she subsided, first into dullness, and afterwards into a compound of feelings: under the influence of which she shed tears one minute, and in the next gave utterance to various exclamations of 'Never say die!' and divers calculations as to what might be the amount of the odds so long as a lady or gentleman was happy, Mr. Fagin, who had had considerable experience of such matters in his time, saw, with great satisfaction, that she was very far gone indeed.

Having eased his mind by this discovery; and having accomplished his twofold object of imparting to the girl what he had, that night, heard, and of ascertaining, with his own eyes, that Sikes had not returned, Mr. Fagin again turned his face homeward: leaving his young friend asleep, with her head upon the table.

It was within an hour of midnight. The weather being dark, and piercing cold, he had no great temptation to loiter. The sharp wind that scoured the streets, seemed to have cleared them of passengers, as of dust and mud, for few people were abroad, and they were to all appearance hastening fast home. It blew from the right quarter for the Jew, however, and straight before it he went: trembling, and shivering, as every fresh gust drove him rudely on his way.

He had reached the corner of his own street, and was already fumbling in his pocket for the door-key, when a dark figure emerged from a projecting entrance which lay in deep shadow, and, crossing the road, glided up to him unperceived.

'Fagin!' whispered a voice close to his ear.

'Ah!' said the Jew, turning quickly round, 'is that—'

'Yes!' interrupted the stranger. 'I have been lingering here these two hours. Where the devil have you been?'

'On your business, my dear,' replied the Jew, glancing uneasily at his companion, and slackening his pace as he spoke. 'On your business all night.'

'Oh, of course!' said the stranger, with a sneer. 'Well; and what's come of it?'

'Nothing good,' said the Jew.

'Nothing bad, I hope?' said the stranger, stopping short, and turning a startled look on his companion.

The Jew shook his head, and was about to reply, when the stranger, interrupting him, motioned to the house, before which they had by this time arrived: remarking, that he had better say what he had got to say, under cover: for his blood was chilled with standing about so long, and the wind blew through him.

Fagin looked as if he could have willingly excused himself from taking home a visitor at that unseasonable hour; and, indeed, muttered something about having no fire; but his companion repeating his request in a peremptory manner, he unlocked the door, and requested him to close it softly, while he got a light.

'It's as dark as the grave,' said the man, groping forward a few steps. 'Make haste!'

'Shut the door,' whispered Fagin from the end of the passage. As he spoke, it closed with a loud noise.

'That wasn't my doing,' said the other man, feeling his way. 'The wind blew it to, or it shut of its own accord: one or the other. Look sharp with the light, or I shall knock my brains out against something in this confounded hole.'

Fagin stealthily descended the kitchen stairs. After a short absence, he returned with a lighted candle, and the intelligence that Toby Crackit was asleep in the back room below, and that the boys were in the front one. Beckoning the man to follow him, he led the way upstairs.

'We can say the few words we've got to say in here, my dear,' said the Jew, throwing open a door on the first floor; 'and as there are holes in the shutters, and we never show lights to our neighbours, we'll set the candle on the stairs. There!'

With those words, the Jew, stooping down, placed the candle on an upper flight of stairs, exactly opposite to the room door. This done, he led the way into the apartment; which was destitute of all movables save a broken arm-chair, and an old couch or sofa without covering, which stood behind the door. Upon this piece of furniture, the stranger sat himself with the air of a weary man; and the Jew, drawing up the arm-chair opposite, they sat face to face. It was not quite dark; the door was partially open; and the candle outside, threw a feeble reflection on the opposite wall.

They conversed for some time in whispers. Though nothing of the conversation was distinguishable beyond a few disjointed words here and there, a listener might easily have perceived that Fagin appeared to be defending himself against some remarks of the stranger; and that the latter was in a state of considerable irritation. They might have been talking, thus, for a quarter of an hour or more, when Monks—by which name the Jew had designated the strange man several times in the course of their colloquy—said, raising his voice a little, 'I tell you again, it was badly planned. Why not have kept him here among the rest, and made a sneaking, snivelling pickpocket of him at once?'

'Only hear him!' exclaimed the Jew, shrugging his shoulders.

'Why, do you mean to say you couldn't have done it, if you had chosen?' demanded Monks, sternly. 'Haven't you done it, with other boys, scores of times? If you had had patience for a twelvemonth, at most, couldn't you have got him convicted, and sent safely out of the kingdom; perhaps for life?'

'Whose turn would that have served, my dear?' inquired the Jew humbly.

'Mine,' replied Monks.

'But not mine,' said the Jew, submissively. 'He might have become of use to me. When there are two parties to a bargain, it is only reasonable that the interests of both should be consulted; is it, my good friend?'

'What then?' demanded Monks.

'I saw it was not easy to train him to the business,' replied the Jew; 'he was not like other boys in the same circumstances.'

'Curse him, no!' muttered the man, 'or he would have been a thief, long ago.'

'I had no hold upon him to make him worse,' pursued the Jew, anxiously watching the countenance of his companion. 'His hand was not in. I had nothing to frighten him with; which we always must have in the beginning, or we labour in vain. What could I do? Send him out with the Dodger and Charley? We had enough of that, at first, my dear; I trembled for us all.'

'*That* was not my doing,' observed Monks.

'No, no, my dear!' renewed the Jew. 'And I don't quarrel with it now; because, if it had never happened, you might never have clapped eyes on the boy to notice him, and so led to the discovery that it was him you were looking for. Well! I got him back for you by means of the girl; and then *she* begins to favour him.'

'Throttle the girl!' said Monks, impatiently.

'Why, we can't afford to do that just now, my dear,' replied the Jew, smiling; 'and, besides, that sort of thing is not in our way; or, one of these days, I might be glad to have it done. I know what these girls are, Monks, well. As soon as the boy begins to harden, she'll care no more for him, than for a block of wood. You want him made a thief. If he is alive, I can make him one from this time; and, if—if—' said the Jew, drawing nearer to the other,—'it's not likely, mind,—but if the worst comes to the worst, and he is dead—'

'It's no fault of mine if he is!' interposed the other man, with a look of terror, and clasping the Jew's arm with trembling hands. 'Mind that. Fagin! I had no hand in it. Anything but his death, I told you from the first. I won't shed blood; it's always found out, and haunts a man besides. If they shot him dead, I was not the cause; do you hear me? Fire this infernal den! What's that?'

'What!' cried the Jew, grasping the coward round the body, with both arms, as he sprung to his feet. 'Where?'

'Yonder! replied the man, glaring at the opposite wall. 'The shadow! I saw the shadow of a woman, in a cloak and bonnet, pass along the wainscot like a breath!'

The Jew released his hold, and they rushed tumultuously from the room. The candle, wasted by the draught, was standing where it had been placed. It showed them only the empty staircase, and their own white faces. They listened intently: a profound silence reigned throughout the house.

'It's your fancy,' said the Jew, taking up the light and turning to his companion.

'I'll swear I saw it!' replied Monks, trembling. 'It was bending forward when I saw it first; and when I spoke, it darted away.'

The Jew glanced contemptuously at the pale face of his associate, and, telling him he could follow, if he pleased, ascended the stairs. They looked into all the rooms; they were cold, bare, and empty. They descended into the passage, and thence into the cellars below. The green damp hung upon the low walls; the tracks of the snail and slug glistened in the light of the candle; but all was still as death.

'What do you think now?' said the Jew, when they had regained the passage. 'Besides ourselves, there's not a creature in the house except Toby and the boys; and they're safe enough. See here!'

As a proof of the fact, the Jew drew forth two keys from his pocket; and explained, that when he first went downstairs, he had locked them in, to prevent any intrusion on the conference.

This accumulated testimony effectually staggered Mr. Monks. His protestations had gradually become less and less vehement as they proceeded in their search without making any discovery; and, now, he gave vent to several very grim laughs, and confessed it could only have been his excited imagination. He declined any renewal of the conversation, however, for that night: suddenly remembering that it was past one o'clock. And so the amiable couple parted.

CHAPTER XXVII

ATONES FOR THE UNPOLITENESS OF A FORMER CHAPTER; WHICH DESERTED A LADY, MOST UNCEREMONIOUSLY

As it would be, by no means, seemly in a humble author to keep so mighty a personage as a beadle waiting, with his back to the fire, and the skirts of his coat gathered up under his arms, until such time as it might suit his pleasure to relieve him; and as it would still less become his station, or his gallantry to involve in the same neglect a lady on whom that beadle had looked with an eye of tenderness and affection, and in whose ear he had whispered sweet words, which, coming from such a quarter, might well thrill the bosom of maid or matron of whatsoever degree; the historian whose pen traces these words—trusting that he knows his place, and that he entertains a becoming reverence for those upon earth to whom high and important authority is delegated—hastens to pay them that respect which their position demands, and to treat them with all that duteous ceremony which their exalted rank, and (by consequence) great virtues, imperatively claim at his hands. Towards this end, indeed, he had purposed to introduce, in this place, a dissertation touching the divine right of beadles, and elucidative of the position, that a beadle can do no wrong: which could not fail to have been both pleasurable and profitable to the right-minded reader but which he is unfortunately compelled, by want of time and space, to postpone to some more convenient and fitting opportunity; on the arrival of which, he will be prepared to show, that a beadle properly constituted: that is to say, a parochial beadle, attached to a parochial workhouse, and attending in his official capacity the parochial church: is, in right and virtue of his office, possessed of all the excellences and best qualities of humanity; and that to none of those excellences, can mere companies' beadles, or court-of-law beadles, or even chapel-of-ease beadles (save the last, and they in a very lowly and inferior degree), lay the remotest sustainable claim.

Mr. Bumble had re-counted the teaspoons, re-weighed the sugar-tongs, made a closer inspection of the milk-pot, and ascertained to a nicety the exact condition of the furniture, down to the very horse-hair seats of the chairs; and had repeated each process full half a dozen times; before he began to think that it was time for Mrs. Corney to return. Thinking begets thinking; as there were no sounds of Mrs. Corney's approach, it occured to Mr. Bumble that it would be an innocent and virtuous way of spending the time, if he were further to allay his curiousity by a cursory glance at the interior of Mrs. Corney's chest of drawers.

Having listened at the keyhole, to assure himself that nobody was approaching the chamber, Mr. Bumble, beginning at the bottom, proceeded to make himself acquainted with the contents of the three long drawers: which, being filled with various garments of good fashion and texture, carefully preserved between two layers of old newspapers, speckled with dried lavender: seemed to yield him exceeding satisfaction. Arriving, in course of time, at the right-hand corner drawer (in which was the key), and beholding therein a small padlocked box, which, being shaken, gave forth a pleasant sound, as of the chinking of coin, Mr. Bumble returned with a stately walk to the fireplace; and, resuming his old attitude, said, with a grave and determined air, 'I'll do it!' He followed up this remarkable declaration, by shaking his head in a waggish manner for ten minutes, as though he were remonstrating with himself for being such a pleasant dog; and then, he took a view of his legs in profile, with much seeming pleasure and interest.

He was still placidly engaged in this latter survey, when Mrs. Corney, hurrying into the room, threw herself, in a breathless state, on a chair by the fireside, and covering her eyes with one hand, placed the other over her heart, and gasped for breath.

'Mrs. Corney,' said Mr. Bumble, stooping over the matron, 'what is this, ma'am? Has anything happened, ma'am? Pray answer me: I'm on—on—' Mr. Bumble, in his alarm, could not immediately think of the word 'tenterhooks,' so he said 'broken bottles.'

'Oh, Mr. Bumble!' cried the lady, 'I have been so dreadfully put out!'

'Put out, ma'am!' exclaimed Mr. Bumble; 'who has dared to—? I know!' said Mr. Bumble, checking himself, with native majesty, 'this is them wicious paupers!'

'It's dreadful to think of!' said the lady, shuddering.

'Then *don't* think of it, ma'am,' rejoined Mr. Bumble.

'I can't help it,' whimpered the lady.

'Then take something, ma'am,' said Mr. Bumble soothingly. 'A little of the wine?'

'Not for the world!' replied Mrs. Corney. 'I couldn't,—oh! The top shelf in the right-hand corner—oh!' Uttering these words, the good lady pointed, distractedly, to the cupboard, and underwent a convulsion from internal spasms. Mr. Bumble rushed to the closet; and, snatching a pint green-glass bottle from the shelf thus incoherently indicated, filled a tea-cup with its contents, and held it to the lady's lips.

'I'm better now,' said Mrs. Corney, falling back, after drinking half of it.

Mr. Bumble raised his eyes piously to the ceiling in thankfulness; and, bringing them down again to the brim of the cup, lifted it to his nose.

'Peppermint,' exclaimed Mrs. Corney, in a faint voice, smiling gently on the beadle as she spoke. 'Try it! There's a little—a little something else in it.'

Mr. Bumble tasted the medicine with a doubtful look; smacked his lips; took another taste; and put the cup down empty.

'It's very comforting,' said Mrs. Corney.

'Very much so indeed, ma'am,' said the beadle. As he spoke, he drew a chair beside the matron, and tenderly inquired what had happened to distress her.

'Nothing,' replied Mrs. Corney. 'I am a foolish, excitable, weak creetur.'

'Not weak, ma'am,' retorted Mr. Bumble, drawing his chair a little closer. 'Are you a weak creetur, Mrs. Corney?'

'We are all weak creeturs,' said Mrs. Corney, laying down a general principle.

'So we are,' said the beadle.

Nothing was said on either side, for a minute or two afterwards. By the expiration of that time, Mr. Bumble had illustrated the position by removing his left arm from the back of Mrs. Corney's chair, where it had previously rested, to Mrs. Corney's apron-string, round which it gradually became entwined.

'We are all weak creeturs,' said Mr. Bumble.

Mrs. Corney sighed.

'Don't sigh, Mrs. Corney,' said Mr. Bumble.

'I can't help it,' said Mrs. Corney. And she sighed again.

'This is a very comfortable room, ma'am,' said Mr. Bumble looking round. 'Another room, and this, ma'am, would be a complete thing.'

'It would be too much for one,' murmured the lady.

'But not for two, ma'am,' rejoined Mr. Bumble, in soft accents. 'Eh, Mrs. Corney?'

Mrs. Corney drooped her head, when the beadle said this; the beadle drooped his, to get a view of Mrs. Corney's face. Mrs. Corney, with great propriety, turned her head away, and released her hand to get at her pocket-handkerchief; but insensibly replaced it in that of Mr. Bumble.

'The board allows you coals, don't they, Mrs. Corney?' inquired the beadle, affectionately pressing her hand.

'And candles,' replied Mrs. Corney, slightly returning the pressure.

'Coals, candles, and house-rent free,' said Mr. Bumble. 'Oh, Mrs. Corney, what an Angel you are!'

The lady was not proof against this burst of feeling. She sank into Mr. Bumble's arms; and that gentleman in his agitation, imprinted a passionate kiss upon her chaste nose.

'Such porochial perfection!' exclaimed Mr. Bumble, rapturously. 'You know that Mr. Slout is worse to-night, my fascinator?'

'Yes,' replied Mrs. Corney, bashfully.

'He can't live a week, the doctor says,' pursued Mr. Bumble. 'He is the master of this establishment; his death will cause a wacancy; that wacancy must be filled up. Oh, Mrs. Corney, what a prospect this opens! What a opportunity for a jining of hearts and housekeepings!'

Mrs. Corney sobbed.

'The little word?' said Mr. Bumble, bending over the bashful beauty. 'The one little, little, little word, my blessed Corney?'

'Ye—ye—yes!' sighed out the matron.

'One more,' pursued the beadle; 'compose your darling feelings for only one more. When is it to come off?'

Mrs. Corney twice essayed to speak: and twice failed. At length summoning up courage, she threw her arms around Mr. Bumble's neck, and said, it might be as soon as ever he pleased, and that he was 'a irresistible duck.'

Matters being thus amicably and satisfactorily arranged, the contract was solemnly ratified in another teacupful of the peppermint mixture; which was rendered the more necessary, by the flutter and agitation of the lady's spirits. While it was being disposed of, she acquainted Mr. Bumble with the old woman's decease.

'Very good,' said that gentleman, sipping his peppermint; 'I'll call at Sowerberry's as I go home, and tell him to send to-morrow morning. Was it that as frightened you, love?'

'It wasn't anything particular, dear,' said the lady evasively.

'It must have been something, love,' urged Mr. Bumble. 'Won't you tell your own B.?'

'Not now,' rejoined the lady; 'one of these days. After we're married, dear.'

'After we're married!' exclaimed Mr. Bumble. 'It wasn't any impudence from any of them male paupers as—'

'No, no, love!' interposed the lady, hastily.

'If I thought it was,' continued Mr. Bumble; 'if I thought as any one of 'em had dared to lift his wulgar eyes to that lovely countenance—'

'They wouldn't have dared to do it, love,' responded the lady.

'They had better not!' said Mr. Bumble, clenching his fist. 'Let me see any man, porochial or extra-porochial, as would presume to do it; and I can tell him that he wouldn't do it a second time!'

Unembellished by any violence of gesticulation, this might have seemed no very high compliment to the lady's charms; but, as Mr. Bumble accompanied the threat with many warlike gestures, she was much touched with this proof of his devotion, and protested, with great admiration, that he was indeed a dove.

The dove then turned up his coat-collar, and put on his cocked hat; and, having exchanged a long and affectionate embrace with his future partner, once again braved the cold wind of the night: merely pausing, for a few minutes, in the male paupers' ward, to abuse them a little, with the view of satisfying himself that he could fill the office of workhouse-master with needful acerbity. Assured of his qualifications, Mr. Bumble left the building with a light heart, and bright visions of his future promotion: which served to occupy his mind until he reached the shop of the undertaker.

Now, Mr. and Mrs. Sowerberry having gone out to tea and supper: and Noah Claypole not being at any time disposed to take upon himself a greater amount of physical exertion than is necessary to a convenient performance of the two functions of eating and drinking, the shop was not closed, although it was past the usual hour of shutting-up. Mr. Bumble tapped with his cane on the counter several times; but, attracting no attention, and beholding a light shining through the glass-window of the little parlour at the back of the shop, he made bold to peep in and see what was going forward; and when he saw what was going forward, he was not a little surprised.

The cloth was laid for supper; the table was covered with bread and butter, plates and glasses; a porter-pot and a wine-bottle. At the upper end of the table, Mr. Noah Claypole lolled negligently in an easy-chair, with his legs thrown over one of the arms: an open clasp-knife in one hand, and a mass of buttered bread in the other. Close beside him stood Charlotte, opening oysters from a barrel: which Mr. Claypole condescended to swallow, with remarkable avidity. A more than ordinary redness in the region of the young gentleman's nose, and a kind of fixed wink in his right eye, denoted that he was in a slight degree intoxicated; these symptoms were confirmed by the intense relish with which he took his oysters, for which nothing but a strong appreciation of their cooling properties, in cases of internal fever, could have sufficiently accounted.

'Here's a delicious fat one, Noah, dear!' said Charlotte; 'try him, do; only this one.'

'What a delicious thing is a oyster!' remarked Mr. Claypole, after he had swallowed it. 'What a pity it is, a number of 'em should ever make you feel uncomfortable; isn't it, Charlotte?'

'It's quite a cruelty,' said Charlotte.

'So it is,' acquiesced Mr. Claypole. 'An't yer fond of oysters?'

'Not overmuch,' replied Charlotte. 'I like to see you eat 'em, Noah dear, better than eating 'em myself.'

'Lor!' said Noah, reflectively; 'how queer!'

'Have another,' said Charlotte. 'Here's one with such a beautiful, delicate beard!'

'I can't manage any more,' said Noah. 'I'm very sorry. Come here, Charlotte, and I'll kiss yer.'

'What!' said Mr. Bumble, bursting into the room. 'Say that again, sir.'

Charlotte uttered a scream, and hid her face in her apron. Mr. Claypole, without making any further change in his position than suffering his legs to reach the ground, gazed at the beadle in drunken terror.

'Say it again, you wile, owdacious fellow!' said Mr. Bumble. 'How dare you mention such a thing, sir? And how dare you encourage him, you insolent minx? Kiss her!' exclaimed Mr. Bumble, in strong indignation. 'Faugh!'

'I didn't mean to do it!' said Noah, blubbering. 'She's always a-kissing of me, whether I like it, or not.'

'Oh, Noah,' cried Charlotte, reproachfully.

'Yer are; yer know yer are!' retorted Noah. 'She's always a-doin' of it, Mr. Bumble, sir; she chucks me under the chin, please, sir; and makes all manner of love!'

'Silence!' cried Mr. Bumble, sternly. 'Take yourself downstairs, ma'am. Noah, you shut up the shop; say another word till your master comes home, at your peril; and, when he does come home, tell him that Mr. Bumble said he was to send a old woman's shell after breakfast to-morrow morning. Do you hear sir? Kissing!' cried Mr. Bumble, holding up his hands. 'The sin and wickedness of the lower orders in this porochial district is frightful! If Parliament don't take their abominable courses under consideration, this country's ruined, and the character of the peasantry gone for ever!' With these words, the beadle strode, with a lofty and gloomy air, from the undertaker's premises.

And now that we have accompanied him so far on his road home, and have made all necessary preparations for the old woman's funeral, let us set on foot a few inquires after young Oliver Twist, and ascertain whether he be still lying in the ditch where Toby Crackit left him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

LOOKS AFTER OLIVER, AND PROCEEDS WITH HIS ADVENTURES

'Wolves tear your throats!' muttered Sikes, grinding his teeth. 'I wish I was among some of you; you'd howl the hoarser for it.'

As Sikes growled forth this imprecation, with the most desperate ferocity that his desperate nature was capable of, he rested the body of the wounded boy across his bended knee; and turned his head, for an instant, to look back at his pursuers.

There was little to be made out, in the mist and darkness; but the loud shouting of men vibrated through the air, and the barking of the neighbouring dogs, roused by the sound of the alarm bell, resounded in every direction.

'Stop, you white-livered hound!' cried the robber, shouting after Toby Crackit, who, making the best use of his long legs, was already ahead. 'Stop!'

The repetition of the word, brought Toby to a dead stand-still. For he was not quite satisfied that he was beyond the range of pistol-shot; and Sikes was in no mood to be played with.

'Bear a hand with the boy,' cried Sikes, beckoning furiously to his confederate. 'Come back!'

Toby made a show of returning; but ventured, in a low voice, broken for want of breath, to intimate considerable reluctance as he came slowly along.

'Quicker!' cried Sikes, laying the boy in a dry ditch at his feet, and drawing a pistol from his pocket. 'Don't play booty with me.'

At this moment the noise grew louder. Sikes, again looking round, could discern that the men who had given chase were already climbing the gate of the field in which he stood; and that a couple of dogs were some paces in advance of them.

'It's all up, Bill!' cried Toby; 'drop the kid, and show 'em your heels.' With this parting advice, Mr. Crackit, preferring the chance of being shot by his friend, to the certainty of being taken by his enemies, fairly turned tail, and darted off at full speed. Sikes clenched his teeth; took one look around; threw over the prostrate form of Oliver, the cape in which he had been hurriedly muffled; ran along the front of the hedge, as if to distract the attention of those behind, from the spot where the boy lay; paused, for a second, before another hedge which met it at right angles; and whirling his pistol high into the air, cleared it at a bound, and was gone.

'Ho, ho, there!' cried a tremulous voice in the rear. 'Pincher! Neptune! Come here, come here!'

The dogs, who, in common with their masters, seemed to have no particular relish for the sport in which they were engaged, readily answered to the command. Three men, who had by this time advanced some distance into the field, stopped to take counsel together.

'My advice, or, leastways, I should say, my *orders*, is,' said the fattest man of the party, 'that we 'mediately go home again.'

'I am agreeable to anything which is agreeable to Mr. Giles,' said a shorter man; who was by no means of a slim figure, and who was very pale in the face, and very polite: as frightened men frequently are.

'I shouldn't wish to appear ill-mannered, gentlemen,' said the third, who had called the dogs back, 'Mr. Giles ought to know.'

'Certainly,' replied the shorter man; 'and whatever Mr. Giles says, it isn't our place to contradict him. No, no, I know my sitiwation! Thank my stars, I know my sitiwation.' To tell the truth, the little man *did* seem to know his situation, and to know perfectly well that it was by no means a desirable one; for his teeth chattered in his head as he spoke.

'You are afraid, Brittles,' said Mr. Giles.

'I an't,' said Brittles.

'You are,' said Giles.

'You're a falsehood, Mr. Giles,' said Brittles.

'You're a lie, Brittles,' said Mr. Giles.

Now, these four retorts arose from Mr. Giles's taunt; and Mr. Giles's taunt had arisen from his indignation at having the responsibility of going home again, imposed upon himself under cover of a compliment. The third man brought the dispute to a close, most philosophically.

'I'll tell you what it is, gentlemen,' said he, 'we're all afraid.'

'Speak for yourself, sir,' said Mr. Giles, who was the palest of the party.

'So I do,' replied the man. 'It's natural and proper to be afraid, under such circumstances. I am.'

'So am I,' said Brittles; 'only there's no call to tell a man he is, so bounceably.'

These frank admissions softened Mr. Giles, who at once owned that *he* was afraid; upon which, they all three faced about, and ran back again with the completest unanimity, until Mr. Giles (who had the shortest wind of the party, as was encumbered with a pitchfork) most handsomely insisted on stopping, to make an apology for his hastiness of speech.

'But it's wonderful,' said Mr. Giles, when he had explained, 'what a man will do, when his blood is up. I should have committed murder—I know I should—if we'd caught one of them rascals.'

As the other two were impressed with a similar presentiment; and as their blood, like his, had all gone down again; some speculation ensued upon the cause of this sudden change in their temperament.

'I know what it was,' said Mr. Giles; 'it was the gate.'

'I shouldn't wonder if it was,' exclaimed Brittles, catching at the idea.

'You may depend upon it,' said Giles, 'that that gate stopped the flow of the excitement. I felt all mine suddenly going away, as I was climbing over it.'

By a remarkable coincidence, the other two had been visited with the same unpleasant sensation at that precise moment. It was quite obvious, therefore, that it was the gate; especially as there was no doubt regarding the time at which the change had taken place, because all three remembered that they had come in sight of the robbers at the instant of its occurance.

This dialogue was held between the two men who had surprised the burglars, and a travelling tinker who had been sleeping in an outhouse, and who had been roused, together with his two mongrel curs, to join in the pursuit. Mr. Giles acted in the double capacity of butler and steward to the old lady of the mansion; Brittles was a lad of all-work: who, having entered her service a mere child, was treated as a promising young boy still, though he was something past thirty.

Encouraging each other with such converse as this; but, keeping very close together, notwithstanding, and looking apprehensively round, whenever a fresh gust rattled through the boughs; the three men hurried back to a tree, behind which they had left their lantern, lest its light should inform the thieves in what direction to fire. Catching up the light, they made the best of their way home, at a good round trot; and long after their dusky forms had ceased to be discernible, the light might have been seen twinkling and dancing in the distance, like some exhalation of the damp and gloomy atmosphere through which it was swiftly borne.

The air grew colder, as day came slowly on; and the mist rolled along the ground like a dense cloud of smoke. The grass was wet; the pathways, and low places, were all mire and water; the damp breath of an unwholesome wind went languidly by, with a hollow moaning. Still, Oliver lay motionless and insensible on the spot where Sikes had left him.

Morning drew on apace. The air become more sharp and piercing, as its first dull hue—the death of night, rather than the birth of day—glimmered faintly in the sky. The objects which had looked dim and terrible in the darkness, grew more and more defined, and gradually resolved into their familiar shapes. The rain came down, thick and fast, and pattered noisily among the leafless bushes. But, Oliver felt it not, as it beat against him; for he still lay stretched, helpless and unconscious, on his bed of clay.

At length, a low cry of pain broke the stillness that prevailed; and uttering it, the boy awoke. His left arm, rudely bandaged in a shawl, hung heavy and useless at his side; the bandage was saturated with blood. He was so weak, that he could scarcely raise himself into a sitting posture; when he had done so, he looked feebly round for help, and groaned with pain. Trembling in every joint, from cold and exhaustion, he made an effort to stand upright; but, shuddering from head to foot, fell prostrate on the ground.

After a short return of the stupor in which he had been so long plunged, Oliver: urged by a creeping sickness at his heart, which seemed to warn him that if he lay there, he must surely die: got upon his feet, and essayed to walk. His head was dizzy, and he staggered to and fro like a drunken man. But he kept up, nevertheless, and, with his head drooping languidly on his breast, went stumbling onward, he knew not whither.

And now, hosts of bewildering and confused ideas came crowding on his mind. He seemed to be still walking between Sikes and Crackit, who were angrily disputing—for the very words they said, sounded in his ears; and when he caught his own attention, as it were, by making some violent effort to save himself from falling, he found that he was talking to them. Then, he was alone with Sikes, plodding on as on the previous day; and as shadowy people passed them, he felt the robber's grasp upon his wrist. Suddenly, he started back at the report of firearms; there rose into the air, loud cries and shouts; lights gleamed before his eyes; all was noise and tumult, as some unseen hand bore him hurriedly away. Through all these rapid visions, there ran an undefined, uneasy consciousness of pain, which wearied and tormented him incessantly.

Thus he staggered on, creeping, almost mechanically, between the bars of gates, or through hedge-gaps as they came in his way, until he reached a road. Here the rain began to fall so heavily, that it roused him.

He looked about, and saw that at no great distance there was a house, which perhaps he could reach. Pitying his condition, they might have compassion on him; and if they did not, it would be better, he thought, to die near human beings, than in the lonely open fields. He summoned up all his strength for one last trial, and bent his faltering steps towards it.

As he drew nearer to this house, a feeling come over him that he had seen it before. He remembered nothing of its details; but the shape and aspect of the building seemed familiar to him.

That garden wall! On the grass inside, he had fallen on his knees last night, and prayed the two men's mercy. It was the very house they had attempted to rob.

Oliver felt such fear come over him when he recognised the place, that, for the instant, he forgot the agony of his wound, and thought only of flight. Flight! He could scarcely stand: and if he were in full possession of all the best powers of his slight and youthful frame, whither could he fly? He pushed against the garden-gate; it was unlocked, and swung open on its hinges. He tottered across the lawn; climbed the steps; knocked faintly at the door; and, his whole strength failing him, sunk down against one of the pillars of the little portico.

It happened that about this time, Mr. Giles, Brittles, and the tinker, were recruiting themselves, after the fatigues and terrors of the night, with tea and sundries, in the kitchen. Not that it was Mr. Giles's habit to admit to too great familiarity the humbler servants: towards whom it was rather his wont to deport himself with a lofty affability, which, while it gratified, could not fail to remind them of his superior position in society. But, death, fires, and burglary, make all men equals; so Mr. Giles sat with his legs stretched out before the kitchen fender, leaning his left arm on the table, while, with his right, he illustrated a circumstantial and minute account of the robbery, to which his bearers (but especially the cook and housemaid, who were of the party) listened with breathless interest.

'It was about half-past two,' said Mr. Giles, 'or I wouldn't swear that it mightn't have been a little nearer three, when I woke up, and, turning round in my bed, as it might be so, (here Mr. Giles turned round in his chair, and pulled the corner of the table-cloth over him to imitate bed-clothes,) I fancied I heerd a noise.'

At this point of the narrative the cook turned pale, and asked the housemaid to shut the door: who asked Brittles, who asked the tinker, who pretended not to hear.

'—Heerd a noise,' continued Mr. Giles. 'I says, at first, "This is illusion"; and was composing myself off to sleep, when I heerd the noise again, distinct.'

'What sort of a noise?' asked the cook.

'A kind of a busting noise,' replied Mr. Giles, looking round him.

'More like the noise of powdering a iron bar on a nutmeg-grater,' suggested Brittles.

'It was, when *you* heerd it, sir,' rejoined Mr. Giles; 'but, at this time, it had a busting sound. I turned down the clothes'; continued Giles, rolling back the table-cloth, 'sat up in bed; and listened.'

The cook and housemaid simultaneously ejaculated 'Lor!' and drew their chairs closer together.

'I heerd it now, quite apparent,' resumed Mr. Giles. '"Somebody," I says, "is forcing of a door, or window; what's to be done? I'll call up that poor lad, Brittles, and save him from being murdered in his bed; or his throat," I says, "may be cut from his right ear to his left, without his ever knowing it."'

Here, all eyes were turned upon Brittles, who fixed his upon the speaker, and stared at him, with his mouth wide open, and his face expressive of the most unmitigated horror.

'I tossed off the clothes,' said Giles, throwing away the table-cloth, and looking very hard at the cook and housemaid, 'got softly out of bed; drew on a pair of—'

'Ladies present, Mr. Giles,' murmured the tinker.

'—Of *shoes*, sir,' said Giles, turning upon him, and laying great emphasis on the word; 'seized the loaded pistol that always goes upstairs with the plate-basket; and walked on tiptoes to his room. "Brittles," I says, when I had woke him, "don't be frightened!"'

'So you did,' observed Brittles, in a low voice.

'"We're dead men, I think, Brittles," I says,' continued Giles; '"but don't be frightened."'

'*Was* he frightened?' asked the cook.

'Not a bit of it,' replied Mr. Giles. 'He was as firm—ah! pretty near as firm as I was.'

'I should have died at once, I'm sure, if it had been me,' observed the housemaid.

'You're a woman,' retorted Brittles, plucking up a little.

'Brittles is right,' said Mr. Giles, nodding his head, approvingly; 'from a woman, nothing else was to be expected. We, being men, took a dark lantern that was standing on Brittle's hob, and groped our way downstairs in the pitch dark,—as it might be so.'

Mr. Giles had risen from his seat, and taken two steps with his eyes shut, to accompany his description with appropriate action, when he started violently, in common with the rest of the company, and hurried back to his chair. The cook and housemaid screamed.

'It was a knock,' said Mr. Giles, assuming perfect serenity. 'Open the door, somebody.'

Nobody moved.

'It seems a strange sort of a thing, a knock coming at such a time in the morning,' said Mr. Giles, surveying the pale faces which surrounded him, and looking very blank himself; 'but the door must be opened. Do you hear, somebody?'

Mr. Giles, as he spoke, looked at Brittles; but that young man, being naturally modest, probably considered himself nobody, and so held that the inquiry could not have any application to him; at all events, he tendered no reply. Mr. Giles directed an appealing glance at the tinker; but he had suddenly fallen asleep. The women were out of the question.

'If Brittles would rather open the door, in the presence of witnesses,' said Mr. Giles, after a short silence, 'I am ready to make one.'

'So am I,' said the tinker, waking up, as suddenly as he had fallen asleep.

Brittles capitulated on these terms; and the party being somewhat re-assured by the discovery (made on throwing open the shutters) that it was now broad day, took their way upstairs; with the dogs in front. The two women, who were afraid to stay below, brought up the rear. By the advice of Mr. Giles, they all talked very loud, to warn any evil-disposed person outside, that they were strong in numbers; and by a master-stoke of policy, originating in the brain of the same ingenious gentleman, the dogs' tails were well pinched, in the hall, to make them bark savagely.

These precautions having been taken, Mr. Giles held on fast by the tinker's arm (to prevent his running away, as he pleasantly said), and gave the word of command to open the door. Brittles obeyed; the group, peeping timorously over each other's shoulders, beheld no more formidable object than poor little Oliver Twist, speechless and exhausted, who raised his heavy eyes, and mutely solicited their compassion.

'A boy!' exclaimed Mr. Giles, valiantly, pushing the tinker into the background. 'What's the matter with the—eh?—Why—Brittles—look here—don't you know?'

Brittles, who had got behind the door to open it, no sooner saw Oliver, than he uttered a loud cry. Mr. Giles, seizing the boy by one leg and one arm (fortunately not the broken limb) lugged him straight into the hall, and deposited him at full length on the floor thereof.

'Here he is!' bawled Giles, calling in a state of great excitement, up the staircase; 'here's one of the thieves, ma'am! Here's a thief, miss! Wounded, miss! I shot him, miss; and Brittles held the light.'

'—In a lantern, miss,' cried Brittles, applying one hand to the side of his mouth, so that his voice might travel the better.

The two women-servants ran upstairs to carry the intelligence that Mr. Giles had captured a robber; and the tinker busied himself in endeavouring to restore Oliver, lest he should die before he could be hanged. In the midst of all this noise and commotion, there was heard a sweet female voice, which quelled it in an instant.

'Giles!' whispered the voice from the stair-head.

'I'm here, miss,' replied Mr. Giles. 'Don't be frightened, miss; I ain't much injured. He didn't make a very desperate resistance, miss! I was soon too many for him.'

'Hush!' replied the young lady; 'you frighten my aunt as much as the thieves did. Is the poor creature much hurt?'

'Wounded desperate, miss,' replied Giles, with indescribable complacency.

'He looks as if he was a-going, miss,' bawled Brittles, in the same manner as before. 'Wouldn't you like to come and look at him, miss, in case he should?'

'Hush, pray; there's a good man!' rejoined the lady. 'Wait quietly only one instant, while I speak to aunt.'

With a footstep as soft and gentle as the voice, the speaker tripped away. She soon returned, with the direction that the wounded person was to be carried, carefully, upstairs to Mr. Giles's room; and that Brittles was to saddle the pony and betake himself instantly to Chertsey: from which place, he was to despatch, with all speed, a constable and doctor.

'But won't you take one look at him, first, miss?' asked Mr. Giles, with as much pride as if Oliver were some bird of rare plumage, that he had skilfully brought down. 'Not one little peep, miss?'

'Not now, for the world,' replied the young lady. 'Poor fellow! Oh! treat him kindly, Giles for my sake!'

The old servant looked up at the speaker, as she turned away, with a glance as proud and admiring as if she had been his own child. Then, bending over Oliver, he helped to carry him upstairs, with the care and solicitude of a woman.

CHAPTER XXIX

HAS AN INTRODUCTORY ACCOUNT OF THE INMATES OF THE HOUSE, TO WHICH OLIVER RESORTED

In a handsome room: though its furniture had rather the air of old-fashioned comfort, than of modern elegance: there sat two ladies at a well-spread breakfast-table. Mr. Giles, dressed with scrupulous care in a full suit of black, was in attendance upon them. He had taken his station some half-way between the side-board and the breakfast-table; and, with his body drawn up to its full height, his head thrown back, and inclined the merest trifle on one side, his left leg advanced, and his right hand thrust into his waist-coat, while his left hung down by his side, grasping a waiter, looked like one who laboured under a very agreeable sense of his own merits and importance.

Of the two ladies, one was well advanced in years; but the high-backed oaken chair in which she sat, was not more upright than she. Dressed with the utmost nicety and precision, in a quaint mixture of by-gone costume, with some slight concessions to the prevailing taste, which rather served to point the old style pleasantly than to impair its effect, she sat, in a stately manner, with her hands folded on the table before her. Her eyes (and age had dimmed but little of their brightness) were attentively upon her young companion.

The younger lady was in the lovely bloom and spring-time of womanhood; at that age, when, if ever angels be for God's good purposes enthroned in mortal forms, they may be, without impiety, supposed to abide in such as hers.

She was not past seventeen. Cast in so slight and exquisite a mould; so mild and gentle; so pure and beautiful; that earth seemed not her element, nor its rough creatures her fit companions. The very intelligence that shone in her deep blue eye, and was stamped upon her noble head, seemed scarcely of her age, or of the world; and yet the changing expression of sweetness and good humour, the thousand lights that played about the face, and left no shadow there; above all, the smile, the cheerful, happy smile, were made for Home, and fireside peace and happiness.

She was busily engaged in the little offices of the table. Chancing to raise her eyes as the elder lady was regarding her, she playfully put back her hair, which was simply braided on her forehead; and threw into her beaming look, such an expression of affection and artless loveliness, that blessed spirits might have smiled to look upon her.

'And Brittles has been gone upwards of an hour, has he?' asked the old lady, after a pause.

'An hour and twelve minutes, ma'am,' replied Mr. Giles, referring to a silver watch, which he drew forth by a black ribbon.

'He is always slow,' remarked the old lady.

'Brittles always was a slow boy, ma'am,' replied the attendant. And seeing, by the bye, that Brittles had been a slow boy for upwards of thirty years, there appeared no great probability of his ever being a fast one.

'He gets worse instead of better, I think,' said the elder lady.

'It is very inexcusable in him if he stops to play with any other boys,' said the young lady, smiling.

Mr. Giles was apparently considering the propriety of indulging in a respectful smile himself, when a gig drove up to the garden-gate: out of which there jumped a fat gentleman, who ran straight up to the door: and who, getting quickly into the house by some mysterious process, burst into the room, and nearly overturned Mr. Giles and the breakfast-table together.

'I never heard of such a thing!' exclaimed the fat gentleman. 'My dear Mrs. Maylie—bless my soul—in the silence of the night, too—I *never* heard of such a thing!'

With these expressions of condolence, the fat gentleman shook hands with both ladies, and drawing up a chair, inquired how they found themselves.

'You ought to be dead; positively dead with the fright,' said the fat gentleman. 'Why didn't you send? Bless me, my man should have come in a minute; and so would I; and my assistant would have been delighted; or anybody, I'm sure, under such circumstances. Dear, dear! So unexpected! In the silence of the night, too!'

The doctor seemed expecially troubled by the fact of the robbery having been unexpected, and attempted in the night-time; as if it were the established custom of gentlemen in the housebreaking way to transact business at noon, and to make an appointment, by post, a day or two previous.

'And you, Miss Rose,' said the doctor, turning to the young lady, 'I—'

'Oh! very much so, indeed,' said Rose, interrupting him; 'but there is a poor creature upstairs, whom aunt wishes you to see.'

'Ah! to be sure,' replied the doctor, 'so there is. That was your handiwork, Giles, I understand.'

Mr. Giles, who had been feverishly putting the tea-cups to rights, blushed very red, and said that he had had that honour.

'Honour, eh?' said the doctor; 'well, I don't know; perhaps it's as honourable to hit a thief in a back kitchen, as to hit your man at twelve paces. Fancy that he fired in the air, and you've fought a duel, Giles.'

Mr. Giles, who thought this light treatment of the matter an unjust attempt at diminishing his glory, answered respectfully, that it was not for the like of him to judge about that; but he rather thought it was no joke to the opposite party.

'Gad, that's true!' said the doctor. 'Where is he? Show me the way. I'll look in again, as I come down, Mrs. Maylie. That's the little window that he got in at, eh? Well, I couldn't have believed it!'

Talking all the way, he followed Mr. Giles upstairs; and while he is going upstairs, the reader may be informed, that Mr. Losberne, a surgeon in the neighbourhood, known through a circuit of ten miles round as 'the doctor,' had grown fat, more from good-humour than from good living: and was as kind and hearty, and withal as eccentric an old bachelor, as will be found in five times that space, by any explorer alive.

The doctor was absent, much longer than either he or the ladies had anticipated. A large flat box was fetched out of the gig; and a bedroom bell was rung very often; and the servants ran up and down stairs perpetually; from which tokens it was justly concluded that something important was going on above. At length he returned; and in reply to an anxious inquiry after his patient; looked very mysterious, and closed the door, carefully.

'This is a very extraordinary thing, Mrs. Maylie,' said the doctor, standing with his back to the door, as if to keep it shut.

'He is not in danger, I hope?' said the old lady.

'Why, that would *not* be an extraordinary thing, under the circumstances,' replied the doctor; 'though I don't think he is. Have you seen the thief?'

'No,' rejoined the old lady.

'Nor heard anything about him?'

'No.'

'I beg your pardon, ma'am, interposed Mr. Giles; 'but I was going to tell you about him when Doctor Losberne came in.'

The fact was, that Mr. Giles had not, at first, been able to bring his mind to the avowal, that he had only shot a boy. Such commendations had been bestowed upon his bravery, that he could not, for the life of him, help postponing the explanation for a few delicious minutes; during which he had flourished, in the very zenith of a brief reputation for undaunted courage.

'Rose wished to see the man,' said Mrs. Maylie, 'but I wouldn't hear of it.'

'Humph!' rejoined the doctor. 'There is nothing very alarming in his appearance. Have you any objection to see him in my presence?'

'If it be necessary,' replied the old lady, 'certainly not.'

'Then I think it is necessary,' said the doctor; 'at all events, I am quite sure that you would deeply regret not having done so, if you postponed it. He is perfectly quiet and comfortable now. Allow me—Miss Rose, will you permit me? Not the slightest fear, I pledge you my honour!'

CHAPTER XXX

RELATES WHAT OLIVER'S NEW VISITORS THOUGHT OF HIM

With many loquacious assurances that they would be agreeably surprised in the aspect of the criminal, the doctor drew the young lady's arm through one of his; and offering his disengaged hand to Mrs. Maylie, led them, with much ceremony and stateliness, upstairs.

'Now,' said the doctor, in a whisper, as he softly turned the handle of a bedroom-door, 'let us hear what you think of him. He has not been shaved very recently, but he don't look at all ferocious notwithstanding. Stop, though! Let me first see that he is in visiting order.'

Stepping before them, he looked into the room. Motioning them to advance, he closed the door when they had entered; and gently drew back the curtains of the bed. Upon it, in lieu of the dogged, black-visaged ruffian they had expected to behold, there lay a mere child: worn with pain and exhaustion, and sunk into a deep sleep. His wounded arm, bound and splintered up, was crossed upon his breast; his head reclined upon the other arm, which was half hidden by his long hair, as it streamed over the pillow.

The honest gentleman held the curtain in his hand, and looked on, for a minute or so, in silence. Whilst he was watching the patient thus, the younger lady glided softly past, and seating herself in a chair by the bedside, gathered Oliver's hair from his face. As she stooped over him, her tears fell upon his forehead.

The boy stirred, and smiled in his sleep, as though these marks of pity and compassion had awakened some pleasant dream of a love and affection he had never known. Thus, a strain of gentle music, or the rippling of water in a silent place, or the odour of a flower, or the mention of a familiar word, will sometimes call up sudden dim remembrances of scenes that never were, in this life; which vanish like a breath; which some brief memory of a happier existence, long gone by, would seem to have awakened; which no voluntary exertion of the mind can ever recall.

'What can this mean?' exclaimed the elder lady. 'This poor child can never have been the pupil of robbers!'

'Vice,' said the surgeon, replacing the curtain, 'takes up her abode in many temples; and who can say that a fair outside shell not enshrine her?'

'But at so early an age!' urged Rose.

'My dear young lady,' rejoined the surgeon, mournfully shaking his head; 'crime, like death, is not confined to the old and withered alone. The youngest and fairest are too often its chosen victims.'

'But, can you—oh! can you really believe that this delicate boy has been the voluntary associate of the worst outcasts of society?' said Rose.

The surgeon shook his head, in a manner which intimated that he feared it was very possible; and observing that they might disturb the patient, led the way into an adjoining apartment.

'But even if he has been wicked,' pursued Rose, 'think how young he is; think that he may never have known a mother's love, or the comfort of a home; that ill-usage and blows, or the want of bread, may have driven him to herd with men who have forced him to guilt. Aunt, dear aunt, for mercy's sake, think of this, before you let them drag this sick child to a prison, which in any case must be the grave of all his chances of amendment. Oh! as you love me, and know that I have never felt the want of parents in your goodness and affection, but that I might have done so, and might have been equally helpless and unprotected with this poor child, have pity upon him before it is too late!'

'My dear love,' said the elder lady, as she folded the weeping girl to her bosom, 'do you think I would harm a hair of his head?'

'Oh, no!' replied Rose, eagerly.

'No, surely,' said the old lady; 'my days are drawing to their close: and may mercy be shown to me as I show it to others! What can I do to save him, sir?'

'Let me think, ma'am,' said the doctor; 'let me think.'

Mr. Losberne thrust his hands into his pockets, and took several turns up and down the room; often stopping, and balancing himself on his toes, and frowning frightfully. After various exclamations of 'I've got it now' and 'no, I haven't,' and as many renewals of the walking and frowning, he at length made a dead halt, and spoke as follows:

'I think if you give me a full and unlimited commission to bully Giles, and that little boy, Brittles, I can manage it. Giles is a faithful fellow and an old servant, I know; but you can make it up to him in a thousand ways, and reward him for being such a good shot besides. You don't object to that?'

'Unless there is some other way of preserving the child,' replied Mrs. Maylie.

'There is no other,' said the doctor. 'No other, take my word for it.'

'Then my aunt invests you with full power,' said Rose, smiling through her tears; 'but pray don't be harder upon the poor fellows than is indispensably necessary.'

'You seem to think,' retorted the doctor, 'that everybody is disposed to be hard-hearted to-day, except yourself, Miss Rose. I only hope, for the sake of the rising male sex generally, that you may be found in as vulnerable and soft-hearted a mood by the first eligible young fellow who appeals to your compassion; and I wish I were a young fellow, that I might avail myself, on the spot, of such a favourable opportunity for doing so, as the present.'

'You are as great a boy as poor Brittles himself,' returned Rose, blushing.

'Well,' said the doctor, laughing heartily, 'that is no very difficult matter. But to return to this boy. The great point of our agreement is yet to come. He will wake in an hour or so, I dare say; and although I have told that thick-headed constable-fellow downstairs that he musn't be moved or spoken to, on peril of his life, I think we may converse with him without danger. Now I make this stipulation—that I shall examine him in your presence, and that, if, from what he says, we judge, and I can show to the satisfaction of your cool reason, that he is a real and thorough bad one (which is more than possible), he shall be left to his fate, without any farther interference on my part, at all events.'

'Oh no, aunt!' entreated Rose.

'Oh yes, aunt!' said the doctor. 'Is is a bargain?'

'He cannot be hardened in vice,' said Rose; 'It is impossible.'

'Very good,' retorted the doctor; 'then so much the more reason for acceding to my proposition.'

Finally the treaty was entered into; and the parties thereunto sat down to wait, with some impatience, until Oliver should awake.

The patience of the two ladies was destined to undergo a longer trial than Mr. Losberne had led them to expect; for hour after hour passed on, and still Oliver slumbered heavily. It was evening, indeed, before the kind-hearted doctor brought them the intelligence, that he was at length sufficiently restored to be spoken to. The boy was very ill, he said, and weak from the loss of blood; but his mind was so troubled with anxiety to disclose something, that he deemed it better to give him the opportunity, than to insist upon his remaining quiet until next morning: which he should otherwise have done.

The conference was a long one. Oliver told them all his simple history, and was often compelled to stop, by pain and want of strength. It was a solemn thing, to hear, in the darkened room, the feeble voice of the sick child recounting a weary catalogue of evils and calamities which hard men had brought upon him. Oh! if when we oppress and grind our fellow-creatures, we bestowed but one thought on the dark evidences of human error, which, like dense and heavy clouds, are rising, slowly it is true, but not less surely, to Heaven, to pour their after-vengeance on our heads; if we heard but one instant, in imagination, the deep testimony of dead men's voices, which no power can stifle, and no pride shut out; where would be the injury and injustice, the suffering, misery, cruelty, and wrong, that each day's life brings with it!

Oliver's pillow was smoothed by gentle hands that night; and loveliness and virtue watched him as he slept. He felt calm and happy, and could have died without a murmur.

The momentous interview was no sooner concluded, and Oliver composed to rest again, than the doctor, after wiping his eyes, and condemning them for being weak all at once, betook himself downstairs to open upon Mr. Giles. And finding nobody about the parlours, it occurred to him, that he could perhaps originate the proceedings with better effect in the kitchen; so into the kitchen he went.

There were assembled, in that lower house of the domestic parliament, the women-servants, Mr. Brittles, Mr. Giles, the tinker (who had received a special invitation to regale himself for the remainder of the day, in consideration of his services), and the constable. The latter gentleman had a large staff, a large head, large features, and large half-boots; and he looked as if he had been taking a proportionate allowance of ale—as indeed he had.

The adventures of the previous night were still under discussion; for Mr. Giles was expatiating upon his presence of mind, when the doctor entered; Mr. Brittles, with a mug of ale in his hand, was corroborating everything, before his superior said it.

'Sit still!' said the doctor, waving his hand.

'Thank you, sir, said Mr. Giles. 'Misses wished some ale to be given out, sir; and as I felt no ways inclined for my own little room, sir, and was disposed for company, I am taking mine among 'em here.'

Brittles headed a low murmur, by which the ladies and gentlemen generally were understood to express the gratification they derived from Mr. Giles's condescension. Mr. Giles looked round with a patronising air, as much as to say that so long as they behaved properly, he would never desert them.

'How is the patient to-night, sir?' asked Giles.

'So-so'; returned the doctor. 'I am afraid you have got yourself into a scrape there, Mr. Giles.'

'I hope you don't mean to say, sir,' said Mr. Giles, trembling, 'that he's going to die. If I thought it, I should never be happy again. I wouldn't cut a boy off: no, not even Brittles here; not for all the plate in the county, sir.'

'That's not the point,' said the doctor, mysteriously. 'Mr. Giles, are you a Protestant?'

'Yes, sir, I hope so,' faltered Mr. Giles, who had turned very pale.

'And what are *you*, boy?' said the doctor, turning sharply upon Brittles.

'Lord bless me, sir!' replied Brittles, starting violently; 'I'm the same as Mr. Giles, sir.'

'Then tell me this,' said the doctor, 'both of you, both of you! Are you going to take upon yourselves to swear, that that boy upstairs is the boy that was put through the little window last night? Out with it! Come! We are prepared for you!'

The doctor, who was universally considered one of the best-tempered creatures on earth, made this demand in such a dreadful tone of anger, that Giles and Brittles, who were considerably muddled by ale and excitement, stared at each other in a state of stupefaction.

'Pay attention to the reply, constable, will you?' said the doctor, shaking his forefinger with great solemnity of manner, and tapping the bridge of his nose with it, to bespeak the exercise of that worthy's utmost acuteness. 'Something may come of this before long.'

The constable looked as wise as he could, and took up his staff of office: which had been reclining indolently in the chimney-corner.

'It's a simple question of identity, you will observe,' said the doctor.

'That's what it is, sir,' replied the constable, coughing with great violence; for he had finished his ale in a hurry, and some of it had gone the wrong way.

'Here's the house broken into,' said the doctor, 'and a couple of men catch one moment's glimpse of a boy, in the midst of gunpowder smoke, and in all the distraction of alarm and darkness. Here's a boy comes to that very same house, next morning, and because he happens to have his arm tied up, these men lay violent hands upon him—by doing which, they place his life in great danger—and swear he is the thief. Now, the question is, whether these men are justified by the fact; if not, in what situation do they place themselves?'

The constable nodded profoundly. He said, if that wasn't law, he would be glad to know what was.

'I ask you again,' thundered the doctor, 'are you, on your solemn oaths, able to identify that boy?'

Brittles looked doubtfully at Mr. Giles; Mr. Giles looked doubtfully at Brittles; the constable put his hand behind his ear, to catch the reply; the two women and the tinker leaned forward to listen; the doctor glanced keenly round; when a ring was heard at the gate, and at the same moment, the sound of wheels.

'It's the runners!' cried Brittles, to all appearance much relieved.

'The what?' exclaimed the doctor, aghast in his turn.

'The Bow Street officers, sir,' replied Brittles, taking up a candle; 'me and Mr. Giles sent for 'em this morning.'

'What?' cried the doctor.

'Yes,' replied Brittles; 'I sent a message up by the coachman, and I only wonder they weren't here before, sir.'

'You did, did you? Then confound your—slow coaches down here; that's all,' said the doctor, walking away.

CHAPTER XXXI

INVOLVES A CRITICAL POSITION

'Who's that?' inquired Brittles, opening the door a little way, with the chain up, and peeping out, shading the candle with his hand.

'Open the door,' replied a man outside; 'it's the officers from Bow Street, as was sent to to-day.'

Much comforted by this assurance, Brittles opened the door to its full width, and confronted a portly man in a great-coat; who walked in, without saying anything more, and wiped his shoes on the mat, as coolly as if he lived there.

'Just send somebody out to relieve my mate, will you, young man?' said the officer; 'he's in the gig, a-minding the prad. Have you got a coach 'us here, that you could put it up in, for five or ten minutes?'

Brittles replying in the affirmative, and pointing out the building, the portly man stepped back to the garden-gate, and helped his companion to put up the gig: while Brittles lighted them, in a state of great admiration. This done, they returned to the house, and, being shown into a parlour, took off their great-coats and hats, and showed like what they were.

The man who had knocked at the door, was a stout personage of middle height, aged about fifty: with shiny black hair, cropped pretty close; half-whiskers, a round face, and sharp eyes. The other was a red-headed, bony man, in top-boots; with a rather ill-favoured countenance, and a turned-up sinister-looking nose.

'Tell your governor that Blathers and Duff is here, will you?' said the stouter man, smoothing down his hair, and laying a pair of handcuffs on the table. 'Oh! Good-evening, master. Can I have a word or two with you in private, if you please?'

This was addressed to Mr. Losberne, who now made his appearance; that gentleman, motioning Brittles to retire, brought in the two ladies, and shut the door.

'This is the lady of the house,' said Mr. Losberne, motioning towards Mrs. Maylie.

Mr. Blathers made a bow. Being desired to sit down, he put his hat on the floor, and taking a chair, motioned to Duff to do the same. The latter gentleman, who did not appear quite so much accustomed to good society, or quite so much at his ease in it—one of the two—seated himself, after undergoing several muscular affections of the limbs, and the head of his stick into his mouth, with some embarrassment.

'Now, with regard to this here robbery, master,' said Blathers. 'What are the circumstances?'

Mr. Losberne, who appeared desirous of gaining time, recounted them at great length, and with much circumlocution. Messrs. Blathers and Duff looked very knowing meanwhile, and occasionally exchanged a nod.

'I can't say, for certain, till I see the work, of course,' said Blathers; 'but my opinion at once is,—I don't mind committing myself to that extent,—that this wasn't done by a yokel; eh, Duff?'

'Certainly not,' replied Duff.

'And, translating the word yokel for the benefit of the ladies, I apprehend your meaning to be, that this attempt was not made by a countryman?' said Mr. Losberne, with a smile.

'That's it, master,' replied Blathers. 'This is all about the robbery, is it?'

'All,' replied the doctor.

'Now, what is this, about this here boy that the servants are a-talking on?' said Blathers.

'Nothing at all,' replied the doctor. 'One of the frightened servants chose to take it into his head, that he had something to do with this attempt to break into the house; but it's nonsense: sheer absurdity.'

'Wery easy disposed of, if it is,' remarked Duff.

'What he says is quite correct,' observed Blathers, nodding his head in a confirmatory way, and playing carelessly with the handcuffs, as if they were a pair of castanets. 'Who is the boy? What account does he give of himself? Where did he come from? He didn't drop out of the clouds, did he, master?'

'Of course not,' replied the doctor, with a nervous glance at the two ladies. 'I know his whole history: but we can talk about that presently. You would like, first, to see the place where the thieves made their attempt, I suppose?'

'Certainly,' rejoined Mr. Blathers. 'We had better inspect the premises first, and examine the servants afterwards. That's the usual way of doing business.'

Lights were then procured; and Messrs. Blathers and Duff, attended by the native constable, Brittles, Giles, and everybody else in short, went into the little room at the end of the passage and looked out at the window; and afterwards went round by way of the lawn, and looked in at the window; and after that, had a candle handed out to inspect the shutter with; and after that, a lantern to trace the footsteps with; and after that, a pitchfork to poke the bushes with. This done, amidst the breathless interest of all beholders, they came in again; and Mr. Giles and Brittles were put through a melodramatic representation of their share in the previous night's adventures: which they performed some six times over: contradicting each other, in not more than one important respect, the first time, and in not more than a dozen the last. This consummation being arrived at, Blathers and Duff cleared the room, and held a long council together, compared with which, for secrecy and solemnity, a consultation of great doctors on the knottiest point in medicine, would be mere child's play.

Meanwhile, the doctor walked up and down the next room in a very uneasy state; and Mrs. Maylie and Rose looked on, with anxious faces.

'Upon my word,' he said, making a halt, after a great number of very rapid turns, 'I hardly know what to do.'

'Surely,' said Rose, 'the poor child's story, faithfully repeated to these men, will be sufficient to exonerate him.'

'I doubt it, my dear young lady,' said the doctor, shaking his head. 'I don't think it would exonerate him, either with them, or with legal functionaries of a higher grade. What is he, after all, they would say? A runaway. Judged by mere worldly considerations and probabilities, his story is a very doubtful one.'

'You believe it, surely?' interrupted Rose.

'*I* believe it, strange as it is; and perhaps I may be an old fool for doing so,' rejoined the doctor; 'but I don't think it is exactly the tale for a practical police-officer, nevertheless.'

'Why not?' demanded Rose.

'Because, my pretty cross-examiner,' replied the doctor: 'because, viewed with their eyes, there are many ugly points about it; he can only prove the parts that look ill, and none of those that look well. Confound the fellows, they *will* have the why and the wherefore, and will take nothing for granted. On his own showing, you see, he has been the companion of thieves for some time past; he has been carried to a police-officer, on a charge of picking a gentleman's pocket; he has been taken away, forcibly, from that gentleman's house, to a place which he cannot describe or point out, and of the situation of which he has not the remotest idea. He is brought down to Chertsey, by men who seem to have taken a violent fancy to him, whether he will or no; and is put through a window to rob a house; and then, just at the very moment when he is going to alarm the inmates, and so do the very thing that would set him all to rights, there rushes into the way, a blundering dog of a half-bred butler, and shoots him! As if on purpose to prevent his doing any good for himself! Don't you see all this?'

'I see it, of course,' replied Rose, smiling at the doctor's impetuosity; 'but still I do not see anything in it, to criminate the poor child.'

'No,' replied the doctor; 'of course not! Bless the bright eyes of your sex! They never see, whether for good or bad, more than one side of any question; and that is, always, the one which first presents itself to them.'

Having given vent to this result of experience, the doctor put his hands into his pockets, and walked up and down the room with even greater rapidity than before.

'The more I think of it,' said the doctor, 'the more I see that it will occasion endless trouble and difficulty if we put these men in possession of the boy's real story. I am certain it will not be believed; and even if they can do nothing to him in the end, still the dragging it forward, and giving publicity to all the doubts that will be cast upon it, must interfere, materially, with your benevolent plan of rescuing him from misery.'

'Oh! what is to be done?' cried Rose. 'Dear, dear! why did they send for these people?'

'Why, indeed!' exclaimed Mrs. Maylie. 'I would not have had them here, for the world.'

'All I know is,' said Mr. Losberne, at last: sitting down with a kind of desperate calmness, 'that we must try and carry it off with a bold face. The object is a good one, and that must be our excuse. The boy has strong symptoms of fever upon him, and is in no condition to be talked to any more; that's one comfort. We must make the best of it; and if bad be the best, it is no fault of ours. Come in!'

'Well, master,' said Blathers, entering the room followed by his colleague, and making the door fast, before he said any more. 'This warn't a put-up thing.'

'And what the devil's a put-up thing?' demanded the doctor, impatiently.

'We call it a put-up robbery, ladies,' said Blathers, turning to them, as if he pitied their ignorance, but had a contempt for the doctor's, 'when the servants is in it.'

'Nobody suspected them, in this case,' said Mrs. Maylie.

'Wery likely not, ma'am,' replied Blathers; 'but they might have been in it, for all that.'

'More likely on that wery account,' said Duff.

'We find it was a town hand,' said Blathers, continuing his report; 'for the style of work is first-rate.'

'Wery pretty indeed it is,' remarked Duff, in an undertone.

'There was two of 'em in it,' continued Blathers; 'and they had a boy with 'em; that's plain from the size of the window. That's all to be said at present. We'll see this lad that you've got upstairs at once, if you please.'

'Perhaps they will take something to drink first, Mrs. Maylie?' said the doctor: his face brightening, as if some new thought had occurred to him.

'Oh! to be sure!' exclaimed Rose, eagerly. 'You shall have it immediately, if you will.'

'Why, thank you, miss!' said Blathers, drawing his coat-sleeve across his mouth; 'it's dry work, this sort of duty. Anythink that's handy, miss; don't put yourself out of the way, on our accounts.'

'What shall it be?' asked the doctor, following the young lady to the sideboard.

'A little drop of spirits, master, if it's all the same,' replied Blathers. 'It's a cold ride from London, ma'am; and I always find that spirits comes home warmer to the feelings.'

This interesting communication was addressed to Mrs. Maylie, who received it very graciously. While it was being conveyed to her, the doctor slipped out of the room.

'Ah!' said Mr. Blathers: not holding his wine-glass by the stem, but grasping the bottom between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand: and placing it in front of his chest; 'I have seen a good many pieces of business like this, in my time, ladies.'

'That crack down in the back lane at Edmonton, Blathers,' said Mr. Duff, assisting his colleague's memory.

'That was something in this way, warn't it?' rejoined Mr. Blathers; 'that was done by Conkey Chickweed, that was.'

'You always gave that to him' replied Duff. 'It was the Family Pet, I tell you. Conkey hadn't any more to do with it than I had.'

'Get out!' retorted Mr. Blathers; 'I know better. Do you mind that time when Conkey was robbed of his money, though? What a start that was! Better than any novel-book *I* ever see!'

'What was that?' inquired Rose: anxious to encourage any symptoms of good-humour in the unwelcome visitors.

'It was a robbery, miss, that hardly anybody would have been down upon,' said Blathers. 'This here Conkey Chickweed—'

'Conkey means Nosey, ma'am,' interposed Duff.

'Of course the lady knows that, don't she?' demanded Mr. Blathers. 'Always interrupting, you are, partner! This here Conkey Chickweed, miss, kept a public-house over Battlebridge way, and he had a cellar, where a good many young lords went to see cock-fighting, and badger-drawing, and that; and a wery intellectual manner the sports was conducted in, for I've seen 'em off'en. He warn't one of the family, at that time; and one night he was robbed of three hundred and twenty-seven guineas in a canvas bag, that was stole out of his bedroom in the dead of night, by a tall man with a black patch over his eye, who had concealed himself under the bed, and after committing the robbery, jumped slap out of window: which was only a story high. He was wery quick about it. But Conkey was quick, too; for he fired a blunderbuss arter him, and roused the neighbourhood. They set up a hue-and-cry, directly, and when they came to look about 'em, found that Conkey had hit the robber; for there was traces of blood, all the way to some palings a good distance off; and there they lost 'em. However, he had made off with the blunt; and, consequently, the name of Mr. Chickweed, licensed witler, appeared in the Gazette among the other bankrupts; and all manner of benefits and subscriptions, and I don't know what all, was got up for the poor man, who was in a wery low state of mind about his loss, and went up and down the streets, for three or four days, a pulling his hair off in such a desperate manner that many people was afraid he might be going to make away with himself. One day he came up to the office, all in a hurry, and had a private interview with the magistrate, who, after a deal of talk, rings the bell, and orders Jem Spyers in (Jem was a active officer), and tells him to go and assist Mr. Chickweed in apprehending the man as robbed his house. "I see him, Spyers," said Chickweed, "pass my house yesterday morning," "Why didn't you up, and collar him!" says Spyers. "I was so struck all of a heap, that you might have fractured my skull with a toothpick," says the poor man; "but we're sure to have him; for between ten and eleven o'clock at night he passed again." Spyers no sooner heard this, than he put some clean linen and a comb, in his pocket, in case he should have to stop a day or two; and away he goes, and sets himself down at one of the public-house windows behind the little red curtain, with his hat on, all ready to bolt out, at a moment's notice. He was smoking his pipe here, late at night, when all of a sudden Chickweed roars out, "Here he is! Stop thief! Murder!" Jem Spyers dashes out; and there he sees Chickweed, a-tearing down the street full cry. Away goes Spyers; on goes Chickweed; round turns the people; everybody roars out, "Thieves!" and Chickweed himself keeps on shouting, all the time, like mad. Spyers loses sight of him a minute as he turns a corner; shoots round; sees a little crowd; dives in; "Which is the man?" "D—me!" says Chickweed, "I've lost him again!" It was a remarkable occurrence, but he warn't to be seen nowhere, so they went back to the public-house. Next morning, Spyers took his old place, and looked out, from behind the curtain, for a tall man with a black patch over his eye, till his own two eyes ached again. At last, he couldn't help shutting 'em, to ease 'em a minute; and the very moment he did so, he hears Chickweed a-roaring out, "Here he is!" Off he starts once more, with Chickweed half-way down the street ahead of him; and after twice as long a run as the yesterday's one, the man's lost again! This was done, once or twice more, till one-half the neighbours gave out that Mr. Chickweed had been robbed by the devil, who was playing tricks with him arterwards; and the other half, that poor Mr. Chickweed had gone mad with grief.'

'What did Jem Spyers say?' inquired the doctor; who had returned to the room shortly after the commencement of the story.

'Jem Spyers,' resumed the officer, 'for a long time said nothing at all, and listened to everything without seeming to, which showed he understood his business. But, one morning, he walked into the bar, and taking out his snuffbox, says "Chickweed, I've found out who done this here robbery." "Have you?" said Chickweed. "Oh, my dear Spyers, only let me have wengeance, and I shall die contented! Oh, my dear Spyers, where is the villain!" "Come!" said Spyers, offering him a pinch of snuff, "none of that gammon! You did it yourself." So he had; and a good bit of money he had made by it, too; and nobody would never have found it out, if he hadn't been so precious anxious to keep up appearances!' said Mr. Blathers, putting down his wine-glass, and clinking the handcuffs together.

'Very curious, indeed,' observed the doctor. 'Now, if you please, you can walk upstairs.'

'If *you* please, sir,' returned Mr. Blathers. Closely following Mr. Losberne, the two officers ascended to Oliver's bedroom; Mr. Giles preceding the party, with a lighted candle.

Oliver had been dozing; but looked worse, and was more feverish than he had appeared yet. Being assisted by the doctor, he managed to sit up in bed for a minute or so; and looked at the strangers without at all understanding what was going forward—in fact, without seeming to recollect where he was, or what had been passing.

'This,' said Mr. Losberne, speaking softly, but with great vehemence notwithstanding, 'this is the lad, who, being accidently wounded by a spring-gun in some boyish trespass on Mr. What-d' ye-call-him's grounds, at the back here, comes to the house for assistance this morning, and is immediately laid hold of and maltreated, by that ingenious gentleman with the candle in his hand: who has placed his life in considerable danger, as I can professionally certify.'

Messrs. Blathers and Duff looked at Mr. Giles, as he was thus recommended to their notice. The bewildered butler gazed from them towards Oliver, and from Oliver towards Mr. Losberne, with a most ludicrous mixture of fear and perplexity.

'You don't mean to deny that, I suppose?' said the doctor, laying Oliver gently down again.

'It was all done for the—for the best, sir,' answered Giles. 'I am sure I thought it was the boy, or I wouldn't have meddled with him. I am not of an inhuman disposition, sir.'

'Thought it was what boy?' inquired the senior officer.

'The housebreaker's boy, sir!' replied Giles. 'They—they certainly had a boy.'

'Well? Do you think so now?' inquired Blathers.

'Think what, now?' replied Giles, looking vacantly at his questioner.

'Think it's the same boy, Stupid-head?' rejoined Blathers, impatiently.

'I don't know; I really don't know,' said Giles, with a rueful countenance. 'I couldn't swear to him.'

'What do you think?' asked Mr. Blathers.

'I don't know what to think,' replied poor Giles. 'I don't think it is the boy; indeed, I'm almost certain that it isn't. You know it can't be.'

'Has this man been a-drinking, sir?' inquired Blathers, turning to the doctor.

'What a precious muddle-headed chap you are!' said Duff, addressing Mr. Giles, with supreme contempt.

Mr. Losberne had been feeling the patient's pulse during this short dialogue; but he now rose from the chair by the bedside, and remarked, that if the officers had any doubts upon the subject, they would perhaps like to step into the next room, and have Brittles before them.

Acting upon this suggestion, they adjourned to a neighbouring apartment, where Mr. Brittles, being called in, involved himself and his respected superior in such a wonderful maze of fresh contradictions and impossibilities, as tended to throw no particular light on anything, but the fact of his own strong mystification; except, indeed, his declarations that he shouldn't know the real boy, if he were put before him that instant; that he had only taken Oliver to be he, because Mr. Giles had said he was; and that Mr. Giles had, five minutes previously, admitted in the kitchen, that he began to be very much afraid he had been a little too hasty.

Among other ingenious surmises, the question was then raised, whether Mr. Giles had really hit anybody; and upon examination of the fellow pistol to that which he had fired, it turned out to have no more destructive loading than gunpowder and brown paper: a discovery which made a considerable impression on everybody but the doctor, who had drawn the ball about ten minutes before. Upon no one, however, did it make a greater impression than on Mr. Giles himself; who, after labouring, for some hours, under the fear of having mortally wounded a fellow-creature, eagerly caught at this new idea, and favoured it to the utmost. Finally, the officers, without troubling themselves very much about Oliver, left the Chertsey constable in the house, and took up their rest for that night in the town; promising to return the next morning.

With the next morning, there came a rumour, that two men and a boy were in the cage at Kingston, who had been apprehended over night under suspicious circumstances; and to Kingston Messrs. Blathers and Duff journeyed accordingly. The suspicious circumstances, however, resolving themselves, on investigation, into the one fact, that they had been discovered sleeping under a haystack; which, although a great crime, is only punishable by imprisonment, and is, in the merciful eye of the English law, and its comprehensive love of all the King's subjects, held to be no satisfactory proof, in the absence of all other evidence, that the sleeper, or sleepers, have committed burglary accompanied with violence, and have therefore rendered themselves liable to the punishment of death; Messrs. Blathers and Duff came back again, as wise as they went.

In short, after some more examination, and a great deal more conversation, a neighbouring magistrate was readily induced to take the joint bail of Mrs. Maylie and Mr. Losberne for Oliver's appearance if he should ever be called upon; and Blathers and Duff, being rewarded with a couple of guineas, returned to town with divided opinions on the subject of their expedition: the latter gentleman on a mature consideration of all the circumstances, inclining to the belief that the burglarious attempt had originated with the Family Pet; and the former being equally disposed to concede the full merit of it to the great Mr. Conkey Chickweed.

Meanwhile, Oliver gradually throve and prospered under the united care of Mrs. Maylie, Rose, and the kind-hearted Mr. Losberne. If fervent prayers, gushing from hearts overcharged with gratitude, be heard in heaven—and if they be not, what prayers are!—the blessings which the orphan child called down upon them, sunk into their souls, diffusing peace and happiness.

CHAPTER XXXII

OF THE HAPPY LIFE OLIVER BEGAN TO LEAD WITH HIS KIND FRIENDS

Oliver's ailings were neither slight nor few. In addition to the pain and delay attendant on a broken limb, his exposure to the wet and cold had brought on fever and ague: which hung about him for many weeks, and reduced him sadly. But, at length, he began, by slow degrees, to get better, and to be able to say sometimes, in a few tearful words, how deeply he felt the goodness of the two sweet ladies, and how ardently he hoped that when he grew strong and well again, he could do something to show his gratitude; only something, which would let them see the love and duty with which his breast was full; something, however slight, which would prove to them that their gentle kindness had not been cast away; but that the poor boy whom their charity had rescued from misery, or death, was eager to serve them with his whole heart and soul.

'Poor fellow!' said Rose, when Oliver had been one day feebly endeavouring to utter the words of thankfulness that rose to his pale lips; 'you shall have many opportunities of serving us, if you will. We are going into the country, and my aunt intends that you shall accompany us. The quiet place, the pure air, and all the pleasure and beauties of spring, will restore you in a few days. We will employ you in a hundred ways, when you can bear the trouble.'

'The trouble!' cried Oliver. 'Oh! dear lady, if I could but work for you; if I could only give you pleasure by watering your flowers, or watching your birds, or running up and down the whole day long, to make you happy; what would I give to do it!'

'You shall give nothing at all,' said Miss Maylie, smiling; 'for, as I told you before, we shall employ you in a hundred ways; and if you only take half the trouble to please us, that you promise now, you will make me very happy indeed.'

'Happy, ma'am!' cried Oliver; 'how kind of you to say so!'

'You will make me happier than I can tell you,' replied the young lady. 'To think that my dear good aunt should have been the means of rescuing any one from such sad misery as you have described to us, would be an unspeakable pleasure to me; but to know that the object of her goodness and compassion was sincerely grateful and attached, in consequence, would delight me, more than you can well imagine. Do you understand me?' she inquired, watching Oliver's thoughtful face.

'Oh yes, ma'am, yes!' replied Oliver eagerly; 'but I was thinking that I am ungrateful now.'

'To whom?' inquired the young lady.

'To the kind gentleman, and the dear old nurse, who took so much care of me before,' rejoined Oliver. 'If they knew how happy I am, they would be pleased, I am sure.'

'I am sure they would,' rejoined Oliver's benefactress; 'and Mr. Losberne has already been kind enough to promise that when you are well enough to bear the journey, he will carry you to see them.'

'Has he, ma'am?' cried Oliver, his face brightening with pleasure. 'I don't know what I shall do for joy when I see their kind faces once again!'

In a short time Oliver was sufficiently recovered to undergo the fatigue of this expedition. One morning he and Mr. Losberne set out, accordingly, in a little carriage which belonged to Mrs. Maylie. When they came to Chertsey Bridge, Oliver turned very pale, and uttered a loud exclamation.

'What's the matter with the boy?' cried the doctor, as usual, all in a bustle. 'Do you see anything—hear anything—feel anything—eh?'

'That, sir,' cried Oliver, pointing out of the carriage window. 'That house!'

'Yes; well, what of it? Stop coachman. Pull up here,' cried the doctor. 'What of the house, my man; eh?'

'The thieves—the house they took me to!' whispered Oliver.

'The devil it is!' cried the doctor. 'Hallo, there! let me out!'

But, before the coachman could dismount from his box, he had tumbled out of the coach, by some means or other; and, running down to the deserted tenement, began kicking at the door like a madman.

'Halloa?' said a little ugly hump-backed man: opening the door so suddenly, that the doctor, from the very impetus of his last kick, nearly fell forward into the passage. 'What's the matter here?'

'Matter!' exclaimed the other, collaring him, without a moment's reflection. 'A good deal. Robbery is the matter.'

'There'll be Murder the matter, too,' replied the hump-backed man, coolly, 'if you don't take your hands off. Do you hear me?'

'I hear you,' said the doctor, giving his captive a hearty shake.

'Where's—confound the fellow, what's his rascally name—Sikes; that's it. Where's Sikes, you thief?'

The hump-backed man stared, as if in excess of amazement and indignation; then, twisting himself, dexterously, from the doctor's grasp, growled forth a volley of horrid oaths, and retired into the house. Before he could shut the door, however, the doctor had passed into the parlour, without a word of parley.

He looked anxiously round; not an article of furniture; not a vestige of anything, animate or inanimate; not even the position of the cupboards; answered Oliver's description!

'Now!' said the hump-backed man, who had watched him keenly, 'what do you mean by coming into my house, in this violent way? Do you want to rob me, or to murder me? Which is it?'

'Did you ever know a man come out to do either, in a chariot and pair, you ridiculous old vampire?' said the irritable doctor.

'What do you want, then?' demanded the hunchback. 'Will you take yourself off, before I do you a mischief? Curse you!'

'As soon as I think proper,' said Mr. Losberne, looking into the other parlour; which, like the first, bore no resemblance whatever to Oliver's account of it. 'I shall find you out, some day, my friend.'

'Will you?' sneered the ill-favoured cripple. 'If you ever want me, I'm here. I haven't lived here mad and all alone, for five-and-twenty years, to be scared by you. You shall pay for this; you shall pay for this.' And so saying, the mis-shapen little demon set up a yell, and danced upon the ground, as if wild with rage.

'Stupid enough, this,' muttered the doctor to himself; 'the boy must have made a mistake. Here! Put that in your pocket, and shut yourself up again.' With these words he flung the hunchback a piece of money, and returned to the carriage.

The man followed to the chariot door, uttering the wildest imprecations and curses all the way; but as Mr. Losberne turned to speak to the driver, he looked into the carriage, and eyed Oliver for an instant with a glance so sharp and fierce and at the same time so furious and vindictive, that, waking or sleeping, he could not forget it for months afterwards. He continued to utter the most fearful imprecations, until the driver had resumed his seat; and when they were once more on their way, they could see him some distance behind: beating his feet upon the ground, and tearing his hair, in transports of real or pretended rage.

'I am an ass!' said the doctor, after a long silence. 'Did you know that before, Oliver?'

'No, sir.'

'Then don't forget it another time.'

'An ass,' said the doctor again, after a further silence of some minutes. 'Even if it had been the right place, and the right fellows had been there, what could I have done, single-handed? And if I had had assistance, I see no good that I should have done, except leading to my own exposure, and an unavoidable statement of the manner in which I have hushed up this business. That would have served me right, though. I am always involving myself in some scrape or other, by acting on impulse. It might have done me good.'

Now, the fact was that the excellent doctor had never acted upon anything but impulse all through his life, and it was no bad compliment to the nature of the impulses which governed him, that so far from being involved in any peculiar troubles or misfortunes, he had the warmest respect and esteem of all who knew him. If the truth must be told, he was a little out of temper, for a minute or two, at being disappointed in procuring corroborative evidence of Oliver's story on the very first occasion on which he had a chance of obtaining any. He soon came round again, however; and finding that Oliver's replies to his questions, were still as straightforward and consistent, and still delivered with as much apparent sincerity and truth, as they had ever been, he made up his mind to attach full credence to them, from that time forth.

As Oliver knew the name of the street in which Mr. Brownlow resided, they were enabled to drive straight thither. When the coach turned into it, his heart beat so violently, that he could scarcely draw his breath.

'Now, my boy, which house is it?' inquired Mr. Losberne.

'That! That!' replied Oliver, pointing eagerly out of the window. 'The white house. Oh! make haste! Pray make haste! I feel as if I should die: it makes me tremble so.'

'Come, come!' said the good doctor, patting him on the shoulder. 'You will see them directly, and they will be overjoyed to find you safe and well.'

'Oh! I hope so!' cried Oliver. 'They were so good to me; so very, very good to me.'

The coach rolled on. It stopped. No; that was the wrong house; the next door. It went on a few paces, and stopped again. Oliver looked up at the windows, with tears of happy expectation coursing down his face.

Alas! the white house was empty, and there was a bill in the window. 'To Let.'

'Knock at the next door,' cried Mr. Losberne, taking Oliver's arm in his. 'What has become of Mr. Brownlow, who used to live in the adjoining house, do you know?'

The servant did not know; but would go and inquire. She presently returned, and said, that Mr. Brownlow had sold off his goods, and gone to the West Indies, six weeks before. Oliver clasped his hands, and sank feebly backward.

'Has his housekeeper gone too?' inquired Mr. Losberne, after a moment's pause.

'Yes, sir'; replied the servant. 'The old gentleman, the housekeeper, and a gentleman who was a friend of Mr. Brownlow's, all went together.'

'Then turn towards home again,' said Mr. Losberne to the driver; 'and don't stop to bait the horses, till you get out of this confounded London!'

'The book-stall keeper, sir?' said Oliver. 'I know the way there. See him, pray, sir! Do see him!'

'My poor boy, this is disappointment enough for one day,' said the doctor. 'Quite enough for both of us. If we go to the book-stall keeper's, we shall certainly find that he is dead, or has set his house on fire, or run away.

No; home again straight!' And in obedience to the doctor's impulse, home they went.

This bitter disappointment caused Oliver much sorrow and grief, even in the midst of his happiness; for he had pleased himself, many times during his illness, with thinking of all that Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Bedwin would say to him: and what delight it would be to tell them how many long days and nights he had passed in reflecting on what they had done for him, and in bewailing his cruel separation from them. The hope of eventually clearing himself with them, too, and explaining how he had been forced away, had buoyed him up, and sustained him, under many of his recent trials; and now, the idea that they should have gone so far, and carried with them the belief that he was an impostor and a robber—a belief which might remain uncontradicted to his dying day—was almost more than he could bear.

The circumstance occasioned no alteration, however, in the behaviour of his benefactors. After another fortnight, when the fine warm weather had fairly begun, and every tree and flower was putting forth its young leaves and rich blossoms, they made preparations for quitting the house at Chertsey, for some months.

Sending the plate, which had so excited Fagin's cupidity, to the banker's; and leaving Giles and another servant in care of the house, they departed to a cottage at some distance in the country, and took Oliver with them.

Who can describe the pleasure and delight, the peace of mind and soft tranquillity, the sickly boy felt in the balmy air, and among the green hills and rich woods, of an inland village! Who can tell how scenes of peace and quietude sink into the minds of pain-worn dwellers in close and noisy places, and carry their own freshness, deep into their jaded hearts! Men who have lived in crowded, pent-up streets, through lives of toil, and who have never wished for change; men, to whom custom has indeed been second nature, and who have come almost to love each brick and stone that formed the narrow boundaries of their daily walks; even they, with the hand of death upon them, have been known to yearn at last for one short glimpse of Nature's face; and, carried far from the scenes of their old pains and pleasures, have seemed to pass at once into a new state of being. Crawling forth, from day to day, to some green sunny spot, they have had such memories wakened up within them by the sight of the sky, and hill and plain, and glistening water, that a foretaste of heaven itself has soothed their quick decline, and they have sunk into their tombs, as peacefully as the sun whose setting they watched from their lonely chamber window but a few hours before, faded from their dim and feeble sight! The memories which peaceful country scenes call up, are not of this world, nor of its thoughts and hopes. Their gentle influence may teach us how to weave fresh garlands for the graves of those we loved: may purify our thoughts, and bear down before it old enmity and hatred; but beneath all this, there lingers, in the least reflective mind, a vague and half-formed consciousness of having held such feelings long before, in some remote and distant time, which calls up solemn thoughts of distant times to come, and bends down pride and worldliness beneath it.

It was a lovely spot to which they repaired. Oliver, whose days had been spent among squalid crowds, and in the midst of noise and brawling, seemed to enter on a new existence there. The rose and honeysuckle clung to the cottage walls; the ivy crept round the trunks of the trees; and the garden-flowers perfumed the air with delicious odours. Hard by, was a little churchyard; not crowded with tall unsightly gravestones, but full of humble mounds, covered with fresh turf and moss: beneath which, the old people of the village lay at rest. Oliver often wandered here; and, thinking of the wretched grave in which his mother lay, would sometimes sit him down and sob unseen; but, when he raised his eyes to the deep sky overhead, he would cease to think of her as lying in the ground, and would weep for her, sadly, but without pain.

It was a happy time. The days were peaceful and serene; the nights brought with them neither fear nor care; no languishing in a wretched prison, or associating with wretched men; nothing but pleasant and happy thoughts. Every morning he went to a white-headed old gentleman, who lived near the little church: who taught him to read better, and to write: and who spoke so kindly, and took such pains, that Oliver could never try enough to please him. Then, he would walk with Mrs. Maylie and Rose, and hear them talk of books; or perhaps sit near them, in some shady place, and listen whilst the young lady read: which he could have done, until it grew too dark to see the letters. Then, he had his own lesson for the next day to prepare; and at this, he would work hard, in a little room which looked into the garden, till evening came slowly on, when the ladies would walk out again, and he with them: listening with such pleasure to all they said: and so happy if they wanted a flower that he could climb to reach, or had forgotten anything he could run to fetch: that he could never be quick enough about it. When it became quite dark, and they returned home, the young lady would sit down to the piano, and play some pleasant air, or sing, in a low and gentle voice, some old song which it pleased her aunt to hear. There would be no candles lighted at such times as these; and Oliver would sit by one of the windows, listening to the sweet music, in a perfect rapture.

And when Sunday came, how differently the day was spent, from any way in which he had ever spent it yet! and how happily too; like all the other days in that most happy time! There was the little church, in the morning, with the green leaves fluttering at the windows: the birds singing without: and the sweet-smelling air stealing in at the low porch, and filling the homely building with its fragrance. The poor people were so neat and clean, and knelt so reverently in prayer, that it seemed a pleasure, not a tedious duty, their assembling there together; and though the singing might be rude, it was real, and sounded more musical (to Oliver's ears at least) than any he had ever heard in church before. Then, there were the walks as usual, and many calls at the clean houses of the labouring men; and at night, Oliver read a chapter or two from the Bible, which he had been studying all the week, and in the performance of which duty he felt more proud and pleased, than if he had been the clergyman himself.

In the morning, Oliver would be a-foot by six o'clock, roaming the fields, and plundering the hedges, far and wide, for nosegays of wild flowers, with which he would return laden, home; and which it took great care and consideration to arrange, to the best advantage, for the embellishment of the breakfast-table. There was fresh groundsel, too, for Miss Maylie's birds, with which Oliver, who had been studying the subject under the able tuition of the village clerk, would decorate the cages, in the most approved taste. When the birds were made all spruce and smart for the day, there was usually some little commission of charity to execute in the village; or, failing that, there was rare cricket-playing, sometimes, on the green; or, failing that, there was always something to do in the garden, or about the plants, to which Oliver (who had studied this science also, under the same master, who was a gardener by trade,) applied himself with hearty good-will, until Miss Rose made her appearance: when there were a thousand commendations to be bestowed on all he had done.

So three months glided away; three months which, in the life of the most blessed and favoured of mortals, might have been unmingled happiness, and which, in Oliver's were true felicity. With the purest and most amiable generosity on one side; and the truest, warmest, soul-felt gratitude on the other; it is no wonder that, by the end of that short time, Oliver Twist had become completely domesticated with the old lady and her niece, and that the fervent attachment of his young and sensitive heart, was repaid by their pride in, and attachment to, himself.

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHEREIN THE HAPPINESS OF OLIVER AND HIS FRIENDS, EXPERIENCES A SUDDEN CHECK

Spring flew swiftly by, and summer came. If the village had been beautiful at first it was now in the full glow and luxuriance of its richness. The great trees, which had looked shrunken and bare in the earlier months, had now burst into strong life and health; and stretching forth their green arms over the thirsty ground, converted open and naked spots into choice nooks, where was a deep and pleasant shade from which to look upon the wide prospect, steeped in sunshine, which lay stretched beyond. The earth had donned her mantle of brightest green; and shed her richest perfumes abroad. It was the prime and vigour of the year; all things were glad and flourishing.

Still, the same quiet life went on at the little cottage, and the same cheerful serenity prevailed among its inmates. Oliver had long since grown stout and healthy; but health or sickness made no difference in his warm feelings of a great many people. He was still the same gentle, attached, affectionate creature that he had been when pain and suffering had wasted his strength, and when he was dependent for every slight attention, and comfort on those who tended him.

One beautiful night, when they had taken a longer walk than was customary with them: for the day had been unusually warm, and there was a brilliant moon, and a light wind had sprung up, which was unusually refreshing. Rose had been in high spirits, too, and they had walked on, in merry conversation, until they had far exceeded their ordinary bounds. Mrs. Maylie being fatigued, they returned more slowly home. The young lady merely throwing off her simple bonnet, sat down to the piano as usual. After running abstractedly over the keys for a few minutes, she fell into a low and very solemn air; and as she played it, they heard a sound as if she were weeping.

'Rose, my dear!' said the elder lady.

Rose made no reply, but played a little quicker, as though the words had roused her from some painful thoughts.

'Rose, my love!' cried Mrs. Maylie, rising hastily, and bending over her. 'What is this? In tears! My dear child, what distresses you?'

'Nothing, aunt; nothing,' replied the young lady. 'I don't know what it is; I can't describe it; but I feel—'

'Not ill, my love?' interposed Mrs. Maylie.

'No, no! Oh, not ill!' replied Rose: shuddering as though some deadly chillness were passing over her, while she spoke; 'I shall be better presently. Close the window, pray!'

Oliver hastened to comply with her request. The young lady, making an effort to recover her cheerfulness, strove to play some livelier tune; but her fingers dropped powerless over the keys. Covering her face with her hands, she sank upon a sofa, and gave vent to the tears which she was now unable to repress.

'My child!' said the elderly lady, folding her arms about her, 'I never saw you so before.'

'I would not alarm you if I could avoid it,' rejoined Rose; 'but indeed I have tried very hard, and cannot help this. I fear I *am* ill, aunt.'

She was, indeed; for, when candles were brought, they saw that in the very short time which had elapsed since their return home, the hue of her countenance had changed to a marble whiteness. Its expression had lost nothing of its beauty; but it was changed; and there was an anxious haggard look about the gentle face, which it had never worn before. Another minute, and it was suffused with a crimson flush: and a heavy wildness came over the soft blue eye. Again this disappeared, like the shadow thrown by a passing cloud; and she was once more deadly pale.

Oliver, who watched the old lady anxiously, observed that she was alarmed by these appearances; and so in truth, was he; but seeing that she affected to make light of them, he endeavoured to do the same, and they so far succeeded, that when Rose was persuaded by her aunt to retire for the night, she was in better spirits; and appeared even in better health: assuring them that she felt certain she should rise in the morning, quite well.

'I hope,' said Oliver, when Mrs. Maylie returned, 'that nothing is the matter? She don't look well to-night, but—'

The old lady motioned to him not to speak; and sitting herself down in a dark corner of the room, remained silent for some time. At length, she said, in a trembling voice:

'I hope not, Oliver. I have been very happy with her for some years: too happy, perhaps. It may be time that I should meet with some misfortune; but I hope it is not this.'

'What?' inquired Oliver.

'The heavy blow,' said the old lady, 'of losing the dear girl who has so long been my comfort and happiness.'

'Oh! God forbid!' exclaimed Oliver, hastily.

'Amen to that, my child!' said the old lady, wringing her hands.

'Surely there is no danger of anything so dreadful?' said Oliver. 'Two hours ago, she was quite well.'

'She is very ill now,' rejoined Mrs. Maylies; 'and will be worse, I am sure. My dear, dear Rose! Oh, what shall I do without her!'

She gave way to such great grief, that Oliver, suppressing his own emotion, ventured to remonstrate with her; and to beg, earnestly, that, for the sake of the dear young lady herself, she would be more calm.

'And consider, ma'am,' said Oliver, as the tears forced themselves into his eyes, despite of his efforts to the contrary. 'Oh! consider how young and good she is, and what pleasure and comfort she gives to all about her. I am sure—certain—quite certain—that, for your sake, who are so good yourself; and for her own; and for the sake of all she makes so happy; she will not die. Heaven will never let her die so young.'

'Hush!' said Mrs. Maylie, laying her hand on Oliver's head. 'You think like a child, poor boy. But you teach me my duty, notwithstanding. I had forgotten it for a moment, Oliver, but I hope I may be pardoned, for I am old, and have seen enough of illness and death to know the agony of separation from the objects of our love. I have seen enough, too, to know that it is not always the youngest and best who are spared to those that love them; but this should give us comfort in our sorrow; for Heaven is just; and such things teach us, impressively, that there is a brighter world than this; and that the passage to it is speedy. God's will be done! I love her; and He knows how well!'

Oliver was surprised to see that as Mrs. Maylie said these words, she checked her lamentations as though by one effort; and drawing herself up as she spoke, became composed and firm. He was still more astonished to find that this firmness lasted; and that, under all the care and watching which ensued, Mrs. Maylie was every ready and collected: performing all the duties which had devolved upon her, steadily, and, to all external appearances, even cheerfully. But he was young, and did not know what strong minds are capable of, under trying circumstances. How should he, when their possessors so seldom know themselves?

An anxious night ensued. When morning came, Mrs. Maylie's predictions were but too well verified. Rose was in the first stage of a high and dangerous fever.

'We must be active, Oliver, and not give way to useless grief,' said Mrs. Maylie, laying her finger on her lip, as she looked steadily into his face; 'this letter must be sent, with all possible expedition, to Mr. Losberne. It must be carried to the market-town: which is not more than four miles off, by the footpath across the field: and thence dispatched, by an express on horseback, straight to Chertsey. The people at the inn will undertake to do this: and I can trust to you to see it done, I know.'

Oliver could make no reply, but looked his anxiety to be gone at once.

'Here is another letter,' said Mrs. Maylie, pausing to reflect; 'but whether to send it now, or wait until I see how Rose goes on, I scarcely know. I would not forward it, unless I feared the worst.'

'Is it for Chertsey, too, ma'am?' inquired Oliver; impatient to execute his commission, and holding out his trembling hand for the letter.

'No,' replied the old lady, giving it to him mechanically. Oliver glanced at it, and saw that it was directed to Harry Maylie, Esquire, at some great lord's house in the country; where, he could not make out.

'Shall it go, ma'am?' asked Oliver, looking up, impatiently.

'I think not,' replied Mrs. Maylie, taking it back. 'I will wait until to-morrow.'

With these words, she gave Oliver her purse, and he started off, without more delay, at the greatest speed he could muster.

Swiftly he ran across the fields, and down the little lanes which sometimes divided them: now almost hidden by the high corn on either side, and now emerging on an open field, where the mowers and haymakers were busy at their work: nor did he stop once, save now and then, for a few seconds, to recover breath, until he came, in a great heat, and covered with dust, on the little market-place of the market-town.

Here he paused, and looked about for the inn. There were a white bank, and a red brewery, and a yellow town-hall; and in one corner there was a large house, with all the wood about it painted green: before which was the sign of 'The George.' To this he hastened, as soon as it caught his eye.

He spoke to a postboy who was dozing under the gateway; and who, after hearing what he wanted, referred him to the ostler; who after hearing all he had to say again, referred him to the landlord; who was a tall gentleman in a blue neckcloth, a white hat, drab breeches, and boots with tops to match, leaning against a pump by the stable-door, picking his teeth with a silver toothpick.

This gentleman walked with much deliberation into the bar to make out the bill: which took a long time making out: and after it was ready, and paid, a horse had to be saddled, and a man to be dressed, which took up ten good minutes more. Meanwhile Oliver was in such a desperate state of impatience and anxiety, that he felt as if he could have jumped upon the horse himself, and galloped away, full tear, to the next stage. At length, all was ready; and the little parcel having been handed up, with many injunctions and entreaties for its speedy delivery, the man set spurs to his horse, and rattling over the uneven paving of the market-place, was out of the town, and galloping along the turnpike-road, in a couple of minutes.

As it was something to feel certain that assistance was sent for, and that no time had been lost, Oliver hurried up the inn-yard, with a somewhat lighter heart. He was turning out of the gateway when he accidently stumbled against a tall man wrapped in a cloak, who was at that moment coming out of the inn door.

'Hah!' cried the man, fixing his eyes on Oliver, and suddenly recoiling. 'What the devil's this?'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said Oliver; 'I was in a great hurry to get home, and didn't see you were coming.'

'Death!' muttered the man to himself, glaring at the boy with his large dark eyes. 'Who would have thought it! Grind him to ashes! He'd start up from a stone coffin, to come in my way!'

'I am sorry,' stammered Oliver, confused by the strange man's wild look. 'I hope I have not hurt you!'

'Rot you!' murmured the man, in a horrible passion; between his clenched teeth; 'if I had only had the courage to say the word, I might have been free of you in a night. Curses on your head, and black death on your heart, you imp! What are you doing here?'

The man shook his fist, as he uttered these words incoherently. He advanced towards Oliver, as if with the intention of aiming a blow at him, but fell violently on the ground: writhing and foaming, in a fit.

Oliver gazed, for a moment, at the struggles of the madman (for such he supposed him to be); and then darted into the house for help. Having seen him safely carried into the hotel, he turned his face homewards, running as fast as he could, to make up for lost time: and recalling with a great deal of astonishment and some fear, the extraordinary behaviour of the person from whom he had just parted.

The circumstance did not dwell in his recollection long, however: for when he reached the cottage, there was enough to occupy his mind, and to drive all considerations of self completely from his memory.

Rose Maylie had rapidly grown worse; before mid-night she was delirious. A medical practitioner, who resided on the spot, was in constant attendance upon her; and after first seeing the patient, he had taken Mrs. Maylie aside, and pronounced her disorder to be one of a most alarming nature. 'In fact,' he said, 'it would be little short of a miracle, if she recovered.'

How often did Oliver start from his bed that night, and stealing out, with noiseless footstep, to the staircase, listen for the slightest sound from the sick chamber! How often did a tremble shake his frame, and cold drops of terror start upon his brow, when a sudden trampling of feet caused him to fear that something too dreadful to think of, had even then occurred! And what had been the fervency of all the prayers he had ever muttered, compared with those he poured forth, now, in the agony and passion of his supplication for the life and health of the gentle creature, who was tottering on the deep grave's verge!

Oh! the suspense, the fearful, acute suspense, of standing idly by while the life of one we dearly love, is trembling in the balance! Oh! the racking thoughts that crowd upon the mind, and make the heart beat violently, and the breath come thick, by the force of the images they conjure up before it; the desperate anxiety *to be doing something* to relieve the pain, or lessen the danger, which we have no power to alleviate; the sinking of soul and spirit, which the sad remembrance of our helplessness produces; what tortures can equal these; what reflections or endeavours can, in the full tide and fever of the time, allay them!

Morning came; and the little cottage was lonely and still. People spoke in whispers; anxious faces appeared at the gate, from time to time; women and children went away in tears. All the livelong day, and for hours after it had grown dark, Oliver paced softly up and down the garden, raising his eyes every instant to the sick chamber, and shuddering to see the darkened window, looking as if death lay stretched inside. Late that night, Mr. Losberne arrived. 'It is hard,' said the good doctor, turning away as he spoke; 'so young; so much beloved; but there is very little hope.'

Another morning. The sun shone brightly; as brightly as if it looked upon no misery or care; and, with every leaf and flower in full bloom about her; with life, and health, and sounds and sights of joy, surrounding her on every side: the fair young creature lay, wasting fast. Oliver crept away to the old churchyard, and sitting down on one of the green mounds, wept and prayed for her, in silence.

There was such peace and beauty in the scene; so much of brightness and mirth in the sunny landscape; such blithesome music in the songs of the summer birds; such freedom in the rapid flight of the rook, careering overhead; so much of life and joyousness in all; that, when the boy raised his aching eyes, and looked about, the thought instinctively occurred to him, that this was not a time for death; that Rose could surely never die when humbler things were all so glad and gay; that graves were for cold and cheerless winter: not for sunlight and fragrance. He almost thought that shrouds were for the old and shrunken; and that they never wrapped the young and graceful form in their ghastly folds.

A knell from the church bell broke harshly on these youthful thoughts. Another! Again! It was tolling for the funeral service. A group of humble mourners entered the gate: wearing white favours; for the corpse was young. They stood uncovered by a grave; and there was a mother—a mother once—among the weeping train. But the sun shone brightly, and the birds sang on.

Oliver turned homeward, thinking on the many kindnesses he had received from the young lady, and wishing that the time could come again, that he might never cease showing her how grateful and attached he was. He had no cause for self-reproach on the score of neglect, or want of thought, for he had been devoted to her service; and yet a hundred little occasions rose up before him, on which he fancied he might have been more zealous, and more earnest, and wished he had been. We need be careful how we deal with those about us, when every death carries to some small circle of survivors, thoughts of so much omitted, and so little done—of so many things forgotten, and so many more which might have been repaired! There is no remorse so deep as that which is unavailing; if we would be spared its tortures, let us remember this, in time.

When he reached home Mrs. Maylie was sitting in the little parlour. Oliver's heart sank at sight of her; for she had never left the bedside of her niece; and he trembled to think what change could have driven her away. He learnt that she had fallen into a deep sleep, from which she would waken, either to recovery and life, or to bid them farewell, and die.

They sat, listening, and afraid to speak, for hours. The untasted meal was removed, with looks which showed that their thoughts were elsewhere, they watched the sun as he sank lower and lower, and, at length, cast over sky and earth those brilliant hues which herald his departure. Their quick ears caught the sound of an approaching footstep. They both involuntarily darted to the door, as Mr. Losberne entered.

'What of Rose?' cried the old lady. 'Tell me at once! I can bear it; anything but suspense! Oh, tell me! in the name of Heaven!'

'You must compose yourself,' said the doctor supporting her. 'Be calm, my dear ma'am, pray.'

'Let me go, in God's name! My dear child! She is dead! She is dying!'

'No!' cried the doctor, passionately. 'As He is good and merciful, she will live to bless us all, for years to come.'

The lady fell upon her knees, and tried to fold her hands together; but the energy which had supported her so long, fled up to Heaven with her first thanksgiving; and she sank into the friendly arms which were extended to receive her.

CHAPTER XXXIV

CONTAINS SOME INTRODUCTORY PARTICULARS RELATIVE TO A YOUNG GENTLEMAN WHO NOW ARRIVES UPON THE SCENE; AND A NEW ADVENTURE WHICH HAPPENED TO OLIVER

It was almost too much happiness to bear. Oliver felt stunned and stupefied by the unexpected intelligence; he could not weep, or speak, or rest. He had scarcely the power of understanding anything that had passed, until, after a long ramble in the quiet evening air, a burst of tears came to his relief, and he seemed to awaken, all at once, to a full sense of the joyful change that had occurred, and the almost insupportable load of anguish which had been taken from his breast.

The night was fast closing in, when he returned homeward: laden with flowers which he had culled, with peculiar care, for the adornment of the sick chamber. As he walked briskly along the road, he heard behind him, the noise of some vehicle, approaching at a furious pace. Looking round, he saw that it was a post-chaise, driven at great speed; and as the horses were galloping, and the road was narrow, he stood leaning against a gate until it should have passed him.

As it dashed on, Oliver caught a glimpse of a man in a white nightcap, whose face seemed familiar to him, although his view was so brief that he could not identify the person. In another second or two, the nightcap was thrust out of the chaise-window, and a stentorian voice bellowed to the driver to stop: which he did, as soon as he could pull up his horses. Then, the nightcap once again appeared: and the same voice called Oliver by his name.

'Here!' cried the voice. 'Oliver, what's the news? Miss Rose! Master O-li-ver!'

'Is is you, Giles?' cried Oliver, running up to the chaise-door.

Giles popped out his nightcap again, preparatory to making some reply, when he was suddenly pulled back by a young gentleman who occupied the other corner of the chaise, and who eagerly demanded what was the news.

'In a word!' cried the gentleman, 'Better or worse?'

'Better—much better!' replied Oliver, hastily.

'Thank Heaven!' exclaimed the gentleman. 'You are sure?'

'Quite, sir,' replied Oliver. 'The change took place only a few hours ago; and Mr. Losberne says, that all danger is at an end.'

The gentleman said not another word, but, opening the chaise-door, leaped out, and taking Oliver hurriedly by the arm, led him aside.

'You are quite certain? There is no possibility of any mistake on your part, my boy, is there?' demanded the gentleman in a tremulous voice. 'Do not deceive me, by awakening hopes that are not to be fulfilled.'

'I would not for the world, sir,' replied Oliver. 'Indeed you may believe me. Mr. Losberne's words were, that she would live to bless us all for many years to come. I heard him say so.'

The tears stood in Oliver's eyes as he recalled the scene which was the beginning of so much happiness; and the gentleman turned his face away, and remained silent, for some minutes. Oliver thought he heard him sob, more than once; but he feared to interrupt him by any fresh remark—for he could well guess what his feelings were—and so stood apart, feigning to be occupied with his nosegay.

All this time, Mr. Giles, with the white nightcap on, had been sitting on the steps of the chaise, supporting an elbow on each knee, and wiping his eyes with a blue cotton pocket-handkerchief dotted with white spots. That the honest fellow had not been feigning emotion, was abundantly demonstrated by the very red eyes with which he regarded the young gentleman, when he turned round and addressed him.

'I think you had better go on to my mother's in the chaise, Giles,' said he. 'I would rather walk slowly on, so as to gain a little time before I see her. You can say I am coming.'

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Harry,' said Giles: giving a final polish to his ruffled countenance with the handkerchief; 'but if you would leave the postboy to say that, I should be very much obliged to you. It wouldn't be proper for the maids to see me in this state, sir; I should never have any more authority with them if they did.'

'Well,' rejoined Harry Maylie, smiling, 'you can do as you like. Let him go on with the luggage, if you wish it, and do you follow with us. Only first exchange that nightcap for some more appropriate covering, or we shall be taken for madmen.'

Mr. Giles, reminded of his unbecoming costume, snatched off and pocketed his nightcap; and substituted a hat, of grave and sober shape, which he took out of the chaise. This done, the postboy drove off; Giles, Mr. Maylie, and Oliver, followed at their leisure.

As they walked along, Oliver glanced from time to time with much interest and curiosity at the new comer. He seemed about five-and-twenty years of age, and was of the middle height; his countenance was frank and handsome; and his demeanor easy and prepossessing. Notwithstanding the difference between youth and age, he bore so strong a likeness to the old lady, that Oliver would have had no great difficulty in imagining their relationship, if he had not already spoken of her as his mother.

Mrs. Maylie was anxiously waiting to receive her son when he reached the cottage. The meeting did not take place without great emotion on both sides.

'Mother!' whispered the young man; 'why did you not write before?'

'I did,' replied Mrs. Maylie; 'but, on reflection, I determined to keep back the letter until I had heard Mr. Losberne's opinion.'

'But why,' said the young man, 'why run the chance of that occurring which so nearly happened? If Rose had—I cannot utter that word now—if this illness had terminated differently, how could you ever have forgiven yourself! How could I ever have know happiness again!'

'If that *had* been the case, Harry,' said Mrs. Maylie, 'I fear your happiness would have been effectually blighted, and that your arrival here, a day sooner or a day later, would have been of very, very little import.'

'And who can wonder if it be so, mother?' rejoined the young man; 'or why should I say, *if*?—It is—it is—you know it, mother—you must know it!'

'I know that she deserves the best and purest love the heart of man can offer,' said Mrs. Maylie; 'I know that the devotion and affection of her nature require no ordinary return, but one that shall be deep and lasting. If I did not feel this, and know, besides, that a changed behaviour in one she loved would break her heart, I should not feel my task so difficult of performance, or have to encounter so many struggles in my own bosom, when I take what seems to me to be the strict line of duty.'

'This is unkind, mother,' said Harry. 'Do you still suppose that I am a boy ignorant of my own mind, and mistaking the impulses of my own soul?'

'I think, my dear son,' returned Mrs. Maylie, laying her hand upon his shoulder, 'that youth has many generous impulses which do not last; and that among them are some, which, being gratified, become only the more fleeting. Above all, I think' said the lady, fixing her eyes on her son's face, 'that if an enthusiastic, ardent, and ambitious man marry a wife on whose name there is a stain, which, though it originate in no fault of hers, may be visited by cold and sordid people upon her, and upon his children also: and, in exact proportion to his success in the world, be cast in his teeth, and made the subject of sneers against him: he may, no matter how generous and good his nature, one day repent of the connection he formed in early life. And she may have the pain of knowing that he does so.'

'Mother,' said the young man, impatiently, 'he would be a selfish brute, unworthy alike of the name of man and of the woman you describe, who acted thus.'

'You think so now, Harry,' replied his mother.

'And ever will!' said the young man. 'The mental agony I have suffered, during the last two days, wrings from me the avowal to you of a passion which, as you well know, is not one of yesterday, nor one I have lightly formed. On Rose, sweet, gentle girl! my heart is set, as firmly as ever heart of man was set on woman. I have no thought, no view, no hope in life, beyond her; and if you oppose me in this great stake, you take my peace and happiness in your hands, and cast them to the wind. Mother, think better of this, and of me, and do not disregard the happiness of which you seem to think so little.'

'Harry,' said Mrs. Maylie, 'it is because I think so much of warm and sensitive hearts, that I would spare them from being wounded. But we have said enough, and more than enough, on this matter, just now.'

'Let it rest with Rose, then,' interposed Harry. 'You will not press these overstrained opinions of yours, so far, as to throw any obstacle in my way?'

'I will not,' rejoined Mrs. Maylie; 'but I would have you consider—'

'I *have* considered!' was the impatient reply; 'Mother, I have considered, years and years. I have considered, ever since I have been capable of serious reflection. My feelings remain unchanged, as they ever will; and why should I suffer the pain of a delay in giving them vent, which can be productive of no earthly good? No! Before I leave this place, Rose shall hear me.'

'She shall,' said Mrs. Maylie.

'There is something in your manner, which would almost imply that she will hear me coldly, mother,' said the young man.

'Not coldly,' rejoined the old lady; 'far from it.'

'How then?' urged the young man. 'She has formed no other attachment?'

'No, indeed,' replied his mother; 'you have, or I mistake, too strong a hold on her affections already. What I would say,' resumed the old lady, stopping her son as he was about to speak, 'is this. Before you stake your all on this chance; before you suffer yourself to be carried to the highest point of hope; reflect for a few moments, my dear child, on Rose's history, and consider what effect the knowledge of her doubtful birth may have on her decision: devoted as she is to us, with all the intensity of her noble mind, and with that perfect sacrifice of self which, in all matters, great or trifling, has always been her characteristic.'

'What do you mean?'

'That I leave you to discover,' replied Mrs. Maylie. 'I must go back to her. God bless you!'

'I shall see you again to-night?' said the young man, eagerly.

'By and by,' replied the lady; 'when I leave Rose.'

'You will tell her I am here?' said Harry.

'Of course,' replied Mrs. Maylie.

'And say how anxious I have been, and how much I have suffered, and how I long to see her. You will not refuse to do this, mother?'

'No,' said the old lady; 'I will tell her all.' And pressing her son's hand, affectionately, she hastened from the room.

Mr. Losberne and Oliver had remained at another end of the apartment while this hurried conversation was proceeding. The former now held out his hand to Harry Maylie; and hearty salutations were exchanged between them. The doctor then communicated, in reply to multifarious questions from his young friend, a precise account of his patient's situation; which was quite as consolatory and full of promise, as Oliver's statement had encouraged him to hope; and to the whole of which, Mr. Giles, who affected to be busy about the luggage, listened with greedy ears.

'Have you shot anything particular, lately, Giles?' inquired the doctor, when he had concluded.

'Nothing particular, sir,' replied Mr. Giles, colouring up to the eyes.

'Nor catching any thieves, nor identifying any house-breakers?' said the doctor.

'None at all, sir,' replied Mr. Giles, with much gravity.

'Well,' said the doctor, 'I am sorry to hear it, because you do that sort of thing admirably. Pray, how is Brittles?'

'The boy is very well, sir,' said Mr. Giles, recovering his usual tone of patronage; 'and sends his respectful duty, sir.'

'That's well,' said the doctor. 'Seeing you here, reminds me, Mr. Giles, that on the day before that on which I was called away so hurriedly, I executed, at the request of your good mistress, a small commission in your favour. Just step into this corner a moment, will you?'

Mr. Giles walked into the corner with much importance, and some wonder, and was honoured with a short whispering conference with the doctor, on the termination of which, he made a great many bows, and retired with steps of unusual stateliness. The subject matter of this conference was not disclosed in the parlour, but the kitchen was speedily enlightened concerning it; for Mr. Giles walked straight thither, and having called for a mug of ale, announced, with an air of majesty, which was highly effective, that it had pleased his mistress, in consideration of his gallant behaviour on the occasion of that attempted robbery, to deposit, in the local savings-bank, the sum of five-and-twenty pounds, for his sole use and benefit. At this, the two women-servants lifted up their hands and eyes, and supposed that Mr. Giles, pulling out his shirt-frill, replied, 'No, no'; and that if they observed that he was at all haughty to his inferiors, he would thank them to tell him so. And then he made a great many other remarks, no less illustrative of his humility, which were received with equal favour and applause, and were, withal, as original and as much to the purpose, as the remarks of great men commonly are.

Above stairs, the remainder of the evening passed cheerfully away; for the doctor was in high spirits; and however fatigued or thoughtful Harry Maylie might have been at first, he was not proof against the worthy gentleman's good humour, which displayed itself in a great variety of sallies and professional recollections, and an abundance of small jokes, which struck Oliver as being the drollest things he had ever heard, and caused him to laugh proportionately; to the evident satisfaction of the doctor, who laughed immoderately at himself, and made Harry laugh almost as heartily, by the very force of sympathy. So, they were as pleasant a party as, under the circumstances, they could well have been; and it was late before they retired, with light and thankful hearts, to take that rest of which, after the doubt and suspense they had recently undergone, they stood much in need.

Oliver rose next morning, in better heart, and went about his usual occupations, with more hope and pleasure than he had known for many days. The birds were once more hung out, to sing, in their old places; and the sweetest wild flowers that could be found, were once more gathered to gladden Rose with their beauty. The melancholy which had seemed to the sad eyes of the anxious boy to hang, for days past, over every object, beautiful as all were, was dispelled by magic. The dew seemed to sparkle more brightly on the green leaves; the air to rustle among them with a sweeter music; and the sky itself to look more blue and bright. Such is the influence which the condition of our own thoughts, exercise, even over the appearance of external objects. Men who look on nature, and their fellow-men, and cry that all is dark and gloomy, are in the right; but the sombre colours are reflections from their own jaundiced eyes and hearts. The real hues are delicate, and need a clearer vision.

It is worthy of remark, and Oliver did not fail to note it at the time, that his morning expeditions were no longer made alone. Harry Maylie, after the very first morning when he met Oliver coming laden home, was seized with such a passion for flowers, and displayed such a taste in their arrangement, as left his young companion far behind. If Oliver were behindhand in these respects, he knew where the best were to be found; and morning after morning they scoured the country together, and brought home the fairest that blossomed. The window of the young lady's chamber was opened now; for she loved to feel the rich summer air stream in, and revive her with its freshness; but there always stood in water, just inside the lattice, one particular little bunch, which was made up with great care, every morning. Oliver could not help noticing that the withered flowers were never thrown away, although the little vase was regularly replenished; nor, could he help observing, that whenever the doctor came into the garden, he invariably cast his eyes up to that particular corner, and nodded his head most expressively, as he set forth on his morning's walk. Pending these observations, the days were flying by; and Rose was rapidly recovering.

Nor did Oliver's time hang heavy on his hands, although the young lady had not yet left her chamber, and there were no evening walks, save now and then, for a short distance, with Mrs. Maylie. He applied himself, with redoubled assiduity, to the instructions of the white-headed old gentleman, and laboured so hard that his quick progress surprised even himself. It was while he was engaged in this pursuit, that he was greatly startled and distressed by a most unexpected occurrence.

The little room in which he was accustomed to sit, when busy at his books, was on the ground-floor, at the back of the house. It was quite a cottage-room, with a lattice-window: around which were clusters of jessamine and honeysuckle, that crept over the casement, and filled the place with their delicious perfume. It looked into a garden, whence a wicket-gate opened into a small paddock; all beyond, was fine meadow-land and wood. There was no other dwelling near, in that direction; and the prospect it commanded was very extensive.

One beautiful evening, when the first shades of twilight were beginning to settle upon the earth, Oliver sat at this window, intent upon his books. He had been poring over them for some time; and, as the day had been uncommonly sultry, and he had exerted himself a great deal, it is no disparagement to the authors, whoever they may have been, to say, that gradually and by slow degrees, he fell asleep.

There is a kind of sleep that steals upon us sometimes, which, while it holds the body prisoner, does not free the mind from a sense of things about it, and enable it to ramble at its pleasure. So far as an overpowering heaviness, a prostration of strength, and an utter inability to control our thoughts or power of motion, can be called sleep, this is it; and yet, we have a consciousness of all that is going on about us, and, if we dream at such a time, words which are really spoken, or sounds which really exist at the moment, accommodate themselves with surprising readiness to our visions, until reality and imagination become so strangely blended that it is afterwards almost matter of impossibility to separate the two. Nor is this, the most striking phenomenon incidental to such a state. It is an undoubted fact, that although our senses of touch and sight be for the time dead, yet our sleeping thoughts, and the visionary scenes that pass before us, will be influenced and materially influenced, by the *mere silent presence* of some external object; which may not have been near us when we closed our eyes: and of whose vicinity we have had no waking consciousness.

Oliver knew, perfectly well, that he was in his own little room; that his books were lying on the table before him; that the sweet air was stirring among the creeping plants outside. And yet he was asleep. Suddenly, the scene changed; the air became close and confined; and he thought, with a glow of terror, that he was in the Jew's house again. There sat the hideous old man, in his accustomed corner, pointing at him, and whispering to another man, with his face averted, who sat beside him.

'Hush, my dear!' he thought he heard the Jew say; 'it is he, sure enough. Come away.'

'He!' the other man seemed to answer; 'could I mistake him, think you? If a crowd of ghosts were to put themselves into his exact shape, and he stood amongst them, there is something that would tell me how to point him out. If you buried him fifty feet deep, and took me across his grave, I fancy I should know, if there wasn't a mark above it, that he lay buried there?'

The man seemed to say this, with such dreadful hatred, that Oliver awoke with the fear, and started up.

Good Heaven! what was that, which sent the blood tingling to his heart, and deprived him of his voice, and of power to move! There—there—at the window—close before him—so close, that he could have almost touched him before he started back: with his eyes peering into the room, and meeting his: there stood the Jew! And beside him, white with rage or fear, or both, were the scowling features of the man who had accosted him in the inn-yard.

It was but an instant, a glance, a flash, before his eyes; and they were gone. But they had recognised him, and he them; and their look was as firmly impressed upon his memory, as if it had been deeply carved in stone, and set before him from his birth. He stood transfixed for a moment; then, leaping from the window into the garden, called loudly for help.

CHAPTER XXXV

CONTAINING THE UNSATISFACTORY RESULT OF OLIVER'S ADVENTURE;

AND A CONVERSATION OF SOME IMPORTANCE BETWEEN HARRY MAYLIE AND ROSE

When the inmates of the house, attracted by Oliver's cries, hurried to the spot from which they proceeded, they found him, pale and agitated, pointing in the direction of the meadows behind the house, and scarcely able to articulate the words, 'The Jew! the Jew!'

Mr. Giles was at a loss to comprehend what this outcry meant; but Harry Maylie, whose perceptions were something quicker, and who had heard Oliver's history from his mother, understood it at once.

'What direction did he take?' he asked, catching up a heavy stick which was standing in a corner.

'That,' replied Oliver, pointing out the course the man had taken; 'I missed them in an instant.'

'Then, they are in the ditch!' said Harry. 'Follow! And keep as near me, as you can.' So saying, he sprang over the hedge, and darted off with a speed which rendered it matter of exceeding difficulty for the others to keep near him.

Giles followed as well as he could; and Oliver followed too; and in the course of a minute or two, Mr. Losberne, who had been out walking, and just then returned, tumbled over the hedge after them, and picking himself up with more agility than he could have been supposed to possess, struck into the same course at no contemptible speed, shouting all the while, most prodigiously, to know what was the matter.

On they all went; nor stopped they once to breathe, until the leader, striking off into an angle of the field indicated by Oliver, began to search, narrowly, the ditch and hedge adjoining; which afforded time for the remainder of the party to come up; and for Oliver to communicate to Mr. Losberne the circumstances that had led to so vigorous a pursuit.

The search was all in vain. There were not even the traces of recent footsteps, to be seen. They stood now, on the summit of a little hill, commanding the open fields in every direction for three or four miles. There was the village in the hollow on the left; but, in order to gain that, after pursuing the track Oliver had pointed out, the men must have made a circuit of open ground, which it was impossible they could have accomplished in so short a time. A thick wood skirted the meadow-land in another direction; but they could not have gained that covert for the same reason.

'It must have been a dream, Oliver,' said Harry Maylie.

'Oh no, indeed, sir,' replied Oliver, shuddering at the very recollection of the old wretch's countenance; 'I saw him too plainly for that. I saw them both, as plainly as I see you now.'

'Who was the other?' inquired Harry and Mr. Losberne, together.

'The very same man I told you of, who came so suddenly upon me at the inn,' said Oliver. 'We had our eyes fixed full upon each other; and I could swear to him.'

'They took this way?' demanded Harry: 'are you sure?'

'As I am that the men were at the window,' replied Oliver, pointing down, as he spoke, to the hedge which divided the cottage-garden from the meadow. 'The tall man leaped over, just there; and the Jew, running a few paces to the right, crept through that gap.'

The two gentlemen watched Oliver's earnest face, as he spoke, and looking from him to each other, seemed to feel satisfied of the accuracy of what he said. Still, in no direction were there any appearances of the trampling of men in hurried flight. The grass was long; but it was trodden down nowhere, save where their own feet had crushed it. The sides and brinks of the ditches were of damp clay; but in no one place could they discern the print of men's shoes, or the slightest mark which would indicate that any feet had pressed the ground for hours before.

'This is strange!' said Harry.

'Strange?' echoed the doctor. 'Blathers and Duff, themselves, could make nothing of it.'

Notwithstanding the evidently useless nature of their search, they did not desist until the coming on of night rendered its further prosecution hopeless; and even then, they gave it up with reluctance. Giles was dispatched to the different ale-houses in the village, furnished with the best description Oliver could give of the appearance and dress of the strangers. Of these, the Jew was, at all events, sufficiently remarkable to be remembered, supposing he had been seen drinking, or loitering about; but Giles returned without any intelligence, calculated to dispel or lessen the mystery.

On the next day, fresh search was made, and the inquiries renewed; but with no better success. On the day following, Oliver and Mr. Maylie repaired to the market-town, in the hope of seeing or hearing something of the men there; but this effort was equally fruitless. After a few days, the affair began to be forgotten, as most affairs are, when wonder, having no fresh food to support it, dies away of itself.

Meanwhile, Rose was rapidly recovering. She had left her room: was able to go out; and mixing once more with the family, carried joy into the hearts of all.

But, although this happy change had a visible effect on the little circle; and although cheerful voices and merry laughter were once more heard in the cottage; there was at times, an unwonted restraint upon some there: even upon Rose herself: which Oliver could not fail to remark. Mrs. Maylie and her son were often closeted together for a long time; and more than once Rose appeared with traces of tears upon her face. After Mr. Losberne had fixed a day for his departure to Chertsey, these symptoms increased; and it became evident that something was in progress which affected the peace of the young lady, and of somebody else besides.

At length, one morning, when Rose was alone in the breakfast-parlour, Harry Maylie entered; and, with some hesitation, begged permission to speak with her for a few moments.

'A few—a very few—will suffice, Rose,' said the young man, drawing his chair towards her. 'What I shall have to say, has already presented itself to your mind; the most cherished hopes of my heart are not unknown to you, though from my lips you have not heard them stated.'

Rose had been very pale from the moment of his entrance; but that might have been the effect of her recent illness. She merely bowed; and bending over some plants that stood near, waited in silence for him to proceed.

'I—I—ought to have left here, before,' said Harry.

'You should, indeed,' replied Rose. 'Forgive me for saying so, but I wish you had.'

'I was brought here, by the most dreadful and agonising of all apprehensions,' said the young man; 'the fear of losing the one dear being on whom my every wish and hope are fixed. You had been dying; trembling between earth and heaven. We know that when the young, the beautiful, and good, are visited with sickness, their pure spirits insensibly turn towards their bright home of lasting rest; we know, Heaven help us! that the best and fairest of our kind, too often fade in blooming.'

There were tears in the eyes of the gentle girl, as these words were spoken; and when one fell upon the flower over which she bent, and glistened brightly in its cup, making it more beautiful, it seemed as though the outpouring of her fresh young heart, claimed kindred naturally, with the loveliest things in nature.

'A creature,' continued the young man, passionately, 'a creature as fair and innocent of guile as one of God's own angels, fluttered between life and death. Oh! who could hope, when the distant world to which she was akin, half opened to her view, that she would return to the sorrow and calamity of this! Rose, Rose, to know that you were passing away like some soft shadow, which a light from above, casts upon the earth; to have no hope that you would be spared to those who linger here; hardly to know a reason why you should be; to feel that you belonged to that bright sphere whither so many of the fairest and the best have winged their early flight; and yet to pray, amid all these consolations, that you might be restored to those who loved you—these were distractions almost too great to bear. They were mine, by day and night; and with them, came such a rushing torrent of fears, and apprehensions, and selfish regrets, lest you should die, and never know how devotedly I loved you, as almost bore down sense and reason in its course. You recovered. Day by day, and almost hour by hour, some drop of health came back, and mingling with the spent and feeble stream of life which circulated languidly within you, swelled it again to a high and rushing tide. I have watched you change almost from death, to life, with eyes that turned blind with their eagerness and deep affection. Do not tell me that you wish I had lost this; for it has softened my heart to all mankind.'

'I did not mean that,' said Rose, weeping; 'I only wish you had left here, that you might have turned to high and noble pursuits again; to pursuits well worthy of you.'

'There is no pursuit more worthy of me: more worthy of the highest nature that exists: than the struggle to win such a heart as yours,' said the young man, taking her hand. 'Rose, my own dear Rose! For years—for years—I have loved you; hoping to win my way to fame, and then come proudly home and tell you it had been pursued only for you to share; thinking, in my daydreams, how I would remind you, in that happy moment, of the many silent tokens I had given of a boy's attachment, and claim your hand, as in redemption of some old mute contract that had been sealed between us! That time has not arrived; but here, with not fame won, and no young vision realised, I offer you the heart so long your own, and stake my all upon the words with which you greet the offer.'

'Your behaviour has ever been kind and noble.' said Rose, mastering the emotions by which she was agitated. 'As you believe that I am not insensible or ungrateful, so hear my answer.'

'It is, that I may endeavour to deserve you; it is, dear Rose?'

'It is,' replied Rose, 'that you must endeavour to forget me; not as your old and dearly-attached companion, for that would wound me deeply; but, as the object of your love. Look into the world; think how many hearts you would be proud to gain, are there. Confide some other passion to me, if you will; I will be the truest, warmest, and most faithful friend you have.'

There was a pause, during which, Rose, who had covered her face with one hand, gave free vent to her tears. Harry still retained the other.

'And your reasons, Rose,' he said, at length, in a low voice; 'your reasons for this decision?'

'You have a right to know them,' rejoined Rose. 'You can say nothing to alter my resolution. It is a duty that I must perform. I owe it, alike to others, and to myself.'

'To yourself?'

'Yes, Harry. I owe it to myself, that I, a friendless, portionless, girl, with a blight upon my name, should not give your friends reason to suspect that I had sordidly yielded to your first passion, and fastened myself, a clog, on all your hopes and projects. I owe it to you and yours, to prevent you from opposing, in the warmth of your generous nature, this great obstacle to your progress in the world.'

'If your inclinations chime with your sense of duty—' Harry began.

'They do not,' replied Rose, colouring deeply.

'Then you return my love?' said Harry. 'Say but that, dear Rose; say but that; and soften the bitterness of this hard disappointment!'

'If I could have done so, without doing heavy wrong to him I loved,' rejoined Rose, 'I could have—'

'Have received this declaration very differently?' said Harry. 'Do not conceal that from me, at least, Rose.'

'I could,' said Rose. 'Stay!' she added, disengaging her hand, 'why should we prolong this painful interview? Most painful to me, and yet productive of lasting happiness, notwithstanding; for it *will* be happiness to know that I once held the high place in your regard which I now occupy, and every triumph you achieve in life will animate me with new fortitude and firmness. Farewell, Harry! As we have met to-day, we meet no more; but in other relations than those in which this conversation have placed us, we may be long and happily entwined; and may every blessing that the prayers of a true and earnest heart can call down from the source of all truth and sincerity, cheer and prosper you!'

'Another word, Rose,' said Harry. 'Your reason in your own words. From your own lips, let me hear it!'

'The prospect before you,' answered Rose, firmly, 'is a brilliant one. All the honours to which great talents and powerful connections can help men in public life, are in store for you. But those connections are proud; and I will neither mingle with such as may hold in scorn the mother who gave me life; nor bring disgrace or failure on the son of her who has so well supplied that mother's place. In a word,' said the young lady, turning away, as her temporary firmness forsook her, 'there is a stain upon my name, which the world visits on innocent heads. I will carry it into no blood but my own; and the reproach shall rest alone on me.'

'One word more, Rose. Dearest Rose! one more!' cried Harry, throwing himself before her. 'If I had been less—less fortunate, the world would call it—if some obscure and peaceful life had been my destiny—if I had been poor, sick, helpless—would you have turned from me then? Or has my probable advancement to riches and honour, given this scruple birth?'

'Do not press me to reply,' answered Rose. 'The question does not arise, and never will. It is unfair, almost unkind, to urge it.'

'If your answer be what I almost dare to hope it is,' retorted Harry, 'it will shed a gleam of happiness upon my lonely way, and light the path before me. It is not an idle thing to do so much, by the utterance of a few brief words, for one who loves you beyond all else. Oh, Rose: in the name of my ardent and enduring attachment; in the name of all I have suffered for you, and all you doom me to undergo; answer me this one question!'

'Then, if your lot had been differently cast,' rejoined Rose; 'if you had been even a little, but not so far, above me; if I could have been a help and comfort to you in any humble scene of peace and retirement, and not a blot and drawback in ambitious and distinguished crowds; I should have been spared this trial. I have every reason to be happy, very happy, now; but then, Harry, I own I should have been happier.'

Busy recollections of old hopes, cherished as a girl, long ago, crowded into the mind of Rose, while making this avowal; but they brought tears with them, as old hopes will when they come back withered; and they relieved her.

'I cannot help this weakness, and it makes my purpose stronger,' said Rose, extending her hand. 'I must leave you now, indeed.'

'I ask one promise,' said Harry. 'Once, and only once more,—say within a year, but it may be much sooner,—I may speak to you again on this subject, for the last time.'

'Not to press me to alter my right determination,' replied Rose, with a melancholy smile; 'it will be useless.'

'No,' said Harry; 'to hear you repeat it, if you will—finally repeat it! I will lay at your feet, whatever of station of fortune I may possess; and if you still adhere to your present resolution, will not seek, by word or act, to change it.'

'Then let it be so,' rejoined Rose; 'it is but one pang the more, and by that time I may be enabled to bear it better.'

She extended her hand again. But the young man caught her to his bosom; and imprinting one kiss on her beautiful forehead, hurried from the room.

CHAPTER XXXVI

IS A VERY SHORT ONE, AND MAY APPEAR OF NO GREAT IMPORTANCE IN ITS PLACE, BUT IT SHOULD BE READ NOTWITHSTANDING, AS A SEQUEL TO THE LAST, AND A KEY TO

ONE THAT WILL FOLLOW WHEN ITS TIME ARRIVES

'And so you are resolved to be my travelling companion this morning; eh?' said the doctor, as Harry Maylie joined him and Oliver at the breakfast-table. 'Why, you are not in the same mind or intention two half-hours together!'

'You will tell me a different tale one of these days,' said Harry, colouring without any perceptible reason.

'I hope I may have good cause to do so,' replied Mr. Losberne; 'though I confess I don't think I shall. But yesterday morning you had made up your mind, in a great hurry, to stay here, and to accompany your mother, like a dutiful son, to the sea-side. Before noon, you announce that you are going to do me the honour of accompanying me as far as I go, on your road to London. And at night, you urge me, with great mystery, to start before the ladies are stirring; the consequence of which is, that young Oliver here is pinned down to his breakfast when he ought to be ranging the meadows after botanical phenomena of all kinds. Too bad, isn't it, Oliver?'

'I should have been very sorry not to have been at home when you and Mr. Maylie went away, sir,' rejoined Oliver.

'That's a fine fellow,' said the doctor; 'you shall come and see me when you return. But, to speak seriously, Harry; has any communication from the great nobs produced this sudden anxiety on your part to be gone?'

'The great nobs,' replied Harry, 'under which designation, I presume, you include my most stately uncle, have not communicated with me at all, since I have been here; nor, at this time of the year, is it likely that anything would occur to render necessary my immediate attendance among them.'

'Well,' said the doctor, 'you are a queer fellow. But of course they will get you into parliament at the election before Christmas, and these sudden shiftings and changes are no bad preparation for political life. There's something in that. Good training is always desirable, whether the race be for place, cup, or sweepstakes.'

Harry Maylie looked as if he could have followed up this short dialogue by one or two remarks that would have staggered the doctor not a little; but he contented himself with saying, 'We shall see,' and pursued the subject no farther. The post-chaise drove up to the door shortly afterwards; and Giles coming in for the luggage, the good doctor bustled out, to see it packed.

'Oliver,' said Harry Maylie, in a low voice, 'let me speak a word with you.'

Oliver walked into the window-recess to which Mr. Maylie beckoned him; much surprised at the mixture of sadness and boisterous spirits, which his whole behaviour displayed.

'You can write well now?' said Harry, laying his hand upon his arm.

'I hope so, sir,' replied Oliver.

'I shall not be at home again, perhaps for some time; I wish you would write to me—say once a fort-night: every alternate Monday: to the General Post Office in London. Will you?'

'Oh! certainly, sir; I shall be proud to do it,' exclaimed Oliver, greatly delighted with the commission.

'I should like to know how—how my mother and Miss Maylie are,' said the young man; 'and you can fill up a sheet by telling me what walks you take, and what you talk about, and whether she—they, I mean—seem happy and quite well. You understand me?'

'Oh! quite, sir, quite,' replied Oliver.

'I would rather you did not mention it to them,' said Harry, hurrying over his words; 'because it might make my mother anxious to write to me oftener, and it is a trouble and worry to her. Let it be a secret between you and me; and mind you tell me everything! I depend upon you.'

Oliver, quite elated and honoured by a sense of his importance, faithfully promised to be secret and explicit in his communications. Mr. Maylie took leave of him, with many assurances of his regard and protection.

The doctor was in the chaise; Giles (who, it had been arranged, should be left behind) held the door open in his hand; and the women-servants were in the garden, looking on. Harry cast one slight glance at the latticed window, and jumped into the carriage.

'Drive on!' he cried, 'hard, fast, full gallop! Nothing short of flying will keep pace with me, to-day.'

'Halloa!' cried the doctor, letting down the front glass in a great hurry, and shouting to the postillion; 'something very short of flying will keep pace with *me*. Do you hear?'

Jingling and clattering, till distance rendered its noise inaudible, and its rapid progress only perceptible to the eye, the vehicle wound its way along the road, almost hidden in a cloud of dust: now wholly disappearing, and now becoming visible again, as intervening objects, or the intricacies of the way, permitted. It was not until even the dusty cloud was no longer to be seen, that the gazers dispersed.

And there was one looker-on, who remained with eyes fixed upon the spot where the carriage had disappeared, long after it was many miles away; for, behind the white curtain which had shrouded her from view when Harry raised his eyes towards the window, sat Rose herself.

'He seems in high spirits and happy,' she said, at length. 'I feared for a time he might be otherwise. I was mistaken. I am very, very glad.'

Tears are signs of gladness as well as grief; but those which coursed down Rose's face, as she sat pensively at the window, still gazing in the same direction, seemed to tell more of sorrow than of joy.

CHAPTER XXXVII

IN WHICH THE READER MAY PERCEIVE A CONTRAST, NOT UNCOMMON IN MATRIMONIAL CASES

Mr. Bumble sat in the workhouse parlour, with his eyes moodily fixed on the cheerless grate, whence, as it was summer time, no brighter gleam proceeded, than the reflection of certain sickly rays of the sun, which were sent back from its cold and shining surface. A paper fly-cage dangled from the ceiling, to which he occasionally raised his eyes in gloomy thought; and, as the heedless insects hovered round the gaudy net-work, Mr. Bumble would heave a deep sigh, while a more gloomy shadow overspread his countenance. Mr. Bumble was meditating; it might be that the insects brought to mind, some painful passage in his own past life.

Nor was Mr. Bumble's gloom the only thing calculated to awaken a pleasing melancholy in the bosom of a spectator. There were not wanting other appearances, and those closely connected with his own person, which announced that a great change had taken place in the position of his affairs. The laced coat, and the cocked hat; where were they? He still wore knee-breeches, and dark cotton stockings on his nether limbs; but they were not *the* breeches. The coat was wide-skirted; and in that respect like *the* coat, but, oh how different! The mighty cocked hat was replaced by a modest round one. Mr. Bumble was no longer a beadle.

There are some promotions in life, which, independent of the more substantial rewards they offer, require peculiar value and dignity from the coats and waistcoats connected with them. A field-marshal has his uniform; a bishop his silk apron; a counsellor his silk gown; a beadle his cocked hat. Strip the bishop of his apron, or the beadle of his hat and lace; what are they? Men. Mere men. Dignity, and even holiness too, sometimes, are more questions of coat and waistcoat than some people imagine.

Mr. Bumble had married Mrs. Corney, and was master of the workhouse. Another beadle had come into power. On him the cocked hat, gold-laced coat, and staff, had all three descended.

'And to-morrow two months it was done!' said Mr. Bumble, with a sigh. 'It seems a age.'

Mr. Bumble might have meant that he had concentrated a whole existence of happiness into the short space of eight weeks; but the sigh—there was a vast deal of meaning in the sigh.

'I sold myself,' said Mr. Bumble, pursuing the same train of relection, 'for six teaspoons, a pair of sugar-tongs, and a milk-pot; with a small quantity of second-hand furniture, and twenty pound in money. I went very reasonable. Cheap, dirt cheap!'

'Cheap!' cried a shrill voice in Mr. Bumble's ear: 'you would have been dear at any price; and dear enough I paid for you, Lord above knows that!'

Mr. Bumble turned, and encountered the face of his interesting consort, who, imperfectly comprehending the few words she had overheard of his complaint, had hazarded the foregoing remark at a venture.

'Mrs. Bumble, ma'am!' said Mr. Bumble, with a sentimental sternness.

'Well!' cried the lady.

'Have the goodness to look at me,' said Mr. Bumble, fixing his eyes upon her. (If she stands such a eye as that,' said Mr. Bumble to himself, 'she can stand anything. It is a eye I never knew to fail with paupers. If it fails with her, my power is gone.')

Whether an exceedingly small expansion of eye be sufficient to quell paupers, who, being lightly fed, are in no very high condition; or whether the late Mrs. Corney was particularly proof against eagle glances; are matters of opinion. The matter of fact, is, that the matron was in no way overpowered by Mr. Bumble's scowl, but, on the contrary, treated it with great disdain, and even raised a laugh thereat, which sounded as though it were genuine.

On hearing this most unexpected sound, Mr. Bumble looked, first incredulous, and afterwards amazed. He then relapsed into his former state; nor did he rouse himself until his attention was again awakened by the voice of his partner.

'Are you going to sit snoring there, all day?' inquired Mrs. Bumble.

'I am going to sit here, as long as I think proper, ma'am,' rejoined Mr. Bumble; 'and although I was *not* snoring, I shall snore, gape, sneeze, laugh, or cry, as the humour strikes me; such being my prerogative.'

'*Your* prerogative!' sneered Mrs. Bumble, with ineffable contempt.

'I said the word, ma'am,' said Mr. Bumble. 'The prerogative of a man is to command.'

'And what's the prerogative of a woman, in the name of Goodness?' cried the relict of Mr. Corney deceased.

'To obey, ma'am,' thundered Mr. Bumble. 'Your late unfortunate husband should have taught it you; and then, perhaps, he might have been alive now. I wish he was, poor man!'

Mrs. Bumble, seeing at a glance, that the decisive moment had now arrived, and that a blow struck for the mastership on one side or other, must necessarily be final and conclusive, no sooner heard this allusion to the dead and gone, than she dropped into a chair, and with a loud scream that Mr. Bumble was a hard-hearted brute, fell into a paroxysm of tears.

But, tears were not the things to find their way to Mr. Bumble's soul; his heart was waterproof. Like washable beaver hats that improve with rain, his nerves were rendered stouter and more vigorous, by showers of tears, which, being tokens of weakness, and so far tacit admissions of his own power, pleased and exalted him. He eyed his good lady with looks of great satisfaction, and begged, in an encouraging manner, that she should cry her hardest: the exercise being looked upon, by the faculty, as strongly conducive to health.

'It opens the lungs, washes the countenance, exercises the eyes, and softens down the temper,' said Mr. Bumble. 'So cry away.'

As he discharged himself of this pleasantry, Mr. Bumble took his hat from a peg, and putting it on, rather rakishly, on one side, as a man might, who felt he had asserted his superiority in a becoming manner, thrust his hands into his pockets, and sauntered towards the door, with much ease and waggishness depicted in his whole appearance.

Now, Mrs. Corney that was, had tried the tears, because they were less troublesome than a manual assault; but, she was quite prepared to make trial of the latter mode of proceeding, as Mr. Bumble was not long in discovering.

The first proof he experienced of the fact, was conveyed in a hollow sound, immediately succeeded by the sudden flying off of his hat to the opposite end of the room. This preliminary proceeding laying bare his head, the expert lady, clasping him tightly round the throat with one hand, inflicted a shower of blows (dealt with singular vigour and dexterity) upon it with the other. This done, she created a little variety by scratching his face, and tearing his hair; and, having, by this time, inflicted as much punishment as she deemed necessary for the offence, she pushed him over a chair, which was luckily well situated for the purpose: and defied him to talk about his prerogative again, if he dared.

'Get up!' said Mrs. Bumble, in a voice of command. 'And take yourself away from here, unless you want me to do something desperate.'

Mr. Bumble rose with a very rueful countenance: wondering much what something desperate might be. Picking up his hat, he looked towards the door.

'Are you going?' demanded Mrs. Bumble.

'Certainly, my dear, certainly,' rejoined Mr. Bumble, making a quicker motion towards the door. 'I didn't intend to—I'm going, my dear! You are so very violent, that really I—'

At this instant, Mrs. Bumble stepped hastily forward to replace the carpet, which had been kicked up in the scuffle. Mr. Bumble immediately darted out of the room, without bestowing another thought on his unfinished sentence: leaving the late Mrs. Corney in full possession of the field.

Mr. Bumble was fairly taken by surprise, and fairly beaten. He had a decided propensity for bullying: derived no inconsiderable pleasure from the exercise of petty cruelty; and, consequently, was (it is needless to say) a coward. This is by no means a disparagement to his character; for many official personages, who are held in high respect and admiration, are the victims of similar infirmities. The remark is made, indeed, rather in his favour than otherwise, and with a view of impressing the reader with a just sense of his qualifications for office.

But, the measure of his degradation was not yet full. After making a tour of the house, and thinking, for the first time, that the poor-laws really were too hard on people; and that men who ran away from their wives, leaving them chargeable to the parish, ought, in justice to be visited with no punishment at all, but rather rewarded as meritorious individuals who had suffered much; Mr. Bumble came to a room where some of the female paupers were usually employed in washing the parish linen: when the sound of voices in conversation, now proceeded.

'Hem!' said Mr. Bumble, summoning up all his native dignity. 'These women at least shall continue to respect the prerogative. Hallo! hallo there! What do you mean by this noise, you hussies?'

With these words, Mr. Bumble opened the door, and walked in with a very fierce and angry manner: which was at once exchanged for a most humiliated and cowering air, as his eyes unexpectedly rested on the form of his lady wife.

'My dear,' said Mr. Bumble, 'I didn't know you were here.'

'Didn't know I was here!' repeated Mrs. Bumble. 'What do *you* do here?'

'I thought they were talking rather too much to be doing their work properly, my dear,' replied Mr. Bumble: glancing distractedly at a couple of old women at the wash-tub, who were comparing notes of admiration at the workhouse-master's humility.

'*You* thought they were talking too much?' said Mrs. Bumble. 'What business is it of yours?'

'Why, my dear—' urged Mr. Bumble submissively.

'What business is it of yours?' demanded Mrs. Bumble, again.

'It's very true, you're matron here, my dear,' submitted Mr. Bumble; 'but I thought you mightn't be in the way just then.'

'I'll tell you what, Mr. Bumble,' returned his lady. 'We don't want any of your interference. You're a great deal too fond of poking your nose into things that don't concern you, making everybody in the house laugh, the moment your back is turned, and making yourself look like a fool every hour in the day. Be off; come!'

Mr. Bumble, seeing with excruciating feelings, the delight of the two old paupers, who were tittering together most rapturously, hesitated for an instant. Mrs. Bumble, whose patience brooked no delay, caught up a bowl of soap-suds, and motioning him towards the door, ordered him instantly to depart, on pain of receiving the contents upon his portly person.

What could Mr. Bumble do? He looked dejectedly round, and slunk away; and, as he reached the door, the titterings of the paupers broke into a shrill chuckle of irrepressible delight. It wanted but this. He was degraded in their eyes; he had lost caste and station before the very paupers; he had fallen from all the height and pomp of beadleship, to the lowest depth of the most snubbed hen-peckery.

'All in two months!' said Mr. Bumble, filled with dismal thoughts. 'Two months! No more than two months ago, I was not only my own master, but everybody else's, so far as the porochial workhouse was concerned, and now!—'

It was too much. Mr. Bumble boxed the ears of the boy who opened the gate for him (for he had reached the portal in his reverie); and walked, distractedly, into the street.

He walked up one street, and down another, until exercise had abated the first passion of his grief; and then the revulsion of feeling made him thirsty. He passed a great many public-houses; but, at length paused before one in a by-way, whose parlour, as he gathered from a hasty peep over the blinds, was deserted, save by one solitary customer. It began to rain, heavily, at the moment. This determined him. Mr. Bumble stepped in; and ordering something to drink, as he passed the bar, entered the apartment into which he had looked from the street.

The man who was seated there, was tall and dark, and wore a large cloak. He had the air of a stranger; and seemed, by a certain haggardness in his look, as well as by the dusty soils on his dress, to have travelled some distance. He eyed Bumble askance, as he entered, but scarcely deigned to nod his head in acknowledgment of his salutation.

Mr. Bumble had quite dignity enough for two; supposing even that the stranger had been more familiar: so he drank his gin-and-water in silence, and read the paper with great show of pomp and circumstance.

It so happened, however: as it will happen very often, when men fall into company under such circumstances: that Mr. Bumble felt, every now and then, a powerful inducement, which he could not resist, to steal a look at the stranger: and that whenever he did so, he withdrew his eyes, in some confusion, to find that the stranger was at that moment stealing a look at him. Mr. Bumble's awkwardness was enhanced by the very remarkable expression of the stranger's eye, which was keen and bright, but shadowed by a scowl of distrust and suspicion, unlike anything he had ever observed before, and repulsive to behold.

When they had encountered each other's glance several times in this way, the stranger, in a harsh, deep voice, broke silence.

'Were you looking for me,' he said, 'when you peered in at the window?'

'Not that I am aware of, unless you're Mr.—' Here Mr. Bumble stopped short; for he was curious to know the stranger's name, and thought in his impatience, he might supply the blank.

'I see you were not,' said the stranger; an expression of quiet sarcasm playing about his mouth; 'or you have known my name. You don't know it. I would recommend you not to ask for it.'

'I meant no harm, young man,' observed Mr. Bumble, majestically.

'And have done none,' said the stranger.

Another silence succeeded this short dialogue: which was again broken by the stranger.

'I have seen you before, I think?' said he. 'You were differently dressed at that time, and I only passed you in the street, but I should know you again. You were beadle here, once; were you not?'

'I was,' said Mr. Bumble, in some surprise; 'porochial beadle.'

'Just so,' rejoined the other, nodding his head. 'It was in that character I saw you. What are you now?'

'Master of the workhouse,' rejoined Mr. Bumble, slowly and impressively, to check any undue familiarity the stranger might otherwise assume. 'Master of the workhouse, young man!'

'You have the same eye to your own interest, that you always had, I doubt not?' resumed the stranger, looking keenly into Mr. Bumble's eyes, as he raised them in astonishment at the question.

'Don't scruple to answer freely, man. I know you pretty well, you see.'

'I suppose, a married man,' replied Mr. Bumble, shading his eyes with his hand, and surveying the stranger, from head to foot, in evident perplexity, 'is not more averse to turning an honest penny when he can, than a single one. Porochial officers are not so well paid that they can afford to refuse any little extra fee, when it comes to them in a civil and proper manner.'

The stranger smiled, and nodded his head again: as much to say, he had not mistaken his man; then rang the bell.

'Fill this glass again,' he said, handing Mr. Bumble's empty tumbler to the landlord. 'Let it be strong and hot. You like it so, I suppose?'

'Not too strong,' replied Mr. Bumble, with a delicate cough.

'You understand what that means, landlord!' said the stranger, drily.

The host smiled, disappeared, and shortly afterwards returned with a steaming jorum: of which, the first gulp brought the water into Mr. Bumble's eyes.

'Now listen to me,' said the stranger, after closing the door and window. 'I came down to this place, to-day, to find you out; and, by one of those chances which the devil throws in the way of his friends sometimes, you walked into the very room I was sitting in, while you were uppermost in my mind. I want some information from you. I don't ask you to give it for nothing, slight as it is. Put up that, to begin with.'

As he spoke, he pushed a couple of sovereigns across the table to his companion, carefully, as though unwilling that the chinking of money should be heard without. When Mr. Bumble had scrupulously examined the coins, to see that they were genuine, and had put them up, with much satisfaction, in his waistcoat-pocket, he went on:

'Carry your memory back—let me see—twelve years, last winter.'

'It's a long time,' said Mr. Bumble. 'Very good. I've done it.'

'The scene, the workhouse.'

'Good!'

'And the time, night.'

'Yes.'

'And the place, the crazy hole, wherever it was, in which miserable drabs brought forth the life and health so often denied to themselves—gave birth to puling children for the parish to rear; and hid their shame, rot 'em in the grave!'

'The lying-in room, I suppose?' said Mr. Bumble, not quite following the stranger's excited description.

'Yes,' said the stranger. 'A boy was born there.'

'A many boys,' observed Mr. Bumble, shaking his head, despondingly.

'A murrain on the young devils!' cried the stranger; 'I speak of one; a meek-looking, pale-faced boy, who was apprenticed down here, to a coffin-maker—I wish he had made his coffin, and screwed his body in it—and who afterwards ran away to London, as it was supposed.

'Why, you mean Oliver! Young Twist!' said Mr. Bumble; 'I remember him, of course. There wasn't a obstinater young rascal—'

'It's not of him I want to hear; I've heard enough of him,' said the stranger, stopping Mr. Bumble in the outset of a tirade on the subject of poor Oliver's vices. 'It's of a woman; the hag that nursed his mother. Where is she?'

'Where is she?' said Mr. Bumble, whom the gin-and-water had rendered facetious. 'It would be hard to tell. There's no midwifery there, whichever place she's gone to; so I suppose she's out of employment, anyway.'

'What do you mean?' demanded the stranger, sternly.

'That she died last winter,' rejoined Mr. Bumble.

The man looked fixedly at him when he had given this information, and although he did not withdraw his eyes for some time afterwards, his gaze gradually became vacant and abstracted, and he seemed lost in thought. For some time, he appeared doubtful whether he ought to be relieved or disappointed by the intelligence; but at length he breathed more freely; and withdrawing his eyes, observed that it was no great matter. With that he rose, as if to depart.

But Mr. Bumble was cunning enough; and he at once saw that an opportunity was opened, for the lucrative disposal of some secret in the possession of his better half. He well remembered the night of old Sally's death, which the occurrences of that day had given him good reason to recollect, as the occasion on which he had proposed to Mrs. Corney; and although that lady had never confided to him the disclosure of which she had been the solitary witness, he had heard enough to know that it related to something that had occurred in the old woman's attendance, as workhouse nurse, upon the young mother of Oliver Twist. Hastily calling this circumstance to mind, he informed the stranger, with an air of mystery, that one woman had been closeted with the old harridan shortly before she died; and that she could, as he had reason to believe, throw some light on the subject of his inquiry.

'How can I find her?' said the stranger, thrown off his guard; and plainly showing that all his fears (whatever they were) were aroused afresh by the intelligence.

'Only through me,' rejoined Mr. Bumble.

'When?' cried the stranger, hastily.

'To-morrow,' rejoined Bumble.

'At nine in the evening,' said the stranger, producing a scrap of paper, and writing down upon it, an obscure address by the water-side, in characters that betrayed his agitation; 'at nine in the evening, bring her to me there. I needn't tell you to be secret. It's your interest.'

With these words, he led the way to the door, after stopping to pay for the liquor that had been drunk. Shortly remarking that their roads were different, he departed, without more ceremony than an emphatic repetition of the hour of appointment for the following night.

On glancing at the address, the parochial functionary observed that it contained no name. The stranger had not gone far, so he made after him to ask it.

'What do you want?' cried the man, turning quickly round, as Bumble touched him on the arm. 'Following me?'

'Only to ask a question,' said the other, pointing to the scrap of paper. 'What name am I to ask for?'

'Monks!' rejoined the man; and strode hastily, away.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

CONTAINING AN ACCOUNT OF WHAT PASSED BETWEEN MR. AND MRS. BUMBLE, AND MR. MONKS, AT THEIR NOCTURNAL INTERVIEW

It was a dull, close, overcast summer evening. The clouds, which had been threatening all day, spread out in a dense and sluggish mass of vapour, already yielded large drops of rain, and seemed to presage a violent thunder-storm, when Mr. and Mrs. Bumble, turning out of the main street of the town, directed their course towards a scattered little colony of ruinous houses, distant from it some mile and a-half, or thereabouts, and erected on a low unwholesome swamp, bordering upon the river.

They were both wrapped in old and shabby outer garments, which might, perhaps, serve the double purpose of protecting their persons from the rain, and sheltering them from observation. The husband carried a lantern, from which, however, no light yet shone; and trudged on, a few paces in front, as though—the way being dirty—to give his wife the benefit of treading in his heavy footprints. They went on, in profound silence; every now and then, Mr. Bumble relaxed his pace, and turned his head as if to make sure that his helpmate was following; then, discovering that she was close at his heels, he mended his rate of walking, and proceeded, at a considerable increase of speed, towards their place of destination.

This was far from being a place of doubtful character; for it had long been known as the residence of none but low ruffians, who, under various pretences of living by their labour, subsisted chiefly on plunder and crime. It was a collection of mere hovels: some, hastily built with loose bricks: others, of old worm-eaten ship-timber: jumbled together without any attempt at order or arrangement, and planted, for the most part, within a few feet of the river's bank. A few leaky boats drawn up on the mud, and made fast to the dwarf wall which skirted it: and here and there an oar or coil of rope: appeared, at first, to indicate that the inhabitants of these miserable cottages pursued some avocation on the river; but a glance at the shattered and useless condition of the articles thus displayed, would have led a passer-by, without much difficulty, to the conjecture that they were disposed there, rather for the preservation of appearances, than with any view to their being actually employed.

In the heart of this cluster of huts; and skirting the river, which its upper stories overhung; stood a large building, formerly used as a manufactory of some kind. It had, in its day, probably furnished employment to the inhabitants of the surrounding tenements. But it had long since gone to ruin. The rat, the worm, and the action of the damp, had weakened and rotted the piles on which it stood; and a considerable portion of the building had already sunk down into the water; while the remainder, tottering and bending over the dark stream, seemed to wait a favourable opportunity of following its old companion, and involving itself in the same fate.

It was before this ruinous building that the worthy couple paused, as the first peal of distant thunder reverberated in the air, and the rain commenced pouring violently down.

'The place should be somewhere here,' said Bumble, consulting a scrap of paper he held in his hand.

'Halloa there!' cried a voice from above.

Following the sound, Mr. Bumble raised his head and descried a man looking out of a door, breast-high, on the second story.

'Stand still, a minute,' cried the voice; 'I'll be with you directly.' With which the head disappeared, and the door closed.

'Is that the man?' asked Mr. Bumble's good lady.

Mr. Bumble nodded in the affirmative.

'Then, mind what I told you,' said the matron: 'and be careful to say as little as you can, or you'll betray us at once.'

Mr. Bumble, who had eyed the building with very rueful looks, was apparently about to express some doubts relative to the advisability of proceeding any further with the enterprise just then, when he was prevented by the appearance of Monks: who opened a small door, near which they stood, and beckoned them inwards.

'Come in!' he cried impatiently, stamping his foot upon the ground. 'Don't keep me here!'

The woman, who had hesitated at first, walked boldly in, without any other invitation. Mr. Bumble, who was ashamed or afraid to lag behind, followed: obviously very ill at ease and with scarcely any of that remarkable dignity which was usually his chief characteristic.

'What the devil made you stand lingering there, in the wet?' said Monks, turning round, and addressing Bumble, after he had bolted the door behind them.

'We—we were only cooling ourselves,' stammered Bumble, looking apprehensively about him.

'Cooling yourselves!' retorted Monks. 'Not all the rain that ever fell, or ever will fall, will put as much of hell's fire out, as a man can carry about with him. You won't cool yourself so easily; don't think it!'

With this agreeable speech, Monks turned short upon the matron, and bent his gaze upon her, till even she, who was not easily cowed, was fain to withdraw her eyes, and turn them towards the ground.

'This is the woman, is it?' demanded Monks.

'Hem! That is the woman,' replied Mr. Bumble, mindful of his wife's caution.

'You think women never can keep secrets, I suppose?' said the matron, interposing, and returning, as she spoke, the searching look of Monks.

'I know they will always keep *one* till it's found out,' said Monks.

'And what may that be?' asked the matron.

'The loss of their own good name,' replied Monks. 'So, by the same rule, if a woman's a party to a secret that might hang or transport her, I'm not afraid of her telling it to anybody; not I! Do you understand, mistress?'

'No,' rejoined the matron, slightly colouring as she spoke.

'Of course you don't!' said Monks. 'How should you?'

Bestowing something half-way between a smile and a frown upon his two companions, and again beckoning them to follow him, the man hastened across the apartment, which was of considerable extent, but low in the roof. He was preparing to ascend a steep staircase, or rather ladder, leading to another floor of warehouses above: when a bright flash of lightning streamed down the aperture, and a peal of thunder followed, which shook the crazy building to its centre.

'Hear it!' he cried, shrinking back. 'Hear it! Rolling and crashing on as if it echoed through a thousand caverns where the devils were hiding from it. I hate the sound!'

He remained silent for a few moments; and then, removing his hands suddenly from his face, showed, to the unspeakable discomposure of Mr. Bumble, that it was much distorted and discoloured.

'These fits come over me, now and then,' said Monks, observing his alarm; 'and thunder sometimes brings them on. Don't mind me now; it's all over for this once.'

Thus speaking, he led the way up the ladder; and hastily closing the window-shutter of the room into which it led, lowered a lantern which hung at the end of a rope and pulley passed through one of the heavy beams in the ceiling: and which cast a dim light upon an old table and three chairs that were placed beneath it.

'Now,' said Monks, when they had all three seated themselves, 'the sooner we come to our business, the better for all. The woman know what it is, does she?'

The question was addressed to Bumble; but his wife anticipated the reply, by intimating that she was perfectly acquainted with it.

'He is right in saying that you were with this hag the night she died; and that she told you something—'

'About the mother of the boy you named,' replied the matron interrupting him. 'Yes.'

'The first question is, of what nature was her communication?' said Monks.

'That's the second,' observed the woman with much deliberation. 'The first is, what may the communication be worth?'

'Who the devil can tell that, without knowing of what kind it is?' asked Monks.

'Nobody better than you, I am persuaded,' answered Mrs. Bumble: who did not want for spirit, as her yoke-fellow could abundantly testify.

'Humph!' said Monks significantly, and with a look of eager inquiry; 'there may be money's worth to get, eh?'

'Perhaps there may,' was the composed reply.

'Something that was taken from her,' said Monks. 'Something that she wore. Something that—'

'You had better bid,' interrupted Mrs. Bumble. 'I have heard enough, already, to assure me that you are the man I ought to talk to.'

Mr. Bumble, who had not yet been admitted by his better half into any greater share of the secret than he had originally possessed, listened to this dialogue with outstretched neck and distended eyes: which he directed towards his wife and Monks, by turns, in undisguised astonishment; increased, if possible, when the latter sternly demanded, what sum was required for the disclosure.

'What's it worth to you?' asked the woman, as collectedly as before.

'It may be nothing; it may be twenty pounds,' replied Monks. 'Speak out, and let me know which.'

'Add five pounds to the sum you have named; give me five-and-twenty pounds in gold,' said the woman; 'and I'll tell you all I know. Not before.'

'Five-and-twenty pounds!' exclaimed Monks, drawing back.

'I spoke as plainly as I could,' replied Mrs. Bumble. 'It's not a large sum, either.'

'Not a large sum for a paltry secret, that may be nothing when it's told!' cried Monks impatiently; 'and which has been lying dead for twelve years past or more!'

'Such matters keep well, and, like good wine, often double their value in course of time,' answered the matron, still preserving the resolute indifference she had assumed. 'As to lying dead, there are those who will lie dead for twelve thousand years to come, or twelve million, for anything you or I know, who will tell strange tales at last!'

'What if I pay it for nothing?' asked Monks, hesitating.

'You can easily take it away again,' replied the matron. 'I am but a woman; alone here; and unprotected.'

'Not alone, my dear, nor unprotected, neither,' submitted Mr. Bumble, in a voice tremulous with fear: '*I* am here, my dear. And besides,' said Mr. Bumble, his teeth chattering as he spoke, 'Mr. Monks is too much of a gentleman to attempt any violence on porochial persons. Mr. Monks is aware that I am not a young man, my dear, and also that I am a little run to seed, as I may say; bu he has heerd: I say I have no doubt Mr. Monks has heerd, my dear: that I am a very determined officer, with very uncommon strength, if I'm once roused. I only want a little rousing; that's all.'

As Mr. Bumble spoke, he made a melancholy feint of grasping his lantern with fierce determination; and plainly showed, by the alarmed expression of every feature, that he *did* want a little rousing, and not a little, prior to making any very warlike demonstration: unless, indeed, against paupers, or other person or persons trained down for the purpose.

'You are a fool,' said Mrs. Bumble, in reply; 'and had better hold your tongue.'

'He had better have cut it out, before he came, if he can't speak in a lower tone,' said Monks, grimly. 'So! He's your husband, eh?'

'He my husband!' tittered the matron, parrying the question.

'I thought as much, when you came in,' rejoined Monks, marking the angry glance which the lady darted at her spouse as she spoke. 'So much the better; I have less hesitation in dealing with two people, when I find that there's only one will between them. I'm in earnest. See here!'

He thrust his hand into a side-pocket; and producing a canvas bag, told out twenty-five sovereigns on the table, and pushed them over to the woman.

'Now,' he said, 'gather them up; and when this cursed peal of thunder, which I feel is coming up to break over the house-top, is gone, let's hear your story.'

The thunder, which seemed in fact much nearer, and to shiver and break almost over their heads, having subsided, Monks, raising his face from the table, bent forward to listen to what the woman should say. The faces of the three nearly touched, as the two men leant over the small table in their eagerness to hear, and the woman also leant forward to render her whisper audible. The sickly rays of the suspended lantern falling directly upon them, aggravated the paleness and anxiety of their countenances: which, encircled by the deepest gloom and darkness, looked ghastly in the extreme.

'When this woman, that we called old Sally, died,' the matron began, 'she and I were alone.'

'Was there no one by?' asked Monks, in the same hollow whisper; 'No sick wretch or idiot in some other bed? No one who could hear, and might, by possibility, understand?'

'Not a soul,' replied the woman; 'we were alone. *I* stood alone beside the body when death came over it.'

'Good,' said Monks, regarding her attentively. 'Go on.'

'She spoke of a young creature,' resumed the matron, 'who had brought a child into the world some years before; not merely in the same room, but in the same bed, in which she then lay dying.'

'Ay?' said Monks, with quivering lip, and glancing over his shoulder, 'Blood! How things come about!'

'The child was the one you named to him last night,' said the matron, nodding carelessly towards her husband; 'the mother this nurse had robbed.'

'In life?' asked Monks.

'In death,' replied the woman, with something like a shudder. 'She stole from the corpse, when it had hardly turned to one, that which the dead mother had prayed her, with her last breath, to keep for the infant's sake.'

'She sold it,' cried Monks, with desperate eagerness; 'did she sell it? Where? When? To whom? How long before?'

'As she told me, with great difficulty, that she had done this,' said the matron, 'she fell back and died.'

'Without saying more?' cried Monks, in a voice which, from its very suppression, seemed only the more furious. 'It's a lie! I'll not be played with. She said more. I'll tear the life out of you both, but I'll know what it was.'

'She didn't utter another word,' said the woman, to all appearance unmoved (as Mr. Bumble was very far from being) by the strange man's violence; 'but she clutched my gown, violently, with one hand, which was partly closed; and when I saw that she was dead, and so removed the hand by force, I found it clasped a scrap of dirty paper.'

'Which contained—' interposed Monks, stretching forward.

'Nothing,' replied the woman; 'it was a pawnbroker's duplicate.'

'For what?' demanded Monks.

'In good time I'll tell you.' said the woman. 'I judge that she had kept the trinket, for some time, in the hope of turning it to better account; and then had pawned it; and had saved or scraped together money to pay the pawnbroker's interest year by year, and prevent its running out; so that if anything came of it, it could still be redeemed. Nothing had come of it; and, as I tell you, she died with the scrap of paper, all worn and tattered, in her hand. The time was out in two days; I thought something might one day come of it too; and so redeemed the pledge.'

'Where is it now?' asked Monks quickly.

'*There*,' replied the woman. And, as if glad to be relieved of it, she hastily threw upon the table a small kid bag scarcely large enough for a French watch, which Monks pouncing upon, tore open with trembling hands. It contained a little gold locket: in which were two locks of hair, and a plain gold wedding-ring.

'It has the word "Agnes" engraved on the inside,' said the woman.

'There is a blank left for the surname; and then follows the date; which is within a year before the child was born. I found out that.'

'And this is all?' said Monks, after a close and eager scrutiny of the contents of the little packet.

'All,' replied the woman.

Mr. Bumble drew a long breath, as if he were glad to find that the story was over, and no mention made of taking the five-and-twenty pounds back again; and now he took courage to wipe the perspiration which had been trickling over his nose, unchecked, during the whole of the previous dialogue.

'I know nothing of the story, beyond what I can guess at,' said his wife addressing Monks, after a short silence; 'and I want to know nothing; for it's safer not. But I may ask you two questions, may I?'

'You may ask,' said Monks, with some show of surprise; 'but whether I answer or not is another question.'

'—Which makes three,' observed Mr. Bumble, essaying a stroke of facetiousness.

'Is that what you expected to get from me?' demanded the matron.

'It is,' replied Monks. 'The other question?'

'What do you propose to do with it? Can it be used against me?'

'Never,' rejoined Monks; 'nor against me either. See here! But don't move a step forward, or your life is not worth a bulrush.'

With these words, he suddenly wheeled the table aside, and pulling an iron ring in the boarding, threw back a large trap-door which opened close at Mr. Bumble's feet, and caused that gentleman to retire several paces backward, with great precipitation.

'Look down,' said Monks, lowering the lantern into the gulf. 'Don't fear me. I could have let you down, quietly enough, when you were seated over it, if that had been my game.'

Thus encouraged, the matron drew near to the brink; and even Mr. Bumble himself, impelled by curiousity, ventured to do the same. The turbid water, swollen by the heavy rain, was rushing rapidly on below; and all other sounds were lost in the noise of its plashing and eddying against the green and slimy piles. There had once been a water-mill beneath; the tide foaming and chafing round the few rotten stakes, and fragments of machinery that yet remained, seemed to dart onward, with a new impulse, when freed from the obstacles which had unavailingly attempted to stem its headlong course.

'If you flung a man's body down there, where would it be to-morrow morning?' said Monks, swinging the lantern to and fro in the dark well.

'Twelve miles down the river, and cut to pieces besides,' replied Bumble, recoiling at the thought.

Monks drew the little packet from his breast, where he had hurriedly thrust it; and tying it to a leaden weight, which had formed a part of some pulley, and was lying on the floor, dropped it into the stream. It fell straight, and true as a die; clove the water with a scarcely audible splash; and was gone.

The three looking into each other's faces, seemed to breathe more freely.

'There!' said Monks, closing the trap-door, which fell heavily back into its former position. 'If the sea ever gives up its dead, as books say it will, it will keep its gold and silver to itself, and that trash among it. We have nothing more to say, and may break up our pleasant party.'

'By all means,' observed Mr. Bumble, with great alacrity.

'You'll keep a quiet tongue in your head, will you?' said Monks, with a threatening look. 'I am not afraid of your wife.'

'You may depend upon me, young man,' answered Mr. Bumble, bowing himself gradually towards the ladder, with excessive politeness. 'On everybody's account, young man; on my own, you know, Mr. Monks.'

'I am glad, for your sake, to hear it,' remarked Monks. 'Light your lantern! And get away from here as fast as you can.'

It was fortunate that the conversation terminated at this point, or Mr. Bumble, who had bowed himself to within six inches of the ladder, would infallibly have pitched headlong into the room below. He lighted his lantern from that which Monks had detached from the rope, and now carried in his hand; and making no effort to prolong the discourse, descended in silence, followed by his wife. Monks brought up the rear, after pausing on the steps to satisfy himself that there were no other sounds to be heard than the beating of the rain without, and the rushing of the water.

They traversed the lower room, slowly, and with caution; for Monks started at every shadow; and Mr. Bumble, holding his lantern a foot above the ground, walked not only with remarkable care, but with a marvellously light step for a gentleman of his figure: looking nervously about him for hidden trap-doors. The gate at which they had entered, was softly unfastened and opened by Monks; merely exchanging a nod with their mysterious acquaintance, the married couple emerged into the wet and darkness outside.

They were no sooner gone, than Monks, who appeared to entertain an invincible repugnance to being left alone, called to a boy who had been hidden somewhere below. Bidding him go first, and bear the light, he returned to the chamber he had just quitted.

CHAPTER XXXIX

INTRODUCES SOME RESPECTABLE CHARACTERS WITH WHOM THE READER

IS ALREADY ACQUAINTED, AND SHOWS HOW MONKS AND THE JEW LAID THEIR WORTHY HEADS TOGETHER

On the evening following that upon which the three worthies mentioned in the last chapter, disposed of their little matter of business as therein narrated, Mr. William Sikes, awakening from a nap, drowsily growled forth an inquiry what time of night it was.

The room in which Mr. Sikes propounded this question, was not one of those he had tenanted, previous to the Chertsey expedition, although it was in the same quarter of the town, and was situated at no great distance from his former lodgings. It was not, in appearance, so desirable a habitation as his old quarters: being a mean and badly-furnished apartment, of very limited size; lighted only by one small window in the shelving roof, and abutting on a close and dirty lane. Nor were there wanting other indications of the good gentleman's having gone down in the world of late: for a great scarcity of furniture, and total absence of comfort, together with the disappearance of all such small moveables as spare clothes and linen, bespoke a state of extreme poverty; while the meagre and attenuated condition of Mr. Sikes himself would have fully confirmed these symptoms, if they had stood in any need of corroboration.

The housebreaker was lying on the bed, wrapped in his white great-coat, by way of dressing-gown, and displaying a set of features in no degree improved by the cadaverous hue of illness, and the addition of a soiled nightcap, and a stiff, black beard of a week's growth. The dog sat at the bedside: now eyeing his master with a wistful look, and now pricking his ears, and uttering a low growl as some noise in the street, or in the lower part of the house, attracted his attention. Seated by the window, busily engaged in patching an old waistcoat which formed a portion of the robber's ordinary dress, was a female: so pale and reduced with watching and privation, that there would have been considerable difficulty in recognising her as the same Nancy who has already figured in this tale, but for the voice in which she replied to Mr. Sikes's question.

'Not long gone seven,' said the girl. 'How do you feel to-night, Bill?'

'As weak as water,' replied Mr. Sikes, with an imprecation on his eyes and limbs. 'Here; lend us a hand, and let me get off this thundering bed anyhow.'

Illness had not improved Mr. Sikes's temper; for, as the girl raised him up and led him to a chair, he muttered various curses on her awkwardness, and struck her.

'Whining are you?' said Sikes. 'Come! Don't stand snivelling there. If you can't do anything better than that, cut off altogether. D'ye hear me?'

'I hear you,' replied the girl, turning her face aside, and forcing a laugh. 'What fancy have you got in your head now?'

'Oh! you've thought better of it, have you?' growled Sikes, marking the tear which trembled in her eye. 'All the better for you, you have.'

'Why, you don't mean to say, you'd be hard upon me to-night, Bill,' said the girl, laying her hand upon his shoulder.

'No!' cried Mr. Sikes. 'Why not?'

'Such a number of nights,' said the girl, with a touch of woman's tenderness, which communicated something like sweetness of tone, even to her voice: 'such a number of nights as I've been patient with you, nursing and caring for you, as if you had been a child: and this the first that I've seen you like yourself; you wouldn't have served me as you did just now, if you'd thought of that, would you? Come, come; say you wouldn't.'

'Well, then,' rejoined Mr. Sikes, 'I wouldn't. Why, damme, now, the girls's whining again!'

'It's nothing,' said the girl, throwing herself into a chair. 'Don't you seem to mind me. It'll soon be over.'

'What'll be over?' demanded Mr. Sikes in a savage voice. 'What foolery are you up to, now, again? Get up and bustle about, and don't come over me with your woman's nonsense.'

At any other time, this remonstrance, and the tone in which it was delivered, would have had the desired effect; but the girl being really weak and exhausted, dropped her head over the back of the chair, and fainted, before Mr. Sikes could get out a few of the appropriate oaths with which, on similar occasions, he was accustomed to garnish his threats. Not knowing, very well, what to do, in this uncommon emergency; for Miss Nancy's hysterics were usually of that violent kind which the patient fights and struggles out of, without much assistance; Mr. Sikes tried a little blasphemy: and finding that mode of treatment wholly ineffectual, called for assistance.

'What's the matter here, my dear?' said Fagin, looking in.

'Lend a hand to the girl, can't you?' replied Sikes impatiently. 'Don't stand chattering and grinning at me!'

With an exclamation of surprise, Fagin hastened to the girl's assistance, while Mr. John Dawkins (otherwise the Artful Dodger), who had followed his venerable friend into the room, hastily deposited on the floor a bundle with which he was laden; and snatching a bottle from the grasp of Master Charles Bates who came close at his heels, uncorked it in a twinkling with his teeth, and poured a portion of its contents down the patient's throat: previously taking a taste, himself, to prevent mistakes.

'Give her a whiff of fresh air with the bellows, Charley,' said Mr. Dawkins; 'and you slap her hands, Fagin, while Bill undoes the petticuts.'

These united restoratives, administered with great energy: especially that department consigned to Master Bates, who appeared to consider his share in the proceedings, a piece of unexampled pleasantry: were not long in producing the desired effect. The girl gradually recovered her senses; and, staggering to a chair by the bedside, hid her face upon the pillow: leaving Mr. Sikes to confront the new comers, in some astonishment at their unlooked-for appearance.

'Why, what evil wind has blowed you here?' he asked Fagin.

'No evil wind at all, my dear, for evil winds blow nobody any good; and I've brought something good with me, that you'll be glad to see. Dodger, my dear, open the bundle; and give Bill the little trifles that we spent all our money on, this morning.'

In compliance with Mr. Fagin's request, the Artful untied this bundle, which was of large size, and formed of an old table-cloth; and handed the articles it contained, one by one, to Charley Bates: who placed them on the table, with various encomiums on their rarity and excellence.

'Sitch a rabbit pie, Bill,' exclaimed that young gentleman, disclosing to view a huge pasty; 'sitch delicate creeturs, with sitch tender limbs, Bill, that the wery bones melt in your mouth, and there's no occasion to pick 'em; half a pound of seven and six-penny green, so precious strong that if you mix it with biling water, it'll go nigh to blow the lid of the tea-pot off; a pound and a half of moist sugar that the niggers didn't work at all at, afore they got it up to sitch a pitch of goodness,—oh no! Two half-quartern brans; pound of best fresh; piece of double Glo'ster; and, to wind up all, some of the richest sort you ever lushed!'

Uttering this last panegyric, Master Bates produced, from one of his extensive pockets, a full-sized wine-bottle, carefully corked; while Mr. Dawkins, at the same instant, poured out a wine-glassful of raw spirits from the bottle he carried: which the invalid tossed down his throat without a moment's hesitation.

'Ah!' said Fagin, rubbing his hands with great satisfaction. 'You'll do, Bill; you'll do now.'

'Do!' exclaimed Mr. Sikes; 'I might have been done for, twenty times over, afore you'd have done anything to help me. What do you mean by leaving a man in this state, three weeks and more, you false-hearted wagabond?'

'Only hear him, boys!' said Fagin, shrugging his shoulders. 'And us come to bring him all these beau-ti-ful things.'

'The things is well enough in their way,' observed Mr. Sikes: a little soothed as he glanced over the table; 'but what have you got to say for yourself, why you should leave me here, down in the mouth, health, blunt, and everything else; and take no more notice of me, all this mortal time, than if I was that 'ere dog.—Drive him down, Charley!'

'I never see such a jolly dog as that,' cried Master Bates, doing as he was desired. 'Smelling the grub like a old lady a going to market! He'd make his fortun' on the stage that dog would, and rewive the drayma besides.'

'Hold your din,' cried Sikes, as the dog retreated under the bed: still growling angrily. 'What have you got to say for yourself, you withered old fence, eh?'

'I was away from London, a week and more, my dear, on a plant,' replied the Jew.

'And what about the other fortnight?' demanded Sikes. 'What about the other fortnight that you've left me lying here, like a sick rat in his hole?'

'I couldn't help it, Bill. I can't go into a long explanation before company; but I couldn't help it, upon my honour.'

'Upon your what?' growled Sikes, with excessive disgust. 'Here! Cut me off a piece of that pie, one of you boys, to take the taste of that out of my mouth, or it'll choke me dead.'

'Don't be out of temper, my dear,' urged Fagin, submissively. 'I have never forgot you, Bill; never once.'

'No! I'll pound it that you han't,' replied Sikes, with a bitter grin. 'You've been scheming and plotting away, every hour that I have laid shivering and burning here; and Bill was to do this; and Bill was to do that; and Bill was to do it all, dirt cheap, as soon as he got well: and was quite poor enough for your work. If it hadn't been for the girl, I might have died.'

'There now, Bill,' remonstrated Fagin, eagerly catching at the word. 'If it hadn't been for the girl! Who but poor ould Fagin was the means of your having such a handy girl about you?'

'He says true enough there!' said Nancy, coming hastily forward. 'Let him be; let him be.'

Nancy's appearance gave a new turn to the conversation; for the boys, receiving a sly wink from the wary old Jew, began to ply her with liquor: of which, however, she took very sparingly; while Fagin, assuming an unusual flow of spirits, gradually brought Mr. Sikes into a better temper, by affecting to regard his threats as a little pleasant banter; and, moreover, by laughing very heartily at one or two rough jokes, which, after repeated applications to the spirit-bottle, he condescended to make.

'It's all very well,' said Mr. Sikes; 'but I must have some blunt from you to-night.'

'I haven't a piece of coin about me,' replied the Jew.

'Then you've got lots at home,' retorted Sikes; 'and I must have some from there.'

'Lots!' cried Fagin, holding up is hands. 'I haven't so much as would—'

'I don't know how much you've got, and I dare say you hardly know yourself, as it would take a pretty long time to count it,' said Sikes; 'but I must have some to-night; and that's flat.'

'Well, well,' said Fagin, with a sigh, 'I'll send the Artful round presently.'

'You won't do nothing of the kind,' rejoined Mr. Sikes. 'The Artful's a deal too artful, and would forget to come, or lose his way, or get dodged by traps and so be perwented, or anything for an excuse, if you put him up to it. Nancy shall go to the ken and fetch it, to make all sure; and I'll lie down and have a snooze while she's gone.'

After a great deal of haggling and squabbling, Fagin beat down the amount of the required advance from five pounds to three pounds four and sixpence: protesting with many solemn asseverations that that would only leave him eighteen-pence to keep house with; Mr. Sikes sullenly remarking that if he couldn't get any more he must accompany him home; with the Dodger and Master Bates put the eatables in the cupboard. The Jew then, taking leave of his affectionate friend, returned homeward, attended by

Nancy and the boys: Mr. Sikes, meanwhile, flinging himself on the bed, and composing himself to sleep away the time until the young lady's return.

In due course, they arrived at Fagin's abode, where they found Toby Crackit and Mr. Chitling intent upon their fifteenth game at cribbage, which it is scarcely necessary to say the latter gentleman lost, and with it, his fifteenth and last sixpence: much to the amusement of his young friends. Mr. Crackit, apparently somewhat ashamed at being found relaxing himself with a gentleman so much his inferior in station and mental endowments, yawned, and inquiring after Sikes, took up his hat to go.

'Has nobody been, Toby?' asked Fagin.

'Not a living leg,' answered Mr. Crackit, pulling up his collar; 'it's been as dull as swipes. You ought to stand something handsome, Fagin, to recompense me for keeping house so long. Damme, I'm as flat as a juryman; and should have gone to sleep, as fast as Newgate, if I hadn't had the good natur' to amuse this youngster. Horrid dull, I'm blessed if I an't!'

With these and other ejaculations of the same kind, Mr. Toby Crackit swept up his winnings, and crammed them into his waistcoat pocket with a haughty air, as though such small pieces of silver were wholly beneath the consideration of a man of his figure; this done, he swaggered out of the room, with so much elegance and gentility, that Mr. Chitling, bestowing numerous admiring glances on his legs and boots till they were out of sight, assured the company that he considered his acquaintance cheap at fifteen sixpences an interview, and that he didn't value his losses the snap of his little finger.

'Wot a rum chap you are, Tom!' said Master Bates, highly amused by this declaration.

'Not a bit of it,' replied Mr. Chitling. 'Am I, Fagin?'

'A very clever fellow, my dear,' said Fagin, patting him on the shoulder, and winking to his other pupils.

'And Mr. Crackit is a heavy swell; an't he, Fagin?' asked Tom.

'No doubt at all of that, my dear.'

'And it is a creditable thing to have his acquaintance; an't it, Fagin?' pursued Tom.

'Very much so, indeed, my dear. They're only jealous, Tom, because he won't give it to them.'

'Ah!' cried Tom, triumphantly, 'that's where it is! He has cleaned me out. But I can go and earn some more, when I like; can't I, Fagin?'

'To be sure you can, and the sooner you go the better, Tom; so make up your loss at once, and don't lose any more time. Dodger! Charley! It's time you were on the lay. Come! It's near ten, and nothing done yet.'

In obedience to this hint, the boys, nodding to Nancy, took up their hats, and left the room; the Dodger and his vivacious friend indulging, as they went, in many witticisms at the expense of Mr. Chitling; in whose conduct, it is but justice to say, there was nothing very conspicuous or peculiar: inasmuch as there are a great number of spirited young bloods upon town, who pay a much higher price than Mr. Chitling for being seen in good society: and a great number of fine gentlemen (composing the good society aforesaid) who established their reputation upon very much the same footing as flash Toby Crackit.

'Now,' said Fagin, when they had left the room, 'I'll go and get you that cash, Nancy. This is only the key of a little cupboard where I keep a few odd things the boys get, my dear. I never lock up my money, for I've got none to lock up, my dear—ha! ha! ha!—none to lock up. It's a poor trade, Nancy, and no thanks; but I'm fond of seeing the young people about me; and I bear it all, I bear it all. Hush!' he said, hastily concealing the key in his breast; 'who's that? Listen!'

The girl, who was sitting at the table with her arms folded, appeared in no way interested in the arrival: or to care whether the person, whoever he was, came or went: until the murmur of a man's voice reached her ears. The instant she caught the sound, she tore off her bonnet and shawl, with the rapidity of lightning, and thrust them under the table. The Jew, turning round immediately afterwards, she muttered a complaint of the heat: in a tone of languor that contrasted, very remarkably, with the extreme haste and violence of this action: which, however, had been unobserved by Fagin, who had his back towards her at the time.

'Bah!' he whispered, as though nettled by the interruption; 'it's the man I expected before; he's coming downstairs. Not a word about the money while he's here, Nance. He won't stop long. Not ten minutes, my dear.'

Laying his skinny forefinger upon his lip, the Jew carried a candle to the door, as a man's step was heard upon the stairs without. He reached it, at the same moment as the visitor, who, coming hastily into the room, was close upon the girl before he observed her.

It was Monks.

'Only one of my young people,' said Fagin, observing that Monks drew back, on beholding a stranger. 'Don't move, Nancy.'

The girl drew closer to the table, and glancing at Monks with an air of careless levity, withdrew her eyes; but as he turned towards Fagin, she stole another look; so keen and searching, and full of purpose, that if there had been any bystander to observe the change, he could hardly have believed the two looks to have proceeded from the same person.

'Any news?' inquired Fagin.

'Great.'

'And—and—good?' asked Fagin, hesitating as though he feared to vex the other man by being too sanguine.

'Not bad, any way,' replied Monks with a smile. 'I have been prompt enough this time. Let me have a word with you.'

The girl drew closer to the table, and made no offer to leave the room, although she could see that Monks was pointing to her. The Jew: perhaps fearing she might say something aloud about the money, if he endeavoured to get rid of her: pointed upward, and took Monks out of the room.

'Not that infernal hole we were in before,' she could hear the man say as they went upstairs. Fagin laughed; and making some reply which did not reach her, seemed, by the creaking of the boards, to lead his companion to the second story.

Before the sound of their footsteps had ceased to echo through the house, the girl had slipped off her shoes; and drawing her gown loosely over her head, and muffling her arms in it, stood at the door, listening with breathless interest. The moment the noise ceased, she glided from the room; ascended the stairs with incredible softness and silence; and was lost in the gloom above.

The room remained deserted for a quarter of an hour or more; the girl glided back with the same unearthly tread; and, immediately afterwards, the two men were heard descending. Monks went at once into the street; and the Jew crawled upstairs again for the money. When he returned, the girl was adjusting her shawl and bonnet, as if preparing to be gone.

'Why, Nance!' exclaimed the Jew, starting back as he put down the candle, 'how pale you are!'

'Pale!' echoed the girl, shading her eyes with her hands, as if to look steadily at him.

'Quite horrible. What have you been doing to yourself?'

'Nothing that I know of, except sitting in this close place for I don't know how long and all,' replied the girl carelessly. 'Come! Let me get back; that's a dear.'

With a sigh for every piece of money, Fagin told the amount into her hand. They parted without more conversation, merely interchanging a 'good-night.'

When the girl got into the open street, she sat down upon a doorstep; and seemed, for a few moments, wholly bewildered and unable to pursue her way. Suddenly she arose; and hurrying on, in a direction quite opposite to that in which Sikes was awaiting her returned, quickened her pace, until it gradually resolved into a violent run. After completely exhausting herself, she stopped to take breath: and, as if suddenly recollecting herself, and deploring her inability to do something she was bent upon, wrung her hands, and burst into tears.

It might be that her tears relieved her, or that she felt the full hopelessness of her condition; but she turned back; and hurrying with nearly as great rapidity in the contrary direction; partly to recover lost time, and partly to keep pace with the violent current of her own thoughts: soon reached the dwelling where she had left the housebreaker.

If she betrayed any agitation, when she presented herself to Mr. Sikes, he did not observe it; for merely inquiring if she had brought the money, and receiving a reply in the affirmative, he uttered a growl of satisfaction, and replacing his head upon the pillow, resumed the slumbers which her arrival had interrupted.

It was fortunate for her that the possession of money occasioned him so much employment next day in the way of eating and drinking; and withal had so beneficial an effect in smoothing down the asperities of his temper; that he had neither time nor inclination to be very critical upon her behaviour and deportment. That she had all the abstracted and nervous manner of one who is on the eve of some bold and hazardous step, which it has required no common struggle to resolve upon, would have been obvious to the lynx-eyed Fagin, who would most probably have taken the alarm at once; but Mr. Sikes lacking the niceties of discrimination, and being troubled with no more subtle misgivings than those which resolve themselves into a dogged roughness of behaviour towards everybody; and being, furthermore, in an unusually amiable condition, as has been already observed; saw nothing unusual in her demeanor, and indeed, troubled himself so little about her, that, had her agitation been far more perceptible than it was, it would have been very unlikely to have awakened his suspicions.

As that day closed in, the girl's excitement increased; and, when night came on, and she sat by, watching until the housebreaker should drink himself asleep, there was an unusual paleness in her cheek, and a fire in her eye, that even Sikes observed with astonishment.

Mr. Sikes being weak from the fever, was lying in bed, taking hot water with his gin to render it less inflammatory; and had pushed his glass towards Nancy to be replenished for the third or fourth time, when these symptoms first struck him.

'Why, burn my body!' said the man, raising himself on his hands as he stared the girl in the face. 'You look like a corpse come to life again. What's the matter?'

'Matter!' replied the girl. 'Nothing. What do you look at me so hard for?'

'What foolery is this?' demanded Sikes, grasping her by the arm, and shaking her roughly. 'What is it? What do you mean? What are you thinking of?'

'Of many things, Bill,' replied the girl, shivering, and as she did so, pressing her hands upon her eyes. 'But, Lord! What odds in that?'

The tone of forced gaiety in which the last words were spoken, seemed to produce a deeper impression on Sikes than the wild and rigid look which had preceded them.

'I tell you wot it is,' said Sikes; 'if you haven't caught the fever, and got it comin' on, now, there's something more than usual in the wind, and something dangerous too. You're not a-going to—. No, damme! you wouldn't do that!'

'Do what?' asked the girl.

'There ain't,' said Sikes, fixing his eyes upon her, and muttering the words to himself; 'there ain't a stauncher-hearted gal going, or I'd have cut her throat three months ago. She's got the fever coming on; that's it.'

Fortifying himself with this assurance, Sikes drained the glass to the bottom, and then, with many grumbling oaths, called for his physic. The girl jumped up, with great alacrity; poured it quickly out, but with her back towards him; and held the vessel to his lips, while he drank off the contents.

'Now,' said the robber, 'come and sit aside of me, and put on your own face; or I'll alter it so, that you won't know it agin when you do want it.'

The girl obeyed. Sikes, locking her hand in his, fell back upon the pillow: turning his eyes upon her face. They closed; opened again; closed once more; again opened. He shifted his position restlessly; and, after dozing again, and again, for two or three minutes, and as often springing up with a look of terror, and gazing vacantly about him, was suddenly stricken, as it were, while in the very attitude of rising, into a deep and heavy sleep. The grasp of his hand relaxed; the upraised arm fell languidly by his side; and he lay like one in a profound trance.

'The laudanum has taken effect at last,' murmured the girl, as she rose from the bedside. 'I may be too late, even now.'

She hastily dressed herself in her bonnet and shawl: looking fearfully round, from time to time, as if, despite the sleeping draught, she expected every moment to feel the pressure of Sikes's heavy hand upon her shoulder; then, stooping softly over the bed, she kissed the robber's lips; and then opening and closing the room-door with noiseless touch, hurried from the house.

A watchman was crying half-past nine, down a dark passage through which she had to pass, in gaining the main thoroughfare.

'Has it long gone the half-hour?' asked the girl.

'It'll strike the hour in another quarter,' said the man: raising his lantern to her face.

'And I cannot get there in less than an hour or more,' muttered Nancy: brushing swiftly past him, and gliding rapidly down the street.

Many of the shops were already closing in the back lanes and avenues through which she tracked her way, in making from Spitalfields towards the West-End of London. The clock struck ten, increasing her impatience. She tore along the narrow pavement: elbowing the passengers from side to side; and darting almost under the horses' heads, crossed crowded streets, where clusters of persons were eagerly watching their opportunity to do the like.

'The woman is mad!' said the people, turning to look after her as she rushed away.

When she reached the more wealthy quarter of the town, the streets were comparatively deserted; and here her headlong progress excited a still greater curiosity in the stragglers whom she hurried past. Some quickened their pace behind, as though to see whither she was hastening at such an unusual rate; and a few made head upon her, and looked back, surprised at her undiminished speed; but they fell off one by one; and when she neared her place of destination, she was alone.

It was a family hotel in a quiet but handsome street near Hyde Park. As the brilliant light of the lamp which burnt before its door, guided her to the spot, the clock struck eleven. She had loitered for a few paces as though irresolute, and making up her mind to advance; but the sound determined her, and she stepped into the hall. The porter's seat was vacant. She looked round with an air of incertitude, and advanced towards the stairs.

'Now, young woman!' said a smartly-dressed female, looking out from a door behind her, 'who do you want here?'

'A lady who is stopping in this house,' answered the girl.

'A lady!' was the reply, accompanied with a scornful look. 'What lady?'

'Miss Maylie,' said Nancy.

The young woman, who had by this time, noted her appearance, replied only by a look of virtuous disdain; and summoned a man to answer her. To him, Nancy repeated her request.

'What name am I to say?' asked the waiter.

'It's of no use saying any,' replied Nancy.

'Nor business?' said the man.

'No, nor that neither,' rejoined the girl. 'I must see the lady.'

'Come!' said the man, pushing her towards the door. 'None of this. Take yourself off.'

'I shall be carried out if I go!' said the girl violently; 'and I can make that a job that two of you won't like to do. Isn't there anybody here,' she said, looking round, 'that will see a simple message carried for a poor wretch like me?'

This appeal produced an effect on a good-tempered-faced man-cook, who with some of the other servants was looking on, and who stepped forward to interfere.

'Take it up for her, Joe; can't you?' said this person.

'What's the good?' replied the man. 'You don't suppose the young lady will see such as her; do you?'

This allusion to Nancy's doubtful character, raised a vast quantity of chaste wrath in the bosoms of four housemaids, who remarked, with great fervour, that the creature was a disgrace to her sex; and strongly advocated her being thrown, ruthlessly, into the kennel.

'Do what you like with me,' said the girl, turning to the men again; 'but do what I ask you first, and I ask you to give this message for God Almighty's sake.'

The soft-hearted cook added his intercession, and the result was that the man who had first appeared undertook its delivery.

'What's it to be?' said the man, with one foot on the stairs.

'That a young woman earnestly asks to speak to Miss Maylie alone,' said Nancy; 'and that if the lady will only hear the first word she has to say, she will know whether to hear her business, or to have her turned out of doors as an impostor.'

'I say,' said the man, 'you're coming it strong!'

'You give the message,' said the girl firmly; 'and let me hear the answer.'

The man ran upstairs. Nancy remained, pale and almost breathless, listening with quivering lip to the very audible expressions of scorn, of which the chaste housemaids were very prolific; and of which they became still more so, when the man returned, and said the young woman was to walk upstairs.

'It's no good being proper in this world,' said the first housemaid.

'Brass can do better than the gold what has stood the fire,' said the second.

The third contented herself with wondering 'what ladies was made of'; and the fourth took the first in a quartette of 'Shameful!' with which the Dianas concluded.

Regardless of all this: for she had weightier matters at heart: Nancy followed the man, with trembling limbs, to a small ante-chamber, lighted by a lamp from the ceiling. Here he left her, and retired.

CHAPTER XL

A STRANGE INTERVIEW, WHICH IS A SEQUEL TO THE LAST CHAMBER

The girl's life had been squandered in the streets, and among the most noisome of the stews and dens of London, but there was something of the woman's original nature left in her still; and when she heard a light step approaching the door opposite to that by which she had entered, and thought of the wide contrast which the small room would in another moment contain, she felt burdened with the sense of her own deep shame, and shrunk as though she could scarcely bear the presence of her with whom she had sought this interview.

But struggling with these better feelings was pride,—the vice of the lowest and most debased creatures no less than of the high and self-assured. The miserable companion of thieves and ruffians, the fallen outcast of low haunts, the associate of the scourings of the jails and hulks, living within the shadow of the gallows itself,—even this degraded being felt too proud to betray a feeble gleam of the womanly feeling which she thought a weakness, but which alone connected her with that humanity, of which her wasting life had obliterated so many, many traces when a very child.

She raised her eyes sufficiently to observe that the figure which presented itself was that of a slight and beautiful girl; then, bending them on the ground, she tossed her head with affected carelessness as she said:

'It's a hard matter to get to see you, lady. If I had taken offence, and gone away, as many would have done, you'd have been sorry for it one day, and not without reason either.'

'I am very sorry if any one has behaved harshly to you,' replied Rose. 'Do not think of that. Tell me why you wished to see me. I am the person you inquired for.'

The kind tone of this answer, the sweet voice, the gentle manner, the absence of any accent of haughtiness or displeasure, took the girl completely by surprise, and she burst into tears.

'Oh, lady, lady!' she said, clasping her hands passionately before her face, 'if there was more like you, there would be fewer like me,—there would—there would!'

'Sit down,' said Rose, earnestly. 'If you are in poverty or affliction I shall be truly glad to relieve you if I can,—I shall indeed. Sit down.'

'Let me stand, lady,' said the girl, still weeping, 'and do not speak to me so kindly till you know me better. It is growing late. Is—is—that door shut?'

'Yes,' said Rose, recoiling a few steps, as if to be nearer assistance in case she should require it. 'Why?'

'Because,' said the girl, 'I am about to put my life and the lives of others in your hands. I am the girl that dragged little Oliver back to old Fagin's on the night he went out from the house in Pentonville.'

'You!' said Rose Maylie.

'I, lady!' replied the girl. 'I am the infamous creature you have heard of, that lives among the thieves, and that never from the first moment I can recollect my eyes and senses opening on London streets have known any better life, or kinder words than they have given me, so help me God! Do not mind shrinking openly from me, lady. I am younger than you would think, to look at me, but I am well used to it. The poorest women fall back, as I make my way along the crowded pavement.'

'What dreadful things are these!' said Rose, involuntarily falling from her strange companion.

'Thank Heaven upon your knees, dear lady,' cried the girl, 'that you had friends to care for and keep you in your childhood, and that you were never in the midst of cold and hunger, and riot and drunkenness, and—and—something worse than all—as I have been from my cradle. I may use the word, for the alley and the gutter were mine, as they will be my deathbed.'

'I pity you!' said Rose, in a broken voice. 'It wrings my heart to hear you!'

'Heaven bless you for your goodness!' rejoined the girl. 'If you knew what I am sometimes, you would pity me, indeed. But I have stolen away from those who would surely murder me, if they knew I had been here, to tell you what I have overheard. Do you know a man named Monks?'

'No,' said Rose.

'He knows you,' replied the girl; 'and knew you were here, for it was by hearing him tell the place that I found you out.'

'I never heard the name,' said Rose.

'Then he goes by some other amongst us,' rejoined the girl, 'which I more than thought before. Some time ago, and soon after Oliver was put into your house on the night of the robbery, I—suspecting this man—listened to a conversation held between him and Fagin in the dark. I found out, from what I heard, that Monks—the man I asked you about, you know—'

'Yes,' said Rose, 'I understand.'

'—That Monks,' pursued the girl, 'had seen him accidently with two of our boys on the day we first lost him, and had known him directly to be the same child that he was watching for, though I couldn't make out why. A bargain was struck with Fagin, that if Oliver was got back he should have a certain sum; and he was to have more for making him a thief, which this Monks wanted for some purpose of his own.'

'For what purpose?' asked Rose.

'He caught sight of my shadow on the wall as I listened, in the hope of finding out,' said the girl; 'and there are not many people besides me that could have got out of their way in time to escape discovery. But I did; and I saw him no more till last night.'

'And what occurred then?'

'I'll tell you, lady. Last night he came again. Again they went upstairs, and I, wrapping myself up so that my shadow would not betray me, again listened at the door. The first words I heard Monks say were these: "So the only proofs of the boy's identity lie at the bottom of the river, and the old hag that received them from the mother is rotting in her coffin." They laughed, and talked of his success in doing this; and Monks, talking on about the boy, and getting very wild, said that though he had got the young devil's money safely now, he'd rather have had it the other way; for, what a game it would have been to have brought down the boast of the father's will, by driving him through every jail in town, and then hauling him up for some capital felony which Fagin could easily manage, after having made a good profit of him besides.'

'What is all this!' said Rose.

'The truth, lady, though it comes from my lips,' replied the girl. 'Then, he said, with oaths common enough in my ears, but strange to yours, that if he could gratify his hatred by taking the boy's life without bringing his own neck in danger, he would; but, as he couldn't, he'd be upon the watch to meet him at every turn in life; and if he took advantage of his birth and history, he might harm him yet. "In short, Fagin," he says, "Jew as you are, you never laid such snares as I'll contrive for my young brother, Oliver."'

'His brother!' exclaimed Rose.

'Those were his words,' said Nancy, glancing uneasily round, as she had scarcely ceased to do, since she began to speak, for a vision of Sikes haunted her perpetually. 'And more. When he spoke of you and the other lady, and said it seemed contrived by Heaven, or the devil, against him, that

Oliver should come into your hands, he laughed, and said there was some comfort in that too, for how many thousands and hundreds of thousands of pounds would you not give, if you had them, to know who your two-legged spaniel was.'

'You do not mean,' said Rose, turning very pale, 'to tell me that this was said in earnest?'

'He spoke in hard and angry earnest, if a man ever did,' replied the girl, shaking her head. 'He is an earnest man when his hatred is up. I know many who do worse things; but I'd rather listen to them all a dozen times, than to that Monks once. It is growing late, and I have to reach home without suspicion of having been on such an errand as this. I must get back quickly.'

'But what can I do?' said Rose. 'To what use can I turn this communication without you? Back! Why do you wish to return to companions you paint in such terrible colors? If you repeat this information to a gentleman whom I can summon in an instant from the next room, you can be consigned to some place of safety without half an hour's delay.'

'I wish to go back,' said the girl. 'I must go back, because—how can I tell such things to an innocent lady like you?—because among the men I have told you of, there is one: the most desperate among them all; that I can't leave: no, not even to be saved from the life I am leading now.'

'Your having interfered in this dear boy's behalf before,' said Rose; 'your coming here, at so great a risk, to tell me what you have heard; your manner, which convinces me of the truth of what you say; your evident contrition, and sense of shame; all lead me to believe that you might yet be reclaimed. Oh!' said the earnest girl, folding her hands as the tears coursed down her face, 'do not turn a deaf ear to the entreaties of one of your own sex; the first—the first, I do believe, who ever appealed to you in the voice of pity and compassion. Do hear my words, and let me save you yet, for better things.'

'Lady,' cried the girl, sinking on her knees, 'dear, sweet, angel lady, you *are* the first that ever blessed me with such words as these, and if I had heard them years ago, they might have turned me from a life of sin and sorrow; but it is too late, it is too late!'

'It is never too late,' said Rose, 'for penitence and atonement.'

'It is,' cried the girl, writhing in agony of her mind; 'I cannot leave him now! I could not be his death.'

'Why should you be?' asked Rose.

'Nothing could save him,' cried the girl. 'If I told others what I have told you, and led to their being taken, he would be sure to die. He is the boldest, and has been so cruel!'

'Is it possible,' cried Rose, 'that for such a man as this, you can resign every future hope, and the certainty of immediate rescue? It is madness.'

'I don't know what it is,' answered the girl; 'I only know that it is so, and not with me alone, but with hundreds of others as bad and wretched as myself. I must go back. Whether it is God's wrath for the wrong I have done, I do not know; but I am drawn back to him through every suffering and ill usage; and I should be, I believe, if I knew that I was to die by his hand at last.'

'What am I to do?' said Rose. 'I should not let you depart from me thus.'

'You should, lady, and I know you will,' rejoined the girl, rising. 'You will not stop my going because I have trusted in your goodness, and forced no promise from you, as I might have done.'

'Of what use, then, is the communication you have made?' said Rose. 'This mystery must be investigated, or how will its disclosure to me, benefit Oliver, whom you are anxious to serve?'

'You must have some kind gentleman about you that will hear it as a secret, and advise you what to do,' rejoined the girl.

'But where can I find you again when it is necessary?' asked Rose. 'I do not seek to know where these dreadful people live, but where will you be walking or passing at any settled period from this time?'

'Will you promise me that you will have my secret strictly kept, and come alone, or with the only other person that knows it; and that I shall not be watched or followed?' asked the girl.

'I promise you solemnly,' answered Rose.

'Every Sunday night, from eleven until the clock strikes twelve,' said the girl without hesitation, 'I will walk on London Bridge if I am alive.'

'Stay another moment,' interposed Rose, as the girl moved hurriedly towards the door. 'Think once again on your own condition, and the opportunity you have of escaping from it. You have a claim on me: not only as the voluntary bearer of this intelligence, but as a woman lost almost beyond redemption. Will you return to this gang of robbers, and to this man, when a word can save you? What fascination is it that can take you back, and make you cling to wickedness and misery? Oh! is there no chord in your heart that I can touch! Is there nothing left, to which I can appeal against this terrible infatuation!'

'When ladies as young, and good, and beautiful as you are,' replied the girl steadily, 'give away your hearts, love will carry you all lengths—even such as you, who have home, friends, other admirers, everything, to fill them. When such as I, who have no certain roof but the coffinlid, and no friend in sickness or death but the hospital nurse, set our rotten hearts on any man, and let him fill the place that has been a blank through all our wretched lives, who can hope to cure us? Pity us, lady—pity us for having only one feeling of the woman left, and for having that turned, by a heavy judgment, from a comfort and a pride, into a new means of violence and suffering.'

'You will,' said Rose, after a pause, 'take some money from me, which may enable you to live without dishonesty—at all events until we meet again?'

'Not a penny,' replied the girl, waving her hand.

'Do not close your heart against all my efforts to help you,' said Rose, stepping gently forward. 'I wish to serve you indeed.'

'You would serve me best, lady,' replied the girl, wringing her hands, 'if you could take my life at once; for I have felt more grief to think of what I am, to-night, than I ever did before, and it would be something not to die in the hell in which I have lived. God bless you, sweet lady, and send as much happiness on your head as I have brought shame on mine!'

Thus speaking, and sobbing aloud, the unhappy creature turned away; while Rose Maylie, overpowered by this extraordinary interview, which had more the semblance of a rapid dream than an actual occurrence, sank into a chair, and endeavoured to collect her wandering thoughts.

CHAPTER XLI

CONTAINING FRESH DISCOVERIES, AND SHOWING THAT SUPRISES, LIKE MISFORTUNES, SELDOM COME ALONE

Her situation was, indeed, one of no common trial and difficulty. While she felt the most eager and burning desire to penetrate the mystery in which Oliver's history was enveloped, she could not but hold sacred the confidence which the miserable woman with whom she had just conversed, had reposed in her, as a young and guileless girl. Her words and manner had touched Rose Maylie's heart; and, mingled with her love for her young charge, and scarcely less intense in its truth and fervour, was her fond wish to win the outcast back to repentance and hope.

They purposed remaining in London only three days, prior to departing for some weeks to a distant part of the coast. It was now midnight of the first day. What course of action could she determine upon, which could be adopted in eight-and-forty hours? Or how could she postpone the journey without exciting suspicion?

Mr. Losberne was with them, and would be for the next two days; but Rose was too well acquainted with the excellent gentleman's impetuosity, and foresaw too clearly the wrath with which, in the first explosion of his indignation, he would regard the instrument of Oliver's recapture, to trust him with the secret, when her representations in the girl's behalf could be seconded by no experienced person. These were all reasons for the greatest caution and most circumspect behaviour in communicating it to Mrs. Maylie, whose first impulse would infallibly be to hold a conference with the worthy doctor on the subject. As to resorting to any legal adviser, even if she had known how to do so, it was scarcely to be thought of, for the same reason. Once the thought occurred to her of seeking assistance from Harry; but this awakened the recollection of their last parting, and it seemed unworthy of her to call him back, when—the tears rose to her eyes as she pursued this train of reflection—he might have by this time learnt to forget her, and to be happier away.

Disturbed by these different reflections; inclining now to one course and then to another, and again recoiling from all, as each successive consideration presented itself to her mind; Rose passed a sleepless and anxious night. After more communing with herself next day, she arrived at the desperate conclusion of consulting Harry.

'If it be painful to him,' she thought, 'to come back here, how painful it will be to me! But perhaps he will not come; he may write, or he may come himself, and studiously abstain from meeting me—he did when he went away. I hardly thought he would; but it was better for us both.' And here Rose dropped the pen, and turned away, as though the very paper which was to be her messenger should not see her weep.

She had taken up the same pen, and laid it down again fifty times, and had considered and reconsidered the first line of her letter without writing the first word, when Oliver, who had been walking in the streets, with Mr. Giles for a body-guard, entered the room in such breathless haste and violent agitation, as seemed to betoken some new cause of alarm.

'What makes you look so flurried?' asked Rose, advancing to meet him.

'I hardly know how; I feel as if I should be choked,' replied the boy. 'Oh dear! To think that I should see him at last, and you should be able to know that I have told you the truth!'

'I never thought you had told us anything but the truth,' said Rose, soothing him. 'But what is this?—of whom do you speak?'

'I have seen the gentleman,' replied Oliver, scarcely able to articulate, 'the gentleman who was so good to me—Mr. Brownlow, that we have so often talked about.'

'Where?' asked Rose.

'Getting out of a coach,' replied Oliver, shedding tears of delight, 'and going into a house. I didn't speak to him—I couldn't speak to him, for he didn't see me, and I trembled so, that I was not able to go up to him. But Giles asked, for me, whether he lived there, and they said he did. Look here,' said Oliver, opening a scrap of paper, 'here it is; here's where he lives—I'm going there directly! Oh, dear me, dear me! What shall I do when I come to see him and hear him speak again!'

With her attention not a little distracted by these and a great many other incoherent exclamations of joy, Rose read the address, which was Craven

Street, in the Strand. She very soon determined upon turning the discovery to account.

'Quick!' she said. 'Tell them to fetch a hackney-coach, and be ready to go with me. I will take you there directly, without a minute's loss of time. I will only tell my aunt that we are going out for an hour, and be ready as soon as you are.'

Oliver needed no prompting to despatch, and in little more than five minutes they were on their way to Craven Street. When they arrived there, Rose left Oliver in the coach, under pretence of preparing the old gentleman to receive him; and sending up her card by the servant, requested to see Mr. Brownlow on very pressing business. The servant soon returned, to beg that she would walk upstairs; and following him into an upper room, Miss Maylie was presented to an elderly gentleman of benevolent appearance, in a bottle-green coat. At no great distance from whom, was seated another old gentleman, in nankeen breeches and gaiters; who did not look particularly benevolent, and who was sitting with his hands clasped on the top of a thick stick, and his chin propped thereupon.

'Dear me,' said the gentleman, in the bottle-green coat, hastily rising with great politeness, 'I beg your pardon, young lady—I imagined it was some importunate person who—I beg you will excuse me. Be seated, pray.'

'Mr. Brownlow, I believe, sir?' said Rose, glancing from the other gentleman to the one who had spoken.

'That is my name,' said the old gentleman. 'This is my friend, Mr. Grimwig. Grimwig, will you leave us for a few minutes?'

'I believe,' interposed Miss Maylie, 'that at this period of our interview, I need not give that gentleman the trouble of going away. If I am correctly informed, he is cognizant of the business on which I wish to speak to you.'

Mr. Brownlow inclined his head. Mr. Grimwig, who had made one very stiff bow, and risen from his chair, made another very stiff bow, and dropped into it again.

'I shall surprise you very much, I have no doubt,' said Rose, naturally embarrassed; 'but you once showed great benevolence and goodness to a very dear young friend of mine, and I am sure you will take an interest in hearing of him again.'

'Indeed!' said Mr. Brownlow.

'Oliver Twist you knew him as,' replied Rose.

The words no sooner escaped her lips, than Mr. Grimwig, who had been affecting to dip into a large book that lay on the table, upset it with a great crash, and falling back in his chair, discharged from his features every expression but one of unmitigated wonder, and indulged in a prolonged and vacant stare; then, as if ashamed of having betrayed so much emotion, he jerked himself, as it were, by a convulsion into his former attitude, and looking out straight before him emitted a long deep whistle, which seemed, at last, not to be discharged on empty air, but to die away in the innermost recesses of his stomach.

Mr. Browlow was no less surprised, although his astonishment was not expressed in the same eccentric manner. He drew his chair nearer to Miss Maylie's, and said,

'Do me the favour, my dear young lady, to leave entirely out of the question that goodness and benevolence of which you speak, and of which nobody else knows anything; and if you have it in your power to produce any evidence which will alter the unfavourable opinion I was once induced to entertain of that poor child, in Heaven's name put me in possession of it.'

'A bad one! I'll eat my head if he is not a bad one,' growled Mr. Grimwig, speaking by some ventriloquial power, without moving a muscle of his face.

'He is a child of a noble nature and a warm heart,' said Rose, colouring; 'and that Power which has thought fit to try him beyond his years, has planted in his breast affections and feelings which would do honour to many who have numbered his days six times over.'

'I'm only sixty-one,' said Mr. Grimwig, with the same rigid face. 'And, as the devil's in it if this Oliver is not twelve years old at least, I don't see the application of that remark.'

'Do not heed my friend, Miss Maylie,' said Mr. Brownlow; 'he does not mean what he says.'

'Yes, he does,' growled Mr. Grimwig.

'No, he does not,' said Mr. Brownlow, obviously rising in wrath as he spoke.

'He'll eat his head, if he doesn't,' growled Mr. Grimwig.

'He would deserve to have it knocked off, if he does,' said Mr. Brownlow.

'And he'd uncommonly like to see any man offer to do it,' responded Mr. Grimwig, knocking his stick upon the floor.

Having gone thus far, the two old gentlemen severally took snuff, and afterwards shook hands, according to their invariable custom.

'Now, Miss Maylie,' said Mr. Brownlow, 'to return to the subject in which your humanity is so much interested. Will you let me know what intelligence you have of this poor child: allowing me to promise that I exhausted every means in my power of discovering him, and that since I have been absent from this country, my first impression that he had imposed upon me, and had been persuaded by his former associates to rob me, has been considerably shaken.'

Rose, who had had time to collect her thoughts, at once related, in a few natural words, all that had befallen Oliver since he left Mr. Brownlow's house; reserving Nancy's information for that gentleman's private ear, and concluding with the assurance that his only sorrow, for some months past, had been not being able to meet with his former benefactor and friend.

'Thank God!' said the old gentleman. 'This is great happiness to me, great happiness. But you have not told me where he is now, Miss Maylie. You must pardon my finding fault with you,—but why not have brought him?'

'He is waiting in a coach at the door,' replied Rose.

'At this door!' cried the old gentleman. With which he hurried out of the room, down the stairs, up the coachsteps, and into the coach, without another word.

When the room-door closed behind him, Mr. Grimwig lifted up his head, and converting one of the hind legs of his chair into a pivot, described three distinct circles with the assistance of his stick and the table; sitting in it all the time. After performing this evolution, he rose and limped as fast as he could up and down the room at least a dozen times, and then stopping suddenly before Rose, kissed her without the slightest preface.

'Hush!' he said, as the young lady rose in some alarm at this unusual proceeding. 'Don't be afraid. I'm old enough to be your grandfather. You're a sweet girl. I like you. Here they are!'

In fact, as he threw himself at one dexterous dive into his former seat, Mr. Brownlow returned, accompanied by Oliver, whom Mr. Grimwig received very graciously; and if the gratification of that moment had been the only reward for all her anxiety and care in Oliver's behalf, Rose Maylie would have been well repaid.

'There is somebody else who should not be forgotten, by the bye,' said Mr. Brownlow, ringing the bell. 'Send Mrs. Bedwin here, if you please.'

The old housekeeper answered the summons with all dispatch; and dropping a curtsey at the door, waited for orders.

'Why, you get blinder every day, Bedwin,' said Mr. Brownlow, rather testily.

'Well, that I do, sir,' replied the old lady. 'People's eyes, at my time of life, don't improve with age, sir.'

'I could have told you that,' rejoined Mr. Brownlow; 'but put on your glasses, and see if you can't find out what you were wanted for, will you?'

The old lady began to rummage in her pocket for her spectacles. But Oliver's patience was not proof against this new trial; and yielding to his first impulse, he sprang into her arms.

'God be good to me!' cried the old lady, embracing him; 'it is my innocent boy!'

'My dear old nurse!' cried Oliver.

'He would come back—I knew he would,' said the old lady, holding him in her arms. 'How well he looks, and how like a gentleman's son he is dressed again! Where have you been, this long, long while? Ah! the same sweet face, but not so pale; the same soft eye, but not so sad. I have never forgotten them or his quiet smile, but have seen them every day, side by side with those of my own dear children, dead and gone since I was a lightsome young creature.' Running on thus, and now holding Oliver from her to mark how he had grown, now clasping him to her and passing her fingers fondly through his hair, the good soul laughed and wept upon his neck by turns.

Leaving her and Oliver to compare notes at leisure, Mr. Brownlow led the way into another room; and there, heard from Rose a full narration of her interview with Nancy, which occasioned him no little surprise and perplexity. Rose also explained her reasons for not confiding in her friend Mr. Losberne in the first instance. The old gentleman considered that she had acted prudently, and readily undertook to hold solemn conference with the worthy doctor himself. To afford him an early opportunity for the execution of this design, it was arranged that he should call at the hotel at eight o'clock that evening, and that in the meantime Mrs. Maylie should be cautiously informed of all that had occurred. These preliminaries adjusted, Rose and Oliver returned home.

Rose had by no means overrated the measure of the good doctor's wrath. Nancy's history was no sooner unfolded to him, than he poured forth a shower of mingled threats and execrations; threatened to make her the first victim of the combined ingenuity of Messrs. Blathers and Duff; and actually put on his hat preparatory to sallying forth to obtain the assistance of those worthies. And, doubtless, he would, in this first outbreak, have carried the intention into effect without a moment's consideration of the consequences, if he had not been restrained, in part, by corresponding violence on the side of Mr. Brownlow, who was himself of an irascible temperament, and party by such arguments and representations as seemed best calculated to dissuade him from his hotbrained purpose.

'Then what the devil is to be done?' said the impetuous doctor, when they had rejoined the two ladies. 'Are we to pass a vote of thanks to all these vagabonds, male and female, and beg them to accept a hundred pounds, or so, apiece, as a trifling mark of our esteem, and some slight acknowledgment of their kindness to Oliver?'

'Not exactly that,' rejoined Mr. Brownlow, laughing; 'but we must proceed gently and with great care.'

'Gentleness and care,' exclaimed the doctor. 'I'd send them one and all to —'

'Never mind where,' interposed Mr. Brownlow. 'But reflect whether sending them anywhere is likely to attain the object we have in view.'

'What object?' asked the doctor.

'Simply, the discovery of Oliver's parentage, and regaining for him the inheritance of which, if this story be true, he has been fraudulently deprived.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Losberne, cooling himself with his pocket-handkerchief; 'I almost forgot that.'

'You see,' pursued Mr. Brownlow; 'placing this poor girl entirely out of the question, and supposing it were possible to bring these scoundrels to justice without compromising her safety, what good should we bring about?'

'Hanging a few of them at least, in all probability,' suggested the doctor, 'and transporting the rest.'

'Very good,' replied Mr. Brownlow, smiling; 'but no doubt they will bring that about for themselves in the fulness of time, and if we step in to forestall them, it seems to me that we shall be performing a very Quixotic act, in direct opposition to our own interest—or at least to Oliver's, which is the same thing.'

'How?' inquired the doctor.

'Thus. It is quite clear that we shall have extreme difficulty in getting to the bottom of this mystery, unless we can bring this man, Monks, upon his knees. That can only be done by stratagem, and by catching him when he is not surrounded by these people. For, suppose he were apprehended, we have no proof against him. He is not even (so far as we know, or as the facts appear to us) concerned with the gang in any of their robberies. If he were not discharged, it is very unlikely that he could receive any further punishment than being committed to prison as a rogue and vagabond; and of course ever afterwards his mouth would be so obstinately closed that he might as well, for our purposes, be deaf, dumb, blind, and an idiot.'

'Then,' said the doctor impetuously, 'I put it to you again, whether you think it reasonable that this promise to the girl should be considered binding; a promise made with the best and kindest intentions, but really—'

'Do not discuss the point, my dear young lady, pray,' said Mr. Brownlow, interrupting Rose as she was about to speak. 'The promise shall be kept. I don't think it will, in the slightest degree, interfere with our proceedings. But, before we can resolve upon any precise course of action, it will be necessary to see the girl; to ascertain from her whether she will point out this Monks, on the understanding that he is to be dealt with by us, and not by the law; or, if she will not, or cannot do that, to procure from her such an account of his haunts and description of his person, as will enable us to identify him. She cannot be seen until next Sunday night; this is Tuesday. I would suggest that in the meantime, we remain perfectly quiet, and keep these matters secret even from Oliver himself.'

Although Mr. Losberne received with many wry faces a proposal involving a delay of five whole days, he was fain to admit that no better course occurred to him just then; and as both Rose and Mrs. Maylie sided very strongly with Mr. Brownlow, that gentleman's proposition was carried unanimously.

'I should like,' he said, 'to call in the aid of my friend Grimwig. He is a strange creature, but a shrewd one, and might prove of material assistance to us; I should say that he was bred a lawyer, and quitted the Bar in disgust because he had only one brief and a motion of course, in twenty years, though whether that is recommendation or not, you must determine for yourselves.'

'I have no objection to your calling in your friend if I may call in mine,' said the doctor.

'We must put it to the vote,' replied Mr. Brownlow, 'who may he be?'

'That lady's son, and this young lady's—very old friend,' said the doctor, motioning towards Mrs. Maylie, and concluding with an expressive glance at her niece.

Rose blushed deeply, but she did not make any audible objection to this motion (possibly she felt in a hopeless minority); and Harry Maylie and Mr. Grimwig were accordingly added to the committee.

'We stay in town, of course,' said Mrs. Maylie, 'while there remains the slightest prospect of prosecuting this inquiry with a chance of success. I will spare neither trouble nor expense in behalf of the object in which we are all so deeply interested, and I am content to remain here, if it be for twelve months, so long as you assure me that any hope remains.'

'Good!' rejoined Mr. Brownlow. 'And as I see on the faces about me, a disposition to inquire how it happened that I was not in the way to corroborate Oliver's tale, and had so suddenly left the kingdom, let me stipulate that I shall be asked no questions until such time as I may deem it expedient to forestall them by telling my own story. Believe me, I make this request with good reason, for I might otherwise excite hopes destined never to be realised, and only increase difficulties and disappointments already quite numerous enough. Come! Supper has been announced, and young Oliver, who is all alone in the next room, will have begun to think, by this time, that we have wearied of his company, and entered into some dark conspiracy to thrust him forth upon the world.'

With these words, the old gentleman gave his hand to Mrs. Maylie, and escorted her into the supper-room. Mr. Losberne followed, leading Rose; and the council was, for the present, effectually broken up.

CHAPTER XLII

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE OF OLIVER'S, EXHIBITING DECIDED MARKS OF GENIUS, BECOMES A PUBLIC CHARACTER IN THE METROPOLIS

Upon the night when Nancy, having lulled Mr. Sikes to sleep, hurried on her self-imposed mission to Rose Maylie, there advanced towards London, by the Great North Road, two persons, upon whom it is expedient that this history should bestow some attention.

They were a man and woman; or perhaps they would be better described as a male and female: for the former was one of those long-limbed, knock-kneed, shambling, bony people, to whom it is difficult to assign any precise age,—looking as they do, when they are yet boys, like undergrown men, and when they are almost men, like overgrown boys. The woman was young, but of a robust and hardy make, as she need have been to bear the weight of the heavy bundle which was strapped to her back. Her companion was not encumbered with much luggage, as there merely dangled from a stick which he carried over his shoulder, a small parcel wrapped in a common handkerchief, and apparently light enough. This circumstance, added to the length of his legs, which were of unusual extent, enabled him with much ease to keep some half-dozen paces in advance of his companion, to whom he occasionally turned with an impatient jerk of the head: as if reproaching her tardiness, and urging her to greater exertion.

Thus, they had toiled along the dusty road, taking little heed of any object within sight, save when they stepped aside to allow a wider passage for the mail-coaches which were whirling out of town, until they passed through Highgate archway; when the foremost traveller stopped and called impatiently to his companion,

'Come on, can't yer? What a lazybones yer are, Charlotte.'

'It's a heavy load, I can tell you,' said the female, coming up, almost breathless with fatigue.

'Heavy! What are yer talking about? What are yer made for?' rejoined the male traveller, changing his own little bundle as he spoke, to the other shoulder. 'Oh, there yer are, resting again! Well, if yer ain't enough to tire anybody's patience out, I don't know what is!'

'Is it much farther?' asked the woman, resting herself against a bank, and looking up with the perspiration streaming from her face.

'Much farther! Yer as good as there,' said the long-legged tramper, pointing out before him. 'Look there! Those are the lights of London.'

'They're a good two mile off, at least,' said the woman despondingly.

'Never mind whether they're two mile off, or twenty,' said Noah Claypole; for he it was; 'but get up and come on, or I'll kick yer, and so I give yer notice.'

As Noah's red nose grew redder with anger, and as he crossed the road while speaking, as if fully prepared to put his threat into execution, the woman rose without any further remark, and trudged onward by his side.

'Where do you mean to stop for the night, Noah?' she asked, after they had walked a few hundred yards.

'How should I know?' replied Noah, whose temper had been considerably impaired by walking.

'Near, I hope,' said Charlotte.

'No, not near,' replied Mr. Claypole. 'There! Not near; so don't think it.'

'Why not?'

'When I tell yer that I don't mean to do a thing, that's enough, without any why or because either,' replied Mr. Claypole with dignity.

'Well, you needn't be so cross,' said his companion.

'A pretty thing it would be, wouldn't it to go and stop at the very first public-house outside the town, so that Sowerberry, if he come up after us, might poke in his old nose, and have us taken back in a cart with handcuffs on,' said Mr. Claypole in a jeering tone. 'No! I shall go and lose myself among the narrowest streets I can find, and not stop till we come to the very out-of-the-wayest house I can set eyes on. 'Cod, yer may thanks yer stars I've got a head; for if we hadn't gone, at first, the wrong road a purpose, and come back across country, yer'd have been locked up hard and fast a week ago, my lady. And serve yer right for being a fool.'

'I know I ain't as cunning as you are,' replied Charlotte; 'but don't put all the blame on me, and say I should have been locked up. You would have been if I had been, any way.'

'Yer took the money from the till, yer know yer did,' said Mr. Claypole.

'I took it for you, Noah, dear,' rejoined Charlotte.

'Did I keep it?' asked Mr. Claypole.

'No; you trusted in me, and let me carry it like a dear, and so you are,' said the lady, chucking him under the chin, and drawing her arm through his.

This was indeed the case; but as it was not Mr. Claypole's habit to repose a blind and foolish confidence in anybody, it should be observed, in justice to that gentleman, that he had trusted Charlotte to this extent, in order that, if they were pursued, the money might be found on her: which would leave him an opportunity of asserting his innocence of any theft, and would greatly facilitate his chances of escape. Of course, he entered at this juncture, into no explanation of his motives, and they walked on very lovingly together.

In pursuance of this cautious plan, Mr. Claypole went on, without halting, until he arrived at the Angel at Islington, where he wisely judged, from the crowd of passengers and numbers of vehicles, that London began in earnest. Just pausing to observe which appeared the most crowded streets, and consequently the most to be avoided, he crossed into Saint John's Road, and was soon deep in the obscurity of the intricate and dirty ways, which, lying between Gray's Inn Lane and Smithfield, render that part of the town one of the lowest and worst that improvement has left in the midst of London.

Through these streets, Noah Claypole walked, dragging Charlotte after him; now stepping into the kennel to embrace at a glance the whole external character of some small public-house; now jogging on again, as some fancied appearance induced him to believe it too public for his purpose. At length, he stopped in front of one, more humble in appearance and more dirty than any he had yet seen; and, having crossed over and surveyed it from the opposite pavement, graciously announced his intention of putting up there, for the night.

'So give us the bundle,' said Noah, unstrapping it from the woman's shoulders, and slinging it over his own; 'and don't yer speak, except when yer spoke to. What's the name of the house—t-h-r—three what?'

'Cripples,' said Charlotte.

'Three Cripples,' repeated Noah, 'and a very good sign too. Now, then! Keep close at my heels, and come along.' With these injunctions, he pushed the rattling door with his shoulder, and entered the house, followed by his companion.

There was nobody in the bar but a young Jew, who, with his two elbows on the counter, was reading a dirty newspaper. He stared very hard at Noah, and Noah stared very hard at him.

If Noah had been attired in his charity-boy's dress, there might have been some reason for the Jew opening his eyes so wide; but as he had discarded the coat and badge, and wore a short smock-frock over his leathers, there seemed no particular reason for his appearance exciting so much attention in a public-house.

'Is this the Three Cripples?' asked Noah.

'That is the dabe of this 'ouse,' replied the Jew.

'A gentleman we met on the road, coming up from the country, recommended us here,' said Noah, nudging Charlotte, perhaps to call her attention to this most ingenious device for attracting respect, and perhaps to warn her to betray no surprise. 'We want to sleep here to-night.'

'I'b dot certaid you cad,' said Barney, who was the attendant sprite; 'but I'll idquire.'

'Show us the tap, and give us a bit of cold meat and a drop of beer while yer inquiring, will yer?' said Noah.

Barney complied by ushering them into a small back-room, and setting the required viands before them; having done which, he informed the travellers that they could be lodged that night, and left the amiable couple to their refreshment.

Now, this back-room was immediately behind the bar, and some steps lower, so that any person connected with the house, undrawing a small curtain which concealed a single pane of glass fixed in the wall of the last-named apartment, about five feet from its flooring, could not only look down upon any guests in the back-room without any great hazard of being observed (the glass being in a dark angle of the wall, between which and a large upright beam the observer had to thrust himself), but could, by applying his ear to the partition, ascertain with tolerable distinctness, their subject of conversation. The landlord of the house had not withdrawn his eye from this place of espial for five minutes, and Barney had only just returned from making the communication above related, when Fagin, in the course of his evening's business, came into the bar to inquire after some of his young pupils.

'Hush!' said Barney: 'stradegers id the next roob.'

'Strangers!' repeated the old man in a whisper.

'Ah! Ad rub uds too,' added Barney. 'Frob the cuttry, but subthig in your way, or I'b bistaked.'

Fagin appeared to receive this communication with great interest.

Mounting a stool, he cautiously applied his eye to the pane of glass, from which secret post he could see Mr. Claypole taking cold beef from the dish, and porter from the pot, and administering homeopathic doses of both to Charlotte, who sat patiently by, eating and drinking at his pleasure.

'Aha!' he whispered, looking round to Barney, 'I like that fellow's looks. He'd be of use to us; he knows how to train the girl already. Don't make as much noise as a mouse, my dear, and let me hear 'em talk—let me hear 'em.'

He again applied his eye to the glass, and turning his ear to the partition, listened attentively: with a subtle and eager look upon his face, that might have appertained to some old goblin.

'So I mean to be a gentleman,' said Mr. Claypole, kicking out his legs, and continuing a conversation, the commencement of which Fagin had arrived too late to hear. 'No more jolly old coffins, Charlotte, but a gentleman's life for me: and, if yer like, yer shall be a lady.'

'I should like that well enough, dear,' replied Charlotte; 'but tills ain't to be emptied every day, and people to get clear off after it.'

'Tills be blowed!' said Mr. Claypole; 'there's more things besides tills to be emptied.'

'What do you mean?' asked his companion.

'Pockets, women's ridicules, houses, mail-coaches, banks!' said Mr. Claypole, rising with the porter.

'But you can't do all that, dear,' said Charlotte.

'I shall look out to get into company with them as can,' replied Noah. 'They'll be able to make us useful some way or another. Why, you yourself are worth fifty women; I never see such a precious sly and deceitful creetur as yer can be when I let yer.'

'Lor, how nice it is to hear yer say so!' exclaimed Charlotte, imprinting a kiss upon his ugly face.

'There, that'll do: don't yer be too affectionate, in case I'm cross with yer,' said Noah, disengaging himself with great gravity. 'I should like to be the captain of some band, and have the whopping of 'em, and follering 'em about, unbeknown to themselves. That would suit me, if there was good profit; and if we could only get in with some gentleman of this sort, I say it would be cheap at that twenty-pound note you've got,—especially as we don't very well know how to get rid of it ourselves.'

After expressing this opinion, Mr. Claypole looked into the porter-pot with an aspect of deep wisdom; and having well shaken its contents, nodded condescendingly to Charlotte, and took a draught, wherewith he appeared greatly refreshed. He was meditating another, when the sudden opening of the door, and the appearance of a stranger, interrupted him.

The stranger was Mr. Fagin. And very amiable he looked, and a very low bow he made, as he advanced, and setting himself down at the nearest table, ordered something to drink of the grinning Barney.

'A pleasant night, sir, but cool for the time of year,' said Fagin, rubbing his hands. 'From the country, I see, sir?'

'How do yer see that?' asked Noah Claypole.

'We have not so much dust as that in London,' replied Fagin, pointing from Noah's shoes to those of his companion, and from them to the two bundles.

'Yer a sharp feller,' said Noah. 'Ha! ha! only hear that, Charlotte!'

'Why, one need be sharp in this town, my dear,' replied the Jew, sinking his voice to a confidential whisper; 'and that's the truth.'

Fagin followed up this remark by striking the side of his nose with his right forefinger,—a gesture which Noah attempted to imitate, though not with complete success, in consequence of his own nose not being large enough for the purpose. However, Mr. Fagin seemed to interpret the endeavour as expressing a perfect coincidence with his opinion, and put about the liquor which Barney reappeared with, in a very friendly manner.

'Good stuff that,' observed Mr. Claypole, smacking his lips.

'Dear!' said Fagin. 'A man need be always emptying a till, or a pocket, or a woman's reticule, or a house, or a mail-coach, or a bank, if he drinks it regularly.'

Mr. Claypole no sooner heard this extract from his own remarks than he fell back in his chair, and looked from the Jew to Charlotte with a countenance of ashy paleness and excessive terror.

'Don't mind me, my dear,' said Fagin, drawing his chair closer. 'Ha! ha! it was lucky it was only me that heard you by chance. It was very lucky it was only me.'

'I didn't take it,' stammered Noah, no longer stretching out his legs like an independent gentleman, but coiling them up as well as he could under his chair; 'it was all her doing; yer've got it now, Charlotte, yer know yer have.'

'No matter who's got it, or who did it, my dear,' replied Fagin, glancing, nevertheless, with a hawk's eye at the girl and the two bundles. 'I'm in that way myself, and I like you for it.'

'In what way?' asked Mr. Claypole, a little recovering.

'In that way of business,' rejoined Fagin; 'and so are the people of the house. You've hit the right nail upon the head, and are as safe here as you could be. There is not a safer place in all this town than is the Cripples; that is, when I like to make it so. And I have taken a fancy to you and the young woman; so I've said the word, and you may make your minds easy.'

Noah Claypole's mind might have been at ease after this assurance, but his body certainly was not; for he shuffled and writhed about, into various uncouth positions: eyeing his new friend meanwhile with mingled fear and suspicion.

'I'll tell you more,' said Fagin, after he had reassured the girl, by dint of friendly nods and muttered encouragements. 'I have got a friend that I think can gratify your darling wish, and put you in the right way, where you can take whatever department of the business you think will suit you best at first, and be taught all the others.'

'Yer speak as if yer were in earnest,' replied Noah.

'What advantage would it be to me to be anything else?' inquired Fagin, shrugging his shoulders. 'Here! Let me have a word with you outside.'

'There's no occasion to trouble ourselves to move,' said Noah, getting his legs by gradual degrees abroad again. 'She'll take the luggage upstairs the while. Charlotte, see to them bundles.'

This mandate, which had been delivered with great majesty, was obeyed without the slightest demur; and Charlotte made the best of her way off with the packages while Noah held the door open and watched her out.

'She's kept tolerably well under, ain't she?' he asked as he resumed his seat: in the tone of a keeper who had tamed some wild animal.

'Quite perfect,' rejoined Fagin, clapping him on the shoulder. 'You're a genius, my dear.'

'Why, I suppose if I wasn't, I shouldn't be here,' replied Noah. 'But, I say, she'll be back if yer lose time.'

'Now, what do you think?' said Fagin. 'If you was to like my friend, could you do better than join him?'

'Is he in a good way of business; that's where it is!' responded Noah, winking one of his little eyes.

'The top of the tree; employs a power of hands; has the very best society in the profession.'

'Regular town-maders?' asked Mr. Claypole.

'Not a countryman among 'em; and I don't think he'd take you, even on my recommendation, if he didn't run rather short of assistants just now,' replied Fagin.

'Should I have to hand over?' said Noah, slapping his breeches-pocket.

'It couldn't possibly be done without,' replied Fagin, in a most decided manner.

'Twenty pound, though—it's a lot of money!'

'Not when it's in a note you can't get rid of,' retorted Fagin. 'Number and date taken, I suppose? Payment stopped at the Bank? Ah! It's not worth much to him. It'll have to go abroad, and he couldn't sell it for a great deal in the market.'

'When could I see him?' asked Noah doubtfully.

'To-morrow morning.'

'Where?'

'Here.'

'Um!' said Noah. 'What's the wages?'

'Live like a gentleman—board and lodging, pipes and spirits free—half of all you earn, and half of all the young woman earns,' replied Mr. Fagin.

Whether Noah Claypole, whose rapacity was none of the least comprehensive, would have acceded even to these glowing terms, had he been a perfectly free agent, is very doubtful; but as he recollected that, in the event of his refusal, it was in the power of his new acquaintance to give him up to justice immediately (and more unlikely things had come to pass), he gradually relented, and said he thought that would suit him.

'But, yer see,' observed Noah, 'as she will be able to do a good deal, I should like to take something very light.'

'A little fancy work?' suggested Fagin.

'Ah! something of that sort,' replied Noah. 'What do you think would suit me now? Something not too trying for the strength, and not very dangerous, you know. That's the sort of thing!'

'I heard you talk of something in the spy way upon the others, my dear,' said Fagin. 'My friend wants somebody who would do that well, very much.'

'Why, I did mention that, and I shouldn't mind turning my hand to it sometimes,' rejoined Mr. Claypole slowly; 'but it wouldn't pay by itself, you know.'

'That's true!' observed the Jew, ruminating or pretending to ruminate. 'No, it might not.'

'What do you think, then?' asked Noah, anxiously regarding him. 'Something in the sneaking way, where it was pretty sure work, and not much more risk than being at home.'

'What do you think of the old ladies?' asked Fagin. 'There's a good deal of money made in snatching their bags and parcels, and running round the corner.'

'Don't they holler out a good deal, and scratch sometimes?' asked Noah, shaking his head. 'I don't think that would answer my purpose. Ain't there any other line open?'

'Stop!' said Fagin, laying his hand on Noah's knee. 'The kinchin lay.'

'What's that?' demanded Mr. Claypole.

'The kinchins, my dear,' said Fagin, 'is the young children that's sent on errands by their mothers, with sixpences and shillings; and the lay is just to take their money away—they've always got it ready in their hands,—then knock 'em into the kennel, and walk off very slow, as if there were nothing else the matter but a child fallen down and hurt itself. Ha! ha! ha!'

'Ha! ha!' roared Mr. Claypole, kicking up his legs in an ecstasy. 'Lord, that's the very thing!'

'To be sure it is,' replied Fagin; 'and you can have a few good beats chalked out in Camden Town, and Battle Bridge, and neighborhoods like that, where they're always going errands; and you can upset as many kinchins as you want, any hour in the day. Ha! ha! ha!'

With this, Fagin poked Mr. Claypole in the side, and they joined in a burst of laughter both long and loud.

'Well, that's all right!' said Noah, when he had recovered himself, and Charlotte had returned. 'What time to-morrow shall we say?'

'Will ten do?' asked Fagin, adding, as Mr. Claypole nodded assent, 'What name shall I tell my good friend.'

'Mr. Bolter,' replied Noah, who had prepared himself for such emergency. 'Mr. Morris Bolter. This is Mrs. Bolter.'

'Mrs. Bolter's humble servant,' said Fagin, bowing with grotesque politeness. 'I hope I shall know her better very shortly.'

'Do you hear the gentleman, Charlotte?' thundered Mr. Claypole.

'Yes, Noah, dear!' replied Mrs. Bolter, extending her hand.

'She calls me Noah, as a sort of fond way of talking,' said Mr. Morris Bolter, late Claypole, turning to Fagin. 'You understand?'

'Oh yes, I understand—perfectly,' replied Fagin, telling the truth for once. 'Good-night! Good-night!'

With many adieus and good wishes, Mr. Fagin went his way. Noah Claypole, bespeaking his good lady's attention, proceeded to enlighten her relative to the arrangement he had made, with all that haughtiness and air of superiority, becoming, not only a member of the sterner sex, but a gentleman who appreciated the dignity of a special appointment on the kinchin lay, in London and its vicinity.

CHAPTER XLIII

WHEREIN IS SHOWN HOW THE ARTFUL DODGER GOT INTO TROUBLE

'And so it was you that was your own friend, was it?' asked Mr. Claypole, otherwise Bolter, when, by virtue of the compact entered into between them, he had removed next day to Fagin's house. "Cod, I thought as much last night!'

'Every man's his own friend, my dear,' replied Fagin, with his most insinuating grin. 'He hasn't as good a one as himself anywhere.'

'Except sometimes,' replied Morris Bolter, assuming the air of a man of the world. 'Some people are nobody's enemies but their own, yer know.'

'Don't believe that,' said Fagin. 'When a man's his own enemy, it's only because he's too much his own friend; not because he's careful for everybody but himself. Pooh! pooh! There ain't such a thing in nature.'

'There oughn't to be, if there is,' replied Mr. Bolter.

'That stands to reason. Some conjurers say that number three is the magic number, and some say number seven. It's neither, my friend, neither. It's number one.

'Ha! ha!' cried Mr. Bolter. 'Number one for ever.'

'In a little community like ours, my dear,' said Fagin, who felt it necessary to qualify this position, 'we have a general number one, without considering me too as the same, and all the other young people.'

'Oh, the devil!' exclaimed Mr. Bolter.

'You see,' pursued Fagin, affecting to disregard this interruption, 'we are so mixed up together, and identified in our interests, that it must be so. For instance, it's your object to take care of number one—meaning yourself.'

'Certainly,' replied Mr. Bolter. 'Yer about right there.'

'Well! You can't take care of yourself, number one, without taking care of me, number one.'

'Number two, you mean,' said Mr. Bolter, who was largely endowed with the quality of selfishness.

'No, I don't!' retorted Fagin. 'I'm of the same importance to you, as you are to yourself.'

'I say,' interrupted Mr. Bolter, 'yer a very nice man, and I'm very fond of yer; but we ain't quite so thick together, as all that comes to.'

'Only think,' said Fagin, shrugging his shoulders, and stretching out his hands; 'only consider. You've done what's a very pretty thing, and what I love you for doing; but what at the same time would put the cravat round your throat, that's so very easily tied and so very difficult to unloose—in plain English, the halter!'

Mr. Bolter put his hand to his neckerchief, as if he felt it inconveniently tight; and murmured an assent, qualified in tone but not in substance.

'The gallows,' continued Fagin, 'the gallows, my dear, is an ugly finger-post, which points out a very short and sharp turning that has stopped many a bold fellow's career on the broad highway. To keep in the easy road, and keep it at a distance, is object number one with you.'

'Of course it is,' replied Mr. Bolter. 'What do yer talk about such things for?'

'Only to show you my meaning clearly,' said the Jew, raising his eyebrows. 'To be able to do that, you depend upon me. To keep my little business all snug, I depend upon you. The first is your number one, the second my number one. The more you value your number one, the more careful you must be of mine; so we come at last to what I told you at first—that a regard for number one holds us all together, and must do so, unless we would all go to pieces in company.'

'That's true,' rejoined Mr. Bolter, thoughtfully. 'Oh! yer a cunning old codger!'

Mr. Fagin saw, with delight, that this tribute to his powers was no mere compliment, but that he had really impressed his recruit with a sense of his wily genius, which it was most important that he should entertain in the outset of their acquaintance. To strengthen an impression so desirable and useful, he followed up the blow by acquainting him, in some detail, with the magnitude and extent of his operations; blending truth and fiction together, as best served his purpose; and bringing both to bear, with so much art, that Mr. Bolter's respect visibly increased, and became tempered, at the same time, with a degree of wholesome fear, which it was highly desirable to awaken.

'It's this mutual trust we have in each other that consoles me under heavy losses,' said Fagin. 'My best hand was taken from me, yesterday morning.'

'You don't mean to say he died?' cried Mr. Bolter.

'No, no,' replied Fagin, 'not so bad as that. Not quite so bad.'

'What, I suppose he was—'

'Wanted,' interposed Fagin. 'Yes, he was wanted.'

'Very particular?' inquired Mr. Bolter.

'No,' replied Fagin, 'not very. He was charged with attempting to pick a pocket, and they found a silver snuff-box on him,—his own, my dear, his own, for he took snuff himself, and was very fond of it. They remanded him till to-day, for they thought they knew the owner. Ah! he was worth fifty boxes, and I'd give the price of as many to have him back. You should have known the Dodger, my dear; you should have known the Dodger.'

'Well, but I shall know him, I hope; don't yer think so?' said Mr. Bolter.

'I'm doubtful about it,' replied Fagin, with a sigh. 'If they don't get any fresh evidence, it'll only be a summary conviction, and we shall have him back again after six weeks or so; but, if they do, it's a case of lagging. They know what a clever lad he is; he'll be a lifer. They'll make the Artful nothing less than a lifer.'

'What do you mean by lagging and a lifer?' demanded Mr. Bolter. 'What's the good of talking in that way to me; why don't yer speak so as I can understand yer?'

Fagin was about to translate these mysterious expressions into the vulgar tongue; and, being interpreted, Mr. Bolter would have been informed that they represented that combination of words, 'transportation for life,' when the dialogue was cut short by the entry of Master Bates, with his hands in his breeches-pockets, and his face twisted into a look of semi-comical woe.

'It's all up, Fagin,' said Charley, when he and his new companion had been made known to each other.

'What do you mean?'

'They've found the gentleman as owns the box; two or three more's a coming to 'dentify him; and the Artful's booked for a passage out,' replied Master Bates. 'I must have a full suit of mourning, Fagin, and a hatband, to wisit him in, afore he sets out upon his travels. To think of Jack Dawkins—lummy Jack—the Dodger—the Artful Dodger—going abroad for a common twopenny-halfpenny sneeze-box! I never thought he'd a done it under a gold watch, chain, and seals, at the lowest. Oh, why didn't he rob some rich old gentleman of all his walables, and go out as a gentleman, and not like a common prig, without no honour nor glory!'

With this expression of feeling for his unfortunate friend, Master Bates sat himself on the nearest chair with an aspect of chagrin and despondency.

'What do you talk about his having neither honour nor glory for!' exclaimed Fagin, darting an angry look at his pupil. 'Wasn't he always the top-sawyer among you all! Is there one of you that could touch him or come near him on any scent! Eh?'

'Not one,' replied Master Bates, in a voice rendered husky by regret; 'not one.'

'Then what do you talk of?' replied Fagin angrily; 'what are you blubbering for?'

''Cause it isn't on the rec-ord, is it?' said Charley, chafed into perfect defiance of his venerable friend by the current of his regrets; ''cause it can't come out in the 'dictment; 'cause nobody will never know half of what he was. How will he stand in the Newgate Calendar? P'raps not be there at all. Oh, my eye, my eye, wot a blow it is!'

'Ha! ha!' cried Fagin, extending his right hand, and turning to Mr. Bolter in a fit of chuckling which shook him as though he had the palsy; 'see what a pride they take in their profession, my dear. Ain't it beautiful?'

Mr. Bolter nodded assent, and Fagin, after contemplating the grief of Charley Bates for some seconds with evident satisfaction, stepped up to that young gentleman and patted him on the shoulder.

'Never mind, Charley,' said Fagin soothingly; 'it'll come out, it'll be sure to come out. They'll all know what a clever fellow he was; he'll show it himself, and not disgrace his old pals and teachers. Think how young he is too! What a distinction, Charley, to be lagged at his time of life!'

'Well, it is a honour that is!' said Charley, a little consoled.

'He shall have all he wants,' continued the Jew. 'He shall be kept in the Stone Jug, Charley, like a gentleman. Like a gentleman! With his beer every day, and money in his pocket to pitch and toss with, if he can't spend it.'

'No, shall he though?' cried Charley Bates.

'Ay, that he shall,' replied Fagin, 'and we'll have a big-wig, Charley: one that's got the greatest gift of the gab: to carry on his defence; and he shall make a speech for himself too, if he likes; and we'll read it all in the papers—"Artful Dodger—shrieks of laughter—here the court was convulsed"—eh, Charley, eh?'

'Ha! ha!' laughed Master Bates, 'what a lark that would be, wouldn't it, Fagin? I say, how the Artful would bother 'em wouldn't he?'

'Would!' cried Fagin. 'He shall—he will!'

'Ah, to be sure, so he will,' repeated Charley, rubbing his hands.

'I think I see him now,' cried the Jew, bending his eyes upon his pupil.

'So do I,' cried Charley Bates. 'Ha! ha! ha! so do I. I see it all afore me, upon my soul I do, Fagin. What a game! What a regular game! All the big-wigs trying to look solemn, and Jack Dawkins addressing of 'em as intimate and comfortable as if he was the judge's own son making a speech arter dinner—ha! ha! ha!'

In fact, Mr. Fagin had so well humoured his young friend's eccentric disposition, that Master Bates, who had at first been disposed to consider the imprisoned Dodger rather in the light of a victim, now looked upon him as the chief actor in a scene of most uncommon and exquisite humour, and felt quite impatient for the arrival of the time when his old companion should have so favourable an opportunity of displaying his abilities.

'We must know how he gets on to-day, by some handy means or other,' said Fagin. 'Let me think.'

'Shall I go?' asked Charley.

'Not for the world,' replied Fagin. 'Are you mad, my dear, stark mad, that you'd walk into the very place where—No, Charley, no. One is enough to lose at a time.'

'You don't mean to go yourself, I suppose?' said Charley with a humorous leer.

'That wouldn't quite fit,' replied Fagin shaking his head.

'Then why don't you send this new cove?' asked Master Bates, laying his hand on Noah's arm. 'Nobody knows him.'

'Why, if he didn't mind—' observed Fagin.

'Mind!' interposed Charley. 'What should he have to mind?'

'Really nothing, my dear,' said Fagin, turning to Mr. Bolter, 'really nothing.'

'Oh, I dare say about that, yer know,' observed Noah, backing towards the door, and shaking his head with a kind of sober alarm. 'No, no—none of that. It's not in my department, that ain't.'

'Wot department has he got, Fagin?' inquired Master Bates, surveying Noah's lank form with much disgust. 'The cutting away when there's anything wrong, and the eating all the wittles when there's everything right; is that his branch?'

'Never mind,' retorted Mr. Bolter; 'and don't yer take liberties with yer superiors, little boy, or yer'll find yerself in the wrong shop.'

Master Bates laughed so vehemently at this magnificent threat, that it was some time before Fagin could interpose, and represent to Mr. Bolter that he incurred no possible danger in visiting the police-office; that, inasmuch as no account of the little affair in which he had engaged, nor any description of his person, had yet been forwarded to the metropolis, it was very probable that he was not even suspected of having resorted to it for shelter; and that, if he were properly disguised, it would be as safe a spot for him to visit as any in London, inasmuch as it would be, of all places, the very last, to which he could be supposed likely to resort of his own free will.

Persuaded, in part, by these representations, but overborne in a much greater degree by his fear of Fagin, Mr. Bolter at length consented, with a very bad grace, to undertake the expedition. By Fagin's directions, he immediately substituted for his own attire, a waggoner's frock, velveteen breeches, and leather leggings: all of which articles the Jew had at hand. He was likewise furnished with a felt hat well garnished with turnpike tickets;

and a carter's whip. Thus equipped, he was to saunter into the office, as some country fellow from Covent Garden market might be supposed to do for the gratification of his curiousity; and as he was as awkward, ungainly, and raw-boned a fellow as need be, Mr. Fagin had no fear but that he would look the part to perfection.

These arrangements completed, he was informed of the necessary signs and tokens by which to recognise the Artful Dodger, and was conveyed by Master Bates through dark and winding ways to within a very short distance of Bow Street. Having described the precise situation of the office, and accompanied it with copious directions how he was to walk straight up the passage, and when he got into the side, and pull off his hat as he went into the room, Charley Bates bade him hurry on alone, and promised to bide his return on the spot of their parting.

Noah Claypole, or Morris Bolter as the reader pleases, punctually followed the directions he had received, which—Master Bates being pretty well acquainted with the locality—were so exact that he was enabled to gain the magisterial presence without asking any question, or meeting with any interruption by the way.

He found himself jostled among a crowd of people, chiefly women, who were huddled together in a dirty frowsy room, at the upper end of which was a raised platform railed off from the rest, with a dock for the prisoners on the left hand against the wall, a box for the witnesses in the middle, and a desk for the magistrates on the right; the awful locality last named, being screened off by a partition which concealed the bench from the common gaze, and left the vulgar to imagine (if they could) the full majesty of justice.

There were only a couple of women in the dock, who were nodding to their admiring friends, while the clerk read some depositions to a couple of policemen and a man in plain clothes who leant over the table. A jailer stood reclining against the dock-rail, tapping his nose listlessly with a large key, except when he repressed an undue tendency to conversation among the idlers, by proclaiming silence; or looked sternly up to bid some woman 'Take that baby out,' when the gravity of justice was disturbed by feeble cries, half-smothered in the mother's shawl, from some meagre infant. The room smelt close and unwholesome; the walls were dirt-discoloured; and the ceiling blackened. There was an old smoky bust over the mantel-shelf, and a dusty clock above the dock—the only thing present, that seemed to go on as it ought; for depravity, or poverty, or an habitual acquaintance with both, had left a taint on all the animate matter, hardly less unpleasant than the thick greasy scum on every inanimate object that frowned upon it.

Noah looked eagerly about him for the Dodger; but although there were several women who would have done very well for that distinguished character's mother or sister, and more than one man who might be supposed to bear a strong resemblance to his father, nobody at all answering the description given him of Mr. Dawkins was to be seen. He waited in a state of much suspense and uncertainty until the women, being committed for trial, went flaunting out; and then was quickly relieved by the appearance of another prisoner who he felt at once could be no other than the object of his visit.

It was indeed Mr. Dawkins, who, shuffling into the office with the big coat sleeves tucked up as usual, his left hand in his pocket, and his hat in his right hand, preceded the jailer, with a rolling gait altogether indescribable, and, taking his place in the dock, requested in an audible voice to know what he was placed in that 'ere disgraceful sitivation for.

'Hold your tongue, will you?' said the jailer.

'I'm an Englishman, ain't I?' rejoined the Dodger. 'Where are my priwileges?'

'You'll get your privileges soon enough,' retorted the jailer, 'and pepper with 'em.'

'We'll see wot the Secretary of State for the Home Affairs has got to say to the beaks, if I don't,' replied Mr. Dawkins. 'Now then! Wot is this here business? I shall thank the madg'strates to dispose of this here little affair, and not to keep me while they read the paper, for I've got an appointment with a genelman in the City, and as I am a man of my word and wery punctual in business matters, he'll go away if I ain't there to my time, and then pr'aps ther won't be an action for damage against them as kep me away. Oh no, certainly not!'

At this point, the Dodger, with a show of being very particular with a view to proceedings to be had thereafter, desired the jailer to communicate 'the names of them two files as was on the bench.' Which so tickled the spectators, that they laughed almost as heartily as Master Bates could have done if he had heard the request.

'Silence there!' cried the jailer.

'What is this?' inquired one of the magistrates.

'A pick-pocketing case, your worship.'

'Has the boy ever been here before?'

'He ought to have been, a many times,' replied the jailer. 'He has been pretty well everywhere else. *I* know him well, your worship.'

'Oh! you know me, do you?' cried the Artful, making a note of the statement. 'Wery good. That's a case of deformation of character, any way.'

Here there was another laugh, and another cry of silence.

'Now then, where are the witnesses?' said the clerk.

'Ah! that's right,' added the Dodger. 'Where are they? I should like to see 'em.'

This wish was immediately gratified, for a policeman stepped forward who had seen the prisoner attempt the pocket of an unknown gentleman in a crowd, and indeed take a handkerchief therefrom, which, being a very old one, he deliberately put back again, after trying it on his own countenance. For this reason, he took the Dodger into custody as soon as he could get near him, and the said Dodger, being searched, had upon his person a silver snuff-box, with the owner's name engraved upon the lid. This gentleman had been discovered on reference to the Court Guide, and being then and there present, swore that the snuff-box was his, and that he had missed it on the previous day, the moment he had disengaged himself from the crowd before referred to. He had also remarked a young gentleman in the throng, particularly active in making his way about, and that young gentleman was the prisoner before him.

'Have you anything to ask this witness, boy?' said the magistrate.

'I wouldn't abase myself by descending to hold no conversation with him,' replied the Dodger.

'Have you anything to say at all?'

'Do you hear his worship ask if you've anything to say?' inquired the jailer, nudging the silent Dodger with his elbow.

'I beg your pardon,' said the Dodger, looking up with an air of abstraction. 'Did you redress yourself to me, my man?'

'I never see such an out-and-out young wagabond, your worship,' observed the officer with a grin. 'Do you mean to say anything, you young shaver?'

'No,' replied the Dodger, 'not here, for this ain't the shop for justice: besides which, my attorney is a-breakfasting this morning with the Wice President of the House of Commons; but I shall have something to say elsewhere, and so will he, and so will a wery numerous and 'spectable circle of acquaintance as'll make them beaks wish they'd never been born, or that they'd got their footmen to hang 'em up to their own hat-pegs, afore they let 'em come out this morning to try it on upon me. I'll—'

'There! He's fully committed!' interposed the clerk. 'Take him away.'

'Come on,' said the jailer.

'Oh ah! I'll come on,' replied the Dodger, brushing his hat with the palm of his hand. 'Ah! (to the Bench) it's no use your looking frightened; I won't show you no mercy, not a ha'porth of it. *You'll* pay for this, my fine fellers. I wouldn't be you for something! I wouldn't go free, now, if you was to fall down on your knees and ask me. Here, carry me off to prison! Take me away!'

With these last words, the Dodger suffered himself to be led off by the collar; threatening, till he got into the yard, to make a parliamentary business of it; and then grinning in the officer's face, with great glee and self-approval.

Having seen him locked up by himself in a little cell, Noah made the best of his way back to where he had left Master Bates. After waiting here some time, he was joined by that young gentleman, who had prudently abstained from showing himself until he had looked carefully abroad from a snug retreat, and ascertained that his new friend had not been followed by any impertinent person.

The two hastened back together, to bear to Mr. Fagin the animating news that the Dodger was doing full justice to his bringing-up, and establishing for himself a glorious reputation.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE TIME ARRIVES FOR NANCY TO REDEEM HER PLEDGE TO ROSE MAYLIE. SHE FAILS.

Adept as she was, in all the arts of cunning and dissimulation, the girl Nancy could not wholly conceal the effect which the knowledge of the step she had taken, wrought upon her mind. She remembered that both the crafty Jew and the brutal Sikes had confided to her schemes, which had been hidden from all others: in the full confidence that she was trustworthy and beyond the reach of their suspicion. Vile as those schemes were, desperate as were their originators, and bitter as were her feelings towards Fagin, who had led her, step by step, deeper and deeper down into an abyss of crime and misery, whence was no escape; still, there were times when, even towards him, she felt some relenting, lest her disclosure should bring him within the iron grasp he had so long eluded, and he should fall at last—richly as he merited such a fate—by her hand.

But, these were the mere wanderings of a mind unable wholly to detach itself from old companions and associations, though enabled to fix itself steadily on one object, and resolved not to be turned aside by any consideration. Her fears for Sikes would have been more powerful inducements to recoil while there was yet time; but she had stipulated that her secret should be rigidly kept, she had dropped no clue which could lead to his discovery, she had refused, even for his sake, a refuge from all the guilt and wretchedness that encompasses her—and what more could she do! She was resolved.

Though all her mental struggles terminated in this conclusion, they forced themselves upon her, again and again, and left their traces too. She grew pale and thin, even within a few days. At times, she took no heed of what was passing before her, or no part in conversations where once, she would have been the loudest. At other times, she laughed without merriment, and was noisy without a moment afterwards—she sat silent and dejected, brooding with her head upon her hands, while the very effort by which she roused herself, told, more forcibly than even these indications, that she was ill at ease, and that her thoughts were occupied with matters very different and distant from those in the course of discussion by her companions.

It was Sunday night, and the bell of the nearest church struck the hour. Sikes and the Jew were talking, but they paused to listen. The girl looked up from the low seat on which she crouched, and listened too. Eleven.

'An hour this side of midnight,' said Sikes, raising the blind to look out and returning to his seat. 'Dark and heavy it is too. A good night for business this.'

'Ah!' replied Fagin. 'What a pity, Bill, my dear, that there's none quite ready to be done.'

'You're right for once,' replied Sikes gruffly. 'It is a pity, for I'm in the humour too.'

Fagin sighed, and shook his head despondingly.

'We must make up for lost time when we've got things into a good train. That's all I know,' said Sikes.

'That's the way to talk, my dear,' replied Fagin, venturing to pat him on the shoulder. 'It does me good to hear you.'

'Does you good, does it!' cried Sikes. 'Well, so be it.'

'Ha! ha! ha!' laughed Fagin, as if he were relieved by even this concession. 'You're like yourself to-night, Bill. Quite like yourself.'

'I don't feel like myself when you lay that withered old claw on my shoulder, so take it away,' said Sikes, casting off the Jew's hand.

'It make you nervous, Bill,—reminds you of being nabbed, does it?' said Fagin, determined not to be offended.

'Reminds me of being nabbed by the devil,' returned Sikes. 'There never was another man with such a face as yours, unless it was your father, and I suppose *he* is singeing his grizzled red beard by this time, unless you came straight from the old 'un without any father at all betwixt you; which I shouldn't wonder at, a bit.'

Fagin offered no reply to this compliment: but, pulling Sikes by the sleeve, pointed his finger towards Nancy, who had taken advantage of the foregoing conversation to put on her bonnet, and was now leaving the room.

'Hallo!' cried Sikes. 'Nance. Where's the gal going to at this time of night?'

'Not far.'

'What answer's that?' retorted Sikes. 'Do you hear me?'

'I don't know where,' replied the girl.

'Then I do,' said Sikes, more in the spirit of obstinacy than because he had any real objection to the girl going where she listed. 'Nowhere. Sit down.'

'I'm not well. I told you that before,' rejoined the girl. 'I want a breath of air.'

'Put your head out of the winder,' replied Sikes.

'There's not enough there,' said the girl. 'I want it in the street.'

'Then you won't have it,' replied Sikes. With which assurance he rose, locked the door, took the key out, and pulling her bonnet from her head, flung it up to the top of an old press. 'There,' said the robber. 'Now stop quietly where you are, will you?'

'It's not such a matter as a bonnet would keep me,' said the girl turning very pale. 'What do you mean, Bill? Do you know what you're doing?'

'Know what I'm—Oh!' cried Sikes, turning to Fagin, 'she's out of her senses, you know, or she daren't talk to me in that way.'

'You'll drive me on the something desperate,' muttered the girl placing both hands upon her breast, as though to keep down by force some violent outbreak. 'Let me go, will you,—this minute—this instant.'

'No!' said Sikes.

'Tell him to let me go, Fagin. He had better. It'll be better for him. Do you hear me?' cried Nancy stamping her foot upon the ground.

'Hear you!' repeated Sikes turning round in his chair to confront her. 'Aye! And if I hear you for half a minute longer, the dog shall have such a grip on your throat as'll tear some of that screaming voice out. Wot has come over you, you jade! Wot is it?'

'Let me go,' said the girl with great earnestness; then sitting herself down on the floor, before the door, she said, 'Bill, let me go; you don't know what you are doing. You don't, indeed. For only one hour—do—do!'

'Cut my limbs off one by one!' cried Sikes, seizing her roughly by the arm, 'If I don't think the gal's stark raving mad. Get up.'

'Not till you let me go—not till you let me go—Never—never!' screamed the girl. Sikes looked on, for a minute, watching his opportunity, and suddenly pinioning her hands dragged her, struggling and wrestling with him by the way, into a small room adjoining, where he sat himself on a bench, and thrusting her into a chair, held her down by force. She struggled and implored by turns until twelve o'clock had struck, and then, wearied and exhausted, ceased to contest the point any further. With a caution, backed by many oaths, to make no more efforts to go out that night, Sikes left her to recover at leisure and rejoined Fagin.

'Whew!' said the housebreaker wiping the perspiration from his face. 'Wot a precious strange gal that is!'

'You may say that, Bill,' replied Fagin thoughtfully. 'You may say that.'

'Wot did she take it into her head to go out to-night for, do you think?' asked Sikes. 'Come; you should know her better than me. Wot does it mean?'

'Obstinacy; woman's obstinacy, I suppose, my dear.'

'Well, I suppose it is,' growled Sikes. 'I thought I had tamed her, but she's as bad as ever.'

'Worse,' said Fagin thoughtfully. 'I never knew her like this, for such a little cause.'

'Nor I,' said Sikes. 'I think she's got a touch of that fever in her blood yet, and it won't come out—eh?'

'Like enough.'

'I'll let her a little blood, without troubling the doctor, if she's took that way again,' said Sikes.

Fagin nodded an expressive approval of this mode of treatment.

'She was hanging about me all day, and night too, when I was stretched on my back; and you, like a blackhearted wolf as you are, kept yourself aloof,' said Sikes. 'We was poor too, all the time, and I think, one way or other, it's worried and fretted her; and that being shut up here so long has made her restless—eh?'

'That's it, my dear,' replied the Jew in a whisper. 'Hush!'

As he uttered these words, the girl herself appeared and resumed her former seat. Her eyes were swollen and red; she rocked herself to and fro; tossed her head; and, after a little time, burst out laughing.

'Why, now she's on the other tack!' exclaimed Sikes, turning a look of excessive surprise on his companion.

Fagin nodded to him to take no further notice just then; and, in a few minutes, the girl subsided into her accustomed demeanour. Whispering Sikes that there was no fear of her relapsing, Fagin took up his hat and bade him good-night. He paused when he reached the room-door, and looking round, asked if somebody would light him down the dark stairs.

'Light him down,' said Sikes, who was filling his pipe. 'It's a pity he should break his neck himself, and disappoint the sight-seers. Show him a light.'

Nancy followed the old man downstairs, with a candle. When they reached the passage, he laid his finger on his lip, and drawing close to the girl, said, in a whisper.

'What is it, Nancy, dear?'

'What do you mean?' replied the girl, in the same tone.

'The reason of all this,' replied Fagin. 'If *he*'—he pointed with his skinny fore-finger up the stairs—'is so hard with you (he's a brute, Nance, a brute-beast), why don't you—'

'Well?' said the girl, as Fagin paused, with his mouth almost touching her ear, and his eyes looking into hers.

'No matter just now. We'll talk of this again. You have a friend in me, Nance; a staunch friend. I have the means at hand, quiet and close. If you want revenge on those that treat you like a dog—like a dog! worse than his dog, for he humours him sometimes—come to me. I say, come to me. He is the mere hound of a day, but you know me of old, Nance.'

'I know you well,' replied the girl, without manifesting the least emotion. 'Good-night.'

She shrank back, as Fagin offered to lay his hand on hers, but said good-night again, in a steady voice, and, answering his parting look with a nod of intelligence, closed the door between them.

Fagin walked towards his home, intent upon the thoughts that were working within his brain. He had conceived the idea—not from what had just passed though that had tended to confirm him, but slowly and by degrees—that Nancy, wearied of the housebreaker's brutality, had conceived an attachment for some new friend. Her altered manner, her repeated absences from home alone, her comparative indifference to the interests of the gang for which she had once been so zealous, and, added to these, her desperate impatience to leave home that night at a particular hour, all favoured the supposition, and rendered it, to him at least, almost matter of certainty. The object of this new liking was not among his myrmidons. He would be a valuable acquisition with such an assistant as Nancy, and must (thus Fagin argued) be secured without delay.

There was another, and a darker object, to be gained. Sikes knew too much, and his ruffian taunts had not galled Fagin the less, because the wounds were hidden. The girl must know, well, that if she shook him off, she could never be safe from his fury, and that it would be surely wreaked—to the maiming of limbs, or perhaps the loss of life—on the object of her more recent fancy.

'With a little persuasion,' thought Fagin, 'what more likely than that she would consent to poison him? Women have done such things, and worse, to secure the same object before now. There would be the dangerous villain:

the man I hate: gone; another secured in his place; and my influence over the girl, with a knowledge of this crime to back it, unlimited.'

These things passed through the mind of Fagin, during the short time he sat alone, in the housebreaker's room; and with them uppermost in his thoughts, he had taken the opportunity afterwards afforded him, of sounding the girl in the broken hints he threw out at parting. There was no expression of surprise, no assumption of an inability to understand his meaning. The girl clearly comprehended it. Her glance at parting showed *that*.

But perhaps she would recoil from a plot to take the life of Sikes, and that was one of the chief ends to be attained. 'How,' thought Fagin, as he crept homeward, 'can I increase my influence with her? What new power can I acquire?'

Such brains are fertile in expedients. If, without extracting a confession from herself, he laid a watch, discovered the object of her altered regard, and threatened to reveal the whole history to Sikes (of whom she stood in no common fear) unless she entered into his designs, could he not secure her compliance?

'I can,' said Fagin, almost aloud. 'She durst not refuse me then. Not for her life, not for her life! I have it all. The means are ready, and shall be set to work. I shall have you yet!'

He cast back a dark look, and a threatening motion of the hand, towards the spot where he had left the bolder villain; and went on his way: busying his bony hands in the folds of his tattered garment, which he wrenched tightly in his grasp, as though there were a hated enemy crushed with every motion of his fingers.

CHAPTER XLV

NOAH CLAYPOLE IS EMPLOYED BY FAGIN ON A SECRET MISSION

The old man was up, betimes, next morning, and waited impatiently for the appearance of his new associate, who after a delay that seemed interminable, at length presented himself, and commenced a voracious assault on the breakfast.

'Bolter,' said Fagin, drawing up a chair and seating himself opposite Morris Bolter.

'Well, here I am,' returned Noah. 'What's the matter? Don't yer ask me to do anything till I have done eating. That's a great fault in this place. Yer never get time enough over yer meals.'

'You can talk as you eat, can't you?' said Fagin, cursing his dear young friend's greediness from the very bottom of his heart.

'Oh yes, I can talk. I get on better when I talk,' said Noah, cutting a monstrous slice of bread. 'Where's Charlotte?'

'Out,' said Fagin. 'I sent her out this morning with the other young woman, because I wanted us to be alone.'

'Oh!' said Noah. 'I wish yer'd ordered her to make some buttered toast first. Well. Talk away. Yer won't interrupt me.'

There seemed, indeed, no great fear of anything interrupting him, as he had evidently sat down with a determination to do a great deal of business.

'You did well yesterday, my dear,' said Fagin. 'Beautiful! Six shillings and ninepence halfpenny on the very first day! The kinchin lay will be a fortune to you.'

'Don't you forget to add three pint-pots and a milk-can,' said Mr. Bolter.

'No, no, my dear. The pint-pots were great strokes of genius: but the milk-can was a perfect masterpiece.'

'Pretty well, I think, for a beginner,' remarked Mr. Bolter complacently. 'The pots I took off airy railings, and the milk-can was standing by itself outside a public-house. I thought it might get rusty with the rain, or catch cold, yer know. Eh? Ha! ha! ha!'

Fagin affected to laugh very heartily; and Mr. Bolter having had his laugh out, took a series of large bites, which finished his first hunk of bread and butter, and assisted himself to a second.

'I want you, Bolter,' said Fagin, leaning over the table, 'to do a piece of work for me, my dear, that needs great care and caution.'

'I say,' rejoined Bolter, 'don't yer go shoving me into danger, or sending me any more o' yer police-offices. That don't suit me, that don't; and so I tell yer.'

'That's not the smallest danger in it—not the very smallest,' said the Jew; 'it's only to dodge a woman.'

'An old woman?' demanded Mr. Bolter.

'A young one,' replied Fagin.

'I can do that pretty well, I know,' said Bolter. 'I was a regular cunning sneak when I was at school. What am I to dodge her for? Not to—'

'Not to do anything, but to tell me where she goes, who she sees, and, if possible, what she says; to remember the street, if it is a street, or the house, if it is a house; and to bring me back all the information you can.'

'What'll yer give me?' asked Noah, setting down his cup, and looking his employer, eagerly, in the face.

'If you do it well, a pound, my dear. One pound,' said Fagin, wishing to interest him in the scent as much as possible. 'And that's what I never gave yet, for any job of work where there wasn't valuable consideration to be gained.'

'Who is she?' inquired Noah.

'One of us.'

'Oh Lor!' cried Noah, curling up his nose. 'Yer doubtful of her, are yer?'

'She has found out some new friends, my dear, and I must know who they are,' replied Fagin.

'I see,' said Noah. 'Just to have the pleasure of knowing them, if they're respectable people, eh? Ha! ha! ha! I'm your man.'

'I knew you would be,' cried Fagin, elated by the success of his proposal.

'Of course, of course,' replied Noah. 'Where is she? Where am I to wait for her? Where am I to go?'

'All that, my dear, you shall hear from me. I'll point her out at the proper time,' said Fagin. 'You keep ready, and leave the rest to me.'

That night, and the next, and the next again, the spy sat booted and equipped in his carter's dress: ready to turn out at a word from Fagin. Six nights passed—six long weary nights—and on each, Fagin came home with a disappointed face, and briefly intimated that it was not yet time. On the seventh, he returned earlier, and with an exultation he could not conceal. It was Sunday.

'She goes abroad to-night,' said Fagin, 'and on the right errand, I'm sure; for she has been alone all day, and the man she is afraid of will not be back much before daybreak. Come with me. Quick!'

Noah started up without saying a word; for the Jew was in a state of such intense excitement that it infected him. They left the house stealthily, and hurrying through a labyrinth of streets, arrived at length before a public-house, which Noah recognised as the same in which he had slept, on the night of his arrival in London.

It was past eleven o'clock, and the door was closed. It opened softly on its hinges as Fagin gave a low whistle. They entered, without noise; and the door was closed behind them.

Scarcely venturing to whisper, but substituting dumb show for words, Fagin, and the young Jew who had admitted them, pointed out the pane of glass to Noah, and signed to him to climb up and observe the person in the adjoining room.

'Is that the woman?' he asked, scarcely above his breath.

Fagin nodded yes.

'I can't see her face well,' whispered Noah. 'She is looking down, and the candle is behind her.

'Stay there,' whispered Fagin. He signed to Barney, who withdrew. In an instant, the lad entered the room adjoining, and, under pretence of snuffing the candle, moved it in the required position, and, speaking to the girl, caused her to raise her face.

'I see her now,' cried the spy.

'Plainly?'

'I should know her among a thousand.'

He hastily descended, as the room-door opened, and the girl came out. Fagin drew him behind a small partition which was curtained off, and they held their breaths as she passed within a few feet of their place of concealment, and emerged by the door at which they had entered.

'Hist!' cried the lad who held the door. 'Dow.'

Noah exchanged a look with Fagin, and darted out.

'To the left,' whispered the lad; 'take the left had, and keep od the other side.'

He did so; and, by the light of the lamps, saw the girl's retreating figure, already at some distance before him. He advanced as near as he considered prudent, and kept on the opposite side of the street, the better to observe her motions. She looked nervously round, twice or thrice, and once stopped to let two men who were following close behind her, pass on. She seemed to gather courage as she advanced, and to walk with a steadier and firmer step.

The spy preserved the same relative distance between them, and followed: with his eye upon her.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE APPOINTMENT KEPT

The church clocks chimed three quarters past eleven, as two figures emerged on London Bridge. One, which advanced with a swift and rapid step, was that of a woman who looked eagerly about her as though in quest of some expected object; the other figure was that of a man, who slunk along in the deepest shadow he could find, and, at some distance, accommodated his pace to hers: stopping when she stopped: and as she moved again, creeping stealthily on: but never allowing himself, in the ardour of his pursuit, to gain upon her footsteps. Thus, they crossed the bridge, from the Middlesex to the Surrey shore, when the woman, apparently disappointed in her anxious scrutiny of the foot-passengers, turned back. The movement was sudden; but he who watched her, was not thrown off his guard by it; for, shrinking into one of the recesses which surmount the piers of the bridge, and leaning over the parapet the better to conceal his figure, he suffered her to pass on the opposite pavement. When she was about the same distance in advance as she had been before, he slipped quietly down, and followed her again. At nearly the centre of the bridge, she stopped. The man stopped too.

It was a very dark night. The day had been unfavourable, and at that hour and place there were few people stirring. Such as there were, hurried quickly past: very possibly without seeing, but certainly without noticing, either the woman, or the man who kept her in view. Their appearance was not calculated to attract the importunate regards of such of London's destitute population, as chanced to take their way over the bridge that night in search of some cold arch or doorless hovel wherein to lay their heads; they stood there in silence: neither speaking nor spoken to, by any one who passed.

A mist hung over the river, deepening the red glare of the fires that burnt upon the small craft moored off the different wharfs, and rendering darker and more indistinct the murky buildings on the banks. The old smoke-stained storehouses on either side, rose heavy and dull from the dense mass of roofs and gables, and frowned sternly upon water too black to reflect even their lumbering shapes. The tower of old Saint Saviour's Church, and the spire of Saint Magnus, so long the giant-warders of the ancient bridge, were visible in the gloom; but the forest of shipping below bridge, and the thickly scattered spires of churches above, were nearly all hidden from sight.

The girl had taken a few restless turns to and fro—closely watched meanwhile by her hidden observer—when the heavy bell of St. Paul's tolled for the death of another day. Midnight had come upon the crowded city. The palace, the night-cellar, the jail, the madhouse: the chambers of birth and death, of health and sickness, the rigid face of the corpse and the calm sleep of the child: midnight was upon them all.

The hour had not struck two minutes, when a young lady, accompanied by a grey-haired gentleman, alighted from a hackney-carriage within a short distance of the bridge, and, having dismissed the vehicle, walked straight towards it. They had scarcely set foot upon its pavement, when the girl started, and immediately made towards them.

They walked onward, looking about them with the air of persons who entertained some very slight expectation which had little chance of being realised, when they were suddenly joined by this new associate. They halted with an exclamation of surprise, but suppressed it immediately; for a man in the garments of a countryman came close up—brushed against them, indeed—at that precise moment.

'Not here,' said Nancy hurriedly, 'I am afraid to speak to you here. Come away—out of the public road—down the steps yonder!'

As she uttered these words, and indicated, with her hand, the direction in which she wished them to proceed, the countryman looked round, and roughly asking what they took up the whole pavement for, passed on.

The steps to which the girl had pointed, were those which, on the Surrey bank, and on the same side of the bridge as Saint Saviour's Church, form a landing-stairs from the river. To this spot, the man bearing the appearance of a countryman, hastened unobserved; and after a moment's survey of the place, he began to descend.

These stairs are a part of the bridge; they consist of three flights. Just below the end of the second, going down, the stone wall on the left terminates in an ornamental pilaster facing towards the Thames. At this point the lower steps widen: so that a person turning that angle of the wall, is necessarily unseen by any others on the stairs who chance to be above him, if only a step. The countryman looked hastily round, when he reached this point; and as there seemed no better place of concealment, and, the tide being out, there was plenty of room, he slipped aside, with his back to the pilaster, and there waited: pretty certain that they would come no lower, and that even if he could not hear what was said, he could follow them again, with safety.

So tardily stole the time in this lonely place, and so eager was the spy to penetrate the motives of an interview so different from what he had been led to expect, that he more than once gave the matter up for lost, and persuaded himself, either that they had stopped far above, or had resorted to some entirely different spot to hold their mysterious conversation. He was on the point of emerging from his hiding-place, and regaining the road above, when he heard the sound of footsteps, and directly afterwards of voices almost close at his ear.

He drew himself straight upright against the wall, and, scarcely breathing, listened attentively.

'This is far enough,' said a voice, which was evidently that of the gentleman. 'I will not suffer the young lady to go any farther. Many people would have distrusted you too much to have come even so far, but you see I am willing to humour you.'

'To humour me!' cried the voice of the girl whom he had followed. 'You're considerate, indeed, sir. To humour me! Well, well, it's no matter.'

'Why, for what,' said the gentleman in a kinder tone, 'for what purpose can you have brought us to this strange place? Why not have let me speak to you, above there, where it is light, and there is something stirring, instead of bringing us to this dark and dismal hole?'

'I told you before,' replied Nancy, 'that I was afraid to speak to you there. I don't know why it is,' said the girl, shuddering, 'but I have such a fear and dread upon me to-night that I can hardly stand.'

'A fear of what?' asked the gentleman, who seemed to pity her.

'I scarcely know of what,' replied the girl. 'I wish I did. Horrible thoughts of death, and shrouds with blood upon them, and a fear that has made me burn as if I was on fire, have been upon me all day. I was reading a book to-night, to wile the time away, and the same things came into the print.'

'Imagination,' said the gentleman, soothing her.

'No imagination,' replied the girl in a hoarse voice. 'I'll swear I saw "coffin" written in every page of the book in large black letters,—aye, and they carried one close to me, in the streets to-night.'

'There is nothing unusual in that,' said the gentleman. 'They have passed me often.'

'*Real ones,*' rejoined the girl. 'This was not.'

There was something so uncommon in her manner, that the flesh of the concealed listener crept as he heard the girl utter these words, and the blood chilled within him. He had never experienced a greater relief than in hearing the sweet voice of the young lady as she begged her to be calm, and not allow herself to become the prey of such fearful fancies.

'Speak to her kindly,' said the young lady to her companion. 'Poor creature! She seems to need it.'

'Your haughty religious people would have held their heads up to see me as I am to-night, and preached of flames and vengeance,' cried the girl. 'Oh, dear lady, why ar'n't those who claim to be God's own folks as gentle and as kind to us poor wretches as you, who, having youth, and beauty, and all that they have lost, might be a little proud instead of so much humbler?'

'Ah!' said the gentleman. 'A Turk turns his face, after washing it well, to the East, when he says his prayers; these good people, after giving their faces such a rub against the World as to take the smiles off, turn with no less regularity, to the darkest side of Heaven. Between the Mussulman and the Pharisee, commend me to the first!'

These words appeared to be addressed to the young lady, and were perhaps uttered with the view of affording Nancy time to recover herself. The gentleman, shortly afterwards, addressed himself to her.

'You were not here last Sunday night,' he said.

'I couldn't come,' replied Nancy; 'I was kept by force.'

'By whom?'

'Him that I told the young lady of before.'

'You were not suspected of holding any communication with anybody on the subject which has brought us here to-night, I hope?' asked the old gentleman.

'No,' replied the girl, shaking her head. 'It's not very easy for me to leave him unless he knows why; I couldn't give him a drink of laudanum before I came away.'

'Did he awake before you returned?' inquired the gentleman.

'No; and neither he nor any of them suspect me.'

'Good,' said the gentleman. 'Now listen to me.'

'I am ready,' replied the girl, as he paused for a moment.

'This young lady,' the gentleman began, 'has communicated to me, and to some other friends who can be safely trusted, what you told her nearly a fortnight since. I confess to you that I had doubts, at first, whether you were to be implicitly relied upon, but now I firmly believe you are.'

'I am,' said the girl earnestly.

'I repeat that I firmly believe it. To prove to you that I am disposed to trust you, I tell you without reserve, that we propose to extort the secret, whatever it may be, from the fear of this man Monks. But if—if—' said the gentleman, 'he cannot be secured, or, if secured, cannot be acted upon as we wish, you must deliver up the Jew.'

'Fagin,' cried the girl, recoiling.

'That man must be delivered up by you,' said the gentleman.

'I will not do it! I will never do it!' replied the girl. 'Devil that he is, and worse than devil as he has been to me, I will never do that.'

'You will not?' said the gentleman, who seemed fully prepared for this answer.

'Never!' returned the girl.

'Tell me why?'

'For one reason,' rejoined the girl firmly, 'for one reason, that the lady knows and will stand by me in, I know she will, for I have her promise: and for this other reason, besides, that, bad life as he has led, I have led a bad life too; there are many of us who have kept the same courses together, and I'll not turn upon them, who might—any of them—have turned upon me, but didn't, bad as they are.'

'Then,' said the gentleman, quickly, as if this had been the point he had been aiming to attain; 'put Monks into my hands, and leave him to me to deal with.'

'What if he turns against the others?'

'I promise you that in that case, if the truth is forced from him, there the matter will rest; there must be circumstances in Oliver's little history which it would be painful to drag before the public eye, and if the truth is once elicited, they shall go scot free.'

'And if it is not?' suggested the girl.

'Then,' pursued the gentleman, 'this Fagin shall not be brought to justice without your consent. In such a case I could show you reasons, I think, which would induce you to yield it.'

'Have I the lady's promise for that?' asked the girl.

'You have,' replied Rose. 'My true and faithful pledge.'

'Monks would never learn how you knew what you do?' said the girl, after a short pause.

'Never,' replied the gentleman. 'The intelligence should be brought to bear upon him, that he could never even guess.'

'I have been a liar, and among liars from a little child,' said the girl after another interval of silence, 'but I will take your words.'

After receiving an assurance from both, that she might safely do so, she proceeded in a voice so low that it was often difficult for the listener to discover even the purport of what she said, to describe, by name and situation, the public-house whence she had been followed that night. From the manner in which she occasionally paused, it appeared as if the gentleman were making some hasty notes of the information she communicated. When she had thoroughly explained the localities of the place, the best position from which to watch it without exciting observation, and the night and hour on which Monks was most in the habit of frequenting it, she seemed to consider for a few moments, for the purpose of recalling his features and appearances more forcibly to her recollection.

'He is tall,' said the girl, 'and a strongly made man, but not stout; he has a lurking walk; and as he walks, constantly looks over his shoulder, first on one side, and then on the other. Don't forget that, for his eyes are sunk in his head so much deeper than any other man's, that you might almost tell him by that alone. His face is dark, like his hair and eyes; and, although he can't be more than six or eight and twenty, withered and haggard. His lips are often discoloured and disfigured with the marks of teeth; for he has desperate fits, and sometimes even bites his hands and covers them with wounds—why did you start?' said the girl, stopping suddenly.

The gentleman replied, in a hurried manner, that he was not conscious of having done so, and begged her to proceed.

'Part of this,' said the girl, 'I have drawn out from other people at the house I tell you of, for I have only seen him twice, and both times he was covered up in a large cloak. I think that's all I can give you to know him by. Stay though,' she added. 'Upon his throat: so high that you can see a part of it below his neckerchief when he turns his face: there is—'

'A broad red mark, like a burn or scald?' cried the gentleman.

'How's this?' said the girl. 'You know him!'

The young lady uttered a cry of surprise, and for a few moments they were so still that the listener could distinctly hear them breathe.

'I think I do,' said the gentleman, breaking silence. 'I should by your description. We shall see. Many people are singularly like each other. It may not be the same.'

As he expressed himself to this effect, with assumed carelessness, he took a step or two nearer the concealed spy, as the latter could tell from the distinctness with which he heard him mutter, 'It must be he!'

'Now,' he said, returning: so it seemed by the sound: to the spot where he had stood before, 'you have given us most valuable assistance, young woman, and I wish you to be the better for it. What can I do to serve you?'

'Nothing,' replied Nancy.

'You will not persist in saying that,' rejoined the gentleman, with a voice and emphasis of kindness that might have touched a much harder and more obdurate heart. 'Think now. Tell me.'

'Nothing, sir,' rejoined the girl, weeping. 'You can do nothing to help me. I am past all hope, indeed.'

'You put yourself beyond its pale,' said the gentleman. 'The past has been a dreary waste with you, of youthful energies mis-spent, and such priceless treasures lavished, as the Creator bestows but once and never grants again, but, for the future, you may hope. I do not say that it is in our power to offer you peace of heart and mind, for that must come as you seek it; but a quiet asylum, either in England, or, if you fear to remain here, in some foreign country, it is not only within the compass of our ability but our most anxious wish to secure you. Before the dawn of morning, before this river wakes to the first glimpse of day-light, you shall be placed as entirely beyond the reach of your former associates, and leave as utter an absence of all trace behind you, as if you were to disappear from the earth this moment. Come! I would not have you go back to exchange one word with any old companion, or take one look at any old haunt, or breathe the very air which is pestilence and death to you. Quit them all, while there is time and opportunity!'

'She will be persuaded now,' cried the young lady. 'She hesitates, I am sure.'

'I fear not, my dear,' said the gentleman.

'No sir, I do not,' replied the girl, after a short struggle. 'I am chained to my old life. I loathe and hate it now, but I cannot leave it. I must have gone too far to turn back,—and yet I don't know, for if you had spoken to me so, some time ago, I should have laughed it off. But,' she said, looking hastily round, 'this fear comes over me again. I must go home.'

'Home!' repeated the young lady, with great stress upon the word.

'Home, lady,' rejoined the girl. 'To such a home as I have raised for myself with the work of my whole life. Let us part. I shall be watched or seen. Go! Go! If I have done you any service all I ask is, that you leave me, and let me go my way alone.'

'It is useless,' said the gentleman, with a sigh. 'We compromise her safety, perhaps, by staying here. We may have detained her longer than she expected already.'

'Yes, yes,' urged the girl. 'You have.'

'What,' cried the young lady, 'can be the end of this poor creature's life!'

'What!' repeated the girl. 'Look before you, lady. Look at that dark water. How many times do you read of such as I who spring into the tide, and leave no living thing, to care for, or bewail them. It may be years hence, or it may be only months, but I shall come to that at last.'

'Do not speak thus, pray,' returned the young lady, sobbing.

'It will never reach your ears, dear lady, and God forbid such horrors should!' replied the girl. 'Good-night, good-night!'

The gentleman turned away.

'This purse,' cried the young lady. 'Take it for my sake, that you may have some resource in an hour of need and trouble.'

'No!' replied the girl. 'I have not done this for money. Let me have that to think of. And yet—give me something that you have worn: I should like to have something—no, no, not a ring—your gloves or handkerchief—anything that I can keep, as having belonged to you, sweet lady. There. Bless you! God bless you. Good-night, good-night!'

The violent agitation of the girl, and the apprehension of some discovery which would subject her to ill-usage and violence, seemed to determine the gentleman to leave her, as she requested.

The sound of retreating footsteps were audible and the voices ceased.

The two figures of the young lady and her companion soon afterwards appeared upon the bridge. They stopped at the summit of the stairs.

'Hark!' cried the young lady, listening. 'Did she call! I thought I heard her voice.'

'No, my love,' replied Mr. Brownlow, looking sadly back. 'She has not moved, and will not till we are gone.'

Rose Maylie lingered, but the old gentleman drew her arm through his, and led her, with gentle force, away. As they disappeared, the girl sunk down nearly at her full length upon one of the stone stairs, and vented the anguish of her heart in bitter tears.

After a time she arose, and with feeble and tottering steps ascended the street. The astonished listener remained motionless on his post for some minutes afterwards, and having ascertained, with many cautious glances round him, that he was again alone, crept slowly from his hiding-place, and returned, stealthily and in the shade of the wall, in the same manner as he had descended.

Peeping out, more than once, when he reached the top, to make sure that he was unobserved, Noah Claypole darted away at his utmost speed, and made for the Jew's house as fast as his legs would carry him.

CHAPTER XLVII

FATAL CONSEQUENCES

It was nearly two hours before day-break; that time which in the autumn of the year, may be truly called the dead of night; when the streets are silent and deserted; when even sounds appear to slumber, and profligacy and riot have staggered home to dream; it was at this still and silent hour, that Fagin sat watching in his old lair, with face so distorted and pale, and eyes so red and blood-shot, that he looked less like a man, than like some hideous phantom, moist from the grave, and worried by an evil spirit.

He sat crouching over a cold hearth, wrapped in an old torn coverlet, with his face turned towards a wasting candle that stood upon a table by his side. His right hand was raised to his lips, and as, absorbed in thought, he hit his long black nails, he disclosed among his toothless gums a few such fangs as should have been a dog's or rat's.

Stretched upon a mattress on the floor, lay Noah Claypole, fast asleep. Towards him the old man sometimes directed his eyes for an instant, and then brought them back again to the candle; which with a long-burnt wick drooping almost double, and hot grease falling down in clots upon the table, plainly showed that his thoughts were busy elsewhere.

Indeed they were. Mortification at the overthrow of his notable scheme; hatred of the girl who had dared to palter with strangers; and utter distrust of the sincerity of her refusal to yield him up; bitter disappointment at the loss of his revenge on Sikes; the fear of detection, and ruin, and death; and a fierce and deadly rage kindled by all; these were the passionate considerations which, following close upon each other with rapid and ceaseless whirl, shot through the brain of Fagin, as every evil thought and blackest purpose lay working at his heart.

He sat without changing his attitude in the least, or appearing to take the smallest heed of time, until his quick ear seemed to be attracted by a footstep in the street.

'At last,' he muttered, wiping his dry and fevered mouth. 'At last!'

The bell rang gently as he spoke. He crept upstairs to the door, and presently returned accompanied by a man muffled to the chin, who carried a bundle under one arm. Sitting down and throwing back his outer coat, the man displayed the burly frame of Sikes.

'There!' he said, laying the bundle on the table. 'Take care of that, and do the most you can with it. It's been trouble enough to get; I thought I should have been here, three hours ago.'

Fagin laid his hand upon the bundle, and locking it in the cupboard, sat down again without speaking. But he did not take his eyes off the robber, for an instant, during this action; and now that they sat over against each other, face to face, he looked fixedly at him, with his lips quivering so violently, and his face so altered by the emotions which had mastered him, that the housebreaker involuntarily drew back his chair, and surveyed him with a look of real affright.

'Wot now?' cried Sikes. 'Wot do you look at a man so for?'

Fagin raised his right hand, and shook his trembling forefinger in the air; but his passion was so great, that the power of speech was for the moment gone.

'Damme!' said Sikes, feeling in his breast with a look of alarm. 'He's gone mad. I must look to myself here.'

'No, no,' rejoined Fagin, finding his voice. 'It's not—you're not the person, Bill. I've no—no fault to find with you.'

'Oh, you haven't, haven't you?' said Sikes, looking sternly at him, and ostentatiously passing a pistol into a more convenient pocket. 'That's lucky—for one of us. Which one that is, don't matter.'

'I've got that to tell you, Bill,' said Fagin, drawing his chair nearer, 'will make you worse than me.'

'Aye?' returned the robber with an incredulous air. 'Tell away! Look sharp, or Nance will think I'm lost.'

'Lost!' cried Fagin. 'She has pretty well settled that, in her own mind, already.'

Sikes looked with an aspect of great perplexity into the Jew's face, and reading no satisfactory explanation of the riddle there, clenched his coat collar in his huge hand and shook him soundly.

'Speak, will you!' he said; 'or if you don't, it shall be for want of breath. Open your mouth and say wot you've got to say in plain words. Out with it, you thundering old cur, out with it!'

'Suppose that lad that's laying there—' Fagin began.

Sikes turned round to where Noah was sleeping, as if he had not previously observed him. 'Well!' he said, resuming his former position.

'Suppose that lad,' pursued Fagin, 'was to peach—to blow upon us all—first seeking out the right folks for the purpose, and then having a meeting with 'em in the street to paint our likenesses, describe every mark that they might know us by, and the crib where we might be most easily taken. Suppose he was to do all this, and besides to blow upon a plant we've all been in, more or less—of his own fancy; not grabbed, trapped, tried, earwigged by the parson and brought to it on bread and water,—but of his own fancy; to please his own taste; stealing out at nights to find those most interested against us, and peaching to them. Do you hear me?' cried the Jew, his eyes flashing with rage. 'Suppose he did all this, what then?'

'What then!' replied Sikes; with a tremendous oath. 'If he was left alive till I came, I'd grind his skull under the iron heel of my boot into as many grains as there are hairs upon his head.'

'What if I did it!' cried Fagin almost in a yell. 'I, that knows so much, and could hang so many besides myself!'

'I don't know,' replied Sikes, clenching his teeth and turning white at the mere suggestion. 'I'd do something in the jail that 'ud get me put in irons; and if I was tried along with you, I'd fall upon you with them in the open court, and beat your brains out afore the people. I should have such strength,' muttered the robber, poising his brawny arm, 'that I could smash your head as if a loaded waggon had gone over it.'

'You would?'

'Would I!' said the housebreaker. 'Try me.'

'If it was Charley, or the Dodger, or Bet, or—'

'I don't care who,' replied Sikes impatiently. 'Whoever it was, I'd serve them the same.'

Fagin looked hard at the robber; and, motioning him to be silent, stooped over the bed upon the floor, and shook the sleeper to rouse him. Sikes leant forward in his chair: looking on with his hands upon his knees, as if wondering much what all this questioning and preparation was to end in.

'Bolter, Bolter! Poor lad!' said Fagin, looking up with an expression of devilish anticipation, and speaking slowly and with marked emphasis. 'He's tired—tired with watching for her so long,—watching for *her*, Bill.'

'Wot d'ye mean?' asked Sikes, drawing back.

Fagin made no answer, but bending over the sleeper again, hauled him into a sitting posture. When his assumed name had been repeated several times, Noah rubbed his eyes, and, giving a heavy yawn, looked sleepily about him.

'Tell me that again—once again, just for him to hear,' said the Jew, pointing to Sikes as he spoke.

'Tell yer what?' asked the sleepy Noah, shaking himself pettishly.

'That about— *Nancy*,' said Fagin, clutching Sikes by the wrist, as if to prevent his leaving the house before he had heard enough. 'You followed her?'

'Yes.'

'To London Bridge?'

'Yes.'

'Where she met two people.'

'So she did.'

'A gentleman and a lady that she had gone to of her own accord before, who asked her to give up all her pals, and Monks first, which she did—and to describe him, which she did—and to tell her what house it was that we meet at, and go to, which she did—and where it could be best watched from, which she did—and what time the people went there, which she did. She did all this. She told it all every word without a threat, without a murmur—she did—did she not?' cried Fagin, half mad with fury.

'All right,' replied Noah, scratching his head. 'That's just what it was!'

'What did they say, about last Sunday?'

'About last Sunday!' replied Noah, considering. 'Why I told yer that before.'

'Again. Tell it again!' cried Fagin, tightening his grasp on Sikes, and brandishing his other hand aloft, as the foam flew from his lips.

'They asked her,' said Noah, who, as he grew more wakeful, seemed to have a dawning perception who Sikes was, 'they asked her why she didn't come, last Sunday, as she promised. She said she couldn't.'

'Why—why? Tell him that.'

'Because she was forcibly kept at home by Bill, the man she had told them of before,' replied Noah.

'What more of him?' cried Fagin. 'What more of the man she had told them of before? Tell him that, tell him that.'

'Why, that she couldn't very easily get out of doors unless he knew where she was going to,' said Noah; 'and so the first time she went to see the lady, she—ha! ha! ha! it made me laugh when she said it, that it did—she gave him a drink of laudanum.'

'Hell's fire!' cried Sikes, breaking fiercely from the Jew. 'Let me go!'

Flinging the old man from him, he rushed from the room, and darted, wildly and furiously, up the stairs.

'Bill, Bill!' cried Fagin, following him hastily. 'A word. Only a word.'

The word would not have been exchanged, but that the housebreaker was unable to open the door: on which he was expending fruitless oaths and violence, when the Jew came panting up.

'Let me out,' said Sikes. 'Don't speak to me; it's not safe. Let me out, I say!'

'Hear me speak a word,' rejoined Fagin, laying his hand upon the lock. 'You won't be—'

'Well,' replied the other.

'You won't be—too—violent, Bill?'

The day was breaking, and there was light enough for the men to see each other's faces. They exchanged one brief glance; there was a fire in the eyes of both, which could not be mistaken.

'I mean,' said Fagin, showing that he felt all disguise was now useless, 'not too violent for safety. Be crafty, Bill, and not too bold.'

Sikes made no reply; but, pulling open the door, of which Fagin had turned the lock, dashed into the silent streets.

Without one pause, or moment's consideration; without once turning his head to the right or left, or raising his eyes to the sky, or lowering them to the ground, but looking straight before him with savage resolution: his teeth so tightly compressed that the strained jaw seemed starting through his skin; the robber held on his headlong course, nor muttered a word, nor relaxed a muscle, until he reached his own door. He opened it, softly, with a key; strode lightly up the stairs; and entering his own room, double-locked the door, and lifting a heavy table against it, drew back the curtain of the bed.

The girl was lying, half-dressed, upon it. He had roused her from her sleep, for she raised herself with a hurried and startled look.

'Get up!' said the man.

'It is you, Bill!' said the girl, with an expression of pleasure at his return.

'It is,' was the reply. 'Get up.'

There was a candle burning, but the man hastily drew it from the candlestick, and hurled it under the grate. Seeing the faint light of early day without, the girl rose to undraw the curtain.

'Let it be,' said Sikes, thrusting his hand before her. 'There's enough light for wot I've got to do.'

'Bill,' said the girl, in the low voice of alarm, 'why do you look like that at me!'

The robber sat regarding her, for a few seconds, with dilated nostrils and heaving breast; and then, grasping her by the head and throat, dragged her into the middle of the room, and looking once towards the door, placed his heavy hand upon her mouth.

'Bill, Bill!' gasped the girl, wrestling with the strength of mortal fear,—'I—I won't scream or cry—not once—hear me—speak to me—tell me what I have done!'

'You know, you she devil!' returned the robber, suppressing his breath. 'You were watched to-night; every word you said was heard.'

'Then spare my life for the love of Heaven, as I spared yours,' rejoined the girl, clinging to him. 'Bill, dear Bill, you cannot have the heart to kill me. Oh! think of all I have given up, only this one night, for you. You *shall* have time to think, and save yourself this crime; I will not loose my hold, you cannot throw me off. Bill, Bill, for dear God's sake, for your own, for mine, stop before you spill my blood! I have been true to you, upon my guilty soul I have!'

The man struggled violently, to release his arms; but those of the girl were clasped round his, and tear her as he would, he could not tear them away.

'Bill,' cried the girl, striving to lay her head upon his breast, 'the gentleman and that dear lady, told me to-night of a home in some foreign country where I could end my days in solitude and peace. Let me see them again, and beg them, on my knees, to show the same mercy and goodness to you; and let us both leave this dreadful place, and far apart lead better lives, and forget how we have lived, except in prayers, and never see each other more. It is never too late to repent. They told me so—I feel it now—but we must have time—a little, little time!'

The housebreaker freed one arm, and grasped his pistol. The certainty of immediate detection if he fired, flashed across his mind even in the midst of his fury; and he beat it twice with all the force he could summon, upon the upturned face that almost touched his own.

She staggered and fell: nearly blinded with the blood that rained down from a deep gash in her forehead; but raising herself, with difficulty, on her knees, drew from her bosom a white handkerchief—Rose Maylie's own—and holding it up, in her folded hands, as high towards Heaven as her feeble strength would allow, breathed one prayer for mercy to her Maker.

It was a ghastly figure to look upon. The murderer staggering backward to the wall, and shutting out the sight with his hand, seized a heavy club and struck her down.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE FLIGHT OF SIKES

Of all bad deeds that, under cover of the darkness, had been committed within wide London's bounds since night hung over it, that was the worst. Of all the horrors that rose with an ill scent upon the morning air, that was the foulest and most cruel.

The sun—the bright sun, that brings back, not light alone, but new life, and hope, and freshness to man—burst upon the crowded city in clear and radiant glory. Through costly-coloured glass and paper-mended window, through cathedral dome and rotten crevice, it shed its equal ray. It lighted up the room where the murdered woman lay. It did. He tried to shut it out, but it would stream in. If the sight had been a ghastly one in the dull morning, what was it, now, in all that brilliant light!

He had not moved; he had been afraid to stir. There had been a moan and motion of the hand; and, with terror added to rage, he had struck and struck again. Once he threw a rug over it; but it was worse to fancy the eyes, and imagine them moving towards him, than to see them glaring upward, as if watching the reflection of the pool of gore that quivered and danced in the sunlight on the ceiling. He had plucked it off again. And there was the body—mere flesh and blood, no more—but such flesh, and so much blood!

He struck a light, kindled a fire, and thrust the club into it. There was hair upon the end, which blazed and shrunk into a light cinder, and, caught by the air, whirled up the chimney. Even that frightened him, sturdy as he was; but he held the weapon till it broke, and then piled it on the coals to burn away, and smoulder into ashes. He washed himself, and rubbed his clothes; there were spots that would not be removed, but he cut the pieces out, and burnt them. How those stains were dispersed about the room! The very feet of the dog were bloody.

All this time he had, never once, turned his back upon the corpse; no, not for a moment. Such preparations completed, he moved, backward, towards the door: dragging the dog with him, lest he should soil his feet anew and carry out new evidence of the crime into the streets. He shut the door softly, locked it, took the key, and left the house.

He crossed over, and glanced up at the window, to be sure that nothing was visible from the outside. There was the curtain still drawn, which she would have opened to admit the light she never saw again. It lay nearly under there. *He* knew that. God, how the sun poured down upon the very spot!

The glance was instantaneous. It was a relief to have got free of the room. He whistled on the dog, and walked rapidly away.

He went through Islington; strode up the hill at Highgate on which stands the stone in honour of Whittington; turned down to Highgate Hill, unsteady of purpose, and uncertain where to go; struck off to the right again, almost as soon as he began to descend it; and taking the foot-path across the fields, skirted Caen Wood, and so came on Hampstead Heath. Traversing the hollow by the Vale of Heath, he mounted the opposite bank, and crossing the road which joins the villages of Hampstead and Highgate, made along the remaining portion of the heath to the fields at North End, in one of which he laid himself down under a hedge, and slept.

Soon he was up again, and away,—not far into the country, but back towards London by the high-road—then back again—then over another part of the same ground as he already traversed—then wandering up and down in fields, and lying on ditches' brinks to rest, and starting up to make for some other spot, and do the same, and ramble on again.

Where could he go, that was near and not too public, to get some meat and drink? Hendon. That was a good place, not far off, and out of most people's way. Thither he directed his steps,—running sometimes, and sometimes, with a strange perversity, loitering at a snail's pace, or stopping altogether and idly breaking the hedges with a stick. But when he got there, all the people he met—the very children at the doors—seemed to view him with suspicion. Back he turned again, without the courage to purchase bit or drop, though he had tasted no food for many hours; and once more he lingered on the Heath, uncertain where to go.

He wandered over miles and miles of ground, and still came back to the old place. Morning and noon had passed, and the day was on the wane, and still he rambled to and fro, and up and down, and round and round, and still lingered about the same spot. At last he got away, and shaped his course for Hatfield.

It was nine o'clock at night, when the man, quite tired out, and the dog, limping and lame from the unaccustomed exercise, turned down the hill by the church of the quiet village, and plodding along the little street, crept into a small public-house, whose scanty light had guided them to the spot. There was a fire in the tap-room, and some country-labourers were drinking before it.

They made room for the stranger, but he sat down in the furthest corner, and ate and drank alone, or rather with his dog: to whom he cast a morsel of food from time to time.

The conversation of the men assembled here, turned upon the neighbouring land, and farmers; and when those topics were exhausted, upon the age of some old man who had been buried on the previous Sunday; the young men present considering him very old, and the old men present declaring him to have been quite young—not older, one white-haired grandfather said, than he was—with ten or fifteen year of life in him at least—if he had taken care; if he had taken care.

There was nothing to attract attention, or excite alarm in this. The robber, after paying his reckoning, sat silent and unnoticed in his corner, and had almost dropped asleep, when he was half wakened by the noisy entrance of a new comer.

This was an antic fellow, half pedlar and half mountebank, who travelled about the country on foot to vend hones, strops, razors, washballs, harness-paste, medicine for dogs and horses, cheap perfumery, cosmetics, and such-like wares, which he carried in a case slung to his back. His entrance was the signal for various homely jokes with the countrymen, which slackened not until he had made his supper, and opened his box of treasures, when he ingeniously contrived to unite business with amusement.

'And what be that stoof? Good to eat, Harry?' asked a grinning countryman, pointing to some composition-cakes in one corner.

'This,' said the fellow, producing one, 'this is the infallible and invaluable composition for removing all sorts of stain, rust, dirt, mildew, spick, speck, spot, or spatter, from silk, satin, linen, cambric, cloth, crape, stuff, carpet, merino, muslin, bombazeen, or woollen stuff. Wine-stains, fruit-stains, beer-stains, water-stains, paint-stains, pitch-stains, any stains, all come out at one rub with the infallible and invaluable composition. If a lady stains her honour, she has only need to swallow one cake and she's cured at once—for it's poison. If a gentleman wants to prove this, he has only need to bolt one little square, and he has put it beyond question—for it's quite as satisfactory as a pistol-bullet, and a great deal nastier in the flavour, consequently the more credit in taking it. One penny a square. With all these virtues, one penny a square!'

There were two buyers directly, and more of the listeners plainly hesitated. The vendor observing this, increased in loquacity.

'It's all bought up as fast as it can be made,' said the fellow. 'There are fourteen water-mills, six steam-engines, and a galvanic battery, always a-working upon it, and they can't make it fast enough, though the men work so hard that they die off, and the widows is pensioned directly, with twenty pound a-year for each of the children, and a premium of fifty for twins. One penny a square! Two half-pence is all the same, and four farthings is received with joy. One penny a square! Wine-stains, fruit-stains, beer-stains, water-stains, paint-stains, pitch-stains, mud-stains, blood-stains! Here is a stain upon the hat of a gentleman in company, that I'll take clean out, before he can order me a pint of ale.'

'Hah!' cried Sikes starting up. 'Give that back.'

'I'll take it clean out, sir,' replied the man, winking to the company, 'before you can come across the room to get it. Gentlemen all, observe the dark stain upon this gentleman's hat, no wider than a shilling, but thicker than a half-crown. Whether it is a wine-stain, fruit-stain, beer-stain, water-stain, paint-stain, pitch-stain, mud-stain, or blood-stain—'

The man got no further, for Sikes with a hideous imprecation overthrew the table, and tearing the hat from him, burst out of the house.

With the same perversity of feeling and irresolution that had fastened upon him, despite himself, all day, the murderer, finding that he was not followed, and that they most probably considered him some drunken sullen fellow, turned back up the town, and getting out of the glare of the lamps of a stage-coach that was standing in the street, was walking past, when he recognised the mail from London, and saw that it was standing at the little post-office. He almost knew what was to come; but he crossed over, and listened.

The guard was standing at the door, waiting for the letter-bag. A man, dressed like a game-keeper, came up at the moment, and he handed him a basket which lay ready on the pavement.

'That's for your people,' said the guard. 'Now, look alive in there, will you. Damn that 'ere bag, it warn't ready night afore last; this won't do, you know!'

'Anything new up in town, Ben?' asked the game-keeper, drawing back to the window-shutters, the better to admire the horses.

'No, nothing that I knows on,' replied the man, pulling on his gloves. 'Corn's up a little. I heerd talk of a murder, too, down Spitalfields way, but I don't reckon much upon it.'

'Oh, that's quite true,' said a gentleman inside, who was looking out of the window. 'And a dreadful murder it was.'

'Was it, sir?' rejoined the guard, touching his hat. 'Man or woman, pray, sir?'

'A woman,' replied the gentleman. 'It is supposed—'

'Now, Ben,' replied the coachman impatiently.

'Damn that 'ere bag,' said the guard; 'are you gone to sleep in there?'

'Coming!' cried the office keeper, running out.

'Coming,' growled the guard. 'Ah, and so's the young 'ooman of property that's going to take a fancy to me, but I don't know when. Here, give hold. All ri—ight!'

The horn sounded a few cheerful notes, and the coach was gone.

Sikes remained standing in the street, apparently unmoved by what he had just heard, and agitated by no stronger feeling than a doubt where to go. At length he went back again, and took the road which leads from Hatfield to St. Albans.

He went on doggedly; but as he left the town behind him, and plunged into the solitude and darkness of the road, he felt a dread and awe creeping upon him which shook him to the core. Every object before him, substance or shadow, still or moving, took the semblance of some fearful thing; but these fears were nothing compared to the sense that haunted him of that morning's ghastly figure following at his heels. He could trace its shadow in the gloom, supply the smallest item of the outline, and note how stiff and solemn it seemed to stalk along. He could hear its garments rustling in the leaves, and every breath of wind came laden with that last low cry. If he stopped it did the same. If he ran, it followed—not running too: that would have been a relief: but like a corpse endowed with the mere machinery of life, and borne on one slow melancholy wind that never rose or fell.

At times, he turned, with desperate determination, resolved to beat this phantom off, though it should look him dead; but the hair rose on his head, and his blood stood still, for it had turned with him and was behind him then. He had kept it before him that morning, but it was behind now—always. He leaned his back against a bank, and felt that it stood above him, visibly out against the cold night-sky. He threw himself upon the road—on his back upon the road. At his head it stood, silent, erect, and still—a living grave-stone, with its epitaph in blood.

Let no man talk of murderers escaping justice, and hint that Providence must sleep. There were twenty score of violent deaths in one long minute of that agony of fear.

There was a shed in a field he passed, that offered shelter for the night. Before the door, were three tall poplar trees, which made it very dark within; and the wind moaned through them with a dismal wail. He *could not* walk on, till daylight came again; and here he stretched himself close to the wall—to undergo new torture.

For now, a vision came before him, as constant and more terrible than that from which he had escaped. Those widely staring eyes, so lustreless and so glassy, that he had better borne to see them than think upon them, appeared in the midst of the darkness: light in themselves, but giving light to nothing. There were but two, but they were everywhere. If he shut out the sight, there came the room with every well-known object—some, indeed, that he would have forgotten, if he had gone over its contents from memory—each in its accustomed place. The body was in *its* place, and its eyes were as he saw them when he stole away. He got up, and rushed into the field without. The figure was behind him. He re-entered the shed, and shrunk down once more. The eyes were there, before he had laid himself along.

And here he remained in such terror as none but he can know, trembling in every limb, and the cold sweat starting from every pore, when suddenly there arose upon the night-wind the noise of distant shouting, and the roar of voices mingled in alarm and wonder. Any sound of men in that lonely place, even though it conveyed a real cause of alarm, was something to him. He regained his strength and energy at the prospect of personal danger; and springing to his feet, rushed into the open air.

The broad sky seemed on fire. Rising into the air with showers of sparks, and rolling one above the other, were sheets of flame, lighting the atmosphere for miles round, and driving clouds of smoke in the direction where he stood. The shouts grew louder as new voices swelled the roar, and he could hear the cry of Fire! mingled with the ringing of an alarm-bell, the fall of heavy bodies, and the crackling of flames as they twined round some new obstacle, and shot aloft as though refreshed by food. The noise increased as he looked. There were people there—men and women—light, bustle. It was like new life to him. He darted onward—straight, headlong—

dashing through brier and brake, and leaping gate and fence as madly as his dog, who careered with loud and sounding bark before him.

He came upon the spot. There were half-dressed figures tearing to and fro, some endeavouring to drag the frightened horses from the stables, others driving the cattle from the yard and out-houses, and others coming laden from the burning pile, amidst a shower of falling sparks, and the tumbling down of red-hot beams. The apertures, where doors and windows stood an hour ago, disclosed a mass of raging fire; walls rocked and crumbled into the burning well; the molten lead and iron poured down, white hot, upon the ground. Women and children shrieked, and men encouraged each other with noisy shouts and cheers. The clanking of the engine-pumps, and the spirting and hissing of the water as it fell upon the blazing wood, added to the tremendous roar. He shouted, too, till he was hoarse; and flying from memory and himself, plunged into the thickest of the throng. Hither and thither he dived that night: now working at the pumps, and now hurrying through the smoke and flame, but never ceasing to engage himself wherever noise and men were thickest. Up and down the ladders, upon the roofs of buildings, over floors that quaked and trembled with his weight, under the lee of falling bricks and stones, in every part of that great fire was he; but he bore a charmed life, and had neither scratch nor bruise, nor weariness nor thought, till morning dawned again, and only smoke and blackened ruins remained.

This mad excitement over, there returned, with ten-fold force, the dreadful consciousness of his crime. He looked suspiciously about him, for the men were conversing in groups, and he feared to be the subject of their talk. The dog obeyed the significant beck of his finger, and they drew off, stealthily, together. He passed near an engine where some men were seated, and they called to him to share in their refreshment. He took some bread and meat; and as he drank a draught of beer, heard the firemen, who were from London, talking about the murder. 'He has gone to Birmingham, they say,' said one: 'but they'll have him yet, for the scouts are out, and by to-morrow night there'll be a cry all through the country.'

He hurried off, and walked till he almost dropped upon the ground; then lay down in a lane, and had a long, but broken and uneasy sleep. He wandered on again, irresolute and undecided, and oppressed with the fear of another solitary night.

Suddenly, he took the desperate resolution to going back to London.

'There's somebody to speak to there, at all event,' he thought. 'A good hiding-place, too. They'll never expect to nab me there, after this country scent. Why can't I lie by for a week or so, and, forcing blunt from Fagin, get abroad to France? Damme, I'll risk it.'

He acted upon this impulse without delay, and choosing the least frequented roads began his journey back, resolved to lie concealed within a short distance of the metropolis, and, entering it at dusk by a circuitous route, to proceed straight to that part of it which he had fixed on for his destination.

The dog, though. If any description of him were out, it would not be forgotten that the dog was missing, and had probably gone with him. This might lead to his apprehension as he passed along the streets. He resolved to drown him, and walked on, looking about for a pond: picking up a heavy stone and tying it to his handkerchief as he went.

The animal looked up into his master's face while these preparations were making; whether his instinct apprehended something of their purpose, or the robber's sidelong look at him was sterner than ordinary, he skulked a little farther in the rear than usual, and cowered as he came more slowly along. When his master halted at the brink of a pool, and looked round to call him, he stopped outright.

'Do you hear me call? Come here!' cried Sikes.

The animal came up from the very force of habit; but as Sikes stooped to attach the handkerchief to his throat, he uttered a low growl and started back.

'Come back!' said the robber.

The dog wagged his tail, but moved not. Sikes made a running noose and called him again.

The dog advanced, retreated, paused an instant, and scoured away at his hardest speed.

The man whistled again and again, and sat down and waited in the expectation that he would return. But no dog appeared, and at length he resumed his journey.

CHAPTER XLIX

MONKS AND MR. BROWNLOW AT LENGTH MEET. THEIR CONVERSATION, AND THE INTELLIGENCE THAT INTERRUPTS IT

The twilight was beginning to close in, when Mr. Brownlow alighted from a hackney-coach at his own door, and knocked softly. The door being opened, a sturdy man got out of the coach and stationed himself on one side of the steps, while another man, who had been seated on the box, dismounted too, and stood upon the other side. At a sign from Mr. Brownlow, they helped out a third man, and taking him between them, hurried him into the house. This man was Monks.

They walked in the same manner up the stairs without speaking, and Mr. Brownlow, preceding them, led the way into a back-room. At the door of this apartment, Monks, who had ascended with evident reluctance, stopped. The two men looked at the old gentleman as if for instructions.

'He knows the alternative,' said Mr. Browlow. 'If he hesitates or moves a finger but as you bid him, drag him into the street, call for the aid of the police, and impeach him as a felon in my name.'

'How dare you say this of me?' asked Monks.

'How dare you urge me to it, young man?' replied Mr. Brownlow, confronting him with a steady look. 'Are you mad enough to leave this house? Unhand him. There, sir. You are free to go, and we to follow. But I warn you, by all I hold most solemn and most sacred, that instant will have you apprehended on a charge of fraud and robbery. I am resolute and immoveable. If you are determined to be the same, your blood be upon your own head!'

'By what authority am I kidnapped in the street, and brought here by these dogs?' asked Monks, looking from one to the other of the men who stood beside him.

'By mine,' replied Mr. Brownlow. 'Those persons are indemnified by me. If you complain of being deprived of your liberty—you had power and opportunity to retrieve it as you came along, but you deemed it advisable to remain quiet—I say again, throw yourself for protection on the law. I will appeal to the law too; but when you have gone too far to recede, do not sue to me for leniency, when the power will have passed into other hands; and do not say I plunged you down the gulf into which you rushed, yourself.'

Monks was plainly disconcerted, and alarmed besides. He hesitated.

'You will decide quickly,' said Mr. Brownlow, with perfect firmness and composure. 'If you wish me to prefer my charges publicly, and consign you to a punishment the extent of which, although I can, with a shudder, foresee, I cannot control, once more, I say, for you know the way. If not, and you appeal to my forbearance, and the mercy of those you have deeply injured, seat yourself, without a word, in that chair. It has waited for you two whole days.'

Monks muttered some unintelligible words, but wavered still.

'You will be prompt,' said Mr. Brownlow. 'A word from me, and the alternative has gone for ever.'

Still the man hesitated.

'I have not the inclination to parley,' said Mr. Brownlow, 'and, as I advocate the dearest interests of others, I have not the right.'

'Is there—' demanded Monks with a faltering tongue,—'is there—no middle course?'

'None.'

Monks looked at the old gentleman, with an anxious eye; but, reading in his countenance nothing but severity and determination, walked into the room, and, shrugging his shoulders, sat down.

'Lock the door on the outside,' said Mr. Brownlow to the attendants, 'and come when I ring.'

The men obeyed, and the two were left alone together.

'This is pretty treatment, sir,' said Monks, throwing down his hat and cloak, 'from my father's oldest friend.'

'It is because I was your father's oldest friend, young man,' returned Mr. Brownlow; 'it is because the hopes and wishes of young and happy years were bound up with him, and that fair creature of his blood and kindred who rejoined her God in youth, and left me here a solitary, lonely man: it is because he knelt with me beside his only sisters' death-bed when he was yet a boy, on the morning that would—but Heaven willed otherwise—have made her my young wife; it is because my seared heart clung to him, from that time forth, through all his trials and errors, till he died; it is because old recollections and associations filled my heart, and even the sight of you brings with it old thoughts of him; it is because of all these things that I am moved to treat you gently now—yes, Edward Leeford, even now—and blush for your unworthiness who bear the name.'

'What has the name to do with it?' asked the other, after contemplating, half in silence, and half in dogged wonder, the agitation of his companion. 'What is the name to me?'

'Nothing,' replied Mr. Brownlow, 'nothing to you. But it was *hers*, and even at this distance of time brings back to me, an old man, the glow and thrill which I once felt, only to hear it repeated by a stranger. I am very glad you have changed it—very—very.'

'This is all mighty fine,' said Monks (to retain his assumed designation) after a long silence, during which he had jerked himself in sullen defiance to and fro, and Mr. Brownlow had sat, shading his face with his hand. 'But what do you want with me?'

'You have a brother,' said Mr. Brownlow, rousing himself: 'a brother, the whisper of whose name in your ear when I came behind you in the street, was, in itself, almost enough to make you accompany me hither, in wonder and alarm.'

'I have no brother,' replied Monks. 'You know I was an only child. Why do you talk to me of brothers? You know that, as well as I.'

'Attend to what I do know, and you may not,' said Mr. Brownlow. 'I shall interest you by and by. I know that of the wretched marriage, into which family pride, and the most sordid and narrowest of all ambition, forced your unhappy father when a mere boy, you were the sole and most unnatural issue.'

'I don't care for hard names,' interrupted Monks with a jeering laugh. 'You know the fact, and that's enough for me.'

'But I also know,' pursued the old gentleman, 'the misery, the slow torture, the protracted anguish of that ill-assorted union. I know how listlessly and wearily each of that wretched pair dragged on their heavy chain through a world that was poisoned to them both. I know how cold formalities were succeeded by open taunts; how indifference gave place to dislike, dislike to hate, and hate to loathing, until at last they wrenched the clanking bond asunder, and retiring a wide space apart, carried each a galling fragment, of which nothing but death could break the rivets, to hide it in new society beneath the gayest looks they could assume. Your mother succeeded; she forgot it soon. But it rusted and cankered at your father's heart for years.'

'Well, they were separated,' said Monks, 'and what of that?'

'When they had been separated for some time,' returned Mr. Brownlow, 'and your mother, wholly given up to continental frivolities, had utterly forgotten the young husband ten good years her junior, who, with prospects blighted, lingered on at home, he fell among new friends. This circumstance, at least, you know already.'

'Not I,' said Monks, turning away his eyes and beating his foot upon the ground, as a man who is determined to deny everything. 'Not I.'

'Your manner, no less than your actions, assures me that you have never forgotten it, or ceased to think of it with bitterness,' returned Mr. Brownlow. 'I speak of fifteen years ago, when you were not more than eleven years old, and your father but one-and-thirty—for he was, I repeat, a boy, when *his* father ordered him to marry. Must I go back to events which cast a shade upon the memory of your parent, or will you spare it, and disclose to me the truth?'

'I have nothing to disclose,' rejoined Monks. 'You must talk on if you will.'

'These new friends, then,' said Mr. Brownlow, 'were a naval officer retired from active service, whose wife had died some half-a-year before, and left him with two children—there had been more, but, of all their family, happily but two survived. They were both daughters; one a beautiful creature of nineteen, and the other a mere child of two or three years old.'

'What's this to me?' asked Monks.

'They resided,' said Mr. Brownlow, without seeming to hear the interruption, 'in a part of the country to which your father in his wandering had repaired, and where he had taken up his abode. Acquaintance, intimacy, friendship, fast followed on each other. Your father was gifted as few men are. He had his sister's soul and person. As the old officer knew him more and more, he grew to love him. I would that it had ended there. His daughter did the same.'

The old gentleman paused; Monks was biting his lips, with his eyes fixed upon the floor; seeing this, he immediately resumed:

'The end of a year found him contracted, solemnly contracted, to that daughter; the object of the first, true, ardent, only passion of a guileless girl.'

'Your tale is of the longest,' observed Monks, moving restlessly in his chair.

'It is a true tale of grief and trial, and sorrow, young man,' returned Mr. Brownlow, 'and such tales usually are; if it were one of unmixed joy and happiness, it would be very brief. At length one of those rich relations to strengthen whose interest and importance your father had been sacrificed, as others are often—it is no uncommon case—died, and to repair the misery he had been instrumental in occasioning, left him his panacea for all griefs—Money. It was necessary that he should immediately repair to Rome, whither this man had sped for health, and where he had died, leaving his affairs in great confusion. He went; was seized with mortal illness there; was followed, the moment the intelligence reached Paris, by your mother who carried you with her; he died the day after her arrival, leaving no will—*no will*—so that the whole property fell to her and you.'

At this part of the recital Monks held his breath, and listened with a face of intense eagerness, though his eyes were not directed towards the speaker. As Mr. Brownlow paused, he changed his position with the air of one who has experienced a sudden relief, and wiped his hot face and hands.

'Before he went abroad, and as he passed through London on his way,' said Mr. Brownlow, slowly, and fixing his eyes upon the other's face, 'he came to me.'

'I never heard of that,' interrupted Monks in a tone intended to appear incredulous, but savouring more of disagreeable surprise.

'He came to me, and left with me, among some other things, a picture—a portrait painted by himself—a likeness of this poor girl—which he did not wish to leave behind, and could not carry forward on his hasty journey. He was worn by anxiety and remorse almost to a shadow; talked in a wild, distracted way, of ruin and dishonour worked by himself; confided to me his intention to convert his whole property, at any loss, into money, and, having settled on his wife and you a portion of his recent acquisition, to fly the country—I guessed too well he would not fly alone—and never see it more. Even from me, his old and early friend, whose strong attachment had taken root in the earth that covered one most dear to both—even from me he withheld any more particular confession, promising to write and tell me all, and after that to see me once again, for the last time on earth. Alas! *That* was the last time. I had no letter, and I never saw him more.'

'I went,' said Mr. Brownlow, after a short pause, 'I went, when all was over, to the scene of his—I will use the term the world would freely use, for worldly harshness or favour are now alike to him—of his guilty love, resolved that if my fears were realised that erring child should find one heart and home to shelter and compassionate her. The family had left that part a week before; they had called in such trifling debts as were outstanding, discharged them, and left the place by night. Why, or whither, none can tell.'

Monks drew his breath yet more freely, and looked round with a smile of triumph.

'When your brother,' said Mr. Brownlow, drawing nearer to the other's chair, 'When your brother: a feeble, ragged, neglected child: was cast in my way by a stronger hand than chance, and rescued by me from a life of vice and infamy—'

'What?' cried Monks.

'By me,' said Mr. Brownlow. 'I told you I should interest you before long. I say by me—I see that your cunning associate suppressed my name, although for ought he knew, it would be quite strange to your ears. When he was rescued by me, then, and lay recovering from sickness in my house, his strong resemblance to this picture I have spoken of, struck me with astonishment. Even when I first saw him in all his dirt and misery, there was a lingering expression in his face that came upon me like a glimpse of some old friend flashing on one in a vivid dream. I need not tell you he was snared away before I knew his history—'

'Why not?' asked Monks hastily.

'Because you know it well.'

'I!'

'Denial to me is vain,' replied Mr. Brownlow. 'I shall show you that I know more than that.'

'You—you—can't prove anything against me,' stammered Monks. 'I defy you to do it!'

'We shall see,' returned the old gentleman with a searching glance. 'I lost the boy, and no efforts of mine could recover him. Your mother being dead, I knew that you alone could solve the mystery if anybody could, and as when I had last heard of you you were on your own estate in the West Indies—whither, as you well know, you retired upon your mother's death to escape the consequences of vicious courses here—I made the voyage. You had left it, months before, and were supposed to be in London, but no one could tell where. I returned. Your agents had no clue to your residence. You came and went, they said, as strangely as you had ever done: sometimes for days together and sometimes not for months: keeping to all appearance the same low haunts and mingling with the same infamous herd who had been your associates when a fierce ungovernable boy. I wearied them with new applications. I paced the streets by night and day, but until two hours ago, all my efforts were fruitless, and I never saw you for an instant.'

'And now you do see me,' said Monks, rising boldly, 'what then? Fraud and robbery are high-sounding words—justified, you think, by a fancied resemblance in some young imp to an idle daub of a dead man's Brother! You don't even know that a child was born of this maudlin pair; you don't even know that.'

'I *did not*,' replied Mr. Brownlow, rising too; 'but within the last fortnight I have learnt it all. You have a brother; you know it, and him. There was a will, which your mother destroyed, leaving the secret and the gain to you at her own death. It contained a reference to some child likely to be the result of this sad connection, which child was born, and accidentally encountered by you, when your suspicions were first awakened by his resemblance to your father. You repaired to the place of his birth. There existed proofs—proofs long suppressed—of his birth and parentage. Those proofs were destroyed by you, and now, in your own words to your accomplice the Jew, "*the only proofs of the boy's identity lie at the bottom of the river, and the old hag that received them from the mother is rotting in her coffin*." Unworthy son, coward, liar,—you, who hold your councils with thieves and murderers in dark rooms at night,—you, whose plots and wiles have brought a violent death upon the head of one worth millions such as you,—you, who from your cradle were gall and bitterness to your own father's heart, and in whom all evil passions, vice, and profligacy, festered, till they found a vent in a hideous disease which had made your face an index even to your mind—you, Edward Leeford, do you still brave me!'

'No, no, no!' returned the coward, overwhelmed by these accumulated charges.

'Every word!' cried the gentleman, 'every word that has passed between you and this detested villain, is known to me. Shadows on the wall have caught your whispers, and brought them to my ear; the sight of the persecuted child has turned vice itself, and given it the courage and almost the attributes of virtue. Murder has been done, to which you were morally if not really a party.'

'No, no,' interposed Monks. 'I—I knew nothing of that; I was going to inquire the truth of the story when you overtook me. I didn't know the cause. I thought it was a common quarrel.'

'It was the partial disclosure of your secrets,' replied Mr. Brownlow. 'Will you disclose the whole?'

'Yes, I will.'

'Set your hand to a statement of truth and facts, and repeat it before witnesses?'

'That I promise too.'

'Remain quietly here, until such a document is drawn up, and proceed with me to such a place as I may deem most advisable, for the purpose of attesting it?'

'If you insist upon that, I'll do that also,' replied Monks.

'You must do more than that,' said Mr. Brownlow. 'Make restitution to an innocent and unoffending child, for such he is, although the offspring of a guilty and most miserable love. You have not forgotten the provisions of the will. Carry them into execution so far as your brother is concerned, and then go where you please. In this world you need meet no more.'

While Monks was pacing up and down, meditating with dark and evil looks on this proposal and the possibilities of evading it: torn by his fears on the one hand and his hatred on the other: the door was hurriedly unlocked, and a gentleman (Mr. Losberne) entered the room in violent agitation.

'The man will be taken,' he cried. 'He will be taken to-night!'

'The murderer?' asked Mr. Brownlow.

'Yes, yes,' replied the other. 'His dog has been seen lurking about some old haunt, and there seems little doubt that his master either is, or will be, there, under cover of the darkness. Spies are hovering about in every direction. I have spoken to the men who are charged with his capture, and they tell me he cannot escape. A reward of a hundred pounds is proclaimed by Government to-night.'

'I will give fifty more,' said Mr. Brownlow, 'and proclaim it with my own lips upon the spot, if I can reach it. Where is Mr. Maylie?'

'Harry? As soon as he had seen your friend here, safe in a coach with you, he hurried off to where he heard this,' replied the doctor, 'and mounting his horse sallied forth to join the first party at some place in the outskirts agreed upon between them.'

'Fagin,' said Mr. Brownlow; 'what of him?'

'When I last heard, he had not been taken, but he will be, or is, by this time. They're sure of him.'

'Have you made up your mind?' asked Mr. Brownlow, in a low voice, of Monks.

'Yes,' he replied. 'You—you—will be secret with me?'

'I will. Remain here till I return. It is your only hope of safety.'

They left the room, and the door was again locked.

'What have you done?' asked the doctor in a whisper.

'All that I could hope to do, and even more. Coupling the poor girl's intelligence with my previous knowledge, and the result of our good friend's inquiries on the spot, I left him no loophole of escape, and laid bare the whole villainy which by these lights became plain as day. Write and appoint the evening after to-morrow, at seven, for the meeting. We shall be down there, a few hours before, but shall require rest: especially the young lady, who *may* have greater need of firmness than either you or I can quite foresee just now. But my blood boils to avenge this poor murdered creature. Which way have they taken?'

'Drive straight to the office and you will be in time,' replied Mr. Losberne. 'I will remain here.'

The two gentlemen hastily separated; each in a fever of excitement wholly uncontrollable.

CHAPTER L

THE PURSUIT AND ESCAPE

Near to that part of the Thames on which the church at Rotherhithe abuts, where the buildings on the banks are dirtiest and the vessels on the river blackest with the dust of colliers and the smoke of close-built low-roofed houses, there exists the filthiest, the strangest, the most extraordinary of the many localities that are hidden in London, wholly unknown, even by name, to the great mass of its inhabitants.

To reach this place, the visitor has to penetrate through a maze of close, narrow, and muddy streets, thronged by the roughest and poorest of waterside people, and devoted to the traffic they may be supposed to occasion. The cheapest and least delicate provisions are heaped in the shops; the coarsest and commonest articles of wearing apparel dangle at the salesman's door, and stream from the house-parapet and windows. Jostling with unemployed labourers of the lowest class, ballast-heavers, coal-whippers, brazen women, ragged children, and the raff and refuse of the river, he makes his way with difficulty along, assailed by offensive sights and smells from the narrow alleys which branch off on the right and left, and deafened by the clash of ponderous waggons that bear great piles of merchandise from the stacks of warehouses that rise from every corner. Arriving, at length, in streets remoter and less-frequented than those through which he has passed, he walks beneath tottering house-fronts projecting over the pavement, dismantled walls that seem to totter as he passes, chimneys half crushed half hesitating to fall, windows guarded by rusty iron bars that time and dirt have almost eaten away, every imaginable sign of desolation and neglect.

In such a neighborhood, beyond Dockhead in the Borough of Southwark, stands Jacob's Island, surrounded by a muddy ditch, six or eight feet deep and fifteen or twenty wide when the tide is in, once called Mill Pond, but known in the days of this story as Folly Ditch. It is a creek or inlet from the Thames, and can always be filled at high water by opening the sluices at the Lead Mills from which it took its old name. At such times, a stranger, looking from one of the wooden bridges thrown across it at Mill Lane, will see the inhabitants of the houses on either side lowering from their back doors and windows, buckets, pails, domestic utensils of all kinds, in which to haul the water up; and when his eye is turned from these operations to the houses themselves, his utmost astonishment will be excited by the scene before him. Crazy wooden galleries common to the backs of half a dozen houses, with holes from which to look upon the slime beneath; windows, broken and patched, with poles thrust out, on which to dry the linen that is never there; rooms so small, so filthy, so confined, that the air would seem too tainted even for the dirt and squalor which they shelter; wooden chambers thrusting themselves out above the mud, and threatening to fall into it—as some have done; dirt-besmeared walls and decaying foundations; every repulsive lineament of poverty, every loathsome indication of filth, rot, and garbage; all these ornament the banks of Folly Ditch.

In Jacob's Island, the warehouses are roofless and empty; the walls are crumbling down; the windows are windows no more; the doors are falling into the streets; the chimneys are blackened, but they yield no smoke. Thirty or forty years ago, before losses and chancery suits came upon it, it was a thriving place; but now it is a desolate island indeed. The houses have no owners; they are broken open, and entered upon by those who have the courage; and there they live, and there they die. They must have powerful motives for a secret residence, or be reduced to a destitute condition indeed, who seek a refuge in Jacob's Island.

In an upper room of one of these houses—a detached house of fair size, ruinous in other respects, but strongly defended at door and window: of which house the back commanded the ditch in manner already described—there were assembled three men, who, regarding each other every now and then with looks expressive of perplexity and expectation, sat for some time in profound and gloomy silence. One of these was Toby Crackit, another Mr. Chitling, and the third a robber of fifty years, whose nose had been almost beaten in, in some old scuffle, and whose face bore a frightful scar which might probably be traced to the same occasion. This man was a returned transport, and his name was Kags.

'I wish,' said Toby turning to Mr. Chitling, 'that you had picked out some other crib when the two old ones got too warm, and had not come here, my fine feller.'

'Why didn't you, blunder-head!' said Kags.

'Well, I thought you'd have been a little more glad to see me than this,' replied Mr. Chitling, with a melancholy air.

'Why, look'e, young gentleman,' said Toby, 'when a man keeps himself so very ex-clusive as I have done, and by that means has a snug house over his head with nobody a prying and smelling about it, it's rather a startling thing to have the honour of a wisit from a young gentleman (however respectable and pleasant a person he may be to play cards with at conweniency) circumstanced as you are.'

'Especially, when the exclusive young man has got a friend stopping with him, that's arrived sooner than was expected from foreign parts, and is too modest to want to be presented to the Judges on his return,' added Mr. Kags.

There was a short silence, after which Toby Crackit, seeming to abandon as hopeless any further effort to maintain his usual devil-may-care swagger, turned to Chitling and said,

'When was Fagin took then?'

'Just at dinner-time—two o'clock this afternoon. Charley and I made our lucky up the wash-us chimney, and Bolter got into the empty water-butt, head downwards; but his legs were so precious long that they stuck out at the top, and so they took him too.'

'And Bet?'

'Poor Bet! She went to see the Body, to speak to who it was,' replied Chitling, his countenance falling more and more, 'and went off mad, screaming and raving, and beating her head against the boards; so they put a strait-weskut on her and took her to the hospital—and there she is.'

'Wot's come of young Bates?' demanded Kags.

'He hung about, not to come over here afore dark, but he'll be here soon,' replied Chitling. 'There's nowhere else to go to now, for the people at the Cripples are all in custody, and the bar of the ken—I went up there and see it with my own eyes—is filled with traps.'

'This is a smash,' observed Toby, biting his lips. 'There's more than one will go with this.'

'The sessions are on,' said Kags: 'if they get the inquest over, and Bolter turns King's evidence: as of course he will, from what he's said already: they can prove Fagin an accessory before the fact, and get the trial on on Friday, and he'll swing in six days from this, by G—!'

'You should have heard the people groan,' said Chitling; 'the officers fought like devils, or they'd have torn him away. He was down once, but they made a ring round him, and fought their way along. You should have seen how he looked about him, all muddy and bleeding, and clung to them as if they were his dearest friends. I can see 'em now, not able to stand upright with the pressing of the mob, and draggin him along amongst 'em; I can see the people jumping up, one behind another, and snarling with their teeth and making at him; I can see the blood upon his hair and beard, and hear the cries with which the women worked themselves into the centre of the crowd at the street corner, and swore they'd tear his heart out!'

The horror-stricken witness of this scene pressed his hands upon his ears, and with his eyes closed got up and paced violently to and fro, like one distracted.

While he was thus engaged, and the two men sat by in silence with their eyes fixed upon the floor, a pattering noise was heard upon the stairs, and Sikes's dog bounded into the room. They ran to the window, downstairs, and into the street. The dog had jumped in at an open window; he made no attempt to follow them, nor was his master to be seen.

'What's the meaning of this?' said Toby when they had returned. 'He can't be coming here. I—I—hope not.'

'If he was coming here, he'd have come with the dog,' said Kags, stooping down to examine the animal, who lay panting on the floor. 'Here! Give us some water for him; he has run himself faint.'

'He's drunk it all up, every drop,' said Chitling after watching the dog some time in silence. 'Covered with mud—lame—half blind—he must have come a long way.'

'Where can he have come from!' exclaimed Toby. 'He's been to the other kens of course, and finding them filled with strangers come on here, where he's been many a time and often. But where can he have come from first, and how comes he here alone without the other!'

'He'—(none of them called the murderer by his old name)—'He can't have made away with himself. What do you think?' said Chitling.

Toby shook his head.

'If he had,' said Kags, 'the dog 'ud want to lead us away to where he did it. No. I think he's got out of the country, and left the dog behind. He must have given him the slip somehow, or he wouldn't be so easy.'

This solution, appearing the most probable one, was adopted as the right; the dog, creeping under a chair, coiled himself up to sleep, without more notice from anybody.

It being now dark, the shutter was closed, and a candle lighted and placed upon the table. The terrible events of the last two days had made a deep impression on all three, increased by the danger and uncertainty of their own position. They drew their chairs closer together, starting at every sound. They spoke little, and that in whispers, and were as silent and awe-stricken as if the remains of the murdered woman lay in the next room.

They had sat thus, some time, when suddenly was heard a hurried knocking at the door below.

'Young Bates,' said Kags, looking angrily round, to check the fear he felt himself.

The knocking came again. No, it wasn't he. He never knocked like that.

Crackit went to the window, and shaking all over, drew in his head. There was no need to tell them who it was; his pale face was enough. The dog too was on the alert in an instant, and ran whining to the door.

'We must let him in,' he said, taking up the candle.

'Isn't there any help for it?' asked the other man in a hoarse voice.

'None. He *must* come in.'

'Don't leave us in the dark,' said Kags, taking down a candle from the chimney-piece, and lighting it, with such a trembling hand that the knocking was twice repeated before he had finished.

Crackit went down to the door, and returned followed by a man with the lower part of his face buried in a handkerchief, and another tied over his head under his hat. He drew them slowly off. Blanched face, sunken eyes, hollow cheeks, beard of three days' growth, wasted flesh, short thick breath; it was the very ghost of Sikes.

He laid his hand upon a chair which stood in the middle of the room, but shuddering as he was about to drop into it, and seeming to glance over his shoulder, dragged it back close to the wall—as close as it would go—and ground it against it—and sat down.

Not a word had been exchanged. He looked from one to another in silence. If an eye were furtively raised and met his, it was instantly averted. When his hollow voice broke silence, they all three started. They seemed never to have heard its tones before.

'How came that dog here?' he asked.

'Alone. Three hours ago.'

'To-night's paper says that Fagin's took. Is it true, or a lie?'

'True.'

They were silent again.

'Damn you all!' said Sikes, passing his hand across his forehead.

'Have you nothing to say to me?'

There was an uneasy movement among them, but nobody spoke.

'You that keep this house,' said Sikes, turning his face to Crackit, 'do you mean to sell me, or to let me lie here till this hunt is over?'

'You may stop here, if you think it safe,' returned the person addressed, after some hesitation.

Sikes carried his eyes slowly up the wall behind him: rather trying to turn his head than actually doing it: and said, 'Is—it—the body—is it buried?'

They shook their heads.

'Why isn't it!' he retorted with the same glance behind him. 'Wot do they keep such ugly things above the ground for?—Who's that knocking?'

Crackit intimated, by a motion of his hand as he left the room, that there was nothing to fear; and directly came back with Charley Bates behind him. Sikes sat opposite the door, so that the moment the boy entered the room he encountered his figure.

'Toby,' said the boy falling back, as Sikes turned his eyes towards him, 'why didn't you tell me this, downstairs?'

There had been something so tremendous in the shrinking off of the three, that the wretched man was willing to propitiate even this lad. Accordingly he nodded, and made as though he would shake hands with him.

'Let me go into some other room,' said the boy, retreating still farther.

'Charley!' said Sikes, stepping forward. 'Don't you—don't you know me?'

'Don't come nearer me,' answered the boy, still retreating, and looking, with horror in his eyes, upon the murderer's face. 'You monster!'

The man stopped half-way, and they looked at each other; but Sikes's eyes sunk gradually to the ground.

'Witness you three,' cried the boy shaking his clenched fist, and becoming more and more excited as he spoke. 'Witness you three—I'm not afraid of him—if they come here after him, I'll give him up; I will. I tell you out at once. He may kill me for it if he likes, or if he dares, but if I am here I'll give him up. I'd give him up if he was to be boiled alive. Murder! Help! If there's the pluck of a man among you three, you'll help me. Murder! Help! Down with him!'

Pouring out these cries, and accompanying them with violent gesticulation, the boy actually threw himself, single-handed, upon the strong man, and in the intensity of his energy and the suddenness of his surprise, brought him heavily to the ground.

The three spectators seemed quite stupefied. They offered no interference, and the boy and man rolled on the ground together; the former, heedless of the blows that showered upon him, wrenching his hands tighter and tighter in the garments about the murderer's breast, and never ceasing to call for help with all his might.

The contest, however, was too unequal to last long. Sikes had him down, and his knee was on his throat, when Crackit pulled him back with a look of alarm, and pointed to the window. There were lights gleaming below, voices in loud and earnest conversation, the tramp of hurried footsteps—endless they seemed in number—crossing the nearest wooden bridge. One man on horseback seemed to be among the crowd; for there was the noise of hoofs rattling on the uneven pavement. The gleam of lights increased; the footsteps came more thickly and noisily on. Then, came a loud knocking at the door, and then a hoarse murmur from such a multitude of angry voices as would have made the boldest quail.

'Help!' shrieked the boy in a voice that rent the air.

'He's here! Break down the door!'

'In the King's name,' cried the voices without; and the hoarse cry arose again, but louder.

'Break down the door!' screamed the boy. 'I tell you they'll never open it. Run straight to the room where the light is. Break down the door!'

Strokes, thick and heavy, rattled upon the door and lower window-shutters as he ceased to speak, and a loud huzzah burst from the crowd; giving the listener, for the first time, some adequate idea of its immense extent.

'Open the door of some place where I can lock this screeching Hell-babe,' cried Sikes fiercely; running to and fro, and dragging the boy, now, as easily as if he were an empty sack. 'That door. Quick!' He flung him in, bolted it, and turned the key. 'Is the downstairs door fast?'

'Double-locked and chained,' replied Crackit, who, with the other two men, still remained quite helpless and bewildered.

'The panels—are they strong?'

'Lined with sheet-iron.'

'And the windows too?'

'Yes, and the windows.'

'Damn you!' cried the desperate ruffian, throwing up the sash and menacing the crowd. 'Do your worst! I'll cheat you yet!'

Of all the terrific yells that ever fell on mortal ears, none could exceed the cry of the infuriated throng. Some shouted to those who were nearest to set the house on fire; others roared to the officers to shoot him dead. Among them all, none showed such fury as the man on horseback, who, throwing himself out of the saddle, and bursting through the crowd as if he were parting water, cried, beneath the window, in a voice that rose above all others, 'Twenty guineas to the man who brings a ladder!'

The nearest voices took up the cry, and hundreds echoed it. Some called for ladders, some for sledge-hammers; some ran with torches to and fro as if to seek them, and still came back and roared again; some spent their breath in impotent curses and execrations; some pressed forward with the ecstasy of madmen, and thus impeded the progress of those below; some among the boldest attempted to climb up by the water-spout and crevices in the wall; and all waved to and fro, in the darkness beneath, like a field of corn moved by an angry wind: and joined from time to time in one loud furious roar.

'The tide,' cried the murderer, as he staggered back into the room, and shut the faces out, 'the tide was in as I came up. Give me a rope, a long rope. They're all in front. I may drop into the Folly Ditch, and clear off that way. Give me a rope, or I shall do three more murders and kill myself.'

The panic-stricken men pointed to where such articles were kept; the murderer, hastily selecting the longest and strongest cord, hurried up to the house-top.

All the window in the rear of the house had been long ago bricked up, except one small trap in the room where the boy was locked, and that was too small even for the passage of his body. But, from this aperture, he had never ceased to call on those without, to guard the back; and thus, when the murderer emerged at last on the house-top by the door in the roof, a loud shout proclaimed the fact to those in front, who immediately began to pour round, pressing upon each other in an unbroken stream.

He planted a board, which he had carried up with him for the purpose, so firmly against the door that it must be matter of great difficulty to open it from the inside; and creeping over the tiles, looked over the low parapet.

The water was out, and the ditch a bed of mud.

The crowd had been hushed during these few moments, watching his motions and doubtful of his purpose, but the instant they perceived it and knew it was defeated, they raised a cry of triumphant execration to which all their previous shouting had been whispers. Again and again it rose. Those who were at too great a distance to know its meaning, took up the sound; it echoed and re-echoed; it seemed as though the whole city had poured its population out to curse him.

On pressed the people from the front—on, on, on, in a strong struggling current of angry faces, with here and there a glaring torch to lighten them up, and show them out in all their wrath and passion. The houses on the opposite side of the ditch had been entered by the mob; sashes were thrown up, or torn bodily out; there were tiers and tiers of faces in every window; cluster upon cluster of people clinging to every house-top. Each little bridge (and there were three in sight) bent beneath the weight of the crowd upon it. Still the current poured on to find some nook or hole from which to vent their shouts, and only for an instant see the wretch.

'They have him now,' cried a man on the nearest bridge. 'Hurrah!'

The crowd grew light with uncovered heads; and again the shout uprose.

'I will give fifty pounds,' cried an old gentleman from the same quarter, 'to the man who takes him alive. I will remain here, till he come to ask me for it.'

There was another roar. At this moment the word was passed among the crowd that the door was forced at last, and that he who had first called for the ladder had mounted into the room. The stream abruptly turned, as this intelligence ran from mouth to mouth; and the people at the windows, seeing those upon the bridges pouring back, quitted their stations, and running into the street, joined the concourse that now thronged pell-mell to the spot they had left: each man crushing and striving with his neighbor, and all panting with impatience to get near the door, and look upon the criminal as the officers brought him out. The cries and shrieks of those who were pressed almost to suffocation, or trampled down and trodden under foot in the confusion, were dreadful; the narrow ways were completely blocked up; and at this time, between the rush of some to regain the space in front of the house, and the unavailing struggles of others to extricate themselves from the mass, the immediate attention was distracted from the murderer, although the universal eagerness for his capture was, if possible, increased.

The man had shrunk down, thoroughly quelled by the ferocity of the crowd, and the impossibility of escape; but seeing this sudden change with no less rapidity than it had occurred, he sprang upon his feet, determined to make one last effort for his life by dropping into the ditch, and, at the risk of being stifled, endeavouring to creep away in the darkness and confusion.

Roused into new strength and energy, and stimulated by the noise within the house which announced that an entrance had really been effected, he set his foot against the stack of chimneys, fastened one end of the rope tightly and firmly round it, and with the other made a strong running noose by the aid of his hands and teeth almost in a second. He could let himself down by the cord to within a less distance of the ground than his own height, and had his knife ready in his hand to cut it then and drop.

At the very instant when he brought the loop over his head previous to slipping it beneath his arm-pits, and when the old gentleman before-mentioned (who had clung so tight to the railing of the bridge as to resist the force of the crowd, and retain his position) earnestly warned those about him that the man was about to lower himself down—at that very instant the murderer, looking behind him on the roof, threw his arms above his head, and uttered a yell of terror.

'The eyes again!' he cried in an unearthly screech.

Staggering as if struck by lightning, he lost his balance and tumbled over the parapet. The noose was on his neck. It ran up with his weight, tight as a bow-string, and swift as the arrow it speeds. He fell for five-and-thirty feet. There was a sudden jerk, a terrific convulsion of the limbs; and there he hung, with the open knife clenched in his stiffening hand.

The old chimney quivered with the shock, but stood it bravely. The murderer swung lifeless against the wall; and the boy, thrusting aside the dangling body which obscured his view, called to the people to come and take him out, for God's sake.

A dog, which had lain concealed till now, ran backwards and forwards on the parapet with a dismal howl, and collecting himself for a spring, jumped for the dead man's shoulders. Missing his aim, he fell into the ditch, turning completely over as he went; and striking his head against a stone, dashed out his brains.

CHAPTER LI

AFFORDING AN EXPLANATION OF MORE MYSTERIES THAN ONE, AND COMPREHENDING A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE WITH NO WORD OF SETTLEMENT OR PIN-MONEY

The events narrated in the last chapter were yet but two days old, when Oliver found himself, at three o'clock in the afternoon, in a travelling-carriage rolling fast towards his native town. Mrs. Maylie, and Rose, and Mrs. Bedwin, and the good doctor were with him: and Mr. Brownlow followed in a post-chaise, accompanied by one other person whose name had not been mentioned.

They had not talked much upon the way; for Oliver was in a flutter of agitation and uncertainty which deprived him of the power of collecting his thoughts, and almost of speech, and appeared to have scarcely less effect on his companions, who shared it, in at least an equal degree. He and the two ladies had been very carefully made acquainted by Mr. Brownlow with the nature of the admissions which had been forced from Monks; and although they knew that the object of their present journey was to complete the work which had been so well begun, still the whole matter was enveloped in enough of doubt and mystery to leave them in endurance of the most intense suspense.

The same kind friend had, with Mr. Losberne's assistance, cautiously stopped all channels of communication through which they could receive intelligence of the dreadful occurrences that so recently taken place. 'It was quite true,' he said, 'that they must know them before long, but it might be at a better time than the present, and it could not be at a worse.' So, they travelled on in silence: each busied with reflections on the object which had brought them together: and no one disposed to give utterance to the thoughts which crowded upon all.

But if Oliver, under these influences, had remained silent while they journeyed towards his birth-place by a road he had never seen, how the whole current of his recollections ran back to old times, and what a crowd of emotions were wakened up in his breast, when they turned into that which he had traversed on foot: a poor houseless, wandering boy, without a friend to help him, or a roof to shelter his head.

'See there, there!' cried Oliver, eagerly clasping the hand of Rose, and pointing out at the carriage window; 'that's the stile I came over; there are the hedges I crept behind, for fear any one should overtake me and force me back! Yonder is the path across the fields, leading to the old house where I was a little child! Oh Dick, Dick, my dear old friend, if I could only see you now!'

'You will see him soon,' replied Rose, gently taking his folded hands between her own. 'You shall tell him how happy you are, and how rich you have grown, and that in all your happiness you have none so great as the coming back to make him happy too.'

'Yes, yes,' said Oliver, 'and we'll—we'll take him away from here, and have him clothed and taught, and send him to some quiet country place where he may grow strong and well,—shall we?'

Rose nodded 'yes,' for the boy was smiling through such happy tears that she could not speak.

'You will be kind and good to him, for you are to every one,' said Oliver. 'It will make you cry, I know, to hear what he can tell; but never mind, never mind, it will be all over, and you will smile again—I know that too—to think how changed he is; you did the same with me. He said "God bless you" to me when I ran away,' cried the boy with a burst of affectionate emotion; 'and I will say "God bless you" now, and show him how I love him for it!'

As they approached the town, and at length drove through its narrow streets, it became matter of no small difficulty to restrain the boy within reasonable bounds. There was Sowerberry's the undertaker's just as it used to be, only smaller and less imposing in appearance than he remembered it—there were all the well-known shops and houses, with almost every one of which he had some slight incident connected—there was Gamfield's cart, the very cart he used to have, standing at the old public-house door—there was the workhouse, the dreary prison of his youthful days, with its dismal windows frowning on the street—there was the same lean porter standing at the gate, at sight of whom Oliver involuntarily shrunk back, and then laughed at himself for being so foolish, then cried, then laughed again—there were scores of faces at the doors and windows that he knew quite well

—there was nearly everything as if he had left it but yesterday, and all his recent life had been but a happy dream.

But it was pure, earnest, joyful reality. They drove straight to the door of the chief hotel (which Oliver used to stare up at, with awe, and think a mighty palace, but which had somehow fallen off in grandeur and size); and here was Mr. Grimwig all ready to receive them, kissing the young lady, and the old one too, when they got out of the coach, as if he were the grandfather of the whole party, all smiles and kindness, and not offering to eat his head—no, not once; not even when he contradicted a very old postboy about the nearest road to London, and maintained he knew it best, though he had only come that way once, and that time fast asleep. There was dinner prepared, and there were bedrooms ready, and everything was arranged as if by magic.

Notwithstanding all this, when the hurry of the first half-hour was over, the same silence and constraint prevailed that had marked their journey down. Mr. Brownlow did not join them at dinner, but remained in a separate room. The two other gentlemen hurried in and out with anxious faces, and, during the short intervals when they were present, conversed apart. Once, Mrs. Maylie was called away, and after being absent for nearly an hour, returned with eyes swollen with weeping. All these things made Rose and Oliver, who were not in any new secrets, nervous and uncomfortable. They sat wondering, in silence; or, if they exchanged a few words, spoke in whispers, as if they were afraid to hear the sound of their own voices.

At length, when nine o'clock had come, and they began to think they were to hear no more that night, Mr. Losberne and Mr. Grimwig entered the room, followed by Mr. Brownlow and a man whom Oliver almost shrieked with surprise to see; for they told him it was his brother, and it was the same man he had met at the market-town, and seen looking in with Fagin at the window of his little room. Monks cast a look of hate, which, even then, he could not dissemble, at the astonished boy, and sat down near the door. Mr. Brownlow, who had papers in his hand, walked to a table near which Rose and Oliver were seated.

'This is a painful task,' said he, 'but these declarations, which have been signed in London before many gentlemen, must be in substance repeated here. I would have spared you the degradation, but we must hear them from your own lips before we part, and you know why.'

'Go on,' said the person addressed, turning away his face. 'Quick. I have almost done enough, I think. Don't keep me here.'

'This child,' said Mr. Brownlow, drawing Oliver to him, and laying his hand upon his head, 'is your half-brother; the illegitimate son of your father, my dear friend Edwin Leeford, by poor young Agnes Fleming, who died in giving him birth.'

'Yes,' said Monks, scowling at the trembling boy: the beating of whose heart he might have heard. 'That is the bastard child.'

'The term you use,' said Mr. Brownlow, sternly, 'is a reproach to those long since passed beyond the feeble censure of the world. It reflects disgrace on no one living, except you who use it. Let that pass. He was born in this town.'

'In the workhouse of this town,' was the sullen reply. 'You have the story there.' He pointed impatiently to the papers as he spoke.

'I must have it here, too,' said Mr. Brownlow, looking round upon the listeners.

'Listen then! You!' returned Monks. 'His father being taken ill at Rome, was joined by his wife, my mother, from whom he had been long separated, who went from Paris and took me with her—to look after his property, for what I know, for she had no great affection for him, nor he for her. He knew nothing of us, for his senses were gone, and he slumbered on till next day, when he died. Among the papers in his desk, were two, dated on the night his illness first came on, directed to yourself'; he addressed himself to Mr. Brownlow; 'and enclosed in a few short lines to you, with an intimation on the cover of the package that it was not to be forwarded till after he was dead. One of these papers was a letter to this girl Agnes; the other a will.'

'What of the letter?' asked Mr. Brownlow.

'The letter?—A sheet of paper crossed and crossed again, with a penitent confession, and prayers to God to help her. He had palmed a tale on the girl that some secret mystery—to be explained one day—prevented his marrying her just then; and so she had gone on, trusting patiently to him, until she trusted too far, and lost what none could ever give her back. She was, at that time, within a few months of her confinement. He told her all he had meant to do, to hide her shame, if he had lived, and prayed her, if he died, not to curse his memory, or think the consequences of their sin would be visited on her or their young child; for all the guilt was his. He reminded her of the day he had given her the little locket and the ring with her christian name engraved upon it, and a blank left for that which he hoped one day to have bestowed upon her—prayed her yet to keep it, and wear it next her heart, as she had done before—and then ran on, wildly, in the same words, over and over again, as if he had gone distracted. I believe he had.'

'The will,' said Mr. Brownlow, as Oliver's tears fell fast.

Monks was silent.

'The will,' said Mr. Brownlow, speaking for him, 'was in the same spirit as the letter. He talked of miseries which his wife had brought upon him; of the rebellious disposition, vice, malice, and premature bad passions of you his only son, who had been trained to hate him; and left you, and your mother, each an annuity of eight hundred pounds. The bulk of his property he divided into two equal portions—one for Agnes Fleming, and the other for their child, if it should be born alive, and ever come of age. If it were a girl, it was to inherit the money unconditionally; but if a boy, only on the stipulation that in his minority he should never have stained his name with any public act of dishonour, meanness, cowardice, or wrong. He did this, he said, to mark his confidence in the other, and his conviction—only strengthened by approaching death—that the child would share her gentle heart, and noble nature. If he were disappointed in this expectation, then the money was to come to you: for then, and not till then, when both children were equal, would he recognise your prior claim upon his purse, who had none upon his heart, but had, from an infant, repulsed him with coldness and aversion.'

'My mother,' said Monks, in a louder tone, 'did what a woman should have done. She burnt this will. The letter never reached its destination; but that, and other proofs, she kept, in case they ever tried to lie away the blot. The girl's father had the truth from her with every aggravation that her violent hate—I love her for it now—could add. Goaded by shame and dishonour he fled with his children into a remote corner of Wales, changing his very name that his friends might never know of his retreat; and here, no great while afterwards, he was found dead in his bed. The girl had left her home, in secret, some weeks before; he had searched for her, on foot, in every town and village near; it was on the night when he returned home, assured that she had destroyed herself, to hide her shame and his, that his old heart broke.'

There was a short silence here, until Mr. Brownlow took up the thread of the narrative.

'Years after this,' he said, 'this man's—Edward Leeford's—mother came to me. He had left her, when only eighteen; robbed her of jewels and money; gambled, squandered, forged, and fled to London: where for two years he had associated with the lowest outcasts. She was sinking under a painful and incurable disease, and wished to recover him before she died. Inquiries were set on foot, and strict searches made. They were unavailing for a long time, but ultimately successful; and he went back with her to France.'

'There she died,' said Monks, 'after a lingering illness; and, on her death-bed, she bequeathed these secrets to me, together with her unquenchable and deadly hatred of all whom they involved—though she need not have left me that, for I had inherited it long before. She would not believe that the girl had destroyed herself, and the child too, but was filled with the impression that a male child had been born, and was alive. I swore to her, if ever it crossed my path, to hunt it down; never to let it rest; to pursue it with the bitterest and most unrelenting animosity; to vent upon it the hatred that I deeply felt, and to spit upon the empty vaunt of that insulting will by draggin it, if I could, to the very gallows-foot. She was right. He came in my way at last. I began well; and, but for babbling drabs, I would have finished as I began!'

As the villain folded his arms tight together, and muttered curses on himself in the impotence of baffled malice, Mr. Brownlow turned to the terrified group beside him, and explained that the Jew, who had been his old accomplice and confidant, had a large reward for keeping Oliver ensnared: of which some part was to be given up, in the event of his being rescued: and that a dispute on this head had led to their visit to the country house for the purpose of identifying him.

'The locket and ring?' said Mr. Brownlow, turning to Monks.

'I bought them from the man and woman I told you of, who stole them from the nurse, who stole them from the corpse,' answered Monks without raising his eyes. 'You know what became of them.'

Mr. Brownlow merely nodded to Mr. Grimwig, who disappearing with great alacrity, shortly returned, pushing in Mrs. Bumble, and dragging her unwilling consort after him.

'Do my hi's deceive me!' cried Mr. Bumble, with ill-feigned enthusiasm, 'or is that little Oliver? Oh O-li-ver, if you know'd how I've been a-grieving for you—'

'Hold your tongue, fool,' murmured Mrs. Bumble.

'Isn't natur, natur, Mrs. Bumble?' remonstrated the workhouse master. 'Can't I be supposed to feel—*I* as brought him up porochially—when I see him a-setting here among ladies and gentlemen of the very affablest description! I always loved that boy as if he'd been my—my—my own grandfather,' said Mr. Bumble, halting for an appropriate comparison. 'Master Oliver, my dear, you remember the blessed gentleman in the white waistcoat? Ah! he went to heaven last week, in a oak coffin with plated handles, Oliver.'

'Come, sir,' said Mr. Grimwig, tartly; 'suppress your feelings.'

'I will do my endeavours, sir,' replied Mr. Bumble. 'How do you do, sir? I hope you are very well.'

This salutation was addressed to Mr. Brownlow, who had stepped up to within a short distance of the respectable couple. He inquired, as he pointed to Monks,

'Do you know that person?'

'No,' replied Mrs. Bumble flatly.

'Perhaps *you* don't?' said Mr. Brownlow, addressing her spouse.

'I never saw him in all my life,' said Mr. Bumble.

'Nor sold him anything, perhaps?'

'No,' replied Mrs. Bumble.

'You never had, perhaps, a certain gold locket and ring?' said Mr. Brownlow.

'Certainly not,' replied the matron. 'Why are we brought here to answer to such nonsense as this?'

Again Mr. Brownlow nodded to Mr. Grimwig; and again that gentleman limped away with extraordinary readiness. But not again did he return with a stout man and wife; for this time, he led in two palsied women, who shook and tottered as they walked.

'You shut the door the night old Sally died,' said the foremost one, raising her shrivelled hand, 'but you couldn't shut out the sound, nor stop the chinks.'

'No, no,' said the other, looking round her and wagging her toothless jaws. 'No, no, no.'

'We heard her try to tell you what she'd done, and saw you take a paper from her hand, and watched you too, next day, to the pawnbroker's shop,' said the first.

'Yes,' added the second, 'and it was a "locket and gold ring." We found out that, and saw it given you. We were by. Oh! we were by.'

'And we know more than that,' resumed the first, 'for she told us often, long ago, that the young mother had told her that, feeling she should never get over it, she was on her way, at the time that she was taken ill, to die near the grave of the father of the child.'

'Would you like to see the pawnbroker himself?' asked Mr. Grimwig with a motion towards the door.

'No,' replied the woman; 'if he—she pointed to Monks—'has been coward enough to confess, as I see he has, and you have sounded all these hags till you have found the right ones, I have nothing more to say. I *did* sell them, and they're where you'll never get them. What then?'

'Nothing,' replied Mr. Brownlow, 'except that it remains for us to take care that neither of you is employed in a situation of trust again. You may leave the room.'

'I hope,' said Mr. Bumble, looking about him with great ruefulness, as Mr. Grimwig disappeared with the two old women: 'I hope that this unfortunate little circumstance will not deprive me of my porochial office?'

'Indeed it will,' replied Mr. Brownlow. 'You may make up your mind to that, and think yourself well off besides.'

'It was all Mrs. Bumble. She *would* do it,' urged Mr. Bumble; first looking round to ascertain that his partner had left the room.

'That is no excuse,' replied Mr. Brownlow. 'You were present on the occasion of the destruction of these trinkets, and indeed are the more guilty of the two, in the eye of the law; for the law supposes that your wife acts under your direction.'

'If the law supposes that,' said Mr. Bumble, squeezing his hat emphatically in both hands, 'the law is a ass—a idiot. If that's the eye of the law, the law is a bachelor; and the worst I wish the law is, that his eye may be opened by experience—by experience.'

Laying great stress on the repetition of these two words, Mr. Bumble fixed his hat on very tight, and putting his hands in his pockets, followed his helpmate downstairs.

'Young lady,' said Mr. Brownlow, turning to Rose, 'give me your hand. Do not tremble. You need not fear to hear the few remaining words we have to say.'

'If they have—I do not know how they can, but if they have—any reference to me,' said Rose, 'pray let me hear them at some other time. I have not strength or spirits now.'

'Nay,' returned the old gentlman, drawing her arm through his; 'you have more fortitude than this, I am sure. Do you know this young lady, sir?'

'Yes,' replied Monks.

'I never saw you before,' said Rose faintly.

'I have seen you often,' returned Monks.

'The father of the unhappy Agnes had *two* daughters,' said Mr. Brownlow. 'What was the fate of the other—the child?'

'The child,' replied Monks, 'when her father died in a strange place, in a strange name, without a letter, book, or scrap of paper that yielded the faintest clue by which his friends or relatives could be traced—the child was taken by some wretched cottagers, who reared it as their own.'

'Go on,' said Mr. Brownlow, signing to Mrs. Maylie to approach. 'Go on!'

'You couldn't find the spot to which these people had repaired,' said Monks, 'but where friendship fails, hatred will often force a way. My mother found it, after a year of cunning search—ay, and found the child.'

'She took it, did she?'

'No. The people were poor and began to sicken—at least the man did—of their fine humanity; so she left it with them, giving them a small present of money which would not last long, and promised more, which she never meant to send. She didn't quite rely, however, on their discontent and poverty for the child's unhappiness, but told the history of the sister's shame, with such alterations as suited her; bade them take good heed of the child, for she came of bad blood; and told them she was illegitimate, and sure to go wrong at one time or other. The circumstances countenanced all this; the people believed it; and there the child dragged on an existence, miserable enough even to satisfy us, until a widow lady, residing, then, at Chester, saw the girl by chance, pitied her, and took her home. There was some cursed spell, I think, against us; for in spite of all our efforts she remained there and was happy. I lost sight of her, two or three years ago, and saw her no more until a few months back.'

'Do you see her now?'

'Yes. Leaning on your arm.'

'But not the less my niece,' cried Mrs. Maylie, folding the fainting girl in her arms; 'not the less my dearest child. I would not lose her now, for all the treasures of the world. My sweet companion, my own dear girl!'

'The only friend I ever had,' cried Rose, clinging to her. 'The kindest, best of friends. My heart will burst. I cannot bear all this.'

'You have borne more, and have been, through all, the best and gentlest creature that ever shed happiness on every one she knew,' said Mrs. Maylie, embracing her tenderly. 'Come, come, my love, remember who this is who waits to clasp you in his arms, poor child! See here—look, look, my dear!'

'Not aunt,' cried Oliver, throwing his arms about her neck; 'I'll never call her aunt—sister, my own dear sister, that something taught my heart to love so dearly from the first! Rose, dear, darling Rose!'

Let the tears which fell, and the broken words which were exchanged in the long close embrace between the orphans, be sacred. A father, sister, and mother, were gained, and lost, in that one moment. Joy and grief were mingled in the cup; but there were no bitter tears: for even grief itself arose so softened, and clothed in such sweet and tender recollections, that it became a solemn pleasure, and lost all character of pain.

They were a long, long time alone. A soft tap at the door, at length announced that some one was without. Oliver opened it, glided away, and gave place to Harry Maylie.

'I know it all,' he said, taking a seat beside the lovely girl. 'Dear Rose, I know it all.'

'I am not here by accident,' he added after a lengthened silence; 'nor have I heard all this to-night, for I knew it yesterday—only yesterday. Do you guess that I have come to remind you of a promise?'

'Stay,' said Rose. 'You *do* know all.'

'All. You gave me leave, at any time within a year, to renew the subject of our last discourse.'

'I did.'

'Not to press you to alter your determination,' pursued the young man, 'but to hear you repeat it, if you would. I was to lay whatever of station or fortune I might possess at your feet, and if you still adhered to your former determination, I pledged myself, by no word or act, to seek to change it.'

'The same reasons which influenced me then, will influence me now,' said Rose firmly. 'If I ever owed a strict and rigid duty to her, whose goodness saved me from a life of indigence and suffering, when should I ever feel it, as I should to-night? It is a struggle,' said Rose, 'but one I am proud to make; it is a pang, but one my heart shall bear.'

'The disclosure of to-night,'—Harry began.

'The disclosure of to-night,' replied Rose softly, 'leaves me in the same position, with reference to you, as that in which I stood before.'

'You harden your heart against me, Rose,' urged her lover.

'Oh Harry, Harry,' said the young lady, bursting into tears; 'I wish I could, and spare myself this pain.'

'Then why inflict it on yourself?' said Harry, taking her hand. 'Think, dear Rose, think what you have heard to-night.'

'And what have I heard! What have I heard!' cried Rose. 'That a sense of his deep disgrace so worked upon my own father that he shunned all—there, we have said enough, Harry, we have said enough.'

'Not yet, not yet,' said the young man, detaining her as she rose. 'My hopes, my wishes, prospects, feeling: every thought in life except my love for you: have undergone a change. I offer you, now, no distinction among a bustling crowd; no mingling with a world of malice and detraction, where the blood is called into honest cheeks by aught but real disgrace and shame; but a home—a heart and home—yes, dearest Rose, and those, and those alone, are all I have to offer.'

'What do you mean!' she faltered.

'I mean but this—that when I left you last, I left you with a firm determination to level all fancied barriers between yourself and me; resolved that if my world could not be yours, I would make yours mine; that no pride of birth should curl the lip at you, for I would turn from it. This I have done. Those who have shrunk from me because of this, have shrunk from you, and proved you so far right. Such power and patronage: such relatives of influence and rank: as smiled upon me then, look coldly now; but there are smiling fields and waving trees in England's richest county; and by one village church—mine, Rose, my own!—there stands a rustic dwelling which you can make me prouder of, than all the hopes I have renounced, measured a thousandfold. This is my rank and station now, and here I lay it down!'

'It's a trying thing waiting supper for lovers,' said Mr. Grimwig, waking up, and pulling his pocket-handkerchief from over his head.

Truth to tell, the supper had been waiting a most unreasonable time. Neither Mrs. Maylie, nor Harry, nor Rose (who all came in together), could offer a word in extenuation.

'I had serious thoughts of eating my head to-night,' said Mr. Grimwig, 'for I began to think I should get nothing else. I'll take the liberty, if you'll allow me, of saluting the bride that is to be.'

Mr. Grimwig lost no time in carrying this notice into effect upon the blushing girl; and the example, being contagious, was followed both by the doctor and Mr. Brownlow: some people affirm that Harry Maylie had been observed to set it, originally, in a dark room adjoining; but the best authorities consider this downright scandal: he being young and a clergyman.

'Oliver, my child,' said Mrs. Maylie, 'where have you been, and why do you look so sad? There are tears stealing down your face at this moment. What is the matter?'

It is a world of disappointment: often to the hopes we most cherish, and hopes that do our nature the greatest honour.

Poor Dick was dead!

CHAPTER LII

FAGIN'S LAST NIGHT ALIVE

The court was paved, from floor to roof, with human faces. Inquisitive and eager eyes peered from every inch of space. From the rail before the dock, away into the sharpest angle of the smallest corner in the galleries, all looks were fixed upon one man—Fagin. Before him and behind: above, below, on the right and on the left: he seemed to stand surrounded by a firmament, all bright with gleaming eyes.

He stood there, in all this glare of living light, with one hand resting on the wooden slab before him, the other held to his ear, and his head thrust forward to enable him to catch with greater distinctness every word that fell from the presiding judge, who was delivering his charge to the jury. At times, he turned his eyes sharply upon them to observe the effect of the slightest featherweight in his favour; and when the points against him were stated with terrible distinctness, looked towards his counsel, in mute appeal that he would, even then, urge something in his behalf. Beyond these manifestations of anxiety, he stirred not hand or foot. He had scarcely moved since the trial began; and now that the judge ceased to speak, he still remained in the same strained attitude of close attention, with his gaze bent on him, as though he listened still.

A slight bustle in the court, recalled him to himself. Looking round, he saw that the juryman had turned together, to consider their verdict. As his eyes wandered to the gallery, he could see the people rising above each other to see his face: some hastily applying their glasses to their eyes: and others whispering their neighbours with looks expressive of abhorrence. A few there were, who seemed unmindful of him, and looked only to the jury, in impatient wonder how they could delay. But in no one face—not even among the women, of whom there were many there—could he read the faintest sympathy with himself, or any feeling but one of all-absorbing interest that he should be condemned.

As he saw all this in one bewildered glance, the deathlike stillness came again, and looking back he saw that the jurymen had turned towards the judge. Hush!

They only sought permission to retire.

He looked, wistfully, into their faces, one by one when they passed out, as though to see which way the greater number leant; but that was fruitless. The jailer touched him on the shoulder. He followed mechanically to the end of the dock, and sat down on a chair. The man pointed it out, or he would not have seen it.

He looked up into the gallery again. Some of the people were eating, and some fanning themselves with handkerchiefs; for the crowded place was very hot. There was one young man sketching his face in a little note-book. He wondered whether it was like, and looked on when the artist broke his pencil-point, and made another with his knife, as any idle spectator might have done.

In the same way, when he turned his eyes towards the judge, his mind began to busy itself with the fashion of his dress, and what it cost, and how he put it on. There was an old fat gentleman on the bench, too, who had gone out, some half an hour before, and now come back. He wondered within himself whether this man had been to get his dinner, what he had had, and where he had had it; and pursued this train of careless thought until some new object caught his eye and roused another.

Not that, all this time, his mind was, for an instant, free from one oppressive overwhelming sense of the grave that opened at his feet; it was ever present to him, but in a vague and general way, and he could not fix his thoughts upon it. Thus, even while he trembled, and turned burning hot at the idea of speedy death, he fell to counting the iron spikes before him, and wondering how the head of one had been broken off, and whether they would mend it, or leave it as it was. Then, he thought of all the horrors of the gallows and the scaffold—and stopped to watch a man sprinkling the floor to cool it—and then went on to think again.

At length there was a cry of silence, and a breathless look from all towards the door. The jury returned, and passed him close. He could glean nothing from their faces; they might as well have been of stone. Perfect stillness ensued—not a rustle—not a breath—Guilty.

The building rang with a tremendous shout, and another, and another, and then it echoed loud groans, that gathered strength as they swelled out, like angry thunder. It was a peal of joy from the populace outside, greeting the news that he would die on Monday.

The noise subsided, and he was asked if he had anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon him. He had resumed his listening attitude, and looked intently at his questioner while the demand was made; but it was twice repeated before he seemed to hear it, and then he only muttered that he was an old man—an old man—and so, dropping into a whisper, was silent again.

The judge assumed the black cap, and the prisoner still stood with the same air and gesture. A woman in the gallery, uttered some exclamation, called forth by this dread solemnity; he looked hastily up as if angry at the interruption, and bent forward yet more attentively. The address was solemn and impressive; the sentence fearful to hear. But he stood, like a marble figure, without the motion of a nerve. His haggard face was still thrust forward, his under-jaw hanging down, and his eyes staring out before him, when the jailer put his hand upon his arm, and beckoned him away. He gazed stupidly about him for an instant, and obeyed.

They led him through a paved room under the court, where some prisoners were waiting till their turns came, and others were talking to their friends, who crowded round a grate which looked into the open yard. There was nobody there to speak to *him*; but, as he passed, the prisoners fell back to render him more visible to the people who were clinging to the bars: and they assailed him with opprobrious names, and screeched and hissed. He shook his fist, and would have spat upon them; but his conductors hurried him on, through a gloomy passage lighted by a few dim lamps, into the interior of the prison.

Here, he was searched, that he might not have about him the means of anticipating the law; this ceremony performed, they led him to one of the condemned cells, and left him there—alone.

He sat down on a stone bench opposite the door, which served for seat and bedstead; and casting his blood-shot eyes upon the ground, tried to collect his thoughts. After awhile, he began to remember a few disjointed fragments of what the judge had said: though it had seemed to him, at the time, that he could not hear a word. These gradually fell into their proper places, and by degrees suggested more: so that in a little time he had the whole, almost as it was delivered. To be hanged by the neck, till he was dead—that was the end. To be hanged by the neck till he was dead.

As it came on very dark, he began to think of all the men he had known who had died upon the scaffold; some of them through his means. They rose up, in such quick succession, that he could hardly count them. He had seen some of them die,—and had joked too, because they died with prayers upon their lips. With what a rattling noise the drop went down; and how suddenly they changed, from strong and vigorous men to dangling heaps of clothes!

Some of them might have inhabited that very cell—sat upon that very spot. It was very dark; why didn't they bring a light? The cell had been built for many years. Scores of men must have passed their last hours there. It was like sitting in a vault strewn with dead bodies—the cap, the noose, the pinioned arms, the faces that he knew, even beneath that hideous veil.—Light, light!

At length, when his hands were raw with beating against the heavy door and walls, two men appeared: one bearing a candle, which he thrust into an iron candlestick fixed against the wall: the other dragging in a mattress on which to pass the night; for the prisoner was to be left alone no more.

Then came the night—dark, dismal, silent night. Other watchers are glad to hear this church-clock strike, for they tell of life and coming day. To him they brought despair. The boom of every iron bell came laden with the one, deep, hollow sound—Death. What availed the noise and bustle of cheerful morning, which penetrated even there, to him? It was another form of knell, with mockery added to the warning.

The day passed off. Day? There was no day; it was gone as soon as come—and night came on again; night so long, and yet so short; long in its dreadful silence, and short in its fleeting hours. At one time he raved and blasphemed; and at another howled and tore his hair. Venerable men of his own persuasion had come to pray beside him, but he had driven them away with curses. They renewed their charitable efforts, and he beat them off.

Saturday night. He had only one night more to live. And as he thought of this, the day broke—Sunday.

It was not until the night of this last awful day, that a withering sense of his helpless, desperate state came in its full intensity upon his blighted soul; not that he had ever held any defined or positive hope of mercy, but that he had never been able to consider more than the dim probability of dying so soon. He had spoken little to either of the two men, who relieved each other in their attendance upon him; and they, for their parts, made no effort to rouse his attention. He had sat there, awake, but dreaming. Now, he started up, every minute, and with gasping mouth and burning skin, hurried to and fro, in such a paroxysm of fear and wrath that even they—used to such sights—recoiled from him with horror. He grew so terrible, at last, in all the tortures of his evil conscience, that one man could not bear to sit there, eyeing him alone; and so the two kept watch together.

He cowered down upon his stone bed, and thought of the past. He had been wounded with some missiles from the crowd on the day of his capture, and his head was bandaged with a linen cloth. His red hair hung down upon his bloodless face; his beard was torn, and twisted into knots; his eyes shone with a terrible light; his unwashed flesh crackled with the fever that burnt him up. Eight—nine—then. If it was not a trick to frighten him, and those were the real hours treading on each other's heels, where would he be, when they came round again! Eleven! Another struck, before the voice of the previous hour had ceased to vibrate. At eight, he would be the only mourner in his own funeral train; at eleven—

Those dreadful walls of Newgate, which have hidden so much misery and such unspeakable anguish, not only from the eyes, but, too often, and too long, from the thoughts, of men, never held so dread a spectacle as that.

The few who lingered as they passed, and wondered what the man was doing who was to be hanged to-morrow, would have slept but ill that night, if they could have seen him.

From early in the evening until nearly midnight, little groups of two and three presented themselves at the lodge-gate, and inquired, with anxious faces, whether any reprieve had been received. These being answered in the negative, communicated the welcome intelligence to clusters in the street, who pointed out to one another the door from which he must come out, and showed where the scaffold would be built, and, walking with unwilling steps away, turned back to conjure up the scene. By degrees they fell off, one by one; and, for an hour, in the dead of night, the street was left to solitude and darkness.

The space before the prison was cleared, and a few strong barriers, painted black, had been already thrown across the road to break the pressure of the expected crowd, when Mr. Brownlow and Oliver appeared at the wicket, and presented an order of admission to the prisoner, signed by one of the sheriffs. They were immediately admitted into the lodge.

'Is the young gentleman to come too, sir?' said the man whose duty it was to conduct them. 'It's not a sight for children, sir.'

'It is not indeed, my friend,' rejoined Mr. Brownlow; 'but my business with this man is intimately connected with him; and as this child has seen him in the full career of his success and villainy, I think it as well—even at the cost of some pain and fear—that he should see him now.'

These few words had been said apart, so as to be inaudible to Oliver. The man touched his hat; and glancing at Oliver with some curiousity, opened another gate, opposite to that by which they had entered, and led them on, through dark and winding ways, towards the cells.

'This,' said the man, stopping in a gloomy passage where a couple of workmen were making some preparations in profound silence—'this is the place he passes through. If you step this way, you can see the door he goes out at.'

He led them into a stone kitchen, fitted with coppers for dressing the prison food, and pointed to a door. There was an open grating above it, through which came the sound of men's voices, mingled with the noise of hammering, and the throwing down of boards. There were putting up the scaffold.

From this place, they passed through several strong gates, opened by other turnkeys from the inner side; and, having entered an open yard, ascended a flight of narrow steps, and came into a passage with a row of strong doors on the left hand. Motioning them to remain where they were, the turnkey knocked at one of these with his bunch of keys. The two attendants, after a little whispering, came out into the passage, stretching themselves as if glad of the temporary relief, and motioned the visitors to follow the jailer into the cell. They did so.

The condemned criminal was seated on his bed, rocking himself from side to side, with a countenance more like that of a snared beast than the face of a man. His mind was evidently wandering to his old life, for he continued to mutter, without appearing conscious of their presence otherwise than as a part of his vision.

'Good boy, Charley—well done—' he mumbled. 'Oliver, too, ha! ha! ha! Oliver too—quite the gentleman now—quite the—take that boy away to bed!'

The jailer took the disengaged hand of Oliver; and, whispering him not to be alarmed, looked on without speaking.

'Take him away to bed!' cried Fagin. 'Do you hear me, some of you? He has been the—the—somehow the cause of all this. It's worth the money to bring him up to it—Bolter's throat, Bill; never mind the girl—Bolter's throat as deep as you can cut. Saw his head off!'

'Fagin,' said the jailer.

'That's me!' cried the Jew, falling instantly, into the attitude of listening he had assumed upon his trial. 'An old man, my Lord; a very old, old man!'

'Here,' said the turnkey, laying his hand upon his breast to keep him down. 'Here's somebody wants to see you, to ask you some questions, I suppose. Fagin, Fagin! Are you a man?'

'I shan't be one long,' he replied, looking up with a face retaining no human expression but rage and terror. 'Strike them all dead! What right have they to butcher me?'

As he spoke he caught sight of Oliver and Mr. Brownlow. Shrinking to the furthest corner of the seat, he demanded to know what they wanted there.

'Steady,' said the turnkey, still holding him down. 'Now, sir, tell him what you want. Quick, if you please, for he grows worse as the time gets on.'

'You have some papers,' said Mr. Brownlow advancing, 'which were placed in your hands, for better security, by a man called Monks.'

'It's all a lie together,' replied Fagin. 'I haven't one—not one.'

'For the love of God,' said Mr. Brownlow solemnly, 'do not say that now, upon the very verge of death; but tell me where they are. You know that Sikes is dead; that Monks has confessed; that there is no hope of any further gain. Where are those papers?'

'Oliver,' cried Fagin, beckoning to him. 'Here, here! Let me whisper to you.'

'I am not afraid,' said Oliver in a low voice, as he relinquished Mr. Brownlow's hand.

'The papers,' said Fagin, drawing Oliver towards him, 'are in a canvas bag, in a hole a little way up the chimney in the top front-room. I want to talk to you, my dear. I want to talk to you.'

'Yes, yes,' returned Oliver. 'Let me say a prayer. Do! Let me say one prayer. Say only one, upon your knees, with me, and we will talk till morning.'

'Outside, outside,' replied Fagin, pushing the boy before him towards the door, and looking vacantly over his head. 'Say I've gone to sleep—they'll believe you. You can get me out, if you take me so. Now then, now then!'

'Oh! God forgive this wretched man!' cried the boy with a burst of tears.

'That's right, that's right,' said Fagin. 'That'll help us on. This door first. If I shake and tremble, as we pass the gallows, don't you mind, but hurry on. Now, now, now!'

'Have you nothing else to ask him, sir?' inquired the turnkey.

'No other question,' replied Mr. Brownlow. 'If I hoped we could recall him to a sense of his position—'

'Nothing will do that, sir,' replied the man, shaking his head. 'You had better leave him.'

The door of the cell opened, and the attendants returned.

'Press on, press on,' cried Fagin. 'Softly, but not so slow. Faster, faster!'

The men laid hands upon him, and disengaging Oliver from his grasp, held him back. He struggled with the power of desperation, for an instant; and then sent up cry upon cry that penetrated even those massive walls, and rang in their ears until they reached the open yard.

It was some time before they left the prison. Oliver nearly swooned after this frightful scene, and was so weak that for an hour or more, he had not the strength to walk.

Day was dawning when they again emerged. A great multitude had already assembled; the windows were filled with people, smoking and playing cards to beguile the time; the crowd were pushing, quarrelling, joking. Everything told of life and animation, but one dark cluster of objects in the centre of all—the black stage, the cross-beam, the rope, and all the hideous apparatus of death.

CHAPTER LIII

AND LAST

The fortunes of those who have figured in this tale are nearly closed. The little that remains to their historian to relate, is told in few and simple words.

Before three months had passed, Rose Fleming and Harry Maylie were married in the village church which was henceforth to be the scene of the young clergyman's labours; on the same day they entered into possession of their new and happy home.

Mrs. Maylie took up her abode with her son and daughter-in-law, to enjoy, during the tranquil remainder of her days, the greatest felicity that age and worth can know—the contemplation of the happiness of those on whom the warmest affections and tenderest cares of a well-spent life, have been unceasingly bestowed.

It appeared, on full and careful investigation, that if the wreck of property remaining in the custody of Monks (which had never prospered either in his hands or in those of his mother) were equally divided between himself and Oliver, it would yield, to each, little more than three thousand pounds. By the provisions of his father's will, Oliver would have been entitled to the whole; but Mr. Brownlow, unwilling to deprive the elder son of the opportunity of retrieving his former vices and pursuing an honest career, proposed this mode of distribution, to which his young charge joyfully acceded.

Monks, still bearing that assumed name, retired with his portion to a distant part of the New World; where, having quickly squandered it, he once more fell into his old courses, and, after undergoing a long confinement for some fresh act of fraud and knavery, at length sunk under an attack of his old disorder, and died in prison. As far from home, died the chief remaining members of his friend Fagin's gang.

Mr. Brownlow adopted Oliver as his son. Removing with him and the old housekeeper to within a mile of the parsonage-house, where his dear friends resided, he gratified the only remaining wish of Oliver's warm and earnest heart, and thus linked together a little society, whose condition approached as nearly to one of perfect happiness as can ever be known in this changing world.

Soon after the marriage of the young people, the worthy doctor returned to Chertsey, where, bereft of the presence of his old friends, he would have been discontented if his temperament had admitted of such a feeling; and would have turned quite peevish if he had known how. For two or three months, he contented himself with hinting that he feared the air began to disagree with him; then, finding that the place really no longer was, to him, what it had been, he settled his business on his assistant, took a bachelor's cottage outside the village of which his young friend was pastor, and instantaneously recovered. Here he took to gardening, planting, fishing, carpentering, and various other pursuits of a similar kind: all undertaken with his characteristic impetuosity. In each and all he has since become famous throughout the neighborhood, as a most profound authority.

Before his removal, he had managed to contract a strong friendship for Mr. Grimwig, which that eccentric gentleman cordially reciprocated. He is accordingly visited by Mr. Grimwig a great many times in the course of the year. On all such occasions, Mr. Grimwig plants, fishes, and carpenters, with great ardour; doing everything in a very singular and unprecedented manner, but always maintaining with his favourite asseveration, that his mode is the right one. On Sundays, he never fails to criticise the sermon to the young clergyman's face: always informing Mr. Losberne, in strict confidence afterwards, that he considers it an excellent performance, but deems it as well not to say so. It is a standing and very favourite joke, for Mr. Brownlow to rally him on his old prophecy concerning Oliver, and to remind him of the night on which they sat with the watch between them, waiting his return; but Mr. Grimwig contends that he was right in the main, and, in proof thereof, remarks that Oliver did not come back after all; which always calls forth a laugh on his side, and increases his good humour.

Mr. Noah Claypole: receiving a free pardon from the Crown in consequence of being admitted approver against Fagin: and considering his profession not altogether as safe a one as he could wish: was, for some little time, at a loss for the means of a livelihood, not burdened with too much work. After some consideration, he went into business as an Informer, in which calling he realises a genteel subsistence. His plan is, to walk out once a week during church time attended by Charlotte in respectable attire. The lady faints away at the doors of charitable publicans, and the gentleman being accommodated with three-penny worth of brandy to restore her, lays an information next day, and pockets half the penalty. Sometimes Mr. Claypole faints himself, but the result is the same.

Mr. and Mrs. Bumble, deprived of their situations, were gradually reduced to great indigence and misery, and finally became paupers in that very same workhouse in which they had once lorded it over others. Mr. Bumble has been heard to say, that in this reverse and degradation, he has not even spirits to be thankful for being separated from his wife.

As to Mr. Giles and Brittles, they still remain in their old posts, although the former is bald, and the last-named boy quite grey. They sleep at the parsonage, but divide their attentions so equally among its inmates, and Oliver and Mr. Brownlow, and Mr. Losberne, that to this day the villagers have never been able to discover to which establishment they properly belong.

Master Charles Bates, appalled by Sikes's crime, fell into a train of reflection whether an honest life was not, after all, the best. Arriving at the conclusion that it certainly was, he turned his back upon the scenes of the past, resolved to amend it in some new sphere of action. He struggled hard, and suffered much, for some time; but, having a contented disposition, and a good purpose, succeeded in the end; and, from being a farmer's drudge, and a carrier's lad, he is now the merriest young grazier in all Northamptonshire.

And now, the hand that traces these words, falters, as it approaches the conclusion of its task; and would weave, for a little longer space, the thread of these adventures.

I would fain linger yet with a few of those among whom I have so long moved, and share their happiness by endeavouring to depict it. I would show Rose Maylie in all the bloom and grace of early womanhood, shedding on her secluded path in life soft and gentle light, that fell on all who trod it with her, and shone into their hearts. I would paint her the life and joy of the fire-side circle and the lively summer group; I would follow her through the sultry fields at noon, and hear the low tones of her sweet voice in the moonlit evening walk; I would watch her in all her goodness and charity abroad, and the smiling untiring discharge of domestic duties at home; I would paint her and her dead sister's child happy in their love for one another, and passing whole hours together in picturing the friends whom they had so sadly lost; I would summon before me, once again, those joyous little faces that clustered round her knee, and listen to their merry prattle; I would recall the tones of that clear laugh, and conjure up the sympathising tear that glistened in the soft blue eye. These, and a thousand looks and smiles, and turns of thought and speech—I would fain recall them every one.

How Mr. Brownlow went on, from day to day, filling the mind of his adopted child with stores of knowledge, and becoming attached to him, more and more, as his nature developed itself, and showed the thriving seeds of all he wished him to become—how he traced in him new traits of his early friend, that awakened in his own bosom old remembrances, melancholy and yet sweet and soothing—how the two orphans, tried by adversity, remembered its lessons in mercy to others, and mutual love, and fervent thanks to Him who had protected and preserved them—these are all matters which need not to be told. I have said that they were truly happy; and without strong affection and humanity of heart, and gratitude to that Being whose code is Mercy, and whose great attribute is Benevolence to all things that breathe, happiness can never be attained.

Within the altar of the old village church there stands a white marble tablet, which bears as yet but one word: 'AGNES.' There is no coffin in that tomb; and may it be many, many years, before another name is placed above it! But, if the spirits of the Dead ever come back to earth, to visit spots hallowed by the love—the love beyond the grave—of those whom they knew in life, I believe that the shade of Agnes sometimes hovers round that solemn nook. I believe it none the less because that nook is in a Church, and she was weak and erring.

THE END OF
Oliver Twist

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

Charles Dickens

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BOOK THE FIRST — THE CUP AND THE LIP

Chapter 1

ON THE LOOK OUT

In these times of ours, though concerning the exact year there is no need to be precise, a boat of dirty and disreputable appearance, with two figures in it, floated on the Thames, between Southwark bridge which is of iron, and London Bridge which is of stone, as an autumn evening was closing in.

The figures in this boat were those of a strong man with ragged grizzled hair and a sun-browned face, and a dark girl of nineteen or twenty, sufficiently like him to be recognizable as his daughter. The girl rowed, pulling a pair of sculls very easily; the man, with the rudder-lines slack in his hands, and his hands loose in his waistband, kept an eager look out. He had no net, hook, or line, and he could not be a fisherman; his boat had no cushion for a sitter, no paint, no inscription, no appliance beyond a rusty boathook and a coil of rope, and he could not be a waterman; his boat was too crazy and too small to take in cargo for delivery, and he could not be a lighterman or river-carrier; there was no clue to what he looked for, but he looked for something, with a most intent and searching gaze. The tide, which had turned an hour before, was running down, and his eyes watched every little race and eddy in its broad sweep, as the boat made slight headway against it, or drove stern foremost before it, according as he directed his daughter by a movement of his head. She watched his face as earnestly as he watched the river. But, in the intensity of her look there was a touch of dread or horror.

Allied to the bottom of the river rather than the surface, by reason of the slime and ooze with which it was covered, and its sodden state, this boat and the two figures in it obviously were doing something that they often did, and were seeking what they often sought. Half savage as the man showed, with no covering on his matted head, with his brown arms bare to between the elbow and the shoulder, with the loose knot of a looser kerchief lying low on his bare breast in a wilderness of beard and whisker, with such dress as he wore seeming to be made out of the mud that begrimed his boat, still there was a business-like usage in his steady gaze. So with every lithe action of the girl, with every turn of her wrist, perhaps most of all with her look of dread or horror; they were things of usage.

'Keep her out, Lizzie. Tide runs strong here. Keep her well afore the sweep of it.'

Trusting to the girl's skill and making no use of the rudder, he eyed the coming tide with an absorbed attention. So the girl eyed him. But, it happened now, that a slant of light from the setting sun glanced into the bottom of the boat, and, touching a rotten stain there which bore some resemblance to the outline of a muffled human form, coloured it as though with diluted blood. This caught the girl's eye, and she shivered.

'What ails you?' said the man, immediately aware of it, though so intent on the advancing waters; 'I see nothing afloat.'

The red light was gone, the shudder was gone, and his gaze, which had come back to the boat for a moment, travelled away again. Wheresoever the strong tide met with an impediment, his gaze paused for an instant. At every mooring-chain and rope, at every stationery boat or barge that split the current into a broad-arrowhead, at the offsets from the piers of Southwark Bridge, at the paddles of the river steamboats as they beat the filthy water, at the floating logs of timber lashed together lying off certain wharves, his shining eyes darted a hungry look. After a darkening hour or so, suddenly the rudder-lines tightened in his hold, and he steered hard towards the Surrey shore.

Always watching his face, the girl instantly answered to the action in her sculling; presently the boat swung round, quivered as from a sudden jerk, and the upper half of the man was stretched out over the stern.

The girl pulled the hood of a cloak she wore, over her head and over her face, and, looking backward so that the front folds of this hood were turned down the river, kept the boat in that direction going before the tide. Until now, the boat had barely held her own, and had hovered about one spot; but now, the banks changed swiftly, and the deepening shadows and the kindling lights of London Bridge were passed, and the tiers of shipping lay on either hand.

It was not until now that the upper half of the man came back into the boat. His arms were wet and dirty, and he washed them over the side. In his right hand he held something, and he washed that in the river too. It was money. He chinked it once, and he blew upon it once, and he spat upon it once,—'for luck,' he hoarsely said—before he put it in his pocket.

'Lizzie!'

The girl turned her face towards him with a start, and rowed in silence. Her face was very pale. He was a hook-nosed man, and with that and his bright eyes and his ruffled head, bore a certain likeness to a roused bird of prey.

'Take that thing off your face.'

She put it back.

'Here! and give me hold of the sculls. I'll take the rest of the spell.'

'No, no, father! No! I can't indeed. Father!—I cannot sit so near it!'

He was moving towards her to change places, but her terrified expostulation stopped him and he resumed his seat.

'What hurt can it do you?'

'None, none. But I cannot bear it.'

'It's my belief you hate the sight of the very river.'

'I—I do not like it, father.'

'As if it wasn't your living! As if it wasn't meat and drink to you!'

At these latter words the girl shivered again, and for a moment paused in her rowing, seeming to turn deadly faint. It escaped his attention, for he was glancing over the stern at something the boat had in tow.

'How can you be so thankless to your best friend, Lizzie? The very fire that warmed you when you were a babby, was picked out of the river alongside the coal barges. The very basket that you slept in, the tide washed ashore. The very rockers that I put it upon to make a cradle of it, I cut out of a piece of wood that drifted from some ship or another.'

Lizzie took her right hand from the scull it held, and touched her lips with it, and for a moment held it out lovingly towards him: then, without speaking, she resumed her rowing, as another boat of similar appearance, though in rather better trim, came out from a dark place and dropped softly alongside.

'In luck again, Gaffer?' said a man with a squinting leer, who sculled her and who was alone, 'I know'd you was in luck again, by your wake as you come down.'

'Ah!' replied the other, drily. 'So you're out, are you?'

'Yes, pardner.'

There was now a tender yellow moonlight on the river, and the new comer, keeping half his boat's length astern of the other boat looked hard at its track.

'I says to myself,' he went on, 'directly you hove in view, yonder's Gaffer, and in luck again, by George if he ain't! Scull it is, pardner—don't fret yourself—I didn't touch him.' This was in answer to a quick impatient movement on the part of Gaffer: the speaker at the same time unshipping his scull on that side, and laying his hand on the gunwale of Gaffer's boat and holding to it.

'He's had touches enough not to want no more, as well as I make him out, Gaffer! Been a knocking about with a pretty many tides, ain't he pardner? Such is my out-of-luck ways, you see! He must have passed me when he went up last time, for I was on the lookout below bridge here. I a'most think you're like the wulturs, pardner, and scent 'em out.'

He spoke in a dropped voice, and with more than one glance at Lizzie who had pulled on her hood again. Both men then looked with a weird unholy interest in the wake of Gaffer's boat.

'Easy does it, betwixt us. Shall I take him aboard, pardner?'

'No,' said the other. In so surly a tone that the man, after a blank stare, acknowledged it with the retort:

'—Arn't been eating nothing as has disagreed with you, have you, pardner?'

'Why, yes, I have,' said Gaffer. 'I have been swallowing too much of that word, Pardner. I am no pardner of yours.'

'Since when was you no pardner of mine, Gaffer Hexam Esquire?'

'Since you was accused of robbing a man. Accused of robbing a live man!' said Gaffer, with great indignation.

'And what if I had been accused of robbing a dead man, Gaffer?'

'You COULDN'T do it.'

'Couldn't you, Gaffer?'

'No. Has a dead man any use for money? Is it possible for a dead man to have money? What world does a dead man belong to? 'Tother world. What world does money belong to? This world. How can money be a corpse's? Can a corpse own it, want it, spend it, claim it, miss it? Don't try to go confounding the rights and wrongs of things in that way. But it's worthy of the sneaking spirit that robs a live man.'

'I'll tell you what it is—.'

'No you won't. I'll tell you what it is. You got off with a short time of it for putting your hand in the pocket of a sailor, a live sailor. Make the most of it and think yourself lucky, but don't think after that to come over ME with your pardners. We have worked together in time past, but we work together no more in time present nor yet future. Let go. Cast off!'

'Gaffer! If you think to get rid of me this way—.'

'If I don't get rid of you this way, I'll try another, and chop you over the fingers with the stretcher, or take a pick at your head with the boat-hook. Cast off! Pull you, Lizzie. Pull home, since you won't let your father pull.'

Lizzie shot ahead, and the other boat fell astern. Lizzie's father, composing himself into the easy attitude of one who had asserted the high moralities and taken an unassailable position, slowly lighted a pipe, and smoked, and took a survey of what he had in tow. What he had in tow, lunged itself at him sometimes in an awful manner when the boat was checked, and sometimes seemed to try to wrench itself away, though for the most part it followed submissively. A neophyte might have fancied that the ripples passing over it were dreadfully like faint changes of expression on a sightless face; but Gaffer was no neophyte and had no fancies.

Chapter 2

THE MAN FROM SOMEWHERE

Mr and Mrs Veneering were bran-new people in a bran-new house in a bran-new quarter of London. Everything about the Veneerings was spick and span new. All their furniture was new, all their friends were new, all their servants were new, their plate was new, their carriage was new, their harness was new, their horses were new, their pictures were new, they themselves were new, they were as newly married as was lawfully compatible with their having a bran-new baby, and if they had set up a great-grandfather, he would have come home in matting from the Pantechnicon, without a scratch upon him, French polished to the crown of his head.

For, in the Veneering establishment, from the hall-chairs with the new coat of arms, to the grand pianoforte with the new action, and upstairs again to the new fire-escape, all things were in a state of high varnish and polish. And what was observable in the furniture, was observable in the Veneerings—the surface smelt a little too much of the workshop and was a trifle sticky.

There was an innocent piece of dinner-furniture that went upon easy castors and was kept over a livery stable-yard in Duke Street, Saint James's, when not in use, to whom the Veneerings were a source of blind confusion. The name of this article was Twemlow. Being first cousin to Lord Snigsworth, he was in frequent requisition, and at many houses might be said to represent the dining-table in its normal state. Mr and Mrs Veneering, for example, arranging a dinner, habitually started with Twemlow, and then put leaves in him, or added guests to him. Sometimes, the table consisted of Twemlow and half a dozen leaves; sometimes, of Twemlow and a dozen leaves; sometimes, Twemlow was pulled out to his utmost extent of twenty leaves. Mr and Mrs Veneering on occasions of ceremony faced each other in the centre of the board, and thus the parallel still held; for, it always happened that the more Twemlow was pulled out, the further he found himself from the center, and nearer to the sideboard at one end of the room, or the window-curtains at the other.

But, it was not this which steeped the feeble soul of Twemlow in confusion. This he was used to, and could take soundings of. The abyss to which he could find no bottom, and from which started forth the engrossing and ever-swelling difficulty of his life, was the insoluble question whether he was Veneering's oldest friend, or newest friend. To the excogitation of this problem, the harmless gentleman had devoted many anxious hours, both in his lodgings over the livery stable-yard, and in the cold gloom, favourable to meditation, of Saint James's Square. Thus. Twemlow had first known Veneering at his club, where Veneering then knew nobody but the man who made them known to one another, who seemed to be the most intimate friend he had in the world, and whom he had known two days—the bond of union between their souls, the nefarious conduct of the committee respecting the cookery of a fillet of veal, having been accidentally cemented at that date. Immediately upon this, Twemlow received an invitation to dine with Veneering, and dined: the man being of the party. Immediately upon that, Twemlow received an invitation to dine with the man, and dined: Veneering being of the party. At the man's were a Member, an Engineer, a Payer-off of the National Debt, a Poem on Shakespeare, a Grievance, and a Public Office, who all seem to be utter strangers to Veneering. And yet immediately after that, Twemlow received an invitation to dine at Veneerings, expressly to meet the Member, the Engineer, the Payer-off of the National Debt, the Poem on Shakespeare, the Grievance, and the Public Office, and, dining, discovered that all of them were the most intimate friends Veneering had in the world, and that the wives of all of them (who were all there) were the objects of Mrs Veneering's most devoted affection and tender confidence.

Thus it had come about, that Mr Twemlow had said to himself in his lodgings, with his hand to his forehead: 'I must not think of this. This is enough to soften any man's brain,'—and yet was always thinking of it, and could never form a conclusion.

This evening the Veneerings give a banquet. Eleven leaves in the Twemlow; fourteen in company all told. Four pigeon-breasted retainers in plain clothes stand in line in the hall. A fifth retainer, proceeding up the staircase with a mournful air—as who should say, 'Here is another wretched creature come to dinner; such is life!'—announces, 'Mis-ter Twemlow!'

Mrs Veneering welcomes her sweet Mr Twemlow. Mr Veneering welcomes his dear Twemlow. Mrs Veneering does not expect that Mr

Twemlow can in nature care much for such insipid things as babies, but so old a friend must please to look at baby. 'Ah! You will know the friend of your family better, Tootleums,' says Mr Veneering, nodding emotionally at that new article, 'when you begin to take notice.' He then begs to make his dear Twemlow known to his two friends, Mr Boots and Mr Brewer—and clearly has no distinct idea which is which.

But now a fearful circumstance occurs.

'Mis-ter and Mis-sus Podsnap!'

'My dear,' says Mr Veneering to Mrs Veneering, with an air of much friendly interest, while the door stands open, 'the Podsnaps.'

A too, too smiling large man, with a fatal freshness on him, appearing with his wife, instantly deserts his wife and darts at Twemlow with:

'How do you do? So glad to know you. Charming house you have here. I hope we are not late. So glad of the opportunity, I am sure!'

When the first shock fell upon him, Twemlow twice skipped back in his neat little shoes and his neat little silk stockings of a bygone fashion, as if impelled to leap over a sofa behind him; but the large man closed with him and proved too strong.

'Let me,' says the large man, trying to attract the attention of his wife in the distance, 'have the pleasure of presenting Mrs Podsnap to her host. She will be,' in his fatal freshness he seems to find perpetual verdure and eternal youth in the phrase, 'she will be so glad of the opportunity, I am sure!'

In the meantime, Mrs Podsnap, unable to originate a mistake on her own account, because Mrs Veneering is the only other lady there, does her best in the way of handsomely supporting her husband's, by looking towards Mr Twemlow with a plaintive countenance and remarking to Mrs Veneering in a feeling manner, firstly, that she fears he has been rather bilious of late, and, secondly, that the baby is already very like him.

It is questionable whether any man quite relishes being mistaken for any other man; but, Mr Veneering having this very evening set up the shirt-front of the young Antinous in new worked cambric just come home, is not at all complimented by being supposed to be Twemlow, who is dry and weazen and some thirty years older. Mrs Veneering equally resents the imputation of being the wife of Twemlow. As to Twemlow, he is so sensible of being a much better bred man than Veneering, that he considers the large man an offensive ass.

In this complicated dilemma, Mr Veneering approaches the large man with extended hand and, smilingly assures that incorrigible personage that he is delighted to see him: who in his fatal freshness instantly replies:

'Thank you. I am ashamed to say that I cannot at this moment recall where we met, but I am so glad of this opportunity, I am sure!'

Then pouncing upon Twemlow, who holds back with all his feeble might, he is haling him off to present him, as Veneering, to Mrs Podsnap, when the arrival of more guests unravels the mistake. Whereupon, having re-shaken hands with Veneering as Veneering, he re-shakes hands with Twemlow as Twemlow, and winds it all up to his own perfect satisfaction by saying to the last-named, 'Ridiculous opportunity—but so glad of it, I am sure!'

Now, Twemlow having undergone this terrific experience, having likewise noted the fusion of Boots in Brewer and Brewer in Boots, and having further observed that of the remaining seven guests four discrete characters enter with wandering eyes and wholly declined to commit themselves as to which is Veneering, until Veneering has them in his grasp;—Twemlow having profited by these studies, finds his brain wholesomely hardening as he approaches the conclusion that he really is Veneering's oldest friend, when his brain softens again and all is lost, through his eyes encountering Veneering and the large man linked together as twin brothers in the back drawing-room near the conservatory door, and through his ears informing him in the tones of Mrs Veneering that the same large man is to be baby's godfather.

'Dinner is on the table!'

Thus the melancholy retainer, as who should say, 'Come down and be poisoned, ye unhappy children of men!'

Twemlow, having no lady assigned him, goes down in the rear, with his hand to his forehead. Boots and Brewer, thinking him indisposed, whisper, 'Man faint. Had no lunch.' But he is only stunned by the unvanquishable difficulty of his existence.

Revived by soup, Twemlow discourses mildly of the Court Circular with Boots and Brewer. Is appealed to, at the fish stage of the banquet, by Veneering, on the disputed question whether his cousin Lord Snigsworth is in or out of town? Gives it that his cousin is out of town. 'At Snigsworthy Park?' Veneering inquires. 'At Snigsworthy,' Twemlow rejoins. Boots and Brewer regard this as a man to be cultivated; and Veneering is clear that he is a remunerative article. Meantime the retainer goes round, like a gloomy Analytical Chemist: always seeming to say, after 'Chablis, sir?'—'You wouldn't if you knew what it's made of.'

The great looking-glass above the sideboard, reflects the table and the company. Reflects the new Veneering crest, in gold and eke in silver, frosted and also thawed, a camel of all work. The Heralds' College found out a Crusading ancestor for Veneering who bore a camel on his shield (or might have done it if he had thought of it), and a caravan of camels take charge of the fruits and flowers and candles, and kneel down be loaded with the salt. Reflects Veneering; forty, wavy-haired, dark, tending to corpulence, sly, mysterious, filmy—a kind of sufficiently well-looking veiled-prophet, not prophesying. Reflects Mrs Veneering; fair, aquiline-nosed and fingered, not so much light hair as she might have, gorgeous in raiment and jewels, enthusiastic, propitiatory, conscious that a corner of her husband's veil is over herself. Reflects Podsnap; prosperously feeding, two little light-coloured wiry wings, one on either side of his else bald head, looking as like his hairbrushes as his hair, dissolving view of red beads on his forehead, large allowance of crumpled shirt-collar up behind. Reflects Mrs Podsnap; fine woman for Professor Owen, quantity of bone, neck and nostrils like a rocking-horse, hard features, majestic head-dress in which Podsnap has hung golden offerings. Reflects Twemlow; grey, dry, polite, susceptible to east wind, First-Gentleman-in-Europe collar and cravat, cheeks drawn in as if he had made a great effort to retire into himself some years ago, and had got so far and had never got any farther. Reflects mature young lady; raven locks, and complexion that lights up well when well powdered—as it is—carrying on considerably in the captivation of mature young gentleman; with too much nose in his face, too much ginger in his whiskers, too much torso in his waistcoat, too much sparkle in his studs, his eyes, his buttons, his talk, and his teeth. Reflects charming old Lady Tippins on Veneering's right; with an immense obtuse drab oblong face, like a face in a tablespoon, and a dyed Long Walk up the top of her head, as a convenient public approach to the bunch of false hair behind, pleased to patronize Mrs Veneering opposite, who is pleased to be patronized. Reflects a certain 'Mortimer', another of Veneering's oldest friends; who never was in the house before, and appears not to want to come again, who sits disconsolate on Mrs Veneering's left, and who was inveigled by Lady Tippins (a friend of his boyhood) to come to these people's and talk, and who won't talk. Reflects Eugene, friend of Mortimer; buried alive in the back of his chair, behind a shoulder—with a powder-epaulette on it—of the mature young lady, and gloomily resorting to the champagne chalice whenever proffered by the Analytical Chemist. Lastly, the looking-glass reflects Boots and Brewer, and two other stuffed Buffers interposed between the rest of the company and possible accidents.

The Veneering dinners are excellent dinners—or new people wouldn't come—and all goes well. Notably, Lady Tippins has made a series of experiments on her digestive functions, so extremely complicated and daring, that if they could be published with their results it might benefit the human race. Having taken in provisions from all parts of the world, this hardy old cruiser has last touched at the North Pole, when, as the ice-plates are being removed, the following words fall from her:

'I assure you, my dear Veneering—'

(Poor Twemlow's hand approaches his forehead, for it would seem now, that Lady Tippins is going to be the oldest friend.)

'I assure you, my dear Veneering, that it is the oddest affair! Like the advertising people, I don't ask you to trust me, without offering a respectable reference. Mortimer there, is my reference, and knows all about it.'

Mortimer raises his drooping eyelids, and slightly opens his mouth. But a faint smile, expressive of 'What's the use!' passes over his face, and he drops his eyelids and shuts his mouth.

'Now, Mortimer,' says Lady Tippins, rapping the sticks of her closed green fan upon the knuckles of her left hand—which is particularly rich in knuckles, 'I insist upon your telling all that is to be told about the man from Jamaica.'

'Give you my honour I never heard of any man from Jamaica, except the man who was a brother,' replies Mortimer.

'Tobago, then.'

'Nor yet from Tobago.'

'Except,' Eugene strikes in: so unexpectedly that the mature young lady, who has forgotten all about him, with a start takes the epaulette out of his way: 'except our friend who long lived on rice-pudding and isinglass, till at length to his something or other, his physician said something else, and a leg of mutton somehow ended in daygo.'

A reviving impression goes round the table that Eugene is coming out. An unfulfilled impression, for he goes in again.

'Now, my dear Mrs Veneering,' quoth Lady Tippins, I appeal to you whether this is not the basest conduct ever known in this world? I carry my lovers about, two or three at a time, on condition that they are very obedient and devoted; and here is my oldest lover-in-chief, the head of all my slaves, throwing off his allegiance before company! And here is another of my lovers, a rough Cymon at present certainly, but of whom I had most hopeful expectations as to his turning out well in course of time, pretending that he can't remember his nursery rhymes! On purpose to annoy me, for he knows how I doat upon them!'

A grisly little fiction concerning her lovers is Lady Tippins's point. She is always attended by a lover or two, and she keeps a little list of her lovers, and she is always booking a new lover, or striking out an old lover, or putting a lover in her black list, or promoting a lover to her blue list, or adding up her lovers, or otherwise posting her book. Mrs Veneering is charmed by the humour, and so is Veneering. Perhaps it is enhanced by a certain yellow play in Lady Tippins's throat, like the legs of scratching poultry.

'I banish the false wretch from this moment, and I strike him out of my Cupidon (my name for my Ledger, my dear,) this very night. But I am resolved to have the account of the man from Somewhere, and I beg you to elicit it for me, my love,' to Mrs Veneering, 'as I have lost my own influence. Oh, you perjured man!' This to Mortimer, with a rattle of her fan.

'We are all very much interested in the man from Somewhere,' Veneering observes.

Then the four Buffers, taking heart of grace all four at once, say:

'Deeply interested!'

'Quite excited!'

'Dramatic!'

'Man from Nowhere, perhaps!'

And then Mrs Veneering—for the Lady Tippins's winning wiles are contagious—folds her hands in the manner of a supplicating child, turns to her left neighbour, and says, 'Tease! Pay! Man from Tumwhere!' At which the four Buffers, again mysteriously moved all four at once, explain, 'You can't resist!'

'Upon my life,' says Mortimer languidly, 'I find it immensely embarrassing to have the eyes of Europe upon me to this extent, and my only consolation is that you will all of you execrate Lady Tippins in your secret hearts when you find, as you inevitably will, the man from Somewhere a bore. Sorry to destroy romance by fixing him with a local habitation, but he comes from the place, the name of which escapes me, but will suggest itself to everybody else here, where they make the wine.'

Eugene suggests 'Day and Martin's.'

'No, not that place,' returns the unmoved Mortimer, 'that's where they make the Port. My man comes from the country where they make the Cape Wine. But look here, old fellow; its not at all statistical and it's rather odd.'

It is always noticeable at the table of the Veneerings, that no man troubles himself much about the Veneerings themselves, and that any one who has anything to tell, generally tells it to anybody else in preference.

'The man,' Mortimer goes on, addressing Eugene, 'whose name is Harmon, was only son of a tremendous old rascal who made his money by Dust.'

'Red velveteens and a bell?' the gloomy Eugene inquires.

'And a ladder and basket if you like. By which means, or by others, he grew rich as a Dust Contractor, and lived in a hollow in a hilly country entirely composed of Dust. On his own small estate the growling old vagabond threw up his own mountain range, like an old volcano, and its geological formation was Dust. Coal-dust, vegetable-dust, bone-dust, crockery dust, rough dust and sifted dust,—all manner of Dust.'

A passing remembrance of Mrs Veneering, here induces Mortimer to address his next half-dozen words to her; after which he wanders away again, tries Twemlow and finds he doesn't answer, ultimately takes up with the Buffers who receive him enthusiastically.

'The moral being—I believe that's the right expression—of this exemplary person, derived its highest gratification from anathematizing his nearest relations and turning them out of doors. Having begun (as was natural) by rendering these attentions to the wife of his bosom, he next found himself at leisure to bestow a similar recognition on the claims of his daughter. He chose a husband for her, entirely to his own satisfaction and not in the least to hers, and proceeded to settle upon her, as her marriage portion, I don't know how much Dust, but something immense. At this stage of the affair the poor girl respectfully intimated that she was secretly engaged to that popular character whom the novelists and versifiers call Another, and that such a marriage would make Dust of her heart and Dust of her life—in short, would set her up, on a very extensive scale, in her father's business. Immediately, the venerable parent—on a cold winter's night, it is said—anathematized and turned her out.'

Here, the Analytical Chemist (who has evidently formed a very low opinion of Mortimer's story) concedes a little claret to the Buffers; who, again mysteriously moved all four at once, screw it slowly into themselves with a peculiar twist of enjoyment, as they cry in chorus, 'Pray go on.'

'The pecuniary resources of Another were, as they usually are, of a very limited nature. I believe I am not using too strong an expression when I say that Another was hard up. However, he married the young lady, and they lived in a humble dwelling, probably possessing a porch ornamented with honeysuckle and woodbine twining, until she died. I must refer you to the Registrar of the District in which the humble dwelling was situated, for the certified cause of death; but early sorrow and anxiety may have had to do with it, though they may not appear in the ruled pages and printed forms. Indisputably this was the case with Another, for he was so cut up by the loss of his young wife that if he outlived her a year it was as much as he did.'

There is that in the indolent Mortimer, which seems to hint that if good society might on any account allow itself to be impressible, he, one of good society, might have the weakness to be impressed by what he here relates. It is hidden with great pains, but it is in him. The gloomy Eugene too, is not without some kindred touch; for, when that appalling Lady Tippins declares that if Another had survived, he should have gone down at the head of her list of lovers—and also when the mature young lady shrugs her epaulettes, and laughs at some private and confidential comment from the mature young gentleman—his gloom deepens to that degree that he trifles quite ferociously with his dessert-knife.

Mortimer proceeds.

'We must now return, as novelists say, and as we all wish they wouldn't, to the man from Somewhere. Being a boy of fourteen, cheaply educated at Brussels when his sister's expulsion befell, it was some little time before he heard of it—probably from herself, for the mother was dead; but that I don't know. Instantly, he absconded, and came over here. He must have been a boy of spirit and resource, to get here on a stopped allowance of five sous a week; but he did it somehow, and he burst in on his father, and pleaded his sister's cause. Venerable parent promptly resorts to anathematization, and turns him out. Shocked and terrified boy takes flight, seeks his fortune, gets aboard ship, ultimately turns up on dry land among the Cape wine: small proprietor, farmer, grower—whatever you like to call it.'

At this juncture, shuffling is heard in the hall, and tapping is heard at the dining-room door. Analytical Chemist goes to the door, confers angrily with unseen tapper, appears to become mollified by descrying reason in the tapping, and goes out.

'So he was discovered, only the other day, after having been expatriated about fourteen years.'

A Buffer, suddenly astounding the other three, by detaching himself, and asserting individuality, inquires: 'How discovered, and why?'

'Ah! To be sure. Thank you for reminding me. Venerable parent dies.'

Same Buffer, emboldened by success, says: 'When?'

'The other day. Ten or twelve months ago.'

Same Buffer inquires with smartness, 'What of?' But herein perishes a melancholy example; being regarded by the three other Buffers with a stony stare, and attracting no further attention from any mortal.

'Venerable parent,' Mortimer repeats with a passing remembrance that there is a Veneering at table, and for the first time addressing him—'dies.'

The gratified Veneering repeats, gravely, 'dies'; and folds his arms, and composes his brow to hear it out in a judicial manner, when he finds himself again deserted in the bleak world.

'His will is found,' said Mortimer, catching Mrs Podsnap's rocking-horse's eye. 'It is dated very soon after the son's flight. It leaves the lowest of the range of dust-mountains, with some sort of a dwelling-house at its foot, to an old servant who is sole executor, and all the rest of the property—which is very considerable—to the son. He directs himself to be buried with certain eccentric ceremonies and precautions against his coming to life, with which I need not bore you, and that's all—except—' and this ends the story.

The Analytical Chemist returning, everybody looks at him. Not because anybody wants to see him, but because of that subtle influence in nature which impels humanity to embrace the slightest opportunity of looking at anything, rather than the person who addresses it.

'—Except that the son's inheriting is made conditional on his marrying a girl, who at the date of the will, was a child of four or five years old, and who is now a marriageable young woman. Advertisement and inquiry discovered the son in the man from Somewhere, and at the present moment, he is on his way home from there—no doubt, in a state of great astonishment—to succeed to a very large fortune, and to take a wife.'

Mrs Podsnap inquires whether the young person is a young person of personal charms? Mortimer is unable to report.

Mr Podsnap inquires what would become of the very large fortune, in the event of the marriage condition not being fulfilled? Mortimer replies, that by special testamentary clause it would then go to the old servant above mentioned, passing over and excluding the son; also, that if the son had not been living, the same old servant would have been sole residuary legatee.

Mrs Veneering has just succeeded in waking Lady Tippins from a snore, by dexterously shunting a train of plates and dishes at her knuckles across the table; when everybody but Mortimer himself becomes aware that the Analytical Chemist is, in a ghostly manner, offering him a folded paper. Curiosity detains Mrs Veneering a few moments.

Mortimer, in spite of all the arts of the chemist, placidly refreshes himself with a glass of Madeira, and remains unconscious of the Document which engrosses the general attention, until Lady Tippins (who has a habit of waking totally insensible), having remembered where she is, and recovered a perception of surrounding objects, says: 'Falser man than Don Juan; why don't you take the note from the commendatore?' Upon which, the chemist advances it under the nose of Mortimer, who looks round at him, and says:

'What's this?'

Analytical Chemist bends and whispers.

'WHO?' Says Mortimer.

Analytical Chemist again bends and whispers.

Mortimer stares at him, and unfolds the paper. Reads it, reads it twice, turns it over to look at the blank outside, reads it a third time.

'This arrives in an extraordinarily opportune manner,' says Mortimer then, looking with an altered face round the table: 'this is the conclusion of the story of the identical man.'

'Already married?' one guesses.

'Declines to marry?' another guesses.

'Codicil among the dust?' another guesses.

'Why, no,' says Mortimer; 'remarkable thing, you are all wrong. The story is completer and rather more exciting than I supposed. Man's drowned!'

Chapter 3

ANOTHER MAN

As the disappearing skirts of the ladies ascended the Veneering staircase, Mortimer, following them forth from the dining-room, turned into a library of bran-new books, in bran-new bindings liberally gilded, and requested to see the messenger who had brought the paper. He was a boy of about fifteen. Mortimer looked at the boy, and the boy looked at the bran-new pilgrims on the wall, going to Canterbury in more gold frame than procession, and more carving than country.

'Whose writing is this?'

'Mine, sir.'

'Who told you to write it?'

'My father, Jesse Hexam.'

'Is it he who found the body?'

'Yes, sir.'

'What is your father?'

The boy hesitated, looked reproachfully at the pilgrims as if they had involved him in a little difficulty, then said, folding a plait in the right leg of his trousers, 'He gets his living along-shore.'

'Is it far?'

'Is which far?' asked the boy, upon his guard, and again upon the road to Canterbury.

'To your father's?'

'It's a goodish stretch, sir. I come up in a cab, and the cab's waiting to be paid. We could go back in it before you paid it, if you liked. I went first to your office, according to the direction of the papers found in the pockets, and there I see nobody but a chap of about my age who sent me on here.'

There was a curious mixture in the boy, of uncompleted savagery, and uncompleted civilization. His voice was hoarse and coarse, and his face was coarse, and his stunted figure was coarse; but he was cleaner than other boys of his type; and his writing, though large and round, was good; and he glanced at the backs of the books, with an awakened curiosity that went below the binding. No one who can read, ever looks at a book, even unopened on a shelf, like one who cannot.

'Were any means taken, do you know, boy, to ascertain if it was possible to restore life?' Mortimer inquired, as he sought for his hat.

'You wouldn't ask, sir, if you knew his state. Pharaoh's multitude that were drowned in the Red Sea, ain't more beyond restoring to life. If Lazarus was only half as far gone, that was the greatest of all the miracles.'

'Halloa!' cried Mortimer, turning round with his hat upon his head, 'you seem to be at home in the Red Sea, my young friend?'

'Read of it with teacher at the school,' said the boy.

'And Lazarus?'

'Yes, and him too. But don't you tell my father! We should have no peace in our place, if that got touched upon. It's my sister's contriving.'

'You seem to have a good sister.'

'She ain't half bad,' said the boy; 'but if she knows her letters it's the most she does—and them I learned her.'

The gloomy Eugene, with his hands in his pockets, had strolled in and assisted at the latter part of the dialogue; when the boy spoke these words slightingly of his sister, he took him roughly enough by the chin, and turned up his face to look at it.

'Well, I'm sure, sir!' said the boy, resisting; 'I hope you'll know me again.'

Eugene vouchsafed no answer; but made the proposal to Mortimer, 'I'll go with you, if you like?' So, they all three went away together in the vehicle that had brought the boy; the two friends (once boys together at a public school) inside, smoking cigars; the messenger on the box beside the driver.

'Let me see,' said Mortimer, as they went along; 'I have been, Eugene, upon the honourable roll of solicitors of the High Court of Chancery, and attorneys at Common Law, five years; and—except gratuitously taking instructions, on an average once a fortnight, for the will of Lady Tippins who has nothing to leave—I have had no scrap of business but this romantic business.'

'And I,' said Eugene, 'have been "called" seven years, and have had no business at all, and never shall have any. And if I had, I shouldn't know how to do it.'

'I am far from being clear as to the last particular,' returned Mortimer, with great composure, 'that I have much advantage over you.'

'I hate,' said Eugene, putting his legs up on the opposite seat, 'I hate my profession.'

'Shall I incommode you, if I put mine up too?' returned Mortimer. 'Thank you. I hate mine.'

'It was forced upon me,' said the gloomy Eugene, 'because it was understood that we wanted a barrister in the family. We have got a precious one.'

'It was forced upon me,' said Mortimer, 'because it was understood that we wanted a solicitor in the family. And we have got a precious one.'

'There are four of us, with our names painted on a door-post in right of one black hole called a set of chambers,' said Eugene; 'and each of us has the fourth of a clerk—Cassim Baba, in the robber's cave—and Cassim is the only respectable member of the party.'

'I am one by myself, one,' said Mortimer, 'high up an awful staircase commanding a burial-ground, and I have a whole clerk to myself, and he has nothing to do but look at the burial-ground, and what he will turn out when arrived at maturity, I cannot conceive. Whether, in that shabby rook's nest, he is always plotting wisdom, or plotting murder; whether he will grow up, after so much solitary brooding, to enlighten his fellow-creatures, or to poison them; is the only speck of interest that presents itself to my professional view. Will you give me a light? Thank you.'

'Then idiots talk,' said Eugene, leaning back, folding his arms, smoking with his eyes shut, and speaking slightly through his nose, 'of Energy. If there is a word in the dictionary under any letter from A to Z that I abominate, it is energy. It is such a conventional superstition, such parrot gabble! What the deuce! Am I to rush out into the street, collar the first man of a wealthy appearance that I meet, shake him, and say, "Go to law upon the spot, you dog, and retain me, or I'll be the death of you"? Yet that would be energy.'

'Precisely my view of the case, Eugene. But show me a good opportunity, show me something really worth being energetic about, and I'll show you energy.'

'And so will I,' said Eugene.

And it is likely enough that ten thousand other young men, within the limits of the London Post-office town delivery, made the same hopeful remark in the course of the same evening.

The wheels rolled on, and rolled down by the Monument and by the Tower, and by the Docks; down by Ratcliffe, and by Rotherhithe; down by where accumulated scum of humanity seemed to be washed from higher grounds, like so much moral sewage, and to be pausing until its own weight forced it over the bank and sunk it in the river. In and out among vessels that seemed to have got ashore, and houses that seemed to have got afloat—among bow-splits staring into windows, and windows staring into ships—the wheels rolled on, until they stopped at a dark corner, river-washed and otherwise not washed at all, where the boy alighted and opened the door.

'You must walk the rest, sir; it's not many yards.' He spoke in the singular number, to the express exclusion of Eugene.

'This is a confoundedly out-of-the-way place,' said Mortimer, slipping over the stones and refuse on the shore, as the boy turned the corner sharp.

'Here's my father's, sir; where the light is.'

The low building had the look of having once been a mill. There was a rotten wart of wood upon its forehead that seemed to indicate where the sails had been, but the whole was very indistinctly seen in the obscurity of the night. The boy lifted the latch of the door, and they passed at once into a low circular room, where a man stood before a red fire, looking down into it, and a girl sat engaged in needlework. The fire was in a rusty brazier, not fitted to the hearth; and a common lamp, shaped like a hyacinth-root, smoked and flared in the neck of a stone bottle on the table. There was a wooden bunk or berth in a corner, and in another corner a wooden stair leading above—so clumsy and steep that it was little better than a ladder. Two or three old sculls and oars stood against the wall, and against another part of the wall was a small dresser, making a spare show of the commonest articles of crockery and cooking-vessels. The roof of the room was not plastered, but was formed of the flooring of the room above. This, being very old, knotted, seamed, and beamed, gave a lowering aspect to the chamber; and roof, and walls, and floor, alike abounding in old smears of flour, red-lead (or some such stain which it had probably acquired in warehousing), and damp, alike had a look of decomposition.

'The gentleman, father.'

The figure at the red fire turned, raised its ruffled head, and looked like a bird of prey.

'You're Mortimer Lightwood Esquire; are you, sir?'

'Mortimer Lightwood is my name. What you found,' said Mortimer, glancing rather shrinkingly towards the bunk; 'is it here?'

''Tain't not to say here, but it's close by. I do everything reg'lar. I've giv' notice of the circumstarnce to the police, and the police have took possession of it. No time ain't been lost, on any hand. The police have put into print already, and here's what the print says of it.'

Taking up the bottle with the lamp in it, he held it near a paper on the wall, with the police heading, BODY FOUND. The two friends read the handbill as it stuck against the wall, and Gaffer read them as he held the light.

'Only papers on the unfortunate man, I see,' said Lightwood, glancing from the description of what was found, to the finder.

'Only papers.'

Here the girl arose with her work in her hand, and went out at the door.

'No money,' pursued Mortimer; 'but threepence in one of the skirt-pockets.'

'Three. Penny. Pieces,' said Gaffer Hexam, in as many sentences.

'The trousers pockets empty, and turned inside out.'

Gaffer Hexam nodded. 'But that's common. Whether it's the wash of the tide or no, I can't say. Now, here,' moving the light to another similar placard, 'HIS pockets was found empty, and turned inside out. And here,' moving the light to another, 'HER pocket was found empty, and turned inside out. And so was this one's. And so was that one's. I can't read, nor I don't want to it, for I know 'em by their places on the wall. This one was a sailor, with two anchors and a flag and G. F. T. on his arm. Look and see if he warn't.'

'Quite right.'

'This one was the young woman in grey boots, and her linen marked with a cross. Look and see if she warn't.'

'Quite right.'

'This is him as had a nasty cut over the eye. This is them two young sisters what tied themselves together with a handkecher. This the drunken old chap, in a pair of list slippers and a nightcap, wot had offered—it afterwards come out—to make a hole in the water for a quartern of rum stood aforehand, and kept to his word for the first and last time in his life. They pretty well papers the room, you see; but I know 'em all. I'm scholar enough!'

He waved the light over the whole, as if to typify the light of his scholarly intelligence, and then put it down on the table and stood behind it looking intently at his visitors. He had the special peculiarity of some birds of prey, that when he knitted his brow, his ruffled crest stood highest.

'You did not find all these yourself; did you?' asked Eugene.

To which the bird of prey slowly rejoined, 'And what might YOUR name be, now?'

'This is my friend,' Mortimer Lightwood interposed; 'Mr Eugene Wrayburn.'

'Mr Eugene Wrayburn, is it? And what might Mr Eugene Wrayburn have asked of me?'

'I asked you, simply, if you found all these yourself?'

'I answer you, simply, most on 'em.'

'Do you suppose there has been much violence and robbery, beforehand, among these cases?'

'I don't suppose at all about it,' returned Gaffer. 'I ain't one of the supposing sort. If you'd got your living to haul out of the river every day of your life, you mightn't be much given to supposing. Am I to show the way?'

As he opened the door, in pursuance of a nod from Lightwood, an extremely pale and disturbed face appeared in the doorway—the face of a man much agitated.

'A body missing?' asked Gaffer Hexam, stopping short; 'or a body found? Which?'

'I am lost!' replied the man, in a hurried and an eager manner.

'Lost?'

'I—I—am a stranger, and don't know the way. I—I—want to find the place where I can see what is described here. It is possible I may know it.' He was panting, and could hardly speak; but, he showed a copy of the newly-printed bill that was still wet upon the wall. Perhaps its newness, or perhaps the accuracy of his observation of its general look, guided Gaffer to a ready conclusion.

'This gentleman, Mr Lightwood, is on that business.'

'Mr Lightwood?'

During a pause, Mortimer and the stranger confronted each other. Neither knew the other.

'I think, sir,' said Mortimer, breaking the awkward silence with his airy self-possession, 'that you did me the honour to mention my name?'

'I repeated it, after this man.'

'You said you were a stranger in London?'

'An utter stranger.'

'Are you seeking a Mr Harmon?'

'No.'

'Then I believe I can assure you that you are on a fruitless errand, and will not find what you fear to find. Will you come with us?'

A little winding through some muddy alleys that might have been deposited by the last ill-savoured tide, brought them to the wicket-gate and bright lamp of a Police Station; where they found the Night-Inspector, with a pen and ink, and ruler, posting up his books in a whitewashed office, as studiously as if he were in a monastery on top of a mountain, and no howling fury of a drunken woman were banging herself against a cell-door in the back-yard at his elbow. With the same air of a recluse much given to study, he desisted from his books to bestow a distrustful nod of recognition upon Gaffer, plainly importing, 'Ah! we know all about YOU, and you'll overdo it some day;' and to inform Mr Mortimer Lightwood and friends, that he would attend them immediately. Then, he finished ruling the work he had in hand (it might have been illuminating a missal, he was so calm), in a very neat and methodical manner, showing not the slightest consciousness of the woman who was banging herself with increased violence, and shrieking most terrifically for some other woman's liver.

'A bull's-eye,' said the Night-Inspector, taking up his keys. Which a deferential satellite produced. 'Now, gentlemen.'

With one of his keys, he opened a cool grot at the end of the yard, and they all went in. They quickly came out again, no one speaking but Eugene: who remarked to Mortimer, in a whisper, 'Not MUCH worse than Lady Tippins.'

So, back to the whitewashed library of the monastery—with that liver still in shrieking requisition, as it had been loudly, while they looked at the silent sight they came to see—and there through the merits of the case as summed up by the Abbot. No clue to how body came into river. Very often was no clue. Too late to know for certain, whether injuries received before or after death; one excellent surgical opinion said, before; other excellent surgical opinion said, after. Steward of ship in which gentleman came home passenger, had been round to view, and could swear to identity. Likewise could swear to clothes. And then, you see, you had the papers, too. How was it he had totally disappeared on leaving ship, 'till found in river? Well! Probably had been upon some little game. Probably thought it a harmless game, wasn't up to things, and it turned out a fatal game. Inquest to-morrow, and no doubt open verdict.

'It appears to have knocked your friend over—knocked him completely off his legs,' Mr Inspector remarked, when he had finished his summing up. 'It has given him a bad turn to be sure!' This was said in a very low voice, and with a searching look (not the first he had cast) at the stranger.

Mr Lightwood explained that it was no friend of his.

'Indeed?' said Mr Inspector, with an attentive ear; 'where did you pick him up?'

Mr Lightwood explained further.

Mr Inspector had delivered his summing up, and had added these words, with his elbows leaning on his desk, and the fingers and thumb of his right hand, fitting themselves to the fingers and thumb of his left. Mr Inspector moved nothing but his eyes, as he now added, raising his voice:

'Turned you faint, sir! Seems you're not accustomed to this kind of work?'

The stranger, who was leaning against the chimneypiece with drooping head, looked round and answered, 'No. It's a horrible sight!'

'You expected to identify, I am told, sir?'

'Yes.'

'HAVE you identified?'

'No. It's a horrible sight. O! a horrible, horrible sight!'

'Who did you think it might have been?' asked Mr Inspector. 'Give us a description, sir. Perhaps we can help you.'

'No, no,' said the stranger; 'it would be quite useless. Good-night.'

Mr Inspector had not moved, and had given no order; but, the satellite slipped his back against the wicket, and laid his left arm along the top of it, and with his right hand turned the bull's-eye he had taken from his chief—in quite a casual manner—towards the stranger.

'You missed a friend, you know; or you missed a foe, you know; or you wouldn't have come here, you know. Well, then; ain't it reasonable to ask, who was it?' Thus, Mr Inspector.

'You must excuse my telling you. No class of man can understand better than you, that families may not choose to publish their disagreements and misfortunes, except on the last necessity. I do not dispute that you discharge your duty in asking me the question; you will not dispute my right to withhold the answer. Good-night.'

Again he turned towards the wicket, where the satellite, with his eye upon his chief, remained a dumb statue.

'At least,' said Mr Inspector, 'you will not object to leave me your card, sir?'

'I should not object, if I had one; but I have not.' He reddened and was much confused as he gave the answer.

'At least,' said Mr Inspector, with no change of voice or manner, 'you will not object to write down your name and address?'

'Not at all.'

Mr Inspector dipped a pen in his inkstand, and deftly laid it on a piece of paper close beside him; then resumed his former attitude. The stranger stepped up to the desk, and wrote in a rather tremulous hand—Mr Inspector taking sidelong note of every hair of his head when it was bent down for the purpose—'Mr Julius Handford, Exchequer Coffee House, Palace Yard, Westminster.'

'Staying there, I presume, sir?'

'Staying there.'

'Consequently, from the country?'

'Eh? Yes—from the country.'

'Good-night, sir.'

The satellite removed his arm and opened the wicket, and Mr Julius Handford went out.

'Reserve!' said Mr Inspector. 'Take care of this piece of paper, keep him in view without giving offence, ascertain that he IS staying there, and find out anything you can about him.'

The satellite was gone; and Mr Inspector, becoming once again the quiet Abbot of that Monastery, dipped his pen in his ink and resumed his books. The two friends who had watched him, more amused by the professional manner than suspicious of Mr Julius Handford, inquired before taking their departure too whether he believed there was anything that really looked bad here?

The Abbot replied with reticence, couldn't say. If a murder, anybody might have done it. Burglary or pocket-picking wanted 'prenticeship. Not so, murder. We were all of us up to that. Had seen scores of people come to identify, and never saw one person struck in that particular way. Might, however, have been Stomach and not Mind. If so, rum stomach. But to be sure there were rum everythings. Pity there was not a word of truth in that superstition about bodies bleeding when touched by the hand of the right person; you never got a sign out of bodies. You got row enough out of such as her—she was good for all night now (referring here to the banging demands for the liver), 'but you got nothing out of bodies if it was ever so.'

There being nothing more to be done until the Inquest was held next day, the friends went away together, and Gaffer Hexam and his son went their separate way. But, arriving at the last corner, Gaffer bade his boy go home while he turned into a red-curtained tavern, that stood dropsically bulging over the causeway, 'for a half-a-pint.'

The boy lifted the latch he had lifted before, and found his sister again seated before the fire at her work. Who raised her head upon his coming in and asking:

'Where did you go, Liz?'

'I went out in the dark.'

'There was no necessity for that. It was all right enough.'

'One of the gentlemen, the one who didn't speak while I was there, looked hard at me. And I was afraid he might know what my face meant. But there! Don't mind me, Charley! I was all in a tremble of another sort when you owned to father you could write a little.'

'Ah! But I made believe I wrote so badly, as that it was odds if any one could read it. And when I wrote slowest and smeared but with my finger most, father was best pleased, as he stood looking over me.'

The girl put aside her work, and drawing her seat close to his seat by the fire, laid her arm gently on his shoulder.

'You'll make the most of your time, Charley; won't you?'

'Won't I? Come! I like that. Don't I?'

'Yes, Charley, yes. You work hard at your learning, I know. And I work a little, Charley, and plan and contrive a little (wake out of my sleep contriving sometimes), how to get together a shilling now, and a shilling then, that shall make father believe you are beginning to earn a stray living along shore.'

'You are father's favourite, and can make him believe anything.'

'I wish I could, Charley! For if I could make him believe that learning was a good thing, and that we might lead better lives, I should be a'most content to die.'

'Don't talk stuff about dying, Liz.'

She placed her hands in one another on his shoulder, and laying her rich brown cheek against them as she looked down at the fire, went on thoughtfully:

'Of an evening, Charley, when you are at the school, and father's—'

'At the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters,' the boy struck in, with a backward nod of his head towards the public-house.

'Yes. Then as I sit a-looking at the fire, I seem to see in the burning coal—like where that glow is now—'

'That's gas, that is,' said the boy, 'coming out of a bit of a forest that's been under the mud that was under the water in the days of Noah's Ark. Look here! When I take the poker—so—and give it a dig—'

'Don't disturb it, Charley, or it'll be all in a blaze. It's that dull glow near it, coming and going, that I mean. When I look at it of an evening, it comes like pictures to me, Charley.'

'Show us a picture,' said the boy. 'Tell us where to look.'

'Ah! It wants my eyes, Charley.'

'Cut away then, and tell us what your eyes make of it.'

'Why, there are you and me, Charley, when you were quite a baby that never knew a mother—'

'Don't go saying I never knew a mother,' interposed the boy, 'for I knew a little sister that was sister and mother both.'

The girl laughed delightedly, and her eyes filled with pleasant tears, as he put both his arms round her waist and so held her.

'There are you and me, Charley, when father was away at work and locked us out, for fear we should set ourselves afire or fall out of window, sitting on the door-sill, sitting on other door-steps, sitting on the bank of the river, wandering about to get through the time. You are rather heavy to carry, Charley, and I am often obliged to rest. Sometimes we are sleepy and fall asleep together in a corner, sometimes we are very hungry, sometimes we are a little frightened, but what is oftenest hard upon us is the cold. You remember, Charley?'

'I remember,' said the boy, pressing her to him twice or thrice, 'that I snuggled under a little shawl, and it was warm there.'

'Sometimes it rains, and we creep under a boat or the like of that: sometimes it's dark, and we get among the gaslights, sitting watching the people as they go along the streets. At last, up comes father and takes us home. And home seems such a shelter after out of doors! And father pulls my shoes off, and dries my feet at the fire, and has me to sit by him while he smokes his pipe long after you are abed, and I notice that father's is a large hand but never a heavy one when it touches me, and that father's is a rough voice but never an angry one when it speaks to me. So, I grow up, and little by little father trusts me, and makes me his companion, and, let him be put out as he may, never once strikes me.'

The listening boy gave a grunt here, as much as to say 'But he strikes ME though!'

'Those are some of the pictures of what is past, Charley.'

'Cut away again,' said the boy, 'and give us a fortune-telling one; a future one.'

'Well! There am I, continuing with father and holding to father, because father loves me and I love father. I can't so much as read a book, because, if I had learned, father would have thought I was deserting him, and I should have lost my influence. I have not the influence I want to have, I cannot stop some dreadful things I try to stop, but I go on in the hope and trust that the time will come. In the meanwhile I know that I am in some things a stay to father, and that if I was not faithful to him he would—in revenge-like, or in disappointment, or both—go wild and bad.'

'Give us a touch of the fortune-telling pictures about me.'

'I was passing on to them, Charley,' said the girl, who had not changed her attitude since she began, and who now mournfully shook her head; 'the others were all leading up. There are you—'

'Where am I, Liz?'

'Still in the hollow down by the flare.'

'There seems to be the deuce-and-all in the hollow down by the flare,' said the boy, glancing from her eyes to the brazier, which had a grisly skeleton look on its long thin legs.

'There are you, Charley, working your way, in secret from father, at the school; and you get prizes; and you go on better and better; and you come to be a—what was it you called it when you told me about that?'

'Ha, ha! Fortune-telling not know the name!' cried the boy, seeming to be rather relieved by this default on the part of the hollow down by the flare. 'Pupil-teacher.'

'You come to be a pupil-teacher, and you still go on better and better, and you rise to be a master full of learning and respect. But the secret has come to father's knowledge long before, and it has divided you from father, and from me.'

'No it hasn't!'

'Yes it has, Charley. I see, as plain as plain can be, that your way is not ours, and that even if father could be got to forgive your taking it (which he never could be), that way of yours would be darkened by our way. But I see too, Charley—'

'Still as plain as plain can be, Liz?' asked the boy playfully.

'Ah! Still. That it is a great work to have cut you away from father's life, and to have made a new and good beginning. So there am I, Charley, left alone with father, keeping him as straight as I can, watching for more influence than I have, and hoping that through some fortunate chance, or when he is ill, or when—I don't know what—I may turn him to wish to do better things.'

'You said you couldn't read a book, Lizzie. Your library of books is the hollow down by the flare, I think.'

'I should be very glad to be able to read real books. I feel my want of learning very much, Charley. But I should feel it much more, if I didn't know it to be a tie between me and father.—Hark! Father's tread!'

It being now past midnight, the bird of prey went straight to roost. At mid-day following he reappeared at the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters, in the character, not new to him, of a witness before a Coroner's Jury.

Mr Mortimer Lightwood, besides sustaining the character of one of the witnesses, doubled the part with that of the eminent solicitor who watched the proceedings on behalf of the representatives of the deceased, as was duly recorded in the newspapers. Mr Inspector watched the proceedings too, and kept his watching closely to himself. Mr Julius Handford having given his right address, and being reported in solvent circumstances as to his bill, though nothing more was known of him at his hotel except that his way of life was very retired, had no summons to appear, and was merely present in the shades of Mr Inspector's mind.

The case was made interesting to the public, by Mr Mortimer Lightwood's evidence touching the circumstances under which the deceased, Mr John Harmon, had returned to England; exclusive private proprietorship in which circumstances was set up at dinner-tables for several days, by Veneering, Twemlow, Podsnap, and all the Buffers: who all related them irreconcilably with one another, and contradicted themselves.

It was also made interesting by the testimony of Job Potterson, the ship's steward, and one Mr Jacob Kibble, a fellow-passenger, that the deceased Mr John Harmon did bring over, in a hand-valise with which he did disembark, the sum realized by the forced sale of his little landed property, and that the sum exceeded, in ready money, seven hundred pounds. It was further made interesting, by the remarkable experiences of Jesse Hexam in having rescued from the Thames so many dead bodies, and for whose behoof a rapturous admirer subscribing himself 'A friend to Burial' (perhaps an undertaker), sent eighteen postage stamps, and five 'Now Sir's to the editor of the Times.

Upon the evidence adduced before them, the Jury found, That the body of Mr John Harmon had been discovered floating in the Thames, in an advanced state of decay, and much injured; and that the said Mr John Harmon had come by his death under highly suspicious circumstances, though by whose act or in what precise manner there was no evidence before this Jury to show. And they appended to their verdict, a recommendation to the Home Office (which Mr Inspector appeared to think highly sensible), to offer a reward for the solution of the mystery. Within eight-and-forty hours, a reward of One Hundred Pounds was proclaimed, together with a free pardon to any person or persons not the actual perpetrator or perpetrators, and so forth in due form.

This Proclamation rendered Mr Inspector additionally studious, and caused him to stand meditating on river-stairs and causeways, and to go lurking about in boats, putting this and that together. But, according to the success with which you put this and that together, you get a woman and a fish apart, or a Mermaid in combination. And Mr Inspector could turn out nothing better than a Mermaid, which no Judge and Jury would believe in.

Thus, like the tides on which it had been borne to the knowledge of men, the Harmon Murder—as it came to be popularly called—went up and down, and ebbed and flowed, now in the town, now in the country, now among palaces, now among hovels, now among lords and ladies and gentlefolks, now among labourers and hammerers and ballast-heavers, until at last, after a long interval of slack water it got out to sea and drifted away.

Chapter 4

THE R. WILFER FAMILY

Reginald Wilfer is a name with rather a grand sound, suggesting on first acquaintance brasses in country churches, scrolls in stained-glass windows, and generally the De Wilfers who came over with the Conqueror. For, it is a remarkable fact in genealogy that no De Any ones ever came over with Anybody else.

But, the Reginald Wilfer family were of such commonplace extraction and pursuits that their forefathers had for generations modestly subsisted on the Docks, the Excise Office, and the Custom House, and the existing R. Wilfer was a poor clerk. So poor a clerk, though having a limited salary and an unlimited family, that he had never yet attained the modest object of his ambition: which was, to wear a complete new suit of clothes, hat and boots included, at one time. His black hat was brown before he could afford a coat, his pantaloons were white at the seams and knees before he could buy a pair of boots, his boots had worn out before he could treat himself to new pantaloons, and, by the time he worked round to the hat again, that shining modern article roofed-in an ancient ruin of various periods.

If the conventional Cherub could ever grow up and be clothed, he might be photographed as a portrait of Wilfer. His chubby, smooth, innocent appearance was a reason for his being always treated with condescension when he was not put down. A stranger entering his own poor house at about ten o'clock P.M. might have been surprised to find him sitting up to supper. So boyish was he in his curves and proportions, that his old schoolmaster meeting him in Cheapside, might have been unable to withstand the temptation of caning him on the spot. In short, he was the conventional cherub, after the supposititious shoot just mentioned, rather grey, with signs of care on his expression, and in decidedly insolvent circumstances.

He was shy, and unwilling to own to the name of Reginald, as being too aspiring and self-assertive a name. In his signature he used only the initial R., and imparted what it really stood for, to none but chosen friends, under the seal of confidence. Out of this, the facetious habit had arisen in the neighbourhood surrounding Mincing Lane of making christian names for him of adjectives and participles beginning with R. Some of these were more or less appropriate: as Rusty, Retiring, Ruddy, Round, Ripe, Ridiculous, Ruminative; others, derived their point from their want of application: as Raging, Rattling, Roaring, Raffish. But, his popular name was Rumty, which in a moment of inspiration had been bestowed upon him by a gentleman of convivial habits connected with the drug-markets, as the beginning of a social chorus, his leading part in the execution of which had led this gentleman to the Temple of Fame, and of which the whole expressive burden ran:

'Rumty iddity, row dow dow,
Sing toodlely, teedlely, bow wow wow.'

Thus he was constantly addressed, even in minor notes on business, as 'Dear Rumty'; in answer to which, he sedately signed himself, 'Yours truly, R. Wilfer.'

He was clerk in the drug-house of Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles. Chicksey and Stobbles, his former masters, had both become absorbed in Veneering, once their traveller or commission agent: who had signalized his accession to supreme power by bringing into the business a quantity of plate-glass window and French-polished mahogany partition, and a gleaming and enormous doorplate.

R. Wilfer locked up his desk one evening, and, putting his bunch of keys in his pocket much as if it were his peg-top, made for home. His home was in the Holloway region north of London, and then divided from it by fields and trees. Between Battle Bridge and that part of the Holloway district in which he dwelt, was a tract of suburban Sahara, where tiles and bricks were burnt, bones were boiled, carpets were beat, rubbish was shot, dogs were fought, and dust was heaped by contractors. Skirting the border of this desert, by the way he took, when the light of its kiln-fires made lurid smears on the fog, R. Wilfer sighed and shook his head.

'Ah me!' said he, 'what might have been is not what is!'

With which commentary on human life, indicating an experience of it not exclusively his own, he made the best of his way to the end of his journey.

Mrs Wilfer was, of course, a tall woman and an angular. Her lord being cherubic, she was necessarily majestic, according to the principle which matrimonially unites contrasts. She was much given to tying up her head in a pocket-handkerchief, knotted under the chin. This head-gear, in conjunction with a pair of gloves worn within doors, she seemed to consider as at once a kind of armour against misfortune (invariably assuming it when in low spirits or difficulties), and as a species of full dress. It was therefore with some sinking of the spirit that her husband beheld her thus heroically attired, putting down her candle in the little hall, and coming down the doorsteps through the little front court to open the gate for him.

Something had gone wrong with the house-door, for R. Wilfer stopped on the steps, staring at it, and cried:

'Hal-loa?'

'Yes,' said Mrs Wilfer, 'the man came himself with a pair of pincers, and took it off, and took it away. He said that as he had no expectation of ever being paid for it, and as he had an order for another LADIES' SCHOOL door-plate, it was better (burnished up) for the interests of all parties.'

'Perhaps it was, my dear; what do you think?'

'You are master here, R. W.,' returned his wife. 'It is as you think; not as I do. Perhaps it might have been better if the man had taken the door too?'

'My dear, we couldn't have done without the door.'

'Couldn't we?'

'Why, my dear! Could we?'

'It is as you think, R. W.; not as I do.' With those submissive words, the dutiful wife preceded him down a few stairs to a little basement front room, half kitchen, half parlour, where a girl of about nineteen, with an exceedingly pretty figure and face, but with an impatient and petulant expression both in her face and in her shoulders (which in her sex and at her age are very expressive of discontent), sat playing draughts with a younger girl, who was the youngest of the House of Wilfer. Not to encumber this page by telling off the Wilfers in detail and casting them up in the gross, it is enough for the present that the rest were what is called 'out in the world,' in various ways, and that they were Many. So many, that when one of his dutiful children called in to see him, R. Wilfer generally seemed to say to himself, after a little mental arithmetic, 'Oh! here's another of 'em!' before adding aloud, 'How de do, John,' or Susan, as the case might be.

'Well Piggywiggies,' said R. W., 'how de do to-night? What I was thinking of, my dear,' to Mrs Wilfer already seated in a corner with folded gloves, 'was, that as we have let our first floor so well, and as we have now no place in which you could teach pupils even if pupils—'

'The milkman said he knew of two young ladies of the highest respectability who were in search of a suitable establishment, and he took a card,' interposed Mrs Wilfer, with severe monotony, as if she were reading an Act of Parliament aloud. 'Tell your father whether it was last Monday, Bella.'

'But we never heard any more of it, ma,' said Bella, the elder girl.

'In addition to which, my dear,' her husband urged, 'if you have no place to put two young persons into—'

'Pardon me,' Mrs Wilfer again interposed; 'they were not young persons. Two young ladies of the highest respectability. Tell your father, Bella, whether the milkman said so.'

'My dear, it is the same thing.'

'No it is not,' said Mrs Wilfer, with the same impressive monotony. 'Pardon me!'

'I mean, my dear, it is the same thing as to space. As to space. If you have no space in which to put two youthful fellow-creatures, however eminently respectable, which I do not doubt, where are those youthful fellow-creatures to be accommodated? I carry it no further than that. And solely looking at it,' said her husband, making the stipulation at once in a conciliatory, complimentary, and argumentative tone—'as I am sure you will agree, my love—from a fellow-creature point of view, my dear.'

'I have nothing more to say,' returned Mrs Wilfer, with a meek renunciatory action of her gloves. 'It is as you think, R. W.; not as I do.'

Here, the huffing of Miss Bella and the loss of three of her men at a swoop, aggravated by the coronation of an opponent, led to that young lady's jerking the draught-board and pieces off the table: which her sister went down on her knees to pick up.

'Poor Bella!' said Mrs Wilfer.

'And poor Lavinia, perhaps, my dear?' suggested R. W.

'Pardon me,' said Mrs Wilfer, 'no!'

It was one of the worthy woman's specialities that she had an amazing power of gratifying her splenetic or worldly-minded humours by extolling her own family: which she thus proceeded, in the present case, to do.

'No, R. W. Lavinia has not known the trial that Bella has known. The trial that your daughter Bella has undergone, is, perhaps, without a parallel, and has been borne, I will say, Nobly. When you see your daughter Bella in her black dress, which she alone of all the family wears, and when you remember the circumstances which have led to her wearing it, and when you know how those circumstances have been sustained, then, R. W., lay your head upon your pillow and say, "Poor Lavinia!"'

Here, Miss Lavinia, from her kneeling situation under the table, put in that she didn't want to be 'poored by pa', or anybody else.

'I am sure you do not, my dear,' returned her mother, 'for you have a fine brave spirit. And your sister Cecilia has a fine brave spirit of another kind, a spirit of pure devotion, a beau-ti-ful spirit! The self-sacrifice of Cecilia reveals a pure and womanly character, very seldom equalled, never surpassed. I have now in my pocket a letter from your sister Cecilia, received this morning—received three months after her marriage, poor child!—in which she tells me that her husband must unexpectedly shelter under their roof his reduced aunt. "But I will be true to him, mamma," she touchingly writes, "I will not leave him, I must not forget that he is my husband. Let his aunt come!" If this is not pathetic, if this is not woman's devotion—!' The good lady waved her gloves in a sense of the impossibility of saying more, and tied the pocket-handkerchief over her head in a tighter knot under her chin.

Bella, who was now seated on the rug to warm herself, with her brown eyes on the fire and a handful of her brown curls in her mouth, laughed at this, and then pouted and half cried.

'I am sure,' said she, 'though you have no feeling for me, pa, I am one of the most unfortunate girls that ever lived. You know how poor we are' (it is probable he did, having some reason to know it!), 'and what a glimpse of wealth I had, and how it melted away, and how I am here in this ridiculous mourning—which I hate!—a kind of a widow who never was married. And yet you don't feel for me.—Yes you do, yes you do.'

This abrupt change was occasioned by her father's face. She stopped to pull him down from his chair in an attitude highly favourable to strangulation, and to give him a kiss and a pat or two on the cheek.

'But you ought to feel for me, you know, pa.'

'My dear, I do.'

'Yes, and I say you ought to. If they had only left me alone and told me nothing about it, it would have mattered much less. But that nasty Mr Lightwood feels it his duty, as he says, to write and tell me what is in reserve for me, and then I am obliged to get rid of George Sampson.'

Here, Lavinia, rising to the surface with the last draughtman rescued, interposed, 'You never cared for George Sampson, Bella.'

'And did I say I did, miss?' Then, pouting again, with the curls in her mouth; 'George Sampson was very fond of me, and admired me very much, and put up with everything I did to him.'

'You were rude enough to him,' Lavinia again interposed.

'And did I say I wasn't, miss? I am not setting up to be sentimental about George Sampson. I only say George Sampson was better than nothing.'

'You didn't show him that you thought even that,' Lavinia again interposed.

'You are a chit and a little idiot,' returned Bella, 'or you wouldn't make such a dolly speech. What did you expect me to do? Wait till you are a woman, and don't talk about what you don't understand. You only show your ignorance!' Then, whimpering again, and at intervals biting the curls, and stopping to look how much was bitten off, 'It's a shame! There never was such a hard case! I shouldn't care so much if it wasn't so ridiculous. It was ridiculous enough to have a stranger coming over to marry me, whether he liked it or not. It was ridiculous enough to know what an embarrassing meeting it would be, and how we never could pretend to have an inclination of our own, either of us. It was ridiculous enough to know I shouldn't like him—how COULD I like him, left to him in a will, like a dozen of spoons, with everything cut and dried beforehand, like orange chips. Talk of orange flowers indeed! I declare again it's a shame! Those ridiculous points would have been smoothed away by the money, for I love money, and want money—want it dreadfully. I hate to be poor, and we are degradingly poor, offensively poor, miserably poor, beastly poor. But here I am, left with all the ridiculous parts of the situation remaining, and, added to them all, this ridiculous dress! And if the truth was known, when the Harmon murder was all over the town, and people were speculating on its being suicide, I dare say those impudent wretches at the clubs and places made jokes about the miserable creature's having preferred a watery grave to me. It's likely enough they took such liberties; I shouldn't wonder! I declare it's a very hard case indeed, and I am a most unfortunate girl. The idea of being a kind of a widow, and never having been married! And the idea of being as poor as ever after all, and going into black, besides, for a man I never saw, and should have hated—as far as HE was concerned—if I had seen!'

The young lady's lamentations were checked at this point by a knuckle, knocking at the half-open door of the room. The knuckle had knocked two or three times already, but had not been heard.

'Who is it?' said Mrs Wilfer, in her Act-of-Parliament manner. 'Enter!'

A gentleman coming in, Miss Bella, with a short and sharp exclamation, scrambled off the hearth-rug and massed the bitten curls together in their right place on her neck.

'The servant girl had her key in the door as I came up, and directed me to this room, telling me I was expected. I am afraid I should have asked her to announce me.'

'Pardon me,' returned Mrs Wilfer. 'Not at all. Two of my daughters. R. W., this is the gentleman who has taken your first-floor. He was so good as to make an appointment for to-night, when you would be at home.'

A dark gentleman. Thirty at the utmost. An expressive, one might say handsome, face. A very bad manner. In the last degree constrained, reserved, diffident, troubled. His eyes were on Miss Bella for an instant, and then looked at the ground as he addressed the master of the house.

'Seeing that I am quite satisfied, Mr Wilfer, with the rooms, and with their situation, and with their price, I suppose a memorandum between us of two or three lines, and a payment down, will bind the bargain? I wish to send in furniture without delay.'

Two or three times during this short address, the cherub addressed had made chubby motions towards a chair. The gentleman now took it, laying a hesitating hand on a corner of the table, and with another hesitating hand lifting the crown of his hat to his lips, and drawing it before his mouth.

'The gentleman, R. W.,' said Mrs Wilfer, 'proposes to take your apartments by the quarter. A quarter's notice on either side.'

'Shall I mention, sir,' insinuated the landlord, expecting it to be received as a matter of course, 'the form of a reference?'

'I think,' returned the gentleman, after a pause, 'that a reference is not necessary; neither, to say the truth, is it convenient, for I am a stranger in London. I require no reference from you, and perhaps, therefore, you will require none from me. That will be fair on both sides. Indeed, I show the greater confidence of the two, for I will pay in advance whatever you please, and I am going to trust my furniture here. Whereas, if you were in embarrassed circumstances—this is merely supposititious—'

Conscience causing R. Wilfer to colour, Mrs Wilfer, from a corner (she always got into stately corners) came to the rescue with a deep-toned 'Perfectly.'

'—Why then I—might lose it.'

'Well!' observed R. Wilfer, cheerfully, 'money and goods are certainly the best of references.'

'Do you think they ARE the best, pa?' asked Miss Bella, in a low voice, and without looking over her shoulder as she warmed her foot on the fender.

'Among the best, my dear.'

'I should have thought, myself, it was so easy to add the usual kind of one,' said Bella, with a toss of her curls.

The gentleman listened to her, with a face of marked attention, though he neither looked up nor changed his attitude. He sat, still and silent, until his future landlord accepted his proposals, and brought writing materials to complete the business. He sat, still and silent, while the landlord wrote.

When the agreement was ready in duplicate (the landlord having worked at it like some cherubic scribe, in what is conventionally called a doubtful, which means a not at all doubtful, Old Master), it was signed by the contracting parties, Bella looking on as scornful witness. The contracting parties were R. Wilfer, and John Rokesmith Esquire.

When it came to Bella's turn to sign her name, Mr Rokesmith, who was standing, as he had sat, with a hesitating hand upon the table, looked at her stealthily, but narrowly. He looked at the pretty figure bending down over the paper and saying, 'Where am I to go, pa? Here, in this corner?' He looked at the beautiful brown hair, shading the coquettish face; he looked at the free dash of the signature, which was a bold one for a woman's; and then they looked at one another.

'Much obliged to you, Miss Wilfer.'

'Obliged?'

'I have given you so much trouble.'

'Signing my name? Yes, certainly. But I am your landlord's daughter, sir.'

As there was nothing more to do but pay eight sovereigns in earnest of the bargain, pocket the agreement, appoint a time for the arrival of his furniture and himself, and go, Mr Rokesmith did that as awkwardly as it might be done, and was escorted by his landlord to the outer air. When R. Wilfer returned, candlestick in hand, to the bosom of his family, he found the bosom agitated.

'Pa,' said Bella, 'we have got a Murderer for a tenant.'

'Pa,' said Lavinia, 'we have got a Robber.'

'To see him unable for his life to look anybody in the face!' said Bella. 'There never was such an exhibition.'

'My dears,' said their father, 'he is a diffident gentleman, and I should say particularly so in the society of girls of your age.'

'Nonsense, our age!' cried Bella, impatiently. 'What's that got to do with him?'

'Besides, we are not of the same age:—which age?' demanded Lavinia.

'Never YOU mind, Lavvy,' retorted Bella; 'you wait till you are of an age to ask such questions. Pa, mark my words! Between Mr Rokesmith and me, there is a natural antipathy and a deep distrust; and something will come of it!'

'My dear, and girls,' said the cherub-patriarch, 'between Mr Rokesmith and me, there is a matter of eight sovereigns, and something for supper shall come of it, if you'll agree upon the article.'

This was a neat and happy turn to give the subject, treats being rare in the Wilfer household, where a monotonous appearance of Dutch-cheese at ten o'clock in the evening had been rather frequently commented on by the dimpled shoulders of Miss Bella. Indeed, the modest Dutchman himself seemed conscious of his want of variety, and generally came before the family in a state of apologetic perspiration. After some discussion on the relative merits of veal-cutlet, sweetbread, and lobster, a decision was pronounced in favour of veal-cutlet. Mrs Wilfer then solemnly divested herself of her handkerchief and gloves, as a preliminary sacrifice to preparing the frying-pan, and R. W. himself went out to purchase the viand. He soon returned, bearing the same in a fresh cabbage-leaf, where it coyly embraced a rasher of ham. Melodious sounds were not long in rising from the frying-pan on the fire, or in seeming, as the firelight danced in the mellow halls of a couple of full bottles on the table, to play appropriate dance-music.

The cloth was laid by Lavvy. Bella, as the acknowledged ornament of the family, employed both her hands in giving her hair an additional wave while sitting in the easiest chair, and occasionally threw in a direction touching the supper: as, 'Very brown, ma;' or, to her sister, 'Put the saltcellar straight, miss, and don't be a dowdy little puss.'

Meantime her father, chinking Mr Rokesmith's gold as he sat expectant between his knife and fork, remarked that six of those sovereigns came just in time for their landlord, and stood them in a little pile on the white tablecloth to look at.

'I hate our landlord!' said Bella.

But, observing a fall in her father's face, she went and sat down by him at the table, and began touching up his hair with the handle of a fork. It was one of the girl's spoilt ways to be always arranging the family's hair—perhaps because her own was so pretty, and occupied so much of her attention.

'You deserve to have a house of your own; don't you, poor pa?'

'I don't deserve it better than another, my dear.'

'At any rate I, for one, want it more than another,' said Bella, holding him by the chin, as she stuck his flaxen hair on end, 'and I grudge this money going to the Monster that swallows up so much, when we all want—Everything. And if you say (as you want to say; I know you want to say so, pa) "that's neither reasonable nor honest, Bella," then I answer, "Maybe not, pa—very likely—but it's one of the consequences of being poor, and of thoroughly hating and detesting to be poor, and that's my case." Now, you look lovely, pa; why don't you always wear your hair like that? And here's the cutlet! If it isn't very brown, ma, I can't eat it, and must have a bit put back to be done expressly.'

However, as it was brown, even to Bella's taste, the young lady graciously partook of it without reconsignment to the frying-pan, and also, in due course, of the contents of the two bottles: whereof one held Scotch ale and the other rum. The latter perfume, with the fostering aid of boiling water and lemon-peel, diffused itself throughout the room, and became so highly concentrated around the warm fireside, that the wind passing over the house roof must have rushed off charged with a delicious whiff of it, after buzzing like a great bee at that particular chimneypot.

'Pa,' said Bella, sipping the fragrant mixture and warming her favourite ankle; 'when old Mr Harmon made such a fool of me (not to mention himself, as he is dead), what do you suppose he did it for?'

'Impossible to say, my dear. As I have told you time out of number since his will was brought to light, I doubt if I ever exchanged a hundred words with the old gentleman. If it was his whim to surprise us, his whim succeeded. For he certainly did it.'

'And I was stamping my foot and screaming, when he first took notice of me; was I?' said Bella, contemplating the ankle before mentioned.

'You were stamping your little foot, my dear, and screaming with your little voice, and laying into me with your little bonnet, which you had snatched off for the purpose,' returned her father, as if the remembrance gave a relish to the rum; 'you were doing this one Sunday morning when I took you out, because I didn't go the exact way you wanted, when the old gentleman, sitting on a seat near, said, "That's a nice girl; that's a VERY nice girl; a promising girl!" And so you were, my dear.'

'And then he asked my name, did he, pa?'

'Then he asked your name, my dear, and mine; and on other Sunday mornings, when we walked his way, we saw him again, and—and really that's all.'

As that was all the rum and water too, or, in other words, as R. W. delicately signified that his glass was empty, by throwing back his head and standing the glass upside down on his nose and upper lip, it might have been charitable in Mrs Wilfer to suggest replenishment. But that heroine briefly suggesting 'Bedtime' instead, the bottles were put away, and the family retired; she cherubically escorted, like some severe saint in a painting, or merely human matron allegorically treated.

'And by this time to-morrow,' said Lavinia when the two girls were alone in their room, 'we shall have Mr Rokesmith here, and shall be expecting to have our throats cut.'

'You needn't stand between me and the candle for all that,' retorted Bella. 'This is another of the consequences of being poor! The idea of a girl with a really fine head of hair, having to do it by one flat candle and a few inches of looking-glass!'

'You caught George Sampson with it, Bella, bad as your means of dressing it are.'

'You low little thing. Caught George Sampson with it! Don't talk about catching people, miss, till your own time for catching—as you call it—comes.'

'Perhaps it has come,' muttered Lavvy, with a toss of her head.

'What did you say?' asked Bella, very sharply. 'What did you say, miss?'

Lavvy declining equally to repeat or to explain, Bella gradually lapsed over her hair-dressing into a soliloquy on the miseries of being poor, as exemplified in having nothing to put on, nothing to go out in, nothing to dress by, only a nasty box to dress at instead of a commodious dressing-table, and being obliged to take in suspicious lodgers. On the last grievance as her climax, she laid great stress—and might have laid greater, had she known that if Mr Julius Handford had a twin brother upon earth, Mr John Rokesmith was the man.

Chapter 5

BOFFIN'S BOWER

Over against a London house, a corner house not far from Cavendish Square, a man with a wooden leg had sat for some years, with his remaining foot in a basket in cold weather, picking up a living on this wise:—Every morning at eight o'clock, he stumped to the corner, carrying a chair, a clothes-horse, a pair of trestles, a board, a basket, and an umbrella, all strapped together. Separating these, the board and trestles became a counter, the basket supplied the few small lots of fruit and sweets that he offered for sale upon it and became a foot-warmer, the unfolded clothes-horse displayed a choice collection of halfpenny ballads and became a screen, and the stool planted within it became his post for the rest of the day. All weathers saw the man at the post. This is to be accepted in a double sense, for he contrived a back to his wooden stool, by placing it against the lamp-post. When the weather was wet, he put up his umbrella over his stock in trade, not over himself; when the weather was dry, he furled that faded article, tied it round with a piece of yarn, and laid it cross-wise under the trestles: where it looked like an unwholesomely-forced lettuce that had lost in colour and crispness what it had gained in size.

He had established his right to the corner, by imperceptible prescription. He had never varied his ground an inch, but had in the beginning diffidently taken the corner upon which the side of the house gave. A howling corner in the winter time, a dusty corner in the summer time, an undesirable corner at the best of times. Shelterless fragments of straw and paper got up revolving storms there, when the main street was at peace; and the water-cart, as if it were drunk or short-sighted, came blundering and jolting round it, making it muddy when all else was clean.

On the front of his sale-board hung a little placard, like a kettle-holder, bearing the inscription in his own small text:

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Errands gone
On with fi
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Delity By
Ladies and Gentlemen
I remain
Your humble Servt:
Silas Wegg

He had not only settled it with himself in course of time, that he was errand-goer by appointment to the house at the corner (though he received such commissions not half a dozen times in a year, and then only as some servant's deputy), but also that he was one of the house's retainers and owed vassalage to it and was bound to leal and loyal interest in it. For this reason, he always spoke of it as 'Our House,' and, though his knowledge of its affairs was mostly speculative and all wrong, claimed to be in its confidence. On similar grounds he never beheld an inmate at any one of its windows but he touched his hat. Yet, he knew so little about the inmates that he gave them names of his own invention: as 'Miss Elizabeth', 'Master George', 'Aunt Jane', 'Uncle Parker '—having no authority whatever for any such designations, but particularly the last—to which, as a natural consequence, he stuck with great obstinacy.

Over the house itself, he exercised the same imaginary power as over its inhabitants and their affairs. He had never been in it, the length of a piece of fat black water-pipe which trailed itself over the area-door into a damp stone passage, and had rather the air of a leech on the house that had 'taken' wonderfully; but this was no impediment to his arranging it according to a plan of his own. It was a great dingy house with a quantity of dim side window and blank back premises, and it cost his mind a world of trouble so to lay it out as to account for everything in its external appearance. But, this once done, was quite satisfactory, and he rested persuaded, that he knew his way about the house blindfold: from the barred garrets in the high roof, to the two iron extinguishers before the main door—which seemed to request all lively visitors to have the kindness to put themselves out, before entering.

Assuredly, this stall of Silas Wegg's was the hardest little stall of all the sterile little stalls in London. It gave you the face-ache to look at his apples, the stomach-ache to look at his oranges, the tooth-ache to look at his nuts. Of the latter commodity he had always a grim little heap, on which lay a little wooden measure which had no discernible inside, and was considered to represent the penn'orth appointed by Magna Charta. Whether from too much east wind or no—it was an easterly corner—the stall, the stock, and the keeper, were all as dry as the Desert. Wegg was a knotty man, and a close-grained, with a face carved out of very hard material, that had just as much play of expression as a watchman's rattle. When he laughed, certain jerks occurred in it, and the rattle sprung. Sooth to say, he was so wooden a man that he seemed to have taken his wooden leg naturally, and rather suggested to the fanciful observer, that he might be expected—if his development received no untimely check—to be completely set up with a pair of wooden legs in about six months.

Mr Wegg was an observant person, or, as he himself said, 'took a powerful sight of notice'. He saluted all his regular passers-by every day, as he sat on his stool backed up by the lamp-post; and on the adaptable character of these salutes he greatly plumed himself. Thus, to the rector, he addressed a bow, compounded of lay deference, and a slight touch of the shady preliminary meditation at church; to the doctor, a confidential bow, as to a gentleman whose acquaintance with his inside he begged respectfully to acknowledge; before the Quality he delighted to abase himself; and for Uncle Parker, who was in the army (at least, so he had settled it), he put his open hand to the side of his hat, in a military manner which that angry-eyed buttoned-up inflammatory-faced old gentleman appeared but imperfectly to appreciate.

The only article in which Silas dealt, that was not hard, was gingerbread. On a certain day, some wretched infant having purchased the damp gingerbread-horse (fearfully out of condition), and the adhesive bird-cage, which had been exposed for the day's sale, he had taken a tin box from under his stool to produce a relay of those dreadful specimens, and was going to look in at the lid, when he said to himself, pausing: 'Oh! Here you are again!'

The words referred to a broad, round-shouldered, one-sided old fellow in mourning, coming comically ambling towards the corner, dressed in a pea over-coat, and carrying a large stick. He wore thick shoes, and thick leather gaiters, and thick gloves like a hedger's. Both as to his dress and to himself, he was of an overlapping rhinoceros build, with folds in his cheeks, and his forehead, and his eyelids, and his lips, and his ears; but with bright, eager, childishly-inquiring, grey eyes, under his ragged eyebrows, and broad-brimmed hat. A very odd-looking old fellow altogether.

'Here you are again,' repeated Mr Wegg, musing. 'And what are you now? Are you in the Funns, or where are you? Have you lately come to settle in this neighbourhood, or do you own to another neighbourhood? Are you in independent circumstances, or is it wasting the motions of a bow on you? Come! I'll speculate! I'll invest a bow in you.'

Which Mr Wegg, having replaced his tin box, accordingly did, as he rose to bait his gingerbread-trap for some other devoted infant. The salute was acknowledged with:

'Morning, sir! Morning! Morning!'

('Calls me Sir!' said Mr Wegg, to himself; 'HE won't answer. A bow gone!')

'Morning, morning, morning!'

'Appears to be rather a 'arty old cock, too,' said Mr Wegg, as before; 'Good morning to YOU, sir.'

'Do you remember me, then?' asked his new acquaintance, stopping in his amble, one-sided, before the stall, and speaking in a pounding way, though with great good-humour.

'I have noticed you go past our house, sir, several times in the course of the last week or so.'

'Our house,' repeated the other. 'Meaning—?'

'Yes,' said Mr Wegg, nodding, as the other pointed the clumsy forefinger of his right glove at the corner house.

'Oh! Now, what,' pursued the old fellow, in an inquisitive manner, carrying his knotted stick in his left arm as if it were a baby, 'what do they allow you now?'

'It's job work that I do for our house,' returned Silas, drily, and with reticence; 'it's not yet brought to an exact allowance.'

'Oh! It's not yet brought to an exact allowance? No! It's not yet brought to an exact allowance. Oh!—Morning, morning, morning!'

'Appears to be rather a cracked old cock,' thought Silas, qualifying his former good opinion, as the other ambled off. But, in a moment he was back again with the question:

'How did you get your wooden leg?'

Mr Wegg replied, (tartly to this personal inquiry), 'In an accident.'

'Do you like it?'

'Well! I haven't got to keep it warm,' Mr Wegg made answer, in a sort of desperation occasioned by the singularity of the question.

'He hasn't,' repeated the other to his knotted stick, as he gave it a hug; 'he hasn't got—ha!—ha!—to keep it warm! Did you ever hear of the name of Boffin?'

'No,' said Mr Wegg, who was growing restive under this examination. 'I never did hear of the name of Boffin.'

'Do you like it?'

'Why, no,' retorted Mr Wegg, again approaching desperation; 'I can't say I do.'

'Why don't you like it?'

'I don't know why I don't,' retorted Mr Wegg, approaching frenzy, 'but I don't at all.'

'Now, I'll tell you something that'll make you sorry for that,' said the stranger, smiling. 'My name's Boffin.'

'I can't help it!' returned Mr Wegg. Implying in his manner the offensive addition, 'and if I could, I wouldn't.'

'But there's another chance for you,' said Mr Boffin, smiling still, 'Do you like the name of Nicodemus? Think it over. Nick, or Noddy.'

'It is not, sir,' Mr Wegg rejoined, as he sat down on his stool, with an air of gentle resignation, combined with melancholy candour; it is not a name as I could wish any one that I had a respect for, to call ME by; but there may be persons that would not view it with the same objections.—I don't know why,' Mr Wegg added, anticipating another question.

'Noddy Boffin,' said that gentleman. 'Noddy. That's my name. Noddy—or Nick—Boffin. What's your name?'

'Silas Wegg.—I don't,' said Mr Wegg, bestirring himself to take the same precaution as before, 'I don't know why Silas, and I don't know why Wegg.'

'Now, Wegg,' said Mr Boffin, hugging his stick closer, 'I want to make a sort of offer to you. Do you remember when you first see me?'

The wooden Wegg looked at him with a meditative eye, and also with a softened air as descrying possibility of profit. 'Let me think. I ain't quite sure, and yet I generally take a powerful sight of notice, too. Was it on a Monday morning, when the butcher-boy had been to our house for orders, and bought a ballad of me, which, being unacquainted with the tune, I run it over to him?'

'Right, Wegg, right! But he bought more than one.'

'Yes, to be sure, sir; he bought several; and wishing to lay out his money to the best, he took my opinion to guide his choice, and we went over the collection together. To be sure we did. Here was him as it might be, and here was myself as it might be, and there was you, Mr Boffin, as you identically are, with your self-same stick under your very same arm, and your very same back towards us. To—be—sure!' added Mr Wegg, looking a little round Mr Boffin, to take him in the rear, and identify this last extraordinary coincidence, 'your wery self-same back!'

'What do you think I was doing, Wegg?'

'I should judge, sir, that you might be glancing your eye down the street.'

'No, Wegg. I was a listening.'

'Was you, indeed?' said Mr Wegg, dubiously.

'Not in a dishonourable way, Wegg, because you was singing to the butcher; and you wouldn't sing secrets to a butcher in the street, you know.'

'It never happened that I did so yet, to the best of my remembrance,' said Mr Wegg, cautiously. 'But I might do it. A man can't say what he might wish to do some day or another.' (This, not to release any little advantage he might derive from Mr Boffin's avowal.)

'Well,' repeated Boffin, 'I was a listening to you and to him. And what do you—you haven't got another stool, have you? I'm rather thick in my breath.'

'I haven't got another, but you're welcome to this,' said Wegg, resigning it. 'It's a treat to me to stand.'

'Lard!' exclaimed Mr Boffin, in a tone of great enjoyment, as he settled himself down, still nursing his stick like a baby, 'it's a pleasant place, this! And then to be shut in on each side, with these ballads, like so many book-leaf blinkers! Why, its delightful!'

'If I am not mistaken, sir,' Mr Wegg delicately hinted, resting a hand on his stall, and bending over the discursive Boffin, 'you alluded to some offer or another that was in your mind?'

'I'm coming to it! All right. I'm coming to it! I was going to say that when I listened that morning, I listened with hadmiration amounting to haw. I thought to myself, "Here's a man with a wooden leg—a literary man with —"'

'N—not exactly so, sir,' said Mr Wegg.

'Why, you know every one of these songs by name and by tune, and if you want to read or to sing any one on 'em off straight, you've only to whip on your spectacles and do it!' cried Mr Boffin. 'I see you at it!'

'Well, sir,' returned Mr Wegg, with a conscious inclination of the head; 'we'll say literary, then.'

'"A literary man—WITH a wooden leg—and all Print is open to him!" That's what I thought to myself, that morning,' pursued Mr Boffin, leaning forward to describe, uncramped by the clotheshorse, as large an arc as his right arm could make; '"all Print is open to him!" And it is, ain't it?'

'Why, truly, sir,' Mr Wegg admitted, with modesty; 'I believe you couldn't show me the piece of English print, that I wouldn't be equal to collaring and throwing.'

'On the spot?' said Mr Boffin.

'On the spot.'

'I know'd it! Then consider this. Here am I, a man without a wooden leg, and yet all print is shut to me.'

'Indeed, sir?' Mr Wegg returned with increasing self-complacency. 'Education neglected?'

'Neg—lected!' repeated Boffin, with emphasis. 'That ain't no word for it. I don't mean to say but what if you showed me a B, I could so far give you change for it, as to answer Boffin.'

'Come, come, sir,' said Mr Wegg, throwing in a little encouragement, 'that's something, too.'

'It's something,' answered Mr Boffin, 'but I'll take my oath it ain't much.'

'Perhaps it's not as much as could be wished by an inquiring mind, sir,' Mr Wegg admitted.

'Now, look here. I'm retired from business. Me and Mrs Boffin—Henerietty Boffin—which her father's name was Henery, and her mother's name was Hetty, and so you get it—we live on a compittance, under the will of a diseased governor.'

'Gentleman dead, sir?'

'Man alive, don't I tell you? A diseased governor? Now, it's too late for me to begin shovelling and sifting at alphabeds and grammar-books. I'm getting to be a old bird, and I want to take it easy. But I want some reading—some fine bold reading, some splendid book in a gorging Lord-Mayor's-Show of wollumes' (probably meaning gorgeous, but misled by association of ideas); 'as'll reach right down your pint of view, and take time to go by you. How can I get that reading, Wegg? By,' tapping him on the breast with the head of his thick stick, 'paying a man truly qualified to do it, so much an hour (say twopence) to come and do it.'

'Hem! Flattered, sir, I am sure,' said Wegg, beginning to regard himself in quite a new light. 'Hew! This is the offer you mentioned, sir?'

'Yes. Do you like it?'

'I am considering of it, Mr Boffin.'

'I don't,' said Boffin, in a free-handed manner, 'want to tie a literary man—WITH a wooden leg—down too tight. A halfpenny an hour shan't part us. The hours are your own to choose, after you've done for the day with your house here. I live over Maiden-Lane way—out Holloway direction—and you've only got to go East-and-by-North when you've finished here, and you're there. Twopence halfpenny an hour,' said Boffin, taking a piece of chalk from his pocket and getting off the stool to work the sum on the top of it in his own way; 'two long'uns and a short'un—twopence halfpenny; two short'uns is a long'un and two two long'uns is four long'uns—making five long'uns; six nights a week at five long'uns a night,' scoring them all down separately, 'and you mount up to thirty long'uns. A round'un! Half a crown!'

Pointing to this result as a large and satisfactory one, Mr Boffin smeared it out with his moistened glove, and sat down on the remains.

'Half a crown,' said Wegg, meditating. 'Yes. (It ain't much, sir.) Half a crown.'

'Per week, you know.'

'Per week. Yes. As to the amount of strain upon the intellect now. Was you thinking at all of poetry?' Mr Wegg inquired, musing.

'Would it come dearer?' Mr Boffin asked.

'It would come dearer,' Mr Wegg returned. 'For when a person comes to grind off poetry night after night, it is but right he should expect to be paid for its weakening effect on his mind.'

'To tell you the truth Wegg,' said Boffin, 'I wasn't thinking of poetry, except in so fur as this:—If you was to happen now and then to feel yourself in the mind to tip me and Mrs Boffin one of your ballads, why then we should drop into poetry.'

'I follow you, sir,' said Wegg. 'But not being a regular musical professional, I should be loath to engage myself for that; and therefore when I dropped into poetry, I should ask to be considered so fur, in the light of a friend.'

At this, Mr Boffin's eyes sparkled, and he shook Silas earnestly by the hand: protesting that it was more than he could have asked, and that he took it very kindly indeed.

'What do you think of the terms, Wegg?' Mr Boffin then demanded, with unconcealed anxiety.

Silas, who had stimulated this anxiety by his hard reserve of manner, and who had begun to understand his man very well, replied with an air; as if he were saying something extraordinarily generous and great:

'Mr Boffin, I never bargain.'

'So I should have thought of you!' said Mr Boffin, admiringly. 'No, sir. I never did 'aggle and I never will 'aggle. Consequently I meet you at once, free and fair, with—Done, for double the money!'

Mr Boffin seemed a little unprepared for this conclusion, but assented, with the remark, 'You know better what it ought to be than I do, Wegg,' and again shook hands with him upon it.

'Could you begin to night, Wegg?' he then demanded.

'Yes, sir,' said Mr Wegg, careful to leave all the eagerness to him. 'I see no difficulty if you wish it. You are provided with the needful implement—a book, sir?'

'Bought him at a sale,' said Mr Boffin. 'Eight wollumes. Red and gold. Purple ribbon in every wollume, to keep the place where you leave off. Do you know him?'

'The book's name, sir?' inquired Silas.

'I thought you might have know'd him without it,' said Mr Boffin slightly disappointed. 'His name is Decline-And-Fall-Off-The-Rooshan-Empire.' (Mr Boffin went over these stones slowly and with much caution.)

'Ay indeed!' said Mr Wegg, nodding his head with an air of friendly recognition.

'You know him, Wegg?'

'I haven't been not to say right slap through him, very lately,' Mr Wegg made answer, 'having been otherways employed, Mr Boffin. But know him? Old familiar declining and falling off the Rooshan? Rather, sir! Ever since I was not so high as your stick. Ever since my eldest brother left our cottage to enlist into the army. On which occasion, as the ballad that was made about it describes:

'Beside that cottage door, Mr Boffin,

A girl was on her knees;
She held aloft a snowy scarf, Sir,
Which (my eldest brother noticed) fluttered in the breeze.
She breathed a prayer for him, Mr Boffin;
A prayer he coold not hear.
And my eldest brother lean'd upon his sword, Mr Boffin,
And wiped away a tear.'

Much impressed by this family circumstance, and also by the friendly disposition of Mr Wegg, as exemplified in his so soon dropping into poetry, Mr Boffin again shook hands with that ligneous sharper, and besought him to name his hour. Mr Wegg named eight.

'Where I live,' said Mr Boffin, 'is called The Bower. Boffin's Bower is the name Mrs Boffin christened it when we come into it as a property. If you should meet with anybody that don't know it by that name (which hardly anybody does), when you've got nigh upon about a odd mile, or say and a quarter if you like, up Maiden Lane, Battle Bridge, ask for Harmony Jail, and you'll be put right. I shall expect you, Wegg,' said Mr Boffin, clapping him on the shoulder with the greatest enthusiasm, 'most joyfully. I shall have no peace or patience till you come. Print is now opening ahead of me. This night, a literary man—WITH a wooden leg—' he bestowed an admiring look upon that decoration, as if it greatly enhanced the relish of Mr Wegg's attainments—'will begin to lead me a new life! My fist again, Wegg. Morning, morning, morning!'

Left alone at his stall as the other ambled off, Mr Wegg subsided into his screen, produced a small pocket-handkerchief of a penitentially-scrubbing character, and took himself by the nose with a thoughtful aspect. Also, while he still grasped that feature, he directed several thoughtful looks down the street, after the retiring figure of Mr Boffin. But, profound gravity sat enthroned on Wegg's countenance. For, while he considered within himself that this was an old fellow of rare simplicity, that this was an opportunity to be improved, and that here might be money to be got beyond present calculation, still he compromised himself by no admission that his new engagement was at all out of his way, or involved the least element of the ridiculous. Mr Wegg would even have picked a handsome quarrel with any one who should have challenged his deep acquaintance with those aforesaid eight volumes of Decline and Fall. His gravity was unusual, portentous, and immeasurable, not because he admitted any doubt of himself but because he perceived it necessary to forestall any doubt of himself in others. And herein he ranged with that very numerous class of impostors, who are quite as determined to keep up appearances to themselves, as to their neighbours.

A certain loftiness, likewise, took possession of Mr Wegg; a condescending sense of being in request as an official expounder of mysteries. It did not move him to commercial greatness, but rather to littleness, insomuch that if it had been within the possibilities of things for the wooden measure to hold fewer nuts than usual, it would have done so that day. But, when night came, and with her veiled eyes beheld him stumping towards Boffin's Bower, he was elated too.

The Bower was as difficult to find, as Fair Rosamond's without the clue. Mr Wegg, having reached the quarter indicated, inquired for the Bower half a dozen times without the least success, until he remembered to ask for Harmony Jail. This occasioned a quick change in the spirits of a hoarse gentleman and a donkey, whom he had much perplexed.

'Why, yer mean Old Harmon's, do yer?' said the hoarse gentleman, who was driving his donkey in a truck, with a carrot for a whip. 'Why didn't yer niver say so? Eddard and me is a goin' by HIM! Jump in.'

Mr Wegg complied, and the hoarse gentleman invited his attention to the third person in company, thus;

'Now, you look at Eddard's ears. What was it as you named, agin? Whisper.'

Mr Wegg whispered, 'Boffin's Bower.'

'Eddard! (keep yer hi on his ears) cut away to Boffin's Bower!'

Edward, with his ears lying back, remained immoveable.

'Eddard! (keep yer hi on his ears) cut away to Old Harmon's.' Edward instantly pricked up his ears to their utmost, and rattled off at such a pace that Mr Wegg's conversation was jolted out of him in a most dislocated state.

'Was-it-Ev-verajail?' asked Mr Wegg, holding on.

'Not a proper jail, wot you and me would get committed to,' returned his escort; 'they giv' it the name, on accounts of Old Harmon living solitary there.'

'And-why-did-they-callitharm-Ony?' asked Wegg.

'On accounts of his never agreeing with nobody. Like a speeches of chaff. Harmon's Jail; Harmony Jail. Working it round like.'

'Doyouknow-Mist-Erboff-in?' asked Wegg.

'I should think so! Everybody do about here. Eddard knows him. (Keep yer hi on his ears.) Noddy Boffin, Eddard!'

The effect of the name was so very alarming, in respect of causing a temporary disappearance of Edward's head, casting his hind hoofs in the air, greatly accelerating the pace and increasing the jolting, that Mr Wegg was fain to devote his attention exclusively to holding on, and to relinquish his desire of ascertaining whether this homage to Boffin was to be considered complimentary or the reverse.

Presently, Edward stopped at a gateway, and Wegg discreetly lost no time in slipping out at the back of the truck. The moment he was landed, his late driver with a wave of the carrot, said 'Supper, Eddard!' and he, the hind hoofs, the truck, and Edward, all seemed to fly into the air together, in a kind of apotheosis.

Pushing the gate, which stood ajar, Wegg looked into an enclosed space where certain tall dark mounds rose high against the sky, and where the pathway to the Bower was indicated, as the moonlight showed, between two lines of broken crockery set in ashes. A white figure advancing along this path, proved to be nothing more ghostly than Mr Boffin, easily attired for the pursuit of knowledge, in an undress garment of short white smock-frock. Having received his literary friend with great cordiality, he conducted him to the interior of the Bower and there presented him to Mrs Boffin:—a stout lady of a rubicund and cheerful aspect, dressed (to Mr Wegg's consternation) in a low evening-dress of sable satin, and a large black velvet hat and feathers.

'Mrs Boffin, Wegg,' said Boffin, 'is a highflyer at Fashion. And her make is such, that she does it credit. As to myself I ain't yet as Fash'nable as I may come to be. Henerietty, old lady, this is the gentleman that's a going to decline and fall off the Rooshan Empire.'

'And I am sure I hope it'll do you both good,' said Mrs Boffin.

It was the queerest of rooms, fitted and furnished more like a luxurious amateur tap-room than anything else within the ken of Silas Wegg. There were two wooden settles by the fire, one on either side of it, with a corresponding table before each. On one of these tables, the eight volumes were ranged flat, in a row, like a galvanic battery; on the other, certain squat case-bottles of inviting appearance seemed to stand on tiptoe to exchange glances with Mr Wegg over a front row of tumblers and a basin of white sugar. On the hob, a kettle steamed; on the hearth, a cat reposed. Facing the fire between the settles, a sofa, a footstool, and a little table, formed a centrepiece devoted to Mrs Boffin. They were garish in taste and colour, but were expensive articles of drawing-room furniture that had a very odd look beside the settles and the flaring gaslight pendent from the ceiling. There was a flowery carpet on the floor; but, instead of reaching to the fireside, its glowing vegetation stopped short at Mrs Boffin's footstool, and gave place to a region of sand and sawdust. Mr Wegg also noticed, with admiring eyes, that, while the flowery land displayed such hollow ornamentation as stuffed birds and waxen fruits under glass-shades, there were, in the territory where vegetation ceased, compensatory shelves on which the best part of a large pie and likewise of a cold joint were plainly discernible among other solids. The room itself was large, though low; and the heavy frames of its old-fashioned windows, and the heavy beams in its crooked ceiling, seemed to indicate that it had once been a house of some mark standing alone in the country.

'Do you like it, Wegg?' asked Mr Boffin, in his pouncing manner.

'I admire it greatly, sir,' said Wegg. 'Peculiar comfort at this fireside, sir.'

'Do you understand it, Wegg?'

'Why, in a general way, sir,' Mr Wegg was beginning slowly and knowingly, with his head stuck on one side, as evasive people do begin, when the other cut him short:

'You DON'T understand it, Wegg, and I'll explain it. These arrangements is made by mutual consent between Mrs Boffin and me. Mrs Boffin, as I've mentioned, is a highflyer at Fashion; at present I'm not. I don't go higher than comfort, and comfort of the sort that I'm equal to the enjoyment of. Well then. Where would be the good of Mrs Boffin and me quarrelling over it? We never did quarrel, before we come into Boffin's Bower as a property; why quarrel when we HAVE come into Boffin's Bower as a property? So Mrs Boffin, she keeps up her part of the room, in her way; I keep up my part of the room in mine. In consequence of which we have at once, Sociability (I should go melancholy mad without Mrs Boffin), Fashion, and Comfort. If I get by degrees to be a higher-flyer at Fashion, then Mrs Boffin will by degrees come for'arder. If Mrs Boffin should ever be less of a dab at Fashion than she is at the present time, then Mrs Boffin's carpet would go back'arder. If we should both continny as we are, why then HERE we are, and give us a kiss, old lady.'

Mrs Boffin who, perpetually smiling, had approached and drawn her plump arm through her lord's, most willingly complied. Fashion, in the form of her black velvet hat and feathers, tried to prevent it; but got deservedly crushed in the endeavour.

'So now, Wegg,' said Mr Boffin, wiping his mouth with an air of much refreshment, 'you begin to know us as we are. This is a charming spot, is the Bower, but you must get to apprechiate it by degrees. It's a spot to find out the merits of; little by little, and a new'un every day. There's a serpentining walk up each of the mounds, that gives you the yard and neighbourhood changing every moment. When you get to the top, there's a view of the neighbouring premises, not to be surpassed. The premises of Mrs Boffin's late father (Canine Provision Trade), you look down into, as if they was your own. And the top of the High Mound is crowned with a lattice-work Arbour, in which, if you don't read out loud many a book in the summer, ay, and as a friend, drop many a time into poetry too, it shan't be my fault. Now, what'll you read on?'

'Thank you, sir,' returned Wegg, as if there were nothing new in his reading at all. 'I generally do it on gin and water.'

'Keeps the organ moist, does it, Wegg?' asked Mr Boffin, with innocent eagerness.

'N-no, sir,' replied Wegg, coolly, 'I should hardly describe it so, sir. I should say, mellers it. Mellers it, is the word I should employ, Mr Boffin.'

His wooden conceit and craft kept exact pace with the delighted expectation of his victim. The visions rising before his mercenary mind, of the many ways in which this connexion was to be turned to account, never obscured the foremost idea natural to a dull overreaching man, that he must not make himself too cheap.

Mrs Boffin's Fashion, as a less inexorable deity than the idol usually worshipped under that name, did not forbid her mixing for her literary guest, or asking if he found the result to his liking. On his returning a gracious answer and taking his place at the literary settle, Mr Boffin began to compose himself as a listener, at the opposite settle, with exultant eyes.

'Sorry to deprive you of a pipe, Wegg,' he said, filling his own, 'but you can't do both together. Oh! and another thing I forgot to name! When you come in here of an evening, and look round you, and notice anything on a shelf that happens to catch your fancy, mention it.'

Wegg, who had been going to put on his spectacles, immediately laid them down, with the sprightly observation:

'You read my thoughts, sir. DO my eyes deceive me, or is that object up there a—a pie? It can't be a pie.'

'Yes, it's a pie, Wegg,' replied Mr Boffin, with a glance of some little discomfiture at the Decline and Fall.

'HAVE I lost my smell for fruits, or is it a apple pie, sir?' asked Wegg.

'It's a veal and ham pie,' said Mr Boffin.

'Is it indeed, sir? And it would be hard, sir, to name the pie that is a better pie than a weal and hammer,' said Mr Wegg, nodding his head emotionally.

'Have some, Wegg?'

'Thank you, Mr Boffin, I think I will, at your invitation. I wouldn't at any other party's, at the present juncture; but at yours, sir!—And meaty jelly too, especially when a little salt, which is the case where there's ham, is mellering to the organ, is very mellering to the organ.' Mr Wegg did not say what organ, but spoke with a cheerful generality.

So, the pie was brought down, and the worthy Mr Boffin exercised his patience until Wegg, in the exercise of his knife and fork, had finished the dish: only profiting by the opportunity to inform Wegg that although it was not strictly Fashionable to keep the contents of a larder thus exposed to view, he (Mr Boffin) considered it hospitable; for the reason, that instead of saying, in a comparatively unmeaning manner, to a visitor, 'There are such and such edibles down stairs; will you have anything up?' you took the bold practical course of saying, 'Cast your eye along the shelves, and, if you see anything you like there, have it down.'

And now, Mr Wegg at length pushed away his plate and put on his spectacles, and Mr Boffin lighted his pipe and looked with beaming eyes into the opening world before him, and Mrs Boffin reclined in a fashionable manner on her sofa: as one who would be part of the audience if she found she could, and would go to sleep if she found she couldn't.

'Hem!' began Wegg, 'This, Mr Boffin and Lady, is the first chapter of the first wollume of the Decline and Fall off—' here he looked hard at the book, and stopped.

'What's the matter, Wegg?'

'Why, it comes into my mind, do you know, sir,' said Wegg with an air of insinuating frankness (having first again looked hard at the book), 'that you made a little mistake this morning, which I had meant to set you right in, only something put it out of my head. I think you said Rooshan Empire, sir?'

'It is Rooshan; ain't it, Wegg?'

'No, sir. Roman. Roman.'

'What's the difference, Wegg?'

'The difference, sir?' Mr Wegg was faltering and in danger of breaking down, when a bright thought flashed upon him. 'The difference, sir? There you place me in a difficulty, Mr Boffin. Suffice it to observe, that the difference is best postponed to some other occasion when Mrs Boffin does not honour us with her company. In Mrs Boffin's presence, sir, we had better drop it.'

Mr Wegg thus came out of his disadvantage with quite a chivalrous air, and not only that, but by dint of repeating with a manly delicacy, 'In Mrs Boffin's presence, sir, we had better drop it!' turned the disadvantage on Boffin, who felt that he had committed himself in a very painful manner.

Then, Mr Wegg, in a dry unflinching way, entered on his task; going straight across country at everything that came before him; taking all the hard words, biographical and geographical; getting rather shaken by Hadrian, Trajan, and the Antonines; stumbling at Polybius (pronounced Polly Beeious, and supposed by Mr Boffin to be a Roman virgin, and by Mrs Boffin to be responsible for that necessity of dropping it); heavily unseated by Titus Antoninus Pius; up again and galloping smoothly with Augustus; finally, getting over the ground well with Commodus: who, under the appellation of Commodious, was held by Mr Boffin to have been quite unworthy of his English origin, and 'not to have acted up to his name' in his government of the Roman people. With the death of this personage, Mr Wegg terminated his first reading; long before which consummation several total eclipses of Mrs Boffin's candle behind her black velvet disc, would have been very alarming, but for being regularly accompanied by a potent smell of burnt pens when her feathers took fire, which acted as a restorative and woke her. Mr Wegg, having read on by rote and attached as few ideas as possible to the text, came out of the encounter fresh; but, Mr Boffin, who had soon laid down his unfinished pipe, and had ever since sat intently staring with his eyes and mind at the confounding enormities of the Romans, was so severely punished that he could hardly wish his literary friend Good-night, and articulate 'Tomorrow.'

'Commodious,' gasped Mr Boffin, staring at the moon, after letting Wegg out at the gate and fastening it: 'Commodious fights in that wild-beast-show, seven hundred and thirty-five times, in one character only! As if that wasn't stunning enough, a hundred lions is turned into the same wild-beast-show all at once! As if that wasn't stunning enough, Commodious, in another character, kills 'em all off in a hundred goes! As if that wasn't stunning enough, Vittle-us (and well named too) eats six millions' worth, English money, in seven months! Wegg takes it easy, but upon-my-soul to a old bird like myself these are scarers. And even now that Commodious is strangled, I don't see a way to our bettering ourselves.' Mr Boffin added as he turned his pensive steps towards the Bower and shook his head, 'I didn't think this morning there was half so many Scarers in Print. But I'm in for it now!'

Chapter 6

CUT ADRIFT

The Six Jolly Fellowship Porters, already mentioned as a tavern of a dropsical appearance, had long settled down into a state of hale infirmity. In its whole constitution it had not a straight floor, and hardly a straight line; but it had outlasted, and clearly would yet outlast, many a better-trimmed building, many a sprucer public-house. Externally, it was a narrow lopsided wooden jumble of corpulent windows heaped one upon another as you might heap as many toppling oranges, with a crazy wooden verandah impending over the water; indeed the whole house, inclusive of the complaining flag-staff on the roof, impended over the water, but seemed to have got into the condition of a faint-hearted diver who has paused so long on the brink that he will never go in at all.

This description applies to the river-frontage of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters. The back of the establishment, though the chief entrance was there, so contracted that it merely represented in its connexion with the front, the handle of a flat iron set upright on its broadest end. This handle stood at the bottom of a wilderness of court and alley: which wilderness pressed so hard and close upon the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters as to leave the hostelry not an inch of ground beyond its door. For this reason, in combination with the fact that the house was all but afloat at high water, when the Porters had a family wash the linen subjected to that operation might usually be seen drying on lines stretched across the reception-rooms and bed-chambers.

The wood forming the chimney-pieces, beams, partitions, floors and doors, of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters, seemed in its old age fraught with confused memories of its youth. In many places it had become gnarled and riven, according to the manner of old trees; knots started out of it; and here and there it seemed to twist itself into some likeness of boughs. In this state of second childhood, it had an air of being in its own way garrulous about its early life. Not without reason was it often asserted by the regular frequenters of the Porters, that when the light shone full upon the grain of certain panels, and particularly upon an old corner cupboard of walnut-wood in the bar, you might trace little forests there, and tiny trees like the parent tree, in full umbrageous leaf.

The bar of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters was a bar to soften the human breast. The available space in it was not much larger than a hackney-coach; but no one could have wished the bar bigger, that space was so girt in by corpulent little casks, and by cordial-bottles radiant with fictitious grapes in bunches, and by lemons in nets, and by biscuits in baskets, and by the polite beer-pulls that made low bows when customers were served with beer, and by the cheese in a snug corner, and by the landlady's own small table in a snugger corner near the fire, with the cloth everlastingly laid. This haven was divided from the rough world by a glass partition and a half-door, with a leaden sill upon it for the convenience of resting your liquor; but, over this half-door the bar's snugness so gushed forth that, albeit customers drank there standing, in a dark and draughty passage where they were shouldered by other customers passing in and out, they always appeared to drink under an enchanting delusion that they were in the bar itself.

For the rest, both the tap and parlour of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters gave upon the river, and had red curtains matching the noses of the regular customers, and were provided with comfortable fireside tin utensils, like models of sugar-loaf hats, made in that shape that they might, with their pointed ends, seek out for themselves glowing nooks in the depths of the red coals, when they mulled your ale, or heated for you those delectable drinks, Purl, Flip, and Dog's Nose. The first of these humming compounds was a speciality of the Porters, which, through an inscription on its door-posts, gently appealed to your feelings as, 'The Early Purl House'. For, it would seem that Purl must always be taken early; though whether for any more distinctly stomachic reason than that, as the early bird catches the worm, so the early purl catches the customer, cannot here be resolved. It only remains to add that in the handle of the flat iron, and opposite the bar, was a very little room like a three-cornered hat, into which no direct ray of sun, moon, or star, ever penetrated, but which was superstitiously regarded as a sanctuary replete with comfort and retirement by gaslight, and on the door of which was therefore painted its alluring name: Cosy.

Miss Potterson, sole proprietor and manager of the Fellowship Porters, reigned supreme on her throne, the Bar, and a man must have drunk himself mad drunk indeed if he thought he could contest a point with her. Being known on her own authority as Miss Abbey Potterson, some water-side heads, which (like the water) were none of the clearest, harboured muddled notions that, because of her dignity and firmness, she was named after, or in some sort related to, the Abbey at Westminster. But, Abbey was only short for Abigail, by which name Miss Potterson had been christened at Limehouse Church, some sixty and odd years before.

'Now, you mind, you Riderhood,' said Miss Abbey Potterson, with emphatic forefinger over the half-door, 'the Fellowship don't want you at all, and would rather by far have your room than your company; but if you were as welcome here as you are not, you shouldn't even then have another drop of drink here this night, after this present pint of beer. So make the most of it.'

'But you know, Miss Potterson,' this was suggested very meekly though, 'if I behave myself, you can't help serving me, miss.'

'CAN'T I!' said Abbey, with infinite expression.

'No, Miss Potterson; because, you see, the law—'

'I am the law here, my man,' returned Miss Abbey, 'and I'll soon convince you of that, if you doubt it at all.'

'I never said I did doubt it at all, Miss Abbey.'

'So much the better for you.'

Abbey the supreme threw the customer's halfpence into the till, and, seating herself in her fireside-chair, resumed the newspaper she had been reading. She was a tall, upright, well-favoured woman, though severe of countenance, and had more of the air of a schoolmistress than mistress of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters. The man on the other side of the half-door, was a waterside-man with a squinting leer, and he eyed her as if he were one of her pupils in disgrace.

'You're cruel hard upon me, Miss Potterson.'

Miss Potterson read her newspaper with contracted brows, and took no notice until he whispered:

'Miss Potterson! Ma'am! Might I have half a word with you?'

Deigning then to turn her eyes sideways towards the suppliant, Miss Potterson beheld him knuckling his low forehead, and ducking at her with his head, as if he were asking leave to fling himself head foremost over the half-door and alight on his feet in the bar.

'Well?' said Miss Potterson, with a manner as short as she herself was long, 'say your half word. Bring it out.'

'Miss Potterson! Ma'am! Would you 'sxcuse me taking the liberty of asking, is it my character that you take objections to?'

'Certainly,' said Miss Potterson.

'Is it that you're afraid of—'

'I am not afraid OF YOU,' interposed Miss Potterson, 'if you mean that.'

'But I humbly don't mean that, Miss Abbey.'

'Then what do you mean?'

'You really are so cruel hard upon me! What I was going to make inquiries was no more than, might you have any apprehensions—leastways beliefs or suppositions—that the company's property mightn't be altogether to be considered safe, if I used the house too regular?'

'What do you want to know for?'

'Well, Miss Abbey, respectfully meaning no offence to you, it would be some satisfaction to a man's mind, to understand why the Fellowship Porters is not to be free to such as me, and is to be free to such as Gaffer.'

The face of the hostess darkened with some shadow of perplexity, as she replied: 'Gaffer has never been where you have been.'

'Signifying in Quod, Miss? Perhaps not. But he may have merited it. He may be suspected of far worse than ever I was.'

'Who suspects him?'

'Many, perhaps. One, beyond all doubts. I do.'

'YOU are not much,' said Miss Abbey Potterson, knitting her brows again with disdain.

'But I was his pardner. Mind you, Miss Abbey, I was his pardner. As such I know more of the ins and outs of him than any person living does. Notice this! I am the man that was his pardner, and I am the man that suspects him.'

'Then,' suggested Miss Abbey, though with a deeper shade of perplexity than before, 'you criminate yourself.'

'No I don't, Miss Abbey. For how does it stand? It stands this way. When I was his pardner, I couldn't never give him satisfaction. Why couldn't I never give him satisfaction? Because my luck was bad; because I couldn't find many enough of 'em. How was his luck? Always good. Notice this! Always good! Ah! There's a many games, Miss Abbey, in which there's chance, but there's a many others in which there's skill too, mixed along with it.'

'That Gaffer has a skill in finding what he finds, who doubts, man?' asked Miss Abbey.

'A skill in purwiding what he finds, perhaps,' said Riderhood, shaking his evil head.

Miss Abbey knitted her brow at him, as he darkly leered at her. 'If you're out upon the river pretty nigh every tide, and if you want to find a man or woman in the river, you'll greatly help your luck, Miss Abbey, by knocking a man or woman on the head aforehand and pitching 'em in.'

'Gracious Lud!' was the involuntary exclamation of Miss Potterson.

'Mind you!' returned the other, stretching forward over the half door to throw his words into the bar; for his voice was as if the head of his boat's mop were down his throat; 'I say so, Miss Abbey! And mind you! I'll follow him up, Miss Abbey! And mind you! I'll bring him to hook at last, if it's twenty year hence, I will! Who's he, to be favoured along of his daughter? Ain't I got a daughter of my own!'

With that flourish, and seeming to have talked himself rather more drunk and much more ferocious than he had begun by being, Mr Riderhood took up his pint pot and swaggered off to the taproom.

Gaffer was not there, but a pretty strong muster of Miss Abbey's pupils were, who exhibited, when occasion required, the greatest docility. On the clock's striking ten, and Miss Abbey's appearing at the door, and addressing a certain person in a faded scarlet jacket, with 'George Jones, your time's up! I told your wife you should be punctual,' Jones submissively rose, gave the company good-night, and retired. At half-past ten, on Miss Abbey's looking in again, and saying, 'William Williams, Bob Glamour, and Jonathan, you are all due,' Williams, Bob, and Jonathan with similar meekness took their leave and evaporated. Greater wonder than these, when a bottle-nosed person in a glazed hat had after some considerable hesitation ordered another glass of gin and water of the attendant potboy, and when Miss Abbey, instead of sending it, appeared in person, saying, 'Captain Joey, you have had as much as will do you good,' not only did the captain feebly rub his knees and contemplate the fire without offering a word of protest, but the rest of the company murmured, 'Ay, ay, Captain! Miss Abbey's right; you be guided by Miss Abbey, Captain.' Nor, was Miss Abbey's vigilance in anywise abated by this submission, but rather sharpened; for, looking round on the deferential faces of her school, and descrying two other young persons in need of admonition, she thus bestowed it: 'Tom Tootle, it's time for a young fellow who's going to be married next month, to be at home and asleep. And you needn't nudge him, Mr Jack Mullins, for I know your work begins early tomorrow, and I say the same to you. So come! Good-night, like good lads!' Upon which, the blushing Tootle looked to Mullins, and the blushing Mullins looked to Tootle, on the question who should rise first, and finally both rose together and went out on the broad grin, followed by Miss Abbey; in whose presence the company did not take the liberty of grinning likewise.

In such an establishment, the white-aproned pot-boy with his shirt-sleeves arranged in a tight roll on each bare shoulder, was a mere hint of the possibility of physical force, thrown out as a matter of state and form. Exactly at the closing hour, all the guests who were left, filed out in the best order: Miss Abbey standing at the half door of the bar, to hold a ceremony of review and dismissal. All wished Miss Abbey good-night and Miss Abbey wished good-night to all, except Riderhood. The sapient pot-boy, looking on officially, then had the conviction borne in upon his soul, that the man was evermore outcast and excommunicate from the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters.

'You Bob Gliddery,' said Miss Abbey to this pot-boy, 'run round to Hexam's and tell his daughter Lizzie that I want to speak to her.'

With exemplary swiftness Bob Gliddery departed, and returned. Lizzie, following him, arrived as one of the two female domestics of the Fellowship Porters arranged on the snug little table by the bar fire, Miss Potterson's supper of hot sausages and mashed potatoes.

'Come in and sit ye down, girl,' said Miss Abbey. 'Can you eat a bit?'

'No thank you, Miss. I have had my supper.'

'I have had mine too, I think,' said Miss Abbey, pushing away the untasted dish, 'and more than enough of it. I am put out, Lizzie.'

'I am very sorry for it, Miss.'

'Then why, in the name of Goodness,' quoth Miss Abbey, sharply, 'do you do it?'

'I do it, Miss!'

'There, there. Don't look astonished. I ought to have begun with a word of explanation, but it's my way to make short cuts at things. I always was a pepperer. You Bob Gliddery there, put the chain upon the door and get ye down to your supper.'

With an alacrity that seemed no less referable to the pepperer fact than to the supper fact, Bob obeyed, and his boots were heard descending towards the bed of the river.

'Lizzie Hexam, Lizzie Hexam,' then began Miss Potterson, 'how often have I held out to you the opportunity of getting clear of your father, and doing well?'

'Very often, Miss.'

'Very often? Yes! And I might as well have spoken to the iron funnel of the strongest sea-going steamer that passes the Fellowship Porters.'

'No, Miss,' Lizzie pleaded; 'because that would not be thankful, and I am.'

'I vow and declare I am half ashamed of myself for taking such an interest in you,' said Miss Abbey, pettishly, 'for I don't believe I should do it if you were not good-looking. Why ain't you ugly?'

Lizzie merely answered this difficult question with an apologetic glance.

'However, you ain't,' resumed Miss Potterson, 'so it's no use going into that. I must take you as I find you. Which indeed is what I've done. And you mean to say you are still obstinate?'

'Not obstinate, Miss, I hope.'

'Firm (I suppose you call it) then?'

'Yes, Miss. Fixed like.'

'Never was an obstinate person yet, who would own to the word!' remarked Miss Potterson, rubbing her vexed nose; 'I'm sure I would, if I was obstinate; but I am a pepperer, which is different. Lizzie Hexam, Lizzie Hexam, think again. Do you know the worst of your father?'

'Do I know the worst of father!' she repeated, opening her eyes. 'Do you know the suspicions to which your father makes himself liable? Do you know the suspicions that are actually about, against him?'

The consciousness of what he habitually did, oppressed the girl heavily, and she slowly cast down her eyes.

'Say, Lizzie. Do you know?' urged Miss Abbey.

'Please to tell me what the suspicions are, Miss,' she asked after a silence, with her eyes upon the ground.

'It's not an easy thing to tell a daughter, but it must be told. It is thought by some, then, that your father helps to their death a few of those that he finds dead.'

The relief of hearing what she felt sure was a false suspicion, in place of the expected real and true one, so lightened Lizzie's breast for the moment, that Miss Abbey was amazed at her demeanour. She raised her eyes quickly, shook her head, and, in a kind of triumph, almost laughed.

'They little know father who talk like that!'

('She takes it,' thought Miss Abbey, 'very quietly. She takes it with extraordinary quietness!')

'And perhaps,' said Lizzie, as a recollection flashed upon her, 'it is some one who has a grudge against father; some one who has threatened father! Is it Riderhood, Miss?'

'Well; yes it is.'

'Yes! He was father's partner, and father broke with him, and now he revenges himself. Father broke with him when I was by, and he was very angry at it. And besides, Miss Abbey!—Will you never, without strong reason, let pass your lips what I am going to say?'

She bent forward to say it in a whisper.

'I promise,' said Miss Abbey.

'It was on the night when the Harmon murder was found out, through father, just above bridge. And just below bridge, as we were sculling home, Riderhood crept out of the dark in his boat. And many and many times afterwards, when such great pains were taken to come to the bottom of the crime, and it never could be come near, I thought in my own thoughts, could Riderhood himself have done the murder, and did he purposely let father find the body? It seemed a'most wicked and cruel to so much as think such a thing; but now that he tries to throw it upon father, I go back to it as if it was a truth. Can it be a truth? That was put into my mind by the dead?'

She asked this question, rather of the fire than of the hostess of the Fellowship Porters, and looked round the little bar with troubled eyes.

But, Miss Potterson, as a ready schoolmistress accustomed to bring her pupils to book, set the matter in a light that was essentially of this world.

'You poor deluded girl,' she said, 'don't you see that you can't open your mind to particular suspicions of one of the two, without opening your mind to general suspicions of the other? They had worked together. Their goings-on had been going on for some time. Even granting that it was as you have had in your thoughts, what the two had done together would come familiar to the mind of one.'

'You don't know father, Miss, when you talk like that. Indeed, indeed, you don't know father.'

'Lizzie, Lizzie,' said Miss Potterson. 'Leave him. You needn't break with him altogether, but leave him. Do well away from him; not because of what I have told you to-night—we'll pass no judgment upon that, and we'll hope it may not be—but because of what I have urged on you before. No matter whether it's owing to your good looks or not, I like you and I want to serve you. Lizzie, come under my direction. Don't fling yourself away, my girl, but be persuaded into being respectable and happy.'

In the sound good feeling and good sense of her entreaty, Miss Abbey had softened into a soothing tone, and had even drawn her arm round the girl's waist. But, she only replied, 'Thank you, thank you! I can't. I won't. I must not think of it. The harder father is borne upon, the more he needs me to lean on.'

And then Miss Abbey, who, like all hard people when they do soften, felt that there was considerable compensation owing to her, underwent reaction and became frigid.

'I have done what I can,' she said, 'and you must go your way. You make your bed, and you must lie on it. But tell your father one thing: he must not come here any more.

'Oh, Miss, will you forbid him the house where I know he's safe?'

'The Fellowships,' returned Miss Abbey, 'has itself to look to, as well as others. It has been hard work to establish order here, and make the Fellowships what it is, and it is daily and nightly hard work to keep it so. The Fellowships must not have a taint upon it that may give it a bad name. I forbid the house to Riderhood, and I forbid the house to Gaffer. I forbid both, equally. I find from Riderhood and you together, that there are suspicions against both men, and I'm not going to take upon myself to decide betwixt them. They are both tarred with a dirty brush, and I can't have the Fellowships tarred with the same brush. That's all I know.'

'Good-night, Miss!' said Lizzie Hexam, sorrowfully.

'Hah!—Good-night!' returned Miss Abbey with a shake of her head.

'Believe me, Miss Abbey, I am truly grateful all the same.'

'I can believe a good deal,' returned the stately Abbey, 'so I'll try to believe that too, Lizzie.'

No supper did Miss Potterson take that night, and only half her usual tumbler of hot Port Negus. And the female domestics—two robust sisters, with staring black eyes, shining flat red faces, blunt noses, and strong black curls, like dolls—interchanged the sentiment that Missis had had her hair combed the wrong way by somebody. And the pot-boy afterwards remarked, that he hadn't been 'so rattled to bed', since his late mother had systematically accelerated his retirement to rest with a poker.

The chaining of the door behind her, as she went forth, disenchanted Lizzie Hexam of that first relief she had felt. The night was black and shrill, the river-side wilderness was melancholy, and there was a sound of casting-out, in the rattling of the iron-links, and the grating of the bolts and staples under Miss Abbey's hand. As she came beneath the lowering sky, a sense of being involved in a murky shade of Murder dropped upon her; and, as the tidal swell of the river broke at her feet without her seeing how it gathered, so, her thoughts startled her by rushing out of an unseen void and striking at her heart.

Of her father's being groundlessly suspected, she felt sure. Sure. Sure. And yet, repeat the word inwardly as often as she would, the attempt to reason out and prove that she was sure, always came after it and failed. Riderhood had done the deed, and entrapped her father. Riderhood had not done the deed, but had resolved in his malice to turn against her father, the appearances that were ready to his hand to distort. Equally and swiftly upon either putting of the case, followed the frightful possibility that her father, being innocent, yet might come to be believed guilty. She had heard of people suffering Death for bloodshed of which they were afterwards proved pure, and those ill-fated persons were not, first, in that dangerous wrong in which her father stood. Then at the best, the beginning of his being set apart, whispered against, and avoided, was a certain fact. It dated from that very night. And as the great black river with its dreary shores was soon lost to her view in the gloom, so, she stood on the river's brink unable to see into the vast blank misery of a life suspected, and fallen away from by good and bad, but knowing that it lay there dim before her, stretching away to the great ocean, Death.

One thing only, was clear to the girl's mind. Accustomed from her very babyhood promptly to do the thing that could be done—whether to keep out weather, to ward off cold, to postpone hunger, or what not—she started out of her meditation, and ran home.

The room was quiet, and the lamp burnt on the table. In the bunk in the corner, her brother lay asleep. She bent over him softly, kissed him, and came to the table.

'By the time of Miss Abbey's closing, and by the run of the tide, it must be one. Tide's running up. Father at Chiswick, wouldn't think of coming down, till after the turn, and that's at half after four. I'll call Charley at six. I shall hear the church-clocks strike, as I sit here.'

Very quietly, she placed a chair before the scanty fire, and sat down in it, drawing her shawl about her.

'Charley's hollow down by the flare is not there now. Poor Charley!'

The clock struck two, and the clock struck three, and the clock struck four, and she remained there, with a woman's patience and her own purpose. When the morning was well on between four and five, she slipped off her shoes (that her going about, might not wake Charley), trimmed the fire sparingly, put water on to boil, and set the table for breakfast. Then she went up the ladder, lamp in hand, and came down again, and glided about and about, making a little bundle. Lastly, from her pocket, and from the chimney-piece, and from an inverted basin on the highest shelf she brought halfpence, a few sixpences, fewer shillings, and fell to laboriously and noiselessly counting them, and setting aside one little heap. She was still so engaged, when she was startled by:

'Hal-loa!' From her brother, sitting up in bed.

'You made me jump, Charley.'

'Jump! Didn't you make ME jump, when I opened my eyes a moment ago, and saw you sitting there, like the ghost of a girl miser, in the dead of the night.'

'It's not the dead of the night, Charley. It's nigh six in the morning.'

'Is it though? But what are you up to, Liz?'

'Still telling your fortune, Charley.'

'It seems to be a precious small one, if that's it,' said the boy. 'What are you putting that little pile of money by itself for?'

'For you, Charley.'

'What do you mean?'

'Get out of bed, Charley, and get washed and dressed, and then I'll tell you.'

Her composed manner, and her low distinct voice, always had an influence over him. His head was soon in a basin of water, and out of it again, and staring at her through a storm of towelling.

'I never,' towelling at himself as if he were his bitterest enemy, 'saw such a girl as you are. What IS the move, Liz?'

'Are you almost ready for breakfast, Charley?'

'You can pour it out. Hal-loa! I say? And a bundle?'

'And a bundle, Charley.'

'You don't mean it's for me, too?'

'Yes, Charley; I do; indeed.'

More serious of face, and more slow of action, than he had been, the boy completed his dressing, and came and sat down at the little breakfast-table, with his eyes amazedly directed to her face.

'You see, Charley dear, I have made up my mind that this is the right time for your going away from us. Over and above all the blessed change of by-and-bye, you'll be much happier, and do much better, even so soon as next month. Even so soon as next week.'

'How do you know I shall?'

'I don't quite know how, Charley, but I do.' In spite of her unchanged manner of speaking, and her unchanged appearance of composure, she scarcely trusted herself to look at him, but kept her eyes employed on the cutting and buttering of his bread, and on the mixing of his tea, and other such little preparations. 'You must leave father to me, Charley—I will do what I can with him—but you must go.'

'You don't stand upon ceremony, I think,' grumbled the boy, throwing his bread and butter about, in an ill-humour.

She made him no answer.

'I tell you what,' said the boy, then, bursting out into an angry whimpering, 'you're a selfish jade, and you think there's not enough for three of us, and you want to get rid of me.'

'If you believe so, Charley,—yes, then I believe too, that I am a selfish jade, and that I think there's not enough for three of us, and that I want to get rid of you.'

It was only when the boy rushed at her, and threw his arms round her neck, that she lost her self-restraint. But she lost it then, and wept over him.

'Don't cry, don't cry! I am satisfied to go, Liz; I am satisfied to go. I know you send me away for my good.'

'O, Charley, Charley, Heaven above us knows I do!'

'Yes yes. Don't mind what I said. Don't remember it. Kiss me.'

After a silence, she loosed him, to dry her eyes and regain her strong quiet influence.

'Now listen, Charley dear. We both know it must be done, and I alone know there is good reason for its being done at once. Go straight to the school, and say that you and I agreed upon it—that we can't overcome father's opposition—that father will never trouble them, but will never take you back. You are a credit to the school, and you will be a greater credit to it yet, and they will help you to get a living. Show what clothes you have brought, and what money, and say that I will send some more money. If I can get some in no other way, I will ask a little help of those two gentlemen who came here that night.'

'I say!' cried her brother, quickly. 'Don't you have it of that chap that took hold of me by the chin! Don't you have it of that Wrayburn one!'

Perhaps a slight additional tinge of red flushed up into her face and brow, as with a nod she laid a hand upon his lips to keep him silently attentive.

'And above all things mind this, Charley! Be sure you always speak well of father. Be sure you always give father his full due. You can't deny that because father has no learning himself he is set against it in you; but favour nothing else against him, and be sure you say—as you know—that your sister is devoted to him. And if you should ever happen to hear anything said against father that is new to you, it will not be true. Remember, Charley! It will not be true.'

The boy looked at her with some doubt and surprise, but she went on again without heeding it.

'Above all things remember! It will not be true. I have nothing more to say, Charley dear, except, be good, and get learning, and only think of some things in the old life here, as if you had dreamed them in a dream last night. Good-bye, my Darling!'

Though so young, she infused in these parting words a love that was far more like a mother's than a sister's, and before which the boy was quite bowed down. After holding her to his breast with a passionate cry, he took up his bundle and darted out at the door, with an arm across his eyes.

The white face of the winter day came sluggishly on, veiled in a frosty mist; and the shadowy ships in the river slowly changed to black substances; and the sun, blood-red on the eastern marshes behind dark masts and yards, seemed filled with the ruins of a forest it had set on fire.

Lizzie, looking for her father, saw him coming, and stood upon the causeway that he might see her.

He had nothing with him but his boat, and came on apace. A knot of those amphibious human-creatures who appear to have some mysterious power of extracting a subsistence out of tidal water by looking at it, were gathered together about the causeway. As her father's boat grounded, they became contemplative of the mud, and dispersed themselves. She saw that the mute avoidance had begun.

Gaffer saw it, too, in so far as that he was moved when he set foot on shore, to stare around him. But, he promptly set to work to haul up his boat, and make her fast, and take the sculls and rudder and rope out of her. Carrying these with Lizzie's aid, he passed up to his dwelling.

'Sit close to the fire, father, dear, while I cook your breakfast. It's all ready for cooking, and only been waiting for you. You must be frozen.'

'Well, Lizzie, I ain't of a glow; that's certain. And my hands seem nailed through to the sculls. See how dead they are!' Something suggestive in their colour, and perhaps in her face, struck him as he held them up; he turned his shoulder and held them down to the fire.

'You were not out in the perishing night, I hope, father?'

'No, my dear. Lay aboard a barge, by a blazing coal-fire.—Where's that boy?'

'There's a drop of brandy for your tea, father, if you'll put it in while I turn this bit of meat. If the river was to get frozen, there would be a deal of distress; wouldn't there, father?'

'Ah! there's always enough of that,' said Gaffer, dropping the liquor into his cup from a squat black bottle, and dropping it slowly that it might seem more; 'distress is for ever a going about, like sut in the air—Ain't that boy up yet?'

'The meat's ready now, father. Eat it while it's hot and comfortable. After you have finished, we'll turn round to the fire and talk.'

But, he perceived that he was evaded, and, having thrown a hasty angry glance towards the bunk, plucked at a corner of her apron and asked:

'What's gone with that boy?'

'Father, if you'll begin your breakfast, I'll sit by and tell you.' He looked at her, stirred his tea and took two or three gulps, then cut at his piece of hot steak with his case-knife, and said, eating:

'Now then. What's gone with that boy?'

'Don't be angry, dear. It seems, father, that he has quite a gift of learning.'

'Unnat'ral young beggar!' said the parent, shaking his knife in the air.

'And that having this gift, and not being equally good at other things, he has made shift to get some schooling.'

'Unnat'ral young beggar!' said the parent again, with his former action.

'—And that knowing you have nothing to spare, father, and not wishing to be a burden on you, he gradually made up his mind to go seek his fortune out of learning. He went away this morning, father, and he cried very much at going, and he hoped you would forgive him.'

'Let him never come a nigh me to ask me my forgiveness,' said the father, again emphasizing his words with the knife. 'Let him never come within sight of my eyes, nor yet within reach of my arm. His own father ain't good enough for him. He's disowned his own father. His own father therefore, disowns him for ever and ever, as a unnat'ral young beggar.'

He had pushed away his plate. With the natural need of a strong rough man in anger, to do something forcible, he now clutched his knife overhand, and struck downward with it at the end of every succeeding sentence. As he would have struck with his own clenched fist if there had chanced to be nothing in it.

'He's welcome to go. He's more welcome to go than to stay. But let him never come back. Let him never put his head inside that door. And let you never speak a word more in his favour, or you'll disown your own father, likewise, and what your father says of him he'll have to come to say of you. Now I see why them men yonder held aloof from me. They says to one another, "Here comes the man as ain't good enough for his own son!" Lizzie—!'

But, she stopped him with a cry. Looking at her he saw her, with a face quite strange to him, shrinking back against the wall, with her hands before her eyes.

'Father, don't! I can't bear to see you striking with it. Put it down!'

He looked at the knife; but in his astonishment still held it.

'Father, it's too horrible. O put it down, put it down!'

Confounded by her appearance and exclamation, he tossed it away, and stood up with his open hands held out before him.

'What's come to you, Liz? Can you think I would strike at you with a knife?'

'No, father, no; you would never hurt me.'

'What should I hurt?'

'Nothing, dear father. On my knees, I am certain, in my heart and soul I am certain, nothing! But it was too dreadful to bear; for it looked—' her hands covering her face again, 'O it looked—'

'What did it look like?'

The recollection of his murderous figure, combining with her trial of last night, and her trial of the morning, caused her to drop at his feet, without having answered.

He had never seen her so before. He raised her with the utmost tenderness, calling her the best of daughters, and 'my poor pretty creetur', and laid her head upon his knee, and tried to restore her. But failing, he laid her head gently down again, got a pillow and placed it under her dark hair, and sought on the table for a spoonful of brandy. There being none left, he hurriedly caught up the empty bottle, and ran out at the door.

He returned as hurriedly as he had gone, with the bottle still empty. He kneeled down by her, took her head on his arm, and moistened her lips with a little water into which he dipped his fingers: saying, fiercely, as he looked around, now over this shoulder, now over that:

'Have we got a pest in the house? Is there summ'at deadly sticking to my clothes? What's let loose upon us? Who loosed it?'

Chapter 7

MR WEGG LOOKS AFTER HIMSELF

Silas Wegg, being on his road to the Roman Empire, approaches it by way of Clerkenwell. The time is early in the evening; the weather moist and raw. Mr Wegg finds leisure to make a little circuit, by reason that he folds his screen early, now that he combines another source of income with it, and also that he feels it due to himself to be anxiously expected at the Bower. 'Boffin will get all the eagerer for waiting a bit,' says Silas, screwing up, as he stumps along, first his right eye, and then his left. Which is something superfluous in him, for Nature has already screwed both pretty tight.

'If I get on with him as I expect to get on,' Silas pursues, stumping and meditating, 'it wouldn't become me to leave it here. It wouldn't he respectable.' Animated by this reflection, he stumps faster, and looks a long way before him, as a man with an ambitious project in abeyance often will do.

Aware of a working-jeweller population taking sanctuary about the church in Clerkenwell, Mr Wegg is conscious of an interest in, and a respect for, the neighbourhood. But, his sensations in this regard halt as to their strict morality, as he halts in his gait; for, they suggest the delights of a coat of invisibility in which to walk off safely with the precious stones and watch-cases, but stop short of any compunction for the people who would lose the same.

Not, however, towards the 'shops' where cunning artificers work in pearls and diamonds and gold and silver, making their hands so rich, that the enriched water in which they wash them is bought for the refiners;—not towards these does Mr Wegg stump, but towards the poorer shops of small retail traders in commodities to eat and drink and keep folks warm, and of Italian frame-makers, and of barbers, and of brokers, and of dealers in dogs and singing-birds. From these, in a narrow and a dirty street devoted to such callings, Mr Wegg selects one dark shop-window with a tallow candle dimly burning in it, surrounded by a muddle of objects vaguely resembling pieces of leather and dry stick, but among which nothing is resolvable into anything distinct, save the candle itself in its old tin candlestick, and two preserved frogs fighting a small-sword duel. Stumping with fresh vigour, he goes in at the dark greasy entry, pushes a little greasy dark reluctant side-door, and follows the door into the little dark greasy shop. It is so dark that nothing can be made out in it, over a little counter, but another tallow candle in another old tin candlestick, close to the face of a man stooping low in a chair.

Mr Wegg nods to the face, 'Good evening.'

The face looking up is a sallow face with weak eyes, surmounted by a tangle of reddish-dusty hair. The owner of the face has no cravat on, and has opened his tumbled shirt-collar to work with the more ease. For the same reason he has no coat on: only a loose waistcoat over his yellow linen. His eyes are like the over-tried eyes of an engraver, but he is not that; his expression and stoop are like those of a shoemaker, but he is not that.

'Good evening, Mr Venus. Don't you remember?'

With slowly dawning remembrance, Mr Venus rises, and holds his candle over the little counter, and holds it down towards the legs, natural and artificial, of Mr Wegg.

'To be SURE!' he says, then. 'How do you do?'

'Wegg, you know,' that gentleman explains.

'Yes, yes,' says the other. 'Hospital amputation?'

'Just so,' says Mr Wegg.

'Yes, yes,' quoth Venus. 'How do you do? Sit down by the fire, and warm your—your other one.'

'The little counter being so short a counter that it leaves the fireplace, which would have been behind it if it had been longer, accessible, Mr Wegg sits down on a box in front of the fire, and inhales a warm and comfortable smell which is not the smell of the shop. 'For that,' Mr Wegg inwardly decides, as he takes a corrective sniff or two, 'is musty, leathery, feathery, cellary, gluey, gummy, and,' with another sniff, 'as it might be, strong of old pairs of bellows.'

'My tea is drawing, and my muffin is on the hob, Mr Wegg; will you partake?'

It being one of Mr Wegg's guiding rules in life always to partake, he says he will. But, the little shop is so excessively dark, is stuck so full of black shelves and brackets and nooks and corners, that he sees Mr Venus's cup and saucer only because it is close under the candle, and does not see from what mysterious recess Mr Venus produces another for himself until it is under his nose. Concurrently, Wegg perceives a pretty little dead bird lying on the counter, with its head drooping on one side against the rim of Mr Venus's saucer, and a long stiff wire piercing its breast. As if it were Cock Robin, the hero of the ballad, and Mr Venus were the sparrow with his bow and arrow, and Mr Wegg were the fly with his little eye.

Mr Venus dives, and produces another muffin, yet untoasted; taking the arrow out of the breast of Cock Robin, he proceeds to toast it on the end of that cruel instrument. When it is brown, he dives again and produces butter, with which he completes his work.

Mr Wegg, as an artful man who is sure of his supper by-and-bye, presses muffin on his host to soothe him into a compliant state of mind, or, as one might say, to grease his works. As the muffins disappear, little by little, the black shelves and nooks and corners begin to appear, and Mr Wegg gradually acquires an imperfect notion that over against him on the chimney-piece is a Hindoo baby in a bottle, curved up with his big head tucked under him, as he would instantly throw a summersault if the bottle were large enough.

When he deems Mr Venus's wheels sufficiently lubricated, Mr Wegg approaches his object by asking, as he lightly taps his hands together, to express an undesigning frame of mind:

'And how have I been going on, this long time, Mr Venus?'

'Very bad,' says Mr Venus, uncompromisingly.

'What? Am I still at home?' asks Wegg, with an air of surprise.

'Always at home.'

This would seem to be secretly agreeable to Wegg, but he veils his feelings, and observes, 'Strange. To what do you attribute it?'

'I don't know,' replies Venus, who is a haggard melancholy man, speaking in a weak voice of querulous complaint, 'to what to attribute it, Mr Wegg. I can't work you into a miscellaneous one, no how. Do what I will, you can't be got to fit. Anybody with a passable knowledge would pick you out at a look, and say,—"No go! Don't match!"'

'Well, but hang it, Mr Venus,' Wegg expostulates with some little irritation, 'that can't be personal and peculiar in ME. It must often happen with miscellaneous ones.'

'With ribs (I grant you) always. But not else. When I prepare a miscellaneous one, I know beforehand that I can't keep to nature, and be miscellaneous with ribs, because every man has his own ribs, and no other man's will go with them; but elseways I can be miscellaneous. I have just sent home a Beauty—a perfect Beauty—to a school of art. One leg Belgian, one leg English, and the pickings of eight other people in it. Talk of not being qualified to be miscellaneous! By rights you OUGHT to be, Mr Wegg.'

Silas looks as hard at his one leg as he can in the dim light, and after a pause sulkily opines 'that it must be the fault of the other people. Or how do you mean to say it comes about?' he demands impatiently.

'I don't know how it comes about. Stand up a minute. Hold the light.' Mr Venus takes from a corner by his chair, the bones of a leg and foot, beautifully pure, and put together with exquisite neatness. These he compares with Mr Wegg's leg; that gentleman looking on, as if he were being measured for a riding-boot. 'No, I don't know how it is, but so it is. You have got a twist in that bone, to the best of my belief. I never saw the likes of you.'

Mr Wegg having looked distrustfully at his own limb, and suspiciously at the pattern with which it has been compared, makes the point:

'I'll bet a pound that ain't an English one!'

'An easy wager, when we run so much into foreign! No, it belongs to that French gentleman.'

As he nods towards a point of darkness behind Mr Wegg, the latter, with a slight start, looks round for 'that French gentleman,' whom he at length descries to be represented (in a very workmanlike manner) by his ribs only, standing on a shelf in another corner, like a piece of armour or a pair of stays.

'Oh!' says Mr Wegg, with a sort of sense of being introduced; 'I dare say you were all right enough in your own country, but I hope no objections will be taken to my saying that the Frenchman was never yet born as I should wish to match.'

At this moment the greasy door is violently pushed inward, and a boy follows it, who says, after having let it slam:

'Come for the stuffed canary.'

'It's three and ninepence,' returns Venus; 'have you got the money?'

The boy produces four shillings. Mr Venus, always in exceedingly low spirits and making whimpering sounds, peers about for the stuffed canary. On his taking the candle to assist his search, Mr Wegg observes that he has a convenient little shelf near his knees, exclusively appropriated to skeleton hands, which have very much the appearance of wanting to lay hold of him. From these Mr Venus rescues the canary in a glass case, and shows it to the boy.

'There!' he whimpers. 'There's animation! On a twig, making up his mind to hop! Take care of him; he's a lovely specimen.—And three is four.'

The boy gathers up his change and has pulled the door open by a leather strap nailed to it for the purpose, when Venus cries out:

'Stop him! Come back, you young villain! You've got a tooth among them halfpence.'

'How was I to know I'd got it? You giv it me. I don't want none of your teeth; I've got enough of my own.' So the boy pipes, as he selects it from his change, and throws it on the counter.

'Don't sauce ME, in the wicious pride of your youth,' Mr Venus retorts pathetically.' Don't hit ME because you see I'm down. I'm low enough without that. It dropped into the till, I suppose. They drop into everything. There was two in the coffee-pot at breakfast time. Molars.'

'Very well, then,' argues the boy, 'what do you call names for?'

To which Mr Venus only replies, shaking his shock of dusty hair, and winking his weak eyes, 'Don't sauce ME, in the wicious pride of your youth; don't hit ME, because you see I'm down. You've no idea how small you'd come out, if I had the articulating of you.'

This consideration seems to have its effect on the boy, for he goes out grumbling.

'Oh dear me, dear me!' sighs Mr Venus, heavily, snuffing the candle, 'the world that appeared so flowery has ceased to blow! You're casting your eye round the shop, Mr Wegg. Let me show you a light. My working bench. My young man's bench. A Wice. Tools. Bones, warious. Skulls, warious. Preserved Indian baby. African ditto. Bottled preparations, warious. Everything within reach of your hand, in good preservation. The mouldy ones a-top. What's in those hampers over them again, I don't quite remember. Say, human warious. Cats. Articulated English baby. Dogs. Ducks. Glass eyes, warious. Mummied bird. Dried cuticle, warious. Oh, dear me! That's the general panoramic view.'

Having so held and waved the candle as that all these heterogeneous objects seemed to come forward obediently when they were named, and then retire again, Mr Venus despondently repeats, 'Oh dear me, dear me!' resumes his seat, and with drooping despondency upon him, falls to pouring himself out more tea.

'Where am I?' asks Mr Wegg.

'You're somewhere in the back shop across the yard, sir; and speaking quite candidly, I wish I'd never bought you of the Hospital Porter.'

'Now, look here, what did you give for me?'

'Well,' replies Venus, blowing his tea: his head and face peering out of the darkness, over the smoke of it, as if he were modernizing the old original rise in his family: 'you were one of a warious lot, and I don't know.'

Silas puts his point in the improved form of 'What will you take for me?'

'Well,' replies Venus, still blowing his tea, 'I'm not prepared, at a moment's notice, to tell you, Mr Wegg.'

'Come! According to your own account I'm not worth much,' Wegg reasons persuasively.

'Not for miscellaneous working in, I grant you, Mr Wegg; but you might turn out valuable yet, as a—' here Mr Venus takes a gulp of tea, so hot that it makes him choke, and sets his weak eyes watering; 'as a Monstrosity, if you'll excuse me.'

Repressing an indignant look, indicative of anything but a disposition to excuse him, Silas pursues his point.

'I think you know me, Mr Venus, and I think you know I never bargain.'

Mr Venus takes gulps of hot tea, shutting his eyes at every gulp, and opening them again in a spasmodic manner; but does not commit himself to assent.

'I have a prospect of getting on in life and elevating myself by my own independent exertions,' says Wegg, feelingly, 'and I shouldn't like—I tell you openly I should NOT like—under such circumstances, to be what I may call dispersed, a part of me here, and a part of me there, but should wish to collect myself like a genteel person.'

'It's a prospect at present, is it, Mr Wegg? Then you haven't got the money for a deal about you? Then I'll tell you what I'll do with you; I'll hold you over. I am a man of my word, and you needn't be afraid of my disposing of you. I'll hold you over. That's a promise. Oh dear me, dear me!'

Fain to accept his promise, and wishing to propitiate him, Mr Wegg looks on as he sighs and pours himself out more tea, and then says, trying to get a sympathetic tone into his voice:

'You seem very low, Mr Venus. Is business bad?'

'Never was so good.'

'Is your hand out at all?'

'Never was so well in. Mr Wegg, I'm not only first in the trade, but I'm THE trade. You may go and buy a skeleton at the West End if you like, and pay the West End price, but it'll be my putting together. I've as much to do as I can possibly do, with the assistance of my young man, and I take a pride and a pleasure in it.'

Mr Venus thus delivers himself, his right hand extended, his smoking saucer in his left hand, protesting as though he were going to burst into a flood of tears.

'That ain't a state of things to make you low, Mr Venus.'

'Mr Wegg, I know it ain't. Mr Wegg, not to name myself as a workman without an equal, I've gone on improving myself in my knowledge of Anatomy, till both by sight and by name I'm perfect. Mr Wegg, if you was brought here loose in a bag to be articulated, I'd name your smallest bones blindfold equally with your largest, as fast as I could pick 'em out, and I'd sort 'em all, and sort your wertebrae, in a manner that would equally surprise and charm you.'

'Well,' remarks Silas (though not quite so readily as last time), 'THAT ain't a state of things to be low about.—Not for YOU to be low about, leastways.'

'Mr Wegg, I know it ain't; Mr Wegg, I know it ain't. But it's the heart that lowers me, it is the heart! Be so good as take and read that card out loud.'

Silas receives one from his hand, which Venus takes from a wonderful litter in a drawer, and putting on his spectacles, reads:

'"Mr Venus,"'

'Yes. Go on.'

'"Preserver of Animals and Birds,"'

'Yes. Go on.'

'"Articulator of human bones."'

'That's it,' with a groan. 'That's it! Mr Wegg, I'm thirty-two, and a bachelor. Mr Wegg, I love her. Mr Wegg, she is worthy of being loved by a

Potentate!' Here Silas is rather alarmed by Mr Venus's springing to his feet in the hurry of his spirits, and haggardly confronting him with his hand on his coat collar; but Mr Venus, begging pardon, sits down again, saying, with the calmness of despair, 'She objects to the business.'

'Does she know the profits of it?'

'She knows the profits of it, but she don't appreciate the art of it, and she objects to it. "I do not wish," she writes in her own handwriting, "to regard myself, nor yet to be regarded, in that boney light".'

Mr Venus pours himself out more tea, with a look and in an attitude of the deepest desolation.

'And so a man climbs to the top of the tree, Mr Wegg, only to see that there's no look-out when he's up there! I sit here of a night surrounded by the lovely trophies of my art, and what have they done for me? Ruined me. Brought me to the pass of being informed that "she does not wish to regard herself, nor yet to be regarded, in that boney light"!' Having repeated the fatal expressions, Mr Venus drinks more tea by gulps, and offers an explanation of his doing so.

'It lowers me. When I'm equally lowered all over, lethargy sets in. By sticking to it till one or two in the morning, I get oblivion. Don't let me detain you, Mr Wegg. I'm not company for any one.'

'It is not on that account,' says Silas, rising, 'but because I've got an appointment. It's time I was at Harmon's.'

'Eh?' said Mr Venus. 'Harmon's, up Battle Bridge way?'

Mr Wegg admits that he is bound for that port.

'You ought to be in a good thing, if you've worked yourself in there. There's lots of money going, there.'

'To think,' says Silas, 'that you should catch it up so quick, and know about it. Wonderful!'

'Not at all, Mr Wegg. The old gentleman wanted to know the nature and worth of everything that was found in the dust; and many's the bone, and feather, and what not, that he's brought to me.'

'Really, now!'

'Yes. (Oh dear me, dear me!) And he's buried quite in this neighbourhood, you know. Over yonder.'

Mr Wegg does not know, but he makes as if he did, by responsively nodding his head. He also follows with his eyes, the toss of Venus's head: as if to seek a direction to over yonder.

'I took an interest in that discovery in the river,' says Venus. (She hadn't written her cutting refusal at that time.) I've got up there—never mind, though.'

He had raised the candle at arm's length towards one of the dark shelves, and Mr Wegg had turned to look, when he broke off.

'The old gentleman was well known all round here. There used to be stories about his having hidden all kinds of property in those dust mounds. I suppose there was nothing in 'em. Probably you know, Mr Wegg?'

'Nothing in 'em,' says Wegg, who has never heard a word of this before.

'Don't let me detain you. Good night!'

The unfortunate Mr Venus gives him a shake of the hand with a shake of his own head, and drooping down in his chair, proceeds to pour himself out more tea. Mr Wegg, looking back over his shoulder as he pulls the door open by the strap, notices that the movement so shakes the crazy shop, and so shakes a momentary flare out of the candle, as that the babies—Hindoo, African, and British—the 'human warious', the French gentleman, the green glass-eyed cats, the dogs, the ducks, and all the rest of the collection, show for an instant as if paralytically animated; while even poor little Cock Robin at Mr Venus's elbow turns over on his innocent side. Next moment, Mr Wegg is stumping under the gaslights and through the mud.

Chapter 8

MR BOFFIN IN CONSULTATION

Whosoever had gone out of Fleet Street into the Temple at the date of this history, and had wandered disconsolate about the Temple until he stumbled on a dismal churchyard, and had looked up at the dismal windows commanding that churchyard until at the most dismal window of them all he saw a dismal boy, would in him have beheld, at one grand comprehensive swoop of the eye, the managing clerk, junior clerk, common-law clerk, conveyancing clerk, chancery clerk, every refinement and department of clerk, of Mr Mortimer Lightwood, erewhile called in the newspapers eminent solicitor.

Mr Boffin having been several times in communication with this clerkly essence, both on its own ground and at the Bower, had no difficulty in identifying it when he saw it up in its dusty eyrie. To the second floor on which the window was situated, he ascended, much pre-occupied in mind by the uncertainties besetting the Roman Empire, and much regretting the death of the amiable Pertinax: who only last night had left the Imperial affairs in a state of great confusion, by falling a victim to the fury of the praetorian guards.

'Morning, morning, morning!' said Mr Boffin, with a wave of his hand, as the office door was opened by the dismal boy, whose appropriate name was Blight. 'Governor in?'

'Mr Lightwood gave you an appointment, sir, I think?'

'I don't want him to give it, you know,' returned Mr Boffin; 'I'll pay my way, my boy.'

'No doubt, sir. Would you walk in? Mr Lightwood ain't in at the present moment, but I expect him back very shortly. Would you take a seat in Mr Lightwood's room, sir, while I look over our Appointment Book?' Young Blight made a great show of fetching from his desk a long thin manuscript volume with a brown paper cover, and running his finger down the day's appointments, murmuring, 'Mr Aggs, Mr Baggs, Mr Caggs, Mr Daggs, Mr

Faggs, Mr Gaggs, Mr Boffin. Yes, sir; quite right. You are a little before your time, sir. Mr Lightwood will be in directly.'

'I'm not in a hurry,' said Mr Boffin

'Thank you, sir. I'll take the opportunity, if you please, of entering your name in our Callers' Book for the day.' Young Blight made another great show of changing the volume, taking up a pen, sucking it, dipping it, and running over previous entries before he wrote. As, 'Mr Alley, Mr Balley, Mr Calley, Mr Dalley, Mr Falley, Mr Galley, Mr Halley, Mr Lalley, Mr Malley. And Mr Boffin.'

'Strict system here; eh, my lad?' said Mr Boffin, as he was booked.

'Yes, sir,' returned the boy. 'I couldn't get on without it.'

By which he probably meant that his mind would have been shattered to pieces without this fiction of an occupation. Wearing in his solitary confinement no fetters that he could polish, and being provided with no drinking-cup that he could carve, he had fallen on the device of ringing alphabetical changes into the two volumes in question, or of entering vast numbers of persons out of the Directory as transacting business with Mr Lightwood. It was the more necessary for his spirits, because, being of a sensitive temperament, he was apt to consider it personally disgraceful to himself that his master had no clients.

'How long have you been in the law, now?' asked Mr Boffin, with a pounce, in his usual inquisitive way.

'I've been in the law, now, sir, about three years.'

'Must have been as good as born in it!' said Mr Boffin, with admiration. 'Do you like it?'

'I don't mind it much,' returned Young Blight, heaving a sigh, as if its bitterness were past.

'What wages do you get?'

'Half what I could wish,' replied young Blight.

'What's the whole that you could wish?'

'Fifteen shillings a week,' said the boy.

'About how long might it take you now, at a average rate of going, to be a Judge?' asked Mr Boffin, after surveying his small stature in silence.

The boy answered that he had not yet quite worked out that little calculation.

'I suppose there's nothing to prevent your going in for it?' said Mr Boffin.

The boy virtually replied that as he had the honour to be a Briton who never never never, there was nothing to prevent his going in for it. Yet he seemed inclined to suspect that there might be something to prevent his coming out with it.

'Would a couple of pound help you up at all?' asked Mr Boffin.

On this head, young Blight had no doubt whatever, so Mr Boffin made him a present of that sum of money, and thanked him for his attention to his (Mr Boffin's) affairs; which, he added, were now, he believed, as good as settled.

Then Mr Boffin, with his stick at his ear, like a Familiar Spirit explaining the office to him, sat staring at a little bookcase of Law Practice and Law Reports, and at a window, and at an empty blue bag, and at a stick of sealing-wax, and a pen, and a box of wafers, and an apple, and a writing-pad—all very dusty—and at a number of inky smears and blots, and at an imperfectly-disguised gun-case pretending to be something legal, and at an iron box labelled HARMON ESTATE, until Mr Lightwood appeared.

Mr Lightwood explained that he came from the proctor's, with whom he had been engaged in transacting Mr Boffin's affairs.

'And they seem to have taken a deal out of you!' said Mr Boffin, with commiseration.

Mr Lightwood, without explaining that his weariness was chronic, proceeded with his exposition that, all forms of law having been at length complied with, will of Harmon deceased having been proved, death of Harmon next inheriting having been proved, &c., and so forth, Court of Chancery having been moved, &c. and so forth, he, Mr Lightwood, had now the gratification, honour, and happiness, again &c. and so forth, of congratulating Mr Boffin on coming into possession as residuary legatee, of upwards of one hundred thousand pounds, standing in the books of the Governor and Company of the Bank of England, again &c. and so forth.

'And what is particularly eligible in the property Mr Boffin, is, that it involves no trouble. There are no estates to manage, no rents to return so much per cent upon in bad times (which is an extremely dear way of getting your name into the newspapers), no voters to become parboiled in hot water with, no agents to take the cream off the milk before it comes to table. You could put the whole in a cash-box to-morrow morning, and take it with you to—say, to the Rocky Mountains. Inasmuch as every man,' concluded Mr Lightwood, with an indolent smile, 'appears to be under a fatal spell which obliges him, sooner or later, to mention the Rocky Mountains in a tone of extreme familiarity to some other man, I hope you'll excuse my pressing you into the service of that gigantic range of geographical bores.'

Without following this last remark very closely, Mr Boffin cast his perplexed gaze first at the ceiling, and then at the carpet.

'Well,' he remarked, 'I don't know what to say about it, I am sure. I was a'most as well as I was. It's a great lot to take care of.'

'My dear Mr Boffin, then DON'T take care of it!'

'Eh?' said that gentleman.

'Speaking now,' returned Mortimer, 'with the irresponsible imbecility of a private individual, and not with the profundity of a professional adviser, I should say that if the circumstance of its being too much, weighs upon your mind, you have the haven of consolation open to you that you can easily make it less. And if you should be apprehensive of the trouble of doing so, there is the further haven of consolation that any number of people will take the trouble off your hands.'

'Well! I don't quite see it,' retorted Mr Boffin, still perplexed. 'That's not satisfactory, you know, what you're a-saying.'

'Is Anything satisfactory, Mr Boffin?' asked Mortimer, raising his eyebrows.

'I used to find it so,' answered Mr Boffin, with a wistful look. 'While I was foreman at the Bower—afore it WAS the Bower—I considered the business very satisfactory. The old man was a awful Tartar (saying it, I'm sure, without disrespect to his memory) but the business was a pleasant one to look after, from before daylight to past dark. It's a'most a pity,' said Mr Boffin, rubbing his ear, 'that he ever went and made so much money. It would have been better for him if he hadn't so given himself up to it. You may depend upon it,' making the discovery all of a sudden, 'that HE found it a great lot to take care of!'

Mr Lightwood coughed, not convinced.

'And speaking of satisfactory,' pursued Mr Boffin, 'why, Lord save us! when we come to take it to pieces, bit by bit, where's the satisfactoriness of the money as yet? When the old man does right the poor boy after all, the poor boy gets no good of it. He gets made away with, at the moment when he's lifting (as one may say) the cup and sarser to his lips. Mr Lightwood, I will now name to you, that on behalf of the poor dear boy, me and Mrs Boffin have stood out against the old man times out of number, till he has called us every name he could lay his tongue to. I have seen him, after Mrs Boffin has given him her mind respecting the claims of the nat'ral affections, catch off Mrs Boffin's bonnet (she wore, in general, a black straw, perched as a matter of convenience on the top of her head), and send it spinning across the yard. I have indeed. And once, when he did this in a manner that amounted to personal, I should have given him a rattler for himself, if Mrs Boffin hadn't thrown herself betwixt us, and received flush on the temple. Which dropped her, Mr Lightwood. Dropped her.'

Mr Lightwood murmured 'Equal honour—Mrs Boffin's head and heart.'

'You understand; I name this,' pursued Mr Boffin, 'to show you, now the affairs are wound up, that me and Mrs Boffin have ever stood as we were in Christian honour bound, the children's friend. Me and Mrs Boffin stood the poor girl's friend; me and Mrs Boffin stood the poor boy's friend; me and Mrs Boffin up and faced the old man when we momently expected to be turned out for our pains. As to Mrs Boffin,' said Mr Boffin lowering his voice, 'she mightn't wish it mentioned now she's Fashionable, but she went so far as to tell him, in my presence, he was a flinty-hearted rascal.'

Mr Lightwood murmured 'Vigorous Saxon spirit—Mrs Boffin's ancestors—bowmen—Agincourt and Cressy.'

'The last time me and Mrs Boffin saw the poor boy,' said Mr Boffin, warming (as fat usually does) with a tendency to melt, 'he was a child of seven year old. For when he came back to make intercession for his sister, me and Mrs Boffin were away overlooking a country contract which was to be sifted before carted, and he was come and gone in a single hour. I say he was a child of seven year old. He was going away, all alone and forlorn, to that foreign school, and he come into our place, situate up the yard of the present Bower, to have a warm at our fire. There was his little scanty travelling clothes upon him. There was his little scanty box outside in the shivering wind, which I was going to carry for him down to the steamboat, as the old man wouldn't hear of allowing a sixpence coach-money. Mrs Boffin, then quite a young woman and pictur of a full-blown rose, stands him by her, kneels down at the fire, warms her two open hands, and falls to rubbing his cheeks; but seeing the tears come into the child's eyes, the tears come fast into her own, and she holds him round the neck, like as if she was protecting him, and cries to me, "I'd give the wide wide world, I would, to run away with him!" I don't say but what it cut me, and but what it at the same time heightened my feelings of admiration for Mrs Boffin. The poor child clings to her for awhile, as she clings to him, and then, when the old man calls, he says "I must go! God bless you!" and for a moment rests his heart against her bosom, and looks up at both of us, as if it was in pain—in agony. Such a look! I went aboard with him (I gave him first what little treat I thought he'd like), and I left him when he had fallen asleep in his berth, and I came back to Mrs Boffin. But tell her what I would of how I had left him, it all went for nothing, for, according to her thoughts, he never changed that look that he had looked up at us two. But it did one piece of good. Mrs Boffin and me had no child of our own, and had sometimes wished that how we had one. But not now. "We might both of us die," says Mrs Boffin, "and other eyes might see that lonely look in our child." So of a night, when it was very cold, or when the wind roared, or the rain dripped heavy, she would wake sobbing, and call out in a fluster, "Don't you see the poor child's face? O shelter the poor child!"—till in course of years it gently wore out, as many things do.'

'My dear Mr Boffin, everything wears to rags,' said Mortimer, with a light laugh.

'I won't go so far as to say everything,' returned Mr Boffin, on whom his manner seemed to grate, 'because there's some things that I never found among the dust. Well, sir. So Mrs Boffin and me grow older and older in the old man's service, living and working pretty hard in it, till the old man is discovered dead in his bed. Then Mrs Boffin and me seal up his box, always standing on the table at the side of his bed, and having frequently heerd tell of the Temple as a spot where lawyer's dust is contracted for, I come down here in search of a lawyer to advise, and I see your young man up at this present elevation, chopping at the flies on the window-sill with his penknife, and I give him a Hoy! not then having the pleasure of your acquaintance, and by that means come to gain the honour. Then you, and the gentleman in the uncomfortable neck-cloth under the little archway in Saint Paul's Churchyard—'

'Doctors' Commons,' observed Lightwood.

'I understood it was another name,' said Mr Boffin, pausing, 'but you know best. Then you and Doctor Scommons, you go to work, and you do the thing that's proper, and you and Doctor S. take steps for finding out the poor boy, and at last you do find out the poor boy, and me and Mrs Boffin often exchange the observation, "We shall see him again, under happy circumstances." But it was never to be; and the want of satisfactoriness is, that after all the money never gets to him.'

'But it gets,' remarked Lightwood, with a languid inclination of the head, 'into excellent hands.'

'It gets into the hands of me and Mrs Boffin only this very day and hour, and that's what I am working round to, having waited for this day and hour a' purpose. Mr Lightwood, here has been a wicked cruel murder. By that murder me and Mrs Boffin mysteriously profit. For the apprehension and conviction of the murderer, we offer a reward of one tithe of the property—a reward of Ten Thousand Pound.'

'Mr Boffin, it's too much.'

'Mr Lightwood, me and Mrs Boffin have fixed the sum together, and we stand to it.'

'But let me represent to you,' returned Lightwood, 'speaking now with professional profundity, and not with individual imbecility, that the offer of such an immense reward is a temptation to forced suspicion, forced construction of circumstances, strained accusation, a whole tool-box of edged tools.'

'Well,' said Mr Boffin, a little staggered, 'that's the sum we put o' one side for the purpose. Whether it shall be openly declared in the new notices that must now be put about in our names—'

'In your name, Mr Boffin; in your name.'

'Very well; in my name, which is the same as Mrs Boffin's, and means both of us, is to be considered in drawing 'em up. But this is the first instruction that I, as the owner of the property, give to my lawyer on coming into it.'

'Your lawyer, Mr Boffin,' returned Lightwood, making a very short note of it with a very rusty pen, 'has the gratification of taking the instruction. There is another?'

'There is just one other, and no more. Make me as compact a little will as can be reconciled with tightness, leaving the whole of the property to "my beloved wife, Henerietty Boffin, sole executrix". Make it as short as you can, using those words; but make it tight.'

At some loss to fathom Mr Boffin's notions of a tight will, Lightwood felt his way.

'I beg your pardon, but professional profundity must be exact. When you say tight—'

'I mean tight,' Mr Boffin explained.

'Exactly so. And nothing can be more laudable. But is the tightness to bind Mrs Boffin to any and what conditions?'

'Bind Mrs Boffin?' interposed her husband. 'No! What are you thinking of! What I want is, to make it all hers so tight as that her hold of it can't be loosed.'

'Hers freely, to do what she likes with? Hers absolutely?'

'Absolutely?' repeated Mr Boffin, with a short sturdy laugh. 'Hah! I should think so! It would be handsome in me to begin to bind Mrs Boffin at this time of day!'

So that instruction, too, was taken by Mr Lightwood; and Mr Lightwood, having taken it, was in the act of showing Mr Boffin out, when Mr Eugene Wrayburn almost jostled him in the door-way. Consequently Mr Lightwood said, in his cool manner, 'Let me make you two known to one another,' and further signified that Mr Wrayburn was counsel learned in the law, and that, partly in the way of business and partly in the way of pleasure, he had imparted to Mr Wrayburn some of the interesting facts of Mr Boffin's biography.

'Delighted,' said Eugene—though he didn't look so—'to know Mr Boffin.'

'Thankee, sir, thankee,' returned that gentleman. 'And how do YOU like the law?'

'A—not particularly,' returned Eugene.

'Too dry for you, eh? Well, I suppose it wants some years of sticking to, before you master it. But there's nothing like work. Look at the bees.'

'I beg your pardon,' returned Eugene, with a reluctant smile, 'but will you excuse my mentioning that I always protest against being referred to the bees?'

'Do you!' said Mr Boffin.

'I object on principle,' said Eugene, 'as a biped—'

'As a what?' asked Mr Boffin.

'As a two-footed creature;—I object on principle, as a two-footed creature, to being constantly referred to insects and four-footed creatures. I object to being required to model my proceedings according to the proceedings of the bee, or the dog, or the spider, or the camel. I fully admit that the camel, for instance, is an excessively temperate person; but he has several stomachs to entertain himself with, and I have only one. Besides, I am not fitted up with a convenient cool cellar to keep my drink in.'

'But I said, you know,' urged Mr Boffin, rather at a loss for an answer, 'the bee.'

'Exactly. And may I represent to you that it's injudicious to say the bee? For the whole case is assumed. Conceding for a moment that there is any analogy between a bee, and a man in a shirt and pantaloons (which I deny), and that it is settled that the man is to learn from the bee (which I also deny), the question still remains, what is he to learn? To imitate? Or to avoid? When your friends the bees worry themselves to that highly fluttered extent about their sovereign, and become perfectly distracted touching the slightest monarchical movement, are we men to learn the greatness of Tuft-hunting, or the littleness of the Court Circular? I am not clear, Mr Boffin, but that the hive may be satirical.'

'At all events, they work,' said Mr Boffin.

'Ye-es,' returned Eugene, disparagingly, 'they work; but don't you think they overdo it? They work so much more than they need—they make so much more than they can eat—they are so incessantly boring and buzzing at their one idea till Death comes upon them—that don't you think they overdo it? And are human labourers to have no holidays, because of the bees? And am I never to have change of air, because the bees don't? Mr Boffin, I think honey excellent at breakfast; but, regarded in the light of my conventional schoolmaster and moralist, I protest against the tyrannical humbug of your friend the bee. With the highest respect for you.'

'Thankee,' said Mr Boffin. 'Morning, morning!'

But, the worthy Mr Boffin jogged away with a comfortless impression he could have dispensed with, that there was a deal of unsatisfactoriness in the world, besides what he had recalled as appertaining to the Harmon property. And he was still jogging along Fleet Street in this condition of mind, when he became aware that he was closely tracked and observed by a man of genteel appearance.

'Now then?' said Mr Boffin, stopping short, with his meditations brought to an abrupt check, 'what's the next article?'

'I beg your pardon, Mr Boffin.'

'My name too, eh? How did you come by it? I don't know you.'

'No, sir, you don't know me.'

Mr Boffin looked full at the man, and the man looked full at him.

'No,' said Mr Boffin, after a glance at the pavement, as if it were made of faces and he were trying to match the man's, 'I DON'T know you.'

'I am nobody,' said the stranger, 'and not likely to be known; but Mr Boffin's wealth—'

'Oh! that's got about already, has it?' muttered Mr Boffin.

'—And his romantic manner of acquiring it, make him conspicuous. You were pointed out to me the other day.'

'Well,' said Mr Boffin, 'I should say I was a disappintment to you when I WAS pinted out, if your politeness would allow you to confess it, for I am well aware I am not much to look at. What might you want with me? Not in the law, are you?'

'No, sir.'

'No information to give, for a reward?'

'No, sir.'

There may have been a momentary mantling in the face of the man as he made the last answer, but it passed directly.

'If I don't mistake, you have followed me from my lawyer's and tried to fix my attention. Say out! Have you? Or haven't you?' demanded Mr Boffin, rather angry.

'Yes.'

'Why have you?'

'If you will allow me to walk beside you, Mr Boffin, I will tell you. Would you object to turn aside into this place—I think it is called Clifford's Inn—where we can hear one another better than in the roaring street?'

('Now,' thought Mr Boffin, 'if he proposes a game at skittles, or meets a country gentleman just come into property, or produces any article of jewellery he has found, I'll knock him down!' With this discreet reflection, and carrying his stick in his arms much as Punch carries his, Mr Boffin turned into Clifford's Inn aforesaid.)

'Mr Boffin, I happened to be in Chancery Lane this morning, when I saw you going along before me. I took the liberty of following you, trying to make up my mind to speak to you, till you went into your lawyer's. Then I waited outside till you came out.'

('Don't quite sound like skittles, nor yet country gentleman, nor yet jewellery,' thought Mr Boffin, 'but there's no knowing.')

'I am afraid my object is a bold one, I am afraid it has little of the usual practical world about it, but I venture it. If you ask me, or if you ask yourself—which is more likely—what emboldens me, I answer, I have been strongly assured, that you are a man of rectitude and plain dealing, with the soundest of sound hearts, and that you are blessed in a wife distinguished by the same qualities.'

'Your information is true of Mrs Boffin, anyhow,' was Mr Boffin's answer, as he surveyed his new friend again. There was something repressed in the strange man's manner, and he walked with his eyes on the ground—though conscious, for all that, of Mr Boffin's observation—and he spoke in a subdued voice. But his words came easily, and his voice was agreeable in tone, albeit constrained.

'When I add, I can discern for myself what the general tongue says of you—that you are quite unspoiled by Fortune, and not uplifted—I trust you will not, as a man of an open nature, suspect that I mean to flatter you, but will believe that all I mean is to excuse myself, these being my only excuses for my present intrusion.'

('How much?' thought Mr Boffin. 'It must be coming to money. How much?')

'You will probably change your manner of living, Mr Boffin, in your changed circumstances. You will probably keep a larger house, have many matters to arrange, and be beset by numbers of correspondents. If you would try me as your Secretary—'

'As WHAT?' cried Mr Boffin, with his eyes wide open.

'Your Secretary.'

'Well,' said Mr Boffin, under his breath, 'that's a queer thing!'

'Or,' pursued the stranger, wondering at Mr Boffin's wonder, 'if you would try me as your man of business under any name, I know you would find me faithful and grateful, and I hope you would find me useful. You may naturally think that my immediate object is money. Not so, for I would willingly serve you a year—two years—any term you might appoint—before that should begin to be a consideration between us.'

'Where do you come from?' asked Mr Boffin.

'I come,' returned the other, meeting his eye, 'from many countries.'

Boffin's acquaintances with the names and situations of foreign lands being limited in extent and somewhat confused in quality, he shaped his next question on an elastic model.

'From—any particular place?'

'I have been in many places.'

'What have you been?' asked Mr Boffin.

Here again he made no great advance, for the reply was, 'I have been a student and a traveller.'

'But if it ain't a liberty to plump it out,' said Mr Boffin, 'what do you do for your living?'

'I have mentioned,' returned the other, with another look at him, and a smile, 'what I aspire to do. I have been superseded as to some slight intentions I had, and I may say that I have now to begin life.'

Not very well knowing how to get rid of this applicant, and feeling the more embarrassed because his manner and appearance claimed a delicacy in which the worthy Mr Boffin feared he himself might be deficient, that gentleman glanced into the mouldy little plantation or cat-preserve, of Clifford's Inn, as it was that day, in search of a suggestion. Sparrows were there, cats were there, dry-rot and wet-rot were there, but it was not otherwise a suggestive spot.

'All this time,' said the stranger, producing a little pocket-book and taking out a card, 'I have not mentioned my name. My name is Rokesmith. I lodge at one Mr Wilfer's, at Holloway.'

Mr Boffin stared again.

'Father of Miss Bella Wilfer?' said he.

'My landlord has a daughter named Bella. Yes; no doubt.'

Now, this name had been more or less in Mr Boffin's thoughts all the morning, and for days before; therefore he said:

'That's singular, too!' unconsciously staring again, past all bounds of good manners, with the card in his hand. 'Though, by-the-bye, I suppose it was one of that family that pinted me out?'

'No. I have never been in the streets with one of them.'

'Heard me talked of among 'em, though?'

'No. I occupy my own rooms, and have held scarcely any communication with them.'

'Odder and odder!' said Mr Boffin. 'Well, sir, to tell you the truth, I don't know what to say to you.'

'Say nothing,' returned Mr Rokesmith; 'allow me to call on you in a few days. I am not so unconscionable as to think it likely that you would accept me on trust at first sight, and take me out of the very street. Let me come to you for your further opinion, at your leisure.'

'That's fair, and I don't object,' said Mr Boffin; 'but it must be on condition that it's fully understood that I no more know that I shall ever be in want of any gentleman as Secretary—it WAS Secretary you said; wasn't it?'

'Yes.'

Again Mr Boffin's eyes opened wide, and he stared at the applicant from head to foot, repeating 'Queer!—You're sure it was Secretary? Are you?'

'I am sure I said so.'

—'As Secretary,' repeated Mr Boffin, meditating upon the word; 'I no more know that I may ever want a Secretary, or what not, than I do that I shall ever be in want of the man in the moon. Me and Mrs Boffin have not even settled that we shall make any change in our way of life. Mrs Boffin's inclinations certainly do tend towards Fashion; but, being already set up in a fashionable way at the Bower, she may not make further alterations. However, sir, as you don't press yourself, I wish to meet you so far as saying, by all means call at the Bower if you like. Call in the course of a week or two. At the same time, I consider that I ought to name, in addition to what I have already named, that I have in my employment a literary man—WITH a wooden leg—as I have no thoughts of parting from.'

'I regret to hear I am in some sort anticipated,' Mr Rokesmith answered, evidently having heard it with surprise; 'but perhaps other duties might arise?'

'You see,' returned Mr Boffin, with a confidential sense of dignity, 'as to my literary man's duties, they're clear. Professionally he declines and he falls, and as a friend he drops into poetry.'

Without observing that these duties seemed by no means clear to Mr Rokesmith's astonished comprehension, Mr Boffin went on:

'And now, sir, I'll wish you good-day. You can call at the Bower any time in a week or two. It's not above a mile or so from you, and your landlord can direct you to it. But as he may not know it by its new name of Boffin's Bower, say, when you inquire of him, it's Harmon's; will you?'

'Harmoon's,' repeated Mr Rokesmith, seeming to have caught the sound imperfectly, 'Harmarn's. How do you spell it?'

'Why, as to the spelling of it,' returned Mr Boffin, with great presence of mind, 'that's YOUR look out. Harmon's is all you've got to say to HIM. Morning, morning, morning!' And so departed, without looking back.

Chapter 9

MR AND MRS BOFFIN IN CONSULTATION

Betaking himself straight homeward, Mr Boffin, without further let or hindrance, arrived at the Bower, and gave Mrs Boffin (in a walking dress of black velvet and feathers, like a mourning coach-horse) an account of all he had said and done since breakfast.

'This brings us round, my dear,' he then pursued, 'to the question we left unfinished: namely, whether there's to be any new go-in for Fashion.'

'Now, I'll tell you what I want, Noddy,' said Mrs Boffin, smoothing her dress with an air of immense enjoyment, 'I want Society.'

'Fashionable Society, my dear?'

'Yes!' cried Mrs Boffin, laughing with the glee of a child. 'Yes! It's no good my being kept here like Wax-Work; is it now?'

'People have to pay to see Wax-Work, my dear,' returned her husband, 'whereas (though you'd be cheap at the same money) the neighbours is welcome to see YOU for nothing.'

'But it don't answer,' said the cheerful Mrs Boffin. 'When we worked like the neighbours, we suited one another. Now we have left work off; we have left off suiting one another.'

'What, do you think of beginning work again?' Mr Boffin hinted.

'Out of the question! We have come into a great fortune, and we must do what's right by our fortune; we must act up to it.'

Mr Boffin, who had a deep respect for his wife's intuitive wisdom, replied, though rather pensively: 'I suppose we must.'

'It's never been acted up to yet, and, consequently, no good has come of it,' said Mrs Boffin.

'True, to the present time,' Mr Boffin assented, with his former pensiveness, as he took his seat upon his settle. 'I hope good may be coming of it in the future time. Towards which, what's your views, old lady?'

Mrs Boffin, a smiling creature, broad of figure and simple of nature, with her hands folded in her lap, and with buxom creases in her throat, proceeded to expound her views.

'I say, a good house in a good neighbourhood, good things about us, good living, and good society. I say, live like our means, without extravagance, and be happy.'

'Yes. I say be happy, too,' assented the still pensive Mr Boffin. 'Lor-a-mussy!' exclaimed Mrs Boffin, laughing and clapping her hands, and gaily rocking herself to and fro, 'when I think of me in a light yellow chariot and pair, with silver boxes to the wheels—'

'Oh! you was thinking of that, was you, my dear?'

'Yes!' cried the delighted creature. 'And with a footman up behind, with a bar across, to keep his legs from being poled! And with a coachman up in front, sinking down into a seat big enough for three of him, all covered with upholstery in green and white! And with two bay horses tossing their heads and stepping higher than they trot long-ways! And with you and me leaning back inside, as grand as ninepence! Oh-h-h-h My! Ha ha ha ha ha!'

Mrs Boffin clapped her hands again, rocked herself again, beat her feet upon the floor, and wiped the tears of laughter from her eyes.

'And what, my old lady,' inquired Mr Boffin, when he also had sympathetically laughed: 'what's your views on the subject of the Bower?'

'Shut it up. Don't part with it, but put somebody in it, to keep it.'

'Any other views?'

'Noddy,' said Mrs Boffin, coming from her fashionable sofa to his side on the plain settle, and hooking her comfortable arm through his, 'Next I think—and I really have been thinking early and late—of the disappointed girl; her that was so cruelly disappointed, you know, both of her husband and his riches. Don't you think we might do something for her? Have her to live with us? Or something of that sort?'

'Ne-ver once thought of the way of doing it!' cried Mr Boffin, smiting the table in his admiration. 'What a thinking steam-ingein this old lady is. And she don't know how she does it. Neither does the ingein!'

Mrs Boffin pulled his nearest ear, in acknowledgment of this piece of philosophy, and then said, gradually toning down to a motherly strain: 'Last, and not least, I have taken a fancy. You remember dear little John Harmon, before he went to school? Over yonder across the yard, at our fire? Now that he is past all benefit of the money, and it's come to us, I should like to find some orphan child, and take the boy and adopt him and give him John's name, and provide for him. Somehow, it would make me easier, I fancy. Say it's only a whim—'

'But I don't say so,' interposed her husband.

'No, but deary, if you did—'

'I should be a Beast if I did,' her husband interposed again.

'That's as much as to say you agree? Good and kind of you, and like you, deary! And don't you begin to find it pleasant now,' said Mrs Boffin, once more radiant in her comely way from head to foot, and once more smoothing her dress with immense enjoyment, 'don't you begin to find it pleasant already, to think that a child will be made brighter, and better, and happier, because of that poor sad child that day? And isn't it pleasant to know that the good will be done with the poor sad child's own money?'

'Yes; and it's pleasant to know that you are Mrs Boffin,' said her husband, 'and it's been a pleasant thing to know this many and many a year!' It was ruin to Mrs Boffin's aspirations, but, having so spoken, they sat side by side, a hopelessly Unfashionable pair.

These two ignorant and unpolished people had guided themselves so far on in their journey of life, by a religious sense of duty and desire to do right. Ten thousand weaknesses and absurdities might have been detected in the breasts of both; ten thousand vanities additional, possibly, in the breast of the woman. But the hard wrathful and sordid nature that had wrung as much work out of them as could be got in their best days, for as little money as could be paid to hurry on their worst, had never been so warped but that it knew their moral straightness and respected it. In its own despite, in a constant conflict with itself and them, it had done so. And this is the eternal law. For, Evil often stops short at itself and dies with the doer of it; but Good, never.

Through his most inveterate purposes, the dead Jailer of Harmony Jail had known these two faithful servants to be honest and true. While he raged at them and reviled them for opposing him with the speech of the honest and true, it had scratched his stony heart, and he had perceived the powerlessness of all his wealth to buy them if he had addressed himself to the attempt. So, even while he was their griping taskmaster and never gave them a good word, he had written their names down in his will. So, even while it was his daily declaration that he mistrusted all mankind—and sorely indeed he did mistrust all who bore any resemblance to himself—he was as certain that these two people, surviving him, would be trustworthy in all things from the greatest to the least, as he was that he must surely die.

Mr and Mrs Boffin, sitting side by side, with Fashion withdrawn to an immeasurable distance, fell to discussing how they could best find their orphan. Mrs Boffin suggested advertisement in the newspapers, requesting orphans answering annexed description to apply at the Bower on a certain day; but Mr Boffin wisely apprehending obstruction of the neighbouring thoroughfares by orphan swarms, this course was negatived. Mrs Boffin next suggested application to their clergyman for a likely orphan. Mr Boffin thinking better of this scheme, they resolved to call upon the reverend gentleman at once, and to take the same opportunity of making acquaintance with Miss Bella Wilfer. In order that these visits might be visits of state, Mrs Boffin's equipage was ordered out.

This consisted of a long hammer-headed old horse, formerly used in the business, attached to a four-wheeled chaise of the same period, which had long been exclusively used by the Harmony Jail poultry as the favourite laying-place of several discreet hens. An unwonted application of corn to the horse, and of paint and varnish to the carriage, when both fell in as a part of the Boffin legacy, had made what Mr Boffin considered a neat turn-out of the whole; and a driver being added, in the person of a long hammer-headed young man who was a very good match for the horse, left nothing to be desired. He, too, had been formerly used in the business, but was now entombed by an honest jobbing tailor of the district in a perfect Sepulchre of coat and gaiters, sealed with ponderous buttons.

Behind this domestic, Mr and Mrs Boffin took their seats in the back compartment of the vehicle: which was sufficiently commodious, but had an undignified and alarming tendency, in getting over a rough crossing, to hiccup itself away from the front compartment. On their being descried emerging from the gates of the Bower, the neighbourhood turned out at door and window to salute the Boffins. Among those who were ever and again left behind, staring after the equipage, were many youthful spirits, who hailed it in stentorian tones with such congratulations as 'Nod-dy Bof-fin!' 'Bof-fin's mon-ey!' 'Down with the dust, Bof-fin!' and other similar compliments. These, the hammer-headed young man took in such ill part that he often impaired the majesty of the progress by pulling up short, and making as though he would alight to exterminate the offenders; a purpose from which he only allowed himself to be dissuaded after long and lively arguments with his employers.

At length the Bower district was left behind, and the peaceful dwelling of the Reverend Frank Milvey was gained. The Reverend Frank Milvey's abode was a very modest abode, because his income was a very modest income. He was officially accessible to every blundering old woman who had incoherence to bestow upon him, and readily received the Boffins. He was quite a young man, expensively educated and wretchedly paid, with quite a young wife and half a dozen quite young children. He was under the necessity of teaching and translating from the classics, to eke out his scanty means, yet was generally expected to have more time to spare than the idlest person in the parish, and more money than the richest. He accepted the needless inequalities and inconsistencies of his life, with a kind of conventional submission that was almost slavish; and any daring layman who would have adjusted such burdens as his, more decently and graciously, would have had small help from him.

With a ready patient face and manner, and yet with a latent smile that showed a quick enough observation of Mrs Boffin's dress, Mr Milvey, in his little book-room—charged with sounds and cries as though the six children above were coming down through the ceiling, and the roasting leg of mutton below were coming up through the floor—listened to Mrs Boffin's statement of her want of an orphan.

'I think,' said Mr Milvey, 'that you have never had a child of your own, Mr and Mrs Boffin?'

Never.

'But, like the Kings and Queens in the Fairy Tales, I suppose you have wished for one?'

In a general way, yes.

Mr Milvey smiled again, as he remarked to himself 'Those kings and queens were always wishing for children.' It occurring to him, perhaps, that if they had been Curates, their wishes might have tended in the opposite direction.

'I think,' he pursued, 'we had better take Mrs Milvey into our Council. She is indispensable to me. If you please, I'll call her.'

So, Mr Milvey called, 'Margaretta, my dear!' and Mrs Milvey came down. A pretty, bright little woman, something worn by anxiety, who had repressed many pretty tastes and bright fancies, and substituted in their stead, schools, soup, flannel, coals, and all the week-day cares and Sunday coughs of a large population, young and old. As gallantly had Mr Milvey repressed much in himself that naturally belonged to his old studies and old fellow-students, and taken up among the poor and their children with the hard crumbs of life.

'Mr and Mrs Boffin, my dear, whose good fortune you have heard of.'

Mrs Milvey, with the most unaffected grace in the world, congratulated them, and was glad to see them. Yet her engaging face, being an open as well as a perceptive one, was not without her husband's latent smile.

'Mrs Boffin wishes to adopt a little boy, my dear.'

Mrs Milvey, looking rather alarmed, her husband added:

'An orphan, my dear.'

'Oh!' said Mrs Milvey, reassured for her own little boys.

'And I was thinking, Margaretta, that perhaps old Mrs Goody's grandchild might answer the purpose.

'Oh my DEAR Frank! I DON'T think that would do!'

'No?'

'Oh NO!'

The smiling Mrs Boffin, feeling it incumbent on her to take part in the conversation, and being charmed with the emphatic little wife and her ready interest, here offered her acknowledgments and inquired what there was against him?

'I DON'T think,' said Mrs Milvey, glancing at the Reverend Frank'—and I believe my husband will agree with me when he considers it again—that you could possibly keep that orphan clean from snuff. Because his grandmother takes so MANY ounces, and drops it over him.'

'But he would not be living with his grandmother then, Margaretta,' said Mr Milvey.

'No, Frank, but it would be impossible to keep her from Mrs Boffin's house; and the MORE there was to eat and drink there, the oftener she would go. And she IS an inconvenient woman. I HOPE it's not uncharitable to remember that last Christmas Eve she drank eleven cups of tea, and grumbled all the time. And she is NOT a grateful woman, Frank. You recollect her addressing a crowd outside this house, about her wrongs, when, one night after we had gone to bed, she brought back the petticoat of new flannel that had been given her, because it was too short.'

'That's true,' said Mr Milvey. 'I don't think that would do. Would little Harrison—'

'Oh, FRANK!' remonstrated his emphatic wife.

'He has no grandmother, my dear.'

'No, but I DON'T think Mrs Boffin would like an orphan who squints so MUCH.'

'That's true again,' said Mr Milvey, becoming haggard with perplexity. 'If a little girl would do—'

'But, my DEAR Frank, Mrs Boffin wants a boy.'

'That's true again,' said Mr Milvey. 'Tom Bocker is a nice boy' (thoughtfully).

'But I DOUBT, Frank,' Mrs Milvey hinted, after a little hesitation, 'if Mrs Boffin wants an orphan QUITE nineteen, who drives a cart and waters the roads.'

Mr Milvey referred the point to Mrs Boffin in a look; on that smiling lady's shaking her black velvet bonnet and bows, he remarked, in lower spirits, 'that's true again.'

'I am sure,' said Mrs Boffin, concerned at giving so much trouble, 'that if I had known you would have taken so much pains, sir—and you too, ma' am—I don't think I would have come.'

'PRAY don't say that!' urged Mrs Milvey.

'No, don't say that,' assented Mr Milvey, 'because we are so much obliged to you for giving us the preference.' Which Mrs Milvey confirmed; and really the kind, conscientious couple spoke, as if they kept some profitable orphan warehouse and were personally patronized. 'But it is a responsible trust,' added Mr Milvey, 'and difficult to discharge. At the same time, we are naturally very unwilling to lose the chance you so kindly give us, and if you could afford us a day or two to look about us,—you know, Margaretta, we might carefully examine the workhouse, and the Infant School, and your District.'

'To be SURE!' said the emphatic little wife.

'We have orphans, I know,' pursued Mr Milvey, quite with the air as if he might have added, 'in stock,' and quite as anxiously as if there were great competition in the business and he were afraid of losing an order, 'over at the clay-pits; but they are employed by relations or friends, and I am afraid it would come at last to a transaction in the way of barter. And even if you exchanged blankets for the child—or books and firing—it would be impossible to prevent their being turned into liquor.'

Accordingly, it was resolved that Mr and Mrs Milvey should search for an orphan likely to suit, and as free as possible from the foregoing objections, and should communicate again with Mrs Boffin. Then, Mr Boffin took the liberty of mentioning to Mr Milvey that if Mr Milvey would do him the kindness to be perpetually his banker to the extent of 'a twenty-pound note or so,' to be expended without any reference to him, he would be heartily obliged. At this, both Mr Milvey and Mrs Milvey were quite as much pleased as if they had no wants of their own, but only knew what poverty was, in the persons of other people; and so the interview terminated with satisfaction and good opinion on all sides.

'Now, old lady,' said Mr Boffin, as they resumed their seats behind the hammer-headed horse and man: 'having made a very agreeable visit there, we'll try Wilfer's.'

It appeared, on their drawing up at the family gate, that to try Wilfer's was a thing more easily projected than done, on account of the extreme difficulty of getting into that establishment; three pulls at the bell producing no external result; though each was attended by audible sounds of scampering and rushing within. At the fourth tug—vindictively administered by the hammer-headed young man—Miss Lavinia appeared, emerging from the house in an accidental manner, with a bonnet and parasol, as designing to take a contemplative walk. The young lady was astonished to find visitors at the gate, and expressed her feelings in appropriate action.

'Here's Mr and Mrs Boffin!' growled the hammer-headed young man through the bars of the gate, and at the same time shaking it, as if he were on view in a Menagerie; 'they've been here half an hour.'

'Who did you say?' asked Miss Lavinia.

'Mr and Mrs BOFFIN' returned the young man, rising into a roar.

Miss Lavinia tripped up the steps to the house-door, tripped down the steps with the key, tripped across the little garden, and opened the gate. 'Please to walk in,' said Miss Lavinia, haughtily. 'Our servant is out.'

Mr and Mrs Boffin complying, and pausing in the little hall until Miss Lavinia came up to show them where to go next, perceived three pairs of listening legs upon the stairs above. Mrs Wilfer's legs, Miss Bella's legs, Mr George Sampson's legs.

'Mr and Mrs Boffin, I think?' said Lavinia, in a warning voice. Strained attention on the part of Mrs Wilfer's legs, of Miss Bella's legs, of Mr George Sampson's legs.

'Yes, Miss.'

'If you'll step this way—down these stairs—I'll let Ma know.' Excited flight of Mrs Wilfer's legs, of Miss Bella's legs, of Mr George Sampson's legs.

After waiting some quarter of an hour alone in the family sitting-room, which presented traces of having been so hastily arranged after a meal, that one might have doubted whether it was made tidy for visitors, or cleared for blindman's buff, Mr and Mrs Boffin became aware of the entrance of Mrs Wilfer, majestically faint, and with a condescending stitch in her side: which was her company manner.

'Pardon me,' said Mrs Wilfer, after the first salutations, and as soon as she had adjusted the handkerchief under her chin, and waved her gloved hands, 'to what am I indebted for this honour?'

'To make short of it, ma'am,' returned Mr Boffin, 'perhaps you may be acquainted with the names of me and Mrs Boffin, as having come into a certain property.'

'I have heard, sir,' returned Mrs Wilfer, with a dignified bend of her head, 'of such being the case.'

'And I dare say, ma'am,' pursued Mr Boffin, while Mrs Boffin added confirmatory nods and smiles, 'you are not very much inclined to take kindly to us?'

'Pardon me,' said Mrs Wilfer. "Twere unjust to visit upon Mr and Mrs Boffin, a calamity which was doubtless a dispensation.' These words were rendered the more effective by a serenely heroic expression of suffering.

'That's fairly meant, I am sure,' remarked the honest Mr Boffin; 'Mrs Boffin and me, ma'am, are plain people, and we don't want to pretend to anything, nor yet to go round and round at anything because there's always a straight way to everything. Consequently, we make this call to say, that we shall be glad to have the honour and pleasure of your daughter's acquaintance, and that we shall be rejoiced if your daughter will come to consider our house in the light of her home equally with this. In short, we want to cheer your daughter, and to give her the opportunity of sharing such pleasures as we are a going to take ourselves. We want to brisk her up, and brisk her about, and give her a change.'

'That's it!' said the open-hearted Mrs Boffin. 'Lor! Let's be comfortable.'

Mrs Wilfer bent her head in a distant manner to her lady visitor, and with majestic monotony replied to the gentleman:

'Pardon me. I have several daughters. Which of my daughters am I to understand is thus favoured by the kind intentions of Mr Boffin and his lady?'

'Don't you see?' the ever-smiling Mrs Boffin put in. 'Naturally, Miss Bella, you know.'

'Oh-h!' said Mrs Wilfer, with a severely unconvinced look. 'My daughter Bella is accessible and shall speak for herself.' Then opening the door a little way, simultaneously with a sound of scuttling outside it, the good lady made the proclamation, 'Send Miss Bella to me!' which proclamation, though grandly formal, and one might almost say heraldic, to hear, was in fact enunciated with her maternal eyes reproachfully glaring on that young lady in the flesh—and in so much of it that she was retiring with difficulty into the small closet under the stairs, apprehensive of the emergence of Mr and Mrs Boffin.

'The avocations of R. W., my husband,' Mrs Wilfer explained, on resuming her seat, 'keep him fully engaged in the City at this time of the day, or he would have had the honour of participating in your reception beneath our humble roof.'

'Very pleasant premises!' said Mr Boffin, cheerfully.

'Pardon me, sir,' returned Mrs Wilfer, correcting him, 'it is the abode of conscious though independent Poverty.'

Finding it rather difficult to pursue the conversation down this road, Mr and Mrs Boffin sat staring at mid-air, and Mrs Wilfer sat silently giving them to understand that every breath she drew required to be drawn with a self-denial rarely paralleled in history, until Miss Bella appeared: whom Mrs Wilfer presented, and to whom she explained the purpose of the visitors.

'I am much obliged to you, I am sure,' said Miss Bella, coldly shaking her curls, 'but I doubt if I have the inclination to go out at all.'

'Bella!' Mrs Wilfer admonished her; 'Bella, you must conquer this.'

'Yes, do what your Ma says, and conquer it, my dear,' urged Mrs Boffin, 'because we shall be so glad to have you, and because you are much too pretty to keep yourself shut up.' With that, the pleasant creature gave her a kiss, and patted her on her dimpled shoulders; Mrs Wilfer sitting stiffly by, like a functionary presiding over an interview previous to an execution.

'We are going to move into a nice house,' said Mrs Boffin, who was woman enough to compromise Mr Boffin on that point, when he couldn't very well contest it; 'and we are going to set up a nice carriage, and we'll go everywhere and see everything. And you mustn't,' seating Bella beside her, and patting her hand, 'you mustn't feel a dislike to us to begin with, because we couldn't help it, you know, my dear.'

With the natural tendency of youth to yield to candour and sweet temper, Miss Bella was so touched by the simplicity of this address that she frankly returned Mrs Boffin's kiss. Not at all to the satisfaction of that good woman of the world, her mother, who sought to hold the advantageous ground of obliging the Boffins instead of being obliged.

'My youngest daughter, Lavinia,' said Mrs Wilfer, glad to make a diversion, as that young lady reappeared. 'Mr George Sampson, a friend of the family.'

The friend of the family was in that stage of tender passion which bound him to regard everybody else as the foe of the family. He put the round head of his cane in his mouth, like a stopper, when he sat down. As if he felt himself full to the throat with affronting sentiments. And he eyed the Boffins with implacable eyes.

'If you like to bring your sister with you when you come to stay with us,' said Mrs Boffin, 'of course we shall be glad. The better you please yourself, Miss Bella, the better you'll please us.'

'Oh, my consent is of no consequence at all, I suppose?' cried Miss Lavinia.

'Lavvy,' said her sister, in a low voice, 'have the goodness to be seen and not heard.'

'No, I won't,' replied the sharp Lavinia. 'I'm not a child, to be taken notice of by strangers.'

'You ARE a child.'

'I'm not a child, and I won't be taken notice of. "Bring your sister," indeed!'

'Lavinia!' said Mrs Wilfer. 'Hold! I will not allow you to utter in my presence the absurd suspicion that any strangers—I care not what their names—can patronize my child. Do you dare to suppose, you ridiculous girl, that Mr and Mrs Boffin would enter these doors upon a patronizing errand; or, if they did, would remain within them, only for one single instant, while your mother had the strength yet remaining in her vital frame to request them to depart? You little know your mother if you presume to think so.'

'It's all very fine,' Lavinia began to grumble, when Mrs Wilfer repeated:

'Hold! I will not allow this. Do you not know what is due to guests? Do you not comprehend that in presuming to hint that this lady and gentleman could have any idea of patronizing any member of your family—I care not which—you accuse them of an impertinence little less than insane?'

'Never mind me and Mrs Boffin, ma'am,' said Mr Boffin, smilingly: 'we don't care.'

'Pardon me, but I do,' returned Mrs Wilfer.

Miss Lavinia laughed a short laugh as she muttered, 'Yes, to be sure.'

'And I require my audacious child,' proceeded Mrs Wilfer, with a withering look at her youngest, on whom it had not the slightest effect, 'to please to be just to her sister Bella; to remember that her sister Bella is much sought after; and that when her sister Bella accepts an attention, she considers herself to be conferring qui-i-ite as much honour,'—this with an indignant shiver,—'as she receives.'

But, here Miss Bella repudiated, and said quietly, 'I can speak for myself; you know, ma. You needn't bring ME in, please.'

'And it's all very well aiming at others through convenient me,' said the irrepressible Lavinia, spitefully; 'but I should like to ask George Sampson what he says to it.'

'Mr Sampson,' proclaimed Mrs Wilfer, seeing that young gentleman take his stopper out, and so darkly fixing him with her eyes as that he put it in again: 'Mr Sampson, as a friend of this family and a frequenter of this house, is, I am persuaded, far too well-bred to interpose on such an invitation.'

This exaltation of the young gentleman moved the conscientious Mrs Boffin to repentance for having done him an injustice in her mind, and consequently to saying that she and Mr Boffin would at any time be glad to see him; an attention which he handsomely acknowledged by replying, with his stopper unremoved, 'Much obliged to you, but I'm always engaged, day and night.'

However, Bella compensating for all drawbacks by responding to the advances of the Boffins in an engaging way, that easy pair were on the whole well satisfied, and proposed to the said Bella that as soon as they should be in a condition to receive her in a manner suitable to their desires, Mrs Boffin should return with notice of the fact. This arrangement Mrs Wilfer sanctioned with a stately inclination of her head and wave of her gloves, as who should say, 'Your demerits shall be overlooked, and you shall be mercifully gratified, poor people.'

'By-the-bye, ma'am,' said Mr Boffin, turning back as he was going, 'you have a lodger?'

'A gentleman,' Mrs Wilfer answered, qualifying the low expression, 'undoubtedly occupies our first floor.'

'I may call him Our Mutual Friend,' said Mr Boffin. 'What sort of a fellow IS Our Mutual Friend, now? Do you like him?'

'Mr Rokesmith is very punctual, very quiet, a very eligible inmate.'

'Because,' Mr Boffin explained, 'you must know that I'm not particularly well acquainted with Our Mutual Friend, for I have only seen him once. You give a good account of him. Is he at home?'

'Mr Rokesmith is at home,' said Mrs Wilfer; 'indeed,' pointing through the window, 'there he stands at the garden gate. Waiting for you, perhaps?'

'Perhaps so,' replied Mr Boffin. 'Saw me come in, maybe.'

Bella had closely attended to this short dialogue. Accompanying Mrs Boffin to the gate, she as closely watched what followed.

'How are you, sir, how are you?' said Mr Boffin. 'This is Mrs Boffin. Mr Rokesmith, that I told you of; my dear.'

She gave him good day, and he bestirred himself and helped her to her seat, and the like, with a ready hand.

'Good-bye for the present, Miss Bella,' said Mrs Boffin, calling out a hearty parting. 'We shall meet again soon! And then I hope I shall have my little John Harmon to show you.'

Mr Rokesmith, who was at the wheel adjusting the skirts of her dress, suddenly looked behind him, and around him, and then looked up at her, with a face so pale that Mrs Boffin cried:

'Gracious!' And after a moment, 'What's the matter, sir?'

'How can you show her the Dead?' returned Mr Rokesmith.

'It's only an adopted child. One I have told her of. One I'm going to give the name to!'

'You took me by surprise,' said Mr Rokesmith, 'and it sounded like an omen, that you should speak of showing the Dead to one so young and blooming.'

Now, Bella suspected by this time that Mr Rokesmith admired her. Whether the knowledge (for it was rather that than suspicion) caused her to incline to him a little more, or a little less, than she had done at first;

whether it rendered her eager to find out more about him, because she sought to establish reason for her distrust, or because she sought to free him from it; was as yet dark to her own heart. But at most times he occupied a great amount of her attention, and she had set her attention closely on this incident.

That he knew it as well as she, she knew as well as he, when they were left together standing on the path by the garden gate.

'Those are worthy people, Miss Wilfer.'

'Do you know them well?' asked Bella.

He smiled, reproaching her, and she coloured, reproaching herself—both, with the knowledge that she had meant to entrap him into an answer not true—when he said 'I know OF them.'

'Truly, he told us he had seen you but once.'

'Truly, I supposed he did.'

Bella was nervous now, and would have been glad to recall her question.

'You thought it strange that, feeling much interested in you, I should start at what sounded like a proposal to bring you into contact with the murdered man who lies in his grave. I might have known—of course in a moment should have known—that it could not have that meaning. But my interest remains.'

Re-entering the family-room in a meditative state, Miss Bella was received by the irrepressible Lavinia with:

'There, Bella! At last I hope you have got your wishes realized—by your Boffins. You'll be rich enough now—with your Boffins. You can have as much flirting as you like—at your Boffins. But you won't take ME to your Boffins, I can tell you—you and your Boffins too!'

'If,' quoth Mr George Sampson, moodily pulling his stopper out, 'Miss Bella's Mr Boffin comes any more of his nonsense to ME, I only wish him to understand, as betwixt man and man, that he does it at his per—' and was going to say peril; but Miss Lavinia, having no confidence in his mental powers, and feeling his oration to have no definite application to any circumstances, jerked his stopper in again, with a sharpness that made his eyes water.

And now the worthy Mrs Wilfer, having used her youngest daughter as a lay-figure for the edification of these Boffins, became bland to her, and proceeded to develop her last instance of force of character, which was still in reserve. This was, to illuminate the family with her remarkable powers as a physiognomist; powers that terrified R. W. when ever let loose, as being always fraught with gloom and evil which no inferior prescience was aware of. And this Mrs Wilfer now did, be it observed, in jealousy of these Boffins, in the very same moments when she was already reflecting how she would flourish these very same Boffins and the state they kept, over the heads of her Boffinless friends.

'Of their manners,' said Mrs Wilfer, 'I say nothing. Of their appearance, I say nothing. Of the disinterestedness of their intentions towards Bella, I say nothing. But the craft, the secrecy, the dark deep underhanded plotting, written in Mrs Boffin's countenance, make me shudder.'

As an incontrovertible proof that those baleful attributes were all there, Mrs Wilfer shuddered on the spot.

Chapter 10

A MARRIAGE CONTRACT

There is excitement in the Veneering mansion. The mature young lady is going to be married (powder and all) to the mature young gentleman, and she is to be married from the Veneering house, and the Veneerings are to give the breakfast. The Analytical, who objects as a matter of principle to everything that occurs on the premises, necessarily objects to the match; but his consent has been dispensed with, and a spring-van is delivering its load of greenhouse plants at the door, in order that to-morrow's feast may be crowned with flowers.

The mature young lady is a lady of property. The mature young gentleman is a gentleman of property. He invests his property. He goes, in a condescending amateurish way, into the City, attends meetings of Directors, and has to do with traffic in Shares. As is well known to the wise in their generation, traffic in Shares is the one thing to have to do with in this world. Have no antecedents, no established character, no cultivation, no ideas, no manners; have Shares. Have Shares enough to be on Boards of Direction in capital letters, oscillate on mysterious business between London and Paris, and be great. Where does he come from? Shares. Where is he going to? Shares. What are his tastes? Shares. Has he any principles? Shares. What squeezes him into Parliament? Shares. Perhaps he never of himself achieved success in anything, never originated anything, never produced anything? Sufficient answer to all; Shares. O mighty Shares! To set those blaring images so high, and to cause us smaller vermin, as under the influence of henbane or opium, to cry out, night and day, 'Relieve us of our money, scatter it for us, buy us and sell us, ruin us, only we beseech ye take rank among the powers of the earth, and fatten on us'!

While the Loves and Graces have been preparing this torch for Hymen, which is to be kindled to-morrow, Mr Twemlow has suffered much in his mind. It would seem that both the mature young lady and the mature young gentleman must indubitably be Veneering's oldest friends. Wards of his, perhaps? Yet that can scarcely be, for they are older than himself. Veneering has been in their confidence throughout, and has done much to lure them to the altar. He has mentioned to Twemlow how he said to Mrs Veneering, 'Anastatia, this must be a match.' He has mentioned to Twemlow how he regards Sophronia Akershem (the mature young lady) in the light of a sister, and Alfred Lammle (the mature young gentleman) in the light of a brother. Twemlow has asked him whether he went to school as a junior with Alfred? He has answered, 'Not exactly.' Whether Sophronia was adopted by his mother? He has answered, 'Not precisely so.' Twemlow's hand has gone to his forehead with a lost air.

But, two or three weeks ago, Twemlow, sitting over his newspaper, and over his dry-toast and weak tea, and over the stable-yard in Duke Street, St James's, received a highly-perfumed cocked-hat and monogram from Mrs Veneering, entreating her dearest Mr T., if not particularly engaged that day, to come like a charming soul and make a fourth at dinner with dear Mr Podsnap, for the discussion of an interesting family topic; the last three words doubly underlined and pointed with a note of admiration. And Twemlow replying, 'Not engaged, and more than delighted,' goes, and this takes place:

'My dear Twemlow,' says Veneering, 'your ready response to Anastatia's unceremonious invitation is truly kind, and like an old, old friend. You know our dear friend Podsnap?'

Twemlow ought to know the dear friend Podsnap who covered him with so much confusion, and he says he does know him, and Podsnap reciprocates. Apparently, Podsnap has been so wrought upon in a short time, as to believe that he has been intimate in the house many, many, many years. In the friendliest manner he is making himself quite at home with his back to the fire, executing a statuette of the Colossus at Rhodes. Twemlow has before noticed in his feeble way how soon the Veneering guests become infected with the Veneering fiction. Not, however, that he has the least notion of its being his own case.

'Our friends, Alfred and Sophronia,' pursues Veneering the veiled prophet: 'our friends Alfred and Sophronia, you will be glad to hear, my dear fellows, are going to be married. As my wife and I make it a family affair the entire direction of which we take upon ourselves, of course our first step is to communicate the fact to our family friends.'

('Oh!' thinks Twemlow, with his eyes on Podsnap, 'then there are only two of us, and he's the other.')

'I did hope,' Veneering goes on, 'to have had Lady Tippins to meet you; but she is always in request, and is unfortunately engaged.'

('Oh!' thinks Twemlow, with his eyes wandering, 'then there are three of us, and SHE'S the other.')

'Mortimer Lightwood,' resumes Veneering, 'whom you both know, is out of town; but he writes, in his whimsical manner, that as we ask him to be bridegroom's best man when the ceremony takes place, he will not refuse, though he doesn't see what he has to do with it.'

('Oh!' thinks Twemlow, with his eyes rolling, 'then there are four of us, and HE'S the other.')

'Boots and Brewer,' observes Veneering, 'whom you also know, I have not asked to-day; but I reserve them for the occasion.'

('Then,' thinks Twemlow, with his eyes shut, 'there are si—' But here collapses and does not completely recover until dinner is over and the Analytical has been requested to withdraw.)

'We now come,' says Veneering, 'to the point, the real point, of our little family consultation. Sophronia, having lost both father and mother, has no one to give her away.'

'Give her away yourself,' says Podsnap.

'My dear Podsnap, no. For three reasons. Firstly, because I couldn't take so much upon myself when I have respected family friends to remember. Secondly, because I am not so vain as to think that I look the part. Thirdly, because Anastatia is a little superstitious on the subject and feels averse to my giving away anybody until baby is old enough to be married.'

'What would happen if he did?' Podsnap inquires of Mrs Veneering.

'My dear Mr Podsnap, it's very foolish I know, but I have an instinctive presentiment that if Hamilton gave away anybody else first, he would never give away baby.' Thus Mrs Veneering; with her open hands pressed together, and each of her eight aquiline fingers looking so very like her one aquiline nose that the bran-new jewels on them seem necessary for distinction's sake.

'But, my dear Podsnap,' quoth Veneering, 'there IS a tried friend of our family who, I think and hope you will agree with me, Podsnap, is the friend on whom this agreeable duty almost naturally devolves. That friend,' saying the words as if the company were about a hundred and fifty in number, 'is now among us. That friend is Twemlow.'

'Certainly!' From Podsnap.

'That friend,' Veneering repeats with greater firmness, 'is our dear good Twemlow. And I cannot sufficiently express to you, my dear Podsnap, the pleasure I feel in having this opinion of mine and Anastatia's so readily confirmed by you, that other equally familiar and tried friend who stands in the proud position—I mean who proudly stands in the position—or I ought rather to say, who places Anastatia and myself in the proud position of himself standing in the simple position—of baby's godfather.' And, indeed, Veneering is much relieved in mind to find that Podsnap betrays no jealousy of Twemlow's elevation.

So, it has come to pass that the spring-van is strewing flowers on the rosy hours and on the staircase, and that Twemlow is surveying the ground on which he is to play his distinguished part to-morrow. He has already been to the church, and taken note of the various impediments in the aisle, under the auspices of an extremely dreary widow who opens the pews, and whose left hand appears to be in a state of acute rheumatism, but is in fact voluntarily doubled up to act as a money-box.

And now Veneering shoots out of the Study wherein he is accustomed, when contemplative, to give his mind to the carving and gilding of the Pilgrims going to Canterbury, in order to show Twemlow the little flourish he has prepared for the trumpets of fashion, describing how that on the seventeenth instant, at St James's Church, the Reverend Blank Blank, assisted by the Reverend Dash Dash, united in the bonds of matrimony, Alfred Lammle Esquire, of Sackville Street, Piccadilly, to Sophronia, only daughter of the late Horatio Akershem, Esquire, of Yorkshire. Also how the fair bride was married from the house of Hamilton Veneering, Esquire, of Stucconia, and was given away by Melvin Twemlow, Esquire, of Duke Street, St James's, second cousin to Lord Snigsworth, of Snigsworthy Park. While perusing which composition, Twemlow makes some opaque approach to perceiving that if the Reverend Blank Blank and the Reverend Dash Dash fail, after this introduction, to become enrolled in the list of Veneering's dearest and oldest friends, they will have none but themselves to thank for it.

After which, appears Sophronia (whom Twemlow has seen twice in his lifetime), to thank Twemlow for counterfeiting the late Horatio Akershem Esquire, broadly of Yorkshire. And after her, appears Alfred (whom Twemlow has seen once in his lifetime), to do the same and to make a pasty sort of glitter, as if he were constructed for candle-light only, and had been let out into daylight by some grand mistake. And after that, comes Mrs Veneering, in a pervadingly aquiline state of figure, and with transparent little knobs on her temper, like the little transparent knob on the bridge of her nose, 'Worn out by worry and excitement,' as she tells her dear Mr Twemlow, and reluctantly revived with curacoa by the Analytical. And after that, the bridesmaids begin to come by rail-road from various parts of the country, and to come like adorable recruits enlisted by a sergeant not present; for, on arriving at the Veneering depot, they are in a barrack of strangers.

So, Twemlow goes home to Duke Street, St James's, to take a plate of mutton broth with a chop in it, and a look at the marriage-service, in order that he may cut in at the right place to-morrow; and he is low, and feels it dull over the livery stable-yard, and is distinctly aware of a dint in his heart, made by the most adorable of the adorable bridesmaids. For, the poor little harmless gentleman once had his fancy, like the rest of us, and she didn't answer (as she often does not), and he thinks the adorable bridesmaid is like the fancy as she was then (which she is not at all), and that if the fancy had not married some one else for money, but had married him for love, he and she would have been happy (which they wouldn't have been), and that she has a tenderness for him still (whereas her toughness is a proverb). Brooding over the fire, with his dried little head in his dried little hands, and his dried little elbows on his dried little knees, Twemlow is melancholy. 'No Adorable to bear me company here!' thinks he. 'No Adorable at the club! A waste, a waste, a waste, my Twemlow!' And so drops asleep, and has galvanic starts all over him.

Betimes next morning, that horrible old Lady Tippins (relict of the late Sir Thomas Tippins, knighted in mistake for somebody else by His Majesty King George the Third, who, while performing the ceremony, was graciously pleased to observe, 'What, what, what? Who, who, who? Why, why, why?') begins to be dyed and varnished for the interesting occasion. She has a reputation for giving smart accounts of things, and she must be at these people's early, my dear, to lose nothing of the fun. Whereabout in the bonnet and drapery announced by her name, any fragment of the real woman may be concealed, is perhaps known to her maid; but you could easily buy all you see of her, in Bond Street; or you might scalp her, and peel her, and scrape her, and make two Lady Tippinses out of her, and yet not penetrate to the genuine article. She has a large gold eye-glass, has Lady

Tippins, to survey the proceedings with. If she had one in each eye, it might keep that other drooping lid up, and look more uniform. But perennial youth is in her artificial flowers, and her list of lovers is full.

'Mortimer, you wretch,' says Lady Tippins, turning the eyeglass about and about, 'where is your charge, the bridegroom?'

'Give you my honour,' returns Mortimer, 'I don't know, and I don't care.'

'Miserable! Is that the way you do your duty?'

'Beyond an impression that he is to sit upon my knee and be seconded at some point of the solemnities, like a principal at a prizefight, I assure you I have no notion what my duty is,' returns Mortimer.

Eugene is also in attendance, with a pervading air upon him of having presupposed the ceremony to be a funeral, and of being disappointed. The scene is the Vestry-room of St James's Church, with a number of leathery old registers on shelves, that might be bound in Lady Tippinses.

But, hark! A carriage at the gate, and Mortimer's man arrives, looking rather like a spurious Mephistopheles and an unacknowledged member of that gentleman's family. Whom Lady Tippins, surveying through her eye-glass, considers a fine man, and quite a catch; and of whom Mortimer remarks, in the lowest spirits, as he approaches, 'I believe this is my fellow, confound him!' More carriages at the gate, and lo the rest of the characters. Whom Lady Tippins, standing on a cushion, surveying through the eye-glass, thus checks off. 'Bride; five-and-forty if a day, thirty shillings a yard, veil fifteen pound, pocket-handkerchief a present. Bridesmaids; kept down for fear of outshining bride, consequently not girls, twelve and sixpence a yard, Veneering's flowers, snub-nosed one rather pretty but too conscious of her stockings, bonnets three pound ten. Twemlow; blessed release for the dear man if she really was his daughter, nervous even under the pretence that she is, well he may be. Mrs Veneering; never saw such velvet, say two thousand pounds as she stands, absolute jeweller's window, father must have been a pawnbroker, or how could these people do it? Attendant unknowns; pokey.'

Ceremony performed, register signed, Lady Tippins escorted out of sacred edifice by Veneering, carriages rolling back to Stucconia, servants with favours and flowers, Veneering's house reached, drawing-rooms most magnificent. Here, the Podsnaps await the happy party; Mr Podsnap, with his hair-brushes made the most of; that imperial rocking-horse, Mrs Podsnap, majestically skittish. Here, too, are Boots and Brewer, and the two other Buffers; each Buffer with a flower in his button-hole, his hair curled, and his gloves buttoned on tight, apparently come prepared, if anything had happened to the bridegroom, to be married instantly. Here, too, the bride's aunt and next relation; a widowed female of a Medusa sort, in a stoney cap, glaring petrifaction at her fellow-creatures. Here, too, the bride's trustee; an oilcake-fed style of business-gentleman with mooney spectacles, and an object of much interest. Veneering launching himself upon this trustee as his oldest friend (which makes seven, Twemlow thought), and confidentially retiring with him into the conservatory, it is understood that Veneering is his co-trustee, and that they are arranging about the fortune. Buffers are even overheard to whisper Thir-ty Thou-sand Pou-nds! with a smack and a relish suggestive of the very finest oysters. Pokey unknowns, amazed to find how intimately they know Veneering, pluck up spirit, fold their arms, and begin to contradict him before breakfast. What time Mrs Veneering, carrying baby dressed as a bridesmaid, flits about among the company, emitting flashes of many-coloured lightning from diamonds, emeralds, and rubies.

The Analytical, in course of time achieving what he feels to be due to himself in bringing to a dignified conclusion several quarrels he has on hand with the pastrycook's men, announces breakfast. Dining-room no less magnificent than drawing-room; tables superb; all the camels out, and all laden. Splendid cake, covered with Cupids, silver, and true-lovers' knots. Splendid bracelet, produced by Veneering before going down, and clasped upon the arm of bride. Yet nobody seems to think much more of the Veneerings than if they were a tolerable landlord and landlady doing the thing in the way of business at so much a head. The bride and bridegroom talk and laugh apart, as has always been their manner; and the Buffers work their way through the dishes with systematic perseverance, as has always been THEIR manner; and the pokey unknowns are exceedingly benevolent to one another in invitations to take glasses of champagne; but Mrs Podsnap, arching her mane and rocking her grandest, has a far more deferential audience than Mrs Veneering; and Podsnap all but does the honours.

Another dismal circumstance is, that Veneering, having the captivating Tippins on one side of him and the bride's aunt on the other, finds it immensely difficult to keep the peace. For, Medusa, besides unmistakingly glaring petrifaction at the fascinating Tippins, follows every lively remark made by that dear creature, with an audible snort: which may be referable to a chronic cold in the head, but may also be referable to indignation and contempt. And this snort being regular in its reproduction, at length comes to be expected by the company, who make embarrassing pauses when it is falling due, and by waiting for it, render it more emphatic when it comes. The stoney aunt has likewise an injurious way of rejecting all dishes whereof Lady Tippins partakes: saying aloud when they are proffered to her, 'No, no, no, not for me. Take it away!' As with a set purpose of implying a misgiving that if nourished upon similar meats, she might come to be like that charmer, which would be a fatal consummation. Aware of her enemy, Lady Tippins tries a youthful sally or two, and tries the eye-glass; but, from the impenetrable cap and snorting armour of the stoney aunt all weapons rebound powerless.

Another objectionable circumstance is, that the pokey unknowns support each other in being unimpressible. They persist in not being frightened by the gold and silver camels, and they are banded together to defy the elaborately chased ice-pails. They even seem to unite in some vague utterance of the sentiment that the landlord and landlady will make a pretty good profit out of this, and they almost carry themselves like customers. Nor is there compensating influence in the adorable bridesmaids; for, having very little interest in the bride, and none at all in one another, those lovely beings become, each one of her own account, depreciatingly contemplative of the millinery present; while the bridegroom's man, exhausted, in the back of his chair, appears to be improving the occasion by penitentially contemplating all the wrong he has ever done; the difference between him and his friend Eugene, being, that the latter, in the back of HIS chair, appears to be contemplating all the wrong he would like to do—particularly to the present company.

In which state of affairs, the usual ceremonies rather droop and flag, and the splendid cake when cut by the fair hand of the bride has but an indigestible appearance. However, all the things indispensable to be said are said, and all the things indispensable to be done are done (including Lady Tippins's yawning, falling asleep, and waking insensible), and there is hurried preparation for the nuptial journey to the Isle of Wight, and the outer air teems with brass bands and spectators. In full sight of whom, the malignant star of the Analytical has pre-ordained that pain and ridicule shall befall him. For he, standing on the doorsteps to grace the departure, is suddenly caught a most prodigious thump on the side of his head with a heavy shoe, which a Buffer in the hall, champagne-flushed and wild of aim, has borrowed on the spur of the moment from the pastrycook's porter, to cast after the departing pair as an auspicious omen.

So they all go up again into the gorgeous drawing-rooms—all of them flushed with breakfast, as having taken scarlatina sociably—and there the combined unknowns do malignant things with their legs to ottomans, and take as much as possible out of the splendid furniture. And so, Lady Tippins, quite undetermined whether today is the day before yesterday, or the day after to-morrow, or the week after next, fades away; and Mortimer Lightwood and Eugene fade away, and Twemlow fades away, and the stoney aunt goes away—she declines to fade, proving rock to the last—and even the unknowns are slowly strained off, and it is all over.

All over, that is to say, for the time being. But, there is another time to come, and it comes in about a fortnight, and it comes to Mr and Mrs Lammle on the sands at Shanklin, in the Isle of Wight.

Mr and Mrs Lammle have walked for some time on the Shanklin sands, and one may see by their footprints that they have not walked arm in arm, and that they have not walked in a straight track, and that they have walked in a moody humour; for, the lady has prodded little spirting holes in the damp sand before her with her parasol, and the gentleman has trailed his stick after him. As if he were of the Mephistopheles family indeed, and had walked with a drooping tail.

'Do you mean to tell me, then, Sophronia—'

Thus he begins after a long silence, when Sophronia flashes fiercely, and turns upon him.

'Don't put it upon ME, sir. I ask you, do YOU mean to tell me?'

Mr Lammle falls silent again, and they walk as before. Mrs Lammle opens her nostrils and bites her under-lip; Mr Lammle takes his gingerous whiskers in his left hand, and, bringing them together, frowns furtively at his beloved, out of a thick gingerous bush.

'Do I mean to say!' Mrs Lammle after a time repeats, with indignation. 'Putting it on me! The unmanly disingenuousness!'

Mr Lammle stops, releases his whiskers, and looks at her. 'The what?'

Mrs Lammle haughtily replies, without stopping, and without looking back. 'The meanness.'

He is at her side again in a pace or two, and he retorts, 'That is not what you said. You said disingenuousness.'

'What if I did?'

'There is no "if" in the case. You did.'

'I did, then. And what of it?'

'What of it?' says Mr Lammle. 'Have you the face to utter the word to me?'

'The face, too!' replied Mrs Lammle, staring at him with cold scorn. 'Pray, how dare you, sir, utter the word to me?'

'I never did.'

As this happens to be true, Mrs Lammle is thrown on the feminine resource of saying, 'I don't care what you uttered or did not utter.'

After a little more walking and a little more silence, Mr Lammle breaks the latter.

'You shall proceed in your own way. You claim a right to ask me do I mean to tell you. Do I mean to tell you what?'

'That you are a man of property?'

'No.'

'Then you married me on false pretences?'

'So be it. Next comes what you mean to say. Do you mean to say you are a woman of property?'

'No.'

'Then you married me on false pretences.'

'If you were so dull a fortune-hunter that you deceived yourself, or if you were so greedy and grasping that you were over-willing to be deceived by appearances, is it my fault, you adventurer?' the lady demands, with great asperity.

'I asked Veneering, and he told me you were rich.'

'Veneering!' with great contempt.' And what does Veneering know about me!'

'Was he not your trustee?'

'No. I have no trustee, but the one you saw on the day when you fraudulently married me. And his trust is not a very difficult one, for it is only an annuity of a hundred and fifteen pounds. I think there are some odd shillings or pence, if you are very particular.'

Mr Lammle bestows a by no means loving look upon the partner of his joys and sorrows, and he mutters something; but checks himself.

'Question for question. It is my turn again, Mrs Lammle. What made you suppose me a man of property?'

'You made me suppose you so. Perhaps you will deny that you always presented yourself to me in that character?'

'But you asked somebody, too. Come, Mrs Lammle, admission for admission. You asked somebody?'

'I asked Veneering.'

'And Veneering knew as much of me as he knew of you, or as anybody knows of him.'

After more silent walking, the bride stops short, to say in a passionate manner:

'I never will forgive the Veneerings for this!'

'Neither will I,' returns the bridegroom.

With that, they walk again; she, making those angry spirts in the sand; he, dragging that dejected tail. The tide is low, and seems to have thrown them together high on the bare shore. A gull comes sweeping by their heads and flouts them. There was a golden surface on the brown cliffs but now, and behold they are only damp earth. A taunting roar comes from the sea, and the far-out rollers mount upon one another, to look at the entrapped impostors, and to join in impish and exultant gambols.

'Do you pretend to believe,' Mrs Lammle resumes, sternly, 'when you talk of my marrying you for worldly advantages, that it was within the bounds of reasonable probability that I would have married you for yourself?'

'Again there are two sides to the question, Mrs Lammle. What do you pretend to believe?'

'So you first deceive me and then insult me!' cries the lady, with a heaving bosom.

'Not at all. I have originated nothing. The double-edged question was yours.'

'Was mine!' the bride repeats, and her parasol breaks in her angry hand.

His colour has turned to a livid white, and ominous marks have come to light about his nose, as if the finger of the very devil himself had, within the last few moments, touched it here and there. But he has repressive power, and she has none.

'Throw it away,' he coolly recommends as to the parasol; 'you have made it useless; you look ridiculous with it.'

Whereupon she calls him in her rage, 'A deliberate villain,' and so casts the broken thing from her as that it strikes him in falling. The finger-marks are something whiter for the instant, but he walks on at her side.

She bursts into tears, declaring herself the wretchedest, the most deceived, the worst-used, of women. Then she says that if she had the courage to kill herself, she would do it. Then she calls him vile impostor. Then she asks him, why, in the disappointment of his base speculation, he does not take her life with his own hand, under the present favourable circumstances. Then she cries again. Then she is enraged again, and makes some mention of swindlers. Finally, she sits down crying on a block of stone, and is in all the known and unknown humours of her sex at once. Pending her changes, those aforesaid marks in his face have come and gone, now here now there, like white steps of a pipe on which the diabolical performer has played a tune. Also his livid lips are parted at last, as if he were breathless with running. Yet he is not.

'Now, get up, Mrs Lammle, and let us speak reasonably.'

She sits upon her stone, and takes no heed of him.

'Get up, I tell you.'

Raising her head, she looks contemptuously in his face, and repeats, 'You tell me! Tell me, forsooth!'

She affects not to know that his eyes are fastened on her as she droops her head again; but her whole figure reveals that she knows it uneasily.

'Enough of this. Come! Do you hear? Get up.'

Yielding to his hand, she rises, and they walk again; but this time with their faces turned towards their place of residence.

'Mrs Lammle, we have both been deceiving, and we have both been deceived. We have both been biting, and we have both been bitten. In a nut-shell, there's the state of the case.'

'You sought me out—'

'Tut! Let us have done with that. WE know very well how it was. Why should you and I talk about it, when you and I can't disguise it? To proceed. I am disappointed and cut a poor figure.'

'Am I no one?'

'Some one—and I was coming to you, if you had waited a moment. You, too, are disappointed and cut a poor figure.'

'An injured figure!'

'You are now cool enough, Sophronia, to see that you can't be injured without my being equally injured; and that therefore the mere word is not to the purpose. When I look back, I wonder how I can have been such a fool as to take you to so great an extent upon trust.'

'And when I look back—' the bride cries, interrupting.

'And when you look back, you wonder how you can have been—you'll excuse the word?'

'Most certainly, with so much reason.

'—Such a fool as to take ME to so great an extent upon trust. But the folly is committed on both sides. I cannot get rid of you; you cannot get rid of me. What follows?'

'Shame and misery,' the bride bitterly replies.

'I don't know. A mutual understanding follows, and I think it may carry us through. Here I split my discourse (give me your arm, Sophronia), into three heads, to make it shorter and plainer. Firstly, it's enough to have been done, without the mortification of being known to have been done. So we agree to keep the fact to ourselves. You agree?'

'If it is possible, I do.'

'Possible! We have pretended well enough to one another. Can't we, united, pretend to the world? Agreed. Secondly, we owe the Veneerings a grudge, and we owe all other people the grudge of wishing them to be taken in, as we ourselves have been taken in. Agreed?'

'Yes. Agreed.'

'We come smoothly to thirdly. You have called me an adventurer, Sophronia. So I am. In plain uncomplimentary English, so I am. So are you, my dear. So are many people. We agree to keep our own secret, and to work together in furtherance of our own schemes.'

'What schemes?'

'Any scheme that will bring us money. By our own schemes, I mean our joint interest. Agreed?'

She answers, after a little hesitation, 'I suppose so. Agreed.'

'Carried at once, you see! Now, Sophronia, only half a dozen words more. We know one another perfectly. Don't be tempted into twitting me with the past knowledge that you have of me, because it is identical with the past knowledge that I have of you, and in twitting me, you twit yourself, and I don't want to hear you do it. With this good understanding established between us, it is better never done. To wind up all:—You have shown temper today, Sophronia. Don't be betrayed into doing so again, because I have a Devil of a temper myself.'

So, the happy pair, with this hopeful marriage contract thus signed, sealed, and delivered, repair homeward. If, when those infernal finger-marks were on the white and breathless countenance of Alfred Lammle, Esquire, they denoted that he conceived the purpose of subduing his dear wife Mrs Alfred Lammle, by at once divesting her of any lingering reality or pretence of self-respect, the purpose would seem to have been presently executed. The mature young lady has mighty little need of powder, now, for her downcast face, as he escorts her in the light of the setting sun to their abode of bliss.

Chapter 11

PODSNAPPERY

Mr Podsnap was well to do, and stood very high in Mr Podsnap's opinion. Beginning with a good inheritance, he had married a good inheritance, and had thriven exceedingly in the Marine Insurance way, and was quite satisfied. He never could make out why everybody was not quite satisfied, and he felt conscious that he set a brilliant social example in being particularly well satisfied with most things, and, above all other things, with himself.

Thus happily acquainted with his own merit and importance, Mr Podsnap settled that whatever he put behind him he put out of existence. There was a dignified conclusiveness—not to add a grand convenience—in this way of getting rid of disagreeables which had done much towards establishing Mr Podsnap in his lofty place in Mr Podsnap's satisfaction. 'I don't want to know about it; I don't choose to discuss it; I don't admit it!' Mr Podsnap had even acquired a peculiar flourish of his right arm in often clearing the world of its most difficult problems, by sweeping them behind him (and consequently sheer away) with those words and a flushed face. For they affronted him.

Mr Podsnap's world was not a very large world, morally; no, nor even geographically: seeing that although his business was sustained upon commerce with other countries, he considered other countries, with that important reservation, a mistake, and of their manners and customs would conclusively observe, 'Not English!' when, PRESTO! with a flourish of the arm, and a flush of the face, they were swept away. Elsewhere, the world got up at eight, shaved close at a quarter-past, breakfasted at nine, went to the City at ten, came home at half-past five, and dined at seven. Mr Podsnap's notions of the Arts in their integrity might have been stated thus. Literature; large print, respectfully descriptive of getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven. Painting and Sculpture; models and portraits representing Professors of getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven. Music; a respectable performance (without variations) on stringed and wind instruments, sedately expressive of getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven. Nothing else to be permitted to those same vagrants the Arts, on pain of excommunication. Nothing else To Be—anywhere!

As a so eminently respectable man, Mr Podsnap was sensible of its being required of him to take Providence under his protection. Consequently he always knew exactly what Providence meant. Inferior and less respectable men might fall short of that mark, but Mr Podsnap was always up to it. And it was very remarkable (and must have been very comfortable) that what Providence meant, was invariably what Mr Podsnap meant.

These may be said to have been the articles of a faith and school which the present chapter takes the liberty of calling, after its representative man, Podsnappery. They were confined within close bounds, as Mr Podsnap's own head was confined by his shirt-collar; and they were enunciated with a sounding pomp that smacked of the creaking of Mr Podsnap's own boots.

There was a Miss Podsnap. And this young rocking-horse was being trained in her mother's art of prancing in a stately manner without ever getting on. But the high parental action was not yet imparted to her, and in truth she was but an undersized damsel, with high shoulders, low spirits, chilled elbows, and a rasped surface of nose, who seemed to take occasional frosty peeps out of childhood into womanhood, and to shrink back again, overcome by her mother's head-dress and her father from head to foot—crushed by the mere dead-weight of Podsnappery.

A certain institution in Mr Podsnap's mind which he called 'the young person' may be considered to have been embodied in Miss Podsnap, his daughter. It was an inconvenient and exacting institution, as requiring everything in the universe to be filed down and fitted to it. The question about everything was, would it bring a blush into the cheek of the young person? And the inconvenience of the young person was, that, according to Mr Podsnap, she seemed always liable to burst into blushes when there was no need at all. There appeared to be no line of demarcation between the young person's excessive innocence, and another person's guiltiest knowledge. Take Mr Podsnap's word for it, and the soberest tints of drab, white, lilac, and grey, were all flaming red to this troublesome Bull of a young person.

The Podsnaps lived in a shady angle adjoining Portman Square. They were a kind of people certain to dwell in the shade, wherever they dwelt. Miss Podsnap's life had been, from her first appearance on this planet, altogether of a shady order; for, Mr Podsnap's young person was likely to get little good out of association with other young persons, and had therefore been restricted to companionship with not very congenial older persons, and with massive furniture. Miss Podsnap's early views of life being principally derived from the reflections of it in her father's boots, and in the walnut and rosewood tables of the dim drawing-rooms, and in their swarthy giants of looking-glasses, were of a sombre cast; and it was not wonderful that now, when she was on most days solemnly tooled through the Park by the side of her mother in a great tall custard-coloured phaeton, she showed above the apron of that vehicle like a dejected young person sitting up in bed to take a startled look at things in general, and very strongly desiring to get her head under the counterpane again.

Said Mr Podsnap to Mrs Podsnap, 'Georgiana is almost eighteen.'

Said Mrs Podsnap to Mr Podsnap, assenting, 'Almost eighteen.'

Said Mr Podsnap then to Mrs Podsnap, 'Really I think we should have some people on Georgiana's birthday.'

Said Mrs Podsnap then to Mr Podsnap, 'Which will enable us to clear off all those people who are due.'

So it came to pass that Mr and Mrs Podsnap requested the honour of the company of seventeen friends of their souls at dinner; and that they substituted other friends of their souls for such of the seventeen original friends of their souls as deeply regretted that a prior engagement prevented their having the honour of dining with Mr and Mrs Podsnap, in pursuance of their kind invitation; and that Mrs Podsnap said of all these inconsolable personages, as she checked them off with a pencil in her list, 'Asked, at any rate, and got rid of;' and that they successfully disposed of a good many friends of their souls in this way, and felt their consciences much lightened.

There were still other friends of their souls who were not entitled to be asked to dinner, but had a claim to be invited to come and take a haunch of mutton vapour-bath at half-past nine. For the clearing off of these worthies, Mrs Podsnap added a small and early evening to the dinner, and looked in at the music-shop to bespeak a well-conducted automaton to come and play quadrilles for a carpet dance.

Mr and Mrs Veneering, and Mr and Mrs Veneering's bran-new bride and bridegroom, were of the dinner company; but the Podsnap establishment had nothing else in common with the Veneerings. Mr Podsnap could tolerate taste in a mushroom man who stood in need of that sort of thing, but was far above it himself. Hideous solidity was the characteristic of the Podsnap plate. Everything was made to look as heavy as it could, and to take up as much room as possible. Everything said boastfully, 'Here you have as much of me in my ugliness as if I were only lead; but I am so many ounces of precious metal worth so much an ounce;—wouldn't you like to melt me down?' A corpulent straddling epergne, blotched all over as if it had broken out in an eruption rather than been ornamented, delivered this address from an unsightly silver platform in the centre of the table. Four silver wine-coolers, each furnished with four staring heads, each head obtrusively carrying a big silver ring in each of its ears, conveyed the sentiment up and down the table, and handed it on to the pot-bellied silver salt-cellars. All the big silver spoons and forks widened the mouths of the company expressly for the purpose of thrusting the sentiment down their throats with every morsel they ate.

The majority of the guests were like the plate, and included several heavy articles weighing ever so much. But there was a foreign gentleman among them: whom Mr Podsnap had invited after much debate with himself—believing the whole European continent to be in mortal alliance against the young person—and there was a droll disposition, not only on the part of Mr Podsnap but of everybody else, to treat him as if he were a child who was hard of hearing.

As a delicate concession to this unfortunately-born foreigner, Mr Podsnap, in receiving him, had presented his wife as 'Madame Podsnap;' also his daughter as 'Mademoiselle Podsnap,' with some inclination to add 'ma fille,' in which bold venture, however, he checked himself. The Veneerings being at that time the only other arrivals, he had added (in a condescendingly explanatory manner), 'Monsieur Vey-nair-reeng,' and had then subsided into English.

'How Do You Like London?' Mr Podsnap now inquired from his station of host, as if he were administering something in the nature of a powder or potion to the deaf child; 'London, Londres, London?'

The foreign gentleman admired it.

'You find it Very Large?' said Mr Podsnap, spaciously.

The foreign gentleman found it very large.

'And Very Rich?'

The foreign gentleman found it, without doubt, enormement riche.

'Enormously Rich, We say,' returned Mr Podsnap, in a condescending manner. 'Our English adverbs do Not terminate in Mong, and We Pronounce the "ch" as if there were a "t" before it. We say Ritch.'

'Reetch,' remarked the foreign gentleman.

'And Do You Find, Sir,' pursued Mr Podsnap, with dignity, 'Many Evidences that Strike You, of our British Constitution in the Streets Of The World's Metropolis, London, Londres, London?'

The foreign gentleman begged to be pardoned, but did not altogether understand.

'The Constitution Britannique,' Mr Podsnap explained, as if he were teaching in an infant school.' We Say British, But You Say Britannique, You Know' (forgivingly, as if that were not his fault). 'The Constitution, Sir.'

The foreign gentleman said, 'Mais, yees; I know eem.'

A youngish sallowish gentleman in spectacles, with a lumpy forehead, seated in a supplementary chair at a corner of the table, here caused a profound sensation by saying, in a raised voice, 'ESKER,' and then stopping dead.

'Mais oui,' said the foreign gentleman, turning towards him. 'Est-ce que? Quoi donc?'

But the gentleman with the lumpy forehead having for the time delivered himself of all that he found behind his lumps, spake for the time no more.

'I Was Inquiring,' said Mr Podsnap, resuming the thread of his discourse, 'Whether You Have Observed in our Streets as We should say, Upon our Pavvy as You would say, any Tokens—'

The foreign gentleman, with patient courtesy entreated pardon; 'But what was tokenz?'

'Marks,' said Mr Podsnap; 'Signs, you know, Appearances—Traces.'

'Ah! Of a Orse?' inquired the foreign gentleman.

'We call it Horse,' said Mr Podsnap, with forbearance. 'In England, Angleterre, England, We Aspirate the "H," and We Say "Horse." Only our Lower Classes Say "Orse!"'

'Pardon,' said the foreign gentleman; 'I am alwiz wrong!'

'Our Language,' said Mr Podsnap, with a gracious consciousness of being always right, 'is Difficult. Ours is a Copious Language, and Trying to Strangers. I will not Pursue my Question.'

But the lumpy gentleman, unwilling to give it up, again madly said, 'ESKER,' and again spake no more.

'It merely referred,' Mr Podsnap explained, with a sense of meritorious proprietorship, 'to Our Constitution, Sir. We Englishmen are Very Proud of our Constitution, Sir. It Was Bestowed Upon Us By Providence. No Other Country is so Favoured as This Country.'

'And ozer countries?—' the foreign gentleman was beginning, when Mr Podsnap put him right again.

'We do not say Ozer; we say Other: the letters are "T" and "H;" You say Tay and Aish, You Know; (still with clemency). The sound is "th"—"th!"'

'And OTHER countries,' said the foreign gentleman. 'They do how?'

'They do, Sir,' returned Mr Podsnap, gravely shaking his head; 'they do—I am sorry to be obliged to say it—AS they do.'

'It was a little particular of Providence,' said the foreign gentleman, laughing; 'for the frontier is not large.'

'Undoubtedly,' assented Mr Podsnap; 'But So it is. It was the Charter of the Land. This Island was Blest, Sir, to the Direct Exclusion of such Other Countries as—as there may happen to be. And if we were all Englishmen present, I would say,' added Mr Podsnap, looking round upon his compatriots, and sounding solemnly with his theme, 'that there is in the Englishman a combination of qualities, a modesty, an independence, a responsibility, a repose, combined with an absence of everything calculated to call a blush into the cheek of a young person, which one would seek in vain among the Nations of the Earth.'

Having delivered this little summary, Mr Podsnap's face flushed, as he thought of the remote possibility of its being at all qualified by any prejudiced citizen of any other country; and, with his favourite right-arm flourish, he put the rest of Europe and the whole of Asia, Africa, and America nowhere.

The audience were much edified by this passage of words; and Mr Podsnap, feeling that he was in rather remarkable force to-day, became smiling and conversational.

'Has anything more been heard, Veneering,' he inquired, 'of the lucky legatee?'

'Nothing more,' returned Veneering, 'than that he has come into possession of the property. I am told people now call him The Golden Dustman. I mentioned to you some time ago, I think, that the young lady whose intended husband was murdered is daughter to a clerk of mine?'

'Yes, you told me that,' said Podsnap; 'and by-the-bye, I wish you would tell it again here, for it's a curious coincidence—curious that the first news of the discovery should have been brought straight to your table (when I was there), and curious that one of your people should have been so nearly interested in it. Just relate that, will you?'

Veneering was more than ready to do it, for he had prospered exceedingly upon the Harmon Murder, and had turned the social distinction it conferred upon him to the account of making several dozen of bran-new bosom-friends. Indeed, such another lucky hit would almost have set him up in that way to his satisfaction. So, addressing himself to the most desirable of his neighbours, while Mrs Veneering secured the next most desirable, he plunged into the case, and emerged from it twenty minutes afterwards with a Bank Director in his arms. In the mean time, Mrs Veneering had dived into the same waters for a wealthy Ship-Broker, and had brought him up, safe and sound, by the hair. Then Mrs Veneering had to relate, to a larger circle, how she had been to see the girl, and how she was really pretty, and (considering her station) presentable. And this she did with such a successful display of her eight aquiline fingers and their encircling jewels, that she happily laid hold of a drifting General Officer, his wife and daughter, and not only restored their animation which had become suspended, but made them lively friends within an hour.

Although Mr Podsnap would in a general way have highly disapproved of Bodies in rivers as ineligible topics with reference to the cheek of the young person, he had, as one may say, a share in this affair which made him a part proprietor. As its returns were immediate, too, in the way of restraining the company from speechless contemplation of the wine-coolers, it paid, and he was satisfied.

And now the haunch of mutton vapour-bath having received a gamey infusion, and a few last touches of sweets and coffee, was quite ready, and the bathers came; but not before the discreet automaton had got behind the bars of the piano music-desk, and there presented the appearance of a captive languishing in a rose-wood jail. And who now so pleasant or so well assorted as Mr and Mrs Alfred Lammle, he all sparkle, she all gracious contentment, both at occasional intervals exchanging looks like partners at cards who played a game against All England.

There was not much youth among the bathers, but there was no youth (the young person always excepted) in the articles of Podsnappery. Bald bathers folded their arms and talked to Mr Podsnap on the hearthrug; sleek-whiskered bathers, with hats in their hands, lunged at Mrs Podsnap and retreated; prowling bathers, went about looking into ornamental boxes and bowls as if they had suspicions of larceny on the part of the Podsnaps, and expected to find something they had lost at the bottom; bathers of the gentler sex sat silently comparing ivory shoulders. All this time and always, poor little Miss Podsnap, whose tiny efforts (if she had made any) were swallowed up in the magnificence of her mother's rocking, kept herself as much out of sight and mind as she could, and appeared to be counting on many dismal returns of the day. It was somehow understood, as a secret article in the state proprieties of Podsnappery that nothing must be said about the day. Consequently this young damsel's nativity was hushed up and looked over, as if it were agreed on all hands that it would have been better that she had never been born.

The Lammles were so fond of the dear Veneerings that they could not for some time detach themselves from those excellent friends; but at length, either a very open smile on Mr Lammle's part, or a very secret elevation of one of his gingerous eyebrows—certainly the one or the other—seemed to say to Mrs Lammle, 'Why don't you play?' And so, looking about her, she saw Miss Podsnap, and seeming to say responsively, 'That card?' and to be answered, 'Yes,' went and sat beside Miss Podsnap.

Mrs Lammle was overjoyed to escape into a corner for a little quiet talk.

It promised to be a very quiet talk, for Miss Podsnap replied in a flutter, 'Oh! Indeed, it's very kind of you, but I am afraid I DON'T talk.'

'Let us make a beginning,' said the insinuating Mrs Lammle, with her best smile.

'Oh! I am afraid you'll find me very dull. But Ma talks!'

That was plainly to be seen, for Ma was talking then at her usual canter, with arched head and mane, opened eyes and nostrils.

'Fond of reading perhaps?'

'Yes. At least I—don't mind that so much,' returned Miss Podsnap.

'M-m-m-m-music. So insinuating was Mrs Lammle that she got half a dozen ms into the word before she got it out.

'I haven't nerve to play even if I could. Ma plays.'

(At exactly the same canter, and with a certain flourishing appearance of doing something, Ma did, in fact, occasionally take a rock upon the instrument.)

'Of course you like dancing?'

'Oh no, I don't,' said Miss Podsnap.

'No? With your youth and attractions? Truly, my dear, you surprise me!'

'I can't say,' observed Miss Podsnap, after hesitating considerably, and stealing several timid looks at Mrs Lammle's carefully arranged face, 'how I might have liked it if I had been a—you won't mention it, WILL you?'

'My dear! Never!'

'No, I am sure you won't. I can't say then how I should have liked it, if I had been a chimney-sweep on May-day.'

'Gracious!' was the exclamation which amazement elicited from Mrs Lammle.

'There! I knew you'd wonder. But you won't mention it, will you?'

'Upon my word, my love,' said Mrs Lammle, 'you make me ten times more desirous, now I talk to you, to know you well than I was when I sat over yonder looking at you. How I wish we could be real friends! Try me as a real friend. Come! Don't fancy me a frumpy old married woman, my dear; I was married but the other day, you know; I am dressed as a bride now, you see. About the chimney-sweeps?'

'Hush! Ma'll hear.'

'She can't hear from where she sits.'

'Don't you be too sure of that,' said Miss Podsnap, in a lower voice. 'Well, what I mean is, that they seem to enjoy it.'

'And that perhaps you would have enjoyed it, if you had been one of them?'

Miss Podsnap nodded significantly.

'Then you don't enjoy it now?'

'How is it possible?' said Miss Podsnap. 'Oh it is such a dreadful thing! If I was wicked enough—and strong enough—to kill anybody, it should be my partner.'

This was such an entirely new view of the Terpsichorean art as socially practised, that Mrs Lammle looked at her young friend in some astonishment. Her young friend sat nervously twiddling her fingers in a pinioned attitude, as if she were trying to hide her elbows. But this latter Utopian object (in short sleeves) always appeared to be the great inoffensive aim of her existence.

'It sounds horrid, don't it?' said Miss Podsnap, with a penitential face.

Mrs Lammle, not very well knowing what to answer, resolved herself into a look of smiling encouragement.

'But it is, and it always has been,' pursued Miss Podsnap, 'such a trial to me! I so dread being awful. And it is so awful! No one knows what I suffered at Madame Sauteuse's, where I learnt to dance and make presentation-curtseys, and other dreadful things—or at least where they tried to teach me. Ma can do it.'

'At any rate, my love,' said Mrs Lammle, soothingly, 'that's over.'

'Yes, it's over,' returned Miss Podsnap, 'but there's nothing gained by that. It's worse here, than at Madame Sauteuse's. Ma was there, and Ma's here; but Pa wasn't there, and company wasn't there, and there were not real partners there. Oh there's Ma speaking to the man at the piano! Oh there's Ma going up to somebody! Oh I know she's going to bring him to me! Oh please don't, please don't, please don't! Oh keep away, keep away, keep away!' These pious ejaculations Miss Podsnap uttered with her eyes closed, and her head leaning back against the wall.

But the Ogre advanced under the pilotage of Ma, and Ma said, 'Georgiana, Mr Grompus,' and the Ogre clutched his victim and bore her off to his castle in the top couple. Then the discreet automaton who had surveyed his ground, played a blossomless tuneless 'set,' and sixteen disciples of Podsnappery went through the figures of - 1, Getting up at eight and shaving close at a quarter past - 2, Breakfasting at nine - 3, Going to the City at ten - 4, Coming home at half-past five - 5, Dining at seven, and the grand chain.

While these solemnities were in progress, Mr Alfred Lammle (most loving of husbands) approached the chair of Mrs Alfred Lammle (most loving of wives), and bending over the back of it, trifled for some few seconds with Mrs Lammle's bracelet. Slightly in contrast with this brief airy toying, one might have noticed a certain dark attention in Mrs Lammle's face as she said some words with her eyes on Mr Lammle's waistcoat, and seemed in return to receive some lesson. But it was all done as a breath passes from a mirror.

And now, the grand chain riveted to the last link, the discreet automaton ceased, and the sixteen, two and two, took a walk among the furniture. And herein the unconsciousness of the Ogre Grompus was pleasantly conspicuous; for, that complacent monster, believing that he was giving Miss Podsnap a treat, prolonged to the utmost stretch of possibility a peripatetic account of an archery meeting; while his victim, heading the procession of sixteen as it slowly circled about, like a revolving funeral, never raised her eyes except once to steal a glance at Mrs Lammle, expressive of intense despair.

At length the procession was dissolved by the violent arrival of a nutmeg, before which the drawing-room door bounced open as if it were a cannon-ball; and while that fragrant article, dispersed through several glasses of coloured warm water, was going the round of society, Miss Podsnap returned to her seat by her new friend.

'Oh my goodness,' said Miss Podsnap. 'THAT'S over! I hope you didn't look at me.'

'My dear, why not?'

'Oh I know all about myself,' said Miss Podsnap.

'I'll tell you something I know about you, my dear,' returned Mrs Lammle in her winning way, 'and that is, you are most unnecessarily shy.'

'Ma ain't,' said Miss Podsnap. '—I detest you! Go along!' This shot was levelled under her breath at the gallant Grompus for bestowing an insinuating smile upon her in passing.

'Pardon me if I scarcely see, my dear Miss Podsnap,' Mrs Lammle was beginning when the young lady interposed.

'If we are going to be real friends (and I suppose we are, for you are the only person who ever proposed it) don't let us be awful. It's awful enough to BE Miss Podsnap, without being called so. Call me Georgiana.'

'Dearest Georgiana,' Mrs Lammle began again.

'Thank you,' said Miss Podsnap.

'Dearest Georgiana, pardon me if I scarcely see, my love, why your mamma's not being shy, is a reason why you should be.'

'Don't you really see that?' asked Miss Podsnap, plucking at her fingers in a troubled manner, and furtively casting her eyes now on Mrs Lammle, now on the ground. 'Then perhaps it isn't?'

'My dearest Georgiana, you defer much too readily to my poor opinion. Indeed it is not even an opinion, darling, for it is only a confession of my dullness.'

'Oh YOU are not dull,' returned Miss Podsnap. 'I am dull, but you couldn't have made me talk if you were.'

Some little touch of conscience answering this perception of her having gained a purpose, called bloom enough into Mrs Lammle's face to make it look brighter as she sat smiling her best smile on her dear Georgiana, and shaking her head with an affectionate playfulness. Not that it meant anything, but that Georgiana seemed to like it.

'What I mean is,' pursued Georgiana, 'that Ma being so endowed with awfulness, and Pa being so endowed with awfulness, and there being so much awfulness everywhere—I mean, at least, everywhere where I am—perhaps it makes me who am so deficient in awfulness, and frightened at it—I say it very badly—I don't know whether you can understand what I mean?'

'Perfectly, dearest Georgiana!' Mrs Lammle was proceeding with every reassuring wile, when the head of that young lady suddenly went back against the wall again and her eyes closed.

'Oh there's Ma being awful with somebody with a glass in his eye! Oh I know she's going to bring him here! Oh don't bring him, don't bring him! Oh he'll be my partner with his glass in his eye! Oh what shall I do!' This time Georgiana accompanied her ejaculations with taps of her feet upon the floor, and was altogether in quite a desperate condition. But, there was no escape from the majestic Mrs Podsnap's production of an ambling stranger, with one eye screwed up into extinction and the other framed and glazed, who, having looked down out of that organ, as if he descried Miss Podsnap at the bottom of some perpendicular shaft, brought her to the surface, and ambled off with her. And then the captive at the piano played another 'set,' expressive of his mournful aspirations after freedom, and other sixteen went through the former melancholy motions, and the ambler took Miss Podsnap for a furniture walk, as if he had struck out an entirely original conception.

In the mean time a stray personage of a meek demeanour, who had wandered to the hearthrug and got among the heads of tribes assembled there in conference with Mr Podsnap, eliminated Mr Podsnap's flush and flourish by a highly unpolite remark; no less than a reference to the circumstance that some half-dozen people had lately died in the streets, of starvation. It was clearly ill-timed after dinner. It was not adapted to the cheek of the young person. It was not in good taste.

'I don't believe it,' said Mr Podsnap, putting it behind him.

The meek man was afraid we must take it as proved, because there were the Inquests and the Registrar's returns.

'Then it was their own fault,' said Mr Podsnap.

Veneering and other elders of tribes commended this way out of it. At once a short cut and a broad road.

The man of meek demeanour intimated that truly it would seem from the facts, as if starvation had been forced upon the culprits in question—as if, in their wretched manner, they had made their weak protests against it—as if they would have taken the liberty of staving it off if they could—as if they would rather not have been starved upon the whole, if perfectly agreeable to all parties.

'There is not,' said Mr Podsnap, flushing angrily, 'there is not a country in the world, sir, where so noble a provision is made for the poor as in this country.'

The meek man was quite willing to concede that, but perhaps it rendered the matter even worse, as showing that there must be something appallingly wrong somewhere.

'Where?' said Mr Podsnap.

The meek man hinted Wouldn't it be well to try, very seriously, to find out where?

'Ah!' said Mr Podsnap. 'Easy to say somewhere; not so easy to say where! But I see what you are driving at. I knew it from the first. Centralization. No. Never with my consent. Not English.'

An approving murmur arose from the heads of tribes; as saying, 'There you have him! Hold him!'

He was not aware (the meek man submitted of himself) that he was driving at any ization. He had no favourite ization that he knew of. But he certainly was more staggered by these terrible occurrences than he was by names, of howsoever so many syllables. Might he ask, was dying of destitution and neglect necessarily English?

'You know what the population of London is, I suppose,' said Mr Podsnap.

The meek man supposed he did, but supposed that had absolutely nothing to do with it, if its laws were well administered.

'And you know; at least I hope you know;' said Mr Podsnap, with severity, 'that Providence has declared that you shall have the poor always with you?'

The meek man also hoped he knew that.

'I am glad to hear it,' said Mr Podsnap with a portentous air. 'I am glad to hear it. It will render you cautious how you fly in the face of Providence.'

In reference to that absurd and irreverent conventional phrase, the meek man said, for which Mr Podsnap was not responsible, he the meek man had no fear of doing anything so impossible; but—

But Mr Podsnap felt that the time had come for flushing and flourishing this meek man down for good. So he said:

'I must decline to pursue this painful discussion. It is not pleasant to my feelings; it is repugnant to my feelings. I have said that I do not admit these things. I have also said that if they do occur (not that I admit it), the fault lies with the sufferers themselves. It is not for ME'—Mr Podsnap pointed 'me' forcibly, as adding by implication though it may be all very well for YOU—'it is not for me to impugn the workings of Providence. I know better than that, I trust, and I have mentioned what the intentions of Providence are. Besides,' said Mr Podsnap, flushing high up among his hair-brushes, with a strong consciousness of personal affront, 'the subject is a very disagreeable one. I will go so far as to say it is an odious one. It is not one to be introduced among our wives and young persons, and I—' He finished with that flourish of his arm which added more expressively than any words, And I remove it from the face of the earth.

Simultaneously with this quenching of the meek man's ineffectual fire; Georgiana having left the ambler up a lane of sofa, in a No Thoroughfare of back drawing-room, to find his own way out, came back to Mrs Lammle. And who should be with Mrs Lammle, but Mr Lammle. So fond of her!

'Alfred, my love, here is my friend. Georgiana, dearest girl, you must like my husband next to me.

Mr Lammle was proud to be so soon distinguished by this special commendation to Miss Podsnap's favour. But if Mr Lammle were prone to be jealous of his dear Sophronia's friendships, he would be jealous of her feeling towards Miss Podsnap.

'Say Georgiana, darling,' interposed his wife.

'Towards—shall I?—Georgiana.' Mr Lammle uttered the name, with a delicate curve of his right hand, from his lips outward. 'For never have I known Sophronia (who is not apt to take sudden likings) so attracted and so captivated as she is by—shall I once more?—Georgiana.'

The object of this homage sat uneasily enough in receipt of it, and then said, turning to Mrs Lammle, much embarrassed:

'I wonder what you like me for! I am sure I can't think.'

'Dearest Georgiana, for yourself. For your difference from all around you.'

'Well! That may be. For I think I like you for your difference from all around me,' said Georgiana with a smile of relief.

'We must be going with the rest,' observed Mrs Lammle, rising with a show of unwillingness, amidst a general dispersal. 'We are real friends, Georgiana dear?'

'Real.'

'Good night, dear girl!'

She had established an attraction over the shrinking nature upon which her smiling eyes were fixed, for Georgiana held her hand while she answered in a secret and half-frightened tone:

'Don't forget me when you are gone away. And come again soon. Good night!'

Charming to see Mr and Mrs Lammle taking leave so gracefully, and going down the stairs so lovingly and sweetly. Not quite so charming to see their smiling faces fall and brood as they dropped moodily into separate corners of their little carriage. But to be sure that was a sight behind the scenes, which nobody saw, and which nobody was meant to see.

Certain big, heavy vehicles, built on the model of the Podsnap plate, took away the heavy articles of guests weighing ever so much; and the less valuable articles got away after their various manners; and the Podsnap plate was put to bed. As Mr Podsnap stood with his back to the drawing-room fire, pulling up his shirtcollar, like a veritable cock of the walk literally pluming himself in the midst of his possessions, nothing would have astonished him more than an intimation that Miss Podsnap, or any other young person properly born and bred, could not be exactly put away like the plate, brought out like the plate, polished like the plate, counted, weighed, and valued like the plate. That such a young person could possibly have a morbid vacancy in the heart for anything younger than the plate, or less monotonous than the plate; or that such a young person's thoughts could try to scale the region bounded on the north, south, east, and west, by the plate; was a monstrous imagination which he would on the spot have flourished into space. This perhaps in some sort arose from Mr Podsnap's blushing young person being, so to speak, all cheek; whereas there is a possibility that there may be young persons of a rather more complex organization.

If Mr Podsnap, pulling up his shirt-collar, could only have heard himself called 'that fellow' in a certain short dialogue, which passed between Mr and Mrs Lammle in their opposite corners of their little carriage, rolling home!

'Sophronia, are you awake?'

'Am I likely to be asleep, sir?'

'Very likely, I should think, after that fellow's company. Attend to what I am going to say.'

'I have attended to what you have already said, have I not? What else have I been doing all to-night.'

'Attend, I tell you,' (in a raised voice) 'to what I am going to say. Keep close to that idiot girl. Keep her under your thumb. You have her fast, and you are not to let her go. Do you hear?'

'I hear you.'

'I foresee there is money to be made out of this, besides taking that fellow down a peg. We owe each other money, you know.'

Mrs Lammle winced a little at the reminder, but only enough to shake her scents and essences anew into the atmosphere of the little carriage, as she settled herself afresh in her own dark corner.

Chapter 12

THE SWEAT OF AN HONEST MAN'S BROW

Mr Mortimer Lightwood and Mr Eugene Wrayburn took a coffee-house dinner together in Mr Lightwood's office. They had newly agreed to set up a joint establishment together. They had taken a bachelor cottage near Hampton, on the brink of the Thames, with a lawn, and a boat-house; and all things fitting, and were to float with the stream through the summer and the Long Vacation.

It was not summer yet, but spring; and it was not gentle spring ethereally mild, as in Thomson's Seasons, but nipping spring with an easterly wind, as in Johnson's, Jackson's, Dickson's, Smith's, and Jones's Seasons. The grating wind sawed rather than blew; and as it sawed, the sawdust whirled about the sawpit. Every street was a sawpit, and there were no top-sawyers; every passenger was an under-sawyer, with the sawdust blinding him and choking him.

That mysterious paper currency which circulates in London when the wind blows, gyrated here and there and everywhere. Whence can it come, whither can it go? It hangs on every bush, flutters in every tree, is caught flying by the electric wires, haunts every enclosure, drinks at every pump, cowers at every grating, shudders upon every plot of grass, seeks rest in vain behind the legions of iron rails. In Paris, where nothing is wasted, costly and luxurious city though it be, but where wonderful human ants creep out of holes and pick up every scrap, there is no such thing. There, it blows nothing but dust. There, sharp eyes and sharp stomachs reap even the east wind, and get something out of it.

The wind sawed, and the sawdust whirled. The shrubs wrung their many hands, bemoaning that they had been over-persuaded by the sun to bud; the young leaves pined; the sparrows repented of their early marriages, like men and women; the colours of the rainbow were discernible, not in floral spring, but in the faces of the people whom it nibbled and pinched. And ever the wind sawed, and the sawdust whirled.

When the spring evenings are too long and light to shut out, and such weather is rife, the city which Mr Podsnap so explanatorily called London, Londres, London, is at its worst. Such a black shrill city, combining the qualities of a smoky house and a scolding wife; such a gritty city; such a hopeless city, with no rent in the leaden canopy of its sky; such a beleaguered city, invested by the great Marsh Forces of Essex and Kent. So the two old schoolfellows felt it to be, as, their dinner done, they turned towards the fire to smoke. Young Blight was gone, the coffee-house waiter was gone, the plates and dishes were gone, the wine was going—but not in the same direction.

'The wind sounds up here,' quoth Eugene, stirring the fire, 'as if we were keeping a lighthouse. I wish we were.'

'Don't you think it would bore us?' Lightwood asked.

'Not more than any other place. And there would be no Circuit to go. But that's a selfish consideration, personal to me.'

'And no clients to come,' added Lightwood. 'Not that that's a selfish consideration at all personal to ME.'

'If we were on an isolated rock in a stormy sea,' said Eugene, smoking with his eyes on the fire, 'Lady Tippins couldn't put off to visit us, or, better still, might put off and get swamped. People couldn't ask one to wedding breakfasts. There would be no Precedents to hammer at, except the plain-sailing Precedent of keeping the light up. It would be exciting to look out for wrecks.'

'But otherwise,' suggested Lightwood, 'there might be a degree of sameness in the life.'

'I have thought of that also,' said Eugene, as if he really had been considering the subject in its various bearings with an eye to the business; 'but it would be a defined and limited monotony. It would not extend beyond two people. Now, it's a question with me, Mortimer, whether a monotony defined with that precision and limited to that extent, might not be more endurable than the unlimited monotony of one's fellow-creatures.'

As Lightwood laughed and passed the wine, he remarked, 'We shall have an opportunity, in our boating summer, of trying the question.'

'An imperfect one,' Eugene acquiesced, with a sigh, 'but so we shall. I hope we may not prove too much for one another.'

'Now, regarding your respected father,' said Lightwood, bringing him to a subject they had expressly appointed to discuss: always the most slippery eel of eels of subjects to lay hold of.

'Yes, regarding my respected father,' assented Eugene, settling himself in his arm-chair. 'I would rather have approached my respected father by candlelight, as a theme requiring a little artificial brilliancy; but we will take him by twilight, enlivened with a glow of Wallsend.'

He stirred the fire again as he spoke, and having made it blaze, resumed.

'My respected father has found, down in the parental neighbourhood, a wife for his not-generally-respected son.'

'With some money, of course?'

'With some money, of course, or he would not have found her. My respected father—let me shorten the dutiful tautology by substituting in future M. R. F., which sounds military, and rather like the Duke of Wellington.'

'What an absurd fellow you are, Eugene!'

'Not at all, I assure you. M. R. F. having always in the clearest manner provided (as he calls it) for his children by pre-arranging from the hour of the birth of each, and sometimes from an earlier period, what the devoted little victim's calling and course in life should be, M. R. F. pre-arranged for myself that I was to be the barrister I am (with the slight addition of an enormous practice, which has not accrued), and also the married man I am not.'

'The first you have often told me.'

'The first I have often told you. Considering myself sufficiently incongruous on my legal eminence, I have until now suppressed my domestic destiny. You know M. R. F., but not as well as I do. If you knew him as well as I do, he would amuse you.'

'Filially spoken, Eugene!'

'Perfectly so, believe me; and with every sentiment of affectionate deference towards M. R. F. But if he amuses me, I can't help it. When my eldest brother was born, of course the rest of us knew (I mean the rest of us would have known, if we had been in existence) that he was heir to the Family Embarrassments—we call it before the company the Family Estate. But when my second brother was going to be born by-and-by, "this," says M. R. F., "is a little pillar of the church." WAS born, and became a pillar of the church; a very shaky one. My third brother appeared, considerably in advance of his engagement to my mother; but M. R. F., not at all put out by surprise, instantly declared him a Circumnavigator. Was pitch-forked into the Navy, but has not circumnavigated. I announced myself and was disposed of with the highly satisfactory results embodied before you. When my younger brother was half an hour old, it was settled by M. R. F. that he should have a mechanical genius. And so on. Therefore I say that M. R. F. amuses me.'

'Touching the lady, Eugene.'

'There M. R. F. ceases to be amusing, because my intentions are opposed to touching the lady.'

'Do you know her?'

'Not in the least.'

'Hadn't you better see her?'

'My dear Mortimer, you have studied my character. Could I possibly go down there, labelled "ELIGIBLE. ON VIEW," and meet the lady, similarly labelled? Anything to carry out M. R. F.'s arrangements, I am sure, with the greatest pleasure—except matrimony. Could I possibly support it? I, so soon bored, so constantly, so fatally?'

'But you are not a consistent fellow, Eugene.'

'In susceptibility to boredom,' returned that worthy, 'I assure you I am the most consistent of mankind.'

'Why, it was but now that you were dwelling in the advantages of a monotony of two.'

'In a lighthouse. Do me the justice to remember the condition. In a lighthouse.'

Mortimer laughed again, and Eugene, having laughed too for the first time, as if he found himself on reflection rather entertaining, relapsed into his usual gloom, and drowsily said, as he enjoyed his cigar, 'No, there is no help for it; one of the prophetic deliveries of M. R. F. must for ever remain unfulfilled. With every disposition to oblige him, he must submit to a failure.'

It had grown darker as they talked, and the wind was sawing and the sawdust was whirling outside paler windows. The underlying churchyard was already settling into deep dim shade, and the shade was creeping up to the housetops among which they sat. 'As if,' said Eugene, 'as if the churchyard ghosts were rising.'

He had walked to the window with his cigar in his mouth, to exalt its flavour by comparing the fireside with the outside, when he stopped midway on his return to his arm-chair, and said:

'Apparently one of the ghosts has lost its way, and dropped in to be directed. Look at this phantom!'

Lightwood, whose back was towards the door, turned his head, and there, in the darkness of the entry, stood a something in the likeness of a man: to whom he addressed the not irrelevant inquiry, 'Who the devil are you?'

'I ask your pardons, Governors,' replied the ghost, in a hoarse double-barrelled whisper, 'but might either on you be Lawyer Lightwood?'

'What do you mean by not knocking at the door?' demanded Mortimer.

'I ask your pardons, Governors,' replied the ghost, as before, 'but probable you was not aware your door stood open.'

'What do you want?'

Hereunto the ghost again hoarsely replied, in its double-barrelled manner, 'I ask your pardons, Governors, but might one on you be Lawyer Lightwood?'

'One of us is,' said the owner of that name.

'All right, Governors Both,' returned the ghost, carefully closing the room door; "tickler business.'

Mortimer lighted the candles. They showed the visitor to be an ill-looking visitor with a squinting leer, who, as he spoke, fumbled at an old sodden fur cap, formless and mangey, that looked like a furry animal, dog or cat, puppy or kitten, drowned and decaying.

'Now,' said Mortimer, 'what is it?'

'Governors Both,' returned the man, in what he meant to be a wheedling tone, 'which on you might be Lawyer Lightwood?'

'I am.'

'Lawyer Lightwood,' ducking at him with a servile air, 'I am a man as gets my living, and as seeks to get my living, by the sweat of my brow. Not to risk being done out of the sweat of my brow, by any chances, I should wish afore going further to be swore in.'

'I am not a swearer in of people, man.'

The visitor, clearly anything but reliant on this assurance, doggedly muttered 'Alfred David.'

'Is that your name?' asked Lightwood.

'My name?' returned the man. 'No; I want to take a Alfred David.'

(Which Eugene, smoking and contemplating him, interpreted as meaning Affidavit.)

'I tell you, my good fellow,' said Lightwood, with his indolent laugh, 'that I have nothing to do with swearing.'

'He can swear AT you,' Eugene explained; 'and so can I. But we can't do more for you.'

Much discomfited by this information, the visitor turned the drowned dog or cat, puppy or kitten, about and about, and looked from one of the Governors Both to the other of the Governors Both, while he deeply considered within himself. At length he decided:

'Then I must be took down.'

'Where?' asked Lightwood.

'Here,' said the man. 'In pen and ink.'

'First, let us know what your business is about.'

'It's about,' said the man, taking a step forward, dropping his hoarse voice, and shading it with his hand, 'it's about from five to ten thousand pound reward. That's what it's about. It's about Murder. That's what it's about.'

'Come nearer the table. Sit down. Will you have a glass of wine?'

'Yes, I will,' said the man; 'and I don't deceive you, Governors.'

It was given him. Making a stiff arm to the elbow, he poured the wine into his mouth, tilted it into his right cheek, as saying, 'What do you think of it?' tilted it into his left cheek, as saying, 'What do YOU think of it?' jerked it into his stomach, as saying, 'What do YOU think of it?' To conclude, smacked his lips, as if all three replied, 'We think well of it.'

'Will you have another?'

'Yes, I will,' he repeated, 'and I don't deceive you, Governors.' And also repeated the other proceedings.

'Now,' began Lightwood, 'what's your name?'

'Why, there you're rather fast, Lawyer Lightwood,' he replied, in a remonstrant manner. 'Don't you see, Lawyer Lightwood? There you're a little bit fast. I'm going to earn from five to ten thousand pound by the sweat of my brow; and as a poor man doing justice to the sweat of my brow, is it likely I can afford to part with so much as my name without its being took down?'

Deferring to the man's sense of the binding powers of pen and ink and paper, Lightwood nodded acceptance of Eugene's nodded proposal to take those spells in hand. Eugene, bringing them to the table, sat down as clerk or notary.

'Now,' said Lightwood, 'what's your name?'

But further precaution was still due to the sweat of this honest fellow's brow.

'I should wish, Lawyer Lightwood,' he stipulated, 'to have that T'other Governor as my witness that what I said I said. Consequent, will the T'other Governor be so good as chuck me his name and where he lives?'

Eugene, cigar in mouth and pen in hand, tossed him his card. After spelling it out slowly, the man made it into a little roll, and tied it up in an end of his neckerchief still more slowly.

'Now,' said Lightwood, for the third time, 'if you have quite completed your various preparations, my friend, and have fully ascertained that your spirits are cool and not in any way hurried, what's your name?'

'Roger Riderhood.'

'Dwelling-place?'

'Lime'us Hole.'

'Calling or occupation?'

Not quite so glib with this answer as with the previous two, Mr Riderhood gave in the definition, 'Waterside character.'

'Anything against you?' Eugene quietly put in, as he wrote.

Rather baulked, Mr Riderhood evasively remarked, with an innocent air, that he believed the T'other Governor had asked him summa't.

'Ever in trouble?' said Eugene.

'Once.' (Might happen to any man, Mr Riderhood added incidentally.)

'On suspicion of—'

'Of seaman's pocket,' said Mr Riderhood. 'Whereby I was in reality the man's best friend, and tried to take care of him.'

'With the sweat of your brow?' asked Eugene.

'Till it poured down like rain,' said Roger Riderhood.

Eugene leaned back in his chair, and smoked with his eyes negligently turned on the informer, and his pen ready to reduce him to more writing. Lightwood also smoked, with his eyes negligently turned on the informer.

'Now let me be took down again,' said Riderhood, when he had turned the drowned cap over and under, and had brushed it the wrong way (if it had a right way) with his sleeve. 'I give information that the man that done the Harmon Murder is Gaffer Hexam, the man that found the body. The hand of Jesse Hexam, commonly called Gaffer on the river and along shore, is the hand that done that deed. His hand and no other.'

The two friends glanced at one another with more serious faces than they had shown yet.

'Tell us on what grounds you make this accusation,' said Mortimer Lightwood.

'On the grounds,' answered Riderhood, wiping his face with his sleeve, 'that I was Gaffer's pardner, and suspected of him many a long day and many a dark night. On the grounds that I knowed his ways. On the grounds that I broke the pardnership because I see the danger; which I warn you his daughter may tell you another story about that, for anythink I can say, but you know what it'll be worth, for she'd tell you lies, the world round and the heavens broad, to save her father. On the grounds that it's well understood along the cause'ays and the stairs that he done it. On the grounds that he's fell off from, because he done it. On the grounds that I will swear he done it. On the grounds that you may take me where you will, and get me sworn to it. I don't want to back out of the consequences. I have made up MY mind. Take me anywheres.'

'All this is nothing,' said Lightwood.

'Nothing?' repeated Riderhood, indignantly and amazedly.

'Merely nothing. It goes to no more than that you suspect this man of the crime. You may do so with some reason, or you may do so with no reason, but he cannot be convicted on your suspicion.'

'Haven't I said—I appeal to the T'other Governor as my witness—haven't I said from the first minute that I opened my mouth in this here world-without-end-everlasting chair' (he evidently used that form of words as next in force to an affidavit), 'that I was willing to swear that he done it? Haven't I said, Take me and get me sworn to it? Don't I say so now? You won't deny it, Lawyer Lightwood?'

'Surely not; but you only offer to swear to your suspicion, and I tell you it is not enough to swear to your suspicion.'

'Not enough, ain't it, Lawyer Lightwood?' he cautiously demanded.

'Positively not.'

'And did I say it WAS enough? Now, I appeal to the T'other Governor. Now, fair! Did I say so?'

'He certainly has not said that he had no more to tell,' Eugene observed in a low voice without looking at him, 'whatever he seemed to imply.'

'Hah!' cried the informer, triumphantly perceiving that the remark was generally in his favour, though apparently not closely understanding it.

'Fort'nate for me I had a witness!'

'Go on, then,' said Lightwood. 'Say out what you have to say. No afterthought.'

'Let me be took down then!' cried the informer, eagerly and anxiously. 'Let me be took down, for by George and the Draggin I'm a coming to it now! Don't do nothing to keep back from a honest man the fruits of the sweat of his brow! I give information, then, that he told me that he done it. Is THAT enough?'

'Take care what you say, my friend,' returned Mortimer.

'Lawyer Lightwood, take care, you, what I say; for I judge you'll be answerable for follering it up!' Then, slowly and emphatically beating it all out with his open right hand on the palm of his left; 'I, Roger Riderhood, Lime'us Hole, Waterside character, tell you, Lawyer Lightwood, that the man Jesse Hexam, commonly called upon the river and along-shore Gaffer, told me that he done the deed. What's more, he told me with his own lips that he done the deed. What's more, he said that he done the deed. And I'll swear it!'

'Where did he tell you so?'

'Outside,' replied Riderhood, always beating it out, with his head determinedly set askew, and his eyes watchfully dividing their attention between his two auditors, 'outside the door of the Six Jolly Fellowships, towards a quarter after twelve o'clock at midnight—but I will not in my conscience undertake to swear to so fine a matter as five minutes—on the night when he picked up the body. The Six Jolly Fellowships won't run away. If it turns out that he warn't at the Six Jolly Fellowships that night at midnight, I'm a liar.'

'What did he say?'

'I'll tell you (take me down, T'other Governor, I ask no better). He come out first; I come out last. I might be a minute arter him; I might be half a minute, I might be a quarter of a minute; I cannot swear to that, and therefore I won't. That's knowing the obligations of a Alfred David, ain't it?'

'Go on.'

'I found him a waiting to speak to me. He says to me, "Rogue Riderhood"—for that's the name I'm mostly called by—not for any meaning in it, for meaning it has none, but because of its being similar to Roger.'

'Never mind that.'

"Scuse ME, Lawyer Lightwood, it's a part of the truth, and as such I do mind it, and I must mind it and I will mind it. "Rogue Riderhood," he says, "words passed betwixt us on the river tonight." Which they had; ask his daughter! "I threatened you," he says, "to chop you over the fingers with my boat's stretcher, or take a aim at your brains with my boathook. I did so on accounts of your looking too hard at what I had in tow, as if you was suspicious, and on accounts of your holding on to the gunwale of my boat." I says to him, "Gaffer, I know it." He says to me, "Rogue Riderhood, you are a man in a dozen"—I think he said in a score, but of that I am not positive, so take the lowest figure, for precious be the obligations of a Alfred David. "And," he says, "when your fellow-men is up, be it their lives or be it their watches, sharp is ever the word with you. Had you suspicions?" I says, "Gaffer, I had; and what's more, I have." He falls a shaking, and he says, "Of what?" I says, "Of foul play." He falls a shaking worse, and he says, "There WAS foul play then. I done it for his money. Don't betray me!" Those were the words as ever he used.'

There was a silence, broken only by the fall of the ashes in the grate. An opportunity which the informer improved by smearing himself all over the head and neck and face with his drowned cap, and not at all improving his own appearance.

'What more?' asked Lightwood.

'Of him, d'ye mean, Lawyer Lightwood?'

'Of anything to the purpose.'

'Now, I'm blest if I understand you, Governors Both,' said the informer, in a creeping manner: propitiating both, though only one had spoken. 'What? Ain't THAT enough?'

'Did you ask him how he did it, where he did it, when he did it?'

'Far be it from me, Lawyer Lightwood! I was so troubled in my mind, that I wouldn't have knowed more, no, not for the sum as I expect to earn from you by the sweat of my brow, twice told! I had put an end to the pardnership. I had cut the connexion. I couldn't undo what was done; and when he begs and prays, "Old pardner, on my knees, don't split upon me!" I only makes answer "Never speak another word to Roger Riderhood, nor look him in the face!" and I shuns that man.'

Having given these words a swing to make them mount the higher and go the further, Rogue Riderhood poured himself out another glass of wine unbidden, and seemed to chew it, as, with the half-emptied glass in his hand, he stared at the candles.

Mortimer glanced at Eugene, but Eugene sat glowering at his paper, and would give him no responsive glance. Mortimer again turned to the informer, to whom he said:

'You have been troubled in your mind a long time, man?'

Giving his wine a final chew, and swallowing it, the informer answered in a single word:

'Hages!'

'When all that stir was made, when the Government reward was offered, when the police were on the alert, when the whole country rang with the crime!' said Mortimer, impatiently.

'Hah!' Mr Riderhood very slowly and hoarsely chimed in, with several retrospective nods of his head. 'Warn't I troubled in my mind then!'

'When conjecture ran wild, when the most extravagant suspicions were afloat, when half a dozen innocent people might have been laid by the heels any hour in the day!' said Mortimer, almost warming.

'Hah!' Mr Riderhood chimed in, as before. 'Warn't I troubled in my mind through it all!'

'But he hadn't,' said Eugene, drawing a lady's head upon his writing-paper, and touching it at intervals, 'the opportunity then of earning so much money, you see.'

'The T'other Governor hits the nail, Lawyer Lightwood! It was that as turned me. I had many times and again struggled to relieve myself of the trouble on my mind, but I couldn't get it off. I had once very nigh got it off to Miss Abbey Potterson which keeps the Six Jolly Fellowships—there is the 'ouse, it won't run away,—there lives the lady, she ain't likely to be struck dead afore you get there—ask her!—but I couldn't do it. At last, out comes the new bill with your own lawful name, Lawyer Lightwood, printed to it, and then I asks the question of my own intellects, Am I to have this trouble on my mind for ever? Am I never to throw it off? Am I always to think more of Gaffer than of my own self? If he's got a daughter, ain't I got a daughter?'

'And echo answered—?' Eugene suggested.

'"You have,"' said Mr Riderhood, in a firm tone.

'Incidentally mentioning, at the same time, her age?' inquired Eugene.

'Yes, governor. Two-and-twenty last October. And then I put it to myself, "Regarding the money. It is a pot of money." For it IS a pot,' said Mr Riderhood, with candour, 'and why deny it?'

'Hear!' from Eugene as he touched his drawing.

'"It is a pot of money; but is it a sin for a labouring man that moistens every crust of bread he earns, with his tears—or if not with them, with the colds he catches in his head—is it a sin for that man to earn it? Say there is anything again earning it." This I put to myself strong, as in duty bound; "how can it be said without blaming Lawyer Lightwood for offering it to be earned?" And was it for ME to blame Lawyer Lightwood? No.'

'No,' said Eugene.

'Certainly not, Governor,' Mr Riderhood acquiesced. 'So I made up my mind to get my trouble off my mind, and to earn by the sweat of my brow what was held out to me. And what's more, he added, suddenly turning bloodthirsty, 'I mean to have it! And now I tell you, once and away, Lawyer Lightwood, that Jesse Hexam, commonly called Gaffer, his hand and no other, done the deed, on his own confession to me. And I give him up to you, and I want him took. This night!'

After another silence, broken only by the fall of the ashes in the grate, which attracted the informer's attention as if it were the chinking of money, Mortimer Lightwood leaned over his friend, and said in a whisper:

'I suppose I must go with this fellow to our imperturbable friend at the police-station.'

'I suppose,' said Eugene, 'there is no help for it.'

'Do you believe him?'

'I believe him to be a thorough rascal. But he may tell the truth, for his own purpose, and for this occasion only.'

'It doesn't look like it.'

'HE doesn't,' said Eugene. 'But neither is his late partner, whom he denounces, a prepossessing person. The firm are cut-throat Shepherds both, in appearance. I should like to ask him one thing.'

The subject of this conference sat leering at the ashes, trying with all his might to overhear what was said, but feigning abstraction as the 'Governors Both' glanced at him.

'You mentioned (twice, I think) a daughter of this Hexam's,' said Eugene, aloud. 'You don't mean to imply that she had any guilty knowledge of the crime?'

The honest man, after considering—perhaps considering how his answer might affect the fruits of the sweat of his brow—replied, unreservedly, 'No, I don't.'

'And you implicate no other person?'

'It ain't what I implicate, it's what Gaffer implicated,' was the dogged and determined answer. 'I don't pretend to know more than that his words to me was, "I done it." Those was his words.'

'I must see this out, Mortimer,' whispered Eugene, rising. 'How shall we go?'

'Let us walk,' whispered Lightwood, 'and give this fellow time to think of it.'

Having exchanged the question and answer, they prepared themselves for going out, and Mr Riderhood rose. While extinguishing the candles, Lightwood, quite as a matter of course took up the glass from which that honest gentleman had drunk, and coolly tossed it under the grate, where it fell shivering into fragments.

'Now, if you will take the lead,' said Lightwood, 'Mr Wrayburn and I will follow. You know where to go, I suppose?'

'I suppose I do, Lawyer Lightwood.'

'Take the lead, then.'

The waterside character pulled his drowned cap over his ears with both hands, and making himself more round-shouldered than nature had made him, by the sullen and persistent slouch with which he went, went down the stairs, round by the Temple Church, across the Temple into Whitefriars, and so on by the waterside streets.

'Look at his hang-dog air,' said Lightwood, following.

'It strikes me rather as a hang-MAN air,' returned Eugene. 'He has undeniable intentions that way.'

They said little else as they followed. He went on before them as an ugly Fate might have done, and they kept him in view, and would have been glad enough to lose sight of him. But on he went before them, always at the same distance, and the same rate. Aslant against the hard implacable weather and the rough wind, he was no more to be driven back than hurried forward, but held on like an advancing Destiny. There came, when they were about midway on their journey, a heavy rush of hail, which in a few minutes pelted the streets clear, and whitened them. It made no difference to him. A man's life being to be taken and the price of it got, the hailstones to arrest the purpose must lie larger and deeper than those. He crashed through them, leaving marks in the fast-melting slush that were mere shapeless holes; one might have fancied, following, that the very fashion of humanity had departed from his feet.

The blast went by, and the moon contended with the fast-flying clouds, and the wild disorder reigning up there made the pitiful little tumults in the streets of no account. It was not that the wind swept all the brawlers into places of shelter, as it had swept the hail still lingering in heaps wherever there was refuge for it; but that it seemed as if the streets were absorbed by the sky, and the night were all in the air.

'If he has had time to think of it,' said Eugene, he has not had time to think better of it—or differently of it, if that's better. There is no sign of drawing back in him; and as I recollect this place, we must be close upon the corner where we alighted that night.'

In fact, a few abrupt turns brought them to the river side, where they had slipped about among the stones, and where they now slipped more; the wind coming against them in slants and flaws, across the tide and the windings of the river, in a furious way. With that habit of getting under the lee of any shelter which waterside characters acquire, the waterside character at present in question led the way to the leeside of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters before he spoke.

'Look round here, Lawyer Lightwood, at them red curtains. It's the Fellowships, the 'ouse as I told you wouldn't run away. And has it run away?'

Not showing himself much impressed by this remarkable confirmation of the informer's evidence, Lightwood inquired what other business they had there?

'I wished you to see the Fellowships for yourself, Lawyer Lightwood, that you might judge whether I'm a liar; and now I'll see Gaffer's window for myself, that we may know whether he's at home.'

With that, he crept away.

'He'll come back, I suppose?' murmured Lightwood.

'Ay! and go through with it,' murmured Eugene.

He came back after a very short interval indeed.

'Gaffer's out, and his boat's out. His daughter's at home, sitting a-looking at the fire. But there's some supper getting ready, so Gaffer's expected. I can find what move he's upon, easy enough, presently.'

Then he beckoned and led the way again, and they came to the police-station, still as clean and cool and steady as before, saving that the flame of its lamp—being but a lamp-flame, and only attached to the Force as an outsider—flickered in the wind.

Also, within doors, Mr Inspector was at his studies as of yore. He recognized the friends the instant they reappeared, but their reappearance had no effect on his composure. Not even the circumstance that Riderhood was their conductor moved him, otherwise than that as he took a dip of ink he seemed, by a settlement of his chin in his stock, to propound to that personage, without looking at him, the question, 'What have YOU been up to, last?'

Mortimer Lightwood asked him, would he be so good as look at those notes? Handing him Eugene's.

Having read the first few lines, Mr Inspector mounted to that (for him) extraordinary pitch of emotion that he said, 'Does either of you two gentlemen happen to have a pinch of snuff about him?' Finding that neither had, he did quite as well without it, and read on.

'Have you heard these read?' he then demanded of the honest man.

'No,' said Riderhood.

'Then you had better hear them.' And so read them aloud, in an official manner.

'Are these notes correct, now, as to the information you bring here and the evidence you mean to give?' he asked, when he had finished reading.

'They are. They are as correct,' returned Mr Riderhood, 'as I am. I can't say more than that for 'em.'

'I'll take this man myself, sir,' said Mr Inspector to Lightwood. Then to Riderhood, 'Is he at home? Where is he? What's he doing? You have made it your business to know all about him, no doubt.'

Riderhood said what he did know, and promised to find out in a few minutes what he didn't know.

'Stop,' said Mr Inspector; 'not till I tell you: We mustn't look like business. Would you two gentlemen object to making a pretence of taking a glass of something in my company at the Fellowships? Well-conducted house, and highly respectable landlady.'

They replied that they would be happy to substitute a reality for the pretence, which, in the main, appeared to be as one with Mr Inspector's meaning.

'Very good,' said he, taking his hat from its peg, and putting a pair of handcuffs in his pocket as if they were his gloves. 'Reserve!' Reserve saluted. 'You know where to find me?' Reserve again saluted. 'Riderhood, when you have found out concerning his coming home, come round to the window of Cosy, tap twice at it, and wait for me. Now, gentlemen.'

As the three went out together, and Riderhood slouched off from under the trembling lamp his separate way, Lightwood asked the officer what he thought of this?

Mr Inspector replied, with due generality and reticence, that it was always more likely that a man had done a bad thing than that he hadn't. That he himself had several times 'reckoned up' Gaffer, but had never been able to bring him to a satisfactory criminal total. That if this story was true, it was only in part true. That the two men, very shy characters, would have been jointly and pretty equally 'in it;' but that this man had 'spotted' the other, to save himself and get the money.

'And I think,' added Mr Inspector, in conclusion, 'that if all goes well with him, he's in a tolerable way of getting it. But as this is the Fellowships, gentlemen, where the lights are, I recommend dropping the subject. You can't do better than be interested in some lime works anywhere down about Northfleet, and doubtful whether some of your lime don't get into bad company as it comes up in barges.'

'You hear Eugene?' said Lightwood, over his shoulder. 'You are deeply interested in lime.'

'Without lime,' returned that unmoved barrister-at-law, 'my existence would be unilluminated by a ray of hope.'

Chapter 13

TRACKING THE BIRD OF PREY

The two lime merchants, with their escort, entered the dominions of Miss Abbey Potterson, to whom their escort (presenting them and their pretended business over the half-door of the bar, in a confidential way) preferred his figurative request that 'a mouthful of fire' might be lighted in Cosy. Always well disposed to assist the constituted authorities, Miss Abbey bade Bob Gliddery attend the gentlemen to that retreat, and promptly enliven it with fire and gaslight. Of this commission the bare-armed Bob, leading the way with a flaming wisp of paper, so speedily acquitted himself, that Cosy seemed to leap out of a dark sleep and embrace them warmly, the moment they passed the lintels of its hospitable door.

'They burn sherry very well here,' said Mr Inspector, as a piece of local intelligence. 'Perhaps you gentlemen might like a bottle?'

The answer being By all means, Bob Gliddery received his instructions from Mr Inspector, and departed in a becoming state of alacrity engendered by reverence for the majesty of the law.

'It's a certain fact,' said Mr Inspector, 'that this man we have received our information from,' indicating Riderhood with his thumb over his shoulder, 'has for some time past given the other man a bad name arising out of your lime barges, and that the other man has been avoided in consequence. I don't say what it means or proves, but it's a certain fact. I had it first from one of the opposite sex of my acquaintance,' vaguely indicating Miss Abbey with his thumb over his shoulder, 'down away at a distance, over yonder.'

Then probably Mr Inspector was not quite unprepared for their visit that evening? Lightwood hinted.

'Well you see,' said Mr Inspector, 'it was a question of making a move. It's of no use moving if you don't know what your move is. You had better by far keep still. In the matter of this lime, I certainly had an idea that it might lie betwixt the two men; I always had that idea. Still I was forced to wait for a start, and I wasn't so lucky as to get a start. This man that we have received our information from, has got a start, and if he don't meet with a check he may make the running and come in first. There may turn out to be something considerable for him that comes in second, and I don't mention who may or who may not try for that place. There's duty to do, and I shall do it, under any circumstances; to the best of my judgment and ability.'

'Speaking as a shipper of lime—' began Eugene.

'Which no man has a better right to do than yourself, you know,' said Mr Inspector.

'I hope not,' said Eugene; 'my father having been a shipper of lime before me, and my grandfather before him—in fact we having been a family immersed to the crowns of our heads in lime during several generations—I beg to observe that if this missing lime could be got hold of without any young female relative of any distinguished gentleman engaged in the lime trade (which I cherish next to my life) being present, I think it might be a more agreeable proceeding to the assisting bystanders, that is to say, lime-burners.'

'I also,' said Lightwood, pushing his friend aside with a laugh, 'should much prefer that.'

'It shall be done, gentlemen, if it can be done conveniently,' said Mr Inspector, with coolness. 'There is no wish on my part to cause any distress in that quarter. Indeed, I am sorry for that quarter.'

'There was a boy in that quarter,' remarked Eugene. 'He is still there?'

'No,' said Mr Inspector.' He has quitted those works. He is otherwise disposed of.'

'Will she be left alone then?' asked Eugene.

'She will be left,' said Mr Inspector, 'alone.'

Bob's reappearance with a steaming jug broke off the conversation. But although the jug steamed forth a delicious perfume, its contents had not received that last happy touch which the surpassing finish of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters imparted on such momentous occasions. Bob carried in his left hand one of those iron models of sugar-loaf hats, before mentioned, into which he emptied the jug, and the pointed end of which he thrust deep down into the fire, so leaving it for a few moments while he disappeared and reappeared with three bright drinking-glasses. Placing these on the table and bending over the fire, meritoriously sensible of the trying nature of his duty, he watched the wreaths of steam, until at the special instant of projection he caught up the iron vessel and gave it one delicate twirl, causing it to send forth one gentle hiss. Then he restored the contents to the jug; held over the steam of the jug, each of the three bright glasses in succession; finally filled them all, and with a clear conscience awaited the applause of his fellow-creatures.

It was bestowed (Mr Inspector having proposed as an appropriate sentiment 'The lime trade!') and Bob withdrew to report the commendations of the guests to Miss Abbey in the bar. It may be here in confidence admitted that, the room being close shut in his absence, there had not appeared to be the slightest reason for the elaborate maintenance of this same lime fiction. Only it had been regarded by Mr Inspector as so uncommonly satisfactory, and so fraught with mysterious virtues, that neither of his clients had presumed to question it.

Two taps were now heard on the outside of the window. Mr Inspector, hastily fortifying himself with another glass, strolled out with a noiseless foot and an unoccupied countenance. As one might go to survey the weather and the general aspect of the heavenly bodies.

'This is becoming grim, Mortimer,' said Eugene, in a low voice. 'I don't like this.'

'Nor I' said Lightwood. 'Shall we go?'

'Being here, let us stay. You ought to see it out, and I won't leave you. Besides, that lonely girl with the dark hair runs in my head. It was little more than a glimpse we had of her that last time, and yet I almost see her waiting by the fire to-night. Do you feel like a dark combination of traitor and pickpocket when you think of that girl?'

'Rather,' returned Lightwood. 'Do you?'

'Very much so.'

Their escort strolled back again, and reported. Divested of its various lime-lights and shadows, his report went to the effect that Gaffer was away in his boat, supposed to be on his old look-out; that he had been expected last high-water; that having missed it for some reason or other, he was not, according to his usual habits at night, to be counted on before next high-water, or it might be an hour or so later; that his daughter, surveyed through the window, would seem to be so expecting him, for the supper was not cooking, but set out ready to be cooked; that it would be high-water at about one, and that it was now barely ten; that there was nothing to be done but watch and wait; that the informer was keeping watch at the instant of that present reporting, but that two heads were better than one (especially when the second was Mr Inspector's); and that the reporter meant to share the watch. And forasmuch as crouching under the lee of a hauled-up boat on a night when it blew cold and strong, and when the weather was varied with blasts of hail at times, might be wearisome to amateurs, the reporter closed with the recommendation that the two gentlemen should remain, for a while at any rate, in their present quarters, which were weather-tight and warm.

They were not inclined to dispute this recommendation, but they wanted to know where they could join the watchers when so disposed. Rather than trust to a verbal description of the place, which might mislead, Eugene (with a less weighty sense of personal trouble on him than he usually had) would go out with Mr Inspector, note the spot, and come back.

On the shelving bank of the river, among the slimy stones of a causeway—not the special causeway of the Six Jolly Fellowships, which had a landing-place of its own, but another, a little removed, and very near to the old windmill which was the denounced man's dwelling-place—were a few boats; some, moored and already beginning to float; others, hauled up above the reach of the tide. Under one of these latter, Eugene's companion disappeared. And when Eugene had observed its position with reference to the other boats, and had made sure that he could not miss it, he turned his eyes upon the building where, as he had been told, the lonely girl with the dark hair sat by the fire.

He could see the light of the fire shining through the window. Perhaps it drew him on to look in. Perhaps he had come out with the express intention. That part of the bank having rank grass growing on it, there was no difficulty in getting close, without any noise of footsteps: it was but to scramble up a ragged face of pretty hard mud some three or four feet high and come upon the grass and to the window. He came to the window by that means.

She had no other light than the light of the fire. The unkindled lamp stood on the table. She sat on the ground, looking at the brazier, with her face leaning on her hand. There was a kind of film or flicker on her face, which at first he took to be the fitful firelight; but, on a second look, he saw that she was weeping. A sad and solitary spectacle, as shown him by the rising and the falling of the fire.

It was a little window of but four pieces of glass, and was not curtained; he chose it because the larger window near it was. It showed him the room, and the bills upon the wall respecting the drowned people starting out and receding by turns. But he glanced slightly at them, though he looked long and steadily at her. A deep rich piece of colour, with the brown flush of her cheek and the shining lustre of her hair, though sad and solitary, weeping by the rising and the falling of the fire.

She started up. He had been so very still that he felt sure it was not he who had disturbed her, so merely withdrew from the window and stood near it in the shadow of the wall. She opened the door, and said in an alarmed tone, 'Father, was that you calling me?' And again, 'Father!' And once again, after listening, 'Father! I thought I heard you call me twice before!'

No response. As she re-entered at the door, he dropped over the bank and made his way back, among the ooze and near the hiding-place, to Mortimer Lightwood: to whom he told what he had seen of the girl, and how this was becoming very grim indeed.

'If the real man feels as guilty as I do,' said Eugene, 'he is remarkably uncomfortable.'

'Influence of secrecy,' suggested Lightwood.

'I am not at all obliged to it for making me Guy Fawkes in the vault and a Sneak in the area both at once,' said Eugene. 'Give me some more of that stuff.'

Lightwood helped him to some more of that stuff, but it had been cooling, and didn't answer now.

'Pooh,' said Eugene, spitting it out among the ashes. 'Tastes like the wash of the river.'

'Are you so familiar with the flavour of the wash of the river?'

'I seem to be to-night. I feel as if I had been half drowned, and swallowing a gallon of it.'

'Influence of locality,' suggested Lightwood.

'You are mighty learned to-night, you and your influences,' returned Eugene. 'How long shall we stay here?'

'How long do you think?'

'If I could choose, I should say a minute,' replied Eugene, 'for the Jolly Fellowship Porters are not the jolliest dogs I have known. But I suppose we are best here until they turn us out with the other suspicious characters, at midnight.'

Thereupon he stirred the fire, and sat down on one side of it. It struck eleven, and he made believe to compose himself patiently. But gradually he took the fidgets in one leg, and then in the other leg, and then in one arm, and then in the other arm, and then in his chin, and then in his back, and then in his forehead, and then in his hair, and then in his nose; and then he stretched himself recumbent on two chairs, and groaned; and then he started up.

'Invisible insects of diabolical activity swarm in this place. I am tickled and twitched all over. Mentally, I have now committed a burglary under the meanest circumstances, and the myrmidons of justice are at my heels.'

'I am quite as bad,' said Lightwood, sitting up facing him, with a tumbled head; after going through some wonderful evolutions, in which his head had been the lowest part of him. 'This restlessness began with me, long ago. All the time you were out, I felt like Gulliver with the Lilliputians firing upon him.'

'It won't do, Mortimer. We must get into the air; we must join our dear friend and brother, Riderhood. And let us tranquillize ourselves by making a compact. Next time (with a view to our peace of mind) we'll commit the crime, instead of taking the criminal. You swear it?'

'Certainly.'

'Sworn! Let Tippins look to it. Her life's in danger.'

Mortimer rang the bell to pay the score, and Bob appeared to transact that business with him: whom Eugene, in his careless extravagance, asked if he would like a situation in the lime-trade?

'Thankee sir, no sir,' said Bob. 'I've a good sitiwation here, sir.'

'If you change your mind at any time,' returned Eugene, 'come to me at my works, and you'll always find an opening in the lime-kiln.'

'Thankee sir,' said Bob.

'This is my partner,' said Eugene, 'who keeps the books and attends to the wages. A fair day's wages for a fair day's work is ever my partner's motto.'

'And a very good 'un it is, gentlemen,' said Bob, receiving his fee, and drawing a bow out of his head with his right hand, very much as he would have drawn a pint of beer out of the beer engine.

'Eugene,' Mortimer apostrophized him, laughing quite heartily when they were alone again, 'how CAN you be so ridiculous?'

'I am in a ridiculous humour,' quoth Eugene; 'I am a ridiculous fellow. Everything is ridiculous. Come along!'

It passed into Mortimer Lightwood's mind that a change of some sort, best expressed perhaps as an intensification of all that was wildest and most negligent and reckless in his friend, had come upon him in the last half-hour or so. Thoroughly used to him as he was, he found something new and strained in him that was for the moment perplexing. This passed into his mind, and passed out again; but he remembered it afterwards.

'There's where she sits, you see,' said Eugene, when they were standing under the bank, roared and riven at by the wind. 'There's the light of her fire.'

'I'll take a peep through the window,' said Mortimer.

'No, don't!' Eugene caught him by the arm. 'Best, not make a show of her. Come to our honest friend.'

He led him to the post of watch, and they both dropped down and crept under the lee of the boat; a better shelter than it had seemed before, being directly contrasted with the blowing wind and the bare night.

'Mr Inspector at home?' whispered Eugene.

'Here I am, sir.'

'And our friend of the perspiring brow is at the far corner there? Good. Anything happened?'

'His daughter has been out, thinking she heard him calling, unless it was a sign to him to keep out of the way. It might have been.'

'It might have been Rule Britannia,' muttered Eugene, 'but it wasn't. Mortimer!'

'Here!' (On the other side of Mr Inspector.)

'Two burglaries now, and a forgery!'

With this indication of his depressed state of mind, Eugene fell silent.

They were all silent for a long while. As it got to be flood-tide, and the water came nearer to them, noises on the river became more frequent, and they listened more. To the turning of steam-paddles, to the clinking of iron chain, to the creaking of blocks, to the measured working of oars, to the occasional violent barking of some passing dog on shipboard, who seemed to scent them lying in their hiding-place. The night was not so dark but that, besides the lights at bows and mastheads gliding to and fro, they could discern some shadowy bulk attached; and now and then a ghostly lighter with a large dark sail, like a warning arm, would start up very near them, pass on, and vanish. At this time of their watch, the water close to them would be often agitated by some impulsion given it from a distance. Often they believed this beat and plash to be the boat they lay in wait for, running in ashore; and again and again they would have started up, but for the immobility with which the informer, well used to the river, kept quiet in his place.

The wind carried away the striking of the great multitude of city church clocks, for those lay to leeward of them; but there were bells to windward that told them of its being One—Two—Three. Without that aid they would have known how the night wore, by the falling of the tide, recorded in the appearance of an ever-widening black wet strip of shore, and the emergence of the paved causeway from the river, foot by foot.

As the time so passed, this slinking business became a more and more precarious one. It would seem as if the man had had some intimation of what was in hand against him, or had taken fright? His movements might have been planned to gain for him, in getting beyond their reach, twelve hours' advantage? The honest man who had expended the sweat of his brow became uneasy, and began to complain with bitterness of the proneness of mankind to cheat him—him invested with the dignity of Labour!

Their retreat was so chosen that while they could watch the river, they could watch the house. No one had passed in or out, since the daughter thought she heard the father calling. No one could pass in or out without being seen.

'But it will be light at five,' said Mr Inspector, 'and then WE shall be seen.'

'Look here,' said Riderhood, 'what do you say to this? He may have been lurking in and out, and just holding his own betwixt two or three bridges, for hours back.'

'What do you make of that?' said Mr Inspector. Stoical, but contradictory.

'He may be doing so at this present time.'

'What do you make of that?' said Mr Inspector.

'My boat's among them boats here at the cause'ay.'

'And what do you make of your boat?' said Mr Inspector.

'What if I put off in her and take a look round? I know his ways, and the likely nooks he favours. I know where he'd be at such a time of the tide, and where he'd be at such another time. Ain't I been his pardner? None of you need show. None of you need stir. I can shove her off without help; and as to me being seen, I'm about at all times.'

'You might have given a worse opinion,' said Mr Inspector, after brief consideration. 'Try it.'

'Stop a bit. Let's work it out. If I want you, I'll drop round under the Fellowships and tip you a whistle.'

'If I might so far presume as to offer a suggestion to my honourable and gallant friend, whose knowledge of naval matters far be it from me to impeach,' Eugene struck in with great deliberation, 'it would be, that to tip a whistle is to advertise mystery and invite speculation. My honourable and gallant friend will, I trust, excuse me, as an independent member, for throwing out a remark which I feel to be due to this house and the country.'

'Was that the T'other Governor, or Lawyer Lightwood?' asked Riderhood. For, they spoke as they crouched or lay, without seeing one another's faces.

'In reply to the question put by my honourable and gallant friend,' said Eugene, who was lying on his back with his hat on his face, as an attitude highly expressive of watchfulness, 'I can have no hesitation in replying (it not being inconsistent with the public service) that those accents were the accents of the T'other Governor.'

'You've tolerable good eyes, ain't you, Governor? You've all tolerable good eyes, ain't you?' demanded the informer.

All.

'Then if I row up under the Fellowship and lay there, no need to whistle. You'll make out that there's a speck of something or another there, and you'll know it's me, and you'll come down that cause'ay to me. Understood all?'

Understood all.

'Off she goes then!'

In a moment, with the wind cutting keenly at him sideways, he was staggering down to his boat; in a few moments he was clear, and creeping up the river under their own shore.

Eugene had raised himself on his elbow to look into the darkness after him. 'I wish the boat of my honourable and gallant friend,' he murmured, lying down again and speaking into his hat, 'may be endowed with philanthropy enough to turn bottom-upward and extinguish him!—Mortimer.'

'My honourable friend.'

'Three burglaries, two forgeries, and a midnight assassination.' Yet in spite of having those weights on his conscience, Eugene was somewhat enlivened by the late slight change in the circumstances of affairs. So were his two companions. Its being a change was everything. The suspense seemed to have taken a new lease, and to have begun afresh from a recent date. There was something additional to look for. They were all three more sharply on the alert, and less deadened by the miserable influences of the place and time.

More than an hour had passed, and they were even dozing, when one of the three—each said it was he, and he had NOT dozed—made out Riderhood in his boat at the spot agreed on. They sprang up, came out from their shelter, and went down to him. When he saw them coming, he dropped alongside the causeway; so that they, standing on the causeway, could speak with him in whispers, under the shadowy mass of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters fast asleep.

'Blest if I can make it out!' said he, staring at them.

'Make what out? Have you seen him?'

'No.'

'What HAVE you seen?' asked Lightwood. For, he was staring at them in the strangest way.

'I've seen his boat.'

'Not empty?'

'Yes, empty. And what's more,—adrift. And what's more,—with one scull gone. And what's more,—with t'other scull jammed in the thowels and broke short off. And what's more,—the boat's drove tight by the tide 'atwixt two tiers of barges. And what's more,—he's in luck again, by George if he ain't!'

Chapter 14

THE BIRD OF PREY BROUGHT DOWN

Cold on the shore, in the raw cold of that leaden crisis in the four-and-twenty hours when the vital force of all the noblest and prettiest things that live is at its lowest, the three watchers looked each at the blank faces of the other two, and all at the blank face of Riderhood in his boat.

'Gaffer's boat, Gaffer in luck again, and yet no Gaffer!' So spake Riderhood, staring disconsolate.

As if with one accord, they all turned their eyes towards the light of the fire shining through the window. It was fainter and duller. Perhaps fire, like the higher animal and vegetable life it helps to sustain, has its greatest tendency towards death, when the night is dying and the day is not yet born.

'If it was me that had the law of this here job in hand,' growled Riderhood with a threatening shake of his head, 'blest if I wouldn't lay hold of HER, at any rate!'

'Ay, but it is not you,' said Eugene. With something so suddenly fierce in him that the informer returned submissively; 'Well, well, well, t'other governor, I didn't say it was. A man may speak.'

'And vermin may be silent,' said Eugene. 'Hold your tongue, you water-rat!'

Astonished by his friend's unusual heat, Lightwood stared too, and then said: 'What can have become of this man?'

'Can't imagine. Unless he dived overboard.' The informer wiped his brow ruefully as he said it, sitting in his boat and always staring disconsolate.

'Did you make his boat fast?'

'She's fast enough till the tide runs back. I couldn't make her faster than she is. Come aboard of mine, and see for your own-selves.'

There was a little backwardness in complying, for the freight looked too much for the boat; but on Riderhood's protesting 'that he had had half a dozen, dead and alive, in her afore now, and she was nothing deep in the water nor down in the stern even then, to speak of;' they carefully took their places, and trimmed the crazy thing. While they were doing so, Riderhood still sat staring disconsolate.

'All right. Give way!' said Lightwood.

'Give way, by George!' repeated Riderhood, before shoving off. 'If he's gone and made off any how Lawyer Lightwood, it's enough to make me give way in a different manner. But he always WAS a cheat, con-found him! He always was a infernal cheat, was Gaffer. Nothing straightfor'ard, nothing on the square. So mean, so underhanded. Never going through with a thing, nor carrying it out like a man!'

'Hallo! Steady!' cried Eugene (he had recovered immediately on embarking), as they bumped heavily against a pile; and then in a lower voice reversed his late apostrophe by remarking ('I wish the boat of my honourable and gallant friend may be endowed with philanthropy enough not to turn bottom-upward and extinguish us!) Steady, steady! Sit close, Mortimer. Here's the hail again. See how it flies, like a troop of wild cats, at Mr Riderhood's eyes!'

Indeed he had the full benefit of it, and it so mauled him, though he bent his head low and tried to present nothing but the mangy cap to it, that he dropped under the lee of a tier of shipping, and they lay there until it was over. The squall had come up, like a spiteful messenger before the morning; there followed in its wake a ragged tear of light which ripped the dark clouds until they showed a great grey hole of day.

They were all shivering, and everything about them seemed to be shivering; the river itself; craft, rigging, sails, such early smoke as there yet was on the shore. Black with wet, and altered to the eye by white patches of hail and sleet, the huddled buildings looked lower than usual, as if they were cowering, and had shrunk with the cold. Very little life was to be seen on either bank, windows and doors were shut, and the staring black and white letters upon wharves and warehouses 'looked,' said Eugene to Mortimer, 'like inscriptions over the graves of dead businesses.'

As they glided slowly on, keeping under the shore and sneaking in and out among the shipping by back-alleys of water, in a pilfering way that seemed to be their boatman's normal manner of progression, all the objects among which they crept were so huge in contrast with their wretched boat, as to threaten to crush it. Not a ship's hull, with its rusty iron links of cable run out of hawse-holes long discoloured with the iron's rusty tears, but seemed to be there with a fell intention. Not a figure-head but had the menacing look of bursting forward to run them down. Not a sluice gate, or a painted scale upon a post or wall, showing the depth of water, but seemed to hint, like the dreadfully facetious Wolf in bed in Grandmamma's cottage, 'That's to drown YOU in, my dears!' Not a lumbering black barge, with its cracked and blistered side impending over them, but seemed to suck at the river with a thirst for sucking them under. And everything so vaunted the spoiling influences of water—discoloured copper, rotten wood, honey-combed stone, green dank deposit—that the after-consequences of being crushed, sucked under, and drawn down, looked as ugly to the imagination as the main event.

Some half-hour of this work, and Riderhood unshipped his sculls, stood holding on to a barge, and hand over hand long-wise along the barge's side gradually worked his boat under her head into a secret little nook of scummy water. And driven into that nook, and wedged as he had described, was Gaffer's boat; that boat with the stain still in it, bearing some resemblance to a muffled human form.

'Now tell me I'm a liar!' said the honest man.

('With a morbid expectation,' murmured Eugene to Lightwood, 'that somebody is always going to tell him the truth.')

'This is Hexam's boat,' said Mr Inspector. 'I know her well.'

'Look at the broken scull. Look at the t'other scull gone. NOW tell me I am a liar!' said the honest man.

Mr Inspector stepped into the boat. Eugene and Mortimer looked on.

'And see now!' added Riderhood, creeping aft, and showing a stretched rope made fast there and towing overboard. 'Didn't I tell you he was in luck again?'

'Haul in,' said Mr Inspector.

'Easy to say haul in,' answered Riderhood. 'Not so easy done. His luck's got fouled under the keels of the barges. I tried to haul in last time, but I couldn't. See how taut the line is!'

'I must have it up,' said Mr Inspector. 'I am going to take this boat ashore, and his luck along with it. Try easy now.'

He tried easy now; but the luck resisted; wouldn't come.

'I mean to have it, and the boat too,' said Mr Inspector, playing the line.

But still the luck resisted; wouldn't come.

'Take care,' said Riderhood. 'You'll disfigure. Or pull asunder perhaps.'

'I am not going to do either, not even to your Grandmother,' said Mr Inspector; 'but I mean to have it. Come!' he added, at once persuasively and with authority to the hidden object in the water, as he played the line again; 'it's no good this sort of game, you know. You MUST come up. I mean to have you.'

There was so much virtue in this distinctly and decidedly meaning to have it, that it yielded a little, even while the line was played.

'I told you so,' quoth Mr Inspector, pulling off his outer coat, and leaning well over the stern with a will. 'Come!'

It was an awful sort of fishing, but it no more disconcerted Mr Inspector than if he had been fishing in a punt on a summer evening by some soothing weir high up the peaceful river. After certain minutes, and a few directions to the rest to 'ease her a little for'ard,' and 'now ease her a trifle aft,' and the like, he said composedly, 'All clear!' and the line and the boat came free together.

Accepting Lightwood's proffered hand to help him up, he then put on his coat, and said to Riderhood, 'Hand me over those spare sculls of yours, and I'll pull this in to the nearest stairs. Go ahead you, and keep out in pretty open water, that I mayn't get fouled again.'

His directions were obeyed, and they pulled ashore directly; two in one boat, two in the other.

'Now,' said Mr Inspector, again to Riderhood, when they were all on the slushy stones; 'you have had more practice in this than I have had, and ought to be a better workman at it. Undo the tow-rope, and we'll help you haul in.'

Riderhood got into the boat accordingly. It appeared as if he had scarcely had a moment's time to touch the rope or look over the stern, when he came scrambling back, as pale as the morning, and gasped out:

'By the Lord, he's done me!'

'What do you mean?' they all demanded.

He pointed behind him at the boat, and gasped to that degree that he dropped upon the stones to get his breath.

'Gaffer's done me. It's Gaffer!'

They ran to the rope, leaving him gasping there. Soon, the form of the bird of prey, dead some hours, lay stretched upon the shore, with a new blast storming at it and clotting the wet hair with hail-stones.

Father, was that you calling me? Father! I thought I heard you call me twice before! Words never to be answered, those, upon the earth-side of the grave. The wind sweeps jeeringly over Father, whips him with the frayed ends of his dress and his jagged hair, tries to turn him where he lies stark on his back, and force his face towards the rising sun, that he may be shamed the more. A lull, and the wind is secret and prying with him; lifts and lets falls a rag; hides palpitating under another rag; runs nimbly through his hair and beard. Then, in a rush, it cruelly taunts him. Father, was that you calling me? Was it you, the voiceless and the dead? Was it you, thus buffeted as you lie here in a heap? Was it you, thus baptized unto Death, with these flying impurities now flung upon your face? Why not speak, Father? Soaking into this filthy ground as you lie here, is your own shape. Did you never see such a shape soaked into your boat? Speak, Father. Speak to us, the winds, the only listeners left you!

'Now see,' said Mr Inspector, after mature deliberation: kneeling on one knee beside the body, when they had stood looking down on the drowned man, as he had many a time looked down on many another man: 'the way of it was this. Of course you gentlemen hardly failed to observe that he was towing by the neck and arms.'

They had helped to release the rope, and of course not.

'And you will have observed before, and you will observe now, that this knot, which was drawn chock-tight round his neck by the strain of his own arms, is a slip-knot': holding it up for demonstration.

Plain enough.

'Likewise you will have observed how he had run the other end of this rope to his boat.'

It had the curves and indentations in it still, where it had been twined and bound.

'Now see,' said Mr Inspector, 'see how it works round upon him. It's a wild tempestuous evening when this man that was,' stooping to wipe some hailstones out of his hair with an end of his own drowned jacket, '—there! Now he's more like himself; though he's badly bruised,—when this man that was, rows out upon the river on his usual lay. He carries with him this coil of rope. He always carries with him this coil of rope. It's as well known to me as he was himself. Sometimes it lay in the bottom of his boat. Sometimes he hung it loose round his neck. He was a light-dresser was this man;—you see?' lifting the loose neckerchief over his breast, and taking the opportunity of wiping the dead lips with it—'and when it was wet, or freezing, or blew cold, he would hang this coil of line round his neck. Last evening he does this. Worse for him! He dodges about in his boat, does this man, till he gets chilled. His hands,' taking up one of them, which dropped like a leaden weight, 'get numbed. He sees some object that's in his way of business, floating. He makes ready to secure that object. He unwinds the end of his coil that he wants to take some turns on in his boat, and he takes turns enough on it to secure that it shan't run out. He makes it too secure, as it happens. He is a little longer about this than usual, his hands being numbed. His object drifts up, before he is quite ready for it. He catches at it, thinks he'll make sure of the contents of the pockets anyhow, in case he should be parted from it, bends right over the stern, and in one of these heavy squalls, or in the cross-swell of two steamers, or in not being quite prepared, or through all or most or some, gets a lurch, overbalances and goes head-foremost overboard. Now see! He can swim, can this man, and instantly he strikes out. But in such striking-out he tangles his arms, pulls strong on the slip-knot, and it runs home. The object he had expected to take in tow, floats by, and his own boat tows him dead, to where we found him, all entangled in his own line. You'll ask me how I make out about the pockets? First, I'll tell you more; there was silver in 'em. How do I make that out? Simple and satisfactory. Because he's got it here.' The lecturer held up the tightly clenched right hand.

'What is to be done with the remains?' asked Lightwood.

'If you wouldn't object to standing by him half a minute, sir,' was the reply, 'I'll find the nearest of our men to come and take charge of him;—I still call it HIM, you see,' said Mr Inspector, looking back as he went, with a philosophical smile upon the force of habit.

'Eugene,' said Lightwood and was about to add 'we may wait at a little distance,' when turning his head he found that no Eugene was there.

He raised his voice and called 'Eugene! Holloa!' But no Eugene replied.

It was broad daylight now, and he looked about. But no Eugene was in all the view.

Mr Inspector speedily returning down the wooden stairs, with a police constable, Lightwood asked him if he had seen his friend leave them? Mr Inspector could not exactly say that he had seen him go, but had noticed that he was restless.

'Singular and entertaining combination, sir, your friend.'

'I wish it had not been a part of his singular entertaining combination to give me the slip under these dreary circumstances at this time of the morning,' said Lightwood. 'Can we get anything hot to drink?'

We could, and we did. In a public-house kitchen with a large fire. We got hot brandy and water, and it revived us wonderfully. Mr Inspector having to Mr Riderhood announced his official intention of 'keeping his eye upon him', stood him in a corner of the fireplace, like a wet umbrella, and took no further outward and visible notice of that honest man, except ordering a separate service of brandy and water for him: apparently out of the public funds.

As Mortimer Lightwood sat before the blazing fire, conscious of drinking brandy and water then and there in his sleep, and yet at one and the same time drinking burnt sherry at the Six Jolly Fellowships, and lying under the boat on the river shore, and sitting in the boat that Riderhood rowed, and listening to the lecture recently concluded, and having to dine in the Temple with an unknown man, who described himself as M. H. F. Eugene Gaffer Harmon, and said he lived at Hailstorm,—as he passed through these curious vicissitudes of fatigue and slumber, arranged upon the scale of a dozen hours to the second, he became aware of answering aloud a communication of pressing importance that had never been made to him, and then turned it into a cough on beholding Mr Inspector. For, he felt, with some natural indignation, that that functionary might otherwise suspect him of having closed his eyes, or wandered in his attention.

'Here just before us, you see,' said Mr Inspector.

'I see,' said Lightwood, with dignity.

'And had hot brandy and water too, you see,' said Mr Inspector, 'and then cut off at a great rate.'

'Who?' said Lightwood.

'Your friend, you know.'

'I know,' he replied, again with dignity.

After hearing, in a mist through which Mr Inspector loomed vague and large, that the officer took upon himself to prepare the dead man's daughter for what had befallen in the night, and generally that he took everything upon himself, Mortimer Lightwood stumbled in his sleep to a cab-stand, called a cab, and had entered the army and committed a capital military offence and been tried by court martial and found guilty and had arranged his affairs and been marched out to be shot, before the door banged.

Hard work rowing the cab through the City to the Temple, for a cup of from five to ten thousand pounds value, given by Mr Boffin; and hard work holding forth at that immeasurable length to Eugene (when he had been rescued with a rope from the running pavement) for making off in that extraordinary manner! But he offered such ample apologies, and was so very penitent, that when Lightwood got out of the cab, he gave the driver a particular charge to be careful of him. Which the driver (knowing there was no other fare left inside) stared at prodigiously.

In short, the night's work had so exhausted and worn out this actor in it, that he had become a mere somnambulist. He was too tired to rest in his sleep, until he was even tired out of being too tired, and dropped into oblivion. Late in the afternoon he awoke, and in some anxiety sent round to Eugene's lodging hard by, to inquire if he were up yet?

Oh yes, he was up. In fact, he had not been to bed. He had just come home. And here he was, close following on the heels of the message.

'Why what bloodshot, draggled, dishevelled spectacle is this!' cried Mortimer.

'Are my feathers so very much rumpled?' said Eugene, coolly going up to the looking-glass. They ARE rather out of sorts. But consider. Such a night for plumage!'

'Such a night?' repeated Mortimer. 'What became of you in the morning?'

'My dear fellow,' said Eugene, sitting on his bed, 'I felt that we had bored one another so long, that an unbroken continuance of those relations must inevitably terminate in our flying to opposite points of the earth. I also felt that I had committed every crime in the Newgate Calendar. So, for mingled considerations of friendship and felony, I took a walk.'

Chapter 15

TWO NEW SERVANTS

Mr and Mrs Boffin sat after breakfast, in the Bower, a prey to prosperity. Mr Boffin's face denoted Care and Complication. Many disordered papers were before him, and he looked at them about as hopefully as an innocent civilian might look at a crowd of troops whom he was required at five minutes' notice to manoeuvre and review. He had been engaged in some attempts to make notes of these papers; but being troubled (as men of his stamp often are) with an exceedingly distrustful and corrective thumb, that busy member had so often interposed to smear his notes, that they were little more legible than the various impressions of itself; which blurred his nose and forehead. It is curious to consider, in such a case as Mr Boffin's, what a cheap article ink is, and how far it may be made to go. As a grain of musk will scent a drawer for many years, and still lose nothing appreciable of its original weight, so a halfpenny-worth of ink would blot Mr Boffin to the roots of his hair and the calves of his legs, without inscribing a line on the paper before him, or appearing to diminish in the inkstand.

Mr Boffin was in such severe literary difficulties that his eyes were prominent and fixed, and his breathing was stertorous, when, to the great relief of Mrs Boffin, who observed these symptoms with alarm, the yard bell rang.

'Who's that, I wonder!' said Mrs Boffin.

Mr Boffin drew a long breath, laid down his pen, looked at his notes as doubting whether he had the pleasure of their acquaintance, and appeared, on a second perusal of their countenances, to be confirmed in his impression that he had not, when there was announced by the hammer-headed young man:

'Mr Rokesmith.'

'Oh!' said Mr Boffin. 'Oh indeed! Our and the Wilfers' Mutual Friend, my dear. Yes. Ask him to come in.'

Mr Rokesmith appeared.

'Sit down, sir,' said Mr Boffin, shaking hands with him. 'Mrs Boffin you're already acquainted with. Well, sir, I am rather unprepared to see you, for, to tell you the truth, I've been so busy with one thing and another, that I've not had time to turn your offer over.'

'That's apology for both of us: for Mr Boffin, and for me as well,' said the smiling Mrs Boffin. 'But Lor! we can talk it over now; can't us?'

Mr Rokesmith bowed, thanked her, and said he hoped so.

'Let me see then,' resumed Mr Boffin, with his hand to his chin. 'It was Secretary that you named; wasn't it?'

'I said Secretary,' assented Mr Rokesmith.

'It rather puzzled me at the time,' said Mr Boffin, 'and it rather puzzled me and Mrs Boffin when we spoke of it afterwards, because (not to make a mystery of our belief) we have always believed a Secretary to be a piece of furniture, mostly of mahogany, lined with green baize or leather, with a lot of little drawers in it. Now, you won't think I take a liberty when I mention that you certainly ain't THAT.'

Certainly not, said Mr Rokesmith. But he had used the word in the sense of Steward.

'Why, as to Steward, you see,' returned Mr Boffin, with his hand still to his chin, 'the odds are that Mrs Boffin and me may never go upon the water. Being both bad sailors, we should want a Steward if we did; but there's generally one provided.'

Mr Rokesmith again explained; defining the duties he sought to undertake, as those of general superintendent, or manager, or overlooker, or man of business.

'Now, for instance—come!' said Mr Boffin, in his pouncing way. 'If you entered my employment, what would you do?'

'I would keep exact accounts of all the expenditure you sanctioned, Mr Boffin. I would write your letters, under your direction. I would transact your business with people in your pay or employment. I would,' with a glance and a half-smile at the table, 'arrange your papers—'

Mr Boffin rubbed his inky ear, and looked at his wife.

'—And so arrange them as to have them always in order for immediate reference, with a note of the contents of each outside it.'

'I tell you what,' said Mr Boffin, slowly crumpling his own blotted note in his hand; 'if you'll turn to at these present papers, and see what you can make of 'em, I shall know better what I can make of you.'

No sooner said than done. Relinquishing his hat and gloves, Mr Rokesmith sat down quietly at the table, arranged the open papers into an orderly heap, cast his eyes over each in succession, folded it, docketed it on the outside, laid it in a second heap, and, when that second heap was complete and the first gone, took from his pocket a piece of string and tied it together with a remarkably dexterous hand at a running curve and a loop.

'Good!' said Mr Boffin. 'Very good! Now let us hear what they're all about; will you be so good?'

John Rokesmith read his abstracts aloud. They were all about the new house. Decorator's estimate, so much. Furniture estimate, so much. Estimate for furniture of offices, so much. Coach-maker's estimate, so much. Horse-dealer's estimate, so much. Harness-maker's estimate, so much. Goldsmith's estimate, so much. Total, so very much. Then came correspondence. Acceptance of Mr Boffin's offer of such a date, and to such an effect. Rejection of Mr Boffin's proposal of such a date and to such an effect. Concerning Mr Boffin's scheme of such another date to such another effect. All compact and methodical.

'Apple-pie order!' said Mr Boffin, after checking off each inscription with his hand, like a man beating time. 'And whatever you do with your ink, I can't think, for you're as clean as a whistle after it. Now, as to a letter. Let's,' said Mr Boffin, rubbing his hands in his pleasantly childish admiration, 'let's try a letter next.'

'To whom shall it be addressed, Mr Boffin?'

'Anyone. Yourself.'

Mr Rokesmith quickly wrote, and then read aloud:

'"Mr Boffin presents his compliments to Mr John Rokesmith, and begs to say that he has decided on giving Mr John Rokesmith a trial in the capacity he desires to fill. Mr Boffin takes Mr John Rokesmith at his word, in postponing to some indefinite period, the consideration of salary. It is quite understood that Mr Boffin is in no way committed on that point. Mr Boffin has merely to add, that he relies on Mr John Rokesmith's assurance that he will be faithful and serviceable. Mr John Rokesmith will please enter on his duties immediately."'

'Well! Now, Noddy!' cried Mrs Boffin, clapping her hands, 'That IS a good one!'

Mr Boffin was no less delighted; indeed, in his own bosom, he regarded both the composition itself and the device that had given birth to it, as a very remarkable monument of human ingenuity.

'And I tell you, my deary,' said Mrs Boffin, 'that if you don't close with Mr Rokesmith now at once, and if you ever go a muddling yourself again with things never meant nor made for you, you'll have an apoplexy—besides iron-moulding your linen—and you'll break my heart.'

Mr Boffin embraced his spouse for these words of wisdom, and then, congratulating John Rokesmith on the brilliancy of his achievements, gave him his hand in pledge of their new relations. So did Mrs Boffin.

'Now,' said Mr Boffin, who, in his frankness, felt that it did not become him to have a gentleman in his employment five minutes, without reposing some confidence in him, 'you must be let a little more into our affairs, Rokesmith. I mentioned to you, when I made your acquaintance, or I might better say when you made mine, that Mrs Boffin's inclinations was setting in the way of Fashion, but that I didn't know how fashionable we might or might not grow. Well! Mrs Boffin has carried the day, and we're going in neck and crop for Fashion.'

'I rather inferred that, sir,' replied John Rokesmith, 'from the scale on which your new establishment is to be maintained.'

'Yes,' said Mr Boffin, 'it's to be a Spanker. The fact is, my literary man named to me that a house with which he is, as I may say, connected—in which he has an interest—'

'As property?' inquired John Rokesmith.

'Why no,' said Mr Boffin, 'not exactly that; a sort of a family tie.'

'Association?' the Secretary suggested.

'Ah!' said Mr Boffin. 'Perhaps. Anyhow, he named to me that the house had a board up, "This Eminently Aristocratic Mansion to be let or sold." Me and Mrs Boffin went to look at it, and finding it beyond a doubt Eminently Aristocratic (though a trifle high and dull, which after all may be part of the same thing) took it. My literary man was so friendly as to drop into a charming piece of poetry on that occasion, in which he complimented Mrs Boffin on coming into possession of—how did it go, my dear?'

Mrs Boffin replied:

'"The gay, the gay and festive scene,
The halls, the halls of dazzling light."'

'That's it! And it was made neater by there really being two halls in the house, a front 'un and a back 'un, besides the servants'. He likewise dropped into a very pretty piece of poetry to be sure, respecting the extent to which he would be willing to put himself out of the way to bring Mrs Boffin round, in case she should ever get low in her spirits in the house. Mrs Boffin has a wonderful memory. Will you repeat it, my dear?'

Mrs Boffin complied, by reciting the verses in which this obliging offer had been made, exactly as she had received them.

'"I'll tell thee how the maiden wept, Mrs Boffin,
When her true love was slain ma'am,
And how her broken spirit slept, Mrs Boffin,
And never woke again ma'am.
I'll tell thee (if agreeable to Mr Boffin) how the steed drew
nigh,
And left his lord afar;
And if my tale (which I hope Mr Boffin might excuse) should
make you sigh,
I'll strike the light guitar."'

'Correct to the letter!' said Mr Boffin. 'And I consider that the poetry brings us both in, in a beautiful manner.'

The effect of the poem on the Secretary being evidently to astonish him, Mr Boffin was confirmed in his high opinion of it, and was greatly pleased.

'Now, you see, Rokesmith,' he went on, 'a literary man—WITH a wooden leg—is liable to jealousy. I shall therefore cast about for comfortable ways and means of not calling up Wegg's jealousy, but of keeping you in your department, and keeping him in his.'

'Lor!' cried Mrs Boffin. 'What I say is, the world's wide enough for all of us!'

'So it is, my dear,' said Mr Boffin, 'when not literary. But when so, not so. And I am bound to bear in mind that I took Wegg on, at a time when I had no thought of being fashionable or of leaving the Bower. To let him feel himself anyways slighted now, would be to be guilty of a meanness, and to act like having one's head turned by the halls of dazzling light. Which Lord forbid! Rokesmith, what shall we say about your living in the house?'

'In this house?'

'No, no. I have got other plans for this house. In the new house?'

'That will be as you please, Mr Boffin. I hold myself quite at your disposal. You know where I live at present.'

'Well!' said Mr Boffin, after considering the point; 'suppose you keep as you are for the present, and we'll decide by-and-by. You'll begin to take charge at once, of all that's going on in the new house, will you?'

'Most willingly. I will begin this very day. Will you give me the address?'

Mr Boffin repeated it, and the Secretary wrote it down in his pocket-book. Mrs Boffin took the opportunity of his being so engaged, to get a better observation of his face than she had yet taken. It impressed her in his favour, for she nodded aside to Mr Boffin, 'I like him.'

'I will see directly that everything is in train, Mr Boffin.'

'Thank'ee. Being here, would you care at all to look round the Bower?'

'I should greatly like it. I have heard so much of its story.'

'Come!' said Mr Boffin. And he and Mrs Boffin led the way.

A gloomy house the Bower, with sordid signs on it of having been, through its long existence as Harmony Jail, in miserly holding. Bare of paint, bare of paper on the walls, bare of furniture, bare of experience of human life. Whatever is built by man for man's occupation, must, like natural creations, fulfil the intention of its existence, or soon perish. This old house had wasted—more from desuetude than it would have wasted from use, twenty years for one.

A certain leanness falls upon houses not sufficiently imbued with life (as if they were nourished upon it), which was very noticeable here. The staircase, balustrades, and rails, had a spare look—an air of being denuded to the bone—which the panels of the walls and the jambs of the doors and windows also bore. The scanty moveables partook of it; save for the cleanliness of the place, the dust—into which they were all resolving would have lain thick on the floors; and those, both in colour and in grain, were worn like old faces that had kept much alone.

The bedroom where the clutching old man had lost his grip on life, was left as he had left it. There was the old grisly four-post bedstead, without hangings, and with a jail-like upper rim of iron and spikes; and there was the old patch-work counterpane. There was the tight-clenched old bureau, receding atop like a bad and secret forehead; there was the cumbersome old table with twisted legs, at the bed-side; and there was the box upon it, in which the will had lain. A few old chairs with patch-work covers, under which the more precious stuff to be preserved had slowly lost its quality of colour without imparting pleasure to any eye, stood against the wall. A hard family likeness was on all these things.

'The room was kept like this, Rokesmith,' said Mr Boffin, 'against the son's return. In short, everything in the house was kept exactly as it came to us, for him to see and approve. Even now, nothing is changed but our own room below-stairs that you have just left. When the son came home for the last time in his life, and for the last time in his life saw his father, it was most likely in this room that they met.'

As the Secretary looked all round it, his eyes rested on a side door in a corner.

'Another staircase,' said Mr Boffin, unlocking the door, 'leading down into the yard. We'll go down this way, as you may like to see the yard, and it's all in the road. When the son was a little child, it was up and down these stairs that he mostly came and went to his father. He was very timid of his father. I've seen him sit on these stairs, in his shy way, poor child, many a time. Mr and Mrs Boffin have comforted him, sitting with his little book on these stairs, often.'

'Ah! And his poor sister too,' said Mrs Boffin. 'And here's the sunny place on the white wall where they one day measured one another. Their own little hands wrote up their names here, only with a pencil; but the names are here still, and the poor dears gone for ever.'

'We must take care of the names, old lady,' said Mr Boffin. 'We must take care of the names. They shan't be rubbed out in our time, nor yet, if we can help it, in the time after us. Poor little children!'

'Ah, poor little children!' said Mrs Boffin.

They had opened the door at the bottom of the staircase giving on the yard, and they stood in the sunlight, looking at the scrawl of the two unsteady childish hands two or three steps up the staircase. There was something in this simple memento of a blighted childhood, and in the tenderness of Mrs Boffin, that touched the Secretary.

Mr Boffin then showed his new man of business the Mounds, and his own particular Mound which had been left him as his legacy under the will before he acquired the whole estate.

'It would have been enough for us,' said Mr Boffin, 'in case it had pleased God to spare the last of those two young lives and sorrowful deaths. We didn't want the rest.'

At the treasures of the yard, and at the outside of the house, and at the detached building which Mr Boffin pointed out as the residence of himself and his wife during the many years of their service, the Secretary looked with interest. It was not until Mr Boffin had shown him every wonder of the Bower twice over, that he remembered his having duties to discharge elsewhere.

'You have no instructions to give me, Mr Boffin, in reference to this place?'

'Not any, Rokesmith. No.'

'Might I ask, without seeming impertinent, whether you have any intention of selling it?'

'Certainly not. In remembrance of our old master, our old master's children, and our old service, me and Mrs Boffin mean to keep it up as it stands.'

The Secretary's eyes glanced with so much meaning in them at the Mounds, that Mr Boffin said, as if in answer to a remark:

'Ay, ay, that's another thing. I may sell THEM, though I should be sorry to see the neighbourhood deprived of 'em too. It'll look but a poor dead flat without the Mounds. Still I don't say that I'm going to keep 'em always there, for the sake of the beauty of the landscape. There's no hurry about it; that's all I say at present. I ain't a scholar in much, Rokesmith, but I'm a pretty fair scholar in dust. I can price the Mounds to a fraction, and I know how they can be best disposed of; and likewise that they take no harm by standing where they do. You'll look in to-morrow, will you be so kind?'

'Every day. And the sooner I can get you into your new house, complete, the better you will be pleased, sir?'

'Well, it ain't that I'm in a mortal hurry,' said Mr Boffin; 'only when you DO pay people for looking alive, it's as well to know that they ARE looking alive. Ain't that your opinion?'

'Quite!' replied the Secretary; and so withdrew.

'Now,' said Mr Boffin to himself; subsiding into his regular series of turns in the yard, 'if I can make it comfortable with Wegg, my affairs will be going smooth.'

The man of low cunning had, of course, acquired a mastery over the man of high simplicity. The mean man had, of course, got the better of the generous man. How long such conquests last, is another matter; that they are achieved, is every-day experience, not even to be flourished away by

Podsnappery itself. The undesigning Boffin had become so far immeshed by the wily Wegg that his mind misgave him he was a very designing man indeed in purposing to do more for Wegg. It seemed to him (so skilful was Wegg) that he was plotting darkly, when he was contriving to do the very thing that Wegg was plotting to get him to do. And thus, while he was mentally turning the kindest of kind faces on Wegg this morning, he was not absolutely sure but that he might somehow deserve the charge of turning his back on him.

For these reasons Mr Boffin passed but anxious hours until evening came, and with it Mr Wegg, stumping leisurely to the Roman Empire. At about this period Mr Boffin had become profoundly interested in the fortunes of a great military leader known to him as Bully Sawyers, but perhaps better known to fame and easier of identification by the classical student, under the less Britannic name of Belisarius. Even this general's career paled in interest for Mr Boffin before the clearing of his conscience with Wegg; and hence, when that literary gentleman had according to custom eaten and drunk until he was all a-glow, and when he took up his book with the usual chirping introduction, 'And now, Mr Boffin, sir, we'll decline and we'll fall!' Mr Boffin stopped him.

'You remember, Wegg, when I first told you that I wanted to make a sort of offer to you?'

'Let me get on my considering cap, sir,' replied that gentleman, turning the open book face downward. 'When you first told me that you wanted to make a sort of offer to me? Now let me think.' (as if there were the least necessity) 'Yes, to be sure I do, Mr Boffin. It was at my corner. To be sure it was! You had first asked me whether I liked your name, and Candour had compelled a reply in the negative case. I little thought then, sir, how familiar that name would come to be!'

'I hope it will be more familiar still, Wegg.'

'Do you, Mr Boffin? Much obliged to you, I'm sure. Is it your pleasure, sir, that we decline and we fall?' with a feint of taking up the book.

'Not just yet awhile, Wegg. In fact, I have got another offer to make you.'

Mr Wegg (who had had nothing else in his mind for several nights) took off his spectacles with an air of bland surprise.

'And I hope you'll like it, Wegg.'

'Thank you, sir,' returned that reticent individual. 'I hope it may prove so. On all accounts, I am sure.' (This, as a philanthropic aspiration.)

'What do you think,' said Mr Boffin, 'of not keeping a stall, Wegg?'

'I think, sir,' replied Wegg, 'that I should like to be shown the gentleman prepared to make it worth my while!'

'Here he is,' said Mr Boffin.

Mr Wegg was going to say, My Benefactor, and had said My Bene, when a grandiloquent change came over him.

'No, Mr Boffin, not you sir. Anybody but you. Do not fear, Mr Boffin, that I shall contaminate the premises which your gold has bought, with MY lowly pursuits. I am aware, sir, that it would not become me to carry on my little traffic under the windows of your mansion. I have already thought of that, and taken my measures. No need to be bought out, sir. Would Stepney Fields be considered intrusive? If not remote enough, I can go remoter. In the words of the poet's song, which I do not quite remember:

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Thrown on the wide world, doom'd to wander and roam,
Bereft of my parents, bereft of a home,
A stranger to something and what's his name joy,
Behold little Edmund the poor Peasant boy.
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—And equally,' said Mr Wegg, repairing the want of direct application in the last line, 'behold myself on a similar footing!'

'Now, Wegg, Wegg, Wegg,' remonstrated the excellent Boffin. 'You are too sensitive.'

'I know I am, sir,' returned Wegg, with obstinate magnanimity. 'I am acquainted with my faults. I always was, from a child, too sensitive.'

'But listen,' pursued the Golden Dustman; 'hear me out, Wegg. You have taken it into your head that I mean to pension you off.'

'True, sir,' returned Wegg, still with an obstinate magnanimity. 'I am acquainted with my faults. Far be it from me to deny them. I HAVE taken it into my head.'

'But I DON'T mean it.'

The assurance seemed hardly as comforting to Mr Wegg, as Mr Boffin intended it to be. Indeed, an appreciable elongation of his visage might have been observed as he replied:

'Don't you, indeed, sir?'

'No,' pursued Mr Boffin; 'because that would express, as I understand it, that you were not going to do anything to deserve your money. But you are; you are.'

'That, sir,' replied Mr Wegg, cheering up bravely, 'is quite another pair of shoes. Now, my independence as a man is again elevated. Now, I no longer

Weep for the hour,
When to Boffinses bower,
The Lord of the valley with offers came;
Neither does the moon hide her light
From the heavens to-night,
And weep behind her clouds o'er any individual in the present
Company's shame.

—Please to proceed, Mr Boffin.'

'Thank'ee, Wegg, both for your confidence in me and for your frequent dropping into poetry; both of which is friendly. Well, then; my idea is, that you should give up your stall, and that I should put you into the Bower here, to keep it for us. It's a pleasant spot; and a man with coals and candles and a pound a week might be in clover here.'

'Hem! Would that man, sir—we will say that man, for the purposes of argueyment;' Mr Wegg made a smiling demonstration of great perspicuity here; 'would that man, sir, be expected to throw any other capacity in, or would any other capacity be considered extra? Now let us (for the purposes of argueyment) suppose that man to be engaged as a reader: say (for the purposes of argueyment) in the evening. Would that man's pay as a reader in the evening, be added to the other amount, which, adopting your language, we will call clover; or would it merge into that amount, or clover?'

'Well,' said Mr Boffin, 'I suppose it would be added.'

'I suppose it would, sir. You are right, sir. Exactly my own views, Mr Boffin.' Here Wegg rose, and balancing himself on his wooden leg, fluttered over his prey with extended hand. 'Mr Boffin, consider it done. Say no more, sir, not a word more. My stall and I are for ever parted. The collection of ballads will in future be reserved for private study, with the object of making poetry tributary'—Wegg was so proud of having found this word, that he said it again, with a capital letter—'Tributary, to friendship. Mr

Boffin, don't allow yourself to be made uncomfortable by the pang it gives me to part from my stock and stall. Similar emotion was undergone by my own father when promoted for his merits from his occupation as a waterman to a situation under Government. His Christian name was Thomas. His words at the time (I was then an infant, but so deep was their impression on me, that I committed them to memory) were:

Then farewell my trim-built wherry,
Oars and coat and badge farewell!
Never more at Chelsea Ferry,
Shall your Thomas take a spell!

—My father got over it, Mr Boffin, and so shall I.'

While delivering these valedictory observations, Wegg continually disappointed Mr Boffin of his hand by flourishing it in the air. He now darted it at his patron, who took it, and felt his mind relieved of a great weight: observing that as they had arranged their joint affairs so satisfactorily, he would now be glad to look into those of Bully Sawyers. Which, indeed, had been left over-night in a very unpromising posture, and for whose impending expedition against the Persians the weather had been by no means favourable all day.

Mr Wegg resumed his spectacles therefore. But Sawyers was not to be of the party that night; for, before Wegg had found his place, Mrs Boffin's tread was heard upon the stairs, so unusually heavy and hurried, that Mr Boffin would have started up at the sound, anticipating some occurrence much out of the common course, even though she had not also called to him in an agitated tone.

Mr Boffin hurried out, and found her on the dark staircase, panting, with a lighted candle in her hand.

'What's the matter, my dear?'

'I don't know; I don't know; but I wish you'd come up-stairs.'

Much surprised, Mr Boffin went up stairs and accompanied Mrs Boffin into their own room: a second large room on the same floor as the room in which the late proprietor had died. Mr Boffin looked all round him, and saw nothing more unusual than various articles of folded linen on a large chest, which Mrs Boffin had been sorting.

'What is it, my dear? Why, you're frightened! YOU frightened?'

'I am not one of that sort certainly,' said Mrs Boffin, as she sat down in a chair to recover herself, and took her husband's arm; 'but it's very strange!'

'What is, my dear?'

'Noddy, the faces of the old man and the two children are all over the house to-night.'

'My dear?' exclaimed Mr Boffin. But not without a certain uncomfortable sensation gliding down his back.

'I know it must sound foolish, and yet it is so.'

'Where did you think you saw them?'

'I don't know that I think I saw them anywhere. I felt them.'

'Touched them?'

'No. Felt them in the air. I was sorting those things on the chest, and not thinking of the old man or the children, but singing to myself, when all in a moment I felt there was a face growing out of the dark.'

'What face?' asked her husband, looking about him.

'For a moment it was the old man's, and then it got younger. For a moment it was both the children's, and then it got older. For a moment it was a strange face, and then it was all the faces.'

'And then it was gone?'

'Yes; and then it was gone.'

'Where were you then, old lady?'

'Here, at the chest. Well; I got the better of it, and went on sorting, and went on singing to myself. "Lor!" I says, "I'll think of something else—something comfortable—and put it out of my head." So I thought of the new house and Miss Bella Wilfer, and was thinking at a great rate with that sheet there in my hand, when all of a sudden, the faces seemed to be hidden in among the folds of it and I let it drop.'

As it still lay on the floor where it had fallen, Mr Boffin picked it up and laid it on the chest.

'And then you ran down stairs?'

'No. I thought I'd try another room, and shake it off. I says to myself, "I'll go and walk slowly up and down the old man's room three times, from end to end, and then I shall have conquered it." I went in with the candle in my hand; but the moment I came near the bed, the air got thick with them.'

'With the faces?'

'Yes, and I even felt that they were in the dark behind the side-door, and on the little staircase, floating away into the yard. Then, I called you.'

Mr Boffin, lost in amazement, looked at Mrs Boffin. Mrs Boffin, lost in her own fluttered inability to make this out, looked at Mr Boffin.

'I think, my dear,' said the Golden Dustman, 'I'll at once get rid of Wegg for the night, because he's coming to inhabit the Bower, and it might be put into his head or somebody else's, if he heard this and it got about that the house is haunted. Whereas we know better. Don't we?'

'I never had the feeling in the house before,' said Mrs Boffin; 'and I have been about it alone at all hours of the night. I have been in the house when Death was in it, and I have been in the house when Murder was a new part of its adventures, and I never had a fright in it yet.'

'And won't again, my dear,' said Mr Boffin. 'Depend upon it, it comes of thinking and dwelling on that dark spot.'

'Yes; but why didn't it come before?' asked Mrs Boffin.

This draft on Mr Boffin's philosophy could only be met by that gentleman with the remark that everything that is at all, must begin at some time. Then, tucking his wife's arm under his own, that she might not be left by herself to be troubled again, he descended to release Wegg. Who, being something drowsy after his plentiful repast, and constitutionally of a shirking temperament, was well enough pleased to stump away, without doing what he had come to do, and was paid for doing.

Mr Boffin then put on his hat, and Mrs Boffin her shawl; and the pair, further provided with a bunch of keys and a lighted lantern, went all over the dismal house—dismal everywhere, but in their own two rooms—from cellar to cock-loft. Not resting satisfied with giving that much chace to Mrs Boffin's fancies, they pursued them into the yard and outbuildings, and under the Mounds. And setting the lantern, when all was done, at the foot of one of the Mounds, they comfortably trotted to and fro for an evening walk, to the end that the murky cobwebs in Mrs Boffin's brain might be blown away.

There, my dear!' said Mr Boffin when they came in to supper. 'That was the treatment, you see. Completely worked round, haven't you?'

'Yes, deary,' said Mrs Boffin, laying aside her shawl. 'I'm not nervous any more. I'm not a bit troubled now. I'd go anywhere about the house the same as ever. But—'

'Eh!' said Mr Boffin.

'But I've only to shut my eyes.'

'And what then?'

'Why then,' said Mrs Boffin, speaking with her eyes closed, and her left hand thoughtfully touching her brow, 'then, there they are! The old man's face, and it gets younger. The two children's faces, and they get older. A face that I don't know. And then all the faces!'

Opening her eyes again, and seeing her husband's face across the table, she leaned forward to give it a pat on the cheek, and sat down to supper, declaring it to be the best face in the world.

Chapter 16

MINDERS AND RE-MINDERS

The Secretary lost no time in getting to work, and his vigilance and method soon set their mark on the Golden Dustman's affairs. His earnestness in determining to understand the length and breadth and depth of every piece of work submitted to him by his employer, was as special as his despatch in transacting it. He accepted no information or explanation at second hand, but made himself the master of everything confided to him.

One part of the Secretary's conduct, underlying all the rest, might have been mistrusted by a man with a better knowledge of men than the Golden Dustman had. The Secretary was as far from being inquisitive or intrusive as Secretary could be, but nothing less than a complete understanding of the whole of the affairs would content him. It soon became apparent (from the knowledge with which he set out) that he must have been to the office where the Harmon will was registered, and must have read the will. He anticipated Mr Boffin's consideration whether he should be advised with on this or that topic, by showing that he already knew of it and understood it. He did this with no attempt at concealment, seeming to be satisfied that it was part of his duty to have prepared himself at all attainable points for its utmost discharge.

This might—let it be repeated—have awakened some little vague mistrust in a man more worldly-wise than the Golden Dustman. On the other hand, the Secretary was discerning, discreet, and silent, though as zealous as if the affairs had been his own. He showed no love of patronage or the command of money, but distinctly preferred resigning both to Mr Boffin. If, in his limited sphere, he sought power, it was the power of knowledge; the power derivable from a perfect comprehension of his business.

As on the Secretary's face there was a nameless cloud, so on his manner there was a shadow equally indefinable. It was not that he was embarrassed, as on that first night with the Wilfer family; he was habitually unembarrassed now, and yet the something remained. It was not that his manner was bad, as on that occasion; it was now very good, as being modest, gracious, and ready. Yet the something never left it. It has been written of men who have undergone a cruel captivity, or who have passed through a terrible strait, or who in self-preservation have killed a defenceless fellow-creature, that the record thereof has never faded from their countenances until they died. Was there any such record here?

He established a temporary office for himself in the new house, and all went well under his hand, with one singular exception. He manifestly objected to communicate with Mr Boffin's solicitor. Two or three times, when there was some slight occasion for his doing so, he transferred the task to Mr Boffin; and his evasion of it soon became so curiously apparent, that Mr Boffin spoke to him on the subject of his reluctance.

'It is so,' the Secretary admitted. 'I would rather not.'

Had he any personal objection to Mr Lightwood?

'I don't know him.'

Had he suffered from law-suits?

'Not more than other men,' was his short answer.

Was he prejudiced against the race of lawyers?

'No. But while I am in your employment, sir, I would rather be excused from going between the lawyer and the client. Of course if you press it, Mr Boffin, I am ready to comply. But I should take it as a great favour if you would not press it without urgent occasion.'

Now, it could not be said that there WAS urgent occasion, for Lightwood retained no other affairs in his hands than such as still lingered and languished about the undiscovered criminal, and such as arose out of the purchase of the house. Many other matters that might have travelled to him, now stopped short at the Secretary, under whose administration they were far more expeditiously and satisfactorily disposed of than they would have been if they had got into Young Blight's domain. This the Golden Dustman quite understood. Even the matter immediately in hand was of very little moment as requiring personal appearance on the Secretary's part, for it amounted to no more than this:—The death of Hexam rendering the sweat of the honest man's brow unprofitable, the honest man had shufflingly declined to moisten his brow for nothing, with that severe exertion which is known in legal circles as swearing your way through a stone wall. Consequently, that new light had gone sputtering out. But, the airing of the old facts had led some one concerned to suggest that it would be well before they were reconsigned to their gloomy shelf—now probably for ever—to induce or compel that Mr Julius Handford to reappear and be questioned. And all traces of Mr Julius Handford being lost, Lightwood now referred to his client for authority to seek him through public advertisement.

'Does your objection go to writing to Lightwood, Rokesmith?'

'Not in the least, sir.'

'Then perhaps you'll write him a line, and say he is free to do what he likes. I don't think it promises.'

'I don't think it promises,' said the Secretary.

'Still, he may do what he likes.'

'I will write immediately. Let me thank you for so considerately yielding to my disinclination. It may seem less unreasonable, if I avow to you that although I don't know Mr Lightwood, I have a disagreeable association connected with him. It is not his fault; he is not at all to blame for it, and does not even know my name.'

Mr Boffin dismissed the matter with a nod or two. The letter was written, and next day Mr Julius Handford was advertised for. He was requested to place himself in communication with Mr Mortimer Lightwood, as a possible means of furthering the ends of justice, and a reward was offered to any one acquainted with his whereabout who would communicate the same to the said Mr Mortimer Lightwood at his office in the Temple. Every day for six weeks this advertisement appeared at the head of all the newspapers, and every day for six weeks the Secretary, when he saw it, said to himself; in the tone in which he had said to his employer, —'I don't think it promises!'

Among his first occupations the pursuit of that orphan wanted by Mrs Boffin held a conspicuous place. From the earliest moment of his engagement he showed a particular desire to please her, and, knowing her to have this object at heart, he followed it up with unwearying alacrity and interest.

Mr and Mrs Milvey had found their search a difficult one. Either an eligible orphan was of the wrong sex (which almost always happened) or was too old, or too young, or too sickly, or too dirty, or too much accustomed to the streets, or too likely to run away; or, it was found impossible to complete the philanthropic transaction without buying the orphan. For, the instant it became known that anybody wanted the orphan, up started some affectionate relative of the orphan who put a price upon the orphan's head. The suddenness of an orphan's rise in the market was not to be paralleled by the maddest records of the Stock Exchange. He would be at five thousand per cent discount out at nurse making a mud pie at nine in the morning, and (being inquired for) would go up to five thousand per cent premium before noon. The market was 'rigged' in various artful ways. Counterfeit stock got into circulation. Parents boldly represented themselves as dead, and brought their orphans with them. Genuine orphan-stock was surreptitiously withdrawn from the market. It being announced, by emissaries posted for the purpose, that Mr and Mrs Milvey were coming down the court, orphan scrip would be instantly concealed, and production refused, save on a condition usually stated by the brokers as 'a gallon of beer'. Likewise, fluctuations of a wild and South-Sea nature were occasioned, by orphan-holders keeping back, and then rushing into the market a dozen together. But, the uniform principle at the root of all these various operations was bargain and sale; and that principle could not be recognized by Mr and Mrs Milvey.

At length, tidings were received by the Reverend Frank of a charming orphan to be found at Brentford. One of the deceased parents (late his parishioners) had a poor widowed grandmother in that agreeable town, and she, Mrs Betty Higden, had carried off the orphan with maternal care, but could not afford to keep him.

The Secretary proposed to Mrs Boffin, either to go down himself and take a preliminary survey of this orphan, or to drive her down, that she might at once form her own opinion. Mrs Boffin preferring the latter course, they set off one morning in a hired phaeton, conveying the hammer-headed young man behind them.

The abode of Mrs Betty Higden was not easy to find, lying in such complicated back settlements of muddy Brentford that they left their equipage at the sign of the Three Magpies, and went in search of it on foot. After many inquiries and defeats, there was pointed out to them in a lane, a very small cottage residence, with a board across the open doorway, hooked on to which board by the armpits was a young gentleman of tender years, angling for mud with a headless wooden horse and line. In this young sportsman, distinguished by a crisply curling auburn head and a bluff countenance, the Secretary descried the orphan.

It unfortunately happened as they quickened their pace, that the orphan, lost to considerations of personal safety in the ardour of the moment, overbalanced himself and toppled into the street. Being an orphan of a chubby conformation, he then took to rolling, and had rolled into the gutter before they could come up. From the gutter he was rescued by John Rokesmith, and thus the first meeting with Mrs Higden was inaugurated by the awkward circumstance of their being in possession—one would say at first sight unlawful possession—of the orphan, upside down and purple in the countenance. The board across the doorway too, acting as a trap equally for the feet of Mrs Higden coming out, and the feet of Mrs Boffin and John Rokesmith going in, greatly increased the difficulty of the situation: to which the cries of the orphan imparted a lugubrious and inhuman character.

At first, it was impossible to explain, on account of the orphan's 'holding his breath': a most terrific proceeding, super-inducing in the orphan lead-colour rigidity and a deadly silence, compared with which his cries were music yielding the height of enjoyment. But as he gradually recovered, Mrs Boffin gradually introduced herself; and smiling peace was gradually wooed back to Mrs Betty Higden's home.

It was then perceived to be a small home with a large mangle in it, at the handle of which machine stood a very long boy, with a very little head, and an open mouth of disproportionate capacity that seemed to assist his eyes in staring at the visitors. In a corner below the mangle, on a couple of stools, sat two very little children: a boy and a girl; and when the very long boy, in an interval of staring, took a turn at the mangle, it was alarming to see how it lunged itself at those two innocents, like a catapult designed for their destruction, harmlessly retiring when within an inch of their heads. The room was clean and neat. It had a brick floor, and a window of diamond panes, and a flounce hanging below the chimney-piece, and strings nailed from bottom to top outside the window on which scarlet-beans were to grow in the coming season if the Fates were propitious. However propitious they might have been in the seasons that were gone, to Betty Higden in the matter of beans, they had not been very favourable in the matter of coins; for it was easy to see that she was poor.

She was one of those old women, was Mrs Betty Higden, who by dint of an indomitable purpose and a strong constitution fight out many years, though each year has come with its new knock-down blows fresh to the fight against her, wearied by it; an active old woman, with a bright dark eye and a resolute face, yet quite a tender creature too; not a logically-reasoning woman, but God is good, and hearts may count in Heaven as high as heads.

'Yes sure!' said she, when the business was opened, 'Mrs Milvey had the kindness to write to me, ma'am, and I got Sloppy to read it. It was a pretty letter. But she's an affable lady.'

The visitors glanced at the long boy, who seemed to indicate by a broader stare of his mouth and eyes that in him Sloppy stood confessed.

'For I aint, you must know,' said Betty, 'much of a hand at reading writing-hand, though I can read my Bible and most print. And I do love a newspaper. You mightn't think it, but Sloppy is a beautiful reader of a newspaper. He do the Police in different voices.'

The visitors again considered it a point of politeness to look at Sloppy, who, looking at them, suddenly threw back his head, extended his mouth to its utmost width, and laughed loud and long. At this the two innocents, with their brains in that apparent danger, laughed, and Mrs Higden laughed, and the orphan laughed, and then the visitors laughed. Which was more cheerful than intelligible.

Then Sloppy seeming to be seized with an industrious mania or fury, turned to at the mangle, and impelled it at the heads of the innocents with such a creaking and rumbling, that Mrs Higden stopped him.

'The gentlefolks can't hear themselves speak, Sloppy. Bide a bit, bide a bit!'

'Is that the dear child in your lap?' said Mrs Boffin.

'Yes, ma'am, this is Johnny.'

'Johnny, too!' cried Mrs Boffin, turning to the Secretary; 'already Johnny! Only one of the two names left to give him! He's a pretty boy.'

With his chin tucked down in his shy childish manner, he was looking furtively at Mrs Boffin out of his blue eyes, and reaching his fat dimpled hand up to the lips of the old woman, who was kissing it by times.

'Yes, ma'am, he's a pretty boy, he's a dear darling boy, he's the child of my own last left daughter's daughter. But she's gone the way of all the rest.'

'Those are not his brother and sister?' said Mrs Boffin. 'Oh, dear no, ma'am. Those are Minders.'

'Minders?' the Secretary repeated.

'Left to be Minded, sir. I keep a Minding-School. I can take only three, on account of the Mangle. But I love children, and Four-pence a week is Four-pence. Come here, Toddles and Poddles.'

Toddles was the pet-name of the boy; Poddles of the girl. At their little unsteady pace, they came across the floor, hand-in-hand, as if they were traversing an extremely difficult road intersected by brooks, and, when they had had their heads patted by Mrs Betty Higden, made lunges at the orphan, dramatically representing an attempt to bear him, crowing, into captivity and slavery. All the three children enjoyed this to a delightful extent, and the sympathetic Sloppy again laughed long and loud. When it was discreet to stop the play, Betty Higden said 'Go to your seats Toddles and Poddles,' and they returned hand-in-hand across country, seeming to find the brooks rather swollen by late rains.

'And Master—or Mister—Sloppy?' said the Secretary, in doubt whether he was man, boy, or what.

'A love-child,' returned Betty Higden, dropping her voice; 'parents never known; found in the street. He was brought up in the—' with a shiver of repugnance, '—the House.'

'The Poor-house?' said the Secretary.

Mrs Higden set that resolute old face of hers, and darkly nodded yes.

'You dislike the mention of it.'

'Dislike the mention of it?' answered the old woman. 'Kill me sooner than take me there. Throw this pretty child under cart-horses feet and a loaded waggon, sooner than take him there. Come to us and find us all a-dying, and set a light to us all where we lie and let us all blaze away with the house into a heap of cinders sooner than move a corpse of us there!'

A surprising spirit in this lonely woman after so many years of hard working, and hard living, my Lords and Gentlemen and Honourable Boards! What is it that we call it in our grandiose speeches? British independence, rather perverted? Is that, or something like it, the ring of the cant?

'Do I never read in the newspapers,' said the dame, fondling the child —'God help me and the like of me!—how the worn-out people that do come down to that, get driven from post to pillar and pillar to post, a-purpose to tire them out! Do I never read how they are put off, put off, put off—how they are grudged, grudged, grudged, the shelter, or the doctor, or the drop of physic, or the bit of bread? Do I never read how they grow heartsick of it and give it up, after having let themselves drop so low, and how they after all die out for want of help? Then I say, I hope I can die as well as another, and I'll die without that disgrace.'

Absolutely impossible my Lords and Gentlemen and Honourable Boards, by any stretch of legislative wisdom to set these perverse people right in their logic?

'Johnny, my pretty,' continued old Betty, caressing the child, and rather mourning over it than speaking to it, 'your old Granny Betty is nigher fourscore year than threescore and ten. She never begged nor had a penny of the Union money in all her life. She paid scot and she paid lot when she had money to pay; she worked when she could, and she starved when she must. You pray that your Granny may have strength enough left her at the last (she's strong for an old one, Johnny), to get up from her bed and run and hide herself and swown to death in a hole, sooner than fall into the hands of those Cruel Jacks we read of that dodge and drive, and worry and weary, and scorn and shame, the decent poor.'

A brilliant success, my Lords and Gentlemen and Honourable Boards to have brought it to this in the minds of the best of the poor! Under submission, might it be worth thinking of at any odd time?

The fright and abhorrence that Mrs Betty Higden smoothed out of her strong face as she ended this diversion, showed how seriously she had meant it.

'And does he work for you?' asked the Secretary, gently bringing the discourse back to Master or Mister Sloppy.

'Yes,' said Betty with a good-humoured smile and nod of the head. 'And well too.'

'Does he live here?'

'He lives more here than anywhere. He was thought to be no better than a Natural, and first come to me as a Minder. I made interest with Mr Blogg the Beadle to have him as a Minder, seeing him by chance up at church, and thinking I might do something with him. For he was a weak ricketty creetur then.'

'Is he called by his right name?'

'Why, you see, speaking quite correctly, he has no right name. I always understood he took his name from being found on a Sloppy night.'

'He seems an amiable fellow.'

'Bless you, sir, there's not a bit of him,' returned Betty, 'that's not amiable. So you may judge how amiable he is, by running your eye along his heighth.'

Of an ungainly make was Sloppy. Too much of him longwise, too little of him broadwise, and too many sharp angles of him angle-wise. One of those shambling male human creatures, born to be indiscreetly candid in the revelation of buttons; every button he had about him glaring at the public to a quite preternatural extent. A considerable capital of knee and elbow and wrist and ankle, had Sloppy, and he didn't know how to dispose of it to the best advantage, but was always investing it in wrong securities, and so getting himself into embarrassed circumstances. Full-Private Number One in the Awkward Squad of the rank and file of life, was Sloppy, and yet had his glimmering notions of standing true to the Colours.

'And now,' said Mrs Boffin, 'concerning Johnny.'

As Johnny, with his chin tucked in and lips pouting, reclined in Betty's lap, concentrating his blue eyes on the visitors and shading them from observation with a dimpled arm, old Betty took one of his fresh fat hands in her withered right, and fell to gently beating it on her withered left.

'Yes, ma'am. Concerning Johnny.'

'If you trust the dear child to me,' said Mrs Boffin, with a face inviting trust, 'he shall have the best of homes, the best of care, the best of education, the best of friends. Please God I will be a true good mother to him!'

'I am thankful to you, ma'am, and the dear child would be thankful if he was old enough to understand.' Still lightly beating the little hand upon her own. 'I wouldn't stand in the dear child's light, not if I had all my life before me instead of a very little of it. But I hope you won't take it ill that I cleave to the child closer than words can tell, for he's the last living thing left me.'

'Take it ill, my dear soul? Is it likely? And you so tender of him as to bring him home here!'

'I have seen,' said Betty, still with that light beat upon her hard rough hand, 'so many of them on my lap. And they are all gone but this one! I am ashamed to seem so selfish, but I don't really mean it. It'll be the making of his fortune, and he'll be a gentleman when I am dead. I—I—don't know what comes over me. I—try against it. Don't notice me!' The light beat stopped, the resolute mouth gave way, and the fine strong old face broke up into weakness and tears.

Now, greatly to the relief of the visitors, the emotional Sloppy no sooner beheld his patroness in this condition, than, throwing back his head and throwing open his mouth, he lifted up his voice and bellowed. This alarming note of something wrong instantly terrified Toddles and Poddles, who were no sooner heard to roar surprisingly, than Johnny, curving himself the wrong way and striking out at Mrs Boffin with a pair of indifferent shoes, became a prey to despair. The absurdity of the situation put its pathos to the rout. Mrs Betty Higden was herself in a moment, and brought them all to order with that speed, that Sloppy, stopping short in a polysyllabic bellow, transferred his energy to the mangle, and had taken several penitential turns before he could be stopped.

'There, there, there!' said Mrs Boffin, almost regarding her kind self as the most ruthless of women. 'Nothing is going to be done. Nobody need be frightened. We're all comfortable; ain't we, Mrs Higden?'

'Sure and certain we are,' returned Betty.

'And there really is no hurry, you know,' said Mrs Boffin in a lower voice. 'Take time to think of it, my good creature!'

'Don't you fear ME no more, ma'am,' said Betty; 'I thought of it for good yesterday. I don't know what come over me just now, but it'll never come again.'

'Well, then, Johnny shall have more time to think of it,' returned Mrs Boffin; 'the pretty child shall have time to get used to it. And you'll get him more used to it, if you think well of it; won't you?'

Betty undertook that, cheerfully and readily.

'Lor,' cried Mrs Boffin, looking radiantly about her, 'we want to make everybody happy, not dismal!—And perhaps you wouldn't mind letting me know how used to it you begin to get, and how it all goes on?'

'I'll send Sloppy,' said Mrs Higden.

'And this gentleman who has come with me will pay him for his trouble,' said Mrs Boffin. 'And Mr Sloppy, whenever you come to my house, be sure you never go away without having had a good dinner of meat, beer, vegetables, and pudding.'

This still further brightened the face of affairs; for, the highly sympathetic Sloppy, first broadly staring and grinning, and then roaring with laughter, Toddles and Poddles followed suit, and Johnny trumped the trick. T and P considering these favourable circumstances for the resumption of that dramatic descent upon Johnny, again came across-country hand-in-hand upon a buccaneering expedition; and this having been fought out in the chimney corner behind Mrs Higden's chair, with great valour on both sides, those desperate pirates returned hand-in-hand to their stools, across the dry bed of a mountain torrent.

'You must tell me what I can do for you, Betty my friend,' said Mrs Boffin confidentially, 'if not to-day, next time.'

'Thank you all the same, ma'am, but I want nothing for myself. I can work. I'm strong. I can walk twenty mile if I'm put to it.' Old Betty was proud, and said it with a sparkle in her bright eyes.

'Yes, but there are some little comforts that you wouldn't be the worse for,' returned Mrs Boffin. 'Bless ye, I wasn't born a lady any more than you.'

'It seems to me,' said Betty, smiling, 'that you were born a lady, and a true one, or there never was a lady born. But I couldn't take anything from you, my dear. I never did take anything from any one. It ain't that I'm not grateful, but I love to earn it better.'

'Well, well!' returned Mrs Boffin. 'I only spoke of little things, or I wouldn't have taken the liberty.'

Betty put her visitor's hand to her lips, in acknowledgment of the delicate answer. Wonderfully upright her figure was, and wonderfully self-reliant her look, as, standing facing her visitor, she explained herself further.

'If I could have kept the dear child, without the dread that's always upon me of his coming to that fate I have spoken of, I could never have parted with him, even to you. For I love him, I love him, I love him! I love my husband long dead and gone, in him; I love my children dead and gone, in him; I love my young and hopeful days dead and gone, in him. I couldn't sell that love, and look you in your bright kind face. It's a free gift. I am in want of nothing. When my strength fails me, if I can but die out quick and quiet, I shall be quite content. I have stood between my dead and that shame I have spoken of; and it has been kept off from every one of them. Sewed into my gown,' with her hand upon her breast, 'is just enough to lay me in the grave. Only see that it's rightly spent, so as I may rest free to the last from that cruelty and disgrace, and you'll have done much more than a little thing for me, and all that in this present world my heart is set upon.'

Mrs Betty Higden's visitor pressed her hand. There was no more breaking up of the strong old face into weakness. My Lords and Gentlemen and Honourable Boards, it really was as composed as our own faces, and almost as dignified.

And now, Johnny was to be inveigled into occupying a temporary position on Mrs Boffin's lap. It was not until he had been piqued into competition with the two diminutive Minders, by seeing them successively raised to that post and retire from it without injury, that he could be by any means induced to leave Mrs Betty Higden's skirts; towards which he exhibited, even when in Mrs Boffin's embrace, strong yearnings, spiritual and bodily; the former expressed in a very gloomy visage, the latter in extended arms. However, a general description of the toy-wonders lurking in Mr Boffin's house, so far conciliated this worldly-minded orphan as to induce him to stare at her frowningly, with a fist in his mouth, and even at length to chuckle when a richly-caparisoned horse on wheels, with a miraculous gift of cantering to cake-shops, was mentioned. This sound being taken up by the Minders, swelled into a rapturous trio which gave general satisfaction.

So, the interview was considered very successful, and Mrs Boffin was pleased, and all were satisfied. Not least of all, Sloppy, who undertook to conduct the visitors back by the best way to the Three Magpies, and whom the hammer-headed young man much despised.

This piece of business thus put in train, the Secretary drove Mrs Boffin back to the Bower, and found employment for himself at the new house until evening. Whether, when evening came, he took a way to his lodgings that led through fields, with any design of finding Miss Bella Wilfer in those fields, is not so certain as that she regularly walked there at that hour.

And, moreover, it is certain that there she was.

No longer in mourning, Miss Bella was dressed in as pretty colours as she could muster. There is no denying that she was as pretty as they, and that she and the colours went very prettily together. She was reading as she walked, and of course it is to be inferred, from her showing no knowledge of Mr Rokesmith's approach, that she did not know he was approaching.

'Eh?' said Miss Bella, raising her eyes from her book, when he stopped before her. 'Oh! It's you.'

'Only I. A fine evening!'

'Is it?' said Bella, looking coldly round. 'I suppose it is, now you mention it. I have not been thinking of the evening.'

'So intent upon your book?'

'Ye-e-es,' replied Bella, with a drawl of indifference.

'A love story, Miss Wilfer?'

'Oh dear no, or I shouldn't be reading it. It's more about money than anything else.'

'And does it say that money is better than anything?'

'Upon my word,' returned Bella, 'I forget what it says, but you can find out for yourself if you like, Mr Rokesmith. I don't want it any more.'

The Secretary took the book—she had fluttered the leaves as if it were a fan—and walked beside her.

'I am charged with a message for you, Miss Wilfer.'

'Impossible, I think!' said Bella, with another drawl.

'From Mrs Boffin. She desired me to assure you of the pleasure she has in finding that she will be ready to receive you in another week or two at furthest.'

Bella turned her head towards him, with her prettily-insolent eyebrows raised, and her eyelids drooping. As much as to say, 'How did YOU come by the message, pray?'

'I have been waiting for an opportunity of telling you that I am Mr Boffin's Secretary.'

'I am as wise as ever,' said Miss Bella, loftily, 'for I don't know what a Secretary is. Not that it signifies.'

'Not at all.'

A covert glance at her face, as he walked beside her, showed him that she had not expected his ready assent to that proposition.

'Then are you going to be always there, Mr Rokesmith?' she inquired, as if that would be a drawback.

'Always? No. Very much there? Yes.'

'Dear me!' drawled Bella, in a tone of mortification.

'But my position there as Secretary, will be very different from yours as guest. You will know little or nothing about me. I shall transact the business: you will transact the pleasure. I shall have my salary to earn; you will have nothing to do but to enjoy and attract.'

'Attract, sir?' said Bella, again with her eyebrows raised, and her eyelids drooping. 'I don't understand you.'

Without replying on this point, Mr Rokesmith went on.

'Excuse me; when I first saw you in your black dress—'

('There!' was Miss Bella's mental exclamation. 'What did I say to them at home? Everybody noticed that ridiculous mourning.')

'When I first saw you in your black dress, I was at a loss to account for that distinction between yourself and your family. I hope it was not impertinent to speculate upon it?'

'I hope not, I am sure,' said Miss Bella, haughtily. 'But you ought to know best how you speculated upon it.'

Mr Rokesmith inclined his head in a deprecatory manner, and went on.

'Since I have been entrusted with Mr Boffin's affairs, I have necessarily come to understand the little mystery. I venture to remark that I feel persuaded that much of your loss may be repaired. I speak, of course, merely of wealth, Miss Wilfer. The loss of a perfect stranger, whose worth, or worthlessness, I cannot estimate—nor you either—is beside the question. But this excellent gentleman and lady are so full of simplicity, so full of generosity, so inclined towards you, and so desirous to—how shall I express it?—to make amends for their good fortune, that you have only to respond.'

As he watched her with another covert look, he saw a certain ambitious triumph in her face which no assumed coldness could conceal.

'As we have been brought under one roof by an accidental combination of circumstances, which oddly extends itself to the new relations before us, I have taken the liberty of saying these few words. You don't consider them intrusive I hope?' said the Secretary with deference.

'Really, Mr Rokesmith, I can't say what I consider them,' returned the young lady. 'They are perfectly new to me, and may be founded altogether on your own imagination.'

'You will see.'

These same fields were opposite the Wilfer premises. The discreet Mrs Wilfer now looking out of window and beholding her daughter in conference with her lodger, instantly tied up her head and came out for a casual walk.

'I have been telling Miss Wilfer,' said John Rokesmith, as the majestic lady came stalking up, 'that I have become, by a curious chance, Mr Boffin's Secretary or man of business.'

'I have not,' returned Mrs Wilfer, waving her gloves in her chronic state of dignity, and vague ill-usage, 'the honour of any intimate acquaintance with Mr Boffin, and it is not for me to congratulate that gentleman on the acquisition he has made.'

'A poor one enough,' said Rokesmith.

'Pardon me,' returned Mrs Wilfer, 'the merits of Mr Boffin may be highly distinguished—may be more distinguished than the countenance of Mrs Boffin would imply—but it were the insanity of humility to deem him worthy of a better assistant.'

'You are very good. I have also been telling Miss Wilfer that she is expected very shortly at the new residence in town.'

'Having tacitly consented,' said Mrs Wilfer, with a grand shrug of her shoulders, and another wave of her gloves, 'to my child's acceptance of the proffered attentions of Mrs Boffin, I interpose no objection.'

Here Miss Bella offered the remonstrance: 'Don't talk nonsense, ma, please.'

'Peace!' said Mrs Wilfer.

'No, ma, I am not going to be made so absurd. Interposing objections!'

'I say,' repeated Mrs Wilfer, with a vast access of grandeur, 'that I am NOT going to interpose objections. If Mrs Boffin (to whose countenance no disciple of Lavater could possibly for a single moment subscribe),' with a shiver, 'seeks to illuminate her new residence in town with the attractions of a child of mine, I am content that she should be favoured by the company of a child of mine.'

'You use the word, ma'am, I have myself used,' said Rokesmith, with a glance at Bella, 'when you speak of Miss Wilfer's attractions there.'

'Pardon me,' returned Mrs Wilfer, with dreadful solemnity, 'but I had not finished.'

'Pray excuse me.'

'I was about to say,' pursued Mrs Wilfer, who clearly had not had the faintest idea of saying anything more: 'that when I use the term attractions, I do so with the qualification that I do not mean it in any way whatever.'

The excellent lady delivered this luminous elucidation of her views with an air of greatly obliging her hearers, and greatly distinguishing herself. Whereat Miss Bella laughed a scornful little laugh and said:

'Quite enough about this, I am sure, on all sides. Have the goodness, Mr Rokesmith, to give my love to Mrs Boffin—'

'Pardon me!' cried Mrs Wilfer. 'Compliments.'

'Love!' repeated Bella, with a little stamp of her foot.

'No!' said Mrs Wilfer, monotonously. 'Compliments.'

('Say Miss Wilfer's love, and Mrs Wilfer's compliments,' the Secretary proposed, as a compromise.)

'And I shall be very glad to come when she is ready for me. The sooner, the better.'

'One last word, Bella,' said Mrs Wilfer, 'before descending to the family apartment. I trust that as a child of mine you will ever be sensible that it will be graceful in you, when associating with Mr and Mrs Boffin upon equal terms, to remember that the Secretary, Mr Rokesmith, as your father's lodger, has a claim on your good word.'

The condescension with which Mrs Wilfer delivered this proclamation of patronage, was as wonderful as the swiftness with which the lodger had lost caste in the Secretary. He smiled as the mother retired down stairs; but his face fell, as the daughter followed.

'So insolent, so trivial, so capricious, so mercenary, so careless, so hard to touch, so hard to turn!' he said, bitterly.

And added as he went upstairs. 'And yet so pretty, so pretty!'

And added presently, as he walked to and fro in his room. 'And if she knew!'

She knew that he was shaking the house by his walking to and fro; and she declared it another of the miseries of being poor, that you couldn't get rid of a haunting Secretary, stump—stump—stumping overhead in the dark, like a Ghost.

Chapter 17

A DISMAL SWAMP

And now, in the blooming summer days, behold Mr and Mrs Boffin established in the eminently aristocratic family mansion, and behold all manner of crawling, creeping, fluttering, and buzzing creatures, attracted by the gold dust of the Golden Dustman!

Foremost among those leaving cards at the eminently aristocratic door before it is quite painted, are the Veneerings: out of breath, one might imagine, from the impetuosity of their rush to the eminently aristocratic steps. One copper-plate Mrs Veneering, two copper-plate Mr Veneerings, and a connubial copper-plate Mr and Mrs Veneering, requesting the honour of Mr and Mrs Boffin's company at dinner with the utmost Analytical solemnities. The enchanting Lady Tippins leaves a card. Twemlow leaves cards. A tall custard-coloured phaeton tooling up in a solemn manner leaves four cards, to wit, a couple of Mr Podsnaps, a Mrs Podsnap, and a Miss Podsnap. All the world and his wife and daughter leave cards. Sometimes the world's wife has so many daughters, that her card reads rather like a Miscellaneous Lot at an Auction; comprising Mrs Tapkins, Miss Tapkins, Miss Frederica Tapkins, Miss Antonina Tapkins, Miss Malvina Tapkins, and Miss Euphemia Tapkins; at the same time, the same lady leaves the card of Mrs Henry George Alfred Swoshle, NEE Tapkins; also, a card, Mrs Tapkins at Home, Wednesdays, Music, Portland Place.

Miss Bella Wilfer becomes an inmate, for an indefinite period, of the eminently aristocratic dwelling. Mrs Boffin bears Miss Bella away to her Milliner's and Dressmaker's, and she gets beautifully dressed. The Veneerings find with swift remorse that they have omitted to invite Miss Bella Wilfer. One Mrs Veneering and one Mr and Mrs Veneering requesting that additional honour, instantly do penance in white cardboard on the hall table. Mrs Tapkins likewise discovers her omission, and with promptitude repairs it; for herself; for Miss Tapkins, for Miss Frederica Tapkins, for Miss Antonina Tapkins, for Miss Malvina Tapkins, and for Miss Euphemia

Tapkins. Likewise, for Mrs Henry George Alfred Swoshle NEE Tapkins. Likewise, for Mrs Tapkins at Home, Wednesdays, Music, Portland Place.

Tradesmen's books hunger, and tradesmen's mouths water, for the gold dust of the Golden Dustman. As Mrs Boffin and Miss Wilfer drive out, or as Mr Boffin walks out at his jog-trot pace, the fishmonger pulls off his hat with an air of reverence founded on conviction. His men cleanse their fingers on their woollen aprons before presuming to touch their foreheads to Mr Boffin or Lady. The gaping salmon and the golden mullet lying on the slab seem to turn up their eyes sideways, as they would turn up their hands if they had any, in worshipping admiration. The butcher, though a portly and a prosperous man, doesn't know what to do with himself; so anxious is he to express humility when discovered by the passing Boffins taking the air in a mutton grove. Presents are made to the Boffin servants, and bland strangers with business-cards meeting said servants in the street, offer hypothetical corruption. As, 'Supposing I was to be favoured with an order from Mr Boffin, my dear friend, it would be worth my while'—to do a certain thing that I hope might not prove wholly disagreeable to your feelings.

But no one knows so well as the Secretary, who opens and reads the letters, what a set is made at the man marked by a stroke of notoriety. Oh the varieties of dust for ocular use, offered in exchange for the gold dust of the Golden Dustman! Fifty-seven churches to be erected with half-crowns, forty-two parsonage houses to be repaired with shillings, seven-and-twenty organs to be built with halfpence, twelve hundred children to be brought up on postage stamps. Not that a half-crown, shilling, halfpenny, or postage stamp, would be particularly acceptable from Mr Boffin, but that it is so obvious he is the man to make up the deficiency. And then the charities, my Christian brother! And mostly in difficulties, yet mostly lavish, too, in the expensive articles of print and paper. Large fat private double letter, sealed with ducal coronet. 'Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire. My Dear Sir,—Having consented to preside at the forthcoming Annual Dinner of the Family Party Fund, and feeling deeply impressed with the immense usefulness of that noble Institution and the great importance of its being supported by a List of Stewards that shall prove to the public the interest taken in it by popular and distinguished men, I have undertaken to ask you to become a Steward on that occasion. Soliciting your favourable reply before the 14th instant, I am, My Dear Sir, Your faithful Servant, LINSEED. P.S. The Steward's fee is limited to three Guineas.' Friendly this, on the part of the Duke of Linseed (and thoughtful in the postscript), only lithographed by the hundred and presenting but a pale individuality of an address to Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, in quite another hand. It takes two noble Earls and a Viscount, combined, to inform Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, in an equally flattering manner, that an estimable lady in the West of England has offered to present a purse containing twenty pounds, to the Society for Granting Annuities to Unassuming Members of the Middle Classes, if twenty individuals will previously present purses of one hundred pounds each. And those benevolent noblemen very kindly point out that if Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, should wish to present two or more purses, it will not be inconsistent with the design of the estimable lady in the West of England, provided each purse be coupled with the name of some member of his honoured and respected family.

These are the corporate beggars. But there are, besides, the individual beggars; and how does the heart of the Secretary fail him when he has to cope with THEM! And they must be coped with to some extent, because they all enclose documents (they call their scraps documents; but they are, as to papers deserving the name, what minced veal is to a calf), the non-return of which would be their ruin. That is say, they are utterly ruined now, but they would be more utterly ruined then. Among these correspondents are several daughters of general officers, long accustomed to every luxury of life (except spelling), who little thought, when their gallant fathers waged war in the Peninsula, that they would ever have to appeal to those whom Providence, in its inscrutable wisdom, has blessed with untold gold, and from among whom they select the name of Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, for a maiden effort in this wise, understanding that he has such a heart as never was. The Secretary learns, too, that confidence between man and wife would seem to obtain but rarely when virtue is in distress, so numerous are the wives who take up their pens to ask Mr Boffin for money without the knowledge of their devoted husbands, who would never permit it; while, on the other hand, so numerous are the husbands who take up their pens to ask Mr Boffin for money without the knowledge of their devoted wives, who would instantly go out of their senses if they had the least suspicion of the circumstance. There are the inspired beggars, too. These were sitting, only yesterday evening, musing over a fragment of candle which must soon go out and leave them in the dark for the rest of their nights, when surely some

Angel whispered the name of Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, to their souls, imparting rays of hope, nay confidence, to which they had long been strangers! Akin to these are the suggestively-befriended beggars. They were partaking of a cold potato and water by the flickering and gloomy light of a lucifer-match, in their lodgings (rent considerably in arrear, and heartless landlady threatening expulsion 'like a dog' into the streets), when a gifted friend happening to look in, said, 'Write immediately to Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire,' and would take no denial. There are the nobly independent beggars too. These, in the days of their abundance, ever regarded gold as dross, and have not yet got over that only impediment in the way of their amassing wealth, but they want no dross from Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire; No, Mr Boffin; the world may term it pride, paltry pride if you will, but they wouldn't take it if you offered it; a loan, sir—for fourteen weeks to the day, interest calculated at the rate of five per cent per annum, to be bestowed upon any charitable institution you may name—is all they want of you, and if you have the meanness to refuse it, count on being despised by these great spirits. There are the beggars of punctual business-habits too. These will make an end of themselves at a quarter to one P.M. on Tuesday, if no Post-office order is in the interim received from Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire; arriving after a quarter to one P.M. on Tuesday, it need not be sent, as they will then (having made an exact memorandum of the heartless circumstances) be 'cold in death.' There are the beggars on horseback too, in another sense from the sense of the proverb. These are mounted and ready to start on the highway to affluence. The goal is before them, the road is in the best condition, their spurs are on, the steed is willing, but, at the last moment, for want of some special thing—a clock, a violin, an astronomical telescope, an electrifying machine—they must dismount for ever, unless they receive its equivalent in money from Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire. Less given to detail are the beggars who make sporting ventures. These, usually to be addressed in reply under initials at a country post-office, inquire in feminine hands, Dare one who cannot disclose herself to Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, but whose name might startle him were it revealed, solicit the immediate advance of two hundred pounds from unexpected riches exercising their noblest privilege in the trust of a common humanity?

In such a Dismal Swamp does the new house stand, and through it does the Secretary daily struggle breast-high. Not to mention all the people alive who have made inventions that won't act, and all the jobbers who job in all the jobberies jobbed; though these may be regarded as the Alligators of the Dismal Swamp, and are always lying by to drag the Golden Dustman under.

But the old house. There are no designs against the Golden Dustman there? There are no fish of the shark tribe in the Bower waters? Perhaps not. Still, Wegg is established there, and would seem, judged by his secret proceedings, to cherish a notion of making a discovery. For, when a man with a wooden leg lies prone on his stomach to peep under bedsteads; and hops up ladders, like some extinct bird, to survey the tops of presses and cupboards; and provides himself an iron rod which he is always poking and prodding into dust-mounds; the probability is that he expects to find something.

BOOK THE SECOND — BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Chapter 1

OF AN EDUCATIONAL CHARACTER

The school at which young Charley Hexam had first learned from a book—the streets being, for pupils of his degree, the great Preparatory Establishment in which very much that is never unlearned is learned without and before book—was a miserable loft in an unsavoury yard. Its atmosphere was oppressive and disagreeable; it was crowded, noisy, and confusing; half the pupils dropped asleep, or fell into a state of waking stupefaction; the other half kept them in either condition by maintaining a monotonous droning noise, as if they were performing, out of time and tune, on a ruder sort of bagpipe. The teachers, animated solely by good intentions, had no idea of execution, and a lamentable jumble was the upshot of their kind endeavours.

It was a school for all ages, and for both sexes. The latter were kept apart, and the former were partitioned off into square assortments. But, all the place was pervaded by a grimly ludicrous pretence that every pupil was childish and innocent. This pretence, much favoured by the lady-visitors, led to the ghastliest absurdities. Young women old in the vices of the commonest and worst life, were expected to profess themselves enthralled by the good child's book, the Adventures of Little Margery, who resided in the village cottage by the mill; severely reproved and morally squashed the miller, when she was five and he was fifty; divided her porridge with singing birds; denied herself a new nankeen bonnet, on the ground that the turnips did not wear nankeen bonnets, neither did the sheep who ate them; who plaited straw and delivered the dreariest orations to all comers, at all sorts of unseasonable times. So, unwieldy young dredgers and hulking mudlarks were referred to the experiences of Thomas Twopence, who, having resolved not to rob (under circumstances of uncommon atrocity) his particular friend and benefactor, of eighteenpence, presently came into supernatural possession of three and sixpence, and lived a shining light ever afterwards. (Note, that the benefactor came to no good.) Several swaggering sinners had written their own biographies in the same strain; it always appearing from the lessons of those very boastful persons, that you were to do good, not because it WAS good, but because you were to make a good thing of it. Contrariwise, the adult pupils were taught to read (if they could learn) out of the New Testament; and by dint of stumbling over the syllables and keeping their bewildered eyes on the particular syllables coming round to their turn, were as absolutely ignorant of the sublime history, as if they had never seen or heard of it. An exceedingly and confoundingly perplexing jumble of a school, in fact, where black spirits and grey, red spirits and white, jumbled jumbled jumbled jumbled, jumbled every night. And particularly every Sunday night. For then, an inclined plane of unfortunate infants would be handed over to the prosiest and worst of all the teachers with good intentions, whom nobody older would endure. Who, taking his stand on the floor before them as chief executioner, would be attended by a conventional volunteer boy as executioner's assistant. When and where it first became the conventional system that a weary or inattentive infant in a class must have its face smoothed downward with a hot hand, or when and where the conventional volunteer boy first beheld such system in operation, and became inflamed with a sacred zeal to administer it, matters not. It was the function of the chief executioner to hold forth, and it was the function of the acolyte to dart at sleeping infants, yawning infants, restless infants, whimpering infants, and smooth their wretched faces; sometimes with one hand, as if he were anointing them for a whisker; sometimes with both hands, applied after the fashion of blinkers. And so the jumble would be in action in this department for a mortal hour; the exponent drawling on to My Dearert Childerrenerr, let us say, for example, about the beautiful coming to the Sepulchre; and repeating the word Sepulchre (commonly used among infants) five hundred times, and never once hinting what it meant; the conventional boy smoothing away right and left, as an infallible commentary; the whole hot-bed of flushed and exhausted infants exchanging measles, rashes, whooping-cough, fever, and stomach disorders, as if they were assembled in High Market for the purpose.

Even in this temple of good intentions, an exceptionally sharp boy exceptionally determined to learn, could learn something, and, having learned it, could impart it much better than the teachers; as being more knowing than they, and not at the disadvantage in which they stood towards the shrewder pupils. In this way it had come about that Charley Hexam had risen in the jumble, taught in the jumble, and been received from the jumble into a better school.

'So you want to go and see your sister, Hexam?'

'If you please, Mr Headstone.'

'I have half a mind to go with you. Where does your sister live?'

'Why, she is not settled yet, Mr Headstone. I'd rather you didn't see her till she is settled, if it was all the same to you.'

'Look here, Hexam.' Mr Bradley Headstone, highly certificated stipendiary schoolmaster, drew his right forefinger through one of the buttonholes of the boy's coat, and looked at it attentively. 'I hope your sister may be good company for you?'

'Why do you doubt it, Mr Headstone?'

'I did not say I doubted it.'

'No, sir; you didn't say so.'

Bradley Headstone looked at his finger again, took it out of the buttonhole and looked at it closer, bit the side of it and looked at it again.

'You see, Hexam, you will be one of us. In good time you are sure to pass a creditable examination and become one of us. Then the question is—'

The boy waited so long for the question, while the schoolmaster looked at a new side of his finger, and bit it, and looked at it again, that at length the boy repeated:

'The question is, sir—?'

'Whether you had not better leave well alone.'

'Is it well to leave my sister alone, Mr Headstone?'

'I do not say so, because I do not know. I put it to you. I ask you to think of it. I want you to consider. You know how well you are doing here.'

'After all, she got me here,' said the boy, with a struggle.

'Perceiving the necessity of it,' acquiesced the schoolmaster, 'and making up her mind fully to the separation. Yes.'

The boy, with a return of that former reluctance or struggle or whatever it was, seemed to debate with himself. At length he said, raising his eyes to the master's face:

'I wish you'd come with me and see her, Mr Headstone, though she is not settled. I wish you'd come with me, and take her in the rough, and judge her for yourself.'

'You are sure you would not like,' asked the schoolmaster, 'to prepare her?'

'My sister Lizzie,' said the boy, proudly, 'wants no preparing, Mr Headstone. What she is, she is, and shows herself to be. There's no pretending about my sister.'

His confidence in her, sat more easily upon him than the indecision with which he had twice contended. It was his better nature to be true to her, if it were his worse nature to be wholly selfish. And as yet the better nature had the stronger hold.

'Well, I can spare the evening,' said the schoolmaster. 'I am ready to walk with you.'

'Thank you, Mr Headstone. And I am ready to go.'

Bradley Headstone, in his decent black coat and waistcoat, and decent white shirt, and decent formal black tie, and decent pantaloons of pepper and salt, with his decent silver watch in his pocket and its decent hair-guard round his neck, looked a thoroughly decent young man of six-and-twenty. He was never seen in any other dress, and yet there was a certain stiffness in his manner of wearing this, as if there were a want of adaptation between him and it, recalling some mechanics in their holiday clothes. He had acquired mechanically a great store of teacher's knowledge. He could do mental arithmetic mechanically, sing at sight mechanically, blow various wind instruments mechanically, even play the great church organ mechanically. From his early childhood up, his mind had been a place of mechanical stowage. The arrangement of his wholesale warehouse, so that it might be always ready to meet the demands of retail dealers history here, geography there, astronomy to the right, political economy to the left—natural history, the physical sciences, figures, music, the lower mathematics, and what not, all in their several places—this care had imparted to his countenance a look of care; while the habit of questioning and being questioned had given him a suspicious manner, or a manner that would be better described as one of lying in wait. There was a kind of settled trouble in the face. It was the face belonging to a naturally slow or inattentive intellect that had toiled hard to get what it had won, and that had to hold it now that it was gotten. He always seemed to be uneasy lest anything should be missing from his mental warehouse, and taking stock to assure himself.

Suppression of so much to make room for so much, had given him a constrained manner, over and above. Yet there was enough of what was animal, and of what was fiery (though smouldering), still visible in him, to suggest that if young Bradley Headstone, when a pauper lad, had chanced to be told off for the sea, he would not have been the last man in a ship's crew. Regarding that origin of his, he was proud, moody, and sullen, desiring it to be forgotten. And few people knew of it.

In some visits to the Jumble his attention had been attracted to this boy Hexam. An undeniable boy for a pupil-teacher; an undeniable boy to do credit to the master who should bring him on. Combined with this consideration, there may have been some thought of the pauper lad now never to be mentioned. Be that how it might, he had with pains gradually worked the boy into his own school, and procured him some offices to discharge there, which were repaid with food and lodging. Such were the circumstances that had brought together, Bradley Headstone and young Charley Hexam that autumn evening. Autumn, because full half a year had come and gone since the bird of prey lay dead upon the river-shore.

The schools—for they were twofold, as the sexes—were down in that district of the flat country tending to the Thames, where Kent and Surrey meet, and where the railways still bestride the market-gardens that will soon die under them. The schools were newly built, and there were so many like them all over the country, that one might have thought the whole were but one restless edifice with the locomotive gift of Aladdin's palace. They were in a neighbourhood which looked like a toy neighbourhood taken in blocks out of a box by a child of particularly incoherent mind, and set up anyhow; here, one side of a new street; there, a large solitary public-house facing nowhere; here, another unfinished street already in ruins; there, a church; here, an immense new warehouse; there, a dilapidated old country villa; then, a medley of black ditch, sparkling cucumber-frame, rank field, richly cultivated kitchen-garden, brick viaduct, arch-spanned canal, and disorder of frowziness and fog. As if the child had given the table a kick, and gone to sleep.

But, even among school-buildings, school-teachers, and school-pupils, all according to pattern and all engendered in the light of the latest Gospel according to Monotony, the older pattern into which so many fortunes have been shaped for good and evil, comes out. It came out in Miss Peecher the schoolmistress, watering her flowers, as Mr Bradley Headstone walked forth. It came out in Miss Peecher the schoolmistress, watering the flowers in the little dusty bit of garden attached to her small official residence, with little windows like the eyes in needles, and little doors like the covers of school-books.

Small, shining, neat, methodical, and buxom was Miss Peecher; cherry-cheeked and tuneful of voice. A little pincushion, a little housewife, a little book, a little workbox, a little set of tables and weights and measures, and a little woman, all in one. She could write a little essay on any subject, exactly a slate long, beginning at the left-hand top of one side and ending at the right-hand bottom of the other, and the essay should be strictly according to rule. If Mr Bradley Headstone had addressed a written proposal of marriage to her, she would probably have replied in a complete little essay on the theme exactly a slate long, but would certainly have replied Yes. For she loved him. The decent hair-guard that went round his neck and took care of his decent silver watch was an object of envy to her. So would Miss Peecher have gone round his neck and taken care of him. Of him, insensible. Because he did not love Miss Peecher.

Miss Peecher's favourite pupil, who assisted her in her little household, was in attendance with a can of water to replenish her little watering-pot, and sufficiently divined the state of Miss Peecher's affections to feel it necessary that she herself should love young Charley Hexam. So, there was a double palpitation among the double stocks and double wall-flowers, when the master and the boy looked over the little gate.

'A fine evening, Miss Peecher,' said the Master.

'A very fine evening, Mr Headstone,' said Miss Peecher. 'Are you taking a walk?'

'Hexam and I are going to take a long walk.'

'Charming weather,' remarked Miss Peecher, FOR a long walk.'

'Ours is rather on business than mere pleasure,' said the Master. Miss Peecher inverting her watering-pot, and very carefully shaking out the few last drops over a flower, as if there were some special virtue in them which would make it a Jack's beanstalk before morning, called for replenishment to her pupil, who had been speaking to the boy.

'Good-night, Miss Peecher,' said the Master.

'Good-night, Mr Headstone,' said the Mistress.

The pupil had been, in her state of pupilage, so imbued with the class-custom of stretching out an arm, as if to hail a cab or omnibus, whenever she found she had an observation on hand to offer to Miss Peecher, that she often did it in their domestic relations; and she did it now.

'Well, Mary Anne?' said Miss Peecher.

'If you please, ma'am, Hexam said they were going to see his sister.'

'But that can't be, I think,' returned Miss Peecher: 'because Mr Headstone can have no business with HER.'

Mary Anne again hailed.

'Well, Mary Anne?'

'If you please, ma'am, perhaps it's Hexam's business?'

'That may be,' said Miss Peecher. 'I didn't think of that. Not that it matters at all.'

Mary Anne again hailed.

'Well, Mary Anne?'

'They say she's very handsome.'

'Oh, Mary Anne, Mary Anne!' returned Miss Peecher, slightly colouring and shaking her head, a little out of humour; 'how often have I told you not to use that vague expression, not to speak in that general way? When you say THEY say, what do you mean? Part of speech They?'

Mary Anne hooked her right arm behind her in her left hand, as being under examination, and replied:

'Personal pronoun.'

'Person, They?'

'Third person.'

'Number, They?'

'Plural number.'

'Then how many do you mean, Mary Anne? Two? Or more?'

'I beg your pardon, ma'am,' said Mary Anne, disconcerted now she came to think of it; 'but I don't know that I mean more than her brother himself.' As she said it, she unhooked her arm.

'I felt convinced of it,' returned Miss Peecher, smiling again. 'Now pray, Mary Anne, be careful another time. He says is very different from they say, remember. Difference between he says and they say? Give it me.'

Mary Anne immediately hooked her right arm behind her in her left hand—an attitude absolutely necessary to the situation—and replied: 'One is indicative mood, present tense, third person singular, verb active to say. Other is indicative mood, present tense, third person plural, verb active to say.'

'Why verb active, Mary Anne?'

'Because it takes a pronoun after it in the objective case, Miss Peecher.'

'Very good indeed,' remarked Miss Peecher, with encouragement. 'In fact, could not be better. Don't forget to apply it, another time, Mary Anne.' This said, Miss Peecher finished the watering of her flowers, and went into her little official residence, and took a refresher of the principal rivers and mountains of the world, their breadths, depths, and heights, before settling the measurements of the body of a dress for her own personal occupation.

Bradley Headstone and Charley Hexam duly got to the Surrey side of Westminster Bridge, and crossed the bridge, and made along the Middlesex shore towards Millbank. In this region are a certain little street called Church Street, and a certain little blind square, called Smith Square, in the centre of which last retreat is a very hideous church with four towers at the four corners, generally resembling some petrified monster, frightful and gigantic, on its back with its legs in the air. They found a tree near by in a corner, and a blacksmith's forge, and a timber yard, and a dealer's in old iron. What a rusty portion of a boiler and a great iron wheel or so meant by lying half-buried in the dealer's fore-court, nobody seemed to know or to want to know. Like the Miller of questionable jollity in the song, They cared for Nobody, no not they, and Nobody cared for them.

After making the round of this place, and noting that there was a deadly kind of repose on it, more as though it had taken laudanum than fallen into a natural rest, they stopped at the point where the street and the square joined, and where there were some little quiet houses in a row. To these Charley Hexam finally led the way, and at one of these stopped.

'This must be where my sister lives, sir. This is where she came for a temporary lodging, soon after father's death.'

'How often have you seen her since?'

'Why, only twice, sir,' returned the boy, with his former reluctance; 'but that's as much her doing as mine.'

'How does she support herself?'

'She was always a fair needlewoman, and she keeps the stockroom of a seaman's outfitter.'

'Does she ever work at her own lodging here?'

'Sometimes; but her regular hours and regular occupation are at their place of business, I believe, sir. This is the number.'

The boy knocked at a door, and the door promptly opened with a spring and a click. A parlour door within a small entry stood open, and disclosed a child—a dwarf—a girl—a something—sitting on a little low old-fashioned arm-chair, which had a kind of little working bench before it.

'I can't get up,' said the child, 'because my back's bad, and my legs are queer. But I'm the person of the house.'

'Who else is at home?' asked Charley Hexam, staring.

'Nobody's at home at present,' returned the child, with a glib assertion of her dignity, 'except the person of the house. What did you want, young man?'

'I wanted to see my sister.'

'Many young men have sisters,' returned the child. 'Give me your name, young man?'

The queer little figure, and the queer but not ugly little face, with its bright grey eyes, were so sharp, that the sharpness of the manner seemed unavoidable. As if, being turned out of that mould, it must be sharp.

'Hexam is my name.'

'Ah, indeed?' said the person of the house. 'I thought it might be. Your sister will be in, in about a quarter of an hour. I am very fond of your sister. She's my particular friend. Take a seat. And this gentleman's name?'

'Mr Headstone, my schoolmaster.'

'Take a seat. And would you please to shut the street door first? I can't very well do it myself; because my back's so bad, and my legs are so queer.'

They complied in silence, and the little figure went on with its work of gumming or gluing together with a camel's-hair brush certain pieces of cardboard and thin wood, previously cut into various shapes. The scissors and knives upon the bench showed that the child herself had cut them; and the bright scraps of velvet and silk and ribbon also strewn upon the bench showed that when duly stuffed (and stuffing too was there), she was to cover them smartly. The dexterity of her nimble fingers was remarkable, and, as she brought two thin edges accurately together by giving them a little bite, she would glance at the visitors out of the corners of her grey eyes with a look that out-sharpened all her other sharpness.

'You can't tell me the name of my trade, I'll be bound,' she said, after taking several of these observations.

'You make pincushions,' said Charley.

'What else do I make?'

'Pen-wipers,' said Bradley Headstone.

'Ha! ha! What else do I make? You're a schoolmaster, but you can't tell me.'

'You do something,' he returned, pointing to a corner of the little bench, 'with straw; but I don't know what.'

'Well done you!' cried the person of the house. 'I only make pincushions and pen-wipers, to use up my waste. But my straw really does belong to my business. Try again. What do I make with my straw?'

'Dinner-mats?'

'A schoolmaster, and says dinner-mats! I'll give you a clue to my trade, in a game of forfeits. I love my love with a B because she's Beautiful; I hate my love with a B because she is Brazen; I took her to the sign of the Blue Boar, and I treated her with Bonnets; her name's Bouncer, and she lives in Bedlam.—Now, what do I make with my straw?'

'Ladies' bonnets?'

'Fine ladies',' said the person of the house, nodding assent. 'Dolls'. I'm a Doll's Dressmaker.'

'I hope it's a good business?'

The person of the house shrugged her shoulders and shook her head. 'No. Poorly paid. And I'm often so pressed for time! I had a doll married, last week, and was obliged to work all night. And it's not good for me, on account of my back being so bad and my legs so queer.'

They looked at the little creature with a wonder that did not diminish, and the schoolmaster said: 'I am sorry your fine ladies are so inconsiderate.'

'It's the way with them,' said the person of the house, shrugging her shoulders again. 'And they take no care of their clothes, and they never keep to the same fashions a month. I work for a doll with three daughters. Bless you, she's enough to ruin her husband!' The person of the house gave a weird little laugh here, and gave them another look out of the corners of her eyes. She had an elfin chin that was capable of great expression; and whenever she gave this look, she hitched this chin up. As if her eyes and her chin worked together on the same wires.

'Are you always as busy as you are now?'

'Busier. I'm slack just now. I finished a large mourning order the day before yesterday. Doll I work for, lost a canary-bird.' The person of the house gave another little laugh, and then nodded her head several times, as who should moralize, 'Oh this world, this world!'

'Are you alone all day?' asked Bradley Headstone. 'Don't any of the neighbouring children—?'

'Ah, lud!' cried the person of the house, with a little scream, as if the word had pricked her. 'Don't talk of children. I can't bear children. I know their tricks and their manners.' She said this with an angry little shake of her tight fist close before her eyes.

Perhaps it scarcely required the teacher-habit, to perceive that the doll's dressmaker was inclined to be bitter on the difference between herself and other children. But both master and pupil understood it so.

'Always running about and screeching, always playing and fighting, always skip-skip-skipping on the pavement and chalking it for their games! Oh! I know their tricks and their manners!' Shaking the little fist as before. 'And that's not all. Ever so often calling names in through a person's keyhole, and imitating a person's back and legs. Oh! I know their tricks and their manners. And I'll tell you what I'd do, to punish 'em. There's doors under the church in the Square—black doors, leading into black vaults. Well! I'd open one of those doors, and I'd cram 'em all in, and then I'd lock the door and through the keyhole I'd blow in pepper.'

'What would be the good of blowing in pepper?' asked Charley Hexam.

'To set 'em sneezing,' said the person of the house, 'and make their eyes water. And when they were all sneezing and inflamed, I'd mock 'em through the keyhole. Just as they, with their tricks and their manners, mock a person through a person's keyhole!'

An uncommonly emphatic shake of her little fist close before her eyes, seemed to ease the mind of the person of the house; for she added with recovered composure, 'No, no, no. No children for me. Give me grown-ups.'

It was difficult to guess the age of this strange creature, for her poor figure furnished no clue to it, and her face was at once so young and so old. Twelve, or at the most thirteen, might be near the mark.

'I always did like grown-ups,' she went on, 'and always kept company with them. So sensible. Sit so quiet. Don't go prancing and capering about! And I mean always to keep among none but grown-ups till I marry. I suppose I must make up my mind to marry, one of these days.'

She listened to a step outside that caught her ear, and there was a soft knock at the door. Pulling at a handle within her reach, she said, with a pleased laugh: 'Now here, for instance, is a grown-up that's my particular friend!' and Lizzie Hexam in a black dress entered the room.

'Charley! You!'

Taking him to her arms in the old way—of which he seemed a little ashamed—she saw no one else.

'There, there, there, Liz, all right my dear. See! Here's Mr Headstone come with me.'

Her eyes met those of the schoolmaster, who had evidently expected to see a very different sort of person, and a murmured word or two of salutation passed between them. She was a little flurried by the unexpected visit, and the schoolmaster was not at his ease. But he never was, quite.

'I told Mr Headstone you were not settled, Liz, but he was so kind as to take an interest in coming, and so I brought him. How well you look!'

Bradley seemed to think so.

'Ah! Don't she, don't she?' cried the person of the house, resuming her occupation, though the twilight was falling fast. 'I believe you she does! But go on with your chat, one and all:

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You one two three,
My com-pa-nie,
And don't mind me.'
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—pointing this impromptu rhyme with three points of her thin fore-finger.

'I didn't expect a visit from you, Charley,' said his sister. 'I supposed that if you wanted to see me you would have sent to me, appointing me to come somewhere near the school, as I did last time. I saw my brother near the school, sir,' to Bradley Headstone, 'because it's easier for me to go there, than for him to come here. I work about midway between the two places.'

'You don't see much of one another,' said Bradley, not improving in respect of ease.

'No.' With a rather sad shake of her head. 'Charley always does well, Mr Headstone?'

'He could not do better. I regard his course as quite plain before him.'

'I hoped so. I am so thankful. So well done of you, Charley dear! It is better for me not to come (except when he wants me) between him and his prospects. You think so, Mr Headstone?'

Conscious that his pupil-teacher was looking for his answer, that he himself had suggested the boy's keeping aloof from this sister, now seen for the first time face to face, Bradley Headstone stammered:

'Your brother is very much occupied, you know. He has to work hard. One cannot but say that the less his attention is diverted from his work, the better for his future. When he shall have established himself, why then—it will be another thing then.'

Lizzie shook her head again, and returned, with a quiet smile: 'I always advised him as you advise him. Did I not, Charley?'

'Well, never mind that now,' said the boy. 'How are you getting on?'

'Very well, Charley. I want for nothing.'

'You have your own room here?'

'Oh yes. Upstairs. And it's quiet, and pleasant, and airy.'

'And she always has the use of this room for visitors,' said the person of the house, screwing up one of her little bony fists, like an opera-glass, and looking through it, with her eyes and her chin in that quaint accordance. 'Always this room for visitors; haven't you, Lizzie dear?'

It happened that Bradley Headstone noticed a very slight action of Lizzie Hexam's hand, as though it checked the doll's dressmaker. And it happened that the latter noticed him in the same instant; for she made a double eyeglass of her two hands, looked at him through it, and cried, with a waggish shake of her head: 'Aha! Caught you spying, did I?'

It might have fallen out so, any way; but Bradley Headstone also noticed that immediately after this, Lizzie, who had not taken off her bonnet, rather hurriedly proposed that as the room was getting dark they should go out into the air. They went out; the visitors saying good-night to the doll's dressmaker, whom they left, leaning back in her chair with her arms crossed, singing to herself in a sweet thoughtful little voice.

'I'll saunter on by the river,' said Bradley. 'You will be glad to talk together.'

As his uneasy figure went on before them among the evening shadows, the boy said to his sister, petulantly:

'When are you going to settle yourself in some Christian sort of place, Liz? I thought you were going to do it before now.'

'I am very well where I am, Charley.'

'Very well where you are! I am ashamed to have brought Mr Headstone with me. How came you to get into such company as that little witch's?'

'By chance at first, as it seemed, Charley. But I think it must have been by something more than chance, for that child—You remember the bills upon the walls at home?'

'Confound the bills upon the walls at home! I want to forget the bills upon the walls at home, and it would be better for you to do the same,' grumbled the boy. 'Well; what of them?'

'This child is the grandchild of the old man.'

'What old man?'

'The terrible drunken old man, in the list slippers and the night-cap.'

The boy asked, rubbing his nose in a manner that half expressed vexation at hearing so much, and half curiosity to hear more: 'How came you to make that out? What a girl you are!'

'The child's father is employed by the house that employs me; that's how I came to know it, Charley. The father is like his own father, a weak wretched trembling creature, falling to pieces, never sober. But a good workman too, at the work he does. The mother is dead. This poor ailing little creature has come to be what she is, surrounded by drunken people from her cradle—if she ever had one, Charley.'

'I don't see what you have to do with her, for all that,' said the boy.

'Don't you, Charley?'

The boy looked doggedly at the river. They were at Millbank, and the river rolled on their left. His sister gently touched him on the shoulder, and pointed to it.

'Any compensation—restitution—never mind the word, you know my meaning. Father's grave.'

But he did not respond with any tenderness. After a moody silence he broke out in an ill-used tone:

'It'll be a very hard thing, Liz, if, when I am trying my best to get up in the world, you pull me back.'

'I, Charley?'

'Yes, you, Liz. Why can't you let bygones be bygones? Why can't you, as Mr Headstone said to me this very evening about another matter, leave well alone? What we have got to do, is, to turn our faces full in our new direction, and keep straight on.'

'And never look back? Not even to try to make some amends?'

'You are such a dreamer,' said the boy, with his former petulance. 'It was all very well when we sat before the fire—when we looked into the hollow down by the flare—but we are looking into the real world, now.'

'Ah, we were looking into the real world then, Charley!'

'I understand what you mean by that, but you are not justified in it. I don't want, as I raise myself to shake you off, Liz. I want to carry you up with me. That's what I want to do, and mean to do. I know what I owe you. I said to Mr Headstone this very evening, "After all, my sister got me here." Well, then. Don't pull me back, and hold me down. That's all I ask, and surely that's not unconscionable.'

She had kept a steadfast look upon him, and she answered with composure:

'I am not here selfishly, Charley. To please myself I could not be too far from that river.'

'Nor could you be too far from it to please me. Let us get quit of it equally. Why should you linger about it any more than I? I give it a wide berth.'

'I can't get away from it, I think,' said Lizzie, passing her hand across her forehead. 'It's no purpose of mine that I live by it still.'

'There you go, Liz! Dreaming again! You lodge yourself of your own accord in a house with a drunken—tailor, I suppose—or something of the sort, and a little crooked antic of a child, or old person, or whatever it is, and then you talk as if you were drawn or driven there. Now, do be more practical.'

She had been practical enough with him, in suffering and striving for him; but she only laid her hand upon his shoulder—not reproachfully—and tapped it twice or thrice. She had been used to do so, to soothe him when she carried him about, a child as heavy as herself. Tears started to his eyes.

'Upon my word, Liz,' drawing the back of his hand across them, 'I mean to be a good brother to you, and to prove that I know what I owe you. All I say is, that I hope you'll control your fancies a little, on my account. I'll get a school, and then you must come and live with me, and you'll have to control your fancies then, so why not now? Now, say I haven't vexed you.'

'You haven't, Charley, you haven't.'

'And say I haven't hurt you.'

'You haven't, Charley.' But this answer was less ready.

'Say you are sure I didn't mean to. Come! There's Mr Headstone stopping and looking over the wall at the tide, to hint that it's time to go. Kiss me, and tell me that you know I didn't mean to hurt you.'

She told him so, and they embraced, and walked on and came up with the schoolmaster.

'But we go your sister's way,' he remarked, when the boy told him he was ready. And with his cumbrous and uneasy action he stiffly offered her his arm. Her hand was just within it, when she drew it back. He looked round with a start, as if he thought she had detected something that repelled her, in the momentary touch.

'I will not go in just yet,' said Lizzie. 'And you have a distance before you, and will walk faster without me.'

Being by this time close to Vauxhall Bridge, they resolved, in consequence, to take that way over the Thames, and they left her; Bradley Headstone giving her his hand at parting, and she thanking him for his care of her brother.

The master and the pupil walked on, rapidly and silently. They had nearly crossed the bridge, when a gentleman came coolly sauntering towards them, with a cigar in his mouth, his coat thrown back, and his hands behind him. Something in the careless manner of this person, and in a certain lazily arrogant air with which he approached, holding possession of twice as much pavement as another would have claimed, instantly caught the boy's attention. As the gentleman passed the boy looked at him narrowly, and then stood still, looking after him.

'Who is it that you stare after?' asked Bradley.

'Why!' said the boy, with a confused and pondering frown upon his face, 'It IS that Wrayburn one!'

Bradley Headstone scrutinized the boy as closely as the boy had scrutinized the gentleman.

'I beg your pardon, Mr Headstone, but I couldn't help wondering what in the world brought HIM here!'

Though he said it as if his wonder were past—at the same time resuming the walk—it was not lost upon the master that he looked over his shoulder after speaking, and that the same perplexed and pondering frown was heavy on his face.

'You don't appear to like your friend, Hexam?'

'I DON'T like him,' said the boy.

'Why not?'

'He took hold of me by the chin in a precious impertinent way, the first time I ever saw him,' said the boy.

'Again, why?'

'For nothing. Or—it's much the same—because something I happened to say about my sister didn't happen to please him.'

'Then he knows your sister?'

'He didn't at that time,' said the boy, still moodily pondering.

'Does now?'

The boy had so lost himself that he looked at Mr Bradley Headstone as they walked on side by side, without attempting to reply until the question had been repeated; then he nodded and answered, 'Yes, sir.'

'Going to see her, I dare say.'

'It can't be!' said the boy, quickly. 'He doesn't know her well enough. I should like to catch him at it!'

When they had walked on for a time, more rapidly than before, the master said, clasping the pupil's arm between the elbow and the shoulder with his hand:

'You were going to tell me something about that person. What did you say his name was?'

'Wrayburn. Mr Eugene Wrayburn. He is what they call a barrister, with nothing to do. The first time he came to our old place was when my father was alive. He came on business; not that it was HIS business—HE never had any business—he was brought by a friend of his.'

'And the other times?'

'There was only one other time that I know of. When my father was killed by accident, he chanced to be one of the finders. He was mooning about, I suppose, taking liberties with people's chins; but there he was, somehow. He brought the news home to my sister early in the morning, and brought Miss Abbey Potterson, a neighbour, to help break it to her. He was mooning about the house when I was fetched home in the afternoon—they didn't know where to find me till my sister could be brought round sufficiently to tell them—and then he mooned away.'

'And is that all?'

'That's all, sir.'

Bradley Headstone gradually released the boy's arm, as if he were thoughtful, and they walked on side by side as before. After a long silence between them, Bradley resumed the talk.

'I suppose—your sister—' with a curious break both before and after the words, 'has received hardly any teaching, Hexam?'

'Hardly any, sir.'

'Sacrificed, no doubt, to her father's objections. I remember them in your case. Yet—your sister—scarcely looks or speaks like an ignorant person.'

'Lizzie has as much thought as the best, Mr Headstone. Too much, perhaps, without teaching. I used to call the fire at home, her books, for she was always full of fancies—sometimes quite wise fancies, considering—when she sat looking at it.'

'I don't like that,' said Bradley Headstone.

His pupil was a little surprised by this striking in with so sudden and decided and emotional an objection, but took it as a proof of the master's interest in himself. It emboldened him to say:

'I have never brought myself to mention it openly to you, Mr Headstone, and you're my witness that I couldn't even make up my mind to take it from you before we came out to-night; but it's a painful thing to think that if I get on as well as you hope, I shall be—I won't say disgraced, because I don't mean disgraced-but—rather put to the blush if it was known—by a sister who has been very good to me.'

'Yes,' said Bradley Headstone in a slurring way, for his mind scarcely seemed to touch that point, so smoothly did it glide to another, 'and there is this possibility to consider. Some man who had worked his way might come to admire—your sister—and might even in time bring himself to think of marrying—your sister—and it would be a sad drawback and a heavy penalty upon him, if; overcoming in his mind other inequalities of condition and other considerations against it, this inequality and this consideration remained in full force.'

'That's much my own meaning, sir.'

'Ay, ay,' said Bradley Headstone, 'but you spoke of a mere brother. Now, the case I have supposed would be a much stronger case; because an admirer, a husband, would form the connexion voluntarily, besides being obliged to proclaim it: which a brother is not. After all, you know, it must be said of you that you couldn't help yourself: while it would be said of him, with equal reason, that he could.'

'That's true, sir. Sometimes since Lizzie was left free by father's death, I have thought that such a young woman might soon acquire more than enough to pass muster. And sometimes I have even thought that perhaps Miss Peecher—'

'For the purpose, I would advise Not Miss Peecher,' Bradley Headstone struck in with a recurrence of his late decision of manner.

'Would you be so kind as to think of it for me, Mr Headstone?'

'Yes, Hexam, yes. I'll think of it. I'll think maturely of it. I'll think well of it.'

Their walk was almost a silent one afterwards, until it ended at the school-house. There, one of neat Miss Peecher's little windows, like the eyes in needles, was illuminated, and in a corner near it sat Mary Anne watching, while Miss Peecher at the table stitched at the neat little body she was making up by brown paper pattern for her own wearing. N.B. Miss Peecher and Miss Peecher's pupils were not much encouraged in the unscholastic art of needlework, by Government.

Mary Anne with her face to the window, held her arm up.

'Well, Mary Anne?'

'Mr Headstone coming home, ma'am.'

In about a minute, Mary Anne again hailed.

'Yes, Mary Anne?'

'Gone in and locked his door, ma'am.'

Miss Peecher repressed a sigh as she gathered her work together for bed, and transfixed that part of her dress where her heart would have been if she had had the dress on, with a sharp, sharp needle.

Chapter 2

STILL EDUCATIONAL

The person of the house, doll's dressmaker and manufacturer of ornamental pincushions and pen-wipers, sat in her quaint little low armchair, singing in the dark, until Lizzie came back. The person of the house had attained that dignity while yet of very tender years indeed, through being the only trustworthy person IN the house.

'Well Lizzie-Mizzie-Wizzie,' said she, breaking off in her song, 'what's the news out of doors?'

'What's the news in doors?' returned Lizzie, playfully smoothing the bright long fair hair which grew very luxuriant and beautiful on the head of the doll's dressmaker.

'Let me see, said the blind man. Why the last news is, that I don't mean to marry your brother.'

'No?'

'No-o,' shaking her head and her chin. 'Don't like the boy.'

'What do you say to his master?'

'I say that I think he's bespoke.'

Lizzie finished putting the hair carefully back over the misshapen shoulders, and then lighted a candle. It showed the little parlour to be dingy, but orderly and clean. She stood it on the mantelshelf, remote from the dressmaker's eyes, and then put the room door open, and the house door open, and turned the little low chair and its occupant towards the outer air. It was a sultry night, and this was a fine-weather arrangement when the day's work was done. To complete it, she seated herself in a chair by the side of the little chair, and protectingly drew under her arm the spare hand that crept up to her.

'This is what your loving Jenny Wren calls the best time in the day and night,' said the person of the house. Her real name was Fanny Cleaver; but she had long ago chosen to bestow upon herself the appellation of Miss Jenny Wren.

'I have been thinking,' Jenny went on, 'as I sat at work to-day, what a thing it would be, if I should be able to have your company till I am married, or at least courted. Because when I am courted, I shall make Him do some of the things that you do for me. He couldn't brush my hair like you do, or help me up and down stairs like you do, and he couldn't do anything like you do; but he could take my work home, and he could call for orders in his clumsy way. And he shall too. I'LL trot him about, I can tell him!'

Jenny Wren had her personal vanities—happily for her—and no intentions were stronger in her breast than the various trials and torments that were, in the fulness of time, to be inflicted upon 'him.'

'Wherever he may happen to be just at present, or whoever he may happen to be,' said Miss Wren, 'I know his tricks and his manners, and I give him warning to look out.'

'Don't you think you are rather hard upon him?' asked her friend, smiling, and smoothing her hair.

'Not a bit,' replied the sage Miss Wren, with an air of vast experience. 'My dear, they don't care for you, those fellows, if you're NOT hard upon 'em. But I was saying If I should be able to have your company. Ah! What a large If! Ain't it?'

'I have no intention of parting company, Jenny.'

'Don't say that, or you'll go directly.'

'Am I so little to be relied upon?'

'You're more to be relied upon than silver and gold.' As she said it, Miss Wren suddenly broke off, screwed up her eyes and her chin, and looked prodigiously knowing. 'Aha!

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Who comes here?
A Grenadier.
What does he want?
A pot of beer.
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And nothing else in the world, my dear!'

A man's figure paused on the pavement at the outer door. 'Mr Eugene Wrayburn, ain't it?' said Miss Wren.

'So I am told,' was the answer.

'You may come in, if you're good.'

'I am not good,' said Eugene, 'but I'll come in.'

He gave his hand to Jenny Wren, and he gave his hand to Lizzie, and he stood leaning by the door at Lizzie's side. He had been strolling with his cigar, he said, (it was smoked out and gone by this time,) and he had strolled round to return in that direction that he might look in as he passed. Had she not seen her brother to-night?

'Yes,' said Lizzie, whose manner was a little troubled.

Gracious condescension on our brother's part! Mr Eugene Wrayburn thought he had passed my young gentleman on the bridge yonder. Who was his friend with him?

'The schoolmaster.'

'To be sure. Looked like it.'

Lizzie sat so still, that one could not have said wherein the fact of her manner being troubled was expressed; and yet one could not have doubted it. Eugene was as easy as ever; but perhaps, as she sat with her eyes cast down, it might have been rather more perceptible that his attention was concentrated upon her for certain moments, than its concentration upon any subject for any short time ever was, elsewhere.

'I have nothing to report, Lizzie,' said Eugene. 'But, having promised you that an eye should be always kept on Mr Riderhood through my friend Lightwood, I like occasionally to renew my assurance that I keep my promise, and keep my friend up to the mark.'

'I should not have doubted it, sir.'

'Generally, I confess myself a man to be doubted,' returned Eugene, coolly, 'for all that.'

'Why are you?' asked the sharp Miss Wren.

'Because, my dear,' said the airy Eugene, 'I am a bad idle dog.'

'Then why don't you reform and be a good dog?' inquired Miss Wren.

'Because, my dear,' returned Eugene, 'there's nobody who makes it worth my while. Have you considered my suggestion, Lizzie?' This in a lower voice, but only as if it were a graver matter; not at all to the exclusion of the person of the house.

'I have thought of it, Mr Wrayburn, but I have not been able to make up my mind to accept it.'

'False pride!' said Eugene.

'I think not, Mr Wrayburn. I hope not.'

'False pride!' repeated Eugene. 'Why, what else is it? The thing is worth nothing in itself. The thing is worth nothing to me. What can it be worth to me? You know the most I make of it. I propose to be of some use to somebody—which I never was in this world, and never shall be on any other occasion—by paying some qualified person of your own sex and age, so many (or rather so few) contemptible shillings, to come here, certain nights in the week, and give you certain instruction which you wouldn't want if you hadn't been a self-denying daughter and sister. You know that it's good to have it, or you would never have so devoted yourself to your brother's having it. Then why not have it: especially when our friend Miss Jenny here would profit by it too? If I proposed to be the teacher, or to attend the lessons—obviously incongruous!—but as to that, I might as well be on the other side of the globe, or not on the globe at all. False pride, Lizzie. Because true pride wouldn't shame, or be shamed by, your thankless brother. True pride wouldn't have schoolmasters brought here, like doctors, to look at a bad case. True pride would go to work and do it. You know that, well enough, for you know that your own true pride would do it to-morrow, if you had the ways and means which false pride won't let me supply. Very well. I add no more than this. Your false pride does wrong to yourself and does wrong to your dead father.'

'How to my father, Mr Wrayburn?' she asked, with an anxious face.

'How to your father? Can you ask! By perpetuating the consequences of his ignorant and blind obstinacy. By resolving not to set right the wrong he did you. By determining that the deprivation to which he condemned you, and which he forced upon you, shall always rest upon his head.'

It chanced to be a subtle string to sound, in her who had so spoken to her brother within the hour. It sounded far more forcibly, because of the change in the speaker for the moment; the passing appearance of earnestness, complete conviction, injured resentment of suspicion, generous and unselfish interest. All these qualities, in him usually so light and careless, she felt to be inseparable from some touch of their opposites in her own breast. She thought, had she, so far below him and so different, rejected this disinterestedness, because of some vain misgiving that he sought her out, or heeded any personal attractions that he might descry in her? The poor girl, pure of heart and purpose, could not bear to think it. Sinking before her own eyes, as she suspected herself of it, she drooped her head as though she had done him some wicked and grievous injury, and broke into silent tears.

'Don't be distressed,' said Eugene, very, very kindly. 'I hope it is not I who have distressed you. I meant no more than to put the matter in its true light before you; though I acknowledge I did it selfishly enough, for I am disappointed.'

Disappointed of doing her a service. How else COULD he be disappointed?

'It won't break my heart,' laughed Eugene; 'it won't stay by me eight-and-forty hours; but I am genuinely disappointed. I had set my fancy on doing this little thing for you and for our friend Miss Jenny. The novelty of my doing anything in the least useful, had its charms. I see, now, that I might have managed it better. I might have affected to do it wholly for our friend Miss J. I might have got myself up, morally, as Sir Eugene Bountiful. But upon my soul I can't make flourishes, and I would rather be disappointed than try.'

If he meant to follow home what was in Lizzie's thoughts, it was skilfully done. If he followed it by mere fortuitous coincidence, it was done by an evil chance.

'It opened out so naturally before me,' said Eugene. 'The ball seemed so thrown into my hands by accident! I happen to be originally brought into contact with you, Lizzie, on those two occasions that you know of. I happen to be able to promise you that a watch shall be kept upon that false accuser, Riderhood. I happen to be able to give you some little consolation in the darkest hour of your distress, by assuring you that I don't believe him. On the same occasion I tell you that I am the idlest and least of lawyers, but that I am better than none, in a case I have noted down with my own hand, and that you may be always sure of my best help, and incidentally of Lightwood's too, in your efforts to clear your father. So, it gradually takes my fancy that I may help you—so easily!—to clear your father of that other blame which I mentioned a few minutes ago, and which is a just and real one. I hope I have explained myself; for I am heartily sorry to have distressed you. I hate to claim to mean well, but I really did mean honestly and simply well, and I want you to know it.'

'I have never doubted that, Mr Wrayburn,' said Lizzie; the more repentant, the less he claimed.

'I am very glad to hear it. Though if you had quite understood my whole meaning at first, I think you would not have refused. Do you think you would?'

'I—don't know that I should, Mr Wrayburn.'

'Well! Then why refuse now you do understand it?'

'It's not easy for me to talk to you,' returned Lizzie, in some confusion, 'for you see all the consequences of what I say, as soon as I say it.'

'Take all the consequences,' laughed Eugene, 'and take away my disappointment. Lizzie Hexam, as I truly respect you, and as I am your friend and a poor devil of a gentleman, I protest I don't even now understand why you hesitate.'

There was an appearance of openness, trustfulness, unsuspecting generosity, in his words and manner, that won the poor girl over; and not only won her over, but again caused her to feel as though she had been influenced by the opposite qualities, with vanity at their head.

'I will not hesitate any longer, Mr Wrayburn. I hope you will not think the worse of me for having hesitated at all. For myself and for Jenny—you let me answer for you, Jenny dear?'

The little creature had been leaning back, attentive, with her elbows resting on the elbows of her chair, and her chin upon her hands. Without changing her attitude, she answered, 'Yes!' so suddenly that it rather seemed as if she had chopped the monosyllable than spoken it.

'For myself and for Jenny, I thankfully accept your kind offer.'

'Agreed! Dismissed!' said Eugene, giving Lizzie his hand before lightly waving it, as if he waved the whole subject away. 'I hope it may not be often that so much is made of so little!'

Then he fell to talking playfully with Jenny Wren. 'I think of setting up a doll, Miss Jenny,' he said.

'You had better not,' replied the dressmaker.

'Why not?'

'You are sure to break it. All you children do.'

'But that makes good for trade, you know, Miss Wren,' returned Eugene. 'Much as people's breaking promises and contracts and bargains of all sorts, makes good for MY trade.'

'I don't know about that,' Miss Wren retorted; 'but you had better by half set up a pen-wiper, and turn industrious, and use it.'

'Why, if we were all as industrious as you, little Busy-Body, we should begin to work as soon as we could crawl, and there would be a bad thing!'

'Do you mean,' returned the little creature, with a flush suffusing her face, 'bad for your backs and your legs?'

'No, no, no,' said Eugene; shocked—to do him justice—at the thought of trifling with her infirmity. 'Bad for business, bad for business. If we all set to work as soon as we could use our hands, it would be all over with the dolls' dressmakers.'

'There's something in that,' replied Miss Wren; 'you have a sort of an idea in your noddle sometimes.' Then, in a changed tone; 'Talking of ideas, my Lizzie,' they were sitting side by side as they had sat at first, 'I wonder how it happens that when I am work, work, working here, all alone in the summer-time, I smell flowers.'

'As a commonplace individual, I should say,' Eugene suggested languidly—for he was growing weary of the person of the house—'that you smell flowers because you DO smell flowers.'

'No I don't,' said the little creature, resting one arm upon the elbow of her chair, resting her chin upon that hand, and looking vacantly before her; 'this is not a flowery neighbourhood. It's anything but that. And yet as I sit at work, I smell miles of flowers. I smell roses, till I think I see the rose-leaves lying in heaps, bushels, on the floor. I smell fallen leaves, till I put down my hand—so—and expect to make them rustle. I smell the white and the pink May in the hedges, and all sorts of flowers that I never was among. For I have seen very few flowers indeed, in my life.'

'Pleasant fancies to have, Jenny dear!' said her friend: with a glance towards Eugene as if she would have asked him whether they were given the child in compensation for her losses.

'So I think, Lizzie, when they come to me. And the birds I hear! Oh!' cried the little creature, holding out her hand and looking upward, 'how they sing!'

There was something in the face and action for the moment, quite inspired and beautiful. Then the chin dropped musingly upon the hand again.

'I dare say my birds sing better than other birds, and my flowers smell better than other flowers. For when I was a little child,' in a tone as though it were ages ago, 'the children that I used to see early in the morning were very different from any others that I ever saw. They were not like me; they were not chilled, anxious, ragged, or beaten; they were never in pain. They were not like the children of the neighbours; they never made me tremble all over, by setting up shrill noises, and they never mocked me. Such numbers of them too! All in white dresses, and with something shining on the borders, and on their heads, that I have never been able to imitate with my work, though I know it so well. They used to come down in long bright slanting rows, and say all together, "Who is this in pain! Who is this in pain!" When I told them who it was, they answered, "Come and play with us!" When I said "I never play! I can't play!" they swept about me and took me up, and made me light. Then it was all delicious ease and rest till they laid me down, and said, all together, "Have patience, and we will come again." Whenever they came back, I used to know they were coming before I saw the long bright rows, by hearing them ask, all together a long way off, "Who is this in pain! Who is this in pain!" And I used to cry out, "O my blessed children, it's poor me. Have pity on me. Take me up and make me light!"'

By degrees, as she progressed in this remembrance, the hand was raised, the late ecstatic look returned, and she became quite beautiful. Having so paused for a moment, silent, with a listening smile upon her face, she looked round and recalled herself.

'What poor fun you think me; don't you, Mr Wrayburn? You may well look tired of me. But it's Saturday night, and I won't detain you.'

'That is to say, Miss Wren,' observed Eugene, quite ready to profit by the hint, 'you wish me to go?'

'Well, it's Saturday night,' she returned, and my child's coming home. And my child is a troublesome bad child, and costs me a world of scolding. I would rather you didn't see my child.'

'A doll?' said Eugene, not understanding, and looking for an explanation.

But Lizzie, with her lips only, shaping the two words, 'Her father,' he delayed no longer. He took his leave immediately. At the corner of the street he stopped to light another cigar, and possibly to ask himself what he was doing otherwise. If so, the answer was indefinite and vague. Who knows what he is doing, who is careless what he does!

A man stumbled against him as he turned away, who mumbled some maudlin apology. Looking after this man, Eugene saw him go in at the door by which he himself had just come out.

On the man's stumbling into the room, Lizzie rose to leave it.

'Don't go away, Miss Hexam,' he said in a submissive manner, speaking thickly and with difficulty. 'Don't fly from unfortunate man in shattered state of health. Give poor invalid honour of your company. It ain't—ain't catching.'

Lizzie murmured that she had something to do in her own room, and went away upstairs.

'How's my Jenny?' said the man, timidly. 'How's my Jenny Wren, best of children, object dearest affections broken-hearted invalid?'

To which the person of the house, stretching out her arm in an attitude of command, replied with irresponsive asperity: 'Go along with you! Go along into your corner! Get into your corner directly!'

The wretched spectacle made as if he would have offered some remonstrance; but not venturing to resist the person of the house, thought better of it, and went and sat down on a particular chair of disgrace.

'Oh-h-h!' cried the person of the house, pointing her little finger, 'You bad old boy! Oh-h-h you naughty, wicked creature! WHAT do you mean by it?'

The shaking figure, unnerved and disjointed from head to foot, put out its two hands a little way, as making overtures of peace and reconciliation. Abject tears stood in its eyes, and stained the blotched red of its cheeks. The swollen lead-coloured under lip trembled with a shameful whine. The whole indecorous threadbare ruin, from the broken shoes to the prematurely-grey scanty hair, grovelled. Not with any sense worthy to be called a sense, of this dire reversal of the places of parent and child, but in a pitiful expostulation to be let off from a scolding.

'I know your tricks and your manners,' cried Miss Wren. 'I know where you've been to!' (which indeed it did not require discernment to discover). 'Oh, you disgraceful old chap!'

The very breathing of the figure was contemptible, as it laboured and rattled in that operation, like a blundering clock.

'Slave, slave, slave, from morning to night,' pursued the person of the house, 'and all for this! WHAT do you mean by it?'

There was something in that emphasized 'What,' which absurdly frightened the figure. As often as the person of the house worked her way round to it—even as soon as he saw that it was coming—he collapsed in an extra degree.

'I wish you had been taken up, and locked up,' said the person of the house. 'I wish you had been poked into cells and black holes, and run over by rats and spiders and beetles. I know their tricks and their manners, and they'd have tickled you nicely. Ain't you ashamed of yourself?'

'Yes, my dear,' stammered the father.

'Then,' said the person of the house, terrifying him by a grand muster of her spirits and forces before recurring to the emphatic word, 'WHAT do you mean by it?'

'Circumstances over which had no control,' was the miserable creature's plea in extenuation.

'I'LL circumstance you and control you too,' retorted the person of the house, speaking with vehement sharpness, 'if you talk in that way. I'll give you in charge to the police, and have you fined five shillings when you can't pay, and then I won't pay the money for you, and you'll be transported for life. How should you like to be transported for life?'

'Shouldn't like it. Poor shattered invalid. Trouble nobody long,' cried the wretched figure.

'Come, come!' said the person of the house, tapping the table near her in a business-like manner, and shaking her head and her chin; 'you know what you've got to do. Put down your money this instant.'

The obedient figure began to rummage in its pockets.

'Spent a fortune out of your wages, I'll be bound!' said the person of the house. 'Put it here! All you've got left! Every farthing!'

Such a business as he made of collecting it from his dogs'-eared pockets; of expecting it in this pocket, and not finding it; of not expecting it in that pocket, and passing it over; of finding no pocket where that other pocket ought to be!

'Is this all?' demanded the person of the house, when a confused heap of pence and shillings lay on the table.

'Got no more,' was the rueful answer, with an accordant shake of the head.

'Let me make sure. You know what you've got to do. Turn all your pockets inside out, and leave 'em so!' cried the person of the house.

He obeyed. And if anything could have made him look more abject or more dismally ridiculous than before, it would have been his so displaying himself.

'Here's but seven and eightpence halfpenny!' exclaimed Miss Wren, after reducing the heap to order. 'Oh, you prodigal old son! Now you shall be starved.'

'No, don't starve me,' he urged, whimpering.

'If you were treated as you ought to be,' said Miss Wren, 'you'd be fed upon the skewers of cats' meat;—only the skewers, after the cats had had the meat. As it is, go to bed.'

When he stumbled out of the corner to comply, he again put out both his hands, and pleaded: 'Circumstances over which no control—'

'Get along with you to bed!' cried Miss Wren, snapping him up. 'Don't speak to me. I'm not going to forgive you. Go to bed this moment!'

Seeing another emphatic 'What' upon its way, he evaded it by complying and was heard to shuffle heavily up stairs, and shut his door, and throw himself on his bed. Within a little while afterwards, Lizzie came down.

'Shall we have our supper, Jenny dear?'

'Ah! bless us and save us, we need have something to keep us going,' returned Miss Jenny, shrugging her shoulders.

Lizzie laid a cloth upon the little bench (more handy for the person of the house than an ordinary table), and put upon it such plain fare as they were accustomed to have, and drew up a stool for herself.

'Now for supper! What are you thinking of, Jenny darling?'

'I was thinking,' she returned, coming out of a deep study, 'what I would do to Him, if he should turn out a drunkard.'

'Oh, but he won't,' said Lizzie. 'You'll take care of that, beforehand.'

'I shall try to take care of it beforehand, but he might deceive me. Oh, my dear, all those fellows with their tricks and their manners do deceive!' With the little fist in full action. 'And if so, I tell you what I think I'd do. When he was asleep, I'd make a spoon red hot, and I'd have some boiling liquor bubbling in a saucepan, and I'd take it out hissing, and I'd open his mouth with the other hand—or perhaps he'd sleep with his mouth ready open—and I'd pour it down his throat, and blister it and choke him.'

'I am sure you would do no such horrible thing,' said Lizzie.

'Shouldn't I? Well; perhaps I shouldn't. But I should like to!'

'I am equally sure you would not.'

'Not even like to? Well, you generally know best. Only you haven't always lived among it as I have lived—and your back isn't bad and your legs are not queer.'

As they went on with their supper, Lizzie tried to bring her round to that prettier and better state. But, the charm was broken. The person of the house was the person of a house full of sordid shames and cares, with an upper room in which that abased figure was infecting even innocent sleep with sensual brutality and degradation. The doll's dressmaker had become a little quaint shrew; of the world, worldly; of the earth, earthy.

Poor doll's dressmaker! How often so dragged down by hands that should have raised her up; how often so misdirected when losing her way on the eternal road, and asking guidance! Poor, poor little doll's dressmaker!

Chapter 3

A PIECE OF WORK

Britannia, sitting meditating one fine day (perhaps in the attitude in which she is presented on the copper coinage), discovers all of a sudden that she wants Veneering in Parliament. It occurs to her that Veneering is 'a representative man'—which cannot in these times be doubted—and that Her Majesty's faithful Commons are incomplete without him. So, Britannia mentions to a legal gentleman of her acquaintance that if Veneering will 'put down' five thousand pounds, he may write a couple of initial letters after his name at the extremely cheap rate of two thousand five hundred per letter. It is clearly understood between Britannia and the legal gentleman that nobody is to take up the five thousand pounds, but that being put down they will disappear by magical conjuration and enchantment.

The legal gentleman in Britannia's confidence going straight from that lady to Veneering, thus commissioned, Veneering declares himself highly flattered, but requires breathing time to ascertain 'whether his friends will rally round him.' Above all things, he says, it behoves him to be clear, at a crisis of this importance, 'whether his friends will rally round him.' The legal gentleman, in the interests of his client cannot allow much time for this purpose, as the lady rather thinks she knows somebody prepared to put down six thousand pounds; but he says he will give Veneering four hours.

Veneering then says to Mrs Veneering, 'We must work,' and throws himself into a Hansom cab. Mrs Veneering in the same moment relinquishes baby to Nurse; presses her aquiline hands upon her brow, to arrange the throbbing intellect within; orders out the carriage; and repeats in a distracted and devoted manner, compounded of Ophelia and any self-immolating female of antiquity you may prefer, 'We must work.'

Veneering having instructed his driver to charge at the Public in the streets, like the Life-Guards at Waterloo, is driven furiously to Duke Street, Saint James's. There, he finds Twemlow in his lodgings, fresh from the hands of a secret artist who has been doing something to his hair with yolks of eggs. The process requiring that Twemlow shall, for two hours after the application, allow his hair to stick upright and dry gradually, he is in an appropriate state for the receipt of startling intelligence; looking equally like the Monument on Fish Street Hill, and King Priam on a certain incendiary occasion not wholly unknown as a neat point from the classics.

'My dear Twemlow,' says Veneering, grasping both his hands, as the dearest and oldest of my friends—'

('Then there can be no more doubt about it in future,' thinks Twemlow, 'and I AM!')

'—Are you of opinion that your cousin, Lord Snigsworth, would give his name as a Member of my Committee? I don't go so far as to ask for his lordship; I only ask for his name. Do you think he would give me his name?'

In sudden low spirits, Twemlow replies, 'I don't think he would.'

'My political opinions,' says Veneering, not previously aware of having any, 'are identical with those of Lord Snigsworth, and perhaps as a matter of public feeling and public principle, Lord Snigsworth would give me his name.'

'It might be so,' says Twemlow; 'but—' And perplexedly scratching his head, forgetful of the yolks of eggs, is the more discomfited by being reminded how stickey he is.

'Between such old and intimate friends as ourselves,' pursues Veneering, 'there should in such a case be no reserve. Promise me that if I ask you to do anything for me which you don't like to do, or feel the slightest difficulty in doing, you will freely tell me so.'

This, Twemlow is so kind as to promise, with every appearance of most heartily intending to keep his word.

'Would you have any objection to write down to Snigsworthy Park, and ask this favour of Lord Snigsworth? Of course if it were granted I should know that I owed it solely to you; while at the same time you would put it to Lord Snigsworth entirely upon public grounds. Would you have any objection?'

Says Twemlow, with his hand to his forehead, 'You have exacted a promise from me.'

'I have, my dear Twemlow.'

'And you expect me to keep it honourably.'

'I do, my dear Twemlow.'

'ON the whole, then;—observe me,' urges Twemlow with great nicety, as if; in the case of its having been off the whole, he would have done it directly—'ON the whole, I must beg you to excuse me from addressing any communication to Lord Snigsworth.'

'Bless you, bless you!' says Veneering; horribly disappointed, but grasping him by both hands again, in a particularly fervent manner.

It is not to be wondered at that poor Twemlow should decline to inflict a letter on his noble cousin (who has gout in the temper), inasmuch as his noble cousin, who allows him a small annuity on which he lives, takes it out of him, as the phrase goes, in extreme severity; putting him, when he visits at Snigsworthy Park, under a kind of martial law; ordaining that he shall hang his hat on a particular peg, sit on a particular chair, talk on particular subjects to particular people, and perform particular exercises: such as sounding the praises of the Family Varnish (not to say Pictures), and abstaining from the choicest of the Family Wines unless expressly invited to partake.

'One thing, however, I CAN do for you,' says Twemlow; 'and that is, work for you.'

Veneering blesses him again.

'I'll go,' says Twemlow, in a rising hurry of spirits, 'to the club;—let us see now; what o'clock is it?'

'Twenty minutes to eleven.'

'I'll be,' says Twemlow, 'at the club by ten minutes to twelve, and I'll never leave it all day.'

Veneering feels that his friends are rallying round him, and says, 'Thank you, thank you. I knew I could rely upon you. I said to Anastatia before leaving home just now to come to you—of course the first friend I have seen on a subject so momentous to me, my dear Twemlow—I said to Anastatia, "We must work."'

'You were right, you were right,' replies Twemlow. 'Tell me. Is SHE working?'

'She is,' says Veneering.

'Good!' cries Twemlow, polite little gentleman that he is. 'A woman's tact is invaluable. To have the dear sex with us, is to have everything with us.'

'But you have not imparted to me,' remarks Veneering, 'what you think of my entering the House of Commons?'

'I think,' rejoins Twemlow, feelingly, 'that it is the best club in London.'

Veneering again blesses him, plunges down stairs, rushes into his Hansom, and directs the driver to be up and at the British Public, and to charge into the City.

Meanwhile Twemlow, in an increasing hurry of spirits, gets his hair down as well as he can—which is not very well; for, after these glutinous applications it is restive, and has a surface on it somewhat in the nature of pastry—and gets to the club by the appointed time. At the club he promptly secures a large window, writing materials, and all the newspapers, and establishes himself; immoveable, to be respectfully contemplated by Pall Mall. Sometimes, when a man enters who nods to him, Twemlow says, 'Do you know Veneering?' Man says, 'No; member of the club?' Twemlow says, 'Yes. Coming in for Pocket-Breaches.' Man says, 'Ah! Hope he may find it worth the money!' yawns, and saunters out. Towards six o'clock of the afternoon, Twemlow begins to persuade himself that he is positively jaded with work, and thinks it much to be regretted that he was not brought up as a Parliamentary agent.

From Twemlow's, Veneering dashes at Podsnap's place of business. Finds Podsnap reading the paper, standing, and inclined to be oratorical over the astonishing discovery he has made, that Italy is not England. Respectfully entreats Podsnap's pardon for stopping the flow of his words of wisdom, and informs him what is in the wind. Tells Podsnap that their political opinions are identical. Gives Podsnap to understand that he, Veneering, formed his political opinions while sitting at the feet of him, Podsnap. Seeks earnestly to know whether Podsnap 'will rally round him?'

Says Podsnap, something sternly, 'Now, first of all, Veneering, do you ask my advice?'

Veneering falters that as so old and so dear a friend—

'Yes, yes, that's all very well,' says Podsnap; 'but have you made up your mind to take this borough of Pocket-Breaches on its own terms, or do you ask my opinion whether you shall take it or leave it alone?'

Veneering repeats that his heart's desire and his soul's thirst are, that Podsnap shall rally round him.

'Now, I'll be plain with you, Veneering,' says Podsnap, knitting his brows. 'You will infer that I don't care about Parliament, from the fact of my not being there?'

Why, of course Veneering knows that! Of course Veneering knows that if Podsnap chose to go there, he would be there, in a space of time that might be stated by the light and thoughtless as a jiffy.

'It is not worth my while,' pursues Podsnap, becoming handsomely mollified, 'and it is the reverse of important to my position. But it is not my wish to set myself up as law for another man, differently situated. You think it IS worth YOUR while, and IS important to YOUR position. Is that so?'

Always with the proviso that Podsnap will rally round him, Veneering thinks it is so.

'Then you don't ask my advice,' says Podsnap. 'Good. Then I won't give it you. But you do ask my help. Good. Then I'll work for you.'

Veneering instantly blesses him, and apprises him that Twemlow is already working. Podsnap does not quite approve that anybody should be already working—regarding it rather in the light of a liberty—but tolerates Twemlow, and says he is a well-connected old female who will do no harm.

'I have nothing very particular to do to-day,' adds Podsnap, 'and I'll mix with some influential people. I had engaged myself to dinner, but I'll send Mrs Podsnap and get off going myself; and I'll dine with you at eight. It's important we should report progress and compare notes. Now, let me see. You ought to have a couple of active energetic fellows, of gentlemanly manners, to go about.'

Veneering, after cogitation, thinks of Boots and Brewer.

'Whom I have met at your house,' says Podsnap. 'Yes. They'll do very well. Let them each have a cab, and go about.'

Veneering immediately mentions what a blessing he feels it, to possess a friend capable of such grand administrative suggestions, and really is elated at this going about of Boots and Brewer, as an idea wearing an electioneering aspect and looking desperately like business. Leaving Podsnap, at a hand-gallop, he descends upon Boots and Brewer, who enthusiastically rally round him by at once bolting off in cabs, taking opposite directions. Then Veneering repairs to the legal gentleman in Britannia's confidence, and with him transacts some delicate affairs of business, and issues an address to the independent electors of Pocket-Breaches, announcing that he is coming among them for their suffrages, as the mariner returns to the home of his early childhood: a phrase which is none the worse for his never having been near the place in his life, and not even now distinctly knowing where it is.

Mrs Veneering, during the same eventful hours, is not idle. No sooner does the carriage turn out, all complete, than she turns into it, all complete, and gives the word 'To Lady Tippins's.' That charmer dwells over a staymaker's in the Belgravian Borders, with a life-size model in the window on the ground floor of a distinguished beauty in a blue petticoat, stay-lace in hand, looking over her shoulder at the town in innocent surprise. As well she may, to find herself dressing under the circumstances.

Lady Tippins at home? Lady Tippins at home, with the room darkened, and her back (like the lady's at the ground-floor window, though for a different reason) cunningly turned towards the light. Lady Tippins is so surprised by seeing her dear Mrs Veneering so early—in the middle of the night, the pretty creature calls it—that her eyelids almost go up, under the influence of that emotion.

To whom Mrs Veneering incoherently communicates, how that Veneering has been offered Pocket-Breaches; how that it is the time for rallying round; how that Veneering has said 'We must work'; how that she is here, as a wife and mother, to entreat Lady Tippins to work; how that the carriage is at Lady Tippins's disposal for purposes of work; how that she, proprietress of said bran new elegant equipage, will return home on foot—on bleeding feet if need be—to work (not specifying how), until she drops by the side of baby's crib.

'My love,' says Lady Tippins, 'compose yourself; we'll bring him in.' And Lady Tippins really does work, and work the Veneering horses too; for she clatters about town all day, calling upon everybody she knows, and showing her entertaining powers and green fan to immense advantage, by rattling on with, My dear soul, what do you think? What do you suppose me to be? You'll never guess. I'm pretending to be an electioneering agent. And for what place of all places? Pocket-Breaches. And why? Because the dearest friend I have in the world has bought it. And who is the dearest friend I have in the world? A man of the name of Veneering. Not omitting his wife, who is the other dearest friend I have in the world; and I positively declare I forgot their baby, who is the other. And we are carrying on this little farce to keep up appearances, and isn't it refreshing! Then, my precious child, the fun of it is that nobody knows who these Veneerings are, and that they know nobody, and that they have a house out of the Tales of the Genii, and give dinners out of the Arabian Nights. Curious to see 'em, my dear? Say you'll know 'em. Come and dine with 'em. They shan't bore you. Say who shall meet you. We'll make up a party of our own, and I'll engage that they shall not interfere with you for one single moment. You really ought to see their gold and silver camels. I call their dinner-table, the Caravan. Do come and dine with my Veneerings, my own Veneerings, my exclusive property, the dearest friends I have in the world! And above all, my dear, be sure you promise me your vote and interest and all sorts of plumpers for Pocket-Breaches; for we couldn't think of spending sixpence on it, my love, and can only consent to be brought in by the spontaneous thingummies of the incorruptible whatdoyoucallums.

Now, the point of view seized by the bewitching Tippins, that this same working and rallying round is to keep up appearances, may have something in it, but not all the truth. More is done, or considered to be done—which does as well—by taking cabs, and 'going about,' than the fair Tippins knew of. Many vast vague reputations have been made, solely by taking cabs and going about. This particularly obtains in all Parliamentary affairs. Whether the business in hand be to get a man in, or get a man out, or get a man over, or promote a railway, or jockey a railway, or what else, nothing is understood to be so effectual as scouring nowhere in a violent hurry—in short, as taking cabs and going about.

Probably because this reason is in the air, Twemlow, far from being singular in his persuasion that he works like a Trojan, is capped by Podsnap, who in his turn is capped by Boots and Brewer. At eight o'clock when all these hard workers assemble to dine at Veneering's, it is understood that the cabs of Boots and Brewer mustn't leave the door, but that pails of water must be brought from the nearest baiting-place, and cast over the horses' legs on the very spot, lest Boots and Brewer should have instant occasion to mount and away. Those fleet messengers require the Analytical to see that their hats are deposited where they can be laid hold of at an instant's notice; and they dine (remarkably well though) with the air of firemen in charge of an engine, expecting intelligence of some tremendous conflagration.

Mrs Veneering faintly remarks, as dinner opens, that many such days would be too much for her.

'Many such days would be too much for all of us,' says Podsnap; 'but we'll bring him in!'

'We'll bring him in,' says Lady Tippins, sportively waving her green fan. 'Veneering for ever!'

'We'll bring him in!' says Twemlow.

'We'll bring him in!' say Boots and Brewer.

Strictly speaking, it would be hard to show cause why they should not bring him in, Pocket-Breaches having closed its little bargain, and there being no opposition. However, it is agreed that they must 'work' to the last, and that if they did not work, something indefinite would happen. It is likewise agreed that they are all so exhausted with the work behind them, and need to be so fortified for the work before them, as to require peculiar strengthening from Veneering's cellar. Therefore, the Analytical has orders to produce the cream of the cream of his binns, and therefore it falls out that rallying becomes rather a trying word for the occasion; Lady Tippins being observed gamely to inculcate the necessity of rearing round their dear Veneering; Podsnap advocating roaring round him; Boots and Brewer declaring their intention of reeling round him; and Veneering thanking his devoted friends one and all, with great emotion, for rarullarulling round him.

In these inspiring moments, Brewer strikes out an idea which is the great hit of the day. He consults his watch, and says (like Guy Fawkes), he'll now go down to the House of Commons and see how things look.

'I'll keep about the lobby for an hour or so,' says Brewer, with a deeply mysterious countenance, 'and if things look well, I won't come back, but will order my cab for nine in the morning.'

'You couldn't do better,' says Podsnap.

Veneering expresses his inability ever to acknowledge this last service. Tears stand in Mrs Veneering's affectionate eyes. Boots shows envy, loses ground, and is regarded as possessing a second-rate mind. They all crowd to the door, to see Brewer off. Brewer says to his driver, 'Now, is your horse pretty fresh?' eyeing the animal with critical scrutiny. Driver says he's as fresh as butter. 'Put him along then,' says Brewer; 'House of Commons.' Driver darts up, Brewer leaps in, they cheer him as he departs, and Mr Podsnap says, 'Mark my words, sir. That's a man of resource; that's a man to make his way in life.'

When the time comes for Veneering to deliver a neat and appropriate stammer to the men of Pocket-Breaches, only Podsnap and Twemlow accompany him by railway to that sequestered spot. The legal gentleman is at the Pocket-Breaches Branch Station, with an open carriage with a printed bill 'Veneering for ever' stuck upon it, as if it were a wall; and they gloriously proceed, amidst the grins of the populace, to a feeble little town hall on crutches, with some onions and bootlaces under it, which the legal gentleman says are a Market; and from the front window of that edifice Veneering speaks to the listening earth. In the moment of his taking his hat off, Podsnap, as per agreement made with Mrs Veneering, telegraphs to that wife and mother, 'He's up.'

Veneering loses his way in the usual No Thoroughfares of speech, and Podsnap and Twemlow say Hear hear! and sometimes, when he can't by any means back himself out of some very unlucky No Thoroughfare, 'He-a-a-r He-a-a-r!' with an air of facetious conviction, as if the ingenuity of the thing gave them a sensation of exquisite pleasure. But Veneering makes two remarkably good points; so good, that they are supposed to have been suggested to him by the legal gentleman in Britannia's confidence, while briefly conferring on the stairs.

Point the first is this. Veneering institutes an original comparison between the country, and a ship; pointedly calling the ship, the Vessel of the State, and the Minister the Man at the Helm. Veneering's object is to let Pocket-Breaches know that his friend on his right (Podsnap) is a man of wealth. Consequently says he, 'And, gentlemen, when the timbers of the Vessel of the State are unsound and the Man at the Helm is unskilful, would those great Marine Insurers, who rank among our world-famed merchant-princes—would they insure her, gentlemen? Would they underwrite her? Would they incur a risk in her? Would they have confidence in her? Why, gentlemen, if I appealed to my honourable friend upon my right, himself among the greatest and most respected of that great and much respected class, he would answer No!'

Point the second is this. The telling fact that Twemlow is related to Lord Snigsworth, must be let off. Veneering supposes a state of public affairs that probably never could by any possibility exist (though this is not quite certain, in consequence of his picture being unintelligible to himself and everybody else), and thus proceeds. 'Why, gentlemen, if I were to indicate such a programme to any class of society, I say it would be received with derision, would be pointed at by the finger of scorn. If I indicated such a programme to any worthy and intelligent tradesman of your town—nay, I will here be personal, and say Our town—what would he reply? He would reply, "Away with it!" That's what HE would reply, gentlemen. In his honest indignation he would reply, "Away with it!" But suppose I mounted higher in the social scale. Suppose I drew my arm through the arm of my respected friend upon my left, and, walking with him through the ancestral woods of his family, and under the spreading beeches of Snigsworthy Park, approached the noble hall, crossed the courtyard, entered by the door, went up the staircase, and, passing from room to room, found myself at last in the august presence of my friend's near kinsman, Lord Snigsworth. And suppose I said to that venerable earl, "My Lord, I am here before your lordship, presented by your lordship's near kinsman, my friend upon my left, to indicate that programme;" what would his lordship answer? Why, he would answer, "Away with it!" That's what he would answer, gentlemen. "Away with it!" Unconsciously using, in his exalted sphere, the exact language of the worthy and intelligent tradesman of our town, the near and dear kinsman of my friend upon my left would answer in his wrath, "Away with it!"'

Veneering finishes with this last success, and Mr Podsnap telegraphs to Mrs Veneering, 'He's down.'

Then, dinner is had at the Hotel with the legal gentleman, and then there are in due succession, nomination, and declaration. Finally Mr Podsnap telegraphs to Mrs Veneering, 'We have brought him in.'

Another gorgeous dinner awaits them on their return to the Veneering halls, and Lady Tippins awaits them, and Boots and Brewer await them. There is a modest assertion on everybody's part that everybody single-handed 'brought him in'; but in the main it is conceded by all, that that stroke of business on Brewer's part, in going down to the house that night to see how things looked, was the master-stroke.

A touching little incident is related by Mrs Veneering, in the course of the evening. Mrs Veneering is habitually disposed to be tearful, and has an extra disposition that way after her late excitement. Previous to withdrawing from the dinner-table with Lady Tippins, she says, in a pathetic and physically weak manner:

'You will all think it foolish of me, I know, but I must mention it. As I sat by Baby's crib, on the night before the election, Baby was very uneasy in her sleep.'

The Analytical chemist, who is gloomily looking on, has diabolical impulses to suggest 'Wind' and throw up his situation; but represses them.

'After an interval almost convulsive, Baby curled her little hands in one another and smiled.'

Mrs Veneering stopping here, Mr Podsnap deems it incumbent on him to say: 'I wonder why!'

'Could it be, I asked myself,' says Mrs Veneering, looking about her for her pocket-handkerchief, 'that the Fairies were telling Baby that her papa would shortly be an M. P.?'

So overcome by the sentiment is Mrs Veneering, that they all get up to make a clear stage for Veneering, who goes round the table to the rescue, and bears her out backward, with her feet impressively scraping the carpet: after remarking that her work has been too much for her strength. Whether the fairies made any mention of the five thousand pounds, and it disagreed with Baby, is not speculated upon.

Poor little Twemlow, quite done up, is touched, and still continues touched after he is safely housed over the livery-stable yard in Duke Street, Saint James's. But there, upon his sofa, a tremendous consideration breaks in upon the mild gentleman, putting all softer considerations to the rout.

'Gracious heavens! Now I have time to think of it, he never saw one of his constituents in all his days, until we saw them together!'

After having paced the room in distress of mind, with his hand to his forehead, the innocent Twemlow returns to his sofa and moans:

'I shall either go distracted, or die, of this man. He comes upon me too late in life. I am not strong enough to bear him!'

Chapter 4

CUPID PROMPTED

To use the cold language of the world, Mrs Alfred Lammle rapidly improved the acquaintance of Miss Podsnap. To use the warm language of Mrs Lammle, she and her sweet Georgiana soon became one: in heart, in mind, in sentiment, in soul.

Whenever Georgiana could escape from the thraldom of Podsnappery; could throw off the bedclothes of the custard-coloured phaeton, and get up; could shrink out of the range of her mother's rocking, and (so to speak) rescue her poor little frosty toes from being rocked over; she repaired to her friend, Mrs Alfred Lammle. Mrs Podsnap by no means objected. As a consciously 'splendid woman,' accustomed to overhear herself so denominated by elderly osteologists pursuing their studies in dinner society, Mrs Podsnap could dispense with her daughter. Mr Podsnap, for his part, on being informed where Georgiana was, swelled with patronage of the Lammles. That they, when unable to lay hold of him, should respectfully grasp at the hem of his mantle; that they, when they could not bask in the glory of him the sun, should take up with the pale reflected light of the watery young moon his daughter; appeared quite natural, becoming, and proper. It gave him a better opinion of the discretion of the Lammles than he had heretofore held, as showing that they appreciated the value of the connexion. So, Georgiana repairing to her friend, Mr Podsnap went out to dinner, and to dinner, and yet to dinner, arm in arm with Mrs Podsnap: settling his obstinate head in his cravat and shirt-collar, much as if he were performing on the Pandean pipes, in his own honour, the triumphal march, See the conquering Podsnap comes, Sound the trumpets, beat the drums!

It was a trait in Mr Podsnap's character (and in one form or other it will be generally seen to pervade the depths and shallows of Podsnappery), that he could not endure a hint of disparagement of any friend or acquaintance of his. 'How dare you?' he would seem to say, in such a case. 'What do you mean? I have licensed this person. This person has taken out MY certificate. Through this person you strike at me, Podsnap the Great. And it is not that I particularly care for the person's dignity, but that I do most particularly care for Podsnap's.' Hence, if any one in his presence had presumed to doubt the responsibility of the Lammles, he would have been mightily huffed. Not that any one did, for Veneering, M.P., was always the authority for their being very rich, and perhaps believed it. As indeed he might, if he chose, for anything he knew of the matter.

Mr and Mrs Lammle's house in Sackville Street, Piccadilly, was but a temporary residence. It has done well enough, they informed their friends, for Mr Lammle when a bachelor, but it would not do now. So, they were always looking at palatial residences in the best situations, and always very nearly taking or buying one, but never quite concluding the bargain. Hereby they made for themselves a shining little reputation apart. People said, on seeing a vacant palatial residence, 'The very thing for the Lammles!' and wrote to the Lammles about it, and the Lammles always went to look at it, but unfortunately it never exactly answered. In short, they suffered so many disappointments, that they began to think it would be necessary to build a palatial residence. And hereby they made another shining reputation; many persons of their acquaintance becoming by anticipation dissatisfied with their own houses, and envious of the non-existent Lammle structure.

The handsome fittings and furnishings of the house in Sackville Street were piled thick and high over the skeleton up-stairs, and if it ever whispered from under its load of upholstery, 'Here I am in the closet!' it was to very few ears, and certainly never to Miss Podsnap's. What Miss Podsnap was particularly charmed with, next to the graces of her friend, was the happiness of her friend's married life. This was frequently their theme of conversation.

'I am sure,' said Miss Podsnap, 'Mr Lammle is like a lover. At least I—I should think he was.'

'Georgiana, darling!' said Mrs Lammle, holding up a forefinger, 'Take care!'

'Oh my goodness me!' exclaimed Miss Podsnap, reddening. 'What have I said now?'

'Alfred, you know,' hinted Mrs Lammle, playfully shaking her head. 'You were never to say Mr Lammle any more, Georgiana.'

'Oh! Alfred, then. I am glad it's no worse. I was afraid I had said something shocking. I am always saying something wrong to ma.'

'To me, Georgiana dearest?'

'No, not to you; you are not ma. I wish you were.'

Mrs Lammle bestowed a sweet and loving smile upon her friend, which Miss Podsnap returned as she best could. They sat at lunch in Mrs Lammle's own boudoir.

'And so, dearest Georgiana, Alfred is like your notion of a lover?'

'I don't say that, Sophronia,' Georgiana replied, beginning to conceal her elbows. 'I haven't any notion of a lover. The dreadful wretches that ma brings up at places to torment me, are not lovers. I only mean that Mr—'

'Again, dearest Georgiana?'

'That Alfred—'

'Sounds much better, darling.'

'—Loves you so. He always treats you with such delicate gallantry and attention. Now, don't he?'

'Truly, my dear,' said Mrs Lammle, with a rather singular expression crossing her face. 'I believe that he loves me, fully as much as I love him.'

'Oh, what happiness!' exclaimed Miss Podsnap.

'But do you know, my Georgiana,' Mrs Lammle resumed presently, 'that there is something suspicious in your enthusiastic sympathy with Alfred's tenderness?'

'Good gracious no, I hope not!'

'Doesn't it rather suggest,' said Mrs Lammle archly, 'that my Georgiana's little heart is—'

'Oh don't!' Miss Podsnap blushingly besought her. 'Please don't! I assure you, Sophronia, that I only praise Alfred, because he is your husband and so fond of you.'

Sophronia's glance was as if a rather new light broke in upon her. It shaded off into a cool smile, as she said, with her eyes upon her lunch, and her eyebrows raised:

'You are quite wrong, my love, in your guess at my meaning. What I insinuated was, that my Georgiana's little heart was growing conscious of a vacancy.'

'No, no, no,' said Georgiana. 'I wouldn't have anybody say anything to me in that way for I don't know how many thousand pounds.'

'In what way, my Georgiana?' inquired Mrs Lammle, still smiling coolly with her eyes upon her lunch, and her eyebrows raised.

'YOU know,' returned poor little Miss Podsnap. 'I think I should go out of my mind, Sophronia, with vexation and shyness and detestation, if anybody did. It's enough for me to see how loving you and your husband are. That's a different thing. I couldn't bear to have anything of that sort going on with myself. I should beg and pray to—to have the person taken away and trampled upon.'

Ah! here was Alfred. Having stolen in unobserved, he playfully leaned on the back of Sophronia's chair, and, as Miss Podsnap saw him, put one of Sophronia's wandering locks to his lips, and waved a kiss from it towards Miss Podsnap.

'What is this about husbands and detestations?' inquired the captivating Alfred.

'Why, they say,' returned his wife, 'that listeners never hear any good of themselves; though you—but pray how long have you been here, sir?'

'This instant arrived, my own.'

'Then I may go on—though if you had been here but a moment or two sooner, you would have heard your praises sounded by Georgiana.'

'Only, if they were to be called praises at all which I really don't think they were,' explained Miss Podsnap in a flutter, 'for being so devoted to Sophronia.'

'Sophronia!' murmured Alfred. 'My life!' and kissed her hand. In return for which she kissed his watch-chain.

'But it was not I who was to be taken away and trampled upon, I hope?' said Alfred, drawing a seat between them.

'Ask Georgiana, my soul,' replied his wife.

Alfred touchingly appealed to Georgiana.

'Oh, it was nobody,' replied Miss Podsnap. 'It was nonsense.'

'But if you are determined to know, Mr Inquisitive Pet, as I suppose you are,' said the happy and fond Sophronia, smiling, 'it was any one who should venture to aspire to Georgiana.'

'Sophronia, my love,' remonstrated Mr Lammle, becoming graver, 'you are not serious?'

'Alfred, my love,' returned his wife, 'I dare say Georgiana was not, but I am.'

'Now this,' said Mr Lammle, 'shows the accidental combinations that there are in things! Could you believe, my Ownest, that I came in here with the name of an aspirant to our Georgiana on my lips?'

'Of course I could believe, Alfred,' said Mrs Lammle, 'anything that YOU told me.'

'You dear one! And I anything that YOU told me.'

How delightful those interchanges, and the looks accompanying them! Now, if the skeleton up-stairs had taken that opportunity, for instance, of calling out 'Here I am, suffocating in the closet!'

'I give you my honour, my dear Sophronia—'

'And I know what that is, love,' said she.

'You do, my darling—that I came into the room all but uttering young Fledgeby's name. Tell Georgiana, dearest, about young Fledgeby.'

'Oh no, don't! Please don't!' cried Miss Podsnap, putting her fingers in her ears. 'I'd rather not.'

Mrs Lammle laughed in her gayest manner, and, removing her Georgiana's unresisting hands, and playfully holding them in her own at arms' length, sometimes near together and sometimes wide apart, went on:

'You must know, you dearly beloved little goose, that once upon a time there was a certain person called young Fledgeby. And this young Fledgeby, who was of an excellent family and rich, was known to two other certain persons, dearly attached to one another and called Mr and Mrs Alfred Lammle. So this young Fledgeby, being one night at the play, there sees with Mr and Mrs Alfred Lammle, a certain heroine called—'

'No, don't say Georgiana Podsnap!' pleaded that young lady almost in tears. 'Please don't. Oh do do do say somebody else! Not Georgiana Podsnap. Oh don't, don't, don't!'

'No other,' said Mrs Lammle, laughing airily, and, full of affectionate blandishments, opening and closing Georgiana's arms like a pair of compasses, than my little Georgiana Podsnap. So this young Fledgeby goes to that Alfred Lammle and says—'

'Oh ple-e-e-ease don't!' Georgiana, as if the supplication were being squeezed out of her by powerful compression. 'I so hate him for saying it!'

'For saying what, my dear?' laughed Mrs Lammle.

'Oh, I don't know what he said,' cried Georgiana wildly, 'but I hate him all the same for saying it.'

'My dear,' said Mrs Lammle, always laughing in her most captivating way, 'the poor young fellow only says that he is stricken all of a heap.'

'Oh, what shall I ever do!' interposed Georgiana. 'Oh my goodness what a Fool he must be!'

'—And implores to be asked to dinner, and to make a fourth at the play another time. And so he dines to-morrow and goes to the Opera with us.

That's all. Except, my dear Georgiana—and what will you think of this!—that he is infinitely shyer than you, and far more afraid of you than you ever were of any one in all your days!'

In perturbation of mind Miss Podsnap still fumed and plucked at her hands a little, but could not help laughing at the notion of anybody's being afraid of her. With that advantage, Sophronia flattered her and rallied her more successfully, and then the insinuating Alfred flattered her and rallied her, and promised that at any moment when she might require that service at his hands, he would take young Fledgeby out and trample on him. Thus it remained amicably understood that young Fledgeby was to come to admire, and that Georgiana was to come to be admired; and Georgiana with the entirely new sensation in her breast of having that prospect before her, and with many kisses from her dear Sophronia in present possession, preceded six feet one of discontented footman (an amount of the article that always came for her when she walked home) to her father's dwelling.

The happy pair being left together, Mrs Lammle said to her husband:

'If I understand this girl, sir, your dangerous fascinations have produced some effect upon her. I mention the conquest in good time because I apprehend your scheme to be more important to you than your vanity.'

There was a mirror on the wall before them, and her eyes just caught him smirking in it. She gave the reflected image a look of the deepest disdain, and the image received it in the glass. Next moment they quietly eyed each other, as if they, the principals, had had no part in that expressive transaction.

It may have been that Mrs Lammle tried in some manner to excuse her conduct to herself by depreciating the poor little victim of whom she spoke with acrimonious contempt. It may have been too that in this she did not quite succeed, for it is very difficult to resist confidence, and she knew she had Georgiana's.

Nothing more was said between the happy pair. Perhaps conspirators who have once established an understanding, may not be over-fond of repeating the terms and objects of their conspiracy. Next day came; came Georgiana; and came Fledgeby.

Georgiana had by this time seen a good deal of the house and its frequenters. As there was a certain handsome room with a billiard table in it—on the ground floor, eating out a backyard—which might have been Mr Lammle's office, or library, but was called by neither name, but simply Mr

Lammle's room, so it would have been hard for stronger female heads than Georgiana's to determine whether its frequenters were men of pleasure or men of business. Between the room and the men there were strong points of general resemblance. Both were too gaudy, too slangey, too odorous of cigars, and too much given to horseflesh; the latter characteristic being exemplified in the room by its decorations, and in the men by their conversation. High-stepping horses seemed necessary to all Mr Lammle's friends—as necessary as their transaction of business together in a gipsy way at untimely hours of the morning and evening, and in rushes and snatches. There were friends who seemed to be always coming and going across the Channel, on errands about the Bourse, and Greek and Spanish and India and Mexican and par and premium and discount and three quarters and seven eighths. There were other friends who seemed to be always lolling and lounging in and out of the City, on questions of the Bourse, and Greek and Spanish and India and Mexican and par and premium and discount and three quarters and seven eighths. They were all feverish, boastful, and indefinably loose; and they all ate and drank a great deal; and made bets in eating and drinking. They all spoke of sums of money, and only mentioned the sums and left the money to be understood; as 'five and forty thousand Tom,' or 'Two hundred and twenty-two on every individual share in the lot Joe.' They seemed to divide the world into two classes of people; people who were making enormous fortunes, and people who were being enormously ruined. They were always in a hurry, and yet seemed to have nothing tangible to do; except a few of them (these, mostly asthmatic and thick-lipped) who were for ever demonstrating to the rest, with gold pencil-cases which they could hardly hold because of the big rings on their forefingers, how money was to be made. Lastly, they all swore at their grooms, and the grooms were not quite as respectful or complete as other men's grooms; seeming somehow to fall short of the groom point as their masters fell short of the gentleman point.

Young Fledgeby was none of these. Young Fledgeby had a peachy cheek, or a cheek compounded of the peach and the red red red wall on which it grows, and was an awkward, sandy-haired, small-eyed youth, exceeding slim (his enemies would have said lanky), and prone to self-examination in the articles of whisker and moustache. While feeling for the whisker that he anxiously expected, Fledgeby underwent remarkable fluctuations of spirits, ranging along the whole scale from confidence to despair. There were times when he started, as exclaiming 'By Jupiter here it is at last!' There were other times when, being equally depressed, he would be seen to shake his head, and give up hope. To see him at those periods leaning on a chimneypiece, like as on an urn containing the ashes of his ambition, with the cheek that would not sprout, upon the hand on which that cheek had forced conviction, was a distressing sight.

Not so was Fledgeby seen on this occasion. Arrayed in superb raiment, with his opera hat under his arm, he concluded his self-examination hopefully, awaited the arrival of Miss Podsnap, and talked small-talk with Mrs Lammle. In facetious homage to the smallness of his talk, and the jerky nature of his manners, Fledgeby's familiars had agreed to confer upon him (behind his back) the honorary title of Fascination Fledgeby.

'Warm weather, Mrs Lammle,' said Fascination Fledgeby. Mrs Lammle thought it scarcely as warm as it had been yesterday. 'Perhaps not,' said Fascination Fledgeby, with great quickness of repartee; 'but I expect it will be devilish warm to-morrow.'

He threw off another little scintillation. 'Been out to-day, Mrs Lammle?'

Mrs Lammle answered, for a short drive.

'Some people,' said Fascination Fledgeby, 'are accustomed to take long drives; but it generally appears to me that if they make 'em too long, they overdo it.'

Being in such feather, he might have surpassed himself in his next sally, had not Miss Podsnap been announced. Mrs Lammle flew to embrace her darling little Georgy, and when the first transports were over, presented Mr Fledgeby. Mr Lammle came on the scene last, for he was always late, and so were the frequenters always late; all hands being bound to be made late, by private information about the Bourse, and Greek and Spanish and India and Mexican and par and premium and discount and three quarters and seven eighths.

A handsome little dinner was served immediately, and Mr Lammle sat sparkling at his end of the table, with his servant behind his chair, and HIS ever-lingering doubts upon the subject of his wages behind himself. Mr Lammle's utmost powers of sparkling were in requisition to-day, for Fascination Fledgeby and Georgiana not only struck each other speechless, but struck each other into astonishing attitudes; Georgiana, as she sat facing Fledgeby, making such efforts to conceal her elbows as were totally incompatible with the use of a knife and fork; and Fledgeby, as he sat facing

Georgiana, avoiding her countenance by every possible device, and betraying the discomposure of his mind in feeling for his whiskers with his spoon, his wine glass, and his bread.

So, Mr and Mrs Alfred Lammle had to prompt, and this is how they prompted.

'Georgiana,' said Mr Lammle, low and smiling, and sparkling all over, like a harlequin; 'you are not in your usual spirits. Why are you not in your usual spirits, Georgiana?'

Georgiana faltered that she was much the same as she was in general; she was not aware of being different.

'Not aware of being different!' retorted Mr Alfred Lammle. 'You, my dear Georgiana! Who are always so natural and unconstrained with us! Who are such a relief from the crowd that are all alike! Who are the embodiment of gentleness, simplicity, and reality!'

Miss Podsnap looked at the door, as if she entertained confused thoughts of taking refuge from these compliments in flight.

'Now, I will be judged,' said Mr Lammle, raising his voice a little, 'by my friend Fledgeby.'

'Oh DON'T!' Miss Podsnap faintly ejaculated: when Mrs Lammle took the prompt-book.

'I beg your pardon, Alfred, my dear, but I cannot part with Mr Fledgeby quite yet; you must wait for him a moment. Mr Fledgeby and I are engaged in a personal discussion.'

Fledgeby must have conducted it on his side with immense art, for no appearance of uttering one syllable had escaped him.

'A personal discussion, Sophronia, my love? What discussion? Fledgeby, I am jealous. What discussion, Fledgeby?'

'Shall I tell him, Mr Fledgeby?' asked Mrs Lammle.

Trying to look as if he knew anything about it, Fascination replied, 'Yes, tell him.'

'We were discussing then,' said Mrs Lammle, 'if you MUST know, Alfred, whether Mr Fledgeby was in his usual flow of spirits.'

'Why, that is the very point, Sophronia, that Georgiana and I were discussing as to herself! What did Fledgeby say?'

'Oh, a likely thing, sir, that I am going to tell you everything, and be told nothing! What did Georgiana say?'

'Georgiana said she was doing her usual justice to herself to-day, and I said she was not.'

'Precisely,' exclaimed Mrs Lammle, 'what I said to Mr Fledgeby.' Still, it wouldn't do. They would not look at one another. No, not even when the sparkling host proposed that the quartette should take an appropriately sparkling glass of wine. Georgiana looked from her wine glass at Mr Lammle and at Mrs Lammle; but mightn't, couldn't, shouldn't, wouldn't, look at Mr Fledgeby. Fascination looked from his wine glass at Mrs Lammle and at Mr Lammle; but mightn't, couldn't, shouldn't, wouldn't, look at Georgiana.

More prompting was necessary. Cupid must be brought up to the mark. The manager had put him down in the bill for the part, and he must play it.

'Sophronia, my dear,' said Mr Lammle, 'I don't like the colour of your dress.'

'I appeal,' said Mrs Lammle, 'to Mr Fledgeby.'

'And I,' said Mr Lammle, 'to Georgiana.'

'Georgy, my love,' remarked Mrs Lammle aside to her dear girl, 'I rely upon you not to go over to the opposition. Now, Mr Fledgeby.'

Fascination wished to know if the colour were not called rose-colour? Yes, said Mr Lammle; actually he knew everything; it was really rose-colour. Fascination took rose-colour to mean the colour of roses. (In this he was very warmly supported by Mr and Mrs Lammle.) Fascination had heard the term Queen of Flowers applied to the Rose. Similarly, it might be said that the dress was the Queen of Dresses. ('Very happy, Fledgeby!' from Mr Lammle.) Notwithstanding, Fascination's opinion was that we all had our eyes—or at least a large majority of us—and that—and—and his farther opinion was several ands, with nothing beyond them.

'Oh, Mr Fledgeby,' said Mrs Lammle, 'to desert me in that way! Oh, Mr Fledgeby, to abandon my poor dear injured rose and declare for blue!'

'Victory, victory!' cried Mr Lammle; 'your dress is condemned, my dear.'

'But what,' said Mrs Lammle, stealing her affectionate hand towards her dear girl's, 'what does Georgy say?'

'She says,' replied Mr Lammle, interpreting for her, 'that in her eyes you look well in any colour, Sophronia, and that if she had expected to be embarrassed by so pretty a compliment as she has received, she would have worn another colour herself. Though I tell her, in reply, that it would not have saved her, for whatever colour she had worn would have been Fledgeby's colour. But what does Fledgeby say?'

'He says,' replied Mrs Lammle, interpreting for him, and patting the back of her dear girl's hand, as if it were Fledgeby who was patting it, 'that it was no compliment, but a little natural act of homage that he couldn't resist. And,' expressing more feeling as if it were more feeling on the part of Fledgeby, 'he is right, he is right!'

Still, no not even now, would they look at one another. Seeming to gnash his sparkling teeth, studs, eyes, and buttons, all at once, Mr Lammle secretly bent a dark frown on the two, expressive of an intense desire to bring them together by knocking their heads together.

'Have you heard this opera of to-night, Fledgeby?' he asked, stopping very short, to prevent himself from running on into 'confound you.'

'Why no, not exactly,' said Fledgeby. 'In fact I don't know a note of it.'

'Neither do you know it, Georgy?' said Mrs Lammle. 'N-no,' replied Georgiana, faintly, under the sympathetic coincidence.

'Why, then,' said Mrs Lammle, charmed by the discovery which flowed from the premises, 'you neither of you know it! How charming!'

Even the craven Fledgeby felt that the time was now come when he must strike a blow. He struck it by saying, partly to Mrs Lammle and partly to the circumambient air, 'I consider myself very fortunate in being reserved by—'

As he stopped dead, Mr Lammle, making that gingerous bush of his whiskers to look out of, offered him the word 'Destiny.'

'No, I wasn't going to say that,' said Fledgeby. 'I was going to say Fate. I consider it very fortunate that Fate has written in the book of—in the book which is its own property—that I should go to that opera for the first time under the memorable circumstances of going with Miss Podsnap.'

To which Georgiana replied, hooking her two little fingers in one another, and addressing the tablecloth, 'Thank you, but I generally go with no one but you, Sophronia, and I like that very much.'

Content perforce with this success for the time, Mr Lammle let Miss Podsnap out of the room, as if he were opening her cage door, and Mrs Lammle followed. Coffee being presently served up stairs, he kept a watch on Fledgeby until Miss Podsnap's cup was empty, and then directed him with his finger (as if that young gentleman were a slow Retriever) to go and fetch it. This feat he performed, not only without failure, but even with the original embellishment of informing Miss Podsnap that green tea was considered bad for the nerves. Though there Miss Podsnap unintentionally threw him out by faltering, 'Oh, is it indeed? How does it act?' Which he was not prepared to elucidate.

The carriage announced, Mrs Lammle said; 'Don't mind me, Mr Fledgeby, my skirts and cloak occupy both my hands, take Miss Podsnap.' And he took her, and Mrs Lammle went next, and Mr Lammle went last, savagely following his little flock, like a drover.

But he was all sparkle and glitter in the box at the Opera, and there he and his dear wife made a conversation between Fledgeby and Georgiana in the following ingenious and skilful manner. They sat in this order: Mrs Lammle, Fascination Fledgeby, Georgiana, Mr Lammle. Mrs Lammle made leading remarks to Fledgeby, only requiring monosyllabic replies. Mr Lammle did the like with Georgiana. At times Mrs Lammle would lean forward to address Mr Lammle to this purpose.

'Alfred, my dear, Mr Fledgeby very justly says, apropos of the last scene, that true constancy would not require any such stimulant as the stage deems necessary.' To which Mr Lammle would reply, 'Ay, Sophronia, my love, but as Georgiana has observed to me, the lady had no sufficient reason to know the state of the gentleman's affections.' To which Mrs Lammle would rejoin, 'Very true, Alfred; but Mr Fledgeby points out,' this. To which Alfred would demur: 'Undoubtedly, Sophronia, but Georgiana acutely remarks,' that. Through this device the two young people conversed at great length and committed themselves to a variety of delicate sentiments, without having once opened their lips, save to say yes or no, and even that not to one another.

Fledgeby took his leave of Miss Podsnap at the carriage door, and the Lammles dropped her at her own home, and on the way Mrs Lammle archly rallied her, in her fond and protecting manner, by saying at intervals, 'Oh little Georgiana, little Georgiana!' Which was not much; but the tone added, 'You have enslaved your Fledgeby.'

And thus the Lammles got home at last, and the lady sat down moody and weary, looking at her dark lord engaged in a deed of violence with a bottle of soda-water as though he were wringing the neck of some unlucky creature and pouring its blood down his throat. As he wiped his dripping whiskers in an ogreish way, he met her eyes, and pausing, said, with no very gentle voice:

'Well?'

'Was such an absolute Booby necessary to the purpose?'

'I know what I am doing. He is no such dolt as you suppose.'

'A genius, perhaps?'

'You sneer, perhaps; and you take a lofty air upon yourself perhaps! But I tell you this:—when that young fellow's interest is concerned, he holds as tight as a horse-leech. When money is in question with that young fellow, he is a match for the Devil.'

'Is he a match for you?'

'He is. Almost as good a one as you thought me for you. He has no quality of youth in him, but such as you have seen to-day. Touch him upon money, and you touch no booby then. He really is a dolt, I suppose, in other things; but it answers his one purpose very well.'

'Has she money in her own right in any case?'

'Ay! she has money in her own right in any case. You have done so well to-day, Sophronia, that I answer the question, though you know I object to any such questions. You have done so well to-day, Sophronia, that you must be tired. Get to bed.'

Chapter 5

MERCURY PROMPTING

Fledgeby deserved Mr Alfred Lammle's eulogium. He was the meanest cur existing, with a single pair of legs. And instinct (a word we all clearly understand) going largely on four legs, and reason always on two, meanness on four legs never attains the perfection of meanness on two.

The father of this young gentleman had been a money-lender, who had transacted professional business with the mother of this young gentleman, when he, the latter, was waiting in the vast dark ante-chambers of the present world to be born. The lady, a widow, being unable to pay the money-lender, married him; and in due course, Fledgeby was summoned out of the vast dark ante-chambers to come and be presented to the Registrar-General. Rather a curious speculation how Fledgeby would otherwise have disposed of his leisure until Doomsday.

Fledgeby's mother offended her family by marrying Fledgeby's father. It is one of the easiest achievements in life to offend your family when your family want to get rid of you. Fledgeby's mother's family had been very much offended with her for being poor, and broke with her for becoming comparatively rich. Fledgeby's mother's family was the Snigsworth family. She had even the high honour to be cousin to Lord Snigsworth—so many times removed that the noble Earl would have had no compunction in removing her one time more and dropping her clean outside the cousinly pale; but cousin for all that.

Among her pre-matrimonial transactions with Fledgeby's father, Fledgeby's mother had raised money of him at a great disadvantage on a certain reversionary interest. The reversion falling in soon after they were married, Fledgeby's father laid hold of the cash for his separate use and benefit. This led to subjective differences of opinion, not to say objective interchanges of boot-jacks, backgammon boards, and other such domestic missiles, between Fledgeby's father and Fledgeby's mother, and those led to Fledgeby's mother spending as much money as she could, and to Fledgeby's father doing all he couldn't to restrain her. Fledgeby's childhood had been, in consequence, a stormy one; but the winds and the waves had gone down in the grave, and Fledgeby flourished alone.

He lived in chambers in the Albany, did Fledgeby, and maintained a spruce appearance. But his youthful fire was all composed of sparks from the grindstone; and as the sparks flew off, went out, and never warmed anything, be sure that Fledgeby had his tools at the grindstone, and turned it with a wary eye.

Mr Alfred Lammle came round to the Albany to breakfast with Fledgeby. Present on the table, one scanty pot of tea, one scanty loaf, two scanty pats of butter, two scanty rashers of bacon, two pitiful eggs, and an abundance of handsome china bought a secondhand bargain.

'What did you think of Georgiana?' asked Mr Lammle.

'Why, I'll tell you,' said Fledgeby, very deliberately.

'Do, my boy.'

'You misunderstand me,' said Fledgeby. 'I don't mean I'll tell you that. I mean I'll tell you something else.'

'Tell me anything, old fellow!'

'Ah, but there you misunderstand me again,' said Fledgeby. 'I mean I'll tell you nothing.'

Mr Lammle sparkled at him, but frowned at him too.

'Look here,' said Fledgeby. 'You're deep and you're ready. Whether I am deep or not, never mind. I am not ready. But I can do one thing, Lammle, I can hold my tongue. And I intend always doing it.'

'You are a long-headed fellow, Fledgeby.'

'May be, or may not be. If I am a short-tongued fellow, it may amount to the same thing. Now, Lammle, I am never going to answer questions.'

'My dear fellow, it was the simplest question in the world.'

'Never mind. It seemed so, but things are not always what they seem. I saw a man examined as a witness in Westminster Hall. Questions put to him seemed the simplest in the world, but turned out to be anything rather than that, after he had answered 'em. Very well. Then he should have held his tongue. If he had held his tongue he would have kept out of scrapes that he got into.'

'If I had held my tongue, you would never have seen the subject of my question,' remarked Lammle, darkening.

'Now, Lammle,' said Fascination Fledgeby, calmly feeling for his whisker, 'it won't do. I won't be led on into a discussion. I can't manage a discussion. But I can manage to hold my tongue.'

'Can?' Mr Lammle fell back upon propitiation. 'I should think you could! Why, when these fellows of our acquaintance drink and you drink with them, the more talkative they get, the more silent you get. The more they let out, the more you keep in.'

'I don't object, Lammle,' returned Fledgeby, with an internal chuckle, 'to being understood, though I object to being questioned. That certainly IS the way I do it.'

'And when all the rest of us are discussing our ventures, none of us ever know what a single venture of yours is!'

'And none of you ever will from me, Lammle,' replied Fledgeby, with another internal chuckle; 'that certainly IS the way I do it.'

'Why of course it is, I know!' rejoined Lammle, with a flourish of frankness, and a laugh, and stretching out his hands as if to show the universe a remarkable man in Fledgeby. 'If I hadn't known it of my Fledgeby, should I have proposed our little compact of advantage, to my Fledgeby?'

'Ah!' remarked Fascination, shaking his head slyly. 'But I am not to be got at in that way. I am not vain. That sort of vanity don't pay, Lammle. No, no, no. Compliments only make me hold my tongue the more.'

Alfred Lammle pushed his plate away (no great sacrifice under the circumstances of there being so little in it), thrust his hands in his pockets, leaned back in his chair, and contemplated Fledgeby in silence. Then he slowly released his left hand from its pocket, and made that bush of his whiskers, still contemplating him in silence. Then he slowly broke silence, and slowly said: 'What—the—Dev-il is this fellow about this morning?'

'Now, look here, Lammle,' said Fascination Fledgeby, with the meanest of twinkles in his meanest of eyes: which were too near together, by the way: 'look here, Lammle; I am very well aware that I didn't show to advantage last night, and that you and your wife—who, I consider, is a very clever woman and an agreeable woman—did. I am not calculated to show to advantage under that sort of circumstances. I know very well you two did show to advantage, and managed capitally. But don't you on that account come talking to me as if I was your doll and puppet, because I am not.

'And all this,' cried Alfred, after studying with a look the meanness that was fain to have the meanest help, and yet was so mean as to turn upon it: 'all this because of one simple natural question!'

'You should have waited till I thought proper to say something about it of myself. I don't like your coming over me with your Georgianas, as if you was her proprietor and mine too.'

'Well, when you are in the gracious mind to say anything about it of yourself,' retorted Lammle, 'pray do.'

'I have done it. I have said you managed capitally. You and your wife both. If you'll go on managing capitally, I'll go on doing my part. Only don't crow.'

'I crow!' exclaimed Lammle, shrugging his shoulders.

'Or,' pursued the other—'or take it in your head that people are your puppets because they don't come out to advantage at the particular moments when you do, with the assistance of a very clever and agreeable wife. All the rest keep on doing, and let Mrs Lammle keep on doing. Now, I have held my tongue when I thought proper, and I have spoken when I thought proper, and there's an end of that. And now the question is,' proceeded Fledgeby, with the greatest reluctance, 'will you have another egg?'

'No, I won't,' said Lammle, shortly.

'Perhaps you're right and will find yourself better without it,' replied Fascination, in greatly improved spirits. 'To ask you if you'll have another rasher would be unmeaning flattery, for it would make you thirsty all day. Will you have some more bread and butter?'

'No, I won't,' repeated Lammle.

'Then I will,' said Fascination. And it was not a mere retort for the sound's sake, but was a cheerful cogent consequence of the refusal; for if Lammle had applied himself again to the loaf, it would have been so heavily visited, in Fledgeby's opinion, as to demand abstinence from bread, on his part, for the remainder of that meal at least, if not for the whole of the next.

Whether this young gentleman (for he was but three-and-twenty) combined with the miserly vice of an old man, any of the open-handed vices of a young one, was a moot point; so very honourably did he keep his own counsel. He was sensible of the value of appearances as an investment, and liked to dress well; but he drove a bargain for every moveable about him, from the coat on his back to the china on his breakfast-table; and every bargain by representing somebody's ruin or somebody's loss, acquired a peculiar charm for him. It was a part of his avarice to take, within narrow bounds, long odds at races; if he won, he drove harder bargains; if he lost, he half starved himself until next time. Why money should be so precious to an Ass too dull and mean to exchange it for any other satisfaction, is strange; but there is no animal so sure to get laden with it, as the Ass who sees nothing written on the face of the earth and sky but the three letters L. S. D.—not Luxury, Sensuality, Dissoluteness, which they often stand for, but the three dry letters. Your concentrated Fox is seldom comparable to your concentrated Ass in money-breeding.

Fascination Fledgeby feigned to be a young gentleman living on his means, but was known secretly to be a kind of outlaw in the bill-broking line, and to put money out at high interest in various ways. His circle of familiar acquaintance, from Mr Lammle round, all had a touch of the outlaw, as to their rovings in the merry greenwood of Jobbery Forest, lying on the outskirts of the Share-Market and the Stock Exchange.

'I suppose you, Lammle,' said Fledgeby, eating his bread and butter, 'always did go in for female society?'

'Always,' replied Lammle, glooming considerably under his late treatment.

'Came natural to you, eh?' said Fledgeby.

'The sex were pleased to like me, sir,' said Lammle sulkily, but with the air of a man who had not been able to help himself.

'Made a pretty good thing of marrying, didn't you?' asked Fledgeby.

The other smiled (an ugly smile), and tapped one tap upon his nose.

'My late governor made a mess of it,' said Fledgeby. 'But Geor—is the right name Georgina or Georgiana?'

'Georgiana.'

'I was thinking yesterday, I didn't know there was such a name. I thought it must end in ina.

'Why?'

'Why, you play—if you can—the Concertina, you know,' replied Fledgeby, meditating very slowly. 'And you have—when you catch it—the Scarlatina. And you can come down from a balloon in a parach—no you can't though. Well, say Georgeute—I mean Georgiana.'

'You were going to remark of Georgiana—?' Lammle moodily hinted, after waiting in vain.

'I was going to remark of Georgiana, sir,' said Fledgeby, not at all pleased to be reminded of his having forgotten it, 'that she don't seem to be violent. Don't seem to be of the pitching-in order.'

'She has the gentleness of the dove, Mr Fledgeby.'

'Of course you'll say so,' replied Fledgeby, sharpening, the moment his interest was touched by another. 'But you know, the real look-out is this:—what I say, not what you say. I say having my late governor and my late mother in my eye—that Georgiana don't seem to be of the pitching-in order.'

The respected Mr Lammle was a bully, by nature and by usual practice. Perceiving, as Fledgeby's affronts cumulated, that conciliation by no means answered the purpose here, he now directed a scowling look into Fledgeby's small eyes for the effect of the opposite treatment. Satisfied by what he saw there, he burst into a violent passion and struck his hand upon the table, making the china ring and dance.

'You are a very offensive fellow, sir,' cried Mr Lammle, rising. 'You are a highly offensive scoundrel. What do you mean by this behaviour?'

'I say!' remonstrated Fledgeby. 'Don't break out.'

'You are a very offensive fellow sir,' repeated Mr Lammle. 'You are a highly offensive scoundrel!'

'I SAY, you know!' urged Fledgeby, quailing.

'Why, you coarse and vulgar vagabond!' said Mr Lammle, looking fiercely about him, 'if your servant was here to give me sixpence of your money to get my boots cleaned afterwards—for you are not worth the expenditure—I'd kick you.'

'No you wouldn't,' pleaded Fledgeby. 'I am sure you'd think better of it.'

'I tell you what, Mr Fledgeby,' said Lammle advancing on him. 'Since you presume to contradict me, I'll assert myself a little. Give me your nose!'

Fledgeby covered it with his hand instead, and said, retreating, 'I beg you won't!'

'Give me your nose, sir,' repeated Lammle.

Still covering that feature and backing, Mr Fledgeby reiterated (apparently with a severe cold in his head), 'I beg, I beg, you won't.'

'And this fellow,' exclaimed Lammle, stopping and making the most of his chest—'This fellow presumes on my having selected him out of all the young fellows I know, for an advantageous opportunity! This fellow presumes on my having in my desk round the corner, his dirty note of hand for a wretched sum payable on the occurrence of a certain event, which event can only be of my and my wife's bringing about! This fellow, Fledgeby, presumes to be impertinent to me, Lammle. Give me your nose sir!'

'No! Stop! I beg your pardon,' said Fledgeby, with humility.

'What do you say, sir?' demanded Mr Lammle, seeming too furious to understand.

'I beg your pardon,' repeated Fledgeby.

'Repeat your words louder, sir. The just indignation of a gentleman has sent the blood boiling to my head. I don't hear you.'

'I say,' repeated Fledgeby, with laborious explanatory politeness, 'I beg your pardon.'

Mr Lammle paused. 'As a man of honour,' said he, throwing himself into a chair, 'I am disarmed.'

Mr Fledgeby also took a chair, though less demonstratively, and by slow approaches removed his hand from his nose. Some natural diffidence assailed him as to blowing it, so shortly after its having assumed a personal and delicate, not to say public, character; but he overcame his scruples by degrees, and modestly took that liberty under an implied protest.

'Lammle,' he said sneakingly, when that was done, 'I hope we are friends again?'

'Mr Fledgeby,' returned Lammle, 'say no more.'

'I must have gone too far in making myself disagreeable,' said Fledgeby, 'but I never intended it.'

'Say no more, say no more!' Mr Lammle repeated in a magnificent tone. 'Give me your'—Fledgeby started—'hand.'

They shook hands, and on Mr Lammle's part, in particular, there ensued great geniality. For, he was quite as much of a dastard as the other, and had been in equal danger of falling into the second place for good, when he took heart just in time, to act upon the information conveyed to him by Fledgeby's eye.

The breakfast ended in a perfect understanding. Incessant machinations were to be kept at work by Mr and Mrs Lammle; love was to be made for Fledgeby, and conquest was to be insured to him; he on his part very humbly admitting his defects as to the softer social arts, and entreating to be backed to the utmost by his two able coadjutors.

Little recked Mr Podsnap of the traps and toils besetting his Young Person. He regarded her as safe within the Temple of Podsnappery, biding the fulness of time when she, Georgiana, should take him, Fitz-Podsnap, who with all his worldly goods should her endow. It would call a blush into the cheek of his standard Young Person to have anything to do with such matters save to take as directed, and with worldly goods as per settlement to be endowed. Who giveth this woman to be married to this man? I, Podsnap. Perish the daring thought that any smaller creation should come between!

It was a public holiday, and Fledgeby did not recover his spirits or his usual temperature of nose until the afternoon. Walking into the City in the holiday afternoon, he walked against a living stream setting out of it; and thus, when he turned into the precincts of St Mary Axe, he found a prevalent repose and quiet there. A yellow overhanging plaster-fronted house at which he stopped was quiet too. The blinds were all drawn down, and the inscription Pubsey and Co. seemed to doze in the counting-house window on the ground-floor giving on the sleepy street.

Fledgeby knocked and rang, and Fledgeby rang and knocked, but no one came. Fledgeby crossed the narrow street and looked up at the house-windows, but nobody looked down at Fledgeby. He got out of temper, crossed the narrow street again, and pulled the housebell as if it were the house's nose, and he were taking a hint from his late experience. His ear at the keyhole seemed then, at last, to give him assurance that something stirred within. His eye at the keyhole seemed to confirm his ear, for he angrily pulled the house's nose again, and pulled and pulled and continued to pull, until a human nose appeared in the dark doorway.

'Now you sir!' cried Fledgeby. 'These are nice games!'

He addressed an old Jewish man in an ancient coat, long of skirt, and wide of pocket. A venerable man, bald and shining at the top of his head, and with long grey hair flowing down at its sides and mingling with his beard. A man who with a graceful Eastern action of homage bent his head, and stretched out his hands with the palms downward, as if to deprecate the wrath of a superior.

'What have you been up to?' said Fledgeby, storming at him.

'Generous Christian master,' urged the Jewish man, 'it being holiday, I looked for no one.'

'Holiday he blowed!' said Fledgeby, entering. 'What have YOU got to do with holidays? Shut the door.'

With his former action the old man obeyed. In the entry hung his rusty large-brimmed low-crowned hat, as long out of date as his coat; in the corner near it stood his staff—no walking-stick but a veritable staff.

Fledgeby turned into the counting-house, perched himself on a business stool, and cocked his hat. There were light boxes on shelves in the counting-house, and strings of mock beads hanging up. There were samples of cheap clocks, and samples of cheap vases of flowers. Foreign toys, all.

Perched on the stool with his hat cocked on his head and one of his legs dangling, the youth of Fledgeby hardly contrasted to advantage with the age of the Jewish man as he stood with his bare head bowed, and his eyes (which he only raised in speaking) on the ground. His clothing was worn down to the rusty hue of the hat in the entry, but though he looked shabby he did not look mean. Now, Fledgeby, though not shabby, did look mean.

'You have not told me what you were up to, you sir,' said Fledgeby, scratching his head with the brim of his hat.

'Sir, I was breathing the air.'

'In the cellar, that you didn't hear?'

'On the house-top.'

'Upon my soul! That's a way of doing business.'

'Sir,' the old man represented with a grave and patient air, 'there must be two parties to the transaction of business, and the holiday has left me alone.'

'Ah! Can't be buyer and seller too. That's what the Jews say; ain't it?'

'At least we say truly, if we say so,' answered the old man with a smile.

'Your people need speak the truth sometimes, for they lie enough,' remarked Fascination Fledgeby.

'Sir, there is,' returned the old man with quiet emphasis, 'too much untruth among all denominations of men.'

Rather dashed, Fascination Fledgeby took another scratch at his intellectual head with his hat, to gain time for rallying.

'For instance,' he resumed, as though it were he who had spoken last, 'who but you and I ever heard of a poor Jew?'

'The Jews,' said the old man, raising his eyes from the ground with his former smile. 'They hear of poor Jews often, and are very good to them.'

'Bother that!' returned Fledgeby. 'You know what I mean. You'd persuade me if you could, that you are a poor Jew. I wish you'd confess how much you really did make out of my late governor. I should have a better opinion of you.'

The old man only bent his head, and stretched out his hands as before.

'Don't go on posturing like a Deaf and Dumb School,' said the ingenious Fledgeby, 'but express yourself like a Christian—or as nearly as you can.'

'I had had sickness and misfortunes, and was so poor,' said the old man, 'as hopelessly to owe the father, principal and interest. The son inheriting, was so merciful as to forgive me both, and place me here.'

He made a little gesture as though he kissed the hem of an imaginary garment worn by the noble youth before him. It was humbly done, but picturesquely, and was not abasing to the doer.

'You won't say more, I see,' said Fledgeby, looking at him as if he would like to try the effect of extracting a double-tooth or two, 'and so it's of no use my putting it to you. But confess this, Riah; who believes you to be poor now?'

'No one,' said the old man.

'There you're right,' assented Fledgeby.

'No one,' repeated the old man with a grave slow wave of his head. 'All scout it as a fable. Were I to say "This little fancy business is not mine";' with a lithe sweep of his easily-turning hand around him, to comprehend the various objects on the shelves; '"it is the little business of a Christian young gentleman who places me, his servant, in trust and charge here, and to whom I am accountable for every single bead," they would laugh. When, in the larger money-business, I tell the borrowers—'

'I say, old chap!' interposed Fledgeby, 'I hope you mind what you DO tell 'em?'

'Sir, I tell them no more than I am about to repeat. When I tell them, "I cannot promise this, I cannot answer for the other, I must see my principal, I have not the money, I am a poor man and it does not rest with me," they are so unbelieving and so impatient, that they sometimes curse me in Jehovah's name.'

'That's deuced good, that is!' said Fascination Fledgeby.

'And at other times they say, "Can it never be done without these tricks, Mr Riah? Come, come, Mr Riah, we know the arts of your people"—my people!—"If the money is to be lent, fetch it, fetch it; if it is not to be lent, keep it and say so." They never believe me.'

'THAT'S all right,' said Fascination Fledgeby.

'They say, "We know, Mr Riah, we know. We have but to look at you, and we know."'

'Oh, a good 'un are you for the post,' thought Fledgeby, 'and a good 'un was I to mark you out for it! I may be slow, but I am precious sure.'

Not a syllable of this reflection shaped itself in any scrap of Mr Fledgeby's breath, lest it should tend to put his servant's price up. But looking at the old man as he stood quiet with his head bowed and his eyes cast down, he felt that to relinquish an inch of his baldness, an inch of his grey hair, an inch of his coat-skirt, an inch of his hat-brim, an inch of his walking-staff, would be to relinquish hundreds of pounds.

'Look here, Riah,' said Fledgeby, mollified by these self-approving considerations. 'I want to go a little more into buying-up queer bills. Look out in that direction.'

'Sir, it shall be done.'

'Casting my eye over the accounts, I find that branch of business pays pretty fairly, and I am game for extending it. I like to know people's affairs likewise. So look out.'

'Sir, I will, promptly.'

'Put it about in the right quarters, that you'll buy queer bills by the lump—by the pound weight if that's all—supposing you see your way to a fair chance on looking over the parcel. And there's one thing more. Come to me with the books for periodical inspection as usual, at eight on Monday morning.'

Riah drew some folding tablets from his breast and noted it down.

'That's all I wanted to say at the present time,' continued Fledgeby in a grudging vein, as he got off the stool, 'except that I wish you'd take the air where you can hear the bell, or the knocker, either one of the two or both. By-the-by how DO you take the air at the top of the house? Do you stick your head out of a chimney-pot?'

'Sir, there are leads there, and I have made a little garden there.'

'To bury your money in, you old dodger?'

'A thumbnail's space of garden would hold the treasure I bury, master,' said Riah. 'Twelve shillings a week, even when they are an old man's wages, bury themselves.'

'I should like to know what you really are worth,' returned Fledgeby, with whom his growing rich on that stipend and gratitude was a very convenient fiction. 'But come! Let's have a look at your garden on the tiles, before I go!'

The old man took a step back, and hesitated.

'Truly, sir, I have company there.'

'Have you, by George!' said Fledgeby; 'I suppose you happen to know whose premises these are?'

'Sir, they are yours, and I am your servant in them.'

'Oh! I thought you might have overlooked that,' retorted Fledgeby, with his eyes on Riah's beard as he felt for his own; 'having company on my premises, you know!'

'Come up and see the guests, sir. I hope for your admission that they can do no harm.'

Passing him with a courteous reverence, specially unlike any action that Mr Fledgeby could for his life have imparted to his own head and hands, the old man began to ascend the stairs. As he toiled on before, with his palm upon the stair-rail, and his long black skirt, a very gaberdine, overhanging each successive step, he might have been the leader in some pilgrimage of devotional ascent to a prophet's tomb. Not troubled by any such weak imagining, Fascination Fledgeby merely speculated on the time of life at which his beard had begun, and thought once more what a good 'un he was for the part.

Some final wooden steps conducted them, stooping under a low penthouse roof, to the house-top. Riah stood still, and, turning to his master, pointed out his guests.

Lizzie Hexam and Jenny Wren. For whom, perhaps with some old instinct of his race, the gentle Jew had spread a carpet. Seated on it, against no more romantic object than a blackened chimney-stack over which some bumble creeper had been trained, they both pored over one book; both with attentive faces; Jenny with the sharper; Lizzie with the more perplexed. Another little book or two were lying near, and a common basket of common fruit, and another basket full of strings of beads and tinsel scraps. A few boxes of humble flowers and evergreens completed the garden; and the encompassing wilderness of dowager old chimneys twirled their cowls and fluttered their smoke, rather as if they were bridling, and fanning themselves, and looking on in a state of airy surprise.

Taking her eyes off the book, to test her memory of something in it, Lizzie was the first to see herself observed. As she rose, Miss Wren likewise became conscious, and said, irreverently addressing the great chief of the premises: 'Whoever you are, I can't get up, because my back's bad and my legs are queer.'

'This is my master,' said Riah, stepping forward.

('Don't look like anybody's master,' observed Miss Wren to herself, with a hitch of her chin and eyes.)

'This, sir,' pursued the old man, 'is a little dressmaker for little people. Explain to the master, Jenny.'

'Dolls; that's all,' said Jenny, shortly. 'Very difficult to fit too, because their figures are so uncertain. You never know where to expect their waists.'

'Her friend,' resumed the old man, motioning towards Lizzie; 'and as industrious as virtuous. But that they both are. They are busy early and late, sir, early and late; and in bye-times, as on this holiday, they go to book-learning.'

'Not much good to be got out of that,' remarked Fledgeby.

'Depends upon the person!' quoth Miss Wren, snapping him up.

'I made acquaintance with my guests, sir,' pursued the Jew, with an evident purpose of drawing out the dressmaker, 'through their coming here to buy of our damage and waste for Miss Jenny's millinery. Our waste goes into the best of company, sir, on her rosy-cheeked little customers. They wear it in their hair, and on their ball-dresses, and even (so she tells me) are presented at Court with it.'

'Ah!' said Fledgeby, on whose intelligence this doll-fancy made rather strong demands; 'she's been buying that basketful to-day, I suppose?'

'I suppose she has,' Miss Jenny interposed; 'and paying for it too, most likely!'

'Let's have a look at it,' said the suspicious chief. Riah handed it to him. 'How much for this now?'

'Two precious silver shillings,' said Miss Wren.

Riah confirmed her with two nods, as Fledgeby looked to him. A nod for each shilling.

'Well,' said Fledgeby, poking into the contents of the basket with his forefinger, 'the price is not so bad. You have got good measure, Miss What-is-it.'

'Try Jenny,' suggested that young lady with great calmness.

'You have got good measure, Miss Jenny; but the price is not so bad.—And you,' said Fledgeby, turning to the other visitor, 'do you buy anything here, miss?'

'No, sir.'

'Nor sell anything neither, miss?'

'No, sir.'

Looking askew at the questioner, Jenny stole her hand up to her friend's, and drew her friend down, so that she bent beside her on her knee.

'We are thankful to come here for rest, sir,' said Jenny. 'You see, you don't know what the rest of this place is to us; does he, Lizzie? It's the quiet, and the air.'

'The quiet!' repeated Fledgeby, with a contemptuous turn of his head towards the City's roar. 'And the air!' with a 'Poof!' at the smoke.

'Ah!' said Jenny. 'But it's so high. And you see the clouds rushing on above the narrow streets, not minding them, and you see the golden arrows pointing at the mountains in the sky from which the wind comes, and you feel as if you were dead.'

The little creature looked above her, holding up her slight transparent hand.

'How do you feel when you are dead?' asked Fledgeby, much perplexed.

'Oh, so tranquil!' cried the little creature, smiling. 'Oh, so peaceful and so thankful! And you hear the people who are alive, crying, and working, and calling to one another down in the close dark streets, and you seem to pity them so! And such a chain has fallen from you, and such a strange good sorrowful happiness comes upon you!'

Her eyes fell on the old man, who, with his hands folded, quietly looked on.

'Why it was only just now,' said the little creature, pointing at him, 'that I fancied I saw him come out of his grave! He toiled out at that low door so bent and worn, and then he took his breath and stood upright, and looked all round him at the sky, and the wind blew upon him, and his life down in the dark was over!—Till he was called back to life,' she added, looking round at Fledgeby with that lower look of sharpness. 'Why did you call him back?'

'He was long enough coming, anyhow,' grumbled Fledgeby.

'But you are not dead, you know,' said Jenny Wren. 'Get down to life!'

Mr Fledgeby seemed to think it rather a good suggestion, and with a nod turned round. As Riah followed to attend him down the stairs, the little creature called out to the Jew in a silvery tone, 'Don't be long gone. Come back, and be dead!' And still as they went down they heard the little sweet voice, more and more faintly, half calling and half singing, 'Come back and be dead, Come back and be dead!'

When they got down into the entry, Fledgeby, pausing under the shadow of the broad old hat, and mechanically poising the staff, said to the old man:

'That's a handsome girl, that one in her senses.'

'And as good as handsome,' answered Riah.

'At all events,' observed Fledgeby, with a dry whistle, 'I hope she ain't bad enough to put any chap up to the fastenings, and get the premises broken open. You look out. Keep your weather eye awake and don't make any more acquaintances, however handsome. Of course you always keep my name to yourself?'

'Sir, assuredly I do.'

'If they ask it, say it's Pubsey, or say it's Co, or say it's anything you like, but what it is.'

His grateful servant—in whose race gratitude is deep, strong, and enduring—bowed his head, and actually did now put the hem of his coat to his lips: though so lightly that the wearer knew nothing of it.

Thus, Fascination Fledgeby went his way, exulting in the artful cleverness with which he had turned his thumb down on a Jew, and the old man went his different way up-stairs. As he mounted, the call or song began to sound in his ears again, and, looking above, he saw the face of the little creature looking down out of a Glory of her long bright radiant hair, and musically repeating to him, like a vision:

'Come up and be dead! Come up and be dead!'

Chapter 6

A RIDDLE WITHOUT AN ANSWER

Again Mr Mortimer Lightwood and Mr Eugene Wrayburn sat together in the Temple. This evening, however, they were not together in the place of business of the eminent solicitor, but in another dismal set of chambers facing it on the same second-floor; on whose dungeon-like black outer-door appeared the legend:

PRIVATE
MR EUGENE WRAYBURN
MR MORTIMER LIGHTWOOD

(Mr Lightwood's Offices opposite.)

Appearances indicated that this establishment was a very recent institution. The white letters of the inscription were extremely white and extremely strong to the sense of smell, the complexion of the tables and chairs was (like Lady Tippins's) a little too blooming to be believed in, and the carpets and floorcloth seemed to rush at the beholder's face in the unusual prominency of their patterns. But the Temple, accustomed to tone down both the still life and the human life that has much to do with it, would soon get the better of all that.

'Well!' said Eugene, on one side of the fire, 'I feel tolerably comfortable. I hope the upholsterer may do the same.'

'Why shouldn't he?' asked Lightwood, from the other side of the fire.

'To be sure,' pursued Eugene, reflecting, 'he is not in the secret of our pecuniary affairs, so perhaps he may be in an easy frame of mind.'

'We shall pay him,' said Mortimer.

'Shall we, really?' returned Eugene, indolently surprised. 'You don't say so!'

'I mean to pay him, Eugene, for my part,' said Mortimer, in a slightly injured tone.

'Ah! I mean to pay him too,' retorted Eugene. 'But then I mean so much that I—that I don't mean.'

'Don't mean?'

'So much that I only mean and shall always only mean and nothing more, my dear Mortimer. It's the same thing.'

His friend, lying back in his easy chair, watched him lying back in his easy chair, as he stretched out his legs on the hearth-rug, and said, with the amused look that Eugene Wrayburn could always awaken in him without seeming to try or care:

'Anyhow, your vagaries have increased the bill.'

'Calls the domestic virtues vagaries!' exclaimed Eugene, raising his eyes to the ceiling.

'This very complete little kitchen of ours,' said Mortimer, 'in which nothing will ever be cooked—'

'My dear, dear Mortimer,' returned his friend, lazily lifting his head a little to look at him, 'how often have I pointed out to you that its moral influence is the important thing?'

'Its moral influence on this fellow!' exclaimed Lightwood, laughing.

'Do me the favour,' said Eugene, getting out of his chair with much gravity, 'to come and inspect that feature of our establishment which you rashly disparage.' With that, taking up a candle, he conducted his chum into the fourth room of the set of chambers—a little narrow room—which was very completely and neatly fitted as a kitchen. 'See!' said Eugene, 'miniature flour-barrel, rolling-pin, spice-box, shelf of brown jars, chopping-board, coffee-mill, dresser elegantly furnished with crockery, saucepans and pans, roasting jack, a charming kettle, an armoury of dish-covers. The moral influence of these objects, in forming the domestic virtues, may have an immense influence upon me; not upon you, for you are a hopeless case, but upon me. In fact, I have an idea that I feel the domestic virtues already forming. Do me the favour to step into my bedroom. Secretaire, you see, and abstruse set of solid mahogany pigeon-holes, one for every letter of the alphabet. To what use do I devote them? I receive a bill—say from Jones. I docket it neatly at the secretaire, JONES, and I put it into pigeonhole J. It's the next thing to a receipt and is quite as satisfactory to ME. And I very much wish, Mortimer,' sitting on his bed, with the air of a philosopher lecturing a disciple, 'that my example might induce YOU to cultivate habits of punctuality and method; and, by means of the moral influences with which I have surrounded you, to encourage the formation of the domestic virtues.'

Mortimer laughed again, with his usual commentaries of 'How CAN you be so ridiculous, Eugene!' and 'What an absurd fellow you are!' but when his laugh was out, there was something serious, if not anxious, in his face. Despite that pernicious assumption of lassitude and indifference, which had become his second nature, he was strongly attached to his friend. He had founded himself upon Eugene when they were yet boys at school; and at this hour imitated him no less, admired him no less, loved him no less, than in those departed days.

'Eugene,' said he, 'if I could find you in earnest for a minute, I would try to say an earnest word to you.'

'An earnest word?' repeated Eugene. 'The moral influences are beginning to work. Say on.'

'Well, I will,' returned the other, 'though you are not earnest yet.'

'In this desire for earnestness,' murmured Eugene, with the air of one who was meditating deeply, 'I trace the happy influences of the little flour-barrel and the coffee-mill. Gratifying.'

'Eugene,' resumed Mortimer, disregarding the light interruption, and laying a hand upon Eugene's shoulder, as he, Mortimer, stood before him seated on his bed, 'you are withholding something from me.'

Eugene looked at him, but said nothing.

'All this past summer, you have been withholding something from me. Before we entered on our boating vacation, you were as bent upon it as I have seen you upon anything since we first rowed together. But you cared very little for it when it came, often found it a tie and a drag upon you, and were constantly away. Now it was well enough half-a-dozen times, a dozen times, twenty times, to say to me in your own odd manner, which I know so well and like so much, that your disappearances were precautions against our boring one another; but of course after a short while I began to know that they covered something. I don't ask what it is, as you have not told me; but the fact is so. Say, is it not?'

'I give you my word of honour, Mortimer,' returned Eugene, after a serious pause of a few moments, 'that I don't know.'

'Don't know, Eugene?'

'Upon my soul, don't know. I know less about myself than about most people in the world, and I don't know.'

'You have some design in your mind?'

'Have I? I don't think I have.'

'At any rate, you have some subject of interest there which used not to be there?'

'I really can't say,' replied Eugene, shaking his head blankly, after pausing again to reconsider. 'At times I have thought yes; at other times I have thought no. Now, I have been inclined to pursue such a subject; now I have felt that it was absurd, and that it tired and embarrassed me. Absolutely, I can't say. Frankly and faithfully, I would if I could.'

So replying, he clapped a hand, in his turn, on his friend's shoulder, as he rose from his seat upon the bed, and said:

'You must take your friend as he is. You know what I am, my dear Mortimer. You know how dreadfully susceptible I am to boredom. You know that when I became enough of a man to find myself an embodied conundrum, I bored myself to the last degree by trying to find out what I meant. You know that at length I gave it up, and declined to guess any more. Then how can I possibly give you the answer that I have not discovered? The old nursery form runs, "Riddle-me-riddle-me-ree, p'raps you can't tell me what this may be?" My reply runs, "No. Upon my life, I can't."'

So much of what was fantastically true to his own knowledge of this utterly careless Eugene, mingled with the answer, that Mortimer could not receive it as a mere evasion. Besides, it was given with an engaging air of openness, and of special exemption of the one friend he valued, from his reckless indifference.

'Come, dear boy!' said Eugene. 'Let us try the effect of smoking. If it enlightens me at all on this question, I will impart unreservedly.'

They returned to the room they had come from, and, finding it heated, opened a window. Having lighted their cigars, they leaned out of this window, smoking, and looking down at the moonlight, as it shone into the court below.

'No enlightenment,' resumed Eugene, after certain minutes of silence. 'I feel sincerely apologetic, my dear Mortimer, but nothing comes.'

'If nothing comes,' returned Mortimer, 'nothing can come from it. So I shall hope that this may hold good throughout, and that there may be nothing on foot. Nothing injurious to you, Eugene, or—'

Eugene stayed him for a moment with his hand on his arm, while he took a piece of earth from an old flowerpot on the window-sill and dexterously shot it at a little point of light opposite; having done which to his satisfaction, he said, 'Or?'

'Or injurious to any one else.'

'How,' said Eugene, taking another little piece of earth, and shooting it with great precision at the former mark, 'how injurious to any one else?'

'I don't know.'

'And,' said Eugene, taking, as he said the word, another shot, 'to whom else?'

'I don't know.'

Checking himself with another piece of earth in his hand, Eugene looked at his friend inquiringly and a little suspiciously. There was no concealed or half-expressed meaning in his face.

'Two belated wanderers in the mazes of the law,' said Eugene, attracted by the sound of footsteps, and glancing down as he spoke, 'stray into the court. They examine the door-posts of number one, seeking the name they want. Not finding it at number one, they come to number two. On the hat of wanderer number two, the shorter one, I drop this pellet. Hitting him on the hat, I smoke serenely, and become absorbed in contemplation of the sky.'

Both the wanderers looked up towards the window; but, after interchanging a mutter or two, soon applied themselves to the door-posts below. There they seemed to discover what they wanted, for they disappeared from view by entering at the doorway. 'When they emerge,' said Eugene, 'you shall see me bring them both down'; and so prepared two pellets for the purpose.

He had not reckoned on their seeking his name, or Lightwood's. But either the one or the other would seem to be in question, for now there came a knock at the door. 'I am on duty to-night,' said Mortimer, 'stay you where you are, Eugene.' Requiring no persuasion, he stayed there, smoking quietly, and not at all curious to know who knocked, until Mortimer spoke to him from within the room, and touched him. Then, drawing in his head, he found the visitors to be young Charley Hexam and the schoolmaster; both standing facing him, and both recognized at a glance.

'You recollect this young fellow, Eugene?' said Mortimer.

'Let me look at him,' returned Wrayburn, coolly. 'Oh, yes, yes. I recollect him!'

He had not been about to repeat that former action of taking him by the chin, but the boy had suspected him of it, and had thrown up his arm with an angry start. Laughingly, Wrayburn looked to Lightwood for an explanation of this odd visit.

'He says he has something to say.'

'Surely it must be to you, Mortimer.'

'So I thought, but he says no. He says it is to you.'

'Yes, I do say so,' interposed the boy. 'And I mean to say what I want to say, too, Mr Eugene Wrayburn!'

Passing him with his eyes as if there were nothing where he stood, Eugene looked on to Bradley Headstone. With consummate indolence, he turned to Mortimer, inquiring: 'And who may this other person be?'

'I am Charles Hexam's friend,' said Bradley; 'I am Charles Hexam's schoolmaster.'

'My good sir, you should teach your pupils better manners,' returned Eugene.

Composedly smoking, he leaned an elbow on the chimneypiece, at the side of the fire, and looked at the schoolmaster. It was a cruel look, in its cold disdain of him, as a creature of no worth. The schoolmaster looked at him, and that, too, was a cruel look, though of the different kind, that it had a raging jealousy and fiery wrath in it.

Very remarkably, neither Eugene Wrayburn nor Bradley Headstone looked at all at the boy. Through the ensuing dialogue, those two, no matter who spoke, or whom was addressed, looked at each other. There was some secret, sure perception between them, which set them against one another in all ways.

'In some high respects, Mr Eugene Wrayburn,' said Bradley, answering him with pale and quivering lips, 'the natural feelings of my pupils are stronger than my teaching.'

'In most respects, I dare say,' replied Eugene, enjoying his cigar, 'though whether high or low is of no importance. You have my name very correctly. Pray what is yours?'

'It cannot concern you much to know, but—'

'True,' interposed Eugene, striking sharply and cutting him short at his mistake, 'it does not concern me at all to know. I can say Schoolmaster, which is a most respectable title. You are right, Schoolmaster.'

It was not the dullest part of this goad in its galling of Bradley Headstone, that he had made it himself in a moment of incautious anger. He tried to set his lips so as to prevent their quivering, but they quivered fast.

'Mr Eugene Wrayburn,' said the boy, 'I want a word with you. I have wanted it so much, that we have looked out your address in the book, and we have been to your office, and we have come from your office here.'

'You have given yourself much trouble, Schoolmaster,' observed Eugene, blowing the feathery ash from his cigar. 'I hope it may prove remunerative.'

'And I am glad to speak,' pursued the boy, 'in presence of Mr Lightwood, because it was through Mr Lightwood that you ever saw my sister.'

For a mere moment, Wrayburn turned his eyes aside from the schoolmaster to note the effect of the last word on Mortimer, who, standing on the opposite side of the fire, as soon as the word was spoken, turned his face towards the fire and looked down into it.

'Similarly, it was through Mr Lightwood that you ever saw her again, for you were with him on the night when my father was found, and so I found you with her on the next day. Since then, you have seen my sister often. You have seen my sister oftener and oftener. And I want to know why?'

'Was this worth while, Schoolmaster?' murmured Eugene, with the air of a disinterested adviser. 'So much trouble for nothing? You should know best, but I think not.'

'I don't know, Mr Wrayburn,' answered Bradley, with his passion rising, 'why you address me—'

'Don't you? said Eugene. 'Then I won't.'

He said it so tauntingly in his perfect placidity, that the respectable right-hand clutching the respectable hair-guard of the respectable watch could have wound it round his throat and strangled him with it. Not another word did Eugene deem it worth while to utter, but stood leaning his head upon his hand, smoking, and looking imperturbably at the chafing Bradley Headstone with his clutching right-hand, until Bradley was wellnigh mad.

'Mr Wrayburn,' proceeded the boy, 'we not only know this that I have charged upon you, but we know more. It has not yet come to my sister's knowledge that we have found it out, but we have. We had a plan, Mr Headstone and I, for my sister's education, and for its being advised and overlooked by Mr Headstone, who is a much more competent authority, whatever you may pretend to think, as you smoke, than you could produce, if you tried. Then, what do we find? What do we find, Mr Lightwood?

Why, we find that my sister is already being taught, without our knowing it. We find that while my sister gives an unwilling and cold ear to our schemes for her advantage—I, her brother, and Mr Headstone, the most competent authority, as his certificates would easily prove, that could be produced—she is wilfully and willingly profiting by other schemes. Ay, and taking pains, too, for I know what such pains are. And so does Mr Headstone! Well! Somebody pays for this, is a thought that naturally occurs to us; who pays? We apply ourselves to find out, Mr Lightwood, and we find that your friend, this Mr Eugene Wrayburn, here, pays. Then I ask him what right has he to do it, and what does he mean by it, and how comes he to be taking such a liberty without my consent, when I am raising myself in the scale of society by my own exertions and Mr Headstone's aid, and have no right to have any darkness cast upon my prospects, or any imputation upon my respectability, through my sister?'

The boyish weakness of this speech, combined with its great selfishness, made it a poor one indeed. And yet Bradley Headstone, used to the little audience of a school, and unused to the larger ways of men, showed a kind of exultation in it.

'Now I tell Mr Eugene Wrayburn,' pursued the boy, forced into the use of the third person by the hopelessness of addressing him in the first, 'that I object to his having any acquaintance at all with my sister, and that I request him to drop it altogether. He is not to take it into his head that I am afraid of my sister's caring for HIM—'

(As the boy sneered, the Master sneered, and Eugene blew off the feathery ash again.)

—'But I object to it, and that's enough. I am more important to my sister than he thinks. As I raise myself, I intend to raise her; she knows that, and she has to look to me for her prospects. Now I understand all this very well, and so does Mr Headstone. My sister is an excellent girl, but she has some romantic notions; not about such things as your Mr Eugene Wrayburns, but about the death of my father and other matters of that sort. Mr Wrayburn encourages those notions to make himself of importance, and so she thinks she ought to be grateful to him, and perhaps even likes to be. Now I don't choose her to be grateful to him, or to be grateful to anybody but me, except Mr Headstone. And I tell Mr Wrayburn that if he don't take heed of what I say, it will be worse for her. Let him turn that over in his memory, and make sure of it. Worse for her!'

A pause ensued, in which the schoolmaster looked very awkward.

'May I suggest, Schoolmaster,' said Eugene, removing his fast-waning cigar from his lips to glance at it, 'that you can now take your pupil away.'

'And Mr Lightwood,' added the boy, with a burning face, under the flaming aggravation of getting no sort of answer or attention, 'I hope you'll take notice of what I have said to your friend, and of what your friend has heard me say, word by word, whatever he pretends to the contrary. You are bound to take notice of it, Mr Lightwood, for, as I have already mentioned, you first brought your friend into my sister's company, and but for you we never should have seen him. Lord knows none of us ever wanted him, any more than any of us will ever miss him. Now Mr Headstone, as Mr Eugene Wrayburn has been obliged to hear what I had to say, and couldn't help himself, and as I have said it out to the last word, we have done all we wanted to do, and may go.'

'Go down-stairs, and leave me a moment, Hexam,' he returned. The boy complying with an indignant look and as much noise as he could make, swung out of the room; and Lightwood went to the window, and leaned there, looking out.

'You think me of no more value than the dirt under your feet,' said Bradley to Eugene, speaking in a carefully weighed and measured tone, or he could not have spoken at all.

'I assure you, Schoolmaster,' replied Eugene, 'I don't think about you.'

'That's not true,' returned the other; 'you know better.'

'That's coarse,' Eugene retorted; 'but you DON'T know better.'

'Mr Wrayburn, at least I know very well that it would be idle to set myself against you in insolent words or overbearing manners. That lad who has just gone out could put you to shame in half-a-dozen branches of knowledge in half an hour, but you can throw him aside like an inferior. You can do as much by me, I have no doubt, beforehand.'

'Possibly,' remarked Eugene.

'But I am more than a lad,' said Bradley, with his clutching hand, 'and I WILL be heard, sir.'

'As a schoolmaster,' said Eugene, 'you are always being heard. That ought to content you.'

'But it does not content me,' replied the other, white with passion. 'Do you suppose that a man, in forming himself for the duties I discharge, and in watching and repressing himself daily to discharge them well, dismisses a man's nature?'

'I suppose you,' said Eugene, 'judging from what I see as I look at you, to be rather too passionate for a good schoolmaster.' As he spoke, he tossed away the end of his cigar.

'Passionate with you, sir, I admit I am. Passionate with you, sir, I respect myself for being. But I have not Devils for my pupils.'

'For your Teachers, I should rather say,' replied Eugene.

'Mr Wrayburn.'

'Schoolmaster.'

'Sir, my name is Bradley Headstone.'

'As you justly said, my good sir, your name cannot concern me. Now, what more?'

'This more. Oh, what a misfortune is mine,' cried Bradley, breaking off to wipe the starting perspiration from his face as he shook from head to foot, 'that I cannot so control myself as to appear a stronger creature than this, when a man who has not felt in all his life what I have felt in a day can so command himself!' He said it in a very agony, and even followed it with an errant motion of his hands as if he could have torn himself.

Eugene Wrayburn looked on at him, as if he found him beginning to be rather an entertaining study.

'Mr Wrayburn, I desire to say something to you on my own part.'

'Come, come, Schoolmaster,' returned Eugene, with a languid approach to impatience as the other again struggled with himself; 'say what you have to say. And let me remind you that the door is standing open, and your young friend waiting for you on the stairs.'

'When I accompanied that youth here, sir, I did so with the purpose of adding, as a man whom you should not be permitted to put aside, in case you put him aside as a boy, that his instinct is correct and right.' Thus Bradley Headstone, with great effort and difficulty.

'Is that all?' asked Eugene.

'No, sir,' said the other, flushed and fierce. 'I strongly support him in his disapproval of your visits to his sister, and in his objection to your officiousness—and worse—in what you have taken upon yourself to do for her.'

'Is THAT all?' asked Eugene.

'No, sir. I determined to tell you that you are not justified in these proceedings, and that they are injurious to his sister.'

'Are you her schoolmaster as well as her brother's?—Or perhaps you would like to be?' said Eugene.

It was a stab that the blood followed, in its rush to Bradley Headstone's face, as swiftly as if it had been dealt with a dagger. 'What do you mean by that?' was as much as he could utter.

'A natural ambition enough,' said Eugene, coolly. Far be it from me to say otherwise. The sister who is something too much upon your lips, perhaps—is so very different from all the associations to which she had been used, and from all the low obscure people about her, that it is a very natural ambition.'

'Do you throw my obscurity in my teeth, Mr Wrayburn?'

'That can hardly be, for I know nothing concerning it, Schoolmaster, and seek to know nothing.'

'You reproach me with my origin,' said Bradley Headstone; 'you cast insinuations at my bringing-up. But I tell you, sir, I have worked my way onward, out of both and in spite of both, and have a right to be considered a better man than you, with better reasons for being proud.'

'How I can reproach you with what is not within my knowledge, or how I can cast stones that were never in my hand, is a problem for the ingenuity of a schoolmaster to prove,' returned Eugene. 'Is THAT all?'

'No, sir. If you suppose that boy—'

'Who really will be tired of waiting,' said Eugene, politely.

'If you suppose that boy to be friendless, Mr Wrayburn, you deceive yourself. I am his friend, and you shall find me so.'

'And you will find HIM on the stairs,' remarked Eugene.

'You may have promised yourself, sir, that you could do what you chose here, because you had to deal with a mere boy, inexperienced, friendless, and unassisted. But I give you warning that this mean calculation is wrong. You have to do with a man also. You have to do with me. I will support him, and, if need be, require reparation for him. My hand and heart are in this cause, and are open to him.'

'And—quite a coincidence—the door is open,' remarked Eugene.

'I scorn your shifty evasions, and I scorn you,' said the schoolmaster. 'In the meanness of your nature you revile me with the meanness of my birth. I hold you in contempt for it. But if you don't profit by this visit, and act accordingly, you will find me as bitterly in earnest against you as I could be if I deemed you worth a second thought on my own account.'

With a consciously bad grace and stiff manner, as Wrayburn looked so easily and calmly on, he went out with these words, and the heavy door closed like a furnace-door upon his red and white heats of rage.

'A curious monomaniac,' said Eugene. 'The man seems to believe that everybody was acquainted with his mother!'

Mortimer Lightwood being still at the window, to which he had in delicacy withdrawn, Eugene called to him, and he fell to slowly pacing the room.

'My dear fellow,' said Eugene, as he lighted another cigar, 'I fear my unexpected visitors have been troublesome. If as a set-off (excuse the legal phrase from a barrister-at-law) you would like to ask Tippins to tea, I pledge myself to make love to her.'

'Eugene, Eugene, Eugene,' replied Mortimer, still pacing the room, 'I am sorry for this. And to think that I have been so blind!'

'How blind, dear boy?' inquired his unmoved friend.

'What were your words that night at the river-side public-house?' said Lightwood, stopping. 'What was it that you asked me? Did I feel like a dark combination of traitor and pickpocket when I thought of that girl?'

'I seem to remember the expression,' said Eugene.

'How do YOU feel when you think of her just now?'

His friend made no direct reply, but observed, after a few whiffs of his cigar, 'Don't mistake the situation. There is no better girl in all this London than Lizzie Hexam. There is no better among my people at home; no better among your people.'

'Granted. What follows?'

'There,' said Eugene, looking after him dubiously as he paced away to the other end of the room, 'you put me again upon guessing the riddle that I have given up.'

'Eugene, do you design to capture and desert this girl?'

'My dear fellow, no.'

'Do you design to marry her?'

'My dear fellow, no.'

'Do you design to pursue her?'

'My dear fellow, I don't design anything. I have no design whatever. I am incapable of designs. If I conceived a design, I should speedily abandon it, exhausted by the operation.'

'Oh Eugene, Eugene!'

'My dear Mortimer, not that tone of melancholy reproach, I entreat. What can I do more than tell you all I know, and acknowledge my ignorance of all I don't know! How does that little old song go, which, under pretence of being cheerful, is by far the most lugubrious I ever heard in my life?

"Away with melancholy,
Nor doleful changes ring
On life and human folly,
But merrily merrily sing
Fal la!"

Don't let us sing Fal la, my dear Mortimer (which is comparatively unmeaning), but let us sing that we give up guessing the riddle altogether.'

'Are you in communication with this girl, Eugene, and is what these people say true?'

'I concede both admissions to my honourable and learned friend.'

'Then what is to come of it? What are you doing? Where are you going?'

'My dear Mortimer, one would think the schoolmaster had left behind him a catechizing infection. You are ruffled by the want of another cigar. Take one of these, I entreat. Light it at mine, which is in perfect order. So! Now do me the justice to observe that I am doing all I can towards self-improvement, and that you have a light thrown on those household implements which, when you only saw them as in a glass darkly, you were hastily—I must say hastily—inclined to depreciate. Sensible of my deficiencies, I have surrounded myself with moral influences expressly meant to promote the formation of the domestic virtues. To those influences, and to the improving society of my friend from boyhood, commend me with your best wishes.'

'Ah, Eugene!' said Lightwood, affectionately, now standing near him, so that they both stood in one little cloud of smoke; 'I would that you answered my three questions! What is to come of it? What are you doing? Where are you going?'

'And my dear Mortimer,' returned Eugene, lightly fanning away the smoke with his hand for the better exposition of his frankness of face and manner, 'believe me, I would answer them instantly if I could. But to enable me to do so, I must first have found out the troublesome conundrum long abandoned. Here it is. Eugene Wrayburn.' Tapping his forehead and breast. 'Riddle-me, riddle-me-ree, perhaps you can't tell me what this may be?—No, upon my life I can't. I give it up!'

Chapter 7

IN WHICH A FRIENDLY MOVE IS ORIGINATED

The arrangement between Mr Boffin and his literary man, Mr Silas Wegg, so far altered with the altered habits of Mr Boffin's life, as that the Roman Empire usually declined in the morning and in the eminently aristocratic family mansion, rather than in the evening, as of yore, and in Boffin's Bower. There were occasions, however, when Mr Boffin, seeking a brief refuge from the blandishments of fashion, would present himself at the Bower after dark, to anticipate the next sallying forth of Wegg, and would there, on the old settle, pursue the downward fortunes of those enervated and corrupted masters of the world who were by this time on their last legs. If Wegg had been worse paid for his office, or better qualified to discharge it, he would have considered these visits complimentary and agreeable; but, holding the position of a handsomely-remunerated humbug, he resented them. This was quite according to rule, for the incompetent servant, by whomsoever employed, is always against his employer. Even those born governors, noble and right honourable creatures, who have been the most imbecile in high places, have uniformly shown themselves the most opposed (sometimes in belying distrust, sometimes in vapid insolence) to THEIR employer. What is in such wise true of the public master and servant, is equally true of the private master and servant all the world over.

When Mr Silas Wegg did at last obtain free access to 'Our House', as he had been wont to call the mansion outside which he had sat shelterless so long, and when he did at last find it in all particulars as different from his mental plans of it as according to the nature of things it well could be, that far-seeing and far-reaching character, by way of asserting himself and making out a case for compensation, affected to fall into a melancholy strain of musing over the mournful past; as if the house and he had had a fall in life together.

'And this, sir,' Silas would say to his patron, sadly nodding his head and musing, 'was once Our House! This, sir, is the building from which I have so often seen those great creatures, Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker'—whose very names were of his own inventing—'pass and repass! And has it come to this, indeed! Ah dear me, dear me!'

So tender were his lamentations, that the kindly Mr Boffin was quite sorry for him, and almost felt mistrustful that in buying the house he had done him an irreparable injury.

Two or three diplomatic interviews, the result of great subtlety on Mr Wegg's part, but assuming the mask of careless yielding to a fortuitous combination of circumstances impelling him towards Clerkenwell, had enabled him to complete his bargain with Mr Venus.

'Bring me round to the Bower,' said Silas, when the bargain was closed, 'next Saturday evening, and if a sociable glass of old Jamaikey warm should meet your views, I am not the man to begrudge it.'

'You are aware of my being poor company, sir,' replied Mr Venus, 'but be it so.'

It being so, here is Saturday evening come, and here is Mr Venus come, and ringing at the Bower-gate.

Mr Wegg opens the gate, descries a sort of brown paper truncheon under Mr Venus's arm, and remarks, in a dry tone: 'Oh! I thought perhaps you might have come in a cab.'

'No, Mr Wegg,' replies Venus. 'I am not above a parcel.'

'Above a parcel! No!' says Wegg, with some dissatisfaction. But does not openly growl, 'a certain sort of parcel might be above you.'

'Here is your purchase, Mr Wegg,' says Venus, politely handing it over, 'and I am glad to restore it to the source from whence it—flowed.'

'Thankee,' says Wegg. 'Now this affair is concluded, I may mention to you in a friendly way that I've my doubts whether, if I had consulted a lawyer, you could have kept this article back from me. I only throw it out as a legal point.'

'Do you think so, Mr Wegg? I bought you in open contract.'

'You can't buy human flesh and blood in this country, sir; not alive, you can't,' says Wegg, shaking his head. 'Then query, bone?'

'As a legal point?' asks Venus.

'As a legal point.'

'I am not competent to speak upon that, Mr Wegg,' says Venus, reddening and growing something louder; 'but upon a point of fact I think myself competent to speak; and as a point of fact I would have seen you—will you allow me to say, further?'

'I wouldn't say more than further, if I was you,' Mr Wegg suggests, pacifically.

—'Before I'd have given that packet into your hand without being paid my price for it. I don't pretend to know how the point of law may stand, but I'm thoroughly confident upon the point of fact.'

As Mr Venus is irritable (no doubt owing to his disappointment in love), and as it is not the cue of Mr Wegg to have him out of temper, the latter gentleman soothingly remarks, 'I only put it as a little case; I only put it ha'porthetically.'

'Then I'd rather, Mr Wegg, you put it another time, penn'orth-etically,' is Mr Venus's retort, 'for I tell you candidly I don't like your little cases.'

Arrived by this time in Mr Wegg's sitting-room, made bright on the chilly evening by gaslight and fire, Mr Venus softens and compliments him on his abode; profiting by the occasion to remind Wegg that he (Venus) told him he had got into a good thing.

'Tolerable,' Wegg rejoins. 'But bear in mind, Mr Venus, that there's no gold without its alloy. Mix for yourself and take a seat in the chimbley-corner. Will you perform upon a pipe, sir?'

'I am but an indifferent performer, sir,' returns the other; 'but I'll accompany you with a whiff or two at intervals.'

So, Mr Venus mixes, and Wegg mixes; and Mr Venus lights and puffs, and Wegg lights and puffs.

'And there's alloy even in this metal of yours, Mr Wegg, you was remarking?'

'Mystery,' returns Wegg. 'I don't like it, Mr Venus. I don't like to have the life knocked out of former inhabitants of this house, in the gloomy dark, and not know who did it.'

'Might you have any suspicions, Mr Wegg?'

'No,' returns that gentleman. 'I know who profits by it. But I've no suspicions.'

Having said which, Mr Wegg smokes and looks at the fire with a most determined expression of Charity; as if he had caught that cardinal virtue by the skirts as she felt it her painful duty to depart from him, and held her by main force.

'Similarly,' resumes Wegg, 'I have observations as I can offer upon certain points and parties; but I make no objections, Mr Venus. Here is an immense fortune drops from the clouds upon a person that shall be nameless. Here is a weekly allowance, with a certain weight of coals, drops from the clouds upon me. Which of us is the better man? Not the person that shall be nameless. That's an observation of mine, but I don't make it an objection. I take my allowance and my certain weight of coals. He takes his fortune. That's the way it works.'

'It would be a good thing for me, if I could see things in the calm light you do, Mr Wegg.'

'Again look here,' pursues Silas, with an oratorical flourish of his pipe and his wooden leg: the latter having an undignified tendency to tilt him back in his chair; 'here's another observation, Mr Venus, unaccompanied with an objection. Him that shall be nameless is liable to be talked over. He gets talked over. Him that shall be nameless, having me at his right hand, naturally looking to be promoted higher, and you may perhaps say meriting to be promoted higher—'

(Mr Venus murmurs that he does say so.)

'—Him that shall be nameless, under such circumstances passes me by, and puts a talking-over stranger above my head. Which of us two is the better man? Which of us two can repeat most poetry? Which of us two has, in the service of him that shall be nameless, tackled the Romans, both civil and military, till he has got as husky as if he'd been weaned and ever since brought up on sawdust? Not the talking-over stranger. Yet the house is as free to him as if it was his, and he has his room, and is put upon a footing, and draws about a thousand a year. I am banished to the Bower, to be found in it like a piece of furniture whenever wanted. Merit, therefore, don't win. That's the way it works. I observe it, because I can't help observing it, being accustomed to take a powerful sight of notice; but I don't object. Ever here before, Mr Venus?'

'Not inside the gate, Mr Wegg.'

'You've been as far as the gate then, Mr Venus?'

'Yes, Mr Wegg, and peeped in from curiosity.'

'Did you see anything?'

'Nothing but the dust-yard.'

Mr Wegg rolls his eyes all round the room, in that ever unsatisfied quest of his, and then rolls his eyes all round Mr Venus; as if suspicious of his having something about him to be found out.

'And yet, sir,' he pursues, 'being acquainted with old Mr Harmon, one would have thought it might have been polite in you, too, to give him a call. And you're naturally of a polite disposition, you are.' This last clause as a softening compliment to Mr Venus.

'It is true, sir,' replies Venus, winking his weak eyes, and running his fingers through his dusty shock of hair, 'that I was so, before a certain observation soured me. You understand to what I allude, Mr Wegg? To a certain written statement respecting not wishing to be regarded in a certain light. Since that, all is fled, save gall.'

'Not all,' says Mr Wegg, in a tone of sentimental condolence.

'Yes, sir,' returns Venus, 'all! The world may deem it harsh, but I'd quite as soon pitch into my best friend as not. Indeed, I'd sooner!'

Involuntarily making a pass with his wooden leg to guard himself as Mr Venus springs up in the emphasis of this unsociable declaration, Mr Wegg tilts over on his back, chair and all, and is rescued by that harmless misanthrope, in a disjointed state and ruefully rubbing his head.

'Why, you lost your balance, Mr Wegg,' says Venus, handing him his pipe.

'And about time to do it,' grumbles Silas, 'when a man's visitors, without a word of notice, conduct themselves with the sudden wiciousness of Jacks-in-boxes! Don't come flying out of your chair like that, Mr Venus!'

'I ask your pardon, Mr Wegg. I am so soured.'

'Yes, but hang it,' says Wegg argumentatively, 'a well-governed mind can be soured sitting! And as to being regarded in lights, there's bumpey lights as well as bony. IN which,' again rubbing his head, 'I object to regard myself.'

'I'll bear it in memory, sir.'

'If you'll be so good.' Mr Wegg slowly subdues his ironical tone and his lingering irritation, and resumes his pipe. 'We were talking of old Mr Harmon being a friend of yours.'

'Not a friend, Mr Wegg. Only known to speak to, and to have a little deal with now and then. A very inquisitive character, Mr Wegg, regarding what was found in the dust. As inquisitive as secret.'

'Ah! You found him secret?' returns Wegg, with a greedy relish.

'He had always the look of it, and the manner of it.'

'Ah!' with another roll of his eyes. 'As to what was found in the dust now. Did you ever hear him mention how he found it, my dear friend? Living on the mysterious premises, one would like to know. For instance, where he found things? Or, for instance, how he set about it? Whether he began at the top of the mounds, or whether he began at the bottom. Whether he prodded'; Mr Wegg's pantomime is skilful and expressive here; 'or whether he scooped? Should you say scooped, my dear Mr Venus; or should you as a man—say prodded?'

'I should say neither, Mr Wegg.'

'As a fellow-man, Mr Venus—mix again—why neither?'

'Because I suppose, sir, that what was found, was found in the sorting and sifting. All the mounds are sorted and sifted?'

'You shall see 'em and pass your opinion. Mix again.'

On each occasion of his saying 'mix again', Mr Wegg, with a hop on his wooden leg, hitches his chair a little nearer; more as if he were proposing that himself and Mr Venus should mix again, than that they should replenish their glasses.

'Living (as I said before) on the mysterious premises,' says Wegg when the other has acted on his hospitable entreaty, 'one likes to know. Would you be inclined to say now—as a brother—that he ever hid things in the dust, as well as found 'em?'

'Mr Wegg, on the whole I should say he might.'

Mr Wegg claps on his spectacles, and admiringly surveys Mr Venus from head to foot.

'As a mortal equally with myself, whose hand I take in mine for the first time this day, having unaccountably overlooked that act so full of boundless confidence binding a fellow-creetur TO a fellow creetur,' says Wegg, holding Mr Venus's palm out, flat and ready for smiting, and now smiting it; 'as such—and no other—for I scorn all lowlier ties betwixt myself and the man walking with his face erect that alone I call my Twin—regarded and regarding in this trustful bond—what do you think he might have hid?'

'It is but a supposition, Mr Wegg.'

'As a Being with his hand upon his heart,' cries Wegg; and the apostrophe is not the less impressive for the Being's hand being actually upon his rum and water; 'put your supposition into language, and bring it out, Mr Venus!'

'He was the species of old gentleman, sir,' slowly returns that practical anatomist, after drinking, 'that I should judge likely to take such opportunities as this place offered, of stowing away money, valuables, maybe papers.'

'As one that was ever an ornament to human life,' says Mr Wegg, again holding out Mr Venus's palm as if he were going to tell his fortune by chiromancy, and holding his own up ready for smiting it when the time should come; 'as one that the poet might have had his eye on, in writing the national naval words:

Helm a-weather, now lay her close,
       Yard arm and yard arm she lies;
Again, cried I, Mr Venus, give her t'other dose,
       Man shrouds and grapple, sir, or she flies!

—that is to say, regarded in the light of true British Oak, for such you are explain, Mr Venus, the expression "papers"!'

'Seeing that the old gentleman was generally cutting off some near relation, or blocking out some natural affection,' Mr Venus rejoins, 'he most likely made a good many wills and codicils.'

The palm of Silas Wegg descends with a sounding smack upon the palm of Venus, and Wegg lavishly exclaims, 'Twin in opinion equally with feeling! Mix a little more!'

Having now hitched his wooden leg and his chair close in front of Mr Venus, Mr Wegg rapidly mixes for both, gives his visitor his glass, touches its rim with the rim of his own, puts his own to his lips, puts it down, and spreading his hands on his visitor's knees thus addresses him:

'Mr Venus. It ain't that I object to being passed over for a stranger, though I regard the stranger as a more than doubtful customer. It ain't for the sake of making money, though money is ever welcome. It ain't for myself, though I am not so haughty as to be above doing myself a good turn. It's for the cause of the right.'

Mr Venus, passively winking his weak eyes both at once, demands: 'What is, Mr Wegg?'

'The friendly move, sir, that I now propose. You see the move, sir?'

'Till you have pointed it out, Mr Wegg, I can't say whether I do or not.'

'If there IS anything to be found on these premises, let us find it together. Let us make the friendly move of agreeing to look for it together.

Let us make the friendly move of agreeing to share the profits of it equally betwixt us. In the cause of the right.' Thus Silas assuming a noble air.

'Then,' says Mr Venus, looking up, after meditating with his hair held in his hands, as if he could only fix his attention by fixing his head; 'if anything was to be unburied from under the dust, it would be kept a secret by you and me? Would that be it, Mr Wegg?'

'That would depend upon what it was, Mr Venus. Say it was money, or plate, or jewellery, it would be as much ours as anybody else's.'

Mr Venus rubs an eyebrow, interrogatively.

'In the cause of the right it would. Because it would be unknowingly sold with the mounds else, and the buyer would get what he was never meant to have, and never bought. And what would that be, Mr Venus, but the cause of the wrong?'

'Say it was papers,' Mr Venus propounds.

'According to what they contained we should offer to dispose of 'em to the parties most interested,' replies Wegg, promptly.

'In the cause of the right, Mr Wegg?'

'Always so, Mr Venus. If the parties should use them in the cause of the wrong, that would be their act and deed. Mr Venus. I have an opinion of you, sir, to which it is not easy to give mouth. Since I called upon you that evening when you were, as I may say, floating your powerful mind in tea, I have felt that you required to be roused with an object. In this friendly move, sir, you will have a glorious object to rouse you.'

Mr Wegg then goes on to enlarge upon what throughout has been uppermost in his crafty mind:—the qualifications of Mr Venus for such a search. He expatiates on Mr Venus's patient habits and delicate manipulation; on his skill in piecing little things together; on his knowledge of various tissues and textures; on the likelihood of small indications leading him on to the discovery of great concealments. 'While as to myself,' says Wegg, 'I am not good at it. Whether I gave myself up to prodding, or whether I gave myself up to scooping, I couldn't do it with that delicate touch so as not to show that I was disturbing the mounds. Quite different with YOU, going to work (as YOU would) in the light of a fellow-man, holily pledged in a friendly move to his brother man.' Mr Wegg next modestly remarks on the want of adaptation in a wooden leg to ladders and such like airy perches, and also hints at an inherent tendency in that timber fiction, when called into action for the purposes of a promenade on an ashey slope, to stick itself into the yielding foothold, and peg its owner to one spot. Then, leaving this part of the subject, he remarks on the special phenomenon that before his installation in the Bower, it was from Mr Venus that he first heard of the legend of hidden wealth in the Mounds: 'which', he observes with a vaguely pious air, 'was surely never meant for nothing.' Lastly, he returns to the cause of the right, gloomily foreshadowing the possibility of something being unearthed to criminate Mr Boffin (of whom he once more candidly admits it cannot be denied that he profits by a murder), and anticipating his denunciation by the friendly movers to avenging justice. And this, Mr Wegg expressly points out, not at all for the sake of the reward—though it would be a want of principle not to take it.

To all this, Mr Venus, with his shock of dusty hair cocked after the manner of a terrier's ears, attends profoundly. When Mr Wegg, having finished, opens his arms wide, as if to show Mr Venus how bare his breast is, and then folds them pending a reply, Mr Venus winks at him with both eyes some little time before speaking.

'I see you have tried it by yourself, Mr Wegg,' he says when he does speak. 'You have found out the difficulties by experience.'

'No, it can hardly be said that I have tried it,' replies Wegg, a little dashed by the hint. 'I have just skimmed it. Skimmed it.'

'And found nothing besides the difficulties?'

Wegg shakes his head.

'I scarcely know what to say to this, Mr Wegg,' observes Venus, after ruminating for a while.

'Say yes,' Wegg naturally urges.

'If I wasn't soured, my answer would be no. But being soured, Mr Wegg, and driven to reckless madness and desperation, I suppose it's Yes.'

Wegg joyfully reproduces the two glasses, repeats the ceremony of clinking their rims, and inwardly drinks with great heartiness to the health and success in life of the young lady who has reduced Mr Venus to his present convenient state of mind.

The articles of the friendly move are then severally recited and agreed upon. They are but secrecy, fidelity, and perseverance. The Bower to be always free of access to Mr Venus for his researches, and every precaution to be taken against their attracting observation in the neighbourhood.

'There's a footstep!' exclaims Venus.

'Where?' cries Wegg, starting.

'Outside. St!'

They are in the act of ratifying the treaty of friendly move, by shaking hands upon it. They softly break off, light their pipes which have gone out, and lean back in their chairs. No doubt, a footstep. It approaches the window, and a hand taps at the glass. 'Come in!' calls Wegg; meaning come round by the door. But the heavy old-fashioned sash is slowly raised, and a head slowly looks in out of the dark background of night.

'Pray is Mr Silas Wegg here? Oh! I see him!'

The friendly movers might not have been quite at their ease, even though the visitor had entered in the usual manner. But, leaning on the breast-high window, and staring in out of the darkness, they find the visitor extremely embarrassing. Especially Mr Venus: who removes his pipe, draws back his head, and stares at the starer, as if it were his own Hindoo baby come to fetch him home.

'Good evening, Mr Wegg. The yard gate-lock should be looked to, if you please; it don't catch.'

'Is it Mr Rokesmith?' falters Wegg.

'It is Mr Rokesmith. Don't let me disturb you. I am not coming in. I have only a message for you, which I undertook to deliver on my way home to my lodgings. I was in two minds about coming beyond the gate without ringing: not knowing but you might have a dog about.'

'I wish I had,' mutters Wegg, with his back turned as he rose from his chair. St! Hush! The talking-over stranger, Mr Venus.'

'Is that any one I know?' inquires the staring Secretary.

'No, Mr Rokesmith. Friend of mine. Passing the evening with me.'

'Oh! I beg his pardon. Mr Boffin wishes you to know that he does not expect you to stay at home any evening, on the chance of his coming. It has occurred to him that he may, without intending it, have been a tie upon you. In future, if he should come without notice, he will take his chance of finding you, and it will be all the same to him if he does not. I undertook to tell you on my way. That's all.'

With that, and 'Good night,' the Secretary lowers the window, and disappears. They listen, and hear his footsteps go back to the gate, and hear the gate close after him.

'And for that individual, Mr Venus,' remarks Wegg, when he is fully gone, 'I have been passed over! Let me ask you what you think of him?'

Apparently, Mr Venus does not know what to think of him, for he makes sundry efforts to reply, without delivering himself of any other articulate utterance than that he has 'a singular look'.

'A double look, you mean, sir,' rejoins Wegg, playing bitterly upon the word. 'That's HIS look. Any amount of singular look for me, but not a double look! That's an under-handed mind, sir.'

'Do you say there's something against him?' Venus asks.

'Something against him?' repeats Wegg. 'Something? What would the relief be to my feelings—as a fellow-man—if I wasn't the slave of truth, and didn't feel myself compelled to answer, Everything!'

See into what wonderful maudlin refuges, featherless ostriches plunge their heads! It is such unspeakable moral compensation to Wegg, to be overcome by the consideration that Mr Rokesmith has an underhanded mind!

'On this starlight night, Mr Venus,' he remarks, when he is showing that friendly mover out across the yard, and both are something the worse for mixing again and again: 'on this starlight night to think that talking-over strangers, and underhanded minds, can go walking home under the sky, as if they was all square!'

'The spectacle of those orbs,' says Mr Venus, gazing upward with his hat tumbling off; 'brings heavy on me her crushing words that she did not wish to regard herself nor yet to be regarded in that—'

'I know! I know! You needn't repeat 'em,' says Wegg, pressing his hand. 'But think how those stars steady me in the cause of the right against some that shall be nameless. It isn't that I bear malice. But see how they glisten with old remembrances! Old remembrances of what, sir?'

Mr Venus begins drearily replying, 'Of her words, in her own handwriting, that she does not wish to regard herself, nor yet—' when Silas cuts him short with dignity.

'No, sir! Remembrances of Our House, of Master George, of Aunt Jane, of Uncle Parker, all laid waste! All offered up sacrifices to the minion of fortune and the worm of the hour!'

Chapter 8

IN WHICH AN INNOCENT ELOPEMENT OCCURS

The minion of fortune and the worm of the hour, or in less cutting language, Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, the Golden Dustman, had become as much at home in his eminently aristocratic family mansion as he was likely ever to be. He could not but feel that, like an eminently aristocratic family cheese, it was much too large for his wants, and bred an infinite amount of parasites; but he was content to regard this drawback on his property as a sort of perpetual Legacy Duty. He felt the more resigned to it, forasmuch as Mrs Boffin enjoyed herself completely, and Miss Bella was delighted.

That young lady was, no doubt, an acquisition to the Boffins. She was far too pretty to be unattractive anywhere, and far too quick of perception to be below the tone of her new career. Whether it improved her heart might be a matter of taste that was open to question; but as touching another matter of taste, its improvement of her appearance and manner, there could be no question whatever.

And thus it soon came about that Miss Bella began to set Mrs Boffin right; and even further, that Miss Bella began to feel ill at ease, and as it were responsible, when she saw Mrs Boffin going wrong. Not that so sweet a disposition and so sound a nature could ever go very wrong even among the great visiting authorities who agreed that the Boffins were 'charmingly vulgar' (which for certain was not their own case in saying so), but that when she made a slip on the social ice on which all the children of Podsnappery, with genteel souls to be saved, are required to skate in circles, or to slide in long rows, she inevitably tripped Miss Bella up (so that young lady felt), and caused her to experience great confusion under the glances of the more skilful performers engaged in those ice-exercises.

At Miss Bella's time of life it was not to be expected that she should examine herself very closely on the congruity or stability of her position in Mr Boffin's house. And as she had never been sparing of complaints of her old home when she had no other to compare it with, so there was no novelty of ingratitude or disdain in her very much preferring her new one.

'An invaluable man is Rokesmith,' said Mr Boffin, after some two or three months. 'But I can't quite make him out.'

Neither could Bella, so she found the subject rather interesting.

'He takes more care of my affairs, morning, noon, and night,' said Mr Boffin, 'than fifty other men put together either could or would; and yet he has ways of his own that are like tying a scaffolding-pole right across the road, and bringing me up short when I am almost a-walking arm in arm with him.'

'May I ask how so, sir?' inquired Bella.

'Well, my dear,' said Mr Boffin, 'he won't meet any company here, but you. When we have visitors, I should wish him to have his regular place at the table like ourselves; but no, he won't take it.'

'If he considers himself above it,' said Miss Bella, with an airy toss of her head, 'I should leave him alone.'

'It ain't that, my dear,' replied Mr Boffin, thinking it over. 'He don't consider himself above it.'

'Perhaps he considers himself beneath it,' suggested Bella. 'If so, he ought to know best.'

'No, my dear; nor it ain't that, neither. No,' repeated Mr Boffin, with a shake of his head, after again thinking it over; 'Rokesmith's a modest man, but he don't consider himself beneath it.'

'Then what does he consider, sir?' asked Bella.

'Dashed if I know!' said Mr Boffin. 'It seemed at first as if it was only Lightwood that he objected to meet. And now it seems to be everybody, except you.'

Oho! thought Miss Bella. 'In—deed! That's it, is it!' For Mr Mortimer Lightwood had dined there two or three times, and she had met him elsewhere, and he had shown her some attention. 'Rather cool in a Secretary—and Pa's lodger—to make me the subject of his jealousy!'

That Pa's daughter should be so contemptuous of Pa's lodger was odd; but there were odder anomalies than that in the mind of the spoilt girl: spoilt first by poverty, and then by wealth. Be it this history's part, however, to leave them to unravel themselves.

'A little too much, I think,' Miss Bella reflected scornfully, 'to have Pa's lodger laying claim to me, and keeping eligible people off! A little too much, indeed, to have the opportunities opened to me by Mr and Mrs Boffin, appropriated by a mere Secretary and Pa's lodger!'

Yet it was not so very long ago that Bella had been fluttered by the discovery that this same Secretary and lodger seem to like her. Ah! but the eminently aristocratic mansion and Mrs Boffin's dressmaker had not come into play then.

In spite of his seemingly retiring manners a very intrusive person, this Secretary and lodger, in Miss Bella's opinion. Always a light in his office-room when we came home from the play or Opera, and he always at the carriage-door to hand us out. Always a provoking radiance too on Mrs Boffin's face, and an abominably cheerful reception of him, as if it were possible seriously to approve what the man had in his mind!

'You never charge me, Miss Wilfer,' said the Secretary, encountering her by chance alone in the great drawing-room, 'with commissions for home. I shall always be happy to execute any commands you may have in that direction.'

'Pray what may you mean, Mr Rokesmith?' inquired Miss Bella, with languidly drooping eyelids.

'By home? I mean your father's house at Holloway.'

She coloured under the retort—so skilfully thrust, that the words seemed to be merely a plain answer, given in plain good faith—and said, rather more emphatically and sharply:

'What commissions and commands are you speaking of?'

'Only little words of remembrance as I assume you sent somehow or other,' replied the Secretary with his former air. 'It would be a pleasure to me if you would make me the bearer of them. As you know, I come and go between the two houses every day.'

'You needn't remind me of that, sir.'

She was too quick in this petulant sally against 'Pa's lodger'; and she felt that she had been so when she met his quiet look.

'They don't send many—what was your expression?—words of remembrance to me,' said Bella, making haste to take refuge in ill-usage.

'They frequently ask me about you, and I give them such slight intelligence as I can.'

'I hope it's truly given,' exclaimed Bella.

'I hope you cannot doubt it, for it would be very much against you, if you could.'

'No, I do not doubt it. I deserve the reproach, which is very just indeed. I beg your pardon, Mr Rokesmith.'

'I should beg you not to do so, but that it shows you to such admirable advantage,' he replied with earnestness. 'Forgive me; I could not help saying that. To return to what I have digressed from, let me add that perhaps they think I report them to you, deliver little messages, and the like. But I forbear to trouble you, as you never ask me.'

'I am going, sir,' said Bella, looking at him as if he had reproved her, 'to see them tomorrow.'

'Is that,' he asked, hesitating, 'said to me, or to them?'

'To which you please.'

'To both? Shall I make it a message?'

'You can if you like, Mr Rokesmith. Message or no message, I am going to see them tomorrow.'

'Then I will tell them so.'

He lingered a moment, as though to give her the opportunity of prolonging the conversation if she wished. As she remained silent, he left her. Two incidents of the little interview were felt by Miss Bella herself, when alone again, to be very curious. The first was, that he unquestionably left her with a penitent air upon her, and a penitent feeling in her heart. The second was, that she had not an intention or a thought of going home, until she had announced it to him as a settled design.

'What can I mean by it, or what can he mean by it?' was her mental inquiry: 'He has no right to any power over me, and how do I come to mind him when I don't care for him?'

Mrs Boffin, insisting that Bella should make tomorrow's expedition in the chariot, she went home in great grandeur. Mrs Wilfer and Miss Lavinia had speculated much on the probabilities and improbabilities of her coming in this gorgeous state, and, on beholding the chariot from the window at which they were secreted to look out for it, agreed that it must be detained at the door as long as possible, for the mortification and confusion of the neighbours. Then they repaired to the usual family room, to receive Miss Bella with a becoming show of indifference.

The family room looked very small and very mean, and the downward staircase by which it was attained looked very narrow and very crooked. The little house and all its arrangements were a poor contrast to the eminently aristocratic dwelling. 'I can hardly believe, thought Bella, that I ever did endure life in this place!'

Gloomy majesty on the part of Mrs Wilfer, and native pertness on the part of Lavvy, did not mend the matter. Bella really stood in natural need of a little help, and she got none.

'This,' said Mrs Wilfer, presenting a cheek to be kissed, as sympathetic and responsive as the back of the bowl of a spoon, 'is quite an honour! You will probably find your sister Lavvy grown, Bella.'

'Ma,' Miss Lavinia interposed, 'there can be no objection to your being aggravating, because Bella richly deserves it; but I really must request that you will not drag in such ridiculous nonsense as my having grown when I am past the growing age.'

'I grew, myself,' Mrs Wilfer sternly proclaimed, 'after I was married.'

'Very well, Ma,' returned Lavvy, 'then I think you had much better have left it alone.'

The lofty glare with which the majestic woman received this answer, might have embarrassed a less pert opponent, but it had no effect upon Lavinia: who, leaving her parent to the enjoyment of any amount of glaring at she might deem desirable under the circumstances, accosted her sister, undismayed.

'I suppose you won't consider yourself quite disgraced, Bella, if I give you a kiss? Well! And how do you do, Bella? And how are your Boffins?'

'Peace!' exclaimed Mrs Wilfer. 'Hold! I will not suffer this tone of levity.'

'My goodness me! How are your Spoffins, then?' said Lavvy, 'since Ma so very much objects to your Boffins.'

'Impertinent girl! Minx!' said Mrs Wilfer, with dread severity.

'I don't care whether I am a Minx, or a Sphinx,' returned Lavinia, coolly, tossing her head; 'it's exactly the same thing to me, and I'd every bit as soon be one as the other; but I know this—I'll not grow after I'm married!'

'You will not? YOU will not?' repeated Mrs Wilfer, solemnly.

'No, Ma, I will not. Nothing shall induce me.'

Mrs Wilfer, having waved her gloves, became loftily pathetic.

'But it was to be expected;' thus she spake. 'A child of mine deserts me for the proud and prosperous, and another child of mine despises me. It is quite fitting.'

'Ma,' Bella struck in, 'Mr and Mrs Boffin are prosperous, no doubt; but you have no right to say they are proud. You must know very well that they are not.'

'In short, Ma,' said Lavvy, bouncing over to the enemy without a word of notice, you must know very well—or if you don't, more shame for you!—that Mr and Mrs Boffin are just absolute perfection.'

'Truly,' returned Mrs Wilfer, courteously receiving the deserter, it would seem that we are required to think so. And this, Lavinia, is my reason for objecting to a tone of levity. Mrs Boffin (of whose physiognomy I can never speak with the composure I would desire to preserve), and your mother, are not on terms of intimacy. It is not for a moment to be supposed that she and her husband dare to presume to speak of this family as the Wilfers. I cannot therefore condescend to speak of them as the Boffins. No; for such a tone—call it familiarity, levity, equality, or what you will—would imply those social interchanges which do not exist. Do I render myself intelligible?'

Without taking the least notice of this inquiry, albeit delivered in an imposing and forensic manner, Lavinia reminded her sister, 'After all, you know, Bella, you haven't told us how your Whatshisnames are.'

'I don't want to speak of them here,' replied Bella, suppressing indignation, and tapping her foot on the floor. 'They are much too kind and too good to be drawn into these discussions.'

'Why put it so?' demanded Mrs Wilfer, with biting sarcasm. 'Why adopt a circuitous form of speech? It is polite and it is obliging; but why do it? Why not openly say that they are much too kind and too good for US? We understand the allusion. Why disguise the phrase?'

'Ma,' said Bella, with one beat of her foot, 'you are enough to drive a saint mad, and so is Lavvy.'

'Unfortunate Lavvy!' cried Mrs Wilfer, in a tone of commiseration. 'She always comes for it. My poor child!' But Lavvy, with the suddenness of her former desertion, now bounced over to the other enemy: very sharply remarking, 'Don't patronize ME, Ma, because I can take care of myself.'

'I only wonder,' resumed Mrs Wilfer, directing her observations to her elder daughter, as safer on the whole than her utterly unmanageable younger, 'that you found time and inclination to tear yourself from Mr and Mrs Boffin, and come to see us at all. I only wonder that our claims, contending against the superior claims of Mr and Mrs Boffin, had any weight. I feel I ought to be thankful for gaining so much, in competition with Mr and Mrs Boffin.' (The good lady bitterly emphasized the first letter of the word Boffin, as if it represented her chief objection to the owners of that name, and as if she could have born Doffin, Moffin, or Poffin much better.)

'Ma,' said Bella, angrily, 'you force me to say that I am truly sorry I did come home, and that I never will come home again, except when poor dear Pa is here. For, Pa is too magnanimous to feel envy and spite towards my generous friends, and Pa is delicate enough and gentle enough to remember the sort of little claim they thought I had upon them and the unusually trying position in which, through no act of my own, I had been placed. And I always did love poor dear Pa better than all the rest of you put together, and I always do and I always shall!'

Here Bella, deriving no comfort from her charming bonnet and her elegant dress, burst into tears.

'I think, R.W.,' cried Mrs Wilfer, lifting up her eyes and apostrophising the air, 'that if you were present, it would be a trial to your feelings to hear your wife and the mother of your family depreciated in your name. But Fate has spared you this, R.W., whatever it may have thought proper to inflict upon her!'

Here Mrs Wilfer burst into tears.

'I hate the Boffins!' protested Miss Lavinia. I don't care who objects to their being called the Boffins. I WILL call 'em the Boffins. The Boffins, the Boffins, the Boffins! And I say they are mischief-making Boffins, and I say the Boffins have set Bella against me, and I tell the Boffins to their faces:' which was not strictly the fact, but the young lady was excited: 'that they are detestable Boffins, disreputable Boffins, odious Boffins, beastly Boffins. There!'

Here Miss Lavinia burst into tears.

The front garden-gate clanked, and the Secretary was seen coming at a brisk pace up the steps. 'Leave Me to open the door to him,' said Mrs Wilfer, rising with stately resignation as she shook her head and dried her eyes; 'we have at present no stipendiary girl to do so. We have nothing to conceal. If he sees these traces of emotion on our cheeks, let him construe them as he may.'

With those words she stalked out. In a few moments she stalked in again, proclaiming in her heraldic manner, 'Mr Rokesmith is the bearer of a packet for Miss Bella Wilfer.'

Mr Rokesmith followed close upon his name, and of course saw what was amiss. But he discreetly affected to see nothing, and addressed Miss Bella.

'Mr Boffin intended to have placed this in the carriage for you this morning. He wished you to have it, as a little keepsake he had prepared—it is only a purse, Miss Wilfer—but as he was disappointed in his fancy, I volunteered to come after you with it.'

Bella took it in her hand, and thanked him.

'We have been quarrelling here a little, Mr Rokesmith, but not more than we used; you know our agreeable ways among ourselves. You find me just going. Good-bye, mamma. Good-bye, Lavvy!' and with a kiss for each Miss Bella turned to the door. The Secretary would have attended her, but Mrs Wilfer advancing and saying with dignity, 'Pardon me! Permit me to assert my natural right to escort my child to the equipage which is in waiting for her,' he begged pardon and gave place. It was a very magnificent spectacle indeed, too see Mrs Wilfer throw open the house-door, and loudly demand with extended gloves, 'The male domestic of Mrs Boffin!' To whom presenting himself, she delivered the brief but majestic charge, 'Miss Wilfer. Coming out!' and so delivered her over, like a female Lieutenant of the Tower relinquishing a State Prisoner. The effect of this ceremonial was for some quarter of an hour afterwards perfectly paralyzing on the neighbours, and was much enhanced by the worthy lady airing herself for that term in a kind of splendidly serene trance on the top step.

When Bella was seated in the carriage, she opened the little packet in her hand. It contained a pretty purse, and the purse contained a bank note for fifty pounds. 'This shall be a joyful surprise for poor dear Pa,' said Bella, 'and I'll take it myself into the City!'

As she was uninformed respecting the exact locality of the place of business of Chicksey Veneering and Stobbles, but knew it to be near Mincing Lane, she directed herself to be driven to the corner of that darksome spot. Thence she despatched 'the male domestic of Mrs Boffin,' in search of the counting-house of Chicksey Veneering and Stobbles, with a message importing that if R. Wilfer could come out, there was a lady waiting who would be glad to speak with him. The delivery of these mysterious words from the mouth of a footman caused so great an excitement in the counting-house, that a youthful scout was instantly appointed to follow Rumty, observe the lady, and come in with his report.

Nor was the agitation by any means diminished, when the scout rushed back with the intelligence that the lady was 'a slap-up gal in a bang-up chariot.'

Rumty himself, with his pen behind his ear under his rusty hat, arrived at the carriage-door in a breathless condition, and had been fairly lugged into the vehicle by his cravat and embraced almost unto choking, before he recognized his daughter. 'My dear child!' he then panted, incoherently. 'Good gracious me! What a lovely woman you are! I thought you had been unkind and forgotten your mother and sister.'

'I have just been to see them, Pa dear.'

'Oh! and how—how did you find your mother?' asked R. W., dubiously.

'Very disagreeable, Pa, and so was Lavvy.'

'They are sometimes a little liable to it,' observed the patient cherub; 'but I hope you made allowances, Bella, my dear?'

'No. I was disagreeable too, Pa; we were all of us disagreeable together. But I want you to come and dine with me somewhere, Pa.'

'Why, my dear, I have already partaken of a—if one might mention such an article in this superb chariot—of a—Saveloy,' replied R. Wilfer, modestly dropping his voice on the word, as he eyed the canary-coloured fittings.

'Oh! That's nothing, Pa!'

'Truly, it ain't as much as one could sometimes wish it to be, my dear,' he admitted, drawing his hand across his mouth. 'Still, when circumstances over which you have no control, interpose obstacles between yourself and Small Germans, you can't do better than bring a contented mind to hear on'—again dropping his voice in deference to the chariot—'Saveloys!'

'You poor good Pa! Pa, do, I beg and pray, get leave for the rest of the day, and come and pass it with me!'

'Well, my dear, I'll cut back and ask for leave.'

'But before you cut back,' said Bella, who had already taken him by the chin, pulled his hat off, and begun to stick up his hair in her old way, 'do say that you are sure I am giddy and inconsiderate, but have never really slighted you, Pa.'

'My dear, I say it with all my heart. And might I likewise observe,' her father delicately hinted, with a glance out at window, 'that perhaps it might be calculated to attract attention, having one's hair publicly done by a lovely woman in an elegant turn-out in Fenchurch Street?'

Bella laughed and put on his hat again. But when his boyish figure bobbed away, its shabbiness and cheerful patience smote the tears out of her eyes. 'I hate that Secretary for thinking it of me,' she said to herself, 'and yet it seems half true!'

Back came her father, more like a boy than ever, in his release from school. 'All right, my dear. Leave given at once. Really very handsomely done!'

'Now where can we find some quiet place, Pa, in which I can wait for you while you go on an errand for me, if I send the carriage away?'

It demanded cogitation. 'You see, my dear,' he explained, 'you really have become such a very lovely woman, that it ought to be a very quiet place.' At length he suggested, 'Near the garden up by the Trinity House on Tower Hill.' So, they were driven there, and Bella dismissed the chariot; sending a pencilled note by it to Mrs Boffin, that she was with her father.

'Now, Pa, attend to what I am going to say, and promise and vow to be obedient.'

'I promise and vow, my dear.'

'You ask no questions. You take this purse; you go to the nearest place where they keep everything of the very very best, ready made; you buy and put on, the most beautiful suit of clothes, the most beautiful hat, and the most beautiful pair of bright boots (patent leather, Pa, mind!) that are to be got for money; and you come back to me.'

'But, my dear Bella—'

'Take care, Pa!' pointing her forefinger at him, merrily. 'You have promised and vowed. It's perjury, you know.'

There was water in the foolish little fellow's eyes, but she kissed them dry (though her own were wet), and he bobbed away again. After half an hour, he came back, so brilliantly transformed, that Bella was obliged to walk round him in ecstatic admiration twenty times, before she could draw her arm through his, and delightedly squeeze it.

'Now, Pa,' said Bella, hugging him close, 'take this lovely woman out to dinner.'

'Where shall we go, my dear?'

'Greenwich!' said Bella, valiantly. 'And be sure you treat this lovely woman with everything of the best.'

While they were going along to take boat, 'Don't you wish, my dear,' said R. W., timidly, 'that your mother was here?'

'No, I don't, Pa, for I like to have you all to myself to-day. I was always your little favourite at home, and you were always mine. We have run away together often, before now; haven't we, Pa?'

'Ah, to be sure we have! Many a Sunday when your mother was—was a little liable to it,' repeating his former delicate expression after pausing to cough.

'Yes, and I am afraid I was seldom or never as good as I ought to have been, Pa. I made you carry me, over and over again, when you should have made me walk; and I often drove you in harness, when you would much rather have sat down and read your news-paper: didn't I?'

'Sometimes, sometimes. But Lor, what a child you were! What a companion you were!'

'Companion? That's just what I want to be to-day, Pa.'

'You are safe to succeed, my love. Your brothers and sisters have all in their turns been companions to me, to a certain extent, but only to a certain extent. Your mother has, throughout life, been a companion that any man might—might look up to—and—and commit the sayings of, to memory—and—form himself upon—if he—'

'If he liked the model?' suggested Bella.

'We-ell, ye-es,' he returned, thinking about it, not quite satisfied with the phrase: 'or perhaps I might say, if it was in him. Supposing, for instance, that a man wanted to be always marching, he would find your mother an inestimable companion. But if he had any taste for walking, or should wish at any time to break into a trot, he might sometimes find it a little difficult to keep step with your mother. Or take it this way, Bella,' he added, after a moment's reflection; 'Supposing that a man had to go through life, we won't say with a companion, but we'll say to a tune. Very good. Supposing that the tune allotted to him was the Dead March in Saul. Well. It would be a very suitable tune for particular occasions—none better—but it would be difficult to keep time with in the ordinary run of domestic transactions. For instance, if he took his supper after a hard day, to the Dead March in Saul, his food might be likely to sit heavy on him. Or, if he was at any time inclined to relieve his mind by singing a comic song or dancing a hornpipe, and was obliged to do it to the Dead March in Saul, he might find himself put out in the execution of his lively intentions.'

'Poor Pa!' thought Bella, as she hung upon his arm.

'Now, what I will say for you, my dear,' the cherub pursued mildly and without a notion of complaining, 'is, that you are so adaptable. So adaptable.'

'Indeed I am afraid I have shown a wretched temper, Pa. I am afraid I have been very complaining, and very capricious. I seldom or never thought of it before. But when I sat in the carriage just now and saw you coming along the pavement, I reproached myself.'

'Not at all, my dear. Don't speak of such a thing.'

A happy and a chatty man was Pa in his new clothes that day. Take it for all in all, it was perhaps the happiest day he had ever known in his life; not even excepting that on which his heroic partner had approached the nuptial altar to the tune of the Dead March in Saul.

The little expedition down the river was delightful, and the little room overlooking the river into which they were shown for dinner was delightful. Everything was delightful. The park was delightful, the punch was delightful, the dishes of fish were delightful, the wine was delightful. Bella was more delightful than any other item in the festival; drawing Pa out in the gayest manner; making a point of always mentioning herself as the lovely woman; stimulating Pa to order things, by declaring that the lovely woman insisted on being treated with them; and in short causing Pa to be quite enraptured with the consideration that he WAS the Pa of such a charming daughter.

And then, as they sat looking at the ships and steamboats making their way to the sea with the tide that was running down, the lovely woman imagined all sorts of voyages for herself and Pa. Now, Pa, in the character of owner of a lumbering square-sailed collier, was tacking away to Newcastle, to fetch black diamonds to make his fortune with; now, Pa was going to China in that handsome threemasted ship, to bring home opium, with which he would for ever cut out Chicksey Veneering and Stobbles, and to bring home silks and shawls without end for the decoration of his charming daughter. Now, John Harmon's disastrous fate was all a dream, and he had come home and found the lovely woman just the article for him, and the lovely woman had found him just the article for her, and they were going away on a trip, in their gallant bark, to look after their vines, with streamers flying at all points, a band playing on deck and Pa established in the great cabin. Now, John Harmon was consigned to his grave again, and a merchant of immense wealth (name unknown) had courted and married the lovely woman, and he was so enormously rich that everything you saw upon the river sailing or steaming belonged to him, and he kept a perfect fleet of yachts for pleasure, and that little impudent yacht which you saw over there, with the great white sail, was called The Bella, in honour of his wife, and she held her state aboard when it pleased her, like a modern Cleopatra. Anon, there would embark in that troop-ship when she got to Gravesend, a mighty general, of large property (name also unknown), who wouldn't hear of going to victory without his wife, and whose wife was the lovely woman, and she was destined to become the idol of all the red coats and blue jackets alow and aloft. And then again: you saw that ship being towed out by a steam-tug? Well! where did you suppose she was going to? She was going among the coral reefs and cocoa-nuts and all that sort of thing, and she was chartered for a fortunate individual of the name of Pa (himself on board, and much respected by all hands), and she was going, for his sole profit and advantage, to fetch a cargo of sweet-smelling woods, the most beautiful that ever were seen, and the most profitable that ever were heard of; and her cargo would be a great fortune, as indeed it ought to be: the lovely woman who had purchased her and fitted her expressly for this voyage, being married to an Indian Prince, who was a Something-or-Other, and who wore Cashmere shawls all over himself and diamonds and emeralds blazing in his turban, and was beautifully coffee-coloured and excessively devoted, though a little too jealous. Thus Bella ran on merrily, in a manner perfectly enchanting to Pa, who was as willing to put his head into the Sultan's tub of water as the beggar-boys below the window were to put THEIR heads in the mud.

'I suppose, my dear,' said Pa after dinner, 'we may come to the conclusion at home, that we have lost you for good?'

Bella shook her head. Didn't know. Couldn't say. All she was able to report was, that she was most handsomely supplied with everything she could possibly want, and that whenever she hinted at leaving Mr and Mrs Boffin, they wouldn't hear of it.

'And now, Pa,' pursued Bella, 'I'll make a confession to you. I am the most mercenary little wretch that ever lived in the world.'

'I should hardly have thought it of you, my dear,' returned her father, first glancing at himself; and then at the dessert.

'I understand what you mean, Pa, but it's not that. It's not that I care for money to keep as money, but I do care so much for what it will buy!'

'Really I think most of us do,' returned R. W.

'But not to the dreadful extent that I do, Pa. O-o!' cried Bella, screwing the exclamation out of herself with a twist of her dimpled chin. 'I AM so mercenary!'

With a wistful glance R. W. said, in default of having anything better to say: 'About when did you begin to feel it coming on, my dear?'

'That's it, Pa. That's the terrible part of it. When I was at home, and only knew what it was to be poor, I grumbled but didn't so much mind. When I was at home expecting to be rich, I thought vaguely of all the great things I would do. But when I had been disappointed of my splendid fortune, and came to see it from day to day in other hands, and to have before my eyes what it could really do, then I became the mercenary little wretch I am.'

'It's your fancy, my dear.'

'I can assure you it's nothing of the sort, Pa!' said Bella, nodding at him, with her very pretty eyebrows raised as high as they would go, and looking comically frightened. 'It's a fact. I am always avariciously scheming.'

'Lor! But how?'

'I'll tell you, Pa. I don't mind telling YOU, because we have always been favourites of each other's, and because you are not like a Pa, but more like a sort of a younger brother with a dear venerable chubbiness on him. And besides,' added Bella, laughing as she pointed a rallying finger at his face, 'because I have got you in my power. This is a secret expedition. If ever you tell of me, I'll tell of you. I'll tell Ma that you dined at Greenwich.'

'Well; seriously, my dear,' observed R. W., with some trepidation of manner, 'it might be as well not to mention it.'

'Aha!' laughed Bella. 'I knew you wouldn't like it, sir! So you keep my confidence, and I'll keep yours. But betray the lovely woman, and you shall find her a serpent. Now, you may give me a kiss, Pa, and I should like to give your hair a turn, because it has been dreadfully neglected in my absence.'

R. W. submitted his head to the operator, and the operator went on talking; at the same time putting separate locks of his hair through a curious process of being smartly rolled over her two revolving forefingers, which were then suddenly pulled out of it in opposite lateral directions. On each of these occasions the patient winced and winked.

'I have made up my mind that I must have money, Pa. I feel that I can't beg it, borrow it, or steal it; and so I have resolved that I must marry it.'

R. W. cast up his eyes towards her, as well as he could under the operating circumstances, and said in a tone of remonstrance, 'My de-ar Bella!'

'Have resolved, I say, Pa, that to get money I must marry money. In consequence of which, I am always looking out for money to captivate.'

'My de-a-r Bella!'

'Yes, Pa, that is the state of the case. If ever there was a mercenary plotter whose thoughts and designs were always in her mean occupation, I am the amiable creature. But I don't care. I hate and detest being poor, and I won't be poor if I can marry money. Now you are deliciously fluffy, Pa, and in a state to astonish the waiter and pay the bill.'

'But, my dear Bella, this is quite alarming at your age.'

'I told you so, Pa, but you wouldn't believe it,' returned Bella, with a pleasant childish gravity. 'Isn't it shocking?'

'It would be quite so, if you fully knew what you said, my dear, or meant it.'

'Well, Pa, I can only tell you that I mean nothing else. Talk to me of love!' said Bella, contemptuously: though her face and figure certainly rendered the subject no incongruous one. 'Talk to me of fiery dragons! But talk to me of poverty and wealth, and there indeed we touch upon realities.'

'My De-ar, this is becoming Awful—' her father was emphatically beginning: when she stopped him.

'Pa, tell me. Did you marry money?'

'You know I didn't, my dear.'

Bella hummed the Dead March in Saul, and said, after all it signified very little! But seeing him look grave and downcast, she took him round the neck and kissed him back to cheerfulness again.

'I didn't mean that last touch, Pa; it was only said in joke. Now mind! You are not to tell of me, and I'll not tell of you. And more than that; I promise to have no secrets from you, Pa, and you may make certain that, whatever mercenary things go on, I shall always tell you all about them in strict confidence.'

Fain to be satisfied with this concession from the lovely woman, R. W. rang the bell, and paid the bill. 'Now, all the rest of this, Pa,' said Bella, rolling up the purse when they were alone again, hammering it small with her little fist on the table, and cramming it into one of the pockets of his new waistcoat, 'is for you, to buy presents with for them at home, and to pay bills with, and to divide as you like, and spend exactly as you think proper. Last of all take notice, Pa, that it's not the fruit of any avaricious scheme. Perhaps if it was, your little mercenary wretch of a daughter wouldn't make so free with it!'

After which, she tugged at his coat with both hands, and pulled him all askew in buttoning that garment over the precious waistcoat pocket, and then tied her dimples into her bonnet-strings in a very knowing way, and took him back to London. Arrived at Mr Boffin's door, she set him with his back against it, tenderly took him by the ears as convenient handles for her purpose, and kissed him until he knocked muffled double knocks at the door with the back of his head. That done, she once more reminded him of their compact and gaily parted from him.

Not so gaily, however, but that tears filled her eyes as he went away down the dark street. Not so gaily, but that she several times said, 'Ah, poor little Pa! Ah, poor dear struggling shabby little Pa!' before she took heart to knock at the door. Not so gaily, but that the brilliant furniture seemed to stare her out of countenance as if it insisted on being compared with the dingy furniture at home. Not so gaily, but that she fell into very low spirits sitting late in her own room, and very heartily wept, as she wished, now that the deceased old John Harmon had never made a will about her, now that the deceased young John Harmon had lived to marry her. 'Contradictory things to wish,' said Bella, 'but my life and fortunes are so contradictory altogether that what can I expect myself to be!'

Chapter 9

IN WHICH THE ORPHAN MAKES HIS WILL

The Secretary, working in the Dismal Swamp betimes next morning, was informed that a youth waited in the hall who gave the name of Sloppy. The footman who communicated this intelligence made a decent pause before uttering the name, to express that it was forced on his reluctance by the youth in question, and that if the youth had had the good sense and good taste to inherit some other name it would have spared the feelings of him the bearer.

'Mrs Boffin will be very well pleased,' said the Secretary in a perfectly composed way. 'Show him in.'

Mr Sloppy being introduced, remained close to the door: revealing in various parts of his form many surprising, confounding, and incomprehensible buttons.

'I am glad to see you,' said John Rokesmith, in a cheerful tone of welcome. 'I have been expecting you.'

Sloppy explained that he had meant to come before, but that the Orphan (of whom he made mention as Our Johnny) had been ailing, and he had waited to report him well.

'Then he is well now?' said the Secretary.

'No he ain't,' said Sloppy.

Mr Sloppy having shaken his head to a considerable extent, proceeded to remark that he thought Johnny 'must have took 'em from the Minders.' Being asked what he meant, he answered, them that come out upon him and partickler his chest. Being requested to explain himself, he stated that there was some of 'em wot you couldn't kiver with a sixpence. Pressed to fall back upon a nominative case, he opined that they wos about as red as ever red could be. 'But as long as they strikes out'ards, sir,' continued Sloppy, 'they ain't so much. It's their striking in'ards that's to be kep off.'

John Rokesmith hoped the child had had medical attendance? Oh yes, said Sloppy, he had been took to the doctor's shop once. And what did the doctor call it? Rokesmith asked him. After some perplexed reflection, Sloppy answered, brightening, 'He called it something as wos wery long for spots.' Rokesmith suggested measles. 'No,' said Sloppy with confidence, 'ever so much longer than THEM, sir!' (Mr Sloppy was elevated by this fact, and seemed to consider that it reflected credit on the poor little patient.)

'Mrs Boffin will be sorry to hear this,' said Rokesmith.

'Mrs Higden said so, sir, when she kep it from her, hoping as Our Johnny would work round.'

'But I hope he will?' said Rokesmith, with a quick turn upon the messenger.

'I hope so,' answered Sloppy. 'It all depends on their striking in'ards.' He then went on to say that whether Johnny had 'took 'em' from the Minders, or whether the Minders had 'took em from Johnny, the Minders had been sent home and had 'got em. Furthermore, that Mrs Higden's days and nights being devoted to Our Johnny, who was never out of her lap, the whole of the mangling arrangements had devolved upon himself, and he had had 'rayther a tight time'. The ungainly piece of honesty beamed and blushed as he said it, quite enraptured with the remembrance of having been serviceable.

'Last night,' said Sloppy, 'when I was a-turning at the wheel pretty late, the mangle seemed to go like Our Johnny's breathing. It begun beautiful, then as it went out it shook a little and got unsteady, then as it took the turn to come home it had a rattle-like and lumbered a bit, then it come smooth, and so it went on till I scarce know'd which was mangle and which was Our Johnny. Nor Our Johnny, he scarce know'd either, for sometimes when the mangle lumbers he says, "Me choking, Granny!" and Mrs Higden holds him up in her lap and says to me "Bide a bit, Sloppy," and we all stops together. And when Our Johnny gets his breathing again, I turns again, and we all goes on together.'

Sloppy had gradually expanded with his description into a stare and a vacant grin. He now contracted, being silent, into a half-repressed gush of tears, and, under pretence of being heated, drew the under part of his sleeve across his eyes with a singularly awkward, laborious, and roundabout smear.

'This is unfortunate,' said Rokesmith. 'I must go and break it to Mrs Boffin. Stay you here, Sloppy.'

Sloppy stayed there, staring at the pattern of the paper on the wall, until the Secretary and Mrs Boffin came back together. And with Mrs Boffin was a young lady (Miss Bella Wilfer by name) who was better worth staring at, it occurred to Sloppy, than the best of wall-papering.

'Ah, my poor dear pretty little John Harmon!' exclaimed Mrs Boffin.

'Yes mum,' said the sympathetic Sloppy.

'You don't think he is in a very, very bad way, do you?' asked the pleasant creature with her wholesome cordiality.

Put upon his good faith, and finding it in collision with his inclinations, Sloppy threw back his head and uttered a mellifluous howl, rounded off with a sniff.

'So bad as that!' cried Mrs Boffin. 'And Betty Higden not to tell me of it sooner!'

'I think she might have been mistrustful, mum,' answered Sloppy, hesitating.

'Of what, for Heaven's sake?'

'I think she might have been mistrustful, mum,' returned Sloppy with submission, 'of standing in Our Johnny's light. There's so much trouble in illness, and so much expense, and she's seen such a lot of its being objected to.'

'But she never can have thought,' said Mrs Boffin, 'that I would grudge the dear child anything?'

'No mum, but she might have thought (as a habit-like) of its standing in Johnny's light, and might have tried to bring him through it unbeknownst.'

Sloppy knew his ground well. To conceal herself in sickness, like a lower animal; to creep out of sight and coil herself away and die; had become this woman's instinct. To catch up in her arms the sick child who was dear to her, and hide it as if it were a criminal, and keep off all ministration but such as her own ignorant tenderness and patience could supply, had become this woman's idea of maternal love, fidelity, and duty. The shameful accounts we read, every week in the Christian year, my lords and gentlemen and honourable boards, the infamous records of small official inhumanity, do not pass by the people as they pass by us. And hence these irrational, blind, and obstinate prejudices, so astonishing to our magnificence, and having no more reason in them—God save the Queen and Confound their politics—no, than smoke has in coming from fire!

'It's not a right place for the poor child to stay in,' said Mrs Boffin. 'Tell us, dear Mr Rokesmith, what to do for the best.'

He had already thought what to do, and the consultation was very short. He could pave the way, he said, in half an hour, and then they would go down to Brentford. 'Pray take me,' said Bella. Therefore a carriage was ordered, of capacity to take them all, and in the meantime Sloppy was regaled, feasting alone in the Secretary's room, with a complete realization of that fairy vision—meat, beer, vegetables, and pudding. In consequence of which his buttons became more importunate of public notice than before, with the exception of two or three about the region of the waistband, which modestly withdrew into a creasy retirement.

Punctual to the time, appeared the carriage and the Secretary. He sat on the box, and Mr Sloppy graced the rumble. So, to the Three Magpies as before: where Mrs Boffin and Miss Bella were handed out, and whence they all went on foot to Mrs Betty Higden's.

But, on the way down, they had stopped at a toy-shop, and had bought that noble charger, a description of whose points and trappings had on the last occasion conciliated the then worldly-minded orphan, and also a Noah's ark, and also a yellow bird with an artificial voice in him, and also a military doll so well dressed that if he had only been of life-size his brother-officers in the Guards might never have found him out. Bearing these gifts, they raised the latch of Betty Higden's door, and saw her sitting in the dimmest and furthest corner with poor Johnny in her lap.

'And how's my boy, Betty?' asked Mrs Boffin, sitting down beside her.

'He's bad! He's bad!' said Betty. 'I begin to be afeerd he'll not be yours any more than mine. All others belonging to him have gone to the Power and the Glory, and I have a mind that they're drawing him to them—leading him away.'

'No, no, no,' said Mrs Boffin.

'I don't know why else he clenches his little hand as if it had hold of a finger that I can't see. Look at it,' said Betty, opening the wrappers in which the flushed child lay, and showing his small right hand lying closed upon his breast. 'It's always so. It don't mind me.'

'Is he asleep?'

'No, I think not. You're not asleep, my Johnny?'

'No,' said Johnny, with a quiet air of pity for himself; and without opening his eyes.

'Here's the lady, Johnny. And the horse.'

Johnny could bear the lady, with complete indifference, but not the horse. Opening his heavy eyes, he slowly broke into a smile on beholding that splendid phenomenon, and wanted to take it in his arms. As it was much too big, it was put upon a chair where he could hold it by the mane and contemplate it. Which he soon forgot to do.

But, Johnny murmuring something with his eyes closed, and Mrs Boffin not knowing what, old Betty bent her ear to listen and took pains to understand. Being asked by her to repeat what he had said, he did so two or three times, and then it came out that he must have seen more than they supposed when he looked up to see the horse, for the murmur was, 'Who is the boofer lady?' Now, the boofer, or beautiful, lady was Bella; and whereas this notice from the poor baby would have touched her of itself; it was rendered more pathetic by the late melting of her heart to her poor little father, and their joke about the lovely woman. So, Bella's behaviour was very tender and very natural when she kneeled on the brick floor to clasp the child, and when the child, with a child's admiration of what is young and pretty, fondled the boofer lady.

'Now, my good dear Betty,' said Mrs Boffin, hoping that she saw her opportunity, and laying her hand persuasively on her arm; 'we have come to remove Johnny from this cottage to where he can be taken better care of.'

Instantly, and before another word could be spoken, the old woman started up with blazing eyes, and rushed at the door with the sick child.

'Stand away from me every one of ye!' she cried out wildly. 'I see what ye mean now. Let me go my way, all of ye. I'd sooner kill the Pretty, and kill myself!'

'Stay, stay!' said Rokesmith, soothing her. 'You don't understand.'

'I understand too well. I know too much about it, sir. I've run from it too many a year. No! Never for me, nor for the child, while there's water enough in England to cover us!'

The terror, the shame, the passion of horror and repugnance, firing the worn face and perfectly maddening it, would have been a quite terrible sight, if embodied in one old fellow-creature alone. Yet it 'crops up'—as our slang goes—my lords and gentlemen and honourable boards, in other fellow-creatures, rather frequently!

'It's been chasing me all my life, but it shall never take me nor mine alive!' cried old Betty. 'I've done with ye. I'd have fastened door and window and starved out, afore I'd ever have let ye in, if I had known what ye came for!'

But, catching sight of Mrs Boffin's wholesome face, she relented, and crouching down by the door and bending over her burden to hush it, said humbly: 'Maybe my fears has put me wrong. If they have so, tell me, and the good Lord forgive me! I'm quick to take this fright, I know, and my head is summ'at light with wearying and watching.'

'There, there, there!' returned Mrs Boffin. 'Come, come! Say no more of it, Betty. It was a mistake, a mistake. Any one of us might have made it in your place, and felt just as you do.'

'The Lord bless ye!' said the old woman, stretching out her hand.

'Now, see, Betty,' pursued the sweet compassionate soul, holding the hand kindly, 'what I really did mean, and what I should have begun by saying out, if I had only been a little wiser and handier. We want to move Johnny to a place where there are none but children; a place set up on purpose for sick children; where the good doctors and nurses pass their lives with children, talk to none but children, touch none but children, comfort and cure none but children.'

'Is there really such a place?' asked the old woman, with a gaze of wonder.

'Yes, Betty, on my word, and you shall see it. If my home was a better place for the dear boy, I'd take him to it; but indeed indeed it's not.'

'You shall take him,' returned Betty, fervently kissing the comforting hand, 'where you will, my deary. I am not so hard, but that I believe your face and voice, and I will, as long as I can see and hear.'

This victory gained, Rokesmith made haste to profit by it, for he saw how woefully time had been lost. He despatched Sloppy to bring the carriage to the door; caused the child to be carefully wrapped up; bade old Betty get her bonnet on; collected the toys, enabling the little fellow to comprehend that his treasures were to be transported with him; and had all things prepared so easily that they were ready for the carriage as soon as it appeared, and in a minute afterwards were on their way. Sloppy they left behind, relieving his overcharged breast with a paroxysm of mangling.

At the Children's Hospital, the gallant steed, the Noah's ark, yellow bird, and the officer in the Guards, were made as welcome as their child-owner. But the doctor said aside to Rokesmith, 'This should have been days ago. Too late!'

However, they were all carried up into a fresh airy room, and there Johnny came to himself, out of a sleep or a swoon or whatever it was, to find himself lying in a little quiet bed, with a little platform over his breast, on which were already arranged, to give him heart and urge him to cheer up, the Noah's ark, the noble steed, and the yellow bird; with the officer in the Guards doing duty over the whole, quite as much to the satisfaction of his country as if he had been upon Parade. And at the bed's head was a coloured picture beautiful to see, representing as it were another Johnny seated on the knee of some Angel surely who loved little children. And, marvellous fact, to lie and stare at: Johnny had become one of a little family, all in little quiet beds (except two playing dominoes in little arm-chairs at a little table on the hearth): and on all the little beds were little platforms whereon were to be seen dolls' houses, woolly dogs with mechanical barks in them not very dissimilar from the artificial voice pervading the bowels of the yellow bird, tin armies, Moorish tumblers, wooden tea things, and the riches of the earth.

As Johnny murmured something in his placid admiration, the ministering women at his bed's head asked him what he said. It seemed that he wanted to know whether all these were brothers and sisters of his? So they told him yes. It seemed then, that he wanted to know whether God had brought them all together there? So they told him yes again. They made out then, that he wanted to know whether they would all get out of pain? So they answered yes to that question likewise, and made him understand that the reply included himself.

Johnny's powers of sustaining conversation were as yet so very imperfectly developed, even in a state of health, that in sickness they were little more than monosyllabic. But, he had to be washed and tended, and remedies were applied, and though those offices were far, far more skilfully and lightly done than ever anything had been done for him in his little life, so rough and short, they would have hurt and tired him but for an amazing circumstance which laid hold of his attention. This was no less than the appearance on his own little platform in pairs, of All Creation, on its way into his own particular ark: the elephant leading, and the fly, with a diffident sense of his size, politely bringing up the rear. A very little brother lying in the next bed with a broken leg, was so enchanted by this spectacle that his delight exalted its enthralling interest; and so came rest and sleep.

'I see you are not afraid to leave the dear child here, Betty,' whispered Mrs Boffin.

'No, ma'am. Most willingly, most thankfully, with all my heart and soul.'

So, they kissed him, and left him there, and old Betty was to come back early in the morning, and nobody but Rokesmith knew for certain how that the doctor had said, 'This should have been days ago. Too late!'

But, Rokesmith knowing it, and knowing that his bearing it in mind would be acceptable thereafter to that good woman who had been the only light in the childhood of desolate John Harmon dead and gone, resolved that late at night he would go back to the bedside of John Harmon's namesake, and see how it fared with him.

The family whom God had brought together were not all asleep, but were all quiet. From bed to bed, a light womanly tread and a pleasant fresh face passed in the silence of the night. A little head would lift itself up into the softened light here and there, to be kissed as the face went by—for these little patients are very loving—and would then submit itself to be composed to rest again. The mite with the broken leg was restless, and moaned; but after a while turned his face towards Johnny's bed, to fortify himself with a view of the ark, and fell asleep. Over most of the beds, the toys were yet grouped as the children had left them when they last laid themselves down, and, in their innocent grotesqueness and incongruity, they might have stood for the children's dreams.

The doctor came in too, to see how it fared with Johnny. And he and Rokesmith stood together, looking down with compassion on him.

'What is it, Johnny?' Rokesmith was the questioner, and put an arm round the poor baby as he made a struggle.

'Him!' said the little fellow. 'Those!'

The doctor was quick to understand children, and, taking the horse, the ark, the yellow bird, and the man in the Guards, from Johnny's bed, softly placed them on that of his next neighbour, the mite with the broken leg.

With a weary and yet a pleased smile, and with an action as if he stretched his little figure out to rest, the child heaved his body on the sustaining arm, and seeking Rokesmith's face with his lips, said:

'A kiss for the boofer lady.'

Having now bequeathed all he had to dispose of, and arranged his affairs in this world, Johnny, thus speaking, left it.

Chapter 10

A SUCCESSOR

Some of the Reverend Frank Milvey's brethren had found themselves exceedingly uncomfortable in their minds, because they were required to bury the dead too hopefully. But, the Reverend Frank, inclining to the belief that they were required to do one or two other things (say out of nine-and-thirty) calculated to trouble their consciences rather more if they would think as much about them, held his peace.

Indeed, the Reverend Frank Milvey was a forbearing man, who noticed many sad warps and blights in the vineyard wherein he worked, and did not profess that they made him savagely wise. He only learned that the more he himself knew, in his little limited human way, the better he could distantly imagine what Omniscience might know.

Wherefore, if the Reverend Frank had had to read the words that troubled some of his brethren, and profitably touched innumerable hearts, in a worse case than Johnny's, he would have done so out of the pity and humility of his soul. Reading them over Johnny, he thought of his own six children, but not of his poverty, and read them with dimmed eyes. And very seriously did he and his bright little wife, who had been listening, look down into the small grave and walk home arm-in-arm.

There was grief in the aristocratic house, and there was joy in the Bower. Mr Wegg argued, if an orphan were wanted, was he not an orphan himself; and could a better be desired? And why go beating about Brentford bushes, seeking orphans forsooth who had established no claims upon you and made no sacrifices for you, when here was an orphan ready to your hand who had given up in your cause, Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker?

Mr Wegg chuckled, consequently, when he heard the tidings. Nay, it was afterwards affirmed by a witness who shall at present be nameless, that in the seclusion of the Bower he poked out his wooden leg, in the stage-ballet manner, and executed a taunting or triumphant pirouette on the genuine leg remaining to him.

John Rokesmith's manner towards Mrs Boffin at this time, was more the manner of a young man towards a mother, than that of a Secretary towards his employer's wife. It had always been marked by a subdued affectionate deference that seemed to have sprung up on the very day of his engagement; whatever was odd in her dress or her ways had seemed to have no oddity for him; he had sometimes borne a quietly-amused face in her company, but still it had seemed as if the pleasure her genial temper and radiant nature yielded him, could have been quite as naturally expressed in a tear as in a smile. The completeness of his sympathy with her fancy for having a little John Harmon to protect and rear, he had shown in every act and word, and now that the kind fancy was disappointed, he treated it with a manly tenderness and respect for which she could hardly thank him enough.

'But I do thank you, Mr Rokesmith,' said Mrs Boffin, 'and I thank you most kindly. You love children.'

'I hope everybody does.'

'They ought,' said Mrs Boffin; 'but we don't all of us do what we ought, do us?'

John Rokesmith replied, 'Some among us supply the short-comings of the rest. You have loved children well, Mr Boffin has told me.'

Not a bit better than he has, but that's his way; he puts all the good upon me. You speak rather sadly, Mr Rokesmith.'

'Do I?'

'It sounds to me so. Were you one of many children?' He shook his head.

'An only child?'

'No there was another. Dead long ago.'

'Father or mother alive?'

'Dead.'—

'And the rest of your relations?'

'Dead—if I ever had any living. I never heard of any.'

At this point of the dialogue Bella came in with a light step. She paused at the door a moment, hesitating whether to remain or retire; perplexed by finding that she was not observed.

'Now, don't mind an old lady's talk,' said Mrs Boffin, 'but tell me. Are you quite sure, Mr Rokesmith, that you have never had a disappointment in love?'

'Quite sure. Why do you ask me?'

'Why, for this reason. Sometimes you have a kind of kept-down manner with you, which is not like your age. You can't be thirty?'

'I am not yet thirty.'

Deeming it high time to make her presence known, Bella coughed here to attract attention, begged pardon, and said she would go, fearing that she interrupted some matter of business.

'No, don't go,' rejoined Mrs Boffin, 'because we are coming to business, instead of having begun it, and you belong to it as much now, my dear Bella, as I do. But I want my Noddy to consult with us. Would somebody be so good as find my Noddy for me?'

Rokesmith departed on that errand, and presently returned accompanied by Mr Boffin at his jog-trot. Bella felt a little vague trepidation as to the subject-matter of this same consultation, until Mrs Boffin announced it.

'Now, you come and sit by me, my dear,' said that worthy soul, taking her comfortable place on a large ottoman in the centre of the room, and drawing her arm through Bella's; 'and Noddy, you sit here, and Mr Rokesmith you sit there. Now, you see, what I want to talk about, is this. Mr and Mrs Milvey have sent me the kindest note possible (which Mr Rokesmith just now read to me out aloud, for I ain't good at handwritings), offering to find me another little child to name and educate and bring up. Well. This has set me thinking.'

('And she is a steam-ingein at it,' murmured Mr Boffin, in an admiring parenthesis, 'when she once begins. It mayn't be so easy to start her; but once started, she's a ingein.')

'—This has set me thinking, I say,' repeated Mrs Boffin, cordially beaming under the influence of her husband's compliment, 'and I have thought two things. First of all, that I have grown timid of reviving John Harmon's name. It's an unfortunate name, and I fancy I should reproach myself if I gave it to another dear child, and it proved again unlucky.'

'Now, whether,' said Mr Boffin, gravely propounding a case for his Secretary's opinion; 'whether one might call that a superstition?'

'It is a matter of feeling with Mrs Boffin,' said Rokesmith, gently. 'The name has always been unfortunate. It has now this new unfortunate association connected with it. The name has died out. Why revive it? Might I ask Miss Wilfer what she thinks?'

'It has not been a fortunate name for me,' said Bella, colouring—'or at least it was not, until it led to my being here—but that is not the point in my thoughts. As we had given the name to the poor child, and as the poor child took so lovingly to me, I think I should feel jealous of calling another child by it. I think I should feel as if the name had become endeared to me, and I had no right to use it so.'

'And that's your opinion?' remarked Mr Boffin, observant of the Secretary's face and again addressing him.

'I say again, it is a matter of feeling,' returned the Secretary. 'I think Miss Wilfer's feeling very womanly and pretty.'

'Now, give us your opinion, Noddy,' said Mrs Boffin.

'My opinion, old lady,' returned the Golden Dustman, 'is your opinion.'

'Then,' said Mrs Boffin, 'we agree not to revive John Harmon's name, but to let it rest in the grave. It is, as Mr Rokesmith says, a matter of feeling, but Lor how many matters ARE matters of feeling! Well; and so I come to the second thing I have thought of. You must know, Bella, my dear, and Mr Rokesmith, that when I first named to my husband my thoughts of adopting a little orphan boy in remembrance of John Harmon, I further named to my husband that it was comforting to think that how the poor boy would be benefited by John's own money, and protected from John's own forlornness.'

'Hear, hear!' cried Mr Boffin. 'So she did. Ancoar!'

'No, not Ancoar, Noddy, my dear,' returned Mrs Boffin, 'because I am going to say something else. I meant that, I am sure, as much as I still mean it. But this little death has made me ask myself the question, seriously, whether I wasn't too bent upon pleasing myself. Else why did I seek out so much for a pretty child, and a child quite to my liking? Wanting to do good, why not do it for its own sake, and put my tastes and likings by?'

'Perhaps,' said Bella; and perhaps she said it with some little sensitiveness arising out of those old curious relations of hers towards the murdered man; 'perhaps, in reviving the name, you would not have liked to give it to a less interesting child than the original. He interested you very much.'

'Well, my dear,' returned Mrs Boffin, giving her a squeeze, 'it's kind of you to find that reason out, and I hope it may have been so, and indeed to a certain extent I believe it was so, but I am afraid not to the whole extent. However, that don't come in question now, because we have done with the name.'

'Laid it up as a remembrance,' suggested Bella, musingly.

'Much better said, my dear; laid it up as a remembrance. Well then; I have been thinking if I take any orphan to provide for, let it not be a pet and a plaything for me, but a creature to be helped for its own sake.'

'Not pretty then?' said Bella.

'No,' returned Mrs Boffin, stoutly.

'Nor prepossessing then?' said Bella.

'No,' returned Mrs Boffin. 'Not necessarily so. That's as it may happen. A well-disposed boy comes in my way who may be even a little wanting in such advantages for getting on in life, but is honest and industrious and requires a helping hand and deserves it. If I am very much in earnest and quite determined to be unselfish, let me take care of HIM.'

Here the footman whose feelings had been hurt on the former occasion, appeared, and crossing to Rokesmith apologetically announced the objectionable Sloppy.

The four members of Council looked at one another, and paused. 'Shall he be brought here, ma'am?' asked Rokesmith.

'Yes,' said Mrs Boffin. Whereupon the footman disappeared, reappeared presenting Sloppy, and retired much disgusted.

The consideration of Mrs Boffin had clothed Mr Sloppy in a suit of black, on which the tailor had received personal directions from Rokesmith to expend the utmost cunning of his art, with a view to the concealment of the cohering and sustaining buttons. But, so much more powerful were the frailties of Sloppy's form than the strongest resources of tailoring science, that he now stood before the Council, a perfect Argus in the way of buttons: shining and winking and gleaming and twinkling out of a hundred of those eyes of bright metal, at the dazzled spectators. The artistic taste of some unknown hatter had furnished him with a hatband of wholesale capacity which was fluted behind, from the crown of his hat to the brim, and terminated in a black bunch, from which the imagination shrunk discomfited and the reason revolted. Some special powers with which his legs were endowed, had already hitched up his glossy trousers at the ankles, and bagged them at the knees; while similar gifts in his arms had raised his coat-sleeves from his wrists and accumulated them at his elbows. Thus set forth, with the additional embellishments of a very little tail to his coat, and a yawning gulf at his waistband, Sloppy stood confessed.

'And how is Betty, my good fellow?' Mrs Boffin asked him.

'Thankee, mum,' said Sloppy, 'she do pretty nicely, and sending her dooty and many thanks for the tea and all faviours and wishing to know the family's healths.'

'Have you just come, Sloppy?'

'Yes, mum.'

'Then you have not had your dinner yet?'

'No, mum. But I mean to it. For I ain't forgotten your handsome orders that I was never to go away without having had a good 'un off of meat and beer and pudding—no: there was four of 'em, for I reckoned 'em up when I had 'em; meat one, beer two, vegetables three, and which was four?—Why, pudding, HE was four!' Here Sloppy threw his head back, opened his mouth wide, and laughed rapturously.

'How are the two poor little Minders?' asked Mrs Boffin.

'Striking right out, mum, and coming round beautiful.'

Mrs Boffin looked on the other three members of Council, and then said, beckoning with her finger:

'Sloppy.'

'Yes, mum.'

'Come forward, Sloppy. Should you like to dine here every day?'

'Off of all four on 'em, mum? O mum!' Sloppy's feelings obliged him to squeeze his hat, and contract one leg at the knee.

'Yes. And should you like to be always taken care of here, if you were industrious and deserving?'

'Oh, mum!—But there's Mrs Higden,' said Sloppy, checking himself in his raptures, drawing back, and shaking his head with very serious meaning. 'There's Mrs Higden. Mrs Higden goes before all. None can ever be better friends to me than Mrs Higden's been. And she must be turned for, must Mrs Higden. Where would Mrs Higden be if she warn't turned for!' At the mere thought of Mrs Higden in this inconceivable affliction, Mr Sloppy's countenance became pale, and manifested the most distressful emotions.

'You are as right as right can be, Sloppy,' said Mrs Boffin 'and far be it from me to tell you otherwise. It shall be seen to. If Betty Higden can be turned for all the same, you shall come here and be taken care of for life, and be made able to keep her in other ways than the turning.'

'Even as to that, mum,' answered the ecstatic Sloppy, 'the turning might be done in the night, don't you see? I could be here in the day, and turn in the night. I don't want no sleep, I don't. Or even if I any ways should want a wink or two,' added Sloppy, after a moment's apologetic reflection, 'I could take 'em turning. I've took 'em turning many a time, and enjoyed 'em wonderful!'

On the grateful impulse of the moment, Mr Sloppy kissed Mrs Boffin's hand, and then detaching himself from that good creature that he might have room enough for his feelings, threw back his head, opened his mouth wide, and uttered a dismal howl. It was creditable to his tenderness of heart, but suggested that he might on occasion give some offence to the neighbours: the rather, as the footman looked in, and begged pardon, finding he was not wanted, but excused himself; on the ground 'that he thought it was Cats.'

Chapter 11

SOME AFFAIRS OF THE HEART

Little Miss Peecher, from her little official dwelling-house, with its little windows like the eyes in needles, and its little doors like the covers of school-books, was very observant indeed of the object of her quiet affections. Love, though said to be afflicted with blindness, is a vigilant watchman, and Miss Peecher kept him on double duty over Mr Bradley Headstone. It was not that she was naturally given to playing the spy—it was not that she was at all secret, plotting, or mean—it was simply that she loved the irresponsive Bradley with all the primitive and homely stock of love that had never been examined or certificated out of her. If her faithful slate had had the latent qualities of sympathetic paper, and its pencil those of invisible ink, many a little treatise calculated to astonish the pupils would have come bursting through the dry sums in school-time under the warming influence of Miss Peecher's bosom. For, oftentimes when school was not, and her calm leisure and calm little house were her own, Miss Peecher would commit to the confidential slate an imaginary description of how, upon a balmy evening at dusk, two figures might have been observed in the market-garden ground round the corner, of whom one, being a manly form, bent over the other, being a womanly form of short stature and some compactness, and breathed in a low voice the words, 'Emma Peecher, wilt thou be my own?' after which the womanly form's head reposed upon the manly form's shoulder, and the nightingales tuned up. Though all unseen, and unsuspected by the pupils, Bradley Headstone even pervaded the school exercises. Was Geography in question? He would come triumphantly flying out of Vesuvius and Aetna ahead of the lava, and would boil unharmed in the hot springs of Iceland, and would float majestically down the Ganges and the Nile. Did History chronicle a king of men? Behold him in pepper-and-salt pantaloons, with his watch-guard round his neck. Were copies to be written? In capital B's and H's most of the girls under Miss Peecher's tuition were half a year ahead of every other letter in the alphabet. And Mental Arithmetic, administered by Miss Peecher, often devoted itself to providing

Bradley Headstone with a wardrobe of fabulous extent: fourscore and four neck-ties at two and ninepence-halfpenny, two gross of silver watches at four pounds fifteen and sixpence, seventy-four black hats at eighteen shillings; and many similar superfluities.

The vigilant watchman, using his daily opportunities of turning his eyes in Bradley's direction, soon apprized Miss Peecher that Bradley was more preoccupied than had been his wont, and more given to strolling about with a downcast and reserved face, turning something difficult in his mind that was not in the scholastic syllabus. Putting this and that together—combining under the head 'this,' present appearances and the intimacy with Charley Hexam, and ranging under the head 'that' the visit to his sister, the watchman reported to Miss Peecher his strong suspicions that the sister was at the bottom of it.

'I wonder,' said Miss Peecher, as she sat making up her weekly report on a half-holiday afternoon, 'what they call Hexam's sister?'

Mary Anne, at her needlework, attendant and attentive, held her arm up.

'Well, Mary Anne?'

'She is named Lizzie, ma'am.'

'She can hardly be named Lizzie, I think, Mary Anne,' returned Miss Peecher, in a tunefully instructive voice. 'Is Lizzie a Christian name, Mary Anne?'

Mary Anne laid down her work, rose, hooked herself behind, as being under catechization, and replied: 'No, it is a corruption, Miss Peecher.'

'Who gave her that name?' Miss Peecher was going on, from the mere force of habit, when she checked herself; on Mary Anne's evincing theological impatience to strike in with her godfathers and her godmothers, and said: 'I mean of what name is it a corruption?'

'Elizabeth, or Eliza, Miss Peecher.'

'Right, Mary Anne. Whether there were any Lizzies in the early Christian Church must be considered very doubtful, very doubtful.' Miss Peecher was exceedingly sage here. 'Speaking correctly, we say, then, that Hexam's sister is called Lizzie; not that she is named so. Do we not, Mary Anne?'

'We do, Miss Peecher.'

'And where,' pursued Miss Peecher, complacent in her little transparent fiction of conducting the examination in a semiofficial manner for Mary

Anne's benefit, not her own, 'where does this young woman, who is called but not named Lizzie, live? Think, now, before answering.'

'In Church Street, Smith Square, by Mill Bank, ma'am.'

'In Church Street, Smith Square, by Mill Bank,' repeated Miss Peecher, as if possessed beforehand of the book in which it was written. Exactly so. And what occupation does this young woman pursue, Mary Anne? Take time.'

'She has a place of trust at an outfitter's in the City, ma'am.'

'Oh!' said Miss Peecher, pondering on it; but smoothly added, in a confirmatory tone, 'At an outfitter's in the City. Ye-es?'

'And Charley—' Mary Anne was proceeding, when Miss Peecher stared.

'I mean Hexam, Miss Peecher.'

'I should think you did, Mary Anne. I am glad to hear you do. And Hexam—'

'Says,' Mary Anne went on, 'that he is not pleased with his sister, and that his sister won't be guided by his advice, and persists in being guided by somebody else's; and that—'

'Mr Headstone coming across the garden!' exclaimed Miss Peecher, with a flushed glance at the looking-glass. 'You have answered very well, Mary Anne. You are forming an excellent habit of arranging your thoughts clearly. That will do.'

The discreet Mary Anne resumed her seat and her silence, and stitched, and stitched, and was stitching when the schoolmaster's shadow came in before him, announcing that he might be instantly expected.

'Good evening, Miss Peecher,' he said, pursuing the shadow, and taking its place.

'Good evening, Mr Headstone. Mary Anne, a chair.'

'Thank you,' said Bradley, seating himself in his constrained manner. 'This is but a flying visit. I have looked in, on my way, to ask a kindness of you as a neighbour.'

'Did you say on your way, Mr Headstone?' asked Miss Peecher.

'On my way to—where I am going.'

'Church Street, Smith Square, by Mill Bank,' repeated Miss Peecher, in her own thoughts.

'Charley Hexam has gone to get a book or two he wants, and will probably be back before me. As we leave my house empty, I took the liberty of telling him I would leave the key here. Would you kindly allow me to do so?'

'Certainly, Mr Headstone. Going for an evening walk, sir?'

'Partly for a walk, and partly for—on business.'

'Business in Church Street, Smith Square, by Mill Bank,' repeated Miss Peecher to herself.

'Having said which,' pursued Bradley, laying his door-key on the table, 'I must be already going. There is nothing I can do for you, Miss Peecher?'

'Thank you, Mr Headstone. In which direction?'

'In the direction of Westminster.'

'Mill Bank,' Miss Peecher repeated in her own thoughts once again. 'No, thank you, Mr Headstone; I'll not trouble you.'

'You couldn't trouble me,' said the schoolmaster.

'Ah!' returned Miss Peecher, though not aloud; 'but you can trouble ME!' And for all her quiet manner, and her quiet smile, she was full of trouble as he went his way.

She was right touching his destination. He held as straight a course for the house of the dolls' dressmaker as the wisdom of his ancestors, exemplified in the construction of the intervening streets, would let him, and walked with a bent head hammering at one fixed idea. It had been an immoveable idea since he first set eyes upon her. It seemed to him as if all that he could suppress in himself he had suppressed, as if all that he could restrain in himself he had restrained, and the time had come—in a rush, in a moment—when the power of self-command had departed from him. Love at first sight is a trite expression quite sufficiently discussed; enough that in certain smouldering natures like this man's, that passion leaps into a blaze, and makes such head as fire does in a rage of wind, when other passions, but for its mastery, could be held in chains. As a multitude of weak, imitative natures are always lying by, ready to go mad upon the next wrong idea that may be broached—in these times, generally some form of tribute to Somebody for something that never was done, or, if ever done, that was done by Somebody Else—so these less ordinary natures may lie by for years, ready on the touch of an instant to burst into flame.

The schoolmaster went his way, brooding and brooding, and a sense of being vanquished in a struggle might have been pieced out of his worried face. Truly, in his breast there lingered a resentful shame to find himself defeated by this passion for Charley Hexam's sister, though in the very self-same moments he was concentrating himself upon the object of bringing the passion to a successful issue.

He appeared before the dolls' dressmaker, sitting alone at her work. 'Oho!' thought that sharp young personage, 'it's you, is it? I know your tricks and your manners, my friend!'

'Hexam's sister,' said Bradley Headstone, 'is not come home yet?'

'You are quite a conjuror,' returned Miss Wren.

'I will wait, if you please, for I want to speak to her.'

'Do you?' returned Miss Wren. 'Sit down. I hope it's mutual.' Bradley glanced distrustfully at the shrewd face again bending over the work, and said, trying to conquer doubt and hesitation:

'I hope you don't imply that my visit will be unacceptable to Hexam's sister?'

'There! Don't call her that. I can't bear you to call her that,' returned Miss Wren, snapping her fingers in a volley of impatient snaps, 'for I don't like Hexam.'

'Indeed?'

'No.' Miss Wren wrinkled her nose, to express dislike. 'Selfish. Thinks only of himself. The way with all of you.'

'The way with all of us? Then you don't like ME?'

'So-so,' replied Miss Wren, with a shrug and a laugh. 'Don't know much about you.'

'But I was not aware it was the way with all of us,' said Bradley, returning to the accusation, a little injured. 'Won't you say, some of us?'

'Meaning,' returned the little creature, 'every one of you, but you. Hah! Now look this lady in the face. This is Mrs Truth. The Honourable. Full-dressed.'

Bradley glanced at the doll she held up for his observation—which had been lying on its face on her bench, while with a needle and thread she fastened the dress on at the back—and looked from it to her.

'I stand the Honourable Mrs T. on my bench in this corner against the wall, where her blue eyes can shine upon you,' pursued Miss Wren, doing so, and making two little dabs at him in the air with her needle, as if she pricked him with it in his own eyes; 'and I defy you to tell me, with Mrs T. for a witness, what you have come here for.'

'To see Hexam's sister.'

'You don't say so!' retorted Miss Wren, hitching her chin. 'But on whose account?'

'Her own.'

'O Mrs T.!' exclaimed Miss Wren. 'You hear him!'

'To reason with her,' pursued Bradley, half humouring what was present, and half angry with what was not present; 'for her own sake.'

'Oh Mrs T.!' exclaimed the dressmaker.

'For her own sake,' repeated Bradley, warming, 'and for her brother's, and as a perfectly disinterested person.'

'Really, Mrs T.,' remarked the dressmaker, 'since it comes to this, we must positively turn you with your face to the wall.' She had hardly done so, when Lizzie Hexam arrived, and showed some surprise on seeing Bradley Headstone there, and Jenny shaking her little fist at him close before her eyes, and the Honourable Mrs T. with her face to the wall.

'Here's a perfectly disinterested person, Lizzie dear,' said the knowing Miss Wren, 'come to talk with you, for your own sake and your brother's. Think of that. I am sure there ought to be no third party present at anything so very kind and so very serious; and so, if you'll remove the third party upstairs, my dear, the third party will retire.'

Lizzie took the hand which the dolls' dressmaker held out to her for the purpose of being supported away, but only looked at her with an inquiring smile, and made no other movement.

'The third party hobbles awfully, you know, when she's left to herself;' said Miss Wren, 'her back being so bad, and her legs so queer; so she can't retire gracefully unless you help her, Lizzie.'

'She can do no better than stay where she is,' returned Lizzie, releasing the hand, and laying her own lightly on Miss Jenny's curls. And then to Bradley: 'From Charley, sir?'

In an irresolute way, and stealing a clumsy look at her, Bradley rose to place a chair for her, and then returned to his own.

'Strictly speaking,' said he, 'I come from Charley, because I left him only a little while ago; but I am not commissioned by Charley. I come of my own spontaneous act.'

With her elbows on her bench, and her chin upon her hands, Miss Jenny Wren sat looking at him with a watchful sidelong look. Lizzie, in her different way, sat looking at him too.

'The fact is,' began Bradley, with a mouth so dry that he had some difficulty in articulating his words: the consciousness of which rendered his manner still more ungainly and undecided; 'the truth is, that Charley, having no secrets from me (to the best of my belief), has confided the whole of this matter to me.'

He came to a stop, and Lizzie asked: 'what matter, sir?'

'I thought,' returned the schoolmaster, stealing another look at her, and seeming to try in vain to sustain it; for the look dropped as it lighted on her eyes, 'that it might be so superfluous as to be almost impertinent, to enter upon a definition of it. My allusion was to this matter of your having put aside your brother's plans for you, and given the preference to those of Mr—I believe the name is Mr Eugene Wrayburn.'

He made this point of not being certain of the name, with another uneasy look at her, which dropped like the last.

Nothing being said on the other side, he had to begin again, and began with new embarrassment.

'Your brother's plans were communicated to me when he first had them in his thoughts. In point of fact he spoke to me about them when I was last here—when we were walking back together, and when I—when the impression was fresh upon me of having seen his sister.'

There might have been no meaning in it, but the little dressmaker here removed one of her supporting hands from her chin, and musingly turned the Honourable Mrs T. with her face to the company. That done, she fell into her former attitude.

'I approved of his idea,' said Bradley, with his uneasy look wandering to the doll, and unconsciously resting there longer than it had rested on Lizzie, 'both because your brother ought naturally to be the originator of any such scheme, and because I hoped to be able to promote it. I should have had inexpressible pleasure, I should have taken inexpressible interest, in promoting it. Therefore I must acknowledge that when your brother was disappointed, I too was disappointed. I wish to avoid reservation or concealment, and I fully acknowledge that.'

He appeared to have encouraged himself by having got so far. At all events he went on with much greater firmness and force of emphasis: though with a curious disposition to set his teeth, and with a curious tight-screwing movement of his right hand in the clenching palm of his left, like the action of one who was being physically hurt, and was unwilling to cry out.

'I am a man of strong feelings, and I have strongly felt this disappointment. I do strongly feel it. I don't show what I feel; some of us are obliged habitually to keep it down. To keep it down. But to return to your brother. He has taken the matter so much to heart that he has remonstrated (in my presence he remonstrated) with Mr Eugene Wrayburn, if that be the name. He did so, quite ineffectually. As any one not blinded to the real character of Mr—Mr Eugene Wrayburn—would readily suppose.'

He looked at Lizzie again, and held the look. And his face turned from burning red to white, and from white back to burning red, and so for the time to lasting deadly white.

'Finally, I resolved to come here alone, and appeal to you. I resolved to come here alone, and entreat you to retract the course you have chosen, and instead of confiding in a mere stranger—a person of most insolent behaviour to your brother and others—to prefer your brother and your brother's friend.'

Lizzie Hexam had changed colour when those changes came over him, and her face now expressed some anger, more dislike, and even a touch of fear. But she answered him very steadily.

'I cannot doubt, Mr Headstone, that your visit is well meant. You have been so good a friend to Charley that I have no right to doubt it. I have nothing to tell Charley, but that I accepted the help to which he so much objects before he made any plans for me; or certainly before I knew of any. It was considerately and delicately offered, and there were reasons that had weight with me which should be as dear to Charley as to me. I have no more to say to Charley on this subject.'

His lips trembled and stood apart, as he followed this repudiation of himself; and limitation of her words to her brother.

'I should have told Charley, if he had come to me,' she resumed, as though it were an after-thought, 'that Jenny and I find our teacher very able and very patient, and that she takes great pains with us. So much so, that we have said to her we hope in a very little while to be able to go on by ourselves. Charley knows about teachers, and I should also have told him, for his satisfaction, that ours comes from an institution where teachers are regularly brought up.'

'I should like to ask you,' said Bradley Headstone, grinding his words slowly out, as though they came from a rusty mill; 'I should like to ask you, if I may without offence, whether you would have objected—no; rather, I should like to say, if I may without offence, that I wish I had had the opportunity of coming here with your brother and devoting my poor abilities and experience to your service.'

'Thank you, Mr Headstone.'

'But I fear,' he pursued, after a pause, furtively wrenching at the seat of his chair with one hand, as if he would have wrenched the chair to pieces, and gloomily observing her while her eyes were cast down, 'that my humble services would not have found much favour with you?'

She made no reply, and the poor stricken wretch sat contending with himself in a heat of passion and torment. After a while he took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead and hands.

'There is only one thing more I had to say, but it is the most important. There is a reason against this matter, there is a personal relation concerned in this matter, not yet explained to you. It might—I don't say it would—it might—induce you to think differently. To proceed under the present circumstances is out of the question. Will you please come to the understanding that there shall be another interview on the subject?'

'With Charley, Mr Headstone?'

'With—well,' he answered, breaking off, 'yes! Say with him too. Will you please come to the understanding that there must be another interview under more favourable circumstances, before the whole case can be submitted?'

'I don't,' said Lizzie, shaking her head, 'understand your meaning, Mr Headstone.'

'Limit my meaning for the present,' he interrupted, 'to the whole case being submitted to you in another interview.'

'What case, Mr Headstone? What is wanting to it?'

'You—you shall be informed in the other interview.' Then he said, as if in a burst of irrepressible despair, 'I—I leave it all incomplete! There is a spell upon me, I think!' And then added, almost as if he asked for pity, 'Good-night!'

He held out his hand. As she, with manifest hesitation, not to say reluctance, touched it, a strange tremble passed over him, and his face, so deadly white, was moved as by a stroke of pain. Then he was gone.

The dolls' dressmaker sat with her attitude unchanged, eyeing the door by which he had departed, until Lizzie pushed her bench aside and sat down near her. Then, eyeing Lizzie as she had previously eyed Bradley and the door, Miss Wren chopped that very sudden and keen chop in which her jaws sometimes indulged, leaned back in her chair with folded arms, and thus expressed herself:

'Humph! If he—I mean, of course, my dear, the party who is coming to court me when the time comes—should be THAT sort of man, he may spare himself the trouble. HE wouldn't do to be trotted about and made useful. He'd take fire and blow up while he was about it.

'And so you would be rid of him,' said Lizzie, humouring her.

'Not so easily,' returned Miss Wren. 'He wouldn't blow up alone. He'd carry me up with him. I know his tricks and his manners.'

'Would he want to hurt you, do you mean?' asked Lizzie.

'Mightn't exactly want to do it, my dear,' returned Miss Wren; 'but a lot of gunpowder among lighted lucifer-matches in the next room might almost as well be here.'

'He is a very strange man,' said Lizzie, thoughtfully.

'I wish he was so very strange a man as to be a total stranger,' answered the sharp little thing.

It being Lizzie's regular occupation when they were alone of an evening to brush out and smooth the long fair hair of the dolls' dressmaker, she unfastened a ribbon that kept it back while the little creature was at her work, and it fell in a beautiful shower over the poor shoulders that were much in need of such adorning rain. 'Not now, Lizzie, dear,' said Jenny; 'let us have a talk by the fire.' With those words, she in her turn loosened her friend's dark hair, and it dropped of its own weight over her bosom, in two rich masses. Pretending to compare the colours and admire the contrast, Jenny so managed a mere touch or two of her nimble hands, as that she herself laying a cheek on one of the dark folds, seemed blinded by her own clustering curls to all but the fire, while the fine handsome face and brow of Lizzie were revealed without obstruction in the sombre light.

'Let us have a talk,' said Jenny, 'about Mr Eugene Wrayburn.'

Something sparkled down among the fair hair resting on the dark hair; and if it were not a star—which it couldn't be—it was an eye; and if it were an eye, it was Jenny Wren's eye, bright and watchful as the bird's whose name she had taken.

'Why about Mr Wrayburn?' Lizzie asked.

'For no better reason than because I'm in the humour. I wonder whether he's rich!'

'No, not rich.'

'Poor?'

'I think so, for a gentleman.'

'Ah! To be sure! Yes, he's a gentleman. Not of our sort; is he?' A shake of the head, a thoughtful shake of the head, and the answer, softly spoken, 'Oh no, oh no!'

The dolls' dressmaker had an arm round her friend's waist. Adjusting the arm, she slyly took the opportunity of blowing at her own hair where it fell over her face; then the eye down there, under lighter shadows sparkled more brightly and appeared more watchful.

'When He turns up, he shan't be a gentleman; I'll very soon send him packing, if he is. However, he's not Mr Wrayburn; I haven't captivated HIM. I wonder whether anybody has, Lizzie!'

'It is very likely.'

'Is it very likely? I wonder who!'

'Is it not very likely that some lady has been taken by him, and that he may love her dearly?'

'Perhaps. I don't know. What would you think of him, Lizzie, if you were a lady?'

'I a lady!' she repeated, laughing. 'Such a fancy!'

'Yes. But say: just as a fancy, and for instance.'

'I a lady! I, a poor girl who used to row poor father on the river. I, who had rowed poor father out and home on the very night when I saw him for the first time. I, who was made so timid by his looking at me, that I got up and went out!'

('He did look at you, even that night, though you were not a lady!' thought Miss Wren.)

'I a lady!' Lizzie went on in a low voice, with her eyes upon the fire. 'I, with poor father's grave not even cleared of undeserved stain and shame, and he trying to clear it for me! I a lady!'

'Only as a fancy, and for instance,' urged Miss Wren.

'Too much, Jenny, dear, too much! My fancy is not able to get that far.' As the low fire gleamed upon her, it showed her smiling, mournfully and abstractedly.

'But I am in the humour, and I must be humoured, Lizzie, because after all I am a poor little thing, and have had a hard day with my bad child. Look in the fire, as I like to hear you tell how you used to do when you lived in that dreary old house that had once been a windmill. Look in the—what was its name when you told fortunes with your brother that I DON'T like?'

'The hollow down by the flare?'

'Ah! That's the name! You can find a lady there, I know.'

'More easily than I can make one of such material as myself, Jenny.'

The sparkling eye looked steadfastly up, as the musing face looked thoughtfully down. 'Well?' said the dolls' dressmaker, 'We have found our lady?'

Lizzie nodded, and asked, 'Shall she be rich?'

'She had better be, as he's poor.'

'She is very rich. Shall she be handsome?'

'Even you can be that, Lizzie, so she ought to be.'

'She is very handsome.'

'What does she say about him?' asked Miss Jenny, in a low voice: watchful, through an intervening silence, of the face looking down at the fire.

'She is glad, glad, to be rich, that he may have the money. She is glad, glad, to be beautiful, that he may be proud of her. Her poor heart—'

'Eh? Her poor hear?' said Miss Wren.

'Her heart—is given him, with all its love and truth. She would joyfully die with him, or, better than that, die for him. She knows he has failings, but she thinks they have grown up through his being like one cast away, for the want of something to trust in, and care for, and think well of. And she says, that lady rich and beautiful that I can never come near, "Only put me in that empty place, only try how little I mind myself, only prove what a world of things I will do and bear for you, and I hope that you might even come to be much better than you are, through me who am so much worse, and hardly worth the thinking of beside you."'

As the face looking at the fire had become exalted and forgetful in the rapture of these words, the little creature, openly clearing away her fair hair with her disengaged hand, had gazed at it with earnest attention and something like alarm. Now that the speaker ceased, the little creature laid down her head again, and moaned, 'O me, O me, O me!'

'In pain, dear Jenny?' asked Lizzie, as if awakened.

'Yes, but not the old pain. Lay me down, lay me down. Don't go out of my sight to-night. Lock the door and keep close to me. Then turning away her face, she said in a whisper to herself, 'My Lizzie, my poor Lizzie! O my blessed children, come back in the long bright slanting rows, and come for her, not me. She wants help more than I, my blessed children!'

She had stretched her hands up with that higher and better look, and now she turned again, and folded them round Lizzie's neck, and rocked herself on Lizzie's breast.

Chapter 12

MORE BIRDS OF PREY

Rogue Riderhood dwelt deep and dark in Limehouse Hole, among the riggers, and the mast, oar and block makers, and the boat-builders, and the sail-lofts, as in a kind of ship's hold stored full of waterside characters, some no better than himself, some very much better, and none much worse. The Hole, albeit in a general way not over nice in its choice of company, was rather shy in reference to the honour of cultivating the Rogue's acquaintance; more frequently giving him the cold shoulder than the warm hand, and seldom or never drinking with him unless at his own expense. A part of the Hole, indeed, contained so much public spirit and private virtue that not even this strong leverage could move it to good fellowship with a tainted accuser. But, there may have been the drawback on this magnanimous morality, that its exponents held a true witness before Justice to be the next unneighbourly and accursed character to a false one.

Had it not been for the daughter whom he often mentioned, Mr Riderhood might have found the Hole a mere grave as to any means it would yield him of getting a living. But Miss Pleasant Riderhood had some little position and connection in Limehouse Hole. Upon the smallest of small scales, she was an unlicensed pawnbroker, keeping what was popularly called a Leaving Shop, by lending insignificant sums on insignificant articles of property deposited with her as security. In her four-and-twentieth year of life, Pleasant was already in her fifth year of this way of trade. Her deceased mother had established the business, and on that parent's demise she had appropriated a secret capital of fifteen shillings to establishing herself in it; the existence of such capital in a pillow being the last intelligible confidential communication made to her by the departed, before succumbing to dropsical conditions of snuff and gin, incompatible equally with coherence and existence.

Why christened Pleasant, the late Mrs Riderhood might possibly have been at some time able to explain, and possibly not. Her daughter had no information on that point. Pleasant she found herself, and she couldn't help it. She had not been consulted on the question, any more than on the question of her coming into these terrestrial parts, to want a name. Similarly, she found herself possessed of what is colloquially termed a swivel eye (derived from her father), which she might perhaps have declined if her sentiments on the subject had been taken. She was not otherwise positively ill-looking, though anxious, meagre, of a muddy complexion, and looking as old again as she really was.

As some dogs have it in the blood, or are trained, to worry certain creatures to a certain point, so—not to make the comparison disrespectfully—Pleasant Riderhood had it in the blood, or had been trained, to regard seamen, within certain limits, as her prey. Show her a man in a blue jacket, and, figuratively speaking, she pinned him instantly. Yet, all things considered, she was not of an evil mind or an unkindly disposition. For, observe how many things were to be considered according to her own unfortunate experience. Show Pleasant Riderhood a Wedding in the street, and she only saw two people taking out a regular licence to quarrel and fight. Show her a Christening, and she saw a little heathen personage having a quite superfluous name bestowed upon it, inasmuch as it would be commonly addressed by some abusive epithet: which little personage was not in the least wanted by anybody, and would be shoved and banged out of everybody's way, until it should grow big enough to shove and bang. Show her a Funeral, and she saw an unremunerative ceremony in the nature of a black masquerade, conferring a temporary gentility on the performers, at an immense expense, and representing the only formal party ever given by the deceased. Show her a live father, and she saw but a duplicate of her own father, who from her infancy had been taken with fits and starts of discharging his duty to her, which duty was always incorporated in the form of a fist or a leathern strap, and being discharged hurt her. All things considered, therefore, Pleasant Riderhood was not so very, very bad. There was even a touch of romance in her—of such romance as could creep into Limehouse Hole—and maybe sometimes of a summer evening, when she stood with folded arms at her shop-door, looking from the reeking street to the sky where the sun was setting, she may have had some vaporous visions of far-off islands in the southern seas or elsewhere (not being geographically particular), where it would be good to roam with a congenial partner among groves of bread-fruit, waiting for ships to be wafted from the hollow ports of civilization. For, sailors to be got the better of, were essential to Miss Pleasant's Eden.

Not on a summer evening did she come to her little shop-door, when a certain man standing over against the house on the opposite side of the street took notice of her. That was on a cold shrewd windy evening, after dark. Pleasant Riderhood shared with most of the lady inhabitants of the Hole, the peculiarity that her hair was a ragged knot, constantly coming down behind, and that she never could enter upon any undertaking without first twisting it into place. At that particular moment, being newly come to the threshold to take a look out of doors, she was winding herself up with both hands after this fashion. And so prevalent was the fashion, that on the occasion of a fight or other disturbance in the Hole, the ladies would be seen flocking from all quarters universally twisting their back-hair as they came along, and many of them, in the hurry of the moment, carrying their back-combs in their mouths.

It was a wretched little shop, with a roof that any man standing in it could touch with his hand; little better than a cellar or cave, down three steps. Yet in its ill-lighted window, among a flaring handkerchief or two, an old peacoat or so, a few valueless watches and compasses, a jar of tobacco and two crossed pipes, a bottle of walnut ketchup, and some horrible sweets these creature discomforts serving as a blind to the main business of the Leaving Shop—was displayed the inscription SEAMAN'S BOARDING-HOUSE.

Taking notice of Pleasant Riderhood at the door, the man crossed so quickly that she was still winding herself up, when he stood close before her.

'Is your father at home?' said he.

'I think he is,' returned Pleasant, dropping her arms; 'come in.'

It was a tentative reply, the man having a seafaring appearance. Her father was not at home, and Pleasant knew it. 'Take a seat by the fire,' were her hospitable words when she had got him in; 'men of your calling are always welcome here.'

'Thankee,' said the man.

His manner was the manner of a sailor, and his hands were the hands of a sailor, except that they were smooth. Pleasant had an eye for sailors, and she noticed the unused colour and texture of the hands, sunburnt though they were, as sharply as she noticed their unmistakable looseness and suppleness, as he sat himself down with his left arm carelessly thrown across his left leg a little above the knee, and the right arm as carelessly thrown over the elbow of the wooden chair, with the hand curved, half open and half shut, as if it had just let go a rope.

'Might you be looking for a Boarding-House?' Pleasant inquired, taking her observant stand on one side of the fire.

'I don't rightly know my plans yet,' returned the man.

'You ain't looking for a Leaving Shop?'

'No,' said the man.

'No,' assented Pleasant, 'you've got too much of an outfit on you for that. But if you should want either, this is both.'

'Ay, ay!' said the man, glancing round the place. 'I know. I've been here before.'

'Did you Leave anything when you were here before?' asked Pleasant, with a view to principal and interest.

'No.' The man shook his head.

'I am pretty sure you never boarded here?'

'No.' The man again shook his head.

'What DID you do here when you were here before?' asked Pleasant. 'For I don't remember you.'

'It's not at all likely you should. I only stood at the door, one night—on the lower step there—while a shipmate of mine looked in to speak to your father. I remember the place well.' Looking very curiously round it.

'Might that have been long ago?'

'Ay, a goodish bit ago. When I came off my last voyage.'

'Then you have not been to sea lately?'

'No. Been in the sick bay since then, and been employed ashore.'

'Then, to be sure, that accounts for your hands.'

The man with a keen look, a quick smile, and a change of manner, caught her up. 'You're a good observer. Yes. That accounts for my hands.'

Pleasant was somewhat disquieted by his look, and returned it suspiciously. Not only was his change of manner, though very sudden, quite collected, but his former manner, which he resumed, had a certain suppressed confidence and sense of power in it that were half threatening.

'Will your father be long?' he inquired.

'I don't know. I can't say.'

'As you supposed he was at home, it would seem that he has just gone out? How's that?'

'I supposed he had come home,' Pleasant explained.

'Oh! You supposed he had come home? Then he has been some time out? How's that?'

'I don't want to deceive you. Father's on the river in his boat.'

'At the old work?' asked the man.

'I don't know what you mean,' said Pleasant, shrinking a step back. 'What on earth d'ye want?'

'I don't want to hurt your father. I don't want to say I might, if I chose. I want to speak to him. Not much in that, is there? There shall be no secrets from you; you shall be by. And plainly, Miss Riderhood, there's nothing to be got out of me, or made of me. I am not good for the Leaving Shop, I am not good for the Boarding-House, I am not good for anything in your way to the extent of sixpenn'orth of halfpence. Put the idea aside, and we shall get on together.'

'But you're a seafaring man?' argued Pleasant, as if that were a sufficient reason for his being good for something in her way.

'Yes and no. I have been, and I may be again. But I am not for you. Won't you take my word for it?'

The conversation had arrived at a crisis to justify Miss Pleasant's hair in tumbling down. It tumbled down accordingly, and she twisted it up, looking from under her bent forehead at the man. In taking stock of his familiarly worn rough-weather nautical clothes, piece by piece, she took stock of a formidable knife in a sheath at his waist ready to his hand, and of a whistle hanging round his neck, and of a short jagged knotted club with a loaded head that peeped out of a pocket of his loose outer jacket or frock. He sat quietly looking at her; but, with these appendages partially revealing themselves, and with a quantity of bristling oakum-coloured head and whisker, he had a formidable appearance.

'Won't you take my word for it?' he asked again.

Pleasant answered with a short dumb nod. He rejoined with another short dumb nod. Then he got up and stood with his arms folded, in front of the fire, looking down into it occasionally, as she stood with her arms folded, leaning against the side of the chimney-piece.

'To wile away the time till your father comes,' he said,—'pray is there much robbing and murdering of seamen about the water-side now?'

'No,' said Pleasant.

'Any?'

'Complaints of that sort are sometimes made, about Ratcliffe and Wapping and up that way. But who knows how many are true?'

'To be sure. And it don't seem necessary.'

'That's what I say,' observed Pleasant. 'Where's the reason for it? Bless the sailors, it ain't as if they ever could keep what they have, without it.'

'You're right. Their money may be soon got out of them, without violence,' said the man.

'Of course it may,' said Pleasant; 'and then they ship again and get more. And the best thing for 'em, too, to ship again as soon as ever they can be brought to it. They're never so well off as when they're afloat.'

'I'll tell you why I ask,' pursued the visitor, looking up from the fire. 'I was once beset that way myself, and left for dead.'

'No?' said Pleasant. 'Where did it happen?'

'It happened,' returned the man, with a ruminative air, as he drew his right hand across his chin, and dipped the other in the pocket of his rough outer coat, 'it happened somewhere about here as I reckon. I don't think it can have been a mile from here.'

'Were you drunk?' asked Pleasant.

'I was muddled, but not with fair drinking. I had not been drinking, you understand. A mouthful did it.'

Pleasant with a grave look shook her head; importing that she understood the process, but decidedly disapproved.

'Fair trade is one thing,' said she, 'but that's another. No one has a right to carry on with Jack in THAT way.'

'The sentiment does you credit,' returned the man, with a grim smile; and added, in a mutter, 'the more so, as I believe it's not your father's.—Yes, I had a bad time of it, that time. I lost everything, and had a sharp struggle for my life, weak as I was.'

'Did you get the parties punished?' asked Pleasant.

'A tremendous punishment followed,' said the man, more seriously; 'but it was not of my bringing about.'

'Of whose, then?' asked Pleasant.

The man pointed upward with his forefinger, and, slowly recovering that hand, settled his chin in it again as he looked at the fire. Bringing her inherited eye to bear upon him, Pleasant Riderhood felt more and more uncomfortable, his manner was so mysterious, so stern, so self-possessed.

'Anyways,' said the damsel, 'I am glad punishment followed, and I say so. Fair trade with seafaring men gets a bad name through deeds of violence. I am as much against deeds of violence being done to seafaring men, as seafaring men can be themselves. I am of the same opinion as my mother was, when she was living. Fair trade, my mother used to say, but no robbery and no blows.' In the way of trade Miss Pleasant would have taken—and indeed did take when she could—as much as thirty shillings a week for board that would be dear at five, and likewise conducted the Leaving business upon correspondingly equitable principles; yet she had that tenderness of conscience and those feelings of humanity, that the moment her ideas of trade were overstepped, she became the seaman's champion, even against her father whom she seldom otherwise resisted.

But, she was here interrupted by her father's voice exclaiming angrily, 'Now, Poll Parrot!' and by her father's hat being heavily flung from his hand and striking her face. Accustomed to such occasional manifestations of his sense of parental duty, Pleasant merely wiped her face on her hair (which of course had tumbled down) before she twisted it up. This was another common procedure on the part of the ladies of the Hole, when heated by verbal or fistic altercation.

'Blest if I believe such a Poll Parrot as you was ever learned to speak!' growled Mr Riderhood, stooping to pick up his hat, and making a feint at her with his head and right elbow; for he took the delicate subject of robbing seamen in extraordinary dudgeon, and was out of humour too. 'What are you Poll Parroting at now? Ain't you got nothing to do but fold your arms and stand a Poll Parroting all night?'

'Let her alone,' urged the man. 'She was only speaking to me.'

'Let her alone too!' retorted Mr Riderhood, eyeing him all over. 'Do you know she's my daughter?'

'Yes.'

'And don't you know that I won't have no Poll Parroting on the part of my daughter? No, nor yet that I won't take no Poll Parroting from no man? And who may YOU be, and what may YOU want?'

'How can I tell you until you are silent?' returned the other fiercely.

'Well,' said Mr Riderhood, quailing a little, 'I am willing to be silent for the purpose of hearing. But don't Poll Parrot me.'

'Are you thirsty, you?' the man asked, in the same fierce short way, after returning his look.

'Why nat'rally,' said Mr Riderhood, 'ain't I always thirsty!' (Indignant at the absurdity of the question.)

'What will you drink?' demanded the man.

'Sherry wine,' returned Mr Riderhood, in the same sharp tone, 'if you're capable of it.'

The man put his hand in his pocket, took out half a sovereign, and begged the favour of Miss Pleasant that she would fetch a bottle. 'With the cork undrawn,' he added, emphatically, looking at her father.

'I'll take my Alfred David,' muttered Mr Riderhood, slowly relaxing into a dark smile, 'that you know a move. Do I know YOU? N—n—no, I don't know you.'

The man replied, 'No, you don't know me.' And so they stood looking at one another surlily enough, until Pleasant came back.

'There's small glasses on the shelf,' said Riderhood to his daughter. 'Give me the one without a foot. I gets my living by the sweat of my brow, and it's good enough for ME.' This had a modest self-denying appearance; but it soon turned out that as, by reason of the impossibility of standing the glass upright while there was anything in it, it required to be emptied as soon as filled, Mr Riderhood managed to drink in the proportion of three to one.

With his Fortunatus's goblet ready in his hand, Mr Riderhood sat down on one side of the table before the fire, and the strange man on the other: Pleasant occupying a stool between the latter and the fireside. The background, composed of handkerchiefs, coats, shirts, hats, and other old articles 'On Leaving,' had a general dim resemblance to human listeners; especially where a shiny black sou'wester suit and hat hung, looking very like a clumsy mariner with his back to the company, who was so curious to overhear, that he paused for the purpose with his coat half pulled on, and his shoulders up to his ears in the uncompleted action.

The visitor first held the bottle against the light of the candle, and next examined the top of the cork. Satisfied that it had not been tampered with, he slowly took from his breastpocket a rusty clasp-knife, and, with a corkscrew in the handle, opened the wine. That done, he looked at the cork, unscrewed it from the corkscrew, laid each separately on the table, and, with the end of the sailor's knot of his neckerchief, dusted the inside of the neck of the bottle. All this with great deliberation.

At first Riderhood had sat with his footless glass extended at arm's length for filling, while the very deliberate stranger seemed absorbed in his preparations. But, gradually his arm reverted home to him, and his glass was lowered and lowered until he rested it upside down upon the table. By the same degrees his attention became concentrated on the knife. And now, as the man held out the bottle to fill all round, Riderhood stood up, leaned over the table to look closer at the knife, and stared from it to him.

'What's the matter?' asked the man.

'Why, I know that knife!' said Riderhood.

'Yes, I dare say you do.'

He motioned to him to hold up his glass, and filled it. Riderhood emptied it to the last drop and began again.

'That there knife—'

'Stop,' said the man, composedly. 'I was going to drink to your daughter. Your health, Miss Riderhood.'

'That knife was the knife of a seaman named George Radfoot.'

'It was.'

'That seaman was well beknown to me.'

'He was.'

'What's come to him?'

'Death has come to him. Death came to him in an ugly shape. He looked,' said the man, 'very horrible after it.'

'Arter what?' said Riderhood, with a frowning stare.

'After he was killed.'

'Killed? Who killed him?'

Only answering with a shrug, the man filled the footless glass, and Riderhood emptied it: looking amazedly from his daughter to his visitor.

'You don't mean to tell a honest man—' he was recommencing with his empty glass in his hand, when his eye became fascinated by the stranger's outer coat. He leaned across the table to see it nearer, touched the sleeve, turned the cuff to look at the sleeve-lining (the man, in his perfect composure, offering not the least objection), and exclaimed, 'It's my belief as this here coat was George Radfoot's too!'

'You are right. He wore it the last time you ever saw him, and the last time you ever will see him—in this world.'

'It's my belief you mean to tell me to my face you killed him!' exclaimed Riderhood; but, nevertheless, allowing his glass to be filled again.

The man only answered with another shrug, and showed no symptom of confusion.

'Wish I may die if I know what to be up to with this chap!' said Riderhood, after staring at him, and tossing his last glassful down his throat. 'Let's know what to make of you. Say something plain.'

'I will,' returned the other, leaning forward across the table, and speaking in a low impressive voice. 'What a liar you are!'

The honest witness rose, and made as though he would fling his glass in the man's face. The man not wincing, and merely shaking his forefinger half knowingly, half menacingly, the piece of honesty thought better of it and sat down again, putting the glass down too.

'And when you went to that lawyer yonder in the Temple with that invented story,' said the stranger, in an exasperatingly comfortable sort of confidence, 'you might have had your strong suspicions of a friend of your own, you know. I think you had, you know.'

'Me my suspicions? Of what friend?'

'Tell me again whose knife was this?' demanded the man.

'It was possessed by, and was the property of—him as I have made mention on,' said Riderhood, stupidly evading the actual mention of the name.

'Tell me again whose coat was this?'

'That there article of clothing likeways belonged to, and was wore by—him as I have made mention on,' was again the dull Old Bailey evasion.

'I suspect that you gave him the credit of the deed, and of keeping cleverly out of the way. But there was small cleverness in HIS keeping out of the way. The cleverness would have been, to have got back for one single instant to the light of the sun.'

'Things is come to a pretty pass,' growled Mr Riderhood, rising to his feet, goaded to stand at bay, 'when bullyers as is wearing dead men's clothes, and bullyers as is armed with dead men's knives, is to come into the houses of honest live men, getting their livings by the sweats of their brows, and is to make these here sort of charges with no rhyme and no reason, neither the one nor yet the other! Why should I have had my suspicions of him?'

'Because you knew him,' replied the man; 'because you had been one with him, and knew his real character under a fair outside; because on the night which you had afterwards reason to believe to be the very night of the murder, he came in here, within an hour of his having left his ship in the docks, and asked you in what lodgings he could find room. Was there no stranger with him?'

'I'll take my world-without-end everlasting Alfred David that you warn't with him,' answered Riderhood. 'You talk big, you do, but things look pretty black against yourself, to my thinking. You charge again' me that George Radfoot got lost sight of, and was no more thought of. What's that for a sailor? Why there's fifty such, out of sight and out of mind, ten times as long as him—through entering in different names, re-shipping when the out'ard voyage is made, and what not—a turning up to light every day about here, and no matter made of it. Ask my daughter. You could go on Poll Parroting enough with her, when I warn't come in: Poll Parrot a little with her on this pint. You and your suspicions of my suspicions of him! What are my suspicions of you? You tell me George Radfoot got killed. I ask you who done it and how you know it. You carry his knife and you wear his coat. I ask you how you come by 'em? Hand over that there bottle!' Here Mr Riderhood appeared to labour under a virtuous delusion that it was his own property. 'And you,' he added, turning to his daughter, as he filled the footless glass, 'if it warn't wasting good sherry wine on you, I'd chuck this at you, for Poll Parroting with this man. It's along of Poll Parroting that such like as him gets their suspicions, whereas I gets mine by argueyment, and being nat'rally a honest man, and sweating away at the brow as a honest man ought.' Here he filled the footless goblet again, and stood chewing one half of its contents and looking down into the other as he slowly rolled the wine about in the glass; while Pleasant, whose sympathetic hair had come down on her being apostrophised, rearranged it, much in the style of the tail of a horse when proceeding to market to be sold.

'Well? Have you finished?' asked the strange man.

'No,' said Riderhood, 'I ain't. Far from it. Now then! I want to know how George Radfoot come by his death, and how you come by his kit?'

'If you ever do know, you won't know now.'

'And next I want to know,' proceeded Riderhood 'whether you mean to charge that what-you-may-call-it-murder—'

'Harmon murder, father,' suggested Pleasant.

'No Poll Parroting!' he vociferated, in return. 'Keep your mouth shut!—I want to know, you sir, whether you charge that there crime on George Radfoot?'

'If you ever do know, you won't know now.'

'Perhaps you done it yourself?' said Riderhood, with a threatening action.

'I alone know,' returned the man, sternly shaking his head, 'the mysteries of that crime. I alone know that your trumped-up story cannot possibly be true. I alone know that it must be altogether false, and that you must know it to be altogether false. I come here to-night to tell you so much of what I know, and no more.'

Mr Riderhood, with his crooked eye upon his visitor, meditated for some moments, and then refilled his glass, and tipped the contents down his throat in three tips.

'Shut the shop-door!' he then said to his daughter, putting the glass suddenly down. 'And turn the key and stand by it! If you know all this, you sir,' getting, as he spoke, between the visitor and the door, 'why han't you gone to Lawyer Lightwood?'

'That, also, is alone known to myself,' was the cool answer.

'Don't you know that, if you didn't do the deed, what you say you could tell is worth from five to ten thousand pound?' asked Riderhood.

'I know it very well, and when I claim the money you shall share it.'

The honest man paused, and drew a little nearer to the visitor, and a little further from the door.

'I know it,' repeated the man, quietly, 'as well as I know that you and George Radfoot were one together in more than one dark business; and as well as I know that you, Roger Riderhood, conspired against an innocent man for blood-money; and as well as I know that I can—and that I swear I will!—give you up on both scores, and be the proof against you in my own person, if you defy me!'

'Father!' cried Pleasant, from the door. 'Don't defy him! Give way to him! Don't get into more trouble, father!'

'Will you leave off a Poll Parroting, I ask you?' cried Mr Riderhood, half beside himself between the two. Then, propitiatingly and crawlingly: 'You sir! You han't said what you want of me. Is it fair, is it worthy of yourself, to talk of my defying you afore ever you say what you want of me?'

'I don't want much,' said the man. 'This accusation of yours must not be left half made and half unmade. What was done for the blood-money must be thoroughly undone.'

'Well; but Shipmate—'

'Don't call me Shipmate,' said the man.

'Captain, then,' urged Mr Riderhood; 'there! You won't object to Captain. It's a honourable title, and you fully look it. Captain! Ain't the man dead? Now I ask you fair. Ain't Gaffer dead?'

'Well,' returned the other, with impatience, 'yes, he is dead. What then?'

'Can words hurt a dead man, Captain? I only ask you fair.'

'They can hurt the memory of a dead man, and they can hurt his living children. How many children had this man?'

'Meaning Gaffer, Captain?'

'Of whom else are we speaking?' returned the other, with a movement of his foot, as if Rogue Riderhood were beginning to sneak before him in the body as well as the spirit, and he spurned him off. 'I have heard of a daughter, and a son. I ask for information; I ask YOUR daughter; I prefer to speak to her. What children did Hexam leave?'

Pleasant, looking to her father for permission to reply, that honest man exclaimed with great bitterness:

'Why the devil don't you answer the Captain? You can Poll Parrot enough when you ain't wanted to Poll Parrot, you perwerse jade!'

Thus encouraged, Pleasant explained that there were only Lizzie, the daughter in question, and the youth. Both very respectable, she added.

'It is dreadful that any stigma should attach to them,' said the visitor, whom the consideration rendered so uneasy that he rose, and paced to and fro, muttering, 'Dreadful! Unforeseen? How could it be foreseen!' Then he stopped, and asked aloud: 'Where do they live?'

Pleasant further explained that only the daughter had resided with the father at the time of his accidental death, and that she had immediately afterwards quitted the neighbourhood.

'I know that,' said the man, 'for I have been to the place they dwelt in, at the time of the inquest. Could you quietly find out for me where she lives now?'

Pleasant had no doubt she could do that. Within what time, did she think? Within a day. The visitor said that was well, and he would return for the information, relying on its being obtained. To this dialogue Riderhood had attended in silence, and he now obsequiously bespake the Captain.

'Captain! Mentioning them unfort'net words of mine respecting Gaffer, it is contrairily to be bore in mind that Gaffer always were a precious rascal, and that his line were a thieving line. Likeways when I went to them two

Governors, Lawyer Lightwood and the t'other Governor, with my information, I may have been a little over-eager for the cause of justice, or (to put it another way) a little over-stimilated by them feelings which rouses a man up, when a pot of money is going about, to get his hand into that pot of money for his family's sake. Besides which, I think the wine of them two Governors was—I will not say a hocussed wine, but fur from a wine as was elthy for the mind. And there's another thing to be remembered, Captain. Did I stick to them words when Gaffer was no more, and did I say bold to them two Governors, "Governors both, wot I informed I still inform; wot was took down I hold to"? No. I says, frank and open—no shuffling, mind you, Captain!—"I may have been mistook, I've been a thinking of it, it mayn't have been took down correct on this and that, and I won't swear to thick and thin, I'd rayther forfeit your good opinions than do it." And so far as I know,' concluded Mr Riderhood, by way of proof and evidence to character, 'I HAVE actiwally forfeited the good opinions of several persons—even your own, Captain, if I understand your words—but I'd sooner do it than be forswore. There; if that's conspiracy, call me conspirator.'

'You shall sign,' said the visitor, taking very little heed of this oration, 'a statement that it was all utterly false, and the poor girl shall have it. I will bring it with me for your signature, when I come again.'

'When might you be expected, Captain?' inquired Riderhood, again dubiously getting between him and door.

'Quite soon enough for you. I shall not disappoint you; don't be afraid.'

'Might you be inclined to leave any name, Captain?'

'No, not at all. I have no such intention.'

'"Shall" is summ'at of a hard word, Captain,' urged Riderhood, still feebly dodging between him and the door, as he advanced. 'When you say a man "shall" sign this and that and t'other, Captain, you order him about in a grand sort of a way. Don't it seem so to yourself?'

The man stood still, and angrily fixed him with his eyes.

'Father, father!' entreated Pleasant, from the door, with her disengaged hand nervously trembling at her lips; 'don't! Don't get into trouble any more!'

'Hear me out, Captain, hear me out! All I was wishing to mention, Captain, afore you took your departer,' said the sneaking Mr Riderhood, falling out of his path, 'was, your handsome words relating to the reward.'

'When I claim it,' said the man, in a tone which seemed to leave some such words as 'you dog,' very distinctly understood, 'you shall share it.'

Looking stedfastly at Riderhood, he once more said in a low voice, this time with a grim sort of admiration of him as a perfect piece of evil, 'What a liar you are!' and, nodding his head twice or thrice over the compliment, passed out of the shop. But, to Pleasant he said good-night kindly.

The honest man who gained his living by the sweat of his brow remained in a state akin to stupefaction, until the footless glass and the unfinished bottle conveyed themselves into his mind. From his mind he conveyed them into his hands, and so conveyed the last of the wine into his stomach. When that was done, he awoke to a clear perception that Poll Parroting was solely chargeable with what had passed. Therefore, not to be remiss in his duty as a father, he threw a pair of sea-boots at Pleasant, which she ducked to avoid, and then cried, poor thing, using her hair for a pocket-handkerchief.

Chapter 13

A SOLO AND A DUETT

The wind was blowing so hard when the visitor came out at the shop-door into the darkness and dirt of Limehouse Hole, that it almost blew him in again. Doors were slamming violently, lamps were flickering or blown out, signs were rocking in their frames, the water of the kennels, wind-dispersed, flew about in drops like rain. Indifferent to the weather, and even preferring it to better weather for its clearance of the streets, the man looked about him with a scrutinizing glance. 'Thus much I know,' he murmured. 'I have never been here since that night, and never was here before that night, but thus much I recognize. I wonder which way did we take when we came out of that shop. We turned to the right as I have turned, but I can recall no more. Did we go by this alley? Or down that little lane?'

He tried both, but both confused him equally, and he came straying back to the same spot. 'I remember there were poles pushed out of upper windows on which clothes were drying, and I remember a low public-house, and the sound flowing down a narrow passage belonging to it of the scraping of a fiddle and the shuffling of feet. But here are all these things in the lane, and here are all these things in the alley. And I have nothing else in my mind but a wall, a dark doorway, a flight of stairs, and a room.'

He tried a new direction, but made nothing of it; walls, dark doorways, flights of stairs and rooms, were too abundant. And, like most people so puzzled, he again and again described a circle, and found himself at the point from which he had begun. 'This is like what I have read in narratives of escape from prison,' said he, 'where the little track of the fugitives in the night always seems to take the shape of the great round world, on which they wander; as if it were a secret law.'

Here he ceased to be the oakum-headed, oakum-whiskered man on whom Miss Pleasant Riderhood had looked, and, allowing for his being still wrapped in a nautical overcoat, became as like that same lost wanted Mr Julius Handford, as never man was like another in this world. In the breast of the coat he stowed the bristling hair and whisker, in a moment, as the favouring wind went with him down a solitary place that it had swept clear of passengers. Yet in that same moment he was the Secretary also, Mr Boffin's Secretary. For John Rokesmith, too, was as like that same lost wanted Mr Julius Handford as never man was like another in this world.

'I have no clue to the scene of my death,' said he. 'Not that it matters now. But having risked discovery by venturing here at all, I should have been glad to track some part of the way.' With which singular words he abandoned his search, came up out of Limehouse Hole, and took the way past Limehouse Church. At the great iron gate of the churchyard he stopped and looked in. He looked up at the high tower spectrally resisting the wind, and he looked round at the white tombstones, like enough to the dead in their winding-sheets, and he counted the nine tolls of the clock-bell.

'It is a sensation not experienced by many mortals,' said he, 'to be looking into a churchyard on a wild windy night, and to feel that I no more hold a place among the living than these dead do, and even to know that I lie buried somewhere else, as they lie buried here. Nothing uses me to it. A spirit that was once a man could hardly feel stranger or lonelier, going unrecognized among mankind, than I feel.

'But this is the fanciful side of the situation. It has a real side, so difficult that, though I think of it every day, I never thoroughly think it out. Now, let me determine to think it out as I walk home. I know I evade it, as many men—perhaps most men—do evade thinking their way through their greatest perplexity. I will try to pin myself to mine. Don't evade it, John Harmon; don't evade it; think it out!

'When I came to England, attracted to the country with which I had none but most miserable associations, by the accounts of my fine inheritance that found me abroad, I came back, shrinking from my father's money, shrinking from my father's memory, mistrustful of being forced on a mercenary wife, mistrustful of my father's intention in thrusting that marriage on me, mistrustful that I was already growing avaricious, mistrustful that I was slackening in gratitude to the two dear noble honest friends who had made the only sunlight in my childish life or that of my heartbroken sister. I came back, timid, divided in my mind, afraid of myself and everybody here, knowing of nothing but wretchedness that my father's wealth had ever brought about. Now, stop, and so far think it out, John Harmon. Is that so? That is exactly so.

'On board serving as third mate was George Radfoot. I knew nothing of him. His name first became known to me about a week before we sailed, through my being accosted by one of the ship-agent's clerks as "Mr Radfoot." It was one day when I had gone aboard to look to my preparations, and the clerk, coming behind me as I stood on deck, tapped me on the shoulder, and said, "Mr Rad-foot, look here," referring to some papers that he had in his hand. And my name first became known to Radfoot, through another clerk within a day or two, and while the ship was yet in port, coming up behind him, tapping him on the shoulder and beginning, "I beg your pardon, Mr Harmon—." I believe we were alike in bulk and stature but not otherwise, and that we were not strikingly alike, even in those respects, when we were together and could be compared.

'However, a sociable word or two on these mistakes became an easy introduction between us, and the weather was hot, and he helped me to a cool cabin on deck alongside his own, and his first school had been at Brussels as mine had been, and he had learnt French as I had learnt it, and he had a little history of himself to relate—God only knows how much of it true, and how much of it false—that had its likeness to mine. I had been a seaman too. So we got to be confidential together, and the more easily yet, because he and every one on board had known by general rumour what I was making the voyage to England for. By such degrees and means, he came to the knowledge of my uneasiness of mind, and of its setting at that time in the direction of desiring to see and form some judgment of my allotted wife, before she could possibly know me for myself; also to try Mrs Boffin and give her a glad surprise. So the plot was made out of our getting common sailors' dresses (as he was able to guide me about London), and throwing ourselves in Bella Wilfer's neighbourhood, and trying to put ourselves in her way, and doing whatever chance might favour on the spot, and seeing what came of it. If nothing came of it, I should be no worse off, and there would merely be a short delay in my presenting myself to Lightwood. I have all these facts right? Yes. They are all accurately right.

'His advantage in all this was, that for a time I was to be lost. It might be for a day or for two days, but I must be lost sight of on landing, or there would be recognition, anticipation, and failure. Therefore, I disembarked with my valise in my hand—as Potterson the steward and Mr Jacob Kibble my fellow-passenger afterwards remembered—and waited for him in the dark by that very Limehouse Church which is now behind me.

'As I had always shunned the port of London, I only knew the church through his pointing out its spire from on board. Perhaps I might recall, if it were any good to try, the way by which I went to it alone from the river; but how we two went from it to Riderhood's shop, I don't know—any more than I know what turns we took and doubles we made, after we left it. The way was purposely confused, no doubt.

'But let me go on thinking the facts out, and avoid confusing them with my speculations. Whether he took me by a straight way or a crooked way, what is that to the purpose now? Steady, John Harmon.

'When we stopped at Riderhood's, and he asked that scoundrel a question or two, purporting to refer only to the lodging-houses in which there was accommodation for us, had I the least suspicion of him? None. Certainly none until afterwards when I held the clue. I think he must have got from Riderhood in a paper, the drug, or whatever it was, that afterwards stupefied me, but I am far from sure. All I felt safe in charging on him to-night, was old companionship in villainy between them. Their undisguised intimacy, and the character I now know Riderhood to bear, made that not at all adventurous. But I am not clear about the drug. Thinking out the circumstances on which I found my suspicion, they are only two. One: I remember his changing a small folded paper from one pocket to another, after we came out, which he had not touched before. Two: I now know Riderhood to have been previously taken up for being concerned in the robbery of an unlucky seaman, to whom some such poison had been given.

'It is my conviction that we cannot have gone a mile from that shop, before we came to the wall, the dark doorway, the flight of stairs, and the room. The night was particularly dark and it rained hard. As I think the circumstances back, I hear the rain splashing on the stone pavement of the passage, which was not under cover. The room overlooked the river, or a dock, or a creek, and the tide was out. Being possessed of the time down to that point, I know by the hour that it must have been about low water; but while the coffee was getting ready, I drew back the curtain (a dark-brown curtain), and, looking out, knew by the kind of reflection below, of the few neighbouring lights, that they were reflected in tidal mud.

'He had carried under his arm a canvas bag, containing a suit of his clothes. I had no change of outer clothes with me, as I was to buy slops. "You are very wet, Mr Harmon,"—I can hear him saying—"and I am quite dry under this good waterproof coat. Put on these clothes of mine. You may find on trying them that they will answer your purpose to-morrow, as well as the slops you mean to buy, or better. While you change, I'll hurry the hot coffee." When he came back, I had his clothes on, and there was a black man with him, wearing a linen jacket, like a steward, who put the smoking coffee on the table in a tray and never looked at me. I am so far literal and exact? Literal and exact, I am certain.

'Now, I pass to sick and deranged impressions; they are so strong, that I rely upon them; but there are spaces between them that I know nothing about, and they are not pervaded by any idea of time.

'I had drank some coffee, when to my sense of sight he began to swell immensely, and something urged me to rush at him. We had a struggle near the door. He got from me, through my not knowing where to strike, in the whirling round of the room, and the flashing of flames of fire between us. I dropped down. Lying helpless on the ground, I was turned over by a foot. I was dragged by the neck into a corner. I heard men speak together. I was turned over by other feet. I saw a figure like myself lying dressed in my clothes on a bed. What might have been, for anything I knew, a silence of days, weeks, months, years, was broken by a violent wrestling of men all over the room. The figure like myself was assailed, and my valise was in its hand. I was trodden upon and fallen over. I heard a noise of blows, and thought it was a wood-cutter cutting down a tree. I could not have said that my name was John Harmon—I could not have thought it—I didn't know it—but when I heard the blows, I thought of the wood-cutter and his axe, and had some dead idea that I was lying in a forest.

'This is still correct? Still correct, with the exception that I cannot possibly express it to myself without using the word I. But it was not I. There was no such thing as I, within my knowledge.

'It was only after a downward slide through something like a tube, and then a great noise and a sparkling and crackling as of fires, that the consciousness came upon me, "This is John Harmon drowning! John Harmon, struggle for your life. John Harmon, call on Heaven and save yourself!" I think I cried it out aloud in a great agony, and then a heavy horrid unintelligible something vanished, and it was I who was struggling there alone in the water.

'I was very weak and faint, frightfully oppressed with drowsiness, and driving fast with the tide. Looking over the black water, I saw the lights racing past me on the two banks of the river, as if they were eager to be gone and leave me dying in the dark. The tide was running down, but I knew nothing of up or down then. When, guiding myself safely with Heaven's assistance before the fierce set of the water, I at last caught at a boat moored, one of a tier of boats at a causeway, I was sucked under her, and came up, only just alive, on the other side.

'Was I long in the water? Long enough to be chilled to the heart, but I don't know how long. Yet the cold was merciful, for it was the cold night air and the rain that restored me from a swoon on the stones of the causeway. They naturally supposed me to have toppled in, drunk, when I crept to the public-house it belonged to; for I had no notion where I was, and could not articulate—through the poison that had made me insensible having affected my speech—and I supposed the night to be the previous night, as it was still dark and raining. But I had lost twenty-four hours.

'I have checked the calculation often, and it must have been two nights that I lay recovering in that public-house. Let me see. Yes. I am sure it was while I lay in that bed there, that the thought entered my head of turning the danger I had passed through, to the account of being for some time supposed to have disappeared mysteriously, and of proving Bella. The dread of our being forced on one another, and perpetuating the fate that seemed to have fallen on my father's riches—the fate that they should lead to nothing but evil—was strong upon the moral timidity that dates from my childhood with my poor sister.

'As to this hour I cannot understand that side of the river where I recovered the shore, being the opposite side to that on which I was ensnared, I shall never understand it now. Even at this moment, while I leave the river behind me, going home, I cannot conceive that it rolls between me and that spot, or that the sea is where it is. But this is not thinking it out; this is making a leap to the present time.

'I could not have done it, but for the fortune in the waterproof belt round my body. Not a great fortune, forty and odd pounds for the inheritor of a hundred and odd thousand! But it was enough. Without it I must have disclosed myself. Without it, I could never have gone to that Exchequer Coffee House, or taken Mrs Wilfer's lodgings.

'Some twelve days I lived at that hotel, before the night when I saw the corpse of Radfoot at the Police Station. The inexpressible mental horror that I laboured under, as one of the consequences of the poison, makes the interval seem greatly longer, but I know it cannot have been longer. That suffering has gradually weakened and weakened since, and has only come upon me by starts, and I hope I am free from it now; but even now, I have sometimes to think, constrain myself, and stop before speaking, or I could not say the words I want to say.

'Again I ramble away from thinking it out to the end. It is not so far to the end that I need be tempted to break off. Now, on straight!

'I examined the newspapers every day for tidings that I was missing, but saw none. Going out that night to walk (for I kept retired while it was light), I found a crowd assembled round a placard posted at Whitehall. It described myself, John Harmon, as found dead and mutilated in the river under circumstances of strong suspicion, described my dress, described the papers in my pockets, and stated where I was lying for recognition. In a wild incautious way I hurried there, and there—with the horror of the death I had escaped, before my eyes in its most appalling shape, added to the inconceivable horror tormenting me at that time when the poisonous stuff was strongest on me—I perceived that Radfoot had been murdered by some unknown hands for the money for which he would have murdered me, and that probably we had both been shot into the river from the same dark place into the same dark tide, when the stream ran deep and strong.

'That night I almost gave up my mystery, though I suspected no one, could offer no information, knew absolutely nothing save that the murdered man was not I, but Radfoot. Next day while I hesitated, and next day while I hesitated, it seemed as if the whole country were determined to have me dead. The Inquest declared me dead, the Government proclaimed me dead; I could not listen at my fireside for five minutes to the outer noises, but it was borne into my ears that I was dead.

'So John Harmon died, and Julius Handford disappeared, and John Rokesmith was born. John Rokesmith's intent to-night has been to repair a wrong that he could never have imagined possible, coming to his ears through the Lightwood talk related to him, and which he is bound by every consideration to remedy. In that intent John Rokesmith will persevere, as his duty is.

'Now, is it all thought out? All to this time? Nothing omitted? No, nothing. But beyond this time? To think it out through the future, is a harder though a much shorter task than to think it out through the past. John Harmon is dead. Should John Harmon come to life?

'If yes, why? If no, why?'

'Take yes, first. To enlighten human Justice concerning the offence of one far beyond it who may have a living mother. To enlighten it with the lights of a stone passage, a flight of stairs, a brown window-curtain, and a black man. To come into possession of my father's money, and with it sordidly to buy a beautiful creature whom I love—I cannot help it; reason has nothing to do with it; I love her against reason—but who would as soon love me for my own sake, as she would love the beggar at the corner. What a use for the money, and how worthy of its old misuses!

'Now, take no. The reasons why John Harmon should not come to life. Because he has passively allowed these dear old faithful friends to pass into possession of the property. Because he sees them happy with it, making a good use of it, effacing the old rust and tarnish on the money. Because they have virtually adopted Bella, and will provide for her. Because there is affection enough in her nature, and warmth enough in her heart, to develop into something enduringly good, under favourable conditions. Because her faults have been intensified by her place in my father's will, and she is already growing better. Because her marriage with John Harmon, after what I have heard from her own lips, would be a shocking mockery, of which both she and I must always be conscious, and which would degrade her in her mind, and me in mine, and each of us in the other's. Because if John Harmon comes to life and does not marry her, the property falls into the very hands that hold it now.

'What would I have? Dead, I have found the true friends of my lifetime still as true as tender and as faithful as when I was alive, and making my memory an incentive to good actions done in my name. Dead, I have found them when they might have slighted my name, and passed greedily over my grave to ease and wealth, lingering by the way, like single-hearted children, to recall their love for me when I was a poor frightened child. Dead, I have heard from the woman who would have been my wife if I had lived, the revolting truth that I should have purchased her, caring nothing for me, as a Sultan buys a slave.

'What would I have? If the dead could know, or do know, how the living use them, who among the hosts of dead has found a more disinterested fidelity on earth than I? Is not that enough for me? If I had come back, these noble creatures would have welcomed me, wept over me, given up everything to me with joy. I did not come back, and they have passed unspoiled into my place. Let them rest in it, and let Bella rest in hers.

'What course for me then? This. To live the same quiet Secretary life, carefully avoiding chances of recognition, until they shall have become more accustomed to their altered state, and until the great swarm of swindlers under many names shall have found newer prey. By that time, the method I am establishing through all the affairs, and with which I will every day take new pains to make them both familiar, will be, I may hope, a machine in such working order as that they can keep it going. I know I need but ask of their generosity, to have. When the right time comes, I will ask no more than will replace me in my former path of life, and John Rokesmith shall tread it as contentedly as he may. But John Harmon shall come back no more.

'That I may never, in the days to come afar off, have any weak misgiving that Bella might, in any contingency, have taken me for my own sake if I had plainly asked her, I WILL plainly ask her: proving beyond all question what I already know too well. And now it is all thought out, from the beginning to the end, and my mind is easier.'

So deeply engaged had the living-dead man been, in thus communing with himself, that he had regarded neither the wind nor the way, and had resisted the former instinctively as he had pursued the latter. But being now come into the City, where there was a coach-stand, he stood irresolute whether to go to his lodgings, or to go first to Mr Boffin's house. He decided to go round by the house, arguing, as he carried his overcoat upon his arm, that it was less likely to attract notice if left there, than if taken to Holloway: both Mrs Wilfer and Miss Lavinia being ravenously curious touching every article of which the lodger stood possessed.

Arriving at the house, he found that Mr and Mrs Boffin were out, but that Miss Wilfer was in the drawing-room. Miss Wilfer had remained at home, in consequence of not feeling very well, and had inquired in the evening if Mr Rokesmith were in his room.

'Make my compliments to Miss Wilfer, and say I am here now.'

Miss Wilfer's compliments came down in return, and, if it were not too much trouble, would Mr Rokesmith be so kind as to come up before he went?

It was not too much trouble, and Mr Rokesmith came up.

Oh she looked very pretty, she looked very, very pretty! If the father of the late John Harmon had but left his money unconditionally to his son, and if his son had but lighted on this loveable girl for himself, and had the happiness to make her loving as well as loveable!

'Dear me! Are you not well, Mr Rokesmith?'

'Yes, quite well. I was sorry to hear, when I came in, that YOU were not.'

'A mere nothing. I had a headache—gone now—and was not quite fit for a hot theatre, so I stayed at home. I asked you if you were not well, because you look so white.'

'Do I? I have had a busy evening.'

She was on a low ottoman before the fire, with a little shining jewel of a table, and her book and her work, beside her. Ah! what a different life the late John Harmon's, if it had been his happy privilege to take his place upon that ottoman, and draw his arm about that waist, and say, 'I hope the time has been long without me? What a Home Goddess you look, my darling!'

But, the present John Rokesmith, far removed from the late John Harmon, remained standing at a distance. A little distance in respect of space, but a great distance in respect of separation.

'Mr Rokesmith,' said Bella, taking up her work, and inspecting it all round the corners, 'I wanted to say something to you when I could have the opportunity, as an explanation why I was rude to you the other day. You have no right to think ill of me, sir.'

The sharp little way in which she darted a look at him, half sensitively injured, and half pettishly, would have been very much admired by the late John Harmon.

'You don't know how well I think of you, Miss Wilfer.'

'Truly, you must have a very high opinion of me, Mr Rokesmith, when you believe that in prosperity I neglect and forget my old home.'

'Do I believe so?'

'You DID, sir, at any rate,' returned Bella.

'I took the liberty of reminding you of a little omission into which you had fallen—insensibly and naturally fallen. It was no more than that.'

'And I beg leave to ask you, Mr Rokesmith,' said Bella, 'why you took that liberty?—I hope there is no offence in the phrase; it is your own, remember.'

'Because I am truly, deeply, profoundly interested in you, Miss Wilfer. Because I wish to see you always at your best. Because I—shall I go on?'

'No, sir,' returned Bella, with a burning face, 'you have said more than enough. I beg that you will NOT go on. If you have any generosity, any honour, you will say no more.'

The late John Harmon, looking at the proud face with the down-cast eyes, and at the quick breathing as it stirred the fall of bright brown hair over the beautiful neck, would probably have remained silent.

'I wish to speak to you, sir,' said Bella, 'once for all, and I don't know how to do it. I have sat here all this evening, wishing to speak to you, and determining to speak to you, and feeling that I must. I beg for a moment's time.'

He remained silent, and she remained with her face averted, sometimes making a slight movement as if she would turn and speak. At length she did so.

'You know how I am situated here, sir, and you know how I am situated at home. I must speak to you for myself, since there is no one about me whom I could ask to do so. It is not generous in you, it is not honourable in you, to conduct yourself towards me as you do.'

'Is it ungenerous or dishonourable to be devoted to you; fascinated by you?'

'Preposterous!' said Bella.

The late John Harmon might have thought it rather a contemptuous and lofty word of repudiation.

'I now feel obliged to go on,' pursued the Secretary, 'though it were only in self-explanation and self-defence. I hope, Miss Wilfer, that it is not unpardonable—even in me—to make an honest declaration of an honest devotion to you.'

'An honest declaration!' repeated Bella, with emphasis.

'Is it otherwise?'

'I must request, sir,' said Bella, taking refuge in a touch of timely resentment, 'that I may not be questioned. You must excuse me if I decline to be cross-examined.'

'Oh, Miss Wilfer, this is hardly charitable. I ask you nothing but what your own emphasis suggests. However, I waive even that question. But what I have declared, I take my stand by. I cannot recall the avowal of my earnest and deep attachment to you, and I do not recall it.'

'I reject it, sir,' said Bella.

'I should be blind and deaf if I were not prepared for the reply. Forgive my offence, for it carries its punishment with it.'

'What punishment?' asked Bella.

'Is my present endurance none? But excuse me; I did not mean to cross-examine you again.'

'You take advantage of a hasty word of mine,' said Bella with a little sting of self-reproach, 'to make me seem—I don't know what. I spoke without consideration when I used it. If that was bad, I am sorry; but you repeat it after consideration, and that seems to me to be at least no better. For the rest, I beg it may be understood, Mr Rokesmith, that there is an end of this between us, now and for ever.'

'Now and for ever,' he repeated.

'Yes. I appeal to you, sir,' proceeded Bella with increasing spirit, 'not to pursue me. I appeal to you not to take advantage of your position in this house to make my position in it distressing and disagreeable. I appeal to you to discontinue your habit of making your misplaced attentions as plain to Mrs Boffin as to me.'

'Have I done so?'

'I should think you have,' replied Bella. 'In any case it is not your fault if you have not, Mr Rokesmith.'

'I hope you are wrong in that impression. I should be very sorry to have justified it. I think I have not. For the future there is no apprehension. It is all over.'

'I am much relieved to hear it,' said Bella. 'I have far other views in life, and why should you waste your own?'

'Mine!' said the Secretary. 'My life!'

His curious tone caused Bella to glance at the curious smile with which he said it. It was gone as he glanced back. 'Pardon me, Miss Wilfer,' he proceeded, when their eyes met; 'you have used some hard words, for which I do not doubt you have a justification in your mind, that I do not understand. Ungenerous and dishonourable. In what?'

'I would rather not be asked,' said Bella, haughtily looking down.

'I would rather not ask, but the question is imposed upon me. Kindly explain; or if not kindly, justly.'

'Oh, sir!' said Bella, raising her eyes to his, after a little struggle to forbear, 'is it generous and honourable to use the power here which your favour with Mr and Mrs Boffin and your ability in your place give you, against me?'

'Against you?'

'Is it generous and honourable to form a plan for gradually bringing their influence to bear upon a suit which I have shown you that I do not like, and which I tell you that I utterly reject?'

The late John Harmon could have borne a good deal, but he would have been cut to the heart by such a suspicion as this.

'Would it be generous and honourable to step into your place—if you did so, for I don't know that you did, and I hope you did not—anticipating, or knowing beforehand, that I should come here, and designing to take me at this disadvantage?'

'This mean and cruel disadvantage,' said the Secretary.

'Yes,' assented Bella.

The Secretary kept silence for a little while; then merely said, 'You are wholly mistaken, Miss Wilfer; wonderfully mistaken. I cannot say, however, that it is your fault. If I deserve better things of you, you do not know it.'

'At least, sir,' retorted Bella, with her old indignation rising, 'you know the history of my being here at all. I have heard Mr Boffin say that you are master of every line and word of that will, as you are master of all his affairs. And was it not enough that I should have been willed away, like a horse, or a dog, or a bird; but must you too begin to dispose of me in your mind, and speculate in me, as soon as I had ceased to be the talk and the laugh of the town? Am I for ever to be made the property of strangers?'

'Believe me,' returned the Secretary, 'you are wonderfully mistaken.'

'I should be glad to know it,' answered Bella.

'I doubt if you ever will. Good-night. Of course I shall be careful to conceal any traces of this interview from Mr and Mrs Boffin, as long as I remain here. Trust me, what you have complained of is at an end for ever.'

'I am glad I have spoken, then, Mr Rokesmith. It has been painful and difficult, but it is done. If I have hurt you, I hope you will forgive me. I am inexperienced and impetuous, and I have been a little spoilt; but I really am not so bad as I dare say I appear, or as you think me.'

He quitted the room when Bella had said this, relenting in her wilful inconsistent way. Left alone, she threw herself back on her ottoman, and said, 'I didn't know the lovely woman was such a Dragon!' Then, she got up and looked in the glass, and said to her image, 'You have been positively swelling your features, you little fool!' Then, she took an impatient walk to the other end of the room and back, and said, 'I wish Pa was here to have a talk about an avaricious marriage; but he is better away, poor dear, for I know I should pull his hair if he WAS here.' And then she threw her work away, and threw her book after it, and sat down and hummed a tune, and hummed it out of tune, and quarrelled with it.

And John Rokesmith, what did he?

He went down to his room, and buried John Harmon many additional fathoms deep. He took his hat, and walked out, and, as he went to Holloway or anywhere else—not at all minding where—heaped mounds upon mounds of earth over John Harmon's grave. His walking did not bring him home until the dawn of day. And so busy had he been all night, piling and piling weights upon weights of earth above John Harmon's grave, that by that time John Harmon lay buried under a whole Alpine range; and still the Sexton Rokesmith accumulated mountains over him, lightening his labour with the dirge, 'Cover him, crush him, keep him down!'

Chapter 14

STRONG OF PURPOSE

The sexton-task of piling earth above John Harmon all night long, was not conducive to sound sleep; but Rokesmith had some broken morning rest, and rose strengthened in his purpose. It was all over now. No ghost should trouble Mr and Mrs Boffin's peace; invisible and voiceless, the ghost should look on for a little while longer at the state of existence out of which it had departed, and then should for ever cease to haunt the scenes in which it had no place.

He went over it all again. He had lapsed into the condition in which he found himself, as many a man lapses into many a condition, without perceiving the accumulative power of its separate circumstances. When in the distrust engendered by his wretched childhood and the action for evil—never yet for good within his knowledge then—of his father and his father's wealth on all within their influence, he conceived the idea of his first deception, it was meant to be harmless, it was to last but a few hours or days, it was to involve in it only the girl so capriciously forced upon him and upon whom he was so capriciously forced, and it was honestly meant well towards her. For, if he had found her unhappy in the prospect of that marriage (through her heart inclining to another man or for any other cause), he would seriously have said: 'This is another of the old perverted uses of the misery-making money. I will let it go to my and my sister's only protectors and friends.' When the snare into which he fell so outstripped his first intention as that he found himself placarded by the police authorities upon the London walls for dead, he confusedly accepted the aid that fell upon him, without considering how firmly it must seem to fix the Boffins in their accession to the fortune. When he saw them, and knew them, and even from his vantage-ground of inspection could find no flaw in them, he asked himself, 'And shall I come to life to dispossess such people as these?' There was no good to set against the putting of them to that hard proof. He had heard from Bella's own lips when he stood tapping at the door on that night of his taking the lodgings, that the marriage would have been on her part thoroughly mercenary. He had since tried her, in his own unknown person and supposed station, and she not only rejected his advances but resented them. Was it for him to have the shame of buying her, or the meanness of punishing her? Yet, by coming to life and accepting the condition of the inheritance, he must do the former; and by coming to life and rejecting it, he must do the latter.

Another consequence that he had never foreshadowed, was the implication of an innocent man in his supposed murder. He would obtain complete retraction from the accuser, and set the wrong right; but clearly the wrong could never have been done if he had never planned a deception. Then, whatever inconvenience or distress of mind the deception cost him, it was manful repentantly to accept as among its consequences, and make no complaint.

Thus John Rokesmith in the morning, and it buried John Harmon still many fathoms deeper than he had been buried in the night.

Going out earlier than he was accustomed to do, he encountered the cherub at the door. The cherub's way was for a certain space his way, and they walked together.

It was impossible not to notice the change in the cherub's appearance. The cherub felt very conscious of it, and modestly remarked:

'A present from my daughter Bella, Mr Rokesmith.'

The words gave the Secretary a stroke of pleasure, for he remembered the fifty pounds, and he still loved the girl. No doubt it was very weak—it always IS very weak, some authorities hold—but he loved the girl.

'I don't know whether you happen to have read many books of African Travel, Mr Rokesmith?' said R. W.

'I have read several.'

'Well, you know, there's usually a King George, or a King Boy, or a King Sambo, or a King Bill, or Bull, or Rum, or Junk, or whatever name the sailors may have happened to give him.'

'Where?' asked Rokesmith.

'Anywhere. Anywhere in Africa, I mean. Pretty well everywhere, I may say; for black kings are cheap—and I think'—said R. W., with an apologetic air, 'nasty'.

'I am much of your opinion, Mr Wilfer. You were going to say—?'

'I was going to say, the king is generally dressed in a London hat only, or a Manchester pair of braces, or one epaulette, or an uniform coat with his legs in the sleeves, or something of that kind.'

'Just so,' said the Secretary.

'In confidence, I assure you, Mr Rokesmith,' observed the cheerful cherub, 'that when more of my family were at home and to be provided for, I used to remind myself immensely of that king. You have no idea, as a single man, of the difficulty I have had in wearing more than one good article at a time.'

'I can easily believe it, Mr Wilfer.'

'I only mention it,' said R. W. in the warmth of his heart, 'as a proof of the amiable, delicate, and considerate affection of my daughter Bella. If she had been a little spoilt, I couldn't have thought so very much of it, under the circumstances. But no, not a bit. And she is so very pretty! I hope you agree with me in finding her very pretty, Mr Rokesmith?'

'Certainly I do. Every one must.'

'I hope so,' said the cherub. 'Indeed, I have no doubt of it. This is a great advancement for her in life, Mr Rokesmith. A great opening of her prospects?'

'Miss Wilfer could have no better friends than Mr and Mrs Boffin.'

'Impossible!' said the gratified cherub. 'Really I begin to think things are very well as they are. If Mr John Harmon had lived—'

'He is better dead,' said the Secretary.

'No, I won't go so far as to say that,' urged the cherub, a little remonstrant against the very decisive and unpitying tone; 'but he mightn't have suited Bella, or Bella mightn't have suited him, or fifty things, whereas now I hope she can choose for herself.'

'Has she—as you place the confidence in me of speaking on the subject, you will excuse my asking—has she—perhaps—chosen?' faltered the Secretary.

'Oh dear no!' returned R. W.

'Young ladies sometimes,' Rokesmith hinted, 'choose without mentioning their choice to their fathers.'

'Not in this case, Mr Rokesmith. Between my daughter Bella and me there is a regular league and covenant of confidence. It was ratified only the other day. The ratification dates from—these,' said the cherub, giving a little pull at the lappels of his coat and the pockets of his trousers. 'Oh no, she has not chosen. To be sure, young George Sampson, in the days when Mr John Harmon—'

'Who I wish had never been born!' said the Secretary, with a gloomy brow.

R. W. looked at him with surprise, as thinking he had contracted an unaccountable spite against the poor deceased, and continued: 'In the days when Mr John Harmon was being sought out, young George Sampson certainly was hovering about Bella, and Bella let him hover. But it never was seriously thought of, and it's still less than ever to be thought of now. For Bella is ambitious, Mr Rokesmith, and I think I may predict will marry fortune. This time, you see, she will have the person and the property before her together, and will be able to make her choice with her eyes open. This is my road. I am very sorry to part company so soon. Good morning, sir!'

The Secretary pursued his way, not very much elevated in spirits by this conversation, and, arriving at the Boffin mansion, found Betty Higden waiting for him.

'I should thank you kindly, sir,' said Betty, 'if I might make so bold as have a word or two wi' you.'

She should have as many words as she liked, he told her; and took her into his room, and made her sit down.

''Tis concerning Sloppy, sir,' said Betty. 'And that's how I come here by myself. Not wishing him to know what I'm a-going to say to you, I got the start of him early and walked up.'

'You have wonderful energy,' returned Rokesmith. 'You are as young as I am.'

Betty Higden gravely shook her head. 'I am strong for my time of life, sir, but not young, thank the Lord!'

'Are you thankful for not being young?'

'Yes, sir. If I was young, it would all have to be gone through again, and the end would be a weary way off, don't you see? But never mind me; 'tis concerning Sloppy.'

'And what about him, Betty?'

''Tis just this, sir. It can't be reasoned out of his head by any powers of mine but what that he can do right by your kind lady and gentleman and do his work for me, both together. Now he can't. To give himself up to being put in the way of arning a good living and getting on, he must give me up. Well; he won't.'

'I respect him for it,' said Rokesmith.

'DO ye, sir? I don't know but what I do myself. Still that don't make it right to let him have his way. So as he won't give me up, I'm a-going to give him up.'

'How, Betty?'

'I'm a-going to run away from him.'

With an astonished look at the indomitable old face and the bright eyes, the Secretary repeated, 'Run away from him?'

'Yes, sir,' said Betty, with one nod. And in the nod and in the firm set of her mouth, there was a vigour of purpose not to be doubted.

'Come, come!' said the Secretary. 'We must talk about this. Let us take our time over it, and try to get at the true sense of the case and the true course, by degrees.'

'Now, lookee here, by dear,' returned old Betty—'asking your excuse for being so familiar, but being of a time of life a'most to be your grandmother twice over. Now, lookee, here. 'Tis a poor living and a hard as is to be got out of this work that I'm a doing now, and but for Sloppy I don't know as I should have held to it this long. But it did just keep us on, the two together. Now that I'm alone—with even Johnny gone—I'd far sooner be upon my feet and tiring of myself out, than a sitting folding and folding by the fire. And I'll tell you why. There's a deadness steals over me at times, that the kind of life favours and I don't like. Now, I seem to have Johnny in my arms—now, his mother—now, his mother's mother—now, I seem to be a child myself, a lying once again in the arms of my own mother—then I get numbed, thought and sense, till I start out of my seat, afeerd that I'm a growing like the poor old people that they brick up in the Unions, as you may sometimes see when they let 'em out of the four walls to have a warm in the sun, crawling quite scared about the streets. I was a nimble girl, and have always been a active body, as I told your lady, first time ever I see her good face. I can still walk twenty mile if I am put to it. I'd far better be a walking than a getting numbed and dreary. I'm a good fair knitter, and can make many little things to sell. The loan from your lady and gentleman of twenty shillings to fit out a basket with, would be a fortune for me. Trudging round the country and tiring of myself out, I shall keep the deadness off, and get my own bread by my own labour. And what more can I want?'

'And this is your plan,' said the Secretary, 'for running away?'

'Show me a better! My deary, show me a better! Why, I know very well,' said old Betty Higden, 'and you know very well, that your lady and gentleman would set me up like a queen for the rest of my life, if so be that we could make it right among us to have it so. But we can't make it right among us to have it so. I've never took charity yet, nor yet has any one belonging to me. And it would be forsaking of myself indeed, and forsaking of my children dead and gone, and forsaking of their children dead and gone, to set up a contradiction now at last.'

'It might come to be justifiable and unavoidable at last,' the Secretary gently hinted, with a slight stress on the word.

'I hope it never will! It ain't that I mean to give offence by being anyways proud,' said the old creature simply, 'but that I want to be of a piece like, and helpful of myself right through to my death.'

'And to be sure,' added the Secretary, as a comfort for her, 'Sloppy will be eagerly looking forward to his opportunity of being to you what you have been to him.'

'Trust him for that, sir!' said Betty, cheerfully. 'Though he had need to be something quick about it, for I'm a getting to be an old one. But I'm a strong one too, and travel and weather never hurt me yet! Now, be so kind as speak for me to your lady and gentleman, and tell 'em what I ask of their good friendliness to let me do, and why I ask it.'

The Secretary felt that there was no gainsaying what was urged by this brave old heroine, and he presently repaired to Mrs Boffin and recommended her to let Betty Higden have her way, at all events for the time. 'It would be far more satisfactory to your kind heart, I know,' he said, 'to provide for her, but it may be a duty to respect this independent spirit.' Mrs Boffin was not proof against the consideration set before her. She and her husband had worked too, and had brought their simple faith and honour clean out of dustheaps. If they owed a duty to Betty Higden, of a surety that duty must be done.

'But, Betty,' said Mrs Boffin, when she accompanied John Rokesmith back to his room, and shone upon her with the light of her radiant face, 'granted all else, I think I wouldn't run away'.

''Twould come easier to Sloppy,' said Mrs Higden, shaking her head. ''Twould come easier to me too. But 'tis as you please.'

'When would you go?'

'Now,' was the bright and ready answer. 'To-day, my deary, to-morrow. Bless ye, I am used to it. I know many parts of the country well. When nothing else was to be done, I have worked in many a market-garden afore now, and in many a hop-garden too.'

'If I give my consent to your going, Betty—which Mr Rokesmith thinks I ought to do—'

Betty thanked him with a grateful curtsey.

'—We must not lose sight of you. We must not let you pass out of our knowledge. We must know all about you.'

'Yes, my deary, but not through letter-writing, because letter-writing—indeed, writing of most sorts hadn't much come up for such as me when I was young. But I shall be to and fro. No fear of my missing a chance of giving myself a sight of your reviving face. Besides,' said Betty, with logical good faith, 'I shall have a debt to pay off, by littles, and naturally that would bring me back, if nothing else would.'

'MUST it be done?' asked Mrs Boffin, still reluctant, of the Secretary.

'I think it must.'

After more discussion it was agreed that it should be done, and Mrs Boffin summoned Bella to note down the little purchases that were necessary to set Betty up in trade. 'Don't ye be timorous for me, my dear,' said the stanch old heart, observant of Bella's face: when I take my seat with my work, clean and busy and fresh, in a country market-place, I shall turn a sixpence as sure as ever a farmer's wife there.'

The Secretary took that opportunity of touching on the practical question of Mr Sloppy's capabilities. He would have made a wonderful cabinet-maker, said Mrs Higden, 'if there had been the money to put him to it.' She had seen him handle tools that he had borrowed to mend the mangle, or to knock a broken piece of furniture together, in a surprising manner. As to constructing toys for the Minders, out of nothing, he had done that daily. And once as many as a dozen people had got together in the lane to see the neatness with which he fitted the broken pieces of a foreign monkey's musical instrument. 'That's well,' said the Secretary. 'It will not be hard to find a trade for him.'

John Harmon being buried under mountains now, the Secretary that very same day set himself to finish his affairs and have done with him. He drew up an ample declaration, to be signed by Rogue Riderhood (knowing he could get his signature to it, by making him another and much shorter evening call), and then considered to whom should he give the document? To Hexam's son, or daughter? Resolved speedily, to the daughter. But it would be safer to avoid seeing the daughter, because the son had seen Julius Handford, and—he could not be too careful—there might possibly be some comparison of notes between the son and daughter, which would awaken slumbering suspicion, and lead to consequences. 'I might even,' he reflected, 'be apprehended as having been concerned in my own murder!' Therefore, best to send it to the daughter under cover by the post. Pleasant Riderhood had undertaken to find out where she lived, and it was not necessary that it should be attended by a single word of explanation. So far, straight.

But, all that he knew of the daughter he derived from Mrs Boffin's accounts of what she heard from Mr Lightwood, who seemed to have a reputation for his manner of relating a story, and to have made this story quite his own. It interested him, and he would like to have the means of knowing more—as, for instance, that she received the exonerating paper, and that it satisfied her—by opening some channel altogether independent of Lightwood: who likewise had seen Julius Handford, who had publicly advertised for Julius Handford, and whom of all men he, the Secretary, most avoided. 'But with whom the common course of things might bring me in a moment face to face, any day in the week or any hour in the day.'

Now, to cast about for some likely means of opening such a channel. The boy, Hexam, was training for and with a schoolmaster. The Secretary knew it, because his sister's share in that disposal of him seemed to be the best part of Lightwood's account of the family. This young fellow, Sloppy, stood in need of some instruction. If he, the Secretary, engaged that schoolmaster to impart it to him, the channel might be opened. The next point was, did Mrs Boffin know the schoolmaster's name? No, but she knew where the school was. Quite enough. Promptly the Secretary wrote to the master of that school, and that very evening Bradley Headstone answered in person.

The Secretary stated to the schoolmaster how the object was, to send to him for certain occasional evening instruction, a youth whom Mr and Mrs Boffin wished to help to an industrious and useful place in life. The schoolmaster was willing to undertake the charge of such a pupil. The Secretary inquired on what terms? The schoolmaster stated on what terms. Agreed and disposed of.

'May I ask, sir,' said Bradley Headstone, 'to whose good opinion I owe a recommendation to you?'

'You should know that I am not the principal here. I am Mr Boffin's Secretary. Mr Boffin is a gentleman who inherited a property of which you may have heard some public mention; the Harmon property.'

'Mr Harmon,' said Bradley: who would have been a great deal more at a loss than he was, if he had known to whom he spoke: 'was murdered and found in the river.'

'Was murdered and found in the river.'

'It was not—'

'No,' interposed the Secretary, smiling, 'it was not he who recommended you. Mr Boffin heard of you through a certain Mr Lightwood. I think you know Mr Lightwood, or know of him?'

'I know as much of him as I wish to know, sir. I have no acquaintance with Mr Lightwood, and I desire none. I have no objection to Mr Lightwood, but I have a particular objection to some of Mr Lightwood's friends—in short, to one of Mr Lightwood's friends. His great friend.'

He could hardly get the words out, even then and there, so fierce did he grow (though keeping himself down with infinite pains of repression), when the careless and contemptuous bearing of Eugene Wrayburn rose before his mind.

The Secretary saw there was a strong feeling here on some sore point, and he would have made a diversion from it, but for Bradley's holding to it in his cumbersome way.

'I have no objection to mention the friend by name,' he said, doggedly. 'The person I object to, is Mr Eugene Wrayburn.'

The Secretary remembered him. In his disturbed recollection of that night when he was striving against the drugged drink, there was but a dim image of Eugene's person; but he remembered his name, and his manner of speaking, and how he had gone with them to view the body, and where he had stood, and what he had said.

'Pray, Mr Headstone, what is the name,' he asked, again trying to make a diversion, 'of young Hexam's sister?'

'Her name is Lizzie,' said the schoolmaster, with a strong contraction of his whole face.

'She is a young woman of a remarkable character; is she not?'

'She is sufficiently remarkable to be very superior to Mr Eugene Wrayburn—though an ordinary person might be that,' said the schoolmaster; 'and I hope you will not think it impertinent in me, sir, to ask why you put the two names together?'

'By mere accident,' returned the Secretary. 'Observing that Mr Wrayburn was a disagreeable subject with you, I tried to get away from it: though not very successfully, it would appear.'

'Do you know Mr Wrayburn, sir?'

'No.'

'Then perhaps the names cannot be put together on the authority of any representation of his?'

'Certainly not.'

'I took the liberty to ask,' said Bradley, after casting his eyes on the ground, 'because he is capable of making any representation, in the swaggering levity of his insolence. I—I hope you will not misunderstand me, sir. I—I am much interested in this brother and sister, and the subject awakens very strong feelings within me. Very, very, strong feelings.' With a shaking hand, Bradley took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow.

The Secretary thought, as he glanced at the schoolmaster's face, that he had opened a channel here indeed, and that it was an unexpectedly dark and deep and stormy one, and difficult to sound. All at once, in the midst of his turbulent emotions, Bradley stopped and seemed to challenge his look. Much as though he suddenly asked him, 'What do you see in me?'

'The brother, young Hexam, was your real recommendation here,' said the Secretary, quietly going back to the point; 'Mr and Mrs Boffin happening to know, through Mr Lightwood, that he was your pupil. Anything that I ask respecting the brother and sister, or either of them, I ask for myself out of my own interest in the subject, and not in my official character, or on Mr Boffin's behalf. How I come to be interested, I need not explain. You know the father's connection with the discovery of Mr Harmon's body.'

'Sir,' replied Bradley, very restlessly indeed, 'I know all the circumstances of that case.'

'Pray tell me, Mr Headstone,' said the Secretary. 'Does the sister suffer under any stigma because of the impossible accusation—groundless would be a better word—that was made against the father, and substantially withdrawn?'

'No, sir,' returned Bradley, with a kind of anger.

'I am very glad to hear it.'

'The sister,' said Bradley, separating his words over-carefully, and speaking as if he were repeating them from a book, 'suffers under no reproach that repels a man of unimpeachable character who had made for himself every step of his way in life, from placing her in his own station. I will not say, raising her to his own station; I say, placing her in it. The sister labours under no reproach, unless she should unfortunately make it for herself. When such a man is not deterred from regarding her as his equal, and when he has convinced himself that there is no blemish on her, I think the fact must be taken to be pretty expressive.'

'And there is such a man?' said the Secretary.

Bradley Headstone knotted his brows, and squared his large lower jaw, and fixed his eyes on the ground with an air of determination that seemed unnecessary to the occasion, as he replied: 'And there is such a man.'

The Secretary had no reason or excuse for prolonging the conversation, and it ended here. Within three hours the oakum-headed apparition once more dived into the Leaving Shop, and that night Rogue Riderhood's recantation lay in the post office, addressed under cover to Lizzie Hexam at her right address.

All these proceedings occupied John Rokesmith so much, that it was not until the following day that he saw Bella again. It seemed then to be tacitly understood between them that they were to be as distantly easy as they could, without attracting the attention of Mr and Mrs Boffin to any marked change in their manner. The fitting out of old Betty Higden was favourable to this, as keeping Bella engaged and interested, and as occupying the general attention.

'I think,' said Rokesmith, when they all stood about her, while she packed her tidy basket—except Bella, who was busily helping on her knees at the chair on which it stood; 'that at least you might keep a letter in your pocket, Mrs Higden, which I would write for you and date from here, merely stating, in the names of Mr and Mrs Boffin, that they are your friends;—I won't say patrons, because they wouldn't like it.'

'No, no, no,' said Mr Boffin; 'no patronizing! Let's keep out of THAT, whatever we come to.'

'There's more than enough of that about, without us; ain't there, Noddy?' said Mrs Boffin.

'I believe you, old lady!' returned the Golden Dustman. 'Overmuch indeed!'

'But people sometimes like to be patronized; don't they, sir?' asked Bella, looking up.

'I don't. And if THEY do, my dear, they ought to learn better,' said Mr Boffin. 'Patrons and Patronesses, and Vice-Patrons and Vice-Patronesses, and Deceased Patrons and Deceased Patronesses, and Ex-Vice-Patrons and Ex-Vice-Patronesses, what does it all mean in the books of the Charities that come pouring in on Rokesmith as he sits among 'em pretty well up to his neck! If Mr Tom Noakes gives his five shillings ain't he a Patron, and if Mrs Jack Styles gives her five shillings ain't she a Patroness? What the deuce is it all about? If it ain't stark staring impudence, what do you call it?'

'Don't be warm, Noddy,' Mrs Boffin urged.

'Warm!' cried Mr Boffin. 'It's enough to make a man smoking hot. I can't go anywhere without being Patronized. I don't want to be Patronized. If I buy a ticket for a Flower Show, or a Music Show, or any sort of Show, and pay pretty heavy for it, why am I to be Patroned and Patronessed as if the Patrons and Patronesses treated me? If there's a good thing to be done, can't it be done on its own merits? If there's a bad thing to be done, can it ever be Patroned and Patronessed right? Yet when a new Institution's going to be built, it seems to me that the bricks and mortar ain't made of half so much consequence as the Patrons and Patronesses; no, nor yet the objects. I wish somebody would tell me whether other countries get Patronized to anything like the extent of this one! And as to the Patrons and Patronesses themselves, I wonder they're not ashamed of themselves. They ain't Pills, or Hair-Washes, or Invigorating Nervous Essences, to be puffed in that way!'

Having delivered himself of these remarks, Mr Boffin took a trot, according to his usual custom, and trotted back to the spot from which he had started.

'As to the letter, Rokesmith,' said Mr Boffin, 'you're as right as a trivet. Give her the letter, make her take the letter, put it in her pocket by violence. She might fall sick. You know you might fall sick,' said Mr Boffin. 'Don't deny it, Mrs Higden, in your obstinacy; you know you might.'

Old Betty laughed, and said that she would take the letter and be thankful.

'That's right!' said Mr Boffin. 'Come! That's sensible. And don't be thankful to us (for we never thought of it), but to Mr Rokesmith.'

The letter was written, and read to her, and given to her.

'Now, how do you feel?' said Mr Boffin. 'Do you like it?'

'The letter, sir?' said Betty. 'Ay, it's a beautiful letter!'

'No, no, no; not the letter,' said Mr Boffin; 'the idea. Are you sure you're strong enough to carry out the idea?'

'I shall be stronger, and keep the deadness off better, this way, than any way left open to me, sir.'

'Don't say than any way left open, you know,' urged Mr Boffin; 'because there are ways without end. A housekeeper would be acceptable over yonder at the Bower, for instance. Wouldn't you like to see the Bower, and know a retired literary man of the name of Wegg that lives there—WITH a wooden leg?'

Old Betty was proof even against this temptation, and fell to adjusting her black bonnet and shawl.

'I wouldn't let you go, now it comes to this, after all,' said Mr Boffin, 'if I didn't hope that it may make a man and a workman of Sloppy, in as short a time as ever a man and workman was made yet. Why, what have you got there, Betty? Not a doll?'

It was the man in the Guards who had been on duty over Johnny's bed. The solitary old woman showed what it was, and put it up quietly in her dress. Then, she gratefully took leave of Mrs Boffin, and of Mr Boffin, and of Rokesmith, and then put her old withered arms round Bella's young and blooming neck, and said, repeating Johnny's words: 'A kiss for the boofer lady.'

The Secretary looked on from a doorway at the boofer lady thus encircled, and still looked on at the boofer lady standing alone there, when the determined old figure with its steady bright eyes was trudging through the streets, away from paralysis and pauperism.

Chapter 15

THE WHOLE CASE SO FAR

Bradley Headstone held fast by that other interview he was to have with Lizzie Hexam. In stipulating for it, he had been impelled by a feeling little short of desperation, and the feeling abided by him. It was very soon after his interview with the Secretary, that he and Charley Hexam set out one leaden evening, not unnoticed by Miss Peecher, to have this desperate interview accomplished.

'That dolls' dressmaker,' said Bradley, 'is favourable neither to me nor to you, Hexam.'

'A pert crooked little chit, Mr Headstone! I knew she would put herself in the way, if she could, and would be sure to strike in with something impertinent. It was on that account that I proposed our going to the City to-night and meeting my sister.'

'So I supposed,' said Bradley, getting his gloves on his nervous hands as he walked. 'So I supposed.'

'Nobody but my sister,' pursued Charley, 'would have found out such an extraordinary companion. She has done it in a ridiculous fancy of giving herself up to another. She told me so, that night when we went there.'

'Why should she give herself up to the dressmaker?' asked Bradley.

'Oh!' said the boy, colouring. 'One of her romantic ideas! I tried to convince her so, but I didn't succeed. However, what we have got to do, is, to succeed to-night, Mr Headstone, and then all the rest follows.'

'You are still sanguine, Hexam.'

'Certainly I am, sir. Why, we have everything on our side.'

'Except your sister, perhaps,' thought Bradley. But he only gloomily thought it, and said nothing.

'Everything on our side,' repeated the boy with boyish confidence. 'Respectability, an excellent connexion for me, common sense, everything!'

'To be sure, your sister has always shown herself a devoted sister,' said Bradley, willing to sustain himself on even that low ground of hope.

'Naturally, Mr Headstone, I have a good deal of influence with her. And now that you have honoured me with your confidence and spoken to me first, I say again, we have everything on our side.'

And Bradley thought again, 'Except your sister, perhaps.'

A grey dusty withered evening in London city has not a hopeful aspect. The closed warehouses and offices have an air of death about them, and the national dread of colour has an air of mourning. The towers and steeples of the many house-encompassed churches, dark and dingy as the sky that seems descending on them, are no relief to the general gloom; a sun-dial on a church-wall has the look, in its useless black shade, of having failed in its business enterprise and stopped payment for ever; melancholy waifs and strays of housekeepers and porter sweep melancholy waifs and strays of papers and pins into the kennels, and other more melancholy waifs and strays explore them, searching and stooping and poking for anything to sell. The set of humanity outward from the City is as a set of prisoners departing from gaol, and dismal Newgate seems quite as fit a stronghold for the mighty Lord Mayor as his own state-dwelling.

On such an evening, when the city grit gets into the hair and eyes and skin, and when the fallen leaves of the few unhappy city trees grind down in corners under wheels of wind, the schoolmaster and the pupil emerged upon the Leadenhall Street region, spying eastward for Lizzie. Being something too soon in their arrival, they lurked at a corner, waiting for her to appear. The best-looking among us will not look very well, lurking at a corner, and Bradley came out of that disadvantage very poorly indeed.

'Here she comes, Mr Headstone! Let us go forward and meet her.'

As they advanced, she saw them coming, and seemed rather troubled. But she greeted her brother with the usual warmth, and touched the extended hand of Bradley.

'Why, where are you going, Charley, dear?' she asked him then.

'Nowhere. We came on purpose to meet you.'

'To meet me, Charley?'

'Yes. We are going to walk with you. But don't let us take the great leading streets where every one walks, and we can't hear ourselves speak. Let us go by the quiet backways. Here's a large paved court by this church, and quiet, too. Let us go up here.'

'But it's not in the way, Charley.'

'Yes it is,' said the boy, petulantly. 'It's in my way, and my way is yours.'

She had not released his hand, and, still holding it, looked at him with a kind of appeal. He avoided her eyes, under pretence of saying, 'Come along, Mr Headstone.' Bradley walked at his side—not at hers—and the brother and sister walked hand in hand. The court brought them to a churchyard; a paved square court, with a raised bank of earth about breast high, in the middle, enclosed by iron rails. Here, conveniently and healthfully elevated above the level of the living, were the dead, and the tombstones; some of the latter droopingly inclined from the perpendicular, as if they were ashamed of the lies they told.

They paced the whole of this place once, in a constrained and uncomfortable manner, when the boy stopped and said:

'Lizzie, Mr Headstone has something to say to you. I don't wish to be an interruption either to him or to you, and so I'll go and take a little stroll and come back. I know in a general way what Mr Headstone intends to say, and I very highly approve of it, as I hope—and indeed I do not doubt—you will. I needn't tell you, Lizzie, that I am under great obligations to Mr Headstone, and that I am very anxious for Mr Headstone to succeed in all he undertakes. As I hope—and as, indeed, I don't doubt—you must be.'

'Charley,' returned his sister, detaining his hand as he withdrew it, 'I think you had better stay. I think Mr Headstone had better not say what he thinks of saying.'

'Why, how do you know what it is?' returned the boy.

'Perhaps I don't, but—'

'Perhaps you don't? No, Liz, I should think not. If you knew what it was, you would give me a very different answer. There; let go; be sensible. I wonder you don't remember that Mr Headstone is looking on.'

She allowed him to separate himself from her, and he, after saying, 'Now Liz, be a rational girl and a good sister,' walked away. She remained standing alone with Bradley Headstone, and it was not until she raised her eyes, that he spoke.

'I said,' he began, 'when I saw you last, that there was something unexplained, which might perhaps influence you. I have come this evening to explain it. I hope you will not judge of me by my hesitating manner when I speak to you. You see me at my greatest disadvantage. It is most unfortunate for me that I wish you to see me at my best, and that I know you see me at my worst.'

She moved slowly on when he paused, and he moved slowly on beside her.

'It seems egotistical to begin by saying so much about myself,' he resumed, 'but whatever I say to you seems, even in my own ears, below what I want to say, and different from what I want to say. I can't help it. So it is. You are the ruin of me.'

She started at the passionate sound of the last words, and at the passionate action of his hands, with which they were accompanied.

'Yes! you are the ruin—the ruin—the ruin—of me. I have no resources in myself, I have no confidence in myself, I have no government of myself when you are near me or in my thoughts. And you are always in my thoughts now. I have never been quit of you since I first saw you. Oh, that was a wretched day for me! That was a wretched, miserable day!'

A touch of pity for him mingled with her dislike of him, and she said: 'Mr Headstone, I am grieved to have done you any harm, but I have never meant it.'

'There!' he cried, despairingly. 'Now, I seem to have reproached you, instead of revealing to you the state of my own mind! Bear with me. I am always wrong when you are in question. It is my doom.'

Struggling with himself, and by times looking up at the deserted windows of the houses as if there could be anything written in their grimy panes that would help him, he paced the whole pavement at her side, before he spoke again.

'I must try to give expression to what is in my mind; it shall and must be spoken. Though you see me so confounded—though you strike me so helpless—I ask you to believe that there are many people who think well of me; that there are some people who highly esteem me; that I have in my way won a Station which is considered worth winning.'

'Surely, Mr Headstone, I do believe it. Surely I have always known it from Charley.'

'I ask you to believe that if I were to offer my home such as it is, my station such as it is, my affections such as they are, to any one of the best considered, and best qualified, and most distinguished, among the young women engaged in my calling, they would probably be accepted. Even readily accepted.'

'I do not doubt it,' said Lizzie, with her eyes upon the ground.

'I have sometimes had it in my thoughts to make that offer and to settle down as many men of my class do: I on the one side of a school, my wife on the other, both of us interested in the same work.'

'Why have you not done so?' asked Lizzie Hexam. 'Why do you not do so?'

'Far better that I never did! The only one grain of comfort I have had these many weeks,' he said, always speaking passionately, and, when most emphatic, repeating that former action of his hands, which was like flinging his heart's blood down before her in drops upon the pavement-stones; 'the only one grain of comfort I have had these many weeks is, that I never did. For if I had, and if the same spell had come upon me for my ruin, I know I should have broken that tie asunder as if it had been thread.'

She glanced at him with a glance of fear, and a shrinking gesture. He answered, as if she had spoken.

'No! It would not have been voluntary on my part, any more than it is voluntary in me to be here now. You draw me to you. If I were shut up in a strong prison, you would draw me out. I should break through the wall to come to you. If I were lying on a sick bed, you would draw me up—to stagger to your feet and fall there.'

The wild energy of the man, now quite let loose, was absolutely terrible. He stopped and laid his hand upon a piece of the coping of the burial-ground enclosure, as if he would have dislodged the stone.

'No man knows till the time comes, what depths are within him. To some men it never comes; let them rest and be thankful! To me, you brought it; on me, you forced it; and the bottom of this raging sea,' striking himself upon the breast, 'has been heaved up ever since.'

'Mr Headstone, I have heard enough. Let me stop you here. It will be better for you and better for me. Let us find my brother.'

'Not yet. It shall and must be spoken. I have been in torments ever since I stopped short of it before. You are alarmed. It is another of my miseries that I cannot speak to you or speak of you without stumbling at every syllable, unless I let the check go altogether and run mad. Here is a man lighting the lamps. He will be gone directly. I entreat of you let us walk round this place again. You have no reason to look alarmed; I can restrain myself, and I will.'

She yielded to the entreaty—how could she do otherwise!—and they paced the stones in silence. One by one the lights leaped up making the cold grey church tower more remote, and they were alone again. He said no more until they had regained the spot where he had broken off; there, he again stood still, and again grasped the stone. In saying what he said then, he never looked at her; but looked at it and wrenched at it.

'You know what I am going to say. I love you. What other men may mean when they use that expression, I cannot tell; what I mean is, that I am under the influence of some tremendous attraction which I have resisted in vain, and which overmasters me. You could draw me to fire, you could draw me to water, you could draw me to the gallows, you could draw me to any death, you could draw me to anything I have most avoided, you could draw me to any exposure and disgrace. This and the confusion of my thoughts, so that I am fit for nothing, is what I mean by your being the ruin of me. But if you would return a favourable answer to my offer of myself in marriage, you could draw me to any good—every good—with equal force. My circumstances are quite easy, and you would want for nothing. My reputation stands quite high, and would be a shield for yours. If you saw me at my work, able to do it well and respected in it, you might even come to take a sort of pride in me;—I would try hard that you should. Whatever considerations I may have thought of against this offer, I have conquered, and I make it with all my heart. Your brother favours me to the utmost, and it is likely that we might live and work together; anyhow, it is certain that he would have my best influence and support. I don't know what I could say more if I tried. I might only weaken what is ill enough said as it is. I only add that if it is any claim on you to be in earnest, I am in thorough earnest, dreadful earnest.'

The powdered mortar from under the stone at which he wrenched, rattled on the pavement to confirm his words.

'Mr Headstone—'

'Stop! I implore you, before you answer me, to walk round this place once more. It will give you a minute's time to think, and me a minute's time to get some fortitude together.'

Again she yielded to the entreaty, and again they came back to the same place, and again he worked at the stone.

'Is it,' he said, with his attention apparently engrossed by it, 'yes, or no?'

'Mr Headstone, I thank you sincerely, I thank you gratefully, and hope you may find a worthy wife before long and be very happy. But it is no.'

'Is no short time necessary for reflection; no weeks or days?' he asked, in the same half-suffocated way.

'None whatever.'

'Are you quite decided, and is there no chance of any change in my favour?'

'I am quite decided, Mr Headstone, and I am bound to answer I am certain there is none.'

'Then,' said he, suddenly changing his tone and turning to her, and bringing his clenched hand down upon the stone with a force that laid the knuckles raw and bleeding; 'then I hope that I may never kill him!'

The dark look of hatred and revenge with which the words broke from his livid lips, and with which he stood holding out his smeared hand as if it held some weapon and had just struck a mortal blow, made her so afraid of him that she turned to run away. But he caught her by the arm.

'Mr Headstone, let me go. Mr Headstone, I must call for help!'

'It is I who should call for help,' he said; 'you don't know yet how much I need it.'

The working of his face as she shrank from it, glancing round for her brother and uncertain what to do, might have extorted a cry from her in another instant; but all at once he sternly stopped it and fixed it, as if Death itself had done so.

'There! You see I have recovered myself. Hear me out.'

With much of the dignity of courage, as she recalled her self-reliant life and her right to be free from accountability to this man, she released her arm from his grasp and stood looking full at him. She had never been so handsome, in his eyes. A shade came over them while he looked back at her, as if she drew the very light out of them to herself.

'This time, at least, I will leave nothing unsaid,' he went on, folding his hands before him, clearly to prevent his being betrayed into any impetuous gesture; 'this last time at least I will not be tortured with after-thoughts of a lost opportunity. Mr Eugene Wrayburn.'

'Was it of him you spoke in your ungovernable rage and violence?' Lizzie Hexam demanded with spirit.

He bit his lip, and looked at her, and said never a word.

'Was it Mr Wrayburn that you threatened?'

He bit his lip again, and looked at her, and said never a word.

'You asked me to hear you out, and you will not speak. Let me find my brother.'

'Stay! I threatened no one.'

Her look dropped for an instant to his bleeding hand. He lifted it to his mouth, wiped it on his sleeve, and again folded it over the other. 'Mr Eugene Wrayburn,' he repeated.

'Why do you mention that name again and again, Mr Headstone?'

'Because it is the text of the little I have left to say. Observe! There are no threats in it. If I utter a threat, stop me, and fasten it upon me. Mr Eugene Wrayburn.'

A worse threat than was conveyed in his manner of uttering the name, could hardly have escaped him.

'He haunts you. You accept favours from him. You are willing enough to listen to HIM. I know it, as well as he does.'

'Mr Wrayburn has been considerate and good to me, sir,' said Lizzie, proudly, 'in connexion with the death and with the memory of my poor father.'

'No doubt. He is of course a very considerate and a very good man, Mr Eugene Wrayburn.'

'He is nothing to you, I think,' said Lizzie, with an indignation she could not repress.

'Oh yes, he is. There you mistake. He is much to me.'

'What can he be to you?'

'He can be a rival to me among other things,' said Bradley.

'Mr Headstone,' returned Lizzie, with a burning face, 'it is cowardly in you to speak to me in this way. But it makes me able to tell you that I do not like you, and that I never have liked you from the first, and that no other living creature has anything to do with the effect you have produced upon me for yourself.'

His head bent for a moment, as if under a weight, and he then looked up again, moistening his lips. 'I was going on with the little I had left to say. I knew all this about Mr Eugene Wrayburn, all the while you were drawing me to you. I strove against the knowledge, but quite in vain. It made no difference in me. With Mr Eugene Wrayburn in my mind, I went on. With Mr Eugene Wrayburn in my mind, I spoke to you just now. With Mr Eugene Wrayburn in my mind, I have been set aside and I have been cast out.'

'If you give those names to my thanking you for your proposal and declining it, is it my fault, Mr Headstone?' said Lizzie, compassionating the bitter struggle he could not conceal, almost as much as she was repelled and alarmed by it.

'I am not complaining,' he returned, 'I am only stating the case. I had to wrestle with my self-respect when I submitted to be drawn to you in spite of Mr Wrayburn. You may imagine how low my self-respect lies now.'

She was hurt and angry; but repressed herself in consideration of his suffering, and of his being her brother's friend.

'And it lies under his feet,' said Bradley, unfolding his hands in spite of himself, and fiercely motioning with them both towards the stones of the pavement. 'Remember that! It lies under that fellow's feet, and he treads upon it and exults above it.'

'He does not!' said Lizzie.

'He does!' said Bradley. 'I have stood before him face to face, and he crushed me down in the dirt of his contempt, and walked over me. Why? Because he knew with triumph what was in store for me to-night.'

'O, Mr Headstone, you talk quite wildly.'

'Quite collectedly. I know what I say too well. Now I have said all. I have used no threat, remember; I have done no more than show you how the case stands;—how the case stands, so far.'

At this moment her brother sauntered into view close by. She darted to him, and caught him by the hand. Bradley followed, and laid his heavy hand on the boy's opposite shoulder.

'Charley Hexam, I am going home. I must walk home by myself to-night, and get shut up in my room without being spoken to. Give me half an hour's start, and let me be, till you find me at my work in the morning. I shall be at my work in the morning just as usual.'

Clasping his hands, he uttered a short unearthly broken cry, and went his way. The brother and sister were left looking at one another near a lamp in the solitary churchyard, and the boy's face clouded and darkened, as he said in a rough tone: 'What is the meaning of this? What have you done to my best friend? Out with the truth!'

'Charley!' said his sister. 'Speak a little more considerately!'

'I am not in the humour for consideration, or for nonsense of any sort,' replied the boy. 'What have you been doing? Why has Mr Headstone gone from us in that way?'

'He asked me—you know he asked me—to be his wife, Charley.'

'Well?' said the boy, impatiently.

'And I was obliged to tell him that I could not be his wife.'

'You were obliged to tell him,' repeated the boy angrily, between his teeth, and rudely pushing her away. 'You were obliged to tell him! Do you know that he is worth fifty of you?'

'It may easily be so, Charley, but I cannot marry him.'

'You mean that you are conscious that you can't appreciate him, and don't deserve him, I suppose?'

'I mean that I do not like him, Charley, and that I will never marry him.'

'Upon my soul,' exclaimed the boy, 'you are a nice picture of a sister! Upon my soul, you are a pretty piece of disinterestedness! And so all my endeavours to cancel the past and to raise myself in the world, and to raise you with me, are to be beaten down by YOUR low whims; are they?'

'I will not reproach you, Charley.'

'Hear her!' exclaimed the boy, looking round at the darkness. 'She won't reproach me! She does her best to destroy my fortunes and her own, and she won't reproach me! Why, you'll tell me, next, that you won't reproach Mr Headstone for coming out of the sphere to which he is an ornament, and putting himself at YOUR feet, to be rejected by YOU!'

'No, Charley; I will only tell you, as I told himself, that I thank him for doing so, that I am sorry he did so, and that I hope he will do much better, and be happy.'

Some touch of compunction smote the boy's hardening heart as he looked upon her, his patient little nurse in infancy, his patient friend, adviser, and reclaimer in boyhood, the self-forgetting sister who had done everything for him. His tone relented, and he drew her arm through his.

'Now, come, Liz; don't let us quarrel: let us be reasonable and talk this over like brother and sister. Will you listen to me?'

'Oh, Charley!' she replied through her starting tears; 'do I not listen to you, and hear many hard things!'

'Then I am sorry. There, Liz! I am unfeignedly sorry. Only you do put me out so. Now see. Mr Headstone is perfectly devoted to you. He has told me in the strongest manner that he has never been his old self for one single minute since I first brought him to see you. Miss Peecher, our schoolmistress—pretty and young, and all that—is known to be very much attached to him, and he won't so much as look at her or hear of her. Now, his devotion to you must be a disinterested one; mustn't it? If he married Miss Peecher, he would be a great deal better off in all worldly respects, than in marrying you. Well then; he has nothing to get by it, has he?'

'Nothing, Heaven knows!'

'Very well then,' said the boy; 'that's something in his favour, and a great thing. Then I come in. Mr Headstone has always got me on, and he has a good deal in his power, and of course if he was my brother-in-law he wouldn't get me on less, but would get me on more. Mr Headstone comes and confides in me, in a very delicate way, and says, "I hope my marrying your sister would be agreeable to you, Hexam, and useful to you?" I say, "There's nothing in the world, Mr Headstone, that I could be better pleased with." Mr Headstone says, "Then I may rely upon your intimate knowledge of me for your good word with your sister, Hexam?" And I say, "Certainly, Mr Headstone, and naturally I have a good deal of influence with her." So I have; haven't I, Liz?'

'Yes, Charley.'

'Well said! Now, you see, we begin to get on, the moment we begin to be really talking it over, like brother and sister. Very well. Then YOU come in. As Mr Headstone's wife you would be occupying a most respectable station, and you would be holding a far better place in society than you hold now, and you would at length get quit of the river-side and the old disagreeables belonging to it, and you would be rid for good of dolls' dressmakers and their drunken fathers, and the like of that. Not that I want to disparage Miss Jenny Wren: I dare say she is all very well in her way; but her way is not your way as Mr Headstone's wife. Now, you see, Liz, on all three accounts—on Mr Headstone's, on mine, on yours—nothing could be better or more desirable.'

They were walking slowly as the boy spoke, and here he stood still, to see what effect he had made. His sister's eyes were fixed upon him; but as they showed no yielding, and as she remained silent, he walked her on again. There was some discomfiture in his tone as he resumed, though he tried to conceal it.

'Having so much influence with you, Liz, as I have, perhaps I should have done better to have had a little chat with you in the first instance, before Mr Headstone spoke for himself. But really all this in his favour seemed so plain and undeniable, and I knew you to have always been so reasonable and sensible, that I didn't consider it worth while. Very likely that was a mistake of mine. However, it's soon set right. All that need be done to set it right, is for you to tell me at once that I may go home and tell Mr Headstone that what has taken place is not final, and that it will all come round by-and-by.'

He stopped again. The pale face looked anxiously and lovingly at him, but she shook her head.

'Can't you speak?' said the boy sharply.

'I am very unwilling to speak, Charley. If I must, I must. I cannot authorize you to say any such thing to Mr Headstone: I cannot allow you to say any such thing to Mr Headstone. Nothing remains to be said to him from me, after what I have said for good and all, to-night.'

'And this girl,' cried the boy, contemptuously throwing her off again, 'calls herself a sister!'

'Charley, dear, that is the second time that you have almost struck me. Don't be hurt by my words. I don't mean—Heaven forbid!—that you intended it; but you hardly know with what a sudden swing you removed yourself from me.'

'However!' said the boy, taking no heed of the remonstrance, and pursuing his own mortified disappointment, 'I know what this means, and you shall not disgrace me.'

'It means what I have told you, Charley, and nothing more.'

'That's not true,' said the boy in a violent tone, 'and you know it's not. It means your precious Mr Wrayburn; that's what it means.'

'Charley! If you remember any old days of ours together, forbear!'

'But you shall not disgrace me,' doggedly pursued the boy. 'I am determined that after I have climbed up out of the mire, you shall not pull me down. You can't disgrace me if I have nothing to do with you, and I will have nothing to do with you for the future.'

'Charley! On many a night like this, and many a worse night, I have sat on the stones of the street, hushing you in my arms. Unsay those words without even saying you are sorry for them, and my arms are open to you still, and so is my heart.'

'I'll not unsay them. I'll say them again. You are an inveterately bad girl, and a false sister, and I have done with you. For ever, I have done with you!'

He threw up his ungrateful and ungracious hand as if it set up a barrier between them, and flung himself upon his heel and left her. She remained impassive on the same spot, silent and motionless, until the striking of the church clock roused her, and she turned away. But then, with the breaking up of her immobility came the breaking up of the waters that the cold heart of the selfish boy had frozen. And 'O that I were lying here with the dead!' and 'O Charley, Charley, that this should be the end of our pictures in the fire!' were all the words she said, as she laid her face in her hands on the stone coping.

A figure passed by, and passed on, but stopped and looked round at her. It was the figure of an old man with a bowed head, wearing a large brimmed low-crowned hat, and a long-skirted coat. After hesitating a little, the figure turned back, and, advancing with an air of gentleness and compassion, said:

'Pardon me, young woman, for speaking to you, but you are under some distress of mind. I cannot pass upon my way and leave you weeping here alone, as if there was nothing in the place. Can I help you? Can I do anything to give you comfort?'

She raised her head at the sound of these kind words, and answered gladly, 'O, Mr Riah, is it you?'

'My daughter,' said the old man, 'I stand amazed! I spoke as to a stranger. Take my arm, take my arm. What grieves you? Who has done this? Poor girl, poor girl!'

'My brother has quarrelled with me,' sobbed Lizzie, 'and renounced me.'

'He is a thankless dog,' said the Jew, angrily. 'Let him go.' Shake the dust from thy feet and let him go. Come, daughter! Come home with me—it is but across the road—and take a little time to recover your peace and to make your eyes seemly, and then I will bear you company through the streets. For it is past your usual time, and will soon be late, and the way is long, and there is much company out of doors to-night.'

She accepted the support he offered her, and they slowly passed out of the churchyard. They were in the act of emerging into the main thoroughfare, when another figure loitering discontentedly by, and looking up the street and down it, and all about, started and exclaimed, 'Lizzie! why, where have you been? Why, what's the matter?'

As Eugene Wrayburn thus addressed her, she drew closer to the Jew, and bent her head. The Jew having taken in the whole of Eugene at one sharp glance, cast his eyes upon the ground, and stood mute.

'Lizzie, what is the matter?'

'Mr Wrayburn, I cannot tell you now. I cannot tell you to-night, if I ever can tell you. Pray leave me.'

'But, Lizzie, I came expressly to join you. I came to walk home with you, having dined at a coffee-house in this neighbourhood and knowing your hour. And I have been lingering about,' added Eugene, 'like a bailiff; or,' with a look at Riah, 'an old clothesman.'

The Jew lifted up his eyes, and took in Eugene once more, at another glance.

'Mr Wrayburn, pray, pray, leave me with this protector. And one thing more. Pray, pray be careful of yourself.'

'Mysteries of Udolpho!' said Eugene, with a look of wonder. 'May I be excused for asking, in the elderly gentleman's presence, who is this kind protector?'

'A trustworthy friend,' said Lizzie.

'I will relieve him of his trust,' returned Eugene. 'But you must tell me, Lizzie, what is the matter?'

'Her brother is the matter,' said the old man, lifting up his eyes again.

'Our brother the matter?' returned Eugene, with airy contempt. 'Our brother is not worth a thought, far less a tear. What has our brother done?'

The old man lifted up his eyes again, with one grave look at Wrayburn, and one grave glance at Lizzie, as she stood looking down. Both were so full of meaning that even Eugene was checked in his light career, and subsided into a thoughtful 'Humph!'

With an air of perfect patience the old man, remaining mute and keeping his eyes cast down, stood, retaining Lizzie's arm, as though in his habit of passive endurance, it would be all one to him if he had stood there motionless all night.

'If Mr Aaron,' said Eugene, who soon found this fatiguing, 'will be good enough to relinquish his charge to me, he will be quite free for any engagement he may have at the Synagogue. Mr Aaron, will you have the kindness?'

But the old man stood stock still.

'Good evening, Mr Aaron,' said Eugene, politely; 'we need not detain you.' Then turning to Lizzie, 'Is our friend Mr Aaron a little deaf?'

'My hearing is very good, Christian gentleman,' replied the old man, calmly; 'but I will hear only one voice to-night, desiring me to leave this damsel before I have conveyed her to her home. If she requests it, I will do it. I will do it for no one else.'

'May I ask why so, Mr Aaron?' said Eugene, quite undisturbed in his ease.

'Excuse me. If she asks me, I will tell her,' replied the old man. 'I will tell no one else.'

'I do not ask you,' said Lizzie, 'and I beg you to take me home. Mr Wrayburn, I have had a bitter trial to-night, and I hope you will not think me ungrateful, or mysterious, or changeable. I am neither; I am wretched. Pray remember what I said to you. Pray, pray, take care.'

'My dear Lizzie,' he returned, in a low voice, bending over her on the other side; 'of what? Of whom?'

'Of any one you have lately seen and made angry.'

He snapped his fingers and laughed. 'Come,' said he, 'since no better may be, Mr Aaron and I will divide this trust, and see you home together. Mr Aaron on that side; I on this. If perfectly agreeable to Mr Aaron, the escort will now proceed.'

He knew his power over her. He knew that she would not insist upon his leaving her. He knew that, her fears for him being aroused, she would be uneasy if he were out of her sight. For all his seeming levity and carelessness, he knew whatever he chose to know of the thoughts of her heart.

And going on at her side, so gaily, regardless of all that had been urged against him; so superior in his sallies and self-possession to the gloomy constraint of her suitor and the selfish petulance of her brother; so faithful to her, as it seemed, when her own stock was faithless; what an immense advantage, what an overpowering influence, were his that night! Add to the rest, poor girl, that she had heard him vilified for her sake, and that she had suffered for his, and where the wonder that his occasional tones of serious interest (setting off his carelessness, as if it were assumed to calm her), that his lightest touch, his lightest look, his very presence beside her in the dark common street, were like glimpses of an enchanted world, which it was natural for jealousy and malice and all meanness to be unable to bear the brightness of, and to gird at as bad spirits might.

Nothing more being said of repairing to Riah's, they went direct to Lizzie's lodging. A little short of the house-door she parted from them, and went in alone.

'Mr Aaron,' said Eugene, when they were left together in the street, 'with many thanks for your company, it remains for me unwillingly to say Farewell.'

'Sir,' returned the other, 'I give you good night, and I wish that you were not so thoughtless.'

'Mr Aaron,' returned Eugene, 'I give you good night, and I wish (for you are a little dull) that you were not so thoughtful.'

But now, that his part was played out for the evening, and when in turning his back upon the Jew he came off the stage, he was thoughtful himself. 'How did Lightwood's catechism run?' he murmured, as he stopped to light his cigar. 'What is to come of it? What are you doing? Where are you going? We shall soon know now. Ah!' with a heavy sigh.

The heavy sigh was repeated as if by an echo, an hour afterwards, when Riah, who had been sitting on some dark steps in a corner over against the house, arose and went his patient way; stealing through the streets in his ancient dress, like the ghost of a departed Time.

Chapter 16

AN ANNIVERSARY OCCASION

The estimable Twemlow, dressing himself in his lodgings over the stable-yard in Duke Street, Saint James's, and hearing the horses at their toilette below, finds himself on the whole in a disadvantageous position as compared with the noble animals at livery. For whereas, on the one hand, he has no attendant to slap him soundingly and require him in gruff accents to come up and come over, still, on the other hand, he has no attendant at all; and the mild gentleman's finger-joints and other joints working rustily in the morning, he could deem it agreeable even to be tied up by the countenance at his chamber-door, so he were there skilfully rubbed down and slushed and sluiced and polished and clothed, while himself taking merely a passive part in these trying transactions.

How the fascinating Tippins gets on when arraying herself for the bewilderment of the senses of men, is known only to the Graces and her maid; but perhaps even that engaging creature, though not reduced to the self-dependence of Twemlow could dispense with a good deal of the trouble attendant on the daily restoration of her charms, seeing that as to her face and neck this adorable divinity is, as it were, a diurnal species of lobster—throwing off a shell every forenoon, and needing to keep in a retired spot until the new crust hardens.

Howbeit, Twemlow doth at length invest himself with collar and cravat and wristbands to his knuckles, and goeth forth to breakfast. And to breakfast with whom but his near neighbours, the Lammles of Sackville Street, who have imparted to him that he will meet his distant kinsman, Mr Fledgely. The awful Snigsworth might taboo and prohibit Fledgely, but the peaceable Twemlow reasons, If he IS my kinsman I didn't make him so, and to meet a man is not to know him.'

It is the first anniversary of the happy marriage of Mr and Mrs Lammle, and the celebration is a breakfast, because a dinner on the desired scale of sumptuosity cannot be achieved within less limits than those of the non-existent palatial residence of which so many people are madly envious. So, Twemlow trips with not a little stiffness across Piccadilly, sensible of having once been more upright in figure and less in danger of being knocked down by swift vehicles. To be sure that was in the days when he hoped for leave from the dread Snigsworth to do something, or be something, in life, and before that magnificent Tartar issued the ukase, 'As he will never distinguish himself, he must be a poor gentleman-pensioner of mine, and let him hereby consider himself pensioned.'

Ah! my Twemlow! Say, little feeble grey personage, what thoughts are in thy breast to-day, of the Fancy—so still to call her who bruised thy heart when it was green and thy head brown—and whether it be better or worse, more painful or less, to believe in the Fancy to this hour, than to know her for a greedy armour-plated crocodile, with no more capacity of imagining the delicate and sensitive and tender spot behind thy waistcoat, than of going straight at it with a knitting-needle. Say likewise, my Twemlow, whether it be the happier lot to be a poor relation of the great, or to stand in the wintry slush giving the hack horses to drink out of the shallow tub at the coach-stand, into which thou has so nearly set thy uncertain foot. Twemlow says nothing, and goes on.

As he approaches the Lammles' door, drives up a little one-horse carriage, containing Tippins the divine. Tippins, letting down the window, playfully extols the vigilance of her cavalier in being in waiting there to hand her out. Twemlow hands her out with as much polite gravity as if she were anything real, and they proceed upstairs. Tippins all abroad about the legs, and seeking to express that those unsteady articles are only skipping in their native buoyancy.

And dear Mrs Lammle and dear Mr Lammle, how do you do, and when are you going down to what's-its-name place—Guy, Earl of Warwick, you know—what is it?—Dun Cow—to claim the flitch of bacon? And Mortimer, whose name is for ever blotted out from my list of lovers, by reason first of fickleness and then of base desertion, how do YOU do, wretch? And Mr Wrayburn, YOU here! What can YOU come for, because we are all very sure before-hand that you are not going to talk! And Veneering, M.P., how are things going on down at the house, and when will you turn out those terrible people for us? And Mrs Veneering, my dear, can it positively be true that you go down to that stifling place night after night, to hear those men prose? Talking of which, Veneering, why don't you prose, for you haven't opened your lips there yet, and we are dying to hear what you have got to say to us! Miss Podsnap, charmed to see you. Pa, here? No! Ma, neither? Oh! Mr Boots! Delighted. Mr Brewer! This IS a gathering of the clans. Thus Tippins, and surveys Fledgeby and outsiders through golden glass, murmuring as she turns about and about, in her innocent giddy way, Anybody else I know? No, I think not. Nobody there. Nobody THERE. Nobody anywhere!

Mr Lammle, all a-glitter, produces his friend Fledgeby, as dying for the honour of presentation to Lady Tippins. Fledgeby presented, has the air of going to say something, has the air of going to say nothing, has an air successively of meditation, of resignation, and of desolation, backs on Brewer, makes the tour of Boots, and fades into the extreme background, feeling for his whisker, as if it might have turned up since he was there five minutes ago.

But Lammle has him out again before he has so much as completely ascertained the bareness of the land. He would seem to be in a bad way, Fledgeby; for Lammle represents him as dying again. He is dying now, of want of presentation to Twemlow.

Twemlow offers his hand. Glad to see him. 'Your mother, sir, was a connexion of mine.'

'I believe so,' says Fledgeby, 'but my mother and her family were two.'

'Are you staying in town?' asks Twemlow.

'I always am,' says Fledgeby.

'You like town,' says Twemlow. But is felled flat by Fledgeby's taking it quite ill, and replying, No, he don't like town. Lammle tries to break the force of the fall, by remarking that some people do not like town. Fledgeby retorting that he never heard of any such case but his own, Twemlow goes down again heavily.

'There is nothing new this morning, I suppose?' says Twemlow, returning to the mark with great spirit.

Fledgeby has not heard of anything.

'No, there's not a word of news,' says Lammle.

'Not a particle,' adds Boots.

'Not an atom,' chimes in Brewer.

Somehow the execution of this little concerted piece appears to raise the general spirits as with a sense of duty done, and sets the company a going. Everybody seems more equal than before, to the calamity of being in the society of everybody else. Even Eugene standing in a window, moodily swinging the tassel of a blind, gives it a smarter jerk now, as if he found himself in better case.

Breakfast announced. Everything on table showy and gaudy, but with a self-assertingly temporary and nomadic air on the decorations, as boasting that they will be much more showy and gaudy in the palatial residence. Mr Lammle's own particular servant behind his chair; the Analytical behind Veneering's chair; instances in point that such servants fall into two classes: one mistrusting the master's acquaintances, and the other mistrusting the master. Mr Lammle's servant, of the second class. Appearing to be lost in wonder and low spirits because the police are so long in coming to take his master up on some charge of the first magnitude.

Veneering, M.P., on the right of Mrs Lammle; Twemlow on her left; Mrs Veneering, W.M.P. (wife of Member of Parliament), and Lady Tippins on Mr Lammle's right and left. But be sure that well within the fascination of Mr Lammle's eye and smile sits little Georgiana. And be sure that close to little Georgiana, also under inspection by the same gingerous gentleman, sits Fledgeby.

Oftener than twice or thrice while breakfast is in progress, Mr Twemlow gives a little sudden turn towards Mrs Lammle, and then says to her, 'I beg your pardon!' This not being Twemlow's usual way, why is it his way to-day? Why, the truth is, Twemlow repeatedly labours under the impression that Mrs Lammle is going to speak to him, and turning finds that it is not so, and mostly that she has her eyes upon Veneering. Strange that this impression so abides by Twemlow after being corrected, yet so it is.

Lady Tippins partaking plentifully of the fruits of the earth (including grape-juice in the category) becomes livelier, and applies herself to elicit sparks from Mortimer Lightwood. It is always understood among the initiated, that that faithless lover must be planted at table opposite to Lady Tippins, who will then strike conversational fire out of him. In a pause of mastication and deglutition, Lady Tippins, contemplating Mortimer, recalls that it was at our dear Veneerings, and in the presence of a party who are surely all here, that he told them his story of the man from somewhere, which afterwards became so horribly interesting and vulgarly popular.

'Yes, Lady Tippins,' assents Mortimer; 'as they say on the stage, "Even so!"'

'Then we expect you,' retorts the charmer, 'to sustain your reputation, and tell us something else.'

'Lady Tippins, I exhausted myself for life that day, and there is nothing more to be got out of me.'

Mortimer parries thus, with a sense upon him that elsewhere it is Eugene and not he who is the jester, and that in these circles where Eugene persists in being speechless, he, Mortimer, is but the double of the friend on whom he has founded himself.

'But,' quoth the fascinating Tippins, 'I am resolved on getting something more out of you. Traitor! what is this I hear about another disappearance?'

'As it is you who have heard it,' returns Lightwood, 'perhaps you'll tell us.'

'Monster, away!' retorts Lady Tippins. 'Your own Golden Dustman referred me to you.'

Mr Lammle, striking in here, proclaims aloud that there is a sequel to the story of the man from somewhere. Silence ensues upon the proclamation.

'I assure you,' says Lightwood, glancing round the table, 'I have nothing to tell.' But Eugene adding in a low voice, 'There, tell it, tell it!' he corrects himself with the addition, 'Nothing worth mentioning.'

Boots and Brewer immediately perceive that it is immensely worth mentioning, and become politely clamorous. Veneering is also visited by a perception to the same effect. But it is understood that his attention is now rather used up, and difficult to hold, that being the tone of the House of Commons.

'Pray don't be at the trouble of composing yourselves to listen,' says Mortimer Lightwood, 'because I shall have finished long before you have fallen into comfortable attitudes. It's like—'

'It's like,' impatiently interrupts Eugene, 'the children's narrative:

"I'll tell you a story
Of Jack a Manory,
And now my story's begun;
I'll tell you another
Of Jack and his brother,
And now my story is done."

—Get on, and get it over!'

Eugene says this with a sound of vexation in his voice, leaning back in his chair and looking balefully at Lady Tippins, who nods to him as her dear Bear, and playfully insinuates that she (a self-evident proposition) is Beauty, and he Beast.

'The reference,' proceeds Mortimer, 'which I suppose to be made by my honourable and fair enslaver opposite, is to the following circumstance. Very lately, the young woman, Lizzie Hexam, daughter of the late Jesse Hexam, otherwise Gaffer, who will be remembered to have found the body of the man from somewhere, mysteriously received, she knew not from whom, an explicit retraction of the charges made against her father, by another water-side character of the name of Riderhood. Nobody believed them, because little Rogue Riderhood—I am tempted into the paraphrase by remembering the charming wolf who would have rendered society a great service if he had devoured Mr Riderhood's father and mother in their infancy—had previously played fast and loose with the said charges, and, in fact, abandoned them. However, the retraction I have mentioned found its way into Lizzie Hexam's hands, with a general flavour on it of having been favoured by some anonymous messenger in a dark cloak and slouched hat, and was by her forwarded, in her father's vindication, to Mr Boffin, my client. You will excuse the phraseology of the shop, but as I never had another client, and in all likelihood never shall have, I am rather proud of him as a natural curiosity probably unique.'

Although as easy as usual on the surface, Lightwood is not quite as easy as usual below it. With an air of not minding Eugene at all, he feels that the subject is not altogether a safe one in that connexion.

'The natural curiosity which forms the sole ornament of my professional museum,' he resumes, 'hereupon desires his Secretary—an individual of the hermit-crab or oyster species, and whose name, I think, is Chokesmith—but it doesn't in the least matter—say Artichoke—to put himself in communication with Lizzie Hexam. Artichoke professes his readiness so to do, endeavours to do so, but fails.'

'Why fails?' asks Boots.

'How fails?' asks Brewer.

'Pardon me,' returns Lightwood,' I must postpone the reply for one moment, or we shall have an anti-climax. Artichoke failing signally, my client refers the task to me: his purpose being to advance the interests of the object of his search. I proceed to put myself in communication with her; I even happen to possess some special means,' with a glance at Eugene, 'of putting myself in communication with her; but I fail too, because she has vanished.'

'Vanished!' is the general echo.

'Disappeared,' says Mortimer. 'Nobody knows how, nobody knows when, nobody knows where. And so ends the story to which my honourable and fair enslaver opposite referred.'

Tippins, with a bewitching little scream, opines that we shall every one of us be murdered in our beds. Eugene eyes her as if some of us would be enough for him. Mrs Veneering, W.M.P., remarks that these social mysteries make one afraid of leaving Baby. Veneering, M.P., wishes to be informed (with something of a second-hand air of seeing the Right Honourable Gentleman at the head of the Home Department in his place) whether it is intended to be conveyed that the vanished person has been spirited away or otherwise harmed? Instead of Lightwood's answering, Eugene answers, and answers hastily and vexedly: 'No, no, no; he doesn't mean that; he means voluntarily vanished—but utterly—completely.'

However, the great subject of the happiness of Mr and Mrs Lammle must not be allowed to vanish with the other vanishments—with the vanishing of the murderer, the vanishing of Julius Handford, the vanishing of Lizzie Hexam,—and therefore Veneering must recall the present sheep to the pen from which they have strayed. Who so fit to discourse of the happiness of Mr and Mrs Lammle, they being the dearest and oldest friends he has in the world; or what audience so fit for him to take into his confidence as that audience, a noun of multitude or signifying many, who are all the oldest and dearest friends he has in the world? So Veneering, without the formality of rising, launches into a familiar oration, gradually toning into the Parliamentary sing-song, in which he sees at that board his dear friend Twemlow who on that day twelvemonth bestowed on his dear friend Lammle the fair hand of his dear friend Sophronia, and in which he also sees at that board his dear friends Boots and Brewer whose rallying round him at a period when his dear friend Lady Tippins likewise rallied round him—ay, and in the foremost rank—he can never forget while memory holds her seat. But he is free to confess that he misses from that board his dear old friend Podsnap, though he is well represented by his dear young friend Georgiana. And he further sees at that board (this he announces with pomp, as if exulting in the powers of an extraordinary telescope) his friend Mr Fledgeby, if he will permit him to call him so. For all of these reasons, and many more which he right well knows will have occurred to persons of your exceptional acuteness, he is here to submit to you that the time has arrived when, with our hearts in our glasses, with tears in our eyes, with blessings on our lips, and in a general way with a profusion of gammon and spinach in our emotional larders, we should one and all drink to our dear friends the Lammles, wishing them many years as happy as the last, and many many friends as congenially united as themselves. And this he will add; that Anastatia Veneering (who is instantly heard to weep) is formed on the same model as her old and chosen friend Sophronia Lammle, in respect that she is devoted to the man who wooed and won her, and nobly discharges the duties of a wife.

Seeing no better way out of it, Veneering here pulls up his oratorical Pegasus extremely short, and plumps down, clean over his head, with: 'Lammle, God bless you!'

Then Lammle. Too much of him every way; pervadingly too much nose of a coarse wrong shape, and his nose in his mind and his manners; too much smile to be real; too much frown to be false; too many large teeth to be visible at once without suggesting a bite. He thanks you, dear friends, for your kindly greeting, and hopes to receive you—it may be on the next of these delightful occasions—in a residence better suited to your claims on the rites of hospitality. He will never forget that at Veneering's he first saw Sophronia. Sophronia will never forget that at Veneering's she first saw him. 'They spoke of it soon after they were married, and agreed that they would never forget it. In fact, to Veneering they owe their union. They hope to show their sense of this some day ('No, no, from Veneering)—oh yes, yes, and let him rely upon it, they will if they can! His marriage with Sophronia was not a marriage of interest on either side: she had her little fortune, he had his little fortune: they joined their little fortunes: it was a marriage of pure inclination and suitability. Thank you! Sophronia and he are fond of the society of young people; but he is not sure that their house would be a good house for young people proposing to remain single, since the contemplation of its domestic bliss might induce them to change their minds. He will not apply this to any one present; certainly not to their darling little Georgiana. Again thank you! Neither, by-the-by, will he apply it to his friend Fledgeby. He thanks Veneering for the feeling manner in which he referred to their common friend Fledgeby, for he holds that gentleman in the highest estimation. Thank you. In fact (returning unexpectedly to Fledgeby), the better you know him, the more you find in him that you desire to know. Again thank you! In his dear Sophronia's name and in his own, thank you!

Mrs Lammle has sat quite still, with her eyes cast down upon the table-cloth. As Mr Lammle's address ends, Twemlow once more turns to her involuntarily, not cured yet of that often recurring impression that she is going to speak to him. This time she really is going to speak to him. Veneering is talking with his other next neighbour, and she speaks in a low voice.

'Mr Twemlow.'

He answers, 'I beg your pardon? Yes?' Still a little doubtful, because of her not looking at him.

'You have the soul of a gentleman, and I know I may trust you. Will you give me the opportunity of saying a few words to you when you come up stairs?'

'Assuredly. I shall be honoured.'

'Don't seem to do so, if you please, and don't think it inconsistent if my manner should be more careless than my words. I may be watched.'

Intensely astonished, Twemlow puts his hand to his forehead, and sinks back in his chair meditating. Mrs Lammle rises. All rise. The ladies go up stairs. The gentlemen soon saunter after them. Fledgeby has devoted the interval to taking an observation of Boots's whiskers, Brewer's whiskers, and Lammle's whiskers, and considering which pattern of whisker he would prefer to produce out of himself by friction, if the Genie of the cheek would only answer to his rubbing.

In the drawing-room, groups form as usual. Lightwood, Boots, and Brewer, flutter like moths around that yellow wax candle—guttering down, and with some hint of a winding-sheet in it—Lady Tippins. Outsiders cultivate Veneering, M P., and Mrs Veneering, W.M.P. Lammle stands with folded arms, Mephistophelean in a corner, with Georgiana and Fledgeby. Mrs Lammle, on a sofa by a table, invites Mr Twemlow's attention to a book of portraits in her hand.

Mr Twemlow takes his station on a settee before her, and Mrs Lammle shows him a portrait.

'You have reason to be surprised,' she says softly, 'but I wish you wouldn't look so.'

Disturbed Twemlow, making an effort not to look so, looks much more so.

'I think, Mr Twemlow, you never saw that distant connexion of yours before to-day?'

'No, never.'

'Now that you do see him, you see what he is. You are not proud of him?'

'To say the truth, Mrs Lammle, no.'

'If you knew more of him, you would be less inclined to acknowledge him. Here is another portrait. What do you think of it?'

Twemlow has just presence of mind enough to say aloud: 'Very like! Uncommonly like!'

'You have noticed, perhaps, whom he favours with his attentions? You notice where he is now, and how engaged?'

'Yes. But Mr Lammle—'

She darts a look at him which he cannot comprehend, and shows him another portrait.

'Very good; is it not?'

'Charming!' says Twemlow.

'So like as to be almost a caricature?—Mr Twemlow, it is impossible to tell you what the struggle in my mind has been, before I could bring myself to speak to you as I do now. It is only in the conviction that I may trust you never to betray me, that I can proceed. Sincerely promise me that you never will betray my confidence—that you will respect it, even though you may no longer respect me,—and I shall be as satisfied as if you had sworn it.'

'Madam, on the honour of a poor gentleman—'

'Thank you. I can desire no more. Mr Twemlow, I implore you to save that child!'

'That child?'

'Georgiana. She will be sacrificed. She will be inveigled and married to that connexion of yours. It is a partnership affair, a money-speculation. She has no strength of will or character to help herself and she is on the brink of being sold into wretchedness for life.'

'Amazing! But what can I do to prevent it?' demands Twemlow, shocked and bewildered to the last degree.

'Here is another portrait. And not good, is it?'

Aghast at the light manner of her throwing her head back to look at it critically, Twemlow still dimly perceives the expediency of throwing his own head back, and does so. Though he no more sees the portrait than if it were in China.

'Decidedly not good,' says Mrs Lammle. 'Stiff and exaggerated!'

'And ex—' But Twemlow, in his demolished state, cannot command the word, and trails off into '—actly so.'

'Mr Twemlow, your word will have weight with her pompous, self-blinded father. You know how much he makes of your family. Lose no time. Warn him.'

'But warn him against whom?'

'Against me.'

By great good fortune Twemlow receives a stimulant at this critical instant. The stimulant is Lammle's voice.

'Sophronia, my dear, what portraits are you showing Twemlow?'

'Public characters, Alfred.'

'Show him the last of me.'

'Yes, Alfred.'

She puts the book down, takes another book up, turns the leaves, and presents the portrait to Twemlow.

'That is the last of Mr Lammle. Do you think it good?—Warn her father against me. I deserve it, for I have been in the scheme from the first. It is my husband's scheme, your connexion's, and mine. I tell you this, only to show you the necessity of the poor little foolish affectionate creature's being befriended and rescued. You will not repeat this to her father. You will spare me so far, and spare my husband. For, though this celebration of to-day is all a mockery, he is my husband, and we must live.—Do you think it like?'

Twemlow, in a stunned condition, feigns to compare the portrait in his hand with the original looking towards him from his Mephistophelean corner.

'Very well indeed!' are at length the words which Twemlow with great difficulty extracts from himself.

'I am glad you think so. On the whole, I myself consider it the best. The others are so dark. Now here, for instance, is another of Mr Lammle—'

'But I don't understand; I don't see my way,' Twemlow stammers, as he falters over the book with his glass at his eye. 'How warn her father, and not tell him? Tell him how much? Tell him how little? I—I—am getting lost.'

'Tell him I am a match-maker; tell him I am an artful and designing woman; tell him you are sure his daughter is best out of my house and my company. Tell him any such things of me; they will all be true. You know what a puffed-up man he is, and how easily you can cause his vanity to take the alarm. Tell him as much as will give him the alarm and make him careful of her, and spare me the rest. Mr Twemlow, I feel my sudden degradation in your eyes; familiar as I am with my degradation in my own eyes, I keenly feel the change that must have come upon me in yours, in these last few moments. But I trust to your good faith with me as implicitly as when I began. If you knew how often I have tried to speak to you to-day, you would almost pity me. I want no new promise from you on my own account, for I am satisfied, and I always shall be satisfied, with the promise you have given me. I can venture to say no more, for I see that I am watched. If you would set my mind at rest with the assurance that you will interpose with the father and save this harmless girl, close that book before you return it to me, and I shall know what you mean, and deeply thank you in my heart.—Alfred, Mr Twemlow thinks the last one the best, and quite agrees with you and me.'

Alfred advances. The groups break up. Lady Tippins rises to go, and Mrs Veneering follows her leader. For the moment, Mrs Lammle does not turn to them, but remains looking at Twemlow looking at Alfred's portrait through his eyeglass. The moment past, Twemlow drops his eyeglass at its ribbon's length, rises, and closes the book with an emphasis which makes that fragile nursling of the fairies, Tippins, start.

Then good-bye and good-bye, and charming occasion worthy of the Golden Age, and more about the flitch of bacon, and the like of that; and Twemlow goes staggering across Piccadilly with his hand to his forehead, and is nearly run down by a flushed lettercart, and at last drops safe in his easy-chair, innocent good gentleman, with his hand to his forehead still, and his head in a whirl.

BOOK THE THIRD — A LONG LANE

Chapter 1

LODGERS IN QUEER STREET

It was a foggy day in London, and the fog was heavy and dark. Animate London, with smarting eyes and irritated lungs, was blinking, wheezing, and choking; inanimate London was a sooty spectre, divided in purpose between being visible and invisible, and so being wholly neither. Gaslights flared in the shops with a haggard and unblest air, as knowing themselves to be night-creatures that had no business abroad under the sun; while the sun itself when it was for a few moments dimly indicated through circling eddies of fog, showed as if it had gone out and were collapsing flat and cold. Even in the surrounding country it was a foggy day, but there the fog was grey, whereas in London it was, at about the boundary line, dark yellow, and a little within it brown, and then browner, and then browner, until at the heart of the City—which call Saint Mary Axe—it was rusty-black. From any point of the high ridge of land northward, it might have been discerned that the loftiest buildings made an occasional struggle to get their heads above the foggy sea, and especially that the great dome of Saint Paul's seemed to die hard; but this was not perceivable in the streets at their feet, where the whole metropolis was a heap of vapour charged with muffled sound of wheels, and enfolding a gigantic catarrh.

At nine o'clock on such a morning, the place of business of Pubsey and Co. was not the liveliest object even in Saint Mary Axe—which is not a very lively spot—with a sobbing gaslight in the counting-house window, and a burglarious stream of fog creeping in to strangle it through the keyhole of the main door. But the light went out, and the main door opened, and Riah came forth with a bag under his arm.

Almost in the act of coming out at the door, Riah went into the fog, and was lost to the eyes of Saint Mary Axe. But the eyes of this history can follow him westward, by Cornhill, Cheapside, Fleet Street, and the Strand, to Piccadilly and the Albany. Thither he went at his grave and measured pace, staff in hand, skirt at heel; and more than one head, turning to look back at his venerable figure already lost in the mist, supposed it to be some ordinary figure indistinctly seen, which fancy and the fog had worked into that passing likeness.

Arrived at the house in which his master's chambers were on the second floor, Riah proceeded up the stairs, and paused at Fascination Fledgeby's door. Making free with neither bell nor knocker, he struck upon the door with the top of his staff, and, having listened, sat down on the threshold. It was characteristic of his habitual submission, that he sat down on the raw dark staircase, as many of his ancestors had probably sat down in dungeons, taking what befell him as it might befall.

After a time, when he had grown so cold as to be fain to blow upon his fingers, he arose and knocked with his staff again, and listened again, and again sat down to wait. Thrice he repeated these actions before his listening ears were greeted by the voice of Fledgeby, calling from his bed, 'Hold your row!—I'll come and open the door directly!' But, in lieu of coming directly, he fell into a sweet sleep for some quarter of an hour more, during which added interval Riah sat upon the stairs and waited with perfect patience.

At length the door stood open, and Mr Fledgeby's retreating drapery plunged into bed again. Following it at a respectful distance, Riah passed into the bed-chamber, where a fire had been sometime lighted, and was burning briskly.

'Why, what time of night do you mean to call it?' inquired Fledgeby, turning away beneath the clothes, and presenting a comfortable rampart of shoulder to the chilled figure of the old man.

'Sir, it is full half-past ten in the morning.'

'The deuce it is! Then it must be precious foggy?'

'Very foggy, sir.'

'And raw, then?'

'Chill and bitter,' said Riah, drawing out a handkerchief, and wiping the moisture from his beard and long grey hair as he stood on the verge of the rug, with his eyes on the acceptable fire.

With a plunge of enjoyment, Fledgeby settled himself afresh.

'Any snow, or sleet, or slush, or anything of that sort?' he asked.

'No, sir, no. Not quite so bad as that. The streets are pretty clean.'

'You needn't brag about it,' returned Fledgeby, disappointed in his desire to heighten the contrast between his bed and the streets. 'But you're always bragging about something. Got the books there?'

'They are here, sir.'

'All right. I'll turn the general subject over in my mind for a minute or two, and while I'm about it you can empty your bag and get ready for me.'

With another comfortable plunge, Mr Fledgeby fell asleep again. The old man, having obeyed his directions, sat down on the edge of a chair, and, folding his hands before him, gradually yielded to the influence of the warmth, and dozed. He was roused by Mr Fledgeby's appearing erect at the foot of the bed, in Turkish slippers, rose-coloured Turkish trousers (got cheap from somebody who had cheated some other somebody out of them), and a gown and cap to correspond. In that costume he would have left nothing to be desired, if he had been further fitted out with a bottomless chair, a lantern, and a bunch of matches.

'Now, old 'un!' cried Fascination, in his light raillery, 'what dodgery are you up to next, sitting there with your eyes shut? You ain't asleep. Catch a weasel at it, and catch a Jew!'

'Truly, sir, I fear I nodded,' said the old man.

'Not you!' returned Fledgeby, with a cunning look. 'A telling move with a good many, I dare say, but it won't put ME off my guard. Not a bad notion though, if you want to look indifferent in driving a bargain. Oh, you are a dodger!'

The old man shook his head, gently repudiating the imputation, and suppressed a sigh, and moved to the table at which Mr Fledgeby was now pouring out for himself a cup of steaming and fragrant coffee from a pot that had stood ready on the hob. It was an edifying spectacle, the young man in his easy chair taking his coffee, and the old man with his grey head bent, standing awaiting his pleasure.

'Now!' said Fledgeby. 'Fork out your balance in hand, and prove by figures how you make it out that it ain't more. First of all, light that candle.'

Riah obeyed, and then taking a bag from his breast, and referring to the sum in the accounts for which they made him responsible, told it out upon the table. Fledgeby told it again with great care, and rang every sovereign.

'I suppose,' he said, taking one up to eye it closely, 'you haven't been lightening any of these; but it's a trade of your people's, you know. YOU understand what sweating a pound means, don't you?'

'Much as you do, sir,' returned the old man, with his hands under opposite cuffs of his loose sleeves, as he stood at the table, deferentially observant of the master's face. 'May I take the liberty to say something?'

'You may,' Fledgeby graciously conceded.

'Do you not, sir—without intending it—of a surety without intending it—sometimes mingle the character I fairly earn in your employment, with the character which it is your policy that I should bear?'

'I don't find it worth my while to cut things so fine as to go into the inquiry,' Fascination coolly answered.

'Not in justice?'

'Bother justice!' said Fledgeby.

'Not in generosity?'

'Jews and generosity!' said Fledgeby. 'That's a good connexion! Bring out your vouchers, and don't talk Jerusalem palaver.'

The vouchers were produced, and for the next half-hour Mr Fledgeby concentrated his sublime attention on them. They and the accounts were all found correct, and the books and the papers resumed their places in the bag.

'Next,' said Fledgeby, 'concerning that bill-broking branch of the business; the branch I like best. What queer bills are to be bought, and at what prices? You have got your list of what's in the market?'

'Sir, a long list,' replied Riah, taking out a pocket-book, and selecting from its contents a folded paper, which, being unfolded, became a sheet of foolscap covered with close writing.

'Whew!' whistled Fledgeby, as he took it in his hand. 'Queer Street is full of lodgers just at present! These are to be disposed of in parcels; are they?'

'In parcels as set forth,' returned the old man, looking over his master's shoulder; 'or the lump.'

'Half the lump will be waste-paper, one knows beforehand,' said Fledgeby. 'Can you get it at waste-paper price? That's the question.'

Riah shook his head, and Fledgeby cast his small eyes down the list. They presently began to twinkle, and he no sooner became conscious of their twinkling, than he looked up over his shoulder at the grave face above him, and moved to the chimney-piece. Making a desk of it, he stood there with his back to the old man, warming his knees, perusing the list at his leisure, and often returning to some lines of it, as though they were particularly interesting. At those times he glanced in the chimney-glass to see what note the old man took of him. He took none that could be detected, but, aware of his employer's suspicions, stood with his eyes on the ground.

Mr Fledgeby was thus amiably engaged when a step was heard at the outer door, and the door was heard to open hastily. 'Hark! That's your doing, you Pump of Israel,' said Fledgeby; 'you can't have shut it.' Then the step was heard within, and the voice of Mr Alfred Lammle called aloud, 'Are you anywhere here, Fledgeby?' To which Fledgeby, after cautioning Riah in a low voice to take his cue as it should be given him, replied, 'Here I am!' and opened his bedroom door.

'Come in!' said Fledgeby. 'This gentleman is only Pubsey and Co. of Saint Mary Axe, that I am trying to make terms for an unfortunate friend with in a matter of some dishonoured bills. But really Pubsey and Co. are so strict with their debtors, and so hard to move, that I seem to be wasting my time. Can't I make ANY terms with you on my friend's part, Mr Riah?'

'I am but the representative of another, sir,' returned the Jew in a low voice. 'I do as I am bidden by my principal. It is not my capital that is invested in the business. It is not my profit that arises therefrom.'

'Ha ha!' laughed Fledgeby. 'Lammle?'

'Ha ha!' laughed Lammle. 'Yes. Of course. We know.'

'Devilish good, ain't it, Lammle?' said Fledgeby, unspeakably amused by his hidden joke.

'Always the same, always the same!' said Lammle. 'Mr—'

'Riah, Pubsey and Co. Saint Mary Axe,' Fledgeby put in, as he wiped away the tears that trickled from his eyes, so rare was his enjoyment of his secret joke.

'Mr Riah is bound to observe the invariable forms for such cases made and provided,' said Lammle.

'He is only the representative of another!' cried Fledgeby. 'Does as he is told by his principal! Not his capital that's invested in the business. Oh, that's good! Ha ha ha ha!' Mr Lammle joined in the laugh and looked knowing; and the more he did both, the more exquisite the secret joke became for Mr Fledgeby.

'However,' said that fascinating gentleman, wiping his eyes again, 'if we go on in this way, we shall seem to be almost making game of Mr Riah, or of Pubsey and Co. Saint Mary Axe, or of somebody: which is far from our intention. Mr Riah, if you would have the kindness to step into the next room for a few moments while I speak with Mr Lammle here, I should like to try to make terms with you once again before you go.'

The old man, who had never raised his eyes during the whole transaction of Mr Fledgeby's joke, silently bowed and passed out by the door which Fledgeby opened for him. Having closed it on him, Fledgeby returned to Lammle, standing with his back to the bedroom fire, with one hand under his coat-skirts, and all his whiskers in the other.

'Halloa!' said Fledgeby. 'There's something wrong!'

'How do you know it?' demanded Lammle.

'Because you show it,' replied Fledgeby in unintentional rhyme.

'Well then; there is,' said Lammle; 'there IS something wrong; the whole thing's wrong.'

'I say!' remonstrated Fascination very slowly, and sitting down with his hands on his knees to stare at his glowering friend with his back to the fire.

'I tell you, Fledgeby,' repeated Lammle, with a sweep of his right arm, 'the whole thing's wrong. The game's up.'

'What game's up?' demanded Fledgeby, as slowly as before, and more sternly.

'THE game. OUR game. Read that.'

Fledgeby took a note from his extended hand and read it aloud. 'Alfred Lammle, Esquire. Sir: Allow Mrs Podsnap and myself to express our united sense of the polite attentions of Mrs Alfred Lammle and yourself towards our daughter, Georgiana. Allow us also, wholly to reject them for the future, and to communicate our final desire that the two families may become entire strangers. I have the honour to be, Sir, your most obedient and very humble servant, JOHN PODSNAP.' Fledgeby looked at the three blank sides of this note, quite as long and earnestly as at the first expressive side, and then looked at Lammle, who responded with another extensive sweep of his right arm.

'Whose doing is this?' said Fledgeby.

'Impossible to imagine,' said Lammle.

'Perhaps,' suggested Fledgeby, after reflecting with a very discontented brow, 'somebody has been giving you a bad character.'

'Or you,' said Lammle, with a deeper frown.

Mr Fledgeby appeared to be on the verge of some mutinous expressions, when his hand happened to touch his nose. A certain remembrance connected with that feature operating as a timely warning, he took it thoughtfully between his thumb and forefinger, and pondered; Lammle meanwhile eyeing him with furtive eyes.

'Well!' said Fledgeby. 'This won't improve with talking about. If we ever find out who did it, we'll mark that person. There's nothing more to be said, except that you undertook to do what circumstances prevent your doing.'

'And that you undertook to do what you might have done by this time, if you had made a prompter use of circumstances,' snarled Lammle.

'Hah! That,' remarked Fledgeby, with his hands in the Turkish trousers, 'is matter of opinion.'

'Mr Fledgeby,' said Lammle, in a bullying tone, 'am I to understand that you in any way reflect upon me, or hint dissatisfaction with me, in this affair?'

'No,' said Fledgeby; 'provided you have brought my promissory note in your pocket, and now hand it over.'

Lammle produced it, not without reluctance. Fledgeby looked at it, identified it, twisted it up, and threw it into the fire. They both looked at it as it blazed, went out, and flew in feathery ash up the chimney.

'NOW, Mr Fledgeby,' said Lammle, as before; 'am I to understand that you in any way reflect upon me, or hint dissatisfaction with me, in this affair?'

'No,' said Fledgeby.

'Finally and unreservedly no?'

'Yes.'

'Fledgeby, my hand.'

Mr Fledgeby took it, saying, 'And if we ever find out who did this, we'll mark that person. And in the most friendly manner, let me mention one thing more. I don't know what your circumstances are, and I don't ask. You have sustained a loss here. Many men are liable to be involved at times, and you may be, or you may not be. But whatever you do, Lammle, don't—don't—don't, I beg of you—ever fall into the hands of Pubsey and Co. in the next room, for they are grinders. Regular flayers and grinders, my dear Lammle,' repeated Fledgeby with a peculiar relish, 'and they'll skin you by the inch, from the nape of your neck to the sole of your foot, and grind every inch of your skin to tooth-powder. You have seen what Mr Riah is. Never fall into his hands, Lammle, I beg of you as a friend!'

Mr Lammle, disclosing some alarm at the solemnity of this affectionate adjuration, demanded why the devil he ever should fall into the hands of Pubsey and Co.?

'To confess the fact, I was made a little uneasy,' said the candid Fledgeby, 'by the manner in which that Jew looked at you when he heard your name. I didn't like his eye. But it may have been the heated fancy of a friend. Of course if you are sure that you have no personal security out, which you may not be quite equal to meeting, and which can have got into his hands, it must have been fancy. Still, I didn't like his eye.'

The brooding Lammle, with certain white dints coming and going in his palpitating nose, looked as if some tormenting imp were pinching it. Fledgeby, watching him with a twitch in his mean face which did duty there for a smile, looked very like the tormentor who was pinching.

'But I mustn't keep him waiting too long,' said Fledgeby, 'or he'll revenge it on my unfortunate friend. How's your very clever and agreeable wife? She knows we have broken down?'

'I showed her the letter.'

'Very much surprised?' asked Fledgeby.

'I think she would have been more so,' answered Lammle, 'if there had been more go in YOU?'

'Oh!—She lays it upon me, then?'

'Mr Fledgeby, I will not have my words misconstrued.'

'Don't break out, Lammle,' urged Fledgeby, in a submissive tone, 'because there's no occasion. I only asked a question. Then she don't lay it upon me? To ask another question.'

'No, sir.'

'Very good,' said Fledgeby, plainly seeing that she did. 'My compliments to her. Good-bye!'

They shook hands, and Lammle strode out pondering. Fledgeby saw him into the fog, and, returning to the fire and musing with his face to it, stretched the legs of the rose-coloured Turkish trousers wide apart, and meditatively bent his knees, as if he were going down upon them.

'You have a pair of whiskers, Lammle, which I never liked,' murmured Fledgeby, 'and which money can't produce; you are boastful of your manners and your conversation; you wanted to pull my nose, and you have let me in for a failure, and your wife says I am the cause of it. I'll bowl you down. I will, though I have no whiskers,' here he rubbed the places where they were due, 'and no manners, and no conversation!'

Having thus relieved his noble mind, he collected the legs of the Turkish trousers, straightened himself on his knees, and called out to Riah in the next room, 'Halloa, you sir!' At sight of the old man re-entering with a gentleness monstrously in contrast with the character he had given him, Mr Fledgeby was so tickled again, that he exclaimed, laughing, 'Good! Good! Upon my soul it is uncommon good!'

'Now, old 'un,' proceeded Fledgeby, when he had had his laugh out, 'you'll buy up these lots that I mark with my pencil—there's a tick there, and a tick there, and a tick there—and I wager two-pence you'll afterwards go on squeezing those Christians like the Jew you are. Now, next you'll want a cheque—or you'll say you want it, though you've capital enough somewhere, if one only knew where, but you'd be peppered and salted and grilled on a gridiron before you'd own to it—and that cheque I'll write.'

When he had unlocked a drawer and taken a key from it to open another drawer, in which was another key that opened another drawer, in which was another key that opened another drawer, in which was the cheque book; and when he had written the cheque; and when, reversing the key and drawer process, he had placed his cheque book in safety again; he beckoned the old man, with the folded cheque, to come and take it.

'Old 'un,' said Fledgeby, when the Jew had put it in his pocketbook, and was putting that in the breast of his outer garment; 'so much at present for my affairs. Now a word about affairs that are not exactly mine. Where is she?'

With his hand not yet withdrawn from the breast of his garment, Riah started and paused.

'Oho!' said Fledgeby. 'Didn't expect it! Where have you hidden her?'

Showing that he was taken by surprise, the old man looked at his master with some passing confusion, which the master highly enjoyed.

'Is she in the house I pay rent and taxes for in Saint Mary Axe?' demanded Fledgeby.

'No, sir.'

'Is she in your garden up atop of that house—gone up to be dead, or whatever the game is?' asked Fledgeby.

'No, sir.'

'Where is she then?'

Riah bent his eyes upon the ground, as if considering whether he could answer the question without breach of faith, and then silently raised them to Fledgeby's face, as if he could not.

'Come!' said Fledgeby. 'I won't press that just now. But I want to know this, and I will know this, mind you. What are you up to?'

The old man, with an apologetic action of his head and hands, as not comprehending the master's meaning, addressed to him a look of mute inquiry.

'You can't be a gallivanting dodger,' said Fledgeby. 'For you're a "regular pity the sorrows", you know—if you DO know any Christian rhyme—"whose trembling limbs have borne him to"—et cetrer. You're one of the Patriarchs; you're a shaky old card; and you can't be in love with this Lizzie?'

'O, sir!' expostulated Riah. 'O, sir, sir, sir!'

'Then why,' retorted Fledgeby, with some slight tinge of a blush, 'don't you out with your reason for having your spoon in the soup at all?'

'Sir, I will tell you the truth. But (your pardon for the stipulation) it is in sacred confidence; it is strictly upon honour.'

'Honour too!' cried Fledgeby, with a mocking lip. 'Honour among Jews. Well. Cut away.'

'It is upon honour, sir?' the other still stipulated, with respectful firmness.

'Oh, certainly. Honour bright,' said Fledgeby.

The old man, never bidden to sit down, stood with an earnest hand laid on the back of the young man's easy chair. The young man sat looking at the fire with a face of listening curiosity, ready to check him off and catch him tripping.

'Cut away,' said Fledgeby. 'Start with your motive.'

'Sir, I have no motive but to help the helpless.'

Mr Fledgeby could only express the feelings to which this incredible statement gave rise in his breast, by a prodigiously long derisive sniff.

'How I came to know, and much to esteem and to respect, this damsel, I mentioned when you saw her in my poor garden on the house-top,' said the Jew.

'Did you?' said Fledgeby, distrustfully. 'Well. Perhaps you did, though.'

'The better I knew her, the more interest I felt in her fortunes. They gathered to a crisis. I found her beset by a selfish and ungrateful brother, beset by an unacceptable wooer, beset by the snares of a more powerful lover, beset by the wiles of her own heart.'

'She took to one of the chaps then?'

'Sir, it was only natural that she should incline towards him, for he had many and great advantages. But he was not of her station, and to marry her was not in his mind. Perils were closing round her, and the circle was fast darkening, when I—being as you have said, sir, too old and broken to be suspected of any feeling for her but a father's—stepped in, and counselled flight. I said, "My daughter, there are times of moral danger when the hardest virtuous resolution to form is flight, and when the most heroic bravery is flight." She answered, she had had this in her thoughts; but whither to fly without help she knew not, and there were none to help her. I showed her there was one to help her, and it was I. And she is gone.'

'What did you do with her?' asked Fledgeby, feeling his cheek.

'I placed her,' said the old man, 'at a distance;' with a grave smooth outward sweep from one another of his two open hands at arm's length; 'at a distance—among certain of our people, where her industry would serve her, and where she could hope to exercise it, unassailed from any quarter.'

Fledgeby's eyes had come from the fire to notice the action of his hands when he said 'at a distance.' Fledgeby now tried (very unsuccessfully) to imitate that action, as he shook his head and said, 'Placed her in that direction, did you? Oh you circular old dodger!'

With one hand across his breast and the other on the easy chair, Riah, without justifying himself, waited for further questioning. But, that it was hopeless to question him on that one reserved point, Fledgeby, with his small eyes too near together, saw full well.

'Lizzie,' said Fledgeby, looking at the fire again, and then looking up. 'Humph, Lizzie. You didn't tell me the other name in your garden atop of the house. I'll be more communicative with you. The other name's Hexam.'

Riah bent his head in assent.

'Look here, you sir,' said Fledgeby. 'I have a notion I know something of the inveigling chap, the powerful one. Has he anything to do with the law?'

'Nominally, I believe it his calling.'

'I thought so. Name anything like Lightwood?'

'Sir, not at all like.'

'Come, old 'un,' said Fledgeby, meeting his eyes with a wink, 'say the name.'

'Wrayburn.'

'By Jupiter!' cried Fledgeby. 'That one, is it? I thought it might be the other, but I never dreamt of that one! I shouldn't object to your baulking either of the pair, dodger, for they are both conceited enough; but that one is as cool a customer as ever I met with. Got a beard besides, and presumes upon it. Well done, old 'un! Go on and prosper!'

Brightened by this unexpected commendation, Riah asked were there more instructions for him?

'No,' said Fledgeby, 'you may toddle now, Judah, and grope about on the orders you have got.' Dismissed with those pleasing words, the old man took his broad hat and staff, and left the great presence: more as if he were some superior creature benignantly blessing Mr Fledgeby, than the poor dependent on whom he set his foot. Left alone, Mr Fledgeby locked his outer door, and came back to his fire.

'Well done you!' said Fascination to himself. 'Slow, you may be; sure, you are!' This he twice or thrice repeated with much complacency, as he again dispersed the legs of the Turkish trousers and bent the knees.

'A tidy shot that, I flatter myself,' he then soliloquised. 'And a Jew brought down with it! Now, when I heard the story told at Lammle's, I didn't make a jump at Riah. Not a hit of it; I got at him by degrees.' Herein he was quite accurate; it being his habit, not to jump, or leap, or make an upward spring, at anything in life, but to crawl at everything.

'I got at him,' pursued Fledgeby, feeling for his whisker, 'by degrees. If your Lammles or your Lightwoods had got at him anyhow, they would have asked him the question whether he hadn't something to do with that gal's disappearance. I knew a better way of going to work. Having got behind the hedge, and put him in the light, I took a shot at him and brought him down plump. Oh! It don't count for much, being a Jew, in a match against ME!'

Another dry twist in place of a smile, made his face crooked here.

'As to Christians,' proceeded Fledgeby, 'look out, fellow-Christians, particularly you that lodge in Queer Street! I have got the run of Queer Street now, and you shall see some games there. To work a lot of power over you and you not know it, knowing as you think yourselves, would be almost worth laying out money upon. But when it comes to squeezing a profit out of you into the bargain, it's something like!'

With this apostrophe Mr Fledgeby appropriately proceeded to divest himself of his Turkish garments, and invest himself with Christian attire. Pending which operation, and his morning ablutions, and his anointing of himself with the last infallible preparation for the production of luxuriant and glossy hair upon the human countenance (quacks being the only sages he believed in besides usurers), the murky fog closed about him and shut him up in its sooty embrace. If it had never let him out any more, the world would have had no irreparable loss, but could have easily replaced him from its stock on hand.

Chapter 2

A RESPECTED FRIEND IN A NEW ASPECT

In the evening of this same foggy day when the yellow window-blind of Pubsey and Co. was drawn down upon the day's work, Riah the Jew once more came forth into Saint Mary Axe. But this time he carried no bag, and was not bound on his master's affairs. He passed over London Bridge, and returned to the Middlesex shore by that of Westminster, and so, ever wading through the fog, waded to the doorstep of the dolls' dressmaker.

Miss Wren expected him. He could see her through the window by the light of her low fire—carefully banked up with damp cinders that it might last the longer and waste the less when she was out—sitting waiting for him in her bonnet. His tap at the glass roused her from the musing solitude in which she sat, and she came to the door to open it; aiding her steps with a little crutch-stick.

'Good evening, godmother!' said Miss Jenny Wren.

The old man laughed, and gave her his arm to lean on.

'Won't you come in and warm yourself, godmother?' asked Miss Jenny Wren.

'Not if you are ready, Cinderella, my dear.'

'Well!' exclaimed Miss Wren, delighted. 'Now you ARE a clever old boy! If we gave prizes at this establishment (but we only keep blanks), you should have the first silver medal, for taking me up so quick.' As she spake thus, Miss Wren removed the key of the house-door from the keyhole and put it in her pocket, and then bustlingly closed the door, and tried it as they both stood on the step. Satisfied that her dwelling was safe, she drew one hand through the old man's arm and prepared to ply her crutch-stick with the other. But the key was an instrument of such gigantic proportions, that before they started Riah proposed to carry it.

'No, no, no! I'll carry it myself,' returned Miss Wren. 'I'm awfully lopsided, you know, and stowed down in my pocket it'll trim the ship. To let you into a secret, godmother, I wear my pocket on my high side, o' purpose.'

With that they began their plodding through the fog.

'Yes, it was truly sharp of you, godmother,' resumed Miss Wren with great approbation, 'to understand me. But, you see, you ARE so like the fairy godmother in the bright little books! You look so unlike the rest of people, and so much as if you had changed yourself into that shape, just this moment, with some benevolent object. Boh!' cried Miss Jenny, putting her face close to the old man's. 'I can see your features, godmother, behind the beard.'

'Does the fancy go to my changing other objects too, Jenny?'

'Ah! That it does! If you'd only borrow my stick and tap this piece of pavement—this dirty stone that my foot taps—it would start up a coach and six. I say! Let's believe so!'

'With all my heart,' replied the good old man.

'And I'll tell you what I must ask you to do, godmother. I must ask you to be so kind as give my child a tap, and change him altogether. O my child has been such a bad, bad child of late! It worries me nearly out of my wits. Not done a stroke of work these ten days. Has had the horrors, too, and fancied that four copper-coloured men in red wanted to throw him into a fiery furnace.'

'But that's dangerous, Jenny.'

'Dangerous, godmother? My child is always dangerous, more or less. He might'—here the little creature glanced back over her shoulder at the sky—'be setting the house on fire at this present moment. I don't know who would have a child, for my part! It's no use shaking him. I have shaken him till I have made myself giddy. "Why don't you mind your Commandments and honour your parent, you naughty old boy?" I said to him all the time. But he only whimpered and stared at me.'

'What shall be changed, after him?' asked Riah in a compassionately playful voice.

'Upon my word, godmother, I am afraid I must be selfish next, and get you to set me right in the back and the legs. It's a little thing to you with your power, godmother, but it's a great deal to poor weak aching me.'

There was no querulous complaining in the words, but they were not the less touching for that.

'And then?'

'Yes, and then—YOU know, godmother. We'll both jump up into the coach and six and go to Lizzie. This reminds me, godmother, to ask you a serious question. You are as wise as wise can be (having been brought up by the fairies), and you can tell me this: Is it better to have had a good thing and lost it, or never to have had it?'

'Explain, god-daughter.'

'I feel so much more solitary and helpless without Lizzie now, than I used to feel before I knew her.' (Tears were in her eyes as she said so.)

'Some beloved companionship fades out of most lives, my dear,' said the Jew,—'that of a wife, and a fair daughter, and a son of promise, has faded out of my own life—but the happiness was.'

'Ah!' said Miss Wren thoughtfully, by no means convinced, and chopping the exclamation with that sharp little hatchet of hers; 'then I tell you what change I think you had better begin with, godmother. You had better change Is into Was and Was into Is, and keep them so.'

'Would that suit your case? Would you not be always in pain then?' asked the old man tenderly.

'Right!' exclaimed Miss Wren with another chop. 'You have changed me wiser, godmother.—Not,' she added with the quaint hitch of her chin and eyes, 'that you need be a very wonderful godmother to do that deed.'

Thus conversing, and having crossed Westminster Bridge, they traversed the ground that Riah had lately traversed, and new ground likewise; for, when they had recrossed the Thames by way of London Bridge, they struck down by the river and held their still foggier course that way.

But previously, as they were going along, Jenny twisted her venerable friend aside to a brilliantly-lighted toy-shop window, and said: 'Now look at 'em! All my work!'

This referred to a dazzling semicircle of dolls in all the colours of the rainbow, who were dressed for presentation at court, for going to balls, for going out driving, for going out on horseback, for going out walking, for going to get married, for going to help other dolls to get married, for all the gay events of life.'

'Pretty, pretty, pretty!' said the old man with a clap of his hands. 'Most elegant taste!'

'Glad you like 'em,' returned Miss Wren, loftily. 'But the fun is, godmother, how I make the great ladies try my dresses on. Though it's the hardest part of my business, and would be, even if my back were not bad and my legs queer.'

He looked at her as not understanding what she said.

'Bless you, godmother,' said Miss Wren, 'I have to scud about town at all hours. If it was only sitting at my bench, cutting out and sewing, it would be comparatively easy work; but it's the trying-on by the great ladies that takes it out of me.'

'How, the trying-on?' asked Riah.

'What a mooney godmother you are, after all!' returned Miss Wren. 'Look here. There's a Drawing Room, or a grand day in the Park, or a Show, or a Fete, or what you like. Very well. I squeeze among the crowd, and I look about me. When I see a great lady very suitable for my business, I say "You'll do, my dear!" and I take particular notice of her, and run home and cut her out and baste her. Then another day, I come scudding back again to try on, and then I take particular notice of her again. Sometimes she plainly seems to say, 'How that little creature is staring!' and sometimes likes it and sometimes don't, but much more often yes than no. All the time I am only saying to myself, "I must hollow out a bit here; I must slope away there;" and I am making a perfect slave of her, with making her try on my doll's dress. Evening parties are severer work for me, because there's only a doorway for a full view, and what with hobbling among the wheels of the carriages and the legs of the horses, I fully expect to be run over some night. However, there I have 'em, just the same. When they go bobbing into the hall from the carriage, and catch a glimpse of my little physiognomy poked out from behind a policeman's cape in the rain, I dare say they think I am wondering and admiring with all my eyes and heart, but they little think they're only working for my dolls! There was Lady Belinda Whitrose. I made her do double duty in one night. I said when she came out of the carriage, "YOU'll do, my dear!" and I ran straight home and cut her out and basted her. Back I came again, and waited behind the men that called the carriages. Very bad night too. At last, "Lady Belinda Whitrose's carriage! Lady Belinda Whitrose coming down!" And I made her try on—oh! and take pains about it too—before she got seated. That's Lady Belinda hanging up by the waist, much too near the gaslight for a wax one, with her toes turned in.'

When they had plodded on for some time nigh the river, Riah asked the way to a certain tavern called the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters. Following the directions he received, they arrived, after two or three puzzled stoppages for consideration, and some uncertain looking about them, at the door of Miss Abbey Potterson's dominions. A peep through the glass portion of the door revealed to them the glories of the bar, and Miss Abbey herself seated in state on her snug throne, reading the newspaper. To whom, with deference, they presented themselves.

Taking her eyes off her newspaper, and pausing with a suspended expression of countenance, as if she must finish the paragraph in hand before undertaking any other business whatever, Miss Abbey demanded, with some slight asperity: 'Now then, what's for you?'

'Could we see Miss Potterson?' asked the old man, uncovering his head.

'You not only could, but you can and you do,' replied the hostess.

'Might we speak with you, madam?'

By this time Miss Abbey's eyes had possessed themselves of the small figure of Miss Jenny Wren. For the closer observation of which, Miss Abbey laid aside her newspaper, rose, and looked over the half-door of the bar. The crutch-stick seemed to entreat for its owner leave to come in and rest by the fire; so, Miss Abbey opened the half-door, and said, as though replying to the crutch-stick:

'Yes, come in and rest by the fire.'

'My name is Riah,' said the old man, with courteous action, 'and my avocation is in London city. This, my young companion—'

'Stop a bit,' interposed Miss Wren. 'I'll give the lady my card.' She produced it from her pocket with an air, after struggling with the gigantic door-key which had got upon the top of it and kept it down. Miss Abbey, with manifest tokens of astonishment, took the diminutive document, and found it to run concisely thus:—

MISS JENNY WREN
DOLLS' DRESSMAKER.

Dolls attended at their own residences.

'Lud!' exclaimed Miss Potterson, staring. And dropped the card.

'We take the liberty of coming, my young companion and I, madam,' said Riah, 'on behalf of Lizzie Hexam.'

Miss Potterson was stooping to loosen the bonnet-strings of the dolls' dressmaker. She looked round rather angrily, and said: 'Lizzie Hexam is a very proud young woman.'

'She would be so proud,' returned Riah, dexterously, 'to stand well in your good opinion, that before she quitted London for—'

'For where, in the name of the Cape of Good Hope?' asked Miss Potterson, as though supposing her to have emigrated.

'For the country,' was the cautious answer,—'she made us promise to come and show you a paper, which she left in our hands for that special purpose. I am an unserviceable friend of hers, who began to know her after her departure from this neighbourhood. She has been for some time living with my young companion, and has been a helpful and a comfortable friend to her. Much needed, madam,' he added, in a lower voice. 'Believe me; if you knew all, much needed.'

'I can believe that,' said Miss Abbey, with a softening glance at the little creature.

'And if it's proud to have a heart that never hardens, and a temper that never tires, and a touch that never hurts,' Miss Jenny struck in, flushed, 'she is proud. And if it's not, she is NOT.'

Her set purpose of contradicting Miss Abbey point blank, was so far from offending that dread authority, as to elicit a gracious smile. 'You do right, child,' said Miss Abbey, 'to speak well of those who deserve well of you.'

'Right or wrong,' muttered Miss Wren, inaudibly, with a visible hitch of her chin, 'I mean to do it, and you may make up your mind to THAT, old lady.'

'Here is the paper, madam,' said the Jew, delivering into Miss Potterson's hands the original document drawn up by Rokesmith, and signed by Riderhood. 'Will you please to read it?'

'But first of all,' said Miss Abbey, '—did you ever taste shrub, child?'

Miss Wren shook her head.

'Should you like to?'

'Should if it's good,' returned Miss Wren.

'You shall try. And, if you find it good, I'll mix some for you with hot water. Put your poor little feet on the fender. It's a cold, cold night, and the fog clings so.' As Miss Abbey helped her to turn her chair, her loosened bonnet dropped on the floor. 'Why, what lovely hair!' cried Miss Abbey. 'And enough to make wigs for all the dolls in the world. What a quantity!'

'Call THAT a quantity?' returned Miss Wren. 'Poof! What do you say to the rest of it?' As she spoke, she untied a band, and the golden stream fell over herself and over the chair, and flowed down to the ground. Miss Abbey's admiration seemed to increase her perplexity. She beckoned the Jew towards her, as she reached down the shrub-bottle from its niche, and whispered:

'Child, or woman?'

'Child in years,' was the answer; 'woman in self-reliance and trial.'

'You are talking about Me, good people,' thought Miss Jenny, sitting in her golden bower, warming her feet. 'I can't hear what you say, but I know your tricks and your manners!'

The shrub, when tasted from a spoon, perfectly harmonizing with Miss Jenny's palate, a judicious amount was mixed by Miss Potterson's skilful hands, whereof Riah too partook. After this preliminary, Miss Abbey read the document; and, as often as she raised her eyebrows in so doing, the watchful Miss Jenny accompanied the action with an expressive and emphatic sip of the shrub and water.

'As far as this goes,' said Miss Abbey Potterson, when she had read it several times, and thought about it, 'it proves (what didn't much need proving) that Rogue Riderhood is a villain. I have my doubts whether he is not the villain who solely did the deed; but I have no expectation of those doubts ever being cleared up now. I believe I did Lizzie's father wrong, but never Lizzie's self; because when things were at the worst I trusted her, had perfect confidence in her, and tried to persuade her to come to me for a refuge. I am very sorry to have done a man wrong, particularly when it can't be undone. Be kind enough to let Lizzie know what I say; not forgetting that if she will come to the Porters, after all, bygones being bygones, she will find a home at the Porters, and a friend at the Porters. She knows Miss Abbey of old, remind her, and she knows what-like the home, and what-like the friend, is likely to turn out. I am generally short and sweet—or short and sour, according as it may be and as opinions vary—' remarked Miss Abbey, 'and that's about all I have got to say, and enough too.'

But before the shrub and water was sipped out, Miss Abbey bethought herself that she would like to keep a copy of the paper by her. 'It's not long, sir,' said she to Riah, 'and perhaps you wouldn't mind just jotting it down.' The old man willingly put on his spectacles, and, standing at the little desk in the corner where Miss Abbey filed her receipts and kept her sample phials (customers' scores were interdicted by the strict administration of the Porters), wrote out the copy in a fair round character. As he stood there, doing his methodical penmanship, his ancient scribelike figure intent upon the work, and the little dolls' dressmaker sitting in her golden bower before the fire, Miss Abbey had her doubts whether she had not dreamed those two rare figures into the bar of the Six Jolly Fellowships, and might not wake with a nod next moment and find them gone.

Miss Abbey had twice made the experiment of shutting her eyes and opening them again, still finding the figures there, when, dreamlike, a confused hubbub arose in the public room. As she started up, and they all three looked at one another, it became a noise of clamouring voices and of the stir of feet; then all the windows were heard to be hastily thrown up, and shouts and cries came floating into the house from the river. A moment more, and Bob Gliddery came clattering along the passage, with the noise of all the nails in his boots condensed into every separate nail.

'What is it?' asked Miss Abbey.

'It's summut run down in the fog, ma'am,' answered Bob. 'There's ever so many people in the river.'

'Tell 'em to put on all the kettles!' cried Miss Abbey. 'See that the boiler's full. Get a bath out. Hang some blankets to the fire. Heat some stone bottles. Have your senses about you, you girls down stairs, and use 'em.'

While Miss Abbey partly delivered these directions to Bob—whom she seized by the hair, and whose head she knocked against the wall, as a general injunction to vigilance and presence of mind—and partly hailed the kitchen with them—the company in the public room, jostling one another, rushed out to the causeway, and the outer noise increased.

'Come and look,' said Miss Abbey to her visitors. They all three hurried to the vacated public room, and passed by one of the windows into the wooden verandah overhanging the river.

'Does anybody down there know what has happened?' demanded Miss Abbey, in her voice of authority.

'It's a steamer, Miss Abbey,' cried one blurred figure in the fog.

'It always IS a steamer, Miss Abbey,' cried another.

'Them's her lights, Miss Abbey, wot you see a-blinking yonder,' cried another.

'She's a-blowing off her steam, Miss Abbey, and that's what makes the fog and the noise worse, don't you see?' explained another.

Boats were putting off, torches were lighting up, people were rushing tumultuously to the water's edge. Some man fell in with a splash, and was pulled out again with a roar of laughter. The drags were called for. A cry for the life-buoy passed from mouth to mouth. It was impossible to make out what was going on upon the river, for every boat that put off sculled into the fog and was lost to view at a boat's length. Nothing was clear but that the unpopular steamer was assailed with reproaches on all sides. She was the Murderer, bound for Gallows Bay; she was the Manslaughterer, bound for Penal Settlement; her captain ought to be tried for his life; her crew ran down men in row-boats with a relish; she mashed up Thames lightermen with her paddles; she fired property with her funnels; she always was, and she always would be, wreaking destruction upon somebody or something, after the manner of all her kind. The whole bulk of the fog teemed with such taunts, uttered in tones of universal hoarseness. All the while, the steamer's lights moved spectrally a very little, as she lay-to, waiting the upshot of whatever accident had happened. Now, she began burning blue-lights. These made a luminous patch about her, as if she had set the fog on fire, and in the patch—the cries changing their note, and becoming more fitful and more excited—shadows of men and boats could be seen moving, while voices shouted: 'There!' 'There again!' 'A couple more strokes a-head!' 'Hurrah!' 'Look out!' 'Hold on!' 'Haul in!' and the like. Lastly, with a few tumbling clots of blue fire, the night closed in dark again, the wheels of the steamer were heard revolving, and her lights glided smoothly away in the direction of the sea.

It appeared to Miss Abbey and her two companions that a considerable time had been thus occupied. There was now as eager a set towards the shore beneath the house as there had been from it; and it was only on the first boat of the rush coming in that it was known what had occurred.

'If that's Tom Tootle,' Miss Abbey made proclamation, in her most commanding tones, 'let him instantly come underneath here.'

The submissive Tom complied, attended by a crowd.

'What is it, Tootle?' demanded Miss Abbey.

'It's a foreign steamer, miss, run down a wherry.'

'How many in the wherry?'

'One man, Miss Abbey.'

'Found?'

'Yes. He's been under water a long time, Miss; but they've grappled up the body.'

'Let 'em bring it here. You, Bob Gliddery, shut the house-door and stand by it on the inside, and don't you open till I tell you. Any police down there?'

'Here, Miss Abbey,' was official rejoinder.

'After they have brought the body in, keep the crowd out, will you? And help Bob Gliddery to shut 'em out.'

'All right, Miss Abbey.'

The autocratic landlady withdrew into the house with Riah and Miss Jenny, and disposed those forces, one on either side of her, within the half-door of the bar, as behind a breastwork.

'You two stand close here,' said Miss Abbey, 'and you'll come to no hurt, and see it brought in. Bob, you stand by the door.'

That sentinel, smartly giving his rolled shirt-sleeves an extra and a final tuck on his shoulders, obeyed.

Sound of advancing voices, sound of advancing steps. Shuffle and talk without. Momentary pause. Two peculiarly blunt knocks or pokes at the door, as if the dead man arriving on his back were striking at it with the soles of his motionless feet.

'That's the stretcher, or the shutter, whichever of the two they are carrying,' said Miss Abbey, with experienced ear. 'Open, you Bob!'

Door opened. Heavy tread of laden men. A halt. A rush. Stoppage of rush. Door shut. Baffled boots from the vexed souls of disappointed outsiders.

'Come on, men!' said Miss Abbey; for so potent was she with her subjects that even then the bearers awaited her permission. 'First floor.'

The entry being low, and the staircase being low, they so took up the burden they had set down, as to carry that low. The recumbent figure, in passing, lay hardly as high as the half door.

Miss Abbey started back at sight of it. 'Why, good God!' said she, turning to her two companions, 'that's the very man who made the declaration we have just had in our hands. That's Riderhood!'

Chapter 3

THE SAME RESPECTED FRIEND IN MORE ASPECTS THAN ONE

In sooth, it is Riderhood and no other, or it is the outer husk and shell of Riderhood and no other, that is borne into Miss Abbey's first-floor bedroom. Supple to twist and turn as the Rogue has ever been, he is sufficiently rigid now; and not without much shuffling of attendant feet, and tilting of his bier this way and that way, and peril even of his sliding off it and being tumbled in a heap over the balustrades, can he be got up stairs.

'Fetch a doctor,' quoth Miss Abbey. And then, 'Fetch his daughter.' On both of which errands, quick messengers depart.

The doctor-seeking messenger meets the doctor halfway, coming under convoy of police. Doctor examines the dank carcase, and pronounces, not hopefully, that it is worth while trying to reanimate the same. All the best means are at once in action, and everybody present lends a hand, and a heart and soul. No one has the least regard for the man; with them all, he has been an object of avoidance, suspicion, and aversion; but the spark of life within him is curiously separable from himself now, and they have a deep interest in it, probably because it IS life, and they are living and must die.

In answer to the doctor's inquiry how did it happen, and was anyone to blame, Tom Tootle gives in his verdict, unavoidable accident and no one to blame but the sufferer. 'He was slinking about in his boat,' says Tom, 'which slinking were, not to speak ill of the dead, the manner of the man, when he come right athwart the steamer's bows and she cut him in two.' Mr Tootle is so far figurative, touching the dismemberment, as that he means the boat, and not the man. For, the man lies whole before them.

Captain Joey, the bottle-nosed regular customer in the glazed hat, is a pupil of the much-respected old school, and (having insinuated himself into the chamber, in the execution of the important service of carrying the drowned man's neck-kerchief) favours the doctor with a sagacious old-scholastic suggestion that the body should be hung up by the heels, 'sim'lar', says Captain Joey, 'to mutton in a butcher's shop,' and should then, as a particularly choice manoeuvre for promoting easy respiration, be rolled upon casks. These scraps of the wisdom of the captain's ancestors are received with such speechless indignation by Miss Abbey, that she instantly seizes the Captain by the collar, and without a single word ejects him, not presuming to remonstrate, from the scene.

There then remain, to assist the doctor and Tom, only those three other regular customers, Bob Glamour, William Williams, and Jonathan (family name of the latter, if any, unknown to man-kind), who are quite enough. Miss Abbey having looked in to make sure that nothing is wanted, descends to the bar, and there awaits the result, with the gentle Jew and Miss Jenny Wren.

If you are not gone for good, Mr Riderhood, it would be something to know where you are hiding at present. This flabby lump of mortality that we work so hard at with such patient perseverance, yields no sign of you. If you are gone for good, Rogue, it is very solemn, and if you are coming back, it is hardly less so. Nay, in the suspense and mystery of the latter question, involving that of where you may be now, there is a solemnity even added to that of death, making us who are in attendance alike afraid to look on you and to look off you, and making those below start at the least sound of a creaking plank in the floor.

Stay! Did that eyelid tremble? So the doctor, breathing low, and closely watching, asks himself.

No.

Did that nostril twitch?

No.

This artificial respiration ceasing, do I feel any faint flutter under my hand upon the chest?

No.

Over and over again No. No. But try over and over again, nevertheless.

See! A token of life! An indubitable token of life! The spark may smoulder and go out, or it may glow and expand, but see! The four rough fellows, seeing, shed tears. Neither Riderhood in this world, nor Riderhood in the other, could draw tears from them; but a striving human soul between the two can do it easily.

He is struggling to come back. Now, he is almost here, now he is far away again. Now he is struggling harder to get back. And yet—like us all, when we swoon—like us all, every day of our lives when we wake—he is instinctively unwilling to be restored to the consciousness of this existence, and would be left dormant, if he could.

Bob Gliddery returns with Pleasant Riderhood, who was out when sought for, and hard to find. She has a shawl over her head, and her first action, when she takes it off weeping, and curtseys to Miss Abbey, is to wind her hair up.

'Thank you, Miss Abbey, for having father here.'

'I am bound to say, girl, I didn't know who it was,' returns Miss Abbey; 'but I hope it would have been pretty much the same if I had known.'

Poor Pleasant, fortified with a sip of brandy, is ushered into the first-floor chamber. She could not express much sentiment about her father if she were called upon to pronounce his funeral oration, but she has a greater tenderness for him than he ever had for her, and crying bitterly when she sees him stretched unconscious, asks the doctor, with clasped hands: 'Is there no hope, sir? O poor father! Is poor father dead?'

To which the doctor, on one knee beside the body, busy and watchful, only rejoins without looking round: 'Now, my girl, unless you have the self-command to be perfectly quiet, I cannot allow you to remain in the room.'

Pleasant, consequently, wipes her eyes with her back-hair, which is in fresh need of being wound up, and having got it out of the way, watches with terrified interest all that goes on. Her natural woman's aptitude soon renders her able to give a little help. Anticipating the doctor's want of this or that, she quietly has it ready for him, and so by degrees is intrusted with the charge of supporting her father's head upon her arm.

It is something so new to Pleasant to see her father an object of sympathy and interest, to find any one very willing to tolerate his society in this world, not to say pressingly and soothingly entreating him to belong to it, that it gives her a sensation she never experienced before. Some hazy idea that if affairs could remain thus for a long time it would be a respectable change, floats in her mind. Also some vague idea that the old evil is drowned out of him, and that if he should happily come back to resume his occupation of the empty form that lies upon the bed, his spirit will be altered. In which state of mind she kisses the stony lips, and quite believes that the impassive hand she chafes will revive a tender hand, if it revive ever.

Sweet delusion for Pleasant Riderhood. But they minister to him with such extraordinary interest, their anxiety is so keen, their vigilance is so great, their excited joy grows so intense as the signs of life strengthen, that how can she resist it, poor thing! And now he begins to breathe naturally, and he stirs, and the doctor declares him to have come back from that inexplicable journey where he stopped on the dark road, and to be here.

Tom Tootle, who is nearest to the doctor when he says this, grasps the doctor fervently by the hand. Bob Glamour, William Williams, and Jonathan of the no surname, all shake hands with one another round, and with the doctor too. Bob Glamour blows his nose, and Jonathan of the no surname is moved to do likewise, but lacking a pocket handkerchief abandons that outlet for his emotion. Pleasant sheds tears deserving her own name, and her sweet delusion is at its height.

There is intelligence in his eyes. He wants to ask a question. He wonders where he is. Tell him.

'Father, you were run down on the river, and are at Miss Abbey Potterson's.'

He stares at his daughter, stares all around him, closes his eyes, and lies slumbering on her arm.

The short-lived delusion begins to fade. The low, bad, unimpressible face is coming up from the depths of the river, or what other depths, to the surface again. As he grows warm, the doctor and the four men cool. As his lineaments soften with life, their faces and their hearts harden to him.

'He will do now,' says the doctor, washing his hands, and looking at the patient with growing disfavour.

'Many a better man,' moralizes Tom Tootle with a gloomy shake of the head, 'ain't had his luck.'

'It's to be hoped he'll make a better use of his life,' says Bob Glamour, 'than I expect he will.'

'Or than he done afore,' adds William Williams.

'But no, not he!' says Jonathan of the no surname, clinching the quartette.

They speak in a low tone because of his daughter, but she sees that they have all drawn off, and that they stand in a group at the other end of the room, shunning him. It would be too much to suspect them of being sorry that he didn't die when he had done so much towards it, but they clearly wish that they had had a better subject to bestow their pains on. Intelligence is conveyed to Miss Abbey in the bar, who reappears on the scene, and contemplates from a distance, holding whispered discourse with the doctor. The spark of life was deeply interesting while it was in abeyance, but now that it has got established in Mr Riderhood, there appears to be a general desire that circumstances had admitted of its being developed in anybody else, rather than that gentleman.

'However,' says Miss Abbey, cheering them up, 'you have done your duty like good and true men, and you had better come down and take something at the expense of the Porters.'

This they all do, leaving the daughter watching the father. To whom, in their absence, Bob Gliddery presents himself.

'His gills looks rum; don't they?' says Bob, after inspecting the patient.

Pleasant faintly nods.

'His gills'll look rummer when he wakes; won't they?' says Bob.

Pleasant hopes not. Why?

'When he finds himself here, you know,' Bob explains. 'Cause Miss Abbey forbid him the house and ordered him out of it. But what you may call the Fates ordered him into it again. Which is rumness; ain't it?'

'He wouldn't have come here of his own accord,' returns poor Pleasant, with an effort at a little pride.

'No,' retorts Bob. 'Nor he wouldn't have been let in, if he had.'

The short delusion is quite dispelled now. As plainly as she sees on her arm the old father, unimproved, Pleasant sees that everybody there will cut him when he recovers consciousness. 'I'll take him away ever so soon as I can,' thinks Pleasant with a sigh; 'he's best at home.'

Presently they all return, and wait for him to become conscious that they will all be glad to get rid of him. Some clothes are got together for him to wear, his own being saturated with water, and his present dress being composed of blankets.

Becoming more and more uncomfortable, as though the prevalent dislike were finding him out somewhere in his sleep and expressing itself to him, the patient at last opens his eyes wide, and is assisted by his daughter to sit up in bed.

'Well, Riderhood,' says the doctor, 'how do you feel?'

He replies gruffly, 'Nothing to boast on.' Having, in fact, returned to life in an uncommonly sulky state.

'I don't mean to preach; but I hope,' says the doctor, gravely shaking his head, 'that this escape may have a good effect upon you, Riderhood.'

The patient's discontented growl of a reply is not intelligible; his daughter, however, could interpret, if she would, that what he says is, he 'don't want no Poll-Parroting'.

Mr Riderhood next demands his shirt; and draws it on over his head (with his daughter's help) exactly as if he had just had a Fight.

'Warn't it a steamer?' he pauses to ask her.

'Yes, father.'

'I'll have the law on her, bust her! and make her pay for it.'

He then buttons his linen very moodily, twice or thrice stopping to examine his arms and hands, as if to see what punishment he has received in the Fight. He then doggedly demands his other garments, and slowly gets them on, with an appearance of great malevolence towards his late opponent and all the spectators. He has an impression that his nose is bleeding, and several times draws the back of his hand across it, and looks for the result, in a pugilistic manner, greatly strengthening that incongruous resemblance.

'Where's my fur cap?' he asks in a surly voice, when he has shuffled his clothes on.

'In the river,' somebody rejoins.

'And warn't there no honest man to pick it up? O' course there was though, and to cut off with it arterwards. You are a rare lot, all on you!'

Thus, Mr Riderhood: taking from the hands of his daughter, with special ill-will, a lent cap, and grumbling as he pulls it down over his ears. Then, getting on his unsteady legs, leaning heavily upon her, and growling, 'Hold still, can't you? What! You must be a staggering next, must you?' he takes his departure out of the ring in which he has had that little turn-up with Death.

Chapter 4

A HAPPY RETURN OF THE DAY

Mr and Mrs Wilfer had seen a full quarter of a hundred more anniversaries of their wedding day than Mr and Mrs Lammle had seen of theirs, but they still celebrated the occasion in the bosom of their family. Not that these celebrations ever resulted in anything particularly agreeable, or that the family was ever disappointed by that circumstance on account of having looked forward to the return of the auspicious day with sanguine anticipations of enjoyment. It was kept morally, rather as a Fast than a Feast, enabling Mrs Wilfer to hold a sombre darkling state, which exhibited that impressive woman in her choicest colours.

The noble lady's condition on these delightful occasions was one compounded of heroic endurance and heroic forgiveness. Lurid indications of the better marriages she might have made, shone athwart the awful gloom of her composure, and fitfully revealed the cherub as a little monster unaccountably favoured by Heaven, who had possessed himself of a blessing for which many of his superiors had sued and contended in vain. So firmly had this his position towards his treasure become established, that when the anniversary arrived, it always found him in an apologetic state. It is not impossible that his modest penitence may have even gone the length of sometimes severely reproving him for that he ever took the liberty of making so exalted a character his wife.

As for the children of the union, their experience of these festivals had been sufficiently uncomfortable to lead them annually to wish, when out of their tenderest years, either that Ma had married somebody else instead of much-teased Pa, or that Pa had married somebody else instead of Ma. When there came to be but two sisters left at home, the daring mind of Bella on the next of these occasions scaled the height of wondering with droll vexation 'what on earth Pa ever could have seen in Ma, to induce him to make such a little fool of himself as to ask her to have him.'

The revolving year now bringing the day round in its orderly sequence, Bella arrived in the Boffin chariot to assist at the celebration. It was the family custom when the day recurred, to sacrifice a pair of fowls on the altar of Hymen; and Bella had sent a note beforehand, to intimate that she would bring the votive offering with her. So, Bella and the fowls, by the united energies of two horses, two men, four wheels, and a plum-pudding carriage dog with as uncomfortable a collar on as if he had been George the Fourth, were deposited at the door of the parental dwelling. They were there received by Mrs Wilfer in person, whose dignity on this, as on most special occasions, was heightened by a mysterious toothache.

'I shall not require the carriage at night,' said Bella. 'I shall walk back.'

The male domestic of Mrs Boffin touched his hat, and in the act of departure had an awful glare bestowed upon him by Mrs Wilfer, intended to carry deep into his audacious soul the assurance that, whatever his private suspicions might be, male domestics in livery were no rarity there.

'Well, dear Ma,' said Bella, 'and how do you do?'

'I am as well, Bella,' replied Mrs Wilfer, 'as can be expected.'

'Dear me, Ma,' said Bella; 'you talk as if one was just born!'

'That's exactly what Ma has been doing,' interposed Lavvy, over the maternal shoulder, 'ever since we got up this morning. It's all very well to laugh, Bella, but anything more exasperating it is impossible to conceive.'

Mrs Wilfer, with a look too full of majesty to be accompanied by any words, attended both her daughters to the kitchen, where the sacrifice was to be prepared.

'Mr Rokesmith,' said she, resignedly, 'has been so polite as to place his sitting-room at our disposal to-day. You will therefore, Bella, be entertained in the humble abode of your parents, so far in accordance with your present style of living, that there will be a drawing-room for your reception as well as a dining-room. Your papa invited Mr Rokesmith to partake of our lowly fare. In excusing himself on account of a particular engagement, he offered the use of his apartment.'

Bella happened to know that he had no engagement out of his own room at Mr Boffin's, but she approved of his staying away. 'We should only have put one another out of countenance,' she thought, 'and we do that quite often enough as it is.'

Yet she had sufficient curiosity about his room, to run up to it with the least possible delay, and make a close inspection of its contents. It was tastefully though economically furnished, and very neatly arranged. There were shelves and stands of books, English, French, and Italian; and in a portfolio on the writing-table there were sheets upon sheets of memoranda and calculations in figures, evidently referring to the Boffin property. On that table also, carefully backed with canvas, varnished, mounted, and rolled like a map, was the placard descriptive of the murdered man who had come from afar to be her husband. She shrank from this ghostly surprise, and felt quite frightened as she rolled and tied it up again. Peeping about here and there, she came upon a print, a graceful head of a pretty woman, elegantly framed, hanging in the corner by the easy chair. 'Oh, indeed, sir!' said Bella, after stopping to ruminate before it. 'Oh, indeed, sir! I fancy I can guess whom you think THAT'S like. But I'll tell you what it's much more like—your impudence!' Having said which she decamped: not solely because she was offended, but because there was nothing else to look at.

'Now, Ma,' said Bella, reappearing in the kitchen with some remains of a blush, 'you and Lavvy think magnificent me fit for nothing, but I intend to prove the contrary. I mean to be Cook today.'

'Hold!' rejoined her majestic mother. 'I cannot permit it. Cook, in that dress!'

'As for my dress, Ma,' returned Bella, merrily searching in a dresser-drawer, 'I mean to apron it and towel it all over the front; and as to permission, I mean to do without.'

'YOU cook?' said Mrs Wilfer. 'YOU, who never cooked when you were at home?'

'Yes, Ma,' returned Bella; 'that is precisely the state of the case.'

She girded herself with a white apron, and busily with knots and pins contrived a bib to it, coming close and tight under her chin, as if it had caught her round the neck to kiss her. Over this bib her dimples looked delightful, and under it her pretty figure not less so. 'Now, Ma,' said Bella, pushing back her hair from her temples with both hands, 'what's first?'

'First,' returned Mrs Wilfer solemnly, 'if you persist in what I cannot but regard as conduct utterly incompatible with the equipage in which you arrived—'

('Which I do, Ma.')

'First, then, you put the fowls down to the fire.'

'To—be—sure!' cried Bella; 'and flour them, and twirl them round, and there they go!' sending them spinning at a great rate. 'What's next, Ma?'

'Next,' said Mrs Wilfer with a wave of her gloves, expressive of abdication under protest from the culinary throne, 'I would recommend examination of the bacon in the saucepan on the fire, and also of the potatoes by the application of a fork. Preparation of the greens will further become necessary if you persist in this unseemly demeanour.'

'As of course I do, Ma.'

Persisting, Bella gave her attention to one thing and forgot the other, and gave her attention to the other and forgot the third, and remembering the third was distracted by the fourth, and made amends whenever she went wrong by giving the unfortunate fowls an extra spin, which made their chance of ever getting cooked exceedingly doubtful. But it was pleasant cookery too. Meantime Miss Lavinia, oscillating between the kitchen and the opposite room, prepared the dining-table in the latter chamber. This office she (always doing her household spiriting with unwillingness) performed in a startling series of whisks and bumps; laying the table-cloth as if she were raising the wind, putting down the glasses and salt-cellars as if she were knocking at the door, and clashing the knives and forks in a skirmishing manner suggestive of hand-to-hand conflict.

'Look at Ma,' whispered Lavinia to Bella when this was done, and they stood over the roasting fowls. 'If one was the most dutiful child in existence (of course on the whole one hopes one is), isn't she enough to make one want to poke her with something wooden, sitting there bolt upright in a corner?'

'Only suppose,' returned Bella, 'that poor Pa was to sit bolt upright in another corner.'

'My dear, he couldn't do it,' said Lavvy. 'Pa would loll directly. But indeed I do not believe there ever was any human creature who could keep so bolt upright as Ma, 'or put such an amount of aggravation into one back! What's the matter, Ma? Ain't you well, Ma?'

'Doubtless I am very well,' returned Mrs Wilfer, turning her eyes upon her youngest born, with scornful fortitude. 'What should be the matter with Me?'

'You don't seem very brisk, Ma,' retorted Lavvy the bold.

'Brisk?' repeated her parent, 'Brisk? Whence the low expression, Lavinia? If I am uncomplaining, if I am silently contented with my lot, let that suffice for my family.'

'Well, Ma,' returned Lavvy, 'since you will force it out of me, I must respectfully take leave to say that your family are no doubt under the greatest obligations to you for having an annual toothache on your wedding day, and that it's very disinterested in you, and an immense blessing to them. Still, on the whole, it is possible to be too boastful even of that boon.'

'You incarnation of sauciness,' said Mrs Wilfer, 'do you speak like that to me? On this day, of all days in the year? Pray do you know what would have become of you, if I had not bestowed my hand upon R. W., your father, on this day?'

'No, Ma,' replied Lavvy, 'I really do not; and, with the greatest respect for your abilities and information, I very much doubt if you do either.'

Whether or no the sharp vigour of this sally on a weak point of Mrs Wilfer's entrenchments might have routed that heroine for the time, is rendered uncertain by the arrival of a flag of truce in the person of Mr George Sampson: bidden to the feast as a friend of the family, whose affections were now understood to be in course of transference from Bella to Lavinia, and whom Lavinia kept—possibly in remembrance of his bad taste in having overlooked her in the first instance—under a course of stinging discipline.

'I congratulate you, Mrs Wilfer,' said Mr George Sampson, who had meditated this neat address while coming along, 'on the day.' Mrs Wilfer thanked him with a magnanimous sigh, and again became an unresisting prey to that inscrutable toothache.

'I am surprised,' said Mr Sampson feebly, 'that Miss Bella condescends to cook.'

Here Miss Lavinia descended on the ill-starred young gentleman with a crushing supposition that at all events it was no business of his. This disposed of Mr Sampson in a melancholy retirement of spirit, until the cherub arrived, whose amazement at the lovely woman's occupation was great.

However, she persisted in dishing the dinner as well as cooking it, and then sat down, bibless and apronless, to partake of it as an illustrious guest: Mrs Wilfer first responding to her husband's cheerful 'For what we are about to receive—'with a sepulchral Amen, calculated to cast a damp upon the stoutest appetite.

'But what,' said Bella, as she watched the carving of the fowls, 'makes them pink inside, I wonder, Pa! Is it the breed?'

'No, I don't think it's the breed, my dear,' returned Pa. 'I rather think it is because they are not done.'

'They ought to be,' said Bella.

'Yes, I am aware they ought to be, my dear,' rejoined her father, 'but they—ain't.'

So, the gridiron was put in requisition, and the good-tempered cherub, who was often as un-cherubically employed in his own family as if he had been in the employment of some of the Old Masters, undertook to grill the fowls. Indeed, except in respect of staring about him (a branch of the public service to which the pictorial cherub is much addicted), this domestic cherub discharged as many odd functions as his prototype; with the difference, say, that he performed with a blacking-brush on the family's boots, instead of performing on enormous wind instruments and double-basses, and that he conducted himself with cheerful alacrity to much useful purpose, instead of foreshortening himself in the air with the vaguest intentions.

Bella helped him with his supplemental cookery, and made him very happy, but put him in mortal terror too by asking him when they sat down at table again, how he supposed they cooked fowls at the Greenwich dinners, and whether he believed they really were such pleasant dinners as people said? His secret winks and nods of remonstrance, in reply, made the mischievous Bella laugh until she choked, and then Lavinia was obliged to slap her on the back, and then she laughed the more.

But her mother was a fine corrective at the other end of the table; to whom her father, in the innocence of his good-fellowship, at intervals appealed with: 'My dear, I am afraid you are not enjoying yourself?'

'Why so, R. W.?' she would sonorously reply.

'Because, my dear, you seem a little out of sorts.'

'Not at all,' would be the rejoinder, in exactly the same tone.

'Would you take a merry-thought, my dear?'

'Thank you. I will take whatever you please, R. W.'

'Well, but my dear, do you like it?'

'I like it as well as I like anything, R. W.' The stately woman would then, with a meritorious appearance of devoting herself to the general good, pursue her dinner as if she were feeding somebody else on high public grounds.

Bella had brought dessert and two bottles of wine, thus shedding unprecedented splendour on the occasion. Mrs Wilfer did the honours of the first glass by proclaiming: 'R. W. I drink to you.

'Thank you, my dear. And I to you.'

'Pa and Ma!' said Bella.

'Permit me,' Mrs Wilfer interposed, with outstretched glove. 'No. I think not. I drank to your papa. If, however, you insist on including me, I can in gratitude offer no objection.'

'Why, Lor, Ma,' interposed Lavvy the bold, 'isn't it the day that made you and Pa one and the same? I have no patience!'

'By whatever other circumstance the day may be marked, it is not the day, Lavinia, on which I will allow a child of mine to pounce upon me. I beg—nay, command!—that you will not pounce. R. W., it is appropriate to recall that it is for you to command and for me to obey. It is your house, and you are master at your own table. Both our healths!' Drinking the toast with tremendous stiffness.

'I really am a little afraid, my dear,' hinted the cherub meekly, 'that you are not enjoying yourself?'

'On the contrary,' returned Mrs Wilfer, 'quite so. Why should I not?'

'I thought, my dear, that perhaps your face might—'

'My face might be a martyrdom, but what would that import, or who should know it, if I smiled?'

And she did smile; manifestly freezing the blood of Mr George Sampson by so doing. For that young gentleman, catching her smiling eye, was so very much appalled by its expression as to cast about in his thoughts concerning what he had done to bring it down upon himself.

'The mind naturally falls,' said Mrs Wilfer, 'shall I say into a reverie, or shall I say into a retrospect? on a day like this.'

Lavvy, sitting with defiantly folded arms, replied (but not audibly), 'For goodness' sake say whichever of the two you like best, Ma, and get it over.'

'The mind,' pursued Mrs Wilfer in an oratorical manner, 'naturally reverts to Papa and Mamma—I here allude to my parents—at a period before the earliest dawn of this day. I was considered tall; perhaps I was. Papa and Mamma were unquestionably tall. I have rarely seen a finer women than my mother; never than my father.'

The irrepressible Lavvy remarked aloud, 'Whatever grandpapa was, he wasn't a female.'

'Your grandpapa,' retorted Mrs Wilfer, with an awful look, and in an awful tone, 'was what I describe him to have been, and would have struck any of his grandchildren to the earth who presumed to question it. It was one of mamma's cherished hopes that I should become united to a tall member of society. It may have been a weakness, but if so, it was equally the weakness, I believe, of King Frederick of Prussia.' These remarks being offered to Mr George Sampson, who had not the courage to come out for single combat, but lurked with his chest under the table and his eyes cast down, Mrs Wilfer proceeded, in a voice of increasing sternness and impressiveness, until she should force that skulker to give himself up. 'Mamma would appear to have had an indefinable foreboding of what afterwards happened, for she would frequently urge upon me, "Not a little man. Promise me, my child, not a little man. Never, never, never, marry a little man!" Papa also would remark to me (he possessed extraordinary humour), "that a family of whales must not ally themselves with sprats." His company was eagerly sought, as may be supposed, by the wits of the day, and our house was their continual resort. I have known as many as three copper-plate engravers exchanging the most exquisite sallies and retorts there, at one time.' (Here Mr Sampson delivered himself captive, and said, with an uneasy movement on his chair, that three was a large number, and it must have been highly entertaining.) 'Among the most prominent members of that distinguished circle, was a gentleman measuring six feet four in height. HE was NOT an engraver.' (Here Mr Sampson said, with no reason whatever, Of course not.) 'This gentleman was so obliging as to honour me with attentions which I could not fail to understand.' (Here Mr Sampson murmured that when it came to that, you could always tell.) 'I immediately announced to both my parents that those attentions were misplaced, and that I could not favour his suit. They inquired was he too tall? I replied it was not the stature, but the intellect was too lofty. At our house, I said, the tone was too brilliant, the pressure was too high, to be maintained by me, a mere woman, in every-day domestic life. I well remember mamma's clasping her hands, and exclaiming "This will end in a little man!"' (Here Mr Sampson glanced at his host and shook his head with despondency.) 'She afterwards went so far as to predict that it would end in a little man whose mind would be below the average, but that was in what I may denominate a paroxysm of maternal disappointment. Within a month,' said Mrs Wilfer, deepening her voice, as if she were relating a terrible ghost story, 'within a-month, I first saw R. W. my husband. Within a year, I married him. It is natural for the mind to recall these dark coincidences on the present day.'

Mr Sampson at length released from the custody of Mrs Wilfer's eye, now drew a long breath, and made the original and striking remark that there was no accounting for these sort of presentiments. R. W. scratched his head and looked apologetically all round the table until he came to his wife, when observing her as it were shrouded in a more sombre veil than before, he once more hinted, 'My dear, I am really afraid you are not altogether enjoying yourself?' To which she once more replied, 'On the contrary, R. W. Quite so.'

The wretched Mr Sampson's position at this agreeable entertainment was truly pitiable. For, not only was he exposed defenceless to the harangues of Mrs Wilfer, but he received the utmost contumely at the hands of Lavinia; who, partly to show Bella that she (Lavinia) could do what she liked with him, and partly to pay him off for still obviously admiring Bella's beauty, led him the life of a dog. Illuminated on the one hand by the stately graces of Mrs Wilfer's oratory, and shadowed on the other by the checks and frowns of the young lady to whom he had devoted himself in his destitution, the sufferings of this young gentleman were distressing to witness. If his mind for the moment reeled under them, it may be urged, in extenuation of its weakness, that it was constitutionally a knock-knee'd mind and never very strong upon its legs.

The rosy hours were thus beguiled until it was time for Bella to have Pa's escort back. The dimples duly tied up in the bonnet-strings and the leave-taking done, they got out into the air, and the cherub drew a long breath as if he found it refreshing.

'Well, dear Pa,' said Bella, 'the anniversary may be considered over.'

'Yes, my dear,' returned the cherub, 'there's another of 'em gone.'

Bella drew his arm closer through hers as they walked along, and gave it a number of consolatory pats. 'Thank you, my dear,' he said, as if she had spoken; 'I am all right, my dear. Well, and how do you get on, Bella?'

'I am not at all improved, Pa.'

'Ain't you really though?'

'No, Pa. On the contrary, I am worse.'

'Lor!' said the cherub.

'I am worse, Pa. I make so many calculations how much a year I must have when I marry, and what is the least I can manage to do with, that I am beginning to get wrinkles over my nose. Did you notice any wrinkles over my nose this evening, Pa?'

Pa laughing at this, Bella gave him two or three shakes.

'You won't laugh, sir, when you see your lovely woman turning haggard. You had better be prepared in time, I can tell you. I shall not be able to keep my greediness for money out of my eyes long, and when you see it there you'll be sorry, and serve you right for not being warned in time. Now, sir, we entered into a bond of confidence. Have you anything to impart?'

'I thought it was you who was to impart, my love.'

'Oh! did you indeed, sir? Then why didn't you ask me, the moment we came out? The confidences of lovely women are not to be slighted. However, I forgive you this once, and look here, Pa; that's'—Bella laid the little forefinger of her right glove on her lip, and then laid it on her father's lip—'that's a kiss for you. And now I am going seriously to tell you—let me see how many—four secrets. Mind! Serious, grave, weighty secrets. Strictly between ourselves.'

'Number one, my dear?' said her father, settling her arm comfortably and confidentially.

'Number one,' said Bella, 'will electrify you, Pa. Who do you think has'—she was confused here in spite of her merry way of beginning 'has made an offer to me?'

Pa looked in her face, and looked at the ground, and looked in her face again, and declared he could never guess.

'Mr Rokesmith.'

'You don't tell me so, my dear!'

'Mis—ter Roke—smith, Pa,' said Bella separating the syllables for emphasis. 'What do you say to THAT?'

Pa answered quietly with the counter-question, 'What did YOU say to that, my love?'

'I said No,' returned Bella sharply. 'Of course.'

'Yes. Of course,' said her father, meditating.

'And I told him why I thought it a betrayal of trust on his part, and an affront to me,' said Bella.

'Yes. To be sure. I am astonished indeed. I wonder he committed himself without seeing more of his way first. Now I think of it, I suspect he always has admired you though, my dear.'

'A hackney coachman may admire me,' remarked Bella, with a touch of her mother's loftiness.

'It's highly probable, my love. Number two, my dear?'

'Number two, Pa, is much to the same purpose, though not so preposterous. Mr Lightwood would propose to me, if I would let him.'

'Then I understand, my dear, that you don't intend to let him?'

Bella again saying, with her former emphasis, 'Why, of course not!' her father felt himself bound to echo, 'Of course not.'

'I don't care for him,' said Bella.

'That's enough,' her father interposed.

'No, Pa, it's NOT enough,' rejoined Bella, giving him another shake or two. 'Haven't I told you what a mercenary little wretch I am? It only becomes enough when he has no money, and no clients, and no expectations, and no anything but debts.'

'Hah!' said the cherub, a little depressed. 'Number three, my dear?'

'Number three, Pa, is a better thing. A generous thing, a noble thing, a delightful thing. Mrs Boffin has herself told me, as a secret, with her own kind lips—and truer lips never opened or closed in this life, I am sure—that they wish to see me well married; and that when I marry with their consent they will portion me most handsomely.' Here the grateful girl burst out crying very heartily.

'Don't cry, my darling,' said her father, with his hand to his eyes; 'it's excusable in me to be a little overcome when I find that my dear favourite child is, after all disappointments, to be so provided for and so raised in the world; but don't YOU cry, don't YOU cry. I am very thankful. I congratulate you with all my heart, my dear.' The good soft little fellow, drying his eyes, here, Bella put her arms round his neck and tenderly kissed him on the high road, passionately telling him he was the best of fathers and the best of friends, and that on her wedding-morning she would go down on her knees to him and beg his pardon for having ever teased him or seemed insensible to the worth of such a patient, sympathetic, genial, fresh young heart. At every one of her adjectives she redoubled her kisses, and finally kissed his hat off, and then laughed immoderately when the wind took it and he ran after it.

When he had recovered his hat and his breath, and they were going on again once more, said her father then: 'Number four, my dear?'

Bella's countenance fell in the midst of her mirth. 'After all, perhaps I had better put off number four, Pa. Let me try once more, if for never so short a time, to hope that it may not really be so.'

The change in her, strengthened the cherub's interest in number four, and he said quietly: 'May not be so, my dear? May not be how, my dear?'

Bella looked at him pensively, and shook her head.

'And yet I know right well it is so, Pa. I know it only too well.'

'My love,' returned her father, 'you make me quite uncomfortable. Have you said No to anybody else, my dear?'

'No, Pa.'

'Yes to anybody?' he suggested, lifting up his eyebrows.

'No, Pa.'

'Is there anybody else who would take his chance between Yes and No, if you would let him, my dear?'

'Not that I know of, Pa.'

'There can't be somebody who won't take his chance when you want him to?' said the cherub, as a last resource.

'Why, of course not, Pa, said Bella, giving him another shake or two.

'No, of course not,' he assented. 'Bella, my dear, I am afraid I must either have no sleep to-night, or I must press for number four.'

'Oh, Pa, there is no good in number four! I am so sorry for it, I am so unwilling to believe it, I have tried so earnestly not to see it, that it is very hard to tell, even to you. But Mr Boffin is being spoilt by prosperity, and is changing every day.'

'My dear Bella, I hope and trust not.'

'I have hoped and trusted not too, Pa; but every day he changes for the worse, and for the worse. Not to me—he is always much the same to me—but to others about him. Before my eyes he grows suspicious, capricious, hard, tyrannical, unjust. If ever a good man were ruined by good fortune, it is my benefactor. And yet, Pa, think how terrible the fascination of money is! I see this, and hate this, and dread this, and don't know but that money might make a much worse change in me. And yet I have money always in my thoughts and my desires; and the whole life I place before myself is money, money, money, and what money can make of life!'

Chapter 5

THE GOLDEN DUSTMAN FALLS INTO BAD COMPANY

Were Bella Wilfer's bright and ready little wits at fault, or was the Golden Dustman passing through the furnace of proof and coming out dross? Ill news travels fast. We shall know full soon.

On that very night of her return from the Happy Return, something chanced which Bella closely followed with her eyes and ears. There was an apartment at the side of the Boffin mansion, known as Mr Boffin's room. Far less grand than the rest of the house, it was far more comfortable, being pervaded by a certain air of homely snugness, which upholstering despotism had banished to that spot when it inexorably set its face against Mr Boffin's appeals for mercy in behalf of any other chamber. Thus, although a room of modest situation—for its windows gave on Silas Wegg's old corner—and of no pretensions to velvet, satin, or gilding, it had got itself established in a domestic position analogous to that of an easy dressing-gown or pair of slippers; and whenever the family wanted to enjoy a particularly pleasant fireside evening, they enjoyed it, as an institution that must be, in Mr Boffin's room.

Mr and Mrs Boffin were reported sitting in this room, when Bella got back. Entering it, she found the Secretary there too; in official attendance it would appear, for he was standing with some papers in his hand by a table with shaded candles on it, at which Mr Boffin was seated thrown back in his easy chair.

'You are busy, sir,' said Bella, hesitating at the door.

'Not at all, my dear, not at all. You're one of ourselves. We never make company of you. Come in, come in. Here's the old lady in her usual place.'

Mrs Boffin adding her nod and smile of welcome to Mr Boffin's words, Bella took her book to a chair in the fireside corner, by Mrs Boffin's work-table. Mr Boffin's station was on the opposite side.

'Now, Rokesmith,' said the Golden Dustman, so sharply rapping the table to bespeak his attention as Bella turned the leaves of her book, that she started; 'where were we?'

'You were saying, sir,' returned the Secretary, with an air of some reluctance and a glance towards those others who were present, 'that you considered the time had come for fixing my salary.'

'Don't be above calling it wages, man,' said Mr Boffin, testily. 'What the deuce! I never talked of any salary when I was in service.'

'My wages,' said the Secretary, correcting himself.

'Rokesmith, you are not proud, I hope?' observed Mr Boffin, eyeing him askance.

'I hope not, sir.'

'Because I never was, when I was poor,' said Mr Boffin. 'Poverty and pride don't go at all well together. Mind that. How can they go well together? Why it stands to reason. A man, being poor, has nothing to be proud of. It's nonsense.'

With a slight inclination of his head, and a look of some surprise, the Secretary seemed to assent by forming the syllables of the word 'nonsense' on his lips.

'Now, concerning these same wages,' said Mr Boffin. 'Sit down.'

The Secretary sat down.

'Why didn't you sit down before?' asked Mr Boffin, distrustfully. 'I hope that wasn't pride? But about these wages. Now, I've gone into the matter, and I say two hundred a year. What do you think of it? Do you think it's enough?'

'Thank you. It is a fair proposal.'

'I don't say, you know,' Mr Boffin stipulated, 'but what it may be more than enough. And I'll tell you why, Rokesmith. A man of property, like me, is bound to consider the market-price. At first I didn't enter into that as much as I might have done; but I've got acquainted with other men of property since, and I've got acquainted with the duties of property. I mustn't go putting the market-price up, because money may happen not to be an object with me. A sheep is worth so much in the market, and I ought to give it and no more. A secretary is worth so much in the market, and I ought to give it and no more. However, I don't mind stretching a point with you.'

'Mr Boffin, you are very good,' replied the Secretary, with an effort.

'Then we put the figure,' said Mr Boffin, 'at two hundred a year. Then the figure's disposed of. Now, there must be no misunderstanding regarding what I buy for two hundred a year. If I pay for a sheep, I buy it out and out. Similarly, if I pay for a secretary, I buy HIM out and out.'

'In other words, you purchase my whole time?'

'Certainly I do. Look here,' said Mr Boffin, 'it ain't that I want to occupy your whole time; you can take up a book for a minute or two when you've nothing better to do, though I think you'll a'most always find something useful to do. But I want to keep you in attendance. It's convenient to have you at all times ready on the premises. Therefore, betwixt your breakfast and your supper,—on the premises I expect to find you.'

The Secretary bowed.

'In bygone days, when I was in service myself,' said Mr Boffin, 'I couldn't go cutting about at my will and pleasure, and you won't expect to go cutting about at your will and pleasure. You've rather got into a habit of that, lately; but perhaps it was for want of a right specification betwixt us. Now, let there be a right specification betwixt us, and let it be this. If you want leave, ask for it.'

Again the Secretary bowed. His manner was uneasy and astonished, and showed a sense of humiliation.

'I'll have a bell,' said Mr Boffin, 'hung from this room to yours, and when I want you, I'll touch it. I don't call to mind that I have anything more to say at the present moment.'

The Secretary rose, gathered up his papers, and withdrew. Bella's eyes followed him to the door, lighted on Mr Boffin complacently thrown back in his easy chair, and drooped over her book.

'I have let that chap, that young man of mine,' said Mr Boffin, taking a trot up and down the room, get above his work. It won't do. I must have him down a peg. A man of property owes a duty to other men of property, and must look sharp after his inferiors.'

Bella felt that Mrs Boffin was not comfortable, and that the eyes of that good creature sought to discover from her face what attention she had given to this discourse, and what impression it had made upon her. For which reason Bella's eyes drooped more engrossedly over her book, and she turned the page with an air of profound absorption in it.

'Noddy,' said Mrs Boffin, after thoughtfully pausing in her work.

'My dear,' returned the Golden Dustman, stopping short in his trot.

'Excuse my putting it to you, Noddy, but now really! Haven't you been a little strict with Mr Rokesmith to-night? Haven't you been a little—just a little little—not quite like your old self?'

'Why, old woman, I hope so,' returned Mr Boffin, cheerfully, if not boastfully.

'Hope so, deary?'

'Our old selves wouldn't do here, old lady. Haven't you found that out yet? Our old selves would be fit for nothing here but to be robbed and imposed upon. Our old selves weren't people of fortune; our new selves are; it's a great difference.'

'Ah!' said Mrs Boffin, pausing in her work again, softly to draw a long breath and to look at the fire. 'A great difference.'

'And we must be up to the difference,' pursued her husband; 'we must be equal to the change; that's what we must be. We've got to hold our own now, against everybody (for everybody's hand is stretched out to be dipped into our pockets), and we have got to recollect that money makes money, as well as makes everything else.'

'Mentioning recollecting,' said Mrs Boffin, with her work abandoned, her eyes upon the fire, and her chin upon her hand, 'do you recollect, Noddy, how you said to Mr Rokesmith when he first came to see us at the Bower, and you engaged him—how you said to him that if it had pleased Heaven to send John Harmon to his fortune safe, we could have been content with the one Mound which was our legacy, and should never have wanted the rest?'

'Ay, I remember, old lady. But we hadn't tried what it was to have the rest then. Our new shoes had come home, but we hadn't put 'em on. We're wearing 'em now, we're wearing 'em, and must step out accordingly.'

Mrs Boffin took up her work again, and plied her needle in silence.

'As to Rokesmith, that young man of mine,' said Mr Boffin, dropping his voice and glancing towards the door with an apprehension of being overheard by some eavesdropper there, 'it's the same with him as with the footmen. I have found out that you must either scrunch them, or let them scrunch you. If you ain't imperious with 'em, they won't believe in your being any better than themselves, if as good, after the stories (lies mostly) that they have heard of your beginnings. There's nothing betwixt stiffening yourself up, and throwing yourself away; take my word for that, old lady.'

Bella ventured for a moment to look stealthily towards him under her eyelashes, and she saw a dark cloud of suspicion, covetousness, and conceit, overshadowing the once open face.

'Hows'ever,' said he, 'this isn't entertaining to Miss Bella. Is it, Bella?'

A deceiving Bella she was, to look at him with that pensively abstracted air, as if her mind were full of her book, and she had not heard a single word!

'Hah! Better employed than to attend to it,' said Mr Boffin. 'That's right, that's right. Especially as you have no call to be told how to value yourself, my dear.'

Colouring a little under this compliment, Bella returned, 'I hope sir, you don't think me vain?'

'Not a bit, my dear,' said Mr Boffin. 'But I think it's very creditable in you, at your age, to be so well up with the pace of the world, and to know what to go in for. You are right. Go in for money, my love. Money's the article. You'll make money of your good looks, and of the money Mrs Boffin and me will have the pleasure of settling upon you, and you'll live and die rich. That's the state to live and die in!' said Mr Boffin, in an unctuous manner. R—r—rich!'

There was an expression of distress in Mrs Boffin's face, as, after watching her husband's, she turned to their adopted girl, and said:

'Don't mind him, Bella, my dear.'

'Eh?' cried Mr Boffin. 'What! Not mind him?'

'I don't mean that,' said Mrs Boffin, with a worried look, 'but I mean, don't believe him to be anything but good and generous, Bella, because he is the best of men. No, I must say that much, Noddy. You are always the best of men.'

She made the declaration as if he were objecting to it: which assuredly he was not in any way.

'And as to you, my dear Bella,' said Mrs Boffin, still with that distressed expression, 'he is so much attached to you, whatever he says, that your own father has not a truer interest in you and can hardly like you better than he does.'

'Says too!' cried Mr Boffin. 'Whatever he says! Why, I say so, openly. Give me a kiss, my dear child, in saying Good Night, and let me confirm what my old lady tells you. I am very fond of you, my dear, and I am entirely of your mind, and you and I will take care that you shall be rich. These good looks of yours (which you have some right to be vain of; my dear, though you are not, you know) are worth money, and you shall make money of 'em. The money you will have, will be worth money, and you shall make money of that too. There's a golden ball at your feet. Good night, my dear.'

Somehow, Bella was not so well pleased with this assurance and this prospect as she might have been. Somehow, when she put her arms round Mrs Boffin's neck and said Good Night, she derived a sense of unworthiness from the still anxious face of that good woman and her obvious wish to excuse her husband. 'Why, what need to excuse him?' thought Bella, sitting down in her own room. 'What he said was very sensible, I am sure, and very true, I am sure. It is only what I often say to myself. Don't I like it then? No, I don't like it, and, though he is my liberal benefactor, I disparage him for it. Then pray,' said Bella, sternly putting the question to herself in the looking-glass as usual, 'what do you mean by this, you inconsistent little Beast?'

The looking-glass preserving a discreet ministerial silence when thus called upon for explanation, Bella went to bed with a weariness upon her spirit which was more than the weariness of want of sleep. And again in the morning, she looked for the cloud, and for the deepening of the cloud, upon the Golden Dustman's face.

She had begun by this time to be his frequent companion in his morning strolls about the streets, and it was at this time that he made her a party to his engaging in a curious pursuit. Having been hard at work in one dull enclosure all his life, he had a child's delight in looking at shops. It had been one of the first novelties and pleasures of his freedom, and was equally the delight of his wife. For many years their only walks in London had been taken on Sundays when the shops were shut; and when every day in the week became their holiday, they derived an enjoyment from the variety and fancy and beauty of the display in the windows, which seemed incapable of exhaustion. As if the principal streets were a great Theatre and the play were childishly new to them, Mr and Mrs Boffin, from the beginning of Bella's intimacy in their house, had been constantly in the front row, charmed with all they saw and applauding vigorously. But now, Mr Boffin's interest began to centre in book-shops; and more than that—for that of itself would not have been much—in one exceptional kind of book.

'Look in here, my dear,' Mr Boffin would say, checking Bella's arm at a bookseller's window; 'you can read at sight, and your eyes are as sharp as they're bright. Now, look well about you, my dear, and tell me if you see any book about a Miser.'

If Bella saw such a book, Mr Boffin would instantly dart in and buy it. And still, as if they had not found it, they would seek out another book-shop, and Mr Boffin would say, 'Now, look well all round, my dear, for a Life of a Miser, or any book of that sort; any Lives of odd characters who may have been Misers.'

Bella, thus directed, would examine the window with the greatest attention, while Mr Boffin would examine her face. The moment she pointed out any book as being entitled Lives of eccentric personages, Anecdotes of strange characters, Records of remarkable individuals, or anything to that purpose, Mr Boffin's countenance would light up, and he would instantly dart in and buy it. Size, price, quality, were of no account. Any book that seemed to promise a chance of miserly biography, Mr Boffin purchased without a moment's delay and carried home. Happening to be informed by a bookseller that a portion of the Annual Register was devoted to 'Characters', Mr Boffin at once bought a whole set of that ingenious compilation, and began to carry it home piecemeal, confiding a volume to Bella, and bearing three himself. The completion of this labour occupied them about a fortnight. When the task was done, Mr Boffin, with his appetite for Misers whetted instead of satiated, began to look out again.

It very soon became unnecessary to tell Bella what to look for, and an understanding was established between her and Mr Boffin that she was always to look for Lives of Misers. Morning after morning they roamed about the town together, pursuing this singular research. Miserly literature not being abundant, the proportion of failures to successes may have been as a hundred to one; still Mr Boffin, never wearied, remained as avaricious for misers as he had been at the first onset. It was curious that Bella never saw the books about the house, nor did she ever hear from Mr Boffin one word of reference to their contents. He seemed to save up his Misers as they had saved up their money. As they had been greedy for it, and secret about it, and had hidden it, so he was greedy for them, and secret about them, and hid them. But beyond all doubt it was to be noticed, and was by Bella very clearly noticed, that, as he pursued the acquisition of those dismal records with the ardour of Don Quixote for his books of chivalry, he began to spend his money with a more sparing hand. And often when he came out of a shop with some new account of one of those wretched lunatics, she would almost shrink from the sly dry chuckle with which he would take her arm again and trot away. It did not appear that Mrs Boffin knew of this taste. He made no allusion to it, except in the morning walks when he and Bella were always alone; and Bella, partly under the impression that he took her into his confidence by implication, and partly in remembrance of Mrs Boffin's anxious face that night, held the same reserve.

While these occurrences were in progress, Mrs Lammle made the discovery that Bella had a fascinating influence over her. The Lammles, originally presented by the dear Veneerings, visited the Boffins on all grand occasions, and Mrs Lammle had not previously found this out; but now the knowledge came upon her all at once. It was a most extraordinary thing (she said to Mrs Boffin); she was foolishly susceptible of the power of beauty, but it wasn't altogether that; she never had been able to resist a natural grace of manner, but it wasn't altogether that; it was more than that, and there was no name for the indescribable extent and degree to which she was captivated by this charming girl.

This charming girl having the words repeated to her by Mrs Boffin (who was proud of her being admired, and would have done anything to give her pleasure), naturally recognized in Mrs Lammle a woman of penetration and taste. Responding to the sentiments, by being very gracious to Mrs Lammle, she gave that lady the means of so improving her opportunity, as that the captivation became reciprocal, though always wearing an appearance of greater sobriety on Bella's part than on the enthusiastic Sophronia's. Howbeit, they were so much together that, for a time, the Boffin chariot held Mrs Lammle oftener than Mrs Boffin: a preference of which the latter worthy soul was not in the least jealous, placidly remarking, 'Mrs Lammle is a younger companion for her than I am, and Lor! she's more fashionable.'

But between Bella Wilfer and Georgiana Podsnap there was this one difference, among many others, that Bella was in no danger of being captivated by Alfred. She distrusted and disliked him. Indeed, her perception was so quick, and her observation so sharp, that after all she mistrusted his wife too, though with her giddy vanity and wilfulness she squeezed the mistrust away into a corner of her mind, and blocked it up there.

Mrs Lammle took the friendliest interest in Bella's making a good match. Mrs Lammle said, in a sportive way, she really must show her beautiful Bella what kind of wealthy creatures she and Alfred had on hand, who would as one man fall at her feet enslaved. Fitting occasion made, Mrs Lammle accordingly produced the most passable of those feverish, boastful, and indefinably loose gentlemen who were always lounging in and out of the City on questions of the Bourse and Greek and Spanish and India and Mexican and par and premium and discount and three-quarters and seven-eighths. Who in their agreeable manner did homage to Bella as if she were a compound of fine girl, thorough-bred horse, well-built drag, and remarkable pipe. But without the least effect, though even Mr Fledgeby's attractions were cast into the scale.

'I fear, Bella dear,' said Mrs Lammle one day in the chariot, 'that you will be very hard to please.'

'I don't expect to be pleased, dear,' said Bella, with a languid turn of her eyes.

'Truly, my love,' returned Sophronia, shaking her head, and smiling her best smile, 'it would not be very easy to find a man worthy of your attractions.'

'The question is not a man, my dear,' said Bella, coolly, 'but an establishment.'

'My love,' returned Mrs Lammle, 'your prudence amazes me—where DID you study life so well!—you are right. In such a case as yours, the object is a fitting establishment. You could not descend to an inadequate one from Mr Boffin's house, and even if your beauty alone could not command it, it is to be assumed that Mr and Mrs Boffin will—'

'Oh! they have already,' Bella interposed.

'No! Have they really?'

A little vexed by a suspicion that she had spoken precipitately, and withal a little defiant of her own vexation, Bella determined not to retreat.

'That is to say,' she explained, 'they have told me they mean to portion me as their adopted child, if you mean that. But don't mention it.'

'Mention it!' replied Mrs Lammle, as if she were full of awakened feeling at the suggestion of such an impossibility. 'Men-tion it!'

'I don't mind telling you, Mrs Lammle—' Bella began again.

'My love, say Sophronia, or I must not say Bella.'

With a little short, petulant 'Oh!' Bella complied. 'Oh!—Sophronia then—I don't mind telling you, Sophronia, that I am convinced I have no heart, as people call it; and that I think that sort of thing is nonsense.'

'Brave girl!' murmured Mrs Lammle.

'And so,' pursued Bella, 'as to seeking to please myself, I don't; except in the one respect I have mentioned. I am indifferent otherwise.'

'But you can't help pleasing, Bella,' said Mrs Lammle, rallying her with an arch look and her best smile, 'you can't help making a proud and an admiring husband. You may not care to please yourself, and you may not care to please him, but you are not a free agent as to pleasing: you are forced to do that, in spite of yourself, my dear; so it may be a question whether you may not as well please yourself too, if you can.'

Now, the very grossness of this flattery put Bella upon proving that she actually did please in spite of herself. She had a misgiving that she was doing wrong—though she had an indistinct foreshadowing that some harm might come of it thereafter, she little thought what consequences it would really bring about—but she went on with her confidence.

'Don't talk of pleasing in spite of one's self, dear,' said Bella. 'I have had enough of that.'

'Ay?' cried Mrs Lammle. 'Am I already corroborated, Bella?'

'Never mind, Sophronia, we will not speak of it any more. Don't ask me about it.'

This plainly meaning Do ask me about it, Mrs Lammle did as she was requested.

'Tell me, Bella. Come, my dear. What provoking burr has been inconveniently attracted to the charming skirts, and with difficulty shaken off?'

'Provoking indeed,' said Bella, 'and no burr to boast of! But don't ask me.'

'Shall I guess?'

'You would never guess. What would you say to our Secretary?'

'My dear! The hermit Secretary, who creeps up and down the back stairs, and is never seen!'

'I don't know about his creeping up and down the back stairs,' said Bella, rather contemptuously, 'further than knowing that he does no such thing; and as to his never being seen, I should be content never to have seen him, though he is quite as visible as you are. But I pleased HIM (for my sins) and he had the presumption to tell me so.'

'The man never made a declaration to you, my dear Bella!'

'Are you sure of that, Sophronia?' said Bella. 'I am not. In fact, I am sure of the contrary.'

'The man must be mad,' said Mrs Lammle, with a kind of resignation.

'He appeared to be in his senses,' returned Bella, tossing her head, 'and he had plenty to say for himself. I told him my opinion of his declaration and his conduct, and dismissed him. Of course this has all been very inconvenient to me, and very disagreeable. It has remained a secret, however. That word reminds me to observe, Sophronia, that I have glided on into telling you the secret, and that I rely upon you never to mention it.'

'Mention it!' repeated Mrs Lammle with her former feeling. 'Men-tion it!'

This time Sophronia was so much in earnest that she found it necessary to bend forward in the carriage and give Bella a kiss. A Judas order of kiss; for she thought, while she yet pressed Bella's hand after giving it, 'Upon your own showing, you vain heartless girl, puffed up by the doting folly of a dustman, I need have no relenting towards YOU. If my husband, who sends me here, should form any schemes for making YOU a victim, I should certainly not cross him again.' In those very same moments, Bella was thinking, 'Why am I always at war with myself? Why have I told, as if upon compulsion, what I knew all along I ought to have withheld? Why am I making a friend of this woman beside me, in spite of the whispers against her that I hear in my heart?'

As usual, there was no answer in the looking-glass when she got home and referred these questions to it. Perhaps if she had consulted some better oracle, the result might have been more satisfactory; but she did not, and all things consequent marched the march before them.

On one point connected with the watch she kept on Mr Boffin, she felt very inquisitive, and that was the question whether the Secretary watched him too, and followed the sure and steady change in him, as she did? Her very limited intercourse with Mr Rokesmith rendered this hard to find out. Their communication now, at no time extended beyond the preservation of commonplace appearances before Mr and Mrs Boffin; and if Bella and the Secretary were ever left alone together by any chance, he immediately withdrew. She consulted his face when she could do so covertly, as she worked or read, and could make nothing of it. He looked subdued; but he had acquired a strong command of feature, and, whenever Mr Boffin spoke to him in Bella's presence, or whatever revelation of himself Mr Boffin made, the Secretary's face changed no more than a wall. A slightly knitted brow, that expressed nothing but an almost mechanical attention, and a compression of the mouth, that might have been a guard against a scornful smile—these she saw from morning to night, from day to day, from week to week, monotonous, unvarying, set, as in a piece of sculpture.

The worst of the matter was, that it thus fell out insensibly—and most provokingly, as Bella complained to herself, in her impetuous little manner—that her observation of Mr Boffin involved a continual observation of Mr Rokesmith. 'Won't THAT extract a look from him?'—'Can it be possible THAT makes no impression on him?' Such questions Bella would propose to herself, often as many times in a day as there were hours in it. Impossible to know. Always the same fixed face.

'Can he be so base as to sell his very nature for two hundred a year?' Bella would think. And then, 'But why not? It's a mere question of price with others besides him. I suppose I would sell mine, if I could get enough for it.' And so she would come round again to the war with herself.

A kind of illegibility, though a different kind, stole over Mr Boffin's face. Its old simplicity of expression got masked by a certain craftiness that assimilated even his good-humour to itself. His very smile was cunning, as if he had been studying smiles among the portraits of his misers. Saving an occasional burst of impatience, or coarse assertion of his mastery, his good-humour remained to him, but it had now a sordid alloy of distrust; and though his eyes should twinkle and all his face should laugh, he would sit holding himself in his own arms, as if he had an inclination to hoard himself up, and must always grudgingly stand on the defensive.

What with taking heed of these two faces, and what with feeling conscious that the stealthy occupation must set some mark on her own, Bella soon began to think that there was not a candid or a natural face among them all but Mrs Boffin's. None the less because it was far less radiant than of yore, faithfully reflecting in its anxiety and regret every line of change in the Golden Dustman's.

'Rokesmith,' said Mr Boffin one evening when they were all in his room again, and he and the Secretary had been going over some accounts, 'I am spending too much money. Or leastways, you are spending too much for me.'

'You are rich, sir.'

'I am not,' said Mr Boffin.

The sharpness of the retort was next to telling the Secretary that he lied. But it brought no change of expression into the set face.

'I tell you I am not rich,' repeated Mr Boffin, 'and I won't have it.'

'You are not rich, sir?' repeated the Secretary, in measured words.

'Well,' returned Mr Boffin, 'if I am, that's my business. I am not going to spend at this rate, to please you, or anybody. You wouldn't like it, if it was your money.'

'Even in that impossible case, sir, I—'

'Hold your tongue!' said Mr Boffin. 'You oughtn't to like it in any case. There! I didn't mean to be rude, but you put me out so, and after all I'm master. I didn't intend to tell you to hold your tongue. I beg your pardon. Don't hold your tongue. Only, don't contradict. Did you ever come across the life of Mr Elwes?' referring to his favourite subject at last.

'The miser?'

'Ah, people called him a miser. People are always calling other people something. Did you ever read about him?'

'I think so.'

'He never owned to being rich, and yet he might have bought me twice over. Did you ever hear of Daniel Dancer?'

'Another miser? Yes.'

'He was a good 'un,' said Mr Boffin, 'and he had a sister worthy of him. They never called themselves rich neither. If they HAD called themselves rich, most likely they wouldn't have been so.'

'They lived and died very miserably. Did they not, sir?'

'No, I don't know that they did,' said Mr Boffin, curtly.

'Then they are not the Misers I mean. Those abject wretches—'

'Don't call names, Rokesmith,' said Mr Boffin.

'—That exemplary brother and sister—lived and died in the foulest and filthiest degradation.'

'They pleased themselves,' said Mr Boffin, 'and I suppose they could have done no more if they had spent their money. But however, I ain't going to fling mine away. Keep the expenses down. The fact is, you ain't enough here, Rokesmith. It wants constant attention in the littlest things. Some of us will be dying in a workhouse next.'

'As the persons you have cited,' quietly remarked the Secretary, 'thought they would, if I remember, sir.'

'And very creditable in 'em too,' said Mr Boffin. 'Very independent in 'em! But never mind them just now. Have you given notice to quit your lodgings?'

'Under your direction, I have, sir.'

'Then I tell you what,' said Mr Boffin; 'pay the quarter's rent—pay the quarter's rent, it'll be the cheapest thing in the end—and come here at once, so that you may be always on the spot, day and night, and keep the expenses down. You'll charge the quarter's rent to me, and we must try and save it somewhere. You've got some lovely furniture; haven't you?'

'The furniture in my rooms is my own.'

'Then we shan't have to buy any for you. In case you was to think it,' said Mr Boffin, with a look of peculiar shrewdness, 'so honourably independent in you as to make it a relief to your mind, to make that furniture over to me in the light of a set-off against the quarter's rent, why ease your mind, ease your mind. I don't ask it, but I won't stand in your way if you should consider it due to yourself. As to your room, choose any empty room at the top of the house.'

'Any empty room will do for me,' said the Secretary.

'You can take your pick,' said Mr Boffin, 'and it'll be as good as eight or ten shillings a week added to your income. I won't deduct for it; I look to you to make it up handsomely by keeping the expenses down. Now, if you'll show a light, I'll come to your office-room and dispose of a letter or two.'

On that clear, generous face of Mrs Boffin's, Bella had seen such traces of a pang at the heart while this dialogue was being held, that she had not the courage to turn her eyes to it when they were left alone. Feigning to be intent on her embroidery, she sat plying her needle until her busy hand was stopped by Mrs Boffin's hand being lightly laid upon it. Yielding to the touch, she felt her hand carried to the good soul's lips, and felt a tear fall on it.

'Oh, my loved husband!' said Mrs Boffin. 'This is hard to see and hear. But my dear Bella, believe me that in spite of all the change in him, he is the best of men.'

He came back, at the moment when Bella had taken the hand comfortingly between her own.

'Eh?' said he, mistrustfully looking in at the door. 'What's she telling you?'

'She is only praising you, sir,' said Bella.

'Praising me? You are sure? Not blaming me for standing on my own defence against a crew of plunderers, who could suck me dry by driblets? Not blaming me for getting a little hoard together?'

He came up to them, and his wife folded her hands upon his shoulder, and shook her head as she laid it on her hands.

'There, there, there!' urged Mr Boffin, not unkindly. 'Don't take on, old lady.'

'But I can't bear to see you so, my dear.'

'Nonsense! Recollect we are not our old selves. Recollect, we must scrunch or be scrunched. Recollect, we must hold our own. Recollect, money makes money. Don't you be uneasy, Bella, my child; don't you be doubtful. The more I save, the more you shall have.'

Bella thought it was well for his wife that she was musing with her affectionate face on his shoulder; for there was a cunning light in his eyes as he said all this, which seemed to cast a disagreeable illumination on the change in him, and make it morally uglier.

Chapter 6

THE GOLDEN DUSTMAN FALLS INTO WORSE COMPANY

It had come to pass that Mr Silas Wegg now rarely attended the minion of fortune and the worm of the hour, at his (the worm's and minion's) own house, but lay under general instructions to await him within a certain margin of hours at the Bower. Mr Wegg took this arrangement in great dudgeon, because the appointed hours were evening hours, and those he considered precious to the progress of the friendly move. But it was quite in character, he bitterly remarked to Mr Venus, that the upstart who had trampled on those eminent creatures, Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker, should oppress his literary man.

The Roman Empire having worked out its destruction, Mr Boffin next appeared in a cab with Rollin's Ancient History, which valuable work being found to possess lethargic properties, broke down, at about the period when the whole of the army of Alexander the Macedonian (at that time about forty thousand strong) burst into tears simultaneously, on his being taken with a shivering fit after bathing. The Wars of the Jews, likewise languishing under Mr Wegg's generalship, Mr Boffin arrived in another cab with Plutarch: whose Lives he found in the sequel extremely entertaining, though he hoped Plutarch might not expect him to believe them all. What to believe, in the course of his reading, was Mr Boffin's chief literary difficulty indeed; for some time he was divided in his mind between half, all, or none; at length, when he decided, as a moderate man, to compound with half, the question still remained, which half? And that stumbling-block he never got over.

One evening, when Silas Wegg had grown accustomed to the arrival of his patron in a cab, accompanied by some profane historian charged with unutterable names of incomprehensible peoples, of impossible descent, waging wars any number of years and syllables long, and carrying illimitable hosts and riches about, with the greatest ease, beyond the confines of geography—one evening the usual time passed by, and no patron appeared. After half an hour's grace, Mr Wegg proceeded to the outer gate, and there executed a whistle, conveying to Mr Venus, if perchance within hearing, the tidings of his being at home and disengaged. Forth from the shelter of a neighbouring wall, Mr Venus then emerged.

'Brother in arms,' said Mr Wegg, in excellent spirits, 'welcome!'

In return, Mr Venus gave him a rather dry good evening.

'Walk in, brother,' said Silas, clapping him on the shoulder, 'and take your seat in my chimley corner; for what says the ballad?

"No malice to dread, sir,
And no falsehood to fear,
But truth to delight me, Mr Venus,
And I forgot what to cheer.
Li toddle de om dee.
And something to guide,
My ain fireside, sir,
My ain fireside."'

With this quotation (depending for its neatness rather on the spirit than the words), Mr Wegg conducted his guest to his hearth.

'And you come, brother,' said Mr Wegg, in a hospitable glow, 'you come like I don't know what—exactly like it—I shouldn't know you from it—shedding a halo all around you.'

'What kind of halo?' asked Mr Venus.

"Ope sir,' replied Silas. 'That's YOUR halo.'

Mr Venus appeared doubtful on the point, and looked rather discontentedly at the fire.

'We'll devote the evening, brother,' exclaimed Wegg, 'to prosecute our friendly move. And arterwards, crushing a flowing wine-cup—which I allude to brewing rum and water—we'll pledge one another. For what says the Poet?

"And you needn't Mr Venus be your black bottle,
For surely I'll be mine,
And we'll take a glass with a slice of lemon in it to which you're partial,
For auld lang syne."'

This flow of quotation and hospitality in Wegg indicated his observation of some little querulousness on the part of Venus.

'Why, as to the friendly move,' observed the last-named gentleman, rubbing his knees peevishly, 'one of my objections to it is, that it DON'T move.'

'Rome, brother,' returned Wegg: 'a city which (it may not be generally known) originated in twins and a wolf; and ended in Imperial marble: wasn't built in a day.'

'Did I say it was?' asked Venus.

'No, you did not, brother. Well-inquired.'

'But I do say,' proceeded Venus, 'that I am taken from among my trophies of anatomy, am called upon to exchange my human warious for mere coal-ashes warious, and nothing comes of it. I think I must give up.'

'No, sir!' remonstrated Wegg, enthusiastically. 'No, Sir!

"Charge, Chester, charge,
On, Mr Venus, on!"

Never say die, sir! A man of your mark!'

'It's not so much saying it that I object to,' returned Mr Venus, 'as doing it. And having got to do it whether or no, I can't afford to waste my time on groping for nothing in cinders.'

'But think how little time you have given to the move, sir, after all,' urged Wegg. 'Add the evenings so occupied together, and what do they come to? And you, sir, harmonizer with myself in opinions, views, and feelings, you with the patience to fit together on wires the whole framework of society—I allude to the human skelinton—you to give in so soon!'

'I don't like it,' returned Mr Venus moodily, as he put his head between his knees and stuck up his dusty hair. 'And there's no encouragement to go on.'

'Not them Mounds without,' said Mr Wegg, extending his right hand with an air of solemn reasoning, 'encouragement? Not them Mounds now looking down upon us?'

'They're too big,' grumbled Venus. 'What's a scratch here and a scrape there, a poke in this place and a dig in the other, to them. Besides; what have we found?'

'What HAVE we found?' cried Wegg, delighted to be able to acquiesce. 'Ah! There I grant you, comrade. Nothing. But on the contrary, comrade, what MAY we find? There you'll grant me. Anything.'

'I don't like it,' pettishly returned Venus as before. 'I came into it without enough consideration. And besides again. Isn't your own Mr Boffin well acquainted with the Mounds? And wasn't he well acquainted with the deceased and his ways? And has he ever showed any expectation of finding anything?'

At that moment wheels were heard.

'Now, I should be loth,' said Mr Wegg, with an air of patient injury, 'to think so ill of him as to suppose him capable of coming at this time of night. And yet it sounds like him.'

A ring at the yard bell.

'It is him,' said Mr Wegg, 'and he is capable of it. I am sorry, because I could have wished to keep up a little lingering fragment of respect for him.'

Here Mr Boffin was heard lustily calling at the yard gate, 'Halloa! Wegg! Halloa!'

'Keep your seat, Mr Venus,' said Wegg. 'He may not stop.' And then called out, 'Halloa, sir! Halloa! I'm with you directly, sir! Half a minute, Mr Boffin. Coming, sir, as fast as my leg will bring me!' And so with a show of much cheerful alacrity stumped out to the gate with a light, and there, through the window of a cab, descried Mr Boffin inside, blocked up with books.

'Here! lend a hand, Wegg,' said Mr Boffin excitedly, 'I can't get out till the way is cleared for me. This is the Annual Register, Wegg, in a cab-full of wollumes. Do you know him?'

'Know the Animal Register, sir?' returned the Impostor, who had caught the name imperfectly. 'For a trifling wager, I think I could find any Animal in him, blindfold, Mr Boffin.'

'And here's Kirby's Wonderful Museum,' said Mr Boffin, 'and Caulfield's Characters, and Wilson's. Such Characters, Wegg, such Characters! I must have one or two of the best of 'em to-night. It's amazing what places they used to put the guineas in, wrapped up in rags. Catch hold of that pile of wollumes, Wegg, or it'll bulge out and burst into the mud. Is there anyone about, to help?'

'There's a friend of mine, sir, that had the intention of spending the evening with me when I gave you up—much against my will—for the night.'

'Call him out,' cried Mr Boffin in a bustle; 'get him to bear a hand. Don't drop that one under your arm. It's Dancer. Him and his sister made pies of a dead sheep they found when they were out a walking. Where's your friend? Oh, here's your friend. Would you be so good as help Wegg and myself with these books? But don't take Jemmy Taylor of Southwark, nor yet Jemmy Wood of Gloucester. These are the two Jemmys. I'll carry them myself.'

Not ceasing to talk and bustle, in a state of great excitement, Mr Boffin directed the removal and arrangement of the books, appearing to be in some sort beside himself until they were all deposited on the floor, and the cab was dismissed.

'There!' said Mr Boffin, gloating over them. 'There they are, like the four-and-twenty fiddlers—all of a row. Get on your spectacles, Wegg; I know where to find the best of 'em, and we'll have a taste at once of what we have got before us. What's your friend's name?'

Mr Wegg presented his friend as Mr Venus.

'Eh?' cried Mr Boffin, catching at the name. 'Of Clerkenwell?'

'Of Clerkenwell, sir,' said Mr Venus.

'Why, I've heard of you,' cried Mr Boffin, 'I heard of you in the old man's time. You knew him. Did you ever buy anything of him?' With piercing eagerness.

'No, sir,' returned Venus.

'But he showed you things; didn't he?'

Mr Venus, with a glance at his friend, replied in the affirmative.

'What did he show you?' asked Mr Boffin, putting his hands behind him, and eagerly advancing his head. 'Did he show you boxes, little cabinets, pocket-books, parcels, anything locked or sealed, anything tied up?'

Mr Venus shook his head.

'Are you a judge of china?'

Mr Venus again shook his head.

'Because if he had ever showed you a teapot, I should be glad to know of it,' said Mr Boffin. And then, with his right hand at his lips, repeated thoughtfully, 'a Teapot, a Teapot', and glanced over the books on the floor, as if he knew there was something interesting connected with a teapot, somewhere among them.

Mr Wegg and Mr Venus looked at one another wonderingly: and Mr Wegg, in fitting on his spectacles, opened his eyes wide, over their rims, and tapped the side of his nose: as an admonition to Venus to keep himself generally wide awake.

'A Teapot,' repeated Mr Boffin, continuing to muse and survey the books; 'a Teapot, a Teapot. Are you ready, Wegg?'

'I am at your service, sir,' replied that gentleman, taking his usual seat on the usual settle, and poking his wooden leg under the table before it. 'Mr Venus, would you make yourself useful, and take a seat beside me, sir, for the conveniency of snuffing the candles?'

Venus complying with the invitation while it was yet being given, Silas pegged at him with his wooden leg, to call his particular attention to Mr Boffin standing musing before the fire, in the space between the two settles.

'Hem! Ahem!' coughed Mr Wegg to attract his employer's attention. 'Would you wish to commence with an Animal, sir—from the Register?'

'No,' said Mr Boffin, 'no, Wegg.' With that, producing a little book from his breast-pocket, he handed it with great care to the literary gentlemen, and inquired, 'What do you call that, Wegg?'

'This, sir,' replied Silas, adjusting his spectacles, and referring to the title-page, 'is Merryweather's Lives and Anecdotes of Misers. Mr Venus, would you make yourself useful and draw the candles a little nearer, sir?' This to have a special opportunity of bestowing a stare upon his comrade.

'Which of 'em have you got in that lot?' asked Mr Boffin. 'Can you find out pretty easy?'

'Well, sir,' replied Silas, turning to the table of contents and slowly fluttering the leaves of the book, 'I should say they must be pretty well all here, sir; here's a large assortment, sir; my eye catches John Overs, sir, John Little, sir, Dick Jarrel, John Elwes, the Reverend Mr Jones of Blewbury, Vulture Hopkins, Daniel Dancer—'

'Give us Dancer, Wegg,' said Mr Boffin.

With another stare at his comrade, Silas sought and found the place.

'Page a hundred and nine, Mr Boffin. Chapter eight. Contents of chapter, "His birth and estate. His garments and outward appearance. Miss Dancer and her feminine graces. The Miser's Mansion. The finding of a treasure. The Story of the Mutton Pies. A Miser's Idea of Death. Bob, the Miser's cur. Griffiths and his Master. How to turn a penny. A substitute for a Fire. The Advantages of keeping a Snuff-box. The Miser dies without a Shirt. The Treasures of a Dunghill—"'

'Eh? What's that?' demanded Mr Boffin.

'"The Treasures," sir,' repeated Silas, reading very distinctly, '"of a Dunghill." Mr Venus, sir, would you obleege with the snuffers?' This, to secure attention to his adding with his lips only, 'Mounds!'

Mr Boffin drew an arm-chair into the space where he stood, and said, seating himself and slyly rubbing his hands:

'Give us Dancer.'

Mr Wegg pursued the biography of that eminent man through its various phases of avarice and dirt, through Miss Dancer's death on a sick regimen of cold dumpling, and through Mr Dancer's keeping his rags together with a hayband, and warming his dinner by sitting upon it, down to the consolatory incident of his dying naked in a sack. After which he read on as follows:

'"The house, or rather the heap of ruins, in which Mr Dancer lived, and which at his death devolved to the right of Captain Holmes, was a most miserable, decayed building, for it had not been repaired for more than half a century."'

(Here Mr Wegg eyes his comrade and the room in which they sat: which had not been repaired for a long time.)

'"But though poor in external structure, the ruinous fabric was very rich in the interior. It took many weeks to explore its whole contents; and Captain Holmes found it a very agreeable task to dive into the miser's secret hoards."'

(Here Mr Wegg repeated 'secret hoards', and pegged his comrade again.)

'"One of Mr Dancer's richest escretoires was found to be a dungheap in the cowhouse; a sum but little short of two thousand five hundred pounds was contained in this rich piece of manure; and in an old jacket, carefully tied, and strongly nailed down to the manger, in bank notes and gold were found five hundred pounds more."'

(Here Mr Wegg's wooden leg started forward under the table, and slowly elevated itself as he read on.)

'"Several bowls were discovered filled with guineas and half-guineas; and at different times on searching the corners of the house they found various parcels of bank notes. Some were crammed into the crevices of the wall"';

(Here Mr Venus looked at the wall.)

'"Bundles were hid under the cushions and covers of the chairs"';

(Here Mr Venus looked under himself on the settle.)

'"Some were reposing snugly at the back of the drawers; and notes amounting to six hundred pounds were found neatly doubled up in the inside of an old teapot. In the stable the Captain found jugs full of old dollars and shillings. The chimney was not left unsearched, and paid very well for the trouble; for in nineteen different holes, all filled with soot, were found various sums of money, amounting together to more than two hundred pounds."'

On the way to this crisis Mr Wegg's wooden leg had gradually elevated itself more and more, and he had nudged Mr Venus with his opposite elbow deeper and deeper, until at length the preservation of his balance became incompatible with the two actions, and he now dropped over sideways upon that gentleman, squeezing him against the settle's edge. Nor did either of the two, for some few seconds, make any effort to recover himself; both remaining in a kind of pecuniary swoon.

But the sight of Mr Boffin sitting in the arm-chair hugging himself, with his eyes upon the fire, acted as a restorative. Counterfeiting a sneeze to cover their movements, Mr Wegg, with a spasmodic 'Tish-ho!' pulled himself and Mr Venus up in a masterly manner.

'Let's have some more,' said Mr Boffin, hungrily.

'John Elwes is the next, sir. Is it your pleasure to take John Elwes?'

'Ah!' said Mr Boffin. 'Let's hear what John did.'

He did not appear to have hidden anything, so went off rather flatly. But an exemplary lady named Wilcocks, who had stowed away gold and silver in a pickle-pot in a clock-case, a canister-full of treasure in a hole under her stairs, and a quantity of money in an old rat-trap, revived the interest. To her succeeded another lady, claiming to be a pauper, whose wealth was found wrapped up in little scraps of paper and old rag. To her, another lady, apple-woman by trade, who had saved a fortune of ten thousand pounds and hidden it 'here and there, in cracks and corners, behind bricks and under the flooring.' To her, a French gentleman, who had crammed up his chimney, rather to the detriment of its drawing powers, 'a leather valise, containing twenty thousand francs, gold coins, and a large quantity of precious stones,' as discovered by a chimneysweep after his death. By these steps Mr Wegg arrived at a concluding instance of the human Magpie:

'Many years ago, there lived at Cambridge a miserly old couple of the name of Jardine: they had two sons: the father was a perfect miser, and at his death one thousand guineas were discovered secreted in his bed. The two sons grew up as parsimonious as their sire. When about twenty years of age, they commenced business at Cambridge as drapers, and they continued there until their death. The establishment of the Messrs Jardine was the most dirty of all the shops in Cambridge. Customers seldom went in to purchase, except perhaps out of curiosity. The brothers were most disreputable-looking beings; for, although surrounded with gay apparel as their staple in trade, they wore the most filthy rags themselves. It is said that they had no bed, and, to save the expense of one, always slept on a bundle of packing-cloths under the counter. In their housekeeping they were penurious in the extreme. A joint of meat did not grace their board for twenty years. Yet when the first of the brothers died, the other, much to his surprise, found large sums of money which had been secreted even from him.'

'There!' cried Mr Boffin. 'Even from him, you see! There was only two of 'em, and yet one of 'em hid from the other.'

Mr Venus, who since his introduction to the French gentleman, had been stooping to peer up the chimney, had his attention recalled by the last sentence, and took the liberty of repeating it.

'Do you like it?' asked Mr Boffin, turning suddenly.

'I beg your pardon, sir?'

'Do you like what Wegg's been a-reading?'

Mr Venus answered that he found it extremely interesting.

'Then come again,' said Mr Boffin, 'and hear some more. Come when you like; come the day after to-morrow, half an hour sooner. There's plenty more; there's no end to it.'

Mr Venus expressed his acknowledgments and accepted the invitation.

'It's wonderful what's been hid, at one time and another,' said Mr Boffin, ruminating; 'truly wonderful.'

'Meaning sir,' observed Wegg, with a propitiatory face to draw him out, and with another peg at his friend and brother, 'in the way of money?'

'Money,' said Mr Boffin. 'Ah! And papers.'

Mr Wegg, in a languid transport, again dropped over on Mr Venus, and again recovering himself, masked his emotions with a sneeze.

'Tish-ho! Did you say papers too, sir? Been hidden, sir?'

'Hidden and forgot,' said Mr Boffin. 'Why the bookseller that sold me the Wonderful Museum—where's the Wonderful Museum?' He was on his knees on the floor in a moment, groping eagerly among the books.

'Can I assist you, sir?' asked Wegg.

'No, I have got it; here it is,' said Mr Boffin, dusting it with the sleeve of his coat. 'Wollume four. I know it was the fourth wollume, that the bookseller read it to me out of. Look for it, Wegg.'

Silas took the book and turned the leaves.

'Remarkable petrefaction, sir?'

'No, that's not it,' said Mr Boffin. 'It can't have been a petrefaction.'

'Memoirs of General John Reid, commonly called The Walking Rushlight, sir? With portrait?'

'No, nor yet him,' said Mr Boffin.

'Remarkable case of a person who swallowed a crown-piece, sir?'

'To hide it?' asked Mr Boffin.

'Why, no, sir,' replied Wegg, consulting the text, 'it appears to have been done by accident. Oh! This next must be it. "Singular discovery of a will, lost twenty-one years."'

'That's it!' cried Mr Boffin. 'Read that.'

'"A most extraordinary case,"' read Silas Wegg aloud, '"was tried at the last Maryborough assizes in Ireland. It was briefly this. Robert Baldwin, in March 1782, made his will, in which he devised the lands now in question, to the children of his youngest son; soon after which his faculties failed him, and he became altogether childish and died, above eighty years old. The defendant, the eldest son, immediately afterwards gave out that his father had destroyed the will; and no will being found, he entered into possession of the lands in question, and so matters remained for twenty-one years, the whole family during all that time believing that the father had died without a will. But after twenty-one years the defendant's wife died, and he very soon afterwards, at the age of seventy-eight, married a very young woman: which caused some anxiety to his two sons, whose poignant expressions of this feeling so exasperated their father, that he in his resentment executed a will to disinherit his eldest son, and in his fit of anger showed it to his second son, who instantly determined to get at it, and destroy it, in order to preserve the property to his brother. With this view, he broke open his father's desk, where he found—not his father's will which he sought after, but the will of his grandfather, which was then altogether forgotten in the family."'

'There!' said Mr Boffin. 'See what men put away and forget, or mean to destroy, and don't!' He then added in a slow tone, 'As—ton—ish—ing!' And as he rolled his eyes all round the room, Wegg and Venus likewise rolled their eyes all round the room. And then Wegg, singly, fixed his eyes on Mr Boffin looking at the fire again; as if he had a mind to spring upon him and demand his thoughts or his life.

'However, time's up for to-night,' said Mr Boffin, waving his hand after a silence. 'More, the day after to-morrow. Range the books upon the shelves, Wegg. I dare say Mr Venus will be so kind as help you.'

While speaking, he thrust his hand into the breast of his outer coat, and struggled with some object there that was too large to be got out easily. What was the stupefaction of the friendly movers when this object at last emerging, proved to be a much-dilapidated dark lantern!

Without at all noticing the effect produced by this little instrument, Mr Boffin stood it on his knee, and, producing a box of matches, deliberately lighted the candle in the lantern, blew out the kindled match, and cast the end into the fire. 'I'm going, Wegg,' he then announced, 'to take a turn about the place and round the yard. I don't want you. Me and this same lantern have taken hundreds—thousands—of such turns in our time together.'

'But I couldn't think, sir—not on any account, I couldn't,'—Wegg was politely beginning, when Mr Boffin, who had risen and was going towards the door, stopped:

'I have told you that I don't want you, Wegg.'

Wegg looked intelligently thoughtful, as if that had not occurred to his mind until he now brought it to bear on the circumstance. He had nothing for it but to let Mr Boffin go out and shut the door behind him. But, the instant he was on the other side of it, Wegg clutched Venus with both hands, and said in a choking whisper, as if he were being strangled:

'Mr Venus, he must be followed, he must be watched, he mustn't be lost sight of for a moment.'

'Why mustn't he?' asked Venus, also strangling.

'Comrade, you might have noticed I was a little elewated in spirits when you come in to-night. I've found something.'

'What have you found?' asked Venus, clutching him with both hands, so that they stood interlocked like a couple of preposterous gladiators.

'There's no time to tell you now. I think he must have gone to look for it. We must have an eye upon him instantly.'

Releasing each other, they crept to the door, opened it softly, and peeped out. It was a cloudy night, and the black shadow of the Mounds made the dark yard darker. 'If not a double swindler,' whispered Wegg, 'why a dark lantern? We could have seen what he was about, if he had carried a light one. Softly, this way.'

Cautiously along the path that was bordered by fragments of crockery set in ashes, the two stole after him. They could hear him at his peculiar trot, crushing the loose cinders as he went. 'He knows the place by heart,' muttered Silas, 'and don't need to turn his lantern on, confound him!' But he did turn it on, almost in that same instant, and flashed its light upon the first of the Mounds.

'Is that the spot?' asked Venus in a whisper.

'He's warm,' said Silas in the same tone. 'He's precious warm. He's close. I think he must be going to look for it. What's that he's got in his hand?'

'A shovel,' answered Venus. 'And he knows how to use it, remember, fifty times as well as either of us.'

'If he looks for it and misses it, partner,' suggested Wegg, 'what shall we do?'

'First of all, wait till he does,' said Venus.

Discreet advice too, for he darkened his lantern again, and the mound turned black. After a few seconds, he turned the light on once more, and was seen standing at the foot of the second mound, slowly raising the lantern little by little until he held it up at arm's length, as if he were examining the condition of the whole surface.

'That can't be the spot too?' said Venus.

'No,' said Wegg, 'he's getting cold.'

'It strikes me,' whispered Venus, 'that he wants to find out whether any one has been groping about there.'

'Hush!' returned Wegg, 'he's getting colder and colder.—Now he's freezing!'

This exclamation was elicited by his having turned the lantern off again, and on again, and being visible at the foot of the third mound.

'Why, he's going up it!' said Venus.

'Shovel and all!' said Wegg.

At a nimbler trot, as if the shovel over his shoulder stimulated him by reviving old associations, Mr Boffin ascended the 'serpentining walk', up the Mound which he had described to Silas Wegg on the occasion of their beginning to decline and fall. On striking into it he turned his lantern off.

The two followed him, stooping low, so that their figures might make no mark in relief against the sky when he should turn his lantern on again. Mr Venus took the lead, towing Mr Wegg, in order that his refractory leg might be promptly extricated from any pitfalls it should dig for itself. They could just make out that the Golden Dustman stopped to breathe. Of course they stopped too, instantly.

'This is his own Mound,' whispered Wegg, as he recovered his wind, 'this one.

'Why all three are his own,' returned Venus.

'So he thinks; but he's used to call this his own, because it's the one first left to him; the one that was his legacy when it was all he took under the will.'

'When he shows his light,' said Venus, keeping watch upon his dusky figure all the time, 'drop lower and keep closer.'

He went on again, and they followed again. Gaining the top of the Mound, he turned on his light—but only partially—and stood it on the ground. A bare lopsided weatherbeaten pole was planted in the ashes there, and had been there many a year. Hard by this pole, his lantern stood: lighting a few feet of the lower part of it and a little of the ashy surface around, and then casting off a purposeless little clear trail of light into the air.

'He can never be going to dig up the pole!' whispered Venus as they dropped low and kept close.

'Perhaps it's holler and full of something,' whispered Wegg.

He was going to dig, with whatsoever object, for he tucked up his cuffs and spat on his hands, and then went at it like an old digger as he was. He had no design upon the pole, except that he measured a shovel's length from it before beginning, nor was it his purpose to dig deep. Some dozen or so of expert strokes sufficed. Then, he stopped, looked down into the cavity, bent over it, and took out what appeared to be an ordinary case-bottle: one of those squat, high-shouldered, short-necked glass bottles which the Dutchman is said to keep his Courage in. As soon as he had done this, he turned off his lantern, and they could hear that he was filling up the hole in the dark. The ashes being easily moved by a skilful hand, the spies took this as a hint to make off in good time. Accordingly, Mr Venus slipped past Mr Wegg and towed him down. But Mr Wegg's descent was not accomplished without some personal inconvenience, for his self-willed leg sticking into the ashes about half way down, and time pressing, Mr Venus took the liberty of hauling him from his tether by the collar: which occasioned him to make the rest of the journey on his back, with his head enveloped in the skirts of his coat, and his wooden leg coming last, like a drag. So flustered was Mr Wegg by this mode of travelling, that when he was set on the level ground with his intellectual developments uppermost, he was quite unconscious of his bearings, and had not the least idea where his place of residence was to be found, until Mr Venus shoved him into it. Even then he staggered round and round, weakly staring about him, until Mr Venus with a hard brush brushed his senses into him and the dust out of him.

Mr Boffin came down leisurely, for this brushing process had been well accomplished, and Mr Venus had had time to take his breath, before he reappeared. That he had the bottle somewhere about him could not be doubted; where, was not so clear. He wore a large rough coat, buttoned over, and it might be in any one of half a dozen pockets.

'What's the matter, Wegg?' said Mr Boffin. 'You are as pale as a candle.'

Mr Wegg replied, with literal exactness, that he felt as if he had had a turn.

'Bile,' said Mr Boffin, blowing out the light in the lantern, shutting it up, and stowing it away in the breast of his coat as before. 'Are you subject to bile, Wegg?'

Mr Wegg again replied, with strict adherence to truth, that he didn't think he had ever had a similar sensation in his head, to anything like the same extent.

'Physic yourself to-morrow, Wegg,' said Mr Boffin, 'to be in order for next night. By-the-by, this neighbourhood is going to have a loss, Wegg.'

'A loss, sir?'

'Going to lose the Mounds.'

The friendly movers made such an obvious effort not to look at one another, that they might as well have stared at one another with all their might.

'Have you parted with them, Mr Boffin?' asked Silas.

'Yes; they're going. Mine's as good as gone already.'

'You mean the little one of the three, with the pole atop, sir.'

'Yes,' said Mr Boffin, rubbing his ear in his old way, with that new touch of craftiness added to it. 'It has fetched a penny. It'll begin to be carted off to-morrow.'

'Have you been out to take leave of your old friend, sir?' asked Silas, jocosely.

'No,' said Mr Boffin. 'What the devil put that in your head?'

He was so sudden and rough, that Wegg, who had been hovering closer and closer to his skirts, despatching the back of his hand on exploring expeditions in search of the bottle's surface, retired two or three paces.

'No offence, sir,' said Wegg, humbly. 'No offence.'

Mr Boffin eyed him as a dog might eye another dog who wanted his bone; and actually retorted with a low growl, as the dog might have retorted.

'Good-night,' he said, after having sunk into a moody silence, with his hands clasped behind him, and his eyes suspiciously wandering about Wegg.—'No! stop there. I know the way out, and I want no light.'

Avarice, and the evening's legends of avarice, and the inflammatory effect of what he had seen, and perhaps the rush of his ill-conditioned blood to his brain in his descent, wrought Silas Wegg to such a pitch of insatiable appetite, that when the door closed he made a swoop at it and drew Venus along with him.

'He mustn't go,' he cried. 'We mustn't let him go? He has got that bottle about him. We must have that bottle.'

'Why, you wouldn't take it by force?' said Venus, restraining him.

'Wouldn't I? Yes I would. I'd take it by any force, I'd have it at any price! Are you so afraid of one old man as to let him go, you coward?'

'I am so afraid of you, as not to let YOU go,' muttered Venus, sturdily, clasping him in his arms.

'Did you hear him?' retorted Wegg. 'Did you hear him say that he was resolved to disappoint us? Did you hear him say, you cur, that he was going to have the Mounds cleared off, when no doubt the whole place will be rummaged? If you haven't the spirit of a mouse to defend your rights, I have. Let me go after him.'

As in his wildness he was making a strong struggle for it, Mr Venus deemed it expedient to lift him, throw him, and fall with him; well knowing that, once down, he would not be up again easily with his wooden leg. So they both rolled on the floor, and, as they did so, Mr Boffin shut the gate.

Chapter 7

THE FRIENDLY MOVE TAKES UP A STRONG POSITION

The friendly movers sat upright on the floor, panting and eyeing one another, after Mr Boffin had slammed the gate and gone away. In the weak eyes of Venus, and in every reddish dust-coloured hair in his shock of hair, there was a marked distrust of Wegg and an alertness to fly at him on perceiving the smallest occasion. In the hard-grained face of Wegg, and in his stiff knotty figure (he looked like a German wooden toy), there was expressed a politic conciliation, which had no spontaneity in it. Both were flushed, flustered, and rumpled, by the late scuffle; and Wegg, in coming to the ground, had received a humming knock on the back of his devoted head, which caused him still to rub it with an air of having been highly—but disagreeably—astonished. Each was silent for some time, leaving it to the other to begin.

'Brother,' said Wegg, at length breaking the silence, 'you were right, and I was wrong. I forgot myself.'

Mr Venus knowingly cocked his shock of hair, as rather thinking Mr Wegg had remembered himself, in respect of appearing without any disguise.

'But comrade,' pursued Wegg, 'it was never your lot to know Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, nor Uncle Parker.'

Mr Venus admitted that he had never known those distinguished persons, and added, in effect, that he had never so much as desired the honour of their acquaintance.

'Don't say that, comrade!' retorted Wegg: 'No, don't say that! Because, without having known them, you never can fully know what it is to be stimilated to frenzy by the sight of the Usurper.'

Offering these excusatory words as if they reflected great credit on himself, Mr Wegg impelled himself with his hands towards a chair in a corner of the room, and there, after a variety of awkward gambols, attained a perpendicular position. Mr Venus also rose.

'Comrade,' said Wegg, 'take a seat. Comrade, what a speaking countenance is yours!'

Mr Venus involuntarily smoothed his countenance, and looked at his hand, as if to see whether any of its speaking properties came off.

'For clearly do I know, mark you,' pursued Wegg, pointing his words with his forefinger, 'clearly do I know what question your expressive features puts to me.'

'What question?' said Venus.

'The question,' returned Wegg, with a sort of joyful affability, 'why I didn't mention sooner, that I had found something. Says your speaking countenance to me: "Why didn't you communicate that, when I first come in this evening? Why did you keep it back till you thought Mr Boffin had come to look for the article?" Your speaking countenance,' said Wegg, 'puts it plainer than language. Now, you can't read in my face what answer I give?'

'No, I can't,' said Venus.

'I knew it! And why not?' returned Wegg, with the same joyful candour. 'Because I lay no claims to a speaking countenance. Because I am well aware of my deficiencies. All men are not gifted alike. But I can answer in words. And in what words? These. I wanted to give you a delightful sap—pur—IZE!'

Having thus elongated and emphasized the word Surprise, Mr Wegg shook his friend and brother by both hands, and then clapped him on both knees, like an affectionate patron who entreated him not to mention so small a service as that which it had been his happy privilege to render.

'Your speaking countenance,' said Wegg, 'being answered to its satisfaction, only asks then, "What have you found?" Why, I hear it say the words!'

'Well?' retorted Venus snappishly, after waiting in vain. 'If you hear it say the words, why don't you answer it?'

'Hear me out!' said Wegg. 'I'm a-going to. Hear me out! Man and brother, partner in feelings equally with undertakings and actions, I have found a cash-box.'

'Where?'

'—Hear me out!' said Wegg. (He tried to reserve whatever he could, and, whenever disclosure was forced upon him, broke into a radiant gush of Hear me out.) 'On a certain day, sir—'

'When?' said Venus bluntly.

'N—no,' returned Wegg, shaking his head at once observantly, thoughtfully, and playfully. 'No, sir! That's not your expressive countenance which asks that question. That's your voice; merely your voice. To proceed. On a certain day, sir, I happened to be walking in the yard—taking my lonely round—for in the words of a friend of my own family, the author of All's Well arranged as a duett:

"Deserted, as you will remember Mr Venus, by the waning
moon,
When stars, it will occur to you before I mention it, proclaim
night's cheerless noon,
On tower, fort, or tented ground,
The sentry walks his lonely round,
The sentry walks:"

—under those circumstances, sir, I happened to be walking in the yard early one afternoon, and happened to have an iron rod in my hand, with which I have been sometimes accustomed to beguile the monotony of a literary life, when I struck it against an object not necessary to trouble you by naming—'

'It is necessary. What object?' demanded Venus, in a wrathful tone.

'—Hear me out!' said Wegg. 'The Pump.—When I struck it against the Pump, and found, not only that the top was loose and opened with a lid, but that something in it rattled. That something, comrade, I discovered to be a small flat oblong cash-box. Shall I say it was disappointingly light?'

'There were papers in it,' said Venus.

'There your expressive countenance speaks indeed!' cried Wegg. 'A paper. The box was locked, tied up, and sealed, and on the outside was a parchment label, with the writing, "MY WILL, JOHN HARMON, TEMPORARILY DEPOSITED HERE."'

'We must know its contents,' said Venus.

'—Hear me out!' cried Wegg. 'I said so, and I broke the box open.

'Without coming to me!' exclaimed Venus.

'Exactly so, sir!' returned Wegg, blandly and buoyantly. 'I see I take you with me! Hear, hear, hear! Resolved, as your discriminating good sense perceives, that if you was to have a sap—pur—IZE, it should be a complete one! Well, sir. And so, as you have honoured me by anticipating, I examined the document. Regularly executed, regularly witnessed, very short. Inasmuch as he has never made friends, and has ever had a rebellious family, he, John Harmon, gives to Nicodemus Boffin the Little Mound, which is quite enough for him, and gives the whole rest and residue of his property to the Crown.'

'The date of the will that has been proved, must be looked to,' remarked Venus. 'It may be later than this one.'

'—Hear me out!' cried Wegg. 'I said so. I paid a shilling (never mind your sixpence of it) to look up that will. Brother, that will is dated months before this will. And now, as a fellow-man, and as a partner in a friendly move,' added Wegg, benignantly taking him by both hands again, and clapping him on both knees again, 'say have I completed my labour of love to your perfect satisfaction, and are you sap—pur—IZED?'

Mr Venus contemplated his fellow-man and partner with doubting eyes, and then rejoined stiffly:

'This is great news indeed, Mr Wegg. There's no denying it. But I could have wished you had told it me before you got your fright to-night, and I could have wished you had ever asked me as your partner what we were to do, before you thought you were dividing a responsibility.'

'—Hear me out!' cried Wegg. 'I knew you was a-going to say so. But alone I bore the anxiety, and alone I'll bear the blame!' This with an air of great magnanimity.

'No,' said Venus. 'Let's see this will and this box.'

'Do I understand, brother,' returned Wegg with considerable reluctance, 'that it is your wish to see this will and this—?'

Mr Venus smote the table with his hand.

'—Hear me out!' said Wegg. 'Hear me out! I'll go and fetch 'em.'

After being some time absent, as if in his covetousness he could hardly make up his mind to produce the treasure to his partner, he returned with an old leathern hat-box, into which he had put the other box, for the better preservation of commonplace appearances, and for the disarming of suspicion. 'But I don't half like opening it here,' said Silas in a low voice, looking around: 'he might come back, he may not be gone; we don't know what he may be up to, after what we've seen.'

'There's something in that,' assented Venus. 'Come to my place.'

Jealous of the custody of the box, and yet fearful of opening it under the existing circumstances, Wegg hesitated. 'Come, I tell you,' repeated Venus, chafing, 'to my place.' Not very well seeing his way to a refusal, Mr Wegg then rejoined in a gush, '—Hear me out!—Certainly.' So he locked up the Bower and they set forth: Mr Venus taking his arm, and keeping it with remarkable tenacity.

They found the usual dim light burning in the window of Mr Venus's establishment, imperfectly disclosing to the public the usual pair of preserved frogs, sword in hand, with their point of honour still unsettled. Mr Venus had closed his shop door on coming out, and now opened it with the key and shut it again as soon as they were within; but not before he had put up and barred the shutters of the shop window. 'No one can get in without being let in,' said he then, 'and we couldn't be more snug than here.' So he raked together the yet warm cinders in the rusty grate, and made a fire, and trimmed the candle on the little counter. As the fire cast its flickering gleams here and there upon the dark greasy walls; the Hindoo baby, the African baby, the articulated English baby, the assortment of skulls, and the rest of the collection, came starting to their various stations as if they had all been out, like their master and were punctual in a general rendezvous to assist at the secret. The French gentleman had grown considerably since Mr Wegg last saw him, being now accommodated with a pair of legs and a head, though his arms were yet in abeyance. To whomsoever the head had originally belonged, Silas Wegg would have regarded it as a personal favour if he had not cut quite so many teeth.

Silas took his seat in silence on the wooden box before the fire, and Venus dropping into his low chair produced from among his skeleton hands, his tea-tray and tea-cups, and put the kettle on. Silas inwardly approved of these preparations, trusting they might end in Mr Venus's diluting his intellect.

'Now, sir,' said Venus, 'all is safe and quiet. Let us see this discovery.'

With still reluctant hands, and not without several glances towards the skeleton hands, as if he mistrusted that a couple of them might spring forth and clutch the document, Wegg opened the hat-box and revealed the cash-box, opened the cash-box and revealed the will. He held a corner of it tight, while Venus, taking hold of another corner, searchingly and attentively read it.

'Was I correct in my account of it, partner?' said Mr Wegg at length.

'Partner, you were,' said Mr Venus.

Mr Wegg thereupon made an easy, graceful movement, as though he would fold it up; but Mr Venus held on by his corner.

'No, sir,' said Mr Venus, winking his weak eyes and shaking his head. 'No, partner. The question is now brought up, who is going to take care of this. Do you know who is going to take care of this, partner?'

'I am,' said Wegg.

'Oh dear no, partner,' retorted Venus. 'That's a mistake. I am. Now look here, Mr Wegg. I don't want to have any words with you, and still less do I want to have any anatomical pursuits with you.'

'What do you mean?' said Wegg, quickly.

'I mean, partner,' replied Venus, slowly, 'that it's hardly possible for a man to feel in a more amiable state towards another man than I do towards you at this present moment. But I am on my own ground, I am surrounded by the trophies of my art, and my tools is very handy.'

'What do you mean, Mr Venus?' asked Wegg again.

'I am surrounded, as I have observed,' said Mr Venus, placidly, 'by the trophies of my art. They are numerous, my stock of human warious is large, the shop is pretty well crammed, and I don't just now want any more trophies of my art. But I like my art, and I know how to exercise my art.'

'No man better,' assented Mr Wegg, with a somewhat staggered air.

'There's the Miscellanies of several human specimens,' said Venus, '(though you mightn't think it) in the box on which you're sitting. There's the Miscellanies of several human specimens, in the lovely compo-one behind the door'; with a nod towards the French gentleman. 'It still wants a pair of arms. I DON'T say that I'm in any hurry for 'em.'

'You must be wandering in your mind, partner,' Silas remonstrated.

'You'll excuse me if I wander,' returned Venus; 'I am sometimes rather subject to it. I like my art, and I know how to exercise my art, and I mean to have the keeping of this document.'

'But what has that got to do with your art, partner?' asked Wegg, in an insinuating tone.

Mr Venus winked his chronically-fatigued eyes both at once, and adjusting the kettle on the fire, remarked to himself, in a hollow voice, 'She'll bile in a couple of minutes.'

Silas Wegg glanced at the kettle, glanced at the shelves, glanced at the French gentleman behind the door, and shrank a little as he glanced at Mr

Venus winking his red eyes, and feeling in his waistcoat pocket—as for a lancet, say—with his unoccupied hand. He and Venus were necessarily seated close together, as each held a corner of the document, which was but a common sheet of paper.

'Partner,' said Wegg, even more insinuatingly than before, 'I propose that we cut it in half, and each keep a half.'

Venus shook his shock of hair, as he replied, 'It wouldn't do to mutilate it, partner. It might seem to be cancelled.'

'Partner,' said Wegg, after a silence, during which they had contemplated one another, 'don't your speaking countenance say that you're a-going to suggest a middle course?'

Venus shook his shock of hair as he replied, 'Partner, you have kept this paper from me once. You shall never keep it from me again. I offer you the box and the label to take care of, but I'll take care of the paper.'

Silas hesitated a little longer, and then suddenly releasing his corner, and resuming his buoyant and benignant tone, exclaimed, 'What's life without trustfulness! What's a fellow-man without honour! You're welcome to it, partner, in a spirit of trust and confidence.'

Continuing to wink his red eyes both together—but in a self-communing way, and without any show of triumph—Mr Venus folded the paper now left in his hand, and locked it in a drawer behind him, and pocketed the key. He then proposed 'A cup of tea, partner?' To which Mr Wegg returned, 'Thank'ee, partner,' and the tea was made and poured out.

'Next,' said Venus, blowing at his tea in his saucer, and looking over it at his confidential friend, 'comes the question, What's the course to be pursued?'

On this head, Silas Wegg had much to say. Silas had to say That, he would beg to remind his comrade, brother, and partner, of the impressive passages they had read that evening; of the evident parallel in Mr Boffin's mind between them and the late owner of the Bower, and the present circumstances of the Bower; of the bottle; and of the box. That, the fortunes of his brother and comrade, and of himself were evidently made, inasmuch as they had but to put their price upon this document, and get that price from the minion of fortune and the worm of the hour: who now appeared to be less of a minion and more of a worm than had been previously supposed. That, he considered it plain that such price was stateable in a single expressive word, and that the word was, 'Halves!' That, the question then arose when 'Halves!' should be called. That, here he had a plan of action to recommend, with a conditional clause. That, the plan of action was that they should lie by with patience; that, they should allow the Mounds to be gradually levelled and cleared away, while retaining to themselves their present opportunity of watching the process—which would be, he conceived, to put the trouble and cost of daily digging and delving upon somebody else, while they might nightly turn such complete disturbance of the dust to the account of their own private investigations—and that, when the Mounds were gone, and they had worked those chances for their own joint benefit solely, they should then, and not before, explode on the minion and worm. But here came the conditional clause, and to this he entreated the special attention of his comrade, brother, and partner. It was not to be borne that the minion and worm should carry off any of that property which was now to be regarded as their own property. When he, Mr Wegg, had seen the minion surreptitiously making off with that bottle, and its precious contents unknown, he had looked upon him in the light of a mere robber, and, as such, would have despoiled him of his ill-gotten gain, but for the judicious interference of his comrade, brother, and partner. Therefore, the conditional clause he proposed was, that, if the minion should return in his late sneaking manner, and if, being closely watched, he should be found to possess himself of anything, no matter what, the sharp sword impending over his head should be instantly shown him, he should be strictly examined as to what he knew or suspected, should be severely handled by them his masters, and should be kept in a state of abject moral bondage and slavery until the time when they should see fit to permit him to purchase his freedom at the price of half his possessions. If, said Mr Wegg by way of peroration, he had erred in saying only 'Halves!' he trusted to his comrade, brother, and partner not to hesitate to set him right, and to reprove his weakness. It might be more according to the rights of things, to say Two-thirds; it might be more according to the rights of things, to say Three-fourths. On those points he was ever open to correction.

Mr Venus, having wafted his attention to this discourse over three successive saucers of tea, signified his concurrence in the views advanced. Inspirited hereby, Mr Wegg extended his right hand, and declared it to be a hand which never yet. Without entering into more minute particulars. Mr Venus, sticking to his tea, briefly professed his belief as polite forms required of him, that it WAS a hand which never yet. But contented himself with looking at it, and did not take it to his bosom.

'Brother,' said Wegg, when this happy understanding was established, 'I should like to ask you something. You remember the night when I first looked in here, and found you floating your powerful mind in tea?'

Still swilling tea, Mr Venus nodded assent.

'And there you sit, sir,' pursued Wegg with an air of thoughtful admiration, 'as if you had never left off! There you sit, sir, as if you had an unlimited capacity of assimilating the flagrant article! There you sit, sir, in the midst of your works, looking as if you'd been called upon for Home, Sweet Home, and was obleeging the company!

"A exile from home splendour dazzles in vain,
O give you your lowly Preparations again,
The birds stuffed so sweetly that can't be expected to come at
your call,
Give you these with the peace of mind dearer than all.
Home, Home, Home, sweet Home!"

—Be it ever,' added Mr Wegg in prose as he glanced about the shop, 'ever so ghastly, all things considered there's no place like it.'

'You said you'd like to ask something; but you haven't asked it,' remarked Venus, very unsympathetic in manner.

'Your peace of mind,' said Wegg, offering condolence, 'your peace of mind was in a poor way that night. HOW'S it going on? IS it looking up at all?'

'She does not wish,' replied Mr Venus with a comical mixture of indignant obstinacy and tender melancholy, 'to regard herself, nor yet to be regarded, in that particular light. There's no more to be said.'

'Ah, dear me, dear me!' exclaimed Wegg with a sigh, but eyeing him while pretending to keep him company in eyeing the fire, 'such is Woman! And I remember you said that night, sitting there as I sat here—said that night when your peace of mind was first laid low, that you had taken an interest in these very affairs. Such is coincidence!'

'Her father,' rejoined Venus, and then stopped to swallow more tea, 'her father was mixed up in them.'

'You didn't mention her name, sir, I think?' observed Wegg, pensively. 'No, you didn't mention her name that night.'

'Pleasant Riderhood.'

'In—deed!' cried Wegg. 'Pleasant Riderhood. There's something moving in the name. Pleasant. Dear me! Seems to express what she might have been, if she hadn't made that unpleasant remark—and what she ain't, in consequence of having made it. Would it at all pour balm into your wounds, Mr Venus, to inquire how you came acquainted with her?'

'I was down at the water-side,' said Venus, taking another gulp of tea and mournfully winking at the fire—'looking for parrots'—taking another gulp and stopping.

Mr Wegg hinted, to jog his attention: 'You could hardly have been out parrot-shooting, in the British climate, sir?'

'No, no, no,' said Venus fretfully. 'I was down at the water-side, looking for parrots brought home by sailors, to buy for stuffing.'

'Ay, ay, ay, sir!'

'—And looking for a nice pair of rattlesnakes, to articulate for a Museum—when I was doomed to fall in with her and deal with her. It was just at the time of that discovery in the river. Her father had seen the discovery being towed in the river. I made the popularity of the subject a reason for going back to improve the acquaintance, and I have never since been the man I was. My very bones is rendered flabby by brooding over it. If they could be brought to me loose, to sort, I should hardly have the face to claim 'em as mine. To such an extent have I fallen off under it.'

Mr Wegg, less interested than he had been, glanced at one particular shelf in the dark.

'Why I remember, Mr Venus,' he said in a tone of friendly commiseration '(for I remember every word that falls from you, sir), I remember that you said that night, you had got up there—and then your words was, "Never mind."'

'—The parrot that I bought of her,' said Venus, with a despondent rise and fall of his eyes. 'Yes; there it lies on its side, dried up; except for its plumage, very like myself. I've never had the heart to prepare it, and I never shall have now.'

With a disappointed face, Silas mentally consigned this parrot to regions more than tropical, and, seeming for the time to have lost his power of assuming an interest in the woes of Mr Venus, fell to tightening his wooden leg as a preparation for departure: its gymnastic performances of that evening having severely tried its constitution.

After Silas had left the shop, hat-box in hand, and had left Mr Venus to lower himself to oblivion-point with the requisite weight of tea, it greatly preyed on his ingenuous mind that he had taken this artist into partnership at all. He bitterly felt that he had overreached himself in the beginning, by grasping at Mr Venus's mere straws of hints, now shown to be worthless for his purpose. Casting about for ways and means of dissolving the connexion without loss of money, reproaching himself for having been betrayed into an avowal of his secret, and complimenting himself beyond measure on his purely accidental good luck, he beguiled the distance between Clerkenwell and the mansion of the Golden Dustman.

For, Silas Wegg felt it to be quite out of the question that he could lay his head upon his pillow in peace, without first hovering over Mr Boffin's house in the superior character of its Evil Genius. Power (unless it be the power of intellect or virtue) has ever the greatest attraction for the lowest natures; and the mere defiance of the unconscious house-front, with his power to strip the roof off the inhabiting family like the roof of a house of cards, was a treat which had a charm for Silas Wegg.

As he hovered on the opposite side of the street, exulting, the carriage drove up.

'There'll shortly be an end of YOU,' said Wegg, threatening it with the hat-box. 'YOUR varnish is fading.'

Mrs Boffin descended and went in.

'Look out for a fall, my Lady Dustwoman,' said Wegg.

Bella lightly descended, and ran in after her.

'How brisk we are!' said Wegg. 'You won't run so gaily to your old shabby home, my girl. You'll have to go there, though.'

A little while, and the Secretary came out.

'I was passed over for you,' said Wegg. 'But you had better provide yourself with another situation, young man.'

Mr Boffin's shadow passed upon the blinds of three large windows as he trotted down the room, and passed again as he went back.

'Yoop!' cried Wegg. 'You're there, are you? Where's the bottle? You would give your bottle for my box, Dustman!'

Having now composed his mind for slumber, he turned homeward. Such was the greed of the fellow, that his mind had shot beyond halves, two-thirds, three-fourths, and gone straight to spoliation of the whole. 'Though that wouldn't quite do,' he considered, growing cooler as he got away. 'That's what would happen to him if he didn't buy us up. We should get nothing by that.'

We so judge others by ourselves, that it had never come into his head before, that he might not buy us up, and might prove honest, and prefer to be poor. It caused him a slight tremor as it passed; but a very slight one, for the idle thought was gone directly.

'He's grown too fond of money for that,' said Wegg; 'he's grown too fond of money.' The burden fell into a strain or tune as he stumped along the pavements. All the way home he stumped it out of the rattling streets, PIANO with his own foot, and FORTE with his wooden leg, 'He's GROWN too FOND of MONEY for THAT, he's GROWN too FOND of MONEY.'

Even next day Silas soothed himself with this melodious strain, when he was called out of bed at daybreak, to set open the yard-gate and admit the train of carts and horses that came to carry off the little Mound. And all day long, as he kept unwinking watch on the slow process which promised to protract itself through many days and weeks, whenever (to save himself from being choked with dust) he patrolled a little cinderous beat he established for the purpose, without taking his eyes from the diggers, he still stumped to the tune: He's GROWN too FOND of MONEY for THAT, he's GROWN too FOND of MONEY.'

Chapter 8

THE END OF A LONG JOURNEY

The train of carts and horses came and went all day from dawn to nightfall, making little or no daily impression on the heap of ashes, though, as the days passed on, the heap was seen to be slowly melting. My lords and gentlemen and honourable boards, when you in the course of your dust-shovelling and cinder-raking have piled up a mountain of pretentious failure, you must off with your honourable coats for the removal of it, and fall to the work with the power of all the queen's horses and all the queen's men, or it will come rushing down and bury us alive.

Yes, verily, my lords and gentlemen and honourable boards, adapting your Catechism to the occasion, and by God's help so you must. For when we have got things to the pass that with an enormous treasure at disposal to relieve the poor, the best of the poor detest our mercies, hide their heads from us, and shame us by starving to death in the midst of us, it is a pass impossible of prosperity, impossible of continuance. It may not be so written in the Gospel according to Podsnappery; you may not 'find these words' for the text of a sermon, in the Returns of the Board of Trade; but they have been the truth since the foundations of the universe were laid, and they will be the truth until the foundations of the universe are shaken by the Builder. This boastful handiwork of ours, which fails in its terrors for the professional pauper, the sturdy breaker of windows and the rampant tearer of clothes, strikes with a cruel and a wicked stab at the stricken sufferer, and is a horror to the deserving and unfortunate. We must mend it, lords and gentlemen and honourable boards, or in its own evil hour it will mar every one of us.

Old Betty Higden fared upon her pilgrimage as many ruggedly honest creatures, women and men, fare on their toiling way along the roads of life. Patiently to earn a spare bare living, and quietly to die, untouched by workhouse hands—this was her highest sublunary hope.

Nothing had been heard of her at Mr Boffin's house since she trudged off. The weather had been hard and the roads had been bad, and her spirit was up. A less stanch spirit might have been subdued by such adverse influences; but the loan for her little outfit was in no part repaid, and it had gone worse with her than she had foreseen, and she was put upon proving her case and maintaining her independence.

Faithful soul! When she had spoken to the Secretary of that 'deadness that steals over me at times', her fortitude had made too little of it. Oftener and ever oftener, it came stealing over her; darker and ever darker, like the shadow of advancing Death. That the shadow should be deep as it came on, like the shadow of an actual presence, was in accordance with the laws of the physical world, for all the Light that shone on Betty Higden lay beyond Death.

The poor old creature had taken the upward course of the river Thames as her general track; it was the track in which her last home lay, and of which she had last had local love and knowledge. She had hovered for a little while in the near neighbourhood of her abandoned dwelling, and had sold, and knitted and sold, and gone on. In the pleasant towns of Chertsey, Walton, Kingston, and Staines, her figure came to be quite well known for some short weeks, and then again passed on.

She would take her stand in market-places, where there were such things, on market days; at other times, in the busiest (that was seldom very busy) portion of the little quiet High Street; at still other times she would explore the outlying roads for great houses, and would ask leave at the Lodge to pass in with her basket, and would not often get it. But ladies in carriages would frequently make purchases from her trifling stock, and were usually pleased with her bright eyes and her hopeful speech. In these and her clean dress originated a fable that she was well to do in the world: one might say, for her station, rich. As making a comfortable provision for its subject which costs nobody anything, this class of fable has long been popular.

In those pleasant little towns on Thames, you may hear the fall of the water over the weirs, or even, in still weather, the rustle of the rushes; and from the bridge you may see the young river, dimpled like a young child, playfully gliding away among the trees, unpolluted by the defilements that lie in wait for it on its course, and as yet out of hearing of the deep summons of the sea. It were too much to pretend that Betty Higden made out such thoughts; no; but she heard the tender river whispering to many like herself, 'Come to me, come to me! When the cruel shame and terror you have so long fled from, most beset you, come to me! I am the Relieving Officer appointed by eternal ordinance to do my work; I am not held in estimation according as I shirk it. My breast is softer than the pauper-nurse's; death in my arms is peacefuller than among the pauper-wards. Come to me!'

There was abundant place for gentler fancies too, in her untutored mind. Those gentlefolks and their children inside those fine houses, could they think, as they looked out at her, what it was to be really hungry, really cold? Did they feel any of the wonder about her, that she felt about them? Bless the dear laughing children! If they could have seen sick Johnny in her arms, would they have cried for pity? If they could have seen dead Johnny on that little bed, would they have understood it? Bless the dear children for his sake, anyhow! So with the humbler houses in the little street, the inner firelight shining on the panes as the outer twilight darkened. When the families gathered in-doors there, for the night, it was only a foolish fancy to feel as if it were a little hard in them to close the shutter and blacken the flame. So with the lighted shops, and speculations whether their masters and mistresses taking tea in a perspective of back-parlour—not so far within but that the flavour of tea and toast came out, mingled with the glow of light, into the street—ate or drank or wore what they sold, with the greater relish because they dealt in it. So with the churchyard on a branch of the solitary way to the night's sleeping-place. 'Ah me! The dead and I seem to have it pretty much to ourselves in the dark and in this weather! But so much the better for all who are warmly housed at home.' The poor soul envied no one in bitterness, and grudged no one anything.

But, the old abhorrence grew stronger on her as she grew weaker, and it found more sustaining food than she did in her wanderings. Now, she would light upon the shameful spectacle of some desolate creature—or some wretched ragged groups of either sex, or of both sexes, with children among them, huddled together like the smaller vermin for a little warmth—lingering and lingering on a doorstep, while the appointed evader of the public trust did his dirty office of trying to weary them out and so get rid of them. Now, she would light upon some poor decent person, like herself, going afoot on a pilgrimage of many weary miles to see some worn-out relative or friend who had been charitably clutched off to a great blank barren Union House, as far from old home as the County Jail (the remoteness of which is always its worst punishment for small rural offenders), and in its dietary, and in its lodging, and in its tending of the sick, a much more penal establishment. Sometimes she would hear a newspaper read out, and would learn how the Registrar General cast up the units that had within the last week died of want and of exposure to the weather: for which that Recording Angel seemed to have a regular fixed place in his sum, as if they were its halfpence. All such things she would hear discussed, as we, my lords and gentlemen and honourable boards, in our unapproachable magnificence never hear them, and from all such things she would fly with the wings of raging Despair.

This is not to be received as a figure of speech. Old Betty Higden however tired, however footsore, would start up and be driven away by her awakened horror of falling into the hands of Charity. It is a remarkable Christian improvement, to have made a pursuing Fury of the Good Samaritan; but it was so in this case, and it is a type of many, many, many.

Two incidents united to intensify the old unreasoning abhorrence—granted in a previous place to be unreasoning, because the people always are unreasoning, and invariably make a point of producing all their smoke without fire.

One day she was sitting in a market-place on a bench outside an inn, with her little wares for sale, when the deadness that she strove against came over her so heavily that the scene departed from before her eyes; when it returned, she found herself on the ground, her head supported by some good-natured market-women, and a little crowd about her.

'Are you better now, mother?' asked one of the women. 'Do you think you can do nicely now?'

'Have I been ill then?' asked old Betty.

'You have had a faint like,' was the answer, 'or a fit. It ain't that you've been a-struggling, mother, but you've been stiff and numbed.'

'Ah!' said Betty, recovering her memory. 'It's the numbness. Yes. It comes over me at times.'

Was it gone? the women asked her.

'It's gone now,' said Betty. 'I shall be stronger than I was afore. Many thanks to ye, my dears, and when you come to be as old as I am, may others do as much for you!'

They assisted her to rise, but she could not stand yet, and they supported her when she sat down again upon the bench.

'My head's a bit light, and my feet are a bit heavy,' said old Betty, leaning her face drowsily on the breast of the woman who had spoken before. 'They'll both come nat'ral in a minute. There's nothing more the matter.'

'Ask her,' said some farmers standing by, who had come out from their market-dinner, 'who belongs to her.'

'Are there any folks belonging to you, mother?' said the woman.

'Yes sure,' answered Betty. 'I heerd the gentleman say it, but I couldn't answer quick enough. There's plenty belonging to me. Don't ye fear for me, my dear.'

'But are any of 'em near here? 'said the men's voices; the women's voices chiming in when it was said, and prolonging the strain.

'Quite near enough,' said Betty, rousing herself. 'Don't ye be afeard for me, neighbours.'

'But you are not fit to travel. Where are you going?' was the next compassionate chorus she heard.

'I'm a going to London when I've sold out all,' said Betty, rising with difficulty. 'I've right good friends in London. I want for nothing. I shall come to no harm. Thankye. Don't ye be afeard for me.'

A well-meaning bystander, yellow-legginged and purple-faced, said hoarsely over his red comforter, as she rose to her feet, that she 'oughtn't to be let to go'.

'For the Lord's love don't meddle with me!' cried old Betty, all her fears crowding on her. 'I am quite well now, and I must go this minute.'

She caught up her basket as she spoke and was making an unsteady rush away from them, when the same bystander checked her with his hand on her sleeve, and urged her to come with him and see the parish-doctor. Strengthening herself by the utmost exercise of her resolution, the poor trembling creature shook him off, almost fiercely, and took to flight. Nor did she feel safe until she had set a mile or two of by-road between herself and the marketplace, and had crept into a copse, like a hunted animal, to hide and recover breath. Not until then for the first time did she venture to recall how she had looked over her shoulder before turning out of the town, and had seen the sign of the White Lion hanging across the road, and the fluttering market booths, and the old grey church, and the little crowd gazing after her but not attempting to follow her.

The second frightening incident was this. She had been again as bad, and had been for some days better, and was travelling along by a part of the road where it touched the river, and in wet seasons was so often overflowed by it that there were tall white posts set up to mark the way. A barge was being towed towards her, and she sat down on the bank to rest and watch it. As the tow-rope was slackened by a turn of the stream and dipped into the water, such a confusion stole into her mind that she thought she saw the forms of her dead children and dead grandchildren peopling the barge, and waving their hands to her in solemn measure; then, as the rope tightened and came up, dropping diamonds, it seemed to vibrate into two parallel ropes and strike her, with a twang, though it was far off. When she looked again, there was no barge, no river, no daylight, and a man whom she had never before seen held a candle close to her face.

'Now, Missis,' said he; 'where did you come from and where are you going to?'

The poor soul confusedly asked the counter-question where she was?

'I am the Lock,' said the man.

'The Lock?'

'I am the Deputy Lock, on job, and this is the Lock-house. (Lock or Deputy Lock, it's all one, while the t'other man's in the hospital.) What's your Parish?'

'Parish!' She was up from the truckle-bed directly, wildly feeling about her for her basket, and gazing at him in affright.

'You'll be asked the question down town,' said the man. 'They won't let you be more than a Casual there. They'll pass you on to your settlement, Missis, with all speed. You're not in a state to be let come upon strange parishes 'ceptin as a Casual.'

''Twas the deadness again!' murmured Betty Higden, with her hand to her head.

'It was the deadness, there's not a doubt about it,' returned the man. 'I should have thought the deadness was a mild word for it, if it had been named to me when we brought you in. Have you got any friends, Missis?'

'The best of friends, Master.'

'I should recommend your looking 'em up if you consider 'em game to do anything for you,' said the Deputy Lock. 'Have you got any money?'

'Just a morsel of money, sir.'

'Do you want to keep it?'

'Sure I do!'

'Well, you know,' said the Deputy Lock, shrugging his shoulders with his hands in his pockets, and shaking his head in a sulkily ominous manner, 'the parish authorities down town will have it out of you, if you go on, you may take your Alfred David.'

'Then I'll not go on.'

'They'll make you pay, as fur as your money will go,' pursued the Deputy, 'for your relief as a Casual and for your being passed to your Parish.'

'Thank ye kindly, Master, for your warning, thank ye for your shelter, and good night.'

'Stop a bit,' said the Deputy, striking in between her and the door. 'Why are you all of a shake, and what's your hurry, Missis?'

'Oh, Master, Master,' returned Betty Higden, I've fought against the Parish and fled from it, all my life, and I want to die free of it!'

'I don't know,' said the Deputy, with deliberation, 'as I ought to let you go. I'm a honest man as gets my living by the sweat of my brow, and I may fall into trouble by letting you go. I've fell into trouble afore now, by George, and I know what it is, and it's made me careful. You might be took with your deadness again, half a mile off—or half of half a quarter, for the matter of that—and then it would be asked, Why did that there honest Deputy Lock, let her go, instead of putting her safe with the Parish? That's what a man of his character ought to have done, it would be argueyfied,' said the Deputy Lock, cunningly harping on the strong string of her terror; 'he ought to have handed her over safe to the Parish. That was to be expected of a man of his merits.'

As he stood in the doorway, the poor old careworn wayworn woman burst into tears, and clasped her hands, as if in a very agony she prayed to him.

'As I've told you, Master, I've the best of friends. This letter will show how true I spoke, and they will be thankful for me.'

The Deputy Lock opened the letter with a grave face, which underwent no change as he eyed its contents. But it might have done, if he could have read them.

'What amount of small change, Missis,' he said, with an abstracted air, after a little meditation, 'might you call a morsel of money?'

Hurriedly emptying her pocket, old Betty laid down on the table, a shilling, and two sixpenny pieces, and a few pence.

'If I was to let you go instead of handing you over safe to the Parish,' said the Deputy, counting the money with his eyes, 'might it be your own free wish to leave that there behind you?'

'Take it, Master, take it, and welcome and thankful!'

'I'm a man,' said the Deputy, giving her back the letter, and pocketing the coins, one by one, 'as earns his living by the sweat of his brow;' here he drew his sleeve across his forehead, as if this particular portion of his humble gains were the result of sheer hard labour and virtuous industry; 'and I won't stand in your way. Go where you like.'

She was gone out of the Lock-house as soon as he gave her this permission, and her tottering steps were on the road again. But, afraid to go back and afraid to go forward; seeing what she fled from, in the sky-glare of the lights of the little town before her, and leaving a confused horror of it everywhere behind her, as if she had escaped it in every stone of every market-place; she struck off by side ways, among which she got bewildered and lost. That night she took refuge from the Samaritan in his latest accredited form, under a farmer's rick; and if—worth thinking of, perhaps, my fellow-Christians—the Samaritan had in the lonely night, 'passed by on the other side', she would have most devoutly thanked High Heaven for her escape from him.

The morning found her afoot again, but fast declining as to the clearness of her thoughts, though not as to the steadiness of her purpose. Comprehending that her strength was quitting her, and that the struggle of her life was almost ended, she could neither reason out the means of getting back to her protectors, nor even form the idea. The overmastering dread, and the proud stubborn resolution it engendered in her to die undegraded, were the two distinct impressions left in her failing mind. Supported only by a sense that she was bent on conquering in her life-long fight, she went on.

The time was come, now, when the wants of this little life were passing away from her. She could not have swallowed food, though a table had been spread for her in the next field. The day was cold and wet, but she scarcely knew it. She crept on, poor soul, like a criminal afraid of being taken, and felt little beyond the terror of falling down while it was yet daylight, and being found alive. She had no fear that she would live through another night.

Sewn in the breast of her gown, the money to pay for her burial was still intact. If she could wear through the day, and then lie down to die under cover of the darkness, she would die independent. If she were captured previously, the money would be taken from her as a pauper who had no right to it, and she would be carried to the accursed workhouse. Gaining her end, the letter would be found in her breast, along with the money, and the gentlefolks would say when it was given back to them, 'She prized it, did old Betty Higden; she was true to it; and while she lived, she would never let it be disgraced by falling into the hands of those that she held in horror.' Most illogical, inconsequential, and light-headed, this; but travellers in the valley of the shadow of death are apt to be light-headed; and worn-out old people of low estate have a trick of reasoning as indifferently as they live, and doubtless would appreciate our Poor Law more philosophically on an income of ten thousand a year.

So, keeping to byways, and shunning human approach, this troublesome old woman hid herself, and fared on all through the dreary day. Yet so unlike was she to vagrant hiders in general, that sometimes, as the day advanced, there was a bright fire in her eyes, and a quicker beating at her feeble heart, as though she said exultingly, 'The Lord will see me through it!'

By what visionary hands she was led along upon that journey of escape from the Samaritan; by what voices, hushed in the grave, she seemed to be addressed; how she fancied the dead child in her arms again, and times innumerable adjusted her shawl to keep it warm; what infinite variety of forms of tower and roof and steeple the trees took; how many furious horsemen rode at her, crying, 'There she goes! Stop! Stop, Betty Higden!' and melted away as they came close; be these things left untold. Faring on and hiding, hiding and faring on, the poor harmless creature, as though she were a Murderess and the whole country were up after her, wore out the day, and gained the night.

'Water-meadows, or such like,' she had sometimes murmured, on the day's pilgrimage, when she had raised her head and taken any note of the real objects about her. There now arose in the darkness, a great building, full of lighted windows. Smoke was issuing from a high chimney in the rear of it, and there was the sound of a water-wheel at the side. Between her and the building, lay a piece of water, in which the lighted windows were reflected, and on its nearest margin was a plantation of trees. 'I humbly thank the Power and the Glory,' said Betty Higden, holding up her withered hands, 'that I have come to my journey's end!'

She crept among the trees to the trunk of a tree whence she could see, beyond some intervening trees and branches, the lighted windows, both in their reality and their reflection in the water. She placed her orderly little basket at her side, and sank upon the ground, supporting herself against the tree. It brought to her mind the foot of the Cross, and she committed herself to Him who died upon it. Her strength held out to enable her to arrange the letter in her breast, so as that it could be seen that she had a paper there. It had held out for this, and it departed when this was done.

'I am safe here,' was her last benumbed thought. 'When I am found dead at the foot of the Cross, it will be by some of my own sort; some of the working people who work among the lights yonder. I cannot see the lighted windows now, but they are there. I am thankful for all!'

The darkness gone, and a face bending down.

'It cannot be the boofer lady?'

'I don't understand what you say. Let me wet your lips again with this brandy. I have been away to fetch it. Did you think that I was long gone?'

It is as the face of a woman, shaded by a quantity of rich dark hair. It is the earnest face of a woman who is young and handsome. But all is over with me on earth, and this must be an Angel.

'Have I been long dead?'

'I don't understand what you say. Let me wet your lips again. I hurried all I could, and brought no one back with me, lest you should die of the shock of strangers.'

'Am I not dead?'

'I cannot understand what you say. Your voice is so low and broken that I cannot hear you. Do you hear me?'

'Yes.'

'Do you mean Yes?'

'Yes.'

'I was coming from my work just now, along the path outside (I was up with the night-hands last night), and I heard a groan, and found you lying here.'

'What work, deary?'

'Did you ask what work? At the paper-mill.'

'Where is it?'

'Your face is turned up to the sky, and you can't see it. It is close by. You can see my face, here, between you and the sky?'

'Yes.'

'Dare I lift you?'

'Not yet.'

'Not even lift your head to get it on my arm? I will do it by very gentle degrees. You shall hardly feel it.'

'Not yet. Paper. Letter.'

'This paper in your breast?'

'Bless ye!'

'Let me wet your lips again. Am I to open it? To read it?'

'Bless ye!'

She reads it with surprise, and looks down with a new expression and an added interest on the motionless face she kneels beside.

'I know these names. I have heard them often.'

'Will you send it, my dear?'

'I cannot understand you. Let me wet your lips again, and your forehead. There. O poor thing, poor thing!' These words through her fast-dropping tears. 'What was it that you asked me? Wait till I bring my ear quite close.'

'Will you send it, my dear?'

'Will I send it to the writers? Is that your wish? Yes, certainly.'

'You'll not give it up to any one but them?'

'No.'

'As you must grow old in time, and come to your dying hour, my dear, you'll not give it up to any one but them?'

'No. Most solemnly.'

'Never to the Parish!' with a convulsed struggle.

'No. Most solemnly.'

'Nor let the Parish touch me, not yet so much as look at me!' with another struggle.

'No. Faithfully.'

A look of thankfulness and triumph lights the worn old face.

The eyes, which have been darkly fixed upon the sky, turn with meaning in them towards the compassionate face from which the tears are dropping, and a smile is on the aged lips as they ask:

'What is your name, my dear?'

'My name is Lizzie Hexam.'

'I must be sore disfigured. Are you afraid to kiss me?'

The answer is, the ready pressure of her lips upon the cold but smiling mouth.

'Bless ye! NOW lift me, my love.'

Lizzie Hexam very softly raised the weather-stained grey head, and lifted her as high as Heaven.

Chapter 9

SOMEBODY BECOMES THE SUBJECT OF A PREDICTION

"'We give thee hearty thanks for that it hath pleased thee to deliver this our sister out of the miseries of this sinful world.'" So read the Reverend Frank Milvey in a not untroubled voice, for his heart misgave him that all was not quite right between us and our sister—or say our sister in Law—Poor Law—and that we sometimes read these words in an awful manner, over our Sister and our Brother too.

And Sloppy—on whom the brave deceased had never turned her back until she ran away from him, knowing that otherwise he would not be separated from her—Sloppy could not in his conscience as yet find the hearty thanks required of it. Selfish in Sloppy, and yet excusable, it may be humbly hoped, because our sister had been more than his mother.

The words were read above the ashes of Betty Higden, in a corner of a churchyard near the river; in a churchyard so obscure that there was nothing in it but grass-mounds, not so much as one single tombstone. It might not be to do an unreasonably great deal for the diggers and hewers, in a registering age, if we ticketed their graves at the common charge; so that a new generation might know which was which: so that the soldier, sailor, emigrant, coming home, should be able to identify the resting-place of father, mother, playmate, or betrothed. For, we turn up our eyes and say that we are all alike in death, and we might turn them down and work the saying out in this world, so far. It would be sentimental, perhaps? But how say ye, my lords and gentleman and honourable boards, shall we not find good standing-room left for a little sentiment, if we look into our crowds?

Near unto the Reverend Frank Milvey as he read, stood his little wife, John Rokesmith the Secretary, and Bella Wilfer. These, over and above Sloppy, were the mourners at the lowly grave. Not a penny had been added to the money sewn in her dress: what her honest spirit had so long projected, was fulfilled.

'I've took it in my head,' said Sloppy, laying it, inconsolable, against the church door, when all was done: I've took it in my wretched head that I might have sometimes turned a little harder for her, and it cuts me deep to think so now.'

The Reverend Frank Milvey, comforting Sloppy, expounded to him how the best of us were more or less remiss in our turnings at our respective Mangles—some of us very much so—and how we were all a halting, failing, feeble, and inconstant crew.

'SHE warn't, sir,' said Sloppy, taking this ghostly counsel rather ill, in behalf of his late benefactress. 'Let us speak for ourselves, sir. She went through with whatever duty she had to do. She went through with me, she went through with the Minders, she went through with herself, she went through with everythink. O Mrs Higden, Mrs Higden, you was a woman and a mother and a mangler in a million million!'

With those heartfelt words, Sloppy removed his dejected head from the church door, and took it back to the grave in the corner, and laid it down there, and wept alone. 'Not a very poor grave,' said the Reverend Frank Milvey, brushing his hand across his eyes, 'when it has that homely figure on it. Richer, I think, than it could be made by most of the sculpture in Westminster Abbey!'

They left him undisturbed, and passed out at the wicket-gate. The water-wheel of the paper-mill was audible there, and seemed to have a softening influence on the bright wintry scene. They had arrived but a little while before, and Lizzie Hexam now told them the little she could add to the letter in which she had enclosed Mr Rokesmith's letter and had asked for their instructions. This was merely how she had heard the groan, and what had afterwards passed, and how she had obtained leave for the remains to be placed in that sweet, fresh, empty store-room of the mill from which they had just accompanied them to the churchyard, and how the last requests had been religiously observed.

'I could not have done it all, or nearly all, of myself,' said Lizzie. 'I should not have wanted the will; but I should not have had the power, without our managing partner.'

'Surely not the Jew who received us?' said Mrs Milvey.

('My dear,' observed her husband in parenthesis, 'why not?')

'The gentleman certainly is a Jew,' said Lizzie, 'and the lady, his wife, is a Jewess, and I was first brought to their notice by a Jew. But I think there cannot be kinder people in the world.'

'But suppose they try to convert you!' suggested Mrs Milvey, bristling in her good little way, as a clergyman's wife.

'To do what, ma'am?' asked Lizzie, with a modest smile.

'To make you change your religion,' said Mrs Milvey.

Lizzie shook her head, still smiling. 'They have never asked me what my religion is. They asked me what my story was, and I told them. They asked me to be industrious and faithful, and I promised to be so. They most willingly and cheerfully do their duty to all of us who are employed here, and we try to do ours to them. Indeed they do much more than their duty to us, for they are wonderfully mindful of us in many ways.

'It is easy to see you're a favourite, my dear,' said little Mrs Milvey, not quite pleased.

'It would be very ungrateful in me to say I am not,' returned Lizzie, 'for I have been already raised to a place of confidence here. But that makes no difference in their following their own religion and leaving all of us to ours. They never talk of theirs to us, and they never talk of ours to us. If I was the last in the mill, it would be just the same. They never asked me what religion that poor thing had followed.'

'My dear,' said Mrs Milvey, aside to the Reverend Frank, 'I wish you would talk to her.'

'My dear,' said the Reverend Frank aside to his good little wife, 'I think I will leave it to somebody else. The circumstances are hardly favourable. There are plenty of talkers going about, my love, and she will soon find one.'

While this discourse was interchanging, both Bella and the Secretary observed Lizzie Hexam with great attention. Brought face to face for the first time with the daughter of his supposed murderer, it was natural that John Harmon should have his own secret reasons for a careful scrutiny of her countenance and manner. Bella knew that Lizzie's father had been falsely accused of the crime which had had so great an influence on her own life and fortunes; and her interest, though it had no secret springs, like that of the Secretary, was equally natural. Both had expected to see something very different from the real Lizzie Hexam, and thus it fell out that she became the unconscious means of bringing them together.

For, when they had walked on with her to the little house in the clean village by the paper-mill, where Lizzie had a lodging with an elderly couple employed in the establishment, and when Mrs Milvey and Bella had been up to see her room and had come down, the mill bell rang. This called Lizzie away for the time, and left the Secretary and Bella standing rather awkwardly in the small street; Mrs Milvey being engaged in pursuing the village children, and her investigations whether they were in danger of becoming children of Israel; and the Reverend Frank being engaged—to say the truth—in evading that branch of his spiritual functions, and getting out of sight surreptitiously.

Bella at length said:

'Hadn't we better talk about the commission we have undertaken, Mr Rokesmith?'

'By all means,' said the Secretary.

'I suppose,' faltered Bella, 'that we ARE both commissioned, or we shouldn't both be here?'

'I suppose so,' was the Secretary's answer.

'When I proposed to come with Mr and Mrs Milvey,' said Bella, 'Mrs Boffin urged me to do so, in order that I might give her my small report—it's not worth anything, Mr Rokesmith, except for it's being a woman's—which indeed with you may be a fresh reason for it's being worth nothing—of Lizzie Hexam.'

'Mr Boffin,' said the Secretary, 'directed me to come for the same purpose.'

As they spoke they were leaving the little street and emerging on the wooded landscape by the river.

'You think well of her, Mr Rokesmith?' pursued Bella, conscious of making all the advances.

'I think highly of her.'

'I am so glad of that! Something quite refined in her beauty, is there not?'

'Her appearance is very striking.'

'There is a shade of sadness upon her that is quite touching. At least I—I am not setting up my own poor opinion, you know, Mr Rokesmith,' said Bella, excusing and explaining herself in a pretty shy way; 'I am consulting you.'

'I noticed that sadness. I hope it may not,' said the Secretary in a lower voice, 'be the result of the false accusation which has been retracted.'

When they had passed on a little further without speaking, Bella, after stealing a glance or two at the Secretary, suddenly said:

'Oh, Mr Rokesmith, don't be hard with me, don't be stern with me; be magnanimous! I want to talk with you on equal terms.'

The Secretary as suddenly brightened, and returned: 'Upon my honour I had no thought but for you. I forced myself to be constrained, lest you might misinterpret my being more natural. There. It's gone.'

'Thank you,' said Bella, holding out her little hand. 'Forgive me.'

'No!' cried the Secretary, eagerly. 'Forgive ME!' For there were tears in her eyes, and they were prettier in his sight (though they smote him on the heart rather reproachfully too) than any other glitter in the world.

When they had walked a little further:

'You were going to speak to me,' said the Secretary, with the shadow so long on him quite thrown off and cast away, 'about Lizzie Hexam. So was I going to speak to you, if I could have begun.'

'Now that you CAN begin, sir,' returned Bella, with a look as if she italicized the word by putting one of her dimples under it, 'what were you going to say?'

'You remember, of course, that in her short letter to Mrs Boffin—short, but containing everything to the purpose—she stipulated that either her name, or else her place of residence, must be kept strictly a secret among us.'

Bella nodded Yes.

'It is my duty to find out why she made that stipulation. I have it in charge from Mr Boffin to discover, and I am very desirous for myself to discover, whether that retracted accusation still leaves any stain upon her. I mean whether it places her at any disadvantage towards any one, even towards herself.'

'Yes,' said Bella, nodding thoughtfully; 'I understand. That seems wise, and considerate.'

'You may not have noticed, Miss Wilfer, that she has the same kind of interest in you, that you have in her. Just as you are attracted by her beaut—by her appearance and manner, she is attracted by yours.'

'I certainly have NOT noticed it,' returned Bella, again italicizing with the dimple, 'and I should have given her credit for—'

The Secretary with a smile held up his hand, so plainly interposing 'not for better taste', that Bella's colour deepened over the little piece of coquetry she was checked in.

'And so,' resumed the Secretary, 'if you would speak with her alone before we go away from here, I feel quite sure that a natural and easy confidence would arise between you. Of course you would not be asked to betray it; and of course you would not, if you were. But if you do not object to put this question to her—to ascertain for us her own feeling in this one matter—you can do so at a far greater advantage than I or any else could. Mr Boffin is anxious on the subject. And I am,' added the Secretary after a moment, 'for a special reason, very anxious.'

'I shall be happy, Mr Rokesmith,' returned Bella, 'to be of the least use; for I feel, after the serious scene of to-day, that I am useless enough in this world.'

'Don't say that,' urged the Secretary.

'Oh, but I mean that,' said Bella, raising her eyebrows.

'No one is useless in this world,' retorted the Secretary, 'who lightens the burden of it for any one else.'

'But I assure you I DON'T, Mr Rokesmith,' said Bella, half-crying.

'Not for your father?'

'Dear, loving, self-forgetting, easily-satisfied Pa! Oh, yes! He thinks so.'

'It is enough if he only thinks so,' said the Secretary. 'Excuse the interruption: I don't like to hear you depreciate yourself.'

'But YOU once depreciated ME, sir,' thought Bella, pouting, 'and I hope you may be satisfied with the consequences you brought upon your head!' However, she said nothing to that purpose; she even said something to a different purpose.

'Mr Rokesmith, it seems so long since we spoke together naturally, that I am embarrassed in approaching another subject. Mr Boffin. You know I am very grateful to him; don't you? You know I feel a true respect for him, and am bound to him by the strong ties of his own generosity; now don't you?'

'Unquestionably. And also that you are his favourite companion.'

'That makes it,' said Bella, 'so very difficult to speak of him. But—. Does he treat you well?'

'You see how he treats me,' the Secretary answered, with a patient and yet proud air.

'Yes, and I see it with pain,' said Bella, very energetically.

The Secretary gave her such a radiant look, that if he had thanked her a hundred times, he could not have said as much as the look said.

'I see it with pain,' repeated Bella, 'and it often makes me miserable. Miserable, because I cannot bear to be supposed to approve of it, or have any indirect share in it. Miserable, because I cannot bear to be forced to admit to myself that Fortune is spoiling Mr Boffin.'

'Miss Wilfer,' said the Secretary, with a beaming face, 'if you could know with what delight I make the discovery that Fortune isn't spoiling YOU, you would know that it more than compensates me for any slight at any other hands.'

'Oh, don't speak of ME,' said Bella, giving herself an impatient little slap with her glove. 'You don't know me as well as—'

'As you know yourself?' suggested the Secretary, finding that she stopped. 'DO you know yourself?'

'I know quite enough of myself,' said Bella, with a charming air of being inclined to give herself up as a bad job, 'and I don't improve upon acquaintance. But Mr Boffin.'

'That Mr Boffin's manner to me, or consideration for me, is not what it used to be,' observed the Secretary, 'must be admitted. It is too plain to be denied.'

'Are you disposed to deny it, Mr Rokesmith?' asked Bella, with a look of wonder.

'Ought I not to be glad to do so, if I could: though it were only for my own sake?'

'Truly,' returned Bella, 'it must try you very much, and—you must please promise me that you won't take ill what I am going to add, Mr Rokesmith?'

'I promise it with all my heart.'

'—And it must sometimes, I should think,' said Bella, hesitating, 'a little lower you in your own estimation?'

Assenting with a movement of his head, though not at all looking as if it did, the Secretary replied:

'I have very strong reasons, Miss Wilfer, for bearing with the drawbacks of my position in the house we both inhabit. Believe that they are not all mercenary, although I have, through a series of strange fatalities, faded out of my place in life. If what you see with such a gracious and good sympathy is calculated to rouse my pride, there are other considerations (and those you do not see) urging me to quiet endurance. The latter are by far the stronger.'

'I think I have noticed, Mr Rokesmith,' said Bella, looking at him with curiosity, as not quite making him out, 'that you repress yourself, and force yourself, to act a passive part.'

'You are right. I repress myself and force myself to act a part. It is not in tameness of spirit that I submit. I have a settled purpose.'

'And a good one, I hope,' said Bella.

'And a good one, I hope,' he answered, looking steadily at her.

'Sometimes I have fancied, sir,' said Bella, turning away her eyes, 'that your great regard for Mrs Boffin is a very powerful motive with you.'

'You are right again; it is. I would do anything for her, bear anything for her. There are no words to express how I esteem that good, good woman.'

'As I do too! May I ask you one thing more, Mr Rokesmith?'

'Anything more.'

'Of course you see that she really suffers, when Mr Boffin shows how he is changing?'

'I see it, every day, as you see it, and am grieved to give her pain.'

'To give her pain?' said Bella, repeating the phrase quickly, with her eyebrows raised.

'I am generally the unfortunate cause of it.'

'Perhaps she says to you, as she often says to me, that he is the best of men, in spite of all.'

'I often overhear her, in her honest and beautiful devotion to him, saying so to you,' returned the Secretary, with the same steady look, 'but I cannot assert that she ever says so to me.'

Bella met the steady look for a moment with a wistful, musing little look of her own, and then, nodding her pretty head several times, like a dimpled philosopher (of the very best school) who was moralizing on Life, heaved a little sigh, and gave up things in general for a bad job, as she had previously been inclined to give up herself.

But, for all that, they had a very pleasant walk. The trees were bare of leaves, and the river was bare of water-lilies; but the sky was not bare of its beautiful blue, and the water reflected it, and a delicious wind ran with the stream, touching the surface crisply. Perhaps the old mirror was never yet made by human hands, which, if all the images it has in its time reflected could pass across its surface again, would fail to reveal some scene of horror or distress. But the great serene mirror of the river seemed as if it might have reproduced all it had ever reflected between those placid banks, and brought nothing to the light save what was peaceful, pastoral, and blooming.

So, they walked, speaking of the newly filled-up grave, and of Johnny, and of many things. So, on their return, they met brisk Mrs Milvey coming to seek them, with the agreeable intelligence that there was no fear for the village children, there being a Christian school in the village, and no worse Judaical interference with it than to plant its garden. So, they got back to the village as Lizzie Hexam was coming from the paper-mill, and Bella detached herself to speak with her in her own home.

'I am afraid it is a poor room for you,' said Lizzie, with a smile of welcome, as she offered the post of honour by the fireside.

'Not so poor as you think, my dear,' returned Bella, 'if you knew all.' Indeed, though attained by some wonderful winding narrow stairs, which seemed to have been erected in a pure white chimney, and though very low in the ceiling, and very rugged in the floor, and rather blinking as to the proportions of its lattice window, it was a pleasanter room than that despised chamber once at home, in which Bella had first bemoaned the miseries of taking lodgers.

The day was closing as the two girls looked at one another by the fireside. The dusky room was lighted by the fire. The grate might have been the old brazier, and the glow might have been the old hollow down by the flare.

'It's quite new to me,' said Lizzie, 'to be visited by a lady so nearly of my own age, and so pretty, as you. It's a pleasure to me to look at you.'

'I have nothing left to begin with,' returned Bella, blushing, 'because I was going to say that it was a pleasure to me to look at you, Lizzie. But we can begin without a beginning, can't we?'

Lizzie took the pretty little hand that was held out in as pretty a little frankness.

'Now, dear,' said Bella, drawing her chair a little nearer, and taking Lizzie's arm as if they were going out for a walk, 'I am commissioned with something to say, and I dare say I shall say it wrong, but I won't if I can help it. It is in reference to your letter to Mr and Mrs Boffin, and this is what it is. Let me see. Oh yes! This is what it is.'

With this exordium, Bella set forth that request of Lizzie's touching secrecy, and delicately spoke of that false accusation and its retraction, and asked might she beg to be informed whether it had any bearing, near or remote, on such request. 'I feel, my dear,' said Bella, quite amazing herself by the business-like manner in which she was getting on, 'that the subject must be a painful one to you, but I am mixed up in it also; for—I don't know whether you may know it or suspect it—I am the willed-away girl who was to have been married to the unfortunate gentleman, if he had been pleased to approve of me. So I was dragged into the subject without my consent, and you were dragged into it without your consent, and there is very little to choose between us.'

'I had no doubt,' said Lizzie, 'that you were the Miss Wilfer I have often heard named. Can you tell me who my unknown friend is?'

'Unknown friend, my dear?' said Bella.

'Who caused the charge against poor father to be contradicted, and sent me the written paper.'

Bella had never heard of him. Had no notion who he was.

'I should have been glad to thank him,' returned Lizzie. 'He has done a great deal for me. I must hope that he will let me thank him some day. You asked me has it anything to do—'

'It or the accusation itself,' Bella put in.

'Yes. Has either anything to do with my wishing to live quite secret and retired here? No.'

As Lizzie Hexam shook her head in giving this reply and as her glance sought the fire, there was a quiet resolution in her folded hands, not lost on Bella's bright eyes.

'Have you lived much alone?' asked Bella.

'Yes. It's nothing new to me. I used to be always alone many hours together, in the day and in the night, when poor father was alive.'

'You have a brother, I have been told?'

'I have a brother, but he is not friendly with me. He is a very good boy though, and has raised himself by his industry. I don't complain of him.'

As she said it, with her eyes upon the fire-glow, there was an instantaneous escape of distress into her face. Bella seized the moment to touch her hand.

'Lizzie, I wish you would tell me whether you have any friend of your own sex and age.'

'I have lived that lonely kind of life, that I have never had one,' was the answer.

'Nor I neither,' said Bella. 'Not that my life has been lonely, for I could have sometimes wished it lonelier, instead of having Ma going on like the Tragic Muse with a face-ache in majestic corners, and Lavvy being spiteful—though of course I am very fond of them both. I wish you could make a friend of me, Lizzie. Do you think you could? I have no more of what they call character, my dear, than a canary-bird, but I know I am trustworthy.'

The wayward, playful, affectionate nature, giddy for want of the weight of some sustaining purpose, and capricious because it was always fluttering among little things, was yet a captivating one. To Lizzie it was so new, so pretty, at once so womanly and so childish, that it won her completely. And when Bella said again, 'Do you think you could, Lizzie?' with her eyebrows raised, her head inquiringly on one side, and an odd doubt about it in her own bosom, Lizzie showed beyond all question that she thought she could.

'Tell me, my dear,' said Bella, 'what is the matter, and why you live like this.'

Lizzie presently began, by way of prelude, 'You must have many lovers—' when Bella checked her with a little scream of astonishment.

'My dear, I haven't one!'

'Not one?'

'Well! Perhaps one,' said Bella. 'I am sure I don't know. I HAD one, but what he may think about it at the present time I can't say. Perhaps I have half a one (of course I don't count that Idiot, George Sampson). However, never mind me. I want to hear about you.'

'There is a certain man,' said Lizzie, 'a passionate and angry man, who says he loves me, and who I must believe does love me. He is the friend of my brother. I shrank from him within myself when my brother first brought him to me; but the last time I saw him he terrified me more than I can say.' There she stopped.

'Did you come here to escape from him, Lizzie?'

'I came here immediately after he so alarmed me.'

'Are you afraid of him here?'

'I am not timid generally, but I am always afraid of him. I am afraid to see a newspaper, or to hear a word spoken of what is done in London, lest he should have done some violence.'

'Then you are not afraid of him for yourself, dear?' said Bella, after pondering on the words.

'I should be even that, if I met him about here. I look round for him always, as I pass to and fro at night.'

'Are you afraid of anything he may do to himself in London, my dear?'

'No. He might be fierce enough even to do some violence to himself, but I don't think of that.'

'Then it would almost seem, dear,' said Bella quaintly, 'as if there must be somebody else?'

Lizzie put her hands before her face for a moment before replying: 'The words are always in my ears, and the blow he struck upon a stone wall as he said them is always before my eyes. I have tried hard to think it not worth remembering, but I cannot make so little of it. His hand was trickling down with blood as he said to me, "Then I hope that I may never kill him!"

Rather startled, Bella made and clasped a girdle of her arms round Lizzie's waist, and then asked quietly, in a soft voice, as they both looked at the fire:

'Kill him! Is this man so jealous, then?'

'Of a gentleman,' said Lizzie. '—I hardly know how to tell you—of a gentleman far above me and my way of life, who broke father's death to me, and has shown an interest in me since.'

'Does he love you?'

Lizzie shook her head.

'Does he admire you?'

Lizzie ceased to shake her head, and pressed her hand upon her living girdle.

'Is it through his influence that you came here?'

'O no! And of all the world I wouldn't have him know that I am here, or get the least clue where to find me.'

'Lizzie, dear! Why?' asked Bella, in amazement at this burst. But then quickly added, reading Lizzie's face: 'No. Don't say why. That was a foolish question of mine. I see, I see.'

There was silence between them. Lizzie, with a drooping head, glanced down at the glow in the fire where her first fancies had been nursed, and her first escape made from the grim life out of which she had plucked her brother, foreseeing her reward.

'You know all now,' she said, raising her eyes to Bella's. 'There is nothing left out. This is my reason for living secret here, with the aid of a good old man who is my true friend. For a short part of my life at home with father, I knew of things—don't ask me what—that I set my face against, and tried to better. I don't think I could have done more, then, without letting my hold on father go; but they sometimes lie heavy on my mind. By doing all for the best, I hope I may wear them out.'

'And wear out too,' said Bella soothingly, 'this weakness, Lizzie, in favour of one who is not worthy of it.'

'No. I don't want to wear that out,' was the flushed reply, 'nor do I want to believe, nor do I believe, that he is not worthy of it. What should I gain by that, and how much should I lose!'

Bella's expressive little eyebrows remonstrated with the fire for some short time before she rejoined:

'Don't think that I press you, Lizzie; but wouldn't you gain in peace, and hope, and even in freedom? Wouldn't it be better not to live a secret life in hiding, and not to be shut out from your natural and wholesome prospects? Forgive my asking you, would that be no gain?'

'Does a woman's heart that—that has that weakness in it which you have spoken of,' returned Lizzie, 'seek to gain anything?'

The question was so directly at variance with Bella's views in life, as set forth to her father, that she said internally, 'There, you little mercenary wretch! Do you hear that? Ain't you ashamed of your self?' and unclasped the girdle of her arms, expressly to give herself a penitential poke in the side.

'But you said, Lizzie,' observed Bella, returning to her subject when she had administered this chastisement, 'that you would lose, besides. Would you mind telling me what you would lose, Lizzie?'

'I should lose some of the best recollections, best encouragements, and best objects, that I carry through my daily life. I should lose my belief that if I had been his equal, and he had loved me, I should have tried with all my might to make him better and happier, as he would have made me. I should lose almost all the value that I put upon the little learning I have, which is all owing to him, and which I conquered the difficulties of, that he might not think it thrown away upon me. I should lose a kind of picture of him—or of what he might have been, if I had been a lady, and he had loved me—which is always with me, and which I somehow feel that I could not do a mean or a wrong thing before. I should leave off prizing the remembrance that he has done me nothing but good since I have known him, and that he has made a change within me, like—like the change in the grain of these hands, which were coarse, and cracked, and hard, and brown when I rowed on the river with father, and are softened and made supple by this new work as you see them now.'

They trembled, but with no weakness, as she showed them.

'Understand me, my dear;' thus she went on. I have never dreamed of the possibility of his being anything to me on this earth but the kind picture that I know I could not make you understand, if the understanding was not in your own breast already. I have no more dreamed of the possibility of MY being his wife, than he ever has—and words could not be stronger than that. And yet I love him. I love him so much, and so dearly, that when I sometimes think my life may be but a weary one, I am proud of it and glad of it. I am proud and glad to suffer something for him, even though it is of no service to him, and he will never know of it or care for it.'

Bella sat enchained by the deep, unselfish passion of this girl or woman of her own age, courageously revealing itself in the confidence of her sympathetic perception of its truth. And yet she had never experienced anything like it, or thought of the existence of anything like it.

'It was late upon a wretched night,' said Lizzie, 'when his eyes first looked at me in my old river-side home, very different from this. His eyes may never look at me again. I would rather that they never did; I hope that they never may. But I would not have the light of them taken out of my life, for anything my life can give me. I have told you everything now, my dear. If it comes a little strange to me to have parted with it, I am not sorry. I had no thought of ever parting with a single word of it, a moment before you came in; but you came in, and my mind changed.'

Bella kissed her on the cheek, and thanked her warmly for her confidence. 'I only wish,' said Bella, 'I was more deserving of it.'

'More deserving of it?' repeated Lizzie, with an incredulous smile.

'I don't mean in respect of keeping it,' said Bella, 'because any one should tear me to bits before getting at a syllable of it—though there's no merit in that, for I am naturally as obstinate as a Pig. What I mean is, Lizzie, that I am a mere impertinent piece of conceit, and you shame me.'

Lizzie put up the pretty brown hair that came tumbling down, owing to the energy with which Bella shook her head; and she remonstrated while thus engaged, 'My dear!'

'Oh, it's all very well to call me your dear,' said Bella, with a pettish whimper, 'and I am glad to be called so, though I have slight enough claim to be. But I AM such a nasty little thing!'

'My dear!' urged Lizzie again.

'Such a shallow, cold, worldly, Limited little brute!' said Bella, bringing out her last adjective with culminating force.

'Do you think,' inquired Lizzie with her quiet smile, the hair being now secured, 'that I don't know better?'

'DO you know better though?' said Bella. 'Do you really believe you know better? Oh, I should be so glad if you did know better, but I am so very much afraid that I must know best!'

Lizzie asked her, laughing outright, whether she ever saw her own face or heard her own voice?

'I suppose so,' returned Bella; 'I look in the glass often enough, and I chatter like a Magpie.'

'I have seen your face, and heard your voice, at any rate,' said Lizzie, 'and they have tempted me to say to you—with a certainty of not going wrong—what I thought I should never say to any one. Does that look ill?'

'No, I hope it doesn't,' pouted Bella, stopping herself in something between a humoured laugh and a humoured sob.

'I used once to see pictures in the fire,' said Lizzie playfully, 'to please my brother. Shall I tell you what I see down there where the fire is glowing?'

They had risen, and were standing on the hearth, the time being come for separating; each had drawn an arm around the other to take leave.

'Shall I tell you,' asked Lizzie, 'what I see down there?'

'Limited little b?' suggested Bella with her eyebrows raised.

'A heart well worth winning, and well won. A heart that, once won, goes through fire and water for the winner, and never changes, and is never daunted.'

'Girl's heart?' asked Bella, with accompanying eyebrows. Lizzie nodded. 'And the figure to which it belongs—'

Is yours,' suggested Bella.

'No. Most clearly and distinctly yours.'

So the interview terminated with pleasant words on both sides, and with many reminders on the part of Bella that they were friends, and pledges that she would soon come down into that part of the country again. There with Lizzie returned to her occupation, and Bella ran over to the little inn to rejoin her company.

'You look rather serious, Miss Wilfer,' was the Secretary's first remark.

'I feel rather serious,' returned Miss Wilfer.

She had nothing else to tell him but that Lizzie Hexam's secret had no reference whatever to the cruel charge, or its withdrawal. Oh yes though! said Bella; she might as well mention one other thing; Lizzie was very desirous to thank her unknown friend who had sent her the written retractation. Was she, indeed? observed the Secretary. Ah! Bella asked him, had he any notion who that unknown friend might be? He had no notion whatever.

They were on the borders of Oxfordshire, so far had poor old Betty Higden strayed. They were to return by the train presently, and, the station being near at hand, the Reverend Frank and Mrs Frank, and Sloppy and Bella and the Secretary, set out to walk to it. Few rustic paths are wide enough for five, and Bella and the Secretary dropped behind.

'Can you believe, Mr Rokesmith,' said Bella, 'that I feel as if whole years had passed since I went into Lizzie Hexam's cottage?'

'We have crowded a good deal into the day,' he returned, 'and you were much affected in the churchyard. You are over-tired.'

'No, I am not at all tired. I have not quite expressed what I mean. I don't mean that I feel as if a great space of time had gone by, but that I feel as if much had happened—to myself, you know.'

'For good, I hope?'

'I hope so,' said Bella.

'You are cold; I felt you tremble. Pray let me put this wrapper of mine about you. May I fold it over this shoulder without injuring your dress? Now, it will be too heavy and too long. Let me carry this end over my arm, as you have no arm to give me.'

Yes she had though. How she got it out, in her muffled state, Heaven knows; but she got it out somehow—there it was—and slipped it through the Secretary's.

'I have had a long and interesting talk with Lizzie, Mr Rokesmith, and she gave me her full confidence.'

'She could not withhold it,' said the Secretary.

'I wonder how you come,' said Bella, stopping short as she glanced at him, 'to say to me just what she said about it!'

'I infer that it must be because I feel just as she felt about it.'

'And how was that, do you mean to say, sir?' asked Bella, moving again.

'That if you were inclined to win her confidence—anybody's confidence—you were sure to do it.'

The railway, at this point, knowingly shutting a green eye and opening a red one, they had to run for it. As Bella could not run easily so wrapped up, the Secretary had to help her. When she took her opposite place in the carriage corner, the brightness in her face was so charming to behold, that on her exclaiming, 'What beautiful stars and what a glorious night!' the Secretary said 'Yes,' but seemed to prefer to see the night and the stars in the light of her lovely little countenance, to looking out of window.

O boofer lady, fascinating boofer lady! If I were but legally executor of Johnny's will! If I had but the right to pay your legacy and to take your receipt!—Something to this purpose surely mingled with the blast of the train as it cleared the stations, all knowingly shutting up their green eyes and opening their red ones when they prepared to let the boofer lady pass.

Chapter 10

SCOUTS OUT

'And so, Miss Wren,' said Mr Eugene Wrayburn, 'I cannot persuade you to dress me a doll?'

'No,' replied Miss Wren snappishly; 'if you want one, go and buy one at the shop.'

'And my charming young goddaughter,' said Mr Wrayburn plaintively, 'down in Hertfordshire—'

('Humbugshire you mean, I think,' interposed Miss Wren.)

'—is to be put upon the cold footing of the general public, and is to derive no advantage from my private acquaintance with the Court Dressmaker?'

'If it's any advantage to your charming godchild—and oh, a precious godfather she has got!'—replied Miss Wren, pricking at him in the air with her needle, 'to be informed that the Court Dressmaker knows your tricks and your manners, you may tell her so by post, with my compliments.'

Miss Wren was busy at her work by candle-light, and Mr Wrayburn, half amused and half vexed, and all idle and shiftless, stood by her bench looking on. Miss Wren's troublesome child was in the corner in deep disgrace, and exhibiting great wretchedness in the shivering stage of prostration from drink.

'Ugh, you disgraceful boy!' exclaimed Miss Wren, attracted by the sound of his chattering teeth, 'I wish they'd all drop down your throat and play at dice in your stomach! Boh, wicked child! Bee-baa, black sheep!'

On her accompanying each of these reproaches with a threatening stamp of the foot, the wretched creature protested with a whine.

'Pay five shillings for you indeed!' Miss Wren proceeded; 'how many hours do you suppose it costs me to earn five shillings, you infamous boy?—Don't cry like that, or I'll throw a doll at you. Pay five shillings fine for you indeed. Fine in more ways than one, I think! I'd give the dustman five shillings, to carry you off in the dust cart.'

'No, no,' pleaded the absurd creature. 'Please!'

'He's enough to break his mother's heart, is this boy,' said Miss Wren, half appealing to Eugene. 'I wish I had never brought him up. He'd be sharper than a serpent's tooth, if he wasn't as dull as ditch water. Look at him. There's a pretty object for a parent's eyes!'

Assuredly, in his worse than swinish state (for swine at least fatten on their guzzling, and make themselves good to eat), he was a pretty object for any eyes.

'A muddling and a swipey old child,' said Miss Wren, rating him with great severity, 'fit for nothing but to be preserved in the liquor that destroys him, and put in a great glass bottle as a sight for other swipey children of his own pattern,—if he has no consideration for his liver, has he none for his mother?'

'Yes. Deration, oh don't!' cried the subject of these angry remarks.

'Oh don't and oh don't,' pursued Miss Wren. 'It's oh do and oh do. And why do you?'

'Won't do so any more. Won't indeed. Pray!'

'There!' said Miss Wren, covering her eyes with her hand. 'I can't bear to look at you. Go up stairs and get me my bonnet and shawl. Make yourself useful in some way, bad boy, and let me have your room instead of your company, for one half minute.'

Obeying her, he shambled out, and Eugene Wrayburn saw the tears exude from between the little creature's fingers as she kept her hand before her eyes. He was sorry, but his sympathy did not move his carelessness to do anything but feel sorry.

'I'm going to the Italian Opera to try on,' said Miss Wren, taking away her hand after a little while, and laughing satirically to hide that she had been crying; 'I must see your back before I go, Mr Wrayburn. Let me first tell you, once for all, that it's of no use your paying visits to me. You wouldn't get what you want, of me, no, not if you brought pincers with you to tear it out.'

'Are you so obstinate on the subject of a doll's dress for my godchild?'

'Ah!' returned Miss Wren with a hitch of her chin, 'I am so obstinate. And of course it's on the subject of a doll's dress—or ADdress—whichever you like. Get along and give it up!'

Her degraded charge had come back, and was standing behind her with the bonnet and shawl.

'Give 'em to me and get back into your corner, you naughty old thing!' said Miss Wren, as she turned and espied him. 'No, no, I won't have your help. Go into your corner, this minute!'

The miserable man, feebly rubbing the back of his faltering hands downward from the wrists, shuffled on to his post of disgrace; but not without a curious glance at Eugene in passing him, accompanied with what seemed as if it might have been an action of his elbow, if any action of any limb or joint he had, would have answered truly to his will. Taking no more particular notice of him than instinctively falling away from the disagreeable contact, Eugene, with a lazy compliment or so to Miss Wren, begged leave to light his cigar, and departed.

'Now you prodigal old son,' said Jenny, shaking her head and her emphatic little forefinger at her burden, 'you sit there till I come back. You dare to move out of your corner for a single instant while I'm gone, and I'll know the reason why.'

With this admonition, she blew her work candles out, leaving him to the light of the fire, and, taking her big door-key in her pocket and her crutch-stick in her hand, marched off.

Eugene lounged slowly towards the Temple, smoking his cigar, but saw no more of the dolls' dressmaker, through the accident of their taking opposite sides of the street. He lounged along moodily, and stopped at Charing Cross to look about him, with as little interest in the crowd as any man might take, and was lounging on again, when a most unexpected object caught his eyes. No less an object than Jenny Wren's bad boy trying to make up his mind to cross the road.

A more ridiculous and feeble spectacle than this tottering wretch making unsteady sallies into the roadway, and as often staggering back again, oppressed by terrors of vehicles that were a long way off or were nowhere, the streets could not have shown. Over and over again, when the course was perfectly clear, he set out, got half way, described a loop, turned, and went back again; when he might have crossed and re-crossed half a dozen times. Then, he would stand shivering on the edge of the pavement, looking up the street and looking down, while scores of people jostled him, and crossed, and went on. Stimulated in course of time by the sight of so many successes, he would make another sally, make another loop, would all but have his foot on the opposite pavement, would see or imagine something coming, and would stagger back again. There, he would stand making spasmodic preparations as if for a great leap, and at last would decide on a start at precisely the wrong moment, and would be roared at by drivers, and would shrink back once more, and stand in the old spot shivering, with the whole of the proceedings to go through again.

'It strikes me,' remarked Eugene coolly, after watching him for some minutes, 'that my friend is likely to be rather behind time if he has any appointment on hand.' With which remark he strolled on, and took no further thought of him.

Lightwood was at home when he got to the Chambers, and had dined alone there. Eugene drew a chair to the fire by which he was having his wine and reading the evening paper, and brought a glass, and filled it for good fellowship's sake.

'My dear Mortimer, you are the express picture of contented industry, reposing (on credit) after the virtuous labours of the day.'

'My dear Eugene, you are the express picture of discontented idleness not reposing at all. Where have you been?'

'I have been,' replied Wrayburn, '—about town. I have turned up at the present juncture, with the intention of consulting my highly intelligent and respected solicitor on the position of my affairs.'

'Your highly intelligent and respect solicitor is of opinion that your affairs are in a bad way, Eugene.'

'Though whether,' said Eugene thoughtfully, 'that can be intelligently said, now, of the affairs of a client who has nothing to lose and who cannot possibly be made to pay, may be open to question.'

'You have fallen into the hands of the Jews, Eugene.'

'My dear boy,' returned the debtor, very composedly taking up his glass, 'having previously fallen into the hands of some of the Christians, I can bear it with philosophy.'

'I have had an interview to-day, Eugene, with a Jew, who seems determined to press us hard. Quite a Shylock, and quite a Patriarch. A picturesque grey-headed and grey-bearded old Jew, in a shovel-hat and gaberdine.'

'Not,' said Eugene, pausing in setting down his glass, 'surely not my worthy friend Mr Aaron?'

'He calls himself Mr Riah.'

'By-the-by,' said Eugene, 'it comes into my mind that—no doubt with an instinctive desire to receive him into the bosom of our Church—I gave him the name of Aaron!'

'Eugene, Eugene,' returned Lightwood, 'you are more ridiculous than usual. Say what you mean.'

'Merely, my dear fellow, that I have the honour and pleasure of a speaking acquaintance with such a Patriarch as you describe, and that I address him as Mr Aaron, because it appears to me Hebraic, expressive, appropriate, and complimentary. Notwithstanding which strong reasons for its being his name, it may not be his name.'

'I believe you are the absurdest man on the face of the earth,' said Lightwood, laughing.

'Not at all, I assure you. Did he mention that he knew me?'

'He did not. He only said of you that he expected to be paid by you.'

'Which looks,' remarked Eugene with much gravity, 'like NOT knowing me. I hope it may not be my worthy friend Mr Aaron, for, to tell you the truth, Mortimer, I doubt he may have a prepossession against me. I strongly suspect him of having had a hand in spiriting away Lizzie.'

'Everything,' returned Lightwood impatiently, 'seems, by a fatality, to bring us round to Lizzie. "About town" meant about Lizzie, just now, Eugene.'

'My solicitor, do you know,' observed Eugene, turning round to the furniture, 'is a man of infinite discernment!'

'Did it not, Eugene?'

'Yes it did, Mortimer.'

'And yet, Eugene, you know you do not really care for her.'

Eugene Wrayburn rose, and put his hands in his pockets, and stood with a foot on the fender, indolently rocking his body and looking at the fire. After a prolonged pause, he replied: 'I don't know that. I must ask you not to say that, as if we took it for granted.'

'But if you do care for her, so much the more should you leave her to herself.'

Having again paused as before, Eugene said: 'I don't know that, either. But tell me. Did you ever see me take so much trouble about anything, as about this disappearance of hers? I ask, for information.'

'My dear Eugene, I wish I ever had!'

'Then you have not? Just so. You confirm my own impression. Does that look as if I cared for her? I ask, for information.'

'I asked YOU for information, Eugene,' said Mortimer reproachfully.

'Dear boy, I know it, but I can't give it. I thirst for information. What do I mean? If my taking so much trouble to recover her does not mean that I care for her, what does it mean? "If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper, where's the peck," &c.?'

Though he said this gaily, he said it with a perplexed and inquisitive face, as if he actually did not know what to make of himself. 'Look on to the end—' Lightwood was beginning to remonstrate, when he caught at the words:

'Ah! See now! That's exactly what I am incapable of doing. How very acute you are, Mortimer, in finding my weak place! When we were at school together, I got up my lessons at the last moment, day by day and bit by bit; now we are out in life together, I get up my lessons in the same way. In the present task I have not got beyond this:—I am bent on finding Lizzie, and I mean to find her, and I will take any means of finding her that offer themselves. Fair means or foul means, are all alike to me. I ask you—for information—what does that mean? When I have found her I may ask you—also for information—what do I mean now? But it would be premature in this stage, and it's not the character of my mind.'

Lightwood was shaking his head over the air with which his friend held forth thus—an air so whimsically open and argumentative as almost to deprive what he said of the appearance of evasion—when a shuffling was heard at the outer door, and then an undecided knock, as though some hand were groping for the knocker. 'The frolicsome youth of the neighbourhood,' said Eugene, 'whom I should be delighted to pitch from this elevation into the churchyard below, without any intermediate ceremonies, have probably turned the lamp out. I am on duty to-night, and will see to the door.'

His friend had barely had time to recall the unprecedented gleam of determination with which he had spoken of finding this girl, and which had faded out of him with the breath of the spoken words, when Eugene came back, ushering in a most disgraceful shadow of a man, shaking from head to foot, and clothed in shabby grease and smear.

'This interesting gentleman,' said Eugene, 'is the son—the occasionally rather trying son, for he has his failings—of a lady of my acquaintance. My dear Mortimer—Mr Dolls.' Eugene had no idea what his name was, knowing the little dressmaker's to be assumed, but presented him with easy confidence under the first appellation that his associations suggested.

'I gather, my dear Mortimer,' pursued Eugene, as Lightwood stared at the obscene visitor, 'from the manner of Mr Dolls—which is occasionally complicated—that he desires to make some communication to me. I have mentioned to Mr Dolls that you and I are on terms of confidence, and have requested Mr Dolls to develop his views here.'

The wretched object being much embarrassed by holding what remained of his hat, Eugene airily tossed it to the door, and put him down in a chair.

'It will be necessary, I think,' he observed, 'to wind up Mr Dolls, before anything to any mortal purpose can be got out of him. Brandy, Mr Dolls, or —?'

'Threepenn'orth Rum,' said Mr Dolls.

A judiciously small quantity of the spirit was given him in a wine-glass, and he began to convey it to his mouth, with all kinds of falterings and gyrations on the road.

'The nerves of Mr Dolls,' remarked Eugene to Lightwood, 'are considerably unstrung. And I deem it on the whole expedient to fumigate Mr Dolls.'

He took the shovel from the grate, sprinkled a few live ashes on it, and from a box on the chimney-piece took a few pastiles, which he set upon them; then, with great composure began placidly waving the shovel in front of Mr Dolls, to cut him off from his company.

'Lord bless my soul, Eugene!' cried Lightwood, laughing again, 'what a mad fellow you are! Why does this creature come to see you?'

'We shall hear,' said Wrayburn, very observant of his face withal. 'Now then. Speak out. Don't be afraid. State your business, Dolls.'

'Mist Wrayburn!' said the visitor, thickly and huskily. '—'TIS Mist Wrayburn, ain't?' With a stupid stare.

'Of course it is. Look at me. What do you want?'

Mr Dolls collapsed in his chair, and faintly said 'Threepenn'orth Rum.'

'Will you do me the favour, my dear Mortimer, to wind up Mr Dolls again?' said Eugene. 'I am occupied with the fumigation.'

A similar quantity was poured into his glass, and he got it to his lips by similar circuitous ways. Having drunk it, Mr Dolls, with an evident fear of running down again unless he made haste, proceeded to business.

'Mist Wrayburn. Tried to nudge you, but you wouldn't. You want that drection. You want t'know where she lives. DO you Mist Wrayburn?'

With a glance at his friend, Eugene replied to the question sternly, 'I do.'

'I am er man,' said Mr Dolls, trying to smite himself on the breast, but bringing his hand to bear upon the vicinity of his eye, 'er do it. I am er man er do it.'

'What are you the man to do?' demanded Eugene, still sternly.

'Er give up that drection.'

'Have you got it?'

With a most laborious attempt at pride and dignity, Mr Dolls rolled his head for some time, awakening the highest expectations, and then answered, as if it were the happiest point that could possibly be expected of him: 'No.'

'What do you mean then?'

Mr Dolls, collapsing in the drowsiest manner after his late intellectual triumph, replied: 'Threepenn'orth Rum.'

'Wind him up again, my dear Mortimer,' said Wrayburn; 'wind him up again.'

'Eugene, Eugene,' urged Lightwood in a low voice, as he complied, 'can you stoop to the use of such an instrument as this?'

'I said,' was the reply, made with that former gleam of determination, 'that I would find her out by any means, fair or foul. These are foul, and I'll take them—if I am not first tempted to break the head of Mr Dolls with the fumigator. Can you get the direction? Do you mean that? Speak! If that's what you have come for, say how much you want.'

'Ten shillings—Threepenn'orths Rum,' said Mr Dolls.

'You shall have it.'

'Fifteen shillings—Threepenn'orths Rum,' said Mr Dolls, making an attempt to stiffen himself.

'You shall have it. Stop at that. How will you get the direction you talk of?'

'I am er man,' said Mr Dolls, with majesty, 'er get it, sir.'

'How will you get it, I ask you?'

'I am ill-used vidual,' said Mr Dolls. 'Blown up morning t'night. Called names. She makes Mint money, sir, and never stands Threepenn'orth Rum.'

'Get on,' rejoined Eugene, tapping his palsied head with the fire-shovel, as it sank on his breast. 'What comes next?'

Making a dignified attempt to gather himself together, but, as it were, dropping half a dozen pieces of himself while he tried in vain to pick up one, Mr Dolls, swaying his head from side to side, regarded his questioner with what he supposed to be a haughty smile and a scornful glance.

'She looks upon me as mere child, sir. I am NOT mere child, sir. Man. Man talent. Lerrers pass betwixt 'em. Postman lerrers. Easy for man talent er get drection, as get his own drection.'

'Get it then,' said Eugene; adding very heartily under his breath, '—You Brute! Get it, and bring it here to me, and earn the money for sixty threepenn'orths of rum, and drink them all, one a top of another, and drink yourself dead with all possible expedition.' The latter clauses of these special instructions he addressed to the fire, as he gave it back the ashes he had taken from it, and replaced the shovel.

Mr Dolls now struck out the highly unexpected discovery that he had been insulted by Lightwood, and stated his desire to 'have it out with him' on the spot, and defied him to come on, upon the liberal terms of a sovereign to a halfpenny. Mr Dolls then fell a crying, and then exhibited a tendency to fall asleep. This last manifestation as by far the most alarming, by reason of its threatening his prolonged stay on the premises, necessitated vigorous measures. Eugene picked up his worn-out hat with the tongs, clapped it on his head, and, taking him by the collar—all this at arm's length—conducted him down stairs and out of the precincts into Fleet Street. There, he turned his face westward, and left him.

When he got back, Lightwood was standing over the fire, brooding in a sufficiently low-spirited manner.

'I'll wash my hands of Mr Dolls physically—' said Eugene, 'and be with you again directly, Mortimer.'

'I would much prefer,' retorted Mortimer, 'your washing your hands of Mr Dolls, morally, Eugene.'

'So would I,' said Eugene; 'but you see, dear boy, I can't do without him.'

In a minute or two he resumed his chair, as perfectly unconcerned as usual, and rallied his friend on having so narrowly escaped the prowess of their muscular visitor.

'I can't be amused on this theme,' said Mortimer, restlessly. 'You can make almost any theme amusing to me, Eugene, but not this.'

'Well!' cried Eugene, 'I am a little ashamed of it myself, and therefore let us change the subject.'

'It is so deplorably underhanded,' said Mortimer. 'It is so unworthy of you, this setting on of such a shameful scout.'

'We have changed the subject!' exclaimed Eugene, airily. 'We have found a new one in that word, scout. Don't be like Patience on a mantelpiece frowning at Dolls, but sit down, and I'll tell you something that you really will find amusing. Take a cigar. Look at this of mine. I light it—draw one puff—breathe the smoke out—there it goes—it's Dolls!—it's gone—and being gone you are a man again.'

'Your subject,' said Mortimer, after lighting a cigar, and comforting himself with a whiff or two, 'was scouts, Eugene.'

'Exactly. Isn't it droll that I never go out after dark, but I find myself attended, always by one scout, and often by two?'

Lightwood took his cigar from his lips in surprise, and looked at his friend, as if with a latent suspicion that there must be a jest or hidden meaning in his words.

'On my honour, no,' said Wrayburn, answering the look and smiling carelessly; 'I don't wonder at your supposing so, but on my honour, no. I say what I mean. I never go out after dark, but I find myself in the ludicrous situation of being followed and observed at a distance, always by one scout, and often by two.'

'Are you sure, Eugene?'

'Sure? My dear boy, they are always the same.'

'But there's no process out against you. The Jews only threaten. They have done nothing. Besides, they know where to find you, and I represent you. Why take the trouble?'

'Observe the legal mind!' remarked Eugene, turning round to the furniture again, with an air of indolent rapture. 'Observe the dyer's hand, assimilating itself to what it works in,—or would work in, if anybody would give it anything to do. Respected solicitor, it's not that. The schoolmaster's abroad.'

'The schoolmaster?'

'Ay! Sometimes the schoolmaster and the pupil are both abroad. Why, how soon you rust in my absence! You don't understand yet? Those fellows who were here one night. They are the scouts I speak of, as doing me the honour to attend me after dark.'

'How long has this been going on?' asked Lightwood, opposing a serious face to the laugh of his friend.

'I apprehend it has been going on, ever since a certain person went off. Probably, it had been going on some little time before I noticed it: which would bring it to about that time.'

'Do you think they suppose you to have inveigled her away?'

'My dear Mortimer, you know the absorbing nature of my professional occupations; I really have not had leisure to think about it.'

'Have you asked them what they want? Have you objected?'

'Why should I ask them what they want, dear fellow, when I am indifferent what they want? Why should I express objection, when I don't object?'

'You are in your most reckless mood. But you called the situation just now, a ludicrous one; and most men object to that, even those who are utterly indifferent to everything else.'

'You charm me, Mortimer, with your reading of my weaknesses. (By-the-by, that very word, Reading, in its critical use, always charms me. An actress's Reading of a chambermaid, a dancer's Reading of a hornpipe, a singer's Reading of a song, a marine painter's Reading of the sea, the kettle-drum's Reading of an instrumental passage, are phrases ever youthful and delightful.) I was mentioning your perception of my weaknesses. I own to the weakness of objecting to occupy a ludicrous position, and therefore I transfer the position to the scouts.'

'I wish, Eugene, you would speak a little more soberly and plainly, if it were only out of consideration for my feeling less at ease than you do.'

'Then soberly and plainly, Mortimer, I goad the schoolmaster to madness. I make the schoolmaster so ridiculous, and so aware of being made ridiculous, that I see him chafe and fret at every pore when we cross one another. The amiable occupation has been the solace of my life, since I was baulked in the manner unnecessary to recall. I have derived inexpressible comfort from it. I do it thus: I stroll out after dark, stroll a little way, look in at a window and furtively look out for the schoolmaster. Sooner or later, I perceive the schoolmaster on the watch; sometimes accompanied by his hopeful pupil; oftener, pupil-less. Having made sure of his watching me, I tempt him on, all over London. One night I go east, another night north, in a few nights I go all round the compass. Sometimes, I walk; sometimes, I proceed in cabs, draining the pocket of the schoolmaster who then follows in cabs. I study and get up abstruse No Thoroughfares in the course of the day. With Venetian mystery I seek those No Thoroughfares at night, glide into them by means of dark courts, tempt the schoolmaster to follow, turn suddenly, and catch him before he can retreat. Then we face one another, and I pass him as unaware of his existence, and he undergoes grinding torments. Similarly, I walk at a great pace down a short street, rapidly turn the corner, and, getting out of his view, as rapidly turn back. I catch him coming on post, again pass him as unaware of his existence, and again he undergoes grinding torments. Night after night his disappointment is acute, but hope springs eternal in the scholastic breast, and he follows me again to-morrow. Thus I enjoy the pleasures of the chase, and derive great benefit from the healthful exercise. When I do not enjoy the pleasures of the chase, for anything I know he watches at the Temple Gate all night.'

'This is an extraordinary story,' observed Lightwood, who had heard it out with serious attention. 'I don't like it.'

'You are a little hipped, dear fellow,' said Eugene; 'you have been too sedentary. Come and enjoy the pleasures of the chase.'

'Do you mean that you believe he is watching now?'

'I have not the slightest doubt he is.'

'Have you seen him to-night?'

'I forgot to look for him when I was last out,' returned Eugene with the calmest indifference; 'but I dare say he was there. Come! Be a British sportsman and enjoy the pleasures of the chase. It will do you good.'

Lightwood hesitated; but, yielding to his curiosity, rose.

'Bravo!' cried Eugene, rising too. 'Or, if Yoicks would be in better keeping, consider that I said Yoicks. Look to your feet, Mortimer, for we shall try your boots. When you are ready, I am—need I say with a Hey Ho Chivey, and likewise with a Hark Forward, Hark Forward, Tantivy?'

'Will nothing make you serious?' said Mortimer, laughing through his gravity.

'I am always serious, but just now I am a little excited by the glorious fact that a southerly wind and a cloudy sky proclaim a hunting evening. Ready? So. We turn out the lamp and shut the door, and take the field.'

As the two friends passed out of the Temple into the public street, Eugene demanded with a show of courteous patronage in which direction Mortimer would you like the run to be? 'There is a rather difficult country about Bethnal Green,' said Eugene, 'and we have not taken in that direction lately. What is your opinion of Bethnal Green?' Mortimer assented to Bethnal Green, and they turned eastward. 'Now, when we come to St Paul's churchyard,' pursued Eugene, 'we'll loiter artfully, and I'll show you the schoolmaster.' But, they both saw him, before they got there; alone, and stealing after them in the shadow of the houses, on the opposite side of the way.

'Get your wind,' said Eugene, 'for I am off directly. Does it occur to you that the boys of Merry England will begin to deteriorate in an educational light, if this lasts long? The schoolmaster can't attend to me and the boys too. Got your wind? I am off!'

At what a rate he went, to breathe the schoolmaster; and how he then lounged and loitered, to put his patience to another kind of wear; what preposterous ways he took, with no other object on earth than to disappoint and punish him; and how he wore him out by every piece of ingenuity that his eccentric humour could devise; all this Lightwood noted, with a feeling of astonishment that so careless a man could be so wary, and that so idle a man could take so much trouble. At last, far on in the third hour of the pleasures of the chase, when he had brought the poor dogging wretch round again into the City, he twisted Mortimer up a few dark entries, twisted him into a little square court, twisted him sharp round again, and they almost ran against Bradley Headstone.

'And you see, as I was saying, Mortimer,' remarked Eugene aloud with the utmost coolness, as though there were no one within hearing by themselves: 'and you see, as I was saying—undergoing grinding torments.'

It was not too strong a phrase for the occasion. Looking like the hunted and not the hunter, baffled, worn, with the exhaustion of deferred hope and consuming hate and anger in his face, white-lipped, wild-eyed, draggle-haired, seamed with jealousy and anger, and torturing himself with the conviction that he showed it all and they exulted in it, he went by them in the dark, like a haggard head suspended in the air: so completely did the force of his expression cancel his figure.

Mortimer Lightwood was not an extraordinarily impressible man, but this face impressed him. He spoke of it more than once on the remainder of the way home, and more than once when they got home.

They had been abed in their respective rooms two or three hours, when Eugene was partly awakened by hearing a footstep going about, and was fully awakened by seeing Lightwood standing at his bedside.

'Nothing wrong, Mortimer?'

'No.'

'What fancy takes you, then, for walking about in the night?'

'I am horribly wakeful.'

'How comes that about, I wonder!'

'Eugene, I cannot lose sight of that fellow's face.'

'Odd!' said Eugene with a light laugh, 'I can.' And turned over, and fell asleep again.

Chapter 11

IN THE DARK

There was no sleep for Bradley Headstone on that night when Eugene Wrayburn turned so easily in his bed; there was no sleep for little Miss Peecher. Bradley consumed the lonely hours, and consumed himself in haunting the spot where his careless rival lay a dreaming; little Miss Peecher wore them away in listening for the return home of the master of her heart, and in sorrowfully presaging that much was amiss with him. Yet more was amiss with him than Miss Peecher's simply arranged little work-box of thoughts, fitted with no gloomy and dark recesses, could hold. For, the state of the man was murderous.

The state of the man was murderous, and he knew it. More; he irritated it, with a kind of perverse pleasure akin to that which a sick man sometimes has in irritating a wound upon his body. Tied up all day with his disciplined show upon him, subdued to the performance of his routine of educational tricks, encircled by a gabbling crowd, he broke loose at night like an ill-tamed wild animal. Under his daily restraint, it was his compensation, not his trouble, to give a glance towards his state at night, and to the freedom of its being indulged. If great criminals told the truth—which, being great criminals, they do not—they would very rarely tell of their struggles against the crime. Their struggles are towards it. They buffet with opposing waves, to gain the bloody shore, not to recede from it. This man perfectly comprehended that he hated his rival with his strongest and worst forces, and that if he tracked him to Lizzie Hexam, his so doing would never serve himself with her, or serve her. All his pains were taken, to the end that he might incense himself with the sight of the detested figure in her company and favour, in her place of concealment. And he knew as well what act of his would follow if he did, as he knew that his mother had borne him. Granted, that he may not have held it necessary to make express mention to himself of the one familiar truth any more than of the other.

He knew equally well that he fed his wrath and hatred, and that he accumulated provocation and self-justification, by being made the nightly sport of the reckless and insolent Eugene. Knowing all this,—and still always going on with infinite endurance, pains, and perseverance, could his dark soul doubt whither he went?

Baffled, exasperated, and weary, he lingered opposite the Temple gate when it closed on Wrayburn and Lightwood, debating with himself should he go home for that time or should he watch longer. Possessed in his jealousy by the fixed idea that Wrayburn was in the secret, if it were not altogether of his contriving, Bradley was as confident of getting the better of him at last by sullenly sticking to him, as he would have been—and often had been—of mastering any piece of study in the way of his vocation, by the like slow persistent process. A man of rapid passions and sluggish intelligence, it had served him often and should serve him again.

The suspicion crossed him as he rested in a doorway with his eyes upon the Temple gate, that perhaps she was even concealed in that set of Chambers. It would furnish another reason for Wrayburn's purposeless walks, and it might be. He thought of it and thought of it, until he resolved to steal up the stairs, if the gatekeeper would let him through, and listen. So, the haggard head suspended in the air flitted across the road, like the spectre of one of the many heads erst hoisted upon neighbouring Temple Bar, and stopped before the watchman.

The watchman looked at it, and asked: 'Who for?'

'Mr Wrayburn.'

'It's very late.'

'He came back with Mr Lightwood, I know, near upon two hours ago. But if he has gone to bed, I'll put a paper in his letter-box. I am expected.'

The watchman said no more, but opened the gate, though rather doubtfully. Seeing, however, that the visitor went straight and fast in the right direction, he seemed satisfied.

The haggard head floated up the dark staircase, and softly descended nearer to the floor outside the outer door of the chambers. The doors of the rooms within, appeared to be standing open. There were rays of candlelight from one of them, and there was the sound of a footstep going about. There were two voices. The words they uttered were not distinguishable, but they were both the voices of men. In a few moments the voices were silent, and there was no sound of footstep, and the inner light went out. If Lightwood could have seen the face which kept him awake, staring and listening in the darkness outside the door as he spoke of it, he might have been less disposed to sleep, through the remainder of the night.

'Not there,' said Bradley; 'but she might have been.' The head arose to its former height from the ground, floated down the stair-case again, and passed on to the gate. A man was standing there, in parley with the watchman.

'Oh!' said the watchman. 'Here he is!'

Perceiving himself to be the antecedent, Bradley looked from the watchman to the man.

'This man is leaving a letter for Mr Lightwood,' the watchman explained, showing it in his hand; 'and I was mentioning that a person had just gone up to Mr Lightwood's chambers. It might be the same business perhaps?'

'No,' said Bradley, glancing at the man, who was a stranger to him.

'No,' the man assented in a surly way; 'my letter—it's wrote by my daughter, but it's mine—is about my business, and my business ain't nobody else's business.'

As Bradley passed out at the gate with an undecided foot, he heard it shut behind him, and heard the footstep of the man coming after him.

''Scuse me,' said the man, who appeared to have been drinking and rather stumbled at him than touched him, to attract his attention: 'but might you be acquainted with the T'other Governor?'

'With whom?' asked Bradley.

'With,' returned the man, pointing backward over his right shoulder with his right thumb, 'the T'other Governor?'

'I don't know what you mean.'

'Why look here,' hooking his proposition on his left-hand fingers with the forefinger of his right. 'There's two Governors, ain't there? One and one, two—Lawyer Lightwood, my first finger, he's one, ain't he? Well; might you be acquainted with my middle finger, the T'other?'

'I know quite as much of him,' said Bradley, with a frown and a distant look before him, 'as I want to know.'

'Hooroar!' cried the man. 'Hooroar T'other t'other Governor. Hooroar T'otherest Governor! I am of your way of thinkin'.'

'Don't make such a noise at this dead hour of the night. What are you talking about?'

'Look here, T'otherest Governor,' replied the man, becoming hoarsely confidential. 'The T'other Governor he's always joked his jokes agin me, owing, as I believe, to my being a honest man as gets my living by the sweat of my brow. Which he ain't, and he don't.'

'What is that to me?'

'T'otherest Governor,' returned the man in a tone of injured innocence, 'if you don't care to hear no more, don't hear no more. You begun it. You said, and likeways showed pretty plain, as you warn't by no means friendly to him. But I don't seek to force my company nor yet my opinions on no man. I am a honest man, that's what I am. Put me in the dock anywhere—I don't care where—and I says, "My Lord, I am a honest man." Put me in the witness-box anywhere—I don't care where—and I says the same to his lordship, and I kisses the book. I don't kiss my coat-cuff; I kisses the book.'

It was not so much in deference to these strong testimonials to character, as in his restless casting about for any way or help towards the discovery on which he was concentrated, that Bradley Headstone replied: 'You needn't take offence. I didn't mean to stop you. You were too—loud in the open street; that was all.'

''Totherest Governor,' replied Mr Riderhood, mollified and mysterious, 'I know wot it is to be loud, and I know wot it is to be soft. Nat'rally I do. It would be a wonder if I did not, being by the Chris'en name of Roger, which took it arter my own father, which took it from his own father, though which of our fam'ly fust took it nat'ral I will not in any ways mislead you by undertakin' to say. And wishing that your elth may be better than your looks, which your inside must be bad indeed if it's on the footing of your out.'

Startled by the implication that his face revealed too much of his mind, Bradley made an effort to clear his brow. It might be worth knowing what this strange man's business was with Lightwood, or Wrayburn, or both, at such an unseasonable hour. He set himself to find out, for the man might prove to be a messenger between those two.

'You call at the Temple late,' he remarked, with a lumbering show of ease.

'Wish I may die,' cried Mr Riderhood, with a hoarse laugh, 'if I warn't a goin' to say the self-same words to you, T'otherest Governor!'

'It chanced so with me,' said Bradley, looking disconcertedly about him.

'And it chanced so with me,' said Riderhood. 'But I don't mind telling you how. Why should I mind telling you? I'm a Deputy Lock-keeper up the river, and I was off duty yes'day, and I shall be on to-morrow.'

'Yes?'

'Yes, and I come to London to look arter my private affairs. My private affairs is to get appinted to the Lock as reg'lar keeper at fust hand, and to have the law of a busted B'low-Bridge steamer which drownded of me. I ain't a goin' to be drownded and not paid for it!'

Bradley looked at him, as though he were claiming to be a Ghost.

'The steamer,' said Mr Riderhood, obstinately, 'run me down and drownded of me. Interference on the part of other parties brought me round; but I never asked 'em to bring me round, nor yet the steamer never asked 'em to it. I mean to be paid for the life as the steamer took.'

'Was that your business at Mr Lightwood's chambers in the middle of the night?' asked Bradley, eyeing him with distrust.

'That and to get a writing to be fust-hand Lock Keeper. A recommendation in writing being looked for, who else ought to give it to me? As I says in the letter in my daughter's hand, with my mark put to it to make it good in law, Who but you, Lawyer Lightwood, ought to hand over this here stifficate, and who but you ought to go in for damages on my account agin the Steamer? For (as I says under my mark) I have had trouble enough along of you and your friend. If you, Lawyer Lightwood, had backed me good and true, and if the T'other Governor had took me down correct (I says under my mark), I should have been worth money at the present time, instead of having a barge-load of bad names chucked at me, and being forced to eat my words, which is a unsatisfying sort of food wotever a man's appetite! And when you mention the middle of the night, T'otherest Governor,' growled Mr Riderhood, winding up his monotonous summary of his wrongs, 'throw your eye on this here bundle under my arm, and bear in mind that I'm a walking back to my Lock, and that the Temple laid upon my line of road.'

Bradley Headstone's face had changed during this latter recital, and he had observed the speaker with a more sustained attention.

'Do you know,' said he, after a pause, during which they walked on side by side, 'that I believe I could tell you your name, if I tried?'

'Prove your opinion,' was the answer, accompanied with a stop and a stare. 'Try.'

'Your name is Riderhood.'

'I'm blest if it ain't,' returned that gentleman. 'But I don't know your'n.'

'That's quite another thing,' said Bradley. 'I never supposed you did.'

As Bradley walked on meditating, the Rogue walked on at his side muttering. The purport of the muttering was: 'that Rogue Riderhood, by George! seemed to be made public property on, now, and that every man seemed to think himself free to handle his name as if it was a Street Pump.' The purport of the meditating was: 'Here is an instrument. Can I use it?'

They had walked along the Strand, and into Pall Mall, and had turned up-hill towards Hyde Park Corner; Bradley Headstone waiting on the pace and lead of Riderhood, and leaving him to indicate the course. So slow were the schoolmaster's thoughts, and so indistinct his purposes when they were but tributary to the one absorbing purpose or rather when, like dark trees under a stormy sky, they only lined the long vista at the end of which he saw those two figures of Wrayburn and Lizzie on which his eyes were fixed—that at least a good half-mile was traversed before he spoke again. Even then, it was only to ask:

'Where is your Lock?'

'Twenty mile and odd—call it five-and-twenty mile and odd, if you like—up stream,' was the sullen reply.

'How is it called?'

'Plashwater Weir Mill Lock.'

'Suppose I was to offer you five shillings; what then?'

'Why, then, I'd take it,' said Mr Riderhood.

The schoolmaster put his hand in his pocket, and produced two half-crowns, and placed them in Mr Riderhood's palm: who stopped at a convenient doorstep to ring them both, before acknowledging their receipt.

'There's one thing about you, T'otherest Governor,' said Riderhood, faring on again, 'as looks well and goes fur. You're a ready money man. Now;' when he had carefully pocketed the coins on that side of himself which was furthest from his new friend; 'what's this for?'

'For you.'

'Why, o' course I know THAT,' said Riderhood, as arguing something that was self-evident. 'O' course I know very well as no man in his right senses would suppose as anythink would make me give it up agin when I'd once got it. But what do you want for it?'

'I don't know that I want anything for it. Or if I do want anything for it, I don't know what it is.' Bradley gave this answer in a stolid, vacant, and self-communing manner, which Mr Riderhood found very extraordinary.

'You have no goodwill towards this Wrayburn,' said Bradley, coming to the name in a reluctant and forced way, as if he were dragged to it.

'No.'

'Neither have I.'

Riderhood nodded, and asked: 'Is it for that?'

'It's as much for that as anything else. It's something to be agreed with, on a subject that occupies so much of one's thoughts.'

'It don't agree with YOU,' returned Mr Riderhood, bluntly. 'No! It don't, T'otherest Governor, and it's no use a lookin' as if you wanted to make out that it did. I tell you it rankles in you. It rankles in you, rusts in you, and pisons you.'

'Say that it does so,' returned Bradley with quivering lips; 'is there no cause for it?'

'Cause enough, I'll bet a pound!' cried Mr Riderhood.

'Haven't you yourself declared that the fellow has heaped provocations, insults, and affronts on you, or something to that effect? He has done the same by me. He is made of venomous insults and affronts, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot. Are you so hopeful or so stupid, as not to know that he and the other will treat your application with contempt, and light their cigars with it?'

'I shouldn't wonder if they did, by George!' said Riderhood, turning angry.

'If they did! They will. Let me ask you a question. I know something more than your name about you; I knew something about Gaffer Hexam. When did you last set eyes upon his daughter?'

'When did I last set eyes upon his daughter, T'otherest Governor?' repeated Mr Riderhood, growing intentionally slower of comprehension as the other quickened in his speech.

'Yes. Not to speak to her. To see her—anywhere?'

The Rogue had got the clue he wanted, though he held it with a clumsy hand. Looking perplexedly at the passionate face, as if he were trying to work out a sum in his mind, he slowly answered:

'I ain't set eyes upon her—never once—not since the day of Gaffer's death.'

'You know her well, by sight?'

'I should think I did! No one better.'

'And you know him as well?'

'Who's him?' asked Riderhood, taking off his hat and rubbing his forehead, as he directed a dull look at his questioner.

'Curse the name! Is it so agreeable to you that you want to hear it again?'

'Oh! HIM!' said Riderhood, who had craftily worked the schoolmaster into this corner, that he might again take note of his face under its evil possession. 'I'd know HIM among a thousand.'

'Did you—' Bradley tried to ask it quietly; but, do what he might with his voice, he could not subdue his face;—'did you ever see them together?'

(The Rogue had got the clue in both hands now.)

'I see 'em together, T'otherest Governor, on the very day when Gaffer was towed ashore.'

Bradley could have hidden a reserved piece of information from the sharp eyes of a whole inquisitive class, but he could not veil from the eyes of the ignorant Riderhood the withheld question next in his breast. 'You shall put it plain if you want it answered,' thought the Rogue, doggedly; 'I ain't a-going a wolunteering.'

'Well! was he insolent to her too?' asked Bradley after a struggle. 'Or did he make a show of being kind to her?'

'He made a show of being most uncommon kind to her,' said Riderhood. 'By George! now I—'

His flying off at a tangent was indisputably natural. Bradley looked at him for the reason.

'Now I think of it,' said Mr Riderhood, evasively, for he was substituting those words for 'Now I see you so jealous,' which was the phrase really in his mind; 'P'r'aps he went and took me down wrong, a purpose, on account o' being sweet upon her!'

The baseness of confirming him in this suspicion or pretence of one (for he could not have really entertained it), was a line's breadth beyond the mark the schoolmaster had reached. The baseness of communing and intriguing with the fellow who would have set that stain upon her, and upon her brother too, was attained. The line's breadth further, lay beyond. He made no reply, but walked on with a lowering face.

What he might gain by this acquaintance, he could not work out in his slow and cumbrous thoughts. The man had an injury against the object of his hatred, and that was something; though it was less than he supposed, for there dwelt in the man no such deadly rage and resentment as burned in his own breast. The man knew her, and might by a fortunate chance see her, or hear of her; that was something, as enlisting one pair of eyes and ears the more. The man was a bad man, and willing enough to be in his pay. That was something, for his own state and purpose were as bad as bad could be, and he seemed to derive a vague support from the possession of a congenial instrument, though it might never be used.

Suddenly he stood still, and asked Riderhood point-blank if he knew where she was? Clearly, he did not know. He asked Riderhood if he would be willing, in case any intelligence of her, or of Wrayburn as seeking her or associating with her, should fall in his way, to communicate it if it were paid for? He would be very willing indeed. He was 'agin 'em both,' he said with an oath, and for why? 'Cause they had both stood betwixt him and his getting his living by the sweat of his brow.

'It will not be long then,' said Bradley Headstone, after some more discourse to this effect, 'before we see one another again. Here is the country road, and here is the day. Both have come upon me by surprise.'

'But, T'otherest Governor,' urged Mr Riderhood, 'I don't know where to find you.'

'It is of no consequence. I know where to find you, and I'll come to your Lock.'

'But, T'otherest Governor,' urged Mr Riderhood again, 'no luck never come yet of a dry acquaintance. Let's wet it, in a mouth-fill of rum and milk, T'otherest Governor.'

Bradley assenting, went with him into an early public-house, haunted by unsavoury smells of musty hay and stale straw, where returning carts, farmers' men, gaunt dogs, fowls of a beery breed, and certain human nightbirds fluttering home to roost, were solacing themselves after their several manners; and where not one of the nightbirds hovering about the sloppy bar failed to discern at a glance in the passion-wasted nightbird with respectable feathers, the worst nightbird of all.

An inspiration of affection for a half-drunken carter going his way led to Mr Riderhood's being elevated on a high heap of baskets on a waggon, and pursuing his journey recumbent on his back with his head on his bundle.

Bradley then turned to retrace his steps, and by-and-by struck off through little-traversed ways, and by-and-by reached school and home. Up came the sun to find him washed and brushed, methodically dressed in decent black coat and waistcoat, decent formal black tie, and pepper-and-salt pantaloons, with his decent silver watch in its pocket, and its decent hair-guard round his neck: a scholastic huntsman clad for the field, with his fresh pack yelping and barking around him.

Yet more really bewitched than the miserable creatures of the much-lamented times, who accused themselves of impossibilities under a contagion of horror and the strongly suggestive influences of Torture, he had been ridden hard by Evil Spirits in the night that was newly gone. He had been spurred and whipped and heavily sweated. If a record of the sport had usurped the places of the peaceful texts from Scripture on the wall, the most advanced of the scholars might have taken fright and run away from the master.

Chapter 12

MEANING MISCHIEF

Up came the sun, steaming all over London, and in its glorious impartiality even condescending to make prismatic sparkles in the whiskers of Mr Alfred Lammle as he sat at breakfast. In need of some brightening from without, was Mr Alfred Lammle, for he had the air of being dull enough within, and looked grievously discontented.

Mrs Alfred Lammle faced her lord. The happy pair of swindlers, with the comfortable tie between them that each had swindled the other, sat moodily observant of the tablecloth. Things looked so gloomy in the breakfast-room, albeit on the sunny side of Sackville Street, that any of the family tradespeople glancing through the blinds might have taken the hint to send in his account and press for it. But this, indeed, most of the family tradespeople had already done, without the hint.

'It seems to me,' said Mrs Lammle, 'that you have had no money at all, ever since we have been married.'

'What seems to you,' said Mr Lammle, 'to have been the case, may possibly have been the case. It doesn't matter.'

Was it the speciality of Mr and Mrs Lammle, or does it ever obtain with other loving couples? In these matrimonial dialogues they never addressed each other, but always some invisible presence that appeared to take a station about midway between them. Perhaps the skeleton in the cupboard comes out to be talked to, on such domestic occasions?

'I have never seen any money in the house,' said Mrs Lammle to the skeleton, 'except my own annuity. That I swear.'

'You needn't take the trouble of swearing,' said Mr Lammle to the skeleton; 'once more, it doesn't matter. You never turned your annuity to so good an account.'

'Good an account! In what way?' asked Mrs Lammle.

'In the way of getting credit, and living well,' said Mr Lammle. Perhaps the skeleton laughed scornfully on being intrusted with this question and this answer; certainly Mrs Lammle did, and Mr Lammle did.

'And what is to happen next?' asked Mrs Lammle of the skeleton.

'Smash is to happen next,' said Mr Lammle to the same authority.

After this, Mrs Lammle looked disdainfully at the skeleton—but without carrying the look on to Mr Lammle—and drooped her eyes. After that, Mr Lammle did exactly the same thing, and drooped HIS eyes. A servant then entering with toast, the skeleton retired into the closet, and shut itself up.

'Sophronia,' said Mr Lammle, when the servant had withdrawn. And then, very much louder: 'Sophronia!'

'Well?'

'Attend to me, if you please.' He eyed her sternly until she did attend, and then went on. 'I want to take counsel with you. Come, come; no more trifling. You know our league and covenant. We are to work together for our joint interest, and you are as knowing a hand as I am. We shouldn't be together, if you were not. What's to be done? We are hemmed into a corner. What shall we do?'

'Have you no scheme on foot that will bring in anything?'

Mr Lammle plunged into his whiskers for reflection, and came out hopeless: 'No; as adventurers we are obliged to play rash games for chances of high winnings, and there has been a run of luck against us.'

She was resuming, 'Have you nothing—' when he stopped her.

'We, Sophronia. We, we, we.'

'Have we nothing to sell?'

'Deuce a bit. I have given a Jew a bill of sale on this furniture, and he could take it to-morrow, to-day, now. He would have taken it before now, I believe, but for Fledgeby.'

'What has Fledgeby to do with him?'

'Knew him. Cautioned me against him before I got into his claws. Couldn't persuade him then, in behalf of somebody else.'

'Do you mean that Fledgeby has at all softened him towards you?'

'Us, Sophronia. Us, us, us.'

'Towards us?'

'I mean that the Jew has not yet done what he might have done, and that Fledgeby takes the credit of having got him to hold his hand.'

'Do you believe Fledgeby?'

'Sophronia, I never believe anybody. I never have, my dear, since I believed you. But it looks like it.'

Having given her this back-handed reminder of her mutinous observations to the skeleton, Mr Lammle rose from table—perhaps, the better to conceal a smile, and a white dint or two about his nose—and took a turn on the carpet and came to the hearthrug.

'If we could have packed the brute off with Georgiana;—but however; that's spilled milk.'

As Lammle, standing gathering up the skirts of his dressing-gown with his back to the fire, said this, looking down at his wife, she turned pale and looked down at the ground. With a sense of disloyalty upon her, and perhaps with a sense of personal danger—for she was afraid of him—even afraid of his hand and afraid of his foot, though he had never done her violence—she hastened to put herself right in his eyes.

'If we could borrow money, Alfred—'

'Beg money, borrow money, or steal money. It would be all one to us, Sophronia,' her husband struck in.

'—Then, we could weather this?'

'No doubt. To offer another original and undeniable remark, Sophronia, two and two make four.'

But, seeing that she was turning something in her mind, he gathered up the skirts of his dressing-gown again, and, tucking them under one arm, and collecting his ample whiskers in his other hand, kept his eye upon her, silently.

'It is natural, Alfred,' she said, looking up with some timidity into his face, 'to think in such an emergency of the richest people we know, and the simplest.'

'Just so, Sophronia.'

'The Boffins.'

'Just so, Sophronia.'

'Is there nothing to be done with them?'

'What is there to be done with them, Sophronia?'

She cast about in her thoughts again, and he kept his eye upon her as before.

'Of course I have repeatedly thought of the Boffins, Sophronia,' he resumed, after a fruitless silence; 'but I have seen my way to nothing. They are well guarded. That infernal Secretary stands between them and—people of merit.'

'If he could be got rid of?' said she, brightening a little, after more casting about.

'Take time, Sophronia,' observed her watchful husband, in a patronizing manner.

'If working him out of the way could be presented in the light of a service to Mr Boffin?'

'Take time, Sophronia.'

'We have remarked lately, Alfred, that the old man is turning very suspicious and distrustful.'

'Miserly too, my dear; which is far the most unpromising for us. Nevertheless, take time, Sophronia, take time.'

She took time and then said:

'Suppose we should address ourselves to that tendency in him of which we have made ourselves quite sure. Suppose my conscience—'

'And we know what a conscience it is, my soul. Yes?'

'Suppose my conscience should not allow me to keep to myself any longer what that upstart girl told me of the Secretary's having made a declaration to her. Suppose my conscience should oblige me to repeat it to Mr Boffin.'

'I rather like that,' said Lammle.

'Suppose I so repeated it to Mr Boffin, as to insinuate that my sensitive delicacy and honour—'

'Very good words, Sophronia.'

'—As to insinuate that OUR sensitive delicacy and honour,' she resumed, with a bitter stress upon the phrase, 'would not allow us to be silent parties to so mercenary and designing a speculation on the Secretary's part, and so gross a breach of faith towards his confiding employer. Suppose I had imparted my virtuous uneasiness to my excellent husband, and he had said, in his integrity, "Sophronia, you must immediately disclose this to Mr Boffin."'

'Once more, Sophronia,' observed Lammle, changing the leg on which he stood, 'I rather like that.'

'You remark that he is well guarded,' she pursued. 'I think so too. But if this should lead to his discharging his Secretary, there would be a weak place made.'

'Go on expounding, Sophronia. I begin to like this very much.'

'Having, in our unimpeachable rectitude, done him the service of opening his eyes to the treachery of the person he trusted, we shall have established a claim upon him and a confidence with him. Whether it can be made much of, or little of, we must wait—because we can't help it—to see. Probably we shall make the most of it that is to be made.'

'Probably,' said Lammle.

'Do you think it impossible,' she asked, in the same cold plotting way, 'that you might replace the Secretary?'

'Not impossible, Sophronia. It might be brought about. At any rate it might be skilfully led up to.'

She nodded her understanding of the hint, as she looked at the fire. 'Mr Lammle,' she said, musingly: not without a slight ironical touch: 'Mr Lammle would be so delighted to do anything in his power. Mr Lammle, himself a man of business as well as a capitalist. Mr Lammle, accustomed to be intrusted with the most delicate affairs. Mr Lammle, who has managed my own little fortune so admirably, but who, to be sure, began to make his reputation with the advantage of being a man of property, above temptation, and beyond suspicion.'

Mr Lammle smiled, and even patted her on the head. In his sinister relish of the scheme, as he stood above her, making it the subject of his cogitations, he seemed to have twice as much nose on his face as he had ever had in his life.

He stood pondering, and she sat looking at the dusty fire without moving, for some time. But, the moment he began to speak again she looked up with a wince and attended to him, as if that double-dealing of hers had been in her mind, and the fear were revived in her of his hand or his foot.

'It appears to me, Sophronia, that you have omitted one branch of the subject. Perhaps not, for women understand women. We might oust the girl herself?'

Mrs Lammle shook her head. 'She has an immensely strong hold upon them both, Alfred. Not to be compared with that of a paid secretary.

'But the dear child,' said Lammle, with a crooked smile, 'ought to have been open with her benefactor and benefactress. The darling love ought to have reposed unbounded confidence in her benefactor and benefactress.'

Sophronia shook her head again.

'Well! Women understand women,' said her husband, rather disappointed. 'I don't press it. It might be the making of our fortune to make a clean sweep of them both. With me to manage the property, and my wife to manage the people—Whew!'

Again shaking her head, she returned: 'They will never quarrel with the girl. They will never punish the girl. We must accept the girl, rely upon it.'

'Well!' cried Lammle, shrugging his shoulders, 'so be it: only always remember that we don't want her.'

'Now, the sole remaining question is,' said Mrs Lammle, 'when shall I begin?'

'You cannot begin too soon, Sophronia. As I have told you, the condition of our affairs is desperate, and may be blown upon at any moment.'

'I must secure Mr Boffin alone, Alfred. If his wife was present, she would throw oil upon the waters. I know I should fail to move him to an angry outburst, if his wife was there. And as to the girl herself—as I am going to betray her confidence, she is equally out of the question.'

'It wouldn't do to write for an appointment?' said Lammle.

'No, certainly not. They would wonder among themselves why I wrote, and I want to have him wholly unprepared.'

'Call, and ask to see him alone?' suggested Lammle.

'I would rather not do that either. Leave it to me. Spare me the little carriage for to-day, and for to-morrow (if I don't succeed to-day), and I'll lie in wait for him.'

It was barely settled when a manly form was seen to pass the windows and heard to knock and ring. 'Here's Fledgeby,' said Lammle. 'He admires you, and has a high opinion of you. I'll be out. Coax him to use his influence with the Jew. His name is Riah, of the House of Pubsey and Co.' Adding these words under his breath, lest he should be audible in the erect ears of Mr Fledgeby, through two keyholes and the hall, Lammle, making signals of discretion to his servant, went softly up stairs.

'Mr Fledgeby,' said Mrs Lammle, giving him a very gracious reception, 'so glad to see you! My poor dear Alfred, who is greatly worried just now about his affairs, went out rather early. Dear Mr Fledgeby, do sit down.'

Dear Mr Fledgeby did sit down, and satisfied himself (or, judging from the expression of his countenance, DISsatisfied himself) that nothing new had occurred in the way of whisker-sprout since he came round the corner from the Albany.

'Dear Mr Fledgeby, it was needless to mention to you that my poor dear Alfred is much worried about his affairs at present, for he has told me what a comfort you are to him in his temporary difficulties, and what a great service you have rendered him.'

'Oh!' said Mr Fledgeby.

'Yes,' said Mrs Lammle.

'I didn't know,' remarked Mr Fledgeby, trying a new part of his chair, 'but that Lammle might be reserved about his affairs.'

'Not to me,' said Mrs Lammle, with deep feeling.

'Oh, indeed?' said Fledgeby.

'Not to me, dear Mr Fledgeby. I am his wife.'

'Yes. I—I always understood so,' said Mr Fledgeby.

'And as the wife of Alfred, may I, dear Mr Fledgeby, wholly without his authority or knowledge, as I am sure your discernment will perceive, entreat you to continue that great service, and once more use your well-earned influence with Mr Riah for a little more indulgence? The name I have heard Alfred mention, tossing in his dreams, IS Riah; is it not?'

'The name of the Creditor is Riah,' said Mr Fledgeby, with a rather uncompromising accent on his noun-substantive. 'Saint Mary Axe. Pubsey and Co.'

'Oh yes!' exclaimed Mrs Lammle, clasping her hands with a certain gushing wildness. 'Pubsey and Co.!'

'The pleading of the feminine—' Mr Fledgeby began, and there stuck so long for a word to get on with, that Mrs Lammle offered him sweetly, 'Heart?'

'No,' said Mr Fledgeby, 'Gender—is ever what a man is bound to listen to, and I wish it rested with myself. But this Riah is a nasty one, Mrs Lammle; he really is.'

'Not if YOU speak to him, dear Mr Fledgeby.'

'Upon my soul and body he is!' said Fledgeby.

'Try. Try once more, dearest Mr Fledgeby. What is there you cannot do, if you will!'

'Thank you,' said Fledgeby, 'you're very complimentary to say so. I don't mind trying him again, at your request. But of course I can't answer for the consequences. Riah is a tough subject, and when he says he'll do a thing, he'll do it.'

'Exactly so,' cried Mrs Lammle, 'and when he says to you he'll wait, he'll wait.'

('She is a devilish clever woman,' thought Fledgeby. 'I didn't see that opening, but she spies it out and cuts into it as soon as it's made. ')

'In point of fact, dear Mr Fledgeby,' Mrs Lammle went on in a very interesting manner, 'not to affect concealment of Alfred's hopes, to you who are so much his friend, there is a distant break in his horizon.'

This figure of speech seemed rather mysterious to Fascination Fledgeby, who said, 'There's a what in his—eh?'

'Alfred, dear Mr Fledgeby, discussed with me this very morning before he went out, some prospects he has, which might entirely change the aspect of his present troubles.'

'Really?' said Fledgeby.

'O yes!' Here Mrs Lammle brought her handkerchief into play. 'And you know, dear Mr Fledgeby—you who study the human heart, and study the world—what an affliction it would be to lose position and to lose credit, when ability to tide over a very short time might save all appearances.'

'Oh!' said Fledgeby. 'Then you think, Mrs Lammle, that if Lammle got time, he wouldn't burst up?—To use an expression,' Mr Fledgeby apologetically explained, 'which is adopted in the Money Market.'

'Indeed yes. Truly, truly, yes!'

'That makes all the difference,' said Fledgeby. 'I'll make a point of seeing Riah at once.'

'Blessings on you, dearest Mr Fledgeby!'

'Not at all,' said Fledgeby. She gave him her hand. 'The hand,' said Mr Fledgeby, 'of a lovely and superior-minded female is ever the repayment of a—'

'Noble action!' said Mrs Lammle, extremely anxious to get rid of him.

'It wasn't what I was going to say,' returned Fledgeby, who never would, under any circumstances, accept a suggested expression, 'but you're very complimentary. May I imprint a—a one—upon it? Good morning!'

'I may depend upon your promptitude, dearest Mr Fledgeby?'

Said Fledgeby, looking back at the door and respectfully kissing his hand, 'You may depend upon it.'

In fact, Mr Fledgeby sped on his errand of mercy through the streets, at so brisk a rate that his feet might have been winged by all the good spirits that wait on Generosity. They might have taken up their station in his breast, too, for he was blithe and merry. There was quite a fresh trill in his voice, when, arriving at the counting-house in St Mary Axe, and finding it for the moment empty, he trolled forth at the foot of the staircase: 'Now, Judah, what are you up to there?'

The old man appeared, with his accustomed deference.

'Halloa!' said Fledgeby, falling back, with a wink. 'You mean mischief, Jerusalem!'

The old man raised his eyes inquiringly.

'Yes you do,' said Fledgeby. 'Oh, you sinner! Oh, you dodger! What! You're going to act upon that bill of sale at Lammle's, are you? Nothing will turn you, won't it? You won't be put off for another single minute, won't you?'

Ordered to immediate action by the master's tone and look, the old man took up his hat from the little counter where it lay.

'You have been told that he might pull through it, if you didn't go in to win, Wide-Awake; have you?' said Fledgeby. 'And it's not your game that he should pull through it; ain't it? You having got security, and there being enough to pay you? Oh, you Jew!'

The old man stood irresolute and uncertain for a moment, as if there might be further instructions for him in reserve.

'Do I go, sir?' he at length asked in a low voice.

'Asks me if he is going!' exclaimed Fledgeby. 'Asks me, as if he didn't know his own purpose! Asks me, as if he hadn't got his hat on ready! Asks me, as if his sharp old eye—why, it cuts like a knife—wasn't looking at his walking-stick by the door!'

'Do I go, sir?'

'Do you go?' sneered Fledgeby. 'Yes, you do go. Toddle, Judah!'

Chapter 13

GIVE A DOG A BAD NAME, AND HANG HIM

Fascination Fledgeby, left alone in the counting-house, strolled about with his hat on one side, whistling, and investigating the drawers, and prying here and there for any small evidences of his being cheated, but could find none. 'Not his merit that he don't cheat me,' was Mr Fledgeby's commentary delivered with a wink, 'but my precaution.' He then with a lazy grandeur asserted his rights as lord of Pubsey and Co. by poking his cane at the stools and boxes, and spitting in the fireplace, and so loitered royally to the window and looked out into the narrow street, with his small eyes just peering over the top of Pubsey and Co.'s blind. As a blind in more senses than one, it reminded him that he was alone in the counting-house with the front door open. He was moving away to shut it, lest he should be injudiciously identified with the establishment, when he was stopped by some one coming to the door.

This some one was the dolls' dressmaker, with a little basket on her arm, and her crutch stick in her hand. Her keen eyes had espied Mr Fledgeby before Mr Fledgeby had espied her, and he was paralysed in his purpose of shutting her out, not so much by her approaching the door, as by her favouring him with a shower of nods, the instant he saw her. This advantage she improved by hobbling up the steps with such despatch that before Mr Fledgeby could take measures for her finding nobody at home, she was face to face with him in the counting-house.

'Hope I see you well, sir,' said Miss Wren. 'Mr Riah in?'

Fledgeby had dropped into a chair, in the attitude of one waiting wearily. 'I suppose he will be back soon,' he replied; 'he has cut out and left me expecting him back, in an odd way. Haven't I seen you before?'

'Once before—if you had your eyesight,' replied Miss Wren; the conditional clause in an under-tone.

'When you were carrying on some games up at the top of the house. I remember. How's your friend?'

'I have more friends than one, sir, I hope,' replied Miss Wren. 'Which friend?'

'Never mind,' said Mr Fledgeby, shutting up one eye, 'any of your friends, all your friends. Are they pretty tolerable?'

Somewhat confounded, Miss Wren parried the pleasantry, and sat down in a corner behind the door, with her basket in her lap. By-and-by, she said, breaking a long and patient silence:

'I beg your pardon, sir, but I am used to find Mr Riah at this time, and so I generally come at this time. I only want to buy my poor little two shillings' worth of waste. Perhaps you'll kindly let me have it, and I'll trot off to my work.'

'I let you have it?' said Fledgeby, turning his head towards her; for he had been sitting blinking at the light, and feeling his cheek. 'Why, you don't really suppose that I have anything to do with the place, or the business; do you?'

'Suppose?' exclaimed Miss Wren. 'He said, that day, you were the master!'

'The old cock in black said? Riah said? Why, he'd say anything.'

'Well; but you said so too,' returned Miss Wren. 'Or at least you took on like the master, and didn't contradict him.'

'One of his dodges,' said Mr Fledgeby, with a cool and contemptuous shrug. 'He's made of dodges. He said to me, "Come up to the top of the house, sir, and I'll show you a handsome girl. But I shall call you the master." So I went up to the top of the house and he showed me the handsome girl (very well worth looking at she was), and I was called the master. I don't know why. I dare say he don't. He loves a dodge for its own sake; being,' added Mr Fledgeby, after casting about for an expressive phrase, 'the dodgerest of all the dodgers.'

'Oh my head!' cried the dolls' dressmaker, holding it with both her hands, as if it were cracking. 'You can't mean what you say.'

'I can, my little woman, retorted Fledgeby, 'and I do, I assure you.

This repudiation was not only an act of deliberate policy on Fledgeby's part, in case of his being surprised by any other caller, but was also a retort upon Miss Wren for her over-sharpness, and a pleasant instance of his humour as regarded the old Jew. 'He has got a bad name as an old Jew, and he is paid for the use of it, and I'll have my money's worth out of him.' This was Fledgeby's habitual reflection in the way of business, and it was sharpened just now by the old man's presuming to have a secret from him: though of the secret itself, as annoying somebody else whom he disliked, he by no means disapproved.

Miss Wren with a fallen countenance sat behind the door looking thoughtfully at the ground, and the long and patient silence had again set in for some time, when the expression of Mr Fledgeby's face betokened that through the upper portion of the door, which was of glass, he saw some one faltering on the brink of the counting-house. Presently there was a rustle and a tap, and then some more rustling and another tap. Fledgeby taking no notice, the door was at length softly opened, and the dried face of a mild little elderly gentleman looked in.

'Mr Riah?' said this visitor, very politely.

'I am waiting for him, sir,' returned Mr Fledgeby. 'He went out and left me here. I expect him back every minute. Perhaps you had better take a chair.'

The gentleman took a chair, and put his hand to his forehead, as if he were in a melancholy frame of mind. Mr Fledgeby eyed him aside, and seemed to relish his attitude.

'A fine day, sir,' remarked Fledgeby.

The little dried gentleman was so occupied with his own depressed reflections that he did not notice the remark until the sound of Mr Fledgeby's voice had died out of the counting-house. Then he started, and said: 'I beg your pardon, sir. I fear you spoke to me?'

'I said,' remarked Fledgeby, a little louder than before, 'it was a fine day.'

'I beg your pardon. I beg your pardon. Yes.'

Again the little dried gentleman put his hand to his forehead, and again Mr Fledgeby seemed to enjoy his doing it. When the gentleman changed his attitude with a sigh, Fledgeby spake with a grin.

'Mr Twemlow, I think?'

The dried gentleman seemed much surprised.

'Had the pleasure of dining with you at Lammle's,' said Fledgeby. 'Even have the honour of being a connexion of yours. An unexpected sort of place this to meet in; but one never knows, when one gets into the City, what people one may knock up against. I hope you have your health, and are enjoying yourself.'

There might have been a touch of impertinence in the last words; on the other hand, it might have been but the native grace of Mr Fledgeby's manner. Mr Fledgeby sat on a stool with a foot on the rail of another stool, and his hat on. Mr Twemlow had uncovered on looking in at the door, and remained so. Now the conscientious Twemlow, knowing what he had done to thwart the gracious Fledgeby, was particularly disconcerted by this encounter. He was as ill at ease as a gentleman well could be. He felt himself bound to conduct himself stiffly towards Fledgeby, and he made him a distant bow. Fledgeby made his small eyes smaller in taking special note of his manner. The dolls' dressmaker sat in her corner behind the door, with her eyes on the ground and her hands folded on her basket, holding her crutch-stick between them, and appearing to take no heed of anything.

'He's a long time,' muttered Mr Fledgeby, looking at his watch. 'What time may you make it, Mr Twemlow?'

Mr Twemlow made it ten minutes past twelve, sir.

'As near as a toucher,' assented Fledgeby. 'I hope, Mr Twemlow, your business here may be of a more agreeable character than mine.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Mr Twemlow.

Fledgeby again made his small eyes smaller, as he glanced with great complacency at Twemlow, who was timorously tapping the table with a folded letter.

'What I know of Mr Riah,' said Fledgeby, with a very disparaging utterance of his name, 'leads me to believe that this is about the shop for disagreeable business. I have always found him the bitingest and tightest screw in London.'

Mr Twemlow acknowledged the remark with a little distant bow. It evidently made him nervous.

'So much so,' pursued Fledgeby, 'that if it wasn't to be true to a friend, nobody should catch me waiting here a single minute. But if you have friends in adversity, stand by them. That's what I say and act up to.'

The equitable Twemlow felt that this sentiment, irrespective of the utterer, demanded his cordial assent. 'You are very right, sir,' he rejoined with spirit. 'You indicate the generous and manly course.

'Glad to have your approbation,' returned Fledgeby. 'It's a coincidence, Mr Twemlow;' here he descended from his perch, and sauntered towards him; 'that the friends I am standing by to-day are the friends at whose house I met you! The Lammles. She's a very taking and agreeable woman?'

Conscience smote the gentle Twemlow pale. 'Yes,' he said. 'She is.'

'And when she appealed to me this morning, to come and try what I could do to pacify their creditor, this Mr Riah—that I certainly have gained some little influence with in transacting business for another friend, but nothing like so much as she supposes—and when a woman like that spoke to me as her dearest Mr Fledgeby, and shed tears—why what could I do, you know?'

Twemlow gasped 'Nothing but come.'

'Nothing but come. And so I came. But why,' said Fledgeby, putting his hands in his pockets and counterfeiting deep meditation, 'why Riah should have started up, when I told him that the Lammles entreated him to hold over a Bill of Sale he has on all their effects; and why he should have cut out, saying he would be back directly; and why he should have left me here alone so long; I cannot understand.'

The chivalrous Twemlow, Knight of the Simple Heart, was not in a condition to offer any suggestion. He was too penitent, too remorseful. For the first time in his life he had done an underhanded action, and he had done wrong. He had secretly interposed against this confiding young man, for no better real reason than because the young man's ways were not his ways.

But, the confiding young man proceeded to heap coals of fire on his sensitive head.

'I beg your pardon, Mr Twemlow; you see I am acquainted with the nature of the affairs that are transacted here. Is there anything I can do for you here? You have always been brought up as a gentleman, and never as a man of business;' another touch of possible impertinence in this place; 'and perhaps you are but a poor man of business. What else is to be expected!'

'I am even a poorer man of business than I am a man, sir,' returned Twemlow, 'and I could hardly express my deficiency in a stronger way. I really do not so much as clearly understand my position in the matter on which I am brought here. But there are reasons which make me very delicate of accepting your assistance. I am greatly, greatly, disinclined to profit by it. I don't deserve it.'

Good childish creature! Condemned to a passage through the world by such narrow little dimly-lighted ways, and picking up so few specks or spots on the road!

'Perhaps,' said Fledgeby, 'you may be a little proud of entering on the topic,—having been brought up as a gentleman.'

'It's not that, sir,' returned Twemlow, 'it's not that. I hope I distinguish between true pride and false pride.'

'I have no pride at all, myself,' said Fledgeby, 'and perhaps I don't cut things so fine as to know one from t'other. But I know this is a place where even a man of business needs his wits about him; and if mine can be of any use to you here, you're welcome to them.'

'You are very good,' said Twemlow, faltering. 'But I am most unwilling —'

'I don't, you know,' proceeded Fledgeby with an ill-favoured glance, 'entertain the vanity of supposing that my wits could be of any use to you in society, but they might be here. You cultivate society and society cultivates you, but Mr Riah's not society. In society, Mr Riah is kept dark; eh, Mr Twemlow?'

Twemlow, much disturbed, and with his hand fluttering about his forehead, replied: 'Quite true.'

The confiding young man besought him to state his case. The innocent Twemlow, expecting Fledgeby to be astounded by what he should unfold, and not for an instant conceiving the possibility of its happening every day, but treating of it as a terrible phenomenon occurring in the course of ages, related how that he had had a deceased friend, a married civil officer with a family, who had wanted money for change of place on change of post, and how he, Twemlow, had 'given him his name,' with the usual, but in the eyes of Twemlow almost incredible result that he had been left to repay what he had never had. How, in the course of years, he had reduced the principal by trifling sums, 'having,' said Twemlow, 'always to observe great economy, being in the enjoyment of a fixed income limited in extent, and that depending on the munificence of a certain nobleman,' and had always pinched the full interest out of himself with punctual pinches. How he had come, in course of time, to look upon this one only debt of his life as a regular quarterly drawback, and no worse, when 'his name' had some way fallen into the possession of Mr Riah, who had sent him notice to redeem it by paying up in full, in one plump sum, or take tremendous consequences. This, with hazy remembrances of how he had been carried to some office to 'confess judgment' (as he recollected the phrase), and how he had been carried to another office where his life was assured for somebody not wholly unconnected with the sherry trade whom he remembered by the remarkable circumstance that he had a Straduarius violin to dispose of, and also a Madonna, formed the sum and substance of Mr Twemlow's narrative. Through which stalked the shadow of the awful Snigsworth, eyed afar off by money-lenders as Security in the Mist, and menacing Twemlow with his baronial truncheon.

To all, Mr Fledgeby listened with the modest gravity becoming a confiding young man who knew it all beforehand, and, when it was finished, seriously shook his head. 'I don't like, Mr Twemlow,' said Fledgeby, 'I don't like Riah's calling in the principal. If he's determined to call it in, it must come.'

'But supposing, sir,' said Twemlow, downcast, 'that it can't come?'

'Then,' retorted Fledgeby, 'you must go, you know.'

'Where?' asked Twemlow, faintly.

'To prison,' returned Fledgeby. Whereat Mr Twemlow leaned his innocent head upon his hand, and moaned a little moan of distress and disgrace.

'However,' said Fledgeby, appearing to pluck up his spirits, 'we'll hope it's not so bad as that comes to. If you'll allow me, I'll mention to Mr Riah when he comes in, who you are, and I'll tell him you're my friend, and I'll say my say for you, instead of your saying it for yourself; I may be able to do it in a more business-like way. You won't consider it a liberty?'

'I thank you again and again, sir,' said Twemlow. 'I am strong, strongly, disinclined to avail myself of your generosity, though my helplessness yields. For I cannot but feel that I—to put it in the mildest form of speech—that I have done nothing to deserve it.'

'Where CAN he be?' muttered Fledgeby, referring to his watch again. 'What CAN he have gone out for? Did you ever see him, Mr Twemlow?'

'Never.'

'He is a thorough Jew to look at, but he is a more thorough Jew to deal with. He's worst when he's quiet. If he's quiet, I shall take it as a very bad sign. Keep your eye upon him when he comes in, and, if he's quiet, don't be hopeful. Here he is!—He looks quiet.'

With these words, which had the effect of causing the harmless Twemlow painful agitation, Mr Fledgeby withdrew to his former post, and the old man entered the counting-house.

'Why, Mr Riah,' said Fledgeby, 'I thought you were lost!'

The old man, glancing at the stranger, stood stock-still. He perceived that his master was leading up to the orders he was to take, and he waited to understand them.

'I really thought,' repeated Fledgeby slowly, 'that you were lost, Mr Riah. Why, now I look at you—but no, you can't have done it; no, you can't have done it!'

Hat in hand, the old man lifted his head, and looked distressfully at Fledgeby as seeking to know what new moral burden he was to bear.

'You can't have rushed out to get the start of everybody else, and put in that bill of sale at Lammle's?' said Fledgeby. 'Say you haven't, Mr Riah.'

'Sir, I have,' replied the old man in a low voice.

'Oh my eye!' cried Fledgeby. 'Tut, tut, tut! Dear, dear, dear! Well! I knew you were a hard customer, Mr Riah, but I never thought you were as hard as that.'

'Sir,' said the old man, with great uneasiness, 'I do as I am directed. I am not the principal here. I am but the agent of a superior, and I have no choice, no power.'

'Don't say so,' retorted Fledgeby, secretly exultant as the old man stretched out his hands, with a shrinking action of defending himself against the sharp construction of the two observers. 'Don't play the tune of the trade, Mr Riah. You've a right to get in your debts, if you're determined to do it, but don't pretend what every one in your line regularly pretends. At least, don't do it to me. Why should you, Mr Riah? You know I know all about you.'

The old man clasped the skirt of his long coat with his disengaged hand, and directed a wistful look at Fledgeby.

'And don't,' said Fledgeby, 'don't, I entreat you as a favour, Mr Riah, be so devilish meek, for I know what'll follow if you are. Look here, Mr Riah. This gentleman is Mr Twemlow.'

The Jew turned to him and bowed. That poor lamb bowed in return; polite, and terrified.

'I have made such a failure,' proceeded Fledgeby, 'in trying to do anything with you for my friend Lammle, that I've hardly a hope of doing anything with you for my friend (and connexion indeed) Mr Twemlow. But I do think that if you would do a favour for anybody, you would for me, and I won't fail for want of trying, and I've passed my promise to Mr Twemlow besides. Now, Mr Riah, here is Mr Twemlow. Always good for his interest, always coming up to time, always paying his little way. Now, why should you press Mr Twemlow? You can't have any spite against Mr Twemlow! Why not be easy with Mr Twemlow?'

The old man looked into Fledgeby's little eyes for any sign of leave to be easy with Mr Twemlow; but there was no sign in them.

'Mr Twemlow is no connexion of yours, Mr Riah,' said Fledgeby; 'you can't want to be even with him for having through life gone in for a gentleman and hung on to his Family. If Mr Twemlow has a contempt for business, what can it matter to you?'

'But pardon me,' interposed the gentle victim, 'I have not. I should consider it presumption.'

'There, Mr Riah!' said Fledgeby, 'isn't that handsomely said? Come! Make terms with me for Mr Twemlow.'

The old man looked again for any sign of permission to spare the poor little gentleman. No. Mr Fledgeby meant him to be racked.

'I am very sorry, Mr Twemlow,' said Riah. 'I have my instructions. I am invested with no authority for diverging from them. The money must be paid.'

'In full and slap down, do you mean, Mr Riah?' asked Fledgeby, to make things quite explicit.

'In full, sir, and at once,' was Riah's answer.

Mr Fledgeby shook his head deploringly at Twemlow, and mutely expressed in reference to the venerable figure standing before him with eyes upon the ground: 'What a Monster of an Israelite this is!'

'Mr Riah,' said Fledgeby.

The old man lifted up his eyes once more to the little eyes in Mr Fledgeby's head, with some reviving hope that the sign might be coming yet.

'Mr Riah, it's of no use my holding back the fact. There's a certain great party in the background in Mr Twemlow's case, and you know it.

'I know it,' the old man admitted.

'Now, I'll put it as a plain point of business, Mr Riah. Are you fully determined (as a plain point of business) either to have that said great party's security, or that said great party's money?'

'Fully determined,' answered Riah, as he read his master's face, and learnt the book.

'Not at all caring for, and indeed as it seems to me rather enjoying,' said Fledgeby, with peculiar unction, 'the precious kick-up and row that will come off between Mr Twemlow and the said great party?'

This required no answer, and received none. Poor Mr Twemlow, who had betrayed the keenest mental terrors since his noble kinsman loomed in the perspective, rose with a sigh to take his departure. 'I thank you very much, sir,' he said, offering Fledgeby his feverish hand. 'You have done me an unmerited service. Thank you, thank you!'

'Don't mention it,' answered Fledgeby. 'It's a failure so far, but I'll stay behind, and take another touch at Mr Riah.'

'Do not deceive yourself Mr Twemlow,' said the Jew, then addressing him directly for the first time. 'There is no hope for you. You must expect no leniency here. You must pay in full, and you cannot pay too promptly, or you will be put to heavy charges. Trust nothing to me, sir. Money, money, money.' When he had said these words in an emphatic manner, he acknowledged Mr Twemlow's still polite motion of his head, and that amiable little worthy took his departure in the lowest spirits.

Fascination Fledgeby was in such a merry vein when the counting-house was cleared of him, that he had nothing for it but to go to the window, and lean his arms on the frame of the blind, and have his silent laugh out, with his back to his subordinate. When he turned round again with a composed countenance, his subordinate still stood in the same place, and the dolls' dressmaker sat behind the door with a look of horror.

'Halloa!' cried Mr Fledgeby, 'you're forgetting this young lady, Mr Riah, and she has been waiting long enough too. Sell her her waste, please, and give her good measure if you can make up your mind to do the liberal thing for once.'

He looked on for a time, as the Jew filled her little basket with such scraps as she was used to buy; but, his merry vein coming on again, he was obliged to turn round to the window once more, and lean his arms on the blind.

'There, my Cinderella dear,' said the old man in a whisper, and with a worn-out look, 'the basket's full now. Bless you! And get you gone!'

'Don't call me your Cinderella dear,' returned Miss Wren. 'O you cruel godmother!'

She shook that emphatic little forefinger of hers in his face at parting, as earnestly and reproachfully as she had ever shaken it at her grim old child at home.

'You are not the godmother at all!' said she. 'You are the Wolf in the Forest, the wicked Wolf! And if ever my dear Lizzie is sold and betrayed, I shall know who sold and betrayed her!'

Chapter 14

MR WEGG PREPARES A GRINDSTONE FOR MR BOFFIN'S NOSE

Having assisted at a few more expositions of the lives of Misers, Mr Venus became almost indispensable to the evenings at the Bower. The circumstance of having another listener to the wonders unfolded by Wegg, or, as it were, another calculator to cast up the guineas found in teapots, chimneys, racks and mangers, and other such banks of deposit, seemed greatly to heighten Mr Boffin's enjoyment; while Silas Wegg, for his part, though of a jealous temperament which might under ordinary circumstances have resented the anatomist's getting into favour, was so very anxious to keep his eye on that gentleman—lest, being too much left to himself, he should be tempted to play any tricks with the precious document in his keeping—that he never lost an opportunity of commending him to Mr Boffin's notice as a third party whose company was much to be desired. Another friendly demonstration towards him Mr Wegg now regularly gratified. After each sitting was over, and the patron had departed, Mr Wegg invariably saw Mr Venus home. To be sure, he as invariably requested to be refreshed with a sight of the paper in which he was a joint proprietor; but he never failed to remark that it was the great pleasure he derived from Mr Venus's improving society which had insensibly lured him round to Clerkenwell again, and that, finding himself once more attracted to the spot by the social powers of Mr V., he would beg leave to go through that little incidental procedure, as a matter of form. 'For well I know, sir,' Mr Wegg would add, 'that a man of your delicate mind would wish to be checked off whenever the opportunity arises, and it is not for me to baulk your feelings.'

A certain rustiness in Mr Venus, which never became so lubricated by the oil of Mr Wegg but that he turned under the screw in a creaking and stiff manner, was very noticeable at about this period. While assisting at the literary evenings, he even went so far, on two or three occasions, as to correct Mr Wegg when he grossly mispronounced a word, or made nonsense of a passage; insomuch that Mr Wegg took to surveying his course in the day, and to making arrangements for getting round rocks at night instead of running straight upon them. Of the slightest anatomical reference he became particularly shy, and, if he saw a bone ahead, would go any distance out of his way rather than mention it by name.

The adverse destinies ordained that one evening Mr Wegg's labouring bark became beset by polysyllables, and embarrassed among a perfect archipelago of hard words. It being necessary to take soundings every minute, and to feel the way with the greatest caution, Mr Wegg's attention was fully employed. Advantage was taken of this dilemma by Mr Venus, to pass a scrap of paper into Mr Boffin's hand, and lay his finger on his own lip.

When Mr Boffin got home at night he found that the paper contained Mr Venus's card and these words: 'Should be glad to be honoured with a call respecting business of your own, about dusk on an early evening.'

The very next evening saw Mr Boffin peeping in at the preserved frogs in Mr Venus's shop-window, and saw Mr Venus espying Mr Boffin with the readiness of one on the alert, and beckoning that gentleman into his interior. Responding, Mr Boffin was invited to seat himself on the box of human miscellanies before the fire, and did so, looking round the place with admiring eyes. The fire being low and fitful, and the dusk gloomy, the whole stock seemed to be winking and blinking with both eyes, as Mr Venus did. The French gentleman, though he had no eyes, was not at all behind-hand, but appeared, as the flame rose and fell, to open and shut his no eyes, with the regularity of the glass-eyed dogs and ducks and birds. The big-headed babies were equally obliging in lending their grotesque aid to the general effect.

'You see, Mr Venus, I've lost no time,' said Mr Boffin. 'Here I am.'

'Here you are, sir,' assented Mr Venus.

'I don't like secrecy,' pursued Mr Boffin—'at least, not in a general way I don't—but I dare say you'll show me good reason for being secret so far.'

'I think I shall, sir,' returned Venus.

'Good,' said Mr Boffin. 'You don't expect Wegg, I take it for granted?'

'No, sir. I expect no one but the present company.'

Mr Boffin glanced about him, as accepting under that inclusive denomination the French gentleman and the circle in which he didn't move, and repeated, 'The present company.'

'Sir,' said Mr Venus, 'before entering upon business, I shall have to ask you for your word and honour that we are in confidence.'

'Let's wait a bit and understand what the expression means,' answered Mr Boffin. 'In confidence for how long? In confidence for ever and a day?'

'I take your hint, sir,' said Venus; 'you think you might consider the business, when you came to know it, to be of a nature incompatible with confidence on your part?'

'I might,' said Mr Boffin with a cautious look.

'True, sir. Well, sir,' observed Venus, after clutching at his dusty hair, to brighten his ideas, 'let us put it another way. I open the business with you, relying upon your honour not to do anything in it, and not to mention me in it, without my knowledge.'

'That sounds fair,' said Mr Boffin. 'I agree to that.'

'I have your word and honour, sir?'

'My good fellow,' retorted Mr Boffin, 'you have my word; and how you can have that, without my honour too, I don't know. I've sorted a lot of dust in my time, but I never knew the two things go into separate heaps.'

This remark seemed rather to abash Mr Venus. He hesitated, and said, 'Very true, sir;' and again, 'Very true, sir,' before resuming the thread of his discourse.

'Mr Boffin, if I confess to you that I fell into a proposal of which you were the subject, and of which you oughtn't to have been the subject, you will allow me to mention, and will please take into favourable consideration, that I was in a crushed state of mind at the time.'

The Golden Dustman, with his hands folded on the top of his stout stick, with his chin resting upon them, and with something leering and whimsical in his eyes, gave a nod, and said, 'Quite so, Venus.'

'That proposal, sir, was a conspiring breach of your confidence, to such an extent, that I ought at once to have made it known to you. But I didn't, Mr Boffin, and I fell into it.'

Without moving eye or finger, Mr Boffin gave another nod, and placidly repeated, 'Quite so, Venus.'

'Not that I was ever hearty in it, sir,' the penitent anatomist went on, 'or that I ever viewed myself with anything but reproach for having turned out of the paths of science into the paths of—' he was going to say 'villany,' but, unwilling to press too hard upon himself, substituted with great emphasis —'Weggery.'

Placid and whimsical of look as ever, Mr Boffin answered:

'Quite so, Venus.'

'And now, sir,' said Venus, 'having prepared your mind in the rough, I will articulate the details.' With which brief professional exordium, he entered on the history of the friendly move, and truly recounted it. One might have thought that it would have extracted some show of surprise or anger, or other emotion, from Mr Boffin, but it extracted nothing beyond his former comment:

'Quite so, Venus.'

'I have astonished you, sir, I believe?' said Mr Venus, pausing dubiously.

Mr Boffin simply answered as aforesaid: 'Quite so, Venus.'

By this time the astonishment was all on the other side. It did not, however, so continue. For, when Venus passed to Wegg's discovery, and from that to their having both seen Mr Boffin dig up the Dutch bottle, that gentleman changed colour, changed his attitude, became extremely restless, and ended (when Venus ended) by being in a state of manifest anxiety, trepidation, and confusion.

'Now, sir,' said Venus, finishing off; 'you best know what was in that Dutch bottle, and why you dug it up, and took it away. I don't pretend to know anything more about it than I saw. All I know is this: I am proud of my calling after all (though it has been attended by one dreadful drawback which has told upon my heart, and almost equally upon my skeleton), and I mean to live by my calling. Putting the same meaning into other words, I do not mean to turn a single dishonest penny by this affair. As the best amends I can make you for having ever gone into it, I make known to you, as a warning, what Wegg has found out. My opinion is, that Wegg is not to be silenced at a modest price, and I build that opinion on his beginning to dispose of your property the moment he knew his power. Whether it's worth your while to silence him at any price, you will decide for yourself, and take your measures accordingly. As far as I am concerned, I have no price. If I am ever called upon for the truth, I tell it, but I want to do no more than I have now done and ended.'

'Thank'ee, Venus!' said Mr Boffin, with a hearty grip of his hand; 'thank'ee, Venus, thank'ee, Venus!' And then walked up and down the little shop in great agitation. 'But look here, Venus,' he by-and-by resumed, nervously sitting down again; 'if I have to buy Wegg up, I shan't buy him any cheaper for your being out of it. Instead of his having half the money—it was to have been half, I suppose? Share and share alike?'

'It was to have been half, sir,' answered Venus.

'Instead of that, he'll now have all. I shall pay the same, if not more. For you tell me he's an unconscionable dog, a ravenous rascal.'

'He is,' said Venus.

'Don't you think, Venus,' insinuated Mr Boffin, after looking at the fire for a while—'don't you feel as if—you might like to pretend to be in it till Wegg was bought up, and then ease your mind by handing over to me what you had made believe to pocket?'

'No I don't, sir,' returned Venus, very positively.

'Not to make amends?' insinuated Mr Boffin.

'No, sir. It seems to me, after maturely thinking it over, that the best amends for having got out of the square is to get back into the square.'

'Humph!' mused Mr Boffin. 'When you say the square, you mean—'

'I mean,' said Venus, stoutly and shortly, 'the right.'

'It appears to me,' said Mr Boffin, grumbling over the fire in an injured manner, 'that the right is with me, if it's anywhere. I have much more right to the old man's money than the Crown can ever have. What was the Crown to him except the King's Taxes? Whereas, me and my wife, we was all in all to him.'

Mr Venus, with his head upon his hands, rendered melancholy by the contemplation of Mr Boffin's avarice, only murmured to steep himself in the luxury of that frame of mind: 'She did not wish so to regard herself, nor yet to be so regarded.'

'And how am I to live,' asked Mr Boffin, piteously, 'if I'm to be going buying fellows up out of the little that I've got? And how am I to set about it? When am I to get my money ready? When am I to make a bid? You haven't told me when he threatens to drop down upon me.'

Venus explained under what conditions, and with what views, the dropping down upon Mr Boffin was held over until the Mounds should be cleared away. Mr Boffin listened attentively. 'I suppose,' said he, with a gleam of hope, 'there's no doubt about the genuineness and date of this confounded will?'

'None whatever,' said Mr Venus.

'Where might it be deposited at present?' asked Mr Boffin, in a wheedling tone.

'It's in my possession, sir.'

'Is it?' he cried, with great eagerness. 'Now, for any liberal sum of money that could be agreed upon, Venus, would you put it in the fire?'

'No, sir, I wouldn't,' interrupted Mr Venus.

'Nor pass it over to me?'

'That would be the same thing. No, sir,' said Mr Venus.

The Golden Dustman seemed about to pursue these questions, when a stumping noise was heard outside, coming towards the door. 'Hush! here's Wegg!' said Venus. 'Get behind the young alligator in the corner, Mr Boffin, and judge him for yourself. I won't light a candle till he's gone; there'll only be the glow of the fire; Wegg's well acquainted with the alligator, and he won't take particular notice of him. Draw your legs in, Mr Boffin, at present I see a pair of shoes at the end of his tail. Get your head well behind his smile, Mr Boffin, and you'll lie comfortable there; you'll find plenty of room behind his smile. He's a little dusty, but he's very like you in tone. Are you right, sir?'

Mr Boffin had but whispered an affirmative response, when Wegg came stumping in. 'Partner,' said that gentleman in a sprightly manner, 'how's yourself?'

'Tolerable,' returned Mr Venus. 'Not much to boast of.'

'In-deed!' said Wegg: 'sorry, partner, that you're not picking up faster, but your soul's too large for your body, sir; that's where it is. And how's our stock in trade, partner? Safe bind, safe find, partner? Is that about it?'

'Do you wish to see it?' asked Venus.

'If you please, partner,' said Wegg, rubbing his hands. 'I wish to see it jintly with yourself. Or, in similar words to some that was set to music some time back:

"I wish you to see it with your eyes,
And I will pledge with mine."'

Turning his back and turning a key, Mr Venus produced the document, holding on by his usual corner. Mr Wegg, holding on by the opposite corner, sat down on the seat so lately vacated by Mr Boffin, and looked it over. 'All right, sir,' he slowly and unwillingly admitted, in his reluctance to loose his hold, 'all right!' And greedily watched his partner as he turned his back again, and turned his key again.

'There's nothing new, I suppose?' said Venus, resuming his low chair behind the counter.

'Yes there is, sir,' replied Wegg; 'there was something new this morning. That foxey old grasper and griper—'

'Mr Boffin?' inquired Venus, with a glance towards the alligator's yard or two of smile.

'Mister be blowed!' cried Wegg, yielding to his honest indignation. 'Boffin. Dusty Boffin. That foxey old grunter and grinder, sir, turns into the yard this morning, to meddle with our property, a menial tool of his own, a young man by the name of Sloppy. Ecod, when I say to him, "What do you want here, young man? This is a private yard," he pulls out a paper from Boffin's other blackguard, the one I was passed over for. "This is to authorize Sloppy to overlook the carting and to watch the work." That's pretty strong, I think, Mr Venus?'

'Remember he doesn't know yet of our claim on the property,' suggested Venus.

'Then he must have a hint of it,' said Wegg, 'and a strong one that'll jog his terrors a bit. Give him an inch, and he'll take an ell. Let him alone this time, and what'll he do with our property next? I tell you what, Mr Venus; it comes to this; I must be overbearing with Boffin, or I shall fly into several pieces. I can't contain myself when I look at him. Every time I see him putting his hand in his pocket, I see him putting it into my pocket. Every time I hear him jingling his money, I hear him taking liberties with my money. Flesh and blood can't bear it. No,' said Mr Wegg, greatly exasperated, 'and I'll go further. A wooden leg can't bear it!'

'But, Mr Wegg,' urged Venus, 'it was your own idea that he should not be exploded upon, till the Mounds were carted away.'

'But it was likewise my idea, Mr Venus,' retorted Wegg, 'that if he came sneaking and sniffing about the property, he should be threatened, given to understand that he has no right to it, and be made our slave. Wasn't that my idea, Mr Venus?'

'It certainly was, Mr Wegg.'

'It certainly was, as you say, partner,' assented Wegg, put into a better humour by the ready admission. 'Very well. I consider his planting one of his menial tools in the yard, an act of sneaking and sniffing. And his nose shall be put to the grindstone for it.'

'It was not your fault, Mr Wegg, I must admit,' said Venus, 'that he got off with the Dutch bottle that night.'

'As you handsomely say again, partner! No, it was not my fault. I'd have had that bottle out of him. Was it to be borne that he should come, like a thief in the dark, digging among stuff that was far more ours than his (seeing that we could deprive him of every grain of it, if he didn't buy us at our own figure), and carrying off treasure from its bowels? No, it was not to be borne. And for that, too, his nose shall be put to the grindstone.'

'How do you propose to do it, Mr Wegg?'

'To put his nose to the grindstone? I propose,' returned that estimable man, 'to insult him openly. And, if looking into this eye of mine, he dares to offer a word in answer, to retort upon him before he can take his breath, "Add another word to that, you dusty old dog, and you're a beggar."'

'Suppose he says nothing, Mr Wegg?'

'Then,' replied Wegg, 'we shall have come to an understanding with very little trouble, and I'll break him and drive him, Mr Venus. I'll put him in harness, and I'll bear him up tight, and I'll break him and drive him. The harder the old Dust is driven, sir, the higher he'll pay. And I mean to be paid high, Mr Venus, I promise you.'

'You speak quite revengefully, Mr Wegg.'

'Revengefully, sir? Is it for him that I have declined and falled, night after night? Is it for his pleasure that I've waited at home of an evening, like a set of skittles, to be set up and knocked over, set up and knocked over, by whatever balls—or books—he chose to bring against me? Why, I'm a hundred times the man he is, sir; five hundred times!'

Perhaps it was with the malicious intent of urging him on to his worst that Mr Venus looked as if he doubted that.

'What? Was it outside the house at present ockypied, to its disgrace, by that minion of fortune and worm of the hour,' said Wegg, falling back upon his strongest terms of reprobation, and slapping the counter, 'that I, Silas Wegg, five hundred times the man he ever was, sat in all weathers, waiting for a errand or a customer? Was it outside that very house as I first set eyes upon him, rolling in the lap of luxury, when I was selling halfpenny ballads there for a living? And am I to grovel in the dust for HIM to walk over? No!'

There was a grin upon the ghastly countenance of the French gentleman under the influence of the firelight, as if he were computing how many thousand slanderers and traitors array themselves against the fortunate, on premises exactly answering to those of Mr Wegg. One might have fancied that the big-headed babies were toppling over with their hydrocephalic attempts to reckon up the children of men who transform their benefactors into their injurers by the same process. The yard or two of smile on the part of the alligator might have been invested with the meaning, 'All about this was quite familiar knowledge down in the depths of the slime, ages ago.'

'But,' said Wegg, possibly with some slight perception to the foregoing effect, 'your speaking countenance remarks, Mr Venus, that I'm duller and savager than usual. Perhaps I HAVE allowed myself to brood too much. Begone, dull Care! 'Tis gone, sir. I've looked in upon you, and empire resumes her sway. For, as the song says—subject to your correction, sir—

"When the heart of a man is depressed with cares,
The mist is dispelled if Venus appears.
Like the notes of a fiddle, you sweetly, sir, sweetly,
Raises our spirits and charms our ears."

Good-night, sir.'

'I shall have a word or two to say to you, Mr Wegg, before long,' remarked Venus, 'respecting my share in the project we've been speaking of.'

'My time, sir,' returned Wegg, 'is yours. In the meanwhile let it be fully understood that I shall not neglect bringing the grindstone to bear, nor yet bringing Dusty Boffin's nose to it. His nose once brought to it, shall be held to it by these hands, Mr Venus, till the sparks flies out in showers.'

With this agreeable promise Wegg stumped out, and shut the shop-door after him. 'Wait till I light a candle, Mr Boffin,' said Venus, 'and you'll come out more comfortable.' So, he lighting a candle and holding it up at arm's length, Mr Boffin disengaged himself from behind the alligator's smile, with an expression of countenance so very downcast that it not only appeared as if the alligator had the whole of the joke to himself, but further as if it had been conceived and executed at Mr Boffin's expense.

'That's a treacherous fellow,' said Mr Boffin, dusting his arms and legs as he came forth, the alligator having been but musty company. 'That's a dreadful fellow.'

'The alligator, sir?' said Venus.

'No, Venus, no. The Serpent.'

'You'll have the goodness to notice, Mr Boffin,' remarked Venus, 'that I said nothing to him about my going out of the affair altogether, because I didn't wish to take you anyways by surprise. But I can't be too soon out of it for my satisfaction, Mr Boffin, and I now put it to you when it will suit your views for me to retire?'

'Thank'ee, Venus, thank'ee, Venus; but I don't know what to say,' returned Mr Boffin, 'I don't know what to do. He'll drop down on me any way. He seems fully determined to drop down; don't he?'

Mr Venus opined that such was clearly his intention.

'You might be a sort of protection for me, if you remained in it,' said Mr Boffin; 'you might stand betwixt him and me, and take the edge off him. Don't you feel as if you could make a show of remaining in it, Venus, till I had time to turn myself round?'

Venus naturally inquired how long Mr Boffin thought it might take him to turn himself round?

'I am sure I don't know,' was the answer, given quite at a loss. 'Everything is so at sixes and sevens. If I had never come into the property, I shouldn't have minded. But being in it, it would be very trying to be turned out; now, don't you acknowledge that it would, Venus?'

Mr Venus preferred, he said, to leave Mr Boffin to arrive at his own conclusions on that delicate question.

'I am sure I don't know what to do,' said Mr Boffin. 'If I ask advice of any one else, it's only letting in another person to be bought out, and then I shall be ruined that way, and might as well have given up the property and gone slap to the workhouse. If I was to take advice of my young man, Rokesmith, I should have to buy HIM out. Sooner or later, of course, he'd drop down upon me, like Wegg. I was brought into the world to be dropped down upon, it appears to me.'

Mr Venus listened to these lamentations in silence, while Mr Boffin jogged to and fro, holding his pockets as if he had a pain in them.

'After all, you haven't said what you mean to do yourself, Venus. When you do go out of it, how do you mean to go?'

Venus replied that as Wegg had found the document and handed it to him, it was his intention to hand it back to Wegg, with the declaration that he himself would have nothing to say to it, or do with it, and that Wegg must act as he chose, and take the consequences.

'And then he drops down with his whole weight upon ME!' cried Mr Boffin, ruefully. 'I'd sooner be dropped upon by you than by him, or even by you jintly, than by him alone!'

Mr Venus could only repeat that it was his fixed intention to betake himself to the paths of science, and to walk in the same all the days of his life; not dropping down upon his fellow-creatures until they were deceased, and then only to articulate them to the best of his humble ability.

'How long could you be persuaded to keep up the appearance of remaining in it?' asked Mr Boffin, retiring on his other idea. 'Could you be got to do so, till the Mounds are gone?'

No. That would protract the mental uneasiness of Mr Venus too long, he said.

'Not if I was to show you reason now?' demanded Mr Boffin; 'not if I was to show you good and sufficient reason?'

If by good and sufficient reason Mr Boffin meant honest and unimpeachable reason, that might weigh with Mr Venus against his personal wishes and convenience. But he must add that he saw no opening to the possibility of such reason being shown him.

'Come and see me, Venus,' said Mr Boffin, 'at my house.'

'Is the reason there, sir?' asked Mr Venus, with an incredulous smile and blink.

'It may be, or may not be,' said Mr Boffin, 'just as you view it. But in the meantime don't go out of the matter. Look here. Do this. Give me your word that you won't take any steps with Wegg, without my knowledge, just as I have given you my word that I won't without yours.'

'Done, Mr Boffin!' said Venus, after brief consideration.

'Thank'ee, Venus, thank'ee, Venus! Done!'

'When shall I come to see you, Mr Boffin.'

'When you like. The sooner the better. I must be going now. Good-night, Venus.'

'Good-night, sir.'

'And good-night to the rest of the present company,' said Mr Boffin, glancing round the shop. 'They make a queer show, Venus, and I should like to be better acquainted with them some day. Good-night, Venus, good-night! Thankee, Venus, thankee, Venus!' With that he jogged out into the street, and jogged upon his homeward way.

'Now, I wonder,' he meditated as he went along, nursing his stick, 'whether it can be, that Venus is setting himself to get the better of Wegg? Whether it can be, that he means, when I have bought Wegg out, to have me all to himself and to pick me clean to the bones!'

It was a cunning and suspicious idea, quite in the way of his school of Misers, and he looked very cunning and suspicious as he went jogging through the streets. More than once or twice, more than twice or thrice, say half a dozen times, he took his stick from the arm on which he nursed it, and hit a straight sharp rap at the air with its head. Possibly the wooden countenance of Mr Silas Wegg was incorporeally before him at those moments, for he hit with intense satisfaction.

He was within a few streets of his own house, when a little private carriage, coming in the contrary direction, passed him, turned round, and passed him again. It was a little carriage of eccentric movement, for again he heard it stop behind him and turn round, and again he saw it pass him. Then it stopped, and then went on, out of sight. But, not far out of sight, for, when he came to the corner of his own street, there it stood again.

There was a lady's face at the window as he came up with this carriage, and he was passing it when the lady softly called to him by his name.

'I beg your pardon, Ma'am?' said Mr Boffin, coming to a stop.

'It is Mrs Lammle,' said the lady.

Mr Boffin went up to the window, and hoped Mrs Lammle was well.

'Not very well, dear Mr Boffin; I have fluttered myself by being—perhaps foolishly—uneasy and anxious. I have been waiting for you some time. Can I speak to you?'

Mr Boffin proposed that Mrs Lammle should drive on to his house, a few hundred yards further.

'I would rather not, Mr Boffin, unless you particularly wish it. I feel the difficulty and delicacy of the matter so much that I would rather avoid speaking to you at your own home. You must think this very strange?'

Mr Boffin said no, but meant yes.

'It is because I am so grateful for the good opinion of all my friends, and am so touched by it, that I cannot bear to run the risk of forfeiting it in any case, even in the cause of duty. I have asked my husband (my dear Alfred, Mr Boffin) whether it is the cause of duty, and he has most emphatically said Yes. I wish I had asked him sooner. It would have spared me much distress.'

('Can this be more dropping down upon me!' thought Mr Boffin, quite bewildered.)

'It was Alfred who sent me to you, Mr Boffin. Alfred said, "Don't come back, Sophronia, until you have seen Mr Boffin, and told him all. Whatever he may think of it, he ought certainly to know it." Would you mind coming into the carriage?'

Mr Boffin answered, 'Not at all,' and took his seat at Mrs Lammle's side.

'Drive slowly anywhere,' Mrs Lammle called to her coachman, 'and don't let the carriage rattle.'

'It MUST be more dropping down, I think,' said Mr Boffin to himself. 'What next?'

Chapter 15

THE GOLDEN DUSTMAN AT HIS WORST

The breakfast table at Mr Boffin's was usually a very pleasant one, and was always presided over by Bella. As though he began each new day in his healthy natural character, and some waking hours were necessary to his relapse into the corrupting influences of his wealth, the face and the demeanour of the Golden Dustman were generally unclouded at that meal. It would have been easy to believe then, that there was no change in him. It was as the day went on that the clouds gathered, and the brightness of the morning became obscured. One might have said that the shadows of avarice and distrust lengthened as his own shadow lengthened, and that the night closed around him gradually.

But, one morning long afterwards to be remembered, it was black midnight with the Golden Dustman when he first appeared. His altered character had never been so grossly marked. His bearing towards his Secretary was so charged with insolent distrust and arrogance, that the latter rose and left the table before breakfast was half done. The look he directed at the Secretary's retiring figure was so cunningly malignant, that Bella would have sat astounded and indignant, even though he had not gone the length of secretly threatening Rokesmith with his clenched fist as he closed the door. This unlucky morning, of all mornings in the year, was the morning next after Mr Boffin's interview with Mrs Lammle in her little carriage.

Bella looked to Mrs Boffin's face for comment on, or explanation of, this stormy humour in her husband, but none was there. An anxious and a distressed observation of her own face was all she could read in it. When they were left alone together—which was not until noon, for Mr Boffin sat long in his easy-chair, by turns jogging up and down the breakfast-room, clenching his fist and muttering—Bella, in consternation, asked her what had happened, what was wrong? 'I am forbidden to speak to you about it, Bella dear; I mustn't tell you,' was all the answer she could get. And still, whenever, in her wonder and dismay, she raised her eyes to Mrs Boffin's face, she saw in it the same anxious and distressed observation of her own.

Oppressed by her sense that trouble was impending, and lost in speculations why Mrs Boffin should look at her as if she had any part in it, Bella found the day long and dreary. It was far on in the afternoon when, she being in her own room, a servant brought her a message from Mr Boffin begging her to come to his.

Mrs Boffin was there, seated on a sofa, and Mr Boffin was jogging up and down. On seeing Bella he stopped, beckoned her to him, and drew her arm through his. 'Don't be alarmed, my dear,' he said, gently; 'I am not angry with you. Why you actually tremble! Don't be alarmed, Bella my dear. I'll see you righted.'

'See me righted?' thought Bella. And then repeated aloud in a tone of astonishment: 'see me righted, sir?'

'Ay, ay!' said Mr Boffin. 'See you righted. Send Mr Rokesmith here, you sir.'

Bella would have been lost in perplexity if there had been pause enough; but the servant found Mr Rokesmith near at hand, and he almost immediately presented himself.

'Shut the door, sir!' said Mr Boffin. 'I have got something to say to you which I fancy you'll not be pleased to hear.'

'I am sorry to reply, Mr Boffin,' returned the Secretary, as, having closed the door, he turned and faced him, 'that I think that very likely.'

'What do you mean?' blustered Mr Boffin.

'I mean that it has become no novelty to me to hear from your lips what I would rather not hear.'

'Oh! Perhaps we shall change that,' said Mr Boffin with a threatening roll of his head.

'I hope so,' returned the Secretary. He was quiet and respectful; but stood, as Bella thought (and was glad to think), on his manhood too.

'Now, sir,' said Mr Boffin, 'look at this young lady on my arm.

Bella involuntarily raising her eyes, when this sudden reference was made to herself, met those of Mr Rokesmith. He was pale and seemed agitated. Then her eyes passed on to Mrs Boffin's, and she met the look again. In a flash it enlightened her, and she began to understand what she had done.

'I say to you, sir,' Mr Boffin repeated, 'look at this young lady on my arm.

'I do so,' returned the Secretary.

As his glance rested again on Bella for a moment, she thought there was reproach in it. But it is possible that the reproach was within herself.

'How dare you, sir,' said Mr Boffin, 'tamper, unknown to me, with this young lady? How dare you come out of your station, and your place in my house, to pester this young lady with your impudent addresses?'

'I must decline to answer questions,' said the Secretary, 'that are so offensively asked.'

'You decline to answer?' retorted Mr Boffin. 'You decline to answer, do you? Then I'll tell you what it is, Rokesmith; I'll answer for you. There are two sides to this matter, and I'll take 'em separately. The first side is, sheer Insolence. That's the first side.'

The Secretary smiled with some bitterness, as though he would have said, 'So I see and hear.'

'It was sheer Insolence in you, I tell you,' said Mr Boffin, 'even to think of this young lady. This young lady was far above YOU. This young lady was no match for YOU. This young lady was lying in wait (as she was qualified to do) for money, and you had no money.'

Bella hung her head and seemed to shrink a little from Mr Boffin's protecting arm.

'What are you, I should like to know,' pursued Mr Boffin, 'that you were to have the audacity to follow up this young lady? This young lady was looking about the market for a good bid; she wasn't in it to be snapped up by fellows that had no money to lay out; nothing to buy with.'

'Oh, Mr Boffin! Mrs Boffin, pray say something for me!' murmured Bella, disengaging her arm, and covering her face with her hands.

'Old lady,' said Mr Boffin, anticipating his wife, 'you hold your tongue. Bella, my dear, don't you let yourself be put out. I'll right you.'

'But you don't, you don't right me!' exclaimed Bella, with great emphasis. 'You wrong me, wrong me!'

'Don't you be put out, my dear,' complacently retorted Mr Boffin. 'I'll bring this young man to book. Now, you Rokesmith! You can't decline to hear, you know, as well as to answer. You hear me tell you that the first side of your conduct was Insolence—Insolence and Presumption. Answer me one thing, if you can. Didn't this young lady tell you so herself?'

'Did I, Mr Rokesmith?' asked Bella with her face still covered. 'O say, Mr Rokesmith! Did I?'

'Don't be distressed, Miss Wilfer; it matters very little now.'

'Ah! You can't deny it, though!' said Mr Boffin, with a knowing shake of his head.

'But I have asked him to forgive me since,' cried Bella; 'and I would ask him to forgive me now again, upon my knees, if it would spare him!'

Here Mrs Boffin broke out a-crying.

'Old lady,' said Mr Boffin, 'stop that noise! Tender-hearted in you, Miss Bella; but I mean to have it out right through with this young man, having got him into a corner. Now, you Rokesmith. I tell you that's one side of your conduct—Insolence and Presumption. Now, I'm a-coming to the other, which is much worse. This was a speculation of yours.'

'I indignantly deny it.'

'It's of no use your denying it; it doesn't signify a bit whether you deny it or not; I've got a head upon my shoulders, and it ain't a baby's. What!' said Mr Boffin, gathering himself together in his most suspicious attitude, and wrinkling his face into a very map of curves and corners. 'Don't I know what grabs are made at a man with money? If I didn't keep my eyes open, and my pockets buttoned, shouldn't I be brought to the workhouse before I knew where I was? Wasn't the experience of Dancer, and Elwes, and Hopkins, and Blewbury Jones, and ever so many more of 'em, similar to mine? Didn't everybody want to make grabs at what they'd got, and bring 'em to poverty and ruin? Weren't they forced to hide everything belonging to 'em, for fear it should be snatched from 'em? Of course they was. I shall be told next that they didn't know human natur!'

'They! Poor creatures,' murmured the Secretary.

'What do you say?' asked Mr Boffin, snapping at him. 'However, you needn't be at the trouble of repeating it, for it ain't worth hearing, and won't go down with ME. I'm a-going to unfold your plan, before this young lady; I'm a-going to show this young lady the second view of you; and nothing you can say will stave it off. (Now, attend here, Bella, my dear.) Rokesmith, you're a needy chap. You're a chap that I pick up in the street. Are you, or ain't you?'

'Go on, Mr Boffin; don't appeal to me.'

'Not appeal to YOU,' retorted Mr Boffin as if he hadn't done so. 'No, I should hope not! Appealing to YOU, would be rather a rum course. As I was saying, you're a needy chap that I pick up in the street. You come and ask me in the street to take you for a Secretary, and I take you. Very good.'

'Very bad,' murmured the Secretary.

'What do you say?' asked Mr Boffin, snapping at him again.

He returned no answer. Mr Boffin, after eyeing him with a comical look of discomfited curiosity, was fain to begin afresh.

'This Rokesmith is a needy young man that I take for my Secretary out of the open street. This Rokesmith gets acquainted with my affairs, and gets to know that I mean to settle a sum of money on this young lady. "Oho!" says this Rokesmith;' here Mr Boffin clapped a finger against his nose, and tapped it several times with a sneaking air, as embodying Rokesmith confidentially confabulating with his own nose; '"This will be a good haul; I'll go in for this!" And so this Rokesmith, greedy and hungering, begins a-creeping on his hands and knees towards the money. Not so bad a speculation either: for if this young lady had had less spirit, or had had less sense, through being at all in the romantic line, by George he might have worked it out and made it pay! But fortunately she was too many for him, and a pretty figure he cuts now he is exposed. There he stands!' said Mr Boffin, addressing Rokesmith himself with ridiculous inconsistency. 'Look at him!'

'Your unfortunate suspicions, Mr Boffin—' began the Secretary.

'Precious unfortunate for you, I can tell you,' said Mr Boffin.

'—are not to be combated by any one, and I address myself to no such hopeless task. But I will say a word upon the truth.'

'Yah! Much you care about the truth,' said Mr Boffin, with a snap of his fingers.

'Noddy! My dear love!' expostulated his wife.

'Old lady,' returned Mr Boffin, 'you keep still. I say to this Rokesmith here, much he cares about the truth. I tell him again, much he cares about the truth.'

'Our connexion being at an end, Mr Boffin,' said the Secretary, 'it can be of very little moment to me what you say.'

'Oh! You are knowing enough,' retorted Mr Boffin, with a sly look, 'to have found out that our connexion's at an end, eh? But you can't get beforehand with me. Look at this in my hand. This is your pay, on your discharge. You can only follow suit. You can't deprive me of the lead. Let's have no pretending that you discharge yourself. I discharge you.'

'So that I go,' remarked the Secretary, waving the point aside with his hand, 'it is all one to me.'

'Is it?' said Mr Boffin. 'But it's two to me, let me tell you. Allowing a fellow that's found out, to discharge himself, is one thing; discharging him for insolence and presumption, and likewise for designs upon his master's money, is another. One and one's two; not one. (Old lady, don't you cut in. You keep still.)'

'Have you said all you wish to say to me?' demanded the Secretary.

'I don't know whether I have or not,' answered Mr Boffin. 'It depends.'

'Perhaps you will consider whether there are any other strong expressions that you would like to bestow upon me?'

'I'll consider that,' said Mr Boffin, obstinately, 'at my convenience, and not at yours. You want the last word. It may not be suitable to let you have it.'

'Noddy! My dear, dear Noddy! You sound so hard!' cried poor Mrs Boffin, not to be quite repressed.

'Old lady,' said her husband, but without harshness, 'if you cut in when requested not, I'll get a pillow and carry you out of the room upon it. What do you want to say, you Rokesmith?'

'To you, Mr Boffin, nothing. But to Miss Wilfer and to your good kind wife, a word.'

'Out with it then,' replied Mr Boffin, 'and cut it short, for we've had enough of you.'

'I have borne,' said the Secretary, in a low voice, 'with my false position here, that I might not be separated from Miss Wilfer. To be near her, has been a recompense to me from day to day, even for the undeserved treatment I have had here, and for the degraded aspect in which she has often seen me. Since Miss Wilfer rejected me, I have never again urged my suit, to the best of my belief, with a spoken syllable or a look. But I have never changed in my devotion to her, except—if she will forgive my saying so—that it is deeper than it was, and better founded.'

'Now, mark this chap's saying Miss Wilfer, when he means L.s.d.!' cried Mr Boffin, with a cunning wink. 'Now, mark this chap's making Miss Wilfer stand for Pounds, Shillings, and Pence!'

'My feeling for Miss Wilfer,' pursued the Secretary, without deigning to notice him, 'is not one to be ashamed of. I avow it. I love her. Let me go where I may when I presently leave this house, I shall go into a blank life, leaving her.'

'Leaving L.s.d. behind me,' said Mr Boffin, by way of commentary, with another wink.

'That I am incapable,' the Secretary went on, still without heeding him, 'of a mercenary project, or a mercenary thought, in connexion with Miss Wilfer, is nothing meritorious in me, because any prize that I could put before my fancy would sink into insignificance beside her. If the greatest wealth or the highest rank were hers, it would only be important in my sight as removing her still farther from me, and making me more hopeless, if that could be. Say,' remarked the Secretary, looking full at his late master, 'say that with a word she could strip Mr Boffin of his fortune and take possession of it, she would be of no greater worth in my eyes than she is.'

'What do you think by this time, old lady,' asked Mr Boffin, turning to his wife in a bantering tone, 'about this Rokesmith here, and his caring for the truth? You needn't say what you think, my dear, because I don't want you to cut in, but you can think it all the same. As to taking possession of my property, I warrant you he wouldn't do that himself if he could.'

'No,' returned the Secretary, with another full look.

'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed Mr Boffin. 'There's nothing like a good 'un while you ARE about it.'

'I have been for a moment,' said the Secretary, turning from him and falling into his former manner, 'diverted from the little I have to say. My interest in Miss Wilfer began when I first saw her; even began when I had only heard of her. It was, in fact, the cause of my throwing myself in Mr Boffin's way, and entering his service. Miss Wilfer has never known this until now. I mention it now, only as a corroboration (though I hope it may be needless) of my being free from the sordid design attributed to me.'

'Now, this is a very artful dog,' said Mr Boffin, with a deep look. 'This is a longer-headed schemer than I thought him. See how patiently and methodically he goes to work. He gets to know about me and my property, and about this young lady, and her share in poor young John's story, and he puts this and that together, and he says to himself, "I'll get in with Boffin, and I'll get in with this young lady, and I'll work 'em both at the same time, and I'll bring my pigs to market somewhere." I hear him say it, bless you! I look at him, now, and I see him say it!'

Mr Boffin pointed at the culprit, as it were in the act, and hugged himself in his great penetration.

'But luckily he hadn't to deal with the people he supposed, Bella, my dear!' said Mr Boffin. 'No! Luckily he had to deal with you, and with me, and with Daniel and Miss Dancer, and with Elwes, and with Vulture Hopkins, and with Blewbury Jones and all the rest of us, one down t'other come on. And he's beat; that's what he is; regularly beat. He thought to squeeze money out of us, and he has done for himself instead, Bella my dear!'

Bella my dear made no response, gave no sign of acquiescence. When she had first covered her face she had sunk upon a chair with her hands resting on the back of it, and had never moved since. There was a short silence at this point, and Mrs Boffin softly rose as if to go to her. But, Mr Boffin stopped her with a gesture, and she obediently sat down again and stayed where she was.

'There's your pay, Mister Rokesmith,' said the Golden Dustman, jerking the folded scrap of paper he had in his hand, towards his late Secretary. 'I dare say you can stoop to pick it up, after what you have stooped to here.'

'I have stooped to nothing but this,' Rokesmith answered as he took it from the ground; 'and this is mine, for I have earned it by the hardest of hard labour.'

'You're a pretty quick packer, I hope,' said Mr Boffin; 'because the sooner you are gone, bag and baggage, the better for all parties.'

'You need have no fear of my lingering.'

'There's just one thing though,' said Mr Boffin, 'that I should like to ask you before we come to a good riddance, if it was only to show this young lady how conceited you schemers are, in thinking that nobody finds out how you contradict yourselves.'

'Ask me anything you wish to ask,' returned Rokesmith, 'but use the expedition that you recommend.'

'You pretend to have a mighty admiration for this young lady?' said Mr Boffin, laying his hand protectingly on Bella's head without looking down at her.

'I do not pretend.'

'Oh! Well. You HAVE a mighty admiration for this young lady—since you are so particular?'

'Yes.'

'How do you reconcile that, with this young lady's being a weak-spirited, improvident idiot, not knowing what was due to herself, flinging up her money to the church-weathercocks, and racing off at a splitting pace for the workhouse?'

'I don't understand you.'

'Don't you? Or won't you? What else could you have made this young lady out to be, if she had listened to such addresses as yours?'

'What else, if I had been so happy as to win her affections and possess her heart?'

'Win her affections,' retorted Mr Boffin, with ineffable contempt, 'and possess her heart! Mew says the cat, Quack-quack says the duck, Bow-wow-wow says the dog! Win her affections and possess her heart! Mew, Quack-quack, Bow-wow!'

John Rokesmith stared at him in his outburst, as if with some faint idea that he had gone mad.

'What is due to this young lady,' said Mr Boffin, 'is Money, and this young lady right well knows it.'

'You slander the young lady.'

'YOU slander the young lady; you with your affections and hearts and trumpery,' returned Mr Boffin. 'It's of a piece with the rest of your behaviour. I heard of these doings of yours only last night, or you should have heard of 'em from me, sooner, take your oath of it. I heard of 'em from a lady with as good a headpiece as the best, and she knows this young lady, and I know this young lady, and we all three know that it's Money she makes a stand for—money, money, money—and that you and your affections and hearts are a Lie, sir!'

'Mrs Boffin,' said Rokesmith, quietly turning to her, 'for your delicate and unvarying kindness I thank you with the warmest gratitude. Good-bye! Miss Wilfer, good-bye!'

'And now, my dear,' said Mr Boffin, laying his hand on Bella's head again, 'you may begin to make yourself quite comfortable, and I hope you feel that you've been righted.'

But, Bella was so far from appearing to feel it, that she shrank from his hand and from the chair, and, starting up in an incoherent passion of tears, and stretching out her arms, cried, 'O Mr Rokesmith, before you go, if you could but make me poor again! O! Make me poor again, Somebody, I beg and pray, or my heart will break if this goes on! Pa, dear, make me poor again and take me home! I was bad enough there, but I have been so much worse here. Don't give me money, Mr Boffin, I won't have money. Keep it away from me, and only let me speak to good little Pa, and lay my head upon his shoulder, and tell him all my griefs. Nobody else can understand me, nobody else can comfort me, nobody else knows how unworthy I am, and yet can love me like a little child. I am better with Pa than any one—more innocent, more sorry, more glad!' So, crying out in a wild way that she could not bear this, Bella drooped her head on Mrs Boffin's ready breast.

John Rokesmith from his place in the room, and Mr Boffin from his, looked on at her in silence until she was silent herself. Then Mr Boffin observed in a soothing and comfortable tone, 'There, my dear, there; you are righted now, and it's ALL right. I don't wonder, I'm sure, at your being a little flurried by having a scene with this fellow, but it's all over, my dear, and you're righted, and it's—and it's ALL right!' Which Mr Boffin repeated with a highly satisfied air of completeness and finality.

'I hate you!' cried Bella, turning suddenly upon him, with a stamp of her little foot—'at least, I can't hate you, but I don't like you!'

'HUL—LO!' exclaimed Mr Boffin in an amazed under-tone.

'You're a scolding, unjust, abusive, aggravating, bad old creature!' cried Bella. 'I am angry with my ungrateful self for calling you names; but you are, you are; you know you are!'

Mr Boffin stared here, and stared there, as misdoubting that he must be in some sort of fit.

'I have heard you with shame,' said Bella. 'With shame for myself, and with shame for you. You ought to be above the base tale-bearing of a time-serving woman; but you are above nothing now.'

Mr Boffin, seeming to become convinced that this was a fit, rolled his eyes and loosened his neckcloth.

'When I came here, I respected you and honoured you, and I soon loved you,' cried Bella. 'And now I can't bear the sight of you. At least, I don't know that I ought to go so far as that—only you're a—you're a Monster!' Having shot this bolt out with a great expenditure of force, Bella hysterically laughed and cried together.

'The best wish I can wish you is,' said Bella, returning to the charge, 'that you had not one single farthing in the world. If any true friend and well-wisher could make you a bankrupt, you would be a Duck; but as a man of property you are a Demon!'

After despatching this second bolt with a still greater expenditure of force, Bella laughed and cried still more.

'Mr Rokesmith, pray stay one moment. Pray hear one word from me before you go! I am deeply sorry for the reproaches you have borne on my account. Out of the depths of my heart I earnestly and truly beg your pardon.'

As she stepped towards him, he met her. As she gave him her hand, he put it to his lips, and said, 'God bless you!' No laughing was mixed with Bella's crying then; her tears were pure and fervent.

'There is not an ungenerous word that I have heard addressed to you—heard with scorn and indignation, Mr Rokesmith—but it has wounded me far more than you, for I have deserved it, and you never have. Mr Rokesmith, it is to me you owe this perverted account of what passed between us that night. I parted with the secret, even while I was angry with myself for doing so. It was very bad in me, but indeed it was not wicked. I did it in a moment of conceit and folly—one of my many such moments—one of my many such hours—years. As I am punished for it severely, try to forgive it!'

'I do with all my soul.'

'Thank you. O thank you! Don't part from me till I have said one other word, to do you justice. The only fault you can be truly charged with, in having spoken to me as you did that night—with how much delicacy and how much forbearance no one but I can know or be grateful to you for—is, that you laid yourself open to be slighted by a worldly shallow girl whose head was turned, and who was quite unable to rise to the worth of what you offered her. Mr Rokesmith, that girl has often seen herself in a pitiful and poor light since, but never in so pitiful and poor a light as now, when the mean tone in which she answered you—sordid and vain girl that she was—has been echoed in her ears by Mr Boffin.'

He kissed her hand again.

'Mr Boffin's speeches were detestable to me, shocking to me,' said Bella, startling that gentleman with another stamp of her little foot. 'It is quite true that there was a time, and very lately, when I deserved to be so "righted," Mr Rokesmith; but I hope that I shall never deserve it again!'

He once more put her hand to his lips, and then relinquished it, and left the room. Bella was hurrying back to the chair in which she had hidden her face so long, when, catching sight of Mrs Boffin by the way, she stopped at her. 'He is gone,' sobbed Bella indignantly, despairingly, in fifty ways at once, with her arms round Mrs Boffin's neck. 'He has been most shamefully abused, and most unjustly and most basely driven away, and I am the cause of it!'

All this time, Mr Boffin had been rolling his eyes over his loosened neckerchief, as if his fit were still upon him. Appearing now to think that he was coming to, he stared straight before him for a while, tied his neckerchief again, took several long inspirations, swallowed several times, and ultimately exclaimed with a deep sigh, as if he felt himself on the whole better: 'Well!'

No word, good or bad, did Mrs Boffin say; but she tenderly took care of Bella, and glanced at her husband as if for orders. Mr Boffin, without imparting any, took his seat on a chair over against them, and there sat leaning forward, with a fixed countenance, his legs apart, a hand on each knee, and his elbows squared, until Bella should dry her eyes and raise her head, which in the fulness of time she did.

'I must go home,' said Bella, rising hurriedly. 'I am very grateful to you for all you have done for me, but I can't stay here.'

'My darling girl!' remonstrated Mrs Boffin.

'No, I can't stay here,' said Bella; 'I can't indeed.—Ugh! you vicious old thing!' (This to Mr Boffin.)

'Don't be rash, my love,' urged Mrs Boffin. 'Think well of what you do.'

'Yes, you had better think well,' said Mr Boffin.

'I shall never more think well of YOU,' cried Bella, cutting him short, with intense defiance in her expressive little eyebrows, and championship of the late Secretary in every dimple. 'No! Never again! Your money has changed you to marble. You are a hard-hearted Miser. You are worse than Dancer, worse than Hopkins, worse than Blackberry Jones, worse than any of the wretches. And more!' proceeded Bella, breaking into tears again, 'you were wholly undeserving of the Gentleman you have lost.'

'Why, you don't mean to say, Miss Bella,' the Golden Dustman slowly remonstrated, 'that you set up Rokesmith against me?'

'I do!' said Bella. 'He is worth a Million of you.'

Very pretty she looked, though very angry, as she made herself as tall as she possibly could (which was not extremely tall), and utterly renounced her patron with a lofty toss of her rich brown head.

'I would rather he thought well of me,' said Bella, 'though he swept the street for bread, than that you did, though you splashed the mud upon him from the wheels of a chariot of pure gold.—There!'

'Well I'm sure!' cried Mr Boffin, staring.

'And for a long time past, when you have thought you set yourself above him, I have only seen you under his feet,' said Bella—'There! And throughout I saw in him the master, and I saw in you the man—There! And when you used him shamefully, I took his part and loved him—There! I boast of it!'

After which strong avowal Bella underwent reaction, and cried to any extent, with her face on the back of her chair.

'Now, look here,' said Mr Boffin, as soon as he could find an opening for breaking the silence and striking in. 'Give me your attention, Bella. I am not angry.'

'I AM!' said Bella.

'I say,' resumed the Golden Dustman, 'I am not angry, and I mean kindly to you, and I want to overlook this. So you'll stay where you are, and we'll agree to say no more about it.'

'No, I can't stay here,' cried Bella, rising hurriedly again; 'I can't think of staying here. I must go home for good.'

'Now, don't be silly,' Mr Boffin reasoned. 'Don't do what you can't undo; don't do what you're sure to be sorry for.'

'I shall never be sorry for it,' said Bella; 'and I should always be sorry, and should every minute of my life despise myself if I remained here after what has happened.'

'At least, Bella,' argued Mr Boffin, 'let there be no mistake about it. Look before you leap, you know. Stay where you are, and all's well, and all's as it was to be. Go away, and you can never come back.'

'I know that I can never come back, and that's what I mean,' said Bella.

'You mustn't expect,' Mr Boffin pursued, 'that I'm a-going to settle money on you, if you leave us like this, because I am not. No, Bella! Be careful! Not one brass farthing.'

'Expect!' said Bella, haughtily. 'Do you think that any power on earth could make me take it, if you did, sir?'

But there was Mrs Boffin to part from, and, in the full flush of her dignity, the impressible little soul collapsed again. Down upon her knees before that good woman, she rocked herself upon her breast, and cried, and sobbed, and folded her in her arms with all her might.

'You're a dear, a dear, the best of dears!' cried Bella. 'You're the best of human creatures. I can never be thankful enough to you, and I can never forget you. If I should live to be blind and deaf I know I shall see and hear you, in my fancy, to the last of my dim old days!'

Mrs Boffin wept most heartily, and embraced her with all fondness; but said not one single word except that she was her dear girl. She said that often enough, to be sure, for she said it over and over again; but not one word else.

Bella broke from her at length, and was going weeping out of the room, when in her own little queer affectionate way, she half relented towards Mr Boffin.

'I am very glad,' sobbed Bella, 'that I called you names, sir, because you richly deserved it. But I am very sorry that I called you names, because you used to be so different. Say good-bye!'

'Good-bye,' said Mr Boffin, shortly.

'If I knew which of your hands was the least spoilt, I would ask you to let me touch it,' said Bella, 'for the last time. But not because I repent of what I have said to you. For I don't. It's true!'

'Try the left hand,' said Mr Boffin, holding it out in a stolid manner; 'it's the least used.'

'You have been wonderfully good and kind to me,' said Bella, 'and I kiss it for that. You have been as bad as bad could be to Mr Rokesmith, and I throw it away for that. Thank you for myself, and good-bye!'

'Good-bye,' said Mr Boffin as before.

Bella caught him round the neck and kissed him, and ran out for ever.

She ran up-stairs, and sat down on the floor in her own room, and cried abundantly. But the day was declining and she had no time to lose. She opened all the places where she kept her dresses; selected only those she had brought with her, leaving all the rest; and made a great misshapen bundle of them, to be sent for afterwards.

'I won't take one of the others,' said Bella, tying the knots of the bundle very tight, in the severity of her resolution. 'I'll leave all the presents behind, and begin again entirely on my own account.' That the resolution might be thoroughly carried into practice, she even changed the dress she wore, for that in which she had come to the grand mansion. Even the bonnet she put on, was the bonnet that had mounted into the Boffin chariot at Holloway.

'Now, I am complete,' said Bella. 'It's a little trying, but I have steeped my eyes in cold water, and I won't cry any more. You have been a pleasant room to me, dear room. Adieu! We shall never see each other again.'

With a parting kiss of her fingers to it, she softly closed the door and went with a light foot down the great staircase, pausing and listening as she went, that she might meet none of the household. No one chanced to be about, and she got down to the hall in quiet. The door of the late Secretary's room stood open. She peeped in as she passed, and divined from the emptiness of his table, and the general appearance of things, that he was already gone. Softly opening the great hall door, and softly closing it upon herself, she turned and kissed it on the outside—insensible old combination of wood and iron that it was!—before she ran away from the house at a swift pace.

'That was well done!' panted Bella, slackening in the next street, and subsiding into a walk. 'If I had left myself any breath to cry with, I should have cried again. Now poor dear darling little Pa, you are going to see your lovely woman unexpectedly.'

Chapter 16

THE FEAST OF THE THREE HOBGOBLINS

The City looked unpromising enough, as Bella made her way along its gritty streets. Most of its money-mills were slackening sail, or had left off grinding for the day. The master-millers had already departed, and the journeymen were departing. There was a jaded aspect on the business lanes and courts, and the very pavements had a weary appearance, confused by the tread of a million of feet. There must be hours of night to temper down the day's distraction of so feverish a place. As yet the worry of the newly-stopped whirling and grinding on the part of the money-mills seemed to linger in the air, and the quiet was more like the prostration of a spent giant than the repose of one who was renewing his strength.

If Bella thought, as she glanced at the mighty Bank, how agreeable it would be to have an hour's gardening there, with a bright copper shovel, among the money, still she was not in an avaricious vein. Much improved in that respect, and with certain half-formed images which had little gold in their composition, dancing before her bright eyes, she arrived in the drug-flavoured region of Mincing Lane, with the sensation of having just opened a drawer in a chemist's shop.

The counting-house of Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles was pointed out by an elderly female accustomed to the care of offices, who dropped upon Bella out of a public-house, wiping her mouth, and accounted for its humidity on natural principles well known to the physical sciences, by explaining that she had looked in at the door to see what o'clock it was. The counting-house was a wall-eyed ground floor by a dark gateway, and Bella was considering, as she approached it, could there be any precedent in the City for her going in and asking for R. Wilfer, when whom should she see, sitting at one of the windows with the plate-glass sash raised, but R. Wilfer himself, preparing to take a slight refection.

On approaching nearer, Bella discerned that the refection had the appearance of a small cottage-loaf and a pennyworth of milk.

Simultaneously with this discovery on her part, her father discovered her, and invoked the echoes of Mincing Lane to exclaim 'My gracious me!'

He then came cherubically flying out without a hat, and embraced her, and handed her in. 'For it's after hours and I am all alone, my dear,' he explained, 'and am having—as I sometimes do when they are all gone—a quiet tea.'

Looking round the office, as if her father were a captive and this his cell, Bella hugged him and choked him to her heart's content.

'I never was so surprised, my dear!' said her father. 'I couldn't believe my eyes. Upon my life, I thought they had taken to lying! The idea of your coming down the Lane yourself! Why didn't you send the footman down the Lane, my dear?'

'I have brought no footman with me, Pa.'

'Oh indeed! But you have brought the elegant turn-out, my love?'

'No, Pa.'

'You never can have walked, my dear?'

'Yes, I have, Pa.'

He looked so very much astonished, that Bella could not make up her mind to break it to him just yet.

'The consequence is, Pa, that your lovely woman feels a little faint, and would very much like to share your tea.'

The cottage loaf and the pennyworth of milk had been set forth on a sheet of paper on the window-seat. The cherubic pocket-knife, with the first bit of the loaf still on its point, lay beside them where it had been hastily thrown down. Bella took the bit off, and put it in her mouth. 'My dear child,' said her father, 'the idea of your partaking of such lowly fare! But at least you must have your own loaf and your own penn'orth. One moment, my dear. The Dairy is just over the way and round the corner.'

Regardless of Bella's dissuasions he ran out, and quickly returned with the new supply. 'My dear child,' he said, as he spread it on another piece of paper before her, 'the idea of a splendid—!' and then looked at her figure, and stopped short.

'What's the matter, Pa?'

'—of a splendid female,' he resumed more slowly, 'putting up with such accommodation as the present!—Is that a new dress you have on, my dear?'

'No, Pa, an old one. Don't you remember it?'

'Why, I THOUGHT I remembered it, my dear!'

'You should, for you bought it, Pa.'

'Yes, I THOUGHT I bought it my dear!' said the cherub, giving himself a little shake, as if to rouse his faculties.

'And have you grown so fickle that you don't like your own taste, Pa dear?'

'Well, my love,' he returned, swallowing a bit of the cottage loaf with considerable effort, for it seemed to stick by the way: 'I should have thought it was hardly sufficiently splendid for existing circumstances.'

'And so, Pa,' said Bella, moving coaxingly to his side instead of remaining opposite, 'you sometimes have a quiet tea here all alone? I am not in the tea's way, if I draw my arm over your shoulder like this, Pa?'

'Yes, my dear, and no, my dear. Yes to the first question, and Certainly Not to the second. Respecting the quiet tea, my dear, why you see the occupations of the day are sometimes a little wearing; and if there's nothing interposed between the day and your mother, why SHE is sometimes a little wearing, too.'

'I know, Pa.'

'Yes, my dear. So sometimes I put a quiet tea at the window here, with a little quiet contemplation of the Lane (which comes soothing), between the day, and domestic—'

'Bliss,' suggested Bella, sorrowfully.

'And domestic Bliss,' said her father, quite contented to accept the phrase.

Bella kissed him. 'And it is in this dark dingy place of captivity, poor dear, that you pass all the hours of your life when you are not at home?'

'Not at home, or not on the road there, or on the road here, my love. Yes. You see that little desk in the corner?'

'In the dark corner, furthest both from the light and from the fireplace? The shabbiest desk of all the desks?'

'Now, does it really strike you in that point of view, my dear?' said her father, surveying it artistically with his head on one side: 'that's mine. That's called Rumty's Perch.'

'Whose Perch?' asked Bella with great indignation.

'Rumty's. You see, being rather high and up two steps they call it a Perch. And they call ME Rumty.'

'How dare they!' exclaimed Bella.

'They're playful, Bella my dear; they're playful. They're more or less younger than I am, and they're playful. What does it matter? It might be Surly, or Sulky, or fifty disagreeable things that I really shouldn't like to be considered. But Rumty! Lor, why not Rumty?'

To inflict a heavy disappointment on this sweet nature, which had been, through all her caprices, the object of her recognition, love, and admiration from infancy, Bella felt to be the hardest task of her hard day. 'I should have done better,' she thought, 'to tell him at first; I should have done better to tell him just now, when he had some slight misgiving; he is quite happy again, and I shall make him wretched.'

He was falling back on his loaf and milk, with the pleasantest composure, and Bella stealing her arm a little closer about him, and at the same time sticking up his hair with an irresistible propensity to play with him founded on the habit of her whole life, had prepared herself to say: 'Pa dear, don't be cast down, but I must tell you something disagreeable!' when he interrupted her in an unlooked-for manner.

'My gracious me!' he exclaimed, invoking the Mincing Lane echoes as before. 'This is very extraordinary!'

'What is, Pa?'

'Why here's Mr Rokesmith now!'

'No, no, Pa, no,' cried Bella, greatly flurried. 'Surely not.'

'Yes there is! Look here!'

Sooth to say, Mr Rokesmith not only passed the window, but came into the counting-house. And not only came into the counting-house, but, finding himself alone there with Bella and her father, rushed at Bella and caught her in his arms, with the rapturous words 'My dear, dear girl; my gallant, generous, disinterested, courageous, noble girl!' And not only that even, (which one might have thought astonishment enough for one dose), but Bella, after hanging her head for a moment, lifted it up and laid it on his breast, as if that were her head's chosen and lasting resting-place!

'I knew you would come to him, and I followed you,' said Rokesmith. 'My love, my life! You ARE mine?'

To which Bella responded, 'Yes, I AM yours if you think me worth taking!' And after that, seemed to shrink to next to nothing in the clasp of his arms, partly because it was such a strong one on his part, and partly because there was such a yielding to it on hers.

The cherub, whose hair would have done for itself under the influence of this amazing spectacle, what Bella had just now done for it, staggered back into the window-seat from which he had risen, and surveyed the pair with his eyes dilated to their utmost.

'But we must think of dear Pa,' said Bella; 'I haven't told dear Pa; let us speak to Pa.' Upon which they turned to do so.

'I wish first, my dear,' remarked the cherub faintly, 'that you'd have the kindness to sprinkle me with a little milk, for I feel as if I was—Going.'

In fact, the good little fellow had become alarmingly limp, and his senses seemed to be rapidly escaping, from the knees upward. Bella sprinkled him with kisses instead of milk, but gave him a little of that article to drink; and he gradually revived under her caressing care.

'We'll break it to you gently, dearest Pa,' said Bella.

'My dear,' returned the cherub, looking at them both, 'you broke so much in the first—Gush, if I may so express myself—that I think I am equal to a good large breakage now.'

'Mr Wilfer,' said John Rokesmith, excitedly and joyfully, 'Bella takes me, though I have no fortune, even no present occupation; nothing but what I can get in the life before us. Bella takes me!'

'Yes, I should rather have inferred, my dear sir,' returned the cherub feebly, 'that Bella took you, from what I have within these few minutes remarked.'

'You don't know, Pa,' said Bella, 'how ill I have used him!'

'You don't know, sir,' said Rokesmith, 'what a heart she has!'

'You don't know, Pa,' said Bella, 'what a shocking creature I was growing, when he saved me from myself!'

'You don't know, sir,' said Rokesmith, 'what a sacrifice she has made for me!'

'My dear Bella,' replied the cherub, still pathetically scared, 'and my dear John Rokesmith, if you will allow me so to call you—'

'Yes do, Pa, do!' urged Bella. 'I allow you, and my will is his law. Isn't it—dear John Rokesmith?'

There was an engaging shyness in Bella, coupled with an engaging tenderness of love and confidence and pride, in thus first calling him by name, which made it quite excusable in John Rokesmith to do what he did. What he did was, once more to give her the appearance of vanishing as aforesaid.

'I think, my dears,' observed the cherub, 'that if you could make it convenient to sit one on one side of me, and the other on the other, we should get on rather more consecutively, and make things rather plainer. John Rokesmith mentioned, a while ago, that he had no present occupation.'

'None,' said Rokesmith.

'No, Pa, none,' said Bella.

'From which I argue,' proceeded the cherub, 'that he has left Mr Boffin?'

'Yes, Pa. And so—'

'Stop a bit, my dear. I wish to lead up to it by degrees. And that Mr Boffin has not treated him well?'

'Has treated him most shamefully, dear Pa!' cried Bella with a flashing face.

'Of which,' pursued the cherub, enjoining patience with his hand, 'a certain mercenary young person distantly related to myself, could not approve? Am I leading up to it right?'

'Could not approve, sweet Pa,' said Bella, with a tearful laugh and a joyful kiss.

'Upon which,' pursued the cherub, 'the certain mercenary young person distantly related to myself, having previously observed and mentioned to myself that prosperity was spoiling Mr Boffin, felt that she must not sell her sense of what was right and what was wrong, and what was true and what was false, and what was just and what was unjust, for any price that could be paid to her by any one alive? Am I leading up to it right?'

With another tearful laugh Bella joyfully kissed him again.

'And therefore—and therefore,' the cherub went on in a glowing voice, as Bella's hand stole gradually up his waistcoat to his neck, 'this mercenary young person distantly related to myself, refused the price, took off the splendid fashions that were part of it, put on the comparatively poor dress that I had last given her, and trusting to my supporting her in what was right, came straight to me. Have I led up to it?'

Bella's hand was round his neck by this time, and her face was on it.

'The mercenary young person distantly related to myself,' said her good father, 'did well! The mercenary young person distantly related to myself, did not trust to me in vain! I admire this mercenary young person distantly related to myself, more in this dress than if she had come to me in China silks, Cashmere shawls, and Golconda diamonds. I love this young person dearly. I say to the man of this young person's heart, out of my heart and with all of it, "My blessing on this engagement betwixt you, and she brings you a good fortune when she brings you the poverty she has accepted for your sake and the honest truth's!"'

The stanch little man's voice failed him as he gave John Rokesmith his hand, and he was silent, bending his face low over his daughter. But, not for long. He soon looked up, saying in a sprightly tone:

'And now, my dear child, if you think you can entertain John Rokesmith for a minute and a half, I'll run over to the Dairy, and fetch HIM a cottage loaf and a drink of milk, that we may all have tea together.'

It was, as Bella gaily said, like the supper provided for the three nursery hobgoblins at their house in the forest, without their thunderous low growlings of the alarming discovery, 'Somebody's been drinking MY milk!' It was a delicious repast; by far the most delicious that Bella, or John Rokesmith, or even R. Wilfer had ever made. The uncongenial oddity of its surroundings, with the two brass knobs of the iron safe of Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles staring from a corner, like the eyes of some dull dragon, only made it the more delightful.

'To think,' said the cherub, looking round the office with unspeakable enjoyment, 'that anything of a tender nature should come off here, is what tickles me. To think that ever I should have seen my Bella folded in the arms of her future husband, HERE, you know!'

It was not until the cottage loaves and the milk had for some time disappeared, and the foreshadowings of night were creeping over Mincing Lane, that the cherub by degrees became a little nervous, and said to Bella, as he cleared his throat:

'Hem!—Have you thought at all about your mother, my dear?'

'Yes, Pa.'

'And your sister Lavvy, for instance, my dear?'

'Yes, Pa. I think we had better not enter into particulars at home. I think it will be quite enough to say that I had a difference with Mr Boffin, and have left for good.'

'John Rokesmith being acquainted with your Ma, my love,' said her father, after some slight hesitation, 'I need have no delicacy in hinting before him that you may perhaps find your Ma a little wearing.'

'A little, patient Pa?' said Bella with a tuneful laugh: the tunefuller for being so loving in its tone.

'Well! We'll say, strictly in confidence among ourselves, wearing; we won't qualify it,' the cherub stoutly admitted. 'And your sister's temper is wearing.'

'I don't mind, Pa.'

'And you must prepare yourself you know, my precious,' said her father, with much gentleness, 'for our looking very poor and meagre at home, and being at the best but very uncomfortable, after Mr Boffin's house.'

'I don't mind, Pa. I could bear much harder trials—for John.'

The closing words were not so softly and blushingly said but that John heard them, and showed that he heard them by again assisting Bella to another of those mysterious disappearances.

'Well!' said the cherub gaily, and not expressing disapproval, 'when you—when you come back from retirement, my love, and reappear on the surface, I think it will be time to lock up and go.'

If the counting-house of Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles had ever been shut up by three happier people, glad as most people were to shut it up, they must have been superlatively happy indeed. But first Bella mounted upon Rumty's Perch, and said, 'Show me what you do here all day long, dear Pa. Do you write like this?' laying her round cheek upon her plump left arm, and losing sight of her pen in waves of hair, in a highly unbusiness-like manner. Though John Rokesmith seemed to like it.

So, the three hobgoblins, having effaced all traces of their feast, and swept up the crumbs, came out of Mincing Lane to walk to Holloway; and if two of the hobgoblins didn't wish the distance twice as long as it was, the third hobgoblin was much mistaken. Indeed, that modest spirit deemed himself so much in the way of their deep enjoyment of the journey, that he apologetically remarked: 'I think, my dears, I'll take the lead on the other side of the road, and seem not to belong to you.' Which he did, cherubically strewing the path with smiles, in the absence of flowers.

It was almost ten o'clock when they stopped within view of Wilfer Castle; and then, the spot being quiet and deserted, Bella began a series of disappearances which threatened to last all night.

'I think, John,' the cherub hinted at last, 'that if you can spare me the young person distantly related to myself, I'll take her in.'

'I can't spare her,' answered John, 'but I must lend her to you.'—My Darling!' A word of magic which caused Bella instantly to disappear again.

'Now, dearest Pa,' said Bella, when she became visible, 'put your hand in mine, and we'll run home as fast as ever we can run, and get it over. Now, Pa. Once!—'

'My dear,' the cherub faltered, with something of a craven air, 'I was going to observe that if your mother—'

'You mustn't hang back, sir, to gain time,' cried Bella, putting out her right foot; 'do you see that, sir? That's the mark; come up to the mark, sir. Once! Twice! Three times and away, Pa!' Off she skimmed, bearing the cherub along, nor ever stopped, nor suffered him to stop, until she had pulled at the bell. 'Now, dear Pa,' said Bella, taking him by both ears as if he were a pitcher, and conveying his face to her rosy lips, 'we are in for it!'

Miss Lavvy came out to open the gate, waited on by that attentive cavalier and friend of the family, Mr George Sampson. 'Why, it's never Bella!' exclaimed Miss Lavvy starting back at the sight. And then bawled, 'Ma! Here's Bella!'

This produced, before they could get into the house, Mrs Wilfer. Who, standing in the portal, received them with ghostly gloom, and all her other appliances of ceremony.

'My child is welcome, though unlooked for,' said she, at the time presenting her cheek as if it were a cool slate for visitors to enrol themselves upon. 'You too, R. W., are welcome, though late. Does the male domestic of Mrs Boffin hear me there?' This deep-toned inquiry was cast forth into the night, for response from the menial in question.

'There is no one waiting, Ma, dear,' said Bella.

'There is no one waiting?' repeated Mrs Wilfer in majestic accents.

'No, Ma, dear.'

A dignified shiver pervaded Mrs Wilfer's shoulders and gloves, as who should say, 'An Enigma!' and then she marched at the head of the procession to the family keeping-room, where she observed:

'Unless, R. W.': who started on being solemnly turned upon: 'you have taken the precaution of making some addition to our frugal supper on your way home, it will prove but a distasteful one to Bella. Cold neck of mutton and a lettuce can ill compete with the luxuries of Mr Boffin's board.'

'Pray don't talk like that, Ma dear,' said Bella; 'Mr Boffin's board is nothing to me.'

But, here Miss Lavinia, who had been intently eyeing Bella's bonnet, struck in with 'Why, Bella!'

'Yes, Lavvy, I know.'

The Irrepressible lowered her eyes to Bella's dress, and stooped to look at it, exclaiming again: 'Why, Bella!'

'Yes, Lavvy, I know what I have got on. I was going to tell Ma when you interrupted. I have left Mr Boffin's house for good, Ma, and I have come home again.'

Mrs Wilfer spake no word, but, having glared at her offspring for a minute or two in an awful silence, retired into her corner of state backward, and sat down: like a frozen article on sale in a Russian market.

'In short, dear Ma,' said Bella, taking off the depreciated bonnet and shaking out her hair, 'I have had a very serious difference with Mr Boffin on the subject of his treatment of a member of his household, and it's a final difference, and there's an end of all.'

'And I am bound to tell you, my dear,' added R. W., submissively, 'that Bella has acted in a truly brave spirit, and with a truly right feeling. And therefore I hope, my dear, you'll not allow yourself to be greatly disappointed.'

'George!' said Miss Lavvy, in a sepulchral, warning voice, founded on her mother's; 'George Sampson, speak! What did I tell you about those Boffins?'

Mr Sampson perceiving his frail bark to be labouring among shoals and breakers, thought it safest not to refer back to any particular thing that he had been told, lest he should refer back to the wrong thing. With admirable seamanship he got his bark into deep water by murmuring 'Yes indeed.'

'Yes! I told George Sampson, as George Sampson tells you, said Miss Lavvy, 'that those hateful Boffins would pick a quarrel with Bella, as soon as her novelty had worn off. Have they done it, or have they not? Was I right, or was I wrong? And what do you say to us, Bella, of your Boffins now?'

'Lavvy and Ma,' said Bella, 'I say of Mr and Mrs Boffin what I always have said; and I always shall say of them what I always have said. But nothing will induce me to quarrel with any one to-night. I hope you are not sorry to see me, Ma dear,' kissing her; 'and I hope you are not sorry to see me, Lavvy,' kissing her too; 'and as I notice the lettuce Ma mentioned, on the table, I'll make the salad.'

Bella playfully setting herself about the task, Mrs Wilfer's impressive countenance followed her with glaring eyes, presenting a combination of the once popular sign of the Saracen's Head, with a piece of Dutch clockwork, and suggesting to an imaginative mind that from the composition of the salad, her daughter might prudently omit the vinegar. But no word issued from the majestic matron's lips. And this was more terrific to her husband (as perhaps she knew) than any flow of eloquence with which she could have edified the company.

'Now, Ma dear,' said Bella in due course, 'the salad's ready, and it's past supper-time.'

Mrs Wilfer rose, but remained speechless. 'George!' said Miss Lavinia in her voice of warning, 'Ma's chair!' Mr Sampson flew to the excellent lady's back, and followed her up close chair in hand, as she stalked to the banquet. Arrived at the table, she took her rigid seat, after favouring Mr Sampson with a glare for himself, which caused the young gentleman to retire to his place in much confusion.

The cherub not presuming to address so tremendous an object, transacted her supper through the agency of a third person, as 'Mutton to your Ma, Bella, my dear'; and 'Lavvy, I dare say your Ma would take some lettuce if you were to put it on her plate.' Mrs Wilfer's manner of receiving those viands was marked by petrified absence of mind; in which state, likewise, she partook of them, occasionally laying down her knife and fork, as saying within her own spirit, 'What is this I am doing?' and glaring at one or other of the party, as if in indignant search of information. A magnetic result of such glaring was, that the person glared at could not by any means successfully pretend to be ignorant of the fact: so that a bystander, without beholding Mrs Wilfer at all, must have known at whom she was glaring, by seeing her refracted from the countenance of the beglared one.

Miss Lavinia was extremely affable to Mr Sampson on this special occasion, and took the opportunity of informing her sister why.

'It was not worth troubling you about, Bella, when you were in a sphere so far removed from your family as to make it a matter in which you could be expected to take very little interest,' said Lavinia with a toss of her chin; 'but George Sampson is paying his addresses to me.'

Bella was glad to hear it. Mr Sampson became thoughtfully red, and felt called upon to encircle Miss Lavinia's waist with his arm; but, encountering a large pin in the young lady's belt, scarified a finger, uttered a sharp exclamation, and attracted the lightning of Mrs Wilfer's glare.

'George is getting on very well,' said Miss Lavinia which might not have been supposed at the moment—'and I dare say we shall be married, one of these days. I didn't care to mention it when you were with your Bof—' here Miss Lavinia checked herself in a bounce, and added more placidly, 'when you were with Mr and Mrs Boffin; but now I think it sisterly to name the circumstance.'

'Thank you, Lavvy dear. I congratulate you.'

'Thank you, Bella. The truth is, George and I did discuss whether I should tell you; but I said to George that you wouldn't be much interested in so paltry an affair, and that it was far more likely you would rather detach yourself from us altogether, than have him added to the rest of us.'

'That was a mistake, dear Lavvy,' said Bella.

'It turns out to be,' replied Miss Lavinia; 'but circumstances have changed, you know, my dear. George is in a new situation, and his prospects are very good indeed. I shouldn't have had the courage to tell you so yesterday, when you would have thought his prospects poor, and not worth notice; but I feel quite bold tonight.'

'When did you begin to feel timid, Lavvy? inquired Bella, with a smile.

'I didn't say that I ever felt timid, Bella,' replied the Irrepressible. 'But perhaps I might have said, if I had not been restrained by delicacy towards a sister's feelings, that I have for some time felt independent; too independent, my dear, to subject myself to have my intended match (you'll prick yourself again, George) looked down upon. It is not that I could have blamed you for looking down upon it, when you were looking up to a rich and great match, Bella; it is only that I was independent.'

Whether the Irrepressible felt slighted by Bella's declaration that she would not quarrel, or whether her spitefulness was evoked by Bella's return to the sphere of Mr George Sampson's courtship, or whether it was a necessary fillip to her spirits that she should come into collision with somebody on the present occasion,—anyhow she made a dash at her stately parent now, with the greatest impetuosity.

'Ma, pray don't sit staring at me in that intensely aggravating manner! If you see a black on my nose, tell me so; if you don't, leave me alone.'

'Do you address Me in those words?' said Mrs Wilfer. 'Do you presume?'

'Don't talk about presuming, Ma, for goodness' sake. A girl who is old enough to be engaged, is quite old enough to object to be stared at as if she was a Clock.'

'Audacious one!' said Mrs Wilfer. 'Your grandmamma, if so addressed by one of her daughters, at any age, would have insisted on her retiring to a dark apartment.'

'My grandmamma,' returned Lavvy, folding her arms and leaning back in her chair, 'wouldn't have sat staring people out of countenance, I think.'

'She would!' said Mrs Wilfer.

'Then it's a pity she didn't know better,' said Lavvy. 'And if my grandmamma wasn't in her dotage when she took to insisting on people's retiring to dark apartments, she ought to have been. A pretty exhibition my grandmamma must have made of herself! I wonder whether she ever insisted on people's retiring into the ball of St Paul's; and if she did, how she got them there!'

'Silence!' proclaimed Mrs Wilfer. 'I command silence!'

'I have not the slightest intention of being silent, Ma,' returned Lavinia coolly, 'but quite the contrary. I am not going to be eyed as if I had come from the Boffins, and sit silent under it. I am not going to have George Sampson eyed as if HE had come from the Boffins, and sit silent under it. If Pa thinks proper to be eyed as if HE had come from the Boffins also, well and good. I don't choose to. And I won't!'

Lavinia's engineering having made this crooked opening at Bella, Mrs Wilfer strode into it.

'You rebellious spirit! You mutinous child! Tell me this, Lavinia. If in violation of your mother's sentiments, you had condescended to allow yourself to be patronized by the Boffins, and if you had come from those halls of slavery—'

'That's mere nonsense, Ma,' said Lavinia.

'How!' exclaimed Mrs Wilfer, with sublime severity.

'Halls of slavery, Ma, is mere stuff and nonsense,' returned the unmoved Irrepressible.

'I say, presumptuous child, if you had come from the neighbourhood of Portland Place, bending under the yoke of patronage and attended by its domestics in glittering garb to visit me, do you think my deep-seated feelings could have been expressed in looks?'

'All I think about it, is,' returned Lavinia, 'that I should wish them expressed to the right person.'

'And if,' pursued her mother, 'if making light of my warnings that the face of Mrs Boffin alone was a face teeming with evil, you had clung to Mrs Boffin instead of to me, and had after all come home rejected by Mrs Boffin, trampled under foot by Mrs Boffin, and cast out by Mrs Boffin, do you think my feelings could have been expressed in looks?'

Lavinia was about replying to her honoured parent that she might as well have dispensed with her looks altogether then, when Bella rose and said, 'Good night, dear Ma. I have had a tiring day, and I'll go to bed.' This broke up the agreeable party. Mr George Sampson shortly afterwards took his leave, accompanied by Miss Lavinia with a candle as far as the hall, and without a candle as far as the garden gate; Mrs Wilfer, washing her hands of the Boffins, went to bed after the manner of Lady Macbeth; and R. W. was left alone among the dilapidations of the supper table, in a melancholy attitude.

But, a light footstep roused him from his meditations, and it was Bella's. Her pretty hair was hanging all about her, and she had tripped down softly, brush in hand, and barefoot, to say good-night to him.

'My dear, you most unquestionably ARE a lovely woman,' said the cherub, taking up a tress in his hand.

'Look here, sir,' said Bella; 'when your lovely woman marries, you shall have that piece if you like, and she'll make you a chain of it. Would you prize that remembrance of the dear creature?'

'Yes, my precious.'

'Then you shall have it if you're good, sir. I am very, very sorry, dearest Pa, to have brought home all this trouble.'

'My pet,' returned her father, in the simplest good faith, 'don't make yourself uneasy about that. It really is not worth mentioning, because things at home would have taken pretty much the same turn any way. If your mother and sister don't find one subject to get at times a little wearing on, they find another. We're never out of a wearing subject, my dear, I assure you. I am afraid you find your old room with Lavvy, dreadfully inconvenient, Bella?'

'No I don't, Pa; I don't mind. Why don't I mind, do you think, Pa?'

'Well, my child, you used to complain of it when it wasn't such a contrast as it must be now. Upon my word, I can only answer, because you are so much improved.'

'No, Pa. Because I am so thankful and so happy!'

Here she choked him until her long hair made him sneeze, and then she laughed until she made him laugh, and then she choked him again that they might not be overheard.

'Listen, sir,' said Bella. 'Your lovely woman was told her fortune to night on her way home. It won't be a large fortune, because if the lovely woman's Intended gets a certain appointment that he hopes to get soon, she will marry on a hundred and fifty pounds a year. But that's at first, and even if it should never be more, the lovely woman will make it quite enough. But that's not all, sir. In the fortune there's a certain fair man—a little man, the fortune-teller said—who, it seems, will always find himself near the lovely woman, and will always have kept, expressly for him, such a peaceful corner in the lovely woman's little house as never was. Tell me the name of that man, sir.'

'Is he a Knave in the pack of cards?' inquired the cherub, with a twinkle in his eyes.

'Yes!' cried Bella, in high glee, choking him again. 'He's the Knave of Wilfers! Dear Pa, the lovely woman means to look forward to this fortune that has been told for her, so delightfully, and to cause it to make her a much better lovely woman than she ever has been yet. What the little fair man is expected to do, sir, is to look forward to it also, by saying to himself when he is in danger of being over-worried, "I see land at last!"

'I see land at last!' repeated her father.

'There's a dear Knave of Wilfers!' exclaimed Bella; then putting out her small white bare foot, 'That's the mark, sir. Come to the mark. Put your boot against it. We keep to it together, mind! Now, sir, you may kiss the lovely woman before she runs away, so thankful and so happy. O yes, fair little man, so thankful and so happy!'

Chapter 17

A SOCIAL CHORUS

Amazement sits enthroned upon the countenances of Mr and Mrs Alfred Lammle's circle of acquaintance, when the disposal of their first-class furniture and effects (including a Billiard Table in capital letters), 'by auction, under a bill of sale,' is publicly announced on a waving hearthrug in Sackville Street. But, nobody is half so much amazed as Hamilton Veneering, Esquire, M.P. for Pocket-Breaches, who instantly begins to find out that the Lammles are the only people ever entered on his soul's register, who are NOT the oldest and dearest friends he has in the world. Mrs Veneering, W.M.P. for Pocket-Breaches, like a faithful wife shares her husband's discovery and inexpressible astonishment. Perhaps the Veneerings twain may deem the last unutterable feeling particularly due to their reputation, by reason that once upon a time some of the longer heads in the City are whispered to have shaken themselves, when Veneering's extensive dealings and great wealth were mentioned. But, it is certain that neither Mr nor Mrs Veneering can find words to wonder in, and it becomes necessary that they give to the oldest and dearest friends they have in the world, a wondering dinner.

For, it is by this time noticeable that, whatever befals, the Veneerings must give a dinner upon it. Lady Tippins lives in a chronic state of invitation to dine with the Veneerings, and in a chronic state of inflammation arising from the dinners. Boots and Brewer go about in cabs, with no other intelligible business on earth than to beat up people to come and dine with the Veneerings. Veneering pervades the legislative lobbies, intent upon entrapping his fellow-legislators to dinner. Mrs Veneering dined with five-and-twenty bran-new faces over night; calls upon them all to day; sends them every one a dinner-card to-morrow, for the week after next; before that dinner is digested, calls upon their brothers and sisters, their sons and daughters, their nephews and nieces, their aunts and uncles and cousins, and invites them all to dinner. And still, as at first, howsoever, the dining circle widens, it is to be observed that all the diners are consistent in appearing to go to the Veneerings, not to dine with Mr and Mrs Veneering (which would seem to be the last thing in their minds), but to dine with one another.

Perhaps, after all,—who knows?—Veneering may find this dining, though expensive, remunerative, in the sense that it makes champions. Mr Podsnap, as a representative man, is not alone in caring very particularly for his own dignity, if not for that of his acquaintances, and therefore in angrily supporting the acquaintances who have taken out his Permit, lest, in their being lessened, he should be. The gold and silver camels, and the ice-pails, and the rest of the Veneering table decorations, make a brilliant show, and when I, Podsnap, casually remark elsewhere that I dined last Monday with a gorgeous caravan of camels, I find it personally offensive to have it hinted to me that they are broken-kneed camels, or camels labouring under suspicion of any sort. 'I don't display camels myself, I am above them: I am a more solid man; but these camels have basked in the light of my countenance, and how dare you, sir, insinuate to me that I have irradiated any but unimpeachable camels?'

The camels are polishing up in the Analytical's pantry for the dinner of wonderment on the occasion of the Lammles going to pieces, and Mr Twemlow feels a little queer on the sofa at his lodgings over the stable yard in Duke Street, Saint James's, in consequence of having taken two advertised pills at about mid-day, on the faith of the printed representation accompanying the box (price one and a penny halfpenny, government stamp included), that the same 'will be found highly salutary as a precautionary measure in connection with the pleasures of the table.' To whom, while sickly with the fancy of an insoluble pill sticking in his gullet, and also with the sensation of a deposit of warm gum languidly wandering within him a little lower down, a servant enters with the announcement that a lady wishes to speak with him.

'A lady!' says Twemlow, pluming his ruffled feathers. 'Ask the favour of the lady's name.'

The lady's name is Lammle. The lady will not detain Mr Twemlow longer than a very few minutes. The lady is sure that Mr Twemlow will do her the kindness to see her, on being told that she particularly desires a short interview. The lady has no doubt whatever of Mr Twemlow's compliance when he hears her name. Has begged the servant to be particular not to mistake her name. Would have sent in a card, but has none.

'Show the lady in.' Lady shown in, comes in.

Mr Twemlow's little rooms are modestly furnished, in an old-fashioned manner (rather like the housekeeper's room at Snigsworthy Park), and would be bare of mere ornament, were it not for a full-length engraving of the sublime Snigsworth over the chimneypiece, snorting at a Corinthian column, with an enormous roll of paper at his feet, and a heavy curtain going to tumble down on his head; those accessories being understood to represent the noble lord as somehow in the act of saving his country.

'Pray take a seat, Mrs Lammle.' Mrs Lammle takes a seat and opens the conversation.

'I have no doubt, Mr Twemlow, that you have heard of a reverse of fortune having befallen us. Of course you have heard of it, for no kind of news travels so fast—among one's friends especially.'

Mindful of the wondering dinner, Twemlow, with a little twinge, admits the imputation.

'Probably it will not,' says Mrs Lammle, with a certain hardened manner upon her, that makes Twemlow shrink, 'have surprised you so much as some others, after what passed between us at the house which is now turned out at windows. I have taken the liberty of calling upon you, Mr Twemlow, to add a sort of postscript to what I said that day.'

Mr Twemlow's dry and hollow cheeks become more dry and hollow at the prospect of some new complication.

'Really,' says the uneasy little gentleman, 'really, Mrs Lammle, I should take it as a favour if you could excuse me from any further confidence. It has ever been one of the objects of my life—which, unfortunately, has not had many objects—to be inoffensive, and to keep out of cabals and interferences.'

Mrs Lammle, by far the more observant of the two, scarcely finds it necessary to look at Twemlow while he speaks, so easily does she read him.

'My postscript—to retain the term I have used'—says Mrs Lammle, fixing her eyes on his face, to enforce what she says herself—'coincides exactly with what you say, Mr Twemlow. So far from troubling you with any new confidence, I merely wish to remind you what the old one was. So far from asking you for interference, I merely wish to claim your strict neutrality.'

Twemlow going on to reply, she rests her eyes again, knowing her ears to be quite enough for the contents of so weak a vessel.

'I can, I suppose,' says Twemlow, nervously, 'offer no reasonable objection to hearing anything that you do me the honour to wish to say to me under those heads. But if I may, with all possible delicacy and politeness, entreat you not to range beyond them, I—I beg to do so.'

'Sir,' says Mrs Lammle, raising her eyes to his face again, and quite daunting him with her hardened manner, 'I imparted to you a certain piece of knowledge, to be imparted again, as you thought best, to a certain person.'

'Which I did,' says Twemlow.

'And for doing which, I thank you; though, indeed, I scarcely know why I turned traitress to my husband in the matter, for the girl is a poor little fool. I was a poor little fool once myself; I can find no better reason.' Seeing the effect she produces on him by her indifferent laugh and cold look, she keeps her eyes upon him as she proceeds. 'Mr Twemlow, if you should chance to see my husband, or to see me, or to see both of us, in the favour or confidence of any one else—whether of our common acquaintance or not, is of no consequence—you have no right to use against us the knowledge I intrusted you with, for one special purpose which has been accomplished. This is what I came to say. It is not a stipulation; to a gentleman it is simply a reminder.'

Twemlow sits murmuring to himself with his hand to his forehead.

'It is so plain a case,' Mrs Lammle goes on, 'as between me (from the first relying on your honour) and you, that I will not waste another word upon it.' She looks steadily at Mr Twemlow, until, with a shrug, he makes her a little one-sided bow, as though saying 'Yes, I think you have a right to rely upon me,' and then she moistens her lips, and shows a sense of relief.

'I trust I have kept the promise I made through your servant, that I would detain you a very few minutes. I need trouble you no longer, Mr Twemlow.'

'Stay!' says Twemlow, rising as she rises. 'Pardon me a moment. I should never have sought you out, madam, to say what I am going to say, but since you have sought me out and are here, I will throw it off my mind. Was it quite consistent, in candour, with our taking that resolution against Mr Fledgeby, that you should afterwards address Mr Fledgeby as your dear and confidential friend, and entreat a favour of Mr Fledgeby? Always supposing that you did; I assert no knowledge of my own on the subject; it has been represented to me that you did.'

'Then he told you?' retorts Mrs Lammle, who again has saved her eyes while listening, and uses them with strong effect while speaking.

'Yes.'

'It is strange that he should have told you the truth,' says Mrs Lammle, seriously pondering. 'Pray where did a circumstance so very extraordinary happen?'

Twemlow hesitates. He is shorter than the lady as well as weaker, and, as she stands above him with her hardened manner and her well-used eyes, he finds himself at such a disadvantage that he would like to be of the opposite sex.

'May I ask where it happened, Mr Twemlow? In strict confidence?'

'I must confess,' says the mild little gentleman, coming to his answer by degrees, 'that I felt some compunctions when Mr Fledgeby mentioned it. I must admit that I could not regard myself in an agreeable light. More particularly, as Mr Fledgeby did, with great civility, which I could not feel that I deserved from him, render me the same service that you had entreated him to render you.

It is a part of the true nobility of the poor gentleman's soul to say this last sentence. 'Otherwise,' he has reflected, 'I shall assume the superior position of having no difficulties of my own, while I know of hers. Which would be mean, very mean.

'Was Mr Fledgeby's advocacy as effectual in your case as in ours?' Mrs Lammle demands.

'As ineffectual.'

'Can you make up your mind to tell me where you saw Mr Fledgeby, Mr Twemlow?'

'I beg your pardon. I fully intended to have done so. The reservation was not intentional. I encountered Mr Fledgeby, quite by accident, on the spot. —By the expression, on the spot, I mean at Mr Riah's in Saint Mary Axe.'

'Have you the misfortune to be in Mr Riah's hands then?'

'Unfortunately, madam,' returns Twemlow, 'the one money obligation to which I stand committed, the one debt of my life (but it is a just debt; pray observe that I don't dispute it), has fallen into Mr Riah's hands.'

'Mr Twemlow,' says Mrs Lammle, fixing his eyes with hers: which he would prevent her doing if he could, but he can't; 'it has fallen into Mr Fledgeby's hands. Mr Riah is his mask. It has fallen into Mr Fledgeby's hands. Let me tell you that, for your guidance. The information may be of use to you, if only to prevent your credulity, in judging another man's truthfulness by your own, from being imposed upon.'

'Impossible!' cries Twemlow, standing aghast. 'How do you know it?'

'I scarcely know how I know it. The whole train of circumstances seemed to take fire at once, and show it to me.'

'Oh! Then you have no proof.'

'It is very strange,' says Mrs Lammle, coldly and boldly, and with some disdain, 'how like men are to one another in some things, though their characters are as different as can be! No two men can have less affinity between them, one would say, than Mr Twemlow and my husband. Yet my husband replies to me "You have no proof," and Mr Twemlow replies to me with the very same words!'

'But why, madam?' Twemlow ventures gently to argue. 'Consider why the very same words? Because they state the fact. Because you HAVE no proof.'

'Men are very wise in their way,' quoth Mrs Lammle, glancing haughtily at the Snigsworth portrait, and shaking out her dress before departing; 'but they have wisdom to learn. My husband, who is not over-confiding, ingenuous, or inexperienced, sees this plain thing no more than Mr Twemlow does—because there is no proof! Yet I believe five women out of six, in my place, would see it as clearly as I do. However, I will never rest (if only in remembrance of Mr Fledgeby's having kissed my hand) until my husband does see it. And you will do well for yourself to see it from this time forth, Mr Twemlow, though I CAN give you no proof.'

As she moves towards the door, Mr Twemlow, attending on her, expresses his soothing hope that the condition of Mr Lammle's affairs is not irretrievable.

'I don't know,' Mrs Lammle answers, stopping, and sketching out the pattern of the paper on the wall with the point of her parasol; 'it depends. There may be an opening for him dawning now, or there may be none. We shall soon find out. If none, we are bankrupt here, and must go abroad, I suppose.'

Mr Twemlow, in his good-natured desire to make the best of it, remarks that there are pleasant lives abroad.

'Yes,' returns Mrs Lammle, still sketching on the wall; 'but I doubt whether billiard-playing, card-playing, and so forth, for the means to live under suspicion at a dirty table-d'hote, is one of them.'

It is much for Mr Lammle, Twemlow politely intimates (though greatly shocked), to have one always beside him who is attached to him in all his fortunes, and whose restraining influence will prevent him from courses that would be discreditable and ruinous. As he says it, Mrs Lammle leaves off sketching, and looks at him.

'Restraining influence, Mr Twemlow? We must eat and drink, and dress, and have a roof over our heads. Always beside him and attached in all his fortunes? Not much to boast of in that; what can a woman at my age do? My husband and I deceived one another when we married; we must bear the consequences of the deception—that is to say, bear one another, and bear the burden of scheming together for to-day's dinner and to-morrow's breakfast—till death divorces us.'

With those words, she walks out into Duke Street, Saint James's. Mr Twemlow returning to his sofa, lays down his aching head on its slippery little horsehair bolster, with a strong internal conviction that a painful interview is not the kind of thing to be taken after the dinner pills which are so highly salutary in connexion with the pleasures of the table.

But, six o'clock in the evening finds the worthy little gentleman getting better, and also getting himself into his obsolete little silk stockings and pumps, for the wondering dinner at the Veneerings. And seven o'clock in the evening finds him trotting out into Duke Street, to trot to the corner and save a sixpence in coach-hire.

Tippins the divine has dined herself into such a condition by this time, that a morbid mind might desire her, for a blessed change, to sup at last, and turn into bed. Such a mind has Mr Eugene Wrayburn, whom Twemlow finds contemplating Tippins with the moodiest of visages, while that playful creature rallies him on being so long overdue at the woolsack. Skittish is Tippins with Mortimer Lightwood too, and has raps to give him with her fan for having been best man at the nuptials of these deceiving what's-their-names who have gone to pieces. Though, indeed, the fan is generally lively, and taps away at the men in all directions, with something of a grisly sound suggestive of the clattering of Lady Tippins's bones.

A new race of intimate friends has sprung up at Veneering's since he went into Parliament for the public good, to whom Mrs Veneering is very attentive. These friends, like astronomical distances, are only to be spoken of in the very largest figures. Boots says that one of them is a Contractor who (it has been calculated) gives employment, directly and indirectly, to five hundred thousand men. Brewer says that another of them is a Chairman, in such request at so many Boards, so far apart, that he never travels less by railway than three thousand miles a week. Buffer says that another of them hadn't a sixpence eighteen months ago, and, through the brilliancy of his genius in getting those shares issued at eighty-five, and buying them all up with no money and selling them at par for cash, has now three hundred and seventy-five thousand pounds—Buffer particularly insisting on the odd seventy-five, and declining to take a farthing less. With Buffer, Boots, and Brewer, Lady Tippins is eminently facetious on the subject of these Fathers of the Scrip-Church: surveying them through her eyeglass, and inquiring whether Boots and Brewer and Buffer think they will make her fortune if she makes love to them? with other pleasantries of that nature. Veneering, in his different way, is much occupied with the Fathers too, piously retiring with them into the conservatory, from which retreat the word 'Committee' is occasionally heard, and where the Fathers instruct Veneering how he must leave the valley of the piano on his left, take the level of the mantelpiece, cross by an open cutting at the candelabra, seize the carrying-traffic at the console, and cut up the opposition root and branch at the window curtains.

Mr and Mrs Podsnap are of the company, and the Fathers descry in Mrs Podsnap a fine woman. She is consigned to a Father—Boots's Father, who employs five hundred thousand men—and is brought to anchor on Veneering's left; thus affording opportunity to the sportive Tippins on his right (he, as usual, being mere vacant space), to entreat to be told something about those loves of Navvies, and whether they really do live on raw beefsteaks, and drink porter out of their barrows. But, in spite of such little skirmishes it is felt that this was to be a wondering dinner, and that the wondering must not be neglected. Accordingly, Brewer, as the man who has the greatest reputation to sustain, becomes the interpreter of the general instinct.

'I took,' says Brewer in a favourable pause, 'a cab this morning, and I rattled off to that Sale.'

Boots (devoured by envy) says, 'So did I.'

Buffer says, 'So did I'; but can find nobody to care whether he did or not.

'And what was it like?' inquires Veneering.

'I assure you,' replies Brewer, looking about for anybody else to address his answer to, and giving the preference to Lightwood; 'I assure you, the things were going for a song. Handsome things enough, but fetching nothing.'

'So I heard this afternoon,' says Lightwood.

Brewer begs to know now, would it be fair to ask a professional man how—on—earth—these—people—ever—did—come—TO—such—A—total smash? (Brewer's divisions being for emphasis.)

Lightwood replies that he was consulted certainly, but could give no opinion which would pay off the Bill of Sale, and therefore violates no confidence in supposing that it came of their living beyond their means.

'But how,' says Veneering, 'CAN people do that!'

Hah! That is felt on all hands to be a shot in the bull's eye. How CAN people do that! The Analytical Chemist going round with champagne, looks very much as if HE could give them a pretty good idea how people did that, if he had a mind.

'How,' says Mrs Veneering, laying down her fork to press her aquiline hands together at the tips of the fingers, and addressing the Father who travels the three thousand miles per week: 'how a mother can look at her baby, and know that she lives beyond her husband's means, I cannot imagine.'

Eugene suggests that Mrs Lammle, not being a mother, had no baby to look at.

'True,' says Mrs Veneering, 'but the principle is the same.'

Boots is clear that the principle is the same. So is Buffer. It is the unfortunate destiny of Buffer to damage a cause by espousing it. The rest of the company have meekly yielded to the proposition that the principle is the same, until Buffer says it is; when instantly a general murmur arises that the principle is not the same.

'But I don't understand,' says the Father of the three hundred and seventy-five thousand pounds, '—if these people spoken of, occupied the position of being in society—they were in society?'

Veneering is bound to confess that they dined here, and were even married from here.

'Then I don't understand,' pursues the Father, 'how even their living beyond their means could bring them to what has been termed a total smash. Because, there is always such a thing as an adjustment of affairs, in the case of people of any standing at all.'

Eugene (who would seem to be in a gloomy state of suggestiveness), suggests, 'Suppose you have no means and live beyond them?'

This is too insolvent a state of things for the Father to entertain. It is too insolvent a state of things for any one with any self-respect to entertain, and is universally scouted. But, it is so amazing how any people can have come to a total smash, that everybody feels bound to account for it specially. One of the Fathers says, 'Gaming table.' Another of the Fathers says, 'Speculated without knowing that speculation is a science.' Boots says 'Horses.' Lady Tippins says to her fan, 'Two establishments.' Mr Podsnap, saying nothing, is referred to for his opinion; which he delivers as follows; much flushed and extremely angry:

'Don't ask me. I desire to take no part in the discussion of these people's affairs. I abhor the subject. It is an odious subject, an offensive subject, a subject that makes me sick, and I—' And with his favourite right-arm flourish which sweeps away everything and settles it for ever, Mr Podsnap sweeps these inconveniently unexplainable wretches who have lived beyond their means and gone to total smash, off the face of the universe.

Eugene, leaning back in his chair, is observing Mr Podsnap with an irreverent face, and may be about to offer a new suggestion, when the Analytical is beheld in collision with the Coachman; the Coachman manifesting a purpose of coming at the company with a silver salver, as though intent upon making a collection for his wife and family; the Analytical cutting him off at the sideboard. The superior stateliness, if not the superior generalship, of the Analytical prevails over a man who is as nothing off the box; and the Coachman, yielding up his salver, retires defeated.

Then, the Analytical, perusing a scrap of paper lying on the salver, with the air of a literary Censor, adjusts it, takes his time about going to the table with it, and presents it to Mr Eugene Wrayburn. Whereupon the pleasant Tippins says aloud, 'The Lord Chancellor has resigned!'

With distracting coolness and slowness—for he knows the curiosity of the Charmer to be always devouring—Eugene makes a pretence of getting out an eyeglass, polishing it, and reading the paper with difficulty, long after he has seen what is written on it. What is written on it in wet ink, is:

'Young Blight.'

'Waiting?' says Eugene over his shoulder, in confidence, with the Analytical.

'Waiting,' returns the Analytical in responsive confidence.

Eugene looks 'Excuse me,' towards Mrs Veneering, goes out, and finds Young Blight, Mortimer's clerk, at the hall-door.

'You told me to bring him, sir, to wherever you was, if he come while you was out and I was in,' says that discreet young gentleman, standing on tiptoe to whisper; 'and I've brought him.'

'Sharp boy. Where is he?' asks Eugene.

'He's in a cab, sir, at the door. I thought it best not to show him, you see, if it could be helped; for he's a-shaking all over, like—Blight's simile is perhaps inspired by the surrounding dishes of sweets—'like Glue Monge.'

'Sharp boy again,' returns Eugene. 'I'll go to him.'

Goes out straightway, and, leisurely leaning his arms on the open window of a cab in waiting, looks in at Mr Dolls: who has brought his own atmosphere with him, and would seem from its odour to have brought it, for convenience of carriage, in a rum-cask.

'Now Dolls, wake up!'

'Mist Wrayburn? Drection! Fifteen shillings!'

After carefully reading the dingy scrap of paper handed to him, and as carefully tucking it into his waistcoat pocket, Eugene tells out the money; beginning incautiously by telling the first shilling into Mr Dolls's hand, which instantly jerks it out of window; and ending by telling the fifteen shillings on the seat.

'Give him a ride back to Charing Cross, sharp boy, and there get rid of him.'

Returning to the dining-room, and pausing for an instant behind the screen at the door, Eugene overhears, above the hum and clatter, the fair Tippins saying: 'I am dying to ask him what he was called out for!'

'Are you?' mutters Eugene, 'then perhaps if you can't ask him, you'll die. So I'll be a benefactor to society, and go. A stroll and a cigar, and I can think this over. Think this over.' Thus, with a thoughtful face, he finds his hat and cloak, unseen of the Analytical, and goes his way.

BOOK THE FOURTH — A TURNING

Chapter 1

SETTING TRAPS

Plashwater Weir Mill Lock looked tranquil and pretty on an evening in the summer time. A soft air stirred the leaves of the fresh green trees, and passed like a smooth shadow over the river, and like a smoother shadow over the yielding grass. The voice of the falling water, like the voices of the sea and the wind, were as an outer memory to a contemplative listener; but not particularly so to Mr Riderhood, who sat on one of the blunt wooden levers of his lock-gates, dozing. Wine must be got into a butt by some agency before it can be drawn out; and the wine of sentiment never having been got into Mr Riderhood by any agency, nothing in nature tapped him.

As the Rogue sat, ever and again nodding himself off his balance, his recovery was always attended by an angry stare and growl, as if, in the absence of any one else, he had aggressive inclinations towards himself. In one of these starts the cry of 'Lock, ho! Lock!' prevented his relapse into a doze. Shaking himself as he got up like the surly brute he was, he gave his growl a responsive twist at the end, and turned his face down-stream to see who hailed.

It was an amateur-sculler, well up to his work though taking it easily, in so light a boat that the Rogue remarked: 'A little less on you, and you'd a'most ha' been a Wagerbut'; then went to work at his windlass handles and sluices, to let the sculler in. As the latter stood in his boat, holding on by the boat-hook to the woodwork at the lock side, waiting for the gates to open, Rogue Riderhood recognized his 'T'other governor,' Mr Eugene Wrayburn; who was, however, too indifferent or too much engaged to recognize him.

The creaking lock-gates opened slowly, and the light boat passed in as soon as there was room enough, and the creaking lock-gates closed upon it, and it floated low down in the dock between the two sets of gates, until the water should rise and the second gates should open and let it out. When Riderhood had run to his second windlass and turned it, and while he leaned against the lever of that gate to help it to swing open presently, he noticed, lying to rest under the green hedge by the towing-path astern of the Lock, a Bargeman.

The water rose and rose as the sluice poured in, dispersing the scum which had formed behind the lumbering gates, and sending the boat up, so that the sculler gradually rose like an apparition against the light from the bargeman's point of view. Riderhood observed that the bargeman rose too, leaning on his arm, and seemed to have his eyes fastened on the rising figure.

But, there was the toll to be taken, as the gates were now complaining and opening. The T'other governor tossed it ashore, twisted in a piece of paper, and as he did so, knew his man.

'Ay, ay? It's you, is it, honest friend?' said Eugene, seating himself preparatory to resuming his sculls. 'You got the place, then?'

'I got the place, and no thanks to you for it, nor yet none to Lawyer Lightwood,' gruffly answered Riderhood.

'We saved our recommendation, honest fellow,' said Eugene, 'for the next candidate—the one who will offer himself when you are transported or hanged. Don't be long about it; will you be so good?'

So imperturbable was the air with which he gravely bent to his work that Riderhood remained staring at him, without having found a retort, until he had rowed past a line of wooden objects by the weir, which showed like huge teetotums standing at rest in the water, and was almost hidden by the drooping boughs on the left bank, as he rowed away, keeping out of the opposing current. It being then too late to retort with any effect—if that could ever have been done—the honest man confined himself to cursing and growling in a grim under-tone. Having then got his gates shut, he crossed back by his plank lock-bridge to the towing-path side of the river.

If, in so doing, he took another glance at the bargeman, he did it by stealth. He cast himself on the grass by the Lock side, in an indolent way, with his back in that direction, and, having gathered a few blades, fell to chewing them. The dip of Eugene Wrayburn's sculls had become hardly audible in his ears when the bargeman passed him, putting the utmost width that he could between them, and keeping under the hedge. Then, Riderhood sat up and took a long look at his figure, and then cried: 'Hi—I—i! Lock, ho! Lock! Plashwater Weir Mill Lock!'

The bargeman stopped, and looked back.

'Plashwater Weir Mill Lock, T'otherest gov—er—nor—or—or—or!' cried Mr Riderhood, with his hands to his mouth.

The bargeman turned back. Approaching nearer and nearer, the bargeman became Bradley Headstone, in rough water-side second-hand clothing.

'Wish I may die,' said Riderhood, smiting his right leg, and laughing, as he sat on the grass, 'if you ain't ha' been a imitating me, T'otherest governor! Never thought myself so good-looking afore!'

Truly, Bradley Headstone had taken careful note of the honest man's dress in the course of that night-walk they had had together. He must have committed it to memory, and slowly got it by heart. It was exactly reproduced in the dress he now wore. And whereas, in his own schoolmaster clothes, he usually looked as if they were the clothes of some other man, he now looked, in the clothes of some other man or men, as if they were his own.

'THIS your Lock?' said Bradley, whose surprise had a genuine air; 'they told me, where I last inquired, it was the third I should come to. This is only the second.'

'It's my belief, governor,' returned Riderhood, with a wink and shake of his head, 'that you've dropped one in your counting. It ain't Locks as YOU'VE been giving your mind to. No, no!'

As he expressively jerked his pointing finger in the direction the boat had taken, a flush of impatience mounted into Bradley's face, and he looked anxiously up the river.

'It ain't Locks as YOU'VE been a reckoning up,' said Riderhood, when the schoolmaster's eyes came back again. 'No, no!'

'What other calculations do you suppose I have been occupied with? Mathematics?'

'I never heerd it called that. It's a long word for it. Hows'ever, p'raps you call it so,' said Riderhood, stubbornly chewing his grass.

'It. What?'

'I'll say them, instead of it, if you like,' was the coolly growled reply. 'It's safer talk too.'

'What do you mean that I should understand by them?'

'Spites, affronts, offences giv' and took, deadly aggrawations, such like,' answered Riderhood.

Do what Bradley Headstone would, he could not keep that former flush of impatience out of his face, or so master his eyes as to prevent their again looking anxiously up the river.

'Ha ha! Don't be afeerd, T'otherest,' said Riderhood. 'The T'other's got to make way agin the stream, and he takes it easy. You can soon come up with him. But wot's the good of saying that to you! YOU know how fur you could have outwalked him betwixt anywheres about where he lost the tide—say Richmond—and this, if you had a mind to it.'

'You think I have been following him?' said Bradley.

'I KNOW you have,' said Riderhood.

'Well! I have, I have,' Bradley admitted. 'But,' with another anxious look up the river, 'he may land.'

'Easy you! He won't be lost if he does land,' said Riderhood. 'He must leave his boat behind him. He can't make a bundle or a parcel on it, and carry it ashore with him under his arm.'

'He was speaking to you just now,' said Bradley, kneeling on one knee on the grass beside the Lock-keeper. 'What did he say?'

'Cheek,' said Riderhood.

'What?'

'Cheek,' repeated Riderhood, with an angry oath; 'cheek is what he said. He can't say nothing but cheek. I'd ha' liked to plump down aboard of him, neck and crop, with a heavy jump, and sunk him.'

Bradley turned away his haggard face for a few moments, and then said, tearing up a tuft of grass:

'Damn him!'

'Hooroar!' cried Riderhood. 'Does you credit! Hooroar! I cry chorus to the T'otherest.'

'What turn,' said Bradley, with an effort at self-repression that forced him to wipe his face, 'did his insolence take to-day?'

'It took the turn,' answered Riderhood, with sullen ferocity, 'of hoping as I was getting ready to be hanged.'

'Let him look to that,' cried Bradley. 'Let him look to that! It will be bad for him when men he has injured, and at whom he has jeered, are thinking of getting hanged. Let HIM get ready for HIS fate, when that comes about. There was more meaning in what he said than he knew of, or he wouldn't have had brains enough to say it. Let him look to it; let him look to it! When men he has wronged, and on whom he has bestowed his insolence, are getting ready to be hanged, there is a death-bell ringing. And not for them.'

Riderhood, looking fixedly at him, gradually arose from his recumbent posture while the schoolmaster said these words with the utmost concentration of rage and hatred. So, when the words were all spoken, he too kneeled on one knee on the grass, and the two men looked at one another.

'Oh!' said Riderhood, very deliberately spitting out the grass he had been chewing. 'Then, I make out, T'otherest, as he is a-going to her?'

'He left London,' answered Bradley, 'yesterday. I have hardly a doubt, this time, that at last he is going to her.'

'You ain't sure, then?'

'I am as sure here,' said Bradley, with a clutch at the breast of his coarse shirt, 'as if it was written there;' with a blow or a stab at the sky.

'Ah! But judging from the looks on you,' retorted Riderhood, completely ridding himself of his grass, and drawing his sleeve across his mouth, 'you've made ekally sure afore, and have got disapinted. It has told upon you.'

'Listen,' said Bradley, in a low voice, bending forward to lay his hand upon the Lock-keeper's shoulder. 'These are my holidays.'

'Are they, by George!' muttered Riderhood, with his eyes on the passion-wasted face. 'Your working days must be stiff 'uns, if these is your holidays.'

'And I have never left him,' pursued Bradley, waving the interruption aside with an impatient hand, 'since they began. And I never will leave him now, till I have seen him with her.'

'And when you have seen him with her?' said Riderhood.

'—I'll come back to you.'

Riderhood stiffened the knee on which he had been resting, got up, and looked gloomily at his new friend. After a few moments they walked side by side in the direction the boat had taken, as if by tacit consent; Bradley pressing forward, and Riderhood holding back; Bradley getting out his neat prim purse into his hand (a present made him by penny subscription among his pupils); and Riderhood, unfolding his arms to smear his coat-cuff across his mouth with a thoughtful air.

'I have a pound for you,' said Bradley.

'You've two,' said Riderhood.

Bradley held a sovereign between his fingers. Slouching at his side with his eyes upon the towing-path, Riderhood held his left hand open, with a certain slight drawing action towards himself. Bradley dipped in his purse for another sovereign, and two chinked in Riderhood's hand, the drawing action of which, promptly strengthening, drew them home to his pocket.

'Now, I must follow him,' said Bradley Headstone. 'He takes this river-road—the fool!—to confuse observation, or divert attention, if not solely to baffle me. But he must have the power of making himself invisible before he can shake Me off.'

Riderhood stopped. 'If you don't get disapinted agin, T'otherest, maybe you'll put up at the Lock-house when you come back?'

'I will.'

Riderhood nodded, and the figure of the bargeman went its way along the soft turf by the side of the towing-path, keeping near the hedge and moving quickly. They had turned a point from which a long stretch of river was visible. A stranger to the scene might have been certain that here and there along the line of hedge a figure stood, watching the bargeman, and waiting for him to come up. So he himself had often believed at first, until his eyes became used to the posts, bearing the dagger that slew Wat Tyler, in the City of London shield.

Within Mr Riderhood's knowledge all daggers were as one. Even to Bradley Headstone, who could have told to the letter without book all about Wat Tyler, Lord Mayor Walworth, and the King, that it is dutiful for youth to know, there was but one subject living in the world for every sharp destructive instrument that summer evening. So, Riderhood looking after him as he went, and he with his furtive hand laid upon the dagger as he passed it, and his eyes upon the boat, were much upon a par.

The boat went on, under the arching trees, and over their tranquil shadows in the water. The bargeman skulking on the opposite bank of the stream, went on after it. Sparkles of light showed Riderhood when and where the rower dipped his blades, until, even as he stood idly watching, the sun went down and the landscape was dyed red. And then the red had the appearance of fading out of it and mounting up to Heaven, as we say that blood, guiltily shed, does.

Turning back towards his Lock (he had not gone out of view of it), the Rogue pondered as deeply as it was within the contracted power of such a fellow to do. 'Why did he copy my clothes? He could have looked like what he wanted to look like, without that.' This was the subject-matter in his thoughts; in which, too, there came lumbering up, by times, like any half floating and half sinking rubbish in the river, the question, Was it done by accident? The setting of a trap for finding out whether it was accidentally done, soon superseded, as a practical piece of cunning, the abstruser inquiry why otherwise it was done. And he devised a means.

Rogue Riderhood went into his Lock-house, and brought forth, into the now sober grey light, his chest of clothes. Sitting on the grass beside it, he turned out, one by one, the articles it contained, until he came to a conspicuous bright red neckerchief stained black here and there by wear. It arrested his attention, and he sat pausing over it, until he took off the rusty colourless wisp that he wore round his throat, and substituted the red neckerchief, leaving the long ends flowing. 'Now,' said the Rogue, 'if arter he sees me in this neckhankecher, I see him in a sim'lar neckhankecher, it won't be accident!' Elated by his device, he carried his chest in again and went to supper.

'Lock ho! Lock!' It was a light night, and a barge coming down summoned him out of a long doze. In due course he had let the barge through and was alone again, looking to the closing of his gates, when Bradley Headstone appeared before him, standing on the brink of the Lock.

'Halloa!' said Riderhood. 'Back a' ready, T'otherest?'

'He has put up for the night, at an Angler's Inn,' was the fatigued and hoarse reply. 'He goes on, up the river, at six in the morning. I have come back for a couple of hours' rest.'

'You want 'em,' said Riderhood, making towards the schoolmaster by his plank bridge.

'I don't want them,' returned Bradley, irritably, 'because I would rather not have them, but would much prefer to follow him all night. However, if he won't lead, I can't follow. I have been waiting about, until I could discover, for a certainty, at what time he starts; if I couldn't have made sure of it, I should have stayed there.—This would be a bad pit for a man to be flung into with his hands tied. These slippery smooth walls would give him no chance. And I suppose those gates would suck him down?'

'Suck him down, or swaller him up, he wouldn't get out,' said Riderhood. 'Not even, if his hands warn't tied, he wouldn't. Shut him in at both ends, and I'd give him a pint o' old ale ever to come up to me standing here.'

Bradley looked down with a ghastly relish. 'You run about the brink, and run across it, in this uncertain light, on a few inches width of rotten wood,' said he. 'I wonder you have no thought of being drowned.'

'I can't be!' said Riderhood.

'You can't be drowned?'

'No!' said Riderhood, shaking his head with an air of thorough conviction, 'it's well known. I've been brought out o' drowning, and I can't be drowned. I wouldn't have that there busted B'lowbridger aware on it, or her people might make it tell agin' the damages I mean to get. But it's well known to water-side characters like myself, that him as has been brought out o drowning, can never be drowned.'

Bradley smiled sourly at the ignorance he would have corrected in one of his pupils, and continued to look down into the water, as if the place had a gloomy fascination for him.

'You seem to like it,' said Riderhood.

He took no notice, but stood looking down, as if he had not heard the words. There was a very dark expression on his face; an expression that the Rogue found it hard to understand. It was fierce, and full of purpose; but the purpose might have been as much against himself as against another. If he had stepped back for a spring, taken a leap, and thrown himself in, it would have been no surprising sequel to the look. Perhaps his troubled soul, set upon some violence, did hover for the moment between that violence and another.

'Didn't you say,' asked Riderhood, after watching him for a while with a sidelong glance, 'as you had come back for a couple o' hours' rest?' But, even then he had to jog him with his elbow before he answered.

'Eh? Yes.'

'Hadn't you better come in and take your couple o' hours' rest?'

'Thank you. Yes.'

With the look of one just awakened, he followed Riderhood into the Lock-house, where the latter produced from a cupboard some cold salt beef and half a loaf, some gin in a bottle, and some water in a jug. The last he brought in, cool and dripping, from the river.

'There, T'otherest,' said Riderhood, stooping over him to put it on the table. 'You'd better take a bite and a sup, afore you takes your snooze.' The draggling ends of the red neckerchief caught the schoolmaster's eyes. Riderhood saw him look at it.

'Oh!' thought that worthy. 'You're a-taking notice, are you? Come! You shall have a good squint at it then.' With which reflection he sat down on the other side of the table, threw open his vest, and made a pretence of re-tying the neckerchief with much deliberation.

Bradley ate and drank. As he sat at his platter and mug, Riderhood saw him, again and yet again, steal a look at the neckerchief, as if he were correcting his slow observation and prompting his sluggish memory. 'When you're ready for your snooze,' said that honest creature, 'chuck yourself on my bed in the corner, T'otherest. It'll be broad day afore three. I'll call you early.'

'I shall require no calling,' answered Bradley. And soon afterwards, divesting himself only of his shoes and coat, laid himself down.

Riderhood, leaning back in his wooden arm-chair with his arms folded on his breast, looked at him lying with his right hand clenched in his sleep and his teeth set, until a film came over his own sight, and he slept too. He awoke to find that it was daylight, and that his visitor was already astir, and going out to the river-side to cool his head:—'Though I'm blest,' muttered Riderhood at the Lock-house door, looking after him, 'if I think there's water enough in all the Thames to do THAT for you!' Within five minutes he had taken his departure, and was passing on into the calm distance as he had passed yesterday. Riderhood knew when a fish leaped, by his starting and glancing round.

'Lock ho! Lock!' at intervals all day, and 'Lock ho! Lock!' thrice in the ensuing night, but no return of Bradley. The second day was sultry and oppressive. In the afternoon, a thunderstorm came up, and had but newly broken into a furious sweep of rain when he rushed in at the door, like the storm itself.

'You've seen him with her!' exclaimed Riderhood, starting up.

'I have.'

'Where?'

'At his journey's end. His boat's hauled up for three days. I heard him give the order. Then, I saw him wait for her and meet her. I saw them'—he stopped as though he were suffocating, and began again—'I saw them walking side by side, last night.'

'What did you do?'

'Nothing.'

'What are you going to do?'

He dropped into a chair, and laughed. Immediately afterwards, a great spirt of blood burst from his nose.

'How does that happen?' asked Riderhood.

'I don't know. I can't keep it back. It has happened twice—three times—four times—I don't know how many times—since last night. I taste it, smell it, see it, it chokes me, and then it breaks out like this.'

He went into the pelting rain again with his head bare, and, bending low over the river, and scooping up the water with his two hands, washed the blood away. All beyond his figure, as Riderhood looked from the door, was a vast dark curtain in solemn movement towards one quarter of the heavens. He raised his head and came back, wet from head to foot, but with the lower parts of his sleeves, where he had dipped into the river, streaming water.

'Your face is like a ghost's,' said Riderhood.

'Did you ever see a ghost?' was the sullen retort.

'I mean to say, you're quite wore out.'

'That may well be. I have had no rest since I left here. I don't remember that I have so much as sat down since I left here.'

'Lie down now, then,' said Riderhood.

'I will, if you'll give me something to quench my thirst first.'

The bottle and jug were again produced, and he mixed a weak draught, and another, and drank both in quick succession. 'You asked me something,' he said then.

'No, I didn't,' replied Riderhood.

'I tell you,' retorted Bradley, turning upon him in a wild and desperate manner, 'you asked me something, before I went out to wash my face in the river.

'Oh! Then?' said Riderhood, backing a little. 'I asked you wot you wos a-going to do.'

'How can a man in this state know?' he answered, protesting with both his tremulous hands, with an action so vigorously angry that he shook the water from his sleeves upon the floor, as if he had wrung them. 'How can I plan anything, if I haven't sleep?'

'Why, that's what I as good as said,' returned the other. 'Didn't I say lie down?'

'Well, perhaps you did.'

'Well! Anyways I says it again. Sleep where you slept last; the sounder and longer you can sleep, the better you'll know arterwards what you're up to.'

His pointing to the truckle bed in the corner, seemed gradually to bring that poor couch to Bradley's wandering remembrance. He slipped off his worn down-trodden shoes, and cast himself heavily, all wet as he was, upon the bed.

Riderhood sat down in his wooden arm-chair, and looked through the window at the lightning, and listened to the thunder. But, his thoughts were far from being absorbed by the thunder and the lightning, for again and again and again he looked very curiously at the exhausted man upon the bed. The man had turned up the collar of the rough coat he wore, to shelter himself from the storm, and had buttoned it about his neck. Unconscious of that, and of most things, he had left the coat so, both when he had laved his face in the river, and when he had cast himself upon the bed; though it would have been much easier to him if he had unloosened it.

The thunder rolled heavily, and the forked lightning seemed to make jagged rents in every part of the vast curtain without, as Riderhood sat by the window, glancing at the bed. Sometimes, he saw the man upon the bed, by a red light; sometimes, by a blue; sometimes, he scarcely saw him in the darkness of the storm; sometimes he saw nothing of him in the blinding glare of palpitating white fire. Anon, the rain would come again with a tremendous rush, and the river would seem to rise to meet it, and a blast of wind, bursting upon the door, would flutter the hair and dress of the man, as if invisible messengers were come around the bed to carry him away. From all these phases of the storm, Riderhood would turn, as if they were interruptions—rather striking interruptions possibly, but interruptions still—of his scrutiny of the sleeper.

'He sleeps sound,' he said within himself; 'yet he's that up to me and that noticing of me that my getting out of my chair may wake him, when a rattling peal won't; let alone my touching of him.'

He very cautiously rose to his feet. 'T'otherest,' he said, in a low, calm voice, 'are you a lying easy? There's a chill in the air, governor. Shall I put a coat over you?'

No answer.

'That's about what it is a'ready, you see,' muttered Riderhood in a lower and a different voice; 'a coat over you, a coat over you!'

The sleeper moving an arm, he sat down again in his chair, and feigned to watch the storm from the window. It was a grand spectacle, but not so grand as to keep his eyes, for half a minute together, from stealing a look at the man upon the bed.

It was at the concealed throat of the sleeper that Riderhood so often looked so curiously, until the sleep seemed to deepen into the stupor of the dead-tired in mind and body. Then, Riderhood came from the window cautiously, and stood by the bed.

'Poor man!' he murmured in a low tone, with a crafty face, and a very watchful eye and ready foot, lest he should start up; 'this here coat of his must make him uneasy in his sleep. Shall I loosen it for him, and make him more comfortable? Ah! I think I ought to do it, poor man. I think I will.'

He touched the first button with a very cautious hand, and a step backward. But, the sleeper remaining in profound unconsciousness, he touched the other buttons with a more assured hand, and perhaps the more lightly on that account. Softly and slowly, he opened the coat and drew it back.

The draggling ends of a bright-red neckerchief were then disclosed, and he had even been at the pains of dipping parts of it in some liquid, to give it the appearance of having become stained by wear. With a much-perplexed face, Riderhood looked from it to the sleeper, and from the sleeper to it, and finally crept back to his chair, and there, with his hand to his chin, sat long in a brown study, looking at both.

Chapter 2

THE GOLDEN DUSTMAN RISES A LITTLE

Mr and Mrs Lammle had come to breakfast with Mr and Mrs Boffin. They were not absolutely uninvited, but had pressed themselves with so much urgency on the golden couple, that evasion of the honour and pleasure of their company would have been difficult, if desired. They were in a charming state of mind, were Mr and Mrs Lammle, and almost as fond of Mr and Mrs Boffin as of one another.

'My dear Mrs Boffin,' said Mrs Lammle, 'it imparts new life to me, to see my Alfred in confidential communication with Mr Boffin. The two were formed to become intimate. So much simplicity combined with so much force of character, such natural sagacity united to such amiability and gentleness—these are the distinguishing characteristics of both.'

This being said aloud, gave Mr Lammle an opportunity, as he came with Mr Boffin from the window to the breakfast table, of taking up his dear and honoured wife.

'My Sophronia,' said that gentleman, 'your too partial estimate of your husband's character—'

'No! Not too partial, Alfred,' urged the lady, tenderly moved; 'never say that.'

'My child, your favourable opinion, then, of your husband—you don't object to that phrase, darling?'

'How can I, Alfred?'

'Your favourable opinion then, my Precious, does less than justice to Mr Boffin, and more than justice to me.'

'To the first charge, Alfred, I plead guilty. But to the second, oh no, no!'

'Less than justice to Mr Boffin, Sophronia,' said Mr Lammle, soaring into a tone of moral grandeur, 'because it represents Mr Boffin as on my lower level; more than justice to me, Sophronia, because it represents me as on Mr Boffin's higher level. Mr Boffin bears and forbears far more than I could.'

'Far more than you could for yourself, Alfred?'

'My love, that is not the question.'

'Not the question, Lawyer?' said Mrs Lammle, archly.

'No, dear Sophronia. From my lower level, I regard Mr Boffin as too generous, as possessed of too much clemency, as being too good to persons who are unworthy of him and ungrateful to him. To those noble qualities I can lay no claim. On the contrary, they rouse my indignation when I see them in action.'

'Alfred!'

'They rouse my indignation, my dear, against the unworthy persons, and give me a combative desire to stand between Mr Boffin and all such persons. Why? Because, in my lower nature I am more worldly and less delicate. Not being so magnanimous as Mr Boffin, I feel his injuries more than he does himself, and feel more capable of opposing his injurers.'

It struck Mrs Lammle that it appeared rather difficult this morning to bring Mr and Mrs Boffin into agreeable conversation. Here had been several lures thrown out, and neither of them had uttered a word. Here were she, Mrs Lammle, and her husband discoursing at once affectingly and effectively, but discoursing alone. Assuming that the dear old creatures were impressed by what they heard, still one would like to be sure of it, the more so, as at least one of the dear old creatures was somewhat pointedly referred to. If the dear old creatures were too bashful or too dull to assume their required places in the discussion, why then it would seem desirable that the dear old creatures should be taken by their heads and shoulders and brought into it.

'But is not my husband saying in effect,' asked Mrs Lammle, therefore, with an innocent air, of Mr and Mrs Boffin, 'that he becomes unmindful of his own temporary misfortunes in his admiration of another whom he is burning to serve? And is not that making an admission that his nature is a generous one? I am wretched in argument, but surely this is so, dear Mr and Mrs Boffin?'

Still, neither Mr and Mrs Boffin said a word. He sat with his eyes on his plate, eating his muffins and ham, and she sat shyly looking at the teapot. Mrs Lammle's innocent appeal was merely thrown into the air, to mingle with the steam of the urn. Glancing towards Mr and Mrs Boffin, she very slightly raised her eyebrows, as though inquiring of her husband: 'Do I notice anything wrong here?'

Mr Lammle, who had found his chest effective on a variety of occasions, manoeuvred his capacious shirt front into the largest demonstration possible, and then smiling retorted on his wife, thus:

'Sophronia, darling, Mr and Mrs Boffin will remind you of the old adage, that self-praise is no recommendation.'

'Self-praise, Alfred? Do you mean because we are one and the same?'

'No, my dear child. I mean that you cannot fail to remember, if you reflect for a single moment, that what you are pleased to compliment me upon feeling in the case of Mr Boffin, you have yourself confided to me as your own feeling in the case of Mrs Boffin.'

('I shall be beaten by this Lawyer,' Mrs Lammle gaily whispered to Mrs Boffin. 'I am afraid I must admit it, if he presses me, for it's damagingly true.')

Several white dints began to come and go about Mr Lammle's nose, as he observed that Mrs Boffin merely looked up from the teapot for a moment with an embarrassed smile, which was no smile, and then looked down again.

'Do you admit the charge, Sophronia?' inquired Alfred, in a rallying tone.

'Really, I think,' said Mrs Lammle, still gaily, 'I must throw myself on the protection of the Court. Am I bound to answer that question, my Lord?' To Mr Boffin.

'You needn't, if you don't like, ma'am,' was his answer. 'It's not of the least consequence.'

Both husband and wife glanced at him, very doubtfully. His manner was grave, but not coarse, and derived some dignity from a certain repressed dislike of the tone of the conversation.

Again Mrs Lammle raised her eyebrows for instruction from her husband. He replied in a slight nod, 'Try 'em again.'

'To protect myself against the suspicion of covert self-laudation, my dear Mrs Boffin,' said the airy Mrs Lammle therefore, 'I must tell you how it was.'

'No. Pray don't,' Mr Boffin interposed.

Mrs Lammle turned to him laughingly. 'The Court objects?'

'Ma'am,' said Mr Boffin, 'the Court (if I am the Court) does object. The Court objects for two reasons. First, because the Court don't think it fair.

Secondly, because the dear old lady, Mrs Court (if I am Mr) gets distressed by it.'

A very remarkable wavering between two bearings—between her propitiatory bearing there, and her defiant bearing at Mr Twemlow's—was observable on the part of Mrs Lammle as she said:

'What does the Court not consider fair?'

'Letting you go on,' replied Mr Boffin, nodding his head soothingly, as who should say, We won't be harder on you than we can help; we'll make the best of it. 'It's not above-board and it's not fair. When the old lady is uncomfortable, there's sure to be good reason for it. I see she is uncomfortable, and I plainly see this is the good reason wherefore. HAVE you breakfasted, ma'am.'

Mrs Lammle, settling into her defiant manner, pushed her plate away, looked at her husband, and laughed; but by no means gaily.

'Have YOU breakfasted, sir?' inquired Mr Boffin.

'Thank you,' replied Alfred, showing all his teeth. 'If Mrs Boffin will oblige me, I'll take another cup of tea.'

He spilled a little of it over the chest which ought to have been so effective, and which had done so little; but on the whole drank it with something of an air, though the coming and going dints got almost as large, the while, as if they had been made by pressure of the teaspoon. 'A thousand thanks,' he then observed. 'I have breakfasted.'

'Now, which,' said Mr Boffin softly, taking out a pocket-book, 'which of you two is Cashier?'

'Sophronia, my dear,' remarked her husband, as he leaned back in his chair, waving his right hand towards her, while he hung his left hand by the thumb in the arm-hole of his waistcoat: 'it shall be your department.'

'I would rather,' said Mr Boffin, 'that it was your husband's, ma'am, because—but never mind, because, I would rather have to do with him. However, what I have to say, I will say with as little offence as possible; if I can say it without any, I shall be heartily glad. You two have done me a service, a very great service, in doing what you did (my old lady knows what it was), and I have put into this envelope a bank note for a hundred pound. I consider the service well worth a hundred pound, and I am well pleased to pay the money. Would you do me the favour to take it, and likewise to accept my thanks?'

With a haughty action, and without looking towards him, Mrs Lammle held out her left hand, and into it Mr Boffin put the little packet. When she had conveyed it to her bosom, Mr Lammle had the appearance of feeling relieved, and breathing more freely, as not having been quite certain that the hundred pounds were his, until the note had been safely transferred out of Mr Boffin's keeping into his own Sophronia's.

'It is not impossible,' said Mr Boffin, addressing Alfred, 'that you have had some general idea, sir, of replacing Rokesmith, in course of time?'

'It is not,' assented Alfred, with a glittering smile and a great deal of nose, 'not impossible.'

'And perhaps, ma'am,' pursued Mr Boffin, addressing Sophronia, 'you have been so kind as to take up my old lady in your own mind, and to do her the honour of turning the question over whether you mightn't one of these days have her in charge, like? Whether you mightn't be a sort of Miss Bella Wilfer to her, and something more?'

'I should hope,' returned Mrs Lammle, with a scornful look and in a loud voice, 'that if I were anything to your wife, sir, I could hardly fail to be something more than Miss Bella Wilfer, as you call her.'

'What do YOU call her, ma'am?' asked Mr Boffin.

Mrs Lammle disdained to reply, and sat defiantly beating one foot on the ground.

'Again I think I may say, that's not impossible. Is it, sir?' asked Mr Boffin, turning to Alfred.

'It is not,' said Alfred, smiling assent as before, 'not impossible.'

'Now,' said Mr Boffin, gently, 'it won't do. I don't wish to say a single word that might be afterwards remembered as unpleasant; but it won't do.'

'Sophronia, my love,' her husband repeated in a bantering manner, 'you hear? It won't do.'

'No,' said Mr Boffin, with his voice still dropped, 'it really won't. You positively must excuse us. If you'll go your way, we'll go ours, and so I hope this affair ends to the satisfaction of all parties.'

Mrs Lammle gave him the look of a decidedly dissatisfied party demanding exemption from the category; but said nothing.

'The best thing we can make of the affair,' said Mr Boffin, 'is a matter of business, and as a matter of business it's brought to a conclusion. You have done me a great service, a very great service, and I have paid for it. Is there any objection to the price?'

Mr and Mrs Lammle looked at one another across the table, but neither could say that there was. Mr Lammle shrugged his shoulders, and Mrs Lammle sat rigid.

'Very good,' said Mr Boffin. 'We hope (my old lady and me) that you'll give us credit for taking the plainest and honestest short-cut that could be taken under the circumstances. We have talked it over with a deal of care (my old lady and me), and we have felt that at all to lead you on, or even at all to let you go on of your own selves, wouldn't be the right thing. So, I have openly given you to understand that—' Mr Boffin sought for a new turn of speech, but could find none so expressive as his former one, repeated in a confidential tone, '—that it won't do. If I could have put the case more pleasantly I would; but I hope I haven't put it very unpleasantly; at all events I haven't meant to. So,' said Mr Boffin, by way of peroration, 'wishing you well in the way you go, we now conclude with the observation that perhaps you'll go it.'

Mr Lammle rose with an impudent laugh on his side of the table, and Mrs Lammle rose with a disdainful frown on hers. At this moment a hasty foot was heard on the staircase, and Georgiana Podsnap broke into the room, unannounced and in tears.

'Oh, my dear Sophronia,' cried Georgiana, wringing her hands as she ran up to embrace her, 'to think that you and Alfred should be ruined! Oh, my poor dear Sophronia, to think that you should have had a Sale at your house after all your kindness to me! Oh, Mr and Mrs Boffin, pray forgive me for this intrusion, but you don't know how fond I was of Sophronia when Pa wouldn't let me go there any more, or what I have felt for Sophronia since I heard from Ma of her having been brought low in the world. You don't, you can't, you never can, think, how I have lain awake at night and cried for my good Sophronia, my first and only friend!'

Mrs Lammle's manner changed under the poor silly girl's embraces, and she turned extremely pale: directing one appealing look, first to Mrs Boffin, and then to Mr Boffin. Both understood her instantly, with a more delicate subtlety than much better educated people, whose perception came less directly from the heart, could have brought to bear upon the case.

'I haven't a minute,' said poor little Georgiana, 'to stay. I am out shopping early with Ma, and I said I had a headache and got Ma to leave me outside in the phaeton, in Piccadilly, and ran round to Sackville Street, and heard that Sophronia was here, and then Ma came to see, oh such a dreadful old stony woman from the country in a turban in Portland Place, and I said I wouldn't go up with Ma but would drive round and leave cards for the Boffins, which is taking a liberty with the name; but oh my goodness I am distracted, and the phaeton's at the door, and what would Pa say if he knew it!'

'Don't ye be timid, my dear,' said Mrs Boffin. 'You came in to see us.'

'Oh, no, I didn't,' cried Georgiana. 'It's very impolite, I know, but I came to see my poor Sophronia, my only friend. Oh! how I felt the separation, my dear Sophronia, before I knew you were brought low in the world, and how much more I feel it now!'

There were actually tears in the bold woman's eyes, as the soft-headed and soft-hearted girl twined her arms about her neck.

'But I've come on business,' said Georgiana, sobbing and drying her face, and then searching in a little reticule, 'and if I don't despatch it I shall have come for nothing, and oh good gracious! what would Pa say if he knew of Sackville Street, and what would Ma say if she was kept waiting on the doorsteps of that dreadful turban, and there never were such pawing horses as ours unsettling my mind every moment more and more when I want more mind than I have got, by pawing up Mr Boffin's street where they have no business to be. Oh! where is, where is it? Oh! I can't find it!' All this time sobbing, and searching in the little reticule.

'What do you miss, my dear?' asked Mr Boffin, stepping forward.

'Oh! it's little enough,' replied Georgiana, 'because Ma always treats me as if I was in the nursery (I am sure I wish I was!), but I hardly ever spend it and it has mounted up to fifteen pounds, Sophronia, and I hope three five-pound notes are better than nothing, though so little, so little! And now I have found that—oh, my goodness! there's the other gone next! Oh no, it isn't, here it is!'

With that, always sobbing and searching in the reticule, Georgiana produced a necklace.

'Ma says chits and jewels have no business together,' pursued Georgiana, 'and that's the reason why I have no trinkets except this, but I suppose my aunt Hawkinson was of a different opinion, because she left me this, though I used to think she might just as well have buried it, for it's always kept in jewellers' cotton. However, here it is, I am thankful to say, and of use at last, and you'll sell it, dear Sophronia, and buy things with it.'

'Give it to me,' said Mr Boffin, gently taking it. 'I'll see that it's properly disposed of.'

'Oh! are you such a friend of Sophronia's, Mr Boffin?' cried Georgiana. 'Oh, how good of you! Oh, my gracious! there was something else, and it's gone out of my head! Oh no, it isn't, I remember what it was. My grandmamma's property, that'll come to me when I am of age, Mr Boffin, will be all my own, and neither Pa nor Ma nor anybody else will have any control over it, and what I wish to do it so make some of it over somehow to Sophronia and Alfred, by signing something somewhere that'll prevail on somebody to advance them something. I want them to have something handsome to bring them up in the world again. Oh, my goodness me! Being such a friend of my dear Sophronia's, you won't refuse me, will you?'

'No, no,' said Mr Boffin, 'it shall be seen to.'

'Oh, thank you, thank you!' cried Georgiana. 'If my maid had a little note and half a crown, I could run round to the pastrycook's to sign something, or I could sign something in the Square if somebody would come and cough for me to let 'em in with the key, and would bring a pen and ink with 'em and a bit of blotting-paper. Oh, my gracious! I must tear myself away, or Pa and Ma will both find out! Dear, dear Sophronia, good, good-bye!'

The credulous little creature again embraced Mrs Lammle most affectionately, and then held out her hand to Mr Lammle.

'Good-bye, dear Mr Lammle—I mean Alfred. You won't think after to-day that I have deserted you and Sophronia because you have been brought low in the world, will you? Oh me! oh me! I have been crying my eyes out of my head, and Ma will be sure to ask me what's the matter. Oh, take me down, somebody, please, please, please!'

Mr Boffin took her down, and saw her driven away, with her poor little red eyes and weak chin peering over the great apron of the custard-coloured phaeton, as if she had been ordered to expiate some childish misdemeanour by going to bed in the daylight, and were peeping over the counterpane in a miserable flutter of repentance and low spirits. Returning to the breakfast-room, he found Mrs Lammle still standing on her side of the table, and Mr Lammle on his.

'I'll take care,' said Mr Boffin, showing the money and the necklace, 'that these are soon given back.'

Mrs Lammle had taken up her parasol from a side table, and stood sketching with it on the pattern of the damask cloth, as she had sketched on the pattern of Mr Twemlow's papered wall.

'You will not undeceive her I hope, Mr Boffin?' she said, turning her head towards him, but not her eyes.

'No,' said Mr Boffin.

'I mean, as to the worth and value of her friend,' Mrs Lammle explained, in a measured voice, and with an emphasis on her last word.

'No,' he returned. 'I may try to give a hint at her home that she is in want of kind and careful protection, but I shall say no more than that to her parents, and I shall say nothing to the young lady herself.'

'Mr and Mrs Boffin,' said Mrs Lammle, still sketching, and seeming to bestow great pains upon it, 'there are not many people, I think, who, under the circumstances, would have been so considerate and sparing as you have been to me just now. Do you care to be thanked?'

'Thanks are always worth having,' said Mrs Boffin, in her ready good nature.

'Then thank you both.'

'Sophronia,' asked her husband, mockingly, 'are you sentimental?'

'Well, well, my good sir,' Mr Boffin interposed, 'it's a very good thing to think well of another person, and it's a very good thing to be thought well of BY another person. Mrs Lammle will be none the worse for it, if she is.'

'Much obliged. But I asked Mrs Lammle if she was.'

She stood sketching on the table-cloth, with her face clouded and set, and was silent.

'Because,' said Alfred, 'I am disposed to be sentimental myself, on your appropriation of the jewels and the money, Mr Boffin. As our little Georgiana said, three five-pound notes are better than nothing, and if you sell a necklace you can buy things with the produce.'

'IF you sell it,' was Mr Boffin's comment, as he put it in his pocket.

Alfred followed it with his looks, and also greedily pursued the notes until they vanished into Mr Boffin's waistcoat pocket. Then he directed a look, half exasperated and half jeering, at his wife. She still stood sketching; but, as she sketched, there was a struggle within her, which found expression in the depth of the few last lines the parasol point indented into the table-cloth, and then some tears fell from her eyes.

'Why, confound the woman,' exclaimed Lammle, 'she IS sentimental!

She walked to the window, flinching under his angry stare, looked out for a moment, and turned round quite coldly.

'You have had no former cause of complaint on the sentimental score, Alfred, and you will have none in future. It is not worth your noticing. We go abroad soon, with the money we have earned here?'

'You know we do; you know we must.'

'There is no fear of my taking any sentiment with me. I should soon be eased of it, if I did. But it will be all left behind. It IS all left behind. Are you ready, Alfred?'

'What the deuce have I been waiting for but you, Sophronia?'

'Let us go then. I am sorry I have delayed our dignified departure.'

She passed out and he followed her. Mr and Mrs Boffin had the curiosity softly to raise a window and look after them as they went down the long street. They walked arm-in-arm, showily enough, but without appearing to interchange a syllable. It might have been fanciful to suppose that under their outer bearing there was something of the shamed air of two cheats who were linked together by concealed handcuffs; but, not so, to suppose that they were haggardly weary of one another, of themselves, and of all this world. In turning the street corner they might have turned out of this world, for anything Mr and Mrs Boffin ever saw of them to the contrary; for, they set eyes on the Lammles never more.

Chapter 3

THE GOLDEN DUSTMAN SINKS AGAIN

The evening of that day being one of the reading evenings at the Bower, Mr Boffin kissed Mrs Boffin after a five o'clock dinner, and trotted out, nursing his big stick in both arms, so that, as of old, it seemed to be whispering in his ear. He carried so very attentive an expression on his countenance that it appeared as if the confidential discourse of the big stick required to be followed closely. Mr Boffin's face was like the face of a thoughtful listener to an intricate communication, and, in trotting along, he occasionally glanced at that companion with the look of a man who was interposing the remark: 'You don't mean it!'

Mr Boffin and his stick went on alone together, until they arrived at certain cross-ways where they would be likely to fall in with any one coming, at about the same time, from Clerkenwell to the Bower. Here they stopped, and Mr Boffin consulted his watch.

'It wants five minutes, good, to Venus's appointment,' said he. 'I'm rather early.'

But Venus was a punctual man, and, even as Mr Boffin replaced his watch in its pocket, was to be descried coming towards him. He quickened his pace on seeing Mr Boffin already at the place of meeting, and was soon at his side.

'Thank'ee, Venus,' said Mr Boffin. 'Thank'ee, thank'ee, thank'ee!'

It would not have been very evident why he thanked the anatomist, but for his furnishing the explanation in what he went on to say.

'All right, Venus, all right. Now, that you've been to see me, and have consented to keep up the appearance before Wegg of remaining in it for a time, I have got a sort of a backer. All right, Venus. Thank'ee, Venus. Thank'ee, thank'ee, thank'ee!'

Mr Venus shook the proffered hand with a modest air, and they pursued the direction of the Bower.

'Do you think Wegg is likely to drop down upon me to-night, Venus?' inquired Mr Boffin, wistfully, as they went along.

'I think he is, sir.'

'Have you any particular reason for thinking so, Venus?'

'Well, sir,' returned that personage, 'the fact is, he has given me another look-in, to make sure of what he calls our stock-in-trade being correct, and he has mentioned his intention that he was not to be put off beginning with you the very next time you should come. And this,' hinted Mr Venus, delicately, 'being the very next time, you know, sir—'

—'Why, therefore you suppose he'll turn to at the grindstone, eh, Wegg?' said Mr Boffin.

'Just so, sir.'

Mr Boffin took his nose in his hand, as if it were already excoriated, and the sparks were beginning to fly out of that feature. 'He's a terrible fellow, Venus; he's an awful fellow. I don't know how ever I shall go through with it. You must stand by me, Venus like a good man and true. You'll do all you can to stand by me, Venus; won't you?'

Mr Venus replied with the assurance that he would; and Mr Boffin, looking anxious and dispirited, pursued the way in silence until they rang at the Bower gate. The stumping approach of Wegg was soon heard behind it, and as it turned upon its hinges he became visible with his hand on the lock.

'Mr Boffin, sir?' he remarked. 'You're quite a stranger!'

'Yes. I've been otherwise occupied, Wegg.'

'Have you indeed, sir?' returned the literary gentleman, with a threatening sneer. 'Hah! I've been looking for you, sir, rather what I may call specially.'

'You don't say so, Wegg?'

'Yes, I do say so, sir. And if you hadn't come round to me tonight, dash my wig if I wouldn't have come round to you tomorrow. Now! I tell you!'

'Nothing wrong, I hope, Wegg?'

'Oh no, Mr Boffin,' was the ironical answer. 'Nothing wrong! What should be wrong in Boffinses Bower! Step in, sir.'

'"If you'll come to the Bower I've shaded for you,
Your bed shan't be roses all spangled with doo:
Will you, will you, will you, will you, come to the Bower?
Oh, won't you, won't you, won't you, won't you, come to the Bower?"'

An unholy glare of contradiction and offence shone in the eyes of Mr Wegg, as he turned the key on his patron, after ushering him into the yard with this vocal quotation. Mr Boffin's air was crestfallen and submissive. Whispered Wegg to Venus, as they crossed the yard behind him: 'Look at the worm and minion; he's down in the mouth already.' Whispered Venus to Wegg: 'That's because I've told him. I've prepared the way for you.'

Mr Boffin, entering the usual chamber, laid his stick upon the settle usually reserved for him, thrust his hands into his pockets, and, with his shoulders raised and his hat drooping back upon them, looking disconsolately at Wegg. 'My friend and partner, Mr Venus, gives me to understand,' remarked that man of might, addressing him, 'that you are aware of our power over you. Now, when you have took your hat off, we'll go into that pint.'

Mr Boffin shook it off with one shake, so that it dropped on the floor behind him, and remained in his former attitude with his former rueful look upon him.

'First of all, I'm a-going to call you Boffin, for short,' said Wegg. 'If you don't like it, it's open to you to lump it.'

'I don't mind it, Wegg,' Mr Boffin replied.

'That's lucky for you, Boffin. Now, do you want to be read to?'

'I don't particularly care about it to-night, Wegg.'

'Because if you did want to,' pursued Mr Wegg, the brilliancy of whose point was dimmed by his having been unexpectedly answered: 'you wouldn't be. I've been your slave long enough. I'm not to be trampled under-foot by a dustman any more. With the single exception of the salary, I renounce the whole and total sitiwation.'

'Since you say it is to be so, Wegg,' returned Mr Boffin, with folded hands, 'I suppose it must be.'

'I suppose it must be,' Wegg retorted. 'Next (to clear the ground before coming to business), you've placed in this yard a skulking, a sneaking, and a sniffing, menial.'

'He hadn't a cold in his head when I sent him here,' said Mr Boffin.

'Boffin!' retorted Wegg, 'I warn you not to attempt a joke with me!'

Here Mr Venus interposed, and remarked that he conceived Mr Boffin to have taken the description literally; the rather, forasmuch as he, Mr Venus, had himself supposed the menial to have contracted an affliction or a habit of the nose, involving a serious drawback on the pleasures of social intercourse, until he had discovered that Mr Wegg's description of him was to be accepted as merely figurative.

'Anyhow, and every how,' said Wegg, 'he has been planted here, and he is here. Now, I won't have him here. So I call upon Boffin, before I say another word, to fetch him in and send him packing to the right-about.'

The unsuspecting Sloppy was at that moment airing his many buttons within view of the window. Mr Boffin, after a short interval of impassive discomfiture, opened the window and beckoned him to come in.

'I call upon Boffin,' said Wegg, with one arm a-kimbo and his head on one side, like a bullying counsel pausing for an answer from a witness, 'to inform that menial that I am Master here!'

In humble obedience, when the button-gleaming Sloppy entered Mr Boffin said to him: 'Sloppy, my fine fellow, Mr Wegg is Master here. He doesn't want you, and you are to go from here.'

'For good!' Mr Wegg severely stipulated.

'For good,' said Mr Boffin.

Sloppy stared, with both his eyes and all his buttons, and his mouth wide open; but was without loss of time escorted forth by Silas Wegg, pushed out at the yard gate by the shoulders, and locked out.

'The atomspear,' said Wegg, stumping back into the room again, a little reddened by his late exertion, 'is now freer for the purposes of respiration. Mr Venus, sir, take a chair. Boffin, you may sit down.'

Mr Boffin, still with his hands ruefully stuck in his pockets, sat on the edge of the settle, shrunk into a small compass, and eyed the potent Silas with conciliatory looks.

'This gentleman,' said Silas Wegg, pointing out Venus, 'this gentleman, Boffin, is more milk and watery with you than I'll be. But he hasn't borne the Roman yoke as I have, nor yet he hasn't been required to pander to your depraved appetite for miserly characters.'

'I never meant, my dear Wegg—' Mr Boffin was beginning, when Silas stopped him.

'Hold your tongue, Boffin! Answer when you're called upon to answer. You'll find you've got quite enough to do. Now, you're aware—are you—that you're in possession of property to which you've no right at all? Are you aware of that?'

'Venus tells me so,' said Mr Boffin, glancing towards him for any support he could give.

'I tell you so,' returned Silas. 'Now, here's my hat, Boffin, and here's my walking-stick. Trifle with me, and instead of making a bargain with you, I'll put on my hat and take up my walking-stick, and go out, and make a bargain with the rightful owner. Now, what do you say?'

'I say,' returned Mr Boffin, leaning forward in alarmed appeal, with his hands on his knees, 'that I am sure I don't want to trifle. Wegg. I have said so to Venus.'

'You certainly have, sir,' said Venus.

'You're too milk and watery with our friend, you are indeed,' remonstrated Silas, with a disapproving shake of his wooden head. Then at once you confess yourself desirous to come to terms, do you Boffin? Before you answer, keep this hat well in your mind and also this walking-stick.'

'I am willing, Wegg, to come to terms.'

'Willing won't do, Boffin. I won't take willing. Are you desirous to come to terms? Do you ask to be allowed as a favour to come to terms?' Mr Wegg again planted his arm, and put his head on one side.

'Yes.'

'Yes what?' said the inexorable Wegg: 'I won't take yes. I'll have it out of you in full, Boffin.'

'Dear me!' cried that unfortunate gentleman. 'I am so worrited! I ask to be allowed to come to terms, supposing your document is all correct.'

'Don't you be afraid of that,' said Silas, poking his head at him. 'You shall be satisfied by seeing it. Mr Venus will show it you, and I'll hold you the while. Then you want to know what the terms are. Is that about the sum and substance of it? Will you or won't you answer, Boffin?' For he had paused a moment.

'Dear me!' cried that unfortunate gentleman again, 'I am worrited to that degree that I'm almost off my head. You hurry me so. Be so good as name the terms, Wegg.'

'Now, mark, Boffin,' returned Silas: 'Mark 'em well, because they're the lowest terms and the only terms. You'll throw your Mound (the little Mound as comes to you any way) into the general estate, and then you'll divide the whole property into three parts, and you'll keep one and hand over the others.'

Mr Venus's mouth screwed itself up, as Mr Boffin's face lengthened itself, Mr Venus not having been prepared for such a rapacious demand.

'Now, wait a bit, Boffin,' Wegg proceeded, 'there's something more. You've been a squandering this property—laying some of it out on yourself. THAT won't do. You've bought a house. You'll be charged for it.'

'I shall be ruined, Wegg!' Mr Boffin faintly protested.

'Now, wait a bit, Boffin; there's something more. You'll leave me in sole custody of these Mounds till they're all laid low. If any waluables should be found in 'em, I'll take care of such waluables. You'll produce your contract for the sale of the Mounds, that we may know to a penny what they're worth, and you'll make out likewise an exact list of all the other property. When the Mounds is cleared away to the last shovel-full, the final diwision will come off.'

'Dreadful, dreadful, dreadful! I shall die in a workhouse!' cried the Golden Dustman, with his hands to his head.

'Now, wait a bit, Boffin; there's something more. You've been unlawfully ferreting about this yard. You've been seen in the act of ferreting about this yard. Two pair of eyes at the present moment brought to bear upon you, have seen you dig up a Dutch bottle.'

'It was mine, Wegg,' protested Mr Boffin. 'I put it there myself.'

'What was in it, Boffin?' inquired Silas.

'Not gold, not silver, not bank notes, not jewels, nothing that you could turn into money, Wegg; upon my soul!'

'Prepared, Mr Venus,' said Wegg, turning to his partner with a knowing and superior air, 'for an ewasive answer on the part of our dusty friend here, I have hit out a little idea which I think will meet your views. We charge that bottle against our dusty friend at a thousand pound.'

Mr Boffin drew a deep groan.

'Now, wait a bit, Boffin; there's something more. In your employment is an under-handed sneak, named Rokesmith. It won't answer to have HIM about, while this business of ours is about. He must be discharged.'

'Rokesmith is already discharged,' said Mr Boffin, speaking in a muffled voice, with his hands before his face, as he rocked himself on the settle.

'Already discharged, is he?' returned Wegg, surprised. 'Oh! Then, Boffin, I believe there's nothing more at present.'

The unlucky gentleman continuing to rock himself to and fro, and to utter an occasional moan, Mr Venus besought him to bear up against his reverses, and to take time to accustom himself to the thought of his new position. But, his taking time was exactly the thing of all others that Silas

Wegg could not be induced to hear of. 'Yes or no, and no half measures!' was the motto which that obdurate person many times repeated; shaking his fist at Mr Boffin, and pegging his motto into the floor with his wooden leg, in a threatening and alarming manner.

At length, Mr Boffin entreated to be allowed a quarter of an hour's grace, and a cooling walk of that duration in the yard. With some difficulty Mr Wegg granted this great favour, but only on condition that he accompanied Mr Boffin in his walk, as not knowing what he might fraudulently unearth if he were left to himself. A more absurd sight than Mr Boffin in his mental irritation trotting very nimbly, and Mr Wegg hopping after him with great exertion, eager to watch the slightest turn of an eyelash, lest it should indicate a spot rich with some secret, assuredly had never been seen in the shadow of the Mounds. Mr Wegg was much distressed when the quarter of an hour expired, and came hopping in, a very bad second.

'I can't help myself!' cried Mr Boffin, flouncing on the settle in a forlorn manner, with his hands deep in his pockets, as if his pockets had sunk. 'What's the good of my pretending to stand out, when I can't help myself? I must give in to the terms. But I should like to see the document.'

Wegg, who was all for clinching the nail he had so strongly driven home, announced that Boffin should see it without an hour's delay. Taking him into custody for that purpose, or overshadowing him as if he really were his Evil Genius in visible form, Mr Wegg clapped Mr Boffin's hat upon the back of his head, and walked him out by the arm, asserting a proprietorship over his soul and body that was at once more grim and more ridiculous than anything in Mr Venus's rare collection. That light-haired gentleman followed close upon their heels, at least backing up Mr Boffin in a literal sense, if he had not had recent opportunities of doing so spiritually; while Mr Boffin, trotting on as hard as he could trot, involved Silas Wegg in frequent collisions with the public, much as a pre-occupied blind man's dog may be seen to involve his master.

Thus they reached Mr Venus's establishment, somewhat heated by the nature of their progress thither. Mr Wegg, especially, was in a flaming glow, and stood in the little shop, panting and mopping his head with his pocket-handkerchief, speechless for several minutes.

Meanwhile, Mr Venus, who had left the duelling frogs to fight it out in his absence by candlelight for the public delectation, put the shutters up.

When all was snug, and the shop-door fastened, he said to the perspiring Silas: 'I suppose, Mr Wegg, we may now produce the paper?'

'Hold on a minute, sir,' replied that discreet character; 'hold on a minute. Will you obligingly shove that box—which you mentioned on a former occasion as containing miscellanies—towards me in the midst of the shop here?'

Mr Venus did as he was asked.

'Very good,' said Silas, looking about: 've—ry good. Will you hand me that chair, sir, to put a-top of it?'

Venus handed him the chair.

'Now, Boffin,' said Wegg, 'mount up here and take your seat, will you?'

Mr Boffin, as if he were about to have his portrait painted, or to be electrified, or to be made a Freemason, or to be placed at any other solitary disadvantage, ascended the rostrum prepared for him.

'Now, Mr Venus,' said Silas, taking off his coat, 'when I catches our friend here round the arms and body, and pins him tight to the back of the chair, you may show him what he wants to see. If you'll open it and hold it well up in one hand, sir, and a candle in the other, he can read it charming.'

Mr Boffin seemed rather inclined to object to these precautionary arrangements, but, being immediately embraced by Wegg, resigned himself. Venus then produced the document, and Mr Boffin slowly spelt it out aloud: so very slowly, that Wegg, who was holding him in the chair with the grip of a wrestler, became again exceedingly the worse for his exertions. 'Say when you've put it safe back, Mr Venus,' he uttered with difficulty, 'for the strain of this is terrimenjious.'

At length the document was restored to its place; and Wegg, whose uncomfortable attitude had been that of a very persevering man unsuccessfully attempting to stand upon his head, took a seat to recover himself. Mr Boffin, for his part, made no attempt to come down, but remained aloft disconsolate.

'Well, Boffin!' said Wegg, as soon as he was in a condition to speak. 'Now, you know.'

'Yes, Wegg,' said Mr Boffin, meekly. 'Now, I know.'

'You have no doubts about it, Boffin.'

'No, Wegg. No, Wegg. None,' was the slow and sad reply.

'Then, take care, you,' said Wegg, 'that you stick to your conditions. Mr Venus, if on this auspicious occasion, you should happen to have a drop of anything not quite so mild as tea in the 'ouse, I think I'd take the friendly liberty of asking you for a specimen of it.'

Mr Venus, reminded of the duties of hospitality, produced some rum. In answer to the inquiry, 'Will you mix it, Mr Wegg?' that gentleman pleasantly rejoined, 'I think not, sir. On so auspicious an occasion, I prefer to take it in the form of a Gum-Tickler.'

Mr Boffin, declining rum, being still elevated on his pedestal, was in a convenient position to be addressed. Wegg having eyed him with an impudent air at leisure, addressed him, therefore, while refreshing himself with his dram.

'Bof—fin!'

'Yes, Wegg,' he answered, coming out of a fit of abstraction, with a sigh.

'I haven't mentioned one thing, because it's a detail that comes of course. You must be followed up, you know. You must be kept under inspection.'

'I don't quite understand,' said Mr Boffin.

'Don't you?' sneered Wegg. 'Where's your wits, Boffin? Till the Mounds is down and this business completed, you're accountable for all the property, recollect. Consider yourself accountable to me. Mr Venus here being too milk and watery with you, I am the boy for you.'

'I've been a-thinking,' said Mr Boffin, in a tone of despondency, 'that I must keep the knowledge from my old lady.'

'The knowledge of the diwision, d'ye mean?' inquired Wegg, helping himself to a third Gum-Tickler—for he had already taken a second.

'Yes. If she was to die first of us two she might then think all her life, poor thing, that I had got the rest of the fortune still, and was saving it.'

'I suspect, Boffin,' returned Wegg, shaking his head sagaciously, and bestowing a wooden wink upon him, 'that you've found out some account of some old chap, supposed to be a Miser, who got himself the credit of having much more money than he had. However, I don't mind.'

'Don't you see, Wegg?' Mr Boffin feelingly represented to him: 'don't you see? My old lady has got so used to the property. It would be such a hard surprise.'

'I don't see it at all,' blustered Wegg. 'You'll have as much as I shall. And who are you?'

'But then, again,' Mr Boffin gently represented; 'my old lady has very upright principles.'

'Who's your old lady,' returned Wegg, 'to set herself up for having uprighter principles than mine?'

Mr Boffin seemed a little less patient at this point than at any other of the negotiations. But he commanded himself, and said tamely enough: 'I think it must be kept from my old lady, Wegg.'

'Well,' said Wegg, contemptuously, though, perhaps, perceiving some hint of danger otherwise, 'keep it from your old lady. I ain't going to tell her. I can have you under close inspection without that. I'm as good a man as you, and better. Ask me to dinner. Give me the run of your 'ouse. I was good enough for you and your old lady once, when I helped you out with your weal and hammers. Was there no Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker, before YOU two?'

'Gently, Mr Wegg, gently,' Venus urged.

'Milk and water-erily you mean, sir,' he returned, with some little thickness of speech, in consequence of the Gum-Ticklers having tickled it. 'I've got him under inspection, and I'll inspect him.

"Along the line the signal ran
England expects as this present man
Will keep Boffin to his duty."

—Boffin, I'll see you home.'

Mr Boffin descended with an air of resignation, and gave himself up, after taking friendly leave of Mr Venus. Once more, Inspector and Inspected went through the streets together, and so arrived at Mr Boffin's door.

But even there, when Mr Boffin had given his keeper good-night, and had let himself in with his key, and had softly closed the door, even there and then, the all-powerful Silas must needs claim another assertion of his newly-asserted power.

'Bof—fin!' he called through the keyhole.

'Yes, Wegg,' was the reply through the same channel.

'Come out. Show yourself again. Let's have another look at you!' Mr Boffin—ah, how fallen from the high estate of his honest simplicity!—opened the door and obeyed.

'Go in. You may get to bed now,' said Wegg, with a grin.

The door was hardly closed, when he again called through the keyhole: 'Bof—fin!'

'Yes, Wegg.'

This time Silas made no reply, but laboured with a will at turning an imaginary grindstone outside the keyhole, while Mr Boffin stooped at it within; he then laughed silently, and stumped home.

Chapter 4

A RUNAWAY MATCH

Cherubic Pa arose with as little noise as possible from beside majestic Ma, one morning early, having a holiday before him. Pa and the lovely woman had a rather particular appointment to keep.

Yet Pa and the lovely woman were not going out together. Bella was up before four, but had no bonnet on. She was waiting at the foot of the stairs—was sitting on the bottom stair, in fact—to receive Pa when he came down, but her only object seemed to be to get Pa well out of the house.

'Your breakfast is ready, sir,' whispered Bella, after greeting him with a hug, 'and all you have to do, is, to eat it up and drink it up, and escape. How do you feel, Pa?'

'To the best of my judgement, like a housebreaker new to the business, my dear, who can't make himself quite comfortable till he is off the premises.'

Bella tucked her arm in his with a merry noiseless laugh, and they went down to the kitchen on tiptoe; she stopping on every separate stair to put the tip of her forefinger on her rosy lips, and then lay it on his lips, according to her favourite petting way of kissing Pa.

'How do YOU feel, my love?' asked R. W., as she gave him his breakfast.

'I feel as if the Fortune-teller was coming true, dear Pa, and the fair little man was turning out as was predicted.'

'Ho! Only the fair little man?' said her father.

Bella put another of those finger-seals upon his lips, and then said, kneeling down by him as he sat at table: 'Now, look here, sir. If you keep well up to the mark this day, what do you think you deserve? What did I promise you should have, if you were good, upon a certain occasion?'

'Upon my word I don't remember, Precious. Yes, I do, though. Wasn't it one of these beau—tiful tresses?' with his caressing hand upon her hair.

'Wasn't it, too!' returned Bella, pretending to pout. 'Upon my word! Do you know, sir, that the Fortune-teller would give five thousand guineas (if it was quite convenient to him, which it isn't) for the lovely piece I have cut off for you? You can form no idea, sir, of the number of times he kissed quite a scrubby little piece—in comparison—that I cut off for HIM. And he wears it, too, round his neck, I can tell you! Near his heart!' said Bella, nodding. 'Ah! very near his heart! However, you have been a good, good boy, and you are the best of all the dearest boys that ever were, this morning, and here's the chain I have made of it, Pa, and you must let me put it round your neck with my own loving hands.'

As Pa bent his head, she cried over him a little, and then said (after having stopped to dry her eyes on his white waistcoat, the discovery of which incongruous circumstance made her laugh): 'Now, darling Pa, give me your hands that I may fold them together, and do you say after me:—My little Bella.'

'My little Bella,' repeated Pa.

'I am very fond of you.'

'I am very fond of you, my darling,' said Pa.

'You mustn't say anything not dictated to you, sir. You daren't do it in your responses at Church, and you mustn't do it in your responses out of Church.'

'I withdraw the darling,' said Pa.

'That's a pious boy! Now again:—You were always—'

'You were always,' repeated Pa.

'A vexatious—'

'No you weren't,' said Pa.

'A vexatious (do you hear, sir?), a vexatious, capricious, thankless, troublesome, Animal; but I hope you'll do better in the time to come, and I bless you and forgive you!' Here, she quite forgot that it was Pa's turn to make the responses, and clung to his neck. 'Dear Pa, if you knew how much I think this morning of what you told me once, about the first time of our seeing old Mr Harmon, when I stamped and screamed and beat you with my detestable little bonnet! I feel as if I had been stamping and screaming and beating you with my hateful little bonnet, ever since I was born, darling!'

'Nonsense, my love. And as to your bonnets, they have always been nice bonnets, for they have always become you—or you have become them; perhaps it was that—at every age.'

'Did I hurt you much, poor little Pa?' asked Bella, laughing (notwithstanding her repentance), with fantastic pleasure in the picture, 'when I beat you with my bonnet?'

'No, my child. Wouldn't have hurt a fly!'

'Ay, but I am afraid I shouldn't have beat you at all, unless I had meant to hurt you,' said Bella. 'Did I pinch your legs, Pa?'

'Not much, my dear; but I think it's almost time I—'

'Oh, yes!' cried Bella. 'If I go on chattering, you'll be taken alive. Fly, Pa, fly!'

So, they went softly up the kitchen stairs on tiptoe, and Bella with her light hand softly removed the fastenings of the house door, and Pa, having received a parting hug, made off. When he had gone a little way, he looked back. Upon which, Bella set another of those finger seals upon the air, and thrust out her little foot expressive of the mark. Pa, in appropriate action, expressed fidelity to the mark, and made off as fast as he could go.

Bella walked thoughtfully in the garden for an hour and more, and then, returning to the bedroom where Lavvy the Irrepressible still slumbered, put on a little bonnet of quiet, but on the whole of sly appearance, which she had yesterday made. 'I am going for a walk, Lavvy,' she said, as she stooped down and kissed her. The Irrepressible, with a bounce in the bed, and a remark that it wasn't time to get up yet, relapsed into unconsciousness, if she had come out of it.

Behold Bella tripping along the streets, the dearest girl afoot under the summer sun! Behold Pa waiting for Bella behind a pump, at least three miles from the parental roof-tree. Behold Bella and Pa aboard an early steamboat for Greenwich.

Were they expected at Greenwich? Probably. At least, Mr John Rokesmith was on the pier looking out, about a couple of hours before the coaly (but to him gold-dusty) little steamboat got her steam up in London. Probably. At least, Mr John Rokesmith seemed perfectly satisfied when he descried them on board. Probably. At least, Bella no sooner stepped ashore than she took Mr John Rokesmith's arm, without evincing surprise, and the two walked away together with an ethereal air of happiness which, as it were, wafted up from the earth and drew after them a gruff and glum old pensioner to see it out. Two wooden legs had this gruff and glum old pensioner, and, a minute before Bella stepped out of the boat, and drew that confiding little arm of hers through Rokesmith's, he had had no object in life but tobacco, and not enough of that. Stranded was Gruff and Glum in a harbour of everlasting mud, when all in an instant Bella floated him, and away he went.

Say, cherubic parent taking the lead, in what direction do we steer first? With some such inquiry in his thoughts, Gruff and Glum, stricken by so sudden an interest that he perked his neck and looked over the intervening people, as if he were trying to stand on tiptoe with his two wooden legs, took an observation of R. W. There was no 'first' in the case, Gruff and Glum made out; the cherubic parent was bearing down and crowding on direct for Greenwich church, to see his relations.

For, Gruff and Glum, though most events acted on him simply as tobacco-stoppers, pressing down and condensing the quids within him, might be imagined to trace a family resemblance between the cherubs in the church architecture, and the cherub in the white waistcoat. Some remembrance of old Valentines, wherein a cherub, less appropriately attired for a proverbially uncertain climate, had been seen conducting lovers to the altar, might have been fancied to inflame the ardour of his timber toes. Be it as it might, he gave his moorings the slip, and followed in chase.

The cherub went before, all beaming smiles; Bella and John Rokesmith followed; Gruff and Glum stuck to them like wax. For years, the wings of his mind had gone to look after the legs of his body; but Bella had brought them back for him per steamer, and they were spread again.

He was a slow sailer on a wind of happiness, but he took a cross cut for the rendezvous, and pegged away as if he were scoring furiously at cribbage. When the shadow of the church-porch swallowed them up, victorious Gruff and Glum likewise presented himself to be swallowed up. And by this time the cherubic parent was so fearful of surprise, that, but for the two wooden legs on which Gruff and Glum was reassuringly mounted, his conscience might have introduced, in the person of that pensioner, his own stately lady disguised, arrived at Greenwich in a car and griffins, like the spiteful Fairy at the christenings of the Princesses, to do something dreadful to the marriage service. And truly he had a momentary reason to be pale of face, and to whisper to Bella, 'You don't think that can be your Ma; do you, my dear?' on account of a mysterious rustling and a stealthy movement somewhere in the remote neighbourhood of the organ, though it was gone directly and was heard no more. Albeit it was heard of afterwards, as will afterwards be read in this veracious register of marriage.

Who taketh? I, John, and so do I, Bella. Who giveth? I, R. W. Forasmuch, Gruff and Glum, as John and Bella have consented together in holy wedlock, you may (in short) consider it done, and withdraw your two wooden legs from this temple. To the foregoing purport, the Minister speaking, as directed by the Rubric, to the People, selectly represented in the present instance by G. and G. above mentioned.

And now, the church-porch having swallowed up Bella Wilfer for ever and ever, had it not in its power to relinquish that young woman, but slid into the happy sunlight, Mrs John Rokesmith instead. And long on the bright steps stood Gruff and Glum, looking after the pretty bride, with a narcotic consciousness of having dreamed a dream.

After which, Bella took out from her pocket a little letter, and read it aloud to Pa and John; this being a true copy of the same.

'DEAREST MA,

I hope you won't be angry, but I am most happily married to Mr John Rokesmith, who loves me better than I can ever deserve, except by loving him with all my heart. I thought it best not to mention it beforehand, in case it should cause any little difference at home. Please tell darling Pa. With love to Lavvy,

Ever dearest Ma, Your affectionate daughter, BELLA (P.S.—Rokesmith).'

Then, John Rokesmith put the queen's countenance on the letter—when had Her Gracious Majesty looked so benign as on that blessed morning!—and then Bella popped it into the post-office, and said merrily, 'Now, dearest Pa, you are safe, and will never be taken alive!'

Pa was, at first, in the stirred depths of his conscience, so far from sure of being safe yet, that he made out majestic matrons lurking in ambush among the harmless trees of Greenwich Park, and seemed to see a stately countenance tied up in a well-known pocket-handkerchief glooming down at him from a window of the Observatory, where the Familiars of the Astronomer Royal nightly outwatch the winking stars. But, the minutes passing on and no Mrs Wilfer in the flesh appearing, he became more confident, and so repaired with good heart and appetite to Mr and Mrs John Rokesmith's cottage on Blackheath, where breakfast was ready.

A modest little cottage but a bright and a fresh, and on the snowy tablecloth the prettiest of little breakfasts. In waiting, too, like an attendant summer breeze, a fluttering young damsel, all pink and ribbons, blushing as if she had been married instead of Bella, and yet asserting the triumph of her sex over both John and Pa, in an exulting and exalted flurry: as who should say, 'This is what you must all come to, gentlemen, when we choose to bring you to book.' This same young damsel was Bella's serving-maid, and unto her did deliver a bunch of keys, commanding treasures in the way of dry-saltery, groceries, jams and pickles, the investigation of which made pastime after breakfast, when Bella declared that 'Pa must taste everything, John dear, or it will never be lucky,' and when Pa had all sorts of things poked into his mouth, and didn't quite know what to do with them when they were put there.

Then they, all three, out for a charming ride, and for a charming stroll among heath in bloom, and there behold the identical Gruff and Glum with his wooden legs horizontally disposed before him, apparently sitting meditating on the vicissitudes of life! To whom said Bella, in her light-hearted surprise: 'Oh! How do you do again? What a dear old pensioner you are!' To which Gruff and Glum responded that he see her married this morning, my Beauty, and that if it warn't a liberty he wished her ji and the fairest of fair wind and weather; further, in a general way requesting to know what cheer? and scrambling up on his two wooden legs to salute, hat in hand, ship-shape, with the gallantry of a man-of-warsman and a heart of oak.

It was a pleasant sight, in the midst of the golden bloom, to see this salt old Gruff and Glum, waving his shovel hat at Bella, while his thin white hair flowed free, as if she had once more launched him into blue water again. 'You are a charming old pensioner,' said Bella, 'and I am so happy that I wish I could make you happy, too.' Answered Gruff and Glum, 'Give me leave to kiss your hand, my Lovely, and it's done!' So it was done to the general contentment; and if Gruff and Glum didn't in the course of the afternoon splice the main brace, it was not for want of the means of inflicting that outrage on the feelings of the Infant Bands of Hope.

But, the marriage dinner was the crowning success, for what had bride and bridegroom plotted to do, but to have and to hold that dinner in the very room of the very hotel where Pa and the lovely woman had once dined together! Bella sat between Pa and John, and divided her attentions pretty equally, but felt it necessary (in the waiter's absence before dinner) to remind Pa that she was HIS lovely woman no longer.

'I am well aware of it, my dear,' returned the cherub, 'and I resign you willingly.'

'Willingly, sir? You ought to be brokenhearted.'

'So I should be, my dear, if I thought that I was going to lose you.'

'But you know you are not; don't you, poor dear Pa? You know that you have only made a new relation who will be as fond of you and as thankful to you—for my sake and your own sake both—as I am; don't you, dear little Pa? Look here, Pa!' Bella put her finger on her own lip, and then on Pa's, and then on her own lip again, and then on her husband's. 'Now, we are a partnership of three, dear Pa.'

The appearance of dinner here cut Bella short in one of her disappearances: the more effectually, because it was put on under the auspices of a solemn gentleman in black clothes and a white cravat, who looked much more like a clergyman than THE clergyman, and seemed to have mounted a great deal higher in the church: not to say, scaled the steeple. This dignitary, conferring in secrecy with John Rokesmith on the subject of punch and wines, bent his head as though stooping to the Papistical practice of receiving auricular confession. Likewise, on John's offering a suggestion which didn't meet his views, his face became overcast and reproachful, as enjoining penance.

What a dinner! Specimens of all the fishes that swim in the sea, surely had swum their way to it, and if samples of the fishes of divers colours that made a speech in the Arabian Nights (quite a ministerial explanation in respect of cloudiness), and then jumped out of the frying-pan, were not to be recognized, it was only because they had all become of one hue by being cooked in batter among the whitebait. And the dishes being seasoned with Bliss—an article which they are sometimes out of, at Greenwich—were of perfect flavour, and the golden drinks had been bottled in the golden age and hoarding up their sparkles ever since.

The best of it was, that Bella and John and the cherub had made a covenant that they would not reveal to mortal eyes any appearance whatever of being a wedding party. Now, the supervising dignitary, the Archbishop of Greenwich, knew this as well as if he had performed the nuptial ceremony. And the loftiness with which his Grace entered into their confidence without being invited, and insisted on a show of keeping the waiters out of it, was the crowning glory of the entertainment.

There was an innocent young waiter of a slender form and with weakish legs, as yet unversed in the wiles of waiterhood, and but too evidently of a romantic temperament, and deeply (it were not too much to add hopelessly) in love with some young female not aware of his merit. This guileless youth, descrying the position of affairs, which even his innocence could not mistake, limited his waiting to languishing admiringly against the sideboard when Bella didn't want anything, and swooping at her when she did. Him, his Grace the Archbishop perpetually obstructed, cutting him out with his elbow in the moment of success, despatching him in degrading quest of melted butter, and, when by any chance he got hold of any dish worth having, bereaving him of it, and ordering him to stand back.

'Pray excuse him, madam,' said the Archbishop in a low stately voice; 'he is a very young man on liking, and we DON'T like him.'

This induced John Rokesmith to observe—by way of making the thing more natural—'Bella, my love, this is so much more successful than any of our past anniversaries, that I think we must keep our future anniversaries here.'

Whereunto Bella replied, with probably the least successful attempt at looking matronly that ever was seen: 'Indeed, I think so, John, dear.'

Here the Archbishop of Greenwich coughed a stately cough to attract the attention of three of his ministers present, and staring at them, seemed to say: 'I call upon you by your fealty to believe this!'

With his own hands he afterwards put on the dessert, as remarking to the three guests, 'The period has now arrived at which we can dispense with the assistance of those fellows who are not in our confidence,' and would have retired with complete dignity but for a daring action issuing from the misguided brain of the young man on liking. He finding, by ill-fortune, a piece of orange flower somewhere in the lobbies now approached undetected with the same in a finger-glass, and placed it on Bella's right hand. The Archbishop instantly ejected and excommunicated him; but the thing was done.

'I trust, madam,' said his Grace, returning alone, 'that you will have the kindness to overlook it, in consideration of its being the act of a very young man who is merely here on liking, and who will never answer.'

With that, he solemnly bowed and retired, and they all burst into laughter, long and merry. 'Disguise is of no use,' said Bella; 'they all find me out; I think it must be, Pa and John dear, because I look so happy!'

Her husband feeling it necessary at this point to demand one of those mysterious disappearances on Bella's part, she dutifully obeyed; saying in a softened voice from her place of concealment:

'You remember how we talked about the ships that day, Pa?'

'Yes, my dear.'

'Isn't it strange, now, to think that there was no John in all the ships, Pa?'

'Not at all, my dear.'

'Oh, Pa! Not at all?'

'No, my dear. How can we tell what coming people are aboard the ships that may be sailing to us now from the unknown seas!'

Bella remaining invisible and silent, her father remained at his dessert and wine, until he remembered it was time for him to get home to Holloway. 'Though I positively cannot tear myself away,' he cherubically added, '—it would be a sin—without drinking to many, many happy returns of this most happy day.'

'Here! ten thousand times!' cried John. 'I fill my glass and my precious wife's.'

'Gentlemen,' said the cherub, inaudibly addressing, in his Anglo-Saxon tendency to throw his feelings into the form of a speech, the boys down below, who were bidding against each other to put their heads in the mud for sixpence: 'Gentlemen—and Bella and John—you will readily suppose that it is not my intention to trouble you with many observations on the present occasion. You will also at once infer the nature and even the terms of the toast I am about to propose on the present occasion. Gentlemen—and Bella and John—the present occasion is an occasion fraught with feelings that I cannot trust myself to express. But gentlemen—and Bella and John—for the part I have had in it, for the confidence you have placed in me, and for the affectionate good-nature and kindness with which you have determined not to find me in the way, when I am well aware that I cannot be otherwise than in it more or less, I do most heartily thank you. Gentlemen—and Bella and John—my love to you, and may we meet, as on the present occasion, on many future occasions; that is to say, gentlemen—and Bella and John—on many happy returns of the present happy occasion.'

Having thus concluded his address, the amiable cherub embraced his daughter, and took his flight to the steamboat which was to convey him to London, and was then lying at the floating pier, doing its best to bump the same to bits. But, the happy couple were not going to part with him in that way, and before he had been on board two minutes, there they were, looking down at him from the wharf above.

'Pa, dear!' cried Bella, beckoning him with her parasol to approach the side, and bending gracefully to whisper.

'Yes, my darling.'

'Did I beat you much with that horrid little bonnet, Pa?'

'Nothing to speak of; my dear.'

'Did I pinch your legs, Pa?'

'Only nicely, my pet.'

'You are sure you quite forgive me, Pa? Please, Pa, please, forgive me quite!' Half laughing at him and half crying to him, Bella besought him in the prettiest manner; in a manner so engaging and so playful and so natural, that her cherubic parent made a coaxing face as if she had never grown up, and said, 'What a silly little Mouse it is!'

'But you do forgive me that, and everything else; don't you, Pa?'

'Yes, my dearest.'

'And you don't feel solitary or neglected, going away by yourself; do you, Pa?'

'Lord bless you! No, my Life!'

'Good-bye, dearest Pa. Good-bye!'

'Good-bye, my darling! Take her away, my dear John. Take her home!'

So, she leaning on her husband's arm, they turned homeward by a rosy path which the gracious sun struck out for them in its setting. And O there are days in this life, worth life and worth death. And O what a bright old song it is, that O 'tis love, 'tis love, 'tis love that makes the world go round!

Chapter 5

CONCERNING THE MENDICANT'S BRIDE

The impressive gloom with which Mrs Wilfer received her husband on his return from the wedding, knocked so hard at the door of the cherubic conscience, and likewise so impaired the firmness of the cherubic legs, that the culprit's tottering condition of mind and body might have roused suspicion in less occupied persons that the grimly heroic lady, Miss Lavinia, and that esteemed friend of the family, Mr George Sampson. But, the attention of all three being fully possessed by the main fact of the marriage, they had happily none to bestow on the guilty conspirator; to which fortunate circumstance he owed the escape for which he was in nowise indebted to himself.

'You do not, R. W.' said Mrs Wilfer from her stately corner, 'inquire for your daughter Bella.'

'To be sure, my dear,' he returned, with a most flagrant assumption of unconsciousness, 'I did omit it. How—or perhaps I should rather say where—IS Bella?'

'Not here,' Mrs Wilfer proclaimed, with folded arms.

The cherub faintly muttered something to the abortive effect of 'Oh, indeed, my dear!'

'Not here,' repeated Mrs Wilfer, in a stern sonorous voice. 'In a word, R. W., you have no daughter Bella.'

'No daughter Bella, my dear?'

'No. Your daughter Bella,' said Mrs Wilfer, with a lofty air of never having had the least copartnership in that young lady: of whom she now made reproachful mention as an article of luxury which her husband had set up entirely on his own account, and in direct opposition to her advice: '—your daughter Bella has bestowed herself upon a Mendicant.'

'Good gracious, my dear!'

'Show your father his daughter Bella's letter, Lavinia,' said Mrs Wilfer, in her monotonous Act of Parliament tone, and waving her hand. 'I think your father will admit it to be documentary proof of what I tell him. I believe your father is acquainted with his daughter Bella's writing. But I do not know. He may tell you he is not. Nothing will surprise me.'

'Posted at Greenwich, and dated this morning,' said the Irrepressible, flouncing at her father in handing him the evidence. 'Hopes Ma won't be angry, but is happily married to Mr John Rokesmith, and didn't mention it beforehand to avoid words, and please tell darling you, and love to me, and I should like to know what you'd have said if any other unmarried member of the family had done it!'

He read the letter, and faintly exclaimed 'Dear me!'

'You may well say Dear me!' rejoined Mrs Wilfer, in a deep tone. Upon which encouragement he said it again, though scarcely with the success he had expected; for the scornful lady then remarked, with extreme bitterness: 'You said that before.'

'It's very surprising. But I suppose, my dear,' hinted the cherub, as he folded the letter after a disconcerting silence, 'that we must make the best of it? Would you object to my pointing out, my dear, that Mr John Rokesmith is not (so far as I am acquainted with him), strictly speaking, a Mendicant.'

'Indeed?' returned Mrs Wilfer, with an awful air of politeness. 'Truly so? I was not aware that Mr John Rokesmith was a gentleman of landed property. But I am much relieved to hear it.'

'I doubt if you HAVE heard it, my dear,' the cherub submitted with hesitation.

'Thank you,' said Mrs Wilfer. 'I make false statements, it appears? So be it. If my daughter flies in my face, surely my husband may. The one thing is not more unnatural than the other. There seems a fitness in the arrangement. By all means!' Assuming, with a shiver of resignation, a deadly cheerfulness.

But, here the Irrepressible skirmished into the conflict, dragging the reluctant form of Mr Sampson after her.

'Ma,' interposed the young lady, 'I must say I think it would be much better if you would keep to the point, and not hold forth about people's flying into people's faces, which is nothing more nor less than impossible nonsense.'

'How!' exclaimed Mrs Wilfer, knitting her dark brows.

'Just im-possible nonsense, Ma,' returned Lavvy, 'and George Sampson knows it is, as well as I do.'

Mrs Wilfer suddenly becoming petrified, fixed her indignant eyes upon the wretched George: who, divided between the support due from him to his love, and the support due from him to his love's mamma, supported nobody, not even himself.

'The true point is,' pursued Lavinia, 'that Bella has behaved in a most unsisterly way to me, and might have severely compromised me with George and with George's family, by making off and getting married in this very low and disreputable manner—with some pew-opener or other, I suppose, for a bridesmaid—when she ought to have confided in me, and ought to have said, "If, Lavvy, you consider it due to your engagement with George, that you should countenance the occasion by being present, then Lavvy, I beg you to BE present, keeping my secret from Ma and Pa." As of course I should have done.'

'As of course you would have done? Ingrate!' exclaimed Mrs Wilfer. 'Viper!'

'I say! You know ma'am. Upon my honour you mustn't,' Mr Sampson remonstrated, shaking his head seriously, 'With the highest respect for you, ma'am, upon my life you mustn't. No really, you know. When a man with the feelings of a gentleman finds himself engaged to a young lady, and it comes (even on the part of a member of the family) to vipers, you know!—I would merely put it to your own good feeling, you know,' said Mr Sampson, in rather lame conclusion.

Mrs Wilfer's baleful stare at the young gentleman in acknowledgment of his obliging interference was of such a nature that Miss Lavinia burst into tears, and caught him round the neck for his protection.

'My own unnatural mother,' screamed the young lady, 'wants to annihilate George! But you shan't be annihilated, George. I'll die first!'

Mr Sampson, in the arms of his mistress, still struggled to shake his head at Mrs Wilfer, and to remark: 'With every sentiment of respect for you, you know, ma'am—vipers really doesn't do you credit.'

'You shall not be annihilated, George!' cried Miss Lavinia. 'Ma shall destroy me first, and then she'll be contented. Oh, oh, oh! Have I lured George from his happy home to expose him to this! George, dear, be free! Leave me, ever dearest George, to Ma and to my fate. Give my love to your aunt, George dear, and implore her not to curse the viper that has crossed your path and blighted your existence. Oh, oh, oh!' The young lady who, hysterically speaking, was only just come of age, and had never gone off yet, here fell into a highly creditable crisis, which, regarded as a first performance, was very successful; Mr Sampson, bending over the body meanwhile, in a state of distraction, which induced him to address Mrs Wilfer in the inconsistent expressions: 'Demon—with the highest respect for you—behold your work!'

The cherub stood helplessly rubbing his chin and looking on, but on the whole was inclined to welcome this diversion as one in which, by reason of the absorbent properties of hysterics, the previous question would become absorbed. And so, indeed, it proved, for the Irrepressible gradually coming to herself; and asking with wild emotion, 'George dear, are you safe?' and further, 'George love, what has happened? Where is Ma?' Mr Sampson, with words of comfort, raised her prostrate form, and handed her to Mrs Wilfer as if the young lady were something in the nature of refreshments. Mrs Wilfer with dignity partaking of the refreshments, by kissing her once on the brow (as if accepting an oyster), Miss Lavvy, tottering, returned to the protection of Mr Sampson; to whom she said, 'George dear, I am afraid I have been foolish; but I am still a little weak and giddy; don't let go my hand, George!' And whom she afterwards greatly agitated at intervals, by giving utterance, when least expected, to a sound between a sob and a bottle of soda water, that seemed to rend the bosom of her frock.

Among the most remarkable effects of this crisis may be mentioned its having, when peace was restored, an inexplicable moral influence, of an elevating kind, on Miss Lavinia, Mrs Wilfer, and Mr George Sampson, from which R. W. was altogether excluded, as an outsider and non-sympathizer. Miss Lavinia assumed a modest air of having distinguished herself; Mrs Wilfer, a serene air of forgiveness and resignation; Mr Sampson, an air of having been improved and chastened. The influence pervaded the spirit in which they returned to the previous question.

'George dear,' said Lavvy, with a melancholy smile, 'after what has passed, I am sure Ma will tell Pa that he may tell Bella we shall all be glad to see her and her husband.'

Mr Sampson said he was sure of it too; murmuring how eminently he respected Mrs Wilfer, and ever must, and ever would. Never more eminently, he added, than after what had passed.

'Far be it from me,' said Mrs Wilfer, making deep proclamation from her corner, 'to run counter to the feelings of a child of mine, and of a Youth,' Mr Sampson hardly seemed to like that word, 'who is the object of her maiden preference. I may feel—nay, know—that I have been deluded and deceived. I may feel—nay, know—that I have been set aside and passed over. I may feel—nay, know—that after having so far overcome my repugnance towards Mr and Mrs Boffin as to receive them under this roof, and to consent to your daughter Bella's,' here turning to her husband, 'residing under theirs, it were well if your daughter Bella,' again turning to her husband, 'had profited in a worldly point of view by a connection so distasteful, so disreputable. I may feel—nay, know—that in uniting herself to Mr Rokesmith she has united herself to one who is, in spite of shallow sophistry, a Mendicant. And I may feel well assured that your daughter Bella,' again turning to her husband, 'does not exalt her family by becoming a Mendicant's bride. But I suppress what I feel, and say nothing of it.'

Mr Sampson murmured that this was the sort of thing you might expect from one who had ever in her own family been an example and never an outrage. And ever more so (Mr Sampson added, with some degree of obscurity,) and never more so, than in and through what had passed. He must take the liberty of adding, that what was true of the mother was true of the youngest daughter, and that he could never forget the touching feelings that the conduct of both had awakened within him. In conclusion, he did hope that there wasn't a man with a beating heart who was capable of something that remained undescribed, in consequence of Miss Lavinia's stopping him as he reeled in his speech.

'Therefore, R. W.' said Mrs Wilfer, resuming her discourse and turning to her lord again, 'let your daughter Bella come when she will, and she will be received. So,' after a short pause, and an air of having taken medicine in it, 'so will her husband.'

'And I beg, Pa,' said Lavinia, 'that you will not tell Bella what I have undergone. It can do no good, and it might cause her to reproach herself.'

'My dearest girl,' urged Mr Sampson, 'she ought to know it.'

'No, George,' said Lavinia, in a tone of resolute self-denial. 'No, dearest George, let it be buried in oblivion.'

Mr Sampson considered that, 'too noble.'

'Nothing is too noble, dearest George,' returned Lavinia. 'And Pa, I hope you will be careful not to refer before Bella, if you can help it, to my engagement to George. It might seem like reminding her of her having cast herself away. And I hope, Pa, that you will think it equally right to avoid mentioning George's rising prospects, when Bella is present. It might seem like taunting her with her own poor fortunes. Let me ever remember that I am her younger sister, and ever spare her painful contrasts, which could not but wound her sharply.'

Mr Sampson expressed his belief that such was the demeanour of Angels. Miss Lavvy replied with solemnity, 'No, dearest George, I am but too well aware that I am merely human.'

Mrs Wilfer, for her part, still further improved the occasion by sitting with her eyes fastened on her husband, like two great black notes of interrogation, severely inquiring, Are you looking into your breast? Do you deserve your blessings? Can you lay your hand upon your heart and say that you are worthy of so hysterical a daughter? I do not ask you if you are worthy of such a wife—put Me out of the question—but are you sufficiently conscious of, and thankful for, the pervading moral grandeur of the family spectacle on which you are gazing? These inquiries proved very harassing to R. W. who, besides being a little disturbed by wine, was in perpetual terror of committing himself by the utterance of stray words that would betray his guilty foreknowledge. However, the scene being over, and—all things considered—well over, he sought refuge in a doze; which gave his lady immense offence.

'Can you think of your daughter Bella, and sleep?' she disdainfully inquired.

To which he mildly answered, 'Yes, I think I can, my dear.'

'Then,' said Mrs Wilfer, with solemn indignation, 'I would recommend you, if you have a human feeling, to retire to bed.'

'Thank you, my dear,' he replied; 'I think it IS the best place for me.' And with these unsympathetic words very gladly withdrew.

Within a few weeks afterwards, the Mendicant's bride (arm-in-arm with the Mendicant) came to tea, in fulfilment of an engagement made through her father. And the way in which the Mendicant's bride dashed at the unassailable position so considerately to be held by Miss Lavy, and scattered the whole of the works in all directions in a moment, was triumphant.

'Dearest Ma,' cried Bella, running into the room with a radiant face, 'how do you do, dearest Ma?' And then embraced her, joyously. 'And Lavvy darling, how do YOU do, and how's George Sampson, and how is he getting on, and when are you going to be married, and how rich are you going to grow? You must tell me all about it, Lavvy dear, immediately.

John, love, kiss Ma and Lavvy, and then we shall all be at home and comfortable.'

Mrs Wilfer stared, but was helpless. Miss Lavinia stared, but was helpless. Apparently with no compunction, and assuredly with no ceremony, Bella tossed her bonnet away, and sat down to make the tea.

'Dearest Ma and Lavvy, you both take sugar, I know. And Pa (you good little Pa), you don't take milk. John does. I didn't before I was married; but I do now, because John does. John dear, did you kiss Ma and Lavvy? Oh, you did! Quite correct, John dear; but I didn't see you do it, so I asked. Cut some bread and butter, John; that's a love. Ma likes it doubled. And now you must tell me, dearest Ma and Lavvy, upon your words and honours! Didn't you for a moment—just a moment—think I was a dreadful little wretch when I wrote to say I had run away?'

Before Mrs Wilfer could wave her gloves, the Mendicant's bride in her merriest affectionate manner went on again.

'I think it must have made you rather cross, dear Ma and Lavvy, and I know I deserved that you should be very cross. But you see I had been such a heedless, heartless creature, and had led you so to expect that I should marry for money, and so to make sure that I was incapable of marrying for love, that I thought you couldn't believe me. Because, you see, you didn't know how much of Good, Good, Good, I had learnt from John. Well! So I was sly about it, and ashamed of what you supposed me to be, and fearful that we couldn't understand one another and might come to words, which we should all be sorry for afterwards, and so I said to John that if he liked to take me without any fuss, he might. And as he did like, I let him. And we were married at Greenwich church in the presence of nobody—except an unknown individual who dropped in,' here her eyes sparkled more brightly, 'and half a pensioner. And now, isn't it nice, dearest Ma and Lavvy, to know that no words have been said which any of us can be sorry for, and that we are all the best of friends at the pleasantest of teas!'

Having got up and kissed them again, she slipped back to her chair (after a loop on the road to squeeze her husband round the neck) and again went on.

'And now you will naturally want to know, dearest Ma and Lavvy, how we live, and what we have got to live upon. Well! And so we live on Blackheath, in the charm—ingest of dolls' houses, de—lightfully furnished, and we have a clever little servant who is de—cidedly pretty, and we are economical and orderly, and do everything by clockwork, and we have a hundred and fifty pounds a year, and we have all we want, and more. And lastly, if you would like to know in confidence, as perhaps you may, what is my opinion of my husband, my opinion is—that I almost love him!'

'And if you would like to know in confidence, as perhaps you may,' said her husband, smiling, as he stood by her side, without her having detected his approach, 'my opinion of my wife, my opinion is—.' But Bella started up, and put her hand upon his lips.

'Stop, Sir! No, John, dear! Seriously! Please not yet a while! I want to be something so much worthier than the doll in the doll's house.'

'My darling, are you not?'

'Not half, not a quarter, so much worthier as I hope you may some day find me! Try me through some reverse, John—try me through some trial—and tell them after THAT, what you think of me.'

'I will, my Life,' said John. 'I promise it.'

'That's my dear John. And you won't speak a word now; will you?'

'And I won't,' said John, with a very expressive look of admiration around him, 'speak a word now!'

She laid her laughing cheek upon his breast to thank him, and said, looking at the rest of them sideways out of her bright eyes: 'I'll go further, Pa and Ma and Lavvy. John don't suspect it—he has no idea of it—but I quite love him!'

Even Mrs Wilfer relaxed under the influence of her married daughter, and seemed in a majestic manner to imply remotely that if R. W. had been a more deserving object, she too might have condescended to come down from her pedestal for his beguilement. Miss Lavinia, on the other hand, had strong doubts of the policy of the course of treatment, and whether it might not spoil Mr Sampson, if experimented on in the case of that young gentleman. R. W. himself was for his part convinced that he was father of one of the most charming of girls, and that Rokesmith was the most favoured of men; which opinion, if propounded to him, Rokesmith would probably not have contested.

The newly-married pair left early, so that they might walk at leisure to their starting-place from London, for Greenwich. At first they were very cheerful and talked much; but after a while, Bella fancied that her husband was turning somewhat thoughtful. So she asked him:

'John dear, what's the matter?'

'Matter, my love?'

'Won't you tell me,' said Bella, looking up into his face, 'what you are thinking of?'

'There's not much in the thought, my soul. I was thinking whether you wouldn't like me to be rich?'

'You rich, John?' repeated Bella, shrinking a little.

'I mean, really rich. Say, as rich as Mr Boffin. You would like that?'

'I should be almost afraid to try, John dear. Was he much the better for his wealth? Was I much the better for the little part I once had in it?'

'But all people are not the worse for riches, my own.'

'Most people?' Bella musingly suggested with raised eyebrows.

'Nor even most people, it may be hoped. If you were rich, for instance, you would have a great power of doing good to others.'

'Yes, sir, for instance,' Bella playfully rejoined; 'but should I exercise the power, for instance? And again, sir, for instance; should I, at the same time, have a great power of doing harm to myself?'

Laughing and pressing her arm, he retorted: 'But still, again for instance; would you exercise that power?'

'I don't know,' said Bella, thoughtfully shaking her head. 'I hope not. I think not. But it's so easy to hope not and think not, without the riches.'

'Why don't you say, my darling—instead of that phrase—being poor?' he asked, looking earnestly at her.

'Why don't I say, being poor! Because I am not poor. Dear John, it's not possible that you suppose I think we are poor?'

'I do, my love.'

'Oh John!'

'Understand me, sweetheart. I know that I am rich beyond all wealth in having you; but I think OF you, and think FOR you. In such a dress as you are wearing now, you first charmed me, and in no dress could you ever look, to my thinking, more graceful or more beautiful. But you have admired many finer dresses this very day; and is it not natural that I wish I could give them to you?'

'It's very nice that you should wish it, John. It brings these tears of grateful pleasure into my eyes, to hear you say so with such tenderness. But I don't want them.'

'Again,' he pursued, 'we are now walking through the muddy streets. I love those pretty feet so dearly, that I feel as if I could not bear the dirt to soil the sole of your shoe. Is it not natural that I wish you could ride in a carriage?'

'It's very nice,' said Bella, glancing downward at the feet in question, 'to know that you admire them so much, John dear, and since you do, I am sorry that these shoes are a full size too large. But I don't want a carriage, believe me.'

'You would like one if you could have one, Bella?'

'I shouldn't like it for its own sake, half so well as such a wish for it. Dear John, your wishes are as real to me as the wishes in the Fairy story, that were all fulfilled as soon as spoken. Wish me everything that you can wish for the woman you dearly love, and I have as good as got it, John. I have better than got it, John!'

They were not the less happy for such talk, and home was not the less home for coming after it. Bella was fast developing a perfect genius for home. All the loves and graces seemed (her husband thought) to have taken domestic service with her, and to help her to make home engaging.

Her married life glided happily on. She was alone all day, for, after an early breakfast her husband repaired every morning to the City, and did not return until their late dinner hour. He was 'in a China house,' he explained to Bella: which she found quite satisfactory, without pursuing the China house into minuter details than a wholesale vision of tea, rice, odd-smelling silks, carved boxes, and tight-eyed people in more than double-soled shoes, with their pigtails pulling their heads of hair off, painted on transparent porcelain. She always walked with her husband to the railroad, and was always there again to meet him; her old coquettish ways a little sobered down (but not much), and her dress as daintily managed as if she managed nothing else. But, John gone to business and Bella returned home, the dress would be laid aside, trim little wrappers and aprons would be substituted, and Bella, putting back her hair with both hands, as if she were making the most business-like arrangements for going dramatically distracted, would enter on the household affairs of the day. Such weighing and mixing and chopping and grating, such dusting and washing and polishing, such snipping and weeding and trowelling and other small gardening, such making and mending and folding and airing, such diverse arrangements, and above all such severe study! For Mrs J. R., who had never been wont to do too much at home as Miss B. W., was under the constant necessity of referring for advice and support to a sage volume entitled The Complete

British Family Housewife, which she would sit consulting, with her elbows on the table and her temples on her hands, like some perplexed enchantress poring over the Black Art. This, principally because the Complete British Housewife, however sound a Briton at heart, was by no means an expert Briton at expressing herself with clearness in the British tongue, and sometimes might have issued her directions to equal purpose in the Kamskatchan language. In any crisis of this nature, Bella would suddenly exclaim aloud, 'Oh you ridiculous old thing, what do you mean by that? You must have been drinking!' And having made this marginal note, would try the Housewife again, with all her dimples screwed into an expression of profound research.

There was likewise a coolness on the part of the British Housewife, which Mrs John Rokesmith found highly exasperating. She would say, 'Take a salamander,' as if a general should command a private to catch a Tartar. Or, she would casually issue the order, 'Throw in a handful—' of something entirely unattainable. In these, the Housewife's most glaring moments of unreason, Bella would shut her up and knock her on the table, apostrophising her with the compliment, 'O you ARE a stupid old Donkey! Where am I to get it, do you think?'

Another branch of study claimed the attention of Mrs John Rokesmith for a regular period every day. This was the mastering of the newspaper, so that she might be close up with John on general topics when John came home. In her desire to be in all things his companion, she would have set herself with equal zeal to master Algebra, or Euclid, if he had divided his soul between her and either. Wonderful was the way in which she would store up the City Intelligence, and beamingly shed it upon John in the course of the evening; incidentally mentioning the commodities that were looking up in the markets, and how much gold had been taken to the Bank, and trying to look wise and serious over it until she would laugh at herself most charmingly and would say, kissing him: 'It all comes of my love, John dear.'

For a City man, John certainly did appear to care as little as might be for the looking up or looking down of things, as well as for the gold that got taken to the Bank. But he cared, beyond all expression, for his wife, as a most precious and sweet commodity that was always looking up, and that never was worth less than all the gold in the world. And she, being inspired by her affection, and having a quick wit and a fine ready instinct, made amazing progress in her domestic efficiency, though, as an endearing creature, she made no progress at all. This was her husband's verdict, and he justified it by telling her that she had begun her married life as the most endearing creature that could possibly be.

'And you have such a cheerful spirit!' he said, fondly. 'You are like a bright light in the house.'

'Am I truly, John?'

'Are you truly? Yes, indeed. Only much more, and much better.'

'Do you know, John dear,' said Bella, taking him by a button of his coat, 'that I sometimes, at odd moments—don't laugh, John, please.'

Nothing should induce John to do it, when she asked him not to do it.

'—That I sometimes think, John, I feel a little serious.'

'Are you too much alone, my darling?'

'O dear, no, John! The time is so short that I have not a moment too much in the week.'

'Why serious, my life, then? When serious?'

'When I laugh, I think,' said Bella, laughing as she laid her head upon his shoulder. 'You wouldn't believe, sir, that I feel serious now? But I do.' And she laughed again, and something glistened in her eyes.

'Would you like to be rich, pet?' he asked her coaxingly.

'Rich, John! How CAN you ask such goose's questions?'

'Do you regret anything, my love?'

'Regret anything? No!' Bella confidently answered. But then, suddenly changing, she said, between laughing and glistening: 'Oh yes, I do though. I regret Mrs Boffin.'

'I, too, regret that separation very much. But perhaps it is only temporary. Perhaps things may so fall out, as that you may sometimes see her again—as that we may sometimes see her again.' Bella might be very anxious on the subject, but she scarcely seemed so at the moment. With an absent air, she was investigating that button on her husband's coat, when Pa came in to spend the evening.

Pa had his special chair and his special corner reserved for him on all occasions, and—without disparagement of his domestic joys—was far happier there, than anywhere. It was always pleasantly droll to see Pa and Bella together; but on this present evening her husband thought her more than usually fantastic with him.

'You are a very good little boy,' said Bella, 'to come unexpectedly, as soon as you could get out of school. And how have they used you at school to-day, you dear?'

'Well, my pet,' replied the cherub, smiling and rubbing his hands as she sat him down in his chair, 'I attend two schools. There's the Mincing Lane establishment, and there's your mother's Academy. Which might you mean, my dear?'

'Both,' said Bella.

'Both, eh? Why, to say the truth, both have taken a little out of me to-day, my dear, but that was to be expected. There's no royal road to learning; and what is life but learning!'

'And what do you do with yourself when you have got your learning by heart, you silly child?'

'Why then, my dear,' said the cherub, after a little consideration, 'I suppose I die.'

'You are a very bad boy,' retorted Bella, 'to talk about dismal things and be out of spirits.'

'My Bella,' rejoined her father, 'I am not out of spirits. I am as gay as a lark.' Which his face confirmed.

'Then if you are sure and certain it's not you, I suppose it must be I,' said Bella; 'so I won't do so any more. John dear, we must give this little fellow his supper, you know.'

'Of course we must, my darling.'

'He has been grubbing and grubbing at school,' said Bella, looking at her father's hand and lightly slapping it, 'till he's not fit to be seen. O what a grubby child!'

'Indeed, my dear,' said her father, 'I was going to ask to be allowed to wash my hands, only you find me out so soon.'

'Come here, sir!' cried Bella, taking him by the front of his coat, 'come here and be washed directly. You are not to be trusted to do it for yourself. Come here, sir!'

The cherub, to his genial amusement, was accordingly conducted to a little washing-room, where Bella soaped his face and rubbed his face, and soaped his hands and rubbed his hands, and splashed him and rinsed him and towelled him, until he was as red as beet-root, even to his very ears: 'Now you must be brushed and combed, sir,' said Bella, busily. 'Hold the light, John. Shut your eyes, sir, and let me take hold of your chin. Be good directly, and do as you are told!'

Her father being more than willing to obey, she dressed his hair in her most elaborate manner, brushing it out straight, parting it, winding it over her fingers, sticking it up on end, and constantly falling back on John to get a good look at the effect of it. Who always received her on his disengaged arm, and detained her, while the patient cherub stood waiting to be finished.

'There!' said Bella, when she had at last completed the final touches. 'Now, you are something like a genteel boy! Put your jacket on, and come and have your supper.'

The cherub investing himself with his coat was led back to his corner—where, but for having no egotism in his pleasant nature, he would have answered well enough for that radiant though self-sufficient boy, Jack Horner—Bella with her own hands laid a cloth for him, and brought him his supper on a tray. 'Stop a moment,' said she, 'we must keep his little clothes clean;' and tied a napkin under his chin, in a very methodical manner.

While he took his supper, Bella sat by him, sometimes admonishing him to hold his fork by the handle, like a polite child, and at other times carving for him, or pouring out his drink. Fantastic as it all was, and accustomed as she ever had been to make a plaything of her good father, ever delighted that she should put him to that account, still there was an occasional something on Bella's part that was new. It could not be said that she was less playful, whimsical, or natural, than she always had been; but it seemed, her husband thought, as if there were some rather graver reason than he had supposed for what she had so lately said, and as if throughout all this, there were glimpses of an underlying seriousness.

It was a circumstance in support of this view of the case, that when she had lighted her father's pipe, and mixed him his glass of grog, she sat down on a stool between her father and her husband, leaning her arm upon the latter, and was very quiet. So quiet, that when her father rose to take his leave, she looked round with a start, as if she had forgotten his being there.

'You go a little way with Pa, John?'

'Yes, my dear. Do you?'

'I have not written to Lizzie Hexam since I wrote and told her that I really had a lover—a whole one. I have often thought I would like to tell her how right she was when she pretended to read in the live coals that I would go through fire and water for him. I am in the humour to tell her so to-night, John, and I'll stay at home and do it.'

'You are tired.'

'Not at all tired, John dear, but in the humour to write to Lizzie. Good night, dear Pa. Good night, you dear, good, gentle Pa!'

Left to herself she sat down to write, and wrote Lizzie a long letter. She had but completed it and read it over, when her husband came back. 'You are just in time, sir,' said Bella; 'I am going to give you your first curtain lecture. It shall be a parlour-curtain lecture. You shall take this chair of mine when I have folded my letter, and I will take the stool (though you ought to take it, I can tell you, sir, if it's the stool of repentance), and you'll soon find yourself taken to task soundly.'

Her letter folded, sealed, and directed, and her pen wiped, and her middle finger wiped, and her desk locked up and put away, and these transactions performed with an air of severe business sedateness, which the Complete British Housewife might have assumed, and certainly would not have rounded off and broken down in with a musical laugh, as Bella did: she placed her husband in his chair, and placed herself upon her stool.

'Now, sir! To begin at the beginning. What is your name?'

A question more decidedly rushing at the secret he was keeping from her, could not have astounded him. But he kept his countenance and his secret, and answered, 'John Rokesmith, my dear.'

'Good boy! Who gave you that name?'

With a returning suspicion that something might have betrayed him to her, he answered, interrogatively, 'My godfathers and my godmothers, dear love?'

'Pretty good!' said Bella. 'Not goodest good, because you hesitate about it. However, as you know your Catechism fairly, so far, I'll let you off the rest. Now, I am going to examine you out of my own head. John dear, why did you go back, this evening, to the question you once asked me before—would I like to be rich?'

Again, his secret! He looked down at her as she looked up at him, with her hands folded on his knee, and it was as nearly told as ever secret was.

Having no reply ready, he could do no better than embrace her.

'In short, dear John,' said Bella, 'this is the topic of my lecture: I want nothing on earth, and I want you to believe it.'

'If that's all, the lecture may be considered over, for I do.'

'It's not all, John dear,' Bella hesitated. 'It's only Firstly. There's a dreadful Secondly, and a dreadful Thirdly to come—as I used to say to myself in sermon-time when I was a very small-sized sinner at church.'

'Let them come, my dearest.'

'Are you sure, John dear; are you absolutely certain in your innermost heart of hearts—?'

'Which is not in my keeping,' he rejoined.

'No, John, but the key is.—Are you absolutely certain that down at the bottom of that heart of hearts, which you have given to me as I have given mine to you, there is no remembrance that I was once very mercenary?'

'Why, if there were no remembrance in me of the time you speak of,' he softly asked her with his lips to hers, 'could I love you quite as well as I do; could I have in the Calendar of my life the brightest of its days; could I whenever I look at your dear face, or hear your dear voice, see and hear my noble champion? It can never have been that which made you serious, darling?'

'No John, it wasn't that, and still less was it Mrs Boffin, though I love her. Wait a moment, and I'll go on with the lecture. Give me a moment, because I like to cry for joy. It's so delicious, John dear, to cry for joy.'

She did so on his neck, and, still clinging there, laughed a little when she said, 'I think I am ready now for Thirdly, John.'

'I am ready for Thirdly,' said John, 'whatever it is.'

'I believe, John,' pursued Bella, 'that you believe that I believe—'

'My dear child,' cried her husband gaily, 'what a quantity of believing!'

'Isn't there?' said Bella, with another laugh. 'I never knew such a quantity! It's like verbs in an exercise. But I can't get on with less believing. I'll try again. I believe, dear John, that you believe that I believe that we have as much money as we require, and that we want for nothing.'

'It is strictly true, Bella.'

'But if our money should by any means be rendered not so much—if we had to stint ourselves a little in purchases that we can afford to make now—would you still have the same confidence in my being quite contented, John?'

'Precisely the same confidence, my soul.'

'Thank you, John dear, thousands upon thousands of times. And I may take it for granted, no doubt,' with a little faltering, 'that you would be quite as contented yourself John? But, yes, I know I may. For, knowing that I should be so, how surely I may know that you would be so; you who are so much stronger, and firmer, and more reasonable and more generous, than I am.'

'Hush!' said her husband, 'I must not hear that. You are all wrong there, though otherwise as right as can be. And now I am brought to a little piece of news, my dearest, that I might have told you earlier in the evening. I have strong reason for confidently believing that we shall never be in the receipt of a smaller income than our present income.'

She might have shown herself more interested in the intelligence; but she had returned to the investigation of the coat-button that had engaged her attention a few hours before, and scarcely seemed to heed what he said.

'And now we have got to the bottom of it at last,' cried her husband, rallying her, 'and this is the thing that made you serious?'

'No dear,' said Bella, twisting the button and shaking her head, 'it wasn't this.'

'Why then, Lord bless this little wife of mine, there's a Fourthly!' exclaimed John.

'This worried me a little, and so did Secondly,' said Bella, occupied with the button, 'but it was quite another sort of seriousness—a much deeper and quieter sort of seriousness—that I spoke of John dear.'

As he bent his face to hers, she raised hers to meet it, and laid her little right hand on his eyes, and kept it there.

'Do you remember, John, on the day we were married, Pa's speaking of the ships that might be sailing towards us from the unknown seas?'

'Perfectly, my darling!'

'I think...among them...there is a ship upon the ocean...bringing...to you and me...a little baby, John.'

Chapter 6

A CRY FOR HELP

The Paper Mill had stopped work for the night, and the paths and roads in its neighbourhood were sprinkled with clusters of people going home from their day's labour in it. There were men, women, and children in the groups, and there was no want of lively colour to flutter in the gentle evening wind. The mingling of various voices and the sound of laughter made a cheerful impression upon the ear, analogous to that of the fluttering colours upon the eye. Into the sheet of water reflecting the flushed sky in the foreground of the living picture, a knot of urchins were casting stones, and watching the expansion of the rippling circles. So, in the rosy evening, one might watch the ever-widening beauty of the landscape—beyond the newly-released workers wending home—beyond the silver river—beyond the deep green fields of corn, so prospering, that the loiterers in their narrow threads of pathway seemed to float immersed breast-high—beyond the hedgerows and the clumps of trees—beyond the windmills on the ridge—away to where the sky appeared to meet the earth, as if there were no immensity of space between mankind and Heaven.

It was a Saturday evening, and at such a time the village dogs, always much more interested in the doings of humanity than in the affairs of their own species, were particularly active. At the general shop, at the butcher's and at the public-house, they evinced an inquiring spirit never to be satiated. Their especial interest in the public-house would seem to imply some latent rakishness in the canine character; for little was eaten there, and they, having no taste for beer or tobacco (Mrs Hubbard's dog is said to have smoked, but proof is wanting), could only have been attracted by sympathy with loose convivial habits. Moreover, a most wretched fiddle played within; a fiddle so unutterably vile, that one lean long-bodied cur, with a better ear than the rest, found himself under compulsion at intervals to go round the corner and howl. Yet, even he returned to the public-house on each occasion with the tenacity of a confirmed drunkard.

Fearful to relate, there was even a sort of little Fair in the village. Some despairing gingerbread that had been vainly trying to dispose of itself all over the country, and had cast a quantity of dust upon its head in its mortification, again appealed to the public from an infirm booth. So did a heap of nuts, long, long exiled from Barcelona, and yet speaking English so indifferently as to call fourteen of themselves a pint. A Peep-show which had originally started with the Battle of Waterloo, and had since made it every other battle of later date by altering the Duke of Wellington's nose, tempted the student of illustrated history. A Fat Lady, perhaps in part sustained upon postponed pork, her professional associate being a Learned Pig, displayed her life-size picture in a low dress as she appeared when presented at Court, several yards round. All this was a vicious spectacle as any poor idea of amusement on the part of the rougher hewers of wood and drawers of water in this land of England ever is and shall be. They MUST NOT vary the rheumatism with amusement. They may vary it with fever and ague, or with as many rheumatic variations as they have joints; but positively not with entertainment after their own manner.

The various sounds arising from this scene of depravity, and floating away into the still evening air, made the evening, at any point which they just reached fitfully, mellowed by the distance, more still by contrast. Such was the stillness of the evening to Eugene Wrayburn, as he walked by the river with his hands behind him.

He walked slowly, and with the measured step and preoccupied air of one who was waiting. He walked between the two points, an osier-bed at this end and some floating lilies at that, and at each point stopped and looked expectantly in one direction.

'It is very quiet,' said he.

It was very quiet. Some sheep were grazing on the grass by the river-side, and it seemed to him that he had never before heard the crisp tearing sound with which they cropped it. He stopped idly, and looked at them.

'You are stupid enough, I suppose. But if you are clever enough to get through life tolerably to your satisfaction, you have got the better of me, Man as I am, and Mutton as you are!'

A rustle in a field beyond the hedge attracted his attention. 'What's here to do?' he asked himself leisurely going towards the gate and looking over. 'No jealous paper-miller? No pleasures of the chase in this part of the country? Mostly fishing hereabouts!'

The field had been newly mown, and there were yet the marks of the scythe on the yellow-green ground, and the track of wheels where the hay had been carried. Following the tracks with his eyes, the view closed with the new hayrick in a corner.

Now, if he had gone on to the hayrick, and gone round it? But, say that the event was to be, as the event fell out, and how idle are such suppositions! Besides, if he had gone; what is there of warning in a Bargeman lying on his face?

'A bird flying to the hedge,' was all he thought about it; and came back, and resumed his walk.

'If I had not a reliance on her being truthful,' said Eugene, after taking some half-dozen turns, 'I should begin to think she had given me the slip for the second time. But she promised, and she is a girl of her word.'

Turning again at the water-lilies, he saw her coming, and advanced to meet her.

'I was saying to myself, Lizzie, that you were sure to come, though you were late.'

'I had to linger through the village as if I had no object before me, and I had to speak to several people in passing along, Mr Wrayburn.'

'Are the lads of the village—and the ladies—such scandal-mongers?' he asked, as he took her hand and drew it through his arm.

She submitted to walk slowly on, with downcast eyes. He put her hand to his lips, and she quietly drew it away.

'Will you walk beside me, Mr Wrayburn, and not touch me?' For, his arm was already stealing round her waist.

She stopped again, and gave him an earnest supplicating look. 'Well, Lizzie, well!' said he, in an easy way though ill at ease with himself 'don't be unhappy, don't be reproachful.'

'I cannot help being unhappy, but I do not mean to be reproachful. Mr Wrayburn, I implore you to go away from this neighbourhood, to-morrow morning.'

'Lizzie, Lizzie, Lizzie!' he remonstrated. 'As well be reproachful as wholly unreasonable. I can't go away.'

'Why not?'

'Faith!' said Eugene in his airily candid manner. 'Because you won't let me. Mind! I don't mean to be reproachful either. I don't complain that you design to keep me here. But you do it, you do it.'

'Will you walk beside me, and not touch me;' for, his arm was coming about her again; 'while I speak to you very seriously, Mr Wrayburn?'

'I will do anything within the limits of possibility, for you, Lizzie,' he answered with pleasant gaiety as he folded his arms. 'See here! Napoleon Buonaparte at St Helena.'

'When you spoke to me as I came from the Mill the night before last,' said Lizzie, fixing her eyes upon him with the look of supplication which troubled his better nature, 'you told me that you were much surprised to see me, and that you were on a solitary fishing excursion. Was it true?'

'It was not,' replied Eugene composedly, 'in the least true. I came here, because I had information that I should find you here.'

'Can you imagine why I left London, Mr Wrayburn?'

'I am afraid, Lizzie,' he openly answered, 'that you left London to get rid of me. It is not flattering to my self-love, but I am afraid you did.'

'I did.'

'How could you be so cruel?'

'O Mr Wrayburn,' she answered, suddenly breaking into tears, 'is the cruelty on my side! O Mr Wrayburn, Mr Wrayburn, is there no cruelty in your being here to-night!'

'In the name of all that's good—and that is not conjuring you in my own name, for Heaven knows I am not good'—said Eugene, 'don't be distressed!'

'What else can I be, when I know the distance and the difference between us? What else can I be, when to tell me why you came here, is to put me to shame!' said Lizzie, covering her face.

He looked at her with a real sentiment of remorseful tenderness and pity. It was not strong enough to impell him to sacrifice himself and spare her, but it was a strong emotion.

'Lizzie! I never thought before, that there was a woman in the world who could affect me so much by saying so little. But don't be hard in your construction of me. You don't know what my state of mind towards you is. You don't know how you haunt me and bewilder me. You don't know how the cursed carelessness that is over-officious in helping me at every other turning of my life, WON'T help me here. You have struck it dead, I think, and I sometimes almost wish you had struck me dead along with it.'

She had not been prepared for such passionate expressions, and they awakened some natural sparks of feminine pride and joy in her breast. To consider, wrong as he was, that he could care so much for her, and that she had the power to move him so!

'It grieves you to see me distressed, Mr Wrayburn; it grieves me to see you distressed. I don't reproach you. Indeed I don't reproach you. You have not felt this as I feel it, being so different from me, and beginning from another point of view. You have not thought. But I entreat you to think now, think now!'

'What am I to think of?' asked Eugene, bitterly.

'Think of me.'

'Tell me how NOT to think of you, Lizzie, and you'll change me altogether.'

'I don't mean in that way. Think of me, as belonging to another station, and quite cut off from you in honour. Remember that I have no protector near me, unless I have one in your noble heart. Respect my good name. If you feel towards me, in one particular, as you might if I was a lady, give me the full claims of a lady upon your generous behaviour. I am removed from you and your family by being a working girl. How true a gentleman to be as considerate of me as if I was removed by being a Queen!'

He would have been base indeed to have stood untouched by her appeal. His face expressed contrition and indecision as he asked:

'Have I injured you so much, Lizzie?'

'No, no. You may set me quite right. I don't speak of the past, Mr Wrayburn, but of the present and the future. Are we not here now, because through two days you have followed me so closely where there are so many eyes to see you, that I consented to this appointment as an escape?'

'Again, not very flattering to my self-love,' said Eugene, moodily; 'but yes. Yes. Yes.'

'Then I beseech you, Mr Wrayburn, I beg and pray you, leave this neighbourhood. If you do not, consider to what you will drive me.'

He did consider within himself for a moment or two, and then retorted, 'Drive you? To what shall I drive you, Lizzie?'

'You will drive me away. I live here peacefully and respected, and I am well employed here. You will force me to quit this place as I quitted London, and—by following me again—will force me to quit the next place in which I may find refuge, as I quitted this.'

'Are you so determined, Lizzie—forgive the word I am going to use, for its literal truth—to fly from a lover?'

'I am so determined,' she answered resolutely, though trembling, 'to fly from such a lover. There was a poor woman died here but a little while ago, scores of years older than I am, whom I found by chance, lying on the wet earth. You may have heard some account of her?'

'I think I have,' he answered, 'if her name was Higden.'

'Her name was Higden. Though she was so weak and old, she kept true to one purpose to the very last. Even at the very last, she made me promise that her purpose should be kept to, after she was dead, so settled was her determination. What she did, I can do. Mr Wrayburn, if I believed—but I do not believe—that you could be so cruel to me as to drive me from place to place to wear me out, you should drive me to death and not do it.'

He looked full at her handsome face, and in his own handsome face there was a light of blended admiration, anger, and reproach, which she—who loved him so in secret whose heart had long been so full, and he the cause of its overflowing—drooped before. She tried hard to retain her firmness, but he saw it melting away under his eyes. In the moment of its dissolution, and of his first full knowledge of his influence upon her, she dropped, and he caught her on his arm.

'Lizzie! Rest so a moment. Answer what I ask you. If I had not been what you call removed from you and cut off from you, would you have made this appeal to me to leave you?'

'I don't know, I don't know. Don't ask me, Mr Wrayburn. Let me go back.'

'I swear to you, Lizzie, you shall go directly. I swear to you, you shall go alone. I'll not accompany you, I'll not follow you, if you will reply.'

'How can I, Mr Wrayburn? How can I tell you what I should have done, if you had not been what you are?'

'If I had not been what you make me out to be,' he struck in, skilfully changing the form of words, 'would you still have hated me?'

'O Mr Wrayburn,' she replied appealingly, and weeping, 'you know me better than to think I do!'

'If I had not been what you make me out to be, Lizzie, would you still have been indifferent to me?'

'O Mr Wrayburn,' she answered as before, 'you know me better than that too!'

There was something in the attitude of her whole figure as he supported it, and she hung her head, which besought him to be merciful and not force her to disclose her heart. He was not merciful with her, and he made her do it.

'If I know you better than quite to believe (unfortunate dog though I am!) that you hate me, or even that you are wholly indifferent to me, Lizzie, let me know so much more from yourself before we separate. Let me know how you would have dealt with me if you had regarded me as being what you would have considered on equal terms with you.'

'It is impossible, Mr Wrayburn. How can I think of you as being on equal terms with me? If my mind could put you on equal terms with me, you could not be yourself. How could I remember, then, the night when I first saw you, and when I went out of the room because you looked at me so attentively? Or, the night that passed into the morning when you broke to me that my father was dead? Or, the nights when you used to come to see me at my next home? Or, your having known how uninstructed I was, and having caused me to be taught better? Or, my having so looked up to you and wondered at you, and at first thought you so good to be at all mindful of me?'

'Only "at first" thought me so good, Lizzie? What did you think me after "at first"? So bad?'

'I don't say that. I don't mean that. But after the first wonder and pleasure of being noticed by one so different from any one who had ever spoken to me, I began to feel that it might have been better if I had never seen you.'

'Why?'

'Because you WERE so different,' she answered in a lower voice. 'Because it was so endless, so hopeless. Spare me!'

'Did you think for me at all, Lizzie?' he asked, as if he were a little stung.

'Not much, Mr Wrayburn. Not much until to-night.'

'Will you tell me why?'

'I never supposed until to-night that you needed to be thought for. But if you do need to be; if you do truly feel at heart that you have indeed been towards me what you have called yourself to-night, and that there is nothing for us in this life but separation; then Heaven help you, and Heaven bless you!'

The purity with which in these words she expressed something of her own love and her own suffering, made a deep impression on him for the passing time. He held her, almost as if she were sanctified to him by death, and kissed her, once, almost as he might have kissed the dead.

'I promised that I would not accompany you, nor follow you. Shall I keep you in view? You have been agitated, and it's growing dark.'

'I am used to be out alone at this hour, and I entreat you not to do so.'

'I promise. I can bring myself to promise nothing more tonight, Lizzie, except that I will try what I can do.'

'There is but one means, Mr Wrayburn, of sparing yourself and of sparing me, every way. Leave this neighbourhood to-morrow morning.'

'I will try.'

As he spoke the words in a grave voice, she put her hand in his, removed it, and went away by the river-side.

'Now, could Mortimer believe this?' murmured Eugene, still remaining, after a while, where she had left him. 'Can I even believe it myself?'

He referred to the circumstance that there were tears upon his hand, as he stood covering his eyes. 'A most ridiculous position this, to be found out in!' was his next thought. And his next struck its root in a little rising resentment against the cause of the tears.

'Yet I have gained a wonderful power over her, too, let her be as much in earnest as she will!'

The reflection brought back the yielding of her face and form as she had drooped under his gaze. Contemplating the reproduction, he seemed to see, for the second time, in the appeal and in the confession of weakness, a little fear.

'And she loves me. And so earnest a character must be very earnest in that passion. She cannot choose for herself to be strong in this fancy, wavering in that, and weak in the other. She must go through with her nature, as I must go through with mine. If mine exacts its pains and penalties all round, so must hers, I suppose.'

Pursuing the inquiry into his own nature, he thought, 'Now, if I married her. If, outfacing the absurdity of the situation in correspondence with M. R. F., I astonished M. R. F. to the utmost extent of his respected powers, by informing him that I had married her, how would M. R. F. reason with the legal mind? "You wouldn't marry for some money and some station, because you were frightfully likely to become bored. Are you less frightfully likely to become bored, marrying for no money and no station? Are you sure of yourself?" Legal mind, in spite of forensic protestations, must secretly admit, "Good reasoning on the part of M. R. F. NOT sure of myself."'

In the very act of calling this tone of levity to his aid, he felt it to be profligate and worthless, and asserted her against it.

'And yet,' said Eugene, 'I should like to see the fellow (Mortimer excepted) who would undertake to tell me that this was not a real sentiment on my part, won out of me by her beauty and her worth, in spite of myself, and that I would not be true to her. I should particularly like to see the fellow to-night who would tell me so, or who would tell me anything that could be construed to her disadvantage; for I am wearily out of sorts with one Wrayburn who cuts a sorry figure, and I would far rather be out of sorts with somebody else. "Eugene, Eugene, Eugene, this is a bad business." Ah! So go the Mortimer Lightwood bells, and they sound melancholy to-night.'

Strolling on, he thought of something else to take himself to task for. 'Where is the analogy, Brute Beast,' he said impatiently, 'between a woman whom your father coolly finds out for you and a woman whom you have found out for yourself, and have ever drifted after with more and more of constancy since you first set eyes upon her? Ass! Can you reason no better than that?'

But, again he subsided into a reminiscence of his first full knowledge of his power just now, and of her disclosure of her heart. To try no more to go away, and to try her again, was the reckless conclusion it turned uppermost. And yet again, 'Eugene, Eugene, Eugene, this is a bad business!' And, 'I wish I could stop the Lightwood peal, for it sounds like a knell.'

Looking above, he found that the young moon was up, and that the stars were beginning to shine in the sky from which the tones of red and yellow were flickering out, in favour of the calm blue of a summer night. He was still by the river-side. Turning suddenly, he met a man, so close upon him that Eugene, surprised, stepped back, to avoid a collision. The man carried something over his shoulder which might have been a broken oar, or spar, or bar, and took no notice of him, but passed on.

'Halloa, friend!' said Eugene, calling after him, 'are you blind?'

The man made no reply, but went his way.

Eugene Wrayburn went the opposite way, with his hands behind him and his purpose in his thoughts. He passed the sheep, and passed the gate, and came within hearing of the village sounds, and came to the bridge. The inn where he stayed, like the village and the mill, was not across the river, but on that side of the stream on which he walked. However, knowing the rushy bank and the backwater on the other side to be a retired place, and feeling out of humour for noise or company, he crossed the bridge, and sauntered on: looking up at the stars as they seemed one by one to be kindled in the sky, and looking down at the river as the same stars seemed to be kindled deep in the water. A landing-place overshadowed by a willow, and a pleasure-boat lying moored there among some stakes, caught his eye as he passed along. The spot was in such dark shadow, that he paused to make out what was there, and then passed on again.

The rippling of the river seemed to cause a correspondent stir in his uneasy reflections. He would have laid them asleep if he could, but they were in movement, like the stream, and all tending one way with a strong current. As the ripple under the moon broke unexpectedly now and then, and palely flashed in a new shape and with a new sound, so parts of his thoughts started, unbidden, from the rest, and revealed their wickedness. 'Out of the question to marry her,' said Eugene, 'and out of the question to leave her. The crisis!'

He had sauntered far enough. Before turning to retrace his steps, he stopped upon the margin, to look down at the reflected night. In an instant, with a dreadful crash, the reflected night turned crooked, flames shot jaggedly across the air, and the moon and stars came bursting from the sky.

Was he struck by lightning? With some incoherent half-formed thought to that effect, he turned under the blows that were blinding him and mashing his life, and closed with a murderer, whom he caught by a red neckerchief—unless the raining down of his own blood gave it that hue.

Eugene was light, active, and expert; but his arms were broken, or he was paralysed, and could do no more than hang on to the man, with his head swung back, so that he could see nothing but the heaving sky. After dragging at the assailant, he fell on the bank with him, and then there was another great crash, and then a splash, and all was done.

Lizzie Hexam, too, had avoided the noise, and the Saturday movement of people in the straggling street, and chose to walk alone by the water until her tears should be dry, and she could so compose herself as to escape remark upon her looking ill or unhappy on going home. The peaceful serenity of the hour and place, having no reproaches or evil intentions within her breast to contend against, sank healingly into its depths. She had meditated and taken comfort. She, too, was turning homeward, when she heard a strange sound.

It startled her, for it was like a sound of blows. She stood still, and listened. It sickened her, for blows fell heavily and cruelly on the quiet of the night. As she listened, undecided, all was silent. As she yet listened, she heard a faint groan, and a fall into the river.

Her old bold life and habit instantly inspired her. Without vain waste of breath in crying for help where there were none to hear, she ran towards the spot from which the sounds had come. It lay between her and the bridge, but it was more removed from her than she had thought; the night being so very quiet, and sound travelling far with the help of water.

At length, she reached a part of the green bank, much and newly trodden, where there lay some broken splintered pieces of wood and some torn fragments of clothes. Stooping, she saw that the grass was bloody. Following the drops and smears, she saw that the watery margin of the bank was bloody. Following the current with her eyes, she saw a bloody face turned up towards the moon, and drifting away.

Now, merciful Heaven be thanked for that old time, and grant, O Blessed Lord, that through thy wonderful workings it may turn to good at last! To whomsoever the drifting face belongs, be it man's or woman's, help my humble hands, Lord God, to raise it from death and restore it to some one to whom it must be dear!

It was thought, fervently thought, but not for a moment did the prayer check her. She was away before it welled up in her mind, away, swift and true, yet steady above all—for without steadiness it could never be done—to the landing-place under the willow-tree, where she also had seen the boat lying moored among the stakes.

A sure touch of her old practised hand, a sure step of her old practised foot, a sure light balance of her body, and she was in the boat. A quick glance of her practised eye showed her, even through the deep dark shadow, the sculls in a rack against the red-brick garden-wall. Another moment, and she had cast off (taking the line with her), and the boat had shot out into the moonlight, and she was rowing down the stream as never other woman rowed on English water.

Intently over her shoulder, without slackening speed, she looked ahead for the driving face. She passed the scene of the struggle—yonder it was, on her left, well over the boat's stern—she passed on her right, the end of the village street, a hilly street that almost dipped into the river; its sounds were growing faint again, and she slackened; looking as the boat drove, everywhere, everywhere, for the floating face.

She merely kept the boat before the stream now, and rested on her oars, knowing well that if the face were not soon visible, it had gone down, and she would overshoot it. An untrained sight would never have seen by the moonlight what she saw at the length of a few strokes astern. She saw the drowning figure rise to the surface, slightly struggle, and as if by instinct turn over on its back to float. Just so had she first dimly seen the face which she now dimly saw again.

Firm of look and firm of purpose, she intently watched its coming on, until it was very near; then, with a touch unshipped her sculls, and crept aft in the boat, between kneeling and crouching. Once, she let the body evade her, not being sure of her grasp. Twice, and she had seized it by its bloody hair.

It was insensible, if not virtually dead; it was mutilated, and streaked the water all about it with dark red streaks. As it could not help itself, it was impossible for her to get it on board. She bent over the stern to secure it with the line, and then the river and its shores rang to the terrible cry she uttered.

But, as if possessed by supernatural spirit and strength, she lashed it safe, resumed her seat, and rowed in, desperately, for the nearest shallow water where she might run the boat aground. Desperately, but not wildly, for she knew that if she lost distinctness of intention, all was lost and gone.

She ran the boat ashore, went into the water, released him from the line, and by main strength lifted him in her arms and laid him in the bottom of the boat. He had fearful wounds upon him, and she bound them up with her dress torn into strips. Else, supposing him to be still alive, she foresaw that he must bleed to death before he could be landed at his inn, which was the nearest place for succour.

This done very rapidly, she kissed his disfigured forehead, looked up in anguish to the stars, and blessed him and forgave him, 'if she had anything to forgive.' It was only in that instant that she thought of herself, and then she thought of herself only for him.

Now, merciful Heaven be thanked for that old time, enabling me, without a wasted moment, to have got the boat afloat again, and to row back against the stream! And grant, O Blessed Lord God, that through poor me he may be raised from death, and preserved to some one else to whom he may be dear one day, though never dearer than to me!

She rowed hard—rowed desperately, but never wildly—and seldom removed her eyes from him in the bottom of the boat. She had so laid him there, as that she might see his disfigured face; it was so much disfigured that his mother might have covered it, but it was above and beyond disfigurement in her eyes.

The boat touched the edge of the patch of inn lawn, sloping gently to the water. There were lights in the windows, but there chanced to be no one out of doors. She made the boat fast, and again by main strength took him up, and never laid him down until she laid him down in the house.

Surgeons were sent for, and she sat supporting his head. She had oftentimes heard in days that were gone, how doctors would lift the hand of an insensible wounded person, and would drop it if the person were dead. She waited for the awful moment when the doctors might lift this hand, all broken and bruised, and let it fall.

The first of the surgeons came, and asked, before proceeding to his examination, 'Who brought him in?'

'I brought him in, sir,' answered Lizzie, at whom all present looked.

'You, my dear? You could not lift, far less carry, this weight.'

'I think I could not, at another time, sir; but I am sure I did.'

The surgeon looked at her with great attention, and with some compassion. Having with a grave face touched the wounds upon the head, and the broken arms, he took the hand.

O! would he let it drop?

He appeared irresolute. He did not retain it, but laid it gently down, took a candle, looked more closely at the injuries on the head, and at the pupils of the eyes. That done, he replaced the candle and took the hand again. Another surgeon then coming in, the two exchanged a whisper, and the second took the hand. Neither did he let it fall at once, but kept it for a while and laid it gently down.

'Attend to the poor girl,' said the first surgeon then. 'She is quite unconscious. She sees nothing and hears nothing. All the better for her! Don't rouse her, if you can help it; only move her. Poor girl, poor girl! She must be amazingly strong of heart, but it is much to be feared that she has set her heart upon the dead. Be gentle with her.'

Chapter 7

BETTER TO BE ABEL THAN CAIN

Day was breaking at Plashwater Weir Mill Lock. Stars were yet visible, but there was dull light in the east that was not the light of night. The moon had gone down, and a mist crept along the banks of the river, seen through which the trees were the ghosts of trees, and the water was the ghost of water. This earth looked spectral, and so did the pale stars: while the cold eastern glare, expressionless as to heat or colour, with the eye of the firmament quenched, might have been likened to the stare of the dead.

Perhaps it was so likened by the lonely Bargeman, standing on the brink of the lock. For certain, Bradley Headstone looked that way, when a chill air came up, and when it passed on murmuring, as if it whispered something that made the phantom trees and water tremble—or threaten—for fancy might have made it either.

He turned away, and tried the Lock-house door. It was fastened on the inside.

'Is he afraid of me?' he muttered, knocking.

Rogue Riderhood was soon roused, and soon undrew the bolt and let him in.

'Why, T'otherest, I thought you had been and got lost! Two nights away! I a'most believed as you'd giv' me the slip, and I had as good as half a mind for to advertise you in the newspapers to come for'ard.'

Bradley's face turned so dark on this hint, that Riderhood deemed it expedient to soften it into a compliment.

'But not you, governor, not you,' he went on, stolidly shaking his head. 'For what did I say to myself arter having amused myself with that there stretch of a comic idea, as a sort of a playful game? Why, I says to myself; "He's a man o' honour." That's what I says to myself. "He's a man o' double honour."'

Very remarkably, Riderhood put no question to him. He had looked at him on opening the door, and he now looked at him again (stealthily this time), and the result of his looking was, that he asked him no question.

'You'll be for another forty on 'em, governor, as I judges, afore you turns your mind to breakfast,' said Riderhood, when his visitor sat down, resting his chin on his hand, with his eyes on the ground. And very remarkably again: Riderhood feigned to set the scanty furniture in order, while he spoke, to have a show of reason for not looking at him.

'Yes. I had better sleep, I think,' said Bradley, without changing his position.

'I myself should recommend it, governor,' assented Riderhood. 'Might you be anyways dry?'

'Yes. I should like a drink,' said Bradley; but without appearing to attend much.

Mr Riderhood got out his bottle, and fetched his jug-full of water, and administered a potation. Then, he shook the coverlet of his bed and spread it smooth, and Bradley stretched himself upon it in the clothes he wore. Mr Riderhood poetically remarking that he would pick the bones of his night's rest, in his wooden chair, sat in the window as before; but, as before, watched the sleeper narrowly until he was very sound asleep. Then, he rose and looked at him close, in the bright daylight, on every side, with great minuteness. He went out to his Lock to sum up what he had seen.

'One of his sleeves is tore right away below the elber, and the t'other's had a good rip at the shoulder. He's been hung on to, pretty tight, for his shirt's all tore out of the neck-gathers. He's been in the grass and he's been in the water. And he's spotted, and I know with what, and with whose. Hooroar!'

Bradley slept long. Early in the afternoon a barge came down. Other barges had passed through, both ways, before it; but the Lock-keeper hailed only this particular barge, for news, as if he had made a time calculation with some nicety. The men on board told him a piece of news, and there was a lingering on their part to enlarge upon it.

Twelve hours had intervened since Bradley's lying down, when he got up. 'Not that I swaller it,' said Riderhood, squinting at his Lock, when he saw Bradley coming out of the house, 'as you've been a sleeping all the time, old boy!'

Bradley came to him, sitting on his wooden lever, and asked what o'clock it was? Riderhood told him it was between two and three.

'When are you relieved?' asked Bradley.

'Day arter to-morrow, governor.'

'Not sooner?'

'Not a inch sooner, governor.'

On both sides, importance seemed attached to this question of relief. Riderhood quite petted his reply; saying a second time, and prolonging a negative roll of his head, 'n—n—not a inch sooner, governor.'

'Did I tell you I was going on to-night?' asked Bradley.

'No, governor,' returned Riderhood, in a cheerful, affable, and conversational manner, 'you did not tell me so. But most like you meant to it and forgot to it. How, otherways, could a doubt have come into your head about it, governor?'

'As the sun goes down, I intend to go on,' said Bradley.

'So much the more necessairy is a Peck,' returned Riderhood. 'Come in and have it, T'otherest.'

The formality of spreading a tablecloth not being observed in Mr Riderhood's establishment, the serving of the 'peck' was the affair of a moment; it merely consisting in the handing down of a capacious baking dish with three-fourths of an immense meat pie in it, and the production of two pocket-knives, an earthenware mug, and a large brown bottle of beer.

Both ate and drank, but Riderhood much the more abundantly. In lieu of plates, that honest man cut two triangular pieces from the thick crust of the pie, and laid them, inside uppermost, upon the table: the one before himself, and the other before his guest. Upon these platters he placed two goodly portions of the contents of the pie, thus imparting the unusual interest to the entertainment that each partaker scooped out the inside of his plate, and consumed it with his other fare, besides having the sport of pursuing the clots of congealed gravy over the plain of the table, and successfully taking them into his mouth at last from the blade of his knife, in case of their not first sliding off it.

Bradley Headstone was so remarkably awkward at these exercises, that the Rogue observed it.

'Look out, T'otherest!' he cried, 'you'll cut your hand!'

But, the caution came too late, for Bradley gashed it at the instant. And, what was more unlucky, in asking Riderhood to tie it up, and in standing close to him for the purpose, he shook his hand under the smart of the wound, and shook blood over Riderhood's dress.

When dinner was done, and when what remained of the platters and what remained of the congealed gravy had been put back into what remained of the pie, which served as an economical investment for all miscellaneous savings, Riderhood filled the mug with beer and took a long drink. And now he did look at Bradley, and with an evil eye.

'T'otherest!' he said, hoarsely, as he bent across the table to touch his arm. 'The news has gone down the river afore you.'

'What news?'

'Who do you think,' said Riderhood, with a hitch of his head, as if he disdainfully jerked the feint away, 'picked up the body? Guess.'

'I am not good at guessing anything.'

'She did. Hooroar! You had him there agin. She did.'

The convulsive twitching of Bradley Headstone's face, and the sudden hot humour that broke out upon it, showed how grimly the intelligence touched him. But he said not a single word, good or bad. He only smiled in a lowering manner, and got up and stood leaning at the window, looking through it. Riderhood followed him with his eyes. Riderhood cast down his eyes on his own besprinkled clothes. Riderhood began to have an air of being better at a guess than Bradley owned to being.

'I have been so long in want of rest,' said the schoolmaster, 'that with your leave I'll lie down again.'

'And welcome, T'otherest!' was the hospitable answer of his host. He had laid himself down without waiting for it, and he remained upon the bed until the sun was low. When he arose and came out to resume his journey, he found his host waiting for him on the grass by the towing-path outside the door.

'Whenever it may be necessary that you and I should have any further communication together,' said Bradley, 'I will come back. Good-night!'

'Well, since no better can be,' said Riderhood, turning on his heel, 'Good-night!' But he turned again as the other set forth, and added under his breath, looking after him with a leer: 'You wouldn't be let to go like that, if my Relief warn't as good as come. I'll catch you up in a mile.'

In a word, his real time of relief being that evening at sunset, his mate came lounging in, within a quarter of an hour. Not staying to fill up the utmost margin of his time, but borrowing an hour or so, to be repaid again when he should relieve his reliever, Riderhood straightway followed on the track of Bradley Headstone.

He was a better follower than Bradley. It had been the calling of his life to slink and skulk and dog and waylay, and he knew his calling well. He effected such a forced march on leaving the Lock House that he was close up with him—that is to say, as close up with him as he deemed it convenient to be—before another Lock was passed. His man looked back pretty often as he went, but got no hint of him. HE knew how to take advantage of the ground, and where to put the hedge between them, and where the wall, and when to duck, and when to drop, and had a thousand arts beyond the doomed Bradley's slow conception.

But, all his arts were brought to a standstill, like himself when Bradley, turning into a green lane or riding by the river-side—a solitary spot run wild in nettles, briars, and brambles, and encumbered with the scathed trunks of a whole hedgerow of felled trees, on the outskirts of a little wood—began stepping on these trunks and dropping down among them and stepping on them again, apparently as a schoolboy might have done, but assuredly with no schoolboy purpose, or want of purpose.

'What are you up to?' muttered Riderhood, down in the ditch, and holding the hedge a little open with both hands. And soon his actions made a most extraordinary reply. 'By George and the Draggin!' cried Riderhood, 'if he ain't a going to bathe!'

He had passed back, on and among the trunks of trees again, and has passed on to the water-side and had begun undressing on the grass. For a moment it had a suspicious look of suicide, arranged to counterfeit accident. 'But you wouldn't have fetched a bundle under your arm, from among that timber, if such was your game!' said Riderhood. Nevertheless it was a relief to him when the bather after a plunge and a few strokes came out. 'For I shouldn't,' he said in a feeling manner, 'have liked to lose you till I had made more money out of you neither.'

Prone in another ditch (he had changed his ditch as his man had changed his position), and holding apart so small a patch of the hedge that the sharpest eyes could not have detected him, Rogue Riderhood watched the bather dressing. And now gradually came the wonder that he stood up, completely clothed, another man, and not the Bargeman.

'Aha!' said Riderhood. 'Much as you was dressed that night. I see. You're a taking me with you, now. You're deep. But I knows a deeper.'

When the bather had finished dressing, he kneeled on the grass, doing something with his hands, and again stood up with his bundle under his arm. Looking all around him with great attention, he then went to the river's edge, and flung it in as far, and yet as lightly as he could. It was not until he was so decidedly upon his way again as to be beyond a bend of the river and for the time out of view, that Riderhood scrambled from the ditch.

'Now,' was his debate with himself 'shall I foller you on, or shall I let you loose for this once, and go a fishing?' The debate continuing, he followed, as a precautionary measure in any case, and got him again in sight. 'If I was to let you loose this once,' said Riderhood then, still following, 'I could make you come to me agin, or I could find you out in one way or another. If I wasn't to go a fishing, others might.—I'll let you loose this once, and go a fishing!' With that, he suddenly dropped the pursuit and turned.

The miserable man whom he had released for the time, but not for long, went on towards London. Bradley was suspicious of every sound he heard, and of every face he saw, but was under a spell which very commonly falls upon the shedder of blood, and had no suspicion of the real danger that lurked in his life, and would have it yet. Riderhood was much in his thoughts—had never been out of his thoughts since the night-adventure of their first meeting; but Riderhood occupied a very different place there, from the place of pursuer; and Bradley had been at the pains of devising so many means of fitting that place to him, and of wedging him into it, that his mind could not compass the possibility of his occupying any other. And this is another spell against which the shedder of blood for ever strives in vain. There are fifty doors by which discovery may enter. With infinite pains and cunning, he double locks and bars forty-nine of them, and cannot see the fiftieth standing wide open.

Now, too, was he cursed with a state of mind more wearing and more wearisome than remorse. He had no remorse; but the evildoer who can hold that avenger at bay, cannot escape the slower torture of incessantly doing the evil deed again and doing it more efficiently. In the defensive declarations and pretended confessions of murderers, the pursuing shadow of this torture may be traced through every lie they tell. If I had done it as alleged, is it conceivable that I would have made this and this mistake? If I had done it as alleged, should I have left that unguarded place which that false and wicked witness against me so infamously deposed to? The state of that wretch who continually finds the weak spots in his own crime, and strives to strengthen them when it is unchangeable, is a state that aggravates the offence by doing the deed a thousand times instead of once; but it is a state, too, that tauntingly visits the offence upon a sullen unrepentant nature with its heaviest punishment every time.

Bradley toiled on, chained heavily to the idea of his hatred and his vengeance, and thinking how he might have satiated both in many better ways than the way he had taken. The instrument might have been better, the spot and the hour might have been better chosen. To batter a man down from behind in the dark, on the brink of a river, was well enough, but he ought to have been instantly disabled, whereas he had turned and seized his assailant; and so, to end it before chance-help came, and to be rid of him, he had been hurriedly thrown backward into the river before the life was fully beaten out of him. Now if it could be done again, it must not be so done. Supposing his head had been held down under water for a while. Supposing the first blow had been truer. Supposing he had been shot. Supposing he had been strangled. Suppose this way, that way, the other way. Suppose anything but getting unchained from the one idea, for that was inexorably impossible.

The school reopened next day. The scholars saw little or no change in their master's face, for it always wore its slowly labouring expression. But, as he heard his classes, he was always doing the deed and doing it better. As he paused with his piece of chalk at the black board before writing on it, he was thinking of the spot, and whether the water was not deeper and the fall straighter, a little higher up, or a little lower down. He had half a mind to draw a line or two upon the board, and show himself what he meant. He was doing it again and improving on the manner, at prayers, in his mental arithmetic, all through his questioning, all through the day.

Charley Hexam was a master now, in another school, under another head. It was evening, and Bradley was walking in his garden observed from behind a blind by gentle little Miss Peecher, who contemplated offering him a loan of her smelling salts for headache, when Mary Anne, in faithful attendance, held up her arm.

'Yes, Mary Anne?'

'Young Mr Hexam, if you please, ma'am, coming to see Mr Headstone.'

'Very good, Mary Anne.'

Again Mary Anne held up her arm.

'You may speak, Mary Anne?'

'Mr Headstone has beckoned young Mr Hexam into his house, ma'am, and he has gone in himself without waiting for young Mr Hexam to come up, and now HE has gone in too, ma'am, and has shut the door.'

'With all my heart, Mary Anne.'

Again Mary Anne's telegraphic arm worked.

'What more, Mary Anne?'

'They must find it rather dull and dark, Miss Peecher, for the parlour blind's down, and neither of them pulls it up.'

'There is no accounting,' said good Miss Peecher with a little sad sigh which she repressed by laying her hand on her neat methodical boddice, 'there is no accounting for tastes, Mary Anne.'

Charley, entering the dark room, stopped short when he saw his old friend in its yellow shade.

'Come in, Hexam, come in.'

Charley advanced to take the hand that was held out to him; but stopped again, short of it. The heavy, bloodshot eyes of the schoolmaster, rising to his face with an effort, met his look of scrutiny.

'Mr Headstone, what's the matter?'

'Matter? Where?'

'Mr Headstone, have you heard the news? This news about the fellow, Mr Eugene Wrayburn? That he is killed?'

'He is dead, then!' exclaimed Bradley.

Young Hexam standing looking at him, he moistened his lips with his tongue, looked about the room, glanced at his former pupil, and looked down. 'I heard of the outrage,' said Bradley, trying to constrain his working mouth, 'but I had not heard the end of it.'

'Where were you,' said the boy, advancing a step as he lowered his voice, 'when it was done? Stop! I don't ask that. Don't tell me. If you force your confidence upon me, Mr Headstone, I'll give up every word of it. Mind! Take notice. I'll give up it, and I'll give up you. I will!'

The wretched creature seemed to suffer acutely under this renunciation. A desolate air of utter and complete loneliness fell upon him, like a visible shade.

'It's for me to speak, not you,' said the boy. 'If you do, you'll do it at your peril. I am going to put your selfishness before you, Mr Headstone—your passionate, violent, and ungovernable selfishness—to show you why I can, and why I will, have nothing more to do with you.'

He looked at young Hexam as if he were waiting for a scholar to go on with a lesson that he knew by heart and was deadly tired of. But he had said his last word to him.

'If you had any part—I don't say what—in this attack,' pursued the boy; 'or if you know anything about it—I don't say how much—or if you know who did it—I go no closer—you did an injury to me that's never to be forgiven. You know that I took you with me to his chambers in the Temple when I told him my opinion of him, and made myself responsible for my opinion of you. You know that I took you with me when I was watching him with a view to recovering my sister and bringing her to her senses; you know that I have allowed myself to be mixed up with you, all through this business, in favouring your desire to marry my sister. And how do you know that, pursuing the ends of your own violent temper, you have not laid me open to suspicion? Is that your gratitude to me, Mr Headstone?'

Bradley sat looking steadily before him at the vacant air. As often as young Hexam stopped, he turned his eyes towards him, as if he were waiting for him to go on with the lesson, and get it done. As often as the boy resumed, Bradley resumed his fixed face.

'I am going to be plain with you, Mr Headstone,' said young Hexam, shaking his head in a half-threatening manner, 'because this is no time for affecting not to know things that I do know—except certain things at which it might not be very safe for you, to hint again. What I mean is this: if you were a good master, I was a good pupil. I have done you plenty of credit, and in improving my own reputation I have improved yours quite as much. Very well then. Starting on equal terms, I want to put before you how you have shown your gratitude to me, for doing all I could to further your wishes with reference to my sister. You have compromised me by being seen about with me, endeavouring to counteract this Mr Eugene Wrayburn. That's the first thing you have done. If my character, and my now dropping you, help me out of that, Mr Headstone, the deliverance is to be attributed to me, and not to you. No thanks to you for it!'

The boy stopping again, he moved his eyes again.

'I am going on, Mr Headstone, don't you be afraid. I am going on to the end, and I have told you beforehand what the end is. Now, you know my story. You are as well aware as I am, that I have had many disadvantages to leave behind me in life. You have heard me mention my father, and you are sufficiently acquainted with the fact that the home from which I, as I may say, escaped, might have been a more creditable one than it was. My father died, and then it might have been supposed that my way to respectability was pretty clear. No. For then my sister begins.'

He spoke as confidently, and with as entire an absence of any tell-tale colour in his cheek, as if there were no softening old time behind him. Not wonderful, for there WAS none in his hollow empty heart. What is there but self, for selfishness to see behind it?

'When I speak of my sister, I devoutly wish that you had never seen her, Mr Headstone. However, you did see her, and that's useless now. I confided in you about her. I explained her character to you, and how she interposed some ridiculous fanciful notions in the way of our being as respectable as I tried for. You fell in love with her, and I favoured you with all my might. She could not be induced to favour you, and so we came into collision with this Mr Eugene Wrayburn. Now, what have you done? Why, you have justified my sister in being firmly set against you from first to last, and you have put me in the wrong again! And why have you done it? Because, Mr Headstone, you are in all your passions so selfish, and so concentrated upon yourself that you have not bestowed one proper thought on me.'

The cool conviction with which the boy took up and held his position, could have been derived from no other vice in human nature.

'It is,' he went on, actually with tears, 'an extraordinary circumstance attendant on my life, that every effort I make towards perfect respectability, is impeded by somebody else through no fault of mine! Not content with doing what I have put before you, you will drag my name into notoriety through dragging my sister's—which you are pretty sure to do, if my suspicions have any foundation at all—and the worse you prove to be, the harder it will be for me to detach myself from being associated with you in people's minds.'

When he had dried his eyes and heaved a sob over his injuries, he began moving towards the door.

'However, I have made up my mind that I will become respectable in the scale of society, and that I will not be dragged down by others. I have done with my sister as well as with you. Since she cares so little for me as to care nothing for undermining my respectability, she shall go her way and I will go mine. My prospects are very good, and I mean to follow them alone. Mr Headstone, I don't say what you have got upon your conscience, for I don't know. Whatever lies upon it, I hope you will see the justice of keeping wide and clear of me, and will find a consolation in completely exonerating all but yourself. I hope, before many years are out, to succeed the master in my present school, and the mistress being a single woman, though some years older than I am, I might even marry her. If it is any comfort to you to know what plans I may work out by keeping myself strictly respectable in the scale of society, these are the plans at present occurring to me. In conclusion, if you feel a sense of having injured me, and a desire to make some small reparation, I hope you will think how respectable you might have been yourself and will contemplate your blighted existence.'

Was it strange that the wretched man should take this heavily to heart? Perhaps he had taken the boy to heart, first, through some long laborious years; perhaps through the same years he had found his drudgery lightened by communication with a brighter and more apprehensive spirit than his own; perhaps a family resemblance of face and voice between the boy and his sister, smote him hard in the gloom of his fallen state. For whichsoever reason, or for all, he drooped his devoted head when the boy was gone, and shrank together on the floor, and grovelled there, with the palms of his hands tight-clasping his hot temples, in unutterable misery, and unrelieved by a single tear.

Rogue Riderhood had been busy with the river that day. He had fished with assiduity on the previous evening, but the light was short, and he had fished unsuccessfully. He had fished again that day with better luck, and had carried his fish home to Plashwater Weir Mill Lock-house, in a bundle.

Chapter 8

A FEW GRAINS OF PEPPER

The dolls' dressmaker went no more to the business-premises of Pubsey and Co. in St Mary Axe, after chance had disclosed to her (as she supposed) the flinty and hypocritical character of Mr Riah. She often moralized over her work on the tricks and the manners of that venerable cheat, but made her little purchases elsewhere, and lived a secluded life. After much consultation with herself, she decided not to put Lizzie Hexam on her guard against the old man, arguing that the disappointment of finding him out would come upon her quite soon enough. Therefore, in her communication with her friend by letter, she was silent on this theme, and principally dilated on the backslidings of her bad child, who every day grew worse and worse.

'You wicked old boy,' Miss Wren would say to him, with a menacing forefinger, 'you'll force me to run away from you, after all, you will; and then you'll shake to bits, and there'll be nobody to pick up the pieces!'

At this foreshadowing of a desolate decease, the wicked old boy would whine and whimper, and would sit shaking himself into the lowest of low spirits, until such time as he could shake himself out of the house and shake another threepennyworth into himself. But dead drunk or dead sober (he had come to such a pass that he was least alive in the latter state), it was always on the conscience of the paralytic scarecrow that he had betrayed his sharp parent for sixty threepennyworths of rum, which were all gone, and that her sharpness would infallibly detect his having done it, sooner or later. All things considered therefore, and addition made of the state of his body to the state of his mind, the bed on which Mr Dolls reposed was a bed of roses from which the flowers and leaves had entirely faded, leaving him to lie upon the thorns and stalks.

On a certain day, Miss Wren was alone at her work, with the house-door set open for coolness, and was trolling in a small sweet voice a mournful little song which might have been the song of the doll she was dressing, bemoaning the brittleness and meltability of wax, when whom should she descry standing on the pavement, looking in at her, but Mr Fledgeby.

'I thought it was you?' said Fledgeby, coming up the two steps.

'Did you?' Miss Wren retorted. 'And I thought it was you, young man. Quite a coincidence. You're not mistaken, and I'm not mistaken. How clever we are!'

'Well, and how are you?' said Fledgeby.

'I am pretty much as usual, sir,' replied Miss Wren. 'A very unfortunate parent, worried out of my life and senses by a very bad child.'

Fledgeby's small eyes opened so wide that they might have passed for ordinary-sized eyes, as he stared about him for the very young person whom he supposed to be in question.

'But you're not a parent,' said Miss Wren, 'and consequently it's of no use talking to you upon a family subject.—To what am I to attribute the honour and favour?'

'To a wish to improve your acquaintance,' Mr Fledgeby replied.

Miss Wren, stopping to bite her thread, looked at him very knowingly.

'We never meet now,' said Fledgeby; 'do we?'

'No,' said Miss Wren, chopping off the word.

'So I had a mind,' pursued Fledgeby, 'to come and have a talk with you about our dodging friend, the child of Israel.'

'So HE gave you my address; did he?' asked Miss Wren.

'I got it out of him,' said Fledgeby, with a stammer.

'You seem to see a good deal of him,' remarked Miss Wren, with shrewd distrust. 'A good deal of him you seem to see, considering.'

'Yes, I do,' said Fledgeby. 'Considering.'

'Haven't you,' inquired the dressmaker, bending over the doll on which her art was being exercised, 'done interceding with him yet?'

'No,' said Fledgeby, shaking his head.

'La! Been interceding with him all this time, and sticking to him still?' said Miss Wren, busy with her work.

'Sticking to him is the word,' said Fledgeby.

Miss Wren pursued her occupation with a concentrated air, and asked, after an interval of silent industry:

'Are you in the army?'

'Not exactly,' said Fledgeby, rather flattered by the question.

'Navy?' asked Miss Wren.

'N—no,' said Fledgeby. He qualified these two negatives, as if he were not absolutely in either service, but was almost in both.

'What are you then?' demanded Miss Wren.

'I am a gentleman, I am,' said Fledgeby.

'Oh!' assented Jenny, screwing up her mouth with an appearance of conviction. 'Yes, to be sure! That accounts for your having so much time to give to interceding. But only to think how kind and friendly a gentleman you must be!'

Mr Fledgeby found that he was skating round a board marked Dangerous, and had better cut out a fresh track. 'Let's get back to the dodgerest of the dodgers,' said he. 'What's he up to in the case of your friend the handsome gal? He must have some object. What's his object?'

'Cannot undertake to say, sir, I am sure!' returned Miss Wren, composedly.

'He won't acknowledge where she's gone,' said Fledgeby; 'and I have a fancy that I should like to have another look at her. Now I know he knows where she is gone.'

'Cannot undertake to say, sir, I am sure!' Miss Wren again rejoined.

'And you know where she is gone,' hazarded Fledgeby.

'Cannot undertake to say, sir, really,' replied Miss Wren.

The quaint little chin met Mr Fledgeby's gaze with such a baffling hitch, that that agreeable gentleman was for some time at a loss how to resume his fascinating part in the dialogue. At length he said:

'Miss Jenny!—That's your name, if I don't mistake?'

'Probably you don't mistake, sir,' was Miss Wren's cool answer; 'because you had it on the best authority. Mine, you know.'

'Miss Jenny! Instead of coming up and being dead, let's come out and look alive. It'll pay better, I assure you,' said Fledgeby, bestowing an inveigling twinkle or two upon the dressmaker. 'You'll find it pay better.'

'Perhaps,' said Miss Jenny, holding out her doll at arm's length, and critically contemplating the effect of her art with her scissors on her lips and her head thrown back, as if her interest lay there, and not in the conversation; 'perhaps you'll explain your meaning, young man, which is Greek to me.—You must have another touch of blue in your trimming, my dear.' Having addressed the last remark to her fair client, Miss Wren proceeded to snip at some blue fragments that lay before her, among fragments of all colours, and to thread a needle from a skein of blue silk.

'Look here,' said Fledgeby.—'Are you attending?'

'I am attending, sir,' replied Miss Wren, without the slightest appearance of so doing. 'Another touch of blue in your trimming, my dear.'

'Well, look here,' said Fledgeby, rather discouraged by the circumstances under which he found himself pursuing the conversation. 'If you're attending—'

('Light blue, my sweet young lady,' remarked Miss Wren, in a sprightly tone, 'being best suited to your fair complexion and your flaxen curls.')

'I say, if you're attending,' proceeded Fledgeby, 'it'll pay better in this way. It'll lead in a roundabout manner to your buying damage and waste of Pubsey and Co. at a nominal price, or even getting it for nothing.'

'Aha!' thought the dressmaker. 'But you are not so roundabout, Little Eyes, that I don't notice your answering for Pubsey and Co. after all! Little Eyes, Little Eyes, you're too cunning by half.'

'And I take it for granted,' pursued Fledgeby, 'that to get the most of your materials for nothing would be well worth your while, Miss Jenny?'

'You may take it for granted,' returned the dressmaker with many knowing nods, 'that it's always well worth my while to make money.'

'Now,' said Fledgeby approvingly, 'you're answering to a sensible purpose. Now, you're coming out and looking alive! So I make so free, Miss Jenny, as to offer the remark, that you and Judah were too thick together to last. You can't come to be intimate with such a deep file as Judah without beginning to see a little way into him, you know,' said Fledgeby with a wink.

'I must own,' returned the dressmaker, with her eyes upon her work, 'that we are not good friends at present.'

'I know you're not good friends at present,' said Fledgeby. 'I know all about it. I should like to pay off Judah, by not letting him have his own deep way in everything. In most things he'll get it by hook or by crook, but—hang it all!—don't let him have his own deep way in everything. That's too much.' Mr Fledgeby said this with some display of indignant warmth, as if he was counsel in the cause for Virtue.

'How can I prevent his having his own way?' began the dressmaker.

'Deep way, I called it,' said Fledgeby.

'—His own deep way, in anything?'

'I'll tell you,' said Fledgeby. 'I like to hear you ask it, because it's looking alive. It's what I should expect to find in one of your sagacious understanding. Now, candidly.'

'Eh?' cried Miss Jenny.

'I said, now candidly,' Mr Fledgeby explained, a little put out.

'Oh-h!'

'I should be glad to countermine him, respecting the handsome gal, your friend. He means something there. You may depend upon it, Judah means something there. He has a motive, and of course his motive is a dark motive. Now, whatever his motive is, it's necessary to his motive'—Mr Fledgeby's constructive powers were not equal to the avoidance of some tautology here—'that it should be kept from me, what he has done with her. So I put it to you, who know: What HAS he done with her? I ask no more. And is that asking much, when you understand that it will pay?'

Miss Jenny Wren, who had cast her eyes upon the bench again after her last interruption, sat looking at it, needle in hand but not working, for some moments. She then briskly resumed her work, and said with a sidelong glance of her eyes and chin at Mr Fledgeby:

'Where d'ye live?'

'Albany, Piccadilly,' replied Fledgeby.

'When are you at home?'

'When you like.'

'Breakfast-time?' said Jenny, in her abruptest and shortest manner.

'No better time in the day,' said Fledgeby.

'I'll look in upon you to-morrow, young man. Those two ladies,' pointing to dolls, 'have an appointment in Bond Street at ten precisely. When I've dropped 'em there, I'll drive round to you. With a weird little laugh, Miss Jenny pointed to her crutch-stick as her equipage.

'This is looking alive indeed!' cried Fledgeby, rising.

'Mark you! I promise you nothing,' said the dolls' dressmaker, dabbing two dabs at him with her needle, as if she put out both his eyes.

'No no. I understand,' returned Fledgeby. 'The damage and waste question shall be settled first. It shall be made to pay; don't you be afraid. Good-day, Miss Jenny.'

'Good-day, young man.'

Mr Fledgeby's prepossessing form withdrew itself; and the little dressmaker, clipping and snipping and stitching, and stitching and snipping and clipping, fell to work at a great rate; musing and muttering all the time.

'Misty, misty, misty. Can't make it out. Little Eyes and the wolf in a conspiracy? Or Little Eyes and the wolf against one another? Can't make it out. My poor Lizzie, have they both designs against you, either way? Can't make it out. Is Little Eyes Pubsey, and the wolf Co? Can't make it out. Pubsey true to Co, and Co to Pubsey? Pubsey false to Co, and Co to Pubsey? Can't make it out. What said Little Eyes? "Now, candidly?" Ah! However the cat jumps, HE'S a liar. That's all I can make out at present; but you may go to bed in the Albany, Piccadilly, with THAT for your pillow, young man!' Thereupon, the little dressmaker again dabbed out his eyes separately, and making a loop in the air of her thread and deftly catching it into a knot with her needle, seemed to bowstring him into the bargain.

For the terrors undergone by Mr Dolls that evening when his little parent sat profoundly meditating over her work, and when he imagined himself found out, as often as she changed her attitude, or turned her eyes towards him, there is no adequate name. Moreover it was her habit to shake her head at that wretched old boy whenever she caught his eye as he shivered and shook. What are popularly called 'the trembles' being in full force upon him that evening, and likewise what are popularly called 'the horrors,' he had a very bad time of it; which was not made better by his being so remorseful as frequently to moan 'Sixty threepennorths.' This imperfect sentence not being at all intelligible as a confession, but sounding like a Gargantuan order for a dram, brought him into new difficulties by occasioning his parent to pounce at him in a more than usually snappish manner, and to overwhelm him with bitter reproaches.

What was a bad time for Mr Dolls, could not fail to be a bad time for the dolls' dressmaker. However, she was on the alert next morning, and drove to Bond Street, and set down the two ladies punctually, and then directed her equipage to conduct her to the Albany. Arrived at the doorway of the house in which Mr Fledgeby's chambers were, she found a lady standing there in a travelling dress, holding in her hand—of all things in the world—a gentleman's hat.

'You want some one?' said the lady in a stern manner.

'I am going up stairs to Mr Fledgeby's.'

'You cannot do that at this moment. There is a gentleman with him. I am waiting for the gentleman. His business with Mr Fledgeby will very soon be transacted, and then you can go up. Until the gentleman comes down, you must wait here.'

While speaking, and afterwards, the lady kept watchfully between her and the staircase, as if prepared to oppose her going up, by force. The lady being of a stature to stop her with a hand, and looking mightily determined, the dressmaker stood still.

'Well? Why do you listen?' asked the lady.

'I am not listening,' said the dressmaker.

'What do you hear?' asked the lady, altering her phrase.

'Is it a kind of a spluttering somewhere?' said the dressmaker, with an inquiring look.

'Mr Fledgeby in his shower-bath, perhaps,' remarked the lady, smiling.

'And somebody's beating a carpet, I think?'

'Mr Fledgeby's carpet, I dare say,' replied the smiling lady.

Miss Wren had a reasonably good eye for smiles, being well accustomed to them on the part of her young friends, though their smiles mostly ran smaller than in nature. But she had never seen so singular a smile as that upon this lady's face. It twitched her nostrils open in a remarkable manner, and contracted her lips and eyebrows. It was a smile of enjoyment too, though of such a fierce kind that Miss Wren thought she would rather not enjoy herself than do it in that way.

'Well!' said the lady, watching her. 'What now?'

'I hope there's nothing the matter!' said the dressmaker.

'Where?' inquired the lady.

'I don't know where,' said Miss Wren, staring about her. 'But I never heard such odd noises. Don't you think I had better call somebody?'

'I think you had better not,' returned the lady with a significant frown, and drawing closer.

On this hint, the dressmaker relinquished the idea, and stood looking at the lady as hard as the lady looked at her. Meanwhile the dressmaker listened with amazement to the odd noises which still continued, and the lady listened too, but with a coolness in which there was no trace of amazement.

Soon afterwards, came a slamming and banging of doors; and then came running down stairs, a gentleman with whiskers, and out of breath, who seemed to be red-hot.

'Is your business done, Alfred?' inquired the lady.

'Very thoroughly done,' replied the gentleman, as he took his hat from her.

'You can go up to Mr Fledgeby as soon as you like,' said the lady, moving haughtily away.

'Oh! And you can take these three pieces of stick with you,' added the gentleman politely, 'and say, if you please, that they come from Mr Alfred Lammle, with his compliments on leaving England. Mr Alfred Lammle. Be so good as not to forget the name.'

The three pieces of stick were three broken and frayed fragments of a stout lithe cane. Miss Jenny taking them wonderingly, and the gentleman repeating with a grin, 'Mr Alfred Lammle, if you'll be so good. Compliments, on leaving England,' the lady and gentleman walked away quite deliberately, and Miss Jenny and her crutch-stick went up stairs. 'Lammle, Lammle, Lammle?' Miss Jenny repeated as she panted from stair to stair, 'where have I heard that name? Lammle, Lammle? I know! Saint Mary Axe!'

With a gleam of new intelligence in her sharp face, the dolls' dressmaker pulled at Fledgeby's bell. No one answered; but, from within the chambers, there proceeded a continuous spluttering sound of a highly singular and unintelligible nature.

'Good gracious! Is Little Eyes choking?' cried Miss Jenny.

Pulling at the bell again and getting no reply, she pushed the outer door, and found it standing ajar. No one being visible on her opening it wider, and the spluttering continuing, she took the liberty of opening an inner door, and then beheld the extraordinary spectacle of Mr Fledgeby in a shirt, a pair of Turkish trousers, and a Turkish cap, rolling over and over on his own carpet, and spluttering wonderfully.

'Oh Lord!' gasped Mr Fledgeby. 'Oh my eye! Stop thief! I am strangling. Fire! Oh my eye! A glass of water. Give me a glass of water. Shut the door. Murder! Oh Lord!' And then rolled and spluttered more than ever.

Hurrying into another room, Miss Jenny got a glass of water, and brought it for Fledgeby's relief: who, gasping, spluttering, and rattling in his throat betweenwhiles, drank some water, and laid his head faintly on her arm.

'Oh my eye!' cried Fledgeby, struggling anew. 'It's salt and snuff. It's up my nose, and down my throat, and in my wind-pipe. Ugh! Ow! Ow! Ow! Ah—h—h—h!' And here, crowing fearfully, with his eyes starting out of his head, appeared to be contending with every mortal disease incidental to poultry.

'And Oh my Eye, I'm so sore!' cried Fledgeby, starting, over on his back, in a spasmodic way that caused the dressmaker to retreat to the wall. 'Oh I smart so! Do put something to my back and arms, and legs and shoulders. Ugh! It's down my throat again and can't come up. Ow! Ow! Ow! Ah—h—h—h! Oh I smart so!' Here Mr Fledgeby bounded up, and bounded down, and went rolling over and over again.

The dolls' dressmaker looked on until he rolled himself into a corner with his Turkish slippers uppermost, and then, resolving in the first place to address her ministration to the salt and snuff, gave him more water and slapped his back. But, the latter application was by no means a success, causing Mr Fledgeby to scream, and to cry out, 'Oh my eye! don't slap me! I'm covered with weales and I smart so!'

However, he gradually ceased to choke and crow, saving at intervals, and Miss Jenny got him into an easy-chair: where, with his eyes red and watery, with his features swollen, and with some half-dozen livid bars across his face, he presented a most rueful sight.

'What ever possessed you to take salt and snuff, young man?' inquired Miss Jenny.

'I didn't take it,' the dismal youth replied. 'It was crammed into my mouth.'

'Who crammed it?' asked Miss Jenny.

'He did,' answered Fledgeby. 'The assassin. Lammle. He rubbed it into my mouth and up my nose and down my throat—Ow! Ow! Ow! Ah—h—h—h! Ugh!—to prevent my crying out, and then cruelly assaulted me.'

'With this?' asked Miss Jenny, showing the pieces of cane.

'That's the weapon,' said Fledgeby, eyeing it with the air of an acquaintance. 'He broke it over me. Oh I smart so! How did you come by it?'

'When he ran down stairs and joined the lady he had left in the hall with his hat'—Miss Jenny began.

'Oh!' groaned Mr Fledgeby, writhing, 'she was holding his hat, was she? I might have known she was in it.'

'When he came down stairs and joined the lady who wouldn't let me come up, he gave me the pieces for you, and I was to say, "With Mr Alfred Lammle's compliments on his leaving England."' Miss Jenny said it with such spiteful satisfaction, and such a hitch of her chin and eyes as might have added to Mr Fledgeby's miseries, if he could have noticed either, in his bodily pain with his hand to his head.

'Shall I go for the police?' inquired Miss Jenny, with a nimble start towards the door.

'Stop! No, don't!' cried Fledgeby. 'Don't, please. We had better keep it quiet. Will you be so good as shut the door? Oh I do smart so!'

In testimony of the extent to which he smarted, Mr Fledgeby came wallowing out of the easy-chair, and took another roll on the carpet.

Now the door's shut,' said Mr Fledgeby, sitting up in anguish, with his Turkish cap half on and half off, and the bars on his face getting bluer, 'do me the kindness to look at my back and shoulders. They must be in an awful state, for I hadn't got my dressing-gown on, when the brute came rushing in. Cut my shirt away from the collar; there's a pair of scissors on that table. Oh!' groaned Mr Fledgeby, with his hand to his head again. 'How I do smart, to be sure!'

'There?' inquired Miss Jenny, alluding to the back and shoulders.

'Oh Lord, yes!' moaned Fledgeby, rocking himself. 'And all over! Everywhere!'

The busy little dressmaker quickly snipped the shirt away, and laid bare the results of as furious and sound a thrashing as even Mr Fledgeby merited. 'You may well smart, young man!' exclaimed Miss Jenny. And stealthily rubbed her little hands behind him, and poked a few exultant pokes with her two forefingers over the crown of his head.

'What do you think of vinegar and brown paper?' inquired the suffering Fledgeby, still rocking and moaning. 'Does it look as if vinegar and brown paper was the sort of application?'

'Yes,' said Miss Jenny, with a silent chuckle. 'It looks as if it ought to be Pickled.'

Mr Fledgeby collapsed under the word 'Pickled,' and groaned again. 'My kitchen is on this floor,' he said; 'you'll find brown paper in a dresser-drawer there, and a bottle of vinegar on a shelf. Would you have the kindness to make a few plasters and put 'em on? It can't be kept too quiet.'

'One, two—hum—five, six. You'll want six,' said the dress-maker.

'There's smart enough,' whimpered Mr Fledgeby, groaning and writhing again, 'for sixty.'

Miss Jenny repaired to the kitchen, scissors in hand, found the brown paper and found the vinegar, and skilfully cut out and steeped six large plasters. When they were all lying ready on the dresser, an idea occurred to her as she was about to gather them up.

'I think,' said Miss Jenny with a silent laugh, 'he ought to have a little pepper? Just a few grains? I think the young man's tricks and manners make a claim upon his friends for a little pepper?'

Mr Fledgeby's evil star showing her the pepper-box on the chimneypiece, she climbed upon a chair, and got it down, and sprinkled all the plasters with a judicious hand. She then went back to Mr Fledgeby, and stuck them all on him: Mr Fledgeby uttering a sharp howl as each was put in its place.

'There, young man!' said the dolls' dressmaker. 'Now I hope you feel pretty comfortable?'

Apparently, Mr Fledgeby did not, for he cried by way of answer, 'Oh—h how I do smart!'

Miss Jenny got his Persian gown upon him, extinguished his eyes crookedly with his Persian cap, and helped him to his bed: upon which he climbed groaning. 'Business between you and me being out of the question to-day, young man, and my time being precious,' said Miss Jenny then, 'I'll make myself scarce. Are you comfortable now?'

'Oh my eye!' cried Mr Fledgeby. 'No, I ain't. Oh—h—h! how I do smart!'

The last thing Miss Jenny saw, as she looked back before closing the room door, was Mr Fledgeby in the act of plunging and gambolling all over his bed, like a porpoise or dolphin in its native element. She then shut the bedroom door, and all the other doors, and going down stairs and emerging from the Albany into the busy streets, took omnibus for Saint Mary Axe: pressing on the road all the gaily-dressed ladies whom she could see from the window, and making them unconscious lay-figures for dolls, while she mentally cut them out and basted them.

Chapter 9

TWO PLACES VACATED

Set down by the omnibus at the corner of Saint Mary Axe, and trusting to her feet and her crutch-stick within its precincts, the dolls' dressmaker proceeded to the place of business of Pubsey and Co. All there was sunny and quiet externally, and shady and quiet internally. Hiding herself in the entry outside the glass door, she could see from that post of observation the old man in his spectacles sitting writing at his desk.

'Boh!' cried the dressmaker, popping in her head at the glass-door. 'Mr Wolf at home?'

The old man took his glasses off, and mildly laid them down beside him. 'Ah Jenny, is it you? I thought you had given me up.'

'And so I had given up the treacherous wolf of the forest,' she replied; 'but, godmother, it strikes me you have come back. I am not quite sure, because the wolf and you change forms. I want to ask you a question or two, to find out whether you are really godmother or really wolf. May I?'

'Yes, Jenny, yes.' But Riah glanced towards the door, as if he thought his principal might appear there, unseasonably.

'If you're afraid of the fox,' said Miss Jenny, 'you may dismiss all present expectations of seeing that animal. HE won't show himself abroad, for many a day.'

'What do you mean, my child?'

'I mean, godmother,' replied Miss Wren, sitting down beside the Jew, 'that the fox has caught a famous flogging, and that if his skin and bones are not tingling, aching, and smarting at this present instant, no fox did ever tingle, ache, and smart.' Therewith Miss Jenny related what had come to pass in the Albany, omitting the few grains of pepper.

'Now, godmother,' she went on, 'I particularly wish to ask you what has taken place here, since I left the wolf here? Because I have an idea about the size of a marble, rolling about in my little noddle. First and foremost, are you Pubsey and Co., or are you either? Upon your solemn word and honour.'

The old man shook his head.

'Secondly, isn't Fledgeby both Pubsey and Co.?'

The old man answered with a reluctant nod.

'My idea,' exclaimed Miss Wren, 'is now about the size of an orange. But before it gets any bigger, welcome back, dear godmother!'

The little creature folded her arms about the old man's neck with great earnestness, and kissed him. 'I humbly beg your forgiveness, godmother. I am truly sorry. I ought to have had more faith in you. But what could I suppose when you said nothing for yourself, you know? I don't mean to offer that as a justification, but what could I suppose, when you were a silent party to all he said? It did look bad; now didn't it?'

'It looked so bad, Jenny,' responded the old man, with gravity, 'that I will straightway tell you what an impression it wrought upon me. I was hateful in mine own eyes. I was hateful to myself, in being so hateful to the debtor and to you. But more than that, and worse than that, and to pass out far and broad beyond myself—I reflected that evening, sitting alone in my garden on the housetop, that I was doing dishonour to my ancient faith and race. I reflected—clearly reflected for the first time—that in bending my neck to the yoke I was willing to wear, I bent the unwilling necks of the whole Jewish people. For it is not, in Christian countries, with the Jews as with other peoples. Men say, 'This is a bad Greek, but there are good Greeks. This is a bad Turk, but there are good Turks.' Not so with the Jews. Men find the bad among us easily enough—among what peoples are the bad not easily found?—but they take the worst of us as samples of the best; they take the lowest of us as presentations of the highest; and they say "All Jews are alike." If, doing what I was content to do here, because I was grateful for the past and have small need of money now, I had been a Christian, I could have done it, compromising no one but my individual self. But doing it as a Jew, I could not choose but compromise the Jews of all conditions and all countries. It is a little hard upon us, but it is the truth. I would that all our people remembered it! Though I have little right to say so, seeing that it came home so late to me.'

The dolls' dressmaker sat holding the old man by the hand, and looking thoughtfully in his face.

'Thus I reflected, I say, sitting that evening in my garden on the housetop. And passing the painful scene of that day in review before me many times, I always saw that the poor gentleman believed the story readily, because I was one of the Jews—that you believed the story readily, my child, because I was one of the Jews—that the story itself first came into the invention of the originator thereof, because I was one of the Jews. This was the result of my having had you three before me, face to face, and seeing the thing visibly presented as upon a theatre. Wherefore I perceived that the obligation was upon me to leave this service. But Jenny, my dear,' said Riah, breaking off, 'I promised that you should pursue your questions, and I obstruct them.'

'On the contrary, godmother; my idea is as large now as a pumpkin—and YOU know what a pumpkin is, don't you? So you gave notice that you were going? Does that come next?' asked Miss Jenny with a look of close attention.

'I indited a letter to my master. Yes. To that effect.'

'And what said Tingling-Tossing-Aching-Screaming-Scratching-Smarter?' asked Miss Wren with an unspeakable enjoyment in the utterance of those honourable titles and in the recollection of the pepper.

'He held me to certain months of servitude, which were his lawful term of notice. They expire to-morrow. Upon their expiration—not before—I had meant to set myself right with my Cinderella.'

'My idea is getting so immense now,' cried Miss Wren, clasping her temples, 'that my head won't hold it! Listen, godmother; I am going to expound. Little Eyes (that's Screaming-Scratching-Smarter) owes you a heavy grudge for going. Little Eyes casts about how best to pay you off. Little Eyes thinks of Lizzie. Little Eyes says to himself, 'I'll find out where he has placed that girl, and I'll betray his secret because it's dear to him.' Perhaps Little Eyes thinks, "I'll make love to her myself too;" but that I can't swear—all the rest I can. So, Little Eyes comes to me, and I go to Little Eyes. That's the way of it. And now the murder's all out, I'm sorry,' added the dolls' dressmaker, rigid from head to foot with energy as she shook her little fist before her eyes, 'that I didn't give him Cayenne pepper and chopped pickled Capsicum!'

This expression of regret being but partially intelligible to Mr Riah, the old man reverted to the injuries Fledgeby had received, and hinted at the necessity of his at once going to tend that beaten cur.

'Godmother, godmother, godmother!' cried Miss Wren irritably, 'I really lose all patience with you. One would think you believed in the Good Samaritan. How can you be so inconsistent?'

'Jenny dear,' began the old man gently, 'it is the custom of our people to help—'

'Oh! Bother your people!' interposed Miss Wren, with a toss of her head. 'If your people don't know better than to go and help Little Eyes, it's a pity they ever got out of Egypt. Over and above that,' she added, 'he wouldn't take your help if you offered it. Too much ashamed. Wants to keep it close and quiet, and to keep you out of the way.'

They were still debating this point when a shadow darkened the entry, and the glass door was opened by a messenger who brought a letter unceremoniously addressed, 'Riah.' To which he said there was an answer wanted.

The letter, which was scrawled in pencil uphill and downhill and round crooked corners, ran thus:

'OLD RIAH,

Your accounts being all squared, go. Shut up the place, turn out directly, and send me the key by bearer. Go. You are an unthankful dog of a Jew. Get out.

F.'

The dolls' dressmaker found it delicious to trace the screaming and smarting of Little Eyes in the distorted writing of this epistle. She laughed over it and jeered at it in a convenient corner (to the great astonishment of the messenger) while the old man got his few goods together in a black bag. That done, the shutters of the upper windows closed, and the office blind pulled down, they issued forth upon the steps with the attendant messenger. There, while Miss Jenny held the bag, the old man locked the house door, and handed over the key to him; who at once retired with the same.

'Well, godmother,' said Miss Wren, as they remained upon the steps together, looking at one another. 'And so you're thrown upon the world!'

'It would appear so, Jenny, and somewhat suddenly.'

'Where are you going to seek your fortune?' asked Miss Wren.

The old man smiled, but looked about him with a look of having lost his way in life, which did not escape the dolls' dressmaker.

'Verily, Jenny,' said he, 'the question is to the purpose, and more easily asked than answered. But as I have experience of the ready goodwill and good help of those who have given occupation to Lizzie, I think I will seek them out for myself.'

'On foot?' asked Miss Wren, with a chop.

'Ay!' said the old man. 'Have I not my staff?'

It was exactly because he had his staff, and presented so quaint an aspect, that she mistrusted his making the journey.

'The best thing you can do,' said Jenny, 'for the time being, at all events, is to come home with me, godmother. Nobody's there but my bad child, and Lizzie's lodging stands empty.' The old man when satisfied that no inconvenience could be entailed on any one by his compliance, readily complied; and the singularly-assorted couple once more went through the streets together.

Now, the bad child having been strictly charged by his parent to remain at home in her absence, of course went out; and, being in the very last stage of mental decrepitude, went out with two objects; firstly, to establish a claim he conceived himself to have upon any licensed victualler living, to be supplied with threepennyworth of rum for nothing; and secondly, to bestow some maudlin remorse on Mr Eugene Wrayburn, and see what profit came of it. Stumblingly pursuing these two designs—they both meant rum, the only meaning of which he was capable—the degraded creature staggered into Covent Garden Market and there bivouacked, to have an attack of the trembles succeeded by an attack of the horrors, in a doorway.

This market of Covent Garden was quite out of the creature's line of road, but it had the attraction for him which it has for the worst of the solitary members of the drunken tribe. It may be the companionship of the nightly stir, or it may be the companionship of the gin and beer that slop about among carters and hucksters, or it may be the companionship of the trodden vegetable refuse which is so like their own dress that perhaps they take the Market for a great wardrobe; but be it what it may, you shall see no such individual drunkards on doorsteps anywhere, as there. Of dozing women-drunkards especially, you shall come upon such specimens there, in the morning sunlight, as you might seek out of doors in vain through London. Such stale vapid rejected cabbage-leaf and cabbage-stalk dress, such damaged-orange countenance, such squashed pulp of humanity, are open to the day nowhere else. So, the attraction of the Market drew Mr Dolls to it, and he had out his two fits of trembles and horrors in a doorway on which a woman had had out her sodden nap a few hours before.

There is a swarm of young savages always flitting about this same place, creeping off with fragments of orange-chests, and mouldy litter—Heaven knows into what holes they can convey them, having no home!—

whose bare feet fall with a blunt dull softness on the pavement as the policeman hunts them, and who are (perhaps for that reason) little heard by the Powers that be, whereas in top-boots they would make a deafening clatter. These, delighting in the trembles and the horrors of Mr Dolls, as in a gratuitous drama, flocked about him in his doorway, butted at him, leaped at him, and pelted him. Hence, when he came out of his invalid retirement and shook off that ragged train, he was much bespattered, and in worse case than ever. But, not yet at his worst; for, going into a public-house, and being supplied in stress of business with his rum, and seeking to vanish without payment, he was collared, searched, found penniless, and admonished not to try that again, by having a pail of dirty water cast over him. This application superinduced another fit of the trembles; after which Mr Dolls, as finding himself in good cue for making a call on a professional friend, addressed himself to the Temple.

There was nobody at the chambers but Young Blight. That discreet youth, sensible of a certain incongruity in the association of such a client with the business that might be coming some day, with the best intentions temporized with Dolls, and offered a shilling for coach-hire home. Mr Dolls, accepting the shilling, promptly laid it out in two threepennyworths of conspiracy against his life, and two threepennyworths of raging repentance. Returning to the Chambers with which burden, he was descried coming round into the court, by the wary young Blight watching from the window: who instantly closed the outer door, and left the miserable object to expend his fury on the panels.

The more the door resisted him, the more dangerous and imminent became that bloody conspiracy against his life. Force of police arriving, he recognized in them the conspirators, and laid about him hoarsely, fiercely, staringly, convulsively, foamingly. A humble machine, familiar to the conspirators and called by the expressive name of Stretcher, being unavoidably sent for, he was rendered a harmless bundle of torn rags by being strapped down upon it, with voice and consciousness gone out of him, and life fast going. As this machine was borne out at the Temple gate by four men, the poor little dolls' dressmaker and her Jewish friend were coming up the street.

'Let us see what it is,' cried the dressmaker. 'Let us make haste and look, godmother.'

The brisk little crutch-stick was but too brisk. 'O gentlemen, gentlemen, he belongs to me!'

'Belongs to you?' said the head of the party, stopping it.

'O yes, dear gentlemen, he's my child, out without leave. My poor bad, bad boy! and he don't know me, he don't know me! O what shall I do,' cried the little creature, wildly beating her hands together, 'when my own child don't know me!'

The head of the party looked (as well he might) to the old man for explanation. He whispered, as the dolls' dressmaker bent over the exhausted form and vainly tried to extract some sign of recognition from it: 'It's her drunken father.'

As the load was put down in the street, Riah drew the head of the party aside, and whispered that he thought the man was dying. 'No, surely not?' returned the other. But he became less confident, on looking, and directed the bearers to 'bring him to the nearest doctor's shop.'

Thither he was brought; the window becoming from within, a wall of faces, deformed into all kinds of shapes through the agency of globular red bottles, green bottles, blue bottles, and other coloured bottles. A ghastly light shining upon him that he didn't need, the beast so furious but a few minutes gone, was quiet enough now, with a strange mysterious writing on his face, reflected from one of the great bottles, as if Death had marked him: 'Mine.'

The medical testimony was more precise and more to the purpose than it sometimes is in a Court of Justice. 'You had better send for something to cover it. All's over.'

Therefore, the police sent for something to cover it, and it was covered and borne through the streets, the people falling away. After it, went the dolls' dressmaker, hiding her face in the Jewish skirts, and clinging to them with one hand, while with the other she plied her stick. It was carried home, and, by reason that the staircase was very narrow, it was put down in the parlour—the little working-bench being set aside to make room for it—and there, in the midst of the dolls with no speculation in their eyes, lay Mr Dolls with no speculation in his.

Many flaunting dolls had to be gaily dressed, before the money was in the dressmaker's pocket to get mourning for Mr Dolls. As the old man, Riah, sat by, helping her in such small ways as he could, he found it difficult to make out whether she really did realize that the deceased had been her father.

'If my poor boy,' she would say, 'had been brought up better, he might have done better. Not that I reproach myself. I hope I have no cause for that.'

'None indeed, Jenny, I am very certain.'

'Thank you, godmother. It cheers me to hear you say so. But you see it is so hard to bring up a child well, when you work, work, work, all day. When he was out of employment, I couldn't always keep him near me. He got fractious and nervous, and I was obliged to let him go into the streets. And he never did well in the streets, he never did well out of sight. How often it happens with children!'

'Too often, even in this sad sense!' thought the old man.

'How can I say what I might have turned out myself, but for my back having been so bad and my legs so queer, when I was young!' the dressmaker would go on. 'I had nothing to do but work, and so I worked. I couldn't play. But my poor unfortunate child could play, and it turned out the worse for him.'

'And not for him alone, Jenny.'

'Well! I don't know, godmother. He suffered heavily, did my unfortunate boy. He was very, very ill sometimes. And I called him a quantity of names;' shaking her head over her work, and dropping tears. 'I don't know that his going wrong was much the worse for me. If it ever was, let us forget it.'

'You are a good girl, you are a patient girl.'

'As for patience,' she would reply with a shrug, 'not much of that, godmother. If I had been patient, I should never have called him names. But I hope I did it for his good. And besides, I felt my responsibility as a mother, so much. I tried reasoning, and reasoning failed. I tried coaxing, and coaxing failed. I tried scolding and scolding failed. But I was bound to try everything, you know, with such a charge upon my hands. Where would have been my duty to my poor lost boy, if I had not tried everything!'

With such talk, mostly in a cheerful tone on the part of the industrious little creature, the day-work and the night-work were beguiled until enough of smart dolls had gone forth to bring into the kitchen, where the working-bench now stood, the sombre stuff that the occasion required, and to bring into the house the other sombre preparations. 'And now,' said Miss Jenny, 'having knocked off my rosy-cheeked young friends, I'll knock off my white-cheeked self.' This referred to her making her own dress, which at last was done. 'The disadvantage of making for yourself,' said Miss Jenny, as she stood upon a chair to look at the result in the glass, 'is, that you can't charge anybody else for the job, and the advantage is, that you haven't to go out to try on. Humph! Very fair indeed! If He could see me now (whoever he is) I hope he wouldn't repent of his bargain!'

The simple arrangements were of her own making, and were stated to Riah thus:

'I mean to go alone, godmother, in my usual carriage, and you'll be so kind as keep house while I am gone. It's not far off. And when I return, we'll have a cup of tea, and a chat over future arrangements. It's a very plain last house that I have been able to give my poor unfortunate boy; but he'll accept the will for the deed if he knows anything about it; and if he doesn't know anything about it,' with a sob, and wiping her eyes, 'why, it won't matter to him. I see the service in the Prayer-book says, that we brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can take nothing out. It comforts me for not being able to hire a lot of stupid undertaker's things for my poor child, and seeming as if I was trying to smuggle 'em out of this world with him, when of course I must break down in the attempt, and bring 'em all back again. As it is, there'll be nothing to bring back but me, and that's quite consistent, for I shan't be brought back, some day!'

After that previous carrying of him in the streets, the wretched old fellow seemed to be twice buried. He was taken on the shoulders of half a dozen blossom-faced men, who shuffled with him to the churchyard, and who were preceded by another blossom-faced man, affecting a stately stalk, as if he were a Policeman of the D(eath) Division, and ceremoniously pretending not to know his intimate acquaintances, as he led the pageant. Yet, the spectacle of only one little mourner hobbling after, caused many people to turn their heads with a look of interest.

At last the troublesome deceased was got into the ground, to be buried no more, and the stately stalker stalked back before the solitary dressmaker, as if she were bound in honour to have no notion of the way home. Those Furies, the conventionalities, being thus appeased, he left her.

'I must have a very short cry, godmother, before I cheer up for good,' said the little creature, coming in. 'Because after all a child is a child, you know.'

It was a longer cry than might have been expected. Howbeit, it wore itself out in a shadowy corner, and then the dressmaker came forth, and washed her face, and made the tea. 'You wouldn't mind my cutting out something while we are at tea, would you?' she asked her Jewish friend, with a coaxing air.

'Cinderella, dear child,' the old man expostulated, 'will you never rest?'

'Oh! It's not work, cutting out a pattern isn't,' said Miss Jenny, with her busy little scissors already snipping at some paper. 'The truth is, godmother, I want to fix it while I have it correct in my mind.'

'Have you seen it to-day then?' asked Riah.

'Yes, godmother. Saw it just now. It's a surplice, that's what it is. Thing our clergymen wear, you know,' explained Miss Jenny, in consideration of his professing another faith.

'And what have you to do with that, Jenny?'

'Why, godmother,' replied the dressmaker, 'you must know that we Professors who live upon our taste and invention, are obliged to keep our eyes always open. And you know already that I have many extra expenses to meet just now. So, it came into my head while I was weeping at my poor boy's grave, that something in my way might be done with a clergyman.'

'What can be done?' asked the old man.

'Not a funeral, never fear!' returned Miss Jenny, anticipating his objection with a nod. 'The public don't like to be made melancholy, I know very well. I am seldom called upon to put my young friends into mourning; not into real mourning, that is; Court mourning they are rather proud of. But a doll clergyman, my dear,—glossy black curls and whiskers—uniting two of my young friends in matrimony,' said Miss Jenny, shaking her forefinger, 'is quite another affair. If you don't see those three at the altar in Bond Street, in a jiffy, my name's Jack Robinson!'

With her expert little ways in sharp action, she had got a doll into whitey-brown paper orders, before the meal was over, and was displaying it for the edification of the Jewish mind, when a knock was heard at the street-door. Riah went to open it, and presently came back, ushering in, with the grave and courteous air that sat so well upon him, a gentleman.

The gentleman was a stranger to the dressmaker; but even in the moment of his casting his eyes upon her, there was something in his manner which brought to her remembrance Mr Eugene Wrayburn.

'Pardon me,' said the gentleman. 'You are the dolls' dressmaker?'

'I am the dolls' dressmaker, sir.'

'Lizzie Hexam's friend?'

'Yes, sir,' replied Miss Jenny, instantly on the defensive. 'And Lizzie Hexam's friend.'

'Here is a note from her, entreating you to accede to the request of Mr Mortimer Lightwood, the bearer. Mr Riah chances to know that I am Mr Mortimer Lightwood, and will tell you so.'

Riah bent his head in corroboration.

'Will you read the note?'

'It's very short,' said Jenny, with a look of wonder, when she had read it.

'There was no time to make it longer. Time was so very precious. My dear friend Mr Eugene Wrayburn is dying.'

The dressmaker clasped her hands, and uttered a little piteous cry.

'Is dying,' repeated Lightwood, with emotion, 'at some distance from here. He is sinking under injuries received at the hands of a villain who attacked him in the dark. I come straight from his bedside. He is almost always insensible. In a short restless interval of sensibility, or partial sensibility, I made out that he asked for you to be brought to sit by him. Hardly relying on my own interpretation of the indistinct sounds he made, I caused Lizzie to hear them. We were both sure that he asked for you.'

The dressmaker, with her hands still clasped, looked affrightedly from the one to the other of her two companions.

'If you delay, he may die with his request ungratified, with his last wish—intrusted to me—we have long been much more than brothers—unfulfilled. I shall break down, if I try to say more.

In a few moments the black bonnet and the crutch-stick were on duty, the good Jew was left in possession of the house, and the dolls' dressmaker, side by side in a chaise with Mortimer Lightwood, was posting out of town.

Chapter 10

THE DOLLS' DRESSMAKER DISCOVERS A WORD

A darkened and hushed room; the river outside the windows flowing on to the vast ocean; a figure on the bed, swathed and bandaged and bound, lying helpless on its back, with its two useless arms in splints at its sides. Only two days of usage so familiarized the little dressmaker with this scene, that it held the place occupied two days ago by the recollections of years.

He had scarcely moved since her arrival. Sometimes his eyes were open, sometimes closed. When they were open, there was no meaning in their unwinking stare at one spot straight before them, unless for a moment the brow knitted into a faint expression of anger, or surprise. Then, Mortimer Lightwood would speak to him, and on occasions he would be so far roused as to make an attempt to pronounce his friend's name. But, in an instant consciousness was gone again, and no spirit of Eugene was in Eugene's crushed outer form.

They provided Jenny with materials for plying her work, and she had a little table placed at the foot of his bed. Sitting there, with her rich shower of hair falling over the chair-back, they hoped she might attract his notice. With the same object, she would sing, just above her breath, when he opened his eyes, or she saw his brow knit into that faint expression, so evanescent that it was like a shape made in water. But as yet he had not heeded. The 'they' here mentioned were the medical attendant; Lizzie, who was there in all her intervals of rest; and Lightwood, who never left him.

The two days became three, and the three days became four. At length, quite unexpectedly, he said something in a whisper.

'What was it, my dear Eugene?'

'Will you, Mortimer—'

'Will I—?

—'Send for her?'

'My dear fellow, she is here.'

Quite unconscious of the long blank, he supposed that they were still speaking together.

The little dressmaker stood up at the foot of the bed, humming her song, and nodded to him brightly. 'I can't shake hands, Jenny,' said Eugene, with something of his old look; 'but I am very glad to see you.'

Mortimer repeated this to her, for it could only be made out by bending over him and closely watching his attempts to say it. In a little while, he added:

'Ask her if she has seen the children.'

Mortimer could not understand this, neither could Jenny herself, until he added:

'Ask her if she has smelt the flowers.'

'Oh! I know!' cried Jenny. 'I understand him now!' Then, Lightwood yielded his place to her quick approach, and she said, bending over the bed, with that better look: 'You mean my long bright slanting rows of children, who used to bring me ease and rest? You mean the children who used to take me up, and make me light?'

Eugene smiled, 'Yes.'

'I have not seen them since I saw you. I never see them now, but I am hardly ever in pain now.'

'It was a pretty fancy,' said Eugene.

'But I have heard my birds sing,' cried the little creature, 'and I have smelt my flowers. Yes, indeed I have! And both were most beautiful and most Divine!'

'Stay and help to nurse me,' said Eugene, quietly. 'I should like you to have the fancy here, before I die.'

She touched his lips with her hand, and shaded her eyes with that same hand as she went back to her work and her little low song. He heard the song with evident pleasure, until she allowed it gradually to sink away into silence.

'Mortimer.'

'My dear Eugene.'

'If you can give me anything to keep me here for only a few minutes—'

To keep you here, Eugene?'

'To prevent my wandering away I don't know where—for I begin to be sensible that I have just come back, and that I shall lose myself again—do so, dear boy!'

Mortimer gave him such stimulants as could be given him with safety (they were always at hand, ready), and bending over him once more, was about to caution him, when he said:

'Don't tell me not to speak, for I must speak. If you knew the harassing anxiety that gnaws and wears me when I am wandering in those places—where are those endless places, Mortimer? They must be at an immense distance!'

He saw in his friend's face that he was losing himself; for he added after a moment: 'Don't be afraid—I am not gone yet. What was it?'

'You wanted to tell me something, Eugene. My poor dear fellow, you wanted to say something to your old friend—to the friend who has always loved you, admired you, imitated you, founded himself upon you, been nothing without you, and who, God knows, would be here in your place if he could!'

'Tut, tut!' said Eugene with a tender glance as the other put his hand before his face. 'I am not worth it. I acknowledge that I like it, dear boy, but I am not worth it. This attack, my dear Mortimer; this murder—'

His friend leaned over him with renewed attention, saying: 'You and I suspect some one.'

'More than suspect. But, Mortimer, while I lie here, and when I lie here no longer, I trust to you that the perpetrator is never brought to justice.'

'Eugene?'

'Her innocent reputation would be ruined, my friend. She would be punished, not he. I have wronged her enough in fact; I have wronged her still more in intention. You recollect what pavement is said to be made of good intentions. It is made of bad intentions too. Mortimer, I am lying on it, and I know!'

'Be comforted, my dear Eugene.'

'I will, when you have promised me. Dear Mortimer, the man must never be pursued. If he should be accused, you must keep him silent and save him. Don't think of avenging me; think only of hushing the story and protecting her. You can confuse the case, and turn aside the circumstances. Listen to what I say to you. It was not the schoolmaster, Bradley Headstone. Do you hear me? Twice; it was not the schoolmaster, Bradley Headstone. Do you hear me? Three times; it was not the schoolmaster, Bradley Headstone.'

He stopped, exhausted. His speech had been whispered, broken, and indistinct; but by a great effort he had made it plain enough to be unmistakeable.

'Dear fellow, I am wandering away. Stay me for another moment, if you can.'

Lightwood lifted his head at the neck, and put a wine-glass to his lips. He rallied.

'I don't know how long ago it was done, whether weeks, days, or hours. No matter. There is inquiry on foot, and pursuit. Say! Is there not?'

'Yes.'

'Check it; divert it! Don't let her be brought in question. Shield her. The guilty man, brought to justice, would poison her name. Let the guilty man go unpunished. Lizzie and my reparation before all! Promise me!'

'Eugene, I do. I promise you!'

In the act of turning his eyes gratefully towards his friend, he wandered away. His eyes stood still, and settled into that former intent unmeaning stare.

Hours and hours, days and nights, he remained in this same condition. There were times when he would calmly speak to his friend after a long period of unconsciousness, and would say he was better, and would ask for something. Before it could be given him, he would be gone again.

The dolls' dressmaker, all softened compassion now, watched him with an earnestness that never relaxed. She would regularly change the ice, or the cooling spirit, on his head, and would keep her ear at the pillow betweenwhiles, listening for any faint words that fell from him in his wanderings. It was amazing through how many hours at a time she would remain beside him, in a crouching attitude, attentive to his slightest moan. As he could not move a hand, he could make no sign of distress; but, through this close watching (if through no secret sympathy or power) the little creature attained an understanding of him that Lightwood did not possess. Mortimer would often turn to her, as if she were an interpreter between this sentient world and the insensible man; and she would change the dressing of a wound, or ease a ligature, or turn his face, or alter the pressure of the bedclothes on him, with an absolute certainty of doing right. The natural lightness and delicacy of touch which had become very refined by practice in her miniature work, no doubt was involved in this; but her perception was at least as fine.

The one word, Lizzie, he muttered millions of times. In a certain phase of his distressful state, which was the worst to those who tended him, he would roll his head upon the pillow, incessantly repeating the name in a hurried and impatient manner, with the misery of a disturbed mind, and the monotony of a machine. Equally, when he lay still and staring, he would repeat it for hours without cessation, but then, always in a tone of subdued warning and horror. Her presence and her touch upon his breast or face would often stop this, and then they learned to expect that he would for some time remain still, with his eyes closed, and that he would be conscious on opening them. But, the heavy disappointment of their hope—revived by the welcome silence of the room—was, that his spirit would glide away again and be lost, in the moment of their joy that it was there.

This frequent rising of a drowning man from the deep, to sink again, was dreadful to the beholders. But, gradually the change stole upon him that it became dreadful to himself. His desire to impart something that was on his mind, his unspeakable yearning to have speech with his friend and make a communication to him, so troubled him when he recovered consciousness, that its term was thereby shortened. As the man rising from the deep would disappear the sooner for fighting with the water, so he in his desperate struggle went down again.

One afternoon when he had been lying still, and Lizzie, unrecognized, had just stolen out of the room to pursue her occupation, he uttered Lightwood's name.

'My dear Eugene, I am here.'

'How long is this to last, Mortimer?'

Lightwood shook his head. 'Still, Eugene, you are no worse than you were.'

'But I know there's no hope. Yet I pray it may last long enough for you to do me one last service, and for me to do one last action. Keep me here a few moments, Mortimer. Try, try!'

His friend gave him what aid he could, and encouraged him to believe that he was more composed, though even then his eyes were losing the expression they so rarely recovered.

'Hold me here, dear fellow, if you can. Stop my wandering away. I am going!'

'Not yet, not yet. Tell me, dear Eugene, what is it I shall do?'

'Keep me here for only a single minute. I am going away again. Don't let me go. Hear me speak first. Stop me—stop me!'

'My poor Eugene, try to be calm.'

'I do try. I try so hard. If you only knew how hard! Don't let me wander till I have spoken. Give me a little more wine.'

Lightwood complied. Eugene, with a most pathetic struggle against the unconsciousness that was coming over him, and with a look of appeal that affected his friend profoundly, said:

'You can leave me with Jenny, while you speak to her and tell her what I beseech of her. You can leave me with Jenny, while you are gone. There's not much for you to do. You won't be long away.'

'No, no, no. But tell me what it is that I shall do, Eugene!'

'I am going! You can't hold me.'

'Tell me in a word, Eugene!'

His eyes were fixed again, and the only word that came from his lips was the word millions of times repeated. Lizzie, Lizzie, Lizzie.

But, the watchful little dressmaker had been vigilant as ever in her watch, and she now came up and touched Lightwood's arm as he looked down at his friend, despairingly.

'Hush!' she said, with her finger on her lips. 'His eyes are closing. He'll be conscious when he next opens them. Shall I give you a leading word to say to him?'

'O Jenny, if you could only give me the right word!'

'I can. Stoop down.'

He stooped, and she whispered in his ear. She whispered in his ear one short word of a single syllable. Lightwood started, and looked at her.

'Try it,' said the little creature, with an excited and exultant face. She then bent over the unconscious man, and, for the first time, kissed him on the cheek, and kissed the poor maimed hand that was nearest to her. Then, she withdrew to the foot of the bed.

Some two hours afterwards, Mortimer Lightwood saw his consciousness come back, and instantly, but very tranquilly, bent over him.

'Don't speak, Eugene. Do no more than look at me, and listen to me. You follow what I say.'

He moved his head in assent.

'I am going on from the point where we broke off. Is the word we should soon have come to—is it—Wife?'

'O God bless you, Mortimer!'

'Hush! Don't be agitated. Don't speak. Hear me, dear Eugene. Your mind will be more at peace, lying here, if you make Lizzie your wife. You wish me to speak to her, and tell her so, and entreat her to be your wife. You ask her to kneel at this bedside and be married to you, that your reparation may be complete. Is that so?'

'Yes. God bless you! Yes.'

'It shall be done, Eugene. Trust it to me. I shall have to go away for some few hours, to give effect to your wishes. You see this is unavoidable?'

'Dear friend, I said so.'

'True. But I had not the clue then. How do you think I got it?'

Glancing wistfully around, Eugene saw Miss Jenny at the foot of the bed, looking at him with her elbows on the bed, and her head upon her hands. There was a trace of his whimsical air upon him, as he tried to smile at her.

'Yes indeed,' said Lightwood, 'the discovery was hers. Observe my dear Eugene; while I am away you will know that I have discharged my trust with Lizzie, by finding her here, in my present place at your bedside, to leave you no more. A final word before I go. This is the right course of a true man, Eugene. And I solemnly believe, with all my soul, that if Providence should mercifully restore you to us, you will be blessed with a noble wife in the preserver of your life, whom you will dearly love.'

'Amen. I am sure of that. But I shall not come through it, Mortimer.'

'You will not be the less hopeful or less strong, for this, Eugene.'

'No. Touch my face with yours, in case I should not hold out till you come back. I love you, Mortimer. Don't be uneasy for me while you are gone. If my dear brave girl will take me, I feel persuaded that I shall live long enough to be married, dear fellow.'

Miss Jenny gave up altogether on this parting taking place between the friends, and sitting with her back towards the bed in the bower made by her bright hair, wept heartily, though noiselessly. Mortimer Lightwood was soon gone. As the evening light lengthened the heavy reflections of the trees in the river, another figure came with a soft step into the sick room.

'Is he conscious?' asked the little dressmaker, as the figure took its station by the pillow. For, Jenny had given place to it immediately, and could not see the sufferer's face, in the dark room, from her new and removed position.

'He is conscious, Jenny,' murmured Eugene for himself. 'He knows his wife.'

Chapter 11

EFFECT IS GIVEN TO THE DOLLS' DRESSMAKER'S DISCOVERY

Mrs John Rokesmith sat at needlework in her neat little room, beside a basket of neat little articles of clothing, which presented so much of the appearance of being in the dolls' dressmaker's way of business, that one might have supposed she was going to set up in opposition to Miss Wren. Whether the Complete British Family Housewife had imparted sage counsel anent them, did not appear, but probably not, as that cloudy oracle was nowhere visible. For certain, however, Mrs John Rokesmith stitched at them with so dexterous a hand, that she must have taken lessons of somebody. Love is in all things a most wonderful teacher, and perhaps love (from a pictorial point of view, with nothing on but a thimble), had been teaching this branch of needlework to Mrs John Rokesmith.

It was near John's time for coming home, but as Mrs John was desirous to finish a special triumph of her skill before dinner, she did not go out to meet him. Placidly, though rather consequentially smiling, she sat stitching away with a regular sound, like a sort of dimpled little charming Dresden-china clock by the very best maker.

A knock at the door, and a ring at the bell. Not John; or Bella would have flown out to meet him. Then who, if not John? Bella was asking herself the question, when that fluttering little fool of a servant fluttered in, saying, 'Mr Lightwood!'

Oh good gracious!

Bella had but time to throw a handkerchief over the basket, when Mr Lightwood made his bow. There was something amiss with Mr Lightwood, for he was strangely grave and looked ill.

With a brief reference to the happy time when it had been his privilege to know Mrs Rokesmith as Miss Wilfer, Mr Lightwood explained what was amiss with him and why he came. He came bearing Lizzie Hexam's earnest hope that Mrs John Rokesmith would see her married.

Bella was so fluttered by the request, and by the short narrative he had feelingly given her, that there never was a more timely smelling-bottle than John's knock. 'My husband,' said Bella; 'I'll bring him in.'

But, that turned out to be more easily said than done; for, the instant she mentioned Mr Lightwood's name, John stopped, with his hand upon the lock of the room door.

'Come up stairs, my darling.'

Bella was amazed by the flush in his face, and by his sudden turning away. 'What can it mean?' she thought, as she accompanied him up stairs.

'Now, my life,' said John, taking her on his knee, 'tell me all about it.'

All very well to say, 'Tell me all about it;' but John was very much confused. His attention evidently trailed off, now and then, even while Bella told him all about it. Yet she knew that he took a great interest in Lizzie and her fortunes. What could it mean?

'You will come to this marriage with me, John dear?'

'N—no, my love; I can't do that.'

'You can't do that, John?'

'No, my dear, it's quite out of the question. Not to be thought of.'

'Am I to go alone, John?'

'No, my dear, you will go with Mr Lightwood.'

'Don't you think it's time we went down to Mr Lightwood, John dear?' Bella insinuated.

'My darling, it's almost time you went, but I must ask you to excuse me to him altogether.'

'You never mean, John dear, that you are not going to see him? Why, he knows you have come home. I told him so.'

'That's a little unfortunate, but it can't be helped. Unfortunate or fortunate, I positively cannot see him, my love.'

Bella cast about in her mind what could be his reason for this unaccountable behaviour; as she sat on his knee looking at him in astonishment and pouting a little. A weak reason presented itself.

'John dear, you never can be jealous of Mr Lightwood?'

'Why, my precious child,' returned her husband, laughing outright: 'how could I be jealous of him? Why should I be jealous of him?'

'Because, you know, John,' pursued Bella, pouting a little more, 'though he did rather admire me once, it was not my fault.'

'It was your fault that I admired you,' returned her husband, with a look of pride in her, 'and why not your fault that he admired you? But, I jealous on that account? Why, I must go distracted for life, if I turned jealous of every one who used to find my wife beautiful and winning!'

'I am half angry with you, John dear,' said Bella, laughing a little, 'and half pleased with you; because you are such a stupid old fellow, and yet you say nice things, as if you meant them. Don't be mysterious, sir. What harm do you know of Mr Lightwood?'

'None, my love.'

'What has he ever done to you, John?'

'He has never done anything to me, my dear. I know no more against him than I know against Mr Wrayburn; he has never done anything to me; neither has Mr Wrayburn. And yet I have exactly the same objection to both of them.'

'Oh, John!' retorted Bella, as if she were giving him up for a bad job, as she used to give up herself. 'You are nothing better than a sphinx! And a married sphinx isn't a—isn't a nice confidential husband,' said Bella, in a tone of injury.

'Bella, my life,' said John Rokesmith, touching her cheek, with a grave smile, as she cast down her eyes and pouted again; 'look at me. I want to speak to you.'

'In earnest, Blue Beard of the secret chamber?' asked Bella, clearing her pretty face.

'In earnest. And I confess to the secret chamber. Don't you remember that you asked me not to declare what I thought of your higher qualities until you had been tried?'

'Yes, John dear. And I fully meant it, and I fully mean it.'

'The time will come, my darling—I am no prophet, but I say so,—when you WILL be tried. The time will come, I think, when you will undergo a trial through which you will never pass quite triumphantly for me, unless you can put perfect faith in me.'

'Then you may be sure of me, John dear, for I can put perfect faith in you, and I do, and I always, always will. Don't judge me by a little thing like this, John. In little things, I am a little thing myself—I always was. But in great things, I hope not; I don't mean to boast, John dear, but I hope not!'

He was even better convinced of the truth of what she said than she was, as he felt her loving arms about him. If the Golden Dustman's riches had been his to stake, he would have staked them to the last farthing on the fidelity through good and evil of her affectionate and trusting heart.

'Now, I'll go down to, and go away with, Mr Lightwood,' said Bella, springing up. 'You are the most creasing and tumbling Clumsy-Boots of a packer, John, that ever was; but if you're quite good, and will promise never to do so any more (though I don't know what you have done!) you may pack me a little bag for a night, while I get my bonnet on.'

He gaily complied, and she tied her dimpled chin up, and shook her head into her bonnet, and pulled out the bows of her bonnet-strings, and got her gloves on, finger by finger, and finally got them on her little plump hands, and bade him good-bye and went down. Mr Lightwood's impatience was much relieved when he found her dressed for departure.

'Mr Rokesmith goes with us?' he said, hesitating, with a look towards the door.

'Oh, I forgot!' replied Bella. 'His best compliments. His face is swollen to the size of two faces, and he is to go to bed directly, poor fellow, to wait for the doctor, who is coming to lance him.'

'It is curious,' observed Lightwood, 'that I have never yet seen Mr Rokesmith, though we have been engaged in the same affairs.'

'Really?' said the unblushing Bella.

'I begin to think,' observed Lightwood, 'that I never shall see him.'

'These things happen so oddly sometimes,' said Bella with a steady countenance, 'that there seems a kind of fatality in them. But I am quite ready, Mr Lightwood.'

They started directly, in a little carriage that Lightwood had brought with him from never-to-be-forgotten Greenwich; and from Greenwich they started directly for London; and in London they waited at a railway station until such time as the Reverend Frank Milvey, and Margaretta his wife, with whom Mortimer Lightwood had been already in conference, should come and join them.

That worthy couple were delayed by a portentous old parishioner of the female gender, who was one of the plagues of their lives, and with whom they bore with most exemplary sweetness and good-humour, notwithstanding her having an infection of absurdity about her, that communicated itself to everything with which, and everybody with whom, she came in contact. She was a member of the Reverend Frank's congregation, and made a point of distinguishing herself in that body, by conspicuously weeping at everything, however cheering, said by the Reverend Frank in his public ministration; also by applying to herself the various lamentations of David, and complaining in a personally injured manner (much in arrear of the clerk and the rest of the respondents) that her enemies were digging pit-falls about her, and breaking her with rods of iron. Indeed, this old widow discharged herself of that portion of the Morning and Evening Service as if she were lodging a complaint on oath and applying for a warrant before a magistrate. But this was not her most inconvenient characteristic, for that took the form of an impression, usually recurring in inclement weather and at about daybreak, that she had something on her mind and stood in immediate need of the Reverend Frank to come and take it off. Many a time had that kind creature got up, and gone out to Mrs Sprodgkin (such was the disciple's name), suppressing a strong sense of her comicality by his strong sense of duty, and perfectly knowing that nothing but a cold would come of it. However, beyond themselves, the Reverend Frank Milvey and Mrs Milvey seldom hinted that Mrs Sprodgkin was hardly worth the trouble she gave; but both made the best of her, as they did of all their troubles.

This very exacting member of the fold appeared to be endowed with a sixth sense, in regard of knowing when the Reverend Frank Milvey least desired her company, and with promptitude appearing in his little hall. Consequently, when the Reverend Frank had willingly engaged that he and his wife would accompany Lightwood back, he said, as a matter of course: 'We must make haste to get out, Margaretta, my dear, or we shall be descended on by Mrs Sprodgkin.' To which Mrs Milvey replied, in her pleasantly emphatic way, 'Oh YES, for she IS such a marplot, Frank, and DOES worry so!' Words that were scarcely uttered when their theme was announced as in faithful attendance below, desiring counsel on a spiritual matter. The points on which Mrs Sprodgkin sought elucidation being seldom of a pressing nature (as Who begat Whom, or some information concerning the Amorites), Mrs Milvey on this special occasion resorted to the device of buying her off with a present of tea and sugar, and a loaf and butter. These gifts Mrs Sprodgkin accepted, but still insisted on dutifully remaining in the hall, to curtsey to the Reverend Frank as he came forth. Who, incautiously saying in his genial manner, 'Well, Sally, there you are!' involved himself in a discursive address from Mrs Sprodgkin, revolving around the result that she regarded tea and sugar in the light of myrrh and frankincense, and considered bread and butter identical with locusts and wild honey. Having communicated this edifying piece of information, Mrs Sprodgkin was left still unadjourned in the hall, and Mr and Mrs Milvey hurried in a heated condition to the railway station. All of which is here recorded to the honour of that good Christian pair, representatives of hundreds of other good Christian pairs as conscientious and as useful, who merge the smallness of their work in its greatness, and feel in no danger of losing dignity when they adapt themselves to incomprehensible humbugs.

'Detained at the last moment by one who had a claim upon me,' was the Reverend Frank's apology to Lightwood, taking no thought of himself. To which Mrs Milvey added, taking thought for him, like the championing little wife she was; 'Oh yes, detained at the last moment. But AS to the claim, Frank, I MUST say that I DO think you are OVER-considerate sometimes, and allow THAT to be a LITTLE abused.'

Bella felt conscious, in spite of her late pledge for herself, that her husband's absence would give disagreeable occasion for surprise to the Milveys. Nor could she appear quite at her ease when Mrs Milvey asked:

'HOW is Mr Rokesmith, and IS he gone before us, or DOES he follow us?'

It becoming necessary, upon this, to send him to bed again and hold him in waiting to be lanced again, Bella did it. But not half as well on the second occasion as on the first; for, a twice-told white one seems almost to become a black one, when you are not used to it.

'Oh DEAR!' said Mrs Milvey, 'I am SO sorry! Mr Rokesmith took SUCH an interest in Lizzie Hexam, when we were there before. And if we had ONLY known of his face, we COULD have given him something that would have kept it down long enough for so SHORT a purpose.'

By way of making the white one whiter, Bella hastened to stipulate that he was not in pain. Mrs Milvey was SO glad of it.

'I don't know HOW it is,' said Mrs Milvey, 'and I am SURE you don't, Frank, but the clergy and their wives seem to CAUSE swelled faces. Whenever I take notice of a child in the school, it seems to me as if its face swelled INSTANTLY. Frank NEVER makes acquaintance with a new old woman, but she gets the face-ache. And another thing is, we DO make the poor children sniff so. I don't know HOW we do it, and I should be so glad not to; but the MORE we take notice of them, the MORE they sniff. Just as they do when the text is given out.—Frank, that's a schoolmaster. I have seen him somewhere.'

The reference was to a young man of reserved appearance, in a coat and waistcoat of black, and pantaloons of pepper and salt. He had come into the office of the station, from its interior, in an unsettled way, immediately after Lightwood had gone out to the train; and he had been hurriedly reading the printed hills and notices on the wall. He had had a wandering interest in what was said among the people waiting there and passing to and fro. He had drawn nearer, at about the time when Mrs Milvey mentioned Lizzie Hexam, and had remained near, since: though always glancing towards the door by which Lightwood had gone out. He stood with his back towards them, and his gloved hands clasped behind him. There was now so evident a faltering upon him, expressive of indecision whether or no he should express his having heard himself referred to, that Mr Milvey spoke to him.

'I cannot recall your name,' he said, 'but I remember to have seen you in your school.'

'My name is Bradley Headstone, sir,' he replied, backing into a more retired place.

'I ought to have remembered it,' said Mr Milvey, giving him his hand. 'I hope you are well? A little overworked, I am afraid?'

'Yes, I am overworked just at present, sir.'

'Had no play in your last holiday time?'

'No, sir.'

'All work and no play, Mr Headstone, will not make dulness, in your case, I dare say; but it will make dyspepsia, if you don't take care.'

'I will endeavour to take care, sir. Might I beg leave to speak to you, outside, a moment?'

'By all means.'

It was evening, and the office was well lighted. The schoolmaster, who had never remitted his watch on Lightwood's door, now moved by another door to a corner without, where there was more shadow than light; and said, plucking at his gloves:

'One of your ladies, sir, mentioned within my hearing a name that I am acquainted with; I may say, well acquainted with. The name of the sister of an old pupil of mine. He was my pupil for a long time, and has got on and gone upward rapidly. The name of Hexam. The name of Lizzie Hexam.' He seemed to be a shy man, struggling against nervousness, and spoke in a very constrained way. The break he set between his last two sentences was quite embarrassing to his hearer.

'Yes,' replied Mr Milvey. 'We are going down to see her.'

'I gathered as much, sir. I hope there is nothing amiss with the sister of my old pupil? I hope no bereavement has befallen her. I hope she is in no affliction? Has lost no—relation?'

Mr Milvey thought this a man with a very odd manner, and a dark downward look; but he answered in his usual open way.

'I am glad to tell you, Mr Headstone, that the sister of your old pupil has not sustained any such loss. You thought I might be going down to bury some one?'

'That may have been the connexion of ideas, sir, with your clerical character, but I was not conscious of it.—Then you are not, sir?'

A man with a very odd manner indeed, and with a lurking look that was quite oppressive.

'No. In fact,' said Mr Milvey, 'since you are so interested in the sister of your old pupil, I may as well tell you that I am going down to marry her.'

The schoolmaster started back.

'Not to marry her, myself,' said Mr Milvey, with a smile, 'because I have a wife already. To perform the marriage service at her wedding.'

Bradley Headstone caught hold of a pillar behind him. If Mr Milvey knew an ashy face when he saw it, he saw it then.

'You are quite ill, Mr Headstone!'

'It is not much, sir. It will pass over very soon. I am accustomed to be seized with giddiness. Don't let me detain you, sir; I stand in need of no assistance, I thank you. Much obliged by your sparing me these minutes of your time.'

As Mr Milvey, who had no more minutes to spare, made a suitable reply and turned back into the office, he observed the schoolmaster to lean against the pillar with his hat in his hand, and to pull at his neckcloth as if he were trying to tear it off. The Reverend Frank accordingly directed the notice of one of the attendants to him, by saying: 'There is a person outside who seems to be really ill, and to require some help, though he says he does not.'

Lightwood had by this time secured their places, and the departure-bell was about to be rung. They took their seats, and were beginning to move out of the station, when the same attendant came running along the platform, looking into all the carriages.

'Oh! You are here, sir!' he said, springing on the step, and holding the window-frame by his elbow, as the carriage moved. 'That person you pointed out to me is in a fit.'

'I infer from what he told me that he is subject to such attacks. He will come to, in the air, in a little while.'

He was took very bad to be sure, and was biting and knocking about him (the man said) furiously. Would the gentleman give him his card, as he had seen him first? The gentleman did so, with the explanation that he knew no more of the man attacked than that he was a man of a very respectable occupation, who had said he was out of health, as his appearance would of itself have indicated. The attendant received the card, watched his opportunity for sliding down, slid down, and so it ended.

Then, the train rattled among the house-tops, and among the ragged sides of houses torn down to make way for it, and over the swarming streets, and under the fruitful earth, until it shot across the river: bursting over the quiet surface like a bomb-shell, and gone again as if it had exploded in the rush of smoke and steam and glare. A little more, and again it roared across the river, a great rocket: spurning the watery turnings and doublings with ineffable contempt, and going straight to its end, as Father Time goes to his. To whom it is no matter what living waters run high or low, reflect the heavenly lights and darknesses, produce their little growth of weeds and flowers, turn here, turn there, are noisy or still, are troubled or at rest, for their course has one sure termination, though their sources and devices are many.

Then, a carriage ride succeeded, near the solemn river, stealing away by night, as all things steal away, by night and by day, so quietly yielding to the attraction of the loadstone rock of Eternity; and the nearer they drew to the chamber where Eugene lay, the more they feared that they might find his wanderings done. At last they saw its dim light shining out, and it gave them hope: though Lightwood faltered as he thought: 'If he were gone, she would still be sitting by him.'

But he lay quiet, half in stupor, half in sleep. Bella, entering with a raised admonitory finger, kissed Lizzie softly, but said not a word. Neither did any of them speak, but all sat down at the foot of the bed, silently waiting. And now, in this night-watch, mingling with the flow of the river and with the rush of the train, came the questions into Bella's mind again: What could be in the depths of that mystery of John's? Why was it that he had never been seen by Mr Lightwood, whom he still avoided? When would that trial come, through which her faith in, and her duty to, her dear husband, was to carry her, rendering him triumphant? For, that had been his term. Her passing through the trial was to make the man she loved with all her heart, triumphant. Term not to sink out of sight in Bella's breast.

Far on in the night, Eugene opened his eyes. He was sensible, and said at once: 'How does the time go? Has our Mortimer come back?'

Lightwood was there immediately, to answer for himself. 'Yes, Eugene, and all is ready.'

'Dear boy!' returned Eugene with a smile, 'we both thank you heartily. Lizzie, tell them how welcome they are, and that I would be eloquent if I could.'

'There is no need,' said Mr Milvey. 'We know it. Are you better, Mr Wrayburn?'

'I am much happier,' said Eugene.

'Much better too, I hope?'

Eugene turned his eyes towards Lizzie, as if to spare her, and answered nothing.

Then, they all stood around the bed, and Mr Milvey, opening his book, began the service; so rarely associated with the shadow of death; so inseparable in the mind from a flush of life and gaiety and hope and health and joy. Bella thought how different from her own sunny little wedding, and wept. Mrs Milvey overflowed with pity, and wept too. The dolls' dressmaker, with her hands before her face, wept in her golden bower. Reading in a low clear voice, and bending over Eugene, who kept his eyes upon him, Mr Milvey did his office with suitable simplicity. As the bridegroom could not move his hand, they touched his fingers with the ring, and so put it on the bride. When the two plighted their troth, she laid her hand on his and kept it there. When the ceremony was done, and all the rest departed from the room, she drew her arm under his head, and laid her own head down upon the pillow by his side.

'Undraw the curtains, my dear girl,' said Eugene, after a while, 'and let us see our wedding-day.'

The sun was rising, and his first rays struck into the room, as she came back, and put her lips to his. 'I bless the day!' said Eugene. 'I bless the day!'

said Lizzie.

'You have made a poor marriage of it, my sweet wife,' said Eugene. 'A shattered graceless fellow, stretched at his length here, and next to nothing for you when you are a young widow.'

'I have made the marriage that I would have given all the world to dare to hope for,' she replied.

'You have thrown yourself away,' said Eugene, shaking his head. 'But you have followed the treasure of your heart. My justification is, that you had thrown that away first, dear girl!'

'No. I had given it to you.'

'The same thing, my poor Lizzie!'

'Hush! hush! A very different thing.'

There were tears in his eyes, and she besought him to close them. 'No,' said Eugene, again shaking his head; 'let me look at you, Lizzie, while I can. You brave devoted girl! You heroine!'

Her own eyes filled under his praises. And when he mustered strength to move his wounded head a very little way, and lay it on her bosom, the tears of both fell.

'Lizzie,' said Eugene, after a silence: 'when you see me wandering away from this refuge that I have so ill deserved, speak to me by my name, and I think I shall come back.'

'Yes, dear Eugene.'

'There!' he exclaimed, smiling. 'I should have gone then, but for that!'

A little while afterwards, when he appeared to be sinking into insensibility, she said, in a calm loving voice: 'Eugene, my dear husband!' He immediately answered: 'There again! You see how you can recall me!' And afterwards, when he could not speak, he still answered by a slight movement of his head upon her bosom.

The sun was high in the sky, when she gently disengaged herself to give him the stimulants and nourishment he required. The utter helplessness of the wreck of him that lay cast ashore there, now alarmed her, but he himself appeared a little more hopeful.

'Ah, my beloved Lizzie!' he said, faintly. 'How shall I ever pay all I owe you, if I recover!'

'Don't be ashamed of me,' she replied, 'and you will have more than paid all.'

'It would require a life, Lizzie, to pay all; more than a life.'

'Live for that, then; live for me, Eugene; live to see how hard I will try to improve myself, and never to discredit you.'

'My darling girl,' he replied, rallying more of his old manner than he had ever yet got together. 'On the contrary, I have been thinking whether it is not the best thing I can do, to die.'

'The best thing you can do, to leave me with a broken heart?'

'I don't mean that, my dear girl. I was not thinking of that. What I was thinking of was this. Out of your compassion for me, in this maimed and broken state, you make so much of me—you think so well of me—you love me so dearly.'

'Heaven knows I love you dearly!'

'And Heaven knows I prize it! Well. If I live, you'll find me out.'

'I shall find out that my husband has a mine of purpose and energy, and will turn it to the best account?'

'I hope so, dearest Lizzie,' said Eugene, wistfully, and yet somewhat whimsically. 'I hope so. But I can't summon the vanity to think so. How can I think so, looking back on such a trifling wasted youth as mine! I humbly hope it; but I daren't believe it. There is a sharp misgiving in my conscience that if I were to live, I should disappoint your good opinion and my own—and that I ought to die, my dear!'

Chapter 12

THE PASSING SHADOW

The winds and tides rose and fell a certain number of times, the earth moved round the sun a certain number of times, the ship upon the ocean made her voyage safely, and brought a baby-Bella home. Then who so blest and happy as Mrs John Rokesmith, saving and excepting Mr John Rokesmith!

'Would you not like to be rich NOW, my darling?'

'How can you ask me such a question, John dear? Am I not rich?'

These were among the first words spoken near the baby Bella as she lay asleep. She soon proved to be a baby of wonderful intelligence, evincing the strongest objection to her grandmother's society, and being invariably seized with a painful acidity of the stomach when that dignified lady honoured her with any attention.

It was charming to see Bella contemplating this baby, and finding out her own dimples in that tiny reflection, as if she were looking in the glass without personal vanity. Her cherubic father justly remarked to her husband that the baby seemed to make her younger than before, reminding him of the days when she had a pet doll and used to talk to it as she carried it about. The world might have been challenged to produce another baby who had such a store of pleasant nonsense said and sung to it, as Bella said and sung to this baby; or who was dressed and undressed as often in four-and-twenty hours as Bella dressed and undressed this baby; or who was held behind doors and poked out to stop its father's way when he came home, as this baby was; or, in a word, who did half the number of baby things, through the lively invention of a gay and proud young mother, that this inexhaustible baby did.

The inexhaustible baby was two or three months old, when Bella began to notice a cloud upon her husband's brow. Watching it, she saw a gathering and deepening anxiety there, which caused her great disquiet. More than once, she awoke him muttering in his sleep; and, though he muttered nothing worse than her own name, it was plain to her that his restlessness originated in some load of care. Therefore, Bella at length put in her claim to divide this load, and hear her half of it.

'You know, John dear,' she said, cheerily reverting to their former conversation, 'that I hope I may safely be trusted in great things. And it surely cannot be a little thing that causes you so much uneasiness. It's very considerate of you to try to hide from me that you are uncomfortable about something, but it's quite impossible to be done, John love.'

'I admit that I am rather uneasy, my own.'

'Then please to tell me what about, sir.'

But no, he evaded that. 'Never mind!' thought Bella, resolutely. 'John requires me to put perfect faith in him, and he shall not be disappointed.'

She went up to London one day, to meet him, in order that they might make some purchases. She found him waiting for her at her journey's end, and they walked away together through the streets. He was in gay spirits, though still harping on that notion of their being rich; and he said, now let them make believe that yonder fine carriage was theirs, and that it was waiting to take them home to a fine house they had; what would Bella, in that case, best like to find in the house? Well! Bella didn't know: already having everything she wanted, she couldn't say. But, by degrees she was led on to confess that she would like to have for the inexhaustible baby such a nursery as never was seen. It was to be 'a very rainbow for colours', as she was quite sure baby noticed colours; and the staircase was to be adorned with the most exquisite flowers, as she was absolutely certain baby noticed flowers; and there was to be an aviary somewhere, of the loveliest little birds, as there was not the smallest doubt in the world that baby noticed birds. Was there nothing else? No, John dear. The predilections of the inexhaustible baby being provided for, Bella could think of nothing else.

They were chatting on in this way, and John had suggested, 'No jewels for your own wear, for instance?' and Bella had replied laughing. O! if he came to that, yes, there might be a beautiful ivory case of jewels on her dressing-table; when these pictures were in a moment darkened and blotted out.

They turned a corner, and met Mr Lightwood.

He stopped as if he were petrified by the sight of Bella's husband, who in the same moment had changed colour.

'Mr Lightwood and I have met before,' he said.

'Met before, John?' Bella repeated in a tone of wonder. 'Mr Lightwood told me he had never seen you.'

'I did not then know that I had,' said Lightwood, discomposed on her account. I believed that I had only heard of—Mr Rokesmith.' With an emphasis on the name.

'When Mr Lightwood saw me, my love,' observed her husband, not avoiding his eye, but looking at him, 'my name was Julius Handford.'

Julius Handford! The name that Bella had so often seen in old newspapers, when she was an inmate of Mr Boffin's house! Julius Handford, who had been publicly entreated to appear, and for intelligence of whom a reward had been publicly offered!

'I would have avoided mentioning it in your presence,' said Lightwood to Bella, delicately; 'but since your husband mentions it himself, I must confirm his strange admission. I saw him as Mr Julius Handford, and I afterwards (unquestionably to his knowledge) took great pains to trace him out.'

'Quite true. But it was not my object or my interest,' said Rokesmith, quietly, 'to be traced out.'

Bella looked from the one to the other, in amazement.

'Mr Lightwood,' pursued her husband, 'as chance has brought us face to face at last—which is not to be wondered at, for the wonder is, that, in spite of all my pains to the contrary, chance has not confronted us together sooner—I have only to remind you that you have been at my house, and to add that I have not changed my residence.'

'Sir' returned Lightwood, with a meaning glance towards Bella, 'my position is a truly painful one. I hope that no complicity in a very dark transaction may attach to you, but you cannot fail to know that your own extraordinary conduct has laid you under suspicion.'

'I know it has,' was all the reply.

'My professional duty,' said Lightwood hesitating, with another glance towards Bella, 'is greatly at variance with my personal inclination; but I doubt, Mr Handford, or Mr Rokesmith, whether I am justified in taking leave of you here, with your whole course unexplained.'

Bella caught her husband by the hand.

'Don't be alarmed, my darling. Mr Lightwood will find that he is quite justified in taking leave of me here. At all events,' added Rokesmith, 'he will find that I mean to take leave of him here.'

'I think, sir,' said Lightwood, 'you can scarcely deny that when I came to your house on the occasion to which you have referred, you avoided me of a set purpose.'

'Mr Lightwood, I assure you I have no disposition to deny it, or intention to deny it. I should have continued to avoid you, in pursuance of the same set purpose, for a short time longer, if we had not met now. I am going straight home, and shall remain at home to-morrow until noon. Hereafter, I hope we may be better acquainted. Good-day.'

Lightwood stood irresolute, but Bella's husband passed him in the steadiest manner, with Bella on his arm; and they went home without encountering any further remonstrance or molestation from any one.

When they had dined and were alone, John Rokesmith said to his wife, who had preserved her cheerfulness: 'And you don't ask me, my dear, why I bore that name?'

'No, John love. I should dearly like to know, of course;' (which her anxious face confirmed;) 'but I wait until you can tell me of your own free will. You asked me if I could have perfect faith in you, and I said yes, and I meant it.'

It did not escape Bella's notice that he began to look triumphant. She wanted no strengthening in her firmness; but if she had had need of any, she would have derived it from his kindling face.

'You cannot have been prepared, my dearest, for such a discovery as that this mysterious Mr Handford was identical with your husband?'

'No, John dear, of course not. But you told me to prepare to be tried, and I prepared myself.'

He drew her to nestle closer to him, and told her it would soon be over, and the truth would soon appear. 'And now,' he went on, 'lay stress, my dear, on these words that I am going to add. I stand in no kind of peril, and I can by possibility be hurt at no one's hand.'

'You are quite, quite sure of that, John dear?'

'Not a hair of my head! Moreover, I have done no wrong, and have injured no man. Shall I swear it?'

'No, John!' cried Bella, laying her hand upon his lips, with a proud look. 'Never to me!'

'But circumstances,' he went on '—I can, and I will, disperse them in a moment—have surrounded me with one of the strangest suspicions ever known. You heard Mr Lightwood speak of a dark transaction?'

'Yes, John.'

'You are prepared to hear explicitly what he meant?'

'Yes, John.'

'My life, he meant the murder of John Harmon, your allotted husband.'

With a fast palpitating heart, Bella grasped him by the arm. 'You cannot be suspected, John?'

'Dear love, I can be—for I am!'

There was silence between them, as she sat looking in his face, with the colour quite gone from her own face and lips. 'How dare they!' she cried at length, in a burst of generous indignation. 'My beloved husband, how dare they!'

He caught her in his arms as she opened hers, and held her to his heart. 'Even knowing this, you can trust me, Bella?'

'I can trust you, John dear, with all my soul. If I could not trust you, I should fall dead at your feet.'

The kindling triumph in his face was bright indeed, as he looked up and rapturously exclaimed, what had he done to deserve the blessing of this dear confiding creature's heart! Again she put her hand upon his lips, saying, 'Hush!' and then told him, in her own little natural pathetic way, that if all the world were against him, she would be for him; that if all the world repudiated him, she would believe him; that if he were infamous in other eyes, he would be honoured in hers; and that, under the worst unmerited suspicion, she could devote her life to consoling him, and imparting her own faith in him to their little child.

A twilight calm of happiness then succeeding to their radiant noon, they remained at peace, until a strange voice in the room startled them both. The room being by that time dark, the voice said, 'Don't let the lady be alarmed by my striking a light,' and immediately a match rattled, and glimmered in a hand. The hand and the match and the voice were then seen by John Rokesmith to belong to Mr Inspector, once meditatively active in this chronicle.

'I take the liberty,' said Mr Inspector, in a business-like manner, 'to bring myself to the recollection of Mr Julius Handford, who gave me his name and address down at our place a considerable time ago. Would the lady object to my lighting the pair of candles on the chimneypiece, to throw a further light upon the subject? No? Thank you, ma'am. Now, we look cheerful.'

Mr Inspector, in a dark-blue buttoned-up frock coat and pantaloons, presented a serviceable, half-pay, Royal Arms kind of appearance, as he applied his pocket handkerchief to his nose and bowed to the lady.

'You favoured me, Mr Handford,' said Mr Inspector, 'by writing down your name and address, and I produce the piece of paper on which you wrote it. Comparing the same with the writing on the fly-leaf of this book on the table—and a sweet pretty volume it is—I find the writing of the entry, "Mrs John Rokesmith. From her husband on her birthday"—and very gratifying to the feelings such memorials are—to correspond exactly. Can I have a word with you?'

'Certainly. Here, if you please,' was the reply.

'Why,' retorted Mr Inspector, again using his pocket handkerchief, 'though there's nothing for the lady to be at all alarmed at, still, ladies are apt to take alarm at matters of business—being of that fragile sex that they're not accustomed to them when not of a strictly domestic character—and I do generally make it a rule to propose retirement from the presence of ladies, before entering upon business topics. Or perhaps,' Mr Inspector hinted, 'if the lady was to step up-stairs, and take a look at baby now!'

'Mrs Rokesmith,'—her husband was beginning; when Mr Inspector, regarding the words as an introduction, said, 'Happy I am sure, to have the honour.' And bowed, with gallantry.

'Mrs Rokesmith,' resumed her husband, 'is satisfied that she can have no reason for being alarmed, whatever the business is.'

'Really? Is that so?' said Mr Inspector. 'But it's a sex to live and learn from, and there's nothing a lady can't accomplish when she once fully gives her mind to it. It's the case with my own wife. Well, ma'am, this good gentleman of yours has given rise to a rather large amount of trouble which might have been avoided if he had come forward and explained himself. Well you see! He DIDN'T come forward and explain himself. Consequently, now that we meet, him and me, you'll say—and say right—that there's nothing to be alarmed at, in my proposing to him TO come forward—or, putting the same meaning in another form, to come along with me—and explain himself.'

When Mr Inspector put it in that other form, 'to come along with me,' there was a relishing roll in his voice, and his eye beamed with an official lustre.

'Do you propose to take me into custody?' inquired John Rokesmith, very coolly.

'Why argue?' returned Mr Inspector in a comfortable sort of remonstrance; 'ain't it enough that I propose that you shall come along with me?'

'For what reason?'

Lord bless my soul and body!' returned Mr Inspector, 'I wonder at it in a man of your education. Why argue?'

'What do you charge against me?'

'I wonder at you before a lady,' said Mr Inspector, shaking his head reproachfully: 'I wonder, brought up as you have been, you haven't a more delicate mind! I charge you, then, with being some way concerned in the Harmon Murder. I don't say whether before, or in, or after, the fact. I don't say whether with having some knowledge of it that hasn't come out.'

'You don't surprise me. I foresaw your visit this afternoon.'

'Don't!' said Mr Inspector. 'Why, why argue? It's my duty to inform you that whatever you say, will be used against you.'

'I don't think it will.'

'But I tell you it will,' said Mr Inspector. 'Now, having received the caution, do you still say that you foresaw my visit this afternoon?'

'Yes. And I will say something more, if you will step with me into the next room.'

With a reassuring kiss on the lips of the frightened Bella, her husband (to whom Mr Inspector obligingly offered his arm), took up a candle, and withdrew with that gentleman. They were a full half-hour in conference. When they returned, Mr Inspector looked considerably astonished.

'I have invited this worthy officer, my dear,' said John, 'to make a short excursion with me in which you shall be a sharer. He will take something to eat and drink, I dare say, on your invitation, while you are getting your bonnet on.'

Mr Inspector declined eating, but assented to the proposal of a glass of brandy and water. Mixing this cold, and pensively consuming it, he broke at intervals into such soliloquies as that he never did know such a move, that he never had been so gravelled, and that what a game was this to try the sort of stuff a man's opinion of himself was made of! Concurrently with these comments, he more than once burst out a laughing, with the half-enjoying and half-piqued air of a man, who had given up a good conundrum, after much guessing, and been told the answer. Bella was so timid of him, that she noted these things in a half-shrinking, half-perceptive way, and similarly noted that there was a great change in his manner towards John. That coming-along-with-him deportment was now lost in long musing looks at John and at herself and sometimes in slow heavy rubs of his hand across his forehead, as if he were ironing cut the creases which his deep pondering made there. He had had some coughing and whistling satellites secretly gravitating towards him about the premises, but they were now dismissed, and he eyed John as if he had meant to do him a public service, but had unfortunately been anticipated. Whether Bella might have noted anything more, if she had been less afraid of him, she could not determine; but it was all inexplicable to her, and not the faintest flash of the real state of the case broke in upon her mind. Mr Inspector's increased notice of herself and knowing way of raising his eyebrows when their eyes by any chance met, as if he put the question 'Don't you see?' augmented her timidity, and, consequently, her perplexity. For all these reasons, when he and she and John, at towards nine o'clock of a winter evening went to London, and began driving from London Bridge, among low-lying water-side wharves and docks and strange places, Bella was in the state of a dreamer; perfectly unable to account for her being there, perfectly unable to forecast what would happen next, or whither she was going, or why; certain of nothing in the immediate present, but that she confided in John, and that John seemed somehow to be getting more triumphant. But what a certainty was that!

They alighted at last at the corner of a court, where there was a building with a bright lamp and wicket gate. Its orderly appearance was very unlike that of the surrounding neighbourhood, and was explained by the inscription POLICE STATION.

'We are not going in here, John?' said Bella, clinging to him.

'Yes, my dear; but of our own accord. We shall come out again as easily, never fear.'

The whitewashed room was pure white as of old, the methodical book-keeping was in peaceful progress as of old, and some distant howler was banging against a cell door as of old. The sanctuary was not a permanent abiding-place, but a kind of criminal Pickford's. The lower passions and vices were regularly ticked off in the books, warehoused in the cells, carted away as per accompanying invoice, and left little mark upon it.

Mr Inspector placed two chairs for his visitors, before the fire, and communed in a low voice with a brother of his order (also of a half-pay, and Royal Arms aspect), who, judged only by his occupation at the moment, might have been a writing-master, setting copies. Their conference done, Mr Inspector returned to the fireplace, and, having observed that he would step round to the Fellowships and see how matters stood, went out. He soon came back again, saying, 'Nothing could be better, for they're at supper with Miss Abbey in the bar;' and then they all three went out together.

Still, as in a dream, Bella found herself entering a snug old-fashioned public-house, and found herself smuggled into a little three-cornered room nearly opposite the bar of that establishment. Mr Inspector achieved the smuggling of herself and John into this queer room, called Cosy in an inscription on the door, by entering in the narrow passage first in order, and suddenly turning round upon them with extended arms, as if they had been two sheep. The room was lighted for their reception.

'Now,' said Mr Inspector to John, turning the gas lower; 'I'll mix with 'em in a casual way, and when I say Identification, perhaps you'll show yourself.'

John nodded, and Mr Inspector went alone to the half-door of the bar. From the dim doorway of Cosy, within which Bella and her husband stood, they could see a comfortable little party of three persons sitting at supper in the bar, and could hear everything that was said.

The three persons were Miss Abbey and two male guests. To whom collectively, Mr Inspector remarked that the weather was getting sharp for the time of year.

'It need be sharp to suit your wits, sir,' said Miss Abbey. 'What have you got in hand now?'

'Thanking you for your compliment: not much, Miss Abbey,' was Mr Inspector's rejoinder.

'Who have you got in Cosy?' asked Miss Abbey.

'Only a gentleman and his wife, Miss.'

'And who are they? If one may ask it without detriment to your deep plans in the interests of the honest public?' said Miss Abbey, proud of Mr Inspector as an administrative genius.

'They are strangers in this part of the town, Miss Abbey. They are waiting till I shall want the gentleman to show himself somewhere, for half a moment.'

'While they're waiting,' said Miss Abbey, 'couldn't you join us?'

Mr Inspector immediately slipped into the bar, and sat down at the side of the half-door, with his back towards the passage, and directly facing the two guests. 'I don't take my supper till later in the night,' said he, 'and therefore I won't disturb the compactness of the table. But I'll take a glass of flip, if that's flip in the jug in the fender.'

'That's flip,' replied Miss Abbey, 'and it's my making, and if even you can find out better, I shall be glad to know where.' Filling him, with hospitable hands, a steaming tumbler, Miss Abbey replaced the jug by the fire; the company not having yet arrived at the flip-stage of their supper, but being as yet skirmishing with strong ale.

'Ah—h!' cried Mr Inspector. 'That's the smack! There's not a Detective in the Force, Miss Abbey, that could find out better stuff than that.'

'Glad to hear you say so,' rejoined Miss Abbey. 'You ought to know, if anybody does.'

'Mr Job Potterson,' Mr Inspector continued, 'I drink your health. Mr Jacob Kibble, I drink yours. Hope you have made a prosperous voyage home, gentlemen both.'

Mr Kibble, an unctuous broad man of few words and many mouthfuls, said, more briefly than pointedly, raising his ale to his lips: 'Same to you.' Mr Job Potterson, a semi-seafaring man of obliging demeanour, said, 'Thank you, sir.'

'Lord bless my soul and body!' cried Mr Inspector. 'Talk of trades, Miss Abbey, and the way they set their marks on men' (a subject which nobody had approached); 'who wouldn't know your brother to be a Steward! There's a bright and ready twinkle in his eye, there's a neatness in his action, there's a smartness in his figure, there's an air of reliability about him in case you wanted a basin, which points out the steward! And Mr Kibble; ain't he Passenger, all over? While there's that mercantile cut upon him which would make you happy to give him credit for five hundred pound, don't you see the salt sea shining on him too?'

'YOU do, I dare say,' returned Miss Abbey, 'but I don't. And as for stewarding, I think it's time my brother gave that up, and took his House in hand on his sister's retiring. The House will go to pieces if he don't. I wouldn't sell it for any money that could be told out, to a person that I couldn't depend upon to be a Law to the Porters, as I have been.'

'There you're right, Miss,' said Mr Inspector. 'A better kept house is not known to our men. What do I say? Half so well a kept house is not known to our men. Show the Force the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters, and the Force—to a constable—will show you a piece of perfection, Mr Kibble.'

That gentleman, with a very serious shake of his head, subscribed the article.

'And talk of Time slipping by you, as if it was an animal at rustic sports with its tail soaped,' said Mr Inspector (again, a subject which nobody had approached); 'why, well you may. Well you may. How has it slipped by us, since the time when Mr Job Potterson here present, Mr Jacob Kibble here present, and an Officer of the Force here present, first came together on a matter of Identification!'

Bella's husband stepped softly to the half-door of the bar, and stood there.

'How has Time slipped by us,' Mr Inspector went on slowly, with his eyes narrowly observant of the two guests, 'since we three very men, at an Inquest in this very house—Mr Kibble? Taken ill, sir?'

Mr Kibble had staggered up, with his lower jaw dropped, catching Potterson by the shoulder, and pointing to the half-door. He now cried out: 'Potterson! Look! Look there!' Potterson started up, started back, and exclaimed: 'Heaven defend us, what's that!' Bella's husband stepped back to Bella, took her in his arms (for she was terrified by the unintelligible terror of the two men), and shut the door of the little room. A hurry of voices succeeded, in which Mr Inspector's voice was busiest; it gradually slackened and sank; and Mr Inspector reappeared. 'Sharp's the word, sir!' he said, looking in with a knowing wink. 'We'll get your lady out at once.' Immediately, Bella and her husband were under the stars, making their way back, alone, to the vehicle they had kept in waiting.

All this was most extraordinary, and Bella could make nothing of it but that John was in the right. How in the right, and how suspected of being in the wrong, she could not divine. Some vague idea that he had never really assumed the name of Handford, and that there was a remarkable likeness between him and that mysterious person, was her nearest approach to any definite explanation. But John was triumphant; that much was made apparent; and she could wait for the rest.

When John came home to dinner next day, he said, sitting down on the sofa by Bella and baby-Bella: 'My dear, I have a piece of news to tell you. I have left the China House.'

As he seemed to like having left it, Bella took it for granted that there was no misfortune in the case.

'In a word, my love,' said John, 'the China House is broken up and abolished. There is no such thing any more.'

'Then, are you already in another House, John?'

'Yes, my darling. I am in another way of business. And I am rather better off.'

The inexhaustible baby was instantly made to congratulate him, and to say, with appropriate action on the part of a very limp arm and a speckled fist: 'Three cheers, ladies and gemplemorums. Hoo—ray!'

'I am afraid, my life,' said John, 'that you have become very much attached to this cottage?'

'Afraid I have, John? Of course I have.'

'The reason why I said afraid,' returned John, 'is, because we must move.'

'O John!'

'Yes, my dear, we must move. We must have our head-quarters in London now. In short, there's a dwelling-house rent-free, attached to my new position, and we must occupy it.'

'That's a gain, John.'

'Yes, my dear, it is undoubtedly a gain.'

He gave her a very blithe look, and a very sly look. Which occasioned the inexhaustible baby to square at him with the speckled fists, and demand in a threatening manner what he meant?

'My love, you said it was a gain, and I said it was a gain. A very innocent remark, surely.'

'I won't,' said the inexhaustible baby, '—allow—you—to—make—game—of—my—venerable—Ma.' At each division administering a soft facer with one of the speckled fists.

John having stooped down to receive these punishing visitations, Bella asked him, would it be necessary to move soon? Why yes, indeed (said John), he did propose that they should move very soon. Taking the furniture with them, of course? (said Bella). Why, no (said John), the fact was, that the house was—in a sort of a kind of a way—furnished already.

The inexhaustible baby, hearing this, resumed the offensive, and said: 'But there's no nursery for me, sir. What do you mean, marble-hearted parent?' To which the marble-hearted parent rejoined that there was a—sort of a kind of a—nursery, and it might be 'made to do'. 'Made to do?' returned the Inexhaustible, administering more punishment, 'what do you take me for?' And was then turned over on its back in Bella's lap, and smothered with kisses.

'But really, John dear,' said Bella, flushed in quite a lovely manner by these exercises, 'will the new house, just as it stands, do for baby? That's the question.'

'I felt that to be the question,' he returned, 'and therefore I arranged that you should come with me and look at it, to-morrow morning.' Appointment made, accordingly, for Bella to go up with him to-morrow morning; John kissed; and Bella delighted.

When they reached London in pursuance of their little plan, they took coach and drove westward. Not only drove westward, but drove into that particular westward division, which Bella had seen last when she turned her face from Mr Boffin's door. Not only drove into that particular division, but drove at last into that very street. Not only drove into that very street, but stopped at last at that very house.

'John dear!' cried Bella, looking out of window in a flutter. 'Do you see where we are?'

'Yes, my love. The coachman's quite right.'

The house-door was opened without any knocking or ringing, and John promptly helped her out. The servant who stood holding the door, asked no question of John, neither did he go before them or follow them as they went straight up-stairs. It was only her husband's encircling arm, urging her on, that prevented Bella from stopping at the foot of the staircase. As they ascended, it was seen to be tastefully ornamented with most beautiful flowers.

'O John!' said Bella, faintly. 'What does this mean?'

'Nothing, my darling, nothing. Let us go on.'

Going on a little higher, they came to a charming aviary, in which a number of tropical birds, more gorgeous in colour than the flowers, were flying about; and among those birds were gold and silver fish, and mosses, and water-lilies, and a fountain, and all manner of wonders.

'O my dear John!' said Bella. 'What does this mean?'

'Nothing, my darling, nothing. Let us go on.'

They went on, until they came to a door. As John put out his hand to open it, Bella caught his hand.

'I don't know what it means, but it's too much for me. Hold me, John, love.'

John caught her up in his arm, and lightly dashed into the room with her.

Behold Mr and Mrs Boffin, beaming! Behold Mrs Boffin clapping her hands in an ecstacy, running to Bella with tears of joy pouring down her comely face, and folding her to her breast, with the words: 'My deary deary, deary girl, that Noddy and me saw married and couldn't wish joy to, or so much as speak to! My deary, deary, deary, wife of John and mother of his little child! My loving loving, bright bright, Pretty Pretty! Welcome to your house and home, my deary!'

Chapter 13

SHOWING HOW THE GOLDEN DUSTMAN HELPED TO SCATTER DUST

In all the first bewilderment of her wonder, the most bewilderingly wonderful thing to Bella was the shining countenance of Mr Boffin. That his wife should be joyous, open-hearted, and genial, or that her face should express every quality that was large and trusting, and no quality that was little or mean, was accordant with Bella's experience. But, that he, with a perfectly beneficent air and a plump rosy face, should be standing there, looking at her and John, like some jovial good spirit, was marvellous. For, how had he looked when she last saw him in that very room (it was the room in which she had given him that piece of her mind at parting), and what had become of all those crooked lines of suspicion, avarice, and distrust, that twisted his visage then?

Mrs Boffin seated Bella on the large ottoman, and seated herself beside her, and John her husband seated himself on the other side of her, and Mr Boffin stood beaming at every one and everything he could see, with surpassing jollity and enjoyment. Mrs Boffin was then taken with a laughing fit of clapping her hands, and clapping her knees, and rocking herself to and fro, and then with another laughing fit of embracing Bella, and rocking her to and fro—both fits, of considerable duration.

'Old lady, old lady,' said Mr Boffin, at length; 'if you don't begin somebody else must.'

'I'm a going to begin, Noddy, my dear,' returned Mrs Boffin. 'Only it isn't easy for a person to know where to begin, when a person is in this state of delight and happiness. Bella, my dear. Tell me, who's this?'

'Who is this?' repeated Bella. 'My husband.'

'Ah! But tell me his name, deary!' cried Mrs Boffin.

'Rokesmith.'

'No, it ain't!' cried Mrs Boffin, clapping her hands, and shaking her head. 'Not a bit of it.'

'Handford then,' suggested Bella.

'No, it ain't!' cried Mrs Boffin, again clapping her hands and shaking her head. 'Not a bit of it.'

'At least, his name is John, I suppose?' said Bella.

'Ah! I should think so, deary!' cried Mrs Boffin. 'I should hope so! Many and many is the time I have called him by his name of John. But what's his other name, his true other name? Give a guess, my pretty!'

'I can't guess,' said Bella, turning her pale face from one to another.

'I could,' cried Mrs Boffin, 'and what's more, I did! I found him out, all in a flash as I may say, one night. Didn't I, Noddy?'

'Ay! That the old lady did!' said Mr Boffin, with stout pride in the circumstance.

'Harkee to me, deary,' pursued Mrs Boffin, taking Bella's hands between her own, and gently beating on them from time to time. 'It was after a particular night when John had been disappointed—as he thought—in his affections. It was after a night when John had made an offer to a certain young lady, and the certain young lady had refused it. It was after a particular night, when he felt himself cast-away-like, and had made up his mind to go seek his fortune. It was the very next night. My Noddy wanted a paper out of his Secretary's room, and I says to Noddy, "I am going by the door, and I'll ask him for it." I tapped at his door, and he didn't hear me. I looked in, and saw him a sitting lonely by his fire, brooding over it. He chanced to look up with a pleased kind of smile in my company when he saw me, and then in a single moment every grain of the gunpowder that had been lying sprinkled thick about him ever since I first set eyes upon him as a man at the Bower, took fire! Too many a time had I seen him sitting lonely, when he was a poor child, to be pitied, heart and hand! Too many a time had I seen him in need of being brightened up with a comforting word! Too many and too many a time to be mistaken, when that glimpse of him come at last! No, no! I just makes out to cry, "I know you now! You're John!" And he catches me as I drops.—So what,' says Mrs Boffin, breaking off in the rush of her speech to smile most radiantly, 'might you think by this time that your husband's name was, dear?'

'Not,' returned Bella, with quivering lips; 'not Harmon? That's not possible?'

'Don't tremble. Why not possible, deary, when so many things are possible?' demanded Mrs Boffin, in a soothing tone.

'He was killed,' gasped Bella.

'Thought to be,' said Mrs Boffin. 'But if ever John Harmon drew the breath of life on earth, that is certainly John Harmon's arm round your waist now, my pretty. If ever John Harmon had a wife on earth, that wife is certainly you. If ever John Harmon and his wife had a child on earth, that child is certainly this.'

By a master-stroke of secret arrangement, the inexhaustible baby here appeared at the door, suspended in mid-air by invisible agency. Mrs Boffin, plunging at it, brought it to Bella's lap, where both Mrs and Mr Boffin (as the saying is) 'took it out of' the Inexhaustible in a shower of caresses. It was only this timely appearance that kept Bella from swooning. This, and her husband's earnestness in explaining further to her how it had come to pass that he had been supposed to be slain, and had even been suspected of his own murder; also, how he had put a pious fraud upon her which had preyed upon his mind, as the time for its disclosure approached, lest she might not make full allowance for the object with which it had originated, and in which it had fully developed.

'But bless ye, my beauty!' cried Mrs Boffin, taking him up short at this point, with another hearty clap of her hands. 'It wasn't John only that was in it. We was all of us in it.'

'I don't,' said Bella, looking vacantly from one to another, 'yet understand—'

'Of course you don't, my deary,' exclaimed Mrs Boffin. 'How can you till you're told! So now I am a going to tell you. So you put your two hands between my two hands again,' cried the comfortable creature, embracing her, 'with that blessed little picter lying on your lap, and you shall be told all the story. Now, I'm a going to tell the story. Once, twice, three times, and the horses is off. Here they go! When I cries out that night, "I know you now, you're John! "—which was my exact words; wasn't they, John?'

'Your exact words,' said John, laying his hand on hers.

'That's a very good arrangement,' cried Mrs Boffin. 'Keep it there, John. And as we was all of us in it, Noddy you come and lay yours a top of his, and we won't break the pile till the story's done.'

Mr Boffin hitched up a chair, and added his broad brown right hand to the heap.

'That's capital!' said Mrs Boffin, giving it a kiss. 'Seems quite a family building; don't it? But the horses is off. Well! When I cries out that night, "I know you now! you're John!" John catches of me, it is true; but I ain't a light weight, bless ye, and he's forced to let me down. Noddy, he hears a noise, and in he trots, and as soon as I anyways comes to myself I calls to him, "Noddy, well I might say as I did say, that night at the Bower, for the Lord be thankful this is John!" On which he gives a heave, and down he goes likewise, with his head under the writing-table. This brings me round comfortable, and that brings him round comfortable, and then John and him and me we all fall a crying for joy.'

'Yes! They cry for joy, my darling,' her husband struck in. 'You understand? These two, whom I come to life to disappoint and dispossess, cry for joy!'

Bella looked at him confusedly, and looked again at Mrs Boffin's radiant face.

'That's right, my dear, don't you mind him,' said Mrs Boffin, 'stick to me. Well! Then we sits down, gradually gets cool, and holds a confabulation. John, he tells us how he is despairing in his mind on accounts of a certain fair young person, and how, if I hadn't found him out, he was going away to seek his fortune far and wide, and had fully meant never to come to life, but to leave the property as our wrongful inheritance for ever and a day. At which you never see a man so frightened as my Noddy was. For to think that he should have come into the property wrongful, however innocent, and—more than that—might have gone on keeping it to his dying day, turned him whiter than chalk.'

'And you too,' said Mr Boffin.

'Don't you mind him, neither, my deary,' resumed Mrs Boffin; 'stick to me. This brings up a confabulation regarding the certain fair young person; when Noddy he gives it as his opinion that she is a deary creetur. "She may be a leetle spoilt, and nat'rally spoilt," he says, "by circumstances, but that's only the surface, and I lay my life," he says, "that she's the true golden gold at heart."

'So did you,' said Mr Boffin.

'Don't you mind him a single morsel, my dear,' proceeded Mrs Boffin, 'but stick to me. Then says John, O, if he could but prove so! Then we both of us ups and says, that minute, "Prove so!"'

With a start, Bella directed a hurried glance towards Mr Boffin. But, he was sitting thoughtfully smiling at that broad brown hand of his, and either didn't see it, or would take no notice of it.

'"Prove it, John!" we says,' repeated Mrs Boffin. '"Prove it and overcome your doubts with triumph, and be happy for the first time in your life, and for the rest of your life." This puts John in a state, to be sure. Then we says, "What will content you? If she was to stand up for you when you was slighted, if she was to show herself of a generous mind when you was oppressed, if she was to be truest to you when you was poorest and friendliest, and all this against her own seeming interest, how would that do?" "Do?" says John, "it would raise me to the skies." "Then," says my Noddy, "make your preparations for the ascent, John, it being my firm belief that up you go!"'

Bella caught Mr Boffin's twinkling eye for half an instant; but he got it away from her, and restored it to his broad brown hand.

'From the first, you was always a special favourite of Noddy's,' said Mrs Boffin, shaking her head. 'O you were! And if I had been inclined to be jealous, I don't know what I mightn't have done to you. But as I wasn't—why, my beauty,' with a hearty laugh and an embrace, 'I made you a special favourite of my own too. But the horses is coming round the corner. Well! Then says my Noddy, shaking his sides till he was fit to make 'em ache again: "Look out for being slighted and oppressed, John, for if ever a man had a hard master, you shall find me from this present time to be such to you." And then he began!' cried Mrs Boffin, in an ecstacy of admiration. 'Lord bless you, then he began! And how he DID begin; didn't he!'

Bella looked half frightened, and yet half laughed.

'But, bless you,' pursued Mrs Boffin, 'if you could have seen him of a night, at that time of it! The way he'd sit and chuckle over himself! The way he'd say "I've been a regular brown bear to-day," and take himself in his arms and hug himself at the thoughts of the brute he had pretended. But every night he says to me: "Better and better, old lady. What did we say of her? She'll come through it, the true golden gold. This'll be the happiest piece of work we ever done." And then he'd say, "I'll be a grislier old growler to-morrow!" and laugh, he would, till John and me was often forced to slap his back, and bring it out of his windpipes with a little water.'

Mr Boffin, with his face bent over his heavy hand, made no sound, but rolled his shoulders when thus referred to, as if he were vastly enjoying himself.

'And so, my good and pretty,' pursued Mrs Boffin, 'you was married, and there was we hid up in the church-organ by this husband of yours; for he wouldn't let us out with it then, as was first meant. "No," he says, "she's so unselfish and contented, that I can't afford to be rich yet. I must wait a little longer." Then, when baby was expected, he says, "She is such a cheerful, glorious housewife that I can't afford to be rich yet. I must wait a little longer." Then when baby was born, he says, "She is so much better than she ever was, that I can't afford to be rich yet. I must wait a little longer." And so he goes on and on, till I says outright, "Now, John, if you don't fix a time for setting her up in her own house and home, and letting us walk out of it, I'll turn Informer." Then he says he'll only wait to triumph beyond what we ever thought possible, and to show her to us better than even we ever supposed; and he says, "She shall see me under suspicion of having murdered myself, and YOU shall see how trusting and how true she'll be." Well! Noddy and me agreed to that, and he was right, and here you are, and the horses is in, and the story is done, and God bless you my Beauty, and God bless us all!'

The pile of hands dispersed, and Bella and Mrs Boffin took a good long hug of one another: to the apparent peril of the inexhaustible baby, lying staring in Bella's lap.

'But IS the story done?' said Bella, pondering. 'Is there no more of it?'

'What more of it should there be, deary?' returned Mrs Boffin, full of glee.

'Are you sure you have left nothing out of it?' asked Bella.

'I don't think I have,' said Mrs Boffin, archly.

'John dear,' said Bella, 'you're a good nurse; will you please hold baby?' Having deposited the Inexhaustible in his arms with those words, Bella looked hard at Mr Boffin, who had moved to a table where he was leaning his head upon his hand with his face turned away, and, quietly settling herself on her knees at his side, and drawing one arm over his shoulder, said: 'Please I beg your pardon, and I made a small mistake of a word when I took leave of you last. Please I think you are better (not worse) than Hopkins, better (not worse) than Dancer, better (not worse) than Blackberry Jones, better (not worse) than any of them! Please something more!' cried Bella, with an exultant ringing laugh as she struggled with him and forced him to turn his delighted face to hers. 'Please I have found out something not yet mentioned. Please I don't believe you are a hard-hearted miser at all, and please I don't believe you ever for one single minute were!'

At this, Mrs Boffin fairly screamed with rapture, and sat beating her feet upon the floor, clapping her hands, and bobbing herself backwards and forwards, like a demented member of some Mandarin's family.

'O, I understand you now, sir!' cried Bella. 'I want neither you nor any one else to tell me the rest of the story. I can tell it to YOU, now, if you would like to hear it.'

'Can you, my dear?' said Mr Boffin. 'Tell it then.'

'What?' cried Bella, holding him prisoner by the coat with both hands. 'When you saw what a greedy little wretch you were the patron of, you determined to show her how much misused and misprized riches could do, and often had done, to spoil people; did you? Not caring what she thought of you (and Goodness knows THAT was of no consequence!) you showed her, in yourself, the most detestable sides of wealth, saying in your own mind, "This shallow creature would never work the truth out of her own weak soul, if she had a hundred years to do it in; but a glaring instance kept before her may open even her eyes and set her thinking." That was what you said to yourself, was it, sir?'

'I never said anything of the sort,' Mr Boffin declared in a state of the highest enjoyment.

'Then you ought to have said it, sir,' returned Bella, giving him two pulls and one kiss, 'for you must have thought and meant it. You saw that good fortune was turning my stupid head and hardening my silly heart—was making me grasping, calculating, insolent, insufferable—and you took the pains to be the dearest and kindest fingerpost that ever was set up anywhere, pointing out the road that I was taking and the end it led to. Confess instantly!'

'John,' said Mr Boffin, one broad piece of sunshine from head to foot, 'I wish you'd help me out of this.'

'You can't be heard by counsel, sir,' returned Bella. 'You must speak for yourself. Confess instantly!'

'Well, my dear,' said Mr Boffin, 'the truth is, that when we did go in for the little scheme that my old lady has pinted out, I did put it to John, what did he think of going in for some such general scheme as YOU have pinted out? But I didn't in any way so word it, because I didn't in any way so mean it. I only said to John, wouldn't it be more consistent, me going in for being a reg'lar brown bear respecting him, to go in as a reg'lar brown bear all round?'

'Confess this minute, sir,' said Bella, 'that you did it to correct and amend me!'

'Certainly, my dear child,' said Mr Boffin, 'I didn't do it to harm you; you may be sure of that. And I did hope it might just hint a caution. Still, it ought to be mentioned that no sooner had my old lady found out John, than John made known to her and me that he had had his eye upon a thankless person by the name of Silas Wegg. Partly for the punishment of which Wegg, by leading him on in a very unhandsome and underhanded game that he was playing, them books that you and me bought so many of together (and, by-the-by, my dear, he wasn't Blackberry Jones, but Blewberry) was read aloud to me by that person of the name of Silas Wegg aforesaid.'

Bella, who was still on her knees at Mr Boffin's feet, gradually sank down into a sitting posture on the ground, as she meditated more and more thoughtfully, with her eyes upon his beaming face.

'Still,' said Bella, after this meditative pause, 'there remain two things that I cannot understand. Mrs Boffin never supposed any part of the change in Mr Boffin to be real; did she?—You never did; did you?' asked Bella, turning to her.

'No!' returned Mrs Boffin, with a most rotund and glowing negative.

'And yet you took it very much to heart,' said Bella. 'I remember its making you very uneasy, indeed.'

'Ecod, you see Mrs John has a sharp eye, John!' cried Mr Boffin, shaking his head with an admiring air. 'You're right, my dear. The old lady nearly blowed us into shivers and smithers, many times.'

'Why?' asked Bella. 'How did that happen, when she was in your secret?'

'Why, it was a weakness in the old lady,' said Mr Boffin; 'and yet, to tell you the whole truth and nothing but the truth, I'm rather proud of it. My dear, the old lady thinks so high of me that she couldn't abear to see and hear me coming out as a reg'lar brown one. Couldn't abear to make-believe as I meant it! In consequence of which, we was everlastingly in danger with her.'

Mrs Boffin laughed heartily at herself; but a certain glistening in her honest eyes revealed that she was by no means cured of that dangerous propensity.

'I assure you, my dear,' said Mr Boffin, 'that on the celebrated day when I made what has since been agreed upon to be my grandest demonstration—

I allude to Mew says the cat, Quack quack says the duck, and Bow-wow-wow says the dog—I assure you, my dear, that on that celebrated day, them flinty and unbelieving words hit my old lady so hard on my account, that I had to hold her, to prevent her running out after you, and defending me by saying I was playing a part.'

Mrs Boffin laughed heartily again, and her eyes glistened again, and it then appeared, not only that in that burst of sarcastic eloquence Mr Boffin was considered by his two fellow-conspirators to have outdone himself, but that in his own opinion it was a remarkable achievement. 'Never thought of it afore the moment, my dear!' he observed to Bella. 'When John said, if he had been so happy as to win your affections and possess your heart, it come into my head to turn round upon him with "Win her affections and possess her heart! Mew says the cat, Quack quack says the duck, and Bow-wow-wow says the dog." I couldn't tell you how it come into my head or where from, but it had so much the sound of a rasper that I own to you it astonished myself. I was awful nigh bursting out a laughing though, when it made John stare!'

'You said, my pretty,' Mrs Boffin reminded Bella, 'that there was one other thing you couldn't understand.'

'O yes!' cried Bella, covering her face with her hands; 'but that I never shall be able to understand as long as I live. It is, how John could love me so when I so little deserved it, and how you, Mr and Mrs Boffin, could be so forgetful of yourselves, and take such pains and trouble, to make me a little better, and after all to help him to so unworthy a wife. But I am very very grateful.'

It was John Harmon's turn then—John Harmon now for good, and John Rokesmith for nevermore—to plead with her (quite unnecessarily) in behalf of his deception, and to tell her, over and over again, that it had been prolonged by her own winning graces in her supposed station of life. This led on to many interchanges of endearment and enjoyment on all sides, in the midst of which the Inexhaustible being observed staring, in a most imbecile manner, on Mrs Boffin's breast, was pronounced to be supernaturally intelligent as to the whole transaction, and was made to declare to the ladies and gemplemorums, with a wave of the speckled fist (with difficulty detached from an exceedingly short waist), 'I have already informed my venerable Ma that I know all about it!'

Then, said John Harmon, would Mrs John Harmon come and see her house? And a dainty house it was, and a tastefully beautiful; and they went through it in procession; the Inexhaustible on Mrs Boffin's bosom (still staring) occupying the middle station, and Mr Boffin bringing up the rear. And on Bella's exquisite toilette table was an ivory casket, and in the casket were jewels the like of which she had never dreamed of, and aloft on an upper floor was a nursery garnished as with rainbows; 'though we were hard put to it,' said John Harmon, 'to get it done in so short a time.

The house inspected, emissaries removed the Inexhaustible, who was shortly afterwards heard screaming among the rainbows; whereupon Bella withdrew herself from the presence and knowledge of gemplemorums, and the screaming ceased, and smiling Peace associated herself with that young olive branch.

'Come and look in, Noddy!' said Mrs Boffin to Mr Boffin.

Mr Boffin, submitting to be led on tiptoe to the nursery door, looked in with immense satisfaction, although there was nothing to see but Bella in a musing state of happiness, seated in a little low chair upon the hearth, with her child in her fair young arms, and her soft eyelashes shading her eyes from the fire.

'It looks as if the old man's spirit had found rest at last; don't it?' said Mrs Boffin.

'Yes, old lady.'

'And as if his money had turned bright again, after a long long rust in the dark, and was at last a beginning to sparkle in the sunlight?'

'Yes, old lady.'

'And it makes a pretty and a promising picter; don't it?'

'Yes, old lady.'

But, aware at the instant of a fine opening for a point, Mr Boffin quenched that observation in this—delivered in the grisliest growling of the regular brown bear. 'A pretty and a hopeful picter? Mew, Quack quack, Bow-wow!' And then trotted silently downstairs, with his shoulders in a state of the liveliest commotion.

Chapter 14

CHECKMATE TO THE FRIENDLY MOVE

Mr and Mrs John Harmon had so timed their taking possession of their rightful name and their London house, that the event befel on the very day when the last waggon-load of the last Mound was driven out at the gates of Boffin's Bower. As it jolted away, Mr Wegg felt that the last load was correspondingly removed from his mind, and hailed the auspicious season when that black sheep, Boffin, was to be closely sheared.

Over the whole slow process of levelling the Mounds, Silas had kept watch with rapacious eyes. But, eyes no less rapacious had watched the growth of the Mounds in years bygone, and had vigilantly sifted the dust of which they were composed. No valuables turned up. How should there be any, seeing that the old hard jailer of Harmony Jail had coined every waif and stray into money, long before?

Though disappointed by this bare result, Mr Wegg felt too sensibly relieved by the close of the labour, to grumble to any great extent. A foreman-representative of the dust contractors, purchasers of the Mounds, had worn Mr Wegg down to skin and bone. This supervisor of the proceedings, asserting his employers' rights to cart off by daylight, nightlight, torchlight, when they would, must have been the death of Silas if the work had lasted much longer. Seeming never to need sleep himself, he would reappear, with a tied-up broken head, in fantail hat and velveteen smalls, like an accursed goblin, at the most unholy and untimely hours. Tired out by keeping close ward over a long day's work in fog and rain, Silas would have just crawled to bed and be dozing, when a horrid shake and rumble under his pillow would announce an approaching train of carts, escorted by this Demon of Unrest, to fall to work again. At another time, he would be rumbled up out of his soundest sleep, in the dead of the night; at another, would be kept at his post eight-and-forty hours on end. The more his persecutor besought him not to trouble himself to turn out, the more suspicious was the crafty Wegg that indications had been observed of something hidden somewhere, and that attempts were on foot to circumvent him. So continually broken was his rest through these means, that he led the life of having wagered to keep ten thousand dog-watches in ten thousand hours, and looked piteously upon himself as always getting up and yet never going to bed. So gaunt and haggard had he grown at last, that his wooden leg showed disproportionate, and presented a thriving appearance in contrast with the rest of his plagued body, which might almost have been termed chubby.

However, Wegg's comfort was, that all his disagreeables were now over, and that he was immediately coming into his property. Of late, the grindstone did undoubtedly appear to have been whirling at his own nose rather than Boffin's, but Boffin's nose was now to be sharpened fine. Thus far, Mr Wegg had let his dusty friend off lightly, having been baulked in that amiable design of frequently dining with him, by the machinations of the sleepless dustman. He had been constrained to depute Mr Venus to keep their dusty friend, Boffin, under inspection, while he himself turned lank and lean at the Bower.

To Mr Venus's museum Mr Wegg repaired when at length the Mounds were down and gone. It being evening, he found that gentleman, as he expected, seated over his fire; but did not find him, as he expected, floating his powerful mind in tea.

'Why, you smell rather comfortable here!' said Wegg, seeming to take it ill, and stopping and sniffing as he entered.

'I AM rather comfortable, sir,' said Venus.

'You don't use lemon in your business, do you?' asked Wegg, sniffing again.

'No, Mr Wegg,' said Venus. 'When I use it at all, I mostly use it in cobblers' punch.'

'What do you call cobblers' punch?' demanded Wegg, in a worse humour than before.

'It's difficult to impart the receipt for it, sir,' returned Venus, 'because, however particular you may be in allotting your materials, so much will still depend upon the individual gifts, and there being a feeling thrown into it. But the groundwork is gin.'

'In a Dutch bottle?' said Wegg gloomily, as he sat himself down.

'Very good, sir, very good!' cried Venus. 'Will you partake, sir?'

'Will I partake?' returned Wegg very surlily. 'Why, of course I will! WILL a man partake, as has been tormented out of his five senses by an everlasting dustman with his head tied up! WILL he, too! As if he wouldn't!'

'Don't let it put you out, Mr Wegg. You don't seem in your usual spirits.'

'If you come to that, you don't seem in your usual spirits,' growled Wegg. 'You seem to be setting up for lively.'

This circumstance appeared, in his then state of mind, to give Mr Wegg uncommon offence.

'And you've been having your hair cut!' said Wegg, missing the usual dusty shock.

'Yes, Mr Wegg. But don't let that put you out, either.'

'And I am blest if you ain't getting fat!' said Wegg, with culminating discontent. 'What are you going to do next?'

'Well, Mr Wegg,' said Venus, smiling in a sprightly manner, 'I suspect you could hardly guess what I am going to do next.'

'I don't want to guess,' retorted Wegg. 'All I've got to say is, that it's well for you that the diwision of labour has been what it has been. It's well for you to have had so light a part in this business, when mine has been so heavy. You haven't had YOUR rest broke, I'll be bound.'

'Not at all, sir,' said Venus. 'Never rested so well in all my life, I thank you.'

'Ah!' grumbled Wegg, 'you should have been me. If you had been me, and had been fretted out of your bed, and your sleep, and your meals, and your mind, for a stretch of months together, you'd have been out of condition and out of sorts.'

'Certainly, it has trained you down, Mr Wegg,' said Venus, contemplating his figure with an artist's eye. 'Trained you down very low, it has! So weazen and yellow is the kivering upon your bones, that one might almost fancy you had come to give a look-in upon the French gentleman in the corner, instead of me.'

Mr Wegg, glancing in great dudgeon towards the French gentleman's corner, seemed to notice something new there, which induced him to glance at the opposite corner, and then to put on his glasses and stare at all the nooks and corners of the dim shop in succession.

'Why, you've been having the place cleaned up!' he exclaimed.

'Yes, Mr Wegg. By the hand of adorable woman.'

'Then what you're going to do next, I suppose, is to get married?'

'That's it, sir.'

Silas took off his glasses again—finding himself too intensely disgusted by the sprightly appearance of his friend and partner to bear a magnified view of him and made the inquiry:

'To the old party?'

'Mr Wegg!' said Venus, with a sudden flush of wrath. 'The lady in question is not a old party.'

'I meant,' exclaimed Wegg, testily, 'to the party as formerly objected?'

'Mr Wegg,' said Venus, 'in a case of so much delicacy, I must trouble you to say what you mean. There are strings that must not be played upon. No sir! Not sounded, unless in the most respectful and tuneful manner. Of such melodious strings is Miss Pleasant Riderhood formed.'

'Then it IS the lady as formerly objected?' said Wegg.

'Sir,' returned Venus with dignity, 'I accept the altered phrase. It is the lady as formerly objected.'

'When is it to come off?' asked Silas.

'Mr Wegg,' said Venus, with another flush. 'I cannot permit it to be put in the form of a Fight. I must temperately but firmly call upon you, sir, to amend that question.'

'When is the lady,' Wegg reluctantly demanded, constraining his ill temper in remembrance of the partnership and its stock in trade, 'a going to give her 'and where she has already given her 'art?'

'Sir,' returned Venus, 'I again accept the altered phrase, and with pleasure. The lady is a going to give her 'and where she has already given her 'art, next Monday.'

'Then the lady's objection has been met?' said Silas.

'Mr Wegg,' said Venus, 'as I did name to you, I think, on a former occasion, if not on former occasions—'

'On former occasions,' interrupted Wegg.

'—What,' pursued Venus, 'what the nature of the lady's objection was, I may impart, without violating any of the tender confidences since sprung up between the lady and myself, how it has been met, through the kind interference of two good friends of mine: one, previously acquainted with the lady: and one, not. The pint was thrown out, sir, by those two friends when they did me the great service of waiting on the lady to try if a union betwixt the lady and me could not be brought to bear—the pint, I say, was thrown out by them, sir, whether if, after marriage, I confined myself to the articulation of men, children, and the lower animals, it might not relieve the lady's mind of her feeling respecting being as a lady—regarded in a bony light. It was a happy thought, sir, and it took root.'

'It would seem, Mr Venus,' observed Wegg, with a touch of distrust, 'that you are flush of friends?'

'Pretty well, sir,' that gentleman answered, in a tone of placid mystery. 'So-so, sir. Pretty well.'

'However,' said Wegg, after eyeing him with another touch of distrust, 'I wish you joy. One man spends his fortune in one way, and another in another. You are going to try matrimony. I mean to try travelling.'

'Indeed, Mr Wegg?'

'Change of air, sea-scenery, and my natural rest, I hope may bring me round after the persecutions I have undergone from the dustman with his head tied up, which I just now mentioned. The tough job being ended and the Mounds laid low, the hour is come for Boffin to stump up. Would ten to-morrow morning suit you, partner, for finally bringing Boffin's nose to the grindstone?'

Ten to-morrow morning would quite suit Mr Venus for that excellent purpose.

'You have had him well under inspection, I hope?' said Silas.

Mr Venus had had him under inspection pretty well every day.

'Suppose you was just to step round to-night then, and give him orders from me—I say from me, because he knows I won't be played with—to be ready with his papers, his accounts, and his cash, at that time in the morning?' said Wegg. 'And as a matter of form, which will be agreeable to your own feelings, before we go out (for I'll walk with you part of the way, though my leg gives under me with weariness), let's have a look at the stock in trade.'

Mr Venus produced it, and it was perfectly correct; Mr Venus undertook to produce it again in the morning, and to keep tryst with Mr Wegg on Boffin's doorstep as the clock struck ten. At a certain point of the road between Clerkenwell and Boffin's house (Mr Wegg expressly insisted that there should be no prefix to the Golden Dustman's name) the partners separated for the night.

It was a very bad night; to which succeeded a very bad morning. The streets were so unusually slushy, muddy, and miserable, in the morning, that Wegg rode to the scene of action; arguing that a man who was, as it were, going to the Bank to draw out a handsome property, could well afford that trifling expense.

Venus was punctual, and Wegg undertook to knock at the door, and conduct the conference. Door knocked at. Door opened.

'Boffin at home?'

The servant replied that MR Boffin was at home.

'He'll do,' said Wegg, 'though it ain't what I call him.'

The servant inquired if they had any appointment?

'Now, I tell you what, young fellow,' said Wegg, 'I won't have it. This won't do for me. I don't want menials. I want Boffin.'

They were shown into a waiting-room, where the all-powerful Wegg wore his hat, and whistled, and with his forefinger stirred up a clock that stood upon the chimneypiece, until he made it strike. In a few minutes they were shown upstairs into what used to be Boffin's room; which, besides the door of entrance, had folding-doors in it, to make it one of a suite of rooms when occasion required. Here, Boffin was seated at a library-table, and here Mr Wegg, having imperiously motioned the servant to withdraw, drew up a chair and seated himself, in his hat, close beside him. Here, also, Mr Wegg instantly underwent the remarkable experience of having his hat twitched off his head and thrown out of a window, which was opened and shut for the purpose.

'Be careful what insolent liberties you take in that gentleman's presence,' said the owner of the hand which had done this, 'or I will throw you after it.'

Wegg involuntarily clapped his hand to his bare head, and stared at the Secretary. For, it was he addressed him with a severe countenance, and who had come in quietly by the folding-doors.

'Oh!' said Wegg, as soon as he recovered his suspended power of speech. 'Very good! I gave directions for YOU to be dismissed. And you ain't gone, ain't you? Oh! We'll look into this presently. Very good!'

'No, nor I ain't gone,' said another voice.

Somebody else had come in quietly by the folding-doors. Turning his head, Wegg beheld his persecutor, the ever-wakeful dustman, accoutred with fantail hat and velveteen smalls complete. Who, untying his tied-up broken head, revealed a head that was whole, and a face that was Sloppy's.

'Ha, ha, ha, gentlemen!' roared Sloppy in a peal of laughter, and with immeasureable relish. 'He never thought as I could sleep standing, and often done it when I turned for Mrs Higden! He never thought as I used to give

Mrs Higden the Police-news in different voices! But I did lead him a life all through it, gentlemen, I hope I really and truly DID!' Here, Mr Sloppy opening his mouth to a quite alarming extent, and throwing back his head to peal again, revealed incalculable buttons.

'Oh!' said Wegg, slightly discomfited, but not much as yet: 'one and one is two not dismissed, is it? Bof—fin! Just let me ask a question. Who set this chap on, in this dress, when the carting began? Who employed this fellow?'

'I say!' remonstrated Sloppy, jerking his head forward. 'No fellows, or I'll throw you out of winder!'

Mr Boffin appeased him with a wave of his hand, and said: 'I employed him, Wegg.'

'Oh! You employed him, Boffin? Very good. Mr Venus, we raise our terms, and we can't do better than proceed to business. Bof—fin! I want the room cleared of these two scum.'

'That's not going to be done, Wegg,' replied Mr Boffin, sitting composedly on the library-table, at one end, while the Secretary sat composedly on it at the other.

'Bof—fin! Not going to be done?' repeated Wegg. 'Not at your peril?'

'No, Wegg,' said Mr Boffin, shaking his head good-humouredly. 'Not at my peril, and not on any other terms.'

Wegg reflected a moment, and then said: 'Mr Venus, will you be so good as hand me over that same dockyment?'

'Certainly, sir,' replied Venus, handing it to him with much politeness. 'There it is. Having now, sir, parted with it, I wish to make a small observation: not so much because it is anyways necessary, or expresses any new doctrine or discovery, as because it is a comfort to my mind. Silas Wegg, you are a precious old rascal.'

Mr Wegg, who, as if anticipating a compliment, had been beating time with the paper to the other's politeness until this unexpected conclusion came upon him, stopped rather abruptly.

'Silas Wegg,' said Venus, 'know that I took the liberty of taking Mr Boffin into our concern as a sleeping partner, at a very early period of our firm's existence.

'Quite true,' added Mr Boffin; 'and I tested Venus by making him a pretended proposal or two; and I found him on the whole a very honest man, Wegg.'

'So Mr Boffin, in his indulgence, is pleased to say,' Venus remarked: 'though in the beginning of this dirt, my hands were not, for a few hours, quite as clean as I could wish. But I hope I made early and full amends.'

'Venus, you did,' said Mr Boffin. 'Certainly, certainly, certainly.'

Venus inclined his head with respect and gratitude. 'Thank you, sir. I am much obliged to you, sir, for all. For your good opinion now, for your way of receiving and encouraging me when I first put myself in communication with you, and for the influence since so kindly brought to bear upon a certain lady, both by yourself and by Mr John Harmon.' To whom, when thus making mention of him, he also bowed.

Wegg followed the name with sharp ears, and the action with sharp eyes, and a certain cringing air was infusing itself into his bullying air, when his attention was re-claimed by Venus.

'Everything else between you and me, Mr Wegg,' said Venus, 'now explains itself, and you can now make out, sir, without further words from me. But totally to prevent any unpleasantness or mistake that might arise on what I consider an important point, to be made quite clear at the close of our acquaintance, I beg the leave of Mr Boffin and Mr John Harmon to repeat an observation which I have already had the pleasure of bringing under your notice. You are a precious old rascal!'

'You are a fool,' said Wegg, with a snap of his fingers, 'and I'd have got rid of you before now, if I could have struck out any way of doing it. I have thought it over, I can tell you. You may go, and welcome. You leave the more for me. Because, you know,' said Wegg, dividing his next observation between Mr Boffin and Mr Harmon, 'I am worth my price, and I mean to have it. This getting off is all very well in its way, and it tells with such an anatomical Pump as this one,' pointing out Mr Venus, 'but it won't do with a Man. I am here to be bought off, and I have named my figure. Now, buy me, or leave me.'

'I'll leave you, Wegg, said Mr Boffin, laughing, 'as far as I am concerned.'

'Bof—fin!' replied Wegg, turning upon him with a severe air, 'I understand YOUR new-born boldness. I see the brass underneath YOUR silver plating. YOU have got YOUR nose out of joint. Knowing that you've nothing at stake, you can afford to come the independent game. Why, you're just so much smeary glass to see through, you know! But Mr Harmon is in another sitiwation. What Mr Harmon risks, is quite another pair of shoes.

Now, I've heerd something lately about this being Mr Harmon—I make out now, some hints that I've met on that subject in the newspaper—and I drop you, Bof—fin, as beneath my notice. I ask Mr Harmon whether he has any idea of the contents of this present paper?'

'It is a will of my late father's, of more recent date than the will proved by Mr Boffin (address whom again, as you have addressed him already, and I'll knock you down), leaving the whole of his property to the Crown,' said John Harmon, with as much indifference as was compatible with extreme sternness.

'Bight you are!' cried Wegg. 'Then,' screwing the weight of his body upon his wooden leg, and screwing his wooden head very much on one side, and screwing up one eye: 'then, I put the question to you, what's this paper worth?'

'Nothing,' said John Harmon.

Wegg had repeated the word with a sneer, and was entering on some sarcastic retort, when, to his boundless amazement, he found himself gripped by the cravat; shaken until his teeth chattered; shoved back, staggering, into a corner of the room; and pinned there.

'You scoundrel!' said John Harmon, whose seafaring hold was like that of a vice.

'You're knocking my head against the wall,' urged Silas faintly.

'I mean to knock your head against the wall,' returned John Harmon, suiting his action to his words, with the heartiest good will; 'and I'd give a thousand pounds for leave to knock your brains out. Listen, you scoundrel, and look at that Dutch bottle.'

Sloppy held it up, for his edification.

'That Dutch bottle, scoundrel, contained the latest will of the many wills made by my unhappy self-tormenting father. That will gives everything absolutely to my noble benefactor and yours, Mr Boffin, excluding and reviling me, and my sister (then already dead of a broken heart), by name. That Dutch bottle was found by my noble benefactor and yours, after he entered on possession of the estate. That Dutch bottle distressed him beyond measure, because, though I and my sister were both no more, it cast a slur upon our memory which he knew we had done nothing in our miserable youth, to deserve. That Dutch bottle, therefore, he buried in the Mound belonging to him, and there it lay while you, you thankless wretch, were prodding and poking—often very near it, I dare say. His intention was, that it should never see the light; but he was afraid to destroy it, lest to destroy such a document, even with his great generous motive, might be an offence at law. After the discovery was made here who I was, Mr Boffin, still restless on the subject, told me, upon certain conditions impossible for such a hound as you to appreciate, the secret of that Dutch bottle. I urged upon him the necessity of its being dug up, and the paper being legally produced and established. The first thing you saw him do, and the second thing has been done without your knowledge. Consequently, the paper now rattling in your hand as I shake you—and I should like to shake the life out of you—is worth less than the rotten cork of the Dutch bottle, do you understand?'

Judging from the fallen countenance of Silas as his head wagged backwards and forwards in a most uncomfortable manner, he did understand.

Now, scoundrel,' said John Harmon, taking another sailor-like turn on his cravat and holding him in his corner at arms' length, 'I shall make two more short speeches to you, because I hope they will torment you. Your discovery was a genuine discovery (such as it was), for nobody had thought of looking into that place. Neither did we know you had made it, until Venus spoke to Mr Boffin, though I kept you under good observation from my first appearance here, and though Sloppy has long made it the chief occupation and delight of his life, to attend you like your shadow. I tell you this, that you may know we knew enough of you to persuade Mr Boffin to let us lead you on, deluded, to the last possible moment, in order that your disappointment might be the heaviest possible disappointment. That's the first short speech, do you understand?'

Here, John Harmon assisted his comprehension with another shake.

'Now, scoundrel,' he pursued, 'I am going to finish. You supposed me just now, to be the possessor of my father's property.—So I am. But through any act of my father's, or by any right I have? No. Through the munificence of Mr Boffin. The conditions that he made with me, before parting with the secret of the Dutch bottle, were, that I should take the fortune, and that he should take his Mound and no more. I owe everything I possess, solely to the disinterestedness, uprightness, tenderness, goodness (there are no words to satisfy me) of Mr and Mrs Boffin. And when, knowing what I knew, I saw such a mud-worm as you presume to rise in this house against this noble soul, the wonder is,' added John Harmon through his clenched teeth, and with a very ugly turn indeed on Wegg's cravat, 'that I didn't try to twist your head off, and fling THAT out of window! So. That's the last short speech, do you understand?'

Silas, released, put his hand to his throat, cleared it, and looked as if he had a rather large fishbone in that region. Simultaneously with this action on his part in his corner, a singular, and on the surface an incomprehensible, movement was made by Mr Sloppy: who began backing towards Mr Wegg along the wall, in the manner of a porter or heaver who is about to lift a sack of flour or coals.

'I am sorry, Wegg,' said Mr Boffin, in his clemency, 'that my old lady and I can't have a better opinion of you than the bad one we are forced to entertain. But I shouldn't like to leave you, after all said and done, worse off in life than I found you. Therefore say in a word, before we part, what it'll cost to set you up in another stall.'

'And in another place,' John Harmon struck in. 'You don't come outside these windows.'

'Mr Boffin,' returned Wegg in avaricious humiliation: 'when I first had the honour of making your acquaintance, I had got together a collection of ballads which was, I may say, above price.'

'Then they can't be paid for,' said John Harmon, 'and you had better not try, my dear sir.'

'Pardon me, Mr Boffin,' resumed Wegg, with a malignant glance in the last speaker's direction, 'I was putting the case to you, who, if my senses did not deceive me, put the case to me. I had a very choice collection of ballads, and there was a new stock of gingerbread in the tin box. I say no more, but would rather leave it to you.'

'But it's difficult to name what's right,' said Mr Boffin uneasily, with his hand in his pocket, 'and I don't want to go beyond what's right, because you really have turned out such a very bad fellow. So artful, and so ungrateful you have been, Wegg; for when did I ever injure you?'

'There was also,' Mr Wegg went on, in a meditative manner, 'a errand connection, in which I was much respected. But I would not wish to be deemed covetous, and I would rather leave it to you, Mr Boffin.'

'Upon my word, I don't know what to put it at,' the Golden Dustman muttered.

'There was likewise,' resumed Wegg, 'a pair of trestles, for which alone a Irish person, who was deemed a judge of trestles, offered five and six—a sum I would not hear of, for I should have lost by it—and there was a stool, a umbrella, a clothes-horse, and a tray. But I leave it to you, Mr Boffin.'

The Golden Dustman seeming to be engaged in some abstruse calculation, Mr Wegg assisted him with the following additional items.

'There was, further, Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker. Ah! When a man thinks of the loss of such patronage as that; when a man finds so fair a garden rooted up by pigs; he finds it hard indeed, without going high, to work it into money. But I leave it wholly to you, sir.'

Mr Sloppy still continued his singular, and on the surface his incomprehensible, movement.

'Leading on has been mentioned,' said Wegg with a melancholy air, 'and it's not easy to say how far the tone of my mind may have been lowered by unwholesome reading on the subject of Misers, when you was leading me and others on to think you one yourself, sir. All I can say is, that I felt my tone of mind a lowering at the time. And how can a man put a price upon his mind! There was likewise a hat just now. But I leave the ole to you, Mr Boffin.'

'Come!' said Mr Boffin. 'Here's a couple of pound.'

'In justice to myself, I couldn't take it, sir.'

The words were but out of his mouth when John Harmon lifted his finger, and Sloppy, who was now close to Wegg, backed to Wegg's back, stooped, grasped his coat collar behind with both hands, and deftly swung him up like the sack of flour or coals before mentioned. A countenance of special discontent and amazement Mr Wegg exhibited in this position, with his buttons almost as prominently on view as Sloppy's own, and with his wooden leg in a highly unaccommodating state. But, not for many seconds was his countenance visible in the room; for, Sloppy lightly trotted out with him and trotted down the staircase, Mr Venus attending to open the street door. Mr Sloppy's instructions had been to deposit his burden in the road; but, a scavenger's cart happening to stand unattended at the corner, with its little ladder planted against the wheel, Mr S. found it impossible to resist the temptation of shooting Mr Silas Wegg into the cart's contents. A somewhat difficult feat, achieved with great dexterity, and with a prodigious splash.

Chapter 15

WHAT WAS CAUGHT IN THE TRAPS THAT WERE SET

How Bradley Headstone had been racked and riven in his mind since the quiet evening when by the river-side he had risen, as it were, out of the ashes of the Bargeman, none but he could have told. Not even he could have told, for such misery can only be felt.

First, he had to bear the combined weight of the knowledge of what he had done, of that haunting reproach that he might have done it so much better, and of the dread of discovery. This was load enough to crush him, and he laboured under it day and night. It was as heavy on him in his scanty sleep, as in his red-eyed waking hours. It bore him down with a dread unchanging monotony, in which there was not a moment's variety. The overweighted beast of burden, or the overweighted slave, can for certain instants shift the physical load, and find some slight respite even in enforcing additional pain upon such a set of muscles or such a limb. Not even that poor mockery of relief could the wretched man obtain, under the steady pressure of the infernal atmosphere into which he had entered.

Time went by, and no visible suspicion dogged him; time went by, and in such public accounts of the attack as were renewed at intervals, he began to see Mr Lightwood (who acted as lawyer for the injured man) straying further from the fact, going wider of the issue, and evidently slackening in his zeal. By degrees, a glimmering of the cause of this began to break on Bradley's sight. Then came the chance meeting with Mr Milvey at the railway station (where he often lingered in his leisure hours, as a place where any fresh news of his deed would be circulated, or any placard referring to it would be posted), and then he saw in the light what he had brought about.

For, then he saw that through his desperate attempt to separate those two for ever, he had been made the means of uniting them. That he had dipped his hands in blood, to mark himself a miserable fool and tool. That Eugene Wrayburn, for his wife's sake, set him aside and left him to crawl along his blasted course. He thought of Fate, or Providence, or be the directing Power what it might, as having put a fraud upon him—overreached him—and in his impotent mad rage bit, and tore, and had his fit.

New assurance of the truth came upon him in the next few following days, when it was put forth how the wounded man had been married on his bed, and to whom, and how, though always in a dangerous condition, he was a shade better. Bradley would far rather have been seized for his murder, than he would have read that passage, knowing himself spared, and knowing why.

But, not to be still further defrauded and overreached—which he would be, if implicated by Riderhood, and punished by the law for his abject failure, as though it had been a success—he kept close in his school during the day, ventured out warily at night, and went no more to the railway station. He examined the advertisements in the newspapers for any sign that Riderhood acted on his hinted threat of so summoning him to renew their acquaintance, but found none. Having paid him handsomely for the support and accommodation he had had at the Lock House, and knowing him to be a very ignorant man who could not write, he began to doubt whether he was to be feared at all, or whether they need ever meet again.

All this time, his mind was never off the rack, and his raging sense of having been made to fling himself across the chasm which divided those two, and bridge it over for their coming together, never cooled down. This horrible condition brought on other fits. He could not have said how many, or when; but he saw in the faces of his pupils that they had seen him in that state, and that they were possessed by a dread of his relapsing.

One winter day when a slight fall of snow was feathering the sills and frames of the schoolroom windows, he stood at his black board, crayon in hand, about to commence with a class; when, reading in the countenances of those boys that there was something wrong, and that they seemed in alarm for him, he turned his eyes to the door towards which they faced. He then saw a slouching man of forbidding appearance standing in the midst of the school, with a bundle under his arm; and saw that it was Riderhood.

He sat down on a stool which one of his boys put for him, and he had a passing knowledge that he was in danger of falling, and that his face was becoming distorted. But, the fit went off for that time, and he wiped his mouth, and stood up again.

'Beg your pardon, governor! By your leave!' said Riderhood, knuckling his forehead, with a chuckle and a leer. 'What place may this be?'

'This is a school.'

'Where young folks learns wot's right?' said Riderhood, gravely nodding. 'Beg your pardon, governor! By your leave! But who teaches this school?'

'I do.'

'You're the master, are you, learned governor?'

'Yes. I am the master.'

'And a lovely thing it must be,' said Riderhood, 'fur to learn young folks wot's right, and fur to know wot THEY know wot you do it. Beg your pardon, learned governor! By your leave!—That there black board; wot's it for?'

'It is for drawing on, or writing on.'

'Is it though!' said Riderhood. 'Who'd have thought it, from the looks on it! WOULD you be so kind as write your name upon it, learned governor?' (In a wheedling tone.)

Bradley hesitated for a moment; but placed his usual signature, enlarged, upon the board.

'I ain't a learned character myself,' said Riderhood, surveying the class, 'but I do admire learning in others. I should dearly like to hear these here young folks read that there name off, from the writing.'

The arms of the class went up. At the miserable master's nod, the shrill chorus arose: 'Bradley Headstone!'

'No?' cried Riderhood. 'You don't mean it? Headstone! Why, that's in a churchyard. Hooroar for another turn!'

Another tossing of arms, another nod, and another shrill chorus:

'Bradley Headstone!'

'I've got it now!' said Riderhood, after attentively listening, and internally repeating: 'Bradley. I see. Chris'en name, Bradley sim'lar to Roger which is my own. Eh? Fam'ly name, Headstone, sim'lar to Riderhood which is my own. Eh?'

Shrill chorus. 'Yes!'

'Might you be acquainted, learned governor,' said Riderhood, 'with a person of about your own heighth and breadth, and wot 'ud pull down in a scale about your own weight, answering to a name sounding summat like Totherest?'

With a desperation in him that made him perfectly quiet, though his jaw was heavily squared; with his eyes upon Riderhood; and with traces of quickened breathing in his nostrils; the schoolmaster replied, in a suppressed voice, after a pause: 'I think I know the man you mean.'

'I thought you knowed the man I mean, learned governor. I want the man.'

With a half glance around him at his pupils, Bradley returned:

'Do you suppose he is here?'

'Begging your pardon, learned governor, and by your leave,' said Riderhood, with a laugh, 'how could I suppose he's here, when there's nobody here but you, and me, and these young lambs wot you're a learning on? But he is most excellent company, that man, and I want him to come and see me at my Lock, up the river.'

'I'll tell him so.'

'D'ye think he'll come?' asked Riderhood.

'I am sure he will.'

'Having got your word for him,' said Riderhood, 'I shall count upon him. P'raps you'd so fur obleege me, learned governor, as tell him that if he don't come precious soon, I'll look him up.'

'He shall know it.'

'Thankee. As I says a while ago,' pursued Riderhood, changing his hoarse tone and leering round upon the class again, 'though not a learned character my own self, I do admire learning in others, to be sure! Being here and having met with your kind attention, Master, might I, afore I go, ask a question of these here young lambs of yourn?'

'If it is in the way of school,' said Bradley, always sustaining his dark look at the other, and speaking in his suppressed voice, 'you may.'

'Oh! It's in the way of school!' cried Riderhood. 'I'll pound it, Master, to be in the way of school. Wot's the diwisions of water, my lambs? Wot sorts of water is there on the land?'

Shrill chorus: 'Seas, rivers, lakes, and ponds.'

'Seas, rivers, lakes, and ponds,' said Riderhood. 'They've got all the lot, Master! Blowed if I shouldn't have left out lakes, never having clapped eyes upon one, to my knowledge. Seas, rivers, lakes, and ponds. Wot is it, lambs, as they ketches in seas, rivers, lakes, and ponds?'

Shrill chorus (with some contempt for the ease of the question):

'Fish!'

'Good a-gin!' said Riderhood. 'But wot else is it, my lambs, as they sometimes ketches in rivers?'

Chorus at a loss. One shrill voice: 'Weed!'

'Good agin!' cried Riderhood. 'But it ain't weed neither. You'll never guess, my dears. Wot is it, besides fish, as they sometimes ketches in rivers? Well! I'll tell you. It's suits o' clothes.'

Bradley's face changed.

'Leastways, lambs,' said Riderhood, observing him out of the corners of his eyes, 'that's wot I my own self sometimes ketches in rivers. For strike me blind, my lambs, if I didn't ketch in a river the wery bundle under my arm!'

The class looked at the master, as if appealing from the irregular entrapment of this mode of examination. The master looked at the examiner, as if he would have torn him to pieces.

'I ask your pardon, learned governor,' said Riderhood, smearing his sleeve across his mouth as he laughed with a relish, 'tain't fair to the lambs, I know. It wos a bit of fun of mine. But upon my soul I drawed this here bundle out of a river! It's a Bargeman's suit of clothes. You see, it had been sunk there by the man as wore it, and I got it up.'

'How do you know it was sunk by the man who wore it?' asked Bradley.

'Cause I see him do it,' said Riderhood.

They looked at each other. Bradley, slowly withdrawing his eyes, turned his face to the black board and slowly wiped his name out.

'A heap of thanks, Master,' said Riderhood, 'for bestowing so much of your time, and of the lambses' time, upon a man as hasn't got no other recommendation to you than being a honest man. Wishing to see at my Lock up the river, the person as we've spoke of, and as you've answered for, I takes my leave of the lambs and of their learned governor both.'

With those words, he slouched out of the school, leaving the master to get through his weary work as he might, and leaving the whispering pupils to observe the master's face until he fell into the fit which had been long impending.

The next day but one was Saturday, and a holiday. Bradley rose early, and set out on foot for Plashwater Weir Mill Lock. He rose so early that it was not yet light when he began his journey. Before extinguishing the candle by which he had dressed himself, he made a little parcel of his decent silver watch and its decent guard, and wrote inside the paper: 'Kindly take care of these for me.' He then addressed the parcel to Miss Peecher, and left it on the most protected corner of the little seat in her little porch.

It was a cold hard easterly morning when he latched the garden gate and turned away. The light snowfall which had feathered his schoolroom windows on the Thursday, still lingered in the air, and was falling white, while the wind blew black. The tardy day did not appear until he had been on foot two hours, and had traversed a greater part of London from east to west. Such breakfast as he had, he took at the comfortless public-house where he had parted from Riderhood on the occasion of their night-walk. He took it, standing at the littered bar, and looked loweringly at a man who stood where Riderhood had stood that early morning.

He outwalked the short day, and was on the towing-path by the river, somewhat footsore, when the night closed in. Still two or three miles short of the Lock, he slackened his pace then, but went steadily on. The ground was now covered with snow, though thinly, and there were floating lumps of ice in the more exposed parts of the river, and broken sheets of ice under the shelter of the banks. He took heed of nothing but the ice, the snow, and the distance, until he saw a light ahead, which he knew gleamed from the Lock House window. It arrested his steps, and he looked all around. The ice, and the snow, and he, and the one light, had absolute possession of the dreary scene. In the distance before him, lay the place where he had struck the worse than useless blows that mocked him with Lizzie's presence there as Eugene's wife. In the distance behind him, lay the place where the children with pointing arms had seemed to devote him to the demons in crying out his name. Within there, where the light was, was the man who as to both distances could give him up to ruin. To these limits had his world shrunk.

He mended his pace, keeping his eyes upon the light with a strange intensity, as if he were taking aim at it. When he approached it so nearly as that it parted into rays, they seemed to fasten themselves to him and draw him on. When he struck the door with his hand, his foot followed so quickly on his hand, that he was in the room before he was bidden to enter.

The light was the joint product of a fire and a candle. Between the two, with his feet on the iron fender, sat Riderhood, pipe in mouth.

He looked up with a surly nod when his visitor came in. His visitor looked down with a surly nod. His outer clothing removed, the visitor then took a seat on the opposite side of the fire.

'Not a smoker, I think?' said Riderhood, pushing a bottle to him across the table.

'No.'

They both lapsed into silence, with their eyes upon the fire.

'You don't need to be told I am here,' said Bradley at length. 'Who is to begin?'

'I'll begin,' said Riderhood, 'when I've smoked this here pipe out.'

He finished it with great deliberation, knocked out the ashes on the hob, and put it by.

'I'll begin,' he then repeated, 'Bradley Headstone, Master, if you wish it.'

'Wish it? I wish to know what you want with me.'

'And so you shall.' Riderhood had looked hard at his hands and his pockets, apparently as a precautionary measure lest he should have any weapon about him. But, he now leaned forward, turning the collar of his waistcoat with an inquisitive finger, and asked, 'Why, where's your watch?'

'I have left it behind.'

'I want it. But it can be fetched. I've took a fancy to it.'

Bradley answered with a contemptuous laugh.

'I want it,' repeated Riderhood, in a louder voice, 'and I mean to have it.'

'That is what you want of me, is it?'

'No,' said Riderhood, still louder; 'it's on'y part of what I want of you. I want money of you.'

'Anything else?'

'Everythink else!' roared Riderhood, in a very loud and furious way. 'Answer me like that, and I won't talk to you at all.'

Bradley looked at him.

'Don't so much as look at me like that, or I won't talk to you at all,' vociferated Riderhood. 'But, instead of talking, I'll bring my hand down upon you with all its weight,' heavily smiting the table with great force, 'and smash you!'

'Go on,' said Bradley, after moistening his lips.

'O! I'm a going on. Don't you fear but I'll go on full-fast enough for you, and fur enough for you, without your telling. Look here, Bradley Headstone, Master. You might have split the T'other governor to chips and wedges, without my caring, except that I might have come upon you for a glass or so now and then. Else why have to do with you at all? But when you copied my clothes, and when you copied my neckhankercher, and when you shook blood upon me after you had done the trick, you did wot I'll be paid for and paid heavy for. If it come to be throw'd upon you, you was to be ready to throw it upon me, was you? Where else but in Plashwater Weir Mill Lock was there a man dressed according as described? Where else but in Plashwater Weir Mill Lock was there a man as had had words with him coming through in his boat? Look at the Lock-keeper in Plashwater Weir Mill Lock, in them same answering clothes and with that same answering red neckhankercher, and see whether his clothes happens to be bloody or not. Yes, they do happen to be bloody. Ah, you sly devil!'

Bradley, very white, sat looking at him in silence.

'But two could play at your game,' said Riderhood, snapping his fingers at him half a dozen times, 'and I played it long ago; long afore you tried your clumsy hand at it; in days when you hadn't begun croaking your lecters or what not in your school. I know to a figure how you done it. Where you stole away, I could steal away arter you, and do it knowinger than you. I know how you come away from London in your own clothes, and where you changed your clothes, and hid your clothes. I see you with my own eyes take your own clothes from their hiding-place among them felled trees, and take a dip in the river to account for your dressing yourself, to any one as might come by. I see you rise up Bradley Headstone, Master, where you sat down Bargeman. I see you pitch your Bargeman's bundle into the river. I hooked your Bargeman's bundle out of the river. I've got your Bargeman's clothes, tore this way and that way with the scuffle, stained green with the grass, and spattered all over with what bust from the blows. I've got them, and I've got you. I don't care a curse for the T'other governor, alive or dead, but I care a many curses for my own self. And as you laid your plots agin me and was a sly devil agin me, I'll be paid for it—I'll be paid for it—I'll be paid for it—till I've drained you dry!'

Bradley looked at the fire, with a working face, and was silent for a while. At last he said, with what seemed an inconsistent composure of voice and feature:

'You can't get blood out of a stone, Riderhood.'

'I can get money out of a schoolmaster though.'

'You can't get out of me what is not in me. You can't wrest from me what I have not got. Mine is but a poor calling. You have had more than two guineas from me, already. Do you know how long it has taken me (allowing for a long and arduous training) to earn such a sum?'

'I don't know, nor I don't care. Yours is a 'spectable calling. To save your 'spectability, it's worth your while to pawn every article of clothes you've got, sell every stick in your house, and beg and borrow every penny you can get trusted with. When you've done that and handed over, I'll leave you. Not afore.'

'How do you mean, you'll leave me?'

'I mean as I'll keep you company, wherever you go, when you go away from here. Let the Lock take care of itself. I'll take care of you, once I've got you.'

Bradley again looked at the fire. Eyeing him aside, Riderhood took up his pipe, refilled it, lighted it, and sat smoking. Bradley leaned his elbows on his knees, and his head upon his hands, and looked at the fire with a most intent abstraction.

'Riderhood,' he said, raising himself in his chair, after a long silence, and drawing out his purse and putting it on the table. 'Say I part with this, which is all the money I have; say I let you have my watch; say that every quarter, when I draw my salary, I pay you a certain portion of it.'

'Say nothink of the sort,' retorted Riderhood, shaking his head as he smoked. 'You've got away once, and I won't run the chance agin. I've had trouble enough to find you, and shouldn't have found you, if I hadn't seen you slipping along the street overnight, and watched you till you was safe housed. I'll have one settlement with you for good and all.'

'Riderhood, I am a man who has lived a retired life. I have no resources beyond myself. I have absolutely no friends.'

'That's a lie,' said Riderhood. 'You've got one friend as I knows of; one as is good for a Savings-Bank book, or I'm a blue monkey!'

Bradley's face darkened, and his hand slowly closed on the purse and drew it back, as he sat listening for what the other should go on to say.

'I went into the wrong shop, fust, last Thursday,' said Riderhood. 'Found myself among the young ladies, by George! Over the young ladies, I see a Missis. That Missis is sweet enough upon you, Master, to sell herself up, slap, to get you out of trouble. Make her do it then.'

Bradley stared at him so very suddenly that Riderhood, not quite knowing how to take it, affected to be occupied with the encircling smoke from his pipe; fanning it away with his hand, and blowing it off.

'You spoke to the mistress, did you?' inquired Bradley, with that former composure of voice and feature that seemed inconsistent, and with averted eyes.

'Poof! Yes,' said Riderhood, withdrawing his attention from the smoke. 'I spoke to her. I didn't say much to her. She was put in a fluster by my dropping in among the young ladies (I never did set up for a lady's man), and she took me into her parlour to hope as there was nothink wrong. I tells her, "O no, nothink wrong. The master's my wery good friend." But I see how the land laid, and that she was comfortable off.'

Bradley put the purse in his pocket, grasped his left wrist with his right hand, and sat rigidly contemplating the fire.

'She couldn't live more handy to you than she does,' said Riderhood, 'and when I goes home with you (as of course I am a going), I recommend you to clean her out without loss of time. You can marry her, arter you and me have come to a settlement. She's nice-looking, and I know you can't be keeping company with no one else, having been so lately disapinted in another quarter.'

Not one other word did Bradley utter all that night. Not once did he change his attitude, or loosen his hold upon his wrist. Rigid before the fire, as if it were a charmed flame that was turning him old, he sat, with the dark lines deepening in his face, its stare becoming more and more haggard, its surface turning whiter and whiter as if it were being overspread with ashes, and the very texture and colour of his hair degenerating.

Not until the late daylight made the window transparent, did this decaying statue move. Then it slowly arose, and sat in the window looking out.

Riderhood had kept his chair all night. In the earlier part of the night he had muttered twice or thrice that it was bitter cold; or that the fire burnt fast, when he got up to mend it; but, as he could elicit from his companion neither sound nor movement, he had afterwards held his peace. He was making some disorderly preparations for coffee, when Bradley came from the window and put on his outer coat and hat.

'Hadn't us better have a bit o' breakfast afore we start?' said Riderhood. 'It ain't good to freeze a empty stomach, Master.'

Without a sign to show that he heard, Bradley walked out of the Lock House. Catching up from the table a piece of bread, and taking his Bargeman's bundle under his arm, Riderhood immediately followed him. Bradley turned towards London. Riderhood caught him up, and walked at his side.

The two men trudged on, side by side, in silence, full three miles. Suddenly, Bradley turned to retrace his course. Instantly, Riderhood turned likewise, and they went back side by side.

Bradley re-entered the Lock House. So did Riderhood. Bradley sat down in the window. Riderhood warmed himself at the fire. After an hour or more, Bradley abruptly got up again, and again went out, but this time turned the other way. Riderhood was close after him, caught him up in a few paces, and walked at his side.

This time, as before, when he found his attendant not to be shaken off, Bradley suddenly turned back. This time, as before, Riderhood turned back along with him. But, not this time, as before, did they go into the Lock House, for Bradley came to a stand on the snow-covered turf by the Lock, looking up the river and down the river. Navigation was impeded by the frost, and the scene was a mere white and yellow desert.

'Come, come, Master,' urged Riderhood, at his side. 'This is a dry game. And where's the good of it? You can't get rid of me, except by coming to a settlement. I am a going along with you wherever you go.'

Without a word of reply, Bradley passed quickly from him over the wooden bridge on the lock gates. 'Why, there's even less sense in this move than t'other,' said Riderhood, following. 'The Weir's there, and you'll have to come back, you know.'

Without taking the least notice, Bradley leaned his body against a post, in a resting attitude, and there rested with his eyes cast down. 'Being brought here,' said Riderhood, gruffly, 'I'll turn it to some use by changing my gates.' With a rattle and a rush of water, he then swung-to the lock gates that were standing open, before opening the others. So, both sets of gates were, for the moment, closed.

'You'd better by far be reasonable, Bradley Headstone, Master,' said Riderhood, passing him, 'or I'll drain you all the dryer for it, when we do settle.—Ah! Would you!'

Bradley had caught him round the body. He seemed to be girdled with an iron ring. They were on the brink of the Lock, about midway between the two sets of gates.

'Let go!' said Riderhood, 'or I'll get my knife out and slash you wherever I can cut you. Let go!'

Bradley was drawing to the Lock-edge. Riderhood was drawing away from it. It was a strong grapple, and a fierce struggle, arm and leg. Bradley got him round, with his back to the Lock, and still worked him backward.

'Let go!' said Riderhood. 'Stop! What are you trying at? You can't drown Me. Ain't I told you that the man as has come through drowning can never be drowned? I can't be drowned.'

'I can be!' returned Bradley, in a desperate, clenched voice. 'I am resolved to be. I'll hold you living, and I'll hold you dead. Come down!'

Riderhood went over into the smooth pit, backward, and Bradley Headstone upon him. When the two were found, lying under the ooze and scum behind one of the rotting gates, Riderhood's hold had relaxed, probably in falling, and his eyes were staring upward. But, he was girdled still with Bradley's iron ring, and the rivets of the iron ring held tight.

Chapter 16

PERSONS AND THINGS IN GENERAL

Mr and Mrs John Harmon's first delightful occupation was, to set all matters right that had strayed in any way wrong, or that might, could, would, or should, have strayed in any way wrong, while their name was in abeyance. In tracing out affairs for which John's fictitious death was to be considered in any way responsible, they used a very broad and free construction; regarding, for instance, the dolls' dressmaker as having a claim on their protection, because of her association with Mrs Eugene Wrayburn, and because of Mrs Eugene's old association, in her turn, with the dark side of the story. It followed that the old man, Riah, as a good and serviceable friend to both, was not to be disclaimed. Nor even Mr Inspector, as having been trepanned into an industrious hunt on a false scent. It may be remarked, in connexion with that worthy officer, that a rumour shortly afterwards pervaded the Force, to the effect that he had confided to Miss Abbey Potterson, over a jug of mellow flip in the bar of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters, that he 'didn't stand to lose a farthing' through Mr Harmon's coming to life, but was quite as well satisfied as if that gentleman had been barbarously murdered, and he (Mr Inspector) had pocketed the government reward.

In all their arrangements of such nature, Mr and Mrs John Harmon derived much assistance from their eminent solicitor, Mr Mortimer Lightwood; who laid about him professionally with such unwonted despatch and intention, that a piece of work was vigorously pursued as soon as cut out; whereby Young Blight was acted on as by that transatlantic dram which is poetically named An Eye-Opener, and found himself staring at real clients instead of out of window. The accessibility of Riah proving very useful as to a few hints towards the disentanglement of Eugene's affairs, Lightwood applied himself with infinite zest to attacking and harassing Mr Fledgeby: who, discovering himself in danger of being blown into the air by certain explosive transactions in which he had been engaged, and having been sufficiently flayed under his beating, came to a parley and asked for quarter. The harmless Twemlow profited by the conditions entered into, though he little thought it. Mr Riah unaccountably melted; waited in person on him over the stable yard in Duke Street, St James's, no longer ravening but mild, to inform him that payment of interest as heretofore, but henceforth at Mr Lightwood's offices, would appease his Jewish rancour; and departed with the secret that Mr John Harmon had advanced the money and become the creditor. Thus, was the sublime Snigsworth's wrath averted, and thus did he snort no larger amount of moral grandeur at the Corinthian column in the print over the fireplace, than was normally in his (and the British) constitution.

Mrs Wilfer's first visit to the Mendicant's bride at the new abode of Mendicancy, was a grand event. Pa had been sent for into the City, on the very day of taking possession, and had been stunned with astonishment, and brought-to, and led about the house by one ear, to behold its various treasures, and had been enraptured and enchanted. Pa had also been appointed Secretary, and had been enjoined to give instant notice of resignation to Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles, for ever and ever. But Ma came later, and came, as was her due, in state.

The carriage was sent for Ma, who entered it with a bearing worthy of the occasion, accompanied, rather than supported, by Miss Lavinia, who altogether declined to recognize the maternal majesty. Mr George Sampson meekly followed. He was received in the vehicle, by Mrs Wilfer, as if admitted to the honour of assisting at a funeral in the family, and she then issued the order, 'Onward!' to the Mendicant's menial.

'I wish to goodness, Ma,' said Lavvy, throwing herself back among the cushions, with her arms crossed, 'that you'd loll a little.'

'How!' repeated Mrs Wilfer. 'Loll!'

'Yes, Ma.'

'I hope,' said the impressive lady, 'I am incapable of it.'

'I am sure you look so, Ma. But why one should go out to dine with one's own daughter or sister, as if one's under-petticoat was a blackboard, I do NOT understand.'

'Neither do I understand,' retorted Mrs Wilfer, with deep scorn, 'how a young lady can mention the garment in the name of which you have indulged. I blush for you.'

'Thank you, Ma,' said Lavvy, yawning, 'but I can do it for myself, I am obliged to you, when there's any occasion.'

Here, Mr Sampson, with the view of establishing harmony, which he never under any circumstances succeeded in doing, said with an agreeable smile: 'After all, you know, ma'am, we know it's there.' And immediately felt that he had committed himself.

'We know it's there!' said Mrs Wilfer, glaring.

'Really, George,' remonstrated Miss Lavinia, 'I must say that I don't understand your allusions, and that I think you might be more delicate and less personal.'

'Go it!' cried Mr Sampson, becoming, on the shortest notice, a prey to despair. 'Oh yes! Go it, Miss Lavinia Wilfer!'

'What you may mean, George Sampson, by your omnibus-driving expressions, I cannot pretend to imagine. Neither,' said Miss Lavinia, 'Mr George Sampson, do I wish to imagine. It is enough for me to know in my own heart that I am not going to—' having imprudently got into a sentence without providing a way out of it, Miss Lavinia was constrained to close with 'going to it'. A weak conclusion which, however, derived some appearance of strength from disdain.

'Oh yes!' cried Mr Sampson, with bitterness. 'Thus it ever is. I never—'

'If you mean to say,' Miss Lavvy cut him short, that you never brought up a young gazelle, you may save yourself the trouble, because nobody in this carriage supposes that you ever did. We know you better.' (As if this were a home-thrust.)

'Lavinia,' returned Mr Sampson, in a dismal vein, I did not mean to say so. What I did mean to say, was, that I never expected to retain my favoured place in this family, after Fortune shed her beams upon it. Why do you take me,' said Mr Sampson, 'to the glittering halls with which I can never compete, and then taunt me with my moderate salary? Is it generous? Is it kind?'

The stately lady, Mrs Wilfer, perceiving her opportunity of delivering a few remarks from the throne, here took up the altercation.

'Mr Sampson,' she began, 'I cannot permit you to misrepresent the intentions of a child of mine.'

'Let him alone, Ma,' Miss Lavvy interposed with haughtiness. 'It is indifferent to me what he says or does.'

'Nay, Lavinia,' quoth Mrs Wilfer, 'this touches the blood of the family. If Mr George Sampson attributes, even to my youngest daughter—'

('I don't see why you should use the word "even", Ma,' Miss Lavvy interposed, 'because I am quite as important as any of the others.')

'Peace!' said Mrs Wilfer, solemnly. 'I repeat, if Mr George Sampson attributes, to my youngest daughter, grovelling motives, he attributes them equally to the mother of my youngest daughter. That mother repudiates them, and demands of Mr George Sampson, as a youth of honour, what he WOULD have? I may be mistaken—nothing is more likely—but Mr George Sampson,' proceeded Mrs Wilfer, majestically waving her gloves, 'appears to me to be seated in a first-class equipage. Mr George Sampson appears to me to be on his way, by his own admission, to a residence that may be termed Palatial. Mr George Sampson appears to me to be invited to participate in the—shall I say the—Elevation which has descended on the family with which he is ambitious, shall I say to Mingle? Whence, then, this tone on Mr Sampson's part?'

'It is only, ma'am,' Mr Sampson explained, in exceedingly low spirits, 'because, in a pecuniary sense, I am painfully conscious of my unworthiness. Lavinia is now highly connected. Can I hope that she will still remain the same Lavinia as of old? And is it not pardonable if I feel sensitive, when I see a disposition on her part to take me up short?'

'If you are not satisfied with your position, sir,' observed Miss Lavinia, with much politeness, 'we can set you down at any turning you may please to indicate to my sister's coachman.'

'Dearest Lavinia,' urged Mr Sampson, pathetically, 'I adore you.'

'Then if you can't do it in a more agreeable manner,' returned the young lady, 'I wish you wouldn't.'

'I also,' pursued Mr Sampson, 'respect you, ma'am, to an extent which must ever be below your merits, I am well aware, but still up to an uncommon mark. Bear with a wretch, Lavinia, bear with a wretch, ma'am, who feels the noble sacrifices you make for him, but is goaded almost to madness,' Mr Sampson slapped his forehead, 'when he thinks of competing with the rich and influential.'

'When you have to compete with the rich and influential, it will probably be mentioned to you,' said Miss Lavvy, 'in good time. At least, it will if the case is MY case.'

Mr Sampson immediately expressed his fervent Opinion that this was 'more than human', and was brought upon his knees at Miss Lavinia's feet.

It was the crowning addition indispensable to the full enjoyment of both mother and daughter, to bear Mr Sampson, a grateful captive, into the glittering halls he had mentioned, and to parade him through the same, at once a living witness of their glory, and a bright instance of their condescension. Ascending the staircase, Miss Lavinia permitted him to walk at her side, with the air of saying: 'Notwithstanding all these surroundings, I am yours as yet, George. How long it may last is another question, but I am yours as yet.' She also benignantly intimated to him, aloud, the nature of the objects upon which he looked, and to which he was unaccustomed: as, 'Exotics, George,' 'An aviary, George,' 'An ormolu clock, George,' and the like. While, through the whole of the decorations, Mrs Wilfer led the way with the bearing of a Savage Chief, who would feel himself compromised by manifesting the slightest token of surprise or admiration.

Indeed, the bearing of this impressive woman, throughout the day, was a pattern to all impressive women under similar circumstances. She renewed the acquaintance of Mr and Mrs Boffin, as if Mr and Mrs Boffin had said of her what she had said of them, and as if Time alone could quite wear her injury out. She regarded every servant who approached her, as her sworn enemy, expressly intending to offer her affronts with the dishes, and to pour forth outrages on her moral feelings from the decanters. She sat erect at table, on the right hand of her son-in-law, as half suspecting poison in the viands, and as bearing up with native force of character against other deadly ambushes. Her carriage towards Bella was as a carriage towards a young lady of good position, whom she had met in society a few years ago. Even when, slightly thawing under the influence of sparkling champagne, she related to her son-in-law some passages of domestic interest concerning her papa, she infused into the narrative such Arctic suggestions of her having been an unappreciated blessing to mankind, since her papa's days, and also of that gentleman's having been a frosty impersonation of a frosty race, as struck cold to the very soles of the feet of the hearers. The Inexhaustible being produced, staring, and evidently intending a weak and washy smile shortly, no sooner beheld her, than it was stricken spasmodic and inconsolable. When she took her leave at last, it would have been hard to say whether it was with the air of going to the scaffold herself, or of leaving the inmates of the house for immediate execution. Yet, John Harmon enjoyed it all merrily, and told his wife, when he and she were alone, that her natural ways had never seemed so dearly natural as beside this foil, and that although he did not dispute her being her father's daughter, he should ever remain stedfast in the faith that she could not be her mother's.

This visit was, as has been said, a grand event. Another event, not grand but deemed in the house a special one, occurred at about the same period; and this was, the first interview between Mr Sloppy and Miss Wren.

The dolls' dressmaker, being at work for the Inexhaustible upon a full-dressed doll some two sizes larger than that young person, Mr Sloppy undertook to call for it, and did so.

'Come in, sir,' said Miss Wren, who was working at her bench. 'And who may you be?'

Mr Sloppy introduced himself by name and buttons.

'Oh indeed!' cried Jenny. 'Ah! I have been looking forward to knowing you. I heard of your distinguishing yourself.'

'Did you, Miss?' grinned Sloppy. 'I am sure I am glad to hear it, but I don't know how.'

'Pitching somebody into a mud-cart,' said Miss Wren.

'Oh! That way!' cried Sloppy. 'Yes, Miss.' And threw back his head and laughed.

'Bless us!' exclaimed Miss Wren, with a start. 'Don't open your mouth as wide as that, young man, or it'll catch so, and not shut again some day.'

Mr Sloppy opened it, if possible, wider, and kept it open until his laugh was out.

'Why, you're like the giant,' said Miss Wren, 'when he came home in the land of Beanstalk, and wanted Jack for supper.'

'Was he good-looking, Miss?' asked Sloppy.

'No,' said Miss Wren. 'Ugly.'

Her visitor glanced round the room—which had many comforts in it now, that had not been in it before—and said: 'This is a pretty place, Miss.'

'Glad you think so, sir,' returned Miss Wren. 'And what do you think of Me?'

The honesty of Mr Sloppy being severely taxed by the question, he twisted a button, grinned, and faltered.

'Out with it!' said Miss Wren, with an arch look. 'Don't you think me a queer little comicality?' In shaking her head at him after asking the question, she shook her hair down.

'Oh!' cried Sloppy, in a burst of admiration. 'What a lot, and what a colour!'

Miss Wren, with her usual expressive hitch, went on with her work. But, left her hair as it was; not displeased by the effect it had made.

'You don't live here alone; do you, Miss?' asked Sloppy.

'No,' said Miss Wren, with a chop. 'Live here with my fairy godmother.'

'With;' Mr Sloppy couldn't make it out; 'with who did you say, Miss?'

'Well!' replied Miss Wren, more seriously. 'With my second father. Or with my first, for that matter.' And she shook her head, and drew a sigh. 'If you had known a poor child I used to have here,' she added, 'you'd have understood me. But you didn't, and you can't. All the better!'

'You must have been taught a long time,' said Sloppy, glancing at the array of dolls in hand, 'before you came to work so neatly, Miss, and with such a pretty taste.'

'Never was taught a stitch, young man!' returned the dress-maker, tossing her head. 'Just gobbled and gobbled, till I found out how to do it. Badly enough at first, but better now.'

'And here have I,' said Sloppy, in something of a self-reproachful tone, 'been a learning and a learning, and here has Mr Boffin been a paying and a paying, ever so long!'

'I have heard what your trade is,' observed Miss Wren; 'it's cabinet-making.'

Mr Sloppy nodded. 'Now that the Mounds is done with, it is. I'll tell you what, Miss. I should like to make you something.'

'Much obliged. But what?'

'I could make you,' said Sloppy, surveying the room, 'I could make you a handy set of nests to lay the dolls in. Or I could make you a handy little set of drawers, to keep your silks and threads and scraps in. Or I could turn you a rare handle for that crutch-stick, if it belongs to him you call your father.'

'It belongs to me,' returned the little creature, with a quick flush of her face and neck. 'I am lame.'

Poor Sloppy flushed too, for there was an instinctive delicacy behind his buttons, and his own hand had struck it. He said, perhaps, the best thing in the way of amends that could be said. 'I am very glad it's yours, because I'd rather ornament it for you than for any one else. Please may I look at it?'

Miss Wren was in the act of handing it to him over her bench, when she paused. 'But you had better see me use it,' she said, sharply. 'This is the way. Hoppetty, Kicketty, Pep-peg-peg. Not pretty; is it?'

'It seems to me that you hardly want it at all,' said Sloppy.

The little dressmaker sat down again, and gave it into his hand, saying, with that better look upon her, and with a smile: 'Thank you!'

'And as concerning the nests and the drawers,' said Sloppy, after measuring the handle on his sleeve, and softly standing the stick aside against the wall, 'why, it would be a real pleasure to me. I've heerd tell that you can sing most beautiful; and I should be better paid with a song than with any money, for I always loved the likes of that, and often giv' Mrs Higden and Johnny a comic song myself, with "Spoken" in it. Though that's not your sort, I'll wager.'

'You are a very kind young man,' returned the dressmaker; 'a really kind young man. I accept your offer.—I suppose He won't mind,' she added as an afterthought, shrugging her shoulders; 'and if he does, he may!'

'Meaning him that you call your father, Miss,' asked Sloppy.

'No, no,' replied Miss Wren. 'Him, Him, Him!'

'Him, him, him?' repeated Sloppy; staring about, as if for Him.

'Him who is coming to court and marry me,' returned Miss Wren. 'Dear me, how slow you are!'

'Oh! HIM!' said Sloppy. And seemed to turn thoughtful and a little troubled. 'I never thought of him. When is he coming, Miss?'

'What a question!' cried Miss Wren. 'How should I know!'

'Where is he coming from, Miss?'

'Why, good gracious, how can I tell! He is coming from somewhere or other, I suppose, and he is coming some day or other, I suppose. I don't know any more about him, at present.'

This tickled Mr Sloppy as an extraordinarily good joke, and he threw back his head and laughed with measureless enjoyment. At the sight of him laughing in that absurd way, the dolls' dressmaker laughed very heartily indeed. So they both laughed, till they were tired.

'There, there, there!' said Miss Wren. 'For goodness' sake, stop, Giant, or I shall be swallowed up alive, before I know it. And to this minute you haven't said what you've come for.'

'I have come for little Miss Harmonses doll,' said Sloppy.

'I thought as much,' remarked Miss Wren, 'and here is little Miss Harmonses doll waiting for you. She's folded up in silver paper, you see, as if she was wrapped from head to foot in new Bank notes. Take care of her, and there's my hand, and thank you again.'

'I'll take more care of her than if she was a gold image,' said Sloppy, 'and there's both MY hands, Miss, and I'll soon come back again.'

But, the greatest event of all, in the new life of Mr and Mrs John Harmon, was a visit from Mr and Mrs Eugene Wrayburn. Sadly wan and worn was the once gallant Eugene, and walked resting on his wife's arm, and leaning heavily upon a stick. But, he was daily growing stronger and better, and it was declared by the medical attendants that he might not be much disfigured by-and-by. It was a grand event, indeed, when Mr and Mrs Eugene Wrayburn came to stay at Mr and Mrs John Harmon's house: where, by the way, Mr and Mrs Boffin (exquisitely happy, and daily cruising about, to look at shops,) were likewise staying indefinitely.

To Mr Eugene Wrayburn, in confidence, did Mrs John Harmon impart what she had known of the state of his wife's affections, in his reckless time. And to Mrs John Harmon, in confidence, did Mr Eugene Wrayburn impart that, please God, she should see how his wife had changed him!

'I make no protestations,' said Eugene; '—who does, who means them! —I have made a resolution.'

'But would you believe, Bella,' interposed his wife, coming to resume her nurse's place at his side, for he never got on well without her: 'that on our wedding day he told me he almost thought the best thing he could do, was to die?'

'As I didn't do it, Lizzie,' said Eugene, 'I'll do that better thing you suggested—for your sake.'

That same afternoon, Eugene lying on his couch in his own room upstairs, Lightwood came to chat with him, while Bella took his wife out for a ride. 'Nothing short of force will make her go, Eugene had said; so, Bella had playfully forced her.

'Dear old fellow,' Eugene began with Lightwood, reaching up his hand, 'you couldn't have come at a better time, for my mind is full, and I want to empty it. First, of my present, before I touch upon my future. M. R. F., who is a much younger cavalier than I, and a professed admirer of beauty, was so affable as to remark the other day (he paid us a visit of two days up the river there, and much objected to the accommodation of the hotel), that Lizzie ought to have her portrait painted. Which, coming from M. R. F., may be considered equivalent to a melodramatic blessing.'

'You are getting well,' said Mortimer, with a smile.

'Really,' said Eugene, 'I mean it. When M. R. F. said that, and followed it up by rolling the claret (for which he called, and I paid), in his mouth, and saying, "My dear son, why do you drink this trash?" it was tantamount in him—to a paternal benediction on our union, accompanied with a gush of tears. The coolness of M. R. F. is not to be measured by ordinary standards.'

'True enough,' said Lightwood.

'That's all,' pursued Eugene, 'that I shall ever hear from M. R. F. on the subject, and he will continue to saunter through the world with his hat on one side. My marriage being thus solemnly recognized at the family altar, I have no further trouble on that score. Next, you really have done wonders for me, Mortimer, in easing my money-perplexities, and with such a guardian and steward beside me, as the preserver of my life (I am hardly strong yet, you see, for I am not man enough to refer to her without a trembling voice—she is so inexpressibly dear to me, Mortimer!), the little that I can call my own will be more than it ever has been. It need be more, for you know what it always has been in my hands. Nothing.'

'Worse than nothing, I fancy, Eugene. My own small income (I devoutly wish that my grandfather had left it to the Ocean rather than to me!) has been an effective Something, in the way of preventing me from turning to at Anything. And I think yours has been much the same.'

'There spake the voice of wisdom,' said Eugene. 'We are shepherds both. In turning to at last, we turn to in earnest. Let us say no more of that, for a few years to come. Now, I have had an idea, Mortimer, of taking myself and my wife to one of the colonies, and working at my vocation there.'

'I should be lost without you, Eugene; but you may be right.'

'No,' said Eugene, emphatically. 'Not right. Wrong!'

He said it with such a lively—almost angry—flash, that Mortimer showed himself greatly surprised.

'You think this thumped head of mine is excited?' Eugene went on, with a high look; 'not so, believe me. I can say to you of the healthful music of my pulse what Hamlet said of his. My blood is up, but wholesomely up, when I think of it. Tell me! Shall I turn coward to Lizzie, and sneak away with her, as if I were ashamed of her! Where would your friend's part in this world be, Mortimer, if she had turned coward to him, and on immeasurably better occasion?'

'Honourable and stanch,' said Lightwood. 'And yet, Eugene—'

'And yet what, Mortimer?'

'And yet, are you sure that you might not feel (for her sake, I say for her sake) any slight coldness towards her on the part of—Society?'

'O! You and I may well stumble at the word,' returned Eugene, laughing. 'Do we mean our Tippins?'

'Perhaps we do,' said Mortimer, laughing also.

'Faith, we DO!' returned Eugene, with great animation. 'We may hide behind the bush and beat about it, but we DO! Now, my wife is something nearer to my heart, Mortimer, than Tippins is, and I owe her a little more than I owe to Tippins, and I am rather prouder of her than I ever was of Tippins. Therefore, I will fight it out to the last gasp, with her and for her, here, in the open field. When I hide her, or strike for her, faint-heartedly, in a hole or a corner, do you whom I love next best upon earth, tell me what I shall most righteously deserve to be told:—that she would have done well to turn me over with her foot that night when I lay bleeding to death, and spat in my dastard face.'

The glow that shone upon him as he spoke the words, so irradiated his features that he looked, for the time, as though he had never been mutilated. His friend responded as Eugene would have had him respond, and they discoursed of the future until Lizzie came back. After resuming her place at his side, and tenderly touching his hands and his head, she said:

'Eugene, dear, you made me go out, but I ought to have stayed with you. You are more flushed than you have been for many days. What have you been doing?'

'Nothing,' replied Eugene, 'but looking forward to your coming back.'

'And talking to Mr Lightwood,' said Lizzie, turning to him with a smile. 'But it cannot have been Society that disturbed you.'

'Faith, my dear love!' retorted Eugene, in his old airy manner, as he laughed and kissed her, 'I rather think it WAS Society though!'

The word ran so much in Mortimer Lightwood's thoughts as he went home to the Temple that night, that he resolved to take a look at Society, which he had not seen for a considerable period.

Chapter 17

THE VOICE OF SOCIETY

Behoves Mortimer Lightwood, therefore, to answer a dinner card from Mr and Mrs Veneering requesting the honour, and to signify that Mr Mortimer Lightwood will be happy to have the other honour. The Veneerings have been, as usual, indefatigably dealing dinner cards to Society, and whoever desires to take a hand had best be quick about it, for it is written in the Books of the Insolvent Fates that Veneering shall make a resounding smash next week. Yes. Having found out the clue to that great mystery how people can contrive to live beyond their means, and having over-jobbed his jobberies as legislator deputed to the Universe by the pure electors of Pocket-Breaches, it shall come to pass next week that Veneering will accept the Chiltern Hundreds, that the legal gentleman in Britannia's confidence will again accept the Pocket-Breaches Thousands, and that the Veneerings will retire to Calais, there to live on Mrs Veneering's diamonds (in which Mr Veneering, as a good husband, has from time to time invested considerable sums), and to relate to Neptune and others, how that, before Veneering retired from Parliament, the House of Commons was composed of himself and the six hundred and fifty-seven dearest and oldest friends he had in the world. It shall likewise come to pass, at as nearly as possible the same period, that Society will discover that it always did despise Veneering, and distrust Veneering, and that when it went to Veneering's to dinner it always had misgivings—though very secretly at the time, it would seem, and in a perfectly private and confidential manner.

The next week's books of the Insolvent Fates, however, being not yet opened, there is the usual rush to the Veneerings, of the people who go to their house to dine with one another and not with them. There is Lady Tippins. There are Podsnap the Great, and Mrs Podsnap. There is Twemlow. There are Buffer, Boots, and Brewer. There is the Contractor, who is Providence to five hundred thousand men. There is the Chairman, travelling three thousand miles per week. There is the brilliant genius who turned the shares into that remarkably exact sum of three hundred and seventy five thousand pounds, no shillings, and nopence.

To whom, add Mortimer Lightwood, coming in among them with a reassumption of his old languid air, founded on Eugene, and belonging to the days when he told the story of the man from Somewhere.

That fresh fairy, Tippins, all but screams at sight of her false swain. She summons the deserter to her with her fan; but the deserter, predetermined not to come, talks Britain with Podsnap. Podsnap always talks Britain, and talks as if he were a sort of Private Watchman employed, in the British interests, against the rest of the world. 'We know what Russia means, sir,' says Podsnap; 'we know what France wants; we see what America is up to; but we know what England is. That's enough for us.'

However, when dinner is served, and Lightwood drops into his old place over against Lady Tippins, she can be fended off no longer. 'Long banished Robinson Crusoe,' says the charmer, exchanging salutations, 'how did you leave the Island?'

'Thank you,' says Lightwood. 'It made no complaint of being in pain anywhere.'

'Say, how did you leave the savages?' asks Lady Tippins.

'They were becoming civilized when I left Juan Fernandez,' says Lightwood. 'At least they were eating one another, which looked like it.'

'Tormentor!' returns the dear young creature. 'You know what I mean, and you trifle with my impatience. Tell me something, immediately, about the married pair. You were at the wedding.'

'Was I, by-the-by?' Mortimer pretends, at great leisure, to consider. 'So I was!'

'How was the bride dressed? In rowing costume?'

Mortimer looks gloomy, and declines to answer.

'I hope she steered herself, skiffed herself, paddled herself, larboarded and starboarded herself, or whatever the technical term may be, to the ceremony?' proceeds the playful Tippins.

'However she got to it, she graced it,' says Mortimer.

Lady Tippins with a skittish little scream, attracts the general attention. 'Graced it! Take care of me if I faint, Veneering. He means to tell us, that a horrid female waterman is graceful!'

'Pardon me. I mean to tell you nothing, Lady Tippins,' replies Lightwood. And keeps his word by eating his dinner with a show of the utmost indifference.

'You shall not escape me in this way, you morose backwoodsman,' retorts Lady Tippins. 'You shall not evade the question, to screen your friend Eugene, who has made this exhibition of himself. The knowledge shall be brought home to you that such a ridiculous affair is condemned by the voice of Society. My dear Mrs Veneering, do let us resolve ourselves into a Committee of the whole House on the subject.'

Mrs Veneering, always charmed by this rattling sylph, cries. 'Oh yes! Do let us resolve ourselves into a Committee of the whole House! So delicious!' Veneering says, 'As many as are of that opinion, say Aye,—contrary, No—the Ayes have it.' But nobody takes the slightest notice of his joke.

'Now, I am Chairwoman of Committees!' cries Lady Tippins.

('What spirits she has!' exclaims Mrs Veneering; to whom likewise nobody attends.)

'And this,' pursues the sprightly one, 'is a Committee of the whole House to what-you-may-call-it—elicit, I suppose—the voice of Society. The question before the Committee is, whether a young man of very fair family, good appearance, and some talent, makes a fool or a wise man of himself in marrying a female waterman, turned factory girl.'

'Hardly so, I think,' the stubborn Mortimer strikes in. 'I take the question to be, whether such a man as you describe, Lady Tippins, does right or wrong in marrying a brave woman (I say nothing of her beauty), who has saved his life, with a wonderful energy and address; whom he knows to be virtuous, and possessed of remarkable qualities; whom he has long admired, and who is deeply attached to him.'

'But, excuse me,' says Podsnap, with his temper and his shirt-collar about equally rumpled; 'was this young woman ever a female waterman?'

'Never. But she sometimes rowed in a boat with her father, I believe.'

General sensation against the young woman. Brewer shakes his head. Boots shakes his head. Buffer shakes his head.

'And now, Mr Lightwood, was she ever,' pursues Podsnap, with his indignation rising high into those hair-brushes of his, 'a factory girl?'

'Never. But she had some employment in a paper mill, I believe.'

General sensation repeated. Brewer says, 'Oh dear!' Boots says, 'Oh dear!' Buffer says, 'Oh dear!' All, in a rumbling tone of protest.

'Then all I have to say is,' returns Podsnap, putting the thing away with his right arm, 'that my gorge rises against such a marriage—that it offends and disgusts me—that it makes me sick—and that I desire to know no more about it.'

('Now I wonder,' thinks Mortimer, amused, 'whether YOU are the Voice of Society!')

'Hear, hear, hear!' cries Lady Tippins. 'Your opinion of this MESALLIANCE, honourable colleagues of the honourable member who has just sat down?'

Mrs Podsnap is of opinion that in these matters there should be an equality of station and fortune, and that a man accustomed to Society should look out for a woman accustomed to Society and capable of bearing her part in it with—an ease and elegance of carriage—that.' Mrs Podsnap stops there, delicately intimating that every such man should look out for a fine woman as nearly resembling herself as he may hope to discover.

('Now I wonder,' thinks Mortimer, 'whether you are the Voice!')

Lady Tippins next canvasses the Contractor, of five hundred thousand power. It appears to this potentate, that what the man in question should have done, would have been, to buy the young woman a boat and a small annuity, and set her up for herself. These things are a question of beefsteaks and porter. You buy the young woman a boat. Very good. You buy her, at the same time, a small annuity. You speak of that annuity in pounds sterling, but it is in reality so many pounds of beefsteaks and so many pints of porter. On the one hand, the young woman has the boat. On the other hand, she consumes so many pounds of beefsteaks and so many pints of porter. Those beefsteaks and that porter are the fuel to that young woman's engine. She derives therefrom a certain amount of power to row the boat; that power will produce so much money; you add that to the small annuity; and thus you get at the young woman's income. That (it seems to the Contractor) is the way of looking at it.

The fair enslaver having fallen into one of her gentle sleeps during the last exposition, nobody likes to wake her. Fortunately, she comes awake of herself, and puts the question to the Wandering Chairman. The Wanderer can only speak of the case as if it were his own. If such a young woman as the young woman described, had saved his own life, he would have been very much obliged to her, wouldn't have married her, and would have got her a berth in an Electric Telegraph Office, where young women answer very well.

What does the Genius of the three hundred and seventy-five thousand pounds, no shillings, and nopence, think? He can't say what he thinks, without asking: Had the young woman any money?

'No,' says Lightwood, in an uncompromising voice; 'no money.'

'Madness and moonshine,' is then the compressed verdict of the Genius. 'A man may do anything lawful, for money. But for no money!—Bosh!'

What does Boots say?

Boots says he wouldn't have done it under twenty thousand pound.

What does Brewer say?

Brewer says what Boots says.

What does Buffer say?

Buffer says he knows a man who married a bathing-woman, and bolted.

Lady Tippins fancies she has collected the suffrages of the whole Committee (nobody dreaming of asking the Veneerings for their opinion), when, looking round the table through her eyeglass, she perceives Mr Twemlow with his hand to his forehead.

Good gracious! My Twemlow forgotten! My dearest! My own! What is his vote?

Twemlow has the air of being ill at ease, as he takes his hand from his forehead and replies.

'I am disposed to think,' says he, 'that this is a question of the feelings of a gentleman.'

'A gentleman can have no feelings who contracts such a marriage,' flushes Podsnap.

'Pardon me, sir,' says Twemlow, rather less mildly than usual, 'I don't agree with you. If this gentleman's feelings of gratitude, of respect, of admiration, and affection, induced him (as I presume they did) to marry this lady—'

'This lady!' echoes Podsnap.

'Sir,' returns Twemlow, with his wristbands bristling a little, 'YOU repeat the word; I repeat the word. This lady. What else would you call her, if the gentleman were present?'

This being something in the nature of a poser for Podsnap, he merely waves it away with a speechless wave.

'I say,' resumes Twemlow, 'if such feelings on the part of this gentleman, induced this gentleman to marry this lady, I think he is the greater gentleman for the action, and makes her the greater lady. I beg to say, that when I use the word, gentleman, I use it in the sense in which the degree may be attained by any man. The feelings of a gentleman I hold sacred, and I confess I am not comfortable when they are made the subject of sport or general discussion.'

'I should like to know,' sneers Podsnap, 'whether your noble relation would be of your opinion.'

'Mr Podsnap,' retorts Twemlow, 'permit me. He might be, or he might not be. I cannot say. But, I could not allow even him to dictate to me on a point of great delicacy, on which I feel very strongly.'

Somehow, a canopy of wet blanket seems to descend upon the company, and Lady Tippins was never known to turn so very greedy or so very cross. Mortimer Lightwood alone brightens. He has been asking himself, as to every other member of the Committee in turn, 'I wonder whether you are the Voice!' But he does not ask himself the question after Twemlow has spoken, and he glances in Twemlow's direction as if he were grateful. When the company disperse—by which time Mr and Mrs Veneering have had quite as much as they want of the honour, and the guests have had quite as much as THEY want of the other honour—Mortimer sees Twemlow home, shakes hands with him cordially at parting, and fares to the Temple, gaily.

POSTSCRIPT

IN LIEU OF PREFACE

When I devised this story, I foresaw the likelihood that a class of readers and commentators would suppose that I was at great pains to conceal exactly what I was at great pains to suggest: namely, that Mr John Harmon was not slain, and that Mr John Rokesmith was he. Pleasing myself with the idea that the supposition might in part arise out of some ingenuity in the story, and thinking it worth while, in the interests of art, to hint to an audience that an artist (of whatever denomination) may perhaps be trusted to know what he is about in his vocation, if they will concede him a little patience, I was not alarmed by the anticipation.

To keep for a long time unsuspected, yet always working itself out, another purpose originating in that leading incident, and turning it to a pleasant and useful account at last, was at once the most interesting and the most difficult part of my design. Its difficulty was much enhanced by the mode of publication; for, it would be very unreasonable to expect that many readers, pursuing a story in portions from month to month through nineteen months, will, until they have it before them complete, perceive the relations of its finer threads to the whole pattern which is always before the eyes of the story-weaver at his loom. Yet, that I hold the advantages of the mode of publication to outweigh its disadvantages, may be easily believed of one who revived it in the Pickwick Papers after long disuse, and has pursued it ever since.

There is sometimes an odd disposition in this country to dispute as improbable in fiction, what are the commonest experiences in fact. Therefore, I note here, though it may not be at all necessary, that there are hundreds of Will Cases (as they are called), far more remarkable than that fancied in this book; and that the stores of the Prerogative Office teem with instances of testators who have made, changed, contradicted, hidden, forgotten, left cancelled, and left uncancelled, each many more wills than were ever made by the elder Mr Harmon of Harmony Jail.

In my social experiences since Mrs Betty Higden came upon the scene and left it, I have found Circumlocutional champions disposed to be warm with me on the subject of my view of the Poor Law. Mr friend Mr Bounderby could never see any difference between leaving the Coketown 'hands' exactly as they were, and requiring them to be fed with turtle soup and venison out of gold spoons. Idiotic propositions of a parallel nature have been freely offered for my acceptance, and I have been called upon to admit that I would give Poor Law relief to anybody, anywhere, anyhow. Putting this nonsense aside, I have observed a suspicious tendency in the champions to divide into two parties; the one, contending that there are no deserving Poor who prefer death by slow starvation and bitter weather, to the mercies of some Relieving Officers and some Union Houses; the other, admitting that there are such Poor, but denying that they have any cause or reason for what they do. The records in our newspapers, the late exposure by THE LANCET, and the common sense and senses of common people, furnish too abundant evidence against both defences. But, that my view of the Poor Law may not be mistaken or misrepresented, I will state it. I believe there has been in England, since the days of the STUARTS, no law so often infamously administered, no law so often openly violated, no law habitually so ill-supervised. In the majority of the shameful cases of disease and death from destitution, that shock the Public and disgrace the country, the illegality is quite equal to the inhumanity—and known language could say no more of their lawlessness.

On Friday the Ninth of June in the present year, Mr and Mrs Boffin (in their manuscript dress of receiving Mr and Mrs Lammle at breakfast) were on the South Eastern Railway with me, in a terribly destructive accident. When I had done what I could to help others, I climbed back into my carriage—nearly turned over a viaduct, and caught aslant upon the turn—to extricate the worthy couple. They were much soiled, but otherwise unhurt. The same happy result attended Miss Bella Wilfer on her wedding day, and Mr Riderhood inspecting Bradley Headstone's red neckerchief as he lay asleep. I remember with devout thankfulness that I can never be much nearer parting company with my readers for ever, than I was then, until there shall be written against my life, the two words with which I have this day closed this book:—THE END.

September 2nd, 1865.

THE END OF
Our Mutual Friend

THE PERILS OF CERTAIN ENGLISH PRISONERS

CHAPTER I—THE ISLAND OF SILVER-STORE

It was in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and forty-four, that I, Gill Davis to command, His Mark, having then the honour to be a private in the Royal Marines, stood a-leaning over the bulwarks of the armed sloop Christopher Columbus, in the South American waters off the Mosquito shore.

My lady remarks to me, before I go any further, that there is no such christian-name as Gill, and that her confident opinion is, that the name given to me in the baptism wherein I was made, &c., was Gilbert. She is certain to be right, but I never heard of it. I was a foundling child, picked up somewhere or another, and I always understood my christian-name to be Gill. It is true that I was called Gills when employed at Snorridge Bottom betwixt Chatham and Maidstone to frighten birds; but that had nothing to do with the Baptism wherein I was made, &c., and wherein a number of things were promised for me by somebody, who let me alone ever afterwards as to performing any of them, and who, I consider, must have been the Beadle. Such name of Gills was entirely owing to my cheeks, or gills, which at that time of my life were of a raspy description.

My lady stops me again, before I go any further, by laughing exactly in her old way and waving the feather of her pen at me. That action on her part, calls to my mind as I look at her hand with the rings on it—Well! I won't! To be sure it will come in, in its own place. But it's always strange to me, noticing the quiet hand, and noticing it (as I have done, you know, so many times) a-fondling children and grandchildren asleep, to think that when blood and honour were up—there! I won't! not at present!—Scratch it out.

She won't scratch it out, and quite honourable; because we have made an understanding that everything is to be taken down, and that nothing that is once taken down shall be scratched out. I have the great misfortune not to be able to read and write, and I am speaking my true and faithful account of those Adventures, and my lady is writing it, word for word.

I say, there I was, a-leaning over the bulwarks of the sloop Christopher Columbus in the South American waters off the Mosquito shore: a subject of his Gracious Majesty King George of England, and a private in the Royal Marines.

In those climates, you don't want to do much. I was doing nothing. I was thinking of the shepherd (my father, I wonder?) on the hillsides by Snorridge Bottom, with a long staff, and with a rough white coat in all weathers all the year round, who used to let me lie in a corner of his hut by night, and who used to let me go about with him and his sheep by day when I could get nothing else to do, and who used to give me so little of his victuals and so much of his staff, that I ran away from him—which was what he wanted all along, I expect—to be knocked about the world in preference to Snorridge Bottom. I had been knocked about the world for nine-and-twenty years in all, when I stood looking along those bright blue South American Waters. Looking after the shepherd, I may say. Watching him in a half-waking dream, with my eyes half-shut, as he, and his flock of sheep, and his two dogs, seemed to move away from the ship's side, far away over the blue water, and go right down into the sky.

"It's rising out of the water, steady," a voice said close to me. I had been thinking on so, that it like woke me with a start, though it was no stranger voice than the voice of Harry Charker, my own comrade.

"What's rising out of the water, steady?" I asked my comrade.

"What?" says he. "The Island."

"O! The Island!" says I, turning my eyes towards it. "True. I forgot the Island."

"Forgot the port you're going to? That's odd, ain't it?"

"It is odd," says I.

"And odd," he said, slowly considering with himself, "ain't even. Is it, Gill?"

He had always a remark just like that to make, and seldom another. As soon as he had brought a thing round to what it was not, he was satisfied. He was one of the best of men, and, in a certain sort of a way, one with the least to say for himself. I qualify it, because, besides being able to read and write like a Quarter-master, he had always one most excellent idea in his mind. That was, Duty. Upon my soul, I don't believe, though I admire learning beyond everything, that he could have got a better idea out of all the books in the world, if he had learnt them every word, and been the cleverest of scholars.

My comrade and I had been quartered in Jamaica, and from there we had been drafted off to the British settlement of Belize, lying away West and North of the Mosquito coast. At Belize there had been great alarm of one cruel gang of pirates (there were always more pirates than enough in those Caribbean Seas), and as they got the better of our English cruisers by running into out-of-the-way creeks and shallows, and taking the land when they were hotly pressed, the governor of Belize had received orders from home to keep a sharp look-out for them along shore. Now, there was an armed sloop came once a-year from Port Royal, Jamaica, to the Island, laden with all manner of necessaries, to eat, and to drink, and to wear, and to use in various ways; and it was aboard of that sloop which had touched at Belize, that I was a-standing, leaning over the bulwarks.

The Island was occupied by a very small English colony. It had been given the name of Silver-Store. The reason of its being so called, was, that the English colony owned and worked a silver-mine over on the mainland, in Honduras, and used this Island as a safe and convenient place to store their silver in, until it was annually fetched away by the sloop. It was brought down from the mine to the coast on the backs of mules, attended by friendly Indians and guarded by white men; from thence it was conveyed over to Silver-Store, when the weather was fair, in the canoes of that country; from Silver-Store, it was carried to Jamaica by the armed sloop once a-year, as I have already mentioned; from Jamaica, it went, of course, all over the world.

How I came to be aboard the armed sloop, is easily told. Four-and-twenty marines under command of a lieutenant—that officer’s name was Linderwood—had been told off at Belize, to proceed to Silver-Store, in aid of boats and seamen stationed there for the chase of the Pirates. The Island was considered a good post of observation against the pirates, both by land and sea; neither the pirate ship nor yet her boats had been seen by any of us, but they had been so much heard of, that the reinforcement was sent. Of that party, I was one. It included a corporal and a sergeant. Charker was corporal, and the sergeant’s name was Drooce. He was the most tyrannical non-commissioned officer in His Majesty’s service.

The night came on, soon after I had had the foregoing words with Charker. All the wonderful bright colours went out of the sea and sky in a few minutes, and all the stars in the Heavens seemed to shine out together, and to look down at themselves in the sea, over one another's shoulders, millions deep. Next morning, we cast anchor off the Island. There was a snug harbour within a little reef; there was a sandy beach; there were cocoa-nut trees with high straight stems, quite bare, and foliage at the top like plumes of magnificent green feathers; there were all the objects that are usually seen in those parts, and *I* am not going to describe them, having something else to tell about.

Great rejoicings, to be sure, were made on our arrival. All the flags in the place were hoisted, all the guns in the place were fired, and all the people in the place came down to look at us. One of those Sambo fellows—they call those natives Sambos, when they are half-negro and half-Indian—had come off outside the reef, to pilot us in, and remained on board after we had let go our anchor. He was called Christian George King, and was fonder of all hands than anybody else was. Now, I confess, for myself, that on that first day, if I had been captain of the Christopher Columbus, instead of private in the Royal Marines, I should have kicked Christian George King—who was no more a Christian than he was a King or a George—over the side, without exactly knowing why, except that it was the right thing to do.

But, I must likewise confess, that I was not in a particularly pleasant humour, when I stood under arms that morning, aboard the Christopher Columbus in the harbour of the Island of Silver-Store. I had had a hard life, and the life of the English on the Island seemed too easy and too gay to please me. "Here you are," I thought to myself, "good scholars and good livers; able to read what you like, able to write what you like, able to eat and drink what you like, and spend what you like, and do what you like; and much *you* care for a poor, ignorant Private in the Royal Marines! Yet it's hard, too, I think, that you should have all the half-pence, and I all the kicks; you all the smooth, and I all the rough; you all the oil, and I all the vinegar." It was as envious a thing to think as might be, let alone its being nonsensical; but, I thought it. I took it so much amiss, that, when a very beautiful young English lady came aboard, I grunted to myself, "Ah! *you* have got a lover, I'll be bound!" As if there was any new offence to me in that, if she had!

She was sister to the captain of our sloop, who had been in a poor way for some time, and who was so ill then that he was obliged to be carried ashore. She was the child of a military officer, and had come out there with her sister, who was married to one of the owners of the silver-mine, and who had three children with her. It was easy to see that she was the light and spirit of the Island. After I had got a good look at her, I grunted to myself again, in an even worse state of mind than before, “I’ll be damned, if I don’t hate him, whoever he is!”

My officer, Lieutenant Linderwood, was as ill as the captain of the sloop, and was carried ashore, too. They were both young men of about my age, who had been delicate in the West India climate. I even took *that* in bad part. I thought I was much fitter for the work than they were, and that if all of us had our deserts, I should be both of them rolled into one. (It may be imagined what sort of an officer of marines I should have made, without the power of reading a written order. And as to any knowledge how to command the sloop—Lord! I should have sunk her in a quarter of an hour!)

However, such were my reflections; and when we men were ashore and dismissed, I strolled about the place along with Charker, making my observations in a similar spirit.

It was a pretty place: in all its arrangements partly South American and partly English, and very agreeable to look at on that account, being like a bit of home that had got chipped off and had floated away to that spot, accommodating itself to circumstances as it drifted along. The huts of the Sambos, to the number of five-and-twenty, perhaps, were down by the beach to the left of the anchorage. On the right was a sort of barrack, with a South American Flag and the Union Jack, flying from the same staff, where the little English colony could all come together, if they saw occasion. It was a walled square of building, with a sort of pleasure-ground inside, and inside that again a sunken block like a powder magazine, with a little square trench round it, and steps down to the door. Charker and I were looking in at the gate, which was not guarded; and I had said to Charker, in reference to the bit like a powder magazine, “That’s where they keep the silver you see;” and Charker had said to me, after thinking it over, “And silver ain’t gold. Is it, Gill?” when the beautiful young English lady I had been so bilious about, looked out of a door, or a window—at all events looked out, from under a bright awning. She no sooner saw us two in uniform, than she came out so quickly that she was still putting on her broad Mexican hat of plaited straw when we saluted.

"Would you like to come in," she said, "and see the place? It is rather a curious place."

We thanked the young lady, and said we didn't wish to be troublesome; but, she said it could be no trouble to an English soldier's daughter, to show English soldiers how their countrymen and country-women fared, so far away from England; and consequently we saluted again, and went in. Then, as we stood in the shade, she showed us (being as affable as beautiful), how the different families lived in their separate houses, and how there was a general house for stores, and a general reading-room, and a general room for music and dancing, and a room for Church; and how there were other houses on the rising ground called the Signal Hill, where they lived in the hotter weather.

"Your officer has been carried up there," she said, "and my brother, too, for the better air. At present, our few residents are dispersed over both spots: deducting, that is to say, such of our number as are always going to, or coming from, or staying at, the Mine."

("*He* is among one of those parties," I thought, "and I wish somebody would knock his head off.")

"Some of our married ladies live here," she said, "during at least half the year, as lonely as widows, with their children."

"Many children here, ma'am?"

"Seventeen. There are thirteen married ladies, and there are eight like me."

There were not eight like her—there was not one like her—in the world. She meant single.

"Which, with about thirty Englishmen of various degrees," said the young lady, "form the little colony now on the Island. I don't count the sailors, for they don't belong to us. Nor the soldiers," she gave us a gracious smile when she spoke of the soldiers, "for the same reason."

"Nor the Sambos, ma'am," said I.

"No."

"Under your favour, and with your leave, ma'am," said I, "are they trustworthy?"

"Perfectly! We are all very kind to them, and they are very grateful to us."

"Indeed, ma'am? Now—Christian George King?—"

"Very much attached to us all. Would die for us."

She was, as in my uneducated way I have observed, very beautiful women almost always to be, so composed, that her composure gave great weight to what she said, and I believed it.

Then, she pointed out to us the building like a powder magazine, and explained to us in what manner the silver was brought from the mine, and was brought over from the mainland, and was stored here. The Christopher Columbus would have a rich lading, she said, for there had been a great yield that year, a much richer yield than usual, and there was a chest of jewels besides the silver.

When we had looked about us, and were getting sheepish, through fearing we were troublesome, she turned us over to a young woman, English born but West India bred, who served her as her maid. This young woman was the widow of a non-commissioned officer in a regiment of the line. She had got married and widowed at St. Vincent, with only a few months between the two events. She was a little saucy woman, with a bright pair of eyes, rather a neat little foot and figure, and rather a neat little turned-up nose. The sort of young woman, I considered at the time, who appeared to invite you to give her a kiss, and who would have slapped your face if you accepted the invitation.

I couldn’t make out her name at first; for, when she gave it in answer to my inquiry, it sounded like Beltot, which didn’t sound right. But, when we became better acquainted—which was while Charker and I were drinking sugar-cane sangaree, which she made in a most excellent manner—I found that her Christian name was Isabella, which they shortened into Bell, and that the name of the deceased non-commissioned officer was Tott. Being the kind of neat little woman it was natural to make a toy of—I never saw a woman so like a toy in my life—she had got the plaything name of Belltott. In short, she had no other name on the island. Even Mr. Commissioner Pordage (and *he* was a grave one!) formally addressed her as Mrs. Belltott, but, I shall come to Mr. Commissioner Pordage presently.

The name of the captain of the sloop was Captain Maryon, and therefore it was no news to hear from Mrs. Belltott, that his sister, the beautiful unmarried young English lady, was Miss Maryon. The novelty was, that her christian-name was Marion too. Marion Maryon. Many a time I have run off those two names in my thoughts, like a bit of verse. Oh many, and many, and many a time!

We saw out all the drink that was produced, like good men and true, and then took our leaves, and went down to the beach. The weather was beautiful; the wind steady, low, and gentle; the island, a picture; the sea, a picture; the sky, a picture. In that country there are two rainy seasons in the year. One sets in at about our English Midsummer; the other, about a fortnight after our English Michaelmas. It was the beginning of August at that time; the first of these rainy seasons was well over; and everything was in its most beautiful growth, and had its loveliest look upon it.

"They enjoy themselves here," I says to Charker, turning surly again. "This is better than private-soldiering."

We had come down to the beach, to be friendly with the boat's-crew who were camped and hutted there; and we were approaching towards their quarters over the sand, when Christian George King comes up from the landing-place at a wolf's-trot, crying, "Yup, So-Jeer!"—which was that Sambo Pilot's barbarous way of saying, Hallo, Soldier! I have stated myself to be a man of no learning, and, if I entertain prejudices, I hope allowance may be made. I will now confess to one. It may be a right one or it may be a wrong one; but, I never did like Natives, except in the form of oysters.

So, when Christian George King, who was individually unpleasant to me besides, comes a trotting along the sand, clucking, "Yup, So-Jeer!" I had a thundering good mind to let fly at him with my right. I certainly should have done it, but that it would have exposed me to reprimand.

"Yup, So-Jeer!" says he. "Bad job."

"What do you mean?" says I.

"Yup, So-Jeer!" says he, "Ship Leakee."

"Ship leaky?" says I.

"Iss," says he, with a nod that looked as if it was jerked out of him by a most violent hiccup—which is the way with those savages.

I cast my eyes at Charker, and we both heard the pumps going aboard the sloop, and saw the signal run up, "Come on board; hands wanted from the shore." In no time some of the sloop's liberty-men were already running down to the water's edge, and the party of seamen, under orders against the Pirates, were putting off to the Columbus in two boats.

"O Christian George King sar berry sorry!" says that Sambo vagabond, then. "Christian George King cry, English fashion!" His English fashion of crying was to screw his black knuckles into his eyes, howl like a dog, and roll himself on his back on the sand. It was trying not to kick him, but I gave Charker the word, “Double-quick, Harry!” and we got down to the water’s edge, and got on board the sloop.

By some means or other, she had sprung such a leak, that no pumping would keep her free; and what between the two fears that she would go down in the harbour, and that, even if she did not, all the supplies she had brought for the little colony would be destroyed by the sea-water as it rose in her, there was great confusion. In the midst of it, Captain Maryon was heard hailing from the beach. He had been carried down in his hammock, and looked very bad; but he insisted on being stood there on his feet; and I saw him, myself, come off in the boat, sitting upright in the stern-sheets, as if nothing was wrong with him.

A quick sort of council was held, and Captain Maryon soon resolved that we must all fall to work to get the cargo out, and that when that was done, the guns and heavy matters must be got out, and that the sloop must be hauled ashore, and careened, and the leak stopped. We were all mustered (the Pirate-Chace party volunteering), and told off into parties, with so many hours of spell and so many hours of relief, and we all went at it with a will. Christian George King was entered one of the party in which I worked, at his own request, and he went at it with as good a will as any of the rest. He went at it with so much heartiness, to say the truth, that he rose in my good opinion almost as fast as the water rose in the ship. Which was fast enough, and faster.

Mr. Commissioner Pordage kept in a red-and-black japanned box, like a family lump-sugar box, some document or other, which some Sambo chief or other had got drunk and spilt some ink over (as well as I could understand the matter), and by that means had given up lawful possession of the Island. Through having hold of this box, Mr. Pordage got his title of Commissioner. He was styled Consul too, and spoke of himself as “Government.”

He was a stiff-jointed, high-nosed old gentleman, without an ounce of fat on him, of a very angry temper and a very yellow complexion. Mrs. Commissioner Pordage, making allowance for difference of sex, was much the same. Mr. Kitten, a small, youngish, bald, botanical and mineralogical gentleman, also connected with the mine—but everybody there was that, more or less—was sometimes called by Mr. Commissioner Pordage, his

Vice-commissioner, and sometimes his Deputy-consul. Or sometimes he spoke of Mr. Kitten, merely as being “under Government.”

The beach was beginning to be a lively scene with the preparations for careening the sloop, and with cargo, and spars, and rigging, and water-casks, dotted about it, and with temporary quarters for the men rising up there out of such sails and odds and ends as could be best set on one side to make them, when Mr. Commissioner Pordage comes down in a high fluster, and asks for Captain Maryon. The Captain, ill as he was, was slung in his hammock betwixt two trees, that he might direct; and he raised his head, and answered for himself.

“Captain Maryon,” cries Mr. Commissioner Pordage, “this is not official. This is not regular.”

“Sir,” says the Captain, “it hath been arranged with the clerk and supercargo, that you should be communicated with, and requested to render any little assistance that may lie in your power. I am quite certain that hath been duly done.”

“Captain Maryon,” replied Mr. Commissioner Pordage, “there hath been no written correspondence. No documents have passed, no memoranda have been made, no minutes have been made, no entries and counter-entries appear in the official muniments. This is indecent. I call upon you, sir, to desist, until all is regular, or Government will take this up.”

“Sir,” says Captain Maryon, chafing a little, as he looked out of his hammock; “between the chances of Government taking this up, and my ship taking herself down, I much prefer to trust myself to the former.”

“You do, sir?” cries Mr. Commissioner Pordage.

“I do, sir,” says Captain Maryon, lying down again.

“Then, Mr. Kitten,” says the Commissioner, “send up instantly for my Diplomatic coat.”

He was dressed in a linen suit at that moment; but, Mr. Kitten started off himself and brought down the Diplomatic coat, which was a blue cloth one, gold-laced, and with a crown on the button.

“Now, Mr. Kitten,” says Pordage, “I instruct you, as Vice-commissioner, and Deputy-consul of this place, to demand of Captain Maryon, of the sloop Christopher Columbus, whether he drives me to the act of putting this coat on?”

“Mr. Pordage,” says Captain Maryon, looking out of his hammock again, “as I can hear what you say, I can answer it without troubling the gentleman. I should be sorry that you should be at the pains of putting on too hot a coat on my account; but, otherwise, you may put it on hind-side before, or inside-out, or with your legs in the sleeves, or your head in the skirts, for any objection that I have to offer to your thoroughly pleasing yourself."

"Very good, Captain Maryon," says Pordage, in a tremendous passion. "Very good, sir. Be the consequences on your own head! Mr. Kitten, as it has come to this, help me on with it."

When he had given that order, he walked off in the coat, and all our names were taken, and I was afterwards told that Mr. Kitten wrote from his dictation more than a bushel of large paper on the subject, which cost more before it was done with, than ever could be calculated, and which only got done with after all, by being lost.

Our work went on merrily, nevertheless, and the Christopher Columbus, hauled up, lay helpless on her side like a great fish out of water. While she was in that state, there was a feast, or a ball, or an entertainment, or more properly all three together, given us in honour of the ship, and the ship's company, and the other visitors. At that assembly, I believe, I saw all the inhabitants then upon the Island, without any exception. I took no particular notice of more than a few, but I found it very agreeable in that little corner of the world to see the children, who were of all ages, and mostly very pretty—as they mostly are. There was one handsome elderly lady, with very dark eyes and gray hair, that I inquired about. I was told that her name was Mrs. Venning; and her married daughter, a fair slight thing, was pointed out to me by the name of Fanny Fisher. Quite a child she looked, with a little copy of herself holding to her dress; and her husband, just come back from the mine, exceeding proud of her. They were a good-looking set of people on the whole, but I didn't like them. I was out of sorts; in conversation with Charker, I found fault with all of them. I said of Mrs. Venning, she was proud; of Mrs. Fisher, she was a delicate little baby-fool. What did I think of this one? Why, he was a fine gentleman. What did I say to that one? Why, she was a fine lady. What could you expect them to be (I asked Charker), nursed in that climate, with the tropical night shining for them, musical instruments playing to them, great trees bending over them, soft lamps lighting them, fire-flies sparkling in among them, bright flowers and birds brought into existence to please their eyes, delicious drinks to be had for the pouring out, delicious fruits to be got for the picking, and every one dancing and murmuring happily in the scented air, with the sea breaking low on the reef for a pleasant chorus.

"Fine gentlemen and fine ladies, Harry?" I says to Charker. "Yes, I think so! Dolls! Dolls! Not the sort of stuff for wear, that comes of poor private soldiering in the Royal Marines!"

However, I could not gainsay that they were very hospitable people, and that they treated us uncommonly well. Every man of us was at the entertainment, and Mrs. Belltott had more partners than she could dance with: though she danced all night, too. As to Jack (whether of the Christopher Columbus, or of the Pirate pursuit party, it made no difference), he danced with his brother Jack, danced with himself, danced with the moon, the stars, the trees, the prospect, anything. I didn't greatly take to the chief-officer of that party, with his bright eyes, brown face, and easy figure. I didn't much like his way when he first happened to come where we were, with Miss Maryon on his arm. "O, Captain Carton," she says, "here are two friends of mine!" He says, "Indeed? These two Marines?"—meaning Charker and self. "Yes," says she, "I showed these two friends of mine when they first came, all the wonders of Silver-Store." He gave us a laughing look, and says he, "You are in luck, men. I would be disrated and go before the mast to-morrow, to be shown the way upward again by such a guide. You are in luck, men." When we had saluted, and he and the lady had waltzed away, I said, "You are a pretty follow, too, to talk of luck. You may go to the Devil!"

Mr. Commissioner Pordage and Mrs. Commissioner, showed among the company on that occasion like the King and Queen of a much Greater Britain than Great Britain. Only two other circumstances in that jovial night made much separate impression on me. One was this. A man in our draft of marines, named Tom Packer, a wild unsteady young fellow, but the son of a respectable shipwright in Portsmouth Yard, and a good scholar who had been well brought up, comes to me after a spell of dancing, and takes me aside by the elbow, and says, swearing angrily:

"Gill Davis, I hope I may not be the death of Sergeant Drooce one day!"

Now, I knew Drooce had always borne particularly hard on this man, and I knew this man to be of a very hot temper: so, I said:

"Tut, nonsense! don't talk so to me! If there's a man in the corps who scorns the name of an assassin, that man and Tom Packer are one."

Tom wipes his head, being in a mortal sweat, and says he:

“I hope so, but I can’t answer for myself when he lords it over me, as he has just now done, before a woman. I tell you what, Gill! Mark my words! It will go hard with Sergeant Drooce, if ever we are in an engagement together, and he has to look to me to save him. Let him say a prayer then, if he knows one, for it’s all over with him, and he is on his Death-bed. Mark my words!”

I did mark his words, and very soon afterwards, too, as will shortly be taken down.

The other circumstance that I noticed at that ball, was, the gaiety and attachment of Christian George King. The innocent spirits that Sambo Pilot was in, and the impossibility he found himself under of showing all the little colony, but especially the ladies and children, how fond he was of them, how devoted to them, and how faithful to them for life and death, for present, future, and everlasting, made a great impression on me. If ever a man, Sambo or no Sambo, was trustful and trusted, to what may be called quite an infantine and sweetly beautiful extent, surely, I thought that morning when I did at last lie down to rest, it was that Sambo Pilot, Christian George King.

This may account for my dreaming of him. He stuck in my sleep, cornerwise, and I couldn’t get him out. He was always flitting about me, dancing round me, and peeping in over my hammock, though I woke and dozed off again fifty times. At last, when I opened my eyes, there he really was, looking in at the open side of the little dark hut; which was made of leaves, and had Charker’s hammock slung in it as well as mine.

“So-Jeer!” says he, in a sort of a low croak. “Yup!”

“Hallo!” says I, starting up. “What? You *are* there, are you?”

“Iss,” says he. “Christian George King got news.”

“What news has he got?”

“Pirates out!”

I was on my feet in a second. So was Charker. We were both aware that Captain Carton, in command of the boats, constantly watched the mainland for a secret signal, though, of course, it was not known to such as us what the signal was.

Christian George King had vanished before we touched the ground. But, the word was already passing from hut to hut to turn out quietly, and we knew that the nimble barbarian had got hold of the truth, or something near it.

In a space among the trees behind the encampment of us visitors, naval and military, was a snugly-screened spot, where we kept the stores that were in use, and did our cookery. The word was passed to assemble here. It was very quickly given, and was given (so far as we were concerned) by Sergeant Drooce, who was as good in a soldier point of view, as he was bad in a tyrannical one. We were ordered to drop into this space, quietly, behind the trees, one by one. As we assembled here, the seamen assembled too. Within ten minutes, as I should estimate, we were all here, except the usual guard upon the beach. The beach (we could see it through the wood) looked as it always had done in the hottest time of the day. The guard were in the shadow of the sloop's hull, and nothing was moving but the sea,—and that moved very faintly. Work had always been knocked off at that hour, until the sun grew less fierce, and the sea-breeze rose; so that its being holiday with us, made no difference, just then, in the look of the place. But I may mention that it was a holiday, and the first we had had since our hard work began. Last night's ball had been given, on the leak's being repaired, and the careening done. The worst of the work was over, and to-morrow we were to begin to get the sloop afloat again.

We marines were now drawn up here under arms. The chace-party were drawn up separate. The men of the Columbus were drawn up separate. The officers stepped out into the midst of the three parties, and spoke so as all might hear. Captain Carton was the officer in command, and he had a spy-glass in his hand. His coxswain stood by him with another spy-glass, and with a slate on which he seemed to have been taking down signals.

"Now, men!" says Captain Carton; "I have to let you know, for your satisfaction: Firstly, that there are ten pirate-boats, strongly manned and armed, lying hidden up a creek yonder on the coast, under the overhanging branches of the dense trees. Secondly, that they will certainly come out this night when the moon rises, on a pillaging and murdering expedition, of which some part of the mainland is the object. Thirdly—don't cheer, men!—that we will give chace, and, if we can get at them, rid the world of them, please God!"

Nobody spoke, that I heard, and nobody moved, that I saw. Yet there was a kind of ring, as if every man answered and approved with the best blood that was inside of him.

"Sir," says Captain Maryon, "I beg to volunteer on this service, with my boats. My people volunteer, to the ship's boys."

"In His Majesty's name and service," the other answers, touching his hat, "I accept your aid with pleasure. Lieutenant Linderwood, how will you divide your men?"

I was ashamed—I give it out to be written down as large and plain as possible—I was heart and soul ashamed of my thoughts of those two sick officers, Captain Maryon and Lieutenant Linderwood, when I saw them, then and there. The spirit in those two gentlemen beat down their illness (and very ill I knew them to be) like Saint George beating down the Dragon. Pain and weakness, want of ease and want of rest, had no more place in their minds than fear itself. Meaning now to express for my lady to write down, exactly what I felt then and there, I felt this: "You two brave fellows that I had been so grudgeful of, I know that if you were dying you would put it off to get up and do your best, and then you would be so modest that in lying down again to die, you would hardly say, 'I did it!'"

It did me good. It really did me good.

But, to go back to where I broke off. Says Captain Carton to Lieutenant Linderwood, "Sir, how will you divide your men? There is not room for all; and a few men should, in any case, be left here."

There was some debate about it. At last, it was resolved to leave eight Marines and four seamen on the Island, besides the sloop's two boys. And because it was considered that the friendly Sambos would only want to be commanded in case of any danger (though none at all was apprehended there), the officers were in favour of leaving the two non-commissioned officers, Drooce and Charker. It was a heavy disappointment to them, just as my being one of the left was a heavy disappointment to me—then, but not soon afterwards. We men drew lots for it, and I drew "Island." So did Tom Packer. So of course, did four more of our rank and file.

When this was settled, verbal instructions were given to all hands to keep the intended expedition secret, in order that the women and children might not be alarmed, or the expedition put in a difficulty by more volunteers. The assembly was to be on that same spot at sunset. Every man was to keep up an appearance, meanwhile, of occupying himself in his usual way. That is to say, every man excepting four old trusty seamen, who were appointed, with an officer, to see to the arms and ammunition, and to muffle the rullocks of the boats, and to make everything as trim and swift and silent as it could be made.

The Sambo Pilot had been present all the while, in case of his being wanted, and had said to the officer in command, five hundred times over if he had said it once, that Christian George King would stay with the So-Jeers, and take care of the booffer ladies and the booffer childs—booffer being that native's expression for beautiful. He was now asked a few questions concerning the putting off of the boats, and in particular whether there was any way of embarking at the back of the Island: which Captain Carton would have half liked to do, and then have dropped round in its shadow and slanted across to the main. But, "No," says Christian George King. "No, no, no! Told you so, ten time. No, no, no! All reef, all rock, all swim, all drown!" Striking out as he said it, like a swimmer gone mad, and turning over on his back on dry land, and spluttering himself to death, in a manner that made him quite an exhibition.

The sun went down, after appearing to be a long time about it, and the assembly was called. Every man answered to his name, of course, and was at his post. It was not yet black dark, and the roll was only just gone through, when up comes Mr. Commissioner Pordage with his Diplomatic coat on.

"Captain Carton," says he, "Sir, what is this?"

"This, Mr. Commissioner" (he was very short with him), "is an expedition against the Pirates. It is a secret expedition, so please to keep it a secret."

"Sir," says Commissioner Pordage, "I trust there is going to be no unnecessary cruelty committed?"

"Sir," returns the officer, "I trust not."

"That is not enough, sir," cries Commissioner Pordage, getting wroth. "Captain Carton, I give you notice. Government requires you to treat the enemy with great delicacy, consideration, clemency, and forbearance."

"Sir," says Captain Carton, "I am an English officer, commanding English Men, and I hope I am not likely to disappoint the Government's just expectations. But, I presume you know that these villains under their black flag have despoiled our countrymen of their property, burnt their homes, barbarously murdered them and their little children, and worse than murdered their wives and daughters?"

"Perhaps I do, Captain Carton," answers Pordage, waving his hand, with dignity; "perhaps I do not. It is not customary, sir, for Government to commit itself."

“It matters very little, Mr. Pordage, whether or no. Believing that I hold my commission by the allowance of God, and not that I have received it direct from the Devil, I shall certainly use it, with all avoidance of unnecessary suffering and with all merciful swiftness of execution, to exterminate these people from the face of the earth. Let me recommend you to go home, sir, and to keep out of the night-air.”

Never another syllable did that officer say to the Commissioner, but turned away to his men. The Commissioner buttoned his Diplomatic coat to the chin, said, “Mr. Kitten, attend me!” gasped, half choked himself, and took himself off.

It now fell very dark, indeed. I have seldom, if ever, seen it darker, nor yet so dark. The moon was not due until one in the morning, and it was but a little after nine when our men lay down where they were mustered. It was pretended that they were to take a nap, but everybody knew that no nap was to be got under the circumstances. Though all were very quiet, there was a restlessness among the people; much what I have seen among the people on a race-course, when the bell has rung for the saddling for a great race with large stakes on it.

At ten, they put off; only one boat putting off at a time; another following in five minutes; both then lying on their oars until another followed. Ahead of all, paddling his own outlandish little canoe without a sound, went the Sambo pilot, to take them safely outside the reef. No light was shown but once, and that was in the commanding officer’s own hand. I lighted the dark lantern for him, and he took it from me when he embarked. They had blue lights and such like with them, but kept themselves as dark as Murder.

The expedition got away with wonderful quietness, and Christian George King soon came back dancing with joy.

“Yup, So-Jeer,” says he to myself in a very objectionable kind of convulsions, “Christian George King sar berry glad. Pirates all be blown a-pieces. Yup! Yup!”

My reply to that cannibal was, “However glad you may be, hold your noise, and don’t dance jigs and slap your knees about it, for I can’t abear to see you do it.”

I was on duty then; we twelve who were left being divided into four watches of three each, three hours’ spell. I was relieved at twelve. A little before that time, I had challenged, and Miss Maryon and Mrs. Belltott had come in.

"Good Davis," says Miss Maryon, "what is the matter? Where is my brother?"

I told her what was the matter, and where her brother was.

"O Heaven help him!" says she, clasping her hands and looking up—she was close in front of me, and she looked most lovely to be sure; "he is not sufficiently recovered, not strong enough for such strife!"

"If you had seen him, miss," I told her, "as I saw him when he volunteered, you would have known that his spirit is strong enough for any strife. It will bear his body, miss, to wherever duty calls him. It will always bear him to an honourable life, or a brave death."

"Heaven bless you!" says she, touching my arm. "I know it. Heaven bless you!"

Mrs. Belltott surprised me by trembling and saying nothing. They were still standing looking towards the sea and listening, after the relief had come round. It continuing very dark, I asked to be allowed to take them back. Miss Maryon thanked me, and she put her arm in mine, and I did take them back. I have now got to make a confession that will appear singular. After I had left them, I laid myself down on my face on the beach, and cried for the first time since I had frightened birds as a boy at Snorridge Bottom, to think what a poor, ignorant, low-placed, private soldier I was.

It was only for half a minute or so. A man can't at all times be quite master of himself, and it was only for half a minute or so. Then I up and went to my hut, and turned into my hammock, and fell asleep with wet eyelashes, and a sore, sore heart. Just as I had often done when I was a child, and had been worse used than usual.

I slept (as a child under those circumstances might) very sound, and yet very sore at heart all through my sleep. I was awoke by the words, "He is a determined man." I had sprung out of my hammock, and had seized my firelock, and was standing on the ground, saying the words myself. "He is a determined man." But, the curiosity of my state was, that I seemed to be repeating them after somebody, and to have been wonderfully startled by hearing them.

As soon as I came to myself, I went out of the hut, and away to where the guard was. Charker challenged:

"Who goes there?"

“A friend.”

“Not Gill?” says he, as he shouldered his piece.

“Gill,” says I.

“Why, what the deuce do you do out of your hammock?” says he.

“Too hot for sleep,” says I; “is all right?”

“Right!” says Charker, “yes, yes; all’s right enough here; what should be wrong here? It’s the boats that we want to know of. Except for fire-flies twinkling about, and the lonesome splashes of great creatures as they drop into the water, there’s nothing going on here to ease a man’s mind from the boats.”

The moon was above the sea, and had risen, I should say, some half-an-hour. As Charker spoke, with his face towards the sea, I, looking landward, suddenly laid my right hand on his breast, and said, “Don’t move. Don’t turn. Don’t raise your voice! You never saw a Maltese face here?”

“No. What do you mean?” he asks, staring at me.

“Nor yet, an English face, with one eye and a patch across the nose?”

“No. What ails you? What do you mean?”

I had seen both, looking at us round the stem of a cocoa-nut tree, where the moon struck them. I had seen that Sambo Pilot, with one hand laid on the stem of the tree, drawing them back into the heavy shadow. I had seen their naked cutlasses twinkle and shine, like bits of the moonshine in the water that had got blown ashore among the trees by the light wind. I had seen it all, in a moment. And I saw in a moment (as any man would), that the signalled move of the pirates on the mainland was a plot and a feint; that the leak had been made to disable the sloop; that the boats had been tempted away, to leave the Island unprotected; that the pirates had landed by some secreted way at the back; and that Christian George King was a double-dyed traitor, and a most infernal villain.

I considered, still all in one and the same moment, that Charker was a brave man, but not quick with his head; and that Sergeant Drooce, with a much better head, was close by. All I said to Charker was, “I am afraid we are betrayed. Turn your back full to the moonlight on the sea, and cover the stem of the cocoa-nut tree which will then be right before you, at the height of a man’s heart. Are you right?”

“I am right,” says Charker, turning instantly, and falling into the position with a nerve of iron; “and right ain’t left. Is it, Gill?”

A few seconds brought me to Sergeant Drooce’s hut. He was fast asleep, and being a heavy sleeper, I had to lay my hand upon him to rouse him. The instant I touched him he came rolling out of his hammock, and upon me like a tiger. And a tiger he was, except that he knew what he was up to, in his utmost heat, as well as any man.

I had to struggle with him pretty hard to bring him to his senses, panting all the while (for he gave me a breather), “Sergeant, I am Gill Davis! Treachery! Pirates on the Island!”

The last words brought him round, and he took his hands of. “I have seen two of them within this minute,” said I. And so I told him what I had told Harry Charker.

His soldierly, though tyrannical, head was clear in an instant. He didn’t waste one word, even of surprise. “Order the guard,” says he, “to draw off quietly into the Fort.” (They called the enclosure I have before mentioned, the Fort, though it was not much of that.) “Then get you to the Fort as quick as you can, rouse up every soul there, and fasten the gate. I will bring in all those who are at the Signal Hill. If we are surrounded before we can join you, you must make a sally and cut us out if you can. The word among our men is, ‘Women and children!’”

He burst away, like fire going before the wind over dry reeds. He roused up the seven men who were off duty, and had them bursting away with him, before they know they were not asleep. I reported orders to Charker, and ran to the Fort, as I have never run at any other time in all my life: no, not even in a dream.

The gate was not fast, and had no good fastening: only a double wooden bar, a poor chain, and a bad lock. Those, I secured as well as they could be secured in a few seconds by one pair of hands, and so ran to that part of the building where Miss Maryon lived. I called to her loudly by her name until she answered. I then called loudly all the names I knew—Mrs. Macey (Miss Maryon’s married sister), Mr. Macey, Mrs. Venning, Mr. and Mrs. Fisher, even Mr. and Mrs. Pordage. Then I called out, “All you gentlemen here, get up and defend the place! We are caught in a trap. Pirates have landed. We are attacked!”

At the terrible word “Pirates!”—for, those villains had done such deeds in those seas as never can be told in writing, and can scarcely be so much as thought of—cries and screams rose up from every part of the place. Quickly lights moved about from window to window, and the cries moved about with them, and men, women, and children came flying down into the square. I remarked to myself, even then, what a number of things I seemed to see at once. I noticed Mrs. Macey coming towards me, carrying all her three children together. I noticed Mr. Pordage in the greatest terror, in vain trying to get on his Diplomatic coat; and Mr. Kitten respectfully tying his pocket-handkerchief over Mrs. Pordage's nightcap. I noticed Mrs. Belltott run out screaming, and shrink upon the ground near me, and cover her face in her hands, and lie all of a bundle, shivering. But, what I noticed with the greatest pleasure was, the determined eyes with which those men of the Mine that I had thought fine gentlemen, came round me with what arms they had: to the full as cool and resolute as I could be, for my life—ay, and for my soul, too, into the bargain!

The chief person being Mr. Macey, I told him how the three men of the guard would be at the gate directly, if they were not already there, and how Sergeant Drooce and the other seven were gone to bring in the outlying part of the people of Silver-Store. I next urged him, for the love of all who were dear to him, to trust no Sambo, and, above all, if he could got any good chance at Christian George King, not to lose it, but to put him out of the world.

"I will follow your advice to the letter, Davis," says he; "what next?"

My answer was, "I think, sir, I would recommend you next, to order down such heavy furniture and lumber as can be moved, and make a barricade within the gate."

"That's good again," says he: "will you see it done?"

"I'll willingly help to do it," says I, "unless or until my superior, Sergeant Drooce, gives me other orders."

He shook me by the hand, and having told off some of his companions to help me, bestirred himself to look to the arms and ammunition. A proper quick, brave, steady, ready gentleman!

One of their three little children was deaf and dumb, Miss Maryon had been from the first with all the children, soothing them, and dressing them (poor little things, they had been brought out of their beds), and making them believe that it was a game of play, so that some of them were now even laughing. I had been working hard with the others at the barricade, and had got up a pretty good breastwork within the gate. Drooce and the seven men had come back, bringing in the people from the Signal Hill, and had worked along with us: but, I had not so much as spoken a word to

Drooce, nor had Drooce so much as spoken a word to me, for we were both too busy. The breastwork was now finished, and I found Miss Maryon at my side, with a child in her arms. Her dark hair was fastened round her head with a band. She had a quantity of it, and it looked even richer and more precious, put up hastily out of her way, than I had seen it look when it was carefully arranged. She was very pale, but extraordinarily quiet and still.

“Dear good Davis,” said she, “I have been waiting to speak one word to you.”

I turned to her directly. If I had received a musket-ball in the heart, and she had stood there, I almost believe I should have turned to her before I dropped.

“This pretty little creature,” said she, kissing the child in her arms, who was playing with her hair and trying to pull it down, “cannot hear what we say—can hear nothing. I trust you so much, and have such great confidence in you, that I want you to make me a promise.”

“What is it, Miss?”

“That if we are defeated, and you are absolutely sure of my being taken, you will kill me.”

“I shall not be alive to do it, Miss. I shall have died in your defence before it comes to that. They must step across my body to lay a hand on you.”

“But, if you are alive, you brave soldier.” How she looked at me! “And if you cannot save me from the Pirates, living, you will save me, dead. Tell me so.”

Well! I told her I would do that at the last, if all else failed. She took my hand—my rough, coarse hand—and put it to her lips. She put it to the child’s lips, and the child kissed it. I believe I had the strength of half a dozen men in me, from that moment, until the fight was over.

All this time, Mr. Commissioner Pordage had been wanting to make a Proclamation to the Pirates to lay down their arms and go away; and everybody had been hustling him about and tumbling over him, while he was calling for pen and ink to write it with. Mrs. Pordage, too, had some curious ideas about the British respectability of her nightcap (which had as many frills to it, growing in layers one inside another, as if it was a white vegetable of the artichoke sort), and she wouldn’t take the nightcap off, and would be angry when it got crushed by the other ladies who were handing things about, and, in short, she gave as much trouble as her husband did. But, as we were now forming for the defence of the place, they were both poked out of the way with no ceremony. The children and ladies were got into the little trench which surrounded the silver-house (we were afraid of leaving them in any of the light buildings, lest they should be set on fire), and we made the best disposition we could. There was a pretty good store, in point of amount, of tolerable swords and cutlasses. Those were issued. There were, also, perhaps a score or so of spare muskets. Those were brought out. To my astonishment, little Mrs. Fisher that I had taken for a doll and a baby, was not only very active in that service, but volunteered to load the spare arms.

"For, I understand it well," says she, cheerfully, without a shake in her voice.

"I am a soldier's daughter and a sailor's sister, and I understand it too," says Miss Maryon, just in the same way.

Steady and busy behind where I stood, those two beautiful and delicate young women fell to handling the guns, hammering the flints, looking to the locks, and quietly directing others to pass up powder and bullets from hand to hand, as unflinching as the best of tried soldiers.

Sergeant Drooce had brought in word that the pirates were very strong in numbers—over a hundred was his estimate—and that they were not, even then, all landed; for, he had seen them in a very good position on the further side of the Signal Hill, evidently waiting for the rest of their men to come up. In the present pause, the first we had had since the alarm, he was telling this over again to Mr. Macey, when Mr. Macey suddenly cried our: "The signal! Nobody has thought of the signal!"

We knew of no signal, so we could not have thought of it.

"What signal may you mean, sir?" says Sergeant Drooce, looking sharp at him.

"There is a pile of wood upon the Signal Hill. If it could be lighted—which never has been done yet—it would be a signal of distress to the mainland."

Charker cries, directly: "Sergeant Drooce, dispatch me on that duty. Give me the two men who were on guard with me to-night, and I'll light the fire, if it can be done."

"And if it can't, Corporal—" Mr. Macey strikes in.

"Look at these ladies and children, sir!" says Charker. "I'd sooner *light myself*, than not try any chance to save them."

We gave him a Hurrah!—it burst from us, come of it what might—and he got his two men, and was let out at the gate, and crept away. I had no sooner come back to my place from being one of the party to handle the gate, than Miss Maryon said in a low voice behind me:

"Davis, will you look at this powder? This is not right."

I turned my head. Christian George King again, and treachery again! Sea-water had been conveyed into the magazine, and every grain of powder was spoiled!

"Stay a moment," said Sergeant Drooce, when I had told him, without causing a movement in a muscle of his face: "look to your pouch, my lad. You Tom Packer, look to your pouch, confound you! Look to your pouches, all you Marines."

The same artful savage had got at them, somehow or another, and the cartridges were all unserviceable. "Hum!" says the Sergeant. "Look to your loading, men. You are right so far?"

Yes; we were right so far.

"Well, my lads, and gentlemen all," says the Sergeant, "this will be a hand-to-hand affair, and so much the better."

He treated himself to a pinch of snuff, and stood up, square-shouldered and broad-chested, in the light of the moon—which was now very bright—as cool as if he was waiting for a play to begin. He stood quiet, and we all stood quiet, for a matter of something like half-an-hour. I took notice from such whispered talk as there was, how little we that the silver did not belong to, thought about it, and how much the people that it did belong to, thought about it. At the end of the half-hour, it was reported from the gate that Charker and the two were falling back on us, pursued by about a dozen.

"Sally! Gate-party, under Gill Davis," says the Sergeant, "and bring 'em in! Like men, now!"

We were not long about it, and we brought them in. "Don't take me," says Charker, holding me round the neck, and stumbling down at my feet when the gate was fast, "don't take me near the ladies or the children, Gill. They had better not see Death, till it can't be helped. They'll see it soon enough."

"Harry!" I answered, holding up his head. "Comrade!"

He was cut to pieces. The signal had been secured by the first pirate party that landed; his hair was all singed off, and his face was blackened with the running pitch from a torch.

He made no complaint of pain, or of anything. “Good-bye, old chap,” was all he said, with a smile. “I’ve got my death. And Death ain’t life. Is it, Gill?”

Having helped to lay his poor body on one side, I went back to my post. Sergeant Drooce looked at me, with his eyebrows a little lifted. I nodded. “Close up here men, and gentlemen all!” said the Sergeant. “A place too many, in the line.”

The Pirates were so close upon us at this time, that the foremost of them were already before the gate. More and more came up with a great noise, and shouting loudly. When we believed from the sound that they were all there, we gave three English cheers. The poor little children joined, and were so fully convinced of our being at play, that they enjoyed the noise, and were heard clapping their hands in the silence that followed.

Our disposition was this, beginning with the rear. Mrs. Venning, holding her daughter’s child in her arms, sat on the steps of the little square trench surrounding the silver-house, encouraging and directing those women and children as she might have done in the happiest and easiest time of her life. Then, there was an armed line, under Mr. Macey, across the width of the enclosure, facing that way and having their backs towards the gate, in order that they might watch the walls and prevent our being taken by surprise. Then there was a space of eight or ten feet deep, in which the spare arms were, and in which Miss Maryon and Mrs. Fisher, their hands and dresses blackened with the spoilt gunpowder, worked on their knees, tying such things as knives, old bayonets, and spear-heads, to the muzzles of the useless muskets. Then, there was a second armed line, under Sergeant Drooce, also across the width of the enclosure, but facing to the gate. Then came the breastwork we had made, with a zigzag way through it for me and my little party to hold good in retreating, as long as we could, when we were driven from the gate. We all knew that it was impossible to hold the place long, and that our only hope was in the timely discovery of the plot by the boats, and in their coming back.

I and my men were now thrown forward to the gate. From a spy-hole, I could see the whole crowd of Pirates. There were Malays among them, Dutch, Maltese, Greeks, Sambos, Negroes, and Convict Englishmen from the West India Islands; among the last, him with the one eye and the patch across the nose. There were some Portuguese, too, and a few Spaniards. The captain was a Portuguese; a little man with very large ear-rings under a very broad hat, and a great bright shawl twisted about his shoulders. They were all strongly armed, but like a boarding party, with pikes, swords, cutlasses, and axes. I noticed a good many pistols, but not a gun of any kind among them. This gave me to understand that they had considered that a continued roll of musketry might perhaps have been heard on the mainland; also, that for the reason that fire would be seen from the mainland they would not set the Fort in flames and roast us alive; which was one of their favourite ways of carrying on. I looked about for Christian George King, and if I had seen him I am much mistaken if he would not have received my one round of ball-cartridge in his head. But, no Christian George King was visible.

A sort of a wild Portuguese demon, who seemed either fierce-mad or fierce-drunk—but, they all seemed one or the other—came forward with the black flag, and gave it a wave or two. After that, the Portuguese captain called out in shrill English, “I say you! English fools! Open the gate! Surrender!”

As we kept close and quiet, he said something to his men which I didn’t understand, and when he had said it, the one-eyed English rascal with the patch (who had stepped out when he began), said it again in English. It was only this. “Boys of the black flag, this is to be quickly done. Take all the prisoners you can. If they don’t yield, kill the children to make them. Forward!” Then, they all came on at the gate, and in another half-minute were smashing and splitting it in.

We struck at them through the gaps and shivers, and we dropped many of them, too; but, their very weight would have carried such a gate, if they had been unarmed. I soon found Sergeant Drooce at my side, forming us six remaining marines in line—Tom Packer next to me—and ordering us to fall back three paces, and, as they broke in, to give them our one little volley at short distance. “Then,” says he, “receive them behind your breastwork on the bayonet, and at least let every man of you pin one of the cursed cockchafers through the body.”

We checked them by our fire, slight as it was, and we checked them at the breastwork. However, they broke over it like swarms of devils—they were, really and truly, more devils than men—and then it was hand to hand, indeed.

We clubbed our muskets and laid about us; even then, those two ladies—always behind me—were steady and ready with the arms. I had a lot of Maltese and Malays upon me, and, but for a broadsword that Miss Maryon's own hand put in mine, should have got my end from them. But, was that all? No. I saw a heap of banded dark hair and a white dress come thrice between me and them, under my own raised right arm, which each time might have destroyed the wearer of the white dress; and each time one of the lot went down, struck dead.

Drooce was armed with a broadsword, too, and did such things with it, that there was a cry, in half-a-dozen languages, of "Kill that sergeant!" as I knew, by the cry being raised in English, and taken up in other tongues. I had received a severe cut across the left arm a few moments before, and should have known nothing of it, except supposing that somebody had struck me a smart blow, if I had not felt weak, and seen myself covered with spouting blood, and, at the same instant of time, seen Miss Maryon tearing her dress and binding it with Mrs. Fisher's help round the wound. They called to Tom Packer, who was scouring by, to stop and guard me for one minute, while I was bound, or I should bleed to death in trying to defend myself. Tom stopped directly, with a good sabre in his hand.

In that same moment—all things seem to happen in that same moment, at such a time—half-a-dozen had rushed howling at Sergeant Drooce. The Sergeant, stepping back against the wall, stopped one howl for ever with such a terrible blow, and waited for the rest to come on, with such a wonderfully unmoved face, that they stopped and looked at him.

"See him now!" cried Tom Packer. "Now, when I could cut him out! Gill! Did I tell you to mark my words?"

I implored Tom Packer in the Lord's name, as well as I could in my faintness, to go to the Sergeant's aid.

"I hate and detest him," says Tom, moodily wavering. "Still, he is a brave man." Then he calls out, "Sergeant Drooce, Sergeant Drooce! Tell me you have driven me too hard, and are sorry for it."

The Sergeant, without turning his eyes from his assailants, which would have been instant death to him, answers.

"No. I won't."

“Sergeant Drooce!” cries Tom, in a kind of an agony. “I have passed my word that I would never save you from Death, if I could, but would leave you to die. Tell me you have driven me too hard and are sorry for it, and that shall go for nothing.”

One of the group laid the Sergeant’s bald bare head open. The Sergeant laid him dead.

“I tell you,” says the Sergeant, breathing a little short, and waiting for the next attack, “no. I won’t. If you are not man enough to strike for a fellow-soldier because he wants help, and because of nothing else, I’ll go into the other world and look for a better man.”

Tom swept upon them, and cut him out. Tom and he fought their way through another knot of them, and sent them flying, and came over to where I was beginning again to feel, with inexpressible joy, that I had got a sword in my hand.

They had hardly come to us, when I heard, above all the other noises, a tremendous cry of women’s voices. I also saw Miss Maryon, with quite a new face, suddenly clap her two hands over Mrs. Fisher’s eyes. I looked towards the silver-house, and saw Mrs. Venning—standing upright on the top of the steps of the trench, with her gray hair and her dark eyes—hide her daughter’s child behind her, among the folds of her dress, strike a pirate with her other hand, and fall, shot by his pistol.

The cry arose again, and there was a terrible and confusing rush of the women into the midst of the struggle. In another moment, something came tumbling down upon me that I thought was the wall. It was a heap of Sambos who had come over the wall; and of four men who clung to my legs like serpents, one who clung to my right leg was Christian George King.

“Yup, So-Jeer,” says he, “Christian George King sar berry glad So-Jeer a prisoner. Christian George King been waiting for So-Jeer sech long time. Yup, yup!”

What could I do, with five-and-twenty of them on me, but be tied hand and foot? So, I was tied hand and foot. It was all over now—boats not come back—all lost! When I was fast bound and was put up against the wall, the one-eyed English convict came up with the Portuguese Captain, to have a look at me.

“See!” says he. “Here’s the determined man! If you had slept sounder, last night, you’d have slept your soundest last night, my determined man.”

The Portuguese Captain laughed in a cool way, and with the flat of his cutlass, hit me crosswise, as if I was the bough of a tree that he played with: first on the face, and then across the chest and the wounded arm. I looked him steady in the face without tumbling while he looked at me, I am happy to say; but, when they went away, I fell, and lay there.

The sun was up, when I was roused and told to come down to the beach and be embarked. I was full of aches and pains, and could not at first remember; but, I remembered quite soon enough. The killed were lying about all over the place, and the Pirates were burying their dead, and taking away their wounded on hastily-made litters, to the back of the Island. As for us prisoners, some of their boats had come round to the usual harbour, to carry us off. We looked a wretched few, I thought, when I got down there; still, it was another sign that we had fought well, and made the enemy suffer.

The Portuguese Captain had all the women already embarked in the boat he himself commanded, which was just putting off when I got down. Miss Maryon sat on one side of him, and gave me a moment’s look, as full of quiet courage, and pity, and confidence, as if it had been an hour long. On the other side of him was poor little Mrs. Fisher, weeping for her child and her mother. I was shoved into the same boat with Drooce and Packer, and the remainder of our party of marines: of whom we had lost two privates, besides Charker, my poor, brave comrade. We all made a melancholy passage, under the hot sun over to the mainland. There, we landed in a solitary place, and were mustered on the sea sand. Mr. and Mrs. Macey and their children were amongst us, Mr. and Mrs. Pordage, Mr. Kitten, Mr. Fisher, and Mrs. Belltott. We mustered only fourteen men, fifteen women, and seven children. Those were all that remained of the English who had lain down to sleep last night, unsuspecting and happy, on the Island of Silver-Store.

CHAPTER III {1}—THE RAFTS ON THE RIVER

We contrived to keep afloat all that night, and, the stream running strong with us, to glide a long way down the river. But, we found the night to be a dangerous time for such navigation, on account of the eddies and rapids, and it was therefore settled next day that in future we would bring-to at sunset, and encamp on the shore. As we knew of no boats that the Pirates possessed, up at the Prison in the Woods, we settled always to encamp on the opposite side of the stream, so as to have the breadth of the river between our sleep and them. Our opinion was, that if they were acquainted with any near way by land to the mouth of this river, they would come up it in force, and retake us or kill us, according as they could; but that if that was not the case, and if the river ran by none of their secret stations, we might escape.

When I say we settled this or that, I do not mean that we planned anything with any confidence as to what might happen an hour hence. So much had happened in one night, and such great changes had been violently and suddenly made in the fortunes of many among us, that we had got better used to uncertainty, in a little while, than I dare say most people do in the course of their lives.

The difficulties we soon got into, through the off-settings and point-currents of the stream, made the likelihood of our being drowned, alone,—to say nothing of our being retaken—as broad and plain as the sun at noonday to all of us. But, we all worked hard at managing the rafts, under the direction of the seamen (of our own skill, I think we never could have prevented them from oversetting), and we also worked hard at making good the defects in their first hasty construction—which the water soon found out. While we humbly resigned ourselves to going down, if it was the will of Our Father that was in Heaven, we humbly made up our minds, that we would all do the best that was in us.

And so we held on, gliding with the stream. It drove us to this bank, and it drove us to that bank, and it turned us, and whirled us; but yet it carried us on. Sometimes much too slowly; sometimes much too fast, but yet it carried us on.

My little deaf and dumb boy slumbered a good deal now, and that was the case with all the children. They caused very little trouble to any one. They seemed, in my eyes, to get more like one another, not only in quiet manner, but in the face, too. The motion of the raft was usually so much the same, the scene was usually so much the same, the sound of the soft wash and ripple of the water was usually so much the same, that they were made drowsy, as they might have been by the constant playing of one tune. Even on the grown people, who worked hard and felt anxiety, the same things produced something of the same effect. Every day was so like the other, that I soon lost count of the days, myself, and had to ask Miss Maryon, for instance, whether this was the third or fourth? Miss Maryon had a pocket-book and pencil, and she kept the log; that is to say, she entered up a clear little journal of the time, and of the distances our seamen thought we had made, each night.

So, as I say, we kept afloat and glided on. All day long, and every day, the water, and the woods, and sky; all day long, and every day, the constant watching of both sides of the river, and far ahead at every bold turn and sweep it made, for any signs of Pirate-boats, or Pirate-dwellings. So, as I say, we kept afloat and glided on. The days melting themselves together to that degree, that I could hardly believe my ears when I asked “How many now, Miss?” and she answered “Seven.”

To be sure, poor Mr. Pordage had, by about now, got his Diplomatic coat into such a state as never was seen. What with the mud of the river, what with the water of the river, what with the sun, and the dews, and the tearing boughs, and the thickets, it hung about him in discoloured shreds like a mop. The sun had touched him a bit. He had taken to always polishing one particular button, which just held on to his left wrist, and to always calling for stationery. I suppose that man called for pens, ink, and paper, tape, and scaling-wax, upwards of one thousand times in four-and-twenty hours. He had an idea that we should never get out of that river unless we were written out of it in a formal Memorandum; and the more we laboured at navigating the rafts, the more he ordered us not to touch them at our peril, and the more he sat and roared for stationery.

Mrs. Pordage, similarly, persisted in wearing her nightcap. I doubt if any one but ourselves who had seen the progress of that article of dress, could by this time have told what it was meant for. It had got so limp and ragged that she couldn’t see out of her eyes for it. It was so dirty, that whether it was vegetable matter out of a swamp, or weeds out of the river, or an old porter’s-knot from England, I don’t think any new spectator could have said. Yet, this unfortunate old woman had a notion that it was not only vastly genteel, but that it was the correct thing as to propriety. And she really did carry herself over the other ladies who had no nightcaps, and who were forced to tie up their hair how they could, in a superior manner that was perfectly amazing.

I don’t know what she looked like, sitting in that blessed nightcap, on a log of wood, outside the hut or cabin upon our raft. She would have rather resembled a fortune-teller in one of the picture-books that used to be in the shop windows in my boyhood, except for her stateliness. But, Lord bless my heart, the dignity with which she sat and moped, with her head in that bundle of tatters, was like nothing else in the world! She was not on speaking terms with more than three of the ladies. Some of them had, what she called, “taken precedence” of her—in getting into, or out of, that miserable little shelter!—and others had not called to pay their respects, or something of that kind. So, there she sat, in her own state and ceremony, while her husband sat on the same log of wood, ordering us one and all to let the raft go to the bottom, and to bring him stationery.

What with this noise on the part of Mr. Commissioner Pordage, and what with the cries of Sergeant Drooce on the raft astern (which were sometimes more than Tom Packer could silence), we often made our slow way down the river, anything but quietly. Yet, that it was of great importance that no ears should be able to hear us from the woods on the banks, could not be doubted. We were looked for, to a certainty, and we might be retaken at any moment. It was an anxious time; it was, indeed, indeed, an anxious time.

On the seventh night of our voyage on the rafts, we made fast, as usual, on the opposite side of the river to that from which we had started, in as dark a place as we could pick out. Our little encampment was soon made, and supper was eaten, and the children fell asleep. The watch was set, and everything made orderly for the night. Such a starlight night, with such blue in the sky, and such black in the places of heavy shade on the banks of the great stream!

Those two ladies, Miss Maryon and Mrs. Fisher, had always kept near me since the night of the attack. Mr. Fisher, who was untiring in the work of our raft, had said to me:

"My dear little childless wife has grown so attached to you, Davis, and you are such a gentle fellow, as well as such a determined one;" our party had adopted that last expression from the one-eyed English pirate, and I repeat what Mr. Fisher said, only because he said it; "that it takes a load off my mind to leave her in your charge."

I said to him: "Your lady is in far better charge than mine, Sir, having Miss Maryon to take care of her; but, you may rely upon it, that I will guard them both—faithful and true."

Says he: "I do rely upon it, Davis, and I heartily wish all the silver on our old Island was yours."

That seventh starlight night, as I have said, we made our camp, and got our supper, and set our watch, and the children fell asleep. It was solemn and beautiful in those wild and solitary parts, to see them, every night before they lay down, kneeling under the bright sky, saying their little prayers at women's laps. At that time we men all uncovered, and mostly kept at a distance. When the innocent creatures rose up, we murmured "Amen!" all together. For, though we had not heard what they said, we know it must be good for us.

At that time, too, as was only natural, those poor mothers in our company, whose children had been killed, shed many tears. I thought the sight seemed to console them while it made them cry; but, whether I was right or wrong in that, they wept very much. On this seventh night, Mrs. Fisher had cried for her lost darling until she cried herself asleep. She was lying on a little couch of leaves and such-like (I made the best little couch I could for them every night), and Miss Maryon had covered her, and sat by her, holding her hand. The stars looked down upon them. As for me, I guarded them.

"Davis!" says Miss Maryon. (I am not going to say what a voice she had. I couldn't if I tried.)

"I am here, Miss."

"The river sounds as if it were swollen to-night."

"We all think, Miss, that we are coming near the sea."

"Do you believe now, we shall escape?"

"I do now, Miss, really believe it." I had always said I did; but, I had in my own mind been doubtful.

"How glad you will be, my good Davis, to see England again!"

I have another confession to make that will appear singular. When she said these words, something rose in my throat; and the stars I looked away at, seemed to break into sparkles that fell down my face and burnt it.

"England is not much to me, Miss, except as a name."

"O, so true an Englishman should not say that!—Are you not well to-night, Davis?" Very kindly, and with a quick change.

"Quite well, Miss."

"Are you sure? Your voice sounds altered in my hearing."

"No, Miss, I am a stronger man than ever. But, England is nothing to me."

Miss Maryon sat silent for so long a while, that I believed she had done speaking to me for one time. However, she had not; for by-and-by she said in a distinct clear tone:

"No, good friend; you must not say that England is nothing to you. It is to be much to you, yet—everything to you. You have to take back to England the good name you have earned here, and the gratitude and attachment and respect you have won here: and you have to make some good English girl very happy and proud, by marrying her; and I shall one day see her, I hope, and make her happier and prouder still, by telling her what noble services her husband's were in South America, and what a noble friend he was to me there."

Though she spoke these kind words in a cheering manner, she spoke them compassionately. I said nothing. It will appear to be another strange confession, that I paced to and fro, within call, all that night, a most unhappy man, reproaching myself all the night long. "You are as ignorant as any man alive; you are as obscure as any man alive; you are as poor as any man alive; you are no better than the mud under your foot." That was the way in which I went on against myself until the morning.

With the day, came the day's labour. What I should have done—without the labour, I don't know. We were afloat again at the usual hour, and were again making our way down the river. It was broader, and clearer of obstructions than it had been, and it seemed to flow faster. This was one of Drooce's quiet days; Mr. Pordage, besides being sulky, had almost lost his voice; and we made good way, and with little noise.

There was always a seaman forward on the raft, keeping a bright look-out. Suddenly, in the full heat of the day, when the children were slumbering, and the very trees and reeds appeared to be slumbering, this man—it was Short—holds up his hand, and cries with great caution: "Avast! Voices ahead!"

We held on against the stream as soon as we could bring her up, and the other raft followed suit. At first, Mr. Macey, Mr. Fisher, and myself, could hear nothing; though both the seamen aboard of us agreed that they could hear voices and oars. After a little pause, however, we united in thinking that we *could* hear the sound of voices, and the dip of oars. But, you can hear a long way in those countries, and there was a bend of the river before us, and nothing was to be seen except such waters and such banks as we were now in the eighth day (and might, for the matter of our feelings, have been in the eightieth), of having seen with anxious eyes.

It was soon decided to put a man ashore, who should creep through the wood, see what was coming, and warn the rafts. The rafts in the meantime to keep the middle of the stream. The man to be put ashore, and not to swim ashore, as the first thing could be more quickly done than the second. The raft conveying him, to get back into mid-stream, and to hold on along with the other, as well is it could, until signalled by the man. In case of danger, the man to shift for himself until it should be safe to take him on board again. I volunteered to be the man.

We knew that the voices and oars must come up slowly against the stream; and our seamen knew, by the set of the stream, under which bank they would come. I was put ashore accordingly. The raft got off well, and I broke into the wood.

Steaming hot it was, and a tearing place to get through. So much the better for me, since it was something to contend against and do. I cut off the bend of the river, at a great saving of space, came to the water's edge again, and hid myself, and waited. I could now hear the dip of the oars very distinctly; the voices had ceased.

The sound came on in a regular tune, and as I lay hidden, I fancied the tune so played to be, "Chris'en—George—King! Chris'en—George—King! Chris'en—George—King!" over and over again, always the same, with the pauses always at the same places. I had likewise time to make up my mind that if these were the Pirates, I could and would (barring my being shot) swim off to my raft, in spite of my wound, the moment I had given the alarm, and hold my old post by Miss Maryon.

"Chris'en—George—King! Chris'en—George—King! Chris'en—George—King!" coming up, now, very near.

I took a look at the branches about me, to see where a shower of bullets would be most likely to do me least hurt; and I took a look back at the track I had made in forcing my way in; and now I was wholly prepared and fully ready for them.

"Chris'en—George—King! Chris'en—George—King! Chris'en—George—King!" Here they are!

Who were they? The barbarous Pirates, scum of all nations, headed by such men as the hideous little Portuguese monkey, and the one-eyed English convict with the gash across his face, that ought to have gashed his wicked head off? The worst men in the world picked out from the worst, to do the cruellest and most atrocious deeds that ever stained it? The howling, murdering, black-flag waving, mad, and drunken crowd of devils that had overcome us by numbers and by treachery? No. These were English men in English boats—good blue-jackets and red-coats—marines that I knew myself, and sailors that knew our seamen! At the helm of the first boat, Captain Carton, eager and steady. At the helm of the second boat, Captain Maryon, brave and bold. At the helm of the third boat, an old seaman, with determination carved into his watchful face, like the figure-head of a ship. Every man doubly and trebly armed from head to foot. Every man lying-to at his work, with a will that had all his heart and soul in it. Every man looking out for any trace of friend or enemy, and burning to be the first to do good or avenge evil. Every man with his face on fire when he saw me, his countryman who had been taken prisoner, and hailed me with a cheer, as Captain Carton's boat ran in and took me on board.

I reported, "All escaped, sir! All well, all safe, all here!"

God bless me—and God bless them—what a cheer! It turned me weak, as I was passed on from hand to hand to the stern of the boat: every hand patting me or grasping me in some way or other, in the moment of my going by.

"Hold up, my brave fellow," says Captain Carton, clapping me on the shoulder like a friend, and giving me a flask. "Put your lips to that, and they'll be red again. Now, boys, give way!"

The banks flew by us as if the mightiest stream that ever ran was with us; and so it was, I am sure, meaning the stream to those men's ardour and spirit. The banks flew by us, and we came in sight of the rafts—the banks flew by us, and we came alongside of the rafts—the banks stopped; and there was a tumult of laughing and crying, and kissing and shaking of hands, and catching up of children and setting of them down again, and a wild hurry of thankfulness and joy that melted every one and softened all hearts.

I had taken notice, in Captain Carton's boat, that there was a curious and quite new sort of fitting on board. It was a kind of a little bower made of flowers, and it was set up behind the captain, and betwixt him and the rudder. Not only was this arbour, so to call it, neatly made of flowers, but it was ornamented in a singular way. Some of the men had taken the ribbons and buckles off their hats, and hung them among the flowers; others had made festoons and streamers of their handkerchiefs, and hung them there; others had intermixed such trifles as bits of glass and shining fragments of lockets and tobacco-boxes with the flowers; so that altogether it was a very bright and lively object in the sunshine. But why there, or what for, I did not understand.

Now, as soon as the first bewilderment was over, Captain Carton gave the order to land for the present. But this boat of his, with two hands left in her, immediately put off again when the men were out of her, and kept off, some yards from the shore. As she floated there, with the two hands gently backing water to keep her from going down the stream, this pretty little arbour attracted many eyes. None of the boat's crew, however, had anything to say about it, except that it was the captain's fancy.

The captain—with the women and children clustering round him, and the men of all ranks grouped outside them, and all listening—stood telling how the Expedition, deceived by its bad intelligence, had chased the light Pirate boats all that fatal night, and had still followed in their wake next day, and had never suspected until many hours too late that the great Pirate body had drawn off in the darkness when the chase began, and shot over to the Island. He stood telling how the Expedition, supposing the whole array of armed boats to be ahead of it, got tempted into shallows and went aground; but not without having its revenge upon the two decoy-boats, both of which it had come up with, overhand, and sent to the bottom with all on board. He stood telling how the Expedition, fearing then that the case stood as it did, got afloat again, by great exertion, after the loss of four more tides, and returned to the Island, where they found the sloop scuttled and the treasure gone. He stood telling how my officer, Lieutenant Linderwood, was left upon the Island, with as strong a force as could be got together hurriedly from the mainland, and how the three boats we saw before us were manned and armed and had come away, exploring the coast and inlets, in search of any tidings of us. He stood telling all this, with his face to the river; and, as he stood telling it, the little arbour of flowers floated in the sunshine before all the faces there.

Leaning on Captain Carton's shoulder, between him and Miss Maryon, was Mrs. Fisher, her head drooping on her arm. She asked him, without raising it, when he had told so much, whether he had found her mother?

"Be comforted! She lies," said the Captain gently, "under the cocoa-nut trees on the beach."

"And my child, Captain Carton, did you find my child, too? Does my darling rest with my mother?"

"No. Your pretty child sleeps," said the Captain, "under a shade of flowers."

His voice shook; but there was something in it that struck all the hearers. At that moment there sprung from the arbour in his boat a little creature, clapping her hands and stretching out her arms, and crying, "Dear papa! Dear mamma! I am not killed. I am saved. I am coming to kiss you. Take me to them, take me to them, good, kind sailors!"

Nobody who saw that scene has ever forgotten it, I am sure, or ever will forget it. The child had kept quite still, where her brave grandmamma had put her (first whispering in her ear, "Whatever happens to me, do not stir, my dear!"), and had remained quiet until the fort was deserted; she had then crept out of the trench, and gone into her mother's house; and there, alone on the solitary Island, in her mother's room, and asleep on her mother's bed, the Captain had found her. Nothing could induce her to be parted from him after he took her up in his arms, and he had brought her away with him, and the men had made the bower for her. To see those men now, was a sight. The joy of the women was beautiful; the joy of those women who had lost their own children, was quite sacred and divine; but, the ecstasies of Captain Carton's boat's crew, when their pet was restored to her parents, were wonderful for the tenderness they showed in the midst of roughness. As the Captain stood with the child in his arms, and the child's own little arms now clinging round his neck, now round her father’s, now round her mother’s, now round some one who pressed up to kiss her, the boat’s crew shook hands with one another, waved their hats over their heads, laughed, sang, cried, danced—and all among themselves, without wanting to interfere with anybody—in a manner never to be represented. At last, I saw the coxswain and another, two very hard-faced men, with grizzled heads, who had been the heartiest of the hearty all along, close with one another, get each of them the other’s head under his arm, and pommel away at it with his fist as hard as he could, in his excess of joy.

When we had well rested and refreshed ourselves—and very glad we were to have some of the heartening things to eat and drink that had come up in the boats—we recommenced our voyage down the river: rafts, and boats, and all. I said to myself, it was a *very* different kind of voyage now, from what it had been; and I fell into my proper place and station among my fellow-soldiers.

But, when we halted for the night, I found that Miss Maryon had spoken to Captain Carton concerning me. For, the Captain came straight up to me, and says he, “My brave fellow, you have been Miss Maryon’s body-guard all along, and you shall remain so. Nobody shall supersede you in the distinction and pleasure of protecting that young lady.” I thanked his honour in the fittest words I could find, and that night I was placed on my old post of watching the place where she slept. More than once in the night, I saw Captain Carton come out into the air, and stroll about there, to see that all was well. I have now this other singular confession to make, that I saw him with a heavy heart. Yes; I saw him with a heavy, heavy heart.

In the day-time, I had the like post in Captain Carton’s boat. I had a special station of my own, behind Miss Maryon, and no hands but hers ever touched my wound. (It has been healed these many long years; but, no other hands have ever touched it.) Mr. Pordage was kept tolerably quiet now, with pen and ink, and began to pick up his senses a little. Seated in the second boat, he made documents with Mr. Kitten, pretty well all day; and he generally handed in a Protest about something whenever we stopped. The Captain, however, made so very light of these papers, that it grew into a saying among the men, when one of them wanted a match for his pipe, “Hand us over a Protest, Jack!” As to Mrs. Pordage, she still wore the nightcap, and she now had cut all the ladies on account of her not having been formally and separately rescued by Captain Carton before anybody else. The end of Mr. Pordage, to bring to an end all I know about him, was, that he got great compliments at home for his conduct on these trying occasions, and that he died of yellow jaundice, a Governor and a K.C.B.

Sergeant Drooce had fallen from a high fever into a low one. Tom Packer—the only man who could have pulled the Sergeant through it—kept hospital aboard the old raft, and Mrs. Belltott, as brisk as ever again (but the spirit of that little woman, when things tried it, was not equal to appearances), was head-nurse under his directions. Before we got down to the Mosquito coast, the joke had been made by one of our men, that we should see her gazetted Mrs. Tom Packer, *vice* Belltott exchanged.

When we reached the coast, we got native boats as substitutes for the rafts; and we rowed along under the land; and in that beautiful climate, and upon that beautiful water, the blooming days were like enchantment. Ah! They were running away, faster than any sea or river, and there was no tide to bring them back. We were coming very near the settlement where the people of Silver-Store were to be left, and from which we Marines were under orders to return to Belize.

Captain Carton had, in the boat by him, a curious long-barrelled Spanish gun, and he had said to Miss Maryon one day that it was the best of guns, and had turned his head to me, and said:

"Gill Davis, load her fresh with a couple of slugs, against a chance of showing how good she is."

So, I had discharged the gun over the sea, and had loaded her, according to orders, and there it had lain at the Captain's feet, convenient to the Captain's hand.

The last day but one of our journey was an uncommonly hot day. We started very early; but, there was no cool air on the sea as the day got on, and by noon the heat was really hard to bear, considering that there were women and children to bear it. Now, we happened to open, just at that time, a very pleasant little cove or bay, where there was a deep shade from a great growth of trees. Now, the Captain, therefore, made the signal to the other boats to follow him in and lie by a while.

The men who were off duty went ashore, and lay down, but were ordered, for caution's sake, not to stray, and to keep within view. The others rested on their oars, and dozed. Awnings had been made of one thing and another, in all the boats, and the passengers found it cooler to be under them in the shade, when there was room enough, than to be in the thick woods. So, the passengers were all afloat, and mostly sleeping. I kept my post behind Miss Maryon, and she was on Captain Carton's right in the boat, and Mrs. Fisher sat on her right again. The Captain had Mrs. Fisher's daughter on his knee. He and the two ladies were talking about the Pirates, and were talking softly; partly, because people do talk softly under such indolent circumstances, and partly because the little girl had gone off asleep.

I think I have before given it out for my Lady to write down, that Captain Carton had a fine bright eye of his own. All at once, he darted me a side look, as much as to say, "Steady—don't take on—I see something!"—and gave the child into her mother's arms. That eye of his was so easy to understand, that I obeyed it by not so much as looking either to the right or to the left out of a corner of my own, or changing my attitude the least trifle. The Captain went on talking in the same mild and easy way; but began—with his arms resting across his knees, and his head a little hanging forward, as if the heat were rather too much for him—began to play with the Spanish gun.

"They had laid their plans, you see," says the Captain, taking up the Spanish gun across his knees, and looking, lazily, at the inlaying on the stock, "with a great deal of art; and the corrupt or blundering local authorities were so easily deceived;" he ran his left hand idly along the barrel, but I saw, with my breath held, that he covered the action of cocking the gun with his right—"so easily deceived, that they summoned us out to come into the trap. But my intention as to future operations—" In a flash the Spanish gun was at his bright eye, and he fired.

All started up; innumerable echoes repeated the sound of the discharge; a cloud of bright-coloured birds flew out of the woods screaming; a handful of leaves were scattered in the place where the shot had struck; a crackling of branches was heard; and some lithe but heavy creature sprang into the air, and fell forward, head down, over the muddy bank.

"What is it?" cries Captain Maryon from his boat. All silent then, but the echoes rolling away.

"It is a Traitor and a Spy," said Captain Carton, handing me the gun to load again. "And I think the other name of the animal is Christian George King!"

Shot through the heart. Some of the people ran round to the spot, and drew him out, with the slime and wet trickling down his face; but his face itself would never stir any more to the end of time.

“Leave him hanging to that tree,” cried Captain Carton; his boat’s crew giving way, and he leaping ashore. “But first into this wood, every man in his place. And boats! Out of gunshot!”

It was a quick change, well meant and well made, though it ended in disappointment. No Pirates were there; no one but the Spy was found. It was supposed that the Pirates, unable to retake us, and expecting a great attack upon them to be the consequence of our escape, had made from the ruins in the Forest, taken to their ship along with the Treasure, and left the Spy to pick up what intelligence he could. In the evening we went away, and he was left hanging to the tree, all alone, with the red sun making a kind of a dead sunset on his black face.

Next day, we gained the settlement on the Mosquito coast for which we were bound. Having stayed there to refresh seven days, and having been much commended, and highly spoken of, and finely entertained, we Marines stood under orders to march from the Town-Gate (it was neither much of a town nor much of a gate), at five in the morning.

My officer had joined us before then. When we turned out at the gate, all the people were there; in the front of them all those who had been our fellow-prisoners, and all the seamen.

“Davis,” says Lieutenant Linderwood. “Stand out, my friend!”

I stood out from the ranks, and Miss Maryon and Captain Carton came up to me.

“Dear Davis,” says Miss Maryon, while the tears fell fast down her face, “your grateful friends, in most unwillingly taking leave of you, ask the favour that, while you bear away with you their affectionate remembrance, which nothing can ever impair, you will also take this purse of money—far more valuable to you, we all know, for the deep attachment and thankfulness with which it is offered, than for its own contents, though we hope those may prove useful to you, too, in after life.”

I got out, in answer, that I thankfully accepted the attachment and affection, but not the money. Captain Carton looked at me very attentively, and stepped back, and moved away. I made him my bow as he stepped back, to thank him for being so delicate.

“No, miss,” said I, “I think it would break my heart to accept of money. But, if you could condescend to give to a man so ignorant and common as myself, any little thing you have worn—such as a bit of ribbon—”

She took a ring from her finger, and put it in my hand. And she rested her hand in mine, while she said these words:

“The brave gentlemen of old—but not one of them was braver, or had a nobler nature than you—took such gifts from ladies, and did all their good actions for the givers’ sakes. If you will do yours for mine, I shall think with pride that I continue to have some share in the life of a gallant and generous man.”

For the second time in my life she kissed my hand. I made so bold, for the first time, as to kiss hers; and I tied the ring at my breast, and I fell back to my place.

Then, the horse-litter went out at the gate with Sergeant Drooce in it; and the horse-litter went out at the gate with Mrs. Belltott in it; and Lieutenant Linderwood gave the word of command, “Quick march!” and, cheered and cried for, we went out of the gate too, marching along the level plain towards the serene blue sky, as if we were marching straight to Heaven.

When I have added here that the Pirate scheme was blown to shivers, by the Pirate-ship which had the Treasure on board being so vigorously attacked by one of His Majesty’s cruisers, among the West India Keys, and being so swiftly boarded and carried, that nobody suspected anything about the scheme until three-fourths of the Pirates were killed, and the other fourth were in irons, and the Treasure was recovered; I come to the last singular confession I have got to make.

It is this. I well knew what an immense and hopeless distance there was between me and Miss Maryon; I well knew that I was no fitter company for her than I was for the angels; I well knew, that she was as high above my reach as the sky over my head; and yet I loved her. What put it in my low heart to be so daring, or whether such a thing ever happened before or since, as that a man so uninstructed and obscure as myself got his unhappy thoughts lifted up to such a height, while knowing very well how presumptuous and impossible to be realised they were, I am unable to say; still, the suffering to me was just as great as if I had been a gentleman. I suffered agony—agony. I suffered hard, and I suffered long. I thought of her last words to me, however, and I never disgraced them. If it had not been for those dear words, I think I should have lost myself in despair and recklessness.

The ring will be found lying on my heart, of course, and will be laid with me wherever I am laid. I am getting on in years now, though I am able and hearty. I was recommended for promotion, and everything was done to reward me that could be done; but my total want of all learning stood in my way, and I found myself so completely out of the road to it that I could not conquer any learning, though I tried. I was long in the service, and I respected it, and was respected in it, and the service is dear to me at this present hour.

At this present hour, when I give this out to my Lady to be written down, all my old pain has softened away, and I am as happy as a man can be, at this present fine old country-house of Admiral Sir George Carton, Baronet. It was my Lady Carton who herself sought me out, over a great many miles of the wide world, and found me in Hospital wounded, and brought me here. It is my Lady Carton who writes down my words. My Lady was Miss Maryon. And now, that I conclude what I had to tell, I see my Lady’s honoured gray hair droop over her face, as she leans a little lower at her desk; and I fervently thank her for being so tender as I see she is, towards the past pain and trouble of her poor, old, faithful, humble soldier.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Dicken's didn't write the second chapter and it is omitted in this edition. In it the prisoners are firstly made a ransom of for the treasure left on the Island and then manage to escape from the Pirates.

THE END OF
The Perils of Certain English Prisoners

THE PICKWICK PAPERS

By Charles Dickens

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THE POSTHUMOUS PAPERS OF THE PICKWICK CLUB

CHAPTER I. THE PICKWICKIANS

The first ray of light which illumines the gloom, and converts into a dazzling brilliancy that obscurity in which the earlier history of the public career of the immortal Pickwick would appear to be involved, is derived from the perusal of the following entry in the Transactions of the Pickwick Club, which the editor of these papers feels the highest pleasure in laying before his readers, as a proof of the careful attention, indefatigable assiduity, and nice discrimination, with which his search among the multifarious documents confided to him has been conducted.

'May 12, 1827. Joseph Smiggers, Esq., P.V.P.M.P.C. [Perpetual Vice-President—Member Pickwick Club], presiding. The following resolutions unanimously agreed to:—

'That this Association has heard read, with feelings of unmingled satisfaction, and unqualified approval, the paper communicated by Samuel Pickwick, Esq., G.C.M.P.C. [General Chairman—Member Pickwick Club], entitled "Speculations on the Source of the Hampstead Ponds, with some Observations on the Theory of Tittlebats;" and that this Association does hereby return its warmest thanks to the said Samuel Pickwick, Esq., G.C.M.P.C., for the same.

'That while this Association is deeply sensible of the advantages which must accrue to the cause of science, from the production to which they have just adverted—no less than from the unwearied researches of Samuel Pickwick, Esq., G.C.M.P.C., in Hornsey, Highgate, Brixton, and Camberwell—they cannot but entertain a lively sense of the inestimable benefits which must inevitably result from carrying the speculations of that learned man into a wider field, from extending his travels, and, consequently, enlarging his sphere of observation, to the advancement of knowledge, and the diffusion of learning.

'That, with the view just mentioned, this Association has taken into its serious consideration a proposal, emanating from the aforesaid, Samuel Pickwick, Esq., G.C.M.P.C., and three other Pickwickians hereinafter named, for forming a new branch of United Pickwickians, under the title of The Corresponding Society of the Pickwick Club.

'That the said proposal has received the sanction and approval of this Association. 'That the Corresponding Society of the Pickwick Club is therefore hereby constituted; and that Samuel Pickwick, Esq., G.C.M.P.C., Tracy Tupman, Esq., M.P.C., Augustus Snodgrass, Esq., M.P.C., and Nathaniel Winkle, Esq., M.P.C., are hereby nominated and appointed members of the same; and that they be requested to forward, from time to time, authenticated accounts of their journeys and investigations, of their observations of character and manners, and of the whole of their adventures, together with all tales and papers to which local scenery or associations may give rise, to the Pickwick Club, stationed in London.

'That this Association cordially recognises the principle of every member of the Corresponding Society defraying his own travelling expenses; and that it sees no objection whatever to the members of the said society pursuing their inquiries for any length of time they please, upon the same terms.

'That the members of the aforesaid Corresponding Society be, and are hereby informed, that their proposal to pay the postage of their letters, and the carriage of their parcels, has been deliberated upon by this Association: that this Association considers such proposal worthy of the great minds from which it emanated, and that it hereby signifies its perfect acquiescence therein.'

A casual observer, adds the secretary, to whose notes we are indebted for the following account—a casual observer might possibly have remarked nothing extraordinary in the bald head, and circular spectacles, which were intently turned towards his (the secretary's) face, during the reading of the above resolutions: to those who knew that the gigantic brain of Pickwick was working beneath that forehead, and that the beaming eyes of Pickwick were twinkling behind those glasses, the sight was indeed an interesting one. There sat the man who had traced to their source the mighty ponds of Hampstead, and agitated the scientific world with his Theory of Tittlebats, as calm and unmoved as the deep waters of the one on a frosty day, or as a solitary specimen of the other in the inmost recesses of an earthen jar. And how much more interesting did the spectacle become, when, starting into full life and animation, as a simultaneous call for 'Pickwick' burst from his followers, that illustrious man slowly mounted into the Windsor chair, on which he had been previously seated, and addressed the club himself had founded. What a study for an artist did that exciting scene present! The eloquent Pickwick, with one hand gracefully concealed behind his coat tails, and the other waving in air to assist his glowing declamation; his elevated position revealing those tights and gaiters, which, had they clothed an ordinary man, might have passed without observation, but which, when Pickwick clothed them—if we may use the expression—inspired involuntary awe and respect; surrounded by the men who had volunteered to share the perils of his travels, and who were destined to participate in the glories of his discoveries. On his right sat Mr. Tracy Tupman—the too susceptible Tupman, who to the wisdom and experience of maturer years superadded the enthusiasm and ardour of a boy in the most interesting and pardonable of human weaknesses—love. Time and feeding had expanded that once romantic form; the black silk waistcoat had become more and more developed; inch by inch had the gold watch-chain beneath it disappeared from within the range of Tupman's vision; and gradually had the capacious chin encroached upon the borders of the white cravat: but the soul of Tupman had known no change—admiration of the fair sex was still its ruling passion. On the left of his great leader sat the poetic Snodgrass, and near him again the sporting Winkle; the former poetically enveloped in a mysterious blue cloak with a canine-skin collar, and the latter communicating additional lustre to a new green shooting-coat, plaid neckerchief, and closely-fitted drabs.

Mr. Pickwick's oration upon this occasion, together with the debate thereon, is entered on the Transactions of the Club. Both bear a strong affinity to the discussions of other celebrated bodies; and, as it is always interesting to trace a resemblance between the proceedings of great men, we transfer the entry to these pages.

'Mr. Pickwick observed (says the secretary) that fame was dear to the heart of every man. Poetic fame was dear to the heart of his friend Snodgrass; the fame of conquest was equally dear to his friend Tupman; and the desire of earning fame in the sports of the field, the air, and the water was uppermost in the breast of his friend Winkle. He (Mr. Pickwick) would not deny that he was influenced by human passions and human feelings (cheers)—possibly by human weaknesses (loud cries of "No"); but this he would say, that if ever the fire of self-importance broke out in his bosom, the desire to benefit the human race in preference effectually quenched it. The praise of mankind was his swing; philanthropy was his insurance office. (Vehement cheering.) He had felt some pride—he acknowledged it freely, and let his enemies make the most of it—he had felt some pride when he presented his Tittlebatian Theory to the world; it might be celebrated or it might not. (A cry of "It is," and great cheering.) He would take the assertion of that honourable Pickwickian whose voice he had just heard—it was celebrated; but if the fame of that treatise were to extend to the farthest confines of the known world, the pride with which he should reflect on the authorship of that production would be as nothing compared with the pride with which he looked around him, on this, the proudest moment of his existence. (Cheers.) He was a humble individual. ("No, no.") Still he could not but feel that they had selected him for a service of great honour, and of some danger. Travelling was in a troubled state, and the minds of coachmen were unsettled. Let them look abroad and contemplate the scenes which were enacting around them. Stage-coaches were upsetting in all directions, horses were bolting, boats were overturning, and boilers were bursting. (Cheers—a voice "No.") No! (Cheers.) Let that honourable Pickwickian who cried "No" so loudly come forward and deny it, if he could. (Cheers.) Who was it that cried "No"? (Enthusiastic cheering.) Was it some vain and disappointed man—he would not say haberdasher (loud cheers)—who, jealous of the praise which had been—perhaps undeservedly—bestowed on his (Mr. Pickwick's) researches, and smarting under the censure which had been heaped upon his own feeble attempts at rivalry, now took this vile and calumnious mode of —-

'Mr. BLOTTON (of Aldgate) rose to order. Did the honourable Pickwickian allude to him? (Cries of "Order," "Chair," "Yes," "No," "Go on," "Leave off," etc.)

'Mr. PICKWICK would not put up to be put down by clamour. He had alluded to the honourable gentleman. (Great excitement.)

'Mr. BLOTTON would only say then, that he repelled the hon. gent.'s false and scurrilous accusation, with profound contempt. (Great cheering.) The hon. gent. was a humbug. (Immense confusion, and loud cries of "Chair," and "Order.")

'Mr. A. SNODGRASS rose to order. He threw himself upon the chair. (Hear.) He wished to know whether this disgraceful contest between two members of that club should be allowed to continue. (Hear, hear.)

'The CHAIRMAN was quite sure the hon. Pickwickian would withdraw the expression he had just made use of.

'Mr. BLOTTON, with all possible respect for the chair, was quite sure he would not.

'The CHAIRMAN felt it his imperative duty to demand of the honourable gentleman, whether he had used the expression which had just escaped him in a common sense.

'Mr. BLOTTON had no hesitation in saying that he had not—he had used the word in its Pickwickian sense. (Hear, hear.) He was bound to acknowledge that, personally, he entertained the highest regard and esteem for the honourable gentleman; he had merely considered him a humbug in a Pickwickian point of view. (Hear, hear.)

'Mr. PICKWICK felt much gratified by the fair, candid, and full explanation of his honourable friend. He begged it to be at once understood, that his own observations had been merely intended to bear a Pickwickian construction. (Cheers.)'

Here the entry terminates, as we have no doubt the debate did also, after arriving at such a highly satisfactory and intelligible point. We have no official statement of the facts which the reader will find recorded in the next chapter, but they have been carefully collated from letters and other MS. authorities, so unquestionably genuine as to justify their narration in a connected form.

CHAPTER II. THE FIRST DAY'S JOURNEY, AND THE FIRST EVENING'S ADVENTURES;

WITH THEIR CONSEQUENCES

That punctual servant of all work, the sun, had just risen, and begun to strike a light on the morning of the thirteenth of May, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-seven, when Mr. Samuel Pickwick burst like another sun from his slumbers, threw open his chamber window, and looked out upon the world beneath. Goswell Street was at his feet, Goswell Street was on his right hand—as far as the eye could reach, Goswell Street extended on his left; and the opposite side of Goswell Street was over the way. 'Such,' thought Mr. Pickwick, 'are the narrow views of those philosophers who, content with examining the things that lie before them, look not to the truths which are hidden beyond. As well might I be content to gaze on Goswell Street for ever, without one effort to penetrate to the hidden countries which on every side surround it.' And having given vent to this beautiful reflection, Mr. Pickwick proceeded to put himself into his clothes, and his clothes into his portmanteau. Great men are seldom over scrupulous in the arrangement of their attire; the operation of shaving, dressing, and coffee-imbibing was soon performed; and, in another hour, Mr. Pickwick, with his portmanteau in his hand, his telescope in his greatcoat pocket, and his note-book in his waistcoat, ready for the reception of any discoveries worthy of being noted down, had arrived at the coach-stand in St. Martin's-le-Grand. 'Cab!' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Here you are, sir,' shouted a strange specimen of the human race, in a sackcloth coat, and apron of the same, who, with a brass label and number round his neck, looked as if he were catalogued in some collection of rarities. This was the waterman. 'Here you are, sir. Now, then, fust cab!' And the first cab having been fetched from the public-house, where he had been smoking his first pipe, Mr. Pickwick and his portmanteau were thrown into the vehicle.

'Golden Cross,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Only a bob's vorth, Tommy,' cried the driver sulkily, for the information of his friend the waterman, as the cab drove off.

'How old is that horse, my friend?' inquired Mr. Pickwick, rubbing his nose with the shilling he had reserved for the fare.

'Forty-two,' replied the driver, eyeing him askant.

'What!' ejaculated Mr. Pickwick, laying his hand upon his note-book. The driver reiterated his former statement. Mr. Pickwick looked very hard at the man's face, but his features were immovable, so he noted down the fact forthwith. 'And how long do you keep him out at a time?'inquired Mr. Pickwick, searching for further information.

'Two or three veeks,' replied the man.

'Weeks!' said Mr. Pickwick in astonishment, and out came the note-book again.

'He lives at Pentonwil when he's at home,' observed the driver coolly, 'but we seldom takes him home, on account of his weakness.'

'On account of his weakness!' reiterated the perplexed Mr. Pickwick.

'He always falls down when he's took out o' the cab,' continued the driver, 'but when he's in it, we bears him up werry tight, and takes him in werry short, so as he can't werry well fall down; and we've got a pair o' precious large wheels on, so ven he does move, they run after him, and he must go on—he can't help it.'

Mr. Pickwick entered every word of this statement in his note-book, with the view of communicating it to the club, as a singular instance of the tenacity of life in horses under trying circumstances. The entry was scarcely completed when they reached the Golden Cross. Down jumped the driver, and out got Mr. Pickwick. Mr. Tupman, Mr. Snodgrass, and Mr. Winkle, who had been anxiously waiting the arrival of their illustrious leader, crowded to welcome him.

'Here's your fare,' said Mr. Pickwick, holding out the shilling to the driver.

What was the learned man's astonishment, when that unaccountable person flung the money on the pavement, and requested in figurative terms to be allowed the pleasure of fighting him (Mr. Pickwick) for the amount!

'You are mad,' said Mr. Snodgrass.

'Or drunk,' said Mr. Winkle.

'Or both,' said Mr. Tupman.

'Come on!' said the cab-driver, sparring away like clockwork. 'Come on—all four on you.'

'Here's a lark!' shouted half a dozen hackney coachmen. 'Go to vork, Sam!—and they crowded with great glee round the party.

'What's the row, Sam?' inquired one gentleman in black calico sleeves.

'Row!' replied the cabman, 'what did he want my number for?' 'I didn't want your number,' said the astonished Mr. Pickwick.

'What did you take it for, then?' inquired the cabman.

'I didn't take it,' said Mr. Pickwick indignantly.

'Would anybody believe,' continued the cab-driver, appealing to the crowd, 'would anybody believe as an informer'ud go about in a man's cab, not only takin' down his number, but ev'ry word he says into the bargain' (a light flashed upon Mr. Pickwick—it was the note-book).

'Did he though?' inquired another cabman.

'Yes, did he,' replied the first; 'and then arter aggerawatin' me to assault him, gets three witnesses here to prove it. But I'll give it him, if I've six months for it. Come on!' and the cabman dashed his hat upon the ground, with a reckless disregard of his own private property, and knocked Mr. Pickwick's spectacles off, and followed up the attack with a blow on Mr. Pickwick's nose, and another on Mr. Pickwick's chest, and a third in Mr. Snodgrass's eye, and a fourth, by way of variety, in Mr. Tupman's waistcoat, and then danced into the road, and then back again to the pavement, and finally dashed the whole temporary supply of breath out of Mr. Winkle's body; and all in half a dozen seconds.

'Where's an officer?' said Mr. Snodgrass.

'Put 'em under the pump,' suggested a hot-pieman.

'You shall smart for this,' gasped Mr. Pickwick.

'Informers!' shouted the crowd.

'Come on,' cried the cabman, who had been sparring without cessation the whole time.

The mob hitherto had been passive spectators of the scene, but as the intelligence of the Pickwickians being informers was spread among them, they began to canvass with considerable vivacity the propriety of enforcing the heated pastry-vendor's proposition: and there is no saying what acts of personal aggression they might have committed, had not the affray been unexpectedly terminated by the interposition of a new-comer.

'What's the fun?' said a rather tall, thin, young man, in a green coat, emerging suddenly from the coach-yard.

'informers!' shouted the crowd again.

'We are not,' roared Mr. Pickwick, in a tone which, to any dispassionate listener, carried conviction with it. 'Ain't you, though—ain't you?' said the young man, appealing to Mr. Pickwick, and making his way through the crowd by the infallible process of elbowing the countenances of its component members.

That learned man in a few hurried words explained the real state of the case.

'Come along, then,' said he of the green coat, lugging Mr. Pickwick after him by main force, and talking the whole way. Here, No. 924, take your fare, and take yourself off—respectable gentleman—know him well—none of your nonsense—this way, sir—where's your friends?—all a mistake, I see—never mind—accidents will happen—best regulated families—never say die—down upon your luck—Pull him UP—Put that in his pipe—like the flavour—damned rascals.' And with a lengthened string of similar broken sentences, delivered with extraordinary volubility, the stranger led the way to the traveller's waiting-room, whither he was closely followed by Mr. Pickwick and his disciples.

'Here, waiter!' shouted the stranger, ringing the bell with tremendous violence, 'glasses round—brandy-and-water, hot and strong, and sweet, and plenty,—eye damaged, Sir? Waiter! raw beef-steak for the gentleman's eye—nothing like raw beef-steak for a bruise, sir; cold lamp-post very good, but lamp-post inconvenient—damned odd standing in the open street half an hour, with your eye against a lamp-post—eh,—very good—ha! ha!' And the stranger, without stopping to take breath, swallowed at a draught full half a pint of the reeking brandy-and-water, and flung himself into a chair with as much ease as if nothing uncommon had occurred.

While his three companions were busily engaged in proffering their thanks to their new acquaintance, Mr. Pickwick had leisure to examine his costume and appearance.

He was about the middle height, but the thinness of his body, and the length of his legs, gave him the appearance of being much taller. The green coat had been a smart dress garment in the days of swallow-tails, but had evidently in those times adorned a much shorter man than the stranger, for the soiled and faded sleeves scarcely reached to his wrists. It was buttoned closely up to his chin, at the imminent hazard of splitting the back; and an old stock, without a vestige of shirt collar, ornamented his neck. His scanty black trousers displayed here and there those shiny patches which bespeak long service, and were strapped very tightly over a pair of patched and mended shoes, as if to conceal the dirty white stockings, which were nevertheless distinctly visible. His long, black hair escaped in negligent waves from beneath each side of his old pinched-up hat; and glimpses of his bare wrists might be observed between the tops of his gloves and the cuffs of his coat sleeves. His face was thin and haggard; but an indescribable air of jaunty impudence and perfect self-possession pervaded the whole man.

Such was the individual on whom Mr. Pickwick gazed through his spectacles (which he had fortunately recovered), and to whom he proceeded, when his friends had exhausted themselves, to return in chosen terms his warmest thanks for his recent assistance.

'Never mind,' said the stranger, cutting the address very short, 'said enough—no more; smart chap that cabman—handled his fives well; but if I'd been your friend in the green jemmy—damn me—punch his head,—'cod I would,—pig's whisper—pieman too,—no gammon.'

This coherent speech was interrupted by the entrance of the Rochester coachman, to announce that 'the Commodore' was on the point of starting.

'Commodore!' said the stranger, starting up, 'my coach—place booked,—one outside—leave you to pay for the brandy-and-water,—want change for a five,—bad silver—Brummagem buttons—won't do—no go—eh?' and he shook his head most knowingly.

Now it so happened that Mr. Pickwick and his three companions had resolved to make Rochester their first halting-place too; and having intimated to their new-found acquaintance that they were journeying to the same city, they agreed to occupy the seat at the back of the coach, where they could all sit together.

'Up with you,' said the stranger, assisting Mr. Pickwick on to the roof with so much precipitation as to impair the gravity of that gentleman's deportment very materially.

'Any luggage, Sir?' inquired the coachman. 'Who—I? Brown paper parcel here, that's all—other luggage gone by water—packing-cases, nailed up—big as houses—heavy, heavy, damned heavy,' replied the stranger, as he forced into his pocket as much as he could of the brown paper parcel, which presented most suspicious indications of containing one shirt and a handkerchief.

'Heads, heads—take care of your heads!' cried the loquacious stranger, as they came out under the low archway, which in those days formed the entrance to the coach-yard. 'Terrible place—dangerous work—other day—five children—mother—tall lady, eating sandwiches—forgot the arch—crash—knock—children look round—mother's head off—sandwich in her hand—no mouth to put it in—head of a family off—shocking, shocking! Looking at Whitehall, sir?—fine place—little window—somebody else's head off there, eh, sir?—he didn't keep a sharp look-out enough either—eh, Sir, eh?'

'I am ruminating,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'on the strange mutability of human affairs.'

'Ah! I see—in at the palace door one day, out at the window the next. Philosopher, Sir?' 'An observer of human nature, Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Ah, so am I. Most people are when they've little to do and less to get. Poet, Sir?'

'My friend Mr. Snodgrass has a strong poetic turn,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'So have I,' said the stranger. 'Epic poem—ten thousand lines—revolution of July—composed it on the spot—Mars by day, Apollo by night—bang the field-piece, twang the lyre.'

'You were present at that glorious scene, sir?' said Mr. Snodgrass.

'Present! think I was;* fired a musket—fired with an idea—rushed into wine shop—wrote it down—back again—whiz, bang—another idea—wine shop again—pen and ink—back again—cut and slash—noble time, Sir. Sportsman, sir?'abruptly turning to Mr. Winkle.

'A little, Sir,' replied that gentleman.

'Fine pursuit, sir—fine pursuit.—Dogs, Sir?'

'Not just now,' said Mr. Winkle.

'Ah! you should keep dogs—fine animals—sagacious creatures—dog of my own once—pointer—surprising instinct—out shooting one day—entering inclosure—whistled—dog stopped—whistled again—Ponto—no go; stock still—called him—Ponto, Ponto—wouldn't move—dog transfixed—staring at a board—looked up, saw an inscription—"Gamekeeper has orders to shoot all dogs found in this inclosure"—wouldn't pass it—wonderful dog—valuable dog that—very.'

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* A remarkable instance of the prophetic force of Mr. Jingle's imagination; this dialogue occurring in the year 1827, and the Revolution in 1830.

'Singular circumstance that,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Will you allow me to make a note of it?'

'Certainly, Sir, certainly—hundred more anecdotes of the same animal.—Fine girl, Sir' (to Mr. Tracy Tupman, who had been bestowing sundry anti-Pickwickian glances on a young lady by the roadside).

'Very!' said Mr. Tupman.

'English girls not so fine as Spanish—noble creatures—jet hair—black eyes—lovely forms—sweet creatures—beautiful.'

'You have been in Spain, sir?' said Mr. Tracy Tupman.

'Lived there—ages.' 'Many conquests, sir?' inquired Mr. Tupman.

'Conquests! Thousands. Don Bolaro Fizzgig—grandee—only daughter—Donna Christina—splendid creature—loved me to distraction—jealous father—high-souled daughter—handsome Englishman—Donna Christina in despair—prussic acid—stomach pump in my portmanteau—operation performed—old Bolaro in ecstasies—consent to our union—join hands and floods of tears—romantic story—very.'

'Is the lady in England now, sir?' inquired Mr. Tupman, on whom the description of her charms had produced a powerful impression.

'Dead, sir—dead,' said the stranger, applying to his right eye the brief remnant of a very old cambric handkerchief. 'Never recovered the stomach pump—undermined constitution—fell a victim.'

'And her father?' inquired the poetic Snodgrass.

'Remorse and misery,' replied the stranger. 'Sudden disappearance—talk of the whole city—search made everywhere without success—public fountain in the great square suddenly ceased playing—weeks elapsed—still a stoppage—workmen employed to clean it—water drawn off—father-in-law discovered sticking head first in the main pipe, with a full confession in his right boot—took him out, and the fountain played away again, as well as ever.'

'Will you allow me to note that little romance down, Sir?' said Mr. Snodgrass, deeply affected.

'Certainly, Sir, certainly—fifty more if you like to hear 'em—strange life mine—rather curious history—not extraordinary, but singular.'

In this strain, with an occasional glass of ale, by way of parenthesis, when the coach changed horses, did the stranger proceed, until they reached Rochester bridge, by which time the note-books, both of Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Snodgrass, were completely filled with selections from his adventures.

'Magnificent ruin!' said Mr. Augustus Snodgrass, with all the poetic fervour that distinguished him, when they came in sight of the fine old castle.

'What a sight for an antiquarian!' were the very words which fell from Mr. Pickwick's mouth, as he applied his telescope to his eye.

'Ah! fine place,' said the stranger, 'glorious pile—frowning walls—tottering arches—dark nooks—crumbling staircases—old cathedral too—earthy smell—pilgrims' feet wore away the old steps—little Saxon doors—confessionals like money-takers' boxes at theatres—queer customers those monks—popes, and lord treasurers, and all sorts of old fellows, with great red faces, and broken noses, turning up every day—buff jerkins too—match-locks—sarcophagus—fine place—old legends too—strange stories: capital;' and the stranger continued to soliloquise until they reached the Bull Inn, in the High Street, where the coach stopped.

'Do you remain here, Sir?' inquired Mr. Nathaniel Winkle.

'Here—not I—but you'd better—good house—nice beds—Wright's next house, dear—very dear—half-a-crown in the bill if you look at the waiter—charge you more if you dine at a friend's than they would if you dined in the coffee-room—rum fellows—very.'

Mr. Winkle turned to Mr. Pickwick, and murmured a few words; a whisper passed from Mr. Pickwick to Mr. Snodgrass, from Mr. Snodgrass to Mr. Tupman, and nods of assent were exchanged. Mr. Pickwick addressed the stranger.

'You rendered us a very important service this morning, sir,' said he, 'will you allow us to offer a slight mark of our gratitude by begging the favour of your company at dinner?'

'Great pleasure—not presume to dictate, but broiled fowl and mushrooms—capital thing! What time?'

'Let me see,' replied Mr. Pickwick, referring to his watch, 'it is now nearly three. Shall we say five?'

'Suit me excellently,' said the stranger, 'five precisely—till then—care of yourselves;' and lifting the pinched-up hat a few inches from his head, and carelessly replacing it very much on one side, the stranger, with half the brown paper parcel sticking out of his pocket, walked briskly up the yard, and turned into the High Street.

'Evidently a traveller in many countries, and a close observer of men and things,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'I should like to see his poem,' said Mr. Snodgrass.

'I should like to have seen that dog,' said Mr. Winkle.

Mr. Tupman said nothing; but he thought of Donna Christina, the stomach pump, and the fountain; and his eyes filled with tears.

A private sitting-room having been engaged, bedrooms inspected, and dinner ordered, the party walked out to view the city and adjoining neighbourhood.

We do not find, from a careful perusal of Mr. Pickwick's notes of the four towns, Stroud, Rochester, Chatham, and Brompton, that his impressions of their appearance differ in any material point from those of other travellers who have gone over the same ground. His general description is easily abridged.

'The principal productions of these towns,' says Mr. Pickwick, 'appear to be soldiers, sailors, Jews, chalk, shrimps, officers, and dockyard men. The commodities chiefly exposed for sale in the public streets are marine stores, hard-bake, apples, flat-fish, and oysters. The streets present a lively and animated appearance, occasioned chiefly by the conviviality of the military. It is truly delightful to a philanthropic mind to see these gallant men staggering along under the influence of an overflow both of animal and ardent spirits; more especially when we remember that the following them about, and jesting with them, affords a cheap and innocent amusement for the boy population. Nothing,' adds Mr. Pickwick, 'can exceed their good-humour. It was but the day before my arrival that one of them had been most grossly insulted in the house of a publican. The barmaid had positively refused to draw him any more liquor; in return for which he had (merely in playfulness) drawn his bayonet, and wounded the girl in the shoulder. And yet this fine fellow was the very first to go down to the house next morning and express his readiness to overlook the matter, and forget what had occurred!

'The consumption of tobacco in these towns,' continues Mr. Pickwick, 'must be very great, and the smell which pervades the streets must be exceedingly delicious to those who are extremely fond of smoking. A superficial traveller might object to the dirt, which is their leading characteristic; but to those who view it as an indication of traffic and commercial prosperity, it is truly gratifying.'

Punctual to five o'clock came the stranger, and shortly afterwards the dinner. He had divested himself of his brown paper parcel, but had made no alteration in his attire, and was, if possible, more loquacious than ever.

'What's that?' he inquired, as the waiter removed one of the covers.

'Soles, Sir.'

'Soles—ah!—capital fish—all come from London-stage-coach proprietors get up political dinners—carriage of soles—dozens of baskets—cunning fellows. Glass of wine, Sir.'

'With pleasure,' said Mr. Pickwick; and the stranger took wine, first with him, and then with Mr. Snodgrass, and then with Mr. Tupman, and then with Mr. Winkle, and then with the whole party together, almost as rapidly as he talked.

'Devil of a mess on the staircase, waiter,' said the stranger. 'Forms going up—carpenters coming down—lamps, glasses, harps. What's going forward?'

'Ball, Sir,' said the waiter.

'Assembly, eh?'

'No, Sir, not assembly, Sir. Ball for the benefit of a charity, Sir.'

'Many fine women in this town, do you know, Sir?' inquired Mr. Tupman, with great interest.

'Splendid—capital. Kent, sir—everybody knows Kent—apples, cherries, hops, and women. Glass of wine, Sir!'

'With great pleasure,' replied Mr. Tupman. The stranger filled, and emptied.

'I should very much like to go,' said Mr. Tupman, resuming the subject of the ball, 'very much.'

'Tickets at the bar, Sir,' interposed the waiter; 'half-a-guinea each, Sir.'

Mr. Tupman again expressed an earnest wish to be present at the festivity; but meeting with no response in the darkened eye of Mr. Snodgrass, or the abstracted gaze of Mr. Pickwick, he applied himself with great interest to the port wine and dessert, which had just been placed on the table. The waiter withdrew, and the party were left to enjoy the cosy couple of hours succeeding dinner.

'Beg your pardon, sir,' said the stranger, 'bottle stands—pass it round—way of the sun—through the button-hole—no heeltaps,' and he emptied his glass, which he had filled about two minutes before, and poured out another, with the air of a man who was used to it.

The wine was passed, and a fresh supply ordered. The visitor talked, the Pickwickians listened. Mr. Tupman felt every moment more disposed for the ball. Mr. Pickwick's countenance glowed with an expression of universal philanthropy, and Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass fell fast asleep.

'They're beginning upstairs,' said the stranger—'hear the company—fiddles tuning—now the harp—there they go.' The various sounds which found their way downstairs announced the commencement of the first quadrille.

'How I should like to go,' said Mr. Tupman again.

'So should I,' said the stranger—'confounded luggage,—heavy smacks—nothing to go in—odd, ain't it?'

Now general benevolence was one of the leading features of the Pickwickian theory, and no one was more remarkable for the zealous manner in which he observed so noble a principle than Mr. Tracy Tupman. The number of instances recorded on the Transactions of the Society, in which that excellent man referred objects of charity to the houses of other members for left-off garments or pecuniary relief is almost incredible. 'I should be very happy to lend you a change of apparel for the purpose,' said Mr. Tracy Tupman, 'but you are rather slim, and I am—'

'Rather fat—grown-up Bacchus—cut the leaves—dismounted from the tub, and adopted kersey, eh?—not double distilled, but double milled—ha! ha! pass the wine.'

Whether Mr. Tupman was somewhat indignant at the peremptory tone in which he was desired to pass the wine which the stranger passed so quickly away, or whether he felt very properly scandalised at an influential member of the Pickwick Club being ignominiously compared to a dismounted Bacchus, is a fact not yet completely ascertained. He passed the wine, coughed twice, and looked at the stranger for several seconds with a stern intensity; as that individual, however, appeared perfectly collected, and quite calm under his searching glance, he gradually relaxed, and reverted to the subject of the ball.

'I was about to observe, Sir,' he said, 'that though my apparel would be too large, a suit of my friend Mr. Winkle's would, perhaps, fit you better.'

The stranger took Mr. Winkle's measure with his eye, and that feature glistened with satisfaction as he said, 'Just the thing.'

Mr. Tupman looked round him. The wine, which had exerted its somniferous influence over Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Winkle, had stolen upon the senses of Mr. Pickwick. That gentleman had gradually passed through the various stages which precede the lethargy produced by dinner, and its consequences. He had undergone the ordinary transitions from the height of conviviality to the depth of misery, and from the depth of misery to the height of conviviality. Like a gas-lamp in the street, with the wind in the pipe, he had exhibited for a moment an unnatural brilliancy, then sank so low as to be scarcely discernible; after a short interval, he had burst out again, to enlighten for a moment; then flickered with an uncertain, staggering sort of light, and then gone out altogether. His head was sunk upon his bosom, and perpetual snoring, with a partial choke occasionally, were the only audible indications of the great man's presence.

The temptation to be present at the ball, and to form his first impressions of the beauty of the Kentish ladies, was strong upon Mr. Tupman. The temptation to take the stranger with him was equally great. He was wholly unacquainted with the place and its inhabitants, and the stranger seemed to possess as great a knowledge of both as if he had lived there from his infancy. Mr. Winkle was asleep, and Mr. Tupman had had sufficient experience in such matters to know that the moment he awoke he would, in the ordinary course of nature, roll heavily to bed. He was undecided. 'Fill your glass, and pass the wine,' said the indefatigable visitor.

Mr. Tupman did as he was requested; and the additional stimulus of the last glass settled his determination.

'Winkle's bedroom is inside mine,' said Mr. Tupman; 'I couldn't make him understand what I wanted, if I woke him now, but I know he has a dress-suit in a carpet bag; and supposing you wore it to the ball, and took it off when we returned, I could replace it without troubling him at all about the matter.'

'Capital,' said the stranger, 'famous plan—damned odd situation—fourteen coats in the packing-cases, and obliged to wear another man's—very good notion, that—very.'

'We must purchase our tickets,' said Mr. Tupman.

'Not worth while splitting a guinea,' said the stranger, 'toss who shall pay for both—I call; you spin—first time—woman—woman—bewitching woman,' and down came the sovereign with the dragon (called by courtesy a woman) uppermost.

Mr. Tupman rang the bell, purchased the tickets, and ordered chamber candlesticks. In another quarter of an hour the stranger was completely arrayed in a full suit of Mr. Nathaniel Winkle's.

'It's a new coat,' said Mr. Tupman, as the stranger surveyed himself with great complacency in a cheval glass; 'the first that's been made with our club button,' and he called his companions' attention to the large gilt button which displayed a bust of Mr. Pickwick in the centre, and the letters 'P. C.' on either side.

'"P. C."' said the stranger—'queer set out—old fellow's likeness, and "P. C."—What does "P. C." stand for—Peculiar Coat, eh?'

Mr. Tupman, with rising indignation and great importance, explained the mystic device.

'Rather short in the waist, ain't it?' said the stranger, screwing himself round to catch a glimpse in the glass of the waist buttons, which were half-way up his back. 'Like a general postman's coat—queer coats those—made by contract—no measuring—mysterious dispensations of Providence—all the short men get long coats—all the long men short ones.' Running on in this way, Mr. Tupman's new companion adjusted his dress, or rather the dress of Mr. Winkle; and, accompanied by Mr. Tupman, ascended the staircase leading to the ballroom.

'What names, sir?' said the man at the door. Mr. Tracy Tupman was stepping forward to announce his own titles, when the stranger prevented him.

'No names at all;' and then he whispered Mr. Tupman, 'names won't do—not known—very good names in their way, but not great ones—capital names for a small party, but won't make an impression in public assemblies—incog. the thing—gentlemen from London—distinguished foreigners—anything.' The door was thrown open, and Mr. Tracy Tupman and the stranger entered the ballroom.

It was a long room, with crimson-covered benches, and wax candles in glass chandeliers. The musicians were securely confined in an elevated den, and quadrilles were being systematically got through by two or three sets of dancers. Two card-tables were made up in the adjoining card-room, and two pair of old ladies, and a corresponding number of stout gentlemen, were executing whist therein.

The finale concluded, the dancers promenaded the room, and Mr. Tupman and his companion stationed themselves in a corner to observe the company.

'Charming women,' said Mr. Tupman.

'Wait a minute,' said the stranger, 'fun presently—nobs not come yet—queer place—dockyard people of upper rank don't know dockyard people of lower rank—dockyard people of lower rank don't know small gentry—small gentry don't know tradespeople—commissioner don't know anybody.'

'Who's that little boy with the light hair and pink eyes, in a fancy dress?'inquired Mr. Tupman.

'Hush, pray—pink eyes—fancy dress—little boy—nonsense—ensign 97th—Honourable Wilmot Snipe—great family—Snipes—very.'

'Sir Thomas Clubber, Lady Clubber, and the Misses Clubber!' shouted the man at the door in a stentorian voice. A great sensation was created throughout the room by the entrance of a tall gentleman in a blue coat and bright buttons, a large lady in blue satin, and two young ladies, on a similar scale, in fashionably-made dresses of the same hue.

'Commissioner—head of the yard—great man—remarkably great man,' whispered the stranger in Mr. Tupman's ear, as the charitable committee ushered Sir Thomas Clubber and family to the top of the room. The Honourable Wilmot Snipe, and other distinguished gentlemen crowded to render homage to the Misses Clubber; and Sir Thomas Clubber stood bolt upright, and looked majestically over his black kerchief at the assembled company.

'Mr. Smithie, Mrs. Smithie, and the Misses Smithie,' was the next announcement.

'What's Mr. Smithie?' inquired Mr. Tracy Tupman.

'Something in the yard,' replied the stranger. Mr. Smithie bowed deferentially to Sir Thomas Clubber; and Sir Thomas Clubber acknowledged the salute with conscious condescension. Lady Clubber took a telescopic view of Mrs. Smithie and family through her eye-glass and Mrs. Smithie stared in her turn at Mrs. Somebody-else, whose husband was not in the dockyard at all.

'Colonel Bulder, Mrs. Colonel Bulder, and Miss Bulder,' were the next arrivals.

'Head of the garrison,' said the stranger, in reply to Mr. Tupman's inquiring look.

Miss Bulder was warmly welcomed by the Misses Clubber; the greeting between Mrs. Colonel Bulder and Lady Clubber was of the most affectionate description; Colonel Bulder and Sir Thomas Clubber exchanged snuff-boxes, and looked very much like a pair of Alexander Selkirks—'Monarchs of all they surveyed.'

While the aristocracy of the place—the Bulders, and Clubbers, and Snipes—were thus preserving their dignity at the upper end of the room, the other classes of society were imitating their example in other parts of it. The less aristocratic officers of the 97th devoted themselves to the families of the less important functionaries from the dockyard. The solicitors' wives, and the wine-merchant's wife, headed another grade (the brewer's wife visited the Bulders); and Mrs. Tomlinson, the post-office keeper, seemed by mutual consent to have been chosen the leader of the trade party.

One of the most popular personages, in his own circle, present, was a little fat man, with a ring of upright black hair round his head, and an extensive bald plain on the top of it—Doctor Slammer, surgeon to the 97th. The doctor took snuff with everybody, chatted with everybody, laughed, danced, made jokes, played whist, did everything, and was everywhere. To these pursuits, multifarious as they were, the little doctor added a more important one than any—he was indefatigable in paying the most unremitting and devoted attention to a little old widow, whose rich dress and profusion of ornament bespoke her a most desirable addition to a limited income.

Upon the doctor, and the widow, the eyes of both Mr. Tupman and his companion had been fixed for some time, when the stranger broke silence.

'Lots of money—old girl—pompous doctor—not a bad idea—good fun,' were the intelligible sentences which issued from his lips. Mr. Tupman looked inquisitively in his face. 'I'll dance with the widow,' said the stranger.

'Who is she?' inquired Mr. Tupman.

'Don't know—never saw her in all my life—cut out the doctor—here goes.' And the stranger forthwith crossed the room; and, leaning against a mantel-piece, commenced gazing with an air of respectful and melancholy admiration on the fat countenance of the little old lady. Mr. Tupman looked on, in mute astonishment. The stranger progressed rapidly; the little doctor danced with another lady; the widow dropped her fan; the stranger picked it up, and presented it—a smile—a bow—a curtsey—a few words of conversation. The stranger walked boldly up to, and returned with, the master of the ceremonies; a little introductory pantomime; and the stranger and Mrs. Budger took their places in a quadrille.

The surprise of Mr. Tupman at this summary proceeding, great as it was, was immeasurably exceeded by the astonishment of the doctor. The stranger was young, and the widow was flattered. The doctor's attentions were unheeded by the widow; and the doctor's indignation was wholly lost on his imperturbable rival. Doctor Slammer was paralysed. He, Doctor Slammer, of the 97th, to be extinguished in a moment, by a man whom nobody had ever seen before, and whom nobody knew even now! Doctor Slammer—Doctor Slammer of the 97th rejected! Impossible! It could not be! Yes, it was; there they were. What! introducing his friend! Could he believe his eyes! He looked again, and was under the painful necessity of admitting the veracity of his optics; Mrs. Budger was dancing with Mr. Tracy Tupman; there was no mistaking the fact. There was the widow before him, bouncing bodily here and there, with unwonted vigour; and Mr. Tracy Tupman hopping about, with a face expressive of the most intense solemnity, dancing (as a good many people do) as if a quadrille were not a thing to be laughed at, but a severe trial to the feelings, which it requires inflexible resolution to encounter.

Silently and patiently did the doctor bear all this, and all the handings of negus, and watching for glasses, and darting for biscuits, and coquetting, that ensued; but, a few seconds after the stranger had disappeared to lead Mrs. Budger to her carriage, he darted swiftly from the room with every particle of his hitherto-bottled-up indignation effervescing, from all parts of his countenance, in a perspiration of passion.

The stranger was returning, and Mr. Tupman was beside him. He spoke in a low tone, and laughed. The little doctor thirsted for his life. He was exulting. He had triumphed.

'Sir!' said the doctor, in an awful voice, producing a card, and retiring into an angle of the passage, 'my name is Slammer, Doctor Slammer, sir—97th Regiment—Chatham Barracks—my card, Sir, my card.' He would have added more, but his indignation choked him.

'Ah!' replied the stranger coolly, 'Slammer—much obliged—polite attention—not ill now, Slammer—but when I am—knock you up.'

'You—you're a shuffler, sir,' gasped the furious doctor, 'a poltroon—a coward—a liar—a—a—will nothing induce you to give me your card, sir!'

'Oh! I see,' said the stranger, half aside, 'negus too strong here—liberal landlord—very foolish—very—lemonade much better—hot rooms—

elderly gentlemen—suffer for it in the morning—cruel—cruel;' and he moved on a step or two.

'You are stopping in this house, Sir,' said the indignant little man; 'you are intoxicated now, Sir; you shall hear from me in the morning, sir. I shall find you out, sir; I shall find you out.'

'Rather you found me out than found me at home,' replied the unmoved stranger.

Doctor Slammer looked unutterable ferocity, as he fixed his hat on his head with an indignant knock; and the stranger and Mr. Tupman ascended to the bedroom of the latter to restore the borrowed plumage to the unconscious Winkle.

That gentleman was fast asleep; the restoration was soon made. The stranger was extremely jocose; and Mr. Tracy Tupman, being quite bewildered with wine, negus, lights, and ladies, thought the whole affair was an exquisite joke. His new friend departed; and, after experiencing some slight difficulty in finding the orifice in his nightcap, originally intended for the reception of his head, and finally overturning his candlestick in his struggles to put it on, Mr. Tracy Tupman managed to get into bed by a series of complicated evolutions, and shortly afterwards sank into repose.

Seven o'clock had hardly ceased striking on the following morning, when Mr. Pickwick's comprehensive mind was aroused from the state of unconsciousness, in which slumber had plunged it, by a loud knocking at his chamber door. 'Who's there?' said Mr. Pickwick, starting up in bed.

'Boots, sir.'

'What do you want?'

'Please, sir, can you tell me which gentleman of your party wears a bright blue dress-coat, with a gilt button with "P. C." on it?'

'It's been given out to brush,' thought Mr. Pickwick, 'and the man has forgotten whom it belongs to.' 'Mr. Winkle,'he called out, 'next room but two, on the right hand.' 'Thank'ee, sir,' said the Boots, and away he went.

'What's the matter?' cried Mr. Tupman, as a loud knocking at his door roused hint from his oblivious repose.

'Can I speak to Mr. Winkle, sir?' replied Boots from the outside.

'Winkle—Winkle!' shouted Mr. Tupman, calling into the inner room. 'Hollo!' replied a faint voice from within the bed-clothes.

'You're wanted—some one at the door;' and, having exerted himself to articulate thus much, Mr. Tracy Tupman turned round and fell fast asleep again.

'Wanted!' said Mr. Winkle, hastily jumping out of bed, and putting on a few articles of clothing; 'wanted! at this distance from town—who on earth can want me?'

'Gentleman in the coffee-room, sir,' replied the Boots, as Mr. Winkle opened the door and confronted him; 'gentleman says he'll not detain you a moment, Sir, but he can take no denial.'

'Very odd!' said Mr. Winkle; 'I'll be down directly.'

He hurriedly wrapped himself in a travelling-shawl and dressing-gown, and proceeded downstairs. An old woman and a couple of waiters were cleaning the coffee-room, and an officer in undress uniform was looking out of the window. He turned round as Mr. Winkle entered, and made a stiff inclination of the head. Having ordered the attendants to retire, and closed the door very carefully, he said, 'Mr. Winkle, I presume?'

'My name is Winkle, sir.'

'You will not be surprised, sir, when I inform you that I have called here this morning on behalf of my friend, Doctor Slammer, of the 97th.'

'Doctor Slammer!' said Mr. Winkle.

'Doctor Slammer. He begged me to express his opinion that your conduct of last evening was of a description which no gentleman could endure; and' (he added) 'which no one gentleman would pursue towards another.'

Mr. Winkle's astonishment was too real, and too evident, to escape the observation of Doctor Slammer's friend; he therefore proceeded—'My friend, Doctor Slammer, requested me to add, that he was firmly persuaded you were intoxicated during a portion of the evening, and possibly unconscious of the extent of the insult you were guilty of. He commissioned me to say, that should this be pleaded as an excuse for your behaviour, he will consent to accept a written apology, to be penned by you, from my dictation.'

'A written apology!' repeated Mr. Winkle, in the most emphatic tone of amazement possible.

'Of course you know the alternative,' replied the visitor coolly.

'Were you intrusted with this message to me by name?' inquired Mr. Winkle, whose intellects were hopelessly confused by this extraordinary conversation.

'I was not present myself,' replied the visitor, 'and in consequence of your firm refusal to give your card to Doctor Slammer, I was desired by that gentleman to identify the wearer of a very uncommon coat—a bright blue dress-coat, with a gilt button displaying a bust, and the letters "P. C."'

Mr. Winkle actually staggered with astonishment as he heard his own costume thus minutely described. Doctor Slammer's friend proceeded:—'From the inquiries I made at the bar, just now, I was convinced that the owner of the coat in question arrived here, with three gentlemen, yesterday afternoon. I immediately sent up to the gentleman who was described as appearing the head of the party, and he at once referred me to you.'

If the principal tower of Rochester Castle had suddenly walked from its foundation, and stationed itself opposite the coffee-room window, Mr. Winkle's surprise would have been as nothing compared with the profound astonishment with which he had heard this address. His first impression was that his coat had been stolen. 'Will you allow me to detain you one moment?' said he.

'Certainly,' replied the unwelcome visitor.

Mr. Winkle ran hastily upstairs, and with a trembling hand opened the bag. There was the coat in its usual place, but exhibiting, on a close inspection, evident tokens of having been worn on the preceding night.

'It must be so,' said Mr. Winkle, letting the coat fall from his hands. 'I took too much wine after dinner, and have a very vague recollection of walking about the streets, and smoking a cigar afterwards. The fact is, I was very drunk;—I must have changed my coat—gone somewhere—and insulted somebody—I have no doubt of it; and this message is the terrible consequence.' Saying which, Mr. Winkle retraced his steps in the direction of the coffee-room, with the gloomy and dreadful resolve of accepting the challenge of the warlike Doctor Slammer, and abiding by the worst consequences that might ensue.

To this determination Mr. Winkle was urged by a variety of considerations, the first of which was his reputation with the club. He had always been looked up to as a high authority on all matters of amusement and dexterity, whether offensive, defensive, or inoffensive; and if, on this very first occasion of being put to the test, he shrunk back from the trial, beneath his leader's eye, his name and standing were lost for ever. Besides, he remembered to have heard it frequently surmised by the uninitiated in such matters that by an understood arrangement between the seconds, the pistols were seldom loaded with ball; and, furthermore, he reflected that if he applied to Mr. Snodgrass to act as his second, and depicted the danger in glowing terms, that gentleman might possibly communicate the intelligence to Mr. Pickwick, who would certainly lose no time in transmitting it to the local authorities, and thus prevent the killing or maiming of his follower.

Such were his thoughts when he returned to the coffee-room, and intimated his intention of accepting the doctor's challenge.

'Will you refer me to a friend, to arrange the time and place of meeting?' said the officer.

'Quite unnecessary,' replied Mr. Winkle; 'name them to me, and I can procure the attendance of a friend afterwards.'

'Shall we say—sunset this evening?' inquired the officer, in a careless tone.

'Very good,' replied Mr. Winkle, thinking in his heart it was very bad.

'You know Fort Pitt?'

'Yes; I saw it yesterday.'

'If you will take the trouble to turn into the field which borders the trench, take the foot-path to the left when you arrive at an angle of the fortification, and keep straight on, till you see me, I will precede you to a secluded place, where the affair can be conducted without fear of interruption.'

'Fear of interruption!' thought Mr. Winkle.

'Nothing more to arrange, I think,' said the officer.

'I am not aware of anything more,' replied Mr. Winkle. 'Good-morning.'

'Good-morning;' and the officer whistled a lively air as he strode away.

That morning's breakfast passed heavily off. Mr. Tupman was not in a condition to rise, after the unwonted dissipation of the previous night; Mr. Snodgrass appeared to labour under a poetical depression of spirits; and even Mr. Pickwick evinced an unusual attachment to silence and soda-water. Mr. Winkle eagerly watched his opportunity: it was not long wanting. Mr. Snodgrass proposed a visit to the castle, and as Mr. Winkle was the only other member of the party disposed to walk, they went out together. 'Snodgrass,' said Mr. Winkle, when they had turned out of the public street. 'Snodgrass, my dear fellow, can I rely upon your secrecy?' As he said this, he most devoutly and earnestly hoped he could not.

'You can,' replied Mr. Snodgrass. 'Hear me swear—'

'No, no,' interrupted Winkle, terrified at the idea of his companion's unconsciously pledging himself not to give information; 'don't swear, don't swear; it's quite unnecessary.'

Mr. Snodgrass dropped the hand which he had, in the spirit of poesy, raised towards the clouds as he made the above appeal, and assumed an attitude of attention.

'I want your assistance, my dear fellow, in an affair of honour,' said Mr. Winkle.

'You shall have it,' replied Mr. Snodgrass, clasping his friend's hand.

'With a doctor—Doctor Slammer, of the 97th,' said Mr. Winkle, wishing to make the matter appear as solemn as possible; 'an affair with an officer, seconded by another officer, at sunset this evening, in a lonely field beyond Fort Pitt.'

'I will attend you,' said Mr. Snodgrass.

He was astonished, but by no means dismayed. It is extraordinary how cool any party but the principal can be in such cases. Mr. Winkle had forgotten this. He had judged of his friend's feelings by his own.

'The consequences may be dreadful,' said Mr. Winkle.

'I hope not,' said Mr. Snodgrass.

'The doctor, I believe, is a very good shot,' said Mr. Winkle.

'Most of these military men are,' observed Mr. Snodgrass calmly; 'but so are you, ain't you?' Mr. Winkle replied in the affirmative; and perceiving that he had not alarmed his companion sufficiently, changed his ground.

'Snodgrass,' he said, in a voice tremulous with emotion, 'if I fall, you will find in a packet which I shall place in your hands a note for my—for my father.'

This attack was a failure also. Mr. Snodgrass was affected, but he undertook the delivery of the note as readily as if he had been a twopenny postman.

'If I fall,' said Mr. Winkle, 'or if the doctor falls, you, my dear friend, will be tried as an accessory before the fact. Shall I involve my friend in transportation—possibly for life!' Mr. Snodgrass winced a little at this, but his heroism was invincible. 'In the cause of friendship,' he fervently exclaimed, 'I would brave all dangers.'

How Mr. Winkle cursed his companion's devoted friendship internally, as they walked silently along, side by side, for some minutes, each immersed in his own meditations! The morning was wearing away; he grew desperate.

'Snodgrass,' he said, stopping suddenly, 'do not let me be balked in this matter—do not give information to the local authorities—do not obtain the assistance of several peace officers, to take either me or Doctor Slammer, of the 97th Regiment, at present quartered in Chatham Barracks, into custody, and thus prevent this duel!—I say, do not.'

Mr. Snodgrass seized his friend's hand warmly, as he enthusiastically replied, 'Not for worlds!'

A thrill passed over Mr. Winkle's frame as the conviction that he had nothing to hope from his friend's fears, and that he was destined to become an animated target, rushed forcibly upon him.

The state of the case having been formally explained to Mr. Snodgrass, and a case of satisfactory pistols, with the satisfactory accompaniments of powder, ball, and caps, having been hired from a manufacturer in Rochester, the two friends returned to their inn; Mr. Winkle to ruminate on the approaching struggle, and Mr. Snodgrass to arrange the weapons of war, and put them into proper order for immediate use.

it was a dull and heavy evening when they again sallied forth on their awkward errand. Mr. Winkle was muffled up in a huge cloak to escape observation, and Mr. Snodgrass bore under his the instruments of destruction.

'Have you got everything?' said Mr. Winkle, in an agitated tone.

'Everything,' replied Mr. Snodgrass; 'plenty of ammunition, in case the shots don't take effect. There's a quarter of a pound of powder in the case, and I have got two newspapers in my pocket for the loadings.'

These were instances of friendship for which any man might reasonably feel most grateful. The presumption is, that the gratitude of Mr. Winkle was too powerful for utterance, as he said nothing, but continued to walk on—rather slowly.

'We are in excellent time,' said Mr. Snodgrass, as they climbed the fence of the first field;'the sun is just going down.' Mr. Winkle looked up at the declining orb and painfully thought of the probability of his 'going down' himself, before long.

'There's the officer,' exclaimed Mr. Winkle, after a few minutes walking. 'Where?' said Mr. Snodgrass.

'There—the gentleman in the blue cloak.' Mr. Snodgrass looked in the direction indicated by the forefinger of his friend, and observed a figure, muffled up, as he had described. The officer evinced his consciousness of their presence by slightly beckoning with his hand; and the two friends followed him at a little distance, as he walked away.

The evening grew more dull every moment, and a melancholy wind sounded through the deserted fields, like a distant giant whistling for his house-dog. The sadness of the scene imparted a sombre tinge to the feelings of Mr. Winkle. He started as they passed the angle of the trench—it looked like a colossal grave.

The officer turned suddenly from the path, and after climbing a paling, and scaling a hedge, entered a secluded field. Two gentlemen were waiting in it; one was a little, fat man, with black hair; and the other—a portly personage in a braided surtout—was sitting with perfect equanimity on a camp-stool.

'The other party, and a surgeon, I suppose,' said Mr. Snodgrass; 'take a drop of brandy.' Mr. Winkle seized the wicker bottle which his friend proffered, and took a lengthened pull at the exhilarating liquid.

'My friend, Sir, Mr. Snodgrass,' said Mr. Winkle, as the officer approached. Doctor Slammer's friend bowed, and produced a case similar to that which Mr. Snodgrass carried.

'We have nothing further to say, Sir, I think,' he coldly remarked, as he opened the case; 'an apology has been resolutely declined.'

'Nothing, Sir,' said Mr. Snodgrass, who began to feel rather uncomfortable himself.

'Will you step forward?' said the officer.

'Certainly,' replied Mr. Snodgrass. The ground was measured, and preliminaries arranged. 'You will find these better than your own,' said the opposite second, producing his pistols. 'You saw me load them. Do you object to use them?'

'Certainly not,' replied Mr. Snodgrass. The offer relieved him from considerable embarrassment, for his previous notions of loading a pistol were rather vague and undefined.

'We may place our men, then, I think,' observed the officer, with as much indifference as if the principals were chess-men, and the seconds players.

'I think we may,' replied Mr. Snodgrass; who would have assented to any proposition, because he knew nothing about the matter. The officer crossed to Doctor Slammer, and Mr. Snodgrass went up to Mr. Winkle.

'It's all ready,' said he, offering the pistol. 'Give me your cloak.'

'You have got the packet, my dear fellow,' said poor Winkle. 'All right,' said Mr. Snodgrass. 'Be steady, and wing him.'

It occurred to Mr. Winkle that this advice was very like that which bystanders invariably give to the smallest boy in a street fight, namely, 'Go in, and win'—an admirable thing to recommend, if you only know how to do it. He took off his cloak, however, in silence—it always took a long time to undo that cloak—and accepted the pistol. The seconds retired, the gentleman on the camp-stool did the same, and the belligerents approached each other.

Mr. Winkle was always remarkable for extreme humanity. It is conjectured that his unwillingness to hurt a fellow-creature intentionally was the cause of his shutting his eyes when he arrived at the fatal spot; and that the circumstance of his eyes being closed, prevented his observing the very extraordinary and unaccountable demeanour of Doctor Slammer. That gentleman started, stared, retreated, rubbed his eyes, stared again, and, finally, shouted, 'Stop, stop!'

'What's all this?' said Doctor Slammer, as his friend and Mr. Snodgrass came running up; 'that's not the man.'

'Not the man!' said Doctor Slammer's second.

'Not the man!' said Mr. Snodgrass.

'Not the man!' said the gentleman with the camp-stool in his hand.

'Certainly not,' replied the little doctor. 'That's not the person who insulted me last night.'

'Very extraordinary!' exclaimed the officer.

'Very,' said the gentleman with the camp-stool. 'The only question is, whether the gentleman, being on the ground, must not be considered, as a matter of form, to be the individual who insulted our friend, Doctor Slammer, yesterday evening, whether he is really that individual or not;' and having delivered this suggestion, with a very sage and mysterious air, the man with the camp-stool took a large pinch of snuff, and looked profoundly round, with the air of an authority in such matters.

Now Mr. Winkle had opened his eyes, and his ears too, when he heard his adversary call out for a cessation of hostilities; and perceiving by what he had afterwards said that there was, beyond all question, some mistake in the matter, he at once foresaw the increase of reputation he should inevitably acquire by concealing the real motive of his coming out; he therefore stepped boldly forward, and said—

'I am not the person. I know it.'

'Then, that,' said the man with the camp-stool, 'is an affront to Doctor Slammer, and a sufficient reason for proceeding immediately.'

'Pray be quiet, Payne,' said the doctor's second. 'Why did you not communicate this fact to me this morning, Sir?'

'To be sure—to be sure,' said the man with the camp-stool indignantly.

'I entreat you to be quiet, Payne,' said the other. 'May I repeat my question, Sir?'

'Because, Sir,' replied Mr. Winkle, who had had time to deliberate upon his answer, 'because, Sir, you described an intoxicated and ungentlemanly person as wearing a coat which I have the honour, not only to wear but to have invented—the proposed uniform, Sir, of the Pickwick Club in London. The honour of that uniform I feel bound to maintain, and I therefore, without inquiry, accepted the challenge which you offered me.'

'My dear Sir,' said the good-humoured little doctor advancing with extended hand, 'I honour your gallantry. Permit me to say, Sir, that I highly admire your conduct, and extremely regret having caused you the inconvenience of this meeting, to no purpose.'

'I beg you won't mention it, Sir,' said Mr. Winkle.

'I shall feel proud of your acquaintance, Sir,' said the little doctor.

'It will afford me the greatest pleasure to know you, sir,' replied Mr. Winkle. Thereupon the doctor and Mr. Winkle shook hands, and then Mr. Winkle and Lieutenant Tappleton (the doctor's second), and then Mr. Winkle and the man with the camp-stool, and, finally, Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass—the last-named gentleman in an excess of admiration at the noble conduct of his heroic friend.

'I think we may adjourn,' said Lieutenant Tappleton.

'Certainly,' added the doctor.

'Unless,' interposed the man with the camp-stool, 'unless Mr. Winkle feels himself aggrieved by the challenge; in which case, I submit, he has a right to satisfaction.'

Mr. Winkle, with great self-denial, expressed himself quite satisfied already. 'Or possibly,' said the man with the camp-stool, 'the gentleman's second may feel himself affronted with some observations which fell from me at an early period of this meeting; if so, I shall be happy to give him satisfaction immediately.'

Mr. Snodgrass hastily professed himself very much obliged with the handsome offer of the gentleman who had spoken last, which he was only induced to decline by his entire contentment with the whole proceedings. The two seconds adjusted the cases, and the whole party left the ground in a much more lively manner than they had proceeded to it.

'Do you remain long here?' inquired Doctor Slammer of Mr. Winkle, as they walked on most amicably together.

'I think we shall leave here the day after to-morrow,' was the reply.

'I trust I shall have the pleasure of seeing you and your friend at my rooms, and of spending a pleasant evening with you, after this awkward mistake,' said the little doctor; 'are you disengaged this evening?'

'We have some friends here,' replied Mr. Winkle, 'and I should not like to leave them to-night. Perhaps you and your friend will join us at the Bull.'

'With great pleasure,' said the little doctor; 'will ten o'clock be too late to look in for half an hour?'

'Oh dear, no,' said Mr. Winkle. 'I shall be most happy to introduce you to my friends, Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Tupman.'

'It will give me great pleasure, I am sure,' replied Doctor Slammer, little suspecting who Mr. Tupman was.

'You will be sure to come?' said Mr. Snodgrass.

'Oh, certainly.'

By this time they had reached the road. Cordial farewells were exchanged, and the party separated. Doctor Slammer and his friends repaired to the barracks, and Mr. Winkle, accompanied by Mr. Snodgrass, returned to their inn.

CHAPTER III. A NEW ACQUAINTANCE—THE STROLLER'S TALE—A DISAGREEABLE

INTERRUPTION, AND AN UNPLEASANT ENCOUNTER

Mr. Pickwick had felt some apprehensions in consequence of the unusual absence of his two friends, which their mysterious behaviour during the whole morning had by no means tended to diminish. It was, therefore, with more than ordinary pleasure that he rose to greet them when they again entered; and with more than ordinary interest that he inquired what had occurred to detain them from his society. In reply to his questions on this point, Mr. Snodgrass was about to offer an historical account of the circumstances just now detailed, when he was suddenly checked by observing that there were present, not only Mr. Tupman and their stage-coach companion of the preceding day, but another stranger of equally singular appearance. It was a careworn-looking man, whose sallow face, and deeply-sunken eyes, were rendered still more striking than Nature had made them, by the straight black hair which hung in matted disorder half-way down his face. His eyes were almost unnaturally bright and piercing; his cheek-bones were high and prominent; and his jaws were so long and lank, that an observer would have supposed that he was drawing the flesh of his face in, for a moment, by some contraction of the muscles, if his half-opened mouth and immovable expression had not announced that it was his ordinary appearance. Round his neck he wore a green shawl, with the large ends straggling over his chest, and making their appearance occasionally beneath the worn button-holes of his old waistcoat. His upper garment was a long black surtout; and below it he wore wide drab trousers, and large boots, running rapidly to seed.

It was on this uncouth-looking person that Mr. Winkle's eye rested, and it was towards him that Mr. Pickwick extended his hand when he said, 'A friend of our friend's here. We discovered this morning that our friend was connected with the theatre in this place, though he is not desirous to have it generally known, and this gentleman is a member of the same profession.

He was about to favour us with a little anecdote connected with it, when you entered.'

'Lots of anecdote,' said the green-coated stranger of the day before, advancing to Mr. Winkle and speaking in a low and confidential tone. 'Rum fellow—does the heavy business—no actor—strange man—all sorts of miseries—Dismal Jemmy, we call him on the circuit.' Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass politely welcomed the gentleman, elegantly designated as 'Dismal Jemmy'; and calling for brandy-and-water, in imitation of the remainder of the company, seated themselves at the table. 'Now sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'will you oblige us by proceeding with what you were going to relate?'

The dismal individual took a dirty roll of paper from his pocket, and turning to Mr. Snodgrass, who had just taken out his note-book, said in a hollow voice, perfectly in keeping with his outward man—'Are you the poet?'

'I—I do a little in that way,' replied Mr. Snodgrass, rather taken aback by the abruptness of the question. 'Ah! poetry makes life what light and music do the stage—strip the one of the false embellishments, and the other of its illusions, and what is there real in either to live or care for?'

'Very true, Sir,' replied Mr. Snodgrass.

'To be before the footlights,' continued the dismal man, 'is like sitting at a grand court show, and admiring the silken dresses of the gaudy throng; to be behind them is to be the people who make that finery, uncared for and unknown, and left to sink or swim, to starve or live, as fortune wills it.'

'Certainly,' said Mr. Snodgrass: for the sunken eye of the dismal man rested on him, and he felt it necessary to say something.

'Go on, Jemmy,' said the Spanish traveller, 'like black-eyed Susan—all in the Downs—no croaking—speak out—look lively.' 'Will you make another glass before you begin, Sir?' said Mr. Pickwick.

The dismal man took the hint, and having mixed a glass of brandy-and-water, and slowly swallowed half of it, opened the roll of paper and proceeded, partly to read, and partly to relate, the following incident, which we find recorded on the Transactions of the Club as 'The Stroller's Tale.'

THE STROLLER'S TALE

'There is nothing of the marvellous in what I am going to relate,' said the dismal man; 'there is nothing even uncommon in it. Want and sickness are too common in many stations of life to deserve more notice than is usually bestowed on the most ordinary vicissitudes of human nature. I have thrown these few notes together, because the subject of them was well known to me for many years. I traced his progress downwards, step by step, until at last he reached that excess of destitution from which he never rose again.

'The man of whom I speak was a low pantomime actor; and, like many people of his class, an habitual drunkard. In his better days, before he had become enfeebled by dissipation and emaciated by disease, he had been in the receipt of a good salary, which, if he had been careful and prudent, he might have continued to receive for some years—not many; because these men either die early, or by unnaturally taxing their bodily energies, lose, prematurely, those physical powers on which alone they can depend for subsistence. His besetting sin gained so fast upon him, however, that it was found impossible to employ him in the situations in which he really was useful to the theatre. The public-house had a fascination for him which he could not resist. Neglected disease and hopeless poverty were as certain to be his portion as death itself, if he persevered in the same course; yet he did persevere, and the result may be guessed. He could obtain no engagement, and he wanted bread. 'Everybody who is at all acquainted with theatrical matters knows what a host of shabby, poverty-stricken men hang about the stage of a large establishment—not regularly engaged actors, but ballet people, procession men, tumblers, and so forth, who are taken on during the run of a pantomime, or an Easter piece, and are then discharged, until the production of some heavy spectacle occasions a new demand for their services. To this mode of life the man was compelled to resort; and taking the chair every night, at some low theatrical house, at once put him in possession of a few more shillings weekly, and enabled him to gratify his old propensity. Even this resource shortly failed him; his irregularities were too great to admit of his earning the wretched pittance he might thus have procured, and he was actually reduced to a state bordering on starvation, only procuring a trifle occasionally by borrowing it of some old companion, or by obtaining an appearance at one or other of the commonest of the minor theatres; and when he did earn anything it was spent in the old way.

'About this time, and when he had been existing for upwards of a year no one knew how, I had a short engagement at one of the theatres on the Surrey side of the water, and here I saw this man, whom I had lost sight of for some time; for I had been travelling in the provinces, and he had been skulking in the lanes and alleys of London. I was dressed to leave the house, and was crossing the stage on my way out, when he tapped me on the shoulder. Never shall I forget the repulsive sight that met my eye when I turned round. He was dressed for the pantomimes in all the absurdity of a clown's costume. The spectral figures in the Dance of Death, the most frightful shapes that the ablest painter ever portrayed on canvas, never presented an appearance half so ghastly. His bloated body and shrunken legs—their deformity enhanced a hundredfold by the fantastic dress—the glassy eyes, contrasting fearfully with the thick white paint with which the face was besmeared; the grotesquely-ornamented head, trembling with paralysis, and the long skinny hands, rubbed with white chalk—all gave him a hideous and unnatural appearance, of which no description could convey an adequate idea, and which, to this day, I shudder to think of. His voice was hollow and tremulous as he took me aside, and in broken words recounted a long catalogue of sickness and privations, terminating as usual with an urgent request for the loan of a trifling sum of money. I put a few shillings in his hand, and as I turned away I heard the roar of laughter which followed his first tumble on the stage. 'A few nights afterwards, a boy put a dirty scrap of paper in my hand, on which were scrawled a few words in pencil, intimating that the man was dangerously ill, and begging me, after the performance, to see him at his lodgings in some street—I forget the name of it now—at no great distance from the theatre. I promised to comply, as soon as I could get away; and after the curtain fell, sallied forth on my melancholy errand.

'It was late, for I had been playing in the last piece; and, as it was a benefit night, the performances had been protracted to an unusual length. It was a dark, cold night, with a chill, damp wind, which blew the rain heavily against the windows and house-fronts. Pools of water had collected in the narrow and little-frequented streets, and as many of the thinly-scattered oil-lamps had been blown out by the violence of the wind, the walk was not only a comfortless, but most uncertain one. I had fortunately taken the right course, however, and succeeded, after a little difficulty, in finding the house to which I had been directed—a coal-shed, with one Storey above it, in the back room of which lay the object of my search.

'A wretched-looking woman, the man's wife, met me on the stairs, and, telling me that he had just fallen into a kind of doze, led me softly in, and placed a chair for me at the bedside. The sick man was lying with his face turned towards the wall; and as he took no heed of my presence, I had leisure to observe the place in which I found myself.

'He was lying on an old bedstead, which turned up during the day. The tattered remains of a checked curtain were drawn round the bed's head, to exclude the wind, which, however, made its way into the comfortless room through the numerous chinks in the door, and blew it to and fro every instant. There was a low cinder fire in a rusty, unfixed grate; and an old three-cornered stained table, with some medicine bottles, a broken glass, and a few other domestic articles, was drawn out before it. A little child was sleeping on a temporary bed which had been made for it on the floor, and the woman sat on a chair by its side. There were a couple of shelves, with a few plates and cups and saucers; and a pair of stage shoes and a couple of foils hung beneath them. With the exception of little heaps of rags and bundles which had been carelessly thrown into the corners of the room, these were the only things in the apartment.

'I had had time to note these little particulars, and to mark the heavy breathing and feverish startings of the sick man, before he was aware of my presence. In the restless attempts to procure some easy resting-place for his head, he tossed his hand out of the bed, and it fell on mine. He started up, and stared eagerly in my face.

'"Mr. Hutley, John," said his wife; "Mr. Hutley, that you sent for to-night, you know."

'"Ah!" said the invalid, passing his hand across his forehead; "Hutley—Hutley—let me see." He seemed endeavouring to collect his thoughts for a few seconds, and then grasping me tightly by the wrist said, "Don't leave me—don't leave me, old fellow. She'll murder me; I know she will."

'"Has he been long so?" said I, addressing his weeping wife.

'"Since yesterday night," she replied. "John, John, don't you know me?"

'"Don't let her come near me," said the man, with a shudder, as she stooped over him. "Drive her away; I can't bear her near me." He stared wildly at her, with a look of deadly apprehension, and then whispered in my ear, "I beat her, Jem; I beat her yesterday, and many times before. I have starved her and the boy too; and now I am weak and helpless, Jem, she'll murder me for it; I know she will. If you'd seen her cry, as I have, you'd know it too. Keep her off." He relaxed his grasp, and sank back exhausted on the pillow. 'I knew but too well what all this meant. If I could have entertained any doubt of it, for an instant, one glance at the woman's pale face and wasted form would have sufficiently explained the real state of the case. "You had better stand aside," said I to the poor creature. "You can do him no good. Perhaps he will be calmer, if he does not see you." She retired out of the man's sight. He opened his eyes after a few seconds, and looked anxiously round.

'"Is she gone?" he eagerly inquired.

'"Yes—yes," said I; "she shall not hurt you."

'"I'll tell you what, Jem," said the man, in a low voice, "she does hurt me. There's something in her eyes wakes such a dreadful fear in my heart, that it drives me mad. All last night, her large, staring eyes and pale face were close to mine; wherever I turned, they turned; and whenever I started up from my sleep, she was at the bedside looking at me." He drew me closer to him, as he said in a deep alarmed whisper, "Jem, she must be an evil spirit—a devil! Hush! I know she is. If she had been a woman she would have died long ago. No woman could have borne what she has."

'I sickened at the thought of the long course of cruelty and neglect which must have occurred to produce such an impression on such a man. I could say nothing in reply; for who could offer hope, or consolation, to the abject being before me?

'I sat there for upwards of two hours, during which time he tossed about, murmuring exclamations of pain or impatience, restlessly throwing his arms here and there, and turning constantly from side to side. At length he fell into that state of partial unconsciousness, in which the mind wanders uneasily from scene to scene, and from place to place, without the control of reason, but still without being able to divest itself of an indescribable sense of present suffering. Finding from his incoherent wanderings that this was the case, and knowing that in all probability the fever would not grow immediately worse, I left him, promising his miserable wife that I would repeat my visit next evening, and, if necessary, sit up with the patient during the night.

'I kept my promise. The last four-and-twenty hours had produced a frightful alteration. The eyes, though deeply sunk and heavy, shone with a lustre frightful to behold. The lips were parched, and cracked in many places; the hard, dry skin glowed with a burning heat; and there was an almost unearthly air of wild anxiety in the man's face, indicating even more strongly the ravages of the disease. The fever was at its height.

'I took the seat I had occupied the night before, and there I sat for hours, listening to sounds which must strike deep to the heart of the most callous among human beings—the awful ravings of a dying man. From what I had heard of the medical attendant's opinion, I knew there was no hope for him: I was sitting by his death-bed. I saw the wasted limbs—which a few hours before had been distorted for the amusement of a boisterous gallery, writhing under the tortures of a burning fever—I heard the clown's shrill laugh, blending with the low murmurings of the dying man.

'It is a touching thing to hear the mind reverting to the ordinary occupations and pursuits of health, when the body lies before you weak and helpless; but when those occupations are of a character the most strongly opposed to anything we associate with grave and solemn ideas, the impression produced is infinitely more powerful. The theatre and the public-house were the chief themes of the wretched man's wanderings. It was evening, he fancied; he had a part to play that night; it was late, and he must leave home instantly. Why did they hold him, and prevent his going?—he should lose the money—he must go. No! they would not let him. He hid his face in his burning hands, and feebly bemoaned his own weakness, and the cruelty of his persecutors. A short pause, and he shouted out a few doggerel rhymes—the last he had ever learned. He rose in bed, drew up his withered limbs, and rolled about in uncouth positions; he was acting—he was at the theatre. A minute's silence, and he murmured the burden of some roaring song. He had reached the old house at last—how hot the room was. He had been ill, very ill, but he was well now, and happy. Fill up his glass. Who was that, that dashed it from his lips? It was the same persecutor that had followed him before. He fell back upon his pillow and moaned aloud. A short period of oblivion, and he was wandering through a tedious maze of low-arched rooms—so low, sometimes, that he must creep upon his hands and knees to make his way along; it was close and dark, and every way he turned, some obstacle impeded his progress. There were insects, too, hideous crawling things, with eyes that stared upon him, and filled the very air around, glistening horribly amidst the thick darkness of the place. The walls and ceiling were alive with reptiles—the vault expanded to an enormous size—frightful figures flitted to and fro—and the faces of men he knew, rendered hideous by gibing and mouthing, peered out from among them; they were searing him with heated irons, and binding his head with cords till the blood started; and he struggled madly for life.

'At the close of one of these paroxysms, when I had with great difficulty held him down in his bed, he sank into what appeared to be a slumber. Overpowered with watching and exertion, I had closed my eyes for a few minutes, when I felt a violent clutch on my shoulder. I awoke instantly. He had raised himself up, so as to seat himself in bed—a dreadful change had come over his face, but consciousness had returned, for he evidently knew me. The child, who had been long since disturbed by his ravings, rose from its little bed, and ran towards its father, screaming with fright—the mother hastily caught it in her arms, lest he should injure it in the violence of his insanity; but, terrified by the alteration of his features, stood transfixed by the bedside. He grasped my shoulder convulsively, and, striking his breast with the other hand, made a desperate attempt to articulate. It was unavailing; he extended his arm towards them, and made another violent effort. There was a rattling noise in the throat—a glare of the eye—a short stifled groan—and he fell back—dead!'

It would afford us the highest gratification to be enabled to record Mr. Pickwick's opinion of the foregoing anecdote. We have little doubt that we should have been enabled to present it to our readers, but for a most unfortunate occurrence.

Mr. Pickwick had replaced on the table the glass which, during the last few sentences of the tale, he had retained in his hand; and had just made up his mind to speak—indeed, we have the authority of Mr. Snodgrass's note-book for stating, that he had actually opened his mouth—when the waiter entered the room, and said—

'Some gentlemen, Sir.'

It has been conjectured that Mr. Pickwick was on the point of delivering some remarks which would have enlightened the world, if not the Thames, when he was thus interrupted; for he gazed sternly on the waiter's countenance, and then looked round on the company generally, as if seeking for information relative to the new-comers.

'Oh!' said Mr. Winkle, rising, 'some friends of mine—show them in. Very pleasant fellows,' added Mr. Winkle, after the waiter had retired

—'officers of the 97th, whose acquaintance I made rather oddly this morning. You will like them very much.'

Mr. Pickwick's equanimity was at once restored. The waiter returned, and ushered three gentlemen into the room.

'Lieutenant Tappleton,' said Mr. Winkle, 'Lieutenant Tappleton, Mr. Pickwick—Doctor Payne, Mr. Pickwick—Mr. Snodgrass you have seen before, my friend Mr. Tupman, Doctor Payne—Doctor Slammer, Mr. Pickwick—Mr. Tupman, Doctor Slam—'

Here Mr. Winkle suddenly paused; for strong emotion was visible on the countenance both of Mr. Tupman and the doctor.

'I have met THIS gentleman before,' said the Doctor, with marked emphasis.

'Indeed!' said Mr. Winkle.

'And—and that person, too, if I am not mistaken,' said the doctor, bestowing a scrutinising glance on the green-coated stranger. 'I think I gave that person a very pressing invitation last night, which he thought proper to decline.' Saying which the doctor scowled magnanimously on the stranger, and whispered his friend Lieutenant Tappleton.

'You don't say so,' said that gentleman, at the conclusion of the whisper.

'I do, indeed,' replied Doctor Slammer.

'You are bound to kick him on the spot,' murmured the owner of the camp-stool, with great importance.

'Do be quiet, Payne,' interposed the lieutenant. 'Will you allow me to ask you, sir,' he said, addressing Mr. Pickwick, who was considerably mystified by this very unpolite by-play—'will you allow me to ask you, Sir, whether that person belongs to your party?'

'No, Sir,' replied Mr. Pickwick, 'he is a guest of ours.'

'He is a member of your club, or I am mistaken?' said the lieutenant inquiringly.

'Certainly not,' responded Mr. Pickwick.

'And never wears your club-button?' said the lieutenant.

'No—never!' replied the astonished Mr. Pickwick.

Lieutenant Tappleton turned round to his friend Doctor Slammer, with a scarcely perceptible shrug of the shoulder, as if implying some doubt of the accuracy of his recollection. The little doctor looked wrathful, but confounded; and Mr. Payne gazed with a ferocious aspect on the beaming countenance of the unconscious Pickwick.

'Sir,' said the doctor, suddenly addressing Mr. Tupman, in a tone which made that gentleman start as perceptibly as if a pin had been cunningly inserted in the calf of his leg, 'you were at the ball here last night!'

Mr. Tupman gasped a faint affirmative, looking very hard at Mr. Pickwick all the while.

'That person was your companion,' said the doctor, pointing to the still unmoved stranger.

Mr. Tupman admitted the fact.

'Now, sir,' said the doctor to the stranger, 'I ask you once again, in the presence of these gentlemen, whether you choose to give me your card, and to receive the treatment of a gentleman; or whether you impose upon me the necessity of personally chastising you on the spot?'

'Stay, sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'I really cannot allow this matter to go any further without some explanation. Tupman, recount the circumstances.'

Mr. Tupman, thus solemnly adjured, stated the case in a few words; touched slightly on the borrowing of the coat; expatiated largely on its having been done 'after dinner'; wound up with a little penitence on his own account; and left the stranger to clear himself as best he could.

He was apparently about to proceed to do so, when Lieutenant Tappleton, who had been eyeing him with great curiosity, said with considerable scorn, 'Haven't I seen you at the theatre, Sir?'

'Certainly,' replied the unabashed stranger.

'He is a strolling actor!' said the lieutenant contemptuously, turning to Doctor Slammer.—'He acts in the piece that the officers of the 52nd get up at the Rochester Theatre to-morrow night. You cannot proceed in this affair, Slammer—impossible!'

'Quite!' said the dignified Payne.

'Sorry to have placed you in this disagreeable situation,' said Lieutenant Tappleton, addressing Mr. Pickwick; 'allow me to suggest, that the best way of avoiding a recurrence of such scenes in future will be to be more select in the choice of your companions. Good-evening, Sir!' and the lieutenant bounced out of the room.

'And allow me to say, Sir,' said the irascible Doctor Payne, 'that if I had been Tappleton, or if I had been Slammer, I would have pulled your nose, Sir, and the nose of every man in this company. I would, sir—every man. Payne is my name, sir—Doctor Payne of the 43rd. Good-evening, Sir.' Having concluded this speech, and uttered the last three words in a loud key, he stalked majestically after his friend, closely followed by Doctor Slammer, who said nothing, but contented himself by withering the company with a look. Rising rage and extreme bewilderment had swelled the noble breast of Mr. Pickwick, almost to the bursting of his waistcoat, during the delivery of the above defiance. He stood transfixed to the spot, gazing on vacancy. The closing of the door recalled him to himself. He rushed forward with fury in his looks, and fire in his eye. His hand was upon the lock of the door; in another instant it would have been on the throat of Doctor Payne of the 43rd, had not Mr. Snodgrass seized his revered leader by the coat tail, and dragged him backwards.

'Restrain him,' cried Mr. Snodgrass; 'Winkle, Tupman—he must not peril his distinguished life in such a cause as this.'

'Let me go,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Hold him tight,' shouted Mr. Snodgrass; and by the united efforts of the whole company, Mr. Pickwick was forced into an arm-chair. 'Leave him alone,' said the green-coated stranger; 'brandy-and-water—jolly old gentleman—lots of pluck—swallow this—ah!—capital stuff.' Having previously tested the virtues of a bumper, which had been mixed by the dismal man, the stranger applied the glass to Mr. Pickwick's mouth; and the remainder of its contents rapidly disappeared.

There was a short pause; the brandy-and-water had done its work; the amiable countenance of Mr. Pickwick was fast recovering its customary expression.

'They are not worth your notice,' said the dismal man.

'You are right, sir,' replied Mr. Pickwick, 'they are not. I am ashamed to have been betrayed into this warmth of feeling. Draw your chair up to the table, Sir.'

The dismal man readily complied; a circle was again formed round the table, and harmony once more prevailed. Some lingering irritability appeared to find a resting-place in Mr. Winkle's bosom, occasioned possibly by the temporary abstraction of his coat—though it is scarcely reasonable to suppose that so slight a circumstance can have excited even a passing feeling of anger in a Pickwickian's breast. With this exception, their good-humour was completely restored; and the evening concluded with the conviviality with which it had begun.

CHAPTER IV. A FIELD DAY AND BIVOUAC—MORE NEW FRIENDS—AN INVITATION TO

THE COUNTRY

Many authors entertain, not only a foolish, but a really dishonest objection to acknowledge the sources whence they derive much valuable information. We have no such feeling. We are merely endeavouring to discharge, in an upright manner, the responsible duties of our editorial functions; and whatever ambition we might have felt under other circumstances to lay claim to the authorship of these adventures, a regard for truth forbids us to do more than claim the merit of their judicious arrangement and impartial narration. The Pickwick papers are our New River Head; and we may be compared to the New River Company. The labours of others have raised for us an immense reservoir of important facts. We merely lay them on, and communicate them, in a clear and gentle stream, through the medium of these pages, to a world thirsting for Pickwickian knowledge.

Acting in this spirit, and resolutely proceeding on our determination to avow our obligations to the authorities we have consulted, we frankly say, that to the note-book of Mr. Snodgrass are we indebted for the particulars recorded in this and the succeeding chapter—particulars which, now that we have disburdened our consciences, we shall proceed to detail without further comment.

The whole population of Rochester and the adjoining towns rose from their beds at an early hour of the following morning, in a state of the utmost bustle and excitement. A grand review was to take place upon the lines. The manoeuvres of half a dozen regiments were to be inspected by the eagle eye of the commander-in-chief; temporary fortifications had been erected, the citadel was to be attacked and taken, and a mine was to be sprung.

Mr. Pickwick was, as our readers may have gathered from the slight extract we gave from his description of Chatham, an enthusiastic admirer of the army. Nothing could have been more delightful to him—nothing could have harmonised so well with the peculiar feeling of each of his companions—as this sight. Accordingly they were soon afoot, and walking in the direction of the scene of action, towards which crowds of people were already pouring from a variety of quarters.

The appearance of everything on the lines denoted that the approaching ceremony was one of the utmost grandeur and importance. There were sentries posted to keep the ground for the troops, and servants on the batteries keeping places for the ladies, and sergeants running to and fro, with vellum-covered books under their arms, and Colonel Bulder, in full military uniform, on horseback, galloping first to one place and then to another, and backing his horse among the people, and prancing, and curvetting, and shouting in a most alarming manner, and making himself very hoarse in the voice, and very red in the face, without any assignable cause or reason whatever. Officers were running backwards and forwards, first communicating with Colonel Bulder, and then ordering the sergeants, and then running away altogether; and even the very privates themselves looked from behind their glazed stocks with an air of mysterious solemnity, which sufficiently bespoke the special nature of the occasion.

Mr. Pickwick and his three companions stationed themselves in the front of the crowd, and patiently awaited the commencement of the proceedings. The throng was increasing every moment; and the efforts they were compelled to make, to retain the position they had gained, sufficiently occupied their attention during the two hours that ensued. At one time there was a sudden pressure from behind, and then Mr. Pickwick was jerked forward for several yards, with a degree of speed and elasticity highly inconsistent with the general gravity of his demeanour; at another moment there was a request to 'keep back' from the front, and then the butt-end of a musket was either dropped upon Mr. Pickwick's toe, to remind him of the demand, or thrust into his chest, to insure its being complied with. Then some facetious gentlemen on the left, after pressing sideways in a body, and squeezing Mr. Snodgrass into the very last extreme of human torture, would request to know 'vere he vos a shovin' to'; and when Mr. Winkle had done expressing his excessive indignation at witnessing this unprovoked assault, some person behind would knock his hat over his eyes, and beg the favour of his putting his head in his pocket. These, and other practical witticisms, coupled with the unaccountable absence of Mr. Tupman (who had suddenly disappeared, and was nowhere to be found), rendered their situation upon the whole rather more uncomfortable than pleasing or desirable.

At length that low roar of many voices ran through the crowd which usually announces the arrival of whatever they have been waiting for. All eyes were turned in the direction of the sally-port. A few moments of eager expectation, and colours were seen fluttering gaily in the air, arms glistened brightly in the sun, column after column poured on to the plain. The troops halted and formed; the word of command rang through the line; there was a general clash of muskets as arms were presented; and the commander-in-chief, attended by Colonel Bulder and numerous officers, cantered to the front. The military bands struck up altogether; the horses stood upon two legs each, cantered backwards, and whisked their tails about in all directions; the dogs barked, the mob screamed, the troops recovered, and nothing was to be seen on either side, as far as the eye could reach, but a long perspective of red coats and white trousers, fixed and motionless.

Mr. Pickwick had been so fully occupied in falling about, and disentangling himself, miraculously, from between the legs of horses, that he had not enjoyed sufficient leisure to observe the scene before him, until it assumed the appearance we have just described. When he was at last enabled to stand firmly on his legs, his gratification and delight were unbounded.

'Can anything be finer or more delightful?' he inquired of Mr. Winkle.

'Nothing,' replied that gentleman, who had had a short man standing on each of his feet for the quarter of an hour immediately preceding. 'It is indeed a noble and a brilliant sight,' said Mr. Snodgrass, in whose bosom a blaze of poetry was rapidly bursting forth, 'to see the gallant defenders of their country drawn up in brilliant array before its peaceful citizens; their faces beaming—not with warlike ferocity, but with civilised gentleness; their eyes flashing—not with the rude fire of rapine or revenge, but with the soft light of humanity and intelligence.'

Mr. Pickwick fully entered into the spirit of this eulogium, but he could not exactly re-echo its terms; for the soft light of intelligence burned rather feebly in the eyes of the warriors, inasmuch as the command 'eyes front' had been given, and all the spectator saw before him was several thousand pair of optics, staring straight forward, wholly divested of any expression whatever.

'We are in a capital situation now,' said Mr. Pickwick, looking round him. The crowd had gradually dispersed in their immediate vicinity, and they were nearly alone.

'Capital!' echoed both Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Winkle.

'What are they doing now?' inquired Mr. Pickwick, adjusting his spectacles.

'I—I—rather think,' said Mr. Winkle, changing colour—'I rather think they're going to fire.'

'Nonsense,' said Mr. Pickwick hastily.

'I—I—really think they are,' urged Mr. Snodgrass, somewhat alarmed.

'Impossible,' replied Mr. Pickwick. He had hardly uttered the word, when the whole half-dozen regiments levelled their muskets as if they had but one common object, and that object the Pickwickians, and burst forth with the most awful and tremendous discharge that ever shook the earth to its centres, or an elderly gentleman off his.

It was in this trying situation, exposed to a galling fire of blank cartridges, and harassed by the operations of the military, a fresh body of whom had begun to fall in on the opposite side, that Mr. Pickwick displayed that perfect coolness and self-possession, which are the indispensable accompaniments of a great mind. He seized Mr. Winkle by the arm, and placing himself between that gentleman and Mr. Snodgrass, earnestly besought them to remember that beyond the possibility of being rendered deaf by the noise, there was no immediate danger to be apprehended from the firing.

'But—but—suppose some of the men should happen to have ball cartridges by mistake,' remonstrated Mr. Winkle, pallid at the supposition he was himself conjuring up. 'I heard something whistle through the air now—so sharp; close to my ear.' 'We had better throw ourselves on our faces, hadn't we?' said Mr. Snodgrass.

'No, no—it's over now,' said Mr. Pickwick. His lip might quiver, and his cheek might blanch, but no expression of fear or concern escaped the lips of that immortal man.

Mr. Pickwick was right—the firing ceased; but he had scarcely time to congratulate himself on the accuracy of his opinion, when a quick movement was visible in the line; the hoarse shout of the word of command ran along it, and before either of the party could form a guess at the meaning of this new manoeuvre, the whole of the half-dozen regiments, with fixed bayonets, charged at double-quick time down upon the very spot on which Mr. Pickwick and his friends were stationed. Man is but mortal; and there is a point beyond which human courage cannot extend. Mr.

Pickwick gazed through his spectacles for an instant on the advancing mass, and then fairly turned his back and—we will not say fled; firstly, because it is an ignoble term, and, secondly, because Mr. Pickwick's figure was by no means adapted for that mode of retreat—he trotted away, at as quick a rate as his legs would convey him; so quickly, indeed, that he did not perceive the awkwardness of his situation, to the full extent, until too late.

The opposite troops, whose falling-in had perplexed Mr. Pickwick a few seconds before, were drawn up to repel the mimic attack of the sham besiegers of the citadel; and the consequence was that Mr. Pickwick and his two companions found themselves suddenly inclosed between two lines of great length, the one advancing at a rapid pace, and the other firmly waiting the collision in hostile array.

'Hoi!' shouted the officers of the advancing line.

'Get out of the way!' cried the officers of the stationary one.

'Where are we to go to?' screamed the agitated Pickwickians.

'Hoi—hoi—hoi!' was the only reply. There was a moment of intense bewilderment, a heavy tramp of footsteps, a violent concussion, a smothered laugh; the half-dozen regiments were half a thousand yards off, and the soles of Mr. Pickwick's boots were elevated in air.

Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Winkle had each performed a compulsory somerset with remarkable agility, when the first object that met the eyes of the latter as he sat on the ground, staunching with a yellow silk handkerchief the stream of life which issued from his nose, was his venerated leader at some distance off, running after his own hat, which was gambolling playfully away in perspective.

There are very few moments in a man's existence when he experiences so much ludicrous distress, or meets with so little charitable commiseration, as when he is in pursuit of his own hat. A vast deal of coolness, and a peculiar degree of judgment, are requisite in catching a hat. A man must not be precipitate, or he runs over it; he must not rush into the opposite extreme, or he loses it altogether. The best way is to keep gently up with the object of pursuit, to be wary and cautious, to watch your opportunity well, get gradually before it, then make a rapid dive, seize it by the crown, and stick it firmly on your head; smiling pleasantly all the time, as if you thought it as good a joke as anybody else.

There was a fine gentle wind, and Mr. Pickwick's hat rolled sportively before it. The wind puffed, and Mr. Pickwick puffed, and the hat rolled over and over as merrily as a lively porpoise in a strong tide: and on it might have rolled, far beyond Mr. Pickwick's reach, had not its course been providentially stopped, just as that gentleman was on the point of resigning it to its fate.

Mr. Pickwick, we say, was completely exhausted, and about to give up the chase, when the hat was blown with some violence against the wheel of a carriage, which was drawn up in a line with half a dozen other vehicles on the spot to which his steps had been directed. Mr. Pickwick, perceiving his advantage, darted briskly forward, secured his property, planted it on his head, and paused to take breath. He had not been stationary half a minute, when he heard his own name eagerly pronounced by a voice, which he at once recognised as Mr. Tupman's, and, looking upwards, he beheld a sight which filled him with surprise and pleasure.

In an open barouche, the horses of which had been taken out, the better to accommodate it to the crowded place, stood a stout old gentleman, in a blue coat and bright buttons, corduroy breeches and top-boots, two young ladies in scarfs and feathers, a young gentleman apparently enamoured of one of the young ladies in scarfs and feathers, a lady of doubtful age, probably the aunt of the aforesaid, and Mr. Tupman, as easy and unconcerned as if he had belonged to the family from the first moments of his infancy. Fastened up behind the barouche was a hamper of spacious dimensions—one of those hampers which always awakens in a contemplative mind associations connected with cold fowls, tongues, and bottles of wine—and on the box sat a fat and red-faced boy, in a state of somnolency, whom no speculative observer could have regarded for an instant without setting down as the official dispenser of the contents of the before-mentioned hamper, when the proper time for their consumption should arrive.

Mr. Pickwick had bestowed a hasty glance on these interesting objects, when he was again greeted by his faithful disciple.

'Pickwick—Pickwick,' said Mr. Tupman; 'come up here. Make haste.'

'Come along, Sir. Pray, come up,' said the stout gentleman. 'Joe!—damn that boy, he's gone to sleep again.—Joe, let down the steps.' The fat boy rolled slowly off the box, let down the steps, and held the carriage door invitingly open. Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Winkle came up at the moment.

'Room for you all, gentlemen,' said the stout man. 'Two inside, and one out. Joe, make room for one of these gentlemen on the box. Now, Sir, come along;' and the stout gentleman extended his arm, and pulled first Mr. Pickwick, and then Mr. Snodgrass, into the barouche by main force. Mr. Winkle mounted to the box, the fat boy waddled to the same perch, and fell fast asleep instantly.

'Well, gentlemen,' said the stout man, 'very glad to see you. Know you very well, gentlemen, though you mayn't remember me. I spent some ev'nin's at your club last winter—picked up my friend Mr. Tupman here this morning, and very glad I was to see him. Well, Sir, and how are you? You do look uncommon well, to be sure.'

Mr. Pickwick acknowledged the compliment, and cordially shook hands with the stout gentleman in the top-boots.

'Well, and how are you, sir?' said the stout gentleman, addressing Mr. Snodgrass with paternal anxiety. 'Charming, eh? Well, that's right—that's right. And how are you, sir (to Mr. Winkle)? Well, I am glad to hear you say you are well; very glad I am, to be sure. My daughters, gentlemen—my gals these are; and that's my sister, Miss Rachael Wardle. She's a Miss, she is; and yet she ain't a Miss—eh, Sir, eh?' And the stout gentleman playfully inserted his elbow between the ribs of Mr. Pickwick, and laughed very heartily.

'Lor, brother!' said Miss Wardle, with a deprecating smile.

'True, true,' said the stout gentleman; 'no one can deny it. Gentlemen, I beg your pardon; this is my friend Mr. Trundle. And now you all know each other, let's be comfortable and happy, and see what's going forward; that's what I say.' So the stout gentleman put on his spectacles, and Mr. Pickwick pulled out his glass, and everybody stood up in the carriage, and looked over somebody else's shoulder at the evolutions of the military.

Astounding evolutions they were, one rank firing over the heads of another rank, and then running away; and then the other rank firing over the heads of another rank, and running away in their turn; and then forming squares, with officers in the centre; and then descending the trench on one side with scaling-ladders, and ascending it on the other again by the same means; and knocking down barricades of baskets, and behaving in the most gallant manner possible. Then there was such a ramming down of the contents of enormous guns on the battery, with instruments like magnified mops; such a preparation before they were let off, and such an awful noise when they did go, that the air resounded with the screams of ladies. The young Misses Wardle were so frightened, that Mr. Trundle was actually obliged to hold one of them up in the carriage, while Mr. Snodgrass supported the other; and Mr. Wardle's sister suffered under such a dreadful state of nervous alarm, that Mr. Tupman found it indispensably necessary to put his arm round her waist, to keep her up at all. Everybody was excited, except the fat boy, and he slept as soundly as if the roaring of cannon were his ordinary lullaby.

'Joe, Joe!' said the stout gentleman, when the citadel was taken, and the besiegers and besieged sat down to dinner. 'Damn that boy, he's gone to sleep again. Be good enough to pinch him, sir—in the leg, if you please; nothing else wakes him—thank you. Undo the hamper, Joe.'

The fat boy, who had been effectually roused by the compression of a portion of his leg between the finger and thumb of Mr. Winkle, rolled off the box once again, and proceeded to unpack the hamper with more expedition than could have been expected from his previous inactivity.

'Now we must sit close,' said the stout gentleman. After a great many jokes about squeezing the ladies' sleeves, and a vast quantity of blushing at sundry jocose proposals, that the ladies should sit in the gentlemen's laps, the whole party were stowed down in the barouche; and the stout gentleman proceeded to hand the things from the fat boy (who had mounted up behind for the purpose) into the carriage.

'Now, Joe, knives and forks.' The knives and forks were handed in, and the ladies and gentlemen inside, and Mr. Winkle on the box, were each furnished with those useful instruments.

'Plates, Joe, plates.' A similar process employed in the distribution of the crockery.

'Now, Joe, the fowls. Damn that boy; he's gone to sleep again. Joe! Joe!' (Sundry taps on the head with a stick, and the fat boy, with some difficulty, roused from his lethargy.) 'Come, hand in the eatables.'

There was something in the sound of the last word which roused the unctuous boy. He jumped up, and the leaden eyes which twinkled behind his mountainous cheeks leered horribly upon the food as he unpacked it from the basket.

'Now make haste,' said Mr. Wardle; for the fat boy was hanging fondly over a capon, which he seemed wholly unable to part with. The boy sighed deeply, and, bestowing an ardent gaze upon its plumpness, unwillingly consigned it to his master.

'That's right—look sharp. Now the tongue—now the pigeon pie. Take care of that veal and ham—mind the lobsters—take the salad out of the cloth—give me the dressing.' Such were the hurried orders which issued from the lips of Mr. Wardle, as he handed in the different articles described, and placed dishes in everybody's hands, and on everybody's knees, in endless number. 'Now ain't this capital?' inquired that jolly personage, when the work of destruction had commenced.

'Capital!' said Mr. Winkle, who was carving a fowl on the box.

'Glass of wine?'

'With the greatest pleasure.' 'You'd better have a bottle to yourself up there, hadn't you?'

'You're very good.'

'Joe!'

'Yes, Sir.' (He wasn't asleep this time, having just succeeded in abstracting a veal patty.)

'Bottle of wine to the gentleman on the box. Glad to see you, Sir.'

'Thank'ee.' Mr. Winkle emptied his glass, and placed the bottle on the coach-box, by his side.

'Will you permit me to have the pleasure, Sir?' said Mr. Trundle to Mr. Winkle.

'With great pleasure,' replied Mr. Winkle to Mr. Trundle, and then the two gentlemen took wine, after which they took a glass of wine round, ladies and all.

'How dear Emily is flirting with the strange gentleman,' whispered the spinster aunt, with true spinster-aunt-like envy, to her brother, Mr. Wardle.

'Oh! I don't know,' said the jolly old gentleman; 'all very natural, I dare say—nothing unusual. Mr. Pickwick, some wine, Sir?' Mr. Pickwick, who had been deeply investigating the interior of the pigeon-pie, readily assented.

'Emily, my dear,' said the spinster aunt, with a patronising air, 'don't talk so loud, love.'

'Lor, aunt!'

'Aunt and the little old gentleman want to have it all to themselves, I think,' whispered Miss Isabella Wardle to her sister Emily. The young ladies laughed very heartily, and the old one tried to look amiable, but couldn't manage it.

'Young girls have such spirits,' said Miss Wardle to Mr. Tupman, with an air of gentle commiseration, as if animal spirits were contraband, and their possession without a permit a high crime and misdemeanour.

'Oh, they have,' replied Mr. Tupman, not exactly making the sort of reply that was expected from him. 'It's quite delightful.'

'Hem!' said Miss Wardle, rather dubiously.

'Will you permit me?' said Mr. Tupman, in his blandest manner, touching the enchanting Rachael's wrist with one hand, and gently elevating the bottle with the other. 'Will you permit me?'

'Oh, sir!' Mr. Tupman looked most impressive; and Rachael expressed her fear that more guns were going off, in which case, of course, she should have required support again.

'Do you think my dear nieces pretty?' whispered their affectionate aunt to Mr. Tupman.

'I should, if their aunt wasn't here,' replied the ready Pickwickian, with a passionate glance.

'Oh, you naughty man—but really, if their complexions were a little better, don't you think they would be nice-looking girls—by candlelight?'

'Yes; I think they would,' said Mr. Tupman, with an air of indifference.

'Oh, you quiz—I know what you were going to say.'

'What?' inquired Mr. Tupman, who had not precisely made up his mind to say anything at all.

'You were going to say that Isabel stoops—I know you were—you men are such observers. Well, so she does; it can't be denied; and, certainly, if there is one thing more than another that makes a girl look ugly it is stooping. I often tell her that when she gets a little older she'll be quite frightful. Well, you are a quiz!'

Mr. Tupman had no objection to earning the reputation at so cheap a rate: so he looked very knowing, and smiled mysteriously.

'What a sarcastic smile,' said the admiring Rachael; 'I declare I'm quite afraid of you.'

'Afraid of me!'

'Oh, you can't disguise anything from me—I know what that smile means very well.'

'What?' said Mr. Tupman, who had not the slightest notion himself.

'You mean,' said the amiable aunt, sinking her voice still lower—'you mean, that you don't think Isabella's stooping is as bad as Emily's boldness.

Well, she is bold! You cannot think how wretched it makes me sometimes—I'm sure I cry about it for hours together—my dear brother is SO good, and so unsuspicious, that he never sees it; if he did, I'm quite certain it would break his heart. I wish I could think it was only manner—I hope it may be—' (Here the affectionate relative heaved a deep sigh, and shook her head despondingly).

'I'm sure aunt's talking about us,' whispered Miss Emily Wardle to her sister—'I'm quite certain of it—she looks so malicious.'

'Is she?' replied Isabella.—'Hem! aunt, dear!'

'Yes, my dear love!'

'I'm SO afraid you'll catch cold, aunt—have a silk handkerchief to tie round your dear old head—you really should take care of yourself—consider your age!'

However well deserved this piece of retaliation might have been, it was as vindictive a one as could well have been resorted to. There is no guessing in what form of reply the aunt's indignation would have vented itself, had not Mr. Wardle unconsciously changed the subject, by calling emphatically for Joe.

'Damn that boy,' said the old gentleman, 'he's gone to sleep again.'

'Very extraordinary boy, that,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'does he always sleep in this way?'

'Sleep!' said the old gentleman, 'he's always asleep. Goes on errands fast asleep, and snores as he waits at table.'

'How very odd!' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Ah! odd indeed,' returned the old gentleman; 'I'm proud of that boy—wouldn't part with him on any account—he's a natural curiosity! Here, Joe—Joe—take these things away, and open another bottle—d'ye hear?'

The fat boy rose, opened his eyes, swallowed the huge piece of pie he had been in the act of masticating when he last fell asleep, and slowly obeyed his master's orders—gloating languidly over the remains of the feast, as he removed the plates, and deposited them in the hamper. The fresh bottle was produced, and speedily emptied: the hamper was made fast in its old place—the fat boy once more mounted the box—the spectacles and pocket-glass were again adjusted—and the evolutions of the military recommenced. There was a great fizzing and banging of guns, and starting of ladies—and then a Mine was sprung, to the gratification of everybody—

and when the mine had gone off, the military and the company followed its example, and went off too.

'Now, mind,' said the old gentleman, as he shook hands with Mr. Pickwick at the conclusion of a conversation which had been carried on at intervals, during the conclusion of the proceedings, 'we shall see you all to-morrow.'

'Most certainly,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'You have got the address?'

'Manor Farm, Dingley Dell,' said Mr. Pickwick, consulting his pocket-book. 'That's it,' said the old gentleman. 'I don't let you off, mind, under a week; and undertake that you shall see everything worth seeing. If you've come down for a country life, come to me, and I'll give you plenty of it. Joe—damn that boy, he's gone to sleep again—Joe, help Tom put in the horses.'

The horses were put in—the driver mounted—the fat boy clambered up by his side—farewells were exchanged—and the carriage rattled off. As the Pickwickians turned round to take a last glimpse of it, the setting sun cast a rich glow on the faces of their entertainers, and fell upon the form of the fat boy. His head was sunk upon his bosom; and he slumbered again.

CHAPTER V. A SHORT ONE—SHOWING, AMONG OTHER MATTERS, HOW Mr. PICKWICK

UNDERTOOK TO DRIVE, AND Mr. WINKLE TO RIDE, AND HOW THEY BOTH DID IT

Bright and pleasant was the sky, balmy the air, and beautiful the appearance of every object around, as Mr. Pickwick leaned over the balustrades of Rochester Bridge, contemplating nature, and waiting for breakfast. The scene was indeed one which might well have charmed a far less reflective mind, than that to which it was presented.

On the left of the spectator lay the ruined wall, broken in many places, and in some, overhanging the narrow beach below in rude and heavy masses. Huge knots of seaweed hung upon the jagged and pointed stones, trembling in every breath of wind; and the green ivy clung mournfully round the dark and ruined battlements. Behind it rose the ancient castle, its towers roofless, and its massive walls crumbling away, but telling us proudly of its old might and strength, as when, seven hundred years ago, it rang with the clash of arms, or resounded with the noise of feasting and revelry. On either side, the banks of the Medway, covered with cornfields and pastures, with here and there a windmill, or a distant church, stretched away as far as the eye could see, presenting a rich and varied landscape, rendered more beautiful by the changing shadows which passed swiftly across it as the thin and half-formed clouds skimmed away in the light of the morning sun. The river, reflecting the clear blue of the sky, glistened and sparkled as it flowed noiselessly on; and the oars of the fishermen dipped into the water with a clear and liquid sound, as their heavy but picturesque boats glided slowly down the stream.

Mr. Pickwick was roused from the agreeable reverie into which he had been led by the objects before him, by a deep sigh, and a touch on his shoulder. He turned round: and the dismal man was at his side.

'Contemplating the scene?' inquired the dismal man. 'I was,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'And congratulating yourself on being up so soon?'

Mr. Pickwick nodded assent.

'Ah! people need to rise early, to see the sun in all his splendour, for his brightness seldom lasts the day through. The morning of day and the morning of life are but too much alike.'

'You speak truly, sir,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'How common the saying,' continued the dismal man, '"The morning's too fine to last." How well might it be applied to our everyday existence. God! what would I forfeit to have the days of my childhood restored, or to be able to forget them for ever!'

'You have seen much trouble, sir,' said Mr. Pickwick compassionately.

'I have,' said the dismal man hurriedly; 'I have. More than those who see me now would believe possible.' He paused for an instant, and then said abruptly—

'Did it ever strike you, on such a morning as this, that drowning would be happiness and peace?'

'God bless me, no!' replied Mr. Pickwick, edging a little from the balustrade, as the possibility of the dismal man's tipping him over, by way of experiment, occurred to him rather forcibly.

'I have thought so, often,' said the dismal man, without noticing the action. 'The calm, cool water seems to me to murmur an invitation to repose and rest. A bound, a splash, a brief struggle; there is an eddy for an instant, it gradually subsides into a gentle ripple; the waters have closed above your head, and the world has closed upon your miseries and misfortunes for ever.' The sunken eye of the dismal man flashed brightly as he spoke, but the momentary excitement quickly subsided; and he turned calmly away, as he said—

'There—enough of that. I wish to see you on another subject. You invited me to read that paper, the night before last, and listened attentively while I did so.' 'I did,' replied Mr. Pickwick; 'and I certainly thought—'

'I asked for no opinion,' said the dismal man, interrupting him, 'and I want none. You are travelling for amusement and instruction. Suppose I forward you a curious manuscript—observe, not curious because wild or improbable, but curious as a leaf from the romance of real life—would you communicate it to the club, of which you have spoken so frequently?'

'Certainly,' replied Mr. Pickwick, 'if you wished it; and it would be entered on their transactions.' 'You shall have it,' replied the dismal man. 'Your address;' and, Mr. Pickwick having communicated their probable route, the dismal man carefully noted it down in a greasy pocket-book, and, resisting Mr. Pickwick's pressing invitation to breakfast, left that gentleman at his inn, and walked slowly away.

Mr. Pickwick found that his three companions had risen, and were waiting his arrival to commence breakfast, which was ready laid in tempting display. They sat down to the meal; and broiled ham, eggs, tea, coffee and sundries, began to disappear with a rapidity which at once bore testimony to the excellence of the fare, and the appetites of its consumers.

'Now, about Manor Farm,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'How shall we go?'

'We had better consult the waiter, perhaps,' said Mr. Tupman; and the waiter was summoned accordingly.

'Dingley Dell, gentlemen—fifteen miles, gentlemen—cross road—post-chaise, sir?'

'Post-chaise won't hold more than two,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'True, sir—beg your pardon, sir.—Very nice four-wheel chaise, sir—seat for two behind—one in front for the gentleman that drives—oh! beg your pardon, sir—that'll only hold three.'

'What's to be done?' said Mr. Snodgrass.

'Perhaps one of the gentlemen would like to ride, sir?' suggested the waiter, looking towards Mr. Winkle; 'very good saddle-horses, sir—any of Mr. Wardle's men coming to Rochester, bring 'em back, Sir.'

'The very thing,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Winkle, will you go on horseback?'

Now Mr. Winkle did entertain considerable misgivings in the very lowest recesses of his own heart, relative to his equestrian skill; but, as he would not have them even suspected, on any account, he at once replied with great hardihood, 'Certainly. I should enjoy it of all things.' Mr. Winkle had rushed upon his fate; there was no resource. 'Let them be at the door by eleven,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Very well, sir,' replied the waiter.

The waiter retired; the breakfast concluded; and the travellers ascended to their respective bedrooms, to prepare a change of clothing, to take with them on their approaching expedition.

Mr. Pickwick had made his preliminary arrangements, and was looking over the coffee-room blinds at the passengers in the street, when the waiter entered, and announced that the chaise was ready—an announcement which the vehicle itself confirmed, by forthwith appearing before the coffee-room blinds aforesaid.

It was a curious little green box on four wheels, with a low place like a wine-bin for two behind, and an elevated perch for one in front, drawn by an immense brown horse, displaying great symmetry of bone. An hostler stood near, holding by the bridle another immense horse—apparently a near relative of the animal in the chaise—ready saddled for Mr. Winkle.

'Bless my soul!' said Mr. Pickwick, as they stood upon the pavement while the coats were being put in. 'Bless my soul! who's to drive? I never thought of that.'

'Oh! you, of course,' said Mr. Tupman.

'Of course,' said Mr. Snodgrass.

'I!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

'Not the slightest fear, Sir,' interposed the hostler. 'Warrant him quiet, Sir; a hinfant in arms might drive him.'

'He don't shy, does he?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Shy, sir?-he wouldn't shy if he was to meet a vagin-load of monkeys with their tails burned off.'

The last recommendation was indisputable. Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass got into the bin; Mr. Pickwick ascended to his perch, and deposited his feet on a floor-clothed shelf, erected beneath it for that purpose.

'Now, shiny Villiam,' said the hostler to the deputy hostler, 'give the gen'lm'n the ribbons.' 'Shiny Villiam'—so called, probably, from his sleek hair and oily countenance—placed the reins in Mr. Pickwick's left hand; and the upper hostler thrust a whip into his right.

'Wo-o!' cried Mr. Pickwick, as the tall quadruped evinced a decided inclination to back into the coffee-room window. 'Wo-o!' echoed Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass, from the bin. 'Only his playfulness, gen'lm'n,' said the head hostler encouragingly; 'jist kitch hold on him, Villiam.' The deputy restrained the animal's impetuosity, and the principal ran to assist Mr. Winkle in mounting.

'T'other side, sir, if you please.'

'Blowed if the gen'lm'n worn't a-gettin' up on the wrong side,' whispered a grinning post-boy to the inexpressibly gratified waiter.

Mr. Winkle, thus instructed, climbed into his saddle, with about as much difficulty as he would have experienced in getting up the side of a first-rate man-of-war.

'All right?' inquired Mr. Pickwick, with an inward presentiment that it was all wrong.

'All right,' replied Mr. Winkle faintly.

'Let 'em go,' cried the hostler.—'Hold him in, sir;' and away went the chaise, and the saddle-horse, with Mr. Pickwick on the box of the one, and Mr. Winkle on the back of the other, to the delight and gratification of the whole inn-yard.

'What makes him go sideways?' said Mr. Snodgrass in the bin, to Mr. Winkle in the saddle.

'I can't imagine,' replied Mr. Winkle. His horse was drifting up the street in the most mysterious manner—side first, with his head towards one side of the way, and his tail towards the other.

Mr. Pickwick had no leisure to observe either this or any other particular, the whole of his faculties being concentrated in the management of the animal attached to the chaise, who displayed various peculiarities, highly interesting to a bystander, but by no means equally amusing to any one seated behind him. Besides constantly jerking his head up, in a very unpleasant and uncomfortable manner, and tugging at the reins to an extent which rendered it a matter of great difficulty for Mr. Pickwick to hold them, he had a singular propensity for darting suddenly every now and then to the side of the road, then stopping short, and then rushing forward for some minutes, at a speed which it was wholly impossible to control.

'What CAN he mean by this?' said Mr. Snodgrass, when the horse had executed this manoeuvre for the twentieth time.

'I don't know,' replied Mr. Tupman; 'it looks very like shying, don't it?' Mr. Snodgrass was about to reply, when he was interrupted by a shout from Mr. Pickwick.

'Woo!' said that gentleman; 'I have dropped my whip.' 'Winkle,' said Mr. Snodgrass, as the equestrian came trotting up on the tall horse, with his hat over his ears, and shaking all over, as if he would shake to pieces, with the violence of the exercise, 'pick up the whip, there's a good fellow.' Mr. Winkle pulled at the bridle of the tall horse till he was black in the face; and having at length succeeded in stopping him, dismounted, handed the whip to Mr. Pickwick, and grasping the reins, prepared to remount.

Now whether the tall horse, in the natural playfulness of his disposition, was desirous of having a little innocent recreation with Mr. Winkle, or whether it occurred to him that he could perform the journey as much to his own satisfaction without a rider as with one, are points upon which, of course, we can arrive at no definite and distinct conclusion. By whatever motives the animal was actuated, certain it is that Mr. Winkle had no sooner touched the reins, than he slipped them over his head, and darted backwards to their full length.

'Poor fellow,' said Mr. Winkle soothingly—'poor fellow—good old horse.' The 'poor fellow' was proof against flattery; the more Mr. Winkle tried to get nearer him, the more he sidled away; and, notwithstanding all kinds of coaxing and wheedling, there were Mr. Winkle and the horse going round and round each other for ten minutes, at the end of which time each was at precisely the same distance from the other as when they first commenced—an unsatisfactory sort of thing under any circumstances, but particularly so in a lonely road, where no assistance can be procured.

'What am I to do?' shouted Mr. Winkle, after the dodging had been prolonged for a considerable time. 'What am I to do? I can't get on him.'

'You had better lead him till we come to a turnpike,' replied Mr. Pickwick from the chaise.

'But he won't come!' roared Mr. Winkle. 'Do come and hold him.'

Mr. Pickwick was the very personation of kindness and humanity: he threw the reins on the horse's back, and having descended from his seat, carefully drew the chaise into the hedge, lest anything should come along the road, and stepped back to the assistance of his distressed companion, leaving Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass in the vehicle.

The horse no sooner beheld Mr. Pickwick advancing towards him with the chaise whip in his hand, than he exchanged the rotary motion in which he had previously indulged, for a retrograde movement of so very determined a character, that it at once drew Mr. Winkle, who was still at the end of the bridle, at a rather quicker rate than fast walking, in the direction from which they had just come. Mr. Pickwick ran to his assistance, but the faster Mr. Pickwick ran forward, the faster the horse ran backward. There was a great scraping of feet, and kicking up of the dust; and at last Mr. Winkle, his arms being nearly pulled out of their sockets, fairly let go his hold. The horse paused, stared, shook his head, turned round, and quietly trotted home to Rochester, leaving Mr. Winkle and Mr. Pickwick gazing on each other with countenances of blank dismay. A rattling noise at a little distance attracted their attention. They looked up.

'Bless my soul!' exclaimed the agonised Mr. Pickwick; 'there's the other horse running away!'

It was but too true. The animal was startled by the noise, and the reins were on his back. The results may be guessed. He tore off with the four-wheeled chaise behind him, and Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass in the four-wheeled chaise. The heat was a short one. Mr. Tupman threw himself into the hedge, Mr. Snodgrass followed his example, the horse dashed the four—wheeled chaise against a wooden bridge, separated the wheels from the body, and the bin from the perch; and finally stood stock still to gaze upon the ruin he had made.

The first care of the two unspilt friends was to extricate their unfortunate companions from their bed of quickset—a process which gave them the unspeakable satisfaction of discovering that they had sustained no injury, beyond sundry rents in their garments, and various lacerations from the brambles. The next thing to be done was to unharness the horse. This complicated process having been effected, the party walked slowly forward, leading the horse among them, and abandoning the chaise to its fate.

An hour's walk brought the travellers to a little road-side public-house, with two elm-trees, a horse trough, and a signpost, in front; one or two deformed hay-ricks behind, a kitchen garden at the side, and rotten sheds and mouldering outhouses jumbled in strange confusion all about it. A red-headed man was working in the garden; and to him Mr. Pickwick called lustily, 'Hollo there!'

The red-headed man raised his body, shaded his eyes with his hand, and stared, long and coolly, at Mr. Pickwick and his companions.

'Hollo there!' repeated Mr. Pickwick.

'Hollo!' was the red-headed man's reply.

'How far is it to Dingley Dell?'

'Better er seven mile.'

'Is it a good road?'

'No, 'tain't.' Having uttered this brief reply, and apparently satisfied himself with another scrutiny, the red-headed man resumed his work. 'We want to put this horse up here,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'I suppose we can, can't we?' 'Want to put that ere horse up, do ee?' repeated the red-headed man, leaning on his spade.

'Of course,' replied Mr. Pickwick, who had by this time advanced, horse in hand, to the garden rails.

'Missus'—roared the man with the red head, emerging from the garden, and looking very hard at the horse—'missus!'

A tall, bony woman—straight all the way down—in a coarse, blue pelisse, with the waist an inch or two below her arm-pits, responded to the call.

'Can we put this horse up here, my good woman?' said Mr. Tupman, advancing, and speaking in his most seductive tones. The woman looked very hard at the whole party; and the red-headed man whispered something in her ear.

'No,' replied the woman, after a little consideration, 'I'm afeerd on it.'

'Afraid!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, 'what's the woman afraid of?'

'It got us in trouble last time,' said the woman, turning into the house; 'I woan't have nothin' to say to 'un.'

'Most extraordinary thing I have ever met with in my life,' said the astonished Mr. Pickwick.

'I—I—really believe,' whispered Mr. Winkle, as his friends gathered round him, 'that they think we have come by this horse in some dishonest manner.'

'What!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, in a storm of indignation. Mr. Winkle modestly repeated his suggestion.

'Hollo, you fellow,' said the angry Mr. Pickwick,'do you think we stole the horse?'

'I'm sure ye did,' replied the red-headed man, with a grin which agitated his countenance from one auricular organ to the other. Saying which he turned into the house and banged the door after him.

'It's like a dream,' ejaculated Mr. Pickwick, 'a hideous dream. The idea of a man's walking about all day with a dreadful horse that he can't get rid of!' The depressed Pickwickians turned moodily away, with the tall quadruped, for which they all felt the most unmitigated disgust, following slowly at their heels.

It was late in the afternoon when the four friends and their four-footed companion turned into the lane leading to Manor Farm; and even when they were so near their place of destination, the pleasure they would otherwise have experienced was materially damped as they reflected on the singularity of their appearance, and the absurdity of their situation. Torn clothes, lacerated faces, dusty shoes, exhausted looks, and, above all, the horse. Oh, how Mr. Pickwick cursed that horse: he had eyed the noble animal from time to time with looks expressive of hatred and revenge; more than once he had calculated the probable amount of the expense he would incur by cutting his throat; and now the temptation to destroy him, or to cast him loose upon the world, rushed upon his mind with tenfold force. He was roused from a meditation on these dire imaginings by the sudden appearance of two figures at a turn of the lane. It was Mr. Wardle, and his faithful attendant, the fat boy.

'Why, where have you been?' said the hospitable old gentleman; 'I've been waiting for you all day. Well, you DO look tired. What! Scratches! Not hurt, I hope—eh? Well, I AM glad to hear that—very. So you've been spilt, eh? Never mind. Common accident in these parts. Joe—he's asleep again!—Joe, take that horse from the gentlemen, and lead it into the stable.'

The fat boy sauntered heavily behind them with the animal; and the old gentleman, condoling with his guests in homely phrase on so much of the day's adventures as they thought proper to communicate, led the way to the kitchen.

'We'll have you put to rights here,' said the old gentleman, 'and then I'll introduce you to the people in the parlour. Emma, bring out the cherry brandy; now, Jane, a needle and thread here; towels and water, Mary. Come, girls, bustle about.'

Three or four buxom girls speedily dispersed in search of the different articles in requisition, while a couple of large-headed, circular-visaged males rose from their seats in the chimney-corner (for although it was a May evening their attachment to the wood fire appeared as cordial as if it were Christmas), and dived into some obscure recesses, from which they speedily produced a bottle of blacking, and some half-dozen brushes.

'Bustle!' said the old gentleman again, but the admonition was quite unnecessary, for one of the girls poured out the cherry brandy, and another brought in the towels, and one of the men suddenly seizing Mr. Pickwick by the leg, at imminent hazard of throwing him off his balance, brushed away at his boot till his corns were red-hot; while the other shampooed Mr. Winkle with a heavy clothes-brush, indulging, during the operation, in that hissing sound which hostlers are wont to produce when engaged in rubbing down a horse.

Mr. Snodgrass, having concluded his ablutions, took a survey of the room, while standing with his back to the fire, sipping his cherry brandy with heartfelt satisfaction. He describes it as a large apartment, with a red brick floor and a capacious chimney; the ceiling garnished with hams, sides of bacon, and ropes of onions. The walls were decorated with several hunting-whips, two or three bridles, a saddle, and an old rusty blunderbuss, with an inscription below it, intimating that it was 'Loaded'—as it had been, on the same authority, for half a century at least. An old eight-day clock, of solemn and sedate demeanour, ticked gravely in one corner; and a silver watch, of equal antiquity, dangled from one of the many hooks which ornamented the dresser.

'Ready?' said the old gentleman inquiringly, when his guests had been washed, mended, brushed, and brandied.

'Quite,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'Come along, then;' and the party having traversed several dark passages, and being joined by Mr. Tupman, who had lingered behind to snatch a kiss from Emma, for which he had been duly rewarded with sundry pushings and scratchings, arrived at the parlour door.

'Welcome,' said their hospitable host, throwing it open and stepping forward to announce them, 'welcome, gentlemen, to Manor Farm.'

CHAPTER VI. AN OLD-FASHIONED CARD-PARTY—THE CLERGYMAN'S VERSES—THE

STORY OF THE CONVICT'S RETURN

Several guests who were assembled in the old parlour rose to greet Mr. Pickwick and his friends upon their entrance; and during the performance of the ceremony of introduction, with all due formalities, Mr. Pickwick had leisure to observe the appearance, and speculate upon the characters and pursuits, of the persons by whom he was surrounded—a habit in which he, in common with many other great men, delighted to indulge.

A very old lady, in a lofty cap and faded silk gown—no less a personage than Mr. Wardle's mother—occupied the post of honour on the right-hand corner of the chimney-piece; and various certificates of her having been brought up in the way she should go when young, and of her not having departed from it when old, ornamented the walls, in the form of samplers of ancient date, worsted landscapes of equal antiquity, and crimson silk tea-kettle holders of a more modern period. The aunt, the two young ladies, and Mr. Wardle, each vying with the other in paying zealous and unremitting attentions to the old lady, crowded round her easy-chair, one holding her ear-trumpet, another an orange, and a third a smelling-bottle, while a fourth was busily engaged in patting and punching the pillows which were arranged for her support. On the opposite side sat a bald-headed old gentleman, with a good-humoured, benevolent face—the clergyman of Dingley Dell; and next him sat his wife, a stout, blooming old lady, who looked as if she were well skilled, not only in the art and mystery of manufacturing home-made cordials greatly to other people's satisfaction, but of tasting them occasionally very much to her own. A little hard-headed, Ripstone pippin-faced man, was conversing with a fat old gentleman in one corner; and two or three more old gentlemen, and two or three more old ladies, sat bolt upright and motionless on their chairs, staring very hard at Mr. Pickwick and his fellow-voyagers.

'Mr. Pickwick, mother,' said Mr. Wardle, at the very top of his voice.

'Ah!' said the old lady, shaking her head; 'I can't hear you.'

'Mr. Pickwick, grandma!' screamed both the young ladies together.

'Ah!' exclaimed the old lady. 'Well, it don't much matter. He don't care for an old 'ooman like me, I dare say.'

'I assure you, ma'am,' said Mr. Pickwick, grasping the old lady's hand, and speaking so loud that the exertion imparted a crimson hue to his benevolent countenance—'I assure you, ma'am, that nothing delights me more than to see a lady of your time of life heading so fine a family, and looking so young and well.'

'Ah!' said the old lady, after a short pause: 'it's all very fine, I dare say; but I can't hear him.'

'Grandma's rather put out now,' said Miss Isabella Wardle, in a low tone; 'but she'll talk to you presently.'

Mr. Pickwick nodded his readiness to humour the infirmities of age, and entered into a general conversation with the other members of the circle.

'Delightful situation this,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Delightful!' echoed Messrs. Snodgrass, Tupman, and Winkle.

'Well, I think it is,' said Mr. Wardle.

'There ain't a better spot o' ground in all Kent, sir,' said the hard-headed man with the pippin—face; 'there ain't indeed, sir—I'm sure there ain't, Sir.' The hard-headed man looked triumphantly round, as if he had been very much contradicted by somebody, but had got the better of him at last.

'There ain't a better spot o' ground in all Kent,' said the hard-headed man again, after a pause.

''Cept Mullins's Meadows,' observed the fat man solemnly. 'Mullins's Meadows!' ejaculated the other, with profound contempt.

'Ah, Mullins's Meadows,' repeated the fat man.

'Reg'lar good land that,' interposed another fat man.

'And so it is, sure-ly,' said a third fat man.

'Everybody knows that,' said the corpulent host.

The hard-headed man looked dubiously round, but finding himself in a minority, assumed a compassionate air and said no more. 'What are they talking about?' inquired the old lady of one of her granddaughters, in a very audible voice; for, like many deaf people, she never seemed to calculate on the possibility of other persons hearing what she said herself.

'About the land, grandma.'

'What about the land?—Nothing the matter, is there?'

'No, no. Mr. Miller was saying our land was better than Mullins's Meadows.'

'How should he know anything about it?'inquired the old lady indignantly. 'Miller's a conceited coxcomb, and you may tell him I said so.' Saying which, the old lady, quite unconscious that she had spoken above a whisper, drew herself up, and looked carving-knives at the hard-headed delinquent.

'Come, come,' said the bustling host, with a natural anxiety to change the conversation, 'what say you to a rubber, Mr. Pickwick?'

'I should like it of all things,' replied that gentleman; 'but pray don't make up one on my account.'

'Oh, I assure you, mother's very fond of a rubber,' said Mr. Wardle; 'ain't you, mother?'

The old lady, who was much less deaf on this subject than on any other, replied in the affirmative.

'Joe, Joe!' said the gentleman; 'Joe—damn that—oh, here he is; put out the card—tables.'

The lethargic youth contrived without any additional rousing to set out two card-tables; the one for Pope Joan, and the other for whist. The whist-players were Mr. Pickwick and the old lady, Mr. Miller and the fat gentleman. The round game comprised the rest of the company.

The rubber was conducted with all that gravity of deportment and sedateness of demeanour which befit the pursuit entitled 'whist'—a solemn observance, to which, as it appears to us, the title of 'game' has been very irreverently and ignominiously applied. The round-game table, on the other hand, was so boisterously merry as materially to interrupt the contemplations of Mr. Miller, who, not being quite so much absorbed as he ought to have been, contrived to commit various high crimes and misdemeanours, which excited the wrath of the fat gentleman to a very great extent, and called forth the good-humour of the old lady in a proportionate degree.

'There!' said the criminal Miller triumphantly, as he took up the odd trick at the conclusion of a hand; 'that could not have been played better, I flatter myself; impossible to have made another trick!'

'Miller ought to have trumped the diamond, oughtn't he, Sir?' said the old lady.

Mr. Pickwick nodded assent.

'Ought I, though?' said the unfortunate, with a doubtful appeal to his partner.

'You ought, Sir,' said the fat gentleman, in an awful voice.

'Very sorry,' said the crestfallen Miller.

'Much use that,' growled the fat gentleman.

'Two by honours—makes us eight,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Another hand. 'Can you one?' inquired the old lady.

'I can,' replied Mr. Pickwick. 'Double, single, and the rub.'

'Never was such luck,' said Mr. Miller.

'Never was such cards,' said the fat gentleman.

A solemn silence; Mr. Pickwick humorous, the old lady serious, the fat gentleman captious, and Mr. Miller timorous.

'Another double,' said the old lady, triumphantly making a memorandum of the circumstance, by placing one sixpence and a battered halfpenny under the candlestick.

'A double, sir,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Quite aware of the fact, Sir,' replied the fat gentleman sharply.

Another game, with a similar result, was followed by a revoke from the unlucky Miller; on which the fat gentleman burst into a state of high personal excitement which lasted until the conclusion of the game, when he retired into a corner, and remained perfectly mute for one hour and twenty-seven minutes; at the end of which time he emerged from his retirement, and offered Mr. Pickwick a pinch of snuff with the air of a man who had made up his mind to a Christian forgiveness of injuries sustained. The old lady's hearing decidedly improved and the unlucky Miller felt as much out of his element as a dolphin in a sentry-box.

Meanwhile the round game proceeded right merrily. Isabella Wardle and Mr. Trundle 'went partners,' and Emily Wardle and Mr. Snodgrass did the same; and even Mr. Tupman and the spinster aunt established a joint-stock company of fish and flattery. Old Mr. Wardle was in the very height of his jollity; and he was so funny in his management of the board, and the old ladies were so sharp after their winnings, that the whole table was in a perpetual roar of merriment and laughter. There was one old lady who always had about half a dozen cards to pay for, at which everybody laughed, regularly every round; and when the old lady looked cross at having to pay, they laughed louder than ever; on which the old lady's face gradually brightened up, till at last she laughed louder than any of them, Then, when the spinster aunt got 'matrimony,' the young ladies laughed afresh, and the Spinster aunt seemed disposed to be pettish; till, feeling Mr. Tupman squeezing her hand under the table, she brightened up too, and looked rather knowing, as if matrimony in reality were not quite so far off as some people thought for; whereupon everybody laughed again, and especially old Mr. Wardle, who enjoyed a joke as much as the youngest. As to Mr. Snodgrass, he did nothing but whisper poetical sentiments into his partner's ear, which made one old gentleman facetiously sly, about partnerships at cards and partnerships for life, and caused the aforesaid old gentleman to make some remarks thereupon, accompanied with divers winks and chuckles, which made the company very merry and the old gentleman's wife especially so. And Mr. Winkle came out with jokes which are very well known in town, but are not all known in the country; and as everybody laughed at them very heartily, and said they were very capital, Mr. Winkle was in a state of great honour and glory. And the benevolent clergyman looked pleasantly on; for the happy faces which surrounded the table made the good old man feel happy too; and though the merriment was rather boisterous, still it came from the heart and not from the lips; and this is the right sort of merriment, after all.

The evening glided swiftly away, in these cheerful recreations; and when the substantial though homely supper had been despatched, and the little party formed a social circle round the fire, Mr. Pickwick thought he had never felt so happy in his life, and at no time so much disposed to enjoy, and make the most of, the passing moment.

'Now this,' said the hospitable host, who was sitting in great state next the old lady's arm-chair, with her hand fast clasped in his—'this is just what I like—the happiest moments of my life have been passed at this old fireside; and I am so attached to it, that I keep up a blazing fire here every evening, until it actually grows too hot to bear it. Why, my poor old mother, here, used to sit before this fireplace upon that little stool when she was a girl; didn't you, mother?'

The tear which starts unbidden to the eye when the recollection of old times and the happiness of many years ago is suddenly recalled, stole down the old lady's face as she shook her head with a melancholy smile.

'You must excuse my talking about this old place, Mr. Pickwick,' resumed the host, after a short pause, 'for I love it dearly, and know no other—the old houses and fields seem like living friends to me; and so does our little church with the ivy, about which, by the bye, our excellent friend there made a song when he first came amongst us. Mr. Snodgrass, have you anything in your glass?'

'Plenty, thank you,' replied that gentleman, whose poetic curiosity had been greatly excited by the last observation of his entertainer. 'I beg your pardon, but you were talking about the song of the Ivy.'

'You must ask our friend opposite about that,' said the host knowingly, indicating the clergyman by a nod of his head.

'May I say that I should like to hear you repeat it, sir?' said Mr. Snodgrass.

'Why, really,' replied the clergyman, 'it's a very slight affair; and the only excuse I have for having ever perpetrated it is, that I was a young man at the time. Such as it is, however, you shall hear it, if you wish.'

A murmur of curiosity was of course the reply; and the old gentleman proceeded to recite, with the aid of sundry promptings from his wife, the lines in question. 'I call them,' said he,

THE IVY GREEN

Oh, a dainty plant is the Ivy green,
That creepeth o'er ruins old!
Of right choice food are his meals, I ween,
In his cell so lone and cold.
The wall must be crumbled, the stone decayed,
To pleasure his dainty whim;
And the mouldering dust that years have made,
Is a merry meal for him.
     Creeping where no life is seen,
     A rare old plant is the Ivy green.

Fast he stealeth on, though he wears no wings,
And a staunch old heart has he.
How closely he twineth, how tight he clings
To his friend the huge Oak Tree!
And slily he traileth along the ground,
And his leaves he gently waves,
As he joyously hugs and crawleth round
The rich mould of dead men's graves.
     Creeping where grim death has been,
     A rare old plant is the Ivy green.

Whole ages have fled and their works decayed,

And nations have scattered been;
But the stout old Ivy shall never fade,
From its hale and hearty green.
The brave old plant in its lonely days,
Shall fatten upon the past;
For the stateliest building man can raise,
Is the Ivy's food at last.
     Creeping on where time has been,
     A rare old plant is the Ivy green.

While the old gentleman repeated these lines a second time, to enable Mr. Snodgrass to note them down, Mr. Pickwick perused the lineaments of his face with an expression of great interest. The old gentleman having concluded his dictation, and Mr. Snodgrass having returned his note-book to his pocket, Mr. Pickwick said—

'Excuse me, sir, for making the remark on so short an acquaintance; but a gentleman like yourself cannot fail, I should think, to have observed many scenes and incidents worth recording, in the course of your experience as a minister of the Gospel.'

'I have witnessed some certainly,' replied the old gentleman, 'but the incidents and characters have been of a homely and ordinary nature, my sphere of action being so very limited.'

'You did make some notes, I think, about John Edmunds, did you not?' inquired Mr. Wardle, who appeared very desirous to draw his friend out, for the edification of his new visitors.

The old gentleman slightly nodded his head in token of assent, and was proceeding to change the subject, when Mr. Pickwick said—

'I beg your pardon, sir, but pray, if I may venture to inquire, who was John Edmunds?'

'The very thing I was about to ask,' said Mr. Snodgrass eagerly.

'You are fairly in for it,' said the jolly host. 'You must satisfy the curiosity of these gentlemen, sooner or later; so you had better take advantage of this favourable opportunity, and do so at once.'

The old gentleman smiled good-humouredly as he drew his chair forward—the remainder of the party drew their chairs closer together, especially Mr. Tupman and the spinster aunt, who were possibly rather hard of hearing; and the old lady's ear-trumpet having been duly adjusted, and Mr. Miller (who had fallen asleep during the recital of the verses) roused from his slumbers by an admonitory pinch, administered beneath the table by his ex-partner the solemn fat man, the old gentleman, without further preface, commenced the following tale, to which we have taken the liberty of prefixing the title of

THE CONVICT'S RETURN

'When I first settled in this village,' said the old gentleman, 'which is now just five-and-twenty years ago, the most notorious person among my parishioners was a man of the name of Edmunds, who leased a small farm near this spot. He was a morose, savage-hearted, bad man; idle and dissolute in his habits; cruel and ferocious in his disposition. Beyond the few lazy and reckless vagabonds with whom he sauntered away his time in the fields, or sotted in the ale-house, he had not a single friend or acquaintance; no one cared to speak to the man whom many feared, and every one detested—and Edmunds was shunned by all.

'This man had a wife and one son, who, when I first came here, was about twelve years old. Of the acuteness of that woman's sufferings, of the gentle and enduring manner in which she bore them, of the agony of solicitude with which she reared that boy, no one can form an adequate conception. Heaven forgive me the supposition, if it be an uncharitable one, but I do firmly and in my soul believe, that the man systematically tried for many years to break her heart; but she bore it all for her child's sake, and, however strange it may seem to many, for his father's too; for brute as he was, and cruelly as he had treated her, she had loved him once; and the recollection of what he had been to her, awakened feelings of forbearance and meekness under suffering in her bosom, to which all God's creatures, but women, are strangers.

'They were poor—they could not be otherwise when the man pursued such courses; but the woman's unceasing and unwearied exertions, early and late, morning, noon, and night, kept them above actual want. These exertions were but ill repaid. People who passed the spot in the evening—sometimes at a late hour of the night—reported that they had heard the moans and sobs of a woman in distress, and the sound of blows; and more than once, when it was past midnight, the boy knocked softly at the door of a neighbour's house, whither he had been sent, to escape the drunken fury of his unnatural father.

'During the whole of this time, and when the poor creature often bore about her marks of ill-usage and violence which she could not wholly conceal, she was a constant attendant at our little church. Regularly every Sunday, morning and afternoon, she occupied the same seat with the boy at her side; and though they were both poorly dressed—much more so than many of their neighbours who were in a lower station—they were always neat and clean. Every one had a friendly nod and a kind word for "poor Mrs. Edmunds"; and sometimes, when she stopped to exchange a few words with a neighbour at the conclusion of the service in the little row of elm-trees which leads to the church porch, or lingered behind to gaze with a mother's pride and fondness upon her healthy boy, as he sported before her with some little companions, her careworn face would lighten up with an expression of heartfelt gratitude; and she would look, if not cheerful and happy, at least tranquil and contented.

'Five or six years passed away; the boy had become a robust and well-grown youth. The time that had strengthened the child's slight frame and knit his weak limbs into the strength of manhood had bowed his mother's form, and enfeebled her steps; but the arm that should have supported her was no longer locked in hers; the face that should have cheered her, no more looked upon her own. She occupied her old seat, but there was a vacant one beside her. The Bible was kept as carefully as ever, the places were found and folded down as they used to be: but there was no one to read it with her; and the tears fell thick and fast upon the book, and blotted the words from her eyes. Neighbours were as kind as they were wont to be of old, but she shunned their greetings with averted head. There was no lingering among the old elm-trees now-no cheering anticipations of happiness yet in store. The desolate woman drew her bonnet closer over her face, and walked hurriedly away.

'Shall I tell you that the young man, who, looking back to the earliest of his childhood's days to which memory and consciousness extended, and carrying his recollection down to that moment, could remember nothing which was not in some way connected with a long series of voluntary privations suffered by his mother for his sake, with ill-usage, and insult, and violence, and all endured for him—shall I tell you, that he, with a reckless disregard for her breaking heart, and a sullen, wilful forgetfulness of all she had done and borne for him, had linked himself with depraved and abandoned men, and was madly pursuing a headlong career, which must bring death to him, and shame to her? Alas for human nature! You have anticipated it long since.

'The measure of the unhappy woman's misery and misfortune was about to be completed. Numerous offences had been committed in the neighbourhood; the perpetrators remained undiscovered, and their boldness increased. A robbery of a daring and aggravated nature occasioned a vigilance of pursuit, and a strictness of search, they had not calculated on. Young Edmunds was suspected, with three companions. He was apprehended—committed—tried—condemned—to die. 'The wild and piercing shriek from a woman's voice, which resounded through the court when the solemn sentence was pronounced, rings in my ears at this moment. That cry struck a terror to the culprit's heart, which trial, condemnation—the approach of death itself, had failed to awaken. The lips which had been compressed in dogged sullenness throughout, quivered and parted involuntarily; the face turned ashy pale as the cold perspiration broke forth from every pore; the sturdy limbs of the felon trembled, and he staggered in the dock.

'In the first transports of her mental anguish, the suffering mother threw herself on her knees at my feet, and fervently sought the Almighty Being who had hitherto supported her in all her troubles to release her from a world of woe and misery, and to spare the life of her only child. A burst of grief, and a violent struggle, such as I hope I may never have to witness again, succeeded. I knew that her heart was breaking from that hour; but I never once heard complaint or murmur escape her lips. 'It was a piteous spectacle to see that woman in the prison-yard from day to day, eagerly and fervently attempting, by affection and entreaty, to soften the hard heart of her obdurate son. It was in vain. He remained moody, obstinate, and unmoved. Not even the unlooked-for commutation of his sentence to transportation for fourteen years, softened for an instant the sullen hardihood of his demeanour.

'But the spirit of resignation and endurance that had so long upheld her, was unable to contend against bodily weakness and infirmity. She fell sick. She dragged her tottering limbs from the bed to visit her son once more, but her strength failed her, and she sank powerless on the ground.

'And now the boasted coldness and indifference of the young man were tested indeed; and the retribution that fell heavily upon him nearly drove him mad. A day passed away and his mother was not there; another flew by, and she came not near him; a third evening arrived, and yet he had not seen her—, and in four-and-twenty hours he was to be separated from her, perhaps for ever. Oh! how the long-forgotten thoughts of former days rushed upon his mind, as he almost ran up and down the narrow yard—as if intelligence would arrive the sooner for his hurrying—and how bitterly a sense of his helplessness and desolation rushed upon him, when he heard the truth! His mother, the only parent he had ever known, lay ill—it might be, dying—within one mile of the ground he stood on; were he free and unfettered, a few minutes would place him by her side. He rushed to the gate, and grasping the iron rails with the energy of desperation, shook it till it rang again, and threw himself against the thick wall as if to force a passage through the stone; but the strong building mocked his feeble efforts, and he beat his hands together and wept like a child.

'I bore the mother's forgiveness and blessing to her son in prison; and I carried the solemn assurance of repentance, and his fervent supplication for pardon, to her sick-bed. I heard, with pity and compassion, the repentant man devise a thousand little plans for her comfort and support when he returned; but I knew that many months before he could reach his place of destination, his mother would be no longer of this world. 'He was removed by night. A few weeks afterwards the poor woman's soul took its flight, I confidently hope, and solemnly believe, to a place of eternal happiness and rest. I performed the burial service over her remains. She lies in our little churchyard. There is no stone at her grave's head. Her sorrows were known to man; her virtues to God. 'it had been arranged previously to the convict's departure, that he should write to his mother as soon as he could obtain permission, and that the letter should be addressed to me. The father had positively refused to see his son from the moment of his apprehension; and it was a matter of indifference to him whether he lived or died. Many years passed over without any intelligence of him; and when more than half his term of transportation had expired, and I had received no letter, I concluded him to be dead, as, indeed, I almost hoped he might be.

'Edmunds, however, had been sent a considerable distance up the country on his arrival at the settlement; and to this circumstance, perhaps, may be attributed the fact, that though several letters were despatched, none of them ever reached my hands. He remained in the same place during the whole fourteen years. At the expiration of the term, steadily adhering to his old resolution and the pledge he gave his mother, he made his way back to

England amidst innumerable difficulties, and returned, on foot, to his native place.

'On a fine Sunday evening, in the month of August, John Edmunds set foot in the village he had left with shame and disgrace seventeen years before. His nearest way lay through the churchyard. The man's heart swelled as he crossed the stile. The tall old elms, through whose branches the declining sun cast here and there a rich ray of light upon the shady part, awakened the associations of his earliest days. He pictured himself as he was then, clinging to his mother's hand, and walking peacefully to church. He remembered how he used to look up into her pale face; and how her eyes would sometimes fill with tears as she gazed upon his features—tears which fell hot upon his forehead as she stooped to kiss him, and made him weep too, although he little knew then what bitter tears hers were. He thought how often he had run merrily down that path with some childish playfellow, looking back, ever and again, to catch his mother's smile, or hear her gentle voice; and then a veil seemed lifted from his memory, and words of kindness unrequited, and warnings despised, and promises broken, thronged upon his recollection till his heart failed him, and he could bear it no longer. 'He entered the church. The evening service was concluded and the congregation had dispersed, but it was not yet closed. His steps echoed through the low building with a hollow sound, and he almost feared to be alone, it was so still and quiet. He looked round him. Nothing was changed. The place seemed smaller than it used to be; but there were the old monuments on which he had gazed with childish awe a thousand times; the little pulpit with its faded cushion; the Communion table before which he had so often repeated the Commandments he had reverenced as a child, and forgotten as a man. He approached the old seat; it looked cold and desolate. The cushion had been removed, and the Bible was not there. Perhaps his mother now occupied a poorer seat, or possibly she had grown infirm and could not reach the church alone. He dared not think of what he feared. A cold feeling crept over him, and he trembled violently as he turned away. 'An old man entered the porch just as he reached it. Edmunds started back, for he knew him well; many a time he had watched him digging graves in the churchyard. What would he say to the returned convict?

'The old man raised his eyes to the stranger's face, bade him "good-evening," and walked slowly on. He had forgotten him.

'He walked down the hill, and through the village. The weather was warm, and the people were sitting at their doors, or strolling in their little gardens as he passed, enjoying the serenity of the evening, and their rest from labour. Many a look was turned towards him, and many a doubtful glance he cast on either side to see whether any knew and shunned him. There were strange faces in almost every house; in some he recognised the burly form of some old schoolfellow—a boy when he last saw him—surrounded by a troop of merry children; in others he saw, seated in an easy-chair at a cottage door, a feeble and infirm old man, whom he only remembered as a hale and hearty labourer; but they had all forgotten him, and he passed on unknown.

'The last soft light of the setting sun had fallen on the earth, casting a rich glow on the yellow corn sheaves, and lengthening the shadows of the orchard trees, as he stood before the old house—the home of his infancy—to which his heart had yearned with an intensity of affection not to be described, through long and weary years of captivity and sorrow. The paling was low, though he well remembered the time that it had seemed a high wall to him; and he looked over into the old garden. There were more seeds and gayer flowers than there used to be, but there were the old trees still—the very tree under which he had lain a thousand times when tired of playing in the sun, and felt the soft, mild sleep of happy boyhood steal gently upon him. There were voices within the house. He listened, but they fell strangely upon his ear; he knew them not. They were merry too; and he well knew that his poor old mother could not be cheerful, and he away. The door opened, and a group of little children bounded out, shouting and romping. The father, with a little boy in his arms, appeared at the door, and they crowded round him, clapping their tiny hands, and dragging him out, to join their joyous sports. The convict thought on the many times he had shrunk from his father's sight in that very place. He remembered how often he had buried his trembling head beneath the bedclothes, and heard the harsh word, and the hard stripe, and his mother's wailing; and though the man sobbed aloud with agony of mind as he left the spot, his fist was clenched, and his teeth were set, in a fierce and deadly passion.

'And such was the return to which he had looked through the weary perspective of many years, and for which he had undergone so much suffering! No face of welcome, no look of forgiveness, no house to receive, no hand to help him—and this too in the old village. What was his loneliness in the wild, thick woods, where man was never seen, to this!

'He felt that in the distant land of his bondage and infamy, he had thought of his native place as it was when he left it; and not as it would be when he returned. The sad reality struck coldly at his heart, and his spirit sank within him. He had not courage to make inquiries, or to present himself to the only person who was likely to receive him with kindness and compassion. He walked slowly on; and shunning the roadside like a guilty man, turned into a meadow he well remembered; and covering his face with his hands, threw himself upon the grass.

'He had not observed that a man was lying on the bank beside him; his garments rustled as he turned round to steal a look at the new-comer; and Edmunds raised his head.

'The man had moved into a sitting posture. His body was much bent, and his face was wrinkled and yellow. His dress denoted him an inmate of the workhouse: he had the appearance of being very old, but it looked more the effect of dissipation or disease, than the length of years. He was staring hard at the stranger, and though his eyes were lustreless and heavy at first, they appeared to glow with an unnatural and alarmed expression after they had been fixed upon him for a short time, until they seemed to be starting from their sockets. Edmunds gradually raised himself to his knees, and looked more and more earnestly on the old man's face. They gazed upon each other in silence.

'The old man was ghastly pale. He shuddered and tottered to his feet. Edmunds sprang to his. He stepped back a pace or two. Edmunds advanced.

'"Let me hear you speak," said the convict, in a thick, broken voice.

'"Stand off!" cried the old man, with a dreadful oath. The convict drew closer to him.

'"Stand off!" shrieked the old man. Furious with terror, he raised his stick, and struck Edmunds a heavy blow across the face.

'"Father—devil!" murmured the convict between his set teeth. He rushed wildly forward, and clenched the old man by the throat—but he was his father; and his arm fell powerless by his side.

'The old man uttered a loud yell which rang through the lonely fields like the howl of an evil spirit. His face turned black, the gore rushed from his mouth and nose, and dyed the grass a deep, dark red, as he staggered and fell. He had ruptured a blood-vessel, and he was a dead man before his son could raise him. 'In that corner of the churchyard,' said the old gentleman, after a silence of a few moments, 'in that corner of the churchyard of which I have before spoken, there lies buried a man who was in my employment for three years after this event, and who was truly contrite, penitent, and humbled, if ever man was. No one save myself knew in that man's lifetime who he was, or whence he came—it was John Edmunds, the returned convict.'

CHAPTER VII. HOW Mr. WINKLE, INSTEAD OF SHOOTING AT THE PIGEON AND

KILLING THE CROW, SHOT AT THE CROW AND WOUNDED THE PIGEON; HOW THE DINGLEY DELL CRICKET CLUB PLAYED ALL-MUGGLETON, AND HOW ALL-MUGGLETON DINED AT THE DINGLEY DELL EXPENSE; WITH OTHER INTERESTING AND INSTRUCTIVE MATTERS

The fatiguing adventures of the day or the somniferous influence of the clergyman's tale operated so strongly on the drowsy tendencies of Mr. Pickwick, that in less than five minutes after he had been shown to his comfortable bedroom he fell into a sound and dreamless sleep, from which he was only awakened by the morning sun darting his bright beams reproachfully into the apartment. Mr. Pickwick was no sluggard, and he sprang like an ardent warrior from his tent-bedstead.

'Pleasant, pleasant country,' sighed the enthusiastic gentleman, as he opened his lattice window. 'Who could live to gaze from day to day on bricks and slates who had once felt the influence of a scene like this? Who could continue to exist where there are no cows but the cows on the chimney-pots; nothing redolent of Pan but pan-tiles; no crop but stone crop? Who could bear to drag out a life in such a spot? Who, I ask, could endure it?' and, having cross-examined solitude after the most approved precedents, at considerable length, Mr. Pickwick thrust his head out of the lattice and looked around him.

The rich, sweet smell of the hay-ricks rose to his chamber window; the hundred perfumes of the little flower-garden beneath scented the air around; the deep-green meadows shone in the morning dew that glistened on every leaf as it trembled in the gentle air; and the birds sang as if every sparkling drop were to them a fountain of inspiration. Mr. Pickwick fell into an enchanting and delicious reverie.

'Hollo!' was the sound that roused him.

He looked to the right, but he saw nobody; his eyes wandered to the left, and pierced the prospect; he stared into the sky, but he wasn't wanted there;

and then he did what a common mind would have done at once—looked into the garden, and there saw Mr. Wardle. 'How are you?' said the good-humoured individual, out of breath with his own anticipations of pleasure.'Beautiful morning, ain't it? Glad to see you up so early. Make haste down, and come out. I'll wait for you here.' Mr. Pickwick needed no second invitation. Ten minutes sufficed for the completion of his toilet, and at the expiration of that time he was by the old gentleman's side.

'Hollo!' said Mr. Pickwick in his turn, seeing that his companion was armed with a gun, and that another lay ready on the grass; 'what's going forward?'

'Why, your friend and I,' replied the host, 'are going out rook-shooting before breakfast. He's a very good shot, ain't he?'

'I've heard him say he's a capital one,' replied Mr. Pickwick, 'but I never saw him aim at anything.'

'Well,' said the host, 'I wish he'd come. Joe—Joe!'

The fat boy, who under the exciting influence of the morning did not appear to be more than three parts and a fraction asleep, emerged from the house.

'Go up, and call the gentleman, and tell him he'll find me and Mr. Pickwick in the rookery. Show the gentleman the way there; d'ye hear?'

The boy departed to execute his commission; and the host, carrying both guns like a second Robinson Crusoe, led the way from the garden.

'This is the place,' said the old gentleman, pausing after a few minutes walking, in an avenue of trees. The information was unnecessary; for the incessant cawing of the unconscious rooks sufficiently indicated their whereabouts.

The old gentleman laid one gun on the ground, and loaded the other.

'Here they are,' said Mr. Pickwick; and, as he spoke, the forms of Mr. Tupman, Mr. Snodgrass, and Mr. Winkle appeared in the distance. The fat boy, not being quite certain which gentleman he was directed to call, had with peculiar sagacity, and to prevent the possibility of any mistake, called them all.

'Come along,' shouted the old gentleman, addressing Mr. Winkle; 'a keen hand like you ought to have been up long ago, even to such poor work as this.'

Mr. Winkle responded with a forced smile, and took up the spare gun with an expression of countenance which a metaphysical rook, impressed with a foreboding of his approaching death by violence, may be supposed to assume. It might have been keenness, but it looked remarkably like misery. The old gentleman nodded; and two ragged boys who had been marshalled to the spot under the direction of the infant Lambert, forthwith commenced climbing up two of the trees. 'What are these lads for?' inquired Mr. Pickwick abruptly. He was rather alarmed; for he was not quite certain but that the distress of the agricultural interest, about which he had often heard a great deal, might have compelled the small boys attached to the soil to earn a precarious and hazardous subsistence by making marks of themselves for inexperienced sportsmen. 'Only to start the game,' replied Mr. Wardle, laughing.

'To what?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Why, in plain English, to frighten the rooks.'

'Oh, is that all?'

'You are satisfied?'

'Quite.'

'Very well. Shall I begin?'

'If you please,' said Mr. Winkle, glad of any respite.

'Stand aside, then. Now for it.'

The boy shouted, and shook a branch with a nest on it. Half a dozen young rooks in violent conversation, flew out to ask what the matter was. The old gentleman fired by way of reply. Down fell one bird, and off flew the others.

'Take him up, Joe,' said the old gentleman.

There was a smile upon the youth's face as he advanced. Indistinct visions of rook-pie floated through his imagination. He laughed as he retired with the bird—it was a plump one.

'Now, Mr. Winkle,' said the host, reloading his own gun. 'Fire away.'

Mr. Winkle advanced, and levelled his gun. Mr. Pickwick and his friends cowered involuntarily to escape damage from the heavy fall of rooks, which they felt quite certain would be occasioned by the devastating barrel of their friend. There was a solemn pause—a shout—a flapping of wings—a faint click.

'Hollo!' said the old gentleman.

'Won't it go?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Missed fire,' said Mr. Winkle, who was very pale—probably from disappointment.

'Odd,' said the old gentleman, taking the gun. 'Never knew one of them miss fire before. Why, I don't see anything of the cap.' 'Bless my soul!' said Mr. Winkle, 'I declare I forgot the cap!'

The slight omission was rectified. Mr. Pickwick crouched again. Mr. Winkle stepped forward with an air of determination and resolution; and Mr. Tupman looked out from behind a tree. The boy shouted; four birds flew out. Mr. Winkle fired. There was a scream as of an individual—not a rook—in corporal anguish. Mr. Tupman had saved the lives of innumerable unoffending birds by receiving a portion of the charge in his left arm.

To describe the confusion that ensued would be impossible. To tell how Mr. Pickwick in the first transports of emotion called Mr. Winkle 'Wretch!' how Mr. Tupman lay prostrate on the ground; and how Mr. Winkle knelt horror-stricken beside him; how Mr. Tupman called distractedly upon some feminine Christian name, and then opened first one eye, and then the other, and then fell back and shut them both—all this would be as difficult to describe in detail, as it would be to depict the gradual recovering of the unfortunate individual, the binding up of his arm with pocket-handkerchiefs, and the conveying him back by slow degrees supported by the arms of his anxious friends.

They drew near the house. The ladies were at the garden gate, waiting for their arrival and their breakfast. The spinster aunt appeared; she smiled, and beckoned them to walk quicker. 'Twas evident she knew not of the disaster. Poor thing! there are times when ignorance is bliss indeed.

They approached nearer.

'Why, what is the matter with the little old gentleman?' said Isabella Wardle. The spinster aunt heeded not the remark; she thought it applied to Mr. Pickwick. In her eyes Tracy Tupman was a youth; she viewed his years through a diminishing glass.

'Don't be frightened,' called out the old host, fearful of alarming his daughters. The little party had crowded so completely round Mr. Tupman, that they could not yet clearly discern the nature of the accident.

'Don't be frightened,' said the host.

'What's the matter?' screamed the ladies.

'Mr. Tupman has met with a little accident; that's all.'

The spinster aunt uttered a piercing scream, burst into an hysteric laugh, and fell backwards in the arms of her nieces.

'Throw some cold water over her,' said the old gentleman.

'No, no,' murmured the spinster aunt; 'I am better now. Bella, Emily—a surgeon! Is he wounded?—Is he dead?—Is he—Ha, ha, ha!' Here the spinster aunt burst into fit number two, of hysteric laughter interspersed with screams.

'Calm yourself,' said Mr. Tupman, affected almost to tears by this expression of sympathy with his sufferings. 'Dear, dear madam, calm yourself.'

'It is his voice!' exclaimed the spinster aunt; and strong symptoms of fit number three developed themselves forthwith.

'Do not agitate yourself, I entreat you, dearest madam,' said Mr. Tupman soothingly. 'I am very little hurt, I assure you.'

'Then you are not dead!' ejaculated the hysterical lady. 'Oh, say you are not dead!'

'Don't be a fool, Rachael,' interposed Mr. Wardle, rather more roughly than was consistent with the poetic nature of the scene. 'What the devil's the use of his saying he isn't dead?'

'No, no, I am not,' said Mr. Tupman. 'I require no assistance but yours. Let me lean on your arm.' He added, in a whisper, 'Oh, Miss Rachael!' The agitated female advanced, and offered her arm. They turned into the breakfast parlour. Mr. Tracy Tupman gently pressed her hand to his lips, and sank upon the sofa.

'Are you faint?' inquired the anxious Rachael.

'No,' said Mr. Tupman. 'It is nothing. I shall be better presently.' He closed his eyes.

'He sleeps,' murmured the spinster aunt. (His organs of vision had been closed nearly twenty seconds.) 'Dear—dear—Mr. Tupman!'

Mr. Tupman jumped up—'Oh, say those words again!' he exclaimed.

The lady started. 'Surely you did not hear them!' she said bashfully.

'Oh, yes, I did!' replied Mr. Tupman; 'repeat them. If you would have me recover, repeat them.' 'Hush!' said the lady. 'My brother.' Mr. Tracy Tupman resumed his former position; and Mr. Wardle, accompanied by a surgeon, entered the room.

The arm was examined, the wound dressed, and pronounced to be a very slight one; and the minds of the company having been thus satisfied, they proceeded to satisfy their appetites with countenances to which an expression of cheerfulness was again restored. Mr. Pickwick alone was silent and reserved. Doubt and distrust were exhibited in his countenance.

His confidence in Mr. Winkle had been shaken—greatly shaken—by the proceedings of the morning. 'Are you a cricketer?' inquired Mr. Wardle of the marksman.

At any other time, Mr. Winkle would have replied in the affirmative. He felt the delicacy of his situation, and modestly replied, 'No.'

'Are you, sir?' inquired Mr. Snodgrass.

'I was once upon a time,' replied the host; 'but I have given it up now. I subscribe to the club here, but I don't play.'

'The grand match is played to-day, I believe,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'It is,' replied the host. 'Of course you would like to see it.'

'I, sir,' replied Mr. Pickwick, 'am delighted to view any sports which may be safely indulged in, and in which the impotent effects of unskilful people do not endanger human life.' Mr. Pickwick paused, and looked steadily on Mr. Winkle, who quailed beneath his leader's searching glance. The great man withdrew his eyes after a few minutes, and added: 'Shall we be justified in leaving our wounded friend to the care of the ladies?'

'You cannot leave me in better hands,' said Mr. Tupman.

'Quite impossible,' said Mr. Snodgrass.

It was therefore settled that Mr. Tupman should be left at home in charge of the females; and that the remainder of the guests, under the guidance of Mr. Wardle, should proceed to the spot where was to be held that trial of skill, which had roused all Muggleton from its torpor, and inoculated Dingley Dell with a fever of excitement.

As their walk, which was not above two miles long, lay through shady lanes and sequestered footpaths, and as their conversation turned upon the delightful scenery by which they were on every side surrounded, Mr. Pickwick was almost inclined to regret the expedition they had used, when he found himself in the main street of the town of Muggleton. Everybody whose genius has a topographical bent knows perfectly well that Muggleton is a corporate town, with a mayor, burgesses, and freemen; and anybody who has consulted the addresses of the mayor to the freemen, or the freemen to the mayor, or both to the corporation, or all three to Parliament, will learn from thence what they ought to have known before, that Muggleton is an ancient and loyal borough, mingling a zealous advocacy of Christian principles with a devoted attachment to commercial rights; in demonstration whereof, the mayor, corporation, and other inhabitants, have presented at divers times, no fewer than one thousand four hundred and twenty petitions against the continuance of negro slavery abroad, and an equal number against any interference with the factory system at home; sixty-eight in favour of the sale of livings in the Church, and eighty-six for abolishing Sunday trading in the street.

Mr. Pickwick stood in the principal street of this illustrious town, and gazed with an air of curiosity, not unmixed with interest, on the objects around him. There was an open square for the market-place; and in the centre of it, a large inn with a sign-post in front, displaying an object very common in art, but rarely met with in nature—to wit, a blue lion, with three bow legs in the air, balancing himself on the extreme point of the centre claw of his fourth foot. There were, within sight, an auctioneer's and fire-agency office, a corn-factor's, a linen-draper's, a saddler's, a distiller's, a grocer's, and a shoe-shop—the last-mentioned warehouse being also appropriated to the diffusion of hats, bonnets, wearing apparel, cotton umbrellas, and useful knowledge. There was a red brick house with a small paved courtyard in front, which anybody might have known belonged to the attorney; and there was, moreover, another red brick house with Venetian blinds, and a large brass door-plate with a very legible announcement that it belonged to the surgeon. A few boys were making their way to the cricket-field; and two or three shopkeepers who were standing at their doors looked as if they should like to be making their way to the same spot, as indeed to all appearance they might have done, without losing any great amount of custom thereby. Mr. Pickwick having paused to make these observations, to be noted down at a more convenient period, hastened to rejoin his friends, who had turned out of the main street, and were already within sight of the field of battle.

The wickets were pitched, and so were a couple of marquees for the rest and refreshment of the contending parties. The game had not yet commenced. Two or three Dingley Dellers, and All-Muggletonians, were amusing themselves with a majestic air by throwing the ball carelessly from hand to hand; and several other gentlemen dressed like them, in straw hats, flannel jackets, and white trousers—a costume in which they looked very much like amateur stone-masons—were sprinkled about the tents, towards one of which Mr. Wardle conducted the party.

Several dozen of 'How-are-you's?' hailed the old gentleman's arrival; and a general raising of the straw hats, and bending forward of the flannel jackets, followed his introduction of his guests as gentlemen from London, who were extremely anxious to witness the proceedings of the day, with which, he had no doubt, they would be greatly delighted.

'You had better step into the marquee, I think, Sir,' said one very stout gentleman, whose body and legs looked like half a gigantic roll of flannel, elevated on a couple of inflated pillow-cases.

'You'll find it much pleasanter, Sir,' urged another stout gentleman, who strongly resembled the other half of the roll of flannel aforesaid.

'You're very good,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'This way,' said the first speaker; 'they notch in here—it's the best place in the whole field;' and the cricketer, panting on before, preceded them to the tent.

'Capital game—smart sport—fine exercise—very,' were the words which fell upon Mr. Pickwick's ear as he entered the tent; and the first object that met his eyes was his green-coated friend of the Rochester coach, holding forth, to the no small delight and edification of a select circle of the chosen of All-Muggleton. His dress was slightly improved, and he wore boots; but there was no mistaking him.

The stranger recognised his friends immediately; and, darting forward and seizing Mr. Pickwick by the hand, dragged him to a seat with his usual impetuosity, talking all the while as if the whole of the arrangements were under his especial patronage and direction.

'This way—this way—capital fun—lots of beer—hogsheads; rounds of beef—bullocks; mustard—cart-loads; glorious day—down with you—make yourself at home—glad to see you—very.'

Mr. Pickwick sat down as he was bid, and Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass also complied with the directions of their mysterious friend. Mr. Wardle looked on in silent wonder.

'Mr. Wardle—a friend of mine,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Friend of yours!—My dear sir, how are you?—Friend of my friend's—give me your hand, sir'—and the stranger grasped Mr. Wardle's hand with all the fervour of a close intimacy of many years, and then stepped back a pace or two as if to take a full survey of his face and figure, and then shook hands with him again, if possible, more warmly than before.

'Well; and how came you here?' said Mr. Pickwick, with a smile in which benevolence struggled with surprise. 'Come,' replied the stranger—'stopping at Crown—Crown at Muggleton—met a party—flannel jackets

—white trousers—anchovy sandwiches—devilled kidney—splendid fellows—glorious.'

Mr. Pickwick was sufficiently versed in the stranger's system of stenography to infer from this rapid and disjointed communication that he had, somehow or other, contracted an acquaintance with the All-Muggletons, which he had converted, by a process peculiar to himself, into that extent of good-fellowship on which a general invitation may be easily founded. His curiosity was therefore satisfied, and putting on his spectacles he prepared himself to watch the play which was just commencing.

All-Muggleton had the first innings; and the interest became intense when Mr. Dumkins and Mr. Podder, two of the most renowned members of that most distinguished club, walked, bat in hand, to their respective wickets. Mr. Luffey, the highest ornament of Dingley Dell, was pitched to bowl against the redoubtable Dumkins, and Mr. Struggles was selected to do the same kind office for the hitherto unconquered Podder. Several players were stationed, to 'look out,' in different parts of the field, and each fixed himself into the proper attitude by placing one hand on each knee, and stooping very much as if he were 'making a back' for some beginner at leap-frog. All the regular players do this sort of thing;—indeed it is generally supposed that it is quite impossible to look out properly in any other position.

The umpires were stationed behind the wickets; the scorers were prepared to notch the runs; a breathless silence ensued. Mr. Luffey retired a few paces behind the wicket of the passive Podder, and applied the ball to his right eye for several seconds. Dumkins confidently awaited its coming with his eyes fixed on the motions of Luffey.

'Play!' suddenly cried the bowler. The ball flew from his hand straight and swift towards the centre stump of the wicket. The wary Dumkins was on the alert: it fell upon the tip of the bat, and bounded far away over the heads of the scouts, who had just stooped low enough to let it fly over them.

'Run—run—another.—Now, then throw her up—up with her—stop there—another—no—yes—no—throw her up, throw her up!'—Such were the shouts which followed the stroke; and at the conclusion of which All-Muggleton had scored two. Nor was Podder behindhand in earning laurels wherewith to garnish himself and Muggleton. He blocked the doubtful balls, missed the bad ones, took the good ones, and sent them flying to all parts of the field. The scouts were hot and tired; the bowlers were changed and bowled till their arms ached; but Dumkins and Podder remained unconquered. Did an elderly gentleman essay to stop the progress of the ball, it rolled between his legs or slipped between his fingers. Did a slim gentleman try to catch it, it struck him on the nose, and bounded pleasantly off with redoubled violence, while the slim gentleman's eyes filled with water, and his form writhed with anguish. Was it thrown straight up to the wicket, Dumkins had reached it before the ball. In short, when Dumkins was caught out, and Podder stumped out, All-Muggleton had notched some fifty-four, while the score of the Dingley Dellers was as blank as their faces. The advantage was too great to be recovered. In vain did the eager Luffey, and the enthusiastic Struggles, do all that skill and experience could suggest, to regain the ground Dingley Dell had lost in the contest—it was of no avail; and in an early period of the winning game Dingley Dell gave in, and allowed the superior prowess of All-Muggleton.

The stranger, meanwhile, had been eating, drinking, and talking, without cessation. At every good stroke he expressed his satisfaction and approval of the player in a most condescending and patronising manner, which could not fail to have been highly gratifying to the party concerned; while at every bad attempt at a catch, and every failure to stop the ball, he launched his personal displeasure at the head of the devoted individual in such denunciations as—'Ah, ah!—stupid'—'Now, butter-fingers'—'Muff'—'Humbug'—and so forth—ejaculations which seemed to establish him in the opinion of all around, as a most excellent and undeniable judge of the whole art and mystery of the noble game of cricket.

'Capital game—well played—some strokes admirable,' said the stranger, as both sides crowded into the tent, at the conclusion of the game.

'You have played it, sir?' inquired Mr. Wardle, who had been much amused by his loquacity. 'Played it! Think I have—thousands of times—not here—West Indies—exciting thing—hot work—very.' 'It must be rather a warm pursuit in such a climate,' observed Mr. Pickwick.

'Warm!—red hot—scorching—glowing. Played a match once—single wicket—friend the colonel—Sir Thomas Blazo—who should get the greatest number of runs.—Won the toss—first innings—seven o'clock A.m.—six natives to look out—went in; kept in—heat intense—natives all fainted—taken away—fresh half-dozen ordered—fainted also—Blazo bowling—supported by two natives—couldn't bowl me out—fainted too—cleared away the colonel—wouldn't give in—faithful attendant—Quanko

Samba—last man left—sun so hot, bat in blisters, ball scorched brown—five hundred and seventy runs—rather exhausted—Quanko mustered up last remaining strength—bowled me out—had a bath, and went out to dinner.'

'And what became of what's-his-name, Sir?' inquired an old gentleman.

'Blazo?'

'No—the other gentleman.' 'Quanko Samba?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Poor Quanko—never recovered it—bowled on, on my account—bowled off, on his own—died, sir.' Here the stranger buried his countenance in a brown jug, but whether to hide his emotion or imbibe its contents, we cannot distinctly affirm. We only know that he paused suddenly, drew a long and deep breath, and looked anxiously on, as two of the principal members of the Dingley Dell club approached Mr. Pickwick, and said—

'We are about to partake of a plain dinner at the Blue Lion, Sir; we hope you and your friends will join us.' 'Of course,' said Mr. Wardle, 'among our friends we include Mr.—;' and he looked towards the stranger.

'Jingle,' said that versatile gentleman, taking the hint at once. 'Jingle—Alfred Jingle, Esq., of No Hall, Nowhere.'

'I shall be very happy, I am sure,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'So shall I,' said Mr. Alfred Jingle, drawing one arm through Mr. Pickwick's, and another through Mr. Wardle's, as he whispered confidentially in the ear of the former gentleman:—

'Devilish good dinner—cold, but capital—peeped into the room this morning—fowls and pies, and all that sort of thing—pleasant fellows these—well behaved, too—very.'

There being no further preliminaries to arrange, the company straggled into the town in little knots of twos and threes; and within a quarter of an hour were all seated in the great room of the Blue Lion Inn, Muggleton—Mr. Dumkins acting as chairman, and Mr. Luffey officiating as vice.

There was a vast deal of talking and rattling of knives and forks, and plates; a great running about of three ponderous-headed waiters, and a rapid disappearance of the substantial viands on the table; to each and every of which item of confusion, the facetious Mr. Jingle lent the aid of half-a-dozen ordinary men at least. When everybody had eaten as much as possible, the cloth was removed, bottles, glasses, and dessert were placed on the table; and the waiters withdrew to 'clear away,'or in other words, to appropriate to their own private use and emolument whatever remnants of the eatables and drinkables they could contrive to lay their hands on.

Amidst the general hum of mirth and conversation that ensued, there was a little man with a puffy Say-nothing-to-me,-or-I'll-contradict-you sort of countenance, who remained very quiet; occasionally looking round him when the conversation slackened, as if he contemplated putting in something very weighty; and now and then bursting into a short cough of inexpressible grandeur. At length, during a moment of comparative silence, the little man called out in a very loud, solemn voice,—

'Mr. Luffey!'

Everybody was hushed into a profound stillness as the individual addressed, replied—

'Sir!'

'I wish to address a few words to you, Sir, if you will entreat the gentlemen to fill their glasses.'

Mr. Jingle uttered a patronising 'Hear, hear,' which was responded to by the remainder of the company; and the glasses having been filled, the vice-president assumed an air of wisdom in a state of profound attention; and said—

'Mr. Staple.'

'Sir,' said the little man, rising, 'I wish to address what I have to say to you and not to our worthy chairman, because our worthy chairman is in some measure—I may say in a great degree—the subject of what I have to say, or I may say to—to—' 'State,' suggested Mr. Jingle.

'Yes, to state,' said the little man, 'I thank my honourable friend, if he will allow me to call him so (four hears and one certainly from Mr. Jingle), for the suggestion. Sir, I am a Deller—a Dingley Deller (cheers). I cannot lay claim to the honour of forming an item in the population of Muggleton; nor, Sir, I will frankly admit, do I covet that honour: and I will tell you why, Sir (hear); to Muggleton I will readily concede all these honours and distinctions to which it can fairly lay claim—they are too numerous and too well known to require aid or recapitulation from me. But, sir, while we remember that Muggleton has given birth to a Dumkins and a Podder, let us never forget that Dingley Dell can boast a Luffey and a Struggles. (Vociferous cheering.) Let me not be considered as wishing to detract from the merits of the former gentlemen. Sir, I envy them the luxury of their own feelings on this occasion. (Cheers.) Every gentleman who hears me, is probably acquainted with the reply made by an individual, who—to use an ordinary figure of speech—"hung out" in a tub, to the emperor Alexander:—"if I were not Diogenes," said he, "I would be Alexander." I can well imagine these gentlemen to say, "If I were not Dumkins I would be Luffey; if I were not Podder I would be Struggles." (Enthusiasm.) But, gentlemen of Muggleton, is it in cricket alone that your fellow-townsmen stand pre-eminent? Have you never heard of Dumkins and determination? Have you never been taught to associate Podder with property? (Great applause.) Have you never, when struggling for your rights, your liberties, and your privileges, been reduced, if only for an instant, to misgiving and despair? And when you have been thus depressed, has not the name of Dumkins laid afresh within your breast the fire which had just gone out; and has not a word from that man lighted it again as brightly as if it had never expired? (Great cheering.) Gentlemen, I beg to surround with a rich halo of enthusiastic cheering the united names of "Dumkins and Podder."'

Here the little man ceased, and here the company commenced a raising of voices, and thumping of tables, which lasted with little intermission during the remainder of the evening. Other toasts were drunk. Mr. Luffey and Mr. Struggles, Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Jingle, were, each in his turn, the subject of unqualified eulogium; and each in due course returned thanks for the honour.

Enthusiastic as we are in the noble cause to which we have devoted ourselves, we should have felt a sensation of pride which we cannot express, and a consciousness of having done something to merit immortality of which we are now deprived, could we have laid the faintest outline on these addresses before our ardent readers. Mr. Snodgrass, as usual, took a great mass of notes, which would no doubt have afforded most useful and valuable information, had not the burning eloquence of the words or the feverish influence of the wine made that gentleman's hand so extremely unsteady, as to render his writing nearly unintelligible, and his style wholly so. By dint of patient investigation, we have been enabled to trace some characters bearing a faint resemblance to the names of the speakers; and we can only discern an entry of a song (supposed to have been sung by Mr. Jingle), in which the words 'bowl' 'sparkling' 'ruby' 'bright' and 'wine' are frequently repeated at short intervals. We fancy, too, that we can discern at the very end of the notes, some indistinct reference to 'broiled bones'; and then the words 'cold' 'without' occur: but as any hypothesis we could found upon them must necessarily rest upon mere conjecture, we are not disposed to indulge in any of the speculations to which they may give rise.

We will therefore return to Mr. Tupman; merely adding that within some few minutes before twelve o'clock that night, the convocation of worthies of Dingley Dell and Muggleton were heard to sing, with great feeling and emphasis, the beautiful and pathetic national air of

'We won't go home till morning,
We won't go home till morning,
We won't go home till morning,
Till daylight doth appear.'

CHAPTER VIII. STRONGLY ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE POSITION, THAT THE COURSE OF

TRUE LOVE IS NOT A RAILWAY

The quiet seclusion of Dingley Dell, the presence of so many of the gentler sex, and the solicitude and anxiety they evinced in his behalf, were all favourable to the growth and development of those softer feelings which nature had implanted deep in the bosom of Mr. Tracy Tupman, and which now appeared destined to centre in one lovely object. The young ladies were pretty, their manners winning, their dispositions unexceptionable; but there was a dignity in the air, a touch-me-not-ishness in the walk, a majesty in the eye, of the spinster aunt, to which, at their time of life, they could lay no claim, which distinguished her from any female on whom Mr. Tupman had ever gazed. That there was something kindred in their nature, something congenial in their souls, something mysteriously sympathetic in their bosoms, was evident. Her name was the first that rose to Mr. Tupman's lips as he lay wounded on the grass; and her hysteric laughter was the first sound that fell upon his ear when he was supported to the house. But had her agitation arisen from an amiable and feminine sensibility which would have been equally irrepressible in any case; or had it been called forth by a more ardent and passionate feeling, which he, of all men living, could alone awaken? These were the doubts which racked his brain as he lay extended on the sofa; these were the doubts which he determined should be at once and for ever resolved.

it was evening. Isabella and Emily had strolled out with Mr. Trundle; the deaf old lady had fallen asleep in her chair; the snoring of the fat boy, penetrated in a low and monotonous sound from the distant kitchen; the buxom servants were lounging at the side door, enjoying the pleasantness of the hour, and the delights of a flirtation, on first principles, with certain unwieldy animals attached to the farm; and there sat the interesting pair, uncared for by all, caring for none, and dreaming only of themselves; there they sat, in short, like a pair of carefully-folded kid gloves—bound up in each other.

'I have forgotten my flowers,' said the spinster aunt.

'Water them now,' said Mr. Tupman, in accents of persuasion.

'You will take cold in the evening air,' urged the spinster aunt affectionately.

'No, no,' said Mr. Tupman, rising; 'it will do me good. Let me accompany you.'

The lady paused to adjust the sling in which the left arm of the youth was placed, and taking his right arm led him to the garden.

There was a bower at the farther end, with honeysuckle, jessamine, and creeping plants—one of those sweet retreats which humane men erect for the accommodation of spiders.

The spinster aunt took up a large watering-pot which lay in one corner, and was about to leave the arbour. Mr. Tupman detained her, and drew her to a seat beside him.

'Miss Wardle!' said he. The spinster aunt trembled, till some pebbles which had accidentally found their way into the large watering-pot shook like an infant's rattle.

'Miss Wardle,' said Mr. Tupman, 'you are an angel.'

'Mr. Tupman!' exclaimed Rachael, blushing as red as the watering-pot itself.

'Nay,' said the eloquent Pickwickian—'I know it but too well.'

'All women are angels, they say,' murmured the lady playfully.

'Then what can you be; or to what, without presumption, can I compare you?' replied Mr. Tupman. 'Where was the woman ever seen who resembled you? Where else could I hope to find so rare a combination of excellence and beauty? Where else could I seek to—Oh!' Here Mr. Tupman paused, and pressed the hand which clasped the handle of the happy watering-pot.

The lady turned aside her head. 'Men are such deceivers,' she softly whispered.

'They are, they are,' ejaculated Mr. Tupman; 'but not all men. There lives at least one being who can never change—one being who would be content to devote his whole existence to your happiness—who lives but in your eyes—who breathes but in your smiles—who bears the heavy burden of life itself only for you.'

'Could such an individual be found—' said the lady.

'But he CAN be found,' said the ardent Mr. Tupman, interposing. 'He IS found. He is here, Miss Wardle.' And ere the lady was aware of his intention, Mr. Tupman had sunk upon his knees at her feet.

'Mr. Tupman, rise,' said Rachael.

'Never!' was the valorous reply. 'Oh, Rachael!' He seized her passive hand, and the watering-pot fell to the ground as he pressed it to his lips.—'Oh, Rachael! say you love me.'

'Mr. Tupman,' said the spinster aunt, with averted head, 'I can hardly speak the words; but—but—you are not wholly indifferent to me.'

Mr. Tupman no sooner heard this avowal, than he proceeded to do what his enthusiastic emotions prompted, and what, for aught we know (for we are but little acquainted with such matters), people so circumstanced always do. He jumped up, and, throwing his arm round the neck of the spinster aunt, imprinted upon her lips numerous kisses, which after a due show of struggling and resistance, she received so passively, that there is no telling how many more Mr. Tupman might have bestowed, if the lady had not given a very unaffected start, and exclaimed in an affrighted tone—

'Mr. Tupman, we are observed!—we are discovered!'

Mr. Tupman looked round. There was the fat boy, perfectly motionless, with his large circular eyes staring into the arbour, but without the slightest expression on his face that the most expert physiognomist could have referred to astonishment, curiosity, or any other known passion that agitates the human breast. Mr. Tupman gazed on the fat boy, and the fat boy stared at him; and the longer Mr. Tupman observed the utter vacancy of the fat boy's countenance, the more convinced he became that he either did not know, or did not understand, anything that had been going forward. Under this impression, he said with great firmness—

'What do you want here, Sir?'

'Supper's ready, sir,' was the prompt reply.

'Have you just come here, sir?' inquired Mr. Tupman, with a piercing look.

'Just,' replied the fat boy.

Mr. Tupman looked at him very hard again; but there was not a wink in his eye, or a curve in his face.

Mr. Tupman took the arm of the spinster aunt, and walked towards the house; the fat boy followed behind.

'He knows nothing of what has happened,'he whispered.

'Nothing,' said the spinster aunt.

There was a sound behind them, as of an imperfectly suppressed chuckle. Mr. Tupman turned sharply round. No; it could not have been the fat boy; there was not a gleam of mirth, or anything but feeding in his whole visage.

'He must have been fast asleep,' whispered Mr. Tupman.

'I have not the least doubt of it,' replied the spinster aunt.

They both laughed heartily.

Mr. Tupman was wrong. The fat boy, for once, had not been fast asleep. He was awake—wide awake—to what had been going forward.

The supper passed off without any attempt at a general conversation. The old lady had gone to bed; Isabella Wardle devoted herself exclusively to Mr. Trundle; the spinster's attentions were reserved for Mr. Tupman; and Emily's thoughts appeared to be engrossed by some distant object—possibly they were with the absent Snodgrass.

Eleven—twelve—one o'clock had struck, and the gentlemen had not arrived. Consternation sat on every face. Could they have been waylaid and robbed? Should they send men and lanterns in every direction by which they could be supposed likely to have travelled home? or should they—Hark! there they were. What could have made them so late? A strange voice, too! To whom could it belong? They rushed into the kitchen, whither the truants had repaired, and at once obtained rather more than a glimmering of the real state of the case.

Mr. Pickwick, with his hands in his pockets and his hat cocked completely over his left eye, was leaning against the dresser, shaking his head from side to side, and producing a constant succession of the blandest and most benevolent smiles without being moved thereunto by any discernible cause or pretence whatsoever; old Mr. Wardle, with a highly-inflamed countenance, was grasping the hand of a strange gentleman muttering protestations of eternal friendship; Mr. Winkle, supporting himself by the eight-day clock, was feebly invoking destruction upon the head of any member of the family who should suggest the propriety of his retiring for the night; and Mr. Snodgrass had sunk into a chair, with an expression of the most abject and hopeless misery that the human mind can imagine, portrayed in every lineament of his expressive face.

'Is anything the matter?' inquired the three ladies.

'Nothing the matter,' replied Mr. Pickwick. 'We—we're—all right.—I say, Wardle, we're all right, ain't we?'

'I should think so,' replied the jolly host.—'My dears, here's my friend Mr. Jingle—Mr. Pickwick's friend, Mr. Jingle, come 'pon—little visit.'

'Is anything the matter with Mr. Snodgrass, Sir?' inquired Emily, with great anxiety.

'Nothing the matter, ma'am,' replied the stranger. 'Cricket dinner—glorious party—capital songs—old port—claret—good—very good—wine, ma'am—wine.'

'It wasn't the wine,' murmured Mr. Snodgrass, in a broken voice. 'It was the salmon.' (Somehow or other, it never is the wine, in these cases.)

'Hadn't they better go to bed, ma'am?' inquired Emma. 'Two of the boys will carry the gentlemen upstairs.'

'I won't go to bed,' said Mr. Winkle firmly.

'No living boy shall carry me,' said Mr. Pickwick stoutly; and he went on smiling as before. 'Hurrah!' gasped Mr. Winkle faintly.

'Hurrah!' echoed Mr. Pickwick, taking off his hat and dashing it on the floor, and insanely casting his spectacles into the middle of the kitchen. At this humorous feat he laughed outright.

'Let's—have—'nother—bottle,'cried Mr. Winkle, commencing in a very loud key, and ending in a very faint one. His head dropped upon his breast; and, muttering his invincible determination not to go to his bed, and a sanguinary regret that he had not 'done for old Tupman' in the morning, he fell fast asleep; in which condition he was borne to his apartment by two young giants under the personal superintendence of the fat boy, to whose protecting care Mr. Snodgrass shortly afterwards confided his own person, Mr. Pickwick accepted the proffered arm of Mr. Tupman and quietly disappeared, smiling more than ever; and Mr. Wardle, after taking as affectionate a leave of the whole family as if he were ordered for immediate execution, consigned to Mr. Trundle the honour of conveying him upstairs, and retired, with a very futile attempt to look impressively solemn and dignified. 'What a shocking scene!' said the spinster aunt.

'Dis-gusting!' ejaculated both the young ladies.

'Dreadful—dreadful!' said Jingle, looking very grave: he was about a bottle and a half ahead of any of his companions. 'Horrid spectacle—very!'

'What a nice man!' whispered the spinster aunt to Mr. Tupman.

'Good-looking, too!' whispered Emily Wardle.

'Oh, decidedly,' observed the spinster aunt.

Mr. Tupman thought of the widow at Rochester, and his mind was troubled. The succeeding half-hour's conversation was not of a nature to calm his perturbed spirit. The new visitor was very talkative, and the number of his anecdotes was only to be exceeded by the extent of his politeness. Mr. Tupman felt that as Jingle's popularity increased, he (Tupman) retired further into the shade. His laughter was forced—his merriment feigned; and when at last he laid his aching temples between the sheets, he thought, with horrid delight, on the satisfaction it would afford him to have Jingle's head at that moment between the feather bed and the mattress.

The indefatigable stranger rose betimes next morning, and, although his companions remained in bed overpowered with the dissipation of the previous night, exerted himself most successfully to promote the hilarity of the breakfast-table. So successful were his efforts, that even the deaf old lady insisted on having one or two of his best jokes retailed through the trumpet; and even she condescended to observe to the spinster aunt, that 'He' (meaning Jingle) 'was an impudent young fellow:' a sentiment in which all her relations then and there present thoroughly coincided.

It was the old lady's habit on the fine summer mornings to repair to the arbour in which Mr. Tupman had already signalised himself, in form and manner following: first, the fat boy fetched from a peg behind the old lady's bedroom door, a close black satin bonnet, a warm cotton shawl, and a thick stick with a capacious handle; and the old lady, having put on the bonnet and shawl at her leisure, would lean one hand on the stick and the other on the fat boy's shoulder, and walk leisurely to the arbour, where the fat boy would leave her to enjoy the fresh air for the space of half an hour; at the expiration of which time he would return and reconduct her to the house.

The old lady was very precise and very particular; and as this ceremony had been observed for three successive summers without the slightest deviation from the accustomed form, she was not a little surprised on this particular morning to see the fat boy, instead of leaving the arbour, walk a few paces out of it, look carefully round him in every direction, and return towards her with great stealth and an air of the most profound mystery.

The old lady was timorous—most old ladies are—and her first impression was that the bloated lad was about to do her some grievous bodily harm with the view of possessing himself of her loose coin. She would have cried for assistance, but age and infirmity had long ago deprived her of the power of screaming; she, therefore, watched his motions with feelings of intense horror which were in no degree diminished by his coming close up to her, and shouting in her ear in an agitated, and as it seemed to her, a threatening tone—

'Missus!'

Now it so happened that Mr. Jingle was walking in the garden close to the arbour at that moment. He too heard the shouts of 'Missus,' and stopped to hear more. There were three reasons for his doing so. In the first place, he was idle and curious; secondly, he was by no means scrupulous; thirdly, and lastly, he was concealed from view by some flowering shrubs. So there he stood, and there he listened.

'Missus!' shouted the fat boy.

'Well, Joe,' said the trembling old lady. 'I'm sure I have been a good mistress to you, Joe. You have invariably been treated very kindly. You have never had too much to do; and you have always had enough to eat.'

This last was an appeal to the fat boy's most sensitive feelings. He seemed touched, as he replied emphatically—'I knows I has.'

'Then what can you want to do now?' said the old lady, gaining courage.

'I wants to make your flesh creep,' replied the boy.

This sounded like a very bloodthirsty mode of showing one's gratitude; and as the old lady did not precisely understand the process by which such a result was to be attained, all her former horrors returned.

'What do you think I see in this very arbour last night?' inquired the boy.

'Bless us! What?' exclaimed the old lady, alarmed at the solemn manner of the corpulent youth.

'The strange gentleman—him as had his arm hurt—a-kissin' and huggin'—'

'Who, Joe? None of the servants, I hope.' 'Worser than that,' roared the fat boy, in the old lady's ear.

'Not one of my grandda'aters?'

'Worser than that.'

'Worse than that, Joe!' said the old lady, who had thought this the extreme limit of human atrocity. 'Who was it, Joe? I insist upon knowing.'

The fat boy looked cautiously round, and having concluded his survey, shouted in the old lady's ear—

'Miss Rachael.'

'What!' said the old lady, in a shrill tone. 'Speak louder.'

'Miss Rachael,' roared the fat boy.

'My da'ater!'

The train of nods which the fat boy gave by way of assent, communicated a blanc-mange like motion to his fat cheeks.

'And she suffered him!' exclaimed the old lady. A grin stole over the fat boy's features as he said—

'I see her a-kissin' of him agin.'

If Mr. Jingle, from his place of concealment, could have beheld the expression which the old lady's face assumed at this communication, the probability is that a sudden burst of laughter would have betrayed his close vicinity to the summer-house. He listened attentively. Fragments of angry sentences such as, 'Without my permission!'—'At her time of life'—'Miserable old 'ooman like me'—'Might have waited till I was dead,' and so forth, reached his ears; and then he heard the heels of the fat boy's boots crunching the gravel, as he retired and left the old lady alone.

It was a remarkable coincidence perhaps, but it was nevertheless a fact, that Mr. Jingle within five minutes of his arrival at Manor Farm on the preceding night, had inwardly resolved to lay siege to the heart of the spinster aunt, without delay. He had observation enough to see, that his off-hand manner was by no means disagreeable to the fair object of his attack; and he had more than a strong suspicion that she possessed that most desirable of all requisites, a small independence. The imperative necessity of ousting his rival by some means or other, flashed quickly upon him, and he immediately resolved to adopt certain proceedings tending to that end and object, without a moment's delay. Fielding tells us that man is fire, and woman tow, and the Prince of Darkness sets a light to 'em. Mr. Jingle knew that young men, to spinster aunts, are as lighted gas to gunpowder, and he determined to essay the effect of an explosion without loss of time.

Full of reflections upon this important decision, he crept from his place of concealment, and, under cover of the shrubs before mentioned, approached the house. Fortune seemed determined to favour his design. Mr. Tupman and the rest of the gentlemen left the garden by the side gate just as he obtained a view of it; and the young ladies, he knew, had walked out alone, soon after breakfast. The coast was clear.

The breakfast-parlour door was partially open. He peeped in. The spinster aunt was knitting. He coughed; she looked up and smiled.

Hesitation formed no part of Mr. Alfred Jingle's character. He laid his finger on his lips mysteriously, walked in, and closed the door.

'Miss Wardle,' said Mr. Jingle, with affected earnestness, 'forgive intrusion—short acquaintance—no time for ceremony—all discovered.'

'Sir!' said the spinster aunt, rather astonished by the unexpected apparition and somewhat doubtful of Mr. Jingle's sanity.

'Hush!' said Mr. Jingle, in a stage-whisper—'Large boy—dumpling face—round eyes—rascal!' Here he shook his head expressively, and the spinster aunt trembled with agitation.

'I presume you allude to Joseph, Sir?' said the lady, making an effort to appear composed.

'Yes, ma'am—damn that Joe!—treacherous dog, Joe—told the old lady—old lady furious—wild—raving—arbour—Tupman—kissing and hugging—all that sort of thing—eh, ma'am—eh?'

'Mr. Jingle,' said the spinster aunt, 'if you come here, Sir, to insult me—'

'Not at all—by no means,' replied the unabashed Mr. Jingle—'overheard the tale—came to warn you of your danger—tender my services—prevent the hubbub. Never mind—think it an insult—leave the room'—and he turned, as if to carry the threat into execution.

'What SHALL I do!' said the poor spinster, bursting into tears. 'My brother will be furious.'

'Of course he will,' said Mr. Jingle pausing—'outrageous.' 'Oh, Mr. Jingle, what CAN I say!' exclaimed the spinster aunt, in another flood of despair.

'Say he dreamt it,' replied Mr. Jingle coolly.

A ray of comfort darted across the mind of the spinster aunt at this suggestion. Mr. Jingle perceived it, and followed up his advantage.

'Pooh, pooh!—nothing more easy—blackguard boy—lovely woman—fat boy horsewhipped—you believed—end of the matter—all comfortable.'

Whether the probability of escaping from the consequences of this ill-timed discovery was delightful to the spinster's feelings, or whether the hearing herself described as a 'lovely woman' softened the asperity of her grief, we know not. She blushed slightly, and cast a grateful look on Mr. Jingle.

That insinuating gentleman sighed deeply, fixed his eyes on the spinster aunt's face for a couple of minutes, started melodramatically, and suddenly withdrew them.

'You seem unhappy, Mr. Jingle,' said the lady, in a plaintive voice. 'May I show my gratitude for your kind interference, by inquiring into the cause, with a view, if possible, to its removal?'

'Ha!' exclaimed Mr. Jingle, with another start—'removal! remove my unhappiness, and your love bestowed upon a man who is insensible to the blessing—who even now contemplates a design upon the affections of the niece of the creature who—but no; he is my friend; I will not expose his vices. Miss Wardle—farewell!' At the conclusion of this address, the most consecutive he was ever known to utter, Mr. Jingle applied to his eyes the remnant of a handkerchief before noticed, and turned towards the door.

'Stay, Mr. Jingle!' said the spinster aunt emphatically. 'You have made an allusion to Mr. Tupman—explain it.'

'Never!' exclaimed Jingle, with a professional (i.e., theatrical) air. 'Never!' and, by way of showing that he had no desire to be questioned further, he drew a chair close to that of the spinster aunt and sat down.

'Mr. Jingle,' said the aunt, 'I entreat—I implore you, if there is any dreadful mystery connected with Mr. Tupman, reveal it.'

'Can I,' said Mr. Jingle, fixing his eyes on the aunt's face—'can I see—lovely creature—sacrificed at the shrine—heartless avarice!' He appeared to be struggling with various conflicting emotions for a few seconds, and then said in a low voice—

'Tupman only wants your money.'

'The wretch!' exclaimed the spinster, with energetic indignation. (Mr. Jingle's doubts were resolved. She HAD money.)

'More than that,' said Jingle—'loves another.'

'Another!' ejaculated the spinster. 'Who?' 'Short girl—black eyes—niece Emily.'

There was a pause.

Now, if there was one individual in the whole world, of whom the spinster aunt entertained a mortal and deep-rooted jealousy, it was this identical niece. The colour rushed over her face and neck, and she tossed her head in silence with an air of ineffable contempt. At last, biting her thin lips, and bridling up, she said—

'It can't be. I won't believe it.'

'Watch 'em,' said Jingle.

'I will,' said the aunt.

'Watch his looks.'

'I will.'

'His whispers.'

'I will.'

'He'll sit next her at table.'

'Let him.'

'He'll flatter her.'

'Let him.'

'He'll pay her every possible attention.'

'Let him.'

'And he'll cut you.'

'Cut ME!' screamed the spinster aunt. 'HE cut ME; will he!' and she trembled with rage and disappointment.

'You will convince yourself?' said Jingle.

'I will.'

'You'll show your spirit?'

'I will.' 'You'll not have him afterwards?'

'Never.'

'You'll take somebody else?' 'Yes.'

'You shall.'

Mr. Jingle fell on his knees, remained thereupon for five minutes thereafter; and rose the accepted lover of the spinster aunt—conditionally upon Mr. Tupman's perjury being made clear and manifest.

The burden of proof lay with Mr. Alfred Jingle; and he produced his evidence that very day at dinner. The spinster aunt could hardly believe her eyes. Mr. Tracy Tupman was established at Emily's side, ogling, whispering, and smiling, in opposition to Mr. Snodgrass. Not a word, not a look, not a glance, did he bestow upon his heart's pride of the evening before.

'Damn that boy!' thought old Mr. Wardle to himself.—He had heard the story from his mother. 'Damn that boy! He must have been asleep. It's all imagination.'

'Traitor!' thought the spinster aunt. 'Dear Mr. Jingle was not deceiving me. Ugh! how I hate the wretch!'

The following conversation may serve to explain to our readers this apparently unaccountable alteration of deportment on the part of Mr. Tracy Tupman.

The time was evening; the scene the garden. There were two figures walking in a side path; one was rather short and stout; the other tall and slim. They were Mr. Tupman and Mr. Jingle. The stout figure commenced the dialogue.

'How did I do it?' he inquired.

'Splendid—capital—couldn't act better myself—you must repeat the part to-morrow—every evening till further notice.'

'Does Rachael still wish it?'

'Of course—she don't like it—but must be done—avert suspicion—afraid of her brother—says there's no help for it—only a few days more—when old folks blinded—crown your happiness.'

'Any message?'

'Love—best love—kindest regards—unalterable affection. Can I say anything for you?'

'My dear fellow,' replied the unsuspicious Mr. Tupman, fervently grasping his 'friend's' hand—'carry my best love—say how hard I find it to dissemble—say anything that's kind: but add how sensible I am of the necessity of the suggestion she made to me, through you, this morning. Say I applaud her wisdom and admire her discretion.' 'I will. Anything more?'

'Nothing, only add how ardently I long for the time when I may call her mine, and all dissimulation may be unnecessary.'

'Certainly, certainly. Anything more?'

'Oh, my friend!' said poor Mr. Tupman, again grasping the hand of his companion, 'receive my warmest thanks for your disinterested kindness; and forgive me if I have ever, even in thought, done you the injustice of supposing that you could stand in my way. My dear friend, can I ever repay you?'

'Don't talk of it,' replied Mr. Jingle. He stopped short, as if suddenly recollecting something, and said—'By the bye—can't spare ten pounds, can you?—very particular purpose—pay you in three days.'

'I dare say I can,' replied Mr. Tupman, in the fulness of his heart. 'Three days, you say?'

'Only three days—all over then—no more difficulties.' Mr. Tupman counted the money into his companion's hand, and he dropped it piece by piece into his pocket, as they walked towards the house.

'Be careful,' said Mr. Jingle—'not a look.'

'Not a wink,' said Mr. Tupman.

'Not a syllable.'

'Not a whisper.'

'All your attentions to the niece—rather rude, than otherwise, to the aunt—only way of deceiving the old ones.'

'I'll take care,' said Mr. Tupman aloud.

'And I'LL take care,' said Mr. Jingle internally; and they entered the house.

The scene of that afternoon was repeated that evening, and on the three afternoons and evenings next ensuing. On the fourth, the host was in high spirits, for he had satisfied himself that there was no ground for the charge against Mr. Tupman. So was Mr. Tupman, for Mr. Jingle had told him that his affair would soon be brought to a crisis. So was Mr. Pickwick, for he was seldom otherwise. So was not Mr. Snodgrass, for he had grown jealous of Mr. Tupman. So was the old lady, for she had been winning at whist. So were Mr. Jingle and Miss Wardle, for reasons of sufficient importance in this eventful history to be narrated in another chapter.

CHAPTER IX. A DISCOVERY AND A CHASE

The supper was ready laid, the chairs were drawn round the table, bottles, jugs, and glasses were arranged upon the sideboard, and everything betokened the approach of the most convivial period in the whole four-and-twenty hours.

'Where's Rachael?' said Mr. Wardle.

'Ay, and Jingle?' added Mr. Pickwick.

'Dear me,' said the host, 'I wonder I haven't missed him before. Why, I don't think I've heard his voice for two hours at least. Emily, my dear, ring the bell.'

The bell was rung, and the fat boy appeared.

'Where's Miss Rachael?' He couldn't say. 'Where's Mr. Jingle, then?' He didn't know. Everybody looked surprised. It was late—past eleven o'clock. Mr. Tupman laughed in his sleeve. They were loitering somewhere, talking about him. Ha, ha! capital notion that—funny.

'Never mind,' said Wardle, after a short pause. 'They'll turn up presently, I dare say. I never wait supper for anybody.'

'Excellent rule, that,' said Mr. Pickwick—'admirable.'

'Pray, sit down,' said the host.

'Certainly' said Mr. Pickwick; and down they sat.

There was a gigantic round of cold beef on the table, and Mr. Pickwick was supplied with a plentiful portion of it. He had raised his fork to his lips, and was on the very point of opening his mouth for the reception of a piece of beef, when the hum of many voices suddenly arose in the kitchen. He paused, and laid down his fork. Mr. Wardle paused too, and insensibly released his hold of the carving-knife, which remained inserted in the beef. He looked at Mr. Pickwick. Mr. Pickwick looked at him.

Heavy footsteps were heard in the passage; the parlour door was suddenly burst open; and the man who had cleaned Mr. Pickwick's boots on his first arrival, rushed into the room, followed by the fat boy and all the domestics. 'What the devil's the meaning of this?' exclaimed the host.

'The kitchen chimney ain't a-fire, is it, Emma?' inquired the old lady. 'Lor, grandma! No,' screamed both the young ladies.

'What's the matter?' roared the master of the house.

The man gasped for breath, and faintly ejaculated—

'They ha' gone, mas'r!—gone right clean off, Sir!' (At this juncture Mr. Tupman was observed to lay down his knife and fork, and to turn very pale.)

'Who's gone?' said Mr. Wardle fiercely.

'Mus'r Jingle and Miss Rachael, in a po'-chay, from Blue Lion, Muggleton. I was there; but I couldn't stop 'em; so I run off to tell 'ee.'

'I paid his expenses!' said Mr. Tupman, jumping up frantically. 'He's got ten pounds of mine!—stop him!—he's swindled me!—I won't bear it!—I'll have justice, Pickwick!—I won't stand it!' and with sundry incoherent exclamations of the like nature, the unhappy gentleman spun round and round the apartment, in a transport of frenzy.

'Lord preserve us!' ejaculated Mr. Pickwick, eyeing the extraordinary gestures of his friend with terrified surprise. 'He's gone mad! What shall we do?' 'Do!' said the stout old host, who regarded only the last words of the sentence. 'Put the horse in the gig! I'll get a chaise at the Lion, and follow 'em instantly. Where?'—he exclaimed, as the man ran out to execute the commission—'where's that villain, Joe?'

'Here I am! but I hain't a willin,' replied a voice. It was the fat boy's.

'Let me get at him, Pickwick,' cried Wardle, as he rushed at the ill-starred youth. 'He was bribed by that scoundrel, Jingle, to put me on a wrong scent, by telling a cock-and-bull story of my sister and your friend Tupman!' (Here Mr. Tupman sank into a chair.) 'Let me get at him!'

'Don't let him!' screamed all the women, above whose exclamations the blubbering of the fat boy was distinctly audible.

'I won't be held!' cried the old man. 'Mr. Winkle, take your hands off. Mr. Pickwick, let me go, sir!'

It was a beautiful sight, in that moment of turmoil and confusion, to behold the placid and philosophical expression of Mr. Pickwick's face, albeit somewhat flushed with exertion, as he stood with his arms firmly clasped round the extensive waist of their corpulent host, thus restraining the impetuosity of his passion, while the fat boy was scratched, and pulled, and pushed from the room by all the females congregated therein. He had no sooner released his hold, than the man entered to announce that the gig was ready.

'Don't let him go alone!' screamed the females. 'He'll kill somebody!'

'I'll go with him,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'You're a good fellow, Pickwick,' said the host, grasping his hand. 'Emma, give Mr. Pickwick a shawl to tie round his neck—make haste. Look after your grandmother, girls; she has fainted away. Now then, are you ready?'

Mr. Pickwick's mouth and chin having been hastily enveloped in a large shawl, his hat having been put on his head, and his greatcoat thrown over his arm, he replied in the affirmative.

They jumped into the gig. 'Give her her head, Tom,' cried the host; and away they went, down the narrow lanes; jolting in and out of the cart-ruts, and bumping up against the hedges on either side, as if they would go to pieces every moment.

'How much are they ahead?' shouted Wardle, as they drove up to the door of the Blue Lion, round which a little crowd had collected, late as it was.

'Not above three-quarters of an hour,' was everybody's reply. 'Chaise-and-four directly!—out with 'em! Put up the gig afterwards.'

'Now, boys!' cried the landlord—'chaise-and-four out—make haste—look alive there!'

Away ran the hostlers and the boys. The lanterns glimmered, as the men ran to and fro; the horses' hoofs clattered on the uneven paving of the yard; the chaise rumbled as it was drawn out of the coach-house; and all was noise and bustle.

'Now then!—is that chaise coming out to-night?' cried Wardle.

'Coming down the yard now, Sir,' replied the hostler.

Out came the chaise—in went the horses—on sprang the boys—in got the travellers.

'Mind—the seven-mile stage in less than half an hour!' shouted Wardle.

'Off with you!'

The boys applied whip and spur, the waiters shouted, the hostlers cheered, and away they went, fast and furiously.

'Pretty situation,' thought Mr. Pickwick, when he had had a moment's time for reflection. 'Pretty situation for the general chairman of the

Pickwick Club. Damp chaise—strange horses—fifteen miles an hour—and twelve o'clock at night!'

For the first three or four miles, not a word was spoken by either of the gentlemen, each being too much immersed in his own reflections to address any observations to his companion. When they had gone over that much ground, however, and the horses getting thoroughly warmed began to do their work in really good style, Mr. Pickwick became too much exhilarated with the rapidity of the motion, to remain any longer perfectly mute.

'We're sure to catch them, I think,' said he.

'Hope so,' replied his companion.

'Fine night,' said Mr. Pickwick, looking up at the moon, which was shining brightly.

'So much the worse,' returned Wardle; 'for they'll have had all the advantage of the moonlight to get the start of us, and we shall lose it. It will have gone down in another hour.'

'It will be rather unpleasant going at this rate in the dark, won't it?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'I dare say it will,' replied his friend dryly.

Mr. Pickwick's temporary excitement began to sober down a little, as he reflected upon the inconveniences and dangers of the expedition in which he had so thoughtlessly embarked. He was roused by a loud shouting of the post-boy on the leader.

'Yo-yo-yo-yo-yoe!' went the first boy.

'Yo-yo-yo-yoe!' went the second.

'Yo-yo-yo-yoe!' chimed in old Wardle himself, most lustily, with his head and half his body out of the coach window.

'Yo-yo-yo-yoe!' shouted Mr. Pickwick, taking up the burden of the cry, though he had not the slightest notion of its meaning or object. And amidst the yo-yoing of the whole four, the chaise stopped.

'What's the matter?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'There's a gate here,' replied old Wardle. 'We shall hear something of the fugitives.'

After a lapse of five minutes, consumed in incessant knocking and shouting, an old man in his shirt and trousers emerged from the turnpike-house, and opened the gate.

'How long is it since a post-chaise went through here?' inquired Mr. Wardle.

'How long?'

'Ah!'

'Why, I don't rightly know. It worn't a long time ago, nor it worn't a short time ago—just between the two, perhaps.'

'Has any chaise been by at all?'

'Oh, yes, there's been a Shay by.'

'How long ago, my friend,' interposed Mr. Pickwick; 'an hour?'

'Ah, I dare say it might be,' replied the man.

'Or two hours?' inquired the post—boy on the wheeler.

'Well, I shouldn't wonder if it was,' returned the old man doubtfully.

'Drive on, boys,' cried the testy old gentleman; 'don't waste any more time with that old idiot!'

'Idiot!' exclaimed the old man with a grin, as he stood in the middle of the road with the gate half-closed, watching the chaise which rapidly diminished in the increasing distance. 'No—not much o' that either; you've lost ten minutes here, and gone away as wise as you came, arter all. If every man on the line as has a guinea give him, earns it half as well, you won't catch t'other shay this side Mich'lmas, old short-and-fat.' And with another prolonged grin, the old man closed the gate, re-entered his house, and bolted the door after him.

Meanwhile the chaise proceeded, without any slackening of pace, towards the conclusion of the stage. The moon, as Wardle had foretold, was rapidly on the wane; large tiers of dark, heavy clouds, which had been gradually overspreading the sky for some time past, now formed one black mass overhead; and large drops of rain which pattered every now and then against the windows of the chaise, seemed to warn the travellers of the rapid approach of a stormy night. The wind, too, which was directly against them, swept in furious gusts down the narrow road, and howled dismally through the trees which skirted the pathway. Mr. Pickwick drew his coat closer about him, coiled himself more snugly up into the corner of the chaise, and fell into a sound sleep, from which he was only awakened by the stopping of the vehicle, the sound of the hostler's bell, and a loud cry of 'Horses on directly!'

But here another delay occurred. The boys were sleeping with such mysterious soundness, that it took five minutes a-piece to wake them. The hostler had somehow or other mislaid the key of the stable, and even when that was found, two sleepy helpers put the wrong harness on the wrong horses, and the whole process of harnessing had to be gone through afresh. Had Mr. Pickwick been alone, these multiplied obstacles would have completely put an end to the pursuit at once, but old Wardle was not to be so easily daunted; and he laid about him with such hearty good-will, cuffing this man, and pushing that; strapping a buckle here, and taking in a link there, that the chaise was ready in a much shorter time than could reasonably have been expected, under so many difficulties.

They resumed their journey; and certainly the prospect before them was by no means encouraging. The stage was fifteen miles long, the night was dark, the wind high, and the rain pouring in torrents. It was impossible to make any great way against such obstacles united; it was hard upon one o'clock already; and nearly two hours were consumed in getting to the end of the stage. Here, however, an object presented itself, which rekindled their hopes, and reanimated their drooping spirits.

'When did this chaise come in?' cried old Wardle, leaping out of his own vehicle, and pointing to one covered with wet mud, which was standing in the yard.

'Not a quarter of an hour ago, sir,' replied the hostler, to whom the question was addressed. 'Lady and gentleman?' inquired Wardle, almost breathless with impatience.

'Yes, sir.'

'Tall gentleman—dress-coat—long legs—thin body?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Elderly lady—thin face—rather skinny—eh?'

'Yes, sir.'

'By heavens, it's the couple, Pickwick,' exclaimed the old gentleman.

'Would have been here before,' said the hostler, 'but they broke a trace.'

''Tis them!' said Wardle, 'it is, by Jove! Chaise-and-four instantly! We shall catch them yet before they reach the next stage. A guinea a-piece, boys-be alive there—bustle about—there's good fellows.'

And with such admonitions as these, the old gentleman ran up and down the yard, and bustled to and fro, in a state of excitement which communicated itself to Mr. Pickwick also; and under the influence of which, that gentleman got himself into complicated entanglements with harness, and mixed up with horses and wheels of chaises, in the most surprising manner, firmly believing that by so doing he was materially forwarding the preparations for their resuming their journey.

'Jump in—jump in!' cried old Wardle, climbing into the chaise, pulling up the steps, and slamming the door after him. 'Come along! Make haste!' And before Mr. Pickwick knew precisely what he was about, he felt himself forced in at the other door, by one pull from the old gentleman and one push from the hostler; and off they were again.

'Ah! we are moving now,' said the old gentleman exultingly. They were indeed, as was sufficiently testified to Mr. Pickwick, by his constant collision either with the hard wood-work of the chaise, or the body of his companion.

'Hold up!' said the stout old Mr. Wardle, as Mr. Pickwick dived head foremost into his capacious waistcoat.

'I never did feel such a jolting in my life,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Never mind,' replied his companion, 'it will soon be over. Steady, steady.'

Mr. Pickwick planted himself into his own corner, as firmly as he could; and on whirled the chaise faster than ever.

They had travelled in this way about three miles, when Mr. Wardle, who had been looking out of the Window for two or three minutes, suddenly drew in his face, covered with splashes, and exclaimed in breathless eagerness—

'Here they are!'

Mr. Pickwick thrust his head out of his window. Yes: there was a chaise-and-four, a short distance before them, dashing along at full gallop.

'Go on, go on,' almost shrieked the old gentleman. 'Two guineas a-piece, boys—don't let 'em gain on us—keep it up—keep it up.'

The horses in the first chaise started on at their utmost speed; and those in Mr. Wardle's galloped furiously behind them.

'I see his head,' exclaimed the choleric old man; 'damme, I see his head.'

'So do I' said Mr. Pickwick; 'that's he.' Mr. Pickwick was not mistaken. The countenance of Mr. Jingle, completely coated with mud thrown up by the wheels, was plainly discernible at the window of his chaise; and the motion of his arm, which was waving violently towards the postillions, denoted that he was encouraging them to increased exertion.

The interest was intense. Fields, trees, and hedges, seemed to rush past them with the velocity of a whirlwind, so rapid was the pace at which they tore along. They were close by the side of the first chaise. Jingle's voice could be plainly heard, even above the din of the wheels, urging on the boys. Old Mr. Wardle foamed with rage and excitement. He roared out scoundrels and villains by the dozen, clenched his fist and shook it expressively at the object of his indignation; but Mr. Jingle only answered with a contemptuous smile, and replied to his menaces by a shout of triumph, as his horses, answering the increased application of whip and spur, broke into a faster gallop, and left the pursuers behind.

Mr. Pickwick had just drawn in his head, and Mr. Wardle, exhausted with shouting, had done the same, when a tremendous jolt threw them forward against the front of the vehicle. There was a sudden bump—a loud crash—away rolled a wheel, and over went the chaise.

After a very few seconds of bewilderment and confusion, in which nothing but the plunging of horses, and breaking of glass could be made out, Mr. Pickwick felt himself violently pulled out from among the ruins of the chaise; and as soon as he had gained his feet, extricated his head from the skirts of his greatcoat, which materially impeded the usefulness of his spectacles, the full disaster of the case met his view.

Old Mr. Wardle without a hat, and his clothes torn in several places, stood by his side, and the fragments of the chaise lay scattered at their feet. The post-boys, who had succeeded in cutting the traces, were standing, disfigured with mud and disordered by hard riding, by the horses' heads. About a hundred yards in advance was the other chaise, which had pulled up on hearing the crash. The postillions, each with a broad grin convulsing his countenance, were viewing the adverse party from their saddles, and Mr. Jingle was contemplating the wreck from the coach window, with evident satisfaction. The day was just breaking, and the whole scene was rendered perfectly visible by the grey light of the morning.

'Hollo!' shouted the shameless Jingle, 'anybody damaged?—elderly gentlemen—no light weights—dangerous work—very.'

'You're a rascal,' roared Wardle.

'Ha! ha!' replied Jingle; and then he added, with a knowing wink, and a jerk of the thumb towards the interior of the chaise—'I say—she's very well—desires her compliments—begs you won't trouble yourself—love to TUPPY—won't you get up behind?—drive on, boys.'

The postillions resumed their proper attitudes, and away rattled the chaise, Mr. Jingle fluttering in derision a white handkerchief from the coach window.

Nothing in the whole adventure, not even the upset, had disturbed the calm and equable current of Mr. Pickwick's temper. The villainy, however, which could first borrow money of his faithful follower, and then abbreviate his name to 'Tuppy,' was more than he could patiently bear. He drew his breath hard, and coloured up to the very tips of his spectacles, as he said, slowly and emphatically—

'If ever I meet that man again, I'll—'

'Yes, yes,' interrupted Wardle, 'that's all very well; but while we stand talking here, they'll get their licence, and be married in London.'

Mr. Pickwick paused, bottled up his vengeance, and corked it down. 'How far is it to the next stage?' inquired Mr. Wardle, of one of the boys.

'Six mile, ain't it, Tom?'

'Rayther better.'

'Rayther better nor six mile, Sir.'

'Can't be helped,' said Wardle, 'we must walk it, Pickwick.'

'No help for it,' replied that truly great man.

So sending forward one of the boys on horseback, to procure a fresh chaise and horses, and leaving the other behind to take care of the broken one, Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Wardle set manfully forward on the walk, first tying their shawls round their necks, and slouching down their hats to escape as much as possible from the deluge of rain, which after a slight cessation had again begun to pour heavily down.

CHAPTER X. CLEARING UP ALL DOUBTS (IF ANY EXISTED) OF THE

DISINTERESTEDNESS OF Mr. A. JINGLE'S CHARACTER

There are in London several old inns, once the headquarters of celebrated coaches in the days when coaches performed their journeys in a graver and more solemn manner than they do in these times; but which have now degenerated into little more than the abiding and booking-places of country wagons. The reader would look in vain for any of these ancient hostelries, among the Golden Crosses and Bull and Mouths, which rear their stately fronts in the improved streets of London. If he would light upon any of these old places, he must direct his steps to the obscurer quarters of the town, and there in some secluded nooks he will find several, still standing with a kind of gloomy sturdiness, amidst the modern innovations which surround them.

In the Borough especially, there still remain some half-dozen old inns, which have preserved their external features unchanged, and which have escaped alike the rage for public improvement and the encroachments of private speculation. Great, rambling queer old places they are, with galleries, and passages, and staircases, wide enough and antiquated enough to furnish materials for a hundred ghost stories, supposing we should ever be reduced to the lamentable necessity of inventing any, and that the world should exist long enough to exhaust the innumerable veracious legends connected with old London Bridge, and its adjacent neighbourhood on the Surrey side.

It was in the yard of one of these inns—of no less celebrated a one than the White Hart—that a man was busily employed in brushing the dirt off a pair of boots, early on the morning succeeding the events narrated in the last chapter. He was habited in a coarse, striped waistcoat, with black calico sleeves, and blue glass buttons; drab breeches and leggings. A bright red handkerchief was wound in a very loose and unstudied style round his neck, and an old white hat was carelessly thrown on one side of his head. There were two rows of boots before him, one cleaned and the other dirty, and at every addition he made to the clean row, he paused from his work, and contemplated its results with evident satisfaction.

The yard presented none of that bustle and activity which are the usual characteristics of a large coach inn. Three or four lumbering wagons, each with a pile of goods beneath its ample canopy, about the height of the second-floor window of an ordinary house, were stowed away beneath a lofty roof which extended over one end of the yard; and another, which was probably to commence its journey that morning, was drawn out into the open space. A double tier of bedroom galleries, with old Clumsy balustrades, ran round two sides of the straggling area, and a double row of bells to correspond, sheltered from the weather by a little sloping roof, hung over the door leading to the bar and coffee-room. Two or three gigs and chaise-carts were wheeled up under different little sheds and pent-houses; and the occasional heavy tread of a cart-horse, or rattling of a chain at the farther end of the yard, announced to anybody who cared about the matter, that the stable lay in that direction. When we add that a few boys in smock-frocks were lying asleep on heavy packages, wool-packs, and other articles that were scattered about on heaps of straw, we have described as fully as need be the general appearance of the yard of the White Hart Inn, High Street, Borough, on the particular morning in question.

A loud ringing of one of the bells was followed by the appearance of a smart chambermaid in the upper sleeping gallery, who, after tapping at one of the doors, and receiving a request from within, called over the balustrades—'Sam!'

'Hollo,' replied the man with the white hat.

'Number twenty-two wants his boots.'

'Ask number twenty-two, vether he'll have 'em now, or vait till he gets 'em,' was the reply.

'Come, don't be a fool, Sam,' said the girl coaxingly, 'the gentleman wants his boots directly.'

'Well, you ARE a nice young 'ooman for a musical party, you are,' said the boot-cleaner. 'Look at these here boots—eleven pair o' boots; and one shoe as belongs to number six, with the wooden leg. The eleven boots is to be called at half-past eight and the shoe at nine. Who's number twenty-two, that's to put all the others out? No, no; reg'lar rotation, as Jack Ketch said, ven he tied the men up. Sorry to keep you a-waitin', Sir, but I'll attend to you directly.'

Saying which, the man in the white hat set to work upon a top-boot with increased assiduity.

There was another loud ring; and the bustling old landlady of the White Hart made her appearance in the opposite gallery.

'Sam,' cried the landlady, 'where's that lazy, idle—why, Sam—oh, there you are; why don't you answer?'

'Vouldn't be gen-teel to answer, till you'd done talking,' replied Sam gruffly.

'Here, clean these shoes for number seventeen directly, and take 'em to private sitting-room, number five, first floor.'

The landlady flung a pair of lady's shoes into the yard, and bustled away.

'Number five,' said Sam, as he picked up the shoes, and taking a piece of chalk from his pocket, made a memorandum of their destination on the soles—'Lady's shoes and private sittin'-room! I suppose she didn't come in the vagin.'

'She came in early this morning,' cried the girl, who was still leaning over the railing of the gallery, 'with a gentleman in a hackney-coach, and it's him as wants his boots, and you'd better do 'em, that's all about it.'

'Vy didn't you say so before,' said Sam, with great indignation, singling out the boots in question from the heap before him. 'For all I know'd he was one o' the regular threepennies. Private room! and a lady too! If he's anything of a gen'l'm'n, he's vurth a shillin' a day, let alone the arrands.' Stimulated by this inspiring reflection, Mr. Samuel brushed away with such hearty good-will, that in a few minutes the boots and shoes, with a polish which would have struck envy to the soul of the amiable Mr. Warren (for they used Day & Martin at the White Hart), had arrived at the door of number five.

'Come in,' said a man's voice, in reply to Sam's rap at the door. Sam made his best bow, and stepped into the presence of a lady and gentleman seated at breakfast. Having officiously deposited the gentleman's boots right and left at his feet, and the lady's shoes right and left at hers, he backed towards the door.

'Boots,' said the gentleman.

'Sir,' said Sam, closing the door, and keeping his hand on the knob of the lock. 'Do you know—what's a-name—Doctors' Commons?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'Where is it?'

'Paul's Churchyard, Sir; low archway on the carriage side, bookseller's at one corner, hot-el on the other, and two porters in the middle as touts for licences.'

'Touts for licences!' said the gentleman.

'Touts for licences,' replied Sam. 'Two coves in vhite aprons—touches their hats ven you walk in—"Licence, Sir, licence?" Queer sort, them, and their mas'rs, too, sir—Old Bailey Proctors—and no mistake.'

'What do they do?' inquired the gentleman.

'Do! You, Sir! That ain't the worst on it, neither. They puts things into old gen'l'm'n's heads as they never dreamed of. My father, Sir, wos a coachman. A widower he wos, and fat enough for anything—uncommon fat, to be sure. His missus dies, and leaves him four hundred pound. Down he goes to the Commons, to see the lawyer and draw the blunt—very smart—top boots on—nosegay in his button-hole—broad-brimmed tile—green shawl—quite the gen'l'm'n. Goes through the archvay, thinking how he should inwest the money—up comes the touter, touches his hat—"Licence, Sir, licence?"—"What's that?" says my father.—"Licence, Sir," says he.—"What licence?" says my father.—"Marriage licence," says the touter.—"Dash my veskit," says my father, "I never thought o' that."—"I think you wants one, Sir," says the touter. My father pulls up, and thinks a bit—"No," says he, "damme, I'm too old, b'sides, I'm a many sizes too large," says he.—"Not a bit on it, Sir," says the touter.—"Think not?" says my father.—"I'm sure not," says he; "we married a gen'l'm'n twice your size, last Monday."—"Did you, though?" said my father.—"To be sure, we did," says the touter, "you're a babby to him—this way, sir—this way!"—and sure enough my father walks arter him, like a tame monkey behind a horgan, into a little back office, vere a teller sat among dirty papers, and tin boxes, making believe he was busy. "Pray take a seat, vile I makes out the affidavit, Sir," says the lawyer.—"Thank'ee, Sir," says my father, and down he sat, and stared with all his eyes, and his mouth vide open, at the names on the boxes. "What's your name, Sir," says the lawyer.—"Tony Weller," says my father.—"Parish?" says the lawyer. "Belle Savage," says my father; for he stopped there wen he drove up, and he know'd nothing about parishes, he didn't.—"And what's the lady's name?" says the lawyer. My father was struck all of a heap. "Blessed if I know," says he.—"Not know!" says the lawyer.—"No more nor you do," says my father; "can't I put that in arterwards?"—"Impossible!" says the lawyer.—"Wery well," says my father, after he'd thought a moment, "put down Mrs. Clarke."—"What Clarke?" says the lawyer, dipping his pen in the ink.—"Susan Clarke, Markis o' Granby, Dorking," says my father; "she'll have me, if I ask. I dessay—I never said nothing to her, but she'll have me, I know." The licence was made out, and she DID have him, and what's more she's got him now; and I never had any of the four hundred pound, worse luck. Beg your pardon, sir,' said Sam, when he had concluded, 'but wen I gets on this here grievance, I runs on like a new barrow with the wheel greased.' Having said which, and having paused for an instant to see whether he was wanted for anything more, Sam left the room.

'Half-past nine—just the time—off at once;' said the gentleman, whom we need hardly introduce as Mr. Jingle.

'Time—for what?' said the spinster aunt coquettishly.

'Licence, dearest of angels—give notice at the church—call you mine, to-morrow'—said Mr. Jingle, and he squeezed the spinster aunt's hand.

'The licence!' said Rachael, blushing.

'The licence,' repeated Mr. Jingle—

'In hurry, post-haste for a licence,
In hurry, ding dong I come back.'

'How you run on,' said Rachael.

'Run on—nothing to the hours, days, weeks, months, years, when we're united—run on—they'll fly on—bolt—mizzle—steam-engine—thousand-horse power—nothing to it.'

'Can't—can't we be married before to-morrow morning?' inquired Rachael. 'Impossible—can't be—notice at the church—leave the licence to-day—ceremony come off to-morrow.' 'I am so terrified, lest my brother should discover us!' said Rachael.

'Discover—nonsense—too much shaken by the break-down—besides—extreme caution—gave up the post-chaise—walked on—took a hackney-coach—came to the Borough—last place in the world that he'd look in—ha! ha!—capital notion that—very.'

'Don't be long,' said the spinster affectionately, as Mr. Jingle stuck the pinched-up hat on his head.

'Long away from you?—Cruel charmer;' and Mr. Jingle skipped playfully up to the spinster aunt, imprinted a chaste kiss upon her lips, and danced out of the room.

'Dear man!' said the spinster, as the door closed after him.

'Rum old girl,' said Mr. Jingle, as he walked down the passage.

It is painful to reflect upon the perfidy of our species; and we will not, therefore, pursue the thread of Mr. Jingle's meditations, as he wended his way to Doctors' Commons. It will be sufficient for our purpose to relate, that escaping the snares of the dragons in white aprons, who guard the entrance to that enchanted region, he reached the vicar-general's office in safety and having procured a highly flattering address on parchment, from the Archbishop of Canterbury, to his 'trusty and well-beloved Alfred Jingle and Rachael Wardle, greeting,' he carefully deposited the mystic document in his pocket, and retraced his steps in triumph to the Borough.

He was yet on his way to the White Hart, when two plump gentleman and one thin one entered the yard, and looked round in search of some authorised person of whom they could make a few inquiries. Mr. Samuel Weller happened to be at that moment engaged in burnishing a pair of painted tops, the personal property of a farmer who was refreshing himself with a slight lunch of two or three pounds of cold beef and a pot or two of porter, after the fatigues of the Borough market; and to him the thin gentleman straightway advanced.

'My friend,' said the thin gentleman.

'You're one o' the adwice gratis order,' thought Sam, 'or you wouldn't be so wery fond o' me all at once.' But he only said—'Well, Sir.'

'My friend,' said the thin gentleman, with a conciliatory hem—'have you got many people stopping here now? Pretty busy. Eh?'

Sam stole a look at the inquirer. He was a little high-dried man, with a dark squeezed-up face, and small, restless, black eyes, that kept winking and twinkling on each side of his little inquisitive nose, as if they were playing a perpetual game of peep-bo with that feature. He was dressed all in black, with boots as shiny as his eyes, a low white neckcloth, and a clean shirt with a frill to it. A gold watch-chain, and seals, depended from his fob. He carried his black kid gloves IN his hands, and not ON them; and as he spoke, thrust his wrists beneath his coat tails, with the air of a man who was in the habit of propounding some regular posers.

'Pretty busy, eh?' said the little man.

'Oh, wery well, Sir,' replied Sam, 'we shan't be bankrupts, and we shan't make our fort'ns. We eats our biled mutton without capers, and don't care for horse-radish ven ve can get beef.'

'Ah,' said the little man, 'you're a wag, ain't you?'

'My eldest brother was troubled with that complaint,' said Sam; 'it may be catching—I used to sleep with him.'

'This is a curious old house of yours,' said the little man, looking round him.

'If you'd sent word you was a-coming, we'd ha' had it repaired;' replied the imperturbable Sam.

The little man seemed rather baffled by these several repulses, and a short consultation took place between him and the two plump gentlemen. At its conclusion, the little man took a pinch of snuff from an oblong silver box, and was apparently on the point of renewing the conversation, when one of the plump gentlemen, who in addition to a benevolent countenance, possessed a pair of spectacles, and a pair of black gaiters, interfered—

'The fact of the matter is,' said the benevolent gentleman, 'that my friend here (pointing to the other plump gentleman) will give you half a guinea, if you'll answer one or two—'

'Now, my dear sir—my dear Sir,' said the little man, 'pray, allow me—my dear Sir, the very first principle to be observed in these cases, is this: if you place the matter in the hands of a professional man, you must in no way interfere in the progress of the business; you must repose implicit confidence in him. Really, Mr.—' He turned to the other plump gentleman, and said, 'I forget your friend's name.'

'Pickwick,' said Mr. Wardle, for it was no other than that jolly personage.

'Ah, Pickwick—really Mr. Pickwick, my dear Sir, excuse me—I shall be happy to receive any private suggestions of yours, as AMICUS CURIAE, but you must see the impropriety of your interfering with my conduct in this case, with such an AD CAPTANDUM argument as the offer of half a guinea. Really, my dear Sir, really;' and the little man took an argumentative pinch of snuff, and looked very profound.

'My only wish, Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'was to bring this very unpleasant matter to as speedy a close as possible.'

'Quite right—quite right,' said the little man.

'With which view,' continued Mr. Pickwick, 'I made use of the argument which my experience of men has taught me is the most likely to succeed in any case.'

'Ay, ay,' said the little man, 'very good, very good, indeed; but you should have suggested it to me. My dear sir, I'm quite certain you cannot be ignorant of the extent of confidence which must be placed in professional men. If any authority can be necessary on such a point, my dear sir, let me refer you to the well-known case in Barnwell and—'

'Never mind George Barnwell,' interrupted Sam, who had remained a wondering listener during this short colloquy; 'everybody knows what sort of a case his was, tho' it's always been my opinion, mind you, that the young 'ooman deserved scragging a precious sight more than he did. Hows'ever, that's neither here nor there. You want me to accept of half a guinea. Wery well, I'm agreeable: I can't say no fairer than that, can I, sir?' (Mr. Pickwick smiled.) Then the next question is, what the devil do you want with me, as the man said, wen he see the ghost?'

'We want to know—' said Mr. Wardle.

'Now, my dear sir—my dear sir,' interposed the busy little man.

Mr. Wardle shrugged his shoulders, and was silent.

'We want to know,' said the little man solemnly; 'and we ask the question of you, in order that we may not awaken apprehensions inside—we want to know who you've got in this house at present?'

'Who there is in the house!' said Sam, in whose mind the inmates were always represented by that particular article of their costume, which came under his immediate superintendence. 'There's a vooden leg in number six; there's a pair of Hessians in thirteen; there's two pair of halves in the commercial; there's these here painted tops in the snuggery inside the bar; and five more tops in the coffee-room.'

'Nothing more?' said the little man.

'Stop a bit,' replied Sam, suddenly recollecting himself. 'Yes; there's a pair of Vellingtons a good deal worn, and a pair o' lady's shoes, in number five.'

'What sort of shoes?' hastily inquired Wardle, who, together with Mr. Pickwick, had been lost in bewilderment at the singular catalogue of visitors.

'Country make,' replied Sam.

'Any maker's name?'

'Brown.'

'Where of?'

'Muggleton.

'It is them,' exclaimed Wardle. 'By heavens, we've found them.'

'Hush!' said Sam. 'The Vellingtons has gone to Doctors' Commons.'

'No,' said the little man.

'Yes, for a licence.'

'We're in time,' exclaimed Wardle. 'Show us the room; not a moment is to be lost.'

'Pray, my dear sir—pray,' said the little man; 'caution, caution.' He drew from his pocket a red silk purse, and looked very hard at Sam as he drew out a sovereign.

Sam grinned expressively.

'Show us into the room at once, without announcing us,' said the little man, 'and it's yours.'

Sam threw the painted tops into a corner, and led the way through a dark passage, and up a wide staircase. He paused at the end of a second passage, and held out his hand.

'Here it is,' whispered the attorney, as he deposited the money on the hand of their guide.

The man stepped forward for a few paces, followed by the two friends and their legal adviser. He stopped at a door.

'Is this the room?' murmured the little gentleman.

Sam nodded assent.

Old Wardle opened the door; and the whole three walked into the room just as Mr. Jingle, who had that moment returned, had produced the licence to the spinster aunt.

The spinster uttered a loud shriek, and throwing herself into a chair, covered her face with her hands. Mr. Jingle crumpled up the licence, and thrust it into his coat pocket. The unwelcome visitors advanced into the middle of the room. 'You—you are a nice rascal, arn't you?' exclaimed Wardle, breathless with passion.

'My dear Sir, my dear sir,' said the little man, laying his hat on the table, 'pray, consider—pray. Defamation of character: action for damages. Calm yourself, my dear sir, pray—'

'How dare you drag my sister from my house?' said the old man.

Ay—ay—very good,' said the little gentleman, 'you may ask that. How dare you, sir?—eh, sir?'

'Who the devil are you?' inquired Mr. Jingle, in so fierce a tone, that the little gentleman involuntarily fell back a step or two.

'Who is he, you scoundrel,' interposed Wardle. 'He's my lawyer, Mr. Perker, of Gray's Inn. Perker, I'll have this fellow prosecuted—indicted—I'll—I'll—I'll ruin him. And you,' continued Mr. Wardle, turning abruptly round to his sister—'you, Rachael, at a time of life when you ought to know better, what do you mean by running away with a vagabond, disgracing your family, and making yourself miserable? Get on your bonnet and come back. Call a hackney-coach there, directly, and bring this lady's bill, d'ye hear—d'ye hear?' 'Cert'nly, Sir,' replied Sam, who had answered Wardle's violent ringing of the bell with a degree of celerity which must have appeared marvellous to anybody who didn't know that his eye had been applied to the outside of the keyhole during the whole interview.

'Get on your bonnet,' repeated Wardle.

'Do nothing of the kind,' said Jingle. 'Leave the room, Sir—no business here—lady's free to act as she pleases—more than one-and-twenty.'

'More than one-and-twenty!' ejaculated Wardle contemptuously. 'More than one-and-forty!'

'I ain't,' said the spinster aunt, her indignation getting the better of her determination to faint.

'You are,' replied Wardle; 'you're fifty if you're an hour.'

Here the spinster aunt uttered a loud shriek, and became senseless.

'A glass of water,' said the humane Mr. Pickwick, summoning the landlady.

'A glass of water!' said the passionate Wardle. 'Bring a bucket, and throw it all over her; it'll do her good, and she richly deserves it.'

'Ugh, you brute!' ejaculated the kind-hearted landlady. 'Poor dear.' And with sundry ejaculations of 'Come now, there's a dear—drink a little of this—it'll do you good—don't give way so—there's a love,' etc. etc., the landlady, assisted by a chambermaid, proceeded to vinegar the forehead, beat the hands, titillate the nose, and unlace the stays of the spinster aunt, and to administer such other restoratives as are usually applied by compassionate females to ladies who are endeavouring to ferment themselves into hysterics.

'Coach is ready, Sir,' said Sam, appearing at the door.

'Come along,' cried Wardle. 'I'll carry her downstairs.'

At this proposition, the hysterics came on with redoubled violence. The landlady was about to enter a very violent protest against this proceeding, and had already given vent to an indignant inquiry whether Mr. Wardle considered himself a lord of the creation, when Mr. Jingle interposed—

'Boots,' said he, 'get me an officer.'

'Stay, stay,' said little Mr. Perker. 'Consider, Sir, consider.'

'I'll not consider,' replied Jingle. 'She's her own mistress—see who dares to take her away—unless she wishes it.'

'I WON'T be taken away,' murmured the spinster aunt. 'I DON'T wish it.' (Here there was a frightful relapse.)

'My dear Sir,' said the little man, in a low tone, taking Mr. Wardle and Mr. Pickwick apart—'my dear Sir, we're in a very awkward situation. It's a distressing case—very; I never knew one more so; but really, my dear sir, really we have no power to control this lady's actions. I warned you before we came, my dear sir, that there was nothing to look to but a compromise.'

There was a short pause.

'What kind of compromise would you recommend?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Why, my dear Sir, our friend's in an unpleasant position—very much so. We must be content to suffer some pecuniary loss.'

'I'll suffer any, rather than submit to this disgrace, and let her, fool as she is, be made miserable for life,' said Wardle.

'I rather think it can be done,' said the bustling little man. 'Mr. Jingle, will you step with us into the next room for a moment?'

Mr. Jingle assented, and the quartette walked into an empty apartment.

'Now, sir,' said the little man, as he carefully closed the door, 'is there no way of accommodating this matter—step this way, sir, for a moment—into this window, Sir, where we can be alone—there, sir, there, pray sit down, sir. Now, my dear Sir, between you and I, we know very well, my dear Sir, that you have run off with this lady for the sake of her money. Don't frown, Sir, don't frown; I say, between you and I, WE know it. We are both men of the world, and WE know very well that our friends here, are not—eh?'

Mr. Jingle's face gradually relaxed; and something distantly resembling a wink quivered for an instant in his left eye.

'Very good, very good,' said the little man, observing the impression he had made. 'Now, the fact is, that beyond a few hundreds, the lady has little or nothing till the death of her mother—fine old lady, my dear Sir.'

'OLD,' said Mr. Jingle briefly but emphatically.

'Why, yes,' said the attorney, with a slight cough. 'You are right, my dear Sir, she is rather old. She comes of an old family though, my dear Sir; old in every sense of the word. The founder of that family came into Kent when Julius Caesar invaded Britain;—only one member of it, since, who hasn't lived to eighty-five, and he was beheaded by one of the Henrys. The old lady is not seventy-three now, my dear Sir.' The little man paused, and took a pinch of snuff.

'Well,' cried Mr. Jingle.

'Well, my dear sir—you don't take snuff!—ah! so much the better—expensive habit—well, my dear Sir, you're a fine young man, man of the world—able to push your fortune, if you had capital, eh?'

'Well,' said Mr. Jingle again.

'Do you comprehend me?'

'Not quite.'

'Don't you think—now, my dear Sir, I put it to you don't you think—that fifty pounds and liberty would be better than Miss Wardle and expectation?'

'Won't do—not half enough!' said Mr. Jingle, rising.

'Nay, nay, my dear Sir,' remonstrated the little attorney, seizing him by the button. 'Good round sum—a man like you could treble it in no time—great deal to be done with fifty pounds, my dear Sir.'

'More to be done with a hundred and fifty,' replied Mr. Jingle coolly.

'Well, my dear Sir, we won't waste time in splitting straws,' resumed the little man, 'say—say—seventy.' 'Won't do,' said Mr. Jingle.

'Don't go away, my dear sir—pray don't hurry,' said the little man. 'Eighty; come: I'll write you a cheque at once.'

'Won't do,' said Mr. Jingle.

'Well, my dear Sir, well,' said the little man, still detaining him; 'just tell me what WILL do.'

'Expensive affair,' said Mr. Jingle. 'Money out of pocket—posting, nine pounds; licence, three—that's twelve—compensation, a hundred—hundred and twelve—breach of honour—and loss of the lady—'

'Yes, my dear Sir, yes,' said the little man, with a knowing look, 'never mind the last two items. That's a hundred and twelve—say a hundred—come.'

'And twenty,' said Mr. Jingle.

'Come, come, I'll write you a cheque,' said the little man; and down he sat at the table for that purpose.

'I'll make it payable the day after to-morrow,' said the little man, with a look towards Mr. Wardle; 'and we can get the lady away, meanwhile.' Mr. Wardle sullenly nodded assent.

'A hundred,' said the little man.

'And twenty,' said Mr. Jingle.

'My dear Sir,' remonstrated the little man.

'Give it him,' interposed Mr. Wardle, 'and let him go.'

The cheque was written by the little gentleman, and pocketed by Mr. Jingle.

'Now, leave this house instantly!' said Wardle, starting up.

'My dear Sir,' urged the little man.

'And mind,' said Mr. Wardle, 'that nothing should have induced me to make this compromise—not even a regard for my family—if I had not known that the moment you got any money in that pocket of yours, you'd go to the devil faster, if possible, than you would without it—'

'My dear sir,' urged the little man again.

'Be quiet, Perker,' resumed Wardle. 'Leave the room, Sir.'

'Off directly,' said the unabashed Jingle. 'Bye bye, Pickwick.' If any dispassionate spectator could have beheld the countenance of the illustrious man, whose name forms the leading feature of the title of this work, during the latter part of this conversation, he would have been almost induced to wonder that the indignant fire which flashed from his eyes did not melt the glasses of his spectacles—so majestic was his wrath. His nostrils dilated, and his fists clenched involuntarily, as he heard himself addressed by the villain. But he restrained himself again—he did not pulverise him.

'Here,' continued the hardened traitor, tossing the licence at Mr. Pickwick's feet; 'get the name altered—take home the lady—do for Tuppy.'

Mr. Pickwick was a philosopher, but philosophers are only men in armour, after all. The shaft had reached him, penetrated through his philosophical harness, to his very heart. In the frenzy of his rage, he hurled the inkstand madly forward, and followed it up himself. But Mr. Jingle had disappeared, and he found himself caught in the arms of Sam.

'Hollo,' said that eccentric functionary, 'furniter's cheap where you come from, Sir. Self-acting ink, that 'ere; it's wrote your mark upon the wall, old gen'l'm'n. Hold still, Sir; wot's the use o' runnin' arter a man as has made his lucky, and got to t'other end of the Borough by this time?'

Mr. Pickwick's mind, like those of all truly great men, was open to conviction. He was a quick and powerful reasoner; and a moment's reflection sufficed to remind him of the impotency of his rage. It subsided as quickly as it had been roused. He panted for breath, and looked benignantly round upon his friends.

Shall we tell the lamentations that ensued when Miss Wardle found herself deserted by the faithless Jingle? Shall we extract Mr. Pickwick's masterly description of that heartrending scene? His note-book, blotted with the tears of sympathising humanity, lies open before us; one word, and it is in the printer's hands. But, no! we will be resolute! We will not wring the public bosom, with the delineation of such suffering!

Slowly and sadly did the two friends and the deserted lady return next day in the Muggleton heavy coach. Dimly and darkly had the sombre shadows of a summer's night fallen upon all around, when they again reached Dingley Dell, and stood within the entrance to Manor Farm.

CHAPTER XI. INVOLVING ANOTHER JOURNEY, AND AN ANTIQUARIAN DISCOVERY;

RECORDING Mr. PICKWICK'S DETERMINATION TO BE PRESENT AT AN ELECTION; AND CONTAINING A MANUSCRIPT OF THE OLD CLERGYMAN'S

A night of quiet and repose in the profound silence of Dingley Dell, and an hour's breathing of its fresh and fragrant air on the ensuing morning, completely recovered Mr. Pickwick from the effects of his late fatigue of body and anxiety of mind. That illustrious man had been separated from his friends and fol lowers for two whole days; and it was with a degree of pleasure and delight, which no common imagination can adequately conceive, that he stepped forward to greet Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass, as he encountered those gentlemen on his return from his early walk. The pleasure was mutual; for who could ever gaze on Mr. Pickwick's beaming face without experiencing the sensation? But still a cloud seemed to hang over his companions which that great man could not but be sensible of, and was wholly at a loss to account for. There was a mysterious air about them both, as unusual as it was alarming.

'And how,' said Mr. Pickwick, when he had grasped his followers by the hand, and exchanged warm salutations of welcome—'how is Tupman?'

Mr. Winkle, to whom the question was more peculiarly addressed, made no reply. He turned away his head, and appeared absorbed in melancholy reflection.

'Snodgrass,' said Mr. Pickwick earnestly, 'how is our friend—he is not ill?'

'No,' replied Mr. Snodgrass; and a tear trembled on his sentimental eyelid, like a rain-drop on a window-frame-'no; he is not ill.'

Mr. Pickwick stopped, and gazed on each of his friends in turn.

'Winkle—Snodgrass,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'what does this mean? Where is our friend? What has happened? Speak—I conjure, I entreat—nay, I command you, speak.'

There was a solemnity—a dignity—in Mr. Pickwick's manner, not to be withstood.

'He is gone,' said Mr. Snodgrass.

'Gone!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick. 'Gone!'

'Gone,' repeated Mr. Snodgrass.

'Where!' ejaculated Mr. Pickwick.

'We can only guess, from that communication,' replied Mr. Snodgrass, taking a letter from his pocket, and placing it in his friend's hand. 'Yesterday morning, when a letter was received from Mr. Wardle, stating that you would be home with his sister at night, the melancholy which had hung over our friend during the whole of the previous day, was observed to increase. He shortly afterwards disappeared: he was missing during the whole day, and in the evening this letter was brought by the hostler from the Crown, at Muggleton. It had been left in his charge in the morning, with a strict injunction that it should not be delivered until night.'

Mr. Pickwick opened the epistle. It was in his friend's hand-writing, and these were its contents:—

'MY DEAR PICKWICK,—YOU, my dear friend, are placed far beyond the reach of many mortal frailties and weaknesses which ordinary people cannot overcome. You do not know what it is, at one blow, to be deserted by a lovely and fascinating creature, and to fall a victim to the artifices of a villain, who had the grin of cunning beneath the mask of friendship. I hope you never may.

'Any letter addressed to me at the Leather Bottle, Cobham, Kent, will be forwarded—supposing I still exist. I hasten from the sight of that world, which has become odious to me. Should I hasten from it altogether, pity—forgive me. Life, my dear Pickwick, has become insupportable to me. The spirit which burns within us, is a porter's knot, on which to rest the heavy load of worldly cares and troubles; and when that spirit fails us, the burden is too heavy to be borne. We sink beneath it. You may tell Rachael—Ah, that name!—

'TRACY TupmAN.'

'We must leave this place directly,' said Mr. Pickwick, as he refolded the note. 'It would not have been decent for us to remain here, under any circumstances, after what has happened; and now we are bound to follow in search of our friend.' And so saying, he led the way to the house.

His intention was rapidly communicated. The entreaties to remain were pressing, but Mr. Pickwick was inflexible. Business, he said, required his immediate attendance.

The old clergyman was present.

'You are not really going?' said he, taking Mr. Pickwick aside.

Mr. Pickwick reiterated his former determination.

'Then here,' said the old gentleman, 'is a little manuscript, which I had hoped to have the pleasure of reading to you myself. I found it on the death of a friend of mine—a medical man, engaged in our county lunatic asylum—among a variety of papers, which I had the option of destroying or preserving, as I thought proper. I can hardly believe that the manuscript is genuine, though it certainly is not in my friend's hand. However, whether it be the genuine production of a maniac, or founded upon the ravings of some unhappy being (which I think more probable), read it, and judge for yourself.'

Mr. Pickwick received the manuscript, and parted from the benevolent old gentleman with many expressions of good-will and esteem.

It was a more difficult task to take leave of the inmates of Manor Farm, from whom they had received so much hospitality and kindness. Mr. Pickwick kissed the young ladies—we were going to say, as if they were his own daughters, only, as he might possibly have infused a little more warmth into the salutation, the comparison would not be quite appropriate—hugged the old lady with filial cordiality; and patted the rosy cheeks of the female servants in a most patriarchal manner, as he slipped into the hands of each some more substantial expression of his approval. The exchange of cordialities with their fine old host and Mr. Trundle was even more hearty and prolonged; and it was not until Mr. Snodgrass had been several times called for, and at last emerged from a dark passage followed soon after by Emily (whose bright eyes looked unusually dim), that the three friends were enabled to tear themselves from their friendly entertainers. Many a backward look they gave at the farm, as they walked slowly away; and many a kiss did Mr. Snodgrass waft in the air, in acknowledgment of something very like a lady's handkerchief, which was waved from one of the upper windows, until a turn of the lane hid the old house from their sight.

At Muggleton they procured a conveyance to Rochester. By the time they reached the last-named place, the violence of their grief had sufficiently abated to admit of their making a very excellent early dinner; and having procured the necessary information relative to the road, the three friends set forward again in the afternoon to walk to Cobham.

A delightful walk it was; for it was a pleasant afternoon in June, and their way lay through a deep and shady wood, cooled by the light wind which gently rustled the thick foliage, and enlivened by the songs of the birds that perched upon the boughs. The ivy and the moss crept in thick clusters over the old trees, and the soft green turf overspread the ground like a silken mat. They emerged upon an open park, with an ancient hall, displaying the quaint and picturesque architecture of Elizabeth's time. Long vistas of stately oaks and elm trees appeared on every side; large herds of deer were cropping the fresh grass; and occasionally a startled hare scoured along the ground, with the speed of the shadows thrown by the light clouds which swept across a sunny landscape like a passing breath of summer.

'If this,' said Mr. Pickwick, looking about him—'if this were the place to which all who are troubled with our friend's complaint came, I fancy their old attachment to this world would very soon return.'

'I think so too,' said Mr. Winkle.

'And really,' added Mr. Pickwick, after half an hour's walking had brought them to the village, 'really, for a misanthrope's choice, this is one of the prettiest and most desirable places of residence I ever met with.'

In this opinion also, both Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass expressed their concurrence; and having been directed to the Leather Bottle, a clean and commodious village ale-house, the three travellers entered, and at once inquired for a gentleman of the name of Tupman.

'Show the gentlemen into the parlour, Tom,' said the landlady.

A stout country lad opened a door at the end of the passage, and the three friends entered a long, low-roofed room, furnished with a large number of high-backed leather-cushioned chairs, of fantastic shapes, and embellished with a great variety of old portraits and roughly-coloured prints of some antiquity. At the upper end of the room was a table, with a white cloth upon it, well covered with a roast fowl, bacon, ale, and et ceteras; and at the table sat Mr. Tupman, looking as unlike a man who had taken his leave of the world, as possible.

On the entrance of his friends, that gentleman laid down his knife and fork, and with a mournful air advanced to meet them.

'I did not expect to see you here,' he said, as he grasped Mr. Pickwick's hand. 'It's very kind.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Pickwick, sitting down, and wiping from his forehead the perspiration which the walk had engendered. 'Finish your dinner, and walk out with me. I wish to speak to you alone.'

Mr. Tupman did as he was desired; and Mr. Pickwick having refreshed himself with a copious draught of ale, waited his friend's leisure. The dinner was quickly despatched, and they walked out together.

For half an hour, their forms might have been seen pacing the churchyard to and fro, while Mr. Pickwick was engaged in combating his companion's resolution. Any repetition of his arguments would be useless; for what language could convey to them that energy and force which their great originator's manner communicated? Whether Mr. Tupman was already tired of retirement, or whether he was wholly unable to resist the eloquent appeal which was made to him, matters not, he did NOT resist it at last.

'It mattered little to him,' he said, 'where he dragged out the miserable remainder of his days; and since his friend laid so much stress upon his humble companionship, he was willing to share his adventures.'

Mr. Pickwick smiled; they shook hands, and walked back to rejoin their companions.

It was at this moment that Mr. Pickwick made that immortal discovery, which has been the pride and boast of his friends, and the envy of every antiquarian in this or any other country. They had passed the door of their inn, and walked a little way down the village, before they recollected the precise spot in which it stood. As they turned back, Mr. Pickwick's eye fell upon a small broken stone, partially buried in the ground, in front of a cottage door. He paused.

'This is very strange,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'What is strange?' inquired Mr. Tupman, staring eagerly at every object near him, but the right one. 'God bless me, what's the matter?'

This last was an ejaculation of irrepressible astonishment, occasioned by seeing Mr. Pickwick, in his enthusiasm for discovery, fall on his knees before the little stone, and commence wiping the dust off it with his pocket-handkerchief.

'There is an inscription here,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Is it possible?' said Mr. Tupman.

'I can discern,'continued Mr. Pickwick, rubbing away with all his might, and gazing intently through his spectacles—'I can discern a cross, and a 13, and then a T. This is important,' continued Mr. Pickwick, starting up. 'This is some very old inscription, existing perhaps long before the ancient almshouses in this place. It must not be lost.'

He tapped at the cottage door. A labouring man opened it.

'Do you know how this stone came here, my friend?' inquired the benevolent Mr. Pickwick.

'No, I doan't, Sir,' replied the man civilly. 'It was here long afore I was born, or any on us.'

Mr. Pickwick glanced triumphantly at his companion.

'You—you—are not particularly attached to it, I dare say,' said Mr. Pickwick, trembling with anxiety. 'You wouldn't mind selling it, now?'

'Ah! but who'd buy it?' inquired the man, with an expression of face which he probably meant to be very cunning.

'I'll give you ten shillings for it, at once,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'if you would take it up for me.'

The astonishment of the village may be easily imagined, when (the little stone having been raised with one wrench of a spade) Mr. Pickwick, by dint of great personal exertion, bore it with his own hands to the inn, and after having carefully washed it, deposited it on the table.

The exultation and joy of the Pickwickians knew no bounds, when their patience and assiduity, their washing and scraping, were crowned with success. The stone was uneven and broken, and the letters were straggling and irregular, but the following fragment of an inscription was clearly to be deciphered:—

[cross]   B I L S T
u m
P S H I
S. M.
ARK

Mr. Pickwick's eyes sparkled with delight, as he sat and gloated over the treasure he had discovered. He had attained one of the greatest objects of his ambition. In a county known to abound in the remains of the early ages; in a village in which there still existed some memorials of the olden time, he—he, the chairman of the Pickwick Club—had discovered a strange and curious inscription of unquestionable antiquity, which had wholly escaped the observation of the many learned men who had preceded him. He could hardly trust the evidence of his senses.

'This—this,' said he, 'determines me. We return to town to-morrow.'

'To-morrow!' exclaimed his admiring followers.

'To-morrow,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'This treasure must be at once deposited where it can be thoroughly investigated and properly understood. I have another reason for this step. In a few days, an election is to take place for the borough of Eatanswill, at which Mr. Perker, a gentleman whom I lately met, is the agent of one of the candidates. We will behold, and minutely examine, a scene so interesting to every Englishman.'

'We will,' was the animated cry of three voices.

Mr. Pickwick looked round him. The attachment and fervour of his followers lighted up a glow of enthusiasm within him. He was their leader, and he felt it.

'Let us celebrate this happy meeting with a convivial glass,' said he. This proposition, like the other, was received with unanimous applause. Having himself deposited the important stone in a small deal box, purchased from the landlady for the purpose, he placed himself in an arm-chair, at the head of the table; and the evening was devoted to festivity and conversation.

It was past eleven o'clock—a late hour for the little village of Cobham—when Mr. Pickwick retired to the bedroom which had been prepared for his reception. He threw open the lattice window, and setting his light upon the table, fell into a train of meditation on the hurried events of the two preceding days.

The hour and the place were both favourable to contemplation; Mr. Pickwick was roused by the church clock striking twelve. The first stroke of the hour sounded solemnly in his ear, but when the bell ceased the stillness seemed insupportable—he almost felt as if he had lost a companion. He was nervous and excited; and hastily undressing himself and placing his light in the chimney, got into bed.

Every one has experienced that disagreeable state of mind, in which a sensation of bodily weariness in vain contends against an inability to sleep. It was Mr. Pickwick's condition at this moment: he tossed first on one side and then on the other; and perseveringly closed his eyes as if to coax himself to slumber. It was of no use. Whether it was the unwonted exertion he had undergone, or the heat, or the brandy-and-water, or the strange bed—whatever it was, his thoughts kept reverting very uncomfortably to the grim pictures downstairs, and the old stories to which they had given rise in the course of the evening. After half an hour's tumbling about, he came to the unsatisfactory conclusion, that it was of no use trying to sleep; so he got up and partially dressed himself. Anything, he thought, was better than lying there fancying all kinds of horrors. He looked out of the window—it was very dark. He walked about the room—it was very lonely.

He had taken a few turns from the door to the window, and from the window to the door, when the clergyman's manuscript for the first time entered his head. It was a good thought. If it failed to interest him, it might send him to sleep. He took it from his coat pocket, and drawing a small table towards his bedside, trimmed the light, put on his spectacles, and composed himself to read. It was a strange handwriting, and the paper was much soiled and blotted. The title gave him a sudden start, too; and he could not avoid casting a wistful glance round the room. Reflecting on the absurdity of giving way to such feelings, however, he trimmed the light again, and read as follows:—

A MADMAN'S MANUSCRIPT

'Yes!—a madman's! How that word would have struck to my heart, many years ago! How it would have roused the terror that used to come upon me sometimes, sending the blood hissing and tingling through my veins, till the cold dew of fear stood in large drops upon my skin, and my knees knocked together with fright! I like it now though. It's a fine name. Show me the monarch whose angry frown was ever feared like the glare of a madman's eye—whose cord and axe were ever half so sure as a madman's gripe. Ho! ho! It's a grand thing to be mad! to be peeped at like a wild lion through the iron bars—to gnash one's teeth and howl, through the long still night, to the merry ring of a heavy chain and to roll and twine among the straw, transported with such brave music. Hurrah for the madhouse! Oh, it's a rare place!

'I remember days when I was afraid of being mad; when I used to start from my sleep, and fall upon my knees, and pray to be spared from the curse of my race; when I rushed from the sight of merriment or happiness, to hide myself in some lonely place, and spend the weary hours in watching the progress of the fever that was to consume my brain. I knew that madness was mixed up with my very blood, and the marrow of my bones! that one generation had passed away without the pestilence appearing among them, and that I was the first in whom it would revive. I knew it must be so: that so it always had been, and so it ever would be: and when I cowered in some obscure corner of a crowded room, and saw men whisper, and point, and turn their eyes towards me, I knew they were telling each other of the doomed madman; and I slunk away again to mope in solitude.

'I did this for years; long, long years they were. The nights here are long sometimes—very long; but they are nothing to the restless nights, and dreadful dreams I had at that time. It makes me cold to remember them. Large dusky forms with sly and jeering faces crouched in the corners of the room, and bent over my bed at night, tempting me to madness. They told me in low whispers, that the floor of the old house in which my father died, was stained with his own blood, shed by his own hand in raging madness. I drove my fingers into my ears, but they screamed into my head till the room rang with it, that in one generation before him the madness slumbered, but that his grandfather had lived for years with his hands fettered to the ground, to prevent his tearing himself to pieces. I knew they told the truth—I knew it well. I had found it out years before, though they had tried to keep it from me. Ha! ha! I was too cunning for them, madman as they thought me.

'At last it came upon me, and I wondered how I could ever have feared it. I could go into the world now, and laugh and shout with the best among them. I knew I was mad, but they did not even suspect it. How I used to hug myself with delight, when I thought of the fine trick I was playing them after their old pointing and leering, when I was not mad, but only dreading that I might one day become so! And how I used to laugh for joy, when I was alone, and thought how well I kept my secret, and how quickly my kind friends would have fallen from me, if they had known the truth. I could have screamed with ecstasy when I dined alone with some fine roaring fellow, to think how pale he would have turned, and how fast he would have run, if he had known that the dear friend who sat close to him, sharpening a bright, glittering knife, was a madman with all the power, and half the will, to plunge it in his heart. Oh, it was a merry life!

'Riches became mine, wealth poured in upon me, and I rioted in pleasures enhanced a thousandfold to me by the consciousness of my well-kept secret. I inherited an estate. The law—the eagle-eyed law itself—had been deceived, and had handed over disputed thousands to a madman's hands. Where was the wit of the sharp-sighted men of sound mind? Where the dexterity of the lawyers, eager to discover a flaw? The madman's cunning had overreached them all.

'I had money. How I was courted! I spent it profusely. How I was praised! How those three proud, overbearing brothers humbled themselves before me! The old, white-headed father, too—such deference—such respect—such devoted friendship—he worshipped me! The old man had a daughter, and the young men a sister; and all the five were poor. I was rich; and when I married the girl, I saw a smile of triumph play upon the faces of her needy relatives, as they thought of their well-planned scheme, and their fine prize. It was for me to smile. To smile! To laugh outright, and tear my hair, and roll upon the ground with shrieks of merriment. They little thought they had married her to a madman.

'Stay. If they had known it, would they have saved her? A sister's happiness against her husband's gold. The lightest feather I blow into the air, against the gay chain that ornaments my body!

'In one thing I was deceived with all my cunning. If I had not been mad—for though we madmen are sharp-witted enough, we get bewildered sometimes—I should have known that the girl would rather have been placed, stiff and cold in a dull leaden coffin, than borne an envied bride to my rich, glittering house. I should have known that her heart was with the dark-eyed boy whose name I once heard her breathe in her troubled sleep; and that she had been sacrificed to me, to relieve the poverty of the old, white-headed man and the haughty brothers.

'I don't remember forms or faces now, but I know the girl was beautiful. I know she was; for in the bright moonlight nights, when I start up from my sleep, and all is quiet about me, I see, standing still and motionless in one corner of this cell, a slight and wasted figure with long black hair, which, streaming down her back, stirs with no earthly wind, and eyes that fix their gaze on me, and never wink or close. Hush! the blood chills at my heart as I write it down—that form is HERS; the face is very pale, and the eyes are glassy bright; but I know them well. That figure never moves; it never frowns and mouths as others do, that fill this place sometimes; but it is much more dreadful to me, even than the spirits that tempted me many years ago—it comes fresh from the grave; and is so very death-like.

'For nearly a year I saw that face grow paler; for nearly a year I saw the tears steal down the mournful cheeks, and never knew the cause. I found it out at last though. They could not keep it from me long. She had never liked me; I had never thought she did: she despised my wealth, and hated the splendour in which she lived; but I had not expected that. She loved another. This I had never thought of. Strange feelings came over me, and thoughts, forced upon me by some secret power, whirled round and round my brain. I did not hate her, though I hated the boy she still wept for. I pitied—yes, I pitied—the wretched life to which her cold and selfish relations had doomed her. I knew that she could not live long; but the thought that before her death she might give birth to some ill-fated being, destined to hand down madness to its offspring, determined me. I resolved to kill her.

'For many weeks I thought of poison, and then of drowning, and then of fire. A fine sight, the grand house in flames, and the madman's wife smouldering away to cinders. Think of the jest of a large reward, too, and of some sane man swinging in the wind for a deed he never did, and all through a madman's cunning! I thought often of this, but I gave it up at last. Oh! the pleasure of stropping the razor day after day, feeling the sharp edge, and thinking of the gash one stroke of its thin, bright edge would make! 'At last the old spirits who had been with me so often before whispered in my ear that the time was come, and thrust the open razor into my hand. I grasped it firmly, rose softly from the bed, and leaned over my sleeping wife. Her face was buried in her hands. I withdrew them softly, and they fell listlessly on her bosom. She had been weeping; for the traces of the tears were still wet upon her cheek. Her face was calm and placid; and even as I looked upon it, a tranquil smile lighted up her pale features. I laid my hand softly on her shoulder. She started—it was only a passing dream. I leaned forward again. She screamed, and woke.

'One motion of my hand, and she would never again have uttered cry or sound. But I was startled, and drew back. Her eyes were fixed on mine. I knew not how it was, but they cowed and frightened me; and I quailed beneath them. She rose from the bed, still gazing fixedly and steadily on me. I trembled; the razor was in my hand, but I could not move. She made towards the door. As she neared it, she turned, and withdrew her eyes from my face. The spell was broken. I bounded forward, and clutched her by the arm. Uttering shriek upon shriek, she sank upon the ground.

'Now I could have killed her without a struggle; but the house was alarmed. I heard the tread of footsteps on the stairs. I replaced the razor in its usual drawer, unfastened the door, and called loudly for assistance.

'They came, and raised her, and placed her on the bed. She lay bereft of animation for hours; and when life, look, and speech returned, her senses had deserted her, and she raved wildly and furiously.

'Doctors were called in—great men who rolled up to my door in easy carriages, with fine horses and gaudy servants. They were at her bedside for weeks. They had a great meeting and consulted together in low and solemn voices in another room. One, the cleverest and most celebrated among them, took me aside, and bidding me prepare for the worst, told me—me, the madman!—that my wife was mad. He stood close beside me at an open window, his eyes looking in my face, and his hand laid upon my arm. With one effort, I could have hurled him into the street beneath. It would have been rare sport to have done it; but my secret was at stake, and I let him go. A few days after, they told me I must place her under some restraint: I must provide a keeper for her. I! I went into the open fields where none could hear me, and laughed till the air resounded with my shouts!

'She died next day. The white-headed old man followed her to the grave, and the proud brothers dropped a tear over the insensible corpse of her whose sufferings they had regarded in her lifetime with muscles of iron. All this was food for my secret mirth, and I laughed behind the white handkerchief which I held up to my face, as we rode home, till the tears Came into my eyes.

'But though I had carried my object and killed her, I was restless and disturbed, and I felt that before long my secret must be known. I could not hide the wild mirth and joy which boiled within me, and made me when I was alone, at home, jump up and beat my hands together, and dance round and round, and roar aloud. When I went out, and saw the busy crowds hurrying about the streets; or to the theatre, and heard the sound of music, and beheld the people dancing, I felt such glee, that I could have rushed among them, and torn them to pieces limb from limb, and howled in transport. But I ground my teeth, and struck my feet upon the floor, and drove my sharp nails into my hands. I kept it down; and no one knew I was a madman yet.

'I remember—though it's one of the last things I can remember: for now I mix up realities with my dreams, and having so much to do, and being always hurried here, have no time to separate the two, from some strange confusion in which they get involved—I remember how I let it out at last. Ha! ha! I think I see their frightened looks now, and feel the ease with which I flung them from me, and dashed my clenched fist into their white faces, and then flew like the wind, and left them screaming and shouting far behind. The strength of a giant comes upon me when I think of it. There—see how this iron bar bends beneath my furious wrench. I could snap it like a twig, only there are long galleries here with many doors—I don't think I could find my way along them; and even if I could, I know there are iron gates below which they keep locked and barred. They know what a clever madman I have been, and they are proud to have me here, to show.

'Let me see: yes, I had been out. It was late at night when I reached home, and found the proudest of the three proud brothers waiting to see me—urgent business he said: I recollect it well. I hated that man with all a madman's hate. Many and many a time had my fingers longed to tear him. They told me he was there. I ran swiftly upstairs. He had a word to say to me. I dismissed the servants. It was late, and we were alone together—for the first time.

'I kept my eyes carefully from him at first, for I knew what he little thought—and I gloried in the knowledge—that the light of madness gleamed from them like fire. We sat in silence for a few minutes. He spoke at last. My recent dissipation, and strange remarks, made so soon after his sister's death, were an insult to her memory. Coupling together many circumstances which had at first escaped his observation, he thought I had not treated her well. He wished to know whether he was right in inferring that I meant to cast a reproach upon her memory, and a disrespect upon her family. It was due to the uniform he wore, to demand this explanation.

'This man had a commission in the army—a commission, purchased with my money, and his sister's misery! This was the man who had been foremost in the plot to ensnare me, and grasp my wealth. This was the man who had been the main instrument in forcing his sister to wed me; well knowing that her heart was given to that puling boy. Due to his uniform! The livery of his degradation! I turned my eyes upon him—I could not help it—but I spoke not a word.

'I saw the sudden change that came upon him beneath my gaze. He was a bold man, but the colour faded from his face, and he drew back his chair. I dragged mine nearer to him; and I laughed—I was very merry then—I saw him shudder. I felt the madness rising within me. He was afraid of me.

'"You were very fond of your sister when she was alive," I said.—"Very."

'He looked uneasily round him, and I saw his hand grasp the back of his chair; but he said nothing.

'"You villain," said I, "I found you out: I discovered your hellish plots against me; I know her heart was fixed on some one else before you compelled her to marry me. I know it—I know it."

'He jumped suddenly from his chair, brandished it aloft, and bid me stand back—for I took care to be getting closer to him all the time I spoke.

'I screamed rather than talked, for I felt tumultuous passions eddying through my veins, and the old spirits whispering and taunting me to tear his heart out.

'"Damn you," said I, starting up, and rushing upon him; "I killed her. I am a madman. Down with you. Blood, blood! I will have it!"

'I turned aside with one blow the chair he hurled at me in his terror, and closed with him; and with a heavy crash we rolled upon the floor together. 'It was a fine struggle that; for he was a tall, strong man, fighting for his life; and I, a powerful madman, thirsting to destroy him. I knew no strength could equal mine, and I was right. Right again, though a madman! His struggles grew fainter. I knelt upon his chest, and clasped his brawny throat firmly with both hands. His face grew purple; his eyes were starting from his head, and with protruded tongue, he seemed to mock me. I squeezed the tighter. 'The door was suddenly burst open with a loud noise, and a crowd of people rushed forward, crying aloud to each other to secure the madman.

'My secret was out; and my only struggle now was for liberty and freedom. I gained my feet before a hand was on me, threw myself among my assailants, and cleared my way with my strong arm, as if I bore a hatchet in my hand, and hewed them down before me. I gained the door, dropped over the banisters, and in an instant was in the street.

'Straight and swift I ran, and no one dared to stop me. I heard the noise of the feet behind, and redoubled my speed. It grew fainter and fainter in the distance, and at length died away altogether; but on I bounded, through marsh and rivulet, over fence and wall, with a wild shout which was taken up by the strange beings that flocked around me on every side, and swelled the sound, till it pierced the air. I was borne upon the arms of demons who swept along upon the wind, and bore down bank and hedge before them, and spun me round and round with a rustle and a speed that made my head swim, until at last they threw me from them with a violent shock, and I fell heavily upon the earth. When I woke I found myself here—here in this gray cell, where the sunlight seldom comes, and the moon steals in, in rays which only serve to show the dark shadows about me, and that silent figure in its old corner. When I lie awake, I can sometimes hear strange shrieks and cries from distant parts of this large place. What they are, I know not; but they neither come from that pale form, nor does it regard them. For from the first shades of dusk till the earliest light of morning, it still stands motionless in the same place, listening to the music of my iron chain, and watching my gambols on my straw bed.'

At the end of the manuscript was written, in another hand, this note:—

[The unhappy man whose ravings are recorded above, was a melancholy instance of the baneful results of energies misdirected in early life, and excesses prolonged until their consequences could never be repaired. The thoughtless riot, dissipation, and debauchery of his younger days produced fever and delirium. The first effects of the latter was the strange delusion, founded upon a well-known medical theory, strongly contended for by some, and as strongly contested by others, that an hereditary madness existed in his family. This produced a settled gloom, which in time developed a morbid insanity, and finally terminated in raving madness. There is every reason to believe that the events he detailed, though distorted in the description by his diseased imagination, really happened. It is only matter of wonder to those who were acquainted with the vices of his early career, that his passions, when no longer controlled by reason, did not lead him to the commission of still more frightful deeds.]

Mr. Pickwick's candle was just expiring in the socket, as he concluded the perusal of the old clergyman's manuscript; and when the light went suddenly out, without any previous flicker by way of warning, it communicated a very considerable start to his excited frame. Hastily throwing off such articles of clothing as he had put on when he rose from his uneasy bed, and casting a fearful glance around, he once more scrambled hastily between the sheets, and soon fell fast asleep.

The sun was shining brilliantly into his chamber, when he awoke, and the morning was far advanced. The gloom which had oppressed him on the previous night had disappeared with the dark shadows which shrouded the landscape, and his thoughts and feelings were as light and gay as the morning itself. After a hearty breakfast, the four gentlemen sallied forth to walk to Gravesend, followed by a man bearing the stone in its deal box. They reached the town about one o'clock (their luggage they had directed to be forwarded to the city, from Rochester), and being fortunate enough to secure places on the outside of a coach, arrived in London in sound health and spirits, on that same afternoon.

The next three or four days were occupied with the preparations which were necessary for their journey to the borough of Eatanswill. As any references to that most important undertaking demands a separate chapter, we may devote the few lines which remain at the close of this, to narrate, with great brevity, the history of the antiquarian discovery.

It appears from the Transactions of the Club, then, that Mr. Pickwick lectured upon the discovery at a General Club Meeting, convened on the night succeeding their return, and entered into a variety of ingenious and erudite speculations on the meaning of the inscription. It also appears that a skilful artist executed a faithful delineation of the curiosity, which was engraven on stone, and presented to the Royal Antiquarian Society, and other learned bodies: that heart-burnings and jealousies without number were created by rival controversies which were penned upon the subject; and that Mr. Pickwick himself wrote a pamphlet, containing ninety-six pages of very small print, and twenty-seven different readings of the inscription: that three old gentlemen cut off their eldest sons with a shilling a-piece for presuming to doubt the antiquity of the fragment; and that one enthusiastic individual cut himself off prematurely, in despair at being unable to fathom its meaning: that Mr. Pickwick was elected an honorary member of seventeen native and foreign societies, for making the discovery: that none of the seventeen could make anything of it; but that all the seventeen agreed it was very extraordinary.

Mr. Blotton, indeed—and the name will be doomed to the undying contempt of those who cultivate the mysterious and the sublime—Mr. Blotton, we say, with the doubt and cavilling peculiar to vulgar minds, presumed to state a view of the case, as degrading as ridiculous. Mr. Blotton, with a mean desire to tarnish the lustre of the immortal name of

Pickwick, actually undertook a journey to Cobham in person, and on his return, sarcastically observed in an oration at the club, that he had seen the man from whom the stone was purchased; that the man presumed the stone to be ancient, but solemnly denied the antiquity of the inscription—inasmuch as he represented it to have been rudely carved by himself in an idle mood, and to display letters intended to bear neither more or less than the simple construction of—'BILL STUMPS, HIS MARK'; and that Mr. Stumps, being little in the habit of original composition, and more accustomed to be guided by the sound of words than by the strict rules of orthography, had omitted the concluding 'L' of his Christian name.

The Pickwick Club (as might have been expected from so enlightened an institution) received this statement with the contempt it deserved, expelled the presumptuous and ill-conditioned Blotton from the society, and voted Mr. Pickwick a pair of gold spectacles, in token of their confidence and approbation: in return for which, Mr. Pickwick caused a portrait of himself to be painted, and hung up in the club room.

Mr. Blotton was ejected but not conquered. He also wrote a pamphlet, addressed to the seventeen learned societies, native and foreign, containing a repetition of the statement he had already made, and rather more than half intimating his opinion that the seventeen learned societies were so many 'humbugs.' Hereupon, the virtuous indignation of the seventeen learned societies being roused, several fresh pamphlets appeared; the foreign learned societies corresponded with the native learned societies; the native learned societies translated the pamphlets of the foreign learned societies into English; the foreign learned societies translated the pamphlets of the native learned societies into all sorts of languages; and thus commenced that celebrated scientific discussion so well known to all men, as the Pickwick controversy.

But this base attempt to injure Mr. Pickwick recoiled upon the head of its calumnious author. The seventeen learned societies unanimously voted the presumptuous Blotton an ignorant meddler, and forthwith set to work upon more treatises than ever. And to this day the stone remains, an illegible monument of Mr. Pickwick's greatness, and a lasting trophy to the littleness of his enemies.

CHAPTER XII. DESCRIPTIVE OF A VERY IMPORTANT PROCEEDING ON THE PART OF

Mr. PICKWICK; NO LESS AN EPOCH IN HIS LIFE, THAN IN THIS HISTORY

Mr. Pickwick's apartments in Goswell Street, although on a limited scale, were not only of a very neat and comfortable description, but peculiarly adapted for the residence of a man of his genius and observation. His sitting-room was the first-floor front, his bedroom the second-floor front; and thus, whether he were sitting at his desk in his parlour, or standing before the dressing-glass in his dormitory, he had an equal opportunity of contemplating human nature in all the numerous phases it exhibits, in that not more populous than popular thoroughfare. His landlady, Mrs. Bardell—the relict and sole executrix of a deceased custom-house officer—was a comely woman of bustling manners and agreeable appearance, with a natural genius for cooking, improved by study and long practice, into an exquisite talent. There were no children, no servants, no fowls. The only other inmates of the house were a large man and a small boy; the first a lodger, the second a production of Mrs. Bardell's. The large man was always home precisely at ten o'clock at night, at which hour he regularly condensed himself into the limits of a dwarfish French bedstead in the back parlour; and the infantine sports and gymnastic exercises of Master Bardell were exclusively confined to the neighbouring pavements and gutters. Cleanliness and quiet reigned throughout the house; and in it Mr. Pickwick's will was law.

To any one acquainted with these points of the domestic economy of the establishment, and conversant with the admirable regulation of Mr. Pickwick's mind, his appearance and behaviour on the morning previous to that which had been fixed upon for the journey to Eatanswill would have been most mysterious and unaccountable. He paced the room to and fro with hurried steps, popped his head out of the window at intervals of about three minutes each, constantly referred to his watch, and exhibited many other manifestations of impatience very unusual with him. It was evident that something of great importance was in contemplation, but what that something was, not even Mrs. Bardell had been enabled to discover.

'Mrs. Bardell,' said Mr. Pickwick, at last, as that amiable female approached the termination of a prolonged dusting of the apartment.

'Sir,' said Mrs. Bardell.

'Your little boy is a very long time gone.'

'Why it's a good long way to the Borough, sir,' remonstrated Mrs. Bardell.

'Ah,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'very true; so it is.' Mr. Pickwick relapsed into silence, and Mrs. Bardell resumed her dusting.

'Mrs. Bardell,' said Mr. Pickwick, at the expiration of a few minutes.

'Sir,' said Mrs. Bardell again. 'Do you think it a much greater expense to keep two people, than to keep one?'

'La, Mr. Pickwick,' said Mrs. Bardell, colouring up to the very border of her cap, as she fancied she observed a species of matrimonial twinkle in the eyes of her lodger; 'La, Mr. Pickwick, what a question!'

'Well, but do you?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'That depends,' said Mrs. Bardell, approaching the duster very near to Mr. Pickwick's elbow which was planted on the table. 'That depends a good deal upon the person, you know, Mr. Pickwick; and whether it's a saving and careful person, sir.'

'That's very true,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'but the person I have in my eye (here he looked very hard at Mrs. Bardell) I think possesses these qualities; and has, moreover, a considerable knowledge of the world, and a great deal of sharpness, Mrs. Bardell, which may be of material use to me.'

'La, Mr. Pickwick,' said Mrs. Bardell, the crimson rising to her cap-border again.

'I do,' said Mr. Pickwick, growing energetic, as was his wont in speaking of a subject which interested him—'I do, indeed; and to tell you the truth, Mrs. Bardell, I have made up my mind.'

'Dear me, sir,'exclaimed Mrs. Bardell.

'You'll think it very strange now,' said the amiable Mr. Pickwick, with a good-humoured glance at his companion, 'that I never consulted you about this matter, and never even mentioned it, till I sent your little boy out this morning—eh?'

Mrs. Bardell could only reply by a look. She had long worshipped Mr. Pickwick at a distance, but here she was, all at once, raised to a pinnacle to which her wildest and most extravagant hopes had never dared to aspire. Mr. Pickwick was going to propose—a deliberate plan, too—sent her little boy to the Borough, to get him out of the way—how thoughtful—how considerate!

'Well,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'what do you think?'

'Oh, Mr. Pickwick,' said Mrs. Bardell, trembling with agitation, 'you're very kind, sir.'

'It'll save you a good deal of trouble, won't it?' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Oh, I never thought anything of the trouble, sir,' replied Mrs. Bardell; 'and, of course, I should take more trouble to please you then, than ever; but it is so kind of you, Mr. Pickwick, to have so much consideration for my loneliness.'

'Ah, to be sure,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'I never thought of that. When I am in town, you'll always have somebody to sit with you. To be sure, so you will.'

'I am sure I ought to be a very happy woman,' said Mrs. Bardell.

'And your little boy—' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Bless his heart!' interposed Mrs. Bardell, with a maternal sob.

'He, too, will have a companion,' resumed Mr. Pickwick, 'a lively one, who'll teach him, I'll be bound, more tricks in a week than he would ever learn in a year.' And Mr. Pickwick smiled placidly.

'Oh, you dear—' said Mrs. Bardell.

Mr. Pickwick started.

'Oh, you kind, good, playful dear,' said Mrs. Bardell; and without more ado, she rose from her chair, and flung her arms round Mr. Pickwick's neck, with a cataract of tears and a chorus of sobs.

'Bless my soul,' cried the astonished Mr. Pickwick; 'Mrs. Bardell, my good woman—dear me, what a situation—pray consider.—Mrs. Bardell, don't—if anybody should come—'

'Oh, let them come,' exclaimed Mrs. Bardell frantically; 'I'll never leave you—dear, kind, good soul;' and, with these words, Mrs. Bardell clung the tighter.

'Mercy upon me,' said Mr. Pickwick, struggling violently, 'I hear somebody coming up the stairs. Don't, don't, there's a good creature, don't.' But entreaty and remonstrance were alike unavailing; for Mrs. Bardell had fainted in Mr. Pickwick's arms; and before he could gain time to deposit her on a chair, Master Bardell entered the room, ushering in Mr. Tupman, Mr. Winkle, and Mr. Snodgrass.

Mr. Pickwick was struck motionless and speechless. He stood with his lovely burden in his arms, gazing vacantly on the countenances of his friends, without the slightest attempt at recognition or explanation. They, in their turn, stared at him; and Master Bardell, in his turn, stared at everybody.

The astonishment of the Pickwickians was so absorbing, and the perplexity of Mr. Pickwick was so extreme, that they might have remained in exactly the same relative situations until the suspended animation of the lady was restored, had it not been for a most beautiful and touching expression of filial affection on the part of her youthful son. Clad in a tight suit of corduroy, spangled with brass buttons of a very considerable size, he at first stood at the door astounded and uncertain; but by degrees, the impression that his mother must have suffered some personal damage pervaded his partially developed mind, and considering Mr. Pickwick as the aggressor, he set up an appalling and semi-earthly kind of howling, and butting forward with his head, commenced assailing that immortal gentleman about the back and legs, with such blows and pinches as the strength of his arm, and the violence of his excitement, allowed.

'Take this little villain away,' said the agonised Mr. Pickwick, 'he's mad.'

'What is the matter?' said the three tongue-tied Pickwickians.

'I don't know,' replied Mr. Pickwick pettishly. 'Take away the boy.' (Here Mr. Winkle carried the interesting boy, screaming and struggling, to the farther end of the apartment.) 'Now help me, lead this woman downstairs.'

'Oh, I am better now,' said Mrs. Bardell faintly.

'Let me lead you downstairs,' said the ever-gallant Mr. Tupman.

'Thank you, sir—thank you;' exclaimed Mrs. Bardell hysterically. And downstairs she was led accordingly, accompanied by her affectionate son.

'I cannot conceive,' said Mr. Pickwick when his friend returned—'I cannot conceive what has been the matter with that woman. I had merely announced to her my intention of keeping a man-servant, when she fell into the extraordinary paroxysm in which you found her. Very extraordinary thing.'

'Very,' said his three friends.

'Placed me in such an extremely awkward situation,' continued Mr. Pickwick.

'Very,' was the reply of his followers, as they coughed slightly, and looked dubiously at each other.

This behaviour was not lost upon Mr. Pickwick. He remarked their incredulity. They evidently suspected him.

'There is a man in the passage now,' said Mr. Tupman.

'It's the man I spoke to you about,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'I sent for him to the Borough this morning. Have the goodness to call him up, Snodgrass.'

Mr. Snodgrass did as he was desired; and Mr. Samuel Weller forthwith presented himself.

'Oh—you remember me, I suppose?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'I should think so,' replied Sam, with a patronising wink. 'Queer start that 'ere, but he was one too many for you, warn't he? Up to snuff and a pinch or two over—eh?'

'Never mind that matter now,' said Mr. Pickwick hastily; 'I want to speak to you about something else. Sit down.'

'Thank'ee, sir,' said Sam. And down he sat without further bidding, having previously deposited his old white hat on the landing outside the door. ''Tain't a wery good 'un to look at,' said Sam, 'but it's an astonishin' 'un to wear; and afore the brim went, it was a wery handsome tile. Hows'ever it's lighter without it, that's one thing, and every hole lets in some air, that's another—wentilation gossamer I calls it.' On the delivery of this sentiment, Mr. Weller smiled agreeably upon the assembled Pickwickians.

'Now with regard to the matter on which I, with the concurrence of these gentlemen, sent for you,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'That's the pint, sir,' interposed Sam; 'out vith it, as the father said to his child, when he swallowed a farden.'

'We want to know, in the first place,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'whether you have any reason to be discontented with your present situation.'

'Afore I answers that 'ere question, gen'l'm'n,' replied Mr. Weller, 'I should like to know, in the first place, whether you're a-goin' to purwide me with a better?'

A sunbeam of placid benevolence played on Mr. Pickwick's features as he said, 'I have half made up my mind to engage you myself.'

'Have you, though?' said Sam.

Mr. Pickwick nodded in the affirmative.

'Wages?' inquired Sam.

'Twelve pounds a year,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'Clothes?'

'Two suits.'

'Work?'

'To attend upon me; and travel about with me and these gentlemen here.' 'Take the bill down,' said Sam emphatically. 'I'm let to a single gentleman, and the terms is agreed upon.'

'You accept the situation?' inquired Mr. Pickwick. 'Cert'nly,' replied Sam. 'If the clothes fits me half as well as the place, they'll do.'

'You can get a character of course?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Ask the landlady o' the White Hart about that, Sir,' replied Sam.

'Can you come this evening?'

'I'll get into the clothes this minute, if they're here,' said Sam, with great alacrity.

'Call at eight this evening,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'and if the inquiries are satisfactory, they shall be provided.'

With the single exception of one amiable indiscretion, in which an assistant housemaid had equally participated, the history of Mr. Weller's conduct was so very blameless, that Mr. Pickwick felt fully justified in closing the engagement that very evening. With the promptness and energy which characterised not only the public proceedings, but all the private actions of this extraordinary man, he at once led his new attendant to one of those convenient emporiums where gentlemen's new and second-hand clothes are provided, and the troublesome and inconvenient formality of measurement dispensed with; and before night had closed in, Mr. Weller was furnished with a grey coat with the P. C. button, a black hat with a cockade to it, a pink striped waistcoat, light breeches and gaiters, and a variety of other necessaries, too numerous to recapitulate.

'Well,' said that suddenly-transformed individual, as he took his seat on the outside of the Eatanswill coach next morning; 'I wonder whether I'm meant to be a footman, or a groom, or a gamekeeper, or a seedsman. I looks like a sort of compo of every one on 'em. Never mind; there's a change of air, plenty to see, and little to do; and all this suits my complaint uncommon; so long life to the Pickvicks, says I!'

CHAPTER XIII. SOME ACCOUNT OF EATANSWILL; OF THE STATE OF PARTIES

THEREIN; AND OF THE ELECTION OF A MEMBER TO SERVE IN PARLIAMENT FOR THAT ANCIENT, LOYAL, AND PATRIOTIC BOROUGH

We will frankly acknowledge that, up to the period of our being first immersed in the voluminous papers of the Pickwick Club, we had never heard of Eatanswill; we will with equal candour admit that we have in vain searched for proof of the actual existence of such a place at the present day. Knowing the deep reliance to be placed on every note and statement of Mr. Pickwick's, and not presuming to set up our recollection against the recorded declarations of that great man, we have consulted every authority, bearing upon the subject, to which we could possibly refer. We have traced every name in schedules A and B, without meeting with that of Eatanswill; we have minutely examined every corner of the pocket county maps issued for the benefit of society by our distinguished publishers, and the same result has attended our investigation. We are therefore led to believe that Mr. Pickwick, with that anxious desire to abstain from giving offence to any, and with those delicate feelings for which all who knew him well know he was so eminently remarkable, purposely substituted a fictitious designation, for the real name of the place in which his observations were made. We are confirmed in this belief by a little circumstance, apparently slight and trivial in itself, but when considered in this point of view, not undeserving of notice. In Mr. Pickwick's note-book, we can just trace an entry of the fact, that the places of himself and followers were booked by the Norwich coach; but this entry was afterwards lined through, as if for the purpose of concealing even the direction in which the borough is situated. We will not, therefore, hazard a guess upon the subject, but will at once proceed with this history, content with the materials which its characters have provided for us.

It appears, then, that the Eatanswill people, like the people of many other small towns, considered themselves of the utmost and most mighty importance, and that every man in Eatanswill, conscious of the weight that attached to his example, felt himself bound to unite, heart and soul, with one of the two great parties that divided the town—the Blues and the Buffs. Now the Blues lost no opportunity of opposing the Buffs, and the Buffs lost no opportunity of opposing the Blues; and the consequence was, that whenever the Buffs and Blues met together at public meeting, town-hall, fair, or market, disputes and high words arose between them. With these dissensions it is almost superfluous to say that everything in Eatanswill was made a party question. If the Buffs proposed to new skylight the market-place, the Blues got up public meetings, and denounced the proceeding; if the Blues proposed the erection of an additional pump in the High Street, the Buffs rose as one man and stood aghast at the enormity. There were Blue shops and Buff shops, Blue inns and Buff inns—there was a Blue aisle and a Buff aisle in the very church itself.

Of course it was essentially and indispensably necessary that each of these powerful parties should have its chosen organ and representative: and, accordingly, there were two newspapers in the town—the Eatanswill GAZETTE and the Eatanswill INDEPENDENT; the former advocating Blue principles, and the latter conducted on grounds decidedly Buff. Fine newspapers they were. Such leading articles, and such spirited attacks!—'Our worthless contemporary, the GAZETTE'—'That disgraceful and dastardly journal, the INDEPENDENT'—'That false and scurrilous print, the INDEPENDENT'—'That vile and slanderous calumniator, the GAZETTE;' these, and other spirit-stirring denunciations, were strewn plentifully over the columns of each, in every number, and excited feelings of the most intense delight and indignation in the bosoms of the townspeople.

Mr. Pickwick, with his usual foresight and sagacity, had chosen a peculiarly desirable moment for his visit to the borough. Never was such a contest known. The Honourable Samuel Slumkey, of Slumkey Hall, was the Blue candidate; and Horatio Fizkin, Esq., of Fizkin Lodge, near Eatanswill, had been prevailed upon by his friends to stand forward on the Buff interest. The GAZETTE warned the electors of Eatanswill that the eyes not only of England, but of the whole civilised world, were upon them; and the INDEPENDENT imperatively demanded to know, whether the constituency of Eatanswill were the grand fellows they had always taken them for, or base and servile tools, undeserving alike of the name of

Englishmen and the blessings of freedom. Never had such a commotion agitated the town before.

It was late in the evening when Mr. Pickwick and his companions, assisted by Sam, dismounted from the roof of the Eatanswill coach. Large blue silk flags were flying from the windows of the Town Arms Inn, and bills were posted in every sash, intimating, in gigantic letters, that the Honourable Samuel Slumkey's committee sat there daily. A crowd of idlers were assembled in the road, looking at a hoarse man in the balcony, who was apparently talking himself very red in the face in Mr. Slumkey's behalf; but the force and point of whose arguments were somewhat impaired by the perpetual beating of four large drums which Mr. Fizkin's committee had stationed at the street corner. There was a busy little man beside him, though, who took off his hat at intervals and motioned to the people to cheer, which they regularly did, most enthusiastically; and as the red-faced gentleman went on talking till he was redder in the face than ever, it seemed to answer his purpose quite as well as if anybody had heard him.

The Pickwickians had no sooner dismounted than they were surrounded by a branch mob of the honest and independent, who forthwith set up three deafening cheers, which being responded to by the main body (for it's not at all necessary for a crowd to know what they are cheering about), swelled into a tremendous roar of triumph, which stopped even the red-faced man in the balcony.

'Hurrah!' shouted the mob, in conclusion.

'One cheer more,' screamed the little fugleman in the balcony, and out shouted the mob again, as if lungs were cast-iron, with steel works.

'Slumkey for ever!' roared the honest and independent.

'Slumkey for ever!' echoed Mr. Pickwick, taking off his hat. 'No Fizkin!' roared the crowd.

'Certainly not!' shouted Mr. Pickwick. 'Hurrah!' And then there was another roaring, like that of a whole menagerie when the elephant has rung the bell for the cold meat.

'Who is Slumkey?'whispered Mr. Tupman.

'I don't know,' replied Mr. Pickwick, in the same tone. 'Hush. Don't ask any questions. It's always best on these occasions to do what the mob do.'

'But suppose there are two mobs?' suggested Mr. Snodgrass.

'Shout with the largest,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

Volumes could not have said more.

They entered the house, the crowd opening right and left to let them pass, and cheering vociferously. The first object of consideration was to secure quarters for the night.

'Can we have beds here?' inquired Mr. Pickwick, summoning the waiter.

'Don't know, Sir,' replied the man; 'afraid we're full, sir—I'll inquire, Sir.' Away he went for that purpose, and presently returned, to ask whether the gentleman were 'Blue.'

As neither Mr. Pickwick nor his companions took any vital interest in the cause of either candidate, the question was rather a difficult one to answer. In this dilemma Mr. Pickwick bethought himself of his new friend, Mr. Perker.

'Do you know a gentleman of the name of Perker?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Certainly, Sir; Honourable Mr. Samuel Slumkey's agent.'

'He is Blue, I think?'

'Oh, yes, Sir.'

'Then WE are Blue,' said Mr. Pickwick; but observing that the man looked rather doubtful at this accommodating announcement, he gave him his card, and desired him to present it to Mr. Perker forthwith, if he should happen to be in the house. The waiter retired; and reappearing almost immediately with a request that Mr. Pickwick would follow him, led the way to a large room on the first floor, where, seated at a long table covered with books and papers, was Mr. Perker.

'Ah—ah, my dear Sir,' said the little man, advancing to meet him; 'very happy to see you, my dear Sir, very. Pray sit down. So you have carried your intention into effect. You have come down here to see an election—eh?' Mr. Pickwick replied in the affirmative.

'Spirited contest, my dear sir,' said the little man.

'I'm delighted to hear it,' said Mr. Pickwick, rubbing his hands. 'I like to see sturdy patriotism, on whatever side it is called forth—and so it's a spirited contest?'

'Oh, yes,' said the little man, 'very much so indeed. We have opened all the public-houses in the place, and left our adversary nothing but the beer-shops-masterly stroke of policy that, my dear Sir, eh?' The little man smiled complacently, and took a large pinch of snuff.

'And what are the probabilities as to the result of the contest?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Why, doubtful, my dear Sir; rather doubtful as yet,' replied the little man. 'Fizkin's people have got three-and-thirty voters in the lock-up coach-house at the White Hart.'

'In the coach-house!' said Mr. Pickwick, considerably astonished by this second stroke of policy.

'They keep 'em locked up there till they want 'em,' resumed the little man. 'The effect of that is, you see, to prevent our getting at them; and even if we could, it would be of no use, for they keep them very drunk on purpose. Smart fellow Fizkin's agent—very smart fellow indeed.'

Mr. Pickwick stared, but said nothing.

'We are pretty confident, though,' said Mr. Perker, sinking his voice almost to a whisper. 'We had a little tea-party here, last night—five-and-forty women, my dear sir—and gave every one of 'em a green parasol when she went away.'

'A parasol!' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Fact, my dear Sir, fact. Five-and-forty green parasols, at seven and sixpence a-piece. All women like finery—extraordinary the effect of those parasols. Secured all their husbands, and half their brothers—beats stockings, and flannel, and all that sort of thing hollow. My idea, my dear Sir, entirely. Hail, rain, or sunshine, you can't walk half a dozen yards up the street, without encountering half a dozen green parasols.'

Here the little man indulged in a convulsion of mirth, which was only checked by the entrance of a third party.

This was a tall, thin man, with a sandy-coloured head inclined to baldness, and a face in which solemn importance was blended with a look of unfathomable profundity. He was dressed in a long brown surtout, with a black cloth waistcoat, and drab trousers. A double eyeglass dangled at his waistcoat; and on his head he wore a very low-crowned hat with a broad brim. The new-comer was introduced to Mr. Pickwick as Mr. Pott, the editor of the Eatanswill GAZETTE. After a few preliminary remarks, Mr. Pott turned round to Mr. Pickwick, and said with solemnity—

'This contest excites great interest in the metropolis, sir?'

'I believe it does,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'To which I have reason to know,' said Pott, looking towards Mr. Perker for corroboration—'to which I have reason to know that my article of last Saturday in some degree contributed.'

'Not the least doubt of it,' said the little man.

'The press is a mighty engine, sir,' said Pott.

Mr. Pickwick yielded his fullest assent to the proposition.

'But I trust, sir,' said Pott, 'that I have never abused the enormous power I wield. I trust, sir, that I have never pointed the noble instrument which is placed in my hands, against the sacred bosom of private life, or the tender breast of individual reputation; I trust, sir, that I have devoted my energies to—to endeavours—humble they may be, humble I know they are—to instil those principles of—which—are—'

Here the editor of the Eatanswill GAZETTE, appearing to ramble, Mr. Pickwick came to his relief, and said—

'Certainly.'

'And what, Sir,' said Pott—'what, Sir, let me ask you as an impartial man, is the state of the public mind in London, with reference to my contest with the INDEPENDENT?'

'Greatly excited, no doubt,' interposed Mr. Perker, with a look of slyness which was very likely accidental.

'The contest,' said Pott, 'shall be prolonged so long as I have health and strength, and that portion of talent with which I am gifted. From that contest, Sir, although it may unsettle men's minds and excite their feelings, and render them incapable for the discharge of the everyday duties of ordinary life; from that contest, sir, I will never shrink, till I have set my heel upon the Eatanswill INDEPENDENT. I wish the people of London, and the people of this country to know, sir, that they may rely upon me—that I will not desert them, that I am resolved to stand by them, Sir, to the last.' 'Your conduct is most noble, Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick; and he grasped the hand of the magnanimous Pott. 'You are, sir, I perceive, a man of sense and talent,' said Mr. Pott, almost breathless with the vehemence of his patriotic declaration. 'I am most happy, sir, to make the acquaintance of such a man.'

'And I,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'feel deeply honoured by this expression of your opinion. Allow me, sir, to introduce you to my fellow-travellers, the other corresponding members of the club I am proud to have founded.'

'I shall be delighted,' said Mr. Pott.

Mr. Pickwick withdrew, and returning with his friends, presented them in due form to the editor of the Eatanswill GAZETTE.

'Now, my dear Pott,' said little Mr. Perker, 'the question is, what are we to do with our friends here?'

'We can stop in this house, I suppose,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Not a spare bed in the house, my dear sir—not a single bed.'

'Extremely awkward,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Very,' said his fellow-voyagers.

'I have an idea upon this subject,' said Mr. Pott, 'which I think may be very successfully adopted. They have two beds at the Peacock, and I can boldly say, on behalf of Mrs. Pott, that she will be delighted to accommodate Mr. Pickwick and any one of his friends, if the other two gentlemen and their servant do not object to shifting, as they best can, at the Peacock.'

After repeated pressings on the part of Mr. Pott, and repeated protestations on that of Mr. Pickwick that he could not think of incommoding or troubling his amiable wife, it was decided that it was the only feasible arrangement that could be made. So it WAS made; and after dinner together at the Town Arms, the friends separated, Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass repairing to the Peacock, and Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Winkle proceeding to the mansion of Mr. Pott; it having been previously arranged that they should all reassemble at the Town Arms in the morning, and accompany the Honourable Samuel Slumkey's procession to the place of nomination.

Mr. Pott's domestic circle was limited to himself and his wife. All men whom mighty genius has raised to a proud eminence in the world, have usually some little weakness which appears the more conspicuous from the contrast it presents to their general character. If Mr. Pott had a weakness, it was, perhaps, that he was rather too submissive to the somewhat contemptuous control and sway of his wife. We do not feel justified in laying any particular stress upon the fact, because on the present occasion all Mrs. Pott's most winning ways were brought into requisition to receive the two gentlemen.

'My dear,' said Mr. Pott, 'Mr. Pickwick—Mr. Pickwick of London.'

Mrs. Pott received Mr. Pickwick's paternal grasp of the hand with enchanting sweetness; and Mr. Winkle, who had not been announced at all, sidled and bowed, unnoticed, in an obscure corner.

'P. my dear'—said Mrs. Pott.

'My life,' said Mr. Pott.

'Pray introduce the other gentleman.'

'I beg a thousand pardons,' said Mr. Pott. 'Permit me, Mrs. Pott, Mr.—'

'Winkle,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Winkle,' echoed Mr. Pott; and the ceremony of introduction was complete.

'We owe you many apologies, ma'am,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'for disturbing your domestic arrangements at so short a notice.'

'I beg you won't mention it, sir,' replied the feminine Pott, with vivacity. 'It is a high treat to me, I assure you, to see any new faces; living as I do, from day to day, and week to week, in this dull place, and seeing nobody.'

'Nobody, my dear!' exclaimed Mr. Pott archly.

'Nobody but you,' retorted Mrs. Pott, with asperity.

'You see, Mr. Pickwick,' said the host in explanation of his wife's lament, 'that we are in some measure cut off from many enjoyments and pleasures of which we might otherwise partake. My public station, as editor of the Eatanswill GAZETTE, the position which that paper holds in the country, my constant immersion in the vortex of politics—'

'P. my dear—' interposed Mrs. Pott.

'My life—' said the editor.

'I wish, my dear, you would endeavour to find some topic of conversation in which these gentlemen might take some rational interest.'

'But, my love,' said Mr. Pott, with great humility, 'Mr. Pickwick does take an interest in it.'

'It's well for him if he can,' said Mrs. Pott emphatically; 'I am wearied out of my life with your politics, and quarrels with the INDEPENDENT, and nonsense. I am quite astonished, P., at your making such an exhibition of your absurdity.'

'But, my dear—' said Mr. Pott.

'Oh, nonsense, don't talk to me,' said Mrs. Pott. 'Do you play ecarte, Sir?'

'I shall be very happy to learn under your tuition,' replied Mr. Winkle.

'Well, then, draw that little table into this window, and let me get out of hearing of those prosy politics.'

'Jane,' said Mr. Pott, to the servant who brought in candles, 'go down into the office, and bring me up the file of the GAZETTE for eighteen hundred and twenty-six. I'll read you,' added the editor, turning to Mr. Pickwick—'I'll just read you a few of the leaders I wrote at that time upon the Buff job of appointing a new tollman to the turnpike here; I rather think they'll amuse you.'

'I should like to hear them very much indeed,' said Mr. Pickwick.

Up came the file, and down sat the editor, with Mr. Pickwick at his side.

We have in vain pored over the leaves of Mr. Pickwick's note-book, in the hope of meeting with a general summary of these beautiful compositions. We have every reason to believe that he was perfectly enraptured with the vigour and freshness of the style; indeed Mr. Winkle has recorded the fact that his eyes were closed, as if with excess of pleasure, during the whole time of their perusal.

The announcement of supper put a stop both to the game of ecarte, and the recapitulation of the beauties of the Eatanswill GAZETTE. Mrs. Pott was in the highest spirits and the most agreeable humour. Mr. Winkle had already made considerable progress in her good opinion, and she did not hesitate to inform him, confidentially, that Mr. Pickwick was 'a delightful old dear.' These terms convey a familiarity of expression, in which few of those who were intimately acquainted with that colossal-minded man, would have presumed to indulge. We have preserved them, nevertheless, as affording at once a touching and a convincing proof of the estimation in which he was held by every class of society, and the case with which he made his way to their hearts and feelings.

It was a late hour of the night—long after Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass had fallen asleep in the inmost recesses of the Peacock—when the two friends retired to rest. Slumber soon fell upon the senses of Mr. Winkle, but his feelings had been excited, and his admiration roused; and for many hours after sleep had rendered him insensible to earthly objects, the face and figure of the agreeable Mrs. Pott presented themselves again and again to his wandering imagination.

The noise and bustle which ushered in the morning were sufficient to dispel from the mind of the most romantic visionary in existence, any associations but those which were immediately connected with the rapidly-approaching election. The beating of drums, the blowing of horns and trumpets, the shouting of men, and tramping of horses, echoed and re—echoed through the streets from the earliest dawn of day; and an occasional fight between the light skirmishers of either party at once enlivened the preparations, and agreeably diversified their character. 'Well, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, as his valet appeared at his bedroom door, just as he was concluding his toilet; 'all alive to-day, I suppose?'

'Reg'lar game, sir,' replied Mr. Weller; 'our people's a-collecting down at the Town Arms, and they're a-hollering themselves hoarse already.'

'Ah,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'do they seem devoted to their party, Sam?'

'Never see such dewotion in my life, Sir.'

'Energetic, eh?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Uncommon,' replied Sam; 'I never see men eat and drink so much afore. I wonder they ain't afeer'd o' bustin'.'

'That's the mistaken kindness of the gentry here,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Wery likely,' replied Sam briefly.

'Fine, fresh, hearty fellows they seem,' said Mr. Pickwick, glancing from the window.

'Wery fresh,' replied Sam; 'me and the two waiters at the Peacock has been a-pumpin' over the independent woters as supped there last night.'

'Pumping over independent voters!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

'Yes,' said his attendant, 'every man slept vere he fell down; we dragged 'em out, one by one, this mornin', and put 'em under the pump, and they're in reg'lar fine order now. Shillin' a head the committee paid for that 'ere job.'

'Can such things be!' exclaimed the astonished Mr. Pickwick.

'Lord bless your heart, sir,' said Sam, 'why where was you half baptised?—that's nothin', that ain't.'

'Nothing?'said Mr. Pickwick. 'Nothin' at all, Sir,' replied his attendant. 'The night afore the last day o' the last election here, the opposite party bribed the barmaid at the Town Arms, to hocus the brandy-and-water of fourteen unpolled electors as was a-stoppin' in the house.'

'What do you mean by "hocussing" brandy-and-water?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Puttin' laud'num in it,' replied Sam. 'Blessed if she didn't send 'em all to sleep till twelve hours arter the election was over. They took one man up to the booth, in a truck, fast asleep, by way of experiment, but it was no go—they wouldn't poll him; so they brought him back, and put him to bed again.' 'Strange practices, these,' said Mr. Pickwick; half speaking to himself and half addressing Sam.

'Not half so strange as a miraculous circumstance as happened to my own father, at an election time, in this wery place, Sir,' replied Sam.

'What was that?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Why, he drove a coach down here once,' said Sam; "lection time came on, and he was engaged by vun party to bring down woters from London.

Night afore he was going to drive up, committee on t' other side sends for him quietly, and away he goes vith the messenger, who shows him in;—large room—lots of gen'l'm'n—heaps of papers, pens and ink, and all that 'ere. "Ah, Mr. Weller," says the gen'l'm'n in the chair, "glad to see you, sir; how are you?"—"Wery well, thank 'ee, Sir," says my father; "I hope you're pretty middlin," says he.—"Pretty well, thank'ee, Sir," says the gen'l'm'n; "sit down, Mr. Weller—pray sit down, sir." So my father sits down, and he and the gen'l'm'n looks wery hard at each other. "You don't remember me?" said the gen'l'm'n.—"Can't say I do," says my father.—"Oh, I know you," says the gen'l'm'n: "know'd you when you was a boy," says he.—"Well, I don't remember you," says my father.—"That's wery odd," says the gen'l'm'n."—"Wery," says my father.—"You must have a bad mem'ry, Mr. Weller," says the gen'l'm'n.—"Well, it is a wery bad 'un," says my father.—"I thought so," says the gen'l'm'n. So then they pours him out a glass of wine, and gammons him about his driving, and gets him into a reg'lar good humour, and at last shoves a twenty-pound note into his hand. "It's a wery bad road between this and London," says the gen'l'm'n.—"Here and there it is a heavy road," says my father.—" 'Specially near the canal, I think," says the gen'l'm'n.—"Nasty bit that 'ere," says my father.—"Well, Mr. Weller," says the gen'l'm'n, "you're a wery good whip, and can do what you like with your horses, we know. We're all wery fond o' you, Mr. Weller, so in case you should have an accident when you're bringing these here woters down, and should tip 'em over into the canal vithout hurtin' of 'em, this is for yourself," says he.—"Gen'l'm'n, you're wery kind," says my father, "and I'll drink your health in another glass of wine," says he; vich he did, and then buttons up the money, and bows himself out. You wouldn't believe, sir,' continued Sam, with a look of inexpressible impudence at his master, 'that on the wery day as he came down with them woters, his coach WAS upset on that 'ere wery spot, and ev'ry man on 'em was turned into the canal.'

'And got out again?' inquired Mr. Pickwick hastily.

'Why,' replied Sam very slowly, 'I rather think one old gen'l'm'n was missin'; I know his hat was found, but I ain't quite certain whether his head was in it or not. But what I look at is the hex-traordinary and wonderful coincidence, that arter what that gen'l'm'n said, my father's coach should be upset in that wery place, and on that wery day!'

'it is, no doubt, a very extraordinary circumstance indeed,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'But brush my hat, Sam, for I hear Mr. Winkle calling me to breakfast.'

With these words Mr. Pickwick descended to the parlour, where he found breakfast laid, and the family already assembled. The meal was hastily despatched; each of the gentlemen's hats was decorated with an enormous blue favour, made up by the fair hands of Mrs. Pott herself; and as Mr. Winkle had undertaken to escort that lady to a house-top, in the immediate vicinity of the hustings, Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Pott repaired alone to the Town Arms, from the back window of which, one of Mr. Slumkey's committee was addressing six small boys and one girl, whom he dignified, at every second sentence, with the imposing title of 'Men of Eatanswill,' whereat the six small boys aforesaid cheered prodigiously.

The stable-yard exhibited unequivocal symptoms of the glory and strength of the Eatanswill Blues. There was a regular army of blue flags, some with one handle, and some with two, exhibiting appropriate devices, in golden characters four feet high, and stout in proportion. There was a grand band of trumpets, bassoons, and drums, marshalled four abreast, and earning their money, if ever men did, especially the drum-beaters, who were very muscular. There were bodies of constables with blue staves, twenty committee-men with blue scarfs, and a mob of voters with blue cockades. There were electors on horseback and electors afoot. There was an open carriage-and-four, for the Honourable Samuel Slumkey; and there were four carriage-and-pair, for his friends and supporters; and the flags were rustling, and the band was playing, and the constables were swearing, and the twenty committee-men were squabbling, and the mob were shouting, and the horses were backing, and the post-boys perspiring; and everybody, and everything, then and there assembled, was for the special use, behoof, honour, and renown, of the Honourable Samuel Slumkey, of Slumkey Hall, one of the candidates for the representation of the borough of Eatanswill, in the Commons House of Parliament of the United Kingdom. Loud and long were the cheers, and mighty was the rustling of one of the blue flags, with 'Liberty of the Press' inscribed thereon, when the sandy head of Mr. Pott was discerned in one of the windows, by the mob beneath; and tremendous was the enthusiasm when the Honourable Samuel Slumkey himself, in top-boots, and a blue neckerchief, advanced and seized the hand of the said Pott, and melodramatically testified by gestures to the crowd, his ineffaceable obligations to the Eatanswill GAZETTE.

'Is everything ready?' said the Honourable Samuel Slumkey to Mr. Perker.

'Everything, my dear Sir,' was the little man's reply.

'Nothing has been omitted, I hope?' said the Honourable Samuel Slumkey.

'Nothing has been left undone, my dear sir—nothing whatever. There are twenty washed men at the street door for you to shake hands with; and six children in arms that you're to pat on the head, and inquire the age of; be particular about the children, my dear sir—it has always a great effect, that sort of thing.'

'I'll take care,' said the Honourable Samuel Slumkey.

'And, perhaps, my dear Sir,' said the cautious little man, 'perhaps if you could—I don't mean to say it's indispensable—but if you could manage to kiss one of 'em, it would produce a very great impression on the crowd.'

'Wouldn't it have as good an effect if the proposer or seconder did that?' said the Honourable Samuel Slumkey.

'Why, I am afraid it wouldn't,' replied the agent; 'if it were done by yourself, my dear Sir, I think it would make you very popular.'

'Very well,' said the Honourable Samuel Slumkey, with a resigned air, 'then it must be done. That's all.'

'Arrange the procession,' cried the twenty committee-men.

Amidst the cheers of the assembled throng, the band, and the constables, and the committee-men, and the voters, and the horsemen, and the carriages, took their places—each of the two-horse vehicles being closely packed with as many gentlemen as could manage to stand upright in it; and that assigned to Mr. Perker, containing Mr. Pickwick, Mr. Tupman, Mr. Snodgrass, and about half a dozen of the committee besides.

There was a moment of awful suspense as the procession waited for the Honourable Samuel Slumkey to step into his carriage. Suddenly the crowd set up a great cheering.

'He has come out,' said little Mr. Perker, greatly excited; the more so as their position did not enable them to see what was going forward.

Another cheer, much louder.

'He has shaken hands with the men,' cried the little agent.

Another cheer, far more vehement.

'He has patted the babies on the head,' said Mr. Perker, trembling with anxiety.

A roar of applause that rent the air.

'He has kissed one of 'em!' exclaimed the delighted little man.

A second roar.

'He has kissed another,' gasped the excited manager.

A third roar.

'He's kissing 'em all!' screamed the enthusiastic little gentleman, and hailed by the deafening shouts of the multitude, the procession moved on.

How or by what means it became mixed up with the other procession, and how it was ever extricated from the confusion consequent thereupon, is more than we can undertake to describe, inasmuch as Mr. Pickwick's hat was knocked over his eyes, nose, and mouth, by one poke of a Buff flag-staff, very early in the proceedings. He describes himself as being surrounded on every side, when he could catch a glimpse of the scene, by angry and ferocious countenances, by a vast cloud of dust, and by a dense crowd of combatants. He represents himself as being forced from the carriage by some unseen power, and being personally engaged in a pugilistic encounter; but with whom, or how, or why, he is wholly unable to state. He then felt himself forced up some wooden steps by the persons from behind; and on removing his hat, found himself surrounded by his friends, in the very front of the left hand side of the hustings. The right was reserved for the Buff party, and the centre for the mayor and his officers; one of whom—the fat crier of Eatanswill—was ringing an enormous bell, by way of commanding silence, while Mr. Horatio Fizkin, and the Honourable Samuel Slumkey, with their hands upon their hearts, were bowing with the utmost affability to the troubled sea of heads that inundated the open space in front; and from whence arose a storm of groans, and shouts, and yells, and hootings, that would have done honour to an earthquake.

'There's Winkle,' said Mr. Tupman, pulling his friend by the sleeve.

'Where!' said Mr. Pickwick, putting on his spectacles, which he had fortunately kept in his pocket hitherto. 'There,' said Mr. Tupman, 'on the top of that house.' And there, sure enough, in the leaden gutter of a tiled roof, were Mr. Winkle and Mrs. Pott, comfortably seated in a couple of chairs, waving their handkerchiefs in token of recognition—a compliment which Mr. Pickwick returned by kissing his hand to the lady.

The proceedings had not yet commenced; and as an inactive crowd is generally disposed to be jocose, this very innocent action was sufficient to awaken their facetiousness.

'Oh, you wicked old rascal,' cried one voice, 'looking arter the girls, are you?'

'Oh, you wenerable sinner,' cried another.

'Putting on his spectacles to look at a married 'ooman!' said a third.

'I see him a-winkin' at her, with his wicked old eye,' shouted a fourth.

'Look arter your wife, Pott,' bellowed a fifth—and then there was a roar of laughter.

As these taunts were accompanied with invidious comparisons between Mr. Pickwick and an aged ram, and several witticisms of the like nature; and as they moreover rather tended to convey reflections upon the honour of an innocent lady, Mr. Pickwick's indignation was excessive; but as silence was proclaimed at the moment, he contented himself by scorching the mob with a look of pity for their misguided minds, at which they laughed more boisterously than ever.

'Silence!' roared the mayor's attendants.

'Whiffin, proclaim silence,' said the mayor, with an air of pomp befitting his lofty station. In obedience to this command the crier performed another concerto on the bell, whereupon a gentleman in the crowd called out 'Muffins'; which occasioned another laugh.

'Gentlemen,' said the mayor, at as loud a pitch as he could possibly force his voice to—'gentlemen. Brother electors of the borough of Eatanswill. We are met here to-day for the purpose of choosing a representative in the room of our late—'

Here the mayor was interrupted by a voice in the crowd.

'Suc-cess to the mayor!' cried the voice, 'and may he never desert the nail and sarspan business, as he got his money by.'

This allusion to the professional pursuits of the orator was received with a storm of delight, which, with a bell-accompaniment, rendered the remainder of his speech inaudible, with the exception of the concluding sentence, in which he thanked the meeting for the patient attention with which they heard him throughout—an expression of gratitude which elicited another burst of mirth, of about a quarter of an hour's duration.

Next, a tall, thin gentleman, in a very stiff white neckerchief, after being repeatedly desired by the crowd to 'send a boy home, to ask whether he hadn't left his voice under the pillow,' begged to nominate a fit and proper person to represent them in Parliament. And when he said it was Horatio

Fizkin, Esquire, of Fizkin Lodge, near Eatanswill, the Fizkinites applauded, and the Slumkeyites groaned, so long, and so loudly, that both he and the seconder might have sung comic songs in lieu of speaking, without anybody's being a bit the wiser.

The friends of Horatio Fizkin, Esquire, having had their innings, a little choleric, pink-faced man stood forward to propose another fit and proper person to represent the electors of Eatanswill in Parliament; and very swimmingly the pink-faced gentleman would have got on, if he had not been rather too choleric to entertain a sufficient perception of the fun of the crowd. But after a very few sentences of figurative eloquence, the pink-faced gentleman got from denouncing those who interrupted him in the mob, to exchanging defiances with the gentlemen on the hustings; whereupon arose an uproar which reduced him to the necessity of expressing his feelings by serious pantomime, which he did, and then left the stage to his seconder, who delivered a written speech of half an hour's length, and wouldn't be stopped, because he had sent it all to the Eatanswill GAZETTE, and the Eatanswill GAZETTE had already printed it, every word.

Then Horatio Fizkin, Esquire, of Fizkin Lodge, near Eatanswill, presented himself for the purpose of addressing the electors; which he no sooner did, than the band employed by the Honourable Samuel Slumkey, commenced performing with a power to which their strength in the morning was a trifle; in return for which, the Buff crowd belaboured the heads and shoulders of the Blue crowd; on which the Blue crowd endeavoured to dispossess themselves of their very unpleasant neighbours the Buff crowd; and a scene of struggling, and pushing, and fighting, succeeded, to which we can no more do justice than the mayor could, although he issued imperative orders to twelve constables to seize the ringleaders, who might amount in number to two hundred and fifty, or thereabouts. At all these encounters, Horatio Fizkin, Esquire, of Fizkin Lodge, and his friends, waxed fierce and furious; until at last Horatio Fizkin, Esquire, of Fizkin Lodge, begged to ask his opponent, the Honourable Samuel Slumkey, of Slumkey Hall, whether that band played by his consent; which question the Honourable Samuel Slumkey declining to answer, Horatio Fizkin, Esquire, of Fizkin Lodge, shook his fist in the countenance of the Honourable Samuel Slumkey, of Slumkey Hall; upon which the Honourable Samuel Slumkey, his blood being up, defied Horatio Fizkin, Esquire, to mortal combat. At this violation of all known rules and precedents of order, the mayor commanded another fantasia on the bell, and declared that he would bring before himself, both Horatio Fizkin, Esquire, of Fizkin Lodge, and the Honourable Samuel Slumkey, of Slumkey Hall, and bind them over to keep the peace. Upon this terrific denunciation, the supporters of the two candidates interfered, and after the friends of each party had quarrelled in pairs, for three-quarters of an hour, Horatio Fizkin, Esquire, touched his hat to the Honourable Samuel Slumkey; the Honourable Samuel Slumkey touched his to Horatio Fizkin, Esquire; the band was stopped; the crowd were partially quieted; and Horatio Fizkin, Esquire, was permitted to proceed.

The speeches of the two candidates, though differing in every other respect, afforded a beautiful tribute to the merit and high worth of the electors of Eatanswill. Both expressed their opinion that a more independent, a more enlightened, a more public-spirited, a more noble-minded, a more disinterested set of men than those who had promised to vote for him, never existed on earth; each darkly hinted his suspicions that the electors in the opposite interest had certain swinish and besotted infirmities which rendered them unfit for the exercise of the important duties they were called upon to discharge. Fizkin expressed his readiness to do anything he was wanted: Slumkey, his determination to do nothing that was asked of him. Both said that the trade, the manufactures, the commerce, the prosperity of Eatanswill, would ever be dearer to their hearts than any earthly object; and each had it in his power to state, with the utmost confidence, that he was the man who would eventually be returned.

There was a show of hands; the mayor decided in favour of the Honourable Samuel Slumkey, of Slumkey Hall. Horatio Fizkin, Esquire, of Fizkin Lodge, demanded a poll, and a poll was fixed accordingly. Then a vote of thanks was moved to the mayor for his able conduct in the chair; and the mayor, devoutly wishing that he had had a chair to display his able conduct in (for he had been standing during the whole proceedings), returned thanks. The processions reformed, the carriages rolled slowly through the crowd, and its members screeched and shouted after them as their feelings or caprice dictated.

During the whole time of the polling, the town was in a perpetual fever of excitement. Everything was conducted on the most liberal and delightful scale. Excisable articles were remarkably cheap at all the public-houses;

and spring vans paraded the streets for the accommodation of voters who were seized with any temporary dizziness in the head—an epidemic which prevailed among the electors, during the contest, to a most alarming extent, and under the influence of which they might frequently be seen lying on the pavements in a state of utter insensibility. A small body of electors remained unpolled on the very last day. They were calculating and reflecting persons, who had not yet been convinced by the arguments of either party, although they had frequent conferences with each. One hour before the close of the poll, Mr. Perker solicited the honour of a private interview with these intelligent, these noble, these patriotic men. It was granted. His arguments were brief but satisfactory. They went in a body to the poll; and when they returned, the Honourable Samuel Slumkey, of Slumkey Hall, was returned also.

CHAPTER XIV. COMPRISING A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE COMPANY AT THE

PEACOCK ASSEMBLED; AND A TALE TOLD BY A BAGMAN

It is pleasant to turn from contemplating the strife and turmoil of political existence, to the peaceful repose of private life. Although in reality no great partisan of either side, Mr. Pickwick was sufficiently fired with Mr. Pott's enthusiasm, to apply his whole time and attention to the proceedings, of which the last chapter affords a description compiled from his own memoranda. Nor while he was thus occupied was Mr. Winkle idle, his whole time being devoted to pleasant walks and short country excursions with Mrs. Pott, who never failed, when such an opportunity presented itself, to seek some relief from the tedious monotony she so constantly complained of. The two gentlemen being thus completely domesticated in the editor's house, Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass were in a great measure cast upon their own resources. Taking but little interest in public affairs, they beguiled their time chiefly with such amusements as the Peacock afforded, which were limited to a bagatelle-board in the first floor, and a sequestered skittle-ground in the back yard. In the science and nicety of both these recreations, which are far more abstruse than ordinary men suppose, they were gradually initiated by Mr. Weller, who possessed a perfect knowledge of such pastimes. Thus, notwithstanding that they were in a great measure deprived of the comfort and advantage of Mr. Pickwick's society, they were still enabled to beguile the time, and to prevent its hanging heavily on their hands.

It was in the evening, however, that the Peacock presented attractions which enabled the two friends to resist even the invitations of the gifted, though prosy, Pott. It was in the evening that the 'commercial room' was filled with a social circle, whose characters and manners it was the delight of Mr. Tupman to observe; whose sayings and doings it was the habit of Mr. Snodgrass to note down.

Most people know what sort of places commercial rooms usually are. That of the Peacock differed in no material respect from the generality of such apartments; that is to say, it was a large, bare-looking room, the furniture of which had no doubt been better when it was newer, with a spacious table in the centre, and a variety of smaller dittos in the corners; an extensive assortment of variously shaped chairs, and an old Turkey carpet, bearing about the same relative proportion to the size of the room, as a lady's pocket-handkerchief might to the floor of a watch-box. The walls were garnished with one or two large maps; and several weather-beaten rough greatcoats, with complicated capes, dangled from a long row of pegs in one corner. The mantel-shelf was ornamented with a wooden inkstand, containing one stump of a pen and half a wafer; a road-book and directory; a county history minus the cover; and the mortal remains of a trout in a glass coffin. The atmosphere was redolent of tobacco-smoke, the fumes of which had communicated a rather dingy hue to the whole room, and more especially to the dusty red curtains which shaded the windows. On the sideboard a variety of miscellaneous articles were huddled together, the most conspicuous of which were some very cloudy fish-sauce cruets, a couple of driving-boxes, two or three whips, and as many travelling shawls, a tray of knives and forks, and the mustard.

Here it was that Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass were seated on the evening after the conclusion of the election, with several other temporary inmates of the house, smoking and drinking.

'Well, gents,' said a stout, hale personage of about forty, with only one eye—a very bright black eye, which twinkled with a roguish expression of fun and good-humour, 'our noble selves, gents. I always propose that toast to the company, and drink Mary to myself. Eh, Mary!'

'Get along with you, you wretch,' said the hand-maiden, obviously not ill-pleased with the compliment, however.

'Don't go away, Mary,' said the black-eyed man.

'Let me alone, imperence,' said the young lady.

'Never mind,' said the one-eyed man, calling after the girl as she left the room. 'I'll step out by and by, Mary. Keep your spirits up, dear.' Here he went through the not very difficult process of winking upon the company with his solitary eye, to the enthusiastic delight of an elderly personage with a dirty face and a clay pipe.

'Rum creeters is women,' said the dirty-faced man, after a pause.

'Ah! no mistake about that,' said a very red-faced man, behind a cigar.

After this little bit of philosophy there was another pause.

'There's rummer things than women in this world though, mind you,' said the man with the black eye, slowly filling a large Dutch pipe, with a most capacious bowl.

'Are you married?' inquired the dirty-faced man.

'Can't say I am.'

'I thought not.' Here the dirty-faced man fell into ecstasies of mirth at his own retort, in which he was joined by a man of bland voice and placid countenance, who always made it a point to agree with everybody.

'Women, after all, gentlemen,' said the enthusiastic Mr. Snodgrass, 'are the great props and comforts of our existence.'

'So they are,' said the placid gentleman.

'When they're in a good humour,' interposed the dirty-faced man.

'And that's very true,' said the placid one.

'I repudiate that qualification,' said Mr. Snodgrass, whose thoughts were fast reverting to Emily Wardle. 'I repudiate it with disdain—with indignation. Show me the man who says anything against women, as women, and I boldly declare he is not a man.' And Mr. Snodgrass took his cigar from his mouth, and struck the table violently with his clenched fist.

'That's good sound argument,' said the placid man.

'Containing a position which I deny,' interrupted he of the dirty countenance.

'And there's certainly a very great deal of truth in what you observe too, Sir,' said the placid gentleman.

'Your health, Sir,' said the bagman with the lonely eye, bestowing an approving nod on Mr. Snodgrass.

Mr. Snodgrass acknowledged the compliment.

'I always like to hear a good argument,'continued the bagman, 'a sharp one, like this: it's very improving; but this little argument about women brought to my mind a story I have heard an old uncle of mine tell, the recollection of which, just now, made me say there were rummer things than women to be met with, sometimes.'

'I should like to hear that same story,' said the red-faced man with the cigar.

'Should you?' was the only reply of the bagman, who continued to smoke with great vehemence.

'So should I,' said Mr. Tupman, speaking for the first time. He was always anxious to increase his stock of experience.

'Should YOU? Well then, I'll tell it. No, I won't. I know you won't believe it,' said the man with the roguish eye, making that organ look more roguish than ever. 'If you say it's true, of course I shall,' said Mr. Tupman.

'Well, upon that understanding I'll tell you,' replied the traveller. 'Did you ever hear of the great commercial house of Bilson & Slum? But it doesn't matter though, whether you did or not, because they retired from business long since. It's eighty years ago, since the circumstance happened to a traveller for that house, but he was a particular friend of my uncle's; and my uncle told the story to me. It's a queer name; but he used to call it

THE BAGMAN'S STORY

and he used to tell it, something in this way.

'One winter's evening, about five o'clock, just as it began to grow dusk, a man in a gig might have been seen urging his tired horse along the road which leads across Marlborough Downs, in the direction of Bristol. I say he might have been seen, and I have no doubt he would have been, if anybody but a blind man had happened to pass that way; but the weather was so bad, and the night so cold and wet, that nothing was out but the water, and so the traveller jogged along in the middle of the road, lonesome and dreary enough. If any bagman of that day could have caught sight of the little neck-or-nothing sort of gig, with a clay-coloured body and red wheels, and the vixenish, ill tempered, fast-going bay mare, that looked like a cross between a butcher's horse and a twopenny post-office pony, he would have known at once, that this traveller could have been no other than Tom Smart, of the great house of Bilson and Slum, Cateaton Street, City. However, as there was no bagman to look on, nobody knew anything at all about the matter; and so Tom Smart and his clay-coloured gig with the red wheels, and the vixenish mare with the fast pace, went on together, keeping the secret among them, and nobody was a bit the wiser.

'There are many pleasanter places even in this dreary world, than Marlborough Downs when it blows hard; and if you throw in beside, a gloomy winter's evening, a miry and sloppy road, and a pelting fall of heavy rain, and try the effect, by way of experiment, in your own proper person, you will experience the full force of this observation.

'The wind blew—not up the road or down it, though that's bad enough, but sheer across it, sending the rain slanting down like the lines they used to rule in the copy-books at school, to make the boys slope well. For a moment it would die away, and the traveller would begin to delude himself into the belief that, exhausted with its previous fury, it had quietly laid itself down to rest, when, whoo! he could hear it growling and whistling in the distance, and on it would come rushing over the hill-tops, and sweeping along the plain, gathering sound and strength as it drew nearer, until it dashed with a heavy gust against horse and man, driving the sharp rain into their ears, and its cold damp breath into their very bones; and past them it would scour, far, far away, with a stunning roar, as if in ridicule of their weakness, and triumphant in the consciousness of its own strength and power.

'The bay mare splashed away, through the mud and water, with drooping ears; now and then tossing her head as if to express her disgust at this very ungentlemanly behaviour of the elements, but keeping a good pace notwithstanding, until a gust of wind, more furious than any that had yet assailed them, caused her to stop suddenly and plant her four feet firmly against the ground, to prevent her being blown over. It's a special mercy that she did this, for if she HAD been blown over, the vixenish mare was so light, and the gig was so light, and Tom Smart such a light weight into the bargain, that they must infallibly have all gone rolling over and over together, until they reached the confines of earth, or until the wind fell; and in either case the probability is, that neither the vixenish mare, nor the clay-coloured gig with the red wheels, nor Tom Smart, would ever have been fit for service again.

'"Well, damn my straps and whiskers," says Tom Smart (Tom sometimes had an unpleasant knack of swearing)—"damn my straps and whiskers," says Tom, "if this ain't pleasant, blow me!"

'You'll very likely ask me why, as Tom Smart had been pretty well blown already, he expressed this wish to be submitted to the same process again. I can't say—all I know is, that Tom Smart said so—or at least he always told my uncle he said so, and it's just the same thing.

'"Blow me," says Tom Smart; and the mare neighed as if she were precisely of the same opinion.

'"Cheer up, old girl," said Tom, patting the bay mare on the neck with the end of his whip. "It won't do pushing on, such a night as this; the first house we come to we'll put up at, so the faster you go the sooner it's over. Soho, old girl—gently—gently."

'Whether the vixenish mare was sufficiently well acquainted with the tones of Tom's voice to comprehend his meaning, or whether she found it colder standing still than moving on, of course I can't say. But I can say that Tom had no sooner finished speaking, than she pricked up her ears, and started forward at a speed which made the clay-coloured gig rattle until you would have supposed every one of the red spokes were going to fly out on the turf of Marlborough Downs; and even Tom, whip as he was, couldn't stop or check her pace, until she drew up of her own accord, before a roadside inn on the right-hand side of the way, about half a quarter of a mile from the end of the Downs. 'Tom cast a hasty glance at the upper part of the house as he threw the reins to the hostler, and stuck the whip in the box. It was a strange old place, built of a kind of shingle, inlaid, as it were, with cross-beams, with gabled-topped windows projecting completely over the pathway, and a low door with a dark porch, and a couple of steep steps leading down into the house, instead of the modern fashion of half a dozen shallow ones leading up to it. It was a comfortable-looking place though, for there was a strong, cheerful light in the bar window, which shed a bright ray across the road, and even lighted up the hedge on the other side; and there was a red flickering light in the opposite window, one moment but faintly discernible, and the next gleaming strongly through the drawn curtains, which intimated that a rousing fire was blazing within. Marking these little evidences with the eye of an experienced traveller, Tom dismounted with as much agility as his half-frozen limbs would permit, and entered the house.

'In less than five minutes' time, Tom was ensconced in the room opposite the bar—the very room where he had imagined the fire blazing—before a substantial, matter-of-fact, roaring fire, composed of something short of a bushel of coals, and wood enough to make half a dozen decent gooseberry bushes, piled half-way up the chimney, and roaring and crackling with a sound that of itself would have warmed the heart of any reasonable man. This was comfortable, but this was not all; for a smartly-dressed girl, with a bright eye and a neat ankle, was laying a very clean white cloth on the table; and as Tom sat with his slippered feet on the fender, and his back to the open door, he saw a charming prospect of the bar reflected in the glass over the chimney-piece, with delightful rows of green bottles and gold labels, together with jars of pickles and preserves, and cheeses and boiled hams, and rounds of beef, arranged on shelves in the most tempting and delicious array. Well, this was comfortable too; but even this was not all—for in the bar, seated at tea at the nicest possible little table, drawn close up before the brightest possible little fire, was a buxom widow of somewhere about eight-and-forty or thereabouts, with a face as comfortable as the bar, who was evidently the landlady of the house, and the supreme ruler over all these agreeable possessions. There was only one drawback to the beauty of the whole picture, and that was a tall man—a very tall man—in a brown coat and bright basket buttons, and black whiskers and wavy black hair, who was seated at tea with the widow, and who it required no great penetration to discover was in a fair way of persuading her to be a widow no longer, but to confer upon him the privilege of sitting down in that bar, for and during the whole remainder of the term of his natural life.

'Tom Smart was by no means of an irritable or envious disposition, but somehow or other the tall man with the brown coat and the bright basket buttons did rouse what little gall he had in his composition, and did make him feel extremely indignant, the more especially as he could now and then observe, from his seat before the glass, certain little affectionate familiarities passing between the tall man and the widow, which sufficiently denoted that the tall man was as high in favour as he was in size. Tom was fond of hot punch—I may venture to say he was VERY fond of hot punch—and after he had seen the vixenish mare well fed and well littered down, and had eaten every bit of the nice little hot dinner which the widow tossed up for him with her own hands, he just ordered a tumbler of it by way of experiment. Now, if there was one thing in the whole range of domestic art, which the widow could manufacture better than another, it was this identical article; and the first tumbler was adapted to Tom Smart's taste with such peculiar nicety, that he ordered a second with the least possible delay. Hot punch is a pleasant thing, gentlemen—an extremely pleasant thing under any circumstances—but in that snug old parlour, before the roaring fire, with the wind blowing outside till every timber in the old house creaked again, Tom Smart found it perfectly delightful. He ordered another tumbler, and then another—I am not quite certain whether he didn't order another after that—but the more he drank of the hot punch, the more he thought of the tall man.

'"Confound his impudence!" said Tom to himself, "what business has he in that snug bar? Such an ugly villain too!" said Tom. "If the widow had any taste, she might surely pick up some better fellow than that." Here Tom's eye wandered from the glass on the chimney-piece to the glass on the table; and as he felt himself becoming gradually sentimental, he emptied the fourth tumbler of punch and ordered a fifth.

'Tom Smart, gentlemen, had always been very much attached to the public line. It had been long his ambition to stand in a bar of his own, in a green coat, knee-cords, and tops. He had a great notion of taking the chair at convivial dinners, and he had often thought how well he could preside in a room of his own in the talking way, and what a capital example he could set to his customers in the drinking department. All these things passed rapidly through Tom's mind as he sat drinking the hot punch by the roaring fire, and he felt very justly and properly indignant that the tall man should be in a fair way of keeping such an excellent house, while he, Tom Smart, was as far off from it as ever. So, after deliberating over the two last tumblers, whether he hadn't a perfect right to pick a quarrel with the tall man for having contrived to get into the good graces of the buxom widow, Tom Smart at last arrived at the satisfactory conclusion that he was a very ill-used and persecuted individual, and had better go to bed.

'Up a wide and ancient staircase the smart girl preceded Tom, shading the chamber candle with her hand, to protect it from the currents of air which in such a rambling old place might have found plenty of room to disport themselves in, without blowing the candle out, but which did blow it out nevertheless—thus affording Tom's enemies an opportunity of asserting that it was he, and not the wind, who extinguished the candle, and that while he pretended to be blowing it alight again, he was in fact kissing the girl. Be this as it may, another light was obtained, and Tom was conducted through a maze of rooms, and a labyrinth of passages, to the apartment which had been prepared for his reception, where the girl bade him good-night and left him alone.

'It was a good large room with big closets, and a bed which might have served for a whole boarding-school, to say nothing of a couple of oaken presses that would have held the baggage of a small army; but what struck Tom's fancy most was a strange, grim-looking, high backed chair, carved in the most fantastic manner, with a flowered damask cushion, and the round knobs at the bottom of the legs carefully tied up in red cloth, as if it had got the gout in its toes. Of any other queer chair, Tom would only have thought it was a queer chair, and there would have been an end of the matter; but there was something about this particular chair, and yet he couldn't tell what it was, so odd and so unlike any other piece of furniture he had ever seen, that it seemed to fascinate him. He sat down before the fire, and stared at the old chair for half an hour.—Damn the chair, it was such a strange old thing, he couldn't take his eyes off it.

'"Well," said Tom, slowly undressing himself, and staring at the old chair all the while, which stood with a mysterious aspect by the bedside, "I never saw such a rum concern as that in my days. Very odd," said Tom, who had got rather sage with the hot punch—"very odd." Tom shook his head with an air of profound wisdom, and looked at the chair again. He couldn't make anything of it though, so he got into bed, covered himself up warm, and fell asleep.

'In about half an hour, Tom woke up with a start, from a confused dream of tall men and tumblers of punch; and the first object that presented itself to his waking imagination was the queer chair.

'"I won't look at it any more," said Tom to himself, and he squeezed his eyelids together, and tried to persuade himself he was going to sleep again. No use; nothing but queer chairs danced before his eyes, kicking up their legs, jumping over each other's backs, and playing all kinds of antics.

'"I may as well see one real chair, as two or three complete sets of false ones," said Tom, bringing out his head from under the bedclothes. There it was, plainly discernible by the light of the fire, looking as provoking as ever.

'Tom gazed at the chair; and, suddenly as he looked at it, a most extraordinary change seemed to come over it. The carving of the back gradually assumed the lineaments and expression of an old, shrivelled human face; the damask cushion became an antique, flapped waistcoat; the round knobs grew into a couple of feet, encased in red cloth slippers; and the whole chair looked like a very ugly old man, of the previous century, with his arms akimbo. Tom sat up in bed, and rubbed his eyes to dispel the illusion. No. The chair was an ugly old gentleman; and what was more, he was winking at Tom Smart.

'Tom was naturally a headlong, careless sort of dog, and he had had five tumblers of hot punch into the bargain; so, although he was a little startled at first, he began to grow rather indignant when he saw the old gentleman winking and leering at him with such an impudent air. At length he resolved that he wouldn't stand it; and as the old face still kept winking away as fast as ever, Tom said, in a very angry tone—

'"What the devil are you winking at me for?"

'"Because I like it, Tom Smart," said the chair; or the old gentleman, whichever you like to call him. He stopped winking though, when Tom spoke, and began grinning like a superannuated monkey.

'"How do you know my name, old nut-cracker face?" inquired Tom Smart, rather staggered; though he pretended to carry it off so well.

'"Come, come, Tom," said the old gentleman, "that's not the way to address solid Spanish mahogany. Damme, you couldn't treat me with less respect if I was veneered." When the old gentleman said this, he looked so fierce that Tom began to grow frightened.

'"I didn't mean to treat you with any disrespect, Sir," said Tom, in a much humbler tone than he had spoken in at first.

'"Well, well," said the old fellow, "perhaps not—perhaps not. Tom—"

'"Sir—"

'"I know everything about you, Tom; everything. You're very poor, Tom."

'"I certainly am," said Tom Smart. "But how came you to know that?"

'"Never mind that," said the old gentleman; "you're much too fond of punch, Tom."

'Tom Smart was just on the point of protesting that he hadn't tasted a drop since his last birthday, but when his eye encountered that of the old gentleman he looked so knowing that Tom blushed, and was silent.

'"Tom," said the old gentleman, "the widow's a fine woman—remarkably fine woman—eh, Tom?" Here the old fellow screwed up his eyes, cocked up one of his wasted little legs, and looked altogether so unpleasantly amorous, that Tom was quite disgusted with the levity of his behaviour—at his time of life, too! '"I am her guardian, Tom," said the old gentleman.

'"Are you?" inquired Tom Smart.

'"I knew her mother, Tom," said the old fellow: "and her grandmother. She was very fond of me—made me this waistcoat, Tom."

'"Did she?" said Tom Smart.

'"And these shoes," said the old fellow, lifting up one of the red cloth mufflers; "but don't mention it, Tom. I shouldn't like to have it known that she was so much attached to me. It might occasion some unpleasantness in the family." When the old rascal said this, he looked so extremely impertinent, that, as Tom Smart afterwards declared, he could have sat upon him without remorse.

'"I have been a great favourite among the women in my time, Tom," said the profligate old debauchee; "hundreds of fine women have sat in my lap for hours together. What do you think of that, you dog, eh!" The old gentleman was proceeding to recount some other exploits of his youth, when he was seized with such a violent fit of creaking that he was unable to proceed.

'"Just serves you right, old boy," thought Tom Smart; but he didn't say anything.

'"Ah!" said the old fellow, "I am a good deal troubled with this now. I am getting old, Tom, and have lost nearly all my rails. I have had an operation performed, too—a small piece let into my back—and I found it a severe trial, Tom."

'"I dare say you did, Sir," said Tom Smart.

'"However," said the old gentleman, "that's not the point. Tom! I want you to marry the widow."

'"Me, Sir!" said Tom.

'"You," said the old gentleman.

'"Bless your reverend locks," said Tom (he had a few scattered horse-hairs left)—"bless your reverend locks, she wouldn't have me." And Tom sighed involuntarily, as he thought of the bar.

'"Wouldn't she?" said the old gentleman firmly.

'"No, no," said Tom; "there's somebody else in the wind. A tall man—a confoundedly tall man—with black whiskers."

'"Tom," said the old gentleman; "she will never have him."

'"Won't she?" said Tom. "If you stood in the bar, old gentleman, you'd tell another story." '"Pooh, pooh," said the old gentleman. "I know all about that."

'"About what?" said Tom.

'"The kissing behind the door, and all that sort of thing, Tom," said the old gentleman. And here he gave another impudent look, which made Tom very wroth, because as you all know, gentlemen, to hear an old fellow, who ought to know better, talking about these things, is very unpleasant—nothing more so.

'"I know all about that, Tom," said the old gentleman. "I have seen it done very often in my time, Tom, between more people than I should like to mention to you; but it never came to anything after all."

'"You must have seen some queer things," said Tom, with an inquisitive look.

'"You may say that, Tom," replied the old fellow, with a very complicated wink. "I am the last of my family, Tom," said the old gentleman, with a melancholy sigh.

'"Was it a large one?" inquired Tom Smart.

'"There were twelve of us, Tom," said the old gentleman; "fine, straight-backed, handsome fellows as you'd wish to see. None of your modern abortions—all with arms, and with a degree of polish, though I say it that should not, which it would have done your heart good to behold."

'"And what's become of the others, Sir?" asked Tom Smart—

'The old gentleman applied his elbow to his eye as he replied, "Gone, Tom, gone. We had hard service, Tom, and they hadn't all my constitution. They got rheumatic about the legs and arms, and went into kitchens and other hospitals; and one of 'em, with long service and hard usage, positively lost his senses—he got so crazy that he was obliged to be burnt. Shocking thing that, Tom."

'"Dreadful!" said Tom Smart.

'The old fellow paused for a few minutes, apparently struggling with his feelings of emotion, and then said—

'"However, Tom, I am wandering from the point. This tall man, Tom, is a rascally adventurer. The moment he married the widow, he would sell off all the furniture, and run away. What would be the consequence? She would be deserted and reduced to ruin, and I should catch my death of cold in some broker's shop."

'"Yes, but—"

'"Don't interrupt me," said the old gentleman. "Of you, Tom, I entertain a very different opinion; for I well know that if you once settled yourself in a public-house, you would never leave it, as long as there was anything to drink within its walls."

'"I am very much obliged to you for your good opinion, Sir," said Tom Smart.

'"Therefore," resumed the old gentleman, in a dictatorial tone, "you shall have her, and he shall not."

'"What is to prevent it?" said Tom Smart eagerly.

'"This disclosure," replied the old gentleman; "he is already married."

'"How can I prove it?" said Tom, starting half out of bed.

'The old gentleman untucked his arm from his side, and having pointed to one of the oaken presses, immediately replaced it, in its old position.

'"He little thinks," said the old gentleman, "that in the right-hand pocket of a pair of trousers in that press, he has left a letter, entreating him to return to his disconsolate wife, with six—mark me, Tom—six babes, and all of them small ones."

'As the old gentleman solemnly uttered these words, his features grew less and less distinct, and his figure more shadowy. A film came over Tom Smart's eyes. The old man seemed gradually blending into the chair, the damask waistcoat to resolve into a cushion, the red slippers to shrink into little red cloth bags. The light faded gently away, and Tom Smart fell back on his pillow, and dropped asleep.

'Morning aroused Tom from the lethargic slumber, into which he had fallen on the disappearance of the old man. He sat up in bed, and for some minutes vainly endeavoured to recall the events of the preceding night. Suddenly they rushed upon him. He looked at the chair; it was a fantastic and grim-looking piece of furniture, certainly, but it must have been a remarkably ingenious and lively imagination, that could have discovered any resemblance between it and an old man.

'"How are you, old boy?" said Tom. He was bolder in the daylight—most men are.

'The chair remained motionless, and spoke not a word.

'"Miserable morning," said Tom. No. The chair would not be drawn into conversation.

'"Which press did you point to?—you can tell me that," said Tom. Devil a word, gentlemen, the chair would say.

'"It's not much trouble to open it, anyhow," said Tom, getting out of bed very deliberately. He walked up to one of the presses. The key was in the lock; he turned it, and opened the door. There was a pair of trousers there. He put his hand into the pocket, and drew forth the identical letter the old gentleman had described!

'"Queer sort of thing, this," said Tom Smart, looking first at the chair and then at the press, and then at the letter, and then at the chair again. "Very queer," said Tom. But, as there was nothing in either, to lessen the queerness, he thought he might as well dress himself, and settle the tall man's business at once—just to put him out of his misery.

'Tom surveyed the rooms he passed through, on his way downstairs, with the scrutinising eye of a landlord; thinking it not impossible, that before long, they and their contents would be his property. The tall man was standing in the snug little bar, with his hands behind him, quite at home. He grinned vacantly at Tom. A casual observer might have supposed he did it, only to show his white teeth; but Tom Smart thought that a consciousness of triumph was passing through the place where the tall man's mind would have been, if he had had any. Tom laughed in his face; and summoned the landlady.

'"Good-morning ma'am," said Tom Smart, closing the door of the little parlour as the widow entered.

'"Good-morning, Sir," said the widow. "What will you take for breakfast, sir?"

'Tom was thinking how he should open the case, so he made no answer.

'"There's a very nice ham," said the widow, "and a beautiful cold larded fowl. Shall I send 'em in, Sir?"

'These words roused Tom from his reflections. His admiration of the widow increased as she spoke. Thoughtful creature! Comfortable provider!

'"Who is that gentleman in the bar, ma'am?" inquired Tom.

'"His name is Jinkins, Sir," said the widow, slightly blushing.

'"He's a tall man," said Tom.

'"He is a very fine man, Sir," replied the widow, "and a very nice gentleman."

'"Ah!" said Tom.

'"Is there anything more you want, Sir?" inquired the widow, rather puzzled by Tom's manner. '"Why, yes," said Tom. "My dear ma'am, will you have the kindness to sit down for one moment?"

'The widow looked much amazed, but she sat down, and Tom sat down too, close beside her. I don't know how it happened, gentlemen—indeed my uncle used to tell me that Tom Smart said he didn't know how it happened either—but somehow or other the palm of Tom's hand fell upon the back of the widow's hand, and remained there while he spoke.

'"My dear ma'am," said Tom Smart—he had always a great notion of committing the amiable—"my dear ma'am, you deserve a very excellent husband—you do indeed."

'"Lor, Sir!" said the widow—as well she might; Tom's mode of commencing the conversation being rather unusual, not to say startling; the fact of his never having set eyes upon her before the previous night being taken into consideration. "Lor, Sir!"

'"I scorn to flatter, my dear ma'am," said Tom Smart. "You deserve a very admirable husband, and whoever he is, he'll be a very lucky man." As Tom said this, his eye involuntarily wandered from the widow's face to the comfort around him.

'The widow looked more puzzled than ever, and made an effort to rise. Tom gently pressed her hand, as if to detain her, and she kept her seat. Widows, gentlemen, are not usually timorous, as my uncle used to say.

'"I am sure I am very much obliged to you, Sir, for your good opinion," said the buxom landlady, half laughing; "and if ever I marry again—"

'"IF," said Tom Smart, looking very shrewdly out of the right-hand corner of his left eye. "IF—" "Well," said the widow, laughing outright this time, "WHEN I do, I hope I shall have as good a husband as you describe."

'"Jinkins, to wit," said Tom.

'"Lor, sir!" exclaimed the widow.

'"Oh, don't tell me," said Tom, "I know him."

'"I am sure nobody who knows him, knows anything bad of him," said the widow, bridling up at the mysterious air with which Tom had spoken.

'"Hem!" said Tom Smart.

'The widow began to think it was high time to cry, so she took out her handkerchief, and inquired whether Tom wished to insult her, whether he thought it like a gentleman to take away the character of another gentleman behind his back, why, if he had got anything to say, he didn't say it to the man, like a man, instead of terrifying a poor weak woman in that way; and so forth.

'"I'll say it to him fast enough," said Tom, "only I want you to hear it first."

'"What is it?" inquired the widow, looking intently in Tom's countenance.

'"I'll astonish you," said Tom, putting his hand in his pocket.

'"If it is, that he wants money," said the widow, "I know that already, and you needn't trouble yourself." '"Pooh, nonsense, that's nothing," said Tom Smart, "I want money. 'Tain't that."

'"Oh, dear, what can it be?" exclaimed the poor widow.

'"Don't be frightened," said Tom Smart. He slowly drew forth the letter, and unfolded it. "You won't scream?" said Tom doubtfully.

'"No, no," replied the widow; "let me see it."

'"You won't go fainting away, or any of that nonsense?" said Tom.

'"No, no," returned the widow hastily.

'"And don't run out, and blow him up," said Tom; "because I'll do all that for you. You had better not exert yourself."

'"Well, well," said the widow, "let me see it."

'"I will," replied Tom Smart; and, with these words, he placed the letter in the widow's hand.

'Gentlemen, I have heard my uncle say, that Tom Smart said the widow's lamentations when she heard the disclosure would have pierced a heart of stone. Tom was certainly very tender-hearted, but they pierced his, to the very core. The widow rocked herself to and fro, and wrung her hands.

'"Oh, the deception and villainy of the man!" said the widow.

'"Frightful, my dear ma'am; but compose yourself," said Tom Smart.

'"Oh, I can't compose myself," shrieked the widow. "I shall never find anyone else I can love so much!"

'"Oh, yes you will, my dear soul," said Tom Smart, letting fall a shower of the largest-sized tears, in pity for the widow's misfortunes. Tom Smart, in the energy of his compassion, had put his arm round the widow's waist; and the widow, in a passion of grief, had clasped Tom's hand. She looked up in Tom's face, and smiled through her tears. Tom looked down in hers, and smiled through his.

'I never could find out, gentlemen, whether Tom did or did not kiss the widow at that particular moment. He used to tell my uncle he didn't, but I have my doubts about it. Between ourselves, gentlemen, I rather think he did.

'At all events, Tom kicked the very tall man out at the front door half an hour later, and married the widow a month after. And he used to drive about the country, with the clay-coloured gig with the red wheels, and the vixenish mare with the fast pace, till he gave up business many years afterwards, and went to France with his wife; and then the old house was pulled down.'

'Will you allow me to ask you,' said the inquisitive old gentleman, 'what became of the chair?'

'Why,' replied the one-eyed bagman, 'it was observed to creak very much on the day of the wedding; but Tom Smart couldn't say for certain whether it was with pleasure or bodily infirmity. He rather thought it was the latter, though, for it never spoke afterwards.'

'Everybody believed the story, didn't they?' said the dirty-faced man, refilling his pipe.

'Except Tom's enemies,' replied the bagman. 'Some of 'em said Tom invented it altogether; and others said he was drunk and fancied it, and got hold of the wrong trousers by mistake before he went to bed. But nobody ever minded what THEY said.'

'Tom Smart said it was all true?'

'Every word.'

'And your uncle?'

'Every letter.'

'They must have been very nice men, both of 'em,' said the dirty-faced man.

'Yes, they were,' replied the bagman; 'very nice men indeed!'

CHAPTER XV. IN WHICH IS GIVEN A FAITHFUL PORTRAITURE OF TWO

DISTINGUISHED PERSONS; AND AN ACCURATE DESCRIPTION OF A PUBLIC BREAKFAST IN THEIR HOUSE AND GROUNDS: WHICH PUBLIC BREAKFAST LEADS TO THE RECOGNITION OF AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE, AND THE COMMENCEMENT OF ANOTHER CHAPTER

Mr. Pickwick's conscience had been somewhat reproaching him for his recent neglect of his friends at the Peacock; and he was just on the point of walking forth in quest of them, on the third morning after the election had terminated, when his faithful valet put into his hand a card, on which was engraved the following inscription:—

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Mrs. Leo Hunter
THE DEN. EATANSWILL.
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'Person's a-waitin',' said Sam, epigrammatically.

'Does the person want me, Sam?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'He wants you partickler; and no one else 'll do, as the devil's private secretary said ven he fetched avay Doctor Faustus,' replied Mr. Weller.

'HE. Is it a gentleman?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'A wery good imitation o' one, if it ain't,' replied Mr. Weller.

'But this is a lady's card,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Given me by a gen'l'm'n, howsoever,' replied Sam, 'and he's a-waitin' in the drawing-room—said he'd rather wait all day, than not see you.'

Mr. Pickwick, on hearing this determination, descended to the drawing-room, where sat a grave man, who started up on his entrance, and said, with an air of profound respect:—

'Mr. Pickwick, I presume?'

'The same.'

'Allow me, Sir, the honour of grasping your hand. Permit me, Sir, to shake it,' said the grave man.

'Certainly,' said Mr. Pickwick. The stranger shook the extended hand, and then continued—

'We have heard of your fame, sir. The noise of your antiquarian discussion has reached the ears of Mrs. Leo Hunter—my wife, sir; I am Mr. Leo Hunter'—the stranger paused, as if he expected that Mr. Pickwick would be overcome by the disclosure; but seeing that he remained perfectly calm, proceeded—

'My wife, sir—Mrs. Leo Hunter—is proud to number among her acquaintance all those who have rendered themselves celebrated by their works and talents. Permit me, sir, to place in a conspicuous part of the list the name of Mr. Pickwick, and his brother-members of the club that derives its name from him.'

'I shall be extremely happy to make the acquaintance of such a lady, sir,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'You SHALL make it, sir,' said the grave man. 'To-morrow morning, sir, we give a public breakfast—a FETE CHAMPETRE—to a great number of those who have rendered themselves celebrated by their works and talents. Permit Mrs. Leo Hunter, Sir, to have the gratification of seeing you at the Den.'

'With great pleasure,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'Mrs. Leo Hunter has many of these breakfasts, Sir,' resumed the new acquaintance—'"feasts of reason," sir, "and flows of soul," as somebody who wrote a sonnet to Mrs. Leo Hunter on her breakfasts, feelingly and originally observed.'

'Was HE celebrated for his works and talents?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'He was Sir,' replied the grave man, 'all Mrs. Leo Hunter's acquaintances are; it is her ambition, sir, to have no other acquaintance.'

'It is a very noble ambition,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'When I inform Mrs. Leo Hunter, that that remark fell from your lips, sir, she will indeed be proud,' said the grave man. 'You have a gentleman in your train, who has produced some beautiful little poems, I think, sir.'

'My friend Mr. Snodgrass has a great taste for poetry,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'So has Mrs. Leo Hunter, Sir. She dotes on poetry, sir. She adores it; I may say that her whole soul and mind are wound up, and entwined with it. She has produced some delightful pieces, herself, sir. You may have met with her "Ode to an Expiring Frog," sir.'

'I don't think I have,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'You astonish me, Sir,' said Mr. Leo Hunter. 'It created an immense sensation. It was signed with an "L" and eight stars, and appeared originally in a lady's magazine. It commenced—

'"Can I view thee panting, lying
On thy stomach, without sighing;
Can I unmoved see thee dying
  On a log
  Expiring frog!"'

'Beautiful!' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Fine,' said Mr. Leo Hunter; 'so simple.'

'Very,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'The next verse is still more touching. Shall I repeat it?'

'If you please,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'It runs thus,' said the grave man, still more gravely.

'"Say, have fiends in shape of boys,
With wild halloo, and brutal noise,
Hunted thee from marshy joys,
  With a dog,
  Expiring frog!"'

'Finely expressed,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'All point, Sir,' said Mr. Leo Hunter; 'but you shall hear Mrs. Leo Hunter repeat it. She can do justice to it, Sir. She will repeat it, in character, Sir, to-morrow morning.'

'In character!'

'As Minerva. But I forgot—it's a fancy-dress DEJEUNE.'

'Dear me,' said Mr. Pickwick, glancing at his own figure—'I can't possibly—'

'Can't, sir; can't!' exclaimed Mr. Leo Hunter. 'Solomon Lucas, the Jew in the High Street, has thousands of fancy-dresses. Consider, Sir, how many appropriate characters are open for your selection. Plato, Zeno, Epicurus, Pythagoras—all founders of clubs.'

'I know that,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'but as I cannot put myself in competition with those great men, I cannot presume to wear their dresses.'

The grave man considered deeply, for a few seconds, and then said—

'On reflection, Sir, I don't know whether it would not afford Mrs. Leo Hunter greater pleasure, if her guests saw a gentleman of your celebrity in his own costume, rather than in an assumed one. I may venture to promise an exception in your case, sir—yes, I am quite certain that, on behalf of Mrs. Leo Hunter, I may venture to do so.'

'In that case,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'I shall have great pleasure in coming.'

'But I waste your time, Sir,' said the grave man, as if suddenly recollecting himself. 'I know its value, sir. I will not detain you. I may tell Mrs. Leo Hunter, then, that she may confidently expect you and your distinguished friends? Good-morning, Sir, I am proud to have beheld so eminent a personage—not a step sir; not a word.' And without giving Mr. Pickwick time to offer remonstrance or denial, Mr. Leo Hunter stalked gravely away.

Mr. Pickwick took up his hat, and repaired to the Peacock, but Mr. Winkle had conveyed the intelligence of the fancy-ball there, before him.

'Mrs. Pott's going,' were the first words with which he saluted his leader.

'Is she?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'As Apollo,' replied Winkle. 'Only Pott objects to the tunic.'

'He is right. He is quite right,' said Mr. Pickwick emphatically.

'Yes; so she's going to wear a white satin gown with gold spangles.'

'They'll hardly know what she's meant for; will they?' inquired Mr. Snodgrass.

'Of course they will,' replied Mr. Winkle indignantly. 'They'll see her lyre, won't they?'

'True; I forgot that,' said Mr. Snodgrass.

'I shall go as a bandit,'interposed Mr. Tupman.

'What!' said Mr. Pickwick, with a sudden start.

'As a bandit,' repeated Mr. Tupman, mildly.

'You don't mean to say,' said Mr. Pickwick, gazing with solemn sternness at his friend—'you don't mean to say, Mr. Tupman, that it is your intention to put yourself into a green velvet jacket, with a two-inch tail?'

'Such IS my intention, Sir,' replied Mr. Tupman warmly. 'And why not, sir?'

'Because, Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, considerably excited—'because you are too old, Sir.'

'Too old!' exclaimed Mr. Tupman.

'And if any further ground of objection be wanting,' continued Mr. Pickwick, 'you are too fat, sir.'

'Sir,' said Mr. Tupman, his face suffused with a crimson glow, 'this is an insult.'

'Sir,' replied Mr. Pickwick, in the same tone, 'it is not half the insult to you, that your appearance in my presence in a green velvet jacket, with a two-inch tail, would be to me.'

'Sir,' said Mr. Tupman, 'you're a fellow.'

'Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'you're another!'

Mr. Tupman advanced a step or two, and glared at Mr. Pickwick. Mr. Pickwick returned the glare, concentrated into a focus by means of his spectacles, and breathed a bold defiance. Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Winkle looked on, petrified at beholding such a scene between two such men.

'Sir,' said Mr. Tupman, after a short pause, speaking in a low, deep voice, 'you have called me old.'

'I have,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'And fat.'

'I reiterate the charge.'

'And a fellow.'

'So you are!'

There was a fearful pause.

'My attachment to your person, sir,' said Mr. Tupman, speaking in a voice tremulous with emotion, and tucking up his wristbands meanwhile, 'is great—very great—but upon that person, I must take summary vengeance.'

'Come on, Sir!' replied Mr. Pickwick. Stimulated by the exciting nature of the dialogue, the heroic man actually threw himself into a paralytic attitude, confidently supposed by the two bystanders to have been intended as a posture of defence.

'What!' exclaimed Mr. Snodgrass, suddenly recovering the power of speech, of which intense astonishment had previously bereft him, and rushing between the two, at the imminent hazard of receiving an application on the temple from each—'what! Mr. Pickwick, with the eyes of the world upon you! Mr. Tupman! who, in common with us all, derives a lustre from his undying name! For shame, gentlemen; for shame.'

The unwonted lines which momentary passion had ruled in Mr. Pickwick's clear and open brow, gradually melted away, as his young friend spoke, like the marks of a black-lead pencil beneath the softening influence of india-rubber. His countenance had resumed its usual benign expression, ere he concluded.

'I have been hasty,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'very hasty. Tupman; your hand.'

The dark shadow passed from Mr. Tupman's face, as he warmly grasped the hand of his friend.

'I have been hasty, too,' said he.

'No, no,' interrupted Mr. Pickwick, 'the fault was mine. You will wear the green velvet jacket?'

'No, no,' replied Mr. Tupman.

'To oblige me, you will,' resumed Mr. Pickwick.

'Well, well, I will,' said Mr. Tupman.

It was accordingly settled that Mr. Tupman, Mr. Winkle, and Mr. Snodgrass, should all wear fancy-dresses. Thus Mr. Pickwick was led by the very warmth of his own good feelings to give his consent to a proceeding from which his better judgment would have recoiled—a more striking illustration of his amiable character could hardly have been conceived, even if the events recorded in these pages had been wholly imaginary.

Mr. Leo Hunter had not exaggerated the resources of Mr. Solomon Lucas. His wardrobe was extensive—very extensive—not strictly classical perhaps, not quite new, nor did it contain any one garment made precisely after the fashion of any age or time, but everything was more or less spangled; and what can be prettier than spangles! It may be objected that they are not adapted to the daylight, but everybody knows that they would glitter if there were lamps; and nothing can be clearer than that if people give fancy-balls in the day-time, and the dresses do not show quite as well as they would by night, the fault lies solely with the people who give the fancy-balls, and is in no wise chargeable on the spangles. Such was the convincing reasoning of Mr. Solomon Lucas; and influenced by such arguments did Mr. Tupman, Mr. Winkle, and Mr. Snodgrass engage to array themselves in costumes which his taste and experience induced him to recommend as admirably suited to the occasion.

A carriage was hired from the Town Arms, for the accommodation of the Pickwickians, and a chariot was ordered from the same repository, for the purpose of conveying Mr. and Mrs. Pott to Mrs. Leo Hunter's grounds, which Mr. Pott, as a delicate acknowledgment of having received an invitation, had already confidently predicted in the Eatanswill GAZETTE 'would present a scene of varied and delicious enchantment—a bewildering coruscation of beauty and talent—a lavish and prodigal display of hospitality—above all, a degree of splendour softened by the most exquisite taste; and adornment refined with perfect harmony and the chastest good keeping—compared with which, the fabled gorgeousness of Eastern fairyland itself would appear to be clothed in as many dark and murky colours, as must be the mind of the splenetic and unmanly being who could presume to taint with the venom of his envy, the preparations made by the virtuous and highly distinguished lady at whose shrine this humble tribute of admiration was offered.' This last was a piece of biting sarcasm against the INDEPENDENT, who, in consequence of not having been invited at all, had been, through four numbers, affecting to sneer at the whole affair, in his very largest type, with all the adjectives in capital letters.

The morning came: it was a pleasant sight to behold Mr. Tupman in full brigand's costume, with a very tight jacket, sitting like a pincushion over his back and shoulders, the upper portion of his legs incased in the velvet shorts, and the lower part thereof swathed in the complicated bandages to which all brigands are peculiarly attached. It was pleasing to see his open and ingenuous countenance, well mustachioed and corked, looking out from an open shirt collar; and to contemplate the sugar-loaf hat, decorated with ribbons of all colours, which he was compelled to carry on his knee, inasmuch as no known conveyance with a top to it, would admit of any man's carrying it between his head and the roof. Equally humorous and agreeable was the appearance of Mr. Snodgrass in blue satin trunks and cloak, white silk tights and shoes, and Grecian helmet, which everybody knows (and if they do not, Mr. Solomon Lucas did) to have been the regular, authentic, everyday costume of a troubadour, from the earliest ages down to the time of their final disappearance from the face of the earth. All this was pleasant, but this was as nothing compared with the shouting of the populace when the carriage drew up, behind Mr. Pott's chariot, which chariot itself drew up at Mr. Pott's door, which door itself opened, and displayed the great Pott accoutred as a Russian officer of justice, with a tremendous knout in his hand—tastefully typical of the stern and mighty power of the Eatanswill GAZETTE, and the fearful lashings it bestowed on public offenders.

'Bravo!' shouted Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass from the passage, when they beheld the walking allegory.

'Bravo!' Mr. Pickwick was heard to exclaim, from the passage.

'Hoo-roar Pott!' shouted the populace. Amid these salutations, Mr. Pott, smiling with that kind of bland dignity which sufficiently testified that he felt his power, and knew how to exert it, got into the chariot.

Then there emerged from the house, Mrs. Pott, who would have looked very like Apollo if she hadn't had a gown on, conducted by Mr. Winkle, who, in his light-red coat could not possibly have been mistaken for anything but a sportsman, if he had not borne an equal resemblance to a general postman. Last of all came Mr. Pickwick, whom the boys applauded as loud as anybody, probably under the impression that his tights and gaiters were some remnants of the dark ages; and then the two vehicles proceeded towards Mrs. Leo Hunter's; Mr. Weller (who was to assist in waiting) being stationed on the box of that in which his master was seated.

Every one of the men, women, boys, girls, and babies, who were assembled to see the visitors in their fancy-dresses, screamed with delight and ecstasy, when Mr. Pickwick, with the brigand on one arm, and the troubadour on the other, walked solemnly up the entrance. Never were such shouts heard as those which greeted Mr. Tupman's efforts to fix the sugar-loaf hat on his head, by way of entering the garden in style.

The preparations were on the most delightful scale; fully realising the prophetic Pott's anticipations about the gorgeousness of Eastern fairyland, and at once affording a sufficient contradiction to the malignant statements of the reptile INDEPENDENT. The grounds were more than an acre and a quarter in extent, and they were filled with people! Never was such a blaze of beauty, and fashion, and literature. There was the young lady who 'did' the poetry in the Eatanswill GAZETTE, in the garb of a sultana, leaning upon the arm of the young gentleman who 'did' the review department, and who was appropriately habited in a field-marshal's uniform—the boots excepted. There were hosts of these geniuses, and any reasonable person would have thought it honour enough to meet them. But more than these, there were half a dozen lions from London—authors, real authors, who had written whole books, and printed them afterwards—and here you might see 'em, walking about, like ordinary men, smiling, and talking—aye, and talking pretty considerable nonsense too, no doubt with the benign intention of rendering themselves intelligible to the common people about them. Moreover, there was a band of music in pasteboard caps; four something-ean singers in the costume of their country, and a dozen hired waiters in the costume of THEIR country—and very dirty costume too. And above all, there was Mrs. Leo Hunter in the character of Minerva, receiving the company, and overflowing with pride and gratification at the notion of having called such distinguished individuals together.

'Mr. Pickwick, ma'am,' said a servant, as that gentleman approached the presiding goddess, with his hat in his hand, and the brigand and troubadour on either arm.

'What! Where!' exclaimed Mrs. Leo Hunter, starting up, in an affected rapture of surprise.

'Here,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Is it possible that I have really the gratification of beholding Mr. Pickwick himself!' ejaculated Mrs. Leo Hunter.

'No other, ma'am,' replied Mr. Pickwick, bowing very low. 'Permit me to introduce my friends—Mr. Tupman—Mr. Winkle—Mr. Snodgrass—to the authoress of "The Expiring Frog."' Very few people but those who have tried it, know what a difficult process it is to bow in green velvet smalls, and a tight jacket, and high-crowned hat; or in blue satin trunks and white silks, or knee-cords and top-boots that were never made for the wearer, and have been fixed upon him without the remotest reference to the comparative dimensions of himself and the suit. Never were such distortions as Mr. Tupman's frame underwent in his efforts to appear easy and graceful—never was such ingenious posturing, as his fancy-dressed friends exhibited.

'Mr. Pickwick,' said Mrs. Leo Hunter, 'I must make you promise not to stir from my side the whole day. There are hundreds of people here, that I must positively introduce you to.'

'You are very kind, ma'am,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'In the first place, here are my little girls; I had almost forgotten them,' said Minerva, carelessly pointing towards a couple of full-grown young ladies, of whom one might be about twenty, and the other a year or two older, and who were dressed in very juvenile costumes—whether to make them look young, or their mamma younger, Mr. Pickwick does not distinctly inform us.

'They are very beautiful,' said Mr. Pickwick, as the juveniles turned away, after being presented.

'They are very like their mamma, Sir,' said Mr. Pott, majestically.

'Oh, you naughty man,' exclaimed Mrs. Leo Hunter, playfully tapping the editor's arm with her fan (Minerva with a fan!).

'Why now, my dear Mrs. Hunter,' said Mr. Pott, who was trumpeter in ordinary at the Den, 'you know that when your picture was in the exhibition of the Royal Academy, last year, everybody inquired whether it was intended for you, or your youngest daughter; for you were so much alike that there was no telling the difference between you.'

'Well, and if they did, why need you repeat it, before strangers?' said Mrs. Leo Hunter, bestowing another tap on the slumbering lion of the Eatanswill GAZETTE.

'Count, count,' screamed Mrs. Leo Hunter to a well-whiskered individual in a foreign uniform, who was passing by.

'Ah! you want me?' said the count, turning back.

'I want to introduce two very clever people to each other,' said Mrs. Leo Hunter. 'Mr. Pickwick, I have great pleasure in introducing you to Count Smorltork.' She added in a hurried whisper to Mr. Pickwick—'The famous foreigner—gathering materials for his great work on England—hem!—Count Smorltork, Mr. Pickwick.' Mr. Pickwick saluted the count with all the reverence due to so great a man, and the count drew forth a set of tablets.

'What you say, Mrs. Hunt?' inquired the count, smiling graciously on the gratified Mrs. Leo Hunter, 'Pig Vig or Big Vig—what you call—lawyer—eh? I see—that is it. Big Vig'—and the count was proceeding to enter Mr. Pickwick in his tablets, as a gentleman of the long robe, who derived his name from the profession to which he belonged, when Mrs. Leo Hunter interposed.

'No, no, count,' said the lady, 'Pick-wick.'

'Ah, ah, I see,' replied the count. 'Peek—christian name; Weeks—surname; good, ver good. Peek Weeks. How you do, Weeks?'

'Quite well, I thank you,' replied Mr. Pickwick, with all his usual affability. 'Have you been long in England?'

'Long—ver long time—fortnight—more.'

'Do you stay here long?'

'One week.'

'You will have enough to do,' said Mr. Pickwick smiling, 'to gather all the materials you want in that time.'

'Eh, they are gathered,' said the count.

'Indeed!' said Mr. Pickwick.

'They are here,' added the count, tapping his forehead significantly. 'Large book at home—full of notes—music, picture, science, potry, poltic;

all tings.'

'The word politics, sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'comprises in itself, a difficult study of no inconsiderable magnitude.'

'Ah!' said the count, drawing out the tablets again, 'ver good—fine words to begin a chapter. Chapter forty-seven. Poltics. The word poltic surprises by himself—' And down went Mr. Pickwick's remark, in Count Smorltork's tablets, with such variations and additions as the count's exuberant fancy suggested, or his imperfect knowledge of the language occasioned.

'Count,' said Mrs. Leo Hunter. 'Mrs. Hunt,' replied the count.

'This is Mr. Snodgrass, a friend of Mr. Pickwick's, and a poet.'

'Stop,' exclaimed the count, bringing out the tablets once more. 'Head, potry—chapter, literary friends—name, Snowgrass; ver good. Introduced to Snowgrass—great poet, friend of Peek Weeks—by Mrs. Hunt, which wrote other sweet poem—what is that name?—Fog—Perspiring Fog—ver good—ver good indeed.' And the count put up his tablets, and with sundry bows and acknowledgments walked away, thoroughly satisfied that he had made the most important and valuable additions to his stock of information.

'Wonderful man, Count Smorltork,' said Mrs. Leo Hunter.

'Sound philosopher,' said Mr. Pott.

'Clear-headed, strong-minded person,' added Mr. Snodgrass.

A chorus of bystanders took up the shout of Count Smorltork's praise, shook their heads sagely, and unanimously cried, 'Very!'

As the enthusiasm in Count Smorltork's favour ran very high, his praises might have been sung until the end of the festivities, if the four something-ean singers had not ranged themselves in front of a small apple-tree, to look picturesque, and commenced singing their national songs, which appeared by no means difficult of execution, inasmuch as the grand secret seemed to be, that three of the something-ean singers should grunt, while the fourth howled. This interesting performance having concluded amidst the loud plaudits of the whole company, a boy forthwith proceeded to entangle himself with the rails of a chair, and to jump over it, and crawl under it, and fall down with it, and do everything but sit upon it, and then to make a cravat of his legs, and tie them round his neck, and then to illustrate the ease with which a human being can be made to look like a magnified toad—all which feats yielded high delight and satisfaction to the assembled spectators. After which, the voice of Mrs. Pott was heard to chirp faintly forth, something which courtesy interpreted into a song, which was all very classical, and strictly in character, because Apollo was himself a composer, and composers can very seldom sing their own music or anybody else's, either. This was succeeded by Mrs. Leo Hunter's recitation of her far-famed 'Ode to an Expiring Frog,' which was encored once, and would have been encored twice, if the major part of the guests, who thought it was high time to get something to eat, had not said that it was perfectly shameful to take advantage of Mrs. Hunter's good nature. So although Mrs. Leo Hunter professed her perfect willingness to recite the ode again, her kind and considerate friends wouldn't hear of it on any account; and the refreshment room being thrown open, all the people who had ever been there before, scrambled in with all possible despatch—Mrs. Leo Hunter's usual course of proceedings being, to issue cards for a hundred, and breakfast for fifty, or in other words to feed only the very particular lions, and let the smaller animals take care of themselves.

'Where is Mr. Pott?' said Mrs. Leo Hunter, as she placed the aforesaid lions around her.

'Here I am,' said the editor, from the remotest end of the room; far beyond all hope of food, unless something was done for him by the hostess.

'Won't you come up here?'

'Oh, pray don't mind him,' said Mrs. Pott, in the most obliging voice—'you give yourself a great deal of unnecessary trouble, Mrs. Hunter. You'll do very well there, won't you—dear?'

'Certainly—love,' replied the unhappy Pott, with a grim smile. Alas for the knout! The nervous arm that wielded it, with such a gigantic force on public characters, was paralysed beneath the glance of the imperious Mrs. Pott.

Mrs. Leo Hunter looked round her in triumph. Count Smorltork was busily engaged in taking notes of the contents of the dishes; Mr. Tupman was doing the honours of the lobster salad to several lionesses, with a degree of grace which no brigand ever exhibited before; Mr. Snodgrass having cut out the young gentleman who cut up the books for the Eatanswill GAZETTE, was engaged in an impassioned argument with the young lady who did the poetry; and Mr. Pickwick was making himself universally agreeable. Nothing seemed wanting to render the select circle complete, when Mr. Leo Hunter—whose department on these occasions, was to stand about in doorways, and talk to the less important people—suddenly called out—'My dear; here's Mr. Charles Fitz-Marshall.'

'Oh dear,' said Mrs. Leo Hunter, 'how anxiously I have been expecting him. Pray make room, to let Mr. Fitz-Marshall pass. Tell Mr. Fitz-Marshall, my dear, to come up to me directly, to be scolded for coming so late.'

'Coming, my dear ma'am,' cried a voice, 'as quick as I can—crowds of people—full room—hard work—very.'

Mr. Pickwick's knife and fork fell from his hand. He stared across the table at Mr. Tupman, who had dropped his knife and fork, and was looking as if he were about to sink into the ground without further notice.

'Ah!' cried the voice, as its owner pushed his way among the last five-and-twenty Turks, officers, cavaliers, and Charles the Seconds, that remained between him and the table, 'regular mangle—Baker's patent—not a crease in my coat, after all this squeezing—might have "got up my linen" as I came along—ha! ha! not a bad idea, that—queer thing to have it mangled when it's upon one, though—trying process—very.'

With these broken words, a young man dressed as a naval officer made his way up to the table, and presented to the astonished Pickwickians the identical form and features of Mr. Alfred Jingle. The offender had barely time to take Mrs. Leo Hunter's proffered hand, when his eyes encountered the indignant orbs of Mr. Pickwick.

'Hollo!' said Jingle. 'Quite forgot—no directions to postillion—give 'em at once—back in a minute.'

'The servant, or Mr. Hunter will do it in a moment, Mr. Fitz-Marshall,' said Mrs. Leo Hunter.

'No, no—I'll do it—shan't be long—back in no time,' replied Jingle. With these words he disappeared among the crowd.

'Will you allow me to ask you, ma'am,' said the excited Mr. Pickwick, rising from his seat, 'who that young man is, and where he resides?'

'He is a gentleman of fortune, Mr. Pickwick,' said Mrs. Leo Hunter, 'to whom I very much want to introduce you. The count will be delighted with him.'

'Yes, yes,' said Mr. Pickwick hastily. 'His residence—'

'Is at present at the Angel at Bury.'

'At Bury?'

'At Bury St. Edmunds, not many miles from here. But dear me, Mr. Pickwick, you are not going to leave us; surely Mr. Pickwick you cannot think of going so soon?'

But long before Mrs. Leo Hunter had finished speaking, Mr. Pickwick had plunged through the throng, and reached the garden, whither he was shortly afterwards joined by Mr. Tupman, who had followed his friend closely.

'It's of no use,' said Mr. Tupman. 'He has gone.'

'I know it,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'and I will follow him.'

'Follow him! Where?' inquired Mr. Tupman.

'To the Angel at Bury,' replied Mr. Pickwick, speaking very quickly. 'How do we know whom he is deceiving there? He deceived a worthy man once, and we were the innocent cause. He shall not do it again, if I can help it; I'll expose him! Sam! Where's my servant?'

'Here you are, Sir,' said Mr. Weller, emerging from a sequestered spot, where he had been engaged in discussing a bottle of Madeira, which he had abstracted from the breakfast-table an hour or two before. 'Here's your servant, Sir. Proud o' the title, as the living skellinton said, ven they show'd him.'

'Follow me instantly,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Tupman, if I stay at Bury, you can join me there, when I write. Till then, good-bye!'

Remonstrances were useless. Mr. Pickwick was roused, and his mind was made up. Mr. Tupman returned to his companions; and in another hour had drowned all present recollection of Mr. Alfred Jingle, or Mr. Charles Fitz-Marshall, in an exhilarating quadrille and a bottle of champagne. By that time, Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller, perched on the outside of a stage-coach, were every succeeding minute placing a less and less distance between themselves and the good old town of Bury St. Edmunds.

CHAPTER XVI. TOO FULL OF ADVENTURE TO BE BRIEFLY DESCRIBED

There is no month in the whole year in which nature wears a more beautiful appearance than in the month of August. Spring has many beauties, and May is a fresh and blooming month, but the charms of this time of year are enhanced by their contrast with the winter season. August has no such advantage. It comes when we remember nothing but clear skies, green fields, and sweet-smelling flowers—when the recollection of snow, and ice, and bleak winds, has faded from our minds as completely as they have disappeared from the earth—and yet what a pleasant time it is! Orchards and cornfields ring with the hum of labour; trees bend beneath the thick clusters of rich fruit which bow their branches to the ground; and the corn, piled in graceful sheaves, or waving in every light breath that sweeps above it, as if it wooed the sickle, tinges the landscape with a golden hue. A mellow softness appears to hang over the whole earth; the influence of the season seems to extend itself to the very wagon, whose slow motion across the well-reaped field is perceptible only to the eye, but strikes with no harsh sound upon the ear.

As the coach rolls swiftly past the fields and orchards which skirt the road, groups of women and children, piling the fruit in sieves, or gathering the scattered ears of corn, pause for an instant from their labour, and shading the sun-burned face with a still browner hand, gaze upon the passengers with curious eyes, while some stout urchin, too small to work, but too mischievous to be left at home, scrambles over the side of the basket in which he has been deposited for security, and kicks and screams with delight. The reaper stops in his work, and stands with folded arms, looking at the vehicle as it whirls past; and the rough cart-horses bestow a sleepy glance upon the smart coach team, which says as plainly as a horse's glance can, 'It's all very fine to look at, but slow going, over a heavy field, is better than warm work like that, upon a dusty road, after all.' You cast a look behind you, as you turn a corner of the road. The women and children have resumed their labour; the reaper once more stoops to his work; the cart-horses have moved on; and all are again in motion. The influence of a scene like this, was not lost upon the well-regulated mind of Mr. Pickwick. Intent upon the resolution he had formed, of exposing the real character of the nefarious Jingle, in any quarter in which he might be pursuing his fraudulent designs, he sat at first taciturn and contemplative, brooding over the means by which his purpose could be best attained. By degrees his attention grew more and more attracted by the objects around him; and at last he derived as much enjoyment from the ride, as if it had been undertaken for the pleasantest reason in the world.

'Delightful prospect, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Beats the chimbley-pots, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller, touching his hat.

'I suppose you have hardly seen anything but chimney-pots and bricks and mortar all your life, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, smiling.

'I worn't always a boots, sir,' said Mr. Weller, with a shake of the head. 'I wos a vaginer's boy, once.'

'When was that?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'When I wos first pitched neck and crop into the world, to play at leap-frog with its troubles,' replied Sam. 'I wos a carrier's boy at startin'; then a vaginer's, then a helper, then a boots. Now I'm a gen'l'm'n's servant. I shall be a gen'l'm'n myself one of these days, perhaps, with a pipe in my mouth, and a summer-house in the back-garden. Who knows? I shouldn't be surprised for one.'

'You are quite a philosopher, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'It runs in the family, I b'lieve, sir,' replied Mr. Weller. 'My father's wery much in that line now. If my mother-in-law blows him up, he whistles. She flies in a passion, and breaks his pipe; he steps out, and gets another. Then she screams wery loud, and falls into 'sterics; and he smokes wery comfortably till she comes to agin. That's philosophy, Sir, ain't it?'

'A very good substitute for it, at all events,' replied Mr. Pickwick, laughing. 'It must have been of great service to you, in the course of your rambling life, Sam.'

'Service, sir,' exclaimed Sam. 'You may say that. Arter I run away from the carrier, and afore I took up with the vaginer, I had unfurnished lodgin's for a fortnight.'

'Unfurnished lodgings?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Yes—the dry arches of Waterloo Bridge. Fine sleeping-place—vithin ten minutes' walk of all the public offices—only if there is any objection to it, it is that the sitivation's rayther too airy. I see some queer sights there.'

'Ah, I suppose you did,' said Mr. Pickwick, with an air of considerable interest.

'Sights, sir,' resumed Mr. Weller, 'as 'ud penetrate your benevolent heart, and come out on the other side. You don't see the reg'lar wagrants there; trust 'em, they knows better than that. Young beggars, male and female, as hasn't made a rise in their profession, takes up their quarters there sometimes; but it's generally the worn-out, starving, houseless creeturs as roll themselves in the dark corners o' them lonesome places—poor creeturs as ain't up to the twopenny rope.'

'And pray, Sam, what is the twopenny rope?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'The twopenny rope, sir,' replied Mr. Weller, 'is just a cheap lodgin' house, where the beds is twopence a night.'

'What do they call a bed a rope for?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Bless your innocence, sir, that ain't it,' replied Sam. 'Ven the lady and gen'l'm'n as keeps the hot-el first begun business, they used to make the beds on the floor; but this wouldn't do at no price, 'cos instead o' taking a moderate twopenn'orth o' sleep, the lodgers used to lie there half the day. So now they has two ropes, 'bout six foot apart, and three from the floor, which goes right down the room; and the beds are made of slips of coarse sacking, stretched across 'em.'

'Well,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Well,' said Mr. Weller, 'the adwantage o' the plan's hobvious. At six o'clock every mornin' they let's go the ropes at one end, and down falls the lodgers. Consequence is, that being thoroughly waked, they get up wery quietly, and walk away! Beg your pardon, sir,' said Sam, suddenly breaking off in his loquacious discourse. 'Is this Bury St. Edmunds?'

'It is,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

The coach rattled through the well-paved streets of a handsome little town, of thriving and cleanly appearance, and stopped before a large inn situated in a wide open street, nearly facing the old abbey.

'And this,' said Mr. Pickwick, looking up. 'Is the Angel! We alight here, Sam. But some caution is necessary. Order a private room, and do not mention my name. You understand.'

'Right as a trivet, sir,' replied Mr. Weller, with a wink of intelligence; and having dragged Mr. Pickwick's portmanteau from the hind boot, into which it had been hastily thrown when they joined the coach at Eatanswill, Mr. Weller disappeared on his errand. A private room was speedily engaged; and into it Mr. Pickwick was ushered without delay. 'Now, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'the first thing to be done is to—' 'Order dinner, Sir,' interposed Mr. Weller. 'It's wery late, sir.'

'Ah, so it is,' said Mr. Pickwick, looking at his watch. 'You are right, Sam.'

'And if I might adwise, Sir,' added Mr. Weller, 'I'd just have a good night's rest arterwards, and not begin inquiring arter this here deep 'un till the mornin'. There's nothin' so refreshen' as sleep, sir, as the servant girl said afore she drank the egg-cupful of laudanum.'

'I think you are right, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'But I must first ascertain that he is in the house, and not likely to go away.'

'Leave that to me, Sir,' said Sam. 'Let me order you a snug little dinner, and make my inquiries below while it's a-getting ready; I could worm ev'ry secret out O' the boots's heart, in five minutes, Sir.' 'Do so,' said Mr. Pickwick; and Mr. Weller at once retired.

In half an hour, Mr. Pickwick was seated at a very satisfactory dinner; and in three-quarters Mr. Weller returned with the intelligence that Mr. Charles Fitz-Marshall had ordered his private room to be retained for him, until further notice. He was going to spend the evening at some private house in the neighbourhood, had ordered the boots to sit up until his return, and had taken his servant with him.

'Now, sir,' argued Mr. Weller, when he had concluded his report, 'if I can get a talk with this here servant in the mornin', he'll tell me all his master's concerns.'

'How do you know that?' interposed Mr. Pickwick.

'Bless your heart, sir, servants always do,' replied Mr. Weller.

'Oh, ah, I forgot that,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Well.'

'Then you can arrange what's best to be done, sir, and we can act accordingly.'

As it appeared that this was the best arrangement that could be made, it was finally agreed upon. Mr. Weller, by his master's permission, retired to spend the evening in his own way; and was shortly afterwards elected, by the unanimous voice of the assembled company, into the taproom chair, in which honourable post he acquitted himself so much to the satisfaction of the gentlemen-frequenters, that their roars of laughter and approbation penetrated to Mr. Pickwick's bedroom, and shortened the term of his natural rest by at least three hours.

Early on the ensuing morning, Mr. Weller was dispelling all the feverish remains of the previous evening's conviviality, through the instrumentality of a halfpenny shower-bath (having induced a young gentleman attached to the stable department, by the offer of that coin, to pump over his head and face, until he was perfectly restored), when he was attracted by the appearance of a young fellow in mulberry-coloured livery, who was sitting on a bench in the yard, reading what appeared to be a hymn-book, with an air of deep abstraction, but who occasionally stole a glance at the individual under the pump, as if he took some interest in his proceedings, nevertheless.

'You're a rum 'un to look at, you are!' thought Mr. Weller, the first time his eyes encountered the glance of the stranger in the mulberry suit, who had a large, sallow, ugly face, very sunken eyes, and a gigantic head, from which depended a quantity of lank black hair. 'You're a rum 'un!' thought Mr. Weller; and thinking this, he went on washing himself, and thought no more about him.

Still the man kept glancing from his hymn-book to Sam, and from Sam to his hymn-book, as if he wanted to open a conversation. So at last, Sam, by way of giving him an opportunity, said with a familiar nod—

'How are you, governor?'

'I am happy to say, I am pretty well, Sir,' said the man, speaking with great deliberation, and closing the book. 'I hope you are the same, Sir?'

'Why, if I felt less like a walking brandy-bottle I shouldn't be quite so staggery this mornin',' replied Sam. 'Are you stoppin' in this house, old 'un?'

The mulberry man replied in the affirmative.

'How was it you worn't one of us, last night?' inquired Sam, scrubbing his face with the towel. 'You seem one of the jolly sort—looks as conwivial as a live trout in a lime basket,' added Mr. Weller, in an undertone.

'I was out last night with my master,' replied the stranger.

'What's his name?' inquired Mr. Weller, colouring up very red with sudden excitement, and the friction of the towel combined.

'Fitz-Marshall,' said the mulberry man.

'Give us your hand,' said Mr. Weller, advancing; 'I should like to know you. I like your appearance, old fellow.'

'Well, that is very strange,' said the mulberry man, with great simplicity of manner. 'I like yours so much, that I wanted to speak to you, from the very first moment I saw you under the pump.' 'Did you though?'

'Upon my word. Now, isn't that curious?'

'Wery sing'ler,' said Sam, inwardly congratulating himself upon the softness of the stranger. 'What's your name, my patriarch?'

'Job.'

'And a wery good name it is; only one I know that ain't got a nickname to it. What's the other name?'

'Trotter,' said the stranger. 'What is yours?'

Sam bore in mind his master's caution, and replied—

'My name's Walker; my master's name's Wilkins. Will you take a drop o' somethin' this mornin', Mr. Trotter?'

Mr. Trotter acquiesced in this agreeable proposal; and having deposited his book in his coat pocket, accompanied Mr. Weller to the tap, where they were soon occupied in discussing an exhilarating compound, formed by mixing together, in a pewter vessel, certain quantities of British Hollands and the fragrant essence of the clove.

'And what sort of a place have you got?' inquired Sam, as he filled his companion's glass, for the second time.

'Bad,' said Job, smacking his lips, 'very bad.'

'You don't mean that?' said Sam.

'I do, indeed. Worse than that, my master's going to be married.'

'No.'

'Yes; and worse than that, too, he's going to run away with an immense rich heiress, from boarding-school.'

'What a dragon!' said Sam, refilling his companion's glass. 'It's some boarding-school in this town, I suppose, ain't it?' Now, although this question was put in the most careless tone imaginable, Mr. Job Trotter plainly showed by gestures that he perceived his new friend's anxiety to draw forth an answer to it. He emptied his glass, looked mysteriously at his companion, winked both of his small eyes, one after the other, and finally made a motion with his arm, as if he were working an imaginary pump-handle; thereby intimating that he (Mr. Trotter) considered himself as undergoing the process of being pumped by Mr. Samuel Weller.

'No, no,' said Mr. Trotter, in conclusion, 'that's not to be told to everybody. That is a secret—a great secret, Mr. Walker.' As the mulberry man said this, he turned his glass upside down, by way of reminding his companion that he had nothing left wherewith to slake his thirst. Sam observed the hint; and feeling the delicate manner in which it was conveyed, ordered the pewter vessel to be refilled, whereat the small eyes of the mulberry man glistened.

'And so it's a secret?' said Sam.

'I should rather suspect it was,' said the mulberry man, sipping his liquor, with a complacent face.

'I suppose your mas'r's wery rich?' said Sam.

Mr. Trotter smiled, and holding his glass in his left hand, gave four distinct slaps on the pockets of his mulberry indescribables with his right, as if to intimate that his master might have done the same without alarming anybody much by the chinking of coin.

'Ah,' said Sam, 'that's the game, is it?'

The mulberry man nodded significantly.

'Well, and don't you think, old feller,' remonstrated Mr. Weller, 'that if you let your master take in this here young lady, you're a precious rascal?'

'I know that,' said Job Trotter, turning upon his companion a countenance of deep contrition, and groaning slightly, 'I know that, and that's what it is that preys upon my mind. But what am I to do?'

'Do!' said Sam; 'di-wulge to the missis, and give up your master.'

'Who'd believe me?' replied Job Trotter. 'The young lady's considered the very picture of innocence and discretion. She'd deny it, and so would my master. Who'd believe me? I should lose my place, and get indicted for a conspiracy, or some such thing; that's all I should take by my motion.'

'There's somethin' in that,' said Sam, ruminating; 'there's somethin' in that.'

'If I knew any respectable gentleman who would take the matter up,' continued Mr. Trotter. 'I might have some hope of preventing the elopement; but there's the same difficulty, Mr. Walker, just the same. I know no gentleman in this strange place; and ten to one if I did, whether he would believe my story.'

'Come this way,' said Sam, suddenly jumping up, and grasping the mulberry man by the arm. 'My mas'r's the man you want, I see.' And after a slight resistance on the part of Job Trotter, Sam led his newly-found friend to the apartment of Mr. Pickwick, to whom he presented him, together with a brief summary of the dialogue we have just repeated.

'I am very sorry to betray my master, sir,' said Job Trotter, applying to his eyes a pink checked pocket-handkerchief about six inches square.

'The feeling does you a great deal of honour,' replied Mr. Pickwick; 'but it is your duty, nevertheless.'

'I know it is my duty, Sir,' replied Job, with great emotion. 'We should all try to discharge our duty, Sir, and I humbly endeavour to discharge mine, Sir; but it is a hard trial to betray a master, Sir, whose clothes you wear, and whose bread you eat, even though he is a scoundrel, Sir.'

'You are a very good fellow,' said Mr. Pickwick, much affected; 'an honest fellow.'

'Come, come,' interposed Sam, who had witnessed Mr. Trotter's tears with considerable impatience, 'blow this 'ere water-cart bis'ness. It won't do no good, this won't.'

'Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick reproachfully. 'I am sorry to find that you have so little respect for this young man's feelings.'

'His feelin's is all wery well, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller; 'and as they're so wery fine, and it's a pity he should lose 'em, I think he'd better keep 'em in his own buzzum, than let 'em ewaporate in hot water, 'specially as they do no good. Tears never yet wound up a clock, or worked a steam ingin'. The next time you go out to a smoking party, young fellow, fill your pipe with that 'ere reflection; and for the present just put that bit of pink gingham into your pocket. 'Tain't so handsome that you need keep waving it about, as if you was a tight-rope dancer.'

'My man is in the right,' said Mr. Pickwick, accosting Job, 'although his mode of expressing his opinion is somewhat homely, and occasionally incomprehensible.'

'He is, sir, very right,' said Mr. Trotter, 'and I will give way no longer.' 'Very well,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Now, where is this boarding-school?'

'It is a large, old, red brick house, just outside the town, Sir,' replied Job Trotter.

'And when,' said Mr. Pickwick—'when is this villainous design to be carried into execution—when is this elopement to take place?'

'To-night, Sir,' replied Job.

'To-night!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick. 'This very night, sir,' replied Job Trotter. 'That is what alarms me so much.'

'Instant measures must be taken,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'I will see the lady who keeps the establishment immediately.'

'I beg your pardon, Sir,' said Job, 'but that course of proceeding will never do.'

'Why not?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'My master, sir, is a very artful man.'

'I know he is,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'And he has so wound himself round the old lady's heart, Sir,' resumed Job, 'that she would believe nothing to his prejudice, if you went down on your bare knees, and swore it; especially as you have no proof but the word of a servant, who, for anything she knows (and my master would be sure to say so), was discharged for some fault, and does this in revenge.'

'What had better be done, then?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Nothing but taking him in the very act of eloping, will convince the old lady, sir,' replied Job.

'All them old cats WILL run their heads agin milestones,' observed Mr. Weller, in a parenthesis.

'But this taking him in the very act of elopement, would be a very difficult thing to accomplish, I fear,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'I don't know, sir,' said Mr. Trotter, after a few moments' reflection. 'I think it might be very easily done.'

'How?' was Mr. Pickwick's inquiry.

'Why,' replied Mr. Trotter, 'my master and I, being in the confidence of the two servants, will be secreted in the kitchen at ten o'clock. When the family have retired to rest, we shall come out of the kitchen, and the young lady out of her bedroom. A post-chaise will be waiting, and away we go.'

'Well?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Well, sir, I have been thinking that if you were in waiting in the garden behind, alone—'

'Alone,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Why alone?'

'I thought it very natural,' replied Job, 'that the old lady wouldn't like such an unpleasant discovery to be made before more persons than can possibly be helped. The young lady, too, sir—consider her feelings.'

'You are very right,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'The consideration evinces your delicacy of feeling. Go on; you are very right.'

'Well, sir, I have been thinking that if you were waiting in the back garden alone, and I was to let you in, at the door which opens into it, from the end of the passage, at exactly half-past eleven o'clock, you would be just in the very moment of time to assist me in frustrating the designs of this bad man, by whom I have been unfortunately ensnared.' Here Mr. Trotter sighed deeply.

'Don't distress yourself on that account,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'if he had one grain of the delicacy of feeling which distinguishes you, humble as your station is, I should have some hopes of him.'

Job Trotter bowed low; and in spite of Mr. Weller's previous remonstrance, the tears again rose to his eyes.

'I never see such a feller,' said Sam, 'Blessed if I don't think he's got a main in his head as is always turned on.'

'Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, with great severity, 'hold your tongue.'

'Wery well, sir,' replied Mr. Weller.

'I don't like this plan,' said Mr. Pickwick, after deep meditation. 'Why cannot I communicate with the young lady's friends?'

'Because they live one hundred miles from here, sir,' responded Job Trotter.

'That's a clincher,' said Mr. Weller, aside.

'Then this garden,' resumed Mr. Pickwick. 'How am I to get into it?'

'The wall is very low, sir, and your servant will give you a leg up.' 'My servant will give me a leg up,' repeated Mr. Pickwick mechanically. 'You will be sure to be near this door that you speak of?'

'You cannot mistake it, Sir; it's the only one that opens into the garden. Tap at it when you hear the clock strike, and I will open it instantly.'

'I don't like the plan,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'but as I see no other, and as the happiness of this young lady's whole life is at stake, I adopt it. I shall be sure to be there.'

Thus, for the second time, did Mr. Pickwick's innate good-feeling involve him in an enterprise from which he would most willingly have stood aloof.

'What is the name of the house?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Westgate House, Sir. You turn a little to the right when you get to the end of the town; it stands by itself, some little distance off the high road, with the name on a brass plate on the gate.'

'I know it,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'I observed it once before, when I was in this town. You may depend upon me.'

Mr. Trotter made another bow, and turned to depart, when Mr. Pickwick thrust a guinea into his hand.

'You're a fine fellow,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'and I admire your goodness of heart. No thanks. Remember—eleven o'clock.'

'There is no fear of my forgetting it, sir,' replied Job Trotter. With these words he left the room, followed by Sam.

'I say,' said the latter, 'not a bad notion that 'ere crying. I'd cry like a rain-water spout in a shower on such good terms. How do you do it?'

'It comes from the heart, Mr. Walker,' replied Job solemnly. 'Good-morning, sir.'

'You're a soft customer, you are; we've got it all out o' you, anyhow,' thought Mr. Weller, as Job walked away.

We cannot state the precise nature of the thoughts which passed through Mr. Trotter's mind, because we don't know what they were.

The day wore on, evening came, and at a little before ten o'clock Sam Weller reported that Mr. Jingle and Job had gone out together, that their luggage was packed up, and that they had ordered a chaise. The plot was evidently in execution, as Mr. Trotter had foretold.

Half-past ten o'clock arrived, and it was time for Mr. Pickwick to issue forth on his delicate errand. Resisting Sam's tender of his greatcoat, in order that he might have no encumbrance in scaling the wall, he set forth, followed by his attendant.

There was a bright moon, but it was behind the clouds. It was a fine dry night, but it was most uncommonly dark. Paths, hedges, fields, houses, and trees, were enveloped in one deep shade. The atmosphere was hot and sultry, the summer lightning quivered faintly on the verge of the horizon, and was the only sight that varied the dull gloom in which everything was wrapped—sound there was none, except the distant barking of some restless house-dog.

They found the house, read the brass plate, walked round the wall, and stopped at that portion of it which divided them from the bottom of the garden.

'You will return to the inn, Sam, when you have assisted me over,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Wery well, Sir.'

'And you will sit up, till I return.'

'Cert'nly, Sir.'

'Take hold of my leg; and, when I say "Over," raise me gently.'

'All right, sir.'

Having settled these preliminaries, Mr. Pickwick grasped the top of the wall, and gave the word 'Over,' which was literally obeyed. Whether his body partook in some degree of the elasticity of his mind, or whether Mr. Weller's notions of a gentle push were of a somewhat rougher description than Mr. Pickwick's, the immediate effect of his assistance was to jerk that immortal gentleman completely over the wall on to the bed beneath, where, after crushing three gooseberry-bushes and a rose-tree, he finally alighted at full length.

'You ha'n't hurt yourself, I hope, Sir?' said Sam, in a loud whisper, as soon as he had recovered from the surprise consequent upon the mysterious disappearance of his master.

'I have not hurt MYSELF, Sam, certainly,' replied Mr. Pickwick, from the other side of the wall, 'but I rather think that YOU have hurt me.'

'I hope not, Sir,' said Sam.

'Never mind,' said Mr. Pickwick, rising, 'it's nothing but a few scratches. Go away, or we shall be overheard.'

'Good-bye, Sir.'

'Good-bye.'

With stealthy steps Sam Weller departed, leaving Mr. Pickwick alone in the garden.

Lights occasionally appeared in the different windows of the house, or glanced from the staircases, as if the inmates were retiring to rest. Not caring to go too near the door, until the appointed time, Mr. Pickwick crouched into an angle of the wall, and awaited its arrival.

It was a situation which might well have depressed the spirits of many a man. Mr. Pickwick, however, felt neither depression nor misgiving. He knew that his purpose was in the main a good one, and he placed implicit reliance on the high-minded Job. It was dull, certainly; not to say dreary; but a contemplative man can always employ himself in meditation. Mr. Pickwick had meditated himself into a doze, when he was roused by the chimes of the neighbouring church ringing out the hour—half-past eleven.

'That's the time,' thought Mr. Pickwick, getting cautiously on his feet. He looked up at the house. The lights had disappeared, and the shutters were closed—all in bed, no doubt. He walked on tiptoe to the door, and gave a gentle tap. Two or three minutes passing without any reply, he gave another tap rather louder, and then another rather louder than that.

At length the sound of feet was audible upon the stairs, and then the light of a candle shone through the keyhole of the door. There was a good deal of unchaining and unbolting, and the door was slowly opened.

Now the door opened outwards; and as the door opened wider and wider, Mr. Pickwick receded behind it, more and more. What was his astonishment when he just peeped out, by way of caution, to see that the person who had opened it was—not Job Trotter, but a servant-girl with a candle in her hand! Mr. Pickwick drew in his head again, with the swiftness displayed by that admirable melodramatic performer, Punch, when he lies in wait for the flat-headed comedian with the tin box of music.

'It must have been the cat, Sarah,' said the girl, addressing herself to some one in the house. 'Puss, puss, puss,—tit, tit, tit.'

But no animal being decoyed by these blandishments, the girl slowly closed the door, and re-fastened it; leaving Mr. Pickwick drawn up straight against the wall.

'This is very curious,' thought Mr. Pickwick. 'They are sitting up beyond their usual hour, I suppose. Extremely unfortunate, that they should have chosen this night, of all others, for such a purpose—exceedingly.' And with these thoughts, Mr. Pickwick cautiously retired to the angle of the wall in which he had been before ensconced; waiting until such time as he might deem it safe to repeat the signal.

He had not been here five minutes, when a vivid flash of lightning was followed by a loud peal of thunder that crashed and rolled away in the distance with a terrific noise—then came another flash of lightning, brighter than the other, and a second peal of thunder louder than the first; and then down came the rain, with a force and fury that swept everything before it.

Mr. Pickwick was perfectly aware that a tree is a very dangerous neighbour in a thunderstorm. He had a tree on his right, a tree on his left, a third before him, and a fourth behind. If he remained where he was, he might fall the victim of an accident; if he showed himself in the centre of the garden, he might be consigned to a constable. Once or twice he tried to scale the wall, but having no other legs this time, than those with which Nature had furnished him, the only effect of his struggles was to inflict a variety of very unpleasant gratings on his knees and shins, and to throw him into a state of the most profuse perspiration.

'What a dreadful situation,' said Mr. Pickwick, pausing to wipe his brow after this exercise. He looked up at the house—all was dark. They must be gone to bed now. He would try the signal again.

He walked on tiptoe across the moist gravel, and tapped at the door. He held his breath, and listened at the key-hole. No reply: very odd. Another knock. He listened again. There was a low whispering inside, and then a voice cried—

'Who's there?'

'That's not Job,' thought Mr. Pickwick, hastily drawing himself straight up against the wall again. 'It's a woman.'

He had scarcely had time to form this conclusion, when a window above stairs was thrown up, and three or four female voices repeated the query—'Who's there?'

Mr. Pickwick dared not move hand or foot. It was clear that the whole establishment was roused. He made up his mind to remain where he was, until the alarm had subsided; and then by a supernatural effort, to get over the wall, or perish in the attempt.

Like all Mr. Pickwick's determinations, this was the best that could be made under the circumstances; but, unfortunately, it was founded upon the assumption that they would not venture to open the door again. What was his discomfiture, when he heard the chain and bolts withdrawn, and saw the door slowly opening, wider and wider! He retreated into the corner, step by step; but do what he would, the interposition of his own person, prevented its being opened to its utmost width.

'Who's there?' screamed a numerous chorus of treble voices from the staircase inside, consisting of the spinster lady of the establishment, three teachers, five female servants, and thirty boarders, all half-dressed and in a forest of curl-papers.

Of course Mr. Pickwick didn't say who was there: and then the burden of the chorus changed into—'Lor! I am so frightened.'

'Cook,' said the lady abbess, who took care to be on the top stair, the very last of the group—'cook, why don't you go a little way into the garden?' 'Please, ma'am, I don't like,' responded the cook.

'Lor, what a stupid thing that cook is!' said the thirty boarders.

'Cook,' said the lady abbess, with great dignity; 'don't answer me, if you please. I insist upon your looking into the garden immediately.'

Here the cook began to cry, and the housemaid said it was 'a shame!' for which partisanship she received a month's warning on the spot.

'Do you hear, cook?' said the lady abbess, stamping her foot impatiently.

'Don't you hear your missis, cook?' said the three teachers.

'What an impudent thing that cook is!' said the thirty boarders.

The unfortunate cook, thus strongly urged, advanced a step or two, and holding her candle just where it prevented her from seeing at all, declared there was nothing there, and it must have been the wind. The door was just going to be closed in consequence, when an inquisitive boarder, who had been peeping between the hinges, set up a fearful screaming, which called back the cook and housemaid, and all the more adventurous, in no time.

'What is the matter with Miss Smithers?' said the lady abbess, as the aforesaid Miss Smithers proceeded to go into hysterics of four young lady power.

'Lor, Miss Smithers, dear,' said the other nine-and-twenty boarders.

'Oh, the man—the man—behind the door!' screamed Miss Smithers.

The lady abbess no sooner heard this appalling cry, than she retreated to her own bedroom, double-locked the door, and fainted away comfortably. The boarders, and the teachers, and the servants, fell back upon the stairs, and upon each other; and never was such a screaming, and fainting, and struggling beheld. In the midst of the tumult, Mr. Pickwick emerged from his concealment, and presented himself amongst them.

'Ladies—dear ladies,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Oh. he says we're dear,' cried the oldest and ugliest teacher. 'Oh, the wretch!'

'Ladies,' roared Mr. Pickwick, rendered desperate by the danger of his situation. 'Hear me. I am no robber. I want the lady of the house.'

'Oh, what a ferocious monster!' screamed another teacher. 'He wants Miss Tomkins.'

Here there was a general scream.

'Ring the alarm bell, somebody!' cried a dozen voices.

'Don't—don't,' shouted Mr. Pickwick. 'Look at me. Do I look like a robber! My dear ladies—you may bind me hand and leg, or lock me up in a closet, if you like. Only hear what I have got to say—only hear me.'

'How did you come in our garden?' faltered the housemaid.

'Call the lady of the house, and I'll tell her everything,' said Mr. Pickwick, exerting his lungs to the utmost pitch. 'Call her—only be quiet, and call her, and you shall hear everything.'

It might have been Mr. Pickwick's appearance, or it might have been his manner, or it might have been the temptation—irresistible to a female mind—of hearing something at present enveloped in mystery, that reduced the more reasonable portion of the establishment (some four individuals) to a state of comparative quiet. By them it was proposed, as a test of Mr. Pickwick's sincerity, that he should immediately submit to personal restraint; and that gentleman having consented to hold a conference with Miss Tomkins, from the interior of a closet in which the day boarders hung their bonnets and sandwich-bags, he at once stepped into it, of his own accord, and was securely locked in. This revived the others; and Miss Tomkins having been brought to, and brought down, the conference began.

'What did you do in my garden, man?' said Miss Tomkins, in a faint voice.

'I came to warn you that one of your young ladies was going to elope to-night,' replied Mr. Pickwick, from the interior of the closet.

'Elope!' exclaimed Miss Tomkins, the three teachers, the thirty boarders, and the five servants. 'Who with?' 'Your friend, Mr. Charles Fitz-Marshall.'

'MY friend! I don't know any such person.'

'Well, Mr. Jingle, then.'

'I never heard the name in my life.'

'Then, I have been deceived, and deluded,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'I have been the victim of a conspiracy—a foul and base conspiracy. Send to the Angel, my dear ma'am, if you don't believe me. Send to the Angel for Mr. Pickwick's manservant, I implore you, ma'am.'

'He must be respectable—he keeps a manservant,' said Miss Tomkins to the writing and ciphering governess.

'It's my opinion, Miss Tomkins,' said the writing and ciphering governess, 'that his manservant keeps him, I think he's a madman, Miss Tomkins, and the other's his keeper.'

'I think you are very right, Miss Gwynn,' responded Miss Tomkins. 'Let two of the servants repair to the Angel, and let the others remain here, to protect us.'

So two of the servants were despatched to the Angel in search of Mr. Samuel Weller; and the remaining three stopped behind to protect Miss Tomkins, and the three teachers, and the thirty boarders. And Mr. Pickwick sat down in the closet, beneath a grove of sandwich-bags, and awaited the return of the messengers, with all the philosophy and fortitude he could summon to his aid.

An hour and a half elapsed before they came back, and when they did come, Mr. Pickwick recognised, in addition to the voice of Mr. Samuel

Weller, two other voices, the tones of which struck familiarly on his ear; but whose they were, he could not for the life of him call to mind.

A very brief conversation ensued. The door was unlocked. Mr. Pickwick stepped out of the closet, and found himself in the presence of the whole establishment of Westgate House, Mr Samuel Weller, and—old Wardle, and his destined son-in-law, Mr. Trundle!

'My dear friend,' said Mr. Pickwick, running forward and grasping Wardle's hand, 'my dear friend, pray, for Heaven's sake, explain to this lady the unfortunate and dreadful situation in which I am placed. You must have heard it from my servant; say, at all events, my dear fellow, that I am neither a robber nor a madman.'

'I have said so, my dear friend. I have said so already,' replied Mr. Wardle, shaking the right hand of his friend, while Mr. Trundle shook the left. 'And whoever says, or has said, he is,' interposed Mr. Weller, stepping forward, 'says that which is not the truth, but so far from it, on the contrary, quite the rewerse. And if there's any number o' men on these here premises as has said so, I shall be wery happy to give 'em all a wery convincing proof o' their being mistaken, in this here wery room, if these wery respectable ladies 'll have the goodness to retire, and order 'em up, one at a time.' Having delivered this defiance with great volubility, Mr. Weller struck his open palm emphatically with his clenched fist, and winked pleasantly on Miss Tomkins, the intensity of whose horror at his supposing it within the bounds of possibility that there could be any men on the premises of Westgate House Establishment for Young Ladies, it is impossible to describe.

Mr. Pickwick's explanation having already been partially made, was soon concluded. But neither in the course of his walk home with his friends, nor afterwards when seated before a blazing fire at the supper he so much needed, could a single observation be drawn from him. He seemed bewildered and amazed. Once, and only once, he turned round to Mr. Wardle, and said—

'How did you come here?'

'Trundle and I came down here, for some good shooting on the first,' replied Wardle. 'We arrived to-night, and were astonished to hear from your servant that you were here too. But I am glad you are,' said the old fellow, slapping him on the back—'I am glad you are. We shall have a jovial party on the first, and we'll give Winkle another chance—eh, old boy?'

Mr. Pickwick made no reply, he did not even ask after his friends at Dingley Dell, and shortly afterwards retired for the night, desiring Sam to fetch his candle when he rung. The bell did ring in due course, and Mr. Weller presented himself.

'Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, looking out from under the bed-clothes.

'Sir,' said Mr. Weller.

Mr. Pickwick paused, and Mr. Weller snuffed the candle.

'Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick again, as if with a desperate effort.

'Sir,' said Mr. Weller, once more.

'Where is that Trotter?'

'Job, sir?'

'Yes.

'Gone, sir.'

'With his master, I suppose?'

'Friend or master, or whatever he is, he's gone with him,' replied Mr. Weller. 'There's a pair on 'em, sir.'

'Jingle suspected my design, and set that fellow on you, with this story, I suppose?' said Mr. Pickwick, half choking.

'Just that, sir,' replied Mr. Weller.

'It was all false, of course?'

'All, sir,' replied Mr. Weller. 'Reg'lar do, sir; artful dodge.'

'I don't think he'll escape us quite so easily the next time, Sam!' said Mr. Pickwick.

'I don't think he will, Sir.'

'Whenever I meet that Jingle again, wherever it is,' said Mr. Pickwick, raising himself in bed, and indenting his pillow with a tremendous blow, 'I'll inflict personal chastisement on him, in addition to the exposure he so richly merits. I will, or my name is not Pickwick.'

'And venever I catches hold o' that there melan-cholly chap with the black hair,' said Sam, 'if I don't bring some real water into his eyes, for once in a way, my name ain't Weller. Good-night, Sir!'

CHAPTER XVII. SHOWING THAT AN ATTACK OF RHEUMATISM, IN SOME CASES, ACTS

AS A QUICKENER TO INVENTIVE GENIUS

The constitution of Mr. Pickwick, though able to sustain a very considerable amount of exertion and fatigue, was not proof against such a combination of attacks as he had undergone on the memorable night, recorded in the last chapter. The process of being washed in the night air, and rough-dried in a closet, is as dangerous as it is peculiar. Mr. Pickwick was laid up with an attack of rheumatism.

But although the bodily powers of the great man were thus impaired, his mental energies retained their pristine vigour. His spirits were elastic; his good-humour was restored. Even the vexation consequent upon his recent adventure had vanished from his mind; and he could join in the hearty laughter, which any allusion to it excited in Mr. Wardle, without anger and without embarrassment. Nay, more. During the two days Mr. Pickwick was confined to bed, Sam was his constant attendant. On the first, he endeavoured to amuse his master by anecdote and conversation; on the second, Mr. Pickwick demanded his writing-desk, and pen and ink, and was deeply engaged during the whole day. On the third, being able to sit up in his bedchamber, he despatched his valet with a message to Mr. Wardle and Mr. Trundle, intimating that if they would take their wine there, that evening, they would greatly oblige him. The invitation was most willingly accepted; and when they were seated over their wine, Mr. Pickwick, with sundry blushes, produced the following little tale, as having been 'edited' by himself, during his recent indisposition, from his notes of Mr. Weller's unsophisticated recital.

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THE PARISH CLERK
A TALE OF TRUE LOVE
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'Once upon a time, in a very small country town, at a considerable distance from London, there lived a little man named Nathaniel Pipkin, who was the parish clerk of the little town, and lived in a little house in the little High Street, within ten minutes' walk from the little church; and who was to be found every day, from nine till four, teaching a little learning to the little boys. Nathaniel Pipkin was a harmless, inoffensive, good-natured being, with a turned-up nose, and rather turned-in legs, a cast in his eye, and a halt in his gait; and he divided his time between the church and his school, verily believing that there existed not, on the face of the earth, so clever a man as the curate, so imposing an apartment as the vestry-room, or so well-ordered a seminary as his own. Once, and only once, in his life, Nathaniel Pipkin had seen a bishop—a real bishop, with his arms in lawn sleeves, and his head in a wig. He had seen him walk, and heard him talk, at a confirmation, on which momentous occasion Nathaniel Pipkin was so overcome with reverence and awe, when the aforesaid bishop laid his hand on his head, that he fainted right clean away, and was borne out of church in the arms of the beadle.

'This was a great event, a tremendous era, in Nathaniel Pipkin's life, and it was the only one that had ever occurred to ruffle the smooth current of his quiet existence, when happening one fine afternoon, in a fit of mental abstraction, to raise his eyes from the slate on which he was devising some tremendous problem in compound addition for an offending urchin to solve, they suddenly rested on the blooming countenance of Maria Lobbs, the only daughter of old Lobbs, the great saddler over the way. Now, the eyes of Mr. Pipkin had rested on the pretty face of Maria Lobbs many a time and oft before, at church and elsewhere; but the eyes of Maria Lobbs had never looked so bright, the cheeks of Maria Lobbs had never looked so ruddy, as upon this particular occasion. No wonder then, that Nathaniel Pipkin was unable to take his eyes from the countenance of Miss Lobbs; no wonder that Miss Lobbs, finding herself stared at by a young man, withdrew her head from the window out of which she had been peeping, and shut the casement and pulled down the blind; no wonder that Nathaniel Pipkin, immediately thereafter, fell upon the young urchin who had previously offended, and cuffed and knocked him about to his heart's content. All this was very natural, and there's nothing at all to wonder at about it.

'It IS matter of wonder, though, that anyone of Mr. Nathaniel Pipkin's retiring disposition, nervous temperament, and most particularly diminutive income, should from this day forth, have dared to aspire to the hand and heart of the only daughter of the fiery old Lobbs—of old Lobbs, the great saddler, who could have bought up the whole village at one stroke of his pen, and never felt the outlay—old Lobbs, who was well known to have heaps of money, invested in the bank at the nearest market town—who was reported to have countless and inexhaustible treasures hoarded up in the little iron safe with the big keyhole, over the chimney-piece in the back parlour—and who, it was well known, on festive occasions garnished his board with a real silver teapot, cream-ewer, and sugar-basin, which he was wont, in the pride of his heart, to boast should be his daughter's property when she found a man to her mind. I repeat it, to be matter of profound astonishment and intense wonder, that Nathaniel Pipkin should have had the temerity to cast his eyes in this direction. But love is blind; and Nathaniel had a cast in his eye; and perhaps these two circumstances, taken together, prevented his seeing the matter in its proper light.

'Now, if old Lobbs had entertained the most remote or distant idea of the state of the affections of Nathaniel Pipkin, he would just have razed the school-room to the ground, or exterminated its master from the surface of the earth, or committed some other outrage and atrocity of an equally ferocious and violent description; for he was a terrible old fellow, was Lobbs, when his pride was injured, or his blood was up. Swear! Such trains of oaths would come rolling and pealing over the way, sometimes, when he was denouncing the idleness of the bony apprentice with the thin legs, that Nathaniel Pipkin would shake in his shoes with horror, and the hair of the pupils' heads would stand on end with fright.

'Well! Day after day, when school was over, and the pupils gone, did Nathaniel Pipkin sit himself down at the front window, and, while he feigned to be reading a book, throw sidelong glances over the way in search of the bright eyes of Maria Lobbs; and he hadn't sat there many days, before the bright eyes appeared at an upper window, apparently deeply engaged in reading too. This was delightful, and gladdening to the heart of Nathaniel Pipkin. It was something to sit there for hours together, and look upon that pretty face when the eyes were cast down; but when Maria Lobbs began to raise her eyes from her book, and dart their rays in the direction of Nathaniel Pipkin, his delight and admiration were perfectly boundless. At last, one day when he knew old Lobbs was out, Nathaniel Pipkin had the temerity to kiss his hand to Maria Lobbs; and Maria Lobbs, instead of shutting the window, and pulling down the blind, kissed HERS to him, and smiled. Upon which Nathaniel Pipkin determined, that, come what might, he would develop the state of his feelings, without further delay.

'A prettier foot, a gayer heart, a more dimpled face, or a smarter form, never bounded so lightly over the earth they graced, as did those of Maria Lobbs, the old saddler's daughter. There was a roguish twinkle in her sparkling eyes, that would have made its way to far less susceptible bosoms than that of Nathaniel Pipkin; and there was such a joyous sound in her merry laugh, that the sternest misanthrope must have smiled to hear it. Even old Lobbs himself, in the very height of his ferocity, couldn't resist the coaxing of his pretty daughter; and when she, and her cousin Kate—an arch, impudent-looking, bewitching little person—made a dead set upon the old man together, as, to say the truth, they very often did, he could have refused them nothing, even had they asked for a portion of the countless and inexhaustible treasures, which were hidden from the light, in the iron safe.

'Nathaniel Pipkin's heart beat high within him, when he saw this enticing little couple some hundred yards before him one summer's evening, in the very field in which he had many a time strolled about till night-time, and pondered on the beauty of Maria Lobbs. But though he had often thought then, how briskly he would walk up to Maria Lobbs and tell her of his passion if he could only meet her, he felt, now that she was unexpectedly before him, all the blood in his body mounting to his face, manifestly to the great detriment of his legs, which, deprived of their usual portion, trembled beneath him. When they stopped to gather a hedge flower, or listen to a bird, Nathaniel Pipkin stopped too, and pretended to be absorbed in meditation, as indeed he really was; for he was thinking what on earth he should ever do, when they turned back, as they inevitably must in time, and meet him face to face. But though he was afraid to make up to them, he couldn't bear to lose sight of them; so when they walked faster he walked faster, when they lingered he lingered, and when they stopped he stopped; and so they might have gone on, until the darkness prevented them, if Kate had not looked slyly back, and encouragingly beckoned Nathaniel to advance. There was something in Kate's manner that was not to be resisted, and so Nathaniel Pipkin complied with the invitation; and after a great deal of blushing on his part, and immoderate laughter on that of the wicked little cousin, Nathaniel Pipkin went down on his knees on the dewy grass, and declared his resolution to remain there for ever, unless he were permitted to rise the accepted lover of Maria Lobbs. Upon this, the merry laughter of Miss Lobbs rang through the calm evening air—without seeming to disturb it, though; it had such a pleasant sound—and the wicked little cousin laughed more immoderately than before, and Nathaniel Pipkin blushed deeper than ever. At length, Maria Lobbs being more strenuously urged by the love-worn little man, turned away her head, and whispered her cousin to say, or at all events Kate did say, that she felt much honoured by Mr. Pipkin's addresses; that her hand and heart were at her father's disposal; but that nobody could be insensible to Mr. Pipkin's merits. As all this was said with much gravity, and as Nathaniel Pipkin walked home with Maria Lobbs, and struggled for a kiss at parting, he went to bed a happy man, and dreamed all night long, of softening old Lobbs, opening the strong box, and marrying Maria.

The next day, Nathaniel Pipkin saw old Lobbs go out upon his old gray pony, and after a great many signs at the window from the wicked little cousin, the object and meaning of which he could by no means understand, the bony apprentice with the thin legs came over to say that his master wasn't coming home all night, and that the ladies expected Mr. Pipkin to tea, at six o'clock precisely. How the lessons were got through that day, neither Nathaniel Pipkin nor his pupils knew any more than you do; but they were got through somehow, and, after the boys had gone, Nathaniel Pipkin took till full six o'clock to dress himself to his satisfaction. Not that it took long to select the garments he should wear, inasmuch as he had no choice about the matter; but the putting of them on to the best advantage, and the touching of them up previously, was a task of no inconsiderable difficulty or importance.

'There was a very snug little party, consisting of Maria Lobbs and her cousin Kate, and three or four romping, good-humoured, rosy-cheeked girls. Nathaniel Pipkin had ocular demonstration of the fact, that the rumours of old Lobbs's treasures were not exaggerated. There were the real solid silver teapot, cream-ewer, and sugar-basin, on the table, and real silver spoons to stir the tea with, and real china cups to drink it out of, and plates of the same, to hold the cakes and toast in. The only eye-sore in the whole place was another cousin of Maria Lobbs's, and a brother of Kate, whom Maria Lobbs called "Henry," and who seemed to keep Maria Lobbs all to himself, up in one corner of the table. It's a delightful thing to see affection in families, but it may be carried rather too far, and Nathaniel Pipkin could not help thinking that Maria Lobbs must be very particularly fond of her relations, if she paid as much attention to all of them as to this individual cousin. After tea, too, when the wicked little cousin proposed a game at blind man's buff, it somehow or other happened that Nathaniel Pipkin was nearly always blind, and whenever he laid his hand upon the male cousin, he was sure to find that Maria Lobbs was not far off. And though the wicked little cousin and the other girls pinched him, and pulled his hair, and pushed chairs in his way, and all sorts of things, Maria Lobbs never seemed to come near him at all; and once—once—Nathaniel Pipkin could have sworn he heard the sound of a kiss, followed by a faint remonstrance from Maria Lobbs, and a half-suppressed laugh from her female friends. All this was odd—very odd—and there is no saying what Nathaniel Pipkin might or might not have done, in consequence, if his thoughts had not been suddenly directed into a new channel.

'The circumstance which directed his thoughts into a new channel was a loud knocking at the street door, and the person who made this loud knocking at the street door was no other than old Lobbs himself, who had unexpectedly returned, and was hammering away, like a coffin-maker; for he wanted his supper. The alarming intelligence was no sooner communicated by the bony apprentice with the thin legs, than the girls tripped upstairs to Maria Lobbs's bedroom, and the male cousin and Nathaniel Pipkin were thrust into a couple of closets in the sitting-room, for want of any better places of concealment; and when Maria Lobbs and the wicked little cousin had stowed them away, and put the room to rights, they opened the street door to old Lobbs, who had never left off knocking since he first began.

'Now it did unfortunately happen that old Lobbs being very hungry was monstrous cross. Nathaniel Pipkin could hear him growling away like an old mastiff with a sore throat; and whenever the unfortunate apprentice with the thin legs came into the room, so surely did old Lobbs commence swearing at him in a most Saracenic and ferocious manner, though apparently with no other end or object than that of easing his bosom by the discharge of a few superfluous oaths. At length some supper, which had been warming up, was placed on the table, and then old Lobbs fell to, in regular style; and having made clear work of it in no time, kissed his daughter, and demanded his pipe.

'Nature had placed Nathaniel Pipkin's knees in very close juxtaposition, but when he heard old Lobbs demand his pipe, they knocked together, as if they were going to reduce each other to powder; for, depending from a couple of hooks, in the very closet in which he stood, was a large, brown-stemmed, silver-bowled pipe, which pipe he himself had seen in the mouth of old Lobbs, regularly every afternoon and evening, for the last five years. The two girls went downstairs for the pipe, and upstairs for the pipe, and everywhere but where they knew the pipe was, and old Lobbs stormed away meanwhile, in the most wonderful manner. At last he thought of the closet, and walked up to it. It was of no use a little man like Nathaniel Pipkin pulling the door inwards, when a great strong fellow like old Lobbs was pulling it outwards. Old Lobbs gave it one tug, and open it flew, disclosing Nathaniel Pipkin standing bolt upright inside, and shaking with apprehension from head to foot. Bless us! what an appalling look old Lobbs gave him, as he dragged him out by the collar, and held him at arm's length.

'"Why, what the devil do you want here?" said old Lobbs, in a fearful voice.

'Nathaniel Pipkin could make no reply, so old Lobbs shook him backwards and forwards, for two or three minutes, by way of arranging his ideas for him.

'"What do you want here?" roared Lobbs; "I suppose you have come after my daughter, now!"

'Old Lobbs merely said this as a sneer: for he did not believe that mortal presumption could have carried Nathaniel Pipkin so far. What was his indignation, when that poor man replied—'"Yes, I did, Mr. Lobbs, I did come after your daughter. I love her, Mr. Lobbs."

'"Why, you snivelling, wry-faced, puny villain," gasped old Lobbs, paralysed by the atrocious confession; "what do you mean by that? Say this to my face! Damme, I'll throttle you!"

'It is by no means improbable that old Lobbs would have carried his threat into execution, in the excess of his rage, if his arm had not been stayed by a very unexpected apparition: to wit, the male cousin, who, stepping out of his closet, and walking up to old Lobbs, said—

'"I cannot allow this harmless person, Sir, who has been asked here, in some girlish frolic, to take upon himself, in a very noble manner, the fault (if fault it is) which I am guilty of, and am ready to avow. I love your daughter, sir; and I came here for the purpose of meeting her."

'Old Lobbs opened his eyes very wide at this, but not wider than Nathaniel Pipkin.

'"You did?" said Lobbs, at last finding breath to speak.

'"I did."

'"And I forbade you this house, long ago."

'"You did, or I should not have been here, clandestinely, to-night."

'I am sorry to record it of old Lobbs, but I think he would have struck the cousin, if his pretty daughter, with her bright eyes swimming in tears, had not clung to his arm.

'"Don't stop him, Maria," said the young man; "if he has the will to strike me, let him. I would not hurt a hair of his gray head, for the riches of the world."

'The old man cast down his eyes at this reproof, and they met those of his daughter. I have hinted once or twice before, that they were very bright eyes, and, though they were tearful now, their influence was by no means lessened. Old Lobbs turned his head away, as if to avoid being persuaded by them, when, as fortune would have it, he encountered the face of the wicked little cousin, who, half afraid for her brother, and half laughing at Nathaniel Pipkin, presented as bewitching an expression of countenance, with a touch of slyness in it, too, as any man, old or young, need look upon. She drew her arm coaxingly through the old man's, and whispered something in his ear; and do what he would, old Lobbs couldn't help breaking out into a smile, while a tear stole down his cheek at the same time. 'Five minutes after this, the girls were brought down from the bedroom with a great deal of giggling and modesty; and while the young people were making themselves perfectly happy, old Lobbs got down the pipe, and smoked it; and it was a remarkable circumstance about that particular pipe of tobacco, that it was the most soothing and delightful one he ever smoked.

'Nathaniel Pipkin thought it best to keep his own counsel, and by so doing gradually rose into high favour with old Lobbs, who taught him to smoke in time; and they used to sit out in the garden on the fine evenings, for many years afterwards, smoking and drinking in great state. He soon recovered the effects of his attachment, for we find his name in the parish register, as a witness to the marriage of Maria Lobbs to her cousin; and it also appears, by reference to other documents, that on the night of the wedding he was incarcerated in the village cage, for having, in a state of extreme intoxication, committed sundry excesses in the streets, in all of which he was aided and abetted by the bony apprentice with the thin legs.'

CHAPTER XVIII. BRIEFLY ILLUSTRATIVE OF TWO POINTS; FIRST, THE POWER OF

HYSTERICS, AND, SECONDLY, THE FORCE OF CIRCUMSTANCES

For two days after the DEJEUNE at Mrs. Hunter's, the Pickwickians remained at Eatanswill, anxiously awaiting the arrival of some intelligence from their revered leader. Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass were once again left to their own means of amusement; for Mr. Winkle, in compliance with a most pressing invitation, continued to reside at Mr. Pott's house, and to devote his time to the companionship of his amiable lady. Nor was the occasional society of Mr. Pott himself wanting to complete their felicity. Deeply immersed in the intensity of his speculations for the public weal and the destruction of the INDEPENDENT, it was not the habit of that great man to descend from his mental pinnacle to the humble level of ordinary minds. On this occasion, however, and as if expressly in compliment to any follower of Mr. Pickwick's, he unbent, relaxed, stepped down from his pedestal, and walked upon the ground, benignly adapting his remarks to the comprehension of the herd, and seeming in outward form, if not in spirit, to be one of them.

Such having been the demeanour of this celebrated public character towards Mr. Winkle, it will be readily imagined that considerable surprise was depicted on the countenance of the latter gentleman, when, as he was sitting alone in the breakfast-room, the door was hastily thrown open, and as hastily closed, on the entrance of Mr. Pott, who, stalking majestically towards him, and thrusting aside his proffered hand, ground his teeth, as if to put a sharper edge on what he was about to utter, and exclaimed, in a saw-like voice—

'Serpent!'

'Sir!' exclaimed Mr. Winkle, starting from his chair.

'Serpent, Sir,' repeated Mr. Pott, raising his voice, and then suddenly depressing it: 'I said, serpent, sir—make the most of it.'

When you have parted with a man at two o'clock in the morning, on terms of the utmost good-fellowship, and he meets you again, at half-past nine, and greets you as a serpent, it is not unreasonable to conclude that something of an unpleasant nature has occurred meanwhile. So Mr. Winkle thought. He returned Mr. Pott's gaze of stone, and in compliance with that gentleman's request, proceeded to make the most he could of the 'serpent.' The most, however, was nothing at all; so, after a profound silence of some minutes' duration, he said,—

'Serpent, Sir! Serpent, Mr. Pott! What can you mean, Sir?—this is pleasantry.'

'Pleasantry, sir!' exclaimed Pott, with a motion of the hand, indicative of a strong desire to hurl the Britannia metal teapot at the head of the visitor. 'Pleasantry, sir!—But—no, I will be calm; I will be calm, Sir;' in proof of his calmness, Mr. Pott flung himself into a chair, and foamed at the mouth.

'My dear sir,' interposed Mr. Winkle.

'DEAR Sir!' replied Pott. 'How dare you address me, as dear Sir, Sir? How dare you look me in the face and do it, sir?'

'Well, Sir, if you come to that,' responded Mr. Winkle, 'how dare you look me in the face, and call me a serpent, sir?'

'Because you are one,' replied Mr. Pott.

'Prove it, Sir,' said Mr. Winkle warmly. 'Prove it.'

A malignant scowl passed over the profound face of the editor, as he drew from his pocket the INDEPENDENT of that morning; and laying his finger on a particular paragraph, threw the journal across the table to Mr. Winkle.

That gentleman took it up, and read as follows:—

'Our obscure and filthy contemporary, in some disgusting observations on the recent election for this borough, has presumed to violate the hallowed sanctity of private life, and to refer in a manner not to be misunderstood, to the personal affairs of our late candidate—aye, and notwithstanding his base defeat, we will add, our future member, Mr. Fizkin. What does our dastardly contemporary mean? What would the ruffian say, if we, setting at naught, like him, the decencies of social intercourse, were to raise the curtain which happily conceals His private life from general ridicule, not to say from general execration? What, if we were even to point out, and comment on, facts and circumstances, which are publicly notorious, and beheld by every one but our mole-eyed contemporary—what if we were to print the following effusion, which we received while we were writing the commencement of this article, from a talented fellow-townsman and correspondent?

'"LINES TO A BRASS POT

'"Oh Pott! if you'd known
How false she'd have grown,
When you heard the marriage bells tinkle;
You'd have done then, I vow,
What you cannot help now,

'What,' said Mr. Pott solemnly—'what rhymes to "tinkle," villain?'

'What rhymes to tinkle?' said Mrs. Pott, whose entrance at the moment forestalled the reply. 'What rhymes to tinkle? Why, Winkle, I should conceive.' Saying this, Mrs. Pott smiled sweetly on the disturbed Pickwickian, and extended her hand towards him. The agitated young man would have accepted it, in his confusion, had not Pott indignantly interposed.

'Back, ma'am—back!' said the editor. 'Take his hand before my very face!'

'Mr. P.!' said his astonished lady.

'Wretched woman, look here,' exclaimed the husband. 'Look here, ma'am—"Lines to a Brass Pot." "Brass Pot"; that's me, ma'am. "False SHE'D have grown"; that's you, ma'am—you.' With this ebullition of rage, which was not unaccompanied with something like a tremble, at the expression of his wife's face, Mr. Pott dashed the current number of the Eatanswill INDEPENDENT at her feet.

'Upon my word, Sir,' said the astonished Mrs. Pott, stooping to pick up the paper. 'Upon my word, Sir!'

Mr. Pott winced beneath the contemptuous gaze of his wife. He had made a desperate struggle to screw up his courage, but it was fast coming unscrewed again.

There appears nothing very tremendous in this little sentence, 'Upon my word, sir,' when it comes to be read; but the tone of voice in which it was delivered, and the look that accompanied it, both seeming to bear reference to some revenge to be thereafter visited upon the head of Pott, produced their effect upon him. The most unskilful observer could have detected in his troubled countenance, a readiness to resign his Wellington boots to any efficient substitute who would have consented to stand in them at that moment.

Mrs. Pott read the paragraph, uttered a loud shriek, and threw herself at full length on the hearth-rug, screaming, and tapping it with the heels of her shoes, in a manner which could leave no doubt of the propriety of her feelings on the occasion.

'My dear,' said the terrified Pott, 'I didn't say I believed it;—I—' but the unfortunate man's voice was drowned in the screaming of his partner.

'Mrs. Pott, let me entreat you, my dear ma'am, to compose yourself,' said Mr. Winkle; but the shrieks and tappings were louder, and more frequent than ever.

'My dear,' said Mr. Pott, 'I'm very sorry. If you won't consider your own health, consider me, my dear. We shall have a crowd round the house.' But the more strenuously Mr. Pott entreated, the more vehemently the screams poured forth.

Very fortunately, however, attached to Mrs. Pott's person was a bodyguard of one, a young lady whose ostensible employment was to preside over her toilet, but who rendered herself useful in a variety of ways, and in none more so than in the particular department of constantly aiding and abetting her mistress in every wish and inclination opposed to the desires of the unhappy Pott. The screams reached this young lady's ears in due course, and brought her into the room with a speed which threatened to derange, materially, the very exquisite arrangement of her cap and ringlets.

'Oh, my dear, dear mistress!' exclaimed the bodyguard, kneeling frantically by the side of the prostrate Mrs. Pott. 'Oh, my dear mistress, what is the matter?'

'Your master—your brutal master,' murmured the patient.

Pott was evidently giving way.

'It's a shame,' said the bodyguard reproachfully. 'I know he'll be the death on you, ma'am. Poor dear thing!'

He gave way more. The opposite party followed up the attack.

'Oh, don't leave me—don't leave me, Goodwin,' murmured Mrs. Pott, clutching at the wrist of the said Goodwin with an hysteric jerk. 'You're the only person that's kind to me, Goodwin.'

At this affecting appeal, Goodwin got up a little domestic tragedy of her own, and shed tears copiously.

'Never, ma'am—never,' said Goodwin.'Oh, sir, you should be careful—you should indeed; you don't know what harm you may do missis; you'll be sorry for it one day, I know—I've always said so.'

The unlucky Pott looked timidly on, but said nothing.

'Goodwin,' said Mrs. Pott, in a soft voice.

'Ma'am,' said Goodwin.

'If you only knew how I have loved that man—' 'Don't distress yourself by recollecting it, ma'am,' said the bodyguard.

Pott looked very frightened. It was time to finish him.

'And now,' sobbed Mrs. Pott, 'now, after all, to be treated in this way; to be reproached and insulted in the presence of a third party, and that party almost a stranger. But I will not submit to it! Goodwin,' continued Mrs. Pott, raising herself in the arms of her attendant, 'my brother, the lieutenant, shall interfere. I'll be separated, Goodwin!'

'It would certainly serve him right, ma'am,' said Goodwin.

Whatever thoughts the threat of a separation might have awakened in Mr. Pott's mind, he forbore to give utterance to them, and contented himself by saying, with great humility:—

'My dear, will you hear me?'

A fresh train of sobs was the only reply, as Mrs. Pott grew more hysterical, requested to be informed why she was ever born, and required sundry other pieces of information of a similar description.

'My dear,' remonstrated Mr. Pott, 'do not give way to these sensitive feelings. I never believed that the paragraph had any foundation, my dear—impossible. I was only angry, my dear—I may say outrageous—with the INDEPENDENT people for daring to insert it; that's all.' Mr. Pott cast an imploring look at the innocent cause of the mischief, as if to entreat him to say nothing about the serpent.

'And what steps, sir, do you mean to take to obtain redress?' inquired Mr. Winkle, gaining courage as he saw Pott losing it.

'Oh, Goodwin,' observed Mrs. Pott, 'does he mean to horsewhip the editor of the INDEPENDENT—does he, Goodwin?'

'Hush, hush, ma'am; pray keep yourself quiet,' replied the bodyguard. 'I dare say he will, if you wish it, ma'am.'

'Certainly,' said Pott, as his wife evinced decided symptoms of going off again. 'Of course I shall.'

'When, Goodwin—when?' said Mrs. Pott, still undecided about the going off.

'Immediately, of course,' said Mr. Pott; 'before the day is out.'

'Oh, Goodwin,' resumed Mrs. Pott, 'it's the only way of meeting the slander, and setting me right with the world.'

'Certainly, ma'am,' replied Goodwin. 'No man as is a man, ma'am, could refuse to do it.'

So, as the hysterics were still hovering about, Mr. Pott said once more that he would do it; but Mrs. Pott was so overcome at the bare idea of having ever been suspected, that she was half a dozen times on the very verge of a relapse, and most unquestionably would have gone off, had it not been for the indefatigable efforts of the assiduous Goodwin, and repeated entreaties for pardon from the conquered Pott; and finally, when that unhappy individual had been frightened and snubbed down to his proper level, Mrs. Pott recovered, and they went to breakfast.

'You will not allow this base newspaper slander to shorten your stay here, Mr. Winkle?' said Mrs. Pott, smiling through the traces of her tears.

'I hope not,' said Mr. Pott, actuated, as he spoke, by a wish that his visitor would choke himself with the morsel of dry toast which he was raising to his lips at the moment, and so terminate his stay effectually.

'I hope not.'

'You are very good,' said Mr. Winkle; 'but a letter has been received from Mr. Pickwick—so I learn by a note from Mr. Tupman, which was brought up to my bedroom door, this morning—in which he requests us to join him at Bury to-day; and we are to leave by the coach at noon.'

'But you will come back?' said Mrs. Pott.

'Oh, certainly,' replied Mr. Winkle.

'You are quite sure?' said Mrs. Pott, stealing a tender look at her visitor.

'Quite,' responded Mr. Winkle.

The breakfast passed off in silence, for each of the party was brooding over his, or her, own personal grievances. Mrs. Pott was regretting the loss of a beau; Mr. Pott his rash pledge to horsewhip the INDEPENDENT; Mr. Winkle his having innocently placed himself in so awkward a situation. Noon approached, and after many adieux and promises to return, he tore himself away.

'If he ever comes back, I'll poison him,' thought Mr. Pott, as he turned into the little back office where he prepared his thunderbolts.

'If I ever do come back, and mix myself up with these people again,'thought Mr. Winkle, as he wended his way to the Peacock, 'I shall deserve to be horsewhipped myself—that's all.'

His friends were ready, the coach was nearly so, and in half an hour they were proceeding on their journey, along the road over which Mr. Pickwick and Sam had so recently travelled, and of which, as we have already said something, we do not feel called upon to extract Mr. Snodgrass's poetical and beautiful description.

Mr. Weller was standing at the door of the Angel, ready to receive them, and by that gentleman they were ushered to the apartment of Mr. Pickwick, where, to the no small surprise of Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass, and the no small embarrassment of Mr. Tupman, they found old Wardle and Trundle.

'How are you?' said the old man, grasping Mr. Tupman's hand. 'Don't hang back, or look sentimental about it; it can't be helped, old fellow. For her sake, I wish you'd had her; for your own, I'm very glad you have not. A young fellow like you will do better one of these days, eh?' With this conclusion, Wardle slapped Mr. Tupman on the back, and laughed heartily.

'Well, and how are you, my fine fellows?' said the old gentleman, shaking hands with Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass at the same time. 'I have just been telling Pickwick that we must have you all down at Christmas. We're going to have a wedding—a real wedding this time.'

'A wedding!' exclaimed Mr. Snodgrass, turning very pale.

'Yes, a wedding. But don't be frightened,' said the good-humoured old man; 'it's only Trundle there, and Bella.'

'Oh, is that all?' said Mr. Snodgrass, relieved from a painful doubt which had fallen heavily on his breast. 'Give you joy, Sir. How is Joe?'

'Very well,' replied the old gentleman. 'Sleepy as ever.'

'And your mother, and the clergyman, and all of 'em?'

'Quite well.'

'Where,' said Mr. Tupman, with an effort—'where is—SHE, Sir?' and he turned away his head, and covered his eyes with his hand. 'SHE!' said the old gentleman, with a knowing shake of the head. 'Do you mean my single relative—eh?'

Mr. Tupman, by a nod, intimated that his question applied to the disappointed Rachael.

'Oh, she's gone away,' said the old gentleman. 'She's living at a relation's, far enough off. She couldn't bear to see the girls, so I let her go. But come! Here's the dinner. You must be hungry after your ride. I am, without any ride at all; so let us fall to.'

Ample justice was done to the meal; and when they were seated round the table, after it had been disposed of, Mr. Pickwick, to the intense horror and indignation of his followers, related the adventure he had undergone, and the success which had attended the base artifices of the diabolical Jingle. 'And the attack of rheumatism which I caught in that garden,' said Mr. Pickwick, in conclusion, 'renders me lame at this moment.'

'I, too, have had something of an adventure,' said Mr. Winkle, with a smile; and, at the request of Mr. Pickwick, he detailed the malicious libel of the Eatanswill INDEPENDENT, and the consequent excitement of their friend, the editor.

Mr. Pickwick's brow darkened during the recital. His friends observed it, and, when Mr. Winkle had concluded, maintained a profound silence. Mr. Pickwick struck the table emphatically with his clenched fist, and spoke as follows:—

'Is it not a wonderful circumstance,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'that we seem destined to enter no man's house without involving him in some degree of trouble? Does it not, I ask, bespeak the indiscretion, or, worse than that, the blackness of heart—that I should say so!—of my followers, that, beneath whatever roof they locate, they disturb the peace of mind and happiness of some confiding female? Is it not, I say—'

Mr. Pickwick would in all probability have gone on for some time, had not the entrance of Sam, with a letter, caused him to break off in his eloquent discourse. He passed his handkerchief across his forehead, took off his spectacles, wiped them, and put them on again; and his voice had recovered its wonted softness of tone when he said—

'What have you there, Sam?'

'Called at the post-office just now, and found this here letter, as has laid there for two days,' replied Mr. Weller. 'It's sealed vith a vafer, and directed in round hand.'

'I don't know this hand,' said Mr. Pickwick, opening the letter. 'Mercy on us! what's this? It must be a jest; it—it—can't be true.'

'What's the matter?' was the general inquiry.

'Nobody dead, is there?' said Wardle, alarmed at the horror in Mr. Pickwick's countenance.

Mr. Pickwick made no reply, but, pushing the letter across the table, and desiring Mr. Tupman to read it aloud, fell back in his chair with a look of vacant astonishment quite alarming to behold.

Mr. Tupman, with a trembling voice, read the letter, of which the following is a copy:—

Freeman's Court, Cornhill, August 28th, 1827.

Bardell against Pickwick.

Sir,

Having been instructed by Mrs. Martha Bardell to commence an action against you for a breach of promise of marriage, for which the plaintiff lays her damages at fifteen hundred pounds, we beg to inform you that a writ has been issued against you in this suit in the Court of Common Pleas; and request to know, by return of post, the name of your attorney in London, who will accept service thereof.

We are, Sir, Your obedient servants, Dodson & Fogg.

Mr. Samuel Pickwick.

There was something so impressive in the mute astonishment with which each man regarded his neighbour, and every man regarded Mr. Pickwick, that all seemed afraid to speak. The silence was at length broken by Mr. Tupman.

'Dodson and Fogg,' he repeated mechanically.

'Bardell and Pickwick,' said Mr. Snodgrass, musing.

'Peace of mind and happiness of confiding females,' murmured Mr. Winkle, with an air of abstraction.

'It's a conspiracy,' said Mr. Pickwick, at length recovering the power of speech; 'a base conspiracy between these two grasping attorneys, Dodson and Fogg. Mrs. Bardell would never do it;—she hasn't the heart to do it;—she hasn't the case to do it. Ridiculous—ridiculous.' 'Of her heart,' said Wardle, with a smile, 'you should certainly be the best judge. I don't wish to discourage you, but I should certainly say that, of her case, Dodson and Fogg are far better judges than any of us can be.'

'It's a vile attempt to extort money,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'I hope it is,' said Wardle, with a short, dry cough.

'Who ever heard me address her in any way but that in which a lodger would address his landlady?' continued Mr. Pickwick, with great vehemence. 'Who ever saw me with her? Not even my friends here—'

'Except on one occasion,' said Mr. Tupman.

Mr. Pickwick changed colour. 'Ah,' said Mr. Wardle. 'Well, that's important. There was nothing suspicious then, I suppose?'

Mr. Tupman glanced timidly at his leader. 'Why,' said he, 'there was nothing suspicious; but—I don't know how it happened, mind—she certainly was reclining in his arms.'

'Gracious powers!' ejaculated Mr. Pickwick, as the recollection of the scene in question struck forcibly upon him; 'what a dreadful instance of the force of circumstances! So she was—so she was.'

'And our friend was soothing her anguish,' said Mr. Winkle, rather maliciously.

'So I was,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'I don't deny it. So I was.'

'Hollo!' said Wardle; 'for a case in which there's nothing suspicious, this looks rather queer—eh, Pickwick? Ah, sly dog—sly dog!' and he laughed till the glasses on the sideboard rang again.

'What a dreadful conjunction of appearances!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, resting his chin upon his hands. 'Winkle—Tupman—I beg your pardon for the observations I made just now. We are all the victims of circumstances, and I the greatest.' With this apology Mr. Pickwick buried his head in his hands, and ruminated; while Wardle measured out a regular circle of nods and winks, addressed to the other members of the company.

'I'll have it explained, though,' said Mr. Pickwick, raising his head and hammering the table. 'I'll see this Dodson and Fogg! I'll go to London to-morrow.'

'Not to-morrow,' said Wardle; 'you're too lame.'

'Well, then, next day.'

'Next day is the first of September, and you're pledged to ride out with us, as far as Sir Geoffrey Manning's grounds at all events, and to meet us at lunch, if you don't take the field.'

'Well, then, the day after,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'Thursday.—Sam!'

'Sir,' replied Mr. Weller.

'Take two places outside to London, on Thursday morning, for yourself and me.'

'Wery well, Sir.'

Mr. Weller left the room, and departed slowly on his errand, with his hands in his pocket and his eyes fixed on the ground.

'Rum feller, the hemperor,' said Mr. Weller, as he walked slowly up the street. 'Think o' his makin' up to that 'ere Mrs. Bardell—vith a little boy, too! Always the vay vith these here old 'uns howsoever, as is such steady goers to look at. I didn't think he'd ha' done it, though—I didn't think he'd ha' done it!' Moralising in this strain, Mr. Samuel Weller bent his steps towards the booking-office.

CHAPTER XIX. A PLEASANT DAY WITH AN UNPLEASANT TERMINATION

The birds, who, happily for their own peace of mind and personal comfort, were in blissful ignorance of the preparations which had been making to astonish them, on the first of September, hailed it, no doubt, as one of the pleasantest mornings they had seen that season. Many a young partridge who strutted complacently among the stubble, with all the finicking coxcombry of youth, and many an older one who watched his levity out of his little round eye, with the contemptuous air of a bird of wisdom and experience, alike unconscious of their approaching doom, basked in the fresh morning air with lively and blithesome feelings, and a few hours afterwards were laid low upon the earth. But we grow affecting: let us proceed.

In plain commonplace matter-of-fact, then, it was a fine morning—so fine that you would scarcely have believed that the few months of an English summer had yet flown by. Hedges, fields, and trees, hill and moorland, presented to the eye their ever-varying shades of deep rich green; scarce a leaf had fallen, scarce a sprinkle of yellow mingled with the hues of summer, warned you that autumn had begun. The sky was cloudless; the sun shone out bright and warm; the songs of birds, the hum of myriads of summer insects, filled the air; and the cottage gardens, crowded with flowers of every rich and beautiful tint, sparkled, in the heavy dew, like beds of glittering jewels. Everything bore the stamp of summer, and none of its beautiful colour had yet faded from the die.

Such was the morning, when an open carriage, in which were three Pickwickians (Mr. Snodgrass having preferred to remain at home), Mr. Wardle, and Mr. Trundle, with Sam Weller on the box beside the driver, pulled up by a gate at the roadside, before which stood a tall, raw-boned gamekeeper, and a half-booted, leather-legginged boy, each bearing a bag of capacious dimensions, and accompanied by a brace of pointers.

'I say,' whispered Mr. Winkle to Wardle, as the man let down the steps, 'they don't suppose we're going to kill game enough to fill those bags, do they?'

'Fill them!' exclaimed old Wardle. 'Bless you, yes! You shall fill one, and I the other; and when we've done with them, the pockets of our shooting-jackets will hold as much more.'

Mr. Winkle dismounted without saying anything in reply to this observation; but he thought within himself, that if the party remained in the open air, till he had filled one of the bags, they stood a considerable chance of catching colds in their heads.

'Hi, Juno, lass-hi, old girl; down, Daph, down,' said Wardle, caressing the dogs. 'Sir Geoffrey still in Scotland, of course, Martin?'

The tall gamekeeper replied in the affirmative, and looked with some surprise from Mr. Winkle, who was holding his gun as if he wished his coat pocket to save him the trouble of pulling the trigger, to Mr. Tupman, who was holding his as if he was afraid of it—as there is no earthly reason to doubt he really was.

'My friends are not much in the way of this sort of thing yet, Martin,' said Wardle, noticing the look. 'Live and learn, you know. They'll be good shots one of these days. I beg my friend Winkle's pardon, though; he has had some practice.'

Mr. Winkle smiled feebly over his blue neckerchief in acknowledgment of the compliment, and got himself so mysteriously entangled with his gun, in his modest confusion, that if the piece had been loaded, he must inevitably have shot himself dead upon the spot.

'You mustn't handle your piece in that 'ere way, when you come to have the charge in it, Sir,' said the tall gamekeeper gruffly; 'or I'm damned if you won't make cold meat of some on us.'

Mr. Winkle, thus admonished, abruptly altered his position, and in so doing, contrived to bring the barrel into pretty smart contact with Mr. Weller's head.

'Hollo!' said Sam, picking up his hat, which had been knocked off, and rubbing his temple. 'Hollo, sir! if you comes it this vay, you'll fill one o' them bags, and something to spare, at one fire.'

Here the leather-legginged boy laughed very heartily, and then tried to look as if it was somebody else, whereat Mr. Winkle frowned majestically.

'Where did you tell the boy to meet us with the snack, Martin?' inquired Wardle.

'Side of One-tree Hill, at twelve o'clock, Sir.'

'That's not Sir Geoffrey's land, is it?'

'No, Sir; but it's close by it. It's Captain Boldwig's land; but there'll be nobody to interrupt us, and there's a fine bit of turf there.'

'Very well,' said old Wardle. 'Now the sooner we're off the better. Will you join us at twelve, then, Pickwick?'

Mr. Pickwick was particularly desirous to view the sport, the more especially as he was rather anxious in respect of Mr. Winkle's life and limbs. On so inviting a morning, too, it was very tantalising to turn back, and leave his friends to enjoy themselves. It was, therefore, with a very rueful air that he replied—

'Why, I suppose I must.'

'Ain't the gentleman a shot, Sir?' inquired the long gamekeeper.

'No,' replied Wardle; 'and he's lame besides.'

'I should very much like to go,' said Mr. Pickwick—'very much.'

There was a short pause of commiseration.

'There's a barrow t'other side the hedge,' said the boy. 'If the gentleman's servant would wheel along the paths, he could keep nigh us, and we could lift it over the stiles, and that.'

'The wery thing,' said Mr. Weller, who was a party interested, inasmuch as he ardently longed to see the sport. 'The wery thing. Well said, Smallcheek; I'll have it out in a minute.'

But here a difficulty arose. The long gamekeeper resolutely protested against the introduction into a shooting party, of a gentleman in a barrow, as a gross violation of all established rules and precedents. It was a great objection, but not an insurmountable one. The gamekeeper having been coaxed and feed, and having, moreover, eased his mind by 'punching' the head of the inventive youth who had first suggested the use of the machine, Mr. Pickwick was placed in it, and off the party set; Wardle and the long gamekeeper leading the way, and Mr. Pickwick in the barrow, propelled by Sam, bringing up the rear.

'Stop, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, when they had got half across the first field.

'What's the matter now?' said Wardle.

'I won't suffer this barrow to be moved another step,' said Mr. Pickwick, resolutely, 'unless Winkle carries that gun of his in a different manner.'

'How AM I to carry it?' said the wretched Winkle. 'Carry it with the muzzle to the ground,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'It's so unsportsmanlike,' reasoned Winkle.

'I don't care whether it's unsportsmanlike or not,' replied Mr. Pickwick; 'I am not going to be shot in a wheel-barrow, for the sake of appearances, to please anybody.'

'I know the gentleman'll put that 'ere charge into somebody afore he's done,' growled the long man.

'Well, well—I don't mind,' said poor Winkle, turning his gun-stock uppermost—'there.'

'Anythin' for a quiet life,' said Mr. Weller; and on they went again.

'Stop!' said Mr. Pickwick, after they had gone a few yards farther.

'What now?' said Wardle.

'That gun of Tupman's is not safe: I know it isn't,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Eh? What! not safe?' said Mr. Tupman, in a tone of great alarm.

'Not as you are carrying it,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'I am very sorry to make any further objection, but I cannot consent to go on, unless you carry it as Winkle does his.'

'I think you had better, sir,' said the long gamekeeper, 'or you're quite as likely to lodge the charge in yourself as in anything else.'

Mr. Tupman, with the most obliging haste, placed his piece in the position required, and the party moved on again; the two amateurs marching with reversed arms, like a couple of privates at a royal funeral.

The dogs suddenly came to a dead stop, and the party advancing stealthily a single pace, stopped too.

'What's the matter with the dogs' legs?' whispered Mr. Winkle. 'How queer they're standing.'

'Hush, can't you?' replied Wardle softly. 'Don't you see, they're making a point?'

'Making a point!' said Mr. Winkle, staring about him, as if he expected to discover some particular beauty in the landscape, which the sagacious animals were calling special attention to. 'Making a point! What are they pointing at?'

'Keep your eyes open,' said Wardle, not heeding the question in the excitement of the moment. 'Now then.'

There was a sharp whirring noise, that made Mr. Winkle start back as if he had been shot himself. Bang, bang, went a couple of guns—the smoke swept quickly away over the field, and curled into the air.

'Where are they!' said Mr. Winkle, in a state of the highest excitement, turning round and round in all directions. 'Where are they? Tell me when to fire. Where are they—where are they?'

'Where are they!' said Wardle, taking up a brace of birds which the dogs had deposited at his feet. 'Why, here they are.'

'No, no; I mean the others,' said the bewildered Winkle.

'Far enough off, by this time,' replied Wardle, coolly reloading his gun.

'We shall very likely be up with another covey in five minutes,' said the long gamekeeper. 'If the gentleman begins to fire now, perhaps he'll just get the shot out of the barrel by the time they rise.'

'Ha! ha! ha!' roared Mr. Weller.

'Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, compassionating his follower's confusion and embarrassment.

'Sir.'

'Don't laugh.'

'Certainly not, Sir.' So, by way of indemnification, Mr. Weller contorted his features from behind the wheel-barrow, for the exclusive amusement of the boy with the leggings, who thereupon burst into a boisterous laugh, and was summarily cuffed by the long gamekeeper, who wanted a pretext for turning round, to hide his own merriment.

'Bravo, old fellow!' said Wardle to Mr. Tupman; 'you fired that time, at all events.'

'Oh, yes,' replied Mr. Tupman, with conscious pride. 'I let it off.'

'Well done. You'll hit something next time, if you look sharp. Very easy, ain't it?'

'Yes, it's very easy,' said Mr. Tupman. 'How it hurts one's shoulder, though. It nearly knocked me backwards. I had no idea these small firearms kicked so.'

'Ah,' said the old gentleman, smiling, 'you'll get used to it in time. Now then—all ready—all right with the barrow there?'

'All right, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller.

'Come along, then.'

'Hold hard, Sir,' said Sam, raising the barrow.

'Aye, aye,' replied Mr. Pickwick; and on they went, as briskly as need be.

'Keep that barrow back now,' cried Wardle, when it had been hoisted over a stile into another field, and Mr. Pickwick had been deposited in it once more.

'All right, sir,' replied Mr. Weller, pausing.

'Now, Winkle,' said the old gentleman, 'follow me softly, and don't be too late this time.'

'Never fear,' said Mr. Winkle. 'Are they pointing?'

'No, no; not now. Quietly now, quietly.' On they crept, and very quietly they would have advanced, if Mr. Winkle, in the performance of some very intricate evolutions with his gun, had not accidentally fired, at the most critical moment, over the boy's head, exactly in the very spot where the tall man's brain would have been, had he been there instead.

'Why, what on earth did you do that for?' said old Wardle, as the birds flew unharmed away.

'I never saw such a gun in my life,' replied poor Mr. Winkle, looking at the lock, as if that would do any good. 'It goes off of its own accord. It WILL do it.'

'Will do it!' echoed Wardle, with something of irritation in his manner. 'I wish it would kill something of its own accord.'

'It'll do that afore long, Sir,' observed the tall man, in a low, prophetic voice.

'What do you mean by that observation, Sir?' inquired Mr. Winkle, angrily.

'Never mind, Sir, never mind,' replied the long gamekeeper; 'I've no family myself, sir; and this here boy's mother will get something handsome from Sir Geoffrey, if he's killed on his land. Load again, Sir, load again.'

'Take away his gun,' cried Mr. Pickwick from the barrow, horror-stricken at the long man's dark insinuations. 'Take away his gun, do you hear, somebody?'

Nobody, however, volunteered to obey the command; and Mr. Winkle, after darting a rebellious glance at Mr. Pickwick, reloaded his gun, and proceeded onwards with the rest.

We are bound, on the authority of Mr. Pickwick, to state, that Mr. Tupman's mode of proceeding evinced far more of prudence and deliberation, than that adopted by Mr. Winkle. Still, this by no means detracts from the great authority of the latter gentleman, on all matters connected with the field; because, as Mr. Pickwick beautifully observes, it has somehow or other happened, from time immemorial, that many of the best and ablest philosophers, who have been perfect lights of science in matters of theory, have been wholly unable to reduce them to practice.

Mr. Tupman's process, like many of our most sublime discoveries, was extremely simple. With the quickness and penetration of a man of genius, he had at once observed that the two great points to be attained were—first, to discharge his piece without injury to himself, and, secondly, to do so, without danger to the bystanders—obviously, the best thing to do, after surmounting the difficulty of firing at all, was to shut his eyes firmly, and fire into the air.

On one occasion, after performing this feat, Mr. Tupman, on opening his eyes, beheld a plump partridge in the act of falling, wounded, to the ground. He was on the point of congratulating Mr. Wardle on his invariable success, when that gentleman advanced towards him, and grasped him warmly by the hand.

'Tupman,' said the old gentleman, 'you singled out that particular bird?'

'No,' said Mr. Tupman—'no.'

'You did,' said Wardle. 'I saw you do it—I observed you pick him out—I noticed you, as you raised your piece to take aim; and I will say this, that the best shot in existence could not have done it more beautifully. You are an older hand at this than I thought you, Tupman; you have been out before.' It was in vain for Mr. Tupman to protest, with a smile of self-denial, that he never had. The very smile was taken as evidence to the contrary; and from that time forth his reputation was established. It is not the only reputation that has been acquired as easily, nor are such fortunate circumstances confined to partridge-shooting.

Meanwhile, Mr. Winkle flashed, and blazed, and smoked away, without producing any material results worthy of being noted down; sometimes expending his charge in mid-air, and at others sending it skimming along so near the surface of the ground as to place the lives of the two dogs on a rather uncertain and precarious tenure. As a display of fancy-shooting, it was extremely varied and curious; as an exhibition of firing with any precise object, it was, upon the whole, perhaps a failure. It is an established axiom, that 'every bullet has its billet.' If it apply in an equal degree to shot, those of Mr. Winkle were unfortunate foundlings, deprived of their natural rights, cast loose upon the world, and billeted nowhere. 'Well,' said Wardle, walking up to the side of the barrow, and wiping the streams of perspiration from his jolly red face; 'smoking day, isn't it?'

'It is, indeed,' replied Mr. Pickwick. The sun is tremendously hot, even to me. I don't know how you must feel it.'

'Why,' said the old gentleman, 'pretty hot. It's past twelve, though. You see that green hill there?'

'Certainly.'

'That's the place where we are to lunch; and, by Jove, there's the boy with the basket, punctual as clockwork!'

'So he is,' said Mr. Pickwick, brightening up. 'Good boy, that. I'll give him a shilling, presently. Now, then, Sam, wheel away.'

'Hold on, sir,' said Mr. Weller, invigorated with the prospect of refreshments. 'Out of the vay, young leathers. If you walley my precious life don't upset me, as the gen'l'm'n said to the driver when they was a-carryin' him to Tyburn.' And quickening his pace to a sharp run, Mr. Weller wheeled his master nimbly to the green hill, shot him dexterously out by the very side of the basket, and proceeded to unpack it with the utmost despatch.

'Weal pie,' said Mr. Weller, soliloquising, as he arranged the eatables on the grass. 'Wery good thing is weal pie, when you know the lady as made it, and is quite sure it ain't kittens; and arter all though, where's the odds, when they're so like weal that the wery piemen themselves don't know the difference?'

'Don't they, Sam?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Not they, sir,' replied Mr. Weller, touching his hat. 'I lodged in the same house vith a pieman once, sir, and a wery nice man he was—reg'lar clever chap, too—make pies out o' anything, he could. "What a number o' cats you keep, Mr. Brooks," says I, when I'd got intimate with him. "Ah," says he, "I do—a good many," says he, "You must be wery fond o' cats," says I. "Other people is," says he, a-winkin' at me; "they ain't in season till the winter though," says he. "Not in season!" says I. "No," says he, "fruits is in, cats is out." "Why, what do you mean?" says I. "Mean!" says he. "That I'll never be a party to the combination o' the butchers, to keep up the price o' meat," says he. "Mr. Weller," says he, a-squeezing my hand wery hard, and vispering in my ear—"don't mention this here agin—but it's the seasonin' as does it. They're all made o' them noble animals," says he, a-pointin' to a wery nice little tabby kitten, "and I seasons 'em for beefsteak, weal or kidney, 'cording to the demand. And more than that," says he, "I can make a weal a beef-steak, or a beef-steak a kidney, or any one on 'em a mutton, at a minute's notice, just as the market changes, and appetites wary!"'

'He must have been a very ingenious young man, that, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, with a slight shudder.

'Just was, sir,' replied Mr. Weller, continuing his occupation of emptying the basket, 'and the pies was beautiful. Tongue—, well that's a wery good thing when it ain't a woman's. Bread—knuckle o' ham, reg'lar picter—cold beef in slices, wery good. What's in them stone jars, young touch-and-go?'

'Beer in this one,' replied the boy, taking from his shoulder a couple of large stone bottles, fastened together by a leathern strap—'cold punch in t'other.'

'And a wery good notion of a lunch it is, take it altogether,' said Mr. Weller, surveying his arrangement of the repast with great satisfaction. 'Now, gen'l'm'n, "fall on," as the English said to the French when they fixed bagginets.'

It needed no second invitation to induce the party to yield full justice to the meal; and as little pressing did it require to induce Mr. Weller, the long gamekeeper, and the two boys, to station themselves on the grass, at a little distance, and do good execution upon a decent proportion of the viands. An old oak afforded a pleasant shelter to the group, and a rich prospect of arable and meadow land, intersected with luxuriant hedges, and richly ornamented with wood, lay spread out before them.

'This is delightful—thoroughly delightful!' said Mr. Pickwick; the skin of whose expressive countenance was rapidly peeling off, with exposure to the sun.

'So it is—so it is, old fellow,' replied Wardle. 'Come; a glass of punch!'

'With great pleasure,' said Mr. Pickwick; the satisfaction of whose countenance, after drinking it, bore testimony to the sincerity of the reply.

'Good,' said Mr. Pickwick, smacking his lips. 'Very good. I'll take another. Cool; very cool. Come, gentlemen,' continued Mr. Pickwick, still retaining his hold upon the jar, 'a toast. Our friends at Dingley Dell.'

The toast was drunk with loud acclamations.

'I'll tell you what I shall do, to get up my shooting again,' said Mr. Winkle, who was eating bread and ham with a pocket-knife. 'I'll put a stuffed partridge on the top of a post, and practise at it, beginning at a short distance, and lengthening it by degrees. I understand it's capital practice.'

'I know a gen'l'man, Sir,' said Mr. Weller, 'as did that, and begun at two yards; but he never tried it on agin; for he blowed the bird right clean away at the first fire, and nobody ever seed a feather on him arterwards.'

'Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Sir,' replied Mr. Weller.

'Have the goodness to reserve your anecdotes till they are called for.'

'Cert'nly, sir.'

Here Mr. Weller winked the eye which was not concealed by the beer-can he was raising to his lips, with such exquisite facetiousness, that the two boys went into spontaneous convulsions, and even the long man condescended to smile.

'Well, that certainly is most capital cold punch,' said Mr. Pickwick, looking earnestly at the stone bottle; 'and the day is extremely warm, and—Tupman, my dear friend, a glass of punch?'

'With the greatest delight,' replied Mr. Tupman; and having drank that glass, Mr. Pickwick took another, just to see whether there was any orange peel in the punch, because orange peel always disagreed with him; and finding that there was not, Mr. Pickwick took another glass to the health of their absent friend, and then felt himself imperatively called upon to propose another in honour of the punch-compounder, unknown.

This constant succession of glasses produced considerable effect upon Mr. Pickwick; his countenance beamed with the most sunny smiles, laughter played around his lips, and good-humoured merriment twinkled in his eye. Yielding by degrees to the influence of the exciting liquid, rendered more so by the heat, Mr. Pickwick expressed a strong desire to recollect a song which he had heard in his infancy, and the attempt proving abortive, sought to stimulate his memory with more glasses of punch, which appeared to have quite a contrary effect; for, from forgetting the words of the song, he began to forget how to articulate any words at all; and finally, after rising to his legs to address the company in an eloquent speech, he fell into the barrow, and fast asleep, simultaneously.

The basket having been repacked, and it being found perfectly impossible to awaken Mr. Pickwick from his torpor, some discussion took place whether it would be better for Mr. Weller to wheel his master back again, or to leave him where he was, until they should all be ready to return. The latter course was at length decided on; and as the further expedition was not to exceed an hour's duration, and as Mr. Weller begged very hard to be one of the party, it was determined to leave Mr. Pickwick asleep in the barrow, and to call for him on their return. So away they went, leaving Mr. Pickwick snoring most comfortably in the shade.

That Mr. Pickwick would have continued to snore in the shade until his friends came back, or, in default thereof, until the shades of evening had fallen on the landscape, there appears no reasonable cause to doubt; always supposing that he had been suffered to remain there in peace. But he was NOT suffered to remain there in peace. And this was what prevented him.

Captain Boldwig was a little fierce man in a stiff black neckerchief and blue surtout, who, when he did condescend to walk about his property, did it in company with a thick rattan stick with a brass ferrule, and a gardener and sub-gardener with meek faces, to whom (the gardeners, not the stick) Captain Boldwig gave his orders with all due grandeur and ferocity; for Captain Boldwig's wife's sister had married a marquis, and the captain's house was a villa, and his land 'grounds,' and it was all very high, and mighty, and great.

Mr. Pickwick had not been asleep half an hour when little Captain Boldwig, followed by the two gardeners, came striding along as fast as his size and importance would let him; and when he came near the oak tree, Captain Boldwig paused and drew a long breath, and looked at the prospect as if he thought the prospect ought to be highly gratified at having him to take notice of it; and then he struck the ground emphatically with his stick, and summoned the head-gardener.

'Hunt,' said Captain Boldwig.

'Yes, Sir,' said the gardener.

'Roll this place to-morrow morning—do you hear, Hunt?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'And take care that you keep this place in good order—do you hear, Hunt?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'And remind me to have a board done about trespassers, and spring guns, and all that sort of thing, to keep the common people out. Do you hear, Hunt; do you hear?'

'I'll not forget it, Sir.'

'I beg your pardon, Sir,' said the other man, advancing, with his hand to his hat.

'Well, Wilkins, what's the matter with you?' said Captain Boldwig.

'I beg your pardon, sir—but I think there have been trespassers here to-day.'

'Ha!' said the captain, scowling around him.

'Yes, sir—they have been dining here, I think, sir.'

'Why, damn their audacity, so they have,' said Captain Boldwig, as the crumbs and fragments that were strewn upon the grass met his eye. 'They have actually been devouring their food here. I wish I had the vagabonds here!' said the captain, clenching the thick stick.

'I wish I had the vagabonds here,' said the captain wrathfully.

'Beg your pardon, sir,' said Wilkins, 'but—'

'But what? Eh?' roared the captain; and following the timid glance of Wilkins, his eyes encountered the wheel-barrow and Mr. Pickwick.

'Who are you, you rascal?' said the captain, administering several pokes to Mr. Pickwick's body with the thick stick. 'What's your name?'

'Cold punch,' murmured Mr. Pickwick, as he sank to sleep again.

'What?' demanded Captain Boldwig.

No reply.

'What did he say his name was?' asked the captain.

'Punch, I think, sir,' replied Wilkins.

'That's his impudence—that's his confounded impudence,' said Captain Boldwig. 'He's only feigning to be asleep now,' said the captain, in a high passion. 'He's drunk; he's a drunken plebeian. Wheel him away, Wilkins, wheel him away directly.' 'Where shall I wheel him to, sir?' inquired Wilkins, with great timidity.

'Wheel him to the devil,' replied Captain Boldwig.

'Very well, sir,' said Wilkins.

'Stay,' said the captain.

Wilkins stopped accordingly.

'Wheel him,' said the captain—'wheel him to the pound; and let us see whether he calls himself Punch when he comes to himself. He shall not bully me—he shall not bully me. Wheel him away.'

Away Mr. Pickwick was wheeled in compliance with this imperious mandate; and the great Captain Boldwig, swelling with indignation, proceeded on his walk.

Inexpressible was the astonishment of the little party when they returned, to find that Mr. Pickwick had disappeared, and taken the wheel-barrow with him. It was the most mysterious and unaccountable thing that was ever heard of For a lame man to have got upon his legs without any previous notice, and walked off, would have been most extraordinary; but when it came to his wheeling a heavy barrow before him, by way of amusement, it grew positively miraculous. They searched every nook and corner round, together and separately; they shouted, whistled, laughed, called—and all with the same result. Mr. Pickwick was not to be found. After some hours of fruitless search, they arrived at the unwelcome conclusion that they must go home without him.

Meanwhile Mr. Pickwick had been wheeled to the pound, and safely deposited therein, fast asleep in the wheel-barrow, to the immeasurable delight and satisfaction not only of all the boys in the village, but three-fourths of the whole population, who had gathered round, in expectation of his waking. If their most intense gratification had been awakened by seeing him wheeled in, how many hundredfold was their joy increased when, after a few indistinct cries of 'Sam!' he sat up in the barrow, and gazed with indescribable astonishment on the faces before him.

A general shout was of course the signal of his having woke up; and his involuntary inquiry of 'What's the matter?' occasioned another, louder than the first, if possible.

'Here's a game!' roared the populace.

'Where am I?' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

'In the pound,' replied the mob.

'How came I here? What was I doing? Where was I brought from?' 'Boldwig! Captain Boldwig!' was the only reply.

'Let me out,' cried Mr. Pickwick. 'Where's my servant? Where are my friends?'

'You ain't got no friends. Hurrah!' Then there came a turnip, then a potato, and then an egg; with a few other little tokens of the playful disposition of the many-headed.

How long this scene might have lasted, or how much Mr. Pickwick might have suffered, no one can tell, had not a carriage, which was driving swiftly by, suddenly pulled up, from whence there descended old Wardle and Sam Weller, the former of whom, in far less time than it takes to write it, if not to read it, had made his way to Mr. Pickwick's side, and placed him in the vehicle, just as the latter had concluded the third and last round of a single combat with the town-beadle.

'Run to the justice's!' cried a dozen voices.

'Ah, run avay,' said Mr. Weller, jumping up on the box. 'Give my compliments—Mr. Veller's compliments—to the justice, and tell him I've spiled his beadle, and that, if he'll swear in a new 'un, I'll come back again to-morrow and spile him. Drive on, old feller.'

'I'll give directions for the commencement of an action for false imprisonment against this Captain Boldwig, directly I get to London,' said Mr. Pickwick, as soon as the carriage turned out of the town.

'We were trespassing, it seems,' said Wardle.

'I don't care,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'I'll bring the action.'

'No, you won't,' said Wardle.

'I will, by—' But as there was a humorous expression in Wardle's face, Mr. Pickwick checked himself, and said, 'Why not?'

'Because,' said old Wardle, half-bursting with laughter, 'because they might turn on some of us, and say we had taken too much cold punch.'

Do what he would, a smile would come into Mr. Pickwick's face; the smile extended into a laugh; the laugh into a roar; the roar became general. So, to keep up their good-humour, they stopped at the first roadside tavern they came to, and ordered a glass of brandy-and-water all round, with a magnum of extra strength for Mr. Samuel Weller.

CHAPTER XX. SHOWING HOW DODSON AND FOGG WERE MEN OF BUSINESS, AND

THEIR CLERKS MEN OF PLEASURE; AND HOW AN AFFECTING INTERVIEW TOOK PLACE BETWEEN Mr. WELLER AND HIS LONG-LOST PARENT; SHOWING ALSO WHAT CHOICE SPIRITS ASSEMBLED AT THE MAGPIE AND STUMP, AND WHAT A CAPITAL CHAPTER THE NEXT ONE WILL BE

In the ground-floor front of a dingy house, at the very farthest end of Freeman's Court, Cornhill, sat the four clerks of Messrs. Dodson & Fogg, two of his Majesty's attorneys of the courts of King's Bench and Common Pleas at Westminster, and solicitors of the High Court of Chancery—the aforesaid clerks catching as favourable glimpses of heaven's light and heaven's sun, in the course of their daily labours, as a man might hope to do, were he placed at the bottom of a reasonably deep well; and without the opportunity of perceiving the stars in the day-time, which the latter secluded situation affords.

The clerks' office of Messrs. Dodson & Fogg was a dark, mouldy, earthy-smelling room, with a high wainscotted partition to screen the clerks from the vulgar gaze, a couple of old wooden chairs, a very loud-ticking clock, an almanac, an umbrella-stand, a row of hat-pegs, and a few shelves, on which were deposited several ticketed bundles of dirty papers, some old deal boxes with paper labels, and sundry decayed stone ink bottles of various shapes and sizes. There was a glass door leading into the passage which formed the entrance to the court, and on the outer side of this glass door, Mr. Pickwick, closely followed by Sam Weller, presented himself on the Friday morning succeeding the occurrence of which a faithful narration is given in the last chapter.

'Come in, can't you!' cried a voice from behind the partition, in reply to Mr. Pickwick's gentle tap at the door. And Mr. Pickwick and Sam entered accordingly.

'Mr. Dodson or Mr. Fogg at home, sir?' inquired Mr. Pickwick, gently, advancing, hat in hand, towards the partition.

'Mr. Dodson ain't at home, and Mr. Fogg's particularly engaged,' replied the voice; and at the same time the head to which the voice belonged, with a pen behind its ear, looked over the partition, and at Mr. Pickwick.

It was a ragged head, the sandy hair of which, scrupulously parted on one side, and flattened down with pomatum, was twisted into little semi-circular tails round a flat face ornamented with a pair of small eyes, and garnished with a very dirty shirt collar, and a rusty black stock.

'Mr. Dodson ain't at home, and Mr. Fogg's particularly engaged,' said the man to whom the head belonged.

'When will Mr. Dodson be back, sir?' inquired Mr. Pickwick. 'Can't say.'

'Will it be long before Mr. Fogg is disengaged, Sir?'

'Don't know.'

Here the man proceeded to mend his pen with great deliberation, while another clerk, who was mixing a Seidlitz powder, under cover of the lid of his desk, laughed approvingly.

'I think I'll wait,' said Mr. Pickwick. There was no reply; so Mr. Pickwick sat down unbidden, and listened to the loud ticking of the clock and the murmured conversation of the clerks.

'That was a game, wasn't it?' said one of the gentlemen, in a brown coat and brass buttons, inky drabs, and bluchers, at the conclusion of some inaudible relation of his previous evening's adventures.

'Devilish good—devilish good,' said the Seidlitz-powder man. 'Tom Cummins was in the chair,' said the man with the brown coat. 'It was half-past four when I got to Somers Town, and then I was so uncommon lushy, that I couldn't find the place where the latch-key went in, and was obliged to knock up the old 'ooman. I say, I wonder what old Fogg 'ud say, if he knew it. I should get the sack, I s'pose—eh?'

At this humorous notion, all the clerks laughed in concert.

'There was such a game with Fogg here, this mornin',' said the man in the brown coat, 'while Jack was upstairs sorting the papers, and you two were gone to the stamp-office. Fogg was down here, opening the letters when that chap as we issued the writ against at Camberwell, you know, came in—what's his name again?'

'Ramsey,' said the clerk who had spoken to Mr. Pickwick.

'Ah, Ramsey—a precious seedy-looking customer. "Well, sir," says old Fogg, looking at him very fierce—you know his way—"well, Sir, have you come to settle?" "Yes, I have, sir," said Ramsey, putting his hand in his pocket, and bringing out the money, "the debt's two pound ten, and the costs three pound five, and here it is, Sir;" and he sighed like bricks, as he lugged out the money, done up in a bit of blotting-paper. Old Fogg looked first at the money, and then at him, and then he coughed in his rum way, so that I knew something was coming. "You don't know there's a declaration filed, which increases the costs materially, I suppose," said Fogg. "You don't say that, sir," said Ramsey, starting back; "the time was only out last night, Sir." "I do say it, though," said Fogg, "my clerk's just gone to file it. Hasn't Mr. Jackson gone to file that declaration in Bullman and Ramsey, Mr. Wicks?" Of course I said yes, and then Fogg coughed again, and looked at Ramsey. "My God!" said Ramsey; "and here have I nearly driven myself mad, scraping this money together, and all to no purpose." "None at all," said Fogg coolly; "so you had better go back and scrape some more together, and bring it here in time." "I can't get it, by God!" said Ramsey, striking the desk with his fist. "Don't bully me, sir," said Fogg, getting into a passion on purpose. "I am not bullying you, sir," said Ramsey. "You are," said Fogg; "get out, sir; get out of this office, Sir, and come back, Sir, when you know how to behave yourself." Well, Ramsey tried to speak, but Fogg wouldn't let him, so he put the money in his pocket, and sneaked out. The door was scarcely shut, when old Fogg turned round to me, with a sweet smile on his face, and drew the declaration out of his coat pocket. "Here, Wicks," says Fogg, "take a cab, and go down to the Temple as quick as you can, and file that. The costs are quite safe, for he's a steady man with a large family, at a salary of five-and-twenty shillings a week, and if he gives us a warrant of attorney, as he must in the end, I know his employers will see it paid; so we may as well get all we can get out of him, Mr. Wicks; it's a Christian act to do it, Mr. Wicks, for with his large family and small income, he'll be all the better for a good lesson against getting into debt—won't he, Mr. Wicks, won't he?"—and he smiled so good-naturedly as he went away, that it was delightful to see him. He is a capital man of business,' said Wicks, in a tone of the deepest admiration, 'capital, isn't he?'

The other three cordially subscribed to this opinion, and the anecdote afforded the most unlimited satisfaction.

'Nice men these here, Sir,' whispered Mr. Weller to his master; 'wery nice notion of fun they has, Sir.'

Mr. Pickwick nodded assent, and coughed to attract the attention of the young gentlemen behind the partition, who, having now relaxed their minds by a little conversation among themselves, condescended to take some notice of the stranger.

'I wonder whether Fogg's disengaged now?' said Jackson.

'I'll see,' said Wicks, dismounting leisurely from his stool. 'What name shall I tell Mr. Fogg?'

'Pickwick,' replied the illustrious subject of these memoirs.

Mr. Jackson departed upstairs on his errand, and immediately returned with a message that Mr. Fogg would see Mr. Pickwick in five minutes; and having delivered it, returned again to his desk.

'What did he say his name was?' whispered Wicks.

'Pickwick,' replied Jackson; 'it's the defendant in Bardell and Pickwick.'

A sudden scraping of feet, mingled with the sound of suppressed laughter, was heard from behind the partition.

'They're a-twiggin' of you, Sir,' whispered Mr. Weller.

'Twigging of me, Sam!' replied Mr. Pickwick; 'what do you mean by twigging me?'

Mr. Weller replied by pointing with his thumb over his shoulder, and Mr. Pickwick, on looking up, became sensible of the pleasing fact, that all the four clerks, with countenances expressive of the utmost amusement, and with their heads thrust over the wooden screen, were minutely inspecting the figure and general appearance of the supposed trifler with female hearts, and disturber of female happiness. On his looking up, the row of heads suddenly disappeared, and the sound of pens travelling at a furious rate over paper, immediately succeeded.

A sudden ring at the bell which hung in the office, summoned Mr. Jackson to the apartment of Fogg, from whence he came back to say that he (Fogg) was ready to see Mr. Pickwick if he would step upstairs. Upstairs Mr. Pickwick did step accordingly, leaving Sam Weller below. The room door of the one-pair back, bore inscribed in legible characters the imposing words, 'Mr. Fogg'; and, having tapped thereat, and been desired to come in, Jackson ushered Mr. Pickwick into the presence.

'Is Mr. Dodson in?' inquired Mr. Fogg.

'Just come in, Sir,' replied Jackson.

'Ask him to step here.'

'Yes, sir.' Exit Jackson.

'Take a seat, sir,' said Fogg; 'there is the paper, sir; my partner will be here directly, and we can converse about this matter, sir.'

Mr. Pickwick took a seat and the paper, but, instead of reading the latter, peeped over the top of it, and took a survey of the man of business, who was an elderly, pimply-faced, vegetable-diet sort of man, in a black coat, dark mixture trousers, and small black gaiters; a kind of being who seemed to be an essential part of the desk at which he was writing, and to have as much thought or feeling.

After a few minutes' silence, Mr. Dodson, a plump, portly, stern-looking man, with a loud voice, appeared; and the conversation commenced.

'This is Mr. Pickwick,' said Fogg.

'Ah! You are the defendant, Sir, in Bardell and Pickwick?' said Dodson.

'I am, sir,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'Well, sir,' said Dodson, 'and what do you propose?'

'Ah!' said Fogg, thrusting his hands into his trousers' pockets, and throwing himself back in his chair, 'what do you propose, Mr Pickwick?'

'Hush, Fogg,' said Dodson, 'let me hear what Mr. Pickwick has to say.'

'I came, gentlemen,' said Mr. Pickwick, gazing placidly on the two partners, 'I came here, gentlemen, to express the surprise with which I received your letter of the other day, and to inquire what grounds of action you can have against me.'

'Grounds of—' Fogg had ejaculated this much, when he was stopped by Dodson.

'Mr. Fogg,' said Dodson, 'I am going to speak.' 'I beg your pardon, Mr. Dodson,' said Fogg.

'For the grounds of action, sir,' continued Dodson, with moral elevation in his air, 'you will consult your own conscience and your own feelings. We, Sir, we, are guided entirely by the statement of our client. That statement, Sir, may be true, or it may be false; it may be credible, or it may be incredible; but, if it be true, and if it be credible, I do not hesitate to say, Sir, that our grounds of action, Sir, are strong, and not to be shaken. You may be an unfortunate man, Sir, or you may be a designing one; but if I were called upon, as a juryman upon my oath, Sir, to express an opinion of your conduct, Sir, I do not hesitate to assert that I should have but one opinion about it.' Here Dodson drew himself up, with an air of offended virtue, and looked at Fogg, who thrust his hands farther in his pockets, and nodding his head sagely, said, in a tone of the fullest concurrence, 'Most certainly.'

'Well, Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, with considerable pain depicted in his countenance, 'you will permit me to assure you that I am a most unfortunate man, so far as this case is concerned.'

'I hope you are, Sir,' replied Dodson; 'I trust you may be, Sir. If you are really innocent of what is laid to your charge, you are more unfortunate than I had believed any man could possibly be. What do you say, Mr. Fogg?'

'I say precisely what you say,' replied Fogg, with a smile of incredulity.

'The writ, Sir, which commences the action,' continued Dodson, 'was issued regularly. Mr. Fogg, where is the PRAECIPE book?'

'Here it is,' said Fogg, handing over a square book, with a parchment cover.

'Here is the entry,' resumed Dodson. '"Middlesex, Capias MARTHA BARDELL, WIDOW, v. SAMUEL PICKWICK. Damages #1500. Dodson & Fogg for the plaintiff, Aug. 28, 1827." All regular, Sir; perfectly.' Dodson coughed and looked at Fogg, who said 'Perfectly,' also. And then they both looked at Mr. Pickwick.

'I am to understand, then,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'that it really is your intention to proceed with this action?'

'Understand, sir!—that you certainly may,' replied Dodson, with something as near a smile as his importance would allow.

'And that the damages are actually laid at fifteen hundred pounds?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'To which understanding you may add my assurance, that if we could have prevailed upon our client, they would have been laid at treble the amount, sir,' replied Dodson. 'I believe Mrs. Bardell specially said, however,' observed Fogg, glancing at Dodson, 'that she would not compromise for a farthing less.'

'Unquestionably,' replied Dodson sternly. For the action was only just begun; and it wouldn't have done to let Mr. Pickwick compromise it then, even if he had been so disposed.

'As you offer no terms, sir,' said Dodson, displaying a slip of parchment in his right hand, and affectionately pressing a paper copy of it, on Mr. Pickwick with his left, 'I had better serve you with a copy of this writ, sir. Here is the original, sir.'

'Very well, gentlemen, very well,' said Mr. Pickwick, rising in person and wrath at the same time; 'you shall hear from my solicitor, gentlemen.'

'We shall be very happy to do so,' said Fogg, rubbing his hands.

'Very,' said Dodson, opening the door.

'And before I go, gentlemen,' said the excited Mr. Pickwick, turning round on the landing, 'permit me to say, that of all the disgraceful and rascally proceedings—'

'Stay, sir, stay,' interposed Dodson, with great politeness. 'Mr. Jackson! Mr. Wicks!'

'Sir,' said the two clerks, appearing at the bottom of the stairs.

'I merely want you to hear what this gentleman says,' replied Dodson. 'Pray, go on, sir—disgraceful and rascally proceedings, I think you said?'

'I did,' said Mr. Pickwick, thoroughly roused. 'I said, Sir, that of all the disgraceful and rascally proceedings that ever were attempted, this is the most so. I repeat it, sir.'

'You hear that, Mr. Wicks,' said Dodson.

'You won't forget these expressions, Mr. Jackson?' said Fogg.

'Perhaps you would like to call us swindlers, sir,' said Dodson. 'Pray do, Sir, if you feel disposed; now pray do, Sir.'

'I do,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'You ARE swindlers.'

'Very good,' said Dodson. 'You can hear down there, I hope, Mr. Wicks?'

'Oh, yes, Sir,' said Wicks.

'You had better come up a step or two higher, if you can't,' added Mr. Fogg. 'Go on, Sir; do go on. You had better call us thieves, Sir; or perhaps You would like to assault one Of US. Pray do it, Sir, if you would; we will not make the smallest resistance. Pray do it, Sir.'

As Fogg put himself very temptingly within the reach of Mr. Pickwick's clenched fist, there is little doubt that that gentleman would have complied with his earnest entreaty, but for the interposition of Sam, who, hearing the dispute, emerged from the office, mounted the stairs, and seized his master by the arm.

'You just come away,' said Mr. Weller. 'Battledore and shuttlecock's a wery good game, vhen you ain't the shuttlecock and two lawyers the battledores, in which case it gets too excitin' to be pleasant. Come avay, Sir. If you want to ease your mind by blowing up somebody, come out into the court and blow up me; but it's rayther too expensive work to be carried on here.'

And without the slightest ceremony, Mr. Weller hauled his master down the stairs, and down the court, and having safely deposited him in Cornhill, fell behind, prepared to follow whithersoever he should lead.

Mr. Pickwick walked on abstractedly, crossed opposite the Mansion House, and bent his steps up Cheapside. Sam began to wonder where they were going, when his master turned round, and said—

'Sam, I will go immediately to Mr. Perker's.'

'That's just exactly the wery place vere you ought to have gone last night, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller.

'I think it is, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'I KNOW it is,' said Mr. Weller.

'Well, well, Sam,' replied Mr. Pickwick, 'we will go there at once; but first, as I have been rather ruffled, I should like a glass of brandy-and-water warm, Sam. Where can I have it, Sam?'

Mr. Weller's knowledge of London was extensive and peculiar. He replied, without the slightest consideration—

'Second court on the right hand side—last house but vun on the same side the vay—take the box as stands in the first fireplace, 'cos there ain't no leg in the middle o' the table, which all the others has, and it's wery inconvenient.'

Mr. Pickwick observed his valet's directions implicitly, and bidding Sam follow him, entered the tavern he had pointed out, where the hot brandy-and-water was speedily placed before him; while Mr. Weller, seated at a respectful distance, though at the same table with his master, was accommodated with a pint of porter.

The room was one of a very homely description, and was apparently under the especial patronage of stage-coachmen; for several gentleman, who had all the appearance of belonging to that learned profession, were drinking and smoking in the different boxes. Among the number was one stout, red-faced, elderly man, in particular, seated in an opposite box, who attracted Mr. Pickwick's attention. The stout man was smoking with great vehemence, but between every half-dozen puffs, he took his pipe from his mouth, and looked first at Mr. Weller and then at Mr. Pickwick. Then, he would bury in a quart pot, as much of his countenance as the dimensions of the quart pot admitted of its receiving, and take another look at Sam and Mr. Pickwick. Then he would take another half-dozen puffs with an air of profound meditation and look at them again. At last the stout man, putting up his legs on the seat, and leaning his back against the wall, began to puff at his pipe without leaving off at all, and to stare through the smoke at the new-comers, as if he had made up his mind to see the most he could of them.

At first the evolutions of the stout man had escaped Mr. Weller's observation, but by degrees, as he saw Mr. Pickwick's eyes every now and then turning towards him, he began to gaze in the same direction, at the same time shading his eyes with his hand, as if he partially recognised the object before him, and wished to make quite sure of its identity. His doubts were speedily dispelled, however; for the stout man having blown a thick cloud from his pipe, a hoarse voice, like some strange effort of ventriloquism, emerged from beneath the capacious shawls which muffled his throat and chest, and slowly uttered these sounds—'Wy, Sammy!'

'Who's that, Sam?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Why, I wouldn't ha' believed it, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller, with astonished eyes. 'It's the old 'un.'

'Old one,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'What old one?'

'My father, sir,' replied Mr. Weller. 'How are you, my ancient?' And with this beautiful ebullition of filial affection, Mr. Weller made room on the seat beside him, for the stout man, who advanced pipe in mouth and pot in hand, to greet him.

'Wy, Sammy,' said the father, 'I ha'n't seen you, for two year and better.'

'Nor more you have, old codger,' replied the son. 'How's mother-in-law?'

'Wy, I'll tell you what, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, senior, with much solemnity in his manner; 'there never was a nicer woman as a widder, than that 'ere second wentur o' mine—a sweet creetur she was, Sammy; all I can say on her now, is, that as she was such an uncommon pleasant widder, it's a great pity she ever changed her condition. She don't act as a vife, Sammy.' 'Don't she, though?' inquired Mr. Weller, junior.

The elder Mr. Weller shook his head, as he replied with a sigh, 'I've done it once too often, Sammy; I've done it once too often. Take example by your father, my boy, and be wery careful o' widders all your life, 'specially if they've kept a public-house, Sammy.' Having delivered this parental advice with great pathos, Mr. Weller, senior, refilled his pipe from a tin box he carried in his pocket; and, lighting his fresh pipe from the ashes of the old One, commenced smoking at a great rate.

'Beg your pardon, sir,' he said, renewing the subject, and addressing Mr. Pickwick, after a considerable pause, 'nothin' personal, I hope, sir; I hope you ha'n't got a widder, sir.'

'Not I,' replied Mr. Pickwick, laughing; and while Mr. Pickwick laughed, Sam Weller informed his parent in a whisper, of the relation in which he stood towards that gentleman.

'Beg your pardon, sir,' said Mr. Weller, senior, taking off his hat, 'I hope you've no fault to find with Sammy, Sir?'

'None whatever,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Wery glad to hear it, sir,' replied the old man; 'I took a good deal o' pains with his eddication, sir; let him run in the streets when he was wery young, and shift for hisself. It's the only way to make a boy sharp, sir.'

'Rather a dangerous process, I should imagine,' said Mr. Pickwick, with a smile.

'And not a wery sure one, neither,' added Mr. Weller; 'I got reg'larly done the other day.'

'No!' said his father.

'I did,' said the son; and he proceeded to relate, in as few words as possible, how he had fallen a ready dupe to the stratagems of Job Trotter.

Mr. Weller, senior, listened to the tale with the most profound attention, and, at its termination, said—

'Worn't one o' these chaps slim and tall, with long hair, and the gift o' the gab wery gallopin'?'

Mr. Pickwick did not quite understand the last item of description, but, comprehending the first, said 'Yes,' at a venture.

'T' other's a black-haired chap in mulberry livery, with a wery large head?'

'Yes, yes, he is,' said Mr. Pickwick and Sam, with great earnestness. 'Then I know where they are, and that's all about it,' said Mr. Weller; 'they're at Ipswich, safe enough, them two.'

'No!' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Fact,' said Mr. Weller, 'and I'll tell you how I know it. I work an Ipswich coach now and then for a friend o' mine. I worked down the wery day arter the night as you caught the rheumatic, and at the Black Boy at Chelmsford—the wery place they'd come to—I took 'em up, right through to Ipswich, where the man-servant—him in the mulberries—told me they was a-goin' to put up for a long time.'

'I'll follow him,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'we may as well see Ipswich as any other place. I'll follow him.'

'You're quite certain it was them, governor?' inquired Mr. Weller, junior.

'Quite, Sammy, quite,' replied his father, 'for their appearance is wery sing'ler; besides that 'ere, I wondered to see the gen'l'm'n so formiliar with his servant; and, more than that, as they sat in the front, right behind the box, I heerd 'em laughing and saying how they'd done old Fireworks.'

'Old who?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Old Fireworks, Sir; by which, I've no doubt, they meant you, Sir.' There is nothing positively vile or atrocious in the appellation of 'old Fireworks,' but still it is by no means a respectful or flattering designation. The recollection of all the wrongs he had sustained at Jingle's hands, had crowded on Mr. Pickwick's mind, the moment Mr. Weller began to speak; it wanted but a feather to turn the scale, and 'old Fireworks' did it.

'I'll follow him,' said Mr. Pickwick, with an emphatic blow on the table.

'I shall work down to Ipswich the day arter to-morrow, Sir,' said Mr. Weller the elder, 'from the Bull in Whitechapel; and if you really mean to go, you'd better go with me.'

'So we had,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'very true; I can write to Bury, and tell them to meet me at Ipswich. We will go with you. But don't hurry away, Mr. Weller; won't you take anything?'

'You're wery good, Sir,' replied Mr. W., stopping short;—'perhaps a small glass of brandy to drink your health, and success to Sammy, Sir, wouldn't be amiss.'

'Certainly not,' replied Mr. Pickwick. 'A glass of brandy here!' The brandy was brought; and Mr. Weller, after pulling his hair to Mr. Pickwick, and nodding to Sam, jerked it down his capacious throat as if it had been a small thimbleful. 'Well done, father,' said Sam, 'take care, old fellow, or you'll have a touch of your old complaint, the gout.'

'I've found a sov'rin' cure for that, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, setting down the glass.

'A sovereign cure for the gout,' said Mr. Pickwick, hastily producing his note-book—'what is it?'

'The gout, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller, 'the gout is a complaint as arises from too much ease and comfort. If ever you're attacked with the gout, sir, jist you marry a widder as has got a good loud woice, with a decent notion of usin' it, and you'll never have the gout agin. It's a capital prescription, sir. I takes it reg'lar, and I can warrant it to drive away any illness as is caused by too much jollity.' Having imparted this valuable secret, Mr. Weller drained his glass once more, produced a laboured wink, sighed deeply, and slowly retired.

'Well, what do you think of what your father says, Sam?' inquired Mr. Pickwick, with a smile.

'Think, Sir!' replied Mr. Weller; 'why, I think he's the wictim o' connubiality, as Blue Beard's domestic chaplain said, vith a tear of pity, ven he buried him.'

There was no replying to this very apposite conclusion, and, therefore, Mr. Pickwick, after settling the reckoning, resumed his walk to Gray's Inn. By the time he reached its secluded groves, however, eight o'clock had struck, and the unbroken stream of gentlemen in muddy high-lows, soiled white hats, and rusty apparel, who were pouring towards the different avenues of egress, warned him that the majority of the offices had closed for that day.

After climbing two pairs of steep and dirty stairs, he found his anticipations were realised. Mr. Perker's 'outer door' was closed; and the dead silence which followed Mr. Weller's repeated kicks thereat, announced that the officials had retired from business for the night.

'This is pleasant, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'I shouldn't lose an hour in seeing him; I shall not be able to get one wink of sleep to-night, I know, unless I have the satisfaction of reflecting that I have confided this matter to a professional man.'

'Here's an old 'ooman comin' upstairs, sir,' replied Mr. Weller; 'p'raps she knows where we can find somebody. Hollo, old lady, vere's Mr. Perker's people?'

'Mr. Perker's people,' said a thin, miserable-looking old woman, stopping to recover breath after the ascent of the staircase—'Mr. Perker's people's gone, and I'm a-goin' to do the office out.' 'Are you Mr. Perker's servant?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'I am Mr. Perker's laundress,' replied the woman.

'Ah,' said Mr. Pickwick, half aside to Sam, 'it's a curious circumstance, Sam, that they call the old women in these inns, laundresses. I wonder what's that for?'

''Cos they has a mortal awersion to washing anythin', I suppose, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller.

'I shouldn't wonder,' said Mr. Pickwick, looking at the old woman, whose appearance, as well as the condition of the office, which she had by this time opened, indicated a rooted antipathy to the application of soap and water; 'do you know where I can find Mr. Perker, my good woman?'

'No, I don't,' replied the old woman gruffly; 'he's out o' town now.'

'That's unfortunate,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'where's his clerk? Do you know?'

'Yes, I know where he is, but he won't thank me for telling you,' replied the laundress.

'I have very particular business with him,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Won't it do in the morning?' said the woman.

'Not so well,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'Well,' said the old woman, 'if it was anything very particular, I was to say where he was, so I suppose there's no harm in telling. If you just go to the Magpie and Stump, and ask at the bar for Mr. Lowten, they'll show you in to him, and he's Mr. Perker's clerk.'

With this direction, and having been furthermore informed that the hostelry in question was situated in a court, happy in the double advantage of being in the vicinity of Clare Market, and closely approximating to the back of New Inn, Mr. Pickwick and Sam descended the rickety staircase in safety, and issued forth in quest of the Magpie and Stump.

This favoured tavern, sacred to the evening orgies of Mr. Lowten and his companions, was what ordinary people would designate a public-house. That the landlord was a man of money-making turn was sufficiently testified by the fact of a small bulkhead beneath the tap-room window, in size and shape not unlike a sedan-chair, being underlet to a mender of shoes: and that he was a being of a philanthropic mind was evident from the protection he afforded to a pieman, who vended his delicacies without fear of interruption, on the very door-step. In the lower windows, which were decorated with curtains of a saffron hue, dangled two or three printed cards, bearing reference to Devonshire cider and Dantzic spruce, while a large blackboard, announcing in white letters to an enlightened public, that there were 500,000 barrels of double stout in the cellars of the establishment, left the mind in a state of not unpleasing doubt and uncertainty as to the precise direction in the bowels of the earth, in which this mighty cavern might be supposed to extend. When we add that the weather-beaten signboard bore the half-obliterated semblance of a magpie intently eyeing a crooked streak of brown paint, which the neighbours had been taught from infancy to consider as the 'stump,' we have said all that need be said of the exterior of the edifice.

On Mr. Pickwick's presenting himself at the bar, an elderly female emerged from behind the screen therein, and presented herself before him.

'Is Mr. Lowten here, ma'am?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Yes, he is, Sir,' replied the landlady. 'Here, Charley, show the gentleman in to Mr. Lowten.'

'The gen'l'm'n can't go in just now,' said a shambling pot-boy, with a red head, 'cos' Mr. Lowten's a-singin' a comic song, and he'll put him out. He'll be done directly, Sir.'

The red-headed pot-boy had scarcely finished speaking, when a most unanimous hammering of tables, and jingling of glasses, announced that the song had that instant terminated; and Mr. Pickwick, after desiring Sam to solace himself in the tap, suffered himself to be conducted into the presence of Mr. Lowten.

At the announcement of 'A gentleman to speak to you, Sir,' a puffy-faced young man, who filled the chair at the head of the table, looked with some surprise in the direction from whence the voice proceeded; and the surprise seemed to be by no means diminished, when his eyes rested on an individual whom he had never seen before.

'I beg your pardon, Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'and I am very sorry to disturb the other gentlemen, too, but I come on very particular business; and if you will suffer me to detain you at this end of the room for five minutes, I shall be very much obliged to you.'

The puffy-faced young man rose, and drawing a chair close to Mr. Pickwick in an obscure corner of the room, listened attentively to his tale of woe.

'Ah,'he said, when Mr. Pickwick had concluded, 'Dodson and Fogg—sharp practice theirs—capital men of business, Dodson and Fogg, sir.'

Mr. Pickwick admitted the sharp practice of Dodson and Fogg, and Lowten resumed. 'Perker ain't in town, and he won't be, neither, before the end of next week; but if you want the action defended, and will leave the copy with me, I can do all that's needful till he comes back.'

'That's exactly what I came here for,' said Mr. Pickwick, handing over the document. 'If anything particular occurs, you can write to me at the post-office, Ipswich.'

'That's all right,' replied Mr. Perker's clerk; and then seeing Mr. Pickwick's eye wandering curiously towards the table, he added, 'will you join us, for half an hour or so? We are capital company here to-night.

There's Samkin and Green's managing-clerk, and Smithers and Price's chancery, and Pimkin and Thomas's out o' doors—sings a capital song, he does—and Jack Bamber, and ever so many more. You're come out of the country, I suppose. Would you like to join us?'

Mr. Pickwick could not resist so tempting an opportunity of studying human nature. He suffered himself to be led to the table, where, after having been introduced to the company in due form, he was accommodated with a seat near the chairman and called for a glass of his favourite beverage.

A profound silence, quite contrary to Mr. Pickwick's expectation, succeeded. 'You don't find this sort of thing disagreeable, I hope, sir?' said his right hand neighbour, a gentleman in a checked shirt and Mosaic studs, with a cigar in his mouth.

'Not in the least,' replied Mr. Pickwick; 'I like it very much, although I am no smoker myself.'

'I should be very sorry to say I wasn't,' interposed another gentleman on the opposite side of the table. 'It's board and lodgings to me, is smoke.'

Mr. Pickwick glanced at the speaker, and thought that if it were washing too, it would be all the better.

Here there was another pause. Mr. Pickwick was a stranger, and his coming had evidently cast a damp upon the party.

'Mr. Grundy's going to oblige the company with a song,' said the chairman.

'No, he ain't,' said Mr. Grundy.

'Why not?' said the chairman.

'Because he can't,' said Mr. Grundy. 'You had better say he won't,' replied the chairman.

'Well, then, he won't,' retorted Mr. Grundy. Mr. Grundy's positive refusal to gratify the company occasioned another silence. 'Won't anybody enliven us?' said the chairman, despondingly.

'Why don't you enliven us yourself, Mr. Chairman?' said a young man with a whisker, a squint, and an open shirt collar (dirty), from the bottom of the table.

'Hear! hear!' said the smoking gentleman, in the Mosaic jewellery.

'Because I only know one song, and I have sung it already, and it's a fine of "glasses round" to sing the same song twice in a night,' replied the chairman.

This was an unanswerable reply, and silence prevailed again.

'I have been to-night, gentlemen,' said Mr. Pickwick, hoping to start a subject which all the company could take a part in discussing, 'I have been to-night, in a place which you all know very well, doubtless, but which I have not been in for some years, and know very little of; I mean Gray's Inn, gentlemen. Curious little nooks in a great place, like London, these old inns are.'

'By Jove!' said the chairman, whispering across the table to Mr. Pickwick, 'you have hit upon something that one of us, at least, would talk upon for ever. You'll draw old Jack Bamber out; he was never heard to talk about anything else but the inns, and he has lived alone in them till he's half crazy.'

The individual to whom Lowten alluded, was a little, yellow, high-shouldered man, whose countenance, from his habit of stooping forward when silent, Mr. Pickwick had not observed before. He wondered, though, when the old man raised his shrivelled face, and bent his gray eye upon him, with a keen inquiring look, that such remarkable features could have escaped his attention for a moment. There was a fixed grim smile perpetually on his countenance; he leaned his chin on a long, skinny hand, with nails of extraordinary length; and as he inclined his head to one side, and looked keenly out from beneath his ragged gray eyebrows, there was a strange, wild slyness in his leer, quite repulsive to behold.

This was the figure that now started forward, and burst into an animated torrent of words. As this chapter has been a long one, however, and as the old man was a remarkable personage, it will be more respectful to him, and more convenient to us, to let him speak for himself in a fresh one.

CHAPTER XXI. IN WHICH THE OLD MAN LAUNCHES FORTH INTO HIS FAVOURITE

THEME, AND RELATES A STORY ABOUT A QUEER CLIENT

Aha!' said the old man, a brief description of whose manner and appearance concluded the last chapter, 'aha! who was talking about the inns?'

'I was, Sir,' replied Mr. Pickwick—'I was observing what singular old places they are.'

'YOU!' said the old man contemptuously. 'What do YOU know of the time when young men shut themselves up in those lonely rooms, and read and read, hour after hour, and night after night, till their reason wandered beneath their midnight studies; till their mental powers were exhausted; till morning's light brought no freshness or health to them; and they sank beneath the unnatural devotion of their youthful energies to their dry old books? Coming down to a later time, and a very different day, what do YOU know of the gradual sinking beneath consumption, or the quick wasting of fever—the grand results of "life" and dissipation—which men have undergone in these same rooms? How many vain pleaders for mercy, do you think, have turned away heart-sick from the lawyer's office, to find a resting-place in the Thames, or a refuge in the jail? They are no ordinary houses, those. There is not a panel in the old wainscotting, but what, if it were endowed with the powers of speech and memory, could start from the wall, and tell its tale of horror—the romance of life, Sir, the romance of life! Common-place as they may seem now, I tell you they are strange old places, and I would rather hear many a legend with a terrific-sounding name, than the true history of one old set of chambers.'

There was something so odd in the old man's sudden energy, and the subject which had called it forth, that Mr. Pickwick was prepared with no observation in reply; and the old man checking his impetuosity, and resuming the leer, which had disappeared during his previous excitement, said—

'Look at them in another light—their most common-place and least romantic. What fine places of slow torture they are! Think of the needy man who has spent his all, beggared himself, and pinched his friends, to enter the profession, which is destined never to yield him a morsel of bread. The waiting—the hope—the disappointment—the fear—the misery—the poverty—the blight on his hopes, and end to his career—the suicide perhaps, or the shabby, slipshod drunkard. Am I not right about them?' And the old man rubbed his hands, and leered as if in delight at having found another point of view in which to place his favourite subject.

Mr. Pickwick eyed the old man with great curiosity, and the remainder of the company smiled, and looked on in silence.

'Talk of your German universities,' said the little old man. 'Pooh, pooh! there's romance enough at home without going half a mile for it; only people never think of it.'

'I never thought of the romance of this particular subject before, certainly,' said Mr. Pickwick, laughing. 'To be sure you didn't,' said the little old man; 'of course not. As a friend of mine used to say to me, "What is there in chambers in particular?" "Queer old places," said I. "Not at all," said he. "Lonely," said I. "Not a bit of it," said he. He died one morning of apoplexy, as he was going to open his outer door. Fell with his head in his own letter-box, and there he lay for eighteen months. Everybody thought he'd gone out of town.'

'And how was he found out at last?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'The benchers determined to have his door broken open, as he hadn't paid any rent for two years. So they did. Forced the lock; and a very dusty skeleton in a blue coat, black knee-shorts, and silks, fell forward in the arms of the porter who opened the door. Queer, that. Rather, perhaps; rather, eh?'The little old man put his head more on one side, and rubbed his hands with unspeakable glee.

'I know another case,' said the little old man, when his chuckles had in some degree subsided. 'It occurred in Clifford's Inn. Tenant of a top set—bad character—shut himself up in his bedroom closet, and took a dose of arsenic. The steward thought he had run away: opened the door, and put a bill up. Another man came, took the chambers, furnished them, and went to live there. Somehow or other he couldn't sleep—always restless and uncomfortable. "Odd," says he. "I'll make the other room my bedchamber, and this my sitting-room." He made the change, and slept very well at night, but suddenly found that, somehow, he couldn't read in the evening: he got nervous and uncomfortable, and used to be always snuffing his candles and staring about him. "I can't make this out," said he, when he came home from the play one night, and was drinking a glass of cold grog, with his back to the wall, in order that he mightn't be able to fancy there was any one behind him—"I can't make it out," said he; and just then his eyes rested on the little closet that had been always locked up, and a shudder ran through his whole frame from top to toe. "I have felt this strange feeling before," said he, "I cannot help thinking there's something wrong about that closet." He made a strong effort, plucked up his courage, shivered the lock with a blow or two of the poker, opened the door, and there, sure enough, standing bolt upright in the corner, was the last tenant, with a little bottle clasped firmly in his hand, and his face—well!' As the little old man concluded, he looked round on the attentive faces of his wondering auditory with a smile of grim delight.

'What strange things these are you tell us of, Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, minutely scanning the old man's countenance, by the aid of his glasses.

'Strange!' said the little old man. 'Nonsense; you think them strange, because you know nothing about it. They are funny, but not uncommon.'

'Funny!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick involuntarily. 'Yes, funny, are they not?' replied the little old man, with a diabolical leer; and then, without pausing for an answer, he continued—

'I knew another man—let me see—forty years ago now—who took an old, damp, rotten set of chambers, in one of the most ancient inns, that had been shut up and empty for years and years before. There were lots of old women's stories about the place, and it certainly was very far from being a cheerful one; but he was poor, and the rooms were cheap, and that would have been quite a sufficient reason for him, if they had been ten times worse than they really were. He was obliged to take some mouldering fixtures that were on the place, and, among the rest, was a great lumbering wooden press for papers, with large glass doors, and a green curtain inside; a pretty useless thing for him, for he had no papers to put in it; and as to his clothes, he carried them about with him, and that wasn't very hard work, either. Well, he had moved in all his furniture—it wasn't quite a truck-full—and had sprinkled it about the room, so as to make the four chairs look as much like a dozen as possible, and was sitting down before the fire at night, drinking the first glass of two gallons of whisky he had ordered on credit, wondering whether it would ever be paid for, and if so, in how many years' time, when his eyes encountered the glass doors of the wooden press. "Ah," says he, "if I hadn't been obliged to take that ugly article at the old broker's valuation, I might have got something comfortable for the money. I'll tell you what it is, old fellow," he said, speaking aloud to the press, having nothing else to speak to, "if it wouldn't cost more to break up your old carcass, than it would ever be worth afterward, I'd have a fire out of you in less than no time." He had hardly spoken the words, when a sound resembling a faint groan, appeared to issue from the interior of the case. It startled him at first, but thinking, on a moment's reflection, that it must be some young fellow in the next chamber, who had been dining out, he put his feet on the fender, and raised the poker to stir the fire. At that moment, the sound was repeated; and one of the glass doors slowly opening, disclosed a pale and emaciated figure in soiled and worn apparel, standing erect in the press. The figure was tall and thin, and the countenance expressive of care and anxiety; but there was something in the hue of the skin, and gaunt and unearthly appearance of the whole form, which no being of this world was ever seen to wear. "Who are you?" said the new tenant, turning very pale; poising the poker in his hand, however, and taking a very decent aim at the countenance of the figure. "Who are you?" "Don't throw that poker at me," replied the form; "if you hurled it with ever so sure an aim, it would pass through me, without resistance, and expend its force on the wood behind. I am a spirit." "And pray, what do you want here?" faltered the tenant. "In this room," replied the apparition, "my worldly ruin was worked, and I and my children beggared. In this press, the papers in a long, long suit, which accumulated for years, were deposited. In this room, when I had died of grief, and long-deferred hope, two wily harpies divided the wealth for which I had contested during a wretched existence, and of which, at last, not one farthing was left for my unhappy descendants. I terrified them from the spot, and since that day have prowled by night—the only period at which I can revisit the earth—about the scenes of my long-protracted misery. This apartment is mine: leave it to me." "If you insist upon making your appearance here," said the tenant, who had had time to collect his presence of mind during this prosy statement of the ghost's, "I shall give up possession with the greatest pleasure; but I should like to ask you one question, if you will allow me." "Say on," said the apparition sternly. "Well," said the tenant, "I don't apply the observation personally to you, because it is equally applicable to most of the ghosts I ever heard of; but it does appear to me somewhat inconsistent, that when you have an opportunity of visiting the fairest spots of earth—for I suppose space is nothing to you—you should always return exactly to the very places where you have been most miserable." "Egad, that's very true; I never thought of that before," said the ghost. "You see, Sir," pursued the tenant, "this is a very uncomfortable room. From the appearance of that press, I should be disposed to say that it is not wholly free from bugs; and I really think you might find much more comfortable quarters: to say nothing of the climate of London, which is extremely disagreeable." "You are very right, Sir," said the ghost politely, "it never struck me till now; I'll try change of air directly"—and, in fact, he began to vanish as he spoke; his legs, indeed, had quite disappeared. "And if, Sir," said the tenant, calling after him, "if you WOULD have the goodness to suggest to the other ladies and gentlemen who are now engaged in haunting old empty houses, that they might be much more comfortable elsewhere, you will confer a very great benefit on society." "I will," replied the ghost; "we must be dull fellows—very dull fellows, indeed; I can't imagine how we can have been so stupid." With these words, the spirit disappeared; and what is rather remarkable,' added the old man, with a shrewd look round the table, 'he never came back again.'

'That ain't bad, if it's true,' said the man in the Mosaic studs, lighting a fresh cigar.

'IF!' exclaimed the old man, with a look of excessive contempt. 'I suppose,' he added, turning to Lowten, 'he'll say next, that my story about the queer client we had, when I was in an attorney's office, is not true either—I shouldn't wonder.'

'I shan't venture to say anything at all about it, seeing that I never heard the story,' observed the owner of the Mosaic decorations.

'I wish you would repeat it, Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Ah, do,' said Lowten, 'nobody has heard it but me, and I have nearly forgotten it.'

The old man looked round the table, and leered more horribly than ever, as if in triumph, at the attention which was depicted in every face. Then rubbing his chin with his hand, and looking up to the ceiling as if to recall the circumstances to his memory, he began as follows:—

THE OLD MAN'S TALE ABOUT THE QUEER CLIENT

'It matters little,' said the old man, 'where, or how, I picked up this brief history. If I were to relate it in the order in which it reached me, I should commence in the middle, and when I had arrived at the conclusion, go back for a beginning. It is enough for me to say that some of its circumstances passed before my own eyes; for the remainder I know them to have happened, and there are some persons yet living, who will remember them but too well.

'In the Borough High Street, near St. George's Church, and on the same side of the way, stands, as most people know, the smallest of our debtors' prisons, the Marshalsea. Although in later times it has been a very different place from the sink of filth and dirt it once was, even its improved condition holds out but little temptation to the extravagant, or consolation to the improvident. The condemned felon has as good a yard for air and exercise in Newgate, as the insolvent debtor in the Marshalsea Prison. [Better. But this is past, in a better age, and the prison exists no longer.]

'It may be my fancy, or it may be that I cannot separate the place from the old recollections associated with it, but this part of London I cannot bear. The street is broad, the shops are spacious, the noise of passing vehicles, the footsteps of a perpetual stream of people—all the busy sounds of traffic, resound in it from morn to midnight; but the streets around are mean and close; poverty and debauchery lie festering in the crowded alleys; want and misfortune are pent up in the narrow prison; an air of gloom and dreariness seems, in my eyes at least, to hang about the scene, and to impart to it a squalid and sickly hue.

'Many eyes, that have long since been closed in the grave, have looked round upon that scene lightly enough, when entering the gate of the old Marshalsea Prison for the first time; for despair seldom comes with the first severe shock of misfortune. A man has confidence in untried friends, he remembers the many offers of service so freely made by his boon companions when he wanted them not; he has hope—the hope of happy inexperience—and however he may bend beneath the first shock, it springs up in his bosom, and flourishes there for a brief space, until it droops beneath the blight of disappointment and neglect. How soon have those same eyes, deeply sunken in the head, glared from faces wasted with famine, and sallow from confinement, in days when it was no figure of speech to say that debtors rotted in prison, with no hope of release, and no prospect of liberty! The atrocity in its full extent no longer exists, but there is enough of it left to give rise to occurrences that make the heart bleed.

'Twenty years ago, that pavement was worn with the footsteps of a mother and child, who, day by day, so surely as the morning came, presented themselves at the prison gate; often after a night of restless misery and anxious thoughts, were they there, a full hour too soon, and then the young mother turning meekly away, would lead the child to the old bridge, and raising him in her arms to show him the glistening water, tinted with the light of the morning's sun, and stirring with all the bustling preparations for business and pleasure that the river presented at that early hour, endeavour to interest his thoughts in the objects before him. But she would quickly set him down, and hiding her face in her shawl, give vent to the tears that blinded her; for no expression of interest or amusement lighted up his thin and sickly face. His recollections were few enough, but they were all of one kind—all connected with the poverty and misery of his parents. Hour after hour had he sat on his mother's knee, and with childish sympathy watched the tears that stole down her face, and then crept quietly away into some dark corner, and sobbed himself to sleep. The hard realities of the world, with many of its worst privations—hunger and thirst, and cold and want—had all come home to him, from the first dawnings of reason; and though the form of childhood was there, its light heart, its merry laugh, and sparkling eyes were wanting. 'The father and mother looked on upon this, and upon each other, with thoughts of agony they dared not breathe in words. The healthy, strong-made man, who could have borne almost any fatigue of active exertion, was wasting beneath the close confinement and unhealthy atmosphere of a crowded prison. The slight and delicate woman was sinking beneath the combined effects of bodily and mental illness. The child's young heart was breaking.

'Winter came, and with it weeks of cold and heavy rain. The poor girl had removed to a wretched apartment close to the spot of her husband's imprisonment; and though the change had been rendered necessary by their increasing poverty, she was happier now, for she was nearer him. For two months, she and her little companion watched the opening of the gate as usual. One day she failed to come, for the first time. Another morning arrived, and she came alone. The child was dead.

'They little know, who coldly talk of the poor man's bereavements, as a happy release from pain to the departed, and a merciful relief from expense to the survivor—they little know, I say, what the agony of those bereavements is. A silent look of affection and regard when all other eyes are turned coldly away—the consciousness that we possess the sympathy and affection of one being when all others have deserted us—is a hold, a stay, a comfort, in the deepest affliction, which no wealth could purchase, or power bestow. The child had sat at his parents' feet for hours together, with his little hands patiently folded in each other, and his thin wan face raised towards them. They had seen him pine away, from day to day; and though his brief existence had been a joyless one, and he was now removed to that peace and rest which, child as he was, he had never known in this world, they were his parents, and his loss sank deep into their souls.

'It was plain to those who looked upon the mother's altered face, that death must soon close the scene of her adversity and trial. Her husband's fellow-prisoners shrank from obtruding on his grief and misery, and left to himself alone, the small room he had previously occupied in common with two companions. She shared it with him; and lingering on without pain, but without hope, her life ebbed slowly away.

'She had fainted one evening in her husband's arms, and he had borne her to the open window, to revive her with the air, when the light of the moon falling full upon her face, showed him a change upon her features, which made him stagger beneath her weight, like a helpless infant.

'"Set me down, George," she said faintly. He did so, and seating himself beside her, covered his face with his hands, and burst into tears.

'"It is very hard to leave you, George," she said; "but it is God's will, and you must bear it for my sake. Oh! how I thank Him for having taken our boy! He is happy, and in heaven now. What would he have done here, without his mother!"

'"You shall not die, Mary, you shall not die;" said the husband, starting up. He paced hurriedly to and fro, striking his head with his clenched fists; then reseating himself beside her, and supporting her in his arms, added more calmly, "Rouse yourself, my dear girl. Pray, pray do. You will revive yet."

'"Never again, George; never again," said the dying woman. "Let them lay me by my poor boy now, but promise me, that if ever you leave this dreadful place, and should grow rich, you will have us removed to some quiet country churchyard, a long, long way off—very far from here—where we can rest in peace. Dear George, promise me you will."

'"I do, I do," said the man, throwing himself passionately on his knees before her. "Speak to me, Mary, another word; one look—but one!"

'He ceased to speak: for the arm that clasped his neck grew stiff and heavy. A deep sigh escaped from the wasted form before him; the lips moved, and a smile played upon the face; but the lips were pallid, and the smile faded into a rigid and ghastly stare. He was alone in the world.

'That night, in the silence and desolation of his miserable room, the wretched man knelt down by the dead body of his wife, and called on God to witness a terrible oath, that from that hour, he devoted himself to revenge her death and that of his child; that thenceforth to the last moment of his life, his whole energies should be directed to this one object; that his revenge should be protracted and terrible; that his hatred should be undying and inextinguishable; and should hunt its object through the world.

'The deepest despair, and passion scarcely human, had made such fierce ravages on his face and form, in that one night, that his companions in misfortune shrank affrighted from him as he passed by. His eyes were bloodshot and heavy, his face a deadly white, and his body bent as if with age. He had bitten his under lip nearly through in the violence of his mental suffering, and the blood which had flowed from the wound had trickled down his chin, and stained his shirt and neckerchief. No tear, or sound of complaint escaped him; but the unsettled look, and disordered haste with which he paced up and down the yard, denoted the fever which was burning within.

'It was necessary that his wife's body should be removed from the prison, without delay. He received the communication with perfect calmness, and acquiesced in its propriety. Nearly all the inmates of the prison had assembled to witness its removal; they fell back on either side when the widower appeared; he walked hurriedly forward, and stationed himself, alone, in a little railed area close to the lodge gate, from whence the crowd, with an instinctive feeling of delicacy, had retired. The rude coffin was borne slowly forward on men's shoulders. A dead silence pervaded the throng, broken only by the audible lamentations of the women, and the shuffling steps of the bearers on the stone pavement. They reached the spot where the bereaved husband stood: and stopped. He laid his hand upon the coffin, and mechanically adjusting the pall with which it was covered, motioned them onward. The turnkeys in the prison lobby took off their hats as it passed through, and in another moment the heavy gate closed behind it. He looked vacantly upon the crowd, and fell heavily to the ground.

'Although for many weeks after this, he was watched, night and day, in the wildest ravings of fever, neither the consciousness of his loss, nor the recollection of the vow he had made, ever left him for a moment. Scenes changed before his eyes, place succeeded place, and event followed event, in all the hurry of delirium; but they were all connected in some way with the great object of his mind. He was sailing over a boundless expanse of sea, with a blood-red sky above, and the angry waters, lashed into fury beneath, boiling and eddying up, on every side. There was another vessel before them, toiling and labouring in the howling storm; her canvas fluttering in ribbons from the mast, and her deck thronged with figures who were lashed to the sides, over which huge waves every instant burst, sweeping away some devoted creatures into the foaming sea. Onward they bore, amidst the roaring mass of water, with a speed and force which nothing could resist; and striking the stem of the foremost vessel, crushed her beneath their keel. From the huge whirlpool which the sinking wreck occasioned, arose a shriek so loud and shrill—the death-cry of a hundred drowning creatures, blended into one fierce yell—that it rung far above the war-cry of the elements, and echoed, and re-echoed till it seemed to pierce air, sky, and ocean. But what was that—that old gray head that rose above the water's surface, and with looks of agony, and screams for aid, buffeted with the waves! One look, and he had sprung from the vessel's side, and with vigorous strokes was swimming towards it. He reached it; he was close upon it. They were HIS features. The old man saw him coming, and vainly strove to elude his grasp. But he clasped him tight, and dragged him beneath the water. Down, down with him, fifty fathoms down; his struggles grew fainter and fainter, until they wholly ceased. He was dead; he had killed him, and had kept his oath.

'He was traversing the scorching sands of a mighty desert, barefoot and alone. The sand choked and blinded him; its fine thin grains entered the very pores of his skin, and irritated him almost to madness. Gigantic masses of the same material, carried forward by the wind, and shone through by the burning sun, stalked in the distance like pillars of living fire. The bones of men, who had perished in the dreary waste, lay scattered at his feet; a fearful light fell on everything around; so far as the eye could reach, nothing but objects of dread and horror presented themselves. Vainly striving to utter a cry of terror, with his tongue cleaving to his mouth, he rushed madly forward. Armed with supernatural strength, he waded through the sand, until, exhausted with fatigue and thirst, he fell senseless on the earth. What fragrant coolness revived him; what gushing sound was that? Water! It was indeed a well; and the clear fresh stream was running at his feet. He drank deeply of it, and throwing his aching limbs upon the bank, sank into a delicious trance. The sound of approaching footsteps roused him. An old gray-headed man tottered forward to slake his burning thirst. It was HE again! Fe wound his arms round the old man's body, and held him back. He struggled, and shrieked for water—for but one drop of water to save his life! But he held the old man firmly, and watched his agonies with greedy eyes; and when his lifeless head fell forward on his bosom, he rolled the corpse from him with his feet.

'When the fever left him, and consciousness returned, he awoke to find himself rich and free, to hear that the parent who would have let him die in jail—WOULD! who HAD let those who were far dearer to him than his own existence die of want, and sickness of heart that medicine cannot cure—had been found dead in his bed of down. He had had all the heart to leave his son a beggar, but proud even of his health and strength, had put off the act till it was too late, and now might gnash his teeth in the other world, at the thought of the wealth his remissness had left him. He awoke to this, and he awoke to more. To recollect the purpose for which he lived, and to remember that his enemy was his wife's own father—the man who had cast him into prison, and who, when his daughter and her child sued at his feet for mercy, had spurned them from his door. Oh, how he cursed the weakness that prevented him from being up, and active, in his scheme of vengeance! 'He caused himself to be carried from the scene of his loss and misery, and conveyed to a quiet residence on the sea-coast; not in the hope of recovering his peace of mind or happiness, for both were fled for ever; but to restore his prostrate energies, and meditate on his darling object. And here, some evil spirit cast in his way the opportunity for his first, most horrible revenge.

'It was summer-time; and wrapped in his gloomy thoughts, he would issue from his solitary lodgings early in the evening, and wandering along a narrow path beneath the cliffs, to a wild and lonely spot that had struck his fancy in his ramblings, seat himself on some fallen fragment of the rock, and burying his face in his hands, remain there for hours—sometimes until night had completely closed in, and the long shadows of the frowning cliffs above his head cast a thick, black darkness on every object near him.

'He was seated here, one calm evening, in his old position, now and then raising his head to watch the flight of a sea-gull, or carry his eye along the glorious crimson path, which, commencing in the middle of the ocean, seemed to lead to its very verge where the sun was setting, when the profound stillness of the spot was broken by a loud cry for help; he listened, doubtful of his having heard aright, when the cry was repeated with even greater vehemence than before, and, starting to his feet, he hastened in the direction whence it proceeded.

'The tale told itself at once: some scattered garments lay on the beach; a human head was just visible above the waves at a little distance from the shore; and an old man, wringing his hands in agony, was running to and fro, shrieking for assistance. The invalid, whose strength was now sufficiently restored, threw off his coat, and rushed towards the sea, with the intention of plunging in, and dragging the drowning man ashore.

'"Hasten here, Sir, in God's name; help, help, sir, for the love of Heaven. He is my son, Sir, my only son!" said the old man frantically, as he advanced to meet him. "My only son, Sir, and he is dying before his father's eyes!"

'At the first word the old man uttered, the stranger checked himself in his career, and, folding his arms, stood perfectly motionless.

'"Great God!" exclaimed the old man, recoiling, "Heyling!"

'The stranger smiled, and was silent.

'"Heyling!" said the old man wildly; "my boy, Heyling, my dear boy, look, look!" Gasping for breath, the miserable father pointed to the spot where the young man was struggling for life.

'"Hark!" said the old man. "He cries once more. He is alive yet. Heyling, save him, save him!"

'The stranger smiled again, and remained immovable as a statue. '"I have wronged you," shrieked the old man, falling on his knees, and clasping his hands together. "Be revenged; take my all, my life; cast me into the water at your feet, and, if human nature can repress a struggle, I will die, without stirring hand or foot. Do it, Heyling, do it, but save my boy; he is so young, Heyling, so young to die!"

'"Listen," said the stranger, grasping the old man fiercely by the wrist; "I will have life for life, and here is ONE. MY child died, before his father's eyes, a far more agonising and painful death than that young slanderer of his sister's worth is meeting while I speak. You laughed—laughed in your daughter's face, where death had already set his hand—at our sufferings, then. What think you of them now! See there, see there!"

'As the stranger spoke, he pointed to the sea. A faint cry died away upon its surface; the last powerful struggle of the dying man agitated the rippling waves for a few seconds; and the spot where he had gone down into his early grave, was undistinguishable from the surrounding water.

'Three years had elapsed, when a gentleman alighted from a private carriage at the door of a London attorney, then well known as a man of no great nicety in his professional dealings, and requested a private interview on business of importance. Although evidently not past the prime of life, his face was pale, haggard, and dejected; and it did not require the acute perception of the man of business, to discern at a glance, that disease or suffering had done more to work a change in his appearance, than the mere hand of time could have accomplished in twice the period of his whole life.

'"I wish you to undertake some legal business for me," said the stranger.

'The attorney bowed obsequiously, and glanced at a large packet which the gentleman carried in his hand. His visitor observed the look, and proceeded.

'"It is no common business," said he; "nor have these papers reached my hands without long trouble and great expense."

'The attorney cast a still more anxious look at the packet; and his visitor, untying the string that bound it, disclosed a quantity of promissory notes, with copies of deeds, and other documents.

'"Upon these papers," said the client, "the man whose name they bear, has raised, as you will see, large sums of money, for years past. There was a tacit understanding between him and the men into whose hands they originally went—and from whom I have by degrees purchased the whole, for treble and quadruple their nominal value—that these loans should be from time to time renewed, until a given period had elapsed. Such an understanding is nowhere expressed. He has sustained many losses of late; and these obligations accumulating upon him at once, would crush him to the earth."

'"The whole amount is many thousands of pounds," said the attorney, looking over the papers.

'"It is," said the client.

'"What are we to do?" inquired the man of business.

'"Do!" replied the client, with sudden vehemence. "Put every engine of the law in force, every trick that ingenuity can devise and rascality execute; fair means and foul; the open oppression of the law, aided by all the craft of its most ingenious practitioners. I would have him die a harassing and lingering death. Ruin him, seize and sell his lands and goods, drive him from house and home, and drag him forth a beggar in his old age, to die in a common jail."

'"But the costs, my dear Sir, the costs of all this," reasoned the attorney, when he had recovered from his momentary surprise. "If the defendant be a man of straw, who is to pay the costs, Sir?"

'"Name any sum," said the stranger, his hand trembling so violently with excitement, that he could scarcely hold the pen he seized as he spoke—"any sum, and it is yours. Don't be afraid to name it, man. I shall not think it dear, if you gain my object."

'The attorney named a large sum, at hazard, as the advance he should require to secure himself against the possibility of loss; but more with the view of ascertaining how far his client was really disposed to go, than with any idea that he would comply with the demand. The stranger wrote a cheque upon his banker, for the whole amount, and left him.

'The draft was duly honoured, and the attorney, finding that his strange client might be safely relied upon, commenced his work in earnest. For more than two years afterwards, Mr. Heyling would sit whole days together, in the office, poring over the papers as they accumulated, and reading again and again, his eyes gleaming with joy, the letters of remonstrance, the prayers for a little delay, the representations of the certain ruin in which the opposite party must be involved, which poured in, as suit after suit, and process after process, was commenced. To all applications for a brief indulgence, there was but one reply—the money must be paid. Land, house, furniture, each in its turn, was taken under some one of the numerous executions which were issued; and the old man himself would have been immured in prison had he not escaped the vigilance of the officers, and fled.

'The implacable animosity of Heyling, so far from being satiated by the success of his persecution, increased a hundredfold with the ruin he inflicted. On being informed of the old man's flight, his fury was unbounded. He gnashed his teeth with rage, tore the hair from his head, and assailed with horrid imprecations the men who had been intrusted with the writ. He was only restored to comparative calmness by repeated assurances of the certainty of discovering the fugitive. Agents were sent in quest of him, in all directions; every stratagem that could be invented was resorted to, for the purpose of discovering his place of retreat; but it was all in vain. Half a year had passed over, and he was still undiscovered.

'At length late one night, Heyling, of whom nothing had been seen for many weeks before, appeared at his attorney's private residence, and sent up word that a gentleman wished to see him instantly. Before the attorney, who had recognised his voice from above stairs, could order the servant to admit him, he had rushed up the staircase, and entered the drawing-room pale and breathless. Having closed the door, to prevent being overheard, he sank into a chair, and said, in a low voice—

'"Hush! I have found him at last."

'"No!" said the attorney. "Well done, my dear sir, well done."

'"He lies concealed in a wretched lodging in Camden Town," said Heyling. "Perhaps it is as well we DID lose sight of him, for he has been living alone there, in the most abject misery, all the time, and he is poor—very poor."

'"Very good," said the attorney. "You will have the caption made to-morrow, of course?"

'"Yes," replied Heyling. "Stay! No! The next day. You are surprised at my wishing to postpone it," he added, with a ghastly smile; "but I had forgotten. The next day is an anniversary in his life: let it be done then."

'"Very good," said the attorney. "Will you write down instructions for the officer?"

'"No; let him meet me here, at eight in the evening, and I will accompany him myself."

'They met on the appointed night, and, hiring a hackney-coach, directed the driver to stop at that corner of the old Pancras Road, at which stands the parish workhouse. By the time they alighted there, it was quite dark; and, proceeding by the dead wall in front of the Veterinary Hospital, they entered a small by-street, which is, or was at that time, called Little College Street, and which, whatever it may be now, was in those days a desolate place enough, surrounded by little else than fields and ditches.

'Having drawn the travelling-cap he had on half over his face, and muffled himself in his cloak, Heyling stopped before the meanest-looking house in the street, and knocked gently at the door. It was at once opened by a woman, who dropped a curtsey of recognition, and Heyling, whispering the officer to remain below, crept gently upstairs, and, opening the door of the front room, entered at once.

'The object of his search and his unrelenting animosity, now a decrepit old man, was seated at a bare deal table, on which stood a miserable candle. He started on the entrance of the stranger, and rose feebly to his feet.

'"What now, what now?" said the old man. "What fresh misery is this? What do you want here?"

'"A word with YOU," replied Heyling. As he spoke, he seated himself at the other end of the table, and, throwing off his cloak and cap, disclosed his features.

'The old man seemed instantly deprived of speech. He fell backward in his chair, and, clasping his hands together, gazed on the apparition with a mingled look of abhorrence and fear.

'"This day six years," said Heyling, "I claimed the life you owed me for my child's. Beside the lifeless form of your daughter, old man, I swore to live a life of revenge. I have never swerved from my purpose for a moment's space; but if I had, one thought of her uncomplaining, suffering look, as she drooped away, or of the starving face of our innocent child, would have nerved me to my task. My first act of requital you well remember: this is my last."

'The old man shivered, and his hands dropped powerless by his side.

'"I leave England to-morrow," said Heyling, after a moment's pause. "To-night I consign you to the living death to which you devoted her—a hopeless prison—"

'He raised his eyes to the old man's countenance, and paused. He lifted the light to his face, set it gently down, and left the apartment.

'"You had better see to the old man," he said to the woman, as he opened the door, and motioned the officer to follow him into the street. "I think he is ill." The woman closed the door, ran hastily upstairs, and found him lifeless.

'Beneath a plain gravestone, in one of the most peaceful and secluded churchyards in Kent, where wild flowers mingle with the grass, and the soft landscape around forms the fairest spot in the garden of England, lie the bones of the young mother and her gentle child. But the ashes of the father do not mingle with theirs; nor, from that night forward, did the attorney ever gain the remotest clue to the subsequent history of his queer client.' As the old man concluded his tale, he advanced to a peg in one corner, and taking down his hat and coat, put them on with great deliberation; and, without saying another word, walked slowly away. As the gentleman with the Mosaic studs had fallen asleep, and the major part of the company were deeply occupied in the humorous process of dropping melted tallow-grease into his brandy-and-water, Mr. Pickwick departed unnoticed, and having settled his own score, and that of Mr. Weller, issued forth, in company with that gentleman, from beneath the portal of the Magpie and Stump.

CHAPTER XXII. Mr. PICKWICK JOURNEYS TO IPSWICH AND MEETS WITH A ROMANTIC

ADVENTURE WITH A MIDDLE-AGED LADY IN YELLOW CURL-PAPERS

'That 'ere your governor's luggage, Sammy?' inquired Mr. Weller of his affectionate son, as he entered the yard of the Bull Inn, Whitechapel, with a travelling-bag and a small portmanteau.

'You might ha' made a worser guess than that, old feller,' replied Mr. Weller the younger, setting down his burden in the yard, and sitting himself down upon it afterwards. 'The governor hisself'll be down here presently.'

'He's a-cabbin' it, I suppose?' said the father.

'Yes, he's a havin' two mile o' danger at eight-pence,' responded the son. 'How's mother-in-law this mornin'?'

'Queer, Sammy, queer,' replied the elder Mr. Weller, with impressive gravity. 'She's been gettin' rayther in the Methodistical order lately, Sammy; and she is uncommon pious, to be sure. She's too good a creetur for me, Sammy. I feel I don't deserve her.'

'Ah,' said Mr. Samuel. 'that's wery self-denyin' o' you.'

'Wery,' replied his parent, with a sigh. 'She's got hold o' some inwention for grown-up people being born again, Sammy—the new birth, I think they calls it. I should wery much like to see that system in haction, Sammy. I should wery much like to see your mother-in-law born again. Wouldn't I put her out to nurse!'

'What do you think them women does t'other day,' continued Mr. Weller, after a short pause, during which he had significantly struck the side of his nose with his forefinger some half-dozen times. 'What do you think they does, t'other day, Sammy?'

'Don't know,' replied Sam, 'what?'

'Goes and gets up a grand tea drinkin' for a feller they calls their shepherd,' said Mr. Weller. 'I was a-standing starin' in at the pictur shop down at our place, when I sees a little bill about it; "tickets half-a-crown. All applications to be made to the committee. Secretary, Mrs. Weller"; and when I got home there was the committee a-sittin' in our back parlour. Fourteen women; I wish you could ha' heard 'em, Sammy. There they was, a-passin' resolutions, and wotin' supplies, and all sorts o' games. Well, what with your mother-in-law a-worrying me to go, and what with my looking for'ard to seein' some queer starts if I did, I put my name down for a ticket; at six o'clock on the Friday evenin' I dresses myself out wery smart, and off I goes with the old 'ooman, and up we walks into a fust-floor where there was tea-things for thirty, and a whole lot o' women as begins whisperin' to one another, and lookin' at me, as if they'd never seen a rayther stout gen'l'm'n of eight-and-fifty afore. By and by, there comes a great bustle downstairs, and a lanky chap with a red nose and a white neckcloth rushes up, and sings out, "Here's the shepherd a-coming to wisit his faithful flock;" and in comes a fat chap in black, vith a great white face, a-smilin' avay like clockwork. Such goin's on, Sammy! "The kiss of peace," says the shepherd; and then he kissed the women all round, and ven he'd done, the man vith the red nose began. I was just a-thinkin' whether I hadn't better begin too—'specially as there was a wery nice lady a-sittin' next me—ven in comes the tea, and your mother-in-law, as had been makin' the kettle bile downstairs. At it they went, tooth and nail. Such a precious loud hymn, Sammy, while the tea was a brewing; such a grace, such eatin' and drinkin'! I wish you could ha' seen the shepherd walkin' into the ham and muffins. I never see such a chap to eat and drink—never. The red-nosed man warn't by no means the sort of person you'd like to grub by contract, but he was nothin' to the shepherd. Well; arter the tea was over, they sang another hymn, and then the shepherd began to preach: and wery well he did it, considerin' how heavy them muffins must have lied on his chest. Presently he pulls up, all of a sudden, and hollers out, "Where is the sinner; where is the mis'rable sinner?" Upon which, all the women looked at me, and began to groan as if they was a-dying. I thought it was rather sing'ler, but howsoever, I says nothing. Presently he pulls up again, and lookin' wery hard at me, says, "Where is the sinner; where is the mis'rable sinner?" and all the women groans again, ten times louder than afore. I got rather savage at this, so I takes a step or two for'ard and says, "My friend," says I, "did you apply that 'ere obserwation to me?" 'Stead of beggin' my pardon as any gen'l'm'n would ha' done, he got more abusive than ever:—called me a wessel, Sammy—a wessel of wrath—and all sorts o' names. So my blood being reg'larly up, I first gave him two or three for himself, and then two or three more to hand over to the man with the red nose, and walked off. I wish you could ha' heard how the women screamed, Sammy, ven they picked up the shepherd from underneath the table—Hollo! here's the governor, the size of life.'

As Mr. Weller spoke, Mr. Pickwick dismounted from a cab, and entered the yard. 'Fine mornin', Sir,' said Mr. Weller, senior.

'Beautiful indeed,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'Beautiful indeed,' echoes a red-haired man with an inquisitive nose and green spectacles, who had unpacked himself from a cab at the same moment as Mr. Pickwick. 'Going to Ipswich, Sir?'

'I am,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'Extraordinary coincidence. So am I.'

Mr. Pickwick bowed.

'Going outside?' said the red-haired man. Mr. Pickwick bowed again.

'Bless my soul, how remarkable—I am going outside, too,' said the red-haired man; 'we are positively going together.' And the red-haired man, who was an important-looking, sharp-nosed, mysterious-spoken personage, with a bird-like habit of giving his head a jerk every time he said anything, smiled as if he had made one of the strangest discoveries that ever fell to the lot of human wisdom.

'I am happy in the prospect of your company, Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Ah,' said the new-comer, 'it's a good thing for both of us, isn't it? Company, you see—company—is—is—it's a very different thing from solitude—ain't it?'

'There's no denying that 'ere,' said Mr. Weller, joining in the conversation, with an affable smile. 'That's what I call a self-evident proposition, as the dog's-meat man said, when the housemaid told him he warn't a gentleman.'

'Ah,' said the red-haired man, surveying Mr. Weller from head to foot with a supercilious look. 'Friend of yours, sir?'

'Not exactly a friend,' replied Mr. Pickwick, in a low tone. 'The fact is, he is my servant, but I allow him to take a good many liberties; for, between ourselves, I flatter myself he is an original, and I am rather proud of him.'

'Ah,' said the red-haired man, 'that, you see, is a matter of taste. I am not fond of anything original; I don't like it; don't see the necessity for it. What's your name, sir?'

'Here is my card, sir,' replied Mr. Pickwick, much amused by the abruptness of the question, and the singular manner of the stranger.

'Ah,' said the red-haired man, placing the card in his pocket-book, 'Pickwick; very good. I like to know a man's name, it saves so much trouble. That's my card, sir. Magnus, you will perceive, sir—Magnus is my name. It's rather a good name, I think, sir.'

'A very good name, indeed,' said Mr. Pickwick, wholly unable to repress a smile.

'Yes, I think it is,' resumed Mr. Magnus. 'There's a good name before it, too, you will observe. Permit me, sir—if you hold the card a little slanting, this way, you catch the light upon the up-stroke. There—Peter Magnus—sounds well, I think, sir.'

'Very,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Curious circumstance about those initials, sir,' said Mr. Magnus. 'You will observe—P.M.—post meridian. In hasty notes to intimate acquaintance, I sometimes sign myself "Afternoon." It amuses my friends very much, Mr. Pickwick.'

'It is calculated to afford them the highest gratification, I should conceive,' said Mr. Pickwick, rather envying the ease with which Mr. Magnus's friends were entertained.

'Now, gen'l'm'n,' said the hostler, 'coach is ready, if you please.'

'Is all my luggage in?' inquired Mr. Magnus.

'All right, sir.'

'Is the red bag in?'

'All right, Sir.'

'And the striped bag?'

'Fore boot, Sir.'

'And the brown-paper parcel?'

'Under the seat, Sir.'

'And the leather hat-box?'

'They're all in, Sir.'

'Now, will you get up?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Excuse me,' replied Magnus, standing on the wheel. 'Excuse me, Mr. Pickwick. I cannot consent to get up, in this state of uncertainty. I am quite satisfied from that man's manner, that the leather hat-box is not in.'

The solemn protestations of the hostler being wholly unavailing, the leather hat-box was obliged to be raked up from the lowest depth of the boot, to satisfy him that it had been safely packed; and after he had been assured on this head, he felt a solemn presentiment, first, that the red bag was mislaid, and next that the striped bag had been stolen, and then that the brown-paper parcel 'had come untied.' At length when he had received ocular demonstration of the groundless nature of each and every of these suspicions, he consented to climb up to the roof of the coach, observing that now he had taken everything off his mind, he felt quite comfortable and happy.

'You're given to nervousness, ain't you, Sir?' inquired Mr. Weller, senior, eyeing the stranger askance, as he mounted to his place.

'Yes; I always am rather about these little matters,' said the stranger, 'but I am all right now—quite right.'

'Well, that's a blessin', said Mr. Weller. 'Sammy, help your master up to the box; t'other leg, Sir, that's it; give us your hand, Sir. Up with you. You was a lighter weight when you was a boy, sir.' 'True enough, that, Mr. Weller,' said the breathless Mr. Pickwick good-humouredly, as he took his seat on the box beside him.

'Jump up in front, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller. 'Now Villam, run 'em out. Take care o' the archvay, gen'l'm'n. "Heads," as the pieman says. That'll do, Villam. Let 'em alone.' And away went the coach up Whitechapel, to the admiration of the whole population of that pretty densely populated quarter.

'Not a wery nice neighbourhood, this, Sir,' said Sam, with a touch of the hat, which always preceded his entering into conversation with his master.

'It is not indeed, Sam,' replied Mr. Pickwick, surveying the crowded and filthy street through which they were passing.

'It's a wery remarkable circumstance, Sir,' said Sam, 'that poverty and oysters always seem to go together.'

'I don't understand you, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'What I mean, sir,' said Sam, 'is, that the poorer a place is, the greater call there seems to be for oysters. Look here, sir; here's a oyster-stall to every half-dozen houses. The street's lined vith 'em. Blessed if I don't think that ven a man's wery poor, he rushes out of his lodgings, and eats oysters in reg'lar desperation.'

'To be sure he does,' said Mr. Weller, senior; 'and it's just the same vith pickled salmon!'

'Those are two very remarkable facts, which never occurred to me before,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'The very first place we stop at, I'll make a note of them.'

By this time they had reached the turnpike at Mile End; a profound silence prevailed until they had got two or three miles farther on, when Mr. Weller, senior, turning suddenly to Mr. Pickwick, said—

'Wery queer life is a pike-keeper's, sir.'

'A what?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'A pike-keeper.'

'What do you mean by a pike-keeper?' inquired Mr. Peter Magnus.

'The old 'un means a turnpike-keeper, gen'l'm'n,' observed Mr. Samuel Weller, in explanation.

'Oh,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'I see. Yes; very curious life. Very uncomfortable.'

'They're all on 'em men as has met vith some disappointment in life,' said Mr. Weller, senior.

'Ay, ay,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Yes. Consequence of vich, they retires from the world, and shuts themselves up in pikes; partly with the view of being solitary, and partly to rewenge themselves on mankind by takin' tolls.'

'Dear me,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'I never knew that before.'

'Fact, Sir,' said Mr. Weller; 'if they was gen'l'm'n, you'd call 'em misanthropes, but as it is, they only takes to pike-keepin'.'

With such conversation, possessing the inestimable charm of blending amusement with instruction, did Mr. Weller beguile the tediousness of the journey, during the greater part of the day. Topics of conversation were never wanting, for even when any pause occurred in Mr. Weller's loquacity, it was abundantly supplied by the desire evinced by Mr. Magnus to make himself acquainted with the whole of the personal history of his fellow-travellers, and his loudly-expressed anxiety at every stage, respecting the safety and well-being of the two bags, the leather hat-box, and the brown-paper parcel.

In the main street of Ipswich, on the left-hand side of the way, a short distance after you have passed through the open space fronting the Town Hall, stands an inn known far and wide by the appellation of the Great White Horse, rendered the more conspicuous by a stone statue of some rampacious animal with flowing mane and tail, distantly resembling an insane cart-horse, which is elevated above the principal door. The Great White Horse is famous in the neighbourhood, in the same degree as a prize ox, or a county-paper-chronicled turnip, or unwieldy pig—for its enormous size. Never was such labyrinths of uncarpeted passages, such clusters of mouldy, ill-lighted rooms, such huge numbers of small dens for eating or sleeping in, beneath any one roof, as are collected together between the four walls of the Great White Horse at Ipswich.

It was at the door of this overgrown tavern that the London coach stopped, at the same hour every evening; and it was from this same London coach that Mr. Pickwick, Sam Weller, and Mr. Peter Magnus dismounted, on the particular evening to which this chapter of our history bears reference.

'Do you stop here, sir?' inquired Mr. Peter Magnus, when the striped bag, and the red bag, and the brown-paper parcel, and the leather hat-box, had all been deposited in the passage. 'Do you stop here, sir?'

'I do,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Dear me,' said Mr. Magnus, 'I never knew anything like these extraordinary coincidences. Why, I stop here too. I hope we dine together?'

'With pleasure,' replied Mr. Pickwick. 'I am not quite certain whether I have any friends here or not, though. Is there any gentleman of the name of Tupman here, waiter?'

A corpulent man, with a fortnight's napkin under his arm, and coeval stockings on his legs, slowly desisted from his occupation of staring down the street, on this question being put to him by Mr. Pickwick; and, after minutely inspecting that gentleman's appearance, from the crown of his hat to the lowest button of his gaiters, replied emphatically—

'No!'

'Nor any gentleman of the name of Snodgrass?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'No!'

'Nor Winkle?'

'No!'

'My friends have not arrived to-day, Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'We will dine alone, then. Show us a private room, waiter.'

On this request being preferred, the corpulent man condescended to order the boots to bring in the gentlemen's luggage; and preceding them down a long, dark passage, ushered them into a large, badly-furnished apartment, with a dirty grate, in which a small fire was making a wretched attempt to be cheerful, but was fast sinking beneath the dispiriting influence of the place. After the lapse of an hour, a bit of fish and a steak was served up to the travellers, and when the dinner was cleared away, Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Peter Magnus drew their chairs up to the fire, and having ordered a bottle of the worst possible port wine, at the highest possible price, for the good of the house, drank brandy-and-water for their own.

Mr. Peter Magnus was naturally of a very communicative disposition, and the brandy-and-water operated with wonderful effect in warming into life the deepest hidden secrets of his bosom. After sundry accounts of himself, his family, his connections, his friends, his jokes, his business, and his brothers (most talkative men have a great deal to say about their brothers), Mr. Peter Magnus took a view of Mr. Pickwick through his coloured spectacles for several minutes, and then said, with an air of modesty—

'And what do you think—what DO you think, Mr. Pickwick—I have come down here for?'

'Upon my word,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'it is wholly impossible for me to guess; on business, perhaps.'

'Partly right, Sir,' replied Mr. Peter Magnus, 'but partly wrong at the same time; try again, Mr. Pickwick.'

'Really,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'I must throw myself on your mercy, to tell me or not, as you may think best; for I should never guess, if I were to try all night.'

'Why, then, he-he-he!' said Mr. Peter Magnus, with a bashful titter, 'what should you think, Mr. Pickwick, if I had come down here to make a proposal, Sir, eh? He, he, he!'

'Think! That you are very likely to succeed,' replied Mr. Pickwick, with one of his beaming smiles. 'Ah!' said Mr. Magnus. 'But do you really think so, Mr. Pickwick? Do you, though?'

'Certainly,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'No; but you're joking, though.'

'I am not, indeed.'

'Why, then,' said Mr. Magnus, 'to let you into a little secret, I think so too. I don't mind telling you, Mr. Pickwick, although I'm dreadful jealous by nature—horrid—that the lady is in this house.' Here Mr. Magnus took off his spectacles, on purpose to wink, and then put them on again.

'That's what you were running out of the room for, before dinner, then, so often,' said Mr. Pickwick archly.

'Hush! Yes, you're right, that was it; not such a fool as to see her, though.'

'No!'

'No; wouldn't do, you know, after having just come off a journey. Wait till to-morrow, sir; double the chance then. Mr. Pickwick, Sir, there is a suit of clothes in that bag, and a hat in that box, which, I expect, in the effect they will produce, will be invaluable to me, sir.'

'Indeed!' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Yes; you must have observed my anxiety about them to-day. I do not believe that such another suit of clothes, and such a hat, could be bought for money, Mr. Pickwick.'

Mr. Pickwick congratulated the fortunate owner of the irresistible garments on their acquisition; and Mr. Peter Magnus remained a few moments apparently absorbed in contemplation. 'She's a fine creature,' said Mr. Magnus.

'Is she?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Very,' said Mr. Magnus. 'Very. She lives about twenty miles from here, Mr. Pickwick. I heard she would be here to-night and all to-morrow forenoon, and came down to seize the opportunity. I think an inn is a good sort of a place to propose to a single woman in, Mr. Pickwick. She is more likely to feel the loneliness of her situation in travelling, perhaps, than she would be at home. What do you think, Mr. Pickwick?'

'I think it is very probable,' replied that gentleman.

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Pickwick,' said Mr. Peter Magnus, 'but I am naturally rather curious; what may you have come down here for?'

'On a far less pleasant errand, Sir,' replied Mr. Pickwick, the colour mounting to his face at the recollection. 'I have come down here, Sir, to expose the treachery and falsehood of an individual, upon whose truth and honour I placed implicit reliance.'

'Dear me,' said Mr. Peter Magnus, 'that's very unpleasant. It is a lady, I presume? Eh? ah! Sly, Mr. Pickwick, sly. Well, Mr. Pickwick, sir, I wouldn't probe your feelings for the world. Painful subjects, these, sir, very painful. Don't mind me, Mr. Pickwick, if you wish to give vent to your feelings. I know what it is to be jilted, Sir; I have endured that sort of thing three or four times.'

'I am much obliged to you, for your condolence on what you presume to be my melancholy case,' said Mr. Pickwick, winding up his watch, and laying it on the table, 'but—'

'No, no,' said Mr. Peter Magnus, 'not a word more; it's a painful subject. I see, I see. What's the time, Mr. Pickwick?' 'Past twelve.'

'Dear me, it's time to go to bed. It will never do, sitting here. I shall be pale to-morrow, Mr. Pickwick.'

At the bare notion of such a calamity, Mr. Peter Magnus rang the bell for the chambermaid; and the striped bag, the red bag, the leathern hat-box, and the brown-paper parcel, having been conveyed to his bedroom, he retired in company with a japanned candlestick, to one side of the house, while Mr. Pickwick, and another japanned candlestick, were conducted through a multitude of tortuous windings, to another.

'This is your room, sir,' said the chambermaid.

'Very well,' replied Mr. Pickwick, looking round him. It was a tolerably large double-bedded room, with a fire; upon the whole, a more comfortable-looking apartment than Mr. Pickwick's short experience of the accommodations of the Great White Horse had led him to expect.

'Nobody sleeps in the other bed, of course,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Oh, no, Sir.'

'Very good. Tell my servant to bring me up some hot water at half-past eight in the morning, and that I shall not want him any more to-night.'

'Yes, Sir,' and bidding Mr. Pickwick good-night, the chambermaid retired, and left him alone.

Mr. Pickwick sat himself down in a chair before the fire, and fell into a train of rambling meditations. First he thought of his friends, and wondered when they would join him; then his mind reverted to Mrs. Martha Bardell; and from that lady it wandered, by a natural process, to the dingy counting-house of Dodson & Fogg. From Dodson & Fogg's it flew off at a tangent, to the very centre of the history of the queer client; and then it came back to the Great White Horse at Ipswich, with sufficient clearness to convince Mr. Pickwick that he was falling asleep. So he roused himself, and began to undress, when he recollected he had left his watch on the table downstairs.

Now this watch was a special favourite with Mr. Pickwick, having been carried about, beneath the shadow of his waistcoat, for a greater number of years than we feel called upon to state at present. The possibility of going to sleep, unless it were ticking gently beneath his pillow, or in the watch-pocket over his head, had never entered Mr. Pickwick's brain. So as it was pretty late now, and he was unwilling to ring his bell at that hour of the night, he slipped on his coat, of which he had just divested himself, and taking the japanned candlestick in his hand, walked quietly downstairs. The more stairs Mr. Pickwick went down, the more stairs there seemed to be to descend, and again and again, when Mr. Pickwick got into some narrow passage, and began to congratulate himself on having gained the ground-floor, did another flight of stairs appear before his astonished eyes. At last he reached a stone hall, which he remembered to have seen when he entered the house. Passage after passage did he explore; room after room did he peep into; at length, as he was on the point of giving up the search in despair, he opened the door of the identical room in which he had spent the evening, and beheld his missing property on the table.

Mr. Pickwick seized the watch in triumph, and proceeded to retrace his steps to his bedchamber. If his progress downward had been attended with difficulties and uncertainty, his journey back was infinitely more perplexing. Rows of doors, garnished with boots of every shape, make, and size, branched off in every possible direction. A dozen times did he softly turn the handle of some bedroom door which resembled his own, when a gruff cry from within of 'Who the devil's that?' or 'What do you want here?' caused him to steal away, on tiptoe, with a perfectly marvellous celerity. He was reduced to the verge of despair, when an open door attracted his attention. He peeped in. Right at last! There were the two beds, whose situation he perfectly remembered, and the fire still burning. His candle, not a long one when he first received it, had flickered away in the drafts of air through which he had passed and sank into the socket as he closed the door after him. 'No matter,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'I can undress myself just as well by the light of the fire.'

The bedsteads stood one on each side of the door; and on the inner side of each was a little path, terminating in a rush-bottomed chair, just wide enough to admit of a person's getting into or out of bed, on that side, if he or she thought proper. Having carefully drawn the curtains of his bed on the outside, Mr. Pickwick sat down on the rush-bottomed chair, and leisurely divested himself of his shoes and gaiters. He then took off and folded up his coat, waistcoat, and neckcloth, and slowly drawing on his tasselled nightcap, secured it firmly on his head, by tying beneath his chin the strings which he always had attached to that article of dress. It was at this moment that the absurdity of his recent bewilderment struck upon his mind. Throwing himself back in the rush-bottomed chair, Mr. Pickwick laughed to himself so heartily, that it would have been quite delightful to any man of well-constituted mind to have watched the smiles that expanded his amiable features as they shone forth from beneath the nightcap.

'It is the best idea,' said Mr. Pickwick to himself, smiling till he almost cracked the nightcap strings—'it is the best idea, my losing myself in this place, and wandering about these staircases, that I ever heard of. Droll, droll, very droll.' Here Mr. Pickwick smiled again, a broader smile than before, and was about to continue the process of undressing, in the best possible humour, when he was suddenly stopped by a most unexpected interruption: to wit, the entrance into the room of some person with a candle, who, after locking the door, advanced to the dressing-table, and set down the light upon it.

The smile that played on Mr. Pickwick's features was instantaneously lost in a look of the most unbounded and wonder-stricken surprise. The person, whoever it was, had come in so suddenly and with so little noise, that Mr. Pickwick had had no time to call out, or oppose their entrance. Who could it be? A robber? Some evil-minded person who had seen him come upstairs with a handsome watch in his hand, perhaps. What was he to do?

The only way in which Mr. Pickwick could catch a glimpse of his mysterious visitor with the least danger of being seen himself, was by creeping on to the bed, and peeping out from between the curtains on the opposite side. To this manoeuvre he accordingly resorted. Keeping the curtains carefully closed with his hand, so that nothing more of him could be seen than his face and nightcap, and putting on his spectacles, he mustered up courage and looked out.

Mr. Pickwick almost fainted with horror and dismay. Standing before the dressing-glass was a middle-aged lady, in yellow curl-papers, busily engaged in brushing what ladies call their 'back-hair.' However the unconscious middle-aged lady came into that room, it was quite clear that she contemplated remaining there for the night; for she had brought a rushlight and shade with her, which, with praiseworthy precaution against fire, she had stationed in a basin on the floor, where it was glimmering away, like a gigantic lighthouse in a particularly small piece of water.

'Bless my soul!' thought Mr. Pickwick, 'what a dreadful thing!'

'Hem!' said the lady; and in went Mr. Pickwick's head with automaton-like rapidity.

'I never met with anything so awful as this,' thought poor Mr. Pickwick, the cold perspiration starting in drops upon his nightcap. 'Never. This is fearful.'

It was quite impossible to resist the urgent desire to see what was going forward. So out went Mr. Pickwick's head again. The prospect was worse than before. The middle-aged lady had finished arranging her hair; had carefully enveloped it in a muslin nightcap with a small plaited border; and was gazing pensively on the fire.

'This matter is growing alarming,' reasoned Mr. Pickwick with himself. 'I can't allow things to go on in this way. By the self-possession of that lady, it is clear to me that I must have come into the wrong room. If I call out she'll alarm the house; but if I remain here the consequences will be still more frightful.' Mr. Pickwick, it is quite unnecessary to say, was one of the most modest and delicate-minded of mortals. The very idea of exhibiting his nightcap to a lady overpowered him, but he had tied those confounded strings in a knot, and, do what he would, he couldn't get it off. The disclosure must be made. There was only one other way of doing it. He shrunk behind the curtains, and called out very loudly—

'Ha-hum!'

That the lady started at this unexpected sound was evident, by her falling up against the rushlight shade; that she persuaded herself it must have been the effect of imagination was equally clear, for when Mr. Pickwick, under the impression that she had fainted away stone-dead with fright, ventured to peep out again, she was gazing pensively on the fire as before.

'Most extraordinary female this,' thought Mr. Pickwick, popping in again. 'Ha-hum!'

These last sounds, so like those in which, as legends inform us, the ferocious giant Blunderbore was in the habit of expressing his opinion that it was time to lay the cloth, were too distinctly audible to be again mistaken for the workings of fancy.

'Gracious Heaven!' said the middle-aged lady, 'what's that?'

'It's—it's—only a gentleman, ma'am,' said Mr. Pickwick, from behind the curtains.

'A gentleman!' said the lady, with a terrific scream.

'It's all over!' thought Mr. Pickwick.

'A strange man!' shrieked the lady. Another instant and the house would be alarmed. Her garments rustled as she rushed towards the door.

'Ma'am,' said Mr. Pickwick, thrusting out his head in the extremity of his desperation, 'ma'am!'

Now, although Mr. Pickwick was not actuated by any definite object in putting out his head, it was instantaneously productive of a good effect. The lady, as we have already stated, was near the door. She must pass it, to reach the staircase, and she would most undoubtedly have done so by this time, had not the sudden apparition of Mr. Pickwick's nightcap driven her back into the remotest corner of the apartment, where she stood staring wildly at Mr. Pickwick, while Mr. Pickwick in his turn stared wildly at her.

'Wretch,' said the lady, covering her eyes with her hands, 'what do you want here?'

'Nothing, ma'am; nothing whatever, ma'am,' said Mr. Pickwick earnestly.

'Nothing!' said the lady, looking up.

'Nothing, ma'am, upon my honour,' said Mr. Pickwick, nodding his head so energetically, that the tassel of his nightcap danced again. 'I am almost ready to sink, ma'am, beneath the confusion of addressing a lady in my nightcap (here the lady hastily snatched off hers), but I can't get it off, ma'am (here Mr. Pickwick gave it a tremendous tug, in proof of the statement). It is evident to me, ma'am, now, that I have mistaken this bedroom for my own. I had not been here five minutes, ma'am, when you suddenly entered it.'

'If this improbable story be really true, Sir,' said the lady, sobbing violently, 'you will leave it instantly.'

'I will, ma'am, with the greatest pleasure,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'Instantly, sir,' said the lady.

'Certainly, ma'am,' interposed Mr. Pickwick, very quickly. 'Certainly, ma'am. I—I—am very sorry, ma'am,' said Mr. Pickwick, making his appearance at the bottom of the bed, 'to have been the innocent occasion of this alarm and emotion; deeply sorry, ma'am.'

The lady pointed to the door. One excellent quality of Mr. Pickwick's character was beautifully displayed at this moment, under the most trying circumstances. Although he had hastily Put on his hat over his nightcap, after the manner of the old patrol; although he carried his shoes and gaiters in his hand, and his coat and waistcoat over his arm; nothing could subdue his native politeness.

'I am exceedingly sorry, ma'am,' said Mr. Pickwick, bowing very low.

'If you are, Sir, you will at once leave the room,' said the lady.

'Immediately, ma'am; this instant, ma'am,' said Mr. Pickwick, opening the door, and dropping both his shoes with a crash in so doing.

'I trust, ma'am,' resumed Mr. Pickwick, gathering up his shoes, and turning round to bow again—'I trust, ma'am, that my unblemished character, and the devoted respect I entertain for your sex, will plead as some slight excuse for this—' But before Mr. Pickwick could conclude the sentence, the lady had thrust him into the passage, and locked and bolted the door behind him.

Whatever grounds of self-congratulation Mr. Pickwick might have for having escaped so quietly from his late awkward situation, his present position was by no means enviable. He was alone, in an open passage, in a strange house in the middle of the night, half dressed; it was not to be supposed that he could find his way in perfect darkness to a room which he had been wholly unable to discover with a light, and if he made the slightest noise in his fruitless attempts to do so, he stood every chance of being shot at, and perhaps killed, by some wakeful traveller. He had no resource but to remain where he was until daylight appeared. So after groping his way a few paces down the passage, and, to his infinite alarm, stumbling over several pairs of boots in so doing, Mr. Pickwick crouched into a little recess in the wall, to wait for morning, as philosophically as he might.

He was not destined, however, to undergo this additional trial of patience; for he had not been long ensconced in his present concealment when, to his unspeakable horror, a man, bearing a light, appeared at the end of the passage. His horror was suddenly converted into joy, however, when he recognised the form of his faithful attendant. It was indeed Mr. Samuel Weller, who after sitting up thus late, in conversation with the boots, who was sitting up for the mail, was now about to retire to rest.

'Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, suddenly appearing before him, 'where's my bedroom?'

Mr. Weller stared at his master with the most emphatic surprise; and it was not until the question had been repeated three several times, that he turned round, and led the way to the long-sought apartment.

'Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, as he got into bed, 'I have made one of the most extraordinary mistakes to-night, that ever were heard of.'

'Wery likely, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller drily.

'But of this I am determined, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'that if I were to stop in this house for six months, I would never trust myself about it, alone, again.'

'That's the wery prudentest resolution as you could come to, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller. 'You rayther want somebody to look arter you, Sir, when your judgment goes out a wisitin'.'

'What do you mean by that, Sam?' said Mr. Pickwick. He raised himself in bed, and extended his hand, as if he were about to say something more; but suddenly checking himself, turned round, and bade his valet 'Good-night.'

'Good-night, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller. He paused when he got outside the door—shook his head—walked on—stopped—snuffed the candle—shook his head again—and finally proceeded slowly to his chamber, apparently buried in the profoundest meditation.

CHAPTER XXIII. IN WHICH Mr. SAMUEL WELLER BEGINS TO DEVOTE HIS ENERGIES

TO THE RETURN MATCH BETWEEN HIMSELF AND Mr. TROTTER

In a small room in the vicinity of the stableyard, betimes in the morning, which was ushered in by Mr. Pickwick's adventure with the middle—aged lady in the yellow curl-papers, sat Mr. Weller, senior, preparing himself for his journey to London. He was sitting in an excellent attitude for having his portrait taken; and here it is.

It is very possible that at some earlier period of his career, Mr. Weller's profile might have presented a bold and determined outline. His face, however, had expanded under the influence of good living, and a disposition remarkable for resignation; and its bold, fleshy curves had so far extended beyond the limits originally assigned them, that unless you took a full view of his countenance in front, it was difficult to distinguish more than the extreme tip of a very rubicund nose. His chin, from the same cause, had acquired the grave and imposing form which is generally described by prefixing the word 'double' to that expressive feature; and his complexion exhibited that peculiarly mottled combination of colours which is only to be seen in gentlemen of his profession, and in underdone roast beef. Round his neck he wore a crimson travelling-shawl, which merged into his chin by such imperceptible gradations, that it was difficult to distinguish the folds of the one, from the folds of the other. Over this, he mounted a long waistcoat of a broad pink-striped pattern, and over that again, a wide-skirted green coat, ornamented with large brass buttons, whereof the two which garnished the waist, were so far apart, that no man had ever beheld them both at the same time. His hair, which was short, sleek, and black, was just visible beneath the capacious brim of a low-crowned brown hat. His legs were encased in knee-cord breeches, and painted top-boots; and a copper watch-chain, terminating in one seal, and a key of the same material, dangled loosely from his capacious waistband.

We have said that Mr. Weller was engaged in preparing for his journey to London—he was taking sustenance, in fact. On the table before him, stood a pot of ale, a cold round of beef, and a very respectable-looking loaf, to each of which he distributed his favours in turn, with the most rigid impartiality. He had just cut a mighty slice from the latter, when the footsteps of somebody entering the room, caused him to raise his head; and he beheld his son.

'Mornin', Sammy!' said the father.

The son walked up to the pot of ale, and nodding significantly to his parent, took a long draught by way of reply.

'Wery good power o' suction, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller the elder, looking into the pot, when his first-born had set it down half empty. 'You'd ha' made an uncommon fine oyster, Sammy, if you'd been born in that station o' life.'

'Yes, I des-say, I should ha' managed to pick up a respectable livin',' replied Sam applying himself to the cold beef, with considerable vigour.

'I'm wery sorry, Sammy,' said the elder Mr. Weller, shaking up the ale, by describing small circles with the pot, preparatory to drinking. 'I'm wery sorry, Sammy, to hear from your lips, as you let yourself be gammoned by that 'ere mulberry man. I always thought, up to three days ago, that the names of Veller and gammon could never come into contract, Sammy, never.'

'Always exceptin' the case of a widder, of course,' said Sam.

'Widders, Sammy,' replied Mr. Weller, slightly changing colour. 'Widders are 'ceptions to ev'ry rule. I have heerd how many ordinary women one widder's equal to in pint o' comin' over you. I think it's five-and-twenty, but I don't rightly know vether it ain't more.'

'Well; that's pretty well,' said Sam.

'Besides,' continued Mr. Weller, not noticing the interruption, 'that's a wery different thing. You know what the counsel said, Sammy, as defended the gen'l'm'n as beat his wife with the poker, venever he got jolly. "And arter all, my Lord," says he, "it's a amiable weakness." So I says respectin' widders, Sammy, and so you'll say, ven you gets as old as me.'

'I ought to ha' know'd better, I know,' said Sam.

'Ought to ha' know'd better!' repeated Mr. Weller, striking the table with his fist. 'Ought to ha' know'd better! why, I know a young 'un as hasn't had half nor quarter your eddication—as hasn't slept about the markets, no, not six months—who'd ha' scorned to be let in, in such a vay; scorned it, Sammy.' In the excitement of feeling produced by this agonising reflection, Mr. Weller rang the bell, and ordered an additional pint of ale.

'Well, it's no use talking about it now,' said Sam. 'It's over, and can't be helped, and that's one consolation, as they always says in Turkey, ven they cuts the wrong man's head off. It's my innings now, gov'nor, and as soon as I catches hold o' this 'ere Trotter, I'll have a good 'un.'

'I hope you will, Sammy. I hope you will,' returned Mr. Weller. 'Here's your health, Sammy, and may you speedily vipe off the disgrace as you've inflicted on the family name.' In honour of this toast Mr. Weller imbibed at a draught, at least two-thirds of a newly-arrived pint, and handed it over to his son, to dispose of the remainder, which he instantaneously did.

'And now, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, consulting a large double-faced silver watch that hung at the end of the copper chain. 'Now it's time I was up at the office to get my vay-bill and see the coach loaded; for coaches, Sammy, is like guns—they requires to be loaded with wery great care, afore they go off.'

At this parental and professional joke, Mr. Weller, junior, smiled a filial smile. His revered parent continued in a solemn tone—

'I'm a-goin' to leave you, Samivel, my boy, and there's no telling ven I shall see you again. Your mother-in-law may ha' been too much for me, or a thousand things may have happened by the time you next hears any news o' the celebrated Mr. Veller o' the Bell Savage. The family name depends wery much upon you, Samivel, and I hope you'll do wot's right by it. Upon all little pints o' breedin', I know I may trust you as vell as if it was my own self. So I've only this here one little bit of adwice to give you. If ever you gets to up'ards o' fifty, and feels disposed to go a-marryin' anybody—no matter who—jist you shut yourself up in your own room, if you've got one, and pison yourself off hand. Hangin's wulgar, so don't you have nothin' to say to that. Pison yourself, Samivel, my boy, pison yourself, and you'll be glad on it arterwards.' With these affecting words, Mr. Weller looked steadfastly on his son, and turning slowly upon his heel, disappeared from his sight.

In the contemplative mood which these words had awakened, Mr. Samuel Weller walked forth from the Great White Horse when his father had left him; and bending his steps towards St. Clement's Church, endeavoured to dissipate his melancholy, by strolling among its ancient precincts. He had loitered about, for some time, when he found himself in a retired spot—a kind of courtyard of venerable appearance—which he discovered had no other outlet than the turning by which he had entered. He was about retracing his steps, when he was suddenly transfixed to the spot by a sudden appearance; and the mode and manner of this appearance, we now proceed to relate.

Mr. Samuel Weller had been staring up at the old brick houses now and then, in his deep abstraction, bestowing a wink upon some healthy-looking servant girl as she drew up a blind, or threw open a bedroom window, when the green gate of a garden at the bottom of the yard opened, and a man having emerged therefrom, closed the green gate very carefully after him, and walked briskly towards the very spot where Mr. Weller was standing.

Now, taking this, as an isolated fact, unaccompanied by any attendant circumstances, there was nothing very extraordinary in it; because in many parts of the world men do come out of gardens, close green gates after them, and even walk briskly away, without attracting any particular share of public observation. It is clear, therefore, that there must have been something in the man, or in his manner, or both, to attract Mr. Weller's particular notice. Whether there was, or not, we must leave the reader to determine, when we have faithfully recorded the behaviour of the individual in question.

When the man had shut the green gate after him, he walked, as we have said twice already, with a brisk pace up the courtyard; but he no sooner caught sight of Mr. Weller than he faltered, and stopped, as if uncertain, for the moment, what course to adopt. As the green gate was closed behind him, and there was no other outlet but the one in front, however, he was not long in perceiving that he must pass Mr. Samuel Weller to get away. He therefore resumed his brisk pace, and advanced, staring straight before him. The most extraordinary thing about the man was, that he was contorting his face into the most fearful and astonishing grimaces that ever were beheld. Nature's handiwork never was disguised with such extraordinary artificial carving, as the man had overlaid his countenance with in one moment.

'Well!' said Mr. Weller to himself, as the man approached. 'This is wery odd. I could ha' swore it was him.'

Up came the man, and his face became more frightfully distorted than ever, as he drew nearer.

'I could take my oath to that 'ere black hair and mulberry suit,' said Mr. Weller; 'only I never see such a face as that afore.'

As Mr. Weller said this, the man's features assumed an unearthly twinge, perfectly hideous. He was obliged to pass very near Sam, however, and the scrutinising glance of that gentleman enabled him to detect, under all these appalling twists of feature, something too like the small eyes of Mr. Job Trotter to be easily mistaken.

'Hollo, you Sir!' shouted Sam fiercely.

The stranger stopped.

'Hollo!' repeated Sam, still more gruffly.

The man with the horrible face looked, with the greatest surprise, up the court, and down the court, and in at the windows of the houses—everywhere but at Sam Weller—and took another step forward, when he was brought to again by another shout.

'Hollo, you sir!' said Sam, for the third time.

There was no pretending to mistake where the voice came from now, so the stranger, having no other resource, at last looked Sam Weller full in the face.

'It won't do, Job Trotter,' said Sam. 'Come! None o' that 'ere nonsense. You ain't so wery 'andsome that you can afford to throw avay many o' your good looks. Bring them 'ere eyes o' yourn back into their proper places, or I'll knock 'em out of your head. D'ye hear?'

As Mr. Weller appeared fully disposed to act up to the spirit of this address, Mr. Trotter gradually allowed his face to resume its natural expression; and then giving a start of joy, exclaimed, 'What do I see? Mr. Walker!'

'Ah,' replied Sam. 'You're wery glad to see me, ain't you?'

'Glad!' exclaimed Job Trotter; 'oh, Mr. Walker, if you had but known how I have looked forward to this meeting! It is too much, Mr. Walker; I cannot bear it, indeed I cannot.' And with these words, Mr. Trotter burst into a regular inundation of tears, and, flinging his arms around those of Mr. Weller, embraced him closely, in an ecstasy of joy.

'Get off!' cried Sam, indignant at this process, and vainly endeavouring to extricate himself from the grasp of his enthusiastic acquaintance. 'Get off, I tell you. What are you crying over me for, you portable engine?'

'Because I am so glad to see you,' replied Job Trotter, gradually releasing Mr. Weller, as the first symptoms of his pugnacity disappeared. 'Oh, Mr. Walker, this is too much.'

'Too much!' echoed Sam, 'I think it is too much—raythег! Now, what have you got to say to me, eh?'

Mr. Trotter made no reply; for the little pink pocket-handkerchief was in full force.

'What have you got to say to me, afore I knock your head off?' repeated Mr. Weller, in a threatening manner.

'Eh!' said Mr. Trotter, with a look of virtuous surprise.

'What have you got to say to me?'

'I, Mr. Walker!'

'Don't call me Valker; my name's Veller; you know that vell enough. What have you got to say to me?'

'Bless you, Mr. Walker—Weller, I mean—a great many things, if you will come away somewhere, where we can talk comfortably. If you knew how I have looked for you, Mr. Weller—'

'Wery hard, indeed, I s'pose?' said Sam drily.

'Very, very, Sir,' replied Mr. Trotter, without moving a muscle of his face. 'But shake hands, Mr. Weller.'

Sam eyed his companion for a few seconds, and then, as if actuated by a sudden impulse, complied with his request. 'How,' said Job Trotter, as they walked away, 'how is your dear, good master? Oh, he is a worthy gentleman, Mr. Weller! I hope he didn't catch cold, that dreadful night, Sir.'

There was a momentary look of deep slyness in Job Trotter's eye, as he said this, which ran a thrill through Mr. Weller's clenched fist, as he burned with a desire to make a demonstration on his ribs. Sam constrained himself, however, and replied that his master was extremely well.

'Oh, I am so glad,' replied Mr. Trotter; 'is he here?'

'Is yourn?' asked Sam, by way of reply.

'Oh, yes, he is here, and I grieve to say, Mr. Weller, he is going on worse than ever.'

'Ah, ah!' said Sam.

'Oh, shocking—terrible!'

'At a boarding-school?' said Sam.

'No, not at a boarding-school,' replied Job Trotter, with the same sly look which Sam had noticed before; 'not at a boarding-school.'

'At the house with the green gate?' said Sam, eyeing his companion closely.

'No, no—oh, not there,' replied Job, with a quickness very unusual to him, 'not there.'

'What was you a-doin' there?' asked Sam, with a sharp glance. 'Got inside the gate by accident, perhaps?'

'Why, Mr. Weller,' replied Job, 'I don't mind telling you my little secrets, because, you know, we took such a fancy for each other when we first met. You recollect how pleasant we were that morning?'

'Oh, yes,' said Sam, impatiently. 'I remember. Well?'

'Well,' replied Job, speaking with great precision, and in the low tone of a man who communicates an important secret; 'in that house with the green gate, Mr. Weller, they keep a good many servants.'

'So I should think, from the look on it,' interposed Sam.

'Yes,' continued Mr. Trotter, 'and one of them is a cook, who has saved up a little money, Mr. Weller, and is desirous, if she can establish herself in life, to open a little shop in the chandlery way, you see.' 'Yes.'

'Yes, Mr. Weller. Well, Sir, I met her at a chapel that I go to; a very neat little chapel in this town, Mr. Weller, where they sing the number four collection of hymns, which I generally carry about with me, in a little book, which you may perhaps have seen in my hand—and I got a little intimate with her, Mr. Weller, and from that, an acquaintance sprung up between us, and I may venture to say, Mr. Weller, that I am to be the chandler.'

'Ah, and a wery amiable chandler you'll make,' replied Sam, eyeing Job with a side look of intense dislike.

'The great advantage of this, Mr. Weller,' continued Job, his eyes filling with tears as he spoke, 'will be, that I shall be able to leave my present disgraceful service with that bad man, and to devote myself to a better and more virtuous life; more like the way in which I was brought up, Mr. Weller.'

'You must ha' been wery nicely brought up,' said Sam.

'Oh, very, Mr. Weller, very,' replied Job. At the recollection of the purity of his youthful days, Mr. Trotter pulled forth the pink handkerchief, and wept copiously.

'You must ha' been an uncommon nice boy, to go to school vith,' said Sam.

'I was, sir,' replied Job, heaving a deep sigh; 'I was the idol of the place.'

'Ah,' said Sam, 'I don't wonder at it. What a comfort you must ha' been to your blessed mother.'

At these words, Mr. Job Trotter inserted an end of the pink handkerchief into the corner of each eye, one after the other, and began to weep copiously.

'Wot's the matter with the man,' said Sam, indignantly. 'Chelsea water-works is nothin' to you. What are you melting vith now? The consciousness o' willainy?'

'I cannot keep my feelings down, Mr. Weller,' said Job, after a short pause. 'To think that my master should have suspected the conversation I had with yours, and so dragged me away in a post-chaise, and after persuading the sweet young lady to say she knew nothing of him, and bribing the school-mistress to do the same, deserted her for a better speculation! Oh! Mr. Weller, it makes me shudder.'

'Oh, that was the vay, was it?' said Mr. Weller.

'To be sure it was,' replied Job.

'Vell,' said Sam, as they had now arrived near the hotel, 'I vant to have a little bit o' talk with you, Job; so if you're not partickler engaged, I should like to see you at the Great White Horse to-night, somewheres about eight o'clock.'

'I shall be sure to come,' said Job.

'Yes, you'd better,' replied Sam, with a very meaning look, 'or else I shall perhaps be askin' arter you, at the other side of the green gate, and then I might cut you out, you know.'

'I shall be sure to be with you, sir,' said Mr. Trotter; and wringing Sam's hand with the utmost fervour, he walked away.

'Take care, Job Trotter, take care,' said Sam, looking after him, 'or I shall be one too many for you this time. I shall, indeed.' Having uttered this soliloquy, and looked after Job till he was to be seen no more, Mr. Weller made the best of his way to his master's bedroom.

'It's all in training, Sir,' said Sam.

'What's in training, Sam?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'I've found 'em out, Sir,' said Sam.

'Found out who?'

'That 'ere queer customer, and the melan-cholly chap with the black hair.'

'Impossible, Sam!' said Mr. Pickwick, with the greatest energy. 'Where are they, Sam: where are they?'

'Hush, hush!' replied Mr. Weller; and as he assisted Mr. Pickwick to dress, he detailed the plan of action on which he proposed to enter.

'But when is this to be done, Sam?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'All in good time, Sir,' replied Sam.

Whether it was done in good time, or not, will be seen hereafter.

CHAPTER XXIV. WHEREIN Mr. PETER MAGNUS GROWS JEALOUS, AND THE

MIDDLE-AGED LADY APPREHENSIVE, WHICH BRINGS THE PICKWICKIANS WITHIN THE GRASP OF THE LAW

When Mr. Pickwick descended to the room in which he and Mr. Peter Magnus had spent the preceding evening, he found that gentleman with the major part of the contents of the two bags, the leathern hat-box, and the brown-paper parcel, displaying to all possible advantage on his person, while he himself was pacing up and down the room in a state of the utmost excitement and agitation.

'Good-morning, Sir,' said Mr. Peter Magnus. 'What do you think of this, Sir?'

'Very effective indeed,' replied Mr. Pickwick, surveying the garments of Mr. Peter Magnus with a good-natured smile.

'Yes, I think it'll do,' said Mr. Magnus. 'Mr. Pickwick, Sir, I have sent up my card.'

'Have you?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'And the waiter brought back word, that she would see me at eleven—at eleven, Sir; it only wants a quarter now.'

'Very near the time,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Yes, it is rather near,' replied Mr. Magnus, 'rather too near to be pleasant—eh! Mr. Pickwick, sir?'

'Confidence is a great thing in these cases,' observed Mr. Pickwick.

'I believe it is, Sir,' said Mr. Peter Magnus. 'I am very confident, Sir. Really, Mr. Pickwick, I do not see why a man should feel any fear in such a case as this, sir. What is it, Sir? There's nothing to be ashamed of; it's a matter of mutual accommodation, nothing more. Husband on one side, wife on the other. That's my view of the matter, Mr. Pickwick.'

'It is a very philosophical one,' replied Mr. Pickwick. 'But breakfast is waiting, Mr. Magnus. Come.'

Down they sat to breakfast, but it was evident, notwithstanding the boasting of Mr. Peter Magnus, that he laboured under a very considerable degree of nervousness, of which loss of appetite, a propensity to upset the tea-things, a spectral attempt at drollery, and an irresistible inclination to look at the clock, every other second, were among the principal symptoms.

'He-he-he,'tittered Mr. Magnus, affecting cheerfulness, and gasping with agitation. 'It only wants two minutes, Mr. Pickwick. Am I pale, Sir?' 'Not very,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

There was a brief pause.

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Pickwick; but have you ever done this sort of thing in your time?' said Mr. Magnus.

'You mean proposing?' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Yes.'

'Never,' said Mr. Pickwick, with great energy, 'never.'

'You have no idea, then, how it's best to begin?' said Mr. Magnus.

'Why,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'I may have formed some ideas upon the subject, but, as I have never submitted them to the test of experience, I should be sorry if you were induced to regulate your proceedings by them.'

'I should feel very much obliged to you, for any advice, Sir,' said Mr. Magnus, taking another look at the clock, the hand of which was verging on the five minutes past.

'Well, sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, with the profound solemnity with which that great man could, when he pleased, render his remarks so deeply impressive. 'I should commence, sir, with a tribute to the lady's beauty and excellent qualities; from them, Sir, I should diverge to my own unworthiness.'

'Very good,' said Mr. Magnus.

'Unworthiness for HER only, mind, sir,' resumed Mr. Pickwick; 'for to show that I was not wholly unworthy, sir, I should take a brief review of my past life, and present condition. I should argue, by analogy, that to anybody else, I must be a very desirable object. I should then expatiate on the warmth of my love, and the depth of my devotion. Perhaps I might then be tempted to seize her hand.'

'Yes, I see,' said Mr. Magnus; 'that would be a very great point.'

'I should then, Sir,' continued Mr. Pickwick, growing warmer as the subject presented itself in more glowing colours before him—'I should then, Sir, come to the plain and simple question, "Will you have me?" I think I am justified in assuming that upon this, she would turn away her head.'

'You think that may be taken for granted?' said Mr. Magnus; 'because, if she did not do that at the right place, it would be embarrassing.'

'I think she would,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Upon this, sir, I should squeeze her hand, and I think—I think, Mr. Magnus—that after I had done that, supposing there was no refusal, I should gently draw away the handkerchief, which my slight knowledge of human nature leads me to suppose the lady would be applying to her eyes at the moment, and steal a respectful kiss. I think I should kiss her, Mr. Magnus; and at this particular point, I am decidedly of opinion that if the lady were going to take me at all, she would murmur into my ears a bashful acceptance.'

Mr. Magnus started; gazed on Mr. Pickwick's intelligent face, for a short time in silence; and then (the dial pointing to the ten minutes past) shook him warmly by the hand, and rushed desperately from the room.

Mr. Pickwick had taken a few strides to and fro; and the small hand of the clock following the latter part of his example, had arrived at the figure which indicates the half-hour, when the door suddenly opened. He turned round to meet Mr. Peter Magnus, and encountered, in his stead, the joyous face of Mr. Tupman, the serene countenance of Mr. Winkle, and the intellectual lineaments of Mr. Snodgrass. As Mr. Pickwick greeted them, Mr. Peter Magnus tripped into the room.

'My friends, the gentleman I was speaking of—Mr. Magnus,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Your servant, gentlemen,' said Mr. Magnus, evidently in a high state of excitement; 'Mr. Pickwick, allow me to speak to you one moment, sir.'

As he said this, Mr. Magnus harnessed his forefinger to Mr. Pickwick's buttonhole, and, drawing him to a window recess, said—

'Congratulate me, Mr. Pickwick; I followed your advice to the very letter.'

'And it was all correct, was it?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'It was, Sir. Could not possibly have been better,' replied Mr. Magnus. 'Mr. Pickwick, she is mine.'

'I congratulate you, with all my heart,' replied Mr. Pickwick, warmly shaking his new friend by the hand.

'You must see her. Sir,' said Mr. Magnus; 'this way, if you please. Excuse us for one instant, gentlemen.' Hurrying on in this way, Mr. Peter Magnus drew Mr. Pickwick from the room. He paused at the next door in the passage, and tapped gently thereat.

'Come in,' said a female voice. And in they went.

'Miss Witherfield,' said Mr. Magnus, 'allow me to introduce my very particular friend, Mr. Pickwick. Mr. Pickwick, I beg to make you known to Miss Witherfield.'

The lady was at the upper end of the room. As Mr. Pickwick bowed, he took his spectacles from his waistcoat pocket, and put them on; a process which he had no sooner gone through, than, uttering an exclamation of surprise, Mr. Pickwick retreated several paces, and the lady, with a half-suppressed scream, hid her face in her hands, and dropped into a chair; whereupon Mr. Peter Magnus was stricken motionless on the spot, and gazed from one to the other, with a countenance expressive of the extremities of horror and surprise. This certainly was, to all appearance, very unaccountable behaviour; but the fact is, that Mr. Pickwick no sooner put on his spectacles, than he at once recognised in the future Mrs. Magnus the lady into whose room he had so unwarrantably intruded on the previous night; and the spectacles had no sooner crossed Mr. Pickwick's nose, than the lady at once identified the countenance which she had seen surrounded by all the horrors of a nightcap. So the lady screamed, and Mr. Pickwick started.

'Mr. Pickwick!' exclaimed Mr. Magnus, lost in astonishment, 'what is the meaning of this, Sir? What is the meaning of it, Sir?' added Mr. Magnus, in a threatening, and a louder tone.

'Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, somewhat indignant at the very sudden manner in which Mr. Peter Magnus had conjugated himself into the imperative mood, 'I decline answering that question.'

'You decline it, Sir?' said Mr. Magnus.

'I do, Sir,' replied Mr. Pickwick; 'I object to say anything which may compromise that lady, or awaken unpleasant recollections in her breast, without her consent and permission.'

'Miss Witherfield,' said Mr. Peter Magnus, 'do you know this person?'

'Know him!' repeated the middle-aged lady, hesitating.

'Yes, know him, ma'am; I said know him,' replied Mr. Magnus, with ferocity.

'I have seen him,' replied the middle-aged lady.

'Where?' inquired Mr. Magnus, 'where?'

'That,' said the middle-aged lady, rising from her seat, and averting her head—'that I would not reveal for worlds.'

'I understand you, ma'am,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'and respect your delicacy; it shall never be revealed by ME depend upon it.'

'Upon my word, ma'am,' said Mr. Magnus, 'considering the situation in which I am placed with regard to yourself, you carry this matter off with tolerable coolness—tolerable coolness, ma'am.'

'Cruel Mr. Magnus!' said the middle-aged lady; here she wept very copiously indeed.

'Address your observations to me, sir,' interposed Mr. Pickwick; 'I alone am to blame, if anybody be.'

'Oh! you alone are to blame, are you, sir?' said Mr. Magnus; 'I—I—see through this, sir. You repent of your determination now, do you?'

'My determination!' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Your determination, Sir. Oh! don't stare at me, Sir,' said Mr. Magnus; 'I recollect your words last night, Sir. You came down here, sir, to expose the treachery and falsehood of an individual on whose truth and honour you had placed implicit reliance—eh?' Here Mr. Peter Magnus indulged in a prolonged sneer; and taking off his green spectacles—which he probably found superfluous in his fit of jealousy—rolled his little eyes about, in a manner frightful to behold.

'Eh?' said Mr. Magnus; and then he repeated the sneer with increased effect. 'But you shall answer it, Sir.'

'Answer what?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Never mind, sir,' replied Mr. Magnus, striding up and down the room. 'Never mind.'

There must be something very comprehensive in this phrase of 'Never mind,' for we do not recollect to have ever witnessed a quarrel in the street, at a theatre, public room, or elsewhere, in which it has not been the standard reply to all belligerent inquiries. 'Do you call yourself a gentleman, sir?'—'Never mind, sir.' 'Did I offer to say anything to the young woman, sir?'—'Never mind, sir.' 'Do you want your head knocked up against that wall, sir?'—'Never mind, sir.' It is observable, too, that there would appear to be some hidden taunt in this universal 'Never mind,' which rouses more indignation in the bosom of the individual addressed, than the most lavish abuse could possibly awaken.

We do not mean to assert that the application of this brevity to himself, struck exactly that indignation to Mr. Pickwick's soul, which it would infallibly have roused in a vulgar breast. We merely record the fact that Mr.

Pickwick opened the room door, and abruptly called out, 'Tupman, come here!'

Mr. Tupman immediately presented himself, with a look of very considerable surprise.

'Tupman,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'a secret of some delicacy, in which that lady is concerned, is the cause of a difference which has just arisen between this gentleman and myself. When I assure him, in your presence, that it has no relation to himself, and is not in any way connected with his affairs, I need hardly beg you to take notice that if he continue to dispute it, he expresses a doubt of my veracity, which I shall consider extremely insulting.' As Mr. Pickwick said this, he looked encyclopedias at Mr. Peter Magnus.

Mr. Pickwick's upright and honourable bearing, coupled with that force and energy of speech which so eminently distinguished him, would have carried conviction to any reasonable mind; but, unfortunately, at that particular moment, the mind of Mr. Peter Magnus was in anything but reasonable order. Consequently, instead of receiving Mr. Pickwick's explanation as he ought to have done, he forthwith proceeded to work himself into a red-hot, scorching, consuming passion, and to talk about what was due to his own feelings, and all that sort of thing; adding force to his declamation by striding to and fro, and pulling his hair—amusements which he would vary occasionally, by shaking his fist in Mr. Pickwick's philanthropic countenance.

Mr. Pickwick, in his turn, conscious of his own innocence and rectitude, and irritated by having unfortunately involved the middle-aged lady in such an unpleasant affair, was not so quietly disposed as was his wont. The consequence was, that words ran high, and voices higher; and at length Mr. Magnus told Mr. Pickwick he should hear from him; to which Mr. Pickwick replied, with laudable politeness, that the sooner he heard from him the better; whereupon the middle-aged lady rushed in terror from the room, out of which Mr. Tupman dragged Mr. Pickwick, leaving Mr. Peter Magnus to himself and meditation.

If the middle-aged lady had mingled much with the busy world, or had profited at all by the manners and customs of those who make the laws and set the fashions, she would have known that this sort of ferocity is the most harmless thing in nature; but as she had lived for the most part in the country, and never read the parliamentary debates, she was little versed in these particular refinements of civilised life. Accordingly, when she had gained her bedchamber, bolted herself in, and began to meditate on the scene she had just witnessed, the most terrific pictures of slaughter and destruction presented themselves to her imagination; among which, a full-length portrait of Mr. Peter Magnus borne home by four men, with the embellishment of a whole barrelful of bullets in his left side, was among the very least. The more the middle-aged lady meditated, the more terrified she became; and at length she determined to repair to the house of the principal magistrate of the town, and request him to secure the persons of Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Tupman without delay.

To this decision the middle-aged lady was impelled by a variety of considerations, the chief of which was the incontestable proof it would afford of her devotion to Mr. Peter Magnus, and her anxiety for his safety. She was too well acquainted with his jealous temperament to venture the slightest allusion to the real cause of her agitation on beholding Mr. Pickwick; and she trusted to her own influence and power of persuasion with the little man, to quell his boisterous jealousy, supposing that Mr. Pickwick were removed, and no fresh quarrel could arise. Filled with these reflections, the middle-aged lady arrayed herself in her bonnet and shawl, and repaired to the mayor's dwelling straightway.

Now George Nupkins, Esquire, the principal magistrate aforesaid, was as grand a personage as the fastest walker would find out, between sunrise and sunset, on the twenty-first of June, which being, according to the almanacs, the longest day in the whole year, would naturally afford him the longest period for his search. On this particular morning, Mr. Nupkins was in a state of the utmost excitement and irritation, for there had been a rebellion in the town; all the day-scholars at the largest day-school had conspired to break the windows of an obnoxious apple-seller, and had hooted the beadle and pelted the constabulary—an elderly gentleman in top-boots, who had been called out to repress the tumult, and who had been a peace-officer, man and boy, for half a century at least. And Mr. Nupkins was sitting in his easy-chair, frowning with majesty, and boiling with rage, when a lady was announced on pressing, private, and particular business. Mr. Nupkins looked calmly terrible, and commanded that the lady should be shown in; which command, like all the mandates of emperors, and magistrates, and other great potentates of the earth, was forthwith obeyed; and Miss Witherfield, interestingly agitated, was ushered in accordingly.

'Muzzle!' said the magistrate.

Muzzle was an undersized footman, with a long body and short legs.

'Muzzle!' 'Yes, your Worship.'

'Place a chair, and leave the room.'

'Yes, your Worship.'

'Now, ma'am, will you state your business?' said the magistrate.

'It is of a very painful kind, Sir,' said Miss Witherfield.

'Very likely, ma'am,' said the magistrate. 'Compose your feelings, ma'am.' Here Mr. Nupkins looked benignant. 'And then tell me what legal business brings you here, ma'am.' Here the magistrate triumphed over the man; and he looked stern again.

'It is very distressing to me, Sir, to give this information,' said Miss Witherfield, 'but I fear a duel is going to be fought here.'

'Here, ma'am?' said the magistrate. 'Where, ma'am?'

'In Ipswich.' 'In Ipswich, ma'am! A duel in Ipswich!' said the magistrate, perfectly aghast at the notion. 'Impossible, ma'am; nothing of the kind can be contemplated in this town, I am persuaded. Bless my soul, ma'am, are you aware of the activity of our local magistracy? Do you happen to have heard, ma'am, that I rushed into a prize-ring on the fourth of May last, attended by only sixty special constables; and, at the hazard of falling a sacrifice to the angry passions of an infuriated multitude, prohibited a pugilistic contest between the Middlesex Dumpling and the Suffolk Bantam? A duel in Ipswich, ma'am? I don't think—I do not think,' said the magistrate, reasoning with himself, 'that any two men can have had the hardihood to plan such a breach of the peace, in this town.'

'My information is, unfortunately, but too correct,' said the middle-aged lady; 'I was present at the quarrel.'

'It's a most extraordinary thing,' said the astounded magistrate. 'Muzzle!'

'Yes, your Worship.'

'Send Mr. Jinks here, directly! Instantly.'

'Yes, your Worship.'

Muzzle retired; and a pale, sharp-nosed, half-fed, shabbily-clad clerk, of middle age, entered the room.

'Mr. Jinks,' said the magistrate. 'Mr. Jinks.'

'Sir,' said Mr. Jinks. 'This lady, Mr. Jinks, has come here, to give information of an intended duel in this town.'

Mr. Jinks, not knowing exactly what to do, smiled a dependent's smile.

'What are you laughing at, Mr. Jinks?' said the magistrate.

Mr. Jinks looked serious instantly.

'Mr. Jinks,' said the magistrate, 'you're a fool.'

Mr. Jinks looked humbly at the great man, and bit the top of his pen.

'You may see something very comical in this information, Sir—but I can tell you this, Mr. Jinks, that you have very little to laugh at,' said the magistrate.

The hungry-looking Jinks sighed, as if he were quite aware of the fact of his having very little indeed to be merry about; and, being ordered to take the lady's information, shambled to a seat, and proceeded to write it down.

'This man, Pickwick, is the principal, I understand?' said the magistrate, when the statement was finished.

'He is,' said the middle-aged lady.

'And the other rioter—what's his name, Mr. Jinks?'

'Tupman, Sir.' 'Tupman is the second?'

'Yes.'

'The other principal, you say, has absconded, ma'am?'

'Yes,' replied Miss Witherfield, with a short cough.

'Very well,' said the magistrate. 'These are two cut-throats from London, who have come down here to destroy his Majesty's population, thinking that at this distance from the capital, the arm of the law is weak and paralysed. They shall be made an example of. Draw up the warrants, Mr. Jinks. Muzzle!'

'Yes, your Worship.'

'Is Grummer downstairs?'

'Yes, your Worship.'

'Send him up.' The obsequious Muzzle retired, and presently returned, introducing the elderly gentleman in the top-boots, who was chiefly remarkable for a bottle-nose, a hoarse voice, a snuff-coloured surtout, and a wandering eye.

'Grummer,' said the magistrate.

'Your Wash-up.'

'Is the town quiet now?'

'Pretty well, your Wash-up,' replied Grummer. 'Pop'lar feeling has in a measure subsided, consekens o' the boys having dispersed to cricket.'

'Nothing but vigorous measures will do in these times, Grummer,' said the magistrate, in a determined manner. 'If the authority of the king's officers is set at naught, we must have the riot act read. If the civil power cannot protect these windows, Grummer, the military must protect the civil power, and the windows too. I believe that is a maxim of the constitution, Mr. Jinks?' 'Certainly, sir,' said Jinks.

'Very good,' said the magistrate, signing the warrants. 'Grummer, you will bring these persons before me, this afternoon. You will find them at the Great White Horse. You recollect the case of the Middlesex Dumpling and the Suffolk Bantam, Grummer?'

Mr. Grummer intimated, by a retrospective shake of the head, that he should never forget it—as indeed it was not likely he would, so long as it continued to be cited daily.

'This is even more unconstitutional,' said the magistrate; 'this is even a greater breach of the peace, and a grosser infringement of his Majesty's prerogative. I believe duelling is one of his Majesty's most undoubted prerogatives, Mr. Jinks?'

'Expressly stipulated in Magna Charta, sir,' said Mr. Jinks.

'One of the brightest jewels in the British crown, wrung from his Majesty by the barons, I believe, Mr. Jinks?' said the magistrate.

'Just so, Sir,' replied Mr. Jinks.

'Very well,' said the magistrate, drawing himself up proudly, 'it shall not be violated in this portion of his dominions. Grummer, procure assistance, and execute these warrants with as little delay as possible. Muzzle!'

'Yes, your Worship.'

'Show the lady out.'

Miss Witherfield retired, deeply impressed with the magistrate's learning and research; Mr. Nupkins retired to lunch; Mr. Jinks retired within himself—that being the only retirement he had, except the sofa-bedstead in the small parlour which was occupied by his landlady's family in the daytime—and Mr. Grummer retired, to wipe out, by his mode of discharging his present commission, the insult which had been fastened upon himself, and the other representative of his Majesty—the beadle—in the course of the morning.

While these resolute and determined preparations for the conservation of the king's peace were pending, Mr. Pickwick and his friends, wholly unconscious of the mighty events in progress, had sat quietly down to dinner; and very talkative and companionable they all were. Mr. Pickwick was in the very act of relating his adventure of the preceding night, to the great amusement of his followers, Mr. Tupman especially, when the door opened, and a somewhat forbidding countenance peeped into the room. The eyes in the forbidding countenance looked very earnestly at Mr. Pickwick, for several seconds, and were to all appearance satisfied with their investigation; for the body to which the forbidding countenance belonged, slowly brought itself into the apartment, and presented the form of an elderly individual in top-boots—not to keep the reader any longer in suspense, in short, the eyes were the wandering eyes of Mr. Grummer, and the body was the body of the same gentleman.

Mr. Grummer's mode of proceeding was professional, but peculiar. His first act was to bolt the door on the inside; his second, to polish his head and countenance very carefully with a cotton handkerchief; his third, to place his hat, with the cotton handkerchief in it, on the nearest chair; and his fourth, to produce from the breast-pocket of his coat a short truncheon, surmounted by a brazen crown, with which he beckoned to Mr. Pickwick with a grave and ghost-like air.

Mr. Snodgrass was the first to break the astonished silence. He looked steadily at Mr. Grummer for a brief space, and then said emphatically, 'This is a private room, Sir. A private room.'

Mr. Grummer shook his head, and replied, 'No room's private to his Majesty when the street door's once passed. That's law. Some people maintains that an Englishman's house is his castle. That's gammon.'

The Pickwickians gazed on each other with wondering eyes.

'Which is Mr. Tupman?' inquired Mr. Grummer. He had an intuitive perception of Mr. Pickwick; he knew him at once.

'My name's Tupman,' said that gentleman.

'My name's Law,' said Mr. Grummer.

'What?' said Mr. Tupman.

'Law,' replied Mr. Grummer—'Law, civil power, and exekative; them's my titles; here's my authority. Blank Tupman, blank Pickwick—against the peace of our sufferin' lord the king—stattit in the case made and purwided—and all regular. I apprehend you Pickwick! Tupman—the aforesaid.'

'What do you mean by this insolence?' said Mr. Tupman, starting up; 'leave the room!'

'Hollo,' said Mr. Grummer, retreating very expeditiously to the door, and opening it an inch or two, 'Dubbley.'

'Well,' said a deep voice from the passage.

'Come for'ard, Dubbley.'

At the word of command, a dirty-faced man, something over six feet high, and stout in proportion, squeezed himself through the half-open door (making his face very red in the process), and entered the room.

'Is the other specials outside, Dubbley?' inquired Mr. Grummer.

Mr. Dubbley, who was a man of few words, nodded assent.

'Order in the diwision under your charge, Dubbley,' said Mr. Grummer.

Mr. Dubbley did as he was desired; and half a dozen men, each with a short truncheon and a brass crown, flocked into the room. Mr. Grummer pocketed his staff, and looked at Mr. Dubbley; Mr. Dubbley pocketed his staff and looked at the division; the division pocketed their staves and looked at Messrs. Tupman and Pickwick.

Mr. Pickwick and his followers rose as one man.

'What is the meaning of this atrocious intrusion upon my privacy?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Who dares apprehend me?' said Mr. Tupman.

'What do you want here, scoundrels?' said Mr. Snodgrass.

Mr. Winkle said nothing, but he fixed his eyes on Grummer, and bestowed a look upon him, which, if he had had any feeling, must have pierced his brain. As it was, however, it had no visible effect on him whatever.

When the executive perceived that Mr. Pickwick and his friends were disposed to resist the authority of the law, they very significantly turned up their coat sleeves, as if knocking them down in the first instance, and taking them up afterwards, were a mere professional act which had only to be thought of to be done, as a matter of course. This demonstration was not lost upon Mr. Pickwick. He conferred a few moments with Mr. Tupman apart, and then signified his readiness to proceed to the mayor's residence, merely begging the parties then and there assembled, to take notice, that it was his firm intention to resent this monstrous invasion of his privileges as an Englishman, the instant he was at liberty; whereat the parties then and there assembled laughed very heartily, with the single exception of Mr. Grummer, who seemed to consider that any slight cast upon the divine right of magistrates was a species of blasphemy not to be tolerated.

But when Mr. Pickwick had signified his readiness to bow to the laws of his country, and just when the waiters, and hostlers, and chambermaids, and post-boys, who had anticipated a delightful commotion from his threatened obstinacy, began to turn away, disappointed and disgusted, a difficulty arose which had not been foreseen. With every sentiment of veneration for the constituted authorities, Mr. Pickwick resolutely protested against making his appearance in the public streets, surrounded and guarded by the officers of justice, like a common criminal. Mr. Grummer, in the then disturbed state of public feeling (for it was half-holiday, and the boys had not yet gone home), as resolutely protested against walking on the opposite side of the way, and taking Mr. Pickwick's parole that he would go straight to the magistrate's; and both Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Tupman as strenuously objected to the expense of a post-coach, which was the only respectable conveyance that could be obtained. The dispute ran high, and the dilemma lasted long; and just as the executive were on the point of overcoming Mr. Pickwick's objection to walking to the magistrate's, by the trite expedient of carrying him thither, it was recollected that there stood in the inn yard, an old sedan-chair, which, having been originally built for a gouty gentleman with funded property, would hold Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Tupman, at least as conveniently as a modern post-chaise. The chair was hired, and brought into the hall; Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Tupman squeezed themselves inside, and pulled down the blinds; a couple of chairmen were speedily found; and the procession started in grand order. The specials surrounded the body of the vehicle; Mr. Grummer and Mr. Dubbley marched triumphantly in front; Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Winkle walked arm-in-arm behind; and the unsoaped of Ipswich brought up the rear.

The shopkeepers of the town, although they had a very indistinct notion of the nature of the offence, could not but be much edified and gratified by this spectacle. Here was the strong arm of the law, coming down with twenty gold-beater force, upon two offenders from the metropolis itself; the mighty engine was directed by their own magistrate, and worked by their own officers; and both the criminals, by their united efforts, were securely shut up, in the narrow compass of one sedan-chair. Many were the expressions of approval and admiration which greeted Mr. Grummer, as he headed the cavalcade, staff in hand; loud and long were the shouts raised by the unsoaped; and amidst these united testimonials of public approbation, the procession moved slowly and majestically along.

Mr. Weller, habited in his morning jacket, with the black calico sleeves, was returning in a rather desponding state from an unsuccessful survey of the mysterious house with the green gate, when, raising his eyes, he beheld a crowd pouring down the street, surrounding an object which had very much the appearance of a sedan-chair. Willing to divert his thoughts from the failure of his enterprise, he stepped aside to see the crowd pass; and finding that they were cheering away, very much to their own satisfaction, forthwith began (by way of raising his spirits) to cheer too, with all his might and main.

Mr. Grummer passed, and Mr. Dubbley passed, and the sedan passed, and the bodyguard of specials passed, and Sam was still responding to the enthusiastic cheers of the mob, and waving his hat about as if he were in the very last extreme of the wildest joy (though, of course, he had not the faintest idea of the matter in hand), when he was suddenly stopped by the unexpected appearance of Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass.

'What's the row, gen'l'm'n?'cried Sam. 'Who have they got in this here watch-box in mournin'?'

Both gentlemen replied together, but their words were lost in the tumult.

'Who is it?' cried Sam again.

once more was a joint reply returned; and, though the words were inaudible, Sam saw by the motion of the two pairs of lips that they had uttered the magic word 'Pickwick.'

This was enough. In another minute Mr. Weller had made his way through the crowd, stopped the chairmen, and confronted the portly Grummer.

'Hollo, old gen'l'm'n!' said Sam. 'Who have you got in this here conweyance?'

'Stand back,' said Mr. Grummer, whose dignity, like the dignity of a great many other men, had been wondrously augmented by a little popularity.

'Knock him down, if he don't,' said Mr. Dubbley.

'I'm wery much obliged to you, old gen'l'm'n,' replied Sam, 'for consulting my conwenience, and I'm still more obliged to the other gen'l'm'n, who looks as if he'd just escaped from a giant's carrywan, for his wery 'andsome suggestion; but I should prefer your givin' me a answer to my question, if it's all the same to you.—How are you, Sir?' This last observation was addressed with a patronising air to Mr. Pickwick, who was peeping through the front window.

Mr. Grummer, perfectly speechless with indignation, dragged the truncheon with the brass crown from its particular pocket, and flourished it before Sam's eyes.

'Ah,' said Sam, 'it's wery pretty, 'specially the crown, which is uncommon like the real one.'

'Stand back!' said the outraged Mr. Grummer. By way of adding force to the command, he thrust the brass emblem of royalty into Sam's neckcloth with one hand, and seized Sam's collar with the other—a compliment which Mr. Weller returned by knocking him down out of hand, having previously with the utmost consideration, knocked down a chairman for him to lie upon.

Whether Mr. Winkle was seized with a temporary attack of that species of insanity which originates in a sense of injury, or animated by this display of Mr. Weller's valour, is uncertain; but certain it is, that he no sooner saw Mr. Grummer fall than he made a terrific onslaught on a small boy who stood next him; whereupon Mr. Snodgrass, in a truly Christian spirit, and in order that he might take no one unawares, announced in a very loud tone that he was going to begin, and proceeded to take off his coat with the utmost deliberation. He was immediately surrounded and secured; and it is but common justice both to him and Mr. Winkle to say, that they did not make the slightest attempt to rescue either themselves or Mr. Weller; who, after a most vigorous resistance, was overpowered by numbers and taken prisoner. The procession then reformed; the chairmen resumed their stations; and the march was re-commenced.

Mr. Pickwick's indignation during the whole of this proceeding was beyond all bounds. He could just see Sam upsetting the specials, and flying about in every direction; and that was all he could see, for the sedan doors wouldn't open, and the blinds wouldn't pull up. At length, with the assistance of Mr. Tupman, he managed to push open the roof; and mounting on the seat, and steadying himself as well as he could, by placing his hand on that gentleman's shoulder, Mr. Pickwick proceeded to address the multitude; to dwell upon the unjustifiable manner in which he had been treated; and to call upon them to take notice that his servant had been first assaulted. In this order they reached the magistrate's house; the chairmen trotting, the prisoners following, Mr. Pickwick oratorising, and the crowd shouting.

CHAPTER XXV. SHOWING, AMONG A VARIETY OF PLEASANT MATTERS, HOW MAJESTIC

AND IMPARTIAL Mr. NUPKINS WAS; AND HOW Mr. WELLER RETURNED Mr. JOB TROTTER'S SHUTTLECOCK AS HEAVILY AS IT CAME—WITH ANOTHER MATTER, WHICH WILL BE FOUND IN ITS PLACE

Violent was Mr. Weller's indignation as he was borne along; numerous were the allusions to the personal appearance and demeanour of Mr. Grummer and his companion; and valorous were the defiances to any six of the gentlemen present, in which he vented his dissatisfaction. Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Winkle listened with gloomy respect to the torrent of eloquence which their leader poured forth from the sedan-chair, and the rapid course of which not all Mr. Tupman's earnest entreaties to have the lid of the vehicle closed, were able to check for an instant. But Mr. Weller's anger quickly gave way to curiosity when the procession turned down the identical courtyard in which he had met with the runaway Job Trotter; and curiosity was exchanged for a feeling of the most gleeful astonishment, when the all-important Mr. Grummer, commanding the sedan-bearers to halt, advanced with dignified and portentous steps to the very green gate from which Job Trotter had emerged, and gave a mighty pull at the bell-handle which hung at the side thereof. The ring was answered by a very smart and pretty-faced servant-girl, who, after holding up her hands in astonishment at the rebellious appearance of the prisoners, and the impassioned language of Mr. Pickwick, summoned Mr. Muzzle. Mr. Muzzle opened one half of the carriage gate, to admit the sedan, the captured ones, and the specials; and immediately slammed it in the faces of the mob, who, indignant at being excluded, and anxious to see what followed, relieved their feelings by kicking at the gate and ringing the bell, for an hour or two afterwards. In this amusement they all took part by turns, except three or four fortunate individuals, who, having discovered a grating in the gate, which commanded a view of nothing, stared through it with the indefatigable perseverance with which people will flatten their noses against the front windows of a chemist's shop, when a drunken man, who has been run over by a dog-cart in the street, is undergoing a surgical inspection in the back-parlour.

At the foot of a flight of steps, leading to the house door, which was guarded on either side by an American aloe in a green tub, the sedan-chair stopped. Mr. Pickwick and his friends were conducted into the hall, whence, having been previously announced by Muzzle, and ordered in by Mr. Nupkins, they were ushered into the worshipful presence of that public-spirited officer.

The scene was an impressive one, well calculated to strike terror to the hearts of culprits, and to impress them with an adequate idea of the stern majesty of the law. In front of a big book-case, in a big chair, behind a big table, and before a big volume, sat Mr. Nupkins, looking a full size larger than any one of them, big as they were. The table was adorned with piles of papers; and above the farther end of it, appeared the head and shoulders of Mr. Jinks, who was busily engaged in looking as busy as possible. The party having all entered, Muzzle carefully closed the door, and placed himself behind his master's chair to await his orders. Mr. Nupkins threw himself back with thrilling solemnity, and scrutinised the faces of his unwilling visitors.

'Now, Grummer, who is that person?' said Mr. Nupkins, pointing to Mr. Pickwick, who, as the spokesman of his friends, stood hat in hand, bowing with the utmost politeness and respect.

'This here's Pickvick, your Wash-up,' said Grummer.

'Come, none o' that 'ere, old Strike-a-light,' interposed Mr. Weller, elbowing himself into the front rank. 'Beg your pardon, sir, but this here officer o' yourn in the gambooge tops, 'ull never earn a decent livin' as a master o' the ceremonies any vere. This here, sir' continued Mr. Weller, thrusting Grummer aside, and addressing the magistrate with pleasant familiarity, 'this here is S. Pickvick, Esquire; this here's Mr. Tupman; that 'ere's Mr. Snodgrass; and farder on, next him on the t'other side, Mr. Winkle—all wery nice gen'l'm'n, Sir, as you'll be wery happy to have the acquaintance on; so the sooner you commits these here officers o' yourn to the tread—mill for a month or two, the sooner we shall begin to be on a pleasant understanding. Business first, pleasure arterwards, as King Richard the Third said when he stabbed the t'other king in the Tower, afore he smothered the babbies.'

At the conclusion of this address, Mr. Weller brushed his hat with his right elbow, and nodded benignly to Jinks, who had heard him throughout with unspeakable awe.

'Who is this man, Grummer?' said the magistrate.

'Wery desp'rate ch'racter, your Wash-up,' replied Grummer. 'He attempted to rescue the prisoners, and assaulted the officers; so we took him into custody, and brought him here.'

'You did quite right,' replied the magistrate. 'He is evidently a desperate ruffian.'

'He is my servant, Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick angrily.

'Oh! he is your servant, is he?' said Mr. Nupkins. 'A conspiracy to defeat the ends of justice, and murder its officers. Pickwick's servant. Put that down, Mr. Jinks.'

Mr. Jinks did so.

'What's your name, fellow?' thundered Mr. Nupkins.

'Veller,' replied Sam.

'A very good name for the Newgate Calendar,' said Mr. Nupkins.

This was a joke; so Jinks, Grummer, Dubbley, all the specials, and Muzzle, went into fits of laughter of five minutes' duration.

'Put down his name, Mr. Jinks,' said the magistrate.

'Two L's, old feller,' said Sam.

Here an unfortunate special laughed again, whereupon the magistrate threatened to commit him instantly. It is a dangerous thing to laugh at the wrong man, in these cases.

'Where do you live?' said the magistrate.

'Vere ever I can,' replied Sam.

'Put down that, Mr. Jinks,' said the magistrate, who was fast rising into a rage.

'Score it under,' said Sam.

'He is a vagabond, Mr. Jinks,' said the magistrate. 'He is a vagabond on his own statement,—is he not, Mr. Jinks?'

'Certainly, Sir.'

'Then I'll commit him—I'll commit him as such,' said Mr. Nupkins.

'This is a wery impartial country for justice, 'said Sam.'There ain't a magistrate goin' as don't commit himself twice as he commits other people.'

At this sally another special laughed, and then tried to look so supernaturally solemn, that the magistrate detected him immediately.

'Grummer,' said Mr. Nupkins, reddening with passion, 'how dare you select such an inefficient and disreputable person for a special constable, as that man? How dare you do it, Sir?'

'I am very sorry, your Wash-up,' stammered Grummer.

'Very sorry!' said the furious magistrate. 'You shall repent of this neglect of duty, Mr. Grummer; you shall be made an example of. Take that fellow's staff away. He's drunk. You're drunk, fellow.'

'I am not drunk, your Worship,' said the man.

'You ARE drunk,' returned the magistrate. 'How dare you say you are not drunk, Sir, when I say you are? Doesn't he smell of spirits, Grummer?'

'Horrid, your Wash-up,' replied Grummer, who had a vague impression that there was a smell of rum somewhere.

'I knew he did,' said Mr. Nupkins. 'I saw he was drunk when he first came into the room, by his excited eye. Did you observe his excited eye, Mr. Jinks?'

'Certainly, Sir.'

'I haven't touched a drop of spirits this morning,' said the man, who was as sober a fellow as need be.

'How dare you tell me a falsehood?' said Mr. Nupkins. 'Isn't he drunk at this moment, Mr. Jinks?'

'Certainly, Sir,' replied Jinks.

'Mr. Jinks,' said the magistrate, 'I shall commit that man for contempt. Make out his committal, Mr. Jinks.'

And committed the special would have been, only Jinks, who was the magistrate's adviser (having had a legal education of three years in a country attorney's office), whispered the magistrate that he thought it wouldn't do; so the magistrate made a speech, and said, that in consideration of the special's family, he would merely reprimand and discharge him. Accordingly, the special was abused, vehemently, for a quarter of an hour, and sent about his business; and Grummer, Dubbley, Muzzle, and all the other specials, murmured their admiration of the magnanimity of Mr. Nupkins.

'Now, Mr. Jinks,' said the magistrate, 'swear Grummer.'

Grummer was sworn directly; but as Grummer wandered, and Mr. Nupkins's dinner was nearly ready, Mr. Nupkins cut the matter short, by putting leading questions to Grummer, which Grummer answered as nearly in the affirmative as he could. So the examination went off, all very smooth and comfortable, and two assaults were proved against Mr. Weller, and a threat against Mr. Winkle, and a push against Mr. Snodgrass. When all this was done to the magistrate's satisfaction, the magistrate and Mr. Jinks consulted in whispers.

The consultation having lasted about ten minutes, Mr. Jinks retired to his end of the table; and the magistrate, with a preparatory cough, drew himself up in his chair, and was proceeding to commence his address, when Mr. Pickwick interposed.

'I beg your pardon, sir, for interrupting you,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'but before you proceed to express, and act upon, any opinion you may have formed on the statements which have been made here, I must claim my right to be heard so far as I am personally concerned.'

'Hold your tongue, Sir,' said the magistrate peremptorily.

'I must submit to you, Sir—' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Hold your tongue, sir,' interposed the magistrate, 'or I shall order an officer to remove you.'

'You may order your officers to do whatever you please, Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'and I have no doubt, from the specimen I have had of the subordination preserved amongst them, that whatever you order, they will execute, Sir; but I shall take the liberty, Sir, of claiming my right to be heard, until I am removed by force.'

'Pickvick and principle!' exclaimed Mr. Weller, in a very audible voice.

'Sam, be quiet,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Dumb as a drum vith a hole in it, Sir,' replied Sam.

Mr. Nupkins looked at Mr. Pickwick with a gaze of intense astonishment, at his displaying such unwonted temerity; and was apparently about to return a very angry reply, when Mr. Jinks pulled him by the sleeve, and whispered something in his ear. To this, the magistrate returned a half-audible answer, and then the whispering was renewed. Jinks was evidently remonstrating. At length the magistrate, gulping down, with a very bad grace, his disinclination to hear anything more, turned to Mr. Pickwick, and said sharply, 'What do you want to say?'

'First,' said Mr. Pickwick, sending a look through his spectacles, under which even Nupkins quailed, 'first, I wish to know what I and my friend have been brought here for?'

'Must I tell him?' whispered the magistrate to Jinks.

'I think you had better, sir,' whispered Jinks to the magistrate. 'An information has been sworn before me,' said the magistrate, 'that it is apprehended you are going to fight a duel, and that the other man, Tupman, is your aider and abettor in it. Therefore—eh, Mr. Jinks?'

'Certainly, sir.'

'Therefore, I call upon you both, to—I think that's the course, Mr. Jinks?'

'Certainly, Sir.'

'To—to—what, Mr. Jinks?' said the magistrate pettishly.

'To find bail, sir.'

'Yes. Therefore, I call upon you both—as I was about to say when I was interrupted by my clerk—to find bail.' 'Good bail,' whispered Mr. Jinks.

'I shall require good bail,' said the magistrate.

'Town's-people,' whispered Jinks.

'They must be townspeople,' said the magistrate.

'Fifty pounds each,' whispered Jinks, 'and householders, of course.'

'I shall require two sureties of fifty pounds each,' said the magistrate aloud, with great dignity, 'and they must be householders, of course.'

'But bless my heart, Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, who, together with Mr. Tupman, was all amazement and indignation; 'we are perfect strangers in this town. I have as little knowledge of any householders here, as I have intention of fighting a duel with anybody.'

'I dare say,' replied the magistrate, 'I dare say—don't you, Mr. Jinks?'

'Certainly, Sir.'

'Have you anything more to say?' inquired the magistrate.

Mr. Pickwick had a great deal more to say, which he would no doubt have said, very little to his own advantage, or the magistrate's satisfaction, if he had not, the moment he ceased speaking, been pulled by the sleeve by Mr. Weller, with whom he was immediately engaged in so earnest a conversation, that he suffered the magistrate's inquiry to pass wholly unnoticed. Mr. Nupkins was not the man to ask a question of the kind twice over; and so, with another preparatory cough, he proceeded, amidst the reverential and admiring silence of the constables, to pronounce his decision. He should fine Weller two pounds for the first assault, and three pounds for the second. He should fine Winkle two pounds, and Snodgrass one pound, besides requiring them to enter into their own recognisances to keep the peace towards all his Majesty's subjects, and especially towards his liege servant, Daniel Grummer. Pickwick and Tupman he had already held to bail.

Immediately on the magistrate ceasing to speak, Mr. Pickwick, with a smile mantling on his again good-humoured countenance, stepped forward, and said—

'I beg the magistrate's pardon, but may I request a few minutes' private conversation with him, on a matter of deep importance to himself?'

'What?' said the magistrate. Mr. Pickwick repeated his request.

'This is a most extraordinary request,' said the magistrate. 'A private interview?'

'A private interview,' replied Mr. Pickwick firmly; 'only, as a part of the information which I wish to communicate is derived from my servant, I should wish him to be present.'

The magistrate looked at Mr. Jinks; Mr. Jinks looked at the magistrate; the officers looked at each other in amazement. Mr. Nupkins turned suddenly pale. Could the man Weller, in a moment of remorse, have divulged some secret conspiracy for his assassination? It was a dreadful thought. He was a public man; and he turned paler, as he thought of Julius Caesar and Mr. Perceval.

The magistrate looked at Mr. Pickwick again, and beckoned Mr. Jinks.

'What do you think of this request, Mr. Jinks?' murmured Mr. Nupkins.

Mr. Jinks, who didn't exactly know what to think of it, and was afraid he might offend, smiled feebly, after a dubious fashion, and, screwing up the corners of his mouth, shook his head slowly from side to side.

'Mr. Jinks,' said the magistrate gravely, 'you are an ass.'

At this little expression of opinion, Mr. Jinks smiled again—rather more feebly than before—and edged himself, by degrees, back into his own corner.

Mr. Nupkins debated the matter within himself for a few seconds, and then, rising from his chair, and requesting Mr. Pickwick and Sam to follow him, led the way into a small room which opened into the justice-parlour. Desiring Mr. Pickwick to walk to the upper end of the little apartment, and holding his hand upon the half-closed door, that he might be able to effect an immediate escape, in case there was the least tendency to a display of hostilities, Mr. Nupkins expressed his readiness to hear the communication, whatever it might be.

'I will come to the point at once, sir,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'it affects yourself and your credit materially. I have every reason to believe, Sir, that you are harbouring in your house a gross impostor!'

'Two,' interrupted Sam. 'Mulberry agin all natur, for tears and willainny!'

'Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'if I am to render myself intelligible to this gentleman, I must beg you to control your feelings.'

'Wery sorry, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller; 'but when I think o' that 'ere Job, I can't help opening the walve a inch or two.'

'In one word, Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'is my servant right in suspecting that a certain Captain Fitz-Marshall is in the habit of visiting here? Because,' added Mr. Pickwick, as he saw that Mr. Nupkins was about to offer a very indignant interruption, 'because if he be, I know that person to be a—'

'Hush, hush,' said Mr. Nupkins, closing the door. 'Know him to be what, Sir?'

'An unprincipled adventurer—a dishonourable character—a man who preys upon society, and makes easily-deceived people his dupes, Sir; his absurd, his foolish, his wretched dupes, Sir,' said the excited Mr. Pickwick.

'Dear me,' said Mr. Nupkins, turning very red, and altering his whole manner directly. 'Dear me, Mr.—'

'Pickvick,' said Sam.

'Pickwick,' said the magistrate, 'dear me, Mr. Pickwick—pray take a seat—you cannot mean this? Captain Fitz-Marshall!'

'Don't call him a cap'en,' said Sam, 'nor Fitz-Marshall neither; he ain't neither one nor t'other. He's a strolling actor, he is, and his name's Jingle; and if ever there was a wolf in a mulberry suit, that 'ere Job Trotter's him.'

'It is very true, Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, replying to the magistrate's look of amazement; 'my only business in this town, is to expose the person of whom we now speak.'

Mr. Pickwick proceeded to pour into the horror-stricken ear of Mr. Nupkins, an abridged account of all Mr. Jingle's atrocities. He related how he had first met him; how he had eloped with Miss Wardle; how he had cheerfully resigned the lady for a pecuniary consideration; how he had entrapped himself into a lady's boarding-school at midnight; and how he (Mr. Pickwick) now felt it his duty to expose his assumption of his present name and rank.

As the narrative proceeded, all the warm blood in the body of Mr. Nupkins tingled up into the very tips of his ears. He had picked up the captain at a neighbouring race-course. Charmed with his long list of aristocratic acquaintance, his extensive travel, and his fashionable demeanour, Mrs. Nupkins and Miss Nupkins had exhibited Captain Fitz-Marshall, and quoted Captain Fitz-Marshall, and hurled Captain Fitz-Marshall at the devoted heads of their select circle of acquaintance, until their bosom friends, Mrs. Porkenham and the Misses Porkenhams, and Mr. Sidney Porkenham, were ready to burst with jealousy and despair. And now, to hear, after all, that he was a needy adventurer, a strolling player, and if not a swindler, something so very like it, that it was hard to tell the difference! Heavens! what would the Porkenhams say! What would be the triumph of Mr. Sidney Porkenham when he found that his addresses had been slighted for such a rival! How should he, Nupkins, meet the eye of old Porkenham at the next quarter-sessions! And what a handle would it be for the opposition magisterial party if the story got abroad!

'But after all,' said Mr. Nupkins, brightening for a moment, after a long pause; 'after all, this is a mere statement. Captain Fitz-Marshall is a man of very engaging manners, and, I dare say, has many enemies. What proof have you of the truth of these representations?'

'Confront me with him,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'that is all I ask, and all I require. Confront him with me and my friends here; you will want no further proof.'

'Why,' said Mr. Nupkins, 'that might be very easily done, for he will be here to-night, and then there would be no occasion to make the matter public, just—just—for the young man's own sake, you know. I—I—should like to consult Mrs. Nupkins on the propriety of the step, in the first instance, though. At all events, Mr. Pickwick, we must despatch this legal business before we can do anything else. Pray step back into the next room.'

Into the next room they went.

'Grummer,' said the magistrate, in an awful voice.

'Your Wash-up,' replied Grummer, with the smile of a favourite.

'Come, come, Sir,' said the magistrate sternly, 'don't let me see any of this levity here. It is very unbecoming, and I can assure you that you have very little to smile at. Was the account you gave me just now strictly true? Now be careful, sir!' 'Your Wash-up,' stammered Grummer, 'I-'

'Oh, you are confused, are you?' said the magistrate. 'Mr. Jinks, you observe this confusion?'

'Certainly, Sir,' replied Jinks.

'Now,' said the magistrate, 'repeat your statement, Grummer, and again I warn you to be careful. Mr. Jinks, take his words down.'

The unfortunate Grummer proceeded to re-state his complaint, but, what between Mr. Jinks's taking down his words, and the magistrate's taking them up, his natural tendency to rambling, and his extreme confusion, he managed to get involved, in something under three minutes, in such a mass of entanglement and contradiction, that Mr. Nupkins at once declared he didn't believe him. So the fines were remitted, and Mr. Jinks found a couple of bail in no time. And all these solemn proceedings having been satisfactorily concluded, Mr. Grummer was ignominiously ordered out—an awful instance of the instability of human greatness, and the uncertain tenure of great men's favour.

Mrs. Nupkins was a majestic female in a pink gauze turban and a light brown wig. Miss Nupkins possessed all her mamma's haughtiness without the turban, and all her ill-nature without the wig; and whenever the exercise of these two amiable qualities involved mother and daughter in some unpleasant dilemma, as they not infrequently did, they both concurred in laying the blame on the shoulders of Mr. Nupkins. Accordingly, when Mr. Nupkins sought Mrs. Nupkins, and detailed the communication which had been made by Mr. Pickwick, Mrs. Nupkins suddenly recollected that she had always expected something of the kind; that she had always said it would be so; that her advice was never taken; that she really did not know what Mr. Nupkins supposed she was; and so forth.

'The idea!' said Miss Nupkins, forcing a tear of very scanty proportions into the corner of each eye; 'the idea of my being made such a fool of!'

'Ah! you may thank your papa, my dear,' said Mrs. Nupkins; 'how I have implored and begged that man to inquire into the captain's family connections; how I have urged and entreated him to take some decisive step! I am quite certain nobody would believe it—quite.'

'But, my dear,' said Mr. Nupkins.

'Don't talk to me, you aggravating thing, don't!' said Mrs. Nupkins.

'My love,' said Mr. Nupkins, 'you professed yourself very fond of Captain Fitz-Marshall. You have constantly asked him here, my dear, and you have lost no opportunity of introducing him elsewhere.'

'Didn't I say so, Henrietta?' cried Mrs. Nupkins, appealing to her daughter with the air of a much-injured female. 'Didn't I say that your papa would turn round and lay all this at my door? Didn't I say so?' Here Mrs. Nupkins sobbed.

'Oh, pa!' remonstrated Miss Nupkins. And here she sobbed too.

'Isn't it too much, when he has brought all this disgrace and ridicule upon us, to taunt me with being the cause of it?' exclaimed Mrs. Nupkins.

'How can we ever show ourselves in society!' said Miss Nupkins.

'How can we face the Porkenhams?' cried Mrs. Nupkins.

'Or the Griggs!' cried Miss Nupkins. 'Or the Slummintowkens!' cried Mrs. Nupkins. 'But what does your papa care! What is it to HIM!' At this dreadful reflection, Mrs. Nupkins wept mental anguish, and Miss Nupkins followed on the same side.

Mrs. Nupkins's tears continued to gush forth, with great velocity, until she had gained a little time to think the matter over; when she decided, in her own mind, that the best thing to do would be to ask Mr. Pickwick and his friends to remain until the captain's arrival, and then to give Mr. Pickwick the opportunity he sought. If it appeared that he had spoken truly, the captain could be turned out of the house without noising the matter abroad, and they could easily account to the Porkenhams for his disappearance, by saying that he had been appointed, through the Court influence of his family, to the governor-generalship of Sierra Leone, of Saugur Point, or any other of those salubrious climates which enchant Europeans so much, that when they once get there, they can hardly ever prevail upon themselves to come back again.

When Mrs. Nupkins dried up her tears, Miss Nupkins dried up hers, and Mr. Nupkins was very glad to settle the matter as Mrs. Nupkins had proposed. So Mr. Pickwick and his friends, having washed off all marks of their late encounter, were introduced to the ladies, and soon afterwards to their dinner; and Mr. Weller, whom the magistrate, with his peculiar sagacity, had discovered in half an hour to be one of the finest fellows alive, was consigned to the care and guardianship of Mr. Muzzle, who was specially enjoined to take him below, and make much of him.

'How de do, sir?' said Mr. Muzzle, as he conducted Mr. Weller down the kitchen stairs.

'Why, no considerable change has taken place in the state of my system, since I see you cocked up behind your governor's chair in the parlour, a little vile ago,' replied Sam.

'You will excuse my not taking more notice of you then,' said Mr. Muzzle. 'You see, master hadn't introduced us, then. Lord, how fond he is of you, Mr. Weller, to be sure!'

'Ah!' said Sam, 'what a pleasant chap he is!'

'Ain't he?'replied Mr. Muzzle.

'So much humour,' said Sam.

'And such a man to speak,' said Mr. Muzzle. 'How his ideas flow, don't they?'

'Wonderful,' replied Sam; 'they comes a-pouring out, knocking each other's heads so fast, that they seems to stun one another; you hardly know what he's arter, do you?' 'That's the great merit of his style of speaking,' rejoined Mr. Muzzle. 'Take care of the last step, Mr. Weller. Would you like to wash your hands, sir, before we join the ladies'! Here's a sink, with the water laid on, Sir, and a clean jack towel behind the door.'

'Ah! perhaps I may as well have a rinse,' replied Mr. Weller, applying plenty of yellow soap to the towel, and rubbing away till his face shone again. 'How many ladies are there?'

'Only two in our kitchen,' said Mr. Muzzle; 'cook and 'ouse-maid. We keep a boy to do the dirty work, and a gal besides, but they dine in the wash'us.'

'Oh, they dines in the wash'us, do they?' said Mr. Weller.

'Yes,' replied Mr. Muzzle, 'we tried 'em at our table when they first come, but we couldn't keep 'em. The gal's manners is dreadful vulgar; and the boy breathes so very hard while he's eating, that we found it impossible to sit at table with him.'

'Young grampus!' said Mr. Weller.

'Oh, dreadful,' rejoined Mr. Muzzle; 'but that is the worst of country service, Mr. Weller; the juniors is always so very savage. This way, sir, if you please, this way.'

Preceding Mr. Weller, with the utmost politeness, Mr. Muzzle conducted him into the kitchen.

'Mary,' said Mr. Muzzle to the pretty servant-girl, 'this is Mr. Weller; a gentleman as master has sent down, to be made as comfortable as possible.'

'And your master's a knowin' hand, and has just sent me to the right place,' said Mr. Weller, with a glance of admiration at Mary. 'If I wos master o' this here house, I should alvays find the materials for comfort vere Mary wos.' 'Lor, Mr. Weller!' said Mary blushing.

'Well, I never!' ejaculated the cook.

'Bless me, cook, I forgot you,' said Mr. Muzzle. 'Mr. Weller, let me introduce you.'

'How are you, ma'am?' said Mr. Weller.'Wery glad to see you, indeed, and hope our acquaintance may be a long 'un, as the gen'l'm'n said to the fi' pun' note.'

When this ceremony of introduction had been gone through, the cook and Mary retired into the back kitchen to titter, for ten minutes; then returning, all giggles and blushes, they sat down to dinner. Mr. Weller's easy manners and conversational powers had such irresistible influence with his new friends, that before the dinner was half over, they were on a footing of perfect intimacy, and in possession of a full account of the delinquency of Job Trotter.

'I never could a-bear that Job,' said Mary.

'No more you never ought to, my dear,' replied Mr. Weller.

'Why not?' inquired Mary.

''Cos ugliness and svindlin' never ought to be formiliar with elegance and wirtew,' replied Mr. Weller. 'Ought they, Mr. Muzzle?'

'Not by no means,' replied that gentleman.

Here Mary laughed, and said the cook had made her; and the cook laughed, and said she hadn't.

'I ha'n't got a glass,' said Mary.

'Drink with me, my dear,' said Mr. Weller. 'Put your lips to this here tumbler, and then I can kiss you by deputy.'

'For shame, Mr. Weller!' said Mary.

'What's a shame, my dear?'

'Talkin' in that way.'

'Nonsense; it ain't no harm. It's natur; ain't it, cook?'

'Don't ask me, imperence,' replied the cook, in a high state of delight; and hereupon the cook and Mary laughed again, till what between the beer, and the cold meat, and the laughter combined, the latter young lady was brought to the verge of choking—an alarming crisis from which she was only recovered by sundry pats on the back, and other necessary attentions, most delicately administered by Mr. Samuel Weller. In the midst of all this jollity and conviviality, a loud ring was heard at the garden gate, to which the young gentleman who took his meals in the wash-house, immediately responded. Mr. Weller was in the height of his attentions to the pretty house-maid; Mr. Muzzle was busy doing the honours of the table; and the cook had just paused to laugh, in the very act of raising a huge morsel to her lips; when the kitchen door opened, and in walked Mr. Job Trotter.

We have said in walked Mr. Job Trotter, but the statement is not distinguished by our usual scrupulous adherence to fact. The door opened and Mr. Trotter appeared. He would have walked in, and was in the very act of doing so, indeed, when catching sight of Mr. Weller, he involuntarily shrank back a pace or two, and stood gazing on the unexpected scene before him, perfectly motionless with amazement and terror.

'Here he is!' said Sam, rising with great glee. 'Why we were that wery moment a-speaking o' you. How are you? Where have you been? Come in.'

Laying his hand on the mulberry collar of the unresisting Job, Mr. Weller dragged him into the kitchen; and, locking the door, handed the key to Mr. Muzzle, who very coolly buttoned it up in a side pocket.

'Well, here's a game!' cried Sam. 'Only think o' my master havin' the pleasure o' meeting yourn upstairs, and me havin' the joy o' meetin' you down here. How are you gettin' on, and how is the chandlery bis'ness likely to do? Well, I am so glad to see you. How happy you look. It's quite a treat to see you; ain't it, Mr. Muzzle?'

'Quite,' said Mr. Muzzle.

'So cheerful he is!' said Sam.

'In such good spirits!' said Muzzle. 'And so glad to see us—that makes it so much more comfortable,' said Sam. 'Sit down; sit down.'

Mr. Trotter suffered himself to be forced into a chair by the fireside. He cast his small eyes, first on Mr. Weller, and then on Mr. Muzzle, but said nothing.

'Well, now,' said Sam, 'afore these here ladies, I should jest like to ask you, as a sort of curiosity, whether you don't consider yourself as nice and well-behaved a young gen'l'm'n, as ever used a pink check pocket-handkerchief, and the number four collection?'

'And as was ever a-going to be married to a cook,' said that lady indignantly. 'The willin!'

'And leave off his evil ways, and set up in the chandlery line arterwards,' said the housemaid.

'Now, I'll tell you what it is, young man,' said Mr. Muzzle solemnly, enraged at the last two allusions, 'this here lady (pointing to the cook) keeps company with me; and when you presume, Sir, to talk of keeping chandlers' shops with her, you injure me in one of the most delicatest points in which one man can injure another. Do you understand that, Sir?'

Here Mr. Muzzle, who had a great notion of his eloquence, in which he imitated his master, paused for a reply.

But Mr. Trotter made no reply. So Mr. Muzzle proceeded in a solemn manner—

'It's very probable, sir, that you won't be wanted upstairs for several minutes, Sir, because MY master is at this moment particularly engaged in settling the hash of YOUR master, Sir; and therefore you'll have leisure, Sir, for a little private talk with me, Sir. Do you understand that, Sir?'

Mr. Muzzle again paused for a reply; and again Mr. Trotter disappointed him.

'Well, then,' said Mr. Muzzle, 'I'm very sorry to have to explain myself before ladies, but the urgency of the case will be my excuse. The back kitchen's empty, Sir. If you will step in there, Sir, Mr. Weller will see fair, and we can have mutual satisfaction till the bell rings. Follow me, Sir!'

As Mr. Muzzle uttered these words, he took a step or two towards the door; and, by way of saving time, began to pull off his coat as he walked along.

Now, the cook no sooner heard the concluding words of this desperate challenge, and saw Mr. Muzzle about to put it into execution, than she uttered a loud and piercing shriek; and rushing on Mr. Job Trotter, who rose from his chair on the instant, tore and buffeted his large flat face, with an energy peculiar to excited females, and twining her hands in his long black hair, tore therefrom about enough to make five or six dozen of the very largest-sized mourning-rings. Having accomplished this feat with all the ardour which her devoted love for Mr. Muzzle inspired, she staggered back; and being a lady of very excitable and delicate feelings, she instantly fell under the dresser, and fainted away.

At this moment, the bell rang.

'That's for you, Job Trotter,' said Sam; and before Mr. Trotter could offer remonstrance or reply—even before he had time to stanch the wounds inflicted by the insensible lady—Sam seized one arm and Mr. Muzzle the other, and one pulling before, and the other pushing behind, they conveyed him upstairs, and into the parlour.

It was an impressive tableau. Alfred Jingle, Esquire, alias Captain Fitz-Marshall, was standing near the door with his hat in his hand, and a smile on his face, wholly unmoved by his very unpleasant situation. Confronting him, stood Mr. Pickwick, who had evidently been inculcating some high moral lesson; for his left hand was beneath his coat tail, and his right extended in air, as was his wont when delivering himself of an impressive address. At a little distance, stood Mr. Tupman with indignant countenance, carefully held back by his two younger friends; at the farther end of the room were Mr. Nupkins, Mrs. Nupkins, and Miss Nupkins, gloomily grand and savagely vexed. 'What prevents me,' said Mr. Nupkins, with magisterial dignity, as Job was brought in—'what prevents me from detaining these men as rogues and impostors? It is a foolish mercy. What prevents me?'

'Pride, old fellow, pride,' replied Jingle, quite at his ease. 'Wouldn't do—no go—caught a captain, eh?—ha! ha! very good—husband for daughter—biter bit—make it public—not for worlds—look stupid—very!'

'Wretch,' said Mr. Nupkins, 'we scorn your base insinuations.'

'I always hated him,' added Henrietta.

'Oh, of course,' said Jingle. 'Tall young man—old lover—Sidney Porkenham—rich—fine fellow—not so rich as captain, though, eh?—turn him away—off with him—anything for captain—nothing like captain anywhere—all the girls—raving mad—eh, Job, eh?'

Here Mr. Jingle laughed very heartily; and Job, rubbing his hands with delight, uttered the first sound he had given vent to since he entered the house—a low, noiseless chuckle, which seemed to intimate that he enjoyed his laugh too much, to let any of it escape in sound. 'Mr. Nupkins,' said the elder lady,'this is not a fit conversation for the servants to overhear. Let these wretches be removed.'

'Certainly, my dear,' Said Mr. Nupkins. 'Muzzle!'

'Your Worship.'

'Open the front door.'

'Yes, your Worship.'

'Leave the house!' said Mr. Nupkins, waving his hand emphatically.

Jingle smiled, and moved towards the door.

'Stay!' said Mr. Pickwick. Jingle stopped.

'I might,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'have taken a much greater revenge for the treatment I have experienced at your hands, and that of your hypocritical friend there.'

Job Trotter bowed with great politeness, and laid his hand upon his heart.

'I say,' said Mr. Pickwick, growing gradually angry, 'that I might have taken a greater revenge, but I content myself with exposing you, which I consider a duty I owe to society. This is a leniency, Sir, which I hope you will remember.'

When Mr. Pickwick arrived at this point, Job Trotter, with facetious gravity, applied his hand to his ear, as if desirous not to lose a syllable he uttered.

'And I have only to add, sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, now thoroughly angry, 'that I consider you a rascal, and a—a—ruffian—and—and worse than any man I ever saw, or heard of, except that pious and sanctified vagabond in the mulberry livery.'

'Ha! ha!' said Jingle, 'good fellow, Pickwick—fine heart—stout old boy—but must NOT be passionate—bad thing, very—bye, bye—see you again some day—keep up your spirits—now, Job—trot!'

With these words, Mr. Jingle stuck on his hat in his old fashion, and strode out of the room. Job Trotter paused, looked round, smiled and then with a bow of mock solemnity to Mr. Pickwick, and a wink to Mr. Weller, the audacious slyness of which baffles all description, followed the footsteps of his hopeful master.

'Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, as Mr. Weller was following.

'Sir.' 'Stay here.'

Mr. Weller seemed uncertain.

'Stay here,' repeated Mr. Pickwick.

'Mayn't I polish that 'ere Job off, in the front garden?' said Mr. Weller. 'Certainly not,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'Mayn't I kick him out o' the gate, Sir?' said Mr. Weller.

'Not on any account,' replied his master.

For the first time since his engagement, Mr. Weller looked, for a moment, discontented and unhappy. But his countenance immediately cleared up; for the wily Mr. Muzzle, by concealing himself behind the street door, and rushing violently out, at the right instant, contrived with great dexterity to overturn both Mr. Jingle and his attendant, down the flight of steps, into the American aloe tubs that stood beneath.

'Having discharged my duty, Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick to Mr. Nupkins, 'I will, with my friends, bid you farewell. While we thank you for such hospitality as we have received, permit me to assure you, in our joint names, that we should not have accepted it, or have consented to extricate ourselves in this way, from our previous dilemma, had we not been impelled by a strong sense of duty. We return to London to-morrow. Your secret is safe with us.'

Having thus entered his protest against their treatment of the morning, Mr. Pickwick bowed low to the ladies, and notwithstanding the solicitations of the family, left the room with his friends.

'Get your hat, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'It's below stairs, Sir,' said Sam, and he ran down after it.

Now, there was nobody in the kitchen, but the pretty housemaid; and as Sam's hat was mislaid, he had to look for it, and the pretty housemaid lighted him. They had to look all over the place for the hat. The pretty housemaid, in her anxiety to find it, went down on her knees, and turned over all the things that were heaped together in a little corner by the door. It was an awkward corner. You couldn't get at it without shutting the door first.

'Here it is,' said the pretty housemaid. 'This is it, ain't it?'

'Let me look,' said Sam.

The pretty housemaid had stood the candle on the floor; and, as it gave a very dim light, Sam was obliged to go down on HIS knees before he could see whether it really was his own hat or not. It was a remarkably small corner, and so—it was nobody's fault but the man's who built the house—Sam and the pretty housemaid were necessarily very close together.

'Yes, this is it,' said Sam. 'Good-bye!'

'Good-bye!' said the pretty housemaid.

'Good-bye!' said Sam; and as he said it, he dropped the hat that had cost so much trouble in looking for.

'How awkward you are,' said the pretty housemaid. 'You'll lose it again, if you don't take care.'

So just to prevent his losing it again, she put it on for him.

Whether it was that the pretty housemaid's face looked prettier still, when it was raised towards Sam's, or whether it was the accidental consequence of their being so near to each other, is matter of uncertainty to this day; but Sam kissed her.

'You don't mean to say you did that on purpose,' said the pretty housemaid, blushing.

'No, I didn't then,' said Sam; 'but I will now.'

So he kissed her again. 'Sam!' said Mr. Pickwick, calling over the banisters.

'Coming, Sir,' replied Sam, running upstairs.

'How long you have been!' said Mr. Pickwick.

'There was something behind the door, Sir, which perwented our getting it open, for ever so long, Sir,' replied Sam.

And this was the first passage of Mr. Weller's first love.

CHAPTER XXVI. WHICH CONTAINS A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE PROGRESS OF THE

ACTION OF BARDELL AGAINST PICKWICK

Having accomplished the main end and object of his journey, by the exposure of Jingle, Mr. Pickwick resolved on immediately returning to London, with the view of becoming acquainted with the proceedings which had been taken against him, in the meantime, by Messrs. Dodson and Fogg. Acting upon this resolution with all the energy and decision of his character, he mounted to the back seat of the first coach which left Ipswich on the morning after the memorable occurrences detailed at length in the two preceding chapters; and accompanied by his three friends, and Mr. Samuel Weller, arrived in the metropolis, in perfect health and safety, the same evening.

Here the friends, for a short time, separated. Messrs. Tupman, Winkle, and Snodgrass repaired to their several homes to make such preparations as might be requisite for their forthcoming visit to Dingley Dell; and Mr. Pickwick and Sam took up their present abode in very good, old-fashioned, and comfortable quarters, to wit, the George and Vulture Tavern and Hotel, George Yard, Lombard Street.

Mr. Pickwick had dined, finished his second pint of particular port, pulled his silk handkerchief over his head, put his feet on the fender, and thrown himself back in an easy-chair, when the entrance of Mr. Weller with his carpet-bag, aroused him from his tranquil meditation.

'Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Sir,' said Mr. Weller.

'I have just been thinking, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'that having left a good many things at Mrs. Bardell's, in Goswell Street, I ought to arrange for taking them away, before I leave town again.'

'Wery good, sir,' replied Mr. Weller.

'I could send them to Mr. Tupman's, for the present, Sam,' continued Mr. Pickwick, 'but before we take them away, it is necessary that they should be looked up, and put together. I wish you would step up to Goswell Street, Sam, and arrange about it.'

'At once, Sir?' inquired Mr. Weller.

'At once,' replied Mr. Pickwick. 'And stay, Sam,' added Mr. Pickwick, pulling out his purse, 'there is some rent to pay. The quarter is not due till Christmas, but you may pay it, and have done with it. A month's notice terminates my tenancy. Here it is, written out. Give it, and tell Mrs. Bardell she may put a bill up, as soon as she likes.'

'Wery good, sir,' replied Mr. Weller; 'anythin' more, sir?'

'Nothing more, Sam.'

Mr. Weller stepped slowly to the door, as if he expected something more; slowly opened it, slowly stepped out, and had slowly closed it within a couple of inches, when Mr. Pickwick called out—

'Sam.'

'Yes, sir,' said Mr. Weller, stepping quickly back, and closing the door behind him. 'I have no objection, Sam, to your endeavouring to ascertain how Mrs. Bardell herself seems disposed towards me, and whether it is really probable that this vile and groundless action is to be carried to extremity. I say I do not object to you doing this, if you wish it, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick.

Sam gave a short nod of intelligence, and left the room. Mr. Pickwick drew the silk handkerchief once more over his head, And composed himself for a nap. Mr. Weller promptly walked forth, to execute his commission.

It was nearly nine o'clock when he reached Goswell Street. A couple of candles were burning in the little front parlour, and a couple of caps were reflected on the window-blind. Mrs. Bardell had got company.

Mr. Weller knocked at the door, and after a pretty long interval—occupied by the party without, in whistling a tune, and by the party within, in persuading a refractory flat candle to allow itself to be lighted—a pair of small boots pattered over the floor-cloth, and Master Bardell presented himself.

'Well, young townskip,' said Sam, 'how's mother?'

'She's pretty well,' replied Master Bardell, 'so am I.'

'Well, that's a mercy,' said Sam; 'tell her I want to speak to her, will you, my hinfant fernomenon?'

Master Bardell, thus adjured, placed the refractory flat candle on the bottom stair, and vanished into the front parlour with his message.

The two caps, reflected on the window-blind, were the respective head-dresses of a couple of Mrs. Bardell's most particular acquaintance, who had just stepped in, to have a quiet cup of tea, and a little warm supper of a couple of sets of pettitoes and some toasted cheese. The cheese was simmering and browning away, most delightfully, in a little Dutch oven before the fire; the pettitoes were getting on deliciously in a little tin saucepan on the hob; and Mrs. Bardell and her two friends were getting on very well, also, in a little quiet conversation about and concerning all their particular friends and acquaintance; when Master Bardell came back from answering the door, and delivered the message intrusted to him by Mr. Samuel Weller.

'Mr. Pickwick's servant!' said Mrs. Bardell, turning pale.

'Bless my soul!' said Mrs. Cluppins.

'Well, I raly would not ha' believed it, unless I had ha' happened to ha' been here!' said Mrs. Sanders.

Mrs. Cluppins was a little, brisk, busy-looking woman; Mrs. Sanders was a big, fat, heavy-faced personage; and the two were the company.

Mrs. Bardell felt it proper to be agitated; and as none of the three exactly knew whether under existing circumstances, any communication, otherwise than through Dodson & Fogg, ought to be held with Mr. Pickwick's servant, they were all rather taken by surprise. In this state of indecision, obviously the first thing to be done, was to thump the boy for finding Mr. Weller at the door. So his mother thumped him, and he cried melodiously.

'Hold your noise—do—you naughty creetur!' said Mrs. Bardell.

'Yes; don't worrit your poor mother,' said Mrs. Sanders.

'She's quite enough to worrit her, as it is, without you, Tommy,' said Mrs. Cluppins, with sympathising resignation.

'Ah! worse luck, poor lamb!' said Mrs. Sanders. At all which moral reflections, Master Bardell howled the louder.

'Now, what shall I do?' said Mrs. Bardell to Mrs. Cluppins.

'I think you ought to see him,' replied Mrs. Cluppins. 'But on no account without a witness.'

'I think two witnesses would be more lawful,' said Mrs. Sanders, who, like the other friend, was bursting with curiosity.

'Perhaps he'd better come in here,' said Mrs. Bardell.

'To be sure,' replied Mrs. Cluppins, eagerly catching at the idea; 'walk in, young man; and shut the street door first, please.'

Mr. Weller immediately took the hint; and presenting himself in the parlour, explained his business to Mrs. Bardell thus—

'Wery sorry to 'casion any personal inconwenience, ma'am, as the housebreaker said to the old lady when he put her on the fire; but as me and my governor 's only jest come to town, and is jest going away agin, it can't be helped, you see.'

'Of course, the young man can't help the faults of his master,' said Mrs. Cluppins, much struck by Mr. Weller's appearance and conversation.

'Certainly not,' chimed in Mrs. Sanders, who, from certain wistful glances at the little tin saucepan, seemed to be engaged in a mental calculation of the probable extent of the pettitoes, in the event of Sam's being asked to stop to supper.

'So all I've come about, is jest this here,' said Sam, disregarding the interruption; 'first, to give my governor's notice—there it is. Secondly, to pay the rent—here it is. Thirdly, to say as all his things is to be put together, and give to anybody as we sends for 'em. Fourthly, that you may let the place as soon as you like—and that's all.'

'Whatever has happened,' said Mrs. Bardell, 'I always have said, and always will say, that in every respect but one, Mr. Pickwick has always behaved himself like a perfect gentleman. His money always as good as the bank—always.'

As Mrs. Bardell said this, she applied her handkerchief to her eyes, and went out of the room to get the receipt.

Sam well knew that he had only to remain quiet, and the women were sure to talk; so he looked alternately at the tin saucepan, the toasted cheese, the wall, and the ceiling, in profound silence.

'Poor dear!' said Mrs. Cluppins.

'Ah, poor thing!' replied Mrs. Sanders. Sam said nothing. He saw they were coming to the subject.

'I raly cannot contain myself,' said Mrs. Cluppins, 'when I think of such perjury. I don't wish to say anything to make you uncomfortable, young man, but your master's an old brute, and I wish I had him here to tell him so.' 'I wish you had,' said Sam.

'To see how dreadful she takes on, going moping about, and taking no pleasure in nothing, except when her friends comes in, out of charity, to sit with her, and make her comfortable,' resumed Mrs. Cluppins, glancing at the tin saucepan and the Dutch oven, 'it's shocking!'

'Barbareous,' said Mrs. Sanders.

'And your master, young man! A gentleman with money, as could never feel the expense of a wife, no more than nothing,' continued Mrs. Cluppins, with great volubility; 'why there ain't the faintest shade of an excuse for his behaviour! Why don't he marry her?'

'Ah,' said Sam, 'to be sure; that's the question.'

'Question, indeed,' retorted Mrs. Cluppins, 'she'd question him, if she'd my spirit. Hows'ever, there is law for us women, mis'rable creeturs as they'd make us, if they could; and that your master will find out, young man, to his cost, afore he's six months older.'

At this consolatory reflection, Mrs. Cluppins bridled up, and smiled at Mrs. Sanders, who smiled back again.

'The action's going on, and no mistake,' thought Sam, as Mrs. Bardell re-entered with the receipt.

'Here's the receipt, Mr. Weller,' said Mrs. Bardell, 'and here's the change, and I hope you'll take a little drop of something to keep the cold out, if it's only for old acquaintance' sake, Mr. Weller.'

Sam saw the advantage he should gain, and at once acquiesced; whereupon Mrs. Bardell produced, from a small closet, a black bottle and a wine-glass; and so great was her abstraction, in her deep mental affliction, that, after filling Mr. Weller's glass, she brought out three more wine-glasses, and filled them too.

'Lauk, Mrs. Bardell,' said Mrs. Cluppins, 'see what you've been and done!'

'Well, that is a good one!' ejaculated Mrs. Sanders.

'Ah, my poor head!' said Mrs. Bardell, with a faint smile.

Sam understood all this, of course, so he said at once, that he never could drink before supper, unless a lady drank with him. A great deal of laughter ensued, and Mrs. Sanders volunteered to humour him, so she took a slight sip out of her glass. Then Sam said it must go all round, so they all took a slight sip. Then little Mrs. Cluppins proposed as a toast, 'Success to Bardell agin Pickwick'; and then the ladies emptied their glasses in honour of the sentiment, and got very talkative directly.

'I suppose you've heard what's going forward, Mr. Weller?' said Mrs. Bardell.

'I've heerd somethin' on it,' replied Sam.

'It's a terrible thing to be dragged before the public, in that way, Mr. Weller,' said Mrs. Bardell; 'but I see now, that it's the only thing I ought to do, and my lawyers, Mr. Dodson and Fogg, tell me that, with the evidence as we shall call, we must succeed. I don't know what I should do, Mr. Weller, if I didn't.'

The mere idea of Mrs. Bardell's failing in her action, affected Mrs. Sanders so deeply, that she was under the necessity of refilling and re-emptying her glass immediately; feeling, as she said afterwards, that if she hadn't had the presence of mind to do so, she must have dropped.

'Ven is it expected to come on?' inquired Sam.

'Either in February or March,' replied Mrs. Bardell.

'What a number of witnesses there'll be, won't there?' said Mrs. Cluppins.

'Ah! won't there!' replied Mrs. Sanders.

'And won't Mr. Dodson and Fogg be wild if the plaintiff shouldn't get it?' added Mrs. Cluppins, 'when they do it all on speculation!'

'Ah! won't they!' said Mrs. Sanders.

'But the plaintiff must get it,' resumed Mrs. Cluppins.

'I hope so,' said Mrs. Bardell.

'Oh, there can't be any doubt about it,' rejoined Mrs. Sanders.

'Vell,' said Sam, rising and setting down his glass, 'all I can say is, that I vish you MAY get it.'

'Thank'ee, Mr. Weller,' said Mrs. Bardell fervently.

'And of them Dodson and Foggs, as does these sort o' things on spec,' continued Mr. Weller, 'as vell as for the other kind and gen'rous people o' the same purfession, as sets people by the ears, free gratis for nothin', and sets their clerks to work to find out little disputes among their neighbours and acquaintances as vants settlin' by means of lawsuits—all I can say o' them is, that I vish they had the reward I'd give 'em.'

'Ah, I wish they had the reward that every kind and generous heart would be inclined to bestow upon them!' said the gratified Mrs. Bardell.

'Amen to that,' replied Sam, 'and a fat and happy liven' they'd get out of it! Wish you good-night, ladies.'

To the great relief of Mrs. Sanders, Sam was allowed to depart without any reference, on the part of the hostess, to the pettitoes and toasted cheese; to which the ladies, with such juvenile assistance as Master Bardell could afford, soon afterwards rendered the amplest justice—indeed they wholly vanished before their strenuous exertions.

Mr. Weller wended his way back to the George and Vulture, and faithfully recounted to his master, such indications of the sharp practice of Dodson & Fogg, as he had contrived to pick up in his visit to Mrs. Bardell's. An interview with Mr. Perker, next day, more than confirmed Mr. Weller's statement; and Mr. Pickwick was fain to prepare for his Christmas visit to Dingley Dell, with the pleasant anticipation that some two or three months afterwards, an action brought against him for damages sustained by reason of a breach of promise of marriage, would be publicly tried in the Court of Common Pleas; the plaintiff having all the advantages derivable, not only from the force of circumstances, but from the sharp practice of Dodson & Fogg to boot.

CHAPTER XXVII. SAMUEL WELLER MAKES A PILGRIMAGE TO DORKING, AND BEHOLDS

HIS MOTHER-IN-LAW

There still remaining an interval of two days before the time agreed upon for the departure of the Pickwickians to Dingley Dell, Mr. Weller sat himself down in a back room at the George and Vulture, after eating an early dinner, to muse on the best way of disposing of his time. It was a remarkably fine day; and he had not turned the matter over in his mind ten minutes, when he was suddenly stricken filial and affectionate; and it occurred to him so strongly that he ought to go down and see his father, and pay his duty to his mother-in-law, that he was lost in astonishment at his own remissness in never thinking of this moral obligation before. Anxious to atone for his past neglect without another hour's delay, he straightway walked upstairs to Mr. Pickwick, and requested leave of absence for this laudable purpose.

'Certainly, Sam, certainly,' said Mr. Pickwick, his eyes glistening with delight at this manifestation of filial feeling on the part of his attendant; 'certainly, Sam.'

Mr. Weller made a grateful bow.

'I am very glad to see that you have so high a sense of your duties as a son, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'I always had, sir,' replied Mr. Weller.

'That's a very gratifying reflection, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick approvingly.

'Wery, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller; 'if ever I wanted anythin' o' my father, I always asked for it in a wery 'spectful and obligin' manner. If he didn't give it me, I took it, for fear I should be led to do anythin' wrong, through not havin' it. I saved him a world o' trouble this vay, Sir.'

'That's not precisely what I meant, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, shaking his head, with a slight smile.

'All good feelin', sir—the wery best intentions, as the gen'l'm'n said ven he run away from his wife 'cos she seemed unhappy with him,' replied Mr.

Weller.

'You may go, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Thank'ee, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller; and having made his best bow, and put on his best clothes, Sam planted himself on the top of the Arundel coach, and journeyed on to Dorking.

The Marquis of Granby, in Mrs. Weller's time, was quite a model of a roadside public-house of the better class—just large enough to be convenient, and small enough to be snug. On the opposite side of the road was a large sign-board on a high post, representing the head and shoulders of a gentleman with an apoplectic countenance, in a red coat with deep blue facings, and a touch of the same blue over his three-cornered hat, for a sky. Over that again were a pair of flags; beneath the last button of his coat were a couple of cannon; and the whole formed an expressive and undoubted likeness of the Marquis of Granby of glorious memory.

The bar window displayed a choice collection of geranium plants, and a well-dusted row of spirit phials. The open shutters bore a variety of golden inscriptions, eulogistic of good beds and neat wines; and the choice group of countrymen and hostlers lounging about the stable door and horse-trough, afforded presumptive proof of the excellent quality of the ale and spirits which were sold within. Sam Weller paused, when he dismounted from the coach, to note all these little indications of a thriving business, with the eye of an experienced traveller; and having done so, stepped in at once, highly satisfied with everything he had observed.

'Now, then!' said a shrill female voice the instant Sam thrust his head in at the door, 'what do you want, young man?'

Sam looked round in the direction whence the voice proceeded. It came from a rather stout lady of comfortable appearance, who was seated beside the fireplace in the bar, blowing the fire to make the kettle boil for tea. She was not alone; for on the other side of the fireplace, sitting bolt upright in a high-backed chair, was a man in threadbare black clothes, with a back almost as long and stiff as that of the chair itself, who caught Sam's most particular and especial attention at once.

He was a prim-faced, red-nosed man, with a long, thin countenance, and a semi-rattlesnake sort of eye—rather sharp, but decidedly bad. He wore very short trousers, and black cotton stockings, which, like the rest of his apparel, were particularly rusty. His looks were starched, but his white neckerchief was not, and its long limp ends straggled over his closely-buttoned waistcoat in a very uncouth and unpicturesque fashion. A pair of old, worn, beaver gloves, a broad-brimmed hat, and a faded green umbrella, with plenty of whalebone sticking through the bottom, as if to counterbalance the want of a handle at the top, lay on a chair beside him; and, being disposed in a very tidy and careful manner, seemed to imply that the red-nosed man, whoever he was, had no intention of going away in a hurry.

To do the red-nosed man justice, he would have been very far from wise if he had entertained any such intention; for, to judge from all appearances, he must have been possessed of a most desirable circle of acquaintance, if he could have reasonably expected to be more comfortable anywhere else. The fire was blazing brightly under the influence of the bellows, and the kettle was singing gaily under the influence of both. A small tray of tea-things was arranged on the table; a plate of hot buttered toast was gently simmering before the fire; and the red-nosed man himself was busily engaged in converting a large slice of bread into the same agreeable edible, through the instrumentality of a long brass toasting-fork. Beside him stood a glass of reeking hot pine-apple rum-and-water, with a slice of lemon in it; and every time the red-nosed man stopped to bring the round of toast to his eye, with the view of ascertaining how it got on, he imbibed a drop or two of the hot pine-apple rum-and-water, and smiled upon the rather stout lady, as she blew the fire.

Sam was so lost in the contemplation of this comfortable scene, that he suffered the first inquiry of the rather stout lady to pass unheeded. It was not until it had been twice repeated, each time in a shriller tone, that he became conscious of the impropriety of his behaviour.

'Governor in?' inquired Sam, in reply to the question.

'No, he isn't,' replied Mrs. Weller; for the rather stout lady was no other than the quondam relict and sole executrix of the dead-and-gone Mr. Clarke; 'no, he isn't, and I don't expect him, either.'

'I suppose he's drivin' up to-day?' said Sam.

'He may be, or he may not,' replied Mrs. Weller, buttering the round of toast which the red-nosed man had just finished. 'I don't know, and, what's more, I don't care.—Ask a blessin', Mr. Stiggins.'

The red-nosed man did as he was desired, and instantly commenced on the toast with fierce voracity.

The appearance of the red-nosed man had induced Sam, at first sight, to more than half suspect that he was the deputy-shepherd of whom his estimable parent had spoken. The moment he saw him eat, all doubt on the subject was removed, and he perceived at once that if he purposed to take up his temporary quarters where he was, he must make his footing good without delay. He therefore commenced proceedings by putting his arm over the half-door of the bar, coolly unbolting it, and leisurely walking in.

'Mother-in-law,' said Sam, 'how are you?'

'Why, I do believe he is a Weller!' said Mrs. W., raising her eyes to Sam's face, with no very gratified expression of countenance.

'I raythor think he is,' said the imperturbable Sam; 'and I hope this here reverend gen'l'm'n 'll excuse me saying that I wish I was THE Weller as owns you, mother-in-law.'

This was a double-barrelled compliment. It implied that Mrs. Weller was a most agreeable female, and also that Mr. Stiggins had a clerical appearance. It made a visible impression at once; and Sam followed up his advantage by kissing his mother-in-law.

'Get along with you!' said Mrs. Weller, pushing him away. 'For shame, young man!' said the gentleman with the red nose.

'No offence, sir, no offence,' replied Sam; 'you're wery right, though; it ain't the right sort o' thing, ven mothers-in-law is young and good-looking, is it, Sir?'

'It's all vanity,' said Mr. Stiggins.

'Ah, so it is,' said Mrs. Weller, setting her cap to rights.

Sam thought it was, too, but he held his peace.

The deputy-shepherd seemed by no means best pleased with Sam's arrival; and when the first effervescence of the compliment had subsided, even Mrs. Weller looked as if she could have spared him without the smallest inconvenience. However, there he was; and as he couldn't be decently turned out, they all three sat down to tea.

'And how's father?' said Sam.

At this inquiry, Mrs. Weller raised her hands, and turned up her eyes, as if the subject were too painful to be alluded to.

Mr. Stiggins groaned.

'What's the matter with that 'ere gen'l'm'n?' inquired Sam.

'He's shocked at the way your father goes on in,' replied Mrs. Weller.

'Oh, he is, is he?' said Sam.

'And with too good reason,' added Mrs. Weller gravely.

Mr. Stiggins took up a fresh piece of toast, and groaned heavily.

'He is a dreadful reprobate,' said Mrs. Weller.

'A man of wrath!' exclaimed Mr. Stiggins. He took a large semi-circular bite out of the toast, and groaned again.

Sam felt very strongly disposed to give the reverend Mr. Stiggins something to groan for, but he repressed his inclination, and merely asked, 'What's the old 'un up to now?'

'Up to, indeed!' said Mrs. Weller, 'Oh, he has a hard heart. Night after night does this excellent man—don't frown, Mr. Stiggins; I WILL say you ARE an excellent man—come and sit here, for hours together, and it has not the least effect upon him.' 'Well, that is odd,' said Sam; 'it 'ud have a wery considerable effect upon me, if I wos in his place; I know that.'

'The fact is, my young friend,' said Mr. Stiggins solemnly, 'he has an obderrate bosom. Oh, my young friend, who else could have resisted the pleading of sixteen of our fairest sisters, and withstood their exhortations to subscribe to our noble society for providing the infant negroes in the West Indies with flannel waistcoats and moral pocket-handkerchiefs?'

'What's a moral pocket-ankercher?' said Sam; 'I never see one o' them articles o' furniter.'

'Those which combine amusement With instruction, my young friend,' replied Mr. Stiggins, 'blending select tales with wood-cuts.'

'Oh, I know,' said Sam; 'them as hangs up in the linen-drapers' shops, with beggars' petitions and all that 'ere upon 'em?'

Mr. Stiggins began a third round of toast, and nodded assent. 'And he wouldn't be persuaded by the ladies, wouldn't he?' said Sam.

'Sat and smoked his pipe, and said the infant negroes were—what did he say the infant negroes were?' said Mrs. Weller.

'Little humbugs,' replied Mr. Stiggins, deeply affected.

'Said the infant negroes were little humbugs,' repeated Mrs. Weller. And they both groaned at the atrocious conduct of the elder Mr. Weller.

A great many more iniquities of a similar nature might have been disclosed, only the toast being all eaten, the tea having got very weak, and Sam holding out no indications of meaning to go, Mr. Stiggins suddenly recollected that he had a most pressing appointment with the shepherd, and took himself off accordingly.

The tea-things had been scarcely put away, and the hearth swept up, when the London coach deposited Mr. Weller, senior, at the door; his legs deposited him in the bar; and his eyes showed him his son.

'What, Sammy!' exclaimed the father.

'What, old Nobs!' ejaculated the son. And they shook hands heartily.

'Wery glad to see you, Sammy,' said the elder Mr. Weller, 'though how you've managed to get over your mother-in-law, is a mystery to me. I only vish you'd write me out the receipt, that's all.'

'Hush!' said Sam, 'she's at home, old feller.' 'She ain't vithin hearin',' replied Mr. Weller; 'she always goes and blows up, downstairs, for a couple of hours arter tea; so we'll just give ourselves a damp, Sammy.'

Saying this, Mr. Weller mixed two glasses of spirits-and-water, and produced a couple of pipes. The father and son sitting down opposite each other; Sam on one side of the fire, in the high-backed chair, and Mr. Weller, senior, on the other, in an easy ditto, they proceeded to enjoy themselves with all due gravity.

'Anybody been here, Sammy?' asked Mr. Weller, senior, dryly, after a long silence.

Sam nodded an expressive assent.

'Red-nosed chap?' inquired Mr. Weller.

Sam nodded again.

'Amiable man that 'ere, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, smoking violently.

'Seems so,' observed Sam.

'Good hand at accounts,' said Mr. Weller. 'Is he?' said Sam.

'Borrows eighteenpence on Monday, and comes on Tuesday for a shillin' to make it up half-a-crown; calls again on Vensday for another half-crown to make it five shillin's; and goes on, doubling, till he gets it up to a five pund note in no time, like them sums in the 'rithmetic book 'bout the nails in the horse's shoes, Sammy.'

Sam intimated by a nod that he recollected the problem alluded to by his parent.

'So you vouldn't subscribe to the flannel veskits?' said Sam, after another interval of smoking.

'Cert'nly not,' replied Mr. Weller; 'what's the good o' flannel veskits to the young niggers abroad? But I'll tell you what it is, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, lowering his voice, and bending across the fireplace; 'I'd come down wery handsome towards strait veskits for some people at home.'

As Mr. Weller said this, he slowly recovered his former position, and winked at his first-born, in a profound manner.

'It cert'nly seems a queer start to send out pocket-'ankerchers to people as don't know the use on 'em,' observed Sam.

'They're alvays a-doin' some gammon of that sort, Sammy,' replied his father. 'T'other Sunday I wos walkin' up the road, wen who should I see, a-standin' at a chapel door, with a blue soup-plate in her hand, but your mother-in-law! I werily believe there was change for a couple o' suv'rins in it, then, Sammy, all in ha'pence; and as the people come out, they rattled the pennies in it, till you'd ha' thought that no mortal plate as ever was baked, could ha' stood the wear and tear. What d'ye think it was all for?'

'For another tea-drinkin', perhaps,' said Sam.

'Not a bit on it,' replied the father; 'for the shepherd's water-rate, Sammy.'

'The shepherd's water-rate!' said Sam.

'Ay,' replied Mr. Weller, 'there was three quarters owin', and the shepherd hadn't paid a farden, not he—perhaps it might be on account that the water warn't o' much use to him, for it's wery little o' that tap he drinks, Sammy, wery; he knows a trick worth a good half-dozen of that, he does. Hows'ever, it warn't paid, and so they cuts the water off. Down goes the shepherd to chapel, gives out as he's a persecuted saint, and says he hopes the heart of the turncock as cut the water off, 'll be softened, and turned in the right vay, but he raycher thinks he's booked for somethin' uncomfortable. Upon this, the women calls a meetin', sings a hymn, wotes your mother-in-law into the chair, wolunteers a collection next Sunday, and hands it all over to the shepherd. And if he ain't got enough out on 'em, Sammy, to make him free of the water company for life,' said Mr. Weller, in conclusion, 'I'm one Dutchman, and you're another, and that's all about it.'

Mr. Weller smoked for some minutes in silence, and then resumed—

'The worst o' these here shepherds is, my boy, that they reg'larly turns the heads of all the young ladies, about here. Lord bless their little hearts, they thinks it's all right, and don't know no better; but they're the wictims o' gammon, Samivel, they're the wictims o' gammon.'

'I s'pose they are,' said Sam.

'Nothin' else,' said Mr. Weller, shaking his head gravely; 'and wot aggrawates me, Samivel, is to see 'em a-wastin' all their time and labour in making clothes for copper-coloured people as don't want 'em, and taking no notice of flesh-coloured Christians as do. If I'd my vay, Samivel, I'd just stick some o' these here lazy shepherds behind a heavy wheelbarrow, and run 'em up and down a fourteen-inch-wide plank all day. That 'ud shake the nonsense out of 'em, if anythin' vould.'

Mr. Weller, having delivered this gentle recipe with strong emphasis, eked out by a variety of nods and contortions of the eye, emptied his glass at a draught, and knocked the ashes out of his pipe, with native dignity.

He was engaged in this operation, when a shrill voice was heard in the passage.

'Here's your dear relation, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller; and Mrs. W. hurried into the room.

'Oh, you've come back, have you!' said Mrs. Weller.

'Yes, my dear,' replied Mr. Weller, filling a fresh pipe.

'Has Mr. Stiggins been back?' said Mrs. Weller.

'No, my dear, he hasn't,' replied Mr. Weller, lighting the pipe by the ingenious process of holding to the bowl thereof, between the tongs, a red-hot coal from the adjacent fire; and what's more, my dear, I shall manage to surwive it, if he don't come back at all.'

'Ugh, you wretch!' said Mrs. Weller.

'Thank'ee, my love,' said Mr. Weller. 'Come, come, father,' said Sam, 'none o' these little lovin's afore strangers. Here's the reverend gen'l'm'n a-comin' in now.' At this announcement, Mrs. Weller hastily wiped off the tears which she had just begun to force on; and Mr. W. drew his chair sullenly into the chimney-corner.

Mr. Stiggins was easily prevailed on to take another glass of the hot pine-apple rum-and-water, and a second, and a third, and then to refresh himself with a slight supper, previous to beginning again. He sat on the same side as Mr. Weller, senior; and every time he could contrive to do so, unseen by his wife, that gentleman indicated to his son the hidden emotions of his bosom, by shaking his fist over the deputy-shepherd's head; a process which afforded his son the most unmingled delight and satisfaction, the more especially as Mr. Stiggins went on, quietly drinking the hot pine-apple rum-and-water, wholly unconscious of what was going forward.

The major part of the conversation was confined to Mrs. Weller and the reverend Mr. Stiggins; and the topics principally descanted on, were the virtues of the shepherd, the worthiness of his flock, and the high crimes and misdemeanours of everybody beside—dissertations which the elder Mr.

Weller occasionally interrupted by half-suppressed references to a gentleman of the name of Walker, and other running commentaries of the same kind.

At length Mr. Stiggins, with several most indubitable symptoms of having quite as much pine-apple rum-and-water about him as he could comfortably accommodate, took his hat, and his leave; and Sam was, immediately afterwards, shown to bed by his father. The respectable old gentleman wrung his hand fervently, and seemed disposed to address some observation to his son; but on Mrs. Weller advancing towards him, he appeared to relinquish that intention, and abruptly bade him good-night.

Sam was up betimes next day, and having partaken of a hasty breakfast, prepared to return to London. He had scarcely set foot without the house, when his father stood before him.

'Goin', Sammy?' inquired Mr. Weller.

'Off at once,' replied Sam.

'I vish you could muffle that 'ere Stiggins, and take him vith you,' said Mr. Weller.

'I am ashamed on you!' said Sam reproachfully; 'what do you let him show his red nose in the Markis o' Granby at all, for?'

Mr. Weller the elder fixed on his son an earnest look, and replied, ''Cause I'm a married man, Samivel,'cause I'm a married man. Ven you're a married man, Samivel, you'll understand a good many things as you don't understand now; but vether it's worth while goin' through so much, to learn so little, as the charity-boy said ven he got to the end of the alphabet, is a matter o' taste. I rayther think it isn't.' 'Well,' said Sam, 'good-bye.'

'Tar, tar, Sammy,' replied his father.

'I've only got to say this here,' said Sam, stopping short, 'that if I was the properiator o' the Markis o' Granby, and that 'ere Stiggins came and made toast in my bar, I'd—'

'What?' interposed Mr. Weller, with great anxiety. 'What?'

'Pison his rum-and-water,' said Sam.

'No!' said Mr. Weller, shaking his son eagerly by the hand, 'would you raly, Sammy-would you, though?'

'I would,' said Sam. 'I wouldn't be too hard upon him at first. I'd drop him in the water-butt, and put the lid on; and if I found he was insensible to kindness, I'd try the other persvasion.'

The elder Mr. Weller bestowed a look of deep, unspeakable admiration on his son, and, having once more grasped his hand, walked slowly away, revolving in his mind the numerous reflections to which his advice had given rise.

Sam looked after him, until he turned a corner of the road; and then set forward on his walk to London. He meditated at first, on the probable consequences of his own advice, and the likelihood of his father's adopting it. He dismissed the subject from his mind, however, with the consolatory reflection that time alone would show; and this is the reflection we would impress upon the reader.

CHAPTER XXVIII. A GOOD-HUMOURED CHRISTMAS CHAPTER, CONTAINING AN ACCOUNT

OF A WEDDING, AND SOME OTHER SPORTS BESIDE: WHICH ALTHOUGH IN THEIR WAY, EVEN AS GOOD CUSTOMS AS MARRIAGE ITSELF, ARE NOT QUITE SO RELIGIOUSLY KEPT UP, IN THESE DEGENERATE TIMES

As brisk as bees, if not altogether as light as fairies, did the four Pickwickians assemble on the morning of the twenty-second day of December, in the year of grace in which these, their faithfully-recorded adventures, were undertaken and accomplished. Christmas was close at hand, in all his bluff and hearty honesty; it was the season of hospitality, merriment, and open-heartedness; the old year was preparing, like an ancient philosopher, to call his friends around him, and amidst the sound of feasting and revelry to pass gently and calmly away. Gay and merry was the time; and right gay and merry were at least four of the numerous hearts that were gladdened by its coming.

And numerous indeed are the hearts to which Christmas brings a brief season of happiness and enjoyment. How many families, whose members have been dispersed and scattered far and wide, in the restless struggles of life, are then reunited, and meet once again in that happy state of companionship and mutual goodwill, which is a source of such pure and unalloyed delight; and one so incompatible with the cares and sorrows of the world, that the religious belief of the most civilised nations, and the rude traditions of the roughest savages, alike number it among the first joys of a future condition of existence, provided for the blessed and happy! How many old recollections, and how many dormant sympathies, does Christmas time awaken!

We write these words now, many miles distant from the spot at which, year after year, we met on that day, a merry and joyous circle. Many of the hearts that throbbed so gaily then, have ceased to beat; many of the looks that shone so brightly then, have ceased to glow; the hands we grasped, have grown cold; the eyes we sought, have hid their lustre in the grave; and yet the old house, the room, the merry voices and smiling faces, the jest, the laugh, the most minute and trivial circumstances connected with those happy meetings, crowd upon our mind at each recurrence of the season, as if the last assemblage had been but yesterday! Happy, happy Christmas, that can win us back to the delusions of our childish days; that can recall to the old man the pleasures of his youth; that can transport the sailor and the traveller, thousands of miles away, back to his own fireside and his quiet home!

But we are so taken up and occupied with the good qualities of this saint Christmas, that we are keeping Mr. Pickwick and his friends waiting in the cold on the outside of the Muggleton coach, which they have just attained, well wrapped up in great-coats, shawls, and comforters. The portmanteaus and carpet-bags have been stowed away, and Mr. Weller and the guard are endeavouring to insinuate into the fore-boot a huge cod-fish several sizes too large for it—which is snugly packed up, in a long brown basket, with a layer of straw over the top, and which has been left to the last, in order that he may repose in safety on the half-dozen barrels of real native oysters, all the property of Mr. Pickwick, which have been arranged in regular order at the bottom of the receptacle. The interest displayed in Mr. Pickwick's countenance is most intense, as Mr. Weller and the guard try to squeeze the cod-fish into the boot, first head first, and then tail first, and then top upward, and then bottom upward, and then side-ways, and then long-ways, all of which artifices the implacable cod-fish sturdily resists, until the guard accidentally hits him in the very middle of the basket, whereupon he suddenly disappears into the boot, and with him, the head and shoulders of the guard himself, who, not calculating upon so sudden a cessation of the passive resistance of the cod-fish, experiences a very unexpected shock, to the unsmotherable delight of all the porters and bystanders. Upon this, Mr. Pickwick smiles with great good-humour, and drawing a shilling from his waistcoat pocket, begs the guard, as he picks himself out of the boot, to drink his health in a glass of hot brandy-and-water; at which the guard smiles too, and Messrs. Snodgrass, Winkle, and Tupman, all smile in company. The guard and Mr. Weller disappear for five minutes, most probably to get the hot brandy-and-water, for they smell very strongly of it, when they return, the coachman mounts to the box, Mr. Weller jumps up behind, the Pickwickians pull their coats round their legs and their shawls over their noses, the helpers pull the horse-cloths off, the coachman shouts out a cheery 'All right,' and away they go.

They have rumbled through the streets, and jolted over the stones, and at length reach the wide and open country. The wheels skim over the hard and frosty ground; and the horses, bursting into a canter at a smart crack of the whip, step along the road as if the load behind them—coach, passengers, cod-fish, oyster-barrels, and all—were but a feather at their heels. They have descended a gentle slope, and enter upon a level, as compact and dry as a solid block of marble, two miles long. Another crack of the whip, and on they speed, at a smart gallop, the horses tossing their heads and rattling the harness, as if in exhilaration at the rapidity of the motion; while the coachman, holding whip and reins in one hand, takes off his hat with the other, and resting it on his knees, pulls out his handkerchief, and wipes his forehead, partly because he has a habit of doing it, and partly because it's as well to show the passengers how cool he is, and what an easy thing it is to drive four-in-hand, when you have had as much practice as he has. Having done this very leisurely (otherwise the effect would be materially impaired), he replaces his handkerchief, pulls on his hat, adjusts his gloves, squares his elbows, cracks the whip again, and on they speed, more merrily than before. A few small houses, scattered on either side of the road, betoken the entrance to some town or village. The lively notes of the guard's key-bugle vibrate in the clear cold air, and wake up the old gentleman inside, who, carefully letting down the window-sash half-way, and standing sentry over the air, takes a short peep out, and then carefully pulling it up again, informs the other inside that they're going to change directly; on which the other inside wakes himself up, and determines to postpone his next nap until after the stoppage. Again the bugle sounds lustily forth, and rouses the cottager's wife and children, who peep out at the house door, and watch the coach till it turns the corner, when they once more crouch round the blazing fire, and throw on another log of wood against father comes home; while father himself, a full mile off, has just exchanged a friendly nod with the coachman, and turned round to take a good long stare at the vehicle as it whirls away.

And now the bugle plays a lively air as the coach rattles through the ill-paved streets of a country town; and the coachman, undoing the buckle which keeps his ribands together, prepares to throw them off the moment he stops. Mr. Pickwick emerges from his coat collar, and looks about him with great curiosity; perceiving which, the coachman informs Mr. Pickwick of the name of the town, and tells him it was market-day yesterday, both of which pieces of information Mr. Pickwick retails to his fellow-passengers; whereupon they emerge from their coat collars too, and look about them also. Mr. Winkle, who sits at the extreme edge, with one leg dangling in the air, is nearly precipitated into the street, as the coach twists round the sharp corner by the cheesemonger's shop, and turns into the market-place; and before Mr. Snodgrass, who sits next to him, has recovered from his alarm, they pull up at the inn yard where the fresh horses, with cloths on, are already waiting. The coachman throws down the reins and gets down himself, and the other outside passengers drop down also; except those who have no great confidence in their ability to get up again; and they remain where they are, and stamp their feet against the coach to warm them—looking, with longing eyes and red noses, at the bright fire in the inn bar, and the sprigs of holly with red berries which ornament the window.

But the guard has delivered at the corn-dealer's shop, the brown paper packet he took out of the little pouch which hangs over his shoulder by a leathern strap; and has seen the horses carefully put to; and has thrown on the pavement the saddle which was brought from London on the coach roof; and has assisted in the conference between the coachman and the hostler about the gray mare that hurt her off fore-leg last Tuesday; and he and Mr. Weller are all right behind, and the coachman is all right in front, and the old gentleman inside, who has kept the window down full two inches all this time, has pulled it up again, and the cloths are off, and they are all ready for starting, except the 'two stout gentlemen,' whom the coachman inquires after with some impatience. Hereupon the coachman, and the guard, and Sam Weller, and Mr. Winkle, and Mr. Snodgrass, and all the hostlers, and every one of the idlers, who are more in number than all the others put together, shout for the missing gentlemen as loud as they can bawl. A distant response is heard from the yard, and Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Tupman come running down it, quite out of breath, for they have been having a glass of ale a-piece, and Mr. Pickwick's fingers are so cold that he has been full five minutes before he could find the sixpence to pay for it. The coachman shouts an admonitory 'Now then, gen'l'm'n,' the guard re-echoes it; the old gentleman inside thinks it a very extraordinary thing that people WILL get down when they know there isn't time for it; Mr. Pickwick struggles up on one side, Mr. Tupman on the other; Mr. Winkle cries 'All right'; and off they start. Shawls are pulled up, coat collars are readjusted, the pavement ceases, the houses disappear; and they are once again dashing along the open road, with the fresh clear air blowing in their faces, and gladdening their very hearts within them.

Such was the progress of Mr. Pickwick and his friends by the Muggleton Telegraph, on their way to Dingley Dell; and at three o'clock that afternoon they all stood high and dry, safe and sound, hale and hearty, upon the steps of the Blue Lion, having taken on the road quite enough of ale and brandy, to enable them to bid defiance to the frost that was binding up the earth in its iron fetters, and weaving its beautiful network upon the trees and hedges. Mr. Pickwick was busily engaged in counting the barrels of oysters and superintending the disinterment of the cod-fish, when he felt himself gently pulled by the skirts of the coat. Looking round, he discovered that the individual who resorted to this mode of catching his attention was no other than Mr. Wardle's favourite page, better known to the readers of this unvarnished history, by the distinguishing appellation of the fat boy.

'Aha!' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Aha!' said the fat boy.

As he said it, he glanced from the cod-fish to the oyster-barrels, and chuckled joyously. He was fatter than ever.

'Well, you look rosy enough, my young friend,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'I've been asleep, right in front of the taproom fire,' replied the fat boy, who had heated himself to the colour of a new chimney-pot, in the course of an hour's nap. 'Master sent me over with the shay-cart, to carry your luggage up to the house. He'd ha' sent some saddle-horses, but he thought you'd rather walk, being a cold day.'

'Yes, yes,' said Mr. Pickwick hastily, for he remembered how they had travelled over nearly the same ground on a previous occasion. 'Yes, we would rather walk. Here, Sam!'

'Sir,' said Mr. Weller.

'Help Mr. Wardle's servant to put the packages into the cart, and then ride on with him. We will walk forward at once.'

Having given this direction, and settled with the coachman, Mr. Pickwick and his three friends struck into the footpath across the fields, and walked briskly away, leaving Mr. Weller and the fat boy confronted together for the first time. Sam looked at the fat boy with great astonishment, but without saying a word; and began to stow the luggage rapidly away in the cart, while the fat boy stood quietly by, and seemed to think it a very interesting sort of thing to see Mr. Weller working by himself.

'There,' said Sam, throwing in the last carpet-bag, 'there they are!'

'Yes,' said the fat boy, in a very satisfied tone, 'there they are.'

'Vell, young twenty stun,' said Sam, 'you're a nice specimen of a prize boy, you are!' 'Thank'ee,' said the fat boy.

'You ain't got nothin' on your mind as makes you fret yourself, have you?' inquired Sam.

'Not as I knows on,' replied the fat boy.

'I should rayther ha' thought, to look at you, that you was a-labourin' under an unrequited attachment to some young 'ooman,' said Sam.

The fat boy shook his head.

'Vell,' said Sam, 'I am glad to hear it. Do you ever drink anythin'?'

'I likes eating better,' replied the boy.

'Ah,' said Sam, 'I should ha' s'posed that; but what I mean is, should you like a drop of anythin' as'd warm you? but I s'pose you never was cold, with all them elastic fixtures, was you?'

'Sometimes,' replied the boy; 'and I likes a drop of something, when it's good.'

'Oh, you do, do you?' said Sam, 'come this way, then!'

The Blue Lion tap was soon gained, and the fat boy swallowed a glass of liquor without so much as winking—a feat which considerably advanced him in Mr. Weller's good opinion. Mr. Weller having transacted a similar piece of business on his own account, they got into the cart.

'Can you drive?' said the fat boy. 'I should rayther think so,' replied Sam.

'There, then,' said the fat boy, putting the reins in his hand, and pointing up a lane, 'it's as straight as you can go; you can't miss it.'

With these words, the fat boy laid himself affectionately down by the side of the cod-fish, and, placing an oyster-barrel under his head for a pillow, fell asleep instantaneously.

'Well,' said Sam, 'of all the cool boys ever I set my eyes on, this here young gen'l'm'n is the coolest. Come, wake up, young dropsy!'

But as young dropsy evinced no symptoms of returning animation, Sam Weller sat himself down in front of the cart, and starting the old horse with a jerk of the rein, jogged steadily on, towards the Manor Farm.

Meanwhile, Mr. Pickwick and his friends having walked their blood into active circulation, proceeded cheerfully on. The paths were hard; the grass was crisp and frosty; the air had a fine, dry, bracing coldness; and the rapid approach of the gray twilight (slate-coloured is a better term in frosty weather) made them look forward with pleasant anticipation to the comforts which awaited them at their hospitable entertainer's. It was the sort of afternoon that might induce a couple of elderly gentlemen, in a lonely field, to take off their greatcoats and play at leap-frog in pure lightness of heart and gaiety; and we firmly believe that had Mr. Tupman at that moment proffered 'a back,' Mr. Pickwick would have accepted his offer with the utmost avidity.

However, Mr. Tupman did not volunteer any such accommodation, and the friends walked on, conversing merrily. As they turned into a lane they had to cross, the sound of many voices burst upon their ears; and before they had even had time to form a guess to whom they belonged, they walked into the very centre of the party who were expecting their arrival—a fact which was first notified to the Pickwickians, by the loud 'Hurrah,' which burst from old Wardle's lips, when they appeared in sight.

First, there was Wardle himself, looking, if that were possible, more jolly than ever; then there were Bella and her faithful Trundle; and, lastly, there were Emily and some eight or ten young ladies, who had all come down to the wedding, which was to take place next day, and who were in as happy and important a state as young ladies usually are, on such momentous occasions; and they were, one and all, startling the fields and lanes, far and wide, with their frolic and laughter.

The ceremony of introduction, under such circumstances, was very soon performed, or we should rather say that the introduction was soon over, without any ceremony at all. In two minutes thereafter, Mr. Pickwick was joking with the young ladies who wouldn't come over the stile while he looked—or who, having pretty feet and unexceptionable ankles, preferred standing on the top rail for five minutes or so, declaring that they were too frightened to move—with as much ease and absence of reserve or constraint, as if he had known them for life. It is worthy of remark, too, that Mr. Snodgrass offered Emily far more assistance than the absolute terrors of the stile (although it was full three feet high, and had only a couple of stepping-stones) would seem to require; while one black-eyed young lady in a very nice little pair of boots with fur round the top, was observed to scream very loudly, when Mr. Winkle offered to help her over.

All this was very snug and pleasant. And when the difficulties of the stile were at last surmounted, and they once more entered on the open field, old Wardle informed Mr. Pickwick how they had all been down in a body to inspect the furniture and fittings-up of the house, which the young couple were to tenant, after the Christmas holidays; at which communication Bella and Trundle both coloured up, as red as the fat boy after the taproom fire; and the young lady with the black eyes and the fur round the boots, whispered something in Emily's ear, and then glanced archly at Mr. Snodgrass; to which Emily responded that she was a foolish girl, but turned very red, notwithstanding; and Mr. Snodgrass, who was as modest as all great geniuses usually are, felt the crimson rising to the crown of his head, and devoutly wished, in the inmost recesses of his own heart, that the young lady aforesaid, with her black eyes, and her archness, and her boots with the fur round the top, were all comfortably deposited in the adjacent county.

But if they were social and happy outside the house, what was the warmth and cordiality of their reception when they reached the farm! The very servants grinned with pleasure at sight of Mr. Pickwick; and Emma bestowed a half-demure, half-impudent, and all-pretty look of recognition, on Mr. Tupman, which was enough to make the statue of Bonaparte in the passage, unfold his arms, and clasp her within them.

The old lady was seated with customary state in the front parlour, but she was rather cross, and, by consequence, most particularly deaf. She never went out herself, and like a great many other old ladies of the same stamp, she was apt to consider it an act of domestic treason, if anybody else took the liberty of doing what she couldn't. So, bless her old soul, she sat as upright as she could, in her great chair, and looked as fierce as might be—and that was benevolent after all.

'Mother,' said Wardle, 'Mr. Pickwick. You recollect him?'

'Never mind,' replied the old lady, with great dignity. 'Don't trouble Mr. Pickwick about an old creetur like me. Nobody cares about me now, and it's very nat'ral they shouldn't.' Here the old lady tossed her head, and smoothed down her lavender-coloured silk dress with trembling hands. 'Come, come, ma'am,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'I can't let you cut an old friend in this way. I have come down expressly to have a long talk, and another rubber with you; and we'll show these boys and girls how to dance a minuet, before they're eight-and-forty hours older.'

The old lady was rapidly giving way, but she did not like to do it all at once; so she only said, 'Ah! I can't hear him!'

'Nonsense, mother,' said Wardle. 'Come, come, don't be cross, there's a good soul. Recollect Bella; come, you must keep her spirits up, poor girl.'

The good old lady heard this, for her lip quivered as her son said it. But age has its little infirmities of temper, and she was not quite brought round yet. So, she smoothed down the lavender-coloured dress again, and turning to Mr. Pickwick said, 'Ah, Mr. Pickwick, young people was very different, when I was a girl.'

'No doubt of that, ma'am,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'and that's the reason why I would make much of the few that have any traces of the old stock'—and saying this, Mr. Pickwick gently pulled Bella towards him, and bestowing a kiss upon her forehead, bade her sit down on the little stool at her grandmother's feet. Whether the expression of her countenance, as it was raised towards the old lady's face, called up a thought of old times, or whether the old lady was touched by Mr. Pickwick's affectionate good-nature, or whatever was the cause, she was fairly melted; so she threw herself on her granddaughter's neck, and all the little ill-humour evaporated in a gush of silent tears.

A happy party they were, that night. Sedate and solemn were the score of rubbers in which Mr. Pickwick and the old lady played together; uproarious was the mirth of the round table. Long after the ladies had retired, did the hot elder wine, well qualified with brandy and spice, go round, and round, and round again; and sound was the sleep and pleasant were the dreams that followed. It is a remarkable fact that those of Mr. Snodgrass bore constant reference to Emily Wardle; and that the principal figure in Mr. Winkle's visions was a young lady with black eyes, and arch smile, and a pair of remarkably nice boots with fur round the tops.

Mr. Pickwick was awakened early in the morning, by a hum of voices and a pattering of feet, sufficient to rouse even the fat boy from his heavy slumbers. He sat up in bed and listened. The female servants and female visitors were running constantly to and fro; and there were such multitudinous demands for hot water, such repeated outcries for needles and thread, and so many half-suppressed entreaties of 'Oh, do come and tie me, there's a dear!' that Mr. Pickwick in his innocence began to imagine that something dreadful must have occurred—when he grew more awake, and remembered the wedding. The occasion being an important one, he dressed himself with peculiar care, and descended to the breakfast-room.

There were all the female servants in a bran new uniform of pink muslin gowns with white bows in their caps, running about the house in a state of excitement and agitation which it would be impossible to describe. The old lady was dressed out in a brocaded gown, which had not seen the light for twenty years, saving and excepting such truant rays as had stolen through the chinks in the box in which it had been laid by, during the whole time. Mr. Trundle was in high feather and spirits, but a little nervous withal. The hearty old landlord was trying to look very cheerful and unconcerned, but failing signally in the attempt. All the girls were in tears and white muslin, except a select two or three, who were being honoured with a private view of the bride and bridesmaids, upstairs. All the Pickwickians were in most blooming array; and there was a terrific roaring on the grass in front of the house, occasioned by all the men, boys, and hobbledehoys attached to the farm, each of whom had got a white bow in his button-hole, and all of whom were cheering with might and main; being incited thereto, and stimulated therein by the precept and example of Mr. Samuel Weller, who had managed to become mighty popular already, and was as much at home as if he had been born on the land.

A wedding is a licensed subject to joke upon, but there really is no great joke in the matter after all;—we speak merely of the ceremony, and beg it to be distinctly understood that we indulge in no hidden sarcasm upon a married life. Mixed up with the pleasure and joy of the occasion, are the many regrets at quitting home, the tears of parting between parent and child, the consciousness of leaving the dearest and kindest friends of the happiest portion of human life, to encounter its cares and troubles with others still untried and little known—natural feelings which we would not render this chapter mournful by describing, and which we should be still more unwilling to be supposed to ridicule.

Let us briefly say, then, that the ceremony was performed by the old clergyman, in the parish church of Dingley Dell, and that Mr. Pickwick's name is attached to the register, still preserved in the vestry thereof; that the young lady with the black eyes signed her name in a very unsteady and tremulous manner; that Emily's signature, as the other bridesmaid, is nearly illegible; that it all went off in very admirable style; that the young ladies generally thought it far less shocking than they had expected; and that although the owner of the black eyes and the arch smile informed Mr. Wardle that she was sure she could never submit to anything so dreadful, we have the very best reasons for thinking she was mistaken. To all this, we may add, that Mr. Pickwick was the first who saluted the bride, and that in so doing he threw over her neck a rich gold watch and chain, which no mortal eyes but the jeweller's had ever beheld before. Then, the old church bell rang as gaily as it could, and they all returned to breakfast. 'Vere does the mince-pies go, young opium-eater?' said Mr. Weller to the fat boy, as he assisted in laying out such articles of consumption as had not been duly arranged on the previous night.

The fat boy pointed to the destination of the pies.

'Wery good,' said Sam, 'stick a bit o' Christmas in 'em. T'other dish opposite. There; now we look compact and comfortable, as the father said ven he cut his little boy's head off, to cure him o' squintin'.'

As Mr. Weller made the comparison, he fell back a step or two, to give full effect to it, and surveyed the preparations with the utmost satisfaction.

'Wardle,' said Mr. Pickwick, almost as soon as they were all seated, 'a glass of wine in honour of this happy occasion!'

'I shall be delighted, my boy,' said Wardle. 'Joe—damn that boy, he's gone to sleep.' 'No, I ain't, sir,' replied the fat boy, starting up from a remote corner, where, like the patron saint of fat boys—the immortal Horner—he had been devouring a Christmas pie, though not with the coolness and deliberation which characterised that young gentleman's proceedings.

'Fill Mr. Pickwick's glass.'

'Yes, sir.'

The fat boy filled Mr. Pickwick's glass, and then retired behind his master's chair, from whence he watched the play of the knives and forks, and the progress of the choice morsels from the dishes to the mouths of the company, with a kind of dark and gloomy joy that was most impressive.

'God bless you, old fellow!' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Same to you, my boy,' replied Wardle; and they pledged each other, heartily.

'Mrs. Wardle,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'we old folks must have a glass of wine together, in honour of this joyful event.'

The old lady was in a state of great grandeur just then, for she was sitting at the top of the table in the brocaded gown, with her newly-married granddaughter on one side, and Mr. Pickwick on the other, to do the carving. Mr. Pickwick had not spoken in a very loud tone, but she understood him at once, and drank off a full glass of wine to his long life and happiness; after which the worthy old soul launched forth into a minute and particular account of her own wedding, with a dissertation on the fashion of wearing high-heeled shoes, and some particulars concerning the life and adventures of the beautiful Lady Tollimglower, deceased; at all of which the old lady herself laughed very heartily indeed, and so did the young ladies too, for they were wondering among themselves what on earth grandma was talking about. When they laughed, the old lady laughed ten times more heartily, and said that these always had been considered capital stories, which caused them all to laugh again, and put the old lady into the very best of humours. Then the cake was cut, and passed through the ring; the young ladies saved pieces to put under their pillows to dream of their future husbands on; and a great deal of blushing and merriment was thereby occasioned.

'Mr. Miller,' said Mr. Pickwick to his old acquaintance, the hard-headed gentleman, 'a glass of wine?'

'With great satisfaction, Mr. Pickwick,' replied the hard-headed gentleman solemnly.

'You'll take me in?' said the benevolent old clergyman.

'And me,' interposed his wife. 'And me, and me,' said a couple of poor relations at the bottom of the table, who had eaten and drunk very heartily, and laughed at everything.

Mr. Pickwick expressed his heartfelt delight at every additional suggestion; and his eyes beamed with hilarity and cheerfulness. 'Ladies and gentlemen,' said Mr. Pickwick, suddenly rising.

'Hear, hear! Hear, hear! Hear, hear!' cried Mr. Weller, in the excitement of his feelings.

'Call in all the servants,' cried old Wardle, interposing to prevent the public rebuke which Mr. Weller would otherwise most indubitably have received from his master. 'Give them a glass of wine each to drink the toast in. Now, Pickwick.'

Amidst the silence of the company, the whispering of the women-servants, and the awkward embarrassment of the men, Mr. Pickwick proceeded—

'Ladies and gentlemen—no, I won't say ladies and gentlemen, I'll call you my friends, my dear friends, if the ladies will allow me to take so great a liberty—'

Here Mr. Pickwick was interrupted by immense applause from the ladies, echoed by the gentlemen, during which the owner of the eyes was distinctly heard to state that she could kiss that dear Mr. Pickwick. Whereupon Mr. Winkle gallantly inquired if it couldn't be done by deputy: to which the young lady with the black eyes replied 'Go away,' and accompanied the request with a look which said as plainly as a look could do, 'if you can.'

'My dear friends,' resumed Mr. Pickwick, 'I am going to propose the health of the bride and bridegroom—God bless 'em (cheers and tears). My young friend, Trundle, I believe to be a very excellent and manly fellow; and his wife I know to be a very amiable and lovely girl, well qualified to transfer to another sphere of action the happiness which for twenty years she has diffused around her, in her father's house. (Here, the fat boy burst forth into stentorian blubberings, and was led forth by the coat collar, by Mr. Weller.) I wish,' added Mr. Pickwick—'I wish I was young enough to be her sister's husband (cheers), but, failing that, I am happy to be old enough to be her father; for, being so, I shall not be suspected of any latent designs when I say, that I admire, esteem, and love them both (cheers and sobs). The bride's father, our good friend there, is a noble person, and I am proud to know him (great uproar). He is a kind, excellent, independent-spirited, fine-hearted, hospitable, liberal man (enthusiastic shouts from the poor relations, at all the adjectives; and especially at the two last). That his daughter may enjoy all the happiness, even he can desire; and that he may derive from the contemplation of her felicity all the gratification of heart and peace of mind which he so well deserves, is, I am persuaded, our united wish. So, let us drink their healths, and wish them prolonged life, and every blessing!'

Mr. Pickwick concluded amidst a whirlwind of applause; and once more were the lungs of the supernumeraries, under Mr. Weller's command, brought into active and efficient operation. Mr. Wardle proposed Mr. Pickwick; Mr. Pickwick proposed the old lady. Mr. Snodgrass proposed Mr. Wardle; Mr. Wardle proposed Mr. Snodgrass. One of the poor relations proposed Mr. Tupman, and the other poor relation proposed Mr. Winkle; all was happiness and festivity, until the mysterious disappearance of both the poor relations beneath the table, warned the party that it was time to adjourn.

At dinner they met again, after a five-and-twenty mile walk, undertaken by the males at Wardle's recommendation, to get rid of the effects of the wine at breakfast. The poor relations had kept in bed all day, with the view of attaining the same happy consummation, but, as they had been unsuccessful, they stopped there. Mr. Weller kept the domestics in a state of perpetual hilarity; and the fat boy divided his time into small alternate allotments of eating and sleeping.

The dinner was as hearty an affair as the breakfast, and was quite as noisy, without the tears. Then came the dessert and some more toasts. Then came the tea and coffee; and then, the ball.

The best sitting-room at Manor Farm was a good, long, dark-panelled room with a high chimney-piece, and a capacious chimney, up which you could have driven one of the new patent cabs, wheels and all. At the upper end of the room, seated in a shady bower of holly and evergreens were the two best fiddlers, and the only harp, in all Muggleton. In all sorts of recesses, and on all kinds of brackets, stood massive old silver candlesticks with four branches each. The carpet was up, the candles burned bright, the fire blazed and crackled on the hearth, and merry voices and light-hearted laughter rang through the room. If any of the old English yeomen had turned into fairies when they died, it was just the place in which they would have held their revels.

If anything could have added to the interest of this agreeable scene, it would have been the remarkable fact of Mr. Pickwick's appearing without his gaiters, for the first time within the memory of his oldest friends.

'You mean to dance?' said Wardle.

'Of course I do,' replied Mr. Pickwick. 'Don't you see I am dressed for the purpose?' Mr. Pickwick called attention to his speckled silk stockings, and smartly tied pumps.

'YOU in silk stockings!' exclaimed Mr. Tupman jocosely.

'And why not, sir—why not?' said Mr. Pickwick, turning warmly upon him. 'Oh, of course there is no reason why you shouldn't wear them,' responded Mr. Tupman.

'I imagine not, sir—I imagine not,' said Mr. Pickwick, in a very peremptory tone.

Mr. Tupman had contemplated a laugh, but he found it was a serious matter; so he looked grave, and said they were a pretty pattern.

'I hope they are,' said Mr. Pickwick, fixing his eyes upon his friend. 'You see nothing extraordinary in the stockings, AS stockings, I trust, Sir?'

'Certainly not. Oh, certainly not,' replied Mr. Tupman. He walked away; and Mr. Pickwick's countenance resumed its customary benign expression.

'We are all ready, I believe,' said Mr. Pickwick, who was stationed with the old lady at the top of the dance, and had already made four false starts, in his excessive anxiety to commence.

'Then begin at once,' said Wardle. 'Now!'

Up struck the two fiddles and the one harp, and off went Mr. Pickwick into hands across, when there was a general clapping of hands, and a cry of 'Stop, stop!'

'What's the matter?' said Mr. Pickwick, who was only brought to, by the fiddles and harp desisting, and could have been stopped by no other earthly power, if the house had been on fire. 'Where's Arabella Allen?' cried a dozen voices.

'And Winkle?'added Mr. Tupman.

'Here we are!' exclaimed that gentleman, emerging with his pretty companion from the corner; as he did so, it would have been hard to tell which was the redder in the face, he or the young lady with the black eyes.

'What an extraordinary thing it is, Winkle,' said Mr. Pickwick, rather pettishly, 'that you couldn't have taken your place before.'

'Not at all extraordinary,' said Mr. Winkle.

'Well,' said Mr. Pickwick, with a very expressive smile, as his eyes rested on Arabella, 'well, I don't know that it WAS extraordinary, either, after all.'

However, there was no time to think more about the matter, for the fiddles and harp began in real earnest. Away went Mr. Pickwick—hands across—down the middle to the very end of the room, and half-way up the chimney, back again to the door—poussette everywhere—loud stamp on the ground—ready for the next couple—off again—all the figure over once more—another stamp to beat out the time—next couple, and the next, and the next again—never was such going; at last, after they had reached the bottom of the dance, and full fourteen couple after the old lady had retired in an exhausted state, and the clergyman's wife had been substituted in her stead, did that gentleman, when there was no demand whatever on his exertions, keep perpetually dancing in his place, to keep time to the music, smiling on his partner all the while with a blandness of demeanour which baffles all description.

Long before Mr. Pickwick was weary of dancing, the newly-married couple had retired from the scene. There was a glorious supper downstairs, notwithstanding, and a good long sitting after it; and when Mr. Pickwick awoke, late the next morning, he had a confused recollection of having, severally and confidentially, invited somewhere about five-and-forty people to dine with him at the George and Vulture, the very first time they came to London; which Mr. Pickwick rightly considered a pretty certain indication of his having taken something besides exercise, on the previous night.

'And so your family has games in the kitchen to-night, my dear, has they?' inquired Sam of Emma.

'Yes, Mr. Weller,' replied Emma; 'we always have on Christmas Eve. Master wouldn't neglect to keep it up on any account.'

'Your master's a wery pretty notion of keeping anythin' up, my dear,' said Mr. Weller; 'I never see such a sensible sort of man as he is, or such a reg'lar gen'l'm'n.' 'Oh, that he is!' said the fat boy, joining in the conversation; 'don't he breed nice pork!' The fat youth gave a semi-cannibalic leer at Mr. Weller, as he thought of the roast legs and gravy.

'Oh, you've woke up, at last, have you?' said Sam.

The fat boy nodded.

'I'll tell you what it is, young boa-constructer,' said Mr. Weller impressively; 'if you don't sleep a little less, and exercise a little more, wen you comes to be a man you'll lay yourself open to the same sort of personal inconwenience as was inflicted on the old gen'l'm'n as wore the pigtail.'

'What did they do to him?' inquired the fat boy, in a faltering voice.

'I'm a-going to tell you,' replied Mr. Weller; 'he was one o' the largest patterns as was ever turned out—reg'lar fat man, as hadn't caught a glimpse of his own shoes for five-and-forty year.'

'Lor!' exclaimed Emma.

'No, that he hadn't, my dear,' said Mr. Weller; 'and if you'd put an exact model of his own legs on the dinin'-table afore him, he wouldn't ha' known 'em. Well, he always walks to his office with a wery handsome gold watch-chain hanging out, about a foot and a quarter, and a gold watch in his fob pocket as was worth—I'm afraid to say how much, but as much as a watch can be—a large, heavy, round manufacter, as stout for a watch, as he was for a man, and with a big face in proportion. "You'd better not carry that 'ere watch," says the old gen'l'm'n's friends, "you'll be robbed on it," says they. "Shall I?" says he. "Yes, you will," says they. "Well," says he, "I should like to see the thief as could get this here watch out, for I'm blessed if I ever can, it's such a tight fit," says he, "and wenever I vants to know what's o'clock, I'm obliged to stare into the bakers' shops," he says. Well, then he laughs as hearty as if he was a-goin' to pieces, and out he walks agin with his powdered head and pigtail, and rolls down the Strand with the chain hangin' out furder than ever, and the great round watch almost bustin' through his gray kersey smalls. There warn't a pickpocket in all London as didn't take a pull at that chain, but the chain 'ud never break, and the watch 'ud never come out, so they soon got tired of dragging such a heavy old gen'l'm'n along the pavement, and he'd go home and laugh till the pigtail wibrated like the penderlum of a Dutch clock. At last, one day the old gen'l'm'n was a-rollin' along, and he sees a pickpocket as he know'd by sight, a-coming up, arm in arm with a little boy with a wery large head. "Here's a game," says the old gen'l'm'n to himself, "they're a-goin' to have another try, but it won't do!" So he begins a-chucklin' wery hearty, wen, all of a sudden, the little boy leaves hold of the pickpocket's arm, and rushes head foremost straight into the old gen'l'm'n's stomach, and for a moment doubles him right up with the pain. "Murder!" says the old gen'l'm'n. "All right, Sir," says the pickpocket, a-wisperin' in his ear. And wen he come straight agin, the watch and chain was gone, and what's worse than that, the old gen'l'm'n's digestion was all wrong ever afterwards, to the wery last day of his life; so just you look about you, young feller, and take care you don't get too fat.'

As Mr. Weller concluded this moral tale, with which the fat boy appeared much affected, they all three repaired to the large kitchen, in which the family were by this time assembled, according to annual custom on Christmas Eve, observed by old Wardle's forefathers from time immemorial.

From the centre of the ceiling of this kitchen, old Wardle had just suspended, with his own hands, a huge branch of mistletoe, and this same branch of mistletoe instantaneously gave rise to a scene of general and most delightful struggling and confusion; in the midst of which, Mr. Pickwick, with a gallantry that would have done honour to a descendant of Lady Tollimglower herself, took the old lady by the hand, led her beneath the mystic branch, and saluted her in all courtesy and decorum. The old lady submitted to this piece of practical politeness with all the dignity which befitted so important and serious a solemnity, but the younger ladies, not being so thoroughly imbued with a superstitious veneration for the custom, or imagining that the value of a salute is very much enhanced if it cost a little trouble to obtain it, screamed and struggled, and ran into corners, and threatened and remonstrated, and did everything but leave the room, until some of the less adventurous gentlemen were on the point of desisting, when they all at once found it useless to resist any longer, and submitted to be kissed with a good grace. Mr. Winkle kissed the young lady with the black eyes, and Mr. Snodgrass kissed Emily; and Mr. Weller, not being particular about the form of being under the mistletoe, kissed Emma and the other female servants, just as he caught them. As to the poor relations, they kissed everybody, not even excepting the plainer portions of the young lady visitors, who, in their excessive confusion, ran right under the mistletoe, as soon as it was hung up, without knowing it! Wardle stood with his back to the fire, surveying the whole scene, with the utmost satisfaction; and the fat boy took the opportunity of appropriating to his own use, and summarily devouring, a particularly fine mince-pie, that had been carefully put by, for somebody else.

Now, the screaming had subsided, and faces were in a glow, and curls in a tangle, and Mr. Pickwick, after kissing the old lady as before mentioned, was standing under the mistletoe, looking with a very pleased countenance on all that was passing around him, when the young lady with the black eyes, after a little whispering with the other young ladies, made a sudden dart forward, and, putting her arm round Mr. Pickwick's neck, saluted him affectionately on the left cheek; and before Mr. Pickwick distinctly knew what was the matter, he was surrounded by the whole body, and kissed by every one of them.

It was a pleasant thing to see Mr. Pickwick in the centre of the group, now pulled this way, and then that, and first kissed on the chin, and then on the nose, and then on the spectacles, and to hear the peals of laughter which were raised on every side; but it was a still more pleasant thing to see Mr. Pickwick, blinded shortly afterwards with a silk handkerchief, falling up against the wall, and scrambling into corners, and going through all the mysteries of blind-man's buff, with the utmost relish for the game, until at last he caught one of the poor relations, and then had to evade the blindman himself, which he did with a nimbleness and agility that elicited the admiration and applause of all beholders. The poor relations caught the people who they thought would like it, and, when the game flagged, got caught themselves. When they all tired of blind-man's buff, there was a great game at snap-dragon, and when fingers enough were burned with that, and all the raisins were gone, they sat down by the huge fire of blazing logs to a substantial supper, and a mighty bowl of wassail, something smaller than an ordinary wash-house copper, in which the hot apples were hissing and bubbling with a rich look, and a jolly sound, that were perfectly irresistible.

'This,' said Mr. Pickwick, looking round him, 'this is, indeed, comfort.'

'Our invariable custom,' replied Mr. Wardle. 'Everybody sits down with us on Christmas Eve, as you see them now—servants and all; and here we wait, until the clock strikes twelve, to usher Christmas in, and beguile the time with forfeits and old stories. Trundle, my boy, rake up the fire.'

Up flew the bright sparks in myriads as the logs were stirred. The deep red blaze sent forth a rich glow, that penetrated into the farthest corner of the room, and cast its cheerful tint on every face.

'Come,' said Wardle, 'a song—a Christmas song! I'll give you one, in default of a better.'

'Bravo!' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Fill up,' cried Wardle. 'It will be two hours, good, before you see the bottom of the bowl through the deep rich colour of the wassail; fill up all round, and now for the song.'

Thus saying, the merry old gentleman, in a good, round, sturdy voice, commenced without more ado—

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

'I care not for Spring; on his fickle wing
Let the blossoms and buds be borne;
He woos them amain with his treacherous rain,
And he scatters them ere the morn.
An inconstant elf, he knows not himself,
Nor his own changing mind an hour,
He'll smile in your face, and, with wry grimace,
He'll wither your youngest flower.

'Let the Summer sun to his bright home run,

He shall never be sought by me;
When he's dimmed by a cloud I can laugh aloud
And care not how sulky he be!
For his darling child is the madness wild
That sports in fierce fever's train;
And when love is too strong, it don't last long,
As many have found to their pain.

'A mild harvest night, by the tranquil light
Of the modest and gentle moon,
Has a far sweeter sheen for me, I ween,
Than the broad and unblushing noon.
But every leaf awakens my grief,
As it lieth beneath the tree;
So let Autumn air be never so fair,
It by no means agrees with me.

'But my song I troll out, for CHRISTMAS Stout,
The hearty, the true, and the bold;
A bumper I drain, and with might and main
Give three cheers for this Christmas old!
We'll usher him in with a merry din
That shall gladden his joyous heart,
And we'll keep him up, while there's bite or sup,
And in fellowship good, we'll part.
'In his fine honest pride, he scorns to hide
One jot of his hard-weather scars;
They're no disgrace, for there's much the same trace
On the cheeks of our bravest tars.
Then again I sing till the roof doth ring
And it echoes from wall to wall—
To the stout old wight, fair welcome to-night,
As the King of the Seasons all!'

This song was tumultuously applauded—for friends and dependents make a capital audience—and the poor relations, especially, were in perfect ecstasies of rapture. Again was the fire replenished, and again went the wassail round.

'How it snows!' said one of the men, in a low tone.

'Snows, does it?' said Wardle.

'Rough, cold night, Sir,' replied the man; 'and there's a wind got up, that drifts it across the fields, in a thick white cloud.'

'What does Jem say?' inquired the old lady. 'There ain't anything the matter, is there?'

'No, no, mother,' replied Wardle; 'he says there's a snowdrift, and a wind that's piercing cold. I should know that, by the way it rumbles in the chimney.'

'Ah!' said the old lady, 'there was just such a wind, and just such a fall of snow, a good many years back, I recollect—just five years before your poor father died. It was a Christmas Eve, too; and I remember that on that very night he told us the story about the goblins that carried away old Gabriel Grub.'

'The story about what?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Oh, nothing, nothing,' replied Wardle. 'About an old sexton, that the good people down here suppose to have been carried away by goblins.'

'Suppose!' ejaculated the old lady. 'Is there anybody hardy enough to disbelieve it? Suppose! Haven't you heard ever since you were a child, that he WAS carried away by the goblins, and don't you know he was?'

'Very well, mother, he was, if you like,' said Wardle laughing. 'He WAS carried away by goblins, Pickwick; and there's an end of the matter.'

'No, no,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'not an end of it, I assure you; for I must hear how, and why, and all about it.'

Wardle smiled, as every head was bent forward to hear, and filling out the wassail with no stinted hand, nodded a health to Mr. Pickwick, and began as follows—

But bless our editorial heart, what a long chapter we have been betrayed into! We had quite forgotten all such petty restrictions as chapters, we solemnly declare. So here goes, to give the goblin a fair start in a new one. A clear stage and no favour for the goblins, ladies and gentlemen, if you please.

CHAPTER XXIX. THE STORY OF THE GOBLINS WHO STOLE A SEXTON

In an old abbey town, down in this part of the country, a long, long while ago—so long, that the story must be a true one, because our great-grandfathers implicitly believed it—there officiated as sexton and grave-digger in the churchyard, one Gabriel Grub. It by no means follows that because a man is a sexton, and constantly surrounded by the emblems of mortality, therefore he should be a morose and melancholy man; your undertakers are the merriest fellows in the world; and I once had the honour of being on intimate terms with a mute, who in private life, and off duty, was as comical and jocose a little fellow as ever chirped out a devil-may-care song, without a hitch in his memory, or drained off a good stiff glass without stopping for breath. But notwithstanding these precedents to the contrary, Gabriel Grub was an ill-conditioned, cross-grained, surly fellow—a morose and lonely man, who consorted with nobody but himself, and an old wicker bottle which fitted into his large deep waistcoat pocket—and who eyed each merry face, as it passed him by, with such a deep scowl of malice and ill-humour, as it was difficult to meet without feeling something the worse for.

'A little before twilight, one Christmas Eve, Gabriel shouldered his spade, lighted his lantern, and betook himself towards the old churchyard; for he had got a grave to finish by next morning, and, feeling very low, he thought it might raise his spirits, perhaps, if he went on with his work at once. As he went his way, up the ancient street, he saw the cheerful light of the blazing fires gleam through the old casements, and heard the loud laugh and the cheerful shouts of those who were assembled around them; he marked the bustling preparations for next day's cheer, and smelled the numerous savoury odours consequent thereupon, as they steamed up from the kitchen windows in clouds. All this was gall and wormwood to the heart of Gabriel Grub; and when groups of children bounded out of the houses, tripped across the road, and were met, before they could knock at the opposite door, by half a dozen curly-headed little rascals who crowded round them as they flocked upstairs to spend the evening in their Christmas games, Gabriel smiled grimly, and clutched the handle of his spade with a firmer grasp, as he thought of measles, scarlet fever, thrush, whooping-cough, and a good many other sources of consolation besides.

'In this happy frame of mind, Gabriel strode along, returning a short, sullen growl to the good-humoured greetings of such of his neighbours as now and then passed him, until he turned into the dark lane which led to the churchyard. Now, Gabriel had been looking forward to reaching the dark lane, because it was, generally speaking, a nice, gloomy, mournful place, into which the townspeople did not much care to go, except in broad daylight, and when the sun was shining; consequently, he was not a little indignant to hear a young urchin roaring out some jolly song about a merry Christmas, in this very sanctuary which had been called Coffin Lane ever since the days of the old abbey, and the time of the shaven-headed monks. As Gabriel walked on, and the voice drew nearer, he found it proceeded from a small boy, who was hurrying along, to join one of the little parties in the old street, and who, partly to keep himself company, and partly to prepare himself for the occasion, was shouting out the song at the highest pitch of his lungs. So Gabriel waited until the boy came up, and then dodged him into a corner, and rapped him over the head with his lantern five or six times, just to teach him to modulate his voice. And as the boy hurried away with his hand to his head, singing quite a different sort of tune, Gabriel Grub chuckled very heartily to himself, and entered the churchyard, locking the gate behind him.

'He took off his coat, set down his lantern, and getting into the unfinished grave, worked at it for an hour or so with right good-will. But the earth was hardened with the frost, and it was no very easy matter to break it up, and shovel it out; and although there was a moon, it was a very young one, and shed little light upon the grave, which was in the shadow of the church. At any other time, these obstacles would have made Gabriel Grub very moody and miserable, but he was so well pleased with having stopped the small boy's singing, that he took little heed of the scanty progress he had made, and looked down into the grave, when he had finished work for the night, with grim satisfaction, murmuring as he gathered up his things—

Brave lodgings for one, brave lodgings for one,
A few feet of cold earth, when life is done;

A stone at the head, a stone at the feet,
A rich, juicy meal for the worms to eat;
Rank grass overhead, and damp clay around,
Brave lodgings for one, these, in holy ground!

'"Ho! ho!" laughed Gabriel Grub, as he sat himself down on a flat tombstone which was a favourite resting-place of his, and drew forth his wicker bottle. "A coffin at Christmas! A Christmas box! Ho! ho! ho!"

'"Ho! ho! ho!" repeated a voice which sounded close behind him.

'Gabriel paused, in some alarm, in the act of raising the wicker bottle to his lips, and looked round. The bottom of the oldest grave about him was not more still and quiet than the churchyard in the pale moonlight. The cold hoar frost glistened on the tombstones, and sparkled like rows of gems, among the stone carvings of the old church. The snow lay hard and crisp upon the ground; and spread over the thickly-strewn mounds of earth, so white and smooth a cover that it seemed as if corpses lay there, hidden only by their winding sheets. Not the faintest rustle broke the profound tranquillity of the solemn scene. Sound itself appeared to be frozen up, all was so cold and still.

'"It was the echoes," said Gabriel Grub, raising the bottle to his lips again.

'"It was NOT," said a deep voice.

'Gabriel started up, and stood rooted to the spot with astonishment and terror; for his eyes rested on a form that made his blood run cold.

'Seated on an upright tombstone, close to him, was a strange, unearthly figure, whom Gabriel felt at once, was no being of this world. His long, fantastic legs which might have reached the ground, were cocked up, and crossed after a quaint, fantastic fashion; his sinewy arms were bare; and his hands rested on his knees. On his short, round body, he wore a close covering, ornamented with small slashes; a short cloak dangled at his back; the collar was cut into curious peaks, which served the goblin in lieu of ruff or neckerchief; and his shoes curled up at his toes into long points. On his head, he wore a broad-brimmed sugar-loaf hat, garnished with a single feather. The hat was covered with the white frost; and the goblin looked as if he had sat on the same tombstone very comfortably, for two or three hundred years. He was sitting perfectly still; his tongue was put out, as if in derision; and he was grinning at Gabriel Grub with such a grin as only a goblin could call up.

'"It was NOT the echoes," said the goblin.

'Gabriel Grub was paralysed, and could make no reply.

'"What do you do here on Christmas Eve?" said the goblin sternly. '"I came to dig a grave, Sir," stammered Gabriel Grub.

'"What man wanders among graves and churchyards on such a night as this?" cried the goblin.

'"Gabriel Grub! Gabriel Grub!" screamed a wild chorus of voices that seemed to fill the churchyard. Gabriel looked fearfully round—nothing was to be seen.

'"What have you got in that bottle?" said the goblin.

'"Hollands, sir," replied the sexton, trembling more than ever; for he had bought it of the smugglers, and he thought that perhaps his questioner might be in the excise department of the goblins.

'"Who drinks Hollands alone, and in a churchyard, on such a night as this?" said the goblin.

'"Gabriel Grub! Gabriel Grub!" exclaimed the wild voices again.

'The goblin leered maliciously at the terrified sexton, and then raising his voice, exclaimed—

'"And who, then, is our fair and lawful prize?"

'To this inquiry the invisible chorus replied, in a strain that sounded like the voices of many choristers singing to the mighty swell of the old church organ—a strain that seemed borne to the sexton's ears upon a wild wind, and to die away as it passed onward; but the burden of the reply was still the same, "Gabriel Grub! Gabriel Grub!"

'The goblin grinned a broader grin than before, as he said, "Well, Gabriel, what do you say to this?"

'The sexton gasped for breath. '"What do you think of this, Gabriel?" said the goblin, kicking up his feet in the air on either side of the tombstone, and looking at the turned-up points with as much complacency as if he had been contemplating the most fashionable pair of Wellingtons in all Bond Street.

'"It's—it's—very curious, Sir," replied the sexton, half dead with fright; "very curious, and very pretty, but I think I'll go back and finish my work, Sir, if you please."

'"Work!" said the goblin, "what work?"

'"The grave, Sir; making the grave," stammered the sexton.

'"Oh, the grave, eh?" said the goblin; "who makes graves at a time when all other men are merry, and takes a pleasure in it?"

'Again the mysterious voices replied, "Gabriel Grub! Gabriel Grub!"

'"I am afraid my friends want you, Gabriel," said the goblin, thrusting his tongue farther into his cheek than ever—and a most astonishing tongue it was—"I'm afraid my friends want you, Gabriel," said the goblin.

'"Under favour, Sir," replied the horror-stricken sexton, "I don't think they can, Sir; they don't know me, Sir; I don't think the gentlemen have ever seen me, Sir."

'"Oh, yes, they have," replied the goblin; "we know the man with the sulky face and grim scowl, that came down the street to-night, throwing his evil looks at the children, and grasping his burying-spade the tighter. We know the man who struck the boy in the envious malice of his heart, because the boy could be merry, and he could not. We know him, we know him."

'Here, the goblin gave a loud, shrill laugh, which the echoes returned twentyfold; and throwing his legs up in the air, stood upon his head, or rather upon the very point of his sugar-loaf hat, on the narrow edge of the tombstone, whence he threw a Somerset with extraordinary agility, right to the sexton's feet, at which he planted himself in the attitude in which tailors generally sit upon the shop-board.

'"I—I—am afraid I must leave you, Sir," said the sexton, making an effort to move.

'"Leave us!" said the goblin, "Gabriel Grub going to leave us. Ho! ho! ho!"

'As the goblin laughed, the sexton observed, for one instant, a brilliant illumination within the windows of the church, as if the whole building were lighted up; it disappeared, the organ pealed forth a lively air, and whole troops of goblins, the very counterpart of the first one, poured into the churchyard, and began playing at leap-frog with the tombstones, never stopping for an instant to take breath, but "overing" the highest among them, one after the other, with the most marvellous dexterity. The first goblin was a most astonishing leaper, and none of the others could come near him; even in the extremity of his terror the sexton could not help observing, that while his friends were content to leap over the common-sized gravestones, the first one took the family vaults, iron railings and all, with as much ease as if they had been so many street-posts.

'At last the game reached to a most exciting pitch; the organ played quicker and quicker, and the goblins leaped faster and faster, coiling themselves up, rolling head over heels upon the ground, and bounding over the tombstones like footballs. The sexton's brain whirled round with the rapidity of the motion he beheld, and his legs reeled beneath him, as the spirits flew before his eyes; when the goblin king, suddenly darting towards him, laid his hand upon his collar, and sank with him through the earth.

'When Gabriel Grub had had time to fetch his breath, which the rapidity of his descent had for the moment taken away, he found himself in what appeared to be a large cavern, surrounded on all sides by crowds of goblins, ugly and grim; in the centre of the room, on an elevated seat, was stationed his friend of the churchyard; and close behind him stood Gabriel Grub himself, without power of motion.

'"Cold to-night," said the king of the goblins, "very cold. A glass of something warm here!"

'At this command, half a dozen officious goblins, with a perpetual smile upon their faces, whom Gabriel Grub imagined to be courtiers, on that account, hastily disappeared, and presently returned with a goblet of liquid fire, which they presented to the king.

'"Ah!" cried the goblin, whose cheeks and throat were transparent, as he tossed down the flame, "this warms one, indeed! Bring a bumper of the same, for Mr. Grub."

'It was in vain for the unfortunate sexton to protest that he was not in the habit of taking anything warm at night; one of the goblins held him while another poured the blazing liquid down his throat; the whole assembly screeched with laughter, as he coughed and choked, and wiped away the tears which gushed plentifully from his eyes, after swallowing the burning draught.

'"And now," said the king, fantastically poking the taper corner of his sugar-loaf hat into the sexton's eye, and thereby occasioning him the most exquisite pain; "and now, show the man of misery and gloom, a few of the pictures from our own great storehouse!"

'As the goblin said this, a thick cloud which obscured the remoter end of the cavern rolled gradually away, and disclosed, apparently at a great distance, a small and scantily furnished, but neat and clean apartment. A crowd of little children were gathered round a bright fire, clinging to their mother's gown, and gambolling around her chair. The mother occasionally rose, and drew aside the window-curtain, as if to look for some expected object; a frugal meal was ready spread upon the table; and an elbow chair was placed near the fire. A knock was heard at the door; the mother opened it, and the children crowded round her, and clapped their hands for joy, as their father entered. He was wet and weary, and shook the snow from his garments, as the children crowded round him, and seizing his cloak, hat, stick, and gloves, with busy zeal, ran with them from the room. Then, as he sat down to his meal before the fire, the children climbed about his knee, and the mother sat by his side, and all seemed happiness and comfort.

'But a change came upon the view, almost imperceptibly. The scene was altered to a small bedroom, where the fairest and youngest child lay dying; the roses had fled from his cheek, and the light from his eye; and even as the sexton looked upon him with an interest he had never felt or known before, he died. His young brothers and sisters crowded round his little bed, and seized his tiny hand, so cold and heavy; but they shrank back from its touch, and looked with awe on his infant face; for calm and tranquil as it was, and sleeping in rest and peace as the beautiful child seemed to be, they saw that he was dead, and they knew that he was an angel looking down upon, and blessing them, from a bright and happy Heaven.

'Again the light cloud passed across the picture, and again the subject changed. The father and mother were old and helpless now, and the number of those about them was diminished more than half; but content and cheerfulness sat on every face, and beamed in every eye, as they crowded round the fireside, and told and listened to old stories of earlier and bygone days. Slowly and peacefully, the father sank into the grave, and, soon after, the sharer of all his cares and troubles followed him to a place of rest. The few who yet survived them, kneeled by their tomb, and watered the green turf which covered it with their tears; then rose, and turned away, sadly and mournfully, but not with bitter cries, or despairing lamentations, for they knew that they should one day meet again; and once more they mixed with the busy world, and their content and cheerfulness were restored. The cloud settled upon the picture, and concealed it from the sexton's view.

'"What do you think of THAT?" said the goblin, turning his large face towards Gabriel Grub.

'Gabriel murmured out something about its being very pretty, and looked somewhat ashamed, as the goblin bent his fiery eyes upon him.

'"You miserable man!" said the goblin, in a tone of excessive contempt. "You!" He appeared disposed to add more, but indignation choked his utterance, so he lifted up one of his very pliable legs, and, flourishing it above his head a little, to insure his aim, administered a good sound kick to Gabriel Grub; immediately after which, all the goblins in waiting crowded round the wretched sexton, and kicked him without mercy, according to the established and invariable custom of courtiers upon earth, who kick whom royalty kicks, and hug whom royalty hugs.

'"Show him some more!" said the king of the goblins.

'At these words, the cloud was dispelled, and a rich and beautiful landscape was disclosed to view—there is just such another, to this day, within half a mile of the old abbey town. The sun shone from out the clear blue sky, the water sparkled beneath his rays, and the trees looked greener, and the flowers more gay, beneath its cheering influence. The water rippled on with a pleasant sound, the trees rustled in the light wind that murmured among their leaves, the birds sang upon the boughs, and the lark carolled on high her welcome to the morning. Yes, it was morning; the bright, balmy morning of summer; the minutest leaf, the smallest blade of grass, was instinct with life. The ant crept forth to her daily toil, the butterfly fluttered and basked in the warm rays of the sun; myriads of insects spread their transparent wings, and revelled in their brief but happy existence. Man walked forth, elated with the scene; and all was brightness and splendour.

'"YOU a miserable man!" said the king of the goblins, in a more contemptuous tone than before. And again the king of the goblins gave his leg a flourish; again it descended on the shoulders of the sexton; and again the attendant goblins imitated the example of their chief.

'Many a time the cloud went and came, and many a lesson it taught to Gabriel Grub, who, although his shoulders smarted with pain from the frequent applications of the goblins' feet thereunto, looked on with an interest that nothing could diminish. He saw that men who worked hard, and earned their scanty bread with lives of labour, were cheerful and happy; and that to the most ignorant, the sweet face of Nature was a never-failing source of cheerfulness and joy. He saw those who had been delicately nurtured, and tenderly brought up, cheerful under privations, and superior to suffering, that would have crushed many of a rougher grain, because they bore within their own bosoms the materials of happiness, contentment, and peace. He saw that women, the tenderest and most fragile of all God's creatures, were the oftenest superior to sorrow, adversity, and distress; and he saw that it was because they bore, in their own hearts, an inexhaustible well-spring of affection and devotion. Above all, he saw that men like himself, who snarled at the mirth and cheerfulness of others, were the foulest weeds on the fair surface of the earth; and setting all the good of the world against the evil, he came to the conclusion that it was a very decent and respectable sort of world after all. No sooner had he formed it, than the cloud which had closed over the last picture, seemed to settle on his senses, and lull him to repose. One by one, the goblins faded from his sight; and, as the last one disappeared, he sank to sleep.

'The day had broken when Gabriel Grub awoke, and found himself lying at full length on the flat gravestone in the churchyard, with the wicker bottle lying empty by his side, and his coat, spade, and lantern, all well whitened by the last night's frost, scattered on the ground. The stone on which he had first seen the goblin seated, stood bolt upright before him, and the grave at which he had worked, the night before, was not far off. At first, he began to doubt the reality of his adventures, but the acute pain in his shoulders when he attempted to rise, assured him that the kicking of the goblins was certainly not ideal. He was staggered again, by observing no traces of footsteps in the snow on which the goblins had played at leap-frog with the gravestones, but he speedily accounted for this circumstance when he remembered that, being spirits, they would leave no visible impression behind them. So, Gabriel Grub got on his feet as well as he could, for the pain in his back; and, brushing the frost off his coat, put it on, and turned his face towards the town.

'But he was an altered man, and he could not bear the thought of returning to a place where his repentance would be scoffed at, and his reformation disbelieved. He hesitated for a few moments; and then turned away to wander where he might, and seek his bread elsewhere.

'The lantern, the spade, and the wicker bottle were found, that day, in the churchyard. There were a great many speculations about the sexton's fate, at first, but it was speedily determined that he had been carried away by the goblins; and there were not wanting some very credible witnesses who had distinctly seen him whisked through the air on the back of a chestnut horse blind of one eye, with the hind-quarters of a lion, and the tail of a bear. At length all this was devoutly believed; and the new sexton used to exhibit to the curious, for a trifling emolument, a good-sized piece of the church weathercock which had been accidentally kicked off by the aforesaid horse in his aerial flight, and picked up by himself in the churchyard, a year or two afterwards.

'Unfortunately, these stories were somewhat disturbed by the unlooked-for reappearance of Gabriel Grub himself, some ten years afterwards, a ragged, contented, rheumatic old man. He told his story to the clergyman, and also to the mayor; and in course of time it began to be received as a matter of history, in which form it has continued down to this very day. The believers in the weathercock tale, having misplaced their confidence once, were not easily prevailed upon to part with it again, so they looked as wise as they could, shrugged their shoulders, touched their foreheads, and murmured something about Gabriel Grub having drunk all the Hollands, and then fallen asleep on the flat tombstone; and they affected to explain what he supposed he had witnessed in the goblin's cavern, by saying that he had seen the world, and grown wiser. But this opinion, which was by no means a popular one at any time, gradually died off; and be the matter how it may, as Gabriel Grub was afflicted with rheumatism to the end of his days, this story has at least one moral, if it teach no better one—and that is, that if a man turn sulky and drink by himself at Christmas time, he may make up his mind to be not a bit the better for it: let the spirits be never so good, or let them be even as many degrees beyond proof, as those which Gabriel Grub saw in the goblin's cavern.'

CHAPTER XXX. HOW THE PICKWICKIANS MADE AND CULTIVATED THE ACQUAINTANCE

OF A COUPLE OF NICE YOUNG MEN BELONGING TO ONE OF THE LIBERAL PROFESSIONS; HOW THEY DISPORTED THEMSELVES ON THE ICE; AND HOW THEIR VISIT CAME TO A CONCLUSION

'Well, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, as that favoured servitor entered his bed-chamber, with his warm water, on the morning of Christmas Day, 'still frosty?'

'Water in the wash-hand basin's a mask o' ice, Sir,' responded Sam.

'Severe weather, Sam,' observed Mr. Pickwick.

'Fine time for them as is well wropped up, as the Polar bear said to himself, ven he was practising his skating,' replied Mr. Weller.

'I shall be down in a quarter of an hour, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, untying his nightcap.

'Wery good, sir,' replied Sam. 'There's a couple o' sawbones downstairs.'

'A couple of what!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, sitting up in bed.

'A couple o' sawbones,' said Sam.

'What's a sawbones?' inquired Mr. Pickwick, not quite certain whether it was a live animal, or something to eat.

'What! Don't you know what a sawbones is, sir?' inquired Mr. Weller. 'I thought everybody know'd as a sawbones was a surgeon.'

'Oh, a surgeon, eh?' said Mr. Pickwick, with a smile.

'Just that, sir,' replied Sam. 'These here ones as is below, though, ain't reg'lar thoroughbred sawbones; they're only in trainin'.' 'In other words they're medical students, I suppose?' said Mr. Pickwick.

Sam Weller nodded assent.

'I am glad of it,' said Mr. Pickwick, casting his nightcap energetically on the counterpane. 'They are fine fellows—very fine fellows; with judgments matured by observation and reflection; and tastes refined by reading and study. I am very glad of it.'

'They're a-smokin' cigars by the kitchen fire,' said Sam.

'Ah!' observed Mr. Pickwick, rubbing his hands, 'overflowing with kindly feelings and animal spirits. Just what I like to see.' 'And one on 'em,' said Sam, not noticing his master's interruption, 'one on 'em's got his legs on the table, and is a-drinking brandy neat, vile the t'other one—him in the barnacles—has got a barrel o' oysters atween his knees, which he's a-openin' like steam, and as fast as he eats 'em, he takes a aim vith the shells at young dropsy, who's a sittin' down fast asleep, in the chimbley corner.'

'Eccentricities of genius, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'You may retire.'

Sam did retire accordingly. Mr. Pickwick at the expiration of the quarter of an hour, went down to breakfast.

'Here he is at last!' said old Mr. Wardle. 'Pickwick, this is Miss Allen's brother, Mr. Benjamin Allen. Ben we call him, and so may you, if you like. This gentleman is his very particular friend, Mr.—'

'Mr. Bob Sawyer,'interposed Mr. Benjamin Allen; whereupon Mr. Bob Sawyer and Mr. Benjamin Allen laughed in concert.

Mr. Pickwick bowed to Bob Sawyer, and Bob Sawyer bowed to Mr. Pickwick. Bob and his very particular friend then applied themselves most assiduously to the eatables before them; and Mr. Pickwick had an opportunity of glancing at them both.

Mr. Benjamin Allen was a coarse, stout, thick-set young man, with black hair cut rather short, and a white face cut rather long. He was embellished with spectacles, and wore a white neckerchief. Below his single-breasted black surtout, which was buttoned up to his chin, appeared the usual number of pepper-and-salt coloured legs, terminating in a pair of imperfectly polished boots. Although his coat was short in the sleeves, it disclosed no vestige of a linen wristband; and although there was quite enough of his face to admit of the encroachment of a shirt collar, it was not graced by the smallest approach to that appendage. He presented, altogether, rather a mildewy appearance, and emitted a fragrant odour of full-flavoured Cubas.

Mr. Bob Sawyer, who was habited in a coarse, blue coat, which, without being either a greatcoat or a surtout, partook of the nature and qualities of both, had about him that sort of slovenly smartness, and swaggering gait, which is peculiar to young gentlemen who smoke in the streets by day, shout and scream in the same by night, call waiters by their Christian names, and do various other acts and deeds of an equally facetious description. He wore a pair of plaid trousers, and a large, rough, double-breasted waistcoat; out of doors, he carried a thick stick with a big top. He eschewed gloves, and looked, upon the whole, something like a dissipated Robinson Crusoe.

Such were the two worthies to whom Mr. Pickwick was introduced, as he took his seat at the breakfast-table on Christmas morning.

'Splendid morning, gentlemen,' said Mr. Pickwick.

Mr. Bob Sawyer slightly nodded his assent to the proposition, and asked Mr. Benjamin Allen for the mustard.

'Have you come far this morning, gentlemen?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Blue Lion at Muggleton,' briefly responded Mr. Allen.

'You should have joined us last night,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'So we should,' replied Bob Sawyer, 'but the brandy was too good to leave in a hurry; wasn't it, Ben?'

'Certainly,' said Mr. Benjamin Allen; 'and the cigars were not bad, or the pork-chops either; were they, Bob?'

'Decidedly not,' said Bob. The particular friends resumed their attack upon the breakfast, more freely than before, as if the recollection of last night's supper had imparted a new relish to the meal.

'Peg away, Bob,' said Mr. Allen, to his companion, encouragingly.

'So I do,' replied Bob Sawyer. And so, to do him justice, he did.

'Nothing like dissecting, to give one an appetite,' said Mr. Bob Sawyer, looking round the table.

Mr. Pickwick slightly shuddered.

'By the bye, Bob,' said Mr. Allen, 'have you finished that leg yet?'

'Nearly,' replied Sawyer, helping himself to half a fowl as he spoke. 'It's a very muscular one for a child's.' 'Is it?' inquired Mr. Allen carelessly.

'Very,' said Bob Sawyer, with his mouth full.

'I've put my name down for an arm at our place,' said Mr. Allen. 'We're clubbing for a subject, and the list is nearly full, only we can't get hold of any fellow that wants a head. I wish you'd take it.'

'No,' replied 'Bob Sawyer; 'can't afford expensive luxuries.'

'Nonsense!' said Allen.

'Can't, indeed,' rejoined Bob Sawyer, 'I wouldn't mind a brain, but I couldn't stand a whole head.' 'Hush, hush, gentlemen, pray,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'I hear the ladies.'

As Mr. Pickwick spoke, the ladies, gallantly escorted by Messrs. Snodgrass, Winkle, and Tupman, returned from an early walk.

'Why, Ben!' said Arabella, in a tone which expressed more surprise than pleasure at the sight of her brother.

'Come to take you home to-morrow,' replied Benjamin.

Mr. Winkle turned pale.

'Don't you see Bob Sawyer, Arabella?' inquired Mr. Benjamin Allen, somewhat reproachfully. Arabella gracefully held out her hand, in acknowledgment of Bob Sawyer's presence. A thrill of hatred struck to Mr. Winkle's heart, as Bob Sawyer inflicted on the proffered hand a perceptible squeeze.

'Ben, dear!' said Arabella, blushing; 'have—have—you been introduced to Mr. Winkle?'

'I have not been, but I shall be very happy to be, Arabella,' replied her brother gravely. Here Mr. Allen bowed grimly to Mr. Winkle, while Mr. Winkle and Mr. Bob Sawyer glanced mutual distrust out of the corners of their eyes.

The arrival of the two new visitors, and the consequent check upon Mr. Winkle and the young lady with the fur round her boots, would in all probability have proved a very unpleasant interruption to the hilarity of the party, had not the cheerfulness of Mr. Pickwick, and the good humour of the host, been exerted to the very utmost for the common weal. Mr. Winkle gradually insinuated himself into the good graces of Mr. Benjamin Allen, and even joined in a friendly conversation with Mr. Bob Sawyer; who, enlivened with the brandy, and the breakfast, and the talking, gradually ripened into a state of extreme facetiousness, and related with much glee an agreeable anecdote, about the removal of a tumour on some gentleman's head, which he illustrated by means of an oyster-knife and a half-quartern loaf, to the great edification of the assembled company. Then the whole train went to church, where Mr. Benjamin Allen fell fast asleep; while Mr. Bob Sawyer abstracted his thoughts from worldly matters, by the ingenious process of carving his name on the seat of the pew, in corpulent letters of four inches long.

'Now,' said Wardle, after a substantial lunch, with the agreeable items of strong beer and cherry-brandy, had been done ample justice to, 'what say you to an hour on the ice? We shall have plenty of time.'

'Capital!' said Mr. Benjamin Allen.

'Prime!' ejaculated Mr. Bob Sawyer.

'You skate, of course, Winkle?' said Wardle.

'Ye-yes; oh, yes,' replied Mr. Winkle. 'I—I—am RATHER out of practice.'

'Oh, DO skate, Mr. Winkle,' said Arabella. 'I like to see it so much.'

'Oh, it is SO graceful,' said another young lady. A third young lady said it was elegant, and a fourth expressed her opinion that it was 'swan-like.'

'I should be very happy, I'm sure,' said Mr. Winkle, reddening; 'but I have no skates.'

This objection was at once overruled. Trundle had a couple of pair, and the fat boy announced that there were half a dozen more downstairs; whereat Mr. Winkle expressed exquisite delight, and looked exquisitely uncomfortable.

Old Wardle led the way to a pretty large sheet of ice; and the fat boy and Mr. Weller, having shovelled and swept away the snow which had fallen on it during the night, Mr. Bob Sawyer adjusted his skates with a dexterity which to Mr. Winkle was perfectly marvellous, and described circles with his left leg, and cut figures of eight, and inscribed upon the ice, without once stopping for breath, a great many other pleasant and astonishing devices, to the excessive satisfaction of Mr. Pickwick, Mr. Tupman, and the ladies; which reached a pitch of positive enthusiasm, when old Wardle and Benjamin Allen, assisted by the aforesaid Bob Sawyer, performed some mystic evolutions, which they called a reel.

All this time, Mr. Winkle, with his face and hands blue with the cold, had been forcing a gimlet into the sole of his feet, and putting his skates on, with the points behind, and getting the straps into a very complicated and entangled state, with the assistance of Mr. Snodgrass, who knew rather less about skates than a Hindoo. At length, however, with the assistance of Mr. Weller, the unfortunate skates were firmly screwed and buckled on, and Mr. Winkle was raised to his feet.

'Now, then, Sir,' said Sam, in an encouraging tone; 'off vith you, and show 'em how to do it.'

'Stop, Sam, stop!' said Mr. Winkle, trembling violently, and clutching hold of Sam's arms with the grasp of a drowning man. 'How slippery it is, Sam!'

'Not an uncommon thing upon ice, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller. 'Hold up, Sir!'

This last observation of Mr. Weller's bore reference to a demonstration Mr. Winkle made at the instant, of a frantic desire to throw his feet in the air, and dash the back of his head on the ice.

'These—these—are very awkward skates; ain't they, Sam?' inquired Mr. Winkle, staggering.

'I'm afeerd there's a orkard gen'l'm'n in 'em, Sir,' replied Sam.

'Now, Winkle,' cried Mr. Pickwick, quite unconscious that there was anything the matter. 'Come; the ladies are all anxiety.'

'Yes, yes,' replied Mr. Winkle, with a ghastly smile. 'I'm coming.'

'Just a-goin' to begin,' said Sam, endeavouring to disengage himself. 'Now, Sir, start off!'

'Stop an instant, Sam,' gasped Mr. Winkle, clinging most affectionately to Mr. Weller. 'I find I've got a couple of coats at home that I don't want, Sam. You may have them, Sam.'

'Thank'ee, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller.

'Never mind touching your hat, Sam,' said Mr. Winkle hastily. 'You needn't take your hand away to do that. I meant to have given you five shillings this morning for a Christmas box, Sam. I'll give it you this afternoon, Sam.'

'You're wery good, sir,' replied Mr. Weller.

'Just hold me at first, Sam; will you?' said Mr. Winkle. 'There—that's right. I shall soon get in the way of it, Sam. Not too fast, Sam; not too fast.'

Mr. Winkle, stooping forward, with his body half doubled up, was being assisted over the ice by Mr. Weller, in a very singular and un-swan-like manner, when Mr. Pickwick most innocently shouted from the opposite bank—

'Sam!'

'Sir?'

'Here. I want you.'

'Let go, Sir,' said Sam. 'Don't you hear the governor a-callin'? Let go, sir.'

With a violent effort, Mr. Weller disengaged himself from the grasp of the agonised Pickwickian, and, in so doing, administered a considerable impetus to the unhappy Mr. Winkle. With an accuracy which no degree of dexterity or practice could have insured, that unfortunate gentleman bore swiftly down into the centre of the reel, at the very moment when Mr. Bob Sawyer was performing a flourish of unparalleled beauty. Mr. Winkle struck wildly against him, and with a loud crash they both fell heavily down. Mr. Pickwick ran to the spot. Bob Sawyer had risen to his feet, but Mr. Winkle was far too wise to do anything of the kind, in skates. He was seated on the ice, making spasmodic efforts to smile; but anguish was depicted on every lineament of his countenance.

'Are you hurt?' inquired Mr. Benjamin Allen, with great anxiety.

'Not much,' said Mr. Winkle, rubbing his back very hard. 'I wish you'd let me bleed you,' said Mr. Benjamin, with great eagerness.

'No, thank you,' replied Mr. Winkle hurriedly.

'I really think you had better,' said Allen.

'Thank you,' replied Mr. Winkle; 'I'd rather not.'

'What do YOU think, Mr. Pickwick?' inquired Bob Sawyer.

Mr. Pickwick was excited and indignant. He beckoned to Mr. Weller, and said in a stern voice, 'Take his skates off.'

'No; but really I had scarcely begun,' remonstrated Mr. Winkle.

'Take his skates off,' repeated Mr. Pickwick firmly.

The command was not to be resisted. Mr. Winkle allowed Sam to obey it, in silence.

'Lift him up,' said Mr. Pickwick. Sam assisted him to rise.

Mr. Pickwick retired a few paces apart from the bystanders; and, beckoning his friend to approach, fixed a searching look upon him, and uttered in a low, but distinct and emphatic tone, these remarkable words—

'You're a humbug, sir.' 'A what?' said Mr. Winkle, starting.

'A humbug, Sir. I will speak plainer, if you wish it. An impostor, sir.'

With those words, Mr. Pickwick turned slowly on his heel, and rejoined his friends.

While Mr. Pickwick was delivering himself of the sentiment just recorded, Mr. Weller and the fat boy, having by their joint endeavours cut out a slide, were exercising themselves thereupon, in a very masterly and brilliant manner. Sam Weller, in particular, was displaying that beautiful feat of fancy-sliding which is currently denominated 'knocking at the cobbler's door,' and which is achieved by skimming over the ice on one foot, and occasionally giving a postman's knock upon it with the other. It was a good long slide, and there was something in the motion which Mr. Pickwick, who was very cold with standing still, could not help envying.

'It looks a nice warm exercise that, doesn't it?' he inquired of Wardle, when that gentleman was thoroughly out of breath, by reason of the indefatigable manner in which he had converted his legs into a pair of compasses, and drawn complicated problems on the ice.

'Ah, it does, indeed,' replied Wardle. 'Do you slide?'

'I used to do so, on the gutters, when I was a boy,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'Try it now,' said Wardle.

'Oh, do, please, Mr. Pickwick!' cried all the ladies.

'I should be very happy to afford you any amusement,' replied Mr. Pickwick, 'but I haven't done such a thing these thirty years.'

'Pooh! pooh! Nonsense!' said Wardle, dragging off his skates with the impetuosity which characterised all his proceedings. 'Here; I'll keep you company; come along!' And away went the good-tempered old fellow down the slide, with a rapidity which came very close upon Mr. Weller, and beat the fat boy all to nothing.

Mr. Pickwick paused, considered, pulled off his gloves and put them in his hat; took two or three short runs, baulked himself as often, and at last took another run, and went slowly and gravely down the slide, with his feet about a yard and a quarter apart, amidst the gratified shouts of all the spectators.

'Keep the pot a-bilin', Sir!' said Sam; and down went Wardle again, and then Mr. Pickwick, and then Sam, and then Mr. Winkle, and then Mr. Bob Sawyer, and then the fat boy, and then Mr. Snodgrass, following closely upon each other's heels, and running after each other with as much eagerness as if their future prospects in life depended on their expedition.

It was the most intensely interesting thing, to observe the manner in which Mr. Pickwick performed his share in the ceremony; to watch the torture of anxiety with which he viewed the person behind, gaining upon him at the imminent hazard of tripping him up; to see him gradually expend the painful force he had put on at first, and turn slowly round on the slide, with his face towards the point from which he had started; to contemplate the playful smile which mantled on his face when he had accomplished the distance, and the eagerness with which he turned round when he had done so, and ran after his predecessor, his black gaiters tripping pleasantly through the snow, and his eyes beaming cheerfulness and gladness through his spectacles. And when he was knocked down (which happened upon the average every third round), it was the most invigorating sight that can possibly be imagined, to behold him gather up his hat, gloves, and handkerchief, with a glowing countenance, and resume his station in the rank, with an ardour and enthusiasm that nothing Could abate.

The sport was at its height, the sliding was at the quickest, the laughter was at the loudest, when a sharp smart crack was heard. There was a quick rush towards the bank, a wild scream from the ladies, and a shout from Mr. Tupman. A large mass of ice disappeared; the water bubbled up over it; Mr. Pickwick's hat, gloves, and handkerchief were floating on the surface; and this was all of Mr. Pickwick that anybody could see.

Dismay and anguish were depicted on every countenance; the males turned pale, and the females fainted; Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Winkle grasped each other by the hand, and gazed at the spot where their leader had gone down, with frenzied eagerness; while Mr. Tupman, by way of rendering the promptest assistance, and at the same time conveying to any persons who might be within hearing, the clearest possible notion of the catastrophe, ran off across the country at his utmost speed, screaming 'Fire!' with all his might.

It was at this moment, when old Wardle and Sam Weller were approaching the hole with cautious steps, and Mr. Benjamin Allen was holding a hurried consultation with Mr. Bob Sawyer on the advisability of bleeding the company generally, as an improving little bit of professional practice—it was at this very moment, that a face, head, and shoulders, emerged from beneath the water, and disclosed the features and spectacles of Mr. Pickwick.

'Keep yourself up for an instant—for only one instant!' bawled Mr. Snodgrass.

'Yes, do; let me implore you—for my sake!' roared Mr. Winkle, deeply affected. The adjuration was rather unnecessary; the probability being, that if Mr. Pickwick had declined to keep himself up for anybody else's sake, it would have occurred to him that he might as well do so, for his own.

'Do you feel the bottom there, old fellow?' said Wardle.

'Yes, certainly,' replied Mr. Pickwick, wringing the water from his head and face, and gasping for breath. 'I fell upon my back. I couldn't get on my feet at first.'

The clay upon so much of Mr. Pickwick's coat as was yet visible, bore testimony to the accuracy of this statement; and as the fears of the spectators were still further relieved by the fat boy's suddenly recollecting that the water was nowhere more than five feet deep, prodigies of valour were performed to get him out. After a vast quantity of splashing, and cracking, and struggling, Mr. Pickwick was at length fairly extricated from his unpleasant position, and once more stood on dry land.

'Oh, he'll catch his death of cold,' said Emily.

'Dear old thing!' said Arabella. 'Let me wrap this shawl round you, Mr. Pickwick.'

'Ah, that's the best thing you can do,' said Wardle; 'and when you've got it on, run home as fast as your legs can carry you, and jump into bed directly.' A dozen shawls were offered on the instant. Three or four of the thickest having been selected, Mr. Pickwick was wrapped up, and started off, under the guidance of Mr. Weller; presenting the singular phenomenon of an elderly gentleman, dripping wet, and without a hat, with his arms bound down to his sides, skimming over the ground, without any clearly-defined purpose, at the rate of six good English miles an hour.

But Mr. Pickwick cared not for appearances in such an extreme case, and urged on by Sam Weller, he kept at the very top of his speed until he reached the door of Manor Farm, where Mr. Tupman had arrived some five minutes before, and had frightened the old lady into palpitations of the heart by impressing her with the unalterable conviction that the kitchen chimney was on fire—a calamity which always presented itself in glowing colours to the old lady's mind, when anybody about her evinced the smallest agitation.

Mr. Pickwick paused not an instant until he was snug in bed. Sam Weller lighted a blazing fire in the room, and took up his dinner; a bowl of punch was carried up afterwards, and a grand carouse held in honour of his safety. Old Wardle would not hear of his rising, so they made the bed the chair, and Mr. Pickwick presided. A second and a third bowl were ordered in; and when Mr. Pickwick awoke next morning, there was not a symptom of rheumatism about him; which proves, as Mr. Bob Sawyer very justly observed, that there is nothing like hot punch in such cases; and that if ever hot punch did fail to act as a preventive, it was merely because the patient fell into the vulgar error of not taking enough of it.

The jovial party broke up next morning. Breakings-up are capital things in our school-days, but in after life they are painful enough. Death, self-interest, and fortune's changes, are every day breaking up many a happy group, and scattering them far and wide; and the boys and girls never come back again. We do not mean to say that it was exactly the case in this particular instance; all we wish to inform the reader is, that the different members of the party dispersed to their several homes; that Mr. Pickwick and his friends once more took their seats on the top of the Muggleton coach; and that Arabella Allen repaired to her place of destination, wherever it might have been—we dare say Mr. Winkle knew, but we confess we don't—under the care and guardianship of her brother Benjamin, and his most intimate and particular friend, Mr. Bob Sawyer.

Before they separated, however, that gentleman and Mr. Benjamin Allen drew Mr. Pickwick aside with an air of some mystery; and Mr. Bob Sawyer, thrusting his forefinger between two of Mr. Pickwick's ribs, and thereby displaying his native drollery, and his knowledge of the anatomy of the human frame, at one and the same time, inquired—

'I say, old boy, where do you hang out?' Mr. Pickwick replied that he was at present suspended at the George and Vulture.

'I wish you'd come and see me,' said Bob Sawyer.

'Nothing would give me greater pleasure,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'There's my lodgings,' said Mr. Bob Sawyer, producing a card. 'Lant Street, Borough; it's near Guy's, and handy for me, you know. Little distance after you've passed St. George's Church—turns out of the High Street on the right hand side the way.'

'I shall find it,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Come on Thursday fortnight, and bring the other chaps with you,' said Mr. Bob Sawyer; 'I'm going to have a few medical fellows that night.'

Mr. Pickwick expressed the pleasure it would afford him to meet the medical fellows; and after Mr. Bob Sawyer had informed him that he meant to be very cosy, and that his friend Ben was to be one of the party, they shook hands and separated.

We feel that in this place we lay ourself open to the inquiry whether Mr. Winkle was whispering, during this brief conversation, to Arabella Allen; and if so, what he said; and furthermore, whether Mr. Snodgrass was conversing apart with Emily Wardle; and if so, what HE said. To this, we reply, that whatever they might have said to the ladies, they said nothing at all to Mr. Pickwick or Mr. Tupman for eight-and-twenty miles, and that they sighed very often, refused ale and brandy, and looked gloomy. If our observant lady readers can deduce any satisfactory inferences from these facts, we beg them by all means to do so.

CHAPTER XXXI. WHICH IS ALL ABOUT THE LAW, AND SUNDRY GREAT AUTHORITIES

LEARNED THEREIN

Scattered about, in various holes and corners of the Temple, are certain dark and dirty chambers, in and out of which, all the morning in vacation, and half the evening too in term time, there may be seen constantly hurrying with bundles of papers under their arms, and protruding from their pockets, an almost uninterrupted succession of lawyers' clerks. There are several grades of lawyers' clerks. There is the articled clerk, who has paid a premium, and is an attorney in perspective, who runs a tailor's bill, receives invitations to parties, knows a family in Gower Street, and another in Tavistock Square; who goes out of town every long vacation to see his father, who keeps live horses innumerable; and who is, in short, the very aristocrat of clerks. There is the salaried clerk—out of door, or in door, as the case may be—who devotes the major part of his thirty shillings a week to his Personal pleasure and adornments, repairs half-price to the Adelphi Theatre at least three times a week, dissipates majestically at the cider cellars afterwards, and is a dirty caricature of the fashion which expired six months ago. There is the middle-aged copying clerk, with a large family, who is always shabby, and often drunk. And there are the office lads in their first surtouts, who feel a befitting contempt for boys at day-schools, club as they go home at night, for saveloys and porter, and think there's nothing like 'life.' There are varieties of the genus, too numerous to recapitulate, but however numerous they may be, they are all to be seen, at certain regulated business hours, hurrying to and from the places we have just mentioned.

These sequestered nooks are the public offices of the legal profession, where writs are issued, judgments signed, declarations filed, and numerous other ingenious machines put in motion for the torture and torment of His Majesty's liege subjects, and the comfort and emolument of the practitioners of the law. They are, for the most part, low-roofed, mouldy rooms, where innumerable rolls of parchment, which have been perspiring in secret for the last century, send forth an agreeable odour, which is mingled by day with the scent of the dry-rot, and by night with the various exhalations which arise from damp cloaks, festering umbrellas, and the coarsest tallow candles.

About half-past seven o'clock in the evening, some ten days or a fortnight after Mr. Pickwick and his friends returned to London, there hurried into one of these offices, an individual in a brown coat and brass buttons, whose long hair was scrupulously twisted round the rim of his napless hat, and whose soiled drab trousers were so tightly strapped over his Blucher boots, that his knees threatened every moment to start from their concealment. He produced from his coat pockets a long and narrow strip of parchment, on which the presiding functionary impressed an illegible black stamp. He then drew forth four scraps of paper, of similar dimensions, each containing a printed copy of the strip of parchment with blanks for a name; and having filled up the blanks, put all the five documents in his pocket, and hurried away.

The man in the brown coat, with the cabalistic documents in his pocket, was no other than our old acquaintance Mr. Jackson, of the house of Dodson & Fogg, Freeman's Court, Cornhill. Instead of returning to the office whence he came, however, he bent his steps direct to Sun Court, and walking straight into the George and Vulture, demanded to know whether one Mr. Pickwick was within.

'Call Mr. Pickwick's servant, Tom,' said the barmaid of the George and Vulture.

'Don't trouble yourself,' said Mr. Jackson. 'I've come on business. If you'll show me Mr. Pickwick's room I'll step up myself.'

'What name, Sir?' said the waiter.

'Jackson,' replied the clerk.

The waiter stepped upstairs to announce Mr. Jackson; but Mr. Jackson saved him the trouble by following close at his heels, and walking into the apartment before he could articulate a syllable.

Mr. Pickwick had, that day, invited his three friends to dinner; they were all seated round the fire, drinking their wine, when Mr. Jackson presented himself, as above described.

'How de do, sir?' said Mr. Jackson, nodding to Mr. Pickwick.

That gentleman bowed, and looked somewhat surprised, for the physiognomy of Mr. Jackson dwelt not in his recollection.

'I have called from Dodson and Fogg's,' said Mr. Jackson, in an explanatory tone.

Mr. Pickwick roused at the name. 'I refer you to my attorney, Sir; Mr. Perker, of Gray's Inn,' said he. 'Waiter, show this gentleman out.'

'Beg your pardon, Mr. Pickwick,' said Jackson, deliberately depositing his hat on the floor, and drawing from his pocket the strip of parchment. 'But personal service, by clerk or agent, in these cases, you know, Mr. Pickwick—nothing like caution, sir, in all legal forms—eh?'

Here Mr. Jackson cast his eye on the parchment; and, resting his hands on the table, and looking round with a winning and persuasive smile, said, 'Now, come; don't let's have no words about such a little matter as this. Which of you gentlemen's name's Snodgrass?'

At this inquiry, Mr. Snodgrass gave such a very undisguised and palpable start, that no further reply was needed.

'Ah! I thought so,' said Mr. Jackson, more affably than before. 'I've a little something to trouble you with, Sir.'

'Me!'exclaimed Mr. Snodgrass.

'It's only a subpoena in Bardell and Pickwick on behalf of the plaintiff,' replied Jackson, singling out one of the slips of paper, and producing a shilling from his waistcoat pocket. 'It'll come on, in the settens after Term: fourteenth of Febooary, we expect; we've marked it a special jury cause, and it's only ten down the paper. That's yours, Mr. Snodgrass.' As Jackson said this, he presented the parchment before the eyes of Mr. Snodgrass, and slipped the paper and the shilling into his hand.

Mr. Tupman had witnessed this process in silent astonishment, when Jackson, turning sharply upon him, said—

'I think I ain't mistaken when I say your name's Tupman, am I?'

Mr. Tupman looked at Mr. Pickwick; but, perceiving no encouragement in that gentleman's widely-opened eyes to deny his name, said—

'Yes, my name is Tupman, Sir.'

'And that other gentleman's Mr. Winkle, I think?' said Jackson. Mr. Winkle faltered out a reply in the affirmative; and both gentlemen were forthwith invested with a slip of paper, and a shilling each, by the dexterous Mr. Jackson.

'Now,' said Jackson, 'I'm afraid you'll think me rather troublesome, but I want somebody else, if it ain't inconvenient. I have Samuel Weller's name here, Mr. Pickwick.'

'Send my servant here, waiter,' said Mr. Pickwick. The waiter retired, considerably astonished, and Mr. Pickwick motioned Jackson to a seat.

There was a painful pause, which was at length broken by the innocent defendant. 'I suppose, Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, his indignation rising while he spoke—'I suppose, Sir, that it is the intention of your employers to seek to criminate me upon the testimony of my own friends?'

Mr. Jackson struck his forefinger several times against the left side of his nose, to intimate that he was not there to disclose the secrets of the prison house, and playfully rejoined—

'Not knowin', can't say.'

'For what other reason, Sir,' pursued Mr. Pickwick, 'are these subpoenas served upon them, if not for this?'

'Very good plant, Mr. Pickwick,' replied Jackson, slowly shaking his head. 'But it won't do. No harm in trying, but there's little to be got out of me.'

Here Mr. Jackson smiled once more upon the company, and, applying his left thumb to the tip of his nose, worked a visionary coffee-mill with his right hand, thereby performing a very graceful piece of pantomime (then much in vogue, but now, unhappily, almost obsolete) which was familiarly denominated 'taking a grinder.'

'No, no, Mr. Pickwick,' said Jackson, in conclusion; 'Perker's people must guess what we've served these subpoenas for. If they can't, they must wait till the action comes on, and then they'll find out.' Mr. Pickwick bestowed a look of excessive disgust on his unwelcome visitor, and would probably have hurled some tremendous anathema at the heads of Messrs. Dodson & Fogg, had not Sam's entrance at the instant interrupted him.

'Samuel Weller?' said Mr. Jackson, inquiringly.

'Vun o' the truest things as you've said for many a long year,' replied Sam, in a most composed manner.

'Here's a subpoena for you, Mr. Weller,' said Jackson.

'What's that in English?' inquired Sam.

'Here's the original,' said Jackson, declining the required explanation.

'Which?' said Sam.

'This,' replied Jackson, shaking the parchment.

'Oh, that's the 'rig'nal, is it?' said Sam. 'Well, I'm wery glad I've seen the 'rig'nal, 'cos it's a gratifyin' sort o' thing, and eases vun's mind so much.'

'And here's the shilling,' said Jackson. 'It's from Dodson and Fogg's.'

'And it's uncommon handsome o' Dodson and Fogg, as knows so little of me, to come down vith a present,' said Sam. 'I feel it as a wery high compliment, sir; it's a wery honorable thing to them, as they knows how to reward merit werever they meets it. Besides which, it's affectin' to one's feelin's.'

As Mr. Weller said this, he inflicted a little friction on his right eyelid, with the sleeve of his coat, after the most approved manner of actors when they are in domestic pathetics.

Mr. Jackson seemed rather puzzled by Sam's proceedings; but, as he had served the subpoenas, and had nothing more to say, he made a feint of putting on the one glove which he usually carried in his hand, for the sake of appearances; and returned to the office to report progress.

Mr. Pickwick slept little that night; his memory had received a very disagreeable refresher on the subject of Mrs. Bardell's action. He breakfasted betimes next morning, and, desiring Sam to accompany him, set forth towards Gray's Inn Square.

'Sam!' said Mr. Pickwick, looking round, when they got to the end of Cheapside.

'Sir?' said Sam, stepping up to his master.

'Which way?' 'Up Newgate Street.'

Mr. Pickwick did not turn round immediately, but looked vacantly in Sam's face for a few seconds, and heaved a deep sigh.

'What's the matter, sir?' inquired Sam.

'This action, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'is expected to come on, on the fourteenth of next month.' 'Remarkable coincidence that 'ere, sir,' replied Sam.

'Why remarkable, Sam?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Walentine's day, sir,' responded Sam; 'reg'lar good day for a breach o' promise trial.'

Mr. Weller's smile awakened no gleam of mirth in his master's countenance. Mr. Pickwick turned abruptly round, and led the way in silence.

They had walked some distance, Mr. Pickwick trotting on before, plunged in profound meditation, and Sam following behind, with a countenance expressive of the most enviable and easy defiance of everything and everybody, when the latter, who was always especially anxious to impart to his master any exclusive information he possessed, quickened his pace until he was close at Mr. Pickwick's heels; and, pointing up at a house they were passing, said—

'Wery nice pork-shop that 'ere, sir.'

'Yes, it seems so,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Celebrated sassage factory,' said Sam.

'Is it?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Is it!' reiterated Sam, with some indignation; 'I should rayther think it was. Why, sir, bless your innocent eyebrows, that's where the mysterious disappearance of a 'spectable tradesman took place four years ago.'

'You don't mean to say he was burked, Sam?' said Mr. Pickwick, looking hastily round.

'No, I don't indeed, sir,' replied Mr. Weller, 'I wish I did; far worse than that. He was the master o' that 'ere shop, sir, and the inwentor o' the patent-never-leavin'-off sassage steam-ingin, as 'ud swaller up a pavin' stone if you put it too near, and grind it into sassages as easy as if it was a tender young babby. Wery proud o' that machine he was, as it was nat'ral he should be, and he'd stand down in the celler a-lookin' at it wen it was in full play, till he got quite melancholy with joy. A wery happy man he'd ha' been, Sir, in the procession o' that 'ere ingin and two more lovely hinfants besides, if it hadn't been for his wife, who was a most owdacious wixin. She was always a-follerin' him about, and dinnin' in his ears, till at last he couldn't stand it no longer. "I'll tell you what it is, my dear," he says one day; "if you persewere in this here sort of amusement," he says, "I'm blessed if I don't go away to 'Merriker; and that's all about it." "You're a idle willin," says she, "and I wish the 'Merrikins joy of their bargain." Arter which she keeps on abusin' of him for half an hour, and then runs into the little parlour behind the shop, sets to a-screamin', says he'll be the death on her, and falls in a fit, which lasts for three good hours—one o' them fits wich is all screamin' and kickin'. Well, next mornin', the husband was missin'. He hadn't taken nothin' from the till—hadn't even put on his greatcoat—so it was quite clear he warn't gone to 'Merriker. Didn't come back next day; didn't come back next week; missis had bills printed, sayin' that, if he'd come back, he should be forgiven everythin' (which was very liberal, seein' that he hadn't done nothin' at all); the canals was dragged, and for two months arterwards, wenever a body turned up, it was carried, as a reg'lar thing, straight off to the sassage shop. Hows'ever, none on 'em answered; so they gave out that he'd run away, and she kep' on the bis'ness. One Saturday night, a little, thin, old gen'l'm'n comes into the shop in a great passion and says, "Are you the missis o' this here shop?" "Yes, I am," says she. "Well, ma'am," says he, "then I've just looked in to say that me and my family ain't a-goin' to be choked for nothin'; and more than that, ma'am," he says, "you'll allow me to observe that as you don't use the primest parts of the meat in the manafacter o' sassages, I'd think you'd find beef come nearly as cheap as buttons." "As buttons, Sir!" says she. "Buttons, ma'am," says the little, old gentleman, unfolding a bit of paper, and showin' twenty or thirty halves o' buttons. "Nice seasonin' for sassages, is trousers' buttons, ma'am." "They're my husband's buttons!" says the widder beginnin' to faint, "What!" screams the little old gen'l'm'n, turnin' wery pale. "I see it all," says the widder; "in a fit of temporary insanity he rashly converted hisself into sassages!" And so he had, Sir,' said Mr. Weller, looking steadily into Mr. Pickwick's horror-stricken countenance, 'or else he'd been draw'd into the ingin; but however that might ha' been, the little, old gen'l'm'n, who had been remarkably partial to sassages all his life, rushed out o' the shop in a wild state, and was never heerd on arterwards!'

The relation of this affecting incident of private life brought master and man to Mr. Perker's chambers. Lowten, holding the door half open, was in conversation with a rustily-clad, miserable-looking man, in boots without toes and gloves without fingers. There were traces of privation and suffering—almost of despair—in his lank and care-worn countenance; he felt his poverty, for he shrank to the dark side of the staircase as Mr. Pickwick approached.

'It's very unfortunate,' said the stranger, with a sigh.

'Very,' said Lowten, scribbling his name on the doorpost with his pen, and rubbing it out again with the feather. 'Will you leave a message for him?'

'When do you think he'll be back?' inquired the stranger.

'Quite uncertain,' replied Lowten, winking at Mr. Pickwick, as the stranger cast his eyes towards the ground.

'You don't think it would be of any use my waiting for him?' said the stranger, looking wistfully into the office.

'Oh, no, I'm sure it wouldn't,' replied the clerk, moving a little more into the centre of the doorway. 'He's certain not to be back this week, and it's a chance whether he will be next; for when Perker once gets out of town, he's never in a hurry to come back again.'

'Out of town!' said Mr. Pickwick; 'dear me, how unfortunate!'

'Don't go away, Mr. Pickwick,' said Lowten, 'I've got a letter for you.' The stranger, seeming to hesitate, once more looked towards the ground, and the clerk winked slyly at Mr. PickwiCK, as if to intimate that some exquisite piece of humour was going forward, though what it was Mr. Pickwick could not for the life of him divine. 'Step in, Mr. Pickwick,' said Lowten. 'Well, will you leave a message, Mr. Watty, or will you call again?'

'Ask him to be so kind as to leave out word what has been done in my business,' said the man; 'for God's sake don't neglect it, Mr. Lowten.'

'No, no; I won't forget it,' replied the clerk. 'Walk in, Mr. Pickwick. Good-morning, Mr. Watty; it's a fine day for walking, isn't it?' Seeing that the stranger still lingered, he beckoned Sam Weller to follow his master in, and shut the door in his face.

'There never was such a pestering bankrupt as that since the world began, I do believe!' said Lowten, throwing down his pen with the air of an injured man. 'His affairs haven't been in Chancery quite four years yet, and I'm d—d if he don't come worrying here twice a week. Step this way, Mr. Pickwick. Perker IS in, and he'll see you, I know. Devilish cold,' he added pettishly, 'standing at that door, wasting one's time with such seedy vagabonds!' Having very vehemently stirred a particularly large fire with a particularly small poker, the clerk led the way to his principal's private room, and announced Mr. Pickwick.

'Ah, my dear Sir,' said little Mr. Perker, bustling up from his chair. 'Well, my dear sir, and what's the news about your matter, eh? Anything more about our friends in Freeman's Court? They've not been sleeping, I know that. Ah, they're very smart fellows; very smart, indeed.'

As the little man concluded, he took an emphatic pinch of snuff, as a tribute to the smartness of Messrs. Dodson and Fogg.

'They are great scoundrels,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Aye, aye,' said the little man; 'that's a matter of opinion, you know, and we won't dispute about terms; because of course you can't be expected to view these subjects with a professional eye. Well, we've done everything that's necessary. I have retained Serjeant Snubbin.'

'Is he a good man?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Good man!' replied Perker; 'bless your heart and soul, my dear Sir, Serjeant Snubbin is at the very top of his profession. Gets treble the business of any man in court—engaged in every case. You needn't mention it abroad; but we say—we of the profession—that Serjeant Snubbin leads the court by the nose.'

The little man took another pinch of snuff as he made this communication, and nodded mysteriously to Mr. Pickwick.

'They have subpoenaed my three friends,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Ah! of course they would,' replied Perker. 'Important witnesses; saw you in a delicate situation.'

'But she fainted of her own accord,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'She threw herself into my arms.'

'Very likely, my dear Sir,' replied Perker; 'very likely and very natural. Nothing more so, my dear Sir, nothing. But who's to prove it?'

'They have subpoenaed my servant, too,' said Mr. Pickwick, quitting the other point; for there Mr. Perker's question had somewhat staggered him.

'Sam?' said Perker.

Mr. Pickwick replied in the affirmative.

'Of course, my dear Sir; of course. I knew they would. I could have told you that, a month ago. You know, my dear Sir, if you WILL take the management of your affairs into your own hands after entrusting them to your solicitor, you must also take the consequences.' Here Mr. Perker drew himself up with conscious dignity, and brushed some stray grains of snuff from his shirt frill.

'And what do they want him to prove?' asked Mr. Pickwick, after two or three minutes' silence.

'That you sent him up to the plaintiff 's to make some offer of a compromise, I suppose,' replied Perker. 'It don't matter much, though; I don't think many counsel could get a great deal out of HIM.'

'I don't think they could,' said Mr. Pickwick, smiling, despite his vexation, at the idea of Sam's appearance as a witness. 'What course do we pursue?'

'We have only one to adopt, my dear Sir,' replied Perker; 'cross-examine the witnesses; trust to Snubbin's eloquence; throw dust in the eyes of the judge; throw ourselves on the jury.'

'And suppose the verdict is against me?' said Mr. Pickwick.

Mr. Perker smiled, took a very long pinch of snuff, stirred the fire, shrugged his shoulders, and remained expressively silent.

'You mean that in that case I must pay the damages?' said Mr. Pickwick, who had watched this telegraphic answer with considerable sternness.

Perker gave the fire another very unnecessary poke, and said, 'I am afraid so.'

'Then I beg to announce to you my unalterable determination to pay no damages whatever,' said Mr. Pickwick, most emphatically. 'None, Perker. Not a pound, not a penny of my money, shall find its way into the pockets of Dodson and Fogg. That is my deliberate and irrevocable determination.' Mr. Pickwick gave a heavy blow on the table before him, in confirmation of the irrevocability of his intention.

'Very well, my dear Sir, very well,' said Perker. 'You know best, of course.'

'Of course,' replied Mr. Pickwick hastily. 'Where does Serjeant Snubbin live?' 'In Lincoln's Inn Old Square,' replied Perker.

'I should like to see him,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'See Serjeant Snubbin, my dear Sir!' rejoined Perker, in utter amazement. 'Pooh, pooh, my dear Sir, impossible. See Serjeant Snubbin! Bless you, my dear Sir, such a thing was never heard of, without a consultation fee being previously paid, and a consultation fixed. It couldn't be done, my dear Sir; it couldn't be done.'

Mr. Pickwick, however, had made up his mind not only that it could be done, but that it should be done; and the consequence was, that within ten minutes after he had received the assurance that the thing was impossible, he was conducted by his solicitor into the outer office of the great Serjeant Snubbin himself.

It was an uncarpeted room of tolerable dimensions, with a large writing-table drawn up near the fire, the baize top of which had long since lost all claim to its original hue of green, and had gradually grown gray with dust and age, except where all traces of its natural colour were obliterated by ink-stains. Upon the table were numerous little bundles of papers tied with red tape; and behind it, sat an elderly clerk, whose sleek appearance and heavy gold watch-chain presented imposing indications of the extensive and lucrative practice of Mr. Serjeant Snubbin.

'Is the Serjeant in his room, Mr. Mallard?' inquired Perker, offering his box with all imaginable courtesy.

'Yes, he is,' was the reply, 'but he's very busy. Look here; not an opinion given yet, on any one of these cases; and an expedition fee paid with all of 'em.' The clerk smiled as he said this, and inhaled the pinch of snuff with a zest which seemed to be compounded of a fondness for snuff and a relish for fees.

'Something like practice that,' said Perker.

'Yes,' said the barrister's clerk, producing his own box, and offering it with the greatest cordiality; 'and the best of it is, that as nobody alive except myself can read the serjeant's writing, they are obliged to wait for the opinions, when he has given them, till I have copied 'em, ha-ha-ha!'

'Which makes good for we know who, besides the serjeant, and draws a little more out of the clients, eh?' said Perker; 'ha, ha, ha!' At this the serjeant's clerk laughed again—not a noisy boisterous laugh, but a silent, internal chuckle, which Mr. Pickwick disliked to hear. When a man bleeds inwardly, it is a dangerous thing for himself; but when he laughs inwardly, it bodes no good to other people.

'You haven't made me out that little list of the fees that I'm in your debt, have you?' said Perker.

'No, I have not,' replied the clerk.

'I wish you would,' said Perker. 'Let me have them, and I'll send you a cheque. But I suppose you're too busy pocketing the ready money, to think of the debtors, eh? ha, ha, ha!' This sally seemed to tickle the clerk amazingly, and he once more enjoyed a little quiet laugh to himself.

'But, Mr. Mallard, my dear friend,' said Perker, suddenly recovering his gravity, and drawing the great man's great man into a Corner, by the lappel of his coat; 'you must persuade the Serjeant to see me, and my client here.'

'Come, come,' said the clerk, 'that's not bad either. See the Serjeant! come, that's too absurd.' Notwithstanding the absurdity of the proposal, however, the clerk allowed himself to be gently drawn beyond the hearing of Mr. Pickwick; and after a short conversation conducted in whispers, walked softly down a little dark passage, and disappeared into the legal luminary's sanctum, whence he shortly returned on tiptoe, and informed Mr. Perker and Mr. Pickwick that the Serjeant had been prevailed upon, in violation of all established rules and customs, to admit them at once.

Mr. Serjeant Snubbins was a lantern-faced, sallow-complexioned man, of about five-and-forty, or—as the novels say—he might be fifty. He had that dull-looking, boiled eye which is often to be seen in the heads of people who have applied themselves during many years to a weary and laborious course of study; and which would have been sufficient, without the additional eyeglass which dangled from a broad black riband round his neck, to warn a stranger that he was very near-sighted. His hair was thin and weak, which was partly attributable to his having never devoted much time to its arrangement, and partly to his having worn for five-and-twenty years the forensic wig which hung on a block beside him. The marks of hairpowder on his coat-collar, and the ill-washed and worse tied white neckerchief round his throat, showed that he had not found leisure since he left the court to make any alteration in his dress; while the slovenly style of the remainder of his costume warranted the inference that his personal appearance would not have been very much improved if he had. Books of practice, heaps of papers, and opened letters, were scattered over the table, without any attempt at order or arrangement; the furniture of the room was old and rickety; the doors of the book-case were rotting in their hinges; the dust flew out from the carpet in little clouds at every step; the blinds were yellow with age and dirt; the state of everything in the room showed, with a clearness not to be mistaken, that Mr. Serjeant Snubbin was far too much occupied with his professional pursuits to take any great heed or regard of his personal comforts.

The Serjeant was writing when his clients entered; he bowed abstractedly when Mr. Pickwick was introduced by his solicitor; and then, motioning them to a seat, put his pen carefully in the inkstand, nursed his left leg, and waited to be spoken to.

'Mr. Pickwick is the defendant in Bardell and Pickwick, Serjeant Snubbin,' said Perker.

'I am retained in that, am I?' said the Serjeant.

'You are, Sir,' replied Perker.

The Serjeant nodded his head, and waited for something else.

'Mr. Pickwick was anxious to call upon you, Serjeant Snubbin,' said Perker, 'to state to you, before you entered upon the case, that he denies there being any ground or pretence whatever for the action against him; and that unless he came into court with clean hands, and without the most conscientious conviction that he was right in resisting the plaintiff's demand, he would not be there at all. I believe I state your views correctly; do I not, my dear Sir?' said the little man, turning to Mr. Pickwick.

'Quite so,' replied that gentleman.

Mr. Serjeant Snubbin unfolded his glasses, raised them to his eyes; and, after looking at Mr. Pickwick for a few seconds with great curiosity, turned to Mr. Perker, and said, smiling slightly as he spoke—'Has Mr. Pickwick a strong case?'

The attorney shrugged his shoulders.

'Do you propose calling witnesses?'

'No.'

The smile on the Serjeant's countenance became more defined; he rocked his leg with increased violence; and, throwing himself back in his easy-chair, coughed dubiously.

These tokens of the Serjeant's presentiments on the subject, slight as they were, were not lost on Mr. Pickwick. He settled the spectacles, through which he had attentively regarded such demonstrations of the barrister's feelings as he had permitted himself to exhibit, more firmly on his nose; and said with great energy, and in utter disregard of all Mr. Perker's admonitory winkings and frownings—

'My wishing to wait upon you, for such a purpose as this, Sir, appears, I have no doubt, to a gentleman who sees so much of these matters as you must necessarily do, a very extraordinary circumstance.'

The Serjeant tried to look gravely at the fire, but the smile came back again.

'Gentlemen of your profession, Sir,' continued Mr. Pickwick, 'see the worst side of human nature. All its disputes, all its ill-will and bad blood, rise up before you. You know from your experience of juries (I mean no disparagement to you, or them) how much depends upon effect; and you are apt to attribute to others, a desire to use, for purposes of deception and Self-interest, the very instruments which you, in pure honesty and honour of purpose, and with a laudable desire to do your utmost for your client, know the temper and worth of so well, from constantly employing them yourselves. I really believe that to this circumstance may be attributed the vulgar but very general notion of your being, as a body, suspicious, distrustful, and over-cautious. Conscious as I am, sir, of the disadvantage of making such a declaration to you, under such circumstances, I have come here, because I wish you distinctly to understand, as my friend Mr. Perker has said, that I am innocent of the falsehood laid to my charge; and although I am very well aware of the inestimable value of your assistance, Sir, I must beg to add, that unless you sincerely believe this, I would rather be deprived of the aid of your talents than have the advantage of them.'

Long before the close of this address, which we are bound to say was of a very prosy character for Mr. Pickwick, the Serjeant had relapsed into a state of abstraction. After some minutes, however, during which he had reassumed his pen, he appeared to be again aware of the presence of his clients; raising his head from the paper, he said, rather snappishly—

'Who is with me in this case?'

'Mr. Phunky, Serjeant Snubbin,' replied the attorney.

'Phunky—Phunky,' said the Serjeant, 'I never heard the name before. He must be a very young man.'

'Yes, he is a very young man,' replied the attorney. 'He was only called the other day. Let me see—he has not been at the Bar eight years yet.'

'Ah, I thought not,' said the Serjeant, in that sort of pitying tone in which ordinary folks would speak of a very helpless little child. 'Mr. Mallard, send round to Mr.—Mr.—' 'Phunky's—Holborn Court, Gray's Inn,' interposed Perker. (Holborn Court, by the bye, is South Square now.) 'Mr. Phunky, and say I should be glad if he'd step here, a moment.'

Mr. Mallard departed to execute his commission; and Serjeant Snubbin relapsed into abstraction until Mr. Phunky himself was introduced.

Although an infant barrister, he was a full-grown man. He had a very nervous manner, and a painful hesitation in his speech; it did not appear to be a natural defect, but seemed rather the result of timidity, arising from the consciousness of being 'kept down' by want of means, or interest, or connection, or impudence, as the case might be. He was overawed by the Serjeant, and profoundly courteous to the attorney.

'I have not had the pleasure of seeing you before, Mr. Phunky,' said Serjeant Snubbin, with haughty condescension.

Mr. Phunky bowed. He HAD had the pleasure of seeing the Serjeant, and of envying him too, with all a poor man's envy, for eight years and a quarter.

'You are with me in this case, I understand?' said the Serjeant.

If Mr. Phunky had been a rich man, he would have instantly sent for his clerk to remind him; if he had been a wise one, he would have applied his forefinger to his forehead, and endeavoured to recollect, whether, in the multiplicity of his engagements, he had undertaken this one or not; but as he was neither rich nor wise (in this sense, at all events) he turned red, and bowed.

'Have you read the papers, Mr. Phunky?' inquired the Serjeant.

Here again, Mr. Phunky should have professed to have forgotten all about the merits of the case; but as he had read such papers as had been laid before him in the course of the action, and had thought of nothing else, waking or sleeping, throughout the two months during which he had been retained as Mr. Serjeant Snubbin's junior, he turned a deeper red and bowed again.

'This is Mr. Pickwick,' said the Serjeant, waving his pen in the direction in which that gentleman was standing.

Mr. Phunky bowed to Mr. Pickwick, with a reverence which a first client must ever awaken; and again inclined his head towards his leader.

'Perhaps you will take Mr. Pickwick away,' said the Serjeant, 'and—and—and—hear anything Mr. Pickwick may wish to communicate. We shall have a consultation, of course.' With that hint that he had been interrupted quite long enough, Mr. Serjeant Snubbin, who had been gradually growing more and more abstracted, applied his glass to his eyes for an instant, bowed slightly round, and was once more deeply immersed in the case before him, which arose out of an interminable lawsuit, originating in the act of an individual, deceased a century or so ago, who had stopped up a pathway leading from some place which nobody ever came from, to some other place which nobody ever went to.

Mr. Phunky would not hear of passing through any door until Mr. Pickwick and his solicitor had passed through before him, so it was some time before they got into the Square; and when they did reach it, they walked up and down, and held a long conference, the result of which was, that it was a very difficult matter to say how the verdict would go; that nobody could presume to calculate on the issue of an action; that it was very lucky they had prevented the other party from getting Serjeant Snubbin; and other topics of doubt and consolation, common in such a position of affairs.

Mr. Weller was then roused by his master from a sweet sleep of an hour's duration; and, bidding adieu to Lowten, they returned to the city.

CHAPTER XXXII. DESCRIBES, FAR MORE FULLY THAN THE COURT NEWSMAN EVER

DID, A BACHELOR'S PARTY, GIVEN BY Mr. BOB SAWYER AT HIS LODGINGS IN THE BOROUGH

There is a repose about Lant Street, in the Borough, which sheds a gentle melancholy upon the soul. There are always a good many houses to let in the street: it is a by-street too, and its dulness is soothing. A house in Lant Street would not come within the denomination of a first-rate residence, in the strict acceptation of the term; but it is a most desirable spot nevertheless. If a man wished to abstract himself from the world—to remove himself from within the reach of temptation—to place himself beyond the possibility of any inducement to look out of the window—we should recommend him by all means go to Lant Street.

In this happy retreat are colonised a few clear-starchers, a sprinkling of journeymen bookbinders, one or two prison agents for the Insolvent Court, several small housekeepers who are employed in the Docks, a handful of mantua-makers, and a seasoning of jobbing tailors. The majority of the inhabitants either direct their energies to the letting of furnished apartments, or devote themselves to the healthful and invigorating pursuit of mangling. The chief features in the still life of the street are green shutters, lodging-bills, brass door-plates, and bell-handles; the principal specimens of animated nature, the pot-boy, the muffin youth, and the baked-potato man. The population is migratory, usually disappearing on the verge of quarter-day, and generally by night. His Majesty's revenues are seldom collected in this happy valley; the rents are dubious; and the water communication is very frequently cut off.

Mr. Bob Sawyer embellished one side of the fire, in his first-floor front, early on the evening for which he had invited Mr. Pickwick, and Mr. Ben Allen the other. The preparations for the reception of visitors appeared to be completed. The umbrellas in the passage had been heaped into the little corner outside the back-parlour door; the bonnet and shawl of the landlady's servant had been removed from the bannisters; there were not more than two pairs of pattens on the street-door mat; and a kitchen candle, with a very long snuff, burned cheerfully on the ledge of the staircase window. Mr. Bob Sawyer had himself purchased the spirits at a wine vaults in High Street, and had returned home preceding the bearer thereof, to preclude the possibility of their delivery at the wrong house. The punch was ready-made in a red pan in the bedroom; a little table, covered with a green baize cloth, had been borrowed from the parlour, to play at cards on; and the glasses of the establishment, together with those which had been borrowed for the occasion from the public-house, were all drawn up in a tray, which was deposited on the landing outside the door.

Notwithstanding the highly satisfactory nature of all these arrangements, there was a cloud on the countenance of Mr. Bob Sawyer, as he sat by the fireside. There was a sympathising expression, too, in the features of Mr. Ben Allen, as he gazed intently on the coals, and a tone of melancholy in his voice, as he said, after a long silence—'Well, it is unlucky she should have taken it in her head to turn sour, just on this occasion. She might at least have waited till to-morrow.'

'That's her malevolence—that's her malevolence,' returned Mr. Bob Sawyer vehemently. 'She says that if I can afford to give a party I ought to be able to pay her confounded "little bill."' 'How long has it been running?' inquired Mr. Ben Allen. A bill, by the bye, is the most extraordinary locomotive engine that the genius of man ever produced. It would keep on running during the longest lifetime, without ever once stopping of its own accord.

'Only a quarter, and a month or so,' replied Mr. Bob Sawyer.

Ben Allen coughed hopelessly, and directed a searching look between the two top bars of the stove.

'It'll be a deuced unpleasant thing if she takes it into her head to let out, when those fellows are here, won't it?' said Mr. Ben Allen at length.

'Horrible,' replied Bob Sawyer, 'horrible.' A low tap was heard at the room door. Mr. Bob Sawyer looked expressively at his friend, and bade the tapper come in; whereupon a dirty, slipshod girl in black cotton stockings, who might have passed for the neglected daughter of a superannuated dustman in very reduced circumstances, thrust in her head, and said—

'Please, Mister Sawyer, Missis Raddle wants to speak to you.'

Before Mr. Bob Sawyer could return any answer, the girl suddenly disappeared with a jerk, as if somebody had given her a violent pull behind;

this mysterious exit was no sooner accomplished, than there was another tap at the door—a smart, pointed tap, which seemed to say, 'Here I am, and in I'm coming.'

Mr. Bob Sawyer glanced at his friend with a look of abject apprehension, and once more cried, 'Come in.'

The permission was not at all necessary, for, before Mr. Bob Sawyer had uttered the words, a little, fierce woman bounced into the room, all in a tremble with passion, and pale with rage.

'Now, Mr. Sawyer,' said the little, fierce woman, trying to appear very calm, 'if you'll have the kindness to settle that little bill of mine I'll thank you, because I've got my rent to pay this afternoon, and my landlord's a-waiting below now.' Here the little woman rubbed her hands, and looked steadily over Mr. Bob Sawyer's head, at the wall behind him.

'I am very sorry to put you to any inconvenience, Mrs. Raddle,' said Bob Sawyer deferentially, 'but—'

'Oh, it isn't any inconvenience,' replied the little woman, with a shrill titter. 'I didn't want it particular before to-day; leastways, as it has to go to my landlord directly, it was as well for you to keep it as me. You promised me this afternoon, Mr. Sawyer, and every gentleman as has ever lived here, has kept his word, Sir, as of course anybody as calls himself a gentleman does.' Mrs. Raddle tossed her head, bit her lips, rubbed her hands harder, and looked at the wall more steadily than ever. It was plain to see, as Mr. Bob Sawyer remarked in a style of Eastern allegory on a subsequent occasion, that she was 'getting the steam up.'

'I am very sorry, Mrs. Raddle,' said Bob Sawyer, with all imaginable humility, 'but the fact is, that I have been disappointed in the City to-day.'—Extraordinary place that City. An astonishing number of men always ARE getting disappointed there.

'Well, Mr. Sawyer,' said Mrs. Raddle, planting herself firmly on a purple cauliflower in the Kidderminster carpet, 'and what's that to me, Sir?'

'I—I—have no doubt, Mrs. Raddle,' said Bob Sawyer, blinking this last question, 'that before the middle of next week we shall be able to set ourselves quite square, and go on, on a better system, afterwards.'

This was all Mrs. Raddle wanted. She had bustled up to the apartment of the unlucky Bob Sawyer, so bent upon going into a passion, that, in all probability, payment would have rather disappointed her than otherwise.

She was in excellent order for a little relaxation of the kind, having just exchanged a few introductory compliments with Mr. R. in the front kitchen.

'Do you suppose, Mr. Sawyer,' said Mrs. Raddle, elevating her voice for the information of the neighbours—'do you suppose that I'm a-going day after day to let a fellar occupy my lodgings as never thinks of paying his rent, nor even the very money laid out for the fresh butter and lump sugar that's bought for his breakfast, and the very milk that's took in, at the street door? Do you suppose a hard-working and industrious woman as has lived in this street for twenty year (ten year over the way, and nine year and three-quarters in this very house) has nothing else to do but to work herself to death after a parcel of lazy idle fellars, that are always smoking and drinking, and lounging, when they ought to be glad to turn their hands to anything that would help 'em to pay their bills? Do you—'

'My good soul,' interposed Mr. Benjamin Allen soothingly.

'Have the goodness to keep your observashuns to yourself, Sir, I beg,' said Mrs. Raddle, suddenly arresting the rapid torrent of her speech, and addressing the third party with impressive slowness and solemnity. 'I am not aweer, Sir, that you have any right to address your conversation to me. I don't think I let these apartments to you, Sir.'

'No, you certainly did not,' said Mr. Benjamin Allen.

'Very good, Sir,' responded Mrs. Raddle, with lofty politeness. 'Then p'raps, Sir, you'll confine yourself to breaking the arms and legs of the poor people in the hospitals, and keep yourself TO yourself, Sir, or there may be some persons here as will make you, Sir.'

'But you are such an unreasonable woman,' remonstrated Mr. Benjamin Allen.

'I beg your parding, young man,' said Mrs. Raddle, in a cold perspiration of anger. 'But will you have the goodness just to call me that again, sir?'

'I didn't make use of the word in any invidious sense, ma'am,' replied Mr. Benjamin Allen, growing somewhat uneasy on his own account.

'I beg your parding, young man,' demanded Mrs. Raddle, in a louder and more imperative tone. 'But who do you call a woman? Did you make that remark to me, sir?'

'Why, bless my heart!' said Mr. Benjamin Allen.

'Did you apply that name to me, I ask of you, sir?' interrupted Mrs. Raddle, with intense fierceness, throwing the door wide open.

'Why, of course I did,' replied Mr. Benjamin Allen.

'Yes, of course you did,' said Mrs. Raddle, backing gradually to the door, and raising her voice to its loudest pitch, for the special behoof of Mr. Raddle in the kitchen. 'Yes, of course you did! And everybody knows that they may safely insult me in my own 'ouse while my husband sits sleeping downstairs, and taking no more notice than if I was a dog in the streets. He ought to be ashamed of himself (here Mrs. Raddle sobbed) to allow his wife to be treated in this way by a parcel of young cutters and carvers of live people's bodies, that disgraces the lodgings (another sob), and leaving her exposed to all manner of abuse; a base, faint-hearted, timorous wretch, that's afraid to come upstairs, and face the ruffinly creatures—that's afraid—that's afraid to come!' Mrs. Raddle paused to listen whether the repetition of the taunt had roused her better half; and finding that it had not been successful, proceeded to descend the stairs with sobs innumerable; when there came a loud double knock at the street door; whereupon she burst into an hysterical fit of weeping, accompanied with dismal moans, which was prolonged until the knock had been repeated six times, when, in an uncontrollable burst of mental agony, she threw down all the umbrellas, and disappeared into the back parlour, closing the door after her with an awful crash.

'Does Mr. Sawyer live here?' said Mr. Pickwick, when the door was opened.

'Yes,' said the girl, 'first floor. It's the door straight afore you, when you gets to the top of the stairs.' Having given this instruction, the handmaid, who had been brought up among the aboriginal inhabitants of Southwark, disappeared, with the candle in her hand, down the kitchen stairs, perfectly satisfied that she had done everything that could possibly be required of her under the circumstances.

Mr. Snodgrass, who entered last, secured the street door, after several ineffectual efforts, by putting up the chain; and the friends stumbled upstairs, where they were received by Mr. Bob Sawyer, who had been afraid to go down, lest he should be waylaid by Mrs. Raddle.

'How are you?' said the discomfited student. 'Glad to see you—take care of the glasses.' This caution was addressed to Mr. Pickwick, who had put his hat in the tray.

'Dear me,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'I beg your pardon.'

'Don't mention it, don't mention it,' said Bob Sawyer. 'I'm rather confined for room here, but you must put up with all that, when you come to see a young bachelor. Walk in. You've seen this gentleman before, I think?' Mr. Pickwick shook hands with Mr. Benjamin Allen, and his friends followed his example. They had scarcely taken their seats when there was another double knock.

'I hope that's Jack Hopkins!' said Mr. Bob Sawyer. 'Hush. Yes, it is. Come up, Jack; come up.'

A heavy footstep was heard upon the stairs, and Jack Hopkins presented himself. He wore a black velvet waistcoat, with thunder-and-lightning buttons; and a blue striped shirt, with a white false collar.

'You're late, Jack?' said Mr. Benjamin Allen.

'Been detained at Bartholomew's,' replied Hopkins.

'Anything new?'

'No, nothing particular. Rather a good accident brought into the casualty ward.'

'What was that, sir?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Only a man fallen out of a four pair of stairs' window; but it's a very fair case indeed.'

'Do you mean that the patient is in a fair way to recover?' inquired Mr. Pickwick. 'No,' replied Mr. Hopkins carelessly. 'No, I should rather say he wouldn't. There must be a splendid operation, though, to-morrow—magnificent sight if Slasher does it.'

'You consider Mr. Slasher a good operator?' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Best alive,' replied Hopkins. 'Took a boy's leg out of the socket last week—boy ate five apples and a gingerbread cake—exactly two minutes after it was all over, boy said he wouldn't lie there to be made game of, and he'd tell his mother if they didn't begin.'

'Dear me!' said Mr. Pickwick, astonished.

'Pooh! That's nothing, that ain't,' said Jack Hopkins. 'Is it, Bob?'

'Nothing at all,' replied Mr. Bob Sawyer.

'By the bye, Bob,' said Hopkins, with a scarcely perceptible glance at Mr. Pickwick's attentive face, 'we had a curious accident last night. A child was brought in, who had swallowed a necklace.'

'Swallowed what, Sir?' interrupted Mr. Pickwick. 'A necklace,' replied Jack Hopkins. 'Not all at once, you know, that would be too much—you couldn't swallow that, if the child did—eh, Mr. Pickwick? ha, ha!' Mr. Hopkins appeared highly gratified with his own pleasantry, and continued—'No, the way was this. Child's parents were poor people who lived in a court. Child's eldest sister bought a necklace—common necklace, made of large black wooden beads. Child being fond of toys, cribbed the necklace, hid it, played with it, cut the string, and swallowed a bead. Child thought it capital fun, went back next day, and swallowed another bead.'

'Bless my heart,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'what a dreadful thing! I beg your pardon, Sir. Go on.'

'Next day, child swallowed two beads; the day after that, he treated himself to three, and so on, till in a week's time he had got through the necklace—five-and-twenty beads in all. The sister, who was an industrious girl, and seldom treated herself to a bit of finery, cried her eyes out, at the loss of the necklace; looked high and low for it; but, I needn't say, didn't find it. A few days afterwards, the family were at dinner—baked shoulder of mutton, and potatoes under it—the child, who wasn't hungry, was playing about the room, when suddenly there was heard a devil of a noise, like a small hailstorm. "Don't do that, my boy," said the father. "I ain't a-doin' nothing," said the child. "Well, don't do it again," said the father. There was a short silence, and then the noise began again, worse than ever. "If you don't mind what I say, my boy," said the father, "you'll find yourself in bed, in something less than a pig's whisper." He gave the child a shake to make him obedient, and such a rattling ensued as nobody ever heard before. "Why, damme, it's IN the child!" said the father, "he's got the croup in the wrong place!" "No, I haven't, father," said the child, beginning to cry, "it's the necklace; I swallowed it, father."—The father caught the child up, and ran with him to the hospital; the beads in the boy's stomach rattling all the way with the jolting; and the people looking up in the air, and down in the cellars, to see where the unusual sound came from. He's in the hospital now,' said Jack Hopkins, 'and he makes such a devil of a noise when he walks about, that they're obliged to muffle him in a watchman's coat, for fear he should wake the patients.'

'That's the most extraordinary case I ever heard of,' said Mr. Pickwick, with an emphatic blow on the table.

'Oh, that's nothing,' said Jack Hopkins. 'Is it, Bob?'

'Certainly not,' replied Bob Sawyer.

'Very singular things occur in our profession, I can assure you, Sir,' said Hopkins.

'So I should be disposed to imagine,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

Another knock at the door announced a large-headed young man in a black wig, who brought with him a scorbutic youth in a long stock. The next comer was a gentleman in a shirt emblazoned with pink anchors, who was closely followed by a pale youth with a plated watchguard. The arrival of a prim personage in clean linen and cloth boots rendered the party complete. The little table with the green baize cover was wheeled out; the first instalment of punch was brought in, in a white jug; and the succeeding three hours were devoted to VINGT-ET-UN at sixpence a dozen, which was only once interrupted by a slight dispute between the scorbutic youth and the gentleman with the pink anchors; in the course of which, the scorbutic youth intimated a burning desire to pull the nose of the gentleman with the emblems of hope; in reply to which, that individual expressed his decided unwillingness to accept of any 'sauce' on gratuitous terms, either from the irascible young gentleman with the scorbutic countenance, or any other person who was ornamented with a head.

When the last 'natural' had been declared, and the profit and loss account of fish and sixpences adjusted, to the satisfaction of all parties, Mr. Bob Sawyer rang for supper, and the visitors squeezed themselves into corners while it was getting ready.

it was not so easily got ready as some people may imagine. First of all, it was necessary to awaken the girl, who had fallen asleep with her face on the kitchen table; this took a little time, and, even when she did answer the bell, another quarter of an hour was consumed in fruitless endeavours to impart to her a faint and distant glimmering of reason. The man to whom the order for the oysters had been sent, had not been told to open them; it is a very difficult thing to open an oyster with a limp knife and a two-pronged fork; and very little was done in this way. Very little of the beef was done either; and the ham (which was also from the German-sausage shop round the corner) was in a similar predicament. However, there was plenty of porter in a tin can; and the cheese went a great way, for it was very strong. So upon the whole, perhaps, the supper was quite as good as such matters usually are.

After supper, another jug of punch was put upon the table, together with a paper of cigars, and a couple of bottles of spirits. Then there was an awful pause; and this awful pause was occasioned by a very common occurrence in this sort of place, but a very embarrassing one notwithstanding.

The fact is, the girl was washing the glasses. The establishment boasted four: we do not record the circumstance as at all derogatory to Mrs. Raddle, for there never was a lodging-house yet, that was not short of glasses. The landlady's glasses were little, thin, blown-glass tumblers, and those which had been borrowed from the public-house were great, dropsical, bloated articles, each supported on a huge gouty leg. This would have been in itself sufficient to have possessed the company with the real state of affairs; but the young woman of all work had prevented the possibility of any misconception arising in the mind of any gentleman upon the subject, by forcibly dragging every man's glass away, long before he had finished his beer, and audibly stating, despite the winks and interruptions of Mr. Bob Sawyer, that it was to be conveyed downstairs, and washed forthwith.

It is a very ill wind that blows nobody any good. The prim man in the cloth boots, who had been unsuccessfully attempting to make a joke during the whole time the round game lasted, saw his opportunity, and availed himself of it. The instant the glasses disappeared, he commenced a long story about a great public character, whose name he had forgotten, making a particularly happy reply to another eminent and illustrious individual whom he had never been able to identify. He enlarged at some length and with great minuteness upon divers collateral circumstances, distantly connected with the anecdote in hand, but for the life of him he couldn't recollect at that precise moment what the anecdote was, although he had been in the habit of telling the story with great applause for the last ten years.

'Dear me,' said the prim man in the cloth boots, 'it is a very extraordinary circumstance.'

'I am sorry you have forgotten it,' said Mr. Bob Sawyer, glancing eagerly at the door, as he thought he heard the noise of glasses jingling; 'very sorry.'

'So am I,' responded the prim man, 'because I know it would have afforded so much amusement. Never mind; I dare say I shall manage to recollect it, in the course of half an hour or so.'

The prim man arrived at this point just as the glasses came back, when Mr. Bob Sawyer, who had been absorbed in attention during the whole time, said he should very much like to hear the end of it, for, so far as it went, it was, without exception, the very best story he had ever heard. The sight of the tumblers restored Bob Sawyer to a degree of equanimity which he had not possessed since his interview with his landlady. His face brightened up, and he began to feel quite convivial.

'Now, Betsy,' said Mr. Bob Sawyer, with great suavity, and dispersing, at the same time, the tumultuous little mob of glasses the girl had collected in the centre of the table—'now, Betsy, the warm water; be brisk, there's a good girl.'

'You can't have no warm water,' replied Betsy.

'No warm water!' exclaimed Mr. Bob Sawyer.

'No,' said the girl, with a shake of the head which expressed a more decided negative than the most copious language could have conveyed. 'Missis Raddle said you warn't to have none.'

The surprise depicted on the countenances of his guests imparted new courage to the host.

'Bring up the warm water instantly—instantly!' said Mr. Bob Sawyer, with desperate sternness.

'No. I can't,' replied the girl; 'Missis Raddle raked out the kitchen fire afore she went to bed, and locked up the kittle.'

'Oh, never mind; never mind. Pray don't disturb yourself about such a trifle,' said Mr. Pickwick, observing the conflict of Bob Sawyer's passions, as depicted in his countenance, 'cold water will do very well.'

'Oh, admirably,' said Mr. Benjamin Allen.

'My landlady is subject to some slight attacks of mental derangement,' remarked Bob Sawyer, with a ghastly smile; 'I fear I must give her warning.'

'No, don't,' said Ben Allen.

'I fear I must,' said Bob, with heroic firmness. 'I'll pay her what I owe her, and give her warning to-morrow morning.' Poor fellow! how devoutly he wished he could!

Mr. Bob Sawyer's heart-sickening attempts to rally under this last blow, communicated a dispiriting influence to the company, the greater part of whom, with the view of raising their spirits, attached themselves with extra cordiality to the cold brandy-and-water, the first perceptible effects of which were displayed in a renewal of hostilities between the scorbutic youth and the gentleman in the shirt. The belligerents vented their feelings of mutual contempt, for some time, in a variety of frownings and snortings, until at last the scorbutic youth felt it necessary to come to a more explicit understanding on the matter; when the following clear understanding took place. 'Sawyer,' said the scorbutic youth, in a loud voice.

'Well, Noddy,' replied Mr. Bob Sawyer.

'I should be very sorry, Sawyer,' said Mr. Noddy, 'to create any unpleasantness at any friend's table, and much less at yours, Sawyer—very; but I must take this opportunity of informing Mr. Gunter that he is no gentleman.'

'And I should be very sorry, Sawyer, to create any disturbance in the street in which you reside,' said Mr. Gunter, 'but I'm afraid I shall be under the necessity of alarming the neighbours by throwing the person who has just spoken, out o' window.'

'What do you mean by that, sir?' inquired Mr. Noddy.

'What I say, Sir,' replied Mr. Gunter.

'I should like to see you do it, Sir,' said Mr. Noddy.

'You shall FEEL me do it in half a minute, Sir,' replied Mr. Gunter.

'I request that you'll favour me with your card, Sir,' said Mr. Noddy.

'I'll do nothing of the kind, Sir,' replied Mr. Gunter.

'Why not, Sir?' inquired Mr. Noddy.

'Because you'll stick it up over your chimney-piece, and delude your visitors into the false belief that a gentleman has been to see you, Sir,' replied Mr. Gunter.

'Sir, a friend of mine shall wait on you in the morning,' said Mr. Noddy.

'Sir, I'm very much obliged to you for the caution, and I'll leave particular directions with the servant to lock up the spoons,' replied Mr. Gunter.

At this point the remainder of the guests interposed, and remonstrated with both parties on the impropriety of their conduct; on which Mr. Noddy begged to state that his father was quite as respectable as Mr. Gunter's father; to which Mr. Gunter replied that his father was to the full as respectable as Mr. Noddy's father, and that his father's son was as good a man as Mr. Noddy, any day in the week. As this announcement seemed the prelude to a recommencement of the dispute, there was another interference on the part of the company; and a vast quantity of talking and clamouring ensued, in the course of which Mr. Noddy gradually allowed his feelings to overpower him, and professed that he had ever entertained a devoted personal attachment towards Mr. Gunter. To this Mr. Gunter replied that, upon the whole, he rather preferred Mr. Noddy to his own brother; on hearing which admission, Mr. Noddy magnanimously rose from his seat, and proffered his hand to Mr. Gunter. Mr. Gunter grasped it with affecting fervour; and everybody said that the whole dispute had been conducted in a manner which was highly honourable to both parties concerned.

'Now,' said Jack Hopkins, 'just to set us going again, Bob, I don't mind singing a song.' And Hopkins, incited thereto by tumultuous applause, plunged himself at once into 'The King, God bless him,' which he sang as loud as he could, to a novel air, compounded of the 'Bay of Biscay,' and 'A Frog he would.' The chorus was the essence of the song; and, as each gentleman sang it to the tune he knew best, the effect was very striking indeed.

It was at the end of the chorus to the first verse, that Mr. Pickwick held up his hand in a listening attitude, and said, as soon as silence was restored—

'Hush! I beg your pardon. I thought I heard somebody calling from upstairs.'

A profound silence immediately ensued; and Mr. Bob Sawyer was observed to turn pale.

'I think I hear it now,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Have the goodness to open the door.'

The door was no sooner opened than all doubt on the subject was removed.

'Mr. Sawyer! Mr. Sawyer!' screamed a voice from the two-pair landing.

'It's my landlady,' said Bob Sawyer, looking round him with great dismay. 'Yes, Mrs. Raddle.'

'What do you mean by this, Mr. Sawyer?' replied the voice, with great shrillness and rapidity of utterance. 'Ain't it enough to be swindled out of one's rent, and money lent out of pocket besides, and abused and insulted by your friends that dares to call themselves men, without having the house turned out of the window, and noise enough made to bring the fire-engines here, at two o'clock in the morning?—Turn them wretches away.'

'You ought to be ashamed of yourselves,' said the voice of Mr. Raddle, which appeared to proceed from beneath some distant bed-clothes.

'Ashamed of themselves!' said Mrs. Raddle. 'Why don't you go down and knock 'em every one downstairs? You would if you was a man.' 'I should if I was a dozen men, my dear,' replied Mr. Raddle pacifically, 'but they have the advantage of me in numbers, my dear.'

'Ugh, you coward!' replied Mrs. Raddle, with supreme contempt. 'DO you mean to turn them wretches out, or not, Mr. Sawyer?'

'They're going, Mrs. Raddle, they're going,' said the miserable Bob. 'I am afraid you'd better go,' said Mr. Bob Sawyer to his friends. 'I thought you were making too much noise.'

'It's a very unfortunate thing,' said the prim man. 'Just as we were getting so comfortable too!' The prim man was just beginning to have a dawning recollection of the story he had forgotten.

'It's hardly to be borne,' said the prim man, looking round. 'Hardly to be borne, is it?'

'Not to be endured,' replied Jack Hopkins; 'let's have the other verse, Bob. Come, here goes!'

'No, no, Jack, don't,' interposed Bob Sawyer; 'it's a capital song, but I am afraid we had better not have the other verse. They are very violent people, the people of the house.'

'Shall I step upstairs, and pitch into the landlord?' inquired Hopkins, 'or keep on ringing the bell, or go and groan on the staircase? You may command me, Bob.'

'I am very much indebted to you for your friendship and good-nature, Hopkins,' said the wretched Mr. Bob Sawyer, 'but I think the best plan to avoid any further dispute is for us to break up at once.'

'Now, Mr. Sawyer,' screamed the shrill voice of Mrs. Raddle, 'are them brutes going?'

'They're only looking for their hats, Mrs. Raddle,' said Bob; 'they are going directly.'

'Going!' said Mrs. Raddle, thrusting her nightcap over the banisters just as Mr. Pickwick, followed by Mr. Tupman, emerged from the sitting-room. 'Going! what did they ever come for?'

'My dear ma'am,' remonstrated Mr. Pickwick, looking up.

'Get along with you, old wretch!' replied Mrs. Raddle, hastily withdrawing the nightcap. 'Old enough to be his grandfather, you willin! You're worse than any of 'em.'

Mr. Pickwick found it in vain to protest his innocence, so hurried downstairs into the street, whither he was closely followed by Mr. Tupman, Mr. Winkle, and Mr. Snodgrass. Mr. Ben Allen, who was dismally depressed with spirits and agitation, accompanied them as far as London Bridge, and in the course of the walk confided to Mr. Winkle, as an especially eligible person to intrust the secret to, that he was resolved to cut the throat of any gentleman, except Mr. Bob Sawyer, who should aspire to the affections of his sister Arabella. Having expressed his determination to perform this painful duty of a brother with proper firmness, he burst into tears, knocked his hat over his eyes, and, making the best of his way back, knocked double knocks at the door of the Borough Market office, and took short naps on the steps alternately, until daybreak, under the firm impression that he lived there, and had forgotten the key.

The visitors having all departed, in compliance with the rather pressing request of Mrs. Raddle, the luckless Mr. Bob Sawyer was left alone, to meditate on the probable events of to-morrow, and the pleasures of the evening.

CHAPTER XXXIII. Mr. WELLER THE ELDER DELIVERS SOME CRITICAL SENTIMENTS

RESPECTING LITERARY COMPOSITION; AND, ASSISTED BY HIS SON SAMUEL, PAYS A SMALL INSTALMENT OF RETALIATION TO THE ACCOUNT OF THE REVEREND GENTLEMAN WITH THE RED NOSE

The morning of the thirteenth of February, which the readers of this authentic narrative know, as well as we do, to have been the day immediately preceding that which was appointed for the trial of Mrs. Bardell's action, was a busy time for Mr. Samuel Weller, who was perpetually engaged in travelling from the George and Vulture to Mr. Perker's chambers and back again, from and between the hours of nine o'clock in the morning and two in the afternoon, both inclusive. Not that there was anything whatever to be done, for the consultation had taken place, and the course of proceeding to be adopted, had been finally determined on; but Mr. Pickwick being in a most extreme state of excitement, persevered in constantly sending small notes to his attorney, merely containing the inquiry, 'Dear Perker. Is all going on well?' to which Mr. Perker invariably forwarded the reply, 'Dear Pickwick. As well as possible'; the fact being, as we have already hinted, that there was nothing whatever to go on, either well or ill, until the sitting of the court on the following morning.

But people who go voluntarily to law, or are taken forcibly there, for the first time, may be allowed to labour under some temporary irritation and anxiety; and Sam, with a due allowance for the frailties of human nature, obeyed all his master's behests with that imperturbable good-humour and unruffable composure which formed one of his most striking and amiable characteristics.

Sam had solaced himself with a most agreeable little dinner, and was waiting at the bar for the glass of warm mixture in which Mr. Pickwick had requested him to drown the fatigues of his morning's walks, when a young boy of about three feet high, or thereabouts, in a hairy cap and fustian overalls, whose garb bespoke a laudable ambition to attain in time the elevation of an hostler, entered the passage of the George and Vulture, and looked first up the stairs, and then along the passage, and then into the bar, as if in search of somebody to whom he bore a commission; whereupon the barmaid, conceiving it not improbable that the said commission might be directed to the tea or table spoons of the establishment, accosted the boy with—

'Now, young man, what do you want?'

'Is there anybody here, named Sam?' inquired the youth, in a loud voice of treble quality.

'What's the t'other name?' said Sam Weller, looking round.

'How should I know?' briskly replied the young gentleman below the hairy cap. 'You're a sharp boy, you are,' said Mr. Weller; 'only I wouldn't show that wery fine edge too much, if I was you, in case anybody took it off. What do you mean by comin' to a hot-el, and asking arter Sam, vith as much politeness as a vild Indian?'

''Cos an old gen'l'm'n told me to,' replied the boy.

'What old gen'l'm'n?' inquired Sam, with deep disdain.

'Him as drives a Ipswich coach, and uses our parlour,' rejoined the boy. 'He told me yesterday mornin' to come to the George and Wultur this arternoon, and ask for Sam.'

'It's my father, my dear,' said Mr. Weller, turning with an explanatory air to the young lady in the bar; 'blessed if I think he hardly knows wot my other name is. Well, young brockiley sprout, wot then?'

'Why then,' said the boy, 'you was to come to him at six o'clock to our 'ouse, 'cos he wants to see you—Blue Boar, Leaden'all Markit. Shall I say you're comin'?'

'You may wenture on that 'ere statement, Sir,' replied Sam. And thus empowered, the young gentleman walked away, awakening all the echoes in George Yard as he did so, with several chaste and extremely correct imitations of a drover's whistle, delivered in a tone of peculiar richness and volume.

Mr. Weller having obtained leave of absence from Mr. Pickwick, who, in his then state of excitement and worry, was by no means displeased at being left alone, set forth, long before the appointed hour, and having plenty of time at his disposal, sauntered down as far as the Mansion House, where he paused and contemplated, with a face of great calmness and philosophy, the numerous cads and drivers of short stages who assemble near that famous place of resort, to the great terror and confusion of the old-lady population of these realms. Having loitered here, for half an hour or so, Mr. Weller turned, and began wending his way towards Leadenhall Market, through a variety of by-streets and courts. As he was sauntering away his spare time, and stopped to look at almost every object that met his gaze, it is by no means surprising that Mr. Weller should have paused before a small stationer's and print-seller's window; but without further explanation it does appear surprising that his eyes should have no sooner rested on certain pictures which were exposed for sale therein, than he gave a sudden start, smote his right leg with great vehemence, and exclaimed, with energy, 'if it hadn't been for this, I should ha' forgot all about it, till it was too late!'

The particular picture on which Sam Weller's eyes were fixed, as he said this, was a highly-coloured representation of a couple of human hearts skewered together with an arrow, cooking before a cheerful fire, while a male and female cannibal in modern attire, the gentleman being clad in a blue coat and white trousers, and the lady in a deep red pelisse with a parasol of the same, were approaching the meal with hungry eyes, up a serpentine gravel path leading thereunto. A decidedly indelicate young gentleman, in a pair of wings and nothing else, was depicted as superintending the cooking; a representation of the spire of the church in Langham Place, London, appeared in the distance; and the whole formed a 'valentine,' of which, as a written inscription in the window testified, there was a large assortment within, which the shopkeeper pledged himself to dispose of, to his countrymen generally, at the reduced rate of one-and-sixpence each.

'I should ha' forgot it; I should certainly ha' forgot it!' said Sam; so saying, he at once stepped into the stationer's shop, and requested to be served with a sheet of the best gilt-edged letter-paper, and a hard-nibbed pen which could be warranted not to splutter. These articles having been promptly supplied, he walked on direct towards Leadenhall Market at a good round pace, very different from his recent lingering one. Looking round him, he there beheld a signboard on which the painter's art had delineated something remotely resembling a cerulean elephant with an aquiline nose in lieu of trunk. Rightly conjecturing that this was the Blue Boar himself, he stepped into the house, and inquired concerning his parent.

'He won't be here this three-quarters of an hour or more,' said the young lady who superintended the domestic arrangements of the Blue Boar.

'Wery good, my dear,' replied Sam. 'Let me have nine-penn'oth o' brandy-and-water luke, and the inkstand, will you, miss?'

The brandy-and-water luke, and the inkstand, having been carried into the little parlour, and the young lady having carefully flattened down the coals to prevent their blazing, and carried away the poker to preclude the possibility of the fire being stirred, without the full privity and concurrence of the Blue Boar being first had and obtained, Sam Weller sat himself down in a box near the stove, and pulled out the sheet of gilt-edged letter-paper, and the hard-nibbed pen. Then looking carefully at the pen to see that there were no hairs in it, and dusting down the table, so that there might be no crumbs of bread under the paper, Sam tucked up the cuffs of his coat, squared his elbows, and composed himself to write.

To ladies and gentlemen who are not in the habit of devoting themselves practically to the science of penmanship, writing a letter is no very easy task; it being always considered necessary in such cases for the writer to recline his head on his left arm, so as to place his eyes as nearly as possible on a level with the paper, and, while glancing sideways at the letters he is constructing, to form with his tongue imaginary characters to correspond. These motions, although unquestionably of the greatest assistance to original composition, retard in some degree the progress of the writer; and Sam had unconsciously been a full hour and a half writing words in small text, smearing out wrong letters with his little finger, and putting in new ones which required going over very often to render them visible through the old blots, when he was roused by the opening of the door and the entrance of his parent.

'Vell, Sammy,' said the father.

'Vell, my Prooshan Blue,' responded the son, laying down his pen. 'What's the last bulletin about mother-in-law?'

'Mrs. Veller passed a very good night, but is uncommon perwerse, and unpleasant this mornin'. Signed upon oath, Tony Veller, Esquire. That's the last vun as was issued, Sammy,' replied Mr. Weller, untying his shawl.

'No better yet?' inquired Sam.

'All the symptoms aggerawated,' replied Mr. Weller, shaking his head. 'But wot's that, you're a-doin' of? Pursuit of knowledge under difficulties, Sammy?'

'I've done now,' said Sam, with slight embarrassment; 'I've been a-writin'.'

'So I see,' replied Mr. Weller. 'Not to any young 'ooman, I hope, Sammy?'

'Why, it's no use a-sayin' it ain't,' replied Sam; 'it's a walentine.'

'A what!' exclaimed Mr. Weller, apparently horror-stricken by the word.

'A walentine,' replied Sam. 'Samivel, Samivel,' said Mr. Weller, in reproachful accents, 'I didn't think you'd ha' done it. Arter the warnin' you've had o' your father's wicious propensities; arter all I've said to you upon this here wery subject; arter actiwally seein' and bein' in the company o' your own mother-in-law, vich I should ha' thought wos a moral lesson as no man could never ha' forgotten to his dyin' day! I didn't think you'd ha' done it, Sammy, I didn't think you'd ha' done it!' These reflections were too much for the good old man. He raised Sam's tumbler to his lips and drank off its contents.

'Wot's the matter now?' said Sam.

'Nev'r mind, Sammy,' replied Mr. Weller, 'it'll be a wery agonisin' trial to me at my time of life, but I'm pretty tough, that's vun consolation, as the wery old turkey remarked wen the farmer said he wos afeerd he should be obliged to kill him for the London market.'

'Wot'll be a trial?' inquired Sam. 'To see you married, Sammy—to see you a dilluded wictim, and thinkin' in your innocence that it's all wery capital,' replied Mr. Weller. 'It's a dreadful trial to a father's feelin's, that 'ere, Sammy—'

'Nonsense,' said Sam. 'I ain't a-goin' to get married, don't you fret yourself about that; I know you're a judge of these things. Order in your pipe and I'll read you the letter. There!'

We cannot distinctly say whether it was the prospect of the pipe, or the consolatory reflection that a fatal disposition to get married ran in the family, and couldn't be helped, which calmed Mr. Weller's feelings, and caused his grief to subside. We should be rather disposed to say that the result was attained by combining the two sources of consolation, for he repeated the second in a low tone, very frequently; ringing the bell meanwhile, to order in the first. He then divested himself of his upper coat; and lighting the pipe and placing himself in front of the fire with his back towards it, so that he could feel its full heat, and recline against the mantel-piece at the same time, turned towards Sam, and, with a countenance greatly mollified by the softening influence of tobacco, requested him to 'fire away.'

Sam dipped his pen into the ink to be ready for any corrections, and began with a very theatrical air—

'"Lovely—"'

'Stop,' said Mr. Weller, ringing the bell. 'A double glass o' the inwariable, my dear.'

'Very well, Sir,' replied the girl; who with great quickness appeared, vanished, returned, and disappeared.

'They seem to know your ways here,' observed Sam.

'Yes,' replied his father, 'I've been here before, in my time. Go on, Sammy.'

'"Lovely creetur,"' repeated Sam.

''Tain't in poetry, is it?' interposed his father.

'No, no,' replied Sam.

'Wery glad to hear it,' said Mr. Weller. 'Poetry's unnat'ral; no man ever talked poetry 'cept a beadle on boxin'-day, or Warren's blackin', or Rowland's oil, or some of them low fellows; never you let yourself down to talk poetry, my boy. Begin agin, Sammy.'

Mr. Weller resumed his pipe with critical solemnity, and Sam once more commenced, and read as follows:

'"Lovely creetur I feel myself a damned—"' 'That ain't proper,' said Mr. Weller, taking his pipe from his mouth.

'No; it ain't "damned,"' observed Sam, holding the letter up to the light, 'it's "shamed," there's a blot there—"I feel myself ashamed."'

'Wery good,' said Mr. Weller. 'Go on.'

'Feel myself ashamed, and completely cir—' I forget what this here word is,' said Sam, scratching his head with the pen, in vain attempts to remember.

'Why don't you look at it, then?' inquired Mr. Weller.

'So I am a-lookin' at it,' replied Sam, 'but there's another blot. Here's a "c," and a "i," and a "d."'

'Circumwented, p'raps,' suggested Mr. Weller.

'No, it ain't that,' said Sam, '"circumscribed"; that's it.'

'That ain't as good a word as "circumwented," Sammy,' said Mr. Weller gravely.

'Think not?' said Sam.

'Nothin' like it,' replied his father.

'But don't you think it means more?' inquired Sam.

'Vell p'raps it's a more tenderer word,' said Mr. Weller, after a few moments' reflection. 'Go on, Sammy.'

'"Feel myself ashamed and completely circumscribed in a-dressin' of you, for you are a nice gal and nothin' but it."'

'That's a wery pretty sentiment,' said the elder Mr. Weller, removing his pipe to make way for the remark.

'Yes, I think it is rayther good,' observed Sam, highly flattered.

'Wot I like in that 'ere style of writin',' said the elder Mr. Weller, 'is, that there ain't no callin' names in it—no Wenuses, nor nothin' o' that kind. Wot's the good o' callin' a young 'ooman a Wenus or a angel, Sammy?'

'Ah! what, indeed?' replied Sam.

'You might jist as well call her a griffin, or a unicorn, or a king's arms at once, which is wery well known to be a collection o' fabulous animals,' added Mr. Weller.

'Just as well,' replied Sam.

'Drive on, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller.

Sam complied with the request, and proceeded as follows; his father continuing to smoke, with a mixed expression of wisdom and complacency, which was particularly edifying.

'"Afore I see you, I thought all women was alike."'

'So they are,' observed the elder Mr. Weller parenthetically.

'"But now,"' continued Sam, '"now I find what a reg'lar soft-headed, inkred'lous turnip I must ha' been; for there ain't nobody like you, though I like you better than nothin' at all." I thought it best to make that rayther strong,' said Sam, looking up.

Mr. Weller nodded approvingly, and Sam resumed.

'"So I take the privilidge of the day, Mary, my dear—as the gen'l'm'n in difficulties did, ven he valked out of a Sunday—to tell you that the first and only time I see you, your likeness was took on my hart in much quicker time and brighter colours than ever a likeness was took by the profeel macheen (wich p'raps you may have heerd on Mary my dear) altho it DOES finish a portrait and put the frame and glass on complete, with a hook at the end to hang it up by, and all in two minutes and a quarter."'

'I am afeerd that werges on the poetical, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller dubiously.

'No, it don't,' replied Sam, reading on very quickly, to avoid contesting the point—

'"Except of me Mary my dear as your walentine and think over what I've said.—My dear Mary I will now conclude." That's all,' said Sam.

'That's rather a Sudden pull-up, ain't it, Sammy?' inquired Mr. Weller.

'Not a bit on it,' said Sam; 'she'll vish there wos more, and that's the great art o' letter-writin'.'

'Well,' said Mr. Weller, 'there's somethin' in that; and I wish your mother-in-law 'ud only conduct her conwersation on the same gen-teel principle. Ain't you a-goin' to sign it?'

'That's the difficulty,' said Sam; 'I don't know what to sign it.'

'Sign it—"Veller",' said the oldest surviving proprietor of that name.

'Won't do,' said Sam. 'Never sign a walentine with your own name.'

'Sign it "Pickwick," then,' said Mr. Weller; 'it's a wery good name, and a easy one to spell.' 'The wery thing,' said Sam. 'I COULD end with a werse; what do you think?'

'I don't like it, Sam,' rejoined Mr. Weller. 'I never know'd a respectable coachman as wrote poetry, 'cept one, as made an affectin' copy o' werses the night afore he was hung for a highway robbery; and he wos only a Cambervell man, so even that's no rule.'

But Sam was not to be dissuaded from the poetical idea that had occurred to him, so he signed the letter—

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 'Your love-sick
   Pickwick.'
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And having folded it, in a very intricate manner, squeezed a downhill direction in one corner: 'To Mary, Housemaid, at Mr. Nupkins's, Mayor's, Ipswich, Suffolk'; and put it into his pocket, wafered, and ready for the general post. This important business having been transacted, Mr. Weller the elder proceeded to open that, on which he had summoned his son.

'The first matter relates to your governor, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller. 'He's a-goin' to be tried to-morrow, ain't he?'

'The trial's a-comin' on,' replied Sam.

'Vell,' said Mr. Weller, 'Now I s'pose he'll want to call some witnesses to speak to his character, or p'rhaps to prove a alleybi. I've been a-turnin' the bis'ness over in my mind, and he may make his-self easy, Sammy. I've got some friends as'll do either for him, but my adwice 'ud be this here—never mind the character, and stick to the alleybi. Nothing like a alleybi, Sammy, nothing.' Mr. Weller looked very profound as he delivered this legal opinion; and burying his nose in his tumbler, winked over the top thereof, at his astonished son. 'Why, what do you mean?' said Sam; 'you don't think he's a-goin' to be tried at the Old Bailey, do you?'

'That ain't no part of the present consideration, Sammy,' replied Mr. Weller. 'Verever he's a-goin' to be tried, my boy, a alleybi's the thing to get him off. Ve got Tom Vildspark off that 'ere manslaughter, with a alleybi, ven all the big vigs to a man said as nothing couldn't save him. And my 'pinion is, Sammy, that if your governor don't prove a alleybi, he'll be what the Italians call reg'larly flummoxed, and that's all about it.'

As the elder Mr. Weller entertained a firm and unalterable conviction that the Old Bailey was the supreme court of judicature in this country, and that its rules and forms of proceeding regulated and controlled the practice of all other courts of justice whatsoever, he totally disregarded the assurances and arguments of his son, tending to show that the alibi was inadmissible; and vehemently protested that Mr. Pickwick was being 'wictimised.' Finding that it was of no use to discuss the matter further, Sam changed the subject, and inquired what the second topic was, on which his revered parent wished to consult him.

'That's a pint o' domestic policy, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller. 'This here Stiggins—'

'Red-nosed man?' inquired Sam.

'The wery same,' replied Mr. Weller. 'This here red-nosed man, Sammy, wisits your mother-in-law vith a kindness and constancy I never see equalled. He's sitch a friend o' the family, Sammy, that wen he's avay from us, he can't be comfortable unless he has somethin' to remember us by.'

'And I'd give him somethin' as 'ud turpentine and beeswax his memory for the next ten years or so, if I wos you,' interposed Sam.

'Stop a minute,' said Mr. Weller; 'I wos a-going to say, he always brings now, a flat bottle as holds about a pint and a half, and fills it vith the pine-apple rum afore he goes avay.'

'And empties it afore he comes back, I s'pose?' said Sam.

'Clean!' replied Mr. Weller; 'never leaves nothin' in it but the cork and the smell; trust him for that, Sammy. Now, these here fellows, my boy, are a-goin' to-night to get up the monthly meetin' o' the Brick Lane Branch o' the United Grand Junction Ebenezer Temperance Association. Your mother-in-law wos a-goin', Sammy, but she's got the rheumatics, and can't; and I, Sammy—I've got the two tickets as wos sent her.' Mr. Weller communicated this secret with great glee, and winked so indefatigably after doing so, that Sam began to think he must have got the TIC DOLOUREUX in his right eyelid.

'Well?' said that young gentleman. 'Well,' continued his progenitor, looking round him very cautiously, 'you and I'll go, punctiwal to the time. The deputy-shepherd won't, Sammy; the deputy-shepherd won't.' Here Mr. Weller was seized with a paroxysm of chuckles, which gradually terminated in as near an approach to a choke as an elderly gentleman can, with safety, sustain.

'Well, I never see sitch an old ghost in all my born days,' exclaimed Sam, rubbing the old gentleman's back, hard enough to set him on fire with the friction. 'What are you a-laughin' at, corpilence?'

'Hush! Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, looking round him with increased caution, and speaking in a whisper. 'Two friends o' mine, as works the Oxford Road, and is up to all kinds o' games, has got the deputy-shepherd safe in tow, Sammy; and ven he does come to the Ebenezer Junction (vich he's sure to do: for they'll see him to the door, and shove him in, if necessary), he'll be as far gone in rum-and-water, as ever he wos at the Markis o' Granby, Dorkin', and that's not sayin' a little neither.' And with this, Mr. Weller once more laughed immoderately, and once more relapsed into a state of partial suffocation, in consequence.

Nothing could have been more in accordance with Sam Weller's feelings than the projected exposure of the real propensities and qualities of the red-nosed man; and it being very near the appointed hour of meeting, the father and son took their way at once to Brick Lane, Sam not forgetting to drop his letter into a general post-office as they walked along.

The monthly meetings of the Brick Lane Branch of the United Grand Junction Ebenezer Temperance Association were held in a large room, pleasantly and airily situated at the top of a safe and commodious ladder. The president was the straight-walking Mr. Anthony Humm, a converted fireman, now a schoolmaster, and occasionally an itinerant preacher; and the secretary was Mr. Jonas Mudge, chandler's shopkeeper, an enthusiastic and disinterested vessel, who sold tea to the members. Previous to the commencement of business, the ladies sat upon forms, and drank tea, till such time as they considered it expedient to leave off; and a large wooden money-box was conspicuously placed upon the green baize cloth of the business-table, behind which the secretary stood, and acknowledged, with a gracious smile, every addition to the rich vein of copper which lay concealed within.

On this particular occasion the women drank tea to a most alarming extent; greatly to the horror of Mr. Weller, senior, who, utterly regardless of all Sam's admonitory nudgings, stared about him in every direction with the most undisguised astonishment.

'Sammy,' whispered Mr. Weller, 'if some o' these here people don't want tappin' to-morrow mornin', I ain't your father, and that's wot it is. Why, this here old lady next me is a-drowndin' herself in tea.' 'Be quiet, can't you?' murmured Sam.

'Sam,' whispered Mr. Weller, a moment afterwards, in a tone of deep agitation, 'mark my vords, my boy. If that 'ere secretary fellow keeps on for only five minutes more, he'll blow hisself up with toast and water.'

'Well, let him, if he likes,' replied Sam; 'it ain't no bis'ness o' yourn.'

'If this here lasts much longer, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, in the same low voice, 'I shall feel it my duty, as a human bein', to rise and address the cheer. There's a young 'ooman on the next form but two, as has drunk nine breakfast cups and a half; and she's a-swellin' wisibly before my wery eyes.'

There is little doubt that Mr. Weller would have carried his benevolent intention into immediate execution, if a great noise, occasioned by putting up the cups and saucers, had not very fortunately announced that the tea-drinking was over. The crockery having been removed, the table with the green baize cover was carried out into the centre of the room, and the business of the evening was commenced by a little emphatic man, with a bald head and drab shorts, who suddenly rushed up the ladder, at the imminent peril of snapping the two little legs incased in the drab shorts, and said—

'Ladies and gentlemen, I move our excellent brother, Mr. Anthony Humm, into the chair.'

The ladies waved a choice selection of pocket-handkerchiefs at this proposition; and the impetuous little man literally moved Mr. Humm into the chair, by taking him by the shoulders and thrusting him into a mahogany-frame which had once represented that article of furniture. The waving of handkerchiefs was renewed; and Mr. Humm, who was a sleek, white-faced man, in a perpetual perspiration, bowed meekly, to the great admiration of the females, and formally took his seat. Silence was then proclaimed by the little man in the drab shorts, and Mr. Humm rose and said—That, with the permission of his Brick Lane Branch brothers and sisters, then and there present, the secretary would read the report of the Brick Lane Branch committee; a proposition which was again received with a demonstration of pocket-handkerchiefs.

The secretary having sneezed in a very impressive manner, and the cough which always seizes an assembly, when anything particular is going to be done, having been duly performed, the following document was read:

'REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE BRICK LANE BRANCH OF THE UNITED GRAND JUNCTION EBENEZER TEMPERANCE ASSOCIATION

'Your committee have pursued their grateful labours during the past month, and have the unspeakable pleasure of reporting the following additional cases of converts to Temperance.

'H. Walker, tailor, wife, and two children. When in better circumstances, owns to having been in the constant habit of drinking ale and beer; says he is not certain whether he did not twice a week, for twenty years, taste "dog's nose," which your committee find upon inquiry, to be compounded of warm porter, moist sugar, gin, and nutmeg (a groan, and 'So it is!' from an elderly female). Is now out of work and penniless; thinks it must be the porter (cheers) or the loss of the use of his right hand; is not certain which, but thinks it very likely that, if he had drunk nothing but water all his life, his fellow-workman would never have stuck a rusty needle in him, and thereby occasioned his accident (tremendous cheering). Has nothing but cold water to drink, and never feels thirsty (great applause).

'Betsy Martin, widow, one child, and one eye. Goes out charing and washing, by the day; never had more than one eye, but knows her mother drank bottled stout, and shouldn't wonder if that caused it (immense cheering). Thinks it not impossible that if she had always abstained from spirits she might have had two eyes by this time (tremendous applause). Used, at every place she went to, to have eighteen-pence a day, a pint of porter, and a glass of spirits; but since she became a member of the Brick Lane Branch, has always demanded three-and-sixpence (the announcement of this most interesting fact was received with deafening enthusiasm).

'Henry Beller was for many years toast-master at various corporation dinners, during which time he drank a great deal of foreign wine; may sometimes have carried a bottle or two home with him; is not quite certain of that, but is sure if he did, that he drank the contents. Feels very low and melancholy, is very feverish, and has a constant thirst upon him; thinks it must be the wine he used to drink (cheers). Is out of employ now; and never touches a drop of foreign wine by any chance (tremendous plaudits).

'Thomas Burton is purveyor of cat's meat to the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs, and several members of the Common Council (the announcement of this gentleman's name was received with breathless interest). Has a wooden leg; finds a wooden leg expensive, going over the stones; used to wear second-hand wooden legs, and drink a glass of hot gin-and-water regularly every night—sometimes two (deep sighs). Found the second-hand wooden legs split and rot very quickly; is firmly persuaded that their constitution was undermined by the gin-and-water (prolonged cheering). Buys new wooden legs now, and drinks nothing but water and weak tea. The new legs last twice as long as the others used to do, and he attributes this solely to his temperate habits (triumphant cheers).'

Anthony Humm now moved that the assembly do regale itself with a song. With a view to their rational and moral enjoyment, Brother Mordlin had adapted the beautiful words of 'Who hasn't heard of a Jolly Young Waterman?' to the tune of the Old Hundredth, which he would request them to join him in singing (great applause). He might take that opportunity of expressing his firm persuasion that the late Mr. Dibdin, seeing the errors of his former life, had written that song to show the advantages of abstinence. It was a temperance song (whirlwinds of cheers). The neatness of the young man's attire, the dexterity of his feathering, the enviable state of mind which enabled him in the beautiful words of the poet, to

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 'Row along, thinking of nothing at all,'
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all combined to prove that he must have been a water-drinker (cheers). Oh, what a state of virtuous jollity! (rapturous cheering). And what was the young man's reward? Let all young men present mark this:

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 'The maidens all flocked to his boat so readily.'
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(Loud cheers, in which the ladies joined.) What a bright example! The sisterhood, the maidens, flocking round the young waterman, and urging him along the stream of duty and of temperance. But, was it the maidens of humble life only, who soothed, consoled, and supported him? No!

`'He was always first oars with the fine city ladies.'`

(Immense cheering.) The soft sex to a man—he begged pardon, to a female—rallied round the young waterman, and turned with disgust from the drinker of spirits (cheers). The Brick Lane Branch brothers were watermen (cheers and laughter). That room was their boat; that audience were the maidens; and he (Mr. Anthony Humm), however unworthily, was 'first oars' (unbounded applause).

'Wot does he mean by the soft sex, Sammy?' inquired Mr. Weller, in a whisper.

'The womin,' said Sam, in the same tone.

'He ain't far out there, Sammy,' replied Mr. Weller; 'they MUST be a soft sex—a wery soft sex, indeed—if they let themselves be gammoned by such fellers as him.'

Any further observations from the indignant old gentleman were cut short by the announcement of the song, which Mr. Anthony Humm gave out two lines at a time, for the information of such of his hearers as were unacquainted with the legend. While it was being sung, the little man with the drab shorts disappeared; he returned immediately on its conclusion, and whispered Mr. Anthony Humm, with a face of the deepest importance. 'My friends,' said Mr. Humm, holding up his hand in a deprecatory manner, to bespeak the silence of such of the stout old ladies as were yet a line or two behind; 'my friends, a delegate from the Dorking Branch of our society, Brother Stiggins, attends below.'

Out came the pocket-handkerchiefs again, in greater force than ever; for Mr. Stiggins was excessively popular among the female constituency of Brick Lane.

'He may approach, I think,' said Mr. Humm, looking round him, with a fat smile. 'Brother Tadger, let him come forth and greet us.'

The little man in the drab shorts who answered to the name of Brother Tadger, bustled down the ladder with great speed, and was immediately afterwards heard tumbling up with the Reverend Mr. Stiggins.

'He's a-comin', Sammy,' whispered Mr. Weller, purple in the countenance with suppressed laughter.

'Don't say nothin' to me,' replied Sam, 'for I can't bear it. He's close to the door. I hear him a-knockin' his head again the lath and plaster now.'

As Sam Weller spoke, the little door flew open, and Brother Tadger appeared, closely followed by the Reverend Mr. Stiggins, who no sooner entered, than there was a great clapping of hands, and stamping of feet, and flourishing of handkerchiefs; to all of which manifestations of delight, Brother Stiggins returned no other acknowledgment than staring with a wild eye, and a fixed smile, at the extreme top of the wick of the candle on the table, swaying his body to and fro, meanwhile, in a very unsteady and uncertain manner.

'Are you unwell, Brother Stiggins?' whispered Mr. Anthony Humm.

'I am all right, Sir,' replied Mr. Stiggins, in a tone in which ferocity was blended with an extreme thickness of utterance; 'I am all right, Sir.'

'Oh, very well,' rejoined Mr. Anthony Humm, retreating a few paces.

'I believe no man here has ventured to say that I am not all right, Sir?' said Mr. Stiggins.

'Oh, certainly not,' said Mr. Humm. 'I should advise him not to, Sir; I should advise him not,' said Mr. Stiggins.

By this time the audience were perfectly silent, and waited with some anxiety for the resumption of business.

'Will you address the meeting, brother?' said Mr. Humm, with a smile of invitation.

'No, sir,' rejoined Mr. Stiggins; 'No, sir. I will not, sir.'

The meeting looked at each other with raised eyelids; and a murmur of astonishment ran through the room.

'It's my opinion, sir,' said Mr. Stiggins, unbuttoning his coat, and speaking very loudly—'it's my opinion, sir, that this meeting is drunk, sir. Brother Tadger, sir!' said Mr. Stiggins, suddenly increasing in ferocity, and turning sharp round on the little man in the drab shorts, 'YOU are drunk, sir!' With this, Mr. Stiggins, entertaining a praiseworthy desire to promote the sobriety of the meeting, and to exclude therefrom all improper characters, hit Brother Tadger on the summit of the nose with such unerring aim, that the drab shorts disappeared like a flash of lightning. Brother Tadger had been knocked, head first, down the ladder.

Upon this, the women set up a loud and dismal screaming; and rushing in small parties before their favourite brothers, flung their arms around them to preserve them from danger. An instance of affection, which had nearly proved fatal to Humm, who, being extremely popular, was all but suffocated, by the crowd of female devotees that hung about his neck, and heaped caresses upon him. The greater part of the lights were quickly put out, and nothing but noise and confusion resounded on all sides.

'Now, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, taking off his greatcoat with much deliberation, 'just you step out, and fetch in a watchman.'

'And wot are you a-goin' to do, the while?' inquired Sam.

'Never you mind me, Sammy,' replied the old gentleman; 'I shall ockipy myself in havin' a small settlement with that 'ere Stiggins.' Before Sam could interfere to prevent it, his heroic parent had penetrated into a remote corner of the room, and attacked the Reverend Mr. Stiggins with manual dexterity.

'Come off!' said Sam.

'Come on!' cried Mr. Weller; and without further invitation he gave the Reverend Mr. Stiggins a preliminary tap on the head, and began dancing round him in a buoyant and cork-like manner, which in a gentleman at his time of life was a perfect marvel to behold.

Finding all remonstrances unavailing, Sam pulled his hat firmly on, threw his father's coat over his arm, and taking the old man round the waist, forcibly dragged him down the ladder, and into the street; never releasing his hold, or permitting him to stop, until they reached the corner. As they gained it, they could hear the shouts of the populace, who were witnessing the removal of the Reverend Mr. Stiggins to strong lodgings for the night, and could hear the noise occasioned by the dispersion in various directions of the members of the Brick Lane Branch of the United Grand Junction Ebenezer Temperance Association.

CHAPTER XXXIV. IS WHOLLY DEVOTED TO A FULL AND FAITHFUL REPORT OF THE

MEMORABLE TRIAL OF BARDELL AGAINST PICKWICK

'I wonder what the foreman of the jury, whoever he'll be, has got for breakfast,' said Mr. Snodgrass, by way of keeping up a conversation on the eventful morning of the fourteenth of February.

'Ah!' said Perker, 'I hope he's got a good one.' 'Why so?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Highly important—very important, my dear Sir,' replied Perker. 'A good, contented, well-breakfasted juryman is a capital thing to get hold of. Discontented or hungry jurymen, my dear sir, always find for the plaintiff.'

'Bless my heart,' said Mr. Pickwick, looking very blank, 'what do they do that for?'

'Why, I don't know,' replied the little man coolly; 'saves time, I suppose. If it's near dinner-time, the foreman takes out his watch when the jury has retired, and says, "Dear me, gentlemen, ten minutes to five, I declare! I dine at five, gentlemen." "So do I," says everybody else, except two men who ought to have dined at three and seem more than half disposed to stand out in consequence. The foreman smiles, and puts up his watch:—"Well, gentlemen, what do we say, plaintiff or defendant, gentlemen? I rather think, so far as I am concerned, gentlemen,—I say, I rather think—but don't let that influence you—I RATHER think the plaintiff's the man." Upon this, two or three other men are sure to say that they think so too—as of course they do; and then they get on very unanimously and comfortably. Ten minutes past nine!' said the little man, looking at his watch.'Time we were off, my dear sir; breach of promise trial-court is generally full in such cases. You had better ring for a coach, my dear sir, or we shall be rather late.'

Mr. Pickwick immediately rang the bell, and a coach having been procured, the four Pickwickians and Mr. Perker ensconced themselves therein, and drove to Guildhall; Sam Weller, Mr. Lowten, and the blue bag, following in a cab.

'Lowten,' said Perker, when they reached the outer hall of the court, 'put Mr. Pickwick's friends in the students' box; Mr. Pickwick himself had better sit by me. This way, my dear sir, this way.' Taking Mr. Pickwick by the coat sleeve, the little man led him to the low seat just beneath the desks of the King's Counsel, which is constructed for the convenience of attorneys, who from that spot can whisper into the ear of the leading counsel in the case, any instructions that may be necessary during the progress of the trial. The occupants of this seat are invisible to the great body of spectators, inasmuch as they sit on a much lower level than either the barristers or the audience, whose seats are raised above the floor. Of course they have their backs to both, and their faces towards the judge.

'That's the witness-box, I suppose?' said Mr. Pickwick, pointing to a kind of pulpit, with a brass rail, on his left hand.

'That's the witness-box, my dear sir,' replied Perker, disinterring a quantity of papers from the blue bag, which Lowten had just deposited at his feet.

'And that,' said Mr. Pickwick, pointing to a couple of enclosed seats on his right, 'that's where the jurymen sit, is it not?'

'The identical place, my dear Sir,' replied Perker, tapping the lid of his snuff-box.

Mr. Pickwick stood up in a state of great agitation, and took a glance at the court. There were already a pretty large sprinkling of spectators in the gallery, and a numerous muster of gentlemen in wigs, in the barristers' seats, who presented, as a body, all that pleasing and extensive variety of nose and whisker for which the Bar of England is so justly celebrated. Such of the gentlemen as had a brief to carry, carried it in as conspicuous a manner as possible, and occasionally scratched their noses therewith, to impress the fact more strongly on the observation of the spectators. Other gentlemen, who had no briefs to show, carried under their arms goodly octavos, with a red label behind, and that under-done-pie-crust-coloured cover, which is technically known as 'law calf.' Others, who had neither briefs nor books, thrust their hands into their pockets, and looked as wise as they conveniently could; others, again, moved here and there with great restlessness and earnestness of manner, content to awaken thereby the admiration and astonishment of the uninitiated strangers. The whole, to the great wonderment of Mr. Pickwick, were divided into little groups, who were chatting and discussing the news of the day in the most unfeeling manner possible—just as if no trial at all were coming on.

A bow from Mr. Phunky, as he entered, and took his seat behind the row appropriated to the King's Counsel, attracted Mr. Pickwick's attention; and he had scarcely returned it, when Mr. Serjeant Snubbin appeared, followed by Mr. Mallard, who half hid the Serjeant behind a large crimson bag, which he placed on his table, and, after shaking hands with Perker, withdrew. Then there entered two or three more Serjeants; and among them, one with a fat body and a red face, who nodded in a friendly manner to Mr. Serjeant Snubbin, and said it was a fine morning.

'Who's that red-faced man, who said it was a fine morning, and nodded to our counsel?' whispered Mr. Pickwick.

'Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz,' replied Perker. 'He's opposed to us; he leads on the other side. That gentleman behind him is Mr. Skimpin, his junior.'

Mr. Pickwick was on the point of inquiring, with great abhorrence of the man's cold-blooded villainy, how Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz, who was counsel for the opposite party, dared to presume to tell Mr. Serjeant Snubbin, who was counsel for him, that it was a fine morning, when he was interrupted by a general rising of the barristers, and a loud cry of 'Silence!' from the officers of the court. Looking round, he found that this was caused by the entrance of the judge.

Mr. Justice Stareleigh (who sat in the absence of the Chief Justice, occasioned by indisposition) was a most particularly short man, and so fat, that he seemed all face and waistcoat. He rolled in, upon two little turned legs, and having bobbed gravely to the Bar, who bobbed gravely to him, put his little legs underneath his table, and his little three-cornered hat upon it; and when Mr. Justice Stareleigh had done this, all you could see of him was two queer little eyes, one broad pink face, and somewhere about half of a big and very comical-looking wig.

The judge had no sooner taken his seat, than the officer on the floor of the court called out 'Silence!' in a commanding tone, upon which another officer in the gallery cried 'Silence!' in an angry manner, whereupon three or four more ushers shouted 'Silence!' in a voice of indignant remonstrance. This being done, a gentleman in black, who sat below the judge, proceeded to call over the names of the jury; and after a great deal of bawling, it was discovered that only ten special jurymen were present. Upon this, Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz prayed a TALES; the gentleman in black then proceeded to press into the special jury, two of the common jurymen; and a greengrocer and a chemist were caught directly.

'Answer to your names, gentlemen, that you may be sworn,' said the gentleman in black. 'Richard Upwitch.'

'Here,' said the greengrocer.

'Thomas Groffin.'

'Here,' said the chemist.

'Take the book, gentlemen. You shall well and truly try—'

'I beg this court's pardon,' said the chemist, who was a tall, thin, yellow-visaged man, 'but I hope this court will excuse my attendance.'

'On what grounds, Sir?' said Mr. Justice Stareleigh.

'I have no assistant, my Lord,' said the chemist.

'I can't help that, Sir,' replied Mr. Justice Stareleigh. 'You should hire one.'

'I can't afford it, my Lord,' rejoined the chemist.

'Then you ought to be able to afford it, Sir,' said the judge, reddening; for Mr. Justice Stareleigh's temper bordered on the irritable, and brooked not contradiction.

'I know I OUGHT to do, if I got on as well as I deserved; but I don't, my Lord,' answered the chemist.

'Swear the gentleman,' said the judge peremptorily.

The officer had got no further than the 'You shall well and truly try,' when he was again interrupted by the chemist.

'I am to be sworn, my Lord, am I?' said the chemist.

'Certainly, sir,' replied the testy little judge.

'Very well, my Lord,' replied the chemist, in a resigned manner. 'Then there'll be murder before this trial's over; that's all. Swear me, if you please, Sir;' and sworn the chemist was, before the judge could find words to utter.

'I merely wanted to observe, my Lord,' said the chemist, taking his seat with great deliberation, 'that I've left nobody but an errand-boy in my shop. He is a very nice boy, my Lord, but he is not acquainted with drugs; and I know that the prevailing impression on his mind is, that Epsom salts means oxalic acid; and syrup of senna, laudanum. That's all, my Lord.' With this, the tall chemist composed himself into a comfortable attitude, and, assuming a pleasant expression of countenance, appeared to have prepared himself for the worst.

Mr. Pickwick was regarding the chemist with feelings of the deepest horror, when a slight sensation was perceptible in the body of the court; and immediately afterwards Mrs. Bardell, supported by Mrs. Cluppins, was led in, and placed, in a drooping state, at the other end of the seat on which Mr. Pickwick sat. An extra-sized umbrella was then handed in by Mr. Dodson, and a pair of pattens by Mr. Fogg, each of whom had prepared a most sympathising and melancholy face for the occasion. Mrs. Sanders then appeared, leading in Master Bardell. At sight of her child, Mrs. Bardell started; suddenly recollecting herself, she kissed him in a frantic manner; then relapsing into a state of hysterical imbecility, the good lady requested to be informed where she was. In reply to this, Mrs. Cluppins and Mrs. Sanders turned their heads away and wept, while Messrs. Dodson and Fogg entreated the plaintiff to compose herself. Serjeant Buzfuz rubbed his eyes very hard with a large white handkerchief, and gave an appealing look towards the jury, while the judge was visibly affected, and several of the beholders tried to cough down their emotion.

'Very good notion that indeed,' whispered Perker to Mr. Pickwick. 'Capital fellows those Dodson and Fogg; excellent ideas of effect, my dear Sir, excellent.'

As Perker spoke, Mrs. Bardell began to recover by slow degrees, while Mrs. Cluppins, after a careful survey of Master Bardell's buttons and the button-holes to which they severally belonged, placed him on the floor of the court in front of his mother—a commanding position in which he could not fail to awaken the full commiseration and sympathy of both judge and jury. This was not done without considerable opposition, and many tears, on the part of the young gentleman himself, who had certain inward misgivings that the placing him within the full glare of the judge's eye was only a formal prelude to his being immediately ordered away for instant execution, or for transportation beyond the seas, during the whole term of his natural life, at the very least.

'Bardell and Pickwick,' cried the gentleman in black, calling on the case, which stood first on the list.

'I am for the plaintiff, my Lord,' said Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz.

'Who is with you, Brother Buzfuz?' said the judge. Mr. Skimpin bowed, to intimate that he was.

'I appear for the defendant, my Lord,' said Mr. Serjeant Snubbin.

'Anybody with you, Brother Snubbin?' inquired the court.

'Mr. Phunky, my Lord,' replied Serjeant Snubbin.

'Serjeant Buzfuz and Mr. Skimpin for the plaintiff,' said the judge, writing down the names in his note-book, and reading as he wrote; 'for the defendant, Serjeant Snubbin and Mr. Monkey.'

'Beg your Lordship's pardon, Phunky.'

'Oh, very good,' said the judge; 'I never had the pleasure of hearing the gentleman's name before.' Here Mr. Phunky bowed and smiled, and the judge bowed and smiled too, and then Mr. Phunky, blushing into the very whites of his eyes, tried to look as if he didn't know that everybody was gazing at him, a thing which no man ever succeeded in doing yet, or in all reasonable probability, ever will.

'Go on,' said the judge.

The ushers again called silence, and Mr. Skimpin proceeded to 'open the case'; and the case appeared to have very little inside it when he had opened it, for he kept such particulars as he knew, completely to himself, and sat down, after a lapse of three minutes, leaving the jury in precisely the same advanced stage of wisdom as they were in before.

Serjeant Buzfuz then rose with all the majesty and dignity which the grave nature of the proceedings demanded, and having whispered to Dodson, and conferred briefly with Fogg, pulled his gown over his shoulders, settled his wig, and addressed the jury.

Serjeant Buzfuz began by saying, that never, in the whole course of his professional experience—never, from the very first moment of his applying himself to the study and practice of the law—had he approached a case with feelings of such deep emotion, or with such a heavy sense of the responsibility imposed upon him—a responsibility, he would say, which he could never have supported, were he not buoyed up and sustained by a conviction so strong, that it amounted to positive certainty that the cause of truth and justice, or, in other words, the cause of his much-injured and most oppressed client, must prevail with the high-minded and intelligent dozen of men whom he now saw in that box before him.

Counsel usually begin in this way, because it puts the jury on the very best terms with themselves, and makes them think what sharp fellows they must be. A visible effect was produced immediately, several jurymen beginning to take voluminous notes with the utmost eagerness.

'You have heard from my learned friend, gentlemen,' continued Serjeant Buzfuz, well knowing that, from the learned friend alluded to, the gentlemen of the jury had heard just nothing at all—'you have heard from my learned friend, gentlemen, that this is an action for a breach of promise of marriage, in which the damages are laid at #1,500. But you have not heard from my learned friend, inasmuch as it did not come within my learned friend's province to tell you, what are the facts and circumstances of the case. Those facts and circumstances, gentlemen, you shall hear detailed by me, and proved by the unimpeachable female whom I will place in that box before you.'

Here, Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz, with a tremendous emphasis on the word 'box,' smote his table with a mighty sound, and glanced at Dodson and Fogg, who nodded admiration of the Serjeant, and indignant defiance of the defendant.

'The plaintiff, gentlemen,' continued Serjeant Buzfuz, in a soft and melancholy voice, 'the plaintiff is a widow; yes, gentlemen, a widow. The late Mr. Bardell, after enjoying, for many years, the esteem and confidence of his sovereign, as one of the guardians of his royal revenues, glided almost imperceptibly from the world, to seek elsewhere for that repose and peace which a custom-house can never afford.' At this pathetic description of the decease of Mr. Bardell, who had been knocked on the head with a quart-pot in a public-house cellar, the learned serjeant's voice faltered, and he proceeded, with emotion—

'Some time before his death, he had stamped his likeness upon a little boy. With this little boy, the only pledge of her departed exciseman, Mrs. Bardell shrank from the world, and courted the retirement and tranquillity of Goswell Street; and here she placed in her front parlour window a written placard, bearing this inscription—"Apartments furnished for a single gentleman. Inquire within."' Here Serjeant Buzfuz paused, while several gentlemen of the jury took a note of the document.

'There is no date to that, is there?' inquired a juror. 'There is no date, gentlemen,' replied Serjeant Buzfuz; 'but I am instructed to say that it was put in the plaintiff's parlour window just this time three years. I entreat the attention of the jury to the wording of this document—"Apartments furnished for a single gentleman"! Mrs. Bardell's opinions of the opposite sex, gentlemen, were derived from a long contemplation of the inestimable qualities of her lost husband. She had no fear, she had no distrust, she had no suspicion; all was confidence and reliance. "Mr. Bardell," said the widow—"Mr. Bardell was a man of honour, Mr. Bardell was a man of his word, Mr. Bardell was no deceiver, Mr. Bardell was once a single gentleman himself; to single gentlemen I look for protection, for assistance, for comfort, and for consolation; in single gentlemen I shall perpetually see something to remind me of what Mr. Bardell was when he first won my young and untried affections; to a single gentleman, then, shall my lodgings be let." Actuated by this beautiful and touching impulse (among the best impulses of our imperfect nature, gentlemen), the lonely and desolate widow dried her tears, furnished her first floor, caught her innocent boy to her maternal bosom, and put the bill up in her parlour window. Did it remain there long? No. The serpent was on the watch, the train was laid, the mine was preparing, the sapper and miner was at work. Before the bill had been in the parlour window three days—three days, gentlemen—a being, erect upon two legs, and bearing all the outward semblance of a man, and not of a monster, knocked at the door of Mrs. Bardell's house. He inquired within—he took the lodgings; and on the very next day he entered into possession of them. This man was Pickwick—Pickwick, the defendant.'

Serjeant Buzfuz, who had proceeded with such volubility that his face was perfectly crimson, here paused for breath. The silence awoke Mr. Justice Stareleigh, who immediately wrote down something with a pen without any ink in it, and looked unusually profound, to impress the jury with the belief that he always thought most deeply with his eyes shut. Serjeant Buzfuz proceeded—

'Of this man Pickwick I will say little; the subject presents but few attractions; and I, gentlemen, am not the man, nor are you, gentlemen, the men, to delight in the contemplation of revolting heartlessness, and of systematic villainy.'

Here Mr. Pickwick, who had been writhing in silence for some time, gave a violent start, as if some vague idea of assaulting Serjeant Buzfuz, in the august presence of justice and law, suggested itself to his mind. An admonitory gesture from Perker restrained him, and he listened to the learned gentleman's continuation with a look of indignation, which contrasted forcibly with the admiring faces of Mrs. Cluppins and Mrs. Sanders.

'I say systematic villainy, gentlemen,' said Serjeant Buzfuz, looking through Mr. Pickwick, and talking AT him; 'and when I say systematic villainy, let me tell the defendant Pickwick, if he be in court, as I am informed he is, that it would have been more decent in him, more becoming, in better judgment, and in better taste, if he had stopped away. Let me tell him, gentlemen, that any gestures of dissent or disapprobation in which he may indulge in this court will not go down with you; that you will know how to value and how to appreciate them; and let me tell him further, as my Lord will tell you, gentlemen, that a counsel, in the discharge of his duty to his client, is neither to be intimidated nor bullied, nor put down; and that any attempt to do either the one or the other, or the first, or the last, will recoil on the head of the attempter, be he plaintiff or be he defendant, be his name Pickwick, or Noakes, or Stoakes, or Stiles, or Brown, or Thompson.'

This little divergence from the subject in hand, had, of course, the intended effect of turning all eyes to Mr. Pickwick. Serjeant Buzfuz, having partially recovered from the state of moral elevation into which he had lashed himself, resumed—

'I shall show you, gentlemen, that for two years, Pickwick continued to reside constantly, and without interruption or intermission, at Mrs. Bardell's house. I shall show you that Mrs. Bardell, during the whole of that time, waited on him, attended to his comforts, cooked his meals, looked out his linen for the washerwoman when it went abroad, darned, aired, and prepared it for wear, when it came home, and, in short, enjoyed his fullest trust and confidence. I shall show you that, on many occasions, he gave halfpence, and on some occasions even sixpences, to her little boy; and I shall prove to you, by a witness whose testimony it will be impossible for my learned friend to weaken or controvert, that on one occasion he patted the boy on the head, and, after inquiring whether he had won any "ALLEY TORS" or "COMMONEYS" lately (both of which I understand to be a particular species of marbles much prized by the youth of this town), made use of this remarkable expression, "How should you like to have another father?" I shall prove to you, gentlemen, that about a year ago, Pickwick suddenly began to absent himself from home, during long intervals, as if with the intention of gradually breaking off from my client; but I shall show you also, that his resolution was not at that time sufficiently strong, or that his better feelings conquered, if better feelings he has, or that the charms and accomplishments of my client prevailed against his unmanly intentions, by proving to you, that on one occasion, when he returned from the country, he distinctly and in terms, offered her marriage: previously, however, taking special care that there would be no witness to their solemn contract; and I am in a situation to prove to you, on the testimony of three of his own friends—most unwilling witnesses, gentlemen—most unwilling witnesses—that on that morning he was discovered by them holding the plaintiff in his arms, and soothing her agitation by his caresses and endearments.'

A visible impression was produced upon the auditors by this part of the learned Serjeant's address. Drawing forth two very small scraps of paper, he proceeded—'And now, gentlemen, but one word more. Two letters have passed between these parties, letters which are admitted to be in the handwriting of the defendant, and which speak volumes, indeed. The letters, too, bespeak the character of the man. They are not open, fervent, eloquent epistles, breathing nothing but the language of affectionate attachment. They are covert, sly, underhanded communications, but, fortunately, far more conclusive than if couched in the most glowing language and the most poetic imagery—letters that must be viewed with a cautious and suspicious eye—letters that were evidently intended at the time, by Pickwick, to mislead and delude any third parties into whose hands they might fall. Let me read the first: "Garraways, twelve o'clock. Dear Mrs. B.—Chops and tomato sauce. Yours, PICKWICK." Gentlemen, what does this mean? Chops and tomato sauce. Yours, Pickwick! Chops! Gracious heavens! and tomato sauce! Gentlemen, is the happiness of a sensitive and confiding female to be trifled away, by such shallow artifices as these? The next has no date whatever, which is in itself suspicious. "Dear Mrs. B., I shall not be at home till to-morrow. Slow coach." And then follows this very remarkable expression. "Don't trouble yourself about the warming-pan." The warming-pan! Why, gentlemen, who DOES trouble himself about a warming-pan? When was the peace of mind of man or woman broken or disturbed by a warming-pan, which is in itself a harmless, a useful, and I will add, gentlemen, a comforting article of domestic furniture? Why is Mrs. Bardell so earnestly entreated not to agitate herself about this warming-pan, unless (as is no doubt the case) it is a mere cover for hidden fire—a mere substitute for some endearing word or promise, agreeably to a preconcerted system of correspondence, artfully contrived by Pickwick with a view to his contemplated desertion, and which I am not in a condition to explain? And what does this allusion to the slow coach mean? For aught I know, it may be a reference to Pickwick himself, who has most unquestionably been a criminally slow coach during the whole of this transaction, but whose speed will now be very unexpectedly accelerated, and whose wheels, gentlemen, as he will find to his cost, will very soon be greased by you!'

Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz paused in this place, to see whether the jury smiled at his joke; but as nobody took it but the greengrocer, whose sensitiveness on the subject was very probably occasioned by his having subjected a chaise-cart to the process in question on that identical morning, the learned Serjeant considered it advisable to undergo a slight relapse into the dismals before he concluded.

'But enough of this, gentlemen,' said Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz, 'it is difficult to smile with an aching heart; it is ill jesting when our deepest sympathies are awakened. My client's hopes and prospects are ruined, and it is no figure of speech to say that her occupation is gone indeed. The bill is down—but there is no tenant. Eligible single gentlemen pass and repass-but there is no invitation for to inquire within or without. All is gloom and silence in the house; even the voice of the child is hushed; his infant sports are disregarded when his mother weeps; his "alley tors" and his "commoneys" are alike neglected; he forgets the long familiar cry of "knuckle down," and at tip-cheese, or odd and even, his hand is out. But Pickwick, gentlemen, Pickwick, the ruthless destroyer of this domestic oasis in the desert of Goswell Street—Pickwick who has choked up the well, and thrown ashes on the sward—Pickwick, who comes before you to-day with his heartless tomato sauce and warming-pans—Pickwick still rears his head with unblushing effrontery, and gazes without a sigh on the ruin he has made. Damages, gentlemen—heavy damages is the only punishment with which you can visit him; the only recompense you can award to my client. And for those damages she now appeals to an enlightened, a high-minded, a right-feeling, a conscientious, a dispassionate, a sympathising, a contemplative jury of her civilised countrymen.' With this beautiful peroration, Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz sat down, and Mr. Justice Stareleigh woke up.

'Call Elizabeth Cluppins,' said Serjeant Buzfuz, rising a minute afterwards, with renewed vigour.

The nearest usher called for Elizabeth Tuppins; another one, at a little distance off, demanded Elizabeth Jupkins; and a third rushed in a breathless state into King Street, and screamed for Elizabeth Muffins till he was hoarse.

Meanwhile Mrs. Cluppins, with the combined assistance of Mrs. Bardell, Mrs. Sanders, Mr. Dodson, and Mr. Fogg, was hoisted into the witness-box; and when she was safely perched on the top step, Mrs. Bardell stood on the bottom one, with the pocket-handkerchief and pattens in one hand, and a glass bottle that might hold about a quarter of a pint of smelling-salts in the other, ready for any emergency. Mrs. Sanders, whose eyes were intently fixed on the judge's face, planted herself close by, with the large umbrella, keeping her right thumb pressed on the spring with an earnest countenance, as if she were fully prepared to put it up at a moment's notice.

'Mrs. Cluppins,' said Serjeant Buzfuz, 'pray compose yourself, ma'am.' Of course, directly Mrs. Cluppins was desired to compose herself, she sobbed with increased vehemence, and gave divers alarming manifestations of an approaching fainting fit, or, as she afterwards said, of her feelings being too many for her.

'Do you recollect, Mrs. Cluppins,' said Serjeant Buzfuz, after a few unimportant questions—'do you recollect being in Mrs. Bardell's back one pair of stairs, on one particular morning in July last, when she was dusting Pickwick's apartment?'

'Yes, my Lord and jury, I do,' replied Mrs. Cluppins.

'Mr. Pickwick's sitting-room was the first-floor front, I believe?'

'Yes, it were, Sir,' replied Mrs. Cluppins.

'What were you doing in the back room, ma'am?' inquired the little judge.

'My Lord and jury,' said Mrs. Cluppins, with interesting agitation, 'I will not deceive you.'

'You had better not, ma'am,' said the little judge.

'I was there,' resumed Mrs. Cluppins, 'unbeknown to Mrs. Bardell; I had been out with a little basket, gentlemen, to buy three pound of red kidney pertaties, which was three pound tuppence ha'penny, when I see Mrs. Bardell's street door on the jar.'

'On the what?' exclaimed the little judge.

'Partly open, my Lord,' said Serjeant Snubbin.

'She said on the jar,' said the little judge, with a cunning look.

'It's all the same, my Lord,' said Serjeant Snubbin. The little judge looked doubtful, and said he'd make a note of it. Mrs. Cluppins then resumed—

'I walked in, gentlemen, just to say good-mornin', and went, in a permiscuous manner, upstairs, and into the back room. Gentlemen, there was the sound of voices in the front room, and—'

'And you listened, I believe, Mrs. Cluppins?' said Serjeant Buzfuz.

'Beggin' your pardon, Sir,' replied Mrs. Cluppins, in a majestic manner, 'I would scorn the haction. The voices was very loud, Sir, and forced themselves upon my ear.'

'Well, Mrs. Cluppins, you were not listening, but you heard the voices. Was one of those voices Pickwick's?'

'Yes, it were, Sir.' And Mrs. Cluppins, after distinctly stating that Mr. Pickwick addressed himself to Mrs. Bardell, repeated by slow degrees, and by dint of many questions, the conversation with which our readers are already acquainted.

The jury looked suspicious, and Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz smiled as he sat down. They looked positively awful when Serjeant Snubbin intimated that he should not cross-examine the witness, for Mr. Pickwick wished it to be distinctly stated that it was due to her to say, that her account was in substance correct.

Mrs. Cluppins having once broken the ice, thought it a favourable opportunity for entering into a short dissertation on her own domestic affairs; so she straightway proceeded to inform the court that she was the mother of eight children at that present speaking, and that she entertained confident expectations of presenting Mr. Cluppins with a ninth, somewhere about that day six months. At this interesting point, the little judge interposed most irascibly; and the effect of the interposition was, that both the worthy lady and Mrs. Sanders were politely taken out of court, under the escort of Mr. Jackson, without further parley.

'Nathaniel Winkle!' said Mr. Skimpin.

'Here!' replied a feeble voice. Mr. Winkle entered the witness-box, and having been duly sworn, bowed to the judge with considerable deference.

'Don't look at me, Sir,' said the judge sharply, in acknowledgment of the salute; 'look at the jury.'

Mr. Winkle obeyed the mandate, and looked at the place where he thought it most probable the jury might be; for seeing anything in his then state of intellectual complication was wholly out of the question.

Mr. Winkle was then examined by Mr. Skimpin, who, being a promising young man of two or three-and-forty, was of course anxious to confuse a witness who was notoriously predisposed in favour of the other side, as much as he could.

'Now, Sir,' said Mr. Skimpin, 'have the goodness to let his Lordship know what your name is, will you?' and Mr. Skimpin inclined his head on one side to listen with great sharpness to the answer, and glanced at the jury meanwhile, as if to imply that he rather expected Mr. Winkle's natural taste for perjury would induce him to give some name which did not belong to him.

'Winkle,' replied the witness.

'What's your Christian name, Sir?' angrily inquired the little judge.

'Nathaniel, Sir.'

'Daniel—any other name?'

'Nathaniel, sir—my Lord, I mean.'

'Nathaniel Daniel, or Daniel Nathaniel?'

'No, my Lord, only Nathaniel—not Daniel at all.'

'What did you tell me it was Daniel for, then, sir?' inquired the judge.

'I didn't, my Lord,' replied Mr. Winkle.

'You did, Sir,' replied the judge, with a severe frown. 'How could I have got Daniel on my notes, unless you told me so, Sir?' This argument was, of course, unanswerable.

'Mr. Winkle has rather a short memory, my Lord,' interposed Mr. Skimpin, with another glance at the jury. 'We shall find means to refresh it before we have quite done with him, I dare say.'

'You had better be careful, Sir,' said the little judge, with a sinister look at the witness.

Poor Mr. Winkle bowed, and endeavoured to feign an easiness of manner, which, in his then state of confusion, gave him rather the air of a disconcerted pickpocket.

'Now, Mr. Winkle,' said Mr. Skimpin, 'attend to me, if you please, Sir; and let me recommend you, for your own sake, to bear in mind his Lordship's injunctions to be careful. I believe you are a particular friend of Mr. Pickwick, the defendant, are you not?'

'I have known Mr. Pickwick now, as well as I recollect at this moment, nearly—'

'Pray, Mr. Winkle, do not evade the question. Are you, or are you not, a particular friend of the defendant's?'

'I was just about to say, that—'

'Will you, or will you not, answer my question, Sir?' 'If you don't answer the question, you'll be committed, Sir,' interposed the little judge, looking over his note-book.

'Come, Sir,' said Mr. Skimpin, 'yes or no, if you please.'

'Yes, I am,' replied Mr. Winkle.

'Yes, you are. And why couldn't you say that at once, Sir? Perhaps you know the plaintiff too? Eh, Mr. Winkle?'

'I don't know her; I've seen her.'

'Oh, you don't know her, but you've seen her? Now, have the goodness to tell the gentlemen of the jury what you mean by that, Mr. Winkle.'

'I mean that I am not intimate with her, but I have seen her when I went to call on Mr. Pickwick, in Goswell Street.'

'How often have you seen her, Sir?'

'How often?'

'Yes, Mr. Winkle, how often? I'll repeat the question for you a dozen times, if you require it, Sir.' And the learned gentleman, with a firm and steady frown, placed his hands on his hips, and smiled suspiciously to the jury.

On this question there arose the edifying brow-beating, customary on such points. First of all, Mr. Winkle said it was quite impossible for him to say how many times he had seen Mrs. Bardell. Then he was asked if he had seen her twenty times, to which he replied, 'Certainly—more than that.' Then he was asked whether he hadn't seen her a hundred times—whether he couldn't swear that he had seen her more than fifty times—whether he didn't know that he had seen her at least seventy-five times, and so forth; the satisfactory conclusion which was arrived at, at last, being, that he had better take care of himself, and mind what he was about. The witness having been by these means reduced to the requisite ebb of nervous perplexity, the examination was continued as follows—

'Pray, Mr. Winkle, do you remember calling on the defendant Pickwick at these apartments in the plaintiff's house in Goswell Street, on one particular morning, in the month of July last?'

'Yes, I do.'

'Were you accompanied on that occasion by a friend of the name of Tupman, and another by the name of Snodgrass?'

'Yes, I was.'

'Are they here?' 'Yes, they are,' replied Mr. Winkle, looking very earnestly towards the spot where his friends were stationed.

'Pray attend to me, Mr. Winkle, and never mind your friends,' said Mr. Skimpin, with another expressive look at the jury. 'They must tell their stories without any previous consultation with you, if none has yet taken place (another look at the jury). Now, Sir, tell the gentlemen of the jury what you saw on entering the defendant's room, on this particular morning. Come; out with it, Sir; we must have it, sooner or later.'

'The defendant, Mr. Pickwick, was holding the plaintiff in his arms, with his hands clasping her waist,' replied Mr. Winkle with natural hesitation, 'and the plaintiff appeared to have fainted away.'

'Did you hear the defendant say anything?'

'I heard him call Mrs. Bardell a good creature, and I heard him ask her to compose herself, for what a situation it was, if anybody should come, or words to that effect.'

'Now, Mr. Winkle, I have only one more question to ask you, and I beg you to bear in mind his Lordship's caution. Will you undertake to swear that Pickwick, the defendant, did not say on the occasion in question—"My dear Mrs. Bardell, you're a good creature; compose yourself to this situation, for to this situation you must come," or words to that effect?'

'I—I didn't understand him so, certainly,' said Mr. Winkle, astounded on this ingenious dove-tailing of the few words he had heard. 'I was on the staircase, and couldn't hear distinctly; the impression on my mind is—'

'The gentlemen of the jury want none of the impressions on your mind, Mr. Winkle, which I fear would be of little service to honest, straightforward men,' interposed Mr. Skimpin. 'You were on the staircase, and didn't distinctly hear; but you will not swear that Pickwick did not make use of the expressions I have quoted? Do I understand that?'

'No, I will not,' replied Mr. Winkle; and down sat Mr. Skimpin with a triumphant countenance.

Mr. Pickwick's case had not gone off in so particularly happy a manner, up to this point, that it could very well afford to have any additional suspicion cast upon it. But as it could afford to be placed in a rather better light, if possible, Mr. Phunky rose for the purpose of getting something important out of Mr. Winkle in cross-examination. Whether he did get anything important out of him, will immediately appear.

'I believe, Mr. Winkle,' said Mr. Phunky, 'that Mr. Pickwick is not a young man?'

'Oh, no,' replied Mr. Winkle; 'old enough to be my father.'

'You have told my learned friend that you have known Mr. Pickwick a long time. Had you ever any reason to suppose or believe that he was about to be married?'

'Oh, no; certainly not;' replied Mr. Winkle with so much eagerness, that Mr. Phunky ought to have got him out of the box with all possible dispatch. Lawyers hold that there are two kinds of particularly bad witnesses—a reluctant witness, and a too-willing witness; it was Mr. Winkle's fate to figure in both characters.

'I will even go further than this, Mr. Winkle,' continued Mr. Phunky, in a most smooth and complacent manner. 'Did you ever see anything in Mr. Pickwick's manner and conduct towards the opposite sex, to induce you to believe that he ever contemplated matrimony of late years, in any case?'

'Oh, no; certainly not,' replied Mr. Winkle.

'Has his behaviour, when females have been in the case, always been that of a man, who, having attained a pretty advanced period of life, content with his own occupations and amusements, treats them only as a father might his daughters?'

'Not the least doubt of it,' replied Mr. Winkle, in the fulness of his heart. 'That is—yes—oh, yes—certainly.'

'You have never known anything in his behaviour towards Mrs. Bardell, or any other female, in the least degree suspicious?' said Mr. Phunky, preparing to sit down; for Serjeant Snubbin was winking at him.

'N-n-no,' replied Mr. Winkle, 'except on one trifling occasion, which, I have no doubt, might be easily explained.'

Now, if the unfortunate Mr. Phunky had sat down when Serjeant Snubbin had winked at him, or if Serjeant Buzfuz had stopped this irregular cross-examination at the outset (which he knew better than to do; observing Mr. Winkle's anxiety, and well knowing it would, in all probability, lead to something serviceable to him), this unfortunate admission would not have been elicited. The moment the words fell from Mr. Winkle's lips, Mr. Phunky sat down, and Serjeant Snubbin rather hastily told him he might leave the box, which Mr. Winkle prepared to do with great readiness, when Serjeant Buzfuz stopped him.

'Stay, Mr. Winkle, stay!' said Serjeant Buzfuz, 'will your Lordship have the goodness to ask him, what this one instance of suspicious behaviour towards females on the part of this gentleman, who is old enough to be his father, was?'

'You hear what the learned counsel says, Sir,' observed the judge, turning to the miserable and agonised Mr. Winkle. 'Describe the occasion to which you refer.'

'My Lord,' said Mr. Winkle, trembling with anxiety, 'I—I'd rather not.'

'Perhaps so,' said the little judge; 'but you must.'

Amid the profound silence of the whole court, Mr. Winkle faltered out, that the trifling circumstance of suspicion was Mr. Pickwick's being found in a lady's sleeping-apartment at midnight; which had terminated, he believed, in the breaking off of the projected marriage of the lady in question, and had led, he knew, to the whole party being forcibly carried before George Nupkins, Esq., magistrate and justice of the peace, for the borough of Ipswich!

'You may leave the box, Sir,' said Serjeant Snubbin. Mr. Winkle did leave the box, and rushed with delirious haste to the George and Vulture, where he was discovered some hours after, by the waiter, groaning in a hollow and dismal manner, with his head buried beneath the sofa cushions.

Tracy Tupman, and Augustus Snodgrass, were severally called into the box; both corroborated the testimony of their unhappy friend; and each was driven to the verge of desperation by excessive badgering. Susannah Sanders was then called, and examined by Serjeant Buzfuz, and cross-examined by Serjeant Snubbin. Had always said and believed that Pickwick would marry Mrs. Bardell; knew that Mrs. Bardell's being engaged to Pickwick was the current topic of conversation in the neighbourhood, after the fainting in July; had been told it herself by Mrs. Mudberry which kept a mangle, and Mrs. Bunkin which clear-starched, but did not see either Mrs. Mudberry or Mrs. Bunkin in court. Had heard Pickwick ask the little boy how he should like to have another father. Did not know that Mrs. Bardell was at that time keeping company with the baker, but did know that the baker was then a single man and is now married. Couldn't swear that Mrs. Bardell was not very fond of the baker, but should think that the baker was not very fond of Mrs. Bardell, or he wouldn't have married somebody else. Thought Mrs. Bardell fainted away on the morning in July, because Pickwick asked her to name the day: knew that she (witness) fainted away stone dead when Mr. Sanders asked her to name the day, and believed that everybody as called herself a lady would do the same, under similar circumstances. Heard Pickwick ask the boy the question about the marbles, but upon her oath did not know the difference between an 'alley tor' and a 'commoney.'

By the COURT.—During the period of her keeping company with Mr. Sanders, had received love letters, like other ladies. In the course of their correspondence Mr. Sanders had often called her a 'duck,' but never 'chops,' nor yet 'tomato sauce.' He was particularly fond of ducks. Perhaps if he had been as fond of chops and tomato sauce, he might have called her that, as a term of affection.

Serjeant Buzfuz now rose with more importance than he had yet exhibited, if that were possible, and vociferated; 'Call Samuel Weller.'

It was quite unnecessary to call Samuel Weller; for Samuel Weller stepped briskly into the box the instant his name was pronounced; and placing his hat on the floor, and his arms on the rail, took a bird's-eye view of the Bar, and a comprehensive survey of the Bench, with a remarkably cheerful and lively aspect. 'What's your name, sir?' inquired the judge.

'Sam Weller, my Lord,' replied that gentleman.

'Do you spell it with a "V" or a "W"?' inquired the judge.

'That depends upon the taste and fancy of the speller, my Lord,' replied Sam; 'I never had occasion to spell it more than once or twice in my life, but I spells it with a "V."'

Here a voice in the gallery exclaimed aloud, 'Quite right too, Samivel, quite right. Put it down a "we," my Lord, put it down a "we."' 'Who is that, who dares address the court?' said the little judge, looking up. 'Usher.'

'Yes, my Lord.'

'Bring that person here instantly.'

'Yes, my Lord.'

But as the usher didn't find the person, he didn't bring him; and, after a great commotion, all the people who had got up to look for the culprit, sat down again. The little judge turned to the witness as soon as his indignation would allow him to speak, and said—

'Do you know who that was, sir?'

'I rayther suspect it was my father, my lord,' replied Sam.

'Do you see him here now?' said the judge.

'No, I don't, my Lord,' replied Sam, staring right up into the lantern at the roof of the court.

'If you could have pointed him out, I would have committed him instantly,' said the judge. Sam bowed his acknowledgments and turned, with unimpaired cheerfulness of countenance, towards Serjeant Buzfuz.

'Now, Mr. Weller,' said Serjeant Buzfuz.

'Now, sir,' replied Sam.

'I believe you are in the service of Mr. Pickwick, the defendant in this case? Speak up, if you please, Mr. Weller.'

'I mean to speak up, Sir,' replied Sam; 'I am in the service o' that 'ere gen'l'man, and a wery good service it is.'

'Little to do, and plenty to get, I suppose?' said Serjeant Buzfuz, with jocularity. 'Oh, quite enough to get, Sir, as the soldier said ven they ordered him three hundred and fifty lashes,' replied Sam.

'You must not tell us what the soldier, or any other man, said, Sir,' interposed the judge; 'it's not evidence.'

'Wery good, my Lord,' replied Sam.

'Do you recollect anything particular happening on the morning when you were first engaged by the defendant; eh, Mr. Weller?' said Serjeant Buzfuz.

'Yes, I do, sir,' replied Sam.

'Have the goodness to tell the jury what it was.'

'I had a reg'lar new fit out o' clothes that mornin', gen'l'men of the jury,' said Sam, 'and that was a wery partickler and uncommon circumstance vith me in those days.'

Hereupon there was a general laugh; and the little judge, looking with an angry countenance over his desk, said, 'You had better be careful, Sir.'

'So Mr. Pickwick said at the time, my Lord,' replied Sam; 'and I was wery careful o' that 'ere suit o' clothes; wery careful indeed, my Lord.'

The judge looked sternly at Sam for full two minutes, but Sam's features were so perfectly calm and serene that the judge said nothing, and motioned Serjeant Buzfuz to proceed.

'Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Weller,' said Serjeant Buzfuz, folding his arms emphatically, and turning half-round to the jury, as if in mute assurance that he would bother the witness yet—'do you mean to tell me, Mr. Weller, that you saw nothing of this fainting on the part of the plaintiff in the arms of the defendant, which you have heard described by the witnesses?' 'Certainly not,' replied Sam; 'I was in the passage till they called me up, and then the old lady was not there.'

'Now, attend, Mr. Weller,' said Serjeant Buzfuz, dipping a large pen into the inkstand before him, for the purpose of frightening Sam with a show of taking down his answer. 'You were in the passage, and yet saw nothing of what was going forward. Have you a pair of eyes, Mr. Weller?'

'Yes, I have a pair of eyes,' replied Sam, 'and that's just it. If they wos a pair o' patent double million magnifyin' gas microscopes of hextra power, p'raps I might be able to see through a flight o' stairs and a deal door; but bein' only eyes, you see, my wision 's limited.'

At this answer, which was delivered without the slightest appearance of irritation, and with the most complete simplicity and equanimity of manner, the spectators tittered, the little judge smiled, and Serjeant Buzfuz looked particularly foolish. After a short consultation with Dodson & Fogg, the learned Serjeant again turned towards Sam, and said, with a painful effort to conceal his vexation, 'Now, Mr. Weller, I'll ask you a question on another point, if you please.'

'If you please, Sir,' rejoined Sam, with the utmost good-humour.

'Do you remember going up to Mrs. Bardell's house, one night in November last?' 'Oh, yes, wery well.'

'Oh, you do remember that, Mr. Weller,' said Serjeant Buzfuz, recovering his spirits; 'I thought we should get at something at last.'

'I rayther thought that, too, sir,' replied Sam; and at this the spectators tittered again.

'Well; I suppose you went up to have a little talk about this trial—eh, Mr. Weller?' said Serjeant Buzfuz, looking knowingly at the jury.

'I went up to pay the rent; but we did get a-talkin' about the trial,' replied Sam.

'Oh, you did get a-talking about the trial,' said Serjeant Buzfuz, brightening up with the anticipation of some important discovery. 'Now, what passed about the trial; will you have the goodness to tell us, Mr. Weller'?'

'Vith all the pleasure in life, sir,' replied Sam. 'Arter a few unimportant obserwations from the two wirtuous females as has been examined here to-day, the ladies gets into a very great state o' admiration at the honourable conduct of Mr. Dodson and Fogg—them two gen'l'men as is settin' near you now.' This, of course, drew general attention to Dodson & Fogg, who looked as virtuous as possible.

'The attorneys for the plaintiff,' said Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz. 'Well! They spoke in high praise of the honourable conduct of Messrs. Dodson and Fogg, the attorneys for the plaintiff, did they?'

'Yes,' said Sam, 'they said what a wery gen'rous thing it was o' them to have taken up the case on spec, and to charge nothing at all for costs, unless they got 'em out of Mr. Pickwick.'

At this very unexpected reply, the spectators tittered again, and Dodson & Fogg, turning very red, leaned over to Serjeant Buzfuz, and in a hurried manner whispered something in his ear.

'You are quite right,' said Serjeant Buzfuz aloud, with affected composure. 'It's perfectly useless, my Lord, attempting to get at any evidence through the impenetrable stupidity of this witness. I will not trouble the court by asking him any more questions. Stand down, sir.'

'Would any other gen'l'man like to ask me anythin'?' inquired Sam, taking up his hat, and looking round most deliberately.

'Not I, Mr. Weller, thank you,' said Serjeant Snubbin, laughing.

'You may go down, sir,' said Serjeant Buzfuz, waving his hand impatiently. Sam went down accordingly, after doing Messrs. Dodson & Fogg's case as much harm as he conveniently could, and saying just as little respecting Mr. Pickwick as might be, which was precisely the object he had had in view all along.

'I have no objection to admit, my Lord,' said Serjeant Snubbin, 'if it will save the examination of another witness, that Mr. Pickwick has retired from business, and is a gentleman of considerable independent property.'

'Very well,' said Serjeant Buzfuz, putting in the two letters to be read, 'then that's my case, my Lord.'

Serjeant Snubbin then addressed the jury on behalf of the defendant; and a very long and a very emphatic address he delivered, in which he bestowed the highest possible eulogiums on the conduct and character of Mr. Pickwick; but inasmuch as our readers are far better able to form a correct estimate of that gentleman's merits and deserts, than Serjeant Snubbin could possibly be, we do not feel called upon to enter at any length into the learned gentleman's observations. He attempted to show that the letters which had been exhibited, merely related to Mr. Pickwick's dinner, or to the preparations for receiving him in his apartments on his return from some country excursion. It is sufficient to add in general terms, that he did the best he could for Mr. Pickwick; and the best, as everybody knows, on the infallible authority of the old adage, could do no more.

Mr. Justice Stareleigh summed up, in the old-established and most approved form. He read as much of his notes to the jury as he could decipher on so short a notice, and made running-comments on the evidence as he went along. If Mrs. Bardell were right, it was perfectly clear that Mr. Pickwick was wrong, and if they thought the evidence of Mrs. Cluppins worthy of credence they would believe it, and, if they didn't, why, they wouldn't. If they were satisfied that a breach of promise of marriage had been committed they would find for the plaintiff with such damages as they thought proper; and if, on the other hand, it appeared to them that no promise of marriage had ever been given, they would find for the defendant with no damages at all. The jury then retired to their private room to talk the matter over, and the judge retired to HIS private room, to refresh himself with a mutton chop and a glass of sherry. An anxious quarter of a hour elapsed; the jury came back; the judge was fetched in. Mr. Pickwick put on his spectacles, and gazed at the foreman with an agitated countenance and a quickly-beating heart.

'Gentlemen,' said the individual in black, 'are you all agreed upon your verdict?'

'We are,' replied the foreman.

'Do you find for the plaintiff, gentlemen, or for the defendant?' 'For the plaintiff.'

'With what damages, gentlemen?'

'Seven hundred and fifty pounds.'

Mr. Pickwick took off his spectacles, carefully wiped the glasses, folded them into their case, and put them in his pocket; then, having drawn on his gloves with great nicety, and stared at the foreman all the while, he mechanically followed Mr. Perker and the blue bag out of court.

They stopped in a side room while Perker paid the court fees; and here, Mr. Pickwick was joined by his friends. Here, too, he encountered Messrs. Dodson & Fogg, rubbing their hands with every token of outward satisfaction.

'Well, gentlemen,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Well, Sir,' said Dodson, for self and partner.

'You imagine you'll get your costs, don't you, gentlemen?' said Mr. Pickwick.

Fogg said they thought it rather probable. Dodson smiled, and said they'd try.

'You may try, and try, and try again, Messrs. Dodson and Fogg,' said Mr. Pickwick vehemently,'but not one farthing of costs or damages do you ever get from me, if I spend the rest of my existence in a debtor's prison.'

'Ha! ha!' laughed Dodson. 'You'll think better of that, before next term, Mr. Pickwick.'

'He, he, he! We'll soon see about that, Mr. Pickwick,' grinned Fogg.

Speechless with indignation, Mr. Pickwick allowed himself to be led by his solicitor and friends to the door, and there assisted into a hackney-coach, which had been fetched for the purpose, by the ever-watchful Sam Weller.

Sam had put up the steps, and was preparing to jump upon the box, when he felt himself gently touched on the shoulder; and, looking round, his father stood before him. The old gentleman's countenance wore a mournful expression, as he shook his head gravely, and said, in warning accents—

'I know'd what 'ud come o' this here mode o' doin' bisness. Oh, Sammy, Sammy, vy worn't there a alleybi!'

CHAPTER XXXV. IN WHICH Mr. PICKWICK THINKS HE HAD BETTER GO TO BATH; AND

GOES ACCORDINGLY

'But surely, my dear sir,' said little Perker, as he stood in Mr. Pickwick's apartment on the morning after the trial, 'surely you don't really mean—really and seriously now, and irritation apart—that you won't pay these costs and damages?'

'Not one halfpenny,' said Mr. Pickwick firmly; 'not one halfpenny.'

'Hooroar for the principle, as the money-lender said ven he vouldn't renew the bill,' observed Mr. Weller, who was clearing away the breakfast-things.

'Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'have the goodness to step downstairs.'

'Cert'nly, sir,' replied Mr. Weller; and acting on Mr. Pickwick's gentle hint, Sam retired.

'No, Perker,' said Mr. Pickwick, with great seriousness of manner, 'my friends here have endeavoured to dissuade me from this determination, but without avail. I shall employ myself as usual, until the opposite party have the power of issuing a legal process of execution against me; and if they are vile enough to avail themselves of it, and to arrest my person, I shall yield myself up with perfect cheerfulness and content of heart. When can they do this?'

'They can issue execution, my dear Sir, for the amount of the damages and taxed costs, next term,' replied Perker, 'just two months hence, my dear sir.'

'Very good,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Until that time, my dear fellow, let me hear no more of the matter. And now,' continued Mr. Pickwick, looking round on his friends with a good-humoured smile, and a sparkle in the eye which no spectacles could dim or conceal, 'the only question is, Where shall we go next?'

Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass were too much affected by their friend's heroism to offer any reply. Mr. Winkle had not yet sufficiently recovered the recollection of his evidence at the trial, to make any observation on any subject, so Mr. Pickwick paused in vain.

'Well,' said that gentleman, 'if you leave me to suggest our destination, I say Bath. I think none of us have ever been there.'

Nobody had; and as the proposition was warmly seconded by Perker, who considered it extremely probable that if Mr. Pickwick saw a little change and gaiety he would be inclined to think better of his determination, and worse of a debtor's prison, it was carried unanimously; and Sam was at once despatched to the White Horse Cellar, to take five places by the half-past seven o'clock coach, next morning.

There were just two places to be had inside, and just three to be had out; so Sam Weller booked for them all, and having exchanged a few compliments with the booking-office clerk on the subject of a pewter half-crown which was tendered him as a portion of his 'change,' walked back to the George and Vulture, where he was pretty busily employed until bed-time in reducing clothes and linen into the smallest possible compass, and exerting his mechanical genius in constructing a variety of ingenious devices for keeping the lids on boxes which had neither locks nor hinges.

The next was a very unpropitious morning for a journey—muggy, damp, and drizzly. The horses in the stages that were going out, and had come through the city, were smoking so, that the outside passengers were invisible. The newspaper-sellers looked moist, and smelled mouldy; the wet ran off the hats of the orange-vendors as they thrust their heads into the coach windows, and diluted the insides in a refreshing manner. The Jews with the fifty-bladed penknives shut them up in despair; the men with the pocket-books made pocket-books of them. Watch-guards and toasting-forks were alike at a discount, and pencil-cases and sponges were a drug in the market.

Leaving Sam Weller to rescue the luggage from the seven or eight porters who flung themselves savagely upon it, the moment the coach stopped, and finding that they were about twenty minutes too early, Mr. Pickwick and his friends went for shelter into the travellers' room—the last resource of human dejection.

The travellers' room at the White Horse Cellar is of course uncomfortable; it would be no travellers' room if it were not. It is the right-hand parlour, into which an aspiring kitchen fireplace appears to have walked, accompanied by a rebellious poker, tongs, and shovel. It is divided into boxes, for the solitary confinement of travellers, and is furnished with a clock, a looking-glass, and a live waiter, which latter article is kept in a small kennel for washing glasses, in a corner of the apartment.

One of these boxes was occupied, on this particular occasion, by a stern-eyed man of about five-and-forty, who had a bald and glossy forehead, with a good deal of black hair at the sides and back of his head, and large black whiskers. He was buttoned up to the chin in a brown coat; and had a large sealskin travelling-cap, and a greatcoat and cloak, lying on the seat beside him. He looked up from his breakfast as Mr. Pickwick entered, with a fierce and peremptory air, which was very dignified; and, having scrutinised that gentleman and his companions to his entire satisfaction, hummed a tune, in a manner which seemed to say that he rather suspected somebody wanted to take advantage of him, but it wouldn't do.

'Waiter,' said the gentleman with the whiskers.

'Sir?' replied a man with a dirty complexion, and a towel of the same, emerging from the kennel before mentioned.

'Some more toast.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Buttered toast, mind,' said the gentleman fiercely.

'Directly, sir,' replied the waiter.

The gentleman with the whiskers hummed a tune in the same manner as before, and pending the arrival of the toast, advanced to the front of the fire, and, taking his coat tails under his arms, looked at his boots and ruminated.

'I wonder whereabouts in Bath this coach puts up,' said Mr. Pickwick, mildly addressing Mr. Winkle.

'Hum—eh—what's that?' said the strange man.

'I made an observation to my friend, sir,' replied Mr. Pickwick, always ready to enter into conversation. 'I wondered at what house the Bath coach put up. Perhaps you can inform me.' 'Are you going to Bath?' said the strange man.

'I am, sir,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'And those other gentlemen?'

'They are going also,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Not inside—I'll be damned if you're going inside,' said the strange man.

'Not all of us,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'No, not all of you,' said the strange man emphatically. 'I've taken two places. If they try to squeeze six people into an infernal box that only holds four, I'll take a post-chaise and bring an action. I've paid my fare. It won't do; I told the clerk when I took my places that it wouldn't do. I know these things have been done. I know they are done every day; but I never was done, and I never will be. Those who know me best, best know it; crush me!' Here the fierce gentleman rang the bell with great violence, and told the waiter he'd better bring the toast in five seconds, or he'd know the reason why.

'My good sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'you will allow me to observe that this is a very unnecessary display of excitement. I have only taken places inside for two.'

'I am glad to hear it,' said the fierce man. 'I withdraw my expressions. I tender an apology. There's my card. Give me your acquaintance.'

'With great pleasure, Sir,' replied Mr. Pickwick. 'We are to be fellow-travellers, and I hope we shall find each other's society mutually agreeable.'

'I hope we shall,' said the fierce gentleman. 'I know we shall. I like your looks; they please me. Gentlemen, your hands and names. Know me.'

Of course, an interchange of friendly salutations followed this gracious speech; and the fierce gentleman immediately proceeded to inform the friends, in the same short, abrupt, jerking sentences, that his name was Dowler; that he was going to Bath on pleasure; that he was formerly in the army; that he had now set up in business as a gentleman; that he lived upon the profits; and that the individual for whom the second place was taken, was a personage no less illustrious than Mrs. Dowler, his lady wife.

'She's a fine woman,' said Mr. Dowler. 'I am proud of her. I have reason.'

'I hope I shall have the pleasure of judging,' said Mr. Pickwick, with a smile. 'You shall,' replied Dowler. 'She shall know you. She shall esteem you. I courted her under singular circumstances. I won her through a rash vow. Thus. I saw her; I loved her; I proposed; she refused me.—"You love another?"—"Spare my blushes."—"I know him."—"You do."—"Very good; if he remains here, I'll skin him."'

'Lord bless me!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick involuntarily.

'Did you skin the gentleman, Sir?' inquired Mr. Winkle, with a very pale face.

'I wrote him a note, I said it was a painful thing. And so it was.'

'Certainly,' interposed Mr. Winkle.

'I said I had pledged my word as a gentleman to skin him. My character was at stake. I had no alternative. As an officer in His Majesty's service, I was bound to skin him. I regretted the necessity, but it must be done. He was open to conviction. He saw that the rules of the service were imperative. He fled. I married her. Here's the coach. That's her head.'

As Mr. Dowler concluded, he pointed to a stage which had just driven up, from the open window of which a rather pretty face in a bright blue bonnet was looking among the crowd on the pavement, most probably for the rash man himself. Mr. Dowler paid his bill, and hurried out with his travelling cap, coat, and cloak; and Mr. Pickwick and his friends followed to secure their places. Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass had seated themselves at the back part of the coach; Mr. Winkle had got inside; and Mr. Pickwick was preparing to follow him, when Sam Weller came up to his master, and whispering in his ear, begged to speak to him, with an air of the deepest mystery.

'Well, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'what's the matter now?'

'Here's rayther a rum go, sir,' replied Sam.

'What?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'This here, Sir,' rejoined Sam. 'I'm wery much afeerd, sir, that the properiator o' this here coach is a playin' some imperence vith us.'

'How is that, Sam?' said Mr. Pickwick; 'aren't the names down on the way-bill?'

'The names is not only down on the vay-bill, Sir,' replied Sam, 'but they've painted vun on 'em up, on the door o' the coach.' As Sam spoke, he pointed to that part of the coach door on which the proprietor's name usually appears; and there, sure enough, in gilt letters of a goodly size, was the magic name of PICKWICK!

'Dear me,' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, quite staggered by the coincidence; 'what a very extraordinary thing!'

'Yes, but that ain't all,' said Sam, again directing his master's attention to the coach door; 'not content vith writin' up "Pick-wick," they puts "Moses" afore it, vich I call addin' insult to injury, as the parrot said ven they not only took him from his native land, but made him talk the English langwidge arterwards.'

'It's odd enough, certainly, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'but if we stand talking here, we shall lose our places.'

'Wot, ain't nothin' to be done in consequence, sir?' exclaimed Sam, perfectly aghast at the coolness with which Mr. Pickwick prepared to ensconce himself inside.

'Done!' said Mr. Pickwick. 'What should be done?' 'Ain't nobody to be whopped for takin' this here liberty, sir?' said Mr. Weller, who had expected that at least he would have been commissioned to challenge the guard and the coachman to a pugilistic encounter on the spot.

'Certainly not,' replied Mr. Pickwick eagerly; 'not on any account. Jump up to your seat directly.'

'I am wery much afeered,' muttered Sam to himself, as he turned away, 'that somethin' queer's come over the governor, or he'd never ha' stood this so quiet. I hope that 'ere trial hasn't broke his spirit, but it looks bad, wery bad.' Mr. Weller shook his head gravely; and it is worthy of remark, as an illustration of the manner in which he took this circumstance to heart, that he did not speak another word until the coach reached the Kensington turnpike. Which was so long a time for him to remain taciturn, that the fact may be considered wholly unprecedented.

Nothing worthy of special mention occurred during the journey. Mr. Dowler related a variety of anecdotes, all illustrative of his own personal prowess and desperation, and appealed to Mrs. Dowler in corroboration thereof; when Mrs. Dowler invariably brought in, in the form of an appendix, some remarkable fact or circumstance which Mr. Dowler had forgotten, or had perhaps through modesty, omitted; for the addenda in every instance went to show that Mr. Dowler was even a more wonderful fellow than he made himself out to be. Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Winkle listened with great admiration, and at intervals conversed with Mrs. Dowler, who was a very agreeable and fascinating person. So, what between Mr. Dowler's stories, and Mrs. Dowler's charms, and Mr. Pickwick's good-humour, and Mr. Winkle's good listening, the insides contrived to be very companionable all the way. The outsides did as outsides always do. They were very cheerful and talkative at the beginning of every stage, and very dismal and sleepy in the middle, and very bright and wakeful again towards the end. There was one young gentleman in an India-rubber cloak, who smoked cigars all day; and there was another young gentleman in a parody upon a greatcoat, who lighted a good many, and feeling obviously unsettled after the second whiff, threw them away when he thought nobody was looking at him. There was a third young man on the box who wished to be learned in cattle; and an old one behind, who was familiar with farming. There was a constant succession of Christian names in smock-frocks and white coats, who were invited to have a 'lift' by the guard, and who knew every horse and hostler on the road and off it; and there was a dinner which would have been cheap at half-a-crown a mouth, if any moderate number of mouths could have eaten it in the time. And at seven o'clock P.m. Mr. Pickwick and his friends, and Mr. Dowler and his wife, respectively retired to their private sitting-rooms at the White Hart Hotel, opposite the Great Pump Room, Bath, where the waiters, from their costume, might be mistaken for Westminster boys, only they destroy the illusion by behaving themselves much better. Breakfast had scarcely been cleared away on the succeeding morning, when a waiter brought in Mr. Dowler's card, with a request to be allowed permission to introduce a friend. Mr. Dowler at once followed up the delivery of the card, by bringing himself and the friend also.

The friend was a charming young man of not much more than fifty, dressed in a very bright blue coat with resplendent buttons, black trousers, and the thinnest possible pair of highly-polished boots. A gold eye-glass was suspended from his neck by a short, broad, black ribbon; a gold snuff-box was lightly clasped in his left hand; gold rings innumerable glittered on his fingers; and a large diamond pin set in gold glistened in his shirt frill. He had a gold watch, and a gold curb chain with large gold seals; and he carried a pliant ebony cane with a gold top. His linen was of the very whitest, finest, and stiffest; his wig of the glossiest, blackest, and curliest. His snuff was princes' mixture; his scent BOUQUET DU ROI. His features were contracted into a perpetual smile; and his teeth were in such perfect order that it was difficult at a small distance to tell the real from the false.

'Mr. Pickwick,' said Mr. Dowler; 'my friend, Angelo Cyrus Bantam, Esquire, M.C.; Bantam; Mr. Pickwick. Know each other.'

'Welcome to Ba-ath, Sir. This is indeed an acquisition. Most welcome to Ba-ath, sir. It is long—very long, Mr. Pickwick, since you drank the waters. It appears an age, Mr. Pickwick. Re-markable!'

Such were the expressions with which Angelo Cyrus Bantam, Esquire, M.C., took Mr. Pickwick's hand; retaining it in his, meantime, and shrugging up his shoulders with a constant succession of bows, as if he really could not make up his mind to the trial of letting it go again.

'It is a very long time since I drank the waters, certainly,' replied Mr. Pickwick; 'for, to the best of my knowledge, I was never here before.'

'Never in Ba-ath, Mr. Pickwick!' exclaimed the Grand Master, letting the hand fall in astonishment. 'Never in Ba-ath! He! he! Mr. Pickwick, you are a wag. Not bad, not bad. Good, good. He! he! he! Re-markable!'

'To my shame, I must say that I am perfectly serious,' rejoined Mr. Pickwick. 'I really never was here before.'

'Oh, I see,' exclaimed the Grand Master, looking extremely pleased; 'yes, yes—good, good—better and better. You are the gentleman of whom we have heard. Yes; we know you, Mr. Pickwick; we know you.'

'The reports of the trial in those confounded papers,' thought Mr. Pickwick. 'They have heard all about me.' 'You are the gentleman residing on Clapham Green,' resumed Bantam, 'who lost the use of his limbs from imprudently taking cold after port wine; who could not be moved in consequence of acute suffering, and who had the water from the king's bath bottled at one hundred and three degrees, and sent by wagon to his bedroom in town, where he bathed, sneezed, and the same day recovered. Very remarkable!'

Mr. Pickwick acknowledged the compliment which the supposition implied, but had the self-denial to repudiate it, notwithstanding; and taking advantage of a moment's silence on the part of the M.C., begged to introduce his friends, Mr. Tupman, Mr. Winkle, and Mr. Snodgrass. An introduction which overwhelmed the M.C. with delight and honour.

'Bantam,' said Mr. Dowler, 'Mr. Pickwick and his friends are strangers. They must put their names down. Where's the book?'

'The register of the distinguished visitors in Ba-ath will be at the Pump Room this morning at two o'clock,' replied the M.C. 'Will you guide our friends to that splendid building, and enable me to procure their autographs?'

'I will,' rejoined Dowler. 'This is a long call. It's time to go. I shall be here again in an hour. Come.'

'This is a ball-night,' said the M.C., again taking Mr. Pickwick's hand, as he rose to go. 'The ball-nights in Ba-ath are moments snatched from paradise; rendered bewitching by music, beauty, elegance, fashion, etiquette, and—and—above all, by the absence of tradespeople, who are quite inconsistent with paradise, and who have an amalgamation of themselves at the Guildhall every fortnight, which is, to say the least, remarkable. Good-bye, good-bye!' and protesting all the way downstairs that he was most satisfied, and most delighted, and most overpowered, and most flattered, Angelo Cyrus Bantam, Esquire, M.C., stepped into a very elegant chariot that waited at the door, and rattled off.

At the appointed hour, Mr. Pickwick and his friends, escorted by Dowler, repaired to the Assembly Rooms, and wrote their names down in the book—an instance of condescension at which Angelo Bantam was even more overpowered than before. Tickets of admission to that evening's assembly were to have been prepared for the whole party, but as they were not ready, Mr. Pickwick undertook, despite all the protestations to the contrary of Angelo Bantam, to send Sam for them at four o'clock in the afternoon, to the M.C.'s house in Queen Square. Having taken a short walk through the city, and arrived at the unanimous conclusion that Park Street was very much like the perpendicular streets a man sees in a dream, which he cannot get up for the life of him, they returned to the White Hart, and despatched Sam on the errand to which his master had pledged him.

Sam Weller put on his hat in a very easy and graceful manner, and, thrusting his hands in his waistcoat pockets, walked with great deliberation to Queen Square, whistling as he went along, several of the most popular airs of the day, as arranged with entirely new movements for that noble instrument the organ, either mouth or barrel. Arriving at the number in Queen Square to which he had been directed, he left off whistling and gave a cheerful knock, which was instantaneously answered by a powdered-headed footman in gorgeous livery, and of symmetrical stature.

'Is this here Mr. Bantam's, old feller?' inquired Sam Weller, nothing abashed by the blaze of splendour which burst upon his sight in the person of the powdered-headed footman with the gorgeous livery.

'Why, young man?' was the haughty inquiry of the powdered-headed footman.

''Cos if it is, jist you step in to him with that 'ere card, and say Mr. Veller's a-waitin', will you?' said Sam. And saying it, he very coolly walked into the hall, and sat down.

The powdered-headed footman slammed the door very hard, and scowled very grandly; but both the slam and the scowl were lost upon Sam, who was regarding a mahogany umbrella-stand with every outward token of critical approval.

Apparently his master's reception of the card had impressed the powdered-headed footman in Sam's favour, for when he came back from delivering it, he smiled in a friendly manner, and said that the answer would be ready directly.

'Wery good,' said Sam. 'Tell the old gen'l'm'n not to put himself in a perspiration. No hurry, six-foot. I've had my dinner.'

'You dine early, sir,' said the powdered-headed footman.

'I find I gets on better at supper when I does,' replied Sam.

'Have you been long in Bath, sir?' inquired the powdered-headed footman. 'I have not had the pleasure of hearing of you before.'

'I haven't created any wery surprisin' sensation here, as yet,' rejoined Sam, 'for me and the other fash'nables only come last night.'

'Nice place, Sir,' said the powdered-headed footman.

'Seems so,' observed Sam.

'Pleasant society, sir,' remarked the powdered-headed footman. 'Very agreeable servants, sir.'

'I should think they wos,' replied Sam. 'Affable, unaffected, say-nothin'-to-nobody sorts o' fellers.'

'Oh, very much so, indeed, sir,' said the powdered-headed footman, taking Sam's remarks as a high compliment. 'Very much so indeed. Do you do anything in this way, Sir?' inquired the tall footman, producing a small snuff-box with a fox's head on the top of it.

'Not without sneezing,' replied Sam.

'Why, it IS difficult, sir, I confess,' said the tall footman. 'It may be done by degrees, Sir. Coffee is the best practice. I carried coffee, Sir, for a long time. It looks very like rappee, sir.'

Here, a sharp peal at the bell reduced the powdered-headed footman to the ignominious necessity of putting the fox's head in his pocket, and hastening with a humble countenance to Mr. Bantam's 'study.' By the bye, who ever knew a man who never read or wrote either, who hadn't got some small back parlour which he WOULD call a study!

'There is the answer, sir,' said the powdered-headed footman. 'I'm afraid you'll find it inconveniently large.'

'Don't mention it,' said Sam, taking a letter with a small enclosure. 'It's just possible as exhausted natur' may manage to surwive it.'

'I hope we shall meet again, Sir,' said the powdered-headed footman, rubbing his hands, and following Sam out to the door-step.

'You are wery obligin', sir,' replied Sam. 'Now, don't allow yourself to be fatigued beyond your powers; there's a amiable bein'. Consider what you owe to society, and don't let yourself be injured by too much work. For the sake o' your feller-creeturs, keep yourself as quiet as you can; only think what a loss you would be!' With these pathetic words, Sam Weller departed.

'A very singular young man that,' said the powdered-headed footman, looking after Mr. Weller, with a countenance which clearly showed he could make nothing of him.

Sam said nothing at all. He winked, shook his head, smiled, winked again; and, with an expression of countenance which seemed to denote that he was greatly amused with something or other, walked merrily away.

At precisely twenty minutes before eight o'clock that night, Angelo Cyrus Bantam, Esq., the Master of the Ceremonies, emerged from his chariot at the door of the Assembly Rooms in the same wig, the same teeth, the same eye-glass, the same watch and seals, the same rings, the same shirt-pin, and the same cane. The only observable alterations in his appearance were, that he wore a brighter blue coat, with a white silk lining, black tights, black silk stockings, and pumps, and a white waistcoat, and was, if possible, just a thought more scented.

Thus attired, the Master of the Ceremonies, in strict discharge of the important duties of his all-important office, planted himself in the room to receive the company.

Bath being full, the company, and the sixpences for tea, poured in, in shoals. In the ballroom, the long card-room, the octagonal card-room, the staircases, and the passages, the hum of many voices, and the sound of many feet, were perfectly bewildering. Dresses rustled, feathers waved, lights shone, and jewels sparkled. There was the music—not of the quadrille band, for it had not yet commenced; but the music of soft, tiny footsteps, with now and then a clear, merry laugh—low and gentle, but very pleasant to hear in a female voice, whether in Bath or elsewhere. Brilliant eyes, lighted up with pleasurable expectation, gleamed from every side; and, look where you would, some exquisite form glided gracefully through the throng, and was no sooner lost, than it was replaced by another as dainty and bewitching.

In the tea-room, and hovering round the card-tables, were a vast number of queer old ladies, and decrepit old gentlemen, discussing all the small talk and scandal of the day, with a relish and gusto which sufficiently bespoke the intensity of the pleasure they derived from the occupation. Mingled with these groups, were three or four match-making mammas, appearing to be wholly absorbed by the conversation in which they were taking part, but failing not from time to time to cast an anxious sidelong glance upon their daughters, who, remembering the maternal injunction to make the best use of their youth, had already commenced incipient flirtations in the mislaying scarves, putting on gloves, setting down cups, and so forth; slight matters apparently, but which may be turned to surprisingly good account by expert practitioners.

Lounging near the doors, and in remote corners, were various knots of silly young men, displaying various varieties of puppyism and stupidity; amusing all sensible people near them with their folly and conceit; and happily thinking themselves the objects of general admiration—a wise and merciful dispensation which no good man will quarrel with.

And lastly, seated on some of the back benches, where they had already taken up their positions for the evening, were divers unmarried ladies past their grand climacteric, who, not dancing because there were no partners for them, and not playing cards lest they should be set down as irretrievably single, were in the favourable situation of being able to abuse everybody without reflecting on themselves. In short, they could abuse everybody, because everybody was there. It was a scene of gaiety, glitter, and show; of richly-dressed people, handsome mirrors, chalked floors, girandoles and wax-candles; and in all parts of the scene, gliding from spot to spot in silent softness, bowing obsequiously to this party, nodding familiarly to that, and smiling complacently on all, was the sprucely-attired person of Angelo Cyrus Bantam, Esquire, the Master of the Ceremonies.

'Stop in the tea-room. Take your sixpenn'orth. Then lay on hot water, and call it tea. Drink it,' said Mr. Dowler, in a loud voice, directing Mr. Pickwick, who advanced at the head of the little party, with Mrs. Dowler on his arm. Into the tea-room Mr. Pickwick turned; and catching sight of him, Mr. Bantam corkscrewed his way through the crowd and welcomed him with ecstasy.

'My dear Sir, I am highly honoured. Ba-ath is favoured. Mrs. Dowler, you embellish the rooms. I congratulate you on your feathers. Remarkable!'

'Anybody here?' inquired Dowler suspiciously.

'Anybody! The ELITE of Ba-ath. Mr. Pickwick, do you see the old lady in the gauze turban?'

'The fat old lady?' inquired Mr. Pickwick innocently.

'Hush, my dear sir—nobody's fat or old in Ba-ath. That's the Dowager Lady Snuphanuph.'

'Is it, indeed?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'No less a person, I assure you,' said the Master of the Ceremonies. 'Hush. Draw a little nearer, Mr. Pickwick. You see the splendidly-dressed young man coming this way?'

'The one with the long hair, and the particularly small forehead?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'The same. The richest young man in Ba-ath at this moment. Young Lord Mutanhed.'

'You don't say so?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Yes. You'll hear his voice in a moment, Mr. Pickwick. He'll speak to me. The other gentleman with him, in the red under-waistcoat and dark moustache, is the Honourable Mr. Crushton, his bosom friend. How do you do, my Lord?'

'Veway hot, Bantam,' said his Lordship.

'It IS very warm, my Lord,' replied the M.C.

'Confounded,' assented the Honourable Mr. Crushton.

'Have you seen his Lordship's mail-cart, Bantam?' inquired the Honourable Mr. Crushton, after a short pause, during which young Lord Mutanhed had been endeavouring to stare Mr. Pickwick out of countenance, and Mr. Crushton had been reflecting what subject his Lordship could talk about best.

'Dear me, no,' replied the M.C.'A mail-cart! What an excellent idea. Remarkable!'

'Gwacious heavens!' said his Lordship, 'I thought evewebody had seen the new mail-cart; it's the neatest, pwettiest, gwacefullest thing that ever wan upon wheels. Painted wed, with a cweam piebald.'

'With a real box for the letters, and all complete,' said the Honourable Mr. Crushton.

'And a little seat in fwont, with an iwon wail, for the dwiver,' added his Lordship. 'I dwove it over to Bwistol the other morning, in a cwimson coat, with two servants widing a quarter of a mile behind; and confound me if the people didn't wush out of their cottages, and awest my pwogwess, to know if I wasn't the post. Glorwious—glorwious!'

At this anecdote his Lordship laughed very heartily, as did the listeners, of course. Then, drawing his arm through that of the obsequious Mr.

Crushton, Lord Mutanhed walked away.

'Delightful young man, his Lordship,' said the Master of the Ceremonies.

'So I should think,' rejoined Mr. Pickwick drily.

The dancing having commenced, the necessary introductions having been made, and all preliminaries arranged, Angelo Bantam rejoined Mr. Pickwick, and led him into the card-room.

Just at the very moment of their entrance, the Dowager Lady Snuphanuph and two other ladies of an ancient and whist-like appearance, were hovering over an unoccupied card-table; and they no sooner set eyes upon Mr. Pickwick under the convoy of Angelo Bantam, than they exchanged glances with each other, seeing that he was precisely the very person they wanted, to make up the rubber.

'My dear Bantam,' said the Dowager Lady Snuphanuph coaxingly, 'find us some nice creature to make up this table; there's a good soul.' Mr. Pickwick happened to be looking another way at the moment, so her Ladyship nodded her head towards him, and frowned expressively.

'My friend Mr. Pickwick, my Lady, will be most happy, I am sure, remarkably so,' said the M.C., taking the hint. 'Mr. Pickwick, Lady Snuphanuph—Mrs. Colonel Wugsby—Miss Bolo.'

Mr. Pickwick bowed to each of the ladies, and, finding escape impossible, cut. Mr. Pickwick and Miss Bolo against Lady Snuphanuph and Mrs. Colonel Wugsby. As the trump card was turned up, at the commencement of the second deal, two young ladies hurried into the room, and took their stations on either side of Mrs. Colonel Wugsby's chair, where they waited patiently until the hand was over.

'Now, Jane,' said Mrs. Colonel Wugsby, turning to one of the girls, 'what is it?' 'I came to ask, ma, whether I might dance with the youngest Mr. Crawley,' whispered the prettier and younger of the two.

'Good God, Jane, how can you think of such things?' replied the mamma indignantly. 'Haven't you repeatedly heard that his father has eight hundred a year, which dies with him? I am ashamed of you. Not on any account.'

'Ma,' whispered the other, who was much older than her sister, and very insipid and artificial, 'Lord Mutanhed has been introduced to me. I said I thought I wasn't engaged, ma.'

'You're a sweet pet, my love,' replied Mrs. Colonel Wugsby, tapping her daughter's cheek with her fan, 'and are always to be trusted. He's immensely rich, my dear. Bless you!' With these words Mrs. Colonel Wugsby kissed her eldest daughter most affectionately, and frowning in a warning manner upon the other, sorted her cards.

Poor Mr. Pickwick! he had never played with three thorough-paced female card-players before. They were so desperately sharp, that they quite frightened him. If he played a wrong card, Miss Bolo looked a small armoury of daggers; if he stopped to consider which was the right one, Lady Snuphanuph would throw herself back in her chair, and smile with a mingled glance of impatience and pity to Mrs. Colonel Wugsby, at which Mrs. Colonel Wugsby would shrug up her shoulders, and cough, as much as to say she wondered whether he ever would begin. Then, at the end of every hand, Miss Bolo would inquire with a dismal countenance and reproachful sigh, why Mr. Pickwick had not returned that diamond, or led the club, or roughed the spade, or finessed the heart, or led through the honour, or brought out the ace, or played up to the king, or some such thing; and in reply to all these grave charges, Mr. Pickwick would be wholly unable to plead any justification whatever, having by this time forgotten all about the game. People came and looked on, too, which made Mr. Pickwick nervous. Besides all this, there was a great deal of distracting conversation near the table, between Angelo Bantam and the two Misses Matinter, who, being single and singular, paid great court to the Master of the Ceremonies, in the hope of getting a stray partner now and then. All these things, combined with the noises and interruptions of constant comings in and goings out, made Mr. Pickwick play rather badly; the cards were against him, also; and when they left off at ten minutes past eleven, Miss Bolo rose from the table considerably agitated, and went straight home, in a flood of tears and a sedan-chair.

Being joined by his friends, who one and all protested that they had scarcely ever spent a more pleasant evening, Mr. Pickwick accompanied them to the White Hart, and having soothed his feelings with something hot, went to bed, and to sleep, almost simultaneously.

CHAPTER XXXVI. THE CHIEF FEATURES OF WHICH WILL BE FOUND TO BE

AN AUTHENTIC VERSION OF THE LEGEND OF PRINCE BLADUD, AND A MOST EXTRAORDINARY CALAMITY THAT BEFELL Mr. WINKLE

As Mr. Pickwick contemplated a stay of at least two months in Bath, he deemed it advisable to take private lodgings for himself and friends for that period; and as a favourable opportunity offered for their securing, on moderate terms, the upper portion of a house in the Royal Crescent, which was larger than they required, Mr. and Mrs. Dowler offered to relieve them of a bedroom and sitting-room. This proposition was at once accepted, and in three days' time they were all located in their new abode, when Mr. Pickwick began to drink the waters with the utmost assiduity. Mr. Pickwick took them systematically. He drank a quarter of a pint before breakfast, and then walked up a hill; and another quarter of a pint after breakfast, and then walked down a hill; and, after every fresh quarter of a pint, Mr. Pickwick declared, in the most solemn and emphatic terms, that he felt a great deal better; whereat his friends were very much delighted, though they had not been previously aware that there was anything the matter with him.

The Great Pump Room is a spacious saloon, ornamented with Corinthian pillars, and a music-gallery, and a Tompion clock, and a statue of Nash, and a golden inscription, to which all the water-drinkers should attend, for it appeals to them in the cause of a deserving charity. There is a large bar with a marble vase, out of which the pumper gets the water; and there are a number of yellow-looking tumblers, out of which the company get it; and it is a most edifying and satisfactory sight to behold the perseverance and gravity with which they swallow it. There are baths near at hand, in which a part of the company wash themselves; and a band plays afterwards, to congratulate the remainder on their having done so. There is another pump room, into which infirm ladies and gentlemen are wheeled, in such an astonishing variety of chairs and chaises, that any adventurous individual who goes in with the regular number of toes, is in imminent danger of coming out without them; and there is a third, into which the quiet people go, for it is less noisy than either. There is an immensity of promenading, on crutches and off, with sticks and without, and a great deal of conversation, and liveliness, and pleasantry.

Every morning, the regular water-drinkers, Mr. Pickwick among the number, met each other in the pump room, took their quarter of a pint, and walked constitutionally. At the afternoon's promenade, Lord Mutanhed, and the Honourable Mr. Crushton, the Dowager Lady Snuphanuph, Mrs. Colonel Wugsby, and all the great people, and all the morning water-drinkers, met in grand assemblage. After this, they walked out, or drove out, or were pushed out in bath-chairs, and met one another again. After this, the gentlemen went to the reading-rooms, and met divisions of the mass. After this, they went home. If it were theatre-night, perhaps they met at the theatre; if it were assembly-night, they met at the rooms; and if it were neither, they met the next day. A very pleasant routine, with perhaps a slight tinge of sameness.

Mr. Pickwick was sitting up by himself, after a day spent in this manner, making entries in his journal, his friends having retired to bed, when he was roused by a gentle tap at the room door.

'Beg your pardon, Sir,' said Mrs. Craddock, the landlady, peeping in; 'but did you want anything more, sir?'

'Nothing more, ma'am,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'My young girl is gone to bed, Sir,' said Mrs. Craddock; 'and Mr. Dowler is good enough to say that he'll sit up for Mrs. Dowler, as the party isn't expected to be over till late; so I was thinking that if you wanted nothing more, Mr. Pickwick, I would go to bed.'

'By all means, ma'am,' replied Mr. Pickwick. 'Wish you good-night, Sir,' said Mrs. Craddock.

'Good-night, ma'am,' rejoined Mr. Pickwick.

Mrs. Craddock closed the door, and Mr. Pickwick resumed his writing.

In half an hour's time the entries were concluded. Mr. Pickwick carefully rubbed the last page on the blotting-paper, shut up the book, wiped his pen on the bottom of the inside of his coat tail, and opened the drawer of the inkstand to put it carefully away. There were a couple of sheets of writing-paper, pretty closely written over, in the inkstand drawer, and they were folded so, that the title, which was in a good round hand, was fully disclosed to him. Seeing from this, that it was no private document; and as it seemed to relate to Bath, and was very short: Mr. Pick-wick unfolded it, lighted his bedroom candle that it might burn up well by the time he finished; and drawing his chair nearer the fire, read as follows—

THE TRUE LEGEND OF PRINCE BLADUD

'Less than two hundred years ago, on one of the public baths in this city, there appeared an inscription in honour of its mighty founder, the renowned Prince Bladud. That inscription is now erased.

'For many hundred years before that time, there had been handed down, from age to age, an old legend, that the illustrious prince being afflicted with leprosy, on his return from reaping a rich harvest of knowledge in Athens, shunned the court of his royal father, and consorted moodily with husbandman and pigs. Among the herd (so said the legend) was a pig of grave and solemn countenance, with whom the prince had a fellow-feeling—for he too was wise—a pig of thoughtful and reserved demeanour; an animal superior to his fellows, whose grunt was terrible, and whose bite was sharp. The young prince sighed deeply as he looked upon the countenance of the majestic swine; he thought of his royal father, and his eyes were bedewed with tears.

'This sagacious pig was fond of bathing in rich, moist mud. Not in summer, as common pigs do now, to cool themselves, and did even in those distant ages (which is a proof that the light of civilisation had already begun to dawn, though feebly), but in the cold, sharp days of winter. His coat was ever so sleek, and his complexion so clear, that the prince resolved to essay the purifying qualities of the same water that his friend resorted to. He made the trial. Beneath that black mud, bubbled the hot springs of Bath. He washed, and was cured. Hastening to his father's court, he paid his best respects, and returning quickly hither, founded this city and its famous baths.

'He sought the pig with all the ardour of their early friendship—but, alas! the waters had been his death. He had imprudently taken a bath at too high a temperature, and the natural philosopher was no more! He was succeeded by Pliny, who also fell a victim to his thirst for knowledge.

'This was the legend. Listen to the true one.

'A great many centuries since, there flourished, in great state, the famous and renowned Lud Hudibras, king of Britain. He was a mighty monarch. The earth shook when he walked—he was so very stout. His people basked in the light of his countenance—it was so red and glowing. He was, indeed, every inch a king. And there were a good many inches of him, too, for although he was not very tall, he was a remarkable size round, and the inches that he wanted in height, he made up in circumference. If any degenerate monarch of modern times could be in any way compared with him, I should say the venerable King Cole would be that illustrious potentate.

'This good king had a queen, who eighteen years before, had had a son, who was called Bladud. He was sent to a preparatory seminary in his father's dominions until he was ten years old, and was then despatched, in charge of a trusty messenger, to a finishing school at Athens; and as there was no extra charge for remaining during the holidays, and no notice required previous to the removal of a pupil, there he remained for eight long years, at the expiration of which time, the king his father sent the lord chamberlain over, to settle the bill, and to bring him home; which, the lord chamberlain doing, was received with shouts, and pensioned immediately.

'When King Lud saw the prince his son, and found he had grown up such a fine young man, he perceived what a grand thing it would be to have him married without delay, so that his children might be the means of perpetuating the glorious race of Lud, down to the very latest ages of the world. With this view, he sent a special embassy, composed of great noblemen who had nothing particular to do, and wanted lucrative employment, to a neighbouring king, and demanded his fair daughter in marriage for his son; stating at the same time that he was anxious to be on the most affectionate terms with his brother and friend, but that if they couldn't agree in arranging this marriage, he should be under the unpleasant necessity of invading his kingdom and putting his eyes out. To this, the other king (who was the weaker of the two) replied that he was very much obliged to his friend and brother for all his goodness and magnanimity, and that his daughter was quite ready to be married, whenever Prince Bladud liked to come and fetch her.

'This answer no sooner reached Britain, than the whole nation was transported with joy. Nothing was heard, on all sides, but the sounds of feasting and revelry—except the chinking of money as it was paid in by the people to the collector of the royal treasures, to defray the expenses of the happy ceremony. It was upon this occasion that King Lud, seated on the top of his throne in full council, rose, in the exuberance of his feelings, and commanded the lord chief justice to order in the richest wines and the court minstrels—an act of graciousness which has been, through the ignorance of traditionary historians, attributed to King Cole, in those celebrated lines in which his Majesty is represented as

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Calling for his pipe, and calling for his pot,
And calling for his fiddlers three.
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Which is an obvious injustice to the memory of King Lud, and a dishonest exaltation of the virtues of King Cole.

'But, in the midst of all this festivity and rejoicing, there was one individual present, who tasted not when the sparkling wines were poured forth, and who danced not, when the minstrels played. This was no other than Prince Bladud himself, in honour of whose happiness a whole people were, at that very moment, straining alike their throats and purse-strings. The truth was, that the prince, forgetting the undoubted right of the minister for foreign affairs to fall in love on his behalf, had, contrary to every precedent of policy and diplomacy, already fallen in love on his own account, and privately contracted himself unto the fair daughter of a noble Athenian.

'Here we have a striking example of one of the manifold advantages of civilisation and refinement. If the prince had lived in later days, he might at once have married the object of his father's choice, and then set himself seriously to work, to relieve himself of the burden which rested heavily upon him. He might have endeavoured to break her heart by a systematic course of insult and neglect; or, if the spirit of her sex, and a proud consciousness of her many wrongs had upheld her under this ill-treatment, he might have sought to take her life, and so get rid of her effectually. But neither mode of relief suggested itself to Prince Bladud; so he solicited a private audience, and told his father.

'it is an old prerogative of kings to govern everything but their passions. King Lud flew into a frightful rage, tossed his crown up to the ceiling, and caught it again—for in those days kings kept their crowns on their heads, and not in the Tower—stamped the ground, rapped his forehead, wondered why his own flesh and blood rebelled against him, and, finally, calling in his guards, ordered the prince away to instant Confinement in a lofty turret;

a course of treatment which the kings of old very generally pursued towards their sons, when their matrimonial inclinations did not happen to point to the same quarter as their own.

'When Prince Bladud had been shut up in the lofty turret for the greater part of a year, with no better prospect before his bodily eyes than a stone wall, or before his mental vision than prolonged imprisonment, he naturally began to ruminate on a plan of escape, which, after months of preparation, he managed to accomplish; considerately leaving his dinner-knife in the heart of his jailer, lest the poor fellow (who had a family) should be considered privy to his flight, and punished accordingly by the infuriated king.

'The monarch was frantic at the loss of his son. He knew not on whom to vent his grief and wrath, until fortunately bethinking himself of the lord chamberlain who had brought him home, he struck off his pension and his head together.

'Meanwhile, the young prince, effectually disguised, wandered on foot through his father's dominions, cheered and supported in all his hardships by sweet thoughts of the Athenian maid, who was the innocent cause of his weary trials. One day he stopped to rest in a country village; and seeing that there were gay dances going forward on the green, and gay faces passing to and fro, ventured to inquire of a reveller who stood near him, the reason for this rejoicing.

'"Know you not, O stranger," was the reply, "of the recent proclamation of our gracious king?"

'"Proclamation! No. What proclamation?" rejoined the prince—for he had travelled along the by and little-frequented ways, and knew nothing of what had passed upon the public roads, such as they were.

'"Why," replied the peasant, "the foreign lady that our prince wished to wed, is married to a foreign noble of her own country, and the king proclaims the fact, and a great public festival besides; for now, of course, Prince Bladud will come back and marry the lady his father chose, who they say is as beautiful as the noonday sun. Your health, sir. God save the king!"

'The prince remained to hear no more. He fled from the spot, and plunged into the thickest recesses of a neighbouring wood. On, on, he wandered, night and day; beneath the blazing sun, and the cold pale moon; through the dry heat of noon, and the damp cold of night; in the gray light of morn, and the red glare of eve. So heedless was he of time or object, that being bound for Athens, he wandered as far out of his way as Bath.

'There was no city where Bath stands, then. There was no vestige of human habitation, or sign of man's resort, to bear the name; but there was the same noble country, the same broad expanse of hill and dale, the same beautiful channel stealing on, far away, the same lofty mountains which, like the troubles of life, viewed at a distance, and partially obscured by the bright mist of its morning, lose their ruggedness and asperity, and seem all ease and softness. Moved by the gentle beauty of the scene, the prince sank upon the green turf, and bathed his swollen feet in his tears.

'"Oh!" said the unhappy Bladud, clasping his hands, and mournfully raising his eyes towards the sky, "would that my wanderings might end here! Would that these grateful tears with which I now mourn hope misplaced, and love despised, might flow in peace for ever!"

'The wish was heard. It was in the time of the heathen deities, who used occasionally to take people at their words, with a promptness, in some cases, extremely awkward. The ground opened beneath the prince's feet; he sank into the chasm; and instantaneously it closed upon his head for ever, save where his hot tears welled up through the earth, and where they have continued to gush forth ever since.

'It is observable that, to this day, large numbers of elderly ladies and gentlemen who have been disappointed in procuring partners, and almost as many young ones who are anxious to obtain them, repair annually to Bath to drink the waters, from which they derive much strength and comfort. This is most complimentary to the virtue of Prince Bladud's tears, and strongly corroborative of the veracity of this legend.'

Mr. Pickwick yawned several times when he had arrived at the end of this little manuscript, carefully refolded, and replaced it in the inkstand drawer, and then, with a countenance expressive of the utmost weariness, lighted his chamber candle, and went upstairs to bed. He stopped at Mr. Dowler's door, according to custom, and knocked to say good-night.

'Ah!' said Dowler, 'going to bed? I wish I was. Dismal night. Windy; isn't it?'

'Very,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Good-night.'

'Good-night.'

Mr. Pickwick went to his bedchamber, and Mr. Dowler resumed his seat before the fire, in fulfilment of his rash promise to sit up till his wife came home.

There are few things more worrying than sitting up for somebody, especially if that somebody be at a party. You cannot help thinking how quickly the time passes with them, which drags so heavily with you; and the more you think of this, the more your hopes of their speedy arrival decline. Clocks tick so loud, too, when you are sitting up alone, and you seem as if you had an under-garment of cobwebs on. First, something tickles your right knee, and then the same sensation irritates your left. You have no sooner changed your position, than it comes again in the arms; when you have fidgeted your limbs into all sorts of queer shapes, you have a sudden relapse in the nose, which you rub as if to rub it off—as there is no doubt you would, if you could. Eyes, too, are mere personal inconveniences; and the wick of one candle gets an inch and a half long, while you are snuffing the other. These, and various other little nervous annoyances, render sitting up for a length of time after everybody else has gone to bed, anything but a cheerful amusement.

This was just Mr. Dowler's opinion, as he sat before the fire, and felt honestly indignant with all the inhuman people at the party who were keeping him up. He was not put into better humour either, by the reflection that he had taken it into his head, early in the evening, to think he had got an ache there, and so stopped at home. At length, after several droppings asleep, and fallings forward towards the bars, and catchings backward soon enough to prevent being branded in the face, Mr. Dowler made up his mind that he would throw himself on the bed in the back room and think—not sleep, of course.

'I'm a heavy sleeper,' said Mr. Dowler, as he flung himself on the bed. 'I must keep awake. I suppose I shall hear a knock here. Yes. I thought so. I can hear the watchman. There he goes. Fainter now, though. A little fainter. He's turning the corner. Ah!' When Mr. Dowler arrived at this point, he turned the corner at which he had been long hesitating, and fell fast asleep.

Just as the clock struck three, there was blown into the crescent a sedan-chair with Mrs. Dowler inside, borne by one short, fat chairman, and one long, thin one, who had had much ado to keep their bodies perpendicular: to say nothing of the chair. But on that high ground, and in the crescent, which the wind swept round and round as if it were going to tear the paving stones up, its fury was tremendous. They were very glad to set the chair down, and give a good round loud double-knock at the street door.

They waited some time, but nobody came.

'Servants is in the arms o' Porpus, I think,' said the short chairman, warming his hands at the attendant link-boy's torch.

'I wish he'd give 'em a squeeze and wake 'em,' observed the long one.

'Knock again, will you, if you please,' cried Mrs. Dowler from the chair. 'Knock two or three times, if you please.'

The short man was quite willing to get the job over, as soon as possible; so he stood on the step, and gave four or five most startling double-knocks, of eight or ten knocks a-piece, while the long man went into the road, and looked up at the windows for a light.

Nobody came. It was all as silent and dark as ever.

'Dear me!' said Mrs. Dowler. 'You must knock again, if you please.' 'There ain't a bell, is there, ma'am?' said the short chairman.

'Yes, there is,' interposed the link-boy, 'I've been a-ringing at it ever so long.'

'It's only a handle,' said Mrs. Dowler, 'the wire's broken.'

'I wish the servants' heads wos,' growled the long man.

'I must trouble you to knock again, if you please,' said Mrs. Dowler, with the utmost politeness.

The short man did knock again several times, without producing the smallest effect. The tall man, growing very impatient, then relieved him, and kept on perpetually knocking double-knocks of two loud knocks each, like an insane postman.

At length Mr. Winkle began to dream that he was at a club, and that the members being very refractory, the chairman was obliged to hammer the table a good deal to preserve order; then he had a confused notion of an auction room where there were no bidders, and the auctioneer was buying everything in; and ultimately he began to think it just within the bounds of possibility that somebody might be knocking at the street door. To make quite certain, however, he remained quiet in bed for ten minutes or so, and listened; and when he had counted two or three-and-thirty knocks, he felt quite satisfied, and gave himself a great deal of credit for being so wakeful.

'Rap rap-rap rap-rap rap-ra, ra, ra, ra, ra, rap!' went the knocker.

Mr. Winkle jumped out of bed, wondering very much what could possibly be the matter, and hastily putting on his stockings and slippers, folded his dressing-gown round him, lighted a flat candle from the rush-light that was burning in the fireplace, and hurried downstairs.

'Here's somebody comin' at last, ma'am,' said the short chairman.

'I wish I wos behind him vith a bradawl,' muttered the long one.

'Who's there?' cried Mr. Winkle, undoing the chain.

'Don't stop to ask questions, cast-iron head,' replied the long man, with great disgust, taking it for granted that the inquirer was a footman; 'but open the door.'

'Come, look sharp, timber eyelids,' added the other encouragingly.

Mr. Winkle, being half asleep, obeyed the command mechanically, opened the door a little, and peeped out. The first thing he saw, was the red glare of the link-boy's torch. Startled by the sudden fear that the house might be on fire, he hastily threw the door wide open, and holding the candle above his head, stared eagerly before him, not quite certain whether what he saw was a sedan-chair or a fire-engine. At this instant there came a violent gust of wind; the light was blown out; Mr. Winkle felt himself irresistibly impelled on to the steps; and the door blew to, with a loud crash.

'Well, young man, now you HAVE done it!' said the short chairman.

Mr. Winkle, catching sight of a lady's face at the window of the sedan, turned hastily round, plied the knocker with all his might and main, and called frantically upon the chairman to take the chair away again.

'Take it away, take it away,' cried Mr. Winkle. 'Here's somebody coming out of another house; put me into the chair. Hide me! Do something with me!'

All this time he was shivering with cold; and every time he raised his hand to the knocker, the wind took the dressing-gown in a most unpleasant manner.

'The people are coming down the crescent now. There are ladies with 'em; cover me up with something. Stand before me!' roared Mr. Winkle. But the chairmen were too much exhausted with laughing to afford him the slightest assistance, and the ladies were every moment approaching nearer and nearer. Mr. Winkle gave a last hopeless knock; the ladies were only a few doors off. He threw away the extinguished candle, which, all this time he had held above his head, and fairly bolted into the sedan-chair where Mrs. Dowler was.

Now, Mrs. Craddock had heard the knocking and the voices at last; and, only waiting to put something smarter on her head than her nightcap, ran down into the front drawing-room to make sure that it was the right party. Throwing up the window-sash as Mr. Winkle was rushing into the chair, she no sooner caught sight of what was going forward below, than she raised a vehement and dismal shriek, and implored Mr. Dowler to get up directly, for his wife was running away with another gentleman.

Upon this, Mr. Dowler bounced off the bed as abruptly as an India-rubber ball, and rushing into the front room, arrived at one window just as Mr. Pickwick threw up the other, when the first object that met the gaze of both, was Mr. Winkle bolting into the sedan-chair.

'Watchman,' shouted Dowler furiously, 'stop him—hold him—keep him tight—shut him in, till I come down. I'll cut his throat—give me a knife—from ear to ear, Mrs. Craddock—I will!' And breaking from the shrieking landlady, and from Mr. Pickwick, the indignant husband seized a small supper-knife, and tore into the street. But Mr. Winkle didn't wait for him. He no sooner heard the horrible threat of the valorous Dowler, than he bounced out of the sedan, quite as quickly as he had bounced in, and throwing off his slippers into the road, took to his heels and tore round the crescent, hotly pursued by Dowler and the watchman. He kept ahead; the door was open as he came round the second time; he rushed in, slammed it in Dowler's face, mounted to his bedroom, locked the door, piled a wash-hand-stand, chest of drawers, and a table against it, and packed up a few necessaries ready for flight with the first ray of morning.

Dowler came up to the outside of the door; avowed, through the keyhole, his steadfast determination of cutting Mr. Winkle's throat next day; and, after a great confusion of voices in the drawing-room, amidst which that of Mr. Pickwick was distinctly heard endeavouring to make peace, the inmates dispersed to their several bed-chambers, and all was quiet once more.

It is not unlikely that the inquiry may be made, where Mr. Weller was, all this time? We will state where he was, in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXXVII. HONOURABLY ACCOUNTS FOR Mr. WELLER'S ABSENCE, BY

DESCRIBING A SOIREE TO WHICH HE WAS INVITED AND WENT; ALSO RELATES HOW HE WAS ENTRUSTED BY Mr. PICKWICK WITH A PRIVATE MISSION OF DELICACY AND IMPORTANCE

'Mr. Weller,' said Mrs. Craddock, upon the morning of this very eventful day, 'here's a letter for you.'

'Wery odd that,' said Sam; 'I'm afeerd there must be somethin' the matter, for I don't recollect any gen'l'm'n in my circle of acquaintance as is capable o' writin' one.'

'Perhaps something uncommon has taken place,' observed Mrs. Craddock.

'It must be somethin' wery uncommon indeed, as could perduce a letter out o' any friend o' mine,' replied Sam, shaking his head dubiously; 'nothin' less than a nat'ral conwulsion, as the young gen'l'm'n observed ven he wos took with fits. It can't be from the gov'ner,' said Sam, looking at the direction. 'He always prints, I know, 'cos he learnt writin' from the large bills in the booking-offices. It's a wery strange thing now, where this here letter can ha' come from.'

As Sam said this, he did what a great many people do when they are uncertain about the writer of a note—looked at the seal, and then at the front, and then at the back, and then at the sides, and then at the superscription; and, as a last resource, thought perhaps he might as well look at the inside, and try to find out from that.

'It's wrote on gilt-edged paper,' said Sam, as he unfolded it, 'and sealed in bronze vax vith the top of a door key. Now for it.' And, with a very grave face, Mr. Weller slowly read as follows—

'A select company of the Bath footmen presents their compliments to Mr. Weller, and requests the pleasure of his company this evening, to a friendly swarry, consisting of a boiled leg of mutton with the usual trimmings. The swarry to be on table at half-past nine o'clock punctually.'

This was inclosed in another note, which ran thus—

'Mr. John Smauker, the gentleman who had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Weller at the house of their mutual acquaintance, Mr. Bantam, a few days since, begs to inclose Mr. Weller the herewith invitation. If Mr. Weller will call on Mr. John Smauker at nine o'clock, Mr. John Smauker will have the pleasure of introducing Mr. Weller.

(Signed) 'JOHN SMAUKER.'

The envelope was directed to blank Weller, Esq., at Mr. Pickwick's; and in a parenthesis, in the left hand corner, were the words 'airy bell,' as an instruction to the bearer.

'Vell,' said Sam, 'this is comin' it rayther powerful, this is. I never heerd a biled leg o' mutton called a swarry afore. I wonder wot they'd call a roast one.'

However, without waiting to debate the point, Sam at once betook himself into the presence of Mr. Pickwick, and requested leave of absence for that evening, which was readily granted. With this permission and the street-door key, Sam Weller issued forth a little before the appointed time, and strolled leisurely towards Queen Square, which he no sooner gained than he had the satisfaction of beholding Mr. John Smauker leaning his powdered head against a lamp-post at a short distance off, smoking a cigar through an amber tube.

'How do you do, Mr. Weller?' said Mr. John Smauker, raising his hat gracefully with one hand, while he gently waved the other in a condescending manner. 'How do you do, Sir?'

'Why, reasonably conwalessent,' replied Sam. 'How do YOU find yourself, my dear feller?'

'Only so so,' said Mr. John Smauker.

'Ah, you've been a-workin' too hard,' observed Sam. 'I was fearful you would; it won't do, you know; you must not give way to that 'ere uncompromisin' spirit o' yourn.'

'It's not so much that, Mr. Weller,' replied Mr. John Smauker, 'as bad wine; I'm afraid I've been dissipating.'

'Oh! that's it, is it?' said Sam; 'that's a wery bad complaint, that.'

'And yet the temptation, you see, Mr. Weller,' observed Mr. John Smauker.

'Ah, to be sure,' said Sam.

'Plunged into the very vortex of society, you know, Mr. Weller,' said Mr. John Smauker, with a sigh.

'Dreadful, indeed!' rejoined Sam.

'But it's always the way,' said Mr. John Smauker; 'if your destiny leads you into public life, and public station, you must expect to be subjected to temptations which other people is free from, Mr. Weller.'

'Precisely what my uncle said, ven he vent into the public line,' remarked Sam, 'and wery right the old gen'l'm'n wos, for he drank hisself to death in somethin' less than a quarter.' Mr. John Smauker looked deeply indignant at any parallel being drawn between himself and the deceased gentleman in question; but, as Sam's face was in the most immovable state of calmness, he thought better of it, and looked affable again. 'Perhaps we had better be walking,' said Mr. Smauker, consulting a copper timepiece which dwelt at the bottom of a deep watch-pocket, and was raised to the surface by means of a black string, with a copper key at the other end.

'P'raps we had,' replied Sam, 'or they'll overdo the swarry, and that'll spile it.'

'Have you drank the waters, Mr. Weller?' inquired his companion, as they walked towards High Street.

'Once,' replied Sam.

'What did you think of 'em, Sir?'

'I thought they was particklery unpleasant,' replied Sam.

'Ah,' said Mr. John Smauker, 'you disliked the killibeate taste, perhaps?'

'I don't know much about that 'ere,' said Sam. 'I thought they'd a wery strong flavour o' warm flat irons.'

'That IS the killibeate, Mr. Weller,' observed Mr. John Smauker contemptuously.

'Well, if it is, it's a wery inexpressive word, that's all,' said Sam. 'It may be, but I ain't much in the chimical line myself, so I can't say.' And here, to the great horror of Mr. John Smauker, Sam Weller began to whistle.

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Weller,' said Mr. John Smauker, agonised at the exceeding ungenteel sound, 'will you take my arm?'

'Thank'ee, you're wery good, but I won't deprive you of it,' replied Sam. 'I've rayther a way o' putting my hands in my pockets, if it's all the same to you.' As Sam said this, he suited the action to the word, and whistled far louder than before.

'This way,' said his new friend, apparently much relieved as they turned down a by-street; 'we shall soon be there.'

'Shall we?' said Sam, quite unmoved by the announcement of his close vicinity to the select footmen of Bath.

'Yes,' said Mr. John Smauker. 'Don't be alarmed, Mr. Weller.'

'Oh, no,' said Sam.

'You'll see some very handsome uniforms, Mr. Weller,' continued Mr. John Smauker; 'and perhaps you'll find some of the gentlemen rather high at first, you know, but they'll soon come round.'

'That's wery kind on 'em,' replied Sam. 'And you know,' resumed Mr. John Smauker, with an air of sublime protection—'you know, as you're a stranger, perhaps, they'll be rather hard upon you at first.'

'They won't be wery cruel, though, will they?' inquired Sam.

'No, no,' replied Mr. John Smauker, pulling forth the fox's head, and taking a gentlemanly pinch. 'There are some funny dogs among us, and they will have their joke, you know; but you mustn't mind 'em, you mustn't mind 'em.'

'I'll try and bear up agin such a reg'lar knock down o' talent,' replied Sam.

'That's right,' said Mr. John Smauker, putting forth his fox's head, and elevating his own; 'I'll stand by you.'

By this time they had reached a small greengrocer's shop, which Mr. John Smauker entered, followed by Sam, who, the moment he got behind him, relapsed into a series of the very broadest and most unmitigated grins, and manifested other demonstrations of being in a highly enviable state of inward merriment.

Crossing the greengrocer's shop, and putting their hats on the stairs in the little passage behind it, they walked into a small parlour; and here the full splendour of the scene burst upon Mr. Weller's view.

A couple of tables were put together in the middle of the parlour, covered with three or four cloths of different ages and dates of washing, arranged to look as much like one as the circumstances of the case would allow. Upon these were laid knives and forks for six or eight people. Some of the knife handles were green, others red, and a few yellow; and as all the forks were black, the combination of colours was exceedingly striking. Plates for a corresponding number of guests were warming behind the fender; and the guests themselves were warming before it: the chief and most important of whom appeared to be a stoutish gentleman in a bright crimson coat with long tails, vividly red breeches, and a cocked hat, who was standing with his back to the fire, and had apparently just entered, for besides retaining his cocked hat on his head, he carried in his hand a high stick, such as gentlemen of his profession usually elevate in a sloping position over the roofs of carriages.

'Smauker, my lad, your fin,' said the gentleman with the cocked hat.

Mr. Smauker dovetailed the top joint of his right-hand little finger into that of the gentleman with the cocked hat, and said he was charmed to see him looking so well.

'Well, they tell me I am looking pretty blooming,' said the man with the cocked hat, 'and it's a wonder, too. I've been following our old woman about, two hours a day, for the last fortnight; and if a constant contemplation of the manner in which she hooks-and-eyes that infernal lavender-coloured old gown of hers behind, isn't enough to throw anybody into a low state of despondency for life, stop my quarter's salary.'

At this, the assembled selections laughed very heartily; and one gentleman in a yellow waistcoat, with a coach-trimming border, whispered a neighbour in green-foil smalls, that Tuckle was in spirits to-night.

'By the bye,' said Mr. Tuckle, 'Smauker, my boy, you—' The remainder of the sentence was forwarded into Mr. John Smauker's ear, by whisper.

'Oh, dear me, I quite forgot,' said Mr. John Smauker. 'Gentlemen, my friend Mr. Weller.'

'Sorry to keep the fire off you, Weller,' said Mr. Tuckle, with a familiar nod. 'Hope you're not cold, Weller.'

'Not by no means, Blazes,' replied Sam. 'It 'ud be a wery chilly subject as felt cold wen you stood opposite. You'd save coals if they put you behind the fender in the waitin'-room at a public office, you would.'

As this retort appeared to convey rather a personal allusion to Mr. Tuckle's crimson livery, that gentleman looked majestic for a few seconds, but gradually edging away from the fire, broke into a forced smile, and said it wasn't bad.

'Wery much obliged for your good opinion, sir,' replied Sam. 'We shall get on by degrees, I des-say. We'll try a better one by and bye.'

At this point the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a gentleman in orange-coloured plush, accompanied by another selection in purple cloth, with a great extent of stocking. The new-comers having been welcomed by the old ones, Mr. Tuckle put the question that supper be ordered in, which was carried unanimously.

The greengrocer and his wife then arranged upon the table a boiled leg of mutton, hot, with caper sauce, turnips, and potatoes. Mr. Tuckle took the chair, and was supported at the other end of the board by the gentleman in orange plush. The greengrocer put on a pair of wash-leather gloves to hand the plates with, and stationed himself behind Mr. Tuckle's chair.

'Harris,' said Mr. Tuckle, in a commanding tone. 'Sir,' said the greengrocer.

'Have you got your gloves on?' 'Yes, Sir.'

'Then take the kiver off.'

'Yes, Sir.'

The greengrocer did as he was told, with a show of great humility, and obsequiously handed Mr. Tuckle the carving-knife; in doing which, he accidentally gaped.

'What do you mean by that, Sir?' said Mr. Tuckle, with great asperity.

'I beg your pardon, Sir,' replied the crestfallen greengrocer, 'I didn't mean to do it, Sir; I was up very late last night, Sir.'

'I tell you what my opinion of you is, Harris,' said Mr. Tuckle, with a most impressive air, 'you're a wulgar beast.'

'I hope, gentlemen,' said Harris, 'that you won't be severe with me, gentlemen. I am very much obliged to you indeed, gentlemen, for your patronage, and also for your recommendations, gentlemen, whenever additional assistance in waiting is required. I hope, gentlemen, I give satisfaction.'

'No, you don't, Sir,' said Mr. Tuckle. 'Very far from it, Sir.'

'We consider you an inattentive reskel,' said the gentleman in the orange plush.

'And a low thief,' added the gentleman in the green-foil smalls.

'And an unreclaimable blaygaird,' added the gentleman in purple.

The poor greengrocer bowed very humbly while these little epithets were bestowed upon him, in the true spirit of the very smallest tyranny; and when everybody had said something to show his superiority, Mr. Tuckle proceeded to carve the leg of mutton, and to help the company.

This important business of the evening had hardly commenced, when the door was thrown briskly open, and another gentleman in a light-blue suit, and leaden buttons, made his appearance.

'Against the rules,' said Mr. Tuckle. 'Too late, too late.'

'No, no; positively I couldn't help it,' said the gentleman in blue. 'I appeal to the company. An affair of gallantry now, an appointment at the theayter.'

'Oh, that indeed,' said the gentleman in the orange plush.

'Yes; raly now, honour bright,' said the man in blue. 'I made a promese to fetch our youngest daughter at half-past ten, and she is such an uncauminly fine gal, that I raly hadn't the 'art to disappint her. No offence to the present company, Sir, but a petticut, sir—a petticut, Sir, is irrevokeable.'

'I begin to suspect there's something in that quarter,' said Tuckle, as the new-comer took his seat next Sam, 'I've remarked, once or twice, that she leans very heavy on your shoulder when she gets in and out of the carriage.'

'Oh, raly, raly, Tuckle, you shouldn't,' said the man in blue. 'It's not fair. I may have said to one or two friends that she wos a very divine creechure, and had refused one or two offers without any hobvus cause, but—no, no, no, indeed, Tuckle—before strangers, too—it's not right—you shouldn't. Delicacy, my dear friend, delicacy!' And the man in blue, pulling up his neckerchief, and adjusting his coat cuffs, nodded and frowned as if there were more behind, which he could say if he liked, but was bound in honour to suppress.

The man in blue being a light-haired, stiff-necked, free and easy sort of footman, with a swaggering air and pert face, had attracted Mr. Weller's special attention at first, but when he began to come out in this way, Sam felt more than ever disposed to cultivate his acquaintance; so he launched himself into the conversation at once, with characteristic independence.

'Your health, Sir,' said Sam. 'I like your conversation much. I think it's wery pretty.'

At this the man in blue smiled, as if it were a compliment he was well used to; but looked approvingly on Sam at the same time, and said he hoped he should be better acquainted with him, for without any flattery at all he seemed to have the makings of a very nice fellow about him, and to be just the man after his own heart.

'You're wery good, sir,' said Sam. 'What a lucky feller you are!'

'How do you mean?' inquired the gentleman in blue.

'That 'ere young lady,' replied Sam.'She knows wot's wot, she does. Ah! I see.' Mr. Weller closed one eye, and shook his head from side to side, in a manner which was highly gratifying to the personal vanity of the gentleman in blue.

'I'm afraid your a cunning fellow, Mr. Weller,' said that individual.

'No, no,' said Sam. 'I leave all that 'ere to you. It's a great deal more in your way than mine, as the gen'l'm'n on the right side o' the garden vall said to the man on the wrong un, ven the mad bull vos a-comin' up the lane.'

'Well, well, Mr. Weller,' said the gentleman in blue, 'I think she has remarked my air and manner, Mr. Weller.'

'I should think she couldn't wery well be off o' that,' said Sam.

'Have you any little thing of that kind in hand, sir?' inquired the favoured gentleman in blue, drawing a toothpick from his waistcoat pocket.

'Not exactly,' said Sam. 'There's no daughters at my place, else o' course I should ha' made up to vun on 'em. As it is, I don't think I can do with anythin' under a female markis. I might keep up with a young 'ooman o' large property as hadn't a title, if she made wery fierce love to me. Not else.'

'Of course not, Mr. Weller,' said the gentleman in blue, 'one can't be troubled, you know; and WE know, Mr. Weller—we, who are men of the world—that a good uniform must work its way with the women, sooner or later. In fact, that's the only thing, between you and me, that makes the service worth entering into.'

'Just so,' said Sam. 'That's it, o' course.'

When this confidential dialogue had gone thus far, glasses were placed round, and every gentleman ordered what he liked best, before the public-house shut up. The gentleman in blue, and the man in orange, who were the chief exquisites of the party, ordered 'cold shrub and water,' but with the others, gin-and-water, sweet, appeared to be the favourite beverage. Sam called the greengrocer a 'desp'rate willin,' and ordered a large bowl of punch—two circumstances which seemed to raise him very much in the opinion of the selections.

'Gentlemen,' said the man in blue, with an air of the most consummate dandyism, 'I'll give you the ladies; come.'

'Hear, hear!' said Sam. 'The young mississes.'

Here there was a loud cry of 'Order,' and Mr. John Smauker, as the gentleman who had introduced Mr. Weller into that company, begged to inform him that the word he had just made use of, was unparliamentary.

'Which word was that 'ere, Sir?' inquired Sam. 'Mississes, Sir,' replied Mr. John Smauker, with an alarming frown. 'We don't recognise such distinctions here.'

'Oh, wery good,' said Sam; 'then I'll amend the obserwation and call 'em the dear creeturs, if Blazes vill allow me.'

Some doubt appeared to exist in the mind of the gentleman in the green-foil smalls, whether the chairman could be legally appealed to, as 'Blazes,' but as the company seemed more disposed to stand upon their own rights than his, the question was not raised. The man with the cocked hat breathed short, and looked long at Sam, but apparently thought it as well to say nothing, in case he should get the worst of it. After a short silence, a gentleman in an embroidered coat reaching down to his heels, and a waistcoat of the same which kept one half of his legs warm, stirred his gin-and-water with great energy, and putting himself upon his feet, all at once by a violent effort, said he was desirous of offering a few remarks to the company, whereupon the person in the cocked hat had no doubt that the company would be very happy to hear any remarks that the man in the long coat might wish to offer.

'I feel a great delicacy, gentlemen, in coming for'ard,' said the man in the long coat, 'having the misforchune to be a coachman, and being only admitted as a honorary member of these agreeable swarrys, but I do feel myself bound, gentlemen—drove into a corner, if I may use the expression—to make known an afflicting circumstance which has come to my knowledge; which has happened I may say within the soap of my everyday contemplation. Gentlemen, our friend Mr. Whiffers (everybody looked at the individual in orange), our friend Mr. Whiffers has resigned.'

Universal astonishment fell upon the hearers. Each gentleman looked in his neighbour's face, and then transferred his glance to the upstanding coachman.

'You may well be sapparised, gentlemen,' said the coachman. 'I will not wenchure to state the reasons of this irrepairabel loss to the service, but I will beg Mr. Whiffers to state them himself, for the improvement and imitation of his admiring friends.'

The suggestion being loudly approved of, Mr. Whiffers explained. He said he certainly could have wished to have continued to hold the appointment he had just resigned. The uniform was extremely rich and expensive, the females of the family was most agreeable, and the duties of the situation was not, he was bound to say, too heavy; the principal service that was required of him, being, that he should look out of the hall window as much as possible, in company with another gentleman, who had also resigned. He could have wished to have spared that company the painful and disgusting detail on which he was about to enter, but as the explanation had been demanded of him, he had no alternative but to state, boldly and distinctly, that he had been required to eat cold meat.

It is impossible to conceive the disgust which this avowal awakened in the bosoms of the hearers. Loud cries of 'Shame,' mingled with groans and hisses, prevailed for a quarter of an hour.

Mr. Whiffers then added that he feared a portion of this outrage might be traced to his own forbearing and accommodating disposition. He had a distinct recollection of having once consented to eat salt butter, and he had, moreover, on an occasion of sudden sickness in the house, so far forgotten himself as to carry a coal-scuttle up to the second floor. He trusted he had not lowered himself in the good opinion of his friends by this frank confession of his faults; and he hoped the promptness with which he had resented the last unmanly outrage on his feelings, to which he had referred, would reinstate him in their good opinion, if he had.

Mr. Whiffers's address was responded to, with a shout of admiration, and the health of the interesting martyr was drunk in a most enthusiastic manner; for this, the martyr returned thanks, and proposed their visitor, Mr. Weller—a gentleman whom he had not the pleasure of an intimate acquaintance with, but who was the friend of Mr. John Smauker, which was a sufficient letter of recommendation to any society of gentlemen whatever, or wherever. On this account, he should have been disposed to have given Mr. Weller's health with all the honours, if his friends had been drinking wine; but as they were taking spirits by way of a change, and as it might be inconvenient to empty a tumbler at every toast, he should propose that the honours be understood.

At the conclusion of this speech, everybody took a sip in honour of Sam; and Sam having ladled out, and drunk, two full glasses of punch in honour of himself, returned thanks in a neat speech.

'Wery much obliged to you, old fellers,' said Sam, ladling away at the punch in the most unembarrassed manner possible, 'for this here compliment; which, comin' from sich a quarter, is wery overvelmin'. I've heered a good deal on you as a body, but I will say, that I never thought you was sich uncommon nice men as I find you air. I only hope you'll take care o' yourselves, and not compromise nothin' o' your dignity, which is a wery charmin' thing to see, when one's out a-walkin', and has always made me wery happy to look at, ever since I was a boy about half as high as the brass-headed stick o' my wery respectable friend, Blazes, there. As to the wictim of oppression in the suit o' brimstone, all I can say of him, is, that I hope he'll get jist as good a berth as he deserves; in vitch case it's wery little cold swarry as ever he'll be troubled with agin.'

Here Sam sat down with a pleasant smile, and his speech having been vociferously applauded, the company broke up.

'Wy, you don't mean to say you're a-goin' old feller?' said Sam Weller to his friend, Mr. John Smauker.

'I must, indeed,' said Mr. Smauker; 'I promised Bantam.'

'Oh, wery well,' said Sam; 'that's another thing. P'raps he'd resign if you disappinted him. You ain't a-goin', Blazes?'

'Yes, I am,' said the man with the cocked hat.

'Wot, and leave three-quarters of a bowl of punch behind you!' said Sam; 'nonsense, set down agin.'

Mr. Tuckle was not proof against this invitation. He laid aside the cocked hat and stick which he had just taken up, and said he would have one glass, for good fellowship's sake.

As the gentleman in blue went home the same way as Mr. Tuckle, he was prevailed upon to stop too. When the punch was about half gone, Sam ordered in some oysters from the green-grocer's shop; and the effect of both was so extremely exhilarating, that Mr. Tuckle, dressed out with the cocked hat and stick, danced the frog hornpipe among the shells on the table, while the gentleman in blue played an accompaniment upon an ingenious musical instrument formed of a hair-comb upon a curl-paper. At last, when the punch was all gone, and the night nearly so, they sallied forth to see each other home. Mr. Tuckle no sooner got into the open air, than he was seized with a sudden desire to lie on the curbstone; Sam thought it would be a pity to contradict him, and so let him have his own way. As the cocked hat would have been spoiled if left there, Sam very considerately flattened it down on the head of the gentleman in blue, and putting the big stick in his hand, propped him up against his own street-door, rang the bell, and walked quietly home.

At a much earlier hour next morning than his usual time of rising, Mr. Pickwick walked downstairs completely dressed, and rang the bell.

'Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, when Mr. Weller appeared in reply to the summons, 'shut the door.'

Mr. Weller did so.

'There was an unfortunate occurrence here, last night, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'which gave Mr. Winkle some cause to apprehend violence from Mr. Dowler.'

'So I've heerd from the old lady downstairs, Sir,' replied Sam.

'And I'm sorry to say, Sam,' continued Mr. Pickwick, with a most perplexed countenance, 'that in dread of this violence, Mr. Winkle has gone away.'

'Gone avay!' said Sam.

'Left the house early this morning, without the slightest previous communication with me,' replied Mr. Pickwick. 'And is gone, I know not where.'

'He should ha' stopped and fought it out, Sir,' replied Sam contemptuously. 'It wouldn't take much to settle that 'ere Dowler, Sir.'

'Well, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'I may have my doubts of his great bravery and determination also. But however that may be, Mr. Winkle is gone. He must be found, Sam. Found and brought back to me.' 'And s'pose he won't come back, Sir?' said Sam.

'He must be made, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Who's to do it, Sir?' inquired Sam, with a smile.

'You,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'Wery good, Sir.'

With these words Mr. Weller left the room, and immediately afterwards was heard to shut the street door. In two hours' time he returned with so much coolness as if he had been despatched on the most ordinary message possible, and brought the information that an individual, in every respect answering Mr. Winkle's description, had gone over to Bristol that morning, by the branch coach from the Royal Hotel.

'Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, grasping his hand, 'you're a capital fellow; an invaluable fellow. You must follow him, Sam.'

'Cert'nly, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller.

'The instant you discover him, write to me immediately, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'If he attempts to run away from you, knock him down, or lock him up. You have my full authority, Sam.'

'I'll be wery careful, sir,' rejoined Sam.

'You'll tell him,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'that I am highly excited, highly displeased, and naturally indignant, at the very extraordinary course he has thought proper to pursue.'

'I will, Sir,' replied Sam.

'You'll tell him,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'that if he does not come back to this very house, with you, he will come back with me, for I will come and fetch him.'

'I'll mention that 'ere, Sir,' rejoined Sam.

'You think you can find him, Sam?' said Mr. Pickwick, looking earnestly in his face.

'Oh, I'll find him if he's anyvere,' rejoined Sam, with great confidence.

'Very well,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Then the sooner you go the better.'

With these instructions, Mr. Pickwick placed a sum of money in the hands of his faithful servitor, and ordered him to start for Bristol immediately, in pursuit of the fugitive.

Sam put a few necessaries in a carpet-bag, and was ready for starting. He stopped when he had got to the end of the passage, and walking quietly back, thrust his head in at the parlour door.

'Sir,' whispered Sam.

'Well, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'I fully understands my instructions, do I, Sir?' inquired Sam.

'I hope so,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'It's reg'larly understood about the knockin' down, is it, Sir?' inquired Sam.

'Perfectly,' replied Pickwick. 'Thoroughly. Do what you think necessary. You have my orders.'

Sam gave a nod of intelligence, and withdrawing his head from the door, set forth on his pilgrimage with a light heart.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. HOW Mr. WINKLE, WHEN HE STEPPED OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN,

WALKED GENTLY AND COMFORTABLY INTO THE FIRE

The ill-starred gentleman who had been the unfortunate cause of the unusual noise and disturbance which alarmed the inhabitants of the Royal Crescent in manner and form already described, after passing a night of great confusion and anxiety, left the roof beneath which his friends still slumbered, bound he knew not whither. The excellent and considerate feelings which prompted Mr. Winkle to take this step can never be too highly appreciated or too warmly extolled. 'If,' reasoned Mr. Winkle with himself—'if this Dowler attempts (as I have no doubt he will) to carry into execution his threat of personal violence against myself, it will be incumbent on me to call him out. He has a wife; that wife is attached to, and dependent on him. Heavens! If I should kill him in the blindness of my wrath, what would be my feelings ever afterwards!' This painful consideration operated so powerfully on the feelings of the humane young man, as to cause his knees to knock together, and his countenance to exhibit alarming manifestations of inward emotion. Impelled by such reflections, he grasped his carpet-bag, and creeping stealthily downstairs, shut the detestable street door with as little noise as possible, and walked off. Bending his steps towards the Royal Hotel, he found a coach on the point of starting for Bristol, and, thinking Bristol as good a place for his purpose as any other he could go to, he mounted the box, and reached his place of destination in such time as the pair of horses, who went the whole stage and back again, twice a day or more, could be reasonably supposed to arrive there. He took up his quarters at the Bush, and designing to postpone any communication by letter with Mr. Pickwick until it was probable that Mr. Dowler's wrath might have in some degree evaporated, walked forth to view the city, which struck him as being a shade more dirty than any place he had ever seen. Having inspected the docks and shipping, and viewed the cathedral, he inquired his way to Clifton, and being directed thither, took the route which was pointed out to him. But as the pavements of Bristol are not the widest or cleanest upon earth, so its streets are not altogether the straightest or least intricate; and Mr. Winkle, being greatly puzzled by their manifold windings and twistings, looked about him for a decent shop in which he could apply afresh for counsel and instruction.

His eye fell upon a newly-painted tenement which had been recently converted into something between a shop and a private house, and which a red lamp, projecting over the fanlight of the street door, would have sufficiently announced as the residence of a medical practitioner, even if the word 'Surgery' had not been inscribed in golden characters on a wainscot ground, above the window of what, in times bygone, had been the front parlour. Thinking this an eligible place wherein to make his inquiries, Mr. Winkle stepped into the little shop where the gilt-labelled drawers and bottles were; and finding nobody there, knocked with a half-crown on the counter, to attract the attention of anybody who might happen to be in the back parlour, which he judged to be the innermost and peculiar sanctum of the establishment, from the repetition of the word surgery on the door—painted in white letters this time, by way of taking off the monotony.

At the first knock, a sound, as of persons fencing with fire-irons, which had until now been very audible, suddenly ceased; at the second, a studious-looking young gentleman in green spectacles, with a very large book in his hand, glided quietly into the shop, and stepping behind the counter, requested to know the visitor's pleasure.

'I am sorry to trouble you, Sir,' said Mr. Winkle, 'but will you have the goodness to direct me to—'

'Ha! ha! ha!' roared the studious young gentleman, throwing the large book up into the air, and catching it with great dexterity at the very moment when it threatened to smash to atoms all the bottles on the counter. 'Here's a start!'

There was, without doubt; for Mr. Winkle was so very much astonished at the extraordinary behaviour of the medical gentleman, that he involuntarily retreated towards the door, and looked very much disturbed at his strange reception.

'What, don't you know me?' said the medical gentleman. Mr. Winkle murmured, in reply, that he had not that pleasure.

'Why, then,' said the medical gentleman, 'there are hopes for me yet; I may attend half the old women in Bristol, if I've decent luck. Get out, you mouldy old villain, get out!' With this adjuration, which was addressed to the large book, the medical gentleman kicked the volume with remarkable agility to the farther end of the shop, and, pulling off his green spectacles, grinned the identical grin of Robert Sawyer, Esquire, formerly of Guy's Hospital in the Borough, with a private residence in Lant Street.

'You don't mean to say you weren't down upon me?' said Mr. Bob Sawyer, shaking Mr. Winkle's hand with friendly warmth.

'Upon my word I was not,' replied Mr. Winkle, returning his pressure.

'I wonder you didn't see the name,' said Bob Sawyer, calling his friend's attention to the outer door, on which, in the same white paint, were traced the words 'Sawyer, late Nockemorf.'

'It never caught my eye,' returned Mr. Winkle.

'Lord, if I had known who you were, I should have rushed out, and caught you in my arms,' said Bob Sawyer; 'but upon my life, I thought you were the King's-taxes.'

'No!' said Mr. Winkle.

'I did, indeed,' responded Bob Sawyer, 'and I was just going to say that I wasn't at home, but if you'd leave a message I'd be sure to give it to myself; for he don't know me; no more does the Lighting and Paving. I think the Church-rates guesses who I am, and I know the Water-works does, because I drew a tooth of his when I first came down here. But come in, come in!' Chattering in this way, Mr. Bob Sawyer pushed Mr. Winkle into the back room, where, amusing himself by boring little circular caverns in the chimney-piece with a red-hot poker, sat no less a person than Mr. Benjamin Allen.

'Well!' said Mr. Winkle. 'This is indeed a pleasure I did not expect. What a very nice place you have here!'

'Pretty well, pretty well,' replied Bob Sawyer. 'I PASSED, soon after that precious party, and my friends came down with the needful for this business; so I put on a black suit of clothes, and a pair of spectacles, and came here to look as solemn as I could.'

'And a very snug little business you have, no doubt?' said Mr. Winkle knowingly.

'Very,' replied Bob Sawyer. 'So snug, that at the end of a few years you might put all the profits in a wine-glass, and cover 'em over with a gooseberry leaf.' 'You cannot surely mean that?' said Mr. Winkle. 'The stock itself—' 'Dummies, my dear boy,' said Bob Sawyer; 'half the drawers have nothing in 'em, and the other half don't open.'

'Nonsense!' said Mr. Winkle.

'Fact—honour!' returned Bob Sawyer, stepping out into the shop, and demonstrating the veracity of the assertion by divers hard pulls at the little gilt knobs on the counterfeit drawers. 'Hardly anything real in the shop but the leeches, and THEY are second-hand.'

'I shouldn't have thought it!' exclaimed Mr. Winkle, much surprised.

'I hope not,' replied Bob Sawyer, 'else where's the use of appearances, eh? But what will you take? Do as we do? That's right. Ben, my fine fellow, put your hand into the cupboard, and bring out the patent digester.'

Mr. Benjamin Allen smiled his readiness, and produced from the closet at his elbow a black bottle half full of brandy.

'You don't take water, of course?' said Bob Sawyer.

'Thank you,' replied Mr. Winkle. 'It's rather early. I should like to qualify it, if you have no objection.'

'None in the least, if you can reconcile it to your conscience,' replied Bob Sawyer, tossing off, as he spoke, a glass of the liquor with great relish. 'Ben, the pipkin!'

Mr. Benjamin Allen drew forth, from the same hiding-place, a small brass pipkin, which Bob Sawyer observed he prided himself upon, particularly because it looked so business-like. The water in the professional pipkin having been made to boil, in course of time, by various little shovelfuls of coal, which Mr. Bob Sawyer took out of a practicable window-seat, labelled 'Soda Water,' Mr. Winkle adulterated his brandy; and the conversation was becoming general, when it was interrupted by the entrance into the shop of a boy, in a sober gray livery and a gold-laced hat, with a small covered basket under his arm, whom Mr. Bob Sawyer immediately hailed with, 'Tom, you vagabond, come here.'

The boy presented himself accordingly.

'You've been stopping to "over" all the posts in Bristol, you idle young scamp!' said Mr. Bob Sawyer.

'No, sir, I haven't,' replied the boy.

'You had better not!' said Mr. Bob Sawyer, with a threatening aspect. 'Who do you suppose will ever employ a professional man, when they see his boy playing at marbles in the gutter, or flying the garter in the horse-road? Have you no feeling for your profession, you groveller? Did you leave all the medicine?' 'Yes, Sir.'

'The powders for the child, at the large house with the new family, and the pills to be taken four times a day at the ill-tempered old gentleman's with the gouty leg?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Then shut the door, and mind the shop.'

'Come,' said Mr. Winkle, as the boy retired, 'things are not quite so bad as you would have me believe, either. There is SOME medicine to be sent out.'

Mr. Bob Sawyer peeped into the shop to see that no stranger was within hearing, and leaning forward to Mr. Winkle, said, in a low tone—

'He leaves it all at the wrong houses.'

Mr. Winkle looked perplexed, and Bob Sawyer and his friend laughed.

'Don't you see?' said Bob. 'He goes up to a house, rings the area bell, pokes a packet of medicine without a direction into the servant's hand, and walks off. Servant takes it into the dining-parlour; master opens it, and reads the label: "Draught to be taken at bedtime—pills as before—lotion as usual—the powder. From Sawyer's, late Nockemorf's. Physicians' prescriptions carefully prepared," and all the rest of it. Shows it to his wife—she reads the label; it goes down to the servants—THEY read the label. Next day, boy calls: "Very sorry—his mistake—immense business—great many parcels to deliver—Mr. Sawyer's compliments—late Nockemorf." The name gets known, and that's the thing, my boy, in the medical way. Bless your heart, old fellow, it's better than all the advertising in the world. We have got one four-ounce bottle that's been to half the houses in Bristol, and hasn't done yet.'

'Dear me, I see,' observed Mr. Winkle; 'what an excellent plan!'

'Oh, Ben and I have hit upon a dozen such,' replied Bob Sawyer, with great glee. 'The lamplighter has eighteenpence a week to pull the night-bell for ten minutes every time he comes round; and my boy always rushes into the church just before the psalms, when the people have got nothing to do but look about 'em, and calls me out, with horror and dismay depicted on his countenance. "Bless my soul," everybody says, "somebody taken suddenly ill! Sawyer, late Nockemorf, sent for. What a business that young man has!"'

At the termination of this disclosure of some of the mysteries of medicine, Mr. Bob Sawyer and his friend, Ben Allen, threw themselves back in their respective chairs, and laughed boisterously. When they had enjoyed the joke to their heart's content, the discourse changed to topics in which Mr. Winkle was more immediately interested.

We think we have hinted elsewhere, that Mr. Benjamin Allen had a way of becoming sentimental after brandy. The case is not a peculiar one, as we ourself can testify, having, on a few occasions, had to deal with patients who have been afflicted in a similar manner. At this precise period of his existence, Mr. Benjamin Allen had perhaps a greater predisposition to maudlinism than he had ever known before; the cause of which malady was briefly this. He had been staying nearly three weeks with Mr. Bob Sawyer; Mr. Bob Sawyer was not remarkable for temperance, nor was Mr. Benjamin Allen for the ownership of a very strong head; the consequence was that, during the whole space of time just mentioned, Mr. Benjamin Allen had been wavering between intoxication partial, and intoxication complete.

'My dear friend,' said Mr. Ben Allen, taking advantage of Mr. Bob Sawyer's temporary absence behind the counter, whither he had retired to dispense some of the second-hand leeches, previously referred to; 'my dear friend, I am very miserable.'

Mr. Winkle professed his heartfelt regret to hear it, and begged to know whether he could do anything to alleviate the sorrows of the suffering student.

'Nothing, my dear boy, nothing,' said Ben. 'You recollect Arabella, Winkle? My sister Arabella—a little girl, Winkle, with black eyes—when we were down at Wardle's? I don't know whether you happened to notice her—a nice little girl, Winkle. Perhaps my features may recall her countenance to your recollection?'

Mr. Winkle required nothing to recall the charming Arabella to his mind; and it was rather fortunate he did not, for the features of her brother Benjamin would unquestionably have proved but an indifferent refresher to his memory. He answered, with as much calmness as he could assume, that he perfectly remembered the young lady referred to, and sincerely trusted she was in good health.

'Our friend Bob is a delightful fellow, Winkle,' was the only reply of Mr. Ben Allen.

'Very,' said Mr. Winkle, not much relishing this close connection of the two names.

'I designed 'em for each other; they were made for each other, sent into the world for each other, born for each other, Winkle,' said Mr. Ben Allen, setting down his glass with emphasis. 'There's a special destiny in the matter, my dear sir; there's only five years' difference between 'em, and both their birthdays are in August.'

Mr. Winkle was too anxious to hear what was to follow to express much wonderment at this extraordinary coincidence, marvellous as it was; so Mr. Ben Allen, after a tear or two, went on to say that, notwithstanding all his esteem and respect and veneration for his friend, Arabella had unaccountably and undutifully evinced the most determined antipathy to his person.

'And I think,' said Mr. Ben Allen, in conclusion. 'I think there's a prior attachment.'

'Have you any idea who the object of it might be?' asked Mr. Winkle, with great trepidation.

Mr. Ben Allen seized the poker, flourished it in a warlike manner above his head, inflicted a savage blow on an imaginary skull, and wound up by saying, in a very expressive manner, that he only wished he could guess; that was all.

'I'd show him what I thought of him,' said Mr. Ben Allen. And round went the poker again, more fiercely than before.

All this was, of course, very soothing to the feelings of Mr. Winkle, who remained silent for a few minutes; but at length mustered up resolution to inquire whether Miss Allen was in Kent.

'No, no,' said Mr. Ben Allen, laying aside the poker, and looking very cunning; 'I didn't think Wardle's exactly the place for a headstrong girl; so, as I am her natural protector and guardian, our parents being dead, I have brought her down into this part of the country to spend a few months at an old aunt's, in a nice, dull, close place. I think that will cure her, my boy. If it doesn't, I'll take her abroad for a little while, and see what that'll do.'

'Oh, the aunt's is in Bristol, is it?' faltered Mr. Winkle.

'No, no, not in Bristol,' replied Mr. Ben Allen, jerking his thumb over his right shoulder; 'over that way—down there. But, hush, here's Bob. Not a word, my dear friend, not a word.'

Short as this conversation was, it roused in Mr. Winkle the highest degree of excitement and anxiety. The suspected prior attachment rankled in his heart. Could he be the object of it? Could it be for him that the fair Arabella had looked scornfully on the sprightly Bob Sawyer, or had he a successful rival? He determined to see her, cost what it might; but here an insurmountable objection presented itself, for whether the explanatory 'over that way,' and 'down there,' of Mr. Ben Allen, meant three miles off, or thirty, or three hundred, he could in no wise guess.

But he had no opportunity of pondering over his love just then, for Bob Sawyer's return was the immediate precursor of the arrival of a meat-pie from the baker's, of which that gentleman insisted on his staying to partake. The cloth was laid by an occasional charwoman, who officiated in the capacity of Mr. Bob Sawyer's housekeeper; and a third knife and fork having been borrowed from the mother of the boy in the gray livery (for Mr. Sawyer's domestic arrangements were as yet conducted on a limited scale), they sat down to dinner; the beer being served up, as Mr. Sawyer remarked, 'in its native pewter.'

After dinner, Mr. Bob Sawyer ordered in the largest mortar in the shop, and proceeded to brew a reeking jorum of rum-punch therein, stirring up and amalgamating the materials with a pestle in a very creditable and apothecary-like manner. Mr. Sawyer, being a bachelor, had only one tumbler in the house, which was assigned to Mr. Winkle as a compliment to the visitor, Mr. Ben Allen being accommodated with a funnel with a cork in the narrow end, and Bob Sawyer contented himself with one of those wide-lipped crystal vessels inscribed with a variety of cabalistic characters, in which chemists are wont to measure out their liquid drugs in compounding prescriptions. These preliminaries adjusted, the punch was tasted, and pronounced excellent; and it having been arranged that Bob Sawyer and Ben Allen should be considered at liberty to fill twice to Mr. Winkle's once, they started fair, with great satisfaction and good-fellowship.

There was no singing, because Mr. Bob Sawyer said it wouldn't look professional; but to make amends for this deprivation there was so much talking and laughing that it might have been heard, and very likely was, at the end of the street. Which conversation materially lightened the hours and improved the mind of Mr. Bob Sawyer's boy, who, instead of devoting the evening to his ordinary occupation of writing his name on the counter, and rubbing it out again, peeped through the glass door, and thus listened and looked on at the same time.

The mirth of Mr. Bob Sawyer was rapidly ripening into the furious, Mr. Ben Allen was fast relapsing into the sentimental, and the punch had well-nigh disappeared altogether, when the boy hastily running in, announced that a young woman had just come over, to say that Sawyer late Nockemorf was wanted directly, a couple of streets off. This broke up the party. Mr. Bob Sawyer, understanding the message, after some twenty repetitions, tied a wet cloth round his head to sober himself, and, having partially succeeded, put on his green spectacles and issued forth. Resisting all entreaties to stay till he came back, and finding it quite impossible to engage Mr. Ben Allen in any intelligible conversation on the subject nearest his heart, or indeed on any other, Mr. Winkle took his departure, and returned to the Bush.

The anxiety of his mind, and the numerous meditations which Arabella had awakened, prevented his share of the mortar of punch producing that effect upon him which it would have had under other circumstances. So, after taking a glass of soda-water and brandy at the bar, he turned into the coffee-room, dispirited rather than elevated by the occurrences of the evening. Sitting in front of the fire, with his back towards him, was a tallish gentleman in a greatcoat: the only other occupant of the room. It was rather a cool evening for the season of the year, and the gentleman drew his chair aside to afford the new-comer a sight of the fire. What were Mr. Winkle's feelings when, in doing so, he disclosed to view the face and figure of the vindictive and sanguinary Dowler!

Mr. Winkle's first impulse was to give a violent pull at the nearest bell-handle, but that unfortunately happened to be immediately behind Mr. Dowler's head. He had made one step towards it, before he checked himself. As he did so, Mr. Dowler very hastily drew back.

'Mr. Winkle, Sir. Be calm. Don't strike me. I won't bear it. A blow! Never!' said Mr. Dowler, looking meeker than Mr. Winkle had expected in a gentleman of his ferocity.

'A blow, Sir?' stammered Mr. Winkle.

'A blow, Sir,' replied Dowler. 'Compose your feelings. Sit down. Hear me.'

'Sir,' said Mr. Winkle, trembling from head to foot, 'before I consent to sit down beside, or opposite you, without the presence of a waiter, I must be secured by some further understanding. You used a threat against me last night, Sir, a dreadful threat, Sir.' Here Mr. Winkle turned very pale indeed, and stopped short.

'I did,' said Dowler, with a countenance almost as white as Mr. Winkle's. 'Circumstances were suspicious. They have been explained. I respect your bravery. Your feeling is upright. Conscious innocence. There's my hand. Grasp it.'

'Really, Sir,' said Mr. Winkle, hesitating whether to give his hand or not, and almost fearing that it was demanded in order that he might be taken at an advantage, 'really, Sir, I—'

'I know what you mean,' interposed Dowler. 'You feel aggrieved. Very natural. So should I. I was wrong. I beg your pardon. Be friendly. Forgive me.' With this, Dowler fairly forced his hand upon Mr. Winkle, and shaking it with the utmost vehemence, declared he was a fellow of extreme spirit, and he had a higher opinion of him than ever.

'Now,' said Dowler, 'sit down. Relate it all. How did you find me? When did you follow? Be frank. Tell me.'

'It's quite accidental,' replied Mr. Winkle, greatly perplexed by the curious and unexpected nature of the interview. 'Quite.'

'Glad of it,' said Dowler. 'I woke this morning. I had forgotten my threat. I laughed at the accident. I felt friendly. I said so.'

'To whom?' inquired Mr. Winkle.

'To Mrs. Dowler. "You made a vow," said she. "I did," said I. "It was a rash one," said she. "It was," said I. "I'll apologise. Where is he?"'

'Who?' inquired Mr. Winkle.

'You,' replied Dowler. 'I went downstairs. You were not to be found. Pickwick looked gloomy. Shook his head. Hoped no violence would be committed. I saw it all. You felt yourself insulted. You had gone, for a friend perhaps. Possibly for pistols. "High spirit," said I. "I admire him."'

Mr. Winkle coughed, and beginning to see how the land lay, assumed a look of importance.

'I left a note for you,' resumed Dowler. 'I said I was sorry. So I was. Pressing business called me here. You were not satisfied. You followed. You required a verbal explanation. You were right. It's all over now. My business is finished. I go back to-morrow. Join me.'

As Dowler progressed in his explanation, Mr. Winkle's countenance grew more and more dignified. The mysterious nature of the commencement of their conversation was explained; Mr. Dowler had as great an objection to duelling as himself; in short, this blustering and awful personage was one of the most egregious cowards in existence, and interpreting Mr. Winkle's absence through the medium of his own fears, had taken the same step as himself, and prudently retired until all excitement of feeling should have subsided.

As the real state of the case dawned upon Mr. Winkle's mind, he looked very terrible, and said he was perfectly satisfied; but at the same time, said so with an air that left Mr. Dowler no alternative but to infer that if he had not been, something most horrible and destructive must inevitably have occurred. Mr. Dowler appeared to be impressed with a becoming sense of Mr. Winkle's magnanimity and condescension; and the two belligerents parted for the night, with many protestations of eternal friendship.

About half-past twelve o'clock, when Mr. Winkle had been revelling some twenty minutes in the full luxury of his first sleep, he was suddenly awakened by a loud knocking at his chamber door, which, being repeated with increased vehemence, caused him to start up in bed, and inquire who was there, and what the matter was.

'Please, Sir, here's a young man which says he must see you directly,' responded the voice of the chambermaid.

'A young man!' exclaimed Mr. Winkle.

'No mistake about that 'ere, Sir,' replied another voice through the keyhole; 'and if that wery same interestin' young creetur ain't let in vithout delay, it's wery possible as his legs vill enter afore his countenance.' The young man gave a gentle kick at one of the lower panels of the door, after he had given utterance to this hint, as if to add force and point to the remark.

'Is that you, Sam?' inquired Mr. Winkle, springing out of bed.

'Quite unpossible to identify any gen'l'm'n vith any degree o' mental satisfaction, vithout lookin' at him, Sir,' replied the voice dogmatically.

Mr. Winkle, not much doubting who the young man was, unlocked the door; which he had no sooner done than Mr. Samuel Weller entered with great precipitation, and carefully relocking it on the inside, deliberately put the key in his waistcoat pocket; and, after surveying Mr. Winkle from head to foot, said—

'You're a wery humorous young gen'l'm'n, you air, Sir!'

'What do you mean by this conduct, Sam?' inquired Mr. Winkle indignantly. 'Get out, sir, this instant. What do you mean, Sir?'

'What do I mean,' retorted Sam; 'come, Sir, this is rayther too rich, as the young lady said when she remonstrated with the pastry-cook, arter he'd sold her a pork pie as had got nothin' but fat inside. What do I mean! Well, that ain't a bad 'un, that ain't.'

'Unlock that door, and leave this room immediately, Sir,' said Mr. Winkle.

'I shall leave this here room, sir, just precisely at the wery same moment as you leaves it,' responded Sam, speaking in a forcible manner, and seating himself with perfect gravity. 'If I find it necessary to carry you away, pick-a-back, o' course I shall leave it the least bit o' time possible afore you; but allow me to express a hope as you won't reduce me to extremities; in saying wich, I merely quote wot the nobleman said to the fractious pennywinkle, ven he vouldn't come out of his shell by means of a pin, and he conseqvently began to be afeered that he should be obliged to crack him in the parlour door.' At the end of this address, which was unusually lengthy for him, Mr. Weller planted his hands on his knees, and looked full in Mr. Winkle's face, with an expression of countenance which showed that he had not the remotest intention of being trifled with.

'You're a amiably-disposed young man, Sir, I don't think,' resumed Mr. Weller, in a tone of moral reproof, 'to go inwolving our precious governor in all sorts o' fanteegs, wen he's made up his mind to go through everythink for principle. You're far worse nor Dodson, Sir; and as for Fogg, I consider him a born angel to you!' Mr. Weller having accompanied this last sentiment with an emphatic slap on each knee, folded his arms with a look of great disgust, and threw himself back in his chair, as if awaiting the criminal's defence.

'My good fellow,' said Mr. Winkle, extending his hand—his teeth chattering all the time he spoke, for he had been standing, during the whole of Mr. Weller's lecture, in his night-gear—'my good fellow, I respect your attachment to my excellent friend, and I am very sorry indeed to have added to his causes for disquiet. There, Sam, there!'

'Well,' said Sam, rather sulkily, but giving the proffered hand a respectful shake at the same time—'well, so you ought to be, and I am very glad to find you air; for, if I can help it, I won't have him put upon by nobody, and that's all about it.'

'Certainly not, Sam,' said Mr. Winkle. 'There! Now go to bed, Sam, and we'll talk further about this in the morning.'

'I'm wery sorry,' said Sam, 'but I can't go to bed.'

'Not go to bed!' repeated Mr. Winkle.

'No,' said Sam, shaking his head. 'Can't be done.'

'You don't mean to say you're going back to-night, Sam?' urged Mr. Winkle, greatly surprised.

'Not unless you particklerly wish it,' replied Sam; 'but I mustn't leave this here room. The governor's orders wos peremptory.'

'Nonsense, Sam,' said Mr. Winkle, 'I must stop here two or three days; and more than that, Sam, you must stop here too, to assist me in gaining an interview with a young lady—Miss Allen, Sam; you remember her—whom I must and will see before I leave Bristol.'

But in reply to each of these positions, Sam shook his head with great firmness, and energetically replied, 'It can't be done.'

After a great deal of argument and representation on the part of Mr. Winkle, however, and a full disclosure of what had passed in the interview with Dowler, Sam began to waver; and at length a compromise was effected, of which the following were the main and principal conditions:—

That Sam should retire, and leave Mr. Winkle in the undisturbed possession of his apartment, on the condition that he had permission to lock the door on the outside, and carry off the key; provided always, that in the event of an alarm of fire, or other dangerous contingency, the door should be instantly unlocked. That a letter should be written to Mr. Pickwick early next morning, and forwarded per Dowler, requesting his consent to Sam and Mr. Winkle's remaining at Bristol, for the purpose and with the object already assigned, and begging an answer by the next coach—, if favourable, the aforesaid parties to remain accordingly, and if not, to return to Bath immediately on the receipt thereof. And, lastly, that Mr. Winkle should be understood as distinctly pledging himself not to resort to the window, fireplace, or other surreptitious mode of escape in the meanwhile. These stipulations having been concluded, Sam locked the door and departed.

He had nearly got downstairs, when he stopped, and drew the key from his pocket.

'I quite forgot about the knockin' down,' said Sam, half turning back. 'The governor distinctly said it was to be done. Amazin' stupid o' me, that 'ere! Never mind,' said Sam, brightening up, 'it's easily done to-morrow, anyvays.'

Apparently much consoled by this reflection, Mr. Weller once more deposited the key in his pocket, and descending the remainder of the stairs without any fresh visitations of conscience, was soon, in common with the other inmates of the house, buried in profound repose.

CHAPTER XXXIX. Mr. SAMUEL WELLER, BEING INTRUSTED WITH A MISSION OF

LOVE, PROCEEDS TO EXECUTE IT; WITH WHAT SUCCESS WILL HEREINAFTER APPEAR

During the whole of next day, Sam kept Mr. Winkle steadily in sight, fully determined not to take his eyes off him for one instant, until he should receive express instructions from the fountain-head. However disagreeable Sam's very close watch and great vigilance were to Mr. Winkle, he thought it better to bear with them, than, by any act of violent opposition, to hazard being carried away by force, which Mr. Weller more than once strongly hinted was the line of conduct that a strict sense of duty prompted him to pursue. There is little reason to doubt that Sam would very speedily have quieted his scruples, by bearing Mr. Winkle back to Bath, bound hand and foot, had not Mr. Pickwick's prompt attention to the note, which Dowler had undertaken to deliver, forestalled any such proceeding. In short, at eight o'clock in the evening, Mr. Pickwick himself walked into the coffee-room of the Bush Tavern, and told Sam with a smile, to his very great relief, that he had done quite right, and it was unnecessary for him to mount guard any longer.

'I thought it better to come myself,' said Mr. Pickwick, addressing Mr. Winkle, as Sam disencumbered him of his great-coat and travelling-shawl, 'to ascertain, before I gave my consent to Sam's employment in this matter, that you are quite in earnest and serious, with respect to this young lady.'

'Serious, from my heart—from my soul!'returned Mr. Winkle, with great energy.

'Remember,' said Mr. Pickwick, with beaming eyes, 'we met her at our excellent and hospitable friend's, Winkle. It would be an ill return to tamper lightly, and without due consideration, with this young lady's affections. I'll not allow that, sir. I'll not allow it.'

'I have no such intention, indeed,' exclaimed Mr. Winkle warmly. 'I have considered the matter well, for a long time, and I feel that my happiness is bound up in her.'

'That's wot we call tying it up in a small parcel, sir,' interposed Mr. Weller, with an agreeable smile.

Mr. Winkle looked somewhat stern at this interruption, and Mr. Pickwick angrily requested his attendant not to jest with one of the best feelings of our nature; to which Sam replied, 'That he wouldn't, if he was aware on it; but there were so many on 'em, that he hardly know'd which was the best ones wen he heerd 'em mentioned.'

Mr. Winkle then recounted what had passed between himself and Mr. Ben Allen, relative to Arabella; stated that his object was to gain an interview with the young lady, and make a formal disclosure of his passion; and declared his conviction, founded on certain dark hints and mutterings of the aforesaid Ben, that, wherever she was at present immured, it was somewhere near the Downs. And this was his whole stock of knowledge or suspicion on the subject.

With this very slight clue to guide him, it was determined that Mr. Weller should start next morning on an expedition of discovery; it was also arranged that Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Winkle, who were less confident of their powers, should parade the town meanwhile, and accidentally drop in upon Mr. Bob Sawyer in the course of the day, in the hope of seeing or hearing something of the young lady's whereabouts.

Accordingly, next morning, Sam Weller issued forth upon his quest, in no way daunted by the very discouraging prospect before him; and away he walked, up one street and down another—we were going to say, up one hill and down another, only it's all uphill at Clifton—without meeting with anything or anybody that tended to throw the faintest light on the matter in hand. Many were the colloquies into which Sam entered with grooms who were airing horses on roads, and nursemaids who were airing children in lanes; but nothing could Sam elicit from either the first-mentioned or the last, which bore the slightest reference to the object of his artfully-prosecuted inquiries. There were a great many young ladies in a great many houses, the greater part whereof were shrewdly suspected by the male and female domestics to be deeply attached to somebody, or perfectly ready to become so, if opportunity afforded. But as none among these young ladies was Miss Arabella Allen, the information left Sam at exactly the old point of wisdom at which he had stood before.

Sam struggled across the Downs against a good high wind, wondering whether it was always necessary to hold your hat on with both hands in that part of the country, and came to a shady by-place, about which were sprinkled several little villas of quiet and secluded appearance. Outside a stable door at the bottom of a long back lane without a thoroughfare, a groom in undress was idling about, apparently persuading himself that he was doing something with a spade and a wheel-barrow. We may remark, in this place, that we have scarcely ever seen a groom near a stable, in his lazy moments, who has not been, to a greater or less extent, the victim of this singular delusion.

Sam thought he might as well talk to this groom as to any one else, especially as he was very tired with walking, and there was a good large stone just opposite the wheel-barrow; so he strolled down the lane, and, seating himself on the stone, opened a conversation with the ease and freedom for which he was remarkable.

'Mornin', old friend,' said Sam.

'Arternoon, you mean,' replied the groom, casting a surly look at Sam.

'You're wery right, old friend,' said Sam; 'I DO mean arternoon. How are you?'

'Why, I don't find myself much the better for seeing of you,' replied the ill-tempered groom.

'That's wery odd—that is,' said Sam, 'for you look so uncommon cheerful, and seem altogether so lively, that it does vun's heart good to see you.'

The surly groom looked surlier still at this, but not sufficiently so to produce any effect upon Sam, who immediately inquired, with a countenance of great anxiety, whether his master's name was not Walker.

'No, it ain't,' said the groom.

'Nor Brown, I s'pose?' said Sam.

'No, it ain't.'

'Nor Vilson?'

'No; nor that @ither,' said the groom.

'Vell,' replied Sam, 'then I'm mistaken, and he hasn't got the honour o' my acquaintance, which I thought he had. Don't wait here out o' compliment to me,' said Sam, as the groom wheeled in the barrow, and prepared to shut the gate. 'Ease afore ceremony, old boy; I'll excuse you.'

'I'd knock your head off for half-a-crown,' said the surly groom, bolting one half of the gate.

'Couldn't afford to have it done on those terms,' rejoined Sam. 'It 'ud be worth a life's board wages at least, to you, and 'ud be cheap at that. Make my compliments indoors. Tell 'em not to vait dinner for me, and say they needn't mind puttin' any by, for it'll be cold afore I come in.'

In reply to this, the groom waxing very wroth, muttered a desire to damage somebody's person; but disappeared without carrying it into execution, slamming the door angrily after him, and wholly unheeding Sam's affectionate request, that he would leave him a lock of his hair before he went.

Sam continued to sit on the large stone, meditating upon what was best to be done, and revolving in his mind a plan for knocking at all the doors within five miles of Bristol, taking them at a hundred and fifty or two hundred a day, and endeavouring to find Miss Arabella by that expedient, when accident all of a sudden threw in his way what he might have sat there for a twelvemonth and yet not found without it.

Into the lane where he sat, there opened three or four garden gates, belonging to as many houses, which though detached from each other, were only separated by their gardens. As these were large and long, and well planted with trees, the houses were not only at some distance off, but the greater part of them were nearly concealed from view. Sam was sitting with his eyes fixed upon the dust-heap outside the next gate to that by which the groom had disappeared, profoundly turning over in his mind the difficulties of his present undertaking, when the gate opened, and a female servant came out into the lane to shake some bedside carpets.

Sam was so very busy with his own thoughts, that it is probable he would have taken no more notice of the young woman than just raising his head and remarking that she had a very neat and pretty figure, if his feelings of gallantry had not been most strongly roused by observing that she had no one to help her, and that the carpets seemed too heavy for her single strength. Mr. Weller was a gentleman of great gallantry in his own way, and he no sooner remarked this circumstance than he hastily rose from the large stone, and advanced towards her.

'My dear,' said Sam, sliding up with an air of great respect, 'you'll spile that wery pretty figure out o' all perportion if you shake them carpets by yourself. Let me help you.'

The young lady, who had been coyly affecting not to know that a gentleman was so near, turned round as Sam spoke—no doubt (indeed she said so, afterwards) to decline this offer from a perfect stranger—when instead of speaking, she started back, and uttered a half-suppressed scream. Sam was scarcely less staggered, for in the countenance of the well-shaped female servant, he beheld the very features of his valentine, the pretty housemaid from Mr. Nupkins's.

'Wy, Mary, my dear!' said Sam.

'Lauk, Mr. Weller,' said Mary, 'how you do frighten one!'

Sam made no verbal answer to this complaint, nor can we precisely say what reply he did make. We merely know that after a short pause Mary said, 'Lor, do adun, Mr. Weller!' and that his hat had fallen off a few moments before—from both of which tokens we should be disposed to infer that one kiss, or more, had passed between the parties.

'Why, how did you come here?' said Mary, when the conversation to which this interruption had been offered, was resumed.

'O' course I came to look arter you, my darlin',' replied Mr. Weller; for once permitting his passion to get the better of his veracity.

'And how did you know I was here?' inquired Mary. 'Who could have told you that I took another service at Ipswich, and that they afterwards moved all the way here? Who COULD have told you that, Mr. Weller?'

'Ah, to be sure,' said Sam, with a cunning look, 'that's the pint. Who could ha' told me?'

'It wasn't Mr. Muzzle, was it?' inquired Mary.

'Oh, no.' replied Sam, with a solemn shake of the head, 'it warn't him.'

'It must have been the cook,' said Mary.

'O' course it must,' said Sam.

'Well, I never heard the like of that!' exclaimed Mary.

'No more did I,' said Sam. 'But Mary, my dear'—here Sam's manner grew extremely affectionate—'Mary, my dear, I've got another affair in hand as is wery pressin'. There's one o' my governor's friends—Mr. Winkle, you remember him?'

'Him in the green coat?' said Mary. 'Oh, yes, I remember him.'

'Well,' said Sam, 'he's in a horrid state o' love; reg'larly comfoozled, and done over vith it.'

'Lor!' interposed Mary.

'Yes,' said Sam; 'but that's nothin' if we could find out the young 'ooman;' and here Sam, with many digressions upon the personal beauty of

Mary, and the unspeakable tortures he had experienced since he last saw her, gave a faithful account of Mr. Winkle's present predicament.

'Well,' said Mary, 'I never did!'

'O' course not,' said Sam, 'and nobody never did, nor never vill neither; and here am I a-walkin' about like the wandering Jew—a sportin' character you have perhaps heerd on Mary, my dear, as vos alvays doin' a match agin' time, and never vent to sleep—looking arter this here Miss Arabella Allen.'

'Miss who?' said Mary, in great astonishment.

'Miss Arabella Allen,' said Sam.

'Goodness gracious!' said Mary, pointing to the garden door which the sulky groom had locked after him. 'Why, it's that very house; she's been living there these six weeks. Their upper house-maid, which is lady's-maid too, told me all about it over the wash-house palin's before the family was out of bed, one mornin'.'

'Wot, the wery next door to you?' said Sam.

'The very next,' replied Mary.

Mr. Weller was so deeply overcome on receiving this intelligence that he found it absolutely necessary to cling to his fair informant for support; and divers little love passages had passed between them, before he was sufficiently collected to return to the subject.

'Vell,' said Sam at length, 'if this don't beat cock-fightin' nothin' never vill, as the lord mayor said, ven the chief secretary o' state proposed his missis's health arter dinner. That wery next house! Wy, I've got a message to her as I've been a-trying all day to deliver.'

'Ah,' said Mary, 'but you can't deliver it now, because she only walks in the garden in the evening, and then only for a very little time; she never goes out, without the old lady.'

Sam ruminated for a few moments, and finally hit upon the following plan of operations; that he should return just at dusk—the time at which Arabella invariably took her walk—and, being admitted by Mary into the garden of the house to which she belonged, would contrive to scramble up the wall, beneath the overhanging boughs of a large pear-tree, which would effectually screen him from observation; would there deliver his message, and arrange, if possible, an interview on behalf of Mr. Winkle for the ensuing evening at the same hour. Having made this arrangement with great despatch, he assisted Mary in the long-deferred occupation of shaking the carpets.

It is not half as innocent a thing as it looks, that shaking little pieces of carpet—at least, there may be no great harm in the shaking, but the folding is a very insidious process. So long as the shaking lasts, and the two parties are kept the carpet's length apart, it is as innocent an amusement as can well be devised; but when the folding begins, and the distance between them gets gradually lessened from one half its former length to a quarter, and then to an eighth, and then to a sixteenth, and then to a thirty-second, if the carpet be long enough, it becomes dangerous. We do not know, to a nicety, how many pieces of carpet were folded in this instance, but we can venture to state that as many pieces as there were, so many times did Sam kiss the pretty housemaid.

Mr. Weller regaled himself with moderation at the nearest tavern until it was nearly dusk, and then returned to the lane without the thoroughfare. Having been admitted into the garden by Mary, and having received from that lady sundry admonitions concerning the safety of his limbs and neck, Sam mounted into the pear-tree, to wait until Arabella should come into sight.

He waited so long without this anxiously-expected event occurring, that he began to think it was not going to take place at all, when he heard light footsteps upon the gravel, and immediately afterwards beheld Arabella walking pensively down the garden. As soon as she came nearly below the tree, Sam began, by way of gently indicating his presence, to make sundry diabolical noises similar to those which would probably be natural to a person of middle age who had been afflicted with a combination of inflammatory sore throat, croup, and whooping-cough, from his earliest infancy.

Upon this, the young lady cast a hurried glance towards the spot whence the dreadful sounds proceeded; and her previous alarm being not at all diminished when she saw a man among the branches, she would most certainly have decamped, and alarmed the house, had not fear fortunately deprived her of the power of moving, and caused her to sink down on a garden seat, which happened by good luck to be near at hand.

'She's a-goin' off,' soliloquised Sam in great perplexity. 'Wot a thing it is, as these here young creeturs will go a-faintin' avay just ven they oughtn't to. Here, young 'ooman, Miss Sawbones, Mrs. Vinkle, don't!'

Whether it was the magic of Mr. Winkle's name, or the coolness of the open air, or some recollection of Mr. Weller's voice, that revived Arabella, matters not. She raised her head and languidly inquired, 'Who's that, and what do you want?'

'Hush,' said Sam, swinging himself on to the wall, and crouching there in as small a compass as he could reduce himself to, 'only me, miss, only me.'

'Mr. Pickwick's servant!' said Arabella earnestly.

'The wery same, miss,' replied Sam. 'Here's Mr. Vinkle reg'larly sewed up vith desperation, miss.'

'Ah!' said Arabella, drawing nearer the wall.

'Ah, indeed,' said Sam. 'Ve thought ve should ha' been obliged to strait-veskit him last night; he's been a-ravin' all day; and he says if he can't see you afore to-morrow night's over, he vishes he may be somethin' unpleasanted if he don't drownd hisself.'

'Oh, no, no, Mr. Weller!' said Arabella, clasping her hands.

'That's wot he says, miss,' replied Sam coolly. 'He's a man of his word, and it's my opinion he'll do it, miss. He's heerd all about you from the sawbones in barnacles.'

'From my brother!' said Arabella, having some faint recognition of Sam's description.

'I don't rightly know which is your brother, miss,' replied Sam. 'Is it the dirtiest vun o' the two?'

'Yes, yes, Mr. Weller,' returned Arabella, 'go on. Make haste, pray.'

'Well, miss,' said Sam, 'he's heerd all about it from him; and it's the gov'nor's opinion that if you don't see him wery quick, the sawbones as we've been a-speakin' on, 'ull get as much extra lead in his head as'll rayther damage the dewelopment o' the orgins if they ever put it in spirits artervards.'

'Oh, what can I do to prevent these dreadful quarrels!' exclaimed Arabella.

'It's the suspicion of a priory 'tachment as is the cause of it all,' replied Sam. 'You'd better see him, miss.'

'But how?—where?'cried Arabella. 'I dare not leave the house alone. My brother is so unkind, so unreasonable! I know how strange my talking thus to you may appear, Mr. Weller, but I am very, very unhappy—' and here poor Arabella wept so bitterly that Sam grew chivalrous.

'It may seem wery strange talkin' to me about these here affairs, miss,' said Sam, with great vehemence; 'but all I can say is, that I'm not only ready but villin' to do anythin' as'll make matters agreeable; and if chuckin' either o' them sawboneses out o' winder 'ull do it, I'm the man.' As Sam Weller said this, he tucked up his wristbands, at the imminent hazard of falling off the wall in so doing, to intimate his readiness to set to work immediately.

Flattering as these professions of good feeling were, Arabella resolutely declined (most unaccountably, as Sam thought) to avail herself of them. For some time she strenuously refused to grant Mr. Winkle the interview Sam had so pathetically requested; but at length, when the conversation threatened to be interrupted by the unwelcome arrival of a third party, she hurriedly gave him to understand, with many professions of gratitude, that it was barely possible she might be in the garden an hour later, next evening. Sam understood this perfectly well; and Arabella, bestowing upon him one of her sweetest smiles, tripped gracefully away, leaving Mr. Weller in a state of very great admiration of her charms, both personal and mental.

Having descended in safety from the wall, and not forgotten to devote a few moments to his own particular business in the same department, Mr. Weller then made the best of his way back to the Bush, where his prolonged absence had occasioned much speculation and some alarm.

'We must be careful,' said Mr. Pickwick, after listening attentively to Sam's tale, 'not for our sakes, but for that of the young lady. We must be very cautious.'

'WE!' said Mr. Winkle, with marked emphasis.

Mr. Pickwick's momentary look of indignation at the tone of this remark, subsided into his characteristic expression of benevolence, as he replied—

'WE, Sir! I shall accompany you.'

'You!' said Mr. Winkle.

'I,' replied Mr. Pickwick mildly. 'In affording you this interview, the young lady has taken a natural, perhaps, but still a very imprudent step. If I am present at the meeting—a mutual friend, who is old enough to be the father of both parties—the voice of calumny can never be raised against her hereafter.'

Mr. Pickwick's eyes lightened with honest exultation at his own foresight, as he spoke thus. Mr. Winkle was touched by this little trait of his delicate respect for the young PROTEGEE of his friend, and took his hand with a feeling of regard, akin to veneration.

'You SHALL go,' said Mr. Winkle.

'I will,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Sam, have my greatcoat and shawl ready, and order a conveyance to be at the door to-morrow evening, rather earlier than is absolutely necessary, in order that we may be in good time.'

Mr. Weller touched his hat, as an earnest of his obedience, and withdrew to make all needful preparations for the expedition.

The coach was punctual to the time appointed; and Mr. Weller, after duly installing Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Winkle inside, took his seat on the box by the driver. They alighted, as had been agreed on, about a quarter of a mile from the place of rendezvous, and desiring the coachman to await their return, proceeded the remaining distance on foot.

It was at this stage of the undertaking that Mr. Pickwick, with many smiles and various other indications of great self-satisfaction, produced from one of his coat pockets a dark lantern, with which he had specially provided himself for the occasion, and the great mechanical beauty of which he proceeded to explain to Mr. Winkle, as they walked along, to the no small surprise of the few stragglers they met.

'I should have been the better for something of this kind, in my last garden expedition, at night; eh, Sam?' said Mr. Pickwick, looking good-humouredly round at his follower, who was trudging behind.

'Wery nice things, if they're managed properly, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller; 'but wen you don't want to be seen, I think they're more useful arter the candle's gone out, than wen it's alight.'

Mr. Pickwick appeared struck by Sam's remarks, for he put the lantern into his pocket again, and they walked on in silence.

'Down here, Sir,' said Sam. 'Let me lead the way. This is the lane, Sir.'

Down the lane they went, and dark enough it was. Mr. Pickwick brought out the lantern, once or twice, as they groped their way along, and threw a very brilliant little tunnel of light before them, about a foot in diameter. It was very pretty to look at, but seemed to have the effect of rendering surrounding objects rather darker than before.

At length they arrived at the large stone. Here Sam recommended his master and Mr. Winkle to seat themselves, while he reconnoitred, and ascertained whether Mary was yet in waiting.

After an absence of five or ten minutes, Sam returned to say that the gate was opened, and all quiet. Following him with stealthy tread, Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Winkle soon found themselves in the garden. Here everybody said, 'Hush!' a good many times; and that being done, no one seemed to have any very distinct apprehension of what was to be done next.

'Is Miss Allen in the garden yet, Mary?' inquired Mr. Winkle, much agitated.

'I don't know, sir,' replied the pretty housemaid. 'The best thing to be done, sir, will be for Mr. Weller to give you a hoist up into the tree, and perhaps Mr. Pickwick will have the goodness to see that nobody comes up the lane, while I watch at the other end of the garden. Goodness gracious, what's that?'

'That 'ere blessed lantern 'ull be the death on us all,' exclaimed Sam peevishly. 'Take care wot you're a-doin' on, sir; you're a-sendin' a blaze o' light, right into the back parlour winder.'

'Dear me!' said Mr. Pickwick, turning hastily aside, 'I didn't mean to do that.'

'Now, it's in the next house, sir,' remonstrated Sam.

'Bless my heart!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, turning round again.

'Now, it's in the stable, and they'll think the place is afire,' said Sam. 'Shut it up, sir, can't you?'

'It's the most extraordinary lantern I ever met with, in all my life!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, greatly bewildered by the effects he had so unintentionally produced. 'I never saw such a powerful reflector.'

'It'll be vun too powerful for us, if you keep blazin' avay in that manner, sir,' replied Sam, as Mr. Pickwick, after various unsuccessful efforts, managed to close the slide. 'There's the young lady's footsteps. Now, Mr. Winkle, sir, up vith you.'

'Stop, stop!' said Mr. Pickwick, 'I must speak to her first. Help me up, Sam.'

'Gently, Sir,' said Sam, planting his head against the wall, and making a platform of his back. 'Step atop o' that 'ere flower-pot, Sir. Now then, up vith you.'

'I'm afraid I shall hurt you, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Never mind me, Sir,' replied Sam. 'Lend him a hand, Mr. Winkle, sir. Steady, sir, steady! That's the time o' day!'

As Sam spoke, Mr. Pickwick, by exertions almost supernatural in a gentleman of his years and weight, contrived to get upon Sam's back; and Sam gently raising himself up, and Mr. Pickwick holding on fast by the top of the wall, while Mr. Winkle clasped him tight by the legs, they contrived by these means to bring his spectacles just above the level of the coping.

'My dear,' said Mr. Pickwick, looking over the wall, and catching sight of Arabella, on the other side, 'don't be frightened, my dear, it's only me.' 'Oh, pray go away, Mr. Pickwick,' said Arabella. 'Tell them all to go away. I am so dreadfully frightened. Dear, dear Mr. Pickwick, don't stop there. You'll fall down and kill yourself, I know you will.'

'Now, pray don't alarm yourself, my dear,' said Mr. Pickwick soothingly. 'There is not the least cause for fear, I assure you. Stand firm, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, looking down.

'All right, sir,' replied Mr. Weller. 'Don't be longer than you can conweniently help, sir. You're raythег heavy.'

'Only another moment, Sam,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'I merely wished you to know, my dear, that I should not have allowed my young friend to see you in this clandestine way, if the situation in which you are placed had left him any alternative; and, lest the impropriety of this step should cause you any uneasiness, my love, it may be a satisfaction to you, to know that I am present. That's all, my dear.'

'Indeed, Mr. Pickwick, I am very much obliged to you for your kindness and consideration,' replied Arabella, drying her tears with her handkerchief. She would probably have said much more, had not Mr. Pickwick's head disappeared with great swiftness, in consequence of a false step on Sam's shoulder which brought him suddenly to the ground. He was up again in an instant however; and bidding Mr. Winkle make haste and get the interview over, ran out into the lane to keep watch, with all the courage and ardour of youth. Mr. Winkle himself, inspired by the occasion, was on the wall in a moment, merely pausing to request Sam to be careful of his master.

'I'll take care on him, sir,' replied Sam. 'Leave him to me.'

'Where is he? What's he doing, Sam?' inquired Mr. Winkle.

'Bless his old gaiters,' rejoined Sam, looking out at the garden door. 'He's a-keepin' guard in the lane vith that 'ere dark lantern, like a amiable Guy Fawkes! I never see such a fine creetur in my days. Blessed if I don't think his heart must ha' been born five-and-twenty year arter his body, at least!'

Mr. Winkle stayed not to hear the encomium upon his friend. He had dropped from the wall; thrown himself at Arabella's feet; and by this time was pleading the sincerity of his passion with an eloquence worthy even of Mr. Pickwick himself.

While these things were going on in the open air, an elderly gentleman of scientific attainments was seated in his library, two or three houses off, writing a philosophical treatise, and ever and anon moistening his clay and his labours with a glass of claret from a venerable-looking bottle which stood by his side. In the agonies of composition, the elderly gentleman looked sometimes at the carpet, sometimes at the ceiling, and sometimes at the wall; and when neither carpet, ceiling, nor wall afforded the requisite degree of inspiration, he looked out of the window.

In one of these pauses of invention, the scientific gentleman was gazing abstractedly on the thick darkness outside, when he was very much surprised by observing a most brilliant light glide through the air, at a short distance above the ground, and almost instantaneously vanish. After a short time the phenomenon was repeated, not once or twice, but several times; at last the scientific gentleman, laying down his pen, began to consider to what natural causes these appearances were to be assigned.

They were not meteors; they were too low. They were not glow-worms; they were too high. They were not will-o'-the-wisps; they were not fireflies; they were not fireworks. What could they be? Some extraordinary and wonderful phenomenon of nature, which no philosopher had ever seen before; something which it had been reserved for him alone to discover, and which he should immortalise his name by chronicling for the benefit of posterity. Full of this idea, the scientific gentleman seized his pen again, and committed to paper sundry notes of these unparalleled appearances, with the date, day, hour, minute, and precise second at which they were visible: all of which were to form the data of a voluminous treatise of great research and deep learning, which should astonish all the atmospherical wiseacres that ever drew breath in any part of the civilised globe.

He threw himself back in his easy-chair, wrapped in contemplations of his future greatness. The mysterious light appeared more brilliantly than before, dancing, to all appearance, up and down the lane, crossing from side to side, and moving in an orbit as eccentric as comets themselves.

The scientific gentleman was a bachelor. He had no wife to call in and astonish, so he rang the bell for his servant.

'Pruffle,' said the scientific gentleman, 'there is something very extraordinary in the air to-night? Did you see that?' said the scientific gentleman, pointing out of the window, as the light again became visible.

'Yes, I did, Sir.'

'What do you think of it, Pruffle?'

'Think of it, Sir?'

'Yes. You have been bred up in this country. What should you say was the cause for those lights, now?'

The scientific gentleman smilingly anticipated Pruffle's reply that he could assign no cause for them at all. Pruffle meditated.

'I should say it was thieves, Sir,' said Pruffle at length.

'You're a fool, and may go downstairs,' said the scientific gentleman.

'Thank you, Sir,' said Pruffle. And down he went.

But the scientific gentleman could not rest under the idea of the ingenious treatise he had projected being lost to the world, which must inevitably be the case if the speculation of the ingenious Mr. Pruffle were not stifled in its birth. He put on his hat and walked quickly down the garden, determined to investigate the matter to the very bottom.

Now, shortly before the scientific gentleman walked out into the garden, Mr. Pickwick had run down the lane as fast as he could, to convey a false alarm that somebody was coming that way; occasionally drawing back the slide of the dark lantern to keep himself from the ditch. The alarm was no sooner given, than Mr. Winkle scrambled back over the wall, and Arabella ran into the house; the garden gate was shut, and the three adventurers were making the best of their way down the lane, when they were startled by the scientific gentleman unlocking his garden gate.

'Hold hard,' whispered Sam, who was, of course, the first of the party. 'Show a light for just vun second, Sir.'

Mr. Pickwick did as he was desired, and Sam, seeing a man's head peeping out very cautiously within half a yard of his own, gave it a gentle tap with his clenched fist, which knocked it, with a hollow sound, against the gate. Having performed this feat with great suddenness and dexterity, Mr. Weller caught Mr. Pickwick up on his back, and followed Mr. Winkle down the lane at a pace which, considering the burden he carried, was perfectly astonishing.

'Have you got your vind back agin, Sir,' inquired Sam, when they had reached the end.

'Quite. Quite, now,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'Then come along, Sir,' said Sam, setting his master on his feet again. 'Come betveen us, sir. Not half a mile to run. Think you're vinnin' a cup, sir. Now for it.'

Thus encouraged, Mr. Pickwick made the very best use of his legs. It may be confidently stated that a pair of black gaiters never got over the ground in better style than did those of Mr. Pickwick on this memorable occasion.

The coach was waiting, the horses were fresh, the roads were good, and the driver was willing. The whole party arrived in safety at the Bush before Mr. Pickwick had recovered his breath.

'in with you at once, sir,' said Sam, as he helped his master out. 'Don't stop a second in the street, arter that 'ere exercise. Beg your pardon, sir,'continued Sam, touching his hat as Mr. Winkle descended, 'hope there warn't a priory 'tachment, sir?'

Mr. Winkle grasped his humble friend by the hand, and whispered in his ear, 'It's all right, Sam; quite right.' Upon which Mr. Weller struck three distinct blows upon his nose in token of intelligence, smiled, winked, and proceeded to put the steps up, with a countenance expressive of lively satisfaction.

As to the scientific gentleman, he demonstrated, in a masterly treatise, that these wonderful lights were the effect of electricity; and clearly proved the same by detailing how a flash of fire danced before his eyes when he put his head out of the gate, and how he received a shock which stunned him for a quarter of an hour afterwards; which demonstration delighted all the scientific associations beyond measure, and caused him to be considered a light of science ever afterwards.

CHAPTER XL. INTRODUCES Mr. PICKWICK TO A NEW AND NOT UNINTERESTING SCENE

IN THE GREAT DRAMA OF LIFE

The remainder of the period which Mr. Pickwick had assigned as the duration of the stay at Bath passed over without the occurrence of anything material. Trinity term commenced. On the expiration of its first week, Mr. Pickwick and his friends returned to London; and the former gentleman, attended of course by Sam, straightway repaired to his old quarters at the George and Vulture.

On the third morning after their arrival, just as all the clocks in the city were striking nine individually, and somewhere about nine hundred and ninety-nine collectively, Sam was taking the air in George Yard, when a queer sort of fresh-painted vehicle drove up, out of which there jumped with great agility, throwing the reins to a stout man who sat beside him, a queer sort of gentleman, who seemed made for the vehicle, and the vehicle for him.

The vehicle was not exactly a gig, neither was it a stanhope. It was not what is currently denominated a dog-cart, neither was it a taxed cart, nor a chaise-cart, nor a guillotined cabriolet; and yet it had something of the character of each and every of these machines. It was painted a bright yellow, with the shafts and wheels picked out in black; and the driver sat in the orthodox sporting style, on cushions piled about two feet above the rail. The horse was a bay, a well-looking animal enough; but with something of a flash and dog-fighting air about him, nevertheless, which accorded both with the vehicle and his master.

The master himself was a man of about forty, with black hair, and carefully combed whiskers. He was dressed in a particularly gorgeous manner, with plenty of articles of jewellery about him—all about three sizes larger than those which are usually worn by gentlemen—and a rough greatcoat to crown the whole. Into one pocket of this greatcoat, he thrust his left hand the moment he dismounted, while from the other he drew forth, with his right, a very bright and glaring silk handkerchief, with which he whisked a speck or two of dust from his boots, and then, crumpling it in his hand, swaggered up the court.

It had not escaped Sam's attention that, when this person dismounted, a shabby-looking man in a brown greatcoat shorn of divers buttons, who had been previously slinking about, on the opposite side of the way, crossed over, and remained stationary close by. Having something more than a suspicion of the object of the gentleman's visit, Sam preceded him to the George and Vulture, and, turning sharp round, planted himself in the Centre of the doorway.

'Now, my fine fellow!' said the man in the rough coat, in an imperious tone, attempting at the same time to push his way past.

'Now, Sir, wot's the matter?' replied Sam, returning the push with compound interest.

'Come, none of this, my man; this won't do with me,' said the owner of the rough coat, raising his voice, and turning white. 'Here, Smouch!'

'Well, wot's amiss here?' growled the man in the brown coat, who had been gradually sneaking up the court during this short dialogue.

'Only some insolence of this young man's,' said the principal, giving Sam another push.

'Come, none o' this gammon,' growled Smouch, giving him another, and a harder one.

This last push had the effect which it was intended by the experienced Mr. Smouch to produce; for while Sam, anxious to return the compliment, was grinding that gentleman's body against the door-post, the principal crept past, and made his way to the bar, whither Sam, after bandying a few epithetical remarks with Mr. Smouch, followed at once.

'Good-morning, my dear,' said the principal, addressing the young lady at the bar, with Botany Bay ease, and New South Wales gentility; 'which is Mr. Pickwick's room, my dear?'

'Show him up,' said the barmaid to a waiter, without deigning another look at the exquisite, in reply to his inquiry.

The waiter led the way upstairs as he was desired, and the man in the rough coat followed, with Sam behind him, who, in his progress up the staircase, indulged in sundry gestures indicative of supreme contempt and defiance, to the unspeakable gratification of the servants and other lookers-on. Mr. Smouch, who was troubled with a hoarse cough, remained below, and expectorated in the passage.

Mr. Pickwick was fast asleep in bed, when his early visitor, followed by Sam, entered the room. The noise they made, in so doing, awoke him.

'Shaving-water, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, from within the curtains.

'Shave you directly, Mr. Pickwick,' said the visitor, drawing one of them back from the bed's head. 'I've got an execution against you, at the suit of Bardell.—Here's the warrant.—Common Pleas.—Here's my card. I suppose you'll come over to my house.' Giving Mr. Pickwick a friendly tap on the shoulder, the sheriff's officer (for such he was) threw his card on the counterpane, and pulled a gold toothpick from his waistcoat pocket.

'Namby's the name,' said the sheriff's deputy, as Mr. Pickwick took his spectacles from under the pillow, and put them on, to read the card. 'Namby, Bell Alley, Coleman Street.'

At this point, Sam Weller, who had had his eyes fixed hitherto on Mr. Namby's shining beaver, interfered.

'Are you a Quaker?' said Sam.

'I'll let you know I am, before I've done with you,' replied the indignant officer. 'I'll teach you manners, my fine fellow, one of these fine mornings.'

'Thank'ee,' said Sam. 'I'll do the same to you. Take your hat off.' With this, Mr. Weller, in the most dexterous manner, knocked Mr. Namby's hat to the other side of the room, with such violence, that he had very nearly caused him to swallow the gold toothpick into the bargain.

'Observe this, Mr. Pickwick,' said the disconcerted officer, gasping for breath. 'I've been assaulted in the execution of my dooty by your servant in your chamber. I'm in bodily fear. I call you to witness this.'

'Don't witness nothin', Sir,' interposed Sam. 'Shut your eyes up tight, Sir. I'd pitch him out o' winder, only he couldn't fall far enough, 'cause o' the leads outside.'

'Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, in an angry voice, as his attendant made various demonstrations of hostilities, 'if you say another word, or offer the slightest interference with this person, I discharge you that instant.'

'But, Sir!' said Sam.

'Hold your tongue,' interposed Mr. Pickwick. 'Take that hat up again.'

But this Sam flatly and positively refused to do; and, after he had been severely reprimanded by his master, the officer, being in a hurry, condescended to pick it up himself, venting a great variety of threats against Sam meanwhile, which that gentleman received with perfect composure, merely observing that if Mr. Namby would have the goodness to put his hat on again, he would knock it into the latter end of next week. Mr. Namby, perhaps thinking that such a process might be productive of inconvenience to himself, declined to offer the temptation, and, soon after, called up Smouch. Having informed him that the capture was made, and that he was to wait for the prisoner until he should have finished dressing, Namby then swaggered out, and drove away. Smouch, requesting Mr. Pickwick in a surly manner 'to be as alive as he could, for it was a busy time,' drew up a chair by the door and sat there, until he had finished dressing. Sam was then despatched for a hackney-coach, and in it the triumvirate proceeded to Coleman Street. It was fortunate the distance was short; for Mr. Smouch, besides possessing no very enchanting conversational powers, was rendered a decidedly unpleasant companion in a limited space, by the physical weakness to which we have elsewhere adverted.

The coach having turned into a very narrow and dark street, stopped before a house with iron bars to all the windows; the door-posts of which were graced by the name and title of 'Namby, Officer to the Sheriffs of London'; the inner gate having been opened by a gentleman who might have passed for a neglected twin-brother of Mr. Smouch, and who was endowed with a large key for the purpose, Mr. Pickwick was shown into the 'coffee-room.'

This coffee-room was a front parlour, the principal features of which were fresh sand and stale tobacco smoke. Mr. Pickwick bowed to the three persons who were seated in it when he entered; and having despatched Sam for Perker, withdrew into an obscure corner, and looked thence with some curiosity upon his new companions.

One of these was a mere boy of nineteen or twenty, who, though it was yet barely ten o'clock, was drinking gin-and-water, and smoking a cigar—amusements to which, judging from his inflamed countenance, he had devoted himself pretty constantly for the last year or two of his life. Opposite him, engaged in stirring the fire with the toe of his right boot, was a coarse, vulgar young man of about thirty, with a sallow face and harsh voice; evidently possessed of that knowledge of the world, and captivating freedom of manner, which is to be acquired in public-house parlours, and at low billiard tables. The third tenant of the apartment was a middle-aged man in a very old suit of black, who looked pale and haggard, and paced up and down the room incessantly; stopping, now and then, to look with great anxiety out of the window as if he expected somebody, and then resuming his walk.

'You'd better have the loan of my razor this morning, Mr. Ayresleigh,' said the man who was stirring the fire, tipping the wink to his friend the boy.

'Thank you, no, I shan't want it; I expect I shall be out, in the course of an hour or so,' replied the other in a hurried manner. Then, walking again up to the window, and once more returning disappointed, he sighed deeply, and left the room; upon which the other two burst into a loud laugh.

'Well, I never saw such a game as that,' said the gentleman who had offered the razor, whose name appeared to be Price. 'Never!' Mr. Price confirmed the assertion with an oath, and then laughed again, when of course the boy (who thought his companion one of the most dashing fellows alive) laughed also.

'You'd hardly think, would you now,' said Price, turning towards Mr. Pickwick, 'that that chap's been here a week yesterday, and never once shaved himself yet, because he feels so certain he's going out in half an hour's time, thinks he may as well put it off till he gets home?'

'Poor man!' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Are his chances of getting out of his difficulties really so great?'

'Chances be d—d,' replied Price; 'he hasn't half the ghost of one. I wouldn't give THAT for his chance of walking about the streets this time ten years.' With this, Mr. Price snapped his fingers contemptuously, and rang the bell.

'Give me a sheet of paper, Crookey,' said Mr. Price to the attendant, who in dress and general appearance looked something between a bankrupt glazier, and a drover in a state of insolvency; 'and a glass of brandy-and-water, Crookey, d'ye hear? I'm going to write to my father, and I must have a stimulant, or I shan't be able to pitch it strong enough into the old boy.' At this facetious speech, the young boy, it is almost needless to say, was fairly convulsed.

'That's right,' said Mr. Price. 'Never say die. All fun, ain't it?'

'Prime!' said the young gentleman.

'You've got some spirit about you, you have,' said Price. 'You've seen something of life.'

'I rather think I have!' replied the boy. He had looked at it through the dirty panes of glass in a bar door.

Mr. Pickwick, feeling not a little disgusted with this dialogue, as well as with the air and manner of the two beings by whom it had been carried on, was about to inquire whether he could not be accommodated with a private sitting-room, when two or three strangers of genteel appearance entered, at sight of whom the boy threw his cigar into the fire, and whispering to Mr. Price that they had come to 'make it all right' for him, joined them at a table in the farther end of the room.

It would appear, however, that matters were not going to be made all right quite so speedily as the young gentleman anticipated; for a very long conversation ensued, of which Mr. Pickwick could not avoid hearing certain angry fragments regarding dissolute conduct, and repeated forgiveness. At last, there were very distinct allusions made by the oldest gentleman of the party to one Whitecross Street, at which the young gentleman, notwithstanding his primeness and his spirit, and his knowledge of life into the bargain, reclined his head upon the table, and howled dismally.

Very much satisfied with this sudden bringing down of the youth's valour, and this effectual lowering of his tone, Mr. Pickwick rang the bell, and was shown, at his own request, into a private room furnished with a carpet, table, chairs, sideboard and sofa, and ornamented with a looking-glass, and various old prints. Here he had the advantage of hearing Mrs. Namby's performance on a square piano overhead, while the breakfast was getting ready; when it came, Mr. Perker came too.

'Aha, my dear sir,' said the little man, 'nailed at last, eh? Come, come, I'm not sorry for it either, because now you'll see the absurdity of this conduct. I've noted down the amount of the taxed costs and damages for which the ca-sa was issued, and we had better settle at once and lose no time. Namby is come home by this time, I dare say. What say you, my dear sir? Shall I draw a cheque, or will you?' The little man rubbed his hands with affected cheerfulness as he said this, but glancing at Mr. Pickwick's countenance, could not forbear at the same time casting a desponding look towards Sam Weller.

'Perker,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'let me hear no more of this, I beg. I see no advantage in staying here, so I Shall go to prison to-night.'

'You can't go to Whitecross Street, my dear Sir,' said Perker. 'Impossible! There are sixty beds in a ward; and the bolt's on, sixteen hours out of the four-and-twenty.'

'I would rather go to some other place of confinement if I can,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'If not, I must make the best I can of that.'

'You can go to the Fleet, my dear Sir, if you're determined to go somewhere,' said Perker.

'That'll do,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'I'll go there directly I have finished my breakfast.'

'Stop, stop, my dear Sir; not the least occasion for being in such a violent hurry to get into a place that most other men are as eager to get out of,' said the good-natured little attorney. 'We must have a habeas-corpus. There'll be no judge at chambers till four o'clock this afternoon. You must wait till then.'

'Very good,' said Mr. Pickwick, with unmoved patience. 'Then we will have a chop here, at two. See about it, Sam, and tell them to be punctual.'

Mr. Pickwick remaining firm, despite all the remonstrances and arguments of Perker, the chops appeared and disappeared in due course; he was then put into another hackney coach, and carried off to Chancery Lane, after waiting half an hour or so for Mr. Namby, who had a select dinner-party and could on no account be disturbed before.

There were two judges in attendance at Serjeant's Inn—one King's Bench, and one Common Pleas—and a great deal of business appeared to be transacting before them, if the number of lawyer's clerks who were hurrying in and out with bundles of papers, afforded any test. When they reached the low archway which forms the entrance to the inn, Perker was detained a few moments parlaying with the coachman about the fare and the change; and Mr. Pickwick, stepping to one side to be out of the way of the stream of people that were pouring in and out, looked about him with some curiosity.

The people that attracted his attention most, were three or four men of shabby-genteel appearance, who touched their hats to many of the attorneys who passed, and seemed to have some business there, the nature of which Mr. Pickwick could not divine. They were curious-looking fellows. One was a slim and rather lame man in rusty black, and a white neckerchief; another was a stout, burly person, dressed in the same apparel, with a great reddish-black cloth round his neck; a third was a little weazen, drunken-looking body, with a pimply face. They were loitering about, with their hands behind them, and now and then with an anxious countenance whispered something in the ear of some of the gentlemen with papers, as they hurried by. Mr. Pickwick remembered to have very often observed them lounging under the archway when he had been walking past; and his curiosity was quite excited to know to what branch of the profession these dingy-looking loungers could possibly belong.

He was about to propound the question to Namby, who kept close beside him, sucking a large gold ring on his little finger, when Perker bustled up, and observing that there was no time to lose, led the way into the inn. As Mr. Pickwick followed, the lame man stepped up to him, and civilly touching his hat, held out a written card, which Mr. Pickwick, not wishing to hurt the man's feelings by refusing, courteously accepted and deposited in his waistcoat pocket.

'Now,' said Perker, turning round before he entered one of the offices, to see that his companions were close behind him. 'In here, my dear sir. Hallo, what do you want?'

This last question was addressed to the lame man, who, unobserved by Mr. Pickwick, made one of the party. In reply to it, the lame man touched his hat again, with all imaginable politeness, and motioned towards Mr. Pickwick.

'No, no,' said Perker, with a smile. 'We don't want you, my dear friend, we don't want you.'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said the lame man. 'The gentleman took my card. I hope you will employ me, sir. The gentleman nodded to me. I'll be judged by the gentleman himself. You nodded to me, sir?'

'Pooh, pooh, nonsense. You didn't nod to anybody, Pickwick? A mistake, a mistake,' said Perker.

'The gentleman handed me his card,' replied Mr. Pickwick, producing it from his waistcoat pocket. 'I accepted it, as the gentleman seemed to wish it—in fact I had some curiosity to look at it when I should be at leisure. I—'

The little attorney burst into a loud laugh, and returning the card to the lame man, informing him it was all a mistake, whispered to Mr. Pickwick as the man turned away in dudgeon, that he was only a bail.

'A what!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

'A bail,' replied Perker.

'A bail!' 'Yes, my dear sir—half a dozen of 'em here. Bail you to any amount, and only charge half a crown. Curious trade, isn't it?' said Perker, regaling himself with a pinch of snuff.

'What! Am I to understand that these men earn a livelihood by waiting about here, to perjure themselves before the judges of the land, at the rate of half a crown a crime?' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, quite aghast at the disclosure.

'Why, I don't exactly know about perjury, my dear sir,' replied the little gentleman. 'Harsh word, my dear sir, very harsh word indeed. It's a legal fiction, my dear sir, nothing more.' Saying which, the attorney shrugged his shoulders, smiled, took a second pinch of snuff, and led the way into the office of the judge's clerk.

This was a room of specially dirty appearance, with a very low ceiling and old panelled walls; and so badly lighted, that although it was broad day outside, great tallow candles were burning on the desks. At one end, was a door leading to the judge's private apartment, round which were congregated a crowd of attorneys and managing clerks, who were called in, in the order in which their respective appointments stood upon the file. Every time this door was opened to let a party out, the next party made a violent rush to get in; and, as in addition to the numerous dialogues which passed between the gentlemen who were waiting to see the judge, a variety of personal squabbles ensued between the greater part of those who had seen him, there was as much noise as could well be raised in an apartment of such confined dimensions.

Nor were the conversations of these gentlemen the only sounds that broke upon the ear. Standing on a box behind a wooden bar at another end of the room was a clerk in spectacles who was 'taking the affidavits'; large batches of which were, from time to time, carried into the private room by another clerk for the judge's signature. There were a large number of attorneys' clerks to be sworn, and it being a moral impossibility to swear them all at once, the struggles of these gentlemen to reach the clerk in spectacles, were like those of a crowd to get in at the pit door of a theatre when Gracious Majesty honours it with its presence. Another functionary, from time to time, exercised his lungs in calling over the names of those who had been sworn, for the purpose of restoring to them their affidavits after they had been signed by the judge, which gave rise to a few more scuffles; and all these things going on at the same time, occasioned as much bustle as the most active and excitable person could desire to behold. There were yet another class of persons—those who were waiting to attend summonses their employers had taken out, which it was optional to the attorney on the opposite side to attend or not—and whose business it was, from time to time, to cry out the opposite attorney's name; to make certain that he was not in attendance without their knowledge.

For example. Leaning against the wall, close beside the seat Mr. Pickwick had taken, was an office-lad of fourteen, with a tenor voice; near him a common-law clerk with a bass one.

A clerk hurried in with a bundle of papers, and stared about him.

'Sniggle and Blink,' cried the tenor.

'Porkin and Snob,' growled the bass. 'Stumpy and Deacon,' said the new-comer.

Nobody answered; the next man who came in, was bailed by the whole three; and he in his turn shouted for another firm; and then somebody else roared in a loud voice for another; and so forth.

All this time, the man in the spectacles was hard at work, swearing the clerks; the oath being invariably administered, without any effort at punctuation, and usually in the following terms:—

'Take the book in your right hand this is your name and hand-writing you swear that the contents of this your affidavit are true so help you God a shilling you must get change I haven't got it.'

'Well, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'I suppose they are getting the HABEAS-CORPUS ready?'

'Yes,' said Sam, 'and I vish they'd bring out the have-his-carcase. It's wery unpleasant keepin' us vaitin' here. I'd ha' got half a dozen have-his-carcases ready, pack'd up and all, by this time.'

What sort of cumbrous and unmanageable machine, Sam Weller imagined a habeas-corpus to be, does not appear; for Perker, at that moment, walked up and took Mr. Pickwick away.

The usual forms having been gone through, the body of Samuel Pickwick was soon afterwards confided to the custody of the tipstaff, to be by him taken to the warden of the Fleet Prison, and there detained until the amount of the damages and costs in the action of Bardell against Pickwick was fully paid and satisfied.

'And that,' said Mr. Pickwick, laughing, 'will be a very long time. Sam, call another hackney-coach. Perker, my dear friend, good-bye.'

'I shall go with you, and see you safe there,' said Perker.

'Indeed,' replied Mr. Pickwick, 'I would rather go without any other attendant than Sam. As soon as I get settled, I will write and let you know, and I shall expect you immediately. Until then, good-bye.'

As Mr. Pickwick said this, he got into the coach which had by this time arrived, followed by the tipstaff. Sam having stationed himself on the box, it rolled away.

'A most extraordinary man that!' said Perker, as he stopped to pull on his gloves.

'What a bankrupt he'd make, Sir,' observed Mr. Lowten, who was standing near. 'How he would bother the commissioners! He'd set 'em at defiance if they talked of committing him, Sir.'

The attorney did not appear very much delighted with his clerk's professional estimate of Mr. Pickwick's character, for he walked away without deigning any reply.

The hackney-coach jolted along Fleet Street, as hackney-coaches usually do. The horses 'went better', the driver said, when they had anything before them (they must have gone at a most extraordinary pace when there was nothing), and so the vehicle kept behind a cart; when the cart stopped, it stopped; and when the cart went on again, it did the same. Mr. Pickwick sat opposite the tipstaff; and the tipstaff sat with his hat between his knees, whistling a tune, and looking out of the coach window.

Time performs wonders. By the powerful old gentleman's aid, even a hackney-coach gets over half a mile of ground. They stopped at length, and Mr. Pickwick alighted at the gate of the Fleet.

The tipstaff, just looking over his shoulder to see that his charge was following close at his heels, preceded Mr. Pickwick into the prison; turning to the left, after they had entered, they passed through an open door into a lobby, from which a heavy gate, opposite to that by which they had entered, and which was guarded by a stout turnkey with the key in his hand, led at once into the interior of the prison.

Here they stopped, while the tipstaff delivered his papers; and here Mr. Pickwick was apprised that he would remain, until he had undergone the ceremony, known to the initiated as 'sitting for your portrait.'

'Sitting for my portrait?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Having your likeness taken, sir,' replied the stout turnkey. 'We're capital hands at likenesses here. Take 'em in no time, and always exact. Walk in, sir, and make yourself at home.'

Mr. Pickwick complied with the invitation, and sat himself down; when Mr. Weller, who stationed himself at the back of the chair, whispered that the sitting was merely another term for undergoing an inspection by the different turnkeys, in order that they might know prisoners from visitors.

'Well, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'then I wish the artists would come. This is rather a public place.'

'They von't be long, Sir, I des-say,' replied Sam. 'There's a Dutch clock, sir.'

'So I see,' observed Mr. Pickwick.

'And a bird-cage, sir,' says Sam. 'Veels vithin veels, a prison in a prison. Ain't it, Sir?'

As Mr. Weller made this philosophical remark, Mr. Pickwick was aware that his sitting had commenced. The stout turnkey having been relieved from the lock, sat down, and looked at him carelessly, from time to time, while a long thin man who had relieved him, thrust his hands beneath his coat tails, and planting himself opposite, took a good long view of him. A third rather surly-looking gentleman, who had apparently been disturbed at his tea, for he was disposing of the last remnant of a crust and butter when he came in, stationed himself close to Mr. Pickwick; and, resting his hands on his hips, inspected him narrowly; while two others mixed with the group, and studied his features with most intent and thoughtful faces. Mr. Pickwick winced a good deal under the operation, and appeared to sit very uneasily in his chair; but he made no remark to anybody while it was being performed, not even to Sam, who reclined upon the back of the chair, reflecting, partly on the situation of his master, and partly on the great satisfaction it would have afforded him to make a fierce assault upon all the turnkeys there assembled, one after the other, if it were lawful and peaceable so to do.

At length the likeness was completed, and Mr. Pickwick was informed that he might now proceed into the prison.

'Where am I to sleep to-night?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Why, I don't rightly know about to-night,' replied the stout turnkey. 'You'll be chummed on somebody to-morrow, and then you'll be all snug and comfortable. The first night's generally rather unsettled, but you'll be set all squares to-morrow.'

After some discussion, it was discovered that one of the turnkeys had a bed to let, which Mr. Pickwick could have for that night. He gladly agreed to hire it.

'If you'll come with me, I'll show it you at once,' said the man. 'It ain't a large 'un; but it's an out-and-outer to sleep in. This way, sir.'

They passed through the inner gate, and descended a short flight of steps. The key was turned after them; and Mr. Pickwick found himself, for the first time in his life, within the walls of a debtors' prison.

CHAPTER XLI. WHAT BEFELL Mr. PICKWICK WHEN HE GOT INTO THE FLEET; WHAT

PRISONERS HE SAW THERE, AND HOW HE PASSED THE NIGHT

Mr. Tom Roker, the gentleman who had accompanied Mr. Pickwick into the prison, turned sharp round to the right when he got to the bottom of the little flight of steps, and led the way, through an iron gate which stood open, and up another short flight of steps, into a long narrow gallery, dirty and low, paved with stone, and very dimly lighted by a window at each remote end.

'This,' said the gentleman, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and looking carelessly over his shoulder to Mr. Pickwick—'this here is the hall flight.'

'Oh,' replied Mr. Pickwick, looking down a dark and filthy staircase, which appeared to lead to a range of damp and gloomy stone vaults, beneath the ground, 'and those, I suppose, are the little cellars where the prisoners keep their small quantities of coals. Unpleasant places to have to go down to; but very convenient, I dare say.'

'Yes, I shouldn't wonder if they was convenient,' replied the gentleman, 'seeing that a few people live there, pretty snug. That's the Fair, that is.'

'My friend,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'you don't really mean to say that human beings live down in those wretched dungeons?'

'Don't I?' replied Mr. Roker, with indignant astonishment; 'why shouldn't I?'

'Live!—live down there!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

'Live down there! Yes, and die down there, too, very often!' replied Mr. Roker; 'and what of that? Who's got to say anything agin it? Live down there! Yes, and a wery good place it is to live in, ain't it?'

As Roker turned somewhat fiercely upon Mr. Pickwick in saying this, and moreover muttered in an excited fashion certain unpleasant invocations concerning his own eyes, limbs, and circulating fluids, the latter gentleman deemed it advisable to pursue the discourse no further. Mr. Roker then proceeded to mount another staircase, as dirty as that which led to the place which has just been the subject of discussion, in which ascent he was closely followed by Mr. Pickwick and Sam.

'There,' said Mr. Roker, pausing for breath when they reached another gallery of the same dimensions as the one below, 'this is the coffee-room flight; the one above's the third, and the one above that's the top; and the room where you're a-going to sleep to-night is the warden's room, and it's this way—come on.' Having said all this in a breath, Mr. Roker mounted another flight of stairs with Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller following at his heels.

These staircases received light from sundry windows placed at some little distance above the floor, and looking into a gravelled area bounded by a high brick wall, with iron CHEVAUX-DE-FRISE at the top. This area, it appeared from Mr. Roker's statement, was the racket-ground; and it further appeared, on the testimony of the same gentleman, that there was a smaller area in that portion of the prison which was nearest Farringdon Street, denominated and called 'the Painted Ground,' from the fact of its walls having once displayed the semblance of various men-of-war in full sail, and other artistical effects achieved in bygone times by some imprisoned draughtsman in his leisure hours.

Having communicated this piece of information, apparently more for the purpose of discharging his bosom of an important fact, than with any specific view of enlightening Mr. Pickwick, the guide, having at length reached another gallery, led the way into a small passage at the extreme end, opened a door, and disclosed an apartment of an appearance by no means inviting, containing eight or nine iron bedsteads.

'There,' said Mr. Roker, holding the door open, and looking triumphantly round at Mr. Pickwick, 'there's a room!'

Mr. Pickwick's face, however, betokened such a very trifling portion of satisfaction at the appearance of his lodging, that Mr. Roker looked, for a reciprocity of feeling, into the countenance of Samuel Weller, who, until now, had observed a dignified silence. 'There's a room, young man,' observed Mr. Roker.

'I see it,' replied Sam, with a placid nod of the head.

'You wouldn't think to find such a room as this in the Farringdon Hotel, would you?' said Mr. Roker, with a complacent smile.

To this Mr. Weller replied with an easy and unstudied closing of one eye; which might be considered to mean, either that he would have thought it, or that he would not have thought it, or that he had never thought anything at all about it, as the observer's imagination suggested. Having executed this feat, and reopened his eye, Mr. Weller proceeded to inquire which was the individual bedstead that Mr. Roker had so flatteringly described as an out-and-outer to sleep in.

'That's it,' replied Mr. Roker, pointing to a very rusty one in a corner. 'It would make any one go to sleep, that bedstead would, whether they wanted to or not.'

'I should think,' said Sam, eyeing the piece of furniture in question with a look of excessive disgust—'I should think poppies was nothing to it.'

'Nothing at all,' said Mr. Roker.

'And I s'pose,' said Sam, with a sidelong glance at his master, as if to see whether there were any symptoms of his determination being shaken by what passed, 'I s'pose the other gen'l'men as sleeps here ARE gen'l'men.'

'Nothing but it,' said Mr. Roker. 'One of 'em takes his twelve pints of ale a day, and never leaves off smoking even at his meals.'

'He must be a first-rater,' said Sam.

'A1,' replied Mr. Roker.

Nothing daunted, even by this intelligence, Mr. Pickwick smilingly announced his determination to test the powers of the narcotic bedstead for that night; and Mr. Roker, after informing him that he could retire to rest at whatever hour he thought proper, without any further notice or formality, walked off, leaving him standing with Sam in the gallery.

It was getting dark; that is to say, a few gas jets were kindled in this place which was never light, by way of compliment to the evening, which had set in outside. As it was rather warm, some of the tenants of the numerous little rooms which opened into the gallery on either hand, had set their doors ajar. Mr. Pickwick peeped into them as he passed along, with great curiosity and interest. Here, four or five great hulking fellows, just visible through a cloud of tobacco smoke, were engaged in noisy and riotous conversation over half-emptied pots of beer, or playing at all-fours with a very greasy pack of cards. In the adjoining room, some solitary tenant might be seen poring, by the light of a feeble tallow candle, over a bundle of soiled and tattered papers, yellow with dust and dropping to pieces from age, writing, for the hundredth time, some lengthened statement of his grievances, for the perusal of some great man whose eyes it would never reach, or whose heart it would never touch. In a third, a man, with his wife and a whole crowd of children, might be seen making up a scanty bed on the ground, or upon a few chairs, for the younger ones to pass the night in. And in a fourth, and a fifth, and a sixth, and a seventh, the noise, and the beer, and the tobacco smoke, and the cards, all came over again in greater force than before.

In the galleries themselves, and more especially on the stair-cases, there lingered a great number of people, who came there, some because their rooms were empty and lonesome, others because their rooms were full and hot; the greater part because they were restless and uncomfortable, and not possessed of the secret of exactly knowing what to do with themselves. There were many classes of people here, from the labouring man in his fustian jacket, to the broken-down spendthrift in his shawl dressing-gown, most appropriately out at elbows; but there was the same air about them all—a kind of listless, jail-bird, careless swagger, a vagabondish who's-afraid sort of bearing, which is wholly indescribable in words, but which any man can understand in one moment if he wish, by setting foot in the nearest debtors' prison, and looking at the very first group of people he sees there, with the same interest as Mr. Pickwick did.

'It strikes me, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, leaning over the iron rail at the stair-head-'it strikes me, Sam, that imprisonment for debt is scarcely any punishment at all.'

'Think not, sir?' inquired Mr. Weller.

'You see how these fellows drink, and smoke, and roar,' replied Mr. Pickwick. 'It's quite impossible that they can mind it much.'

'Ah, that's just the wery thing, Sir,' rejoined Sam, 'they don't mind it; it's a reg'lar holiday to them—all porter and skittles. It's the t'other vuns as gets done over vith this sort o' thing; them down-hearted fellers as can't svig avay at the beer, nor play at skittles neither; them as vould pay if they could, and gets low by being boxed up. I'll tell you wot it is, sir; them as is always a-idlin' in public-houses it don't damage at all, and them as is alvays a-workin' wen they can, it damages too much. "It's unekal," as my father used to say wen his grog worn't made half-and-half: "it's unekal, and that's the fault on it."'

'I think you're right, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, after a few moments' reflection, 'quite right.'

'P'raps, now and then, there's some honest people as likes it,' observed Mr. Weller, in a ruminative tone, 'but I never heerd o' one as I can call to mind, 'cept the little dirty-faced man in the brown coat; and that was force of habit.'

'And who was he?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Wy, that's just the wery point as nobody never know'd,' replied Sam.

'But what did he do?'

'Wy, he did wot many men as has been much better know'd has done in their time, Sir,' replied Sam, 'he run a match agin the constable, and vun it.'

'In other words, I suppose,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'he got into debt.'

'Just that, Sir,' replied Sam, 'and in course o' time he come here in consekens. It warn't much—execution for nine pound nothin', multiplied by five for costs; but hows'ever here he stopped for seventeen year. If he got any wrinkles in his face, they were stopped up vith the dirt, for both the dirty face and the brown coat wos just the same at the end o' that time as they wos at the beginnin'. He wos a wery peaceful, inoffendin' little creetur, and wos alvays a-bustlin' about for somebody, or playin' rackets and never vinnin'; till at last the turnkeys they got quite fond on him, and he wos in the lodge ev'ry night, a-chattering vith 'em, and tellin' stories, and all that 'ere. Vun night he wos in there as usual, along vith a wery old friend of his, as wos on the lock, ven he says all of a sudden, "I ain't seen the market outside, Bill," he says (Fleet Market wos there at that time)—"I ain't seen the market outside, Bill," he says, "for seventeen year." "I know you ain't," says the turnkey, smoking his pipe. "I should like to see it for a minit, Bill," he says. "Wery probable," says the turnkey, smoking his pipe wery fierce, and making believe he warn't up to wot the little man wanted. "Bill," says the little man, more abrupt than afore, "I've got the fancy in my head. Let me see the public streets once more afore I die; and if I ain't struck with apoplexy, I'll be back in five minits by the clock." "And wot 'ud become o' me if you WOS struck with apoplexy?" said the turnkey. "Wy," says the little creetur, "whoever found me, 'ud bring me home, for I've got my card in my pocket, Bill," he says, "No. 20, Coffee-room Flight": and that wos true, sure enough, for wen he wanted to make the acquaintance of any new-comer, he used to pull out a little limp card vith them words on it and nothin' else; in consideration of vich, he vos alvays called Number Tventy. The turnkey takes a fixed look at him, and at last he says in a solemn manner, "Tventy," he says, "I'll trust you; you Won't get your old friend into trouble." "No, my boy; I hope I've somethin' better behind here," says the little man; and as he said it he hit his little vesket wery hard, and then a tear started out o' each eye, which wos wery extraordinary, for it wos supposed as water never touched his face. He shook the turnkey by the hand; out he vent—'

'And never came back again,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Wrong for vunce, sir,' replied Mr. Weller, 'for back he come, two minits afore the time, a-bilin' with rage, sayin' how he'd been nearly run over by a hackney-coach that he warn't used to it; and he was blowed if he wouldn't write to the lord mayor. They got him pacified at last; and for five years arter that, he never even so much as peeped out o' the lodge gate.'

'At the expiration of that time he died, I suppose,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'No, he didn't, Sir,' replied Sam. 'He got a curiosity to go and taste the beer at a new public-house over the way, and it wos such a wery nice parlour, that he took it into his head to go there every night, which he did for a long time, always comin' back reg'lar about a quarter of an hour afore the gate shut, which was all wery snug and comfortable. At last he began to get so precious jolly, that he used to forget how the time vent, or care nothin' at all about it, and he went on gettin' later and later, till vun night his old friend wos just a-shuttin' the gate—had turned the key in fact—wen he come up. "Hold hard, Bill," he says. "Wot, ain't you come home yet, Tventy?" says the turnkey, "I thought you wos in, long ago." "No, I wasn't," says the little man, with a smile. "Well, then, I'll tell you wot it is, my friend," says the turnkey, openin' the gate wery slow and sulky, "it's my 'pinion as you've got into bad company o' late, which I'm wery sorry to see. Now, I don't wish to do nothing harsh," he says, "but if you can't confine yourself to steady circles, and find your vay back at reg'lar hours, as sure as you're a-standin' there, I'll shut you out altogether!" The little man was seized vith a wiolent fit o' tremblin', and never vent outside the prison walls artervards!'

As Sam concluded, Mr. Pickwick slowly retraced his steps downstairs. After a few thoughtful turns in the Painted Ground, which, as it was now dark, was nearly deserted, he intimated to Mr. Weller that he thought it high time for him to withdraw for the night; requesting him to seek a bed in some adjacent public-house, and return early in the morning, to make arrangements for the removal of his master's wardrobe from the George and Vulture. This request Mr. Samuel Weller prepared to obey, with as good a grace as he could assume, but with a very considerable show of reluctance nevertheless. He even went so far as to essay sundry ineffectual hints regarding the expediency of stretching himself on the gravel for that night; but finding Mr. Pickwick obstinately deaf to any such suggestions, finally withdrew.

There is no disguising the fact that Mr. Pickwick felt very low-spirited and uncomfortable—not for lack of society, for the prison was very full, and a bottle of wine would at once have purchased the utmost good-fellowship of a few choice spirits, without any more formal ceremony of introduction; but he was alone in the coarse, vulgar crowd, and felt the depression of spirits and sinking of heart, naturally consequent on the reflection that he was cooped and caged up, without a prospect of liberation. As to the idea of releasing himself by ministering to the sharpness of Dodson & Fogg, it never for an instant entered his thoughts.

In this frame of mind he turned again into the coffee-room gallery, and walked slowly to and fro. The place was intolerably dirty, and the smell of tobacco smoke perfectly suffocating. There was a perpetual slamming and banging of doors as the people went in and out; and the noise of their voices and footsteps echoed and re-echoed through the passages constantly. A young woman, with a child in her arms, who seemed scarcely able to crawl, from emaciation and misery, was walking up and down the passage in conversation with her husband, who had no other place to see her in. As they passed Mr. Pickwick, he could hear the female sob bitterly; and once she burst into such a passion of grief, that she was compelled to lean against the wall for support, while the man took the child in his arms, and tried to soothe her.

Mr. Pickwick's heart was really too full to bear it, and he went upstairs to bed.

Now, although the warder's room was a very uncomfortable one (being, in every point of decoration and convenience, several hundred degrees inferior to the common infirmary of a county jail), it had at present the merit of being wholly deserted save by Mr. Pickwick himself. So, he sat down at the foot of his little iron bedstead, and began to wonder how much a year the warder made out of the dirty room. Having satisfied himself, by mathematical calculation, that the apartment was about equal in annual value to the freehold of a small street in the suburbs of London, he took to wondering what possible temptation could have induced a dingy-looking fly that was crawling over his pantaloons, to come into a close prison, when he had the choice of so many airy situations—a course of meditation which led him to the irresistible conclusion that the insect was insane. After settling this point, he began to be conscious that he was getting sleepy; whereupon he took his nightcap out of the pocket in which he had had the precaution to stow it in the morning, and, leisurely undressing himself, got into bed and fell asleep.

'Bravo! Heel over toe—cut and shuffle—pay away at it, Zephyr! I'm smothered if the opera house isn't your proper hemisphere. Keep it up! Hooray!' These expressions, delivered in a most boisterous tone, and accompanied with loud peals of laughter, roused Mr. Pickwick from one of those sound slumbers which, lasting in reality some half-hour, seem to the sleeper to have been protracted for three weeks or a month.

The voice had no sooner ceased than the room was shaken with such violence that the windows rattled in their frames, and the bedsteads trembled again. Mr. Pickwick started up, and remained for some minutes fixed in mute astonishment at the scene before him.

On the floor of the room, a man in a broad-skirted green coat, with corduroy knee-smalls and gray cotton stockings, was performing the most popular steps of a hornpipe, with a slang and burlesque caricature of grace and lightness, which, combined with the very appropriate character of his costume, was inexpressibly absurd. Another man, evidently very drunk, who had probably been tumbled into bed by his companions, was sitting up between the sheets, warbling as much as he could recollect of a comic song, with the most intensely sentimental feeling and expression; while a third, seated on one of the bedsteads, was applauding both performers with the air of a profound connoisseur, and encouraging them by such ebullitions of feeling as had already roused Mr. Pickwick from his sleep.

This last man was an admirable specimen of a class of gentry which never can be seen in full perfection but in such places—they may be met with, in an imperfect state, occasionally about stable-yards and Public-houses; but they never attain their full bloom except in these hot-beds, which would almost seem to be considerately provided by the legislature for the sole purpose of rearing them.

He was a tall fellow, with an olive complexion, long dark hair, and very thick bushy whiskers meeting under his chin. He wore no neckerchief, as he had been playing rackets all day, and his Open shirt collar displayed their full luxuriance. On his head he wore one of the common eighteenpenny French skull-caps, with a gaudy tassel dangling therefrom, very happily in keeping with a common fustian coat. His legs, which, being long, were afflicted with weakness, graced a pair of Oxford-mixture trousers, made to show the full symmetry of those limbs. Being somewhat negligently braced, however, and, moreover, but imperfectly buttoned, they fell in a series of not the most graceful folds over a pair of shoes sufficiently down at heel to display a pair of very soiled white stockings. There was a rakish, vagabond smartness, and a kind of boastful rascality, about the whole man, that was worth a mine of gold.

This figure was the first to perceive that Mr. Pickwick was looking on; upon which he winked to the Zephyr, and entreated him, with mock gravity, not to wake the gentleman. 'Why, bless the gentleman's honest heart and soul!' said the Zephyr, turning round and affecting the extremity of surprise; 'the gentleman is awake. Hem, Shakespeare! How do you do, Sir? How is Mary and Sarah, sir? and the dear old lady at home, Sir? Will you have the kindness to put my compliments into the first little parcel you're sending that way, sir, and say that I would have sent 'em before, only I was afraid they might be broken in the wagon, sir?'

'Don't overwhelm the gentlemen with ordinary civilities when you see he's anxious to have something to drink,' said the gentleman with the whiskers, with a jocose air. 'Why don't you ask the gentleman what he'll take?'

'Dear me, I quite forgot,' replied the other. 'What will you take, sir? Will you take port wine, sir, or sherry wine, sir? I can recommend the ale, sir; or perhaps you'd like to taste the porter, sir? Allow me to have the felicity of hanging up your nightcap, Sir.'

With this, the speaker snatched that article of dress from Mr. Pickwick's head, and fixed it in a twinkling on that of the drunken man, who, firmly impressed with the belief that he was delighting a numerous assembly, continued to hammer away at the comic song in the most melancholy strains imaginable.

Taking a man's nightcap from his brow by violent means, and adjusting it on the head of an unknown gentleman, of dirty exterior, however ingenious a witticism in itself, is unquestionably one of those which come under the denomination of practical jokes. Viewing the matter precisely in this light, Mr. Pickwick, without the slightest intimation of his purpose, sprang vigorously out of bed, struck the Zephyr so smart a blow in the chest as to deprive him of a considerable portion of the commodity which sometimes bears his name, and then, recapturing his nightcap, boldly placed himself in an attitude of defence.

'Now,' said Mr. Pickwick, gasping no less from excitement than from the expenditure of so much energy, 'come on—both of you—both of you!' With this liberal invitation the worthy gentleman communicated a revolving motion to his clenched fists, by way of appalling his antagonists with a display of science.

It might have been Mr. Pickwick's very unexpected gallantry, or it might have been the complicated manner in which he had got himself out of bed, and fallen all in a mass upon the hornpipe man, that touched his adversaries. Touched they were; for, instead of then and there making an attempt to commit man-slaughter, as Mr. Pickwick implicitly believed they would have done, they paused, stared at each other a short time, and finally laughed outright.

'Well, you're a trump, and I like you all the better for it,' said the Zephyr. 'Now jump into bed again, or you'll catch the rheumatics. No malice, I hope?' said the man, extending a hand the size of the yellow clump of fingers which sometimes swings over a glover's door.

'Certainly not,' said Mr. Pickwick, with great alacrity; for, now that the excitement was over, he began to feel rather cool about the legs.

'Allow me the H-onour,' said the gentleman with the whiskers, presenting his dexter hand, and aspirating the h.

'With much pleasure, sir,' said Mr. Pickwick; and having executed a very long and solemn shake, he got into bed again.

'My name is Smangle, sir,' said the man with the whiskers.

'Oh,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Mine is Mivins,' said the man in the stockings.

'I am delighted to hear it, sir,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Hem,' coughed Mr. Smangle.

'Did you speak, sir?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'No, I did not, sir,' said Mr. Smangle.

All this was very genteel and pleasant; and, to make matters still more comfortable, Mr. Smangle assured Mr. Pickwick a great many more times that he entertained a very high respect for the feelings of a gentleman; which sentiment, indeed, did him infinite credit, as he could be in no wise supposed to understand them.

'Are you going through the court, sir?' inquired Mr. Smangle. 'Through the what?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Through the court—Portugal Street—the Court for Relief of—You know.'

'Oh, no,' replied Mr. Pickwick. 'No, I am not.'

'Going out, perhaps?' suggested Mr. Mivins.

'I fear not,' replied Mr. Pickwick. 'I refuse to pay some damages, and am here in consequence.'

'Ah,' said Mr. Smangle, 'paper has been my ruin.'

'A stationer, I presume, Sir?' said Mr. Pickwick innocently.

'Stationer! No, no; confound and curse me! Not so low as that. No trade. When I say paper, I mean bills.'

'Oh, you use the word in that sense. I see,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Damme! A gentleman must expect reverses,' said Smangle. 'What of that? Here am I in the Fleet Prison. Well; good. What then? I'm none the worse for that, am I?'

'Not a bit,' replied Mr. Mivins. And he was quite right; for, so far from Mr. Smangle being any the worse for it, he was something the better, inasmuch as to qualify himself for the place, he had attained gratuitous possession of certain articles of jewellery, which, long before that, had found their way to the pawnbroker's.

'Well; but come,' said Mr. Smangle; 'this is dry work. Let's rinse our mouths with a drop of burnt sherry; the last-comer shall stand it, Mivins shall fetch it, and I'll help to drink it. That's a fair and gentlemanlike division of labour, anyhow. Curse me!'

Unwilling to hazard another quarrel, Mr. Pickwick gladly assented to the proposition, and consigned the money to Mr. Mivins, who, as it was nearly eleven o'clock, lost no time in repairing to the coffee-room on his errand.

'I say,' whispered Smangle, the moment his friend had left the room; 'what did you give him?'

'Half a sovereign,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'He's a devilish pleasant gentlemanly dog,' said Mr. Smangle;—'infernal pleasant. I don't know anybody more so; but—' Here Mr. Smangle stopped short, and shook his head dubiously.

'You don't think there is any probability of his appropriating the money to his own use?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Oh, no! Mind, I don't say that; I expressly say that he's a devilish gentlemanly fellow,' said Mr. Smangle. 'But I think, perhaps, if somebody went down, just to see that he didn't dip his beak into the jug by accident, or make some confounded mistake in losing the money as he came upstairs, it would be as well. Here, you sir, just run downstairs, and look after that gentleman, will you?'

This request was addressed to a little timid-looking, nervous man, whose appearance bespoke great poverty, and who had been crouching on his bedstead all this while, apparently stupefied by the novelty of his situation.

'You know where the coffee-room is,' said Smangle; 'just run down, and tell that gentleman you've come to help him up with the jug. Or—stop—I'll tell you what—I'll tell you how we'll do him,' said Smangle, with a cunning look.

'How?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Send down word that he's to spend the change in cigars. Capital thought. Run and tell him that; d'ye hear? They shan't be wasted,' continued Smangle, turning to Mr. Pickwick. 'I'LL smoke 'em.'

This manoeuvring was so exceedingly ingenious and, withal, performed with such immovable composure and coolness, that Mr. Pickwick would have had no wish to disturb it, even if he had had the power. In a short time Mr. Mivins returned, bearing the sherry, which Mr. Smangle dispensed in two little cracked mugs; considerately remarking, with reference to himself, that a gentleman must not be particular under such circumstances, and that, for his part, he was not too proud to drink out of the jug. In which, to show his sincerity, he forthwith pledged the company in a draught which half emptied it.

An excellent understanding having been by these means promoted, Mr. Smangle proceeded to entertain his hearers with a relation of divers romantic adventures in which he had been from time to time engaged, involving various interesting anecdotes of a thoroughbred horse, and a magnificent Jewess, both of surpassing beauty, and much coveted by the nobility and gentry of these kingdoms.

Long before these elegant extracts from the biography of a gentleman were concluded, Mr. Mivins had betaken himself to bed, and had set in snoring for the night, leaving the timid stranger and Mr. Pickwick to the full benefit of Mr. Smangle's experiences.

Nor were the two last-named gentlemen as much edified as they might have been by the moving passages narrated. Mr. Pickwick had been in a state of slumber for some time, when he had a faint perception of the drunken man bursting out afresh with the comic song, and receiving from Mr. Smangle a gentle intimation, through the medium of the water-jug, that his audience was not musically disposed. Mr. Pickwick then once again dropped off to sleep, with a confused consciousness that Mr. Smangle was still engaged in relating a long story, the chief point of which appeared to be that, on some occasion particularly stated and set forth, he had 'done' a bill and a gentleman at the same time.

CHAPTER XLII. ILLUSTRATIVE, LIKE THE PRECEDING ONE, OF THE OLD PROVERB,

THAT ADVERSITY BRINGS A MAN ACQUAINTED WITH STRANGE BEDFELLOWS—LIKEWISE CONTAINING Mr. PICKWICK'S EXTRAORDINARY AND STARTLING ANNOUNCEMENT TO Mr. SAMUEL WELLER

When Mr. Pickwick opened his eyes next morning, the first object upon which they rested was Samuel Weller, seated upon a small black portmanteau, intently regarding, apparently in a condition of profound abstraction, the stately figure of the dashing Mr. Smangle; while Mr. Smangle himself, who was already partially dressed, was seated on his bedstead, occupied in the desperately hopeless attempt of staring Mr. Weller out of countenance. We say desperately hopeless, because Sam, with a comprehensive gaze which took in Mr. Smangle's cap, feet, head, face, legs, and whiskers, all at the same time, continued to look steadily on, with every demonstration of lively satisfaction, but with no more regard to Mr. Smangle's personal sentiments on the subject than he would have displayed had he been inspecting a wooden statue, or a straw-embowelled Guy Fawkes.

'Well; will you know me again?' said Mr. Smangle, with a frown.

'I'd svear to you anyveres, Sir,' replied Sam cheerfully.

'Don't be impertinent to a gentleman, Sir,' said Mr. Smangle.

'Not on no account,' replied Sam. 'If you'll tell me wen he wakes, I'll be upon the wery best extra-super behaviour!' This observation, having a remote tendency to imply that Mr. Smangle was no gentleman, kindled his ire.

'Mivins!' said Mr. Smangle, with a passionate air.

'What's the office?' replied that gentleman from his couch.

'Who the devil is this fellow?'

''Gad,' said Mr. Mivins, looking lazily out from under the bed-clothes, 'I ought to ask YOU that. Hasn't he any business here?'

'No,' replied Mr. Smangle. 'Then knock him downstairs, and tell him not to presume to get up till I come and kick him,' rejoined Mr. Mivins; with this prompt advice that excellent gentleman again betook himself to slumber.

The conversation exhibiting these unequivocal symptoms of verging on the personal, Mr. Pickwick deemed it a fit point at which to interpose.

'Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Sir,' rejoined that gentleman.

'Has anything new occurred since last night?'

'Nothin' partickler, sir,' replied Sam, glancing at Mr. Smangle's whiskers; 'the late prewailance of a close and confined atmosphere has been rayther favourable to the growth of veeds, of an alarmin' and sangvinary natur; but vith that 'ere exception things is quiet enough.'

'I shall get up,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'give me some clean things.' Whatever hostile intentions Mr. Smangle might have entertained, his thoughts were speedily diverted by the unpacking of the portmanteau; the contents of which appeared to impress him at once with a most favourable opinion, not only of Mr. Pickwick, but of Sam also, who, he took an early opportunity of declaring in a tone of voice loud enough for that eccentric personage to overhear, was a regular thoroughbred original, and consequently the very man after his own heart. As to Mr. Pickwick, the affection he conceived for him knew no limits.

'Now is there anything I can do for you, my dear Sir?' said Smangle.

'Nothing that I am aware of, I am obliged to you,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'No linen that you want sent to the washerwoman's? I know a delightful washerwoman outside, that comes for my things twice a week; and, by Jove!—how devilish lucky!—this is the day she calls. Shall I put any of those little things up with mine? Don't say anything about the trouble. Confound and curse it! if one gentleman under a cloud is not to put himself a little out of the way to assist another gentleman in the same condition, what's human nature?'

Thus spake Mr. Smangle, edging himself meanwhile as near as possible to the portmanteau, and beaming forth looks of the most fervent and disinterested friendship.

'There's nothing you want to give out for the man to brush, my dear creature, is there?' resumed Smangle.

'Nothin' whatever, my fine feller,' rejoined Sam, taking the reply into his own mouth. 'P'raps if vun of us wos to brush, without troubling the man, it 'ud be more agreeable for all parties, as the schoolmaster said when the young gentleman objected to being flogged by the butler.'

'And there's nothing I can send in my little box to the washer-woman's, is there?' said Smangle, turning from Sam to Mr. Pickwick, with an air of some discomfiture.

'Nothin' whatever, Sir,' retorted Sam; 'I'm afeered the little box must be chock full o' your own as it is.'

This speech was accompanied with such a very expressive look at that particular portion of Mr. Smangle's attire, by the appearance of which the skill of laundresses in getting up gentlemen's linen is generally tested, that he was fain to turn upon his heel, and, for the present at any rate, to give up all design on Mr. Pickwick's purse and wardrobe. He accordingly retired in dudgeon to the racket-ground, where he made a light and whole-some breakfast on a couple of the cigars which had been purchased on the previous night. Mr. Mivins, who was no smoker, and whose account for small articles of chandlery had also reached down to the bottom of the slate, and been 'carried over' to the other side, remained in bed, and, in his own words, 'took it out in sleep.'

After breakfasting in a small closet attached to the coffee-room, which bore the imposing title of the Snuggery, the temporary inmate of which, in consideration of a small additional charge, had the unspeakable advantage of overhearing all the conversation in the coffee-room aforesaid; and, after despatching Mr. Weller on some necessary errands, Mr. Pickwick repaired to the lodge, to consult Mr. Roker concerning his future accommodation.

'Accommodation, eh?' said that gentleman, consulting a large book. 'Plenty of that, Mr. Pickwick. Your chummage ticket will be on twenty-seven, in the third.'

'Oh,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'My what, did you say?'

'Your chummage ticket,' replied Mr. Roker; 'you're up to that?'

'Not quite,' replied Mr. Pickwick, with a smile.

'Why,' said Mr. Roker, 'it's as plain as Salisbury. You'll have a chummage ticket upon twenty-seven in the third, and them as is in the room will be your chums.'

'Are there many of them?' inquired Mr. Pickwick dubiously.

'Three,' replied Mr. Roker.

Mr. Pickwick coughed.

'One of 'em's a parson,' said Mr. Roker, filling up a little piece of paper as he spoke; 'another's a butcher.'

'Eh?' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

'A butcher,' repeated Mr. Roker, giving the nib of his pen a tap on the desk to cure it of a disinclination to mark. 'What a thorough-paced goer he used to be sure-ly! You remember Tom Martin, Neddy?' said Roker, appealing to another man in the lodge, who was paring the mud off his shoes with a five-and-twenty-bladed pocket-knife.

'I should think so,' replied the party addressed, with a strong emphasis on the personal pronoun.

'Bless my dear eyes!' said Mr. Roker, shaking his head slowly from side to side, and gazing abstractedly out of the grated windows before him, as if he were fondly recalling some peaceful scene of his early youth; 'it seems but yesterday that he whopped the coal-heaver down Fox-under-the-Hill by the wharf there. I think I can see him now, a-coming up the Strand between the two street-keepers, a little sobered by the bruising, with a patch o' winegar and brown paper over his right eyelid, and that 'ere lovely bulldog, as pinned the little boy arterwards, a-following at his heels. What a rum thing time is, ain't it, Neddy?'

The gentleman to whom these observations were addressed, who appeared of a taciturn and thoughtful cast, merely echoed the inquiry; Mr. Roker, shaking off the poetical and gloomy train of thought into which he had been betrayed, descended to the common business of life, and resumed his pen.

'Do you know what the third gentlemen is?' inquired Mr. Pickwick, not very much gratified by this description of his future associates.

'What is that Simpson, Neddy?' said Mr. Roker, turning to his companion.

'What Simpson?' said Neddy.

'Why, him in twenty-seven in the third, that this gentleman's going to be chummed on.'

'Oh, him!' replied Neddy; 'he's nothing exactly. He WAS a horse chaunter: he's a leg now.'

'Ah, so I thought,' rejoined Mr. Roker, closing the book, and placing the small piece of paper in Mr. Pickwick's hands. 'That's the ticket, sir.'

Very much perplexed by this summary disposition of this person, Mr. Pickwick walked back into the prison, revolving in his mind what he had better do. Convinced, however, that before he took any other steps it would be advisable to see, and hold personal converse with, the three gentlemen with whom it was proposed to quarter him, he made the best of his way to the third flight.

After groping about in the gallery for some time, attempting in the dim light to decipher the numbers on the different doors, he at length appealed to a pot-boy, who happened to be pursuing his morning occupation of gleaning for pewter.

'Which is twenty-seven, my good fellow?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Five doors farther on,' replied the pot-boy. 'There's the likeness of a man being hung, and smoking the while, chalked outside the door.'

Guided by this direction, Mr. Pickwick proceeded slowly along the gallery until he encountered the 'portrait of a gentleman,' above described, upon whose countenance he tapped, with the knuckle of his forefinger—gently at first, and then audibly. After repeating this process several times without effect, he ventured to open the door and peep in.

There was only one man in the room, and he was leaning out of window as far as he could without overbalancing himself, endeavouring, with great perseverance, to spit upon the crown of the hat of a personal friend on the parade below. As neither speaking, coughing, sneezing, knocking, nor any other ordinary mode of attracting attention, made this person aware of the presence of a visitor, Mr. Pickwick, after some delay, stepped up to the window, and pulled him gently by the coat tail. The individual brought in his head and shoulders with great swiftness, and surveying Mr. Pickwick from head to foot, demanded in a surly tone what the—something beginning with a capital H—he wanted.

'I believe,' said Mr. Pickwick, consulting his ticket—'I believe this is twenty-seven in the third?'

'Well?' replied the gentleman.

'I have come here in consequence of receiving this bit of paper,' rejoined Mr. Pickwick.

'Hand it over,' said the gentleman.

Mr. Pickwick complied.

'I think Roker might have chummed you somewhere else,' said Mr. Simpson (for it was the leg), after a very discontented sort of a pause.

Mr. Pickwick thought so also; but, under all the circumstances, he considered it a matter of sound policy to be silent. Mr. Simpson mused for a few moments after this, and then, thrusting his head out of the window, gave a shrill whistle, and pronounced some word aloud, several times. What the word was, Mr. Pickwick could not distinguish; but he rather inferred that it must be some nickname which distinguished Mr. Martin, from the fact of a great number of gentlemen on the ground below, immediately proceeding to cry 'Butcher!' in imitation of the tone in which that useful class of society are wont, diurnally, to make their presence known at area railings.

Subsequent occurrences confirmed the accuracy of Mr. Pickwick's impression; for, in a few seconds, a gentleman, prematurely broad for his years, clothed in a professional blue jean frock and top-boots with circular toes, entered the room nearly out of breath, closely followed by another gentleman in very shabby black, and a sealskin cap. The latter gentleman, who fastened his coat all the way up to his chin by means of a pin and a button alternately, had a very coarse red face, and looked like a drunken chaplain; which, indeed, he was.

These two gentlemen having by turns perused Mr. Pickwick's billet, the one expressed his opinion that it was 'a rig,' and the other his conviction that it was 'a go.' Having recorded their feelings in these very intelligible terms, they looked at Mr. Pickwick and each other in awkward silence.

'It's an aggravating thing, just as we got the beds so snug,' said the chaplain, looking at three dirty mattresses, each rolled up in a blanket; which occupied one corner of the room during the day, and formed a kind of slab, on which were placed an old cracked basin, ewer, and soap-dish, of common yellow earthenware, with a blue flower—'very aggravating.'

Mr. Martin expressed the same opinion in rather stronger terms; Mr. Simpson, after having let a variety of expletive adjectives loose upon society without any substantive to accompany them, tucked up his sleeves, and began to wash the greens for dinner.

While this was going on, Mr. Pickwick had been eyeing the room, which was filthily dirty, and smelt intolerably close. There was no vestige of either carpet, curtain, or blind. There was not even a closet in it. Unquestionably there were but few things to put away, if there had been one; but, however few in number, or small in individual amount, still, remnants of loaves and pieces of cheese, and damp towels, and scrags of meat, and articles of wearing apparel, and mutilated crockery, and bellows without nozzles, and toasting-forks without prongs, do present somewhat of an uncomfortable appearance when they are scattered about the floor of a small apartment, which is the common sitting and sleeping room of three idle men.

'I suppose this can be managed somehow,' said the butcher, after a pretty long silence. 'What will you take to go out?' 'I beg your pardon,' replied Mr. Pickwick. 'What did you say? I hardly understand you.'

'What will you take to be paid out?' said the butcher. 'The regular chummage is two-and-six. Will you take three bob?'

'And a bender,' suggested the clerical gentleman.

'Well, I don't mind that; it's only twopence a piece more,' said Mr. Martin. 'What do you say, now? We'll pay you out for three-and-sixpence a week. Come!'

'And stand a gallon of beer down,' chimed in Mr. Simpson. 'There!'

'And drink it on the spot,' said the chaplain. 'Now!'

'I really am so wholly ignorant of the rules of this place,' returned Mr. Pickwick, 'that I do not yet comprehend you. Can I live anywhere else? I thought I could not.'

At this inquiry Mr. Martin looked, with a countenance of excessive surprise, at his two friends, and then each gentleman pointed with his right thumb over his left shoulder. This action imperfectly described in words by the very feeble term of 'over the left,' when performed by any number of ladies or gentlemen who are accustomed to act in unison, has a very graceful and airy effect; its expression is one of light and playful sarcasm.

'CAN you!' repeated Mr. Martin, with a smile of pity.

'Well, if I knew as little of life as that, I'd eat my hat and swallow the buckle whole,' said the clerical gentleman.

'So would I,' added the sporting one solemnly.

After this introductory preface, the three chums informed Mr. Pickwick, in a breath, that money was, in the Fleet, just what money was out of it; that it would instantly procure him almost anything he desired; and that, supposing he had it, and had no objection to spend it, if he only signified his wish to have a room to himself, he might take possession of one, furnished and fitted to boot, in half an hour's time.

With this the parties separated, very much to their common satisfaction; Mr. Pickwick once more retracing his steps to the lodge, and the three companions adjourning to the coffee-room, there to spend the five shillings which the clerical gentleman had, with admirable prudence and foresight, borrowed of him for the purpose.

'I knowed it!' said Mr. Roker, with a chuckle, when Mr. Pickwick stated the object with which he had returned. 'Didn't I say so, Neddy?'

The philosophical owner of the universal penknife growled an affirmative.

'I knowed you'd want a room for yourself, bless you!' said Mr. Roker. 'Let me see. You'll want some furniture. You'll hire that of me, I suppose? That's the reg'lar thing.'

'With great pleasure,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'There's a capital room up in the coffee-room flight, that belongs to a Chancery prisoner,' said Mr. Roker. 'It'll stand you in a pound a week. I suppose you don't mind that?'

'Not at all,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Just step there with me,' said Roker, taking up his hat with great alacrity; 'the matter's settled in five minutes. Lord! why didn't you say at first that you was willing to come down handsome?'

The matter was soon arranged, as the turnkey had foretold. The Chancery prisoner had been there long enough to have lost his friends, fortune, home, and happiness, and to have acquired the right of having a room to himself. As he laboured, however, under the inconvenience of often wanting a morsel of bread, he eagerly listened to Mr. Pickwick's proposal to rent the apartment, and readily covenanted and agreed to yield him up the sole and undisturbed possession thereof, in consideration of the weekly payment of twenty shillings; from which fund he furthermore contracted to pay out any person or persons that might be chummed upon it.

As they struck the bargain, Mr. Pickwick surveyed him with a painful interest. He was a tall, gaunt, cadaverous man, in an old greatcoat and slippers, with sunken cheeks, and a restless, eager eye. His lips were bloodless, and his bones sharp and thin. God help him! the iron teeth of confinement and privation had been slowly filing him down for twenty years.

'And where will you live meanwhile, Sir?' said Mr. Pickwick, as he laid the amount of the first week's rent, in advance, on the tottering table.

The man gathered up the money with a trembling hand, and replied that he didn't know yet; he must go and see where he could move his bed to.

'I am afraid, sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, laying his hand gently and compassionately on his arm—'I am afraid you will have to live in some noisy, crowded place. Now, pray, consider this room your own when you want quiet, or when any of your friends come to see you.'

'Friends!' interposed the man, in a voice which rattled in his throat. 'if I lay dead at the bottom of the deepest mine in the world; tight screwed down and soldered in my coffin; rotting in the dark and filthy ditch that drags its slime along, beneath the foundations of this prison; I could not be more forgotten or unheeded than I am here. I am a dead man; dead to society, without the pity they bestow on those whose souls have passed to judgment. Friends to see me! My God! I have sunk, from the prime of life into old age, in this place, and there is not one to raise his hand above my bed when I lie dead upon it, and say, "It is a blessing he is gone!"'

The excitement, which had cast an unwonted light over the man's face, while he spoke, subsided as he concluded; and pressing his withered hands together in a hasty and disordered manner, he shuffled from the room.

'Rides rather rusty,' said Mr. Roker, with a smile. 'Ah! they're like the elephants. They feel it now and then, and it makes 'em wild!'

Having made this deeply-sympathising remark, Mr. Roker entered upon his arrangements with such expedition, that in a short time the room was furnished with a carpet, six chairs, a table, a sofa bedstead, a tea-kettle, and various small articles, on hire, at the very reasonable rate of seven-and-twenty shillings and sixpence per week.

'Now, is there anything more we can do for you?' inquired Mr. Roker, looking round with great satisfaction, and gaily chinking the first week's hire in his closed fist.

'Why, yes,' said Mr. Pickwick, who had been musing deeply for some time. 'Are there any people here who run on errands, and so forth?'

'Outside, do you mean?' inquired Mr. Roker.

'Yes. I mean who are able to go outside. Not prisoners.'

'Yes, there is,' said Roker. 'There's an unfortunate devil, who has got a friend on the poor side, that's glad to do anything of that sort. He's been running odd jobs, and that, for the last two months. Shall I send him?'

'If you please,' rejoined Mr. Pickwick. 'Stay; no. The poor side, you say? I should like to see it. I'll go to him myself.'

The poor side of a debtor's prison is, as its name imports, that in which the most miserable and abject class of debtors are confined. A prisoner having declared upon the poor side, pays neither rent nor chummage. His fees, upon entering and leaving the jail, are reduced in amount, and he becomes entitled to a share of some small quantities of food: to provide which, a few charitable persons have, from time to time, left trifling legacies in their wills. Most of our readers will remember, that, until within a very few years past, there was a kind of iron cage in the wall of the Fleet Prison, within which was posted some man of hungry looks, who, from time to time, rattled a money-box, and exclaimed in a mournful voice, 'Pray, remember the poor debtors; pray remember the poor debtors.' The receipts of this box, when there were any, were divided among the poor prisoners; and the men on the poor side relieved each other in this degrading office.

Although this custom has been abolished, and the cage is now boarded up, the miserable and destitute condition of these unhappy persons remains the same. We no longer suffer them to appeal at the prison gates to the charity and compassion of the passersby; but we still leave unblotted the leaves of our statute book, for the reverence and admiration of succeeding ages, the just and wholesome law which declares that the sturdy felon shall be fed and clothed, and that the penniless debtor shall be left to die of starvation and nakedness. This is no fiction. Not a week passes over our head, but, in every one of our prisons for debt, some of these men must inevitably expire in the slow agonies of want, if they were not relieved by their fellow-prisoners.

Turning these things in his mind, as he mounted the narrow staircase at the foot of which Roker had left him, Mr. Pickwick gradually worked himself to the boiling-over point; and so excited was he with his reflections on this subject, that he had burst into the room to which he had been directed, before he had any distinct recollection, either of the place in which he was, or of the object of his visit.

The general aspect of the room recalled him to himself at once; but he had no sooner cast his eye on the figure of a man who was brooding over the dusty fire, than, letting his hat fall on the floor, he stood perfectly fixed and immovable with astonishment.

Yes; in tattered garments, and without a coat; his common calico shirt, yellow and in rags; his hair hanging over his face; his features changed with suffering, and pinched with famine—there sat Mr. Alfred Jingle; his head resting on his hands, his eyes fixed upon the fire, and his whole appearance denoting misery and dejection!

Near him, leaning listlessly against the wall, stood a strong-built countryman, flicking with a worn-out hunting-whip the top-boot that adorned his right foot; his left being thrust into an old slipper. Horses, dogs, and drink had brought him there, pell-mell. There was a rusty spur on the solitary boot, which he occasionally jerked into the empty air, at the same time giving the boot a smart blow, and muttering some of the sounds by which a sportsman encourages his horse. He was riding, in imagination, some desperate steeplechase at that moment. Poor wretch! He never rode a match on the swiftest animal in his costly stud, with half the speed at which he had torn along the course that ended in the Fleet.

On the opposite side of the room an old man was seated on a small wooden box, with his eyes riveted on the floor, and his face settled into an expression of the deepest and most hopeless despair. A young girl—his little grand-daughter—was hanging about him, endeavouring, with a thousand childish devices, to engage his attention; but the old man neither saw nor heard her. The voice that had been music to him, and the eyes that had been light, fell coldly on his senses. His limbs were shaking with disease, and the palsy had fastened on his mind.

There were two or three other men in the room, congregated in a little knot, and noiselessly talking among themselves. There was a lean and haggard woman, too—a prisoner's wife—who was watering, with great solicitude, the wretched stump of a dried-up, withered plant, which, it was plain to see, could never send forth a green leaf again—too true an emblem, perhaps, of the office she had come there to discharge.

Such were the objects which presented themselves to Mr. Pickwick's view, as he looked round him in amazement. The noise of some one stumbling hastily into the room, roused him. Turning his eyes towards the door, they encountered the new-comer; and in him, through his rags and dirt, he recognised the familiar features of Mr. Job Trotter.

'Mr. Pickwick!' exclaimed Job aloud.

'Eh?' said Jingle, starting from his seat. 'Mr ——! So it is—queer place—strange things—serves me right—very.' Mr. Jingle thrust his hands into the place where his trousers pockets used to be, and, dropping his chin upon his breast, sank back into his chair.

Mr. Pickwick was affected; the two men looked so very miserable. The sharp, involuntary glance Jingle had cast at a small piece of raw loin of mutton, which Job had brought in with him, said more of their reduced state than two hours' explanation could have done. Mr. Pickwick looked mildly at Jingle, and said—

'I should like to speak to you in private. Will you step out for an instant?'

'Certainly,' said Jingle, rising hastily. 'Can't step far—no danger of overwalking yourself here—spike park—grounds pretty—romantic, but not extensive—open for public inspection—family always in town—housekeeper desperately careful—very.'

'You have forgotten your coat,' said Mr. Pickwick, as they walked out to the staircase, and closed the door after them.

'Eh?' said Jingle. 'Spout—dear relation—uncle Tom—couldn't help it—must eat, you know. Wants of nature—and all that.'

'What do you mean?'

'Gone, my dear sir—last coat—can't help it. Lived on a pair of boots, whole fortnight. Silk umbrella—ivory handle—week—fact—honour—ask Job—knows it.'

'Lived for three weeks upon a pair of boots, and a silk umbrella with an ivory handle!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, who had only heard of such things in shipwrecks or read of them in Constable's Miscellany.

'True,' said Jingle, nodding his head. 'Pawnbroker's shop—duplicates here—small sums—mere nothing—all rascals.'

'Oh,' said Mr. Pickwick, much relieved by this explanation; 'I understand you. You have pawned your wardrobe.'

'Everything—Job's too—all shirts gone—never mind—saves washing. Nothing soon—lie in bed—starve—die—inquest—little bone-house—poor prisoner—common necessaries—hush it up—gentlemen of the jury—warden's tradesmen—keep it snug—natural death—coroner's order—workhouse funeral—serve him right—all over—drop the curtain.'

Jingle delivered this singular summary of his prospects in life, with his accustomed volubility, and with various twitches of the countenance to counterfeit smiles. Mr. Pickwick easily perceived that his recklessness was assumed, and looking him full, but not unkindly, in the face, saw that his eyes were moist with tears.

'Good fellow,' said Jingle, pressing his hand, and turning his head away. 'Ungrateful dog—boyish to cry—can't help it—bad fever—weak—ill—hungry. Deserved it all—but suffered much—very.' Wholly unable to keep up appearances any longer, and perhaps rendered worse by the effort he had made, the dejected stroller sat down on the stairs, and, covering his face with his hands, sobbed like a child.

'Come, come,' said Mr. Pickwick, with considerable emotion, 'we will see what can be done, when I know all about the matter. Here, Job; where is that fellow?'

'Here, sir,' replied Job, presenting himself on the staircase. We have described him, by the bye, as having deeply-sunken eyes, in the best of times. In his present state of want and distress, he looked as if those features had gone out of town altogether.

'Here, sir,' cried Job.

'Come here, sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, trying to look stern, with four large tears running down his waistcoat. 'Take that, sir.'

Take what? In the ordinary acceptation of such language, it should have been a blow. As the world runs, it ought to have been a sound, hearty cuff; for Mr. Pickwick had been duped, deceived, and wronged by the destitute outcast who was now wholly in his power. Must we tell the truth? It was something from Mr. Pickwick's waistcoat pocket, which chinked as it was given into Job's hand, and the giving of which, somehow or other imparted a sparkle to the eye, and a swelling to the heart, of our excellent old friend, as he hurried away.

Sam had returned when Mr. Pickwick reached his own room, and was inspecting the arrangements that had been made for his comfort, with a kind of grim satisfaction which was very pleasant to look upon. Having a decided objection to his master's being there at all, Mr. Weller appeared to consider it a high moral duty not to appear too much pleased with anything that was done, said, suggested, or proposed.

'Well, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Well, sir,' replied Mr. Weller.

'Pretty comfortable now, eh, Sam?'

'Pretty vell, sir,' responded Sam, looking round him in a disparaging manner.

'Have you seen Mr. Tupman and our other friends?'

'Yes, I HAVE seen 'em, sir, and they're a-comin' to-morrow, and wos wery much surprised to hear they warn't to come to-day,' replied Sam.

'You have brought the things I wanted?'

Mr. Weller in reply pointed to various packages which he had arranged, as neatly as he could, in a corner of the room.

'Very well, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, after a little hesitation; 'listen to what I am going to say, Sam.'

'Cert'nly, Sir,' rejoined Mr. Weller; 'fire away, Sir.'

'I have felt from the first, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, with much solemnity, 'that this is not the place to bring a young man to.'

'Nor an old 'un neither, Sir,' observed Mr. Weller.

'You're quite right, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'but old men may come here through their own heedlessness and unsuspicion, and young men may be brought here by the selfishness of those they serve. It is better for those young men, in every point of view, that they should not remain here. Do you understand me, Sam?'

'Vy no, Sir, I do NOT,' replied Mr. Weller doggedly.

'Try, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Vell, sir,' rejoined Sam, after a short pause, 'I think I see your drift; and if I do see your drift, it's my 'pinion that you're a-comin' it a great deal too strong, as the mail-coachman said to the snowstorm, ven it overtook him.'

'I see you comprehend me, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Independently of my wish that you should not be idling about a place like this, for years to come, I feel that for a debtor in the Fleet to be attended by his manservant is a monstrous absurdity. Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'for a time you must leave me.'

'Oh, for a time, eh, sir?' rejoined Mr. Weller rather sarcastically.

'Yes, for the time that I remain here,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Your wages I shall continue to pay. Any one of my three friends will be happy to take you, were it only out of respect to me. And if I ever do leave this place, Sam,' added Mr. Pickwick, with assumed cheerfulness—'if I do, I pledge you my word that you shall return to me instantly.'

'Now I'll tell you wot it is, Sir,' said Mr. Weller, in a grave and solemn voice. 'This here sort o' thing won't do at all, so don't let's hear no more about it.' 'I am serious, and resolved, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'You air, air you, sir?' inquired Mr. Weller firmly. 'Wery good, Sir; then so am I.'

Thus speaking, Mr. Weller fixed his hat on his head with great precision, and abruptly left the room.

'Sam!' cried Mr. Pickwick, calling after him, 'Sam! Here!'

But the long gallery ceased to re-echo the sound of footsteps. Sam Weller was gone.

CHAPTER XLIII. SHOWING HOW Mr. SAMUEL WELLER GOT INTO DIFFICULTIES

In a lofty room, ill-lighted and worse ventilated, situated in Portugal Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, there sit nearly the whole year round, one, two, three, or four gentlemen in wigs, as the case may be, with little writing-desks before them, constructed after the fashion of those used by the judges of the land, barring the French polish. There is a box of barristers on their right hand; there is an enclosure of insolvent debtors on their left; and there is an inclined plane of most especially dirty faces in their front. These gentlemen are the Commissioners of the Insolvent Court, and the place in which they sit, is the Insolvent Court itself.

It is, and has been, time out of mind, the remarkable fate of this court to be, somehow or other, held and understood, by the general consent of all the destitute shabby-genteel people in London, as their common resort, and place of daily refuge. It is always full. The steams of beer and spirits perpetually ascend to the ceiling, and, being condensed by the heat, roll down the walls like rain; there are more old suits of clothes in it at one time, than will be offered for sale in all Houndsditch in a twelvemonth; more unwashed skins and grizzly beards than all the pumps and shaving-shops between Tyburn and Whitechapel could render decent, between sunrise and sunset.

It must not be supposed that any of these people have the least shadow of business in, or the remotest connection with, the place they so indefatigably attend. If they had, it would be no matter of surprise, and the singularity of the thing would cease. Some of them sleep during the greater part of the sitting; others carry small portable dinners wrapped in pocket-handkerchiefs or sticking out of their worn-out pockets, and munch and listen with equal relish; but no one among them was ever known to have the slightest personal interest in any case that was ever brought forward. Whatever they do, there they sit from the first moment to the last. When it is heavy, rainy weather, they all come in, wet through; and at such times the vapours of the court are like those of a fungus-pit.

A casual visitor might suppose this place to be a temple dedicated to the Genius of Seediness. There is not a messenger or process-server attached to it, who wears a coat that was made for him; not a tolerably fresh, or wholesome-looking man in the whole establishment, except a little white-headed apple-faced tipstaff, and even he, like an ill-conditioned cherry preserved in brandy, seems to have artificially dried and withered up into a state of preservation to which he can lay no natural claim. The very barristers' wigs are ill-powdered, and their curls lack crispness.

But the attorneys, who sit at a large bare table below the commissioners, are, after all, the greatest curiosities. The professional establishment of the more opulent of these gentlemen, consists of a blue bag and a boy; generally a youth of the Jewish persuasion. They have no fixed offices, their legal business being transacted in the parlours of public-houses, or the yards of prisons, whither they repair in crowds, and canvass for customers after the manner of omnibus cads. They are of a greasy and mildewed appearance; and if they can be said to have any vices at all, perhaps drinking and cheating are the most conspicuous among them. Their residences are usually on the outskirts of 'the Rules,' chiefly lying within a circle of one mile from the obelisk in St. George's Fields. Their looks are not prepossessing, and their manners are peculiar.

Mr. Solomon Pell, one of this learned body, was a fat, flabby, pale man, in a surtout which looked green one minute, and brown the next, with a velvet collar of the same chameleon tints. His forehead was narrow, his face wide, his head large, and his nose all on one side, as if Nature, indignant with the propensities she observed in him in his birth, had given it an angry tweak which it had never recovered. Being short-necked and asthmatic, however, he respired principally through this feature; so, perhaps, what it wanted in ornament, it made up in usefulness.

'I'm sure to bring him through it,' said Mr. Pell.

'Are you, though?' replied the person to whom the assurance was pledged.

'Certain sure,' replied Pell; 'but if he'd gone to any irregular practitioner, mind you, I wouldn't have answered for the consequences.'

'Ah!' said the other, with open mouth.

'No, that I wouldn't,' said Mr. Pell; and he pursed up his lips, frowned, and shook his head mysteriously.

Now, the place where this discourse occurred was the public-house just opposite to the Insolvent Court; and the person with whom it was held was no other than the elder Mr. Weller, who had come there, to comfort and console a friend, whose petition to be discharged under the act, was to be that day heard, and whose attorney he was at that moment consulting.

'And vere is George?' inquired the old gentleman.

Mr. Pell jerked his head in the direction of a back parlour, whither Mr. Weller at once repairing, was immediately greeted in the warmest and most flattering manner by some half-dozen of his professional brethren, in token of their gratification at his arrival. The insolvent gentleman, who had contracted a speculative but imprudent passion for horsing long stages, which had led to his present embarrassments, looked extremely well, and was soothing the excitement of his feelings with shrimps and porter.

The salutation between Mr. Weller and his friends was strictly confined to the freemasonry of the craft; consisting of a jerking round of the right wrist, and a tossing of the little finger into the air at the same time. We once knew two famous coachmen (they are dead now, poor fellows) who were twins, and between whom an unaffected and devoted attachment existed. They passed each other on the Dover road, every day, for twenty-four years, never exchanging any other greeting than this; and yet, when one died, the other pined away, and soon afterwards followed him!

'Vell, George,' said Mr. Weller senior, taking off his upper coat, and seating himself with his accustomed gravity. 'How is it? All right behind, and full inside?'

'All right, old feller,' replied the embarrassed gentleman.

'Is the gray mare made over to anybody?' inquired Mr. Weller anxiously. George nodded in the affirmative.

'Vell, that's all right,' said Mr. Weller. 'Coach taken care on, also?'

'Con-signed in a safe quarter,' replied George, wringing the heads off half a dozen shrimps, and swallowing them without any more ado.

'Wery good, wery good,' said Mr. Weller. 'Alvays see to the drag ven you go downhill. Is the vay-bill all clear and straight for'erd?'

'The schedule, sir,' said Pell, guessing at Mr. Weller's meaning, 'the schedule is as plain and satisfactory as pen and ink can make it.'

Mr. Weller nodded in a manner which bespoke his inward approval of these arrangements; and then, turning to Mr. Pell, said, pointing to his friend George—

'Ven do you take his cloths off?'

'Why,' replied Mr. Pell, 'he stands third on the opposed list, and I should think it would be his turn in about half an hour. I told my clerk to come over and tell us when there was a chance.'

Mr. Weller surveyed the attorney from head to foot with great admiration, and said emphatically—

'And what'll you take, sir?'

'Why, really,' replied Mr. Pell, 'you're very—Upon my word and honour, I'm not in the habit of—It's so very early in the morning, that, actually, I am almost—Well, you may bring me threepenn'orth of rum, my dear.'

The officiating damsel, who had anticipated the order before it was given, set the glass of spirits before Pell, and retired.

'Gentlemen,' said Mr. Pell, looking round upon the company, 'success to your friend! I don't like to boast, gentlemen; it's not my way; but I can't help saying, that, if your friend hadn't been fortunate enough to fall into hands that—But I won't say what I was going to say. Gentlemen, my service to you.' Having emptied the glass in a twinkling, Mr. Pell smacked his lips, and looked complacently round on the assembled coachmen, who evidently regarded him as a species of divinity.

'Let me see,' said the legal authority. 'What was I a-saying, gentlemen?'

'I think you was remarkin' as you wouldn't have no objection to another o' the same, Sir,' said Mr. Weller, with grave facetiousness. 'Ha, ha!' laughed Mr. Pell. 'Not bad, not bad. A professional man, too! At this time of the morning, it would be rather too good a—Well, I don't know, my dear—you may do that again, if you please. Hem!'

This last sound was a solemn and dignified cough, in which Mr. Pell, observing an indecent tendency to mirth in some of his auditors, considered it due to himself to indulge.

'The late Lord Chancellor, gentlemen, was very fond of me,' said Mr. Pell.

'And wery creditable in him, too,' interposed Mr. Weller.

'Hear, hear,' assented Mr. Pell's client. 'Why shouldn't he be?

'Ah! Why, indeed!' said a very red-faced man, who had said nothing yet, and who looked extremely unlikely to say anything more. 'Why shouldn't he?'

A murmur of assent ran through the company.

'I remember, gentlemen,' said Mr. Pell, 'dining with him on one occasion; there was only us two, but everything as splendid as if twenty people had been expected—the great seal on a dumb-waiter at his right hand, and a man in a bag-wig and suit of armour guarding the mace with a drawn sword and silk stockings—which is perpetually done, gentlemen, night and day; when he said, "Pell," he said, "no false delicacy, Pell. You're a man of talent; you can get anybody through the Insolvent Court, Pell; and your country should be proud of you." Those were his very words. "My Lord," I said, "you flatter me."—"Pell," he said, "if I do, I'm damned."'

'Did he say that?' inquired Mr. Weller.

'He did,' replied Pell.

'Vell, then,' said Mr. Weller, 'I say Parliament ought to ha' took it up; and if he'd been a poor man, they would ha' done it.'

'But, my dear friend,' argued Mr. Pell, 'it was in confidence.'

'In what?' said Mr. Weller.

'In confidence.'

'Oh! wery good,' replied Mr. Weller, after a little reflection. 'If he damned hisself in confidence, o' course that was another thing.'

'Of course it was,' said Mr. Pell. 'The distinction's obvious, you will perceive.'

'Alters the case entirely,' said Mr. Weller. 'Go on, Sir.' 'No, I will not go on, Sir,' said Mr. Pell, in a low and serious tone. 'You have reminded me, Sir, that this conversation was private—private and confidential, gentlemen. Gentlemen, I am a professional man. It may be that I am a good deal looked up to, in my profession—it may be that I am not. Most people know. I say nothing. Observations have already been made, in this room, injurious to the reputation of my noble friend. You will excuse me, gentlemen; I was imprudent. I feel that I have no right to mention this matter without his concurrence. Thank you, Sir; thank you.' Thus delivering himself, Mr. Pell thrust his hands into his pockets, and, frowning grimly around, rattled three halfpence with terrible determination.

This virtuous resolution had scarcely been formed, when the boy and the blue bag, who were inseparable companions, rushed violently into the room, and said (at least the boy did, for the blue bag took no part in the announcement) that the case was coming on directly. The intelligence was no sooner received than the whole party hurried across the street, and began to fight their way into court—a preparatory ceremony, which has been calculated to occupy, in ordinary cases, from twenty-five minutes to thirty.

Mr. Weller, being stout, cast himself at once into the crowd, with the desperate hope of ultimately turning up in some place which would suit him. His success was not quite equal to his expectations; for having neglected to take his hat off, it was knocked over his eyes by some unseen person, upon whose toes he had alighted with considerable force. Apparently this individual regretted his impetuosity immediately afterwards, for, muttering an indistinct exclamation of surprise, he dragged the old man out into the hall, and, after a violent struggle, released his head and face.

'Samivel!' exclaimed Mr. Weller, when he was thus enabled to behold his rescuer.

Sam nodded.

'You're a dutiful and affectionate little boy, you are, ain't you,' said Mr. Weller, 'to come a-bonnetin' your father in his old age?'

'How should I know who you wos?' responded the son. 'Do you s'pose I wos to tell you by the weight o' your foot?'

'Vell, that's wery true, Sammy,' replied Mr. Weller, mollified at once; 'but wot are you a-doin' on here? Your gov'nor can't do no good here, Sammy. They won't pass that werdick, they won't pass it, Sammy.' And Mr. Weller shook his head with legal solemnity.

'Wot a perwerse old file it is!' exclaimed Sam. 'always a-goin' on about werdicks and alleybis and that. Who said anything about the werdick?'

Mr. Weller made no reply, but once more shook his head most learnedly.

'Leave off rattlin' that 'ere nob o' yourn, if you don't want it to come off the springs altogether,' said Sam impatiently, 'and behave reasonable. I vent all the vay down to the Markis o' Granby, arter you, last night.'

'Did you see the Marchioness o' Granby, Sammy?' inquired Mr. Weller, with a sigh.

'Yes, I did,' replied Sam.

'How wos the dear creetur a-lookin'?'

'Wery queer,' said Sam. 'I think she's a-injurin' herself gradivally vith too much o' that 'ere pine-apple rum, and other strong medicines of the same natur.'

'You don't mean that, Sammy?' said the senior earnestly.

'I do, indeed,' replied the junior. Mr. Weller seized his son's hand, clasped it, and let it fall. There was an expression on his countenance in doing so—not of dismay or apprehension, but partaking more of the sweet and gentle character of hope. A gleam of resignation, and even of cheerfulness, passed over his face too, as he slowly said, 'I ain't quite certain, Sammy; I wouldn't like to say I wos altogether positive, in case of any subsekent disappointment, but I rayther think, my boy, I rayther think, that the shepherd's got the liver complaint!'

'Does he look bad?' inquired Sam.

'He's uncommon pale,' replied his father, "cept about the nose, which is redder than ever. His appetite is wery so-so, but he imbibes wonderful.'

Some thoughts of the rum appeared to obtrude themselves on Mr. Weller's mind, as he said this; for he looked gloomy and thoughtful; but he very shortly recovered, as was testified by a perfect alphabet of winks, in which he was only wont to indulge when particularly pleased.

'Vell, now,' said Sam, 'about my affair. Just open them ears o' yourn, and don't say nothin' till I've done.' With this preface, Sam related, as succinctly as he could, the last memorable conversation he had had with Mr. Pickwick.

'Stop there by himself, poor creetur!' exclaimed the elder Mr. Weller, 'without nobody to take his part! It can't be done, Samivel, it can't be done.'

'O' course it can't,' asserted Sam: 'I know'd that, afore I came.' 'Why, they'll eat him up alive, Sammy,'exclaimed Mr. Weller.

Sam nodded his concurrence in the opinion.

'He goes in rayther raw, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller metaphorically, 'and he'll come out, done so ex-ceedin' brown, that his most formiliar friends won't know him. Roast pigeon's nothin' to it, Sammy.'

Again Sam Weller nodded.

'It oughtn't to be, Samivel,' said Mr. Weller gravely.

'It mustn't be,' said Sam.

'Cert'nly not,' said Mr. Weller.

'Vell now,' said Sam, 'you've been a-prophecyin' away, wery fine, like a red-faced Nixon, as the sixpenny books gives picters on.'

'Who wos he, Sammy?' inquired Mr. Weller.

'Never mind who he was,' retorted Sam; 'he warn't a coachman; that's enough for you.' 'I know'd a ostler o' that name,' said Mr. Weller, musing.

'It warn't him,' said Sam. 'This here gen'l'm'n was a prophet.'

'Wot's a prophet?' inquired Mr. Weller, looking sternly on his son.

'Wy, a man as tells what's a-goin' to happen,' replied Sam.

'I wish I'd know'd him, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller. 'P'raps he might ha' throw'd a small light on that 'ere liver complaint as we wos a-speakin' on, just now. Hows'ever, if he's dead, and ain't left the bisness to nobody, there's an end on it. Go on, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, with a sigh.

'Well,' said Sam, 'you've been a-prophecyin' avay about wot'll happen to the gov'ner if he's left alone. Don't you see any way o' takin' care on him?'

'No, I don't, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, with a reflective visage.

'No vay at all?' inquired Sam.

'No vay,' said Mr. Weller, 'unless'—and a gleam of intelligence lighted up his countenance as he sank his voice to a whisper, and applied his mouth to the ear of his offspring—'unless it is getting him out in a turn-up bedstead, unbeknown to the turnkeys, Sammy, or dressin' him up like a old 'ooman vith a green wail.'

Sam Weller received both of these suggestions with unexpected contempt, and again propounded his question.

'No,' said the old gentleman; 'if he von't let you stop there, I see no vay at all. It's no thoroughfare, Sammy, no thoroughfare.'

'Well, then, I'll tell you wot it is,' said Sam, 'I'll trouble you for the loan of five-and-twenty pound.'

'Wot good'll that do?' inquired Mr. Weller.

'Never mind,' replied Sam. 'P'raps you may ask for it five minits arterwards; p'raps I may say I von't pay, and cut up rough. You von't think o' arrestin' your own son for the money, and sendin' him off to the Fleet, will you, you unnat'ral wagabone?'

At this reply of Sam's, the father and son exchanged a complete code of telegraph nods and gestures, after which, the elder Mr. Weller sat himself down on a stone step and laughed till he was purple.

'Wot a old image it is!' exclaimed Sam, indignant at this loss of time. 'What are you a-settin' down there for, con-wertin' your face into a street-door knocker, wen there's so much to be done. Where's the money?' 'In the boot, Sammy, in the boot,' replied Mr. Weller, composing his features. 'Hold my hat, Sammy.'

Having divested himself of this encumbrance, Mr. Weller gave his body a sudden wrench to one side, and by a dexterous twist, contrived to get his right hand into a most capacious pocket, from whence, after a great deal of panting and exertion, he extricated a pocket-book of the large octavo size, fastened by a huge leathern strap. From this ledger he drew forth a couple of whiplashes, three or four buckles, a little sample-bag of corn, and, finally, a small roll of very dirty bank-notes, from which he selected the required amount, which he handed over to Sam.

'And now, Sammy,' said the old gentleman, when the whip-lashes, and the buckles, and the samples, had been all put back, and the book once more deposited at the bottom of the same pocket, 'now, Sammy, I know a gen'l'm'n here, as'll do the rest o' the bisness for us, in no time—a limb o' the law, Sammy, as has got brains like the frogs, dispersed all over his body, and reachin' to the wery tips of his fingers; a friend of the Lord Chancellorship's, Sammy, who'd only have to tell him what he wanted, and he'd lock you up for life, if that wos all.'

'I say,' said Sam, 'none o' that.'

'None o' wot?' inquired Mr. Weller.

'Wy, none o' them unconstitootional ways o' doin' it,' retorted Sam. 'The have-his-carcass, next to the perpetual motion, is vun of the blessedest things as wos ever made. I've read that 'ere in the newspapers wery of'en.'

'Well, wot's that got to do vith it?' inquired Mr. Weller.

'Just this here,' said Sam, 'that I'll patronise the inwention, and go in, that vay. No visperin's to the Chancellorship—I don't like the notion. It mayn't be altogether safe, vith reference to gettin' out agin.'

Deferring to his son's feeling upon this point, Mr. Weller at once sought the erudite Solomon Pell, and acquainted him with his desire to issue a writ, instantly, for the SUM of twenty-five pounds, and costs of process; to be executed without delay upon the body of one Samuel Weller; the charges thereby incurred, to be paid in advance to Solomon Pell.

The attorney was in high glee, for the embarrassed coach-horser was ordered to be discharged forthwith. He highly approved of Sam's attachment to his master; declared that it strongly reminded him of his own feelings of devotion to his friend, the Chancellor; and at once led the elder Mr. Weller down to the Temple, to swear the affidavit of debt, which the boy, with the assistance of the blue bag, had drawn up on the spot.

Meanwhile, Sam, having been formally introduced to the whitewashed gentleman and his friends, as the offspring of Mr. Weller, of the Belle Savage, was treated with marked distinction, and invited to regale himself with them in honour of the occasion—an invitation which he was by no means backward in accepting.

The mirth of gentlemen of this class is of a grave and quiet character, usually; but the present instance was one of peculiar festivity, and they relaxed in proportion. After some rather tumultuous toasting of the Chief Commissioner and Mr. Solomon Pell, who had that day displayed such transcendent abilities, a mottled-faced gentleman in a blue shawl proposed that somebody should sing a song. The obvious suggestion was, that the mottled-faced gentleman, being anxious for a song, should sing it himself; but this the mottled-faced gentleman sturdily, and somewhat offensively, declined to do. Upon which, as is not unusual in such cases, a rather angry colloquy ensued.

'Gentlemen,' said the coach-horser, 'rather than disturb the harmony of this delightful occasion, perhaps Mr. Samuel Weller will oblige the company.'

'Raly, gentlemen,' said Sam, 'I'm not wery much in the habit o' singin' without the instrument; but anythin' for a quiet life, as the man said wen he took the sitivation at the lighthouse.'

With this prelude, Mr. Samuel Weller burst at once into the following wild and beautiful legend, which, under the impression that it is not generally known, we take the liberty of quoting. We would beg to call particular attention to the monosyllable at the end of the second and fourth lines, which not only enables the singer to take breath at those points, but greatly assists the metre.

ROMANCE

I

Bold Turpin vunce, on Hounslow Heath,
His bold mare Bess bestrode-er;
Ven there he see'd the Bishop's coach
A-coming along the road-er.
So he gallops close to the 'orse's legs,
And he claps his head vithin;
And the Bishop says, 'Sure as eggs is eggs,
This here's the bold Turpin!'

CHORUS

And the Bishop says, 'Sure as eggs is eggs,
This here's the bold Turpin!'

II

Says Turpin, 'You shall eat your words,
With a sarse of leaden bul-let;'
So he puts a pistol to his mouth,
And he fires it down his gul-let.
The coachman he not likin' the job,
Set off at full gal-lop,
But Dick put a couple of balls in his nob,
And perwailed on him to stop.

CHORUS (sarcastically)

But Dick put a couple of balls in his nob,
And perwailed on him to stop.

'I maintain that that 'ere song's personal to the cloth,' said the mottled-faced gentleman, interrupting it at this point. 'I demand the name o' that coachman.'

'Nobody know'd,' replied Sam. 'He hadn't got his card in his pocket.'

'I object to the introduction o' politics,' said the mottled-faced gentleman. 'I submit that, in the present company, that 'ere song's political; and, wot's much the same, that it ain't true. I say that that coachman did not run away; but that he died game—game as pheasants; and I won't hear nothin' said to the contrairey.'

As the mottled-faced gentleman spoke with great energy and determination, and as the opinions of the company seemed divided on the subject, it threatened to give rise to fresh altercation, when Mr. Weller and Mr. Pell most opportunely arrived.

'All right, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller.

'The officer will be here at four o'clock,' said Mr. Pell. 'I suppose you won't run away meanwhile, eh? Ha! ha!'

'P'raps my cruel pa 'ull relent afore then,' replied Sam, with a broad grin.

'Not I,' said the elder Mr. Weller.

'Do,' said Sam.

'Not on no account,' replied the inexorable creditor.

'I'll give bills for the amount, at sixpence a month,' said Sam.

'I won't take 'em,' said Mr. Weller.

'Ha, ha, ha! very good, very good,' said Mr. Solomon Pell, who was making out his little bill of costs; 'a very amusing incident indeed!

Benjamin, copy that.' And Mr. Pell smiled again, as he called Mr. Weller's attention to the amount.

'Thank you, thank you,' said the professional gentleman, taking up another of the greasy notes as Mr. Weller took it from the pocket-book. 'Three ten and one ten is five. Much obliged to you, Mr. Weller. Your son is a most deserving young man, very much so indeed, Sir. It's a very pleasant trait in a young man's character, very much so,' added Mr. Pell, smiling smoothly round, as he buttoned up the money.

'Wot a game it is!' said the elder Mr. Weller, with a chuckle. 'A reg'lar prodigy son!'

'Prodigal—prodigal son, Sir,' suggested Mr. Pell, mildly.

'Never mind, Sir,' said Mr. Weller, with dignity. 'I know wot's o'clock, Sir. Wen I don't, I'll ask you, Sir.'

By the time the officer arrived, Sam had made himself so extremely popular, that the congregated gentlemen determined to see him to prison in a body. So off they set; the plaintiff and defendant walking arm in arm, the officer in front, and eight stout coachmen bringing up the rear. At Serjeant's Inn Coffee-house the whole party halted to refresh, and, the legal arrangements being completed, the procession moved on again.

Some little commotion was occasioned in Fleet Street, by the pleasantry of the eight gentlemen in the flank, who persevered in walking four abreast; it was also found necessary to leave the mottled-faced gentleman behind, to fight a ticket-porter, it being arranged that his friends should call for him as they came back. Nothing but these little incidents occurred on the way. When they reached the gate of the Fleet, the cavalcade, taking the time from the plaintiff, gave three tremendous cheers for the defendant, and, after having shaken hands all round, left him.

Sam, having been formally delivered into the warder's custody, to the intense astonishment of Roker, and to the evident emotion of even the phlegmatic Neddy, passed at once into the prison, walked straight to his master's room, and knocked at the door.

'Come in,' said Mr. Pickwick.

Sam appeared, pulled off his hat, and smiled.

'Ah, Sam, my good lad!' said Mr. Pickwick, evidently delighted to see his humble friend again; 'I had no intention of hurting your feelings yesterday, my faithful fellow, by what I said. Put down your hat, Sam, and let me explain my meaning, a little more at length.'

'Won't presently do, sir?' inquired Sam.

'Certainly,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'but why not now?'

'I'd rayther not now, sir,' rejoined Sam.

'Why?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

''Cause—' said Sam, hesitating.

'Because of what?' inquired Mr. Pickwick, alarmed at his follower's manner. 'Speak out, Sam.'

''Cause,' rejoined Sam—''cause I've got a little bisness as I want to do.'

'What business?' inquired Mr. Pickwick, surprised at Sam's confused manner.

'Nothin' partickler, Sir,' replied Sam.

'Oh, if it's nothing particular,' said Mr. Pickwick, with a smile, 'you can speak with me first.'

'I think I'd better see arter it at once,' said Sam, still hesitating.

Mr. Pickwick looked amazed, but said nothing.

'The fact is—' said Sam, stopping short.

'Well!' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Speak out, Sam.'

'Why, the fact is,' said Sam, with a desperate effort, 'perhaps I'd better see arter my bed afore I do anythin' else.'

'YOUR BED!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, in astonishment.

'Yes, my bed, Sir,' replied Sam, 'I'm a prisoner. I was arrested this here wery arternoon for debt.'

'You arrested for debt!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, sinking into a chair.

'Yes, for debt, Sir,' replied Sam. 'And the man as puts me in, 'ull never let me out till you go yourself.'

'Bless my heart and soul!' ejaculated Mr. Pickwick. 'What do you mean?'

'Wot I say, Sir,' rejoined Sam. 'If it's forty years to come, I shall be a prisoner, and I'm very glad on it; and if it had been Newgate, it would ha' been just the same. Now the murder's out, and, damme, there's an end on it!'

With these words, which he repeated with great emphasis and violence, Sam Weller dashed his hat upon the ground, in a most unusual state of excitement; and then, folding his arms, looked firmly and fixedly in his master's face.

CHAPTER LXIV. TREATS OF DIVERS LITTLE MATTERS WHICH OCCURRED IN THE

FLEET, AND OF Mr. WINKLE'S MYSTERIOUS BEHAVIOUR; AND SHOWS HOW THE POOR CHANCERY PRISONER OBTAINED HIS RELEASE AT LAST

Mr. Pickwick felt a great deal too much touched by the warmth of Sam's attachment, to be able to exhibit any manifestation of anger or displeasure at the precipitate course he had adopted, in voluntarily consigning himself to a debtor's prison for an indefinite period. The only point on which he persevered in demanding an explanation, was, the name of Sam's detaining creditor; but this Mr. Weller as perseveringly withheld.

'It ain't o' no use, sir,' said Sam, again and again; 'he's a malicious, bad-disposed, vorldly-minded, spiteful, windictive creetur, with a hard heart as there ain't no soft'nin', as the wirtuous clergyman remarked of the old gen'l'm'n with the dropsy, ven he said, that upon the whole he thought he'd rayther leave his property to his vife than build a chapel vith it.'

'But consider, Sam,' Mr. Pickwick remonstrated, 'the sum is so small that it can very easily be paid; and having made up My mind that you shall stop with me, you should recollect how much more useful you would be, if you could go outside the walls.' 'Wery much obliged to you, sir,' replied Mr. Weller gravely; 'but I'd rayther not.'

'Rather not do what, Sam?'

'Wy, I'd rayther not let myself down to ask a favour o' this here unremorseful enemy.'

'But it is no favour asking him to take his money, Sam,' reasoned Mr. Pickwick.

'Beg your pardon, sir,' rejoined Sam, 'but it 'ud be a wery great favour to pay it, and he don't deserve none; that's where it is, sir.'

Here Mr. Pickwick, rubbing his nose with an air of some vexation, Mr. Weller thought it prudent to change the theme of the discourse.

'I takes my determination on principle, Sir,' remarked Sam, 'and you takes yours on the same ground; wich puts me in mind o' the man as killed his-self on principle, wich o' course you've heerd on, Sir.' Mr. Weller paused when he arrived at this point, and cast a comical look at his master out of the corners of his eyes.

'There is no "of course" in the case, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, gradually breaking into a smile, in spite of the uneasiness which Sam's obstinacy had given him. 'The fame of the gentleman in question, never reached my ears.'

'No, sir!' exclaimed Mr. Weller. 'You astonish me, Sir; he wos a clerk in a gov'ment office, sir.'

'Was he?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Yes, he wos, Sir,' rejoined Mr. Weller; 'and a wery pleasant gen'l'm'n too—one o' the precise and tidy sort, as puts their feet in little India-rubber fire-buckets wen it's wet weather, and never has no other bosom friends but hare-skins; he saved up his money on principle, wore a clean shirt ev'ry day on principle; never spoke to none of his relations on principle, 'fear they shou'd want to borrow money of him; and wos altogether, in fact, an uncommon agreeable character. He had his hair cut on principle vunce a fortnight, and contracted for his clothes on the economic principle—three suits a year, and send back the old uns. Being a wery reg'lar gen'l'm'n, he din'd ev'ry day at the same place, where it was one-and-nine to cut off the joint, and a wery good one-and-nine's worth he used to cut, as the landlord often said, with the tears a-tricklin' down his face, let alone the way he used to poke the fire in the vinter time, which wos a dead loss o' four-pence ha'penny a day, to say nothin' at all o' the aggrawation o' seein' him do it. So uncommon grand with it too! "POST arter the next gen'l'm'n," he sings out ev'ry day ven he comes in. "See arter the TIMES, Thomas; let me look at the MORNIN' HERALD, when it's out o' hand; don't forget to bespeak the CHRONICLE; and just bring the 'TIZER, vill you:" and then he'd set vith his eyes fixed on the clock, and rush out, just a quarter of a minit 'fore the time to waylay the boy as wos a-comin' in with the evenin' paper, which he'd read with sich intense interest and persewerance as worked the other customers up to the wery confines o' desperation and insanity, 'specially one i-rascible old gen'l'm'n as the vaiter wos always obliged to keep a sharp eye on, at sich times, fear he should be tempted to commit some rash act with the carving-knife. Vell, Sir, here he'd stop, occupyin' the best place for three hours, and never takin' nothin' arter his dinner, but sleep, and then he'd go away to a coffee-house a few streets off, and have a small pot o' coffee and four crumpets, arter wich he'd walk home to Kensington and go to bed. One night he wos took very ill; sends for a doctor; doctor comes in a green fly, with a kind o' Robinson Crusoe set o' steps, as he could let down wen he got out, and pull up arter him wen he got in, to perwent the necessity o' the coachman's gettin' down, and thereby undeceivin' the public by lettin' 'em see that it wos only a livery coat as he'd got on, and not the trousers to match. "Wot's the matter?" says the doctor. "Wery ill," says the patient. "Wot have you been a-eatin' on?" says the doctor. "Roast weal," says the patient. "Wot's the last thing you dewoured?" says the doctor. "Crumpets," says the patient. "That's it!" says the doctor. "I'll send you a box of pills directly, and don't you never take no more of 'em," he says. "No more o' wot?" says the patient—"pills?" "No; crumpets," says the doctor. "Wy?" says the patient, starting up in bed; "I've eat four crumpets, ev'ry night for fifteen year, on principle." "Well, then, you'd better leave 'em off, on principle," says the doctor. "Crumpets is NOT wholesome, Sir," says the doctor, wery fierce. "But they're so cheap," says the patient, comin' down a little, "and so wery fillin' at the price." "They'd be dear to you, at any price; dear if you wos paid to eat 'em," says the doctor. "Four crumpets a night," he says, "vill do your business in six months!" The patient looks him full in the face, and turns it over in his mind for a long time, and at last he says, "Are you sure o' that 'ere, Sir?" "I'll stake my professional reputation on it," says the doctor. "How many crumpets, at a sittin', do you think 'ud kill me off at once?" says the patient. "I don't know," says the doctor. "Do you think half-a-crown's wurth 'ud do it?" says the patient. "I think it might," says the doctor. "Three shillins' wurth 'ud be sure to do it, I s'pose?" says the patient. "Certainly," says the doctor. "Wery good," says the patient; "good-night." Next mornin' he gets up, has a fire lit, orders in three shillins' wurth o' crumpets, toasts 'em all, eats 'em all, and blows his brains out.'

'What did he do that for?' inquired Mr. Pickwick abruptly; for he was considerably startled by this tragical termination of the narrative.

'Wot did he do it for, Sir?' reiterated Sam. 'Wy, in support of his great principle that crumpets wos wholesome, and to show that he wouldn't be put out of his way for nobody!' With such like shiftings and changings of the discourse, did Mr. Weller meet his master's questioning on the night of his taking up his residence in the Fleet. Finding all gentle remonstrance useless, Mr. Pickwick at length yielded a reluctant consent to his taking lodgings by the week, of a bald-headed cobbler, who rented a small slip room in one of the upper galleries. To this humble apartment Mr. Weller moved a mattress and bedding, which he hired of Mr. Roker; and, by the time he lay down upon it at night, was as much at home as if he had been bred in the prison, and his whole family had vegetated therein for three generations.

'Do you always smoke arter you goes to bed, old cock?' inquired Mr. Weller of his landlord, when they had both retired for the night.

'Yes, I does, young bantam,' replied the cobbler.

'Will you allow me to in-quire wy you make up your bed under that 'ere deal table?' said Sam.

''Cause I was always used to a four-poster afore I came here, and I find the legs of the table answer just as well,' replied the cobbler.

'You're a character, sir,' said Sam.

'I haven't got anything of the kind belonging to me,' rejoined the cobbler, shaking his head; 'and if you want to meet with a good one, I'm afraid you'll find some difficulty in suiting yourself at this register office.'

The above short dialogue took place as Mr. Weller lay extended on his mattress at one end of the room, and the cobbler on his, at the other; the apartment being illumined by the light of a rush-candle, and the cobbler's pipe, which was glowing below the table, like a red-hot coal. The conversation, brief as it was, predisposed Mr. Weller strongly in his landlord's favour; and, raising himself on his elbow, he took a more lengthened survey of his appearance than he had yet had either time or inclination to make.

He was a sallow man—all cobblers are; and had a strong bristly beard—all cobblers have. His face was a queer, good-tempered, crooked-featured piece of workmanship, ornamented with a couple of eyes that must have worn a very joyous expression at one time, for they sparkled yet. The man was sixty, by years, and Heaven knows how old by imprisonment, so that his having any look approaching to mirth or contentment, was singular enough. He was a little man, and, being half doubled up as he lay in bed, looked about as long as he ought to have been without his legs. He had a great red pipe in his mouth, and was smoking, and staring at the rush-light, in a state of enviable placidity.

'Have you been here long?' inquired Sam, breaking the silence which had lasted for some time.

'Twelve year,' replied the cobbler, biting the end of his pipe as he spoke.

'Contempt?' inquired Sam. The cobbler nodded.

'Well, then,' said Sam, with some sternness, 'wot do you persevere in bein' obstinit for, vastin' your precious life away, in this here magnified pound? Wy don't you give in, and tell the Chancellorship that you're wery sorry for makin' his court contemptible, and you won't do so no more?'

The cobbler put his pipe in the corner of his mouth, while he smiled, and then brought it back to its old place again; but said nothing.

'Wy don't you?' said Sam, urging his question strenuously.

'Ah,' said the cobbler, 'you don't quite understand these matters. What do you suppose ruined me, now?'

'Wy,' said Sam, trimming the rush-light, 'I s'pose the beginnin' wos, that you got into debt, eh?'

'Never owed a farden,' said the cobbler; 'try again.'

'Well, perhaps,' said Sam, 'you bought houses, wich is delicate English for goin' mad; or took to buildin', wich is a medical term for bein' incurable.'

The cobbler shook his head and said, 'Try again.'

'You didn't go to law, I hope?' said Sam suspiciously.

'Never in my life,' replied the cobbler.

'The fact is, I was ruined by having money left me.'

'Come, come,' said Sam, 'that von't do. I wish some rich enemy 'ud try to vork my destruction in that 'ere vay. I'd let him.'

'Oh, I dare say you don't believe it,' said the cobbler, quietly smoking his pipe. 'I wouldn't if I was you; but it's true for all that.'

'How wos it?' inquired Sam, half induced to believe the fact already, by the look the cobbler gave him.

'Just this,' replied the cobbler; 'an old gentleman that I worked for, down in the country, and a humble relation of whose I married—she's dead, God bless her, and thank Him for it!—was seized with a fit and went off.'

'Where?' inquired Sam, who was growing sleepy after the numerous events of the day.

'How should I know where he went?' said the cobbler, speaking through his nose in an intense enjoyment of his pipe. 'He went off dead.'

'Oh, that indeed,' said Sam. 'Well?'

'Well,' said the cobbler, 'he left five thousand pound behind him.'

'And wery gen-teel in him so to do,' said Sam.

'One of which,' continued the cobbler, 'he left to me, 'cause I married his relation, you see.'

'Wery good,' murmured Sam.

'And being surrounded by a great number of nieces and nevys, as was always quarrelling and fighting among themselves for the property, he makes me his executor, and leaves the rest to me in trust, to divide it among 'em as the will prowided.'

'Wot do you mean by leavin' it on trust?' inquired Sam, waking up a little. 'If it ain't ready-money, were's the use on it?'

'It's a law term, that's all,' said the cobbler.

'I don't think that,' said Sam, shaking his head. 'There's wery little trust at that shop. Hows'ever, go on.' 'Well,' said the cobbler, 'when I was going to take out a probate of the will, the nieces and nevys, who was desperately disappointed at not getting all the money, enters a caveat against it.' 'What's that?' inquired Sam.

'A legal instrument, which is as much as to say, it's no go,' replied the cobbler.

'I see,' said Sam, 'a sort of brother-in-law o' the have-his-carcass. Well.'

'But,' continued the cobbler, 'finding that they couldn't agree among themselves, and consequently couldn't get up a case against the will, they withdrew the caveat, and I paid all the legacies. I'd hardly done it, when one nevy brings an action to set the will aside. The case comes on, some months afterwards, afore a deaf old gentleman, in a back room somewhere down by Paul's Churchyard; and arter four counsels had taken a day a-piece to bother him regularly, he takes a week or two to consider, and read the evidence in six volumes, and then gives his judgment that how the testator was not quite right in his head, and I must pay all the money back again, and all the costs. I appealed; the case come on before three or four very sleepy gentlemen, who had heard it all before in the other court, where they're lawyers without work; the only difference being, that, there, they're called doctors, and in the other place delegates, if you understand that; and they very dutifully confirmed the decision of the old gentleman below. After that, we went into Chancery, where we are still, and where I shall always be. My lawyers have had all my thousand pound long ago; and what between the estate, as they call it, and the costs, I'm here for ten thousand, and shall stop here, till I die, mending shoes. Some gentlemen have talked of bringing it before Parliament, and I dare say would have done it, only they hadn't time to come to me, and I hadn't power to go to them, and they got tired of my long letters, and dropped the business. And this is God's truth, without one word of suppression or exaggeration, as fifty people, both in this place and out of it, very well know.'

The cobbler paused to ascertain what effect his story had produced on Sam; but finding that he had dropped asleep, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, sighed, put it down, drew the bed-clothes over his head, and went to sleep, too.

Mr. Pickwick was sitting at breakfast, alone, next morning (Sam being busily engaged in the cobbler's room, polishing his master's shoes and brushing the black gaiters) when there came a knock at the door, which, before Mr. Pickwick could cry 'Come in!' was followed by the appearance of a head of hair and a cotton-velvet cap, both of which articles of dress he had no difficulty in recognising as the personal property of Mr. Smangle.

'How are you?' said that worthy, accompanying the inquiry with a score or two of nods; 'I say—do you expect anybody this morning? Three men—devilish gentlemanly fellows—have been asking after you downstairs, and knocking at every door on the hall flight; for which they've been most infernally blown up by the collegians that had the trouble of opening 'em.'

'Dear me! How very foolish of them,' said Mr. Pickwick, rising. 'Yes; I have no doubt they are some friends whom I rather expected to see, yesterday.'

'Friends of yours!' exclaimed Smangle, seizing Mr. Pickwick by the hand. 'Say no more. Curse me, they're friends of mine from this minute, and friends of Mivins's, too. Infernal pleasant, gentlemanly dog, Mivins, isn't he?' said Smangle, with great feeling.

'I know so little of the gentleman,' said Mr. Pickwick, hesitating, 'that I —'

'I know you do,' interrupted Smangle, clasping Mr. Pickwick by the shoulder. 'You shall know him better. You'll be delighted with him. That man, Sir,' said Smangle, with a solemn countenance, 'has comic powers that would do honour to Drury Lane Theatre.'

'Has he indeed?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Ah, by Jove he has!' replied Smangle. 'Hear him come the four cats in the wheel-barrow—four distinct cats, sir, I pledge you my honour. Now you know that's infernal clever! Damme, you can't help liking a man, when you see these traits about him. He's only one fault—that little failing I mentioned to you, you know.'

As Mr. Smangle shook his head in a confidential and sympathising manner at this juncture, Mr. Pickwick felt that he was expected to say something, so he said, 'Ah!' and looked restlessly at the door.

'Ah!' echoed Mr. Smangle, with a long-drawn sigh. 'He's delightful company, that man is, sir. I don't know better company anywhere; but he has that one drawback. If the ghost of his grandfather, Sir, was to rise before him this minute, he'd ask him for the loan of his acceptance on an eightpenny stamp.' 'Dear me!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

'Yes,' added Mr. Smangle; 'and if he'd the power of raising him again, he would, in two months and three days from this time, to renew the bill!'

'Those are very remarkable traits,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'but I'm afraid that while we are talking here, my friends may be in a state of great perplexity at not finding me.'

'I'll show 'em the way,' said Smangle, making for the door. 'Good-day. I won't disturb you while they're here, you know. By the bye—'

As Smangle pronounced the last three words, he stopped suddenly, reclosed the door which he had opened, and, walking softly back to Mr. Pickwick, stepped close up to him on tiptoe, and said, in a very soft whisper—

'You couldn't make it convenient to lend me half-a-crown till the latter end of next week, could you?'

Mr. Pickwick could scarcely forbear smiling, but managing to preserve his gravity, he drew forth the coin, and placed it in Mr. Smangle's palm; upon which, that gentleman, with many nods and winks, implying profound mystery, disappeared in quest of the three strangers, with whom he presently returned; and having coughed thrice, and nodded as many times, as an assurance to Mr. Pickwick that he would not forget to pay, he shook hands all round, in an engaging manner, and at length took himself off.

'My dear friends,' said Mr. Pickwick, shaking hands alternately with Mr. Tupman, Mr. Winkle, and Mr. Snodgrass, who were the three visitors in question, 'I am delighted to see you.'

The triumvirate were much affected. Mr. Tupman shook his head deploringly, Mr. Snodgrass drew forth his handkerchief, with undisguised emotion; and Mr. Winkle retired to the window, and sniffed aloud.

'Mornin', gen'l'm'n,' said Sam, entering at the moment with the shoes and gaiters. 'Avay vith melincholly, as the little boy said ven his schoolmissus died. Velcome to the college, gen'l'm'n.'

'This foolish fellow,' said Mr. Pickwick, tapping Sam on the head as he knelt down to button up his master's gaiters—'this foolish fellow has got himself arrested, in order to be near me.'

'What!' exclaimed the three friends.

'Yes, gen'l'm'n,' said Sam, 'I'm a—stand steady, sir, if you please—I'm a prisoner, gen'l'm'n. Con-fined, as the lady said.'

'A prisoner!' exclaimed Mr. Winkle, with unaccountable vehemence.

'Hollo, sir!' responded Sam, looking up. 'Wot's the matter, Sir?'

'I had hoped, Sam, that—Nothing, nothing,' said Mr. Winkle precipitately.

There was something so very abrupt and unsettled in Mr. Winkle's manner, that Mr. Pickwick involuntarily looked at his two friends for an explanation.

'We don't know,' said Mr. Tupman, answering this mute appeal aloud. 'He has been much excited for two days past, and his whole demeanour very unlike what it usually is. We feared there must be something the matter, but he resolutely denies it.'

'No, no,' said Mr. Winkle, colouring beneath Mr. Pickwick's gaze; 'there is really nothing. I assure you there is nothing, my dear sir. It will be necessary for me to leave town, for a short time, on private business, and I had hoped to have prevailed upon you to allow Sam to accompany me.'

Mr. Pickwick looked more astonished than before.

'I think,' faltered Mr. Winkle, 'that Sam would have had no objection to do so; but, of course, his being a prisoner here, renders it impossible. So I must go alone.'

As Mr. Winkle said these words, Mr. Pickwick felt, with some astonishment, that Sam's fingers were trembling at the gaiters, as if he were rather surprised or startled. Sam looked up at Mr. Winkle, too, when he had finished speaking; and though the glance they exchanged was instantaneous, they seemed to understand each other.

'Do you know anything of this, Sam?' said Mr. Pickwick sharply.

'No, I don't, sir,' replied Mr. Weller, beginning to button with extraordinary assiduity.

'Are you sure, Sam?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Wy, sir,' responded Mr. Weller; 'I'm sure so far, that I've never heerd anythin' on the subject afore this moment. If I makes any guess about it,' added Sam, looking at Mr. Winkle, 'I haven't got any right to say what 'It is, fear it should be a wrong 'un.'

'I have no right to make any further inquiry into the private affairs of a friend, however intimate a friend,' said Mr. Pickwick, after a short silence; 'at present let me merely say, that I do not understand this at all. There. We have had quite enough of the subject.'

Thus expressing himself, Mr. Pickwick led the conversation to different topics, and Mr. Winkle gradually appeared more at ease, though still very far from being completely so. They had all so much to converse about, that the morning very quickly passed away; and when, at three o'clock, Mr. Weller produced upon the little dining-table, a roast leg of mutton and an enormous meat-pie, with sundry dishes of vegetables, and pots of porter, which stood upon the chairs or the sofa bedstead, or where they could, everybody felt disposed to do justice to the meal, notwithstanding that the meat had been purchased, and dressed, and the pie made, and baked, at the prison cookery hard by.

To these succeeded a bottle or two of very good wine, for which a messenger was despatched by Mr. Pickwick to the Horn Coffee-house, in Doctors' Commons. The bottle or two, indeed, might be more properly described as a bottle or six, for by the time it was drunk, and tea over, the bell began to ring for strangers to withdraw.

But, if Mr. Winkle's behaviour had been unaccountable in the morning, it became perfectly unearthly and solemn when, under the influence of his feelings, and his share of the bottle or six, he prepared to take leave of his friend. He lingered behind, until Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass had disappeared, and then fervently clenched Mr. Pickwick's hand, with an expression of face in which deep and mighty resolve was fearfully blended with the very concentrated essence of gloom.

'Good-night, my dear Sir!' said Mr. Winkle between his set teeth.

'Bless you, my dear fellow!' replied the warm-hearted Mr. Pickwick, as he returned the pressure of his young friend's hand.

'Now then!' cried Mr. Tupman from the gallery.

'Yes, yes, directly,' replied Mr. Winkle. 'Good-night!'

'Good-night,' said Mr. Pickwick.

There was another good-night, and another, and half a dozen more after that, and still Mr. Winkle had fast hold of his friend's hand, and was looking into his face with the same strange expression.

'Is anything the matter?' said Mr. Pickwick at last, when his arm was quite sore with shaking. 'Nothing,' said Mr. Winkle.

'Well then, good-night,' said Mr. Pickwick, attempting to disengage his hand.

'My friend, my benefactor, my honoured companion,' murmured Mr. Winkle, catching at his wrist. 'Do not judge me harshly; do not, when you hear that, driven to extremity by hopeless obstacles, I—'

'Now then,' said Mr. Tupman, reappearing at the door. 'Are you coming, or are we to be locked in?'

'Yes, yes, I am ready,' replied Mr. Winkle. And with a violent effort he tore himself away.

As Mr. Pickwick was gazing down the passage after them in silent astonishment, Sam Weller appeared at the stair-head, and whispered for one moment in Mr. Winkle's ear.

'Oh, certainly, depend upon me,' said that gentleman aloud.

'Thank'ee, sir. You won't forget, sir?' said Sam. 'Of course not,' replied Mr. Winkle.

'Wish you luck, Sir,' said Sam, touching his hat. 'I should very much liked to ha' joined you, Sir; but the gov'nor, o' course, is paramount.'

'It is very much to your credit that you remain here,' said Mr. Winkle. With these words they disappeared down the stairs.

'Very extraordinary,' said Mr. Pickwick, going back into his room, and seating himself at the table in a musing attitude. 'What can that young man be going to do?'

He had sat ruminating about the matter for some time, when the voice of Roker, the turnkey, demanded whether he might come in.

'By all means,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'I've brought you a softer pillow, Sir,' said Mr. Roker, 'instead of the temporary one you had last night.'

'Thank you,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Will you take a glass of wine?'

'You're wery good, Sir,' replied Mr. Roker, accepting the proffered glass. 'Yours, sir.'

'Thank you,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'I'm sorry to say that your landlord's wery bad to-night, Sir,' said Roker, setting down the glass, and inspecting the lining of his hat preparatory to putting it on again.

'What! The Chancery prisoner!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

'He won't be a Chancery prisoner wery long, Sir,' replied Roker, turning his hat round, so as to get the maker's name right side upwards, as he looked into it.

'You make my blood run cold,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'What do you mean?'

'He's been consumptive for a long time past,' said Mr. Roker, 'and he's taken wery bad in the breath to-night. The doctor said, six months ago, that nothing but change of air could save him.'

'Great Heaven!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick; 'has this man been slowly murdered by the law for six months?'

'I don't know about that,' replied Roker, weighing the hat by the brim in both hands. 'I suppose he'd have been took the same, wherever he was. He went into the infirmary, this morning; the doctor says his strength is to be kept up as much as possible; and the warden's sent him wine and broth and that, from his own house. It's not the warden's fault, you know, sir.'

'Of course not,' replied Mr. Pickwick hastily.

'I'm afraid, however,' said Roker, shaking his head, 'that it's all up with him. I offered Neddy two six-penn'orths to one upon it just now, but he wouldn't take it, and quite right. Thank'ee, Sir. Good-night, sir.'

'Stay,' said Mr. Pickwick earnestly. 'Where is this infirmary?'

'Just over where you slept, sir,' replied Roker. 'I'll show you, if you like to come.' Mr. Pickwick snatched up his hat without speaking, and followed at once.

The turnkey led the way in silence; and gently raising the latch of the room door, motioned Mr. Pickwick to enter. It was a large, bare, desolate room, with a number of stump bedsteads made of iron, on one of which lay stretched the shadow of a man—wan, pale, and ghastly. His breathing was hard and thick, and he moaned painfully as it came and went. At the bedside sat a short old man in a cobbler's apron, who, by the aid of a pair of horn spectacles, was reading from the Bible aloud. It was the fortunate legatee.

The sick man laid his hand upon his attendant's arm, and motioned him to stop. He closed the book, and laid it on the bed.

'Open the window,' said the sick man.

He did so. The noise of carriages and carts, the rattle of wheels, the cries of men and boys, all the busy sounds of a mighty multitude instinct with life and occupation, blended into one deep murmur, floated into the room. Above the hoarse loud hum, arose, from time to time, a boisterous laugh; or a scrap of some jingling song, shouted forth, by one of the giddy crowd, would strike upon the ear, for an instant, and then be lost amidst the roar of voices and the tramp of footsteps; the breaking of the billows of the restless sea of life, that rolled heavily on, without. These are melancholy sounds to a quiet listener at any time; but how melancholy to the watcher by the bed of death!

'There is no air here,' said the man faintly. 'The place pollutes it. It was fresh round about, when I walked there, years ago; but it grows hot and heavy in passing these walls. I cannot breathe it.'

'We have breathed it together, for a long time,' said the old man. 'Come, come.'

There was a short silence, during which the two spectators approached the bed. The sick man drew a hand of his old fellow-prisoner towards him, and pressing it affectionately between both his own, retained it in his grasp.

'I hope,' he gasped after a while, so faintly that they bent their ears close over the bed to catch the half-formed sounds his pale lips gave vent to—'I hope my merciful Judge will bear in mind my heavy punishment on earth. Twenty years, my friend, twenty years in this hideous grave! My heart broke when my child died, and I could not even kiss him in his little coffin. My loneliness since then, in all this noise and riot, has been very dreadful. May God forgive me! He has seen my solitary, lingering death.'

He folded his hands, and murmuring something more they could not hear, fell into a sleep—only a sleep at first, for they saw him smile.

They whispered together for a little time, and the turnkey, stooping over the pillow, drew hastily back. 'He has got his discharge, by G—!' said the man.

He had. But he had grown so like death in life, that they knew not when he died.

CHAPTER XLIV. DESCRIPTIVE OF AN AFFECTING INTERVIEW BETWEEN Mr. SAMUEL

WELLER AND A FAMILY PARTY. Mr. PICKWICK MAKES A TOUR OF THE DIMINUTIVE WORLD HE INHABITS, AND RESOLVES TO MIX WITH IT, IN FUTURE, AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE

A few mornings after his incarceration, Mr. Samuel Weller, having arranged his master's room with all possible care, and seen him comfortably seated over his books and papers, withdrew to employ himself for an hour or two to come, as he best could. It was a fine morning, and it occurred to Sam that a pint of porter in the open air would lighten his next quarter of an hour or so, as well as any little amusement in which he could indulge.

Having arrived at this conclusion, he betook himself to the tap. Having purchased the beer, and obtained, moreover, the day-but-one-before-yesterday's paper, he repaired to the skittle-ground, and seating himself on a bench, proceeded to enjoy himself in a very sedate and methodical manner.

First of all, he took a refreshing draught of the beer, and then he looked up at a window, and bestowed a platonic wink on a young lady who was peeling potatoes thereat. Then he opened the paper, and folded it so as to get the police reports outwards; and this being a vexatious and difficult thing to do, when there is any wind stirring, he took another draught of the beer when he had accomplished it. Then, he read two lines of the paper, and stopped short to look at a couple of men who were finishing a game at rackets, which, being concluded, he cried out 'wery good,' in an approving manner, and looked round upon the spectators, to ascertain whether their sentiments coincided with his own. This involved the necessity of looking up at the windows also; and as the young lady was still there, it was an act of common politeness to wink again, and to drink to her good health in dumb show, in another draught of the beer, which Sam did; and having frowned hideously upon a small boy who had noted this latter proceeding with open eyes, he threw one leg over the other, and, holding the newspaper in both hands, began to read in real earnest.

He had hardly composed himself into the needful state of abstraction, when he thought he heard his own name proclaimed in some distant passage. Nor was he mistaken, for it quickly passed from mouth to mouth, and in a few seconds the air teemed with shouts of 'Weller!' 'Here!' roared Sam, in a stentorian voice. 'Wot's the matter? Who wants him? Has an express come to say that his country house is afire?'

'Somebody wants you in the hall,' said a man who was standing by.

'Just mind that 'ere paper and the pot, old feller, will you?' said Sam. 'I'm a-comin'. Blessed, if they was a-callin' me to the bar, they couldn't make more noise about it!'

Accompanying these words with a gentle rap on the head of the young gentleman before noticed, who, unconscious of his close vicinity to the person in request, was screaming 'Weller!' with all his might, Sam hastened across the ground, and ran up the steps into the hall. Here, the first object that met his eyes was his beloved father sitting on a bottom stair, with his hat in his hand, shouting out 'Weller!' in his very loudest tone, at half-minute intervals.

'Wot are you a-roarin' at?' said Sam impetuously, when the old gentleman had discharged himself of another shout; 'making yourself so precious hot that you looks like a aggrawated glass-blower. Wot's the matter?'

'Aha!' replied the old gentleman, 'I began to be afeerd that you'd gone for a walk round the Regency Park, Sammy.'

'Come,' said Sam, 'none o' them taunts agin the wictim o' avarice, and come off that 'ere step. Wot arc you a-settin' down there for? I don't live there.'

'I've got such a game for you, Sammy,' said the elder Mr. Weller, rising.

'Stop a minit,' said Sam, 'you're all vite behind.'

'That's right, Sammy, rub it off,' said Mr. Weller, as his son dusted him. 'It might look personal here, if a man walked about with vitevash on his clothes, eh, Sammy?'

As Mr. Weller exhibited in this place unequivocal symptoms of an approaching fit of chuckling, Sam interposed to stop it.

'Keep quiet, do,' said Sam, 'there never vos such a old picter-card born. Wot are you bustin' vith, now?'

'Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, wiping his forehead, 'I'm afeerd that vun o' these days I shall laugh myself into a appleplexy, my boy.'

'Vell, then, wot do you do it for?' said Sam. 'Now, then, wot have you got to say?'

'Who do you think's come here with me, Samivel?' said Mr. Weller, drawing back a pace or two, pursing up his mouth, and extending his eyebrows. 'Pell?' said Sam.

Mr. Weller shook his head, and his red cheeks expanded with the laughter that was endeavouring to find a vent.

'Mottled-faced man, p'raps?' asked Sam.

Again Mr. Weller shook his head.

'Who then?'asked Sam.

'Your mother-in-law,' said Mr. Weller; and it was lucky he did say it, or his cheeks must inevitably have cracked, from their most unnatural distension.

'Your mother—in—law, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, 'and the red-nosed man, my boy; and the red-nosed man. Ho! ho! ho!'

With this, Mr. Weller launched into convulsions of laughter, while Sam regarded him with a broad grin gradually over-spreading his whole countenance.

'They've come to have a little serious talk with you, Samivel,' said Mr. Weller, wiping his eyes. 'Don't let out nothin' about the unnat'ral creditor, Sammy.'

'Wot, don't they know who it is?' inquired Sam.

'Not a bit on it,' replied his father.

'Vere are they?' said Sam, reciprocating all the old gentleman's grins.

'In the snuggery,' rejoined Mr. Weller. 'Catch the red-nosed man a-goin' anyvere but vere the liquors is; not he, Samivel, not he. Ve'd a wery pleasant ride along the road from the Markis this mornin', Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, when he felt himself equal to the task of speaking in an articulate manner. 'I drove the old piebald in that 'ere little shay-cart as belonged to your mother-in-law's first wenter, into vich a harm-cheer wos lifted for the shepherd; and I'm blessed,' said Mr. Weller, with a look of deep scorn—'I'm blessed if they didn't bring a portable flight o' steps out into the road a-front o' our door for him, to get up by.'

'You don't mean that?' said Sam.

'I do mean that, Sammy,' replied his father, 'and I vish you could ha' seen how tight he held on by the sides wen he did get up, as if he wos afeerd o' being precipitayted down full six foot, and dashed into a million hatoms. He tumbled in at last, however, and avay ve vent; and I rayther think—I say I rayther think, Samivel—that he found his-self a little jolted ven ve turned the corners.'

'Wot, I s'pose you happened to drive up agin a post or two?' said Sam. 'I'm afeerd,' replied Mr. Weller, in a rapture of winks—'I'm afeerd I took vun or two on 'em, Sammy; he wos a-flyin' out o' the arm-cheer all the way.'

Here the old gentleman shook his head from side to side, and was seized with a hoarse internal rumbling, accompanied with a violent swelling of the countenance, and a sudden increase in the breadth of all his features; symptoms which alarmed his son not a little.

'Don't be frightened, Sammy, don't be frightened,' said the old gentleman, when by dint of much struggling, and various convulsive stamps upon the ground, he had recovered his voice. 'It's only a kind o' quiet laugh as I'm a-tryin' to come, Sammy.'

'Well, if that's wot it is,' said Sam, 'you'd better not try to come it agin. You'll find it rayther a dangerous inwention.'

'Don't you like it, Sammy?' inquired the old gentleman.

'Not at all,' replied Sam.

'Well,' said Mr. Weller, with the tears still running down his cheeks, 'it 'ud ha' been a wery great accommodation to me if I could ha' done it, and 'ud ha' saved a good many vords atween your mother-in-law and me, sometimes; but I'm afeerd you're right, Sammy, it's too much in the appleplexy line—a deal too much, Samivel.'

This conversation brought them to the door of the snuggery, into which Sam—pausing for an instant to look over his shoulder, and cast a sly leer at his respected progenitor, who was still giggling behind—at once led the way.

'Mother-in-law,' said Sam, politely saluting the lady, 'wery much obliged to you for this here wisit.—Shepherd, how air you?'

'Oh, Samuel!' said Mrs. Weller. 'This is dreadful.'

'Not a bit on it, mum,' replied Sam.—'Is it, shepherd?'

Mr. Stiggins raised his hands, and turned up his eyes, until the whites—or rather the yellows—were alone visible; but made no reply in words.

'Is this here gen'l'm'n troubled with any painful complaint?' said Sam, looking to his mother-in-law for explanation.

'The good man is grieved to see you here, Samuel,' replied Mrs. Weller.

'Oh, that's it, is it?' said Sam. 'I was afeerd, from his manner, that he might ha' forgotten to take pepper vith that 'ere last cowcumber he eat. Set down, Sir, ve make no extra charge for settin' down, as the king remarked wen he blowed up his ministers.'

'Young man,' said Mr. Stiggins ostentatiously, 'I fear you are not softened by imprisonment.'

'Beg your pardon, Sir,' replied Sam; 'wot wos you graciously pleased to hobserve?'

'I apprehend, young man, that your nature is no softer for this chastening,' said Mr. Stiggins, in a loud voice.

'Sir,' replied Sam, 'you're wery kind to say so. I hope my natur is NOT a soft vun, Sir. Wery much obliged to you for your good opinion, Sir.'

At this point of the conversation, a sound, indecorously approaching to a laugh, was heard to proceed from the chair in which the elder Mr. Weller was seated; upon which Mrs. Weller, on a hasty consideration of all the circumstances of the case, considered it her bounden duty to become gradually hysterical.

'Weller,' said Mrs. W. (the old gentleman was seated in a corner); 'Weller! Come forth.'

'Wery much obleeged to you, my dear,' replied Mr. Weller; 'but I'm quite comfortable vere I am.'

Upon this, Mrs. Weller burst into tears.

'Wot's gone wrong, mum?' said Sam.

'Oh, Samuel!' replied Mrs. Weller, 'your father makes me wretched. Will nothing do him good?'

'Do you hear this here?' said Sam. 'Lady vants to know vether nothin' 'ull do you good.'

'Wery much indebted to Mrs. Weller for her po-lite inquiries, Sammy,' replied the old gentleman. 'I think a pipe vould benefit me a good deal. Could I be accommodated, Sammy?'

Here Mrs. Weller let fall some more tears, and Mr. Stiggins groaned.

'Hollo! Here's this unfortunate gen'l'm'n took ill agin,' said Sam, looking round. 'Vere do you feel it now, sir?'

'In the same place, young man,' rejoined Mr. Stiggins, 'in the same place.'

'Vere may that be, Sir?' inquired Sam, with great outward simplicity.

'In the buzzim, young man,' replied Mr. Stiggins, placing his umbrella on his waistcoat.

At this affecting reply, Mrs. Weller, being wholly unable to suppress her feelings, sobbed aloud, and stated her conviction that the red-nosed man was a saint; whereupon Mr. Weller, senior, ventured to suggest, in an undertone, that he must be the representative of the united parishes of St. Simon Without and St. Walker Within.

'I'm afeered, mum,' said Sam, 'that this here gen'l'm'n, with the twist in his countenance, feels rather thirsty, with the melancholy spectacle afore him. Is it the case, mum?'

The worthy lady looked at Mr. Stiggins for a reply; that gentleman, with many rollings of the eye, clenched his throat with his right hand, and mimicked the act of swallowing, to intimate that he was athirst.

'I am afraid, Samuel, that his feelings have made him so indeed,' said Mrs. Weller mournfully.

'Wot's your usual tap, sir?' replied Sam.

'Oh, my dear young friend,' replied Mr. Stiggins, 'all taps is vanities!'

'Too true, too true, indeed,' said Mrs. Weller, murmuring a groan, and shaking her head assentingly.

'Well,' said Sam, 'I des-say they may be, sir; but wich is your partickler wanity? Wich wanity do you like the flavour on best, sir?'

'Oh, my dear young friend,' replied Mr. Stiggins, 'I despise them all. If,' said Mr. Stiggins—'if there is any one of them less odious than another, it is the liquor called rum. Warm, my dear young friend, with three lumps of sugar to the tumbler.'

'Wery sorry to say, sir,' said Sam, 'that they don't allow that particular wanity to be sold in this here establishment.'

'Oh, the hardness of heart of these inveterate men!' ejaculated Mr. Stiggins. 'Oh, the accursed cruelty of these inhuman persecutors!'

With these words, Mr. Stiggins again cast up his eyes, and rapped his breast with his umbrella; and it is but justice to the reverend gentleman to say, that his indignation appeared very real and unfeigned indeed.

After Mrs. Weller and the red-nosed gentleman had commented on this inhuman usage in a very forcible manner, and had vented a variety of pious and holy execrations against its authors, the latter recommended a bottle of port wine, warmed with a little water, spice, and sugar, as being grateful to the stomach, and savouring less of vanity than many other compounds. It was accordingly ordered to be prepared, and pending its preparation the red-nosed man and Mrs. Weller looked at the elder W. and groaned.

'Well, Sammy,' said the gentleman, 'I hope you'll find your spirits rose by this here lively wisit. Wery cheerful and improvin' conwersation, ain't it, Sammy?'

'You're a reprobate,' replied Sam; 'and I desire you won't address no more o' them ungraceful remarks to me.'

So far from being edified by this very proper reply, the elder Mr. Weller at once relapsed into a broad grin; and this inexorable conduct causing the lady and Mr. Stiggins to close their eyes, and rock themselves to and fro on their chairs, in a troubled manner, he furthermore indulged in several acts of pantomime, indicative of a desire to pummel and wring the nose of the aforesaid Stiggins, the performance of which, appeared to afford him great mental relief. The old gentleman very narrowly escaped detection in one instance; for Mr. Stiggins happening to give a start on the arrival of the negus, brought his head in smart contact with the clenched fist with which Mr. Weller had been describing imaginary fireworks in the air, within two inches of his ear, for some minutes.

'Wot are you a-reachin' out, your hand for the tumbler in that 'ere sawage way for?' said Sam, with great promptitude. 'Don't you see you've hit the gen'l'm'n?'

'I didn't go to do it, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, in some degree abashed by the very unexpected occurrence of the incident.

'Try an in'ard application, sir,' said Sam, as the red-nosed gentleman rubbed his head with a rueful visage. 'Wot do you think o' that, for a go o' wanity, warm, Sir?'

Mr. Stiggins made no verbal answer, but his manner was expressive. He tasted the contents of the glass which Sam had placed in his hand, put his umbrella on the floor, and tasted it again, passing his hand placidly across his stomach twice or thrice; he then drank the whole at a breath, and smacking his lips, held out the tumbler for more.

Nor was Mrs. Weller behind-hand in doing justice to the composition. The good lady began by protesting that she couldn't touch a drop—then took a small drop—then a large drop—then a great many drops; and her feelings being of the nature of those substances which are powerfully affected by the application of strong waters, she dropped a tear with every drop of negus, and so got on, melting the feelings down, until at length she had arrived at a very pathetic and decent pitch of misery.

The elder Mr. Weller observed these signs and tokens with many manifestations of disgust, and when, after a second jug of the same, Mr. Stiggins began to sigh in a dismal manner, he plainly evinced his disapprobation of the whole proceedings, by sundry incoherent ramblings of speech, among which frequent angry repetitions of the word 'gammon' were alone distinguishable to the ear.

'I'll tell you wot it is, Samivel, my boy,' whispered the old gentleman into his son's ear, after a long and steadfast contemplation of his lady and Mr. Stiggins; 'I think there must be somethin' wrong in your mother-in-law's inside, as vell as in that o' the red-nosed man.'

'Wot do you mean?' said Sam.

'I mean this here, Sammy,' replied the old gentleman, 'that wot they drink, don't seem no nourishment to 'em; it all turns to warm water, and comes a-pourin' out o' their eyes. 'Pend upon it, Sammy, it's a constitootional infirmity.'

Mr. Weller delivered this scientific opinion with many confirmatory frowns and nods; which, Mrs. Weller remarking, and concluding that they bore some disparaging reference either to herself or to Mr. Stiggins, or to both, was on the point of becoming infinitely worse, when Mr. Stiggins, getting on his legs as well as he could, proceeded to deliver an edifying discourse for the benefit of the company, but more especially of Mr. Samuel, whom he adjured in moving terms to be upon his guard in that sink of iniquity into which he was cast; to abstain from all hypocrisy and pride of heart; and to take in all things exact pattern and copy by him (Stiggins), in which case he might calculate on arriving, sooner or later at the comfortable conclusion, that, like him, he was a most estimable and blameless character, and that all his acquaintances and friends were hopelessly abandoned and profligate wretches. Which consideration, he said, could not but afford him the liveliest satisfaction.

He furthermore conjured him to avoid, above all things, the vice of intoxication, which he likened unto the filthy habits of swine, and to those poisonous and baleful drugs which being chewed in the mouth, are said to filch away the memory. At this point of his discourse, the reverend and red-nosed gentleman became singularly incoherent, and staggering to and fro in the excitement of his eloquence, was fain to catch at the back of a chair to preserve his perpendicular.

Mr. Stiggins did not desire his hearers to be upon their guard against those false prophets and wretched mockers of religion, who, without sense to expound its first doctrines, or hearts to feel its first principles, are more dangerous members of society than the common criminal; imposing, as they necessarily do, upon the weakest and worst informed, casting scorn and contempt on what should be held most sacred, and bringing into partial disrepute large bodies of virtuous and well-conducted persons of many excellent sects and persuasions. But as he leaned over the back of the chair for a considerable time, and closing one eye, winked a good deal with the other, it is presumed that he thought all this, but kept it to himself.

During the delivery of the oration, Mrs. Weller sobbed and wept at the end of the paragraphs; while Sam, sitting cross-legged on a chair and resting his arms on the top rail, regarded the speaker with great suavity and blandness of demeanour; occasionally bestowing a look of recognition on the old gentleman, who was delighted at the beginning, and went to sleep about half-way.

'Brayvo; wery pretty!' said Sam, when the red-nosed man having finished, pulled his worn gloves on, thereby thrusting his fingers through the broken tops till the knuckles were disclosed to view. 'Wery pretty.'

'I hope it may do you good, Samuel,' said Mrs. Weller solemnly.

'I think it vill, mum,' replied Sam.

'I wish I could hope that it would do your father good,' said Mrs. Weller.

'Thank'ee, my dear,' said Mr. Weller, senior. 'How do you find yourself arter it, my love?'

'Scoffer!' exclaimed Mrs. Weller.

'Benighted man!' said the Reverend Mr. Stiggins.

'If I don't get no better light than that 'ere moonshine o' yourn, my worthy creetur,' said the elder Mr. Weller, 'it's wery likely as I shall continey to be a night coach till I'm took off the road altogether. Now, Mrs. We, if the piebald stands at livery much longer, he'll stand at nothin' as we go back, and p'raps that 'ere harm-cheer 'ull be tipped over into some hedge or another, with the shepherd in it.'

At this supposition, the Reverend Mr. Stiggins, in evident consternation, gathered up his hat and umbrella, and proposed an immediate departure, to which Mrs. Weller assented. Sam walked with them to the lodge gate, and took a dutiful leave.

'A-do, Samivel,' said the old gentleman.

'Wot's a-do?' inquired Sammy.

'Well, good-bye, then,' said the old gentleman.

'Oh, that's wot you're aimin' at, is it?' said Sam. 'Good-bye!'

'Sammy,' whispered Mr. Weller, looking cautiously round; 'my duty to your gov'nor, and tell him if he thinks better o' this here bis'ness, to commoonicate vith me. Me and a cab'net-maker has dewised a plan for gettin' him out. A pianner, Samivel—a pianner!' said Mr. Weller, striking his son on the chest with the back of his hand, and falling back a step or two.

'Wot do you mean?' said Sam.

'A pianner-forty, Samivel,' rejoined Mr. Weller, in a still more mysterious manner, 'as he can have on hire; vun as von't play, Sammy.'

'And wot 'ud be the good o' that?' said Sam.

'Let him send to my friend, the cabinet-maker, to fetch it back, Sammy,' replied Mr. Weller. 'Are you avake, now?'

'No,' rejoined Sam.

'There ain't no vurks in it,' whispered his father. 'It 'ull hold him easy, vith his hat and shoes on, and breathe through the legs, vich his holler. Have a passage ready taken for 'Merriker. The 'Merrikin gov'ment will never give him up, ven vunce they find as he's got money to spend, Sammy. Let the gov'nor stop there, till Mrs. Bardell's dead, or Mr. Dodson and Fogg's hung (wich last ewent I think is the most likely to happen first, Sammy), and then let him come back and write a book about the 'Merrikins as'll pay all his expenses and more, if he blows 'em up enough.'

Mr. Weller delivered this hurried abstract of his plot with great vehemence of whisper; and then, as if fearful of weakening the effect of the tremendous communication by any further dialogue, he gave the coachman's salute, and vanished.

Sam had scarcely recovered his usual composure of countenance, which had been greatly disturbed by the secret communication of his respected relative, when Mr. Pickwick accosted him.

'Sam,' said that gentleman.

'Sir,' replied Mr. Weller.

'I am going for a walk round the prison, and I wish you to attend me. I see a prisoner we know coming this way, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, smiling.

'Wich, Sir?' inquired Mr. Weller; 'the gen'l'm'n vith the head o' hair, or the interestin' captive in the stockin's?'

'Neither,' rejoined Mr. Pickwick. 'He is an older friend of yours, Sam.'

'O' mine, Sir?' exclaimed Mr. Weller.

'You recollect the gentleman very well, I dare say, Sam,' replied Mr. Pickwick, 'or else you are more unmindful of your old acquaintances than I think you are. Hush! not a word, Sam; not a syllable. Here he is.'

As Mr. Pickwick spoke, Jingle walked up. He looked less miserable than before, being clad in a half-worn suit of clothes, which, with Mr. Pickwick's assistance, had been released from the pawnbroker's. He wore clean linen too, and had had his hair cut. He was very pale and thin, however; and as he crept slowly up, leaning on a stick, it was easy to see that he had suffered severely from illness and want, and was still very weak. He took off his hat as Mr. Pickwick saluted him, and seemed much humbled and abashed at the sight of Sam Weller.

Following close at his heels, came Mr. Job Trotter, in the catalogue of whose vices, want of faith and attachment to his companion could at all events find no place. He was still ragged and squalid, but his face was not quite so hollow as on his first meeting with Mr. Pickwick, a few days before. As he took off his hat to our benevolent old friend, he murmured some broken expressions of gratitude, and muttered something about having been saved from starving.

'Well, well,' said Mr. Pickwick, impatiently interrupting him, 'you can follow with Sam. I want to speak to you, Mr. Jingle. Can you walk without his arm?'

'Certainly, sir—all ready—not too fast—legs shaky—head queer—round and round—earthquaky sort of feeling—very.'

'Here, give me your arm,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'No, no,' replied Jingle; 'won't indeed—rather not.'

'Nonsense,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'lean upon me, I desire, Sir.'

Seeing that he was confused and agitated, and uncertain what to do, Mr. Pickwick cut the matter short by drawing the invalided stroller's arm through his, and leading him away, without saying another word about it.

During the whole of this time the countenance of Mr. Samuel Weller had exhibited an expression of the most overwhelming and absorbing astonishment that the imagination can portray. After looking from Job to Jingle, and from Jingle to Job in profound silence, he softly ejaculated the words, 'Well, I AM damn'd!' which he repeated at least a score of times; after which exertion, he appeared wholly bereft of speech, and again cast his eyes, first upon the one and then upon the other, in mute perplexity and bewilderment.

'Now, Sam!' said Mr. Pickwick, looking back.

'I'm a-comin', sir,' replied Mr. Weller, mechanically following his master; and still he lifted not his eyes from Mr. Job Trotter, who walked at his side in silence. Job kept his eyes fixed on the ground for some time. Sam, with his glued to Job's countenance, ran up against the people who were walking about, and fell over little children, and stumbled against steps and railings, without appearing at all sensible of it, until Job, looking stealthily up, said—

'How do you do, Mr. Weller?'

'It IS him!' exclaimed Sam; and having established Job's identity beyond all doubt, he smote his leg, and vented his feelings in a long, shrill whistle.

'Things has altered with me, sir,' said Job.

'I should think they had,' exclaimed Mr. Weller, surveying his companion's rags with undisguised wonder. 'This is rayther a change for the worse, Mr. Trotter, as the gen'l'm'n said, wen he got two doubtful shillin's and sixpenn'orth o' pocket-pieces for a good half-crown.'

'It is indeed,' replied Job, shaking his head. 'There is no deception now, Mr. Weller. Tears,' said Job, with a look of momentary slyness—'tears are not the only proofs of distress, nor the best ones.'

'No, they ain't,' replied Sam expressively.

'They may be put on, Mr. Weller,' said Job.

'I know they may,' said Sam; 'some people, indeed, has 'em always ready laid on, and can pull out the plug wenever they likes.'

'Yes,' replied Job; 'but these sort of things are not so easily counterfeited, Mr. Weller, and it is a more painful process to get them up.' As he spoke, he pointed to his sallow, sunken cheeks, and, drawing up his coat sleeve, disclosed an arm which looked as if the bone could be broken at a touch, so sharp and brittle did it appear, beneath its thin covering of flesh.

'Wot have you been a-doin' to yourself?' said Sam, recoiling.

'Nothing,' replied Job.

'Nothin'!' echoed Sam.

'I have been doin' nothing for many weeks past,' said Job; and eating and drinking almost as little.'

Sam took one comprehensive glance at Mr. Trotter's thin face and wretched apparel; and then, seizing him by the arm, commenced dragging him away with great violence.

'Where are you going, Mr. Weller?' said Job, vainly struggling in the powerful grasp of his old enemy. 'Come on,' said Sam; 'come on!' He deigned no further explanation till they reached the tap, and then called for a pot of porter, which was speedily produced.

'Now,' said Sam, 'drink that up, ev'ry drop on it, and then turn the pot upside down, to let me see as you've took the medicine.'

'But, my dear Mr. Weller,' remonstrated Job.

'Down vith it!' said Sam peremptorily.

Thus admonished, Mr. Trotter raised the pot to his lips, and, by gentle and almost imperceptible degrees, tilted it into the air. He paused once, and only once, to draw a long breath, but without raising his face from the vessel, which, in a few moments thereafter, he held out at arm's length, bottom upward. Nothing fell upon the ground but a few particles of froth, which slowly detached themselves from the rim, and trickled lazily down.

'Well done!' said Sam. 'How do you find yourself arter it?'

'Better, Sir. I think I am better,' responded Job.

'O' course you air,' said Sam argumentatively. 'It's like puttin' gas in a balloon. I can see with the naked eye that you gets stouter under the operation. Wot do you say to another o' the same dimensions?'

'I would rather not, I am much obliged to you, Sir,' replied Job—'much rather not.'

'Vell, then, wot do you say to some wittles?' inquired Sam.

'Thanks to your worthy governor, Sir,' said Mr. Trotter, 'we have half a leg of mutton, baked, at a quarter before three, with the potatoes under it to save boiling.'

'Wot! Has HE been a-purwidin' for you?' asked Sam emphatically.

'He has, Sir,' replied Job. 'More than that, Mr. Weller; my master being very ill, he got us a room—we were in a kennel before—and paid for it, Sir; and come to look at us, at night, when nobody should know. Mr. Weller,' said Job, with real tears in his eyes, for once, 'I could serve that gentleman till I fell down dead at his feet.'

'I say!' said Sam, 'I'll trouble you, my friend! None o' that!'

Job Trotter looked amazed.

'None o' that, I say, young feller,' repeated Sam firmly. 'No man serves him but me. And now we're upon it, I'll let you into another secret besides that,' said Sam, as he paid for the beer. 'I never heerd, mind you, or read of in story-books, nor see in picters, any angel in tights and gaiters—not even in spectacles, as I remember, though that may ha' been done for anythin' I know to the contrairey—but mark my vords, Job Trotter, he's a reg'lar thoroughbred angel for all that; and let me see the man as wenturs to tell me he knows a better vun.' With this defiance, Mr. Weller buttoned up his change in a side pocket, and, with many confirmatory nods and gestures by the way, proceeded in search of the subject of discourse.

They found Mr. Pickwick, in company with Jingle, talking very earnestly, and not bestowing a look on the groups who were congregated on the racket-ground; they were very motley groups too, and worth the looking at, if it were only in idle curiosity.

'Well,' said Mr. Pickwick, as Sam and his companion drew nigh, 'you will see how your health becomes, and think about it meanwhile. Make the statement out for me when you feel yourself equal to the task, and I will discuss the subject with you when I have considered it. Now, go to your room. You are tired, and not strong enough to be out long.'

Mr. Alfred Jingle, without one spark of his old animation—with nothing even of the dismal gaiety which he had assumed when Mr. Pickwick first stumbled on him in his misery—bowed low without speaking, and, motioning to Job not to follow him just yet, crept slowly away.

'Curious scene this, is it not, Sam?' said Mr. Pickwick, looking good-humouredly round.

'Wery much so, Sir,' replied Sam. 'Wonders 'ull never cease,' added Sam, speaking to himself. 'I'm wery much mistaken if that 'ere Jingle worn't a-doin somethin' in the water-cart way!'

The area formed by the wall in that part of the Fleet in which Mr. Pickwick stood was just wide enough to make a good racket-court; one side being formed, of course, by the wall itself, and the other by that portion of the prison which looked (or rather would have looked, but for the wall) towards St. Paul's Cathedral. Sauntering or sitting about, in every possible attitude of listless idleness, were a great number of debtors, the major part of whom were waiting in prison until their day of 'going up' before the Insolvent Court should arrive; while others had been remanded for various terms, which they were idling away as they best could. Some were shabby, some were smart, many dirty, a few clean; but there they all lounged, and loitered, and slunk about with as little spirit or purpose as the beasts in a menagerie.

Lolling from the windows which commanded a view of this promenade were a number of persons, some in noisy conversation with their acquaintance below, others playing at ball with some adventurous throwers outside, others looking on at the racket-players, or watching the boys as they cried the game. Dirty, slipshod women passed and repassed, on their way to the cooking-house in one corner of the yard; children screamed, and fought, and played together, in another; the tumbling of the skittles, and the shouts of the players, mingled perpetually with these and a hundred other sounds; and all was noise and tumult—save in a little miserable shed a few yards off, where lay, all quiet and ghastly, the body of the Chancery prisoner who had died the night before, awaiting the mockery of an inquest. The body! It is the lawyer's term for the restless, whirling mass of cares and anxieties, affections, hopes, and griefs, that make up the living man. The law had his body; and there it lay, clothed in grave-clothes, an awful witness to its tender mercy.

'Would you like to see a whistling-shop, Sir?' inquired Job Trotter.

'What do you mean?' was Mr. Pickwick's counter inquiry.

'A vistlin' shop, Sir,' interposed Mr. Weller.

'What is that, Sam?—A bird-fancier's?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Bless your heart, no, Sir,' replied Job; 'a whistling-shop, Sir, is where they sell spirits.' Mr. Job Trotter briefly explained here, that all persons, being prohibited under heavy penalties from conveying spirits into debtors' prisons, and such commodities being highly prized by the ladies and gentlemen confined therein, it had occurred to some speculative turnkey to connive, for certain lucrative considerations, at two or three prisoners retailing the favourite article of gin, for their own profit and advantage.

'This plan, you see, Sir, has been gradually introduced into all the prisons for debt,' said Mr. Trotter.

'And it has this wery great advantage,' said Sam, 'that the turnkeys takes wery good care to seize hold o' ev'rybody but them as pays 'em, that attempts the willainy, and wen it gets in the papers they're applauded for their wigilance; so it cuts two ways—frightens other people from the trade, and elewates their own characters.'

'Exactly so, Mr. Weller,' observed Job.

'Well, but are these rooms never searched to ascertain whether any spirits are concealed in them?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Cert'nly they are, Sir,' replied Sam; 'but the turnkeys knows beforehand, and gives the word to the wistlers, and you may wistle for it wen you go to look.'

By this time, Job had tapped at a door, which was opened by a gentleman with an uncombed head, who bolted it after them when they had walked in, and grinned; upon which Job grinned, and Sam also; whereupon Mr. Pickwick, thinking it might be expected of him, kept on smiling to the end of the interview.

The gentleman with the uncombed head appeared quite satisfied with this mute announcement of their business, and, producing a flat stone bottle, which might hold about a couple of quarts, from beneath his bedstead, filled out three glasses of gin, which Job Trotter and Sam disposed of in a most workmanlike manner.

'Any more?' said the whistling gentleman.

'No more,' replied Job Trotter.

Mr. Pickwick paid, the door was unbolted, and out they came; the uncombed gentleman bestowing a friendly nod upon Mr. Roker, who happened to be passing at the moment.

From this spot, Mr. Pickwick wandered along all the galleries, up and down all the staircases, and once again round the whole area of the yard. The great body of the prison population appeared to be Mivins, and Smangle, and the parson, and the butcher, and the leg, over and over, and over again. There were the same squalor, the same turmoil and noise, the same general characteristics, in every corner; in the best and the worst alike. The whole place seemed restless and troubled; and the people were crowding and flitting to and fro, like the shadows in an uneasy dream.

'I have seen enough,' said Mr. Pickwick, as he threw himself into a chair in his little apartment. 'My head aches with these scenes, and my heart too. Henceforth I will be a prisoner in my own room.'

And Mr. Pickwick steadfastly adhered to this determination. For three long months he remained shut up, all day; only stealing out at night to breathe the air, when the greater part of his fellow-prisoners were in bed or carousing in their rooms. His health was beginning to suffer from the closeness of the confinement, but neither the often-repeated entreaties of

Perker and his friends, nor the still more frequently-repeated warnings and admonitions of Mr. Samuel Weller, could induce him to alter one jot of his inflexible resolution.

CHAPTER XLVI. RECORDS A TOUCHING ACT OF DELICATE FEELING, NOT UNMIXED

WITH PLEASANTRY, ACHIEVED AND PERFORMED BY Messrs. DODSON AND FOGG

It was within a week of the close of the month of July, that a hackney cabriolet, number unrecorded, was seen to proceed at a rapid pace up Goswell Street; three people were squeezed into it besides the driver, who sat in his own particular little dickey at the side; over the apron were hung two shawls, belonging to two small vixenish-looking ladies under the apron; between whom, compressed into a very small compass, was stowed away, a gentleman of heavy and subdued demeanour, who, whenever he ventured to make an observation, was snapped up short by one of the vixenish ladies before-mentioned. Lastly, the two vixenish ladies and the heavy gentleman were giving the driver contradictory directions, all tending to the one point, that he should stop at Mrs. Bardell's door; which the heavy gentleman, in direct opposition to, and defiance of, the vixenish ladies, contended was a green door and not a yellow one.

'Stop at the house with a green door, driver,' said the heavy gentleman.

'Oh! You perwerse creetur!' exclaimed one of the vixenish ladies. 'Drive to the 'ouse with the yellow door, cabmin.'

Upon this the cabman, who in a sudden effort to pull up at the house with the green door, had pulled the horse up so high that he nearly pulled him backward into the cabriolet, let the animal's fore-legs down to the ground again, and paused.

'Now vere am I to pull up?' inquired the driver. 'Settle it among yourselves. All I ask is, vere?'

Here the contest was renewed with increased violence; and the horse being troubled with a fly on his nose, the cabman humanely employed his leisure in lashing him about on the head, on the counter-irritation principle.

'Most wotes carries the day!' said one of the vixenish ladies at length. 'The 'ouse with the yellow door, cabman.'

But after the cabriolet had dashed up, in splendid style, to the house with the yellow door, 'making,' as one of the vixenish ladies triumphantly said, 'acterrally more noise than if one had come in one's own carriage,' and after the driver had dismounted to assist the ladies in getting out, the small round head of Master Thomas Bardell was thrust out of the one-pair window of a house with a red door, a few numbers off.

'Aggrawatin' thing!' said the vixenish lady last-mentioned, darting a withering glance at the heavy gentleman.

'My dear, it's not my fault,' said the gentleman.

'Don't talk to me, you creetur, don't,' retorted the lady. 'The house with the red door, cabmin. Oh! If ever a woman was troubled with a ruffinly creetur, that takes a pride and a pleasure in disgracing his wife on every possible occasion afore strangers, I am that woman!'

'You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Raddle,' said the other little woman, who was no other than Mrs. Cluppins. 'What have I been a-doing of?' asked Mr. Raddle.

'Don't talk to me, don't, you brute, for fear I should be perwoked to forgit my sect and strike you!' said Mrs. Raddle.

While this dialogue was going on, the driver was most ignominiously leading the horse, by the bridle, up to the house with the red door, which Master Bardell had already opened. Here was a mean and low way of arriving at a friend's house! No dashing up, with all the fire and fury of the animal; no jumping down of the driver; no loud knocking at the door; no opening of the apron with a crash at the very last moment, for fear of the ladies sitting in a draught; and then the man handing the shawls out, afterwards, as if he were a private coachman! The whole edge of the thing had been taken off—it was flatter than walking.

'Well, Tommy,' said Mrs. Cluppins, 'how's your poor dear mother?'

'Oh, she's very well,' replied Master Bardell. 'She's in the front parlour, all ready. I'm ready too, I am.' Here Master Bardell put his hands in his pockets, and jumped off and on the bottom step of the door.

'Is anybody else a-goin', Tommy?' said Mrs. Cluppins, arranging her pelerine.

'Mrs. Sanders is going, she is,' replied Tommy; 'I'm going too, I am.'

'Drat the boy,' said little Mrs. Cluppins. 'He thinks of nobody but himself. Here, Tommy, dear.'

'Well,' said Master Bardell.

'Who else is a-goin', lovey?' said Mrs. Cluppins, in an insinuating manner.

'Oh! Mrs. Rogers is a-goin',' replied Master Bardell, opening his eyes very wide as he delivered the intelligence.

'What? The lady as has taken the lodgings!' ejaculated Mrs. Cluppins.

Master Bardell put his hands deeper down into his pockets, and nodded exactly thirty-five times, to imply that it was the lady-lodger, and no other.

'Bless us!' said Mrs. Cluppins. 'It's quite a party!'

'Ah, if you knew what was in the cupboard, you'd say so,' replied Master Bardell.

'What is there, Tommy?' said Mrs. Cluppins coaxingly. 'You'll tell ME, Tommy, I know.' 'No, I won't,' replied Master Bardell, shaking his head, and applying himself to the bottom step again.

'Drat the child!' muttered Mrs. Cluppins. 'What a prowokin' little wretch it is! Come, Tommy, tell your dear Cluppy.'

'Mother said I wasn't to,' rejoined Master Bardell, 'I'm a-goin' to have some, I am.' Cheered by this prospect, the precocious boy applied himself to his infantile treadmill, with increased vigour.

The above examination of a child of tender years took place while Mr. and Mrs. Raddle and the cab-driver were having an altercation concerning the fare, which, terminating at this point in favour of the cabman, Mrs. Raddle came up tottering.

'Lauk, Mary Ann! what's the matter?' said Mrs. Cluppins.

'It's put me all over in such a tremble, Betsy,' replied Mrs. Raddle. 'Raddle ain't like a man; he leaves everythink to me.'

This was scarcely fair upon the unfortunate Mr. Raddle, who had been thrust aside by his good lady in the commencement of the dispute, and peremptorily commanded to hold his tongue. He had no opportunity of defending himself, however, for Mrs. Raddle gave unequivocal signs of fainting; which, being perceived from the parlour window, Mrs. Bardell, Mrs. Sanders, the lodger, and the lodger's servant, darted precipitately out, and conveyed her into the house, all talking at the same time, and giving utterance to various expressions of pity and condolence, as if she were one of the most suffering mortals on earth. Being conveyed into the front parlour, she was there deposited on a sofa; and the lady from the first floor running up to the first floor, returned with a bottle of sal-volatile, which, holding Mrs. Raddle tight round the neck, she applied in all womanly kindness and pity to her nose, until that lady with many plunges and struggles was fain to declare herself decidedly better.

'Ah, poor thing!' said Mrs. Rogers, 'I know what her feelin's is, too well.' 'Ah, poor thing! so do I,' said Mrs. Sanders; and then all the ladies moaned in unison, and said they knew what it was, and they pitied her from their hearts, they did. Even the lodger's little servant, who was thirteen years old and three feet high, murmured her sympathy.

'But what's been the matter?' said Mrs. Bardell.

'Ah, what has decomposed you, ma'am?' inquired Mrs. Rogers.

'I have been a good deal flurried,' replied Mrs. Raddle, in a reproachful manner. Thereupon the ladies cast indignant glances at Mr. Raddle.

'Why, the fact is,' said that unhappy gentleman, stepping forward, 'when we alighted at this door, a dispute arose with the driver of the cabrioily—' A loud scream from his wife, at the mention of this word, rendered all further explanation inaudible.

'You'd better leave us to bring her round, Raddle,' said Mrs. Cluppins. 'She'll never get better as long as you're here.'

All the ladies concurred in this opinion; so Mr. Raddle was pushed out of the room, and requested to give himself an airing in the back yard. Which he did for about a quarter of an hour, when Mrs. Bardell announced to him with a solemn face that he might come in now, but that he must be very careful how he behaved towards his wife. She knew he didn't mean to be unkind; but Mary Ann was very far from strong, and, if he didn't take care, he might lose her when he least expected it, which would be a very dreadful reflection for him afterwards; and so on. All this, Mr. Raddle heard with great submission, and presently returned to the parlour in a most lamb-like manner.

'Why, Mrs. Rogers, ma'am,' said Mrs. Bardell, 'you've never been introduced, I declare! Mr. Raddle, ma'am; Mrs. Cluppins, ma'am; Mrs. Raddle, ma'am.'

'Which is Mrs. Cluppins's sister,' suggested Mrs. Sanders.

'Oh, indeed!' said Mrs. Rogers graciously; for she was the lodger, and her servant was in waiting, so she was more gracious than intimate, in right of her position. 'Oh, indeed!'

Mrs. Raddle smiled sweetly, Mr. Raddle bowed, and Mrs. Cluppins said, 'she was sure she was very happy to have an opportunity of being known to a lady which she had heerd so much in favour of, as Mrs. Rogers.'

A compliment which the last-named lady acknowledged with graceful condescension.

'Well, Mr. Raddle,' said Mrs. Bardell; 'I'm sure you ought to feel very much honoured at you and Tommy being the only gentlemen to escort so many ladies all the way to the Spaniards, at Hampstead. Don't you think he ought, Mrs. Rogers, ma'am?' 'Oh, certainly, ma'am,' replied Mrs. Rogers; after whom all the other ladies responded, 'Oh, certainly.'

'Of course I feel it, ma'am,' said Mr. Raddle, rubbing his hands, and evincing a slight tendency to brighten up a little. 'Indeed, to tell you the truth, I said, as we was a-coming along in the cabrioily—'

At the recapitulation of the word which awakened so many painful recollections, Mrs. Raddle applied her handkerchief to her eyes again, and uttered a half-suppressed scream; so that Mrs. Bardell frowned upon Mr. Raddle, to intimate that he had better not say anything more, and desired Mrs. Rogers's servant, with an air, to 'put the wine on.'

This was the signal for displaying the hidden treasures of the closet, which comprised sundry plates of oranges and biscuits, and a bottle of old crusted port—that at one-and-nine—with another of the celebrated East India sherry at fourteen-pence, which were all produced in honour of the lodger, and afforded unlimited satisfaction to everybody. After great consternation had been excited in the mind of Mrs. Cluppins, by an attempt on the part of Tommy to recount how he had been cross-examined regarding the cupboard then in action (which was fortunately nipped in the bud by his imbibing half a glass of the old crusted 'the wrong way,' and thereby endangering his life for some seconds), the party walked forth in quest of a Hampstead stage. This was soon found, and in a couple of hours they all arrived safely in the Spaniards Tea-gardens, where the luckless Mr. Raddle's very first act nearly occasioned his good lady a relapse; it being neither more nor less than to order tea for seven, whereas (as the ladies one and all remarked), what could have been easier than for Tommy to have drank out of anybody's cup—or everybody's, if that was all—when the waiter wasn't looking, which would have saved one head of tea, and the tea just as good!

However, there was no help for it, and the tea-tray came, with seven cups and saucers, and bread-and-butter on the same scale. Mrs. Bardell was unanimously voted into the chair, and Mrs. Rogers being stationed on her right hand, and Mrs. Raddle on her left, the meal proceeded with great merriment and success.

'How sweet the country is, to be sure!' sighed Mrs. Rogers; 'I almost wish I lived in it always.'

'Oh, you wouldn't like that, ma'am,' replied Mrs. Bardell, rather hastily; for it was not at all advisable, with reference to the lodgings, to encourage such notions; 'you wouldn't like it, ma'am.'

'Oh! I should think you was a deal too lively and sought after, to be content with the country, ma'am,' said little Mrs. Cluppins.

'Perhaps I am, ma'am. Perhaps I am,' sighed the first-floor lodger.

'For lone people as have got nobody to care for them, or take care of them, or as have been hurt in their mind, or that kind of thing,' observed Mr. Raddle, plucking up a little cheerfulness, and looking round, 'the country is all very well. The country for a wounded spirit, they say.'

Now, of all things in the world that the unfortunate man could have said, any would have been preferable to this. Of course Mrs. Bardell burst into tears, and requested to be led from the table instantly; upon which the affectionate child began to cry too, most dismally.

'Would anybody believe, ma'am,' exclaimed Mrs. Raddle, turning fiercely to the first-floor lodger, 'that a woman could be married to such a unmanly creetur, which can tamper with a woman's feelings as he does, every hour in the day, ma'am?'

'My dear,' remonstrated Mr. Raddle, 'I didn't mean anything, my dear.'

'You didn't mean!' repeated Mrs. Raddle, with great scorn and contempt. 'Go away. I can't bear the sight on you, you brute.'

'You must not flurry yourself, Mary Ann,' interposed Mrs. Cluppins. 'You really must consider yourself, my dear, which you never do. Now go away, Raddle, there's a good soul, or you'll only aggravate her.'

'You had better take your tea by yourself, Sir, indeed,' said Mrs. Rogers, again applying the smelling-bottle.

Mrs. Sanders, who, according to custom, was very busy with the bread-and-butter, expressed the same opinion, and Mr. Raddle quietly retired.

After this, there was a great hoisting up of Master Bardell, who was rather a large size for hugging, into his mother's arms, in which operation he got his boots in the tea-board, and occasioned some confusion among the cups and saucers. But that description of fainting fits, which is contagious among ladies, seldom lasts long; so when he had been well kissed, and a little cried over, Mrs. Bardell recovered, set him down again, wondering how she could have been so foolish, and poured out some more tea.

It was at this moment, that the sound of approaching wheels was heard, and that the ladies, looking up, saw a hackney-coach stop at the garden gate.

'More company!' said Mrs. Sanders.

'It's a gentleman,' said Mrs. Raddle.

'Well, if it ain't Mr. Jackson, the young man from Dodson and Fogg's!' cried Mrs. Bardell. 'Why, gracious! Surely Mr. Pickwick can't have paid the damages.'

'Or hoffered marriage!' said Mrs. Cluppins.

'Dear me, how slow the gentleman is,'exclaimed Mrs. Rogers. 'Why doesn't he make haste!'

As the lady spoke these words, Mr. Jackson turned from the coach where he had been addressing some observations to a shabby man in black leggings, who had just emerged from the vehicle with a thick ash stick in his hand, and made his way to the place where the ladies were seated; winding his hair round the brim of his hat, as he came along. 'Is anything the matter? Has anything taken place, Mr. Jackson?' said Mrs. Bardell eagerly.

'Nothing whatever, ma'am,' replied Mr. Jackson. 'How de do, ladies? I have to ask pardon, ladies, for intruding—but the law, ladies—the law.' With this apology Mr. Jackson smiled, made a comprehensive bow, and gave his hair another wind. Mrs. Rogers whispered Mrs. Raddle that he was really an elegant young man.

'I called in Goswell Street,' resumed Mr. Jackson, 'and hearing that you were here, from the slavey, took a coach and came on. Our people want you down in the city directly, Mrs. Bardell.'

'Lor!' ejaculated that lady, starting at the sudden nature of the communication.

'Yes,' said Mr. Jackson, biting his lip. 'It's very important and pressing business, which can't be postponed on any account. Indeed, Dodson expressly said so to me, and so did Fogg. I've kept the coach on purpose for you to go back in.'

'How very strange!' exclaimed Mrs. Bardell.

The ladies agreed that it WAS very strange, but were unanimously of opinion that it must be very important, or Dodson & Fogg would never have sent; and further, that the business being urgent, she ought to repair to Dodson & Fogg's without any delay.

There was a certain degree of pride and importance about being wanted by one's lawyers in such a monstrous hurry, that was by no means displeasing to Mrs. Bardell, especially as it might be reasonably supposed to enhance her consequence in the eyes of the first-floor lodger. She simpered a little, affected extreme vexation and hesitation, and at last arrived at the conclusion that she supposed she must go.

'But won't you refresh yourself after your walk, Mr. Jackson?' said Mrs. Bardell persuasively.

'Why, really there ain't much time to lose,' replied Jackson; 'and I've got a friend here,' he continued, looking towards the man with the ash stick.

'Oh, ask your friend to come here, Sir,' said Mrs. Bardell. 'Pray ask your friend here, Sir.'

'Why, thank'ee, I'd rather not,' said Mr. Jackson, with some embarrassment of manner. 'He's not much used to ladies' society, and it makes him bashful. If you'll order the waiter to deliver him anything short, he won't drink it off at once, won't he!—only try him!' Mr. Jackson's fingers wandered playfully round his nose at this portion of his discourse, to warn his hearers that he was speaking ironically.

The waiter was at once despatched to the bashful gentleman, and the bashful gentleman took something; Mr. Jackson also took something, and the ladies took something, for hospitality's sake. Mr. Jackson then said he was afraid it was time to go; upon which, Mrs. Sanders, Mrs. Cluppins, and Tommy (who it was arranged should accompany Mrs. Bardell, leaving the others to Mr. Raddle's protection), got into the coach.

'Isaac,' said Jackson, as Mrs. Bardell prepared to get in, looking up at the man with the ash stick, who was seated on the box, smoking a cigar.

'Well?'

'This is Mrs. Bardell.'

'Oh, I know'd that long ago,' said the man.

Mrs. Bardell got in, Mr. Jackson got in after her, and away they drove. Mrs. Bardell could not help ruminating on what Mr. Jackson's friend had said. Shrewd creatures, those lawyers. Lord bless us, how they find people out!

'Sad thing about these costs of our people's, ain't it,' said Jackson, when Mrs. Cluppins and Mrs. Sanders had fallen asleep; 'your bill of costs, I mean.'

'I'm very sorry they can't get them,' replied Mrs. Bardell. 'But if you law gentlemen do these things on speculation, why you must get a loss now and then, you know.'

'You gave them a COGNOVIT for the amount of your costs, after the trial, I'm told!' said Jackson.

'Yes. Just as a matter of form,' replied Mrs. Bardell.

'Certainly,' replied Jackson drily. 'Quite a matter of form. Quite.'

On they drove, and Mrs. Bardell fell asleep. She was awakened, after some time, by the stopping of the coach.

'Bless us!' said the lady.'Are we at Freeman's Court?'

'We're not going quite so far,' replied Jackson. 'Have the goodness to step out.'

Mrs. Bardell, not yet thoroughly awake, complied. It was a curious place: a large wall, with a gate in the middle, and a gas-light burning inside.

'Now, ladies,' cried the man with the ash stick, looking into the coach, and shaking Mrs. Sanders to wake her, 'Come!' Rousing her friend, Mrs. Sanders alighted. Mrs. Bardell, leaning on Jackson's arm, and leading Tommy by the hand, had already entered the porch. They followed.

The room they turned into was even more odd-looking than the porch. Such a number of men standing about! And they stared so!

'What place is this?' inquired Mrs. Bardell, pausing.

'Only one of our public offices,' replied Jackson, hurrying her through a door, and looking round to see that the other women were following. 'Look sharp, Isaac!'

'Safe and sound,' replied the man with the ash stick. The door swung heavily after them, and they descended a small flight of steps.

'Here we are at last. All right and tight, Mrs. Bardell!' said Jackson, looking exultingly round.

'What do you mean?' said Mrs. Bardell, with a palpitating heart.

'Just this,' replied Jackson, drawing her a little on one side; 'don't be frightened, Mrs. Bardell. There never was a more delicate man than Dodson, ma'am, or a more humane man than Fogg. It was their duty in the way of business, to take you in execution for them costs; but they were anxious to spare your feelings as much as they could. What a comfort it must be, to you, to think how it's been done! This is the Fleet, ma'am. Wish you good-night, Mrs. Bardell. Good-night, Tommy!'

As Jackson hurried away in company with the man with the ash stick another man, with a key in his hand, who had been looking on, led the bewildered female to a second short flight of steps leading to a doorway. Mrs. Bardell screamed violently; Tommy roared; Mrs. Cluppins shrunk within herself; and Mrs. Sanders made off, without more ado. For there stood the injured Mr. Pickwick, taking his nightly allowance of air; and beside him leant Samuel Weller, who, seeing Mrs. Bardell, took his hat off with mock reverence, while his master turned indignantly on his heel.

'Don't bother the woman,' said the turnkey to Weller; 'she's just come in.'

'A prisoner!' said Sam, quickly replacing his hat. 'Who's the plaintives? What for? Speak up, old feller.'

'Dodson and Fogg,' replied the man; 'execution on COGNOVIT for costs.'

'Here, Job, Job!' shouted Sam, dashing into the passage. 'Run to Mr. Perker's, Job. I want him directly. I see some good in this. Here's a game. Hooray! vere's the gov'nor?'

But there was no reply to these inquiries, for Job had started furiously off, the instant he received his commission, and Mrs. Bardell had fainted in real downright earnest.

CHAPTER XLVII. IS CHIEFLY DEVOTED TO MATTERS OF BUSINESS, AND THE

TEMPORAL ADVANTAGE OF DODSON AND FOGG—Mr. WINKLE REAPPEARS UNDER EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES—Mr. PICKWICK'S BENEVOLENCE PROVES STRONGER THAN HIS OBSTINACY

Job Trotter, abating nothing of his speed, ran up Holborn, sometimes in the middle of the road, sometimes on the pavement, sometimes in the gutter, as the chances of getting along varied with the press of men, women, children, and coaches, in each division of the thoroughfare, and, regardless of all obstacles stopped not for an instant until he reached the gate of Gray's Inn. Notwithstanding all the expedition he had used, however, the gate had been closed a good half-hour when he reached it, and by the time he had discovered Mr. Perker's laundress, who lived with a married daughter, who had bestowed her hand upon a non-resident waiter, who occupied the one-pair of some number in some street closely adjoining to some brewery somewhere behind Gray's Inn Lane, it was within fifteen minutes of closing the prison for the night. Mr. Lowten had still to be ferreted out from the back parlour of the Magpie and Stump; and Job had scarcely accomplished this object, and communicated Sam Weller's message, when the clock struck ten.

'There,' said Lowten, 'it's too late now. You can't get in to-night; you've got the key of the street, my friend.'

'Never mind me,' replied Job. 'I can sleep anywhere. But won't it be better to see Mr. Perker to-night, so that we may be there, the first thing in the morning?'

'Why,' responded Lowten, after a little consideration, 'if it was in anybody else's case, Perker wouldn't be best pleased at my going up to his house; but as it's Mr. Pickwick's, I think I may venture to take a cab and charge it to the office.' Deciding on this line of conduct, Mr. Lowten took up his hat, and begging the assembled company to appoint a deputy-chairman during his temporary absence, led the way to the nearest coach-stand. Summoning the cab of most promising appearance, he directed the driver to repair to Montague Place, Russell Square.

Mr. Perker had had a dinner-party that day, as was testified by the appearance of lights in the drawing-room windows, the sound of an improved grand piano, and an improvable cabinet voice issuing therefrom, and a rather overpowering smell of meat which pervaded the steps and entry. In fact, a couple of very good country agencies happening to come up to town, at the same time, an agreeable little party had been got together to meet them, comprising Mr. Snicks, the Life Office Secretary, Mr. Prosee, the eminent counsel, three solicitors, one commissioner of bankrupts, a special pleader from the Temple, a small-eyed peremptory young gentleman, his pupil, who had written a lively book about the law of demises, with a vast quantity of marginal notes and references; and several other eminent and distinguished personages. From this society, little Mr. Perker detached himself, on his clerk being announced in a whisper; and repairing to the dining-room, there found Mr. Lowten and Job Trotter looking very dim and shadowy by the light of a kitchen candle, which the gentleman who condescended to appear in plush shorts and cottons for a quarterly stipend, had, with a becoming contempt for the clerk and all things appertaining to 'the office,' placed upon the table.

'Now, Lowten,' said little Mr. Perker, shutting the door,'what's the matter? No important letter come in a parcel, is there?'

'No, Sir,' replied Lowten. 'This is a messenger from Mr. Pickwick, Sir.'

'From Pickwick, eh?' said the little man, turning quickly to Job. 'Well, what is it?'

'Dodson and Fogg have taken Mrs. Bardell in execution for her costs, Sir,' said Job.

'No!' exclaimed Perker, putting his hands in his pockets, and reclining against the sideboard.

'Yes,' said Job. 'It seems they got a cognovit out of her, for the amount of 'em, directly after the trial.'

'By Jove!' said Perker, taking both hands out of his pockets, and striking the knuckles of his right against the palm of his left, emphatically, 'those are the cleverest scamps I ever had anything to do with!'

'The sharpest practitioners I ever knew, Sir,' observed Lowten.

'Sharp!' echoed Perker. 'There's no knowing where to have them.'

'Very true, Sir, there is not,' replied Lowten; and then, both master and man pondered for a few seconds, with animated countenances, as if they were reflecting upon one of the most beautiful and ingenious discoveries that the intellect of man had ever made. When they had in some measure recovered from their trance of admiration, Job Trotter discharged himself of the rest of his commission. Perker nodded his head thoughtfully, and pulled out his watch.

'At ten precisely, I will be there,' said the little man. 'Sam is quite right. Tell him so. Will you take a glass of wine, Lowten?' 'No, thank you, Sir.'

'You mean yes, I think,' said the little man, turning to the sideboard for a decanter and glasses.

As Lowten DID mean yes, he said no more on the subject, but inquired of Job, in an audible whisper, whether the portrait of Perker, which hung opposite the fireplace, wasn't a wonderful likeness, to which Job of course replied that it was. The wine being by this time poured out, Lowten drank to Mrs. Perker and the children, and Job to Perker. The gentleman in the plush shorts and cottons considering it no part of his duty to show the people from the office out, consistently declined to answer the bell, and they showed themselves out. The attorney betook himself to his drawing-room, the clerk to the Magpie and Stump, and Job to Covent Garden Market to spend the night in a vegetable basket.

Punctually at the appointed hour next morning, the good-humoured little attorney tapped at Mr. Pickwick's door, which was opened with great alacrity by Sam Weller.

'Mr. Perker, sir,' said Sam, announcing the visitor to Mr. Pickwick, who was sitting at the window in a thoughtful attitude. 'Wery glad you've looked in accidentally, Sir. I rather think the gov'nor wants to have a word and a half with you, Sir.'

Perker bestowed a look of intelligence on Sam, intimating that he understood he was not to say he had been sent for; and beckoning him to approach, whispered briefly in his ear.

'You don't mean that 'ere, Sir?' said Sam, starting back in excessive surprise.

Perker nodded and smiled.

Mr. Samuel Weller looked at the little lawyer, then at Mr. Pickwick, then at the ceiling, then at Perker again; grinned, laughed outright, and finally, catching up his hat from the carpet, without further explanation, disappeared.

'What does this mean?' inquired Mr. Pickwick, looking at Perker with astonishment. 'What has put Sam into this extraordinary state?'

'Oh, nothing, nothing,' replied Perker. 'Come, my dear Sir, draw up your chair to the table. I have a good deal to say to you.'

'What papers are those?' inquired Mr. Pickwick, as the little man deposited on the table a small bundle of documents tied with red tape.

'The papers in Bardell and Pickwick,' replied Perker, undoing the knot with his teeth.

Mr. Pickwick grated the legs of his chair against the ground; and throwing himself into it, folded his hands and looked sternly—if Mr. Pickwick ever could look sternly—at his legal friend.

'You don't like to hear the name of the cause?' said the little man, still busying himself with the knot.

'No, I do not indeed,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'Sorry for that,' resumed Perker, 'because it will form the subject of our conversation.'

'I would rather that the subject should be never mentioned between us, Perker,' interposed Mr. Pickwick hastily.

'Pooh, pooh, my dear Sir,' said the little man, untying the bundle, and glancing eagerly at Mr. Pickwick out of the corners of his eyes. 'It must be mentioned. I have come here on purpose. Now, are you ready to hear what I have to say, my dear Sir? No hurry; if you are not, I can wait. I have this morning's paper here. Your time shall be mine. There!' Hereupon, the little man threw one leg over the other, and made a show of beginning to read with great composure and application.

'Well, well,' said Mr. Pickwick, with a sigh, but softening into a smile at the same time. 'Say what you have to say; it's the old story, I suppose?'

'With a difference, my dear Sir; with a difference,' rejoined Perker, deliberately folding up the paper and putting it into his pocket again. 'Mrs. Bardell, the plaintiff in the action, is within these walls, Sir.'

'I know it,' was Mr. Pickwick's reply.

'Very good,' retorted Perker. 'And you know how she comes here, I suppose; I mean on what grounds, and at whose suit?'

'Yes; at least I have heard Sam's account of the matter,' said Mr. Pickwick, with affected carelessness.

'Sam's account of the matter,' replied Perker, 'is, I will venture to say, a perfectly correct one. Well now, my dear Sir, the first question I have to ask, is, whether this woman is to remain here?'

'To remain here!' echoed Mr. Pickwick.

'To remain here, my dear Sir,' rejoined Perker, leaning back in his chair and looking steadily at his client.

'How can you ask me?' said that gentleman. 'It rests with Dodson and Fogg; you know that very well.'

'I know nothing of the kind,' retorted Perker firmly. 'It does NOT rest with Dodson and Fogg; you know the men, my dear Sir, as well as I do. It rests solely, wholly, and entirely with you.'

'With me!' ejaculated Mr. Pickwick, rising nervously from his chair, and reseating himself directly afterwards.

The little man gave a double-knock on the lid of his snuff-box, opened it, took a great pinch, shut it up again, and repeated the words, 'With you.'

'I say, my dear Sir,' resumed the little man, who seemed to gather confidence from the snuff—'I say, that her speedy liberation or perpetual imprisonment rests with you, and with you alone. Hear me out, my dear Sir, if you please, and do not be so very energetic, for it will only put you into a perspiration and do no good whatever. I say,' continued Perker, checking off each position on a different finger, as he laid it down—'I say that nobody but you can rescue her from this den of wretchedness; and that you can only do that, by paying the costs of this suit—both of plaintive and defendant—into the hands of these Freeman Court sharks. Now pray be quiet, my dear sir.'

Mr. Pickwick, whose face had been undergoing most surprising changes during this speech, and was evidently on the verge of a strong burst of indignation, calmed his wrath as well as he could. Perker, strengthening his argumentative powers with another pinch of snuff, proceeded—

'I have seen the woman, this morning. By paying the costs, you can obtain a full release and discharge from the damages; and further—this I know is a far greater object of consideration with you, my dear sir—a voluntary statement, under her hand, in the form of a letter to me, that this business was, from the very first, fomented, and encouraged, and brought about, by these men, Dodson and Fogg; that she deeply regrets ever having been the instrument of annoyance or injury to you; and that she entreats me to intercede with you, and implore your pardon.'

'If I pay her costs for her,' said Mr. Pickwick indignantly. 'A valuable document, indeed!'

'No "if" in the case, my dear Sir,' said Perker triumphantly. 'There is the very letter I speak of. Brought to my office by another woman at nine o'clock this morning, before I had set foot in this place, or held any communication with Mrs. Bardell, upon my honour.' Selecting the letter from the bundle, the little lawyer laid it at Mr. Pickwick's elbow, and took snuff for two consecutive minutes, without winking.

'Is this all you have to say to me?' inquired Mr. Pickwick mildly.

'Not quite,' replied Perker. 'I cannot undertake to say, at this moment, whether the wording of the cognovit, the nature of the ostensible consideration, and the proof we can get together about the whole conduct of the suit, will be sufficient to justify an indictment for conspiracy. I fear not, my dear Sir; they are too clever for that, I doubt. I do mean to say, however, that the whole facts, taken together, will be sufficient to justify you, in the minds of all reasonable men. And now, my dear Sir, I put it to you. This one hundred and fifty pounds, or whatever it may be—take it in round numbers—is nothing to you. A jury had decided against you; well, their verdict is wrong, but still they decided as they thought right, and it IS against you. You have now an opportunity, on easy terms, of placing yourself in a much higher position than you ever could, by remaining here; which would only be imputed, by people who didn't know you, to sheer dogged, wrongheaded, brutal obstinacy; nothing else, my dear Sir, believe me. Can you hesitate to avail yourself of it, when it restores you to your friends, your old pursuits, your health and amusements; when it liberates your faithful and attached servant, whom you otherwise doom to imprisonment for the whole of your life; and above all, when it enables you to take the very magnanimous revenge—which I know, my dear sir, is one after your own heart—of releasing this woman from a scene of misery and debauchery, to which no man should ever be consigned, if I had my will, but the infliction of which on any woman, is even more frightful and barbarous. Now I ask you, my dear sir, not only as your legal adviser, but as your very true friend, will you let slip the occasion of attaining all these objects, and doing all this good, for the paltry consideration of a few pounds finding their way into the pockets of a couple of rascals, to whom it makes no manner of difference, except that the more they gain, the more they'll seek, and so the sooner be led into some piece of knavery that must end in a crash? I have put these considerations to you, my dear Sir, very feebly and imperfectly, but I ask you to think of them. Turn them over in your mind as long as you please. I wait here most patiently for your answer.'

Before Mr. Pickwick could reply, before Mr. Perker had taken one twentieth part of the snuff with which so unusually long an address imperatively required to be followed up, there was a low murmuring of voices outside, and then a hesitating knock at the door.

'Dear, dear,' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, who had been evidently roused by his friend's appeal; 'what an annoyance that door is! Who is that?'

'Me, Sir,' replied Sam Weller, putting in his head.

'I can't speak to you just now, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'I am engaged at this moment, Sam.'

'Beg your pardon, Sir,' rejoined Mr. Weller. 'But here's a lady here, Sir, as says she's somethin' wery partickler to disclose.'

'I can't see any lady,' replied Mr. Pickwick, whose mind was filled with visions of Mrs. Bardell.

'I wouldn't make too sure o' that, Sir,' urged Mr. Weller, shaking his head. 'If you know'd who was near, sir, I rayther think you'd change your note; as the hawk remarked to himself vith a cheerful laugh, ven he heerd the robin-redbreast a-singin' round the corner.'

'Who is it?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Will you see her, Sir?' asked Mr. Weller, holding the door in his hand as if he had some curious live animal on the other side.

'I suppose I must,' said Mr. Pickwick, looking at Perker.

'Well then, all in to begin!' cried Sam. 'Sound the gong, draw up the curtain, and enter the two conspiraytors.'

As Sam Weller spoke, he threw the door open, and there rushed tumultuously into the room, Mr. Nathaniel Winkle, leading after him by the hand, the identical young lady who at Dingley Dell had worn the boots with the fur round the tops, and who, now a very pleasing compound of blushes and confusion, and lilac silk, and a smart bonnet, and a rich lace veil, looked prettier than ever.

'Miss Arabella Allen!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, rising from his chair.

'No,' replied Mr. Winkle, dropping on his knees. 'Mrs. Winkle. Pardon, my dear friend, pardon!'

Mr. Pickwick could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses, and perhaps would not have done so, but for the corroborative testimony afforded by the smiling countenance of Perker, and the bodily presence, in the background, of Sam and the pretty housemaid; who appeared to contemplate the proceedings with the liveliest satisfaction.

'Oh, Mr. Pickwick!' said Arabella, in a low voice, as if alarmed at the silence. 'Can you forgive my imprudence?'

Mr. Pickwick returned no verbal response to this appeal; but he took off his spectacles in great haste, and seizing both the young lady's hands in his, kissed her a great number of times—perhaps a greater number than was absolutely necessary—and then, still retaining one of her hands, told Mr. Winkle he was an audacious young dog, and bade him get up. This, Mr. Winkle, who had been for some seconds scratching his nose with the brim of his hat, in a penitent manner, did; whereupon Mr. Pickwick slapped him on the back several times, and then shook hands heartily with Perker, who, not to be behind-hand in the compliments of the occasion, saluted both the bride and the pretty housemaid with right good-will, and, having wrung Mr. Winkle's hand most cordially, wound up his demonstrations of joy by taking snuff enough to set any half-dozen men with ordinarily-constructed noses, a-sneezing for life. 'Why, my dear girl,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'how has all this come about? Come! Sit down, and let me hear it all. How well she looks, doesn't she, Perker?' added Mr. Pickwick, surveying Arabella's face with a look of as much pride and exultation, as if she had been his daughter.

'Delightful, my dear Sir,' replied the little man. 'If I were not a married man myself, I should be disposed to envy you, you dog.' Thus expressing himself, the little lawyer gave Mr. Winkle a poke in the chest, which that gentleman reciprocated; after which they both laughed very loudly, but not so loudly as Mr. Samuel Weller, who had just relieved his feelings by kissing the pretty housemaid under cover of the cupboard door.

'I can never be grateful enough to you, Sam, I am sure,' said Arabella, with the sweetest smile imaginable. 'I shall not forget your exertions in the garden at Clifton.'

'Don't say nothin' wotever about it, ma'am,' replied Sam. 'I only assisted natur, ma'am; as the doctor said to the boy's mother, after he'd bled him to death.'

'Mary, my dear, sit down,' said Mr. Pickwick, cutting short these compliments. 'Now then; how long have you been married, eh?'

Arabella looked bashfully at her lord and master, who replied, 'Only three days.'

'Only three days, eh?' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Why, what have you been doing these three months?'

'Ah, to be sure!' interposed Perker; 'come, account for this idleness. You see Mr. Pickwick's only astonishment is, that it wasn't all over, months ago.'

'Why the fact is,' replied Mr. Winkle, looking at his blushing young wife, 'that I could not persuade Bella to run away, for a long time. And when I had persuaded her, it was a long time more before we could find an opportunity. Mary had to give a month's warning, too, before she could leave her place next door, and we couldn't possibly have done it without her assistance.' 'Upon my word,' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, who by this time had resumed his spectacles, and was looking from Arabella to Winkle, and from Winkle to Arabella, with as much delight depicted in his countenance as warmheartedness and kindly feeling can communicate to the human face—'upon my word! you seem to have been very systematic in your proceedings. And is your brother acquainted with all this, my dear?'

'Oh, no, no,' replied Arabella, changing colour. 'Dear Mr. Pickwick, he must only know it from you—from your lips alone. He is so violent, so prejudiced, and has been so—so anxious in behalf of his friend, Mr. Sawyer,' added Arabella, looking down, 'that I fear the consequences dreadfully.'

'Ah, to be sure,' said Perker gravely. 'You must take this matter in hand for them, my dear sir. These young men will respect you, when they would listen to nobody else. You must prevent mischief, my dear Sir. Hot blood, hot blood.' And the little man took a warning pinch, and shook his head doubtfully.

'You forget, my love,' said Mr. Pickwick gently, 'you forget that I am a prisoner.'

'No, indeed I do not, my dear Sir,' replied Arabella. 'I never have forgotten it. I have never ceased to think how great your sufferings must have been in this shocking place. But I hoped that what no consideration for yourself would induce you to do, a regard to our happiness might. If my brother hears of this, first, from you, I feel certain we shall be reconciled. He is my only relation in the world, Mr. Pickwick, and unless you plead for me, I fear I have lost even him. I have done wrong, very, very wrong, I know.'Here poor Arabella hid her face in her handkerchief, and wept bitterly.

Mr. Pickwick's nature was a good deal worked upon, by these same tears; but when Mrs. Winkle, drying her eyes, took to coaxing and entreating in the sweetest tones of a very sweet voice, he became particularly restless, and evidently undecided how to act, as was evinced by sundry nervous rubbings of his spectacle-glasses, nose, tights, head, and gaiters.

Taking advantage of these symptoms of indecision, Mr. Perker (to whom, it appeared, the young couple had driven straight that morning) urged with legal point and shrewdness that Mr. Winkle, senior, was still unacquainted with the important rise in life's flight of steps which his son had taken; that the future expectations of the said son depended entirely upon the said Winkle, senior, continuing to regard him with undiminished feelings of affection and attachment, which it was very unlikely he would, if this great event were long kept a secret from him; that Mr. Pickwick, repairing to Bristol to seek Mr. Allen, might, with equal reason, repair to Birmingham to seek Mr. Winkle, senior; lastly, that Mr. Winkle, senior, had good right and title to consider Mr. Pickwick as in some degree the guardian and adviser of his son, and that it consequently behoved that gentleman, and was indeed due to his personal character, to acquaint the aforesaid Winkle, senior, personally, and by word of mouth, with the whole circumstances of the case, and with the share he had taken in the transaction.

Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass arrived, most opportunely, in this stage of the pleadings, and as it was necessary to explain to them all that had occurred, together with the various reasons pro and con, the whole of the arguments were gone over again, after which everybody urged every argument in his own way, and at his own length. And, at last, Mr. Pickwick, fairly argued and remonstrated out of all his resolutions, and being in imminent danger of being argued and remonstrated out of his wits, caught Arabella in his arms, and declaring that she was a very amiable creature, and that he didn't know how it was, but he had always been very fond of her from the first, said he could never find it in his heart to stand in the way of young people's happiness, and they might do with him as they pleased.

Mr. Weller's first act, on hearing this concession, was to despatch Job Trotter to the illustrious Mr. Pell, with an authority to deliver to the bearer the formal discharge which his prudent parent had had the foresight to leave in the hands of that learned gentleman, in case it should be, at any time, required on an emergency; his next proceeding was, to invest his whole stock of ready-money in the purchase of five-and-twenty gallons of mild porter, which he himself dispensed on the racket-ground to everybody who would partake of it; this done, he hurra'd in divers parts of the building until he lost his voice, and then quietly relapsed into his usual collected and philosophical condition.

At three o'clock that afternoon, Mr. Pickwick took a last look at his little room, and made his way, as well as he could, through the throng of debtors who pressed eagerly forward to shake him by the hand, until he reached the lodge steps. He turned here, to look about him, and his eye lightened as he did so. In all the crowd of wan, emaciated faces, he saw not one which was not happier for his sympathy and charity.

'Perker,' said Mr. Pickwick, beckoning one young man towards him, 'this is Mr. Jingle, whom I spoke to you about.'

'Very good, my dear Sir,' replied Perker, looking hard at Jingle. 'You will see me again, young man, to-morrow. I hope you may live to remember and feel deeply, what I shall have to communicate, Sir.'

Jingle bowed respectfully, trembled very much as he took Mr. Pickwick's proffered hand, and withdrew.

'Job you know, I think?' said Mr. Pickwick, presenting that gentleman.

'I know the rascal,' replied Perker good-humouredly. 'See after your friend, and be in the way to-morrow at one. Do you hear? Now, is there anything more?'

'Nothing,' rejoined Mr. Pickwick. 'You have delivered the little parcel I gave you for your old landlord, Sam?'

'I have, Sir,' replied Sam. 'He bust out a-cryin', Sir, and said you wos wery gen'rous and thoughtful, and he only wished you could have him innockilated for a gallopin' consumption, for his old friend as had lived here so long wos dead, and he'd noweres to look for another.' 'Poor fellow, poor fellow!' said Mr. Pickwick. 'God bless you, my friends!'

As Mr. Pickwick uttered this adieu, the crowd raised a loud shout. Many among them were pressing forward to shake him by the hand again, when he drew his arm through Perker's, and hurried from the prison, far more sad and melancholy, for the moment, than when he had first entered it. Alas! how many sad and unhappy beings had he left behind!

A happy evening was that for at least one party in the George and Vulture; and light and cheerful were two of the hearts that emerged from its hospitable door next morning. The owners thereof were Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller, the former of whom was speedily deposited inside a comfortable post-coach, with a little dickey behind, in which the latter mounted with great agility.

'Sir,' called out Mr. Weller to his master.

'Well, Sam,' replied Mr. Pickwick, thrusting his head out of the window.

'I wish them horses had been three months and better in the Fleet, Sir.'

'Why, Sam?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Wy, Sir,' exclaimed Mr. Weller, rubbing his hands, 'how they would go if they had been!'

CHAPTER XLVIII. RELATES HOW Mr. PICKWICK, WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF SAMUEL

WELLER, ESSAYED TO SOFTEN THE HEART OF Mr. BENJAMIN ALLEN, AND TO MOLLIFY THE WRATH OF Mr. ROBERT SAWYER

Mr. Ben Allen and Mr. Bob Sawyer sat together in the little surgery behind the shop, discussing minced veal and future prospects, when the discourse, not unnaturally, turned upon the practice acquired by Bob the aforesaid, and his present chances of deriving a competent independence from the honourable profession to which he had devoted himself.

'Which, I think,' observed Mr. Bob Sawyer, pursuing the thread of the subject—'which, I think, Ben, are rather dubious.'

'What's rather dubious?' inquired Mr. Ben Allen, at the same time sharpening his intellect with a draught of beer. 'What's dubious?'

'Why, the chances,' responded Mr. Bob Sawyer.

'I forgot,' said Mr. Ben Allen. 'The beer has reminded me that I forgot, Bob—yes; they ARE dubious.'

'It's wonderful how the poor people patronise me,' said Mr. Bob Sawyer reflectively. 'They knock me up, at all hours of the night; they take medicine to an extent which I should have conceived impossible; they put on blisters and leeches with a perseverance worthy of a better cause; they make additions to their families, in a manner which is quite awful. Six of those last-named little promissory notes, all due on the same day, Ben, and all intrusted to me!'

'It's very gratifying, isn't it?' said Mr. Ben Allen, holding his plate for some more minced veal.

'Oh, very,' replied Bob; 'only not quite so much so as the confidence of patients with a shilling or two to spare would be. This business was capitally described in the advertisement, Ben. It is a practice, a very extensive practice—and that's all.'

'Bob,' said Mr. Ben Allen, laying down his knife and fork, and fixing his eyes on the visage of his friend, 'Bob, I'll tell you what it is.'

'What is it?' inquired Mr. Bob Sawyer.

'You must make yourself, with as little delay as possible, master of Arabella's one thousand pounds.'

'Three per cent. consolidated bank annuities, now standing in her name in the book or books of the governor and company of the Bank of England,' added Bob Sawyer, in legal phraseology.

'Exactly so,' said Ben. 'She has it when she comes of age, or marries. She wants a year of coming of age, and if you plucked up a spirit she needn't want a month of being married.'

'She's a very charming and delightful creature,' quoth Mr. Robert Sawyer, in reply; 'and has only one fault that I know of, Ben. It happens, unfortunately, that that single blemish is a want of taste. She don't like me.'

'It's my opinion that she don't know what she does like,' said Mr. Ben Allen contemptuously.

'Perhaps not,' remarked Mr. Bob Sawyer. 'But it's my opinion that she does know what she doesn't like, and that's of more importance.'

'I wish,' said Mr. Ben Allen, setting his teeth together, and speaking more like a savage warrior who fed on raw wolf's flesh which he carved with his fingers, than a peaceable young gentleman who ate minced veal with a knife and fork—'I wish I knew whether any rascal really has been tampering with her, and attempting to engage her affections. I think I should assassinate him, Bob.'

'I'd put a bullet in him, if I found him out,' said Mr. Sawyer, stopping in the course of a long draught of beer, and looking malignantly out of the porter pot. 'If that didn't do his business, I'd extract it afterwards, and kill him that way.'

Mr. Benjamin Allen gazed abstractedly on his friend for some minutes in silence, and then said—

'You have never proposed to her, point-blank, Bob?'

'No. Because I saw it would be of no use,' replied Mr. Robert Sawyer.

'You shall do it, before you are twenty-four hours older,' retorted Ben, with desperate calmness. 'She shall have you, or I'll know the reason why. I'll exert my authority.'

'Well,' said Mr. Bob Sawyer, 'we shall see.'

'We shall see, my friend,' replied Mr. Ben Allen fiercely. He paused for a few seconds, and added in a voice broken by emotion, 'You have loved her from a child, my friend. You loved her when we were boys at school together, and, even then, she was wayward and slighted your young feelings. Do you recollect, with all the eagerness of a child's love, one day pressing upon her acceptance, two small caraway-seed biscuits and one sweet apple, neatly folded into a circular parcel with the leaf of a copy-book?'

'I do,' replied Bob Sawyer.

'She slighted that, I think?' said Ben Allen.

'She did,' rejoined Bob. 'She said I had kept the parcel so long in the pockets of my corduroys, that the apple was unpleasantly warm.'

'I remember,' said Mr. Allen gloomily. 'Upon which we ate it ourselves, in alternate bites.'

Bob Sawyer intimated his recollection of the circumstance last alluded to, by a melancholy frown; and the two friends remained for some time absorbed, each in his own meditations.

While these observations were being exchanged between Mr. Bob Sawyer and Mr. Benjamin Allen; and while the boy in the gray livery, marvelling at the unwonted prolongation of the dinner, cast an anxious look, from time to time, towards the glass door, distracted by inward misgivings regarding the amount of minced veal which would be ultimately reserved for his individual cravings; there rolled soberly on through the streets of Bristol, a private fly, painted of a sad green colour, drawn by a chubby sort of brown horse, and driven by a surly-looking man with his legs dressed like the legs of a groom, and his body attired in the coat of a coachman. Such appearances are common to many vehicles belonging to, and maintained by, old ladies of economic habits; and in this vehicle sat an old lady who was its mistress and proprietor.

'Martin!' said the old lady, calling to the surly man, out of the front window.

'Well?' said the surly man, touching his hat to the old lady.

'Mr. Sawyer's,' said the old lady.

'I was going there,' said the surly man.

The old lady nodded the satisfaction which this proof of the surly man's foresight imparted to her feelings; and the surly man giving a smart lash to the chubby horse, they all repaired to Mr. Bob Sawyer's together.

'Martin!' said the old lady, when the fly stopped at the door of Mr. Robert Sawyer, late Nockemorf.

'Well?' said Martin.

'Ask the lad to step out, and mind the horse.'

'I'm going to mind the horse myself,' said Martin, laying his whip on the roof of the fly.

'I can't permit it, on any account,' said the old lady; 'your testimony will be very important, and I must take you into the house with me. You must not stir from my side during the whole interview. Do you hear?'

'I hear,' replied Martin.

'Well; what are you stopping for?'

'Nothing,' replied Martin. So saying, the surly man leisurely descended from the wheel, on which he had been poising himself on the tops of the toes of his right foot, and having summoned the boy in the gray livery, opened the coach door, flung down the steps, and thrusting in a hand enveloped in a dark wash-leather glove, pulled out the old lady with as much unconcern in his manner as if she were a bandbox.

'Dear me!' exclaimed the old lady. 'I am so flurried, now I have got here, Martin, that I'm all in a tremble.'

Mr. Martin coughed behind the dark wash-leather gloves, but expressed no sympathy; so the old lady, composing herself, trotted up Mr. Bob Sawyer's steps, and Mr. Martin followed. Immediately on the old lady's entering the shop, Mr. Benjamin Allen and Mr. Bob Sawyer, who had been putting the spirits-and-water out of sight, and upsetting nauseous drugs to take off the smell of the tobacco smoke, issued hastily forth in a transport of pleasure and affection.

'My dear aunt,' exclaimed Mr. Ben Allen, 'how kind of you to look in upon us! Mr. Sawyer, aunt; my friend Mr. Bob Sawyer whom I have spoken to you about, regarding—you know, aunt.' And here Mr. Ben Allen, who was not at the moment extraordinarily sober, added the word 'Arabella,' in what was meant to be a whisper, but which was an especially audible and distinct tone of speech which nobody could avoid hearing, if anybody were so disposed.

'My dear Benjamin,' said the old lady, struggling with a great shortness of breath, and trembling from head to foot, 'don't be alarmed, my dear, but I think I had better speak to Mr. Sawyer, alone, for a moment. Only for one moment.'

'Bob,' said Mr. Allen, 'will you take my aunt into the surgery?'

'Certainly,' responded Bob, in a most professional voice. 'Step this way, my dear ma'am. Don't be frightened, ma'am. We shall be able to set you to rights in a very short time, I have no doubt, ma'am. Here, my dear ma'am.

Now then!' With this, Mr. Bob Sawyer having handed the old lady to a chair, shut the door, drew another chair close to her, and waited to hear detailed the symptoms of some disorder from which he saw in perspective a long train of profits and advantages.

The first thing the old lady did, was to shake her head a great many times, and began to cry.

'Nervous,' said Bob Sawyer complacently. 'Camphor-julep and water three times a day, and composing draught at night.'

'I don't know how to begin, Mr. Sawyer,' said the old lady. 'It is so very painful and distressing.'

'You need not begin, ma'am,' rejoined Mr. Bob Sawyer. 'I can anticipate all you would say. The head is in fault.'

'I should be very sorry to think it was the heart,' said the old lady, with a slight groan.

'Not the slightest danger of that, ma'am,' replied Bob Sawyer. 'The stomach is the primary cause.'

'Mr. Sawyer!' exclaimed the old lady, starting.

'Not the least doubt of it, ma'am,' rejoined Bob, looking wondrous wise. 'Medicine, in time, my dear ma'am, would have prevented it all.'

'Mr. Sawyer,' said the old lady, more flurried than before, 'this conduct is either great impertinence to one in my situation, Sir, or it arises from your not understanding the object of my visit. If it had been in the power of medicine, or any foresight I could have used, to prevent what has occurred, I should certainly have done so. I had better see my nephew at once,' said the old lady, twirling her reticule indignantly, and rising as she spoke.

'Stop a moment, ma'am,' said Bob Sawyer; 'I'm afraid I have not understood you. What IS the matter, ma'am?'

'My niece, Mr. Sawyer,' said the old lady: 'your friend's sister.'

'Yes, ma'am,' said Bob, all impatience; for the old lady, although much agitated, spoke with the most tantalising deliberation, as old ladies often do. 'Yes, ma'am.'

'Left my home, Mr. Sawyer, three days ago, on a pretended visit to my sister, another aunt of hers, who keeps the large boarding-school, just beyond the third mile-stone, where there is a very large laburnum-tree and an oak gate,' said the old lady, stopping in this place to dry her eyes.

'Oh, devil take the laburnum-tree, ma'am!' said Bob, quite forgetting his professional dignity in his anxiety. 'Get on a little faster; put a little more steam on, ma'am, pray.'

'This morning,' said the old lady slowly—'this morning, she—'

'She came back, ma'am, I suppose,' said Bob, with great animation. 'Did she come back?'

'No, she did not; she wrote,' replied the old lady.

'What did she say?' inquired Bob eagerly.

'She said, Mr. Sawyer,' replied the old lady—'and it is this I want to prepare Benjamin's mind for, gently and by degrees; she said that she was—I have got the letter in my pocket, Mr. Sawyer, but my glasses are in the carriage, and I should only waste your time if I attempted to point out the passage to you, without them; she said, in short, Mr. Sawyer, that she was married.' 'What!' said, or rather shouted, Mr. Bob Sawyer.

'Married,' repeated the old lady.

Mr. Bob Sawyer stopped to hear no more; but darting from the surgery into the outer shop, cried in a stentorian voice, 'Ben, my boy, she's bolted!'

Mr. Ben Allen, who had been slumbering behind the counter, with his head half a foot or so below his knees, no sooner heard this appalling communication, than he made a precipitate rush at Mr. Martin, and, twisting his hand in the neck-cloth of that taciturn servitor, expressed an obliging intention of choking him where he stood. This intention, with a promptitude often the effect of desperation, he at once commenced carrying into execution, with much vigour and surgical skill.

Mr. Martin, who was a man of few words and possessed but little power of eloquence or persuasion, submitted to this operation with a very calm and agreeable expression of countenance, for some seconds; finding, however, that it threatened speedily to lead to a result which would place it beyond his power to claim any wages, board or otherwise, in all time to come, he muttered an inarticulate remonstrance and felled Mr. Benjamin Allen to the ground. As that gentleman had his hands entangled in his cravat, he had no alternative but to follow him to the floor. There they both lay struggling, when the shop door opened, and the party was increased by the arrival of two most unexpected visitors, to wit, Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Samuel Weller.

The impression at once produced on Mr. Weller's mind by what he saw, was, that Mr. Martin was hired by the establishment of Sawyer, late Nockemorf, to take strong medicine, or to go into fits and be experimentalised upon, or to swallow poison now and then with the view of testing the efficacy of some new antidotes, or to do something or other to promote the great science of medicine, and gratify the ardent spirit of inquiry burning in the bosoms of its two young professors. So, without presuming to interfere, Sam stood perfectly still, and looked on, as if he were mightily interested in the result of the then pending experiment. Not so, Mr. Pickwick. He at once threw himself on the astonished combatants, with his accustomed energy, and loudly called upon the bystanders to interpose.

This roused Mr. Bob Sawyer, who had been hitherto quite paralysed by the frenzy of his companion. With that gentleman's assistance, Mr. Pickwick raised Ben Allen to his feet. Mr. Martin finding himself alone on the floor, got up, and looked about him.

'Mr. Allen,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'what is the matter, Sir?'

'Never mind, Sir!' replied Mr. Allen, with haughty defiance.

'What is it?' inquired Mr. Pickwick, looking at Bob Sawyer. 'Is he unwell?'

Before Bob could reply, Mr. Ben Allen seized Mr. Pickwick by the hand, and murmured, in sorrowful accents, 'My sister, my dear Sir; my sister.'

'Oh, is that all!' said Mr. Pickwick. 'We shall easily arrange that matter, I hope. Your sister is safe and well, and I am here, my dear Sir, to—'

'Sorry to do anythin' as may cause an interruption to such wery pleasant proceedin's, as the king said wen he dissolved the parliament,' interposed Mr. Weller, who had been peeping through the glass door; 'but there's another experiment here, sir. Here's a wenerable old lady a—lyin' on the carpet waitin' for dissection, or galwinism, or some other rewivin' and scientific inwention.'

'I forgot,' exclaimed Mr. Ben Allen. 'It is my aunt.'

'Dear me!' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Poor lady! Gently Sam, gently.'

'Strange sitivation for one o' the family,' observed Sam Weller, hoisting the aunt into a chair. 'Now depitty sawbones, bring out the wollatilly!'

The latter observation was addressed to the boy in gray, who, having handed over the fly to the care of the street-keeper, had come back to see what all the noise was about. Between the boy in gray, and Mr. Bob Sawyer, and Mr. Benjamin Allen (who having frightened his aunt into a fainting fit, was affectionately solicitous for her recovery) the old lady was at length restored to consciousness; then Mr. Ben Allen, turning with a puzzled countenance to Mr. Pickwick, asked him what he was about to say, when he had been so alarmingly interrupted.

'We are all friends here, I presume?' said Mr. Pickwick, clearing his voice, and looking towards the man of few words with the surly countenance, who drove the fly with the chubby horse.

This reminded Mr. Bob Sawyer that the boy in gray was looking on, with eyes wide open, and greedy ears. The incipient chemist having been lifted up by his coat collar, and dropped outside the door, Bob Sawyer assured Mr. Pickwick that he might speak without reserve.

'Your sister, my dear Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, turning to Benjamin Allen, 'is in London; well and happy.'

'Her happiness is no object to me, sir,' said Benjamin Allen, with a flourish of the hand.

'Her husband IS an object to ME, Sir,' said Bob Sawyer. 'He shall be an object to me, sir, at twelve paces, and a pretty object I'll make of him, sir—a mean-spirited scoundrel!' This, as it stood, was a very pretty denunciation, and magnanimous withal; but Mr. Bob Sawyer rather weakened its effect, by winding up with some general observations concerning the punching of heads and knocking out of eyes, which were commonplace by comparison.

'Stay, sir,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'before you apply those epithets to the gentleman in question, consider, dispassionately, the extent of his fault, and above all remember that he is a friend of mine.'

'What!' said Mr. Bob Sawyer. 'His name!' cried Ben Allen. 'His name!'

'Mr. Nathaniel Winkle,' said Mr. Pickwick.

Mr. Benjamin Allen deliberately crushed his spectacles beneath the heel of his boot, and having picked up the pieces, and put them into three separate pockets, folded his arms, bit his lips, and looked in a threatening manner at the bland features of Mr. Pickwick.

'Then it's you, is it, Sir, who have encouraged and brought about this match?' inquired Mr. Benjamin Allen at length.

'And it's this gentleman's servant, I suppose,' interrupted the old lady, 'who has been skulking about my house, and endeavouring to entrap my servants to conspire against their mistress.—Martin!'

'Well?' said the surly man, coming forward.

'Is that the young man you saw in the lane, whom you told me about, this morning?'

Mr. Martin, who, as it has already appeared, was a man of few words, looked at Sam Weller, nodded his head, and growled forth, 'That's the man.' Mr. Weller, who was never proud, gave a smile of friendly recognition as his eyes encountered those of the surly groom, and admitted in courteous terms, that he had 'knowed him afore.'

'And this is the faithful creature,' exclaimed Mr. Ben Allen, 'whom I had nearly suffocated!—Mr. Pickwick, how dare you allow your fellow to be employed in the abduction of my sister? I demand that you explain this matter, sir.'

'Explain it, sir!' cried Bob Sawyer fiercely.

'It's a conspiracy,' said Ben Allen.

'A regular plant,' added Mr. Bob Sawyer.

'A disgraceful imposition,' observed the old lady.

'Nothing but a do,' remarked Martin. 'Pray hear me,' urged Mr. Pickwick, as Mr. Ben Allen fell into a chair that patients were bled in, and gave way to his pocket-handkerchief. 'I have rendered no assistance in this matter, beyond being present at one interview between the young people which I could not prevent, and from which I conceived my presence would remove any slight colouring of impropriety that it might otherwise have had; this is the whole share I have had in the transaction, and I had no suspicion that an immediate marriage was even contemplated. Though, mind,' added Mr. Pickwick, hastily checking himself—'mind, I do not say I should have prevented it, if I had known that it was intended.'

'You hear that, all of you; you hear that?' said Mr. Benjamin Allen.

'I hope they do,' mildly observed Mr. Pickwick, looking round, 'and,' added that gentleman, his colour mounting as he spoke, 'I hope they hear this, Sir, also. That from what has been stated to me, sir, I assert that you were by no means justified in attempting to force your sister's inclinations as you did, and that you should rather have endeavoured by your kindness and forbearance to have supplied the place of other nearer relations whom she had never known, from a child. As regards my young friend, I must beg to add, that in every point of worldly advantage he is, at least, on an equal footing with yourself, if not on a much better one, and that unless I hear this question discussed with becoming temper and moderation, I decline hearing any more said upon the subject.'

'I wish to make a wery few remarks in addition to wot has been put for'ard by the honourable gen'l'm'n as has jist give over,' said Mr. Weller, stepping forth, 'wich is this here: a indiwidual in company has called me a feller.'

'That has nothing whatever to do with the matter, Sam,' interposed Mr. Pickwick. 'Pray hold your tongue.'

'I ain't a-goin' to say nothin' on that 'ere pint, sir,' replied Sam, 'but merely this here. P'raps that gen'l'm'n may think as there wos a priory 'tachment; but there worn't nothin' o' the sort, for the young lady said in the wery beginnin' o' the keepin' company, that she couldn't abide him. Nobody's cut him out, and it 'ud ha' been jist the wery same for him if the young lady had never seen Mr. Vinkle. That's what I wished to say, sir, and I hope I've now made that 'ere gen'l'm'n's mind easy.

A short pause followed these consolatory remarks of Mr. Weller. Then Mr. Ben Allen rising from his chair, protested that he would never see Arabella's face again; while Mr. Bob Sawyer, despite Sam's flattering assurance, vowed dreadful vengeance on the happy bridegroom.

But, just when matters were at their height, and threatening to remain so, Mr. Pickwick found a powerful assistant in the old lady, who, evidently much struck by the mode in which he had advocated her niece's cause, ventured to approach Mr. Benjamin Allen with a few comforting reflections, of which the chief were, that after all, perhaps, it was well it was no worse; the least said the soonest mended, and upon her word she did not know that it was so very bad after all; what was over couldn't be begun, and what couldn't be cured must be endured; with various other assurances of the like novel and strengthening description. To all of these, Mr. Benjamin Allen replied that he meant no disrespect to his aunt, or anybody there, but if it were all the same to them, and they would allow him to have his own way, he would rather have the pleasure of hating his sister till death, and after it.

At length, when this determination had been announced half a hundred times, the old lady suddenly bridling up and looking very majestic, wished to know what she had done that no respect was to be paid to her years or station, and that she should be obliged to beg and pray, in that way, of her own nephew, whom she remembered about five-and-twenty years before he was born, and whom she had known, personally, when he hadn't a tooth in his head; to say nothing of her presence on the first occasion of his having his hair cut, and assistance at numerous other times and ceremonies during his babyhood, of sufficient importance to found a claim upon his affection, obedience, and sympathies, for ever.

While the good lady was bestowing this objurgation on Mr. Ben Allen, Bob Sawyer and Mr. Pickwick had retired in close conversation to the inner room, where Mr. Sawyer was observed to apply himself several times to the mouth of a black bottle, under the influence of which, his features gradually assumed a cheerful and even jovial expression. And at last he emerged from the room, bottle in hand, and, remarking that he was very sorry to say he had been making a fool of himself, begged to propose the health and happiness of Mr. and Mrs. Winkle, whose felicity, so far from envying, he would be the first to congratulate them upon. Hearing this, Mr. Ben Allen suddenly arose from his chair, and, seizing the black bottle, drank the toast so heartily, that, the liquor being strong, he became nearly as black in the face as the bottle. Finally, the black bottle went round till it was empty, and there was so much shaking of hands and interchanging of compliments, that even the metal-visaged Mr. Martin condescended to smile.

'And now,' said Bob Sawyer, rubbing his hands, 'we'll have a jolly night.'

'I am sorry,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'that I must return to my inn. I have not been accustomed to fatigue lately, and my journey has tired me exceedingly.'

'You'll take some tea, Mr. Pickwick?' said the old lady, with irresistible sweetness.

'Thank you, I would rather not,' replied that gentleman. The truth is, that the old lady's evidently increasing admiration was Mr. Pickwick's principal inducement for going away. He thought of Mrs. Bardell; and every glance of the old lady's eyes threw him into a cold perspiration.

As Mr. Pickwick could by no means be prevailed upon to stay, it was arranged at once, on his own proposition, that Mr. Benjamin Allen should accompany him on his journey to the elder Mr. Winkle's, and that the coach should be at the door, at nine o'clock next morning. He then took his leave, and, followed by Samuel Weller, repaired to the Bush. It is worthy of remark, that Mr. Martin's face was horribly convulsed as he shook hands with Sam at parting, and that he gave vent to a smile and an oath simultaneously; from which tokens it has been inferred by those who were best acquainted with that gentleman's peculiarities, that he expressed himself much pleased with Mr. Weller's society, and requested the honour of his further acquaintance.

'Shall I order a private room, Sir?' inquired Sam, when they reached the Bush.

'Why, no, Sam,' replied Mr. Pickwick; 'as I dined in the coffee-room, and shall go to bed soon, it is hardly worth while. See who there is in the travellers' room, Sam.'

Mr. Weller departed on his errand, and presently returned to say that there was only a gentleman with one eye; and that he and the landlord were drinking a bowl of bishop together.

'I will join them,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'He's a queer customer, the vun-eyed vun, sir,' observed Mr. Weller, as he led the way. 'He's a-gammonin' that 'ere landlord, he is, sir, till he don't rightly know wether he's a-standing on the soles of his boots or the crown of his hat.'

The individual to whom this observation referred, was sitting at the upper end of the room when Mr. Pickwick entered, and was smoking a large Dutch pipe, with his eye intently fixed on the round face of the landlord; a jolly-looking old personage, to whom he had recently been relating some tale of wonder, as was testified by sundry disjointed exclamations of, 'Well, I wouldn't have believed it! The strangest thing I ever heard! Couldn't have supposed it possible!' and other expressions of astonishment which burst spontaneously from his lips, as he returned the fixed gaze of the one-eyed man.

'Servant, sir,' said the one-eyed man to Mr. Pickwick. 'Fine night, sir.'

'Very much so indeed,' replied Mr. Pickwick, as the waiter placed a small decanter of brandy, and some hot water before him.

While Mr. Pickwick was mixing his brandy-and-water, the one-eyed man looked round at him earnestly, from time to time, and at length said—

'I think I've seen you before.'

'I don't recollect you,' rejoined Mr. Pickwick.

'I dare say not,' said the one-eyed man. 'You didn't know me, but I knew two friends of yours that were stopping at the Peacock at Eatanswill, at the time of the election.'

'Oh, indeed!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

'Yes,' rejoined the one-eyed man. 'I mentioned a little circumstance to them about a friend of mine of the name of Tom Smart. Perhaps you've heard them speak of it.'

'Often,' rejoined Mr. Pickwick, smiling. 'He was your uncle, I think?'

'No, no; only a friend of my uncle's,' replied the one-eyed man.

'He was a wonderful man, that uncle of yours, though,' remarked the landlord shaking his head.

'Well, I think he was; I think I may say he was,' answered the one-eyed man. 'I could tell you a story about that same uncle, gentlemen, that would rather surprise you.'

'Could you?' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Let us hear it, by all means.'

The one-eyed bagman ladled out a glass of negus from the bowl, and drank it; smoked a long whiff out of the Dutch pipe; and then, calling to Sam Weller who was lingering near the door, that he needn't go away unless he wanted to, because the story was no secret, fixed his eye upon the landlord's, and proceeded, in the words of the next chapter.

CHAPTER XLIX. CONTAINING THE STORY OF THE BAGMAN'S UNCLE

'My uncle, gentlemen,' said the bagman, 'was one of the merriest, pleasantest, cleverest fellows, that ever lived. I wish you had known him, gentlemen. On second thoughts, gentlemen, I don't wish you had known him, for if you had, you would have been all, by this time, in the ordinary course of nature, if not dead, at all events so near it, as to have taken to stopping at home and giving up company, which would have deprived me of the inestimable pleasure of addressing you at this moment. Gentlemen, I wish your fathers and mothers had known my uncle. They would have been amazingly fond of him, especially your respectable mothers; I know they would. If any two of his numerous virtues predominated over the many that adorned his character, I should say they were his mixed punch and his after-supper song. Excuse my dwelling on these melancholy recollections of departed worth; you won't see a man like my uncle every day in the week.

'I have always considered it a great point in my uncle's character, gentlemen, that he was the intimate friend and companion of Tom Smart, of the great house of Bilson and Slum, Cateaton Street, City. My uncle collected for Tiggin and Welps, but for a long time he went pretty near the same journey as Tom; and the very first night they met, my uncle took a fancy for Tom, and Tom took a fancy for my uncle. They made a bet of a new hat before they had known each other half an hour, who should brew the best quart of punch and drink it the quickest. My uncle was judged to have won the making, but Tom Smart beat him in the drinking by about half a salt-spoonful. They took another quart apiece to drink each other's health in, and were staunch friends ever afterwards. There's a destiny in these things, gentlemen; we can't help it.

'In personal appearance, my uncle was a trifle shorter than the middle size; he was a thought stouter too, than the ordinary run of people, and perhaps his face might be a shade redder. He had the jolliest face you ever saw, gentleman: something like Punch, with a handsome nose and chin; his eyes were always twinkling and sparkling with good-humour; and a smile —not one of your unmeaning wooden grins, but a real, merry, hearty, good-tempered smile—was perpetually on his countenance. He was pitched out of his gig once, and knocked, head first, against a milestone. There he lay, stunned, and so cut about the face with some gravel which had been heaped up alongside it, that, to use my uncle's own strong expression, if his mother could have revisited the earth, she wouldn't have known him. Indeed, when I come to think of the matter, gentlemen, I feel pretty sure she wouldn't, for she died when my uncle was two years and seven months old, and I think it's very likely that, even without the gravel, his top-boots would have puzzled the good lady not a little; to say nothing of his jolly red face. However, there he lay, and I have heard my uncle say, many a time, that the man said who picked him up that he was smiling as merrily as if he had tumbled out for a treat, and that after they had bled him, the first faint glimmerings of returning animation, were his jumping up in bed, bursting out into a loud laugh, kissing the young woman who held the basin, and demanding a mutton chop and a pickled walnut. He was very fond of pickled walnuts, gentlemen. He said he always found that, taken without vinegar, they relished the beer.

'My uncle's great journey was in the fall of the leaf, at which time he collected debts, and took orders, in the north; going from London to Edinburgh, from Edinburgh to Glasgow, from Glasgow back to Edinburgh, and thence to London by the smack. You are to understand that his second visit to Edinburgh was for his own pleasure. He used to go back for a week, just to look up his old friends; and what with breakfasting with this one, lunching with that, dining with the third, and supping with another, a pretty tight week he used to make of it. I don't know whether any of you, gentlemen, ever partook of a real substantial hospitable Scotch breakfast, and then went out to a slight lunch of a bushel of oysters, a dozen or so of bottled ale, and a noggin or two of whiskey to close up with. If you ever did, you will agree with me that it requires a pretty strong head to go out to dinner and supper afterwards.

'But bless your hearts and eyebrows, all this sort of thing was nothing to my uncle! He was so well seasoned, that it was mere child's play. I have heard him say that he could see the Dundee people out, any day, and walk home afterwards without staggering; and yet the Dundee people have as strong heads and as strong punch, gentlemen, as you are likely to meet with, between the poles. I have heard of a Glasgow man and a Dundee man drinking against each other for fifteen hours at a sitting. They were both suffocated, as nearly as could be ascertained, at the same moment, but with this trifling exception, gentlemen, they were not a bit the worse for it.

'One night, within four-and-twenty hours of the time when he had settled to take shipping for London, my uncle supped at the house of a very old friend of his, a Bailie Mac something and four syllables after it, who lived in the old town of Edinburgh. There were the bailie's wife, and the bailie's three daughters, and the bailie's grown-up son, and three or four stout, bushy eye-browed, canny, old Scotch fellows, that the bailie had got together to do honour to my uncle, and help to make merry. It was a glorious supper. There was kippered salmon, and Finnan haddocks, and a lamb's head, and a haggis—a celebrated Scotch dish, gentlemen, which my uncle used to say always looked to him, when it came to table, very much like a Cupid's stomach—and a great many other things besides, that I forget the names of, but very good things, notwithstanding. The lassies were pretty and agreeable; the bailie's wife was one of the best creatures that ever lived; and my uncle was in thoroughly good cue. The consequence of which was, that the young ladies tittered and giggled, and the old lady laughed out loud, and the bailie and the other old fellows roared till they were red in the face, the whole mortal time. I don't quite recollect how many tumblers of whiskey-toddy each man drank after supper; but this I know, that about one o'clock in the morning, the bailie's grown-up son became insensible while attempting the first verse of "Willie brewed a peck o' maut"; and he having been, for half an hour before, the only other man visible above the mahogany, it occurred to my uncle that it was almost time to think about going, especially as drinking had set in at seven o'clock, in order that he might get home at a decent hour. But, thinking it might not be quite polite to go just then, my uncle voted himself into the chair, mixed another glass, rose to propose his own health, addressed himself in a neat and complimentary speech, and drank the toast with great enthusiasm. Still nobody woke; so my uncle took a little drop more—neat this time, to prevent the toddy from disagreeing with him—and, laying violent hands on his hat, sallied forth into the street.

'It was a wild, gusty night when my uncle closed the bailie's door, and settling his hat firmly on his head to prevent the wind from taking it, thrust his hands into his pockets, and looking upward, took a short survey of the state of the weather. The clouds were drifting over the moon at their giddiest speed; at one time wholly obscuring her; at another, suffering her to burst forth in full splendour and shed her light on all the objects around; anon, driving over her again, with increased velocity, and shrouding everything in darkness. "Really, this won't do," said my uncle, addressing himself to the weather, as if he felt himself personally offended. "This is not at all the kind of thing for my voyage. It will not do at any price," said my uncle, very impressively. Having repeated this, several times, he recovered his balance with some difficulty—for he was rather giddy with looking up into the sky so long—and walked merrily on.

'The bailie's house was in the Canongate, and my uncle was going to the other end of Leith Walk, rather better than a mile's journey. On either side of him, there shot up against the dark sky, tall, gaunt, straggling houses, with time-stained fronts, and windows that seemed to have shared the lot of eyes in mortals, and to have grown dim and sunken with age. Six, seven, eight Storey high, were the houses; storey piled upon storey, as children build with cards—throwing their dark shadows over the roughly paved road, and making the dark night darker. A few oil lamps were scattered at long distances, but they only served to mark the dirty entrance to some narrow close, or to show where a common stair communicated, by steep and intricate windings, with the various flats above. Glancing at all these things with the air of a man who had seen them too often before, to think them worthy of much notice now, my uncle walked up the middle of the street, with a thumb in each waistcoat pocket, indulging from time to time in various snatches of song, chanted forth with such good-will and spirit, that the quiet honest folk started from their first sleep and lay trembling in bed till the sound died away in the distance; when, satisfying themselves that it was only some drunken ne'er-do-weel finding his way home, they covered themselves up warm and fell asleep again.

'I am particular in describing how my uncle walked up the middle of the street, with his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, gentlemen, because, as he often used to say (and with great reason too) there is nothing at all extraordinary in this story, unless you distinctly understand at the beginning, that he was not by any means of a marvellous or romantic turn.

'Gentlemen, my uncle walked on with his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, taking the middle of the street to himself, and singing, now a verse of a love song, and then a verse of a drinking one, and when he was tired of both, whistling melodiously, until he reached the North Bridge, which, at this point, connects the old and new towns of Edinburgh. Here he stopped for a minute, to look at the strange, irregular clusters of lights piled one above the other, and twinkling afar off so high, that they looked like stars, gleaming from the castle walls on the one side and the Calton Hill on the other, as if they illuminated veritable castles in the air; while the old picturesque town slept heavily on, in gloom and darkness below: its palace and chapel of Holyrood, guarded day and night, as a friend of my uncle's used to say, by old Arthur's Seat, towering, surly and dark, like some gruff genius, over the ancient city he has watched so long. I say, gentlemen, my uncle stopped here, for a minute, to look about him; and then, paying a compliment to the weather, which had a little cleared up, though the moon was sinking, walked on again, as royally as before; keeping the middle of the road with great dignity, and looking as if he would very much like to meet with somebody who would dispute possession of it with him. There was nobody at all disposed to contest the point, as it happened; and so, on he went, with his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, like a lamb.

'When my uncle reached the end of Leith Walk, he had to cross a pretty large piece of waste ground which separated him from a short street which he had to turn down to go direct to his lodging. Now, in this piece of waste ground, there was, at that time, an enclosure belonging to some wheelwright who contracted with the Post Office for the purchase of old, worn-out mail coaches; and my uncle, being very fond of coaches, old, young, or middle-aged, all at once took it into his head to step out of his road for no other purpose than to peep between the palings at these mails—about a dozen of which he remembered to have seen, crowded together in a very forlorn and dismantled state, inside. My uncle was a very enthusiastic, emphatic sort of person, gentlemen; so, finding that he could not obtain a good peep between the palings he got over them, and sitting himself quietly down on an old axle-tree, began to contemplate the mail coaches with a deal of gravity.

'There might be a dozen of them, or there might be more—my uncle was never quite certain on this point, and being a man of very scrupulous veracity about numbers, didn't like to say—but there they stood, all huddled together in the most desolate condition imaginable. The doors had been torn from their hinges and removed; the linings had been stripped off, only a shred hanging here and there by a rusty nail; the lamps were gone, the poles had long since vanished, the ironwork was rusty, the paint was worn away; the wind whistled through the chinks in the bare woodwork; and the rain, which had collected on the roofs, fell, drop by drop, into the insides with a hollow and melancholy sound. They were the decaying skeletons of departed mails, and in that lonely place, at that time of night, they looked chill and dismal.

'My uncle rested his head upon his hands, and thought of the busy, bustling people who had rattled about, years before, in the old coaches, and were now as silent and changed; he thought of the numbers of people to whom one of these crazy, mouldering vehicles had borne, night after night, for many years, and through all weathers, the anxiously expected intelligence, the eagerly looked-for remittance, the promised assurance of health and safety, the sudden announcement of sickness and death. The merchant, the lover, the wife, the widow, the mother, the school-boy, the very child who tottered to the door at the postman's knock—how had they all looked forward to the arrival of the old coach. And where were they all now? 'Gentlemen, my uncle used to SAY that he thought all this at the time, but I rather suspect he learned it out of some book afterwards, for he distinctly stated that he fell into a kind of doze, as he sat on the old axle-tree looking at the decayed mail coaches, and that he was suddenly awakened by some deep church bell striking two. Now, my uncle was never a fast thinker, and if he had thought all these things, I am quite certain it would have taken him till full half-past two o'clock at the very least. I am, therefore, decidedly of opinion, gentlemen, that my uncle fell into a kind of doze, without having thought about anything at all.

'Be this as it may, a church bell struck two. My uncle woke, rubbed his eyes, and jumped up in astonishment.

'In one instant, after the clock struck two, the whole of this deserted and quiet spot had become a scene of most extraordinary life and animation. The mail coach doors were on their hinges, the lining was replaced, the ironwork was as good as new, the paint was restored, the lamps were alight; cushions and greatcoats were on every coach-box, porters were thrusting parcels into every boot, guards were stowing away letter-bags, hostlers were dashing pails of water against the renovated wheels; numbers of men were pushing about, fixing poles into every coach; passengers arrived, portmanteaus were handed up, horses were put to; in short, it was perfectly clear that every mail there, was to be off directly. Gentlemen, my uncle opened his eyes so wide at all this, that, to the very last moment of his life, he used to wonder how it fell out that he had ever been able to shut 'em again.

'"Now then!" said a voice, as my uncle felt a hand on his shoulder, "you're booked for one inside. You'd better get in."

'"I booked!" said my uncle, turning round.

'"Yes, certainly."

'My uncle, gentlemen, could say nothing, he was so very much astonished. The queerest thing of all was that although there was such a crowd of persons, and although fresh faces were pouring in, every moment, there was no telling where they came from. They seemed to start up, in some strange manner, from the ground, or the air, and disappear in the same way. When a porter had put his luggage in the coach, and received his fare, he turned round and was gone; and before my uncle had well begun to wonder what had become of him, half a dozen fresh ones started up, and staggered along under the weight of parcels, which seemed big enough to crush them. The passengers were all dressed so oddly too! Large, broad-skirted laced coats, with great cuffs and no collars; and wigs, gentlemen—great formal wigs with a tie behind. My uncle could make nothing of it.

'"Now, are you going to get in?" said the person who had addressed my uncle before. He was dressed as a mail guard, with a wig on his head and most enormous cuffs to his coat, and had a lantern in one hand, and a huge blunderbuss in the other, which he was going to stow away in his little arm-chest. "ARE you going to get in, Jack Martin?" said the guard, holding the lantern to my uncle's face.

'"Hollo!" said my uncle, falling back a step or two. "That's familiar!"

'"It's so on the way-bill," said the guard.

'"Isn't there a 'Mister' before it?" said my uncle. For he felt, gentlemen, that for a guard he didn't know, to call him Jack Martin, was a liberty which the Post Office wouldn't have sanctioned if they had known it.

'"No, there is not," rejoined the guard coolly.

'"Is the fare paid?" inquired my uncle.

'"Of course it is," rejoined the guard.

'"It is, is it?" said my uncle. "Then here goes! Which coach?"

'"This," said the guard, pointing to an old-fashioned Edinburgh and London mail, which had the steps down and the door open. "Stop! Here are the other passengers. Let them get in first."

'As the guard spoke, there all at once appeared, right in front of my uncle, a young gentleman in a powdered wig, and a sky-blue coat trimmed with silver, made very full and broad in the skirts, which were lined with buckram. Tiggin and Welps were in the printed calico and waistcoat piece line, gentlemen, so my uncle knew all the materials at once. He wore knee breeches, and a kind of leggings rolled up over his silk stockings, and shoes with buckles; he had ruffles at his wrists, a three-cornered hat on his head, and a long taper sword by his side. The flaps of his waist-coat came half-way down his thighs, and the ends of his cravat reached to his waist. He stalked gravely to the coach door, pulled off his hat, and held it above his head at arm's length, cocking his little finger in the air at the same time, as some affected people do, when they take a cup of tea. Then he drew his feet together, and made a low, grave bow, and then put out his left hand. My uncle was just going to step forward, and shake it heartily, when he perceived that these attentions were directed, not towards him, but to a young lady who just then appeared at the foot of the steps, attired in an old-fashioned green velvet dress with a long waist and stomacher. She had no bonnet on her head, gentlemen, which was muffled in a black silk hood, but she looked round for an instant as she prepared to get into the coach, and such a beautiful face as she disclosed, my uncle had never seen—not even in a picture. She got into the coach, holding up her dress with one hand; and as my uncle always said with a round oath, when he told the story, he wouldn't have believed it possible that legs and feet could have been brought to such a state of perfection unless he had seen them with his own eyes.

'But, in this one glimpse of the beautiful face, my uncle saw that the young lady cast an imploring look upon him, and that she appeared terrified and distressed. He noticed, too, that the young fellow in the powdered wig, notwithstanding his show of gallantry, which was all very fine and grand, clasped her tight by the wrist when she got in, and followed himself immediately afterwards. An uncommonly ill-looking fellow, in a close brown wig, and a plum-coloured suit, wearing a very large sword, and boots up to his hips, belonged to the party; and when he sat himself down next to the young lady, who shrank into a corner at his approach, my uncle was confirmed in his original impression that something dark and mysterious was going forward, or, as he always said himself, that "there was a screw loose somewhere." It's quite surprising how quickly he made up his mind to help the lady at any peril, if she needed any help.

'"Death and lightning!" exclaimed the young gentleman, laying his hand upon his sword as my uncle entered the coach.

'"Blood and thunder!" roared the other gentleman. With this, he whipped his sword out, and made a lunge at my uncle without further ceremony. My uncle had no weapon about him, but with great dexterity he snatched the ill-looking gentleman's three-cornered hat from his head, and, receiving the point of his sword right through the crown, squeezed the sides together, and held it tight.

'"Pink him behind!" cried the ill-looking gentleman to his companion, as he struggled to regain his sword.

'"He had better not," cried my uncle, displaying the heel of one of his shoes, in a threatening manner. "I'll kick his brains out, if he has any—, or fracture his skull if he hasn't." Exerting all his strength, at this moment, my uncle wrenched the ill-looking man's sword from his grasp, and flung it clean out of the coach window, upon which the younger gentleman vociferated, "Death and lightning!" again, and laid his hand upon the hilt of his sword, in a very fierce manner, but didn't draw it. Perhaps, gentlemen, as my uncle used to say with a smile, perhaps he was afraid of alarming the lady.

'"Now, gentlemen," said my uncle, taking his seat deliberately, "I don't want to have any death, with or without lightning, in a lady's presence, and we have had quite blood and thundering enough for one journey; so, if you please, we'll sit in our places like quiet insides. Here, guard, pick up that gentleman's carving-knife."

'As quickly as my uncle said the words, the guard appeared at the coach window, with the gentleman's sword in his hand. He held up his lantern, and looked earnestly in my uncle's face, as he handed it in, when, by its light, my uncle saw, to his great surprise, that an immense crowd of mail-coach guards swarmed round the window, every one of whom had his eyes earnestly fixed upon him too. He had never seen such a sea of white faces, red bodies, and earnest eyes, in all his born days.

'"This is the strangest sort of thing I ever had anything to do with," thought my uncle; "allow me to return you your hat, sir."

'The ill-looking gentleman received his three-cornered hat in silence, looked at the hole in the middle with an inquiring air, and finally stuck it on the top of his wig with a solemnity the effect of which was a trifle impaired by his sneezing violently at the moment, and jerking it off again.

'"All right!" cried the guard with the lantern, mounting into his little seat behind. Away they went. My uncle peeped out of the coach window as they emerged from the yard, and observed that the other mails, with coachmen, guards, horses, and passengers, complete, were driving round and round in circles, at a slow trot of about five miles an hour. My uncle burned with indignation, gentlemen. As a commercial man, he felt that the mail-bags were not to be trifled with, and he resolved to memorialise the Post Office on the subject, the very instant he reached London.

'At present, however, his thoughts were occupied with the young lady who sat in the farthest corner of the coach, with her face muffled closely in her hood; the gentleman with the sky-blue coat sitting opposite to her; the other man in the plum-coloured suit, by her side; and both watching her intently. If she so much as rustled the folds of her hood, he could hear the ill-looking man clap his hand upon his sword, and could tell by the other's breathing (it was so dark he couldn't see his face) that he was looking as big as if he were going to devour her at a mouthful. This roused my uncle more and more, and he resolved, come what might, to see the end of it. He had a great admiration for bright eyes, and sweet faces, and pretty legs and feet; in short, he was fond of the whole sex. It runs in our family, gentleman—so am I.

'Many were the devices which my uncle practised, to attract the lady's attention, or at all events, to engage the mysterious gentlemen in conversation. They were all in vain; the gentlemen wouldn't talk, and the lady didn't dare. He thrust his head out of the coach window at intervals, and bawled out to know why they didn't go faster. But he called till he was hoarse; nobody paid the least attention to him. He leaned back in the coach, and thought of the beautiful face, and the feet and legs. This answered better; it whiled away the time, and kept him from wondering where he was going, and how it was that he found himself in such an odd situation. Not that this would have worried him much, anyway—he was a mighty free and easy, roving, devil-may-care sort of person, was my uncle, gentlemen.

'All of a sudden the coach stopped. "Hollo!" said my uncle, "what's in the wind now?"

'"Alight here," said the guard, letting down the steps.

'"Here!" cried my uncle.

'"Here," rejoined the guard.

'"I'll do nothing of the sort," said my uncle.

'"Very well, then stop where you are," said the guard.

'"I will," said my uncle.

'"Do," said the guard.

'The passengers had regarded this colloquy with great attention, and, finding that my uncle was determined not to alight, the younger man squeezed past him, to hand the lady out. At this moment, the ill-looking man was inspecting the hole in the crown of his three-cornered hat. As the young lady brushed past, she dropped one of her gloves into my uncle's hand, and softly whispered, with her lips so close to his face that he felt her warm breath on his nose, the single word "Help!" Gentlemen, my uncle leaped out of the coach at once, with such violence that it rocked on the springs again.

'"Oh! you've thought better of it, have you?" said the guard, when he saw my uncle standing on the ground.

'My uncle looked at the guard for a few seconds, in some doubt whether it wouldn't be better to wrench his blunderbuss from him, fire it in the face of the man with the big sword, knock the rest of the company over the head with the stock, snatch up the young lady, and go off in the smoke. On second thoughts, however, he abandoned this plan, as being a shade too melodramatic in the execution, and followed the two mysterious men, who, keeping the lady between them, were now entering an old house in front of which the coach had stopped. They turned into the passage, and my uncle followed.

'Of all the ruinous and desolate places my uncle had ever beheld, this was the most so. It looked as if it had once been a large house of entertainment; but the roof had fallen in, in many places, and the stairs were steep, rugged, and broken. There was a huge fireplace in the room into which they walked, and the chimney was blackened with smoke; but no warm blaze lighted it up now. The white feathery dust of burned wood was still strewed over the hearth, but the stove was cold, and all was dark and gloomy.

'"Well," said my uncle, as he looked about him, "a mail travelling at the rate of six miles and a half an hour, and stopping for an indefinite time at such a hole as this, is rather an irregular sort of proceeding, I fancy. This shall be made known. I'll write to the papers."

'My uncle said this in a pretty loud voice, and in an open, unreserved sort of manner, with the view of engaging the two strangers in conversation if he could. But, neither of them took any more notice of him than whispering to each other, and scowling at him as they did so. The lady was at the farther end of the room, and once she ventured to wave her hand, as if beseeching my uncle's assistance.

'At length the two strangers advanced a little, and the conversation began in earnest.

'"You don't know this is a private room, I suppose, fellow?" said the gentleman in sky-blue.

'"No, I do not, fellow," rejoined my uncle. "Only, if this is a private room specially ordered for the occasion, I should think the public room must be a VERY comfortable one;" with this, my uncle sat himself down in a high-backed chair, and took such an accurate measure of the gentleman, with his eyes, that Tiggin and Welps could have supplied him with printed calico for a suit, and not an inch too much or too little, from that estimate alone.

'"Quit this room," said both men together, grasping their swords.

'"Eh?" said my uncle, not at all appearing to comprehend their meaning.

'"Quit the room, or you are a dead man," said the ill-looking fellow with the large sword, drawing it at the same time and flourishing it in the air.

'"Down with him!" cried the gentleman in sky-blue, drawing his sword also, and falling back two or three yards. "Down with him!" The lady gave a loud scream.

'Now, my uncle was always remarkable for great boldness, and great presence of mind. All the time that he had appeared so indifferent to what was going on, he had been looking slily about for some missile or weapon of defence, and at the very instant when the swords were drawn, he espied, standing in the chimney-corner, an old basket-hilted rapier in a rusty scabbard. At one bound, my uncle caught it in his hand, drew it, flourished it gallantly above his head, called aloud to the lady to keep out of the way, hurled the chair at the man in sky-blue, and the scabbard at the man in plum-colour, and taking advantage of the confusion, fell upon them both, pell-mell.

'Gentlemen, there is an old story—none the worse for being true—regarding a fine young Irish gentleman, who being asked if he could play the fiddle, replied he had no doubt he could, but he couldn't exactly say, for certain, because he had never tried. This is not inapplicable to my uncle and his fencing. He had never had a sword in his hand before, except once when he played Richard the Third at a private theatre, upon which occasion it was arranged with Richmond that he was to be run through, from behind, without showing fight at all. But here he was, cutting and slashing with two experienced swordsman, thrusting, and guarding, and poking, and slicing, and acquitting himself in the most manful and dexterous manner possible, although up to that time he had never been aware that he had the least notion of the science. It only shows how true the old saying is, that a man never knows what he can do till he tries, gentlemen.

'The noise of the combat was terrific; each of the three combatants swearing like troopers, and their swords clashing with as much noise as if all the knives and steels in Newport market were rattling together, at the same time. When it was at its very height, the lady (to encourage my uncle most probably) withdrew her hood entirely from her face, and disclosed a countenance of such dazzling beauty, that he would have fought against fifty men, to win one smile from it and die. He had done wonders before, but now he began to powder away like a raving mad giant.

'At this very moment, the gentleman in sky-blue turning round, and seeing the young lady with her face uncovered, vented an exclamation of rage and jealousy, and, turning his weapon against her beautiful bosom, pointed a thrust at her heart, which caused my uncle to utter a cry of apprehension that made the building ring. The lady stepped lightly aside, and snatching the young man's sword from his hand, before he had recovered his balance, drove him to the wall, and running it through him, and the panelling, up to the very hilt, pinned him there, hard and fast. It was a splendid example. My uncle, with a loud shout of triumph, and a strength that was irresistible, made his adversary retreat in the same direction, and plunging the old rapier into the very centre of a large red flower in the pattern of his waistcoat, nailed him beside his friend; there they both stood, gentlemen, jerking their arms and legs about in agony, like the toy-shop figures that are moved by a piece of pack-thread. My uncle always said, afterwards, that this was one of the surest means he knew of, for disposing of an enemy; but it was liable to one objection on the ground of expense, inasmuch as it involved the loss of a sword for every man disabled.

'"The mail, the mail!" cried the lady, running up to my uncle and throwing her beautiful arms round his neck; "we may yet escape."

'"May!" cried my uncle; "why, my dear, there's nobody else to kill, is there?" My uncle was rather disappointed, gentlemen, for he thought a little quiet bit of love-making would be agreeable after the slaughtering, if it were only to change the subject.

'"We have not an instant to lose here," said the young lady. "He (pointing to the young gentleman in sky-blue) is the only son of the powerful Marquess of Filletoville." '"Well then, my dear, I'm afraid he'll never come to the title," said my uncle, looking coolly at the young gentleman as he stood fixed up against the wall, in the cockchafer fashion that I have described. "You have cut off the entail, my love."

'"I have been torn from my home and my friends by these villains," said the young lady, her features glowing with indignation. "That wretch would have married me by violence in another hour."

'"Confound his impudence!" said my uncle, bestowing a very contemptuous look on the dying heir of Filletoville.

'"As you may guess from what you have seen," said the young lady, "the party were prepared to murder me if I appealed to any one for assistance. If their accomplices find us here, we are lost. Two minutes hence may be too late. The mail!" With these words, overpowered by her feelings, and the exertion of sticking the young Marquess of Filletoville, she sank into my uncle's arms. My uncle caught her up, and bore her to the house door. There stood the mail, with four long-tailed, flowing-maned, black horses, ready harnessed; but no coachman, no guard, no hostler even, at the horses' heads.

'Gentlemen, I hope I do no injustice to my uncle's memory, when I express my opinion, that although he was a bachelor, he had held some ladies in his arms before this time; I believe, indeed, that he had rather a habit of kissing barmaids; and I know, that in one or two instances, he had been seen by credible witnesses, to hug a landlady in a very perceptible manner. I mention the circumstance, to show what a very uncommon sort of person this beautiful young lady must have been, to have affected my uncle in the way she did; he used to say, that as her long dark hair trailed over his arm, and her beautiful dark eyes fixed themselves upon his face when she recovered, he felt so strange and nervous that his legs trembled beneath him. But who can look in a sweet, soft pair of dark eyes, without feeling queer? I can't, gentlemen. I am afraid to look at some eyes I know, and that's the truth of it.

'"You will never leave me," murmured the young lady.

'"Never," said my uncle. And he meant it too.

'"My dear preserver!" exclaimed the young lady. "My dear, kind, brave preserver!"

'"Don't," said my uncle, interrupting her.

'"Why?" inquired the young lady.

'"Because your mouth looks so beautiful when you speak," rejoined my uncle, "that I'm afraid I shall be rude enough to kiss it."

'The young lady put up her hand as if to caution my uncle not to do so, and said—No, she didn't say anything—she smiled. When you are looking at a pair of the most delicious lips in the world, and see them gently break into a roguish smile—if you are very near them, and nobody else by—you cannot better testify your admiration of their beautiful form and colour than by kissing them at once. My uncle did so, and I honour him for it.

'"Hark!" cried the young lady, starting. "The noise of wheels, and horses!"

'"So it is," said my uncle, listening. He had a good ear for wheels, and the trampling of hoofs; but there appeared to be so many horses and carriages rattling towards them, from a distance, that it was impossible to form a guess at their number. The sound was like that of fifty brakes, with six blood cattle in each.

'"We are pursued!" cried the young lady, clasping her hands. "We are pursued. I have no hope but in you!"

'There was such an expression of terror in her beautiful face, that my uncle made up his mind at once. He lifted her into the coach, told her not to be frightened, pressed his lips to hers once more, and then advising her to draw up the window to keep the cold air out, mounted to the box.

'"Stay, love," cried the young lady.

'"What's the matter?" said my uncle, from the coach-box.

'"I want to speak to you," said the young lady; "only a word. Only one word, dearest."

'"Must I get down?" inquired my uncle. The lady made no answer, but she smiled again. Such a smile, gentlemen! It beat the other one, all to nothing. My uncle descended from his perch in a twinkling.

'"What is it, my dear?" said my uncle, looking in at the coach window. The lady happened to bend forward at the same time, and my uncle thought she looked more beautiful than she had done yet. He was very close to her just then, gentlemen, so he really ought to know.

'"What is it, my dear?" said my uncle.

'"Will you never love any one but me—never marry any one beside?" said the young lady.

'My uncle swore a great oath that he never would marry anybody else, and the young lady drew in her head, and pulled up the window. He jumped upon the box, squared his elbows, adjusted the ribands, seized the whip which lay on the roof, gave one flick to the off leader, and away went the four long-tailed, flowing-maned black horses, at fifteen good English miles an hour, with the old mail-coach behind them. Whew! How they tore along!

'The noise behind grew louder. The faster the old mail went, the faster came the pursuers—men, horses, dogs, were leagued in the pursuit. The noise was frightful, but, above all, rose the voice of the young lady, urging my uncle on, and shrieking, "Faster! Faster!"

'They whirled past the dark trees, as feathers would be swept before a hurricane. Houses, gates, churches, haystacks, objects of every kind they shot by, with a velocity and noise like roaring waters suddenly let loose. But still the noise of pursuit grew louder, and still my uncle could hear the young lady wildly screaming, "Faster! Faster!"

'My uncle plied whip and rein, and the horses flew onward till they were white with foam; and yet the noise behind increased; and yet the young lady cried, "Faster! Faster!" My uncle gave a loud stamp on the boot in the energy of the moment, and—found that it was gray morning, and he was sitting in the wheelwright's yard, on the box of an old Edinburgh mail, shivering with the cold and wet and stamping his feet to warm them! He got down, and looked eagerly inside for the beautiful young lady. Alas! There was neither door nor seat to the coach. It was a mere shell.

'Of course, my uncle knew very well that there was some mystery in the matter, and that everything had passed exactly as he used to relate it. He remained staunch to the great oath he had sworn to the beautiful young lady, refusing several eligible landladies on her account, and dying a bachelor at last. He always said what a curious thing it was that he should have found out, by such a mere accident as his clambering over the palings, that the ghosts of mail-coaches and horses, guards, coachmen, and passengers, were in the habit of making journeys regularly every night. He used to add, that he believed he was the only living person who had ever been taken as a passenger on one of these excursions. And I think he was right, gentlemen—at least I never heard of any other.'

'I wonder what these ghosts of mail-coaches carry in their bags,' said the landlord, who had listened to the whole story with profound attention.

'The dead letters, of course,' said the bagman.

'Oh, ah! To be sure,' rejoined the landlord. 'I never thought of that.'

CHAPTER L. HOW Mr. PICKWICK SPED UPON HIS MISSION, AND HOW HE WAS

REINFORCED IN THE OUTSET BY A MOST UNEXPECTED AUXILIARY

The horses were put to, punctually at a quarter before nine next morning, and Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller having each taken his seat, the one inside and the other out, the postillion was duly directed to repair in the first instance to Mr. Bob Sawyer's house, for the purpose of taking up Mr. Benjamin Allen.

It was with feelings of no small astonishment, when the carriage drew up before the door with the red lamp, and the very legible inscription of 'Sawyer, late Nockemorf,' that Mr. Pickwick saw, on popping his head out of the coach window, the boy in the gray livery very busily employed in putting up the shutters—the which, being an unusual and an unbusinesslike proceeding at that hour of the morning, at once suggested to his mind two inferences: the one, that some good friend and patient of Mr. Bob Sawyer's was dead; the other, that Mr. Bob Sawyer himself was bankrupt.

'What is the matter?' said Mr. Pickwick to the boy.

'Nothing's the matter, Sir,' replied the boy, expanding his mouth to the whole breadth of his countenance.

'All right, all right!' cried Bob Sawyer, suddenly appearing at the door, with a small leathern knapsack, limp and dirty, in one hand, and a rough coat and shawl thrown over the other arm. 'I'm going, old fellow.'

'You!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

'Yes,' replied Bob Sawyer, 'and a regular expedition we'll make of it. Here, Sam! Look out!' Thus briefly bespeaking Mr. Weller's attention, Mr. Bob Sawyer jerked the leathern knapsack into the dickey, where it was immediately stowed away, under the seat, by Sam, who regarded the proceeding with great admiration. This done, Mr. Bob Sawyer, with the assistance of the boy, forcibly worked himself into the rough coat, which was a few sizes too small for him, and then advancing to the coach window, thrust in his head, and laughed boisterously. 'What a start it is, isn't it?' cried

Bob, wiping the tears out of his eyes, with one of the cuffs of the rough coat.

'My dear Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, with some embarrassment, 'I had no idea of your accompanying us.'

'No, that's just the very thing,' replied Bob, seizing Mr. Pickwick by the lappel of his coat. 'That's the joke.'

'Oh, that's the joke, is it?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Of course,' replied Bob. 'It's the whole point of the thing, you know—that, and leaving the business to take care of itself, as it seems to have made up its mind not to take care of me.' With this explanation of the phenomenon of the shutters, Mr. Bob Sawyer pointed to the shop, and relapsed into an ecstasy of mirth.

'Bless me, you are surely not mad enough to think of leaving your patients without anybody to attend them!' remonstrated Mr. Pickwick in a very serious tone.

'Why not?' asked Bob, in reply. 'I shall save by it, you know. None of them ever pay. Besides,' said Bob, lowering his voice to a confidential whisper, 'they will be all the better for it; for, being nearly out of drugs, and not able to increase my account just now, I should have been obliged to give them calomel all round, and it would have been certain to have disagreed with some of them. So it's all for the best.'

There was a philosophy and a strength of reasoning about this reply, which Mr. Pickwick was not prepared for. He paused a few moments, and added, less firmly than before—

'But this chaise, my young friend, will only hold two; and I am pledged to Mr. Allen.'

'Don't think of me for a minute,' replied Bob. 'I've arranged it all; Sam and I will share the dickey between us. Look here. This little bill is to be wafered on the shop door: "Sawyer, late Nockemorf. Inquire of Mrs. Cripps over the way." Mrs. Cripps is my boy's mother. "Mr. Sawyer's very sorry," says Mrs. Cripps, "couldn't help it—fetched away early this morning to a consultation of the very first surgeons in the country—couldn't do without him—would have him at any price—tremendous operation." The fact is,' said Bob, in conclusion, 'it'll do me more good than otherwise, I expect. If it gets into one of the local papers, it will be the making of me. Here's Ben; now then, jump in!'

With these hurried words, Mr. Bob Sawyer pushed the postboy on one side, jerked his friend into the vehicle, slammed the door, put up the steps, wafered the bill on the street door, locked it, put the key in his pocket, jumped into the dickey, gave the word for starting, and did the whole with such extraordinary precipitation, that before Mr. Pickwick had well begun to consider whether Mr. Bob Sawyer ought to go or not, they were rolling away, with Mr. Bob Sawyer thoroughly established as part and parcel of the equipage.

So long as their progress was confined to the streets of Bristol, the facetious Bob kept his professional green spectacles on, and conducted himself with becoming steadiness and gravity of demeanour; merely giving utterance to divers verbal witticisms for the exclusive behoof and entertainment of Mr. Samuel Weller. But when they emerged on the open road, he threw off his green spectacles and his gravity together, and performed a great variety of practical jokes, which were calculated to attract the attention of the passersby, and to render the carriage and those it contained objects of more than ordinary curiosity; the least conspicuous among these feats being a most vociferous imitation of a key-bugle, and the ostentatious display of a crimson silk pocket-handkerchief attached to a walking-stick, which was occasionally waved in the air with various gestures indicative of supremacy and defiance.

'I wonder,' said Mr. Pickwick, stopping in the midst of a most sedate conversation with Ben Allen, bearing reference to the numerous good qualities of Mr. Winkle and his sister—'I wonder what all the people we pass, can see in us to make them stare so.'

'It's a neat turn-out,' replied Ben Allen, with something of pride in his tone. 'They're not used to see this sort of thing, every day, I dare say.'

'Possibly,' replied Mr. Pickwick. 'It may be so. Perhaps it is.'

Mr. Pickwick might very probably have reasoned himself into the belief that it really was, had he not, just then happening to look out of the coach window, observed that the looks of the passengers betokened anything but respectful astonishment, and that various telegraphic communications appeared to be passing between them and some persons outside the vehicle, whereupon it occurred to him that these demonstrations might be, in some remote degree, referable to the humorous deportment of Mr. Robert Sawyer.

'I hope,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'that our volatile friend is committing no absurdities in that dickey behind.'

'Oh dear, no,' replied Ben Allen. 'Except when he's elevated, Bob's the quietest creature breathing.'

Here a prolonged imitation of a key-bugle broke upon the ear, succeeded by cheers and screams, all of which evidently proceeded from the throat and lungs of the quietest creature breathing, or in plainer designation, of Mr. Bob Sawyer himself.

Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Ben Allen looked expressively at each other, and the former gentleman taking off his hat, and leaning out of the coach window until nearly the whole of his waistcoat was outside it, was at length enabled to catch a glimpse of his facetious friend.

Mr. Bob Sawyer was seated, not in the dickey, but on the roof of the chaise, with his legs as far asunder as they would conveniently go, wearing Mr. Samuel Weller's hat on one side of his head, and bearing, in one hand, a most enormous sandwich, while, in the other, he supported a goodly-sized case-bottle, to both of which he applied himself with intense relish, varying the monotony of the occupation by an occasional howl, or the interchange of some lively badinage with any passing stranger. The crimson flag was carefully tied in an erect position to the rail of the dickey; and Mr. Samuel Weller, decorated with Bob Sawyer's hat, was seated in the centre thereof, discussing a twin sandwich, with an animated countenance, the expression of which betokened his entire and perfect approval of the whole arrangement.

This was enough to irritate a gentleman with Mr. Pickwick's sense of propriety, but it was not the whole extent of the aggravation, for a stage-coach full, inside and out, was meeting them at the moment, and the astonishment of the passengers was very palpably evinced. The congratulations of an Irish family, too, who were keeping up with the chaise, and begging all the time, were of rather a boisterous description, especially those of its male head, who appeared to consider the display as part and parcel of some political or other procession of triumph.

'Mr. Sawyer!' cried Mr. Pickwick, in a state of great excitement, 'Mr. Sawyer, Sir!'

'Hollo!' responded that gentleman, looking over the side of the chaise with all the coolness in life.

'Are you mad, sir?' demanded Mr. Pickwick.

'Not a bit of it,' replied Bob; 'only cheerful.'

'Cheerful, sir!' ejaculated Mr. Pickwick. 'Take down that scandalous red handkerchief, I beg. I insist, Sir. Sam, take it down.'

Before Sam could interpose, Mr. Bob Sawyer gracefully struck his colours, and having put them in his pocket, nodded in a courteous manner to Mr. Pickwick, wiped the mouth of the case-bottle, and applied it to his own, thereby informing him, without any unnecessary waste of words, that he devoted that draught to wishing him all manner of happiness and prosperity. Having done this, Bob replaced the cork with great care, and looking benignantly down on Mr. Pickwick, took a large bite out of the sandwich, and smiled.

'Come,' said Mr. Pickwick, whose momentary anger was not quite proof against Bob's immovable self-possession, 'pray let us have no more of this absurdity.'

'No, no,' replied Bob, once more exchanging hats with Mr. Weller; 'I didn't mean to do it, only I got so enlivened with the ride that I couldn't help it.'

'Think of the look of the thing,' expostulated Mr. Pickwick; 'have some regard to appearances.'

'Oh, certainly,' said Bob, 'it's not the sort of thing at all. All over, governor.'

Satisfied with this assurance, Mr. Pickwick once more drew his head into the chaise and pulled up the glass; but he had scarcely resumed the conversation which Mr. Bob Sawyer had interrupted, when he was somewhat startled by the apparition of a small dark body, of an oblong form, on the outside of the window, which gave sundry taps against it, as if impatient of admission.

'What's this?'exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

'It looks like a case-bottle;' remarked Ben Allen, eyeing the object in question through his spectacles with some interest; 'I rather think it belongs to Bob.'

The impression was perfectly accurate; for Mr. Bob Sawyer, having attached the case-bottle to the end of the walking-stick, was battering the window with it, in token of his wish, that his friends inside would partake of its contents, in all good-fellowship and harmony.

'What's to be done?' said Mr. Pickwick, looking at the bottle. 'This proceeding is more absurd than the other.'

'I think it would be best to take it in,' replied Mr. Ben Allen; 'it would serve him right to take it in and keep it, wouldn't it?'

'It would,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'shall I?'

'I think it the most proper course we could possibly adopt,' replied Ben.

This advice quite coinciding with his own opinion, Mr. Pickwick gently let down the window and disengaged the bottle from the stick; upon which the latter was drawn up, and Mr. Bob Sawyer was heard to laugh heartily.

'What a merry dog it is!' said Mr. Pickwick, looking round at his companion, with the bottle in his hand.

'He is,' said Mr. Allen.

'You cannot possibly be angry with him,' remarked Mr. Pickwick.

'Quite out of the question,' observed Benjamin Allen.

During this short interchange of sentiments, Mr. Pickwick had, in an abstracted mood, uncorked the bottle.

'What is it?' inquired Ben Allen carelessly.

'I don't know,' replied Mr. Pickwick, with equal carelessness. 'It smells, I think, like milk-punch.' 'Oh, indeed?' said Ben.

'I THINK so,' rejoined Mr. Pickwick, very properly guarding himself against the possibility of stating an untruth; 'mind, I could not undertake to say certainly, without tasting it.'

'You had better do so,' said Ben; 'we may as well know what it is.'

'Do you think so?' replied Mr. Pickwick. 'Well; if you are curious to know, of course I have no objection.'

Ever willing to sacrifice his own feelings to the wishes of his friend, Mr. Pickwick at once took a pretty long taste.

'What is it?' inquired Ben Allen, interrupting him with some impatience.

'Curious,' said Mr. Pickwick, smacking his lips, 'I hardly know, now. Oh, yes!' said Mr. Pickwick, after a second taste. 'It IS punch.'

Mr. Ben Allen looked at Mr. Pickwick; Mr. Pickwick looked at Mr. Ben Allen; Mr. Ben Allen smiled; Mr. Pickwick did not.

'It would serve him right,' said the last-named gentleman, with some severity—'it would serve him right to drink it every drop.'

'The very thing that occurred to me,' said Ben Allen.

'Is it, indeed?' rejoined Mr. Pickwick. 'Then here's his health!' With these words, that excellent person took a most energetic pull at the bottle, and handed it to Ben Allen, who was not slow to imitate his example. The smiles became mutual, and the milk-punch was gradually and cheerfully disposed of.

'After all,' said Mr. Pickwick, as he drained the last drop, 'his pranks are really very amusing; very entertaining indeed.'

'You may say that,' rejoined Mr. Ben Allen. In proof of Bob Sawyer's being one of the funniest fellows alive, he proceeded to entertain Mr. Pickwick with a long and circumstantial account how that gentleman once drank himself into a fever and got his head shaved; the relation of which pleasant and agreeable history was only stopped by the stoppage of the chaise at the Bell at Berkeley Heath, to change horses.

'I say! We're going to dine here, aren't we?' said Bob, looking in at the window.

'Dine!' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Why, we have only come nineteen miles, and have eighty-seven and a half to go.'

'Just the reason why we should take something to enable us to bear up against the fatigue,' remonstrated Mr. Bob Sawyer.

'Oh, it's quite impossible to dine at half-past eleven o'clock in the day,' replied Mr. Pickwick, looking at his watch.

'So it is,' rejoined Bob, 'lunch is the very thing. Hollo, you sir! Lunch for three, directly; and keep the horses back for a quarter of an hour. Tell them to put everything they have cold, on the table, and some bottled ale, and let us taste your very best Madeira.' Issuing these orders with monstrous importance and bustle, Mr. Bob Sawyer at once hurried into the house to superintend the arrangements; in less than five minutes he returned and declared them to be excellent.

The quality of the lunch fully justified the eulogium which Bob had pronounced, and very great justice was done to it, not only by that gentleman, but Mr. Ben Allen and Mr. Pickwick also. Under the auspices of the three, the bottled ale and the Madeira were promptly disposed of; and when (the horses being once more put to) they resumed their seats, with the case-bottle full of the best substitute for milk-punch that could be procured on so short a notice, the key-bugle sounded, and the red flag waved, without the slightest opposition on Mr. Pickwick's part.

At the Hop Pole at Tewkesbury, they stopped to dine; upon which occasion there was more bottled ale, with some more Madeira, and some port besides; and here the case-bottle was replenished for the fourth time. Under the influence of these combined stimulants, Mr. Pickwick and Mr.

Ben Allen fell fast asleep for thirty miles, while Bob and Mr. Weller sang duets in the dickey.

It was quite dark when Mr. Pickwick roused himself sufficiently to look out of the window. The straggling cottages by the road-side, the dingy hue of every object visible, the murky atmosphere, the paths of cinders and brick-dust, the deep-red glow of furnace fires in the distance, the volumes of dense smoke issuing heavily forth from high toppling chimneys, blackening and obscuring everything around; the glare of distant lights, the ponderous wagons which toiled along the road, laden with clashing rods of iron, or piled with heavy goods—all betokened their rapid approach to the great working town of Birmingham.

As they rattled through the narrow thoroughfares leading to the heart of the turmoil, the sights and sounds of earnest occupation struck more forcibly on the senses. The streets were thronged with working people. The hum of labour resounded from every house; lights gleamed from the long casement windows in the attic storeys, and the whirl of wheels and noise of machinery shook the trembling walls. The fires, whose lurid, sullen light had been visible for miles, blazed fiercely up, in the great works and factories of the town. The din of hammers, the rushing of steam, and the dead heavy clanking of engines, was the harsh music which arose from every quarter. The postboy was driving briskly through the open streets, and past the handsome and well-lighted shops that intervene between the outskirts of the town and the Old Royal Hotel, before Mr. Pickwick had begun to consider the very difficult and delicate nature of the commission which had carried him thither.

The delicate nature of this commission, and the difficulty of executing it in a satisfactory manner, were by no means lessened by the voluntary companionship of Mr. Bob Sawyer. Truth to tell, Mr. Pickwick felt that his presence on the occasion, however considerate and gratifying, was by no means an honour he would willingly have sought; in fact, he would cheerfully have given a reasonable sum of money to have had Mr. Bob Sawyer removed to any place at not less than fifty miles' distance, without delay.

Mr. Pickwick had never held any personal communication with Mr. Winkle, senior, although he had once or twice corresponded with him by letter, and returned satisfactory answers to his inquiries concerning the moral character and behaviour of his son; he felt nervously sensible that to wait upon him, for the first time, attended by Bob Sawyer and Ben Allen, both slightly fuddled, was not the most ingenious and likely means that could have been hit upon to prepossess him in his favour.

'However,' said Mr. Pickwick, endeavouring to reassure himself, 'I must do the best I can. I must see him to-night, for I faithfully promised to do so. If they persist in accompanying me, I must make the interview as brief as possible, and be content that, for their own sakes, they will not expose themselves.'

As he comforted himself with these reflections, the chaise stopped at the door of the Old Royal. Ben Allen having been partially awakened from a stupendous sleep, and dragged out by the collar by Mr. Samuel Weller, Mr. Pickwick was enabled to alight. They were shown to a comfortable apartment, and Mr. Pickwick at once propounded a question to the waiter concerning the whereabout of Mr. Winkle's residence.

'Close by, Sir,' said the waiter, 'not above five hundred yards, Sir. Mr. Winkle is a wharfinger, Sir, at the canal, sir. Private residence is not—oh dear, no, sir, not five hundred yards, sir.' Here the waiter blew a candle out, and made a feint of lighting it again, in order to afford Mr. Pickwick an opportunity of asking any further questions, if he felt so disposed. 'Take anything now, Sir?' said the waiter, lighting the candle in desperation at Mr. Pickwick's silence. 'Tea or coffee, Sir? Dinner, sir?'

'Nothing now.'

'Very good, sir. Like to order supper, Sir?'

'Not just now.'

'Very good, Sir.' Here, he walked slowly to the door, and then stopping short, turned round and said, with great suavity—

'Shall I send the chambermaid, gentlemen?'

'You may if you please,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'If YOU please, sir.'

'And bring some soda-water,' said Bob Sawyer.

'Soda-water, Sir! Yes, Sir.' With his mind apparently relieved from an overwhelming weight, by having at last got an order for something, the waiter imperceptibly melted away. Waiters never walk or run. They have a peculiar and mysterious power of skimming out of rooms, which other mortals possess not.

Some slight symptoms of vitality having been awakened in Mr. Ben Allen by the soda-water, he suffered himself to be prevailed upon to wash his face and hands, and to submit to be brushed by Sam. Mr. Pickwick and Bob Sawyer having also repaired the disorder which the journey had made in their apparel, the three started forth, arm in arm, to Mr. Winkle's; Bob Sawyer impregnating the atmosphere with tobacco smoke as he walked along.

About a quarter of a mile off, in a quiet, substantial-looking street, stood an old red brick house with three steps before the door, and a brass plate upon it, bearing, in fat Roman capitals, the words, 'Mr. Winkle.'The steps were very white, and the bricks were very red, and the house was very clean; and here stood Mr. Pickwick, Mr. Benjamin Allen, and Mr. Bob Sawyer, as the clock struck ten.

A smart servant-girl answered the knock, and started on beholding the three strangers.

'Is Mr. Winkle at home, my dear?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'He is just going to supper, Sir,' replied the girl.

'Give him that card if you please,' rejoined Mr. Pickwick. 'Say I am sorry to trouble him at so late an hour; but I am anxious to see him to-night, and have only just arrived.' The girl looked timidly at Mr. Bob Sawyer, who was expressing his admiration of her personal charms by a variety of wonderful grimaces; and casting an eye at the hats and greatcoats which hung in the passage, called another girl to mind the door while she went upstairs. The sentinel was speedily relieved; for the girl returned immediately, and begging pardon of the gentlemen for leaving them in the street, ushered them into a floor-clothed back parlour, half office and half dressing room, in which the principal useful and ornamental articles of furniture were a desk, a wash-hand stand and shaving-glass, a boot-rack and boot-jack, a high stool, four chairs, a table, and an old eight-day clock. Over the mantelpiece were the sunken doors of an iron safe, while a couple of hanging shelves for books, an almanac, and several files of dusty papers, decorated the walls.

'Very sorry to leave you standing at the door, Sir,' said the girl, lighting a lamp, and addressing Mr. Pickwick with a winning smile, 'but you was quite strangers to me; and we have such a many trampers that only come to see what they can lay their hands on, that really—'

'There is not the least occasion for any apology, my dear,' said Mr. Pickwick good-humouredly.

'Not the slightest, my love,' said Bob Sawyer, playfully stretching forth his arms, and skipping from side to side, as if to prevent the young lady's leaving the room.

The young lady was not at all softened by these allurements, for she at once expressed her opinion, that Mr. Bob Sawyer was an 'odous creetur;' and, on his becoming rather more pressing in his attentions, imprinted her fair fingers upon his face, and bounced out of the room with many expressions of aversion and contempt.

Deprived of the young lady's society, Mr. Bob Sawyer proceeded to divert himself by peeping into the desk, looking into all the table drawers, feigning to pick the lock of the iron safe, turning the almanac with its face to the wall, trying on the boots of Mr. Winkle, senior, over his own, and making several other humorous experiments upon the furniture, all of which afforded Mr. Pickwick unspeakable horror and agony, and yielded Mr. Bob Sawyer proportionate delight.

At length the door opened, and a little old gentleman in a snuff-coloured suit, with a head and face the precise counterpart of those belonging to Mr. Winkle, junior, excepting that he was rather bald, trotted into the room with Mr. Pickwick's card in one hand, and a silver candlestick in the other.

'Mr. Pickwick, sir, how do you do?' said Winkle the elder, putting down the candlestick and proffering his hand. 'Hope I see you well, sir. Glad to see you. Be seated, Mr. Pickwick, I beg, Sir. This gentleman is—'

'My friend, Mr. Sawyer,' interposed Mr. Pickwick, 'your son's friend.'

'Oh,' said Mr. Winkle the elder, looking rather grimly at Bob. 'I hope you are well, sir.'

'Right as a trivet, sir,' replied Bob Sawyer.

'This other gentleman,' cried Mr. Pickwick, 'is, as you will see when you have read the letter with which I am intrusted, a very near relative, or I should rather say a very particular friend of your son's. His name is Allen.'

'THAT gentleman?' inquired Mr. Winkle, pointing with the card towards Ben Allen, who had fallen asleep in an attitude which left nothing of him visible but his spine and his coat collar.

Mr. Pickwick was on the point of replying to the question, and reciting Mr. Benjamin Allen's name and honourable distinctions at full length, when the sprightly Mr. Bob Sawyer, with a view of rousing his friend to a sense of his situation, inflicted a startling pinch upon the fleshly part of his arm, which caused him to jump up with a shriek. Suddenly aware that he was in the presence of a stranger, Mr. Ben Allen advanced and, shaking Mr. Winkle most affectionately by both hands for about five minutes, murmured, in some half-intelligible fragments of sentences, the great delight he felt in seeing him, and a hospitable inquiry whether he felt disposed to take anything after his walk, or would prefer waiting 'till dinner-time;' which done, he sat down and gazed about him with a petrified stare, as if he had not the remotest idea where he was, which indeed he had not.

All this was most embarrassing to Mr. Pickwick, the more especially as Mr. Winkle, senior, evinced palpable astonishment at the eccentric—not to say extraordinary—behaviour of his two companions. To bring the matter to an issue at once, he drew a letter from his pocket, and presenting it to Mr. Winkle, senior, said—

'This letter, Sir, is from your son. You will see, by its contents, that on your favourable and fatherly consideration of it, depend his future happiness and welfare. Will you oblige me by giving it the calmest and coolest perusal, and by discussing the subject afterwards with me, in the tone and spirit in which alone it ought to be discussed? You may judge of the importance of your decision to your son, and his intense anxiety upon the subject, by my waiting upon you, without any previous warning, at so late an hour; and,' added Mr. Pickwick, glancing slightly at his two companions—'and under such unfavourable circumstances.'

With this prelude, Mr. Pickwick placed four closely-written sides of extra superfine wire-wove penitence in the hands of the astounded Mr. Winkle, senior. Then reseating himself in his chair, he watched his looks and manner: anxiously, it is true, but with the open front of a gentleman who feels he has taken no part which he need excuse or palliate. The old wharfinger turned the letter over, looked at the front, back, and sides, made a microscopic examination of the fat little boy on the seal, raised his eyes to Mr. Pickwick's face, and then, seating himself on the high stool, and drawing the lamp closer to him, broke the wax, unfolded the epistle, and lifting it to the light, prepared to read. Just at this moment, Mr. Bob Sawyer, whose wit had lain dormant for some minutes, placed his hands on his knees, and made a face after the portraits of the late Mr. Grimaldi, as clown. It so happened that Mr. Winkle, senior, instead of being deeply engaged in reading the letter, as Mr. Bob Sawyer thought, chanced to be looking over the top of it at no less a person than Mr. Bob Sawyer himself; rightly conjecturing that the face aforesaid was made in ridicule and derision of his own person, he fixed his eyes on Bob with such expressive sternness, that the late Mr. Grimaldi's lineaments gradually resolved themselves into a very fine expression of humility and confusion.

'Did you speak, Sir?' inquired Mr. Winkle, senior, after an awful silence.

'No, sir,' replied Bob, With no remains of the clown about him, save and except the extreme redness of his cheeks.

'You are sure you did not, sir?' said Mr. Winkle, senior.

'Oh dear, yes, sir, quite,' replied Bob.

'I thought you did, Sir,' replied the old gentleman, with indignant emphasis. 'Perhaps you LOOKED at me, sir?'

'Oh, no! sir, not at all,' replied Bob, with extreme civility.

'I am very glad to hear it, sir,' said Mr. Winkle, senior. Having frowned upon the abashed Bob with great magnificence, the old gentleman again brought the letter to the light, and began to read it seriously.

Mr. Pickwick eyed him intently as he turned from the bottom line of the first page to the top line of the second, and from the bottom of the second to the top of the third, and from the bottom of the third to the top of the fourth; but not the slightest alteration of countenance afforded a clue to the feelings with which he received the announcement of his son's marriage, which Mr. Pickwick knew was in the very first half-dozen lines.

He read the letter to the last word, folded it again with all the carefulness and precision of a man of business, and, just when Mr. Pickwick expected some great outbreak of feeling, dipped a pen in the ink-stand, and said, as quietly as if he were speaking on the most ordinary counting-house topic—

'What is Nathaniel's address, Mr. Pickwick?'

'The George and Vulture, at present,' replied that gentleman.

'George and Vulture. Where is that?'

'George Yard, Lombard Street.'

'In the city?'

'Yes.'

The old gentleman methodically indorsed the address on the back of the letter; and then, placing it in the desk, which he locked, said, as he got off the stool and put the bunch of keys in his pocket—

'I suppose there is nothing else which need detain us, Mr. Pickwick?'

'Nothing else, my dear Sir!' observed that warm-hearted person in indignant amazement. 'Nothing else! Have you no opinion to express on this momentous event in our young friend's life? No assurance to convey to him, through me, of the continuance of your affection and protection? Nothing to say which will cheer and sustain him, and the anxious girl who looks to him for comfort and support? My dear Sir, consider.'

'I will consider,' replied the old gentleman. 'I have nothing to say just now. I am a man of business, Mr. Pickwick. I never commit myself hastily in any affair, and from what I see of this, I by no means like the appearance of it. A thousand pounds is not much, Mr. Pickwick.'

'You're very right, Sir,' interposed Ben Allen, just awake enough to know that he had spent his thousand pounds without the smallest difficulty. 'You're an intelligent man. Bob, he's a very knowing fellow this.'

'I am very happy to find that you do me the justice to make the admission, sir,' said Mr. Winkle, senior, looking contemptuously at Ben Allen, who was shaking his head profoundly. 'The fact is, Mr. Pickwick, that when I gave my son a roving license for a year or so, to see something of men and manners (which he has done under your auspices), so that he might not enter life a mere boarding-school milk-sop to be gulled by everybody, I never bargained for this. He knows that very well, so if I withdraw my countenance from him on this account, he has no call to be surprised. He shall hear from me, Mr. Pickwick. Good-night, sir.—Margaret, open the door.'

All this time, Bob Sawyer had been nudging Mr. Ben Allen to say something on the right side; Ben accordingly now burst, without the slightest preliminary notice, into a brief but impassioned piece of eloquence.

'Sir,' said Mr. Ben Allen, staring at the old gentleman, out of a pair of very dim and languid eyes, and working his right arm vehemently up and down, 'you—you ought to be ashamed of yourself.'

'As the lady's brother, of course you are an excellent judge of the question,' retorted Mr. Winkle, senior. 'There; that's enough. Pray say no more, Mr. Pickwick. Good-night, gentlemen!'

With these words the old gentleman took up the candle-stick and opening the room door, politely motioned towards the passage.

'You will regret this, Sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, setting his teeth close together to keep down his choler; for he felt how important the effect might prove to his young friend.

'I am at present of a different opinion,' calmly replied Mr. Winkle, senior. 'Once again, gentlemen, I wish you a good-night.'

Mr. Pickwick walked with angry strides into the street. Mr. Bob Sawyer, completely quelled by the decision of the old gentleman's manner, took the same course. Mr. Ben Allen's hat rolled down the steps immediately afterwards, and Mr. Ben Allen's body followed it directly. The whole party went silent and supperless to bed; and Mr. Pickwick thought, just before he fell asleep, that if he had known Mr. Winkle, senior, had been quite so much of a man of business, it was extremely probable he might never have waited upon him, on such an errand.

CHAPTER LI. IN WHICH Mr. PICKWICK ENCOUNTERS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE—TO

WHICH FORTUNATE CIRCUMSTANCE THE READER IS MAINLY INDEBTED FOR MATTER OF THRILLING INTEREST HEREIN SET DOWN, CONCERNING TWO GREAT PUBLIC MEN OF MIGHT AND POWER

The morning which broke upon Mr. Pickwick's sight at eight o'clock, was not at all calculated to elevate his spirits, or to lessen the depression which the unlooked-for result of his embassy inspired. The sky was dark and gloomy, the air was damp and raw, the streets were wet and sloppy. The smoke hung sluggishly above the chimney-tops as if it lacked the courage to rise, and the rain came slowly and doggedly down, as if it had not even the spirit to pour. A game-cock in the stableyard, deprived of every spark of his accustomed animation, balanced himself dismally on one leg in a corner; a donkey, moping with drooping head under the narrow roof of an outhouse, appeared from his meditative and miserable countenance to be contemplating suicide. In the street, umbrellas were the only things to be seen, and the clicking of pattens and splashing of rain-drops were the only sounds to be heard.

The breakfast was interrupted by very little conversation; even Mr. Bob Sawyer felt the influence of the weather, and the previous day's excitement. In his own expressive language he was 'floored.' So was Mr. Ben Allen. So was Mr. Pickwick.

In protracted expectation of the weather clearing up, the last evening paper from London was read and re-read with an intensity of interest only known in cases of extreme destitution; every inch of the carpet was walked over with similar perseverance; the windows were looked out of, often enough to justify the imposition of an additional duty upon them; all kinds of topics of conversation were started, and failed; and at length Mr. Pickwick, when noon had arrived, without a change for the better, rang the bell resolutely, and ordered out the chaise.

Although the roads were miry, and the drizzling rain came down harder than it had done yet, and although the mud and wet splashed in at the open windows of the carriage to such an extent that the discomfort was almost as great to the pair of insides as to the pair of outsides, still there was something in the motion, and the sense of being up and doing, which was so infinitely superior to being pent in a dull room, looking at the dull rain dripping into a dull street, that they all agreed, on starting, that the change was a great improvement, and wondered how they could possibly have delayed making it as long as they had done.

When they stopped to change at Coventry, the steam ascended from the horses in such clouds as wholly to obscure the hostler, whose voice was however heard to declare from the mist, that he expected the first gold medal from the Humane Society on their next distribution of rewards, for taking the postboy's hat off; the water descending from the brim of which, the invisible gentleman declared, must have drowned him (the postboy), but for his great presence of mind in tearing it promptly from his head, and drying the gasping man's countenance with a wisp of straw.

'This is pleasant,' said Bob Sawyer, turning up his coat collar, and pulling the shawl over his mouth to concentrate the fumes of a glass of brandy just swallowed.

'Wery,' replied Sam composedly.

'You don't seem to mind it,' observed Bob.

'Vy, I don't exactly see no good my mindin' on it 'ud do, sir,' replied Sam.

'That's an unanswerable reason, anyhow,' said Bob.

'Yes, sir,' rejoined Mr. Weller. 'Wotever is, is right, as the young nobleman sweetly remarked wen they put him down in the pension list 'cos his mother's uncle's vife's grandfather vunce lit the king's pipe vith a portable tinder-box.' 'Not a bad notion that, Sam,' said Mr. Bob Sawyer approvingly.

'Just wot the young nobleman said ev'ry quarter-day arterwards for the rest of his life,' replied Mr. Weller.

'Wos you ever called in,' inquired Sam, glancing at the driver, after a short silence, and lowering his voice to a mysterious whisper—'wos you ever called in, when you wos 'prentice to a sawbones, to wisit a postboy.'

'I don't remember that I ever was,' replied Bob Sawyer.

'You never see a postboy in that 'ere hospital as you WALKED (as they says o' the ghosts), did you?' demanded Sam.

'No,' replied Bob Sawyer. 'I don't think I ever did.'

'Never know'd a churchyard were there wos a postboy's tombstone, or see a dead postboy, did you?' inquired Sam, pursuing his catechism.

'No,' rejoined Bob, 'I never did.'

'No!' rejoined Sam triumphantly. 'Nor never vill; and there's another thing that no man never see, and that's a dead donkey. No man never see a dead donkey 'cept the gen'l'm'n in the black silk smalls as know'd the young 'ooman as kep' a goat; and that wos a French donkey, so wery likely he warn't wun o' the reg'lar breed.'

'Well, what has that got to do with the postboys?' asked Bob Sawyer.

'This here,' replied Sam. 'Without goin' so far as to as-sert, as some wery sensible people do, that postboys and donkeys is both immortal, wot I say is this: that wenever they feels theirselves gettin' stiff and past their work, they just rides off together, wun postboy to a pair in the usual way; wot becomes on 'em nobody knows, but it's wery probable as they starts avay to take their pleasure in some other vorld, for there ain't a man alive as ever see either a donkey or a postboy a-takin' his pleasure in this!'

Expatiating upon this learned and remarkable theory, and citing many curious statistical and other facts in its support, Sam Weller beguiled the time until they reached Dunchurch, where a dry postboy and fresh horses were procured; the next stage was Daventry, and the next Towcester; and at the end of each stage it rained harder than it had done at the beginning.

'I say,' remonstrated Bob Sawyer, looking in at the coach window, as they pulled up before the door of the Saracen's Head, Towcester, 'this won't do, you know.'

'Bless me!' said Mr. Pickwick, just awakening from a nap, 'I'm afraid you're wet.'

'Oh, you are, are you?' returned Bob. 'Yes, I am, a little that way, Uncomfortably damp, perhaps.'

Bob did look dampish, inasmuch as the rain was streaming from his neck, elbows, cuffs, skirts, and knees; and his whole apparel shone so with the wet, that it might have been mistaken for a full suit of prepared oilskin.

'I AM rather wet,' said Bob, giving himself a shake and casting a little hydraulic shower around, like a Newfoundland dog just emerged from the water.

'I think it's quite impossible to go on to-night,' interposed Ben.

'Out of the question, sir,' remarked Sam Weller, coming to assist in the conference; 'it's a cruelty to animals, sir, to ask 'em to do it. There's beds here, sir,' said Sam, addressing his master, 'everything clean and comfortable. Wery good little dinner, sir, they can get ready in half an hour—pair of fowls, sir, and a weal cutlet; French beans, 'taturs, tart, and tidiness. You'd better stop vere you are, sir, if I might recommend. Take adwice, sir, as the doctor said.'

The host of the Saracen's Head opportunely appeared at this moment, to confirm Mr. Weller's statement relative to the accommodations of the establishment, and to back his entreaties with a variety of dismal conjectures regarding the state of the roads, the doubt of fresh horses being to be had at the next stage, the dead certainty of its raining all night, the equally mortal certainty of its clearing up in the morning, and other topics of inducement familiar to innkeepers.

'Well,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'but I must send a letter to London by some conveyance, so that it may be delivered the very first thing in the morning, or I must go forwards at all hazards.'

The landlord smiled his delight. Nothing could be easier than for the gentleman to inclose a letter in a sheet of brown paper, and send it on, either by the mail or the night coach from Birmingham. If the gentleman were particularly anxious to have it left as soon as possible, he might write outside, 'To be delivered immediately,' which was sure to be attended to; or 'Pay the bearer half-a-crown extra for instant delivery,' which was surer still.

'Very well,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'then we will stop here.'

'Lights in the Sun, John; make up the fire; the gentlemen are wet!' cried the landlord. 'This way, gentlemen; don't trouble yourselves about the postboy now, sir. I'll send him to you when you ring for him, sir. Now, John, the candles.'

The candles were brought, the fire was stirred up, and a fresh log of wood thrown on. In ten minutes' time, a waiter was laying the cloth for dinner, the curtains were drawn, the fire was blazing brightly, and everything looked (as everything always does, in all decent English inns) as if the travellers had been expected, and their comforts prepared, for days beforehand.

Mr. Pickwick sat down at a side table, and hastily indited a note to Mr. Winkle, merely informing him that he was detained by stress of weather, but would certainly be in London next day; until when he deferred any account of his proceedings. This note was hastily made into a parcel, and despatched to the bar per Mr. Samuel Weller.

Sam left it with the landlady, and was returning to pull his master's boots off, after drying himself by the kitchen fire, when glancing casually through a half-opened door, he was arrested by the sight of a gentleman with a sandy head who had a large bundle of newspapers lying on the table before him, and was perusing the leading article of one with a settled sneer which curled up his nose and all other features into a majestic expression of haughty contempt.

'Hollo!' said Sam, 'I ought to know that 'ere head and them features; the eyeglass, too, and the broad-brimmed tile! Eatansvill to vit, or I'm a Roman.'

Sam was taken with a troublesome cough, at once, for the purpose of attracting the gentleman's attention; the gentleman starting at the sound, raised his head and his eyeglass, and disclosed to view the profound and thoughtful features of Mr. Pott, of the Eatanswill GAZETTE.

'Beggin' your pardon, sir,' said Sam, advancing with a bow, 'my master's here, Mr. Pott.'

'Hush! hush!' cried Pott, drawing Sam into the room, and closing the door, with a countenance of mysterious dread and apprehension.

'Wot's the matter, Sir?' inquired Sam, looking vacantly about him.

'Not a whisper of my name,' replied Pott; 'this is a buff neighbourhood. If the excited and irritable populace knew I was here, I should be torn to pieces.'

'No! Vould you, sir?' inquired Sam.

'I should be the victim of their fury,' replied Pott. 'Now young man, what of your master?'

'He's a-stopping here to-night on his vay to town, with a couple of friends,' replied Sam.

'Is Mr. Winkle one of them?' inquired Pott, with a slight frown.

'No, Sir. Mr. Vinkle stops at home now,' rejoined Sam. 'He's married.'

'Married!' exclaimed Pott, with frightful vehemence. He stopped, smiled darkly, and added, in a low, vindictive tone, 'It serves him right!' Having given vent to this cruel ebullition of deadly malice and cold-blooded triumph over a fallen enemy, Mr. Pott inquired whether Mr. Pickwick's friends were 'blue?' Receiving a most satisfactory answer in the affirmative from Sam, who knew as much about the matter as Pott himself, he consented to accompany him to Mr. Pickwick's room, where a hearty welcome awaited him, and an agreement to club their dinners together was at once made and ratified.

'And how are matters going on in Eatanswill?' inquired Mr. Pickwick, when Pott had taken a seat near the fire, and the whole party had got their wet boots off, and dry slippers on. 'Is the INDEPENDENT still in being?'

'The INDEPENDENT, sir,' replied Pott, 'is still dragging on a wretched and lingering career. Abhorred and despised by even the few who are cognisant of its miserable and disgraceful existence, stifled by the very filth it so profusely scatters, rendered deaf and blind by the exhalations of its own slime, the obscene journal, happily unconscious of its degraded state, is rapidly sinking beneath that treacherous mud which, while it seems to give it a firm standing with the low and debased classes of society, is nevertheless rising above its detested head, and will speedily engulf it for ever.'

Having delivered this manifesto (which formed a portion of his last week's leader) with vehement articulation, the editor paused to take breath, and looked majestically at Bob Sawyer.

'You are a young man, sir,' said Pott.

Mr. Bob Sawyer nodded.

'So are you, sir,' said Pott, addressing Mr. Ben Allen.

Ben admitted the soft impeachment.

'And are both deeply imbued with those blue principles, which, so long as I live, I have pledged myself to the people of these kingdoms to support and to maintain?' suggested Pott.

'Why, I don't exactly know about that,' replied Bob Sawyer. 'I am—'

'Not buff, Mr. Pickwick,' interrupted Pott, drawing back his chair, 'your friend is not buff, sir?'

'No, no,' rejoined Bob, 'I'm a kind of plaid at present; a compound of all sorts of colours.'

'A waverer,' said Pott solemnly, 'a waverer. I should like to show you a series of eight articles, Sir, that have appeared in the Eatanswill GAZETTE. I think I may venture to say that you would not be long in establishing your opinions on a firm and solid blue basis, sir.' 'I dare say I should turn very blue, long before I got to the end of them,' responded Bob.

Mr. Pott looked dubiously at Bob Sawyer for some seconds, and, turning to Mr. Pickwick, said—

'You have seen the literary articles which have appeared at intervals in the Eatanswill GAZETTE in the course of the last three months, and which have excited such general—I may say such universal—attention and admiration?'

'Why,' replied Mr. Pickwick, slightly embarrassed by the question, 'the fact is, I have been so much engaged in other ways, that I really have not had an opportunity of perusing them.'

'You should do so, Sir,' said Pott, with a severe countenance.

'I will,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'They appeared in the form of a copious review of a work on Chinese metaphysics, Sir,' said Pott.

'Oh,' observed Mr. Pickwick; 'from your pen, I hope?'

'From the pen of my critic, Sir,' rejoined Pott, with dignity.

'An abstruse subject, I should conceive,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Very, Sir,' responded Pott, looking intensely sage. 'He CRAMMED for it, to use a technical but expressive term; he read up for the subject, at my desire, in the "Encyclopaedia Britannica."'

'Indeed!' said Mr. Pickwick; 'I was not aware that that valuable work contained any information respecting Chinese metaphysics.'

'He read, Sir,' rejoined Pott, laying his hand on Mr. Pickwick's knee, and looking round with a smile of intellectual superiority—'he read for metaphysics under the letter M, and for China under the letter C, and combined his information, Sir!'

Mr. Pott's features assumed so much additional grandeur at the recollection of the power and research displayed in the learned effusions in question, that some minutes elapsed before Mr. Pickwick felt emboldened to renew the conversation; at length, as the editor's countenance gradually relaxed into its customary expression of moral supremacy, he ventured to resume the discourse by asking—

'Is it fair to inquire what great object has brought you so far from home?'

'That object which actuates and animates me in all my gigantic labours, Sir,' replied Pott, with a calm smile: 'my country's good.' 'I supposed it was some public mission,' observed Mr. Pickwick.

'Yes, Sir,' resumed Pott, 'it is.' Here, bending towards Mr. Pickwick, he whispered in a deep, hollow voice, 'A Buff ball, Sir, will take place in Birmingham to-morrow evening.'

'God bless me!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

'Yes, Sir, and supper,' added Pott.

'You don't say so!' ejaculated Mr. Pickwick.

Pott nodded portentously.

Now, although Mr. Pickwick feigned to stand aghast at this disclosure, he was so little versed in local politics that he was unable to form an adequate comprehension of the importance of the dire conspiracy it referred to; observing which, Mr. Pott, drawing forth the last number of the Eatanswill GAZETTE, and referring to the same, delivered himself of the following paragraph:—

HOLE-AND-CORNER BUFFERY.

'A reptile contemporary has recently sweltered forth his black venom in the vain and hopeless attempt of sullying the fair name of our distinguished and excellent representative, the Honourable Mr. Slumkey—that Slumkey whom we, long before he gained his present noble and exalted position, predicted would one day be, as he now is, at once his country's brightest honour, and her proudest boast: alike her bold defender and her honest pride—our reptile contemporary, we say, has made himself merry, at the expense of a superbly embossed plated coal-scuttle, which has been presented to that glorious man by his enraptured constituents, and towards the purchase of which, the nameless wretch insinuates, the Honourable Mr. Slumkey himself contributed, through a confidential friend of his butler's, more than three-fourths of the whole sum subscribed. Why, does not the crawling creature see, that even if this be the fact, the Honourable Mr. Slumkey only appears in a still more amiable and radiant light than before, if that be possible? Does not even his obtuseness perceive that this amiable and touching desire to carry out the wishes of the constituent body, must for ever endear him to the hearts and souls of such of his fellow townsmen as are not worse than swine; or, in other words, who are not as debased as our contemporary himself? But such is the wretched trickery of hole-and-corner Buffery! These are not its only artifices. Treason is abroad. We boldly state, now that we are goaded to the disclosure, and we throw ourselves on the country and its constables for protection—we boldly state that secret preparations are at this moment in progress for a Buff ball; which is to be held in a Buff town, in the very heart and centre of a Buff population; which is to be conducted by a Buff master of the ceremonies; which is to be attended by four ultra Buff members of Parliament, and the admission to which, is to be by Buff tickets! Does our fiendish contemporary wince? Let him writhe, in impotent malice, as we pen the words, WE WILL BE THERE.'

'There, Sir,' said Pott, folding up the paper quite exhausted, 'that is the state of the case!'

The landlord and waiter entering at the moment with dinner, caused Mr. Pott to lay his finger on his lips, in token that he considered his life in Mr. Pickwick's hands, and depended on his secrecy. Messrs. Bob Sawyer and Benjamin Allen, who had irreverently fallen asleep during the reading of the quotation from the Eatanswill GAZETTE, and the discussion which followed it, were roused by the mere whispering of the talismanic word 'Dinner' in their ears; and to dinner they went with good digestion waiting on appetite, and health on both, and a waiter on all three.

In the course of the dinner and the sitting which succeeded it, Mr. Pott descending, for a few moments, to domestic topics, informed Mr. Pickwick that the air of Eatanswill not agreeing with his lady, she was then engaged in making a tour of different fashionable watering-places with a view to the recovery of her wonted health and spirits; this was a delicate veiling of the fact that Mrs. Pott, acting upon her often-repeated threat of separation, had, in virtue of an arrangement negotiated by her brother, the lieutenant, and concluded by Mr. Pott, permanently retired with the faithful bodyguard upon one moiety or half part of the annual income and profits arising from the editorship and sale of the Eatanswill GAZETTE.

While the great Mr. Pott was dwelling upon this and other matters, enlivening the conversation from time to time with various extracts from his own lucubrations, a stern stranger, calling from the window of a stage-coach, outward bound, which halted at the inn to deliver packages, requested to know whether if he stopped short on his journey and remained there for the night, he could be furnished with the necessary accommodation of a bed and bedstead.

'Certainly, sir,' replied the landlord.

'I can, can I?' inquired the stranger, who seemed habitually suspicious in look and manner.

'No doubt of it, Sir,' replied the landlord.

'Good,' said the stranger. 'Coachman, I get down here. Guard, my carpet-bag!'

Bidding the other passengers good-night, in a rather snappish manner, the stranger alighted. He was a shortish gentleman, with very stiff black hair cut in the porcupine or blacking-brush style, and standing stiff and straight all over his head; his aspect was pompous and threatening; his manner was peremptory; his eyes were sharp and restless; and his whole bearing bespoke a feeling of great confidence in himself, and a consciousness of immeasurable superiority over all other people.

This gentleman was shown into the room originally assigned to the patriotic Mr. Pott; and the waiter remarked, in dumb astonishment at the singular coincidence, that he had no sooner lighted the candles than the gentleman, diving into his hat, drew forth a newspaper, and began to read it with the very same expression of indignant scorn, which, upon the majestic features of Pott, had paralysed his energies an hour before. The man observed too, that, whereas Mr. Pott's scorn had been roused by a newspaper headed the Eatanswill INDEPENDENT, this gentleman's withering contempt was awakened by a newspaper entitled the Eatanswill GAZETTE.

'Send the landlord,' said the stranger.

'Yes, sir,' rejoined the waiter.

The landlord was sent, and came.

'Are you the landlord?' inquired the gentleman.

'I am sir,' replied the landlord.

'My name is Slurk,' said the gentleman.

The landlord slightly inclined his head.

'Slurk, sir,' repeated the gentleman haughtily. 'Do you know me now, man?'

The landlord scratched his head, looked at the ceiling, and at the stranger, and smiled feebly.

'Do you know me, man?' inquired the stranger angrily.

The landlord made a strong effort, and at length replied,

'Well, Sir, I do not know you.'

'Great Heaven!' said the stranger, dashing his clenched fist upon the table. 'And this is popularity!'

The landlord took a step or two towards the door; the stranger fixing his eyes upon him, resumed.

'This,' said the stranger—'this is gratitude for years of labour and study in behalf of the masses. I alight wet and weary; no enthusiastic crowds press forward to greet their champion; the church bells are silent; the very name elicits no responsive feeling in their torpid bosoms. It is enough,' said the agitated Mr. Slurk, pacing to and fro, 'to curdle the ink in one's pen, and induce one to abandon their cause for ever.'

'Did you say brandy-and-water, Sir?' said the landlord, venturing a hint.

'Rum,' said Mr. Slurk, turning fiercely upon him. 'Have you got a fire anywhere?'

'We can light one directly, Sir,' said the landlord.

'Which will throw out no heat until it is bed-time,' interrupted Mr. Slurk. 'Is there anybody in the kitchen?'

Not a soul. There was a beautiful fire. Everybody had gone, and the house door was closed for the night.

'I will drink my rum-and-water,' said Mr. Slurk, 'by the kitchen fire.' So, gathering up his hat and newspaper, he stalked solemnly behind the landlord to that humble apartment, and throwing himself on a settle by the fireside, resumed his countenance of scorn, and began to read and drink in silent dignity.

Now, some demon of discord, flying over the Saracen's Head at that moment, on casting down his eyes in mere idle curiosity, happened to behold Slurk established comfortably by the kitchen fire, and Pott slightly elevated with wine in another room; upon which the malicious demon, darting down into the last-mentioned apartment with inconceivable rapidity, passed at once into the head of Mr. Bob Sawyer, and prompted him for his (the demon's) own evil purpose to speak as follows:—

'I say, we've let the fire out. It's uncommonly cold after the rain, isn't it?'

'It really is,' replied Mr. Pickwick, shivering.

'It wouldn't be a bad notion to have a cigar by the kitchen fire, would it?' said Bob Sawyer, still prompted by the demon aforesaid.

'It would be particularly comfortable, I think,' replied Mr. Pickwick. 'Mr. Pott, what do you say?'

Mr. Pott yielded a ready assent; and all four travellers, each with his glass in his hand, at once betook themselves to the kitchen, with Sam Weller heading the procession to show them the way.

The stranger was still reading; he looked up and started. Mr. Pott started.

'What's the matter?' whispered Mr. Pickwick.

'That reptile!' replied Pott.

'What reptile?' said Mr. Pickwick, looking about him for fear he should tread on some overgrown black beetle, or dropsical spider.

'That reptile,' whispered Pott, catching Mr. Pickwick by the arm, and pointing towards the stranger. 'That reptile Slurk, of the INDEPENDENT!'

'Perhaps we had better retire,' whispered Mr. Pickwick.

'Never, Sir,' rejoined Pott, pot-valiant in a double sense—'never.' With these words, Mr. Pott took up his position on an opposite settle, and selecting one from a little bundle of newspapers, began to read against his enemy.

Mr. Pott, of course read the INDEPENDENT, and Mr. Slurk, of course, read the GAZETTE; and each gentleman audibly expressed his contempt at the other's compositions by bitter laughs and sarcastic sniffs; whence they proceeded to more open expressions of opinion, such as 'absurd,' 'wretched,' 'atrocity,' 'humbug,' 'knavery', 'dirt,' 'filth,' 'slime,' 'ditch-water,' and other critical remarks of the like nature.

Both Mr. Bob Sawyer and Mr. Ben Allen had beheld these symptoms of rivalry and hatred, with a degree of delight which imparted great additional relish to the cigars at which they were puffing most vigorously. The moment they began to flag, the mischievous Mr. Bob Sawyer, addressing Slurk with great politeness, said—

'Will you allow me to look at your paper, Sir, when you have quite done with it?'

'You will find very little to repay you for your trouble in this contemptible THING, sir,' replied Slurk, bestowing a Satanic frown on Pott.

'You shall have this presently,' said Pott, looking up, pale with rage, and quivering in his speech, from the same cause. 'Ha! ha! you will be amused with this FELLOW'S audacity.'

Terrible emphasis was laid upon 'thing' and 'fellow'; and the faces of both editors began to glow with defiance.

'The ribaldry of this miserable man is despicably disgusting,' said Pott, pretending to address Bob Sawyer, and scowling upon Slurk. Here, Mr. Slurk laughed very heartily, and folding up the paper so as to get at a fresh column conveniently, said, that the blockhead really amused him.

'What an impudent blunderer this fellow is,' said Pott, turning from pink to crimson.

'Did you ever read any of this man's foolery, Sir?' inquired Slurk of Bob Sawyer.

'Never,' replied Bob; 'is it very bad?'

'Oh, shocking! shocking!' rejoined Slurk.

'Really! Dear me, this is too atrocious!' exclaimed Pott, at this juncture; still feigning to be absorbed in his reading.

'If you can wade through a few sentences of malice, meanness, falsehood, perjury, treachery, and cant,' said Slurk, handing the paper to Bob, 'you will, perhaps, be somewhat repaid by a laugh at the style of this ungrammatical twaddler.'

'What's that you said, Sir?' inquired Mr. Pott, looking up, trembling all over with passion.

'What's that to you, sir?' replied Slurk.

'Ungrammatical twaddler, was it, sir?' said Pott.

'Yes, sir, it was,' replied Slurk; 'and BLUE BORE, Sir, if you like that better; ha! ha!'

Mr. Pott retorted not a word at this jocose insult, but deliberately folded up his copy of the INDEPENDENT, flattened it carefully down, crushed it beneath his boot, spat upon it with great ceremony, and flung it into the fire.

'There, sir,' said Pott, retreating from the stove, 'and that's the way I would serve the viper who produces it, if I were not, fortunately for him, restrained by the laws of my country.'

'Serve him so, sir!' cried Slurk, starting up. 'Those laws shall never be appealed to by him, sir, in such a case. Serve him so, sir!'

'Hear! hear!' said Bob Sawyer.

'Nothing can be fairer,' observed Mr. Ben Allen.

'Serve him so, sir!' reiterated Slurk, in a loud voice.

Mr. Pott darted a look of contempt, which might have withered an anchor.

'Serve him so, sir!' reiterated Slurk, in a louder voice than before.

'I will not, sir,' rejoined Pott.

'Oh, you won't, won't you, sir?' said Mr. Slurk, in a taunting manner; 'you hear this, gentlemen! He won't; not that he's afraid—, oh, no! he WON'T. Ha! ha!'

'I consider you, sir,' said Mr. Pott, moved by this sarcasm, 'I consider you a viper. I look upon you, sir, as a man who has placed himself beyond the pale of society, by his most audacious, disgraceful, and abominable public conduct. I view you, sir, personally and politically, in no other light than as a most unparalleled and unmitigated viper.'

The indignant Independent did not wait to hear the end of this personal denunciation; for, catching up his carpet-bag, which was well stuffed with movables, he swung it in the air as Pott turned away, and, letting it fall with a circular sweep on his head, just at that particular angle of the bag where a good thick hairbrush happened to be packed, caused a sharp crash to be heard throughout the kitchen, and brought him at once to the ground.

'Gentlemen,' cried Mr. Pickwick, as Pott started up and seized the fire-shovel—'gentlemen! Consider, for Heaven's sake—help—Sam—here—pray, gentlemen—interfere, somebody.'

Uttering these incoherent exclamations, Mr. Pickwick rushed between the infuriated combatants just in time to receive the carpet-bag on one side of his body, and the fire-shovel on the other. Whether the representatives of the public feeling of Eatanswill were blinded by animosity, or (being both acute reasoners) saw the advantage of having a third party between them to bear all the blows, certain it is that they paid not the slightest attention to Mr. Pickwick, but defying each other with great spirit, plied the carpet-bag and the fire-shovel most fearlessly. Mr. Pickwick would unquestionably have suffered severely for his humane interference, if Mr. Weller, attracted by his master's cries, had not rushed in at the moment, and, snatching up a meal—sack, effectually stopped the conflict by drawing it over the head and shoulders of the mighty Pott, and clasping him tight round the shoulders.

'Take away that 'ere bag from the t'other madman,' said Sam to Ben Allen and Bob Sawyer, who had done nothing but dodge round the group, each with a tortoise-shell lancet in his hand, ready to bleed the first man stunned. 'Give it up, you wretched little creetur, or I'll smother you in it.'

Awed by these threats, and quite out of breath, the INDEPENDENT suffered himself to be disarmed; and Mr. Weller, removing the extinguisher from Pott, set him free with a caution.

'You take yourselves off to bed quietly,' said Sam, 'or I'll put you both in it, and let you fight it out vith the mouth tied, as I vould a dozen sich, if they played these games. And you have the goodness to come this here way, sir, if you please.'

Thus addressing his master, Sam took him by the arm, and led him off, while the rival editors were severally removed to their beds by the landlord, under the inspection of Mr. Bob Sawyer and Mr. Benjamin Allen; breathing, as they went away, many sanguinary threats, and making vague appointments for mortal combat next day. When they came to think it over, however, it occurred to them that they could do it much better in print, so they recommenced deadly hostilities without delay; and all Eatanswill rung with their boldness—on paper.

They had taken themselves off in separate coaches, early next morning, before the other travellers were stirring; and the weather having now cleared up, the chaise companions once more turned their faces to London.

CHAPTER LII. INVOLVING A SERIOUS CHANGE IN THE WELLER FAMILY, AND THE

UNTIMELY DOWNFALL OF Mr. STIGGINS

Considering it a matter of delicacy to abstain from introducing either Bob Sawyer or Ben Allen to the young couple, until they were fully prepared to expect them, and wishing to spare Arabella's feelings as much as possible, Mr. Pickwick proposed that he and Sam should alight in the neighbourhood of the George and Vulture, and that the two young men should for the present take up their quarters elsewhere. To this they very readily agreed, and the proposition was accordingly acted upon; Mr. Ben Allen and Mr. Bob Sawyer betaking themselves to a sequestered pot-shop on the remotest confines of the Borough, behind the bar door of which their names had in other days very often appeared at the head of long and complex calculations worked in white chalk.

'Dear me, Mr. Weller,' said the pretty housemaid, meeting Sam at the door.

'Dear ME I vish it vos, my dear,' replied Sam, dropping behind, to let his master get out of hearing. 'Wot a sweet-lookin' creetur you are, Mary!'

'Lot, Mr. Weller, what nonsense you do talk!' said Mary. 'Oh! don't, Mr. Weller.'

'Don't what, my dear?' said Sam.

'Why, that,' replied the pretty housemaid. 'Lor, do get along with you.' Thus admonishing him, the pretty housemaid pushed Sam against the wall, declaring that he had tumbled her cap, and put her hair quite out of curl.

'And prevented what I was going to say, besides,' added Mary. 'There's a letter been waiting here for you four days; you hadn't gone away, half an hour, when it came; and more than that, it's got "immediate," on the outside.'

'Vere is it, my love?' inquired Sam.

'I took care of it, for you, or I dare say it would have been lost long before this,' replied Mary. 'There, take it; it's more than you deserve.'

With these words, after many pretty little coquettish doubts and fears, and wishes that she might not have lost it, Mary produced the letter from behind the nicest little muslin tucker possible, and handed it to Sam, who thereupon kissed it with much gallantry and devotion.

'My goodness me!' said Mary, adjusting the tucker, and feigning unconsciousness, 'you seem to have grown very fond of it all at once.'

To this Mr. Weller only replied by a wink, the intense meaning of which no description could convey the faintest idea of; and, sitting himself down beside Mary on a window-seat, opened the letter and glanced at the contents.

'Hollo!' exclaimed Sam, 'wot's all this?'

'Nothing the matter, I hope?' said Mary, peeping over his shoulder.

'Bless them eyes o' yourn!' said Sam, looking up.

'Never mind my eyes; you had much better read your letter,' said the pretty housemaid; and as she said so, she made the eyes twinkle with such slyness and beauty that they were perfectly irresistible.

Sam refreshed himself with a kiss, and read as follows:—

'MARKIS GRAN
'By DORKEN
'Wensdy.

'My DEAR SAMMLE,

'I am werry sorry to have the pleasure of being a Bear of ill news your Mother in law cort cold consekens of imprudently settin too long on the damp grass in the rain a hearing of a shepherd who warnt able to leave off till late at night owen to his having vound his-self up vith brandy and vater and not being able to stop his-self till he got a little sober which took a many hours to do the doctor says that if she'd svallo'd varm brandy and vater artervards insted of afore she mightn't have been no vus her veels wos immedetly greased and everythink done to set her agoin as could be inwented your father had hopes as she vould have vorked round as usual but just as she wos a turnen the corner my boy she took the wrong road and vent down hill vith a welocity you never see and notvithstandin that the drag wos put on directly by the medikel man it wornt of no use at all for she paid the last pike at twenty minutes afore six o'clock yesterday evenin havin done the journey wery much under the reglar time vich praps was partly owen to her haven taken in wery little luggage by the vay your father says that if you vill come and see me Sammy he vill take it as a wery great favor for I am wery lonely Samivel n. b. he VILL have it spelt that vay vich I say ant right and as there is sich a many things to settle he is sure your guvner wont object of course he vill not Sammy for I knows him better so he sends his dooty in which I join and am Samivel infernally yours

`'TONY VELLER.'`

'Wot a incomprehensible letter,' said Sam; 'who's to know wot it means, vith all this he-ing and I-ing! It ain't my father's writin', 'cept this here signater in print letters; that's his.'

'Perhaps he got somebody to write it for him, and signed it himself afterwards,' said the pretty housemaid.

'Stop a minit,' replied Sam, running over the letter again, and pausing here and there, to reflect, as he did so. 'You've hit it. The gen'l'm'n as wrote it wos a-tellin' all about the misfortun' in a proper vay, and then my father comes a-lookin' over him, and complicates the whole concern by puttin' his oar in. That's just the wery sort o' thing he'd do. You're right, Mary, my dear.'

Having satisfied himself on this point, Sam read the letter all over, once more, and, appearing to form a clear notion of its contents for the first time, ejaculated thoughtfully, as he folded it up—

'And so the poor creetur's dead! I'm sorry for it. She warn't a bad-disposed 'ooman, if them shepherds had let her alone. I'm wery sorry for it.'

Mr. Weller uttered these words in so serious a manner, that the pretty housemaid cast down her eyes and looked very grave.

'Hows'ever,' said Sam, putting the letter in his pocket with a gentle sigh, 'it wos to be—and wos, as the old lady said arter she'd married the footman. Can't be helped now, can it, Mary?'

Mary shook her head, and sighed too.

'I must apply to the hemperor for leave of absence,' said Sam.

Mary sighed again—the letter was so very affecting.

'Good-bye!' said Sam.

'Good-bye,' rejoined the pretty housemaid, turning her head away.

'Well, shake hands, won't you?' said Sam.

The pretty housemaid put out a hand which, although it was a housemaid's, was a very small one, and rose to go.

'I shan't be wery long avay,' said Sam.

'You're always away,' said Mary, giving her head the slightest possible toss in the air. 'You no sooner come, Mr. Weller, than you go again.'

Mr. Weller drew the household beauty closer to him, and entered upon a whispering conversation, which had not proceeded far, when she turned her face round and condescended to look at him again. When they parted, it was somehow or other indispensably necessary for her to go to her room, and arrange the cap and curls before she could think of presenting herself to her mistress; which preparatory ceremony she went off to perform, bestowing many nods and smiles on Sam over the banisters as she tripped upstairs.

'I shan't be avay more than a day, or two, Sir, at the furthest,' said Sam, when he had communicated to Mr. Pickwick the intelligence of his father's loss.

'As long as may be necessary, Sam,' replied Mr. Pickwick, 'you have my full permission to remain.'

Sam bowed.

'You will tell your father, Sam, that if I can be of any assistance to him in his present situation, I shall be most willing and ready to lend him any aid in my power,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Thank'ee, sir,' rejoined Sam. 'I'll mention it, sir.'

And with some expressions of mutual good-will and interest, master and man separated.

It was just seven o'clock when Samuel Weller, alighting from the box of a stage-coach which passed through Dorking, stood within a few hundred yards of the Marquis of Granby. It was a cold, dull evening; the little street looked dreary and dismal; and the mahogany countenance of the noble and gallant marquis seemed to wear a more sad and melancholy expression than it was wont to do, as it swung to and fro, creaking mournfully in the wind. The blinds were pulled down, and the shutters partly closed; of the knot of loungers that usually collected about the door, not one was to be seen; the place was silent and desolate.

Seeing nobody of whom he could ask any preliminary questions, Sam walked softly in, and glancing round, he quickly recognised his parent in the distance.

The widower was seated at a small round table in the little room behind the bar, smoking a pipe, with his eyes intently fixed upon the fire. The funeral had evidently taken place that day, for attached to his hat, which he still retained on his head, was a hatband measuring about a yard and a half in length, which hung over the top rail of the chair and streamed negligently down. Mr. Weller was in a very abstracted and contemplative mood. Notwithstanding that Sam called him by name several times, he still continued to smoke with the same fixed and quiet countenance, and was only roused ultimately by his son's placing the palm of his hand on his shoulder.

'Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, 'you're welcome.'

'I've been a-callin' to you half a dozen times,' said Sam, hanging his hat on a peg, 'but you didn't hear me.'

'No, Sammy,' replied Mr. Weller, again looking thoughtfully at the fire. 'I was in a referee, Sammy.'

'Wot about?' inquired Sam, drawing his chair up to the fire.

'In a referee, Sammy,' replied the elder Mr. Weller, 'regarding HER, Samivel.' Here Mr. Weller jerked his head in the direction of Dorking churchyard, in mute explanation that his words referred to the late Mrs. Weller.

'I wos a-thinkin', Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, eyeing his son, with great earnestness, over his pipe, as if to assure him that however extraordinary and incredible the declaration might appear, it was nevertheless calmly and deliberately uttered. 'I wos a-thinkin', Sammy, that upon the whole I wos wery sorry she wos gone.'

'Vell, and so you ought to be,' replied Sam.

Mr. Weller nodded his acquiescence in the sentiment, and again fastening his eyes on the fire, shrouded himself in a cloud, and mused deeply.

'Those wos wery sensible observations as she made, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, driving the smoke away with his hand, after a long silence.

'Wot observations?' inquired Sam.

'Them as she made, arter she was took ill,' replied the old gentleman. 'Wot was they?'

'Somethin' to this here effect. "Veller," she says, "I'm afeered I've not done by you quite wot I ought to have done; you're a wery kind-hearted man, and I might ha' made your home more comfortabler. I begin to see now," she says, "ven it's too late, that if a married 'ooman vishes to be religious, she should begin vith dischargin' her dooties at home, and makin' them as is about her cheerful and happy, and that vile she goes to church, or chapel, or wot not, at all proper times, she should be wery careful not to con-wert this sort o' thing into a excuse for idleness or self-indulgence. I have done this," she says, "and I've vasted time and substance on them as has done it more than me; but I hope ven I'm gone, Veller, that you'll think on me as I wos afore I know'd them people, and as I raly wos by natur."

'"Susan," says I—I wos took up wery short by this, Samivel; I von't deny it, my boy—"Susan," I says, "you've been a wery good vife to me, altogether; don't say nothin' at all about it; keep a good heart, my dear; and you'll live to see me punch that 'ere Stiggins's head yet." She smiled at this, Samivel,' said the old gentleman, stifling a sigh with his pipe, 'but she died arter all!'

'Vell,' said Sam, venturing to offer a little homely consolation, after the lapse of three or four minutes, consumed by the old gentleman in slowly shaking his head from side to side, and solemnly smoking, 'vell, gov'nor, ve must all come to it, one day or another.'

'So we must, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller the elder.

'There's a Providence in it all,' said Sam.

'O' course there is,' replied his father, with a nod of grave approval. 'Wot 'ud become of the undertakers vithout it, Sammy?'

Lost in the immense field of conjecture opened by this reflection, the elder Mr. Weller laid his pipe on the table, and stirred the fire with a meditative visage.

While the old gentleman was thus engaged, a very buxom-looking cook, dressed in mourning, who had been bustling about, in the bar, glided into the room, and bestowing many smirks of recognition upon Sam, silently stationed herself at the back of his father's chair, and announced her presence by a slight cough, the which, being disregarded, was followed by a louder one.

'Hollo!' said the elder Mr. Weller, dropping the poker as he looked round, and hastily drew his chair away. 'Wot's the matter now?'

'Have a cup of tea, there's a good soul,' replied the buxom female coaxingly. 'I von't,' replied Mr. Weller, in a somewhat boisterous manner. 'I'll see you—' Mr. Weller hastily checked himself, and added in a low tone, 'furder fust.'

'Oh, dear, dear! How adwersity does change people!' said the lady, looking upwards.

'It's the only thing 'twixt this and the doctor as shall change my condition,' muttered Mr. Weller.

'I really never saw a man so cross,' said the buxom female.

'Never mind. It's all for my own good; vich is the reflection vith vich the penitent school-boy comforted his feelin's ven they flogged him,' rejoined the old gentleman.

The buxom female shook her head with a compassionate and sympathising air; and, appealing to Sam, inquired whether his father really ought not to make an effort to keep up, and not give way to that lowness of spirits.

'You see, Mr. Samuel,' said the buxom female, 'as I was telling him yesterday, he will feel lonely, he can't expect but what he should, sir, but he should keep up a good heart, because, dear me, I'm sure we all pity his loss, and are ready to do anything for him; and there's no situation in life so bad, Mr. Samuel, that it can't be mended. Which is what a very worthy person said to me when my husband died.' Here the speaker, putting her hand before her mouth, coughed again, and looked affectionately at the elder Mr. Weller.

'As I don't rekvire any o' your conversation just now, mum, vill you have the goodness to re-tire?' inquired Mr. Weller, in a grave and steady voice.

'Well, Mr. Weller,' said the buxom female, 'I'm sure I only spoke to you out of kindness.'

'Wery likely, mum,' replied Mr. Weller. 'Samivel, show the lady out, and shut the door after her.'

This hint was not lost upon the buxom female; for she at once left the room, and slammed the door behind her, upon which Mr. Weller, senior, falling back in his chair in a violent perspiration, said—

'Sammy, if I wos to stop here alone vun week—only vun week, my boy—that 'ere 'ooman 'ud marry me by force and wiolence afore it was over.'

'Wot! is she so wery fond on you?' inquired Sam.

'Fond!' replied his father. 'I can't keep her avay from me. If I was locked up in a fireproof chest vith a patent Brahmin, she'd find means to get at me, Sammy.'

'Wot a thing it is to be so sought arter!' observed Sam, smiling.

'I don't take no pride out on it, Sammy,' replied Mr. Weller, poking the fire vehemently, 'it's a horrid sitiwation. I'm actiwally drove out o' house and home by it. The breath was scarcely out o' your poor mother-in-law's body, ven vun old 'ooman sends me a pot o' jam, and another a pot o' jelly, and another brews a blessed large jug o' camomile-tea, vich she brings in vith her own hands.' Mr. Weller paused with an aspect of intense disgust, and looking round, added in a whisper, 'They wos all widders, Sammy, all on 'em, 'cept the camomile-tea vun, as wos a single young lady o' fifty-three.'

Sam gave a comical look in reply, and the old gentleman having broken an obstinate lump of coal, with a countenance expressive of as much earnestness and malice as if it had been the head of one of the widows last-mentioned, said:

'In short, Sammy, I feel that I ain't safe anyveres but on the box.'

'How are you safer there than anyveres else?' interrupted Sam.

''Cos a coachman's a privileged indiwidual,' replied Mr. Weller, looking fixedly at his son. ''Cos a coachman may do vithout suspicion wot other men may not; 'cos a coachman may be on the wery amicablest terms with eighty mile o' females, and yet nobody think that he ever means to marry any vun among 'em. And wot other man can say the same, Sammy?'

'Vell, there's somethin' in that,' said Sam.

'If your gov'nor had been a coachman,' reasoned Mr. Weller, 'do you s'pose as that 'ere jury 'ud ever ha' conwicted him, s'posin' it possible as the matter could ha' gone to that extremity? They dustn't ha' done it.'

'Wy not?' said Sam, rather disparagingly.

'Wy not!' rejoined Mr. Weller; ''cos it 'ud ha' gone agin their consciences. A reg'lar coachman's a sort o' con-nectin' link betwixt singleness and matrimony, and every practicable man knows it.'

'Wot! You mean, they're gen'ral favorites, and nobody takes adwantage on 'em, p'raps?' said Sam.

His father nodded.

'How it ever come to that 'ere pass,' resumed the parent Weller, 'I can't say. Wy it is that long-stage coachmen possess such insiniwations, and is alvays looked up to—a-dored I may say—by ev'ry young 'ooman in ev'ry town he vurks through, I don't know. I only know that so it is. It's a regulation of natur—a dispensary, as your poor mother-in-law used to say.'

'A dispensation,' said Sam, correcting the old gentleman.

'Wery good, Samivel, a dispensation if you like it better,' returned Mr. Weller; 'I call it a dispensary, and it's always writ up so, at the places vere they gives you physic for nothin' in your own bottles; that's all.'

With these words, Mr. Weller refilled and relighted his pipe, and once more summoning up a meditative expression of countenance, continued as follows—

'Therefore, my boy, as I do not see the adwisability o' stoppin here to be married vether I vant to or not, and as at the same time I do not vish to separate myself from them interestin' members o' society altogether, I have come to the determination o' driving the Safety, and puttin' up vunce more at the Bell Savage, vich is my nat'ral born element, Sammy.'

'And wot's to become o' the bis'ness?' inquired Sam.

'The bis'ness, Samivel,' replied the old gentleman, 'good-vill, stock, and fixters, vill be sold by private contract; and out o' the money, two hundred pound, agreeable to a rekvest o' your mother-in-law's to me, a little afore she died, vill be invested in your name in—What do you call them things agin?'

'Wot things?' inquired Sam.

'Them things as is always a-goin' up and down, in the city.'

'Omnibuses?' suggested Sam.

'Nonsense,' replied Mr. Weller. 'Them things as is alvays a-fluctooatin', and gettin' theirselves inwolved somehow or another vith the national debt, and the chequers bill; and all that.'

'Oh! the funds,' said Sam.

'Ah!' rejoined Mr. Weller, 'the funs; two hundred pounds o' the money is to be inwested for you, Samivel, in the funs; four and a half per cent. reduced counsels, Sammy.'

'Wery kind o' the old lady to think o' me,' said Sam, 'and I'm wery much obliged to her.'

'The rest will be inwested in my name,' continued the elder Mr. Weller; 'and wen I'm took off the road, it'll come to you, so take care you don't spend it all at vunst, my boy, and mind that no widder gets a inklin' o' your fortun', or you're done.'

Having delivered this warning, Mr. Weller resumed his pipe with a more serene countenance; the disclosure of these matters appearing to have eased his mind considerably.

'Somebody's a-tappin' at the door,' said Sam.

'Let 'em tap,' replied his father, with dignity.

Sam acted upon the direction. There was another tap, and another, and then a long row of taps; upon which Sam inquired why the tapper was not admitted.

'Hush,' whispered Mr. Weller, with apprehensive looks, 'don't take no notice on 'em, Sammy, it's vun o' the widders, p'raps.'

No notice being taken of the taps, the unseen visitor, after a short lapse, ventured to open the door and peep in. It was no female head that was thrust in at the partially-opened door, but the long black locks and red face of Mr. Stiggins. Mr. Weller's pipe fell from his hands.

The reverend gentleman gradually opened the door by almost imperceptible degrees, until the aperture was just wide enough to admit of the passage of his lank body, when he glided into the room and closed it after him, with great care and gentleness. Turning towards Sam, and raising his hands and eyes in token of the unspeakable sorrow with which he regarded the calamity that had befallen the family, he carried the high-backed chair to his old corner by the fire, and, seating himself on the very edge, drew forth a brown pocket-handkerchief, and applied the same to his optics.

While this was going forward, the elder Mr. Weller sat back in his chair, with his eyes wide open, his hands planted on his knees, and his whole countenance expressive of absorbing and overwhelming astonishment. Sam sat opposite him in perfect silence, waiting, with eager curiosity, for the termination of the scene.

Mr. Stiggins kept the brown pocket-handkerchief before his eyes for some minutes, moaning decently meanwhile, and then, mastering his feelings by a strong effort, put it in his pocket and buttoned it up. After this, he stirred the fire; after that, he rubbed his hands and looked at Sam.

'Oh, my young friend,' said Mr. Stiggins, breaking the silence, in a very low voice, 'here's a sorrowful affliction!'

Sam nodded very slightly.

'For the man of wrath, too!' added Mr. Stiggins; 'it makes a vessel's heart bleed!' Mr. Weller was overheard by his son to murmur something relative to making a vessel's nose bleed; but Mr. Stiggins heard him not. 'Do you know, young man,' whispered Mr. Stiggins, drawing his chair closer to Sam, 'whether she has left Emanuel anything?'

'Who's he?' inquired Sam.

'The chapel,' replied Mr. Stiggins; 'our chapel; our fold, Mr. Samuel.'

'She hasn't left the fold nothin', nor the shepherd nothin', nor the animals nothin',' said Sam decisively; 'nor the dogs neither.'

Mr. Stiggins looked slily at Sam; glanced at the old gentleman, who was sitting with his eyes closed, as if asleep; and drawing his chair still nearer, said—

'Nothing for ME, Mr. Samuel?'

Sam shook his head.

'I think there's something,' said Stiggins, turning as pale as he could turn. 'Consider, Mr. Samuel; no little token?'

'Not so much as the vorth o' that 'ere old umberella o' yourn,' replied Sam.

'Perhaps,' said Mr. Stiggins hesitatingly, after a few moments' deep thought, 'perhaps she recommended me to the care of the man of wrath, Mr. Samuel?'

'I think that's wery likely, from what he said,' rejoined Sam; 'he wos a-speakin' about you, jist now.'

'Was he, though?' exclaimed Stiggins, brightening up. 'Ah! He's changed, I dare say. We might live very comfortably together now, Mr. Samuel, eh? I could take care of his property when you are away—good care, you see.'

Heaving a long-drawn sigh, Mr. Stiggins paused for a response.

Sam nodded, and Mr. Weller the elder gave vent to an extraordinary sound, which, being neither a groan, nor a grunt, nor a gasp, nor a growl, seemed to partake in some degree of the character of all four.

Mr. Stiggins, encouraged by this sound, which he understood to betoken remorse or repentance, looked about him, rubbed his hands, wept, smiled, wept again, and then, walking softly across the room to a well-remembered shelf in one corner, took down a tumbler, and with great deliberation put four lumps of sugar in it. Having got thus far, he looked about him again, and sighed grievously; with that, he walked softly into the bar, and presently returning with the tumbler half full of pine-apple rum, advanced to the kettle which was singing gaily on the hob, mixed his grog, stirred it, sipped it, sat down, and taking a long and hearty pull at the rum-and-water, stopped for breath.

The elder Mr. Weller, who still continued to make various strange and uncouth attempts to appear asleep, offered not a single word during these proceedings; but when Stiggins stopped for breath, he darted upon him, and snatching the tumbler from his hand, threw the remainder of the rum-and-water in his face, and the glass itself into the grate. Then, seizing the reverend gentleman firmly by the collar, he suddenly fell to kicking him most furiously, accompanying every application of his top-boot to Mr. Stiggins's person, with sundry violent and incoherent anathemas upon his limbs, eyes, and body.

'Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, 'put my hat on tight for me.'

Sam dutifully adjusted the hat with the long hatband more firmly on his father's head, and the old gentleman, resuming his kicking with greater agility than before, tumbled with Mr. Stiggins through the bar, and through the passage, out at the front door, and so into the street—the kicking continuing the whole way, and increasing in vehemence, rather than diminishing, every time the top-boot was lifted.

It was a beautiful and exhilarating sight to see the red-nosed man writhing in Mr. Weller's grasp, and his whole frame quivering with anguish as kick followed kick in rapid succession; it was a still more exciting spectacle to behold Mr. Weller, after a powerful struggle, immersing Mr. Stiggins's head in a horse-trough full of water, and holding it there, until he was half suffocated.

'There!' said Mr. Weller, throwing all his energy into one most complicated kick, as he at length permitted Mr. Stiggins to withdraw his head from the trough, 'send any vun o' them lazy shepherds here, and I'll pound him to a jelly first, and drownd him artervards! Sammy, help me in, and fill me a small glass of brandy. I'm out o' breath, my boy.'

CHAPTER LIII. COMPRISING THE FINAL EXIT OF Mr. JINGLE AND JOB TROTTER,

WITH A GREAT MORNING OF BUSINESS IN GRAY'S INN SQUARE—CONCLUDING WITH A DOUBLE KNOCK AT Mr. PERKER'S DOOR

When Arabella, after some gentle preparation and many assurances that there was not the least occasion for being low-spirited, was at length made acquainted by Mr. Pickwick with the unsatisfactory result of his visit to Birmingham, she burst into tears, and sobbing aloud, lamented in moving terms that she should have been the unhappy cause of any estrangement between a father and his son.

'My dear girl,' said Mr. Pickwick kindly, 'it is no fault of yours. It was impossible to foresee that the old gentleman would be so strongly prepossessed against his son's marriage, you know. I am sure,' added Mr. Pickwick, glancing at her pretty face, 'he can have very little idea of the pleasure he denies himself.'

'Oh, my dear Mr. Pickwick,' said Arabella, 'what shall we do, if he continues to be angry with us?'

'Why, wait patiently, my dear, until he thinks better of it,' replied Mr. Pickwick cheerfully.

'But, dear Mr. Pickwick, what is to become of Nathaniel if his father withdraws his assistance?' urged Arabella.

'In that case, my love,' rejoined Mr. Pickwick, 'I will venture to prophesy that he will find some other friend who will not be backward in helping him to start in the world.'

The significance of this reply was not so well disguised by Mr. Pickwick but that Arabella understood it. So, throwing her arms round his neck, and kissing him affectionately, she sobbed louder than before.

'Come, come,' said Mr. Pickwick taking her hand, 'we will wait here a few days longer, and see whether he writes or takes any other notice of your husband's communication. If not, I have thought of half a dozen plans, any one of which would make you happy at once. There, my dear, there!'

With these words, Mr. Pickwick gently pressed Arabella's hand, and bade her dry her eyes, and not distress her husband. Upon which, Arabella, who was one of the best little creatures alive, put her handkerchief in her reticule, and by the time Mr. Winkle joined them, exhibited in full lustre the same beaming smiles and sparkling eyes that had originally captivated him.

'This is a distressing predicament for these young people,' thought Mr. Pickwick, as he dressed himself next morning. 'I'll walk up to Perker's, and consult him about the matter.'

As Mr. Pickwick was further prompted to betake himself to Gray's Inn Square by an anxious desire to come to a pecuniary settlement with the kind-hearted little attorney without further delay, he made a hurried breakfast, and executed his intention so speedily, that ten o'clock had not struck when he reached Gray's Inn.

It still wanted ten minutes to the hour when he had ascended the staircase on which Perker's chambers were. The clerks had not arrived yet, and he beguiled the time by looking out of the staircase window. The healthy light of a fine October morning made even the dingy old houses brighten up a little; some of the dusty windows actually looking almost cheerful as the sun's rays gleamed upon them. Clerk after clerk hastened into the square by one or other of the entrances, and looking up at the Hall clock, accelerated or decreased his rate of walking according to the time at which his office hours nominally commenced; the half-past nine o'clock people suddenly becoming very brisk, and the ten o'clock gentlemen falling into a pace of most aristocratic slowness. The clock struck ten, and clerks poured in faster than ever, each one in a greater perspiration than his predecessor. The noise of unlocking and opening doors echoed and re-echoed on every side; heads appeared as if by magic in every window; the porters took up their stations for the day; the slipshod laundresses hurried off; the postman ran from house to house; and the whole legal hive was in a bustle.

'You're early, Mr. Pickwick,' said a voice behind him.

'Ah, Mr. Lowten,' replied that gentleman, looking round, and recognising his old acquaintance.

'Precious warm walking, isn't it?' said Lowten, drawing a Bramah key from his pocket, with a small plug therein, to keep the dust out.

'You appear to feel it so,' rejoined Mr. Pickwick, smiling at the clerk, who was literally red-hot.

'I've come along, rather, I can tell you,' replied Lowten. 'It went the half hour as I came through the Polygon. I'm here before him, though, so I don't mind.'

Comforting himself with this reflection, Mr. Lowten extracted the plug from the door-key; having opened the door, replugged and repocketed his Bramah, and picked up the letters which the postman had dropped through the box, he ushered Mr. Pickwick into the office. Here, in the twinkling of an eye, he divested himself of his coat, put on a threadbare garment, which he took out of a desk, hung up his hat, pulled forth a few sheets of cartridge and blotting-paper in alternate layers, and, sticking a pen behind his ear, rubbed his hands with an air of great satisfaction.

'There, you see, Mr. Pickwick,' he said, 'now I'm complete. I've got my office coat on, and my pad out, and let him come as soon as he likes. You haven't got a pinch of snuff about you, have you?'

'No, I have not,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'I'm sorry for it,' said Lowten. 'Never mind. I'll run out presently, and get a bottle of soda. Don't I look rather queer about the eyes, Mr. Pickwick?'

The individual appealed to, surveyed Mr. Lowten's eyes from a distance, and expressed his opinion that no unusual queerness was perceptible in those features.

'I'm glad of it,' said Lowten. 'We were keeping it up pretty tolerably at the Stump last night, and I'm rather out of sorts this morning. Perker's been about that business of yours, by the bye.'

'What business?' inquired Mr. Pickwick. 'Mrs. Bardell's costs?'

'No, I don't mean that,' replied Mr. Lowten. 'About getting that customer that we paid the ten shillings in the pound to the bill-discounter for, on your account—to get him out of the Fleet, you know—about getting him to Demerara.'

'Oh, Mr. Jingle,' said Mr. Pickwick hastily. 'Yes. Well?'

'Well, it's all arranged,' said Lowten, mending his pen. 'The agent at Liverpool said he had been obliged to you many times when you were in business, and he would be glad to take him on your recommendation.'

'That's well,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'I am delighted to hear it.'

'But I say,' resumed Lowten, scraping the back of the pen preparatory to making a fresh split, 'what a soft chap that other is!'

'Which other?'

'Why, that servant, or friend, or whatever he is; you know, Trotter.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Pickwick, with a smile. 'I always thought him the reverse.'

'Well, and so did I, from what little I saw of him,' replied Lowten, 'it only shows how one may be deceived. What do you think of his going to Demerara, too?'

'What! And giving up what was offered him here!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

'Treating Perker's offer of eighteen bob a week, and a rise if he behaved himself, like dirt,' replied Lowten. 'He said he must go along with the other one, and so they persuaded Perker to write again, and they've got him something on the same estate; not near so good, Perker says, as a convict would get in New South Wales, if he appeared at his trial in a new suit of clothes.'

'Foolish fellow,' said Mr. Pickwick, with glistening eyes. 'Foolish fellow.'

'Oh, it's worse than foolish; it's downright sneaking, you know,' replied Lowten, nibbing the pen with a contemptuous face. 'He says that he's the only friend he ever had, and he's attached to him, and all that. Friendship's a very good thing in its way—we are all very friendly and comfortable at the Stump, for instance, over our grog, where every man pays for himself; but damn hurting yourself for anybody else, you know! No man should have more than two attachments—the first, to number one, and the second to the ladies; that's what I say—ha! ha!' Mr. Lowten concluded with a loud laugh, half in jocularity, and half in derision, which was prematurely cut short by the sound of Perker's footsteps on the stairs, at the first approach of which, he vaulted on his stool with an agility most remarkable, and wrote intensely.

The greeting between Mr. Pickwick and his professional adviser was warm and cordial; the client was scarcely ensconced in the attorney's arm-chair, however, when a knock was heard at the door, and a voice inquired whether Mr. Perker was within.

'Hark!' said Perker, 'that's one of our vagabond friends—Jingle himself, my dear Sir. Will you see him?'

'What do you think?' inquired Mr. Pickwick, hesitating.

'Yes, I think you had better. Here, you Sir, what's your name, walk in, will you?'

In compliance with this unceremonious invitation, Jingle and Job walked into the room, but, seeing Mr. Pickwick, stopped short in some confusion. 'Well,' said Perker, 'don't you know that gentleman?'

'Good reason to,' replied Mr. Jingle, stepping forward. 'Mr. Pickwick—deepest obligations—life preserver—made a man of me—you shall never repent it, Sir.'

'I am happy to hear you say so,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'You look much better.'

'Thanks to you, sir—great change—Majesty's Fleet—unwholesome place—very,' said Jingle, shaking his head. He was decently and cleanly dressed, and so was Job, who stood bolt upright behind him, staring at Mr. Pickwick with a visage of iron.

'When do they go to Liverpool?' inquired Mr. Pickwick, half aside to Perker.

'This evening, Sir, at seven o'clock,' said Job, taking one step forward. 'By the heavy coach from the city, Sir.'

'Are your places taken?'

'They are, sir,' replied Job.

'You have fully made up your mind to go?'

'I have sir,' answered Job.

'With regard to such an outfit as was indispensable for Jingle,' said Perker, addressing Mr. Pickwick aloud. 'I have taken upon myself to make an arrangement for the deduction of a small sum from his quarterly salary, which, being made only for one year, and regularly remitted, will provide for that expense. I entirely disapprove of your doing anything for him, my dear sir, which is not dependent on his own exertions and good conduct.'

'Certainly,' interposed Jingle, with great firmness. 'Clear head—man of the world—quite right—perfectly.'

'By compounding with his creditor, releasing his clothes from the pawnbroker's, relieving him in prison, and paying for his passage,' continued Perker, without noticing Jingle's observation, 'you have already lost upwards of fifty pounds.'

'Not lost,' said Jingle hastily, 'Pay it all—stick to business—cash up—every farthing. Yellow fever, perhaps—can't help that—if not—' Here Mr. Jingle paused, and striking the crown of his hat with great violence, passed his hand over his eyes, and sat down.

'He means to say,' said Job, advancing a few paces, 'that if he is not carried off by the fever, he will pay the money back again. If he lives, he will, Mr. Pickwick. I will see it done. I know he will, Sir,' said Job, with energy. 'I could undertake to swear it.'

'Well, well,' said Mr. Pickwick, who had been bestowing a score or two of frowns upon Perker, to stop his summary of benefits conferred, which the little attorney obstinately disregarded, 'you must be careful not to play any more desperate cricket matches, Mr. Jingle, or to renew your acquaintance with Sir Thomas Blazo, and I have little doubt of your preserving your health.'

Mr. Jingle smiled at this sally, but looked rather foolish notwithstanding; so Mr. Pickwick changed the subject by saying—

'You don't happen to know, do you, what has become of another friend of yours—a more humble one, whom I saw at Rochester?'

'Dismal Jemmy?' inquired Jingle.

'Yes.'

Jingle shook his head.

'Clever rascal—queer fellow, hoaxing genius—Job's brother.'

'Job's brother!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick. 'Well, now I look at him closely, there IS a likeness.'

'We were always considered like each other, Sir,' said Job, with a cunning look just lurking in the corners of his eyes, 'only I was really of a serious nature, and he never was. He emigrated to America, Sir, in consequence of being too much sought after here, to be comfortable; and has never been heard of since.'

'That accounts for my not having received the "page from the romance of real life," which he promised me one morning when he appeared to be contemplating suicide on Rochester Bridge, I suppose,' said Mr. Pickwick, smiling. 'I need not inquire whether his dismal behaviour was natural or assumed.'

'He could assume anything, Sir,' said Job. 'You may consider yourself very fortunate in having escaped him so easily. On intimate terms he would have been even a more dangerous acquaintance than—' Job looked at Jingle, hesitated, and finally added, 'than—than-myself even.'

'A hopeful family yours, Mr. Trotter,' said Perker, sealing a letter which he had just finished writing.

'Yes, Sir,' replied Job. 'Very much so.'

'Well,' said the little man, laughing, 'I hope you are going to disgrace it. Deliver this letter to the agent when you reach Liverpool, and let me advise you, gentlemen, not to be too knowing in the West Indies. If you throw away this chance, you will both richly deserve to be hanged, as I sincerely trust you will be. And now you had better leave Mr. Pickwick and me alone, for we have other matters to talk over, and time is precious.' As Perker said this, he looked towards the door, with an evident desire to render the leave-taking as brief as possible.

It was brief enough on Mr. Jingle's part. He thanked the little attorney in a few hurried words for the kindness and promptitude with which he had rendered his assistance, and, turning to his benefactor, stood for a few seconds as if irresolute what to say or how to act. Job Trotter relieved his perplexity; for, with a humble and grateful bow to Mr. Pickwick, he took his friend gently by the arm, and led him away.

'A worthy couple!' said Perker, as the door closed behind them.

'I hope they may become so,' replied Mr. Pickwick. 'What do you think? Is there any chance of their permanent reformation?'

Perker shrugged his shoulders doubtfully, but observing Mr. Pickwick's anxious and disappointed look, rejoined—

'Of course there is a chance. I hope it may prove a good one. They are unquestionably penitent now; but then, you know, they have the recollection of very recent suffering fresh upon them. What they may become, when that fades away, is a problem that neither you nor I can solve. However, my dear Sir,' added Perker, laying his hand on Mr. Pickwick's shoulder, 'your object is equally honourable, whatever the result is. Whether that species of benevolence which is so very cautious and long-sighted that it is seldom exercised at all, lest its owner should be imposed upon, and so wounded in his self-love, be real charity or a worldly counterfeit, I leave to wiser heads than mine to determine. But if those two fellows were to commit a burglary to-morrow, my opinion of this action would be equally high.'

With these remarks, which were delivered in a much more animated and earnest manner than is usual in legal gentlemen, Perker drew his chair to his desk, and listened to Mr. Pickwick's recital of old Mr. Winkle's obstinacy.

'Give him a week,' said Perker, nodding his head prophetically.

'Do you think he will come round?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'I think he will,' rejoined Perker. 'If not, we must try the young lady's persuasion; and that is what anybody but you would have done at first.'

Mr. Perker was taking a pinch of snuff with various grotesque contractions of countenance, eulogistic of the persuasive powers appertaining unto young ladies, when the murmur of inquiry and answer was heard in the outer office, and Lowten tapped at the door.

'Come in!' cried the little man.

The clerk came in, and shut the door after him, with great mystery.

'What's the matter?' inquired Perker.

'You're wanted, Sir.'

'Who wants me?'

Lowten looked at Mr. Pickwick, and coughed.

'Who wants me? Can't you speak, Mr. Lowten?'

'Why, sir,' replied Lowten, 'it's Dodson; and Fogg is with him.'

'Bless my life!' said the little man, looking at his watch, 'I appointed them to be here at half-past eleven, to settle that matter of yours, Pickwick. I gave them an undertaking on which they sent down your discharge; it's very awkward, my dear Sir; what will you do? Would you like to step into the next room?'

The next room being the identical room in which Messrs. Dodson & Fogg were, Mr. Pickwick replied that he would remain where he was: the more especially as Messrs. Dodson & Fogg ought to be ashamed to look him in the face, instead of his being ashamed to see them. Which latter circumstance he begged Mr. Perker to note, with a glowing countenance and many marks of indignation.

'Very well, my dear Sir, very well,' replied Perker, 'I can only say that if you expect either Dodson or Fogg to exhibit any symptom of shame or confusion at having to look you, or anybody else, in the face, you are the most sanguine man in your expectations that I ever met with. Show them in, Mr. Lowten.'

Mr. Lowten disappeared with a grin, and immediately returned ushering in the firm, in due form of precedence—Dodson first, and Fogg afterwards.

'You have seen Mr. Pickwick, I believe?' said Perker to Dodson, inclining his pen in the direction where that gentleman was seated.

'How do you do, Mr. Pickwick?' said Dodson, in a loud voice.

'Dear me,'cried Fogg, 'how do you do, Mr. Pickwick? I hope you are well, Sir. I thought I knew the face,' said Fogg, drawing up a chair, and looking round him with a smile.

Mr. Pickwick bent his head very slightly, in answer to these salutations, and, seeing Fogg pull a bundle of papers from his coat pocket, rose and walked to the window.

'There's no occasion for Mr. Pickwick to move, Mr. Perker,' said Fogg, untying the red tape which encircled the little bundle, and smiling again more sweetly than before. 'Mr. Pickwick is pretty well acquainted with these proceedings. There are no secrets between us, I think. He! he! he!'

'Not many, I think,' said Dodson. 'Ha! ha! ha!' Then both the partners laughed together—pleasantly and cheerfully, as men who are going to receive money often do.

'We shall make Mr. Pickwick pay for peeping,' said Fogg, with considerable native humour, as he unfolded his papers. 'The amount of the taxed costs is one hundred and thirty-three, six, four, Mr. Perker.'

There was a great comparing of papers, and turning over of leaves, by Fogg and Perker, after this statement of profit and loss. Meanwhile, Dodson said, in an affable manner, to Mr. Pickwick—

'I don't think you are looking quite so stout as when I had the pleasure of seeing you last, Mr. Pickwick.'

'Possibly not, Sir,' replied Mr. Pickwick, who had been flashing forth looks of fierce indignation, without producing the smallest effect on either of the sharp practitioners; 'I believe I am not, Sir. I have been persecuted and annoyed by scoundrels of late, Sir.' Perker coughed violently, and asked Mr. Pickwick whether he wouldn't like to look at the morning paper. To which inquiry Mr. Pickwick returned a most decided negative.

'True,' said Dodson, 'I dare say you have been annoyed in the Fleet; there are some odd gentry there. Whereabouts were your apartments, Mr. Pickwick?'

'My one room,' replied that much-injured gentleman, 'was on the coffee-room flight.'

'Oh, indeed!' said Dodson. 'I believe that is a very pleasant part of the establishment.'

'Very,'replied Mr. Pickwick drily.

There was a coolness about all this, which, to a gentleman of an excitable temperament, had, under the circumstances, rather an exasperating tendency. Mr. Pickwick restrained his wrath by gigantic efforts; but when Perker wrote a cheque for the whole amount, and Fogg deposited it in a small pocket-book, with a triumphant smile playing over his pimply features, which communicated itself likewise to the stern countenance of Dodson, he felt the blood in his cheeks tingling with indignation.

'Now, Mr. Dodson,' said Fogg, putting up the pocket-book and drawing on his gloves, 'I am at your service.'

'Very good,' said Dodson, rising; 'I am quite ready.'

'I am very happy,' said Fogg, softened by the cheque, 'to have had the pleasure of making Mr. Pickwick's acquaintance. I hope you don't think quite so ill of us, Mr. Pickwick, as when we first had the pleasure of seeing you.'

'I hope not,' said Dodson, with the high tone of calumniated virtue. 'Mr. Pickwick now knows us better, I trust; whatever your opinion of gentlemen of our profession may be, I beg to assure you, sir, that I bear no ill-will or vindictive feeling towards you for the sentiments you thought proper to express in our office in Freeman's Court, Cornhill, on the occasion to which my partner has referred.'

'Oh, no, no; nor I,' said Fogg, in a most forgiving manner.

'Our conduct, Sir,' said Dodson, 'will speak for itself, and justify itself, I hope, upon every occasion. We have been in the profession some years, Mr. Pickwick, and have been honoured with the confidence of many excellent clients. I wish you good-morning, Sir.'

'Good-morning, Mr. Pickwick,' said Fogg. So saying, he put his umbrella under his arm, drew off his right glove, and extended the hand of reconciliation to that most indignant gentleman; who, thereupon, thrust his hands beneath his coat tails, and eyed the attorney with looks of scornful amazement.

'Lowten!' cried Perker, at this moment. 'Open the door.'

'Wait one instant,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'Perker, I WILL speak.'

'My dear Sir, pray let the matter rest where it is,' said the little attorney, who had been in a state of nervous apprehension during the whole interview; 'Mr. Pickwick, I beg—'

'I will not be put down, Sir,' replied Mr. Pickwick hastily. 'Mr. Dodson, you have addressed some remarks to me.'

Dodson turned round, bent his head meekly, and smiled.

'Some remarks to me,' repeated Mr. Pickwick, almost breathless; 'and your partner has tendered me his hand, and you have both assumed a tone of forgiveness and high-mindedness, which is an extent of impudence that I was not prepared for, even in you.'

'What, sir!' exclaimed Dodson.

'What, sir!' reiterated Fogg.

'Do you know that I have been the victim of your plots and conspiracies?' continued Mr. Pickwick. 'Do you know that I am the man whom you have been imprisoning and robbing? Do you know that you were the attorneys for the plaintiff, in Bardell and Pickwick?'

'Yes, sir, we do know it,' replied Dodson.

'Of course we know it, Sir,' rejoined Fogg, slapping his pocket—perhaps by accident.

'I see that you recollect it with satisfaction,' said Mr. Pickwick, attempting to call up a sneer for the first time in his life, and failing most signally in so doing. 'Although I have long been anxious to tell you, in plain terms, what my opinion of you is, I should have let even this opportunity pass, in deference to my friend Perker's wishes, but for the unwarrantable tone you have assumed, and your insolent familiarity. I say insolent familiarity, sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, turning upon Fogg with a fierceness of gesture which caused that person to retreat towards the door with great expedition.

'Take care, Sir,' said Dodson, who, though he was the biggest man of the party, had prudently entrenched himself behind Fogg, and was speaking over his head with a very pale face. 'Let him assault you, Mr. Fogg; don't return it on any account.'

'No, no, I won't return it,' said Fogg, falling back a little more as he spoke; to the evident relief of his partner, who by these means was gradually getting into the outer office.

'You are,' continued Mr. Pickwick, resuming the thread of his discourse—'you are a well-matched pair of mean, rascally, pettifogging robbers.'

'Well,' interposed Perker, 'is that all?'

'It is all summed up in that,' rejoined Mr. Pickwick; 'they are mean, rascally, pettifogging robbers.'

'There!' said Perker, in a most conciliatory tone. 'My dear sirs, he has said all he has to say. Now pray go. Lowten, is that door open?'

Mr. Lowten, with a distant giggle, replied in the affirmative.

'There, there—good-morning—good-morning—now pray, my dear sirs—Mr. Lowten, the door!' cried the little man, pushing Dodson & Fogg, nothing loath, out of the office; 'this way, my dear sirs—now pray don't prolong this—Dear me—Mr. Lowten—the door, sir—why don't you attend?'

'If there's law in England, sir,' said Dodson, looking towards Mr. Pickwick, as he put on his hat, 'you shall smart for this.'

'You are a couple of mean—'

'Remember, sir, you pay dearly for this,' said Fogg.

'—Rascally, pettifogging robbers!' continued Mr. Pickwick, taking not the least notice of the threats that were addressed to him.

'Robbers!' cried Mr. Pickwick, running to the stair-head, as the two attorneys descended.

'Robbers!' shouted Mr. Pickwick, breaking from Lowten and Perker, and thrusting his head out of the staircase window.

When Mr. Pickwick drew in his head again, his countenance was smiling and placid; and, walking quietly back into the office, he declared that he had now removed a great weight from his mind, and that he felt perfectly comfortable and happy.

Perker said nothing at all until he had emptied his snuff-box, and sent Lowten out to fill it, when he was seized with a fit of laughing, which lasted five minutes; at the expiration of which time he said that he supposed he ought to be very angry, but he couldn't think of the business seriously yet—when he could, he would be.

'Well, now,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'let me have a settlement with you.' 'Of the same kind as the last?' inquired Perker, with another laugh. 'Not exactly,' rejoined Mr. Pickwick, drawing out his pocket-book, and shaking the little man heartily by the hand, 'I only mean a pecuniary settlement. You have done me many acts of kindness that I can never repay, and have no wish to repay, for I prefer continuing the obligation.'

With this preface, the two friends dived into some very complicated accounts and vouchers, which, having been duly displayed and gone through by Perker, were at once discharged by Mr. Pickwick with many professions of esteem and friendship.

They had no sooner arrived at this point, than a most violent and startling knocking was heard at the door; it was not an ordinary double-knock, but a constant and uninterrupted succession of the loudest single raps, as if the knocker were endowed with the perpetual motion, or the person outside had forgotten to leave off.

'Dear me, what's that?' exclaimed Perker, starting.

'I think it is a knock at the door,' said Mr. Pickwick, as if there could be the smallest doubt of the fact.

The knocker made a more energetic reply than words could have yielded, for it continued to hammer with surprising force and noise, without a moment's cessation.

'Dear me!' said Perker, ringing his bell, 'we shall alarm the inn. Mr. Lowten, don't you hear a knock?'

'I'll answer the door in one moment, Sir,' replied the clerk.

The knocker appeared to hear the response, and to assert that it was quite impossible he could wait so long. It made a stupendous uproar.

'It's quite dreadful,' said Mr. Pickwick, stopping his ears.

'Make haste, Mr. Lowten,' Perker called out; 'we shall have the panels beaten in.'

Mr. Lowten, who was washing his hands in a dark closet, hurried to the door, and turning the handle, beheld the appearance which is described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER LIV. CONTAINING SOME PARTICULARS RELATIVE TO THE DOUBLE KNOCK,

AND OTHER MATTERS: AMONG WHICH CERTAIN INTERESTING DISCLOSURES RELATIVE TO Mr. SNODGRASS AND A YOUNG LADY ARE BY NO MEANS IRRELEVANT TO THIS HISTORY

The object that presented itself to the eyes of the astonished clerk, was a boy—a wonderfully fat boy—habited as a serving lad, standing upright on the mat, with his eyes closed as if in sleep. He had never seen such a fat boy, in or out of a travelling caravan; and this, coupled with the calmness and repose of his appearance, so very different from what was reasonably to have been expected of the inflicter of such knocks, smote him with wonder.

'What's the matter?' inquired the clerk.

The extraordinary boy replied not a word; but he nodded once, and seemed, to the clerk's imagination, to snore feebly.

'Where do you come from?' inquired the clerk.

The boy made no sign. He breathed heavily, but in all other respects was motionless.

The clerk repeated the question thrice, and receiving no answer, prepared to shut the door, when the boy suddenly opened his eyes, winked several times, sneezed once, and raised his hand as if to repeat the knocking. Finding the door open, he stared about him with astonishment, and at length fixed his eyes on Mr. Lowten's face.

'What the devil do you knock in that way for?' inquired the clerk angrily.

'Which way?' said the boy, in a slow and sleepy voice.

'Why, like forty hackney-coachmen,' replied the clerk.

'Because master said, I wasn't to leave off knocking till they opened the door, for fear I should go to sleep,' said the boy.

'Well,' said the clerk, 'what message have you brought?'

'He's downstairs,' rejoined the boy.

'Who?'

'Master. He wants to know whether you're at home.'

Mr. Lowten bethought himself, at this juncture, of looking out of the window. Seeing an open carriage with a hearty old gentleman in it, looking up very anxiously, he ventured to beckon him; on which, the old gentleman jumped out directly.

'That's your master in the carriage, I suppose?' said Lowten.

The boy nodded.

All further inquiries were superseded by the appearance of old Wardle, who, running upstairs and just recognising Lowten, passed at once into Mr. Perker's room.

'Pickwick!' said the old gentleman. 'Your hand, my boy! Why have I never heard until the day before yesterday of your suffering yourself to be cooped up in jail? And why did you let him do it, Perker?'

'I couldn't help it, my dear Sir,' replied Perker, with a smile and a pinch of snuff; 'you know how obstinate he is?'

'Of course I do; of course I do,' replied the old gentleman. 'I am heartily glad to see him, notwithstanding. I will not lose sight of him again, in a hurry.'

With these words, Wardle shook Mr. Pickwick's hand once more, and, having done the same by Perker, threw himself into an arm-chair, his jolly red face shining again with smiles and health.

'Well!' said Wardle. 'Here are pretty goings on—a pinch of your snuff, Perker, my boy—never were such times, eh?'

'What do you mean?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Mean!' replied Wardle. 'Why, I think the girls are all running mad; that's no news, you'll say? Perhaps it's not; but it's true, for all that.'

'You have not come up to London, of all places in the world, to tell us that, my dear Sir, have you?' inquired Perker.

'No, not altogether,' replied Wardle; 'though it was the main cause of my coming. How's Arabella?'

'Very well,' replied Mr. Pickwick, 'and will be delighted to see you, I am sure.'

'Black-eyed little jilt!' replied Wardle. 'I had a great idea of marrying her myself, one of these odd days. But I am glad of it too, very glad.'

'How did the intelligence reach you?' asked Mr. Pickwick.

'Oh, it came to my girls, of course,'replied Wardle. 'Arabella wrote, the day before yesterday, to say she had made a stolen match without her husband's father's consent, and so you had gone down to get it when his refusing it couldn't prevent the match, and all the rest of it. I thought it a very good time to say something serious to my girls; so I said what a dreadful thing it was that children should marry without their parents' consent, and so forth; but, bless your hearts, I couldn't make the least impression upon them. They thought it such a much more dreadful thing that there should have been a wedding without bridesmaids, that I might as well have preached to Joe himself.' Here the old gentleman stopped to laugh; and having done so to his heart's content, presently resumed—

'But this is not the best of it, it seems. This is only half the love-making and plotting that have been going forward. We have been walking on mines for the last six months, and they're sprung at last.'

'What do you mean?' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, turning pale; 'no other secret marriage, I hope?'

'No, no,' replied old Wardle; 'not so bad as that; no.'

'What then?' inquired Mr. Pickwick; 'am I interested in it?'

'Shall I answer that question, Perker?' said Wardle.

'If you don't commit yourself by doing so, my dear Sir.'

'Well then, you are,' said Wardle.

'How?' asked Mr. Pickwick anxiously. 'In what way?'

'Really,' replied Wardle, 'you're such a fiery sort of a young fellow that I am almost afraid to tell you; but, however, if Perker will sit between us to prevent mischief, I'll venture.'

Having closed the room door, and fortified himself with another application to Perker's snuff-box, the old gentleman proceeded with his great disclosure in these words—

'The fact is, that my daughter Bella—Bella, who married young Trundle, you know.'

'Yes, yes, we know,' said Mr. Pickwick impatiently.

'Don't alarm me at the very beginning. My daughter Bella—Emily having gone to bed with a headache after she had read Arabella's letter to me—sat herself down by my side the other evening, and began to talk over this marriage affair. "Well, pa," she says, "what do you think of it?" "Why, my dear," I said, "I suppose it's all very well; I hope it's for the best." I answered in this way because I was sitting before the fire at the time, drinking my grog rather thoughtfully, and I knew my throwing in an undecided word now and then, would induce her to continue talking. Both my girls are pictures of their dear mother, and as I grow old I like to sit with only them by me; for their voices and looks carry me back to the happiest period of my life, and make me, for the moment, as young as I used to be then, though not quite so light-hearted. "It's quite a marriage of affection, pa," said Bella, after a short silence. "Yes, my dear," said I, "but such marriages do not always turn out the happiest."'

'I question that, mind!' interposed Mr. Pickwick warmly. 'Very good,' responded Wardle, 'question anything you like when it's your turn to speak, but don't interrupt me.'

'I beg your pardon,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Granted,' replied Wardle. '"I am sorry to hear you express your opinion against marriages of affection, pa," said Bella, colouring a little. "I was wrong; I ought not to have said so, my dear, either," said I, patting her cheek as kindly as a rough old fellow like me could pat it, "for your mother's was one, and so was yours." "It's not that I meant, pa," said Bella. "The fact is, pa, I wanted to speak to you about Emily."'

Mr. Pickwick started.

'What's the matter now?' inquired Wardle, stopping in his narrative.

'Nothing,'replied Mr. Pickwick. 'Pray go on.'

'I never could spin out a story,' said Wardle abruptly. 'It must come out, sooner or later, and it'll save us all a great deal of time if it comes at once. The long and the short of it is, then, that Bella at last mustered up courage to tell me that Emily was very unhappy; that she and your young friend Snodgrass had been in constant correspondence and communication ever since last Christmas; that she had very dutifully made up her mind to run away with him, in laudable imitation of her old friend and school-fellow; but that having some compunctions of conscience on the subject, inasmuch as I had always been rather kindly disposed to both of them, they had thought it better in the first instance to pay me the compliment of asking whether I would have any objection to their being married in the usual matter-of-fact manner. There now, Mr. Pickwick, if you can make it convenient to reduce your eyes to their usual size again, and to let me hear what you think we ought to do, I shall feel rather obliged to you!'

The testy manner in which the hearty old gentleman uttered this last sentence was not wholly unwarranted; for Mr. Pickwick's face had settled down into an expression of blank amazement and perplexity, quite curious to behold.

'Snodgrass!-since last Christmas!' were the first broken words that issued from the lips of the confounded gentleman.

'Since last Christmas,' replied Wardle; 'that's plain enough, and very bad spectacles we must have worn, not to have discovered it before.'

'I don't understand it,' said Mr. Pickwick, ruminating; 'I cannot really understand it.'

'It's easy enough to understand it,' replied the choleric old gentleman. 'If you had been a younger man, you would have been in the secret long ago; and besides,' added Wardle, after a moment's hesitation, 'the truth is, that, knowing nothing of this matter, I have rather pressed Emily for four or five months past, to receive favourably (if she could; I would never attempt to force a girl's inclinations) the addresses of a young gentleman down in our neighbourhood. I have no doubt that, girl-like, to enhance her own value and increase the ardour of Mr. Snodgrass, she has represented this matter in very glowing colours, and that they have both arrived at the conclusion that they are a terribly-persecuted pair of unfortunates, and have no resource but clandestine matrimony, or charcoal. Now the question is, what's to be done?'

'What have YOU done?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'I!'

'I mean what did you do when your married daughter told you this?'

'Oh, I made a fool of myself of course,' rejoined Wardle.

'Just so,' interposed Perker, who had accompanied this dialogue with sundry twitchings of his watch-chain, vindictive rubbings of his nose, and other symptoms of impatience. 'That's very natural; but how?'

'I went into a great passion and frightened my mother into a fit,' said Wardle.

'That was judicious,' remarked Perker; 'and what else?'

'I fretted and fumed all next day, and raised a great disturbance,' rejoined the old gentleman. 'At last I got tired of rendering myself unpleasant and making everybody miserable; so I hired a carriage at Muggleton, and, putting my own horses in it, came up to town, under pretence of bringing Emily to see Arabella.'

'Miss Wardle is with you, then?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'To be sure she is,' replied Wardle. 'She is at Osborne's Hotel in the Adelphi at this moment, unless your enterprising friend has run away with her since I came out this morning.'

'You are reconciled then?' said Perker.

'Not a bit of it,' answered Wardle; 'she has been crying and moping ever since, except last night, between tea and supper, when she made a great parade of writing a letter that I pretended to take no notice of.'

'You want my advice in this matter, I suppose?' said Perker, looking from the musing face of Mr. Pickwick to the eager countenance of Wardle, and taking several consecutive pinches of his favourite stimulant.

'I suppose so,' said Wardle, looking at Mr. Pickwick.

'Certainly,' replied that gentleman.

'Well then,' said Perker, rising and pushing his chair back, 'my advice is, that you both walk away together, or ride away, or get away by some means or other, for I'm tired of you, and just talk this matter over between you. If you have not settled it by the next time I see you, I'll tell you what to do.'

'This is satisfactory,' said Wardle, hardly knowing whether to smile or be offended.

'Pooh, pooh, my dear Sir,' returned Perker. 'I know you both a great deal better than you know yourselves. You have settled it already, to all intents and purposes.'

Thus expressing himself, the little gentleman poked his snuff-box first into the chest of Mr. Pickwick, and then into the waistcoat of Mr. Wardle, upon which they all three laughed, especially the two last-named gentlemen, who at once shook hands again, without any obvious or particular reason.

'You dine with me to-day,' said Wardle to Perker, as he showed them out.

'Can't promise, my dear Sir, can't promise,' replied Perker. 'I'll look in, in the evening, at all events.'

'I shall expect you at five,' said Wardle. 'Now, Joe!' And Joe having been at length awakened, the two friends departed in Mr. Wardle's carriage, which in common humanity had a dickey behind for the fat boy, who, if there had been a footboard instead, would have rolled off and killed himself in his very first nap.

Driving to the George and Vulture, they found that Arabella and her maid had sent for a hackney-coach immediately on the receipt of a short note from Emily announcing her arrival in town, and had proceeded straight to the Adelphi. As Wardle had business to transact in the city, they sent the carriage and the fat boy to his hotel, with the information that he and Mr. Pickwick would return together to dinner at five o'clock.

Charged with this message, the fat boy returned, slumbering as peaceably in his dickey, over the stones, as if it had been a down bed on watch springs. By some extraordinary miracle he awoke of his own accord, when the coach stopped, and giving himself a good shake to stir up his faculties, went upstairs to execute his commission.

Now, whether the shake had jumbled the fat boy's faculties together, instead of arranging them in proper order, or had roused such a quantity of new ideas within him as to render him oblivious of ordinary forms and ceremonies, or (which is also possible) had proved unsuccessful in preventing his falling asleep as he ascended the stairs, it is an undoubted fact that he walked into the sitting-room without previously knocking at the door; and so beheld a gentleman with his arms clasping his young mistress's waist, sitting very lovingly by her side on a sofa, while Arabella and her pretty handmaid feigned to be absorbed in looking out of a window at the other end of the room. At the sight of this phenomenon, the fat boy uttered an interjection, the ladies a scream, and the gentleman an oath, almost simultaneously.

'Wretched creature, what do you want here?' said the gentleman, who it is needless to say was Mr. Snodgrass.

To this the fat boy, considerably terrified, briefly responded, 'Missis.'

'What do you want me for,' inquired Emily, turning her head aside, 'you stupid creature?'

'Master and Mr. Pickwick is a-going to dine here at five,' replied the fat boy.

'Leave the room!' said Mr. Snodgrass, glaring upon the bewildered youth.

'No, no, no,' added Emily hastily. 'Bella, dear, advise me.'

Upon this, Emily and Mr. Snodgrass, and Arabella and Mary, crowded into a corner, and conversed earnestly in whispers for some minutes, during which the fat boy dozed.

'Joe,' said Arabella, at length, looking round with a most bewitching smile, 'how do you do, Joe?'

'Joe,' said Emily, 'you're a very good boy; I won't forget you, Joe.'

'Joe,' said Mr. Snodgrass, advancing to the astonished youth, and seizing his hand, 'I didn't know you before. There's five shillings for you, Joe!"

'I'll owe you five, Joe,' said Arabella, 'for old acquaintance sake, you know;' and another most captivating smile was bestowed upon the corpulent intruder.

The fat boy's perception being slow, he looked rather puzzled at first to account for this sudden prepossession in his favour, and stared about him in a very alarming manner. At length his broad face began to show symptoms of a grin of proportionately broad dimensions; and then, thrusting half-a-crown into each of his pockets, and a hand and wrist after it, he burst into a horse laugh: being for the first and only time in his existence.

'He understands us, I see,' said Arabella. 'He had better have something to eat, immediately,' remarked Emily.

The fat boy almost laughed again when he heard this suggestion. Mary, after a little more whispering, tripped forth from the group and said—

'I am going to dine with you to-day, sir, if you have no objection.'

'This way,' said the fat boy eagerly. 'There is such a jolly meat-pie!'

With these words, the fat boy led the way downstairs; his pretty companion captivating all the waiters and angering all the chambermaids as she followed him to the eating-room.

There was the meat-pie of which the youth had spoken so feelingly, and there were, moreover, a steak, and a dish of potatoes, and a pot of porter.

'Sit down,' said the fat boy. 'Oh, my eye, how prime! I am SO hungry.'

Having apostrophised his eye, in a species of rapture, five or six times, the youth took the head of the little table, and Mary seated herself at the bottom.

'Will you have some of this?' said the fat boy, plunging into the pie up to the very ferules of the knife and fork.

'A little, if you please,' replied Mary.

The fat boy assisted Mary to a little, and himself to a great deal, and was just going to begin eating when he suddenly laid down his knife and fork, leaned forward in his chair, and letting his hands, with the knife and fork in them, fall on his knees, said, very slowly—

'I say! How nice you look!'

This was said in an admiring manner, and was, so far, gratifying; but still there was enough of the cannibal in the young gentleman's eyes to render the compliment a double one.

'Dear me, Joseph,' said Mary, affecting to blush, 'what do you mean?'

The fat boy, gradually recovering his former position, replied with a heavy sigh, and, remaining thoughtful for a few moments, drank a long draught of the porter. Having achieved this feat, he sighed again, and applied himself assiduously to the pie.

'What a nice young lady Miss Emily is!' said Mary, after a long silence.

The fat boy had by this time finished the pie. He fixed his eyes on Mary, and replied—'I knows a nicerer.'

'Indeed!' said Mary.

'Yes, indeed!' replied the fat boy, with unwonted vivacity.

'What's her name?' inquired Mary.

'What's yours?'

'Mary.'

'So's hers,' said the fat boy. 'You're her.' The boy grinned to add point to the compliment, and put his eyes into something between a squint and a cast, which there is reason to believe he intended for an ogle.

'You mustn't talk to me in that way,' said Mary; 'you don't mean it.'

'Don't I, though?' replied the fat boy. 'I say?'

'Well?'

'Are you going to come here regular?'

'No,' rejoined Mary, shaking her head, 'I'm going away again to-night. Why?'

'Oh,' said the fat boy, in a tone of strong feeling; 'how we should have enjoyed ourselves at meals, if you had been!'

'I might come here sometimes, perhaps, to see you,' said Mary, plaiting the table-cloth in assumed coyness, 'if you would do me a favour.'

The fat boy looked from the pie-dish to the steak, as if he thought a favour must be in a manner connected with something to eat; and then took out one of the half-crowns and glanced at it nervously.

'Don't you understand me?' said Mary, looking slily in his fat face.

Again he looked at the half-crown, and said faintly, 'No.'

'The ladies want you not to say anything to the old gentleman about the young gentleman having been upstairs; and I want you too.'

'Is that all?' said the fat boy, evidently very much relieved, as he pocketed the half-crown again. 'Of course I ain't a-going to.'

'You see,' said Mary, 'Mr. Snodgrass is very fond of Miss Emily, and Miss Emily's very fond of him, and if you were to tell about it, the old gentleman would carry you all away miles into the country, where you'd see nobody.'

'No, no, I won't tell,' said the fat boy stoutly.

'That's a dear,' said Mary. 'Now it's time I went upstairs, and got my lady ready for dinner.'

'Don't go yet,' urged the fat boy.

'I must,' replied Mary. 'Good-bye, for the present.'

The fat boy, with elephantine playfulness, stretched out his arms to ravish a kiss; but as it required no great agility to elude him, his fair enslaver had vanished before he closed them again; upon which the apathetic youth ate a pound or so of steak with a sentimental countenance, and fell fast asleep.

There was so much to say upstairs, and there were so many plans to concert for elopement and matrimony in the event of old Wardle continuing to be cruel, that it wanted only half an hour of dinner when Mr. Snodgrass took his final adieu. The ladies ran to Emily's bedroom to dress, and the lover, taking up his hat, walked out of the room. He had scarcely got outside the door, when he heard Wardle's voice talking loudly, and looking over the banisters beheld him, followed by some other gentlemen, coming straight upstairs. Knowing nothing of the house, Mr. Snodgrass in his confusion stepped hastily back into the room he had just quitted, and passing thence into an inner apartment (Mr. Wardle's bedchamber), closed the door softly, just as the persons he had caught a glimpse of entered the sitting-room. These were Mr. Wardle, Mr. Pickwick, Mr. Nathaniel Winkle, and Mr. Benjamin Allen, whom he had no difficulty in recognising by their voices.

'Very lucky I had the presence of mind to avoid them,' thought Mr. Snodgrass with a smile, and walking on tiptoe to another door near the bedside; 'this opens into the same passage, and I can walk quietly and comfortably away.'

There was only one obstacle to his walking quietly and comfortably away, which was that the door was locked and the key gone.

'Let us have some of your best wine to-day, waiter,' said old Wardle, rubbing his hands.

'You shall have some of the very best, sir,' replied the waiter.

'Let the ladies know we have come in.'

'Yes, Sir.'

Devoutly and ardently did Mr. Snodgrass wish that the ladies could know he had come in. He ventured once to whisper, 'Waiter!' through the keyhole, but the probability of the wrong waiter coming to his relief, flashed upon his mind, together with a sense of the strong resemblance between his own situation and that in which another gentleman had been recently found in a neighbouring hotel (an account of whose misfortunes had appeared under the head of 'Police' in that morning's paper), he sat himself on a portmanteau, and trembled violently.

'We won't wait a minute for Perker,' said Wardle, looking at his watch; 'he is always exact. He will be here, in time, if he means to come; and if he does not, it's of no use waiting. Ha! Arabella!'

'My sister!' exclaimed Mr. Benjamin Allen, folding her in a most romantic embrace.

'Oh, Ben, dear, how you do smell of tobacco,' said Arabella, rather overcome by this mark of affection.

'Do I?' said Mr. Benjamin Allen. 'Do I, Bella? Well, perhaps I do.'

Perhaps he did, having just left a pleasant little smoking-party of twelve medical students, in a small back parlour with a large fire.

'But I am delighted to see you,' said Mr. Ben Allen. 'Bless you, Bella!'

'There,' said Arabella, bending forward to kiss her brother; 'don't take hold of me again, Ben, dear, because you tumble me so.'

At this point of the reconciliation, Mr. Ben Allen allowed his feelings and the cigars and porter to overcome him, and looked round upon the beholders with damp spectacles.

'Is nothing to be said to me?' cried Wardle, with open arms.

'A great deal,' whispered Arabella, as she received the old gentleman's hearty caress and congratulation. 'You are a hard-hearted, unfeeling, cruel monster.'

'You are a little rebel,' replied Wardle, in the same tone, 'and I am afraid I shall be obliged to forbid you the house. People like you, who get married in spite of everybody, ought not to be let loose on society. But come!' added the old gentleman aloud, 'here's the dinner; you shall sit by me. Joe; why, damn the boy, he's awake!'

To the great distress of his master, the fat boy was indeed in a state of remarkable vigilance, his eyes being wide open, and looking as if they intended to remain so. There was an alacrity in his manner, too, which was equally unaccountable; every time his eyes met those of Emily or Arabella, he smirked and grinned; once, Wardle could have sworn, he saw him wink.

This alteration in the fat boy's demeanour originated in his increased sense of his own importance, and the dignity he acquired from having been taken into the confidence of the young ladies; and the smirks, and grins, and winks were so many condescending assurances that they might depend upon his fidelity. As these tokens were rather calculated to awaken suspicion than allay it, and were somewhat embarrassing besides, they were occasionally answered by a frown or shake of the head from Arabella, which the fat boy, considering as hints to be on his guard, expressed his perfect understanding of, by smirking, grinning, and winking, with redoubled assiduity.

'Joe,' said Mr. Wardle, after an unsuccessful search in all his pockets, 'is my snuff-box on the sofa?'

'No, sir,' replied the fat boy.

'Oh, I recollect; I left it on my dressing-table this morning,' said Wardle. 'Run into the next room and fetch it.'

The fat boy went into the next room; and, having been absent about a minute, returned with the snuff-box, and the palest face that ever a fat boy wore.

'What's the matter with the boy?' exclaimed Wardle.

'Nothen's the matter with me,' replied Joe nervously.

'Have you been seeing any spirits?' inquired the old gentleman.

'Or taking any?' added Ben Allen.

'I think you're right,' whispered Wardle across the table. 'He is intoxicated, I'm sure.'

Ben Allen replied that he thought he was; and, as that gentleman had seen a vast deal of the disease in question, Wardle was confirmed in an impression which had been hovering about his mind for half an hour, and at once arrived at the conclusion that the fat boy was drunk.

'Just keep your eye upon him for a few minutes,' murmured Wardle. 'We shall soon find out whether he is or not.'

The unfortunate youth had only interchanged a dozen words with Mr. Snodgrass, that gentleman having implored him to make a private appeal to some friend to release him, and then pushed him out with the snuff-box, lest his prolonged absence should lead to a discovery. He ruminated a little with a most disturbed expression of face, and left the room in search of Mary.

But Mary had gone home after dressing her mistress, and the fat boy came back again more disturbed than before.

Wardle and Mr. Ben Allen exchanged glances. 'Joe!' said Wardle.

'Yes, sir.'

'What did you go away for?'

The fat boy looked hopelessly in the face of everybody at table, and stammered out that he didn't know.

'Oh,' said Wardle, 'you don't know, eh? Take this cheese to Mr. Pickwick.'

Now, Mr. Pickwick being in the very best health and spirits, had been making himself perfectly delightful all dinner-time, and was at this moment engaged in an energetic conversation with Emily and Mr. Winkle; bowing his head, courteously, in the emphasis of his discourse, gently waving his left hand to lend force to his observations, and all glowing with placid smiles. He took a piece of cheese from the plate, and was on the point of turning round to renew the conversation, when the fat boy, stooping so as to bring his head on a level with that of Mr. Pickwick, pointed with his thumb over his shoulder, and made the most horrible and hideous face that was ever seen out of a Christmas pantomime.

'Dear me!' said Mr. Pickwick, starting, 'what a very—Eh?' He stopped, for the fat boy had drawn himself up, and was, or pretended to be, fast asleep.

'What's the matter?' inquired Wardle.

'This is such an extremely singular lad!' replied Mr. Pickwick, looking uneasily at the boy. 'It seems an odd thing to say, but upon my word I am afraid that, at times, he is a little deranged.'

'Oh! Mr. Pickwick, pray don't say so,' cried Emily and Arabella, both at once.

'I am not certain, of course,' said Mr. Pickwick, amidst profound silence and looks of general dismay; 'but his manner to me this moment really was very alarming. Oh!' ejaculated Mr. Pickwick, suddenly jumping up with a short scream. 'I beg your pardon, ladies, but at that moment he ran some sharp instrument into my leg. Really, he is not safe.'

'He's drunk,' roared old Wardle passionately. 'Ring the bell! Call the waiters! He's drunk.'

'I ain't,' said the fat boy, falling on his knees as his master seized him by the collar. 'I ain't drunk.'

'Then you're mad; that's worse. Call the waiters,' said the old gentleman.

'I ain't mad; I'm sensible,' rejoined the fat boy, beginning to cry.

'Then, what the devil did you run sharp instruments into Mr. Pickwick's legs for?' inquired Wardle angrily.

'He wouldn't look at me,' replied the boy. 'I wanted to speak to him.'

'What did you want to say?' asked half a dozen voices at once.

The fat boy gasped, looked at the bedroom door, gasped again, and wiped two tears away with the knuckle of each of his forefingers.

'What did you want to say?' demanded Wardle, shaking him.

'Stop!' said Mr. Pickwick; 'allow me. What did you wish to communicate to me, my poor boy?'

'I want to whisper to you,' replied the fat boy.

'You want to bite his ear off, I suppose,' said Wardle. 'Don't come near him; he's vicious; ring the bell, and let him be taken downstairs.'

Just as Mr. Winkle caught the bell-rope in his hand, it was arrested by a general expression of astonishment; the captive lover, his face burning with confusion, suddenly walked in from the bedroom, and made a comprehensive bow to the company.

'Hollo!' cried Wardle, releasing the fat boy's collar, and staggering back. 'What's this?'

'I have been concealed in the next room, sir, since you returned,' explained Mr. Snodgrass.

'Emily, my girl,' said Wardle reproachfully, 'I detest meanness and deceit; this is unjustifiable and indelicate in the highest degree. I don't deserve this at your hands, Emily, indeed!'

'Dear papa,' said Emily, 'Arabella knows—everybody here knows—Joe knows—that I was no party to this concealment. Augustus, for Heaven's sake, explain it!'

Mr. Snodgrass, who had only waited for a hearing, at once recounted how he had been placed in his then distressing predicament; how the fear of giving rise to domestic dissensions had alone prompted him to avoid Mr. Wardle on his entrance; how he merely meant to depart by another door, but, finding it locked, had been compelled to stay against his will. It was a painful situation to be placed in; but he now regretted it the less, inasmuch as it afforded him an opportunity of acknowledging, before their mutual friends, that he loved Mr. Wardle's daughter deeply and sincerely; that he was proud to avow that the feeling was mutual; and that if thousands of miles were placed between them, or oceans rolled their waters, he could never for an instant forget those happy days, when first—et cetera, et cetera.

Having delivered himself to this effect, Mr. Snodgrass bowed again, looked into the crown of his hat, and stepped towards the door.

'Stop!' shouted Wardle. 'Why, in the name of all that's—'

'Inflammable,' mildly suggested Mr. Pickwick, who thought something worse was coming.

'Well—that's inflammable,' said Wardle, adopting the substitute; 'couldn't you say all this to me in the first instance?'

'Or confide in me?' added Mr. Pickwick.

'Dear, dear,' said Arabella, taking up the defence, 'what is the use of asking all that now, especially when you know you had set your covetous old heart on a richer son-in-law, and are so wild and fierce besides, that everybody is afraid of you, except me? Shake hands with him, and order him some dinner, for goodness gracious' sake, for he looks half starved; and pray have your wine up at once, for you'll not be tolerable until you have taken two bottles at least.'

The worthy old gentleman pulled Arabella's ear, kissed her without the smallest scruple, kissed his daughter also with great affection, and shook Mr. Snodgrass warmly by the hand.

'She is right on one point at all events,' said the old gentleman cheerfully. 'Ring for the wine!'

The wine came, and Perker came upstairs at the same moment. Mr. Snodgrass had dinner at a side table, and, when he had despatched it, drew his chair next Emily, without the smallest opposition on the old gentleman's part.

The evening was excellent. Little Mr. Perker came out wonderfully, told various comic stories, and sang a serious song which was almost as funny as the anecdotes. Arabella was very charming, Mr. Wardle very jovial, Mr. Pickwick very harmonious, Mr. Ben Allen very uproarious, the lovers very silent, Mr. Winkle very talkative, and all of them very happy.

CHAPTER LV. Mr. SOLOMON PELL, ASSISTED BY A SELECT COMMITTEE OF

COACHMEN, ARRANGES THE AFFAIRS OF THE ELDER Mr. WELLER

'Samivel,' said Mr. Weller, accosting his son on the morning after the funeral, 'I've found it, Sammy. I thought it wos there.'

'Thought wot wos there?' inquired Sam.

'Your mother-in-law's vill, Sammy,' replied Mr. Weller. 'In wirtue o' vich, them arrangements is to be made as I told you on, last night, respectin' the funs.'

'Wot, didn't she tell you were it wos?' inquired Sam.

'Not a bit on it, Sammy,' replied Mr. Weller. 'We wos a adjestin' our little differences, and I wos a-cheerin' her spirits and bearin' her up, so that I forgot to ask anythin' about it. I don't know as I should ha' done it, indeed, if I had remembered it,' added Mr. Weller, 'for it's a rum sort o' thing, Sammy, to go a-hankerin' arter anybody's property, ven you're assistin' 'em in illness. It's like helping an outside passenger up, ven he's been pitched off a coach, and puttin' your hand in his pocket, vile you ask him, vith a sigh, how he finds his-self, Sammy.'

With this figurative illustration of his meaning, Mr. Weller unclasped his pocket-book, and drew forth a dirty sheet of letter-paper, on which were inscribed various characters crowded together in remarkable confusion.

'This here is the dockyment, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller. 'I found it in the little black tea-pot, on the top shelf o' the bar closet. She used to keep bank-notes there, 'fore she vos married, Samivel. I've seen her take the lid off, to pay a bill, many and many a time. Poor creetur, she might ha' filled all the tea-pots in the house vith vills, and not have inconwenienced herself neither, for she took wery little of anythin' in that vay lately, 'cept on the temperance nights, ven they just laid a foundation o' tea to put the spirits atop on!'

'What does it say?' inquired Sam.

'Jist vot I told you, my boy,' rejoined his parent. 'Two hundred pound vurth o' reduced counsels to my son-in-law, Samivel, and all the rest o' my property, of ev'ry kind and description votsoever, to my husband, Mr. Tony Veller, who I appint as my sole eggzekiter.'

'That's all, is it?' said Sam.

'That's all,' replied Mr. Weller. 'And I s'pose as it's all right and satisfactory to you and me as is the only parties interested, ve may as vell put this bit o' paper into the fire.'

'Wot are you a-doin' on, you lunatic?' said Sam, snatching the paper away, as his parent, in all innocence, stirred the fire preparatory to suiting the action to the word. 'You're a nice eggzekiter, you are.'

'Vy not?' inquired Mr. Weller, looking sternly round, with the poker in his hand.

'Vy not?' exclaimed Sam. "Cos it must be proved, and probated, and swore to, and all manner o' formalities.'

'You don't mean that?' said Mr. Weller, laying down the poker.

Sam buttoned the will carefully in a side pocket; intimating by a look, meanwhile, that he did mean it, and very seriously too.

'Then I'll tell you wot it is,' said Mr. Weller, after a short meditation, 'this is a case for that 'ere confidential pal o' the Chancellorship's. Pell must look into this, Sammy. He's the man for a difficult question at law. Ve'll have this here brought afore the Solvent Court, directly, Samivel.'

'I never did see such a addle-headed old creetur!' exclaimed Sam irritably; 'Old Baileys, and Solvent Courts, and alleybis, and ev'ry species o' gammon alvays a-runnin' through his brain. You'd better get your out o' door clothes on, and come to town about this bisness, than stand a-preachin' there about wot you don't understand nothin' on.'

'Wery good, Sammy,' replied Mr. Weller, 'I'm quite agreeable to anythin' as vill hexpedite business, Sammy. But mind this here, my boy, nobody but Pell—nobody but Pell as a legal adwiser.'

'I don't want anybody else,' replied Sam. 'Now, are you a-comin'?'

'Vait a minit, Sammy,' replied Mr. Weller, who, having tied his shawl with the aid of a small glass that hung in the window, was now, by dint of the most wonderful exertions, struggling into his upper garments. 'Vait a minit' Sammy; ven you grow as old as your father, you von't get into your veskit quite as easy as you do now, my boy.'

'If I couldn't get into it easier than that, I'm blessed if I'd vear vun at all,' rejoined his son.

'You think so now,' said Mr. Weller, with the gravity of age, 'but you'll find that as you get vider, you'll get viser. Vidth and visdom, Sammy, alvays grows together.'

As Mr. Weller delivered this infallible maxim—the result of many years' personal experience and observation—he contrived, by a dexterous twist of his body, to get the bottom button of his coat to perform its office. Having paused a few seconds to recover breath, he brushed his hat with his elbow, and declared himself ready.

'As four heads is better than two, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, as they drove along the London Road in the chaise-cart, 'and as all this here property is a wery great temptation to a legal gen'l'm'n, ve'll take a couple o' friends o' mine vith us, as'll be wery soon down upon him if he comes anythin' irreg'lar; two o' them as saw you to the Fleet that day. They're the wery best judges,' added Mr. Weller, in a half-whisper—'the wery best judges of a horse, you ever know'd.'

'And of a lawyer too?' inquired Sam.

'The man as can form a ackerate judgment of a animal, can form a ackerate judgment of anythin',' replied his father, so dogmatically, that Sam did not attempt to controvert the position.

In pursuance of this notable resolution, the services of the mottled-faced gentleman and of two other very fat coachmen—selected by Mr. Weller, probably, with a view to their width and consequent wisdom—were put into requisition; and this assistance having been secured, the party proceeded to the public-house in Portugal Street, whence a messenger was despatched to the Insolvent Court over the way, requiring Mr. Solomon Pell's immediate attendance.

The messenger fortunately found Mr. Solomon Pell in court, regaling himself, business being rather slack, with a cold collation of an Abernethy biscuit and a saveloy. The message was no sooner whispered in his ear than he thrust them in his pocket among various professional documents, and hurried over the way with such alacrity that he reached the parlour before the messenger had even emancipated himself from the court.

'Gentlemen,' said Mr. Pell, touching his hat, 'my service to you all. I don't say it to flatter you, gentlemen, but there are not five other men in the world, that I'd have come out of that court for, to-day.'

'So busy, eh?' said Sam.

'Busy!' replied Pell; 'I'm completely sewn up, as my friend the late Lord Chancellor many a time used to say to me, gentlemen, when he came out from hearing appeals in the House of Lords. Poor fellow; he was very susceptible to fatigue; he used to feel those appeals uncommonly. I actually thought more than once that he'd have sunk under 'em; I did, indeed.'

Here Mr. Pell shook his head and paused; on which, the elder Mr. Weller, nudging his neighbour, as begging him to mark the attorney's high connections, asked whether the duties in question produced any permanent ill effects on the constitution of his noble friend.

'I don't think he ever quite recovered them,' replied Pell; 'in fact I'm sure he never did. "Pell," he used to say to me many a time, "how the blazes you can stand the head-work you do, is a mystery to me."—"Well," I used to answer, "I hardly know how I do it, upon my life."—"Pell," he'd add, sighing, and looking at me with a little envy—friendly envy, you know, gentlemen, mere friendly envy; I never minded it—"Pell, you're a wonder; a wonder." Ah! you'd have liked him very much if you had known him, gentlemen. Bring me three-penn'orth of rum, my dear.'

Addressing this latter remark to the waitress, in a tone of subdued grief, Mr. Pell sighed, looked at his shoes and the ceiling; and, the rum having by that time arrived, drank it up.

'However,' said Pell, drawing a chair to the table, 'a professional man has no right to think of his private friendships when his legal assistance is wanted. By the bye, gentlemen, since I saw you here before, we have had to weep over a very melancholy occurrence.'

Mr. Pell drew out a pocket-handkerchief, when he came to the word weep, but he made no further use of it than to wipe away a slight tinge of rum which hung upon his upper lip.

'I saw it in the ADVERTISER, Mr. Weller,' continued Pell. 'Bless my soul, not more than fifty-two! Dear me—only think.'

These indications of a musing spirit were addressed to the mottled-faced man, whose eyes Mr. Pell had accidentally caught; on which, the mottled-faced man, whose apprehension of matters in general was of a foggy nature, moved uneasily in his seat, and opined that, indeed, so far as that went, there was no saying how things was brought about; which observation, involving one of those subtle propositions which it is difficult to encounter in argument, was controverted by nobody.

'I have heard it remarked that she was a very fine woman, Mr. Weller,' said Pell, in a sympathising manner.

'Yes, sir, she wos,' replied the elder Mr. Weller, not much relishing this mode of discussing the subject, and yet thinking that the attorney, from his long intimacy with the late Lord Chancellor, must know best on all matters of polite breeding. 'She wos a wery fine 'ooman, sir, ven I first know'd her. She wos a widder, sir, at that time.'

'Now, it's curious,' said Pell, looking round with a sorrowful smile; 'Mrs. Pell was a widow.'

'That's very extraordinary,' said the mottled-faced man.

'Well, it is a curious coincidence,' said Pell.

'Not at all,' gruffly remarked the elder Mr. Weller. 'More widders is married than single wimin.'

'Very good, very good,' said Pell, 'you're quite right, Mr. Weller. Mrs. Pell was a very elegant and accomplished woman; her manners were the theme of universal admiration in our neighbourhood. I was proud to see that woman dance; there was something so firm and dignified, and yet natural, in her motion. Her cutting, gentlemen, was simplicity itself. Ah! well, well! Excuse my asking the question, Mr. Samuel,' continued the attorney in a lower voice, 'was your mother-in-law tall?'

'Not wery,' replied Sam.

'Mrs. Pell was a tall figure,' said Pell, 'a splendid woman, with a noble shape, and a nose, gentlemen, formed to command and be majestic. She was very much attached to me—very much—highly connected, too. Her mother's brother, gentlemen, failed for eight hundred pounds, as a law stationer.'

'Vell,' said Mr. Weller, who had grown rather restless during this discussion, 'vith regard to bis'ness.'

The word was music to Pell's ears. He had been revolving in his mind whether any business was to be transacted, or whether he had been merely invited to partake of a glass of brandy-and-water, or a bowl of punch, or any similar professional compliment, and now the doubt was set at rest without his appearing at all eager for its solution. His eyes glistened as he laid his hat on the table, and said—

'What is the business upon which—um? Either of these gentlemen wish to go through the court? We require an arrest; a friendly arrest will do, you know; we are all friends here, I suppose?'

'Give me the dockyment, Sammy,' said Mr. Weller, taking the will from his son, who appeared to enjoy the interview amazingly. 'Wot we rekvire, sir, is a probe o' this here.'

'Probate, my dear Sir, probate,' said Pell.

'Well, sir,' replied Mr. Weller sharply, 'probe and probe it, is wery much the same; if you don't understand wot I mean, sir, I des-say I can find them as does.'

'No offence, I hope, Mr. Weller,' said Pell meekly. 'You are the executor, I see,' he added, casting his eyes over the paper.

'I am, sir,' replied Mr. Weller.

'These other gentlemen, I presume, are legatees, are they?' inquired Pell, with a congratulatory smile.

'Sammy is a leg-at-ease,' replied Mr. Weller; 'these other gen'l'm'n is friends o' mine, just come to see fair; a kind of umpires.'

'Oh!' said Pell, 'very good. I have no objections, I'm sure. I shall want a matter of five pound of you before I begin, ha! ha! ha!'

It being decided by the committee that the five pound might be advanced, Mr. Weller produced that sum; after which, a long consultation about nothing particular took place, in the course whereof Mr. Pell demonstrated to the perfect satisfaction of the gentlemen who saw fair, that unless the management of the business had been intrusted to him, it must all have gone wrong, for reasons not clearly made out, but no doubt sufficient. This important point being despatched, Mr. Pell refreshed himself with three chops, and liquids both malt and spirituous, at the expense of the estate; and then they all went away to Doctors' Commons.

The next day there was another visit to Doctors' Commons, and a great to-do with an attesting hostler, who, being inebriated, declined swearing anything but profane oaths, to the great scandal of a proctor and surrogate. Next week, there were more visits to Doctors' Commons, and there was a visit to the Legacy Duty Office besides, and there were treaties entered into, for the disposal of the lease and business, and ratifications of the same, and inventories to be made out, and lunches to be taken, and dinners to be eaten, and so many profitable things to be done, and such a mass of papers accumulated that Mr. Solomon Pell, and the boy, and the blue bag to boot, all got so stout that scarcely anybody would have known them for the same man, boy, and bag, that had loitered about Portugal Street, a few days before.

At length all these weighty matters being arranged, a day was fixed for selling out and transferring the stock, and of waiting with that view upon Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, stock-broker, of somewhere near the bank, who had been recommended by Mr. Solomon Pell for the purpose.

It was a kind of festive occasion, and the parties were attired accordingly. Mr. Weller's tops were newly cleaned, and his dress was arranged with peculiar care; the mottled-faced gentleman wore at his button-hole a full-sized dahlia with several leaves; and the coats of his two friends were adorned with nosegays of laurel and other evergreens. All three were habited in strict holiday costume; that is to say, they were wrapped up to the chins, and wore as many clothes as possible, which is, and has been, a stage-coachman's idea of full dress ever since stage-coaches were invented.

Mr. Pell was waiting at the usual place of meeting at the appointed time; even he wore a pair of gloves and a clean shirt, much frayed at the collar and wristbands by frequent washings.

'A quarter to two,' said Pell, looking at the parlour clock. 'If we are with Mr. Flasher at a quarter past, we shall just hit the best time.'

'What should you say to a drop o' beer, gen'l'm'n?' suggested the mottled-faced man. 'And a little bit o' cold beef,' said the second coachman.

'Or a oyster,' added the third, who was a hoarse gentleman, supported by very round legs.

'Hear, hear!' said Pell; 'to congratulate Mr. Weller, on his coming into possession of his property, eh? Ha! ha!'

'I'm quite agreeable, gen'l'm'n,' answered Mr. Weller. 'Sammy, pull the bell.'

Sammy complied; and the porter, cold beef, and oysters being promptly produced, the lunch was done ample justice to. Where everybody took so active a part, it is almost invidious to make a distinction; but if one individual evinced greater powers than another, it was the coachman with the hoarse voice, who took an imperial pint of vinegar with his oysters, without betraying the least emotion.

'Mr. Pell, Sir,' said the elder Mr. Weller, stirring a glass of brandy-and-water, of which one was placed before every gentleman when the oyster shells were removed—'Mr. Pell, Sir, it wos my intention to have proposed the funs on this occasion, but Samivel has vispered to me—'

Here Mr. Samuel Weller, who had silently eaten his oysters with tranquil smiles, cried, 'Hear!' in a very loud voice. —'Has vispered to me,' resumed his father, 'that it vould be better to dewote the liquor to vishin' you success and prosperity, and thankin' you for the manner in which you've brought this here business through. Here's your health, sir.'

'Hold hard there,' interposed the mottled-faced gentleman, with sudden energy; 'your eyes on me, gen'l'm'n!'

Saying this, the mottled-faced gentleman rose, as did the other gentlemen. The mottled-faced gentleman reviewed the company, and slowly lifted his hand, upon which every man (including him of the mottled countenance) drew a long breath, and lifted his tumbler to his lips. In one instant, the mottled-faced gentleman depressed his hand again, and every glass was set down empty. It is impossible to describe the thrilling effect produced by this striking ceremony. At once dignified, solemn, and impressive, it combined every element of grandeur.

'Well, gentlemen,' said Mr. Pell, 'all I can say is, that such marks of confidence must be very gratifying to a professional man. I don't wish to say anything that might appear egotistical, gentlemen, but I'm very glad, for your own sakes, that you came to me; that's all. If you had gone to any low member of the profession, it's my firm conviction, and I assure you of it as a fact, that you would have found yourselves in Queer Street before this. I could have wished my noble friend had been alive to have seen my management of this case. I don't say it out of pride, but I think—However, gentlemen, I won't trouble you with that. I'm generally to be found here, gentlemen, but if I'm not here, or over the way, that's my address. You'll find my terms very cheap and reasonable, and no man attends more to his clients than I do, and I hope I know a little of my profession besides. If you have any opportunity of recommending me to any of your friends, gentlemen, I shall be very much obliged to you, and so will they too, when they come to know me. Your healths, gentlemen.'

With this expression of his feelings, Mr. Solomon Pell laid three small written cards before Mr. Weller's friends, and, looking at the clock again, feared it was time to be walking. Upon this hint Mr. Weller settled the bill, and, issuing forth, the executor, legatee, attorney, and umpires, directed their steps towards the city.

The office of Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, of the Stock Exchange, was in a first floor up a court behind the Bank of England; the house of Wilkins

Flasher, Esquire, was at Brixton, Surrey; the horse and stanhope of Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, were at an adjacent livery stable; the groom of Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, was on his way to the West End to deliver some game; the clerk of Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, had gone to his dinner; and so Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, himself, cried, 'Come in,' when Mr. Pell and his companions knocked at the counting-house door.

'Good-morning, Sir,' said Pell, bowing obsequiously. 'We want to make a little transfer, if you please.'

'Oh, just come in, will you?' said Mr. Flasher. 'Sit down a minute; I'll attend to you directly.'

'Thank you, Sir,' said Pell, 'there's no hurry. Take a chair, Mr. Weller.'

Mr. Weller took a chair, and Sam took a box, and the umpires took what they could get, and looked at the almanac and one or two papers which were wafered against the wall, with as much open-eyed reverence as if they had been the finest efforts of the old masters.

'Well, I'll bet you half a dozen of claret on it; come!' said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, resuming the conversation to which Mr. Pell's entrance had caused a momentary interruption.

This was addressed to a very smart young gentleman who wore his hat on his right whisker, and was lounging over the desk, killing flies with a ruler. Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, was balancing himself on two legs of an office stool, spearing a wafer-box with a penknife, which he dropped every now and then with great dexterity into the very centre of a small red wafer that was stuck outside. Both gentlemen had very open waistcoats and very rolling collars, and very small boots, and very big rings, and very little watches, and very large guard-chains, and symmetrical inexpressibles, and scented pocket-handkerchiefs.

'I never bet half a dozen!' said the other gentleman. 'I'll take a dozen.'

'Done, Simmery, done!' said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire.

'P. P., mind,' observed the other.

'Of course,' replied Wilkins Flasher, Esquire. Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, entered it in a little book, with a gold pencil-case, and the other gentleman entered it also, in another little book with another gold pencil-case.

'I see there's a notice up this morning about Boffer,' observed Mr. Simmery. 'Poor devil, he's expelled the house!'

'I'll bet you ten guineas to five, he cuts his throat,' said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire.

'Done,' replied Mr. Simmery.

'Stop! I bar,' said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, thoughtfully. 'Perhaps he may hang himself.'

'Very good,' rejoined Mr. Simmery, pulling out the gold pencil-case again. 'I've no objection to take you that way. Say, makes away with himself.'

'Kills himself, in fact,' said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire.

'Just so,' replied Mr. Simmery, putting it down. '"Flasher—ten guineas to five, Boffer kills himself." Within what time shall we say?'

'A fortnight?' suggested Wilkins Flasher, Esquire.

'Con-found it, no,' rejoined Mr. Simmery, stopping for an instant to smash a fly with the ruler. 'Say a week.'

'Split the difference,' said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire. 'Make it ten days.'

'Well; ten days,'rejoined Mr. Simmery.

So it was entered down on the little books that Boffer was to kill himself within ten days, or Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, was to hand over to Frank Simmery, Esquire, the sum of ten guineas; and that if Boffer did kill himself within that time, Frank Simmery, Esquire, would pay to Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, five guineas, instead.

'I'm very sorry he has failed,' said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire. 'Capital dinners he gave.'

'Fine port he had too,' remarked Mr. Simmery. 'We are going to send our butler to the sale to-morrow, to pick up some of that sixty-four.'

'The devil you are!' said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire. 'My man's going too. Five guineas my man outbids your man.'

'Done.'

Another entry was made in the little books, with the gold pencil-cases; and Mr. Simmery, having by this time killed all the flies and taken all the bets, strolled away to the Stock Exchange to see what was going forward.

Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, now condescended to receive Mr. Solomon Pell's instructions, and having filled up some printed forms, requested the party to follow him to the bank, which they did: Mr. Weller and his three friends staring at all they beheld in unbounded astonishment, and Sam encountering everything with a coolness which nothing could disturb.

Crossing a courtyard which was all noise and bustle, and passing a couple of porters who seemed dressed to match the red fire engine which was wheeled away into a corner, they passed into an office where their business was to be transacted, and where Pell and Mr. Flasher left them standing for a few moments, while they went upstairs into the Will Office.

'Wot place is this here?' whispered the mottled-faced gentleman to the elder Mr. Weller.

'Counsel's Office,' replied the executor in a whisper.

'Wot are them gen'l'men a-settin' behind the counters?' asked the hoarse coachman.

'Reduced counsels, I s'pose,' replied Mr. Weller. 'Ain't they the reduced counsels, Samivel?'

'Wy, you don't suppose the reduced counsels is alive, do you?' inquired Sam, with some disdain.

'How should I know?' retorted Mr. Weller; 'I thought they looked wery like it. Wot are they, then?'

'Clerks,' replied Sam.

'Wot are they all a-eatin' ham sangwidges for?' inquired his father.

''Cos it's in their dooty, I suppose,' replied Sam, 'it's a part o' the system; they're alvays a-doin' it here, all day long!' Mr. Weller and his friends had scarcely had a moment to reflect upon this singular regulation as connected with the monetary system of the country, when they were rejoined by Pell and Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, who led them to a part of the counter above which was a round blackboard with a large 'W.' on it.

'Wot's that for, Sir?' inquired Mr. Weller, directing Pell's attention to the target in question.

'The first letter of the name of the deceased,' replied Pell.

'I say,' said Mr. Weller, turning round to the umpires, there's somethin' wrong here. We's our letter—this won't do.'

The referees at once gave it as their decided opinion that the business could not be legally proceeded with, under the letter W., and in all probability it would have stood over for one day at least, had it not been for the prompt, though, at first sight, undutiful behaviour of Sam, who, seizing his father by the skirt of the coat, dragged him to the counter, and pinned him there, until he had affixed his signature to a couple of instruments; which, from Mr. Weller's habit of printing, was a work of so much labour and time, that the officiating clerk peeled and ate three Ribstone pippins while it was performing.

As the elder Mr. Weller insisted on selling out his portion forthwith, they proceeded from the bank to the gate of the Stock Exchange, to which

Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, after a short absence, returned with a cheque on Smith, Payne, & Smith, for five hundred and thirty pounds; that being the money to which Mr. Weller, at the market price of the day, was entitled, in consideration of the balance of the second Mrs. Weller's funded savings. Sam's two hundred pounds stood transferred to his name, and Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, having been paid his commission, dropped the money carelessly into his coat pocket, and lounged back to his office.

Mr. Weller was at first obstinately determined on cashing the cheque in nothing but sovereigns; but it being represented by the umpires that by so doing he must incur the expense of a small sack to carry them home in, he consented to receive the amount in five-pound notes.

'My son,' said Mr. Weller, as they came out of the banking-house—'my son and me has a wery partickler engagement this arternoon, and I should like to have this here bis'ness settled out of hand, so let's jest go straight avay someveres, vere ve can hordit the accounts.'

A quiet room was soon found, and the accounts were produced and audited. Mr. Pell's bill was taxed by Sam, and some charges were disallowed by the umpires; but, notwithstanding Mr. Pell's declaration, accompanied with many solemn asseverations that they were really too hard upon him, it was by very many degrees the best professional job he had ever had, and one on which he boarded, lodged, and washed, for six months afterwards.

The umpires having partaken of a dram, shook hands and departed, as they had to drive out of town that night. Mr. Solomon Pell, finding that nothing more was going forward, either in the eating or drinking way, took a friendly leave, and Sam and his father were left alone.

'There!' said Mr. Weller, thrusting his pocket-book in his side pocket. 'Vith the bills for the lease, and that, there's eleven hundred and eighty pound here. Now, Samivel, my boy, turn the horses' heads to the George and Wulter!'

CHAPTER LVI. AN IMPORTANT CONFERENCE TAKES PLACE BETWEEN Mr. PICKWICK

AND SAMUEL WELLER, AT WHICH HIS PARENT ASSISTS—AN OLD GENTLEMAN IN A SNUFF-COLOURED SUIT ARRIVES UNEXPECTEDLY

Mr. Pickwick was sitting alone, musing over many things, and thinking among other considerations how he could best provide for the young couple whose present unsettled condition was matter of constant regret and anxiety to him, when Mary stepped lightly into the room, and, advancing to the table, said, rather hastily—

'Oh, if you please, Sir, Samuel is downstairs, and he says may his father see you?'

'Surely,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'Thank you, Sir,' said Mary, tripping towards the door again.

'Sam has not been here long, has he?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Oh, no, Sir,' replied Mary eagerly. 'He has only just come home. He is not going to ask you for any more leave, Sir, he says.'

Mary might have been conscious that she had communicated this last intelligence with more warmth than seemed actually necessary, or she might have observed the good-humoured smile with which Mr. Pickwick regarded her, when she had finished speaking. She certainly held down her head, and examined the corner of a very smart little apron, with more closeness than there appeared any absolute occasion for.

'Tell them they can come up at once, by all means,' said Mr. Pickwick.

Mary, apparently much relieved, hurried away with her message.

Mr. Pickwick took two or three turns up and down the room; and, rubbing his chin with his left hand as he did so, appeared lost in thought.

'Well, well,' said Mr. Pickwick, at length in a kind but somewhat melancholy tone, 'it is the best way in which I could reward him for his attachment and fidelity; let it be so, in Heaven's name. It is the fate of a lonely old man, that those about him should form new and different attachments and leave him. I have no right to expect that it should be otherwise with me. No, no,' added Mr. Pickwick more cheerfully, 'it would be selfish and ungrateful. I ought to be happy to have an opportunity of providing for him so well. I am. Of course I am.'

Mr. Pickwick had been so absorbed in these reflections, that a knock at the door was three or four times repeated before he heard it. Hastily seating himself, and calling up his accustomed pleasant looks, he gave the required permission, and Sam Weller entered, followed by his father.

'Glad to see you back again, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'How do you do, Mr. Weller?'

'Wery hearty, thank'ee, sir,' replied the widower; 'hope I see you well, sir.'

'Quite, I thank you,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'I wanted to have a little bit o' conwersation with you, sir,' said Mr. Weller, 'if you could spare me five minits or so, sir.'

'Certainly,' replied Mr. Pickwick. 'Sam, give your father a chair.'

'Thank'ee, Samivel, I've got a cheer here,' said Mr. Weller, bringing one forward as he spoke; 'uncommon fine day it's been, sir,' added the old gentleman, laying his hat on the floor as he sat himself down.

'Remarkably so, indeed,' replied Mr. Pickwick. 'Very seasonable.'

'Seasonablest veather I ever see, sir,' rejoined Mr. Weller. Here, the old gentleman was seized with a violent fit of coughing, which, being terminated, he nodded his head and winked and made several supplicatory and threatening gestures to his son, all of which Sam Weller steadily abstained from seeing.

Mr. Pickwick, perceiving that there was some embarrassment on the old gentleman's part, affected to be engaged in cutting the leaves of a book that lay beside him, and waited patiently until Mr. Weller should arrive at the object of his visit.

'I never see sich a aggrawatin' boy as you are, Samivel,' said Mr. Weller, looking indignantly at his son; 'never in all my born days.'

'What is he doing, Mr. Weller?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'He von't begin, sir,' rejoined Mr. Weller; 'he knows I ain't ekal to expressin' myself ven there's anythin' partickler to be done, and yet he'll stand and see me a-settin' here taking up your walable time, and makin' a reg'lar spectacle o' myself, rayther than help me out vith a syllable. It ain't filial conduct, Samivel,' said Mr. Weller, wiping his forehead; 'wery far from it.'

'You said you'd speak,' replied Sam; 'how should I know you wos done up at the wery beginnin'?'

'You might ha' seen I warn't able to start,' rejoined his father; 'I'm on the wrong side of the road, and backin' into the palin's, and all manner of unpleasantness, and yet you von't put out a hand to help me. I'm ashamed on you, Samivel.'

'The fact is, Sir,' said Sam, with a slight bow, 'the gov'nor's been a-drawin' his money.'

'Wery good, Samivel, wery good,' said Mr. Weller, nodding his head with a satisfied air, 'I didn't mean to speak harsh to you, Sammy. Wery good. That's the vay to begin. Come to the pint at once. Wery good indeed, Samivel.'

Mr. Weller nodded his head an extraordinary number of times, in the excess of his gratification, and waited in a listening attitude for Sam to resume his statement.

'You may sit down, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, apprehending that the interview was likely to prove rather longer than he had expected.

Sam bowed again and sat down; his father looking round, he continued—

'The gov'nor, sir, has drawn out five hundred and thirty pound.'

'Reduced counsels,' interposed Mr. Weller, senior, in an undertone.

'It don't much matter vether it's reduced counsels, or wot not,' said Sam; 'five hundred and thirty pounds is the sum, ain't it?'

'All right, Samivel,' replied Mr. Weller.

'To vich sum, he has added for the house and bisness—'

'Lease, good-vill, stock, and fixters,' interposed Mr. Weller.

'As much as makes it,' continued Sam, 'altogether, eleven hundred and eighty pound.'

'Indeed!' said Mr. Pickwick. 'I am delighted to hear it. I congratulate you, Mr. Weller, on having done so well.'

'Vait a minit, Sir,' said Mr. Weller, raising his hand in a deprecatory manner. 'Get on, Samivel.'

'This here money,' said Sam, with a little hesitation, 'he's anxious to put someveres, vere he knows it'll be safe, and I'm wery anxious too, for if he keeps it, he'll go a-lendin' it to somebody, or inwestin' property in horses, or droppin' his pocket-book down an airy, or makin' a Egyptian mummy of his-self in some vay or another.'

'Wery good, Samivel,' observed Mr. Weller, in as complacent a manner as if Sam had been passing the highest eulogiums on his prudence and foresight. 'Wery good.'

'For vich reasons,' continued Sam, plucking nervously at the brim of his hat—'for vich reasons, he's drawn it out to-day, and come here vith me to say, leastvays to offer, or in other vords—'

'To say this here,' said the elder Mr. Weller impatiently, 'that it ain't o' no use to me. I'm a-goin' to vork a coach reg'lar, and ha'n't got noveres to keep it in, unless I vos to pay the guard for takin' care on it, or to put it in vun o' the coach pockets, vich 'ud be a temptation to the insides. If you'll take care on it for me, sir, I shall be wery much obliged to you. P'raps,' said Mr. Weller, walking up to Mr. Pickwick and whispering in his ear—'p'raps it'll go a little vay towards the expenses o' that 'ere conwiction. All I say is, just you keep it till I ask you for it again.' With these words, Mr. Weller placed the pocket-book in Mr. Pickwick's hands, caught up his hat, and ran out of the room with a celerity scarcely to be expected from so corpulent a subject.

'Stop him, Sam!' exclaimed Mr. Pickwick earnestly. 'Overtake him; bring him back instantly! Mr. Weller—here—come back!'

Sam saw that his master's injunctions were not to be disobeyed; and, catching his father by the arm as he was descending the stairs, dragged him back by main force.

'My good friend,' said Mr. Pickwick, taking the old man by the hand, 'your honest confidence overpowers me.'

'I don't see no occasion for nothin' o' the kind, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller obstinately.

'I assure you, my good friend, I have more money than I can ever need; far more than a man at my age can ever live to spend,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'No man knows how much he can spend, till he tries,' observed Mr. Weller.

'Perhaps not,' replied Mr. Pickwick; 'but as I have no intention of trying any such experiments, I am not likely to come to want. I must beg you to take this back, Mr. Weller.' 'Wery well,' said Mr. Weller, with a discontented look. 'Mark my vords, Sammy, I'll do somethin' desperate vith this here property; somethin' desperate!'

'You'd better not,' replied Sam.

Mr. Weller reflected for a short time, and then, buttoning up his coat with great determination, said—

'I'll keep a pike.'

'Wot!' exclaimed Sam.

'A pike!' rejoined Mr. Weller, through his set teeth; 'I'll keep a pike. Say good-bye to your father, Samivel. I dewote the remainder of my days to a pike.'

This threat was such an awful one, and Mr. Weller, besides appearing fully resolved to carry it into execution, seemed so deeply mortified by Mr. Pickwick's refusal, that that gentleman, after a short reflection, said—

'Well, well, Mr. Weller, I will keep your money. I can do more good with it, perhaps, than you can.'

'Just the wery thing, to be sure,' said Mr. Weller, brightening up; 'o' course you can, sir.'

'Say no more about it,' said Mr. Pickwick, locking the pocket-book in his desk; 'I am heartily obliged to you, my good friend. Now sit down again. I want to ask your advice.'

The internal laughter occasioned by the triumphant success of his visit, which had convulsed not only Mr. Weller's face, but his arms, legs, and body also, during the locking up of the pocket-book, suddenly gave place to the most dignified gravity as he heard these words.

'Wait outside a few minutes, Sam, will you?' said Mr. Pickwick.

Sam immediately withdrew.

Mr. Weller looked uncommonly wise and very much amazed, when Mr. Pickwick opened the discourse by saying—

'You are not an advocate for matrimony, I think, Mr. Weller?'

Mr. Weller shook his head. He was wholly unable to speak; vague thoughts of some wicked widow having been successful in her designs on Mr. Pickwick, choked his utterance.

'Did you happen to see a young girl downstairs when you came in just now with your son?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Yes. I see a young gal,' replied Mr. Weller shortly.

'What did you think of her, now? Candidly, Mr. Weller, what did you think of her?'

'I thought she wos wery plump, and vell made,' said Mr. Weller, with a critical air.

'So she is,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'so she is. What did you think of her manners, from what you saw of her?'

'Wery pleasant,' rejoined Mr. Weller. 'Wery pleasant and comformable.'

The precise meaning which Mr. Weller attached to this last-mentioned adjective, did not appear; but, as it was evident from the tone in which he used it that it was a favourable expression, Mr. Pickwick was as well satisfied as if he had been thoroughly enlightened on the subject.

'I take a great interest in her, Mr. Weller,' said Mr. Pickwick.

Mr. Weller coughed.

'I mean an interest in her doing well,' resumed Mr. Pickwick; 'a desire that she may be comfortable and prosperous. You understand?'

'Wery clearly,' replied Mr. Weller, who understood nothing yet.

'That young person,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'is attached to your son.'

'To Samivel Veller!' exclaimed the parent.

'Yes,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'It's nat'ral,' said Mr. Weller, after some consideration, 'nat'ral, but raything alarmin'. Sammy must be careful.'

'How do you mean?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

'Wery careful that he don't say nothin' to her,' responded Mr. Weller. 'Wery careful that he ain't led avay, in a innocent moment, to say anythin' as may lead to a conwiction for breach. You're never safe vith 'em, Mr. Pickwick, ven they vunce has designs on you; there's no knowin' vere to have 'em; and vile you're a-considering of it, they have you. I wos married fust, that vay myself, Sir, and Sammy wos the consekens o' the manoover.'

'You give me no great encouragement to conclude what I have to say,' observed Mr. Pickwick, 'but I had better do so at once. This young person is not only attached to your son, Mr. Weller, but your son is attached to her.'

'Vell,' said Mr. Weller, 'this here's a pretty sort o' thing to come to a father's ears, this is!'

'I have observed them on several occasions,' said Mr. Pickwick, making no comment on Mr. Weller's last remark; 'and entertain no doubt at all about it. Supposing I were desirous of establishing them comfortably as man and wife in some little business or situation, where they might hope to obtain a decent living, what should you think of it, Mr. Weller?'

At first, Mr. Weller received with wry faces a proposition involving the marriage of anybody in whom he took an interest; but, as Mr. Pickwick argued the point with him, and laid great stress on the fact that Mary was not a widow, he gradually became more tractable. Mr. Pickwick had great influence over him, and he had been much struck with Mary's appearance; having, in fact, bestowed several very unfatherly winks upon her, already.

At length he said that it was not for him to oppose Mr. Pickwick's inclination, and that he would be very happy to yield to his advice; upon which, Mr. Pickwick joyfully took him at his word, and called Sam back into the room.

'Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, clearing his throat, 'your father and I have been having some conversation about you.'

'About you, Samivel,' said Mr. Weller, in a patronising and impressive voice.

'I am not so blind, Sam, as not to have seen, a long time since, that you entertain something more than a friendly feeling towards Mrs. Winkle's maid,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'You hear this, Samivel?' said Mr. Weller, in the same judicial form of speech as before.

'I hope, Sir,' said Sam, addressing his master, 'I hope there's no harm in a young man takin' notice of a young 'ooman as is undeniably good-looking and well-conducted.'

'Certainly not,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Not by no means,' acquiesced Mr. Weller, affably but magisterially.

'So far from thinking there is anything wrong in conduct so natural,' resumed Mr. Pickwick, 'it is my wish to assist and promote your wishes in this respect. With this view, I have had a little conversation with your father; and finding that he is of my opinion—'

'The lady not bein' a widder,' interposed Mr. Weller in explanation.

'The lady not being a widow,' said Mr. Pickwick, smiling. 'I wish to free you from the restraint which your present position imposes upon you, and to mark my sense of your fidelity and many excellent qualities, by enabling you to marry this girl at once, and to earn an independent livelihood for yourself and family. I shall be proud, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, whose voice had faltered a little hitherto, but now resumed its customary tone, 'proud and happy to make your future prospects in life my grateful and peculiar care.'

There was a profound silence for a short time, and then Sam said, in a low, husky sort of voice, but firmly withal—

'I'm very much obliged to you for your goodness, Sir, as is only like yourself; but it can't be done.'

'Can't be done!' ejaculated Mr. Pickwick in astonishment.

'Samivel!' said Mr. Weller, with dignity.

'I say it can't be done,' repeated Sam in a louder key. 'Wot's to become of you, Sir?'

'My good fellow,' replied Mr. Pickwick, 'the recent changes among my friends will alter my mode of life in future, entirely; besides, I am growing older, and want repose and quiet. My rambles, Sam, are over.'

'How do I know that 'ere, sir?' argued Sam. 'You think so now! S'pose you wos to change your mind, vich is not unlikely, for you've the spirit o' five-and-twenty in you still, what 'ud become on you vithout me? It can't be done, Sir, it can't be done.'

'Wery good, Samivel, there's a good deal in that,' said Mr. Weller encouragingly.

'I speak after long deliberation, Sam, and with the certainty that I shall keep my word,' said Mr. Pickwick, shaking his head. 'New scenes have closed upon me; my rambles are at an end.'

'Wery good,' rejoined Sam. 'Then, that's the wery best reason wy you should alvays have somebody by you as understands you, to keep you up and make you comfortable. If you vant a more polished sort o' feller, vell and good, have him; but vages or no vages, notice or no notice, board or no board, lodgin' or no lodgin', Sam Veller, as you took from the old inn in the Borough, sticks by you, come what may; and let ev'rythin' and ev'rybody do their wery fiercest, nothin' shall ever perwent it!'

At the close of this declaration, which Sam made with great emotion, the elder Mr. Weller rose from his chair, and, forgetting all considerations of time, place, or propriety, waved his hat above his head, and gave three vehement cheers.

'My good fellow,' said Mr. Pickwick, when Mr. Weller had sat down again, rather abashed at his own enthusiasm, 'you are bound to consider the young woman also.'

'I do consider the young 'ooman, Sir,' said Sam. 'I have considered the young 'ooman. I've spoke to her. I've told her how I'm sitivated; she's ready to vait till I'm ready, and I believe she vill. If she don't, she's not the young 'ooman I take her for, and I give her up vith readiness. You've know'd me afore, Sir. My mind's made up, and nothin' can ever alter it.'

Who could combat this resolution? Not Mr. Pickwick. He derived, at that moment, more pride and luxury of feeling from the disinterested attachment of his humble friends, than ten thousand protestations from the greatest men living could have awakened in his heart.

While this conversation was passing in Mr. Pickwick's room, a little old gentleman in a suit of snuff-coloured clothes, followed by a porter carrying a small portmanteau, presented himself below; and, after securing a bed for the night, inquired of the waiter whether one Mrs. Winkle was staying there, to which question the waiter of course responded in the affirmative.

'Is she alone?' inquired the old gentleman.

'I believe she is, Sir,' replied the waiter; 'I can call her own maid, Sir, if you—'

'No, I don't want her,' said the old gentleman quickly. 'Show me to her room without announcing me.'

'Eh, Sir?' said the waiter.

'Are you deaf?' inquired the little old gentleman.

'No, sir.'

'Then listen, if you please. Can you hear me now?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'That's well. Show me to Mrs. Winkle's room, without announcing me.'

As the little old gentleman uttered this command, he slipped five shillings into the waiter's hand, and looked steadily at him.

'Really, sir,' said the waiter, 'I don't know, sir, whether—'

'Ah! you'll do it, I see,' said the little old gentleman. 'You had better do it at once. It will save time.'

There was something so very cool and collected in the gentleman's manner, that the waiter put the five shillings in his pocket, and led him upstairs without another word.

'This is the room, is it?' said the gentleman. 'You may go.' The waiter complied, wondering much who the gentleman could be, and what he wanted; the little old gentleman, waiting till he was out of sight, tapped at the door.

'Come in,' said Arabella.

'Um, a pretty voice, at any rate,' murmured the little old gentleman; 'but that's nothing.' As he said this, he opened the door and walked in. Arabella, who was sitting at work, rose on beholding a stranger—a little confused—but by no means ungracefully so.

'Pray don't rise, ma'am,' said the unknown, walking in, and closing the door after him. 'Mrs. Winkle, I believe?'

Arabella inclined her head.

'Mrs. Nathaniel Winkle, who married the son of the old man at Birmingham?' said the stranger, eyeing Arabella with visible curiosity.

Again Arabella inclined her head, and looked uneasily round, as if uncertain whether to call for assistance.

'I surprise you, I see, ma'am,' said the old gentleman.

'Rather, I confess,' replied Arabella, wondering more and more.

'I'll take a chair, if you'll allow me, ma'am,' said the stranger.

He took one; and drawing a spectacle-case from his pocket, leisurely pulled out a pair of spectacles, which he adjusted on his nose.

'You don't know me, ma'am?' he said, looking so intently at Arabella that she began to feel alarmed.

'No, sir,' she replied timidly.

'No,' said the gentleman, nursing his left leg; 'I don't know how you should. You know my name, though, ma'am.'

'Do I?' said Arabella, trembling, though she scarcely knew why. 'May I ask what it is?'

'Presently, ma'am, presently,' said the stranger, not having yet removed his eyes from her countenance. 'You have been recently married, ma'am?'

'I have,' replied Arabella, in a scarcely audible tone, laying aside her work, and becoming greatly agitated as a thought, that had occurred to her before, struck more forcibly upon her mind.

'Without having represented to your husband the propriety of first consulting his father, on whom he is dependent, I think?' said the stranger.

Arabella applied her handkerchief to her eyes.

'Without an endeavour, even, to ascertain, by some indirect appeal, what were the old man's sentiments on a point in which he would naturally feel much interested?' said the stranger.

'I cannot deny it, Sir,' said Arabella.

'And without having sufficient property of your own to afford your husband any permanent assistance in exchange for the worldly advantages which you knew he would have gained if he had married agreeably to his father's wishes?' said the old gentleman. 'This is what boys and girls call disinterested affection, till they have boys and girls of their own, and then they see it in a rougher and very different light!'

Arabella's tears flowed fast, as she pleaded in extenuation that she was young and inexperienced; that her attachment had alone induced her to take the step to which she had resorted; and that she had been deprived of the counsel and guidance of her parents almost from infancy.

'It was wrong,' said the old gentleman in a milder tone, 'very wrong. It was romantic, unbusinesslike, foolish.'

'It was my fault; all my fault, Sir,' replied poor Arabella, weeping.

'Nonsense,' said the old gentleman; 'it was not your fault that he fell in love with you, I suppose? Yes it was, though,' said the old gentleman, looking rather slily at Arabella. 'It was your fault. He couldn't help it.'

This little compliment, or the little gentleman's odd way of paying it, or his altered manner—so much kinder than it was, at first—or all three together, forced a smile from Arabella in the midst of her tears.

'Where's your husband?' inquired the old gentleman, abruptly; stopping a smile which was just coming over his own face.

'I expect him every instant, sir,' said Arabella. 'I persuaded him to take a walk this morning. He is very low and wretched at not having heard from his father.'

'Low, is he?' said the old gentlemen. 'Serve him right!'

'He feels it on my account, I am afraid,' said Arabella; 'and indeed, Sir, I feel it deeply on his. I have been the sole means of bringing him to his present condition.'

'Don't mind it on his account, my dear,' said the old gentleman. 'It serves him right. I am glad of it—actually glad of it, as far as he is concerned.'

The words were scarcely out of the old gentleman's lips, when footsteps were heard ascending the stairs, which he and Arabella seemed both to recognise at the same moment. The little gentleman turned pale; and, making a strong effort to appear composed, stood up, as Mr. Winkle entered the room.

'Father!' cried Mr. Winkle, recoiling in amazement.

'Yes, sir,' replied the little old gentleman. 'Well, Sir, what have you got to say to me?'

Mr. Winkle remained silent.

'You are ashamed of yourself, I hope, Sir?' said the old gentleman.

Still Mr. Winkle said nothing.

'Are you ashamed of yourself, Sir, or are you not?' inquired the old gentleman.

'No, Sir,' replied Mr. Winkle, drawing Arabella's arm through his. 'I am not ashamed of myself, or of my wife either.'

'Upon my word!' cried the old gentleman ironically.

'I am very sorry to have done anything which has lessened your affection for me, Sir,' said Mr. Winkle; 'but I will say, at the same time, that I have no reason to be ashamed of having this lady for my wife, nor you of having her for a daughter.'

'Give me your hand, Nat,' said the old gentleman, in an altered voice. 'Kiss me, my love. You are a very charming little daughter-in-law after all!'

In a few minutes' time Mr. Winkle went in search of Mr. Pickwick, and returning with that gentleman, presented him to his father, whereupon they shook hands for five minutes incessantly.

'Mr. Pickwick, I thank you most heartily for all your kindness to my son,' said old Mr. Winkle, in a bluff, straightforward way. 'I am a hasty fellow, and when I saw you last, I was vexed and taken by surprise. I have judged for myself now, and am more than satisfied. Shall I make any more apologies, Mr. Pickwick?'

'Not one,' replied that gentleman. 'You have done the only thing wanting to complete my happiness.'

Hereupon there was another shaking of hands for five minutes longer, accompanied by a great number of complimentary speeches, which, besides being complimentary, had the additional and very novel recommendation of being sincere.

Sam had dutifully seen his father to the Belle Sauvage, when, on returning, he encountered the fat boy in the court, who had been charged with the delivery of a note from Emily Wardle.

'I say,' said Joe, who was unusually loquacious, 'what a pretty girl Mary is, isn't she? I am SO fond of her, I am!'

Mr. Weller made no verbal remark in reply; but eyeing the fat boy for a moment, quite transfixed at his presumption, led him by the collar to the corner, and dismissed him with a harmless but ceremonious kick. After which, he walked home, whistling.

CHAPTER LVII. IN WHICH THE PICKWICK CLUB IS FINALLY DISSOLVED, AND

EVERYTHING CONCLUDED TO THE SATISFACTION OF EVERYBODY

For a whole week after the happy arrival of Mr. Winkle from Birmingham, Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller were from home all day long, only returning just in time for dinner, and then wearing an air of mystery and importance quite foreign to their natures. It was evident that very grave and eventful proceedings were on foot; but various surmises were afloat, respecting their precise character. Some (among whom was Mr. Tupman) were disposed to think that Mr. Pickwick contemplated a matrimonial alliance; but this idea the ladies most strenuously repudiated. Others rather inclined to the belief that he had projected some distant tour, and was at present occupied in effecting the preliminary arrangements; but this again was stoutly denied by Sam himself, who had unequivocally stated, when cross-examined by Mary, that no new journeys were to be undertaken. At length, when the brains of the whole party had been racked for six long days, by unavailing speculation, it was unanimously resolved that Mr. Pickwick should be called upon to explain his conduct, and to state distinctly why he had thus absented himself from the society of his admiring friends.

With this view, Mr. Wardle invited the full circle to dinner at the Adelphi; and the decanters having been thrice sent round, opened the business.

'We are all anxious to know,' said the old gentleman, 'what we have done to offend you, and to induce you to desert us and devote yourself to these solitary walks.'

'Are you?' said Mr. Pickwick. 'It is singular enough that I had intended to volunteer a full explanation this very day; so, if you will give me another glass of wine, I will satisfy your curiosity.'

The decanters passed from hand to hand with unwonted briskness, and Mr. Pickwick, looking round on the faces of his friends with a cheerful smile, proceeded—'All the changes that have taken place among us,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'I mean the marriage that HAS taken place, and the marriage that WILL take place, with the changes they involve, rendered it necessary for me to think, soberly and at once, upon my future plans. I determined on retiring to some quiet, pretty neighbourhood in the vicinity of London; I saw a house which exactly suited my fancy; I have taken it and furnished it. It is fully prepared for my reception, and I intend entering upon it at once, trusting that I may yet live to spend many quiet years in peaceful retirement, cheered through life by the society of my friends, and followed in death by their affectionate remembrance.'

Here Mr. Pickwick paused, and a low murmur ran round the table.

'The house I have taken,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'is at Dulwich. It has a large garden, and is situated in one of the most pleasant spots near London. It has been fitted up with every attention to substantial comfort; perhaps to a little elegance besides; but of that you shall judge for yourselves. Sam accompanies me there. I have engaged, on Perker's representation, a housekeeper—a very old one—and such other servants as she thinks I shall require. I propose to consecrate this little retreat, by having a ceremony in which I take a great interest, performed there. I wish, if my friend Wardle entertains no objection, that his daughter should be married from my new house, on the day I take possession of it. The happiness of young people,' said Mr. Pickwick, a little moved, 'has ever been the chief pleasure of my life. It will warm my heart to witness the happiness of those friends who are dearest to me, beneath my own roof.'

Mr. Pickwick paused again: Emily and Arabella sobbed audibly.

'I have communicated, both personally and by letter, with the club,' resumed Mr. Pickwick, 'acquainting them with my intention. During our long absence, it has suffered much from internal dissentions; and the withdrawal of my name, coupled with this and other circumstances, has occasioned its dissolution. The Pickwick Club exists no longer.

'I shall never regret,' said Mr. Pickwick in a low voice, 'I shall never regret having devoted the greater part of two years to mixing with different varieties and shades of human character, frivolous as my pursuit of novelty may have appeared to many. Nearly the whole of my previous life having been devoted to business and the pursuit of wealth, numerous scenes of which I had no previous conception have dawned upon me—I hope to the enlargement of my mind, and the improvement of my understanding. If I have done but little good, I trust I have done less harm, and that none of my adventures will be other than a source of amusing and pleasant recollection to me in the decline of life. God bless you all!'

With these words, Mr. Pickwick filled and drained a bumper with a trembling hand; and his eyes moistened as his friends rose with one accord, and pledged him from their hearts.

There were few preparatory arrangements to be made for the marriage of Mr. Snodgrass. As he had neither father nor mother, and had been in his minority a ward of Mr. Pickwick's, that gentleman was perfectly well acquainted with his possessions and prospects. His account of both was quite satisfactory to Wardle—as almost any other account would have been, for the good old gentleman was overflowing with Hilarity and kindness—and a handsome portion having been bestowed upon Emily, the marriage was fixed to take place on the fourth day from that time—the suddenness of which preparations reduced three dressmakers and a tailor to the extreme verge of insanity.

Getting post-horses to the carriage, old Wardle started off, next day, to bring his mother back to town. Communicating his intelligence to the old lady with characteristic impetuosity, she instantly fainted away; but being promptly revived, ordered the brocaded silk gown to be packed up forthwith, and proceeded to relate some circumstances of a similar nature attending the marriage of the eldest daughter of Lady Tollimglower, deceased, which occupied three hours in the recital, and were not half finished at last.

Mrs. Trundle had to be informed of all the mighty preparations that were making in London; and, being in a delicate state of health, was informed thereof through Mr. Trundle, lest the news should be too much for her; but it was not too much for her, inasmuch as she at once wrote off to Muggleton, to order a new cap and a black satin gown, and moreover avowed her determination of being present at the ceremony. Hereupon, Mr. Trundle called in the doctor, and the doctor said Mrs. Trundle ought to know best how she felt herself, to which Mrs. Trundle replied that she felt herself quite equal to it, and that she had made up her mind to go; upon which the doctor, who was a wise and discreet doctor, and knew what was good for himself, as well as for other people, said that perhaps if Mrs. Trundle stopped at home, she might hurt herself more by fretting, than by going, so perhaps she had better go. And she did go; the doctor with great attention sending in half a dozen of medicine, to be drunk upon the road.

In addition to these points of distraction, Wardle was intrusted with two small letters to two small young ladies who were to act as bridesmaids; upon the receipt of which, the two young ladies were driven to despair by having no 'things' ready for so important an occasion, and no time to make them in—a circumstance which appeared to afford the two worthy papas of the two small young ladies rather a feeling of satisfaction than otherwise. However, old frocks were trimmed, and new bonnets made, and the young ladies looked as well as could possibly have been expected of them. And as they cried at the subsequent ceremony in the proper places, and trembled at the right times, they acquitted themselves to the admiration of all beholders. How the two poor relations ever reached London—whether they walked, or got behind coaches, or procured lifts in wagons, or carried each other by turns—is uncertain; but there they were, before Wardle; and the very first people that knocked at the door of Mr. Pickwick's house, on the bridal morning, were the two poor relations, all smiles and shirt collar.

They were welcomed heartily though, for riches or poverty had no influence on Mr. Pickwick; the new servants were all alacrity and readiness; Sam was in a most unrivalled state of high spirits and excitement; Mary was glowing with beauty and smart ribands.

The bridegroom, who had been staying at the house for two or three days previous, sallied forth gallantly to Dulwich Church to meet the bride, attended by Mr. Pickwick, Ben Allen, Bob Sawyer, and Mr. Tupman; with Sam Weller outside, having at his button-hole a white favour, the gift of his lady-love, and clad in a new and gorgeous suit of livery invented for the occasion. They were met by the Wardles, and the Winkles, and the bride and bridesmaids, and the Trundles; and the ceremony having been performed, the coaches rattled back to Mr. Pickwick's to breakfast, where little Mr. Perker already awaited them.

Here, all the light clouds of the more solemn part of the proceedings passed away; every face shone forth joyously; and nothing was to be heard but congratulations and commendations. Everything was so beautiful! The lawn in front, the garden behind, the miniature conservatory, the dining-room, the drawing-room, the bedrooms, the smoking-room, and, above all, the study, with its pictures and easy-chairs, and odd cabinets, and queer tables, and books out of number, with a large cheerful window opening upon a pleasant lawn and commanding a pretty landscape, dotted here and there with little houses almost hidden by the trees; and then the curtains, and the carpets, and the chairs, and the sofas! Everything was so beautiful, so compact, so neat, and in such exquisite taste, said everybody, that there really was no deciding what to admire most.

And in the midst of all this, stood Mr. Pickwick, his countenance lighted up with smiles, which the heart of no man, woman, or child, could resist: himself the happiest of the group: shaking hands, over and over again, with the same people, and when his own hands were not so employed, rubbing them with pleasure: turning round in a different direction at every fresh expression of gratification or curiosity, and inspiring everybody with his looks of gladness and delight.

Breakfast is announced. Mr. Pickwick leads the old lady (who has been very eloquent on the subject of Lady Tollimglower) to the top of a long table; Wardle takes the bottom; the friends arrange themselves on either side; Sam takes his station behind his master's chair; the laughter and talking cease; Mr. Pickwick, having said grace, pauses for an instant and looks round him. As he does so, the tears roll down his cheeks, in the fullness of his joy.

Let us leave our old friend in one of those moments of unmixed happiness, of which, if we seek them, there are ever some, to cheer our transitory existence here. There are dark shadows on the earth, but its lights are stronger in the contrast. Some men, like bats or owls, have better eyes for the darkness than for the light. We, who have no such optical powers, are better pleased to take our last parting look at the visionary companions of many solitary hours, when the brief sunshine of the world is blazing full upon them.

It is the fate of most men who mingle with the world, and attain even the prime of life, to make many real friends, and lose them in the course of nature. It is the fate of all authors or chroniclers to create imaginary friends, and lose them in the course of art. Nor is this the full extent of their misfortunes; for they are required to furnish an account of them besides.

In compliance with this custom—unquestionably a bad one—we subjoin a few biographical words, in relation to the party at Mr. Pickwick's assembled.

Mr. and Mrs. Winkle, being fully received into favour by the old gentleman, were shortly afterwards installed in a newly-built house, not half a mile from Mr. Pickwick's. Mr. Winkle, being engaged in the city as agent or town correspondent of his father, exchanged his old costume for the ordinary dress of Englishmen, and presented all the external appearance of a civilised Christian ever afterwards.

Mr. and Mrs. Snodgrass settled at Dingley Dell, where they purchased and cultivated a small farm, more for occupation than profit. Mr. Snodgrass, being occasionally abstracted and melancholy, is to this day reputed a great poet among his friends and acquaintance, although we do not find that he has ever written anything to encourage the belief. There are many celebrated characters, literary, philosophical, and otherwise, who hold a high reputation on a similar tenure.

Mr. Tupman, when his friends married, and Mr. Pickwick settled, took lodgings at Richmond, where he has ever since resided. He walks constantly on the terrace during the summer months, with a youthful and jaunty air, which has rendered him the admiration of the numerous elderly ladies of single condition, who reside in the vicinity. He has never proposed again.

Mr. Bob Sawyer, having previously passed through the GAZETTE, passed over to Bengal, accompanied by Mr. Benjamin Allen; both gentlemen having received surgical appointments from the East India Company. They each had the yellow fever fourteen times, and then resolved to try a little abstinence; since which period, they have been doing well. Mrs. Bardell let lodgings to many conversable single gentlemen, with great profit, but never brought any more actions for breach of promise of marriage. Her attorneys, Messrs. Dodson & Fogg, continue in business, from which they realise a large income, and in which they are universally considered among the sharpest of the sharp.

Sam Weller kept his word, and remained unmarried, for two years. The old housekeeper dying at the end of that time, Mr. Pickwick promoted Mary to the situation, on condition of her marrying Mr. Weller at once, which she did without a murmur. From the circumstance of two sturdy little boys having been repeatedly seen at the gate of the back garden, there is reason to suppose that Sam has some family.

The elder Mr. Weller drove a coach for twelve months, but being afflicted with the gout, was compelled to retire. The contents of the pocket-book had been so well invested for him, however, by Mr. Pickwick, that he had a handsome independence to retire on, upon which he still lives at an excellent public-house near Shooter's Hill, where he is quite reverenced as an oracle, boasting very much of his intimacy with Mr. Pickwick, and retaining a most unconquerable aversion to widows.

Mr. Pickwick himself continued to reside in his new house, employing his leisure hours in arranging the memoranda which he afterwards presented to the secretary of the once famous club, or in hearing Sam Weller read aloud, with such remarks as suggested themselves to his mind, which never failed to afford Mr. Pickwick great amusement. He was much troubled at first, by the numerous applications made to him by Mr. Snodgrass, Mr. Winkle, and Mr. Trundle, to act as godfather to their offspring; but he has become used to it now, and officiates as a matter of course. He never had occasion to regret his bounty to Mr. Jingle; for both that person and Job Trotter became, in time, worthy members of society, although they have always steadily objected to return to the scenes of their old haunts and temptations. Mr. Pickwick is somewhat infirm now; but he retains all his former juvenility of spirit, and may still be frequently seen, contemplating the pictures in the Dulwich Gallery, or enjoying a walk about the pleasant neighbourhood on a fine day. He is known by all the poor people about, who never fail to take their hats off, as he passes, with great respect. The children idolise him, and so indeed does the whole neighbourhood. Every year he repairs to a large family merry-making at Mr. Wardle's; on this, as on all other occasions, he is invariably attended by the faithful Sam, between whom and his master there exists a steady and reciprocal attachment which nothing but death will terminate.

THE END OF
The Pickwick Papers

PICTURES FROM ITALY

THE READER’S PASSPORT

If the readers of this volume will be so kind as to take their credentials for the different places which are the subject of its author’s reminiscences, from the Author himself, perhaps they may visit them, in fancy, the more agreeably, and with a better understanding of what they are to expect.

Many books have been written upon Italy, affording many means of studying the history of that interesting country, and the innumerable associations entwined about it. I make but little reference to that stock of information; not at all regarding it as a necessary consequence of my having had recourse to the storehouse for my own benefit, that I should reproduce its easily accessible contents before the eyes of my readers.

Neither will there be found, in these pages, any grave examination into the government or misgovernment of any portion of the country. No visitor of that beautiful land can fail to have a strong conviction on the subject; but as I chose when residing there, a Foreigner, to abstain from the discussion of any such questions with any order of Italians, so I would rather not enter on the inquiry now. During my twelve months’ occupation of a house at Genoa, I never found that authorities constitutionally jealous were distrustful of me; and I should be sorry to give them occasion to regret their free courtesy, either to myself or any of my countrymen.

There is, probably, not a famous Picture or Statue in all Italy, but could be easily buried under a mountain of printed paper devoted to dissertations on it. I do not, therefore, though an earnest admirer of Painting and Sculpture, expatiate at any length on famous Pictures and Statues.

This Book is a series of faint reflections - mere shadows in the water - of places to which the imaginations of most people are attracted in a greater or less degree, on which mine had dwelt for years, and which have some interest for all. The greater part of the descriptions were written on the spot, and sent home, from time to time, in private letters. I do not mention the circumstance as an excuse for any defects they may present, for it would be none; but as a guarantee to the Reader that they were at least penned in the fulness of the subject, and with the liveliest impressions of novelty and freshness.

If they have ever a fanciful and idle air, perhaps the reader will suppose them written in the shade of a Sunny Day, in the midst of the objects of which they treat, and will like them none the worse for having such influences of the country upon them.

I hope I am not likely to be misunderstood by Professors of the Roman Catholic faith, on account of anything contained in these pages. I have done my best, in one of my former productions, to do justice to them; and I trust, in this, they will do justice to me. When I mention any exhibition that impressed me as absurd or disagreeable, I do not seek to connect it, or recognise it as necessarily connected with, any essentials of their creed. When I treat of the ceremonies of the Holy Week, I merely treat of their effect, and do not challenge the good and learned Dr. Wiseman’s interpretation of their meaning. When I hint a dislike of nunneries for young girls who abjure the world before they have ever proved or known it; or doubt the *ex officio* sanctity of all Priests and Friars; I do no more than many conscientious Catholics both abroad and at home.

I have likened these Pictures to shadows in the water, and would fain hope that I have, nowhere, stirred the water so roughly, as to mar the shadows. I could never desire to be on better terms with all my friends than now, when distant mountains rise, once more, in my path. For I need not hesitate to avow, that, bent on correcting a brief mistake I made, not long ago, in disturbing the old relations between myself and my readers, and departing for a moment from my old pursuits, I am about to resume them, joyfully, in Switzerland; where during another year of absence, I can at once work out the themes I have now in my mind, without interruption: and while I keep my English audience within speaking distance, extend my knowledge of a noble country, inexpressibly attractive to me. {1}

This book is made as accessible as possible, because it would be a great pleasure to me if I could hope, through its means, to compare impressions with some among the multitudes who will hereafter visit the scenes described with interest and delight.

And I have only now, in passport wise, to sketch my reader's portrait, which I hope may be thus supposititiously traced for either sex:

Complexion	Fair.
Eyes	Very cheerful.
Nose	Not supercilious.
Mouth	Smiling.
Visage	Beaming.
General Expression	Extremely agreeable.

CHAPTER I - GOING THROUGH FRANCE

On a fine Sunday morning in the Midsummer time and weather of eighteen hundred and forty-four, it was, my good friend, when - don't be alarmed; not when two travellers might have been observed slowly making their way over that picturesque and broken ground by which the first chapter of a Middle Aged novel is usually attained - but when an English travelling-carriage of considerable proportions, fresh from the shady halls of the Pantechnicon near Belgrave Square, London, was observed (by a very small French soldier; for I saw him look at it) to issue from the gate of the Hôtel Meurice in the Rue Rivoli at Paris.

I am no more bound to explain why the English family travelling by this carriage, inside and out, should be starting for Italy on a Sunday morning, of all good days in the week, than I am to assign a reason for all the little men in France being soldiers, and all the big men postilions; which is the invariable rule. But, they had some sort of reason for what they did, I have no doubt; and their reason for being there at all, was, as you know, that they were going to live in fair Genoa for a year; and that the head of the family purposed, in that space of time, to stroll about, wherever his restless humour carried him.

And it would have been small comfort to me to have explained to the population of Paris generally, that I was that Head and Chief; and not the radiant embodiment of good humour who sat beside me in the person of a French Courier - best of servants and most beaming of men! Truth to say, he looked a great deal more patriarchal than I, who, in the shadow of his portly presence, dwindled down to no account at all.

There was, of course, very little in the aspect of Paris - as we rattled near the dismal Morgue and over the Pont Neuf - to reproach us for our Sunday travelling. The wine-shops (every second house) were driving a roaring trade; awnings were spreading, and chairs and tables arranging, outside the cafés, preparatory to the eating of ices, and drinking of cool liquids, later in the day; shoe-blacks were busy on the bridges; shops were open; carts and waggons clattered to and fro; the narrow, up-hill, funnel-like streets across the River, were so many dense perspectives of crowd and bustle, parti-coloured nightcaps, tobacco-pipes, blouses, large boots, and shaggy heads of hair; nothing at that hour denoted a day of rest, unless it were the appearance, here and there, of a family pleasure-party, crammed into a bulky old lumbering cab; or of some contemplative holiday-maker in the freest and easiest dishabille, leaning out of a low garret window, watching the drying of his newly polished shoes on the little parapet outside (if a gentleman), or the airing of her stockings in the sun (if a lady), with calm anticipation.

Once clear of the never-to-be-forgotten-or-forgiven pavement which surrounds Paris, the first three days of travelling towards Marseilles are quiet and monotonous enough. To Sens. To Avallon. To Chalons. A sketch of one day's proceedings is a sketch of all three; and here it is.

We have four horses, and one postilion, who has a very long whip, and drives his team, something like the Courier of Saint Petersburgh in the circle at Astley's or Franconi's: only he sits his own horse instead of standing on him. The immense jack-boots worn by these postilions, are sometimes a century or two old; and are so ludicrously disproportionate to the wearer's foot, that the spur, which is put where his own heel comes, is generally halfway up the leg of the boots. The man often comes out of the stable-yard, with his whip in his hand and his shoes on, and brings out, in both hands, one boot at a time, which he plants on the ground by the side of his horse, with great gravity, until everything is ready. When it is - and oh Heaven! the noise they make about it! - he gets into the boots, shoes and all, or is hoisted into them by a couple of friends; adjusts the rope harness, embossed by the labours of innumerable pigeons in the stables; makes all the horses kick and plunge; cracks his whip like a madman; shouts 'En route - Hi!' and away we go. He is sure to have a contest with his horse before we have gone very far; and then he calls him a Thief, and a Brigand, and a Pig, and what not; and beats him about the head as if he were made of wood.

There is little more than one variety in the appearance of the country, for the first two days. From a dreary plain, to an interminable avenue, and from an interminable avenue to a dreary plain again. Plenty of vines there are in the open fields, but of a short low kind, and not trained in festoons, but about straight sticks. Beggars innumerable there are, everywhere; but an extraordinarily scanty population, and fewer children than I ever encountered. I don't believe we saw a hundred children between Paris and Chalons. Queer old towns, draw-bridged and walled: with odd little towers at the angles, like grotesque faces, as if the wall had put a mask on, and were staring down into the moat; other strange little towers, in gardens and fields, and down lanes, and in farm-yards: all alone, and always round, with a peaked roof, and never used for any purpose at all; ruinous buildings of all sorts; sometimes an hôtel de ville, sometimes a guard-house, sometimes a dwelling-house, sometimes a château with a rank garden, prolific in dandelion, and watched over by extinguisher-topped turrets, and blink-eyed little casements; are the standard objects, repeated over and over again. Sometimes we pass a village inn, with a crumbling wall belonging to it, and a perfect town of out-houses; and painted over the gateway, 'Stabling for Sixty Horses;' as indeed there might be stabling for sixty score, were there any horses to be stabled there, or anybody resting there, or anything stirring about the place but a dangling bush, indicative of the wine inside: which flutters idly in the wind, in lazy keeping with everything else, and certainly is never in a green old age, though always so old as to be dropping to pieces. And all day long, strange little narrow waggons, in strings of six or eight, bringing cheese from Switzerland, and frequently in charge, the whole line, of one man, or even boy - and he very often asleep in the foremost cart - come jingling past: the horses drowsily ringing the bells upon their harness, and looking as if they thought (no doubt they do) their great blue woolly furniture, of immense weight and thickness, with a pair of grotesque horns growing out of the collar, very much too warm for the Midsummer weather.

Then, there is the Diligence, twice or thrice a-day; with the dusty outsides in blue frocks, like butchers; and the insides in white nightcaps; and its cabriolet head on the roof, nodding and shaking, like an idiot's head; and its Young-France passengers staring out of window, with beards down to their waists, and blue spectacles awfully shading their warlike eyes, and very big sticks clenched in their National grasp. Also the Malle Poste, with only a couple of passengers, tearing along at a real good dare-devil pace, and out of sight in no time. Steady old Curés come jolting past, now and then, in such ramshackle, rusty, musty, clattering coaches as no Englishman would believe in; and bony women dawdle about in solitary places, holding cows by ropes while they feed, or digging and hoeing or doing field-work of a more laborious kind, or representing real shepherdesses with their flocks - to obtain an adequate idea of which pursuit and its followers, in any country, it is only necessary to take any pastoral poem, or picture, and imagine to yourself whatever is most exquisitely and widely unlike the descriptions therein contained.

You have been travelling along, stupidly enough, as you generally do in the last stage of the day; and the ninety-six bells upon the horses - twenty-four apiece - have been ringing sleepily in your ears for half an hour or so; and it has become a very jog-trot, monotonous, tiresome sort of business; and you have been thinking deeply about the dinner you will have at the next stage; when, down at the end of the long avenue of trees through which you are travelling, the first indication of a town appears, in the shape of some straggling cottages: and the carriage begins to rattle and roll over a horribly uneven pavement. As if the equipage were a great firework, and the mere sight of a smoking cottage chimney had lighted it, instantly it begins to crack and splutter, as if the very devil were in it. Crack, crack, crack, crack. Crack-crack-crack. Crick-crack. Crick-crack. Helo! Hola! Vite! Voleur! Brigand! Hi hi hi! En r-r-r-r-route! Whip, wheels, driver, stones, beggars, children, crack, crack, crack; helo! hola! charité pour l'amour de Dieu! crick-crack-crick-crack; crick, crick, crick; bump, jolt, crack, bump, crick-crack; round the corner, up the narrow street, down the paved hill on the other side; in the gutter; bump, bump; jolt, jog, crick, crick, crick; crack, crack, crack; into the shop-windows on the left-hand side of the street, preliminary to a sweeping turn into the wooden archway on the right; rumble, rumble, rumble; clatter, clatter, clatter; crick, crick, crick; and here we are in the yard of the Hôtel de l'Ecu d'Or; used up, gone out, smoking, spent, exhausted; but sometimes making a false start unexpectedly, with nothing coming of it - like a firework to the last!

The landlady of the Hôtel de l'Ecu d'Or is here; and the landlord of the Hôtel de l'Ecu d'Or is here; and the femme de chambre of the Hôtel de l'Ecu d'Or is here; and a gentleman in a glazed cap, with a red beard like a bosom friend, who is staying at the Hôtel de l'Ecu d'Or, is here; and Monsieur le Curé is walking up and down in a corner of the yard by himself, with a shovel hat upon his head, and a black gown on his back, and a book in one hand, and an umbrella in the other; and everybody, except Monsieur le Curé, is open-mouthed and open-eyed, for the opening of the carriage-door. The landlord of the Hôtel de l'Ecu d'Or, dotes to that extent upon the Courier, that he can hardly wait for his coming down from the box, but embraces his very legs and boot-heels as he descends. 'My Courier! My brave Courier! My friend! My brother!' The landlady loves him, the femme de chambre blesses him, the garçon worships him. The Courier asks if his letter has been received? It has, it has. Are the rooms prepared? They are, they are. The best rooms for my noble Courier. The rooms of state for my gallant Courier; the whole house is at the service of my best of friends! He keeps his hand upon the carriage-door, and asks some other question to enhance the expectation. He carries a green leathern purse outside his coat, suspended by a belt. The idlers look at it; one touches it. It is full of five-franc pieces. Murmurs of admiration are heard among the boys. The landlord falls upon the Courier's neck, and folds him to his breast. He is so much fatter than he was, he says! He looks so rosy and so well!

The door is opened. Breathless expectation. The lady of the family gets out. Ah sweet lady! Beautiful lady! The sister of the lady of the family gets out. Great Heaven, Ma'amselle is charming! First little boy gets out. Ah, what a beautiful little boy! First little girl gets out. Oh, but this is an enchanting child! Second little girl gets out. The landlady, yielding to the finest impulse of our common nature, catches her up in her arms! Second little boy gets out. Oh, the sweet boy! Oh, the tender little family! The baby is handed out. Angelic baby! The baby has topped everything. All the rapture is expended on the baby! Then the two nurses tumble out; and the enthusiasm swelling into madness, the whole family are swept up-stairs as on a cloud; while the idlers press about the carriage, and look into it, and walk round it, and touch it. For it is something to touch a carriage that has held so many people. It is a legacy to leave one's children.

The rooms are on the first floor, except the nursery for the night, which is a great rambling chamber, with four or five beds in it: through a dark passage, up two steps, down four, past a pump, across a balcony, and next door to the stable. The other sleeping apartments are large and lofty; each with two small bedsteads, tastefully hung, like the windows, with red and white drapery. The sitting-room is famous. Dinner is already laid in it for three; and the napkins are folded in cocked-hat fashion. The floors are of red tile. There are no carpets, and not much furniture to speak of; but there is abundance of looking-glass, and there are large vases under glass shades, filled with artificial flowers; and there are plenty of clocks. The whole party are in motion. The brave Courier, in particular, is everywhere: looking after the beds, having wine poured down his throat by his dear brother the landlord, and picking up green cucumbers - always cucumbers; Heaven knows where he gets them - with which he walks about, one in each hand, like truncheons.

Dinner is announced. There is very thin soup; there are very large loaves - one apiece; a fish; four dishes afterwards; some poultry afterwards; a dessert afterwards; and no lack of wine. There is not much in the dishes; but they are very good, and always ready instantly. When it is nearly dark, the brave Courier, having eaten the two cucumbers, sliced up in the contents of a pretty large decanter of oil, and another of vinegar, emerges from his retreat below, and proposes a visit to the Cathedral, whose massive tower frowns down upon the court-yard of the inn. Off we go; and very solemn and grand it is, in the dim light: so dim at last, that the polite, old, lanthorn-jawed Sacristan has a feeble little bit of candle in his hand, to grope among the tombs with - and looks among the grim columns, very like a lost ghost who is searching for his own.

Underneath the balcony, when we return, the inferior servants of the inn are supping in the open air, at a great table; the dish, a stew of meat and vegetables, smoking hot, and served in the iron cauldron it was boiled in. They have a pitcher of thin wine, and are very merry; merrier than the gentleman with the red beard, who is playing billiards in the light room on the left of the yard, where shadows, with cues in their hands, and cigars in their mouths, cross and recross the window, constantly. Still the thin Curé walks up and down alone, with his book and umbrella. And there he walks, and there the billiard-balls rattle, long after we are fast asleep.

We are astir at six next morning. It is a delightful day, shaming yesterday’s mud upon the carriage, if anything could shame a carriage, in a land where carriages are never cleaned. Everybody is brisk; and as we finish breakfast, the horses come jingling into the yard from the Post-house. Everything taken out of the carriage is put back again. The brave Courier announces that all is ready, after walking into every room, and looking all round it, to be certain that nothing is left behind. Everybody gets in. Everybody connected with the Hôtel de l’Ecu d’Or is again enchanted. The brave Courier runs into the house for a parcel containing cold fowl, sliced ham, bread, and biscuits, for lunch; hands it into the coach; and runs back again.

What has he got in his hand now? More cucumbers? No. A long strip of paper. It’s the bill.

The brave Courier has two belts on, this morning: one supporting the purse: another, a mighty good sort of leathern bottle, filled to the throat with the best light Bordeaux wine in the house. He never pays the bill till this bottle is full. Then he disputes it.

He disputes it now, violently. He is still the landlord's brother, but by another father or mother. He is not so nearly related to him as he was last night. The landlord scratches his head. The brave Courier points to certain figures in the bill, and intimates that if they remain there, the Hôtel de l'Ecu d'Or is thenceforth and for ever an hôtel de l'Ecu de cuivre. The landlord goes into a little counting-house. The brave Courier follows, forces the bill and a pen into his hand, and talks more rapidly than ever. The landlord takes the pen. The Courier smiles. The landlord makes an alteration. The Courier cuts a joke. The landlord is affectionate, but not weakly so. He bears it like a man. He shakes hands with his brave brother, but he don't hug him. Still, he loves his brother; for he knows that he will be returning that way, one of these fine days, with another family, and he foresees that his heart will yearn towards him again. The brave Courier traverses all round the carriage once, looks at the drag, inspects the wheels, jumps up, gives the word, and away we go!

It is market morning. The market is held in the little square outside in front of the cathedral. It is crowded with men and women, in blue, in red, in green, in white; with canvassed stalls; and fluttering merchandise. The country people are grouped about, with their clean baskets before them. Here, the lace-sellers; there, the butter and egg-sellers; there, the fruit-sellers; there, the shoe-makers. The whole place looks as if it were the stage of some great theatre, and the curtain had just run up, for a picturesque ballet. And there is the cathedral to boot: scene-like: all grim, and swarthy, and mouldering, and cold: just splashing the pavement in one place with faint purple drops, as the morning sun, entering by a little window on the eastern side, struggles through some stained glass panes, on the western.

In five minutes we have passed the iron cross, with a little ragged kneeling-place of turf before it, in the outskirts of the town; and are again upon the road.

CHAPTER II - LYONS, THE RHONE, AND THE GOBLIN OF AVIGNON

Chalons is a fair resting-place, in right of its good inn on the bank of the river, and the little steamboats, gay with green and red paint, that come and go upon it: which make up a pleasant and refreshing scene, after the dusty roads. But, unless you would like to dwell on an enormous plain, with jagged rows of irregular poplars on it, that look in the distance like so many combs with broken teeth: and unless you would like to pass your life without the possibility of going up-hill, or going up anything but stairs: you would hardly approve of Chalons as a place of residence.

You would probably like it better, however, than Lyons: which you may reach, if you will, in one of the before-mentioned steamboats, in eight hours.

What a city Lyons is! Talk about people feeling, at certain unlucky times, as if they had tumbled from the clouds! Here is a whole town that is tumbled, anyhow, out of the sky; having been first caught up, like other stones that tumble down from that region, out of fens and barren places, dismal to behold! The two great streets through which the two great rivers dash, and all the little streets whose name is Legion, were scorching, blistering, and sweltering. The houses, high and vast, dirty to excess, rotten as old cheeses, and as thickly peopled. All up the hills that hem the city in, these houses swarm; and the mites inside were lolling out of the windows, and drying their ragged clothes on poles, and crawling in and out at the doors, and coming out to pant and gasp upon the pavement, and creeping in and out among huge piles and bales of fusty, musty, stifling goods; and living, or rather not dying till their time should come, in an exhausted receiver. Every manufacturing town, melted into one, would hardly convey an impression of Lyons as it presented itself to me: for all the undrained, unscavengered qualities of a foreign town, seemed grafted, there, upon the native miseries of a manufacturing one; and it bears such fruit as I would go some miles out of my way to avoid encountering again.

In the cool of the evening: or rather in the faded heat of the day: we went to see the Cathedral, where divers old women, and a few dogs, were engaged in contemplation. There was no difference, in point of cleanliness, between its stone pavement and that of the streets; and there was a wax saint, in a little box like a berth aboard ship, with a glass front to it, whom Madame Tussaud would have nothing to say to, on any terms, and which even Westminster Abbey might be ashamed of. If you would know all about the architecture of this church, or any other, its dates, dimensions, endowments, and history, is it not written in Mr. Murray's Guide-Book, and may you not read it there, with thanks to him, as I did!

For this reason, I should abstain from mentioning the curious clock in Lyons Cathedral, if it were not for a small mistake I made, in connection with that piece of mechanism. The keeper of the church was very anxious it should be shown; partly for the honour of the establishment and the town; and partly, perhaps, because of his deriving a percentage from the additional consideration. However that may be, it was set in motion, and thereupon a host of little doors flew open, and innumerable little figures staggered out of them, and jerked themselves back again, with that special unsteadiness of purpose, and hitching in the gait, which usually attaches to figures that are moved by clock-work. Meanwhile, the Sacristan stood explaining these wonders, and pointing them out, severally, with a wand. There was a centre puppet of the Virgin Mary; and close to her, a small pigeon-hole, out of which another and a very ill-looking puppet made one of the most sudden plunges I ever saw accomplished: instantly flopping back again at sight of her, and banging his little door violently after him. Taking this to be emblematic of the victory over Sin and Death, and not at all unwilling to show that I perfectly understood the subject, in anticipation of the showman, I rashly said, 'Aha! The Evil Spirit. To be sure. He is very soon disposed of.' 'Pardon, Monsieur,' said the Sacristan, with a polite motion of his hand towards the little door, as if introducing somebody - 'The Angel Gabriel!'

Soon after daybreak next morning, we were steaming down the Arrowy Rhone, at the rate of twenty miles an hour, in a very dirty vessel full of merchandise, and with only three or four other passengers for our companions: among whom, the most remarkable was a silly, old, meek-faced, garlic-eating, immeasurably polite Chevalier, with a dirty scrap of red ribbon hanging at his button-hole, as if he had tied it there to remind himself of something; as Tom Noddy, in the farce, ties knots in his pocket-handkerchief.

For the last two days, we had seen great sullen hills, the first indications of the Alps, lowering in the distance. Now, we were rushing on beside them: sometimes close beside them: sometimes with an intervening slope, covered with vineyards. Villages and small towns hanging in mid-air, with great woods of olives seen through the light open towers of their churches, and clouds moving slowly on, upon the steep acclivity behind them; ruined castles perched on every eminence; and scattered houses in the clefts and gullies of the hills; made it very beautiful. The great height of these, too, making the buildings look so tiny, that they had all the charm of elegant models; their excessive whiteness, as contrasted with the brown rocks, or the sombre, deep, dull, heavy green of the olive-tree; and the puny size, and little slow walk of the Lilliputian men and women on the bank; made a charming picture. There were ferries out of number, too; bridges; the famous Pont d’Esprit, with I don’t know how many arches; towns where memorable wines are made; Vallence, where Napoleon studied; and the noble river, bringing at every winding turn, new beauties into view.

There lay before us, that same afternoon, the broken bridge of Avignon, and all the city baking in the sun; yet with an under-done-pie-crust, battlemented wall, that never will be brown, though it bake for centuries.

The grapes were hanging in clusters in the streets, and the brilliant Oleander was in full bloom everywhere. The streets are old and very narrow, but tolerably clean, and shaded by awnings stretched from house to house. Bright stuffs and handkerchiefs, curiosities, ancient frames of carved wood, old chairs, ghostly tables, saints, virgins, angels, and staring daubs of portraits, being exposed for sale beneath, it was very quaint and lively. All this was much set off, too, by the glimpses one caught, through a rusty gate standing ajar, of quiet sleepy court-yards, having stately old houses within, as silent as tombs. It was all very like one of the descriptions in the Arabian Nights. The three one-eyed Calenders might have knocked at any one of those doors till the street rang again, and the porter who persisted in asking questions - the man who had the delicious purchases put into his basket in the morning - might have opened it quite naturally.

After breakfast next morning, we sallied forth to see the lions. Such a delicious breeze was blowing in, from the north, as made the walk delightful: though the pavement-stones, and stones of the walls and houses, were far too hot to have a hand laid on them comfortably.

We went, first of all, up a rocky height, to the cathedral: where Mass was performing to an auditory very like that of Lyons, namely, several old women, a baby, and a very self-possessed dog, who had marked out for himself a little course or platform for exercise, beginning at the altar-rails and ending at the door, up and down which constitutional walk he trotted, during the service, as methodically and calmly, as any old gentleman out of doors.

It is a bare old church, and the paintings in the roof are sadly defaced by time and damp weather; but the sun was shining in, splendidly, through the red curtains of the windows, and glittering on the altar furniture; and it looked as bright and cheerful as need be.

Going apart, in this church, to see some painting which was being executed in fresco by a French artist and his pupil, I was led to observe more closely than I might otherwise have done, a great number of votive offerings with which the walls of the different chapels were profusely hung. I will not say decorated, for they were very roughly and comically got up; most likely by poor sign-painters, who eke out their living in that way. They were all little pictures: each representing some sickness or calamity from which the person placing it there, had escaped, through the interposition of his or her patron saint, or of the Madonna; and I may refer to them as good specimens of the class generally. They are abundant in Italy.

In a grotesque squareness of outline, and impossibility of perspective, they are not unlike the woodcuts in old books; but they were oil-paintings, and the artist, like the painter of the Primrose family, had not been sparing of his colours. In one, a lady was having a toe amputated - an operation which a saintly personage had sailed into the room, upon a couch, to superintend. In another, a lady was lying in bed, tucked up very tight and prim, and staring with much composure at a tripod, with a slop-basin on it; the usual form of washing-stand, and the only piece of furniture, besides the bedstead, in her chamber. One would never have supposed her to be labouring under any complaint, beyond the inconvenience of being miraculously wide awake, if the painter had not hit upon the idea of putting all her family on their knees in one corner, with their legs sticking out behind them on the floor, like boot-trees. Above whom, the Virgin, on a kind of blue divan, promised to restore the patient. In another case, a lady was in the very act of being run over, immediately outside the city walls, by a sort of piano-forte van. But the Madonna was there again. Whether the supernatural appearance had startled the horse (a bay griffin), or whether it was invisible to him, I don't know; but he was galloping away, ding dong, without the smallest reverence or compunction. On every picture 'Ex voto' was painted in yellow capitals in the sky.

Though votive offerings were not unknown in Pagan Temples, and are evidently among the many compromises made between the false religion and the true, when the true was in its infancy, I could wish that all the other compromises were as harmless. Gratitude and Devotion are Christian qualities; and a grateful, humble, Christian spirit may dictate the observance.

Hard by the cathedral stands the ancient Palace of the Popes, of which one portion is now a common jail, and another a noisy barrack: while gloomy suites of state apartments, shut up and deserted, mock their own old state and glory, like the embalmed bodies of kings. But we neither went there, to see state rooms, nor soldiers' quarters, nor a common jail, though we dropped some money into a prisoners' box outside, whilst the prisoners, themselves, looked through the iron bars, high up, and watched us eagerly. We went to see the ruins of the dreadful rooms in which the Inquisition used to sit.

A little, old, swarthy woman, with a pair of flashing black eyes, - proof that the world hadn’t conjured down the devil within her, though it had had between sixty and seventy years to do it in, - came out of the Barrack Cabaret, of which she was the keeper, with some large keys in her hands, and marshalled us the way that we should go. How she told us, on the way, that she was a Government Officer (*concierge du palais a apostolique*), and had been, for I don’t know how many years; and how she had shown these dungeons to princes; and how she was the best of dungeon demonstrators; and how she had resided in the palace from an infant, - had been born there, if I recollect right, - I needn’t relate. But such a fierce, little, rapid, sparkling, energetic she-devil I never beheld. She was alight and flaming, all the time. Her action was violent in the extreme. She never spoke, without stopping expressly for the purpose. She stamped her feet, clutched us by the arms, flung herself into attitudes, hammered against walls with her keys, for mere emphasis: now whispered as if the Inquisition were there still: now shrieked as if she were on the rack herself; and had a mysterious, hag-like way with her forefinger, when approaching the remains of some new horror - looking back and walking stealthily, and making horrible grimaces - that might alone have qualified her to walk up and down a sick man’s counterpane, to the exclusion of all other figures, through a whole fever.

Passing through the court-yard, among groups of idle soldiers, we turned off by a gate, which this She-Goblin unlocked for our admission, and locked again behind us: and entered a narrow court, rendered narrower by fallen stones and heaps of rubbish; part of it choking up the mouth of a ruined subterranean passage, that once communicated (or is said to have done so) with another castle on the opposite bank of the river. Close to this court-yard is a dungeon - we stood within it, in another minute - in the dismal tower *des oubliettes*, where Rienzi was imprisoned, fastened by an iron chain to the very wall that stands there now, but shut out from the sky which now looks down into it. A few steps brought us to the Cachots, in which the prisoners of the Inquisition were confined for forty-eight hours after their capture, without food or drink, that their constancy might be shaken, even before they were confronted with their gloomy judges. The day has not got in there yet. They are still small cells, shut in by four unyielding, close, hard walls; still profoundly dark; still massively doored and fastened, as of old.

Goblin, looking back as I have described, went softly on, into a vaulted chamber, now used as a store-room: once the chapel of the Holy Office. The place where the tribunal sat, was plain. The platform might have been removed but yesterday. Conceive the parable of the Good Samaritan having been painted on the wall of one of these Inquisition chambers! But it was, and may be traced there yet.

High up in the jealous wall, are niches where the faltering replies of the accused were heard and noted down. Many of them had been brought out of the very cell we had just looked into, so awfully; along the same stone passage. We had trodden in their very footsteps.

I am gazing round me, with the horror that the place inspires, when Goblin clutches me by the wrist, and lays, not her skinny finger, but the handle of a key, upon her lip. She invites me, with a jerk, to follow her. I do so. She leads me out into a room adjoining - a rugged room, with a funnel-shaped, contracting roof, open at the top, to the bright day. I ask her what it is. She folds her arms, leers hideously, and stares. I ask again. She glances round, to see that all the little company are there; sits down upon a mound of stones; throws up her arms, and yells out, like a fiend, ‘La Salle de la Question!’

The Chamber of Torture! And the roof was made of that shape to stifle the victim’s cries! Oh Goblin, Goblin, let us think of this awhile, in silence. Peace, Goblin! Sit with your short arms crossed on your short legs, upon that heap of stones, for only five minutes, and then flame out again.

Minutes! Seconds are not marked upon the Palace clock, when, with her eyes flashing fire, Goblin is up, in the middle of the chamber, describing, with her sunburnt arms, a wheel of heavy blows. Thus it ran round! cries Goblin. Mash, mash, mash! An endless routine of heavy hammers. Mash, mash, mash! upon the sufferer’s limbs. See the stone trough! says Goblin. For the water torture! Gurgle, swill, bloat, burst, for the Redeemer’s honour! Suck the bloody rag, deep down into your unbelieving body, Heretic, at every breath you draw! And when the executioner plucks it out, reeking with the smaller mysteries of God's own Image, know us for His chosen servants, true believers in the Sermon on the Mount, elect disciples of Him who never did a miracle but to heal: who never struck a man with palsy, blindness, deafness, dumbness, madness, any one affliction of mankind; and never stretched His blessed hand out, but to give relief and ease!

See! cries Goblin. There the furnace was. There they made the irons red-hot. Those holes supported the sharp stake, on which the tortured persons hung poised: dangling with their whole weight from the roof. 'But;' and Goblin whispers this; 'Monsieur has heard of this tower? Yes? Let Monsieur look down, then!'

A cold air, laden with an earthy smell, falls upon the face of Monsieur; for she has opened, while speaking, a trap-door in the wall. Monsieur looks in. Downward to the bottom, upward to the top, of a steep, dark, lofty tower: very dismal, very dark, very cold. The Executioner of the Inquisition, says Goblin, edging in her head to look down also, flung those who were past all further torturing, down here. 'But look! does Monsieur see the black stains on the wall?' A glance, over his shoulder, at Goblin's keen eye, shows Monsieur - and would without the aid of the directing key - where they are. 'What are they?' 'Blood!'

In October, 1791, when the Revolution was at its height here, sixty persons: men and women ('and priests,' says Goblin, 'priests'): were murdered, and hurled, the dying and the dead, into this dreadful pit, where a quantity of quick-lime was tumbled down upon their bodies. Those ghastly tokens of the massacre were soon no more; but while one stone of the strong building in which the deed was done, remains upon another, there they will lie in the memories of men, as plain to see as the splashing of their blood upon the wall is now.

Was it a portion of the great scheme of Retribution, that the cruel deed should be committed in this place! That a part of the atrocities and monstrous institutions, which had been, for scores of years, at work, to change men's nature, should in its last service, tempt them with the ready means of gratifying their furious and beastly rage! Should enable them to show themselves, in the height of their frenzy, no worse than a great, solemn, legal establishment, in the height of its power! No worse! Much better. They used the Tower of the Forgotten, in the name of Liberty - their liberty; an earth-born creature, nursed in the black mud of the Bastile moats and dungeons, and necessarily betraying many evidences of its unwholesome bringing-up - but the Inquisition used it in the name of Heaven.

Goblin's finger is lifted; and she steals out again, into the Chapel of the Holy Office. She stops at a certain part of the flooring. Her great effect is at hand. She waits for the rest. She darts at the brave Courier, who is explaining something; hits him a sounding rap on the hat with the largest key; and bids him be silent. She assembles us all, round a little trap-door in the floor, as round a grave.

'Voilà!' she darts down at the ring, and flings the door open with a crash, in her goblin energy, though it is no light weight. 'Voilà les oubliettes! Voilà les oubliettes! Subterranean! Frightful! Black! Terrible! Deadly! Les oubliettes de l'Inquisition!'

My blood ran cold, as I looked from Goblin, down into the vaults, where these forgotten creatures, with recollections of the world outside: of wives, friends, children, brothers: starved to death, and made the stones ring with their unavailing groans. But, the thrill I felt on seeing the accursed wall below, decayed and broken through, and the sun shining in through its gaping wounds, was like a sense of victory and triumph. I felt exalted with the proud delight of living in these degenerate times, to see it. As if I were the hero of some high achievement! The light in the doleful vaults was typical of the light that has streamed in, on all persecution in God's name, but which is not yet at its noon! It cannot look more lovely to a blind man newly restored to sight, than to a traveller who sees it, calmly and majestically, treading down the darkness of that Infernal Well.

CHAPTER III - AVIGNON TO GENOA

Goblin, having shown *les oubliettes*, felt that her great *coup* was struck. She let the door fall with a crash, and stood upon it with her arms a-kimbo, sniffing prodigiously.

When we left the place, I accompanied her into her house, under the outer gateway of the fortress, to buy a little history of the building. Her cabaret, a dark, low room, lighted by small windows, sunk in the thick wall - in the softened light, and with its forge-like chimney; its little counter by the door, with bottles, jars, and glasses on it; its household implements and scraps of dress against the wall; and a sober-looking woman (she must have a congenial life of it, with Goblin,) knitting at the door - looked exactly like a picture by OSTADE.

I walked round the building on the outside, in a sort of dream, and yet with the delightful sense of having awakened from it, of which the light, down in the vaults, had given me the assurance. The immense thickness and giddy height of the walls, the enormous strength of the massive towers, the great extent of the building, its gigantic proportions, frowning aspect, and barbarous irregularity, awaken awe and wonder. The recollection of its opposite old uses: an impregnable fortress, a luxurious palace, a horrible prison, a place of torture, the court of the Inquisition: at one and the same time, a house of feasting, fighting, religion, and blood: gives to every stone in its huge form a fearful interest, and imparts new meaning to its incongruities. I could think of little, however, then, or long afterwards, but the sun in the dungeons. The palace coming down to be the lounging-place of noisy soldiers, and being forced to echo their rough talk, and common oaths, and to have their garments fluttering from its dirty windows, was some reduction of its state, and something to rejoice at; but the day in its cells, and the sky for the roof of its chambers of cruelty - that was its desolation and defeat! If I had seen it in a blaze from ditch to rampart, I should have felt that not that light, nor all the light in all the fire that burns, could waste it, like the sunbeams in its secret council-chamber, and its prisons.

Before I quit this Palace of the Popes, let me translate from the little history I mentioned just now, a short anecdote, quite appropriate to itself, connected with its adventures.

‘An ancient tradition relates, that in 1441, a nephew of Pierre de Lude, the Pope’s legate, seriously insulted some distinguished ladies of Avignon, whose relations, in revenge, seized the young man, and horribly mutilated him. For several years the legate kept *his* revenge within his own breast, but he was not the less resolved upon its gratification at last. He even made, in the fulness of time, advances towards a complete reconciliation; and when their apparent sincerity had prevailed, he invited to a splendid banquet, in this palace, certain families, whole families, whom he sought to exterminate. The utmost gaiety animated the repast; but the measures of the legate were well taken. When the dessert was on the board, a Swiss presented himself, with the announcement that a strange ambassador solicited an extraordinary audience. The legate, excusing himself, for the moment, to his guests, retired, followed by his officers. Within a few minutes afterwards, five hundred persons were reduced to ashes: the whole of that wing of the building having been blown into the air with a terrible explosion!’

After seeing the churches (I will not trouble you with churches just now), we left Avignon that afternoon. The heat being very great, the roads outside the walls were strewn with people fast asleep in every little slip of shade, and with lazy groups, half asleep and half awake, who were waiting until the sun should be low enough to admit of their playing bowls among the burnt-up trees, and on the dusty road. The harvest here was already gathered in, and mules and horses were treading out the corn in the fields. We came, at dusk, upon a wild and hilly country, once famous for brigands; and travelled slowly up a steep ascent. So we went on, until eleven at night, when we halted at the town of Aix (within two stages of Marseilles) to sleep.

The hotel, with all the blinds and shutters closed to keep the light and heat out, was comfortable and airy next morning, and the town was very clean; but so hot, and so intensely light, that when I walked out at noon it was like coming suddenly from the darkened room into crisp blue fire. The air was so very clear, that distant hills and rocky points appeared within an hour’s walk; while the town immediately at hand - with a kind of blue wind between me and it - seemed to be white hot, and to be throwing off a fiery air from the surface.

We left this town towards evening, and took the road to Marseilles. A dusty road it was; the houses shut up close; and the vines powdered white. At nearly all the cottage doors, women were peeling and slicing onions into earthen bowls for supper. So they had been doing last night all the way from Avignon. We passed one or two shady dark châteaux, surrounded by trees, and embellished with cool basins of water: which were the more refreshing to behold, from the great scarcity of such residences on the road we had travelled. As we approached Marseilles, the road began to be covered with holiday people. Outside the public-houses were parties smoking, drinking, playing draughts and cards, and (once) dancing. But dust, dust, dust, everywhere. We went on, through a long, straggling, dirty suburb, thronged with people; having on our left a dreary slope of land, on which the country-houses of the Marseilles merchants, always staring white, are jumbled and heaped without the slightest order: backs, fronts, sides, and gables towards all points of the compass; until, at last, we entered the town.

I was there, twice or thrice afterwards, in fair weather and foul; and I am afraid there is no doubt that it is a dirty and disagreeable place. But the prospect, from the fortified heights, of the beautiful Mediterranean, with its lovely rocks and islands, is most delightful. These heights are a desirable retreat, for less picturesque reasons - as an escape from a compound of vile smells perpetually arising from a great harbour full of stagnant water, and befouled by the refuse of innumerable ships with all sorts of cargoes: which, in hot weather, is dreadful in the last degree.

There were foreign sailors, of all nations, in the streets; with red shirts, blue shirts, buff shirts, tawny shirts, and shirts of orange colour; with red caps, blue caps, green caps, great beards, and no beards; in Turkish turbans, glazed English hats, and Neapolitan head-dresses. There were the townspeople sitting in clusters on the pavement, or airing themselves on the tops of their houses, or walking up and down the closest and least airy of Boulevards; and there were crowds of fierce-looking people of the lower sort, blocking up the way, constantly. In the very heart of all this stir and uproar, was the common madhouse; a low, contracted, miserable building, looking straight upon the street, without the smallest screen or court-yard; where chattering mad-men and mad-women were peeping out, through rusty bars, at the staring faces below, while the sun, darting fiercely aslant into their little cells, seemed to dry up their brains, and worry them, as if they were baited by a pack of dogs.

We were pretty well accommodated at the Hôtel du Paradis, situated in a narrow street of very high houses, with a hairdresser's shop opposite, exhibiting in one of its windows two full-length waxen ladies, twirling round and round: which so enchanted the hairdresser himself, that he and his family sat in arm-chairs, and in cool undresses, on the pavement outside, enjoying the gratification of the passers-by, with lazy dignity. The family had retired to rest when we went to bed, at midnight; but the hairdresser (a corpulent man, in drab slippers) was still sitting there, with his legs stretched out before him, and evidently couldn't bear to have the shutters put up.

Next day we went down to the harbour, where the sailors of all nations were discharging and taking in cargoes of all kinds: fruits, wines, oils, silks, stuffs, velvets, and every manner of merchandise. Taking one of a great number of lively little boats with gay-striped awnings, we rowed away, under the sterns of great ships, under tow-ropes and cables, against and among other boats, and very much too near the sides of vessels that were faint with oranges, to the *Marie Antoinette*, a handsome steamer bound for Genoa, lying near the mouth of the harbour. By-and-by, the carriage, that unwieldy 'trifle from the Pantechnicon,' on a flat barge, bumping against everything, and giving occasion for a prodigious quantity of oaths and grimaces, came stupidly alongside; and by five o'clock we were steaming out in the open sea. The vessel was beautifully clean; the meals were served under an awning on deck; the night was calm and clear; the quiet beauty of the sea and sky unspeakable.

We were off Nice, early next morning, and coasted along, within a few miles of the Cornice road (of which more in its place) nearly all day. We could see Genoa before three; and watching it as it gradually developed its splendid amphitheatre, terrace rising above terrace, garden above garden, palace above palace, height upon height, was ample occupation for us, till we ran into the stately harbour. Having been duly astonished, here, by the sight of a few Cappucini monks, who were watching the fair-weighing of some wood upon the wharf, we drove off to Albaro, two miles distant, where we had engaged a house.

The way lay through the main streets, but not through the Strada Nuova, or the Strada Balbi, which are the famous streets of palaces. I never in my life was so dismayed! The wonderful novelty of everything, the unusual smells, the unaccountable filth (though it is reckoned the cleanest of Italian towns), the disorderly jumbling of dirty houses, one upon the roof of another; the passages more squalid and more close than any in St. Giles's or old Paris; in and out of which, not vagabonds, but well-dressed women, with white veils and great fans, were passing and repassing; the perfect absence of resemblance in any dwelling-house, or shop, or wall, or post, or pillar, to anything one had ever seen before; and the disheartening dirt, discomfort, and decay; perfectly confounded me. I fell into a dismal reverie. I am conscious of a feverish and bewildered vision of saints and virgins' shrines at the street corners - of great numbers of friars, monks, and soldiers - of vast red curtains, waving in the doorways of the churches - of always going up hill, and yet seeing every other street and passage going higher up - of fruit-stalls, with fresh lemons and oranges hanging in garlands made of vine-leaves - of a guard-house, and a drawbridge - and some gateways - and vendors of iced water, sitting with little trays upon the margin of the kennel - and this is all the consciousness I had, until I was set down in a rank, dull, weedy court-yard, attached to a kind of pink jail; and was told I lived there.

I little thought, that day, that I should ever come to have an attachment for the very stones in the streets of Genoa, and to look back upon the city with affection as connected with many hours of happiness and quiet! But these are my first impressions honestly set down; and how they changed, I will set down too. At present, let us breathe after this long-winded journey.

CHAPTER IV - GENOA AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD

The first impressions of such a place as ALBARO, the suburb of Genoa, where I am now, as my American friends would say, ‘located,’ can hardly fail, I should imagine, to be mournful and disappointing. It requires a little time and use to overcome the feeling of depression consequent, at first, on so much ruin and neglect. Novelty, pleasant to most people, is particularly delightful, I think, to me. I am not easily dispirited when I have the means of pursuing my own fancies and occupations; and I believe I have some natural aptitude for accommodating myself to circumstances. But, as yet, I stroll about here, in all the holes and corners of the neighbourhood, in a perpetual state of forlorn surprise; and returning to my villa: the Villa Bagnerello (it sounds romantic, but Signor Bagnerello is a butcher hard by): have sufficient occupation in pondering over my new experiences, and comparing them, very much to my own amusement, with my expectations, until I wander out again.

The Villa Bagnerello: or the Pink Jail, a far more expressive name for the mansion: is in one of the most splendid situations imaginable. The noble bay of Genoa, with the deep blue Mediterranean, lies stretched out near at hand; monstrous old desolate houses and palaces are dotted all about; lofty hills, with their tops often hidden in the clouds, and with strong forts perched high up on their craggy sides, are close upon the left; and in front, stretching from the walls of the house, down to a ruined chapel which stands upon the bold and picturesque rocks on the sea-shore, are green vineyards, where you may wander all day long in partial shade, through interminable vistas of grapes, trained on a rough trellis-work across the narrow paths.

This sequestered spot is approached by lanes so very narrow, that when we arrived at the Custom-house, we found the people here had *taken the measure* of the narrowest among them, and were waiting to apply it to the carriage; which ceremony was gravely performed in the street, while we all stood by in breathless suspense. It was found to be a very tight fit, but just a possibility, and no more - as I am reminded every day, by the sight of various large holes which it punched in the walls on either side as it came along. We are more fortunate, I am told, than an old lady, who took a house in these parts not long ago, and who stuck fast in *her* carriage in a lane; and as it was impossible to open one of the doors, she was obliged to submit to the indignity of being hauled through one of the little front windows, like a harlequin.

When you have got through these narrow lanes, you come to an archway, imperfectly stopped up by a rusty old gate - my gate. The rusty old gate has a bell to correspond, which you ring as long as you like, and which nobody answers, as it has no connection whatever with the house. But there is a rusty old knocker, too - very loose, so that it slides round when you touch it - and if you learn the trick of it, and knock long enough, somebody comes. The brave Courier comes, and gives you admittance. You walk into a seedy little garden, all wild and weedy, from which the vineyard opens; cross it, enter a square hall like a cellar, walk up a cracked marble staircase, and pass into a most enormous room with a vaulted roof and whitewashed walls: not unlike a great Methodist chapel. This is the *sala*. It has five windows and five doors, and is decorated with pictures which would gladden the heart of one of those picture-cleaners in London who hang up, as a sign, a picture divided, like death and the lady, at the top of the old ballad: which always leaves you in a state of uncertainty whether the ingenious professor has cleaned one half, or dirtied the other. The furniture of this *sala* is a sort of red brocade. All the chairs are immovable, and the sofa weighs several tons.

On the same floor, and opening out of this same chamber, are dining-room, drawing-room, and divers bedrooms: each with a multiplicity of doors and windows. Up-stairs are divers other gaunt chambers, and a kitchen; and down-stairs is another kitchen, which, with all sorts of strange contrivances for burning charcoal, looks like an alchemical laboratory. There are also some half-dozen small sitting-rooms, where the servants in this hot July, may escape from the heat of the fire, and where the brave Courier plays all sorts of musical instruments of his own manufacture, all the evening long. A mighty old, wandering, ghostly, echoing, grim, bare house it is, as ever I beheld or thought of.

There is a little vine-covered terrace, opening from the drawing-room; and under this terrace, and forming one side of the little garden, is what used to be the stable. It is now a cow-house, and has three cows in it, so that we get new milk by the bucketful. There is no pasturage near, and they never go out, but are constantly lying down, and surfeiting themselves with vine-leaves - perfect Italian cows enjoying the *dolce far' niente* all day long. They are presided over, and slept with, by an old man named Antonio, and his son; two burnt-sienna natives with naked legs and feet, who wear, each, a shirt, a pair of trousers, and a red sash, with a relic, or some sacred charm like the bonbon off a twelfth-cake, hanging round the neck. The old man is very anxious to convert me to the Catholic faith, and exhorts me frequently. We sit upon a stone by the door, sometimes in the evening, like Robinson Crusoe and Friday reversed; and he generally relates, towards my conversion, an abridgment of the History of Saint Peter - chiefly, I believe, from the unspeakable delight he has in his imitation of the cock.

The view, as I have said, is charming; but in the day you must keep the lattice-blinds close shut, or the sun would drive you mad; and when the sun goes down you must shut up all the windows, or the mosquitoes would tempt you to commit suicide. So at this time of the year, you don't see much of the prospect within doors. As for the flies, you don't mind them. Nor the fleas, whose size is prodigious, and whose name is Legion, and who populate the coach-house to that extent that I daily expect to see the carriage going off bodily, drawn by myriads of industrious fleas in harness. The rats are kept away, quite comfortably, by scores of lean cats, who roam about the garden for that purpose. The lizards, of course, nobody cares for; they play in the sun, and don't bite. The little scorpions are merely curious. The beetles are rather late, and have not appeared yet. The frogs are company. There is a preserve of them in the grounds of the next villa; and after nightfall, one would think that scores upon scores of women in pattens were going up and down a wet stone pavement without a moment's cessation. That is exactly the noise they make.

The ruined chapel, on the picturesque and beautiful sea-shore, was dedicated, once upon a time, to Saint John the Baptist. I believe there is a legend that Saint John's bones were received there, with various solemnities, when they were first brought to Genoa; for Genoa possesses them to this day. When there is any uncommon tempest at sea, they are brought out and exhibited to the raging weather, which they never fail to calm. In consequence of this connection of Saint John with the city, great numbers of the common people are christened Giovanni Baptista, which latter name is pronounced in the Genoese patois ‘Batcheetcha,’ like a sneeze. To hear everybody calling everybody else Batcheetcha, on a Sunday, or festa-day, when there are crowds in the streets, is not a little singular and amusing to a stranger.

The narrow lanes have great villas opening into them, whose walls (outside walls, I mean) are profusely painted with all sorts of subjects, grim and holy. But time and the sea-air have nearly obliterated them; and they look like the entrance to Vauxhall Gardens on a sunny day. The court-yards of these houses are overgrown with grass and weeds; all sorts of hideous patches cover the bases of the statues, as if they were afflicted with a cutaneous disorder; the outer gates are rusty; and the iron bars outside the lower windows are all tumbling down. Firewood is kept in halls where costly treasures might be heaped up, mountains high; waterfalls are dry and choked; fountains, too dull to play, and too lazy to work, have just enough recollection of their identity, in their sleep, to make the neighbourhood damp; and the sirocco wind is often blowing over all these things for days together, like a gigantic oven out for a holiday.

Not long ago, there was a festa-day, in honour of the *Virgin’s mother*, when the young men of the neighbourhood, having worn green wreaths of the vine in some procession or other, bathed in them, by scores. It looked very odd and pretty. Though I am bound to confess (not knowing of the festa at that time), that I thought, and was quite satisfied, they wore them as horses do - to keep the flies off.

Soon afterwards, there was another festa-day, in honour of St. Nazaro. One of the Albaro young men brought two large bouquets soon after breakfast, and coming up-stairs into the great *sala*, presented them himself. This was a polite way of begging for a contribution towards the expenses of some music in the Saint’s honour, so we gave him whatever it may have been, and his messenger departed: well satisfied. At six o’clock in the evening we went to the church - close at hand - a very gaudy place, hung all over with festoons and bright draperies, and filled, from the altar to the main door, with women, all seated. They wear no bonnets here, simply a long white veil - the ‘mezzero;’ and it was the most gauzy, ethereal-looking audience I ever saw. The young women are not generally pretty, but they walk remarkably well, and in their personal carriage and the management of their veils, display much innate grace and elegance. There were some men present: not very many: and a few of these were kneeling about the aisles, while everybody else tumbled over them. Innumerable tapers were burning in the church; the bits of silver and tin about the saints (especially in the Virgin's necklace) sparkled brilliantly; the priests were seated about the chief altar; the organ played away, lustily, and a full band did the like; while a conductor, in a little gallery opposite to the band, hammered away on the desk before him, with a scroll; and a tenor, without any voice, sang. The band played one way, the organ played another, the singer went a third, and the unfortunate conductor banged and banged, and flourished his scroll on some principle of his own: apparently well satisfied with the whole performance. I never did hear such a discordant din. The heat was intense all the time.

The men, in red caps, and with loose coats hanging on their shoulders (they never put them on), were playing bowls, and buying sweetmeats, immediately outside the church. When half-a-dozen of them finished a game, they came into the aisle, crossed themselves with the holy water, knelt on one knee for an instant, and walked off again to play another game at bowls. They are remarkably expert at this diversion, and will play in the stony lanes and streets, and on the most uneven and disastrous ground for such a purpose, with as much nicety as on a billiard-table. But the most favourite game is the national one of Mora, which they pursue with surprising ardour, and at which they will stake everything they possess. It is a destructive kind of gambling, requiring no accessories but the ten fingers, which are always - I intend no pun - at hand. Two men play together. One calls a number - say the extreme one, ten. He marks what portion of it he pleases by throwing out three, or four, or five fingers; and his adversary has, in the same instant, at hazard, and without seeing his hand, to throw out as many fingers, as will make the exact balance. Their eyes and hands become so used to this, and act with such astonishing rapidity, that an uninitiated bystander would find it very difficult, if not impossible, to follow the progress of the game. The initiated, however, of whom there is always an eager group looking on, devour it with the most intense avidity; and as they are always ready to champion one side or the other in case of a dispute, and are frequently divided in their partisanship, it is often a very noisy proceeding. It is never the quietest game in the world; for the numbers are always called in a loud sharp voice, and follow as close upon each other as they can be counted. On a holiday evening, standing at a window, or walking in a garden, or passing through the streets, or sauntering in any quiet place about the town, you will hear this game in progress in a score of wine-shops at once; and looking over any vineyard walk, or turning almost any corner, will come upon a knot of players in full cry. It is observable that most men have a propensity to throw out some particular number oftener than another; and the vigilance with which two sharp-eyed players will mutually endeavour to detect this weakness, and adapt their game to it, is very curious and entertaining. The effect is greatly heightened by the universal suddenness and vehemence of gesture; two men playing for half a farthing with an intensity as all-absorbing as if the stake were life.

Hard by here is a large Palazzo, formerly belonging to some member of the Brignole family, but just now hired by a school of Jesuits for their summer quarters. I walked into its dismantled precincts the other evening about sunset, and couldn’t help pacing up and down for a little time, drowsily taking in the aspect of the place: which is repeated hereabouts in all directions.

I loitered to and fro, under a colonnade, forming two sides of a weedy, grass-grown court-yard, whereof the house formed a third side, and a low terrace-walk, overlooking the garden and the neighbouring hills, the fourth. I don’t believe there was an uncracked stone in the whole pavement. In the centre was a melancholy statue, so piebald in its decay, that it looked exactly as if it had been covered with sticking-plaster, and afterwards powdered. The stables, coach-houses, offices, were all empty, all ruinous, all utterly deserted.

Doors had lost their hinges, and were holding on by their latches; windows were broken, painted plaster had peeled off, and was lying about in clods; fowls and cats had so taken possession of the out-buildings, that I couldn’t help thinking of the fairy tales, and eyeing them with suspicion, as transformed retainers, waiting to be changed back again. One old Tom in particular: a scraggy brute, with a hungry green eye (a poor relation, in reality, I am inclined to think): came prowling round and round me, as if he half believed, for the moment, that I might be the hero come to marry the lady, and set all to-rights; but discovering his mistake, he suddenly gave a grim snarl, and walked away with such a tremendous tail, that he couldn't get into the little hole where he lived, but was obliged to wait outside, until his indignation and his tail had gone down together.

In a sort of summer-house, or whatever it may be, in this colonnade, some Englishmen had been living, like grubs in a nut; but the Jesuits had given them notice to go, and they had gone, and *that* was shut up too. The house: a wandering, echoing, thundering barrack of a place, with the lower windows barred up, as usual, was wide open at the door: and I have no doubt I might have gone in, and gone to bed, and gone dead, and nobody a bit the wiser. Only one suite of rooms on an upper floor was tenanted; and from one of these, the voice of a young-lady vocalist, practising bravura lustily, came flaunting out upon the silent evening.

I went down into the garden, intended to be prim and quaint, with avenues, and terraces, and orange-trees, and statues, and water in stone basins; and everything was green, gaunt, weedy, straggling, under grown or over grown, mildewy, damp, redolent of all sorts of slabby, clammy, creeping, and uncomfortable life. There was nothing bright in the whole scene but a firefly - one solitary firefly - showing against the dark bushes like the last little speck of the departed Glory of the house; and even it went flitting up and down at sudden angles, and leaving a place with a jerk, and describing an irregular circle, and returning to the same place with a twitch that startled one: as if it were looking for the rest of the Glory, and wondering (Heaven knows it might!) what had become of it.

In the course of two months, the flitting shapes and shadows of my dismal entering reverie gradually resolved themselves into familiar forms and substances; and I already began to think that when the time should come, a year hence, for closing the long holiday and turning back to England, I might part from Genoa with anything but a glad heart.

It is a place that ‘grows upon you’ every day. There seems to be always something to find out in it. There are the most extraordinary alleys and by-ways to walk about in. You can lose your way (what a comfort that is, when you are idle!) twenty times a day, if you like; and turn up again, under the most unexpected and surprising difficulties. It abounds in the strangest contrasts; things that are picturesque, ugly, mean, magnificent, delightful, and offensive, break upon the view at every turn.

They who would know how beautiful the country immediately surrounding Genoa is, should climb (in clear weather) to the top of Monte Faccio, or, at least, ride round the city walls: a feat more easily performed. No prospect can be more diversified and lovely than the changing views of the harbour, and the valleys of the two rivers, the Polcevera and the Bizagno, from the heights along which the strongly fortified walls are carried, like the great wall of China in little. In not the least picturesque part of this ride, there is a fair specimen of a real Genoese tavern, where the visitor may derive good entertainment from real Genoese dishes, such as Tagliarini; Ravioli; German sausages, strong of garlic, sliced and eaten with fresh green figs; cocks’ combs and sheep-kidneys, chopped up with mutton chops and liver; small pieces of some unknown part of a calf, twisted into small shreds, fried, and served up in a great dish like white-bait; and other curiosities of that kind. They often get wine at these suburban Trattorie, from France and Spain and Portugal, which is brought over by small captains in little trading-vessels. They buy it at so much a bottle, without asking what it is, or caring to remember if anybody tells them, and usually divide it into two heaps; of which they label one Champagne, and the other Madeira. The various opposite flavours, qualities, countries, ages, and vintages that are comprised under these two general heads is quite extraordinary. The most limited range is probably from cool Gruel up to old Marsala, and down again to apple Tea.

The great majority of the streets are as narrow as any thoroughfare can well be, where people (even Italian people) are supposed to live and walk about; being mere lanes, with here and there a kind of well, or breathing-place. The houses are immensely high, painted in all sorts of colours, and are in every stage and state of damage, dirt, and lack of repair. They are commonly let off in floors, or flats, like the houses in the old town of

Edinburgh, or many houses in Paris. There are few street doors; the entrance halls are, for the most part, looked upon as public property; and any moderately enterprising scavenger might make a fine fortune by now and then clearing them out. As it is impossible for coaches to penetrate into these streets, there are sedan chairs, gilded and otherwise, for hire in divers places. A great many private chairs are also kept among the nobility and gentry; and at night these are trotted to and fro in all directions, preceded by bearers of great lanthorns, made of linen stretched upon a frame. The sedans and lanthorns are the legitimate successors of the long strings of patient and much-abused mules, that go jingling their little bells through these confined streets all day long. They follow them, as regularly as the stars the sun.

When shall I forget the Streets of Palaces: the Strada Nuova and the Strada Balbi! or how the former looked one summer day, when I first saw it underneath the brightest and most intensely blue of summer skies: which its narrow perspective of immense mansions, reduced to a tapering and most precious strip of brightness, looking down upon the heavy shade below! A brightness not too common, even in July and August, to be well esteemed: for, if the Truth must out, there were not eight blue skies in as many midsummer weeks, saving, sometimes, early in the morning; when, looking out to sea, the water and the firmament were one world of deep and brilliant blue. At other times, there were clouds and haze enough to make an Englishman grumble in his own climate.

The endless details of these rich Palaces: the walls of some of them, within, alive with masterpieces by Vandyke! The great, heavy, stone balconies, one above another, and tier over tier: with here and there, one larger than the rest, towering high up - a huge marble platform; the doorless vestibules, massively barred lower windows, immense public staircases, thick marble pillars, strong dungeon-like arches, and dreary, dreaming, echoing vaulted chambers: among which the eye wanders again, and again, and again, as every palace is succeeded by another - the terrace gardens between house and house, with green arches of the vine, and groves of orange-trees, and blushing oleander in full bloom, twenty, thirty, forty feet above the street - the painted halls, mouldering, and blotting, and rotting in the damp corners, and still shining out in beautiful colours and voluptuous designs, where the walls are dry - the faded figures on the outsides of the houses, holding wreaths, and crowns, and flying upward, and downward, and standing in niches, and here and there looking fainter and more feeble than elsewhere, by contrast with some fresh little Cupids, who on a more recently decorated portion of the front, are stretching out what seems to be the semblance of a blanket, but is, indeed, a sun-dial - the steep, steep, up-hill streets of small palaces (but very large palaces for all that), with marble terraces looking down into close by-ways - the magnificent and innumerable Churches; and the rapid passage from a street of stately edifices, into a maze of the vilest squalor, steaming with unwholesome stenches, and swarming with half-naked children and whole worlds of dirty people - make up, altogether, such a scene of wonder: so lively, and yet so dead: so noisy, and yet so quiet: so obtrusive, and yet so shy and lowering: so wide awake, and yet so fast asleep: that it is a sort of intoxication to a stranger to walk on, and on, and on, and look about him. A bewildering phantasmagoria, with all the inconsistency of a dream, and all the pain and all the pleasure of an extravagant reality!

The different uses to which some of these Palaces are applied, all at once, is characteristic. For instance, the English Banker (my excellent and hospitable friend) has his office in a good-sized Palazzo in the Strada Nuova. In the hall (every inch of which is elaborately painted, but which is as dirty as a police-station in London), a hook-nosed Saracen's Head with an immense quantity of black hair (there is a man attached to it) sells walking-sticks. On the other side of the doorway, a lady with a showy handkerchief for head-dress (wife to the Saracen's Head, I believe) sells articles of her own knitting; and sometimes flowers. A little further in, two or three blind men occasionally beg. Sometimes, they are visited by a man without legs, on a little go-cart, but who has such a fresh-coloured, lively face, and such a respectable, well-conditioned body, that he looks as if he had sunk into the ground up to his middle, or had come, but partially, up a flight of cellar-steps to speak to somebody. A little further in, a few men, perhaps, lie asleep in the middle of the day; or they may be chairmen waiting for their absent freight. If so, they have brought their chairs in with them, and there *they* stand also. On the left of the hall is a little room: a hatter's shop. On the first floor, is the English bank. On the first floor also, is a whole house, and a good large residence too. Heaven knows what there may be above that; but when you are there, you have only just begun to go up-stairs. And yet, coming down-stairs again, thinking of this; and passing out at a great crazy door in the back of the hall, instead of turning the other way, to get into the street again; it bangs behind you, making the dismallest and most lonesome echoes, and you stand in a yard (the yard of the same house) which seems to have been unvisited by human foot, for a hundred years. Not a sound disturbs its repose. Not a head, thrust out of any of the grim, dark, jealous windows, within sight, makes the weeds in the cracked pavement faint of heart, by suggesting the possibility of there being hands to grub them up. Opposite to you, is a giant figure carved in stone, reclining, with an urn, upon a lofty piece of artificial rockwork; and out of the urn, dangles the fag end of a leaden pipe, which, once upon a time, poured a small torrent down the rocks. But the eye-sockets of the giant are not drier than this channel is now. He seems to have given his urn, which is nearly upside down, a final tilt; and after crying, like a sepulchral child, ‘All gone!’ to have lapsed into a stony silence.

In the streets of shops, the houses are much smaller, but of great size notwithstanding, and extremely high. They are very dirty: quite undrained, if my nose be at all reliable: and emit a peculiar fragrance, like the smell of very bad cheese, kept in very hot blankets. Notwithstanding the height of the houses, there would seem to have been a lack of room in the City, for new houses are thrust in everywhere. Wherever it has been possible to cram a tumble-down tenement into a crack or corner, in it has gone. If there be a nook or angle in the wall of a church, or a crevice in any other dead wall, of any sort, there you are sure to find some kind of habitation: looking as if it had grown there, like a fungus. Against the Government House, against the old Senate House, round about any large building, little shops stick so close, like parasite vermin to the great carcase. And for all this, look where you may: up steps, down steps, anywhere, everywhere: there are irregular houses, receding, starting forward, tumbling down, leaning against their neighbours, crippling themselves or their friends by some means or other, until one, more irregular than the rest, chokes up the way, and you can’t see any further.

One of the rottenest-looking parts of the town, I think, is down by the landing-wharf: though it may be, that its being associated with a great deal of rottenness on the evening of our arrival, has stamped it deeper in my mind. Here, again, the houses are very high, and are of an infinite variety of deformed shapes, and have (as most of the houses have) something hanging out of a great many windows, and wafting its frowsy fragrance on the breeze. Sometimes, it is a curtain; sometimes, it is a carpet; sometimes, it is a bed; sometimes, a whole line-full of clothes; but there is almost always something. Before the basement of these houses, is an arcade over the pavement: very massive, dark, and low, like an old crypt. The stone, or plaster, of which it is made, has turned quite black; and against every one of these black piles, all sorts of filth and garbage seem to accumulate spontaneously. Beneath some of the arches, the sellers of macaroni and polenta establish their stalls, which are by no means inviting. The offal of a fish-market, near at hand - that is to say, of a back lane, where people sit upon the ground and on various old bulk-heads and sheds, and sell fish when they have any to dispose of - and of a vegetable market, constructed on the same principle - are contributed to the decoration of this quarter; and as all the mercantile business is transacted here, and it is crowded all day, it has a very decided flavour about it. The Porto Franco, or Free Port (where goods brought in from foreign countries pay no duty until they are sold and taken out, as in a bonded warehouse in England), is down here also; and two portentous officials, in cocked hats, stand at the gate to search you if they choose, and to keep out Monks and Ladies. For, Sanctity as well as Beauty has been known to yield to the temptation of smuggling, and in the same way: that is to say, by concealing the smuggled property beneath the loose folds of its dress. So Sanctity and Beauty may, by no means, enter.

The streets of Genoa would be all the better for the importation of a few Priests of prepossessing appearance. Every fourth or fifth man in the streets is a Priest or a Monk; and there is pretty sure to be at least one itinerant ecclesiastic inside or outside every hackney carriage on the neighbouring roads. I have no knowledge, elsewhere, of more repulsive countenances than are to be found among these gentry. If Nature's handwriting be at all legible, greater varieties of sloth, deceit, and intellectual torpor, could hardly be observed among any class of men in the world.

MR. PEPYS once heard a clergyman assert in his sermon, in illustration of his respect for the Priestly office, that if he could meet a Priest and angel together, he would salute the Priest first. I am rather of the opinion of PETRARCH, who, when his pupil BOCCACCIO wrote to him in great tribulation, that he had been visited and admonished for his writings by a Carthusian Friar who claimed to be a messenger immediately commissioned by Heaven for that purpose, replied, that for his own part, he would take the liberty of testing the reality of the commission by personal observation of the Messenger's face, eyes, forehead, behaviour, and discourse. I cannot but believe myself, from similar observation, that many unaccredited celestial messengers may be seen skulking through the streets of Genoa, or droning away their lives in other Italian towns.

Perhaps the Cappuccíni, though not a learned body, are, as an order, the best friends of the people. They seem to mingle with them more immediately, as their counsellors and comforters; and to go among them more, when they are sick; and to pry less than some other orders, into the secrets of families, for the purpose of establishing a baleful ascendency over their weaker members; and to be influenced by a less fierce desire to make converts, and once made, to let them go to ruin, soul and body. They may be seen, in their coarse dress, in all parts of the town at all times, and begging in the markets early in the morning. The Jesuits too, muster strong in the streets, and go slinking noiselessly about, in pairs, like black cats.

In some of the narrow passages, distinct trades congregate. There is a street of jewellers, and there is a row of booksellers; but even down in places where nobody ever can, or ever could, penetrate in a carriage, there are mighty old palaces shut in among the gloomiest and closest walls, and almost shut out from the sun. Very few of the tradesmen have any idea of setting forth their goods, or disposing them for show. If you, a stranger, want to buy anything, you usually look round the shop till you see it; then clutch it, if it be within reach, and inquire how much. Everything is sold at the most unlikely place. If you want coffee, you go to a sweetmeat shop; and if you want meat, you will probably find it behind an old checked curtain, down half-a-dozen steps, in some sequestered nook as hard to find as if the commodity were poison, and Genoa's law were death to any that uttered it.

Most of the apothecaries' shops are great lounging-places. Here, grave men with sticks, sit down in the shade for hours together, passing a meagre Genoa paper from hand to hand, and talking, drowsily and sparingly, about the News. Two or three of these are poor physicians, ready to proclaim themselves on an emergency, and tear off with any messenger who may arrive. You may know them by the way in which they stretch their necks to listen, when you enter; and by the sigh with which they fall back again into their dull corners, on finding that you only want medicine. Few people lounge in the barbers' shops; though they are very numerous, as hardly any man shaves himself. But the apothecary's has its group of loungers, who sit back among the bottles, with their hands folded over the tops of their sticks. So still and quiet, that either you don't see them in the darkened shop, or mistake them - as I did one ghostly man in bottle-green, one day, with a hat like a stopper - for Horse Medicine.

On a summer evening the Genoese are as fond of putting themselves, as their ancestors were of putting houses, in every available inch of space in and about the town. In all the lanes and alleys, and up every little ascent, and on every dwarf wall, and on every flight of steps, they cluster like bees. Meanwhile (and especially on festa-days) the bells of the churches ring incessantly; not in peals, or any known form of sound, but in a horrible, irregular, jerking, dingle, dingle, dingle: with a sudden stop at every fifteenth dingle or so, which is maddening. This performance is usually achieved by a boy up in the steeple, who takes hold of the clapper, or a little rope attached to it, and tries to dingle louder than every other boy similarly employed. The noise is supposed to be particularly obnoxious to Evil Spirits; but looking up into the steeples, and seeing (and hearing) these young Christians thus engaged, one might very naturally mistake them for the Enemy.

Festa-days, early in the autumn, are very numerous. All the shops were shut up, twice within a week, for these holidays; and one night, all the houses in the neighbourhood of a particular church were illuminated, while the church itself was lighted, outside, with torches; and a grove of blazing links was erected, in an open space outside one of the city gates. This part of the ceremony is prettier and more singular a little way in the country, where you can trace the illuminated cottages all the way up a steep hill-side;

and where you pass festoons of tapers, wasting away in the starlight night, before some lonely little house upon the road.

On these days, they always dress the church of the saint in whose honour the festa is holden, very gaily. Gold-embroidered festoons of different colours, hang from the arches; the altar furniture is set forth; and sometimes, even the lofty pillars are swathed from top to bottom in tight-fitting draperies. The cathedral is dedicated to St. Lorenzo. On St. Lorenzo's day, we went into it, just as the sun was setting. Although these decorations are usually in very indifferent taste, the effect, just then, was very superb indeed. For the whole building was dressed in red; and the sinking sun, streaming in, through a great red curtain in the chief doorway, made all the gorgeousness its own. When the sun went down, and it gradually grew quite dark inside, except for a few twinkling tapers on the principal altar, and some small dangling silver lamps, it was very mysterious and effective. But, sitting in any of the churches towards evening, is like a mild dose of opium.

With the money collected at a festa, they usually pay for the dressing of the church, and for the hiring of the band, and for the tapers. If there be any left (which seldom happens, I believe), the souls in Purgatory get the benefit of it. They are also supposed to have the benefit of the exertions of certain small boys, who shake money-boxes before some mysterious little buildings like rural turnpikes, which (usually shut up close) fly open on Red-letter days, and disclose an image and some flowers inside.

Just without the city gate, on the Albara road, is a small house, with an altar in it, and a stationary money-box: also for the benefit of the souls in Purgatory. Still further to stimulate the charitable, there is a monstrous painting on the plaster, on either side of the grated door, representing a select party of souls, frying. One of them has a grey moustache, and an elaborate head of grey hair: as if he had been taken out of a hairdresser's window and cast into the furnace. There he is: a most grotesque and hideously comic old soul: for ever blistering in the real sun, and melting in the mimic fire, for the gratification and improvement (and the contributions) of the poor Genoese.

They are not a very joyous people, and are seldom seen to dance on their holidays: the staple places of entertainment among the women, being the churches and the public walks. They are very good-tempered, obliging, and industrious. Industry has not made them clean, for their habitations are extremely filthy, and their usual occupation on a fine Sunday morning, is to sit at their doors, hunting in each other’s heads. But their dwellings are so close and confined that if those parts of the city had been beaten down by Massena in the time of the terrible Blockade, it would have at least occasioned one public benefit among many misfortunes.

The Peasant Women, with naked feet and legs, are so constantly washing clothes, in the public tanks, and in every stream and ditch, that one cannot help wondering, in the midst of all this dirt, who wears them when they are clean. The custom is to lay the wet linen which is being operated upon, on a smooth stone, and hammer away at it, with a flat wooden mallet. This they do, as furiously as if they were revenging themselves on dress in general for being connected with the Fall of Mankind.

It is not unusual to see, lying on the edge of the tank at these times, or on another flat stone, an unfortunate baby, tightly swathed up, arms and legs and all, in an enormous quantity of wrapper, so that it is unable to move a toe or finger. This custom (which we often see represented in old pictures) is universal among the common people. A child is left anywhere without the possibility of crawling away, or is accidentally knocked off a shelf, or tumbled out of bed, or is hung up to a hook now and then, and left dangling like a doll at an English rag-shop, without the least inconvenience to anybody.

I was sitting, one Sunday, soon after my arrival, in the little country church of San Martino, a couple of miles from the city, while a baptism took place. I saw the priest, and an attendant with a large taper, and a man, and a woman, and some others; but I had no more idea, until the ceremony was all over, that it was a baptism, or that the curious little stiff instrument, that was passed from one to another, in the course of the ceremony, by the handle - like a short poker - was a child, than I had that it was my own christening. I borrowed the child afterwards, for a minute or two (it was lying across the font then), and found it very red in the face but perfectly quiet, and not to be bent on any terms. The number of cripples in the streets, soon ceased to surprise me.

There are plenty of Saints' and Virgin's Shrines, of course; generally at the corners of streets. The favourite memento to the Faithful, about Genoa, is a painting, representing a peasant on his knees, with a spade and some other agricultural implements beside him; and the Madonna, with the Infant Saviour in her arms, appearing to him in a cloud. This is the legend of the Madonna della Guardia: a chapel on a mountain within a few miles, which is in high repute. It seems that this peasant lived all alone by himself, tilling some land atop of the mountain, where, being a devout man, he daily said his prayers to the Virgin in the open air; for his hut was a very poor one. Upon a certain day, the Virgin appeared to him, as in the picture, and said, 'Why do you pray in the open air, and without a priest?' The peasant explained because there was neither priest nor church at hand - a very uncommon complaint indeed in Italy. 'I should wish, then,' said the Celestial Visitor, 'to have a chapel built here, in which the prayers of the Faithful may be offered up.' 'But, Santissima Madonna,' said the peasant, 'I am a poor man; and chapels cannot be built without money. They must be supported, too, Santissima; for to have a chapel and not support it liberally, is a wickedness - a deadly sin.' This sentiment gave great satisfaction to the visitor. 'Go!' said she. 'There is such a village in the valley on the left, and such another village in the valley on the right, and such another village elsewhere, that will gladly contribute to the building of a chapel. Go to them! Relate what you have seen; and do not doubt that sufficient money will be forthcoming to erect my chapel, or that it will, afterwards, be handsomely maintained.' All of which (miraculously) turned out to be quite true. And in proof of this prediction and revelation, there is the chapel of the Madonna della Guardia, rich and flourishing at this day.

The splendour and variety of the Genoese churches, can hardly be exaggerated. The church of the Annunciata especially: built, like many of the others, at the cost of one noble family, and now in slow progress of repair: from the outer door to the utmost height of the high cupola, is so elaborately painted and set in gold, that it looks (as SIMOND describes it, in his charming book on Italy) like a great enamelled snuff-box. Most of the richer churches contain some beautiful pictures, or other embellishments of great price, almost universally set, side by side, with sprawling effigies of maudlin monks, and the veriest trash and tinsel ever seen.

It may be a consequence of the frequent direction of the popular mind, and pocket, to the souls in Purgatory, but there is very little tenderness for the *bodies* of the dead here. For the very poor, there are, immediately outside one angle of the walls, and behind a jutting point of the fortification, near the sea, certain common pits - one for every day in the year - which all remain closed up, until the turn of each comes for its daily reception of dead bodies. Among the troops in the town, there are usually some Swiss: more or less. When any of these die, they are buried out of a fund maintained by such of their countrymen as are resident in Genoa. Their providing coffins for these men is matter of great astonishment to the authorities.

Certainly, the effect of this promiscuous and indecent splashing down of dead people in so many wells, is bad. It surrounds Death with revolting associations, that insensibly become connected with those whom Death is approaching. Indifference and avoidance are the natural result; and all the softening influences of the great sorrow are harshly disturbed.

There is a ceremony when an old Cavaliére or the like, expires, of erecting a pile of benches in the cathedral, to represent his bier; covering them over with a pall of black velvet; putting his hat and sword on the top; making a little square of seats about the whole; and sending out formal invitations to his friends and acquaintances to come and sit there, and hear Mass: which is performed at the principal Altar, decorated with an infinity of candles for that purpose.

When the better kind of people die, or are at the point of death, their nearest relations generally walk off: retiring into the country for a little change, and leaving the body to be disposed of, without any superintendence from them. The procession is usually formed, and the coffin borne, and the funeral conducted, by a body of persons called a Confratérnita, who, as a kind of voluntary penance, undertake to perform these offices, in regular rotation, for the dead; but who, mingling something of pride with their humility, are dressed in a loose garment covering their whole person, and wear a hood concealing the face; with breathing-holes and apertures for the eyes. The effect of this costume is very ghastly: especially in the case of a certain Blue Confratérnita belonging to Genoa, who, to say the least of them, are very ugly customers, and who look - suddenly encountered in their pious ministration in the streets - as if they were Ghoules or Demons, bearing off the body for themselves.

Although such a custom may be liable to the abuse attendant on many Italian customs, of being recognised as a means of establishing a current account with Heaven, on which to draw, too easily, for future bad actions, or as an expiation for past misdeeds, it must be admitted to be a good one, and a practical one, and one involving unquestionably good works. A voluntary service like this, is surely better than the imposed penance (not at all an infrequent one) of giving so many licks to such and such a stone in the pavement of the cathedral; or than a vow to the Madonna to wear nothing but blue for a year or two. This is supposed to give great delight above; blue being (as is well known) the Madonna's favourite colour. Women who have devoted themselves to this act of Faith, are very commonly seen walking in the streets.

There are three theatres in the city, besides an old one now rarely opened. The most important - the Carlo Felice: the opera-house of Genoa - is a very splendid, commodious, and beautiful theatre. A company of comedians were acting there, when we arrived: and soon after their departure, a second-rate opera company came. The great season is not until the carnival time - in the spring. Nothing impressed me, so much, in my visits here (which were pretty numerous) as the uncommonly hard and cruel character of the audience, who resent the slightest defect, take nothing good-humouredly, seem to be always lying in wait for an opportunity to hiss, and spare the actresses as little as the actors.

But, as there is nothing else of a public nature at which they are allowed to express the least disapprobation, perhaps they are resolved to make the most of this opportunity.

There are a great number of Piedmontese officers too, who are allowed the privilege of kicking their heels in the pit, for next to nothing: gratuitous, or cheap accommodation for these gentlemen being insisted on, by the Governor, in all public or semi-public entertainments. They are lofty critics in consequence, and infinitely more exacting than if they made the unhappy manager's fortune.

The TEATRO DIURNO, or Day Theatre, is a covered stage in the open air, where the performances take place by daylight, in the cool of the afternoon; commencing at four or five o'clock, and lasting, some three hours. It is curious, sitting among the audience, to have a fine view of the neighbouring hills and houses, and to see the neighbours at their windows looking on, and to hear the bells of the churches and convents ringing at most complete cross-purposes with the scene. Beyond this, and the novelty of seeing a play in the fresh pleasant air, with the darkening evening closing in, there is nothing very exciting or characteristic in the performances. The actors are indifferent; and though they sometimes represent one of Goldoni's comedies, the staple of the Drama is French. Anything like nationality is dangerous to despotic governments, and Jesuit-beleaguered kings.

The Theatre of Puppets, or Marionetti - a famous company from Milan - is, without any exception, the drollest exhibition I ever beheld in my life. I never saw anything so exquisitely ridiculous. They *look* between four and five feet high, but are really much smaller; for when a musician in the orchestra happens to put his hat on the stage, it becomes alarmingly gigantic, and almost blots out an actor. They usually play a comedy, and a ballet. The comic man in the comedy I saw one summer night, is a waiter in an hotel. There never was such a locomotive actor, since the world began. Great pains are taken with him. He has extra joints in his legs: and a practical eye, with which he winks at the pit, in a manner that is absolutely insupportable to a stranger, but which the initiated audience, mainly composed of the common people, receive (so they do everything else) quite as a matter of course, and as if he were a man. His spirits are prodigious. He continually shakes his legs, and winks his eye. And there is a heavy father with grey hair, who sits down on the regular conventional stage-bank, and blesses his daughter in the regular conventional way, who is tremendous. No one would suppose it possible that anything short of a real man could be so tedious. It is the triumph of art.

In the ballet, an Enchanter runs away with the Bride, in the very hour of her nuptials, He brings her to his cave, and tries to soothe her. They sit down on a sofa (the regular sofa! in the regular place, O. P. Second Entrance!) and a procession of musicians enters; one creature playing a drum, and knocking himself off his legs at every blow. These failing to delight her, dancers appear. Four first; then two; *the* two; the flesh-coloured two. The way in which they dance; the height to which they spring; the impossible and inhuman extent to which they pirouette; the revelation of their preposterous legs; the coming down with a pause, on the very tips of their toes, when the music requires it; the gentleman's retiring up, when it is the lady's turn; and the lady's retiring up, when it is the gentleman's turn; the final passion of a pas-de-deux; and the going off with a bound! - I shall never see a real ballet, with a composed countenance again.

I went, another night, to see these Puppets act a play called 'St. Helena, or the Death of Napoleon.' It began by the disclosure of Napoleon, with an immense head, seated on a sofa in his chamber at St. Helena; to whom his valet entered with this obscure announcement:

'Sir Yew ud se on Low?' (the *ow*, as in cow).

Sir Hudson (that you could have seen his regimentals!) was a perfect mammoth of a man, to Napoleon; hideously ugly, with a monstrously disproportionate face, and a great clump for the lower-jaw, to express his tyrannical and obdurate nature. He began his system of persecution, by calling his prisoner 'General Buonaparte;' to which the latter replied, with the deepest tragedy, 'Sir Yew ud se on Low, call me not thus. Repeat that phrase and leave me! I am Napoleon, Emperor of France!' Sir Yew ud se on, nothing daunted, proceeded to entertain him with an ordinance of the British Government, regulating the state he should preserve, and the furniture of his rooms: and limiting his attendants to four or five persons. 'Four or five for *me*!' said Napoleon. 'Me! One hundred thousand men were lately at my sole command; and this English officer talks of four or five for *me*!' Throughout the piece, Napoleon (who talked very like the real Napoleon, and was, for ever, having small soliloquies by himself) was very bitter on 'these English officers,' and 'these English soldiers;' to the great satisfaction of the audience, who were perfectly delighted to have Low bullied; and who, whenever Low said 'General Buonaparte' (which he always did: always receiving the same correction), quite execrated him. It would be hard to say why; for Italians have little cause to sympathise with Napoleon, Heaven knows.

There was no plot at all, except that a French officer, disguised as an Englishman, came to propound a plan of escape; and being discovered, but not before Napoleon had magnanimously refused to steal his freedom, was immediately ordered off by Low to be hanged. In two very long speeches, which Low made memorable, by winding up with ‘Yas!’ - to show that he was English - which brought down thunders of applause. Napoleon was so affected by this catastrophe, that he fainted away on the spot, and was carried out by two other puppets. Judging from what followed, it would appear that he never recovered the shock; for the next act showed him, in a clean shirt, in his bed (curtains crimson and white), where a lady, prematurely dressed in mourning, brought two little children, who kneeled down by the bedside, while he made a decent end; the last word on his lips being ‘Vatterlo.’

It was unspeakably ludicrous. Buonaparte’s boots were so wonderfully beyond control, and did such marvellous things of their own accord: doubling themselves up, and getting under tables, and dangling in the air, and sometimes skating away with him, out of all human knowledge, when he was in full speech - mischances which were not rendered the less absurd, by a settled melancholy depicted in his face. To put an end to one conference with Low, he had to go to a table, and read a book: when it was the finest spectacle I ever beheld, to see his body bending over the volume, like a boot-jack, and his sentimental eyes glaring obstinately into the pit. He was prodigiously good, in bed, with an immense collar to his shirt, and his little hands outside the coverlet. So was Dr. Antommarchi, represented by a puppet with long lank hair, like Mawworm’s, who, in consequence of some derangement of his wires, hovered about the couch like a vulture, and gave medical opinions in the air. He was almost as good as Low, though the latter was great at all times - a decided brute and villain, beyond all possibility of mistake. Low was especially fine at the last, when, hearing the doctor and the valet say, ‘The Emperor is dead!’ he pulled out his watch, and wound up the piece (not the watch) by exclaiming, with characteristic brutality, ‘Ha! ha! Eleven minutes to six! The General dead! and the spy hanged!’ This brought the curtain down, triumphantly.

There is not in Italy, they say (and I believe them), a lovelier residence than the Palazzo Peschiere, or Palace of the Fishponds, whither we removed as soon as our three months' tenancy of the Pink Jail at Albaro had ceased and determined.

It stands on a height within the walls of Genoa, but aloof from the town: surrounded by beautiful gardens of its own, adorned with statues, vases, fountains, marble basins, terraces, walks of orange-trees and lemon-trees, groves of roses and camellias. All its apartments are beautiful in their proportions and decorations; but the great hall, some fifty feet in height, with three large windows at the end, overlooking the whole town of Genoa, the harbour, and the neighbouring sea, affords one of the most fascinating and delightful prospects in the world. Any house more cheerful and habitable than the great rooms are, within, it would be difficult to conceive; and certainly nothing more delicious than the scene without, in sunshine or in moonlight, could be imagined. It is more like an enchanted place in an Eastern story than a grave and sober lodging.

How you may wander on, from room to room, and never tire of the wild fancies on the walls and ceilings, as bright in their fresh colouring as if they had been painted yesterday; or how one floor, or even the great hall which opens on eight other rooms, is a spacious promenade; or how there are corridors and bed-chambers above, which we never use and rarely visit, and scarcely know the way through; or how there is a view of a perfectly different character on each of the four sides of the building; matters little. But that prospect from the hall is like a vision to me. I go back to it, in fancy, as I have done in calm reality a hundred times a day; and stand there, looking out, with the sweet scents from the garden rising up about me, in a perfect dream of happiness.

There lies all Genoa, in beautiful confusion, with its many churches, monasteries, and convents, pointing up into the sunny sky; and down below me, just where the roofs begin, a solitary convent parapet, fashioned like a gallery, with an iron across at the end, where sometimes early in the morning, I have seen a little group of dark-veiled nuns gliding sorrowfully to and fro, and stopping now and then to peep down upon the waking world in which they have no part. Old Monte Faccio, brightest of hills in good weather, but sulkiest when storms are coming on, is here, upon the left. The Fort within the walls (the good King built it to command the town, and beat the houses of the Genoese about their ears, in case they should be discontented) commands that height upon the right. The broad sea lies beyond, in front there; and that line of coast, beginning by the light-house, and tapering away, a mere speck in the rosy distance, is the beautiful coast road that leads to Nice. The garden near at hand, among the roofs and houses: all red with roses and fresh with little fountains: is the Acqua Sola - a public promenade, where the military band plays gaily, and the white veils cluster thick, and the Genoese nobility ride round, and round, and round, in state-clothes and coaches at least, if not in absolute wisdom. Within a stone's-throw, as it seems, the audience of the Day Theatre sit: their faces turned this way. But as the stage is hidden, it is very odd, without a knowledge of the cause, to see their faces changed so suddenly from earnestness to laughter; and odder still, to hear the rounds upon rounds of applause, rattling in the evening air, to which the curtain falls. But, being Sunday night, they act their best and most attractive play. And now, the sun is going down, in such magnificent array of red, and green, and golden light, as neither pen nor pencil could depict; and to the ringing of the vesper bells, darkness sets in at once, without a twilight. Then, lights begin to shine in Genoa, and on the country road; and the revolving lanthorn out at sea there, flashing, for an instant, on this palace front and portico, illuminates it as if there were a bright moon bursting from behind a cloud; then, merges it in deep obscurity. And this, so far as I know, is the only reason why the Genoese avoid it after dark, and think it haunted.

My memory will haunt it, many nights, in time to come; but nothing worse, I will engage. The same Ghost will occasionally sail away, as I did one pleasant autumn evening, into the bright prospect, and sniff the morning air at Marseilles.

The corpulent hairdresser was still sitting in his slippers outside his shop-door there, but the twirling ladies in the window, with the natural inconstancy of their sex, had ceased to twirl, and were languishing, stock still, with their beautiful faces addressed to blind corners of the establishment, where it was impossible for admirers to penetrate.

The steamer had come from Genoa in a delicious run of eighteen hours, and we were going to run back again by the Cornice road from Nice: not being satisfied to have seen only the outsides of the beautiful towns that rise in picturesque white clusters from among the olive woods, and rocks, and hills, upon the margin of the Sea.

The Boat which started for Nice that night, at eight o'clock, was very small, and so crowded with goods that there was scarcely room to move; neither was there anything to cat on board, except bread; nor to drink, except coffee. But being due at Nice at about eight or so in the morning, this was of no consequence; so when we began to wink at the bright stars, in involuntary acknowledgment of their winking at us, we turned into our berths, in a crowded, but cool little cabin, and slept soundly till morning.

The Boat, being as dull and dogged a little boat as ever was built, it was within an hour of noon when we turned into Nice Harbour, where we very little expected anything but breakfast. But we were laden with wool. Wool must not remain in the Custom-house at Marseilles more than twelve months at a stretch, without paying duty. It is the custom to make fictitious removals of unsold wool to evade this law; to take it somewhere when the twelve months are nearly out; bring it straight back again; and warehouse it, as a new cargo, for nearly twelve months longer. This wool of ours, had come originally from some place in the East. It was recognised as Eastern produce, the moment we entered the harbour. Accordingly, the gay little Sunday boats, full of holiday people, which had come off to greet us, were warned away by the authorities; we were declared in quarantine; and a great flag was solemnly run up to the mast-head on the wharf, to make it known to all the town.

It was a very hot day indeed. We were unshaved, unwashed, undressed, unfed, and could hardly enjoy the absurdity of lying blistering in a lazy harbour, with the town looking on from a respectful distance, all manner of whiskered men in cocked hats discussing our fate at a remote guard-house, with gestures (we looked very hard at them through telescopes) expressive of a week's detention at least: and nothing whatever the matter all the time.
But even in this crisis the brave Courier achieved a triumph. He telegraphed somebody (*I* saw nobody) either naturally connected with the

hotel, or put *en rapport* with the establishment for that occasion only. The telegraph was answered, and in half an hour or less, there came a loud shout from the guard-house. The captain was wanted. Everybody helped the captain into his boat. Everybody got his luggage, and said we were going. The captain rowed away, and disappeared behind a little jutting corner of the Galley-slaves' Prison: and presently came back with something, very sulkily. The brave Courier met him at the side, and received the something as its rightful owner. It was a wicker basket, folded in a linen cloth; and in it were two great bottles of wine, a roast fowl, some salt fish chopped with garlic, a great loaf of bread, a dozen or so of peaches, and a few other trifles. When we had selected our own breakfast, the brave Courier invited a chosen party to partake of these refreshments, and assured them that they need not be deterred by motives of delicacy, as he would order a second basket to be furnished at their expense. Which he did - no one knew how - and by-and-by, the captain being again summoned, again sulkily returned with another something; over which my popular attendant presided as before: carving with a clasp-knife, his own personal property, something smaller than a Roman sword.

The whole party on board were made merry by these unexpected supplies; but none more so than a loquacious little Frenchman, who got drunk in five minutes, and a sturdy Cappuccíno Friar, who had taken everybody's fancy mightily, and was one of the best friars in the world, I verily believe.

He had a free, open countenance; and a rich brown, flowing beard; and was a remarkably handsome man, of about fifty. He had come up to us, early in the morning, and inquired whether we were sure to be at Nice by eleven; saying that he particularly wanted to know, because if we reached it by that time he would have to perform Mass, and must deal with the consecrated wafer, fasting; whereas, if there were no chance of his being in time, he would immediately breakfast. He made this communication, under the idea that the brave Courier was the captain; and indeed he looked much more like it than anybody else on board. Being assured that we should arrive in good time, he fasted, and talked, fasting, to everybody, with the most charming good humour; answering jokes at the expense of friars, with other jokes at the expense of laymen, and saying that, friar as he was, he would engage to take up the two strongest men on board, one after the other, with his teeth, and carry them along the deck. Nobody gave him the opportunity, but I dare say he could have done it; for he was a gallant, noble figure of a man, even in the Cappuccíno dress, which is the ugliest and most ungainly that can well be.

All this had given great delight to the loquacious Frenchman, who gradually patronised the Friar very much, and seemed to commiserate him as one who might have been born a Frenchman himself, but for an unfortunate destiny. Although his patronage was such as a mouse might bestow upon a lion, he had a vast opinion of its condescension; and in the warmth of that sentiment, occasionally rose on tiptoe, to slap the Friar on the back.

When the baskets arrived: it being then too late for Mass: the Friar went to work bravely: eating prodigiously of the cold meat and bread, drinking deep draughts of the wine, smoking cigars, taking snuff, sustaining an uninterrupted conversation with all hands, and occasionally running to the boat’s side and hailing somebody on shore with the intelligence that we *must* be got out of this quarantine somehow or other, as he had to take part in a great religious procession in the afternoon. After this, he would come back, laughing lustily from pure good humour: while the Frenchman wrinkled his small face into ten thousand creases, and said how droll it was, and what a brave boy was that Friar! At length the heat of the sun without, and the wine within, made the Frenchman sleepy. So, in the noontide of his patronage of his gigantic protégé, he lay down among the wool, and began to snore.

It was four o’clock before we were released; and the Frenchman, dirty and woolly, and snuffy, was still sleeping when the Friar went ashore. As soon as we were free, we all hurried away, to wash and dress, that we might make a decent appearance at the procession; and I saw no more of the Frenchman until we took up our station in the main street to see it pass, when he squeezed himself into a front place, elaborately renovated; threw back his little coat, to show a broad-barred velvet waistcoat, sprinkled all over with stars; then adjusted himself and his cane so as utterly to bewilder and transfix the Friar, when he should appear.

The procession was a very long one, and included an immense number of people divided into small parties; each party chanting nasally, on its own account, without reference to any other, and producing a most dismal result. There were angels, crosses, Virgins carried on flat boards surrounded by Cupids, crowns, saints, missals, infantry, tapers, monks, nuns, relics, dignitaries of the church in green hats, walking under crimson parasols: and, here and there, a species of sacred street-lamp hoisted on a pole. We looked out anxiously for the Cappuccíni, and presently their brown robes and corded girdles were seen coming on, in a body.

I observed the little Frenchman chuckle over the idea that when the Friar saw him in the broad-barred waistcoat, he would mentally exclaim, ‘Is that my Patron! *That* distinguished man!’ and would be covered with confusion. Ah! never was the Frenchman so deceived. As our friend the Cappuccíno advanced, with folded arms, he looked straight into the visage of the little Frenchman, with a bland, serene, composed abstraction, not to be described. There was not the faintest trace of recognition or amusement on his features; not the smallest consciousness of bread and meat, wine, snuff, or cigars. ‘C’est lui-même,’ I heard the little Frenchman say, in some doubt. Oh yes, it was himself. It was not his brother or his nephew, very like him. It was he. He walked in great state: being one of the Superiors of the Order: and looked his part to admiration. There never was anything so perfect of its kind as the contemplative way in which he allowed his placid gaze to rest on us, his late companions, as if he had never seen us in his life and didn’t see us then. The Frenchman, quite humbled, took off his hat at last, but the Friar still passed on, with the same imperturbable serenity; and the broad-barred waistcoat, fading into the crowd, was seen no more.

The procession wound up with a discharge of musketry that shook all the windows in the town. Next afternoon we started for Genoa, by the famed Cornice road.

The half-French, half-Italian Vetturíno, who undertook, with his little rattling carriage and pair, to convey us thither in three days, was a careless, good-looking fellow, whose light-heartedness and singing propensities knew no bounds as long as we went on smoothly. So long, he had a word and a smile, and a flick of his whip, for all the peasant girls, and odds and ends of the Sonnambula for all the echoes. So long, he went jingling through every little village, with bells on his horses and rings in his ears: a very meteor of gallantry and cheerfulness. But, it was highly characteristic to see him under a slight reverse of circumstances, when, in one part of the journey, we came to a narrow place where a waggon had broken down and stopped up the road. His hands were twined in his hair immediately, as if a combination of all the direst accidents in life had suddenly fallen on his devoted head. He swore in French, prayed in Italian, and went up and down, beating his feet on the ground in a very ecstasy of despair. There were various carters and mule-drivers assembled round the broken waggon, and at last some man of an original turn of mind, proposed that a general and joint effort should be made to get things to-rights again, and clear the way - an idea which I verily believe would never have presented itself to our friend, though we had remained there until now. It was done at no great cost of labour; but at every pause in the doing, his hands were wound in his hair again, as if there were no ray of hope to lighten his misery. The moment he was on his box once more, and clattering briskly down hill, he returned to the Sonnambula and the peasant girls, as if it were not in the power of misfortune to depress him.

Much of the romance of the beautiful towns and villages on this beautiful road, disappears when they are entered, for many of them are very miserable. The streets are narrow, dark, and dirty; the inhabitants lean and squalid; and the withered old women, with their wiry grey hair twisted up into a knot on the top of the head, like a pad to carry loads on, are so intensely ugly, both along the Riviera, and in Genoa, too, that, seen straggling about in dim doorways with their spindles, or crooning together in by-corners, they are like a population of Witches - except that they certainly are not to be suspected of brooms or any other instrument of cleanliness. Neither are the pig-skins, in common use to hold wine, and hung out in the sun in all directions, by any means ornamental, as they always preserve the form of very bloated pigs, with their heads and legs cut off, dangling upside-down by their own tails.

These towns, as they are seen in the approach, however: nestling, with their clustering roofs and towers, among trees on steep hill-sides, or built upon the brink of noble bays: are charming. The vegetation is, everywhere, luxuriant and beautiful, and the Palm-tree makes a novel feature in the novel scenery. In one town, San Remo - a most extraordinary place, built on gloomy open arches, so that one might ramble underneath the whole town - there are pretty terrace gardens; in other towns, there is the clang of shipwrights' hammers, and the building of small vessels on the beach. In some of the broad bays, the fleets of Europe might ride at anchor. In every case, each little group of houses presents, in the distance, some enchanting confusion of picturesque and fanciful shapes.

The road itself - now high above the glittering sea, which breaks against the foot of the precipice: now turning inland to sweep the shore of a bay: now crossing the stony bed of a mountain stream: now low down on the beach: now winding among riven rocks of many forms and colours: now chequered by a solitary ruined tower, one of a chain of towers built, in old time, to protect the coast from the invasions of the Barbary Corsairs - presents new beauties every moment. When its own striking scenery is passed, and it trails on through a long line of suburb, lying on the flat sea-shore, to Genoa, then, the changing glimpses of that noble city and its harbour, awaken a new source of interest; freshened by every huge, unwieldy, half-inhabited old house in its outskirts: and coming to its climax when the city gate is reached, and all Genoa with its beautiful harbour, and neighbouring hills, bursts proudly on the view.

CHAPTER V - TO PARMA, MODENA, AND BOLOGNA

I strolled away from Genoa on the 6th of November, bound for a good many places (England among them), but first for Piacenza; for which town I started in the *coupé* of a machine something like a travelling caravan, in company with the brave Courier, and a lady with a large dog, who howled dolefully, at intervals, all night. It was very wet, and very cold; very dark, and very dismal; we travelled at the rate of barely four miles an hour, and stopped nowhere for refreshment. At ten o'clock next morning, we changed coaches at Alessandria, where we were packed up in another coach (the body whereof would have been small for a fly), in company with a very old priest; a young Jesuit, his companion - who carried their breviaries and other books, and who, in the exertion of getting into the coach, had made a gash of pink leg between his black stocking and his black knee-shorts, that reminded one of Hamlet in Ophelia’s closet, only it was visible on both legs - a provincial Avvocáto; and a gentleman with a red nose that had an uncommon and singular sheen upon it, which I never observed in the human subject before. In this way we travelled on, until four o’clock in the afternoon; the roads being still very heavy, and the coach very slow. To mend the matter, the old priest was troubled with cramps in his legs, so that he had to give a terrible yell every ten minutes or so, and be hoisted out by the united efforts of the company; the coach always stopping for him, with great gravity. This disorder, and the roads, formed the main subject of conversation. Finding, in the afternoon, that the *coupé* had discharged two people, and had only one passenger inside - a monstrous ugly Tuscan, with a great purple moustache, of which no man could see the ends when he had his hat on - I took advantage of its better accommodation, and in company with this gentleman (who was very conversational and good-humoured) travelled on, until nearly eleven o’clock at night, when the driver reported that he couldn’t think of going any farther, and we accordingly made a halt at a place called Stradella.

The inn was a series of strange galleries surrounding a yard where our coach, and a waggon or two, and a lot of fowls, and firewood, were all heaped up together, higgledy-piggledy; so that you didn’t know, and couldn’t have taken your oath, which was a fowl and which was a cart. We followed a sleepy man with a flaring torch, into a great, cold room, where there were two immensely broad beds, on what looked like two immensely broad deal dining-tables; another deal table of similar dimensions in the middle of the bare floor; four windows; and two chairs. Somebody said it was my room; and I walked up and down it, for half an hour or so, staring at the Tuscan, the old priest, the young priest, and the Avvocáto (Red-Nose lived in the town, and had gone home), who sat upon their beds, and stared at me in return.

The rather dreary whimsicality of this stage of the proceedings, is interrupted by an announcement from the Brave (he had been cooking) that supper is ready; and to the priest’s chamber (the next room and the counterpart of mine) we all adjourn. The first dish is a cabbage, boiled with a great quantity of rice in a tureen full of water, and flavoured with cheese.

It is so hot, and we are so cold, that it appears almost jolly. The second dish is some little bits of pork, fried with pigs' kidneys. The third, two red fowls. The fourth, two little red turkeys. The fifth, a huge stew of garlic and truffles, and I don't know what else; and this concludes the entertainment.

Before I can sit down in my own chamber, and think it of the dampest, the door opens, and the Brave comes moving in, in the middle of such a quantity of fuel that he looks like Birnam Wood taking a winter walk. He kindles this heap in a twinkling, and produces a jorum of hot brandy and water; for that bottle of his keeps company with the seasons, and now holds nothing but the purest *eau de vie*. When he has accomplished this feat, he retires for the night; and I hear him, for an hour afterwards, and indeed until I fall asleep, making jokes in some outhouse (apparently under the pillow), where he is smoking cigars with a party of confidential friends. He never was in the house in his life before; but he knows everybody everywhere, before he has been anywhere five minutes; and is certain to have attracted to himself, in the meantime, the enthusiastic devotion of the whole establishment.

This is at twelve o'clock at night. At four o'clock next morning, he is up again, fresher than a full-blown rose; making blazing fires without the least authority from the landlord; producing mugs of scalding coffee when nobody else can get anything but cold water; and going out into the dark streets, and roaring for fresh milk, on the chance of somebody with a cow getting up to supply it. While the horses are 'coming,' I stumble out into the town too. It seems to be all one little Piazza, with a cold damp wind blowing in and out of the arches, alternately, in a sort of pattern. But it is profoundly dark, and raining heavily; and I shouldn't know it to-morrow, if I were taken there to try. Which Heaven forbid.

The horses arrive in about an hour. In the interval, the driver swears; sometimes Christian oaths, sometimes Pagan oaths. Sometimes, when it is a long, compound oath, he begins with Christianity and merges into Paganism. Various messengers are despatched; not so much after the horses, as after each other; for the first messenger never comes back, and all the rest imitate him. At length the horses appear, surrounded by all the messengers; some kicking them, and some dragging them, and all shouting abuse to them. Then, the old priest, the young priest, the Avvocáto, the Tuscan, and all of us, take our places; and sleepy voices proceeding from the doors of extraordinary hutches in divers parts of the yard, cry out 'Addio corrière mio! Buon' viággio, corrière!' Salutations which the courier, with his face one monstrous grin, returns in like manner as we go jolting and wallowing away, through the mud.

At Piacenza, which was four or five hours' journey from the inn at Stradella, we broke up our little company before the hotel door, with divers manifestations of friendly feeling on all sides. The old priest was taken with the cramp again, before he had got half-way down the street; and the young priest laid the bundle of books on a door-step, while he dutifully rubbed the old gentleman's legs. The client of the Avvocáto was waiting for him at the yard-gate, and kissed him on each cheek, with such a resounding smack, that I am afraid he had either a very bad case, or a scantily-furnished purse. The Tuscan, with a cigar in his mouth, went loitering off, carrying his hat in his hand that he might the better trail up the ends of his dishevelled moustache. And the brave Courier, as he and I strolled away to look about us, began immediately to entertain me with the private histories and family affairs of the whole party.

A brown, decayed, old town, Piacenza is. A deserted, solitary, grass-grown place, with ruined ramparts; half filled-up trenches, which afford a frowsy pasturage to the lean kine that wander about them; and streets of stern houses, moodily frowning at the other houses over the way. The sleepiest and shabbiest of soldiery go wandering about, with the double curse of laziness and poverty, uncouthly wrinkling their misfitting regimentals; the dirtiest of children play with their impromptu toys (pigs and mud) in the feeblest of gutters; and the gauntest of dogs trot in and out of the dullest of archways, in perpetual search of something to eat, which they never seem to find. A mysterious and solemn Palace, guarded by two colossal statues, twin Genii of the place, stands gravely in the midst of the idle town; and the king with the marble legs, who flourished in the time of the thousand and one Nights, might live contentedly inside of it, and never have the energy, in his upper half of flesh and blood, to want to come out.

What a strange, half-sorrowful and half-delicious doze it is, to ramble through these places gone to sleep and basking in the sun! Each, in its turn, appears to be, of all the mouldy, dreary, God-forgotten towns in the wide world, the chief. Sitting on this hillock where a bastion used to be, and where a noisy fortress was, in the time of the old Roman station here, I became aware that I have never known till now, what it is to be lazy. A dormouse must surely be in very much the same condition before he retires under the wool in his cage; or a tortoise before he buries himself.

I feel that I am getting rusty. That any attempt to think, would be accompanied with a creaking noise. That there is nothing, anywhere, to be done, or needing to be done. That there is no more human progress, motion, effort, or advancement, of any kind beyond this. That the whole scheme stopped here centuries ago, and laid down to rest until the Day of Judgment.

Never while the brave Courier lives! Behold him jingling out of Piacenza, and staggering this way, in the tallest posting-chaise ever seen, so that he looks out of the front window as if he were peeping over a garden wall; while the postilion, concentrated essence of all the shabbiness of Italy, pauses for a moment in his animated conversation, to touch his hat to a blunt-nosed little Virgin, hardly less shabby than himself, enshrined in a plaster Punch’s show outside the town.

In Genoa, and thereabouts, they train the vines on trellis-work, supported on square clumsy pillars, which, in themselves, are anything but picturesque. But, here, they twine them around trees, and let them trail among the hedges; and the vineyards are full of trees, regularly planted for this purpose, each with its own vine twining and clustering about it. Their leaves are now of the brightest gold and deepest red; and never was anything so enchantingly graceful and full of beauty. Through miles of these delightful forms and colours, the road winds its way. The wild festoons, the elegant wreaths, and crowns, and garlands of all shapes; the fairy nets flung over great trees, and making them prisoners in sport; the tumbled heaps and mounds of exquisite shapes upon the ground; how rich and beautiful they are! And every now and then, a long, long line of trees, will be all bound and garlanded together: as if they had taken hold of one another, and were coming dancing down the field!

Parma has cheerful, stirring streets, for an Italian town; and consequently is not so characteristic as many places of less note. Always excepting the retired Piazza, where the Cathedral, Baptistery, and Campanile - ancient buildings, of a sombre brown, embellished with innumerable grotesque monsters and dreamy-looking creatures carved in marble and red stone - are clustered in a noble and magnificent repose. Their silent presence was only invaded, when I saw them, by the twittering of the many birds that were flying in and out of the crevices in the stones and little nooks in the architecture, where they had made their nests. They were busy, rising from the cold shade of Temples made with hands, into the sunny air of Heaven. Not so the worshippers within, who were listening to the same drowsy chaunt, or kneeling before the same kinds of images and tapers, or whispering, with their heads bowed down, in the selfsame dark confessionals, as I had left in Genoa and everywhere else.

The decayed and mutilated paintings with which this church is covered, have, to my thinking, a remarkably mournful and depressing influence. It is miserable to see great works of art - something of the Souls of Painters - perishing and fading away, like human forms. This cathedral is odorous with the rotting of Correggio’s frescoes in the Cupola. Heaven knows how beautiful they may have been at one time. Connoisseurs fall into raptures with them now; but such a labyrinth of arms and legs: such heaps of foreshortened limbs, entangled and involved and jumbled together: no operative surgeon, gone mad, could imagine in his wildest delirium.

There is a very interesting subterranean church here: the roof supported by marble pillars, behind each of which there seemed to be at least one beggar in ambush: to say nothing of the tombs and secluded altars. From every one of these lurking-places, such crowds of phantom-looking men and women, leading other men and women with twisted limbs, or chattering jaws, or paralytic gestures, or idiotic heads, or some other sad infirmity, came hobbling out to beg, that if the ruined frescoes in the cathedral above, had been suddenly animated, and had retired to this lower church, they could hardly have made a greater confusion, or exhibited a more confounding display of arms and legs.

There is Petrarch’s Monument, too; and there is the Baptistery, with its beautiful arches and immense font; and there is a gallery containing some very remarkable pictures, whereof a few were being copied by hairy-faced artists, with little velvet caps more off their heads than on. There is the Farnese Palace, too; and in it one of the dreariest spectacles of decay that ever was seen - a grand, old, gloomy theatre, mouldering away.

It is a large wooden structure, of the horse-shoe shape; the lower seats arranged upon the Roman plan, but above them, great heavy chambers; rather than boxes, where the Nobles sat, remote in their proud state. Such desolation as has fallen on this theatre, enhanced in the spectator’s fancy by its gay intention and design, none but worms can be familiar with. A hundred and ten years have passed, since any play was acted here. The sky shines in through the gashes in the roof; the boxes are dropping down, wasting away, and only tenanted by rats; damp and mildew smear the faded colours, and make spectral maps upon the panels; lean rags are dangling down where there were gay festoons on the Proscenium; the stage has rotted so, that a narrow wooden gallery is thrown across it, or it would sink beneath the tread, and bury the visitor in the gloomy depth beneath. The desolation and decay impress themselves on all the senses. The air has a mouldering smell, and an earthy taste; any stray outer sounds that straggle in with some lost sunbeam, are muffled and heavy; and the worm, the maggot, and the rot have changed the surface of the wood beneath the touch, as time will seam and roughen a smooth hand. If ever Ghosts act plays, they act them on this ghostly stage.

It was most delicious weather, when we came into Modena, where the darkness of the sombre colonnades over the footways skirting the main street on either side, was made refreshing and agreeable by the bright sky, so wonderfully blue. I passed from all the glory of the day, into a dim cathedral, where High Mass was performing, feeble tapers were burning, people were kneeling in all directions before all manner of shrines, and officiating priests were crooning the usual chant, in the usual, low, dull, drawling, melancholy tone.

Thinking how strange it was, to find, in every stagnant town, this same Heart beating with the same monotonous pulsation, the centre of the same torpid, listless system, I came out by another door, and was suddenly scared to death by a blast from the shrillest trumpet that ever was blown. Immediately, came tearing round the corner, an equestrian company from Paris: marshalling themselves under the walls of the church, and flouting, with their horses' heels, the griffins, lions, tigers, and other monsters in stone and marble, decorating its exterior. First, there came a stately nobleman with a great deal of hair, and no hat, bearing an enormous banner, on which was inscribed, MAZEPPA! TO-NIGHT! Then, a Mexican chief, with a great pear-shaped club on his shoulder, like Hercules. Then, six or eight Roman chariots: each with a beautiful lady in extremely short petticoats, and unnaturally pink tights, erect within: shedding beaming looks upon the crowd, in which there was a latent expression of discomposure and anxiety, for which I couldn't account, until, as the open back of each chariot presented itself, I saw the immense difficulty with which the pink legs maintained their perpendicular, over the uneven pavement of the town: which gave me quite a new idea of the ancient Romans and Britons. The procession was brought to a close, by some dozen indomitable warriors of different nations, riding two and two, and haughtily surveying the tame population of Modena: among whom, however, they occasionally condescended to scatter largesse in the form of a few handbills. After caracolling among the lions and tigers, and proclaiming that evening's entertainments with blast of trumpet, it then filed off, by the other end of the square, and left a new and greatly increased dulness behind.

When the procession had so entirely passed away, that the shrill trumpet was mild in the distance, and the tail of the last horse was hopelessly round the corner, the people who had come out of the church to stare at it, went back again. But one old lady, kneeling on the pavement within, near the door, had seen it all, and had been immensely interested, without getting up; and this old lady's eye, at that juncture, I happened to catch: to our mutual confusion. She cut our embarrassment very short, however, by crossing herself devoutly, and going down, at full length, on her face, before a figure in a fancy petticoat and a gilt crown; which was so like one of the procession-figures, that perhaps at this hour she may think the whole appearance a celestial vision. Anyhow, I must certainly have forgiven her her interest in the Circus, though I had been her Father Confessor.

There was a little fiery-eyed old man with a crooked shoulder, in the cathedral, who took it very ill that I made no effort to see the bucket (kept in an old tower) which the people of Modena took away from the people of Bologna in the fourteenth century, and about which there was war made and a mock-heroic poem by TASSONE, too. Being quite content, however, to look at the outside of the tower, and feast, in imagination, on the bucket within; and preferring to loiter in the shade of the tall Campanile, and about the cathedral; I have no personal knowledge of this bucket, even at the present time.

Indeed, we were at Bologna, before the little old man (or the Guide-Book) would have considered that we had half done justice to the wonders of Modena. But it is such a delight to me to leave new scenes behind, and still go on, encountering newer scenes - and, moreover, I have such a perverse disposition in respect of sights that are cut, and dried, and dictated - that I fear I sin against similar authorities in every place I visit.

Be this as it may, in the pleasant Cemetery at Bologna, I found myself walking next Sunday morning, among the stately marble tombs and colonnades, in company with a crowd of Peasants, and escorted by a little Cicerone of that town, who was excessively anxious for the honour of the place, and most solicitous to divert my attention from the bad monuments: whereas he was never tired of extolling the good ones. Seeing this little man (a good-humoured little man he was, who seemed to have nothing in his face but shining teeth and eyes) looking wistfully at a certain plot of grass, I asked him who was buried there. ‘The poor people, Signore,’ he said, with a shrug and a smile, and stopping to look back at me - for he always went on a little before, and took off his hat to introduce every new monument. ‘Only the poor, Signore! It’s very cheerful. It’s very lively. How green it is, how cool! It’s like a meadow! There are five,’ - holding up all the fingers of his right hand to express the number, which an Italian peasant will always do, if it be within the compass of his ten fingers, - ‘there are five of my little children buried there, Signore; just there; a little to the right. Well! Thanks to God! It's very cheerful. How green it is, how cool it is! It's quite a meadow!'

He looked me very hard in the face, and seeing I was sorry for him, took a pinch of snuff (every Cicerone takes snuff), and made a little bow; partly in deprecation of his having alluded to such a subject, and partly in memory of the children and of his favourite saint. It was as unaffected and as perfectly natural a little bow, as ever man made. Immediately afterwards, he took his hat off altogether, and begged to introduce me to the next monument; and his eyes and his teeth shone brighter than before.

CHAPTER VI - THROUGH BOLOGNA AND FERRARA

There was such a very smart official in attendance at the Cemetery where the little Cicerone had buried his children, that when the little Cicerone suggested to me, in a whisper, that there would be no offence in presenting this officer, in return for some slight extra service, with a couple of pauls (about tenpence, English money), I looked incredulously at his cocked hat, wash-leather gloves, well-made uniform, and dazzling buttons, and rebuked the little Cicerone with a grave shake of the head. For, in splendour of appearance, he was at least equal to the Deputy Usher of the Black Rod; and the idea of his carrying, as Jeremy Diddler would say, 'such a thing as tenpence' away with him, seemed monstrous. He took it in excellent part, however, when I made bold to give it him, and pulled off his cocked hat with a flourish that would have been a bargain at double the money.

It seemed to be his duty to describe the monuments to the people - at all events he was doing so; and when I compared him, like Gulliver in Brobdingnag, 'with the Institutions of my own beloved country, I could not refrain from tears of pride and exultation.' He had no pace at all; no more than a tortoise. He loitered as the people loitered, that they might gratify their curiosity; and positively allowed them, now and then, to read the inscriptions on the tombs. He was neither shabby, nor insolent, nor churlish, nor ignorant. He spoke his own language with perfect propriety, and seemed to consider himself, in his way, a kind of teacher of the people, and to entertain a just respect both for himself and them. They would no more have such a man for a Verger in Westminster Abbey, than they would let the people in (as they do at Bologna) to see the monuments for nothing. {2}

Again, an ancient sombre town, under the brilliant sky; with heavy arcades over the footways of the older streets, and lighter and more cheerful archways in the newer portions of the town. Again, brown piles of sacred buildings, with more birds flying in and out of chinks in the stones; and more snarling monsters for the bases of the pillars. Again, rich churches, drowsy Masses, curling incense, tinkling bells, priests in bright vestments: pictures, tapers, laced altar cloths, crosses, images, and artificial flowers.

There is a grave and learned air about the city, and a pleasant gloom upon it, that would leave it, a distinct and separate impression in the mind, among a crowd of cities, though it were not still further marked in the traveller’s remembrance by the two brick leaning towers (sufficiently unsightly in themselves, it must be acknowledged), inclining cross-wise as if they were bowing stiffly to each other - a most extraordinary termination to the perspective of some of the narrow streets. The colleges, and churches too, and palaces: and above all the academy of Fine Arts, where there are a host of interesting pictures, especially by GUIDO, DOMENICHINO, and LUDOVICO CARACCI: give it a place of its own in the memory. Even though these were not, and there were nothing else to remember it by, the great Meridian on the pavement of the church of San Petronio, where the sunbeams mark the time among the kneeling people, would give it a fanciful and pleasant interest.

Bologna being very full of tourists, detained there by an inundation which rendered the road to Florence impassable, I was quartered up at the top of an hotel, in an out-of-the-way room which I never could find: containing a bed, big enough for a boarding-school, which I couldn’t fall asleep in. The chief among the waiters who visited this lonely retreat, where there was no other company but the swallows in the broad eaves over the window, was a man of one idea in connection with the English; and the subject of this harmless monomania, was Lord Byron. I made the discovery by accidentally remarking to him, at breakfast, that the matting with which the floor was covered, was very comfortable at that season, when he immediately replied that Milor Beeron had been much attached to that kind of matting. Observing, at the same moment, that I took no milk, he exclaimed with enthusiasm, that Milor Beeron had never touched it. At first, I took it for granted, in my innocence, that he had been one of the Beeron servants; but no, he said, no, he was in the habit of speaking about my Lord, to English gentlemen; that was all. He knew all about him, he said. In proof of it, he connected him with every possible topic, from the Monte Pulciano wine at dinner (which was grown on an estate he had owned), to the big bed itself, which was the very model of his. When I left the inn, he coupled with his final bow in the yard, a parting assurance that the road by which I was going, had been Milor Beeron's favourite ride; and before the horse's feet had well begun to clatter on the pavement, he ran briskly up-stairs again, I dare say to tell some other Englishman in some other solitary room that the guest who had just departed was Lord Beeron's living image.

I had entered Bologna by night - almost midnight - and all along the road thither, after our entrance into the Papal territory: which is not, in any part, supremely well governed, Saint Peter's keys being rather rusty now; the driver had so worried about the danger of robbers in travelling after dark, and had so infected the brave Courier, and the two had been so constantly stopping and getting up and down to look after a portmanteau which was tied on behind, that I should have felt almost obliged to any one who would have had the goodness to take it away. Hence it was stipulated, that, whenever we left Bologna, we should start so as not to arrive at Ferrara later than eight at night; and a delightful afternoon and evening journey it was, albeit through a flat district which gradually became more marshy from the overflow of brooks and rivers in the recent heavy rains.

At sunset, when I was walking on alone, while the horses rested, I arrived upon a little scene, which, by one of those singular mental operations of which we are all conscious, seemed perfectly familiar to me, and which I see distinctly now. There was not much in it. In the blood red light, there was a mournful sheet of water, just stirred by the evening wind; upon its margin a few trees. In the foreground was a group of silent peasant girls leaning over the parapet of a little bridge, and looking, now up at the sky, now down into the water; in the distance, a deep bell; the shade of approaching night on everything. If I had been murdered there, in some former life, I could not have seemed to remember the place more thoroughly, or with a more emphatic chilling of the blood; and the mere remembrance of it acquired in that minute, is so strengthened by the imaginary recollection, that I hardly think I could forget it.

More solitary, more depopulated, more deserted, old Ferrara, than any city of the solemn brotherhood! The grass so grows up in the silent streets, that any one might make hay there, literally, while the sun shines. But the sun shines with diminished cheerfulness in grim Ferrara; and the people are so few who pass and re-pass through the places, that the flesh of its inhabitants might be grass indeed, and growing in the squares.

I wonder why the head coppersmith in an Italian town, always lives next door to the Hotel, or opposite: making the visitor feel as if the beating hammers were his own heart, palpitating with a deadly energy! I wonder why jealous corridors surround the bedroom on all sides, and fill it with unnecessary doors that can't be shut, and will not open, and abut on pitchy darkness! I wonder why it is not enough that these distrustful genii stand agape at one's dreams all night, but there must also be round open portholes, high in the wall, suggestive, when a mouse or rat is heard behind the wainscot, of a somebody scraping the wall with his toes, in his endeavours to reach one of these portholes and look in! I wonder why the faggots are so constructed, as to know of no effect but an agony of heat when they are lighted and replenished, and an agony of cold and suffocation at all other times! I wonder, above all, why it is the great feature of domestic architecture in Italian inns, that all the fire goes up the chimney, except the smoke!

The answer matters little. Coppersmiths, doors, portholes, smoke, and faggots, are welcome to me. Give me the smiling face of the attendant, man or woman; the courteous manner; the amiable desire to please and to be pleased; the light-hearted, pleasant, simple air - so many jewels set in dirt - and I am theirs again to-morrow!

ARIOSTO'S house, TASSO'S prison, a rare old Gothic cathedral, and more churches of course, are the sights of Ferrara. But the long silent streets, and the dismantled palaces, where ivy waves in lieu of banners, and where rank weeds are slowly creeping up the long-untrodden stairs, are the best sights of all.

The aspect of this dreary town, half an hour before sunrise one fine morning, when I left it, was as picturesque as it seemed unreal and spectral. It was no matter that the people were not yet out of bed; for if they had all been up and busy, they would have made but little difference in that desert of a place. It was best to see it, without a single figure in the picture; a city of the dead, without one solitary survivor. Pestilence might have ravaged streets, squares, and market-places; and sack and siege have ruined the old houses, battered down their doors and windows, and made breaches in their roofs. In one part, a great tower rose into the air; the only landmark in the melancholy view. In another, a prodigious castle, with a moat about it, stood aloof: a sullen city in itself. In the black dungeons of this castle, Parisina and her lover were beheaded in the dead of night. The red light, beginning to shine when I looked back upon it, stained its walls without, as they have, many a time, been stained within, in old days; but for any sign of life they gave, the castle and the city might have been avoided by all human creatures, from the moment when the axe went down upon the last of the two lovers: and might have never vibrated to another sound

Beyond the blow that to the block
Pierced through with forced and sullen shock.

Coming to the Po, which was greatly swollen, and running fiercely, we crossed it by a floating bridge of boats, and so came into the Austrian territory, and resumed our journey: through a country of which, for some miles, a great part was under water. The brave Courier and the soldiery had first quarrelled, for half an hour or more, over our eternal passport. But this was a daily relaxation with the Brave, who was always stricken deaf when shabby functionaries in uniform came, as they constantly did come, plunging out of wooden boxes to look at it - or in other words to beg - and who, stone deaf to my entreaties that the man might have a trifle given him, and we resume our journey in peace, was wont to sit reviling the functionary in broken English: while the unfortunate man's face was a portrait of mental agony framed in the coach window, from his perfect ignorance of what was being said to his disparagement.

There was a postilion, in the course of this day's journey, as wild and savagely good-looking a vagabond as you would desire to see. He was a tall, stout-made, dark-complexioned fellow, with a profusion of shaggy black hair hanging all over his face, and great black whiskers stretching down his throat. His dress was a torn suit of rifle green, garnished here and there with red; a steeple-crowned hat, innocent of nap, with a broken and bedraggled feather stuck in the band; and a flaming red neckerchief hanging on his shoulders. He was not in the saddle, but reposed, quite at his ease, on a sort of low foot-board in front of the postchaise, down amongst the horses' tails - convenient for having his brains kicked out, at any moment. To this Brigand, the brave Courier, when we were at a reasonable trot, happened to suggest the practicability of going faster. He received the proposal with a perfect yell of derision; brandished his whip about his head (such a whip! it was more like a home-made bow); flung up his heels, much higher than the horses; and disappeared, in a paroxysm, somewhere in the neighbourhood of the axle-tree. I fully expected to see him lying in the road, a hundred yards behind, but up came the steeple-crowned hat again, next minute, and he was seen reposing, as on a sofa, entertaining himself with the idea, and crying, 'Ha, ha! what next! Oh the devil! Faster too! Shoo - hoo - o - o!' (This last ejaculation, an inexpressibly defiant hoot.) Being anxious to reach our immediate destination that night, I ventured, by-and-by, to repeat the experiment on my own account. It produced exactly the same effect. Round flew the whip with the same scornful flourish, up came the heels, down went the steeple-crowned hat, and presently he reappeared, reposing as before and saying to himself, 'Ha ha! what next! Faster too! Oh the devil! Shoo - hoo - o - o!'

CHAPTER VII - AN ITALIAN DREAM

I had been travelling, for some days; resting very little in the night, and never in the day. The rapid and unbroken succession of novelties that had passed before me, came back like half-formed dreams; and a crowd of objects wandered in the greatest confusion through my mind, as I travelled on, by a solitary road. At intervals, some one among them would stop, as it were, in its restless flitting to and fro, and enable me to look at it, quite steadily, and behold it in full distinctness. After a few moments, it would dissolve, like a view in a magic-lantern; and while I saw some part of it quite plainly, and some faintly, and some not at all, would show me another of the many places I had lately seen, lingering behind it, and coming through it. This was no sooner visible than, in its turn, it melted into something else.

At one moment, I was standing again, before the brown old rugged churches of Modena. As I recognised the curious pillars with grim monsters for their bases, I seemed to see them, standing by themselves in the quiet square at Padua, where there were the staid old University, and the figures, demurely gowned, grouped here and there in the open space about it. Then, I was strolling in the outskirts of that pleasant city, admiring the unusual neatness of the dwelling-houses, gardens, and orchards, as I had seen them a few hours before. In their stead arose, immediately, the two towers of Bologna; and the most obstinate of all these objects, failed to hold its ground, a minute, before the monstrous moated castle of Ferrara, which, like an illustration to a wild romance, came back again in the red sunrise, lording it over the solitary, grass-grown, withered town. In short, I had that incoherent but delightful jumble in my brain, which travellers are apt to have, and are indolently willing to encourage. Every shake of the coach in which I sat, half dozing in the dark, appeared to jerk some new recollection out of its place, and to jerk some other new recollection into it; and in this state I fell asleep.

I was awakened after some time (as I thought) by the stopping of the coach. It was now quite night, and we were at the waterside. There lay here, a black boat, with a little house or cabin in it of the same mournful colour. When I had taken my seat in this, the boat was paddled, by two men, towards a great light, lying in the distance on the sea.

Ever and again, there was a dismal sigh of wind. It ruffled the water, and rocked the boat, and sent the dark clouds flying before the stars. I could not but think how strange it was, to be floating away at that hour: leaving the land behind, and going on, towards this light upon the sea. It soon began to burn brighter; and from being one light became a cluster of tapers, twinkling and shining out of the water, as the boat approached towards them by a dreamy kind of track, marked out upon the sea by posts and piles.

We had floated on, five miles or so, over the dark water, when I heard it rippling in my dream, against some obstruction near at hand. Looking out attentively, I saw, through the gloom, a something black and massive - like a shore, but lying close and flat upon the water, like a raft - which we were gliding past. The chief of the two rowers said it was a burial-place.

Full of the interest and wonder which a cemetery lying out there, in the lonely sea, inspired, I turned to gaze upon it as it should recede in our path, when it was quickly shut out from my view. Before I knew by what, or how, I found that we were gliding up a street - a phantom street; the houses rising on both sides, from the water, and the black boat gliding on beneath their windows. Lights were shining from some of these casements, plumbing the depth of the black stream with their reflected rays, but all was profoundly silent.

So we advanced into this ghostly city, continuing to hold our course through narrow streets and lanes, all filled and flowing with water. Some of the corners where our way branched off, were so acute and narrow, that it seemed impossible for the long slender boat to turn them; but the rowers, with a low melodious cry of warning, sent it skimming on without a pause. Sometimes, the rowers of another black boat like our own, echoed the cry, and slackening their speed (as I thought we did ours) would come flitting past us like a dark shadow. Other boats, of the same sombre hue, were lying moored, I thought, to painted pillars, near to dark mysterious doors that opened straight upon the water. Some of these were empty; in some, the rowers lay asleep; towards one, I saw some figures coming down a gloomy archway from the interior of a palace: gaily dressed, and attended by torch-bearers. It was but a glimpse I had of them; for a bridge, so low and close upon the boat that it seemed ready to fall down and crush us: one of the many bridges that perplexed the Dream: blotted them out, instantly. On we went, floating towards the heart of this strange place - with water all about us where never water was elsewhere - clusters of houses, churches, heaps of stately buildings growing out of it - and, everywhere, the same extraordinary silence. Presently, we shot across a broad and open stream; and passing, as I thought, before a spacious paved quay, where the bright lamps with which it was illuminated showed long rows of arches and pillars, of ponderous construction and great strength, but as light to the eye as garlands of hoarfrost or gossamer - and where, for the first time, I saw people walking - arrived at a flight of steps leading from the water to a large mansion, where, having passed through corridors and galleries innumerable, I lay down to rest; listening to the black boats stealing up and down below the window on the rippling water, till I fell asleep.

The glory of the day that broke upon me in this Dream; its freshness, motion, buoyancy; its sparkles of the sun in water; its clear blue sky and rustling air; no waking words can tell. But, from my window, I looked down on boats and barks; on masts, sails, cordage, flags; on groups of busy sailors, working at the cargoes of these vessels; on wide quays, strewn with bales, casks, merchandise of many kinds; on great ships, lying near at hand in stately indolence; on islands, crowned with gorgeous domes and turrets: and where golden crosses glittered in the light, atop of wondrous churches, springing from the sea! Going down upon the margin of the green sea, rolling on before the door, and filling all the streets, I came upon a place of such surpassing beauty, and such grandeur, that all the rest was poor and faded, in comparison with its absorbing loveliness.

It was a great Piazza, as I thought; anchored, like all the rest, in the deep ocean. On its broad bosom, was a Palace, more majestic and magnificent in its old age, than all the buildings of the earth, in the high prime and fulness of their youth. Cloisters and galleries: so light, they might have been the work of fairy hands: so strong that centuries had battered them in vain: wound round and round this palace, and enfolded it with a Cathedral, gorgeous in the wild luxuriant fancies of the East. At no great distance from its porch, a lofty tower, standing by itself, and rearing its proud head, alone, into the sky, looked out upon the Adriatic Sea. Near to the margin of the stream, were two ill-omened pillars of red granite; one having on its top, a figure with a sword and shield; the other, a winged lion. Not far from these again, a second tower: richest of the rich in all its decorations: even here, where all was rich: sustained aloft, a great orb, gleaming with gold and deepest blue: the Twelve Signs painted on it, and a mimic sun revolving in its course around them: while above, two bronze giants hammered out the hours upon a sounding bell. An oblong square of lofty houses of the whitest stone, surrounded by a light and beautiful arcade, formed part of this enchanted scene; and, here and there, gay masts for flags rose, tapering, from the pavement of the unsubstantial ground.

I thought I entered the Cathedral, and went in and out among its many arches: traversing its whole extent. A grand and dreamy structure, of immense proportions; golden with old mosaics; redolent of perfumes; dim with the smoke of incense; costly in treasure of precious stones and metals, glittering through iron bars; holy with the bodies of deceased saints; rainbow-hued with windows of stained glass; dark with carved woods and coloured marbles; obscure in its vast heights, and lengthened distances; shining with silver lamps and winking lights; unreal, fantastic, solemn, inconceivable throughout. I thought I entered the old palace; pacing silent galleries and council-chambers, where the old rulers of this mistress of the waters looked sternly out, in pictures, from the walls, and where her high-prowed galleys, still victorious on canvas, fought and conquered as of old. I thought I wandered through its halls of state and triumph - bare and empty now! - and musing on its pride and might, extinct: for that was past; all past: heard a voice say, ‘Some tokens of its ancient rule and some consoling reasons for its downfall, may be traced here, yet!’

I dreamed that I was led on, then, into some jealous rooms, communicating with a prison near the palace; separated from it by a lofty bridge crossing a narrow street; and called, I dreamed, The Bridge of Sighs.

But first I passed two jagged slits in a stone wall; the lions’ mouths - now toothless - where, in the distempered horror of my sleep, I thought denunciations of innocent men to the old wicked Council, had been dropped through, many a time, when the night was dark. So, when I saw the council-room to which such prisoners were taken for examination, and the door by which they passed out, when they were condemned - a door that never closed upon a man with life and hope before him - my heart appeared to die within me.

It was smitten harder though, when, torch in hand, I descended from the cheerful day into two ranges, one below another, of dismal, awful, horrible stone cells. They were quite dark. Each had a loop-hole in its massive wall, where, in the old time, every day, a torch was placed - I dreamed - to light the prisoner within, for half an hour. The captives, by the glimmering of these brief rays, had scratched and cut inscriptions in the blackened vaults. I saw them. For their labour with a rusty nail's point, had outlived their agony and them, through many generations.

One cell, I saw, in which no man remained for more than four-and-twenty hours; being marked for dead before he entered it. Hard by, another, and a dismal one, whereto, at midnight, the confessor came - a monk brown-robed, and hooded - ghastly in the day, and free bright air, but in the midnight of that murky prison, Hope's extinguisher, and Murder's herald. I had my foot upon the spot, where, at the same dread hour, the shriven prisoner was strangled; and struck my hand upon the guilty door - low-browed and stealthy - through which the lumpish sack was carried out into a boat, and rowed away, and drowned where it was death to cast a net.

Around this dungeon stronghold, and above some part of it: licking the rough walls without, and smearing them with damp and slime within: stuffing dank weeds and refuse into chinks and crevices, as if the very stones and bars had mouths to stop: furnishing a smooth road for the removal of the bodies of the secret victims of the State - a road so ready that it went along with them, and ran before them, like a cruel officer - flowed the same water that filled this Dream of mine, and made it seem one, even at the time.

Descending from the palace by a staircase, called, I thought, the Giant's - I had some imaginary recollection of an old man abdicating, coming, more slowly and more feebly, down it, when he heard the bell, proclaiming his successor - I glided off, in one of the dark boats, until we came to an old arsenal guarded by four marble lions. To make my Dream more monstrous and unlikely, one of these had words and sentences upon its body, inscribed there, at an unknown time, and in an unknown language; so that their purport was a mystery to all men.

There was little sound of hammers in this place for building ships, and little work in progress; for the greatness of the city was no more, as I have said. Indeed, it seemed a very wreck found drifting on the sea; a strange flag hoisted in its honourable stations, and strangers standing at its helm. A splendid barge in which its ancient chief had gone forth, pompously, at certain periods, to wed the ocean, lay here, I thought, no more; but, in its place, there was a tiny model, made from recollection like the city's greatness; and it told of what had been (so are the strong and weak confounded in the dust) almost as eloquently as the massive pillars, arches, roofs, reared to overshadow stately ships that had no other shadow now, upon the water or the earth.

An armoury was there yet. Plundered and despoiled; but an armoury. With a fierce standard taken from the Turks, drooping in the dull air of its cage. Rich suits of mail worn by great warriors were hoarded there; crossbows and bolts; quivers full of arrows; spears; swords, daggers, maces, shields, and heavy-headed axes. Plates of wrought steel and iron, to make the gallant horse a monster cased in metal scales; and one spring-weapon (easy to be carried in the breast) designed to do its office noiselessly, and made for shooting men with poisoned darts.

One press or case I saw, full of accursed instruments of torture horribly contrived to cramp, and pinch, and grind and crush men's bones, and tear and twist them with the torment of a thousand deaths. Before it, were two iron helmets, with breast-pieces: made to close up tight and smooth upon the heads of living sufferers; and fastened on to each, was a small knob or anvil, where the directing devil could repose his elbow at his ease, and listen, near the walled-up ear, to the lamentations and confessions of the wretch within. There was that grim resemblance in them to the human shape - they were such moulds of sweating faces, pained and cramped - that it was difficult to think them empty; and terrible distortions lingering within them, seemed to follow me, when, taking to my boat again, I rowed off to a kind of garden or public walk in the sea, where there were grass and trees. But I forgot them when I stood upon its farthest brink - I stood there, in my dream - and looked, along the ripple, to the setting sun; before me, in the sky and on the deep, a crimson flush; and behind me the whole city resolving into streaks of red and purple, on the water.

In the luxurious wonder of so rare a dream, I took but little heed of time, and had but little understanding of its flight. But there were days and nights in it; and when the sun was high, and when the rays of lamps were crooked in the running water, I was still afloat, I thought: plashing the slippery walls and houses with the cleavings of the tide, as my black boat, borne upon it, skimmed along the streets.

Sometimes, alighting at the doors of churches and vast palaces, I wandered on, from room to room, from aisle to aisle, through labyrinths of rich altars, ancient monuments; decayed apartments where the furniture, half awful, half grotesque, was mouldering away. Pictures were there, replete with such enduring beauty and expression: with such passion, truth and power: that they seemed so many young and fresh realities among a host of spectres. I thought these, often intermingled with the old days of the city: with its beauties, tyrants, captains, patriots, merchants, counters, priests: nay, with its very stones, and bricks, and public places; all of which lived again, about me, on the walls. Then, coming down some marble staircase where the water lapped and oozed against the lower steps, I passed into my boat again, and went on in my dream.

Floating down narrow lanes, where carpenters, at work with plane and chisel in their shops, tossed the light shaving straight upon the water, where it lay like weed, or ebbed away before me in a tangled heap. Past open doors, decayed and rotten from long steeping in the wet, through which some scanty patch of vine shone green and bright, making unusual shadows on the pavement with its trembling leaves. Past quays and terraces, where women, gracefully veiled, were passing and repassing, and where idlers were reclining in the sunshine, on flag-stones and on flights of steps. Past bridges, where there were idlers too; loitering and looking over. Below stone balconies, erected at a giddy height, before the loftiest windows of the loftiest houses. Past plots of garden, theatres, shrines, prodigious piles of architecture - Gothic - Saracenic - fanciful with all the fancies of all times and countries. Past buildings that were high, and low, and black, and white, and straight, and crooked; mean and grand, crazy and strong. Twining among a tangled lot of boats and barges, and shooting out at last into a Grand Canal! There, in the errant fancy of my dream, I saw old Shylock passing to and fro upon a bridge, all built upon with shops and humming with the tongues of men; a form I seemed to know for Desdemona's, leaned down through a latticed blind to pluck a flower. And, in the dream, I thought that Shakespeare's spirit was abroad upon the water somewhere: stealing through the city.

At night, when two votive lamps burnt before an image of the Virgin, in a gallery outside the great cathedral, near the roof, I fancied that the great piazza of the Winged Lion was a blaze of cheerful light, and that its whole arcade was thronged with people; while crowds were diverting themselves in splendid coffee-houses opening from it - which were never shut, I thought, but open all night long. When the bronze giants struck the hour of midnight on the bell, I thought the life and animation of the city were all centred here; and as I rowed away, abreast the silent quays, I only saw them dotted, here and there, with sleeping boatmen wrapped up in their cloaks, and lying at full length upon the stones.

But close about the quays and churches, palaces and prisons sucking at their walls, and welling up into the secret places of the town: crept the water always. Noiseless and watchful: coiled round and round it, in its many folds, like an old serpent: waiting for the time, I thought, when people should look down into its depths for any stone of the old city that had claimed to be its mistress.

Thus it floated me away, until I awoke in the old market-place at Verona. I have, many and many a time, thought since, of this strange Dream upon the water: half-wondering if it lie there yet, and if its name be VENICE.

CHAPTER VIII - BY VERONA, MANTUA, AND MILAN, ACROSS THE PASS OF THE SIMPLON INTO SWITZERLAND

I had been half afraid to go to Verona, lest it should at all put me out of conceit with Romeo and Juliet. But, I was no sooner come into the old market-place, than the misgiving vanished. It is so fanciful, quaint, and picturesque a place, formed by such an extraordinary and rich variety of fantastic buildings, that there could be nothing better at the core of even this romantic town: scene of one of the most romantic and beautiful of stories.

It was natural enough, to go straight from the Market-place, to the House of the Capulets, now degenerated into a most miserable little inn. Noisy vetturíni and muddy market-carts were disputing possession of the yard, which was ankle-deep in dirt, with a brood of splashed and bespattered geese; and there was a grim-visaged dog, viciously panting in a doorway, who would certainly have had Romeo by the leg, the moment he put it over the wall, if he had existed and been at large in those times. The orchard fell into other hands, and was parted off many years ago; but there used to be one attached to the house - or at all events there may have, been, - and the hat (Cappêllo) the ancient cognizance of the family, may still be seen, carved in stone, over the gateway of the yard. The geese, the market-carts, their drivers, and the dog, were somewhat in the way of the story, it must be confessed; and it would have been pleasanter to have found the house empty, and to have been able to walk through the disused rooms. But the hat was unspeakably comfortable; and the place where the garden used to be, hardly less so. Besides, the house is a distrustful, jealous-looking house as one would desire to see, though of a very moderate size. So I was quite satisfied with it, as the veritable mansion of old Capulet, and was correspondingly grateful in my acknowledgments to an extremely unsentimental middle-aged lady, the Padrona of the Hotel, who was lounging on the threshold looking at the geese; and who at least resembled the Capulets in the one particular of being very great indeed in the ‘Family’ way.

From Juliet’s home, to Juliet’s tomb, is a transition as natural to the visitor, as to fair Juliet herself, or to the proudest Juliet that ever has taught the torches to burn bright in any time. So, I went off, with a guide, to an old, old garden, once belonging to an old, old convent, I suppose; and being admitted, at a shattered gate, by a bright-eyed woman who was washing clothes, went down some walks where fresh plants and young flowers were prettily growing among fragments of old wall, and ivy-coloured mounds; and was shown a little tank, or water-trough, which the bright-eyed woman - drying her arms upon her ‘kerchief, called ‘La tomba di Giulietta la sfortunáta.’ With the best disposition in the world to believe, I could do no more than believe that the bright-eyed woman believed; so I gave her that much credit, and her customary fee in ready money. It was a pleasure, rather than a disappointment, that Juliet’s resting-place was forgotten. However consolatory it may have been to Yorick’s Ghost, to hear the feet upon the pavement overhead, and, twenty times a day, the repetition of his name, it is better for Juliet to lie out of the track of tourists, and to have no visitors but such as come to graves in spring-rain, and sweet air, and sunshine.

Pleasant Verona! With its beautiful old palaces, and charming country in the distance, seen from terrace walks, and stately, balustraded galleries. With its Roman gates, still spanning the fair street, and casting, on the sunlight of to-day, the shade of fifteen hundred years ago. With its marble-fitted churches, lofty towers, rich architecture, and quaint old quiet thoroughfares, where shouts of Montagues and Capulets once resounded,

And made Verona’s ancient citizens
Cast by their grave, beseeming ornaments,
To wield old partizans.

With its fast-rushing river, picturesque old bridge, great castle, waving cypresses, and prospect so delightful, and so cheerful! Pleasant Verona!

In the midst of it, in the Piazza di Brá - a spirit of old time among the familiar realities of the passing hour - is the great Roman Amphitheatre. So well preserved, and carefully maintained, that every row of seats is there, unbroken. Over certain of the arches, the old Roman numerals may yet be seen; and there are corridors, and staircases, and subterranean passages for beasts, and winding ways, above ground and below, as when the fierce thousands hurried in and out, intent upon the bloody shows of the arena. Nestling in some of the shadows and hollow places of the walls, now, are smiths with their forges, and a few small dealers of one kind or other; and there are green weeds, and leaves, and grass, upon the parapet. But little else is greatly changed.

When I had traversed all about it, with great interest, and had gone up to the topmost round of seats, and turning from the lovely panorama closed in by the distant Alps, looked down into the building, it seemed to lie before me like the inside of a prodigious hat of plaited straw, with an enormously broad brim and a shallow crown; the plaits being represented by the four-and-forty rows of seats. The comparison is a homely and fantastic one, in sober remembrance and on paper, but it was irresistibly suggested at the moment, nevertheless.

An equestrian troop had been there, a short time before - the same troop, I dare say, that appeared to the old lady in the church at Modena - and had scooped out a little ring at one end of the area; where their performances had taken place, and where the marks of their horses' feet were still fresh. I could not but picture to myself, a handful of spectators gathered together on one or two of the old stone seats, and a spangled Cavalier being gallant, or a Policinello funny, with the grim walls looking on. Above all, I thought how strangely those Roman mutes would gaze upon the favourite comic scene of the travelling English, where a British nobleman (Lord John), with a very loose stomach: dressed in a blue-tailed coat down to his heels, bright yellow breeches, and a white hat: comes abroad, riding double on a rearing horse, with an English lady (Lady Betsy) in a straw bonnet and green veil, and a red spencer; and who always carries a gigantic reticule, and a put-up parasol.

I walked through and through the town all the rest of the day, and could have walked there until now, I think. In one place, there was a very pretty modern theatre, where they had just performed the opera (always popular in Verona) of Romeo and Juliet. In another there was a collection, under a colonnade, of Greek, Roman, and Etruscan remains, presided over by an ancient man who might have been an Etruscan relic himself; for he was not strong enough to open the iron gate, when he had unlocked it, and had neither voice enough to be audible when he described the curiosities, nor sight enough to see them: he was so very old. In another place, there was a gallery of pictures: so abominably bad, that it was quite delightful to see them mouldering away. But anywhere: in the churches, among the palaces, in the streets, on the bridge, or down beside the river: it was always pleasant Verona, and in my remembrance always will be.

I read Romeo and Juliet in my own room at the inn that night - of course, no Englishman had ever read it there, before - and set out for Mantua next day at sunrise, repeating to myself (in the *coupé* of an omnibus, and next to the conductor, who was reading the Mysteries of Paris),

There is no world without Verona's walls
But purgatory, torture, hell itself.
Hence-banished is banished from the world,
And world's exile is death -

which reminded me that Romeo was only banished five-and-twenty miles after all, and rather disturbed my confidence in his energy and boldness.

Was the way to Mantua as beautiful, in his time, I wonder! Did it wind through pasture land as green, bright with the same glancing streams, and dotted with fresh clumps of graceful trees! Those purple mountains lay on the horizon, then, for certain; and the dresses of these peasant girls, who wear a great, knobbed, silver pin like an English 'life-preserver' through their hair behind, can hardly be much changed. The hopeful feeling of so bright a morning, and so exquisite a sunrise, can have been no stranger, even to an exiled lover's breast; and Mantua itself must have broken on him in the prospect, with its towers, and walls, and water, pretty much as on a commonplace and matrimonial omnibus. He made the same sharp twists and turns, perhaps, over two rumbling drawbridges; passed through the like long, covered, wooden bridge; and leaving the marshy water behind, approached the rusty gate of stagnant Mantua.

If ever a man were suited to his place of residence, and his place of residence to him, the lean Apothecary and Mantua came together in a perfect fitness of things. It may have been more stirring then, perhaps. If so, the Apothecary was a man in advance of his time, and knew what

Mantua would be, in eighteen hundred and forty-four. He fasted much, and that assisted him in his foreknowledge.

I put up at the Hotel of the Golden Lion, and was in my own room arranging plans with the brave Courier, when there came a modest little tap at the door, which opened on an outer gallery surrounding a court-yard; and an intensely shabby little man looked in, to inquire if the gentleman would have a Cicerone to show the town. His face was so very wistful and anxious, in the half-opened doorway, and there was so much poverty expressed in his faded suit and little pinched hat, and in the thread-bare worsted glove with which he held it - not expressed the less, because these were evidently his genteel clothes, hastily slipped on - that I would as soon have trodden on him as dismissed him. I engaged him on the instant, and he stepped in directly.

While I finished the discussion in which I was engaged, he stood, beaming by himself in a corner, making a feint of brushing my hat with his arm. If his fee had been as many napoleons as it was francs, there could not have shot over the twilight of his shabbiness such a gleam of sun, as lighted up the whole man, now that he was hired.

‘Well!’ said I, when I was ready, ‘shall we go out now?’

‘If the gentleman pleases. It is a beautiful day. A little fresh, but charming; altogether charming. The gentleman will allow me to open the door. This is the Inn Yard. The court-yard of the Golden Lion! The gentleman will please to mind his footing on the stairs.’

We were now in the street.

‘This is the street of the Golden Lion. This, the outside of the Golden Lion. The interesting window up there, on the first Piano, where the pane of glass is broken, is the window of the gentleman’s chamber!’

Having viewed all these remarkable objects, I inquired if there were much to see in Mantua.

‘Well! Truly, no. Not much! So, so,’ he said, shrugging his shoulders apologetically.

‘Many churches?’

‘No. Nearly all suppressed by the French.’

‘Monasteries or convents?’

‘No. The French again! Nearly all suppressed by Napoleon.’

‘Much business?’

‘Very little business.’

‘Many strangers?’

‘Ah Heaven!’

I thought he would have fainted.

‘Then, when we have seen the two large churches yonder, what shall we do next?’ said I.

He looked up the street, and down the street, and rubbed his chin timidly; and then said, glancing in my face as if a light had broken on his mind, yet with a humble appeal to my forbearance that was perfectly irresistible:

‘We can take a little turn about the town, Signore!’ (Si può far ‘un píccolo gíro della citta).

It was impossible to be anything but delighted with the proposal, so we set off together in great good-humour. In the relief of his mind, he opened his heart, and gave up as much of Mantua as a Cicerone could.

‘One must eat,’ he said; ‘but, bah! it was a dull place, without doubt!’

He made as much as possible of the Basilica of Santa Andrea - a noble church - and of an inclosed portion of the pavement, about which tapers were burning, and a few people kneeling, and under which is said to be preserved the Sangreal of the old Romances. This church disposed of, and another after it (the cathedral of San Pietro), we went to the Museum, which was shut up. ‘It was all the same,’ he said. ‘Bah! There was not much inside!’ Then, we went to see the Piazza del Diavolo, built by the Devil (for no particular purpose) in a single night; then, the Piazza Virgiliana; then, the statue of Virgil - *our* Poet, my little friend said, plucking up a spirit, for the moment, and putting his hat a little on one side. Then, we went to a dismal sort of farm-yard, by which a picture-gallery was approached. The moment the gate of this retreat was opened, some five hundred geese came waddling round us, stretching out their necks, and clamouring in the most hideous manner, as if they were ejaculating, ‘Oh! here’s somebody come to see the Pictures! Don’t go up! Don’t go up!’ While we went up, they waited very quietly about the door in a crowd, cackling to one another occasionally, in a subdued tone; but the instant we appeared again, their necks came out like telescopes, and setting up a great noise, which meant, I have no doubt, ‘What, you would go, would you! What do you think of it! How do you like it!’ they attended us to the outer gate, and cast us forth, derisively, into Mantua.

The geese who saved the Capitol, were, as compared to these, Pork to the learned Pig. What a gallery it was! I would take their opinion on a question of art, in preference to the discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds.

Now that we were standing in the street, after being thus ignominiouly escorted thither, my little friend was plainly reduced to the ‘píccolo gíro,’ or little circuit of the town, he had formerly proposed. But my suggestion that we should visit the Palazzo Tè (of which I had heard a great deal, as a strange wild place) imparted new life to him, and away we went.

The secret of the length of Midas’s ears, would have been more extensively known, if that servant of his, who whispered it to the reeds, had lived in Mantua, where there are reeds and rushes enough to have published it to all the world. The Palazzo Tè stands in a swamp, among this sort of vegetation; and is, indeed, as singular a place as I ever saw.

Not for its dreariness, though it is very dreary. Not for its dampness, though it is very damp. Nor for its desolate condition, though it is as desolate and neglected as house can be. But chiefly for the unaccountable nightmares with which its interior has been decorated (among other subjects of more delicate execution), by Giulio Romano. There is a leering Giant over a certain chimney-piece, and there are dozens of Giants (Titans warring with Jove) on the walls of another room, so inconceivably ugly and grotesque, that it is marvellous how any man can have imagined such creatures. In the chamber in which they abound, these monsters, with swollen faces and cracked cheeks, and every kind of distortion of look and limb, are depicted as staggering under the weight of falling buildings, and being overwhelmed in the ruins; upheaving masses of rock, and burying themselves beneath; vainly striving to sustain the pillars of heavy roofs that topple down upon their heads; and, in a word, undergoing and doing every kind of mad and demoniacal destruction. The figures are immensely large, and exaggerated to the utmost pitch of uncouthness; the colouring is harsh and disagreeable; and the whole effect more like (I should imagine) a violent rush of blood to the head of the spectator, than any real picture set before him by the hand of an artist. This apoplectic performance was shown by a sickly-looking woman, whose appearance was referable, I dare say, to the bad air of the marshes; but it was difficult to help feeling as if she were too much haunted by the Giants, and they were frightening her to death, all alone in that exhausted cistern of a Palace, among the reeds and rushes, with the mists hovering about outside, and stalking round and round it continually.

Our walk through Mantua showed us, in almost every street, some suppressed church: now used for a warehouse, now for nothing at all: all as crazy and dismantled as they could be, short of tumbling down bodily. The marshy town was so intensely dull and flat, that the dirt upon it seemed not to have come there in the ordinary course, but to have settled and mantled on its surface as on standing water. And yet there were some business-dealings going on, and some profits realising; for there were arcades full of Jews, where those extraordinary people were sitting outside their shops, contemplating their stores of stuffs, and woollens, and bright handkerchiefs, and trinkets: and looking, in all respects, as wary and business-like, as their brethren in Houndsditch, London.

Having selected a Vetturíno from among the neighbouring Christians, who agreed to carry us to Milan in two days and a half, and to start, next morning, as soon as the gates were opened, I returned to the Golden Lion, and dined luxuriously in my own room, in a narrow passage between two bedsteads: confronted by a smoky fire, and backed up by a chest of drawers. At six o'clock next morning, we were jingling in the dark through the wet cold mist that enshrouded the town; and, before noon, the driver (a native of Mantua, and sixty years of age or thereabouts) began *to ask the way* to Milan.

It lay through Bozzolo; formerly a little republic, and now one of the most deserted and poverty-stricken of towns: where the landlord of the miserable inn (God bless him! it was his weekly custom) was distributing infinitesimal coins among a clamorous herd of women and children, whose rags were fluttering in the wind and rain outside his door, where they were gathered to receive his charity. It lay through mist, and mud, and rain, and vines trained low upon the ground, all that day and the next; the first sleeping-place being Cremona, memorable for its dark brick churches, and immensely high tower, the Torrazzo - to say nothing of its violins, of which it certainly produces none in these degenerate days; and the second, Lodi. Then we went on, through more mud, mist, and rain, and marshy ground: and through such a fog, as Englishmen, strong in the faith of their own grievances, are apt to believe is nowhere to be found but in their own country, until we entered the paved streets of Milan.

The fog was so dense here, that the spire of the far-famed Cathedral might as well have been at Bombay, for anything that could be seen of it at that time. But as we halted to refresh, for a few days then, and returned to Milan again next summer, I had ample opportunities of seeing the glorious structure in all its majesty and beauty.

All Christian homage to the saint who lies within it! There are many good and true saints in the calendar, but San Carlo Borromeo has - if I may quote Mrs. Primrose on such a subject - ‘my warm heart.’ A charitable doctor to the sick, a munificent friend to the poor, and this, not in any spirit of blind bigotry, but as the bold opponent of enormous abuses in the Romish church, I honour his memory. I honour it none the less, because he was nearly slain by a priest, suborned, by priests, to murder him at the altar: in acknowledgment of his endeavours to reform a false and hypocritical brotherhood of monks. Heaven shield all imitators of San Carlo Borromeo as it shielded him! A reforming Pope would need a little shielding, even now.

The subterranean chapel in which the body of San Carlo Borromeo is preserved, presents as striking and as ghastly a contrast, perhaps, as any place can show. The tapers which are lighted down there, flash and gleam on alti-rilievi in gold and silver, delicately wrought by skilful hands, and representing the principal events in the life of the saint. Jewels, and precious metals, shine and sparkle on every side. A windlass slowly removes the front of the altar; and, within it, in a gorgeous shrine of gold and silver, is seen, through alabaster, the shrivelled mummy of a man: the pontifical robes with which it is adorned, radiant with diamonds, emeralds, rubies: every costly and magnificent gem. The shrunken heap of poor earth in the midst of this great glitter, is more pitiful than if it lay upon a dung-hill. There is not a ray of imprisoned light in all the flash and fire of jewels, but seems to mock the dusty holes where eyes were, once. Every thread of silk in the rich vestments seems only a provision from the worms that spin, for the behoof of worms that propagate in sepulchres.

In the old refectory of the dilapidated Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie, is the work of art, perhaps, better known than any other in the world: the Last Supper, by Leonardo da Vinci - with a door cut through it by the intelligent Dominican friars, to facilitate their operations at dinner-time.

I am not mechanically acquainted with the art of painting, and have no other means of judging of a picture than as I see it resembling and refining upon nature, and presenting graceful combinations of forms and colours. I am, therefore, no authority whatever, in reference to the ‘touch’ of this or that master; though I know very well (as anybody may, who chooses to think about the matter) that few very great masters can possibly have painted, in the compass of their lives, one-half of the pictures that bear their names, and that are recognised by many aspirants to a reputation for taste, as undoubted originals. But this, by the way. Of the Last Supper, I would simply observe, that in its beautiful composition and arrangement, there it is, at Milan, a wonderful picture; and that, in its original colouring, or in its original expression of any single face or feature, there it is not. Apart from the damage it has sustained from damp, decay, or neglect, it has been (as Barry shows) so retouched upon, and repainted, and that so clumsily, that many of the heads are, now, positive deformities, with patches of paint and plaster sticking upon them like wens, and utterly distorting the expression. Where the original artist set that impress of his genius on a face, which, almost in a line or touch, separated him from meaner painters and made him what he was, succeeding bunglers, filling up, or painting across seams and cracks, have been quite unable to imitate his hand; and putting in some scowls, or frowns, or wrinkles, of their own, have blotched and spoiled the work. This is so well established as an historical fact, that I should not repeat it, at the risk of being tedious, but for having observed an English gentleman before the picture, who was at great pains to fall into what I may describe as mild convulsions, at certain minute details of expression which are not left in it. Whereas, it would be comfortable and rational for travellers and critics to arrive at a general understanding that it cannot fail to have been a work of extraordinary merit, once: when, with so few of its original beauties remaining, the grandeur of the general design is yet sufficient to sustain it, as a piece replete with interest and dignity.

We achieved the other sights of Milan, in due course, and a fine city it is, though not so unmistakably Italian as to possess the characteristic qualities of many towns far less important in themselves. The Corso, where the Milanese gentry ride up and down in carriages, and rather than not do which, they would half starve themselves at home, is a most noble public promenade, shaded by long avenues of trees. In the splendid theatre of La Scala, there was a ballet of action performed after the opera, under the title of Prometheus: in the beginning of which, some hundred or two of men and women represented our mortal race before the refinements of the arts and sciences, and loves and graces, came on earth to soften them. I never saw anything more effective. Generally speaking, the pantomimic action of the Italians is more remarkable for its sudden and impetuous character than for its delicate expression, but, in this case, the drooping monotony: the weary, miserable, listless, moping life: the sordid passions and desires of human creatures, destitute of those elevating influences to which we owe so much, and to whose promoters we render so little: were expressed in a manner really powerful and affecting. I should have thought it almost impossible to present such an idea so strongly on the stage, without the aid of speech.

Milan soon lay behind us, at five o'clock in the morning; and before the golden statue on the summit of the cathedral spire was lost in the blue sky, the Alps, stupendously confused in lofty peaks and ridges, clouds and snow, were towering in our path.

Still, we continued to advance toward them until nightfall; and, all day long, the mountain tops presented strangely shifting shapes, as the road displayed them in different points of view. The beautiful day was just declining, when we came upon the Lago Maggiore, with its lovely islands. For however fanciful and fantastic the Isola Bella may be, and is, it still is beautiful. Anything springing out of that blue water, with that scenery around it, must be.

It was ten o’clock at night when we got to Domo d’Ossola, at the foot of the Pass of the Simplon. But as the moon was shining brightly, and there was not a cloud in the starlit sky, it was no time for going to bed, or going anywhere but on. So, we got a little carriage, after some delay, and began the ascent.

It was late in November; and the snow lying four or five feet thick in the beaten road on the summit (in other parts the new drift was already deep), the air was piercing cold. But, the serenity of the night, and the grandeur of the road, with its impenetrable shadows, and deep glooms, and its sudden turns into the shining of the moon and its incessant roar of falling water, rendered the journey more and more sublime at every step.

Soon leaving the calm Italian villages below us, sleeping in the moonlight, the road began to wind among dark trees, and after a time emerged upon a barer region, very steep and toilsome, where the moon shone bright and high. By degrees, the roar of water grew louder; and the stupendous track, after crossing the torrent by a bridge, struck in between two massive perpendicular walls of rock that quite shut out the moonlight, and only left a few stars shining in the narrow strip of sky above. Then, even this was lost, in the thick darkness of a cavern in the rock, through which the way was pierced; the terrible cataract thundering and roaring close below it, and its foam and spray hanging, in a mist, about the entrance. Emerging from this cave, and coming again into the moonlight, and across a dizzy bridge, it crept and twisted upward, through the Gorge of Gondo, savage and grand beyond description, with smooth-fronted precipices, rising up on either hand, and almost meeting overhead. Thus we went, climbing on our rugged way, higher and higher all night, without a moment’s weariness: lost in the contemplation of the black rocks, the tremendous heights and depths, the fields of smooth snow lying, in the clefts and hollows, and the fierce torrents thundering headlong down the deep abyss.

Towards daybreak, we came among the snow, where a keen wind was blowing fiercely. Having, with some trouble, awakened the inmates of a wooden house in this solitude: round which the wind was howling dismally, catching up the snow in wreaths and hurling it away: we got some breakfast in a room built of rough timbers, but well warmed by a stove, and well contrived (as it had need to be) for keeping out the bitter storms. A sledge being then made ready, and four horses harnessed to it, we went, ploughing, through the snow. Still upward, but now in the cold light of morning, and with the great white desert on which we travelled, plain and clear.

We were well upon the summit of the mountain: and had before us the rude cross of wood, denoting its greatest altitude above the sea: when the light of the rising sun, struck, all at once, upon the waste of snow, and turned it a deep red. The lonely grandeur of the scene was then at its height.

As we went sledging on, there came out of the Hospice founded by Napoleon, a group of Peasant travellers, with staves and knapsacks, who had rested there last night: attended by a Monk or two, their hospitable entertainers, trudging slowly forward with them, for company's sake. It was pleasant to give them good morning, and pretty, looking back a long way after them, to see them looking back at us, and hesitating presently, when one of our horses stumbled and fell, whether or no they should return and help us. But he was soon up again, with the assistance of a rough waggoner whose team had stuck fast there too; and when we had helped him out of his difficulty, in return, we left him slowly ploughing towards them, and went slowly and swiftly forward, on the brink of a steep precipice, among the mountain pines.

Taking to our wheels again, soon afterwards, we began rapidly to descend; passing under everlasting glaciers, by means of arched galleries, hung with clusters of dripping icicles; under and over foaming waterfalls; near places of refuge, and galleries of shelter against sudden danger; through caverns over whose arched roofs the avalanches slide, in spring, and bury themselves in the unknown gulf beneath. Down, over lofty bridges, and through horrible ravines: a little shifting speck in the vast desolation of ice and snow, and monstrous granite rocks; down through the deep Gorge of the Saltine, and deafened by the torrent plunging madly down, among the riven blocks of rock, into the level country, far below. Gradually down, by zig-zag roads, lying between an upward and a downward precipice, into warmer weather, calmer air, and softer scenery, until there lay before us, glittering like gold or silver in the thaw and sunshine, the metal-covered, red, green, yellow, domes and church-spires of a Swiss town.

The business of these recollections being with Italy, and my business, consequently, being to scamper back thither as fast as possible, I will not recall (though I am sorely tempted) how the Swiss villages, clustered at the feet of Giant mountains, looked like playthings; or how confusedly the houses were heaped and piled together; or how there were very narrow streets to shut the howling winds out in the winter-time; and broken bridges, which the impetuous torrents, suddenly released in spring, had swept away. Or how there were peasant women here, with great round fur caps: looking, when they peeped out of casements and only their heads were seen, like a population of Sword-bearers to the Lord Mayor of London; or how the town of Vevey, lying on the smooth lake of Geneva, was beautiful to see; or how the statue of Saint Peter in the street at Fribourg, grasps the largest key that ever was beheld; or how Fribourg is illustrious for its two suspension bridges, and its grand cathedral organ.

Or how, between that town and Bâle, the road meandered among thriving villages of wooden cottages, with overhanging thatched roofs, and low protruding windows, glazed with small round panes of glass like crown-pieces; or how, in every little Swiss homestead, with its cart or waggon carefully stowed away beside the house, its little garden, stock of poultry, and groups of red-cheeked children, there was an air of comfort, very new and very pleasant after Italy; or how the dresses of the women changed again, and there were no more sword-bearers to be seen; and fair white stomachers, and great black, fan-shaped, gauzy-looking caps, prevailed instead.

Or how the country by the Jura mountains, sprinkled with snow, and lighted by the moon, and musical with falling water, was delightful; or how, below the windows of the great hotel of the Three Kings at Bâle, the swollen Rhine ran fast and green; or how, at Strasbourg, it was quite as fast but not as green: and was said to be foggy lower down: and, at that late time of the year, was a far less certain means of progress, than the highway road to Paris.

Or how Strasbourg itself, in its magnificent old Gothic Cathedral, and its ancient houses with their peaked roofs and gables, made a little gallery of quaint and interesting views; or how a crowd was gathered inside the cathedral at noon, to see the famous mechanical clock in motion, striking twelve. How, when it struck twelve, a whole army of puppets went through many ingenious evolutions; and, among them, a huge puppet-cock, perched on the top, crowed twelve times, loud and clear. Or how it was wonderful to see this cock at great pains to clap its wings, and strain its throat; but obviously having no connection whatever with its own voice; which was deep within the clock, a long way down.

Or how the road to Paris, was one sea of mud, and thence to the coast, a little better for a hard frost. Or how the cliffs of Dover were a pleasant sight, and England was so wonderfully neat - though dark, and lacking colour on a winter's day, it must be conceded.

Or how, a few days afterwards, it was cool, re-crossing the channel, with ice upon the decks, and snow lying pretty deep in France. Or how the Malle Poste scrambled through the snow, headlong, drawn in the hilly parts by any number of stout horses at a canter; or how there were, outside the Post-office Yard in Paris, before daybreak, extraordinary adventurers in heaps of rags, groping in the snowy streets with little rakes, in search of odds and ends.

Or how, between Paris and Marseilles, the snow being then exceeding deep, a thaw came on, and the mail waded rather than rolled for the next three hundred miles or so; breaking springs on Sunday nights, and putting out its two passengers to warm and refresh themselves pending the repairs, in miserable billiard-rooms, where hairy company, collected about stoves, were playing cards; the cards being very like themselves - extremely limp and dirty.

Or how there was detention at Marseilles from stress of weather; and steamers were advertised to go, which did not go; or how the good Steam-packet Charlemagne at length put out, and met such weather that now she threatened to run into Toulon, and now into Nice, but, the wind moderating, did neither, but ran on into Genoa harbour instead, where the familiar Bells rang sweetly in my ear. Or how there was a travelling party on board, of whom one member was very ill in the cabin next to mine, and being ill was cross, and therefore declined to give up the Dictionary, which he kept under his pillow; thereby obliging his companions to come down to him, constantly, to ask what was the Italian for a lump of sugar - a glass of brandy and water - what's o'clock? and so forth: which he always insisted on looking out, with his own sea-sick eyes, declining to entrust the book to any man alive.

Like GRUMIO, I might have told you, in detail, all this and something more - but to as little purpose - were I not deterred by the remembrance that my business is with Italy. Therefore, like GRUMIO'S story, 'it shall die in oblivion.'

CHAPTER IX - TO ROME BY PISA AND SIENA

There is nothing in Italy, more beautiful to me, than the coast-road between Genoa and Spezzia. On one side: sometimes far below, sometimes nearly on a level with the road, and often skirted by broken rocks of many shapes: there is the free blue sea, with here and there a picturesque felucca gliding slowly on; on the other side are lofty hills, ravines besprinkled with white cottages, patches of dark olive woods, country churches with their light open towers, and country houses gaily painted. On every bank and knoll by the wayside, the wild cactus and aloe flourish in exuberant profusion; and the gardens of the bright villages along the road, are seen, all blushing in the summer-time with clusters of the Belladonna, and are fragrant in the autumn and winter with golden oranges and lemons.

Some of the villages are inhabited, almost exclusively, by fishermen; and it is pleasant to see their great boats hauled up on the beach, making little patches of shade, where they lie asleep, or where the women and children sit romping and looking out to sea, while they mend their nets upon the shore. There is one town, Camoglia, with its little harbour on the sea, hundreds of feet below the road; where families of mariners live, who, time out of mind, have owned coasting-vessels in that place, and have traded to Spain and elsewhere. Seen from the road above, it is like a tiny model on the margin of the dimpled water, shining in the sun. Descended into, by the winding mule-tracks, it is a perfect miniature of a primitive seafaring town;

the saltest, roughest, most piratical little place that ever was seen. Great rusty iron rings and mooring-chains, capstans, and fragments of old masts and spars, choke up the way; hardy rough-weather boats, and seamen's clothing, flutter in the little harbour or are drawn out on the sunny stones to dry; on the parapet of the rude pier, a few amphibious-looking fellows lie asleep, with their legs dangling over the wall, as though earth or water were all one to them, and if they slipped in, they would float away, dozing comfortably among the fishes; the church is bright with trophies of the sea, and votive offerings, in commemoration of escape from storm and shipwreck. The dwellings not immediately abutting on the harbour are approached by blind low archways, and by crooked steps, as if in darkness and in difficulty of access they should be like holds of ships, or inconvenient cabins under water; and everywhere, there is a smell of fish, and sea-weed, and old rope.

The coast-road whence Camoglia is descried so far below, is famous, in the warm season, especially in some parts near Genoa, for fire-flies. Walking there on a dark night, I have seen it made one sparkling firmament by these beautiful insects: so that the distant stars were pale against the flash and glitter that spangled every olive wood and hill-side, and pervaded the whole air.

It was not in such a season, however, that we traversed this road on our way to Rome. The middle of January was only just past, and it was very gloomy and dark weather; very wet besides. In crossing the fine pass of Bracco, we encountered such a storm of mist and rain, that we travelled in a cloud the whole way. There might have been no Mediterranean in the world, for anything that we saw of it there, except when a sudden gust of wind, clearing the mist before it, for a moment, showed the agitated sea at a great depth below, lashing the distant rocks, and spouting up its foam furiously. The rain was incessant; every brook and torrent was greatly swollen; and such a deafening leaping, and roaring, and thundering of water, I never heard the like of in my life.

Hence, when we came to Spezzia, we found that the Magra, an unbridged river on the high-road to Pisa, was too high to be safely crossed in the Ferry Boat, and were fain to wait until the afternoon of next day, when it had, in some degree, subsided. Spezzia, however, is a good place to tarry at; by reason, firstly, of its beautiful bay; secondly, of its ghostly Inn; thirdly, of the head-dress of the women, who wear, on one side of their head, a small doll's straw hat, stuck on to the hair; which is certainly the oddest and most roguish head-gear that ever was invented.

The Magra safely crossed in the Ferry Boat - the passage is not by any means agreeable, when the current is swollen and strong - we arrived at Carrara, within a few hours. In good time next morning, we got some ponies, and went out to see the marble quarries.

They are four or five great glens, running up into a range of lofty hills, until they can run no longer, and are stopped by being abruptly strangled by Nature. The quarries, 'or caves,' as they call them there, are so many openings, high up in the hills, on either side of these passes, where they blast and excavate for marble: which may turn out good or bad: may make a man's fortune very quickly, or ruin him by the great expense of working what is worth nothing. Some of these caves were opened by the ancient Romans, and remain as they left them to this hour. Many others are being worked at this moment; others are to be begun to-morrow, next week, next month; others are unbought, unthought of; and marble enough for more ages than have passed since the place was resorted to, lies hidden everywhere: patiently awaiting its time of discovery.

As you toil and clamber up one of these steep gorges (having left your pony soddening his girths in water, a mile or two lower down) you hear, every now and then, echoing among the hills, in a low tone, more silent than the previous silence, a melancholy warning bugle, - a signal to the miners to withdraw. Then, there is a thundering, and echoing from hill to hill, and perhaps a splashing up of great fragments of rock into the air; and on you toil again until some other bugle sounds, in a new direction, and you stop directly, lest you should come within the range of the new explosion.

There were numbers of men, working high up in these hills - on the sides - clearing away, and sending down the broken masses of stone and earth, to make way for the blocks of marble that had been discovered. As these came rolling down from unseen hands into the narrow valley, I could not help thinking of the deep glen (just the same sort of glen) where the Roc left

Sindbad the Sailor; and where the merchants from the heights above, flung down great pieces of meat for the diamonds to stick to. There were no eagles here, to darken the sun in their swoop, and pounce upon them; but it was as wild and fierce as if there had been hundreds.

But the road, the road down which the marble comes, however immense the blocks! The genius of the country, and the spirit of its institutions, pave that road: repair it, watch it, keep it going! Conceive a channel of water running over a rocky bed, beset with great heaps of stone of all shapes and sizes, winding down the middle of this valley; and *that* being the road - because it was the road five hundred years ago! Imagine the clumsy carts of five hundred years ago, being used to this hour, and drawn, as they used to be, five hundred years ago, by oxen, whose ancestors were worn to death five hundred years ago, as their unhappy descendants are now, in twelve months, by the suffering and agony of this cruel work! Two pair, four pair, ten pair, twenty pair, to one block, according to its size; down it must come, this way. In their struggling from stone to stone, with their enormous loads behind them, they die frequently upon the spot; and not they alone; for their passionate drivers, sometimes tumbling down in their energy, are crushed to death beneath the wheels. But it was good five hundred years ago, and it must be good now: and a railroad down one of these steeps (the easiest thing in the world) would be flat blasphemy.

When we stood aside, to see one of these cars drawn by only a pair of oxen (for it had but one small block of marble on it), coming down, I hailed, in my heart, the man who sat upon the heavy yoke, to keep it on the neck of the poor beasts - and who faced backwards: not before him - as the very Devil of true despotism. He had a great rod in his hand, with an iron point; and when they could plough and force their way through the loose bed of the torrent no longer, and came to a stop, he poked it into their bodies, beat it on their heads, screwed it round and round in their nostrils, got them on a yard or two, in the madness of intense pain; repeated all these persuasions, with increased intensity of purpose, when they stopped again; got them on, once more; forced and goaded them to an abrupter point of the descent; and when their writhing and smarting, and the weight behind them, bore them plunging down the precipice in a cloud of scattered water, whirled his rod above his head, and gave a great whoop and hallo, as if he had achieved something, and had no idea that they might shake him off, and blindly mash his brains upon the road, in the noontide of his triumph.

Standing in one of the many studii of Carrara, that afternoon - for it is a great workshop, full of beautifully-finished copies in marble, of almost every figure, group, and bust, we know - it seemed, at first, so strange to me that those exquisite shapes, replete with grace, and thought, and delicate repose, should grow out of all this toil, and sweat, and torture! But I soon found a parallel to it, and an explanation of it, in every virtue that springs up in miserable ground, and every good thing that has its birth in sorrow and distress. And, looking out of the sculptor's great window, upon the marble mountains, all red and glowing in the decline of day, but stern and solemn to the last, I thought, my God! how many quarries of human hearts and souls, capable of far more beautiful results, are left shut up and mouldering away: while pleasure-travellers through life, avert their faces, as they pass, and shudder at the gloom and ruggedness that conceal them!

The then reigning Duke of Modena, to whom this territory in part belonged, claimed the proud distinction of being the only sovereign in Europe who had not recognised Louis-Philippe as King of the French! He was not a wag, but quite in earnest. He was also much opposed to railroads; and if certain lines in contemplation by other potentates, on either side of him, had been executed, would have probably enjoyed the satisfaction of having an omnibus plying to and fro across his not very vast dominions, to forward travellers from one terminus to another.

Carrara, shut in by great hills, is very picturesque and bold. Few tourists stay there; and the people are nearly all connected, in one way or other, with the working of marble. There are also villages among the caves, where the workmen live. It contains a beautiful little Theatre, newly built; and it is an interesting custom there, to form the chorus of labourers in the marble quarries, who are self-taught and sing by ear. I heard them in a comic opera, and in an act of 'Norma;' and they acquitted themselves very well; unlike the common people of Italy generally, who (with some exceptions among the Neapolitans) sing vilely out of tune, and have very disagreeable singing voices.

From the summit of a lofty hill beyond Carrara, the first view of the fertile plain in which the town of Pisa lies - with Leghorn, a purple spot in the flat distance - is enchanting. Nor is it only distance that lends enchantment to the view; for the fruitful country, and rich woods of olive-trees through which the road subsequently passes, render it delightful.

The moon was shining when we approached Pisa, and for a long time we could see, behind the wall, the leaning Tower, all awry in the uncertain light; the shadowy original of the old pictures in school-books, setting forth ‘The Wonders of the World.’ Like most things connected in their first associations with school-books and school-times, it was too small. I felt it keenly. It was nothing like so high above the wall as I had hoped. It was another of the many deceptions practised by Mr. Harris, Bookseller, at the corner of St. Paul’s Churchyard, London. *His* Tower was a fiction, but this was a reality - and, by comparison, a short reality. Still, it looked very well, and very strange, and was quite as much out of the perpendicular as Harris had represented it to be. The quiet air of Pisa too; the big guard-house at the gate, with only two little soldiers in it; the streets with scarcely any show of people in them; and the Arno, flowing quaintly through the centre of the town; were excellent. So, I bore no malice in my heart against Mr. Harris (remembering his good intentions), but forgave him before dinner, and went out, full of confidence, to see the Tower next morning.

I might have known better; but, somehow, I had expected to see it, casting its long shadow on a public street where people came and went all day. It was a surprise to me to find it in a grave retired place, apart from the general resort, and carpeted with smooth green turf. But, the group of buildings, clustered on and about this verdant carpet: comprising the Tower, the Baptistery, the Cathedral, and the Church of the Campo Santo: is perhaps the most remarkable and beautiful in the whole world; and from being clustered there, together, away from the ordinary transactions and details of the town, they have a singularly venerable and impressive character. It is the architectural essence of a rich old city, with all its common life and common habitations pressed out, and filtered away.

SIMOND compares the Tower to the usual pictorial representations in children’s books of the Tower of Babel. It is a happy simile, and conveys a better idea of the building than chapters of laboured description. Nothing can exceed the grace and lightness of the structure; nothing can be more remarkable than its general appearance. In the course of the ascent to the top (which is by an easy staircase), the inclination is not very apparent; but, at the summit, it becomes so, and gives one the sensation of being in a ship that has heeled over, through the action of an ebb-tide. The effect *upon the low side*, so to speak - looking over from the gallery, and seeing the shaft recede to its base - is very startling; and I saw a nervous traveller hold on to the Tower involuntarily, after glancing down, as if he had some idea of propping it up. The view within, from the ground - looking up, as through a slanted tube - is also very curious. It certainly inclines as much as the most sanguine tourist could desire. The natural impulse of ninety-nine people out of a hundred, who were about to recline upon the grass below it, to rest, and contemplate the adjacent buildings, would probably be, not to take up their position under the leaning side; it is so very much aslant.

The manifold beauties of the Cathedral and Baptistery need no recapitulation from me; though in this case, as in a hundred others, I find it difficult to separate my own delight in recalling them, from your weariness in having them recalled. There is a picture of St. Agnes, by Andrea del Sarto, in the former, and there are a variety of rich columns in the latter, that tempt me strongly.

It is, I hope, no breach of my resolution not to be tempted into elaborate descriptions, to remember the Campo Santo; where grass-grown graves are dug in earth brought more than six hundred years ago, from the Holy Land; and where there are, surrounding them, such cloisters, with such playing lights and shadows falling through their delicate tracery on the stone pavement, as surely the dullest memory could never forget. On the walls of this solemn and lovely place, are ancient frescoes, very much obliterated and decayed, but very curious. As usually happens in almost any collection of paintings, of any sort, in Italy, where there are many heads, there is, in one of them, a striking accidental likeness of Napoleon. At one time, I used to please my fancy with the speculation whether these old painters, at their work, had a foreboding knowledge of the man who would one day arise to wreak such destruction upon art: whose soldiers would make targets of great pictures, and stable their horses among triumphs of architecture. But the same Corsican face is so plentiful in some parts of Italy at this day, that a more commonplace solution of the coincidence is unavoidable.

If Pisa be the seventh wonder of the world in right of its Tower, it may claim to be, at least, the second or third in right of its beggars. They waylay the unhappy visitor at every turn, escort him to every door he enters at, and lie in wait for him, with strong reinforcements, at every door by which they know he must come out. The grating of the portal on its hinges is the signal for a general shout, and the moment he appears, he is hemmed in, and fallen on, by heaps of rags and personal distortions. The beggars seem to embody all the trade and enterprise of Pisa. Nothing else is stirring, but warm air. Going through the streets, the fronts of the sleepy houses look like backs. They are all so still and quiet, and unlike houses with people in them, that the greater part of the city has the appearance of a city at daybreak, or during a general siesta of the population. Or it is yet more like those backgrounds of houses in common prints, or old engravings, where windows and doors are squarely indicated, and one figure (a beggar of course) is seen walking off by itself into illimitable perspective.

Not so Leghorn (made illustrious by SMOLLETT’S grave), which is a thriving, business-like, matter-of-fact place, where idleness is shouldered out of the way by commerce. The regulations observed there, in reference to trade and merchants, are very liberal and free; and the town, of course, benefits by them. Leghorn had a bad name in connection with stabbers, and with some justice it must be allowed; for, not many years ago, there was an assassination club there, the members of which bore no ill-will to anybody in particular, but stabbed people (quite strangers to them) in the streets at night, for the pleasure and excitement of the recreation. I think the president of this amiable society was a shoemaker. He was taken, however, and the club was broken up. It would, probably, have disappeared in the natural course of events, before the railroad between Leghorn and Pisa, which is a good one, and has already begun to astonish Italy with a precedent of punctuality, order, plain dealing, and improvement - the most dangerous and heretical astonisher of all. There must have been a slight sensation, as of earthquake, surely, in the Vatican, when the first Italian railroad was thrown open.

Returning to Pisa, and hiring a good-tempered Vetturíno, and his four horses, to take us on to Rome, we travelled through pleasant Tuscan villages and cheerful scenery all day. The roadside crosses in this part of Italy are numerous and curious. There is seldom a figure on the cross, though there is sometimes a face, but they are remarkable for being garnished with little models in wood, of every possible object that can be connected with the Saviour's death. The cock that crowed when Peter had denied his Master thrice, is usually perched on the tip-top; and an ornithological phenomenon he generally is. Under him, is the inscription. Then, hung on to the cross-beam, are the spear, the reed with the sponge of vinegar and water at the end, the coat without seam for which the soldiers cast lots, the dice-box with which they threw for it, the hammer that drove in the nails, the pincers that pulled them out, the ladder which was set against the cross, the crown of thorns, the instrument of flagellation, the lanthorn with which Mary went to the tomb (I suppose), and the sword with which Peter smote the servant of the high priest, - a perfect toy-shop of little objects, repeated at every four or five miles, all along the highway.

On the evening of the second day from Pisa, we reached the beautiful old city of Siena. There was what they called a Carnival, in progress; but, as its secret lay in a score or two of melancholy people walking up and down the principal street in common toy-shop masks, and being more melancholy, if possible, than the same sort of people in England, I say no more of it. We went off, betimes next morning, to see the Cathedral, which is wonderfully picturesque inside and out, especially the latter - also the market-place, or great Piazza, which is a large square, with a great broken-nosed fountain in it: some quaint Gothic houses: and a high square brick tower; *outside* the top of which - a curious feature in such views in Italy - hangs an enormous bell. It is like a bit of Venice, without the water. There are some curious old Palazzi in the town, which is very ancient; and without having (for me) the interest of Verona, or Genoa, it is very dreamy and fantastic, and most interesting.

We went on again, as soon as we had seen these things, and going over a rather bleak country (there had been nothing but vines until now: mere walking-sticks at that season of the year), stopped, as usual, between one and two hours in the middle of the day, to rest the horses; that being a part of every Vetturíno contract. We then went on again, through a region gradually becoming bleaker and wilder, until it became as bare and desolate as any Scottish moors. Soon after dark, we halted for the night, at the osteria of La Scala: a perfectly lone house, where the family were sitting round a great fire in the kitchen, raised on a stone platform three or four feet high, and big enough for the roasting of an ox. On the upper, and only other floor of this hotel, there was a great, wild, rambling sála, with one very little window in a by-corner, and four black doors opening into four black bedrooms in various directions. To say nothing of another large black door, opening into another large black sála, with the staircase coming abruptly through a kind of trap-door in the floor, and the rafters of the roof looming above: a suspicious little press skulking in one obscure corner: and all the knives in the house lying about in various directions. The fireplace was of the purest Italian architecture, so that it was perfectly impossible to see it for the smoke. The waitress was like a dramatic brigand's wife, and wore the same style of dress upon her head. The dogs barked like mad; the echoes returned the compliments bestowed upon them; there was not another house within twelve miles; and things had a dreary, and rather a cut-throat, appearance.

They were not improved by rumours of robbers having come out, strong and boldly, within a few nights; and of their having stopped the mail very near that place. They were known to have waylaid some travellers not long before, on Mount Vesuvius itself, and were the talk at all the roadside inns. As they were no business of ours, however (for we had very little with us to lose), we made ourselves merry on the subject, and were very soon as comfortable as need be. We had the usual dinner in this solitary house; and a very good dinner it is, when you are used to it. There is something with a vegetable or some rice in it which is a sort of shorthand or arbitrary character for soup, and which tastes very well, when you have flavoured it with plenty of grated cheese, lots of salt, and abundance of pepper. There is the half fowl of which this soup has been made. There is a stewed pigeon, with the gizzards and livers of himself and other birds stuck all round him. There is a bit of roast beef, the size of a small French roll. There are a scrap of Parmesan cheese, and five little withered apples, all huddled together on a small plate, and crowding one upon the other, as if each were trying to save itself from the chance of being eaten. Then there is coffee; and then there is bed. You don’t mind brick floors; you don’t mind yawning doors, nor banging windows; you don’t mind your own horses being stabled under the bed: and so close, that every time a horse coughs or sneezes, he wakes you. If you are good-humoured to the people about you, and speak pleasantly, and look cheerful, take my word for it you may be well entertained in the very worst Italian Inn, and always in the most obliging manner, and may go from one end of the country to the other (despite all stories to the contrary) without any great trial of your patience anywhere. Especially, when you get such wine in flasks, as the Orvieto, and the Monte Pulciano.

It was a bad morning when we left this place; and we went, for twelve miles, over a country as barren, as stony, and as wild, as Cornwall in England, until we came to Radicofani, where there is a ghostly, goblin inn: once a hunting-seat, belonging to the Dukes of Tuscany. It is full of such rambling corridors, and gaunt rooms, that all the murdering and phantom tales that ever were written might have originated in that one house. There are some horrible old Palazzi in Genoa: one in particular, not unlike it, outside: but there is a winding, creaking, wormy, rustling, door-opening, foot-on-staircase-falling character about this Radicofani Hotel, such as I never saw, anywhere else. The town, such as it is, hangs on a hill-side above the house, and in front of it. The inhabitants are all beggars; and as soon as they see a carriage coming, they swoop down upon it, like so many birds of prey.

When we got on the mountain pass, which lies beyond this place, the wind (as they had forewarned us at the inn) was so terrific, that we were obliged to take my other half out of the carriage, lest she should be blown over, carriage and all, and to hang to it, on the windy side (as well as we could for laughing), to prevent its going, Heaven knows where. For mere force of wind, this land-storm might have competed with an Atlantic gale, and had a reasonable chance of coming off victorious. The blast came sweeping down great gullies in a range of mountains on the right: so that we looked with positive awe at a great morass on the left, and saw that there was not a bush or twig to hold by. It seemed as if, once blown from our feet, we must be swept out to sea, or away into space. There was snow, and hail, and rain, and lightning, and thunder; and there were rolling mists, travelling with incredible velocity. It was dark, awful, and solitary to the last degree; there were mountains above mountains, veiled in angry clouds; and there was such a wrathful, rapid, violent, tumultuous hurry, everywhere, as rendered the scene unspeakably exciting and grand.

It was a relief to get out of it, notwithstanding; and to cross even the dismal, dirty Papal Frontier. After passing through two little towns; in one of which, Acquapendente, there was also a ‘Carnival’ in progress: consisting of one man dressed and masked as a woman, and one woman dressed and masked as a man, walking ankle-deep, through the muddy streets, in a very melancholy manner: we came, at dusk, within sight of the Lake of Bolsena, on whose bank there is a little town of the same name, much celebrated for malaria. With the exception of this poor place, there is not a cottage on the banks of the lake, or near it (for nobody dare sleep there); not a boat upon its waters; not a stick or stake to break the dismal monotony of seven-and-twenty watery miles. We were late in getting in, the roads being very bad from heavy rains; and, after dark, the dulness of the scene was quite intolerable.

We entered on a very different, and a finer scene of desolation, next night, at sunset. We had passed through Montefiaschone (famous for its wine) and Viterbo (for its fountains): and after climbing up a long hill of eight or ten miles’ extent, came suddenly upon the margin of a solitary lake: in one part very beautiful, with a luxuriant wood; in another, very barren, and shut in by bleak volcanic hills. Where this lake flows, there stood, of old, a city. It was swallowed up one day; and in its stead, this water rose. There are ancient traditions (common to many parts of the world) of the ruined city having been seen below, when the water was clear; but however that may be, from this spot of earth it vanished. The ground came bubbling up above it; and the water too; and here they stand, like ghosts on whom the other world closed suddenly, and who have no means of getting back again. They seem to be waiting the course of ages, for the next earthquake in that place; when they will plunge below the ground, at its first yawning, and be seen no more. The unhappy city below, is not more lost and dreary, than these fire-charred hills and the stagnant water, above. The red sun looked strangely on them, as with the knowledge that they were made for caverns and darkness; and the melancholy water oozed and sucked the mud, and crept quietly among the marshy grass and reeds, as if the overthrow of all the ancient towers and housetops, and the death of all the ancient people born and bred there, were yet heavy on its conscience.

A short ride from this lake, brought us to Ronciglione; a little town like a large pig-sty, where we passed the night. Next morning at seven o’clock, we started for Rome.

As soon as we were out of the pig-sty, we entered on the Campagna Romana; an undulating flat (as you know), where few people can live; and where, for miles and miles, there is nothing to relieve the terrible monotony and gloom. Of all kinds of country that could, by possibility, lie outside the gates of Rome, this is the aptest and fittest burial-ground for the Dead City. So sad, so quiet, so sullen; so secret in its covering up of great masses of ruin, and hiding them; so like the waste places into which the men possessed with devils used to go and howl, and rend themselves, in the old days of Jerusalem. We had to traverse thirty miles of this Campagna; and for two-and-twenty we went on and on, seeing nothing but now and then a lonely house, or a villainous-looking shepherd: with matted hair all over his face, and himself wrapped to the chin in a frowsy brown mantle, tending his sheep. At the end of that distance, we stopped to refresh the horses, and to get some lunch, in a common malaria-shaken, despondent little public-house, whose every inch of wall and beam, inside, was (according to custom) painted and decorated in a way so miserable that every room looked like the wrong side of another room, and, with its wretched imitation of drapery, and lop-sided little daubs of lyres, seemed to have been plundered from behind the scenes of some travelling circus.

When we were fairly going off again, we began, in a perfect fever, to strain our eyes for Rome; and when, after another mile or two, the Eternal City appeared, at length, in the distance; it looked like - I am half afraid to write the word - like LONDON!!! There it lay, under a thick cloud, with innumerable towers, and steeples, and roofs of houses, rising up into the sky, and high above them all, one Dome. I swear, that keenly as I felt the seeming absurdity of the comparison, it was so like London, at that distance, that if you could have shown it me, in a glass, I should have taken it for nothing else.

CHAPTER X - ROME

We entered the Eternal City, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, on the thirtieth of January, by the Porta del Popolo, and came immediately - it was a dark, muddy day, and there had been heavy rain - on the skirts of the Carnival. We did not, then, know that we were only looking at the fag end of the masks, who were driving slowly round and round the Piazza until they could find a promising opportunity for falling into the stream of carriages, and getting, in good time, into the thick of the festivity; and coming among them so abruptly, all travel-stained and weary, was not coming very well prepared to enjoy the scene.

We had crossed the Tiber by the Ponte Molle two or three miles before. It had looked as yellow as it ought to look, and hurrying on between its worn-away and miry banks, had a promising aspect of desolation and ruin. The masquerade dresses on the fringe of the Carnival, did great violence to this promise. There were no great ruins, no solemn tokens of antiquity, to be seen; - they all lie on the other side of the city. There seemed to be long streets of commonplace shops and houses, such as are to be found in any European town; there were busy people, equipages, ordinary walkers to and fro; a multitude of chattering strangers. It was no more *my* Rome: the Rome of anybody's fancy, man or boy; degraded and fallen and lying asleep in the sun among a heap of ruins: than the Place de la Concorde in Paris is. A cloudy sky, a dull cold rain, and muddy streets, I was prepared for, but not for this: and I confess to having gone to bed, that night, in a very indifferent humour, and with a very considerably quenched enthusiasm.

Immediately on going out next day, we hurried off to St. Peter's. It looked immense in the distance, but distinctly and decidedly small, by comparison, on a near approach. The beauty of the Piazza, on which it stands, with its clusters of exquisite columns, and its gushing fountains - so fresh, so broad, and free, and beautiful - nothing can exaggerate. The first burst of the interior, in all its expansive majesty and glory: and, most of all, the looking up into the Dome: is a sensation never to be forgotten. But, there were preparations for a Festa; the pillars of stately marble were swathed in some impertinent frippery of red and yellow; the altar, and entrance to the subterranean chapel: which is before it: in the centre of the church: were like a goldsmith's shop, or one of the opening scenes in a very lavish pantomime. And though I had as high a sense of the beauty of the building (I hope) as it is possible to entertain, I felt no very strong emotion. I have been infinitely more affected in many English cathedrals when the organ has been playing, and in many English country churches when the congregation have been singing. I had a much greater sense of mystery and wonder, in the Cathedral of San Mark at Venice.

When we came out of the church again (we stood nearly an hour staring up into the dome: and would not have 'gone over' the Cathedral then, for any money), we said to the coachman, 'Go to the Coliseum.' In a quarter of an hour or so, he stopped at the gate, and we went in.

It is no fiction, but plain, sober, honest Truth, to say: so suggestive and distinct is it at this hour: that, for a moment - actually in passing in - they who will, may have the whole great pile before them, as it used to be, with thousands of eager faces staring down into the arena, and such a whirl of strife, and blood, and dust going on there, as no language can describe. Its solitude, its awful beauty, and its utter desolation, strike upon the stranger the next moment, like a softened sorrow; and never in his life, perhaps, will he be so moved and overcome by any sight, not immediately connected with his own affections and afflictions.

To see it crumbling there, an inch a year; its walls and arches overgrown with green; its corridors open to the day; the long grass growing in its porches; young trees of yesterday, springing up on its ragged parapets, and bearing fruit: chance produce of the seeds dropped there by the birds who build their nests within its chinks and crannies; to see its Pit of Fight filled up with earth, and the peaceful Cross planted in the centre; to climb into its upper halls, and look down on ruin, ruin, ruin, all about it; the triumphal arches of Constantine, Septimus Severus, and Titus; the Roman Forum; the Palace of the Caesars; the temples of the old religion, fallen down and gone; is to see the ghost of old Rome, wicked, wonderful old city, haunting the very ground on which its people trod. It is the most impressive, the most stately, the most solemn, grand, majestic, mournful sight, conceivable. Never, in its bloodiest prime, can the sight of the gigantic Coliseum, full and running over with the lustiest life, have moved one's heart, as it must move all who look upon it now, a ruin. GOD be thanked: a ruin!

As it tops the other ruins: standing there, a mountain among graves: so do its ancient influences outlive all other remnants of the old mythology and old butchery of Rome, in the nature of the fierce and cruel Roman people. The Italian face changes as the visitor approaches the city; its beauty becomes devilish; and there is scarcely one countenance in a hundred, among the common people in the streets, that would not be at home and happy in a renovated Coliseum to-morrow.

Here was Rome indeed at last; and such a Rome as no one can imagine in its full and awful grandeur! We wandered out upon the Appian Way, and then went on, through miles of ruined tombs and broken walls, with here and there a desolate and uninhabited house: past the Circus of Romulus, where the course of the chariots, the stations of the judges, competitors, and spectators, are yet as plainly to be seen as in old time: past the tomb of Cecilia Metella: past all inclosure, hedge, or stake, wall or fence: away upon the open Campagna, where on that side of Rome, nothing is to be beheld but Ruin. Except where the distant Apennines bound the view upon the left, the whole wide prospect is one field of ruin. Broken aqueducts, left in the most picturesque and beautiful clusters of arches; broken temples; broken tombs. A desert of decay, sombre and desolate beyond all expression; and with a history in every stone that strews the ground.

On Sunday, the Pope assisted in the performance of High Mass at St. Peter's. The effect of the Cathedral on my mind, on that second visit, was exactly what it was at first, and what it remains after many visits. It is not religiously impressive or affecting. It is an immense edifice, with no one point for the mind to rest upon; and it tires itself with wandering round and round. The very purpose of the place, is not expressed in anything you see there, unless you examine its details - and all examination of details is incompatible with the place itself. It might be a Pantheon, or a Senate House, or a great architectural trophy, having no other object than an architectural triumph. There is a black statue of St. Peter, to be sure, under a red canopy; which is larger than life and which is constantly having its great toe kissed by good Catholics. You cannot help seeing that: it is so very prominent and popular. But it does not heighten the effect of the temple, as a work of art; and it is not expressive - to me at least - of its high purpose.

A large space behind the altar, was fitted up with boxes, shaped like those at the Italian Opera in England, but in their decoration much more gaudy. In the centre of the kind of theatre thus railed off, was a canopied dais with the Pope's chair upon it. The pavement was covered with a carpet of the brightest green; and what with this green, and the intolerable reds and crimsons, and gold borders of the hangings, the whole concern looked like a stupendous Bonbon. On either side of the altar, was a large box for lady strangers. These were filled with ladies in black dresses and black veils. The gentlemen of the Pope's guard, in red coats, leather breeches, and jack-boots, guarded all this reserved space, with drawn swords that were very flashy in every sense; and from the altar all down the nave, a broad lane was kept clear by the Pope's Swiss guard, who wear a quaint striped surcoat, and striped tight legs, and carry halberds like those which are usually shouldered by those theatrical supernumeraries, who never *can* get off the stage fast enough, and who may be generally observed to linger in the enemy's camp after the open country, held by the opposite forces, has been split up the middle by a convulsion of Nature.

I got upon the border of the green carpet, in company with a great many other gentlemen, attired in black (no other passport is necessary), and stood there at my ease, during the performance of Mass. The singers were in a crib of wirework (like a large meat-safe or bird-cage) in one corner; and sang most atrociously. All about the green carpet, there was a slowly moving crowd of people: talking to each other: staring at the Pope through eye-glasses; defrauding one another, in moments of partial curiosity, out of precarious seats on the bases of pillars: and grinning hideously at the ladies. Dotted here and there, were little knots of friars (Frances-cáni, or Cappuccíni, in their coarse brown dresses and peaked hoods) making a strange contrast to the gaudy ecclesiastics of higher degree, and having their humility gratified to the utmost, by being shouldered about, and elbowed right and left, on all sides. Some of these had muddy sandals and umbrellas, and stained garments: having trudged in from the country. The faces of the greater part were as coarse and heavy as their dress; their dogged, stupid, monotonous stare at all the glory and splendour, having something in it, half miserable, and half ridiculous.

Upon the green carpet itself, and gathered round the altar, was a perfect army of cardinals and priests, in red, gold, purple, violet, white, and fine linen. Stragglers from these, went to and fro among the crowd, conversing two and two, or giving and receiving introductions, and exchanging salutations; other functionaries in black gowns, and other functionaries in court-dresses, were similarly engaged. In the midst of all these, and stealthy Jesuits creeping in and out, and the extreme restlessness of the Youth of England, who were perpetually wandering about, some few steady persons in black cassocks, who had knelt down with their faces to the wall, and were poring over their missals, became, unintentionally, a sort of humane man-traps, and with their own devout legs, tripped up other people's by the dozen.

There was a great pile of candles lying down on the floor near me, which a very old man in a rusty black gown with an open-work tippet, like a summer ornament for a fireplace in tissue-paper, made himself very busy in dispensing to all the ecclesiastics: one a-piece. They loitered about with these for some time, under their arms like walking-sticks, or in their hands like truncheons. At a certain period of the ceremony, however, each carried his candle up to the Pope, laid it across his two knees to be blessed, took it back again, and filed off. This was done in a very attenuated procession, as you may suppose, and occupied a long time. Not because it takes long to bless a candle through and through, but because there were so many candles to be blessed. At last they were all blessed: and then they were all lighted; and then the Pope was taken up, chair and all, and carried round the church.

I must say, that I never saw anything, out of November, so like the popular English commemoration of the fifth of that month. A bundle of matches and a lantern, would have made it perfect. Nor did the Pope, himself, at all mar the resemblance, though he has a pleasant and venerable face; for, as this part of the ceremony makes him giddy and sick, he shuts his eyes when it is performed: and having his eyes shut and a great mitre on his head, and his head itself wagging to and fro as they shook him in carrying, he looked as if his mask were going to tumble off. The two immense fans which are always borne, one on either side of him, accompanied him, of course, on this occasion. As they carried him along, he blessed the people with the mystic sign; and as he passed them, they kneeled down. When he had made the round of the church, he was brought back again, and if I am not mistaken, this performance was repeated, in the whole, three times. There was, certainly nothing solemn or effective in it; and certainly very much that was droll and tawdry. But this remark applies to the whole ceremony, except the raising of the Host, when every man in the guard dropped on one knee instantly, and dashed his naked sword on the ground; which had a fine effect.

The next time I saw the cathedral, was some two or three weeks afterwards, when I climbed up into the ball; and then, the hangings being taken down, and the carpet taken up, but all the framework left, the remnants of these decorations looked like an exploded cracker.

The Friday and Saturday having been solemn Festa days, and Sunday being always a *dies non* in carnival proceedings, we had looked forward, with some impatience and curiosity, to the beginning of the new week: Monday and Tuesday being the two last and best days of the Carnival.

On the Monday afternoon at one or two o’clock, there began to be a great rattling of carriages into the court-yard of the hotel; a hurrying to and fro of all the servants in it; and, now and then, a swift shooting across some doorway or balcony, of a straggling stranger in a fancy dress: not yet sufficiently well used to the same, to wear it with confidence, and defy public opinion. All the carriages were open, and had the linings carefully covered with white cotton or calico, to prevent their proper decorations from being spoiled by the incessant pelting of sugar-plums; and people were packing and cramming into every vehicle as it waited for its occupants, enormous sacks and baskets full of these confétti, together with such heaps of flowers, tied up in little nosegays, that some carriages were not only brimful of flowers, but literally running over: scattering, at every shake and jerk of the springs, some of their abundance on the ground. Not to be behindhand in these essential particulars, we caused two very respectable sacks of sugar-plums (each about three feet high) and a large clothes-basket full of flowers to be conveyed into our hired barouche, with all speed. And from our place of observation, in one of the upper balconies of the hotel, we contemplated these arrangements with the liveliest satisfaction. The carriages now beginning to take up their company, and move away, we got into ours, and drove off too, armed with little wire masks for our faces; the sugar-plums, like Falstaff's adulterated sack, having lime in their composition.

The Corso is a street a mile long; a street of shops, and palaces, and private houses, sometimes opening into a broad piazza. There are verandahs and balconies, of all shapes and sizes, to almost every house - not on one story alone, but often to one room or another on every story - put there in general with so little order or regularity, that if, year after year, and season after season, it had rained balconies, hailed balconies, snowed balconies, blown balconies, they could scarcely have come into existence in a more disorderly manner.

This is the great fountain-head and focus of the Carnival. But all the streets in which the Carnival is held, being vigilantly kept by dragoons, it is necessary for carriages, in the first instance, to pass, in line, down another thoroughfare, and so come into the Corso at the end remote from the Piázza del Popolo; which is one of its terminations. Accordingly, we fell into the string of coaches, and, for some time, jogged on quietly enough; now crawling on at a very slow walk; now trotting half-a-dozen yards; now backing fifty; and now stopping altogether: as the pressure in front obliged us. If any impetuous carriage dashed out of the rank and clattered forward, with the wild idea of getting on faster, it was suddenly met, or overtaken, by a trooper on horseback, who, deaf as his own drawn sword to all remonstrances, immediately escorted it back to the very end of the row, and made it a dim speck in the remotest perspective. Occasionally, we interchanged a volley of confétti with the carriage next in front, or the carriage next behind; but as yet, this capturing of stray and errant coaches by the military, was the chief amusement.

Presently, we came into a narrow street, where, besides one line of carriages going, there was another line of carriages returning. Here the sugar-plums and the nosegays began to fly about, pretty smartly; and I was fortunate enough to observe one gentleman attired as a Greek warrior, catch a light-whiskered brigand on the nose (he was in the very act of tossing up a bouquet to a young lady in a first-floor window) with a precision that was much applauded by the bystanders. As this victorious Greek was exchanging a facetious remark with a stout gentleman in a doorway - one-half black and one-half white, as if he had been peeled up the middle - who had offered him his congratulations on this achievement, he received an orange from a housetop, full on his left ear, and was much surprised, not to say discomfited. Especially, as he was standing up at the time; and in consequence of the carriage moving on suddenly, at the same moment, staggered ignominiously, and buried himself among his flowers.

Some quarter of an hour of this sort of progress, brought us to the Corso; and anything so gay, so bright, and lively as the whole scene there, it would be difficult to imagine. From all the innumerable balconies: from the remotest and highest, no less than from the lowest and nearest: hangings of bright red, bright green, bright blue, white and gold, were fluttering in the brilliant sunlight. From windows, and from parapets, and tops of houses, streamers of the richest colours, and draperies of the gaudiest and most sparkling hues, were floating out upon the street. The buildings seemed to have been literally turned inside out, and to have all their gaiety towards the highway. Shop-fronts were taken down, and the windows filled with company, like boxes at a shining theatre; doors were carried off their hinges, and long tapestried groves, hung with garlands of flowers and evergreens, displayed within; builders' scaffoldings were gorgeous temples, radiant in silver, gold, and crimson; and in every nook and corner, from the pavement to the chimney-tops, where women's eyes could glisten, there they danced, and laughed, and sparkled, like the light in water. Every sort of bewitching madness of dress was there. Little preposterous scarlet jackets; quaint old stomachers, more wicked than the smartest bodices; Polish pelisses, strained and tight as ripe gooseberries; tiny Greek caps, all awry, and clinging to the dark hair, Heaven knows how; every wild, quaint, bold, shy, pettish, madcap fancy had its illustration in a dress; and every fancy was as dead forgotten by its owner, in the tumult of merriment, as if the three old aqueducts that still remain entire had brought Lethe into Rome, upon their sturdy arches, that morning.

The carriages were now three abreast; in broader places four; often stationary for a long time together, always one close mass of variegated brightness; showing, the whole street-full, through the storm of flowers, like flowers of a larger growth themselves. In some, the horses were richly caparisoned in magnificent trappings; in others they were decked from head to tail, with flowing ribbons. Some were driven by coachmen with enormous double faces: one face leering at the horses: the other cocking its extraordinary eyes into the carriage: and both rattling again, under the hail of sugar-plums. Other drivers were attired as women, wearing long ringlets and no bonnets, and looking more ridiculous in any real difficulty with the horses (of which, in such a concourse, there were a great many) than tongue can tell, or pen describe. Instead of sitting *in* the carriages, upon the seats, the handsome Roman women, to see and to be seen the better, sit in the heads of the barouches, at this time of general licence, with their feet upon the cushions - and oh, the flowing skirts and dainty waists, the blessed shapes and laughing faces, the free, good-humoured, gallant figures that they make! There were great vans, too, full of handsome girls - thirty, or more together, perhaps - and the broadsides that were poured into, and poured out of, these fairy fire-shops, splashed the air with flowers and bon-bons for ten minutes at a time. Carriages, delayed long in one place, would begin a deliberate engagement with other carriages, or with people at the lower windows; and the spectators at some upper balcony or window, joining in the fray, and attacking both parties, would empty down great bags of confétti, that descended like a cloud, and in an instant made them white as millers. Still, carriages on carriages, dresses on dresses, colours on colours, crowds upon crowds, without end. Men and boys clinging to the wheels of coaches, and holding on behind, and following in their wake, and diving in among the horses’ feet to pick up scattered flowers to sell again; maskers on foot (the drollest generally) in fantastic exaggerations of court-dresses, surveying the throng through enormous eye-glasses, and always transported with an ecstasy of love, on the discovery of any particularly old lady at a window; long strings of Policinelli, laying about them with blown bladders at the ends of sticks; a waggon-full of madmen, screaming and tearing to the life; a coach-full of grave mamelukes, with their horse-tail standard set up in the midst; a party of gipsy-women engaged in terrific conflict with a shipful of sailors; a man-monkey on a pole, surrounded by strange animals with pigs' faces, and lions' tails, carried under their arms, or worn gracefully over their shoulders; carriages on carriages, dresses on dresses, colours on colours, crowds upon crowds, without end. Not many actual characters sustained, or represented, perhaps, considering the number dressed, but the main pleasure of the scene consisting in its perfect good temper; in its bright, and infinite, and flashing variety; and in its entire abandonment to the mad humour of the time - an abandonment so perfect, so contagious, so irresistible, that the steadiest foreigner fights up to his middle in flowers and sugar-plums, like the wildest Roman of them all, and thinks of nothing else till half-past four o'clock, when he is suddenly reminded (to his great regret) that this is not the whole business of his existence, by hearing the trumpets sound, and seeing the dragoons begin to clear the street.

How it ever *is* cleared for the race that takes place at five, or how the horses ever go through the race, without going over the people, is more than I can say. But the carriages get out into the by-streets, or up into the Piázza del Popolo, and some people sit in temporary galleries in the latter place, and tens of thousands line the Corso on both sides, when the horses are brought out into the Piázza - to the foot of that same column which, for centuries, looked down upon the games and chariot-races in the Circus Maximus.

At a given signal they are started off. Down the live lane, the whole length of the Corso, they fly like the wind: riderless, as all the world knows: with shining ornaments upon their backs, and twisted in their plaited manes: and with heavy little balls stuck full of spikes, dangling at their sides, to goad them on. The jingling of these trappings, and the rattling of their hoofs upon the hard stones; the dash and fury of their speed along the echoing street; nay, the very cannon that are fired - these noises are nothing to the roaring of the multitude: their shouts: the clapping of their hands. But it is soon over - almost instantaneously. More cannon shake the town. The horses have plunged into the carpets put across the street to stop them; the goal is reached; the prizes are won (they are given, in part, by the poor Jews, as a compromise for not running foot-races themselves); and there is an end to that day's sport.

But if the scene be bright, and gay, and crowded, on the last day but one, it attains, on the concluding day, to such a height of glittering colour, swarming life, and frolicsome uproar, that the bare recollection of it makes me giddy at this moment. The same diversions, greatly heightened and intensified in the ardour with which they are pursued, go on until the same hour. The race is repeated; the cannon are fired; the shouting and clapping of hands are renewed; the cannon are fired again; the race is over; and the prizes are won. But the carriages: ankle-deep with sugar-plums within, and so be-flowered and dusty without, as to be hardly recognisable for the same vehicles that they were, three hours ago: instead of scampering off in all directions, throng into the Corso, where they are soon wedged together in a scarcely moving mass. For the diversion of the Moccoletti, the last gay madness of the Carnival, is now at hand; and sellers of little tapers like what are called Christmas candles in England, are shouting lustily on every side, 'Moccoli, Moccoli! Ecco Moccoli!' - a new item in the tumult; quite abolishing that other item of ' Ecco Fióri! Ecco Fior-r-r!' which has been making itself audible over all the rest, at intervals, the whole day through.

As the bright hangings and dresses are all fading into one dull, heavy, uniform colour in the decline of the day, lights begin flashing, here and there: in the windows, on the housetops, in the balconies, in the carriages, in the hands of the foot-passengers: little by little: gradually, gradually: more and more: until the whole long street is one great glare and blaze of fire. Then, everybody present has but one engrossing object; that is, to extinguish other people's candles, and to keep his own alight; and everybody: man, woman, or child, gentleman or lady, prince or peasant, native or foreigner: yells and screams, and roars incessantly, as a taunt to the subdued, 'Senza Moccolo, Senza Moccolo!' (Without a light! Without a light!) until nothing is heard but a gigantic chorus of those two words, mingled with peals of laughter.

The spectacle, at this time, is one of the most extraordinary that can be imagined. Carriages coming slowly by, with everybody standing on the seats or on the box, holding up their lights at arms' length, for greater safety; some in paper shades; some with a bunch of undefended little tapers, kindled altogether; some with blazing torches; some with feeble little candles; men on foot, creeping along, among the wheels, watching their opportunity, to make a spring at some particular light, and dash it out; other people climbing up into carriages, to get hold of them by main force; others, chasing some unlucky wanderer, round and round his own coach, to blow out the light he has begged or stolen somewhere, before he can ascend to his own company, and enable them to light their extinguished tapers; others, with their hats off, at a carriage-door, humbly beseeching some kind-hearted lady to oblige them with a light for a cigar, and when she is in the fulness of doubt whether to comply or no, blowing out the candle she is guarding so tenderly with her little hand; other people at the windows, fishing for candles with lines and hooks, or letting down long willow-wands with handkerchiefs at the end, and flapping them out, dexterously, when the bearer is at the height of his triumph, others, biding their time in corners, with immense extinguishers like halberds, and suddenly coming down upon glorious torches; others, gathered round one coach, and sticking to it; others, raining oranges and nosegays at an obdurate little lantern, or regularly storming a pyramid of men, holding up one man among them, who carries one feeble little wick above his head, with which he defies them all! Senza Moccolo! Senza Moccolo! Beautiful women, standing up in coaches, pointing in derision at extinguished lights, and clapping their hands, as they pass on, crying, ‘Senza Moccolo! Senza Moccolo!’; low balconies full of lovely faces and gay dresses, struggling with assailants in the streets; some repressing them as they climb up, some bending down, some leaning over, some shrinking back - delicate arms and bosoms - graceful figures - glowing lights, fluttering dresses, Senza Moccolo, Senza Moccoli, Senza Moc-co-lo-o-o-o! - when in the wildest enthusiasm of the cry, and fullest ecstasy of the sport, the Ave Maria rings from the church steeples, and the Carnival is over in an instant - put out like a taper, with a breath!

There was a masquerade at the theatre at night, as dull and senseless as a London one, and only remarkable for the summary way in which the house was cleared at eleven o’clock: which was done by a line of soldiers forming along the wall, at the back of the stage, and sweeping the whole company out before them, like a broad broom. The game of the Moccoletti (the word, in the singular, Moccoletto, is the diminutive of Moccolo, and means a little lamp or candlesnuff) is supposed by some to be a ceremony of burlesque mourning for the death of the Carnival: candles being indispensable to Catholic grief. But whether it be so, or be a remnant of the ancient Saturnalia, or an incorporation of both, or have its origin in anything else, I shall always remember it, and the frolic, as a brilliant and most captivating sight: no less remarkable for the unbroken good-humour of all concerned, down to the very lowest (and among those who scaled the carriages, were many of the commonest men and boys), than for its innocent vivacity. For, odd as it may seem to say so, of a sport so full of thoughtlessness and personal display, it is as free from any taint of immodesty as any general mingling of the two sexes can possibly be; and there seems to prevail, during its progress, a feeling of general, almost childish, simplicity and confidence, which one thinks of with a pang, when the Ave Maria has rung it away, for a whole year.

Availing ourselves of a part of the quiet interval between the termination of the Carnival and the beginning of the Holy Week: when everybody had run away from the one, and few people had yet begun to run back again for the other: we went conscientiously to work, to see Rome. And, by dint of going out early every morning, and coming back late every evening, and labouring hard all day, I believe we made acquaintance with every post and pillar in the city, and the country round; and, in particular, explored so many churches, that I abandoned that part of the enterprise at last, before it was half finished, lest I should never, of my own accord, go to church again, as long as I lived. But, I managed, almost every day, at one time or other, to get back to the Coliseum, and out upon the open Campagna, beyond the Tomb of Cecilia Metella.

We often encountered, in these expeditions, a company of English Tourists, with whom I had an ardent, but ungratified longing, to establish a speaking acquaintance. They were one Mr. Davis, and a small circle of friends. It was impossible not to know Mrs. Davis's name, from her being always in great request among her party, and her party being everywhere. During the Holy Week, they were in every part of every scene of every ceremony. For a fortnight or three weeks before it, they were in every tomb, and every church, and every ruin, and every Picture Gallery; and I hardly ever observed Mrs. Davis to be silent for a moment. Deep underground, high up in St. Peter’s, out on the Campagna, and stifling in the Jews’ quarter, Mrs. Davis turned up, all the same. I don’t think she ever saw anything, or ever looked at anything; and she had always lost something out of a straw hand-basket, and was trying to find it, with all her might and main, among an immense quantity of English halfpence, which lay, like sands upon the sea-shore, at the bottom of it. There was a professional Cicerone always attached to the party (which had been brought over from London, fifteen or twenty strong, by contract), and if he so much as looked at Mrs. Davis, she invariably cut him short by saying, ‘There, God bless the man, don’t worrit me! I don’t understand a word you say, and shouldn’t if you was to talk till you was black in the face!’ Mr. Davis always had a snuff-coloured great-coat on, and carried a great green umbrella in his hand, and had a slow curiosity constantly devouring him, which prompted him to do extraordinary things, such as taking the covers off urns in tombs, and looking in at the ashes as if they were pickles - and tracing out inscriptions with the ferrule of his umbrella, and saying, with intense thoughtfulness, ‘Here’s a B you see, and there’s a R, and this is the way we goes on in; is it!’ His antiquarian habits occasioned his being frequently in the rear of the rest; and one of the agonies of Mrs. Davis, and the party in general, was an ever-present fear that Davis would be lost. This caused them to scream for him, in the strangest places, and at the most improper seasons. And when he came, slowly emerging out of some sepulchre or other, like a peaceful Ghoule, saying ‘Here I am!’ Mrs. Davis invariably replied, ‘You’ll be buried alive in a foreign country, Davis, and it’s no use trying to prevent you!’

Mr. and Mrs. Davis, and their party, had, probably, been brought from London in about nine or ten days. Eighteen hundred years ago, the Roman legions under Claudius, protested against being led into Mr. and Mrs. Davis’s country, urging that it lay beyond the limits of the world.

Among what may be called the Cubs or minor Lions of Rome, there was one that amused me mightily. It is always to be found there; and its den is on the great flight of steps that lead from the Piazza di Spágna, to the church of Trínita del Monte. In plainer words, these steps are the great place of resort for the artists’ ‘Models,’ and there they are constantly waiting to be hired. The first time I went up there, I could not conceive why the faces seemed familiar to me; why they appeared to have beset me, for years, in every possible variety of action and costume; and how it came to pass that they started up before me, in Rome, in the broad day, like so many saddled and bridled nightmares. I soon found that we had made acquaintance, and improved it, for several years, on the walls of various Exhibition Galleries. There is one old gentleman, with long white hair and an immense beard, who, to my knowledge, has gone half through the catalogue of the Royal Academy. This is the venerable, or patriarchal model. He carries a long staff; and every knot and twist in that staff I have seen, faithfully delineated, innumerable times. There is another man in a blue cloak, who always pretends to be asleep in the sun (when there is any), and who, I need not say, is always very wide awake, and very attentive to the disposition of his legs. This is the *dolce far' niente* model. There is another man in a brown cloak, who leans against a wall, with his arms folded in his mantle, and looks out of the corners of his eyes: which are just visible beneath his broad slouched hat. This is the assassin model. There is another man, who constantly looks over his own shoulder, and is always going away, but never does. This is the haughty, or scornful model. As to Domestic Happiness, and Holy Families, they should come very cheap, for there are lumps of them, all up the steps; and the cream of the thing is, that they are all the falsest vagabonds in the world, especially made up for the purpose, and having no counterparts in Rome or any other part of the habitable globe.

My recent mention of the Carnival, reminds me of its being said to be a mock mourning (in the ceremony with which it closes), for the gaieties and merry-makings before Lent; and this again reminds me of the real funerals and mourning processions of Rome, which, like those in most other parts of Italy, are rendered chiefly remarkable to a Foreigner, by the indifference with which the mere clay is universally regarded, after life has left it. And this is not from the survivors having had time to dissociate the memory of the dead from their well-remembered appearance and form on earth; for the interment follows too speedily after death, for that: almost always taking place within four-and-twenty hours, and, sometimes, within twelve.

At Rome, there is the same arrangement of Pits in a great, bleak, open, dreary space, that I have already described as existing in Genoa. When I visited it, at noonday, I saw a solitary coffin of plain deal: uncovered by any shroud or pall, and so slightly made, that the hoof of any wandering mule would have crushed it in: carelessly tumbled down, all on one side, on the door of one of the pits - and there left, by itself, in the wind and sunshine. ‘How does it come to be left here?’ I asked the man who showed me the place. ‘It was brought here half an hour ago, Signore,’ he said. I remembered to have met the procession, on its return: straggling away at a good round pace. ‘When will it be put in the pit?’ I asked him. ‘When the cart comes, and it is opened to-night,’ he said. ‘How much does it cost to be brought here in this way, instead of coming in the cart?’ I asked him. ‘Ten scudi,’ he said (about two pounds, two-and-sixpence, English). ‘The other bodies, for whom nothing is paid, are taken to the church of the Santa Maria della Consolázione,’ he continued, ‘and brought here altogether, in the cart at night.’ I stood, a moment, looking at the coffin, which had two initial letters scrawled upon the top; and turned away, with an expression in my face, I suppose, of not much liking its exposure in that manner: for he said, shrugging his shoulders with great vivacity, and giving a pleasant smile, ‘But he’s dead, Signore, he’s dead. Why not?’

Among the innumerable churches, there is one I must select for separate mention. It is the church of the Ara Coeli, supposed to be built on the site of the old Temple of Jupiter Feretrius; and approached, on one side, by a long steep flight of steps, which seem incomplete without some group of bearded soothsayers on the top. It is remarkable for the possession of a miraculous Bambíno, or wooden doll, representing the Infant Saviour; and I first saw this miraculous Bambíno, in legal phrase, in manner following, that is to say:

We had strolled into the church one afternoon, and were looking down its long vista of gloomy pillars (for all these ancient churches built upon the ruins of old temples, are dark and sad), when the Brave came running in, with a grin upon his face that stretched it from ear to ear, and implored us to follow him, without a moment’s delay, as they were going to show the Bambíno to a select party. We accordingly hurried off to a sort of chapel, or sacristy, hard by the chief altar, but not in the church itself, where the select party, consisting of two or three Catholic gentlemen and ladies (not

Italians), were already assembled: and where one hollow-cheeked young monk was lighting up divers candles, while another was putting on some clerical robes over his coarse brown habit. The candles were on a kind of altar, and above it were two delectable figures, such as you would see at any English fair, representing the Holy Virgin, and Saint Joseph, as I suppose, bending in devotion over a wooden box, or coffer; which was shut.

The hollow-cheeked monk, number One, having finished lighting the candles, went down on his knees, in a corner, before this set-piece; and the monk number Two, having put on a pair of highly ornamented and gold-bespattered gloves, lifted down the coffer, with great reverence, and set it on the altar. Then, with many genuflexions, and muttering certain prayers, he opened it, and let down the front, and took off sundry coverings of satin and lace from the inside. The ladies had been on their knees from the commencement; and the gentlemen now dropped down devoutly, as he exposed to view a little wooden doll, in face very like General Tom Thumb, the American Dwarf: gorgeously dressed in satin and gold lace, and actually blazing with rich jewels. There was scarcely a spot upon its little breast, or neck, or stomach, but was sparkling with the costly offerings of the Faithful. Presently, he lifted it out of the box, and carrying it round among the kneelers, set its face against the forehead of every one, and tendered its clumsy foot to them to kiss - a ceremony which they all performed down to a dirty little ragamuffin of a boy who had walked in from the street. When this was done, he laid it in the box again: and the company, rising, drew near, and commended the jewels in whispers. In good time, he replaced the coverings, shut up the box, put it back in its place, locked up the whole concern (Holy Family and all) behind a pair of folding-doors; took off his priestly vestments; and received the customary ‘small charge,’ while his companion, by means of an extinguisher fastened to the end of a long stick, put out the lights, one after another. The candles being all extinguished, and the money all collected, they retired, and so did the spectators.

I met this same Bambíno, in the street a short time afterwards, going, in great state, to the house of some sick person. It is taken to all parts of Rome for this purpose, constantly; but, I understand that it is not always as successful as could be wished; for, making its appearance at the bedside of weak and nervous people in extremity, accompanied by a numerous escort, it not unfrequently frightens them to death. It is most popular in cases of child-birth, where it has done such wonders, that if a lady be longer than usual in getting through her difficulties, a messenger is despatched, with all speed, to solicit the immediate attendance of the Bambíno. It is a very valuable property, and much confided in - especially by the religious body to whom it belongs.

I am happy to know that it is not considered immaculate, by some who are good Catholics, and who are behind the scenes, from what was told me by the near relation of a Priest, himself a Catholic, and a gentleman of learning and intelligence. This Priest made my informant promise that he would, on no account, allow the Bambíno to be borne into the bedroom of a sick lady, in whom they were both interested. ‘For,’ said he, ‘if they (the monks) trouble her with it, and intrude themselves into her room, it will certainly kill her.’ My informant accordingly looked out of the window when it came; and, with many thanks, declined to open the door. He endeavoured, in another case of which he had no other knowledge than such as he gained as a passer-by at the moment, to prevent its being carried into a small unwholesome chamber, where a poor girl was dying. But, he strove against it unsuccessfully, and she expired while the crowd were pressing round her bed.

Among the people who drop into St. Peter’s at their leisure, to kneel on the pavement, and say a quiet prayer, there are certain schools and seminaries, priestly and otherwise, that come in, twenty or thirty strong. These boys always kneel down in single file, one behind the other, with a tall grim master in a black gown, bringing up the rear: like a pack of cards arranged to be tumbled down at a touch, with a disproportionately large Knave of clubs at the end. When they have had a minute or so at the chief altar, they scramble up, and filing off to the chapel of the Madonna, or the sacrament, flop down again in the same order; so that if anybody did stumble against the master, a general and sudden overthrow of the whole line must inevitably ensue.

The scene in all the churches is the strangest possible. The same monotonous, heartless, drowsy chaunting, always going on; the same dark building, darker from the brightness of the street without; the same lamps dimly burning; the selfsame people kneeling here and there; turned towards you, from one altar or other, the same priest's back, with the same large cross embroidered on it; however different in size, in shape, in wealth, in architecture, this church is from that, it is the same thing still. There are the same dirty beggars stopping in their muttered prayers to beg; the same miserable cripples exhibiting their deformity at the doors; the same blind men, rattling little pots like kitchen pepper-castors: their depositories for alms; the same preposterous crowns of silver stuck upon the painted heads of single saints and Virgins in crowded pictures, so that a little figure on a mountain has a head-dress bigger than the temple in the foreground, or adjacent miles of landscape; the same favourite shrine or figure, smothered with little silver hearts and crosses, and the like: the staple trade and show of all the jewellers; the same odd mixture of respect and indecorum, faith and phlegm: kneeling on the stones, and spitting on them, loudly; getting up from prayers to beg a little, or to pursue some other worldly matter: and then kneeling down again, to resume the contrite supplication at the point where it was interrupted. In one church, a kneeling lady got up from her prayer, for a moment, to offer us her card, as a teacher of Music; and in another, a sedate gentleman with a very thick walking-staff, arose from his devotions to belabour his dog, who was growling at another dog: and whose yelps and howls resounded through the church, as his master quietly relapsed into his former train of meditation - keeping his eye upon the dog, at the same time, nevertheless.

Above all, there is always a receptacle for the contributions of the Faithful, in some form or other. Sometimes, it is a money-box, set up between the worshipper, and the wooden life-size figure of the Redeemer; sometimes, it is a little chest for the maintenance of the Virgin; sometimes, an appeal on behalf of a popular Bambíno; sometimes, a bag at the end of a long stick, thrust among the people here and there, and vigilantly jingled by an active Sacristan; but there it always is, and, very often, in many shapes in the same church, and doing pretty well in all. Nor, is it wanting in the open air - the streets and roads - for, often as you are walking along, thinking about anything rather than a tin canister, that object pounces out upon you from a little house by the wayside; and on its top is painted, 'For the Souls in Purgatory;' an appeal which the bearer repeats a great many times, as he rattles it before you, much as Punch rattles the cracked bell which his sanguine disposition makes an organ of.

And this reminds me that some Roman altars of peculiar sanctity, bear the inscription, ‘Every Mass performed at this altar frees a soul from Purgatory.’ I have never been able to find out the charge for one of these services, but they should needs be expensive. There are several Crosses in Rome too, the kissing of which, confers indulgences for varying terms. That in the centre of the Coliseum, is worth a hundred days; and people may be seen kissing it from morning to night. It is curious that some of these crosses seem to acquire an arbitrary popularity: this very one among them. In another part of the Coliseum there is a cross upon a marble slab, with the inscription, ‘Who kisses this cross shall be entitled to Two hundred and forty days’ indulgence.’ But I saw no one person kiss it, though, day after day, I sat in the arena, and saw scores upon scores of peasants pass it, on their way to kiss the other.

To single out details from the great dream of Roman Churches, would be the wildest occupation in the world. But St. Stefano Rotondo, a damp, mildewed vault of an old church in the outskirts of Rome, will always struggle uppermost in my mind, by reason of the hideous paintings with which its walls are covered. These represent the martyrdoms of saints and early Christians; and such a panorama of horror and butchery no man could imagine in his sleep, though he were to eat a whole pig raw, for supper. Grey-bearded men being boiled, fried, grilled, crimped, singed, eaten by wild beasts, worried by dogs, buried alive, torn asunder by horses, chopped up small with hatchets: women having their breasts torn with iron pinchers, their tongues cut out, their ears screwed off, their jaws broken, their bodies stretched upon the rack, or skinned upon the stake, or crackled up and melted in the fire: these are among the mildest subjects. So insisted on, and laboured at, besides, that every sufferer gives you the same occasion for wonder as poor old Duncan awoke, in Lady Macbeth, when she marvelled at his having so much blood in him.

There is an upper chamber in the Mamertine prisons, over what is said to have been - and very possibly may have been - the dungeon of St. Peter. This chamber is now fitted up as an oratory, dedicated to that saint; and it lives, as a distinct and separate place, in my recollection, too. It is very small and low-roofed; and the dread and gloom of the ponderous, obdurate old prison are on it, as if they had come up in a dark mist through the floor. Hanging on the walls, among the clustered votive offerings, are objects, at once strangely in keeping, and strangely at variance, with the place - rusty daggers, knives, pistols, clubs, divers instruments of violence and murder, brought here, fresh from use, and hung up to propitiate offended Heaven: as if the blood upon them would drain off in consecrated air, and have no voice to cry with. It is all so silent and so close, and tomb-like; and the dungeons below are so black and stealthy, and stagnant, and naked; that this little dark spot becomes a dream within a dream: and in the vision of great churches which come rolling past me like a sea, it is a small wave by itself, that melts into no other wave, and does not flow on with the rest.

It is an awful thing to think of the enormous caverns that are entered from some Roman churches, and undermine the city. Many churches have crypts and subterranean chapels of great size, which, in the ancient time, were baths, and secret chambers of temples, and what not: but I do not speak of them. Beneath the church of St. Giovanni and St. Paolo, there are the jaws of a terrific range of caverns, hewn out of the rock, and said to have another outlet underneath the Coliseum - tremendous darknesses of vast extent, half-buried in the earth and unexplorable, where the dull torches, flashed by the attendants, glimmer down long ranges of distant vaults branching to the right and left, like streets in a city of the dead; and show the cold damp stealing down the walls, drip-drop, drip-drop, to join the pools of water that lie here and there, and never saw, or never will see, one ray of the sun. Some accounts make these the prisons of the wild beasts destined for the amphitheatre; some the prisons of the condemned gladiators; some, both. But the legend most appalling to the fancy is, that in the upper range (for there are two stories of these caves) the Early Christians destined to be eaten at the Coliseum Shows, heard the wild beasts, hungry for them, roaring down below; until, upon the night and solitude of their captivity, there burst the sudden noon and life of the vast theatre crowded to the parapet, and of these, their dreaded neighbours, bounding in!

Below the church of San Sebastiano, two miles beyond the gate of San Sebastiano, on the Appian Way, is the entrance to the catacombs of Rome -

quarries in the old time, but afterwards the hiding-places of the Christians. These ghastly passages have been explored for twenty miles; and form a chain of labyrinths, sixty miles in circumference.

A gaunt Franciscan friar, with a wild bright eye, was our only guide, down into this profound and dreadful place. The narrow ways and openings hither and thither, coupled with the dead and heavy air, soon blotted out, in all of us, any recollection of the track by which we had come: and I could not help thinking 'Good Heaven, if, in a sudden fit of madness, he should dash the torches out, or if he should be seized with a fit, what would become of us!' On we wandered, among martyrs' graves: passing great subterranean vaulted roads, diverging in all directions, and choked up with heaps of stones, that thieves and murderers may not take refuge there, and form a population under Rome, even worse than that which lives between it and the sun. Graves, graves, graves; Graves of men, of women, of their little children, who ran crying to the persecutors, 'We are Christians! We are Christians!' that they might be murdered with their parents; Graves with the palm of martyrdom roughly cut into their stone boundaries, and little niches, made to hold a vessel of the martyrs' blood; Graves of some who lived down here, for years together, ministering to the rest, and preaching truth, and hope, and comfort, from the rude altars, that bear witness to their fortitude at this hour; more roomy graves, but far more terrible, where hundreds, being surprised, were hemmed in and walled up: buried before Death, and killed by slow starvation.

'The Triumphs of the Faith are not above ground in our splendid churches,' said the friar, looking round upon us, as we stopped to rest in one of the low passages, with bones and dust surrounding us on every side. 'They are here! Among the Martyrs' Graves!' He was a gentle, earnest man, and said it from his heart; but when I thought how Christian men have dealt with one another; how, perverting our most merciful religion, they have hunted down and tortured, burnt and beheaded, strangled, slaughtered, and oppressed each other; I pictured to myself an agony surpassing any that this Dust had suffered with the breath of life yet lingering in it, and how these great and constant hearts would have been shaken - how they would have quailed and drooped - if a foreknowledge of the deeds that professing Christians would commit in the Great Name for which they died, could have rent them with its own unutterable anguish, on the cruel wheel, and bitter cross, and in the fearful fire.

Such are the spots and patches in my dream of churches, that remain apart, and keep their separate identity. I have a fainter recollection, sometimes of the relics; of the fragments of the pillar of the Temple that was rent in twain; of the portion of the table that was spread for the Last Supper; of the well at which the woman of Samaria gave water to Our Saviour; of two columns from the house of Pontius Pilate; of the stone to which the Sacred hands were bound, when the scourging was performed; of the grid-iron of Saint Lawrence, and the stone below it, marked with the frying of his fat and blood; these set a shadowy mark on some cathedrals, as an old story, or a fable might, and stop them for an instant, as they flit before me. The rest is a vast wilderness of consecrated buildings of all shapes and fancies, blending one with another; of battered pillars of old Pagan temples, dug up from the ground, and forced, like giant captives, to support the roofs of Christian churches; of pictures, bad, and wonderful, and impious, and ridiculous; of kneeling people, curling incense, tinkling bells, and sometimes (but not often) of a swelling organ: of Madonne, with their breasts stuck full of swords, arranged in a half-circle like a modern fan; of actual skeletons of dead saints, hideously attired in gaudy satins, silks, and velvets trimmed with gold: their withered crust of skull adorned with precious jewels, or with chaplets of crushed flowers; sometimes of people gathered round the pulpit, and a monk within it stretching out the crucifix, and preaching fiercely: the sun just streaming down through some high window on the sail-cloth stretched above him and across the church, to keep his high-pitched voice from being lost among the echoes of the roof. Then my tired memory comes out upon a flight of steps, where knots of people are asleep, or basking in the light; and strolls away, among the rags, and smells, and palaces, and hovels, of an old Italian street.

On one Saturday morning (the eighth of March), a man was beheaded here. Nine or ten months before, he had waylaid a Bavarian countess, travelling as a pilgrim to Rome - alone and on foot, of course - and performing, it is said, that act of piety for the fourth time. He saw her change a piece of gold at Viterbo, where he lived; followed her; bore her company on her journey for some forty miles or more, on the treacherous pretext of protecting her; attacked her, in the fulfilment of his unrelenting purpose, on the Campagna, within a very short distance of Rome, near to what is called (but what is not) the Tomb of Nero; robbed her; and beat her to death with her own pilgrim's staff. He was newly married, and gave some of her apparel to his wife: saying that he had bought it at a fair. She, however, who had seen the pilgrim-countess passing through their town, recognised some trifle as having belonged to her. Her husband then told her what he had done. She, in confession, told a priest; and the man was taken, within four days after the commission of the murder.

There are no fixed times for the administration of justice, or its execution, in this unaccountable country; and he had been in prison ever since. On the Friday, as he was dining with the other prisoners, they came and told him he was to be beheaded next morning, and took him away. It is very unusual to execute in Lent; but his crime being a very bad one, it was deemed advisable to make an example of him at that time, when great numbers of pilgrims were coming towards Rome, from all parts, for the Holy Week. I heard of this on the Friday evening, and saw the bills up at the churches, calling on the people to pray for the criminal's soul. So, I determined to go, and see him executed.

The beheading was appointed for fourteen and a-half o'clock, Roman time: or a quarter before nine in the forenoon. I had two friends with me; and as we did not know but that the crowd might be very great, we were on the spot by half-past seven. The place of execution was near the church of San Giovanni decolláto (a doubtful compliment to Saint John the Baptist) in one of the impassable back streets without any footway, of which a great part of Rome is composed - a street of rotten houses, which do not seem to belong to anybody, and do not seem to have ever been inhabited, and certainly were never built on any plan, or for any particular purpose, and have no window-sashes, and are a little like deserted breweries, and might be warehouses but for having nothing in them. Opposite to one of these, a white house, the scaffold was built. An untidy, unpainted, uncouth, crazy-looking thing of course: some seven feet high, perhaps: with a tall, gallows-shaped frame rising above it, in which was the knife, charged with a ponderous mass of iron, all ready to descend, and glittering brightly in the morning sun, whenever it looked out, now and then, from behind a cloud.

There were not many people lingering about; and these were kept at a considerable distance from the scaffold, by parties of the Pope's dragoons. Two or three hundred foot-soldiers were under arms, standing at ease in clusters here and there; and the officers were walking up and down in twos and threes, chatting together, and smoking cigars.

At the end of the street, was an open space, where there would be a dust-heap, and piles of broken crockery, and mounds of vegetable refuse, but for such things being thrown anywhere and everywhere in Rome, and favouring no particular sort of locality. We got into a kind of wash-house, belonging to a dwelling-house on this spot; and standing there in an old cart, and on a heap of cartwheels piled against the wall, looked, through a large grated window, at the scaffold, and straight down the street beyond it until, in consequence of its turning off abruptly to the left, our perspective was brought to a sudden termination, and had a corpulent officer, in a cocked hat, for its crowning feature.

Nine o'clock struck, and ten o'clock struck, and nothing happened. All the bells of all the churches rang as usual. A little parliament of dogs assembled in the open space, and chased each other, in and out among the soldiers. Fierce-looking Romans of the lowest class, in blue cloaks, russet cloaks, and rags uncloaked, came and went, and talked together. Women and children fluttered, on the skirts of the scanty crowd. One large muddy spot was left quite bare, like a bald place on a man's head. A cigar-merchant, with an earthen pot of charcoal ashes in one hand, went up and down, crying his wares. A pastry-merchant divided his attention between the scaffold and his customers. Boys tried to climb up walls, and tumbled down again. Priests and monks elbowed a passage for themselves among the people, and stood on tiptoe for a sight of the knife: then went away. Artists, in inconceivable hats of the middle-ages, and beards (thank Heaven!) of no age at all, flashed picturesque scowls about them from their stations in the throng. One gentleman (connected with the fine arts, I presume) went up and down in a pair of Hessian-boots, with a red beard hanging down on his breast, and his long and bright red hair, plaited into two tails, one on either side of his head, which fell over his shoulders in front of him, very nearly to his waist, and were carefully entwined and braided!

Eleven o’clock struck and still nothing happened. A rumour got about, among the crowd, that the criminal would not confess; in which case, the priests would keep him until the Ave Maria (sunset); for it is their merciful custom never finally to turn the crucifix away from a man at that pass, as one refusing to be shriven, and consequently a sinner abandoned of the Saviour, until then. People began to drop off. The officers shrugged their shoulders and looked doubtful. The dragoons, who came riding up below our window, every now and then, to order an unlucky hackney-coach or cart away, as soon as it had comfortably established itself, and was covered with exulting people (but never before), became imperious, and quick-tempered. The bald place hadn’t a straggling hair upon it; and the corpulent officer, crowning the perspective, took a world of snuff.

Suddenly, there was a noise of trumpets. ‘Attention!’ was among the foot-soldiers instantly. They were marched up to the scaffold and formed round it. The dragoons galloped to their nearer stations too. The guillotine became the centre of a wood of bristling bayonets and shining sabres. The people closed round nearer, on the flank of the soldiery. A long straggling stream of men and boys, who had accompanied the procession from the prison, came pouring into the open space. The bald spot was scarcely distinguishable from the rest. The cigar and pastry-merchants resigned all thoughts of business, for the moment, and abandoning themselves wholly to pleasure, got good situations in the crowd. The perspective ended, now, in a troop of dragoons. And the corpulent officer, sword in hand, looked hard at a church close to him, which he could see, but we, the crowd, could not.

After a short delay, some monks were seen approaching to the scaffold from this church; and above their heads, coming on slowly and gloomily, the effigy of Christ upon the cross, canopied with black. This was carried round the foot of the scaffold, to the front, and turned towards the criminal, that he might see it to the last. It was hardly in its place, when he appeared on the platform, bare-footed; his hands bound; and with the collar and neck of his shirt cut away, almost to the shoulder. A young man - six-and-twenty

- vigorously made, and well-shaped. Face pale; small dark moustache; and dark brown hair.

He had refused to confess, it seemed, without first having his wife brought to see him; and they had sent an escort for her, which had occasioned the delay.

He immediately kneeled down, below the knife. His neck fitting into a hole, made for the purpose, in a cross plank, was shut down, by another plank above; exactly like the pillory. Immediately below him was a leathern bag. And into it his head rolled instantly.

The executioner was holding it by the hair, and walking with it round the scaffold, showing it to the people, before one quite knew that the knife had fallen heavily, and with a rattling sound.

When it had travelled round the four sides of the scaffold, it was set upon a pole in front - a little patch of black and white, for the long street to stare at, and the flies to settle on. The eyes were turned upward, as if he had avoided the sight of the leathern bag, and looked to the crucifix. Every tinge and hue of life had left it in that instant. It was dull, cold, livid, wax. The body also.

There was a great deal of blood. When we left the window, and went close up to the scaffold, it was very dirty; one of the two men who were throwing water over it, turning to help the other lift the body into a shell, picked his way as through mire. A strange appearance was the apparent annihilation of the neck. The head was taken off so close, that it seemed as if the knife had narrowly escaped crushing the jaw, or shaving off the ear; and the body looked as if there were nothing left above the shoulder.

Nobody cared, or was at all affected. There was no manifestation of disgust, or pity, or indignation, or sorrow. My empty pockets were tried, several times, in the crowd immediately below the scaffold, as the corpse was being put into its coffin. It was an ugly, filthy, careless, sickening spectacle; meaning nothing but butchery beyond the momentary interest, to the one wretched actor. Yes! Such a sight has one meaning and one warning. Let me not forget it. The speculators in the lottery, station themselves at favourable points for counting the gouts of blood that spirt out, here or there; and buy that number. It is pretty sure to have a run upon it.

The body was carted away in due time, the knife cleansed, the scaffold taken down, and all the hideous apparatus removed. The executioner: an outlaw *ex officio* (what a satire on the Punishment!) who dare not, for his life, cross the Bridge of St. Angelo but to do his work: retreated to his lair, and the show was over.

At the head of the collections in the palaces of Rome, the Vatican, of course, with its treasures of art, its enormous galleries, and staircases, and suites upon suites of immense chambers, ranks highest and stands foremost. Many most noble statues, and wonderful pictures, are there; nor is it heresy to say that there is a considerable amount of rubbish there, too. When any old piece of sculpture dug out of the ground, finds a place in a gallery because it is old, and without any reference to its intrinsic merits: and finds admirers by the hundred, because it is there, and for no other reason on earth: there will be no lack of objects, very indifferent in the plain eyesight of any one who employs so vulgar a property, when he may wear the spectacles of Cant for less than nothing, and establish himself as a man of taste for the mere trouble of putting them on.

I unreservedly confess, for myself, that I cannot leave my natural perception of what is natural and true, at a palace-door, in Italy or elsewhere, as I should leave my shoes if I were travelling in the East. I cannot forget that there are certain expressions of face, natural to certain passions, and as unchangeable in their nature as the gait of a lion, or the flight of an eagle. I cannot dismiss from my certain knowledge, such commonplace facts as the ordinary proportion of men’s arms, and legs, and heads; and when I meet with performances that do violence to these experiences and recollections, no matter where they may be, I cannot honestly admire them, and think it best to say so; in spite of high critical advice that we should sometimes feign an admiration, though we have it not.

Therefore, I freely acknowledge that when I see a jolly young Waterman representing a cherubim, or a Barclay and Perkins’s Drayman depicted as an Evangelist, I see nothing to commend or admire in the performance, however great its reputed Painter. Neither am I partial to libellous Angels, who play on fiddles and bassoons, for the edification of sprawling monks apparently in liquor. Nor to those Monsieur Tonsons of galleries, Saint Francis and Saint Sebastian; both of whom I submit should have very uncommon and rare merits, as works of art, to justify their compound multiplication by Italian Painters.

It seems to me, too, that the indiscriminate and determined raptures in which some critics indulge, is incompatible with the true appreciation of the really great and transcendent works. I cannot imagine, for example, how the resolute champion of undeserving pictures can soar to the amazing beauty of Titian's great picture of the Assumption of the Virgin at Venice; or how the man who is truly affected by the sublimity of that exquisite production, or who is truly sensible of the beauty of Tintoretto's great picture of the Assembly of the Blessed in the same place, can discern in Michael Angelo's Last Judgment, in the Sistine chapel, any general idea, or one pervading thought, in harmony with the stupendous subject. He who will contemplate Raphael's masterpiece, the Transfiguration, and will go away into another chamber of that same Vatican, and contemplate another design of Raphael, representing (in incredible caricature) the miraculous stopping of a great fire by Leo the Fourth - and who will say that he admires them both, as works of extraordinary genius - must, as I think, be wanting in his powers of perception in one of the two instances, and, probably, in the high and lofty one.

It is easy to suggest a doubt, but I have a great doubt whether, sometimes, the rules of art are not too strictly observed, and whether it is quite well or agreeable that we should know beforehand, where this figure will be turning round, and where that figure will be lying down, and where there will be drapery in folds, and so forth. When I observe heads inferior to the subject, in pictures of merit, in Italian galleries, I do not attach that reproach to the Painter, for I have a suspicion that these great men, who were, of necessity, very much in the hands of monks and priests, painted monks and priests a great deal too often. I frequently see, in pictures of real power, heads quite below the story and the painter: and I invariably observe that those heads are of the Convent stamp, and have their counterparts among the Convent inmates of this hour; so, I have settled with myself that, in such cases, the lameness was not with the painter, but with the vanity and ignorance of certain of his employers, who would be apostles - on canvas, at all events.

The exquisite grace and beauty of Canova’s statues; the wonderful gravity and repose of many of the ancient works in sculpture, both in the Capitol and the Vatican; and the strength and fire of many others; are, in their different ways, beyond all reach of words. They are especially impressive and delightful, after the works of Bernini and his disciples, in which the churches of Rome, from St. Peter’s downward, abound; and which are, I verily believe, the most detestable class of productions in the wide world. I would infinitely rather (as mere works of art) look upon the three deities of the Past, the Present, and the Future, in the Chinese Collection, than upon the best of these breezy maniacs; whose every fold of drapery is blown inside-out; whose smallest vein, or artery, is as big as an ordinary forefinger; whose hair is like a nest of lively snakes; and whose attitudes put all other extravagance to shame. Insomuch that I do honestly believe, there can be no place in the world, where such intolerable abortions, begotten of the sculptor’s chisel, are to be found in such profusion, as in Rome.

There is a fine collection of Egyptian antiquities, in the Vatican; and the ceilings of the rooms in which they are arranged, are painted to represent a starlight sky in the Desert. It may seem an odd idea, but it is very effective. The grim, half-human monsters from the temples, look more grim and monstrous underneath the deep dark blue; it sheds a strange uncertain gloomy air on everything - a mystery adapted to the objects; and you leave them, as you find them, shrouded in a solemn night.

In the private palaces, pictures are seen to the best advantage. There are seldom so many in one place that the attention need become distracted, or the eye confused. You see them very leisurely; and are rarely interrupted by a crowd of people. There are portraits innumerable, by Titian, and Rembrandt, and Vandyke; heads by Guido, and Domenichino, and Carlo Dolci; various subjects by Correggio, and Murillo, and Raphael, and Salvator Rosa, and Spagnoletto - many of which it would be difficult, indeed, to praise too highly, or to praise enough; such is their tenderness and grace; their noble elevation, purity, and beauty.

The portrait of Beatrice di Cenci, in the Palazzo Berberini, is a picture almost impossible to be forgotten. Through the transcendent sweetness and beauty of the face, there is a something shining out, that haunts me. I see it now, as I see this paper, or my pen. The head is loosely draped in white; the light hair falling down below the linen folds. She has turned suddenly towards you; and there is an expression in the eyes - although they are very tender and gentle - as if the wildness of a momentary terror, or distraction, had been struggled with and overcome, that instant; and nothing but a celestial hope, and a beautiful sorrow, and a desolate earthly helplessness remained. Some stories say that Guido painted it, the night before her execution; some other stories, that he painted it from memory, after having seen her, on her way to the scaffold. I am willing to believe that, as you see her on his canvas, so she turned towards him, in the crowd, from the first sight of the axe, and stamped upon his mind a look which he has stamped on mine as though I had stood beside him in the concourse. The guilty palace of the Cenci: blighting a whole quarter of the town, as it stands withering away by grains: had that face, to my fancy, in its dismal porch, and at its black, blind windows, and flitting up and down its dreary stairs, and growing out of the darkness of the ghostly galleries. The History is written in the Painting; written, in the dying girl's face, by Nature's own hand. And oh! how in that one touch she puts to flight (instead of making kin) the puny world that claim to be related to her, in right of poor conventional forgeries!

I saw in the Palazzo Spada, the statue of Pompey; the statue at whose base Caesar fell. A stern, tremendous figure! I imagined one of greater finish: of the last refinement: full of delicate touches: losing its distinctness, in the giddy eyes of one whose blood was ebbing before it, and settling into some such rigid majesty as this, as Death came creeping over the upturned face.

The excursions in the neighbourhood of Rome are charming, and would be full of interest were it only for the changing views they afford, of the wild Campagna. But, every inch of ground, in every direction, is rich in associations, and in natural beauties. There is Albano, with its lovely lake and wooded shore, and with its wine, that certainly has not improved since the days of Horace, and in these times hardly justifies his panegyric. There is squalid Tivoli, with the river Anio, diverted from its course, and plunging down, headlong, some eighty feet in search of it. With its picturesque Temple of the Sibyl, perched high on a crag; its minor waterfalls glancing and sparkling in the sun; and one good cavern yawning darkly, where the river takes a fearful plunge and shoots on, low down under beetling rocks. There, too, is the Villa d'Este, deserted and decaying among groves of melancholy pine and cypress trees, where it seems to lie in state. Then, there is Frascati, and, on the steep above it, the ruins of Tusculum, where Cicero lived, and wrote, and adorned his favourite house (some fragments of it may yet be seen there), and where Cato was born. We saw its ruined amphitheatre on a grey, dull day, when a shrill March wind was blowing, and when the scattered stones of the old city lay strewn about the lonely eminence, as desolate and dead as the ashes of a long extinguished fire.

One day we walked out, a little party of three, to Albano, fourteen miles distant; possessed by a great desire to go there by the ancient Appian way, long since ruined and overgrown. We started at half-past seven in the morning, and within an hour or so were out upon the open Campagna. For twelve miles we went climbing on, over an unbroken succession of mounds, and heaps, and hills, of ruin. Tombs and temples, overthrown and prostrate; small fragments of columns, friezes, pediments; great blocks of granite and marble; mouldering arches, grass-grown and decayed; ruin enough to build a spacious city from; lay strewn about us. Sometimes, loose walls, built up from these fragments by the shepherds, came across our path; sometimes, a ditch between two mounds of broken stones, obstructed our progress; sometimes, the fragments themselves, rolling from beneath our feet, made it a toilsome matter to advance; but it was always ruin. Now, we tracked a piece of the old road, above the ground; now traced it, underneath a grassy covering, as if that were its grave; but all the way was ruin. In the distance, ruined aqueducts went stalking on their giant course along the plain; and every breath of wind that swept towards us, stirred early flowers and grasses, springing up, spontaneously, on miles of ruin. The unseen larks above us, who alone disturbed the awful silence, had their nests in ruin; and the fierce herdsmen, clad in sheepskins, who now and then scowled out upon us from their sleeping nooks, were housed in ruin. The aspect of the desolate Campagna in one direction, where it was most level, reminded me of an American prairie; but what is the solitude of a region where men have never dwelt, to that of a Desert, where a mighty race have left their footprints in the earth from which they have vanished; where the resting-places of their Dead, have fallen like their Dead; and the broken hour-glass of Time is but a heap of idle dust! Returning, by the road, at sunset! and looking, from the distance, on the course we had taken in the morning, I almost feel (as I had felt when I first saw it, at that hour) as if the sun would never rise again, but looked its last, that night, upon a ruined world.

To come again on Rome, by moonlight, after such an expedition, is a fitting close to such a day. The narrow streets, devoid of footways, and choked, in every obscure corner, by heaps of dunghill-rubbish, contrast so strongly, in their cramped dimensions, and their filth, and darkness, with the broad square before some haughty church: in the centre of which, a hieroglyphic-covered obelisk, brought from Egypt in the days of the Emperors, looks strangely on the foreign scene about it; or perhaps an ancient pillar, with its honoured statue overthrown, supports a Christian saint: Marcus Aurelius giving place to Paul, and Trajan to St. Peter. Then, there are the ponderous buildings reared from the spoliation of the Coliseum, shutting out the moon, like mountains: while here and there, are broken arches and rent walls, through which it gushes freely, as the life comes pouring from a wound. The little town of miserable houses, walled, and shut in by barred gates, is the quarter where the Jews are locked up nightly, when the clock strikes eight - a miserable place, densely populated, and reeking with bad odours, but where the people are industrious and money-getting. In the day-time, as you make your way along the narrow streets, you see them all at work: upon the pavement, oftener than in their dark and frouzy shops: furbishing old clothes, and driving bargains.

Crossing from these patches of thick darkness, out into the moon once more, the fountain of Trevi, welling from a hundred jets, and rolling over mimic rocks, is silvery to the eye and ear. In the narrow little throat of street, beyond, a booth, dressed out with flaring lamps, and boughs of trees, attracts a group of sulky Romans round its smoky coppers of hot broth, and cauliflower stew; its trays of fried fish, and its flasks of wine. As you rattle round the sharply-twisting corner, a lumbering sound is heard. The coachman stops abruptly, and uncovers, as a van comes slowly by, preceded by a man who bears a large cross; by a torch-bearer; and a priest: the latter chaunting as he goes. It is the Dead Cart, with the bodies of the poor, on their way to burial in the Sacred Field outside the walls, where they will be thrown into the pit that will be covered with a stone to-night, and sealed up for a year.

But whether, in this ride, you pass by obelisks, or columns ancient temples, theatres, houses, porticoes, or forums: it is strange to see, how every fragment, whenever it is possible, has been blended into some modern structure, and made to serve some modern purpose - a wall, a dwelling-place, a granary, a stable - some use for which it never was designed, and associated with which it cannot otherwise than lamely assort. It is stranger still, to see how many ruins of the old mythology: how many fragments of obsolete legend and observance: have been incorporated into the worship of Christian altars here; and how, in numberless respects, the false faith and the true are fused into a monstrous union.

From one part of the city, looking out beyond the walls, a squat and stunted pyramid (the burial-place of Caius Cestius) makes an opaque triangle in the moonlight. But, to an English traveller, it serves to mark the grave of Shelley too, whose ashes lie beneath a little garden near it. Nearer still, almost within its shadow, lie the bones of Keats, ‘whose name is writ in water,’ that shines brightly in the landscape of a calm Italian night.

The Holy Week in Rome is supposed to offer great attractions to all visitors; but, saving for the sights of Easter Sunday, I would counsel those who go to Rome for its own interest, to avoid it at that time. The ceremonies, in general, are of the most tedious and wearisome kind; the heat and crowd at every one of them, painfully oppressive; the noise, hubbub, and confusion, quite distracting. We abandoned the pursuit of these shows, very early in the proceedings, and betook ourselves to the Ruins again. But, we plunged into the crowd for a share of the best of the sights; and what we saw, I will describe to you.

At the Sistine chapel, on the Wednesday, we saw very little, for by the time we reached it (though we were early) the besieging crowd had filled it to the door, and overflowed into the adjoining hall, where they were struggling, and squeezing, and mutually expostulating, and making great rushes every time a lady was brought out faint, as if at least fifty people could be accommodated in her vacant standing-room. Hanging in the doorway of the chapel, was a heavy curtain, and this curtain, some twenty people nearest to it, in their anxiety to hear the chaunting of the Miserere, were continually plucking at, in opposition to each other, that it might not fall down and stifle the sound of the voices. The consequence was, that it occasioned the most extraordinary confusion, and seemed to wind itself about the unwary, like a Serpent. Now, a lady was wrapped up in it, and couldn't be unwound. Now, the voice of a stifling gentleman was heard inside it, beseeching to be let out. Now, two muffled arms, no man could say of which sex, struggled in it as in a sack. Now, it was carried by a rush, bodily overhead into the chapel, like an awning. Now, it came out the other way, and blinded one of the Pope's Swiss Guard, who had arrived, that moment, to set things to rights.

Being seated at a little distance, among two or three of the Pope's gentlemen, who were very weary and counting the minutes - as perhaps his Holiness was too - we had better opportunities of observing this eccentric entertainment, than of hearing the Miserere. Sometimes, there was a swell of mournful voices that sounded very pathetic and sad, and died away, into a low strain again; but that was all we heard.

At another time, there was the Exhibition of Relics in St. Peter's, which took place at between six and seven o'clock in the evening, and was striking from the cathedral being dark and gloomy, and having a great many people in it. The place into which the relics were brought, one by one, by a party of three priests, was a high balcony near the chief altar. This was the only lighted part of the church. There are always a hundred and twelve lamps burning near the altar, and there were two tall tapers, besides, near the black statue of St. Peter; but these were nothing in such an immense edifice. The gloom, and the general upturning of faces to the balcony, and the prostration of true believers on the pavement, as shining objects, like pictures or looking-glasses, were brought out and shown, had something effective in it, despite the very preposterous manner in which they were held up for the general edification, and the great elevation at which they were displayed; which one would think rather calculated to diminish the comfort derivable from a full conviction of their being genuine.

On the Thursday, we went to see the Pope convey the Sacrament from the Sistine chapel, to deposit it in the Capella Paolina, another chapel in the Vatican; - a ceremony emblematical of the entombment of the Saviour before His Resurrection. We waited in a great gallery with a great crowd of people (three-fourths of them English) for an hour or so, while they were chaunting the Miserere, in the Sistine chapel again. Both chapels opened out of the gallery; and the general attention was concentrated on the occasional opening and shutting of the door of the one for which the Pope was ultimately bound. None of these openings disclosed anything more tremendous than a man on a ladder, lighting a great quantity of candles; but at each and every opening, there was a terrific rush made at this ladder and this man, something like (I should think) a charge of the heavy British cavalry at Waterloo. The man was never brought down, however, nor the ladder; for it performed the strangest antics in the world among the crowd - where it was carried by the man, when the candles were all lighted; and finally it was stuck up against the gallery wall, in a very disorderly manner, just before the opening of the other chapel, and the commencement of a new chaunt, announced the approach of his Holiness. At this crisis, the soldiers of the guard, who had been poking the crowd into all sorts of shapes, formed down the gallery: and the procession came up, between the two lines they made.

There were a few choristers, and then a great many priests, walking two and two, and carrying - the good-looking priests at least - their lighted tapers, so as to throw the light with a good effect upon their faces: for the room was darkened. Those who were not handsome, or who had not long beards, carried *their* tapers anyhow, and abandoned themselves to spiritual contemplation. Meanwhile, the chaunting was very monotonous and dreary. The procession passed on, slowly, into the chapel, and the drone of voices went on, and came on, with it, until the Pope himself appeared, walking under a white satin canopy, and bearing the covered Sacrament in both hands; cardinals and canons clustered round him, making a brilliant show. The soldiers of the guard knelt down as he passed; all the bystanders bowed; and so he passed on into the chapel: the white satin canopy being removed from over him at the door, and a white satin parasol hoisted over his poor old head, in place of it. A few more couples brought up the rear, and passed into the chapel also. Then, the chapel door was shut; and it was all over; and everybody hurried off headlong, as for life or death, to see something else, and say it wasn't worth the trouble.

I think the most popular and most crowded sight (excepting those of Easter Sunday and Monday, which are open to all classes of people) was the Pope washing the feet of Thirteen men, representing the twelve apostles, and Judas Iscariot. The place in which this pious office is performed, is one of the chapels of St. Peter's, which is gaily decorated for the occasion; the thirteen sitting, 'all of a row,' on a very high bench, and looking particularly uncomfortable, with the eyes of Heaven knows how many English, French, Americans, Swiss, Germans, Russians, Swedes, Norwegians, and other foreigners, nailed to their faces all the time. They are robed in white; and on their heads they wear a stiff white cap, like a large English porter-pot, without a handle. Each carries in his hand, a nosegay, of the size of a fine cauliflower; and two of them, on this occasion, wore spectacles; which, remembering the characters they sustained, I thought a droll appendage to the costume. There was a great eye to character. St. John was represented by a good-looking young man. St. Peter, by a grave-looking old gentleman, with a flowing brown beard; and Judas Iscariot by such an enormous hypocrite (I could not make out, though, whether the expression of his face was real or assumed) that if he had acted the part to the death and had gone away and hanged himself, he would have left nothing to be desired.

As the two large boxes, appropriated to ladies at this sight, were full to the throat, and getting near was hopeless, we posted off, along with a great crowd, to be in time at the Table, where the Pope, in person, waits on these Thirteen; and after a prodigious struggle at the Vatican staircase, and several personal conflicts with the Swiss guard, the whole crowd swept into the room. It was a long gallery hung with drapery of white and red, with another great box for ladies (who are obliged to dress in black at these ceremonies, and to wear black veils), a royal box for the King of Naples and his party; and the table itself, which, set out like a ball supper, and ornamented with golden figures of the real apostles, was arranged on an elevated platform on one side of the gallery. The counterfeit apostles' knives and forks were laid out on that side of the table which was nearest to the wall, so that they might be stared at again, without let or hindrance.

The body of the room was full of male strangers; the crowd immense; the heat very great; and the pressure sometimes frightful. It was at its height, when the stream came pouring in, from the feet-washing; and then there were such shrieks and outcries, that a party of Piedmontese dragoons went to the rescue of the Swiss guard, and helped them to calm the tumult.

The ladies were particularly ferocious, in their struggles for places. One lady of my acquaintance was seized round the waist, in the ladies' box, by a strong matron, and hoisted out of her place; and there was another lady (in a back row in the same box) who improved her position by sticking a large pin into the ladies before her.

The gentlemen about me were remarkably anxious to see what was on the table; and one Englishman seemed to have embarked the whole energy of his nature in the determination to discover whether there was any mustard. 'By Jupiter there's vinegar!' I heard him say to his friend, after he had stood on tiptoe an immense time, and had been crushed and beaten on all sides. 'And there's oil! I saw them distinctly, in cruets! Can any gentleman, in front there, see mustard on the table? Sir, will you oblige me! *Do* you see a Mustard-Pot?'

The apostles and Judas appearing on the platform, after much expectation, were marshalled, in line, in front of the table, with Peter at the top; and a good long stare was taken at them by the company, while twelve of them took a long smell at their nosegays, and Judas - moving his lips very obtrusively - engaged in inward prayer. Then, the Pope, clad in a scarlet robe, and wearing on his head a skull-cap of white satin, appeared in the midst of a crowd of Cardinals and other dignitaries, and took in his hand a little golden ewer, from which he poured a little water over one of Peter's hands, while one attendant held a golden basin; a second, a fine cloth; a third, Peter's nosegay, which was taken from him during the operation. This his Holiness performed, with considerable expedition, on every man in the line (Judas, I observed, to be particularly overcome by his condescension); and then the whole Thirteen sat down to dinner. Grace said by the Pope. Peter in the chair.

There was white wine, and red wine: and the dinner looked very good. The courses appeared in portions, one for each apostle: and these being presented to the Pope, by Cardinals upon their knees, were by him handed to the Thirteen. The manner in which Judas grew more white-livered over his victuals, and languished, with his head on one side, as if he had no appetite, defies all description. Peter was a good, sound, old man, and went in, as the saying is, ‘to win;’ eating everything that was given him (he got the best: being first in the row) and saying nothing to anybody. The dishes appeared to be chiefly composed of fish and vegetables. The Pope helped the Thirteen to wine also; and, during the whole dinner, somebody read something aloud, out of a large book - the Bible, I presume - which nobody could hear, and to which nobody paid the least attention. The Cardinals, and other attendants, smiled to each other, from time to time, as if the thing were a great farce; and if they thought so, there is little doubt they were perfectly right. His Holiness did what he had to do, as a sensible man gets through a troublesome ceremony, and seemed very glad when it was all over.

The Pilgrims’ Suppers: where lords and ladies waited on the Pilgrims, in token of humility, and dried their feet when they had been well washed by deputy: were very attractive. But, of all the many spectacles of dangerous reliance on outward observances, in themselves mere empty forms, none struck me half so much as the Scala Santa, or Holy Staircase, which I saw several times, but to the greatest advantage, or disadvantage, on Good Friday.

This holy staircase is composed of eight-and-twenty steps, said to have belonged to Pontius Pilate’s house and to be the identical stair on which Our Saviour trod, in coming down from the judgment-seat. Pilgrims ascend it, only on their knees. It is steep; and, at the summit, is a chapel, reported to be full of relics; into which they peep through some iron bars, and then come down again, by one of two side staircases, which are not sacred, and may be walked on.

On Good Friday, there were, on a moderate computation, a hundred people, slowly shuffling up these stairs, on their knees, at one time; while others, who were going up, or had come down - and a few who had done both, and were going up again for the second time - stood loitering in the porch below, where an old gentleman in a sort of watch-box, rattled a tin canister, with a slit in the top, incessantly, to remind them that he took the money. The majority were country-people, male and female. There were four or five Jesuit priests, however, and some half-dozen well-dressed women. A whole school of boys, twenty at least, were about half-way up - evidently enjoying it very much. They were all wedged together, pretty closely; but the rest of the company gave the boys as wide a berth as possible, in consequence of their betraying some recklessness in the management of their boots.

I never, in my life, saw anything at once so ridiculous, and so unpleasant, as this sight - ridiculous in the absurd incidents inseparable from it; and unpleasant in its senseless and unmeaning degradation. There are two steps to begin with, and then a rather broad landing. The more rigid climbers went along this landing on their knees, as well as up the stairs; and the figures they cut, in their shuffling progress over the level surface, no description can paint. Then, to see them watch their opportunity from the porch, and cut in where there was a place next the wall! And to see one man with an umbrella (brought on purpose, for it was a fine day) hoisting himself, unlawfully, from stair to stair! And to observe a demure lady of fifty-five or so, looking back, every now and then, to assure herself that her legs were properly disposed!

There were such odd differences in the speed of different people, too. Some got on as if they were doing a match against time; others stopped to say a prayer on every step. This man touched every stair with his forehead, and kissed it; that man scratched his head all the way. The boys got on brilliantly, and were up and down again before the old lady had accomplished her half-dozen stairs. But most of the penitents came down, very sprightly and fresh, as having done a real good substantial deed which it would take a good deal of sin to counterbalance; and the old gentleman in the watch-box was down upon them with his canister while they were in this humour, I promise you.

As if such a progress were not in its nature inevitably droll enough, there lay, on the top of the stairs, a wooden figure on a crucifix, resting on a sort of great iron saucer: so rickety and unsteady, that whenever an enthusiastic person kissed the figure, with more than usual devotion, or threw a coin into the saucer, with more than common readiness (for it served in this respect as a second or supplementary canister), it gave a great leap and rattle, and nearly shook the attendant lamp out: horribly frightening the people further down, and throwing the guilty party into unspeakable embarrassment.

On Easter Sunday, as well as on the preceding Thursday, the Pope bestows his benediction on the people, from the balcony in front of St. Peter's. This Easter Sunday was a day so bright and blue: so cloudless, balmy, wonderfully bright: that all the previous bad weather vanished from the recollection in a moment. I had seen the Thursday's Benediction dropping damply on some hundreds of umbrellas, but there was not a sparkle then, in all the hundred fountains of Rome - such fountains as they are! - and on this Sunday morning they were running diamonds. The miles of miserable streets through which we drove (compelled to a certain course by the Pope's dragoons: the Roman police on such occasions) were so full of colour, that nothing in them was capable of wearing a faded aspect. The common people came out in their gayest dresses; the richer people in their smartest vehicles; Cardinals rattled to the church of the Poor Fishermen in their state carriages; shabby magnificence flaunted its thread-bare liveries and tarnished cocked hats, in the sun; and every coach in Rome was put in requisition for the Great Piazza of St. Peter's.

One hundred and fifty thousand people were there at least! Yet there was ample room. How many carriages were there, I don't know; yet there was room for them too, and to spare. The great steps of the church were densely crowded. There were many of the Contadini, from Albano (who delight in red), in that part of the square, and the mingling of bright colours in the crowd was beautiful. Below the steps the troops were ranged. In the magnificent proportions of the place they looked like a bed of flowers. Sulky Romans, lively peasants from the neighbouring country, groups of pilgrims from distant parts of Italy, sight-seeing foreigners of all nations, made a murmur in the clear air, like so many insects; and high above them all, plashing and bubbling, and making rainbow colours in the light, the two delicious fountains welled and tumbled bountifully.

A kind of bright carpet was hung over the front of the balcony; and the sides of the great window were bedecked with crimson drapery. An awning was stretched, too, over the top, to screen the old man from the hot rays of the sun. As noon approached, all eyes were turned up to this window. In due time, the chair was seen approaching to the front, with the gigantic fans of peacock's feathers, close behind. The doll within it (for the balcony is very high) then rose up, and stretched out its tiny arms, while all the male spectators in the square uncovered, and some, but not by any means the greater part, kneeled down. The guns upon the ramparts of the Castle of St. Angelo proclaimed, next moment, that the benediction was given; drums beat; trumpets sounded; arms clashed; and the great mass below, suddenly breaking into smaller heaps, and scattering here and there in rills, was stirred like parti-coloured sand.

What a bright noon it was, as we rode away! The Tiber was no longer yellow, but blue. There was a blush on the old bridges, that made them fresh and hale again. The Pantheon, with its majestic front, all seamed and furrowed like an old face, had summer light upon its battered walls. Every squalid and desolate hut in the Eternal City (bear witness every grim old palace, to the filth and misery of the plebeian neighbour that elbows it, as certain as Time has laid its grip on its patrician head!) was fresh and new with some ray of the sun. The very prison in the crowded street, a whirl of carriages and people, had some stray sense of the day, dropping through its chinks and crevices: and dismal prisoners who could not wind their faces round the barricading of the blocked-up windows, stretched out their hands, and clinging to the rusty bars, turned *them* towards the overflowing street: as if it were a cheerful fire, and could be shared in, that way.

But, when the night came on, without a cloud to dim the full moon, what a sight it was to see the Great Square full once more, and the whole church, from the cross to the ground, lighted with innumerable lanterns, tracing out the architecture, and winking and shining all round the colonnade of the piazza! And what a sense of exultation, joy, delight, it was, when the great bell struck half-past seven - on the instant - to behold one bright red mass of fire, soar gallantly from the top of the cupola to the extremest summit of the cross, and the moment it leaped into its place, become the signal of a bursting out of countless lights, as great, and red, and blazing as itself, from every part of the gigantic church; so that every cornice, capital, and smallest ornament of stone, expressed itself in fire: and the black, solid groundwork of the enormous dome seemed to grow transparent as an egg-shell!

A train of gunpowder, an electric chain - nothing could be fired, more suddenly and swiftly, than this second illumination; and when we had got away, and gone upon a distant height, and looked towards it two hours afterwards, there it still stood, shining and glittering in the calm night like a jewel! Not a line of its proportions wanting; not an angle blunted; not an atom of its radiance lost.

The next night - Easter Monday - there was a great display of fireworks from the Castle of St. Angelo. We hired a room in an opposite house, and made our way, to our places, in good time, through a dense mob of people choking up the square in front, and all the avenues leading to it; and so loading the bridge by which the castle is approached, that it seemed ready to sink into the rapid Tiber below. There are statues on this bridge (execrable works), and, among them, great vessels full of burning tow were placed: glaring strangely on the faces of the crowd, and not less strangely on the stone counterfeits above them.

The show began with a tremendous discharge of cannon; and then, for twenty minutes or half an hour, the whole castle was one incessant sheet of fire, and labyrinth of blazing wheels of every colour, size, and speed: while rockets streamed into the sky, not by ones or twos, or scores, but hundreds at a time. The concluding burst - the Girandola - was like the blowing up into the air of the whole massive castle, without smoke or dust.

In half an hour afterwards, the immense concourse had dispersed; the moon was looking calmly down upon her wrinkled image in the river; and half-a-dozen men and boys, with bits of lighted candle in their hands: moving here and there, in search of anything worth having, that might have been dropped in the press: had the whole scene to themselves.

By way of contrast we rode out into old ruined Rome, after all this firing and booming, to take our leave of the Coliseum. I had seen it by moonlight before (I could never get through a day without going back to it), but its tremendous solitude that night is past all telling. The ghostly pillars in the

Forum; the Triumphal Arches of Old Emperors; those enormous masses of ruins which were once their palaces; the grass-grown mounds that mark the graves of ruined temples; the stones of the Via Sacra, smooth with the tread of feet in ancient Rome; even these were dimmed, in their transcendent melancholy, by the dark ghost of its bloody holidays, erect and grim; haunting the old scene; despoiled by pillaging Popes and fighting Princes, but not laid; wringing wild hands of weed, and grass, and bramble; and lamenting to the night in every gap and broken arch - the shadow of its awful self, immovable!

As we lay down on the grass of the Campagna, next day, on our way to Florence, hearing the larks sing, we saw that a little wooden cross had been erected on the spot where the poor Pilgrim Countess was murdered. So, we piled some loose stones about it, as the beginning of a mound to her memory, and wondered if we should ever rest there again, and look back at Rome.

CHAPTER XI - A RAPID DIORAMA

We are bound for Naples! And we cross the threshold of the Eternal City at yonder gate, the Gate of San Giovanni Laterano, where the two last objects that attract the notice of a departing visitor, and the two first objects that attract the notice of an arriving one, are a proud church and a decaying ruin - good emblems of Rome.

Our way lies over the Campagna, which looks more solemn on a bright blue day like this, than beneath a darker sky; the great extent of ruin being plainer to the eye: and the sunshine through the arches of the broken aqueducts, showing other broken arches shining through them in the melancholy distance. When we have traversed it, and look back from Albano, its dark, undulating surface lies below us like a stagnant lake, or like a broad, dull Lethe flowing round the walls of Rome, and separating it from all the world! How often have the Legions, in triumphant march, gone glittering across that purple waste, so silent and unpeopled now! How often has the train of captives looked, with sinking hearts, upon the distant city, and beheld its population pouring out, to hail the return of their conqueror! What riot, sensuality and murder, have run mad in the vast palaces now heaps of brick and shattered marble! What glare of fires, and roar of popular tumult, and wail of pestilence and famine, have come sweeping over the wild plain where nothing is now heard but the wind, and where the solitary lizards gambol unmolested in the sun!

The train of wine-carts going into Rome, each driven by a shaggy peasant reclining beneath a little gipsy-fashioned canopy of sheep-skin, is ended now, and we go toiling up into a higher country where there are trees. The next day brings us on the Pontine Marshes, wearily flat and lonesome, and overgrown with brushwood, and swamped with water, but with a fine road made across them, shaded by a long, long avenue. Here and there, we pass a solitary guard-house; here and there a hovel, deserted, and walled up. Some herdsmen loiter on the banks of the stream beside the road, and sometimes a flat-bottomed boat, towed by a man, comes rippling idly along it. A horseman passes occasionally, carrying a long gun cross-wise on the saddle before him, and attended by fierce dogs; but there is nothing else astir save the wind and the shadows, until we come in sight of Terracina.

How blue and bright the sea, rolling below the windows of the inn so famous in robber stories! How picturesque the great crags and points of rock overhanging to-morrow’s narrow road, where galley-slaves are working in the quarries above, and the sentinels who guard them lounge on the sea-shore! All night there is the murmur of the sea beneath the stars; and, in the morning, just at daybreak, the prospect suddenly becoming expanded, as if by a miracle, reveals - in the far distance, across the sea there! - Naples with its islands, and Vesuvius spouting fire! Within a quarter of an hour, the whole is gone as if it were a vision in the clouds, and there is nothing but the sea and sky.

The Neapolitan frontier crossed, after two hours’ travelling; and the hungriest of soldiers and custom-house officers with difficulty appeased; we enter, by a gateless portal, into the first Neapolitan town - Fondi. Take note of Fondi, in the name of all that is wretched and beggarly.

A filthy channel of mud and refuse meanders down the centre of the miserable streets, fed by obscene rivulets that trickle from the abject houses. There is not a door, a window, or a shutter; not a roof, a wall, a post, or a pillar, in all Fondi, but is decayed, and crazy, and rotting away. The wretched history of the town, with all its sieges and pillages by Barbarossa and the rest, might have been acted last year. How the gaunt dogs that sneak about the miserable streets, come to be alive, and undevoured by the people, is one of the enigmas of the world.

A hollow-cheeked and scowling people they are! All beggars; but that's nothing. Look at them as they gather round. Some, are too indolent to come down-stairs, or are too wisely mistrustful of the stairs, perhaps, to venture: so stretch out their lean hands from upper windows, and howl; others, come flocking about us, fighting and jostling one another, and demanding, incessantly, charity for the love of God, charity for the love of the Blessed Virgin, charity for the love of all the Saints. A group of miserable children, almost naked, screaming forth the same petition, discover that they can see themselves reflected in the varnish of the carriage, and begin to dance and make grimaces, that they may have the pleasure of seeing their antics repeated in this mirror. A crippled idiot, in the act of striking one of them who drowns his clamorous demand for charity, observes his angry counterpart in the panel, stops short, and thrusting out his tongue, begins to wag his head and chatter. The shrill cry raised at this, awakens half-a-dozen wild creatures wrapped in frowsy brown cloaks, who are lying on the church-steps with pots and pans for sale. These, scrambling up, approach, and beg defiantly. 'I am hungry. Give me something. Listen to me, Signor. I am hungry!' Then, a ghastly old woman, fearful of being too late, comes hobbling down the street, stretching out one hand, and scratching herself all the way with the other, and screaming, long before she can be heard, 'Charity, charity! I'll go and pray for you directly, beautiful lady, if you'll give me charity!' Lastly, the members of a brotherhood for burying the dead: hideously masked, and attired in shabby black robes, white at the skirts, with the splashes of many muddy winters: escorted by a dirty priest, and a congenial cross-bearer: come hurrying past. Surrounded by this motley concourse, we move out of Fondi: bad bright eyes glaring at us, out of the darkness of every crazy tenement, like glistening fragments of its filth and putrefaction.

A noble mountain-pass, with the ruins of a fort on a strong eminence, traditionally called the Fort of Fra Diavolo; the old town of Itrí, like a device in pastry, built up, almost perpendicularly, on a hill, and approached by long steep flights of steps; beautiful Mola di Gaëta, whose wines, like those of Albano, have degenerated since the days of Horace, or his taste for wine was bad: which is not likely of one who enjoyed it so much, and extolled it so well; another night upon the road at St. Agatha; a rest next day at Capua, which is picturesque, but hardly so seductive to a traveller now, as the soldiers of Praetorian Rome were wont to find the ancient city of that name; a flat road among vines festooned and looped from tree to tree; and Mount Vesuvius close at hand at last! - its cone and summit whitened with snow; and its smoke hanging over it, in the heavy atmosphere of the day, like a dense cloud. So we go, rattling down hill, into Naples.

A funeral is coming up the street, towards us. The body, on an open bier, borne on a kind of palanquin, covered with a gay cloth of crimson and gold. The mourners, in white gowns and masks. If there be death abroad, life is well represented too, for all Naples would seem to be out of doors, and tearing to and fro in carriages. Some of these, the common Vetturíno vehicles, are drawn by three horses abreast, decked with smart trappings and great abundance of brazen ornament, and always going very fast. Not that their loads are light; for the smallest of them has at least six people inside, four in front, four or five more hanging on behind, and two or three more, in a net or bag below the axle-tree, where they lie half-suffocated with mud and dust. Exhibitors of Punch, buffo singers with guitars, reciters of poetry, reciters of stories, a row of cheap exhibitions with clowns and showmen, drums, and trumpets, painted cloths representing the wonders within, and admiring crowds assembled without, assist the whirl and bustle. Ragged lazzaroni lie asleep in doorways, archways, and kennels; the gentry, gaily dressed, are dashing up and down in carriages on the Chiaji, or walking in the Public Gardens; and quiet letter-writers, perched behind their little desks and inkstands under the Portico of the Great Theatre of San Carlo, in the public street, are waiting for clients.

Here is a galley-slave in chains, who wants a letter written to a friend. He approaches a clerkly-looking man, sitting under the corner arch, and makes his bargain. He has obtained permission of the sentinel who guards him: who stands near, leaning against the wall and cracking nuts. The galley-slave dictates in the ear of the letter-writer, what he desires to say; and as he can’t read writing, looks intently in his face, to read there whether he sets down faithfully what he is told. After a time, the galley-slave becomes discursive - incoherent. The secretary pauses and rubs his chin. The galley-slave is voluble and energetic. The secretary, at length, catches the idea, and with the air of a man who knows how to word it, sets it down; stopping, now and then, to glance back at his text admiringly. The galley-slave is silent. The soldier stoically cracks his nuts. Is there anything more to say? inquires the letter-writer. No more. Then listen, friend of mine. He reads it through. The galley-slave is quite enchanted. It is folded, and addressed, and given to him, and he pays the fee. The secretary falls back indolently in his chair, and takes a book. The galley-slave gathers up an empty sack. The sentinel throws away a handful of nut-shells, shoulders his musket, and away they go together.

Why do the beggars rap their chins constantly, with their right hands, when you look at them? Everything is done in pantomime in Naples, and that is the conventional sign for hunger. A man who is quarrelling with another, yonder, lays the palm of his right hand on the back of his left, and shakes the two thumbs - expressive of a donkey’s ears - whereat his adversary is goaded to desperation. Two people bargaining for fish, the buyer empties an imaginary waistcoat pocket when he is told the price, and walks away without a word: having thoroughly conveyed to the seller that he considers it too dear. Two people in carriages, meeting, one touches his lips, twice or thrice, holding up the five fingers of his right hand, and gives a horizontal cut in the air with the palm. The other nods briskly, and goes his way. He has been invited to a friendly dinner at half-past five o’clock, and will certainly come.

All over Italy, a peculiar shake of the right hand from the wrist, with the forefinger stretched out, expresses a negative - the only negative beggars will ever understand. But, in Naples, those five fingers are a copious language.

All this, and every other kind of out-door life and stir, and macaroni-eating at sunset, and flower-selling all day long, and begging and stealing everywhere and at all hours, you see upon the bright sea-shore, where the waves of the bay sparkle merrily. But, lovers and hunters of the picturesque, let us not keep too studiously out of view the miserable depravity, degradation, and wretchedness, with which this gay Neapolitan life is inseparably associated! It is not well to find Saint Giles's so repulsive, and the Porta Capuana so attractive. A pair of naked legs and a ragged red scarf, do not make *all* the difference between what is interesting and what is coarse and odious? Painting and poetising for ever, if you will, the beauties of this most beautiful and lovely spot of earth, let us, as our duty, try to associate a new picturesque with some faint recognition of man's destiny and capabilities; more hopeful, I believe, among the ice and snow of the North Pole, than in the sun and bloom of Naples.

Capri - once made odious by the deified beast Tiberius - Ischia, Procida, and the thousand distant beauties of the Bay, lie in the blue sea yonder, changing in the mist and sunshine twenty times a-day: now close at hand, now far off, now unseen. The fairest country in the world, is spread about us. Whether we turn towards the Miseno shore of the splendid watery amphitheatre, and go by the Grotto of Posilipo to the Grotto del Cane and away to Baiae: or take the other way, towards Vesuvius and Sorrento, it is one succession of delights. In the last-named direction, where, over doors and archways, there are countless little images of San Gennaro, with his Canute's hand stretched out, to check the fury of the Burning Mountain, we are carried pleasantly, by a railroad on the beautiful Sea Beach, past the town of Torre del Greco, built upon the ashes of the former town destroyed by an eruption of Vesuvius, within a hundred years; and past the flat-roofed houses, granaries, and macaroni manufactories; to Castel-a-Mare, with its ruined castle, now inhabited by fishermen, standing in the sea upon a heap of rocks. Here, the railroad terminates; but, hence we may ride on, by an unbroken succession of enchanting bays, and beautiful scenery, sloping from the highest summit of Saint Angelo, the highest neighbouring mountain, down to the water's edge - among vineyards, olive-trees, gardens of oranges and lemons, orchards, heaped-up rocks, green gorges in the hills - and by the bases of snow-covered heights, and through small towns with handsome, dark-haired women at the doors - and pass delicious summer villas - to Sorrento, where the Poet Tasso drew his inspiration from the beauty surrounding him. Returning, we may climb the heights above Castel-a-Mare, and looking down among the boughs and leaves, see the crisp water glistening in the sun; and clusters of white houses in distant Naples, dwindling, in the great extent of prospect, down to dice. The coming back to the city, by the beach again, at sunset: with the glowing sea on one side, and the darkening mountain, with its smoke and flame, upon the other: is a sublime conclusion to the glory of the day.

That church by the Porta Capuana - near the old fisher-market in the dirtiest quarter of dirty Naples, where the revolt of Masaniello began - is memorable for having been the scene of one of his earliest proclamations to the people, and is particularly remarkable for nothing else, unless it be its waxen and bejewelled Saint in a glass case, with two odd hands; or the enormous number of beggars who are constantly rapping their chins there, like a battery of castanets. The cathedral with the beautiful door, and the columns of African and Egyptian granite that once ornamented the temple of Apollo, contains the famous sacred blood of San Gennaro or Januarius: which is preserved in two phials in a silver tabernacle, and miraculously liquefies three times a-year, to the great admiration of the people. At the same moment, the stone (distant some miles) where the Saint suffered martyrdom, becomes faintly red. It is said that the officiating priests turn faintly red also, sometimes, when these miracles occur.

The old, old men who live in hovels at the entrance of these ancient catacombs, and who, in their age and infirmity, seem waiting here, to be buried themselves, are members of a curious body, called the Royal Hospital, who are the official attendants at funerals. Two of these old spectres totter away, with lighted tapers, to show the caverns of death - as unconcerned as if they were immortal. They were used as burying-places for three hundred years; and, in one part, is a large pit full of skulls and bones, said to be the sad remains of a great mortality occasioned by a plague. In the rest there is nothing but dust. They consist, chiefly, of great wide corridors and labyrinths, hewn out of the rock. At the end of some of these long passages, are unexpected glimpses of the daylight, shining down from above. It looks as ghastly and as strange; among the torches, and the dust, and the dark vaults: as if it, too, were dead and buried.

The present burial-place lies out yonder, on a hill between the city and Vesuvius. The old Campo Santo with its three hundred and sixty-five pits, is only used for those who die in hospitals, and prisons, and are unclaimed by their friends. The graceful new cemetery, at no great distance from it, though yet unfinished, has already many graves among its shrubs and flowers, and airy colonnades. It might be reasonably objected elsewhere, that some of the tombs are meretricious and too fanciful; but the general brightness seems to justify it here; and Mount Vesuvius, separated from them by a lovely slope of ground, exalts and saddens the scene.

If it be solemn to behold from this new City of the Dead, with its dark smoke hanging in the clear sky, how much more awful and impressive is it, viewed from the ghostly ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii!

Stand at the bottom of the great market-place of Pompeii, and look up the silent streets, through the ruined temples of Jupiter and Isis, over the broken houses with their inmost sanctuaries open to the day, away to Mount Vesuvius, bright and snowy in the peaceful distance; and lose all count of time, and heed of other things, in the strange and melancholy sensation of seeing the Destroyed and the Destroyer making this quiet picture in the sun. Then, ramble on, and see, at every turn, the little familiar tokens of human habitation and every-day pursuits; the chafing of the bucket-rope in the stone rim of the exhausted well; the track of carriage-wheels in the pavement of the street; the marks of drinking-vessels on the stone counter of the wine-shop; the amphorae in private cellars, stored away so many hundred years ago, and undisturbed to this hour - all rendering the solitude and deadly lonesomeness of the place, ten thousand times more solemn, than if the volcano, in its fury, had swept the city from the earth, and sunk it in the bottom of the sea.

After it was shaken by the earthquake which preceded the eruption, workmen were employed in shaping out, in stone, new ornaments for temples and other buildings that had suffered. Here lies their work, outside the city gate, as if they would return to-morrow.

In the cellar of Diomede’s house, where certain skeletons were found huddled together, close to the door, the impression of their bodies on the ashes, hardened with the ashes, and became stamped and fixed there, after they had shrunk, inside, to scanty bones. So, in the theatre of Herculaneum, a comic mask, floating on the stream when it was hot and liquid, stamped its mimic features in it as it hardened into stone; and now, it turns upon the stranger the fantastic look it turned upon the audiences in that same theatre two thousand years ago.

Next to the wonder of going up and down the streets, and in and out of the houses, and traversing the secret chambers of the temples of a religion that has vanished from the earth, and finding so many fresh traces of remote antiquity: as if the course of Time had been stopped after this desolation, and there had been no nights and days, months, years, and centuries, since: nothing is more impressive and terrible than the many evidences of the searching nature of the ashes, as bespeaking their irresistible power, and the impossibility of escaping them. In the wine-cellars, they forced their way into the earthen vessels: displacing the wine and choking them, to the brim, with dust. In the tombs, they forced the ashes of the dead from the funeral urns, and rained new ruin even into them. The mouths, and eyes, and skulls of all the skeletons, were stuffed with this terrible hail. In Herculaneum, where the flood was of a different and a heavier kind, it rolled in, like a sea. Imagine a deluge of water turned to marble, at its height - and that is what is called ‘the lava’ here.

Some workmen were digging the gloomy well on the brink of which we now stand, looking down, when they came on some of the stone benches of the theatre - those steps (for such they seem) at the bottom of the excavation - and found the buried city of Herculaneum. Presently going down, with lighted torches, we are perplexed by great walls of monstrous thickness, rising up between the benches, shutting out the stage, obtruding their shapeless forms in absurd places, confusing the whole plan, and making it a disordered dream. We cannot, at first, believe, or picture to ourselves, that THIS came rolling in, and drowned the city; and that all that is not here, has been cut away, by the axe, like solid stone. But this perceived and understood, the horror and oppression of its presence are indescribable.

Many of the paintings on the walls in the roofless chambers of both cities, or carefully removed to the museum at Naples, are as fresh and plain, as if they had been executed yesterday. Here are subjects of still life, as provisions, dead game, bottles, glasses, and the like; familiar classical stories, or mythological fables, always forcibly and plainly told; conceits of cupids, quarrelling, sporting, working at trades; theatrical rehearsals; poets reading their productions to their friends; inscriptions chalked upon the walls; political squibs, advertisements, rough drawings by schoolboys; everything to people and restore the ancient cities, in the fancy of their wondering visitor. Furniture, too, you see, of every kind - lamps, tables, couches; vessels for eating, drinking, and cooking; workmen's tools, surgical instruments, tickets for the theatre, pieces of money, personal ornaments, bunches of keys found clenched in the grasp of skeletons, helmets of guards and warriors; little household bells, yet musical with their old domestic tones.

The least among these objects, lends its aid to swell the interest of Vesuvius, and invest it with a perfect fascination. The looking, from either ruined city, into the neighbouring grounds overgrown with beautiful vines and luxuriant trees; and remembering that house upon house, temple on temple, building after building, and street after street, are still lying underneath the roots of all the quiet cultivation, waiting to be turned up to the light of day; is something so wonderful, so full of mystery, so captivating to the imagination, that one would think it would be paramount, and yield to nothing else. To nothing but Vesuvius; but the mountain is the genius of the scene. From every indication of the ruin it has worked, we look, again, with an absorbing interest to where its smoke is rising up into the sky. It is beyond us, as we thread the ruined streets: above us, as we stand upon the ruined walls, we follow it through every vista of broken columns, as we wander through the empty court-yards of the houses; and through the garlandings and interlacings of every wanton vine. Turning away to Paestum yonder, to see the awful structures built, the least aged of them, hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, and standing yet, erect in lonely majesty, upon the wild, malaria-blighted plain - we watch Vesuvius as it disappears from the prospect, and watch for it again, on our return, with the same thrill of interest: as the doom and destiny of all this beautiful country, biding its terrible time.

It is very warm in the sun, on this early spring-day, when we return from Paestum, but very cold in the shade: insomuch, that although we may lunch, pleasantly, at noon, in the open air, by the gate of Pompeii, the neighbouring rivulet supplies thick ice for our wine. But, the sun is shining brightly; there is not a cloud or speck of vapour in the whole blue sky, looking down upon the bay of Naples; and the moon will be at the full to-night. No matter that the snow and ice lie thick upon the summit of Vesuvius, or that we have been on foot all day at Pompeii, or that croakers maintain that strangers should not be on the mountain by night, in such an unusual season. Let us take advantage of the fine weather; make the best of our way to Resina, the little village at the foot of the mountain; prepare ourselves, as well as we can, on so short a notice, at the guide's house; ascend at once, and have sunset half-way up, moonlight at the top, and midnight to come down in!

At four o'clock in the afternoon, there is a terrible uproar in the little stable-yard of Signior Salvatore, the recognised head-guide, with the gold band round his cap; and thirty under-guides who are all scuffling and screaming at once, are preparing half-a-dozen saddled ponies, three litters, and some stout staves, for the journey. Every one of the thirty, quarrels with the other twenty-nine, and frightens the six ponies; and as much of the village as can possibly squeeze itself into the little stable-yard, participates in the tumult, and gets trodden on by the cattle.

After much violent skirmishing, and more noise than would suffice for the storming of Naples, the procession starts. The head-guide, who is liberally paid for all the attendants, rides a little in advance of the party; the other thirty guides proceed on foot. Eight go forward with the litters that are to be used by-and-by; and the remaining two-and-twenty beg.

We ascend, gradually, by stony lanes like rough broad flights of stairs, for some time. At length, we leave these, and the vineyards on either side of them, and emerge upon a bleak bare region where the lava lies confusedly, in enormous rusty masses; as if the earth had been ploughed up by burning thunderbolts. And now, we halt to see the sun set. The change that falls upon the dreary region, and on the whole mountain, as its red light fades, and the night comes on - and the unutterable solemnity and dreariness that reign around, who that has witnessed it, can ever forget!

It is dark, when after winding, for some time, over the broken ground, we arrive at the foot of the cone: which is extremely steep, and seems to rise, almost perpendicularly, from the spot where we dismount. The only light is reflected from the snow, deep, hard, and white, with which the cone is covered. It is now intensely cold, and the air is piercing. The thirty-one have brought no torches, knowing that the moon will rise before we reach the top. Two of the litters are devoted to the two ladies; the third, to a rather heavy gentleman from Naples, whose hospitality and good-nature have attached him to the expedition, and determined him to assist in doing the honours of the mountain. The rather heavy gentleman is carried by fifteen men; each of the ladies by half-a-dozen. We who walk, make the best use of our staves; and so the whole party begin to labour upward over the snow, - as if they were toiling to the summit of an antediluvian Twelfth-cake.

We are a long time toiling up; and the head-guide looks oddly about him when one of the company - not an Italian, though an habitué of the mountain for many years: whom we will call, for our present purpose, Mr. Pickle of Portici - suggests that, as it is freezing hard, and the usual footing of ashes is covered by the snow and ice, it will surely be difficult to descend. But the sight of the litters above, tilting up and down, and jerking from this side to that, as the bearers continually slip and tumble, diverts our attention; more especially as the whole length of the rather heavy gentleman is, at that moment, presented to us alarmingly foreshortened, with his head downwards.

The rising of the moon soon afterwards, revives the flagging spirits of the bearers. Stimulating each other with their usual watchword, ‘Courage, friend! It is to eat macaroni!’ they press on, gallantly, for the summit.

From tingeing the top of the snow above us, with a band of light, and pouring it in a stream through the valley below, while we have been ascending in the dark, the moon soon lights the whole white mountain-side, and the broad sea down below, and tiny Naples in the distance, and every village in the country round. The whole prospect is in this lovely state, when we come upon the platform on the mountain-top - the region of Fire - an exhausted crater formed of great masses of gigantic cinders, like blocks of stone from some tremendous waterfall, burnt up; from every chink and crevice of which, hot, sulphurous smoke is pouring out: while, from another conical-shaped hill, the present crater, rising abruptly from this platform at the end, great sheets of fire are streaming forth: reddening the night with flame, blackening it with smoke, and spotting it with red-hot stones and cinders, that fly up into the air like feathers, and fall down like lead. What words can paint the gloom and grandeur of this scene!

The broken ground; the smoke; the sense of suffocation from the sulphur: the fear of falling down through the crevices in the yawning ground; the stopping, every now and then, for somebody who is missing in the dark (for the dense smoke now obscures the moon); the intolerable noise of the thirty; and the hoarse roaring of the mountain; make it a scene of such confusion, at the same time, that we reel again. But, dragging the ladies through it, and across another exhausted crater to the foot of the present Volcano, we approach close to it on the windy side, and then sit down among the hot ashes at its foot, and look up in silence; faintly estimating the action that is going on within, from its being full a hundred feet higher, at this minute, than it was six weeks ago.

There is something in the fire and roar, that generates an irresistible desire to get nearer to it. We cannot rest long, without starting off, two of us, on our hands and knees, accompanied by the head-guide, to climb to the brim of the flaming crater, and try to look in. Meanwhile, the thirty yell, as with one voice, that it is a dangerous proceeding, and call to us to come back; frightening the rest of the party out of their wits.

What with their noise, and what with the trembling of the thin crust of ground, that seems about to open underneath our feet and plunge us in the burning gulf below (which is the real danger, if there be any); and what with the flashing of the fire in our faces, and the shower of red-hot ashes that is raining down, and the choking smoke and sulphur; we may well feel giddy and irrational, like drunken men. But, we contrive to climb up to the brim, and look down, for a moment, into the Hell of boiling fire below. Then, we all three come rolling down; blackened, and singed, and scorched, and hot, and giddy: and each with his dress alight in half-a-dozen places.

You have read, a thousand times, that the usual way of descending, is, by sliding down the ashes: which, forming a gradually-increasing ledge below the feet, prevent too rapid a descent. But, when we have crossed the two exhausted craters on our way back and are come to this precipitous place, there is (as Mr. Pickle has foretold) no vestige of ashes to be seen; the whole being a smooth sheet of ice.

In this dilemma, ten or a dozen of the guides cautiously join hands, and make a chain of men; of whom the foremost beat, as well as they can, a rough track with their sticks, down which we prepare to follow. The way being fearfully steep, and none of the party: even of the thirty: being able to keep their feet for six paces together, the ladies are taken out of their litters, and placed, each between two careful persons; while others of the thirty hold by their skirts, to prevent their falling forward - a necessary precaution, tending to the immediate and hopeless dilapidation of their apparel. The rather heavy gentleman is abjured to leave his litter too, and be escorted in a similar manner; but he resolves to be brought down as he was brought up, on the principle that his fifteen bearers are not likely to tumble all at once, and that he is safer so, than trusting to his own legs.

In this order, we begin the descent: sometimes on foot, sometimes shuffling on the ice: always proceeding much more quietly and slowly, than on our upward way: and constantly alarmed by the falling among us of somebody from behind, who endangers the footing of the whole party, and clings pertinaciously to anybody’s ankles. It is impossible for the litter to be in advance, too, as the track has to be made; and its appearance behind us, overhead - with some one or other of the bearers always down, and the rather heavy gentleman with his legs always in the air - is very threatening and frightful. We have gone on thus, a very little way, painfully and anxiously, but quite merrily, and regarding it as a great success - and have all fallen several times, and have all been stopped, somehow or other, as we were sliding away - when Mr. Pickle of Portici, in the act of remarking on these uncommon circumstances as quite beyond his experience, stumbles, falls, disengages himself, with quick presence of mind, from those about him, plunges away head foremost, and rolls, over and over, down the whole surface of the cone!

Sickening as it is to look, and be so powerless to help him, I see him there, in the moonlight - I have had such a dream often - skimming over the white ice, like a cannon-ball. Almost at the same moment, there is a cry from behind; and a man who has carried a light basket of spare cloaks on his head, comes rolling past, at the same frightful speed, closely followed by a boy. At this climax of the chapter of accidents, the remaining eight-and-twenty vociferate to that degree, that a pack of wolves would be music to them!

Giddy, and bloody, and a mere bundle of rags, is Pickle of Portici when we reach the place where we dismounted, and where the horses are waiting; but, thank God, sound in limb! And never are we likely to be more glad to see a man alive and on his feet, than to see him now - making light of it too, though sorely bruised and in great pain. The boy is brought into the Hermitage on the Mountain, while we are at supper, with his head tied up; and the man is heard of, some hours afterwards. He too is bruised and stunned, but has broken no bones; the snow having, fortunately, covered all the larger blocks of rock and stone, and rendered them harmless.

After a cheerful meal, and a good rest before a blazing fire, we again take horse, and continue our descent to Salvatore’s house - very slowly, by reason of our bruised friend being hardly able to keep the saddle, or endure the pain of motion. Though it is so late at night, or early in the morning, all the people of the village are waiting about the little stable-yard when we arrive, and looking up the road by which we are expected. Our appearance is hailed with a great clamour of tongues, and a general sensation for which in our modesty we are somewhat at a loss to account, until, turning into the yard, we find that one of a party of French gentlemen who were on the mountain at the same time is lying on some straw in the stable, with a broken limb: looking like Death, and suffering great torture; and that we were confidently supposed to have encountered some worse accident.

So ‘well returned, and Heaven be praised!’ as the cheerful Vetturíno, who has borne us company all the way from Pisa, says, with all his heart! And away with his ready horses, into sleeping Naples!

It wakes again to Policinelli and pickpockets, buffo singers and beggars, rags, puppets, flowers, brightness, dirt, and universal degradation; airing its Harlequin suit in the sunshine, next day and every day; singing, starving, dancing, gaming, on the sea-shore; and leaving all labour to the burning mountain, which is ever at its work.

Our English dilettanti would be very pathetic on the subject of the national taste, if they could hear an Italian opera half as badly sung in England as we may hear the Foscari performed, to-night, in the splendid theatre of San Carlo. But, for astonishing truth and spirit in seizing and embodying the real life about it, the shabby little San Carlino Theatre - the rickety house one story high, with a staring picture outside: down among the drums and trumpets, and the tumblers, and the lady conjurer - is without a rival anywhere.

There is one extraordinary feature in the real life of Naples, at which we may take a glance before we go - the Lotteries.

They prevail in most parts of Italy, but are particularly obvious, in their effects and influences, here. They are drawn every Saturday. They bring an immense revenue to the Government; and diffuse a taste for gambling among the poorest of the poor, which is very comfortable to the coffers of the State, and very ruinous to themselves. The lowest stake is one grain; less than a farthing. One hundred numbers - from one to a hundred, inclusive - are put into a box. Five are drawn. Those are the prizes. I buy three numbers. If one of them come up, I win a small prize. If two, some hundreds of times my stake. If three, three thousand five hundred times my stake. I stake (or play as they call it) what I can upon my numbers, and buy what numbers I please. The amount I play, I pay at the lottery office, where I purchase the ticket; and it is stated on the ticket itself.

Every lottery office keeps a printed book, an Universal Lottery Diviner, where every possible accident and circumstance is provided for, and has a number against it. For instance, let us take two carlini - about sevenpence. On our way to the lottery office, we run against a black man. When we get there, we say gravely, ‘The Diviner.’ It is handed over the counter, as a serious matter of business. We look at black man. Such a number. ‘Give us that.’ We look at running against a person in the street. ‘Give us that. ’ We look at the name of the street itself. ‘Give us that.’ Now, we have our three numbers.

If the roof of the theatre of San Carlo were to fall in, so many people would play upon the numbers attached to such an accident in the Diviner, that the Government would soon close those numbers, and decline to run the risk of losing any more upon them. This often happens. Not long ago, when there was a fire in the King's Palace, there was such a desperate run on fire, and king, and palace, that further stakes on the numbers attached to those words in the Golden Book were forbidden. Every accident or event, is supposed, by the ignorant populace, to be a revelation to the beholder, or party concerned, in connection with the lottery. Certain people who have a talent for dreaming fortunately, are much sought after; and there are some priests who are constantly favoured with visions of the lucky numbers.

I heard of a horse running away with a man, and dashing him down, dead, at the corner of a street. Pursuing the horse with incredible speed, was another man, who ran so fast, that he came up, immediately after the accident. He threw himself upon his knees beside the unfortunate rider, and clasped his hand with an expression of the wildest grief. 'If you have life,' he said, 'speak one word to me! If you have one gasp of breath left, mention your age for Heaven's sake, that I may play that number in the lottery.'

It is four o'clock in the afternoon, and we may go to see our lottery drawn. The ceremony takes place every Saturday, in the Tribunale, or Court of Justice - this singular, earthy-smelling room, or gallery, as mouldy as an old cellar, and as damp as a dungeon. At the upper end is a platform, with a large horse-shoe table upon it; and a President and Council sitting round - all judges of the Law. The man on the little stool behind the President, is the Capo Lazzarone, a kind of tribune of the people, appointed on their behalf to see that all is fairly conducted: attended by a few personal friends. A ragged, swarthy fellow he is: with long matted hair hanging down all over his face: and covered, from head to foot, with most unquestionably genuine dirt. All the body of the room is filled with the commonest of the Neapolitan people: and between them and the platform, guarding the steps leading to the latter, is a small body of soldiers.

There is some delay in the arrival of the necessary number of judges; during which, the box, in which the numbers are being placed, is a source of the deepest interest. When the box is full, the boy who is to draw the numbers out of it becomes the prominent feature of the proceedings. He is already dressed for his part, in a tight brown Holland coat, with only one (the left) sleeve to it, which leaves his right arm bared to the shoulder, ready for plunging down into the mysterious chest.

During the hush and whisper that pervade the room, all eyes are turned on this young minister of fortune. People begin to inquire his age, with a view to the next lottery; and the number of his brothers and sisters; and the age of his father and mother; and whether he has any moles or pimples upon him; and where, and how many; when the arrival of the last judge but one (a little old man, universally dreaded as possessing the Evil Eye) makes a slight diversion, and would occasion a greater one, but that he is immediately deposed, as a source of interest, by the officiating priest, who advances gravely to his place, followed by a very dirty little boy, carrying his sacred vestments, and a pot of Holy Water.

Here is the last judge come at last, and now he takes his place at the horse-shoe table.

There is a murmur of irrepressible agitation. In the midst of it, the priest puts his head into the sacred vestments, and pulls the same over his shoulders. Then he says a silent prayer; and dipping a brush into the pot of Holy Water, sprinkles it over the box - and over the boy, and gives them a double-barrelled blessing, which the box and the boy are both hoisted on the table to receive. The boy remaining on the table, the box is now carried round the front of the platform, by an attendant, who holds it up and shakes it lustily all the time; seeming to say, like the conjurer, ‘There is no deception, ladies and gentlemen; keep your eyes upon me, if you please!’

At last, the box is set before the boy; and the boy, first holding up his naked arm and open hand, dives down into the hole (it is made like a ballot-box) and pulls out a number, which is rolled up, round something hard, like a bonbon. This he hands to the judge next him, who unrolls a little bit, and hands it to the President, next to whom he sits. The President unrolls it, very slowly. The Capo Lazzarone leans over his shoulder. The President holds it up, unrolled, to the Capo Lazzarone. The Capo Lazzarone, looking at it eagerly, cries out, in a shrill, loud voice, ‘Sessantadue!’ (sixty-two), expressing the two upon his fingers, as he calls it out. Alas! the Capo Lazzarone himself has not staked on sixty-two. His face is very long, and his eyes roll wildly.

As it happens to be a favourite number, however, it is pretty well received, which is not always the case. They are all drawn with the same ceremony, omitting the blessing. One blessing is enough for the whole multiplication-table. The only new incident in the proceedings, is the gradually deepening intensity of the change in the Cape Lazzarone, who has, evidently, speculated to the very utmost extent of his means; and who, when he sees the last number, and finds that it is not one of his, clasps his hands, and raises his eyes to the ceiling before proclaiming it, as though remonstrating, in a secret agony, with his patron saint, for having committed so gross a breach of confidence. I hope the Capo Lazzarone may not desert him for some other member of the Calendar, but he seems to threaten it.

Where the winners may be, nobody knows. They certainly are not present; the general disappointment filling one with pity for the poor people. They look: when we stand aside, observing them, in their passage through the court-yard down below: as miserable as the prisoners in the gaol (it forms a part of the building), who are peeping down upon them, from between their bars; or, as the fragments of human heads which are still dangling in chains outside, in memory of the good old times, when their owners were strung up there, for the popular edification.

Away from Naples in a glorious sunrise, by the road to Capua, and then on a three days’ journey along by-roads, that we may see, on the way, the monastery of Monte Cassino, which is perched on the steep and lofty hill above the little town of San Germano, and is lost on a misty morning in the clouds.

So much the better, for the deep sounding of its bell, which, as we go winding up, on mules, towards the convent, is heard mysteriously in the still air, while nothing is seen but the grey mist, moving solemnly and slowly, like a funeral procession. Behold, at length the shadowy pile of building close before us: its grey walls and towers dimly seen, though so near and so vast: and the raw vapour rolling through its cloisters heavily.

There are two black shadows walking to and fro in the quadrangle, near the statues of the Patron Saint and his sister; and hopping on behind them, in and out of the old arches, is a raven, croaking in answer to the bell, and uttering, at intervals, the purest Tuscan. How like a Jesuit he looks! There never was a sly and stealthy fellow so at home as is this raven, standing now at the refectory door, with his head on one side, and pretending to glance another way, while he is scrutinizing the visitors keenly, and listening with fixed attention. What a dull-headed monk the porter becomes in comparison!

‘He speaks like us!’ says the porter: ‘quite as plainly.’ Quite as plainly, Porter. Nothing could be more expressive than his reception of the peasants who are entering the gate with baskets and burdens. There is a roll in his eye, and a chuckle in his throat, which should qualify him to be chosen Superior of an Order of Ravens. He knows all about it. ‘It’s all right,’ he says. ‘We know what we know. Come along, good people. Glad to see you!’ How was this extraordinary structure ever built in such a situation, where the labour of conveying the stone, and iron, and marble, so great a height, must have been prodigious? ‘Caw!’ says the raven, welcoming the peasants. How, being despoiled by plunder, fire and earthquake, has it risen from its ruins, and been again made what we now see it, with its church so sumptuous and magnificent? ‘Caw!’ says the raven, welcoming the peasants. These people have a miserable appearance, and (as usual) are densely ignorant, and all beg, while the monks are chaunting in the chapel. ‘Caw!’ says the raven, ‘Cuckoo!’

So we leave him, chuckling and rolling his eye at the convent gate, and wind slowly down again through the cloud. At last emerging from it, we come in sight of the village far below, and the flat green country intersected by rivulets; which is pleasant and fresh to see after the obscurity and haze of the convent - no disrespect to the raven, or the holy friars.

Away we go again, by muddy roads, and through the most shattered and tattered of villages, where there is not a whole window among all the houses, or a whole garment among all the peasants, or the least appearance of anything to eat, in any of the wretched hucksters’ shops. The women wear a bright red bodice laced before and behind, a white skirt, and the

Neapolitan head-dress of square folds of linen, primitively meant to carry loads on. The men and children wear anything they can get. The soldiers are as dirty and rapacious as the dogs. The inns are such hobgoblin places, that they are infinitely more attractive and amusing than the best hotels in Paris. Here is one near Valmontone (that is Valmontone the round, walled town on the mount opposite), which is approached by a quagmire almost knee-deep. There is a wild colonnade below, and a dark yard full of empty stables and lofts, and a great long kitchen with a great long bench and a great long form, where a party of travellers, with two priests among them, are crowding round the fire while their supper is cooking. Above stairs, is a rough brick gallery to sit in, with very little windows with very small patches of knotty glass in them, and all the doors that open from it (a dozen or two) off their hinges, and a bare board on tressels for a table, at which thirty people might dine easily, and a fireplace large enough in itself for a breakfast-parlour, where, as the faggots blaze and crackle, they illuminate the ugliest and grimmest of faces, drawn in charcoal on the whitewashed chimney-sides by previous travellers. There is a flaring country lamp on the table; and, hovering about it, scratching her thick black hair continually, a yellow dwarf of a woman, who stands on tiptoe to arrange the hatchet knives, and takes a flying leap to look into the water-jug. The beds in the adjoining rooms are of the liveliest kind. There is not a solitary scrap of looking-glass in the house, and the washing apparatus is identical with the cooking utensils. But the yellow dwarf sets on the table a good flask of excellent wine, holding a quart at least; and produces, among half-a-dozen other dishes, two-thirds of a roasted kid, smoking hot. She is as good-humoured, too, as dirty, which is saying a great deal. So here's long life to her, in the flask of wine, and prosperity to the establishment.

Rome gained and left behind, and with it the Pilgrims who are now repairing to their own homes again - each with his scallop shell and staff, and soliciting alms for the love of God - we come, by a fair country, to the Falls of Terni, where the whole Velino river dashes, headlong, from a rocky height, amidst shining spray and rainbows. Perugia, strongly fortified by art and nature, on a lofty eminence, rising abruptly from the plain where purple mountains mingle with the distant sky, is glowing, on its market-day, with radiant colours. They set off its sombre but rich Gothic buildings admirably. The pavement of its market-place is strewn with country goods.

All along the steep hill leading from the town, under the town wall, there is a noisy fair of calves, lambs, pigs, horses, mules, and oxen. Fowls, geese, and turkeys, flutter vigorously among their very hoofs; and buyers, sellers, and spectators, clustering everywhere, block up the road as we come shouting down upon them.

Suddenly, there is a ringing sound among our horses. The driver stops them. Sinking in his saddle, and casting up his eyes to Heaven, he delivers this apostrophe, ‘Oh Jove Omnipotent! here is a horse has lost his shoe!’

Notwithstanding the tremendous nature of this accident, and the utterly forlorn look and gesture (impossible in any one but an Italian Vetturíno) with which it is announced, it is not long in being repaired by a mortal Farrier, by whose assistance we reach Castiglione the same night, and Arezzo next day. Mass is, of course, performing in its fine cathedral, where the sun shines in among the clustered pillars, through rich stained-glass windows: half revealing, half concealing the kneeling figures on the pavement, and striking out paths of spotted light in the long aisles.

But, how much beauty of another kind is here, when, on a fair clear morning, we look, from the summit of a hill, on Florence! See where it lies before us in a sun-lighted valley, bright with the winding Arno, and shut in by swelling hills; its domes, and towers, and palaces, rising from the rich country in a glittering heap, and shining in the sun like gold!

Magnificently stern and sombre are the streets of beautiful Florence; and the strong old piles of building make such heaps of shadow, on the ground and in the river, that there is another and a different city of rich forms and fancies, always lying at our feet. Prodigious palaces, constructed for defence, with small distrustful windows heavily barred, and walls of great thickness formed of huge masses of rough stone, frown, in their old sulky state, on every street. In the midst of the city - in the Piazza of the Grand Duke, adorned with beautiful statues and the Fountain of Neptune - rises the Palazzo Vecchio, with its enormous overhanging battlements, and the Great Tower that watches over the whole town. In its court-yard - worthy of the Castle of Otranto in its ponderous gloom - is a massive staircase that the heaviest waggon and the stoutest team of horses might be driven up. Within it, is a Great Saloon, faded and tarnished in its stately decorations, and mouldering by grains, but recording yet, in pictures on its walls, the triumphs of the Medici and the wars of the old Florentine people. The prison is hard by, in an adjacent court-yard of the building - a foul and dismal place, where some men are shut up close, in small cells like ovens; and where others look through bars and beg; where some are playing draughts, and some are talking to their friends, who smoke, the while, to purify the air; and some are buying wine and fruit of women-vendors; and all are squalid, dirty, and vile to look at. ‘They are merry enough, Signore,’ says the jailer. ‘They are all blood-stained here,’ he adds, indicating, with his hand, three-fourths of the whole building. Before the hour is out, an old man, eighty years of age, quarrelling over a bargain with a young girl of seventeen, stabs her dead, in the market-place full of bright flowers; and is brought in prisoner, to swell the number.

Among the four old bridges that span the river, the Ponte Vecchio - that bridge which is covered with the shops of Jewellers and Goldsmiths - is a most enchanting feature in the scene. The space of one house, in the centre, being left open, the view beyond is shown as in a frame; and that precious glimpse of sky, and water, and rich buildings, shining so quietly among the huddled roofs and gables on the bridge, is exquisite. Above it, the Gallery of the Grand Duke crosses the river. It was built to connect the two Great Palaces by a secret passage; and it takes its jealous course among the streets and houses, with true despotism: going where it lists, and spurning every obstacle away, before it.

The Grand Duke has a worthier secret passage through the streets, in his black robe and hood, as a member of the Compagnia della Misericordia, which brotherhood includes all ranks of men. If an accident take place, their office is, to raise the sufferer, and bear him tenderly to the Hospital. If a fire break out, it is one of their functions to repair to the spot, and render their assistance and protection. It is, also, among their commonest offices, to attend and console the sick; and they neither receive money, nor eat, nor drink, in any house they visit for this purpose. Those who are on duty for the time, are all called together, on a moment’s notice, by the tolling of the great bell of the Tower; and it is said that the Grand Duke has been seen, at this sound, to rise from his seat at table, and quietly withdraw to attend the summons.

In this other large Piazza, where an irregular kind of market is held, and stores of old iron and other small merchandise are set out on stalls, or scattered on the pavement, are grouped together, the Cathedral with its great Dome, the beautiful Italian Gothic Tower the Campanile, and the Baptistery with its wrought bronze doors. And here, a small untrodden square in the pavement, is 'the Stone of DANTE,' where (so runs the story) he was used to bring his stool, and sit in contemplation. I wonder was he ever, in his bitter exile, withheld from cursing the very stones in the streets of Florence the ungrateful, by any kind remembrance of this old musing-place, and its association with gentle thoughts of little Beatrice!

The chapel of the Medici, the Good and Bad Angels, of Florence; the church of Santa Croce where Michael Angelo lies buried, and where every stone in the cloisters is eloquent on great men's deaths; innumerable churches, often masses of unfinished heavy brickwork externally, but solemn and serene within; arrest our lingering steps, in strolling through the city.

In keeping with the tombs among the cloisters, is the Museum of Natural History, famous through the world for its preparations in wax; beginning with models of leaves, seeds, plants, inferior animals; and gradually ascending, through separate organs of the human frame, up to the whole structure of that wonderful creation, exquisitely presented, as in recent death. Few admonitions of our frail mortality can be more solemn and more sad, or strike so home upon the heart, as the counterfeits of Youth and Beauty that are lying there, upon their beds, in their last sleep.

Beyond the walls, the whole sweet Valley of the Arno, the convent at Fiesole, the Tower of Galileo, BOCCACCIO'S house, old villas and retreats; innumerable spots of interest, all glowing in a landscape of surpassing beauty steeped in the richest light; are spread before us. Returning from so much brightness, how solemn and how grand the streets again, with their great, dark, mournful palaces, and many legends: not of siege, and war, and might, and Iron Hand alone, but of the triumphant growth of peaceful Arts and Sciences.

What light is shed upon the world, at this day, from amidst these rugged Palaces of Florence! Here, open to all comers, in their beautiful and calm retreats, the ancient Sculptors are immortal, side by side with Michael Angelo, Canova, Titian, Rembrandt, Raphael, Poets, Historians, Philosophers - those illustrious men of history, beside whom its crowned heads and harnessed warriors show so poor and small, and are so soon forgotten. Here, the imperishable part of noble minds survives, placid and equal, when strongholds of assault and defence are overthrown; when the tyranny of the many, or the few, or both, is but a tale; when Pride and Power are so much cloistered dust. The fire within the stern streets, and among the massive Palaces and Towers, kindled by rays from Heaven, is still burning brightly, when the flickering of war is extinguished and the household fires of generations have decayed; as thousands upon thousands of faces, rigid with the strife and passion of the hour, have faded out of the old Squares and public haunts, while the nameless Florentine Lady, preserved from oblivion by a Painter's hand, yet lives on, in enduring grace and youth.

Let us look back on Florence while we may, and when its shining Dome is seen no more, go travelling through cheerful Tuscany, with a bright remembrance of it; for Italy will be the fairer for the recollection. The summer-time being come: and Genoa, and Milan, and the Lake of Como lying far behind us: and we resting at Faido, a Swiss village, near the awful rocks and mountains, the everlasting snows and roaring cataracts, of the Great Saint Gothard: hearing the Italian tongue for the last time on this journey: let us part from Italy, with all its miseries and wrongs, affectionately, in our admiration of the beauties, natural and artificial, of which it is full to overflowing, and in our tenderness towards a people, naturally well-disposed, and patient, and sweet-tempered. Years of neglect, oppression, and misrule, have been at work, to change their nature and reduce their spirit; miserable jealousies, fomented by petty Princes to whom union was destruction, and division strength, have been a canker at their root of nationality, and have barbarized their language; but the good that was in them ever, is in them yet, and a noble people may be, one day, raised up from these ashes. Let us entertain that hope! And let us not remember Italy the less regardfully, because, in every fragment of her fallen Temples, and every stone of her deserted palaces and prisons, she helps to inculcate the lesson that the wheel of Time is rolling for an end, and that the world is, in all great essentials, better, gentler, more forbearing, and more hopeful, as it rolls!

Footnotes:

{1} This was written in 1846.

{2} A far more liberal and just recognition of the public has arisen in Westminster Abbey since this was written.

THE END OF Pictures from Italy

THE POOR TRAVELER.

BY CHARLES DICKENS.

> [Dickens' introduction to this story describes his going to Rochester on Christmas Eve and seeing there a quaint old charity, which provided for the entertainment of "six poor travelers who not being rogues or proctors might receive gratis for one night lodging, entertainment and fourpence each." In honor of the day a special meal is provided for the travelers then in the charity. After the meal, when the travelers have gathered around the fire, their entertainer gives them the reason for the unwonted feast as "Christmas Eve, my friends, when the Shepherds, who were poor travelers, too, in their way, heard the Angels sing, 'On earth, peace: Good will toward men.'" Then each traveler was invited to relate a story, and among those told was the following.]

In the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety-nine, a relative of mine came limping down, on foot, to the town of Chatham. He was a poor traveler, with not a farthing in his pocket.

My relative came down to Chatham to enlist in a cavalry regiment, if a cavalry regiment would have him; if not, to take King George's shilling from any corporal or sergeant who would put a bunch of ribbons in his hat. His object was to get shot; but he thought he might as well ride to death as be at the trouble of walking.

My relative's Christian name was Richard, but he was better known as Dick. He dropped his own surname on the road down, and took up that of Doubledick. He was passed as Richard Doubledick; age, twenty-two; height, five foot ten; native place, Exmouth, which he had never been near in his life. There was no cavalry in Chatham when he limped over the bridge with half a shoe to his dusty feet, so he enlisted into a regiment of the line, and was glad to get drunk and forget all about it.

You are to know that this relative of mine had gone wrong, and run wild. His heart was in the right place, but it was sealed up. He had been betrothed to a good and beautiful girl, whom he had loved better than she—

or perhaps even he—believed; but in an evil hour he had given her cause to say to him solemnly, "Richard, I will never marry any other man. I will live single for your sake, but Mary Marshall's lips"—her name was Mary Marshall—"never address another word to you on earth. Go, Richard! Heaven forgive you!" This finished him. This brought him down to Chatham. This made him Private Richard Doubledick, with a determination to be shot.

There was not a more dissipated and reckless soldier in Chatham barracks, in the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety-nine, than Private Richard Doubledick. He associated with the dregs of every regiment; he was as seldom sober as he could be, and was constantly under punishment. It became clear to the whole barracks that Private Richard Doubledick would very soon be flogged.

Now the Captain of Richard Doubledick's company was a young gentleman not above five years his senior, whose eyes had an expression in them which affected Private Richard Doubledick in a very remarkable way. They were bright, handsome, dark eyes,—what are called laughing eyes generally, and, when serious, rather steady than severe,—but they were the only eyes now left in his narrowed world that Private Richard Doubledick could not stand. Unabashed by evil report and punishment, defiant of everything else and everybody else, he had but to know that those eyes looked at him for a moment, and he felt ashamed. He could not so much as salute Captain Taunton in the street like any other officer. He was reproached and confused,—troubled by the mere possibility of the Captain's looking at him. In his worst moments, he would rather turn back, and go any distance out of his way, than encounter those two handsome, dark, bright eyes.

One day, when Private Richard Doubledick came out of the Black hole, where he had been passing the last eight and forty hours, and in which retreat he spent a good deal of his time, he was ordered to betake himself to Captain Taunton's quarters. In the stale and squalid state of a man just out of the Black hole, he had less fancy than ever for being seen by the Captain; but he was not so mad yet as to disobey orders, and consequently went up to the terrace overlooking the parade-ground, where the officers' quarters were; twisting and breaking in his hands, as he went along, a bit of the straw that had formed the decorative furniture of the Black hole.

"Come in!" cried the Captain, when he knocked with his knuckles at the door. Private Richard Doubledick pulled off his cap, took a stride forward, and felt very conscious that he stood in the light of the dark, bright eyes.

There was a slight pause. Private Richard Doubledick had put the straw in his mouth, and was gradually doubling it up into his windpipe and choking himself.

"Doubledick," said the Captain, "do you know where you are going to?"

"To the devil, sir," faltered Doubledick.

"Yes," returned the Captain. "And very fast."

Private Richard Doubledick turned the straw of the Black hole in his mouth, and made a miserable salute of acquiescence.

"Doubledick," said the Captain, "since I entered his Majesty's service, a boy of seventeen, I have been pained to see many men of promise going that road; but I have never been so pained to see a man determined to make the shameful journey as I have been, ever since you joined the regiment, to see you."

Private Richard Doubledick began to find a film stealing over the floor at which he looked; also to find the legs of the Captain's breakfast-table turning crooked, as if he saw them through water.

"I am only a common soldier, sir," said he. "It signifies very little what such a poor brute comes to."

"You are a man," returned the Captain, with grave indignation, "of education and superior advantages; and if you say that, meaning what you say, you have sunk lower than I had believed. How low that must be, I leave you to consider, knowing what I know of your disgrace, and seeing what I see."

"I hope to get shot soon, sir," said Private Richard Doubledick; "and then the regiment and the world together will be rid of me."

The legs of the table were becoming very crooked. Doubledick, looking up to steady his vision, met the eyes that had so strong an influence over him. He put his hand before his own eyes, and the breast of his disgrace-jacket swelled as if it would fly asunder.

"I would rather," said the young Captain, "see this in you, Doubledick, than I would see five thousand guineas counted out upon this table for a gift to my good mother. Have you a mother?"

"I am thankful to say she is dead, sir."

"If your praises," returned the Captain, "were sounded from mouth to mouth through the whole regiment, through the whole army, through the whole country, you would wish she had lived to say, with pride and joy, 'He is my son!'"

"Spare me, sir," said Doubledick. "She would never have heard any good of me. She would never have had any pride and joy in owning herself my mother. Love and compassion she might have had, and would have always had, I know; but not—Spare me, sir! I am a broken wretch, quite at your mercy!" And he turned his face to the wall, and stretched out his imploring hand.

"My friend—" began the Captain.

"God bless you, sir!" sobbed Private Richard Doubledick.

I have heard from Private Richard Doubledick's own lips, that he dropped down upon his knee, kissed that officer's hand, arose, and went out of the light of the dark, bright eyes, an altered man.

In that year, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-nine, the French were in Egypt, in Italy, in Germany, where not? Napoleon Bonaparte had likewise begun to stir against England in India, and most men could read the signs of the great troubles that were coming on. In the very next year, when we formed an alliance with Austria against him. Captain Taunton's regiment was on service in India. And there was not a finer non-commissioned officer in it,—no, nor in the whole line,—than Corporal Richard Doubledick.

In eighteen hundred and one, the Indian army were on the coast of Egypt. Next year was the year of the proclamation of the short peace, and they were recalled. It had then become well known to thousands of men, that wherever Captain Taunton, with the dark, bright eyes, led, there, close to him, ever at his side, firm as a rock, true as the sun, and brave as Mars, would be certain to be found, while life beat in their hearts, that famous soldier, *Sergeant* Richard Doubledick.

Eighteen hundred and five, besides being the great year of Trafalgar, was a year of hard fighting in India. That year saw such wonders done by a Sergeant-Major, who cut his way single-handed through a solid mass of men, recovered the colors of his regiment, which had been seized from the hand of a poor boy shot through the heart, and rescued his wounded Captain, who was down, and in a very jungle of horses' hoofs and sabres,—

saw such wonders done, I say, by this brave Sergeant-Major, that he was specially made the bearer of the colors he had won; and *Ensign* Richard Doubledick had risen from the ranks.

Sorely cut up in every battle, but always reinforced by the bravest of men,—for the fame of following the old colors, shot through and through, which Ensign Richard Doubledick had saved, inspired all breasts,—this regiment fought its way through the Peninsular war, up to the investment of Badajos in eighteen hundred and twelve. Again and again it had been cheered through the British ranks until the tears had sprung into men's eyes at the mere hearing of the mighty British voice, so exultant in their valor; and there was not a drummer boy but knew the legend, that wherever the two friends, Major Taunton, with the dark, bright eyes, and Ensign Richard Doubledick, who was devoted to him, were seen to go, there the boldest spirits in the English army became wild to follow.

One day, at Badajos,—not in the great storming, but in repelling a hot sally of the besieged upon our men at work in the trenches, who had given way,—the two officers found themselves hurrying forward, face to face, against a party of French infantry, who made a stand. There was an officer at their head, encouraging his men,—a courageous, handsome, gallant officer of five-and-thirty, whom Doubledick saw hurriedly, almost momentarily, but saw well. He particularly noticed this officer waving his sword, and rallying his men with an eager and excited cry, when they fired in obedience to his gesture, and Major Taunton dropped.

It was over in ten minutes more, and Doubledick returned to the spot where he had laid the best friend man ever had, on a coat spread upon the wet clay. Major Taunton's uniform was opened at the breast, and on his shirt were three little spots of blood.

"Dear Doubledick," said he, "I am dying."

"For the love of Heaven, no!" exclaimed the other, kneeling down beside him, and passing his arm round his neck to raise his head. "Taunton! My preserver, my guardian angel, my witness! Dearest, truest, kindest of human beings! Taunton! For God's sake!"

The bright, dark eyes—so very, very dark, now, in the pale face—smiled upon him; and the hand he had kissed thirteen years ago laid itself fondly on his breast.

"Write to my mother. You will see home again. Tell her how we became friends. It will comfort her, as it comforts me."

He spoke no more, but faintly signed for a moment toward his hair as it fluttered in the wind. The Ensign understood him. He smiled again when he saw that, and, gently turning his face over on the supporting arm as if for rest, died, with his hand upon the breast in which he had revived a soul.

No dry eye looked on Ensign Richard Doubledick that melancholy day. He buried his friend on the field, and became a lone, bereaved man. Beyond his duty he appeared to have but two remaining cares in life,—one, to preserve the little packet of hair he was to give to Taunton's mother; the other, to encounter that French officer who had rallied the men under whose fire Taunton fell. A new legend now began to circulate among our troops; and it was, that when he and the French officer came face to face once more, there would be weeping in France.

The war went on—and through it went the exact picture of the French officer on the one side, and the bodily reality upon the other—until the battle of Toulouse was fought. In the returns sent home appeared these words: "Severely wounded, but not dangerously, *Lieutenant* Richard Doubledick."

At midsummer-time, in the year eighteen hundred and fourteen, Lieutenant Richard Doubledick, now a browned soldier, seven-and-thirty years of age, came home to England invalided. He brought the hair with him, near his heart. Many a French officer had he seen since that day; many a dreadful night, in searching with men and lanterns for his wounded, had he relieved French officers lying disabled; but the mental picture and the reality had never come together.

Though he was weak and suffered pain, he lost not an hour in getting down to Frome in Somersetshire, where Taunton's mother lived. In the sweet, compassionate words that naturally present themselves to the mind to-night, "he was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow."

It was a Sunday evening, and the lady sat at her quiet garden-window, reading the Bible; reading to herself, in a trembling voice, that very passage in it, as I have heard him tell. He heard the words: "Young man, I say unto thee, arise!"

He had to pass the window; and the bright, dark eyes of his debased time seemed to look at him. Her heart told her who he was; she came to the door quickly, and fell upon his neck.

"He saved me from ruin, made me a human creature, won me from infamy and shame. O God, forever bless him! As He will, He will!"

"He will!" the lady answered. "I know he is in heaven!" Then she piteously cried, "But O my darling boy, my darling boy!"

Never from the hour when Private Richard Doubledick enlisted at Chatham had the Private, Corporal, Sergeant, Sergeant-Major, Ensign, or Lieutenant breathed his right name, or the name of Mary Marshall, or a word of the story of his life, into any ear except his reclaimer's. That previous scene in his existence was closed. He had firmly resolved that his expiation should be to live unknown; to disturb no more the peace that had long grown over his old offences; to let it be revealed, when he was dead, that he had striven and suffered, and had never forgotten; and then, if they could forgive him and believe him—well, it would be time enough—time enough!

But that night, remembering the words he had cherished for two years, "Tell her how we became friends. It will comfort her, as it comforts me," he related everything. It gradually seemed to him as if in his maturity he had recovered a mother; it gradually seemed to her as if in her bereavement she had found a son. During his stay in England, the quiet garden into which he had slowly and painfully crept, a stranger, became the boundary of his home; when he was able to rejoin his regiment in the spring, he left the garden, thinking was this indeed the first time he had ever turned his face toward the old colors with a woman's blessing!

He followed them—so ragged, so scarred and pierced now, that they would scarcely hold together—to Quatre Bras and Ligny. He stood beside them, in an awful stillness of many men, shadowy through the mist and drizzle of a wet June forenoon, on the field of Waterloo. And down to that hour the picture in his mind of the French officer had never been compared with the reality.

The famous regiment was in action early in the battle, and received its first check in many an eventful year, when he was seen to fall. But it swept on to avenge him, and left behind it no such creature in the world of consciousness as Lieutenant Richard Doubledick.

Through pits of mire and pools of rain; along deep ditches, once roads, that were pounded and ploughed to pieces by artillery, heavy wagons, tramp of men and horses, and the struggle of every wheeled thing that could carry wounded soldiers; jolted among the dying and the dead, so disfigured by blood and mud as to be hardly recognizable for humanity; dead, as to any sentient life that was in it, and yet alive,—the form that had been Lieutenant

Richard Doubledick, with whose praises England rang, was conveyed to Brussels. There it was tenderly laid down in hospital; and there it lay, week after week, through the long, bright summer days, until the harvest, spared by war, had ripened and was gathered in.

Slowly laboring, at last, through a long, heavy dream of confused time and place, presenting faint glimpses of army surgeons whom he knew, and of faces that had been familiar to his youth,—dearest and kindest among them, Mary Marshall's, with a solicitude upon it more like reality than anything he could discern,—Lieutenant Richard Doubledick came back to life. To the beautiful life of a calm autumn evening sunset, to the peaceful life of a fresh, quiet room with a large window standing open; a balcony beyond, in which were moving leaves and sweet-smelling flowers; beyond, again, the clear sky, with the sun full in his sight, pouring its golden radiance on his bed.

It was so tranquil and so lovely that he thought he had passed into another world. And he said in a faint voice, "Taunton, are you near me?"

A face bent over him. Not his, his mother's.

"I came to nurse you. We have nursed you many weeks. You were moved here long ago. Do you remember nothing?"

"Nothing."

The lady kissed his cheek, and held his hand, soothing him.

"Where is the regiment? What has happened? Let me call you mother. What has happened, mother?"

"A great victory, dear. The war is over, and the regiment was the bravest in the field."

His eyes kindled, his lips trembled, he sobbed, and the tears ran down his face. He was very weak, too weak to move his hand.

From that time, he recovered. Slowly, for he had been desperately wounded in the head, and had been shot in the body, but making some little advance every day. When he had gained sufficient strength to converse as he lay in bed, he soon began to remark that Mrs. Taunton always brought him back to his own history. Then he recalled his preserver's dying words, and thought, "It comforts her."

One day he awoke out of a sleep, refreshed, and asked her to read to him. But the curtain of the bed, softening the light, which she always drew back when he awoke, that she might see him from her table at the bedside where she sat at work, was held undrawn; and a woman's voice spoke, which was not hers.

"Can you bear to see a stranger?" it said softly. "Will you like to see a stranger?"

"Stranger!" he repeated. The voice awoke old memories, before the days of Private Richard Doubledick.

"A stranger now, but not a stranger once," it said in tones that thrilled him. "Richard, dear Richard, lost through so many years, my name—"

He cried out her name "Mary," and she held him in her arms, and his head lay on her bosom.

* * * * *

Well! They were happy. It was a long recovery, but they were happy through it all. The snow had melted on the ground, and the birds were singing in the leafless thickets of the early spring, when those three were first able to ride out together, and when people flocked about the open carriage to cheer and congratulate *Captain* Richard Doubledick.

But even then it became necessary for the Captain, instead of returning to England, to complete his recovery in the climate of Southern France. They found a spot upon the Rhône, within a ride of the old town of Avignon, and within view of its broken bridge, which was all they could desire; they lived there, together, six months; then returned to England. Mrs. Taunton, growing old after three years—though not so old as that her bright, dark eyes were dimmed—and remembering that her strength had been benefited by the change, resolved to go back for a year to those parts. So she went with a faithful servant, who had often carried her son in his arms; and she was to be rejoined and escorted home, at the year's end, by Captain Richard Doubledick.

She wrote regularly to her children (as she called them now), and they to her. She went to the neighborhood of Aix; and there, in their own château near the farmer's house she rented, she grew into intimacy with a family belonging to that part of France. The intimacy began in her often meeting among the vineyards a pretty child, a girl with a most compassionate heart, who was never tired of listening to the solitary English lady's stories of her poor son and the cruel wars. The family were as gentle as the child, and at length she came to know them so well that she accepted their invitation to pass the last month of her residence abroad under their roof. All this intelligence she wrote home, piecemeal as it came about, from time to time;

and at last enclosed a polite note, from the head of the château, soliciting, on the occasion of his approaching mission to that neighborhood, the honor of the company of that man so justly celebrated, Captain Richard Doubledick.

Captain Doubledick, now a hardy, handsome man in the full vigor of life, broader across the chest and shoulders than he had ever been before, dispatched a courteous reply, and followed it in person. Traveling through all that extent of country after three years of peace, he blessed the better days on which the world had fallen. The corn was golden, not drenched in unnatural red; was bound in sheaves for food, not trodden underfoot by men in mortal fight. The smoke rose up from peaceful hearths, not blazing ruins. The carts were laden with the fair fruits of the earth, not with wounds and death. To him who had so often seen the terrible reverse, these things were beautiful indeed; and they brought him in a softened spirit to the old château near Aix upon a deep blue evening.

It was a large château of the genuine old ghostly kind, with round towers, and extinguishers, and a high leaden roof, and more windows than Aladdin's palace. The entrance doors stood open, as doors often do in that country when the heat of the day is past; and the Captain saw no bell or knocker, and walked in.

He walked into a lofty stone hall, refreshingly cool and gloomy after the glare of a Southern day's travel. Extending along the four sides of this hall was a gallery, leading to suites of rooms; and it was lighted from the top. Still no bell was to be seen.

"Faith," said the Captain, halting, ashamed of the clanking of his boots, "this is a ghostly beginning!"

He started back, and felt his face turn white. In the gallery, looking down at him, stood the French officer—the officer whose picture he had carried in his mind so long and so far. Compared with the original, at last—in every lineament how like it was!

He moved and disappeared, and Captain Richard Doubledick heard his steps coming quickly down into the hall. He entered through an archway. There was a bright, sudden look upon his face, much such a look as it had worn in that fatal moment.

Monsieur le Capitaine Richard Doubledick? Enchanted to receive him!

"He has not remembered me, as I have remembered him; he did not take such a note of my face, that day, as I took of his," thought Captain Richard

Doubledick. "How shall I tell him?"

"You were at Waterloo," said the French officer.

"I was," said Captain Richard Doubledick. "And at Badajos."

Left alone with the sound of his own stern voice in his ears, he sat down to consider. What shall I do, and how shall I tell him? At that time, unhappily, many deplorable duels had been fought between English and French officers arising out of the recent war; and these duels, and how to avoid this officer's hospitality, were the uppermost thought in Captain Richard Doubledick's mind.

"His mother, above all," the Captain thought. "How shall I tell *her*?"

"Spirit of my departed friend," said he, "is it through thee these better thoughts are rising in my mind? Is it thou who hast shown me, all the way I have drawn to meet this man, the blessings of the altered time? Is it thou who hast sent thy stricken mother to me, to stay my angry hand? Is it from thee the whisper comes, that this man did his duty as thou didst,—and as I did, through thy guidance, which has wholly saved me here on earth,—and that he did no more?"

He sat down, with his head buried in his hands, and, when he rose up, made the second strong resolution in his life,—that neither to the French officer, nor to the mother of his departed friend, nor to any soul, while either of the two was living, would he breathe what only he knew. And when he touched that French officer's glass with his own, that day at dinner, he secretly forgave him in the name of the Divine Forgiver of Injuries.

THE END OF
The Poor Traveler

Reprinted Pieces

THE LONG VOYAGE

WHEN the wind is blowing and the sleet or rain is driving against the dark windows, I love to sit by the fire, thinking of what I have read in books of voyage and travel. Such books have had a strong fascination for my mind from my earliest childhood; and I wonder it should have come to pass that I never have been round the world, never have been shipwrecked, ice-environed, tomahawked, or eaten.

Sitting on my ruddy hearth in the twilight of New Year's Eve, I find incidents of travel rise around me from all the latitudes and longitudes of the globe. They observe no order or sequence, but appear and vanish as they will - 'come like shadows, so depart.' Columbus, alone upon the sea with his disaffected crew, looks over the waste of waters from his high station on the poop of his ship, and sees the first uncertain glimmer of the light, 'rising and falling with the waves, like a torch in the bark of some fisherman,' which is the shining star of a new world. Bruce is caged in Abyssinia, surrounded by the gory horrors which shall often startle him out of his sleep at home when years have passed away. Franklin, come to the end of his unhappy overland journey - would that it had been his last! - lies perishing of hunger with his brave companions: each emaciated figure stretched upon its miserable bed without the power to rise: all, dividing the weary days between their prayers, their remembrances of the dear ones at home, and conversation on the pleasures of eating; the last-named topic being ever present to them, likewise, in their dreams. All the African travellers, wayworn, solitary and sad, submit themselves again to drunken, murderous, man-selling despots, of the lowest order of humanity; and Mungo Park, fainting under a tree and succoured by a woman, gratefully remembers how his Good Samaritan has always come to him in woman's shape, the wide world over.

A shadow on the wall in which my mind's eye can discern some traces of a rocky sea-coast, recalls to me a fearful story of travel derived from that unpromising narrator of such stories, a parliamentary blue-book. A convict is its chief figure, and this man escapes with other prisoners from a penal settlement. It is an island, and they seize a boat, and get to the main land. Their way is by a rugged and precipitous sea-shore, and they have no earthly hope of ultimate escape, for the party of soldiers despatched by an easier course to cut them off, must inevitably arrive at their distant bourne long before them, and retake them if by any hazard they survive the horrors of the way. Famine, as they all must have foreseen, besets them early in their course. Some of the party die and are eaten; some are murdered by the rest and eaten. This one awful creature eats his fill, and sustains his strength, and lives on to be recaptured and taken back. The unrelateable experiences through which he has passed have been so tremendous, that he is not hanged as he might be, but goes back to his old chained-gang work. A little time, and he tempts one other prisoner away, seizes another boat, and flies once more - necessarily in the old hopeless direction, for he can take no other. He is soon cut off, and met by the pursuing party face to face, upon the beach. He is alone. In his former journey he acquired an inappeasable relish for his dreadful food. He urged the new man away, expressly to kill him and eat him. In the pockets on one side of his coarse convict- dress, are portions of the man's body, on which he is regaling; in the pockets on the other side is an untouched store of salted pork (stolen before he left the island) for which he has no appetite. He is taken back, and he is hanged. But I shall never see that sea-beach on the wall or in the fire, without him, solitary monster, eating as he prowls along, while the sea rages and rises at him.

Captain Bligh (a worse man to be entrusted with arbitrary power there could scarcely be) is handed over the side of the Bounty, and turned adrift on the wide ocean in an open boat, by order of Fletcher Christian, one of his officers, at this very minute. Another flash of my fire, and 'Thursday October Christian,' five- and-twenty years of age, son of the dead and gone Fletcher by a savage mother, leaps aboard His Majesty's ship Briton, hove-to off Pitcairn's Island; says his simple grace before eating, in good English; and knows that a pretty little animal on board is called a dog, because in his childhood he had heard of such strange creatures from his father and the other mutineers, grown grey under the shade of the bread-fruit trees, speaking of their lost country far away.

See the Halsewell, East Indiaman outward bound, driving madly on a January night towards the rocks near Seacombe, on the island of Purbeck! The captain's two dear daughters are aboard, and five other ladies. The ship has been driving many hours, has seven feet water in her hold, and her mainmast has been cut away. The description of her loss, familiar to me from my early boyhood, seems to be read aloud as she rushes to her destiny.

'About two in the morning of Friday the sixth of January, the ship still driving, and approaching very fast to the shore, Mr. Henry Meriton, the second mate, went again into the cuddy, where the captain then was. Another conversation taking place, Captain Pierce expressed extreme anxiety for the preservation of his beloved daughters, and earnestly asked the officer if he could devise any method of saving them. On his answering with great concern, that he feared it would be impossible, but that their only chance would be to wait for morning, the captain lifted up his hands in silent and distressful ejaculation.

'At this dreadful moment, the ship struck, with such violence as to dash the heads of those standing in the cuddy against the deck above them, and the shock was accompanied by a shriek of horror that burst at one instant from every quarter of the ship.

'Many of the seamen, who had been remarkably inattentive and remiss in their duty during great part of the storm, now poured upon deck, where no exertions of the officers could keep them, while their assistance might have been useful. They had actually skulked in their hammocks, leaving the working of the pumps and other necessary labours to the officers of the ship, and the soldiers, who had made uncommon exertions. Roused by a sense of their danger, the same seamen, at this moment, in frantic exclamations, demanded of heaven and their fellow-sufferers that succour which their own efforts, timely made, might possibly have procured.

'The ship continued to beat on the rocks; and soon bilging, fell with her broadside towards the shore. When she struck, a number of the men climbed up the ensign-staff, under an apprehension of her immediately going to pieces.

'Mr. Meriton, at this crisis, offered to these unhappy beings the best advice which could be given; he recommended that all should come to the side of the ship lying lowest on the rocks, and singly to take the opportunities which might then offer, of escaping to the shore.

'Having thus provided, to the utmost of his power, for the safety of the desponding crew, he returned to the round-house, where, by this time, all the passengers and most of the officers had assembled. The latter were employed in offering consolation to the unfortunate ladies; and, with unparalleled magnanimity, suffering their compassion for the fair and amiable companions of their misfortunes to prevail over the sense of their own danger.

'In this charitable work of comfort, Mr. Meriton now joined, by assurances of his opinion, that, the ship would hold together till the morning, when all would be safe. Captain Pierce, observing one of the young gentlemen loud in his exclamations of terror, and frequently cry that the ship was parting, cheerfully bid him be quiet, remarking that though the ship should go to pieces, he would not, but would be safe enough.

'It is difficult to convey a correct idea of the scene of this deplorable catastrophe, without describing the place where it happened. The Haleswell struck on the rocks at a part of the shore where the cliff is of vast height, and rises almost perpendicular from its base. But at this particular spot, the foot of the cliff is excavated into a cavern of ten or twelve yards in depth, and of breadth equal to the length of a large ship. The sides of the cavern are so nearly upright, as to be of extremely difficult access; and the bottom is strewed with sharp and uneven rocks, which seem, by some convulsion of the earth, to have been detached from its roof.

'The ship lay with her broadside opposite to the mouth of this cavern, with her whole length stretched almost from side to side of it. But when she struck, it was too dark for the unfortunate persons on board to discover the real magnitude of the danger, and the extreme horror of such a situation.

'In addition to the company already in the round-house, they had admitted three black women and two soldiers' wives; who, with the husband of one of them, had been allowed to come in, though the seamen, who had tumultuously demanded entrance to get the lights, had been opposed and kept out by Mr. Rogers and Mr. Brimer, the third and fifth mates. The numbers there were, therefore, now increased to near fifty. Captain Pierce sat on a chair, a cot, or some other moveable, with a daughter on each side, whom he alternately pressed to his affectionate breast. The rest of the melancholy assembly were seated on the deck, which was strewed with musical instruments, and the wreck of furniture and other articles.

'Here also Mr. Meriton, after having cut several wax-candles in pieces, and stuck them up in various parts of the round-house, and lighted up all the glass lanthorns he could find, took his seat, intending to wait the approach of dawn; and then assist the partners of his dangers to escape. But, observing that the poor ladies appeared parched and exhausted, he brought a basket of oranges and prevailed on some of them to refresh themselves by sucking a little of the juice. At this time they were all tolerably composed, except Miss Mansel, who was in hysteric fits on the floor of the deck of the round-house.

'But on Mr. Meriton's return to the company, he perceived a considerable alteration in the appearance of the ship; the sides were visibly giving way; the deck seemed to be lifting, and he discovered other strong indications that she could not hold much longer together. On this account, he attempted to go forward to look out, but immediately saw that the ship had separated in the middle, and that the forepart having changed its position, lay rather further out towards the sea. In such an emergency, when the next moment might plunge him into eternity, he determined to seize the present opportunity, and follow the example of the crew and the soldiers, who were now quitting the ship in numbers, and making their way to the shore, though quite ignorant of its nature and description.

'Among other expedients, the ensign-staff had been unshipped, and attempted to be laid between the ship's side and some of the rocks, but without success, for it snapped asunder before it reached them. However, by the light of a lanthorn, which a seaman handed through the skylight of the round-house to the deck, Mr. Meriton discovered a spar which appeared to be laid from the ship's side to the rocks, and on this spar he resolved to attempt his escape.

'Accordingly, lying down upon it, he thrust himself forward; however, he soon found that it had no communication with the rock; he reached the end of it, and then slipped off, receiving a very violent bruise in his fall, and before he could recover his legs, he was washed off by the surge. He now supported himself by swimming, until a returning wave dashed him against the back part of the cavern. Here he laid hold of a small projection in the rock, but was so much benumbed that he was on the point of quitting it, when a seaman, who had already gained a footing, extended his hand, and assisted him until he could secure himself a little on the rock; from which he clambered on a shelf still higher, and out of the reach of the surf.

'Mr. Rogers, the third mate, remained with the captain and the unfortunate ladies and their companions nearly twenty minutes after Mr. Meriton had quitted the ship. Soon after the latter left the round-house, the captain asked what was become of him, to which Mr. Rogers replied, that he was gone on deck to see what could be done. After this, a heavy sea breaking over the ship, the ladies exclaimed, "Oh, poor Meriton! he is drowned; had he stayed with us he would have been safe!" and they all, particularly Miss Mary Pierce, expressed great concern at the apprehension of his loss.

'The sea was now breaking in at the fore part of the ship, and reached as far as the mainmast. Captain Pierce gave Mr. Rogers a nod, and they took a lamp and went together into the stern-gallery, where, after viewing the rocks for some time, Captain Pierce asked Mr. Rogers if he thought there was any possibility of saving the girls; to which he replied, he feared there was none; for they could only discover the black face of the perpendicular rock, and not the cavern which afforded shelter to those who escaped. They then returned to the round-house, where Mr. Rogers hung up the lamp, and Captain Pierce sat down between his two daughters.

'The sea continuing to break in very fast, Mr. Macmanus, a midshipman, and Mr. Schutz, a passenger, asked Mr. Rogers what they could do to escape. "Follow me," he replied, and they all went into the stern-gallery, and from thence to the upper-quarter- gallery on the poop. While there, a very heavy sea fell on board, and the round-house gave way; Mr. Rogers heard the ladies shriek at intervals, as if the water reached them; the noise of the sea at other times drowning their voices.

'Mr. Brimer had followed him to the poop, where they remained together about five minutes, when on the breaking of this heavy sea, they jointly seized a hen-coop. The same wave which proved fatal to some of those below, carried him and his companion to the rock, on which they were violently dashed and miserably bruised.

'Here on the rock were twenty-seven men; but it now being low water, and as they were convinced that on the flowing of the tide all must be washed off, many attempted to get to the back or the sides of the cavern, beyond the reach of the returning sea. Scarcely more than six, besides Mr. Rogers and Mr. Brimer, succeeded.

'Mr. Rogers, on gaining this station, was so nearly exhausted, that had his exertions been protracted only a few minutes longer, he must have sunk under them. He was now prevented from joining Mr. Meriton, by at least twenty men between them, none of whom could move, without the imminent peril of his life.

'They found that a very considerable number of the crew, seamen and soldiers, and some petty officers, were in the same situation as themselves, though many who had reached the rocks below, perished in attempting to ascend. They could yet discern some part of the ship, and in their dreary station solaced themselves with the hopes of its remaining entire until day-break; for, in the midst of their own distress, the sufferings of the females on board affected them with the most poignant anguish; and every sea that broke inspired them with terror for their safety.

'But, alas, their apprehensions were too soon realised! Within a very few minutes of the time that Mr. Rogers gained the rock, an universal shriek, which long vibrated in their ears, in which the voice of female distress was lamentably distinguished, announced the dreadful catastrophe. In a few moments all was hushed, except the roaring of the winds and the dashing of the waves; the wreck was buried in the deep, and not an atom of it was ever afterwards seen.'

The most beautiful and affecting incident I know, associated with a shipwreck, succeeds this dismal story for a winter night. The Grosvenor, East Indiaman, homeward bound, goes ashore on the coast of Caffraria. It is resolved that the officers, passengers, and crew, in number one hundred and thirty-five souls, shall endeavour to penetrate on foot, across trackless deserts, infested by wild beasts and cruel savages, to the Dutch settlements at the Cape of Good Hope. With this forlorn object before them, they finally separate into two parties - never more to meet on earth.

There is a solitary child among the passengers - a little boy of seven years old who has no relation there; and when the first party is moving away he cries after some member of it who has been kind to him. The crying of a child might be supposed to be a little thing to men in such great extremity; but it touches them, and he is immediately taken into that detachment.

From which time forth, this child is sublimely made a sacred charge. He is pushed, on a little raft, across broad rivers by the swimming sailors; they carry him by turns through the deep sand and long grass (he patiently walking at all other times); they share with him such putrid fish as they find to eat; they lie down and wait for him when the rough carpenter, who becomes his especial friend, lags behind. Beset by lions and tigers, by savages, by thirst, by hunger, by death in a crowd of ghastly shapes, they never - O Father of all mankind, thy name be blessed for it! - forget this child. The captain stops exhausted, and his faithful coxswain goes back and is seen to sit down by his side, and neither of the two shall be any more beheld until the great last day; but, as the rest go on for their lives, they take the child with them. The carpenter dies of poisonous berries eaten in starvation; and the steward, succeeding to the command of the party, succeeds to the sacred guardianship of the child.

God knows all he does for the poor baby; how he cheerfully carries him in his arms when he himself is weak and ill; how he feeds him when he himself is griped with want; how he folds his ragged jacket round him, lays his little worn face with a woman's tenderness upon his sunburnt breast, soothes him in his sufferings, sings to him as he limps along, unmindful of his own parched and bleeding feet. Divided for a few days from the rest, they dig a grave in the sand and bury their good friend the cooper - these two companions alone in the wilderness - and then the time comes when they both are ill, and beg their wretched partners in despair, reduced and few in number now, to wait by them one day. They wait by them one day, they wait by them two days. On the morning of the third, they move very softly about, in making their preparations for the resumption of their journey; for, the child is sleeping by the fire, and it is agreed with one consent that he shall not be disturbed until the last moment. The moment comes, the fire is dying - and the child is dead.

His faithful friend, the steward, lingers but a little while behind him. His grief is great, he staggers on for a few days, lies down in the desert, and dies. But he shall be re-united in his immortal spirit - who can doubt it! - with the child, when he and the poor carpenter shall be raised up with the words, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto Me.'

As I recall the dispersal and disappearance of nearly all the participators in this once famous shipwreck (a mere handful being recovered at last), and the legends that were long afterwards revived from time to time among the English officers at the Cape, of a white woman with an infant, said to have been seen weeping outside a savage hut far in the interior, who was whisperingly associated with the remembrance of the missing ladies saved from the wrecked vessel, and who was often sought but never found, thoughts of another kind of travel came into my mind.

Thoughts of a voyager unexpectedly summoned from home, who travelled a vast distance, and could never return. Thoughts of this unhappy wayfarer in the depths of his sorrow, in the bitterness of his anguish, in the helplessness of his self- reproach, in the desperation of his desire to set right what he had left wrong, and do what he had left undone.

For, there were many, many things he had neglected. Little matters while he was at home and surrounded by them, but things of mighty moment when he was at an immeasurable distance. There were many many blessings that he had inadequately felt, there were many trivial injuries that he had not forgiven, there was love that he had but poorly returned, there was friendship that he had too lightly prized: there were a million kind words that he might have spoken, a million kind looks that he might have given, uncountable slight easy deeds in which he might have been most truly great and good. O for a day (he would exclaim), for but one day to make amends! But the sun never shone upon that happy day, and out of his remote captivity he never came.

Why does this traveller's fate obscure, on New Year's Eve, the other histories of travellers with which my mind was filled but now, and cast a solemn shadow over me! Must I one day make his journey? Even so. Who shall say, that I may not then be tortured by such late regrets: that I may not then look from my exile on my empty place and undone work? I stand upon a sea-shore, where the waves are years. They break and fall, and I may little heed them; but, with every wave the sea is rising, and I know that it will float me on this traveller's voyage at last.

THE BEGGING-LETTER WRITER

THE amount of money he annually diverts from wholesome and useful purposes in the United Kingdom, would be a set-off against the Window Tax. He is one of the most shameless frauds and impositions of this time. In his idleness, his mendacity, and the immeasurable harm he does to the deserving, - dirtying the stream of true benevolence, and muddling the brains of foolish justices, with inability to distinguish between the base coin of distress, and the true currency we have always among us, - he is more worthy of Norfolk Island than three-fourths of the worst characters who are sent there. Under any rational system, he would have been sent there long ago.

I, the writer of this paper, have been, for some time, a chosen receiver of Begging Letters. For fourteen years, my house has been made as regular a Receiving House for such communications as any one of the great branch Post-Offices is for general correspondence. I ought to know something of the Begging-Letter Writer. He has besieged my door at all hours of the day and night; he has fought my servant; he has lain in ambush for me, going out and coming in; he has followed me out of town into the country; he has appeared at provincial hotels, where I have been staying for only a few hours; he has written to me from immense distances, when I have been out of England. He has fallen sick; he has died and been buried; he has come to life again, and again departed from this transitory scene: he has been his own son, his own mother, his own baby, his idiot brother, his uncle, his aunt, his aged grandfather. He has wanted a greatcoat, to go to India in; a pound to set him up in life for ever; a pair of boots to take him to the coast of China; a hat to get him into a permanent situation under Government. He has frequently been exactly seven-and-sixpence short of independence. He has had such openings at Liverpool - posts of great trust and confidence in merchants' houses, which nothing but seven-and- sixpence was wanting to him to secure - that I wonder he is not Mayor of that flourishing town at the present moment.

The natural phenomena of which he has been the victim, are of a most astounding nature. He has had two children who have never grown up; who have never had anything to cover them at night; who have been continually driving him mad, by asking in vain for food; who have never come out of fevers and measles (which, I suppose, has accounted for his fuming his letters with tobacco smoke, as a disinfectant); who have never changed in the least degree through fourteen long revolving years. As to his wife, what that suffering woman has undergone, nobody knows. She has always been in an interesting situation through the same long period, and has never been confined yet. His devotion to her has been unceasing. He has never cared for himself; HE could have perished - he would rather, in short - but was it not his Christian duty as a man, a husband, and a father, - to write begging letters when he looked at her? (He has usually remarked that he would call in the evening for an answer to this question.)

He has been the sport of the strangest misfortunes. What his brother has done to him would have broken anybody else's heart. His brother went into business with him, and ran away with the money; his brother got him to be security for an immense sum and left him to pay it; his brother would have given him employment to the tune of hundreds a-year, if he would have consented to write letters on a Sunday; his brother enunciated principles incompatible with his religious views, and he could not (in consequence) permit his brother to provide for him. His landlord has never shown a spark of human feeling. When he put in that execution I don't know, but he has never taken it out. The broker's man has grown grey in possession. They will have to bury him some day.

He has been attached to every conceivable pursuit. He has been in the army, in the navy, in the church, in the law; connected with the press, the fine arts, public institutions, every description and grade of business. He has been brought up as a gentleman; he has been at every college in Oxford and Cambridge; he can quote Latin in his letters (but generally misspells some minor English word); he can tell you what Shakespeare says about begging, better than you know it. It is to be observed, that in the midst of his afflictions he always reads the newspapers; and rounds off his appeal with some allusion, that may be supposed to be in my way, to the popular subject of the hour.

His life presents a series of inconsistencies. Sometimes he has never written such a letter before. He blushes with shame. That is the first time; that shall be the last. Don't answer it, and let it be understood that, then, he will kill himself quietly. Sometimes (and more frequently) he HAS written a few such letters. Then he encloses the answers, with an intimation that they are of inestimable value to him, and a request that they may be carefully returned. He is fond of enclosing something - verses, letters, pawnbrokers' duplicates, anything to necessitate an answer. He is very severe upon 'the pampered minion of fortune,' who refused him the half-sovereign referred to in the enclosure number two - but he knows me better.

He writes in a variety of styles; sometimes in low spirits; sometimes quite jocosely. When he is in low spirits he writes down-hill and repeats words - these little indications being expressive of the perturbation of his mind. When he is more vivacious, he is frank with me; he is quite the agreeable rattle. I know what human nature is, - who better? Well! He had a little money once, and he ran through it - as many men have done before him. He finds his old friends turn away from him now - many men have done that before him too! Shall he tell me why he writes to me? Because he has no kind of claim upon me. He puts it on that ground plainly; and begs to ask for the loan (as I know human nature) of two sovereigns, to be repaid next Tuesday six weeks, before twelve at noon.

Sometimes, when he is sure that I have found him out, and that there is no chance of money, he writes to inform me that I have got rid of him at last. He has enlisted into the Company's service, and is off directly - but he wants a cheese. He is informed by the serjeant that it is essential to his prospects in the regiment that he should take out a single Gloucester cheese, weighing from twelve to fifteen pounds. Eight or nine shillings would buy it. He does not ask for money, after what has passed; but if he calls at nine, to-morrow morning may he hope to find a cheese? And is there anything he can do to show his gratitude in Bengal?

Once he wrote me rather a special letter, proposing relief in kind. He had got into a little trouble by leaving parcels of mud done up in brown paper, at people's houses, on pretence of being a Railway- Porter, in which character he received carriage money. This sportive fancy he expiated in the House of Correction. Not long after his release, and on a Sunday morning, he called with a letter (having first dusted himself all over), in which he gave me to understand that, being resolved to earn an honest livelihood, he had been travelling about the country with a cart of crockery. That he had been doing pretty well until the day before, when his horse had dropped down dead near Chatham, in Kent. That this had reduced him to the unpleasant necessity of getting into the shafts himself, and drawing the cart of crockery to London - a somewhat exhausting pull of thirty miles. That he did not venture to ask again for money; but that if I would have the goodness TO LEAVE HIM OUT A DONKEY, he would call for the animal before breakfast!

At another time my friend (I am describing actual experiences) introduced himself as a literary gentleman in the last extremity of distress. He had had a play accepted at a certain Theatre - which was really open; its representation was delayed by the indisposition of a leading actor - who was really ill; and he and his were in a state of absolute starvation. If he made his necessities known to the Manager of the Theatre, he put it to me to say what kind of treatment he might expect? Well! we got over that difficulty to our mutual satisfaction. A little while afterwards he was in some other strait. I think Mrs. Southcote, his wife, was in extremity - and we adjusted that point too. A little while afterwards he had taken a new house, and was going headlong to ruin for want of a water-butt. I had my misgivings about the water- butt, and did not reply to that epistle. But a little while afterwards, I had reason to feel penitent for my neglect. He wrote me a few broken-hearted lines, informing me that the dear partner of his sorrows died in his arms last night at nine o'clock!

I despatched a trusty messenger to comfort the bereaved mourner and his poor children; but the messenger went so soon, that the play was not ready to be played out; my friend was not at home, and his wife was in a most delightful state of health. He was taken up by the Mendicity Society (informally it afterwards appeared), and I presented myself at a London Police-Office with my testimony against him. The Magistrate was wonderfully struck by his educational acquirements, deeply impressed by the excellence of his letters, exceedingly sorry to see a man of his attainments there, complimented him highly on his powers of composition, and was quite charmed to have the agreeable duty of discharging him. A collection was made for the 'poor fellow,' as he was called in the reports, and I left the court with a comfortable sense of being universally regarded as a sort of monster. Next day comes to me a friend of mine, the governor of a large prison. 'Why did you ever go to the Police-Office against that man,' says he, 'without coming to me first? I know all about him and his frauds. He lodged in the house of one of my warders, at the very time when he first wrote to you; and then he was eating spring-lamb at eighteen-pence a pound, and early asparagus at I don't know how much a bundle!' On that very same day, and in that very same hour, my injured gentleman wrote a solemn address to me, demanding to know what compensation I proposed to make him for his having passed the night in a 'loathsome dungeon.' And next morning an Irish gentleman, a member of the same fraternity, who had read the case, and was very well persuaded I should be chary of going to that Police-Office again, positively refused to leave my door for less than a sovereign, and, resolved to besiege me into compliance, literally 'sat down' before it for ten mortal hours. The garrison being well provisioned, I remained within the walls; and he raised the siege at midnight with a prodigious alarum on the bell.

The Begging-Letter Writer often has an extensive circle of acquaintance. Whole pages of the 'Court Guide' are ready to be references for him. Noblemen and gentlemen write to say there never was such a man for probity and virtue. They have known him time out of mind, and there is nothing they wouldn't do for him. Somehow, they don't give him that one pound ten he stands in need of; but perhaps it is not enough - they want to do more, and his modesty will not allow it. It is to be remarked of his trade that it is a very fascinating one. He never leaves it; and those who are near to him become smitten with a love of it, too, and sooner or later set up for themselves. He employs a messenger - man, woman, or child. That messenger is certain ultimately to become an independent Begging-Letter Writer. His sons and daughters succeed to his calling, and write begging-letters when he is no more. He throws off the infection of begging-letter writing, like the contagion of disease. What Sydney Smith so happily called 'the dangerous luxury of dishonesty' is more tempting, and more catching, it would seem, in this instance than in any other.

He always belongs to a Corresponding-Society of Begging-Letter Writers. Any one who will, may ascertain this fact. Give money to-day in recognition of a begging-letter, - no matter how unlike a common begging-letter, - and for the next fortnight you will have a rush of such communications. Steadily refuse to give; and the begging-letters become Angels' visits, until the Society is from some cause or other in a dull way of business, and may as well try you as anybody else. It is of little use inquiring into the Begging-Letter Writer's circumstances. He may be sometimes accidentally found out, as in the case already mentioned (though that was not the first inquiry made); but apparent misery is always a part of his trade, and real misery very often is, in the intervals of spring-lamb and early asparagus. It is naturally an incident of his dissipated and dishonest life.

That the calling is a successful one, and that large sums of money are gained by it, must be evident to anybody who reads the Police Reports of such cases. But, prosecutions are of rare occurrence, relatively to the extent to which the trade is carried on. The cause of this is to be found (as no one knows better than the Begging-Letter Writer, for it is a part of his speculation) in the aversion people feel to exhibit themselves as having been imposed upon, or as having weakly gratified their consciences with a lazy, flimsy substitute for the noblest of all virtues. There is a man at large, at the moment when this paper is preparing for the press (on the 29th of April, 1850), and never once taken up yet, who, within these twelvemonths, has been probably the most audacious and the most successful swindler that even this trade has ever known. There has been something singularly base in this fellow's proceedings; it has been his business to write to all sorts and conditions of people, in the names of persons of high reputation and unblemished honour, professing to be in distress - the general admiration and respect for whom has ensured a ready and generous reply.

Now, in the hope that the results of the real experience of a real person may do something more to induce reflection on this subject than any abstract treatise - and with a personal knowledge of the extent to which the Begging-Letter Trade has been carried on for some time, and has been for some time constantly increasing - the writer of this paper entreats the attention of his readers to a few concluding words. His experience is a type of the experience of many; some on a smaller, some on an infinitely larger scale. All may judge of the soundness or unsoundness of his conclusions from it.

Long doubtful of the efficacy of such assistance in any case whatever, and able to recall but one, within his whole individual knowledge, in which he had the least after-reason to suppose that any good was done by it, he was led, last autumn, into some serious considerations. The begging-letters flying about by every post, made it perfectly manifest that a set of lazy vagabonds were interposed between the general desire to do something to relieve the sickness and misery under which the poor were suffering, and the suffering poor themselves. That many who sought to do some little to repair the social wrongs, inflicted in the way of preventible sickness and death upon the poor, were strengthening those wrongs, however innocently, by wasting money on pestilent knaves cumbering society. That imagination, - soberly following one of these knaves into his life of punishment in jail, and comparing it with the life of one of these poor in a cholera- stricken alley, or one of the children of one of these poor, soothed in its dying hour by the late lamented Mr. Drouet, - contemplated a grim farce, impossible to be presented very much longer before God or man. That the crowning miracle of all the miracles summed up in the New Testament, after the miracle of the blind seeing, and the lame walking, and the restoration of the dead to life, was the miracle that the poor had the Gospel preached to them. That while the poor were unnaturally and unnecessarily cut off by the thousand, in the prematurity of their age, or in the rottenness of their youth - for of flower or blossom such youth has none - the Gospel was NOT preached to them, saving in hollow and unmeaning voices. That of all wrongs, this was the first mighty wrong the Pestilence warned us to set right. And that no Post- Office Order to any amount, given to a Begging-Letter Writer for the quieting of an uneasy breast, would be presentable on the Last Great Day as anything towards it.

The poor never write these letters. Nothing could be more unlike their habits. The writers are public robbers; and we who support them are parties to their depredations. They trade upon every circumstance within their knowledge that affects us, public or private, joyful or sorrowful; they pervert the lessons of our lives; they change what ought to be our strength and virtue into weakness, and encouragement of vice. There is a plain remedy, and it is in our own hands. We must resolve, at any sacrifice of feeling, to be deaf to such appeals, and crush the trade.

There are degrees in murder. Life must be held sacred among us in more ways than one - sacred, not merely from the murderous weapon, or the subtle poison, or the cruel blow, but sacred from preventible diseases, distortions, and pains. That is the first great end we have to set against this miserable imposition. Physical life respected, moral life comes next. What will not content a Begging-Letter Writer for a week, would educate a score of children for a year. Let us give all we can; let us give more than ever. Let us do all we can; let us do more than ever. But let us give, and do, with a high purpose; not to endow the scum of the earth, to its own greater corruption, with the offals of our duty.

A CHILD'S DREAM OF A STAR

THERE was once a child, and he strolled about a good deal, and thought of a number of things. He had a sister, who was a child too, and his constant companion. These two used to wonder all day long. They wondered at the beauty of the flowers; they wondered at the height and blueness of the sky; they wondered at the depth of the bright water; they wondered at the goodness and the power of GOD who made the lovely world.

They used to say to one another, sometimes, Supposing all the children upon earth were to die, would the flowers, and the water, and the sky be sorry? They believed they would be sorry. For, said they, the buds are the children of the flowers, and the little playful streams that gambol down the hill-sides are the children of the water; and the smallest bright specks playing at hide and seek in the sky all night, must surely be the children of the stars; and they would all be grieved to see their playmates, the children of men, no more.

There was one clear shining star that used to come out in the sky before the rest, near the church spire, above the graves. It was larger and more beautiful, they thought, than all the others, and every night they watched for it, standing hand in hand at a window. Whoever saw it first cried out, 'I see the star!' And often they cried out both together, knowing so well when it would rise, and where. So they grew to be such friends with it, that, before lying down in their beds, they always looked out once again, to bid it good night; and when they were turning round to sleep, they used to say, 'God bless the star!'

But while she was still very young, oh, very, very young, the sister drooped, and came to be so weak that she could no longer stand in the window at night; and then the child looked sadly out by himself, and when he saw the star, turned round and said to the patient pale face on the bed, 'I see the star!' and then a smile would come upon the face, and a little weak voice used to say, 'God bless my brother and the star!'

And so the time came all too soon! when the child looked out alone, and when there was no face on the bed; and when there was a little grave among the graves, not there before; and when the star made long rays down towards him, as he saw it through his tears.

Now, these rays were so bright, and they seemed to make such a shining way from earth to Heaven, that when the child went to his solitary bed, he dreamed about the star; and dreamed that, lying where he was, he saw a train of people taken up that sparkling road by angels. And the star, opening, showed him a great world of light, where many more such angels waited to receive them.

All these angels, who were waiting, turned their beaming eyes upon the people who were carried up into the star; and some came out from the long rows in which they stood, and fell upon the people's necks, and kissed them tenderly, and went away with them down avenues of light, and were so happy in their company, that lying in his bed he wept for joy.

But, there were many angels who did not go with them, and among them one he knew. The patient face that once had lain upon the bed was glorified and radiant, but his heart found out his sister among all the host.

His sister's angel lingered near the entrance of the star, and said to the leader among those who had brought the people thither:

'Is my brother come?'

And he said 'No.'

She was turning hopefully away, when the child stretched out his arms, and cried, 'O, sister, I am here! Take me!' and then she turned her beaming eyes upon him, and it was night; and the star was shining into the room, making long rays down towards him as he saw it through his tears.

From that hour forth, the child looked out upon the star as on the home he was to go to, when his time should come; and he thought that he did not belong to the earth alone, but to the star too, because of his sister's angel gone before.

There was a baby born to be a brother to the child; and while he was so little that he never yet had spoken word, he stretched his tiny form out on his bed, and died.

Again the child dreamed of the open star, and of the company of angels, and the train of people, and the rows of angels with their beaming eyes all turned upon those people's faces.

Said his sister's angel to the leader:

'Is my brother come?'

And he said, 'Not that one, but another.'

As the child beheld his brother's angel in her arms, he cried, 'O, sister, I am here! Take me!' And she turned and smiled upon him, and the star was shining.

He grew to be a young man, and was busy at his books when an old servant came to him and said:

'Thy mother is no more. I bring her blessing on her darling son!'

Again at night he saw the star, and all that former company. Said his sister's angel to the leader.

'Is my brother come?'

And he said, 'Thy mother!'

A mighty cry of joy went forth through all the star, because the mother was re-united to her two children. And he stretched out his arms and cried, 'O, mother, sister, and brother, I am here! Take me!' And they answered him, 'Not yet,' and the star was shining.

He grew to be a man, whose hair was turning grey, and he was sitting in his chair by the fireside, heavy with grief, and with his face bedewed with tears, when the star opened once again.

Said his sister's angel to the leader: 'Is my brother come?'

And he said, 'Nay, but his maiden daughter.'

And the man who had been the child saw his daughter, newly lost to him, a celestial creature among those three, and he said, 'My daughter's head is on my sister's bosom, and her arm is around my mother's neck, and at her feet there is the baby of old time, and I can bear the parting from her, GOD be praised!'

And the star was shining.

Thus the child came to be an old man, and his once smooth face was wrinkled, and his steps were slow and feeble, and his back was bent. And one night as he lay upon his bed, his children standing round, he cried, as he had cried so long ago:

'I see the star!'

They whispered one another, 'He is dying.'

And he said, 'I am. My age is falling from me like a garment, and I move towards the star as a child. And O, my Father, now I thank thee that it has so often opened, to receive those dear ones who await me!'

And the star was shining; and it shines upon his grave.

OUR ENGLISH WATERING-PLACE

IN the Autumn-time of the year, when the great metropolis is so much hotter, so much noisier, so much more dusty or so much more water-carted, so much more crowded, so much more disturbing and distracting in all respects, than it usually is, a quiet sea-beach becomes indeed a blessed spot. Half awake and half asleep, this idle morning in our sunny window on the edge of a chalk-cliff in the old-fashioned watering-place to which we are a faithful resorter, we feel a lazy inclination to sketch its picture.

The place seems to respond. Sky, sea, beach, and village, lie as still before us as if they were sitting for the picture. It is dead low-water. A ripple plays among the ripening corn upon the cliff, as if it were faintly trying from recollection to imitate the sea; and the world of butterflies hovering over the crop of radish-seed are as restless in their little way as the gulls are in their larger manner when the wind blows. But the ocean lies winking in the sunlight like a drowsy lion - its glassy waters scarcely curve upon the shore - the fishing-boats in the tiny harbour are all stranded in the mud - our two colliers (our watering-place has a maritime trade employing that amount of shipping) have not an inch of water within a quarter of a mile of them, and turn, exhausted, on their sides, like faint fish of an antediluvian species. Rusty cables and chains, ropes and rings, undermost parts of posts and piles and confused timber-defences against the waves, lie strewn about, in a brown litter of tangled sea-weed and fallen cliff which looks as if a family of giants had been making tea here for ages, and had observed an untidy custom of throwing their tea-leaves on the shore.

In truth, our watering-place itself has been left somewhat high and dry by the tide of years. Concerned as we are for its honour, we must reluctantly admit that the time when this pretty little semicircular sweep of houses, tapering off at the end of the wooden pier into a point in the sea, was a gay place, and when the lighthouse overlooking it shone at daybreak on company dispersing from public balls, is but dimly traditional now. There is a bleak chamber in our watering-place which is yet called the Assembly 'Rooms,' and understood to be available on hire for balls or concerts; and, some few seasons since, an ancient little gentleman came down and stayed at the hotel, who said that he had danced there, in bygone ages, with the Honourable Miss Peepy, well known to have been the Beauty of her day and the cruel occasion of innumerable duels. But he was so old and shrivelled, and so very rheumatic in the legs, that it demanded more imagination than our watering-place can usually muster, to believe him; therefore, except the Master of the 'Rooms' (who to this hour wears knee-breeches, and who confirmed the statement with tears in his eyes), nobody did believe in the little lame old gentleman, or even in the Honourable Miss Peepy, long deceased.

As to subscription balls in the Assembly Rooms of our watering- place now, red-hot cannon balls are less improbable. Sometimes, a misguided wanderer of a Ventriloquist, or an Infant Phenomenon, or a juggler, or somebody with an Orrery that is several stars behind the time, takes the place for a night, and issues bills with the name of his last town lined out, and the name of ours ignominiously written in, but you may be sure this never happens twice to the same unfortunate person. On such occasions the discoloured old Billiard Table that is seldom played at (unless the ghost of the Honourable Miss Peepy plays at pool with other ghosts) is pushed into a corner, and benches are solemnly constituted into front seats, back seats, and reserved seats - which are much the same after you have paid - and a few dull candles are lighted - wind permitting - and the performer and the scanty audience play out a short match which shall make the other most low-spirited - which is usually a drawn game. After that, the performer instantly departs with maledictory expressions, and is never heard of more.

But the most wonderful feature of our Assembly Rooms, is, that an annual sale of 'Fancy and other China,' is announced here with mysterious constancy and perseverance. Where the china comes from, where it goes to, why it is annually put up to auction when nobody ever thinks of bidding for it, how it comes to pass that it is always the same china, whether it would not have been cheaper, with the sea at hand, to have thrown it away, say in eighteen hundred and thirty, are standing enigmas. Every year the bills come out, every year the Master of the Rooms gets into a little pulpit on a table, and offers it for sale, every year nobody buys it, every year it is put away somewhere till next year, when it appears again as if the whole thing were a new idea. We have a faint remembrance of an unearthly collection of clocks, purporting to be the work of Parisian and Genevese artists - chiefly bilious-faced clocks, supported on sickly white crutches, with their pendulums dangling like lame legs - to which a similar course of events occurred for several years, until they seemed to lapse away, of mere imbecility.

Attached to our Assembly Rooms is a library. There is a wheel of fortune in it, but it is rusty and dusty, and never turns. A large doll, with moveable eyes, was put up to be raffled for, by five- and-twenty members at two shillings, seven years ago this autumn, and the list is not full yet. We are rather sanguine, now, that the raffle will come off next year. We think so, because we only want nine members, and should only want eight, but for number two having grown up since her name was entered, and withdrawn it when she was married. Down the street, there is a toy-ship of considerable burden, in the same condition. Two of the boys who were entered for that raffle have gone to India in real ships, since; and one was shot, and died in the arms of his sister's lover, by whom he sent his last words home.

This is the library for the Minerva Press. If you want that kind of reading, come to our watering-place. The leaves of the romances, reduced to a condition very like curl-paper, are thickly studded with notes in pencil: sometimes complimentary, sometimes jocose. Some of these commentators, like commentators in a more extensive way, quarrel with one another. One young gentleman who sarcastically writes 'O!!!' after every sentimental passage, is pursued through his literary career by another, who writes 'Insulting Beast!' Miss Julia Mills has read the whole collection of these books. She has left marginal notes on the pages, as 'Is not this truly touching? J. M.' 'How thrilling! J. M.' 'Entranced here by the Magician's potent spell. J. M.' She has also italicised her favourite traits in the description of the hero, as 'his hair, which was DARK and WAVY, clustered in RICH PROFUSION around a MARBLE BROW, whose lofty paleness bespoke the intellect within.' It reminds her of another hero. She adds, 'How like B. L. Can this be mere coincidence? J. M.'

You would hardly guess which is the main street of our watering- place, but you may know it by its being always stopped up with donkey-chaises. Whenever you come here, and see harnessed donkeys eating clover out of barrows drawn completely across a narrow thoroughfare, you may be quite sure you are in our High Street. Our Police you may know by his uniform, likewise by his never on any account interfering with anybody - especially the tramps and vagabonds. In our fancy shops we have a capital collection of damaged goods, among which the flies of countless summers 'have been roaming.' We are great in obsolete seals, and in faded pin- cushions, and in rickety camp-stools, and in exploded cutlery, and in miniature vessels, and in stunted little telescopes, and in objects made of shells that pretend not to be shells. Diminutive spades, barrows, and baskets, are our principal articles of commerce; but even they don't look quite new somehow. They always seem to have been offered and refused somewhere else, before they came down to our watering-place.

Yet, it must not be supposed that our watering-place is an empty place, deserted by all visitors except a few staunch persons of approved fidelity. On the contrary, the chances are that if you came down here in August or September, you wouldn't find a house to lay your head in. As to finding either house or lodging of which you could reduce the terms, you could scarcely engage in a more hopeless pursuit. For all this, you are to observe that every season is the worst season ever known, and that the householding population of our watering-place are ruined regularly every autumn. They are like the farmers, in regard that it is surprising how much ruin they will bear. We have an excellent hotel - capital baths, warm, cold, and shower - first-rate bathing-machines - and as good butchers, bakers, and grocers, as heart could desire. They all do business, it is to be presumed, from motives of philanthropy - but it is quite certain that they are all being ruined. Their interest in strangers, and their politeness under ruin, bespeak their amiable nature. You would say so, if you only saw the baker helping a new comer to find suitable apartments.

So far from being at a discount as to company, we are in fact what would be popularly called rather a nobby place. Some tip-top 'Nobbs' come down occasionally - even Dukes and Duchesses. We have known such carriages to blaze among the donkey-chaises, as made beholders wink. Attendant on these equipages come resplendent creatures in plush and powder, who are sure to be stricken disgusted with the indifferent accommodation of our watering-place, and who, of an evening (particularly when it rains), may be seen very much out of drawing, in rooms far too small for their fine figures, looking discontentedly out of little back windows into bye-streets. The lords and ladies get on well enough and quite good-humouredly: but if you want to see the gorgeous phenomena who wait upon them at a perfect non-plus, you should come and look at the resplendent creatures with little back parlours for servants' halls, and turn-up bedsteads to sleep in, at our watering-place. You have no idea how they take it to heart.

We have a pier - a queer old wooden pier, fortunately without the slightest pretensions to architecture, and very picturesque in consequence. Boats are hauled up upon it, ropes are coiled all over it; lobster-pots, nets, masts, oars, spars, sails, ballast, and rickety capstans, make a perfect labyrinth of it. For ever hovering about this pier, with their hands in their pockets, or leaning over the rough bulwark it opposes to the sea, gazing through telescopes which they carry about in the same profound receptacles, are the Boatmen of our watering-place. Looking at them, you would say that surely these must be the laziest boatmen in the world. They lounge about, in obstinate and inflexible pantaloons that are apparently made of wood, the whole season through. Whether talking together about the shipping in the Channel, or gruffly unbending over mugs of beer at the public- house, you would consider them the slowest of men. The chances are a thousand to one that you might stay here for ten seasons, and never see a boatman in a hurry. A certain expression about his loose hands, when they are not in his pockets, as if he were carrying a considerable lump of iron in each, without any inconvenience, suggests strength, but he never seems to use it. He has the appearance of perpetually strolling - running is too inappropriate a word to be thought of - to seed. The only subject on which he seems to feel any approach to enthusiasm, is pitch. He pitches everything he can lay hold of, - the pier, the palings, his boat, his house, - when there is nothing else left he turns to and even pitches his hat, or his rough-weather clothing. Do not judge him by deceitful appearances. These are among the bravest and most skilful mariners that exist. Let a gale arise and swell into a storm, let a sea run that might appal the stoutest heart that ever beat, let the Light-boat on these dangerous sands throw up a rocket in the night, or let them hear through the angry roar the signal- guns of a ship in distress, and these men spring up into activity so dauntless, so valiant, and heroic, that the world cannot surpass it. Cavillers may object that they chiefly live upon the salvage of valuable cargoes. So they do, and God knows it is no great living that they get out of the deadly risks they run. But put that hope of gain aside. Let these rough fellows be asked, in any storm, who volunteers for the life-boat to save some perishing souls, as poor and empty-handed as themselves, whose lives the perfection of human reason does not rate at the value of a farthing each; and that boat will be manned, as surely and as cheerfully, as if a thousand pounds were told down on the weather-beaten pier. For this, and for the recollection of their comrades whom we have known, whom the raging sea has engulfed before their children's eyes in such brave efforts, whom the secret sand has buried, we hold the boatmen of our watering-place in our love and honour, and are tender of the fame they well deserve.

So many children are brought down to our watering-place that, when they are not out of doors, as they usually are in fine weather, it is wonderful where they are put: the whole village seeming much too small to hold them under cover. In the afternoons, you see no end of salt and sandy little boots drying on upper window-sills. At bathing-time in the morning, the little bay re-echoes with every shrill variety of shriek and splash - after which, if the weather be at all fresh, the sands teem with small blue mottled legs. The sands are the children's great resort. They cluster there, like ants: so busy burying their particular friends, and making castles with infinite labour which the next tide overthrows, that it is curious to consider how their play, to the music of the sea, foreshadows the realities of their after lives.

It is curious, too, to observe a natural ease of approach that there seems to be between the children and the boatmen. They mutually make acquaintance, and take individual likings, without any help. You will come upon one of those slow heavy fellows sitting down patiently mending a little ship for a mite of a boy, whom he could crush to death by throwing his lightest pair of trousers on him. You will be sensible of the oddest contrast between the smooth little creature, and the rough man who seems to be carved out of hard-grained wood - between the delicate hand expectantly held out, and the immense thumb and finger that can hardly feel the rigging of thread they mend - between the small voice and the gruff growl - and yet there is a natural propriety in the companionship: always to be noted in confidence between a child and a person who has any merit of reality and genuineness: which is admirably pleasant.

We have a preventive station at our watering-place, and much the same thing may be observed - in a lesser degree, because of their official character - of the coast blockade; a steady, trusty, well- conditioned, well-conducted set of men, with no misgiving about looking you full in the face, and with a quiet thorough-going way of passing along to their duty at night, carrying huge sou'-wester clothing in reserve, that is fraught with all good prepossession. They are handy fellows - neat about their houses - industrious at gardening - would get on with their wives, one thinks, in a desert island - and people it, too, soon.

As to the naval officer of the station, with his hearty fresh face, and his blue eye that has pierced all kinds of weather, it warms our hearts when he comes into church on a Sunday, with that bright mixture of blue coat, buff waistcoat, black neck-kerchief, and gold epaulette, that is associated in the minds of all Englishmen with brave, unpretending, cordial, national service. We like to look at him in his Sunday state; and if we were First Lord (really possessing the indispensable qualification for the office of knowing nothing whatever about the sea), we would give him a ship to-morrow.

We have a church, by-the-by, of course - a hideous temple of flint, like a great petrified haystack. Our chief clerical dignitary, who, to his honour, has done much for education both in time and money, and has established excellent schools, is a sound, shrewd, healthy gentleman, who has got into little occasional difficulties with the neighbouring farmers, but has had a pestilent trick of being right. Under a new regulation, he has yielded the church of our watering-place to another clergyman. Upon the whole we get on in church well. We are a little bilious sometimes, about these days of fraternisation, and about nations arriving at a new and more unprejudiced knowledge of each other (which our Christianity don't quite approve), but it soon goes off, and then we get on very well.

There are two dissenting chapels, besides, in our small watering- place; being in about the proportion of a hundred and twenty guns to a yacht. But the dissension that has torn us lately, has not been a religious one. It has arisen on the novel question of Gas. Our watering-place has been convulsed by the agitation, Gas or No Gas. It was never reasoned why No Gas, but there was a great No Gas party. Broadsides were printed and stuck about - a startling circumstance in our watering-place. The No Gas party rested content with chalking 'No Gas!' and 'Down with Gas!' and other such angry war-whoops, on the few back gates and scraps of wall which the limits of our watering-place afford; but the Gas party printed and posted bills, wherein they took the high ground of proclaiming against the No Gas party, that it was said Let there be light and there was light; and that not to have light (that is gas-light) in our watering-place, was to contravene the great decree. Whether by these thunderbolts or not, the No Gas party were defeated; and in this present season we have had our handful of shops illuminated for the first time. Such of the No Gas party, however, as have got shops, remain in opposition and burn tallow - exhibiting in their windows the very picture of the sulkiness that punishes itself, and a new illustration of the old adage about cutting off your nose to be revenged on your face, in cutting off their gas to be revenged on their business.

Other population than we have indicated, our watering-place has none. There are a few old used-up boatmen who creep about in the sunlight with the help of sticks, and there is a poor imbecile shoemaker who wanders his lonely life away among the rocks, as if he were looking for his reason - which he will never find. Sojourners in neighbouring watering-places come occasionally in flys to stare at us, and drive away again as if they thought us very dull; Italian boys come, Punch comes, the Fantoccini come, the Tumblers come, the Ethiopians come; Glee-singers come at night, and hum and vibrate (not always melodiously) under our windows. But they all go soon, and leave us to ourselves again. We once had a travelling Circus and Wombwell's Menagerie at the same time. They both know better than ever to try it again; and the Menagerie had nearly razed us from the face of the earth in getting the elephant away - his caravan was so large, and the watering-place so small. We have a fine sea, wholesome for all people; profitable for the body, profitable for the mind. The poet's words are sometimes on its awful lips:

And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand.
And the sound of a voice that is still!
Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.

Yet it is not always so, for the speech of the sea is various, and wants not abundant resource of cheerfulness, hope, and lusty encouragement. And since I have been idling at the window here, the tide has risen. The boats are dancing on the bubbling water; the colliers are afloat again; the white-bordered waves rush in; the children

Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him
When he comes back;

the radiant sails are gliding past the shore, and shining on the far horizon; all the sea is sparkling, heaving, swelling up with life and beauty, this bright morning.

OUR FRENCH WATERING-PLACE

HAVING earned, by many years of fidelity, the right to be sometimes inconstant to our English watering-place, we have dallied for two or three seasons with a French watering-place: once solely known to us as a town with a very long street, beginning with an abattoir and ending with a steam-boat, which it seemed our fate to behold only at daybreak on winter mornings, when (in the days before continental railroads), just sufficiently awake to know that we were most uncomfortably asleep, it was our destiny always to clatter through it, in the coupe of the diligence from Paris, with a sea of mud behind us, and a sea of tumbling waves before. In relation to which latter monster, our mind's eye now recalls a worthy Frenchman in a seal-skin cap with a braided hood over it, once our travelling companion in the coupe aforesaid, who, waking up with a pale and crumpled visage, and looking ruefully out at the grim row of breakers enjoying themselves fanatically on an instrument of torture called 'the Bar,' inquired of us whether we were ever sick at sea? Both to prepare his mind for the abject creature we were presently to become, and also to afford him consolation, we replied, 'Sir, your servant is always sick when it is possible to be so.' He returned, altogether uncheered by the bright example, 'Ah, Heaven, but I am always sick, even when it is IMpossible to be so.'

The means of communication between the French capital and our French watering-place are wholly changed since those days; but, the Channel remains unbridged as yet, and the old floundering and knocking about go on there. It must be confessed that saving in reasonable (and therefore rare) sea-weather, the act of arrival at our French watering-place from England is difficult to be achieved with dignity. Several little circumstances combine to render the visitor an object of humiliation. In the first place, the steamer no sooner touches the port, than all the passengers fall into captivity: being boarded by an overpowering force of Custom-house officers, and marched into a gloomy dungeon. In the second place, the road to this dungeon is fenced off with ropes breast-high, and outside those ropes all the English in the place who have lately been sea-sick and are now well, assemble in their best clothes to enjoy the degradation of their dilapidated fellow-creatures. 'Oh, my gracious! how ill this one has been!' 'Here's a damp one coming next!' 'HERE'S a pale one!' 'Oh! Ain't he green in the face, this next one!' Even we ourself (not deficient in natural dignity) have a lively remembrance of staggering up this detested lane one September day in a gale of wind, when we were received like an irresistible comic actor, with a burst of laughter and applause, occasioned by the extreme imbecility of our legs.

We were coming to the third place. In the third place, the captives, being shut up in the gloomy dungeon, are strained, two or three at a time, into an inner cell, to be examined as to passports; and across the doorway of communication, stands a military creature making a bar of his arm. Two ideas are generally present to the British mind during these ceremonies; first, that it is necessary to make for the cell with violent struggles, as if it were a life-boat and the dungeon a ship going down; secondly, that the military creature's arm is a national affront, which the government at home ought instantly to 'take up.' The British mind and body becoming heated by these fantasies, delirious answers are made to inquiries, and extravagant actions performed. Thus, Johnson persists in giving Johnson as his baptismal name, and substituting for his ancestral designation the national 'Dam!' Neither can he by any means be brought to recognise the distinction between a portmanteau-key and a passport, but will obstinately persevere in tendering the one when asked for the other. This brings him to the fourth place, in a state of mere idiotcy; and when he is, in the fourth place, cast out at a little door into a howling wilderness of touters, he becomes a lunatic with wild eyes and floating hair until rescued and soothed. If friendless and unrescued, he is generally put into a railway omnibus and taken to Paris.

But, our French watering-place, when it is once got into, is a very enjoyable place. It has a varied and beautiful country around it, and many characteristic and agreeable things within it. To be sure, it might have fewer bad smells and less decaying refuse, and it might be better drained, and much cleaner in many parts, and therefore infinitely more healthy. Still, it is a bright, airy, pleasant, cheerful town; and if you were to walk down either of its three well-paved main streets, towards five o'clock in the afternoon, when delicate odours of cookery fill the air, and its hotel windows (it is full of hotels) give glimpses of long tables set out for dinner, and made to look sumptuous by the aid of napkins folded fan-wise, you would rightly judge it to be an uncommonly good town to eat and drink in.

We have an old walled town, rich in cool public wells of water, on the top of a hill within and above the present business-town; and if it were some hundreds of miles further from England, instead of being, on a clear day, within sight of the grass growing in the crevices of the chalk-cliffs of Dover, you would long ago have been bored to death about that town. It is more picturesque and quaint than half the innocent places which tourists, following their leader like sheep, have made impostors of. To say nothing of its houses with grave courtyards, its queer by-corners, and its many-windowed streets white and quiet in the sunlight, there is an ancient belfry in it that would have been in all the Annuals and Albums, going and gone, these hundred years if it had but been more expensive to get at. Happily it has escaped so well, being only in our French watering-place, that you may like it of your own accord in a natural manner, without being required to go into convulsions about it. We regard it as one of the later blessings of our life, that BILKINS, the only authority on Taste, never took any notice that we can find out, of our French watering-place. Bilkins never wrote about it, never pointed out anything to be seen in it, never measured anything in it, always left it alone. For which relief, Heaven bless the town and the memory of the immortal Bilkins likewise!

There is a charming walk, arched and shaded by trees, on the old walls that form the four sides of this High Town, whence you get glimpses of the streets below, and changing views of the other town and of the river, and of the hills and of the sea. It is made more agreeable and peculiar by some of the solemn houses that are rooted in the deep streets below, bursting into a fresher existence a-top, and having doors and windows, and even gardens, on these ramparts. A child going in at the courtyard gate of one of these houses, climbing up the many stairs, and coming out at the fourth-floor window, might conceive himself another Jack, alighting on enchanted ground from another bean-stalk. It is a place wonderfully populous in children; English children, with governesses reading novels as they walk down the shady lanes of trees, or nursemaids interchanging gossip on the seats; French children with their smiling bonnes in snow-white caps, and themselves - if little boys - in straw head-gear like bee-hives, work-baskets and church hassocks. Three years ago, there were three weazen old men, one bearing a frayed red ribbon in his threadbare button-hole, always to be found walking together among these children, before dinner- time. If they walked for an appetite, they doubtless lived en pension - were contracted for - otherwise their poverty would have made it a rash action. They were stooping, blear-eyed, dull old men, slip-shod and shabby, in long-skirted short-waisted coats and meagre trousers, and yet with a ghost of gentility hovering in their company. They spoke little to each other, and looked as if they might have been politically discontented if they had had vitality enough. Once, we overheard red-ribbon feebly complain to the other two that somebody, or something, was 'a Robber;' and then they all three set their mouths so that they would have ground their teeth if they had had any. The ensuing winter gathered red- ribbon unto the great company of faded ribbons, and next year the remaining two were there - getting themselves entangled with hoops and dolls - familiar mysteries to the children - probably in the eyes of most of them, harmless creatures who had never been like children, and whom children could never be like. Another winter came, and another old man went, and so, this present year, the last of the triumvirate, left off walking - it was no good, now - and sat by himself on a little solitary bench, with the hoops and the dolls as lively as ever all about him.

In the Place d'Armes of this town, a little decayed market is held, which seems to slip through the old gateway, like water, and go rippling down the hill, to mingle with the murmuring market in the lower town, and get lost in its movement and bustle. It is very agreeable on an idle summer morning to pursue this market-stream from the hill-top. It begins, dozingly and dully, with a few sacks of corn; starts into a surprising collection of boots and shoes; goes brawling down the hill in a diversified channel of old cordage, old iron, old crockery, old clothes, civil and military, old rags, new cotton goods, flaming prints of saints, little looking-glasses, and incalculable lengths of tape; dives into a backway, keeping out of sight for a little while, as streams will, or only sparkling for a moment in the shape of a market drinking- shop; and suddenly reappears behind the great church, shooting itself into a bright confusion of white-capped women and blue- bloused men, poultry, vegetables, fruits, flowers, pots, pans, praying-chairs, soldiers, country butter, umbrellas and other sun- shades, girl-porters waiting to be hired with baskets at their backs, and one weazen little old man in a cocked hat, wearing a cuirass of drinking-glasses and carrying on his shoulder a crimson temple fluttering with flags, like a glorified pavior's rammer without the handle, who rings a little bell in all parts of the scene, and cries his cooling drink Hola, Hola, Ho-o-o! in a shrill cracked voice that somehow makes itself heard, above all the chaffering and vending hum. Early in the afternoon, the whole course of the stream is dry. The praying-chairs are put back in the church, the umbrellas are folded up, the unsold goods are carried away, the stalls and stands disappear, the square is swept, the hackney coaches lounge there to be hired, and on all the country roads (if you walk about, as much as we do) you will see the peasant women, always neatly and comfortably dressed, riding home, with the pleasantest saddle-furniture of clean milk-pails, bright butter-kegs, and the like, on the jolliest little donkeys in the world.

We have another market in our French watering-place - that is to say, a few wooden hutches in the open street, down by the Port - devoted to fish. Our fishing-boats are famous everywhere; and our fishing people, though they love lively colours, and taste is neutral (see Bilkins), are among the most picturesque people we ever encountered. They have not only a quarter of their own in the town itself, but they occupy whole villages of their own on the neighbouring cliffs. Their churches and chapels are their own; they consort with one another, they intermarry among themselves, their customs are their own, and their costume is their own and never changes. As soon as one of their boys can walk, he is provided with a long bright red nightcap; and one of their men would as soon think of going afloat without his head, as without that indispensable appendage to it. Then, they wear the noblest boots, with the hugest tops - flapping and bulging over anyhow; above which, they encase themselves in such wonderful overalls and petticoat trousers, made to all appearance of tarry old sails, so additionally stiffened with pitch and salt, that the wearers have a walk of their own, and go straddling and swinging about among the boats and barrels and nets and rigging, a sight to see. Then, their younger women, by dint of going down to the sea barefoot, to fling their baskets into the boats as they come in with the tide, and bespeak the first fruits of the haul with propitiatory promises to love and marry that dear fisherman who shall fill that basket like an Angel, have the finest legs ever carved by Nature in the brightest mahogany, and they walk like Juno. Their eyes, too, are so lustrous that their long gold ear-rings turn dull beside those brilliant neighbours; and when they are dressed, what with these beauties, and their fine fresh faces, and their many petticoats - striped petticoats, red petticoats, blue petticoats, always clean and smart, and never too long - and their home-made stockings, mulberry-coloured, blue, brown, purple, lilac - which the older women, taking care of the Dutch-looking children, sit in all sorts of places knitting, knitting, knitting from morning to night - and what with their little saucy bright blue jackets, knitted too, and fitting close to their handsome figures; and what with the natural grace with which they wear the commonest cap, or fold the commonest handkerchief round their luxuriant hair - we say, in a word and out of breath, that taking all these premises into our consideration, it has never been a matter of the least surprise to us that we have never once met, in the cornfields, on the dusty roads, by the breezy windmills, on the plots of short sweet grass overhanging the sea - anywhere - a young fisherman and fisherwoman of our French watering-place together, but the arm of that fisherman has invariably been, as a matter of course and without any absurd attempt to disguise so plain a necessity, round the neck or waist of that fisherwoman. And we have had no doubt whatever, standing looking at their uphill streets, house rising above house, and terrace above terrace, and bright garments here and there lying sunning on rough stone parapets, that the pleasant mist on all such objects, caused by their being seen through the brown nets hung across on poles to dry, is, in the eyes of every true young fisherman, a mist of love and beauty, setting off the goddess of his heart.

Moreover it is to be observed that these are an industrious people, and a domestic people, and an honest people. And though we are aware that at the bidding of Bilkins it is our duty to fall down and worship the Neapolitans, we make bold very much to prefer the fishing people of our French watering-place - especially since our last visit to Naples within these twelvemonths, when we found only four conditions of men remaining in the whole city: to wit, lazzaroni, priests, spies, and soldiers, and all of them beggars; the paternal government having banished all its subjects except the rascals.

But we can never henceforth separate our French watering-place from our own landlord of two summers, M. Loyal Devasseur, citizen and town-councillor. Permit us to have the pleasure of presenting M. Loyal Devasseur.

His own family name is simply Loyal; but, as he is married, and as in that part of France a husband always adds to his own name the family name of his wife, he writes himself Loyal Devasseur. He owns a compact little estate of some twenty or thirty acres on a lofty hill-side, and on it he has built two country houses, which he lets furnished. They are by many degrees the best houses that are so let near our French watering-place; we have had the honour of living in both, and can testify. The entrance-hall of the first we inhabited was ornamented with a plan of the estate, representing it as about twice the size of Ireland; insomuch that when we were yet new to the property (M. Loyal always speaks of it as 'La propriete') we went three miles straight on end in search of the bridge of Austerlitz - which we afterwards found to be immediately outside the window. The Chateau of the Old Guard, in another part of the grounds, and, according to the plan, about two leagues from the little dining-room, we sought in vain for a week, until, happening one evening to sit upon a bench in the forest (forest in the plan), a few yards from the house-door, we observed at our feet, in the ignominious circumstances of being upside down and greenly rotten, the Old Guard himself: that is to say, the painted effigy of a member of that distinguished corps, seven feet high, and in the act of carrying arms, who had had the misfortune to be blown down in the previous winter. It will be perceived that M. Loyal is a staunch admirer of the great Napoleon. He is an old soldier himself - captain of the National Guard, with a handsome gold vase on his chimney-piece presented to him by his company - and his respect for the memory of the illustrious general is enthusiastic. Medallions of him, portraits of him, busts of him, pictures of him, are thickly sprinkled all over the property. During the first month of our occupation, it was our affliction to be constantly knocking down Napoleon: if we touched a shelf in a dark corner, he toppled over with a crash; and every door we opened, shook him to the soul. Yet M. Loyal is not a man of mere castles in the air, or, as he would say, in Spain. He has a specially practical, contriving, clever, skilful eye and hand. His houses are delightful. He unites French elegance and English comfort, in a happy manner quite his own. He has an extraordinary genius for making tasteful little bedrooms in angles of his roofs, which an Englishman would as soon think of turning to any account as he would think of cultivating the Desert. We have ourself reposed deliciously in an elegant chamber of M. Loyal's construction, with our head as nearly in the kitchen chimney-pot as we can conceive it likely for the head of any gentleman, not by profession a Sweep, to be. And, into whatsoever strange nook M. Loyal's genius penetrates, it, in that nook, infallibly constructs a cupboard and a row of pegs. In either of our houses, we could have put away the knapsacks and hung up the hats of the whole regiment of Guides.

Aforetime, M. Loyal was a tradesman in the town. You can transact business with no present tradesman in the town, and give your card 'chez M. Loyal,' but a brighter face shines upon you directly. We doubt if there is, ever was, or ever will be, a man so universally pleasant in the minds of people as M. Loyal is in the minds of the citizens of our French watering-place. They rub their hands and laugh when they speak of him. Ah, but he is such a good child, such a brave boy, such a generous spirit, that Monsieur Loyal! It is the honest truth. M. Loyal's nature is the nature of a gentleman. He cultivates his ground with his own hands (assisted by one little labourer, who falls into a fit now and then); and he digs and delves from morn to eve in prodigious perspirations - 'works always,' as he says - but, cover him with dust, mud, weeds, water, any stains you will, you never can cover the gentleman in M. Loyal. A portly, upright, broad-shouldered, brown-faced man, whose soldierly bearing gives him the appearance of being taller than he is, look into the bright eye of M. Loyal, standing before you in his working-blouse and cap, not particularly well shaved, and, it may be, very earthy, and you shall discern in M. Loyal a gentleman whose true politeness is ingrain, and confirmation of whose word by his bond you would blush to think of. Not without reason is M. Loyal when he tells that story, in his own vivacious way, of his travelling to Fulham, near London, to buy all these hundreds and hundreds of trees you now see upon the Property, then a bare, bleak hill; and of his sojourning in Fulham three months; and of his jovial evenings with the market-gardeners; and of the crowning banquet before his departure, when the market-gardeners rose as one man, clinked their glasses all together (as the custom at Fulham is), and cried, 'Vive Loyal!'

M. Loyal has an agreeable wife, but no family; and he loves to drill the children of his tenants, or run races with them, or do anything with them, or for them, that is good-natured. He is of a highly convivial temperament, and his hospitality is unbounded. Billet a soldier on him, and he is delighted. Five-and-thirty soldiers had M. Loyal billeted on him this present summer, and they all got fat and red-faced in two days. It became a legend among the troops that whosoever got billeted on M. Loyal rolled in clover; and so it fell out that the fortunate man who drew the billet 'M. Loyal Devasseur' always leaped into the air, though in heavy marching order. M. Loyal cannot bear to admit anything that might seem by any implication to disparage the military profession. We hinted to him once, that we were conscious of a remote doubt arising in our mind, whether a sou a day for pocket-money, tobacco, stockings, drink, washing, and social pleasures in general, left a very large margin for a soldier's enjoyment. Pardon! said Monsieur Loyal, rather wincing. It was not a fortune, but - a la bonne heure - it was better than it used to be! What, we asked him on another occasion, were all those neighbouring peasants, each living with his family in one room, and each having a soldier (perhaps two) billeted on him every other night, required to provide for those soldiers? 'Faith!' said M. Loyal, reluctantly; a bed, monsieur, and fire to cook with, and a candle. And they share their supper with those soldiers. It is not possible that they could eat alone.' - 'And what allowance do they get for this?' said we. Monsieur Loyal drew himself up taller, took a step back, laid his hand upon his breast, and said, with majesty, as speaking for himself and all France, 'Monsieur, it is a contribution to the State!'

It is never going to rain, according to M. Loyal. When it is impossible to deny that it is now raining in torrents, he says it will be fine - charming - magnificent - to-morrow. It is never hot on the Property, he contends. Likewise it is never cold. The flowers, he says, come out, delighting to grow there; it is like Paradise this morning; it is like the Garden of Eden. He is a little fanciful in his language: smilingly observing of Madame Loyal, when she is absent at vespers, that she is 'gone to her salvation' - allee a son salut. He has a great enjoyment of tobacco, but nothing would induce him to continue smoking face to face with a lady. His short black pipe immediately goes into his breast pocket, scorches his blouse, and nearly sets him on fire. In the Town Council and on occasions of ceremony, he appears in a full suit of black, with a waistcoat of magnificent breadth across the chest, and a shirt-collar of fabulous proportions. Good M. Loyal! Under blouse or waistcoat, he carries one of the gentlest hearts that beat in a nation teeming with gentle people. He has had losses, and has been at his best under them. Not only the loss of his way by night in the Fulham times - when a bad subject of an Englishman, under pretence of seeing him home, took him into all the night public-houses, drank 'arfanarf' in every one at his expense, and finally fled, leaving him shipwrecked at Cleefeeway, which we apprehend to be Ratcliffe Highway - but heavier losses than that. Long ago a family of children and a mother were left in one of his houses without money, a whole year. M. Loyal - anything but as rich as we wish he had been - had not the heart to say 'you must go;' so they stayed on and stayed on, and paying-tenants who would have come in couldn't come in, and at last they managed to get helped home across the water; and M. Loyal kissed the whole group, and said, 'Adieu, my poor infants!' and sat down in their deserted salon and smoked his pipe of peace. - 'The rent, M. Loyal?' 'Eh! well! The rent!' M. Loyal shakes his head. 'Le bon Dieu,' says M. Loyal presently, 'will recompense me,' and he laughs and smokes his pipe of peace. May he smoke it on the Property, and not be recompensed, these fifty years!

There are public amusements in our French watering-place, or it would not be French. They are very popular, and very cheap. The sea-bathing - which may rank as the most favoured daylight entertainment, inasmuch as the French visitors bathe all day long, and seldom appear to think of remaining less than an hour at a time in the water - is astoundingly cheap. Omnibuses convey you, if you please, from a convenient part of the town to the beach and back again; you have a clean and comfortable bathing-machine, dress, linen, and all appliances; and the charge for the whole is half-a- franc, or fivepence. On the pier, there is usually a guitar, which seems presumptuously enough to set its tinkling against the deep hoarseness of the sea, and there is always some boy or woman who sings, without any voice, little songs without any tune: the strain we have most frequently heard being an appeal to 'the sportsman' not to bag that choicest of game, the swallow. For bathing purposes, we have also a subscription establishment with an esplanade, where people lounge about with telescopes, and seem to get a good deal of weariness for their money; and we have also an association of individual machine proprietors combined against this formidable rival. M. Feroce, our own particular friend in the bathing line, is one of these. How he ever came by his name we cannot imagine. He is as gentle and polite a man as M. Loyal Devasseur himself; immensely stout withal; and of a beaming aspect. M. Feroce has saved so many people from drowning, and has been decorated with so many medals in consequence, that his stoutness seems a special dispensation of Providence to enable him to wear them; if his girth were the girth of an ordinary man, he could never hang them on, all at once. It is only on very great occasions that M. Feroce displays his shining honours. At other times they lie by, with rolls of manuscript testifying to the causes of their presentation, in a huge glass case in the red- sofa'd salon of his private residence on the beach, where M. Feroce also keeps his family pictures, his portraits of himself as he appears both in bathing life and in private life, his little boats that rock by clockwork, and his other ornamental possessions.

Then, we have a commodious and gay Theatre - or had, for it is burned down now - where the opera was always preceded by a vaudeville, in which (as usual) everybody, down to the little old man with the large hat and the little cane and tassel, who always played either my Uncle or my Papa, suddenly broke out of the dialogue into the mildest vocal snatches, to the great perplexity of unaccustomed strangers from Great Britain, who never could make out when they were singing and when they were talking - and indeed it was pretty much the same. But, the caterers in the way of entertainment to whom we are most beholden, are the Society of Welldoing, who are active all the summer, and give the proceeds of their good works to the poor. Some of the most agreeable fetes they contrive, are announced as 'Dedicated to the children;' and the taste with which they turn a small public enclosure into an elegant garden beautifully illuminated; and the thorough-going heartiness and energy with which they personally direct the childish pleasures; are supremely delightful. For fivepence a head, we have on these occasions donkey races with English 'Jokeis,' and other rustic sports; lotteries for toys; roundabouts, dancing on the grass to the music of an admirable band, fire- balloons and fireworks. Further, almost every week all through the summer - never mind, now, on what day of the week - there is a fete in some adjoining village (called in that part of the country a Ducasse), where the people - really THE PEOPLE - dance on the green turf in the open air, round a little orchestra, that seems itself to dance, there is such an airy motion of flags and streamers all about it. And we do not suppose that between the Torrid Zone and the North Pole there are to be found male dancers with such astonishingly loose legs, furnished with so many joints in wrong places, utterly unknown to Professor Owen, as those who here disport themselves. Sometimes, the fete appertains to a particular trade; you will see among the cheerful young women at the joint Ducasse of the milliners and tailors, a wholesome knowledge of the art of making common and cheap things uncommon and pretty, by good sense and good taste, that is a practical lesson to any rank of society in a whole island we could mention. The oddest feature of these agreeable scenes is the everlasting Roundabout (we preserve an English word wherever we can, as we are writing the English language), on the wooden horses of which machine grown-up people of all ages are wound round and round with the utmost solemnity, while the proprietor's wife grinds an organ, capable of only one tune, in the centre.

As to the boarding-houses of our French watering-place, they are Legion, and would require a distinct treatise. It is not without a sentiment of national pride that we believe them to contain more bores from the shores of Albion than all the clubs in London. As you walk timidly in their neighbourhood, the very neckcloths and hats of your elderly compatriots cry to you from the stones of the streets, 'We are Bores - avoid us!' We have never overheard at street corners such lunatic scraps of political and social discussion as among these dear countrymen of ours. They believe everything that is impossible and nothing that is true. They carry rumours, and ask questions, and make corrections and improvements on one another, staggering to the human intellect. And they are for ever rushing into the English library, propounding such incomprehensible paradoxes to the fair mistress of that establishment, that we beg to recommend her to her Majesty's gracious consideration as a fit object for a pension.

The English form a considerable part of the population of our French watering-place, and are deservedly addressed and respected in many ways. Some of the surface-addresses to them are odd enough, as when a laundress puts a placard outside her house announcing her possession of that curious British instrument, a 'Mingle;' or when a tavern-keeper provides accommodation for the celebrated English game of 'Nokemdon.' But, to us, it is not the least pleasant feature of our French watering-place that a long and constant fusion of the two great nations there, has taught each to like the other, and to learn from the other, and to rise superior to the absurd prejudices that have lingered among the weak and ignorant in both countries equally.

Drumming and trumpeting of course go on for ever in our French watering-place. Flag-flying is at a premium, too; but, we cheerfully avow that we consider a flag a very pretty object, and that we take such outward signs of innocent liveliness to our heart of hearts. The people, in the town and in the country, are a busy people who work hard; they are sober, temperate, good-humoured, light-hearted, and generally remarkable for their engaging manners. Few just men, not immoderately bilious, could see them in their recreations without very much respecting the character that is so easily, so harmlessly, and so simply, pleased.

BILL-STICKING

IF I had an enemy whom I hated - which Heaven forbid! - and if I knew of something which sat heavy on his conscience, I think I would introduce that something into a Posting-Bill, and place a large impression in the hands of an active sticker. I can scarcely imagine a more terrible revenge. I should haunt him, by this means, night and day. I do not mean to say that I would publish his secret, in red letters two feet high, for all the town to read: I would darkly refer to it. It should be between him, and me, and the Posting-Bill. Say, for example, that, at a certain period of his life, my enemy had surreptitiously possessed himself of a key. I would then embark my capital in the lock business, and conduct that business on the advertising principle. In all my placards and advertisements, I would throw up the line SECRET KEYS. Thus, if my enemy passed an uninhabited house, he would see his conscience glaring down on him from the parapets, and peeping up at him from the cellars. If he took a dead wall in his walk, it would be alive with reproaches. If he sought refuge in an omnibus, the panels thereof would become Belshazzar's palace to him. If he took boat, in a wild endeavour to escape, he would see the fatal words lurking under the arches of the bridges over the Thames. If he walked the streets with downcast eyes, he would recoil from the very stones of the pavement, made eloquent by lamp-black lithograph. If he drove or rode, his way would be blocked up by enormous vans, each proclaiming the same words over and over again from its whole extent of surface. Until, having gradually grown thinner and paler, and having at last totally rejected food, he would miserably perish, and I should be revenged. This conclusion I should, no doubt, celebrate by laughing a hoarse laugh in three syllables, and folding my arms tight upon my chest agreeably to most of the examples of glutted animosity that I have had an opportunity of observing in connexion with the Drama - which, by-the-by, as involving a good deal of noise, appears to me to be occasionally confounded with the Drummer.

The foregoing reflections presented themselves to my mind, the other day, as I contemplated (being newly come to London from the East Riding of Yorkshire, on a house-hunting expedition for next May), an old warehouse which rotting paste and rotting paper had brought down to the condition of an old cheese. It would have been impossible to say, on the most conscientious survey, how much of its front was brick and mortar, and how much decaying and decayed plaster. It was so thickly encrusted with fragments of bills, that no ship's keel after a long voyage could be half so foul. All traces of the broken windows were billed out, the doors were billed across, the water-spout was billed over. The building was shored up to prevent its tumbling into the street; and the very beams erected against it were less wood than paste and paper, they had been so continually posted and reposted. The forlorn dregs of old posters so encumbered this wreck, that there was no hold for new posters, and the stickers had abandoned the place in despair, except one enterprising man who had hoisted the last masquerade to a clear spot near the level of the stack of chimneys where it waved and drooped like a shattered flag. Below the rusty cellar-grating, crumpled remnants of old bills torn down, rotted away in wasting heaps of fallen leaves. Here and there, some of the thick rind of the house had peeled off in strips, and fluttered heavily down, littering the street; but, still, below these rents and gashes, layers of decomposing posters showed themselves, as if they were interminable. I thought the building could never even be pulled down, but in one adhesive heap of rottenness and poster. As to getting in - I don't believe that if the Sleeping Beauty and her Court had been so billed up, the young Prince could have done it.

Knowing all the posters that were yet legible, intimately, and pondering on their ubiquitous nature, I was led into the reflections with which I began this paper, by considering what an awful thing it would be, ever to have wronged - say M. JULLIEN for example - and to have his avenging name in characters of fire incessantly before my eyes. Or to have injured MADAME TUSSAUD, and undergo a similar retribution. Has any man a self-reproachful thought associated with pills, or ointment? What an avenging spirit to that man is PROFESSOR HOLLOWAY! Have I sinned in oil? CABBURN pursues me. Have I a dark remembrance associated with any gentlemanly garments, bespoke or ready made? MOSES and SON are on my track. Did I ever aim a blow at a defenceless fellow-creature's head? That head eternally being measured for a wig, or that worse head which was bald before it used the balsam, and hirsute afterwards - enforcing the benevolent moral, 'Better to be bald as a Dutch cheese than come to this,' - undoes me. Have I no sore places in my mind which MECHI touches - which NICOLL probes - which no registered article whatever lacerates? Does no discordant note within me thrill responsive to mysterious watchwords, as 'Revalenta Arabica,' or 'Number One St. Paul's Churchyard'? Then may I enjoy life, and be happy.

Lifting up my eyes, as I was musing to this effect, I beheld advancing towards me (I was then on Cornhill, near to the Royal Exchange), a solemn procession of three advertising vans, of first- class dimensions, each drawn by a very little horse. As the cavalcade approached, I was at a loss to reconcile the careless deportment of the drivers of these vehicles, with the terrific announcements they conducted through the city, which being a summary of the contents of a Sunday newspaper, were of the most thrilling kind. Robbery, fire, murder, and the ruin of the United Kingdom - each discharged in a line by itself, like a separate broad-side of red-hot shot - were among the least of the warnings addressed to an unthinking people. Yet, the Ministers of Fate who drove the awful cars, leaned forward with their arms upon their knees in a state of extreme lassitude, for want of any subject of interest. The first man, whose hair I might naturally have expected to see standing on end, scratched his head - one of the smoothest I ever beheld - with profound indifference. The second whistled. The third yawned.

Pausing to dwell upon this apathy, it appeared to me, as the fatal cars came by me, that I descried in the second car, through the portal in which the charioteer was seated, a figure stretched upon the floor. At the same time, I thought I smelt tobacco. The latter impression passed quickly from me; the former remained. Curious to know whether this prostrate figure was the one impressible man of the whole capital who had been stricken insensible by the terrors revealed to him, and whose form had been placed in the car by the charioteer, from motives of humanity, I followed the procession. It turned into Leadenhall-market, and halted at a public-house. Each driver dismounted. I then distinctly heard, proceeding from the second car, where I had dimly seen the prostrate form, the words:

'And a pipe!'

The driver entering the public-house with his fellows, apparently for purposes of refreshment, I could not refrain from mounting on the shaft of the second vehicle, and looking in at the portal. I then beheld, reclining on his back upon the floor, on a kind of mattress or divan, a little man in a shooting-coat. The exclamation 'Dear me' which irresistibly escaped my lips caused him to sit upright, and survey me. I found him to be a good-looking little man of about fifty, with a shining face, a tight head, a bright eye, a moist wink, a quick speech, and a ready air. He had something of a sporting way with him.

He looked at me, and I looked at him, until the driver displaced me by handing in a pint of beer, a pipe, and what I understand is called 'a screw' of tobacco - an object which has the appearance of a curl-paper taken off the barmaid's head, with the curl in it.

'I beg your pardon,' said I, when the removed person of the driver again admitted of my presenting my face at the portal. 'But - excuse my curiosity, which I inherit from my mother - do you live here?'

'That's good, too!' returned the little man, composedly laying aside a pipe he had smoked out, and filling the pipe just brought to him.

'Oh, you DON'T live here then?' said I.

He shook his head, as he calmly lighted his pipe by means of a German tinder-box, and replied, 'This is my carriage. When things are flat, I take a ride sometimes, and enjoy myself. I am the inventor of these wans.'

His pipe was now alight. He drank his beer all at once, and he smoked and he smiled at me.

'It was a great idea!' said I.

'Not so bad,' returned the little man, with the modesty of merit.

'Might I be permitted to inscribe your name upon the tablets of my memory?' I asked.

'There's not much odds in the name,' returned the little man, ' - no name particular - I am the King of the Bill-Stickers.'

'Good gracious!' said I.

The monarch informed me, with a smile, that he had never been crowned or installed with any public ceremonies, but that he was peaceably acknowledged as King of the Bill-Stickers in right of being the oldest and most respected member of 'the old school of bill-sticking.' He likewise gave me to understand that there was a Lord Mayor of the Bill-Stickers, whose genius was chiefly exercised within the limits of the city. He made some allusion, also, to an inferior potentate, called 'Turkey-legs;' but I did not understand that this gentleman was invested with much power. I rather inferred that he derived his title from some peculiarity of gait, and that it was of an honorary character.

'My father,' pursued the King of the Bill-Stickers, 'was Engineer, Beadle, and Bill-Sticker to the parish of St. Andrew's, Holborn, in the year one thousand seven hundred and eighty. My father stuck bills at the time of the riots of London.'

'You must be acquainted with the whole subject of bill-sticking, from that time to the present!' said I.

'Pretty well so,' was the answer.

'Excuse me,' said I; 'but I am a sort of collector - '

''Not Income-tax?' cried His Majesty, hastily removing his pipe from his lips.

'No, no,' said I.

'Water-rate?' said His Majesty.

'No, no,' I returned.

'Gas? Assessed? Sewers?' said His Majesty.

'You misunderstand me,' I replied, soothingly. 'Not that sort of collector at all: a collector of facts.'

'Oh, if it's only facts,' cried the King of the Bill-Stickers, recovering his good-humour, and banishing the great mistrust that had suddenly fallen upon him, 'come in and welcome! If it had been income, or winders, I think I should have pitched you out of the wan, upon my soul!'

Readily complying with the invitation, I squeezed myself in at the small aperture. His Majesty, graciously handing me a little three- legged stool on which I took my seat in a corner, inquired if I smoked.

'I do; - that is, I can,' I answered.

'Pipe and a screw!' said His Majesty to the attendant charioteer.

'Do you prefer a dry smoke, or do you moisten it?'

As unmitigated tobacco produces most disturbing effects upon my system (indeed, if I had perfect moral courage, I doubt if I should smoke at all, under any circumstances), I advocated moisture, and begged the Sovereign of the Bill-Stickers to name his usual liquor, and to concede to me the privilege of paying for it. After some delicate reluctance on his part, we were provided, through the instrumentality of the attendant charioteer, with a can of cold rum-and-water, flavoured with sugar and lemon. We were also furnished with a tumbler, and I was provided with a pipe. His Majesty, then observing that we might combine business with conversation, gave the word for the car to proceed; and, to my great delight, we jogged away at a foot pace.

I say to my great delight, because I am very fond of novelty, and it was a new sensation to be jolting through the tumult of the city in that secluded Temple, partly open to the sky, surrounded by the roar without, and seeing nothing but the clouds. Occasionally, blows from whips fell heavily on the Temple's walls, when by stopping up the road longer than usual, we irritated carters and coachmen to madness; but they fell harmless upon us within and disturbed not the serenity of our peaceful retreat. As I looked upward, I felt, I should imagine, like the Astronomer Royal. I was enchanted by the contrast between the freezing nature of our external mission on the blood of the populace, and the perfect composure reigning within those sacred precincts: where His Majesty, reclining easily on his left arm, smoked his pipe and drank his rum-and-water from his own side of the tumbler, which stood impartially between us. As I looked down from the clouds and caught his royal eye, he understood my reflections. 'I have an idea,' he observed, with an upward glance, 'of training scarlet runners across in the season, - making a arbour of it, - and sometimes taking tea in the same, according to the song.'

I nodded approval.

'And here you repose and think?' said I.

'And think,' said he, 'of posters - walls - and hoardings.'

We were both silent, contemplating the vastness of the subject. I remembered a surprising fancy of dear THOMAS HOOD'S, and wondered whether this monarch ever sighed to repair to the great wall of China, and stick bills all over it.

'And so,' said he, rousing himself, 'it's facts as you collect?'

'Facts,' said I.

'The facts of bill-sticking,' pursued His Majesty, in a benignant manner, 'as known to myself, air as following. When my father was Engineer, Beadle, and Bill-Sticker to the parish of St. Andrew's, Holborn, he employed women to post bills for him. He employed women to post bills at the time of the riots of London. He died at the age of seventy-five year, and was buried by the murdered Eliza Grimwood, over in the Waterloo Road.'

As this was somewhat in the nature of a royal speech, I listened with deference and silently. His Majesty, taking a scroll from his pocket, proceeded, with great distinctness, to pour out the following flood of information:-

'"The bills being at that period mostly proclamations and declarations, and which were only a demy size, the manner of posting the bills (as they did not use brushes) was by means of a piece of wood which they called a 'dabber.' Thus things continued till such time as the State Lottery was passed, and then the printers began to print larger bills, and men were employed instead of women, as the State Lottery Commissioners then began to send men all over England to post bills, and would keep them out for six or eight months at a time, and they were called by the London bill-stickers 'TRAMPERS,' their wages at the time being ten shillings per day, besides expenses. They used sometimes to be stationed in large towns for five or six months together, distributing the schemes to all the houses in the town. And then there were more caricature wood-block engravings for posting-bills than there are at the present time, the principal printers, at that time, of posting-bills being Messrs. Evans and Ruffy, of Budge Row; Thoroughgood and Whiting, of the present day; and Messrs. Gye and Balne, Gracechurch Street, City. The largest bills printed at that period were a two-sheet double crown; and when they commenced printing four-sheet bills, two bill-stickers would work together. They had no settled wages per week, but had a fixed price for their work, and the London bill-stickers, during a lottery week, have been known to earn, each, eight or nine pounds per week, till the day of drawing; likewise the men who carried boards in the street used to have one pound per week, and the bill-stickers at that time would not allow any one to wilfully cover or destroy their bills, as they had a society amongst themselves, and very frequently dined together at some public-house where they used to go of an evening to have their work delivered out untoe 'em."'

All this His Majesty delivered in a gallant manner; posting it, as it were, before me, in a great proclamation. I took advantage of the pause he now made, to inquire what a 'two-sheet double crown' might express?

'A two-sheet double crown,' replied the King, 'is a bill thirty- nine inches wide by thirty inches high.'

'Is it possible,' said I, my mind reverting to the gigantic admonitions we were then displaying to the multitude - which were as infants to some of the posting-bills on the rotten old warehouse - 'that some few years ago the largest bill was no larger than that?'

'The fact,' returned the King, 'is undoubtedly so.' Here he instantly rushed again into the scroll.

'"Since the abolishing of the State Lottery all that good feeling has gone, and nothing but jealousy exists, through the rivalry of each other. Several bill-sticking companies have started, but have failed. The first party that started a company was twelve year ago; but what was left of the old school and their dependants joined together and opposed them. And for some time we were quiet again, till a printer of Hatton Garden formed a company by hiring the sides of houses; but he was not supported by the public, and he left his wooden frames fixed up for rent. The last company that started, took advantage of the New Police Act, and hired of Messrs. Grissell and Peto the hoarding of Trafalgar Square, and established a bill-sticking office in Cursitor Street, Chancery Lane, and engaged some of the new bill-stickers to do their work, and for a time got the half of all our work, and with such spirit did they carry on their opposition towards us, that they used to give us in charge before the magistrate, and get us fined; but they found it so expensive, that they could not keep it up, for they were always employing a lot of ruffians from the Seven Dials to come and fight us; and on one occasion the old bill-stickers went to Trafalgar Square to attempt to post bills, when they were given in custody by the watchman in their employ, and fined at Queen Square five pounds, as they would not allow any of us to speak in the office; but when they were gone, we had an interview with the magistrate, who mitigated the fine to fifteen shillings. During the time the men were waiting for the fine, this company started off to a public-house that we were in the habit of using, and waited for us coming back, where a fighting scene took place that beggars description. Shortly after this, the principal one day came and shook hands with us, and acknowledged that he had broken up the company, and that he himself had lost five hundred pound in trying to overthrow us. We then took possession of the hoarding in Trafalgar Square; but Messrs. Grissell and Peto would not allow us to post our bills on the said hoarding without paying them - and from first to last we paid upwards of two hundred pounds for that hoarding, and likewise the hoarding of the Reform Club-house, Pall Mall."'

His Majesty, being now completely out of breath, laid down his scroll (which he appeared to have finished), puffed at his pipe, and took some rum-and-water. I embraced the opportunity of asking how many divisions the art and mystery of bill-sticking comprised? He replied, three - auctioneers' bill-sticking, theatrical bill- sticking, general bill-sticking.

'The auctioneers' porters,' said the King, 'who do their bill- sticking, are mostly respectable and intelligent, and generally well paid for their work, whether in town or country. The price paid by the principal auctioneers for country work is nine shillings per day; that is, seven shillings for day's work, one shilling for lodging, and one for paste. Town work is five shillings a day, including paste.'

'Town work must be rather hot work,' said I, 'if there be many of those fighting scenes that beggar description, among the bill- stickers?'

'Well,' replied the King, 'I an't a stranger, I assure you, to black eyes; a bill-sticker ought to know how to handle his fists a bit. As to that row I have mentioned, that grew out of competition, conducted in an uncompromising spirit. Besides a man in a horse-and-shay continually following us about, the company had a watchman on duty, night and day, to prevent us sticking bills upon the hoarding in Trafalgar Square. We went there, early one morning, to stick bills and to black-wash their bills if we were interfered with. We WERE interfered with, and I gave the word for laying on the wash. It WAS laid on - pretty brisk - and we were all taken to Queen Square: but they couldn't fine ME. I knew that,' - with a bright smile - 'I'd only give directions - I was only the General.' Charmed with this monarch's affability, I inquired if he had ever hired a hoarding himself.

'Hired a large one,' he replied, 'opposite the Lyceum Theatre, when the buildings was there. Paid thirty pound for it; let out places on it, and called it "The External Paper-Hanging Station." But it didn't answer. Ah!' said His Majesty thoughtfully, as he filled the glass, 'Bill-stickers have a deal to contend with. The bill- sticking clause was got into the Police Act by a member of Parliament that employed me at his election. The clause is pretty stiff respecting where bills go; but HE didn't mind where HIS bills went. It was all right enough, so long as they was HIS bills!'

Fearful that I observed a shadow of misanthropy on the King's cheerful face, I asked whose ingenious invention that was, which I greatly admired, of sticking bills under the arches of the bridges.

'Mine!' said His Majesty. 'I was the first that ever stuck a bill under a bridge! Imitators soon rose up, of course. - When don't they? But they stuck 'em at low-water, and the tide came and swept the bills clean away. I knew that!' The King laughed.

'What may be the name of that instrument, like an immense fishing-rod,' I inquired, 'with which bills are posted on high places?'

'The joints,' returned His Majesty. 'Now, we use the joints where formerly we used ladders - as they do still in country places. Once, when Madame' (Vestris, understood) 'was playing in Liverpool, another bill-sticker and me were at it together on the wall outside the Clarence Dock - me with the joints - him on a ladder. Lord! I had my bill up, right over his head, yards above him, ladder and all, while he was crawling to his work. The people going in and out of the docks, stood and laughed! - It's about thirty years since the joints come in.'

'Are there any bill-stickers who can't read?' I took the liberty of inquiring.

'Some,' said the King. 'But they know which is the right side up'ards of their work. They keep it as it's given out to 'em. I have seen a bill or so stuck wrong side up'ards. But it's very rare.'

Our discourse sustained some interruption at this point, by the procession of cars occasioning a stoppage of about three-quarters of a mile in length, as nearly as I could judge. His Majesty, however, entreating me not to be discomposed by the contingent uproar, smoked with great placidity, and surveyed the firmament.

When we were again in motion, I begged to be informed what was the largest poster His Majesty had ever seen. The King replied, 'A thirty-six sheet poster.' I gathered, also, that there were about a hundred and fifty bill-stickers in London, and that His Majesty considered an average hand equal to the posting of one hundred bills (single sheets) in a day. The King was of opinion, that, although posters had much increased in size, they had not increased in number; as the abolition of the State Lotteries had occasioned a great falling off, especially in the country. Over and above which change, I bethought myself that the custom of advertising in newspapers had greatly increased. The completion of many London improvements, as Trafalgar Square (I particularly observed the singularity of His Majesty's calling THAT an improvement), the Royal Exchange, &c., had of late years reduced the number of advantageous posting-places. Bill-Stickers at present rather confine themselves to districts, than to particular descriptions of work. One man would strike over Whitechapel, another would take round

Houndsditch, Shoreditch, and the City Road; one (the King said) would stick to the Surrey side; another would make a beat of the West-end.

His Majesty remarked, with some approach to severity, on the neglect of delicacy and taste, gradually introduced into the trade by the new school: a profligate and inferior race of impostors who took jobs at almost any price, to the detriment of the old school, and the confusion of their own misguided employers. He considered that the trade was overdone with competition, and observed speaking of his subjects, 'There are too many of 'em.' He believed, still, that things were a little better than they had been; adducing, as a proof, the fact that particular posting places were now reserved, by common consent, for particular posters; those places, however, must be regularly occupied by those posters, or, they lapsed and fell into other hands. It was of no use giving a man a Drury Lane bill this week and not next. Where was it to go? He was of opinion that going to the expense of putting up your own board on which your sticker could display your own bills, was the only complete way of posting yourself at the present time; but, even to effect this, on payment of a shilling a week to the keepers of steamboat piers and other such places, you must be able, besides, to give orders for theatres and public exhibitions, or you would be sure to be cut out by somebody. His Majesty regarded the passion for orders, as one of the most unappeasable appetites of human nature. If there were a building, or if there were repairs, going on, anywhere, you could generally stand something and make it right with the foreman of the works; but, orders would be expected from you, and the man who could give the most orders was the man who would come off best. There was this other objectionable point, in orders, that workmen sold them for drink, and often sold them to persons who were likewise troubled with the weakness of thirst: which led (His Majesty said) to the presentation of your orders at Theatre doors, by individuals who were 'too shakery' to derive intellectual profit from the entertainments, and who brought a scandal on you. Finally, His Majesty said that you could hardly put too little in a poster; what you wanted, was, two or three good catch-lines for the eye to rest on - then, leave it alone - and there you were!

These are the minutes of my conversation with His Majesty, as I noted them down shortly afterwards. I am not aware that I have been betrayed into any alteration or suppression. The manner of the King was frank in the extreme; and he seemed to me to avoid, at once that slight tendency to repetition which may have been observed in the conversation of His Majesty King George the Third, and - that slight under-current of egotism which the curious observer may perhaps detect in the conversation of Napoleon Bonaparte.

I must do the King the justice to say that it was I, and not he, who closed the dialogue. At this juncture, I became the subject of a remarkable optical delusion; the legs of my stool appeared to me to double up; the car to spin round and round with great violence; and a mist to arise between myself and His Majesty. In addition to these sensations, I felt extremely unwell. I refer these unpleasant effects, either to the paste with which the posters were affixed to the van: which may have contained some small portion of arsenic; or, to the printer's ink, which may have contained some equally deleterious ingredient. Of this, I cannot be sure. I am only sure that I was not affected, either by the smoke, or the rum- and-water. I was assisted out of the vehicle, in a state of mind which I have only experienced in two other places - I allude to the Pier at Dover, and to the corresponding portion of the town of Calais - and sat upon a door-step until I recovered. The procession had then disappeared. I have since looked anxiously for the King in several other cars, but I have not yet had the happiness of seeing His Majesty.

'BIRTHS. MRS. MEEK, OF A SON

MY name is Meek. I am, in fact, Mr. Meek. That son is mine and Mrs. Meek's. When I saw the announcement in the Times, I dropped the paper. I had put it in, myself, and paid for it, but it looked so noble that it overpowered me.

As soon as I could compose my feelings, I took the paper up to Mrs. Meek's bedside. 'Maria Jane,' said I (I allude to Mrs. Meek), 'you are now a public character.' We read the review of our child, several times, with feelings of the strongest emotion; and I sent the boy who cleans the boots and shoes, to the office for fifteen copies. No reduction was made on taking that quantity.

It is scarcely necessary for me to say, that our child had been expected. In fact, it had been expected, with comparative confidence, for some months. Mrs. Meek's mother, who resides with us - of the name of Bigby - had made every preparation for its admission to our circle.

I hope and believe I am a quiet man. I will go farther. I KNOW I am a quiet man. My constitution is tremulous, my voice was never loud, and, in point of stature, I have been from infancy, small. I have the greatest respect for Maria Jane's Mama. She is a most remarkable woman. I honour Maria Jane's Mama. In my opinion she would storm a town, single-handed, with a hearth-broom, and carry it. I have never known her to yield any point whatever, to mortal man. She is calculated to terrify the stoutest heart.

Still - but I will not anticipate.

The first intimation I had, of any preparations being in progress, on the part of Maria Jane's Mama, was one afternoon, several months ago. I came home earlier than usual from the office, and, proceeding into the dining-room, found an obstruction behind the door, which prevented it from opening freely. It was an obstruction of a soft nature. On looking in, I found it to be a female.

The female in question stood in the corner behind the door, consuming Sherry Wine. From the nutty smell of that beverage pervading the apartment, I have no doubt she was consuming a second glassful. She wore a black bonnet of large dimensions, and was copious in figure. The expression of her countenance was severe and discontented. The words to which she gave utterance on seeing me, were these, 'Oh, git along with you, Sir, if YOU please; me and Mrs. Bigby don't want no male parties here!'

That female was Mrs. Prodgit.

I immediately withdrew, of course. I was rather hurt, but I made no remark. Whether it was that I showed a lowness of spirits after dinner, in consequence of feeling that I seemed to intrude, I cannot say. But, Maria Jane's Mama said to me on her retiring for the night: in a low distinct voice, and with a look of reproach that completely subdued me: 'George Meek, Mrs. Prodgit is your wife's nurse!'

I bear no ill-will towards Mrs. Prodgit. Is it likely that I, writing this with tears in my eyes, should be capable of deliberate animosity towards a female, so essential to the welfare of Maria Jane? I am willing to admit that Fate may have been to blame, and not Mrs. Prodgit; but, it is undeniably true, that the latter female brought desolation and devastation into my lowly dwelling.

We were happy after her first appearance; we were sometimes exceedingly so. But, whenever the parlour door was opened, and 'Mrs. Prodgit!' announced (and she was very often announced), misery ensued. I could not bear Mrs. Prodgit's look. I felt that I was far from wanted, and had no business to exist in Mrs. Prodgit's presence. Between Maria Jane's Mama, and Mrs. Prodgit, there was a dreadful, secret, understanding - a dark mystery and conspiracy, pointing me out as a being to be shunned. I appeared to have done something that was evil. Whenever Mrs. Prodgit called, after dinner, I retired to my dressing-room - where the temperature is very low indeed, in the wintry time of the year - and sat looking at my frosty breath as it rose before me, and at my rack of boots; a serviceable article of furniture, but never, in my opinion, an exhilarating object. The length of the councils that were held with Mrs. Prodgit, under these circumstances, I will not attempt to describe. I will merely remark, that Mrs. Prodgit always consumed Sherry Wine while the deliberations were in progress; that they always ended in Maria Jane's being in wretched spirits on the sofa; and that Maria Jane's Mama always received me, when I was recalled, with a look of desolate triumph that too plainly said, 'NOW, George Meek! You see my child, Maria Jane, a ruin, and I hope you are satisfied!'

I pass, generally, over the period that intervened between the day when Mrs. Prodgit entered her protest against male parties, and the ever-memorable midnight when I brought her to my unobtrusive home in a cab, with an extremely large box on the roof, and a bundle, a bandbox, and a basket, between the driver's legs. I have no objection to Mrs. Prodgit (aided and abetted by Mrs. Bigby, who I never can forget is the parent of Maria Jane) taking entire possession of my unassuming establishment. In the recesses of my own breast, the thought may linger that a man in possession cannot be so dreadful as a woman, and that woman Mrs. Prodgit; but, I ought to bear a good deal, and I hope I can, and do. Huffing and snubbing, prey upon my feelings; but, I can bear them without complaint. They may tell in the long run; I may be hustled about, from post to pillar, beyond my strength; nevertheless, I wish to avoid giving rise to words in the family.

The voice of Nature, however, cries aloud in behalf of Augustus George, my infant son. It is for him that I wish to utter a few plaintive household words. I am not at all angry; I am mild - but miserable.

I wish to know why, when my child, Augustus George, was expected in our circle, a provision of pins was made, as if the little stranger were a criminal who was to be put to the torture immediately, on his arrival, instead of a holy babe? I wish to know why haste was made to stick those pins all over his innocent form, in every direction? I wish to be informed why light and air are excluded from Augustus George, like poisons? Why, I ask, is my unoffending infant so hedged into a basket-bedstead, with dimity and calico, with miniature sheets and blankets, that I can only hear him snuffle (and no wonder!) deep down under the pink hood of a little bathing-machine, and can never peruse even so much of his lineaments as his nose?

Was I expected to be the father of a French Roll, that the brushes of All Nations were laid in, to rasp Augustus George? Am I to be told that his sensitive skin was ever intended by Nature to have rashes brought out upon it, by the premature and incessant use of those formidable little instruments?

Is my son a Nutmeg, that he is to be grated on the stiff edges of sharp frills? Am I the parent of a Muslin boy, that his yielding surface is to be crimped and small plaited? Or is my child composed of Paper or of Linen, that impressions of the finer getting-up art, practised by the laundress, are to be printed off, all over his soft arms and legs, as I constantly observe them? The starch enters his soul; who can wonder that he cries?

Was Augustus George intended to have limbs, or to be born a Torso? I presume that limbs were the intention, as they are the usual practice. Then, why are my poor child's limbs fettered and tied up? Am I to be told that there is any analogy between Augustus George Meek and Jack Sheppard?

Analyse Castor Oil at any Institution of Chemistry that may be agreed upon, and inform me what resemblance, in taste, it bears to that natural provision which it is at once the pride and duty of Maria Jane to administer to Augustus George! Yet, I charge Mrs. Prodgit (aided and abetted by Mrs. Bigby) with systematically forcing Castor Oil on my innocent son, from the first hour of his birth. When that medicine, in its efficient action, causes internal disturbance to Augustus George, I charge Mrs. Prodgit (aided and abetted by Mrs. Bigby) with insanely and inconsistently administering opium to allay the storm she has raised! What is the meaning of this?

If the days of Egyptian Mummies are past, how dare Mrs. Prodgit require, for the use of my son, an amount of flannel and linen that would carpet my humble roof? Do I wonder that she requires it? No! This morning, within an hour, I beheld this agonising sight. I beheld my son - Augustus George - in Mrs. Prodgit's hands, and on Mrs. Prodgit's knee, being dressed. He was at the moment, comparatively speaking, in a state of nature; having nothing on, but an extremely short shirt, remarkably disproportionate to the length of his usual outer garments. Trailing from Mrs. Prodgit's lap, on the floor, was a long narrow roller or bandage - I should say of several yards in extent. In this, I SAW Mrs. Prodgit tightly roll the body of my unoffending infant, turning him over and over, now presenting his unconscious face upwards, now the back of his bald head, until the unnatural feat was accomplished, and the bandage secured by a pin, which I have every reason to believe entered the body of my only child. In this tourniquet, he passes the present phase of his existence. Can I know it, and smile!

I fear I have been betrayed into expressing myself warmly, but I feel deeply. Not for myself; for Augustus George. I dare not interfere. Will any one? Will any publication? Any doctor? Any parent? Any body? I do not complain that Mrs. Prodgit (aided and abetted by Mrs. Bigby) entirely alienates Maria Jane's affections from me, and interposes an impassable barrier between us. I do not complain of being made of no account. I do not want to be of any account. But, Augustus George is a production of Nature (I cannot think otherwise), and I claim that he should be treated with some remote reference to Nature. In my opinion, Mrs. Prodgit is, from first to last, a convention and a superstition. Are all the faculty afraid of Mrs. Prodgit? If not, why don't they take her in hand and improve her?

P.S. Maria Jane's Mama boasts of her own knowledge of the subject, and says she brought up seven children besides Maria Jane. But how do I know that she might not have brought them up much better? Maria Jane herself is far from strong, and is subject to headaches, and nervous indigestion. Besides which, I learn from the statistical tables that one child in five dies within the first year of its life; and one child in three, within the fifth. That don't look as if we could never improve in these particulars, I think!

P.P.S. Augustus George is in convulsions.

LYING AWAKE

'MY uncle lay with his eyes half closed, and his nightcap drawn almost down to his nose. His fancy was already wandering, and began to mingle up the present scene with the crater of Vesuvius, the French Opera, the Coliseum at Rome, Dolly's Chop-house in London, and all the farrago of noted places with which the brain of a traveller is crammed; in a word, he was just falling asleep.'

Thus, that delightful writer, WASHINGTON IRVING, in his Tales of a Traveller. But, it happened to me the other night to be lying: not with my eyes half closed, but with my eyes wide open; not with my nightcap drawn almost down to my nose, for on sanitary principles I never wear a nightcap: but with my hair pitchforked and touzled all over the pillow; not just falling asleep by any means, but glaringly, persistently, and obstinately, broad awake. Perhaps, with no scientific intention or invention, I was illustrating the theory of the Duality of the Brain; perhaps one part of my brain, being wakeful, sat up to watch the other part which was sleepy. Be that as it may, something in me was as desirous to go to sleep as it possibly could be, but something else in me WOULD NOT go to sleep, and was as obstinate as George the Third.

Thinking of George the Third - for I devote this paper to my train of thoughts as I lay awake: most people lying awake sometimes, and having some interest in the subject - put me in mind of BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, and so Benjamin Franklin's paper on the art of procuring pleasant dreams, which would seem necessarily to include the art of going to sleep, came into my head. Now, as I often used to read that paper when I was a very small boy, and as I recollect everything I read then as perfectly as I forget everything I read now, I quoted 'Get out of bed, beat up and turn your pillow, shake the bed-clothes well with at least twenty shakes, then throw the bed open and leave it to cool; in the meanwhile, continuing undrest, walk about your chamber. When you begin to feel the cold air unpleasant, then return to your bed, and you will soon fall asleep, and your sleep will be sweet and pleasant.' Not a bit of it! I performed the whole ceremony, and if it were possible for me to be more saucer-eyed than I was before, that was the only result that came of it.

Except Niagara. The two quotations from Washington Irving and Benjamin Franklin may have put it in my head by an American association of ideas; but there I was, and the Horse-shoe Fall was thundering and tumbling in my eyes and ears, and the very rainbows that I left upon the spray when I really did last look upon it, were beautiful to see. The night-light being quite as plain, however, and sleep seeming to be many thousand miles further off than Niagara, I made up my mind to think a little about Sleep; which I no sooner did than I whirled off in spite of myself to Drury Lane Theatre, and there saw a great actor and dear friend of mine (whom I had been thinking of in the day) playing Macbeth, and heard him apostrophising 'the death of each day's life,' as I have heard him many a time, in the days that are gone.

But, Sleep. I WILL think about Sleep. I am determined to think (this is the way I went on) about Sleep. I must hold the word Sleep, tight and fast, or I shall be off at a tangent in half a second. I feel myself unaccountably straying, already, into Clare Market. Sleep. It would be curious, as illustrating the equality of sleep, to inquire how many of its phenomena are common to all classes, to all degrees of wealth and poverty, to every grade of education and ignorance. Here, for example, is her Majesty Queen Victoria in her palace, this present blessed night, and here is Winking Charley, a sturdy vagrant, in one of her Majesty's jails. Her Majesty has fallen, many thousands of times, from that same Tower, which I claim a right to tumble off now and then. So has Winking Charley. Her Majesty in her sleep has opened or prorogued Parliament, or has held a Drawing Room, attired in some very scanty dress, the deficiencies and improprieties of which have caused her great uneasiness. I, in my degree, have suffered unspeakable agitation of mind from taking the chair at a public dinner at the London Tavern in my night-clothes, which not all the courtesy of my kind friend and host MR. BATHE could persuade me were quite adapted to the occasion. Winking Charley has been repeatedly tried in a worse condition. Her Majesty is no stranger to a vault or firmament, of a sort of floorcloth, with an indistinct pattern distantly resembling eyes, which occasionally obtrudes itself on her repose. Neither am I. Neither is Winking Charley. It is quite common to all three of us to skim along with airy strides a little above the ground; also to hold, with the deepest interest, dialogues with various people, all represented by ourselves; and to be at our wit's end to know what they are going to tell us; and to be indescribably astonished by the secrets they disclose. It is probable that we have all three committed murders and hidden bodies. It is pretty certain that we have all desperately wanted to cry out, and have had no voice; that we have all gone to the play and not been able to get in; that we have all dreamed much more of our youth than of our later lives; that - I have lost it! The thread's broken.

And up I go. I, lying here with the night-light before me, up I go, for no reason on earth that I can find out, and drawn by no links that are visible to me, up the Great Saint Bernard! I have lived in Switzerland, and rambled among the mountains; but, why I should go there now, and why up the Great Saint Bernard in preference to any other mountain, I have no idea. As I lie here broad awake, and with every sense so sharpened that I can distinctly hear distant noises inaudible to me at another time, I make that journey, as I really did, on the same summer day, with the same happy party - ah! two since dead, I grieve to think - and there is the same track, with the same black wooden arms to point the way, and there are the same storm-refuges here and there; and there is the same snow falling at the top, and there are the same frosty mists, and there is the same intensely cold convent with its menagerie smell, and the same breed of dogs fast dying out, and the same breed of jolly young monks whom I mourn to know as humbugs, and the same convent parlour with its piano and the sitting round the fire, and the same supper, and the same lone night in a cell, and the same bright fresh morning when going out into the highly rarefied air was like a plunge into an icy bath. Now, see here what comes along; and why does this thing stalk into my mind on the top of a Swiss mountain!

It is a figure that I once saw, just after dark, chalked upon a door in a little back lane near a country church - my first church. How young a child I may have been at the time I don't know, but it horrified me so intensely - in connexion with the churchyard, I suppose, for it smokes a pipe, and has a big hat with each of its ears sticking out in a horizontal line under the brim, and is not in itself more oppressive than a mouth from ear to ear, a pair of goggle eyes, and hands like two bunches of carrots, five in each, can make it - that it is still vaguely alarming to me to recall (as I have often done before, lying awake) the running home, the looking behind, the horror, of its following me; though whether disconnected from the door, or door and all, I can't say, and perhaps never could. It lays a disagreeable train. I must resolve to think of something on the voluntary principle.

The balloon ascents of this last season. They will do to think about, while I lie awake, as well as anything else. I must hold them tight though, for I feel them sliding away, and in their stead are the Mannings, husband and wife, hanging on the top of Horse- monger Lane Jail. In connexion with which dismal spectacle, I recall this curious fantasy of the mind. That, having beheld that execution, and having left those two forms dangling on the top of the entrance gateway - the man's, a limp, loose suit of clothes as if the man had gone out of them; the woman's, a fine shape, so elaborately corseted and artfully dressed, that it was quite unchanged in its trim appearance as it slowly swung from side to side - I never could, by my uttermost efforts, for some weeks, present the outside of that prison to myself (which the terrible impression I had received continually obliged me to do) without presenting it with the two figures still hanging in the morning air. Until, strolling past the gloomy place one night, when the street was deserted and quiet, and actually seeing that the bodies were not there, my fancy was persuaded, as it were, to take them down and bury them within the precincts of the jail, where they have lain ever since.

The balloon ascents of last season. Let me reckon them up. There were the horse, the bull, the parachute, - and the tumbler hanging on - chiefly by his toes, I believe - below the car. Very wrong, indeed, and decidedly to be stopped. But, in connexion with these and similar dangerous exhibitions, it strikes me that that portion of the public whom they entertain, is unjustly reproached. Their pleasure is in the difficulty overcome. They are a public of great faith, and are quite confident that the gentleman will not fall off the horse, or the lady off the bull or out of the parachute, and that the tumbler has a firm hold with his toes. They do not go to see the adventurer vanquished, but triumphant. There is no parallel in public combats between men and beasts, because nobody can answer for the particular beast - unless it were always the same beast, in which case it would be a mere stage-show, which the same public would go in the same state of mind to see, entirely believing in the brute being beforehand safely subdued by the man. That they are not accustomed to calculate hazards and dangers with any nicety, we may know from their rash exposure of themselves in overcrowded steamboats, and unsafe conveyances and places of all kinds. And I cannot help thinking that instead of railing, and attributing savage motives to a people naturally well disposed and humane, it is better to teach them, and lead them argumentatively and reasonably - for they are very reasonable, if you will discuss a matter with them - to more considerate and wise conclusions.

This is a disagreeable intrusion! Here is a man with his throat cut, dashing towards me as I lie awake! A recollection of an old story of a kinsman of mine, who, going home one foggy winter night to Hampstead, when London was much smaller and the road lonesome, suddenly encountered such a figure rushing past him, and presently two keepers from a madhouse in pursuit. A very unpleasant creature indeed, to come into my mind unbidden, as I lie awake.

- The balloon ascents of last season. I must return to the balloons. Why did the bleeding man start out of them? Never mind; if I inquire, he will be back again. The balloons. This particular public have inherently a great pleasure in the contemplation of physical difficulties overcome; mainly, as I take it, because the lives of a large majority of them are exceedingly monotonous and real, and further, are a struggle against continual difficulties, and further still, because anything in the form of accidental injury, or any kind of illness or disability is so very serious in their own sphere. I will explain this seeming paradox of mine. Take the case of a Christmas Pantomime. Surely nobody supposes that the young mother in the pit who falls into fits of laughter when the baby is boiled or sat upon, would be at all diverted by such an occurrence off the stage. Nor is the decent workman in the gallery, who is transported beyond the ignorant present by the delight with which he sees a stout gentleman pushed out of a two pair of stairs window, to be slandered by the suspicion that he would be in the least entertained by such a spectacle in any street in London, Paris, or New York. It always appears to me that the secret of this enjoyment lies in the temporary superiority to the common hazards and mischances of life; in seeing casualties, attended when they really occur with bodily and mental suffering, tears, and poverty, happen through a very rough sort of poetry without the least harm being done to any one - the pretence of distress in a pantomime being so broadly humorous as to be no pretence at all. Much as in the comic fiction I can understand the mother with a very vulnerable baby at home, greatly relishing the invulnerable baby on the stage, so in the

Cremorne reality I can understand the mason who is always liable to fall off a scaffold in his working jacket and to be carried to the hospital, having an infinite admiration of the radiant personage in spangles who goes into the clouds upon a bull, or upside down, and who, he takes it for granted - not reflecting upon the thing - has, by uncommon skill and dexterity, conquered such mischances as those to which he and his acquaintance are continually exposed.

I wish the Morgue in Paris would not come here as I lie awake, with its ghastly beds, and the swollen saturated clothes hanging up, and the water dripping, dripping all day long, upon that other swollen saturated something in the corner, like a heap of crushed over-ripe figs that I have seen in Italy! And this detestable Morgue comes back again at the head of a procession of forgotten ghost stories. This will never do. I must think of something else as I lie awake; or, like that sagacious animal in the United States who recognised the colonel who was such a dead shot, I am a gone 'Coon. What shall I think of? The late brutal assaults. Very good subject. The late brutal assaults.

(Though whether, supposing I should see, here before me as I lie awake, the awful phantom described in one of those ghost stories, who, with a head-dress of shroud, was always seen looking in through a certain glass door at a certain dead hour - whether, in such a case it would be the least consolation to me to know on philosophical grounds that it was merely my imagination, is a question I can't help asking myself by the way.)

The late brutal assaults. I strongly question the expediency of advocating the revival of whipping for those crimes. It is a natural and generous impulse to be indignant at the perpetration of inconceivable brutality, but I doubt the whipping panacea gravely. Not in the least regard or pity for the criminal, whom I hold in far lower estimation than a mad wolf, but in consideration for the general tone and feeling, which is very much improved since the whipping times. It is bad for a people to be familiarised with such punishments. When the whip went out of Bridewell, and ceased to be flourished at the carts tail and at the whipping-post, it began to fade out of madhouses, and workhouses, and schools and families, and to give place to a better system everywhere, than cruel driving. It would be hasty, because a few brutes may be inadequately punished, to revive, in any aspect, what, in so many aspects, society is hardly yet happily rid of. The whip is a very contagious kind of thing, and difficult to confine within one set of bounds. Utterly abolish punishment by fine - a barbarous device, quite as much out of date as wager by battle, but particularly connected in the vulgar mind with this class of offence - at least quadruple the term of imprisonment for aggravated assaults - and above all let us, in such cases, have no Pet Prisoning, vain glorifying, strong soup, and roasted meats, but hard work, and one unchanging and uncompromising dietary of bread and water, well or ill; and we shall do much better than by going down into the dark to grope for the whip among the rusty fragments of the rack, and the branding iron, and the chains and gibbet from the public roads, and the weights that pressed men to death in the cells of Newgate.

I had proceeded thus far, when I found I had been lying awake so long that the very dead began to wake too, and to crowd into my thoughts most sorrowfully. Therefore, I resolved to lie awake no more, but to get up and go out for a night walk - which resolution was an acceptable relief to me, as I dare say it may prove now to a great many more.

THE GHOST OF ART

I AM a bachelor, residing in rather a dreary set of chambers in the Temple. They are situated in a square court of high houses, which would be a complete well, but for the want of water and the absence of a bucket. I live at the top of the house, among the tiles and sparrows. Like the little man in the nursery-story, I live by myself, and all the bread and cheese I get - which is not much - I put upon a shelf. I need scarcely add, perhaps, that I am in love, and that the father of my charming Julia objects to our union.

I mention these little particulars as I might deliver a letter of introduction. The reader is now acquainted with me, and perhaps will condescend to listen to my narrative.

I am naturally of a dreamy turn of mind; and my abundant leisure - for I am called to the Bar - coupled with much lonely listening to the twittering of sparrows, and the pattering of rain, has encouraged that disposition. In my 'top set' I hear the wind howl on a winter night, when the man on the ground floor believes it is perfectly still weather. The dim lamps with which our Honourable Society (supposed to be as yet unconscious of the new discovery called Gas) make the horrors of the staircase visible, deepen the gloom which generally settles on my soul when I go home at night.

I am in the Law, but not of it. I can't exactly make out what it means. I sit in Westminster Hall sometimes (in character) from ten to four; and when I go out of Court, I don't know whether I am standing on my wig or my boots.

It appears to me (I mention this in confidence) as if there were too much talk and too much law - as if some grains of truth were started overboard into a tempestuous sea of chaff.

All this may make me mystical. Still, I am confident that what I am going to describe myself as having seen and heard, I actually did see and hear.

It is necessary that I should observe that I have a great delight in pictures. I am no painter myself, but I have studied pictures and written about them. I have seen all the most famous pictures in the world; my education and reading have been sufficiently general to possess me beforehand with a knowledge of most of the subjects to which a Painter is likely to have recourse; and, although I might be in some doubt as to the rightful fashion of the scabbard of King Lear's sword, for instance, I think I should know King Lear tolerably well, if I happened to meet with him.

I go to all the Modern Exhibitions every season, and of course I revere the Royal Academy. I stand by its forty Academical articles almost as firmly as I stand by the thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. I am convinced that in neither case could there be, by any rightful possibility, one article more or less.

It is now exactly three years - three years ago, this very month - since I went from Westminster to the Temple, one Thursday afternoon, in a cheap steamboat. The sky was black, when I imprudently walked on board. It began to thunder and lighten immediately afterwards, and the rain poured down in torrents. The deck seeming to smoke with the wet, I went below; but so many passengers were there, smoking too, that I came up again, and buttoning my pea-coat, and standing in the shadow of the paddle- box, stood as upright as I could, and made the best of it.

It was at this moment that I first beheld the terrible Being, who is the subject of my present recollections.

Standing against the funnel, apparently with the intention of drying himself by the heat as fast as he got wet, was a shabby man in threadbare black, and with his hands in his pockets, who fascinated me from the memorable instant when I caught his eye.

Where had I caught that eye before? Who was he? Why did I connect him, all at once, with the Vicar of Wakefield, Alfred the Great, Gil Blas, Charles the Second, Joseph and his Brethren, the Fairy Queen, Tom Jones, the Decameron of Boccaccio, Tam O'Shanter, the Marriage of the Doge of Venice with the Adriatic, and the Great Plague of London? Why, when he bent one leg, and placed one hand upon the back of the seat near him, did my mind associate him wildly with the words, 'Number one hundred and forty-two, Portrait of a gentleman'? Could it be that I was going mad?

I looked at him again, and now I could have taken my affidavit that he belonged to the Vicar of Wakefield's family. Whether he was the Vicar, or

Moses, or Mr. Burchill, or the Squire, or a conglomeration of all four, I knew not; but I was impelled to seize him by the throat, and charge him with being, in some fell way, connected with the Primrose blood. He looked up at the rain, and then - oh Heaven! - he became Saint John. He folded his arms, resigning himself to the weather, and I was frantically inclined to address him as the Spectator, and firmly demand to know what he had done with Sir Roger de Coverley.

The frightful suspicion that I was becoming deranged, returned upon me with redoubled force. Meantime, this awful stranger, inexplicably linked to my distress, stood drying himself at the funnel; and ever, as the steam rose from his clothes, diffusing a mist around him, I saw through the ghostly medium all the people I have mentioned, and a score more, sacred and profane.

I am conscious of a dreadful inclination that stole upon me, as it thundered and lightened, to grapple with this man, or demon, and plunge him over the side. But, I constrained myself - I know not how - to speak to him, and in a pause of the storm, I crossed the deck, and said:

'What are you?'

He replied, hoarsely, 'A Model.'

'A what?' said I.

'A Model,' he replied. 'I sets to the profession for a bob a- hour.' (All through this narrative I give his own words, which are indelibly imprinted on my memory.)

The relief which this disclosure gave me, the exquisite delight of the restoration of my confidence in my own sanity, I cannot describe. I should have fallen on his neck, but for the consciousness of being observed by the man at the wheel.

'You then,' said I, shaking him so warmly by the hand, that I wrung the rain out of his coat-cuff, 'are the gentleman whom I have so frequently contemplated, in connection with a high-backed chair with a red cushion, and a table with twisted legs.'

'I am that Model,' he rejoined moodily, 'and I wish I was anything else.'

'Say not so,' I returned. 'I have seen you in the society of many beautiful young women;' as in truth I had, and always (I now remember) in the act of making the most of his legs.

'No doubt,' said he. 'And you've seen me along with warses of flowers, and any number of table-kivers, and antique cabinets, and warious gammon.'

'Sir?' said I.

'And warious gammon,' he repeated, in a louder voice. 'You might have seen me in armour, too, if you had looked sharp. Blessed if I ha'n't stood in half the suits of armour as ever came out of Pratt's shop: and sat, for weeks together, a-eating nothing, out of half the gold and silver dishes as has ever been lent for the purpose out of Storrses, and Mortimerses, or Garrardses, and Davenportseseses.'

Excited, as it appeared, by a sense of injury, I thought he would never have found an end for the last word. But, at length it rolled sullenly away with the thunder.

'Pardon me,' said I, 'you are a well-favoured, well-made man, and yet - forgive me - I find, on examining my mind, that I associate you with - that my recollection indistinctly makes you, in short - excuse me - a kind of powerful monster.'

'It would be a wonder if it didn't,' he said. 'Do you know what my points are?'

'No,' said I.

'My throat and my legs,' said he. 'When I don't set for a head, I mostly sets for a throat and a pair of legs. Now, granted you was a painter, and was to work at my throat for a week together, I suppose you'd see a lot of lumps and bumps there, that would never be there at all, if you looked at me, complete, instead of only my throat. Wouldn't you?'

'Probably,' said I, surveying him.

'Why, it stands to reason,' said the Model. 'Work another week at my legs, and it'll be the same thing. You'll make 'em out as knotty and as knobby, at last, as if they was the trunks of two old trees. Then, take and stick my legs and throat on to another man's body, and you'll make a reg'lar monster. And that's the way the public gets their reg'lar monsters, every first Monday in May, when the Royal Academy Exhibition opens.'

'You are a critic,' said I, with an air of deference.

'I'm in an uncommon ill humour, if that's it,' rejoined the Model, with great indignation. 'As if it warn't bad enough for a bob a- hour, for a man to be mixing himself up with that there jolly old furniter that one 'ud think the public know'd the wery nails in by this time - or to be putting on greasy old 'ats and cloaks, and playing tambourines in the Bay o' Naples, with Wesuvius a smokin' according to pattern in the background, and the wines a bearing wonderful in the middle distance - or to be unpolitely kicking up his legs among a lot o' gals, with no reason whatever in his mind but to show 'em - as if this warn't bad enough, I'm to go and be thrown out of employment too!'

'Surely no!' said I.

'Surely yes,' said the indignant Model. 'BUT I'LL GROW ONE.'

The gloomy and threatening manner in which he muttered the last words, can never be effaced from my remembrance. My blood ran cold.

I asked of myself, what was it that this desperate Being was resolved to grow. My breast made no response.

I ventured to implore him to explain his meaning. With a scornful laugh, he uttered this dark prophecy:

'I'LL GROW ONE. AND, MARK MY WORDS, IT SHALL HAUNT YOU!'

We parted in the storm, after I had forced half-a-crown on his acceptance, with a trembling hand. I conclude that something supernatural happened to the steamboat, as it bore his reeking figure down the river; but it never got into the papers.

Two years elapsed, during which I followed my profession without any vicissitudes; never holding so much as a motion, of course. At the expiration of that period, I found myself making my way home to the Temple, one night, in precisely such another storm of thunder and lightning as that by which I had been overtaken on board the steamboat - except that this storm, bursting over the town at midnight, was rendered much more awful by the darkness and the hour.

As I turned into my court, I really thought a thunderbolt would fall, and plough the pavement up. Every brick and stone in the place seemed to have an echo of its own for the thunder. The waterspouts were overcharged, and the rain came tearing down from the house-tops as if they had been mountain-tops.

Mrs. Parkins, my laundress - wife of Parkins the porter, then newly dead of a dropsy - had particular instructions to place a bedroom candle and a match under the staircase lamp on my landing, in order that I might light my candle there, whenever I came home. Mrs. Parkins invariably disregarding all instructions, they were never there. Thus it happened that on this occasion I groped my way into my sitting-room to find the candle, and came out to light it.

What were my emotions when, underneath the staircase lamp, shining with wet as if he had never been dry since our last meeting, stood the mysterious Being whom I had encountered on the steamboat in a thunderstorm, two years before! His prediction rushed upon my mind, and I turned faint.

'I said I'd do it,' he observed, in a hollow voice, 'and I have done it. May I come in?'

'Misguided creature, what have you done?' I returned.

'I'll let you know,' was his reply, 'if you'll let me in.'

Could it be murder that he had done? And had he been so successful that he wanted to do it again, at my expense?

I hesitated.

'May I come in?' said he.

I inclined my head, with as much presence of mind as I could command, and he followed me into my chambers. There, I saw that the lower part of his face was tied up, in what is commonly called a Belcher handkerchief. He slowly removed this bandage, and exposed to view a long dark beard, curling over his upper lip, twisting about the corners of his mouth, and hanging down upon his breast.

'What is this?' I exclaimed involuntarily, 'and what have you become?'

'I am the Ghost of Art!' said he.

The effect of these words, slowly uttered in the thunder-storm at midnight, was appalling in the last degree. More dead than alive, I surveyed him in silence.

'The German taste came up,' said he, 'and threw me out of bread. I am ready for the taste now.'

He made his beard a little jagged with his hands, folded his arms, and said,

'Severity!'

I shuddered. It was so severe.

He made his beard flowing on his breast, and, leaning both hands on the staff of a carpet-broom which Mrs. Parkins had left among my books, said:

'Benevolence.'

I stood transfixed. The change of sentiment was entirely in the beard. The man might have left his face alone, or had no face.

The beard did everything.

He lay down, on his back, on my table, and with that action of his head threw up his beard at the chin.

'That's death!' said he.

He got off my table and, looking up at the ceiling, cocked his beard a little awry; at the same time making it stick out before him.

'Adoration, or a vow of vengeance,' he observed.

He turned his profile to me, making his upper lip very bulky with the upper part of his beard.

'Romantic character,' said he.

He looked sideways out of his beard, as if it were an ivy-bush. 'Jealousy,' said he. He gave it an ingenious twist in the air, and informed me that he was carousing. He made it shaggy with his fingers - and it was Despair; lank - and it was avarice: tossed it all kinds of ways - and it was rage. The beard did everything.

'I am the Ghost of Art,' said he. 'Two bob a-day now, and more when it's longer! Hair's the true expression. There is no other. I SAID I'D GROW IT, AND I'VE GROWN IT, AND IT SHALL HAUNT YOU!'

He may have tumbled down-stairs in the dark, but he never walked down or ran down. I looked over the banisters, and I was alone with the thunder.

Need I add more of my terrific fate? IT HAS haunted me ever since. It glares upon me from the walls of the Royal Academy, (except when MACLISE subdues it to his genius,) it fills my soul with terror at the British Institution, it lures young artists on to their destruction. Go where I will, the Ghost of Art, eternally working the passions in hair, and expressing everything by beard, pursues me. The prediction is accomplished, and the victim has no rest.

OUT OF TOWN

SITTING, on a bright September morning, among my books and papers at my open window on the cliff overhanging the sea-beach, I have the sky and ocean framed before me like a beautiful picture. A beautiful picture, but with such movement in it, such changes of light upon the sails of ships and wake of steamboats, such dazzling gleams of silver far out at sea, such fresh touches on the crisp wave-tops as they break and roll towards me - a picture with such music in the billowy rush upon the shingle, the blowing of morning wind through the corn-sheaves where the farmers' waggons are busy, the singing of the larks, and the distant voices of children at play - such charms of sight and sound as all the Galleries on earth can but poorly suggest.

So dreamy is the murmur of the sea below my window, that I may have been here, for anything I know, one hundred years. Not that I have grown old, for, daily on the neighbouring downs and grassy hill- sides, I find that I can still in reason walk any distance, jump over anything, and climb up anywhere; but, that the sound of the ocean seems to have become so customary to my musings, and other realities seem so to have gone aboard ship and floated away over the horizon, that, for aught I will undertake to the contrary, I am the enchanted son of the King my father, shut up in a tower on the sea-shore, for protection against an old she-goblin who insisted on being my godmother, and who foresaw at the font - wonderful creature! - that I should get into a scrape before I was twenty- one. I remember to have been in a City (my Royal parent's dominions, I suppose), and apparently not long ago either, that was in the dreariest condition. The principal inhabitants had all been changed into old newspapers, and in that form were preserving their window-blinds from dust, and wrapping all their smaller household gods in curl-papers. I walked through gloomy streets where every house was shut up and newspapered, and where my solitary footsteps echoed on the deserted pavements. In the public rides there were no carriages, no horses, no animated existence, but a few sleepy policemen, and a few adventurous boys taking advantage of the devastation to swarm up the lamp-posts. In the Westward streets there was no traffic; in the Westward shops, no business. The water-patterns which the 'Prentices had trickled out on the pavements early in the morning, remained uneffaced by human feet. At the corners of mews, Cochin-China fowls stalked gaunt and savage; nobody being left in the deserted city (as it appeared to me), to feed them. Public Houses, where splendid footmen swinging their legs over gorgeous hammer-cloths beside wigged coachmen were wont to regale, were silent, and the unused pewter pots shone, too bright for business, on the shelves. I beheld a Punch's Show leaning against a wall near Park Lane, as if it had fainted. It was deserted, and there were none to heed its desolation. In Belgrave Square I met the last man - an ostler - sitting on a post in a ragged red waistcoat, eating straw, and mildewing away.

If I recollect the name of the little town, on whose shore this sea is murmuring - but I am not just now, as I have premised, to be relied upon for anything - it is Pavilionstone. Within a quarter of a century, it was a little fishing town, and they do say, that the time was, when it was a little smuggling town. I have heard that it was rather famous in the hollands and brandy way, and that coevally with that reputation the lamplighter's was considered a bad life at the Assurance Offices. It was observed that if he were not particular about lighting up, he lived in peace; but that, if he made the best of the oil-lamps in the steep and narrow streets, he usually fell over the cliff at an early age. Now, gas and electricity run to the very water's edge, and the South-Eastern Railway Company screech at us in the dead of night.

But, the old little fishing and smuggling town remains, and is so tempting a place for the latter purpose, that I think of going out some night next week, in a fur cap and a pair of petticoat trousers, and running an empty tub, as a kind of archaeological pursuit. Let nobody with corns come to Pavilionstone, for there are breakneck flights of ragged steps, connecting the principal streets by back-ways, which will cripple that visitor in half an hour. These are the ways by which, when I run that tub, I shall escape. I shall make a Thermopylae of the corner of one of them, defend it with my cutlass against the coast-guard until my brave companions have sheered off, then dive into the darkness, and regain my Susan's arms. In connection with these breakneck steps I observe some wooden cottages, with tumble-down out-houses, and back-yards three feet square, adorned with garlands of dried fish, in one of which (though the General Board of Health might object) my Susan dwells.

The South-Eastern Company have brought Pavilionstone into such vogue, with their tidal trains and splendid steam-packets, that a new Pavilionstone is rising up. I am, myself, of New Pavilionstone. We are a little mortary and limey at present, but we are getting on capitally. Indeed, we were getting on so fast, at one time, that we rather overdid it, and built a street of shops, the business of which may be expected to arrive in about ten years. We are sensibly laid out in general; and with a little care and pains (by no means wanting, so far), shall become a very pretty place. We ought to be, for our situation is delightful, our air is delicious, and our breezy hills and downs, carpeted with wild thyme, and decorated with millions of wild flowers, are, on the faith of a pedestrian, perfect. In New Pavilionstone we are a little too much addicted to small windows with more bricks in them than glass, and we are not over-fanciful in the way of decorative architecture, and we get unexpected sea-views through cracks in the street doors; on the whole, however, we are very snug and comfortable, and well accommodated. But the Home Secretary (if there be such an officer) cannot too soon shut up the burial-ground of the old parish church. It is in the midst of us, and Pavilionstone will get no good of it, if it be too long left alone.

The lion of Pavilionstone is its Great Hotel. A dozen years ago, going over to Paris by South-Eastern Tidal Steamer, you used to be dropped upon the platform of the main line Pavilionstone Station (not a junction then), at eleven o'clock on a dark winter's night, in a roaring wind; and in the howling wilderness outside the station, was a short omnibus which brought you up by the forehead the instant you got in at the door; and nobody cared about you, and you were alone in the world. You bumped over infinite chalk, until you were turned out at a strange building which had just left off being a barn without having quite begun to be a house, where nobody expected your coming, or knew what to do with you when you were come, and where you were usually blown about, until you happened to be blown against the cold beef, and finally into bed. At five in the morning you were blown out of bed, and after a dreary breakfast, with crumpled company, in the midst of confusion, were hustled on board a steamboat and lay wretched on deck until you saw France lunging and surging at you with great vehemence over the bowsprit.

Now, you come down to Pavilionstone in a free and easy manner, an irresponsible agent, made over in trust to the South-Eastern Company, until you get out of the railway-carriage at high-water mark. If you are crossing by the boat at once, you have nothing to do but walk on board and be happy there if you can - I can't. If you are going to our Great Pavilionstone Hotel, the sprightliest porters under the sun, whose cheerful looks are a pleasant welcome, shoulder your luggage, drive it off in vans, bowl it away in trucks, and enjoy themselves in playing athletic games with it. If you are for public life at our great Pavilionstone Hotel, you walk into that establishment as if it were your club; and find ready for you, your news-room, dining-room, smoking-room, billiard-room, music-room, public breakfast, public dinner twice a-day (one plain, one gorgeous), hot baths and cold baths. If you want to be bored, there are plenty of bores always ready for you, and from Saturday to Monday in particular, you can be bored (if you like it) through and through. Should you want to be private at our Great Pavilionstone Hotel, say but the word, look at the list of charges, choose your floor, name your figure - there you are, established in your castle, by the day, week, month, or year, innocent of all comers or goers, unless you have my fancy for walking early in the morning down the groves of boots and shoes, which so regularly flourish at all the chamber-doors before breakfast, that it seems to me as if nobody ever got up or took them in. Are you going across the Alps, and would you like to air your Italian at our Great Pavilionstone Hotel? Talk to the Manager - always conversational, accomplished, and polite. Do you want to be aided, abetted, comforted, or advised, at our Great Pavilionstone Hotel? Send for the good landlord, and he is your friend. Should you, or any one belonging to you, ever be taken ill at our Great Pavilionstone Hotel, you will not soon forget him or his kind wife. And when you pay your bill at our Great Pavilionstone Hotel, you will not be put out of humour by anything you find in it.

A thoroughly good inn, in the days of coaching and posting, was a noble place. But no such inn would have been equal to the reception of four or five hundred people, all of them wet through, and half of them dead sick, every day in the year. This is where we shine, in our Pavilionstone Hotel. Again - who, coming and going, pitching and tossing, boating and training, hurrying in, and flying out, could ever have calculated the fees to be paid at an old-fashioned house? In our Pavilionstone Hotel vocabulary, there is no such word as fee. Everything is done for you; every service is provided at a fixed and reasonable charge; all the prices are hung up in all the rooms; and you can make out your own bill beforehand, as well as the book-keeper.

In the case of your being a pictorial artist, desirous of studying at small expense the physiognomies and beards of different nations, come, on receipt of this, to Pavilionstone. You shall find all the nations of the earth, and all the styles of shaving and not shaving, hair cutting and hair letting alone, for ever flowing through our hotel. Couriers you shall see by hundreds; fat leathern bags for five-franc pieces, closing with violent snaps, like discharges of fire-arms, by thousands; more luggage in a morning than, fifty years ago, all Europe saw in a week. Looking at trains, steamboats, sick travellers, and luggage, is our great Pavilionstone recreation. We are not strong in other public amusements. We have a Literary and Scientific Institution, and we have a Working Men's Institution - may it hold many gipsy holidays in summer fields, with the kettle boiling, the band of music playing, and the people dancing; and may I be on the hill-side, looking on with pleasure at a wholesome sight too rare in England! - and we have two or three churches, and more chapels than I have yet added up. But public amusements are scarce with us. If a poor theatrical manager comes with his company to give us, in a loft, Mary Bax, or the Murder on the Sand Hills, we don't care much for him - starve him out, in fact. We take more kindly to wax-work, especially if it moves; in which case it keeps much clearer of the second commandment than when it is still. Cooke's Circus (Mr. Cooke is my friend, and always leaves a good name behind him) gives us only a night in passing through. Nor does the travelling menagerie think us worth a longer visit. It gave us a look-in the other day, bringing with it the residentiary van with the stained glass windows, which Her Majesty kept ready-made at Windsor Castle, until she found a suitable opportunity of submitting it for the proprietor's acceptance. I brought away five wonderments from this exhibition. I have wondered ever since, Whether the beasts ever do get used to those small places of confinement; Whether the monkeys have that very horrible flavour in their free state; Whether wild animals have a natural ear for time and tune, and therefore every four-footed creature began to howl in despair when the band began to play; What the giraffe does with his neck when his cart is shut up; and, Whether the elephant feels ashamed of himself when he is brought out of his den to stand on his head in the presence of the whole Collection.

We are a tidal harbour at Pavilionstone, as indeed I have implied already in my mention of tidal trains. At low water, we are a heap of mud, with an empty channel in it where a couple of men in big boots always shovel and scoop: with what exact object, I am unable to say. At that time, all the stranded fishing-boats turn over on their sides, as if they were dead marine monsters; the colliers and other shipping stick disconsolate in the mud; the steamers look as if their white chimneys would never smoke more, and their red paddles never turn again; the green sea-slime and weed upon the rough stones at the entrance, seem records of obsolete high tides never more to flow; the flagstaff-halyards droop; the very little wooden lighthouse shrinks in the idle glare of the sun. And here I may observe of the very little wooden lighthouse, that when it is lighted at night, - red and green, - it looks so like a medical man's, that several distracted husbands have at various times been found, on occasions of premature domestic anxiety, going round and round it, trying to find the Nightbell.

But, the moment the tide begins to make, the Pavilionstone Harbour begins to revive. It feels the breeze of the rising water before the water comes, and begins to flutter and stir. When the little shallow waves creep in, barely overlapping one another, the vanes at the mastheads wake, and become agitated. As the tide rises, the fishing-boats get into good spirits and dance, the flagstaff hoists a bright red flag, the steamboat smokes, cranes creak, horses and carriages dangle in the air, stray passengers and luggage appear. Now, the shipping is afloat, and comes up buoyantly, to look at the wharf. Now, the carts that have come down for coals, load away as hard as they can load. Now, the steamer smokes immensely, and occasionally blows at the paddle-boxes like a vaporous whale- greatly disturbing nervous loungers. Now, both the tide and the breeze have risen, and you are holding your hat on (if you want to see how the ladies hold THEIR hats on, with a stay, passing over the broad brim and down the nose, come to Pavilionstone). Now, everything in the harbour splashes, dashes, and bobs. Now, the Down Tidal Train is telegraphed, and you know (without knowing how you know), that two hundred and eighty-seven people are coming. Now, the fishing-boats that have been out, sail in at the top of the tide. Now, the bell goes, and the locomotive hisses and shrieks, and the train comes gliding in, and the two hundred and eighty-seven come scuffling out. Now, there is not only a tide of water, but a tide of people, and a tide of luggage - all tumbling and flowing and bouncing about together. Now, after infinite bustle, the steamer steams out, and we (on the Pier) are all delighted when she rolls as if she would roll her funnel out, and all are disappointed when she don't. Now, the other steamer is coming in, and the Custom House prepares, and the wharf-labourers assemble, and the hawsers are made ready, and the Hotel Porters come rattling down with van and truck, eager to begin more Olympic games with more luggage. And this is the way in which we go on, down at Pavilionstone, every tide. And, if you want to live a life of luggage, or to see it lived, or to breathe sweet air which will send you to sleep at a moment's notice at any period of the day or night, or to disport yourself upon or in the sea, or to scamper about Kent, or to come out of town for the enjoyment of all or any of these pleasures, come to Pavilionstone.

OUT OF THE SEASON

IT fell to my lot, this last bleak Spring, to find myself in a watering-place out of the Season. A vicious north-east squall blew me into it from foreign parts, and I tarried in it alone for three days, resolved to be exceedingly busy.

On the first day, I began business by looking for two hours at the sea, and staring the Foreign Militia out of countenance. Having disposed of these important engagements, I sat down at one of the two windows of my room, intent on doing something desperate in the way of literary composition, and writing a chapter of unheard-of excellence - with which the present essay has no connexion.

It is a remarkable quality in a watering-place out of the season, that everything in it, will and must be looked at. I had no previous suspicion of this fatal truth but, the moment I sat down to write, I began to perceive it. I had scarcely fallen into my most promising attitude, and dipped my pen in the ink, when I found the clock upon the pier - a red-faced clock with a white rim - importuning me in a highly vexatious manner to consult my watch, and see how I was off for Greenwich time. Having no intention of making a voyage or taking an observation, I had not the least need of Greenwich time, and could have put up with watering-place time as a sufficiently accurate article. The pier-clock, however, persisting, I felt it necessary to lay down my pen, compare my watch with him, and fall into a grave solicitude about half- seconds. I had taken up my pen again, and was about to commence that valuable chapter, when a Custom-house cutter under the window requested that I would hold a naval review of her, immediately.

It was impossible, under the circumstances, for any mental resolution, merely human, to dismiss the Custom-house cutter, because the shadow of her topmast fell upon my paper, and the vane played on the masterly blank chapter. I was therefore under the necessity of going to the other window; sitting astride of the chair there, like Napoleon bivouacking in the print; and inspecting the cutter as she lay, all that day, in the way of my chapter, O! She was rigged to carry a quantity of canvas, but her hull was so very small that four giants aboard of her (three men and a boy) who were vigilantly scraping at her, all together, inspired me with a terror lest they should scrape her away. A fifth giant, who appeared to consider himself 'below' - as indeed he was, from the waist downwards - meditated, in such close proximity with the little gusty chimney-pipe, that he seemed to be smoking it. Several boys looked on from the wharf, and, when the gigantic attention appeared to be fully occupied, one or other of these would furtively swing himself in mid-air over the Custom-house cutter, by means of a line pendant from her rigging, like a young spirit of the storm. Presently, a sixth hand brought down two little water-casks; presently afterwards, a truck came, and delivered a hamper. I was now under an obligation to consider that the cutter was going on a cruise, and to wonder where she was going, and when she was going, and why she was going, and at what date she might be expected back, and who commanded her? With these pressing questions I was fully occupied when the Packet, making ready to go across, and blowing off her spare steam, roared, 'Look at me!'

It became a positive duty to look at the Packet preparing to go across; aboard of which, the people newly come down by the rail- road were hurrying in a great fluster. The crew had got their tarry overalls on - and one knew what THAT meant - not to mention the white basins, ranged in neat little piles of a dozen each, behind the door of the after-cabin. One lady as I looked, one resigning and far-seeing woman, took her basin from the store of crockery, as she might have taken a refreshment-ticket, laid herself down on deck with that utensil at her ear, muffled her feet in one shawl, solemnly covered her countenance after the antique manner with another, and on the completion of these preparations appeared by the strength of her volition to become insensible. The mail-bags (O that I myself had the sea-legs of a mail-bag!) were tumbled aboard; the Packet left off roaring, warped out, and made at the white line upon the bar. One dip, one roll, one break of the sea over her bows, and Moore's Almanack or the sage Raphael could not have told me more of the state of things aboard, than I knew.

The famous chapter was all but begun now, and would have been quite begun, but for the wind. It was blowing stiffly from the east, and it rumbled in the chimney and shook the house. That was not much; but, looking out into the wind's grey eye for inspiration, I laid down my pen again to make the remark to myself, how emphatically everything by the sea declares that it has a great concern in the state of the wind. The trees blown all one way; the defences of the harbour reared highest and strongest against the raging point; the shingle flung up on the beach from the same direction; the number of arrows pointed at the common enemy; the sea tumbling in and rushing towards them as if it were inflamed by the sight. This put it in my head that I really ought to go out and take a walk in the wind; so, I gave up the magnificent chapter for that day, entirely persuading myself that I was under a moral obligation to have a blow.

I had a good one, and that on the high road - the very high road - on the top of the cliffs, where I met the stage-coach with all the outsides holding their hats on and themselves too, and overtook a flock of sheep with the wool about their necks blown into such great ruffs that they looked like fleecy owls. The wind played upon the lighthouse as if it were a great whistle, the spray was driven over the sea in a cloud of haze, the ships rolled and pitched heavily, and at intervals long slants and flaws of light made mountain-steeps of communication between the ocean and the sky. A walk of ten miles brought me to a seaside town without a cliff, which, like the town I had come from, was out of the season too. Half of the houses were shut up; half of the other half were to let; the town might have done as much business as it was doing then, if it had been at the bottom of the sea. Nobody seemed to flourish save the attorney; his clerk's pen was going in the bow- window of his wooden house; his brass door-plate alone was free from salt, and had been polished up that morning. On the beach, among the rough buggers and capstans, groups of storm-beaten boatmen, like a sort of marine monsters, watched under the lee of those objects, or stood leaning forward against the wind, looking out through battered spy-glasses. The parlour bell in the Admiral Benbow had grown so flat with being out of the season, that neither could I hear it ring when I pulled the handle for lunch, nor could the young woman in black stockings and strong shoes, who acted as waiter out of the season, until it had been tinkled three times.

Admiral Benbow's cheese was out of the season, but his home-made bread was good, and his beer was perfect. Deluded by some earlier spring day which had been warm and sunny, the Admiral had cleared the firing out of his parlour stove, and had put some flower-pots in - which was amiable and hopeful in the Admiral, but not judicious: the room being, at that present visiting, transcendantly cold. I therefore took the liberty of peeping out across a little stone passage into the Admiral's kitchen, and, seeing a high settle with its back towards me drawn out in front of the Admiral's kitchen fire, I strolled in, bread and cheese in hand, munching and looking about. One landsman and two boatmen were seated on the settle, smoking pipes and drinking beer out of thick pint crockery mugs - mugs peculiar to such places, with parti-coloured rings round them, and ornaments between the rings like frayed-out roots. The landsman was relating his experience, as yet only three nights old, of a fearful running-down case in the Channel, and therein presented to my imagination a sound of music that it will not soon forget.

'At that identical moment of time,' said he (he was a prosy man by nature, who rose with his subject), 'the night being light and calm, but with a grey mist upon the water that didn't seem to spread for more than two or three mile, I was walking up and down the wooden causeway next the pier, off where it happened, along with a friend of mine, which his name is Mr. Clocker. Mr. Clocker is a grocer over yonder.' (From the direction in which he pointed the bowl of his pipe, I might have judged Mr. Clocker to be a merman, established in the grocery trade in five-and-twenty fathoms of water.) 'We were smoking our pipes, and walking up and down the causeway, talking of one thing and talking of another. We were quite alone there, except that a few hovellers' (the Kentish name for 'long-shore boatmen like his companions) 'were hanging about their lugs, waiting while the tide made, as hovellers will.' (One of the two boatmen, thoughtfully regarding me, shut up one eye; this I understood to mean: first, that he took me into the conversation: secondly, that he confirmed the proposition: thirdly, that he announced himself as a hoveller.) 'All of a sudden Mr. Clocker and me stood rooted to the spot, by hearing a sound come through the stillness, right over the sea, LIKE A GREAT SORROWFUL FLUTE OR AEOLIAN HARP. We didn't in the least know what it was, and judge of our surprise when we saw the hovellers, to a man, leap into the boats and tear about to hoist sail and get off, as if they had every one of 'em gone, in a moment, raving mad! But THEY knew it was the cry of distress from the sinking emigrant ship.'

When I got back to my watering-place out of the season, and had done my twenty miles in good style, I found that the celebrated Black Mesmerist intended favouring the public that evening in the Hall of the Muses, which he had engaged for the purpose. After a good dinner, seated by the fire in an easy chair, I began to waver in a design I had formed of waiting on the Black Mesmerist, and to incline towards the expediency of remaining where I was. Indeed a point of gallantry was involved in my doing so, inasmuch as I had not left France alone, but had come from the prisons of St. Pelagie with my distinguished and unfortunate friend Madame Roland (in two volumes which I bought for two francs each, at the book-stall in the Place de la Concorde, Paris, at the corner of the Rue Royale). Deciding to pass the evening tete-a-tete with Madame Roland, I derived, as I always do, great pleasure from that spiritual woman's society, and the charms of her brave soul and engaging conversation. I must confess that if she had only some more faults, only a few more passionate failings of any kind, I might love her better; but I am content to believe that the deficiency is in me, and not in her. We spent some sadly interesting hours together on this occasion, and she told me again of her cruel discharge from the Abbaye, and of her being re-arrested before her free feet had sprung lightly up half-a-dozen steps of her own staircase, and carried off to the prison which she only left for the guillotine.

Madame Roland and I took leave of one another before mid-night, and I went to bed full of vast intentions for next day, in connexion with the unparalleled chapter. To hear the foreign mail-steamers coming in at dawn of day, and to know that I was not aboard or obliged to get up, was very comfortable; so, I rose for the chapter in great force.

I had advanced so far as to sit down at my window again on my second morning, and to write the first half-line of the chapter and strike it out, not liking it, when my conscience reproached me with not having surveyed the watering-place out of the season, after all, yesterday, but with having gone straight out of it at the rate of four miles and a half an hour. Obviously the best amends that I could make for this remissness was to go and look at it without another moment's delay. So - altogether as a matter of duty - I gave up the magnificent chapter for another day, and sauntered out with my hands in my pockets.

All the houses and lodgings ever let to visitors, were to let that morning. It seemed to have snowed bills with To Let upon them. This put me upon thinking what the owners of all those apartments did, out of the season; how they employed their time, and occupied their minds. They could not be always going to the Methodist chapels, of which I passed one every other minute. They must have some other recreation. Whether they pretended to take one another's lodgings, and opened one another's tea-caddies in fun? Whether they cut slices off their own beef and mutton, and made believe that it belonged to somebody else? Whether they played little dramas of life, as children do, and said, 'I ought to come and look at your apartments, and you ought to ask two guineas a- week too much, and then I ought to say I must have the rest of the day to think of it, and then you ought to say that another lady and gentleman with no children in family had made an offer very close to your own terms, and you had passed your word to give them a positive answer in half an hour, and indeed were just going to take the bill down when you heard the knock, and then I ought to take them, you know?' Twenty such speculations engaged my thoughts. Then, after passing, still clinging to the walls, defaced rags of the bills of last year's Circus, I came to a back field near a timber-yard where the Circus itself had been, and where there was yet a sort of monkish tonsure on the grass, indicating the spot where the young lady had gone round upon her pet steed Firefly in her daring flight. Turning into the town again, I came among the shops, and they were emphatically out of the season. The chemist had no boxes of ginger-beer powders, no beautifying sea-side soaps and washes, no attractive scents; nothing but his great goggle-eyed red bottles, looking as if the winds of winter and the drift of the salt-sea had inflamed them. The grocers' hot pickles, Harvey's Sauce, Doctor Kitchener's Zest, Anchovy Paste, Dundee Marmalade, and the whole stock of luxurious helps to appetite, were hybernating somewhere underground. The china-shop had no trifles from anywhere. The Bazaar had given in altogether, and presented a notice on the shutters that this establishment would re-open at Whitsuntide, and that the proprietor in the meantime might be heard of at Wild Lodge, East Cliff. At the Sea-bathing Establishment, a row of neat little wooden houses seven or eight feet high, I SAW the proprietor in bed in the shower-bath. As to the bathing- machines, they were (how they got there, is not for me to say) at the top of a hill at least a mile and a half off. The library, which I had never seen otherwise than wide open, was tight shut; and two peevish bald old gentlemen seemed to be hermetically sealed up inside, eternally reading the paper. That wonderful mystery, the music-shop, carried it off as usual (except that it had more cabinet pianos in stock), as if season or no season were all one to it. It made the same prodigious display of bright brazen wind- instruments, horribly twisted, worth, as I should conceive, some thousands of pounds, and which it is utterly impossible that anybody in any season can ever play or want to play. It had five triangles in the window, six pairs of castanets, and three harps; likewise every polka with a coloured frontispiece that ever was published; from the original one where a smooth male and female Pole of high rank are coming at the observer with their arms a- kimbo, to the Ratcatcher's Daughter. Astonishing establishment, amazing enigma! Three other shops were pretty much out of the season, what they were used to be in it. First, the shop where they sell the sailors' watches, which had still the old collection of enormous timekeepers, apparently designed to break a fall from the masthead: with places to wind them up, like fire-plugs. Secondly, the shop where they sell the sailors' clothing, which displayed the old sou'-westers, and the old oily suits, and the old pea-jackets, and the old one sea-chest, with its handles like a pair of rope ear-rings. Thirdly, the unchangeable shop for the sale of literature that has been left behind. Here, Dr. Faustus was still going down to very red and yellow perdition, under the superintendence of three green personages of a scaly humour, with excrescential serpents growing out of their blade-bones. Here, the Golden Dreamer, and the Norwood Fortune Teller, were still on sale at sixpence each, with instructions for making the dumb cake, and reading destinies in tea-cups, and with a picture of a young woman with a high waist lying on a sofa in an attitude so uncomfortable as almost to account for her dreaming at one and the same time of a conflagration, a shipwreck, an earthquake, a skeleton, a church- porch, lightning, funerals performed, and a young man in a bright blue coat and canary pantaloons. Here, were Little Warblers and Fairburn's Comic Songsters. Here, too, were ballads on the old ballad paper and in the old confusion of types; with an old man in a cocked hat, and an arm-chair, for the illustration to Will Watch the bold Smuggler; and the Friar of Orders Grey, represented by a little girl in a hoop, with a ship in the distance. All these as of yore, when they were infinite delights to me!

It took me so long fully to relish these many enjoyments, that I had not more than an hour before bedtime to devote to Madame Roland. We got on admirably together on the subject of her convent education, and I rose next morning with the full conviction that the day for the great chapter was at last arrived.

It had fallen calm, however, in the night, and as I sat at breakfast I blushed to remember that I had not yet been on the Downs. I a walker, and not yet on the Downs! Really, on so quiet and bright a morning this must be set right. As an essential part of the Whole Duty of Man, therefore, I left the chapter to itself - for the present - and went on the Downs. They were wonderfully green and beautiful, and gave me a good deal to do. When I had done with the free air and the view, I had to go down into the valley and look after the hops (which I know nothing about), and to be equally solicitous as to the cherry orchards. Then I took it on myself to cross-examine a tramping family in black (mother alleged, I have no doubt by herself in person, to have died last week), and to accompany eighteenpence which produced a great effect, with moral admonitions which produced none at all. Finally, it was late in the afternoon before I got back to the unprecedented chapter, and then I determined that it was out of the season, as the place was, and put it away.

I went at night to the benefit of Mrs. B. Wedgington at the Theatre, who had placarded the town with the admonition, 'DON'T FORGET IT!' I made the house, according to my calculation, four and ninepence to begin with, and it may have warmed up, in the course of the evening, to half a sovereign. There was nothing to offend any one, - the good Mr. Baines of Leeds excepted. Mrs. B. Wedgington sang to a grand piano. Mr. B. Wedgington did the like, and also took off his coat, tucked up his trousers, and danced in clogs. Master B. Wedgington, aged ten months, was nursed by a shivering young person in the boxes, and the eye of Mrs. B. Wedgington wandered that way more than once. Peace be with all the Wedgingtons from A. to Z. May they find themselves in the Season somewhere!

A POOR MAN'S TALE OF A PATENT

I AM not used to writing for print. What working-man, that never labours less (some Mondays, and Christmas Time and Easter Time excepted) than twelve or fourteen hours a day, is? But I have been asked to put down, plain, what I have got to say; and so I take pen-and-ink, and do it to the best of my power, hoping defects will find excuse.

I was born nigh London, but have worked in a shop at Birmingham (what you would call Manufactories, we call Shops), almost ever since I was out of my time. I served my apprenticeship at Deptford, nigh where I was born, and I am a smith by trade. My name is John. I have been called 'Old John' ever since I was nineteen year of age, on account of not having much hair. I am fifty-six year of age at the present time, and I don't find myself with more hair, nor yet with less, to signify, than at nineteen year of age aforesaid.

I have been married five and thirty year, come next April. I was married on All Fools' Day. Let them laugh that will. I won a good wife that day, and it was as sensible a day to me as ever I had.

We have had a matter of ten children, six whereof are living. My eldest son is engineer in the Italian steam-packet 'Mezzo Giorno, plying between Marseilles and Naples, and calling at Genoa, Leghorn, and Civita Vecchia.' He was a good workman. He invented a many useful little things that brought him in - nothing. I have two sons doing well at Sydney, New South Wales - single, when last heard from. One of my sons (James) went wild and for a soldier, where he was shot in India, living six weeks in hospital with a musket-ball lodged in his shoulder-blade, which he wrote with his own hand. He was the best looking. One of my two daughters (Mary) is comfortable in her circumstances, but water on the chest. The other (Charlotte), her husband run away from her in the basest manner, and she and her three children live with us. The youngest, six year old, has a turn for mechanics.

I am not a Chartist, and I never was. I don't mean to say but what I see a good many public points to complain of, still I don't think that's the way to set them right. If I did think so, I should be a Chartist. But I don't think so, and I am not a Chartist. I read the paper, and hear discussion, at what we call 'a parlour,' in Birmingham, and I know many good men and workmen who are Chartists. Note. Not Physical force.

It won't be took as boastful in me, if I make the remark (for I can't put down what I have got to say, without putting that down before going any further), that I have always been of an ingenious turn. I once got twenty pound by a screw, and it's in use now. I have been twenty year, off and on, completing an Invention and perfecting it. I perfected of it, last Christmas Eve at ten o'clock at night. Me and my wife stood and let some tears fall over the Model, when it was done and I brought her in to take a look at it.

A friend of mine, by the name of William Butcher, is a Chartist. Moderate. He is a good speaker. He is very animated. I have often heard him deliver that what is, at every turn, in the way of us working-men, is, that too many places have been made, in the course of time, to provide for people that never ought to have been provided for; and that we have to obey forms and to pay fees to support those places when we shouldn't ought. 'True,' (delivers William Butcher), 'all the public has to do this, but it falls heaviest on the working-man, because he has least to spare; and likewise because impediments shouldn't be put in his way, when he wants redress of wrong or furtherance of right.' Note. I have wrote down those words from William Butcher's own mouth. W. B. delivering them fresh for the aforesaid purpose.

Now, to my Model again. There it was, perfected of, on Christmas Eve, gone nigh a year, at ten o'clock at night. All the money I could spare I had laid out upon the Model; and when times was bad, or my daughter Charlotte's children sickly, or both, it had stood still, months at a spell. I had pulled it to pieces, and made it over again with improvements, I don't know how often. There it stood, at last, a perfected Model as aforesaid.

William Butcher and me had a long talk, Christmas Day, respecting of the Model. William is very sensible. But sometimes cranky. William said, 'What will you do with it, John?' I said, 'Patent it.' William said, 'How patent it, John?' I said, 'By taking out a Patent.' William then delivered that the law of Patent was a cruel wrong. William said, 'John, if you make your invention public, before you get a Patent, any one may rob you of the fruits of your hard work. You are put in a cleft stick, John. Either you must drive a bargain very much against yourself, by getting a party to come forward beforehand with the great expenses of the Patent; or, you must be put about, from post to pillar, among so many parties, trying to make a better bargain for yourself, and showing your invention, that your invention will be took from you over your head.' I said, 'William Butcher, are you cranky? You are sometimes cranky.' William said, 'No, John, I tell you the truth;' which he then delivered more at length. I said to W. B. I would Patent the invention myself.

My wife's brother, George Bury of West Bromwich (his wife unfortunately took to drinking, made away with everything, and seventeen times committed to Birmingham Jail before happy release in every point of view), left my wife, his sister, when he died, a legacy of one hundred and twenty-eight pound ten, Bank of England Stocks. Me and my wife never broke into that money yet. Note. We might come to be old and past our work. We now agreed to Patent the invention. We said we would make a hole in it - I mean in the aforesaid money - and Patent the invention. William Butcher wrote me a letter to Thomas Joy, in London. T. J. is a carpenter, six foot four in height, and plays quoits well. He lives in Chelsea, London, by the church. I got leave from the shop, to be took on again when I come back. I am a good workman. Not a Teetotaller; but never drunk. When the Christmas holidays were over, I went up to London by the Parliamentary Train, and hired a lodging for a week with Thomas Joy. He is married. He has one son gone to sea.

Thomas Joy delivered (from a book he had) that the first step to be took, in Patenting the invention, was to prepare a petition unto Queen Victoria. William Butcher had delivered similar, and drawn it up. Note. William is a ready writer. A declaration before a Master in Chancery was to be added to it. That, we likewise drew up. After a deal of trouble I found out a Master, in Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, nigh Temple Bar, where I made the declaration, and paid eighteen-pence. I was told to take the declaration and petition to the Home Office, in Whitehall, where I left it to be signed by the Home Secretary (after I had found the office out), and where I paid two pound, two, and sixpence. In six days he signed it, and I was told to take it to the Attorney- General's chambers, and leave it there for a report. I did so, and paid four pound, four. Note. Nobody all through, ever thankful for their money, but all uncivil.

My lodging at Thomas Joy's was now hired for another week, whereof five days were gone. The Attorney-General made what they called a Report-of-course (my invention being, as William Butcher had delivered before starting, unopposed), and I was sent back with it to the Home Office. They made a Copy of it, which was called a Warrant. For this warrant, I paid seven pound, thirteen, and six. It was sent to the Queen, to sign. The Queen sent it back, signed. The Home Secretary signed it again. The gentleman throwed it at me when I called, and said, 'Now take it to the Patent Office in Lincoln's Inn.' I was then in my third week at Thomas Joy's living very sparing, on account of fees. I found myself losing heart.

At the Patent Office in Lincoln's Inn, they made 'a draft of the Queen's bill,' of my invention, and a 'docket of the bill.' I paid five pound, ten, and six, for this. They 'engrossed two copies of the bill; one for the Signet Office, and one for the Privy-Seal Office.' I paid one pound, seven, and six, for this. Stamp duty over and above, three pound. The Engrossing Clerk of the same office engrossed the Queen's bill for signature. I paid him one pound, one. Stamp-duty, again, one pound, ten. I was next to take the Queen's bill to the Attorney-General again, and get it signed again. I took it, and paid five pound more. I fetched it away, and took it to the Home Secretary again. He sent it to the Queen again. She signed it again. I paid seven pound, thirteen, and six, more, for this. I had been over a month at Thomas Joy's. I was quite wore out, patience and pocket.

Thomas Joy delivered all this, as it went on, to William Butcher. William Butcher delivered it again to three Birmingham Parlours, from which it got to all the other Parlours, and was took, as I have been told since, right through all the shops in the North of England. Note. William Butcher delivered, at his Parlour, in a speech, that it was a Patent way of making Chartists.

But I hadn't nigh done yet. The Queen's bill was to be took to the Signet Office in Somerset House, Strand - where the stamp shop is. The Clerk of the Signet made 'a Signet bill for the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal.' I paid him four pound, seven. The Clerk of the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal made 'a Privy-Seal bill for the Lord Chancellor.' I paid him, four pound, two. The Privy-Seal bill was handed over to the Clerk of the Patents, who engrossed the aforesaid. I paid him five pound, seventeen, and eight; at the same time, I paid Stamp-duty for the Patent, in one lump, thirty pound. I next paid for 'boxes for the Patent,' nine and sixpence. Note. Thomas Joy would have made the same at a profit for eighteen-pence. I next paid 'fees to the Deputy, the Lord Chancellor's Purse-bearer,' two pound, two. I next paid 'fees to the Clerk of the Hanapar,' seven pound, thirteen. I next paid 'fees to the Deputy Clerk of the Hanaper,' ten shillings. I next paid, to the Lord Chancellor again, one pound, eleven, and six. Last of all, I paid 'fees to the Deputy Sealer, and Deputy Chaff- wax,' ten shillings and sixpence. I had lodged at Thomas Joy's over six weeks, and the unopposed Patent for my invention, for England only, had cost me ninety-six pound, seven, and eightpence. If I had taken it out for the United Kingdom, it would have cost me more than three hundred pound.

Now, teaching had not come up but very limited when I was young. So much the worse for me you'll say. I say the same. William Butcher is twenty year younger than me. He knows a hundred year more. If William Butcher had wanted to Patent an invention, he might have been sharper than myself when hustled backwards and forwards among all those offices, though I doubt if so patient. Note. William being sometimes cranky, and consider porters, messengers, and clerks.

Thereby I say nothing of my being tired of my life, while I was Patenting my invention. But I put this: Is it reasonable to make a man feel as if, in inventing an ingenious improvement meant to do good, he had done something wrong? How else can a man feel, when he is met by such difficulties at every turn? All inventors taking out a Patent MUST feel so. And look at the expense. How hard on me, and how hard on the country if there's any merit in me (and my invention is took up now, I am thankful to say, and doing well), to put me to all that expense before I can move a finger! Make the addition yourself, and it'll come to ninety-six pound, seven, and eightpence. No more, and no less.

What can I say against William Butcher, about places? Look at the Home Secretary, the Attorney-General, the Patent Office, the Engrossing Clerk, the Lord Chancellor, the Privy Seal, the Clerk of the Patents, the Lord Chancellor's Purse-bearer, the Clerk of the Hanaper, the Deputy Clerk of the Hanaper, the Deputy Sealer, and the Deputy Chaff-wax. No man in England could get a Patent for an Indian-rubber band, or an iron-hoop, without feeing all of them. Some of them, over and over again. I went through thirty-five stages. I began with the Queen upon the Throne. I ended with the Deputy Chaff-wax. Note. I should like to see the Deputy Chaff-wax. Is it a man, or what is it?

What I had to tell, I have told. I have wrote it down. I hope it's plain. Not so much in the handwriting (though nothing to boast of there), as in the sense of it. I will now conclude with Thomas Joy. Thomas said to me, when we parted, 'John, if the laws of this country were as honest as they ought to be, you would have come to London - registered an exact description and drawing of your invention - paid half-a-crown or so for doing of it - and therein and thereby have got your Patent.'

My opinion is the same as Thomas Joy. Further. In William Butcher's delivering 'that the whole gang of Hanapers and Chaff- waxes must be done away with, and that England has been chaffed and waxed sufficient,' I agree.

THE NOBLE SAVAGE

TO come to the point at once, I beg to say that I have not the least belief in the Noble Savage. I consider him a prodigious nuisance, and an enormous superstition. His calling rum fire- water, and me a pale face, wholly fail to reconcile me to him. I don't care what he calls me. I call him a savage, and I call a savage a something highly desirable to be civilised off the face of the earth. I think a mere gent (which I take to be the lowest form of civilisation) better than a howling, whistling, clucking, stamping, jumping, tearing savage. It is all one to me, whether he sticks a fish-bone through his visage, or bits of trees through the lobes of his ears, or bird's feathers in his head; whether he flattens his hair between two boards, or spreads his nose over the breadth of his face, or drags his lower lip down by great weights, or blackens his teeth, or knocks them out, or paints one cheek red and the other blue, or tattoos himself, or oils himself, or rubs his body with fat, or crimps it with knives. Yielding to whichsoever of these agreeable eccentricities, he is a savage - cruel, false, thievish, murderous; addicted more or less to grease, entrails, and beastly customs; a wild animal with the questionable gift of boasting; a conceited, tiresome, bloodthirsty, monotonous humbug.

Yet it is extraordinary to observe how some people will talk about him, as they talk about the good old times; how they will regret his disappearance, in the course of this world's development, from such and such lands where his absence is a blessed relief and an indispensable preparation for the sowing of the very first seeds of any influence that can exalt humanity; how, even with the evidence of himself before them, they will either be determined to believe, or will suffer themselves to be persuaded into believing, that he is something which their five senses tell them he is not.

There was Mr. Catlin, some few years ago, with his Ojibbeway Indians. Mr. Catlin was an energetic, earnest man, who had lived among more tribes of Indians than I need reckon up here, and who had written a picturesque and glowing book about them. With his party of Indians squatting and spitting on the table before him, or dancing their miserable jigs after their own dreary manner, he called, in all good faith, upon his civilised audience to take notice of their symmetry and grace, their perfect limbs, and the exquisite expression of their pantomime; and his civilised audience, in all good faith, complied and admired. Whereas, as mere animals, they were wretched creatures, very low in the scale and very poorly formed; and as men and women possessing any power of truthful dramatic expression by means of action, they were no better than the chorus at an Italian Opera in England - and would have been worse if such a thing were possible.

Mine are no new views of the noble savage. The greatest writers on natural history found him out long ago. BUFFON knew what he was, and showed why he is the sulky tyrant that he is to his women, and how it happens (Heaven be praised!) that his race is spare in numbers. For evidence of the quality of his moral nature, pass himself for a moment and refer to his 'faithful dog.' Has he ever improved a dog, or attached a dog, since his nobility first ran wild in woods, and was brought down (at a very long shot) by POPE? Or does the animal that is the friend of man, always degenerate in his low society?

It is not the miserable nature of the noble savage that is the new thing; it is the whimpering over him with maudlin admiration, and the affecting to regret him, and the drawing of any comparison of advantage between the blemishes of civilisation and the tenor of his swinish life. There may have been a change now and then in those diseased absurdities, but there is none in him.

Think of the Bushmen. Think of the two men and the two women who have been exhibited about England for some years. Are the majority of persons - who remember the horrid little leader of that party in his festering bundle of hides, with his filth and his antipathy to water, and his straddled legs, and his odious eyes shaded by his brutal hand, and his cry of 'Qu-u-u-u-aaa!' (Bosjesman for something desperately insulting I have no doubt) - conscious of an affectionate yearning towards that noble savage, or is it idiosyncratic in me to abhor, detest, abominate, and abjure him? I have no reserve on this subject, and will frankly state that, setting aside that stage of the entertainment when he counterfeited the death of some creature he had shot, by laying his head on his hand and shaking his left leg - at which time I think it would have been justifiable homicide to slay him - I have never seen that group sleeping, smoking, and expectorating round their brazier, but I have sincerely desired that something might happen to the charcoal smouldering therein, which would cause the immediate suffocation of the whole of the noble strangers.

There is at present a party of Zulu Kaffirs exhibiting at the St. George's Gallery, Hyde Park Corner, London. These noble savages are represented in a most agreeable manner; they are seen in an elegant theatre, fitted with appropriate scenery of great beauty, and they are described in a very sensible and unpretending lecture, delivered with a modesty which is quite a pattern to all similar exponents. Though extremely ugly, they are much better shaped than such of their predecessors as I have referred to; and they are rather picturesque to the eye, though far from odoriferous to the nose. What a visitor left to his own interpretings and imaginings might suppose these noblemen to be about, when they give vent to that pantomimic expression which is quite settled to be the natural gift of the noble savage, I cannot possibly conceive; for it is so much too luminous for my personal civilisation that it conveys no idea to my mind beyond a general stamping, ramping, and raving, remarkable (as everything in savage life is) for its dire uniformity. But let us - with the interpreter's assistance, of which I for one stand so much in need - see what the noble savage does in Zulu Kaffirland.

The noble savage sets a king to reign over him, to whom he submits his life and limbs without a murmur or question, and whose whole life is passed chin deep in a lake of blood; but who, after killing incessantly, is in his turn killed by his relations and friends, the moment a grey hair appears on his head. All the noble savage's wars with his fellow-savages (and he takes no pleasure in anything else) are wars of extermination - which is the best thing I know of him, and the most comfortable to my mind when I look at him. He has no moral feelings of any kind, sort, or description; and his 'mission' may be summed up as simply diabolical.

The ceremonies with which he faintly diversifies his life are, of course, of a kindred nature. If he wants a wife he appears before the kennel of the gentleman whom he has selected for his father-in- law, attended by a party of male friends of a very strong flavour, who screech and whistle and stamp an offer of so many cows for the young lady's hand. The chosen father-in-law - also supported by a high-flavoured party of male friends - screeches, whistles, and yells (being seated on the ground, he can't stamp) that there never was such a daughter in the market as his daughter, and that he must have six more cows. The son-in-law and his select circle of backers screech, whistle, stamp, and yell in reply, that they will give three more cows. The father-in-law (an old deluder, overpaid at the beginning) accepts four, and rises to bind the bargain. The whole party, the young lady included, then falling into epileptic convulsions, and screeching, whistling, stamping, and yelling together - and nobody taking any notice of the young lady (whose charms are not to be thought of without a shudder) - the noble savage is considered married, and his friends make demoniacal leaps at him by way of congratulation.

When the noble savage finds himself a little unwell, and mentions the circumstance to his friends, it is immediately perceived that he is under the influence of witchcraft. A learned personage, called an Imyanger or Witch Doctor, is immediately sent for to Nooker the Umtargartie, or smell out the witch. The male inhabitants of the kraal being seated on the ground, the learned doctor, got up like a grizzly bear, appears, and administers a dance of a most terrific nature, during the exhibition of which remedy he incessantly gnashes his teeth, and howls:- 'I am the original physician to Nooker the Umtargartie. Yow yow yow! No connexion with any other establishment. Till till till! All other Umtargarties are feigned Umtargarties, Boroo Boroo! but I perceive here a genuine and real Umtargartie, Hoosh Hoosh Hoosh! in whose blood I, the original Imyanger and Nookerer, Blizzerum Boo! will wash these bear's claws of mine. O yow yow yow!' All this time the learned physician is looking out among the attentive faces for some unfortunate man who owes him a cow, or who has given him any small offence, or against whom, without offence, he has conceived a spite. Him he never fails to Nooker as the Umtargartie, and he is instantly killed. In the absence of such an individual, the usual practice is to Nooker the quietest and most gentlemanly person in company. But the nookering is invariably followed on the spot by the butchering.

Some of the noble savages in whom Mr. Catlin was so strongly interested, and the diminution of whose numbers, by rum and smallpox, greatly affected him, had a custom not unlike this, though much more appalling and disgusting in its odious details.

The women being at work in the fields, hoeing the Indian corn, and the noble savage being asleep in the shade, the chief has sometimes the condescension to come forth, and lighten the labour by looking at it. On these occasions, he seats himself in his own savage chair, and is attended by his shield-bearer: who holds over his head a shield of cowhide - in shape like an immense mussel shell - fearfully and wonderfully, after the manner of a theatrical supernumerary. But lest the great man should forget his greatness in the contemplation of the humble works of agriculture, there suddenly rushes in a poet, retained for the purpose, called a Praiser. This literary gentleman wears a leopard's head over his own, and a dress of tigers' tails; he has the appearance of having come express on his hind legs from the Zoological Gardens; and he incontinently strikes up the chief's praises, plunging and tearing all the while. There is a frantic wickedness in this brute's manner of worrying the air, and gnashing out, 'O what a delightful chief he is! O what a delicious quantity of blood he sheds! O how majestically he laps it up! O how charmingly cruel he is! O how he tears the flesh of his enemies and crunches the bones! O how like the tiger and the leopard and the wolf and the bear he is! O, row row row row, how fond I am of him!' which might tempt the Society of Friends to charge at a hand-gallop into the Swartz-Kop location and exterminate the whole kraal.

When war is afoot among the noble savages - which is always - the chief holds a council to ascertain whether it is the opinion of his brothers and friends in general that the enemy shall be exterminated. On this occasion, after the performance of an Umsebeuza, or war song, - which is exactly like all the other songs, - the chief makes a speech to his brothers and friends, arranged in single file. No particular order is observed during the delivery of this address, but every gentleman who finds himself excited by the subject, instead of crying 'Hear, hear!' as is the custom with us, darts from the rank and tramples out the life, or crushes the skull, or mashes the face, or scoops out the eyes, or breaks the limbs, or performs a whirlwind of atrocities on the body, of an imaginary enemy. Several gentlemen becoming thus excited at once, and pounding away without the least regard to the orator, that illustrious person is rather in the position of an orator in an Irish House of Commons. But, several of these scenes of savage life bear a strong generic resemblance to an Irish election, and I think would be extremely well received and understood at Cork.

In all these ceremonies the noble savage holds forth to the utmost possible extent about himself; from which (to turn him to some civilised account) we may learn, I think, that as egotism is one of the most offensive and contemptible littlenesses a civilised man can exhibit, so it is really incompatible with the interchange of ideas; inasmuch as if we all talked about ourselves we should soon have no listeners, and must be all yelling and screeching at once on our own separate accounts: making society hideous. It is my opinion that if we retained in us anything of the noble savage, we could not get rid of it too soon. But the fact is clearly otherwise. Upon the wife and dowry question, substituting coin for cows, we have assuredly nothing of the Zulu Kaffir left. The endurance of despotism is one great distinguishing mark of a savage always. The improving world has quite got the better of that too. In like manner, Paris is a civilised city, and the Theatre Francais a highly civilised theatre; and we shall never hear, and never have heard in these later days (of course) of the Praiser THERE. No, no, civilised poets have better work to do. As to Nookering Umtargarties, there are no pretended Umtargarties in Europe, and no European powers to Nooker them; that would be mere spydom, subordination, small malice, superstition, and false pretence. And as to private Umtargarties, are we not in the year eighteen hundred and fifty-three, with spirits rapping at our doors?

To conclude as I began. My position is, that if we have anything to learn from the Noble Savage, it is what to avoid. His virtues are a fable; his happiness is a delusion; his nobility, nonsense.

We have no greater justification for being cruel to the miserable object, than for being cruel to a WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE or an ISAAC NEWTON; but he passes away before an immeasurably better and higher power than ever ran wild in any earthly woods, and the world will be all the better when his place knows him no more.

A FLIGHT

WHEN Don Diego de - I forget his name - the inventor of the last new Flying Machines, price so many francs for ladies, so many more for gentlemen - when Don Diego, by permission of Deputy Chaff-wax and his noble band, shall have taken out a Patent for the Queen's dominions, and shall have opened a commodious Warehouse in an airy situation; and when all persons of any gentility will keep at least a pair of wings, and be seen skimming about in every direction; I shall take a flight to Paris (as I soar round the world) in a cheap and independent manner. At present, my reliance is on the South- Eastern Railway Company, in whose Express Train here I sit, at eight of the clock on a very hot morning, under the very hot roof of the Terminus at London Bridge, in danger of being 'forced' like a cucumber or a melon, or a pine-apple. And talking of pine- apples, I suppose there never were so many pine-apples in a Train as there appear to be in this Train.

Whew! The hot-house air is faint with pine-apples. Every French citizen or citizeness is carrying pine-apples home. The compact little Enchantress in the corner of my carriage (French actress, to whom I yielded up my heart under the auspices of that brave child, 'MEAT-CHELL,' at the St. James's Theatre the night before last) has a pine-apple in her lap. Compact Enchantress's friend, confidante, mother, mystery, Heaven knows what, has two pine-apples in her lap, and a bundle of them under the seat. Tobacco-smoky Frenchman in Algerine wrapper, with peaked hood behind, who might be Abd-el- Kader dyed rifle-green, and who seems to be dressed entirely in dirt and braid, carries pine-apples in a covered basket. Tall, grave, melancholy Frenchman, with black Vandyke beard, and hair close-cropped, with expansive chest to waistcoat, and compressive waist to coat: saturnine as to his pantaloons, calm as to his feminine boots, precious as to his jewellery, smooth and white as to his linen: dark-eyed, high-foreheaded, hawk-nosed - got up, one thinks, like Lucifer or Mephistopheles, or Zamiel, transformed into a highly genteel Parisian - has the green end of a pine-apple sticking out of his neat valise.

Whew! If I were to be kept here long, under this forcing-frame, I wonder what would become of me - whether I should be forced into a giant, or should sprout or blow into some other phenomenon! Compact Enchantress is not ruffled by the heat - she is always composed, always compact. O look at her little ribbons, frills, and edges, at her shawl, at her gloves, at her hair, at her bracelets, at her bonnet, at everything about her! How is it accomplished? What does she do to be so neat? How is it that every trifle she wears belongs to her, and cannot choose but be a part of her? And even Mystery, look at HER! A model. Mystery is not young, not pretty, though still of an average candle-light passability; but she does such miracles in her own behalf, that, one of these days, when she dies, they'll be amazed to find an old woman in her bed, distantly like her. She was an actress once, I shouldn't wonder, and had a Mystery attendant on herself. Perhaps, Compact Enchantress will live to be a Mystery, and to wait with a shawl at the side-scenes, and to sit opposite to Mademoiselle in railway carriages, and smile and talk subserviently, as Mystery does now. That's hard to believe!

Two Englishmen, and now our carriage is full. First Englishman, in the monied interest - flushed, highly respectable - Stock Exchange, perhaps - City, certainly. Faculties of second Englishman entirely absorbed in hurry. Plunges into the carriage, blind. Calls out of window concerning his luggage, deaf. Suffocates himself under pillows of great-coats, for no reason, and in a demented manner. Will receive no assurance from any porter whatsoever. Is stout and hot, and wipes his head, and makes himself hotter by breathing so hard. Is totally incredulous respecting assurance of Collected Guard, that 'there's no hurry.' No hurry! And a flight to Paris in eleven hours!

It is all one to me in this drowsy corner, hurry or no hurry. Until Don Diego shall send home my wings, my flight is with the South-Eastern Company. I can fly with the South-Eastern, more lazily, at all events, than in the upper air. I have but to sit here thinking as idly as I please, and be whisked away. I am not accountable to anybody for the idleness of my thoughts in such an idle summer flight; my flight is provided for by the South-Eastern and is no business of mine.

The bell! With all my heart. It does not require me to do so much as even to flap my wings. Something snorts for me, something shrieks for me, something proclaims to everything else that it had better keep out of my way, - and away I go.

Ah! The fresh air is pleasant after the forcing-frame, though it does blow over these interminable streets, and scatter the smoke of this vast wilderness of chimneys. Here we are - no, I mean there we were, for it has darted far into the rear - in Bermondsey where the tanners live. Flash! The distant shipping in the Thames is gone. Whirr! The little streets of new brick and red tile, with here and there a flagstaff growing like a tall weed out of the scarlet beans, and, everywhere, plenty of open sewer and ditch for the promotion of the public health, have been fired off in a volley. Whizz! Dust-heaps, market-gardens, and waste grounds. Rattle! New Cross Station. Shock! There we were at Croydon. Bur-r-r-r! The tunnel.

I wonder why it is that when I shut my eyes in a tunnel I begin to feel as if I were going at an Express pace the other way. I am clearly going back to London now. Compact Enchantress must have forgotten something, and reversed the engine. No! After long darkness, pale fitful streaks of light appear. I am still flying on for Folkestone. The streaks grow stronger - become continuous - become the ghost of day - become the living day - became I mean - the tunnel is miles and miles away, and here I fly through sunlight, all among the harvest and the Kentish hops.

There is a dreamy pleasure in this flying. I wonder where it was, and when it was, that we exploded, blew into space somehow, a Parliamentary Train, with a crowd of heads and faces looking at us out of cages, and some hats waving. Monied Interest says it was at Reigate Station. Expounds to Mystery how Reigate Station is so many miles from London, which Mystery again develops to Compact Enchantress. There might be neither a Reigate nor a London for me, as I fly away among the Kentish hops and harvest. What do I care?

Bang! We have let another Station off, and fly away regardless. Everything is flying. The hop-gardens turn gracefully towards me, presenting regular avenues of hops in rapid flight, then whirl away. So do the pools and rushes, haystacks, sheep, clover in full bloom delicious to the sight and smell, corn-sheaves, cherry- orchards, apple-orchards, reapers, gleaners, hedges, gates, fields that taper off into little angular corners, cottages, gardens, now and then a church. Bang, bang! A double-barrelled

Station! Now a wood, now a bridge, now a landscape, now a cutting, now a - Bang! a single-barrelled Station - there was a cricket-match somewhere with two white tents, and then four flying cows, then turnips - now the wires of the electric telegraph are all alive, and spin, and blurr their edges, and go up and down, and make the intervals between each other most irregular: contracting and expanding in the strangest manner. Now we slacken. With a screwing, and a grinding, and a smell of water thrown on ashes, now we stop!

Demented Traveller, who has been for two or three minutes watchful, clutches his great-coats, plunges at the door, rattles it, cries 'Hi!' eager to embark on board of impossible packets, far inland. Collected Guard appears. 'Are you for Tunbridge, sir?' 'Tunbridge? No. Paris.' 'Plenty of time, sir. No hurry. Five minutes here, sir, for refreshment.' I am so blest (anticipating Zamiel, by half a second) as to procure a glass of water for Compact Enchantress.

Who would suppose we had been flying at such a rate, and shall take wing again directly? Refreshment-room full, platform full, porter with watering-pot deliberately cooling a hot wheel, another porter with equal deliberation helping the rest of the wheels bountifully to ice cream. Monied Interest and I re-entering the carriage first, and being there alone, he intimates to me that the French are 'no go' as a Nation. I ask why? He says, that Reign of Terror of theirs was quite enough. I ventured to inquire whether he remembers anything that preceded said Reign of Terror? He says not particularly. 'Because,' I remark, 'the harvest that is reaped, has sometimes been sown.' Monied Interest repeats, as quite enough for him, that the French are revolutionary, - 'and always at it.'

Bell. Compact Enchantress, helped in by Zamiel (whom the stars confound!), gives us her charming little side-box look, and smites me to the core. Mystery eating sponge-cake. Pine-apple atmosphere faintly tinged with suspicions of sherry. Demented Traveller flits past the carriage, looking for it. Is blind with agitation, and can't see it. Seems singled out by Destiny to be the only unhappy creature in the flight, who has any cause to hurry himself. Is nearly left behind. Is seized by Collected Guard after the Train is in motion, and bundled in. Still, has lingering suspicions that there must be a boat in the neighbourhood, and WILL look wildly out of window for it.

Flight resumed. Corn-sheaves, hop-gardens, reapers, gleaners, apple-orchards, cherry-orchards, Stations single and double- barrelled, Ashford. Compact Enchantress (constantly talking to Mystery, in an exquisite manner) gives a little scream; a sound that seems to come from high up in her precious little head; from behind her bright little eyebrows. 'Great Heaven, my pine-apple! My Angel! It is lost!' Mystery is desolated. A search made. It is not lost. Zamiel finds it. I curse him (flying) in the Persian manner. May his face be turned upside down, and jackasses sit upon his uncle's grave!

Now fresher air, now glimpses of unenclosed Down-land with flapping crows flying over it whom we soon outfly, now the Sea, now Folkestone at a quarter after ten. 'Tickets ready, gentlemen!' Demented dashes at the door. 'For Paris, sir? No hurry.'

Not the least. We are dropped slowly down to the Port, and sidle to and fro (the whole Train) before the insensible Royal George Hotel, for some ten minutes. The Royal George takes no more heed of us than its namesake under water at Spithead, or under earth at Windsor, does. The Royal George's dog lies winking and blinking at us, without taking the trouble to sit up; and the Royal George's 'wedding party' at the open window (who seem, I must say, rather tired of bliss) don't bestow a solitary glance upon us, flying thus to Paris in eleven hours. The first gentleman in Folkestone is evidently used up, on this subject.

Meanwhile, Demented chafes. Conceives that every man's hand is against him, and exerting itself to prevent his getting to Paris. Refuses consolation. Rattles door. Sees smoke on the horizon, and 'knows' it's the boat gone without him. Monied Interest resentfully explains that HE is going to Paris too. Demented signifies, that if Monied Interest chooses to be left behind, HE don't.

'Refreshments in the Waiting-Room, ladies and gentlemen. No hurry, ladies and gentlemen, for Paris. No hurry whatever!'

Twenty minutes' pause, by Folkestone clock, for looking at Enchantress while she eats a sandwich, and at Mystery while she eats of everything there that is eatable, from pork-pie, sausage, jam, and gooseberries, to lumps of sugar. All this time, there is a very waterfall of luggage, with a spray of dust, tumbling slantwise from the pier into the steamboat. All this time, Demented (who has no business with it) watches it with starting eyes, fiercely requiring to be shown HIS luggage. When it at last concludes the cataract, he rushes hotly to refresh - is shouted after, pursued, jostled, brought back, pitched into the departing steamer upside down, and caught by mariners disgracefully.

A lovely harvest-day, a cloudless sky, a tranquil sea. The piston- rods of the engines so regularly coming up from below, to look (as well they may) at the bright weather, and so regularly almost knocking their iron heads against the cross beam of the skylight, and never doing it! Another Parisian actress is on board, attended by another Mystery. Compact Enchantress greets her sister artist - Oh, the Compact One's pretty teeth! - and Mystery greets Mystery. My Mystery soon ceases to be conversational - is taken poorly, in a word, having lunched too miscellaneously - and goes below. The remaining Mystery then smiles upon the sister artists (who, I am afraid, wouldn't greatly mind stabbing each other), and is upon the whole ravished.

And now I find that all the French people on board begin to grow, and all the English people to shrink. The French are nearing home, and shaking off a disadvantage, whereas we are shaking it on. Zamiel is the same man, and Abd-el-Kader is the same man, but each seems to come into possession of an indescribable confidence that departs from us - from Monied Interest, for instance, and from me. Just what they gain, we lose. Certain British 'Gents' about the steersman, intellectually nurtured at home on parody of everything and truth of nothing, become subdued, and in a manner forlorn; and when the steersman tells them (not exultingly) how he has 'been upon this station now eight year, and never see the old town of Bullum yet,' one of them, with an imbecile reliance on a reed, asks him what he considers to be the best hotel in Paris?

Now, I tread upon French ground, and am greeted by the three charming words, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, painted up (in letters a little too thin for their height) on the Custom-house wall - also by the sight of large cocked hats, without which demonstrative head-gear nothing of a public nature can be done upon this soil. All the rabid Hotel population of Boulogne howl and shriek outside a distant barrier, frantic to get at us. Demented, by some unlucky means peculiar to himself, is delivered over to their fury, and is presently seen struggling in a whirlpool of Touters - is somehow understood to be going to Paris - is, with infinite noise, rescued by two cocked hats, and brought into Custom-house bondage with the rest of us.

Here, I resign the active duties of life to an eager being, of preternatural sharpness, with a shelving forehead and a shabby snuff-coloured coat, who (from the wharf) brought me down with his eye before the boat came into port. He darts upon my luggage, on the floor where all the luggage is strewn like a wreck at the bottom of the great deep; gets it proclaimed and weighed as the property of 'Monsieur a traveller unknown;' pays certain francs for it, to a certain functionary behind a Pigeon Hole, like a pay-box at a Theatre (the arrangements in general are on a wholesale scale, half military and half theatrical); and I suppose I shall find it when I come to Paris - he says I shall. I know nothing about it, except that I pay him his small fee, and pocket the ticket he gives me, and sit upon a counter, involved in the general distraction.

Railway station. 'Lunch or dinner, ladies and gentlemen. Plenty of time for Paris. Plenty of time!' Large hall, long counter, long strips of dining-table, bottles of wine, plates of meat, roast chickens, little loaves of bread, basins of soup, little caraffes of brandy, cakes, and fruit. Comfortably restored from these resources, I begin to fly again.

I saw Zamiel (before I took wing) presented to Compact Enchantress and Sister Artist, by an officer in uniform, with a waist like a wasp's, and pantaloons like two balloons. They all got into the next carriage together, accompanied by the two Mysteries. They laughed. I am alone in the carriage (for I don't consider Demented anybody) and alone in the world.

Fields, windmills, low grounds, pollard-trees, windmills, fields, fortifications, Abbeville, soldiering and drumming. I wonder where England is, and when I was there last - about two years ago, I should say. Flying in and out among these trenches and batteries, skimming the clattering drawbridges, looking down into the stagnant ditches, I become a prisoner of state, escaping. I am confined with a comrade in a fortress. Our room is in an upper story. We have tried to get up the chimney, but there's an iron grating across it, imbedded in the masonry. After months of labour, we have worked the grating loose with the poker, and can lift it up. We have also made a hook, and twisted our rugs and blankets into ropes. Our plan is, to go up the chimney, hook our ropes to the top, descend hand over hand upon the roof of the guard-house far below, shake the hook loose, watch the opportunity of the sentinels pacing away, hook again, drop into the ditch, swim across it, creep into the shelter of the wood. The time is come - a wild and stormy night. We are up the chimney, we are on the guard-house roof, we are swimming in the murky ditch, when lo! 'Qui v'la?' a bugle, the alarm, a crash! What is it? Death? No, Amiens.

More fortifications, more soldiering and drumming, more basins of soup, more little loaves of bread, more bottles of wine, more caraffes of brandy, more time for refreshment. Everything good, and everything ready. Bright, unsubstantial-looking, scenic sort of station. People waiting. Houses, uniforms, beards, moustaches, some sabots, plenty of neat women, and a few old-visaged children. Unless it be a delusion born of my giddy flight, the grown-up people and the children seem to change places in France. In general, the boys and girls are little old men and women, and the men and women lively boys and girls.

Bugle, shriek, flight resumed. Monied Interest has come into my carriage. Says the manner of refreshing is 'not bad,' but considers it French. Admits great dexterity and politeness in the attendants. Thinks a decimal currency may have something to do with their despatch in settling accounts, and don't know but what it's sensible and convenient. Adds, however, as a general protest, that they're a revolutionary people - and always at it.

Ramparts, canals, cathedral, river, soldiering and drumming, open country, river, earthenware manufactures, Creil. Again ten minutes. Not even Demented in a hurry. Station, a drawing-room with a verandah: like a planter's house. Monied Interest considers it a band-box, and not made to last. Little round tables in it, at one of which the Sister Artists and attendant Mysteries are established with Wasp and Zamiel, as if they were going to stay a week.

Anon, with no more trouble than before, I am flying again, and lazily wondering as I fly. What has the South-Eastern done with all the horrible little villages we used to pass through, in the DILIGENCE? What have they done with all the summer dust, with all the winter mud, with all the dreary avenues of little trees, with all the ramshackle postyards, with all the beggars (who used to turn out at night with bits of lighted candle, to look in at the coach windows), with all the long-tailed horses who were always biting one another, with all the big postilions in jack-boots - with all the mouldy cafes that we used to stop at, where a long mildewed table-cloth, set forth with jovial bottles of vinegar and oil, and with a Siamese arrangement of pepper and salt, was never wanting? Where are the grass-grown little towns, the wonderful little market-places all unconscious of markets, the shops that nobody kept, the streets that nobody trod, the churches that nobody went to, the bells that nobody rang, the tumble-down old buildings plastered with many-coloured bills that nobody read? Where are the two-

and-twenty weary hours of long, long day and night journey, sure to be either insupportably hot or insupportably cold? Where are the pains in my bones, where are the fidgets in my legs, where is the Frenchman with the nightcap who never WOULD have the little coupe-window down, and who always fell upon me when he went to sleep, and always slept all night snoring onions?

A voice breaks in with 'Paris! Here we are!'

I have overflown myself, perhaps, but I can't believe it. I feel as if I were enchanted or bewitched. It is barely eight o'clock yet - it is nothing like half-past - when I have had my luggage examined at that briskest of Custom-houses attached to the station, and am rattling over the pavement in a hackney-cabriolet.

Surely, not the pavement of Paris? Yes, I think it is, too. I don't know any other place where there are all these high houses, all these haggard-looking wine shops, all these billiard tables, all these stocking-makers with flat red or yellow legs of wood for signboard, all these fuel shops with stacks of billets painted outside, and real billets sawing in the gutter, all these dirty corners of streets, all these cabinet pictures over dark doorways representing discreet matrons nursing babies. And yet this morning - I'll think of it in a warm-bath.

Very like a small room that I remember in the Chinese baths upon the Boulevard, certainly; and, though I see it through the steam, I think that I might swear to that peculiar hot-linen basket, like a large wicker hour-glass. When can it have been that I left home? When was it that I paid 'through to Paris' at London Bridge, and discharged myself of all responsibility, except the preservation of a voucher ruled into three divisions, of which the first was snipped off at Folkestone, the second aboard the boat, and the third taken at my journey's end? It seems to have been ages ago. Calculation is useless. I will go out for a walk.

The crowds in the streets, the lights in the shops and balconies, the elegance, variety, and beauty of their decorations, the number of the theatres, the brilliant cafes with their windows thrown up high and their vivacious groups at little tables on the pavement, the light and glitter of the houses turned as it were inside out, soon convince me that it is no dream; that I am in Paris, howsoever I got there. I stroll down to the sparkling Palais Royal, up the Rue de Rivoli, to the Place Vendome. As I glance into a print-shop window, Monied Interest, my late travelling companion, comes upon me, laughing with the highest relish of disdain. 'Here's a people!' he says, pointing to Napoleon in the window and Napoleon on the column. 'Only one idea all over Paris! A monomania!' Humph! I THINK I have seen Napoleon's match? There was a statue, when I came away, at Hyde Park Corner, and another in the City, and a print or two in the shops.

I walk up to the Barriere de l'Etoile, sufficiently dazed by my flight to have a pleasant doubt of the reality of everything about me; of the lively crowd, the overhanging trees, the performing dogs, the hobby-horses, the beautiful perspectives of shining lamps: the hundred and one enclosures, where the singing is, in gleaming orchestras of azure and gold, and where a star-eyed Houri comes round with a box for voluntary offerings. So, I pass to my hotel, enchanted; sup, enchanted; go to bed, enchanted; pushing back this morning (if it really were this morning) into the remoteness of time, blessing the South-Eastern Company for realising the Arabian Nights in these prose days, murmuring, as I wing my idle flight into the land of dreams, 'No hurry, ladies and gentlemen, going to Paris in eleven hours. It is so well done, that there really is no hurry!'

THE DETECTIVE POLICE

WE are not by any means devout believers in the old Bow Street Police. To say the truth, we think there was a vast amount of humbug about those worthies. Apart from many of them being men of very indifferent character, and far too much in the habit of consorting with thieves and the like, they never lost a public occasion of jobbing and trading in mystery and making the most of themselves. Continually puffed besides by incompetent magistrates anxious to conceal their own deficiencies, and hand-in-glove with the penny-a-liners of that time, they became a sort of superstition. Although as a Preventive Police they were utterly ineffective, and as a Detective Police were very loose and uncertain in their operations, they remain with some people a superstition to the present day.

On the other hand, the Detective Force organised since the establishment of the existing Police, is so well chosen and trained, proceeds so systematically and quietly, does its business in such a workmanlike manner, and is always so calmly and steadily engaged in the service of the public, that the public really do not know enough of it, to know a tithe of its usefulness. Impressed with this conviction, and interested in the men themselves, we represented to the authorities at Scotland Yard, that we should be glad, if there were no official objection, to have some talk with the Detectives. A most obliging and ready permission being given, a certain evening was appointed with a certain Inspector for a social conference between ourselves and the Detectives, at The Household Words Office in Wellington Street, Strand, London. In consequence of which appointment the party 'came off,' which we are about to describe. And we beg to repeat that, avoiding such topics as it might for obvious reasons be injurious to the public, or disagreeable to respectable individuals, to touch upon in print, our description is as exact as we can make it.

The reader will have the goodness to imagine the Sanctum Sanctorum of Household Words. Anything that best suits the reader's fancy, will best represent that magnificent chamber. We merely stipulate for a round table in the middle, with some glasses and cigars arranged upon it; and the editorial sofa elegantly hemmed in between that stately piece of furniture and the wall.

It is a sultry evening at dusk. The stones of Wellington Street are hot and gritty, and the watermen and hackney-coachmen at the Theatre opposite, are much flushed and aggravated. Carriages are constantly setting down the people who have come to Fairy-Land; and there is a mighty shouting and bellowing every now and then, deafening us for the moment, through the open windows.

Just at dusk, Inspectors Wield and Stalker are announced; but we do not undertake to warrant the orthography of any of the names here mentioned. Inspector Wield presents Inspector Stalker. Inspector Wield is a middle-aged man of a portly presence, with a large, moist, knowing eye, a husky voice, and a habit of emphasising his conversation by the aid of a corpulent fore-finger, which is constantly in juxtaposition with his eyes or nose. Inspector Stalker is a shrewd, hard-headed Scotchman - in appearance not at all unlike a very acute, thoroughly-trained schoolmaster, from the Normal Establishment at Glasgow. Inspector Wield one might have known, perhaps, for what he is - Inspector Stalker, never.

The ceremonies of reception over, Inspectors Wield and Stalker observe that they have brought some sergeants with them. The sergeants are presented - five in number, Sergeant Dornton, Sergeant Witchem, Sergeant Mith, Sergeant Fendall, and Sergeant Straw. We have the whole Detective Force from Scotland Yard, with one exception. They sit down in a semi-circle (the two Inspectors at the two ends) at a little distance from the round table, facing the editorial sofa. Every man of them, in a glance, immediately takes an inventory of the furniture and an accurate sketch of the editorial presence. The Editor feels that any gentleman in company could take him up, if need should be, without the smallest hesitation, twenty years hence.

The whole party are in plain clothes. Sergeant Dornton about fifty years of age, with a ruddy face and a high sunburnt forehead, has the air of one who has been a Sergeant in the army - he might have sat to Wilkie for the Soldier in the Reading of the Will. He is famous for steadily pursuing the inductive process, and, from small beginnings, working on from clue to clue until he bags his man. Sergeant Witchem, shorter and thicker-set, and marked with the small-pox, has something of a reserved and thoughtful air, as if he were engaged in deep arithmetical calculations. He is renowned for his acquaintance with the swell mob. Sergeant Mith, a smooth-faced man with a fresh bright complexion, and a strange air of simplicity, is a dab at housebreakers. Sergeant Fendall, a light- haired, well-spoken, polite person, is a prodigious hand at pursuing private inquiries of a delicate nature. Straw, a little wiry Sergeant of meek demeanour and strong sense, would knock at a door and ask a series of questions in any mild character you choose to prescribe to him, from a charity-boy upwards, and seem as innocent as an infant. They are, one and all, respectable-looking men; of perfectly good deportment and unusual intelligence; with nothing lounging or slinking in their manners; with an air of keen observation and quick perception when addressed; and generally presenting in their faces, traces more or less marked of habitually leading lives of strong mental excitement. They have all good eyes; and they all can, and they all do, look full at whomsoever they speak to.

We light the cigars, and hand round the glasses (which are very temperately used indeed), and the conversation begins by a modest amateur reference on the Editorial part to the swell mob. Inspector Wield immediately removes his cigar from his lips, waves his right hand, and says, 'Regarding the swell mob, sir, I can't do better than call upon Sergeant Witchem. Because the reason why? I'll tell you. Sergeant Witchem is better acquainted with the swell mob than any officer in London.'

Our heart leaping up when we beheld this rainbow in the sky, we turn to Sergeant Witchem, who very concisely, and in well-chosen language, goes into the subject forthwith. Meantime, the whole of his brother officers are closely interested in attending to what he says, and observing its effect. Presently they begin to strike in, one or two together, when an opportunity offers, and the conversation becomes general. But these brother officers only come in to the assistance of each other - not to the contradiction - and a more amicable brotherhood there could not be. From the swell mob, we diverge to the kindred topics of cracksmen, fences, public- house dancers, area-sneaks, designing young people who go out 'gonophing,' and other 'schools.' It is observable throughout these revelations, that Inspector Stalker, the Scotchman, is always exact and statistical, and that when any question of figures arises, everybody as by one consent pauses, and looks to him.

When we have exhausted the various schools of Art - during which discussion the whole body have remained profoundly attentive, except when some unusual noise at the Theatre over the way has induced some gentleman to glance inquiringly towards the window in that direction, behind his next neighbour's back - we burrow for information on such points as the following. Whether there really are any highway robberies in London, or whether some circumstances not convenient to be mentioned by the aggrieved party, usually precede the robberies complained of, under that head, which quite change their character? Certainly the latter, almost always. Whether in the case of robberies in houses, where servants are necessarily exposed to doubt, innocence under suspicion ever becomes so like guilt in appearance, that a good officer need be cautious how he judges it? Undoubtedly. Nothing is so common or deceptive as such appearances at first. Whether in a place of public amusement, a thief knows an officer, and an officer knows a thief - supposing them, beforehand, strangers to each other - because each recognises in the other, under all disguise, an inattention to what is going on, and a purpose that is not the purpose of being entertained? Yes. That's the way exactly. Whether it is reasonable or ridiculous to trust to the alleged experiences of thieves as narrated by themselves, in prisons, or penitentiaries, or anywhere? In general, nothing more absurd. Lying is their habit and their trade; and they would rather lie - even if they hadn't an interest in it, and didn't want to make themselves agreeable - than tell the truth.

From these topics, we glide into a review of the most celebrated and horrible of the great crimes that have been committed within the last fifteen or twenty years. The men engaged in the discovery of almost all of them, and in the pursuit or apprehension of the murderers, are here, down to the very last instance. One of our guests gave chase to and boarded the emigrant ship, in which the murderess last hanged in London was supposed to have embarked. We learn from him that his errand was not announced to the passengers, who may have no idea of it to this hour. That he went below, with the captain, lamp in hand - it being dark, and the whole steerage abed and sea-sick - and engaged the Mrs. Manning who WAS on board, in a conversation about her luggage, until she was, with no small pains, induced to raise her head, and turn her face towards the light. Satisfied that she was not the object of his search, he quietly re-embarked in the Government steamer along-side, and steamed home again with the intelligence.

When we have exhausted these subjects, too, which occupy a considerable time in the discussion, two or three leave their chairs, whisper Sergeant Witchem, and resume their seat. Sergeant Witchem, leaning forward a little, and placing a hand on each of his legs, then modestly speaks as follows:

'My brother-officers wish me to relate a little account of my taking Tally-ho Thompson. A man oughtn't to tell what he has done himself; but still, as nobody was with me, and, consequently, as nobody but myself can tell it, I'll do it in the best way I can, if it should meet your approval.'

We assure Sergeant Witchem that he will oblige us very much, and we all compose ourselves to listen with great interest and attention.

'Tally-ho Thompson,' says Sergeant Witchem, after merely wetting his lips with his brandy-and-water, 'Tally-ho Thompson was a famous horse-stealer, couper, and magsman. Thompson, in conjunction with a pal that occasionally worked with him, gammoned a countryman out of a good round sum of money, under pretence of getting him a situation - the regular old dodge - and was afterwards in the "Hue and Cry" for a horse - a horse that he stole down in Hertfordshire. I had to look after Thompson, and I applied myself, of course, in the first instance, to discovering where he was. Now, Thompson's wife lived, along with a little daughter, at Chelsea. Knowing that Thompson was somewhere in the country, I watched the house - especially at post-time in the morning - thinking Thompson was pretty likely to write to her. Sure enough, one morning the postman comes up, and delivers a letter at Mrs. Thompson's door. Little girl opens the door, and takes it in. We're not always sure of postmen, though the people at the post-offices are always very obliging. A postman may help us, or he may not, - just as it happens. However, I go across the road, and I say to the postman, after he has left the letter, "Good morning! how are you?" "How are YOU!" says he. "You've just delivered a letter for Mrs. Thompson." "Yes, I have." "You didn't happen to remark what the post-mark was, perhaps?" "No," says he, "I didn't." "Come," says I, "I'll be plain with you. I'm in a small way of business, and I have given Thompson credit, and I can't afford to lose what he owes me. I know he's got money, and I know he's in the country, and if you could tell me what the post-mark was, I should be very much obliged to you, and you'd do a service to a tradesman in a small way of business that can't afford a loss." "Well," he said, "I do assure you that I did not observe what the post-mark was; all I know is, that there was money in the letter - I should say a sovereign." This was enough for me, because of course I knew that Thompson having sent his wife money, it was probable she'd write to Thompson, by return of post, to acknowledge the receipt. So I said "Thankee" to the postman, and I kept on the watch. In the afternoon I saw the little girl come out. Of course I followed her. She went into a stationer's shop, and I needn't say to you that I looked in at the window. She bought some writing-paper and envelopes, and a pen. I think to myself, "That'll do!" - watch her home again - and don't go away, you may be sure, knowing that Mrs. Thompson was writing her letter to Tally-ho, and that the letter would be posted presently. In about an hour or so, out came the little girl again, with the letter in her hand. I went up, and said something to the child, whatever it might have been; but I couldn't see the direction of the letter, because she held it with the seal upwards. However, I observed that on the back of the letter there was what we call a kiss - a drop of wax by the side of the seal - and again, you understand, that was enough for me. I saw her post the letter, waited till she was gone, then went into the shop, and asked to see the Master. When he came out, I told him, "Now, I'm an Officer in the Detective Force; there's a letter with a kiss been posted here just now, for a man that I'm in search of; and what I have to ask of you, is, that you will let me look at the direction of that letter." He was very civil - took a lot of letters from the box in the window - shook 'em out on the counter with the faces downwards - and there among 'em was the identical letter with the kiss. It was directed, Mr. Thomas Pigeon, Post Office, B-, to be left till called for. Down I went to B- (a hundred and twenty miles or so) that night. Early next morning I went to the Post Office; saw the gentleman in charge of that department; told him who I was; and that my object was to see, and track, the party that should come for the letter for Mr. Thomas Pigeon. He was very polite, and said, "You shall have every assistance we can give you; you can wait inside the office; and we'll take care to let you know when anybody comes for the letter." Well, I waited there three days, and began to think that nobody ever WOULD come. At last the clerk whispered to me, "Here! Detective! Somebody's come for the letter!" "Keep him a minute," said I, and I ran round to the outside of the office. There I saw a young chap with the appearance of an Ostler, holding a horse by the bridle - stretching the bridle across the pavement, while he waited at the Post Office Window for the letter. I began to pat the horse, and that; and I said to the boy, "Why, this is Mr. Jones's Mare!" "No. It an't." "No?" said I. "She's very like Mr. Jones's Mare!" "She an't Mr. Jones's Mare, anyhow," says he. "It's Mr. So and So's, of the Warwick Arms." And up he jumped, and off he went - letter and all. I got a cab, followed on the box, and was so quick after him that I came into the stable-yard of the Warwick Arms, by one gate, just as he came in by another. I went into the bar, where there was a young woman serving, and called for a glass of brandy-and-water. He came in directly, and handed her the letter. She casually looked at it, without saying anything, and stuck it up behind the glass over the chimney-piece. What was to be done next?

'I turned it over in my mind while I drank my brandy-and-water (looking pretty sharp at the letter the while), but I couldn't see my way out of it at all. I tried to get lodgings in the house, but there had been a horse-fair, or something of that sort, and it was full. I was obliged to put up somewhere else, but I came backwards and forwards to the bar for a couple of days, and there was the letter always behind the glass. At last I thought I'd write a letter to Mr. Pigeon myself, and see what that would do. So I wrote one, and posted it, but I purposely addressed it, Mr. John Pigeon, instead of Mr. Thomas Pigeon, to see what THAT would do. In the morning (a very wet morning it was) I watched the postman down the street, and cut into the bar, just before he reached the Warwick Arms. In he came presently with my letter. "Is there a Mr. John Pigeon staying here?" "No! - stop a bit though," says the barmaid; and she took down the letter behind the glass. "No," says she, "it's Thomas, and HE is not staying here. Would you do me a favour, and post this for me, as it is so wet?" The postman said Yes; she folded it in another envelope, directed it, and gave it him. He put it in his hat, and away he went.

'I had no difficulty in finding out the direction of that letter. It was addressed Mr. Thomas Pigeon, Post Office, R-, Northamptonshire, to be left till called for. Off I started directly for R-; I said the same at the Post Office there, as I had said at B-; and again I waited three days before anybody came. At last another chap on horseback came. "Any letters for Mr. Thomas Pigeon?" "Where do you come from?" "New Inn, near R-." He got the letter, and away HE went at a canter.

'I made my inquiries about the New Inn, near R-, and hearing it was a solitary sort of house, a little in the horse line, about a couple of miles from the station, I thought I'd go and have a look at it. I found it what it had been described, and sauntered in, to look about me. The landlady was in the bar, and I was trying to get into conversation with her; asked her how business was, and spoke about the wet weather, and so on; when I saw, through an open door, three men sitting by the fire in a sort of parlour, or kitchen; and one of those men, according to the description I had of him, was Tally-ho Thompson!

'I went and sat down among 'em, and tried to make things agreeable; but they were very shy - wouldn't talk at all - looked at me, and at one another, in a way quite the reverse of sociable. I reckoned 'em up, and finding that they were all three bigger men than me, and considering that their looks were ugly - that it was a lonely place - railroad station two miles off - and night coming on - thought I couldn't do better than have a drop of brandy-and-water to keep my courage up. So I called for my brandy-and-water; and as I was sitting drinking it by the fire, Thompson got up and went out.

'Now the difficulty of it was, that I wasn't sure it WAS Thompson, because I had never set eyes on him before; and what I had wanted was to be quite certain of him. However, there was nothing for it now, but to follow, and put a bold face upon it. I found him talking, outside in the yard, with the landlady. It turned out afterwards that he was wanted by a Northampton officer for something else, and that, knowing that officer to be pock-marked (as I am myself), he mistook me for him. As I have observed, I found him talking to the landlady, outside. I put my hand upon his shoulder - this way - and said, "Tally-ho Thompson, it's no use. I know you. I'm an officer from London, and I take you into custody for felony!" "That be d-d!" says Tally-ho Thompson.

'We went back into the house, and the two friends began to cut up rough, and their looks didn't please me at all, I assure you. "Let the man go. What are you going to do with him?" "I'll tell you what I'm going to do with him. I'm going to take him to London to- night, as sure as I'm alive. I'm not alone here, whatever you may think. You mind your own business, and keep yourselves to yourselves. It'll be better for you, for I know you both very well." I'D never seen or heard of 'em in all my life, but my bouncing cowed 'em a bit, and they kept off, while Thompson was making ready to go. I thought to myself, however, that they might be coming after me on the dark road, to rescue Thompson; so I said to the landlady, "What men have you got in the house, Missis?" "We haven't got no men here," she says, sulkily.

"You have got an ostler, I suppose?" "Yes, we've got an ostler." "Let me see him." Presently he came, and a shaggy-headed young fellow he was. "Now attend to me, young man," says I; "I'm a Detective Officer from London. This man's name is Thompson. I have taken him into custody for felony. I am going to take him to the railroad station. I call upon you in the Queen's name to assist me; and mind you, my friend, you'll get yourself into more trouble than you know of, if you don't!' You never saw a person open his eyes so wide. "Now, Thompson, come along!" says I. But when I took out the handcuffs, Thompson cries, "No! None of that! I won't stand THEM! I'll go along with you quiet, but I won't bear none of that!" "Tally-ho Thompson," I said, "I'm willing to behave as a man to you, if you are willing to behave as a man to me. Give me your word that you'll come peaceably along, and I don't want to handcuff you." "I will," says Thompson, "but I'll have a glass of brandy first." "I don't care if I've another," said I. "We'll have two more, Missis," said the friends, "and confound you, Constable, you'll give your man a drop, won't you?" I was agreeable to that, so we had it all round, and then my man and I took Tally-ho Thompson safe to the railroad, and I carried him to London that night. He was afterwards acquitted, on account of a defect in the evidence; and I understand he always praises me up to the skies, and says I'm one of the best of men.'

This story coming to a termination amidst general applause, Inspector Wield, after a little grave smoking, fixes his eye on his host, and thus delivers himself:

'It wasn't a bad plant that of mine, on Fikey, the man accused of forging the Sou'-Western Railway debentures - it was only t'other day - because the reason why? I'll tell you.

'I had information that Fikey and his brother kept a factory over yonder there,' - indicating any region on the Surrey side of the river - 'where he bought second-hand carriages; so after I'd tried in vain to get hold of him by other means, I wrote him a letter in an assumed name, saying that I'd got a horse and shay to dispose of, and would drive down next day that he might view the lot, and make an offer - very reasonable it was, I said - a reg'lar bargain. Straw and me then went off to a friend of mine that's in the livery and job business, and hired a turn-out for the day, a precious smart turn-out it was - quite a slap-up thing! Down we drove, accordingly, with a friend (who's not in the Force himself); and leaving my friend in the shay near a public-house, to take care of the horse, we went to the factory, which was some little way off. In the factory, there was a number of strong fellows at work, and after reckoning 'em up, it was clear to me that it wouldn't do to try it on there. They were too many for us. We must get our man out of doors. "Mr. Fikey at home?" "No, he ain't." "Expected home soon?" "Why, no, not soon." "Ah! Is his brother here?" "I'M his brother." "Oh! well, this is an ill-conwenience, this is. I wrote him a letter yesterday, saying I'd got a little turn-out to dispose of, and I've took the trouble to bring the turn-out down a' purpose, and now he ain't in the way." "No, he ain't in the way. You couldn't make it convenient to call again, could you?" "Why, no, I couldn't. I want to sell; that's the fact; and I can't put it off. Could you find him anywheres?" At first he said No, he couldn't, and then he wasn't sure about it, and then he'd go and try. So at last he went up-stairs, where there was a sort of loft, and presently down comes my man himself in his shirt-sleeves.

'"Well," he says, "this seems to be raycher a pressing matter of yours." "Yes," I says, "it IS raycher a pressing matter, and you'll find it a bargain - dirt cheap." "I ain't in partickler want of a bargain just now," he says, "but where is it?" "Why," I says, "the turn-out's just outside. Come and look at it." He hasn't any suspicions, and away we go. And the first thing that happens is, that the horse runs away with my friend (who knows no more of driving than a child) when he takes a little trot along the road to show his paces. You never saw such a game in your life!

'When the bolt is over, and the turn-out has come to a standstill again, Fikey walks round and round it as grave as a judge - me too. "There, sir!" I says. "There's a neat thing!" "It ain't a bad style of thing," he says. "I believe you," says I. "And there's a horse!" - for I saw him looking at it. "Rising eight!" I says, rubbing his fore-legs. (Bless you, there ain't a man in the world knows less of horses than I do, but I'd heard my friend at the Livery Stables say he was eight year old, so I says, as knowing as possible, "Rising eight.") "Rising eight, is he?" says he. "Rising eight," says I. "Well," he says, "what do you want for it?" "Why, the first and last figure for the whole concern is five-and-twenty pound!" "That's very cheap!" he says, looking at me. "Ain't it?" I says. "I told you it was a bargain! Now, without any higgling and haggling about it, what I want is to sell, and that's my price. Further, I'll make it easy to you, and take half the money down, and you can do a bit of stiff (1) for the balance."

" Well," he says again, "that's very cheap." "I believe you," says I; "get in and try it, and you'll buy it. Come! take a trial!"

'Ecod, he gets in, and we get in, and we drive along the road, to show him to one of the railway clerks that was hid in the public- house window to identify him. But the clerk was bothered, and didn't know whether it was him, or wasn't - because the reason why? I'll tell you, - on account of his having shaved his whiskers. "It's a clever little horse," he says, "and trots well; and the shay runs light." "Not a doubt about it," I says. "And now, Mr. Fikey, I may as well make it all right, without wasting any more of your time. The fact is, I'm Inspector Wield, and you're my prisoner." "You don't mean that?" he says. "I do, indeed." "Then burn my body," says Fikey, "if this ain't TOO bad!"

'Perhaps you never saw a man so knocked over with surprise. "I hope you'll let me have my coat?" he says. "By all means." "Well, then, let's drive to the factory." "Why, not exactly that, I think," said I; "I've been there, once before, to-day. Suppose we send for it." He saw it was no go, so he sent for it, and put it on, and we drove him up to London, comfortable.'

This reminiscence is in the height of its success, when a general proposal is made to the fresh-complexioned, smooth-faced officer, with the strange air of simplicity, to tell the 'Butcher's Story.'

The fresh-complexioned, smooth-faced officer, with the strange air of simplicity, began with a rustic smile, and in a soft, wheedling tone of voice, to relate the Butcher's Story, thus:

'It's just about six years ago, now, since information was given at Scotland Yard of there being extensive robberies of lawns and silks going on, at some wholesale houses in the City. Directions were given for the business being looked into; and Straw, and Fendall, and me, we were all in it.'

'When you received your instructions,' said we, 'you went away, and held a sort of Cabinet Council together!'

The smooth-faced officer coaxingly replied, 'Ye-es. Just so. We turned it over among ourselves a good deal. It appeared, when we went into it, that the goods were sold by the receivers extraordinarily cheap - much cheaper than they could have been if they had been honestly come by. The receivers were in the trade, and kept capital shops - establishments of the first respectability - one of 'em at the West End, one down in Westminster. After a lot of watching and inquiry, and this and that among ourselves, we found that the job was managed, and the purchases of the stolen goods made, at a little public-house near Smithfield, down by Saint Bartholomew's; where the Warehouse Porters, who were the thieves, took 'em for that purpose, don't you see? and made appointments to meet the people that went between themselves and the receivers. This public-house was principally used by journeymen butchers from the country, out of place, and in want of situations; so, what did we do, but - ha, ha, ha! - we agreed that I should be dressed up like a butcher myself, and go and live there!'

Never, surely, was a faculty of observation better brought to bear upon a purpose, than that which picked out this officer for the part. Nothing in all creation could have suited him better. Even while he spoke, he became a greasy, sleepy, shy, good-natured, chuckle-headed, unsuspicious, and confiding young butcher. His very hair seemed to have suet in it, as he made it smooth upon his head, and his fresh complexion to be lubricated by large quantities of animal food.

' - So I - ha, ha, ha!' (always with the confiding snigger of the foolish young butcher) 'so I dressed myself in the regular way, made up a little bundle of clothes, and went to the public-house, and asked if I could have a lodging there? They says, "yes, you can have a lodging here," and I got a bedroom, and settled myself down in the tap. There was a number of people about the place, and coming backwards and forwards to the house; and first one says, and then another says, "Are you from the country, young man?" "Yes," I says, "I am. I'm come out of Northamptonshire, and I'm quite lonely here, for I don't know London at all, and it's such a mighty big town." "It IS a big town," they says. "Oh, it's a VERY big town!" I says. "Really and truly I never was in such a town. It quite confuses of me!" and all that, you know.

'When some of the journeymen Butchers that used the house, found that I wanted a place, they says, "Oh, we'll get you a place!" And they actually took me to a sight of places, in Newgate Market, Newport Market, Clare, Carnaby - I don't know where all. But the wages was - ha, ha, ha! - was not sufficient, and I never could suit myself, don't you see? Some of the queer frequenters of the house were a little suspicious of me at first, and I was obliged to be very cautious indeed how I communicated with Straw or Fendall. Sometimes, when I went out, pretending to stop and look into the shop windows, and just casting my eye round, I used to see some of 'em following me; but, being perhaps better accustomed than they thought for, to that sort of thing, I used to lead 'em on as far as I thought necessary or convenient - sometimes a long way - and then turn sharp round, and meet 'em, and say, "Oh, dear, how glad I am to come upon you so fortunate! This London's such a place, I'm blowed if I ain't lost again!" And then we'd go back all together, to the public-house, and - ha, ha, ha! and smoke our pipes, don't you see?

'They were very attentive to me, I am sure. It was a common thing, while I was living there, for some of 'em to take me out, and show me London. They showed me the Prisons - showed me Newgate - and when they showed me Newgate, I stops at the place where the Porters pitch their loads, and says, "Oh dear, is this where they hang the men? Oh Lor!" "That!" they says, "what a simple cove he is! THAT ain't it!" And then, they pointed out which WAS it, and I says "Lor!" and they says, "Now you'll know it agen, won't you?" And I said I thought I should if I tried hard - and I assure you I kept a sharp look out for the City Police when we were out in this way, for if any of 'em had happened to know me, and had spoke to me, it would have been all up in a minute. However, by good luck such a thing never happened, and all went on quiet: though the difficulties I had in communicating with my brother officers were quite extraordinary.

'The stolen goods that were brought to the public-house by the Warehouse Porters, were always disposed of in a back parlour. For a long time, I never could get into this parlour, or see what was done there. As I sat smoking my pipe, like an innocent young chap, by the tap-room fire, I'd hear some of the parties to the robbery, as they came in and out, say softly to the landlord, "Who's that? What does HE do here?" "Bless your soul," says the landlord, "he's only a" - ha, ha, ha! - "he's only a green young fellow from the country, as is looking for a butcher's sitiwation. Don't mind HIM!" So, in course of time, they were so convinced of my being green, and got to be so accustomed to me, that I was as free of the parlour as any of 'em, and I have seen as much as Seventy Pounds' Worth of fine lawn sold there, in one night, that was stolen from a warehouse in Friday Street. After the sale the buyers always stood treat - hot supper, or dinner, or what not - and they'd say on those occasions, "Come on, Butcher! Put your best leg foremost, young 'un, and walk into it!" Which I used to do - and hear, at table, all manner of particulars that it was very important for us Detectives to know.

'This went on for ten weeks. I lived in the public-house all the time, and never was out of the Butcher's dress - except in bed. At last, when I had followed seven of the thieves, and set 'em to rights - that's an expression of ours, don't you see, by which I mean to say that I traced 'em, and found out where the robberies were done, and all about 'em - Straw, and Fendall, and I, gave one another the office, and at a time agreed upon, a descent was made upon the public-house, and the apprehensions effected. One of the first things the officers did, was to collar me - for the parties to the robbery weren't to suppose yet, that I was anything but a Butcher - on which the landlord cries out, "Don't take HIM," he says, "whatever you do! He's only a poor young chap from the country, and butter wouldn't melt in his mouth!" However, they - ha, ha, ha! - they took me, and pretended to search my bedroom, where nothing was found but an old fiddle belonging to the landlord, that had got there somehow or another. But, it entirely changed the landlord's opinion, for when it was produced, he says, "My fiddle! The Butcher's a purloiner! I give him into custody for the robbery of a musical instrument!"

'The man that had stolen the goods in Friday Street was not taken yet. He had told me, in confidence, that he had his suspicions there was something wrong (on account of the City Police having captured one of the party), and that he was going to make himself scarce. I asked him, "Where do you mean to go, Mr. Shepherdson?" "Why, Butcher," says he, "the Setting Moon, in the Commercial Road, is a snug house, and I shall bang out there for a time. I shall call myself Simpson, which appears to me to be a modest sort of a name. Perhaps you'll give us a look in, Butcher?" "Well," says I, "I think I WILL give you a call" - which I fully intended, don't you see, because, of course, he was to be taken! I went over to the Setting Moon next day, with a brother officer, and asked at the bar for Simpson. They pointed out his room, up-stairs. As we were going up, he looks down over the banister, and calls out, "Halloa, Butcher! is that you?" "Yes, it's me. How do you find yourself?" "Bobbish," he says; "but who's that with you?" "It's only a young man, that's a friend of mine," I says. "Come along, then," says he; "any friend of the Butcher's is as welcome as the Butcher!" So, I made my friend acquainted with him, and we took him into custody.

'You have no idea, sir, what a sight it was, in Court, when they first knew that I wasn't a Butcher, after all! I wasn't produced at the first examination, when there was a remand; but I was at the second. And when I stepped into the box, in full police uniform, and the whole party saw how they had been done, actually a groan of horror and dismay proceeded from 'em in the dock!

'At the Old Bailey, when their trials came on, Mr. Clarkson was engaged for the defence, and he COULDN'T make out how it was, about the Butcher. He thought, all along, it was a real Butcher. When the counsel for the prosecution said, "I will now call before you, gentlemen, the Police-officer," meaning myself, Mr. Clarkson says, "Why Police-officer? Why more Police-officers? I don't want Police. We have had a great deal too much of the Police. I want the Butcher!" However, sir, he had the Butcher and the Police- officer, both in one. Out of seven prisoners committed for trial, five were found guilty, and some of 'em were transported. The respectable firm at the West End got a term of imprisonment; and that's the Butcher's Story!'

The story done, the chuckle-headed Butcher again resolved himself into the smooth-faced Detective. But, he was so extremely tickled by their having taken him about, when he was that Dragon in disguise, to show him London, that he could not help reverting to that point in his narrative; and gently repeating with the Butcher snigger, '"Oh, dear," I says, "is that where they hang the men? Oh, Lor!" "THAT!" says they. "What a simple cove he is!"'

It being now late, and the party very modest in their fear of being too diffuse, there were some tokens of separation; when Sergeant Dornton, the soldierly-looking man, said, looking round him with a smile:

'Before we break up, sir, perhaps you might have some amusement in hearing of the Adventures of a Carpet Bag. They are very short; and, I think, curious.'

We welcomed the Carpet Bag, as cordially as Mr. Shepherdson welcomed the false Butcher at the Setting Moon. Sergeant Dornton proceeded.

'In 1847, I was despatched to Chatham, in search of one Mesheck, a Jew. He had been carrying on, pretty heavily, in the bill-stealing way, getting acceptances from young men of good connexions (in the army chiefly), on pretence of discount, and bolting with the same.

'Mesheck was off, before I got to Chatham. All I could learn about him was, that he had gone, probably to London, and had with him - a Carpet Bag.

'I came back to town, by the last train from Blackwall, and made inquiries concerning a Jew passenger with - a Carpet Bag.

'The office was shut up, it being the last train. There were only two or three porters left. Looking after a Jew with a Carpet Bag, on the Blackwall Railway, which was then the high road to a great Military Depot, was worse than looking after a needle in a hayrick. But it happened that one of these porters had carried, for a certain Jew, to a certain public-house, a certain - Carpet Bag.

'I went to the public-house, but the Jew had only left his luggage there for a few hours, and had called for it in a cab, and taken it away. I put such questions there, and to the porter, as I thought prudent, and got at this description of - the Carpet Bag.

'It was a bag which had, on one side of it, worked in worsted, a green parrot on a stand. A green parrot on a stand was the means by which to identify that - Carpet Bag.

'I traced Mesheck, by means of this green parrot on a stand, to Cheltenham, to Birmingham, to Liverpool, to the Atlantic Ocean. At Liverpool he was too many for me. He had gone to the United States, and I gave up all thoughts of Mesheck, and likewise of his - Carpet Bag.

'Many months afterwards - near a year afterwards - there was a bank in Ireland robbed of seven thousand pounds, by a person of the name of Doctor Dundey, who escaped to America; from which country some of the stolen notes came home. He was supposed to have bought a farm in New Jersey. Under proper management, that estate could be seized and sold, for the benefit of the parties he had defrauded. I was sent off to America for this purpose.

'I landed at Boston. I went on to New York. I found that he had lately changed New York paper-money for New Jersey paper money, and had banked cash in New Brunswick. To take this Doctor Dundey, it was necessary to entrap him into the State of New York, which required a deal of artifice and trouble. At one time, he couldn't be drawn into an appointment. At another time, he appointed to come to meet me, and a New York officer, on a pretext I made; and then his children had the measles. At last he came, per steamboat, and I took him, and lodged him in a New York prison called the Tombs; which I dare say you know, sir?'

Editorial acknowledgment to that effect.

'I went to the Tombs, on the morning after his capture, to attend the examination before the magistrate. I was passing through the magistrate's private room, when, happening to look round me to take notice of the place, as we generally have a habit of doing, I clapped my eyes, in one corner, on a - Carpet Bag.

'What did I see upon that Carpet Bag, if you'll believe me, but a green parrot on a stand, as large as life!

'"That Carpet Bag, with the representation of a green parrot on a stand," said I, "belongs to an English Jew, named Aaron Mesheck, and to no other man, alive or dead!"

'I give you my word the New York Police Officers were doubled up with surprise.

'"How did you ever come to know that?" said they.

'"I think I ought to know that green parrot by this time," said I; "for I have had as pretty a dance after that bird, at home, as ever I had, in all my life!"'

'And was it Mesheck's?' we submissively inquired.

'Was it, sir? Of course it was! He was in custody for another offence, in that very identical Tombs, at that very identical time. And, more than that! Some memoranda, relating to the fraud for which I had vainly endeavoured to take him, were found to be, at that moment, lying in that very same individual - Carpet Bag!'

Such are the curious coincidences and such is the peculiar ability, always sharpening and being improved by practice, and always adapting itself to every variety of circumstances, and opposing itself to every new device that perverted ingenuity can invent, for which this important social branch of the public service is remarkable! For ever on the watch, with their wits stretched to the utmost, these officers have, from day to day and year to year, to set themselves against every novelty of trickery and dexterity that the combined imaginations of all the lawless rascals in England can devise, and to keep pace with every such invention that comes out. In the Courts of Justice, the materials of thousands of such stories as we have narrated - often elevated into the marvellous and romantic, by the circumstances of the case - are dryly compressed into the set phrase, 'in consequence of information I received, I did so and so.' Suspicion was to be directed, by careful inference and deduction, upon the right person; the right person was to be taken, wherever he had gone, or whatever he was doing to avoid detection: he is taken; there he is at the bar; that is enough. From information I, the officer, received, I did it; and, according to the custom in these cases, I say no more.

These games of chess, played with live pieces, are played before small audiences, and are chronicled nowhere. The interest of the game supports the player. Its results are enough for justice. To compare great things with small, suppose LEVERRIER or ADAMS informing the public that from information he had received he had discovered a new planet; or COLUMBUS informing the public of his day that from information he had received he had discovered a new continent; so the Detectives inform it that they have discovered a new fraud or an old offender, and the process is unknown.

Thus, at midnight, closed the proceedings of our curious and interesting party. But one other circumstance finally wound up the evening, after our Detective guests had left us. One of the sharpest among them, and the officer best acquainted with the Swell Mob, had his pocket picked, going home!

THREE 'DETECTIVE' ANECDOTES

I. - THE PAIR OF GLOVES

'IT'S a singler story, sir,' said Inspector Wield, of the Detective Police, who, in company with Sergeants Dornton and Mith, paid us another twilight visit, one July evening; 'and I've been thinking you might like to know it.

'It's concerning the murder of the young woman, Eliza Grimwood, some years ago, over in the Waterloo Road. She was commonly called The Countess, because of her handsome appearance and her proud way of carrying of herself; and when I saw the poor Countess (I had known her well to speak to), lying dead, with her throat cut, on the floor of her bedroom, you'll believe me that a variety of reflections calculated to make a man rather low in his spirits, came into my head.

'That's neither here nor there. I went to the house the morning after the murder, and examined the body, and made a general observation of the bedroom where it was. Turning down the pillow of the bed with my hand, I found, underneath it, a pair of gloves. A pair of gentleman's dress gloves, very dirty; and inside the lining, the letters TR, and a cross.

'Well, sir, I took them gloves away, and I showed 'em to the magistrate, over at Union Hall, before whom the case was. He says, "Wield," he says, "there's no doubt this is a discovery that may lead to something very important; and what you have got to do, Wield, is, to find out the owner of these gloves."

'I was of the same opinion, of course, and I went at it immediately. I looked at the gloves pretty narrowly, and it was my opinion that they had been cleaned. There was a smell of sulphur and rosin about 'em, you know, which cleaned gloves usually have, more or less. I took 'em over to a friend of mine at Kennington, who was in that line, and I put it to him. "What do you say now? Have these gloves been cleaned?" "These gloves have been cleaned," says he. "Have you any idea who cleaned them?" says I. "Not at all," says he; "I've a very distinct idea who DIDN'T clean 'em, and that's myself. But I'll tell you what, Wield, there ain't above eight or nine reg'lar glove-cleaners in London," - there were not, at that time, it seems - "and I think I can give you their addresses, and you may find out, by that means, who did clean 'em." Accordingly, he gave me the directions, and I went here, and I went there, and I looked up this man, and I looked up that man; but, though they all agreed that the gloves had been cleaned, I couldn't find the man, woman, or child, that had cleaned that aforesaid pair of gloves.

'What with this person not being at home, and that person being expected home in the afternoon, and so forth, the inquiry took me three days. On the evening of the third day, coming over Waterloo Bridge from the Surrey side of the river, quite beat, and very much vexed and disappointed, I thought I'd have a shilling's worth of entertainment at the Lyceum Theatre to freshen myself up. So I went into the Pit, at half-price, and I sat myself down next to a very quiet, modest sort of young man. Seeing I was a stranger (which I thought it just as well to appear to be) he told me the names of the actors on the stage, and we got into conversation. When the play was over, we came out together, and I said, "We've been very companionable and agreeable, and perhaps you wouldn't object to a drain?" "Well, you're very good," says he; "I SHOULDN'T object to a drain." Accordingly, we went to a public- house, near the Theatre, sat ourselves down in a quiet room up- stairs on the first floor, and called for a pint of half-and-half, apiece, and a pipe.

'Well, sir, we put our pipes aboard, and we drank our half-and- half, and sat a-talking, very sociably, when the young man says, "You must excuse me stopping very long," he says, "because I'm forced to go home in good time. I must be at work all night." "At work all night?" says I. "You ain't a baker?" "No," he says, laughing, "I ain't a baker." "I thought not," says I, "you haven't the looks of a baker." "No," says he, "I'm a glove-cleaner."

'I never was more astonished in my life, than when I heard them words come out of his lips. "You're a glove-cleaner, are you?" says I. "Yes," he says, "I am." "Then, perhaps," says I, taking the gloves out of my pocket, "you can tell me who cleaned this pair of gloves? It's a rum story," I says. "I was dining over at Lambeth, the other day, at a free-and-easy - quite promiscuous - with a public company - when some gentleman, he left these gloves behind him! Another gentleman and me, you see, we laid a wager of a sovereign, that I wouldn't find out who they belonged to. I've spent as much as seven shillings already, in trying to discover; but, if you could help me, I'd stand another seven and welcome. You see there's TR and a cross, inside." "I see," he says. "Bless you, I know these gloves very well! I've seen dozens of pairs belonging to the same party." "No?" says I. "Yes," says he. "Then you know who cleaned 'em?" says I. "Rather so," says he. "My father cleaned 'em."

'"Where does your father live?" says I. "Just round the corner," says the young man, "near Exeter Street, here. He'll tell you who they belong to, directly." "Would you come round with me now?" says I. "Certainly," says he, "but you needn't tell my father that you found me at the play, you know, because he mightn't like it." "All right!" We went round to the place, and there we found an old man in a white apron, with two or three daughters, all rubbing and cleaning away at lots of gloves, in a front parlour. "Oh, Father!" says the young man, "here's a person been and made a bet about the ownership of a pair of gloves, and I've told him you can settle it." "Good evening, sir," says I to the old gentleman. "Here's the gloves your son speaks of. Letters TR, you see, and a cross." "Oh yes," he says, "I know these gloves very well; I've cleaned dozens of pairs of 'em. They belong to Mr. Trinkle, the great upholsterer in Cheapside." "Did you get 'em from Mr. Trinkle, direct," says I, "if you'll excuse my asking the question?" "No," says he; "Mr. Trinkle always sends 'em to Mr. Phibbs's, the haberdasher's, opposite his shop, and the haberdasher sends 'em to me." "Perhaps YOU wouldn't object to a drain?" says I. "Not in the least!" says he. So I took the old gentleman out, and had a little more talk with him and his son, over a glass, and we parted excellent friends.

'This was late on a Saturday night. First thing on the Monday morning, I went to the haberdasher's shop, opposite Mr. Trinkle's, the great upholsterer's in Cheapside. "Mr. Phibbs in the way?" "My name is Phibbs." "Oh! I believe you sent this pair of gloves to be cleaned?" "Yes, I did, for young Mr. Trinkle over the way. There he is in the shop!" "Oh! that's him in the shop, is it? Him in the green coat?" "The same individual." "Well, Mr. Phibbs, this is an unpleasant affair; but the fact is, I am Inspector Wield of the Detective Police, and I found these gloves under the pillow of the young woman that was murdered the other day, over in the Waterloo Road!" "Good Heaven!" says he. "He's a most respectable young man, and if his father was to hear of it, it would be the ruin of him!" "I'm very sorry for it," says I, "but I must take him into custody." "Good Heaven!" says Mr. Phibbs, again; "can nothing be done?" "Nothing," says I. "Will you allow me to call him over here," says he, "that his father may not see it done?" "I don't object to that," says I; "but unfortunately, Mr. Phibbs, I can't allow of any communication between you. If any was attempted, I should have to interfere directly. Perhaps you'll beckon him over here?' Mr. Phibbs went to the door and beckoned, and the young fellow came across the street directly; a smart, brisk young fellow.

'"Good morning, sir," says I. "Good morning, sir," says he. "Would you allow me to inquire, sir," says I, "if you ever had any acquaintance with a party of the name of Grimwood?" "Grimwood! Grimwood!" says he. "No!" "You know the Waterloo Road?" "Oh! of course I know the Waterloo Road!" "Happen to have heard of a young woman being murdered there?" "Yes, I read it in the paper, and very sorry I was to read it." "Here's a pair of gloves belonging to you, that I found under her pillow the morning afterwards!"

'He was in a dreadful state, sir; a dreadful state I "Mr. Wield," he says, "upon my solemn oath I never was there. I never so much as saw her, to my knowledge, in my life!" "I am very sorry," says I. "To tell you the truth; I don't think you ARE the murderer, but I must take you to Union Hall in a cab. However, I think it's a case of that sort, that, at present, at all events, the magistrate will hear it in private."

'A private examination took place, and then it came out that this young man was acquainted with a cousin of the unfortunate Eliza Grimwood, and that, calling to see this cousin a day or two before the murder, he left these gloves upon the table. Who should come in, shortly afterwards, but Eliza Grimwood! "Whose gloves are these?" she says, taking 'em up. "Those are Mr. Trinkle's gloves," says her cousin. "Oh!" says she, "they are very dirty, and of no use to him, I am sure. I shall take 'em away for my girl to clean the stoves with." And she put 'em in her pocket. The girl had used 'em to clean the stoves, and, I have no doubt, had left 'em lying on the bedroom mantelpiece, or on the drawers, or somewhere; and her mistress, looking round to see that the room was tidy, had caught 'em up and put 'em under the pillow where I found 'em.

That's the story, sir.'

II. - THE ARTFUL TOUCH

'One of the most BEAUTIFUL things that ever was done, perhaps,' said Inspector Wield, emphasising the adjective, as preparing us to expect dexterity or ingenuity rather than strong interest, 'was a move of Sergeant Witchem's. It was a lovely idea!

'Witchem and me were down at Epsom one Derby Day, waiting at the station for the Swell Mob. As I mentioned, when we were talking about these things before, we are ready at the station when there's races, or an Agricultural Show, or a Chancellor sworn in for an university, or Jenny Lind, or anything of that sort; and as the Swell Mob come down, we send 'em back again by the next train. But some of the Swell Mob, on the occasion of this Derby that I refer to, so far kidded us as to hire a horse and shay; start away from London by Whitechapel, and miles round; come into Epsom from the opposite direction; and go to work, right and left, on the course, while we were waiting for 'em at the Rail. That, however, ain't the point of what I'm going to tell you.

'While Witchem and me were waiting at the station, there comes up one Mr. Tatt; a gentleman formerly in the public line, quite an amateur Detective in his way, and very much respected. "Halloa, Charley Wield," he says. "What are you doing here? On the look out for some of your old friends?" "Yes, the old move, Mr. Tatt." "Come along," he says, "you and Witchem, and have a glass of sherry." "We can't stir from the place," says I, "till the next train comes in; but after that, we will with pleasure." Mr. Tatt waits, and the train comes in, and then Witchem and me go off with him to the Hotel. Mr. Tatt he's got up quite regardless of expense, for the occasion; and in his shirt-front there's a beautiful diamond prop, cost him fifteen or twenty pound - a very handsome pin indeed. We drink our sherry at the bar, and have had our three or four glasses, when Witchem cries suddenly, "Look out, Mr. Wield! stand fast!" and a dash is made into the place by the Swell Mob - four of 'em - that have come down as I tell you, and in a moment Mr. Tatt's prop is gone! Witchem, he cuts 'em off at the door, I lay about me as hard as I can, Mr. Tatt shows fight like a good 'un, and there we are, all down together, heads and heels, knocking about on the floor of the bar - perhaps you never see such a scene of confusion! However, we stick to our men (Mr. Tatt being as good as any officer), and we take 'em all, and carry 'em off to the station.' The station's full of people, who have been took on the course; and it's a precious piece of work to get 'em secured. However, we do it at last, and we search 'em; but nothing's found upon 'em, and they're locked up; and a pretty state of heat we are in by that time, I assure you!

'I was very blank over it, myself, to think that the prop had been passed away; and I said to Witchem, when we had set 'em to rights, and were cooling ourselves along with Mr. Tatt, "we don't take much by THIS move, anyway, for nothing's found upon 'em, and it's only the braggadocia, (2) after all." "What do you mean, Mr. Wield?" says Witchem. "Here's the diamond pin!" and in the palm of his hand there it was, safe and sound! "Why, in the name of wonder," says me and Mr. Tatt, in astonishment, "how did you come by that?" "I'll tell you how I come by it," says he. "I saw which of 'em took it; and when we were all down on the floor together, knocking about, I just gave him a little touch on the back of his hand, as I knew his pal would; and he thought it WAS his pal; and gave it me!" It was beautiful, beau-ti-ful!

'Even that was hardly the best of the case, for that chap was tried at the Quarter Sessions at Guildford. You know what Quarter Sessions are, sir. Well, if you'll believe me, while them slow justices were looking over the Acts of Parliament, to see what they could do to him, I'm blowed if he didn't cut out of the dock before their faces! He cut out of the dock, sir, then and there; swam across a river; and got up into a tree to dry himself. In the tree he was took - an old woman having seen him climb up - and Witchem's artful touch transported him!'

III. - THE SOFA

"What young men will do, sometimes, to ruin themselves and break their friends' hearts,' said Sergeant Dornton, 'it's surprising! I had a case at Saint Blank's Hospital which was of this sort. A bad case, indeed, with a bad end!

'The Secretary, and the House-Surgeon, and the Treasurer, of Saint Blank's Hospital, came to Scotland Yard to give information of numerous robberies having been committed on the students. The students could leave nothing in the pockets of their great-coats, while the great-coats were hanging at the hospital, but it was almost certain to be stolen. Property of various descriptions was constantly being lost; and the gentlemen were naturally uneasy about it, and anxious, for the credit of the institution, that the thief or thieves should be discovered. The case was entrusted to me, and I went to the hospital.

'"Now, gentlemen," said I, after we had talked it over; "I understand this property is usually lost from one room."

'Yes, they said. It was.

'"I should wish, if you please," said I, "to see the room."

'It was a good-sized bare room down-stairs, with a few tables and forms in it, and a row of pegs, all round, for hats and coats.

'"Next, gentlemen," said I, "do you suspect anybody?"

'Yes, they said. They did suspect somebody. They were sorry to say, they suspected one of the porters.

'"I should like," said I, "to have that man pointed out to me, and to have a little time to look after him."

'He was pointed out, and I looked after him, and then I went back to the hospital, and said, "Now, gentlemen, it's not the porter. He's, unfortunately for himself, a little too fond of drink, but he's nothing worse. My suspicion is, that these robberies are committed by one of the students; and if you'll put me a sofa into that room where the pegs are - as there's no closet - I think I shall be able to detect the thief. I wish the sofa, if you please, to be covered with chintz, or something of that sort, so that I may lie on my chest, underneath it, without being seen."

'The sofa was provided, and next day at eleven o'clock, before any of the students came, I went there, with those gentlemen, to get underneath it. It turned out to be one of those old-fashioned sofas with a great cross-beam at the bottom, that would have broken my back in no time if I could ever have got below it. We had quite a job to break all this away in the time; however, I fell to work, and they fell to work, and we broke it out, and made a clear place for me. I got under the sofa, lay down on my chest, took out my knife, and made a convenient hole in the chintz to look through. It was then settled between me and the gentlemen that when the students were all up in the wards, one of the gentlemen should come in, and hang up a great-coat on one of the pegs. And that that great-coat should have, in one of the pockets, a pocket-book containing marked money.

'After I had been there some time, the students began to drop into the room, by ones, and twos, and threes, and to talk about all sorts of things, little thinking there was anybody under the sofa - and then to go up-stairs. At last there came in one who remained until he was alone in the room by himself. A tallish, good-looking young man of one or two and twenty, with a light whisker. He went to a particular hat-peg, took off a good hat that was hanging there, tried it on, hung his own hat in its place, and hung that hat on another peg, nearly opposite to me. I then felt quite certain that he was the thief, and would come back by-and-by.

'When they were all up-stairs, the gentleman came in with the great-coat. I showed him where to hang it, so that I might have a good view of it; and he went away; and I lay under the sofa on my chest, for a couple of hours or so, waiting.

'At last, the same young man came down. He walked across the room, whistling - stopped and listened - took another walk and whistled - stopped again, and listened - then began to go regularly round the pegs, feeling in the pockets of all the coats. When he came to the great-coat, and felt the pocket-book, he was so eager and so hurried that he broke the strap in tearing it open. As he began to put the money in his pocket, I crawled out from under the sofa, and his eyes met mine.

'My face, as you may perceive, is brown now, but it was pale at that time, my health not being good; and looked as long as a horse's. Besides which, there was a great draught of air from the door, underneath the sofa, and I had tied a handkerchief round my head; so what I looked like, altogether, I don't know. He turned blue - literally blue - when he saw me crawling out, and I couldn't feel surprised at it.

'"I am an officer of the Detective Police," said I, "and have been lying here, since you first came in this morning. I regret, for the sake of yourself and your friends, that you should have done what you have; but this case is complete. You have the pocket-book in your hand and the money upon you; and I must take you into custody!"

'It was impossible to make out any case in his behalf, and on his trial he pleaded guilty. How or when he got the means I don't know; but while he was awaiting his sentence, he poisoned himself in Newgate.'

We inquired of this officer, on the conclusion of the foregoing anecdote, whether the time appeared long, or short, when he lay in that constrained position under the sofa?

'Why, you see, sir,' he replied, 'if he hadn't come in, the first time, and I had not been quite sure he was the thief, and would return, the time would have seemed long. But, as it was, I being dead certain of my man, the time seemed pretty short.'

ON DUTY WITH INSPECTOR FIELD

HOW goes the night? Saint Giles's clock is striking nine. The weather is dull and wet, and the long lines of street lamps are blurred, as if we saw them through tears. A damp wind blows and rakes the pieman's fire out, when he opens the door of his little furnace, carrying away an eddy of sparks.

Saint Giles's clock strikes nine. We are punctual. Where is Inspector Field? Assistant Commissioner of Police is already here, enwrapped in oil-skin cloak, and standing in the shadow of Saint Giles's steeple. Detective Sergeant, weary of speaking French all day to foreigners unpacking at the Great Exhibition, is already here. Where is Inspector Field?

Inspector Field is, to-night, the guardian genius of the British Museum. He is bringing his shrewd eye to bear on every corner of its solitary galleries, before he reports 'all right.' Suspicious of the Elgin marbles, and not to be done by cat-faced Egyptian giants with their hands upon their knees, Inspector Field, sagacious, vigilant, lamp in hand, throwing monstrous shadows on the walls and ceilings, passes through the spacious rooms. If a mummy trembled in an atom of its dusty covering, Inspector Field would say, 'Come out of that, Tom Green. I know you!' If the smallest 'Gonoph' about town were crouching at the bottom of a classic bath, Inspector Field would nose him with a finer scent than the ogre's, when adventurous Jack lay trembling in his kitchen copper. But all is quiet, and Inspector Field goes warily on, making little outward show of attending to anything in particular, just recognising the Ichthyosaurus as a familiar acquaintance, and wondering, perhaps, how the detectives did it in the days before the Flood.

Will Inspector Field be long about this work? He may be half-an- hour longer. He sends his compliments by Police Constable, and proposes that we meet at St. Giles's Station House, across the road. Good. It were as well to stand by the fire, there, as in the shadow of Saint Giles's steeple.

Anything doing here to-night? Not much. We are very quiet. A lost boy, extremely calm and small, sitting by the fire, whom we now confide to a constable to take home, for the child says that if you show him Newgate Street, he can show you where he lives - a raving drunken woman in the cells, who has screeched her voice away, and has hardly power enough left to declare, even with the passionate help of her feet and arms, that she is the daughter of a British officer, and, strike her blind and dead, but she'll write a letter to the Queen! but who is soothed with a drink of water - in another cell, a quiet woman with a child at her breast, for begging - in another, her husband in a smock-frock, with a basket of watercresses - in another, a pickpocket - in another, a meek tremulous old pauper man who has been out for a holiday 'and has took but a little drop, but it has overcome him after so many months in the house' - and that's all as yet. Presently, a sensation at the Station House door. Mr. Field, gentlemen!

Inspector Field comes in, wiping his forehead, for he is of a burly figure, and has come fast from the ores and metals of the deep mines of the earth, and from the Parrot Gods of the South Sea Islands, and from the birds and beetles of the tropics, and from the Arts of Greece and Rome, and from the Sculptures of Nineveh, and from the traces of an elder world, when these were not. Is Rogers ready? Rogers is ready, strapped and great-coated, with a flaming eye in the middle of his waist, like a deformed Cyclops. Lead on, Rogers, to Rats' Castle!

How many people may there be in London, who, if we had brought them deviously and blindfold, to this street, fifty paces from the Station House, and within call of Saint Giles's church, would know it for a not remote part of the city in which their lives are passed? How many, who amidst this compound of sickening smells, these heaps of filth, these tumbling houses, with all their vile contents, animate, and inanimate, slimily overflowing into the black road, would believe that they breathe THIS air? How much Red Tape may there be, that could look round on the faces which now hem us in - for our appearance here has caused a rush from all points to a common centre - the lowering foreheads, the sallow cheeks, the brutal eyes, the matted hair, the infected, vermin-haunted heaps of rags - and say, 'I have thought of this. I have not dismissed the thing. I have neither blustered it away, nor frozen it away, nor tied it up and put it away, nor smoothly said pooh, pooh! to it when it has been shown to me?'

This is not what Rogers wants to know, however. What Rogers wants to know, is, whether you WILL clear the way here, some of you, or whether you won't; because if you don't do it right on end, he'll lock you up! 'What! YOU are there, are you, Bob Miles? You haven't had enough of it yet, haven't you? You want three months more, do you? Come away from that gentleman! What are you creeping round there for?'

'What am I a doing, thinn, Mr. Rogers?' says Bob Miles, appearing, villainous, at the end of a lane of light, made by the lantern.

'I'll let you know pretty quick, if you don't hook it. WILL you hook it?'

A sycophantic murmur rises from the crowd. 'Hook it, Bob, when Mr. Rogers and Mr. Field tells you! Why don't you hook it, when you are told to?'

The most importunate of the voices strikes familiarly on Mr. Rogers's ear. He suddenly turns his lantern on the owner.

'What! YOU are there, are you, Mister Click? You hook it too - come!'

'What for?' says Mr. Click, discomfited.

'You hook it, will you!' says Mr. Rogers with stern emphasis.

Both Click and Miles DO 'hook it,' without another word, or, in plainer English, sneak away.

'Close up there, my men!' says Inspector Field to two constables on duty who have followed. 'Keep together, gentlemen; we are going down here. Heads!'

Saint Giles's church strikes half-past ten. We stoop low, and creep down a precipitous flight of steps into a dark close cellar. There is a fire. There is a long deal table. There are benches. The cellar is full of company, chiefly very young men in various conditions of dirt and raggedness. Some are eating supper. There are no girls or women present. Welcome to Rats' Castle, gentlemen, and to this company of noted thieves!

'Well, my lads! How are you, my lads? What have you been doing to-day? Here's some company come to see you, my lads! - THERE'S a plate of beefsteak, sir, for the supper of a fine young man! And there's a mouth for a steak, sir! Why, I should be too proud of such a mouth as that, if I had it myself! Stand up and show it, sir! Take off your cap. There's a fine young man for a nice little party, sir! An't he?'

Inspector Field is the bustling speaker. Inspector Field's eye is the roving eye that searches every corner of the cellar as he talks. Inspector Field's hand is the well-known hand that has collared half the people here, and motioned their brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, male and female friends, inexorably to New South Wales. Yet Inspector Field stands in this den, the Sultan of the place. Every thief here cowers before him, like a schoolboy before his schoolmaster. All watch him, all answer when addressed, all laugh at his jokes, all seek to propitiate him. This cellar company alone - to say nothing of the crowd surrounding the entrance from the street above, and making the steps shine with eyes - is strong enough to murder us all, and willing enough to do it; but, let Inspector Field have a mind to pick out one thief here, and take him; let him produce that ghostly truncheon from his pocket, and say, with his business-air, 'My lad, I want you!' and all Rats' Castle shall be stricken with paralysis, and not a finger move against him, as he fits the handcuffs on!

Where's the Earl of Warwick? - Here he is, Mr. Field! Here's the Earl of Warwick, Mr. Field! - O there you are, my Lord. Come for'ard. There's a chest, sir, not to have a clean shirt on. An't it? Take your hat off, my Lord. Why, I should be ashamed if I was you - and an Earl, too - to show myself to a gentleman with my hat on! - The Earl of Warwick laughs and uncovers. All the company laugh. One pickpocket, especially, laughs with great enthusiasm. O what a jolly game it is, when Mr. Field comes down - and don't want nobody!

So, YOU are here, too, are you, you tall, grey, soldierly-looking, grave man, standing by the fire? - Yes, sir. Good evening, Mr. Field! - Let us see. You lived servant to a nobleman once? - Yes, Mr. Field. - And what is it you do now; I forget? - Well, Mr. Field, I job about as well as I can. I left my employment on account of delicate health. The family is still kind to me. Mr. Wix of Piccadilly is also very kind to me when I am hard up. Likewise Mr. Nix of Oxford Street. I get a trifle from them occasionally, and rub on as well as I can, Mr. Field. Mr. Field's eye rolls enjoyingly, for this man is a notorious begging-letter writer. - Good night, my lads! - Good night, Mr. Field, and thank'ee, sir!

Clear the street here, half a thousand of you! Cut it, Mrs. Stalker - none of that - we don't want you! Rogers of the flaming eye, lead on to the tramps' lodging-house!

A dream of baleful faces attends to the door. Now, stand back all of you! In the rear Detective Sergeant plants himself, composedly whistling, with his strong right arm across the narrow passage. Mrs. Stalker, I am something'd that need not be written here, if you won't get yourself into trouble, in about half a minute, if I see that face of yours again!

Saint Giles's church clock, striking eleven, hums through our hand from the dilapidated door of a dark outhouse as we open it, and are stricken back by the pestilent breath that issues from within. Rogers to the front with the light, and let us look!

Ten, twenty, thirty - who can count them! Men, women, children, for the most part naked, heaped upon the floor like maggots in a cheese! Ho! In that dark corner yonder! Does anybody lie there? Me sir, Irish me, a widder, with six children. And yonder? Me sir, Irish me, with me wife and eight poor babes. And to the left there? Me sir, Irish me, along with two more Irish boys as is me friends. And to the right there? Me sir and the Murphy fam'ly, numbering five blessed souls. And what's this, coiling, now, about my foot? Another Irish me, pitifully in want of shaving, whom I have awakened from sleep - and across my other foot lies his wife - and by the shoes of Inspector Field lie their three eldest - and their three youngest are at present squeezed between the open door and the wall. And why is there no one on that little mat before the sullen fire? Because O'Donovan, with his wife and daughter, is not come in from selling Lucifers! Nor on the bit of sacking in the nearest corner? Bad luck! Because that Irish family is late to-night, a-cadging in the streets!

They are all awake now, the children excepted, and most of them sit up, to stare. Wheresoever Mr. Rogers turns the flaming eye, there is a spectral figure rising, unshrouded, from a grave of rags. Who is the landlord here? - I am, Mr. Field! says a bundle of ribs and parchment against the wall, scratching itself. - Will you spend this money fairly, in the morning, to buy coffee for 'em all? - Yes, sir, I will! - O he'll do it, sir, he'll do it fair. He's honest! cry the spectres. And with thanks and Good Night sink into their graves again.

Thus, we make our New Oxford Streets, and our other new streets, never heeding, never asking, where the wretches whom we clear out, crowd. With such scenes at our doors, with all the plagues of Egypt tied up with bits of cobweb in kennels so near our homes, we timorously make our Nuisance Bills and Boards of Health, nonentities, and think to keep away the Wolves of Crime and Filth, by our electioneering ducking to little vestrymen and our gentlemanly handling of Red Tape!

Intelligence of the coffee-money has got abroad. The yard is full, and Rogers of the flaming eye is beleaguered with entreaties to show other Lodging Houses. Mine next! Mine! Mine! Rogers, military, obdurate, stiff-necked, immovable, replies not, but leads away; all falling back before him. Inspector Field follows. Detective Sergeant, with his barrier of arm across the little passage, deliberately waits to close the procession. He sees behind him, without any effort, and exceedingly disturbs one individual far in the rear by coolly calling out, 'It won't do, Mr. Michael! Don't try it!'

After council holden in the street, we enter other lodging-houses, public-houses, many lairs and holes; all noisome and offensive; none so filthy and so crowded as where Irish are. In one, The Ethiopian party are expected home presently - were in Oxford Street when last heard of - shall be fetched, for our delight, within ten minutes. In another, one of the two or three Professors who drew Napoleon Buonaparte and a couple of mackerel, on the pavement and then let the work of art out to a speculator, is refreshing after his labours. In another, the vested interest of the profitable nuisance has been in one family for a hundred years, and the landlord drives in comfortably from the country to his snug little stew in town. In all, Inspector Field is received with warmth. Coiners and smashers droop before him; pickpockets defer to him; the gentle sex (not very gentle here) smile upon him. Half-drunken hags check themselves in the midst of pots of beer, or pints of gin, to drink to Mr. Field, and pressingly to ask the honour of his finishing the draught. One beldame in rusty black has such admiration for him, that she runs a whole street's length to shake him by the hand; tumbling into a heap of mud by the way, and still pressing her attentions when her very form has ceased to be distinguishable through it. Before the power of the law, the power of superior sense - for common thieves are fools beside these men - and the power of a perfect mastery of their character, the garrison of Rats' Castle and the adjacent Fortresses make but a skulking show indeed when reviewed by Inspector Field.

Saint Giles's clock says it will be midnight in half-an-hour, and Inspector Field says we must hurry to the Old Mint in the Borough. The cab-driver is low-spirited, and has a solemn sense of his responsibility. Now, what's your fare, my lad? - O YOU know, Inspector Field, what's the good of asking ME!

Say, Parker, strapped and great-coated, and waiting in dim Borough doorway by appointment, to replace the trusty Rogers whom we left deep in Saint Giles's, are you ready? Ready, Inspector Field, and at a motion of my wrist behold my flaming eye.

This narrow street, sir, is the chief part of the Old Mint, full of low lodging-houses, as you see by the transparent canvas-lamps and blinds, announcing beds for travellers! But it is greatly changed, friend Field, from my former knowledge of it; it is infinitely quieter and more subdued than when I was here last, some seven years ago? O yes! Inspector Haynes, a first-rate man, is on this station now and plays the Devil with them!

Well, my lads! How are you to-night, my lads? Playing cards here, eh? Who wins? - Why, Mr. Field, I, the sulky gentleman with the damp flat side-curls, rubbing my bleared eye with the end of my neckerchief which is like a dirty eel-skin, am losing just at present, but I suppose I must take my pipe out of my mouth, and be submissive to YOU - I hope I see you well, Mr. Field? - Aye, all right, my lad. Deputy, who have you got up-stairs? Be pleased to show the rooms!

Why Deputy, Inspector Field can't say. He only knows that the man who takes care of the beds and lodgers is always called so. Steady, O Deputy, with the flaring candle in the blacking-bottle, for this is a slushy back-yard, and the wooden staircase outside the house creaks and has holes in it.

Again, in these confined intolerable rooms, burrowed out like the holes of rats or the nests of insect-vermin, but fuller of intolerable smells, are crowds of sleepers, each on his foul truckle-bed coiled up beneath a rug. Holloa here! Come! Let us see you! Show your face! Pilot Parker goes from bed to bed and turns their slumbering heads towards us, as a salesman might turn sheep. Some wake up with an execration and a threat. - What! who spoke? O! If it's the accursed glaring eye that fixes me, go where I will, I am helpless. Here! I sit up to be looked at. Is it me you want? Not you, lie down again! and I lie down, with a woful growl.

Whenever the turning lane of light becomes stationary for a moment, some sleeper appears at the end of it, submits himself to be scrutinised, and fades away into the darkness.

There should be strange dreams here, Deputy. They sleep sound enough, says Deputy, taking the candle out of the blacking-bottle, snuffing it with his fingers, throwing the snuff into the bottle, and corking it up with the candle; that's all I know. What is the inscription, Deputy, on all the discoloured sheets? A precaution against loss of linen. Deputy turns down the rug of an unoccupied bed and discloses it. STOP THIEF!

To lie at night, wrapped in the legend of my slinking life; to take the cry that pursues me, waking, to my breast in sleep; to have it staring at me, and clamouring for me, as soon as consciousness returns; to have it for my first-foot on New-Year's day, my Valentine, my Birthday salute, my Christmas greeting, my parting with the old year. STOP THIEF!

And to know that I MUST be stopped, come what will. To know that I am no match for this individual energy and keenness, or this organised and steady system! Come across the street, here, and, entering by a little shop and yard, examine these intricate passages and doors, contrived for escape, flapping and counter- flapping, like the lids of the conjurer's boxes. But what avail they? Who gets in by a nod, and shows their secret working to us? Inspector Field.

Don't forget the old Farm House, Parker! Parker is not the man to forget it. We are going there, now. It is the old Manor-House of these parts, and stood in the country once. Then, perhaps, there was something, which was not the beastly street, to see from the shattered low fronts of the overhanging wooden houses we are passing under - shut up now, pasted over with bills about the literature and drama of the Mint, and mouldering away. This long paved yard was a paddock or a garden once, or a court in front of the Farm House. Perchance, with a dovecot in the centre, and fowls peeking about - with fair elm trees, then, where discoloured chimney-stacks and gables are now - noisy, then, with rooks which have yielded to a different sort of rookery. It's likelier than not, Inspector Field thinks, as we turn into the common kitchen, which is in the yard, and many paces from the house.

Well, my lads and lasses, how are you all? Where's Blackey, who has stood near London Bridge these five-and-twenty years, with a painted skin to represent disease? - Here he is, Mr. Field! - How are you, Blackey? - Jolly, sa! Not playing the fiddle to-night, Blackey? - Not a night, sa! A sharp, smiling youth, the wit of the kitchen, interposes. He an't musical to-night, sir. I've been giving him a moral lecture; I've been a talking to him about his latter end, you see. A good many of these are my pupils, sir. This here young man (smoothing down the hair of one near him, reading a Sunday paper) is a pupil of mine. I'm a teaching of him to read, sir. He's a promising cove, sir. He's a smith, he is, and gets his living by the sweat of the brow, sir. So do I, myself, sir. This young woman is my sister, Mr. Field. SHE'S getting on very well too. I've a deal of trouble with 'em, sir, but I'm richly rewarded, now I see 'em all a doing so well, and growing up so creditable. That's a great comfort, that is, an't it, sir? - In the midst of the kitchen (the whole kitchen is in ecstasies with this impromptu 'chaff') sits a young, modest, gentle-looking creature, with a beautiful child in her lap. She seems to belong to the company, but is so strangely unlike it. She has such a pretty, quiet face and voice, and is so proud to hear the child admired - thinks you would hardly believe that he is only nine months old! Is she as bad as the rest, I wonder? Inspectorial experience does not engender a belief contrariwise, but prompts the answer, Not a ha'porth of difference!

There is a piano going in the old Farm House as we approach. It stops. Landlady appears. Has no objections, Mr. Field, to gentlemen being brought, but wishes it were at earlier hours, the lodgers complaining of ill-conwenience. Inspector Field is polite and soothing - knows his woman and the sex. Deputy (a girl in this case) shows the way up a heavy, broad old staircase, kept very clean, into clean rooms where many sleepers are, and where painted panels of an older time look strangely on the truckle beds. The sight of whitewash and the smell of soap - two things we seem by this time to have parted from in infancy - make the old Farm House a phenomenon, and connect themselves with the so curiously misplaced picture of the pretty mother and child long after we have left it, - long after we have left, besides, the neighbouring nook with something of a rustic flavour in it yet, where once, beneath a low wooden colonnade still standing as of yore, the eminent Jack Sheppard condescended to regale himself, and where, now, two old bachelor brothers in broad hats (who are whispered in the Mint to have made a compact long ago that if either should ever marry, he must forfeit his share of the joint property) still keep a sequestered tavern, and sit o' nights smoking pipes in the bar, among ancient bottles and glasses, as our eyes behold them.

How goes the night now? Saint George of Southwark answers with twelve blows upon his bell. Parker, good night, for Williams is already waiting over in the region of Ratcliffe Highway, to show the houses where the sailors dance.

I should like to know where Inspector Field was born. In Ratcliffe Highway, I would have answered with confidence, but for his being equally at home wherever we go. HE does not trouble his head as I do, about the river at night. HE does not care for its creeping, black and silent, on our right there, rushing through sluice-gates, lapping at piles and posts and iron rings, hiding strange things in its mud, running away with suicides and accidentally drowned bodies faster than midnight funeral should, and acquiring such various experience between its cradle and its grave. It has no mystery for HIM. Is there not the Thames Police!

Accordingly, Williams leads the way. We are a little late, for some of the houses are already closing. No matter. You show us plenty. All the landlords know Inspector Field. All pass him, freely and good-humouredly, wheresoever he wants to go. So thoroughly are all these houses open to him and our local guide, that, granting that sailors must be entertained in their own way - as I suppose they must, and have a right to be - I hardly know how such places could be better regulated. Not that I call the company very select, or the dancing very graceful - even so graceful as that of the German Sugar Bakers, whose assembly, by the Minories, we stopped to visit - but there is watchful maintenance of order in every house, and swift expulsion where need is. Even in the midst of drunkenness, both of the lethargic kind and the lively, there is sharp landlord supervision, and pockets are in less peril than out of doors. These houses show, singularly, how much of the picturesque and romantic there truly is in the sailor, requiring to be especially addressed. All the songs (sung in a hailstorm of halfpence, which are pitched at the singer without the least tenderness for the time or tune - mostly from great rolls of copper carried for the purpose - and which he occasionally dodges like shot as they fly near his head) are of the sentimental sea sort. All the rooms are decorated with nautical subjects. Wrecks, engagements, ships on fire, ships passing lighthouses on iron-bound coasts, ships blowing up, ships going down, ships running ashore, men lying out upon the main-yard in a gale of wind, sailors and ships in every variety of peril, constitute the illustrations of fact. Nothing can be done in the fanciful way, without a thumping boy upon a scaly dolphin.

How goes the night now? Past one. Black and Green are waiting in Whitechapel to unveil the mysteries of Wentworth Street. Williams, the best of friends must part. Adieu!

Are not Black and Green ready at the appointed place? O yes! They glide out of shadow as we stop. Imperturbable Black opens the cab- door; Imperturbable Green takes a mental note of the driver. Both Green and

Black then open each his flaming eye, and marshal us the way that we are going.

The lodging-house we want is hidden in a maze of streets and courts. It is fast shut. We knock at the door, and stand hushed looking up for a light at one or other of the begrimed old lattice windows in its ugly front, when another constable comes up - supposes that we want 'to see the school.' Detective Sergeant meanwhile has got over a rail, opened a gate, dropped down an area, overcome some other little obstacles, and tapped at a window. Now returns. The landlord will send a deputy immediately.

Deputy is heard to stumble out of bed. Deputy lights a candle, draws back a bolt or two, and appears at the door. Deputy is a shivering shirt and trousers by no means clean, a yawning face, a shock head much confused externally and internally. We want to look for some one. You may go up with the light, and take 'em all, if you like, says Deputy, resigning it, and sitting down upon a bench in the kitchen with his ten fingers sleepily twisting in his hair.

Halloa here! Now then! Show yourselves. That'll do. It's not you. Don't disturb yourself any more! So on, through a labyrinth of airless rooms, each man responding, like a wild beast, to the keeper who has tamed him, and who goes into his cage. What, you haven't found him, then? says Deputy, when we came down. A woman mysteriously sitting up all night in the dark by the smouldering ashes of the kitchen fire, says it's only tramps and cadgers here; it's gonophs over the way. A man mysteriously walking about the kitchen all night in the dark, bids her hold her tongue. We come out. Deputy fastens the door and goes to bed again.

Black and Green, you know Bark, lodging-house keeper and receiver of stolen goods? - O yes, Inspector Field. - Go to Bark's next.

Bark sleeps in an inner wooden hutch, near his street door. As we parley on the step with Bark's Deputy, Bark growls in his bed. We enter, and Bark flies out of bed. Bark is a red villain and a wrathful, with a sanguine throat that looks very much as if it were expressly made for hanging, as he stretches it out, in pale defiance, over the half-door of his hutch. Bark's parts of speech are of an awful sort - principally adjectives. I won't, says Bark, have no adjective police and adjective strangers in my adjective premises! I won't, by adjective and substantive! Give me my trousers, and I'll send the whole adjective police to adjective and substantive! Give me, says Bark, my adjective trousers! I'll put an adjective knife in the whole bileing of 'em. I'll punch their adjective heads. I'll rip up their adjective substantives. Give me my adjective trousers! says Bark, and I'll spile the bileing of 'em!

Now, Bark, what's the use of this? Here's Black and Green, Detective Sergeant, and Inspector Field. You know we will come in. - I know you won't! says Bark. Somebody give me my adjective trousers! Bark's trousers seem difficult to find. He calls for them as Hercules might for his club. Give me my adjective trousers! says Bark, and I'll spile the bileing of 'em!

Inspector Field holds that it's all one whether Bark likes the visit or don't like it. He, Inspector Field, is an Inspector of the Detective Police, Detective Sergeant IS Detective Sergeant, Black and Green are constables in uniform. Don't you be a fool, Bark, or you know it will be the worse for you. - I don't care, says Bark. Give me my adjective trousers!

At two o'clock in the morning, we descend into Bark's low kitchen, leaving Bark to foam at the mouth above, and Imperturbable Black and Green to look at him. Bark's kitchen is crammed full of thieves, holding a CONVERSAZIONE there by lamp-light. It is by far the most dangerous assembly we have seen yet. Stimulated by the ravings of Bark, above, their looks are sullen, but not a man speaks. We ascend again. Bark has got his trousers, and is in a state of madness in the passage with his back against a door that shuts off the upper staircase. We observe, in other respects, a ferocious individuality in Bark. Instead of 'STOP THIEF!' on his linen, he prints 'STOLEN FROM Bark's!'

Now, Bark, we are going up-stairs! - No, you ain't! - YOU refuse admission to the Police, do you, Bark? - Yes, I do! I refuse it to all the adjective police, and to all the adjective substantives. If the adjective coves in the kitchen was men, they'd come up now, and do for you! Shut me that there door! says Bark, and suddenly we are enclosed in the passage. They'd come up and do for you! cries Bark, and waits. Not a sound in the kitchen! They'd come up and do for you! cries Bark again, and waits. Not a sound in the kitchen! We are shut up, half-a-dozen of us, in Bark's house in the innermost recesses of the worst part of London, in the dead of the night - the house is crammed with notorious robbers and ruffians - and not a man stirs. No, Bark. They know the weight of the law, and they know Inspector Field and Co. too well.

We leave bully Bark to subside at leisure out of his passion and his trousers, and, I dare say, to be inconveniently reminded of this little brush before long. Black and Green do ordinary duty here, and look serious.

As to White, who waits on Holborn Hill to show the courts that are eaten out of Rotten Gray's Inn, Lane, where other lodging-houses are, and where (in one blind alley) the Thieves' Kitchen and Seminary for the teaching of the art to children is, the night has so worn away, being now

almost at odds with morning, which is which,

that they are quiet, and no light shines through the chinks in the shutters. As undistinctive Death will come here, one day, sleep comes now. The wicked cease from troubling sometimes, even in this life.

DOWN WITH THE TIDE

A VERY dark night it was, and bitter cold; the east wind blowing bleak, and bringing with it stinging particles from marsh, and moor, and fen - from the Great Desert and Old Egypt, may be. Some of the component parts of the sharp-edged vapour that came flying up the Thames at London might be mummy-dust, dry atoms from the Temple at Jerusalem, camels' foot-prints, crocodiles' hatching- places, loosened grains of expression from the visages of blunt- nosed sphynxes, waifs and strays from caravans of turbaned merchants, vegetation from jungles, frozen snow from the Himalayas. O! It was very, very dark upon the Thames, and it was bitter, bitter cold.

'And yet,' said the voice within the great pea-coat at my side, 'you'll have seen a good many rivers, too, I dare say?'

'Truly,' said I, 'when I come to think of it, not a few. From the Niagara, downward to the mountain rivers of Italy, which are like the national spirit - very tame, or chafing suddenly and bursting bounds, only to dwindle away again. The Moselle, and the Rhine, and the Rhone; and the Seine, and the Saone; and the St. Lawrence, Mississippi, and Ohio; and the Tiber, the Po, and the Arno; and the - '

Peacoat coughing as if he had had enough of that, I said no more. I could have carried the catalogue on to a teasing length, though, if I had been in the cruel mind.

'And after all,' said he, 'this looks so dismal?'

'So awful,' I returned, 'at night. The Seine at Paris is very gloomy too, at such a time, and is probably the scene of far more crime and greater wickedness; but this river looks so broad and vast, so murky and silent, seems such an image of death in the midst of the great city's life, that - '

That Peacoat coughed again. He COULD NOT stand my holding forth.

We were in a four-oared Thames Police Galley, lying on our oars in the deep shadow of Southwark Bridge - under the corner arch on the Surrey side - having come down with the tide from Vauxhall. We were fain to hold on pretty tight, though close in shore, for the river was swollen and the tide running down very strong. We were watching certain water-rats of human growth, and lay in the deep shade as quiet as mice; our light hidden and our scraps of conversation carried on in whispers. Above us, the massive iron girders of the arch were faintly visible, and below us its ponderous shadow seemed to sink down to the bottom of the stream.

We had been lying here some half an hour. With our backs to the wind, it is true; but the wind being in a determined temper blew straight through us, and would not take the trouble to go round. I would have boarded a fireship to get into action, and mildly suggested as much to my friend Pea.

'No doubt,' says he as patiently as possible; 'but shore-going tactics wouldn't do with us. River-thieves can always get rid of stolen property in a moment by dropping it overboard. We want to take them WITH the property, so we lurk about and come out upon 'em sharp. If they see us or hear us, over it goes.'

Pea's wisdom being indisputable, there was nothing for it but to sit there and be blown through, for another half-hour. The water- rats thinking it wise to abscond at the end of that time without commission of felony, we shot out, disappointed, with the tide.

'Grim they look, don't they?' said Pea, seeing me glance over my shoulder at the lights upon the bridge, and downward at their long crooked reflections in the river.

'Very,' said I, 'and make one think with a shudder of Suicides.
What a night for a dreadful leap from that parapet!'

'Aye, but Waterloo's the favourite bridge for making holes in the water from,' returned Pea. 'By the bye - avast pulling, lads! - would you like to speak to Waterloo on the subject?'

My face confessing a surprised desire to have some friendly conversation with Waterloo Bridge, and my friend Pea being the most obliging of men, we put about, pulled out of the force of the stream, and in place of going at great speed with the tide, began to strive against it, close in shore again. Every colour but black seemed to have departed from the world. The air was black, the water was black, the barges and hulks were black, the piles were black, the buildings were black, the shadows were only a deeper shade of black upon a black ground. Here and there, a coal fire in an iron cresset blazed upon a wharf; but, one knew that it too had been black a little while ago, and would be black again soon. Uncomfortable rushes of water suggestive of gurgling and drowning, ghostly rattlings of iron chains, dismal clankings of discordant engines, formed the music that accompanied the dip of our oars and their rattling in the rowlocks. Even the noises had a black sound to me - as the trumpet sounded red to the blind man.

Our dexterous boat's crew made nothing of the tide, and pulled us gallantly up to Waterloo Bridge. Here Pea and I disembarked, passed under the black stone archway, and climbed the steep stone steps. Within a few feet of their summit, Pea presented me to Waterloo (or an eminent toll-taker representing that structure), muffled up to the eyes in a thick shawl, and amply great-coated and fur-capped.

Waterloo received us with cordiality, and observed of the night that it was 'a Searcher.' He had been originally called the Strand Bridge, he informed us, but had received his present name at the suggestion of the proprietors, when Parliament had resolved to vote three hundred thousand pound for the erection of a monument in honour of the victory. Parliament took the hint (said Waterloo, with the least flavour of misanthropy) and saved the money. Of course the late Duke of Wellington was the first passenger, and of course he paid his penny, and of course a noble lord preserved it evermore. The treadle and index at the toll-house (a most ingenious contrivance for rendering fraud impossible), were invented by Mr. Lethbridge, then property-man at Drury Lane Theatre.

Was it suicide, we wanted to know about? said Waterloo. Ha! Well, he had seen a good deal of that work, he did assure us. He had prevented some. Why, one day a woman, poorish looking, came in between the hatch, slapped down a penny, and wanted to go on without the change! Waterloo suspected this, and says to his mate, 'give an eye to the gate,' and bolted after her. She had got to the third seat between the piers, and was on the parapet just a going over, when he caught her and gave her in charge. At the police office next morning, she said it was along of trouble and a bad husband.

'Likely enough,' observed Waterloo to Pea and myself, as he adjusted his chin in his shawl. 'There's a deal of trouble about, you see - and bad husbands too!'

Another time, a young woman at twelve o'clock in the open day, got through, darted along; and, before Waterloo could come near her, jumped upon the parapet, and shot herself over sideways. Alarm given, watermen put off, lucky escape. - Clothes buoyed her up.

'This is where it is,' said Waterloo. 'If people jump off straight forwards from the middle of the parapet of the bays of the bridge, they are seldom killed by drowning, but are smashed, poor things; that's what THEY are; they dash themselves upon the buttress of the bridge. But you jump off,' said Waterloo to me, putting his fore- finger in a button-hole of my great-coat; 'you jump off from the side of the bay, and you'll tumble, true, into the stream under the arch. What you have got to do, is to mind how you jump in! There was poor Tom Steele from Dublin. Didn't dive! Bless you, didn't dive at all! Fell down so flat into the water, that he broke his breast-bone, and lived two days!'

I asked Waterloo if there were a favourite side of his bridge for this dreadful purpose? He reflected, and thought yes, there was. He should say the Surrey side.

Three decent-looking men went through one day, soberly and quietly, and went on abreast for about a dozen yards: when the middle one, he sung out, all of a sudden, 'Here goes, Jack!' and was over in a minute.

Body found? Well. Waterloo didn't rightly recollect about that.

They were compositors, THEY were.

He considered it astonishing how quick people were! Why, there was a cab came up one Boxing-night, with a young woman in it, who looked, according to Waterloo's opinion of her, a little the worse for liquor; very handsome she was too - very handsome. She stopped the cab at the gate, and said she'd pay the cabman then, which she did, though there was a little hankering about the fare, because at first she didn't seem quite to know where she wanted to be drove to. However, she paid the man, and the toll too, and looking Waterloo in the face (he thought she knew him, don't you see!) said, 'I'll finish it somehow!' Well, the cab went off, leaving Waterloo a little doubtful in his mind, and while it was going on at full speed the young woman jumped out, never fell, hardly staggered, ran along the bridge pavement a little way, passing several people, and jumped over from the second opening. At the inquest it was giv' in evidence that she had been quarrelling at the Hero of Waterloo, and it was brought in jealousy. (One of the results of Waterloo's experience was, that there was a deal of jealousy about.)

'Do we ever get madmen?' said Waterloo, in answer to an inquiry of mine. 'Well, we DO get madmen. Yes, we have had one or two; escaped from 'Sylums, I suppose. One hadn't a halfpenny; and because I wouldn't let him through, he went back a little way, stooped down, took a run, and butted at the hatch like a ram. He smashed his hat rarely, but his head didn't seem no worse - in my opinion on account of his being wrong in it afore. Sometimes people haven't got a halfpenny. If they are really tired and poor we give 'em one and let 'em through. Other people will leave things - pocket-handkerchiefs mostly. I HAVE taken cravats and gloves, pocket-knives, tooth-picks, studs, shirt-pins, rings (generally from young gents, early in the morning), but handkerchiefs is the general thing.'

'Regular customers?' said Waterloo. 'Lord, yes! We have regular customers. One, such a worn-out, used-up old file as you can scarcely picter, comes from the Surrey side as regular as ten o'clock at night comes; and goes over, I think, to some flash house on the Middlesex side. He comes back, he does, as reg'lar as the clock strikes three in the morning, and then can hardly drag one of his old legs after the other. He always turns down the water- stairs, comes up again, and then goes on down the Waterloo Road. He always does the same thing, and never varies a minute. Does it every night - even Sundays.'

I asked Waterloo if he had given his mind to the possibility of this particular customer going down the water-stairs at three o'clock some morning, and never coming up again? He didn't think THAT of him, he replied. In fact, it was Waterloo's opinion, founded on his observation of that file, that he know'd a trick worth two of it.

'There's another queer old customer,' said Waterloo, 'comes over, as punctual as the almanack, at eleven o'clock on the sixth of January, at eleven o'clock on the fifth of April, at eleven o'clock on the sixth of July, at eleven o'clock on the tenth of October. Drives a shaggy little, rough pony, in a sort of a rattle-trap arm- chair sort of a thing. White hair he has, and white whiskers, and muffles himself up with all manner of shawls. He comes back again the same afternoon, and we never see more of him for three months. He is a captain in the navy - retired - wery old - wery odd - and served with Lord Nelson. He is particular about drawing his pension at Somerset House afore the clock strikes twelve every quarter. I HAVE heerd say that he thinks it wouldn't be according to the Act of Parliament, if he didn't draw it afore twelve.'

Having related these anecdotes in a natural manner, which was the best warranty in the world for their genuine nature, our friend Waterloo was sinking deep into his shawl again, as having exhausted his communicative powers and taken in enough east wind, when my other friend Pea in a moment brought him to the surface by asking whether he had not been occasionally the subject of assault and battery in the execution of his duty? Waterloo recovering his spirits, instantly dashed into a new branch of his subject. We learnt how 'both these teeth' - here he pointed to the places where two front teeth were not - were knocked out by an ugly customer who one night made a dash at him (Waterloo) while his (the ugly customer's) pal and coadjutor made a dash at the toll-taking apron where the money-pockets were; how Waterloo, letting the teeth go (to Blazes, he observed indefinitely), grappled with the apron- seizer, permitting the ugly one to run away; and how he saved the bank, and captured his man, and consigned him to fine and imprisonment. Also how, on another night, 'a Cove' laid hold of Waterloo, then presiding at the horse-gate of his bridge, and threw him unceremoniously over his knee, having first cut his head open with his whip. How Waterloo 'got right,' and started after the Cove all down the Waterloo Road, through Stamford Street, and round to the foot of Blackfriars Bridge, where the Cove 'cut into' a public-house. How Waterloo cut in too; but how an aider and abettor of the Cove's, who happened to be taking a promiscuous drain at the bar, stopped Waterloo; and the Cove cut out again, ran across the road down Holland Street, and where not, and into a beer-shop. How Waterloo breaking away from his detainer was close upon the Cove's heels, attended by no end of people, who, seeing him running with the blood streaming down his face, thought something worse was 'up,' and roared Fire! and Murder! on the hopeful chance of the matter in hand being one or both. How the Cove was ignominiously taken, in a shed where he had run to hide, and how at the Police Court they at first wanted to make a sessions job of it; but eventually Waterloo was allowed to be 'spoke to,' and the Cove made it square with Waterloo by paying his doctor's bill (W. was laid up for a week) and giving him 'Three, ten.' Likewise we learnt what we had faintly suspected before, that your sporting amateur on the Derby day, albeit a captain, can be - 'if he be,' as Captain Bobadil observes, 'so generously minded' - anything but a man of honour and a gentleman; not sufficiently gratifying his nice sense of humour by the witty scattering of flour and rotten eggs on obtuse civilians, but requiring the further excitement of 'bilking the toll,' and 'Pitching into' Waterloo, and 'cutting him about the head with his whip;' finally being, when called upon to answer for the assault, what Waterloo described as 'Minus,' or, as I humbly conceived it, not to be found. Likewise did Waterloo inform us, in reply to my inquiries, admiringly and deferentially preferred through my friend Pea, that the takings at the Bridge had more than doubled in amount, since the reduction of the toll one half. And being asked if the aforesaid takings included much bad money, Waterloo responded, with a look far deeper than the deepest part of the river, HE should think not! - and so retired into his shawl for the rest of the night.

Then did Pea and I once more embark in our four-oared galley, and glide swiftly down the river with the tide. And while the shrewd East rasped and notched us, as with jagged razors, did my friend Pea impart to me confidences of interest relating to the Thames Police; we, between whiles, finding 'duty boats' hanging in dark corners under banks, like weeds - our own was a 'supervision boat' - and they, as they reported 'all right!' flashing their hidden light on us, and we flashing ours on them. These duty boats had one sitter in each: an Inspector: and were rowed 'Ran-dan,' which - for the information of those who never graduated, as I was once proud to do, under a fireman-waterman and winner of Kean's Prize Wherry: who, in the course of his tuition, took hundreds of gallons of rum and egg (at my expense) at the various houses of note above and below bridge; not by any means because he liked it, but to cure a weakness in his liver, for which the faculty had particularly recommended it - may be explained as rowed by three men, two pulling an oar each, and one a pair of sculls.

Thus, floating down our black highway, sullenly frowned upon by the knitted brows of Blackfriars, Southwark, and London, each in his lowering turn, I was shown by my friend Pea that there are, in the Thames Police Force, whose district extends from Battersea to Barking Creek, ninety-eight men, eight duty boats, and two supervision boats; and that these go about so silently, and lie in wait in such dark places, and so seem to be nowhere, and so may be anywhere, that they have gradually become a police of prevention, keeping the river almost clear of any great crimes, even while the increased vigilance on shore has made it much harder than of yore to live by 'thieving' in the streets. And as to the various kinds of water-thieves, said my friend Pea, there were the Tier-rangers, who silently dropped alongside the tiers of shipping in the Pool, by night, and who, going to the companion-head, listened for two snores - snore number one, the skipper's; snore number two, the mate's - mates and skippers always snoring great guns, and being dead sure to be hard at it if they had turned in and were asleep. Hearing the double fire, down went the Rangers into the skippers' cabins; groped for the skippers' inexpressibles, which it was the custom of those gentlemen to shake off, watch, money, braces, boots, and all together, on the floor; and therewith made off as silently as might be. Then there were the Lumpers, or labourers employed to unload vessels. They wore loose canvas jackets with a broad hem in the bottom, turned inside, so as to form a large circular pocket in which they could conceal, like clowns in pantomimes, packages of surprising sizes. A great deal of property was stolen in this manner (Pea confided to me) from steamers; first, because steamers carry a larger number of small packages than other ships; next, because of the extreme rapidity with which they are obliged to be unladen for their return voyages. The Lumpers dispose of their booty easily to marine store dealers, and the only remedy to be suggested is that marine store shops should be licensed, and thus brought under the eye of the police as rigidly as public-houses. Lumpers also smuggle goods ashore for the crews of vessels. The smuggling of tobacco is so considerable, that it is well worth the while of the sellers of smuggled tobacco to use hydraulic presses, to squeeze a single pound into a package small enough to be contained in an ordinary pocket. Next, said my friend Pea, there were the Truckers - less thieves than smugglers, whose business it was to land more considerable parcels of goods than the Lumpers could manage. They sometimes sold articles of grocery and so forth, to the crews, in order to cloak their real calling, and get aboard without suspicion. Many of them had boats of their own, and made money. Besides these, there were the Dredgermen, who, under pretence of dredging up coals and such like from the bottom of the river, hung about barges and other undecked craft, and when they saw an opportunity, threw any property they could lay their hands on overboard: in order slyly to dredge it up when the vessel was gone. Sometimes, they dexterously used their dredges to whip away anything that might lie within reach. Some of them were mighty neat at this, and the accomplishment was called dry dredging. Then, there was a vast deal of property, such as copper nails, sheathing, hardwood, &c., habitually brought away by shipwrights and other workmen from their employers' yards, and disposed of to marine store dealers, many of whom escaped detection through hard swearing, and their extraordinary artful ways of accounting for the possession of stolen property. Likewise, there were special-pleading practitioners, for whom barges 'drifted away of their own selves' - they having no hand in it, except first cutting them loose, and afterwards plundering them - innocents, meaning no harm, who had the misfortune to observe those foundlings wandering about the Thames.

We were now going in and out, with little noise and great nicety, among the tiers of shipping, whose many hulls, lying close together, rose out of the water like black streets. Here and there, a Scotch, an Irish, or a foreign steamer, getting up her steam as the tide made, looked, with her great chimney and high sides, like a quiet factory among the common buildings. Now, the streets opened into clearer spaces, now contracted into alleys; but the tiers were so like houses, in the dark, that I could almost have believed myself in the narrower bye-ways of Venice. Everything was wonderfully still; for, it wanted full three hours of flood, and nothing seemed awake but a dog here and there.

So we took no Tier-rangers captive, nor any Lumpers, nor Truckers, nor Dredgermen, nor other evil-disposed person or persons; but went ashore at Wapping, where the old Thames Police office is now a station-house, and where the old Court, with its cabin windows looking on the river, is a quaint charge room: with nothing worse in it usually than a stuffed cat in a glass case, and a portrait, pleasant to behold, of a rare old Thames Police officer, Mr. Superintendent Evans, now succeeded by his son. We looked over the charge books, admirably kept, and found the prevention so good that there were not five hundred entries (including drunken and disorderly) in a whole year. Then, we looked into the store-room; where there was an oakum smell, and a nautical seasoning of dreadnought clothing, rope yarn, boat-hooks, sculls and oars, spare stretchers, rudders, pistols, cutlasses, and the like. Then, into the cell, aired high up in the wooden wall through an opening like a kitchen plate-rack: wherein there was a drunken man, not at all warm, and very wishful to know if it were morning yet. Then, into a better sort of watch and ward room, where there was a squadron of stone bottles drawn up, ready to be filled with hot water and applied to any unfortunate creature who might be brought in apparently drowned. Finally, we shook hands with our worthy friend Pea, and ran all the way to Tower Hill, under strong Police suspicion occasionally, before we got warm.

A WALK IN A WORKHOUSE

ON a certain Sunday, I formed one of the congregation assembled in the chapel of a large metropolitan Workhouse. With the exception of the clergyman and clerk, and a very few officials, there were none but paupers present. The children sat in the galleries; the women in the body of the chapel, and in one of the side aisles; the men in the remaining aisle. The service was decorously performed, though the sermon might have been much better adapted to the comprehension and to the circumstances of the hearers. The usual supplications were offered, with more than the usual significancy in such a place, for the fatherless children and widows, for all sick persons and young children, for all that were desolate and oppressed, for the comforting and helping of the weak-hearted, for the raising-up of them that had fallen; for all that were in danger, necessity, and tribulation. The prayers of the congregation were desired 'for several persons in the various wards dangerously ill;' and others who were recovering returned their thanks to Heaven.

Among this congregation, were some evil-looking young women, and beetle-browed young men; but not many - perhaps that kind of characters kept away. Generally, the faces (those of the children excepted) were depressed and subdued, and wanted colour. Aged people were there, in every variety. Mumbling, blear-eyed, spectacled, stupid, deaf, lame; vacantly winking in the gleams of sun that now and then crept in through the open doors, from the paved yard; shading their listening ears, or blinking eyes, with their withered hands; poring over their books, leering at nothing, going to sleep, crouching and drooping in corners. There were weird old women, all skeleton within, all bonnet and cloak without, continually wiping their eyes with dirty dusters of pocket- handkerchiefs; and there were ugly old crones, both male and female, with a ghastly kind of contentment upon them which was not at all comforting to see. Upon the whole, it was the dragon, Pauperism, in a very weak and impotent condition; toothless, fangless, drawing his breath heavily enough, and hardly worth chaining up.

When the service was over, I walked with the humane and conscientious gentleman whose duty it was to take that walk, that Sunday morning, through the little world of poverty enclosed within the workhouse walls. It was inhabited by a population of some fifteen hundred or two thousand paupers, ranging from the infant newly born or not yet come into the pauper world, to the old man dying on his bed.

In a room opening from a squalid yard, where a number of listless women were lounging to and fro, trying to get warm in the ineffectual sunshine of the tardy May morning - in the 'Itch Ward,' not to compromise the truth - a woman such as HOGARTH has often drawn, was hurriedly getting on her gown before a dusty fire. She was the nurse, or wardswoman, of that insalubrious department - herself a pauper - flabby, raw-boned, untidy - unpromising and coarse of aspect as need be. But, on being spoken to about the patients whom she had in charge, she turned round, with her shabby gown half on, half off, and fell a crying with all her might. Not for show, not querulously, not in any mawkish sentiment, but in the deep grief and affliction of her heart; turning away her dishevelled head: sobbing most bitterly, wringing her hands, and letting fall abundance of great tears, that choked her utterance. What was the matter with the nurse of the itch-ward? Oh, 'the dropped child' was dead! Oh, the child that was found in the street, and she had brought up ever since, had died an hour ago, and see where the little creature lay, beneath this cloth! The dear, the pretty dear!

The dropped child seemed too small and poor a thing for Death to be in earnest with, but Death had taken it; and already its diminutive form was neatly washed, composed, and stretched as if in sleep upon a box. I thought I heard a voice from Heaven saying, It shall be well for thee, O nurse of the itch-ward, when some less gentle pauper does those offices to thy cold form, that such as the dropped child are the angels who behold my Father's face!

In another room, were several ugly old women crouching, witch-like, round a hearth, and chattering and nodding, after the manner of the monkeys. 'All well here? And enough to eat?' A general chattering and chuckling; at last an answer from a volunteer. 'Oh yes, gentleman! Bless you, gentleman! Lord bless the Parish of St. So-and-So! It feed the hungry, sir, and give drink to the thusty, and it warm them which is cold, so it do, and good luck to the parish of St. So-and-So, and thankee, gentleman!' Elsewhere, a party of pauper nurses were at dinner. 'How do YOU get on?' 'Oh pretty well, sir! We works hard, and we lives hard - like the sodgers!'

In another room, a kind of purgatory or place of transition, six or eight noisy madwomen were gathered together, under the superintendence of one sane attendant. Among them was a girl of two or three and twenty, very prettily dressed, of most respectable appearance and good manners, who had been brought in from the house where she had lived as domestic servant (having, I suppose, no friends), on account of being subject to epileptic fits, and requiring to be removed under the influence of a very bad one. She was by no means of the same stuff, or the same breeding, or the same experience, or in the same state of mind, as those by whom she was surrounded; and she pathetically complained that the daily association and the nightly noise made her worse, and was driving her mad - which was perfectly evident. The case was noted for inquiry and redress, but she said she had already been there for some weeks.

If this girl had stolen her mistress's watch, I do not hesitate to say she would have been infinitely better off. We have come to this absurd, this dangerous, this monstrous pass, that the dishonest felon is, in respect of cleanliness, order, diet, and accommodation, better provided for, and taken care of, than the honest pauper.

And this conveys no special imputation on the workhouse of the parish of St. So-and-So, where, on the contrary, I saw many things to commend. It was very agreeable, recollecting that most infamous and atrocious enormity committed at Tooting - an enormity which, a hundred years hence, will still be vividly remembered in the bye- ways of English life, and which has done more to engender a gloomy discontent and suspicion among many thousands of the people than all the Chartist leaders could have done in all their lives - to find the pauper children in this workhouse looking robust and well, and apparently the objects of very great care. In the Infant School - a large, light, airy room at the top of the building - the little creatures, being at dinner, and eating their potatoes heartily, were not cowed by the presence of strange visitors, but stretched out their small hands to be shaken, with a very pleasant confidence. And it was comfortable to see two mangy pauper rocking-horses rampant in a corner. In the girls' school, where the dinner was also in progress, everything bore a cheerful and healthy aspect. The meal was over, in the boys' school, by the time of our arrival there, and the room was not yet quite rearranged; but the boys were roaming unrestrained about a large and airy yard, as any other schoolboys might have done. Some of them had been drawing large ships upon the schoolroom wall; and if they had a mast with shrouds and stays set up for practice (as they have in the Middlesex House of Correction), it would be so much the better. At present, if a boy should feel a strong impulse upon him to learn the art of going aloft, he could only gratify it, I presume, as the men and women paupers gratify their aspirations after better board and lodging, by smashing as many workhouse windows as possible, and being promoted to prison.

In one place, the Newgate of the Workhouse, a company of boys and youths were locked up in a yard alone; their day-room being a kind of kennel where the casual poor used formerly to be littered down at night. Divers of them had been there some long time. 'Are they never going away?' was the natural inquiry. 'Most of them are crippled, in some form or other,' said the Wardsman, 'and not fit for anything.' They slunk about, like dispirited wolves or hyaenas; and made a pounce at their food when it was served out, much as those animals do. The big-headed idiot shuffling his feet along the pavement, in the sunlight outside, was a more agreeable object everyway.

Groves of babies in arms; groves of mothers and other sick women in bed; groves of lunatics; jungles of men in stone-paved down-stairs day-rooms, waiting for their dinners; longer and longer groves of old people, in up-stairs Infirmary wards, wearing out life, God knows how - this was the scenery through which the walk lay, for two hours. In some of these latter chambers, there were pictures stuck against the wall, and a neat display of crockery and pewter on a kind of sideboard; now and then it was a treat to see a plant or two; in almost every ward there was a cat.

In all of these Long Walks of aged and infirm, some old people were bedridden, and had been for a long time; some were sitting on their beds half-naked; some dying in their beds; some out of bed, and sitting at a table near the fire. A sullen or lethargic indifference to what was asked, a blunted sensibility to everything but warmth and food, a moody absence of complaint as being of no use, a dogged silence and resentful desire to be left alone again, I thought were generally apparent. On our walking into the midst of one of these dreary perspectives of old men, nearly the following little dialogue took place, the nurse not being immediately at hand:

'All well here?'

No answer. An old man in a Scotch cap sitting among others on a form at the table, eating out of a tin porringer, pushes back his cap a little to look at us, claps it down on his forehead again with the palm of his hand, and goes on eating.

'All well here?' (repeated).

No answer. Another old man sitting on his bed, paralytically peeling a boiled potato, lifts his head and stares.

'Enough to eat?'

No answer. Another old man, in bed, turns himself and coughs.

'How are YOU to-day?' To the last old man.

That old man says nothing; but another old man, a tall old man of very good address, speaking with perfect correctness, comes forward from somewhere, and volunteers an answer. The reply almost always proceeds from a volunteer, and not from the person looked at or spoken to.

'We are very old, sir,' in a mild, distinct voice. 'We can't expect to be well, most of us.'

'Are you comfortable?'

'I have no complaint to make, sir.' With a half shake of his head, a half shrug of his shoulders, and a kind of apologetic smile.

'Enough to eat?'

'Why, sir, I have but a poor appetite,' with the same air as before; 'and yet I get through my allowance very easily.'

'But,' showing a porringer with a Sunday dinner in it; 'here is a portion of mutton, and three potatoes. You can't starve on that?'

'Oh dear no, sir,' with the same apologetic air. 'Not starve.'

'What do you want?'

'We have very little bread, sir. It's an exceedingly small quantity of bread.'

The nurse, who is now rubbing her hands at the questioner's elbow, interferes with, 'It ain't much raly, sir. You see they've only six ounces a day, and when they've took their breakfast, there CAN only be a little left for night, sir.'

Another old man, hitherto invisible, rises out of his bed-clothes, as out of a grave, and looks on.

'You have tea at night?' The questioner is still addressing the well-spoken old man.

'Yes, sir, we have tea at night.'

'And you save what bread you can from the morning, to eat with it?'

'Yes, sir - if we can save any.'

'And you want more to eat with it?'

'Yes, sir.' With a very anxious face.

The questioner, in the kindness of his heart, appears a little discomposed, and changes the subject.

'What has become of the old man who used to lie in that bed in the corner?'

The nurse don't remember what old man is referred to. There has been such a many old men. The well-spoken old man is doubtful. The spectral old man who has come to life in bed, says, 'Billy Stevens.' Another old man who has previously had his head in the fireplace, pipes out,

'Charley Walters.'

Something like a feeble interest is awakened. I suppose Charley Walters had conversation in him.

'He's dead,' says the piping old man.

Another old man, with one eye screwed up, hastily displaces the piping old man, and says.

'Yes! Charley Walters died in that bed, and - and - '

'Billy Stevens,' persists the spectral old man.

'No, no! and Johnny Rogers died in that bed, and - and - they're both on 'em dead - and Sam'l Bowyer;' this seems very extraordinary to him; 'he went out!'

With this he subsides, and all the old men (having had quite enough of it) subside, and the spectral old man goes into his grave again, and takes the shade of Billy Stevens with him.

As we turn to go out at the door, another previously invisible old man, a hoarse old man in a flannel gown, is standing there, as if he had just come up through the floor.

'I beg your pardon, sir, could I take the liberty of saying a word?'

'Yes; what is it?'

'I am greatly better in my health, sir; but what I want, to get me quite round,' with his hand on his throat, 'is a little fresh air, sir. It has always done my complaint so much good, sir. The regular leave for going out, comes round so seldom, that if the gentlemen, next Friday, would give me leave to go out walking, now and then - for only an hour or so, sir! - '

Who could wonder, looking through those weary vistas of bed and infirmity, that it should do him good to meet with some other scenes, and assure himself that there was something else on earth? Who could help wondering why the old men lived on as they did; what grasp they had on life; what crumbs of interest or occupation they could pick up from its bare board; whether Charley Walters had ever described to them the days when he kept company with some old pauper woman in the bud, or Billy Stevens ever told them of the time when he was a dweller in the far-off foreign land called Home!

The morsel of burnt child, lying in another room, so patiently, in bed, wrapped in lint, and looking steadfastly at us with his bright quiet eyes when we spoke to him kindly, looked as if the knowledge of these things, and of all the tender things there are to think about, might have been in his mind - as if he thought, with us, that there was a fellow-feeling in the pauper nurses which appeared to make them more kind to their charges than the race of common nurses in the hospitals - as if he mused upon the Future of some older children lying around him in the same place, and thought it best, perhaps, all things considered, that he should die - as if he knew, without fear, of those many coffins, made and unmade, piled up in the store below - and of his unknown friend, 'the dropped child,' calm upon the box-lid covered with a cloth. But there was something wistful and appealing, too, in his tiny face, as if, in the midst of all the hard necessities and incongruities he pondered on, he pleaded, in behalf of the helpless and the aged poor, for a little more liberty - and a little more bread.

PRINCE BULL. A FAIRY TALE

ONCE upon a time, and of course it was in the Golden Age, and I hope you may know when that was, for I am sure I don't, though I have tried hard to find out, there lived in a rich and fertile country, a powerful Prince whose name was BULL. He had gone through a great deal of fighting, in his time, about all sorts of things, including nothing; but, had gradually settled down to be a steady, peaceable, good-natured, corpulent, rather sleepy Prince.

This Puissant Prince was married to a lovely Princess whose name was Fair Freedom. She had brought him a large fortune, and had borne him an immense number of children, and had set them to spinning, and farming, and engineering, and soldiering, and sailoring, and doctoring, and lawyering, and preaching, and all kinds of trades. The coffers of Prince Bull were full of treasure, his cellars were crammed with delicious wines from all parts of the world, the richest gold and silver plate that ever was seen adorned his sideboards, his sons were strong, his daughters were handsome, and in short you might have supposed that if there ever lived upon earth a fortunate and happy Prince, the name of that Prince, take him for all in all, was assuredly Prince Bull.

But, appearances, as we all know, are not always to be trusted - far from it; and if they had led you to this conclusion respecting Prince Bull, they would have led you wrong as they often have led me.

For, this good Prince had two sharp thorns in his pillow, two hard knobs in his crown, two heavy loads on his mind, two unbridled nightmares in his sleep, two rocks ahead in his course. He could not by any means get servants to suit him, and he had a tyrannical old godmother, whose name was Tape.

She was a Fairy, this Tape, and was a bright red all over. She was disgustingly prim and formal, and could never bend herself a hair's breadth this way or that way, out of her naturally crooked shape. But, she was very potent in her wicked art. She could stop the fastest thing in the world, change the strongest thing into the weakest, and the most useful into the most useless. To do this she had only to put her cold hand upon it, and repeat her own name, Tape. Then it withered away.

At the Court of Prince Bull - at least I don't mean literally at his court, because he was a very genteel Prince, and readily yielded to his godmother when she always reserved that for his hereditary Lords and Ladies - in the dominions of Prince Bull, among the great mass of the community who were called in the language of that polite country the Mobs and the Snobs, were a number of very ingenious men, who were always busy with some invention or other, for promoting the prosperity of the Prince's subjects, and augmenting the Prince's power. But, whenever they submitted their models for the Prince's approval, his godmother stepped forward, laid her hand upon them, and said 'Tape.' Hence it came to pass, that when any particularly good discovery was made, the discoverer usually carried it off to some other Prince, in foreign parts, who had no old godmother who said Tape. This was not on the whole an advantageous state of things for Prince Bull, to the best of my understanding.

The worst of it was, that Prince Bull had in course of years lapsed into such a state of subjection to this unlucky godmother, that he never made any serious effort to rid himself of her tyranny. I have said this was the worst of it, but there I was wrong, because there is a worse consequence still, behind. The Prince's numerous family became so downright sick and tired of Tape, that when they should have helped the Prince out of the difficulties into which that evil creature led him, they fell into a dangerous habit of moodily keeping away from him in an impassive and indifferent manner, as though they had quite forgotten that no harm could happen to the Prince their father, without its inevitably affecting themselves.

Such was the aspect of affairs at the court of Prince Bull, when this great Prince found it necessary to go to war with Prince Bear. He had been for some time very doubtful of his servants, who, besides being indolent and addicted to enriching their families at his expense, domineered over him dreadfully; threatening to discharge themselves if they were found the least fault with, pretending that they had done a wonderful amount of work when they had done nothing, making the most unmeaning speeches that ever were heard in the Prince's name, and uniformly showing themselves to be very inefficient indeed. Though, that some of them had excellent characters from previous situations is not to be denied. Well; Prince Bull called his servants together, and said to them one and all, 'Send out my army against Prince Bear. Clothe it, arm it, feed it, provide it with all necessaries and contingencies, and I will pay the piper! Do your duty by my brave troops,' said the Prince, 'and do it well, and I will pour my treasure out like water, to defray the cost. Who ever heard ME complain of money well laid out!' Which indeed he had reason for saying, inasmuch as he was well known to be a truly generous and munificent Prince.

When the servants heard those words, they sent out the army against Prince Bear, and they set the army tailors to work, and the army provision merchants, and the makers of guns both great and small, and the gunpowder makers, and the makers of ball, shell, and shot; and they bought up all manner of stores and ships, without troubling their heads about the price, and appeared to be so busy that the good Prince rubbed his hands, and (using a favourite expression of his), said, 'It's all right I' But, while they were thus employed, the Prince's godmother, who was a great favourite with those servants, looked in upon them continually all day long, and whenever she popped in her head at the door said, How do you do, my children? What are you doing here?' 'Official business, godmother.' 'Oho!' says this wicked Fairy. '- Tape!' And then the business all went wrong, whatever it was, and the servants' heads became so addled and muddled that they thought they were doing wonders.

Now, this was very bad conduct on the part of the vicious old nuisance, and she ought to have been strangled, even if she had stopped here; but, she didn't stop here, as you shall learn. For, a number of the Prince's subjects, being very fond of the Prince's army who were the bravest of men, assembled together and provided all manner of eatables and drinkables, and books to read, and clothes to wear, and tobacco to smoke, and candies to burn, and nailed them up in great packing-cases, and put them aboard a great many ships, to be carried out to that brave army in the cold and inclement country where they were fighting Prince Bear. Then, up comes this wicked Fairy as the ships were weighing anchor, and says, 'How do you do, my children? What are you doing here?' - 'We are going with all these comforts to the army, godmother.' - 'Oho!' says she. 'A pleasant voyage, my darlings. - Tape!' And from that time forth, those enchanting ships went sailing, against wind and tide and rhyme and reason, round and round the world, and whenever they touched at any port were ordered off immediately, and could never deliver their cargoes anywhere.

This, again, was very bad conduct on the part of the vicious old nuisance, and she ought to have been strangled for it if she had done nothing worse; but, she did something worse still, as you shall learn. For, she got astride of an official broomstick, and muttered as a spell these two sentences, 'On Her Majesty's service,' and 'I have the honour to be, sir, your most obedient servant,' and presently alighted in the cold and inclement country where the army of Prince Bull were encamped to fight the army of Prince Bear. On the sea-shore of that country, she found piled together, a number of houses for the army to live in, and a quantity of provisions for the army to live upon, and a quantity of clothes for the army to wear: while, sitting in the mud gazing at them, were a group of officers as red to look at as the wicked old woman herself. So, she said to one of them, 'Who are you, my darling, and how do you do?' - 'I am the Quartermaster General's Department, godmother, and I am pretty well.' Then she said to another, 'Who are YOU, my darling, and how do YOU do?' - 'I am the Commissariat Department, godmother, and I am pretty well! Then she said to another, 'Who are YOU, my darling, and how do YOU do?' - 'I am the Head of the Medical Department, godmother, and I am pretty well.' Then, she said to some gentlemen scented with lavender, who kept themselves at a great distance from the rest, 'And who are YOU, my pretty pets, and how do YOU do?' And they answered, 'We- aw-are-the-aw-Staff-aw-Department, godmother, and we are very well indeed.' - 'I am delighted to see you all, my beauties,' says this wicked old Fairy, ' - Tape!' Upon that, the houses, clothes, and provisions, all mouldered away; and the soldiers who were sound, fell sick; and the soldiers who were sick, died miserably: and the noble army of Prince Bull perished.

When the dismal news of his great loss was carried to the Prince, he suspected his godmother very much indeed; but, he knew that his servants must have kept company with the malicious beldame, and must have given way to her, and therefore he resolved to turn those servants out of their places. So, he called to him a Roebuck who had the gift of speech, and he said, 'Good Roebuck, tell them they must go.' So, the good Roebuck delivered his message, so like a man that you might have supposed him to be nothing but a man, and they were turned out - but, not without warning, for that they had had a long time.

And now comes the most extraordinary part of the history of this Prince. When he had turned out those servants, of course he wanted others. What was his astonishment to find that in all his dominions, which contained no less than twenty-seven millions of people, there were not above five-and-twenty servants altogether! They were so lofty about it, too, that instead of discussing whether they should hire themselves as servants to Prince Bull, they turned things topsy-turvy, and considered whether as a favour they should hire Prince Bull to be their master! While they were arguing this point among themselves quite at their leisure, the wicked old red Fairy was incessantly going up and down, knocking at the doors of twelve of the oldest of the five-and-twenty, who were the oldest inhabitants in all that country, and whose united ages amounted to one thousand, saying, 'Will YOU hire Prince Bull for your master? - Will YOU hire Prince Bull for your master?' To which one answered, 'I will if next door will;' and another, 'I won't if over the way does;' and another, 'I can't if he, she, or they, might, could, would, or should.' And all this time Prince Bull's affairs were going to rack and ruin.

At last, Prince Bull in the height of his perplexity assumed a thoughtful face, as if he were struck by an entirely new idea. The wicked old Fairy, seeing this, was at his elbow directly, and said, 'How do you do, my Prince, and what are you thinking of?' - 'I am thinking, godmother,' says he, 'that among all the seven-and-twenty millions of my subjects who have never been in service, there are men of intellect and business who have made me very famous both among my friends and enemies.' - 'Aye, truly?' says the Fairy. - 'Aye, truly,' says the Prince. - 'And what then?' says the Fairy. - 'Why, then,' says he, 'since the regular old class of servants do so ill, are so hard to get, and carry it with so high a hand, perhaps I might try to make good servants of some of these.' The words had no sooner passed his lips than she returned, chuckling, 'You think so, do you? Indeed, my Prince? - Tape!' Thereupon he directly forgot what he was thinking of, and cried out lamentably to the old servants, 'O, do come and hire your poor old master! Pray do! On any terms!'

And this, for the present, finishes the story of Prince Bull. I wish I could wind it up by saying that he lived happy ever afterwards, but I cannot in my conscience do so; for, with Tape at his elbow, and his estranged children fatally repelled by her from coming near him, I do not, to tell you the plain truth, believe in the possibility of such an end to it.

A PLATED ARTICLE

PUTTING up for the night in one of the chiefest towns of Staffordshire, I find it to be by no means a lively town. In fact, it is as dull and dead a town as any one could desire not to see. It seems as if its whole population might be imprisoned in its Railway Station. The Refreshment Room at that Station is a vortex of dissipation compared with the extinct town-inn, the Dodo, in the dull High Street.

Why High Street? Why not rather Low Street, Flat Street, Low- Spirited Street, Used-up Street? Where are the people who belong to the High Street? Can they all be dispersed over the face of the country, seeking the unfortunate Strolling Manager who decamped from the mouldy little Theatre last week, in the beginning of his season (as his play-bills testify), repentantly resolved to bring him back, and feed him, and be entertained? Or, can they all be gathered to their fathers in the two old churchyards near to the High Street - retirement into which churchyards appears to be a mere ceremony, there is so very little life outside their confines, and such small discernible difference between being buried alive in the town, and buried dead in the town tombs? Over the way, opposite to the staring blank bow windows of the Dodo, are a little ironmonger's shop, a little tailor's shop (with a picture of the Fashions in the small window and a bandy-legged baby on the pavement staring at it) - a watchmakers shop, where all the clocks and watches must be stopped, I am sure, for they could never have the courage to go, with the town in general, and the Dodo in particular, looking at them. Shade of Miss Linwood, erst of Leicester Square, London, thou art welcome here, and thy retreat is fitly chosen! I myself was one of the last visitors to that awful storehouse of thy life's work, where an anchorite old man and woman took my shilling with a solemn wonder, and conducting me to a gloomy sepulchre of needlework dropping to pieces with dust and age and shrouded in twilight at high noon, left me there, chilled, frightened, and alone. And now, in ghostly letters on all the dead walls of this dead town, I read thy honoured name, and find that thy Last Supper, worked in Berlin Wool, invites inspection as a powerful excitement!

Where are the people who are bidden with so much cry to this feast of little wool? Where are they? Who are they? They are not the bandy-legged baby studying the fashions in the tailor's window. They are not the two earthy ploughmen lounging outside the saddler's shop, in the stiff square where the Town Hall stands, like a brick and mortar private on parade. They are not the landlady of the Dodo in the empty bar, whose eye had trouble in it and no welcome, when I asked for dinner. They are not the turnkeys of the Town Jail, looking out of the gateway in their uniforms, as if they had locked up all the balance (as my American friends would say) of the inhabitants, and could now rest a little. They are not the two dusty millers in the white mill down by the river, where the great water-wheel goes heavily round and round, like the monotonous days and nights in this forgotten place. Then who are they, for there is no one else? No; this deponent maketh oath and saith that there is no one else, save and except the waiter at the Dodo, now laying the cloth. I have paced the streets, and stared at the houses, and am come back to the blank bow window of the Dodo; and the town clocks strike seven, and the reluctant echoes seem to cry, 'Don't wake us!' and the bandy-legged baby has gone home to bed.

If the Dodo were only a gregarious bird - if he had only some confused idea of making a comfortable nest - I could hope to get through the hours between this and bed-time, without being consumed by devouring melancholy. But, the Dodo's habits are all wrong. It provides me with a trackless desert of sitting-room, with a chair for every day in the year, a table for every month, and a waste of sideboard where a lonely China vase pines in a corner for its mate long departed, and will never make a match with the candlestick in the opposite corner if it live till Doomsday. The Dodo has nothing in the larder. Even now, I behold the Boots returning with my sole in a piece of paper; and with that portion of my dinner, the Boots, perceiving me at the blank bow window, slaps his leg as he comes across the road, pretending it is something else. The Dodo excludes the outer air. When I mount up to my bedroom, a smell of closeness and flue gets lazily up my nose like sleepy snuff. The loose little bits of carpet writhe under my tread, and take wormy shapes. I don't know the ridiculous man in the looking-glass, beyond having met him once or twice in a dish-cover - and I can never shave HIM to-morrow morning! The Dodo is narrow-minded as to towels; expects me to wash on a freemason's apron without the trimming: when I asked for soap, gives me a stony-hearted something white, with no more lather in it than the Elgin marbles. The Dodo has seen better days, and possesses interminable stables at the back - silent, grass-grown, broken-windowed, horseless.

This mournful bird can fry a sole, however, which is much. Can cook a steak, too, which is more. I wonder where it gets its Sherry? If I were to send my pint of wine to some famous chemist to be analysed, what would it turn out to be made of? It tastes of pepper, sugar, bitter-almonds, vinegar, warm knives, any flat drinks, and a little brandy. Would it unman a Spanish exile by reminding him of his native land at all? I think not. If there really be any townspeople out of the churchyards, and if a caravan of them ever do dine, with a bottle of wine per man, in this desert of the Dodo, it must make good for the doctor next day!

Where was the waiter born? How did he come here? Has he any hope of getting away from here? Does he ever receive a letter, or take a ride upon the railway, or see anything but the Dodo? Perhaps he has seen the Berlin Wool. He appears to have a silent sorrow on him, and it may be that. He clears the table; draws the dingy curtains of the great bow window, which so unwillingly consent to meet, that they must be pinned together; leaves me by the fire with my pint decanter, and a little thin funnel-shaped wine-glass, and a plate of pale biscuits - in themselves engendering desperation.

No book, no newspaper! I left the Arabian Nights in the railway carriage, and have nothing to read but Bradshaw, and 'that way madness lies.' Remembering what prisoners and ship-wrecked mariners have done to exercise their minds in solitude, I repeat the multiplication table, the pence table, and the shilling table: which are all the tables I happen to know. What if I write something? The Dodo keeps no pens but steel pens; and those I always stick through the paper, and can turn to no other account.

What am I to do? Even if I could have the bandy-legged baby knocked up and brought here, I could offer him nothing but sherry, and that would be the death of him. He would never hold up his head again if he touched it. I can't go to bed, because I have conceived a mortal hatred for my bedroom; and I can't go away, because there is no train for my place of destination until morning. To burn the biscuits will be but a fleeting joy; still it is a temporary relief, and here they go on the fire! Shall I break the plate? First let me look at the back, and see who made it. COPELAND.

Copeland! Stop a moment. Was it yesterday I visited Copeland's works, and saw them making plates? In the confusion of travelling about, it might be yesterday or it might be yesterday month; but I think it was yesterday. I appeal to the plate. The plate says, decidedly, yesterday. I find the plate, as I look at it, growing into a companion.

Don't you remember (says the plate) how you steamed away, yesterday morning, in the bright sun and the east wind, along the valley of the sparkling Trent? Don't you recollect how many kilns you flew past, looking like the bowls of gigantic tobacco-pipes, cut short off from the stem and turned upside down? And the fires - and the smoke - and the roads made with bits of crockery, as if all the plates and dishes in the civilised world had been Macadamised, expressly for the laming of all the horses? Of course I do!

And don't you remember (says the plate) how you alighted at Stoke - a picturesque heap of houses, kilns, smoke, wharfs, canals, and river, lying (as was most appropriate) in a basin - and how, after climbing up the sides of the basin to look at the prospect, you trundled down again at a walking-match pace, and straight proceeded to my father's, Copeland's, where the whole of my family, high and low, rich and poor, are turned out upon the world from our nursery and seminary, covering some fourteen acres of ground? And don't you remember what we spring from:- heaps of lumps of clay, partially prepared and cleaned in Devonshire and Dorsetshire, whence said clay principally comes - and hills of flint, without which we should want our ringing sound, and should never be musical? And as to the flint, don't you recollect that it is first burnt in kilns, and is then laid under the four iron feet of a demon slave, subject to violent stamping fits, who, when they come on, stamps away insanely with his four iron legs, and would crush all the flint in the Isle of Thanet to powder, without leaving off? And as to the clay, don't you recollect how it is put into mills or teazers, and is sliced, and dug, and cut at, by endless knives, clogged and sticky, but persistent - and is pressed out of that machine through a square trough, whose form it takes - and is cut off in square lumps and thrown into a vat, and there mixed with water, and beaten to a pulp by paddle-wheels - and is then run into a rough house, all rugged beams and ladders splashed with white, - superintended by Grindoff the Miller in his working clothes, all splashed with white, - where it passes through no end of machinery- moved sieves all splashed with white, arranged in an ascending scale of fineness (some so fine, that three hundred silk threads cross each other in a single square inch of their surface), and all in a violent state of ague with their teeth for ever chattering, and their bodies for ever shivering! And as to the flint again, isn't it mashed and mollified and troubled and soothed, exactly as rags are in a paper-mill, until it is reduced to a pap so fine that it contains no atom of 'grit' perceptible to the nicest taste? And as to the flint and the clay together, are they not, after all this, mixed in the proportion of five of clay to one of flint, and isn't the compound - known as 'slip' - run into oblong troughs, where its superfluous moisture may evaporate; and finally, isn't it slapped and banged and beaten and patted and kneaded and wedged and knocked about like butter, until it becomes a beautiful grey dough, ready for the potter's use?

In regard of the potter, popularly so called (says the plate), you don't mean to say you have forgotten that a workman called a Thrower is the man under whose hand this grey dough takes the shapes of the simpler household vessels as quickly as the eye can follow? You don't mean to say you cannot call him up before you, sitting, with his attendant woman, at his potter's wheel - a disc about the size of a dinner-plate, revolving on two drums slowly or quickly as he wills - who made you a complete breakfast-set for a bachelor, as a good-humoured little off-hand joke? You remember how he took up as much dough as he wanted, and, throwing it on his wheel, in a moment fashioned it into a teacup - caught up more clay and made a saucer - a larger dab and whirled it into a teapot - winked at a smaller dab and converted it into the lid of the teapot, accurately fitting by the measurement of his eye alone - coaxed a middle-sized dab for two seconds, broke it, turned it over at the rim, and made a milkpot - laughed, and turned out a slop- basin - coughed, and provided for the sugar? Neither, I think, are you oblivious of the newer mode of making various articles, but especially basins, according to which improvement a mould revolves instead of a disc? For you MUST remember (says the plate) how you saw the mould of a little basin spinning round and round, and how the workmen smoothed and pressed a handful of dough upon it, and how with an instrument called a profile (a piece of wood, representing the profile of a basin's foot) he cleverly scraped and carved the ring which makes the base of any such basin, and then took the basin off the lathe like a doughy skull-cap to be dried, and afterwards (in what is called a green state) to be put into a second lathe, there to be finished and burnished with a steel burnisher? And as to moulding in general (says the plate), it can't be necessary for me to remind you that all ornamental articles, and indeed all articles not quite circular, are made in moulds. For you must remember how you saw the vegetable dishes, for example, being made in moulds; and how the handles of teacups, and the spouts of teapots, and the feet of tureens, and so forth, are all made in little separate moulds, and are each stuck on to the body corporate, of which it is destined to form a part, with a stuff called 'slag,' as quickly as you can recollect it. Further, you learnt - you know you did - in the same visit, how the beautiful sculptures in the delicate new material called Parian, are all constructed in moulds; how, into that material, animal bones are ground up, because the phosphate of lime contained in bones makes it translucent; how everything is moulded, before going into the fire, one-fourth larger than it is intended to come out of the fire, because it shrinks in that proportion in the intense heat; how, when a figure shrinks unequally, it is spoiled - emerging from the furnace a misshapen birth; a big head and a little body, or a little head and a big body, or a Quasimodo with long arms and short legs, or a Miss Biffin with neither legs nor arms worth mentioning.

And as to the Kilns, in which the firing takes place, and in which some of the more precious articles are burnt repeatedly, in various stages of their process towards completion, - as to the Kilns (says the plate, warming with the recollection), if you don't remember THEM with a horrible interest, what did you ever go to Copeland's for? When you stood inside of one of those inverted bowls of a Pre-Adamite tobacco-pipe, looking up at the blue sky through the open top far off, as you might have looked up from a well, sunk under the centre of the pavement of the Pantheon at Rome, had you the least idea where you were? And when you found yourself surrounded, in that dome-shaped cavern, by innumerable columns of an unearthly order of architecture, supporting nothing, and squeezed close together as if a Pre-Adamite Samson had taken a vast Hall in his arms and crushed it into the smallest possible space, had you the least idea what they were? No (says the plate), of course not! And when you found that each of those pillars was a pile of ingeniously made vessels of coarse clay - called Saggers - looking, when separate, like raised-pies for the table of the mighty Giant Blunderbore, and now all full of various articles of pottery ranged in them in baking order, the bottom of each vessel serving for the cover of the one below, and the whole Kiln rapidly filling with these, tier upon tier, until the last workman should have barely room to crawl out, before the closing of the jagged aperture in the wall and the kindling of the gradual fire; did you not stand amazed to think that all the year round these dread chambers are heating, white hot - and cooling - and filling - and emptying - and being bricked up - and broken open - humanly speaking, for ever and ever? To be sure you did! And standing in one of those Kilns nearly full, and seeing a free crow shoot across the aperture a-top, and learning how the fire would wax hotter and hotter by slow degrees, and would cool similarly through a space of from forty to sixty hours, did no remembrance of the days when human clay was burnt oppress you? Yes. I think so! I suspect that some fancy of a fiery haze and a shortening breath, and a growing heat, and a gasping prayer; and a figure in black interposing between you and the sky (as figures in black are very apt to do), and looking down, before it grew too hot to look and live, upon the Heretic in his edifying agony - I say I suspect (says the plate) that some such fancy was pretty strong upon you when you went out into the air, and blessed God for the bright spring day and the degenerate times!

After that, I needn't remind you what a relief it was to see the simplest process of ornamenting this 'biscuit' (as it is called when baked) with brown circles and blue trees - converting it into the common crockery-ware that is exported to Africa, and used in cottages at home. For (says the plate) I am well persuaded that you bear in mind how those particular jugs and mugs were once more set upon a lathe and put in motion; and how a man blew the brown colour (having a strong natural affinity with the material in that condition) on them from a blowpipe as they twirled; and how his daughter, with a common brush, dropped blotches of blue upon them in the right places; and how, tilting the blotches upside down, she made them run into rude images of trees, and there an end.

And didn't you see (says the plate) planted upon my own brother that astounding blue willow, with knobbed and gnarled trunk, and foliage of blue ostrich feathers, which gives our family the title of 'willow pattern'? And didn't you observe, transferred upon him at the same time, that blue bridge which spans nothing, growing out from the roots of the willow; and the three blue Chinese going over it into a blue temple, which has a fine crop of blue bushes sprouting out of the roof; and a blue boat sailing above them, the mast of which is burglariously sticking itself into the foundations of a blue villa, suspended sky-high, surmounted by a lump of blue rock, sky-higher, and a couple of billing blue birds, sky-highest - together with the rest of that amusing blue landscape, which has, in deference to our revered ancestors of the Cerulean Empire, and in defiance of every known law of perspective, adorned millions of our family ever since the days of platters? Didn't you inspect the copper-plate on which my pattern was deeply engraved? Didn't you perceive an impression of it taken in cobalt colour at a cylindrical press, upon a leaf of thin paper, streaming from a plunge-bath of soap and water? Wasn't the paper impression daintily spread, by a light-fingered damsel (you KNOW you admired her!), over the surface of the plate, and the back of the paper rubbed prodigiously hard - with a long tight roll of flannel, tied up like a round of hung beef - without so much as ruffling the paper, wet as it was? Then (says the plate), was not the paper washed away with a sponge, and didn't there appear, set off upon the plate, THIS identical piece of Pre-Raphaelite blue distemper which you now behold? Not to be denied! I had seen all this - and more. I had been shown, at Copeland's, patterns of beautiful design, in faultless perspective, which are causing the ugly old willow to wither out of public favour; and which, being quite as cheap, insinuate good wholesome natural art into the humblest households. When Mr. and Mrs. Sprat have satisfied their material tastes by that equal division of fat and lean which has made their MENAGE immortal; and have, after the elegant tradition, 'licked the platter clean,' they can - thanks to modern artists in clay - feast their intellectual tastes upon excellent delineations of natural objects.

This reflection prompts me to transfer my attention from the blue plate to the forlorn but cheerfully painted vase on the sideboard. And surely (says the plate) you have not forgotten how the outlines of such groups of flowers as you see there, are printed, just as I was printed, and are afterwards shaded and filled in with metallic colours by women and girls? As to the aristocracy of our order, made of the finer clay-porcelain peers and peeresses; - the slabs, and panels, and table-tops, and tazze; the endless nobility and gentry of dessert, breakfast, and tea services; the gemmed perfume bottles, and scarlet and gold salvers; you saw that they were painted by artists, with metallic colours laid on with camel-hair pencils, and afterwards burnt in.

And talking of burning in (says the plate), didn't you find that every subject, from the willow pattern to the landscape after Turner - having been framed upon clay or porcelain biscuit - has to be glazed? Of course, you saw the glaze - composed of various vitreous materials - laid over every article; and of course you witnessed the close imprisonment of each piece in saggers upon the separate system rigidly enforced by means of fine-pointed earthenware stilts placed between the articles to prevent the slightest communication or contact. We had in my time - and I suppose it is the same now - fourteen hours' firing to fix the glaze and to make it 'run' all over us equally, so as to put a good shiny and unscratchable surface upon us. Doubtless, you observed that one sort of glaze - called printing-body - is burnt into the better sort of ware BEFORE it is printed. Upon this you saw some of the finest steel engravings transferred, to be fixed by an after glazing - didn't you? Why, of course you did!

Of course I did. I had seen and enjoyed everything that the plate recalled to me, and had beheld with admiration how the rotatory motion which keeps this ball of ours in its place in the great scheme, with all its busy mites upon it, was necessary throughout the process, and could only be dispensed with in the fire. So, listening to the plate's reminders, and musing upon them, I got through the evening after all, and went to bed. I made but one sleep of it - for which I have no doubt I am also indebted to the plate - and left the lonely Dodo in the morning, quite at peace with it, before the bandy-legged baby was up.

OUR HONOURABLE FRIEND

WE are delighted to find that he has got in! Our honourable friend is triumphantly returned to serve in the next Parliament. He is the honourable member for Verbosity - the best represented place in England.

Our honourable friend has issued an address of congratulation to the Electors, which is worthy of that noble constituency, and is a very pretty piece of composition. In electing him, he says, they have covered themselves with glory, and England has been true to herself. (In his preliminary address he had remarked, in a poetical quotation of great rarity, that nought could make us rue, if England to herself did prove but true.)

Our honourable friend delivers a prediction, in the same document, that the feeble minions of a faction will never hold up their heads any more; and that the finger of scorn will point at them in their dejected state, through countless ages of time. Further, that the hireling tools that would destroy the sacred bulwarks of our nationality are unworthy of the name of Englishman; and that so long as the sea shall roll around our ocean-girded isle, so long his motto shall be, No surrender. Certain dogged persons of low principles and no intellect, have disputed whether anybody knows who the minions are, or what the faction is, or which are the hireling tools and which the sacred bulwarks, or what it is that is never to be surrendered, and if not, why not? But, our honourable friend the member for Verbosity knows all about it.

Our honourable friend has sat in several parliaments, and given bushels of votes. He is a man of that profundity in the matter of vote-giving, that you never know what he means. When he seems to be voting pure white, he may be in reality voting jet black. When he says Yes, it is just as likely as not - or rather more so - that he means No. This is the statesmanship of our honourable friend. It is in this, that he differs from mere unparliamentary men. YOU may not know what he meant then, or what he means now; but, our honourable friend knows, and did from the first know, both what he meant then, and what he means now; and when he said he didn't mean it then, he did in fact say, that he means it now. And if you mean to say that you did not then, and do not now, know what he did mean then, or does mean now, our honourable friend will be glad to receive an explicit declaration from you whether you are prepared to destroy the sacred bulwarks of our nationality.

Our honourable friend, the member for Verbosity, has this great attribute, that he always means something, and always means the same thing. When he came down to that House and mournfully boasted in his place, as an individual member of the assembled Commons of this great and happy country, that he could lay his hand upon his heart, and solemnly declare that no consideration on earth should induce him, at any time or under any circumstances, to go as far north as Berwick-upon-Tweed; and when he nevertheless, next year, did go to Berwick-upon-Tweed, and even beyond it, to Edinburgh; he had one single meaning, one and indivisible. And God forbid (our honourable friend says) that he should waste another argument upon the man who professes that he cannot understand it! 'I do NOT, gentlemen,' said our honourable friend, with indignant emphasis and amid great cheering, on one such public occasion. 'I do NOT, gentlemen, I am free to confess, envy the feelings of that man whose mind is so constituted as that he can hold such language to me, and yet lay his head upon his pillow, claiming to be a native of that land,

Whose march is o'er the mountain-wave,
Whose home is on the deep!

(Vehement cheering, and man expelled.)

When our honourable friend issued his preliminary address to the constituent body of Verbosity on the occasion of one particular glorious triumph, it was supposed by some of his enemies, that even he would be placed in a situation of difficulty by the following comparatively trifling conjunction of circumstances. The dozen noblemen and gentlemen whom our honourable friend supported, had 'come in,' expressly to do a certain thing. Now, four of the dozen said, at a certain place, that they didn't mean to do that thing, and had never meant to do it; another four of the dozen said, at another certain place, that they did mean to do that thing, and had always meant to do it; two of the remaining four said, at two other certain places, that they meant to do half of that thing (but differed about which half), and to do a variety of nameless wonders instead of the other half; and one of the remaining two declared that the thing itself was dead and buried, while the other as strenuously protested that it was alive and kicking. It was admitted that the parliamentary genius of our honourable friend would be quite able to reconcile such small discrepancies as these; but, there remained the additional difficulty that each of the twelve made entirely different statements at different places, and that all the twelve called everything visible and invisible, sacred and profane, to witness, that they were a perfectly impregnable phalanx of unanimity. This, it was apprehended, would be a stumbling-block to our honourable friend.

The difficulty came before our honourable friend, in this way. He went down to Verbosity to meet his free and independent constituents, and to render an account (as he informed them in the local papers) of the trust they had confided to his hands - that trust which it was one of the proudest privileges of an Englishman to possess - that trust which it was the proudest privilege of an Englishman to hold. It may be mentioned as a proof of the great general interest attaching to the contest, that a Lunatic whom nobody employed or knew, went down to Verbosity with several thousand pounds in gold, determined to give the whole away - which he actually did; and that all the publicans opened their houses for nothing. Likewise, several fighting men, and a patriotic group of burglars sportively armed with life-preservers, proceeded (in barouches and very drunk) to the scene of action at their own expense; these children of nature having conceived a warm attachment to our honourable friend, and intending, in their artless manner, to testify it by knocking the voters in the opposite interest on the head.

Our honourable friend being come into the presence of his constituents, and having professed with great suavity that he was delighted to see his good friend Tipkisson there, in his working- dress - his good friend Tipkisson being an inveterate saddler, who always opposes him, and for whom he has a mortal hatred - made them a brisk, ginger-beery sort of speech, in which he showed them how the dozen noblemen and gentlemen had (in exactly ten days from their coming in) exercised a surprisingly beneficial effect on the whole financial condition of Europe, had altered the state of the exports and imports for the current half-year, had prevented the drain of gold, had made all that matter right about the glut of the raw material, and had restored all sorts of balances with which the superseded noblemen and gentlemen had played the deuce - and all this, with wheat at so much a quarter, gold at so much an ounce, and the Bank of England discounting good bills at so much per cent.! He might be asked, he observed in a peroration of great power, what were his principles? His principles were what they always had been. His principles were written in the countenances of the lion and unicorn; were stamped indelibly upon the royal shield which those grand animals supported, and upon the free words of fire which that shield bore. His principles were, Britannia and her sea-king trident! His principles were, commercial prosperity co-existently with perfect and profound agricultural contentment; but short of this he would never stop. His principles were, these, - with the addition of his colours nailed to the mast, every man's heart in the right place, every man's eye open, every man's hand ready, every man's mind on the alert. His principles were these, concurrently with a general revision of something - speaking generally - and a possible readjustment of something else, not to be mentioned more particularly. His principles, to sum up all in a word, were, Hearths and Altars, Labour and Capital, Crown and Sceptre, Elephant and Castle. And now, if his good friend Tipkisson required any further explanation from him, he (our honourable friend) was there, willing and ready to give it.

Tipkisson, who all this time had stood conspicuous in the crowd, with his arms folded and his eyes intently fastened on our honourable friend: Tipkisson, who throughout our honourable friend's address had not relaxed a muscle of his visage, but had stood there, wholly unaffected by the torrent of eloquence: an object of contempt and scorn to mankind (by which we mean, of course, to the supporters of our honourable friend); Tipkisson now said that he was a plain man (Cries of 'You are indeed!'), and that what he wanted to know was, what our honourable friend and the dozen noblemen and gentlemen were driving at?

Our honourable friend immediately replied, 'At the illimitable perspective.'

It was considered by the whole assembly that this happy statement of our honourable friend's political views ought, immediately, to have settled Tipkisson's business and covered him with confusion; but, that implacable person, regardless of the execrations that were heaped upon him from all sides (by which we mean, of course, from our honourable friend's side), persisted in retaining an unmoved countenance, and obstinately retorted that if our honourable friend meant that, he wished to know what THAT meant?

It was in repelling this most objectionable and indecent opposition, that our honourable friend displayed his highest qualifications for the representation of Verbosity. His warmest supporters present, and those who were best acquainted with his generalship, supposed that the moment was come when he would fall back upon the sacred bulwarks of our nationality. No such thing. He replied thus: 'My good friend Tipkisson, gentlemen, wishes to know what I mean when he asks me what we are driving at, and when I candidly tell him, at the illimitable perspective, he wishes (if I understand him) to know what I mean?' - 'I do!' says Tipkisson, amid cries of 'Shame' and 'Down with him.' 'Gentlemen,' says our honourable friend, 'I will indulge my good friend Tipkisson, by telling him, both what I mean and what I don't mean. (Cheers and cries of 'Give it him!') Be it known to him then, and to all whom it may concern, that I do mean altars, hearths, and homes, and that I don't mean mosques and Mohammedanism!' The effect of this home- thrust was terrific. Tipkisson (who is a Baptist) was hooted down and hustled out, and has ever since been regarded as a Turkish Renegade who contemplates an early pilgrimage to Mecca. Nor was he the only discomfited man. The charge, while it stuck to him, was magically transferred to our honourable friend's opponent, who was represented in an immense variety of placards as a firm believer in Mahomet; and the men of Verbosity were asked to choose between our honourable friend and the Bible, and our honourable friend's opponent and the Koran. They decided for our honourable friend, and rallied round the illimitable perspective.

It has been claimed for our honourable friend, with much appearance of reason, that he was the first to bend sacred matters to electioneering tactics. However this may be, the fine precedent was undoubtedly set in a Verbosity election: and it is certain that our honourable friend (who was a disciple of Brahma in his youth, and was a Buddhist when we had the honour of travelling with him a few years ago) always professes in public more anxiety than the whole Bench of Bishops, regarding the theological and doxological opinions of every man, woman, and child, in the United Kingdom.

As we began by saying that our honourable friend has got in again at this last election, and that we are delighted to find that he has got in, so we will conclude. Our honourable friend cannot come in for Verbosity too often. It is a good sign; it is a great example. It is to men like our honourable friend, and to contests like those from which he comes triumphant, that we are mainly indebted for that ready interest in politics, that fresh enthusiasm in the discharge of the duties of citizenship, that ardent desire to rush to the poll, at present so manifest throughout England. When the contest lies (as it sometimes does) between two such men as our honourable friend, it stimulates the finest emotions of our nature, and awakens the highest admiration of which our heads and hearts are capable.

It is not too much to predict that our honourable friend will be always at his post in the ensuing session. Whatever the question be, or whatever the form of its discussion; address to the crown, election petition, expenditure of the public money, extension of the public suffrage, education, crime; in the whole house, in committee of the whole house, in select committee; in every parliamentary discussion of every subject, everywhere: the Honourable Member for Verbosity will most certainly be found.

OUR SCHOOL

WE went to look at it, only this last Midsummer, and found that the Railway had cut it up root and branch. A great trunk-line had swallowed the playground, sliced away the schoolroom, and pared off the corner of the house: which, thus curtailed of its proportions, presented itself, in a green stage of stucco, profilewise towards the road, like a forlorn flat-iron without a handle, standing on end.

It seems as if our schools were doomed to be the sport of change. We have faint recollections of a Preparatory Day-School, which we have sought in vain, and which must have been pulled down to make a new street, ages ago. We have dim impressions, scarcely amounting to a belief, that it was over a dyer's shop. We know that you went up steps to it; that you frequently grazed your knees in doing so; that you generally got your leg over the scraper, in trying to scrape the mud off a very unsteady little shoe. The mistress of the Establishment holds no place in our memory; but, rampant on one eternal door-mat, in an eternal entry long and narrow, is a puffy pug-dog, with a personal animosity towards us, who triumphs over Time. The bark of that baleful Pug, a certain radiating way he had of snapping at our undefended legs, the ghastly grinning of his moist black muzzle and white teeth, and the insolence of his crisp tail curled like a pastoral crook, all live and flourish. From an otherwise unaccountable association of him with a fiddle, we conclude that he was of French extraction, and his name FIDELE. He belonged to some female, chiefly inhabiting a back-parlour, whose life appears to us to have been consumed in sniffing, and in wearing a brown beaver bonnet. For her, he would sit up and balance cake upon his nose, and not eat it until twenty had been counted. To the best of our belief we were once called in to witness this performance; when, unable, even in his milder moments, to endure our presence, he instantly made at us, cake and all.

Why a something in mourning, called 'Miss Frost,' should still connect itself with our preparatory school, we are unable to say. We retain no impression of the beauty of Miss Frost - if she were beautiful; or of the mental fascinations of Miss Frost - if she were accomplished; yet her name and her black dress hold an enduring place in our remembrance. An equally impersonal boy, whose name has long since shaped itself unalterably into 'Master Mawls,' is not to be dislodged from our brain. Retaining no vindictive feeling towards Mawls - no feeling whatever, indeed - we infer that neither he nor we can have loved Miss Frost. Our first impression of Death and Burial is associated with this formless pair. We all three nestled awfully in a corner one wintry day, when the wind was blowing shrill, with Miss Frost's pinafore over our heads; and Miss Frost told us in a whisper about somebody being 'screwed down.' It is the only distinct recollection we preserve of these impalpable creatures, except a suspicion that the manners of Master Mawls were susceptible of much improvement. Generally speaking, we may observe that whenever we see a child intently occupied with its nose, to the exclusion of all other subjects of interest, our mind reverts, in a flash, to Master Mawls.

But, the School that was Our School before the Railroad came and overthrew it, was quite another sort of place. We were old enough to be put into Virgil when we went there, and to get Prizes for a variety of polishing on which the rust has long accumulated. It was a School of some celebrity in its neighbourhood - nobody could have said why - and we had the honour to attain and hold the eminent position of first boy. The master was supposed among us to know nothing, and one of the ushers was supposed to know everything. We are still inclined to think the first-named supposition perfectly correct.

We have a general idea that its subject had been in the leather trade, and had bought us - meaning Our School - of another proprietor who was immensely learned. Whether this belief had any real foundation, we are not likely ever to know now. The only branches of education with which he showed the least acquaintance, were, ruling and corporally punishing. He was always ruling ciphering-books with a bloated mahogany ruler, or smiting the palms of offenders with the same diabolical instrument, or viciously drawing a pair of pantaloons tight with one of his large hands, and caning the wearer with the other. We have no doubt whatever that this occupation was the principal solace of his existence.

A profound respect for money pervaded Our School, which was, of course, derived from its Chief. We remember an idiotic goggle-eyed boy, with a big head and half-crowns without end, who suddenly appeared as a parlour-boarder, and was rumoured to have come by sea from some mysterious part of the earth where his parents rolled in gold. He was usually called 'Mr.' by the Chief, and was said to feed in the parlour on steaks and gravy; likewise to drink currant wine. And he openly stated that if rolls and coffee were ever denied him at breakfast, he would write home to that unknown part of the globe from which he had come, and cause himself to be recalled to the regions of gold. He was put into no form or class, but learnt alone, as little as he liked - and he liked very little - and there was a belief among us that this was because he was too wealthy to be 'taken down.' His special treatment, and our vague association of him with the sea, and with storms, and sharks, and Coral Reefs occasioned the wildest legends to be circulated as his history. A tragedy in blank verse was written on the subject - if our memory does not deceive us, by the hand that now chronicles these recollections - in which his father figured as a Pirate, and was shot for a voluminous catalogue of atrocities: first imparting to his wife the secret of the cave in which his wealth was stored, and from which his only son's half-crowns now issued. Dumbledon (the boy's name) was represented as 'yet unborn' when his brave father met his fate; and the despair and grief of Mrs. Dumbledon at that calamity was movingly shadowed forth as having weakened the parlour-boarder's mind. This production was received with great favour, and was twice performed with closed doors in the dining- room. But, it got wind, and was seized as libellous, and brought the unlucky poet into severe affliction. Some two years afterwards, all of a sudden one day, Dumbledon vanished. It was whispered that the Chief himself had taken him down to the Docks, and re-shipped him for the Spanish Main; but nothing certain was ever known about his disappearance. At this hour, we cannot thoroughly disconnect him from California.

Our School was rather famous for mysterious pupils. There was another - a heavy young man, with a large double-cased silver watch, and a fat knife the handle of which was a perfect tool-box - who unaccountably appeared one day at a special desk of his own, erected close to that of the Chief, with whom he held familiar converse. He lived in the parlour, and went out for his walks, and never took the least notice of us - even of us, the first boy -

unless to give us a deprecatory kick, or grimly to take our hat off and throw it away, when he encountered us out of doors, which unpleasant ceremony he always performed as he passed - not even condescending to stop for the purpose. Some of us believed that the classical attainments of this phenomenon were terrific, but that his penmanship and arithmetic were defective, and he had come there to mend them; others, that he was going to set up a school, and had paid the Chief 'twenty-five pound down,' for leave to see Our School at work. The gloomier spirits even said that he was going to buy us; against which contingency, conspiracies were set on foot for a general defection and running away. However, he never did that. After staying for a quarter, during which period, though closely observed, he was never seen to do anything but make pens out of quills, write small hand in a secret portfolio, and punch the point of the sharpest blade in his knife into his desk all over it, he too disappeared, and his place knew him no more.

There was another boy, a fair, meek boy, with a delicate complexion and rich curling hair, who, we found out, or thought we found out (we have no idea now, and probably had none then, on what grounds, but it was confidentially revealed from mouth to mouth), was the son of a Viscount who had deserted his lovely mother. It was understood that if he had his rights, he would be worth twenty thousand a year. And that if his mother ever met his father, she would shoot him with a silver pistol, which she carried, always loaded to the muzzle, for that purpose. He was a very suggestive topic. So was a young Mulatto, who was always believed (though very amiable) to have a dagger about him somewhere. But, we think they were both outshone, upon the whole, by another boy who claimed to have been born on the twenty-ninth of February, and to have only one birthday in five years. We suspect this to have been a fiction - but he lived upon it all the time he was at Our School.

The principal currency of Our School was slate pencil. It had some inexplicable value, that was never ascertained, never reduced to a standard. To have a great hoard of it was somehow to be rich. We used to bestow it in charity, and confer it as a precious boon upon our chosen friends. When the holidays were coming, contributions were solicited for certain boys whose relatives were in India, and who were appealed for under the generic name of 'Holiday-stoppers,' - appropriate marks of remembrance that should enliven and cheer them in their homeless state. Personally, we always contributed these tokens of sympathy in the form of slate pencil, and always felt that it would be a comfort and a treasure to them.

Our School was remarkable for white mice. Red-polls, linnets, and even canaries, were kept in desks, drawers, hat-boxes, and other strange refuges for birds; but white mice were the favourite stock. The boys trained the mice, much better than the masters trained the boys. We recall one white mouse, who lived in the cover of a Latin dictionary, who ran up ladders, drew Roman chariots, shouldered muskets, turned wheels, and even made a very creditable appearance on the stage as the Dog of Montargis. He might have achieved greater things, but for having the misfortune to mistake his way in a triumphal procession to the Capitol, when he fell into a deep inkstand, and was dyed black and drowned. The mice were the occasion of some most ingenious engineering, in the construction of their houses and instruments of performance. The famous one belonged to a company of proprietors, some of whom have since made Railroads, Engines, and Telegraphs; the chairman has erected mills and bridges in New Zealand.

The usher at Our School, who was considered to know everything as opposed to the Chief, who was considered to know nothing, was a bony, gentle-faced, clerical-looking young man in rusty black. It was whispered that he was sweet upon one of Maxby's sisters (Maxby lived close by, and was a day pupil), and further that he 'favoured Maxby.' As we remember, he taught Italian to Maxby's sisters on half-holidays. He once went to the play with them, and wore a white waistcoat and a rose: which was considered among us equivalent to a declaration. We were of opinion on that occasion, that to the last moment he expected Maxby's father to ask him to dinner at five o'clock, and therefore neglected his own dinner at half-past one, and finally got none. We exaggerated in our imaginations the extent to which he punished Maxby's father's cold meat at supper; and we agreed to believe that he was elevated with wine and water when he came home. But, we all liked him; for he had a good knowledge of boys, and would have made it a much better school if he had had more power. He was writing master, mathematical master, English master, made out the bills, mended the pens, and did all sorts of things. He divided the little boys with the Latin master (they were smuggled through their rudimentary books, at odd times when there was nothing else to do), and he always called at parents' houses to inquire after sick boys, because he had gentlemanly manners. He was rather musical, and on some remote quarter-day had bought an old trombone; but a bit of it was lost, and it made the most extraordinary sounds when he sometimes tried to play it of an evening. His holidays never began (on account of the bills) until long after ours; but, in the summer vacations he used to take pedestrian excursions with a knapsack; and at Christmas time, he went to see his father at Chipping Norton, who we all said (on no authority) was a dairy-fed pork- butcher. Poor fellow! He was very low all day on Maxby's sister's wedding-day, and afterwards was thought to favour Maxby more than ever, though he had been expected to spite him. He has been dead these twenty years. Poor fellow!

Our remembrance of Our School, presents the Latin master as a colourless doubled-up near-sighted man with a crutch, who was always cold, and always putting onions into his ears for deafness, and always disclosing ends of flannel under all his garments, and almost always applying a ball of pocket-handkerchief to some part of his face with a screwing action round and round. He was a very good scholar, and took great pains where he saw intelligence and a desire to learn: otherwise, perhaps not. Our memory presents him (unless teased into a passion) with as little energy as colour - as having been worried and tormented into monotonous feebleness - as having had the best part of his life ground out of him in a Mill of boys. We remember with terror how he fell asleep one sultry afternoon with the little smuggled class before him, and awoke not when the footstep of the Chief fell heavy on the floor; how the Chief aroused him, in the midst of a dread silence, and said, 'Mr. Blinkins, are you ill, sir?' how he blushingly replied, 'Sir, rather so;' how the Chief retorted with severity, 'Mr. Blinkins, this is no place to be ill in' (which was very, very true), and walked back solemn as the ghost in Hamlet, until, catching a wandering eye, he called that boy for inattention, and happily expressed his feelings towards the Latin master through the medium of a substitute.

There was a fat little dancing-master who used to come in a gig, and taught the more advanced among us hornpipes (as an accomplishment in great social demand in after life); and there was a brisk little French master who used to come in the sunniest weather, with a handleless umbrella, and to whom the Chief was always polite, because (as we believed), if the Chief offended him, he would instantly address the Chief in French, and for ever confound him before the boys with his inability to understand or reply.

There was besides, a serving man, whose name was Phil. Our retrospective glance presents Phil as a shipwrecked carpenter, cast away upon the desert island of a school, and carrying into practice an ingenious inkling of many trades. He mended whatever was broken, and made whatever was wanted. He was general glazier, among other things, and mended all the broken windows - at the prime cost (as was darkly rumoured among us) of ninepence, for every square charged three-and-six to parents. We had a high opinion of his mechanical genius, and generally held that the Chief 'knew something bad of him,' and on pain of divulgence enforced Phil to be his bondsman. We particularly remember that Phil had a sovereign contempt for learning: which engenders in us a respect for his sagacity, as it implies his accurate observation of the relative positions of the Chief and the ushers. He was an impenetrable man, who waited at table between whiles, and throughout 'the half' kept the boxes in severe custody. He was morose, even to the Chief, and never smiled, except at breaking-up, when, in acknowledgment of the toast, 'Success to Phil! Hooray!' he would slowly carve a grin out of his wooden face, where it would remain until we were all gone. Nevertheless, one time when we had the scarlet fever in the school, Phil nursed all the sick boys of his own accord, and was like a mother to them.

There was another school not far off, and of course Our School could have nothing to say to that school. It is mostly the way with schools, whether of boys or men. Well! the railway has swallowed up ours, and the locomotives now run smoothly over its ashes.

So fades and languishes, grows dim and dies,
All that this world is proud of,

- and is not proud of, too. It had little reason to be proud of Our School, and has done much better since in that way, and will do far better yet.

OUR VESTRY

WE have the glorious privilege of being always in hot water if we like. We are a shareholder in a Great Parochial British Joint Stock Bank of Balderdash. We have a Vestry in our borough, and can vote for a vestryman - might even BE a vestryman, mayhap, if we were inspired by a lofty and noble ambition. Which we are not.

Our Vestry is a deliberative assembly of the utmost dignity and importance. Like the Senate of ancient Rome, its awful gravity overpowers (or ought to overpower) barbarian visitors. It sits in the Capitol (we mean in the capital building erected for it), chiefly on Saturdays, and shakes the earth to its centre with the echoes of its thundering eloquence, in a Sunday paper.

To get into this Vestry in the eminent capacity of Vestryman, gigantic efforts are made, and Herculean exertions used. It is made manifest to the dullest capacity at every election, that if we reject Snozzle we are done for, and that if we fail to bring in Blunderbooze at the top of the poll, we are unworthy of the dearest rights of Britons. Flaming placards are rife on all the dead walls in the borough, public-houses hang out banners, hackney-cabs burst into full-grown flowers of type, and everybody is, or should be, in a paroxysm of anxiety.

At these momentous crises of the national fate, we are much assisted in our deliberations by two eminent volunteers; one of whom subscribes himself A Fellow Parishioner, the other, A Rate- Payer. Who they are, or what they are, or where they are, nobody knows; but, whatever one asserts, the other contradicts. They are both voluminous writers, indicting more epistles than Lord Chesterfield in a single week; and the greater part of their feelings are too big for utterance in anything less than capital letters. They require the additional aid of whole rows of notes of admiration, like balloons, to point their generous indignation; and they sometimes communicate a crushing severity to stars. As thus:

MEN OF MOONEYMOUNT.

Is it, or is it not, a * * * to saddle the parish with a debt of 2,745 pounds 6S. 9D., yet claim to be a RIGID ECONOMIST?

Is it, or is it not, a * * * to state as a fact what is proved to be BOTH A MORAL AND A PHYSICAL IMPOSSIBILITY?

Is it, or is it not, a * * * to call 2,745 pounds 6S. 9D. nothing; and nothing, something?

Do you, or do you NOT want a * * * TO REPRESENT YOU IN THE VESTRY?

Your consideration of these questions is recommended to you by

A FELLOW PARISHIONER.

It was to this important public document that one of our first orators, MR. MAGG (of Little Winkling Street), adverted, when he opened the great debate of the fourteenth of November by saying, 'Sir, I hold in my hand an anonymous slander' - and when the interruption, with which he was at that point assailed by the opposite faction, gave rise to that memorable discussion on a point of order which will ever be remembered with interest by constitutional assemblies. In the animated debate to which we refer, no fewer than thirty-seven gentlemen, many of them of great eminence, including MR. WIGSBY (of Chumbledon Square), were seen upon their legs at one time; and it was on the same great occasion that DOGGINSON - regarded in our Vestry as 'a regular John Bull:' we believe, in consequence of his having always made up his mind on every subject without knowing anything about it - informed another gentleman of similar principles on the opposite side, that if he 'cheek'd him,' he would resort to the extreme measure of knocking his blessed head off.

This was a great occasion. But, our Vestry shines habitually. In asserting its own pre-eminence, for instance, it is very strong. On the least provocation, or on none, it will be clamorous to know whether it is to be 'dictated to,' or 'trampled on,' or 'ridden over rough-shod.' Its great watchword is Self-government. That is to say, supposing our Vestry to favour any little harmless disorder like Typhus Fever, and supposing the Government of the country to be, by any accident, in such ridiculous hands, as that any of its authorities should consider it a duty to object to Typhus Fever - obviously an unconstitutional objection - then, our Vestry cuts in with a terrible manifesto about Self-government, and claims its independent right to have as much Typhus Fever as pleases itself. Some absurd and dangerous persons have represented, on the other hand, that though our Vestry may be able to 'beat the bounds' of its own parish, it may not be able to beat the bounds of its own diseases; which (say they) spread over the whole land, in an ever expanding circle of waste, and misery, and death, and widowhood, and orphanage, and desolation. But, our Vestry makes short work of any such fellows as these.

It was our Vestry - pink of Vestries as it is - that in support of its favourite principle took the celebrated ground of denying the existence of the last pestilence that raged in England, when the pestilence was raging at the Vestry doors. Dogginson said it was plums; Mr. Wigsby (of Chumbledon Square) said it was oysters; Mr. Magg (of Little Winkling Street) said, amid great cheering, it was the newspapers. The noble indignation of our Vestry with that un- English institution the Board of Health, under those circumstances, yields one of the finest passages in its history. It wouldn't hear of rescue. Like Mr. Joseph Miller's Frenchman, it would be drowned and nobody should save it. Transported beyond grammar by its kindled ire, it spoke in unknown tongues, and vented unintelligible bellowings, more like an ancient oracle than the modern oracle it is admitted on all hands to be. Rare exigencies produce rare things; and even our Vestry, new hatched to the woful time, came forth a greater goose than ever.

But this, again, was a special occasion. Our Vestry, at more ordinary periods, demands its meed of praise.

Our Vestry is eminently parliamentary. Playing at Parliament is its favourite game. It is even regarded by some of its members as a chapel of ease to the House of Commons: a Little Go to be passed first. It has its strangers' gallery, and its reported debates (see the Sunday paper before mentioned), and our Vestrymen are in and out of order, and on and off their legs, and above all are transcendently quarrelsome, after the pattern of the real original.

Our Vestry being assembled, Mr. Magg never begs to trouble Mr. Wigsby with a simple inquiry. He knows better than that. Seeing the honourable gentleman, associated in their minds with Chumbledon Square, in his place, he wishes to ask that honourable gentleman what the intentions of himself, and those with whom he acts, may be, on the subject of the paving of the district known as Piggleum Buildings? Mr. Wigsby replies (with his eye on next Sunday's paper) that in reference to the question which has been put to him by the honourable gentleman opposite, he must take leave to say, that if that honourable gentleman had had the courtesy to give him notice of that question, he (Mr. Wigsby) would have consulted with his colleagues in reference to the advisability, in the present state of the discussions on the new paving-rate, of answering that question. But, as the honourable gentleman has NOT had the courtesy to give him notice of that question (great cheering from the Wigsby interest), he must decline to give the honourable gentleman the satisfaction he requires. Mr. Magg, instantly rising to retort, is received with loud cries of 'Spoke!' from the Wigsby interest, and with cheers from the Magg side of the house. Moreover, five gentlemen rise to order, and one of them, in revenge for being taken no notice of, petrifies the assembly by moving that this Vestry do now adjourn; but, is persuaded to withdraw that awful proposal, in consideration of its tremendous consequences if persevered in. Mr. Magg, for the purpose of being heard, then begs to move, that you, sir, do now pass to the order of the day; and takes that opportunity of saying, that if an honourable gentleman whom he has in his eye, and will not demean himself by more particularly naming (oh, oh, and cheers), supposes that he is to be put down by clamour, that honourable gentleman - however supported he may be, through thick and thin, by a Fellow Parishioner, with whom he is well acquainted (cheers and counter-cheers, Mr. Magg being invariably backed by the Rate-Payer) - will find himself mistaken. Upon this, twenty members of our Vestry speak in succession concerning what the two great men have meant, until it appears, after an hour and twenty minutes, that neither of them meant anything. Then our Vestry begins business.

We have said that, after the pattern of the real original, our Vestry in playing at Parliament is transcendently quarrelsome. It enjoys a personal altercation above all things. Perhaps the most redoubtable case of this kind we have ever had - though we have had so many that it is difficult to decide - was that on which the last extreme solemnities passed between Mr. Tiddypot (of Gumption House) and Captain Banger (of Wilderness Walk).

In an adjourned debate on the question whether water could be regarded in the light of a necessary of life; respecting which there were great differences of opinion, and many shades of sentiment; Mr. Tiddypot, in a powerful burst of eloquence against that hypothesis, frequently made use of the expression that such and such a rumour had 'reached his ears.' Captain Banger, following him, and holding that, for purposes of ablution and refreshment, a pint of water per diem was necessary for every adult of the lower classes, and half a pint for every child, cast ridicule upon his address in a sparkling speech, and concluded by saying that instead of those rumours having reached the ears of the honourable gentleman, he rather thought the honourable gentleman's ears must have reached the rumours, in consequence of their well- known length. Mr. Tiddypot immediately rose, looked the honourable and gallant gentleman full in the face, and left the Vestry.

The excitement, at this moment painfully intense, was heightened to an acute degree when Captain Banger rose, and also left the Vestry. After a few moments of profound silence - one of those breathless pauses never to be forgotten - Mr. Chib (of Tucket's Terrace, and the father of the Vestry) rose. He said that words and looks had passed in that assembly, replete with consequences which every feeling mind must deplore. Time pressed. The sword was drawn, and while he spoke the scabbard might be thrown away. He moved that those honourable gentlemen who had left the Vestry be recalled, and required to pledge themselves upon their honour that this affair should go no farther. The motion being by a general union of parties unanimously agreed to (for everybody wanted to have the belligerents there, instead of out of sight: which was no fun at all), Mr. Magg was deputed to recover Captain Banger, and Mr. Chib himself to go in search of Mr. Tiddypot. The Captain was found in a conspicuous position, surveying the passing omnibuses from the top step of the front-door immediately adjoining the beadle's box; Mr. Tiddypot made a desperate attempt at resistance, but was overpowered by Mr. Chib (a remarkably hale old gentleman of eighty- two), and brought back in safety.

Mr. Tiddypot and the Captain being restored to their places, and glaring on each other, were called upon by the chair to abandon all homicidal intentions, and give the Vestry an assurance that they did so. Mr. Tiddypot remained profoundly silent. The Captain likewise remained profoundly silent, saying that he was observed by those around him to fold his arms like Napoleon Buonaparte, and to snort in his breathing - actions but too expressive of gunpowder.

The most intense emotion now prevailed. Several members clustered in remonstrance round the Captain, and several round Mr. Tiddypot; but, both were obdurate. Mr. Chib then presented himself amid tremendous cheering, and said, that not to shrink from the discharge of his painful duty, he must now move that both honourable gentlemen be taken into custody by the beadle, and conveyed to the nearest police-office, there to be held to bail. The union of parties still continuing, the motion was seconded by Mr. Wigsby - on all usual occasions Mr. Chib's opponent - and rapturously carried with only one dissentient voice. This was Dogginson's, who said from his place 'Let 'em fight it out with fistes;' but whose coarse remark was received as it merited.

The beadle now advanced along the floor of the Vestry, and beckoned with his cocked hat to both members. Every breath was suspended. To say that a pin might have been heard to fall, would be feebly to express the all-absorbing interest and silence. Suddenly, enthusiastic cheering broke out from every side of the Vestry. Captain Banger had risen - being, in fact, pulled up by a friend on either side, and poked up by a friend behind.

The Captain said, in a deep determined voice, that he had every respect for that Vestry and every respect for that chair; that he also respected the honourable gentleman of Gumpton House; but, that he respected his honour more. Hereupon the Captain sat down, leaving the whole Vestry much affected. Mr. Tiddypot instantly rose, and was received with the same encouragement. He likewise said - and the exquisite art of this orator communicated to the observation an air of freshness and novelty - that he too had every respect for that Vestry; that he too had every respect for that chair. That he too respected the honourable and gallant gentleman of Wilderness Walk; but, that he too respected his honour more. 'Hows'ever,' added the distinguished Vestryman, 'if the honourable and gallant gentleman's honour is never more doubted and damaged than it is by me, he's all right.' Captain Banger immediately started up again, and said that after those observations, involving as they did ample concession to his honour without compromising the honour of the honourable gentleman, he would be wanting in honour as well as in generosity, if he did not at once repudiate all intention of wounding the honour of the honourable gentleman, or saying anything dishonourable to his honourable feelings. These observations were repeatedly interrupted by bursts of cheers. Mr. Tiddypot retorted that he well knew the spirit of honour by which the honourable and gallant gentleman was so honourably animated, and that he accepted an honourable explanation, offered in a way that did him honour; but, he trusted that the Vestry would consider that his (Mr. Tiddypot's) honour had imperatively demanded of him that painful course which he had felt it due to his honour to adopt. The Captain and Mr. Tiddypot then touched their hats to one another across the Vestry, a great many times, and it is thought that these proceedings (reported to the extent of several columns in next Sunday's paper) will bring them in as church-wardens next year.

All this was strictly after the pattern of the real original, and so are the whole of our Vestry's proceedings. In all their debates, they are laudably imitative of the windy and wordy slang of the real original, and of nothing that is better in it. They have head-strong party animosities, without any reference to the merits of questions; they tack a surprising amount of debate to a very little business; they set more store by forms than they do by substances: - all very like the real original! It has been doubted in our borough, whether our Vestry is of any utility; but our own conclusion is, that it is of the use to the Borough that a diminishing mirror is to a painter, as enabling it to perceive in a small focus of absurdity all the surface defects of the real original.

OUR BORE

IT is unnecessary to say that we keep a bore. Everybody does. But, the bore whom we have the pleasure and honour of enumerating among our particular friends, is such a generic bore, and has so many traits (as it appears to us) in common with the great bore family, that we are tempted to make him the subject of the present notes. May he be generally accepted!

Our bore is admitted on all hands to be a good-hearted man. He may put fifty people out of temper, but he keeps his own. He preserves a sickly solid smile upon his face, when other faces are ruffled by the perfection he has attained in his art, and has an equable voice which never travels out of one key or rises above one pitch. His manner is a manner of tranquil interest. None of his opinions are startling. Among his deepest-rooted convictions, it may be mentioned that he considers the air of England damp, and holds that our lively neighbours - he always calls the French our lively neighbours - have the advantage of us in that particular. Nevertheless he is unable to forget that John Bull is John Bull all the world over, and that England with all her faults is England still.

Our bore has travelled. He could not possibly be a complete bore without having travelled. He rarely speaks of his travels without introducing, sometimes on his own plan of construction, morsels of the language of the country - which he always translates. You cannot name to him any little remote town in France, Italy, Germany, or Switzerland but he knows it well; stayed there a fortnight under peculiar circumstances. And talking of that little place, perhaps you know a statue over an old fountain, up a little court, which is the second - no, the third - stay - yes, the third turning on the right, after you come out of the Post-house, going up the hill towards the market? You DON'T know that statue? Nor that fountain? You surprise him! They are not usually seen by travellers (most extraordinary, he has never yet met with a single traveller who knew them, except one

German, the most intelligent man he ever met in his life!) but he thought that YOU would have been the man to find them out. And then he describes them, in a circumstantial lecture half an hour long, generally delivered behind a door which is constantly being opened from the other side; and implores you, if you ever revisit that place, now do go and look at that statue and fountain!

Our bore, in a similar manner, being in Italy, made a discovery of a dreadful picture, which has been the terror of a large portion of the civilized world ever since. We have seen the liveliest men paralysed by it, across a broad dining-table. He was lounging among the mountains, sir, basking in the mellow influences of the climate, when he came to UNA PICCOLA CHIESA - a little church - or perhaps it would be more correct to say UNA PICCOLISSIMA CAPPELLA - the smallest chapel you can possibly imagine - and walked in. There was nobody inside but a CIECO - a blind man - saying his prayers, and a VECCHIO PADRE - old friar-rattling a money-box. But, above the head of that friar, and immediately to the right of the altar as you enter - to the right of the altar? No. To the left of the altar as you enter - or say near the centre - there hung a painting (subject, Virgin and Child) so divine in its expression, so pure and yet so warm and rich in its tone, so fresh in its touch, at once so glowing in its colour and so statuesque in its repose, that our bore cried out in ecstasy, 'That's the finest picture in Italy!' And so it is, sir. There is no doubt of it. It is astonishing that that picture is so little known. Even the painter is uncertain. He afterwards took Blumb, of the Royal Academy (it is to be observed that our bore takes none but eminent people to see sights, and that none but eminent people take our bore), and you never saw a man so affected in your life as Blumb was. He cried like a child! And then our bore begins his description in detail - for all this is introductory - and strangles his hearers with the folds of the purple drapery.

By an equally fortunate conjunction of accidental circumstances, it happened that when our bore was in Switzerland, he discovered a Valley, of that superb character, that Chamouni is not to be mentioned in the same breath with it. This is how it was, sir. He was travelling on a mule - had been in the saddle some days - when, as he and the guide, Pierre Blanquo: whom you may know, perhaps? - our bore is sorry you don't, because he's the only guide deserving of the name - as he and Pierre were descending, towards evening, among those everlasting snows, to the little village of La

Croix, our bore observed a mountain track turning off sharply to the right. At first he was uncertain whether it WAS a track at all, and in fact, he said to Pierre, 'QU'EST QUE C'EST DONC, MON AMI? - What is that, my friend? 'Ou, MONSIEUR!' said Pierre - 'Where, sir?' ' La! - there!' said our bore. 'MONSIEUR, CE N'EST RIEN DE TOUT - sir, it's nothing at all,' said Pierre. 'ALLONS! - Make haste. IL VA NEIGET - it's going to snow!' But, our bore was not to be done in that way, and he firmly replied, 'I wish to go in that direction - JE VEUX Y ALLER. I am bent upon it - JE SUIS DETERMINE. EN AVANT! - go ahead!' In consequence of which firmness on our bore's part, they proceeded, sir, during two hours of evening, and three of moonlight (they waited in a cavern till the moon was up), along the slenderest track, overhanging perpendicularly the most awful gulfs, until they arrived, by a winding descent, in a valley that possibly, and he may say probably, was never visited by any stranger before. What a valley! Mountains piled on mountains, avalanches stemmed by pine forests; waterfalls, chalets, mountain-torrents, wooden bridges, every conceivable picture of Swiss scenery! The whole village turned out to receive our bore. The peasant girls kissed him, the men shook hands with him, one old lady of benevolent appearance wept upon his breast. He was conducted, in a primitive triumph, to the little inn: where he was taken ill next morning, and lay for six weeks, attended by the amiable hostess (the same benevolent old lady who had wept over night) and her charming daughter, Fanchette. It is nothing to say that they were attentive to him; they doted on him. They called him in their simple way, L'ANGE ANGLAIS - the English Angel. When our bore left the valley, there was not a dry eye in the place; some of the people attended him for miles. He begs and entreats of you as a personal favour, that if you ever go to Switzerland again (you have mentioned that your last visit was your twenty-third), you will go to that valley, and see Swiss scenery for the first time. And if you want really to know the pastoral people of Switzerland, and to understand them, mention, in that valley, our bore's name!

Our bore has a crushing brother in the East, who, somehow or other, was admitted to smoke pipes with Mehemet Ali, and instantly became an authority on the whole range of Eastern matters, from Haroun Alraschid to the present Sultan. He is in the habit of expressing mysterious opinions on this wide range of subjects, but on questions of foreign policy more particularly, to our bore, in letters; and our bore is continually sending bits of these letters to the newspapers (which they never insert), and carrying other bits about in his pocket-book. It is even whispered that he has been seen at the Foreign Office, receiving great consideration from the messengers, and having his card promptly borne into the sanctuary of the temple. The havoc committed in society by this Eastern brother is beyond belief. Our bore is always ready with him. We have known our bore to fall upon an intelligent young sojourner in the wilderness, in the first sentence of a narrative, and beat all confidence out of him with one blow of his brother. He became omniscient, as to foreign policy, in the smoking of those pipes with Mehemet Ali. The balance of power in Europe, the machinations of the Jesuits, the gentle and humanising influence of Austria, the position and prospects of that hero of the noble soul who is worshipped by happy France, are all easy reading to our bore's brother. And our bore is so provokingly self-denying about him! 'I don't pretend to more than a very general knowledge of these subjects myself,' says he, after enervating the intellects of several strong men, 'but these are my brother's opinions, and I believe he is known to be well-informed.'

The commonest incidents and places would appear to have been made special, expressly for our bore. Ask him whether he ever chanced to walk, between seven and eight in the morning, down St. James's Street, London, and he will tell you, never in his life but once. But, it's curious that that once was in eighteen thirty; and that as our bore was walking down the street you have just mentioned, at the hour you have just mentioned - half-past seven - or twenty minutes to eight. No! Let him be correct! - exactly a quarter before eight by the palace clock - he met a fresh-coloured, grey- haired, good-humoured looking gentleman, with a brown umbrella, who, as he passed him, touched his hat and said, 'Fine morning, sir, fine morning!' - William the Fourth!

Ask our bore whether he has seen Mr. Barry's new Houses of Parliament, and he will reply that he has not yet inspected them minutely, but, that you remind him that it was his singular fortune to be the last man to see the old Houses of Parliament before the fire broke out. It happened in this way. Poor John Spine, the celebrated novelist, had taken him over to South Lambeth to read to him the last few chapters of what was certainly his best book - as our bore told him at the time, adding, 'Now, my dear John, touch it, and you'll spoil it!' - and our bore was going back to the club by way of Millbank and Parliament Street, when he stopped to think of

Canning, and look at the Houses of Parliament. Now, you know far more of the philosophy of Mind than our bore does, and are much better able to explain to him than he is to explain to you why or wherefore, at that particular time, the thought of fire should come into his head. But, it did. It did. He thought, What a national calamity if an edifice connected with so many associations should be consumed by fire! At that time there was not a single soul in the street but himself. All was quiet, dark, and solitary. After contemplating the building for a minute - or, say a minute and a half, not more - our bore proceeded on his way, mechanically repeating, What a national calamity if such an edifice, connected with such associations, should be destroyed by - A man coming towards him in a violent state of agitation completed the sentence, with the exclamation, Fire! Our bore looked round, and the whole structure was in a blaze.

In harmony and union with these experiences, our bore never went anywhere in a steamboat but he made either the best or the worst voyage ever known on that station. Either he overheard the captain say to himself, with his hands clasped, 'We are all lost!' or the captain openly declared to him that he had never made such a run before, and never should be able to do it again. Our bore was in that express train on that railway, when they made (unknown to the passengers) the experiment of going at the rate of a hundred to miles an hour. Our bore remarked on that occasion to the other people in the carriage, 'This is too fast, but sit still!' He was at the Norwich musical festival when the extraordinary echo for which science has been wholly unable to account, was heard for the first and last time. He and the bishop heard it at the same moment, and caught each other's eye. He was present at that illumination of St. Peter's, of which the Pope is known to have remarked, as he looked at it out of his window in the Vatican, 'O CIELO! QUESTA COSA NON SARA FATTA, MAI ANCORA, COME QUESTA - O Heaven! this thing will never be done again, like this!' He has seen every lion he ever saw, under some remarkably propitious circumstances. He knows there is no fancy in it, because in every case the showman mentioned the fact at the time, and congratulated him upon it.

At one period of his life, our bore had an illness. It was an illness of a dangerous character for society at large. Innocently remark that you are very well, or that somebody else is very well; and our bore, with a preface that one never knows what a blessing health is until one has lost it, is reminded of that illness, and drags you through the whole of its symptoms, progress, and treatment. Innocently remark that you are not well, or that somebody else is not well, and the same inevitable result ensues. You will learn how our bore felt a tightness about here, sir, for which he couldn't account, accompanied with a constant sensation as if he were being stabbed - or, rather, jobbed - that expresses it more correctly - jobbed - with a blunt knife. Well, sir! This went on, until sparks began to flit before his eyes, water-wheels to turn round in his head, and hammers to beat incessantly, thump, thump, thump, all down his back - along the whole of the spinal vertebrae. Our bore, when his sensations had come to this, thought it a duty he owed to himself to take advice, and he said, Now, whom shall I consult? He naturally thought of Callow, at that time one of the most eminent physicians in London, and he went to Callow. Callow said, 'Liver!' and prescribed rhubarb and calomel, low diet, and moderate exercise. Our bore went on with this treatment, getting worse every day, until he lost confidence in Callow, and went to Moon, whom half the town was then mad about. Moon was interested in the case; to do him justice he was very much interested in the case; and he said, 'Kidneys!' He altered the whole treatment, sir - gave strong acids, cupped, and blistered. This went on, our bore still getting worse every day, until he openly told Moon it would be a satisfaction to him if he would have a consultation with Clatter. The moment Clatter saw our bore, he said, 'Accumulation of fat about the heart!' Snugglewood, who was called in with him, differed, and said, 'Brain!' But, what they all agreed upon was, to lay our bore upon his back, to shave his head, to leech him, to administer enormous quantities of medicine, and to keep him low; so that he was reduced to a mere shadow, you wouldn't have known him, and nobody considered it possible that he could ever recover. This was his condition, sir, when he heard of Jilkins - at that period in a very small practice, and living in the upper part of a house in Great Portland Street; but still, you understand, with a rising reputation among the few people to whom he was known. Being in that condition in which a drowning man catches at a straw, our bore sent for Jilkins. Jilkins came. Our bore liked his eye, and said, 'Mr. Jilkins, I have a presentiment that you will do me good.' Jilkins's reply was characteristic of the man. It was, 'Sir, I mean to do you good.' This confirmed our bore's opinion of his eye, and they went into the case together - went completely into it. Jilkins then got up, walked across the room, came back, and sat down. His words were these. 'You have been humbugged. This is a case of indigestion, occasioned by deficiency of power in the Stomach. Take a mutton chop in half-an-hour, with a glass of the finest old sherry that can be got for money. Take two mutton chops to-morrow, and two glasses of the finest old sherry. Next day, I'll come again.' In a week our bore was on his legs, and Jilkins's success dates from that period!

Our bore is great in secret information. He happens to know many things that nobody else knows. He can generally tell you where the split is in the Ministry; he knows a great deal about the Queen; and has little anecdotes to relate of the royal nursery. He gives you the judge's private opinion of Sludge the murderer, and his thoughts when he tried him. He happens to know what such a man got by such a transaction, and it was fifteen thousand five hundred pounds, and his income is twelve thousand a year. Our bore is also great in mystery. He believes, with an exasperating appearance of profound meaning, that you saw Parkins last Sunday? - Yes, you did. - Did he say anything particular? - No, nothing particular. - Our bore is surprised at that. - Why? - Nothing. Only he understood that Parkins had come to tell you something. - What about? - Well! our bore is not at liberty to mention what about. But, he believes you will hear that from Parkins himself, soon, and he hopes it may not surprise you as it did him. Perhaps, however, you never heard about Parkins's wife's sister? - No. - Ah! says our bore, that explains it!

Our bore is also great in argument. He infinitely enjoys a long humdrum, drowsy interchange of words of dispute about nothing. He considers that it strengthens the mind, consequently, he 'don't see that,' very often. Or, he would be glad to know what you mean by that. Or, he doubts that. Or, he has always understood exactly the reverse of that. Or, he can't admit that. Or, he begs to deny that. Or, surely you don't mean that. And so on. He once advised us; offered us a piece of advice, after the fact, totally impracticable and wholly impossible of acceptance, because it supposed the fact, then eternally disposed of, to be yet in abeyance. It was a dozen years ago, and to this hour our bore benevolently wishes, in a mild voice, on certain regular occasions, that we had thought better of his opinion.

The instinct with which our bore finds out another bore, and closes with him, is amazing. We have seen him pick his man out of fifty men, in a couple of minutes. They love to go (which they do naturally) into a slow argument on a previously exhausted subject, and to contradict each other, and to wear the hearers out, without impairing their own perennial freshness as bores. It improves the good understanding between them, and they get together afterwards, and bore each other amicably. Whenever we see our bore behind a door with another bore, we know that when he comes forth, he will praise the other bore as one of the most intelligent men he ever met. And this bringing us to the close of what we had to say about our bore, we are anxious to have it understood that he never bestowed this praise on us.

A MONUMENT OF FRENCH FOLLY

IT was profoundly observed by a witty member of the Court of Common Council, in Council assembled in the City of London, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fifty, that the French are a frog-eating people, who wear wooden shoes.

We are credibly informed, in reference to the nation whom this choice spirit so happily disposed of, that the caricatures and stage representations which were current in England some half a century ago, exactly depict their present condition. For example, we understand that every Frenchman, without exception, wears a pigtail and curl-papers. That he is extremely sallow, thin, long- faced, and lantern-jawed. That the calves of his legs are invariably undeveloped; that his legs fail at the knees, and that his shoulders are always higher than his ears. We are likewise assured that he rarely tastes any food but soup maigre, and an onion; that he always says, 'By Gar! Aha! Vat you tell me, sare?' at the end of every sentence he utters; and that the true generic name of his race is the Mounseers, or the Parly-voos. If he be not a dancing-master, or a barber, he must be a cook; since no other trades but those three are congenial to the tastes of the people, or permitted by the Institutions of the country. He is a slave, of course. The ladies of France (who are also slaves) invariably have their heads tied up in Belcher handkerchiefs, wear long earrings, carry tambourines, and beguile the weariness of their yoke by singing in head voices through their noses - principally to barrel- organs.

It may be generally summed up, of this inferior people, that they have no idea of anything.

Of a great Institution like Smithfield, they are unable to form the least conception. A Beast Market in the heart of Paris would be regarded an impossible nuisance. Nor have they any notion of slaughter-houses in the midst of a city. One of these benighted frog-eaters would scarcely understand your meaning, if you told him of the existence of such a British bulwark.

It is agreeable, and perhaps pardonable, to indulge in a little self-complacency when our right to it is thoroughly established. At the present time, to be rendered memorable by a final attack on that good old market which is the (rotten) apple of the Corporation's eye, let us compare ourselves, to our national delight and pride as to these two subjects of slaughter-house and beast-market, with the outlandish foreigner.

The blessings of Smithfield are too well understood to need recapitulation; all who run (away from mad bulls and pursuing oxen) may read. Any market-day they may be beheld in glorious action. Possibly the merits of our slaughter-houses are not yet quite so generally appreciated.

Slaughter-houses, in the large towns of England, are always (with the exception of one or two enterprising towns) most numerous in the most densely crowded places, where there is the least circulation of air. They are often underground, in cellars; they are sometimes in close back yards; sometimes (as in Spitalfields) in the very shops where the meat is sold. Occasionally, under good private management, they are ventilated and clean. For the most part, they are unventilated and dirty; and, to the reeking walls, putrid fat and other offensive animal matter clings with a tenacious hold. The busiest slaughter-houses in London are in the neighbourhood of Smithfield, in Newgate Market, in Whitechapel, in Newport Market, in Leadenhall Market, in Clare Market. All these places are surrounded by houses of a poor description, swarming with inhabitants. Some of them are close to the worst burial- grounds in London. When the slaughter-house is below the ground, it is a common practice to throw the sheep down areas, neck and crop - which is exciting, but not at all cruel. When it is on the level surface, it is often extremely difficult of approach. Then, the beasts have to be worried, and goaded, and pronged, and tail- twisted, for a long time before they can be got in - which is entirely owing to their natural obstinacy. When it is not difficult of approach, but is in a foul condition, what they see and scent makes them still more reluctant to enter - which is their natural obstinacy again. When they do get in at last, after no trouble and suffering to speak of (for, there is nothing in the previous journey into the heart of London, the night's endurance in Smithfield, the struggle out again, among the crowded multitude, the coaches, carts, waggons, omnibuses, gigs, chaises, phaetons, cabs, trucks, dogs, boys, whoopings, roarings, and ten thousand other distractions), they are represented to be in a most unfit state to be killed, according to microscopic examinations made of their fevered blood by one of the most distinguished physiologists in the world, PROFESSOR OWEN - but that's humbug. When they ARE killed, at last, their reeking carcases are hung in impure air, to become, as the same Professor will explain to you, less nutritious and more unwholesome - but he is only an UNcommon counsellor, so don't mind HIM. In half a quarter of a mile's length of Whitechapel, at one time, there shall be six hundred newly slaughtered oxen hanging up, and seven hundred sheep - but, the more the merrier - proof of prosperity. Hard by Snow Hill and Warwick Lane, you shall see the little children, inured to sights of brutality from their birth, trotting along the alleys, mingled with troops of horribly busy pigs, up to their ankles in blood - but it makes the young rascals hardy. Into the imperfect sewers of this overgrown city, you shall have the immense mass of corruption, engendered by these practices, lazily thrown out of sight, to rise, in poisonous gases, into your house at night, when your sleeping children will most readily absorb them, and to find its languid way, at last, into the river that you drink - but, the French are a frog-eating people who wear wooden shoes, and it's O the roast beef of England, my boy, the jolly old English roast beef.

It is quite a mistake - a newfangled notion altogether - to suppose that there is any natural antagonism between putrefaction and health. They know better than that, in the Common Council. You may talk about Nature, in her wisdom, always warning man through his sense of smell, when he draws near to something dangerous; but, that won't go down in the City. Nature very often don't mean anything. Mrs. Quickly says that prunes are ill for a green wound; but whosoever says that putrid animal substances are ill for a green wound, or for robust vigour, or for anything or for anybody, is a humanity-monger and a humbug. Britons never, never, never, &c., therefore. And prosperity to cattle-driving, cattle- slaughtering, bone-crushing, blood-boiling, trotter-scraping, tripe-dressing, paunch-cleaning, gut-spinning, hide-preparing, tallow-melting, and other salubrious proceedings, in the midst of hospitals, churchyards, workhouses, schools, infirmaries, refuges, dwellings, provision-shops nurseries, sick-beds, every stage and baiting-place in the journey from birth to death!

These UNcommon counsellors, your Professor Owens and fellows, will contend that to tolerate these things in a civilised city, is to reduce it to a worse condition than BRUCE found to prevail in ABYSSINIA. For there (say they) the jackals and wild dogs came at night to devour the offal; whereas, here there are no such natural scavengers, and quite as savage customs. Further, they will demonstrate that nothing in Nature is intended to be wasted, and that besides the waste which such abuses occasion in the articles of health and life - main sources of the riches of any community - they lead to a prodigious waste of changing matters, which might, with proper preparation, and under scientific direction, be safely applied to the increase of the fertility of the land. Thus (they argue) does Nature ever avenge infractions of her beneficent laws, and so surely as Man is determined to warp any of her blessings into curses, shall they become curses, and shall he suffer heavily. But, this is cant. Just as it is cant of the worst description to say to the London Corporation, 'How can you exhibit to the people so plain a spectacle of dishonest equivocation, as to claim the right of holding a market in the midst of the great city, for one of your vested privileges, when you know that when your last market holding charter was granted to you by King Charles the First, Smithfield stood IN THE SUBURBS OF LONDON, and is in that very charter so described in those five words?' - which is certainly true, but has nothing to do with the question.

Now to the comparison, in these particulars of civilisation, between the capital of England, and the capital of that frog-eating and wooden-shoe wearing country, which the illustrious Common Councilman so sarcastically settled.

In Paris, there is no Cattle Market. Cows and calves are sold within the city, but, the Cattle Markets are at Poissy, about thirteen miles off, on a line of railway; and at Sceaux, about five miles off. The Poissy market is held every Thursday; the Sceaux market, every Monday. In Paris, there are no slaughter-houses, in our acceptation of the term. There are five public Abattoirs - within the walls, though in the suburbs - and in these all the slaughtering for the city must be performed. They are managed by a Syndicat or Guild of Butchers, who confer with the Minister of the Interior on all matters affecting the trade, and who are consulted when any new regulations are contemplated for its government. They are, likewise, under the vigilant superintendence of the police. Every butcher must be licensed: which proves him at once to be a slave, for we don't license butchers in England - we only license apothecaries, attorneys, post-masters, publicans, hawkers, retailers of tobacco, snuff, pepper, and vinegar - and one or two other little trades, not worth mentioning. Every arrangement in connexion with the slaughtering and sale of meat, is matter of strict police regulation. (Slavery again, though we certainly have a general sort of Police Act here.)

But, in order that the reader may understand what a monument of folly these frog-eaters have raised in their abattoirs and cattle- markets, and may compare it with what common counselling has done for us all these years, and would still do but for the innovating spirit of the times, here follows a short account of a recent visit to these places:

It was as sharp a February morning as you would desire to feel at your fingers' ends when I turned out - tumbling over a chiffonier with his little basket and rake, who was picking up the bits of coloured paper that had been swept out, over-night, from a Bon-Bon shop - to take the Butchers' Train to Poissy. A cold, dim light just touched the high roofs of the Tuileries which have seen such changes, such distracted crowds, such riot and bloodshed; and they looked as calm, and as old, all covered with white frost, as the very Pyramids. There was not light enough, yet, to strike upon the towers of Notre Dame across the water; but I thought of the dark pavement of the old Cathedral as just beginning to be streaked with grey; and of the lamps in the 'House of God,' the Hospital close to it, burning low and being quenched; and of the keeper of the Morgue going about with a fading lantern, busy in the arrangement of his terrible waxwork for another sunny day.

The sun was up, and shining merrily when the butchers and I, announcing our departure with an engine shriek to sleepy Paris, rattled away for the Cattle Market. Across the country, over the Seine, among a forest of scrubby trees - the hoar frost lying cold in shady places, and glittering in the light - and here we are - at Poissy! Out leap the butchers, who have been chattering all the way like madmen, and off they straggle for the Cattle Market (still chattering, of course, incessantly), in hats and caps of all shapes, in coats and blouses, in calf-skins, cow-skins, horse- skins, furs, shaggy mantles, hairy coats, sacking, baize, oil-skin, anything you please that will keep a man and a butcher warm, upon a frosty morning.

Many a French town have I seen, between this spot of ground and Strasburg or Marseilles, that might sit for your picture, little Poissy! Barring the details of your old church, I know you well, albeit we make acquaintance, now, for the first time. I know your narrow, straggling, winding streets, with a kennel in the midst, and lamps slung across. I know your picturesque street-corners, winding up-hill Heaven knows why or where! I know your tradesmen's inscriptions, in letters not quite fat enough; your barbers' brazen basins dangling over little shops; your Cafes and Estaminets, with cloudy bottles of stale syrup in the windows, and pictures of crossed billiard cues outside. I know this identical grey horse with his tail rolled up in a knot like the 'back hair' of an untidy woman, who won't be shod, and who makes himself heraldic by clattering across the street on his hind-legs, while twenty voices shriek and growl at him as a Brigand, an accursed Robber, and an everlastingly-doomed Pig. I know your sparkling town-fountain, too, my Poissy, and am glad to see it near a cattle-market, gushing so freshly, under the auspices of a gallant little sublimated Frenchman wrought in metal, perched upon the top. Through all the land of France I know this unswept room at The Glory, with its peculiar smell of beans and coffee, where the butchers crowd about the stove, drinking the thinnest of wine from the smallest of tumblers; where the thickest of coffee-cups mingle with the longest of loaves, and the weakest of lump sugar; where Madame at the counter easily acknowledges the homage of all entering and departing butchers; where the billiard-table is covered up in the midst like a great bird-cake - but the bird may sing by-and-by!

A bell! The Calf Market! Polite departure of butchers. Hasty payment and departure on the part of amateur Visitor. Madame reproaches Ma'amselle for too fine a susceptibility in reference to the devotion of a Butcher in a bear-skin. Monsieur, the landlord of The Glory, counts a double handful of sous, without an unobliterated inscription, or an undamaged crowned head, among them.

There is little noise without, abundant space, and no confusion. The open area devoted to the market is divided into three portions: the Calf Market, the Cattle Market, the Sheep Market. Calves at eight, cattle at ten, sheep at mid-day. All is very clean.

The Calf Market is a raised platform of stone, some three or four feet high, open on all sides, with a lofty overspreading roof, supported on stone columns, which give it the appearance of a sort of vineyard from Northern Italy. Here, on the raised pavement, lie innumerable calves, all bound hind-legs and fore-legs together, and all trembling violently - perhaps with cold, perhaps with fear, perhaps with pain; for, this mode of tying, which seems to be an absolute superstition with the peasantry, can hardly fail to cause great suffering. Here, they lie, patiently in rows, among the straw, with their stolid faces and inexpressive eyes, superintended by men and women, boys and girls; here they are inspected by our friends, the butchers, bargained for, and bought. Plenty of time; plenty of room; plenty of good humour. 'Monsieur Francois in the bear-skin, how do you do, my friend? You come from Paris by the train? The fresh air does you good. If you are in want of three or four fine calves this market morning, my angel, I, Madame Doche, shall be happy to deal with you. Behold these calves, Monsieur Francois! Great Heaven, you are doubtful! Well, sir, walk round and look about you. If you find better for the money, buy them. If not, come to me!' Monsieur Francois goes his way leisurely, and keeps a wary eye upon the stock. No other butcher jostles Monsieur Francois; Monsieur Francois jostles no other butcher. Nobody is flustered and aggravated. Nobody is savage. In the midst of the country blue frocks and red handkerchiefs, and the butchers' coats, shaggy, furry, and hairy: of calf-skin, cow-skin, horse-skin, and bear-skin: towers a cocked hat and a blue cloak. Slavery! For OUR Police wear great-coats and glazed hats.

But now the bartering is over, and the calves are sold. 'Ho!
Gregoire, Antoine, Jean, Louis! Bring up the carts, my children!
Quick, brave infants! Hola! Hi!'

The carts, well littered with straw, are backed up to the edge of the raised pavement, and various hot infants carry calves upon their heads, and dexterously pitch them in, while other hot infants, standing in the carts, arrange the calves, and pack them carefully in straw. Here is a promising young calf, not sold, whom Madame Doche unbinds. Pardon me, Madame Doche, but I fear this mode of tying the four legs of a quadruped together, though strictly a la mode, is not quite right. You observe, Madame Doche, that the cord leaves deep indentations in the skin, and that the animal is so cramped at first as not to know, or even remotely suspect that HE is unbound, until you are so obliging as to kick him, in your delicate little way, and pull his tail like a bell- rope. Then, he staggers to his knees, not being able to stand, and stumbles about like a drunken calf, or the horse at Franconi's, whom you may have seen, Madame Doche, who is supposed to have been mortally wounded in battle. But, what is this rubbing against me, as I apostrophise Madame Doche? It is another heated infant with a calf upon his head. 'Pardon, Monsieur, but will you have the politeness to allow me to pass?' 'Ah, sir, willingly. I am vexed to obstruct the way.' On he staggers, calf and all, and makes no allusion whatever either to my eyes or limbs.

Now, the carts are all full. More straw, my Antoine, to shake over these top rows; then, off we will clatter, rumble, jolt, and rattle, a long row of us, out of the first town-gate, and out at the second town-gate, and past the empty sentry-box, and the little thin square bandbox of a guardhouse, where nobody seems to live: and away for Paris, by the paved road, lying, a straight, straight line, in the long, long avenue of trees. We can neither choose our road, nor our pace, for that is all prescribed to us. The public convenience demands that our carts should get to Paris by such a route, and no other (Napoleon had leisure to find that out, while he had a little war with the world upon his hands), and woe betide us if we infringe orders.

Drovers of oxen stand in the Cattle Market, tied to iron bars fixed into posts of granite. Other droves advance slowly down the long avenue, past the second town-gate, and the first town-gate, and the sentry-box, and the bandbox, thawing the morning with their smoky breath as they come along. Plenty of room; plenty of time. Neither man nor beast is driven out of his wits by coaches, carts, waggons, omnibuses, gigs, chaises, phaetons, cabs, trucks, boys, whoopings, roarings, and multitudes. No tail-twisting is necessary - no iron pronging is necessary. There are no iron prongs here. The market for cattle is held as quietly as the market for calves. In due time, off the cattle go to Paris; the drovers can no more choose their road, nor their time, nor the numbers they shall drive, than they can choose their hour for dying in the course of nature.

Sheep next. The sheep-pens are up here, past the Branch Bank of Paris established for the convenience of the butchers, and behind the two pretty fountains they are making in the Market. My name is Bull: yet I think I should like to see as good twin fountains - not to say in Smithfield, but in England anywhere. Plenty of room; plenty of time. And here are sheep-dogs, sensible as ever, but with a certain French air about them - not without a suspicion of dominoes - with a kind of flavour of moustache and beard - demonstrative dogs, shaggy and loose where an English dog would be tight and close - not so troubled with business calculations as our English drovers' dogs, who have always got their sheep upon their minds, and think about their work, even resting, as you may see by their faces; but, dashing, showy, rather unreliable dogs: who might worry me instead of their legitimate charges if they saw occasion - and might see it somewhat suddenly.

The market for sheep passes off like the other two; and away they go, by THEIR allotted road to Paris. My way being the Railway, I make the best of it at twenty miles an hour; whirling through the now high-lighted landscape; thinking that the inexperienced green buds will be wishing, before long, they had not been tempted to come out so soon; and wondering who lives in this or that chateau, all window and lattice, and what the family may have for breakfast this sharp morning.

After the Market comes the Abattoir. What abattoir shall I visit first? Montmartre is the largest. So I will go there.

The abattoirs are all within the walls of Paris, with an eye to the receipt of the octroi duty; but, they stand in open places in the suburbs, removed from the press and bustle of the city. They are managed by the Syndicat or Guild of Butchers, under the inspection of the Police. Certain smaller items of the revenue derived from them are in part retained by the Guild for the payment of their expenses, and in part devoted by it to charitable purposes in connexion with the trade. They cost six hundred and eighty thousand pounds; and they return to the city of Paris an interest on that outlay, amounting to nearly six and a-half per cent.

Here, in a sufficiently dismantled space is the Abattoir of Montmartre, covering nearly nine acres of ground, surrounded by a high wall, and looking from the outside like a cavalry barrack. At the iron gates is a small functionary in a large cocked hat. 'Monsieur desires to see the abattoir? Most certainly.' State being inconvenient in private transactions, and Monsieur being already aware of the cocked hat, the functionary puts it into a little official bureau which it almost fills, and accompanies me in the modest attire - as to his head - of ordinary life.

Many of the animals from Poissy have come here. On the arrival of each drove, it was turned into yonder ample space, where each butcher who had bought, selected his own purchases. Some, we see now, in these long perspectives of stalls with a high over-hanging roof of wood and open tiles rising above the walls. While they rest here, before being slaughtered, they are required to be fed and watered, and the stalls must be kept clean. A stated amount of fodder must always be ready in the loft above; and the supervision is of the strictest kind. The same regulations apply to sheep and calves; for which, portions of these perspectives are strongly railed off. All the buildings are of the strongest and most solid description.

After traversing these lairs, through which, besides the upper provision for ventilation just mentioned, there may be a thorough current of air from opposite windows in the side walls, and from doors at either end, we traverse the broad, paved, court-yard until we come to the slaughter-houses. They are all exactly alike, and adjoin each other, to the number of eight or nine together, in blocks of solid building. Let us walk into the first.

It is firmly built and paved with stone. It is well lighted, thoroughly aired, and lavishly provided with fresh water. It has two doors opposite each other; the first, the door by which I entered from the main yard; the second, which is opposite, opening on another smaller yard, where the sheep and calves are killed on benches. The pavement of that yard, I see, slopes downward to a gutter, for its being more easily cleansed. The slaughter-house is fifteen feet high, sixteen feet and a-half wide, and thirty-three feet long. It is fitted with a powerful windlass, by which one man at the handle can bring the head of an ox down to the ground to receive the blow from the pole-axe that is to fell him - with the means of raising the carcass and keeping it suspended during the after-operation of dressing - and with hooks on which carcasses can hang, when completely prepared, without touching the walls. Upon the pavement of this first stone chamber, lies an ox scarcely dead. If I except the blood draining from him, into a little stone well in a corner of the pavement, the place is free from offence as the Place de la Concorde. It is infinitely purer and cleaner, I know, my friend the functionary, than the Cathedral of Notre Dame. Ha, ha! Monsieur is pleasant, but, truly, there is reason, too, in what he says.

I look into another of these slaughter-houses. 'Pray enter,' says a gentleman in bloody boots. 'This is a calf I have killed this morning. Having a little time upon my hands, I have cut and punctured this lace pattern in the coats of his stomach. It is pretty enough. I did it to divert myself.' - 'It is beautiful, Monsieur, the slaughterer!' He tells me I have the gentility to say so.

I look into rows of slaughter-houses. In many, retail dealers, who have come here for the purpose, are making bargains for meat. There is killing enough, certainly, to satiate an unused eye; and there are steaming carcasses enough, to suggest the expediency of a fowl and salad for dinner; but, everywhere, there is an orderly, clean, well-systematised routine of work in progress - horrible work at the best, if you please; but, so much the greater reason why it should be made the best of. I don't know (I think I have observed, my name is Bull) that a Parisian of the lowest order is particularly delicate, or that his nature is remarkable for an infinitesimal infusion of ferocity; but, I do know, my potent, grave, and common counselling Signors, that he is forced, when at this work, to submit himself to a thoroughly good system, and to make an Englishman very heartily ashamed of you.

Here, within the walls of the same abattoir, in other roomy and commodious buildings, are a place for converting the fat into tallow and packing it for market - a place for cleansing and scalding calves' heads and sheep's feet - a place for preparing tripe - stables and coach-houses for the butchers - innumerable conveniences, aiding in the diminution of offensiveness to its lowest possible point, and the raising of cleanliness and supervision to their highest. Hence, all the meat that goes out of the gate is sent away in clean covered carts. And if every trade connected with the slaughtering of animals were obliged by law to be carried on in the same place, I doubt, my friend, now reinstated in the cocked hat (whose civility these two francs imperfectly acknowledge, but appear munificently to repay), whether there could be better regulations than those which are carried out at the Abattoir of Montmartre. Adieu, my friend, for I am away to the other side of Paris, to the Abattoir of Grenelle! And there I find exactly the same thing on a smaller scale, with the addition of a magnificent Artesian well, and a different sort of conductor, in the person of a neat little woman with neat little eyes, and a neat little voice, who picks her neat little way among the bullocks in a very neat little pair of shoes and stockings.

Such is the Monument of French Folly which a foreigneering people have erected, in a national hatred and antipathy for common counselling wisdom. That wisdom, assembled in the City of London, having distinctly refused, after a debate of three days long, and by a majority of nearly seven to one, to associate itself with any Metropolitan Cattle Market unless it be held in the midst of the City, it follows that we shall lose the inestimable advantages of common counselling protection, and be thrown, for a market, on our own wretched resources. In all human probability we shall thus come, at last, to erect a monument of folly very like this French monument.

If that be done, the consequences are obvious. The leather trade will be ruined, by the introduction of American timber, to be manufactured into shoes for the fallen English; the Lord Mayor will be required, by the popular voice, to live entirely on frogs; and both these changes will (how, is not at present quite clear, but certainly somehow or other) fall on that unhappy landed interest which is always being killed, yet is always found to be alive - and kicking.

Footnotes:
(1) Give a bill
(2) Three months' imprisonment as reputed thieves.

THE END OF
Reprinted Pieces

THE SEVEN POOR TRAVELLERS—IN THREE CHAPTERS

CHAPTER I—IN THE OLD CITY OF ROCHESTER

Strictly speaking, there were only six Poor Travellers; but, being a Traveller myself, though an idle one, and being withal as poor as I hope to be, I brought the number up to seven. This word of explanation is due at once, for what says the inscription over the quaint old door?

RICHARD WATTS, Esq.
by his Will, dated 22 Aug. 1579,
founded this Charity
for Six poor Travellers,
who not being ROGUES, or PROCTORS,
May receive gratis for one Night,
Lodging, Entertainment,
and Fourpence each.

It was in the ancient little city of Rochester in Kent, of all the good days in the year upon a Christmas-eve, that I stood reading this inscription over the quaint old door in question. I had been wandering about the neighbouring Cathedral, and had seen the tomb of Richard Watts, with the effigy of worthy Master Richard starting out of it like a ship's figure-head; and I had felt that I could do no less, as I gave the Verger his fee, than inquire the way to Watts's Charity. The way being very short and very plain, I had come prosperously to the inscription and the quaint old door.

"Now," said I to myself, as I looked at the knocker, "I know I am not a Proctor; I wonder whether I am a Rogue!"

Upon the whole, though Conscience reproduced two or three pretty faces which might have had smaller attraction for a moral Goliath than they had had for me, who am but a Tom Thumb in that way, I came to the conclusion that I was not a Rogue. So, beginning to regard the establishment as in some sort my property, bequeathed to me and divers co-legatees, share and share alike, by the Worshipful Master Richard Watts, I stepped backward into the road to survey my inheritance.

I found it to be a clean white house, of a staid and venerable air, with the quaint old door already three times mentioned (an arched door), choice little long low lattice-windows, and a roof of three gables. The silent High Street of Rochester is full of gables, with old beams and timbers carved into strange faces. It is oddly garnished with a queer old clock that projects over the pavement out of a grave red-brick building, as if Time carried on business there, and hung out his sign. Sooth to say, he did an active stroke of work in Rochester, in the old days of the Romans, and the Saxons, and the Normans; and down to the times of King John, when the rugged castle—I will not undertake to say how many hundreds of years old then—was abandoned to the centuries of weather which have so defaced the dark apertures in its walls, that the ruin looks as if the rooks and daws had pecked its eyes out.

I was very well pleased, both with my property and its situation. While I was yet surveying it with growing content, I espied, at one of the upper lattices which stood open, a decent body, of a wholesome matronly appearance, whose eyes I caught inquiringly addressed to mine. They said so plainly, “Do you wish to see the house?” that I answered aloud, “Yes, if you please.” And within a minute the old door opened, and I bent my head, and went down two steps into the entry.

“This,” said the matronly presence, ushering me into a low room on the right, “is where the Travellers sit by the fire, and cook what bits of suppers they buy with their fourpences.”

“O! Then they have no Entertainment?” said I. For the inscription over the outer door was still running in my head, and I was mentally repeating, in a kind of tune, “Lodging, entertainment, and fourpence each.”

“They have a fire provided for ’em,” returned the matron—a mighty civil person, not, as I could make out, overpaid; “and these cooking utensils. And this what’s painted on a board is the rules for their behaviour. They have their fourpences when they get their tickets from the steward over the way,—for I don’t admit ’em myself, they must get their tickets first,—and sometimes one buys a rasher of bacon, and another a herring, and another a pound of potatoes, or what not. Sometimes two or three of ’em will club their fourpences together, and make a supper that way. But not much of anything is to be got for fourpence, at present, when provisions is so dear.”

“True indeed,” I remarked. I had been looking about the room, admiring its snug fireside at the upper end, its glimpse of the street through the low mullioned window, and its beams overhead. "It is very comfortable," said I.

"Ill-conwenient," observed the matronly presence.

I liked to hear her say so; for it showed a commendable anxiety to execute in no niggardly spirit the intentions of Master Richard Watts. But the room was really so well adapted to its purpose that I protested, quite enthusiastically, against her disparagement.

"Nay, ma'am," said I, "I am sure it is warm in winter and cool in summer. It has a look of homely welcome and soothing rest. It has a remarkably cosey fireside, the very blink of which, gleaming out into the street upon a winter night, is enough to warm all Rochester's heart. And as to the convenience of the six Poor Travellers—"

"I don't mean them," returned the presence. "I speak of its being an ill-conwenience to myself and my daughter, having no other room to sit in of a night."

This was true enough, but there was another quaint room of corresponding dimensions on the opposite side of the entry: so I stepped across to it, through the open doors of both rooms, and asked what this chamber was for.

"This," returned the presence, "is the Board Room. Where the gentlemen meet when they come here."

Let me see. I had counted from the street six upper windows besides these on the ground-story. Making a perplexed calculation in my mind, I rejoined, "Then the six Poor Travellers sleep upstairs?"

My new friend shook her head. "They sleep," she answered, "in two little outer galleries at the back, where their beds has always been, ever since the Charity was founded. It being so very ill-conwenient to me as things is at present, the gentlemen are going to take off a bit of the back-yard, and make a slip of a room for 'em there, to sit in before they go to bed."

"And then the six Poor Travellers," said I, "will be entirely out of the house?"

"Entirely out of the house," assented the presence, comfortably smoothing her hands. "Which is considered much better for all parties, and much more conwenient."

I had been a little startled, in the Cathedral, by the emphasis with which the effigy of Master Richard Watts was bursting out of his tomb; but I began to think, now, that it might be expected to come across the High Street some stormy night, and make a disturbance here.

Howbeit, I kept my thoughts to myself, and accompanied the presence to the little galleries at the back. I found them on a tiny scale, like the galleries in old inn-yards; and they were very clean.

While I was looking at them, the matron gave me to understand that the prescribed number of Poor Travellers were forthcoming every night from year's end to year's end; and that the beds were always occupied. My questions upon this, and her replies, brought us back to the Board Room so essential to the dignity of "the gentlemen," where she showed me the printed accounts of the Charity hanging up by the window. From them I gathered that the greater part of the property bequeathed by the Worshipful Master Richard Watts for the maintenance of this foundation was, at the period of his death, mere marsh-land; but that, in course of time, it had been reclaimed and built upon, and was very considerably increased in value. I found, too, that about a thirtieth part of the annual revenue was now expended on the purposes commemorated in the inscription over the door; the rest being handsomely laid out in Chancery, law expenses, collectorship, receivership, poundage, and other appendages of management, highly complimentary to the importance of the six Poor Travellers. In short, I made the not entirely new discovery that it may be said of an establishment like this, in dear old England, as of the fat oyster in the American story, that it takes a good many men to swallow it whole.

"And pray, ma'am," said I, sensible that the blankness of my face began to brighten as the thought occurred to me, "could one see these Travellers?"

"Well!" she returned dubiously, "no!"

"Not to-night, for instance!" said I.

"Well!" she returned more positively, "no. Nobody ever asked to see them, and nobody ever did see them."

As I am not easily balked in a design when I am set upon it, I urged to the good lady that this was Christmas-eve; that Christmas comes but once a year,—which is unhappily too true, for when it begins to stay with us the whole year round we shall make this earth a very different place; that I was possessed by the desire to treat the Travellers to a supper and a temperate glass of hot Wassail; that the voice of Fame had been heard in that land, declaring my ability to make hot Wassail; that if I were permitted to hold the feast, I should be found conformable to reason, sobriety, and good hours; in a word, that I could be merry and wise myself, and had been even known at a pinch to keep others so, although I was decorated with no badge or medal, and was not a Brother, Orator, Apostle, Saint, or Prophet of any denomination whatever. In the end I prevailed, to my great joy. It was settled that at nine o'clock that night a Turkey and a piece of Roast Beef should smoke upon the board; and that I, faint and unworthy minister for once of Master Richard Watts, should preside as the Christmas-supper host of the six Poor Travellers.

I went back to my inn to give the necessary directions for the Turkey and Roast Beef, and, during the remainder of the day, could settle to nothing for thinking of the Poor Travellers. When the wind blew hard against the windows,—it was a cold day, with dark gusts of sleet alternating with periods of wild brightness, as if the year were dying fitfully,—I pictured them advancing towards their resting-place along various cold roads, and felt delighted to think how little they foresaw the supper that awaited them. I painted their portraits in my mind, and indulged in little heightening touches. I made them footsore; I made them weary; I made them carry packs and bundles; I made them stop by finger-posts and milestones, leaning on their bent sticks, and looking wistfully at what was written there; I made them lose their way; and filled their five wits with apprehensions of lying out all night, and being frozen to death. I took up my hat, and went out, climbed to the top of the Old Castle, and looked over the windy hills that slope down to the Medway, almost believing that I could descry some of my Travellers in the distance. After it fell dark, and the Cathedral bell was heard in the invisible steeple—quite a bower of frosty rime when I had last seen it—striking five, six, seven, I became so full of my Travellers that I could eat no dinner, and felt constrained to watch them still in the red coals of my fire. They were all arrived by this time, I thought, had got their tickets, and were gone in.—There my pleasure was dashed by the reflection that probably some Travellers had come too late and were shut out.

After the Cathedral bell had struck eight, I could smell a delicious savour of Turkey and Roast Beef rising to the window of my adjoining bedroom, which looked down into the inn-yard just where the lights of the kitchen reddened a massive fragment of the Castle Wall. It was high time to make the Wassail now; therefore I had up the materials (which, together with their proportions and combinations, I must decline to impart, as the only secret of my own I was ever known to keep), and made a glorious jorum. Not in a bowl; for a bowl anywhere but on a shelf is a low superstition, fraught with cooling and slopping; but in a brown earthenware pitcher, tenderly suffocated, when full, with a coarse cloth. It being now upon the stroke of nine, I set out for Watts's Charity, carrying my brown beauty in my arms. I would trust Ben, the waiter, with untold gold; but there are strings in the human heart which must never be sounded by another, and drinks that I make myself are those strings in mine.

The Travellers were all assembled, the cloth was laid, and Ben had brought a great billet of wood, and had laid it artfully on the top of the fire, so that a touch or two of the poker after supper should make a roaring blaze. Having deposited my brown beauty in a red nook of the hearth, inside the fender, where she soon began to sing like an ethereal cricket, diffusing at the same time odours as of ripe vineyards, spice forests, and orange groves,—I say, having stationed my beauty in a place of security and improvement, I introduced myself to my guests by shaking hands all round, and giving them a hearty welcome.

I found the party to be thus composed. Firstly, myself. Secondly, a very decent man indeed, with his right arm in a sling, who had a certain clean agreeable smell of wood about him, from which I judged him to have something to do with shipbuilding. Thirdly, a little sailor-boy, a mere child, with a profusion of rich dark brown hair, and deep womanly-looking eyes. Fourthly, a shabby-genteel personage in a threadbare black suit, and apparently in very bad circumstances, with a dry suspicious look; the absent buttons on his waistcoat eked out with red tape; and a bundle of extraordinarily tattered papers sticking out of an inner breast-pocket. Fifthly, a foreigner by birth, but an Englishman in speech, who carried his pipe in the band of his hat, and lost no time in telling me, in an easy, simple, engaging way, that he was a watchmaker from Geneva, and travelled all about the Continent, mostly on foot, working as a journeyman, and seeing new countries,—possibly (I thought) also smuggling a watch or so, now and then. Sixthly, a little widow, who had been very pretty and was still very young, but whose beauty had been wrecked in some great misfortune, and whose manner was remarkably timid, scared, and solitary. Seventhly and lastly, a Traveller of a kind familiar to my boyhood, but now almost obsolete,—a Book-Pedler, who had a quantity of Pamphlets and Numbers with him, and who presently boasted that he could repeat more verses in an evening than he could sell in a twelvemonth.

All these I have mentioned in the order in which they sat at table. I presided, and the matronly presence faced me. We were not long in taking our places, for the supper had arrived with me, in the following procession:

Myself with the pitcher.
Ben with Beer.
Inattentive Boy with hot plates. Inattentive Boy with hot plates.
THE TURKEY.
Female carrying sauces to be heated on the spot.
THE BEEF.
Man with Tray on his head, containing Vegetables and Sundries.
Volunteer Hostler from Hotel, grinning,
And rendering no assistance.

As we passed along the High Street, comet-like, we left a long tail of fragrance behind us which caused the public to stop, sniffing in wonder. We had previously left at the corner of the inn-yard a wall-eyed young man connected with the Fly department, and well accustomed to the sound of a railway whistle which Ben always carries in his pocket, whose instructions were, so soon as he should hear the whistle blown, to dash into the kitchen, seize the hot plum-pudding and mince-pies, and speed with them to Watts's Charity, where they would be received (he was further instructed) by the sauce-female, who would be provided with brandy in a blue state of combustion.

All these arrangements were executed in the most exact and punctual manner. I never saw a finer turkey, finer beef, or greater prodigality of sauce and gravy;—and my Travellers did wonderful justice to everything set before them. It made my heart rejoice to observe how their wind and frost hardened faces softened in the clatter of plates and knives and forks, and mellowed in the fire and supper heat. While their hats and caps and wrappers, hanging up, a few small bundles on the ground in a corner, and in another corner three or four old walking-sticks, worn down at the end to mere fringe, linked this smug interior with the bleak outside in a golden chain.

When supper was done, and my brown beauty had been elevated on the table, there was a general requisition to me to "take the corner;" which suggested to me comfortably enough how much my friends here made of a fire,—for when had *I* ever thought so highly of the corner, since the days when I connected it with Jack Horner? However, as I declined, Ben, whose touch on all convivial instruments is perfect, drew the table apart, and instructing my Travellers to open right and left on either side of me, and form round the fire, closed up the centre with myself and my chair, and preserved the order we had kept at table. He had already, in a tranquil manner, boxed the ears of the inattentive boys until they had been by imperceptible degrees boxed out of the room; and he now rapidly skirmished the sauce-female into the High Street, disappeared, and softly closed the door.

This was the time for bringing the poker to bear on the billet of wood. I tapped it three times, like an enchanted talisman, and a brilliant host of merry-makers burst out of it, and sported off by the chimney,—rushing up the middle in a fiery country dance, and never coming down again. Meanwhile, by their sparkling light, which threw our lamp into the shade, I filled the glasses, and gave my Travellers, CHRISTMAS!—CHRISTMAS-EVE, my friends, when the shepherds, who were Poor Travellers, too, in their way, heard the Angels sing, “On earth, peace. Good-will towards men!”

I don’t know who was the first among us to think that we ought to take hands as we sat, in deference to the toast, or whether any one of us anticipated the others, but at any rate we all did it. We then drank to the memory of the good Master Richard Watts. And I wish his Ghost may never have had worse usage under that roof than it had from us.

It was the witching time for Story-telling. “Our whole life, Travellers,” said I, “is a story more or less intelligible,—generally less; but we shall read it by a clearer light when it is ended. I, for one, am so divided this night between fact and fiction, that I scarce know which is which. Shall I beguile the time by telling you a story as we sit here?”

They all answered, yes. I had little to tell them, but I was bound by my own proposal. Therefore, after looking for awhile at the spiral column of smoke wreathing up from my brown beauty, through which I could have almost sworn I saw the effigy of Master Richard Watts less startled than usual, I fired away.

CHAPTER II—THE STORY OF RICHARD DOUBLEDICK

In the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety-nine, a relative of mine came limping down, on foot, to this town of Chatham. I call it this town, because if anybody present knows to a nicety where Rochester ends and Chatham begins, it is more than I do. He was a poor traveller, with not a farthing in his pocket. He sat by the fire in this very room, and he slept one night in a bed that will be occupied to-night by some one here.

My relative came down to Chatham to enlist in a cavalry regiment, if a cavalry regiment would have him; if not, to take King George's shilling from any corporal or sergeant who would put a bunch of ribbons in his hat. His object was to get shot; but he thought he might as well ride to death as be at the trouble of walking.

My relative's Christian name was Richard, but he was better known as Dick. He dropped his own surname on the road down, and took up that of Doubledick. He was passed as Richard Doubledick; age, twenty-two; height, five foot ten; native place, Exmouth, which he had never been near in his life. There was no cavalry in Chatham when he limped over the bridge here with half a shoe to his dusty feet, so he enlisted into a regiment of the line, and was glad to get drunk and forget all about it.

You are to know that this relative of mine had gone wrong, and run wild. His heart was in the right place, but it was sealed up. He had been betrothed to a good and beautiful girl, whom he had loved better than she—or perhaps even he—believed; but in an evil hour he had given her cause to say to him solemnly, "Richard, I will never marry another man. I will live single for your sake, but Mary Marshall's lips"—her name was Mary Marshall—"never address another word to you on earth. Go, Richard! Heaven forgive you!" This finished him. This brought him down to Chatham. This made him Private Richard Doubledick, with a determination to be shot.

There was not a more dissipated and reckless soldier in Chatham barracks, in the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety-nine, than Private Richard Doubledick. He associated with the dregs of every regiment; he was as seldom sober as he could be, and was constantly under punishment. It became clear to the whole barracks that Private Richard Doubledick would very soon be flogged.

Now the Captain of Richard Doubledick's company was a young gentleman not above five years his senior, whose eyes had an expression in them which affected Private Richard Doubledick in a very remarkable way. They were bright, handsome, dark eyes,—what are called laughing eyes generally, and, when serious, rather steady than severe,—but they were the only eyes now left in his narrowed world that Private Richard Doubledick could not stand. Unabashed by evil report and punishment, defiant of everything else and everybody else, he had but to know that those eyes looked at him for a moment, and he felt ashamed. He could not so much as salute Captain Taunton in the street like any other officer. He was reproached and confused,—troubled by the mere possibility of the captain's looking at him. In his worst moments, he would rather turn back, and go any distance out of his way, than encounter those two handsome, dark, bright eyes.

One day, when Private Richard Doubledick came out of the Black hole, where he had been passing the last eight-and-forty hours, and in which retreat he spent a good deal of his time, he was ordered to betake himself to Captain Taunton's quarters. In the stale and squalid state of a man just out of the Black hole, he had less fancy than ever for being seen by the captain; but he was not so mad yet as to disobey orders, and consequently went up to the terrace overlooking the parade-ground, where the officers' quarters were; twisting and breaking in his hands, as he went along, a bit of the straw that had formed the decorative furniture of the Black hole.

"Come in!" cried the Captain, when he had knocked with his knuckles at the door. Private Richard Doubledick pulled off his cap, took a stride forward, and felt very conscious that he stood in the light of the dark, bright eyes.

There was a silent pause. Private Richard Doubledick had put the straw in his mouth, and was gradually doubling it up into his windpipe and choking himself.

"Doubledick," said the Captain, "do you know where you are going to?"

"To the Devil, sir?" faltered Doubledick.

"Yes," returned the Captain. "And very fast."

Private Richard Doubledick turned the straw of the Black hole in his month, and made a miserable salute of acquiescence.

"Doubledick," said the Captain, "since I entered his Majesty's service, a boy of seventeen, I have been pained to see many men of promise going that road; but I have never been so pained to see a man make the shameful journey as I have been, ever since you joined the regiment, to see you."

Private Richard Doubledick began to find a film stealing over the floor at which he looked; also to find the legs of the Captain's breakfast-table turning crooked, as if he saw them through water.

"I am only a common soldier, sir," said he. "It signifies very little what such a poor brute comes to."

"You are a man," returned the Captain, with grave indignation, "of education and superior advantages; and if you say that, meaning what you say, you have sunk lower than I had believed. How low that must be, I leave you to consider, knowing what I know of your disgrace, and seeing what I see."

"I hope to get shot soon, sir," said Private Richard Doubledick; "and then the regiment and the world together will be rid of me."

The legs of the table were becoming very crooked. Doubledick, looking up to steady his vision, met the eyes that had so strong an influence over him. He put his hand before his own eyes, and the breast of his disgrace-jacket swelled as if it would fly asunder.

"I would rather," said the young Captain, "see this in you, Doubledick, than I would see five thousand guineas counted out upon this table for a gift to my good mother. Have you a mother?"

"I am thankful to say she is dead, sir."

"If your praises," returned the Captain, "were sounded from mouth to mouth through the whole regiment, through the whole army, through the whole country, you would wish she had lived to say, with pride and joy, 'He is my son!'"

"Spare me, sir," said Doubledick. "She would never have heard any good of me. She would never have had any pride and joy in owning herself my mother. Love and compassion she might have had, and would have always had, I know but not—Spare me, sir! I am a broken wretch, quite at your mercy!" And he turned his face to the wall, and stretched out his imploring hand.

"My friend—" began the Captain.

"God bless you, sir!" sobbed Private Richard Doubledick.

"You are at the crisis of your fate. Hold your course unchanged a little longer, and you know what must happen. *I* know even better than you can imagine, that, after that has happened, you are lost. No man who could shed those tears could bear those marks."

"I fully believe it, sir," in a low, shivering voice said Private Richard Doubledick.

"But a man in any station can do his duty," said the young Captain, "and, in doing it, can earn his own respect, even if his case should be so very unfortunate and so very rare that he can earn no other man's. A common soldier, poor brute though you called him just now, has this advantage in the stormy times we live in, that he always does his duty before a host of sympathising witnesses. Do you doubt that he may so do it as to be extolled through a whole regiment, through a whole army, through a whole country? Turn while you may yet retrieve the past, and try."

"I will! I ask for only one witness, sir," cried Richard, with a bursting heart.

"I understand you. I will be a watchful and a faithful one."

I have heard from Private Richard Doubledick's own lips, that he dropped down upon his knee, kissed that officer's hand, arose, and went out of the light of the dark, bright eyes, an altered man.

In that year, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-nine, the French were in Egypt, in Italy, in Germany, where not? Napoleon Bonaparte had likewise begun to stir against us in India, and most men could read the signs of the great troubles that were coming on. In the very next year, when we formed an alliance with Austria against him, Captain Taunton's regiment was on service in India. And there was not a finer non-commissioned officer in it,—no, nor in the whole line—than Corporal Richard Doubledick.

In eighteen hundred and one, the Indian army were on the coast of Egypt. Next year was the year of the proclamation of the short peace, and they were recalled. It had then become well known to thousands of men, that wherever Captain Taunton, with the dark, bright eyes, led, there, close to him, ever at his side, firm as a rock, true as the sun, and brave as Mars, would be certain to be found, while life beat in their hearts, that famous soldier, Sergeant Richard Doubledick.

Eighteen hundred and five, besides being the great year of Trafalgar, was a year of hard fighting in India. That year saw such wonders done by a Sergeant-Major, who cut his way single-handed through a solid mass of men, recovered the colours of his regiment, which had been seized from the hand of a poor boy shot through the heart, and rescued his wounded Captain, who was down, and in a very jungle of horses' hoofs and sabres,—saw such wonders done, I say, by this brave Sergeant-Major, that he was specially made the bearer of the colours he had won; and Ensign Richard Doubledick had risen from the ranks.

Sorely cut up in every battle, but always reinforced by the bravest of men,—for the fame of following the old colours, shot through and through, which Ensign Richard Doubledick had saved, inspired all breasts,—this regiment fought its way through the Peninsular war, up to the investment of Badajos in eighteen hundred and twelve. Again and again it had been cheered through the British ranks until the tears had sprung into men's eyes at the mere hearing of the mighty British voice, so exultant in their valour; and there was not a drummer-boy but knew the legend, that wherever the two friends, Major Taunton, with the dark, bright eyes, and Ensign Richard Doubledick, who was devoted to him, were seen to go, there the boldest spirits in the English army became wild to follow.

One day, at Badajos,—not in the great storming, but in repelling a hot sally of the besieged upon our men at work in the trenches, who had given way,—the two officers found themselves hurrying forward, face to face, against a party of French infantry, who made a stand. There was an officer at their head, encouraging his men,—a courageous, handsome, gallant officer of five-and-thirty, whom Doubledick saw hurriedly, almost momentarily, but saw well. He particularly noticed this officer waving his sword, and rallying his men with an eager and excited cry, when they fired in obedience to his gesture, and Major Taunton dropped.

It was over in ten minutes more, and Doubledick returned to the spot where he had laid the best friend man ever had on a coat spread upon the wet clay. Major Taunton's uniform was opened at the breast, and on his shirt were three little spots of blood.

"Dear Doubledick," said he, "I am dying."

"For the love of Heaven, no!" exclaimed the other, kneeling down beside him, and passing his arm round his neck to raise his head.

"Taunton! My preserver, my guardian angel, my witness! Dearest, truest, kindest of human beings! Taunton! For God's sake!"

The bright, dark eyes—so very, very dark now, in the pale face—smiled upon him; and the hand he had kissed thirteen years ago laid itself fondly on his breast.

"Write to my mother. You will see Home again. Tell her how we became friends. It will comfort her, as it comforts me."

He spoke no more, but faintly signed for a moment towards his hair as it fluttered in the wind. The Ensign understood him. He smiled again when he saw that, and, gently turning his face over on the supporting arm as if for rest, died, with his hand upon the breast in which he had revived a soul.

No dry eye looked on Ensign Richard Doubledick that melancholy day. He buried his friend on the field, and became a lone, bereaved man. Beyond his duty he appeared to have but two remaining cares in life,—one, to preserve the little packet of hair he was to give to Taunton's mother; the other, to encounter that French officer who had rallied the men under whose fire Taunton fell. A new legend now began to circulate among our troops; and it was, that when he and the French officer came face to face once more, there would be weeping in France.

The war went on—and through it went the exact picture of the French officer on the one side, and the bodily reality upon the other—until the Battle of Toulouse was fought. In the returns sent home appeared these words: "Severely wounded, but not dangerously, Lieutenant Richard Doubledick."

At Midsummer-time, in the year eighteen hundred and fourteen, Lieutenant Richard Doubledick, now a browned soldier, seven-and-thirty years of age, came home to England invalided. He brought the hair with him, near his heart. Many a French officer had he seen since that day; many a dreadful night, in searching with men and lanterns for his wounded, had he relieved French officers lying disabled; but the mental picture and the reality had never come together.

Though he was weak and suffered pain, he lost not an hour in getting down to Frome in Somersetshire, where Taunton's mother lived. In the sweet, compassionate words that naturally present themselves to the mind to-night, "he was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow."

It was a Sunday evening, and the lady sat at her quiet garden-window, reading the Bible; reading to herself, in a trembling voice, that very passage in it, as I have heard him tell. He heard the words: “Young man, I say unto thee, arise!”

He had to pass the window; and the bright, dark eyes of his debased time seemed to look at him. Her heart told her who he was; she came to the door quickly, and fell upon his neck.

“He saved me from ruin, made me a human creature, won me from infamy and shame. O, God for ever bless him! As He will, He Will!”

“He will!” the lady answered. “I know he is in heaven!” Then she piteously cried, “But O, my darling boy, my darling boy!”

Never from the hour when Private Richard Doubledick enlisted at Chatham had the Private, Corporal, Sergeant, Sergeant-Major, Ensign, or Lieutenant breathed his right name, or the name of Mary Marshall, or a word of the story of his life, into any ear except his reclaimer’s. That previous scene in his existence was closed. He had firmly resolved that his expiation should be to live unknown; to disturb no more the peace that had long grown over his old offences; to let it be revealed, when he was dead, that he had striven and suffered, and had never forgotten; and then, if they could forgive him and believe him—well, it would be time enough—time enough!

But that night, remembering the words he had cherished for two years, “Tell her how we became friends. It will comfort her, as it comforts me,” he related everything. It gradually seemed to him as if in his maturity he had recovered a mother; it gradually seemed to her as if in her bereavement she had found a son. During his stay in England, the quiet garden into which he had slowly and painfully crept, a stranger, became the boundary of his home; when he was able to rejoin his regiment in the spring, he left the garden, thinking was this indeed the first time he had ever turned his face towards the old colours with a woman’s blessing!

He followed them—so ragged, so scarred and pierced now, that they would scarcely hold together—to Quatre Bras and Ligny. He stood beside them, in an awful stillness of many men, shadowy through the mist and drizzle of a wet June forenoon, on the field of Waterloo. And down to that hour the picture in his mind of the French officer had never been compared with the reality.

The famous regiment was in action early in the battle, and received its first check in many an eventful year, when he was seen to fall. But it swept on to avenge him, and left behind it no such creature in the world of consciousness as Lieutenant Richard Doubledick.

Through pits of mire, and pools of rain; along deep ditches, once roads, that were pounded and ploughed to pieces by artillery, heavy waggons, tramp of men and horses, and the struggle of every wheeled thing that could carry wounded soldiers; jolted among the dying and the dead, so disfigured by blood and mud as to be hardly recognisable for humanity; undisturbed by the moaning of men and the shrieking of horses, which, newly taken from the peaceful pursuits of life, could not endure the sight of the stragglers lying by the wayside, never to resume their toilsome journey; dead, as to any sentient life that was in it, and yet alive,—the form that had been Lieutenant Richard Doubledick, with whose praises England rang, was conveyed to Brussels. There it was tenderly laid down in hospital; and there it lay, week after week, through the long bright summer days, until the harvest, spared by war, had ripened and was gathered in.

Over and over again the sun rose and set upon the crowded city; over and over again the moonlight nights were quiet on the plains of Waterloo: and all that time was a blank to what had been Lieutenant Richard Doubledick. Rejoicing troops marched into Brussels, and marched out; brothers and fathers, sisters, mothers, and wives, came thronging thither, drew their lots of joy or agony, and departed; so many times a day the bells rang; so many times the shadows of the great buildings changed; so many lights sprang up at dusk; so many feet passed here and there upon the pavements; so many hours of sleep and cooler air of night succeeded: indifferent to all, a marble face lay on a bed, like the face of a recumbent statue on the tomb of Lieutenant Richard Doubledick.

Slowly labouring, at last, through a long heavy dream of confused time and place, presenting faint glimpses of army surgeons whom he knew, and of faces that had been familiar to his youth,—dearest and kindest among them, Mary Marshall's, with a solicitude upon it more like reality than anything he could discern,—Lieutenant Richard Doubledick came back to life. To the beautiful life of a calm autumn evening sunset, to the peaceful life of a fresh quiet room with a large window standing open; a balcony beyond, in which were moving leaves and sweet-smelling flowers; beyond, again, the clear sky, with the sun full in his sight, pouring its golden radiance on his bed.

It was so tranquil and so lovely that he thought he had passed into another world. And he said in a faint voice, “Taunton, are you near me?”

A face bent over him. Not his, his mother’s.

“I came to nurse you. We have nursed you many weeks. You were moved here long ago. Do you remember nothing?”

“Nothing.”

The lady kissed his cheek, and held his hand, soothing him.

“Where is the regiment? What has happened? Let me call you mother. What has happened, mother?”

“A great victory, dear. The war is over, and the regiment was the bravest in the field.”

His eyes kindled, his lips trembled, he sobbed, and the tears ran down his face. He was very weak, too weak to move his hand.

“Was it dark just now?” he asked presently.

“No.”

“It was only dark to me? Something passed away, like a black shadow. But as it went, and the sun—O the blessed sun, how beautiful it is!—touched my face, I thought I saw a light white cloud pass out at the door. Was there nothing that went out?”

She shook her head, and in a little while he fell asleep, she still holding his hand, and soothing him.

From that time, he recovered. Slowly, for he had been desperately wounded in the head, and had been shot in the body, but making some little advance every day. When he had gained sufficient strength to converse as he lay in bed, he soon began to remark that Mrs. Taunton always brought him back to his own history. Then he recalled his preserver’s dying words, and thought, “It comforts her.”

One day he awoke out of a sleep, refreshed, and asked her to read to him. But the curtain of the bed, softening the light, which she always drew back when he awoke, that she might see him from her table at the bedside where she sat at work, was held undrawn; and a woman’s voice spoke, which was not hers.

“Can you bear to see a stranger?” it said softly. “Will you like to see a stranger?”

“Stranger!” he repeated. The voice awoke old memories, before the days of Private Richard Doubledick.

“A stranger now, but not a stranger once,” it said in tones that thrilled him. “Richard, dear Richard, lost through so many years, my name—”

He cried out her name, “Mary,” and she held him in her arms, and his head lay on her bosom.

“I am not breaking a rash vow, Richard. These are not Mary Marshall’s lips that speak. I have another name.”

She was married.

“I have another name, Richard. Did you ever hear it?”

“Never!”

He looked into her face, so pensively beautiful, and wondered at the smile upon it through her tears.

“Think again, Richard. Are you sure you never heard my altered name?”

“Never!”

“Don’t move your head to look at me, dear Richard. Let it lie here, while I tell my story. I loved a generous, noble man; loved him with my whole heart; loved him for years and years; loved him faithfully, devotedly; loved him without hope of return; loved him, knowing nothing of his highest qualities—not even knowing that he was alive. He was a brave soldier. He was honoured and beloved by thousands of thousands, when the mother of his dear friend found me, and showed me that in all his triumphs he had never forgotten me. He was wounded in a great battle. He was brought, dying, here, into Brussels. I came to watch and tend him, as I would have joyfully gone, with such a purpose, to the dreariest ends of the earth. When he knew no one else, he knew me. When he suffered most, he bore his sufferings barely murmuring, content to rest his head where your rests now. When he lay at the point of death, he married me, that he might call me Wife before he died. And the name, my dear love, that I took on that forgotten night—”

“I know it now!” he sobbed. “The shadowy remembrance strengthens. It is come back. I thank Heaven that my mind is quite restored! My Mary, kiss me; lull this weary head to rest, or I shall die of gratitude. His parting words were fulfilled. I see Home again!”

Well! They were happy. It was a long recovery, but they were happy through it all. The snow had melted on the ground, and the birds were singing in the leafless thickets of the early spring, when those three were first able to ride out together, and when people flocked about the open carriage to cheer and congratulate Captain Richard Doubledick.

But even then it became necessary for the Captain, instead of returning to England, to complete his recovery in the climate of Southern France. They found a spot upon the Rhône, within a ride of the old town of Avignon, and within view of its broken bridge, which was all they could desire; they lived there, together, six months; then returned to England. Mrs. Taunton, growing old after three years—though not so old as that her bright, dark eyes were dimmed—and remembering that her strength had been benefited by the change resolved to go back for a year to those parts. So she went with a faithful servant, who had often carried her son in his arms; and she was to be rejoined and escorted home, at the year's end, by Captain Richard Doubledick.

She wrote regularly to her children (as she called them now), and they to her. She went to the neighbourhood of Aix; and there, in their own château near the farmer's house she rented, she grew into intimacy with a family belonging to that part of France. The intimacy began in her often meeting among the vineyards a pretty child, a girl with a most compassionate heart, who was never tired of listening to the solitary English lady's stories of her poor son and the cruel wars. The family were as gentle as the child, and at length she came to know them so well that she accepted their invitation to pass the last month of her residence abroad under their roof. All this intelligence she wrote home, piecemeal as it came about, from time to time; and at last enclosed a polite note, from the head of the château, soliciting, on the occasion of his approaching mission to that neighbourhood, the honour of the company of cet homme si justement célèbre, Monsieur le Capitaine Richard Doubledick.

Captain Doubledick, now a hardy, handsome man in the full vigour of life, broader across the chest and shoulders than he had ever been before, dispatched a courteous reply, and followed it in person. Travelling through all that extent of country after three years of Peace, he blessed the better days on which the world had fallen. The corn was golden, not drenched in unnatural red; was bound in sheaves for food, not trodden underfoot by men in mortal fight. The smoke rose up from peaceful hearths, not blazing ruins. The carts were laden with the fair fruits of the earth, not with wounds and death. To him who had so often seen the terrible reverse, these things were beautiful indeed; and they brought him in a softened spirit to the old château near Aix upon a deep blue evening.

It was a large château of the genuine old ghostly kind, with round towers, and extinguishers, and a high leaden roof, and more windows than Aladdin's Palace. The lattice blinds were all thrown open after the heat of the day, and there were glimpses of rambling walls and corridors within. Then there were immense out-buildings fallen into partial decay, masses of dark trees, terrace-gardens, balustrades; tanks of water, too weak to play and too dirty to work; statues, weeds, and thickets of iron railing that seemed to have overgrown themselves like the shrubberies, and to have branched out in all manner of wild shapes. The entrance doors stood open, as doors often do in that country when the heat of the day is past; and the Captain saw no bell or knocker, and walked in.

He walked into a lofty stone hall, refreshingly cool and gloomy after the glare of a Southern day's travel. Extending along the four sides of this hall was a gallery, leading to suites of rooms; and it was lighted from the top. Still no bell was to be seen.

"Faith," said the Captain halting, ashamed of the clanking of his boots, "this is a ghostly beginning!"

He started back, and felt his face turn white. In the gallery, looking down at him, stood the French officer—the officer whose picture he had carried in his mind so long and so far. Compared with the original, at last—in every lineament how like it was!

He moved, and disappeared, and Captain Richard Doubledick heard his steps coming quickly down own into the hall. He entered through an archway. There was a bright, sudden look upon his face, much such a look as it had worn in that fatal moment.

Monsieur le Capitaine Richard Doubledick? Enchanted to receive him! A thousand apologies! The servants were all out in the air. There was a little fête among them in the garden. In effect, it was the fête day of my daughter, the little cherished and protected of Madame Taunton.

He was so gracious and so frank that Monsieur le Capitaine Richard Doubledick could not withhold his hand. "It is the hand of a brave Englishman," said the French officer, retaining it while he spoke. "I could respect a brave Englishman, even as my foe, how much more as my friend! I also am a soldier."

"He has not remembered me, as I have remembered him; he did not take such note of my face, that day, as I took of his," thought Captain Richard Doubledick. "How shall I tell him?"

The French officer conducted his guest into a garden and presented him to his wife, an engaging and beautiful woman, sitting with Mrs. Taunton in a whimsical old-fashioned pavilion. His daughter, her fair young face beaming with joy, came running to embrace him; and there was a boy-baby to tumble down among the orange trees on the broad steps, in making for his father's legs. A multitude of children visitors were dancing to sprightly music; and all the servants and peasants about the château were dancing too. It was a scene of innocent happiness that might have been invented for the climax of the scenes of peace which had soothed the Captain's journey.

He looked on, greatly troubled in his mind, until a resounding bell rang, and the French officer begged to show him his rooms. They went upstairs into the gallery from which the officer had looked down; and Monsieur le Capitaine Richard Doubledick was cordially welcomed to a grand outer chamber, and a smaller one within, all clocks and draperies, and hearths, and brazen dogs, and tiles, and cool devices, and elegance, and vastness.

"You were at Waterloo," said the French officer.

"I was," said Captain Richard Doubledick. "And at Badajos."

Left alone with the sound of his own stern voice in his ears, he sat down to consider, What shall I do, and how shall I tell him? At that time, unhappily, many deplorable duels had been fought between English and French officers, arising out of the recent war; and these duels, and how to avoid this officer's hospitality, were the uppermost thought in Captain Richard Doubledick's mind.

He was thinking, and letting the time run out in which he should have dressed for dinner, when Mrs. Taunton spoke to him outside the door, asking if he could give her the letter he had brought from Mary. "His mother, above all," the Captain thought. "How shall I tell *her*?"

"You will form a friendship with your host, I hope," said Mrs. Taunton, whom he hurriedly admitted, "that will last for life. He is so true-hearted and so generous, Richard, that you can hardly fail to esteem one another. If He had been spared," she kissed (not without tears) the locket in which she wore his hair, "he would have appreciated him with his own magnanimity, and would have been truly happy that the evil days were past which made such a man his enemy."

She left the room; and the Captain walked, first to one window, whence he could see the dancing in the garden, then to another window, whence he could see the smiling prospect and the peaceful vineyards.

"Spirit of my departed friend," said he, "is it through thee these better thoughts are rising in my mind? Is it thou who hast shown me, all the way I have been drawn to meet this man, the blessings of the altered time? Is it thou who hast sent thy stricken mother to me, to stay my angry hand? Is it from thee the whisper comes, that this man did his duty as thou didst,—and as I did, through thy guidance, which has wholly saved me here on earth,—and that he did no more?"

He sat down, with his head buried in his hands, and, when he rose up, made the second strong resolution of his life,—that neither to the French officer, nor to the mother of his departed friend, nor to any soul, while either of the two was living, would he breathe what only he knew. And when he touched that French officer's glass with his own, that day at dinner, he secretly forgave him in the name of the Divine Forgiver of injuries.

* * * * *

Here I ended my story as the first Poor Traveller. But, if I had told it now, I could have added that the time has since come when the son of Major Richard Doubledick, and the son of that French officer, friends as their fathers were before them, fought side by side in one cause, with their respective nations, like long-divided brothers whom the better times have brought together, fast united.

CHAPTER III—THE ROAD

My story being finished, and the Wassail too, we broke up as the Cathedral bell struck Twelve. I did not take leave of my travellers that night; for it had come into my head to reappear, in conjunction with some hot coffee, at seven in the morning.

As I passed along the High Street, I heard the Waits at a distance, and struck off to find them. They were playing near one of the old gates of the City, at the corner of a wonderfully quaint row of red-brick tenements, which the clarionet obligingly informed me were inhabited by the Minor-Canons. They had odd little porches over the doors, like sounding-boards over old pulpits; and I thought I should like to see one of the Minor-Canons come out upon his top stop, and favour us with a little Christmas discourse about the poor scholars of Rochester; taking for his text the words of his Master relative to the devouring of Widows' houses.

The clarionet was so communicative, and my inclinations were (as they generally are) of so vagabond a tendency, that I accompanied the Waits across an open green called the Vines, and assisted—in the French sense—at the performance of two waltzes, two polkas, and three Irish melodies, before I thought of my inn any more. However, I returned to it then, and found a fiddle in the kitchen, and Ben, the wall-eyed young man, and two chambermaids, circling round the great deal table with the utmost animation.

I had a very bad night. It cannot have been owing to the turkey or the beef,—and the Wassail is out of the question—but in every endeavour that I made to get to sleep I failed most dismally. I was never asleep; and in whatsoever unreasonable direction my mind rambled, the effigy of Master Richard Watts perpetually embarrassed it.

In a word, I only got out of the Worshipful Master Richard Watts's way by getting out of bed in the dark at six o'clock, and tumbling, as my custom is, into all the cold water that could be accumulated for the purpose. The outer air was dull and cold enough in the street, when I came down there; and the one candle in our supper-room at Watts's Charity looked as pale in the burning as if it had had a bad night too. But my Travellers had all slept soundly, and they took to the hot coffee, and the piles of bread-and-butter, which Ben had arranged like deals in a timber-yard, as kindly as I could desire.

While it was yet scarcely daylight, we all came out into the street together, and there shook hands. The widow took the little sailor towards Chatham, where he was to find a steamboat for Sheerness; the lawyer, with an extremely knowing look, went his own way, without committing himself by announcing his intentions; two more struck off by the cathedral and old castle for Maidstone; and the book-pedler accompanied me over the bridge. As for me, I was going to walk by Cobham Woods, as far upon my way to London as I fancied.

When I came to the stile and footpath by which I was to diverge from the main road, I bade farewell to my last remaining Poor Traveller, and pursued my way alone. And now the mists began to rise in the most beautiful manner, and the sun to shine; and as I went on through the bracing air, seeing the hoarfrost sparkle everywhere, I felt as if all Nature shared in the joy of the great Birthday.

Going through the woods, the softness of my tread upon the mossy ground and among the brown leaves enhanced the Christmas sacredness by which I felt surrounded. As the whitened stems environed me, I thought how the Founder of the time had never raised his benignant hand, save to bless and heal, except in the case of one unconscious tree. By Cobham Hall, I came to the village, and the churchyard where the dead had been quietly buried, "in the sure and certain hope" which Christmas time inspired. What children could I see at play, and not be loving of, recalling who had loved them! No garden that I passed was out of unison with the day, for I remembered that the tomb was in a garden, and that "she, supposing him to be the gardener," had said, "Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." In time, the distant river with the ships came full in view, and with it pictures of the poor fishermen, mending their nets, who arose and followed him,—of the teaching of the people from a ship pushed off a little way from shore, by reason of the multitude,—of a majestic figure walking on the water, in the loneliness of night. My very shadow on the ground was eloquent of Christmas; for did not the people lay their sick where the more shadows of the men who had heard and seen him might fall as they passed along?

Thus Christmas begirt me, far and near, until I had come to Blackheath, and had walked down the long vista of gnarled old trees in Greenwich Park, and was being steam-rattled through the mists now closing in once more, towards the lights of London. Brightly they shone, but not so brightly as my own fire, and the brighter faces around it, when we came together to celebrate the day. And there I told of worthy Master Richard Watts, and of my supper with the Six Poor Travellers who were neither Rogues nor Proctors, and from that hour to this I have never seen one of them again.

THE END OF
The Seven Poor Travellers

SKETCHES BY BOZ

Illustrative of Every-Day Life
and Every-Day People

By CHARLES DICKENS

LONDON: CHAPMAN & HALL, ld.
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1903

PREFACE

The whole of these Sketches were written and published, one by one, when I was a very young man. They were collected and republished while I was still a very young man; and sent into the world with all their imperfections (a good many) on their heads.

They comprise my first attempts at authorship—with the exception of certain tragedies achieved at the mature age of eight or ten, and represented with great applause to overflowing nurseries. I am conscious of their often being extremely crude and ill-considered, and bearing obvious marks of haste and inexperience; particularly in that section of the present volume which is comprised under the general head of Tales.

But as this collection is not originated now, and was very leniently and favourably received when it was first made, I have not felt it right either to remodel or expunge, beyond a few words and phrases here and there.

OUR PARISH

CHAPTER I—THE BEADLE. THE PARISH ENGINE. THE SCHOOLMASTER

How much is conveyed in those two short words—'The Parish!' And with how many tales of distress and misery, of broken fortune and ruined hopes, too often of unrelieved wretchedness and successful knavery, are they associated! A poor man, with small earnings, and a large family, just manages to live on from hand to mouth, and to procure food from day to day; he has barely sufficient to satisfy the present cravings of nature, and can take no heed of the future. His taxes are in arrear, quarter-day passes by, another quarter-day arrives: he can procure no more quarter for himself, and is summoned by—the parish. His goods are distrained, his children are crying with cold and hunger, and the very bed on which his sick wife is lying, is dragged from beneath her. What can he do? To whom is he to apply for relief? To private charity? To benevolent individuals? Certainly not—there is his parish. There are the parish vestry, the parish infirmary, the parish surgeon, the parish officers, the parish beadle. Excellent institutions, and gentle, kind-hearted men. The woman dies—she is buried by the parish. The children have no protector—they are taken care of by the parish. The man first neglects, and afterwards cannot obtain, work—he is relieved by the parish; and when distress and drunkenness have done their work upon him, he is maintained, a harmless babbling idiot, in the parish asylum.

The parish beadle is one of the most, perhaps *the* most, important member of the local administration. He is not so well off as the churchwardens, certainly, nor is he so learned as the vestry-clerk, nor does he order things quite so much his own way as either of them. But his power is very great, notwithstanding; and the dignity of his office is never impaired by the absence of efforts on his part to maintain it. The beadle of our parish is a splendid fellow. It is quite delightful to hear him, as he explains the state of the existing poor laws to the deaf old women in the board-room passage on business nights; and to hear what he said to the senior churchwarden, and what the senior churchwarden said to him; and what ‘we’ (the beadle and the other gentlemen) came to the determination of doing. A miserable-looking woman is called into the boardroom, and represents a case of extreme destitution, affecting herself—a widow, with six small children. ‘Where do you live?’ inquires one of the overseers. ‘I rents a two-pair back, gentlemen, at Mrs. Brown’s, Number 3, Little King William’s-alley, which has lived there this fifteen year, and knows me to be very hard-working and industrious, and when my poor husband was alive, gentlemen, as died in the hospital’—‘Well, well,’ interrupts the overseer, taking a note of the address, ‘I’ll send Simmons, the beadle, to-morrow morning, to ascertain whether your story is correct; and if so, I suppose you must have an order into the House—Simmons, go to this woman’s the first thing to-morrow morning, will you?’ Simmons bows assent, and ushers the woman out. Her previous admiration of ‘the board’ (who all sit behind great books, and with their hats on) fades into nothing before her respect for her lace-trimmed conductor; and her account of what has passed inside, increases—if that be possible—the marks of respect, shown by the assembled crowd, to that solemn functionary. As to taking out a summons, it’s quite a hopeless case if Simmons attends it, on behalf of the parish. He knows all the titles of the Lord Mayor by heart; states the case without a single stammer: and it is even reported that on one occasion he ventured to make a joke, which the Lord Mayor’s head footman (who happened to be present) afterwards told an intimate friend, confidentially, was almost equal to one of Mr. Hobler’s.

See him again on Sunday in his state-coat and cocked-hat, with a large-headed staff for show in his left hand, and a small cane for use in his right. How pompously he marshals the children into their places! and how demurely the little urchins look at him askance as he surveys them when they are all seated, with a glare of the eye peculiar to beadles! The churchwardens and overseers being duly installed in their curtained pews, he seats himself on a mahogany bracket, erected expressly for him at the top of the aisle, and divides his attention between his prayer-book and the boys. Suddenly, just at the commencement of the communion service, when the whole congregation is hushed into a profound silence, broken only by the voice of the officiating clergyman, a penny is heard to ring on the stone floor of the aisle with astounding clearness. Observe the generalship of the beadle. His involuntary look of horror is instantly changed into one of perfect indifference, as if he were the only person present who had not heard the noise. The artifice succeeds. After putting forth his right leg now and then, as a feeler, the victim who dropped the money ventures to make one or two distinct dives after it; and the beadle, gliding softly round, salutes his little round head, when it again appears above the seat, with divers double knocks, administered with the cane before noticed, to the intense delight of three young men in an adjacent pew, who cough violently at intervals until the conclusion of the sermon.

Such are a few traits of the importance and gravity of a parish beadle—a gravity which has never been disturbed in any case that has come under our observation, except when the services of that particularly useful machine, a parish fire-engine, are required: then indeed all is bustle. Two little boys run to the beadle as fast as their legs will carry them, and report from their own personal observation that some neighbouring chimney is on fire; the engine is hastily got out, and a plentiful supply of boys being obtained, and harnessed to it with ropes, away they rattle over the pavement, the beadle, running—we do not exaggerate—running at the side, until they arrive at some house, smelling strongly of soot, at the door of which the beadle knocks with considerable gravity for half-an-hour. No attention being paid to these manual applications, and the turn-cock having turned on the water, the engine turns off amidst the shouts of the boys; it pulls up once more at the work-house, and the beadle ‘pulls up’ the unfortunate householder next day, for the amount of his legal reward. We never saw a parish engine at a regular fire but once. It came up in gallant style—three miles and a half an hour, at least; there was a capital supply of water, and it was first on the spot. Bang went the pumps—the people cheered—the beadle perspired profusely; but it was unfortunately discovered, just as they were going to put the fire out, that nobody understood the process by which the engine was filled with water; and that eighteen boys, and a man, had exhausted themselves in pumping for twenty minutes, without producing the slightest effect!

The personages next in importance to the beadle, are the master of the workhouse and the parish schoolmaster. The vestry-clerk, as everybody knows, is a short, pudgy little man, in black, with a thick gold watch-chain of considerable length, terminating in two large seals and a key. He is an attorney, and generally in a bustle; at no time more so, than when he is hurrying to some parochial meeting, with his gloves crumpled up in one hand, and a large red book under the other arm. As to the churchwardens and overseers, we exclude them altogether, because all we know of them is, that they are usually respectable tradesmen, who wear hats with brims inclined to flatness, and who occasionally testify in gilt letters on a blue ground, in some conspicuous part of the church, to the important fact of a gallery having being enlarged and beautified, or an organ rebuilt.

The master of the workhouse is not, in our parish—nor is he usually in any other—one of that class of men the better part of whose existence has passed away, and who drag out the remainder in some inferior situation, with just enough thought of the past, to feel degraded by, and discontented with the present. We are unable to guess precisely to our own satisfaction what station the man can have occupied before; we should think he had been an inferior sort of attorney's clerk, or else the master of a national school—whatever he was, it is clear his present position is a change for the better. His income is small certainly, as the rusty black coat and threadbare velvet collar demonstrate: but then he lives free of house-rent, has a limited allowance of coals and candles, and an almost unlimited allowance of authority in his petty kingdom. He is a tall, thin, bony man; always wears shoes and black cotton stockings with his surtout; and eyes you, as you pass his parlour-window, as if he wished you were a pauper, just to give you a specimen of his power. He is an admirable specimen of a small tyrant: morose, brutish, and ill-tempered; bullying to his inferiors, cringing to his superiors, and jealous of the influence and authority of the beadle.

Our schoolmaster is just the very reverse of this amiable official. He has been one of those men one occasionally hears of, on whom misfortune seems to have set her mark; nothing he ever did, or was concerned in, appears to have prospered. A rich old relation who had brought him up, and openly announced his intention of providing for him, left him 10,000*l.* in his will, and revoked the bequest in a codicil. Thus unexpectedly reduced to the necessity of providing for himself, he procured a situation in a public office. The young clerks below him, died off as if there were a plague among them; but the old fellows over his head, for the reversion of whose places he was anxiously waiting, lived on and on, as if they were immortal. He speculated and lost. He speculated again and won—but never got his money. His talents were great; his disposition, easy, generous and liberal. His friends profited by the one, and abused the other. Loss succeeded loss; misfortune crowded on misfortune; each successive day brought him nearer the verge of hopeless penury, and the quondam friends who had been warmest in their professions, grew strangely cold and indifferent. He had children whom he loved, and a wife on whom he doted. The former turned their backs on him; the latter died broken-hearted. He went with the stream—it had ever been his failing, and he had not courage sufficient to bear up against so many shocks—he had never cared for himself, and the only being who had cared for him, in his poverty and distress, was spared to him no longer. It was at this period that he applied for parochial relief. Some kind-hearted man who had known him in happier times, chanced to be churchwarden that year, and through his interest he was appointed to his present situation.

He is an old man now. Of the many who once crowded round him in all the hollow friendship of boon-companionship, some have died, some have fallen like himself, some have prospered—all have forgotten him. Time and misfortune have mercifully been permitted to impair his memory, and use has habituated him to his present condition. Meek, uncomplaining, and zealous in the discharge of his duties, he has been allowed to hold his situation long beyond the usual period; and he will no doubt continue to hold it, until infirmity renders him incapable, or death releases him. As the grey-headed old man feebly paces up and down the sunny side of the little court-yard between school hours, it would be difficult, indeed, for the most intimate of his former friends to recognise their once gay and happy associate, in the person of the Pauper Schoolmaster.

CHAPTER II—THE CURATE. THE OLD LADY. THE HALF-PAY CAPTAIN

We commenced our last chapter with the beadle of our parish, because we are deeply sensible of the importance and dignity of his office. We will begin the present, with the clergyman. Our curate is a young gentleman of such prepossessing appearance, and fascinating manners, that within one month after his first appearance in the parish, half the young-lady inhabitants were melancholy with religion, and the other half, desponding with love. Never were so many young ladies seen in our parish church on Sunday before; and never had the little round angels' faces on Mr. Tomkins's monument in the side aisle, beheld such devotion on earth as they all exhibited. He was about five-and-twenty when he first came to astonish the parishioners. He parted his hair on the centre of his forehead in the form of a Norman arch, wore a brilliant of the first water on the fourth finger of his left hand (which he always applied to his left cheek when he read prayers), and had a deep sepulchral voice of unusual solemnity. Innumerable were the calls made by prudent mammas on our new curate, and innumerable the invitations with which he was assailed, and which, to do him justice, he readily accepted. If his manner in the pulpit had created an impression in his favour, the sensation was increased tenfold, by his appearance in private circles. Pews in the immediate vicinity of the pulpit or reading-desk rose in value; sittings in the centre aisle were at a premium: an inch of room in the front row of the gallery could not be procured for love or money; and some people even went so far as to assert, that the three Miss Browns, who had an obscure family pew just behind the churchwardens', were detected, one Sunday, in the free seats by the communion-table, actually lying in wait for the curate as he passed to the vestry! He began to preach extempore sermons, and even grave papas caught the infection. He got out of bed at half-past twelve o'clock one winter's night, to half-baptise a washerwoman's child in a slop-basin, and the gratitude of the parishioners knew no bounds—the very churchwardens grew generous, and insisted on the parish defraying the expense of the watch-box on wheels, which the new curate had ordered for himself, to perform the funeral service in, in wet weather. He sent three pints of gruel and a quarter of a pound of tea to a poor woman who had been brought to bed of four small children, all at once—the parish were charmed. He got up a subscription for her—the woman's fortune was made. He spoke for one hour and twenty-five minutes, at an anti-slavery meeting at the Goat and Boots—the enthusiasm was at its height. A proposal was set on foot for presenting the curate with a piece of plate, as a mark of esteem for his valuable services rendered to the parish. The list of subscriptions was filled up in no time; the contest was, not who should escape the contribution, but who should be the foremost to subscribe. A splendid silver inkstand was made, and engraved with an appropriate inscription; the curate was invited to a public breakfast, at the before-mentioned Goat and Boots; the inkstand was presented in a neat speech by Mr. Gubbins, the ex-churchwarden, and acknowledged by the curate in terms which drew tears into the eyes of all present—the very waiters were melted.

One would have supposed that, by this time, the theme of universal admiration was lifted to the very pinnacle of popularity. No such thing. The curate began to cough; four fits of coughing one morning between the Litany and the Epistle, and five in the afternoon service. Here was a discovery—the curate was consumptive. How interestingly melancholy! If the young ladies were energetic before, their sympathy and solicitude now knew no bounds. Such a man as the curate—such a dear—such a perfect love—to be consumptive! It was too much. Anonymous presents of black-currant jam, and lozenges, elastic waistcoats, bosom friends, and warm stockings, poured in upon the curate until he was as completely fitted out with winter clothing, as if he were on the verge of an expedition to the North Pole: verbal bulletins of the state of his health were circulated throughout the parish half-a-dozen times a day; and the curate was in the very zenith of his popularity.

About this period, a change came over the spirit of the parish. A very quiet, respectable, dozing old gentleman, who had officiated in our chapel-of-ease for twelve years previously, died one fine morning, without having given any notice whatever of his intention. This circumstance gave rise to counter-sensation the first; and the arrival of his successor occasioned counter-sensation the second. He was a pale, thin, cadaverous man, with large black eyes, and long straggling black hair: his dress was slovenly in the extreme, his manner ungainly, his doctrines startling; in short, he was in every respect the antipodes of the curate. Crowds of our female parishioners flocked to hear him; at first, because he was *so* odd-looking, then because his face was *so* expressive, then because he preached *so* well; and at last, because they really thought that, after all, there was something about him which it was quite impossible to describe. As to the curate, he was all very well; but certainly, after all, there was no denying that—that—in short, the curate wasn't a novelty, and the other clergyman was. The inconstancy of public opinion is proverbial: the congregation migrated one by one. The curate coughed till he was black in the face—it was in vain. He respired with difficulty—it was equally ineffectual in awakening sympathy. Seats are once again to be had in any part of our parish church, and the chapel-of-ease is going to be enlarged, as it is crowded to suffocation every Sunday!

The best known and most respected among our parishioners, is an old lady, who resided in our parish long before our name was registered in the list of baptisms. Our parish is a suburban one, and the old lady lives in a neat row of houses in the most airy and pleasant part of it. The house is her own; and it, and everything about it, except the old lady herself, who looks a little older than she did ten years ago, is in just the same state as when the old gentleman was living. The little front parlour, which is the old lady's ordinary sitting-room, is a perfect picture of quiet neatness; the carpet is covered with brown Holland, the glass and picture-frames are carefully enveloped in yellow muslin; the table-covers are never taken off, except when the leaves are turpentined and bees'-waxed, an operation which is regularly commenced every other morning at half-past nine o'clock—and the little nicknacks are always arranged in precisely the same manner. The greater part of these are presents from little girls whose parents live in the same row; but some of them, such as the two old-fashioned watches (which never keep the same time, one being always a quarter of an hour too slow, and the other a quarter of an hour too fast), the little picture of the Princess Charlotte and Prince Leopold as they appeared in the Royal Box at Drury Lane Theatre, and others of the same class, have been in the old lady's possession for many years. Here the old lady sits with her spectacles on, busily engaged in needlework—near the window in summer time; and if she sees you coming up the steps, and you happen to be a favourite, she trots out to open the street-door for you before you knock, and as you must be fatigued after that hot walk, insists on your swallowing two glasses of sherry before you exert yourself by talking. If you call in the evening you will find her cheerful, but rather more serious than usual, with an open Bible on the table, before her, of which 'Sarah,' who is just as neat and methodical as her mistress, regularly reads two or three chapters in the parlour aloud.

The old lady sees scarcely any company, except the little girls before noticed, each of whom has always a regular fixed day for a periodical tea-drinking with her, to which the child looks forward as the greatest treat of its existence. She seldom visits at a greater distance than the next door but one on either side; and when she drinks tea here, Sarah runs out first and knocks a double-knock, to prevent the possibility of her 'Missis's' catching cold by having to wait at the door. She is very scrupulous in returning these little invitations, and when she asks Mr. and Mrs. So-and-so, to meet Mr. and Mrs. Somebody-else, Sarah and she dust the urn, and the best china tea-service, and the Pope Joan board; and the visitors are received in the drawing-room in great state. She has but few relations, and they are scattered about in different parts of the country, and she seldom sees them. She has a son in India, whom she always describes to you as a fine, handsome fellow—so like the profile of his poor dear father over the sideboard, but the old lady adds, with a mournful shake of the head, that he has always been one of her greatest trials; and that indeed he once almost broke her heart; but it pleased God to enable her to get the better of it, and she would prefer your never mentioning the subject to her again. She has a great number of pensioners: and on Saturday, after she comes back from market, there is a regular levee of old men and women in the passage, waiting for their weekly gratuity. Her name always heads the list of any benevolent subscriptions, and hers are always the most liberal donations to the Winter Coal and Soup Distribution Society. She subscribed twenty pounds towards the erection of an organ in our parish church, and was so overcome the first Sunday the children sang to it, that she was obliged to be carried out by the pew-opener. Her entrance into church on Sunday is always the signal for a little bustle in the side aisle, occasioned by a general rise among the poor people, who bow and curtsey until the pew-opener has ushered the old lady into her accustomed seat, dropped a respectful curtsey, and shut the door: and the same ceremony is repeated on her leaving church, when she walks home with the family next door but one, and talks about the sermon all the way, invariably opening the conversation by asking the youngest boy where the text was.

Thus, with the annual variation of a trip to some quiet place on the sea-coast, passes the old lady’s life. It has rolled on in the same unvarying and benevolent course for many years now, and must at no distant period be brought to its final close. She looks forward to its termination, with calmness and without apprehension. She has everything to hope and nothing to fear.

A very different personage, but one who has rendered himself very conspicuous in our parish, is one of the old lady’s next-door neighbours. He is an old naval officer on half-pay, and his bluff and unceremonious behaviour disturbs the old lady’s domestic economy, not a little. In the first place, he *will* smoke cigars in the front court, and when he wants something to drink with them—which is by no means an uncommon circumstance—he lifts up the old lady’s knocker with his walking-stick, and demands to have a glass of table ale, handed over the rails. In addition to this cool proceeding, he is a bit of a Jack of all trades, or to use his own words, ‘a regular Robinson Crusoe;’ and nothing delights him better than to experimentalise on the old lady’s property. One morning he got up early, and planted three or four roots of full-grown marigolds in every bed of her front garden, to the inconceivable astonishment of the old lady, who actually thought when she got up and looked out of the window, that it was some strange eruption which had come out in the night. Another time he took to pieces the eight-day clock on the front landing, under pretence of cleaning the works, which he put together again, by some undiscovered process, in so wonderful a manner, that the large hand has done nothing but trip up the little one ever since. Then he took to breeding silk-worms, which he *would* bring in two or three times a day, in little paper boxes, to show the old lady, generally dropping a worm or two at every visit. The consequence was, that one morning a very stout silk-worm was discovered in the act of walking up-stairs—probably with the view of inquiring after his friends, for, on further inspection, it appeared that some of his companions had already found their way to every room in the house. The old lady went to the seaside in despair, and during her absence he completely effaced the name from her brass door-plate, in his attempts to polish it with aqua-fortis.

But all this is nothing to his seditious conduct in public life. He attends every vestry meeting that is held; always opposes the constituted authorities of the parish, denounces the profligacy of the churchwardens, contests legal points against the vestry-clerk, will make the tax-gatherer call for his money till he won’t call any longer, and then he sends it: finds fault with the sermon every Sunday, says that the organist ought to be ashamed of himself, offers to back himself for any amount to sing the psalms better than all the children put together, male and female; and, in short, conducts himself in the most turbulent and uproarious manner. The worst of it is, that having a high regard for the old lady, he wants to make her a convert to his views, and therefore walks into her little parlour with his newspaper in his hand, and talks violent politics by the hour. He is a charitable, open-hearted old fellow at bottom, after all; so, although he puts the old lady a little out occasionally, they agree very well in the main, and she laughs as much at each feat of his handiwork when it is all over, as anybody else.

CHAPTER III—THE FOUR SISTERS

The row of houses in which the old lady and her troublesome neighbour reside, comprises, beyond all doubt, a greater number of characters within its circumscribed limits, than all the rest of the parish put together. As we cannot, consistently with our present plan, however, extend the number of our parochial sketches beyond six, it will be better perhaps, to select the most peculiar, and to introduce them at once without further preface.

The four Miss Willises, then, settled in our parish thirteen years ago. It is a melancholy reflection that the old adage, ‘time and tide wait for no man,’ applies with equal force to the fairer portion of the creation; and willingly would we conceal the fact, that even thirteen years ago the Miss Willises were far from juvenile. Our duty as faithful parochial chroniclers, however, is paramount to every other consideration, and we are bound to state, that thirteen years since, the authorities in matrimonial cases, considered the youngest Miss Willis in a very precarious state, while the eldest sister was positively given over, as being far beyond all human hope. Well, the Miss Willises took a lease of the house; it was fresh painted and papered from top to bottom: the paint inside was all wainscoted, the marble all cleaned, the old grates taken down, and register-stoves, you could see to dress by, put up; four trees were planted in the back garden, several small baskets of gravel sprinkled over the front one, vans of elegant furniture arrived, spring blinds were fitted to the windows, carpenters who had been employed in the various preparations, alterations, and repairs, made confidential statements to the different maid-servants in the row, relative to the magnificent scale on which the Miss Willises were commencing; the maid-servants told their ‘Missises,’ the Missises told their friends, and vague rumours were circulated throughout the parish, that No. 25, in Gordon-place, had been taken by four maiden ladies of immense property.

At last, the Miss Willises moved in; and then the ‘calling’ began. The house was the perfection of neatness—so were the four Miss Willises. Everything was formal, stiff, and cold—so were the four Miss Willises. Not a single chair of the whole set was ever seen out of its place—not a single Miss Willis of the whole four was ever seen out of hers. There they always sat, in the same places, doing precisely the same things at the same hour. The eldest Miss Willis used to knit, the second to draw, the two others to play duets on the piano. They seemed to have no separate existence, but to have made up their minds just to winter through life together. They were three long graces in drapery, with the addition, like a school-dinner, of another long grace afterwards—the three fates with another sister—the Siamese twins multiplied by two. The eldest Miss Willis grew bilious—the four Miss Willises grew bilious immediately. The eldest Miss Willis grew ill-tempered and religious—the four Miss Willises were ill-tempered and religious directly. Whatever the eldest did, the others did, and whatever anybody else did, they all disapproved of; and thus they vegetated—living in Polar harmony among themselves, and, as they sometimes went out, or saw company 'in a quiet-way' at home, occasionally icing the neighbours. Three years passed over in this way, when an unlooked for and extraordinary phenomenon occurred. The Miss Willises showed symptoms of summer, the frost gradually broke up; a complete thaw took place. Was it possible? one of the four Miss Willises was going to be married!

Now, where on earth the husband came from, by what feelings the poor man could have been actuated, or by what process of reasoning the four Miss Willises succeeded in persuading themselves that it was possible for a man to marry one of them, without marrying them all, are questions too profound for us to resolve: certain it is, however, that the visits of Mr. Robinson (a gentleman in a public office, with a good salary and a little property of his own, besides) were received—that the four Miss Willises were courted in due form by the said Mr Robinson—that the neighbours were perfectly frantic in their anxiety to discover which of the four Miss Willises was the fortunate fair, and that the difficulty they experienced in solving the problem was not at all lessened by the announcement of the eldest Miss Willis,—'*We* are going to marry Mr. Robinson.'

It was very extraordinary. They were so completely identified, the one with the other, that the curiosity of the whole row—even of the old lady herself—was roused almost beyond endurance. The subject was discussed at every little card-table and tea-drinking. The old gentleman of silk-worm notoriety did not hesitate to express his decided opinion that Mr. Robinson was of Eastern descent, and contemplated marrying the whole family at once; and the row, generally, shook their heads with considerable gravity, and declared the business to be very mysterious. They hoped it might all end well;—it certainly had a very singular appearance, but still it would be uncharitable to express any opinion without good grounds to go upon, and certainly the Miss Willises were *quite* old enough to judge for themselves, and to be sure people ought to know their own business best, and so forth.

At last, one fine morning, at a quarter before eight o'clock, a.m., two glass-coaches drove up to the Miss Willises' door, at which Mr. Robinson had arrived in a cab ten minutes before, dressed in a light-blue coat and double-milled kersey pantaloons, white neckerchief, pumps, and dress-gloves, his manner denoting, as appeared from the evidence of the housemaid at No. 23, who was sweeping the door-steps at the time, a considerable degree of nervous excitement. It was also hastily reported on the same testimony, that the cook who opened the door, wore a large white bow of unusual dimensions, in a much smarter head-dress than the regulation cap to which the Miss Willises invariably restricted the somewhat excursive tastes of female servants in general.

The intelligence spread rapidly from house to house. It was quite clear that the eventful morning had at length arrived; the whole row stationed themselves behind their first and second floor blinds, and waited the result in breathless expectation.

At last the Miss Willises' door opened; the door of the first glass-coach did the same. Two gentlemen, and a pair of ladies to correspond—friends of the family, no doubt; up went the steps, bang went the door, off went the first class-coach, and up came the second.

The street door opened again; the excitement of the whole row increased—Mr. Robinson and the eldest Miss Willis. 'I thought so,' said the lady at No. 19; 'I always said it was *Miss* Willis!'—'Well, I never!' ejaculated the young lady at No. 18 to the young lady at No. 17.—'Did you ever, dear!' responded the young lady at No. 17 to the young lady at No. 18. 'It's too ridiculous!' exclaimed a spinster of an *un*certain age, at No. 16, joining in the conversation. But who shall portray the astonishment of Gordon-place, when Mr. Robinson handed in *all* the Miss Willises, one after the other, and then squeezed himself into an acute angle of the glass-coach, which forthwith proceeded at a brisk pace, after the other glass-coach, which other glass-coach had itself proceeded, at a brisk pace, in the direction of the parish church! Who shall depict the perplexity of the clergyman, when *all* the Miss Willises knelt down at the communion-table, and repeated the responses incidental to the marriage service in an audible voice—or who shall describe the confusion which prevailed, when—even after the difficulties thus occasioned had been adjusted—*all* the Miss Willises went into hysterics at the conclusion of the ceremony, until the sacred edifice resounded with their united wailings!

As the four sisters and Mr. Robinson continued to occupy the same house after this memorable occasion, and as the married sister, whoever she was, never appeared in public without the other three, we are not quite clear that the neighbours ever would have discovered the real Mrs. Robinson, but for a circumstance of the most gratifying description, which *will* happen occasionally in the best-regulated families. Three quarter-days elapsed, and the row, on whom a new light appeared to have been bursting for some time, began to speak with a sort of implied confidence on the subject, and to wonder how Mrs. Robinson—the youngest Miss Willis that was—got on; and servants might be seen running up the steps, about nine or ten o'clock every morning, with 'Missis's compliments, and wishes to know how Mrs. Robinson finds herself this morning?' And the answer always was, 'Mrs. Robinson's compliments, and she's in very good spirits, and doesn't find herself any worse.' The piano was heard no longer, the knitting-needles were laid aside, drawing was neglected, and mantua-making and millinery, on the smallest scale imaginable, appeared to have become the favourite amusement of the whole family. The parlour wasn't quite as tidy as it used to be, and if you called in the morning, you would see lying on a table, with an old newspaper carelessly thrown over them, two or three particularly small caps, rather larger than if they had been made for a moderate-sized doll, with a small piece of lace, in the shape of a horse-shoe, let in behind: or perhaps a white robe, not very large in circumference, but very much out of proportion in point of length, with a little tucker round the top, and a frill round the bottom; and once when we called, we saw a long white roller, with a kind of blue margin down each side, the probable use of which, we were at a loss to conjecture. Then we fancied that Dr. Dawson, the surgeon, &c., who displays a large lamp with a different colour in every pane of glass, at the corner of the row, began to be knocked up at night oftener than he used to be; and once we were very much alarmed by hearing a hackney-coach stop at Mrs. Robinson's door, at half-past two o'clock in the morning, out of which there emerged a fat old woman, in a cloak and night-cap, with a bundle in one hand, and a pair of pattens in the other, who looked as if she had been suddenly knocked up out of bed for some very special purpose.

When we got up in the morning we saw that the knocker was tied up in an old white kid glove; and we, in our innocence (we were in a state of bachelorship then), wondered what on earth it all meant, until we heard the eldest Miss Willis, *in propriâ personâ* say, with great dignity, in answer to the next inquiry, '*My* compliments, and Mrs. Robinson's doing as well as can be expected, and the little girl thrives wonderfully.' And then, in common with the rest of the row, our curiosity was satisfied, and we began to wonder it had never occurred to us what the matter was, before.

CHAPTER IV—THE ELECTION FOR BEADLE

A great event has recently occurred in our parish. A contest of paramount interest has just terminated; a parochial convulsion has taken place. It has been succeeded by a glorious triumph, which the country—or at least the parish—it is all the same—will long remember. We have had an election; an election for beadle. The supporters of the old beadle system have been defeated in their stronghold, and the advocates of the great new beadle principles have achieved a proud victory.

Our parish, which, like all other parishes, is a little world of its own, has long been divided into two parties, whose contentions, slumbering for a while, have never failed to burst forth with unabated vigour, on any occasion on which they could by possibility be renewed. Watching-rates, lighting-rates, paving-rates, sewer's-rates, church-rates, poor's-rates—all sorts of rates, have been in their turns the subjects of a grand struggle; and as to questions of patronage, the asperity and determination with which they have been contested is scarcely credible.

The leader of the official party—the steady advocate of the churchwardens, and the unflinching supporter of the overseers—is an old gentleman who lives in our row. He owns some half a dozen houses in it, and always walks on the opposite side of the way, so that he may be able to take in a view of the whole of his property at once. He is a tall, thin, bony man, with an interrogative nose, and little restless perking eyes, which appear to have been given him for the sole purpose of peeping into other people's affairs with. He is deeply impressed with the importance of our parish business, and prides himself, not a little, on his style of addressing the parishioners in vestry assembled. His views are rather confined than extensive; his principles more narrow than liberal. He has been heard to declaim very loudly in favour of the liberty of the press, and advocates the repeal of the stamp duty on newspapers, because the daily journals who now have a monopoly of the public, never give *verbatim* reports of vestry meetings. He would not appear egotistical for the world, but at the same time he must say, that there are *speeches*—that celebrated speech of his own, on the emoluments of the sexton, and the duties of the office, for instance—which might be communicated to the public, greatly to their improvement and advantage.

His great opponent in public life is Captain Purday, the old naval officer on half-pay, to whom we have already introduced our readers. The captain being a determined opponent of the constituted authorities, whoever they may chance to be, and our other friend being their steady supporter, with an equal disregard of their individual merits, it will readily be supposed, that occasions for their coming into direct collision are neither few nor far between. They divided the vestry fourteen times on a motion for heating the church with warm water instead of coals: and made speeches about liberty and expenditure, and prodigality and hot water, which threw the whole parish into a state of excitement. Then the captain, when he was on the visiting committee, and his opponent overseer, brought forward certain distinct and specific charges relative to the management of the workhouse, boldly expressed his total want of confidence in the existing authorities, and moved for 'a copy of the recipe by which the paupers' soup was prepared, together with any documents relating thereto.' This the overseer steadily resisted; he fortified himself by precedent, appealed to the established usage, and declined to produce the papers, on the ground of the injury that would be done to the public service, if documents of a strictly private nature, passing between the master of the workhouse and the cook, were to be thus dragged to light on the motion of any individual member of the vestry. The motion was lost by a majority of two; and then the captain, who never allows himself to be defeated, moved for a committee of inquiry into the whole subject. The affair grew serious: the question was discussed at meeting after meeting, and vestry after vestry; speeches were made, attacks repudiated, personal defiances exchanged, explanations received, and the greatest excitement prevailed, until at last, just as the question was going to be finally decided, the vestry found that somehow or other, they had become entangled in a point of form, from which it was impossible to escape with propriety. So, the motion was dropped, and everybody looked extremely important, and seemed quite satisfied with the meritorious nature of the whole proceeding.

This was the state of affairs in our parish a week or two since, when Simmons, the beadle, suddenly died. The lamented deceased had over-exerted himself, a day or two previously, in conveying an aged female, highly intoxicated, to the strong room of the work-house. The excitement thus occasioned, added to a severe cold, which this indefatigable officer had caught in his capacity of director of the parish engine, by inadvertently playing over himself instead of a fire, proved too much for a constitution already enfeebled by age; and the intelligence was conveyed to the Board one evening that Simmons had died, and left his respects.

The breath was scarcely out of the body of the deceased functionary, when the field was filled with competitors for the vacant office, each of whom rested his claims to public support, entirely on the number and extent of his family, as if the office of beadle were originally instituted as an encouragement for the propagation of the human species. ‘Bung for Beadle. Five small children!’—‘Hopkins for Beadle. Seven small children!!’—‘Timkins for Beadle. Nine small children!!!’ Such were the placards in large black letters on a white ground, which were plentifully pasted on the walls, and posted in the windows of the principal shops. Timkins’s success was considered certain: several mothers of families half promised their votes, and the nine small children would have run over the course, but for the production of another placard, announcing the appearance of a still more meritorious candidate. ‘Spruggins for Beadle. Ten small children (two of them twins), and a wife!!!’ There was no resisting this; ten small children would have been almost irresistible in themselves, without the twins, but the touching parenthesis about that interesting production of nature, and the still more touching allusion to Mrs. Spruggins, must ensure success. Spruggins was the favourite at once, and the appearance of his lady, as she went about to solicit votes (which encouraged confident hopes of a still further addition to the house of Spruggins at no remote period), increased the general prepossession in his favour. The other candidates, Bung alone excepted, resigned in despair. The day of election was fixed; and the canvass proceeded with briskness and perseverance on both sides.

The members of the vestry could not be supposed to escape the contagious excitement inseparable from the occasion. The majority of the lady inhabitants of the parish declared at once for Spruggins; and the *quondam* overseer took the same side, on the ground that men with large families always had been elected to the office, and that although he must admit, that, in other respects, Spruggins was the least qualified candidate of the two, still it was an old practice, and he saw no reason why an old practice should be departed from. This was enough for the captain. He immediately sided with Bung, canvassed for him personally in all directions, wrote squibs on Spruggins, and got his butcher to skewer them up on conspicuous joints in his shop-front; frightened his neighbour, the old lady, into a palpitation of the heart, by his awful denunciations of Spruggins's party; and bounced in and out, and up and down, and backwards and forwards, until all the sober inhabitants of the parish thought it inevitable that he must die of a brain fever, long before the election began.

The day of election arrived. It was no longer an individual struggle, but a party contest between the ins and outs. The question was, whether the withering influence of the overseers, the domination of the churchwardens, and the blighting despotism of the vestry-clerk, should be allowed to render the election of beadle a form—a nullity: whether they should impose a vestry-elected beadle on the parish, to do their bidding and forward their views, or whether the parishioners, fearlessly asserting their undoubted rights, should elect an independent beadle of their own.

The nomination was fixed to take place in the vestry, but so great was the throng of anxious spectators, that it was found necessary to adjourn to the church, where the ceremony commenced with due solemnity. The appearance of the churchwardens and overseers, and the ex-churchwardens and ex-overseers, with Spruggins in the rear, excited general attention. Spruggins was a little thin man, in rusty black, with a long pale face, and a countenance expressive of care and fatigue, which might either be attributed to the extent of his family or the anxiety of his feelings. His opponent appeared in a cast-off coat of the captain's—a blue coat with bright buttons; white trousers, and that description of shoes familiarly known by the appellation of 'high-lows.' There was a serenity in the open countenance of Bung—a kind of moral dignity in his confident air—an 'I wish you may get it' sort of expression in his eye—which infused animation into his supporters, and evidently dispirited his opponents.

The ex-churchwarden rose to propose Thomas Spruggins for beadle. He had known him long. He had had his eye upon him closely for years; he had watched him with twofold vigilance for months. (A parishioner here suggested that this might be termed 'taking a double sight,' but the observation was drowned in loud cries of 'Order!') He would repeat that he had had his eye upon him for years, and this he would say, that a more well-conducted, a more well-behaved, a more sober, a more quiet man, with a more well-regulated mind, he had never met with. A man with a larger family he had never known (cheers). The parish required a man who could be depended on ('Hear!' from the Spruggins side, answered by ironical cheers from the Bung party). Such a man he now proposed ('No,' 'Yes'). He would not allude to individuals (the ex-churchwarden continued, in the celebrated negative style adopted by great speakers). He would not advert to a gentleman who had once held a high rank in the service of his majesty; he would not say, that that gentleman was no gentleman; he would not assert, that that man was no man; he would not say, that he was a turbulent parishioner; he would not say, that he had grossly misbehaved himself, not only on this, but on all former occasions; he would not say, that he was one of those discontented and treasonable spirits, who carried confusion and disorder wherever they went; he would not say, that he harboured in his heart envy, and hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness. No! He wished to have everything comfortable and pleasant, and therefore, he would say—nothing about him (cheers).

The captain replied in a similar parliamentary style. He would not say, he was astonished at the speech they had just heard; he would not say, he was disgusted (cheers). He would not retort the epithets which had been hurled against him (renewed cheering); he would not allude to men once in office, but now happily out of it, who had mismanaged the workhouse, ground the paupers, diluted the beer, slack-baked the bread, boned the meat, heightened the work, and lowered the soup (tremendous cheers). He would not ask what such men deserved (a voice, 'Nothing a-day, and find themselves!'). He would not say, that one burst of general indignation should drive them from the parish they polluted with their presence ('Give it him!'). He would not allude to the unfortunate man who had been proposed—he would not say, as the vestry's tool, but as Beadle. He would not advert to that individual’s family; he would not say, that nine children, twins, and a wife, were very bad examples for pauper imitation (loud cheers). He would not advert in detail to the qualifications of Bung. The man stood before him, and he would not say in his presence, what he might be disposed to say of him, if he were absent. (Here Mr. Bung telegraphed to a friend near him, under cover of his hat, by contracting his left eye, and applying his right thumb to the tip of his nose). It had been objected to Bung that he had only five children (‘Hear, hear!’ from the opposition). Well; he had yet to learn that the legislature had affixed any precise amount of infantine qualification to the office of beadle; but taking it for granted that an extensive family were a great requisite, he entreated them to look to facts, and compare *data*, about which there could be no mistake. Bung was 35 years of age. Spruggins—of whom he wished to speak with all possible respect—was 50. Was it not more than possible—was it not very probable—that by the time Bung attained the latter age, he might see around him a family, even exceeding in number and extent, that to which Spruggins at present laid claim (deafening cheers and waving of handkerchiefs)? The captain concluded, amidst loud applause, by calling upon the parishioners to sound the tocsin, rush to the poll, free themselves from dictation, or be slaves for ever.

On the following day the polling began, and we never have had such a bustle in our parish since we got up our famous anti-slavery petition, which was such an important one, that the House of Commons ordered it to be printed, on the motion of the member for the district. The captain engaged two hackney-coaches and a cab for Bung’s people—the cab for the drunken voters, and the two coaches for the old ladies, the greater portion of whom, owing to the captain’s impetuosity, were driven up to the poll and home again, before they recovered from their flurry sufficiently to know, with any degree of clearness, what they had been doing. The opposite party wholly neglected these precautions, and the consequence was, that a great many ladies who were walking leisurely up to the church—for it was a very hot day—to vote for Spruggins, were artfully decoyed into the coaches, and voted for Bung. The captain’s arguments, too, had produced considerable effect: the attempted influence of the vestry produced a greater. A threat of exclusive dealing was clearly established against the vestry-clerk—a case of heartless and profligate atrocity. It appeared that the delinquent had been in the habit of purchasing six penn’orth of muffins, weekly, from an old woman who rents a small house in the parish, and resides among the original settlers; on her last weekly visit, a message was conveyed to her through the medium of the cook, couched in mysterious terms, but indicating with sufficient clearness, that the vestry-clerk's appetite for muffins, in future, depended entirely on her vote on the beadleship. This was sufficient: the stream had been turning previously, and the impulse thus administered directed its final course. The Bung party ordered one shilling's-worth of muffins weekly for the remainder of the old woman's natural life; the parishioners were loud in their exclamations; and the fate of Spruggins was sealed.

It was in vain that the twins were exhibited in dresses of the same pattern, and night-caps, to match, at the church door: the boy in Mrs. Spruggins's right arm, and the girl in her left—even Mrs. Spruggins herself failed to be an object of sympathy any longer. The majority attained by Bung on the gross poll was four hundred and twenty-eight, and the cause of the parishioners triumphed.

CHAPTER V—THE BROKER'S MAN

The excitement of the late election has subsided, and our parish being once again restored to a state of comparative tranquillity, we are enabled to devote our attention to those parishioners who take little share in our party contests or in the turmoil and bustle of public life. And we feel sincere pleasure in acknowledging here, that in collecting materials for this task we have been greatly assisted by Mr. Bung himself, who has imposed on us a debt of obligation which we fear we can never repay. The life of this gentleman has been one of a very chequered description: he has undergone transitions—not from grave to gay, for he never was grave—not from lively to severe, for severity forms no part of his disposition; his fluctuations have been between poverty in the extreme, and poverty modified, or, to use his own emphatic language, 'between nothing to eat and just half enough.' He is not, as he forcibly remarks, 'one of those fortunate men who, if they were to dive under one side of a barge stark-naked, would come up on the other with a new suit of clothes on, and a ticket for soup in the waistcoat-pocket:' neither is he one of those, whose spirit has been broken beyond redemption by misfortune and want. He is just one of the careless, good-for-nothing, happy fellows, who float, cork-like, on the surface, for the world to play at hockey with: knocked here, and there, and everywhere: now to the right, then to the left, again up in the air, and anon to the bottom, but always reappearing and bounding with the stream buoyantly and merrily along. Some few months before he was prevailed upon to stand a contested election for the office of beadle, necessity attached him to the service of a broker; and on the opportunities he here acquired of ascertaining the condition of most of the poorer inhabitants of the parish, his patron, the captain, first grounded his claims to public support. Chance threw the man in our way a short time since. We were, in the first instance, attracted by his prepossessing impudence at the election; we were not surprised, on further acquaintance, to find him a shrewd, knowing fellow, with no inconsiderable power of observation; and, after conversing with him a little, were somewhat struck (as we dare say our readers have frequently been in other cases) with the power some men seem to have, not only of sympathising with, but to all appearance of understanding feelings to which they themselves are entire strangers. We had been expressing to the new functionary our surprise that he should ever have served in the capacity to which we have just adverted, when we gradually led him into one or two professional anecdotes. As we are induced to think, on reflection, that they will tell better in nearly his own words, than with any attempted embellishments of ours, we will at once entitle them.

MR BUNG’S NARRATIVE

‘It’s very true, as you say, sir,’ Mr. Bung commenced, ‘that a broker’s man’s is not a life to be envied; and in course you know as well as I do, though you don’t say it, that people hate and scout ’em because they’re the ministers of wretchedness, like, to poor people. But what could I do, sir? The thing was no worse because I did it, instead of somebody else; and if putting me in possession of a house would put me in possession of three and sixpence a day, and levying a distress on another man’s goods would relieve my distress and that of my family, it can’t be expected but what I’d take the job and go through with it. I never liked it, God knows; I always looked out for something else, and the moment I got other work to do, I left it. If there is anything wrong in being the agent in such matters—not the principal, mind you—I’m sure the business, to a beginner like I was, at all events, carries its own punishment along with it. I wished again and again that the people would only blow me up, or pitch into me—that I wouldn’t have minded, it’s all in my way; but it’s the being shut up by yourself in one room for five days, without so much as an old newspaper to look at, or anything to see out o’ the winder but the roofs and chimneys at the back of the house, or anything to listen to, but the ticking, perhaps, of an old Dutch clock, the sobbing of the missis, now and then, the low talking of friends in the next room, who speak in whispers, lest “the man” should overhear them, or perhaps the occasional opening of the door, as a child peeps in to look at you, and then runs half-frightened away—it’s all this, that makes you feel sneaking somehow, and ashamed of yourself; and then, if it’s wintertime, they just give you fire enough to make you think you’d like more, and bring in your grub as if they wished it ’ud choke you—as I dare say they do, for the matter of that, most heartily. If they’re very civil, they make you up a bed in the room at night, and if they don’t, your master sends one in for you; but there you are, without being washed or shaved all the time, shunned by everybody, and spoken to by no one, unless some one comes in at dinner-time, and asks you whether you want any more, in a tone as much to say, “I hope you don’t,” or, in the evening, to inquire whether you wouldn’t rather have a candle, after you’ve been sitting in the dark half the night. When I was left in this way, I used to sit, think, think, thinking, till I felt as lonesome as a kitten in a wash-house copper with the lid on; but I believe the old brokers’ men who are regularly trained to it, never think at all. I have heard some on ’em say, indeed, that they don’t know how!

‘I put in a good many distresses in my time (continued Mr. Bung), and in course I wasn’t long in finding, that some people are not as much to be pitied as others are, and that people with good incomes who get into difficulties, which they keep patching up day after day and week after week, get so used to these sort of things in time, that at last they come scarcely to feel them at all. I remember the very first place I was put in possession of, was a gentleman’s house in this parish here, that everybody would suppose couldn’t help having money if he tried. I went with old Fixem, my old master, ’bout half arter eight in the morning; rang the area-bell; servant in livery opened the door: “Governor at home?”—“Yes, he is,” says the man; “but he’s breakfasting just now.” “Never mind,” says Fixem, “just you tell him there’s a gentleman here, as wants to speak to him partickler.” So the servant he opens his eyes, and stares about him all ways—looking for the gentleman, as it struck me, for I don’t think anybody but a man as was stone-blind would mistake Fixem for one; and as for me, I was as seedy as a cheap cowcumber. Hows'ever, he turns round, and goes to the breakfast-parlour, which was a little snug sort of room at the end of the passage, and Fixem (as we always did in that profession), without waiting to be announced, walks in arter him, and before the servant could get out, "Please, sir, here's a man as wants to speak to you," looks in at the door as familiar and pleasant as may be. "Who the devil are you, and how dare you walk into a gentleman's house without leave?" says the master, as fierce as a bull in fits. "My name," says Fixem, winking to the master to send the servant away, and putting the warrant into his hands folded up like a note, "My name's Smith," says he, "and I called from Johnson's about that business of Thompson's."—"Oh," says the other, quite down on him directly, "How *is* Thompson?" says he; "Pray sit down, Mr. Smith: John, leave the room." Out went the servant; and the gentleman and Fixem looked at one another till they couldn't look any longer, and then they varied the amusements by looking at me, who had been standing on the mat all this time. "Hundred and fifty pounds, I see," said the gentleman at last. "Hundred and fifty pound," said Fixem, "besides cost of levy, sheriff's poundage, and all other incidental expenses."—"Um," says the gentleman, "I shan't be able to settle this before to-morrow afternoon."—"Very sorry; but I shall be obliged to leave my man here till then," replies Fixem, pretending to look very miserable over it. "That's very unfort'nate," says the gentleman, "for I have got a large party here to-night, and I'm ruined if those fellows of mine get an inkling of the matter—just step here, Mr. Smith," says he, after a short pause. So Fixem walks with him up to the window, and after a good deal of whispering, and a little chinking of suverins, and looking at me, he comes back and says, "Bung, you're a handy fellow, and very honest I know. This gentleman wants an assistant to clean the plate and wait at table to-day, and if you're not particularly engaged," says old Fixem, grinning like mad, and shoving a couple of suverins into my hand, "he'll be very glad to avail himself of your services." Well, I laughed: and the gentleman laughed, and we all laughed; and I went home and cleaned myself, leaving Fixem there, and when I went back, Fixem went away, and I polished up the plate, and waited at table, and gammoned the servants, and nobody had the least idea I was in possession, though it very nearly came out after all; for one of the last gentlemen who remained, came down-stairs into the hall where I was sitting pretty late at night, and putting half-a-crown into my hand, says, "Here, my man," says he, “run and get me a coach, will you?” I thought it was a do, to get me out of the house, and was just going to say so, sulkily enough, when the gentleman (who was up to everything) came running down-stairs, as if he was in great anxiety. “Bung,” says he, pretending to be in a consuming passion. “Sir,” says I. “Why the devil an’t you looking after that plate?”—“I was just going to send him for a coach for me,” says the other gentleman. “And I was just a-going to say,” says I—“Anybody else, my dear fellow,” interrupts the master of the house, pushing me down the passage to get out of the way—“anybody else; but I have put this man in possession of all the plate and valuables, and I cannot allow him on any consideration whatever, to leave the house. Bung, you scoundrel, go and count those forks in the breakfast-parlour instantly.” You may be sure I went laughing pretty hearty when I found it was all right. The money was paid next day, with the addition of something else for myself, and that was the best job that I (and I suspect old Fixem too) ever got in that line.

‘But this is the bright side of the picture, sir, after all,’ resumed Mr. Bung, laying aside the knowing look and flash air, with which he had repeated the previous anecdote—‘and I’m sorry to say, it’s the side one sees very, very seldom, in comparison with the dark one. The civility which money will purchase, is rarely extended to those who have none; and there’s a consolation even in being able to patch up one difficulty, to make way for another, to which very poor people are strangers. I was once put into a house down George’s-yard—that little dirty court at the back of the gas-works; and I never shall forget the misery of them people, dear me! It was a distress for half a year’s rent—two pound ten, I think. There was only two rooms in the house, and as there was no passage, the lodgers up-stairs always went through the room of the people of the house, as they passed in and out; and every time they did so—which, on the average, was about four times every quarter of an hour—they blowed up quite frightful: for their things had been seized too, and included in the inventory. There was a little piece of enclosed dust in front of the house, with a cinder-path leading up to the door, and an open rain-water butt on one side. A dirty striped curtain, on a very slack string, hung in the window, and a little triangular bit of broken looking-glass rested on the sill inside. I suppose it was meant for the people’s use, but their appearance was so wretched, and so miserable, that I’m certain they never could have plucked up courage to look themselves in the face a second time, if they survived the fright of doing so once. There was two or three chairs, that might have been worth, in their best days, from eightpence to a shilling a-piece; a small deal table, an old corner cupboard with nothing in it, and one of those bedsteads which turn up half way, and leave the bottom legs sticking out for you to knock your head against, or hang your hat upon; no bed, no bedding. There was an old sack, by way of rug, before the fireplace, and four or five children were grovelling about, among the sand on the floor. The execution was only put in, to get ’em out of the house, for there was nothing to take to pay the expenses; and here I stopped for three days, though that was a mere form too: for, in course, I knew, and we all knew, they could never pay the money. In one of the chairs, by the side of the place where the fire ought to have been, was an old ’ooman—the ugliest and dirtiest I ever see—who sat rocking herself backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, without once stopping, except for an instant now and then, to clasp together the withered hands which, with these exceptions, she kept constantly rubbing upon her knees, just raising and depressing her fingers convulsively, in time to the rocking of the chair. On the other side sat the mother with an infant in her arms, which cried till it cried itself to sleep, and when it ’woke, cried till it cried itself off again. The old ’ooman’s voice I never heard: she seemed completely stupefied; and as to the mother’s, it would have been better if she had been so too, for misery had changed her to a devil. If you had heard how she cursed the little naked children as was rolling on the floor, and seen how savagely she struck the infant when it cried with hunger, you’d have shuddered as much as I did. There they remained all the time: the children ate a morsel of bread once or twice, and I gave ’em best part of the dinners my missis brought me, but the woman ate nothing; they never even laid on the bedstead, nor was the room swept or cleaned all the time. The neighbours were all too poor themselves to take any notice of ’em, but from what I could make out from the abuse of the woman up-stairs, it seemed the husband had been transported a few weeks before. When the time was up, the landlord and old Fixem too, got rather frightened about the family, and so they made a stir about it, and had ’em taken to the workhouse. They sent the sick couch for the old ’ooman, and Simmons took the children away at night. The old ’ooman went into the infirmary, and very soon died. The children are all in the house to this day, and very comfortable they are in comparison. As to the mother, there was no taming her at all. She had been a quiet, hard-working woman, I believe, but her misery had actually drove her wild; so after she had been sent to the house of correction half-a-dozen times, for throwing inkstands at the overseers, blaspheming the churchwardens, and smashing everybody as come near her, she burst a blood-vessel one mornin', and died too; and a happy release it was, both for herself and the old paupers, male and female, which she used to tip over in all directions, as if they were so many skittles, and she the ball.

'Now this was bad enough,' resumed Mr. Bung, taking a half-step towards the door, as if to intimate that he had nearly concluded. 'This was bad enough, but there was a sort of quiet misery—if you understand what I mean by that, sir—about a lady at one house I was put into, as touched me a good deal more. It doesn't matter where it was exactly: indeed, I'd rather not say, but it was the same sort o' job. I went with Fixem in the usual way—there was a year's rent in arrear; a very small servant-girl opened the door, and three or four fine-looking little children was in the front parlour we were shown into, which was very clean, but very scantily furnished, much like the children themselves. "Bung," says Fixem to me, in a low voice, when we were left alone for a minute, "I know something about this here family, and my opinion is, it's no go." "Do you think they can't settle?" says I, quite anxiously; for I liked the looks of them children. Fixem shook his head, and was just about to reply, when the door opened, and in come a lady, as white as ever I see any one in my days, except about the eyes, which were red with crying. She walked in, as firm as I could have done; shut the door carefully after her, and sat herself down with a face as composed as if it was made of stone. "What is the matter, gentlemen?" says she, in a surprisin' steady voice. "*Is* this an execution?" "It is, mum," says Fixem. The lady looked at him as steady as ever: she didn't seem to have understood him. "It is, mum," says Fixem again; "this is my warrant of distress, mum," says he, handing it over as polite as if it was a newspaper which had been bespoke arter the next gentleman.

'The lady's lip trembled as she took the printed paper. She cast her eye over it, and old Fixem began to explain the form, but saw she wasn't reading it, plain enough, poor thing. "Oh, my God!" says she, suddenly a-bursting out crying, letting the warrant fall, and hiding her face in her hands. "Oh, my God! what will become of us!" The noise she made, brought in a young lady of about nineteen or twenty, who, I suppose, had been a-listening at the door, and who had got a little boy in her arms: she sat him down in the lady’s lap, without speaking, and she hugged the poor little fellow to her bosom, and cried over him, till even old Fixem put on his blue spectacles to hide the two tears, that was a-trickling down, one on each side of his dirty face. “Now, dear ma,” says the young lady, “you know how much you have borne. For all our sakes—for pa’s sake,” says she, “don’t give way to this!”—“No, no, I won’t!” says the lady, gathering herself up, hastily, and drying her eyes; “I am very foolish, but I’m better now—much better.” And then she roused herself up, went with us into every room while we took the inventory, opened all the drawers of her own accord, sorted the children’s little clothes to make the work easier; and, except doing everything in a strange sort of hurry, seemed as calm and composed as if nothing had happened. When we came down-stairs again, she hesitated a minute or two, and at last says, “Gentlemen,” says she, “I am afraid I have done wrong, and perhaps it may bring you into trouble. I secreted just now,” she says, “the only trinket I have left in the world—here it is.” So she lays down on the table a little miniature mounted in gold. “It’s a miniature,” she says, “of my poor dear father! I little thought once, that I should ever thank God for depriving me of the original, but I do, and have done for years back, most fervently. Take it away, sir,” she says, “it’s a face that never turned from me in sickness and distress, and I can hardly bear to turn from it now, when, God knows, I suffer both in no ordinary degree.” I couldn’t say nothing, but I raised my head from the inventory which I was filling up, and looked at Fixem; the old fellow nodded to me significantly, so I ran my pen through the “*Mini*” I had just written, and left the miniature on the table.

‘Well, sir, to make short of a long story, I was left in possession, and in possession I remained; and though I was an ignorant man, and the master of the house a clever one, I saw what he never did, but what he would give worlds now (if he had ’em) to have seen in time. I saw, sir, that his wife was wasting away, beneath cares of which she never complained, and griefs she never told. I saw that she was dying before his eyes; I knew that one exertion from him might have saved her, but he never made it. I don’t blame him: I don’t think he *could* rouse himself. She had so long anticipated all his wishes, and acted for him, that he was a lost man when left to himself. I used to think when I caught sight of her, in the clothes she used to wear, which looked shabby even upon her, and would have been scarcely decent on any one else, that if I was a gentleman it would wring my very heart to see the woman that was a smart and merry girl when I courted her, so altered through her love for me. Bitter cold and damp weather it was, yet, though her dress was thin, and her shoes none of the best, during the whole three days, from morning to night, she was out of doors running about to try and raise the money. The money *was* raised and the execution was paid out. The whole family crowded into the room where I was, when the money arrived. The father was quite happy as the inconvenience was removed—I dare say he didn't know how; the children looked merry and cheerful again; the eldest girl was bustling about, making preparations for the first comfortable meal they had had since the distress was put in; and the mother looked pleased to see them all so. But if ever I saw death in a woman's face, I saw it in hers that night.

'I was right, sir,' continued Mr. Bung, hurriedly passing his coat-sleeve over his face; 'the family grew more prosperous, and good fortune arrived. But it was too late. Those children are motherless now, and their father would give up all he has since gained—house, home, goods, money: all that he has, or ever can have, to restore the wife he has lost.'

CHAPTER VI—THE LADIES' SOCIETIES

Our Parish is very prolific in ladies' charitable institutions. In winter, when wet feet are common, and colds not scarce, we have the ladies' soup distribution society, the ladies' coal distribution society, and the ladies' blanket distribution society; in summer, when stone fruits flourish and stomach aches prevail, we have the ladies' dispensary, and the ladies' sick visitation committee; and all the year round we have the ladies' child's examination society, the ladies' bible and prayer-book circulation society, and the ladies' childbed-linen monthly loan society. The two latter are decidedly the most important; whether they are productive of more benefit than the rest, it is not for us to say, but we can take upon ourselves to affirm, with the utmost solemnity, that they create a greater stir and more bustle, than all the others put together.

We should be disposed to affirm, on the first blush of the matter, that the bible and prayer-book society is not so popular as the childbed-linen society; the bible and prayer-book society has, however, considerably increased in importance within the last year or two, having derived some adventitious aid from the factious opposition of the child's examination society; which factious opposition originated in manner following:—When the young curate was popular, and all the unmarried ladies in the parish took a serious turn, the charity children all at once became objects of peculiar and especial interest. The three Miss Browns (enthusiastic admirers of the curate) taught, and exercised, and examined, and re-examined the unfortunate children, until the boys grew pale, and the girls consumptive with study and fatigue. The three Miss Browns stood it out very well, because they relieved each other; but the children, having no relief at all, exhibited decided symptoms of weariness and care. The unthinking part of the parishioners laughed at all this, but the more reflective portion of the inhabitants abstained from expressing any opinion on the subject until that of the curate had been clearly ascertained.

The opportunity was not long wanting. The curate preached a charity sermon on behalf of the charity school, and in the charity sermon aforesaid, expatiated in glowing terms on the praiseworthy and indefatigable exertions of certain estimable individuals. Sobs were heard to issue from the three Miss Browns' pew; the pew-opener of the division was seen to hurry down the centre aisle to the vestry door, and to return immediately, bearing a glass of water in her hand. A low moaning ensued; two more pew-openers rushed to the spot, and the three Miss Browns, each supported by a pew-opener, were led out of the church, and led in again after the lapse of five minutes with white pocket-handkerchiefs to their eyes, as if they had been attending a funeral in the churchyard adjoining. If any doubt had for a moment existed, as to whom the allusion was intended to apply, it was at once removed. The wish to enlighten the charity children became universal, and the three Miss Browns were unanimously besought to divide the school into classes, and to assign each class to the superintendence of two young ladies.

A little learning is a dangerous thing, but a little patronage is more so; the three Miss Browns appointed all the old maids, and carefully excluded the young ones. Maiden aunts triumphed, mammas were reduced to the lowest depths of despair, and there is no telling in what act of violence the general indignation against the three Miss Browns might have vented itself, had not a perfectly providential occurrence changed the tide of public feeling. Mrs. Johnson Parker, the mother of seven extremely fine girls—all unmarried—hastily reported to several other mammas of several other unmarried families, that five old men, six old women, and children innumerable, in the free seats near her pew, were in the habit of coming to church every Sunday, without either bible or prayer-book. Was this to be borne in a civilised country? Could such things be tolerated in a Christian land? Never! A ladies' bible and prayer-book distribution society was instantly formed: president, Mrs. Johnson Parker; treasurers, auditors, and secretary, the Misses Johnson Parker: subscriptions were entered into, books were bought, all the free-seat people provided therewith, and when the first lesson was given out, on the first Sunday succeeding these events, there was such a dropping of books, and rustling of leaves, that it was morally impossible to hear one word of the service for five minutes afterwards.

The three Miss Browns, and their party, saw the approaching danger, and endeavoured to avert it by ridicule and sarcasm. Neither the old men nor the old women could read their books, now they had got them, said the three Miss Browns. Never mind; they could learn, replied Mrs. Johnson Parker. The children couldn't read either, suggested the three Miss Browns. No matter; they could be taught, retorted Mrs. Johnson Parker. A balance of parties took place. The Miss Browns publicly examined—popular feeling inclined to the child's examination society. The Miss Johnson Parkers publicly distributed—a reaction took place in favour of the prayer-book distribution. A feather would have turned the scale, and a feather did turn it. A missionary returned from the West Indies; he was to be presented to the Dissenters' Missionary Society on his marriage with a wealthy widow. Overtures were made to the Dissenters by the Johnson Parkers. Their object was the same, and why not have a joint meeting of the two societies? The proposition was accepted. The meeting was duly heralded by public announcement, and the room was crowded to suffocation. The Missionary appeared on the platform; he was hailed with enthusiasm. He repeated a dialogue he had heard between two negroes, behind a hedge, on the subject of distribution societies; the approbation was tumultuous. He gave an imitation of the two negroes in broken English; the roof was rent with applause. From that period we date (with one trifling exception) a daily increase in the popularity of the distribution society, and an increase of popularity, which the feeble and impotent opposition of the examination party, has only tended to augment.

Now, the great points about the childbed-linen monthly loan society are, that it is less dependent on the fluctuations of public opinion than either the distribution or the child’s examination; and that, come what may, there is never any lack of objects on which to exercise its benevolence. Our parish is a very populous one, and, if anything, contributes, we should be disposed to say, rather more than its due share to the aggregate amount of births in the metropolis and its environs. The consequence is, that the monthly loan society flourishes, and invests its members with a most enviable amount of bustling patronage. The society (whose only notion of dividing time, would appear to be its allotment into months) holds monthly tea-drinkings, at which the monthly report is received, a secretary elected for the month ensuing, and such of the monthly boxes as may not happen to be out on loan for the month, carefully examined.

We were never present at one of these meetings, from all of which it is scarcely necessary to say, gentlemen are carefully excluded; but Mr. Bung has been called before the board once or twice, and we have his authority for stating, that its proceedings are conducted with great order and regularity: not more than four members being allowed to speak at one time on any pretence whatever. The regular committee is composed exclusively of married ladies, but a vast number of young unmarried ladies of from eighteen to twenty-five years of age, respectively, are admitted as honorary members, partly because they are very useful in replenishing the boxes, and visiting the confined; partly because it is highly desirable that they should be initiated, at an early period, into the more serious and matronly duties of after-life; and partly, because prudent mammas have not unfrequently been known to turn this circumstance to wonderfully good account in matrimonial speculations.

In addition to the loan of the monthly boxes (which are always painted blue, with the name of the society in large white letters on the lid), the society dispense occasional grants of beef-tea, and a composition of warm beer, spice, eggs, and sugar, commonly known by the name of ‘candle,’ to its patients. And here again the services of the honorary members are called into requisition, and most cheerfully conceded. Deputations of twos or threes are sent out to visit the patients, and on these occasions there is such a tasting of candle and beef-tea, such a stirring about of little messes in tiny saucepans on the hob, such a dressing and undressing of infants, such a tying, and folding, and pinning; such a nursing and warming of little legs and feet before the fire, such a delightful confusion of talking and cooking, bustle, importance, and officiousness, as never can be enjoyed in its full extent but on similar occasions.

In rivalry of these two institutions, and as a last expiring effort to acquire parochial popularity, the child's examination people determined, the other day, on having a grand public examination of the pupils; and the large school-room of the national seminary was, by and with the consent of the parish authorities, devoted to the purpose. Invitation circulars were forwarded to all the principal parishioners, including, of course, the heads of the other two societies, for whose especial behoof and edification the display was intended; and a large audience was confidently anticipated on the occasion. The floor was carefully scrubbed the day before, under the immediate superintendence of the three Miss Browns; forms were placed across the room for the accommodation of the visitors, specimens in writing were carefully selected, and as carefully patched and touched up, until they astonished the children who had written them, rather more than the company who read them; sums in compound addition were rehearsed and re-rehearsed until all the children had the totals by heart; and the preparations altogether were on the most laborious and most comprehensive scale. The morning arrived: the children were yellow-soaped and flannelled, and towelled, till their faces shone again; every pupil's hair was carefully combed into his or her eyes, as the case might be; the girls were adorned with snow-white tippets, and caps bound round the head by a single purple ribbon: the necks of the elder boys were fixed into collars of startling dimensions.

The doors were thrown open, and the Misses Brown and Co. were discovered in plain white muslin dresses, and caps of the same—the child's examination uniform. The room filled: the greetings of the company were loud and cordial. The distributionists trembled, for their popularity was at stake. The eldest boy fell forward, and delivered a propitiatory address from behind his collar. It was from the pen of Mr. Henry Brown; the applause was universal, and the Johnson Parkers were aghast. The examination proceeded with success, and terminated in triumph. The child's examination society gained a momentary victory, and the Johnson Parkers retreated in despair.

A secret council of the distributionists was held that night, with Mrs. Johnson Parker in the chair, to consider of the best means of recovering the ground they had lost in the favour of the parish. What could be done? Another meeting! Alas! who was to attend it? The Missionary would not do twice; and the slaves were emancipated. A bold step must be taken. The parish must be astonished in some way or other; but no one was able to suggest what the step should be. At length, a very old lady was heard to mumble, in indistinct tones, ‘Exeter Hall.’ A sudden light broke in upon the meeting. It was unanimously resolved, that a deputation of old ladies should wait upon a celebrated orator, imploring his assistance, and the favour of a speech; and the deputation should also wait on two or three other imbecile old women, not resident in the parish, and entreat their attendance. The application was successful, the meeting was held; the orator (an Irishman) came. He talked of green isles—other shores—vast Atlantic—bosom of the deep—Christian charity—blood and extermination—mercy in hearts—arms in hands—altars and homes—household gods. He wiped his eyes, he blew his nose, and he quoted Latin. The effect was tremendous—the Latin was a decided hit. Nobody knew exactly what it was about, but everybody knew it must be affecting, because even the orator was overcome. The popularity of the distribution society among the ladies of our parish is unprecedented; and the child’s examination is going fast to decay.

CHAPTER VII—OUR NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOUR

We are very fond of speculating as we walk through a street, on the character and pursuits of the people who inhabit it; and nothing so materially assists us in these speculations as the appearance of the house doors. The various expressions of the human countenance afford a beautiful and interesting study; but there is something in the physiognomy of street-door knockers, almost as characteristic, and nearly as infallible. Whenever we visit a man for the first time, we contemplate the features of his knocker with the greatest curiosity, for we well know, that between the man and his knocker, there will inevitably be a greater or less degree of resemblance and sympathy.

For instance, there is one description of knocker that used to be common enough, but which is fast passing away—a large round one, with the jolly face of a convivial lion smiling blandly at you, as you twist the sides of your hair into a curl or pull up your shirt-collar while you are waiting for the door to be opened; we never saw that knocker on the door of a churlish man—so far as our experience is concerned, it invariably bespoke hospitality and another bottle.

No man ever saw this knocker on the door of a small attorney or bill-broker; they always patronise the other lion; a heavy ferocious-looking fellow, with a countenance expressive of savage stupidity—a sort of grand master among the knockers, and a great favourite with the selfish and brutal.

Then there is a little pert Egyptian knocker, with a long thin face, a pinched-up nose, and a very sharp chin; he is most in vogue with your government-office people, in light drabs and starched cravats; little spare, priggish men, who are perfectly satisfied with their own opinions, and consider themselves of paramount importance.

We were greatly troubled a few years ago, by the innovation of a new kind of knocker, without any face at all, composed of a wreath depending from a hand or small truncheon. A little trouble and attention, however, enabled us to overcome this difficulty, and to reconcile the new system to our favourite theory. You will invariably find this knocker on the doors of cold and formal people, who always ask you why you *don't* come, and never say *do*.

Everybody knows the brass knocker is common to suburban villas, and extensive boarding-schools; and having noticed this genus we have recapitulated all the most prominent and strongly-defined species.

Some phrenologists affirm, that the agitation of a man's brain by different passions, produces corresponding developments in the form of his skull. Do not let us be understood as pushing our theory to the full length of asserting, that any alteration in a man's disposition would produce a visible effect on the feature of his knocker. Our position merely is, that in such a case, the magnetism which must exist between a man and his knocker, would induce the man to remove, and seek some knocker more congenial to his altered feelings. If you ever find a man changing his habitation without any reasonable pretext, depend upon it, that, although he may not be aware of the fact himself, it is because he and his knocker are at variance. This is a new theory, but we venture to launch it, nevertheless, as being quite as ingenious and infallible as many thousands of the learned speculations which are daily broached for public good and private fortune-making.

Entertaining these feelings on the subject of knockers, it will be readily imagined with what consternation we viewed the entire removal of the knocker from the door of the next house to the one we lived in, some time ago, and the substitution of a bell. This was a calamity we had never anticipated. The bare idea of anybody being able to exist without a knocker, appeared so wild and visionary, that it had never for one instant entered our imagination.

We sauntered moodily from the spot, and bent our steps towards Eaton-square, then just building. What was our astonishment and indignation to find that bells were fast becoming the rule, and knockers the exception! Our theory trembled beneath the shock. We hastened home; and fancying we foresaw in the swift progress of events, its entire abolition, resolved from that day forward to vent our speculations on our next-door neighbours in person. The house adjoining ours on the left hand was uninhabited, and we had, therefore, plenty of leisure to observe our next-door neighbours on the other side.

The house without the knocker was in the occupation of a city clerk, and there was a neatly-written bill in the parlour window intimating that lodgings for a single gentleman were to be let within.

It was a neat, dull little house, on the shady side of the way, with new, narrow floorcloth in the passage, and new, narrow stair-carpets up to the first floor. The paper was new, and the paint was new, and the furniture was new; and all three, paper, paint, and furniture, bespoke the limited means of the tenant. There was a little red and black carpet in the drawing-room, with a border of flooring all the way round; a few stained chairs and a pembroke table. A pink shell was displayed on each of the little sideboards, which, with the addition of a tea-tray and caddy, a few more shells on the mantelpiece, and three peacock’s feathers tastefully arranged above them, completed the decorative furniture of the apartment.

This was the room destined for the reception of the single gentleman during the day, and a little back room on the same floor was assigned as his sleeping apartment by night.

The bill had not been long in the window, when a stout, good-humoured looking gentleman, of about five-and-thirty, appeared as a candidate for the tenancy. Terms were soon arranged, for the bill was taken down immediately after his first visit. In a day or two the single gentleman came in, and shortly afterwards his real character came out.

First of all, he displayed a most extraordinary partiality for sitting up till three or four o'clock in the morning, drinking whiskey-and-water, and smoking cigars; then he invited friends home, who used to come at ten o'clock, and begin to get happy about the small hours, when they evinced their perfect contentment by singing songs with half-a-dozen verses of two lines each, and a chorus of ten, which chorus used to be shouted forth by the whole strength of the company, in the most enthusiastic and vociferous manner, to the great annoyance of the neighbours, and the special discomfort of another single gentleman overhead.

Now, this was bad enough, occurring as it did three times a week on the average, but this was not all; for when the company *did* go away, instead of walking quietly down the street, as anybody else's company would have done, they amused themselves by making alarming and frightful noises, and counterfeiting the shrieks of females in distress; and one night, a red-faced gentleman in a white hat knocked in the most urgent manner at the door of the powdered-headed old gentleman at No. 3, and when the powdered-headed old gentleman, who thought one of his married daughters must have been taken ill prematurely, had groped down-stairs, and after a great deal of unbolting and key-turning, opened the street door, the red-faced man in the white hat said he hoped he'd excuse his giving him so much trouble, but he'd feel obliged if he'd favour him with a glass of cold spring water, and the loan of a shilling for a cab to take him home, on which the old gentleman slammed the door and went up-stairs, and threw the contents of his water jug out of window—very straight, only it went over the wrong man; and the whole street was involved in confusion.

A joke's a joke; and even practical jests are very capital in their way, if you can only get the other party to see the fun of them; but the population of our street were so dull of apprehension, as to be quite lost to a sense of the drollery of this proceeding: and the consequence was, that our next-door neighbour was obliged to tell the single gentleman, that unless he gave up entertaining his friends at home, he really must be compelled to part with him.

The single gentleman received the remonstrance with great good-humour, and promised from that time forward, to spend his evenings at a coffee-house—a determination which afforded general and unmixed satisfaction.

The next night passed off very well, everybody being delighted with the change; but on the next, the noises were renewed with greater spirit than ever. The single gentleman’s friends being unable to see him in his own house every alternate night, had come to the determination of seeing him home every night; and what with the discordant greetings of the friends at parting, and the noise created by the single gentleman in his passage up-stairs, and his subsequent struggles to get his boots off, the evil was not to be borne. So, our next-door neighbour gave the single gentleman, who was a very good lodger in other respects, notice to quit; and the single gentleman went away, and entertained his friends in other lodgings.

The next applicant for the vacant first floor, was of a very different character from the troublesome single gentleman who had just quitted it. He was a tall, thin, young gentleman, with a profusion of brown hair, reddish whiskers, and very slightly developed moustaches. He wore a braided surtout, with frogs behind, light grey trousers, and wash-leather gloves, and had altogether rather a military appearance. So unlike the roystering single gentleman. Such insinuating manners, and such a delightful address! So seriously disposed, too! When he first came to look at the lodgings, he inquired most particularly whether he was sure to be able to get a seat in the parish church; and when he had agreed to take them, he requested to have a list of the different local charities, as he intended to subscribe his mite to the most deserving among them.

Our next-door neighbour was now perfectly happy. He had got a lodger at last, of just his own way of thinking—a serious, well-disposed man, who abhorred gaiety, and loved retirement. He took down the bill with a light heart, and pictured in imagination a long series of quiet Sundays, on which he and his lodger would exchange mutual civilities and Sunday papers.

The serious man arrived, and his luggage was to arrive from the country next morning. He borrowed a clean shirt, and a prayer-book, from our next-door neighbour, and retired to rest at an early hour, requesting that he might be called punctually at ten o’clock next morning—not before, as he was much fatigued.

He *was* called, and did not answer: he was called again, but there was no reply. Our next-door neighbour became alarmed, and burst the door open. The serious man had left the house mysteriously; carrying with him the shirt, the prayer-book, a teaspoon, and the bedclothes.

Whether this occurrence, coupled with the irregularities of his former lodger, gave our next-door neighbour an aversion to single gentlemen, we know not; we only know that the next bill which made its appearance in the parlour window intimated generally, that there were furnished apartments to let on the first floor. The bill was soon removed. The new lodgers at first attracted our curiosity, and afterwards excited our interest.

They were a young lad of eighteen or nineteen, and his mother, a lady of about fifty, or it might be less. The mother wore a widow's weeds, and the boy was also clothed in deep mourning. They were poor—very poor; for their only means of support arose from the pittance the boy earned, by copying writings, and translating for booksellers.

They had removed from some country place and settled in London; partly because it afforded better chances of employment for the boy, and partly, perhaps, with the natural desire to leave a place where they had been in better circumstances, and where their poverty was known. They were proud under their reverses, and above revealing their wants and privations to strangers. How bitter those privations were, and how hard the boy worked to remove them, no one ever knew but themselves. Night after night, two, three, four hours after midnight, could we hear the occasional raking up of the scanty fire, or the hollow and half-stifled cough, which indicated his being still at work; and day after day, could we see more plainly that nature had set that unearthly light in his plaintive face, which is the beacon of her worst disease.

Actuated, we hope, by a higher feeling than mere curiosity, we contrived to establish, first an acquaintance, and then a close intimacy, with the poor strangers. Our worst fears were realised; the boy was sinking fast. Through a part of the winter, and the whole of the following spring and summer, his labours were unceasingly prolonged: and the mother attempted to procure needle-work, embroidery—anything for bread.

A few shillings now and then, were all she could earn. The boy worked steadily on; dying by minutes, but never once giving utterance to complaint or murmur.

One beautiful autumn evening we went to pay our customary visit to the invalid. His little remaining strength had been decreasing rapidly for two or three days preceding, and he was lying on the sofa at the open window, gazing at the setting sun. His mother had been reading the Bible to him, for she closed the book as we entered, and advanced to meet us.

‘I was telling William,’ she said, ‘that we must manage to take him into the country somewhere, so that he may get quite well. He is not ill, you know, but he is not very strong, and has exerted himself too much lately.’ Poor thing! The tears that streamed through her fingers, as she turned aside, as if to adjust her close widow’s cap, too plainly showed how fruitless was the attempt to deceive herself.

We sat down by the head of the sofa, but said nothing, for we saw the breath of life was passing gently but rapidly from the young form before us. At every respiration, his heart beat more slowly.

The boy placed one hand in ours, grasped his mother’s arm with the other, drew her hastily towards him, and fervently kissed her cheek. There was a pause. He sunk back upon his pillow, and looked long and earnestly in his mother’s face.

‘William, William!’ murmured the mother, after a long interval, ‘don’t look at me so—speak to me, dear!’

The boy smiled languidly, but an instant afterwards his features resolved into the same cold, solemn gaze.

‘William, dear William! rouse yourself; don’t look at me so, love—pray don’t! Oh, my God! what shall I do!’ cried the widow, clasping her hands in agony—‘my dear boy! he is dying!’ The boy raised himself by a violent effort, and folded his hands together—‘Mother! dear, dear mother, bury me in the open fields—anywhere but in these dreadful streets. I should like to be where you can see my grave, but not in these close crowded streets; they have killed me; kiss me again, mother; put your arm round my neck—’

He fell back, and a strange expression stole upon his features; not of pain or suffering, but an indescribable fixing of every line and muscle.

The boy was dead.

SCENES

CHAPTER I—THE STREETS—MORNING

The appearance presented by the streets of London an hour before sunrise, on a summer's morning, is most striking even to the few whose unfortunate pursuits of pleasure, or scarcely less unfortunate pursuits of business, cause them to be well acquainted with the scene. There is an air of cold, solitary desolation about the noiseless streets which we are accustomed to see thronged at other times by a busy, eager crowd, and over the quiet, closely-shut buildings, which throughout the day are swarming with life and bustle, that is very impressive.

The last drunken man, who shall find his way home before sunlight, has just staggered heavily along, roaring out the burden of the drinking song of the previous night: the last houseless vagrant whom penury and police have left in the streets, has coiled up his chilly limbs in some paved comer, to dream of food and warmth. The drunken, the dissipated, and the wretched have disappeared; the more sober and orderly part of the population have not yet awakened to the labours of the day, and the stillness of death is over the streets; its very hue seems to be imparted to them, cold and lifeless as they look in the grey, sombre light of daybreak. The coach-stands in the larger thoroughfares are deserted: the night-houses are closed; and the chosen promenades of profligate misery are empty.

An occasional policeman may alone be seen at the street corners, listlessly gazing on the deserted prospect before him; and now and then a rakish-looking cat runs stealthily across the road and descends his own area with as much caution and slyness—bounding first on the water-butt, then on the dust-hole, and then alighting on the flag-stones—as if he were conscious that his character depended on his gallantry of the preceding night escaping public observation. A partially opened bedroom-window here and there, bespeaks the heat of the weather, and the uneasy slumbers of its occupant; and the dim scanty flicker of the rushlight, through the window-blind, denotes the chamber of watching or sickness. With these few exceptions, the streets present no signs of life, nor the houses of habitation.

An hour wears away; the spires of the churches and roofs of the principal buildings are faintly tinged with the light of the rising sun; and the streets, by almost imperceptible degrees, begin to resume their bustle and animation. Market-carts roll slowly along: the sleepy waggoner impatiently urging on his tired horses, or vainly endeavouring to awaken the boy, who, luxuriously stretched on the top of the fruit-baskets, forgets, in happy oblivion, his long-cherished curiosity to behold the wonders of London.

Rough, sleepy-looking animals of strange appearance, something between ostlers and hackney-coachmen, begin to take down the shutters of early public-houses; and little deal tables, with the ordinary preparations for a street breakfast, make their appearance at the customary stations. Numbers of men and women (principally the latter), carrying upon their heads heavy baskets of fruit, toil down the park side of Piccadilly, on their way to Covent-garden, and, following each other in rapid succession, form a long straggling line from thence to the turn of the road at Knightsbridge.

Here and there, a bricklayer’s labourer, with the day’s dinner tied up in a handkerchief, walks briskly to his work, and occasionally a little knot of three or four schoolboys on a stolen bathing expedition rattle merrily over the pavement, their boisterous mirth contrasting forcibly with the demeanour of the little sweep, who, having knocked and rung till his arm aches, and being interdicted by a merciful legislature from endangering his lungs by calling out, sits patiently down on the door-step, until the housemaid may happen to awake.

Covent-garden market, and the avenues leading to it, are thronged with carts of all sorts, sizes, and descriptions, from the heavy lumbering waggon, with its four stout horses, to the jingling costermonger’s cart, with its consumptive donkey. The pavement is already strewed with decayed cabbage-leaves, broken hay-bands, and all the indescribable litter of a vegetable market; men are shouting, carts backing, horses neighing, boys fighting, basket-women talking, piemen expatiating on the excellence of their pastry, and donkeys braying. These and a hundred other sounds form a compound discordant enough to a Londoner’s ears, and remarkably disagreeable to those of country gentlemen who are sleeping at the Hummums for the first time.

Another hour passes away, and the day begins in good earnest. The servant of all work, who, under the plea of sleeping very soundly, has utterly disregarded ‘Missis’s’ ringing for half an hour previously, is warned by Master (whom Missis has sent up in his drapery to the landing-place for that purpose), that it’s half-past six, whereupon she awakes all of a sudden, with well-feigned astonishment, and goes down-stairs very sulkily, wishing, while she strikes a light, that the principle of spontaneous combustion would extend itself to coals and kitchen range. When the fire is lighted, she opens the street-door to take in the milk, when, by the most singular coincidence in the world, she discovers that the servant next door has just taken in her milk too, and that Mr. Todd’s young man over the way, is, by an equally extraordinary chance, taking down his master’s shutters. The inevitable consequence is, that she just steps, milk-jug in hand, as far as next door, just to say ‘good morning’ to Betsy Clark, and that Mr. Todd’s young man just steps over the way to say ‘good morning’ to both of ’em; and as the aforesaid Mr. Todd’s young man is almost as good-looking and fascinating as the baker himself, the conversation quickly becomes very interesting, and probably would become more so, if Betsy Clark’s Missis, who always will be a-followin’ her about, didn’t give an angry tap at her bedroom window, on which Mr. Todd’s young man tries to whistle coolly, as he goes back to his shop much faster than he came from it; and the two girls run back to their respective places, and shut their street-doors with surprising softness, each of them poking their heads out of the front parlour window, a minute afterwards, however, ostensibly with the view of looking at the mail which just then passes by, but really for the purpose of catching another glimpse of Mr. Todd’s young man, who being fond of mails, but more of females, takes a short look at the mails, and a long look at the girls, much to the satisfaction of all parties concerned.

The mail itself goes on to the coach-office in due course, and the passengers who are going out by the early coach, stare with astonishment at the passengers who are coming in by the early coach, who look blue and dismal, and are evidently under the influence of that odd feeling produced by travelling, which makes the events of yesterday morning seem as if they had happened at least six months ago, and induces people to wonder with considerable gravity whether the friends and relations they took leave of a fortnight before, have altered much since they have left them. The coach-office is all alive, and the coaches which are just going out, are surrounded by the usual crowd of Jews and nondescripts, who seem to consider, Heaven knows why, that it is quite impossible any man can mount a coach without requiring at least sixpenny-worth of oranges, a penknife, a pocket-book, a last year’s annual, a pencil-case, a piece of sponge, and a small series of caricatures.

Half an hour more, and the sun darts his bright rays cheerfully down the still half-empty streets, and shines with sufficient force to rouse the dismal laziness of the apprentice, who pauses every other minute from his task of sweeping out the shop and watering the pavement in front of it, to tell another apprentice similarly employed, how hot it will be to-day, or to stand with his right hand shading his eyes, and his left resting on the broom, gazing at the ‘Wonder,’ or the ‘Tally-ho,’ or the ‘Nimrod,’ or some other fast coach, till it is out of sight, when he re-enters the shop, envying the passengers on the outside of the fast coach, and thinking of the old red brick house ‘down in the country,’ where he went to school: the miseries of the milk and water, and thick bread and scrapings, fading into nothing before the pleasant recollection of the green field the boys used to play in, and the green pond he was caned for presuming to fall into, and other schoolboy associations.

Cabs, with trunks and band-boxes between the drivers’ legs and outside the apron, rattle briskly up and down the streets on their way to the coach-offices or steam-packet wharfs; and the cab-drivers and hackney-coachmen who are on the stand polish up the ornamental part of their dingy vehicles—the former wondering how people can prefer ‘them wild beast cariwans of homnibuses, to a riglar cab with a fast trotter,’ and the latter admiring how people can trust their necks into one of ‘them crazy cabs, when they can have a ’spectable ’ackney cotche with a pair of ’orses as von’t run away with no vun;’ a consolation unquestionably founded on fact, seeing that a hackney-coach horse never was known to run at all, ‘except,’ as the smart cabman in front of the rank observes, ‘except one, and *he* run back’ards.’

The shops are now completely opened, and apprentices and shopmen are busily engaged in cleaning and decking the windows for the day. The bakers’ shops in town are filled with servants and children waiting for the drawing of the first batch of rolls—an operation which was performed a full hour ago in the suburbs: for the early clerk population of Somers and Camden towns, Islington, and Pentonville, are fast pouring into the city, or directing their steps towards Chancery-lane and the Inns of Court. Middle-aged men, whose salaries have by no means increased in the same proportion as their families, plod steadily along, apparently with no object in view but the counting-house; knowing by sight almost everybody they meet or overtake, for they have seen them every morning (Sunday excepted) during the last twenty years, but speaking to no one. If they do happen to overtake a personal acquaintance, they just exchange a hurried salutation, and keep walking on either by his side, or in front of him, as his rate of walking may chance to be. As to stopping to shake hands, or to take the friend's arm, they seem to think that as it is not included in their salary, they have no right to do it. Small office lads in large hats, who are made men before they are boys, hurry along in pairs, with their first coat carefully brushed, and the white trousers of last Sunday plentifully besmeared with dust and ink. It evidently requires a considerable mental struggle to avoid investing part of the day's dinner-money in the purchase of the stale tarts so temptingly exposed in dusty tins at the pastry-cooks' doors; but a consciousness of their own importance and the receipt of seven shillings a-week, with the prospect of an early rise to eight, comes to their aid, and they accordingly put their hats a little more on one side, and look under the bonnets of all the milliners' and stay-makers' apprentices they meet—poor girls!—the hardest worked, the worst paid, and too often, the worst used class of the community.

Eleven o'clock, and a new set of people fill the streets. The goods in the shop-windows are invitingly arranged; the shopmen in their white neckerchiefs and spruce coats, look as it they couldn't clean a window if their lives depended on it; the carts have disappeared from Covent-garden; the waggoners have returned, and the costermongers repaired to their ordinary 'beats' in the suburbs; clerks are at their offices, and gigs, cabs, omnibuses, and saddle-horses, are conveying their masters to the same destination. The streets are thronged with a vast concourse of people, gay and shabby, rich and poor, idle and industrious; and we come to the heat, bustle, and activity of Noon.

CHAPTER II—THE STREETS—NIGHT

But the streets of London, to be beheld in the very height of their glory, should be seen on a dark, dull, murky winter's night, when there is just enough damp gently stealing down to make the pavement greasy, without cleansing it of any of its impurities; and when the heavy lazy mist, which hangs over every object, makes the gas-lamps look brighter, and the brilliantly-lighted shops more splendid, from the contrast they present to the darkness around. All the people who are at home on such a night as this, seem disposed to make themselves as snug and comfortable as possible; and the passengers in the streets have excellent reason to envy the fortunate individuals who are seated by their own firesides.

In the larger and better kind of streets, dining parlour curtains are closely drawn, kitchen fires blaze brightly up, and savoury steams of hot dinners salute the nostrils of the hungry wayfarer, as he plods wearily by the area railings. In the suburbs, the muffin boy rings his way down the little street, much more slowly than he is wont to do; for Mrs. Macklin, of No. 4, has no sooner opened her little street-door, and screamed out ‘Muffins!’ with all her might, than Mrs. Walker, at No. 5, puts her head out of the parlour-window, and screams ‘Muffins!’ too; and Mrs. Walker has scarcely got the words out of her lips, than Mrs. Peplow, over the way, lets loose Master Peplow, who darts down the street, with a velocity which nothing but buttered muffins in perspective could possibly inspire, and drags the boy back by main force, whereupon Mrs. Macklin and Mrs. Walker, just to save the boy trouble, and to say a few neighbourly words to Mrs. Peplow at the same time, run over the way and buy their muffins at Mrs. Peplow’s door, when it appears from the voluntary statement of Mrs. Walker, that her ‘kittle’s jist a-biling, and the cups and sarsers ready laid,’ and that, as it was such a wretched night out o’ doors, she’d made up her mind to have a nice, hot, comfortable cup o’ tea—a determination at which, by the most singular coincidence, the other two ladies had simultaneously arrived.

After a little conversation about the wretchedness of the weather and the merits of tea, with a digression relative to the viciousness of boys as a rule, and the amiability of Master Peplow as an exception, Mrs. Walker sees her husband coming down the street; and as he must want his tea, poor man, after his dirty walk from the Docks, she instantly runs across, muffins in hand, and Mrs. Macklin does the same, and after a few words to Mrs. Walker, they all pop into their little houses, and slam their little street-doors, which are not opened again for the remainder of the evening, except to the nine o’clock ‘beer,’ who comes round with a lantern in front of his tray, and says, as he lends Mrs. Walker ‘Yesterday’s ‘Tiser,’ that he’s blessed if he can hardly hold the pot, much less feel the paper, for it’s one of the bitterest nights he ever felt, ’cept the night when the man was frozen to death in the Brick-field.

After a little prophetic conversation with the policeman at the street-corner, touching a probable change in the weather, and the setting-in of a hard frost, the nine o’clock beer returns to his master’s house, and employs himself for the remainder of the evening, in assiduously stirring the tap-room fire, and deferentially taking part in the conversation of the worthies assembled round it.

The streets in the vicinity of the Marsh-gate and Victoria Theatre present an appearance of dirt and discomfort on such a night, which the groups who lounge about them in no degree tend to diminish. Even the little block-tin temple sacred to baked potatoes, surmounted by a splendid design in variegated lamps, looks less gay than usual, and as to the kidney-pie stand, its glory has quite departed. The candle in the transparent lamp, manufactured of oil-paper, embellished with ‘characters,’ has been blown out fifty times, so the kidney-pie merchant, tired with running backwards and forwards to the next wine-vaults, to get a light, has given up the idea of illumination in despair, and the only signs of his ‘whereabout,’ are the bright sparks, of which a long irregular train is whirled down the street every time he opens his portable oven to hand a hot kidney-pie to a customer.

Flat-fish, oyster, and fruit vendors linger hopelessly in the kennel, in vain endeavouring to attract customers; and the ragged boys who usually disport themselves about the streets, stand crouched in little knots in some projecting doorway, or under the canvas blind of a cheesemonger’s, where great flaring gas-lights, unshaded by any glass, display huge piles of blight red and pale yellow cheeses, mingled with little fivepenny dabs of dingy bacon, various tubs of weekly Dorset, and cloudy rolls of ‘best fresh.’

Here they amuse themselves with theatrical converse, arising out of their last half-price visit to the Victoria gallery, admire the terrific combat, which is nightly encored, and expatiate on the inimitable manner in which Bill Thompson can ‘come the double monkey,’ or go through the mysterious involutions of a sailor’s hornpipe.

It is nearly eleven o’clock, and the cold thin rain which has been drizzling so long, is beginning to pour down in good earnest; the baked-potato man has departed—the kidney-pie man has just walked away with his warehouse on his arm—the cheesemonger has drawn in his blind, and the boys have dispersed. The constant clicking of pattens on the slippy and uneven pavement, and the rustling of umbrellas, as the wind blows against the shop-windows, bear testimony to the inclemency of the night; and the policeman, with his oilskin cape buttoned closely round him, seems as he holds his hat on his head, and turns round to avoid the gust of wind and rain which drives against him at the street-corner, to be very far from congratulating himself on the prospect before him.

The little chandler's shop with the cracked bell behind the door, whose melancholy tinkling has been regulated by the demand for quarterns of sugar and half-ounces of coffee, is shutting up. The crowds which have been passing to and fro during the whole day, are rapidly dwindling away; and the noise of shouting and quarrelling which issues from the public-houses, is almost the only sound that breaks the melancholy stillness of the night.

There was another, but it has ceased. That wretched woman with the infant in her arms, round whose meagre form the remnant of her own scanty shawl is carefully wrapped, has been attempting to sing some popular ballad, in the hope of wringing a few pence from the compassionate passer-by. A brutal laugh at her weak voice is all she has gained. The tears fall thick and fast down her own pale face; the child is cold and hungry, and its low half-stifled wailing adds to the misery of its wretched mother, as she moans aloud, and sinks despairingly down, on a cold damp door-step.

Singing! How few of those who pass such a miserable creature as this, think of the anguish of heart, the sinking of soul and spirit, which the very effort of singing produces. Bitter mockery! Disease, neglect, and starvation, faintly articulating the words of the joyous ditty, that has enlivened your hours of feasting and merriment, God knows how often! It is no subject of jeering. The weak tremulous voice tells a fearful tale of want and famishing; and the feeble singer of this roaring song may turn away, only to die of cold and hunger.

One o'clock! Parties returning from the different theatres foot it through the muddy streets; cabs, hackney-coaches, carriages, and theatre omnibuses, roll swiftly by; watermen with dim dirty lanterns in their hands, and large brass plates upon their breasts, who have been shouting and rushing about for the last two hours, retire to their watering-houses, to solace themselves with the creature comforts of pipes and purl; the half-price pit and box frequenters of the theatres throng to the different houses of refreshment; and chops, kidneys, rabbits, oysters, stout, cigars, and ‘goes’ innumerable, are served up amidst a noise and confusion of smoking, running, knife-clattering, and waiter-chattering, perfectly indescribable.

The more musical portion of the play-going community betake themselves to some harmonic meeting. As a matter of curiosity let us follow them thither for a few moments.

In a lofty room of spacious dimensions, are seated some eighty or a hundred guests knocking little pewter measures on the tables, and hammering away, with the handles of their knives, as if they were so many trunk-makers. They are applauding a glee, which has just been executed by the three ‘professional gentlemen’ at the top of the centre table, one of whom is in the chair—the little pompous man with the bald head just emerging from the collar of his green coat. The others are seated on either side of him—the stout man with the small voice, and the thin-faced dark man in black. The little man in the chair is a most amusing personage,—such condescending grandeur, and *such* a voice!

‘Bass!’ as the young gentleman near us with the blue stock forcibly remarks to his companion, ‘bass! I b’lieve you; he can go down lower than any man: so low sometimes that you can’t hear him.’ And so he does. To hear him growling away, gradually lower and lower down, till he can’t get back again, is the most delightful thing in the world, and it is quite impossible to witness unmoved the impressive solemnity with which he pours forth his soul in ‘My ’art’s in the ’ighlands,’ or ‘The brave old Hoak.’ The stout man is also addicted to sentimentality, and warbles ‘Fly, fly from the world, my Bessy, with me,’ or some such song, with lady-like sweetness, and in the most seductive tones imaginable.

‘Pray give your orders, gen’l’m’n—pray give your orders,’—says the pale-faced man with the red head; and demands for ‘goes’ of gin and ‘goes’ of brandy, and pints of stout, and cigars of peculiar mildness, are vociferously made from all parts of the room. The ‘professional gentlemen’ are in the very height of their glory, and bestow condescending nods, or even a word or two of recognition, on the better-known frequenters of the room, in the most bland and patronising manner possible.

The little round-faced man, with the small brown surtout, white stockings and shoes, is in the comic line; the mixed air of self-denial, and mental consciousness of his own powers, with which he acknowledges the call of the chair, is particularly gratifying. 'Gen'l'men,' says the little pompous man, accompanying the word with a knock of the president's hammer on the table—'Gen'l'men, allow me to claim your attention—our friend, Mr. Smuggins, will oblige.'—'Bravo!' shout the company; and Smuggins, after a considerable quantity of coughing by way of symphony, and a most facetious sniff or two, which afford general delight, sings a comic song, with a fal-de-ral—tol-de-ral chorus at the end of every verse, much longer than the verse itself. It is received with unbounded applause, and after some aspiring genius has volunteered a recitationfootnote, and failed dismally therein, the little pompous man gives another knock, and says 'Gen'l'men, we will attempt a glee, if you please.' This announcement calls forth tumultuous applause, and the more energetic spirits express the unqualified approbation it affords them, by knocking one or two stout glasses off their legs—a humorous device; but one which frequently occasions some slight altercation when the form of paying the damage is proposed to be gone through by the waiter.

Scenes like these are continued until three or four o'clock in the morning; and even when they close, fresh ones open to the inquisitive novice. But as a description of all of them, however slight, would require a volume, the contents of which, however instructive, would be by no means pleasing, we make our bow, and drop the curtain.

CHAPTER III—SHOPS AND THEIR TENANTS

What inexhaustible food for speculation, do the streets of London afford! We never were able to agree with Sterne in pitying the man who could travel from Dan to Beersheba, and say that all was barren; we have not the slightest commiseration for the man who can take up his hat and stick, and walk from Covent-garden to St. Paul's Churchyard, and back into the bargain, without deriving some amusement—we had almost said instruction—from his perambulation. And yet there are such beings: we meet them every day. Large black stocks and light waistcoats, jet canes and discontented countenances, are the characteristics of the race; other people brush quickly by you, steadily plodding on to business, or cheerfully running after pleasure. These men linger listlessly past, looking as happy and animated as a policeman on duty. Nothing seems to make an impression on their minds: nothing short of being knocked down by a porter, or run over by a cab, will disturb their equanimity. You will meet them on a fine day in any of the leading thoroughfares: peep through the window of a west-end cigar shop in the evening, if you can manage to get a glimpse between the blue curtains which intercept the vulgar gaze, and you see them in their only enjoyment of existence. There they are lounging about, on round tubs and pipe boxes, in all the dignity of whiskers, and gilt watch-guards; whispering soft nothings to the young lady in amber, with the large ear-rings, who, as she sits behind the counter in a blaze of adoration and gas-light, is the admiration of all the female servants in the neighbourhood, and the envy of every milliner’s apprentice within two miles round.

One of our principal amusements is to watch the gradual progress—the rise or fall—of particular shops. We have formed an intimate acquaintance with several, in different parts of town, and are perfectly acquainted with their whole history. We could name off-hand, twenty at least, which we are quite sure have paid no taxes for the last six years. They are never inhabited for more than two months consecutively, and, we verily believe, have witnessed every retail trade in the directory.

There is one, whose history is a sample of the rest, in whose fate we have taken especial interest, having had the pleasure of knowing it ever since it has been a shop. It is on the Surrey side of the water—a little distance beyond the Marsh-gate. It was originally a substantial, good-looking private house enough; the landlord got into difficulties, the house got into Chancery, the tenant went away, and the house went to ruin. At this period our acquaintance with it commenced; the paint was all worn off; the windows were broken, the area was green with neglect and the overflowings of the water-butt; the butt itself was without a lid, and the street-door was the very picture of misery. The chief pastime of the children in the vicinity had been to assemble in a body on the steps, and to take it in turn to knock loud double knocks at the door, to the great satisfaction of the neighbours generally, and especially of the nervous old lady next door but one. Numerous complaints were made, and several small basins of water discharged over the offenders, but without effect. In this state of things, the marine-store dealer at the corner of the street, in the most obliging manner took the knocker off, and sold it: and the unfortunate house looked more wretched than ever.

We deserted our friend for a few weeks. What was our surprise, on our return, to find no trace of its existence! In its place was a handsome shop, fast approaching to a state of completion, and on the shutters were large bills, informing the public that it would shortly be opened with ‘an extensive stock of linen-drapery and haberdashery.’ It opened in due course; there was the name of the proprietor ‘and Co.’ in gilt letters, almost too dazzling to look at. Such ribbons and shawls! and two such elegant young men behind the counter, each in a clean collar and white neckcloth, like the lover in a farce. As to the proprietor, he did nothing but walk up and down the shop, and hand seats to the ladies, and hold important conversations with the handsomest of the young men, who was shrewdly suspected by the neighbours to be the ‘Co.’ We saw all this with sorrow; we felt a fatal presentiment that the shop was doomed—and so it was. Its decay was slow, but sure. Tickets gradually appeared in the windows; then rolls of flannel, with labels on them, were stuck outside the door; then a bill was pasted on the street-door, intimating that the first floor was to let unfurnished; then one of the young men disappeared altogether, and the other took to a black neckerchief, and the proprietor took to drinking. The shop became dirty, broken panes of glass remained unmended, and the stock disappeared piecemeal. At last the company’s man came to cut off the water, and then the linen-draper cut off himself, leaving the landlord his compliments and the key.

The next occupant was a fancy stationer. The shop was more modestly painted than before, still it was neat; but somehow we always thought, as we passed, that it looked like a poor and struggling concern. We wished the man well, but we trembled for his success. He was a widower evidently, and had employment elsewhere, for he passed us every morning on his road to the city. The business was carried on by his eldest daughter. Poor girl! she needed no assistance. We occasionally caught a glimpse of two or three children, in mourning like herself, as they sat in the little parlour behind the shop; and we never passed at night without seeing the eldest girl at work, either for them, or in making some elegant little trifle for sale. We often thought, as her pale face looked more sad and pensive in the dim candle-light, that if those thoughtless females who interfere with the miserable market of poor creatures such as these, knew but one-half of the misery they suffer, and the bitter privations they endure, in their honourable attempts to earn a scanty subsistence, they would, perhaps, resign even opportunities for the gratification of vanity, and an immodest love of self-display, rather than drive them to a last dreadful resource, which it would shock the delicate feelings of these *charitable* ladies to hear named.

But we are forgetting the shop. Well, we continued to watch it, and every day showed too clearly the increasing poverty of its inmates. The children were clean, it is true, but their clothes were threadbare and shabby; no tenant had been procured for the upper part of the house, from the letting of which, a portion of the means of paying the rent was to have been derived, and a slow, wasting consumption prevented the eldest girl from continuing her exertions. Quarter-day arrived. The landlord had suffered from the extravagance of his last tenant, and he had no compassion for the struggles of his successor; he put in an execution. As we passed one morning, the broker's men were removing the little furniture there was in the house, and a newly-posted bill informed us it was again 'To Let.' What became of the last tenant we never could learn; we believe the girl is past all suffering, and beyond all sorrow. God help her! We hope she is.

We were somewhat curious to ascertain what would be the next stage—for that the place had no chance of succeeding now, was perfectly clear. The bill was soon taken down, and some alterations were being made in the interior of the shop. We were in a fever of expectation; we exhausted conjecture—we imagined all possible trades, none of which were perfectly reconcilable with our idea of the gradual decay of the tenement. It opened, and we wondered why we had not guessed at the real state of the case before. The shop—not a large one at the best of times—had been converted into two: one was a bonnet-shape maker's, the other was opened by a tobacconist, who also dealt in walking-sticks and Sunday newspapers; the two were separated by a thin partition, covered with tawdry striped paper.

The tobacconist remained in possession longer than any tenant within our recollection. He was a red-faced, impudent, good-for-nothing dog, evidently accustomed to take things as they came, and to make the best of a bad job. He sold as many cigars as he could, and smoked the rest. He occupied the shop as long as he could make peace with the landlord, and when he could no longer live in quiet, he very coolly locked the door, and bolted himself. From this period, the two little dens have undergone innumerable changes. The tobacconist was succeeded by a theatrical hair-dresser, who ornamented the window with a great variety of 'characters,' and terrific combats. The bonnet-shape maker gave place to a greengrocer, and the histrionic barber was succeeded, in his turn, by a tailor. So numerous have been the changes, that we have of late done little more than mark the peculiar but certain indications of a house being poorly inhabited. It has been progressing by almost imperceptible degrees. The occupiers of the shops have gradually given up room after room, until they have only reserved the little parlour for themselves. First there appeared a brass plate on the private door, with ‘Ladies’ School’ legibly engraved thereon; shortly afterwards we observed a second brass plate, then a bell, and then another bell.

When we paused in front of our old friend, and observed these signs of poverty, which are not to be mistaken, we thought as we turned away, that the house had attained its lowest pitch of degradation. We were wrong. When we last passed it, a ‘dairy’ was established in the area, and a party of melancholy-looking fowls were amusing themselves by running in at the front door, and out at the back one.

CHAPTER IV—SCOTLAND-YARD

Scotland-yard is a small—a very small-tract of land, bounded on one side by the river Thames, on the other by the gardens of Northumberland House: abutting at one end on the bottom of Northumberland-street, at the other on the back of Whitehall-place. When this territory was first accidentally discovered by a country gentleman who lost his way in the Strand, some years ago, the original settlers were found to be a tailor, a publican, two eating-house keepers, and a fruit-pie maker; and it was also found to contain a race of strong and bulky men, who repaired to the wharfs in Scotland-yard regularly every morning, about five or six o’clock, to fill heavy waggons with coal, with which they proceeded to distant places up the country, and supplied the inhabitants with fuel. When they had emptied their waggons, they again returned for a fresh supply; and this trade was continued throughout the year.

As the settlers derived their subsistence from ministering to the wants of these primitive traders, the articles exposed for sale, and the places where they were sold, bore strong outward marks of being expressly adapted to their tastes and wishes. The tailor displayed in his window a Lilliputian pair of leather gaiters, and a diminutive round frock, while each doorpost was appropriately garnished with a model of a coal-sack. The two eating-house keepers exhibited joints of a magnitude, and puddings of a solidity, which coalheavers alone could appreciate; and the fruit-pie maker displayed on his well-scrubbed window-board large white compositions of flour and dripping, ornamented with pink stains, giving rich promise of the fruit within, which made their huge mouths water, as they lingered past.

But the choicest spot in all Scotland-yard was the old public-house in the corner. Here, in a dark wainscoted-room of ancient appearance, cheered by the glow of a mighty fire, and decorated with an enormous clock, whereof the face was white, and the figures black, sat the lusty coalheavers, quaffing large draughts of Barclay’s best, and puffing forth volumes of smoke, which wreathed heavily above their heads, and involved the room in a thick dark cloud. From this apartment might their voices be heard on a winter’s night, penetrating to the very bank of the river, as they shouted out some sturdy chorus, or roared forth the burden of a popular song; dwelling upon the last few words with a strength and length of emphasis which made the very roof tremble above them.

Here, too, would they tell old legends of what the Thames was in ancient times, when the Patent Shot Manufactory wasn’t built, and Waterloo-bridge had never been thought of; and then they would shake their heads with portentous looks, to the deep edification of the rising generation of heavers, who crowded round them, and wondered where all this would end; whereat the tailor would take his pipe solemnly from his mouth, and say, how that he hoped it might end well, but he very much doubted whether it would or not, and couldn’t rightly tell what to make of it—a mysterious expression of opinion, delivered with a semi-prophetic air, which never failed to elicit the fullest concurrence of the assembled company; and so they would go on drinking and wondering till ten o’clock came, and with it the tailor’s wife to fetch him home, when the little party broke up, to meet again in the same room, and say and do precisely the same things, on the following evening at the same hour.

About this time the barges that came up the river began to bring vague rumours to Scotland-yard of somebody in the city having been heard to say, that the Lord Mayor had threatened in so many words to pull down the old London-bridge, and build up a new one. At first these rumours were disregarded as idle tales, wholly destitute of foundation, for nobody in Scotland-yard doubted that if the Lord Mayor contemplated any such dark design, he would just be clapped up in the Tower for a week or two, and then killed off for high treason.

By degrees, however, the reports grew stronger, and more frequent, and at last a barge, laden with numerous chaldrons of the best Wallsend, brought up the positive intelligence that several of the arches of the old bridge were stopped, and that preparations were actually in progress for constructing the new one. What an excitement was visible in the old tap-room on that memorable night! Each man looked into his neighbour's face, pale with alarm and astonishment, and read therein an echo of the sentiments which filled his own breast. The oldest heaver present proved to demonstration, that the moment the piers were removed, all the water in the Thames would run clean off, and leave a dry gully in its place. What was to become of the coal-barges—of the trade of Scotland-yard—of the very existence of its population? The tailor shook his head more sagely than usual, and grimly pointing to a knife on the table, bid them wait and see what happened. He said nothing—not he; but if the Lord Mayor didn't fall a victim to popular indignation, why he would be rather astonished; that was all.

They did wait; barge after barge arrived, and still no tidings of the assassination of the Lord Mayor. The first stone was laid: it was done by a Duke—the King's brother. Years passed away, and the bridge was opened by the King himself. In course of time, the piers were removed; and when the people in Scotland-yard got up next morning in the confident expectation of being able to step over to Pedlar's Acre without wetting the soles of their shoes, they found to their unspeakable astonishment that the water was just where it used to be.

A result so different from that which they had anticipated from this first improvement, produced its full effect upon the inhabitants of Scotland-yard. One of the eating-house keepers began to court public opinion, and to look for customers among a new class of people. He covered his little dining-tables with white cloths, and got a painter's apprentice to inscribe something about hot joints from twelve to two, in one of the little panes of his shop-window. Improvement began to march with rapid strides to the very threshold of Scotland-yard. A new market sprung up at Hungerford, and the Police Commissioners established their office in Whitehall-place. The traffic in Scotland-yard increased; fresh Members were added to the House of Commons, the Metropolitan Representatives found it a near cut, and many other foot passengers followed their example.

We marked the advance of civilisation, and beheld it with a sigh. The eating-house keeper who manfully resisted the innovation of table-cloths, was losing ground every day, as his opponent gained it, and a deadly feud sprung up between them. The genteel one no longer took his evening's pint in Scotland-yard, but drank gin and water at a 'parlour' in Parliament-street. The fruit-pie maker still continued to visit the old room, but he took to smoking cigars, and began to call himself a pastrycook, and to read the papers. The old heavers still assembled round the ancient fireplace, but their talk was mournful: and the loud song and the joyous shout were heard no more.

And what is Scotland-yard now? How have its old customs changed; and how has the ancient simplicity of its inhabitants faded away! The old tottering public-house is converted into a spacious and lofty 'wine-vaults;' gold leaf has been used in the construction of the letters which emblazon its exterior, and the poet's art has been called into requisition, to intimate that if you drink a certain description of ale, you must hold fast by the rail. The tailor exhibits in his window the pattern of a foreign-looking brown surtout, with silk buttons, a fur collar, and fur cuffs. He wears a stripe down the outside of each leg of his trousers: and we have detected his assistants (for he has assistants now) in the act of sitting on the shop-board in the same uniform.

At the other end of the little row of houses a boot-maker has established himself in a brick box, with the additional innovation of a first floor; and here he exposes for sale, boots—real Wellington boots—an article which a few years ago, none of the original inhabitants had ever seen or heard of. It was but the other day, that a dress-maker opened another little box in the middle of the row; and, when we thought that the spirit of change could produce no alteration beyond that, a jeweller appeared, and not content with exposing gilt rings and copper bracelets out of number, put up an announcement, which still sticks in his window, that 'ladies' ears may be pierced within.' The dress-maker employs a young lady who wears pockets in her apron; and the tailor informs the public that gentlemen may have their own materials made up.

Amidst all this change, and restlessness, and innovation, there remains but one old man, who seems to mourn the downfall of this ancient place. He holds no converse with human kind, but, seated on a wooden bench at the angle of the wall which fronts the crossing from Whitehall-place, watches in silence the gambols of his sleek and well-fed dogs. He is the presiding genius of Scotland-yard. Years and years have rolled over his head; but, in fine weather or in foul, hot or cold, wet or dry, hail, rain, or snow, he is still in his accustomed spot. Misery and want are depicted in his countenance; his form is bent by age, his head is grey with length of trial, but there he sits from day to day, brooding over the past; and thither he will continue to drag his feeble limbs, until his eyes have closed upon Scotland-yard, and upon the world together.

A few years hence, and the antiquary of another generation looking into some mouldy record of the strife and passions that agitated the world in these times, may glance his eye over the pages we have just filled: and not all his knowledge of the history of the past, not all his black-letter lore, or his skill in book-collecting, not all the dry studies of a long life, or the dusty volumes that have cost him a fortune, may help him to the whereabouts, either of Scotland-yard, or of any one of the landmarks we have mentioned in describing it.

CHAPTER V—SEVEN DIALS

We have always been of opinion that if Tom King and the Frenchman had not immortalised Seven Dials, Seven Dials would have immortalised itself. Seven Dials! the region of song and poetry—first effusions, and last dying speeches: hallowed by the names of Catnach and of Pitts—names that will entwine themselves with costermongers, and barrel-organs, when penny magazines shall have superseded penny yards of song, and capital punishment be unknown!

Look at the construction of the place. The Gordian knot was all very well in its way: so was the maze of Hampton Court: so is the maze at the Beulah Spa: so were the ties of stiff white neckcloths, when the difficulty of getting one on, was only to be equalled by the apparent impossibility of ever getting it off again. But what involutions can compare with those of Seven Dials? Where is there such another maze of streets, courts, lanes, and alleys? Where such a pure mixture of Englishmen and Irishmen, as in this complicated part of London? We boldly aver that we doubt the veracity of the legend to which we have adverted. We *can* suppose a man rash enough to inquire at random—at a house with lodgers too—for a Mr.

Thompson, with all but the certainty before his eyes, of finding at least two or three Thompsons in any house of moderate dimensions; but a Frenchman—a Frenchman in Seven Dials! Pooh! He was an Irishman. Tom King's education had been neglected in his infancy, and as he couldn't understand half the man said, he took it for granted he was talking French.

The stranger who finds himself in 'The Dials' for the first time, and stands Belzoni-like, at the entrance of seven obscure passages, uncertain which to take, will see enough around him to keep his curiosity and attention awake for no inconsiderable time. From the irregular square into which he has plunged, the streets and courts dart in all directions, until they are lost in the unwholesome vapour which hangs over the house-tops, and renders the dirty perspective uncertain and confined; and lounging at every corner, as if they came there to take a few gasps of such fresh air as has found its way so far, but is too much exhausted already, to be enabled to force itself into the narrow alleys around, are groups of people, whose appearance and dwellings would fill any mind but a regular Londoner's with astonishment.

On one side, a little crowd has collected round a couple of ladies, who having imbibed the contents of various 'three-outs' of gin and bitters in the course of the morning, have at length differed on some point of domestic arrangement, and are on the eve of settling the quarrel satisfactorily, by an appeal to blows, greatly to the interest of other ladies who live in the same house, and tenements adjoining, and who are all partisans on one side or other.

'Vy don't you pitch into her, Sarah?' exclaims one half-dressed matron, by way of encouragement. 'Vy don't you? if *my* 'usband had treated her with a drain last night, unbeknown to me, I'd tear her precious eyes out—a wixen!'

'What's the matter, ma'am?' inquires another old woman, who has just bustled up to the spot.

'Matter!' replies the first speaker, talking *at* the obnoxious combatant, 'matter! Here's poor dear Mrs. Sulliwin, as has five blessed children of her own, can't go out a charing for one arternoon, but what hussies must be a comin', and 'ticing avay her oun' 'usband, as she's been married to twelve year come next Easter Monday, for I see the certificate ven I vas a drinkin' a cup o' tea vith her, only the werry last blessed Ven'sday as ever was sent. I 'appen'd to say promiscuously, "Mrs. Sulliwin," says I—'

‘What do you mean by hussies?’ interrupts a champion of the other party, who has evinced a strong inclination throughout to get up a branch fight on her own account (‘Hooroar,’ ejaculates a pot-boy in parenthesis, ‘put the kye-bosk on her, Mary!’), ‘What do you mean by hussies?’ reiterates the champion.

‘Niver mind,’ replies the opposition expressively, ‘niver mind; *you* go home, and, ven you’re quite sober, mend your stockings.’

This somewhat personal allusion, not only to the lady’s habits of intemperance, but also to the state of her wardrobe, rouses her utmost ire, and she accordingly complies with the urgent request of the bystanders to ‘pitch in,’ with considerable alacrity. The scuffle became general, and terminates, in minor play-bill phraseology, with ‘arrival of the policemen, interior of the station-house, and impressive *dénouement*.’

In addition to the numerous groups who are idling about the gin-shops and squabbling in the centre of the road, every post in the open space has its occupant, who leans against it for hours, with listless perseverance. It is odd enough that one class of men in London appear to have no enjoyment beyond leaning against posts. We never saw a regular bricklayer’s labourer take any other recreation, fighting excepted. Pass through St. Giles’s in the evening of a week-day, there they are in their fustian dresses, spotted with brick-dust and whitewash, leaning against posts. Walk through Seven Dials on Sunday morning: there they are again, drab or light corduroy trousers, Blucher boots, blue coats, and great yellow waistcoats, leaning against posts. The idea of a man dressing himself in his best clothes, to lean against a post all day!

The peculiar character of these streets, and the close resemblance each one bears to its neighbour, by no means tends to decrease the bewilderment in which the unexperienced wayfarer through ‘the Dials’ finds himself involved. He traverses streets of dirty, straggling houses, with now and then an unexpected court composed of buildings as ill-proportioned and deformed as the half-naked children that wallow in the kennels. Here and there, a little dark chandler’s shop, with a cracked bell hung up behind the door to announce the entrance of a customer, or betray the presence of some young gentleman in whom a passion for shop tills has developed itself at an early age: others, as if for support, against some handsome lofty building, which usurps the place of a low dingy public-house; long rows of broken and patched windows expose plants that may have flourished when ‘the

Dials' were built, in vessels as dirty as 'the Dials' themselves; and shops for the purchase of rags, bones, old iron, and kitchen-stuff, vie in cleanliness with the bird-fanciers and rabbit-dealers, which one might fancy so many arks, but for the irresistible conviction that no bird in its proper senses, who was permitted to leave one of them, would ever come back again. Brokers' shops, which would seem to have been established by humane individuals, as refuges for destitute bugs, interspersed with announcements of day-schools, penny theatres, petition-writers, mangles, and music for balls or routs, complete the 'still life' of the subject; and dirty men, filthy women, squalid children, fluttering shuttlecocks, noisy battledores, reeking pipes, bad fruit, more than doubtful oysters, attenuated cats, depressed dogs, and anatomical fowls, are its cheerful accompaniments.

If the external appearance of the houses, or a glance at their inhabitants, present but few attractions, a closer acquaintance with either is little calculated to alter one's first impression. Every room has its separate tenant, and every tenant is, by the same mysterious dispensation which causes a country curate to 'increase and multiply' most marvellously, generally the head of a numerous family.

The man in the shop, perhaps, is in the baked 'jemmy' line, or the fire-wood and hearth-stone line, or any other line which requires a floating capital of eighteen-pence or thereabouts: and he and his family live in the shop, and the small back parlour behind it. Then there is an Irish labourer and *his* family in the back kitchen, and a jobbing man—carpet-beater and so forth—with *his* family in the front one. In the front one-pair, there's another man with another wife and family, and in the back one-pair, there's 'a young 'oman as takes in tambour-work, and dresses quite genteel,' who talks a good deal about 'my friend,' and can't 'a-bear anything low.' The second floor front, and the rest of the lodgers, are just a second edition of the people below, except a shabby-genteel man in the back attic, who has his half-pint of coffee every morning from the coffee-shop next door but one, which boasts a little front den called a coffee-room, with a fireplace, over which is an inscription, politely requesting that, 'to prevent mistakes,' customers will 'please to pay on delivery.' The shabby-genteel man is an object of some mystery, but as he leads a life of seclusion, and never was known to buy anything beyond an occasional pen, except half-pints of coffee, penny loaves, and ha'porths of ink, his fellow-lodgers very naturally suppose him to be an author; and rumours are current in the Dials, that he writes poems for Mr. Warren.

Now anybody who passed through the Dials on a hot summer's evening, and saw the different women of the house gossiping on the steps, would be apt to think that all was harmony among them, and that a more primitive set of people than the native Diallers could not be imagined. Alas! the man in the shop ill-treats his family; the carpet-beater extends his professional pursuits to his wife; the one-pair front has an undying feud with the two-pair front, in consequence of the two-pair front persisting in dancing over his (the one-pair front's) head, when he and his family have retired for the night; the two-pair back will interfere with the front kitchen's children; the Irishman comes home drunk every other night, and attacks everybody; and the one-pair back screams at everything. Animosities spring up between floor and floor; the very cellar asserts his equality. Mrs. A. 'smacks' Mrs. B.'s child for 'making faces.' Mrs. B. forthwith throws cold water over Mrs. A.'s child for 'calling names.' The husbands are embroiled—the quarrel becomes general—an assault is the consequence, and a police-officer the result.

CHAPTER VI—MEDITATIONS IN MONMOUTH-STREET

We have always entertained a particular attachment towards Monmouth-street, as the only true and real emporium for second-hand wearing apparel. Monmouth-street is venerable from its antiquity, and respectable from its usefulness. Holywell-street we despise; the red-headed and red-whiskered Jews who forcibly haul you into their squalid houses, and thrust you into a suit of clothes, whether you will or not, we detest.

The inhabitants of Monmouth-street are a distinct class; a peaceable and retiring race, who immure themselves for the most part in deep cellars, or small back parlours, and who seldom come forth into the world, except in the dusk and coolness of the evening, when they may be seen seated, in chairs on the pavement, smoking their pipes, or watching the gambols of their engaging children as they revel in the gutter, a happy troop of infantine scavengers. Their countenances bear a thoughtful and a dirty cast, certain indications of their love of traffic; and their habitations are distinguished by that disregard of outward appearance and neglect of personal comfort, so common among people who are constantly immersed in profound speculations, and deeply engaged in sedentary pursuits.

We have hinted at the antiquity of our favourite spot. ‘A Monmouth-street laced coat’ was a by-word a century ago; and still we find Monmouth-street the same. Pilot great-coats with wooden buttons, have usurped the place of the ponderous laced coats with full skirts; embroidered waistcoats with large flaps, have yielded to double-breasted checks with roll-collars; and three-cornered hats of quaint appearance, have given place to the low crowns and broad brims of the coachman school; but it is the times that have changed, not Monmouth-street. Through every alteration and every change, Monmouth-street has still remained the burial-place of the fashions; and such, to judge from all present appearances, it will remain until there are no more fashions to bury.

We love to walk among these extensive groves of the illustrious dead, and to indulge in the speculations to which they give rise; now fitting a deceased coat, then a dead pair of trousers, and anon the mortal remains of a gaudy waistcoat, upon some being of our own conjuring up, and endeavouring, from the shape and fashion of the garment itself, to bring its former owner before our mind’s eye. We have gone on speculating in this way, until whole rows of coats have started from their pegs, and buttoned up, of their own accord, round the waists of imaginary wearers; lines of trousers have jumped down to meet them; waistcoats have almost burst with anxiety to put themselves on; and half an acre of shoes have suddenly found feet to fit them, and gone stumping down the street with a noise which has fairly awakened us from our pleasant reverie, and driven us slowly away, with a bewildered stare, an object of astonishment to the good people of Monmouth-street, and of no slight suspicion to the policemen at the opposite street corner.

We were occupied in this manner the other day, endeavouring to fit a pair of lace-up half-boots on an ideal personage, for whom, to say the truth, they were full a couple of sizes too small, when our eyes happened to alight on a few suits of clothes ranged outside a shop-window, which it immediately struck us, must at different periods have all belonged to, and been worn by, the same individual, and had now, by one of those strange conjunctions of circumstances which will occur sometimes, come to be exposed together for sale in the same shop. The idea seemed a fantastic one, and we looked at the clothes again with a firm determination not to be easily led away. No, we were right; the more we looked, the more we were convinced of the accuracy of our previous impression. There was the man's whole life written as legibly on those clothes, as if we had his autobiography engrossed on parchment before us.

The first was a patched and much-soiled skeleton suit; one of those straight blue cloth cases in which small boys used to be confined, before belts and tunics had come in, and old notions had gone out: an ingenious contrivance for displaying the full symmetry of a boy's figure, by fastening him into a very tight jacket, with an ornamental row of buttons over each shoulder, and then buttoning his trousers over it, so as to give his legs the appearance of being hooked on, just under the armpits. This was the boy's dress. It had belonged to a town boy, we could see; there was a shortness about the legs and arms of the suit; and a bagging at the knees, peculiar to the rising youth of London streets. A small day-school he had been at, evidently. If it had been a regular boys' school they wouldn't have let him play on the floor so much, and rub his knees so white. He had an indulgent mother too, and plenty of halfpence, as the numerous smears of some sticky substance about the pockets, and just below the chin, which even the salesman's skill could not succeed in disguising, sufficiently betokened. They were decent people, but not overburdened with riches, or he would not have so far outgrown the suit when he passed into those corduroys with the round jacket; in which he went to a boys' school, however, and learnt to write—and in ink of pretty tolerable blackness, too, if the place where he used to wipe his pen might be taken as evidence.

A black suit and the jacket changed into a diminutive coat. His father had died, and the mother had got the boy a message-lad's place in some office. A long-worn suit that one; rusty and threadbare before it was laid aside, but clean and free from soil to the last. Poor woman! We could imagine her assumed cheerfulness over the scanty meal, and the refusal of her own small portion, that her hungry boy might have enough. Her constant anxiety for his welfare, her pride in his growth mingled sometimes with the thought, almost too acute to bear, that as he grew to be a man his old affection might cool, old kindnesses fade from his mind, and old promises be forgotten—the sharp pain that even then a careless word or a cold look would give her—all crowded on our thoughts as vividly as if the very scene were passing before us.

These things happen every hour, and we all know it; and yet we felt as much sorrow when we saw, or fancied we saw—it makes no difference which—the change that began to take place now, as if we had just conceived the bare possibility of such a thing for the first time. The next suit, smart but slovenly; meant to be gay, and yet not half so decent as the threadbare apparel; redolent of the idle lounge, and the blackguard companions, told us, we thought, that the widow's comfort had rapidly faded away. We could imagine that coat—imagine! we could see it; we *had* seen it a hundred times—sauntering in company with three or four other coats of the same cut, about some place of profligate resort at night.

We dressed, from the same shop-window in an instant, half a dozen boys of from fifteen to twenty; and putting cigars into their mouths, and their hands into their pockets, watched them as they sauntered down the street, and lingered at the corner, with the obscene jest, and the oft-repeated oath. We never lost sight of them, till they had cocked their hats a little more on one side, and swaggered into the public-house; and then we entered the desolate home, where the mother sat late in the night, alone; we watched her, as she paced the room in feverish anxiety, and every now and then opened the door, looked wistfully into the dark and empty street, and again returned, to be again and again disappointed. We beheld the look of patience with which she bore the brutish threat, nay, even the drunken blow; and we heard the agony of tears that gushed from her very heart, as she sank upon her knees in her solitary and wretched apartment.

A long period had elapsed, and a greater change had taken place, by the time of casting off the suit that hung above. It was that of a stout, broad-shouldered, sturdy-chested man; and we knew at once, as anybody would, who glanced at that broad-skirted green coat, with the large metal buttons, that its wearer seldom walked forth without a dog at his heels, and some idle ruffian, the very counterpart of himself, at his side. The vices of the boy had grown with the man, and we fancied his home then—if such a place deserve the name.

We saw the bare and miserable room, destitute of furniture, crowded with his wife and children, pale, hungry, and emaciated; the man cursing their lamentations, staggering to the tap-room, from whence he had just returned, followed by his wife and a sickly infant, clamouring for bread; and heard the street-wrangle and noisy recrimination that his striking her occasioned. And then imagination led us to some metropolitan workhouse, situated in the midst of crowded streets and alleys, filled with noxious vapours, and ringing with boisterous cries, where an old and feeble woman, imploring pardon for her son, lay dying in a close dark room, with no child to clasp her hand, and no pure air from heaven to fan her brow. A stranger closed the eyes that settled into a cold unmeaning glare, and strange ears received the words that murmured from the white and half-closed lips.

A coarse round frock, with a worn cotton neckerchief, and other articles of clothing of the commonest description, completed the history. A prison, and the sentence—banishment or the gallows. What would the man have given then, to be once again the contented humble drudge of his boyish years; to have been restored to life, but for a week, a day, an hour, a minute, only for so long a time as would enable him to say one word of passionate regret to, and hear one sound of heartfelt forgiveness from, the cold and ghastly form that lay rotting in the pauper's grave! The children wild in the streets, the mother a destitute widow; both deeply tainted with the deep disgrace of the husband and father's name, and impelled by sheer necessity, down the precipice that had led him to a lingering death, possibly of many years' duration, thousands of miles away. We had no clue to the end of the tale; but it was easy to guess its termination.

We took a step or two further on, and by way of restoring the naturally cheerful tone of our thoughts, began fitting visionary feet and legs into a cellar-board full of boots and shoes, with a speed and accuracy that would have astonished the most expert artist in leather, living. There was one pair of boots in particular—a jolly, good-tempered, hearty-looking pair of tops, that excited our warmest regard; and we had got a fine, red-faced, jovial fellow of a market-gardener into them, before we had made their acquaintance half a minute. They were just the very thing for him. There was his huge fat legs bulging over the tops, and fitting them too tight to admit of his tucking in the loops he had pulled them on by; and his knee-cords with an interval of stocking; and his blue apron tucked up round his waist; and his red neckerchief and blue coat, and a white hat stuck on one side of his head; and there he stood with a broad grin on his great red face, whistling away, as if any other idea but that of being happy and comfortable had never entered his brain.

This was the very man after our own heart; we knew all about him; we had seen him coming up to Covent-garden in his green chaise-cart, with the fat, tubby little horse, half a thousand times; and even while we cast an affectionate look upon his boots, at that instant, the form of a coquettish servant-maid suddenly sprung into a pair of Denmark satin shoes that stood beside them, and we at once recognised the very girl who accepted his offer of a ride, just on this side the Hammersmith suspension-bridge, the very last Tuesday morning we rode into town from Richmond.

A very smart female, in a showy bonnet, stepped into a pair of grey cloth boots, with black fringe and binding, that were studiously pointing out their toes on the other side of the top-boots, and seemed very anxious to engage his attention, but we didn't observe that our friend the market-gardener appeared at all captivated with these blandishments; for beyond giving a knowing wink when they first began, as if to imply that he quite understood their end and object, he took no further notice of them. His indifference, however, was amply recompensed by the excessive gallantry of a very old gentleman with a silver-headed stick, who tottered into a pair of large list shoes, that were standing in one corner of the board, and indulged in a variety of gestures expressive of his admiration of the lady in the cloth boots, to the immeasurable amusement of a young fellow we put into a pair of long-quartered pumps, who we thought would have split the coat that slid down to meet him, with laughing.

We had been looking on at this little pantomime with great satisfaction for some time, when, to our unspeakable astonishment, we perceived that the whole of the characters, including a numerous *corps de ballet* of boots and shoes in the background, into which we had been hastily thrusting as many feet as we could press into the service, were arranging themselves in order for dancing; and some music striking up at the moment, to it they went without delay. It was perfectly delightful to witness the agility of the market-gardener. Out went the boots, first on one side, then on the other, then cutting, then shuffling, then setting to the Denmark satins, then advancing, then retreating, then going round, and then repeating the whole of the evolutions again, without appearing to suffer in the least from the violence of the exercise.

Nor were the Denmark satins a bit behindhand, for they jumped and bounded about, in all directions; and though they were neither so regular, nor so true to the time as the cloth boots, still, as they seemed to do it from the heart, and to enjoy it more, we candidly confess that we preferred their style of dancing to the other. But the old gentleman in the list shoes was the most amusing object in the whole party; for, besides his grotesque attempts to appear youthful, and amorous, which were sufficiently entertaining in themselves, the young fellow in the pumps managed so artfully that every time the old gentleman advanced to salute the lady in the cloth boots, he trod with his whole weight on the old fellow's toes, which made him roar with anguish, and rendered all the others like to die of laughing.

We were in the full enjoyment of these festivities when we heard a shrill, and by no means musical voice, exclaim, 'Hope you'll know me agin, imperence!' and on looking intently forward to see from whence the sound came, we found that it proceeded, not from the young lady in the cloth boots, as we had at first been inclined to suppose, but from a bulky lady of elderly appearance who was seated in a chair at the head of the cellar-steps, apparently for the purpose of superintending the sale of the articles arranged there.

A barrel-organ, which had been in full force close behind us, ceased playing; the people we had been fitting into the shoes and boots took to flight at the interruption; and as we were conscious that in the depth of our meditations we might have been rudely staring at the old lady for half an hour without knowing it, we took to flight too, and were soon immersed in the deepest obscurity of the adjacent 'Dials.'

CHAPTER VII—HACKNEY-COACH STANDS

We maintain that hackney-coaches, properly so called, belong solely to the metropolis. We may be told, that there are hackney-coach stands in Edinburgh; and not to go quite so far for a contradiction to our position, we may be reminded that Liverpool, Manchester, 'and other large towns' (as the Parliamentary phrase goes), have *their* hackney-coach stands. We readily concede to these places the possession of certain vehicles, which may look almost as dirty, and even go almost as slowly, as London hackney-coaches; but that they have the slightest claim to compete with the metropolis, either in point of stands, drivers, or cattle, we indignantly deny.

Take a regular, ponderous, rickety, London hackney-coach of the old school, and let any man have the boldness to assert, if he can, that he ever beheld any object on the face of the earth which at all resembles it, unless, indeed, it were another hackney-coach of the same date. We have recently observed on certain stands, and we say it with deep regret, rather dapper green chariots, and coaches of polished yellow, with four wheels of the same colour as the coach, whereas it is perfectly notorious to every one who has studied the subject, that every wheel ought to be of a different colour, and a different size. These are innovations, and, like other miscalled improvements, awful signs of the restlessness of the public mind, and the little respect paid to our time-honoured institutions. Why should hackney-coaches be clean? Our ancestors found them dirty, and left them so. Why should we, with a feverish wish to 'keep moving,' desire to roll along at the rate of six miles an hour, while they were content to rumble over the stones at four? These are solemn considerations. Hackney-coaches are part and parcel of the law of the land; they were settled by the Legislature; plated and numbered by the wisdom of Parliament.

Then why have they been swamped by cabs and omnibuses? Or why should people be allowed to ride quickly for eightpence a mile, after Parliament had come to the solemn decision that they should pay a shilling a mile for riding slowly? We pause for a reply;—and, having no chance of getting one, begin a fresh paragraph.

Our acquaintance with hackney-coach stands is of long standing. We are a walking book of fares, feeling ourselves, half bound, as it were, to be always in the right on contested points. We know all the regular watermen within three miles of Covent-garden by sight, and should be almost tempted to believe that all the hackney-coach horses in that district knew us by sight too, if one-half of them were not blind. We take great interest in hackney-coaches, but we seldom drive, having a knack of turning ourselves over when we attempt to do so. We are as great friends to horses, hackney-coach and otherwise, as the renowned Mr. Martin, of costermonger notoriety, and yet we never ride. We keep no horse, but a clothes-horse; enjoy no saddle so much as a saddle of mutton; and, following our own inclinations, have never followed the hounds. Leaving these fleeter means of getting over the ground, or of depositing oneself upon it, to those who like them, by hackney-coach stands we take our stand.

There is a hackney-coach stand under the very window at which we are writing; there is only one coach on it now, but it is a fair specimen of the class of vehicles to which we have alluded—a great, lumbering, square concern of a dingy yellow colour (like a bilious brunette), with very small glasses, but very large frames; the panels are ornamented with a faded coat of arms, in shape something like a dissected bat, the axletree is red, and the majority of the wheels are green. The box is partially covered by an old great-coat, with a multiplicity of capes, and some extraordinary-looking clothes; and the straw, with which the canvas cushion is stuffed, is sticking up in several places, as if in rivalry of the hay, which is peeping through the chinks in the boot. The horses, with drooping heads, and each with a mane and tail as scanty and straggling as those of a worn-out rocking-horse, are standing patiently on some damp straw, occasionally wincing, and rattling the harness; and now and then, one of them lifts his mouth to the ear of his companion, as if he were saying, in a whisper, that he should like to assassinate the coachman. The coachman himself is in the watering-house; and the waterman, with his hands forced into his pockets as far as they can possibly go, is dancing the 'double shuffle,' in front of the pump, to keep his feet warm.

The servant-girl, with the pink ribbons, at No. 5, opposite, suddenly opens the street-door, and four small children forthwith rush out, and scream 'Coach!' with all their might and main. The waterman darts from the pump, seizes the horses by their respective bridles, and drags them, and the coach too, round to the house, shouting all the time for the coachman at the very top, or rather very bottom of his voice, for it is a deep bass growl. A response is heard from the tap-room; the coachman, in his wooden-soled shoes, makes the street echo again as he runs across it; and then there is such a struggling, and backing, and grating of the kennel, to get the coach-door opposite the house-door, that the children are in perfect ecstasies of delight. What a commotion! The old lady, who has been stopping there for the last month, is going back to the country. Out comes box after box, and one side of the vehicle is filled with luggage in no time; the children get into everybody's way, and the youngest, who has upset himself in his attempts to carry an umbrella, is borne off wounded and kicking. The youngsters disappear, and a short pause ensues, during which the old lady is, no doubt, kissing them all round in the back parlour. She appears at last, followed by her married daughter, all the children, and both the servants, who, with the joint assistance of the coachman and waterman, manage to get her safely into the coach. A cloak is handed in, and a little basket, which we could almost swear contains a small black bottle, and a paper of sandwiches. Up go the steps, bang goes the door, 'Golden-cross, Charing-cross, Tom,' says the waterman; 'Good-bye, grandma,' cry the children, off jingles the coach at the rate of three miles an hour, and the mamma and children retire into the house, with the exception of one little villain, who runs up the street at the top of his speed, pursued by the servant; not ill-pleased to have such an opportunity of displaying her attractions. She brings him back, and, after casting two or three gracious glances across the way, which are either intended for us or the potboy (we are not quite certain which), shuts the door, and the hackney-coach stand is again at a standstill.

We have been frequently amused with the intense delight with which 'a servant of all work,' who is sent for a coach, deposits herself inside; and the unspeakable gratification which boys, who have been despatched on a similar errand, appear to derive from mounting the box. But we never recollect to have been more amused with a hackney-coach party, than one we saw early the other morning in Tottenham-court-road. It was a wedding-party, and emerged from one of the inferior streets near Fitzroy-square. There were the bride, with a thin white dress, and a great red face; and the bridesmaid, a little, dumpy, good-humoured young woman, dressed, of course, in the same appropriate costume; and the bridegroom and his chosen friend, in blue coats, yellow waist-coats, white trousers, and Berlin gloves to match. They stopped at the corner of the street, and called a coach with an air of indescribable dignity. The moment they were in, the bridesmaid threw a red shawl, which she had, no doubt, brought on purpose, negligently over the number on the door, evidently to delude pedestrians into the belief that the hackney-coach was a private carriage; and away they went, perfectly satisfied that the imposition was successful, and quite unconscious that there was a great staring number stuck up behind, on a plate as large as a schoolboy's slate. A shilling a mile!—the ride was worth five, at least, to them.

What an interesting book a hackney-coach might produce, if it could carry as much in its head as it does in its body! The autobiography of a broken-down hackney-coach, would surely be as amusing as the autobiography of a broken-down hackneyed dramatist; and it might tell as much of its travels *with* the pole, as others have of their expeditions *to* it. How many stories might be related of the different people it had conveyed on matters of business or profit—pleasure or pain! And how many melancholy tales of the same people at different periods! The country-girl—the showy, over-dressed woman—the drunken prostitute! The raw apprentice—the dissipated spendthrift—the thief!

Talk of cabs! Cabs are all very well in cases of expedition, when it’s a matter of neck or nothing, life or death, your temporary home or your long one. But, besides a cab’s lacking that gravity of deportment which so peculiarly distinguishes a hackney-coach, let it never be forgotten that a cab is a thing of yesterday, and that he never was anything better. A hackney-cab has always been a hackney-cab, from his first entry into life; whereas a hackney-coach is a remnant of past gentility, a victim to fashion, a hanger-on of an old English family, wearing their arms, and, in days of yore, escorted by men wearing their livery, stripped of his finery, and thrown upon the world, like a once-smart footman when he is no longer sufficiently juvenile for his office, progressing lower and lower in the scale of four-wheeled degradation, until at last it comes to—*a stand*!

CHAPTER VIII—DOCTORS’ COMMONS

Walking without any definite object through St. Paul’s Churchyard, a little while ago, we happened to turn down a street entitled ‘Paul’s-chain,’ and keeping straight forward for a few hundred yards, found ourself, as a natural consequence, in Doctors’ Commons. Now Doctors’ Commons being familiar by name to everybody, as the place where they grant marriage-licenses to love-sick couples, and divorces to unfaithful ones; register the wills of people who have any property to leave, and punish hasty gentlemen who call ladies by unpleasant names, we no sooner discovered that we were really within its precincts, than we felt a laudable desire to become better acquainted therewith; and as the first object of our curiosity was the Court, whose decrees can even unloose the bonds of matrimony, we procured a direction to it; and bent our steps thither without delay.

Crossing a quiet and shady court-yard, paved with stone, and frowned upon by old red brick houses, on the doors of which were painted the names of sundry learned civilians, we paused before a small, green-baized, brass-headed-nailed door, which yielding to our gentle push, at once admitted us into an old quaint-looking apartment, with sunken windows, and black carved wainscoting, at the upper end of which, seated on a raised platform, of semicircular shape, were about a dozen solemn-looking gentlemen, in crimson gowns and wigs.

At a more elevated desk in the centre, sat a very fat and red-faced gentleman, in tortoise-shell spectacles, whose dignified appearance announced the judge; and round a long green-baized table below, something like a billiard-table without the cushions and pockets, were a number of very self-important-looking personages, in stiff neckcloths, and black gowns with white fur collars, whom we at once set down as proctors. At the lower end of the billiard-table was an individual in an arm-chair, and a wig, whom we afterwards discovered to be the registrar; and seated behind a little desk, near the door, were a respectable-looking man in black, of about twenty-stone weight or thereabouts, and a fat-faced, smirking, civil-looking body, in a black gown, black kid gloves, knee shorts, and silks, with a shirt-frill in his bosom, curls on his head, and a silver staff in his hand, whom we had no difficulty in recognising as the officer of the Court. The latter, indeed, speedily set our mind at rest upon this point, for, advancing to our elbow, and opening a conversation forthwith, he had communicated to us, in less than five minutes, that he was the apparitor, and the other the court-keeper; that this was the Arches Court, and therefore the counsel wore red gowns, and the proctors fur collars; and that when the other Courts sat there, they didn't wear red gowns or fur collars either; with many other scraps of intelligence equally interesting. Besides these two officers, there was a little thin old man, with long grizzly hair, crouched in a remote corner, whose duty, our communicative friend informed us, was to ring a large hand-bell when the Court opened in the morning, and who, for aught his appearance betokened to the contrary, might have been similarly employed for the last two centuries at least.

The red-faced gentleman in the tortoise-shell spectacles had got all the talk to himself just then, and very well he was doing it, too, only he spoke very fast, but that was habit; and rather thick, but that was good living. So we had plenty of time to look about us. There was one individual who amused us mightily. This was one of the bewigged gentlemen in the red robes, who was straddling before the fire in the centre of the Court, in the attitude of the brazen Colossus, to the complete exclusion of everybody else. He had gathered up his robe behind, in much the same manner as a slovenly woman would her petticoats on a very dirty day, in order that he might feel the full warmth of the fire. His wig was put on all awry, with the tail straggling about his neck; his scanty grey trousers and short black gaiters, made in the worst possible style, imported an additional inelegant appearance to his uncouth person; and his limp, badly-starched shirt-collar almost obscured his eyes. We shall never be able to claim any credit as a physiognomist again, for, after a careful scrutiny of this gentleman's countenance, we had come to the conclusion that it bespoke nothing but conceit and silliness, when our friend with the silver staff whispered in our ear that he was no other than a doctor of civil law, and heaven knows what besides. So of course we were mistaken, and he must be a very talented man. He conceals it so well though—perhaps with the merciful view of not astonishing ordinary people too much—that you would suppose him to be one of the stupidest dogs alive.

The gentleman in the spectacles having concluded his judgment, and a few minutes having been allowed to elapse, to afford time for the buzz of the Court to subside, the registrar called on the next cause, which was 'the office of the Judge promoted by Bumple against Sludberry.' A general movement was visible in the Court, at this announcement, and the obliging functionary with silver staff whispered us that 'there would be some fun now, for this was a brawling case.'

We were not rendered much the wiser by this piece of information, till we found by the opening speech of the counsel for the promoter, that, under a half-obsolete statute of one of the Edwards, the court was empowered to visit with the penalty of excommunication, any person who should be proved guilty of the crime of 'brawling,' or 'smiting,' in any church, or vestry adjoining thereto; and it appeared, by some eight-and-twenty affidavits, which were duly referred to, that on a certain night, at a certain vestry-meeting, in a certain parish particularly set forth, Thomas Sludberry, the party appeared against in that suit, had made use of, and applied to Michael Bumple, the promoter, the words 'You be blowed;' and that, on the said Michael Bumple and others remonstrating with the said Thomas Sludberry, on the impropriety of his conduct, the said Thomas Sludberry repeated the aforesaid expression, 'You be blowed;' and furthermore desired and requested to know, whether the said Michael Bumple 'wanted anything for himself;' adding, 'that if the said Michael Bumple did want anything for himself, he, the said Thomas Sludberry, was the man to give it him;' at the same time making use of other heinous and sinful expressions, all of which, Bumple submitted, came within the intent and meaning of the Act; and therefore he, for the soul's health and chastening of Sludberry, prayed for sentence of excommunication against him accordingly.

Upon these facts a long argument was entered into, on both sides, to the great edification of a number of persons interested in the parochial squabbles, who crowded the court; and when some very long and grave speeches had been made *pro* and *con*, the red-faced gentleman in the tortoise-shell spectacles took a review of the case, which occupied half an hour more, and then pronounced upon Sludberry the awful sentence of excommunication for a fortnight, and payment of the costs of the suit. Upon this, Sludberry, who was a little, red-faced, sly-looking, ginger-beer seller, addressed the court, and said, if they'd be good enough to take off the costs, and excommunicate him for the term of his natural life instead, it would be much more convenient to him, for he never went to church at all. To this appeal the gentleman in the spectacles made no other reply than a look of virtuous indignation; and Sludberry and his friends retired. As the man with the silver staff informed us that the court was on the point of rising, we retired too—pondering, as we walked away, upon the beautiful spirit of these ancient ecclesiastical laws, the kind and neighbourly feelings they are calculated to awaken, and the strong attachment to religious institutions which they cannot fail to engender.

We were so lost in these meditations, that we had turned into the street, and run up against a door-post, before we recollected where we were walking. On looking upwards to see what house we had stumbled upon, the words 'Prerogative-Office,' written in large characters, met our eye; and as we were in a sight-seeing humour and the place was a public one, we walked in.

The room into which we walked, was a long, busy-looking place, partitioned off, on either side, into a variety of little boxes, in which a few clerks were engaged in copying or examining deeds. Down the centre of the room were several desks nearly breast high, at each of which, three or four people were standing, poring over large volumes. As we knew that they were searching for wills, they attracted our attention at once.

It was curious to contrast the lazy indifference of the attorneys' clerks who were making a search for some legal purpose, with the air of earnestness and interest which distinguished the strangers to the place, who were looking up the will of some deceased relative; the former pausing every now and then with an impatient yawn, or raising their heads to look at the people who passed up and down the room; the latter stooping over the book, and running down column after column of names in the deepest abstraction.

There was one little dirty-faced man in a blue apron, who after a whole morning's search, extending some fifty years back, had just found the will to which he wished to refer, which one of the officials was reading to him in a low hurried voice from a thick vellum book with large clasps. It was perfectly evident that the more the clerk read, the less the man with the blue apron understood about the matter. When the volume was first brought down, he took off his hat, smoothed down his hair, smiled with great self-satisfaction, and looked up in the reader's face with the air of a man who had made up his mind to recollect every word he heard. The first two or three lines were intelligible enough; but then the technicalities began, and the little man began to look rather dubious. Then came a whole string of complicated trusts, and he was regularly at sea. As the reader proceeded, it was quite apparent that it was a hopeless case, and the little man, with his mouth open and his eyes fixed upon his face, looked on with an expression of bewilderment and perplexity irresistibly ludicrous.

A little further on, a hard-featured old man with a deeply-wrinkled face, was intently perusing a lengthy will with the aid of a pair of horn spectacles: occasionally pausing from his task, and slily noting down some brief memorandum of the bequests contained in it. Every wrinkle about his toothless mouth, and sharp keen eyes, told of avarice and cunning. His clothes were nearly threadbare, but it was easy to see that he wore them from choice and not from necessity; all his looks and gestures down to the very small pinches of snuff which he every now and then took from a little tin canister, told of wealth, and penury, and avarice.

As he leisurely closed the register, put up his spectacles, and folded his scraps of paper in a large leathern pocket-book, we thought what a nice hard bargain he was driving with some poverty-stricken legatee, who, tired of waiting year after year, until some life-interest should fall in, was selling his chance, just as it began to grow most valuable, for a twelfth part of its worth. It was a good speculation—a very safe one. The old man stowed his pocket-book carefully in the breast of his great-coat, and hobbled away with a leer of triumph. That will had made him ten years younger at the lowest computation.

Having commenced our observations, we should certainly have extended them to another dozen of people at least, had not a sudden shutting up and putting away of the worm-eaten old books, warned us that the time for closing the office had arrived; and thus deprived us of a pleasure, and spared our readers an infliction.

We naturally fell into a train of reflection as we walked homewards, upon the curious old records of likings and dislikings; of jealousies and revenges; of affection defying the power of death, and hatred pursued beyond the grave, which these depositories contain; silent but striking tokens, some of them, of excellence of heart, and nobleness of soul; melancholy examples, others, of the worst passions of human nature. How many men as they lay speechless and helpless on the bed of death, would have given worlds but for the strength and power to blot out the silent evidence of animosity and bitterness, which now stands registered against them in Doctors' Commons!

CHAPTER IX—LONDON RECREATIONS

The wish of persons in the humbler classes of life, to ape the manners and customs of those whom fortune has placed above them, is often the subject of remark, and not unfrequently of complaint. The inclination may, and no doubt does, exist to a great extent, among the small gentility—the would-be aristocrats—of the middle classes. Tradesmen and clerks, with fashionable novel-reading families, and circulating-library-subscribing daughters, get up small assemblies in humble imitation of Almack's, and promenade the dingy 'large room' of some second-rate hotel with as much complacency as the enviable few who are privileged to exhibit their magnificence in that exclusive haunt of fashion and foolery. Aspiring young ladies, who read flaming accounts of some 'fancy fair in high life,' suddenly grow desperately charitable; visions of admiration and matrimony float before their eyes; some wonderfully meritorious institution, which, by the strangest accident in the world, has never been heard of before, is discovered to be in a languishing condition: Thomson's great room, or Johnson's nursery-ground, is forthwith engaged, and the aforesaid young ladies, from mere charity, exhibit themselves for three days, from twelve to four, for the small charge of one shilling per head! With the exception of these classes of society, however, and a few weak and insignificant persons, we do not think the attempt at imitation to which we have alluded, prevails in any great degree. The different character of the recreations of different classes, has often afforded us amusement; and we have chosen it for the subject of our present sketch, in the hope that it may possess some amusement for our readers.

If the regular City man, who leaves Lloyd's at five o'clock, and drives home to Hackney, Clapton, Stamford-hill, or elsewhere, can be said to have any daily recreation beyond his dinner, it is his garden. He never does anything to it with his own hands; but he takes great pride in it notwithstanding; and if you are desirous of paying your addresses to the youngest daughter, be sure to be in raptures with every flower and shrub it contains. If your poverty of expression compel you to make any distinction between the two, we would certainly recommend your bestowing more admiration on his garden than his wine. He always takes a walk round it, before he starts for town in the morning, and is particularly anxious that the fish-pond should be kept specially neat. If you call on him on Sunday in summer-time, about an hour before dinner, you will find him sitting in an arm-chair, on the lawn behind the house, with a straw hat on, reading a Sunday paper. A short distance from him you will most likely observe a handsome paroquet in a large brass-wire cage; ten to one but the two eldest girls are loitering in one of the side walks accompanied by a couple of young gentlemen, who are holding parasols over them—of course only to keep the sun off—while the younger children, with the under nursery-maid, are strolling listlessly about, in the shade. Beyond these occasions, his delight in his garden appears to arise more from the consciousness of possession than actual enjoyment of it. When he drives you down to dinner on a week-day, he is rather fatigued with the occupations of the morning, and tolerably cross into the bargain; but when the cloth is removed, and he has drank three or four glasses of his favourite port, he orders the French windows of his dining-room (which of course look into the garden) to be opened, and throwing a silk handkerchief over his head, and leaning back in his arm-chair, descants at considerable length upon its beauty, and the cost of maintaining it. This is to impress you—who are a young friend of the family—with a due sense of the excellence of the garden, and the wealth of its owner; and when he has exhausted the subject, he goes to sleep.

There is another and a very different class of men, whose recreation is their garden. An individual of this class, resides some short distance from town—say in the Hampstead-road, or the Kilburn-road, or any other road where the houses are small and neat, and have little slips of back garden. He and his wife—who is as clean and compact a little body as himself—have occupied the same house ever since he retired from business twenty years ago. They have no family. They once had a son, who died at about five years old. The child's portrait hangs over the mantelpiece in the best sitting-room, and a little cart he used to draw about, is carefully preserved as a relic.

In fine weather the old gentleman is almost constantly in the garden; and when it is too wet to go into it, he will look out of the window at it, by the hour together. He has always something to do there, and you will see him digging, and sweeping, and cutting, and planting, with manifest delight. In spring-time, there is no end to the sowing of seeds, and sticking little bits of wood over them, with labels, which look like epitaphs to their memory; and in the evening, when the sun has gone down, the perseverance with which he lugs a great watering-pot about is perfectly astonishing. The only other recreation he has, is the newspaper, which he peruses every day, from beginning to end, generally reading the most interesting pieces of intelligence to his wife, during breakfast. The old lady is very fond of flowers, as the hyacinth-glasses in the parlour-window, and geranium-pots in the little front court, testify. She takes great pride in the garden too: and when one of the four fruit-trees produces rather a larger gooseberry than usual, it is carefully preserved under a wine-glass on the sideboard, for the edification of visitors, who are duly informed that Mr. So-and-so planted the tree which produced it, with his own hands. On a summer's evening, when the large watering-pot has been filled and emptied some fourteen times, and the old couple have quite exhausted themselves by trotting about, you will see them sitting happily together in the little summerhouse, enjoying the calm and peace of the twilight, and watching the shadows as they fall upon the garden, and gradually growing thicker and more sombre, obscure the tints of their gayest flowers—no bad emblem of the years that have silently rolled over their heads, deadening in their course the brightest hues of early hopes and feelings which have long since faded away. These are their only recreations, and they require no more. They have within themselves, the materials of comfort and content; and the only anxiety of each, is to die before the other.

This is no ideal sketch. There *used* to be many old people of this description; their numbers may have diminished, and may decrease still more. Whether the course female education has taken of late days—whether the pursuit of giddy frivolities, and empty nothings, has tended to unfit women for that quiet domestic life, in which they show far more beautifully than in the most crowded assembly, is a question we should feel little gratification in discussing: we hope not.

Let us turn now, to another portion of the London population, whose recreations present about as strong a contrast as can well be conceived—we mean the Sunday pleasurers; and let us beg our readers to imagine themselves stationed by our side in some well-known rural 'Tea-gardens.'

The heat is intense this afternoon, and the people, of whom there are additional parties arriving every moment, look as warm as the tables which have been recently painted, and have the appearance of being red-hot. What a dust and noise! Men and women—boys and girls—sweethearts and married people—babies in arms, and children in chaises—pipes and shrimps—cigars and periwinkles—tea and tobacco. Gentlemen, in alarming waistcoats, and steel watch-guards, promenading about, three abreast, with surprising dignity (or as the gentleman in the next box facetiously observes, 'cutting it uncommon fat!')—ladies, with great, long, white pocket-handkerchiefs like small table-cloths, in their hands, chasing one another on the grass in the most playful and interesting manner, with the view of attracting the attention of the aforesaid gentlemen—husbands in perspective ordering bottles of ginger-beer for the objects of their affections, with a lavish disregard of expense; and the said objects washing down huge quantities of 'shrimps' and 'winkles,' with an equal disregard of their own bodily health and subsequent comfort—boys, with great silk hats just balanced on the top of their heads, smoking cigars, and trying to look as if they liked them—gentlemen in pink shirts and blue waistcoats, occasionally upsetting either themselves, or somebody else, with their own canes.

Some of the finery of these people provokes a smile, but they are all clean, and happy, and disposed to be good-natured and sociable. Those two motherly-looking women in the smart pelisses, who are chatting so confidentially, inserting a 'ma'am' at every fourth word, scraped an acquaintance about a quarter of an hour ago: it originated in admiration of the little boy who belongs to one of them—that diminutive specimen of mortality in the three-cornered pink satin hat with black feathers. The two men in the blue coats and drab trousers, who are walking up and down, smoking their pipes, are their husbands. The party in the opposite box are a pretty fair specimen of the generality of the visitors. These are the father and mother, and old grandmother: a young man and woman, and an individual addressed by the euphonious title of ‘Uncle Bill,’ who is evidently the wit of the party. They have some half-dozen children with them, but it is scarcely necessary to notice the fact, for that is a matter of course here. Every woman in ‘the gardens,’ who has been married for any length of time, must have had twins on two or three occasions; it is impossible to account for the extent of juvenile population in any other way.

Observe the inexpressible delight of the old grandmother, at Uncle Bill’s splendid joke of ‘tea for four: bread-and-butter for forty;’ and the loud explosion of mirth which follows his wafering a paper ‘pigtail’ on the waiter’s collar. The young man is evidently ‘keeping company’ with Uncle Bill’s niece: and Uncle Bill’s hints—such as ‘Don’t forget me at the dinner, you know,’ ‘I shall look out for the cake, Sally,’ ‘I’ll be godfather to your first—wager it’s a boy,’ and so forth, are equally embarrassing to the young people, and delightful to the elder ones. As to the old grandmother, she is in perfect ecstasies, and does nothing but laugh herself into fits of coughing, until they have finished the ‘gin-and-water warm with,’ of which Uncle Bill ordered ‘glasses round’ after tea, ‘just to keep the night air out, and to do it up comfortable and riglar arter sitch an as-tonishing hot day!’

It is getting dark, and the people begin to move. The field leading to town is quite full of them; the little hand-chaises are dragged wearily along, the children are tired, and amuse themselves and the company generally by crying, or resort to the much more pleasant expedient of going to sleep—the mothers begin to wish they were at home again—sweethearts grow more sentimental than ever, as the time for parting arrives—the gardens look mournful enough, by the light of the two lanterns which hang against the trees for the convenience of smokers—and the waiters who have been running about incessantly for the last six hours, think they feel a little tired, as they count their glasses and their gains.

CHAPTER X—THE RIVER

‘Are you fond of the water?’ is a question very frequently asked, in hot summer weather, by amphibious-looking young men. ‘Very,’ is the general reply. ‘An’t you?’—‘Hardly ever off it,’ is the response, accompanied by sundry adjectives, expressive of the speaker’s heartfelt admiration of that element. Now, with all respect for the opinion of society in general, and cutter clubs in particular, we humbly suggest that some of the most painful reminiscences in the mind of every individual who has occasionally disported himself on the Thames, must be connected with his aquatic recreations. Who ever heard of a successful water-party?—or to put the question in a still more intelligible form, who ever saw one? We have been on water excursions out of number, but we solemnly declare that we cannot call to mind one single occasion of the kind, which was not marked by more miseries than any one would suppose could be reasonably crowded into the space of some eight or nine hours. Something has always gone wrong. Either the cork of the salad-dressing has come out, or the most anxiously expected member of the party has not come out, or the most disagreeable man in company would come out, or a child or two have fallen into the water, or the gentleman who undertook to steer has endangered everybody’s life all the way, or the gentlemen who volunteered to row have been ‘out of practice,’ and performed very alarming evolutions, putting their oars down into the water and not being able to get them up again, or taking terrific pulls without putting them in at all; in either case, pitching over on the backs of their heads with startling violence, and exhibiting the soles of their pumps to the ‘sitters’ in the boat, in a very humiliating manner.

We grant that the banks of the Thames are very beautiful at Richmond and Twickenham, and other distant havens, often sought though seldom reached; but from the ‘Red-us’ back to Blackfriars-bridge, the scene is wonderfully changed. The Penitentiary is a noble building, no doubt, and the sportive youths who ‘go in’ at that particular part of the river, on a summer’s evening, may be all very well in perspective; but when you are obliged to keep in shore coming home, and the young ladies will colour up, and look perseveringly the other way, while the married dittos cough slightly, and stare very hard at the water, you feel awkward—especially if you happen to have been attempting the most distant approach to sentimentality, for an hour or two previously.

Although experience and suffering have produced in our minds the result we have just stated, we are by no means blind to a proper sense of the fun which a looker-on may extract from the amateurs of boating. What can be more amusing than Searle’s yard on a fine Sunday morning? It’s a

Richmond tide, and some dozen boats are preparing for the reception of the parties who have engaged them. Two or three fellows in great rough trousers and Guernsey shirts, are getting them ready by easy stages; now coming down the yard with a pair of sculls and a cushion—then having a chat with the 'Jack,' who, like all his tribe, seems to be wholly incapable of doing anything but lounging about—then going back again, and returning with a rudder-line and a stretcher—then solacing themselves with another chat—and then wondering, with their hands in their capacious pockets, 'where them gentlemen's got to as ordered the six.' One of these, the head man, with the legs of his trousers carefully tucked up at the bottom, to admit the water, we presume—for it is an element in which he is infinitely more at home than on land—is quite a character, and shares with the defunct oyster-swallower the celebrated name of 'Dando.' Watch him, as taking a few minutes' respite from his toils, he negligently seats himself on the edge of a boat, and fans his broad bushy chest with a cap scarcely half so furry. Look at his magnificent, though reddish whiskers, and mark the somewhat native humour with which he 'chaffs' the boys and 'prentices, or cunningly gammons the gen'lm'n into the gift of a glass of gin, of which we verily believe he swallows in one day as much as any six ordinary men, without ever being one atom the worse for it.

But the party arrives, and Dando, relieved from his state of uncertainty, starts up into activity. They approach in full aquatic costume, with round blue jackets, striped shirts, and caps of all sizes and patterns, from the velvet skull-cap of French manufacture, to the easy head-dress familiar to the students of the old spelling-books, as having, on the authority of the portrait, formed part of the costume of the Reverend Mr. Dilworth.

This is the most amusing time to observe a regular Sunday water-party. There has evidently been up to this period no inconsiderable degree of boasting on everybody's part relative to his knowledge of navigation; the sight of the water rapidly cools their courage, and the air of self-denial with which each of them insists on somebody else's taking an oar, is perfectly delightful. At length, after a great deal of changing and fidgeting, consequent upon the election of a stroke-oar: the inability of one gentleman to pull on this side, of another to pull on that, and of a third to pull at all, the boat's crew are seated. 'Shove her off!' cries the cockswain, who looks as easy and comfortable as if he were steering in the Bay of Biscay. The order is obeyed; the boat is immediately turned completely round, and proceeds towards Westminster-bridge, amidst such a splashing and struggling as never was seen before, except when the Royal George went down. ‘Back wa’ater, sir,’ shouts Dando, ‘Back wa’ater, you sir, aft;’ upon which everybody thinking he must be the individual referred to, they all back water, and back comes the boat, stern first, to the spot whence it started. ‘Back water, you sir, aft; pull round, you sir, for’ad, can’t you?’ shouts Dando, in a frenzy of excitement. ‘Pull round, Tom, can’t you?’ re-echoes one of the party. ‘Tom an’t for’ad,’ replies another. ‘Yes, he is,’ cries a third; and the unfortunate young man, at the imminent risk of breaking a blood-vessel, pulls and pulls, until the head of the boat fairly lies in the direction of Vauxhall-bridge. ‘That’s right—now pull all on you!’ shouts Dando again, adding, in an under-tone, to somebody by him, ‘Blowed if hever I see sich a set of muffs!’ and away jogs the boat in a zigzag direction, every one of the six oars dipping into the water at a different time; and the yard is once more clear, until the arrival of the next party.

A well-contested rowing-match on the Thames, is a very lively and interesting scene. The water is studded with boats of all sorts, kinds, and descriptions; places in the coal-barges at the different wharfs are let to crowds of spectators, beer and tobacco flow freely about; men, women, and children wait for the start in breathless expectation; cutters of six and eight oars glide gently up and down, waiting to accompany their *protégés* during the race; bands of music add to the animation, if not to the harmony of the scene; groups of watermen are assembled at the different stairs, discussing the merits of the respective candidates; and the prize wherry, which is rowed slowly about by a pair of sculls, is an object of general interest.

Two o’clock strikes, and everybody looks anxiously in the direction of the bridge through which the candidates for the prize will come—half-past two, and the general attention which has been preserved so long begins to flag, when suddenly a gun is heard, and a noise of distant hurra’ing along each bank of the river—every head is bent forward—the noise draws nearer and nearer—the boats which have been waiting at the bridge start briskly up the river, and a well-manned galley shoots through the arch, the sitters cheering on the boats behind them, which are not yet visible.

‘Here they are,’ is the general cry—and through darts the first boat, the men in her, stripped to the skin, and exerting every muscle to preserve the advantage they have gained—four other boats follow close astern; there are not two boats’ length between them—the shouting is tremendous, and the interest intense. ‘Go on, Pink’—‘Give it her, Red’—‘Sulliwin for ever’—‘Bravo! George’—‘Now, Tom, now—now—now—why don’t your partner stretch out?’—‘Two pots to a pint on Yellow,’ &c., &c. Every little public-house fires its gun, and hoists its flag; and the men who win the heat, come in, amidst a splashing and shouting, and banging and confusion, which no one can imagine who has not witnessed it, and of which any description would convey a very faint idea.

One of the most amusing places we know is the steam-wharf of the London Bridge, or St. Katharine’s Dock Company, on a Saturday morning in summer, when the Gravesend and Margate steamers are usually crowded to excess; and as we have just taken a glance at the river above bridge, we hope our readers will not object to accompany us on board a Gravesend packet.

Coaches are every moment setting down at the entrance to the wharf, and the stare of bewildered astonishment with which the ‘fares’ resign themselves and their luggage into the hands of the porters, who seize all the packages at once as a matter of course, and run away with them, heaven knows where, is laughable in the extreme. A Margate boat lies alongside the wharf, the Gravesend boat (which starts first) lies alongside that again; and as a temporary communication is formed between the two, by means of a plank and hand-rail, the natural confusion of the scene is by no means diminished.

‘Gravesend?’ inquires a stout father of a stout family, who follow him, under the guidance of their mother, and a servant, at the no small risk of two or three of them being left behind in the confusion. ‘Gravesend?’

‘Pass on, if you please, sir,’ replies the attendant—‘other boat, sir.’

Hereupon the stout father, being rather mystified, and the stout mother rather distracted by maternal anxiety, the whole party deposit themselves in the Margate boat, and after having congratulated himself on having secured very comfortable seats, the stout father sallies to the chimney to look for his luggage, which he has a faint recollection of having given some man, something, to take somewhere. No luggage, however, bearing the most remote resemblance to his own, in shape or form, is to be discovered; on which the stout father calls very loudly for an officer, to whom he states the case, in the presence of another father of another family—a little thin man—who entirely concurs with him (the stout father) in thinking that it’s high time something was done with these steam companies, and that as the

Corporation Bill failed to do it, something else must; for really people’s property is not to be sacrificed in this way; and that if the luggage isn’t restored without delay, he will take care it shall be put in the papers, for the public is not to be the victim of these great monopolies. To this, the officer, in his turn, replies, that that company, ever since it has been St. Kat’rine’s Dock Company, has protected life and property; that if it had been the London Bridge Wharf Company, indeed, he shouldn’t have wondered, seeing that the morality of that company (they being the opposition) can’t be answered for, by no one; but as it is, he’s convinced there must be some mistake, and he wouldn’t mind making a solemn oath afore a magistrate that the gentleman’ll find his luggage afore he gets to Margate.

Here the stout father, thinking he is making a capital point, replies, that as it happens, he is not going to Margate at all, and that ‘Passenger to Gravesend’ was on the luggage, in letters of full two inches long; on which the officer rapidly explains the mistake, and the stout mother, and the stout children, and the servant, are hurried with all possible despatch on board the Gravesend boat, which they reached just in time to discover that their luggage is there, and that their comfortable seats are not. Then the bell, which is the signal for the Gravesend boat starting, begins to ring most furiously: and people keep time to the bell, by running in and out of our boat at a double-quick pace. The bell stops; the boat starts: people who have been taking leave of their friends on board, are carried away against their will; and people who have been taking leave of their friends on shore, find that they have performed a very needless ceremony, in consequence of their not being carried away at all. The regular passengers, who have season tickets, go below to breakfast; people who have purchased morning papers, compose themselves to read them; and people who have not been down the river before, think that both the shipping and the water, look a great deal better at a distance.

When we get down about as far as Blackwall, and begin to move at a quicker rate, the spirits of the passengers appear to rise in proportion. Old women who have brought large wicker hand-baskets with them, set seriously to work at the demolition of heavy sandwiches, and pass round a wine-glass, which is frequently replenished from a flat bottle like a stomach-warmer, with considerable glee: handing it first to the gentleman in the foraging-cap, who plays the harp—partly as an expression of satisfaction with his previous exertions, and partly to induce him to play

‘Dumbledumbdeary,’ for ‘Alick’ to dance to; which being done, Alick, who is a damp earthy child in red worsted socks, takes certain small jumps upon the deck, to the unspeakable satisfaction of his family circle. Girls who have brought the first volume of some new novel in their reticule, become extremely plaintive, and expatiate to Mr. Brown, or young Mr. O’Brien, who has been looking over them, on the blueness of the sky, and brightness of the water; on which Mr. Brown or Mr. O’Brien, as the case may be, remarks in a low voice that he has been quite insensible of late to the beauties of nature, that his whole thoughts and wishes have centred in one object alone—whereupon the young lady looks up, and failing in her attempt to appear unconscious, looks down again; and turns over the next leaf with great difficulty, in order to afford opportunity for a lengthened pressure of the hand.

Telescopes, sandwiches, and glasses of brandy-and-water cold without, begin to be in great requisition; and bashful men who have been looking down the hatchway at the engine, find, to their great relief, a subject on which they can converse with one another—and a copious one too—Steam.

‘Wonderful thing steam, sir.’ ‘Ah! (a deep-drawn sigh) it is indeed, sir.’ ‘Great power, sir.’ ‘Immense—immense!’ ‘Great deal done by steam, sir.’ ‘Ah! (another sigh at the immensity of the subject, and a knowing shake of the head) you may say that, sir.’ ‘Still in its infancy, they say, sir.’ Novel remarks of this kind, are generally the commencement of a conversation which is prolonged until the conclusion of the trip, and, perhaps, lays the foundation of a speaking acquaintance between half-a-dozen gentlemen, who, having their families at Gravesend, take season tickets for the boat, and dine on board regularly every afternoon.

CHAPTER XI—ASTLEY’S

We never see any very large, staring, black Roman capitals, in a book, or shop-window, or placarded on a wall, without their immediately recalling to our mind an indistinct and confused recollection of the time when we were first initiated in the mysteries of the alphabet. We almost fancy we see the pin’s point following the letter, to impress its form more strongly on our bewildered imagination; and wince involuntarily, as we remember the hard knuckles with which the reverend old lady who instilled into our mind the first principles of education for ninepence per week, or ten and sixpence per quarter, was wont to poke our juvenile head occasionally, by way of adjusting the confusion of ideas in which we were generally involved. The same kind of feeling pursues us in many other instances, but there is no place which recalls so strongly our recollections of childhood as Astley's. It was not a 'Royal Amphitheatre' in those days, nor had Ducrow arisen to shed the light of classic taste and portable gas over the sawdust of the circus; but the whole character of the place was the same, the pieces were the same, the clown's jokes were the same, the riding-masters were equally grand, the comic performers equally witty, the tragedians equally hoarse, and the 'highly-trained chargers' equally spirited. Astley's has altered for the better—we have changed for the worse. Our histrionic taste is gone, and with shame we confess, that we are far more delighted and amused with the audience, than with the pageantry we once so highly appreciated.

We like to watch a regular Astley's party in the Easter or Midsummer holidays—pa and ma, and nine or ten children, varying from five foot six to two foot eleven: from fourteen years of age to four. We had just taken our seat in one of the boxes, in the centre of the house, the other night, when the next was occupied by just such a party as we should have attempted to describe, had we depicted our *beau idéal* of a group of Astley's visitors.

First of all, there came three little boys and a little girl, who, in pursuance of pa's directions, issued in a very audible voice from the box-door, occupied the front row; then two more little girls were ushered in by a young lady, evidently the governess. Then came three more little boys, dressed like the first, in blue jackets and trousers, with lay-down shirt-collars: then a child in a braided frock and high state of astonishment, with very large round eyes, opened to their utmost width, was lifted over the seats—a process which occasioned a considerable display of little pink legs—then came ma and pa, and then the eldest son, a boy of fourteen years old, who was evidently trying to look as if he did not belong to the family.

The first five minutes were occupied in taking the shawls off the little girls, and adjusting the bows which ornamented their hair; then it was providentially discovered that one of the little boys was seated behind a pillar and could not see, so the governess was stuck behind the pillar, and the boy lifted into her place. Then pa drilled the boys, and directed the stowing away of their pocket-handkerchiefs, and ma having first nodded and winked to the governess to pull the girls' frocks a little more off their shoulders, stood up to review the little troop—an inspection which appeared to terminate much to her own satisfaction, for she looked with a complacent air at pa, who was standing up at the further end of the seat. Pa returned the glance, and blew his nose very emphatically; and the poor governess peeped out from behind the pillar, and timidly tried to catch ma's eye, with a look expressive of her high admiration of the whole family. Then two of the little boys who had been discussing the point whether Astley's was more than twice as large as Drury Lane, agreed to refer it to 'George' for his decision; at which 'George,' who was no other than the young gentleman before noticed, waxed indignant, and remonstrated in no very gentle terms on the gross impropriety of having his name repeated in so loud a voice at a public place, on which all the children laughed very heartily, and one of the little boys wound up by expressing his opinion, that 'George began to think himself quite a man now,' whereupon both pa and ma laughed too; and George (who carried a dress cane and was cultivating whiskers) muttered that 'William always was encouraged in his impertinence;' and assumed a look of profound contempt, which lasted the whole evening.

The play began, and the interest of the little boys knew no bounds. Pa was clearly interested too, although he very unsuccessfully endeavoured to look as if he wasn't. As for ma, she was perfectly overcome by the drollery of the principal comedian, and laughed till every one of the immense bows on her ample cap trembled, at which the governess peeped out from behind the pillar again, and whenever she could catch ma's eye, put her handkerchief to her mouth, and appeared, as in duty bound, to be in convulsions of laughter also. Then when the man in the splendid armour vowed to rescue the lady or perish in the attempt, the little boys applauded vehemently, especially one little fellow who was apparently on a visit to the family, and had been carrying on a child's flirtation, the whole evening, with a small coquette of twelve years old, who looked like a model of her mamma on a reduced scale; and who, in common with the other little girls (who generally speaking have even more coquettishness about them than much older ones), looked very properly shocked, when the knight's squire kissed the princess's confidential chambermaid.

When the scenes in the circle commenced, the children were more delighted than ever; and the wish to see what was going forward, completely conquering pa's dignity, he stood up in the box, and applauded as loudly as any of them. Between each feat of horsemanship, the governess leant across to ma, and retailed the clever remarks of the children on that which had preceded: and ma, in the openness of her heart, offered the governess an acidulated drop, and the governess, gratified to be taken notice of, retired behind her pillar again with a brighter countenance: and the whole party seemed quite happy, except the exquisite in the back of the box, who, being too grand to take any interest in the children, and too insignificant to be taken notice of by anybody else, occupied himself, from time to time, in rubbing the place where the whiskers ought to be, and was completely alone in his glory.

We defy any one who has been to Astley's two or three times, and is consequently capable of appreciating the perseverance with which precisely the same jokes are repeated night after night, and season after season, not to be amused with one part of the performances at least—we mean the scenes in the circle. For ourself, we know that when the hoop, composed of jets of gas, is let down, the curtain drawn up for the convenience of the half-price on their ejectment from the ring, the orange-peel cleared away, and the sawdust shaken, with mathematical precision, into a complete circle, we feel as much enlivened as the youngest child present; and actually join in the laugh which follows the clown's shrill shout of 'Here we are!' just for old acquaintance' sake. Nor can we quite divest ourself of our old feeling of reverence for the riding-master, who follows the clown with a long whip in his hand, and bows to the audience with graceful dignity. He is none of your second-rate riding-masters in nankeen dressing-gowns, with brown frogs, but the regular gentleman-attendant on the principal riders, who always wears a military uniform with a table-cloth inside the breast of the coat, in which costume he forcibly reminds one of a fowl trussed for roasting. He is—but why should we attempt to describe that of which no description can convey an adequate idea? Everybody knows the man, and everybody remembers his polished boots, his graceful demeanour, stiff, as some misjudging persons have in their jealousy considered it, and the splendid head of black hair, parted high on the forehead, to impart to the countenance an appearance of deep thought and poetic melancholy. His soft and pleasing voice, too, is in perfect unison with his noble bearing, as he humours the clown by indulging in a little badinage; and the striking recollection of his own dignity, with which he exclaims, 'Now, sir, if you please, inquire for Miss Woolford, sir,' can never be forgotten. The graceful air, too, with which he introduces Miss Woolford into the arena, and, after assisting her to the saddle, follows her fairy courser round the circle, can never fail to create a deep impression in the bosom of every female servant present.

When Miss Woolford, and the horse, and the orchestra, all stop together to take breath, he urbanely takes part in some such dialogue as the following (commenced by the clown): 'I say, sir!'—'Well, sir?' (it's always conducted in the politest manner.)—'Did you ever happen to hear I was in the army, sir?'—'No, sir.'—'Oh, yes, sir—I can go through my exercise, sir.'—'Indeed, sir!'—'Shall I do it now, sir?'—'If you please, sir; come, sir—make haste' (a cut with the long whip, and 'Ha' done now—I don't like it,' from the clown). Here the clown throws himself on the ground, and goes through a variety of gymnastic convulsions, doubling himself up, and untying himself again, and making himself look very like a man in the most hopeless extreme of human agony, to the vociferous delight of the gallery, until he is interrupted by a second cut from the long whip, and a request to see 'what Miss Woolford's stopping for?' On which, to the inexpressible mirth of the gallery, he exclaims, 'Now, Miss Woolford, what can I come for to go, for to fetch, for to bring, for to carry, for to do, for you, ma'am?' On the lady's announcing with a sweet smile that she wants the two flags, they are, with sundry grimaces, procured and handed up; the clown facetiously observing after the performance of the latter ceremony—'He, he, oh! I say, sir, Miss Woolford knows me; she smiled at me.' Another cut from the whip, a burst from the orchestra, a start from the horse, and round goes Miss Woolford again on her graceful performance, to the delight of every member of the audience, young or old. The next pause affords an opportunity for similar witticisms, the only additional fun being that of the clown making ludicrous grimaces at the riding-master every time his back is turned; and finally quitting the circle by jumping over his head, having previously directed his attention another way.

Did any of our readers ever notice the class of people, who hang about the stage-doors of our minor theatres in the daytime? You will rarely pass one of these entrances without seeing a group of three or four men conversing on the pavement, with an indescribable public-house-parlour swagger, and a kind of conscious air, peculiar to people of this description. They always seem to think they are exhibiting; the lamps are ever before them. That young fellow in the faded brown coat, and very full light green trousers, pulls down the wristbands of his check shirt, as ostentatiously as if it were of the finest linen, and cocks the white hat of the summer-before-last as knowingly over his right eye, as if it were a purchase of yesterday. Look at the dirty white Berlin gloves, and the cheap silk handkerchief stuck in the bosom of his threadbare coat. Is it possible to see him for an instant, and not come to the conclusion that he is the walking gentleman who wears a blue surtout, clean collar, and white trousers, for half an hour, and then shrinks into his worn-out scanty clothes: who has to boast night after night of his splendid fortune, with the painful consciousness of a pound a-week and his boots to find; to talk of his father's mansion in the country, with a dreary recollection of his own two-pair back, in the New Cut; and to be envied and flattered as the favoured lover of a rich heiress, remembering all the while that the ex-dancer at home is in the family way, and out of an engagement?

Next to him, perhaps, you will see a thin pale man, with a very long face, in a suit of shining black, thoughtfully knocking that part of his boot which once had a heel, with an ash stick. He is the man who does the heavy business, such as prosy fathers, virtuous servants, curates, landlords, and so forth.

By the way, talking of fathers, we should very much like to see some piece in which all the dramatis personae were orphans. Fathers are invariably great nuisances on the stage, and always have to give the hero or heroine a long explanation of what was done before the curtain rose, usually commencing with 'It is now nineteen years, my dear child, since your blessed mother (here the old villain's voice falters) confided you to my charge. You were then an infant,' &c., &c. Or else they have to discover, all of a sudden, that somebody whom they have been in constant communication with, during three long acts, without the slightest suspicion, is their own child: in which case they exclaim, 'Ah! what do I see? This bracelet! That smile! These documents! Those eyes! Can I believe my senses?—It must be!—Yes—it is, it is my child!'—'My father!' exclaims the child; and they fall into each other's arms, and look over each other's shoulders, and the audience give three rounds of applause.

To return from this digression, we were about to say, that these are the sort of people whom you see talking, and attitudinising, outside the stage-doors of our minor theatres. At Astley's they are always more numerous than at any other place. There is generally a groom or two, sitting on the window-sill, and two or three dirty shabby-genteel men in checked neckerchiefs, and sallow linen, lounging about, and carrying, perhaps, under one arm, a pair of stage shoes badly wrapped up in a piece of old newspaper. Some years ago we used to stand looking, open-mouthed, at these men, with a feeling of mysterious curiosity, the very recollection of which provokes a smile at the moment we are writing. We could not believe that the beings of light and elegance, in milk-white tunics, salmon-coloured legs, and blue scarfs, who flitted on sleek cream-coloured horses before our eyes at night, with all the aid of lights, music, and artificial flowers, could be the pale, dissipated-looking creatures we beheld by day.

We can hardly believe it now. Of the lower class of actors we have seen something, and it requires no great exercise of imagination to identify the walking gentleman with the ‘dirty swell,’ the comic singer with the public-house chairman, or the leading tragedian with drunkenness and distress; but these other men are mysterious beings, never seen out of the ring, never beheld but in the costume of gods and sylphs. With the exception of Ducrow, who can scarcely be classed among them, who ever knew a rider at Astley’s, or saw him but on horseback? Can our friend in the military uniform ever appear in threadbare attire, or descend to the comparatively un-wadded costume of every-day life? Impossible! We cannot—we will not—believe it.

CHAPTER XII—GREENWICH FAIR

If the Parks be ‘the lungs of London,’ we wonder what Greenwich Fair is—a periodical breaking out, we suppose, a sort of spring-rash: a three days’ fever, which cools the blood for six months afterwards, and at the expiration of which London is restored to its old habits of plodding industry, as suddenly and completely as if nothing had ever happened to disturb them.

In our earlier days, we were a constant frequenter of Greenwich Fair, for years. We have proceeded to, and returned from it, in almost every description of vehicle. We cannot conscientiously deny the charge of having once made the passage in a spring-van, accompanied by thirteen gentlemen, fourteen ladies, an unlimited number of children, and a barrel of beer; and we have a vague recollection of having, in later days, found ourself the eighth outside, on the top of a hackney-coach, at something past four o’clock in the morning, with a rather confused idea of our own name, or place of residence. We have grown older since then, and quiet, and steady: liking nothing better than to spend our Easter, and all our other holidays, in some quiet nook, with people of whom we shall never tire; but we think we still remember something of Greenwich Fair, and of those who resort to it. At all events we will try.

The road to Greenwich during the whole of Easter Monday, is in a state of perpetual bustle and noise. Cabs, hackney-coaches, ‘shay’ carts, coal-waggons, stages, omnibuses, sociables, gigs, donkey-chaises—all crammed with people (for the question never is, what the horse can draw, but what the vehicle will hold), roll along at their utmost speed; the dust flies in clouds, ginger-beer corks go off in volleys, the balcony of every public-house is crowded with people, smoking and drinking, half the private houses are turned into tea-shops, fiddles are in great request, every little fruit-shop displays its stall of gilt gingerbread and penny toys; turnpike men are in despair; horses won’t go on, and wheels will come off; ladies in ‘carawans’ scream with fright at every fresh concussion, and their admirers find it necessary to sit remarkably close to them, by way of encouragement; servants-of-all-work, who are not allowed to have followers, and have got a holiday for the day, make the most of their time with the faithful admirer who waits for a stolen interview at the corner of the street every night, when they go to fetch the beer—apprentices grow sentimental, and straw-bonnet makers kind. Everybody is anxious to get on, and actuated by the common wish to be at the fair, or in the park, as soon as possible.

Pedestrians linger in groups at the roadside, unable to resist the allurements of the stout proprietress of the ‘Jack-in-the-box, three shies a penny,’ or the more splendid offers of the man with three thimbles and a pea on a little round board, who astonishes the bewildered crowd with some such address as, ‘Here’s the sort o’ game to make you laugh seven years arter you’re dead, and turn ev’ry air on your ed gray vith delight! Three thimbles and vun little pea—with a vun, two, three, and a two, three, vun: catch him who can, look on, keep your eyes open, and niver say die! niver mind the change, and the expense: all fair and above board: them as don’t play can’t vin, and luck attend the ryal sportsman! Bet any gen’lm’n any sum of money, from harf-a-crown up to a suverin, as he doesn’t name the thimble as kivers the pea!’ Here some greenhorn whispers his friend that he distinctly saw the pea roll under the middle thimble—an impression which is immediately confirmed by a gentleman in top-boots, who is standing by, and who, in a low tone, regrets his own inability to bet, in consequence of having unfortunately left his purse at home, but strongly urges the stranger not to neglect such a golden opportunity. The 'plant' is successful, the bet is made, the stranger of course loses: and the gentleman with the thimbles consoles him, as he pockets the money, with an assurance that it's 'all the fortin of war! this time I vin, next time you vin: niver mind the loss of two bob and a bender! Do it up in a small parcel, and break out in a fresh place. Here's the sort o' game,' &c.—and the eloquent harangue, with such variations as the speaker's exuberant fancy suggests, is again repeated to the gaping crowd, reinforced by the accession of several new-comers.

The chief place of resort in the daytime, after the public-houses, is the park, in which the principal amusement is to drag young ladies up the steep hill which leads to the Observatory, and then drag them down again, at the very top of their speed, greatly to the derangement of their curls and bonnet-caps, and much to the edification of lookers-on from below. 'Kiss in the Ring,' and 'Threading my Grandmother's Needle,' too, are sports which receive their full share of patronage. Love-sick swains, under the influence of gin-and-water, and the tender passion, become violently affectionate: and the fair objects of their regard enhance the value of stolen kisses, by a vast deal of struggling, and holding down of heads, and cries of 'Oh! Ha' done, then, George—Oh, do tickle him for me, Mary—Well, I never!' and similar Lucretian ejaculations. Little old men and women, with a small basket under one arm, and a wine-glass, without a foot, in the other hand, tender 'a drop o' the right sort' to the different groups; and young ladies, who are persuaded to indulge in a drop of the aforesaid right sort, display a pleasing degree of reluctance to taste it, and cough afterwards with great propriety.

The old pensioners, who, for the moderate charge of a penny, exhibit the mast-house, the Thames and shipping, the place where the men used to hang in chains, and other interesting sights, through a telescope, are asked questions about objects within the range of the glass, which it would puzzle a Solomon to answer; and requested to find out particular houses in particular streets, which it would have been a task of some difficulty for Mr. Horner (not the young gentleman who ate mince-pies with his thumb, but the man of Colosseum notoriety) to discover. Here and there, where some three or four couple are sitting on the grass together, you will see a sunburnt woman in a red cloak ‘telling fortunes’ and prophesying husbands, which it requires no extraordinary observation to describe, for the originals are before her. Thereupon, the lady concerned laughs and blushes, and ultimately buries her face in an imitation cambric handkerchief, and the gentleman described looks extremely foolish, and squeezes her hand, and fees the gipsy liberally; and the gipsy goes away, perfectly satisfied herself, and leaving those behind her perfectly satisfied also: and the prophecy, like many other prophecies of greater importance, fulfils itself in time.

But it grows dark: the crowd has gradually dispersed, and only a few stragglers are left behind. The light in the direction of the church shows that the fair is illuminated; and the distant noise proves it to be filling fast. The spot, which half an hour ago was ringing with the shouts of boisterous mirth, is as calm and quiet as if nothing could ever disturb its serenity: the fine old trees, the majestic building at their feet, with the noble river beyond, glistening in the moonlight, appear in all their beauty, and under their most favourable aspect; the voices of the boys, singing their evening hymn, are borne gently on the air; and the humblest mechanic who has been lingering on the grass so pleasant to the feet that beat the same dull round from week to week in the paved streets of London, feels proud to think as he surveys the scene before him, that he belongs to the country which has selected such a spot as a retreat for its oldest and best defenders in the decline of their lives.

Five minutes’ walking brings you to the fair; a scene calculated to awaken very different feelings. The entrance is occupied on either side by the vendors of gingerbread and toys: the stalls are gaily lighted up, the most attractive goods profusely disposed, and unbonneted young ladies, in their zeal for the interest of their employers, seize you by the coat, and use all the blandishments of ‘Do, dear’—‘There’s a love’—‘Don’t be cross, now,’ &c., to induce you to purchase half a pound of the real spice nuts, of which the majority of the regular fair-goers carry a pound or two as a present supply, tied up in a cotton pocket-handkerchief. Occasionally you pass a deal table, on which are exposed pen’orths of pickled salmon (fennel included), in little white saucers: oysters, with shells as large as cheese-plates, and divers specimens of a species of snail (*wilks*, we think they are called), floating in a somewhat bilious-looking green liquid. Cigars, too, are in great demand;

gentlemen must smoke, of course, and here they are, two a penny, in a regular authentic cigar-box, with a lighted tallow candle in the centre.

Imagine yourself in an extremely dense crowd, which swings you to and fro, and in and out, and every way but the right one; add to this the screams of women, the shouts of boys, the clanging of gongs, the firing of pistols, the ringing of bells, the bellowings of speaking-trumpets, the squeaking of penny dittos, the noise of a dozen bands, with three drums in each, all playing different tunes at the same time, the hallooing of showmen, and an occasional roar from the wild-beast shows; and you are in the very centre and heart of the fair.

This immense booth, with the large stage in front, so brightly illuminated with variegated lamps, and pots of burning fat, is ‘Richardson’s,’ where you have a melodrama (with three murders and a ghost), a pantomime, a comic song, an overture, and some incidental music, all done in five-and-twenty minutes.

The company are now promenading outside in all the dignity of wigs, spangles, red-ochre, and whitening. See with what a ferocious air the gentleman who personates the Mexican chief, paces up and down, and with what an eye of calm dignity the principal tragedian gazes on the crowd below, or converses confidentially with the harlequin! The four clowns, who are engaged in a mock broadsword combat, may be all very well for the low-minded holiday-makers; but these are the people for the reflective portion of the community. They look so noble in those Roman dresses, with their yellow legs and arms, long black curly heads, bushy eyebrows, and scowl expressive of assassination, and vengeance, and everything else that is grand and solemn. Then, the ladies—were there ever such innocent and awful-looking beings; as they walk up and down the platform in twos and threes, with their arms round each other’s waists, or leaning for support on one of those majestic men! Their spangled muslin dresses and blue satin shoes and sandals (a *leetle* the worse for wear) are the admiration of all beholders; and the playful manner in which they check the advances of the clown, is perfectly enchanting.

‘Just a-going to begin! Pray come for’erd, come for’erd,’ exclaims the man in the countryman’s dress, for the seventieth time: and people force their way up the steps in crowds. The band suddenly strikes up, the harlequin and columbine set the example, reels are formed in less than no time, the Roman heroes place their arms a-kimbo, and dance with considerable agility; and the leading tragic actress, and the gentleman who enacts the 'swell' in the pantomime, foot it to perfection. 'All in to begin,' shouts the manager, when no more people can be induced to 'come for'erd,' and away rush the leading members of the company to do the dreadful in the first piece.

A change of performance takes place every day during the fair, but the story of the tragedy is always pretty much the same. There is a rightful heir, who loves a young lady, and is beloved by her; and a wrongful heir, who loves her too, and isn't beloved by her; and the wrongful heir gets hold of the rightful heir, and throws him into a dungeon, just to kill him off when convenient, for which purpose he hires a couple of assassins—a good one and a bad one—who, the moment they are left alone, get up a little murder on their own account, the good one killing the bad one, and the bad one wounding the good one. Then the rightful heir is discovered in prison, carefully holding a long chain in his hands, and seated despondingly in a large arm-chair; and the young lady comes in to two bars of soft music, and embraces the rightful heir; and then the wrongful heir comes in to two bars of quick music (technically called 'a hurry'), and goes on in the most shocking manner, throwing the young lady about as if she was nobody, and calling the rightful heir 'Ar-recreant—ar-wretch!' in a very loud voice, which answers the double purpose of displaying his passion, and preventing the sound being deadened by the sawdust. The interest becomes intense; the wrongful heir draws his sword, and rushes on the rightful heir; a blue smoke is seen, a gong is heard, and a tall white figure (who has been all this time, behind the arm-chair, covered over with a table-cloth), slowly rises to the tune of 'Oft in the stilly night.' This is no other than the ghost of the rightful heir's father, who was killed by the wrongful heir's father, at sight of which the wrongful heir becomes apoplectic, and is literally 'struck all of a heap,' the stage not being large enough to admit of his falling down at full length. Then the good assassin staggers in, and says he was hired in conjunction with the bad assassin, by the wrongful heir, to kill the rightful heir; and he's killed a good many people in his time, but he's very sorry for it, and won't do so any more—a promise which he immediately redeems, by dying off hand without any nonsense about it. Then the rightful heir throws down his chain; and then two men, a sailor, and a young woman (the tenantry of the rightful heir) come in, and the ghost makes dumb motions to them, which they, by supernatural interference, understand—for no one else can; and the ghost (who can’t do anything without blue fire) blesses the rightful heir and the young lady, by half suffocating them with smoke: and then a muffin-bell rings, and the curtain drops.

The exhibitions next in popularity to these itinerant theatres are the travelling menageries, or, to speak more intelligibly, the ‘Wild-beast shows,’ where a military band in beef-eater’s costume, with leopard-skin caps, play incessantly; and where large highly-coloured representations of tigers tearing men’s heads open, and a lion being burnt with red-hot irons to induce him to drop his victim, are hung up outside, by way of attracting visitors.

The principal officer at these places is generally a very tall, hoarse man, in a scarlet coat, with a cane in his hand, with which he occasionally raps the pictures we have just noticed, by way of illustrating his description—something in this way. ‘Here, here, here; the lion, the lion (tap), exactly as he is represented on the canvas outside (three taps): no waiting, remember; no deception. The fe-ro-cious lion (tap, tap) who bit off the gentleman’s head last Cambervel vos a twelvemonth, and has killed on the awerage three keepers a-year ever since he arrived at matoority. No extra charge on this account recollect; the price of admission is only sixpence.’ This address never fails to produce a considerable sensation, and sixpences flow into the treasury with wonderful rapidity.

The dwarfs are also objects of great curiosity, and as a dwarf, a giantess, a living skeleton, a wild Indian, ‘a young lady of singular beauty, with perfectly white hair and pink eyes,’ and two or three other natural curiosities, are usually exhibited together for the small charge of a penny, they attract very numerous audiences. The best thing about a dwarf is, that he has always a little box, about two feet six inches high, into which, by long practice, he can just manage to get, by doubling himself up like a boot-jack; this box is painted outside like a six-roomed house, and as the crowd see him ring a bell, or fire a pistol out of the first-floor window, they verily believe that it is his ordinary town residence, divided like other mansions into drawing-rooms, dining-parlour, and bedchambers. Shut up in this case, the unfortunate little object is brought out to delight the throng by holding a facetious dialogue with the proprietor: in the course of which, the dwarf (who is always particularly drunk) pledges himself to sing a comic song inside, and pays various compliments to the ladies, which induce them to ‘come for’erd’ with great alacrity. As a giant is not so easily moved, a pair of indescribables of most capacious dimensions, and a huge shoe, are usually brought out, into which two or three stout men get all at once, to the enthusiastic delight of the crowd, who are quite satisfied with the solemn assurance that these habiliments form part of the giant's everyday costume.

The grandest and most numerously-frequented booth in the whole fair, however, is 'The Crown and Anchor'—a temporary ball-room—we forget how many hundred feet long, the price of admission to which is one shilling. Immediately on your right hand as you enter, after paying your money, is a refreshment place, at which cold beef, roast and boiled, French rolls, stout, wine, tongue, ham, even fowls, if we recollect right, are displayed in tempting array. There is a raised orchestra, and the place is boarded all the way down, in patches, just wide enough for a country dance.

There is no master of the ceremonies in this artificial Eden—all is primitive, unreserved, and unstudied. The dust is blinding, the heat insupportable, the company somewhat noisy, and in the highest spirits possible: the ladies, in the height of their innocent animation, dancing in the gentlemen's hats, and the gentlemen promenading 'the gay and festive scene' in the ladies' bonnets, or with the more expensive ornaments of false noses, and low-crowned, tinder-box-looking hats: playing children's drums, and accompanied by ladies on the penny trumpet.

The noise of these various instruments, the orchestra, the shouting, the 'scratchers,' and the dancing, is perfectly bewildering. The dancing, itself, beggars description—every figure lasts about an hour, and the ladies bounce up and down the middle, with a degree of spirit which is quite indescribable. As to the gentlemen, they stamp their feet against the ground, every time 'hands four round' begins, go down the middle and up again, with cigars in their mouths, and silk handkerchiefs in their hands, and whirl their partners round, nothing loth, scrambling and falling, and embracing, and knocking up against the other couples, until they are fairly tired out, and can move no longer. The same scene is repeated again and again (slightly varied by an occasional 'row') until a late hour at night: and a great many clerks and 'prentices find themselves next morning with aching heads, empty pockets, damaged hats, and a very imperfect recollection of how it was they did *not* get home.

CHAPTER XIII—PRIVATE THEATRES

> ‘Richard the Third.—Duke of Glo’ster 2*l.*; Earl of Richmond, 1*l*; Duke of Buckingham, 15*s.*; Catesby, 12*s.*; Tressel, 10*s.* 6*d.*; Lord Stanley, 5*s.*; Lord Mayor of London, 2*s.* 6*d.’*

Such are the written placards wafered up in the gentlemen’s dressing-room, or the green-room (where there is any), at a private theatre; and such are the sums extracted from the shop-till, or overcharged in the office expenditure, by the donkeys who are prevailed upon to pay for permission to exhibit their lamentable ignorance and boobyism on the stage of a private theatre. This they do, in proportion to the scope afforded by the character for the display of their imbecility. For instance, the Duke of Glo’ster is well worth two pounds, because he has it all to himself; he must wear a real sword, and what is better still, he must draw it, several times in the course of the piece. The soliloquies alone are well worth fifteen shillings; then there is the stabbing King Henry—decidedly cheap at three-and-sixpence, that’s eighteen-and-sixpence; bullying the coffin-bearers—say eighteen-pence, though it’s worth much more—that’s a pound. Then the love scene with Lady Ann, and the bustle of the fourth act can’t be dear at ten shillings more—that’s only one pound ten, including the ‘off with his head!’—which is sure to bring down the applause, and it is very easy to do—‘Orf with his ed’ (very quick and loud;—then slow and sneeringly)—‘So much for Bu-u-u-uckingham!’ Lay the emphasis on the ’uck;’ get yourself gradually into a corner, and work with your right hand, while you’re saying it, as if you were feeling your way, and it’s sure to do. The tent scene is confessedly worth half-a-sovereign, and so you have the fight in, gratis, and everybody knows what an effect may be produced by a good combat. One—two—three—four—over; then, one—two—three—four—under; then thrust; then dodge and slide about; then fall down on one knee; then fight upon it, and then get up again and stagger. You may keep on doing this, as long as it seems to take—say ten minutes—and then fall down (backwards, if you can manage it without hurting yourself), and die game: nothing like it for producing an effect. They always do it at Astley’s and Sadler’s Wells, and if they don’t know how to do this sort of thing, who in the world does? A small child, or a female in white, increases the interest of a combat materially—indeed, we are not aware that a regular legitimate terrific broadsword combat could be done without; but it would be rather difficult, and somewhat unusual, to introduce this effect in the last scene of Richard the Third, so the only thing to be done, is, just to make the best of a bad bargain, and be as long as possible fighting it out.

The principal patrons of private theatres are dirty boys, low copying-clerks, in attorneys' offices, capacious-headed youths from city counting-houses, Jews whose business, as lenders of fancy dresses, is a sure passport to the amateur stage, shop-boys who now and then mistake their masters' money for their own; and a choice miscellany of idle vagabonds. The proprietor of a private theatre may be an ex-scene-painter, a low coffee-house-keeper, a disappointed eighth-rate actor, a retired smuggler, or uncertificated bankrupt. The theatre itself may be in Catherine-street, Strand, the purlieus of the city, the neighbourhood of Gray's-inn-lane, or the vicinity of Sadler's Wells; or it may, perhaps, form the chief nuisance of some shabby street, on the Surrey side of Waterloo-bridge.

The lady performers pay nothing for their characters, and it is needless to add, are usually selected from one class of society; the audiences are necessarily of much the same character as the performers, who receive, in return for their contributions to the management, tickets to the amount of the money they pay.

All the minor theatres in London, especially the lowest, constitute the centre of a little stage-struck neighbourhood. Each of them has an audience exclusively its own; and at any you will see dropping into the pit at half-price, or swaggering into the back of a box, if the price of admission be a reduced one, divers boys of from fifteen to twenty-one years of age, who throw back their coat and turn up their wristbands, after the portraits of Count D'Orsay, hum tunes and whistle when the curtain is down, by way of persuading the people near them, that they are not at all anxious to have it up again, and speak familiarly of the inferior performers as Bill Such-a-one, and Ned So-and-so, or tell each other how a new piece called *The Unknown Bandit of the Invisible Cavern*, is in rehearsal; how Mister Palmer is to play *The Unknown Bandit*; how Charley Scarton is to take the part of an English sailor, and fight a broadsword combat with six unknown bandits, at one and the same time (one theatrical sailor is always equal to half a dozen men at least); how Mister Palmer and Charley Scarton are to go through a double hornpipe in fetters in the second act; how the interior of the invisible cavern is to occupy the whole extent of the stage; and other town-surprising theatrical announcements. These gentlemen are the amateurs—the *Richards*, *Shylocks*, *Beverleys*, and *Othellos*—the *Young Dorntons*, *Rovers*, *Captain Absolutes*, and *Charles Surfaces*—a private theatre.

See them at the neighbouring public-house or the theatrical coffee-shop! They are the kings of the place, supposing no real performers to be present; and roll about, hats on one side, and arms a-kimbo, as if they had actually come into possession of eighteen shillings a-week, and a share of a ticket night. If one of them does but know an Astley's supernumerary he is a happy fellow. The mingled air of envy and admiration with which his companions will regard him, as he converses familiarly with some mouldy-looking man in a fancy neckerchief, whose partially corked eyebrows, and half-rouged face, testify to the fact of his having just left the stage or the circle, sufficiently shows in what high admiration these public characters are held.

With the double view of guarding against the discovery of friends or employers, and enhancing the interest of an assumed character, by attaching a high-sounding name to its representative, these geniuses assume fictitious names, which are not the least amusing part of the play-bill of a private theatre. Belville, Melville, Treville, Berkeley, Randolph, Byron, St. Clair, and so forth, are among the humblest; and the less imposing titles of Jenkins, Walker, Thomson, Barker, Solomons, &c., are completely laid aside. There is something imposing in this, and it is an excellent apology for shabbiness into the bargain. A shrunken, faded coat, a decayed hat, a patched and soiled pair of trousers—nay, even a very dirty shirt (and none of these appearances are very uncommon among the members of the *corps dramatique*), may be worn for the purpose of disguise, and to prevent the remotest chance of recognition. Then it prevents any troublesome inquiries or explanations about employment and pursuits; everybody is a gentleman at large, for the occasion, and there are none of those unpleasant and unnecessary distinctions to which even genius must occasionally succumb elsewhere. As to the ladies (God bless them), they are quite above any formal absurdities; the mere circumstance of your being behind the scenes is a sufficient introduction to their society—for of course they know that none but strictly respectable persons would be admitted into that close fellowship with them, which acting engenders. They place implicit reliance on the manager, no doubt; and as to the manager, he is all affability when he knows you well,—or, in other words, when he has pocketed your money once, and entertains confident hopes of doing so again.

A quarter before eight—there will be a full house to-night—six parties in the boxes, already; four little boys and a woman in the pit; and two fiddles and a flute in the orchestra, who have got through five overtures since seven o'clock (the hour fixed for the commencement of the performances), and have just begun the sixth. There will be plenty of it, though, when it does begin, for there is enough in the bill to last six hours at least.

That gentleman in the white hat and checked shirt, brown coat and brass buttons, lounging behind the stage-box on the O. P. side, is Mr. Horatio St. Julien, alias Jem Larkins. His line is genteel comedy—his father's, coal and potato. He *does* Alfred Highflier in the last piece, and very well he'll do it—at the price. The party of gentlemen in the opposite box, to whom he has just nodded, are friends and supporters of Mr. Beverley (otherwise Loggins), the *Macbeth* of the night. You observe their attempts to appear easy and gentlemanly, each member of the party, with his feet cocked upon the cushion in front of the box! They let them do these things here, upon the same humane principle which permits poor people's children to knock double knocks at the door of an empty house—because they can't do it anywhere else. The two stout men in the centre box, with an opera-glass ostentatiously placed before them, are friends of the proprietor—opulent country managers, as he confidentially informs every individual among the crew behind the curtain—opulent country managers looking out for recruits; a representation which Mr. Nathan, the dresser, who is in the manager's interest, and has just arrived with the costumes, offers to confirm upon oath if required—corroborative evidence, however, is quite unnecessary, for the gulls believe it at once.

The stout Jewess who has just entered, is the mother of the pale, bony little girl, with the necklace of blue glass beads, sitting by her; she is being brought up to 'the profession.' Pantomime is to be her line, and she is coming out to-night, in a hornpipe after the tragedy. The short thin man beside Mr. St. Julien, whose white face is so deeply seared with the small-pox, and whose dirty shirt-front is inlaid with open-work, and embossed with coral studs like ladybirds, is the low comedian and comic singer of the establishment. The remainder of the audience—a tolerably numerous one by this time—are a motley group of dupes and blackguards.

The foot-lights have just made their appearance: the wicks of the six little oil lamps round the only tier of boxes, are being turned up, and the additional light thus afforded serves to show the presence of dirt, and absence of paint, which forms a prominent feature in the audience part of the house. As these preparations, however, announce the speedy commencement of the play, let us take a peep 'behind,' previous to the ringing-up.

The little narrow passages beneath the stage are neither especially clean nor too brilliantly lighted; and the absence of any flooring, together with the damp mildewy smell which pervades the place, does not conduce in any great degree to their comfortable appearance. Don't fall over this plate basket—it's one of the 'properties'—the caldron for the witches' cave; and the three uncouth-looking figures, with broken clothes-props in their hands, who are drinking gin-and-water out of a pint pot, are the weird sisters. This miserable room, lighted by candles in sconces placed at lengthened intervals round the wall, is the dressing-room, common to the gentlemen performers, and the square hole in the ceiling is *the* trap-door of the stage above. You will observe that the ceiling is ornamented with the beams that support the boards, and tastefully hung with cobwebs.

The characters in the tragedy are all dressed, and their own clothes are scattered in hurried confusion over the wooden dresser which surrounds the room. That snuff-shop-looking figure, in front of the glass, is *Banquo*: and the young lady with the liberal display of legs, who is kindly painting his face with a hare's foot, is dressed for *Fleance*. The large woman, who is consulting the stage directions in Cumberland's edition of *Macbeth*, is the *Lady Macbeth* of the night; she is always selected to play the part, because she is tall and stout, and *looks* a little like Mrs. Siddons—at a considerable distance. That stupid-looking milksop, with light hair and bow legs—a kind of man whom you can warrant town-made—is fresh caught; he plays *Malcolm* to-night, just to accustom himself to an audience. He will get on better by degrees; he will play *Othello* in a month, and in a month more, will very probably be apprehended on a charge of embezzlement. The black-eyed female with whom he is talking so earnestly, is dressed for the 'gentlewoman.' It is *her* first appearance, too—in that character. The boy of fourteen who is having his eyebrows smeared with soap and whitening, is *Duncan*, King of Scotland; and the two dirty men with the corked countenances, in very old green tunics, and dirty drab boots, are the 'army.'

‘Look sharp below there, gents,’ exclaims the dresser, a red-headed and red-whiskered Jew, calling through the trap, ‘they’re a-going to ring up. The flute says he’ll be blowed if he plays any more, and they’re getting precious noisy in front.’ A general rush immediately takes place to the half-dozen little steep steps leading to the stage, and the heterogeneous group are soon assembled at the side scenes, in breathless anxiety and motley confusion.

‘Now,’ cries the manager, consulting the written list which hangs behind the first P. S, wing, ‘Scene 1, open country—lamps down—thunder and lightning—all ready, White?’ [This is addressed to one of the army.] ‘All ready.’—‘Very well. Scene 2, front chamber. Is the front chamber down?’—‘Yes.’—‘Very well.’—‘Jones’ [to the other army who is up in the flies]. ‘Hallo!’—‘Wind up the open country when we ring up.’—‘I’ll take care.’—‘Scene 3, back perspective with practical bridge. Bridge ready, White? Got the tressels there?’—‘All right.’

‘Very well. Clear the stage,’ cries the manager, hastily packing every member of the company into the little space there is between the wings and the wall, and one wing and another. ‘Places, places. Now then, Witches—Duncan—Malcolm—bleeding officer—where’s the bleeding officer?’—‘Here!’ replies the officer, who has been rose-pinking for the character. ‘Get ready, then; now, White, ring the second music-bell.’ The actors who are to be discovered, are hastily arranged, and the actors who are not to be discovered place themselves, in their anxiety to peep at the house, just where the audience can see them. The bell rings, and the orchestra, in acknowledgment of the call, play three distinct chords. The bell rings—the tragedy (!) opens—and our description closes.

CHAPTER XIV—VAUXHALL-GARDENS BY DAY

There was a time when if a man ventured to wonder how Vauxhall-gardens would look by day, he was hailed with a shout of derision at the absurdity of the idea. Vauxhall by daylight! A porter-pot without porter, the House of Commons without the Speaker, a gas-lamp without the gas—pooh, nonsense, the thing was not to be thought of. It was rumoured, too, in those times, that Vauxhall-gardens by day, were the scene of secret and hidden experiments; that there, carvers were exercised in the mystic art of cutting a moderate-sized ham into slices thin enough to pave the whole of the grounds; that beneath the shade of the tall trees, studious men were constantly engaged in chemical experiments, with the view of discovering how much water a bowl of negus could possibly bear; and that in some retired nooks, appropriated to the study of ornithology, other sage and learned men were, by a process known only to themselves, incessantly employed in reducing fowls to a mere combination of skin and bone.

Vague rumours of this kind, together with many others of a similar nature, cast over Vauxhall-gardens an air of deep mystery; and as there is a great deal in the mysterious, there is no doubt that to a good many people, at all events, the pleasure they afforded was not a little enhanced by this very circumstance.

Of this class of people we confess to having made one. We loved to wander among these illuminated groves, thinking of the patient and laborious researches which had been carried on there during the day, and witnessing their results in the suppers which were served up beneath the light of lamps and to the sound of music at night. The temples and saloons and cosmoramas and fountains glittered and sparkled before our eyes; the beauty of the lady singers and the elegant deportment of the gentlemen, captivated our hearts; a few hundred thousand of additional lamps dazzled our senses; a bowl or two of punch bewildered our brains; and we were happy.

In an evil hour, the proprietors of Vauxhall-gardens took to opening them by day. We regretted this, as rudely and harshly disturbing that veil of mystery which had hung about the property for many years, and which none but the noonday sun, and the late Mr. Simpson, had ever penetrated. We shrunk from going; at this moment we scarcely know why. Perhaps a morbid consciousness of approaching disappointment—perhaps a fatal presentiment—perhaps the weather; whatever it was, we did *not* go until the second or third announcement of a race between two balloons tempted us, and we went.

We paid our shilling at the gate, and then we saw for the first time, that the entrance, if there had been any magic about it at all, was now decidedly disenchanted, being, in fact, nothing more nor less than a combination of very roughly-painted boards and sawdust. We glanced at the orchestra and supper-room as we hurried past—we just recognised them, and that was all.

We bent our steps to the firework-ground; there, at least, we should not be disappointed. We reached it, and stood rooted to the spot with mortification and astonishment. *That* the Moorish tower—that wooden shed with a door in the centre, and daubs of crimson and yellow all round, like a gigantic watch-case! *That* the place where night after night we had beheld the undaunted Mr. Blackmore make his terrific ascent, surrounded by flames of fire, and peals of artillery, and where the white garments of Madame Somebody (we forget even her name now), who nobly devoted her life to the manufacture of fireworks, had so often been seen fluttering in the wind, as she called up a red, blue, or party-coloured light to illumine her temple! *That* the—but at this moment the bell rung; the people scampered away, pell-mell, to the spot from whence the sound proceeded; and we, from the mere force of habit, found ourself running among the first, as if for very life.

It was for the concert in the orchestra. A small party of dismal men in cocked hats were 'executing' the overture to *Tancredi*, and a numerous assemblage of ladies and gentlemen, with their families, had rushed from their half-emptied stout mugs in the supper boxes, and crowded to the spot. Intense was the low murmur of admiration when a particularly small gentleman, in a dress coat, led on a particularly tall lady in a blue sarcenet pelisse and bonnet of the same, ornamented with large white feathers, and forthwith commenced a plaintive duet.

We knew the small gentleman well; we had seen a lithographed semblance of him, on many a piece of music, with his mouth wide open as if in the act of singing; a wine-glass in his hand; and a table with two decanters and four pine-apples on it in the background. The tall lady, too, we had gazed on, lost in raptures of admiration, many and many a time—how different people *do* look by daylight, and without punch, to be sure! It was a beautiful duet: first the small gentleman asked a question, and then the tall lady answered it; then the small gentleman and the tall lady sang together most melodiously; then the small gentleman went through a little piece of vehemence by himself, and got very tenor indeed, in the excitement of his feelings, to which the tall lady responded in a similar manner; then the small gentleman had a shake or two, after which the tall lady had the same, and then they both merged imperceptibly into the original air: and the band wound themselves up to a pitch of fury, and the small gentleman handed the tall lady out, and the applause was rapturous.

The comic singer, however, was the especial favourite; we really thought that a gentleman, with his dinner in a pocket-handkerchief, who stood near us, would have fainted with excess of joy. A marvellously facetious gentleman that comic singer is; his distinguishing characteristics are, a wig approaching to the flaxen, and an aged countenance, and he bears the name of one of the English counties, if we recollect right. He sang a very good song about the seven ages, the first half-hour of which afforded the assembly the purest delight; of the rest we can make no report, as we did not stay to hear any more.

We walked about, and met with a disappointment at every turn; our favourite views were mere patches of paint; the fountain that had sparkled so showily by lamp-light, presented very much the appearance of a water-pipe that had burst; all the ornaments were dingy, and all the walks gloomy. There was a spectral attempt at rope-dancing in the little open theatre. The sun shone upon the spangled dresses of the performers, and their evolutions were about as inspiriting and appropriate as a country-dance in a family vault. So we retraced our steps to the firework-ground, and mingled with the little crowd of people who were contemplating Mr. Green.

Some half-dozen men were restraining the impetuosity of one of the balloons, which was completely filled, and had the car already attached; and as rumours had gone abroad that a Lord was ‘going up,’ the crowd were more than usually anxious and talkative. There was one little man in faded black, with a dirty face and a rusty black neckerchief with a red border, tied in a narrow wisp round his neck, who entered into conversation with everybody, and had something to say upon every remark that was made within his hearing. He was standing with his arms folded, staring up at the balloon, and every now and then vented his feelings of reverence for the aëronaut, by saying, as he looked round to catch somebody’s eye, ‘He’s a rum ’un is Green; think o’ this here being up’ards of his two hundredth ascent; ecod, the man as is ekal to Green never had the toothache yet, nor won’t have within this hundred year, and that’s all about it. When you meets with real talent, and native, too, encourage it, that’s what I say;’ and when he had delivered himself to this effect, he would fold his arms with more determination than ever, and stare at the balloon with a sort of admiring defiance of any other man alive, beyond himself and Green, that impressed the crowd with the opinion that he was an oracle.

‘Ah, you’re very right, sir,’ said another gentleman, with his wife, and children, and mother, and wife’s sister, and a host of female friends, in all the gentility of white pocket-handkerchiefs, frills, and spencers, ‘Mr. Green is a steady hand, sir, and there’s no fear about him.’

‘Fear!’ said the little man: ‘isn’t it a lovely thing to see him and his wife a going up in one balloon, and his own son and *his* wife a jostling up against them in another, and all of them going twenty or thirty mile in three hours or so, and then coming back in pochayses? I don’t know where this here science is to stop, mind you; that’s what bothers me.’

Here there was a considerable talking among the females in the spencers.

‘What’s the ladies a laughing at, sir?’ inquired the little man, condescendingly.

‘It’s only my sister Mary,’ said one of the girls, ‘as says she hopes his lordship won’t be frightened when he’s in the car, and want to come out again.’

‘Make yourself easy about that there, my dear,’ replied the little man. ‘If he was so much as to move a inch without leave, Green would jist fetch him a crack over the head with the telescope, as would send him into the bottom of the basket in no time, and stun him till they come down again.’

‘Would he, though?’ inquired the other man.

‘Yes, would he,’ replied the little one, ‘and think nothing of it, neither, if he was the king himself. Green’s presence of mind is wonderful.’

Just at this moment all eyes were directed to the preparations which were being made for starting. The car was attached to the second balloon, the two were brought pretty close together, and a military band commenced playing, with a zeal and fervour which would render the most timid man in existence but too happy to accept any means of quitting that particular spot of earth on which they were stationed. Then Mr. Green, sen., and his noble companion entered one car, and Mr. Green, jun., and *his* companion the other; and then the balloons went up, and the aërial travellers stood up, and the crowd outside roared with delight, and the two gentlemen who had never ascended before, tried to wave their flags, as if they were not nervous, but held on very fast all the while; and the balloons were wafted gently away, our little friend solemnly protesting, long after they were reduced to mere specks in the air, that he could still distinguish the white hat of Mr. Green. The gardens disgorged their multitudes, boys ran up and down screaming ‘bal-loon;’ and in all the crowded thoroughfares people rushed out of their shops into the middle of the road, and having stared up in the air at two little black objects till they almost dislocated their necks, walked slowly in again, perfectly satisfied.

The next day there was a grand account of the ascent in the morning papers, and the public were informed how it was the finest day but four in Mr. Green’s remembrance; how they retained sight of the earth till they lost it behind the clouds; and how the reflection of the balloon on the undulating masses of vapour was gorgeously picturesque; together with a little science about the refraction of the sun’s rays, and some mysterious hints respecting atmospheric heat and eddying currents of air.

There was also an interesting account how a man in a boat was distinctly heard by Mr. Green, jun., to exclaim, ‘My eye!’ which Mr. Green, jun., attributed to his voice rising to the balloon, and the sound being thrown back from its surface into the car; and the whole concluded with a slight allusion to another ascent next Wednesday, all of which was very instructive and very amusing, as our readers will see if they look to the papers. If we have forgotten to mention the date, they have only to wait till next summer, and take the account of the first ascent, and it will answer the purpose equally well.

CHAPTER XV—EARLY COACHES

We have often wondered how many months’ incessant travelling in a post-chaise it would take to kill a man; and wondering by analogy, we should very much like to know how many months of constant travelling in a succession of early coaches, an unfortunate mortal could endure. Breaking a man alive upon the wheel, would be nothing to breaking his rest, his peace, his heart—everything but his fast—upon four; and the punishment of Ixion (the only practical person, by-the-bye, who has discovered the secret of the perpetual motion) would sink into utter insignificance before the one we have suggested. If we had been a powerful churchman in those good times when blood was shed as freely as water, and men were mowed down like grass, in the sacred cause of religion, we would have lain by very quietly till we got hold of some especially obstinate miscreant, who positively refused to be converted to our faith, and then we would have booked him for an inside place in a small coach, which travelled day and night: and securing the remainder of the places for stout men with a slight tendency to coughing and spitting, we would have started him forth on his last travels: leaving him mercilessly to all the tortures which the waiters, landlords, coachmen, guards, boots, chambermaids, and other familiars on his line of road, might think proper to inflict.

Who has not experienced the miseries inevitably consequent upon a summons to undertake a hasty journey? You receive an intimation from your place of business—wherever that may be, or whatever you may be—that it will be necessary to leave town without delay. You and your family are forthwith thrown into a state of tremendous excitement; an express is immediately dispatched to the washerwoman's; everybody is in a bustle; and you, yourself, with a feeling of dignity which you cannot altogether conceal, sally forth to the booking-office to secure your place. Here a painful consciousness of your own unimportance first rushes on your mind—the people are as cool and collected as if nobody were going out of town, or as if a journey of a hundred odd miles were a mere nothing. You enter a mouldy-looking room, ornamented with large posting-bills; the greater part of the place enclosed behind a huge, lumbering, rough counter, and fitted up with recesses that look like the dens of the smaller animals in a travelling menagerie, without the bars. Some half-dozen people are 'booking' brown-paper parcels, which one of the clerks flings into the aforesaid recesses with an air of recklessness which you, remembering the new carpet-bag you bought in the morning, feel considerably annoyed at; porters, looking like so many Atlases, keep rushing in and out, with large packages on their shoulders; and while you are waiting to make the necessary inquiries, you wonder what on earth the booking-office clerks can have been before they were booking-office clerks; one of them with his pen behind his ear, and his hands behind him, is standing in front of the fire, like a full-length portrait of Napoleon; the other with his hat half off his head, enters the passengers' names in the books with a coolness which is inexpressibly provoking; and the villain whistles—actually whistles—while a man asks him what the fare is outside, all the way to Holyhead!—in frosty weather, too! They are clearly an isolated race, evidently possessing no sympathies or feelings in common with the rest of mankind. Your turn comes at last, and having paid the fare, you tremblingly inquire—'What time will it be necessary for me to be here in the morning?'—'Six o'clock,' replies the whistler, carelessly pitching the sovereign you have just parted with, into a wooden bowl on the desk. ‘Rather before than arter,’ adds the man with the semi-roasted unmentionables, with just as much ease and complacency as if the whole world got out of bed at five. You turn into the street, ruminating as you bend your steps homewards on the extent to which men become hardened in cruelty, by custom.

If there be one thing in existence more miserable than another, it most unquestionably is the being compelled to rise by candlelight. If you have ever doubted the fact, you are painfully convinced of your error, on the morning of your departure. You left strict orders, overnight, to be called at half-past four, and you have done nothing all night but doze for five minutes at a time, and start up suddenly from a terrific dream of a large church-clock with the small hand running round, with astonishing rapidity, to every figure on the dial-plate. At last, completely exhausted, you fall gradually into a refreshing sleep—your thoughts grow confused—the stage-coaches, which have been ‘going off’ before your eyes all night, become less and less distinct, until they go off altogether; one moment you are driving with all the skill and smartness of an experienced whip—the next you are exhibiting *à la* Ducrow, on the off-leader; anon you are closely muffled up, inside, and have just recognised in the person of the guard an old schoolfellow, whose funeral, even in your dream, you remember to have attended eighteen years ago. At last you fall into a state of complete oblivion, from which you are aroused, as if into a new state of existence, by a singular illusion. You are apprenticed to a trunk-maker; how, or why, or when, or wherefore, you don’t take the trouble to inquire; but there you are, pasting the lining in the lid of a portmanteau. Confound that other apprentice in the back shop, how he is hammering!—rap, rap, rap—what an industrious fellow he must be! you have heard him at work for half an hour past, and he has been hammering incessantly the whole time. Rap, rap, rap, again—he’s talking now—what’s that he said? Five o’clock! You make a violent exertion, and start up in bed. The vision is at once dispelled; the trunk-maker’s shop is your own bedroom, and the other apprentice your shivering servant, who has been vainly endeavouring to wake you for the last quarter of an hour, at the imminent risk of breaking either his own knuckles or the panels of the door.

You proceed to dress yourself, with all possible dispatch. The flaring flat candle with the long snuff, gives light enough to show that the things you want, are not where they ought to be, and you undergo a trifling delay in consequence of having carefully packed up one of your boots in your over-anxiety of the preceding night. You soon complete your toilet, however, for you are not particular on such an occasion, and you shaved yesterday evening; so mounting your Petersham great-coat, and green travelling shawl, and grasping your carpet-bag in your right hand, you walk lightly down-stairs, lest you should awaken any of the family, and after pausing in the common sitting-room for one moment, just to have a cup of coffee (the said common sitting-room looking remarkably comfortable, with everything out of its place, and strewed with the crumbs of last night's supper), you undo the chain and bolts of the street-door, and find yourself fairly in the street.

A thaw, by all that is miserable! The frost is completely broken up. You look down the long perspective of Oxford-street, the gas-lights mournfully reflected on the wet pavement, and can discern no speck in the road to encourage the belief that there is a cab or a coach to be had—the very coachmen have gone home in despair. The cold sleet is drizzling down with that gentle regularity, which betokens a duration of four-and-twenty hours at least; the damp hangs upon the house-tops and lamp-posts, and clings to you like an invisible cloak. The water is 'coming in' in every area, the pipes have burst, the water-butts are running over; the kennels seem to be doing matches against time, pump-handles descend of their own accord, horses in market-carts fall down, and there's no one to help them up again, policemen look as if they had been carefully sprinkled with powdered glass; here and there a milk-woman trudges slowly along, with a bit of list round each foot to keep her from slipping; boys who 'don't sleep in the house,' and are not allowed much sleep out of it, can't wake their masters by thundering at the shop-door, and cry with the cold—the compound of ice, snow, and water on the pavement, is a couple of inches thick—nobody ventures to walk fast to keep himself warm, and nobody could succeed in keeping himself warm if he did.

It strikes a quarter past five as you trudge down Waterloo-place on your way to the Golden Cross, and you discover, for the first time, that you were called about an hour too early. You have not time to go back; there is no place open to go into, and you have, therefore, no resource but to go forward, which you do, feeling remarkably satisfied with yourself, and everything about you. You arrive at the office, and look wistfully up the yard for the Birmingham High-flier, which, for aught you can see, may have flown away altogether, for preparations appear to be on foot for the departure of any vehicle in the shape of a coach. You wander into the booking-office, which with the gas-lights and blazing fire, looks quite comfortable by contrast—that is to say, if any place *can* look comfortable at half-past five on a winter's morning. There stands the identical book-keeper in the same position as if he had not moved since you saw him yesterday. As he informs you, that the coach is up the yard, and will be brought round in about a quarter of an hour, you leave your bag, and repair to 'The Tap'—not with any absurd idea of warming yourself, because you feel such a result to be utterly hopeless, but for the purpose of procuring some hot brandy-and-water, which you do,—when the kettle boils! an event which occurs exactly two minutes and a half before the time fixed for the starting of the coach.

The first stroke of six, peals from St. Martin's church steeple, just as you take the first sip of the boiling liquid. You find yourself at the booking-office in two seconds, and the tap-waiter finds himself much comforted by your brandy-and-water, in about the same period. The coach is out; the horses are in, and the guard and two or three porters, are stowing the luggage away, and running up the steps of the booking-office, and down the steps of the booking-office, with breathless rapidity. The place, which a few minutes ago was so still and quiet, is now all bustle; the early vendors of the morning papers have arrived, and you are assailed on all sides with shouts of '*Times*, gen'lm'n, *Times*,' 'Here's *Chron—Chron—Chron*,' '*Herald*, ma'am,' 'Highly interesting murder, gen'lm'n,' 'Curious case o' breach o' promise, ladies.' The inside passengers are already in their dens, and the outsides, with the exception of yourself, are pacing up and down the pavement to keep themselves warm; they consist of two young men with very long hair, to which the sleet has communicated the appearance of crystallised rats' tails; one thin young woman cold and peevish, one old gentleman ditto ditto, and something in a cloak and cap, intended to represent a military officer; every member of the party, with a large stiff shawl over his chin, looking exactly as if he were playing a set of Pan's pipes.

'Take off the cloths, Bob,' says the coachman, who now appears for the first time, in a rough blue great-coat, of which the buttons behind are so far apart, that you can't see them both at the same time. 'Now, gen'lm'n,' cries the guard, with the waybill in his hand. ‘Five minutes behind time already!’ Up jump the passengers—the two young men smoking like lime-kilns, and the old gentleman grumbling audibly. The thin young woman is got upon the roof, by dint of a great deal of pulling, and pushing, and helping and trouble, and she repays it by expressing her solemn conviction that she will never be able to get down again.

‘All right,’ sings out the guard at last, jumping up as the coach starts, and blowing his horn directly afterwards, in proof of the soundness of his wind. ‘Let ’em go, Harry, give ’em their heads,’ cries the coachman—and off we start as briskly as if the morning were ‘all right,’ as well as the coach: and looking forward as anxiously to the termination of our journey, as we fear our readers will have done, long since, to the conclusion of our paper.

CHAPTER XVI—OMNIBUSES

It is very generally allowed that public conveyances afford an extensive field for amusement and observation. Of all the public conveyances that have been constructed since the days of the Ark—we think that is the earliest on record—to the present time, commend us to an omnibus. A long stage is not to be despised, but there you have only six insides, and the chances are, that the same people go all the way with you—there is no change, no variety. Besides, after the first twelve hours or so, people get cross and sleepy, and when you have seen a man in his nightcap, you lose all respect for him; at least, that is the case with us. Then on smooth roads people frequently get prosy, and tell long stories, and even those who don’t talk, may have very unpleasant predilections. We once travelled four hundred miles, inside a stage-coach, with a stout man, who had a glass of rum-and-water, warm, handed in at the window at every place where we changed horses. This was decidedly unpleasant. We have also travelled occasionally, with a small boy of a pale aspect, with light hair, and no perceptible neck, coming up to town from school under the protection of the guard, and directed to be left at the Cross Keys till called for. This is, perhaps, even worse than rum-and-water in a close atmosphere. Then there is the whole train of evils consequent on a change of the coachman; and the misery of the discovery—which the guard is sure to make the moment you begin to doze—that he wants a brown-paper parcel, which he distinctly remembers to have deposited under the seat on which you are reposing. A great deal of bustle and groping takes place, and when you are thoroughly awakened, and severely cramped, by holding your legs up by an almost supernatural exertion, while he is looking behind them, it suddenly occurs to him that he put it in the fore-boot. Bang goes the door; the parcel is immediately found; off starts the coach again; and the guard plays the key-bugle as loud as he can play it, as if in mockery of your wretchedness.

Now, you meet with none of these afflictions in an omnibus; sameness there can never be. The passengers change as often in the course of one journey as the figures in a kaleidoscope, and though not so glittering, are far more amusing. We believe there is no instance on record, of a man’s having gone to sleep in one of these vehicles. As to long stories, would any man venture to tell a long story in an omnibus? and even if he did, where would be the harm? nobody could possibly hear what he was talking about. Again; children, though occasionally, are not often to be found in an omnibus; and even when they are, if the vehicle be full, as is generally the case, somebody sits upon them, and we are unconscious of their presence. Yes, after mature reflection, and considerable experience, we are decidedly of opinion, that of all known vehicles, from the glass-coach in which we were taken to be christened, to that sombre caravan in which we must one day make our last earthly journey, there is nothing like an omnibus.

We will back the machine in which we make our daily peregrination from the top of Oxford-street to the city, against any ‘buss’ on the road, whether it be for the gaudiness of its exterior, the perfect simplicity of its interior, or the native coolness of its cad. This young gentleman is a singular instance of self-devotion; his somewhat intemperate zeal on behalf of his employers, is constantly getting him into trouble, and occasionally into the house of correction. He is no sooner emancipated, however, than he resumes the duties of his profession with unabated ardour. His principal distinction is his activity. His great boast is, ‘that he can chuck an old gen’lm’n into the buss, shut him in, and rattle off, afore he knows where it’s a-going to’—a feat which he frequently performs, to the infinite amusement of every one but the old gentleman concerned, who, somehow or other, never can see the joke of the thing.

We are not aware that it has ever been precisely ascertained, how many passengers our omnibus will contain. The impression on the cad’s mind evidently is, that it is amply sufficient for the accommodation of any number of persons that can be enticed into it. ‘Any room?’ cries a hot pedestrian. ‘Plenty o’ room, sir,’ replies the conductor, gradually opening the door, and not disclosing the real state of the case, until the wretched man is on the steps. ‘Where?’ inquires the entrapped individual, with an attempt to back out again. ‘Either side, sir,’ rejoins the cad, shoving him in, and slamming the door. ‘All right, Bill.’ Retreat is impossible; the new-comer rolls about, till he falls down somewhere, and there he stops.

As we get into the city a little before ten, four or five of our party are regular passengers. We always take them up at the same places, and they generally occupy the same seats; they are always dressed in the same manner, and invariably discuss the same topics—the increasing rapidity of cabs, and the disregard of moral obligations evinced by omnibus men. There is a little testy old man, with a powdered head, who always sits on the right-hand side of the door as you enter, with his hands folded on the top of his umbrella. He is extremely impatient, and sits there for the purpose of keeping a sharp eye on the cad, with whom he generally holds a running dialogue. He is very officious in helping people in and out, and always volunteers to give the cad a poke with his umbrella, when any one wants to alight. He usually recommends ladies to have sixpence ready, to prevent delay; and if anybody puts a window down, that he can reach, he immediately puts it up again.

‘Now, what are you stopping for?’ says the little man every morning, the moment there is the slightest indication of ‘pulling up’ at the corner of Regent-street, when some such dialogue as the following takes place between him and the cad:

‘What are you stopping for?’

Here the cad whistles, and affects not to hear the question.

‘I say [a poke], what are you stopping for?’

‘For passengers, sir. Ba—nk.—Ty.’

‘I know you’re stopping for passengers; but you’ve no business to do so. *Why* are you stopping?’

‘Vy, sir, that’s a difficult question. I think it is because we perfer stopping here to going on.’

‘Now mind,’ exclaims the little old man, with great vehemence, ‘I’ll pull you up to-morrow; I’ve often threatened to do it; now I will.’

‘Thankee, sir,’ replies the cad, touching his hat with a mock expression of gratitude;—‘werry much obliged to you indeed, sir.’ Here the young men in the omnibus laugh very heartily, and the old gentleman gets very red in the face, and seems highly exasperated.

The stout gentleman in the white neckcloth, at the other end of the vehicle, looks very prophetic, and says that something must shortly be done with these fellows, or there’s no saying where all this will end; and the shabby-genteel man with the green bag, expresses his entire concurrence in the opinion, as he has done regularly every morning for the last six months.

A second omnibus now comes up, and stops immediately behind us. Another old gentleman elevates his cane in the air, and runs with all his might towards our omnibus; we watch his progress with great interest; the door is opened to receive him, he suddenly disappears—he has been spirited away by the opposition. Hereupon the driver of the opposition taunts our people with his having ‘regularly done ’em out of that old swell,’ and the voice of the ‘old swell’ is heard, vainly protesting against this unlawful detention. We rattle off, the other omnibus rattles after us, and every time we stop to take up a passenger, they stop to take him too; sometimes we get him; sometimes they get him; but whoever don’t get him, say they ought to have had him, and the cads of the respective vehicles abuse one another accordingly.

As we arrive in the vicinity of Lincoln’s-inn-fields, Bedford-row, and other legal haunts, we drop a great many of our original passengers, and take up fresh ones, who meet with a very sulky reception. It is rather remarkable, that the people already in an omnibus, always look at newcomers, as if they entertained some undefined idea that they have no business to come in at all. We are quite persuaded the little old man has some notion of this kind, and that he considers their entry as a sort of negative impertinence.

Conversation is now entirely dropped; each person gazes vacantly through the window in front of him, and everybody thinks that his opposite neighbour is staring at him. If one man gets out at Shoe-lane, and another at the corner of Farringdon-street, the little old gentleman grumbles, and suggests to the latter, that if he had got out at Shoe-lane too, he would have saved them the delay of another stoppage; whereupon the young men laugh again, and the old gentleman looks very solemn, and says nothing more till he gets to the Bank, when he trots off as fast as he can, leaving us to do the same, and to wish, as we walk away, that we could impart to others any portion of the amusement we have gained for ourselves.

CHAPTER XVII—THE LAST CAB-DRIVER, AND THE FIRST OMNIBUS CAD

Of all the cabriolet-drivers whom we have ever had the honour and gratification of knowing by sight—and our acquaintance in this way has been most extensive—there is one who made an impression on our mind which can never be effaced, and who awakened in our bosom a feeling of admiration and respect, which we entertain a fatal presentiment will never be called forth again by any human being. He was a man of most simple and prepossessing appearance. He was a brown-whiskered, white-hatted, no-coated cabman; his nose was generally red, and his bright blue eye not unfrequently stood out in bold relief against a black border of artificial workmanship; his boots were of the Wellington form, pulled up to meet his corduroy knee-smalls, or at least to approach as near them as their dimensions would admit of; and his neck was usually garnished with a bright yellow handkerchief. In summer he carried in his mouth a flower; in winter, a straw—slight, but, to a contemplative mind, certain indications of a love of nature, and a taste for botany.

His cabriolet was gorgeously painted—a bright red; and wherever we went, City or West End, Paddington or Holloway, North, East, West, or South, there was the red cab, bumping up against the posts at the street corners, and turning in and out, among hackney-coaches, and drays, and carts, and waggons, and omnibuses, and contriving by some strange means or other, to get out of places which no other vehicle but the red cab could ever by any possibility have contrived to get into at all. Our fondness for that red cab was unbounded. How we should have liked to have seen it in the circle at Astley’s! Our life upon it, that it should have performed such evolutions as would have put the whole company to shame—Indian chiefs, knights, Swiss peasants, and all.

Some people object to the exertion of getting into cabs, and others object to the difficulty of getting out of them; we think both these are objections which take their rise in perverse and ill-conditioned minds. The getting into a cab is a very pretty and graceful process, which, when well performed, is essentially melodramatic. First, there is the expressive pantomime of every one of the eighteen cabmen on the stand, the moment you raise your eyes from the ground. Then there is your own pantomime in reply—quite a little ballet. Four cabs immediately leave the stand, for your especial accommodation; and the evolutions of the animals who draw them, are beautiful in the extreme, as they grate the wheels of the cabs against the curb-stones, and sport playfully in the kennel. You single out a particular cab, and dart swiftly towards it. One bound, and you are on the first step; turn your body lightly round to the right, and you are on the second; bend gracefully beneath the reins, working round to the left at the same time, and you are in the cab. There is no difficulty in finding a seat: the apron knocks you comfortably into it at once, and off you go.

The getting out of a cab is, perhaps, rather more complicated in its theory, and a shade more difficult in its execution. We have studied the subject a great deal, and we think the best way is, to throw yourself out, and trust to chance for alighting on your feet. If you make the driver alight first, and then throw yourself upon him, you will find that he breaks your fall materially. In the event of your contemplating an offer of eightpence, on no account make the tender, or show the money, until you are safely on the pavement. It is very bad policy attempting to save the fourpence. You are very much in the power of a cabman, and he considers it a kind of fee not to do you any wilful damage. Any instruction, however, in the art of getting out of a cab, is wholly unnecessary if you are going any distance, because the probability is, that you will be shot lightly out before you have completed the third mile.

We are not aware of any instance on record in which a cab-horse has performed three consecutive miles without going down once. What of that? It is all excitement. And in these days of derangement of the nervous system and universal lassitude, people are content to pay handsomely for excitement; where can it be procured at a cheaper rate?

But to return to the red cab; it was omnipresent. You had but to walk down Holborn, or Fleet-street, or any of the principal thoroughfares in which there is a great deal of traffic, and judge for yourself. You had hardly turned into the street, when you saw a trunk or two, lying on the ground: an uprooted post, a hat-box, a portmanteau, and a carpet-bag, strewed about in a very picturesque manner: a horse in a cab standing by, looking about him with great unconcern; and a crowd, shouting and screaming with delight, cooling their flushed faces against the glass windows of a chemist’s shop.—‘What’s the matter here, can you tell me?’—‘O’ny a cab, sir.’—‘Anybody hurt, do you know?’—‘O’ny the fare, sir. I see him a turnin’ the corner, and I ses to another gen’lm’n “that’s a reg’lar little oss that, and he’s a comin’ along rayther sweet, an’t he?”—“He just is,” ses the other gen’lm’n, ven bump they cums agin the post, and out flies the fare like bricks.’ Need we say it was the red cab; or that the gentleman with the straw in his mouth, who emerged so coolly from the chemist’s shop and philosophically climbing into the little dickey, started off at full gallop, was the red cab’s licensed driver?

The ubiquity of this red cab, and the influence it exercised over the risible muscles of justice itself, was perfectly astonishing. You walked into the justice-room of the Mansion-house; the whole court resounded with merriment. The Lord Mayor threw himself back in his chair, in a state of frantic delight at his own joke; every vein in Mr. Hobler’s countenance was swollen with laughter, partly at the Lord Mayor’s facetiousness, but more at his own; the constables and police-officers were (as in duty bound) in ecstasies at Mr. Hobler and the Lord Mayor combined; and the very paupers, glancing respectfully at the beadle’s countenance, tried to smile, as even he relaxed. A tall, weazen-faced man, with an impediment in his speech, would be endeavouring to state a case of imposition against the red cab’s driver; and the red cab’s driver, and the Lord Mayor, and Mr. Hobler, would be having a little fun among themselves, to the inordinate delight of everybody but the complainant. In the end, justice would be so tickled with the red cab-driver’s native humour, that the fine would be mitigated, and he would go away full gallop, in the red cab, to impose on somebody else without loss of time.

The driver of the red cab, confident in the strength of his own moral principles, like many other philosophers, was wont to set the feelings and opinions of society at complete defiance. Generally speaking, perhaps, he would as soon carry a fare safely to his destination, as he would upset him—sooner, perhaps, because in that case he not only got the money, but had the additional amusement of running a longer heat against some smart rival. But society made war upon him in the shape of penalties, and he must make war upon society in his own way. This was the reasoning of the red cab-driver. So, he bestowed a searching look upon the fare, as he put his hand in his waistcoat pocket, when he had gone half the mile, to get the money ready; and if he brought forth eightpence, out he went.

The last time we saw our friend was one wet evening in Tottenham-court-road, when he was engaged in a very warm and somewhat personal altercation with a loquacious little gentleman in a green coat. Poor fellow! there were great excuses to be made for him: he had not received above eighteenpence more than his fare, and consequently laboured under a great deal of very natural indignation. The dispute had attained a pretty considerable height, when at last the loquacious little gentleman, making a mental calculation of the distance, and finding that he had already paid more than he ought, avowed his unalterable determination to 'pull up' the cabman in the morning.

'Now, just mark this, young man,' said the little gentleman, 'I'll pull you up to-morrow morning.'

'No! will you though?' said our friend, with a sneer.

'I will,' replied the little gentleman, 'mark my words, that's all. If I live till to-morrow morning, you shall repent this.'

There was a steadiness of purpose, and indignation of speech, about the little gentleman, as he took an angry pinch of snuff, after this last declaration, which made a visible impression on the mind of the red cab-driver. He appeared to hesitate for an instant. It was only for an instant; his resolve was soon taken.

'You'll pull me up, will you?' said our friend.

'I will,' rejoined the little gentleman, with even greater vehemence an before.

'Very well,' said our friend, tucking up his shirt sleeves very calmly. 'There'll be three veeks for that. Wery good; that'll bring me up to the middle o' next month. Three veeks more would carry me on to my birthday, and then I've got ten pound to draw. I may as well get board, lodgin', and washin', till then, out of the county, as pay for it myself; consequently here goes!'

So, without more ado, the red cab-driver knocked the little gentleman down, and then called the police to take himself into custody, with all the civility in the world.

A story is nothing without the sequel; and therefore, we may state, that to our certain knowledge, the board, lodging, and washing were all provided in due course. We happen to know the fact, for it came to our knowledge thus: We went over the House of Correction for the county of Middlesex shortly after, to witness the operation of the silent system; and looked on all the 'wheels' with the greatest anxiety, in search of our long-lost friend. He was nowhere to be seen, however, and we began to think that the little gentleman in the green coat must have relented, when, as we were traversing the kitchen-garden, which lies in a sequestered part of the prison, we were startled by hearing a voice, which apparently proceeded from the wall, pouring forth its soul in the plaintive air of 'All round my hat,' which was then just beginning to form a recognised portion of our national music.

We started.—'What voice is that?' said we. The Governor shook his head.

'Sad fellow,' he replied, 'very sad. He positively refused to work on the wheel; so, after many trials, I was compelled to order him into solitary confinement. He says he likes it very much though, and I am afraid he does, for he lies on his back on the floor, and sings comic songs all day!'

Shall we add, that our heart had not deceived us and that the comic singer was no other than our eagerly-sought friend, the red cab-driver?

We have never seen him since, but we have strong reason to suspect that this noble individual was a distant relative of a waterman of our acquaintance, who, on one occasion, when we were passing the coach-stand over which he presides, after standing very quietly to see a tall man struggle into a cab, ran up very briskly when it was all over (as his brethren invariably do), and, touching his hat, asked, as a matter of course, for 'a copper for the waterman.' Now, the fare was by no means a handsome man; and, waxing very indignant at the demand, he replied—'Money! What for? Coming up and looking at me, I suppose!'—'Vell, sir,' rejoined the waterman, with a smile of immovable complacency, '*that's* worth twopence.'

The identical waterman afterwards attained a very prominent station in society; and as we know something of his life, and have often thought of telling what we *do* know, perhaps we shall never have a better opportunity than the present.

Mr. William Barker, then, for that was the gentleman's name, Mr. William Barker was born—but why need we relate where Mr. William Barker was born, or when? Why scrutinise the entries in parochial ledgers, or seek to penetrate the Lucinian mysteries of lying-in hospitals? Mr.

William Barker *was* born, or he had never been. There is a son—there was a father. There is an effect—there was a cause. Surely this is sufficient information for the most Fatima-like curiosity; and, if it be not, we regret our inability to supply any further evidence on the point. Can there be a more satisfactory, or more strictly parliamentary course? Impossible.

We at once avow a similar inability to record at what precise period, or by what particular process, this gentleman's patronymic, of William Barker, became corrupted into 'Bill Boorker.' Mr. Barker acquired a high standing, and no inconsiderable reputation, among the members of that profession to which he more peculiarly devoted his energies; and to them he was generally known, either by the familiar appellation of 'Bill Boorker,' or the flattering designation of 'Aggerawatin Bill,' the latter being a playful and expressive *sobriquet*, illustrative of Mr. Barker's great talent in 'aggerawatin' and rendering wild such subjects of her Majesty as are conveyed from place to place, through the instrumentality of omnibuses. Of the early life of Mr. Barker little is known, and even that little is involved in considerable doubt and obscurity. A want of application, a restlessness of purpose, a thirsting after porter, a love of all that is roving and cadger-like in nature, shared in common with many other great geniuses, appear to have been his leading characteristics. The busy hum of a parochial free-school, and the shady repose of a county gaol, were alike inefficacious in producing the slightest alteration in Mr. Barker's disposition. His feverish attachment to change and variety nothing could repress; his native daring no punishment could subdue.

If Mr. Barker can be fairly said to have had any weakness in his earlier years, it was an amiable one—love; love in its most comprehensive form—a love of ladies, liquids, and pocket-handkerchiefs. It was no selfish feeling; it was not confined to his own possessions, which but too many men regard with exclusive complacency. No; it was a nobler love—a general principle. It extended itself with equal force to the property of other people.

There is something very affecting in this. It is still more affecting to know, that such philanthropy is but imperfectly rewarded. Bow-street, Newgate, and Millbank, are a poor return for general benevolence, evincing itself in an irrepressible love for all created objects. Mr. Barker felt it so. After a lengthened interview with the highest legal authorities, he quitted his ungrateful country, with the consent, and at the expense, of its

Government; proceeded to a distant shore; and there employed himself, like another Cincinnatus, in clearing and cultivating the soil—a peaceful pursuit, in which a term of seven years glided almost imperceptibly away.

Whether, at the expiration of the period we have just mentioned, the British Government required Mr. Barker's presence here, or did not require his residence abroad, we have no distinct means of ascertaining. We should be inclined, however, to favour the latter position, inasmuch as we do not find that he was advanced to any other public post on his return, than the post at the corner of the Haymarket, where he officiated as assistant-waterman to the hackney-coach stand. Seated, in this capacity, on a couple of tubs near the curbstone, with a brass plate and number suspended round his neck by a massive chain, and his ankles curiously enveloped in haybands, he is supposed to have made those observations on human nature which exercised so material an influence over all his proceedings in later life.

Mr. Barker had not officiated for many months in this capacity, when the appearance of the first omnibus caused the public mind to go in a new direction, and prevented a great many hackney-coaches from going in any direction at all. The genius of Mr. Barker at once perceived the whole extent of the injury that would be eventually inflicted on cab and coach stands, and, by consequence, on watermen also, by the progress of the system of which the first omnibus was a part. He saw, too, the necessity of adopting some more profitable profession; and his active mind at once perceived how much might be done in the way of enticing the youthful and unwary, and shoving the old and helpless, into the wrong buss, and carrying them off, until, reduced to despair, they ransomed themselves by the payment of sixpence a-head, or, to adopt his own figurative expression in all its native beauty, 'till they was rig'larly done over, and forked out the stumpy.'

An opportunity for realising his fondest anticipations, soon presented itself. Rumours were rife on the hackney-coach stands, that a buss was building, to run from Lisson-grove to the Bank, down Oxford-street and Holborn; and the rapid increase of busses on the Paddington-road, encouraged the idea. Mr. Barker secretly and cautiously inquired in the proper quarters. The report was correct; the 'Royal William' was to make its first journey on the following Monday. It was a crack affair altogether. An enterprising young cabman, of established reputation as a dashing whip

—for he had compromised with the parents of three scrunched children, and just ‘worked out’ his fine for knocking down an old lady—was the driver; and the spirited proprietor, knowing Mr. Barker’s qualifications, appointed him to the vacant office of cad on the very first application. The buss began to run, and Mr. Barker entered into a new suit of clothes, and on a new sphere of action.

To recapitulate all the improvements introduced by this extraordinary man into the omnibus system—gradually, indeed, but surely—would occupy a far greater space than we are enabled to devote to this imperfect memoir. To him is universally assigned the original suggestion of the practice which afterwards became so general—of the driver of a second buss keeping constantly behind the first one, and driving the pole of his vehicle either into the door of the other, every time it was opened, or through the body of any lady or gentleman who might make an attempt to get into it; a humorous and pleasant invention, exhibiting all that originality of idea, and fine, bold flow of spirits, so conspicuous in every action of this great man.

Mr. Barker had opponents of course; what man in public life has not? But even his worst enemies cannot deny that he has taken more old ladies and gentlemen to Paddington who wanted to go to the Bank, and more old ladies and gentlemen to the Bank who wanted to go to Paddington, than any six men on the road; and however much malevolent spirits may pretend to doubt the accuracy of the statement, they well know it to be an established fact, that he has forcibly conveyed a variety of ancient persons of either sex, to both places, who had not the slightest or most distant intention of going anywhere at all.

Mr. Barker was the identical cad who nobly distinguished himself, some time since, by keeping a tradesman on the step—the omnibus going at full speed all the time—till he had thrashed him to his entire satisfaction, and finally throwing him away, when he had quite done with him. Mr. Barker it *ought* to have been, who honestly indignant at being ignominiously ejected from a house of public entertainment, kicked the landlord in the knee, and thereby caused his death. We say it *ought* to have been Mr. Barker, because the action was not a common one, and could have emanated from no ordinary mind.

It has now become matter of history; it is recorded in the Newgate Calendar; and we wish we could attribute this piece of daring heroism to

Mr. Barker. We regret being compelled to state that it was not performed by him. Would, for the family credit we could add, that it was achieved by his brother!

It was in the exercise of the nicer details of his profession, that Mr. Barker's knowledge of human nature was beautifully displayed. He could tell at a glance where a passenger wanted to go to, and would shout the name of the place accordingly, without the slightest reference to the real destination of the vehicle. He knew exactly the kind of old lady that would be too much flurried by the process of pushing in and pulling out of the caravan, to discover where she had been put down, until too late; had an intuitive perception of what was passing in a passenger's mind when he inwardly resolved to 'pull that cad up to-morrow morning;' and never failed to make himself agreeable to female servants, whom he would place next the door, and talk to all the way.

Human judgment is never infallible, and it would occasionally happen that Mr. Barker experimentalised with the timidity or forbearance of the wrong person, in which case a summons to a Police-office, was, on more than one occasion, followed by a committal to prison. It was not in the power of trifles such as these, however, to subdue the freedom of his spirit. As soon as they passed away, he resumed the duties of his profession with unabated ardour.

We have spoken of Mr. Barker and of the red cab-driver, in the past tense. Alas! Mr. Barker has again become an absentee; and the class of men to which they both belonged is fast disappearing. Improvement has peered beneath the aprons of our cabs, and penetrated to the very innermost recesses of our omnibuses. Dirt and fustian will vanish before cleanliness and livery. Slang will be forgotten when civility becomes general: and that enlightened, eloquent, sage, and profound body, the Magistracy of London, will be deprived of half their amusement, and half their occupation.

CHAPTER XVIII—A PARLIAMENTARY SKETCH

We hope our readers will not be alarmed at this rather ominous title. We assure them that we are not about to become political, neither have we the slightest intention of being more prosy than usual—if we can help it. It has occurred to us that a slight sketch of the general aspect of ‘the House,’ and the crowds that resort to it on the night of an important debate, would be productive of some amusement: and as we have made some few calls at the aforesaid house in our time—have visited it quite often enough for our purpose, and a great deal too often for our personal peace and comfort—we have determined to attempt the description. Dismissing from our minds, therefore, all that feeling of awe, which vague ideas of breaches of privilege, Serjeant-at-Arms, heavy denunciations, and still heavier fees, are calculated to awaken, we enter at once into the building, and upon our subject.

Half-past four o’clock—and at five the mover of the Address will be ‘on his legs,’ as the newspapers announce sometimes by way of novelty, as if speakers were occasionally in the habit of standing on their heads. The members are pouring in, one after the other, in shoals. The few spectators who can obtain standing-room in the passages, scrutinise them as they pass, with the utmost interest, and the man who can identify a member occasionally, becomes a person of great importance. Every now and then you hear earnest whispers of ‘That’s Sir John Thomson.’ ‘Which? him with the gilt order round his neck?’ ‘No, no; that’s one of the messengers—that other with the yellow gloves, is Sir John Thomson.’ ‘Here’s Mr. Smith.’ ‘Lor!’ ‘Yes, how d’ye do, sir?—(He is our new member)—How do you do, sir?’ Mr. Smith stops: turns round with an air of enchanting urbanity (for the rumour of an intended dissolution has been very extensively circulated this morning); seizes both the hands of his gratified constituent, and, after greeting him with the most enthusiastic warmth, darts into the lobby with an extraordinary display of ardour in the public cause, leaving an immense impression in his favour on the mind of his ‘fellow-townsman.’

The arrivals increase in number, and the heat and noise increase in very unpleasant proportion. The livery servants form a complete lane on either side of the passage, and you reduce yourself into the smallest possible space to avoid being turned out. You see that stout man with the hoarse voice, in the blue coat, queer-crowned, broad-brimmed hat, white corduroy breeches, and great boots, who has been talking incessantly for half an hour past, and whose importance has occasioned no small quantity of mirth among the strangers. That is the great conservator of the peace of Westminster. You cannot fail to have remarked the grace with which he saluted the noble Lord who passed just now, or the excessive dignity of his air, as he expostulates with the crowd. He is rather out of temper now, in consequence of the very irreverent behaviour of those two young fellows behind him, who have done nothing but laugh all the time they have been here.

‘Will they divide to-night, do you think, Mr. ---’ timidly inquires a little thin man in the crowd, hoping to conciliate the man of office.

‘How *can* you ask such questions, sir?’ replies the functionary, in an incredibly loud key, and pettishly grasping the thick stick he carries in his right hand. ‘Pray do not, sir. I beg of you; pray do not, sir.’ The little man looks remarkably out of his element, and the uninitiated part of the throng are in positive convulsions of laughter.

Just at this moment some unfortunate individual appears, with a very smirking air, at the bottom of the long passage. He has managed to elude the vigilance of the special constable downstairs, and is evidently congratulating himself on having made his way so far.

‘Go back, sir—you must *not* come here,’ shouts the hoarse one, with tremendous emphasis of voice and gesture, the moment the offender catches his eye.

The stranger pauses.

‘Do you hear, sir—will you go back?’ continues the official dignitary, gently pushing the intruder some half-dozen yards.

‘Come, don’t push me,’ replies the stranger, turning angrily round.

‘I will, sir.’

‘You won’t, sir.’

‘Go out, sir.’

‘Take your hands off me, sir.’

‘Go out of the passage, sir.’

‘You’re a Jack-in-office, sir.’

‘A what?’ ejaculates he of the boots.

‘A Jack-in-office, sir, and a very insolent fellow,’ reiterates the stranger, now completely in a passion.

‘Pray do not force me to put you out, sir,’ retorts the other—‘pray do not—my instructions are to keep this passage clear—it’s the Speaker’s orders, sir.’

‘D-n the Speaker, sir!’ shouts the intruder.

‘Here, Wilson!—Collins!’ gasps the officer, actually paralysed at this insulting expression, which in his mind is all but high treason; ‘take this man out—take him out, I say! How dare you, sir?’ and down goes the unfortunate man five stairs at a time, turning round at every stoppage, to come back again, and denouncing bitter vengeance against the commander-in-chief, and all his supernumeraries.

‘Make way, gentlemen,—pray make way for the Members, I beg of you!’ shouts the zealous officer, turning back, and preceding a whole string of the liberal and independent.

You see this ferocious-looking gentleman, with a complexion almost as sallow as his linen, and whose large black moustache would give him the appearance of a figure in a hairdresser’s window, if his countenance possessed the thought which is communicated to those waxen caricatures of the human face divine. He is a militia-officer, and the most amusing person in the House. Can anything be more exquisitely absurd than the burlesque grandeur of his air, as he strides up to the lobby, his eyes rolling like those of a Turk’s head in a cheap Dutch clock? He never appears without that bundle of dirty papers which he carries under his left arm, and which are generally supposed to be the miscellaneous estimates for 1804, or some equally important documents. He is very punctual in his attendance at the House, and his self-satisfied ‘He-ar-He-ar,’ is not unfrequently the signal for a general titter.

This is the gentleman who once actually sent a messenger up to the Strangers’ gallery in the old House of Commons, to inquire the name of an individual who was using an eye-glass, in order that he might complain to the Speaker that the person in question was quizzing him! On another occasion, he is reported to have repaired to Bellamy’s kitchen—a refreshment-room, where persons who are not Members are admitted on sufferance, as it were—and perceiving two or three gentlemen at supper, who, he was aware, were not Members, and could not, in that place, very well resent his behaviour, he indulged in the pleasantry of sitting with his booted leg on the table at which they were supping! He is generally harmless, though, and always amusing.

By dint of patience, and some little interest with our friend the constable, we have contrived to make our way to the Lobby, and you can just manage to catch an occasional glimpse of the House, as the door is opened for the admission of Members. It is tolerably full already, and little groups of Members are congregated together here, discussing the interesting topics of the day.

That smart-looking fellow in the black coat with velvet facings and cuffs, who wears his *D'Orsay* hat so rakishly, is 'Honest Tom,' a metropolitan representative; and the large man in the cloak with the white lining—not the man by the pillar; the other with the light hair hanging over his coat collar behind—is his colleague. The quiet gentlemanly-looking man in the blue surtout, gray trousers, white neckerchief and gloves, whose closely-buttoned coat displays his manly figure and broad chest to great advantage, is a very well-known character. He has fought a great many battles in his time, and conquered like the heroes of old, with no other arms than those the gods gave him. The old hard-featured man who is standing near him, is really a good specimen of a class of men, now nearly extinct. He is a county Member, and has been from time whereof the memory of man is not to the contrary. Look at his loose, wide, brown coat, with capacious pockets on each side; the knee-breeches and boots, the immensely long waistcoat, and silver watch-chain dangling below it, the wide-brimmed brown hat, and the white handkerchief tied in a great bow, with straggling ends sticking out beyond his shirt-frill. It is a costume one seldom sees nowadays, and when the few who wear it have died off, it will be quite extinct. He can tell you long stories of Fox, Pitt, Sheridan, and Canning, and how much better the House was managed in those times, when they used to get up at eight or nine o'clock, except on regular field-days, of which everybody was apprised beforehand. He has a great contempt for all young Members of Parliament, and thinks it quite impossible that a man can say anything worth hearing, unless he has sat in the House for fifteen years at least, without saying anything at all. He is of opinion that 'that young Macaulay' was a regular impostor; he allows, that Lord Stanley may do something one of these days, but 'he's too young, sir—too young.' He is an excellent authority on points of precedent, and when he grows talkative, after his wine, will tell you how Sir Somebody Something, when he was whipper-in for the Government, brought four men out of their beds to vote in the majority, three of whom died on their way home again; how the House once divided on the question, that fresh candles be now brought in; how the Speaker was once upon a time left in the chair by accident, at the conclusion of business, and was obliged to sit in the House by himself for three hours, till some Member could be knocked up and brought back again, to move the adjournment; and a great many other anecdotes of a similar description.

There he stands, leaning on his stick; looking at the throng of Exquisites around him with most profound contempt; and conjuring up, before his mind’s eye, the scenes he beheld in the old House, in days gone by, when his own feelings were fresher and brighter, and when, as he imagines, wit, talent, and patriotism flourished more brightly too.

You are curious to know who that young man in the rough great-coat is, who has accosted every Member who has entered the House since we have been standing here. He is not a Member; he is only an ‘hereditary bondsman,’ or, in other words, an Irish correspondent of an Irish newspaper, who has just procured his forty-second frank from a Member whom he never saw in his life before. There he goes again—another! Bless the man, he has his hat and pockets full already.

We will try our fortune at the Strangers’ gallery, though the nature of the debate encourages very little hope of success. What on earth are you about? Holding up your order as if it were a talisman at whose command the wicket would fly open? Nonsense. Just preserve the order for an autograph, if it be worth keeping at all, and make your appearance at the door with your thumb and forefinger expressively inserted in your waistcoat-pocket. This tall stout man in black is the door-keeper. ‘Any room?’ ‘Not an inch—two or three dozen gentlemen waiting down-stairs on the chance of somebody’s going out.’ Pull out your purse—‘Are you *quite* sure there’s no room?’—‘I’ll go and look,’ replies the door-keeper, with a wistful glance at your purse, ‘but I’m afraid there’s not.’ He returns, and with real feeling assures you that it is morally impossible to get near the gallery. It is of no use waiting. When you are refused admission into the Strangers’ gallery at the House of Commons, under such circumstances, you may return home thoroughly satisfied that the place must be remarkably full indeed. [122]

Retracing our steps through the long passage, descending the stairs, and crossing Palace-yard, we halt at a small temporary doorway adjoining the King’s entrance to the House of Lords. The order of the serjeant-at-arms will admit you into the Reporters’ gallery, from whence you can obtain a tolerably good view of the House. Take care of the stairs, they are none of the best; through this little wicket—there. As soon as your eyes become a little used to the mist of the place, and the glare of the chandeliers below you, you will see that some unimportant personage on the Ministerial side of the House (to your right hand) is speaking, amidst a hum of voices and confusion which would rival Babel, but for the circumstance of its being all in one language.

The ‘hear, hear,’ which occasioned that laugh, proceeded from our warlike friend with the moustache; he is sitting on the back seat against the wall, behind the Member who is speaking, looking as ferocious and intellectual as usual. Take one look around you, and retire! The body of the House and the side galleries are full of Members; some, with their legs on the back of the opposite seat; some, with theirs stretched out to their utmost length on the floor; some going out, others coming in; all talking, laughing, lounging, coughing, oh-ing, questioning, or groaning; presenting a conglomeration of noise and confusion, to be met with in no other place in existence, not even excepting Smithfield on a market-day, or a cock-pit in its glory.

But let us not omit to notice Bellamy’s kitchen, or, in other words, the refreshment-room, common to both Houses of Parliament, where Ministerialists and Oppositionists, Whigs and Tories, Radicals, Peers, and Destructives, strangers from the gallery, and the more favoured strangers from below the bar, are alike at liberty to resort; where divers honourable members prove their perfect independence by remaining during the whole of a heavy debate, solacing themselves with the creature comforts; and whence they are summoned by whippers-in, when the House is on the point of dividing; either to give their ‘conscientious votes’ on questions of which they are conscientiously innocent of knowing anything whatever, or to find a vent for the playful exuberance of their wine-inspired fancies, in boisterous shouts of ‘Divide,’ occasionally varied with a little howling, barking, crowing, or other ebullitions of senatorial pleasantry.

When you have ascended the narrow staircase which, in the present temporary House of Commons, leads to the place we are describing, you will probably observe a couple of rooms on your right hand, with tables spread for dining. Neither of these is the kitchen, although they are both devoted to the same purpose; the kitchen is further on to our left, up these half-dozen stairs. Before we ascend the staircase, however, we must request you to pause in front of this little bar-place with the sash-windows; and beg your particular attention to the steady, honest-looking old fellow in black, who is its sole occupant. Nicholas (we do not mind mentioning the old fellow’s name, for if Nicholas be not a public man, who is?—and public men’s names are public property)—Nicholas is the butler of Bellamy’s, and has held the same place, dressed exactly in the same manner, and said precisely the same things, ever since the oldest of its present visitors can remember. An excellent servant Nicholas is—an unrivalled compounder of salad-dressing—an admirable preparer of soda-water and lemon—a special mixer of cold grog and punch—and, above all, an unequalled judge of cheese. If the old man have such a thing as vanity in his composition, this is certainly his pride; and if it be possible to imagine that anything in this world could disturb his impenetrable calmness, we should say it would be the doubting his judgment on this important point.

We needn’t tell you all this, however, for if you have an atom of observation, one glance at his sleek, knowing-looking head and face—his prim white neckerchief, with the wooden tie into which it has been regularly folded for twenty years past, merging by imperceptible degrees into a small-plaited shirt-frill—and his comfortable-looking form encased in a well-brushed suit of black—would give you a better idea of his real character than a column of our poor description could convey.

Nicholas is rather out of his element now; he cannot see the kitchen as he used to in the old House; there, one window of his glass-case opened into the room, and then, for the edification and behoof of more juvenile questioners, he would stand for an hour together, answering deferential questions about Sheridan, and Percival, and Castlereagh, and Heaven knows who beside, with manifest delight, always inserting a ‘Mister’ before every commoner’s name.

Nicholas, like all men of his age and standing, has a great idea of the degeneracy of the times. He seldom expresses any political opinions, but we managed to ascertain, just before the passing of the Reform Bill, that Nicholas was a thorough Reformer. What was our astonishment to discover shortly after the meeting of the first reformed Parliament, that he was a most inveterate and decided Tory! It was very odd: some men change their opinions from necessity, others from expediency, others from inspiration; but that Nicholas should undergo any change in any respect, was an event we had never contemplated, and should have considered impossible. His strong opinion against the clause which empowered the metropolitan districts to return Members to Parliament, too, was perfectly unaccountable.

We discovered the secret at last; the metropolitan Members always dined at home. The rascals! As for giving additional Members to Ireland, it was even worse—decidedly unconstitutional. Why, sir, an Irish Member would go up there, and eat more dinner than three English Members put together. He took no wine; drank table-beer by the half-gallon; and went home to Manchester-buildings, or Millbank-street, for his whiskey-and-water. And what was the consequence? Why, the concern lost—actually lost, sir—by his patronage. A queer old fellow is Nicholas, and as completely a part of the building as the house itself. We wonder he ever left the old place, and fully expected to see in the papers, the morning after the fire, a pathetic account of an old gentleman in black, of decent appearance, who was seen at one of the upper windows when the flames were at their height, and declared his resolute intention of falling with the floor. He must have been got out by force. However, he was got out—here he is again, looking as he always does, as if he had been in a bandbox ever since the last session. There he is, at his old post every night, just as we have described him: and, as characters are scarce, and faithful servants scarcer, long may he be there, say we!

Now, when you have taken your seat in the kitchen, and duly noticed the large fire and roasting-jack at one end of the room—the little table for washing glasses and draining jugs at the other—the clock over the window opposite St. Margaret’s Church—the deal tables and wax candles—the damask table-cloths and bare floor—the plate and china on the tables, and the gridiron on the fire; and a few other anomalies peculiar to the place—we will point out to your notice two or three of the people present, whose station or absurdities render them the most worthy of remark.

It is half-past twelve o’clock, and as the division is not expected for an hour or two, a few Members are lounging away the time here in preference to standing at the bar of the House, or sleeping in one of the side galleries. That singularly awkward and ungainly-looking man, in the brownish-white hat, with the straggling black trousers which reach about half-way down the leg of his boots, who is leaning against the meat-screen, apparently deluding himself into the belief that he is thinking about something, is a splendid sample of a Member of the House of Commons concentrating in his own person the wisdom of a constituency. Observe the wig, of a dark hue but indescribable colour, for if it be naturally brown, it has acquired a black tint by long service, and if it be naturally black, the same cause has imparted to it a tinge of rusty brown; and remark how very materially the great blinker-like spectacles assist the expression of that most intelligent face. Seriously speaking, did you ever see a countenance so expressive of the most hopeless extreme of heavy dulness, or behold a form so strangely put together? He is no great speaker: but when he *does* address the House, the effect is absolutely irresistible.

The small gentleman with the sharp nose, who has just saluted him, is a Member of Parliament, an ex-Alderman, and a sort of amateur fireman. He, and the celebrated fireman's dog, were observed to be remarkably active at the conflagration of the two Houses of Parliament—they both ran up and down, and in and out, getting under people's feet, and into everybody's way, fully impressed with the belief that they were doing a great deal of good, and barking tremendously. The dog went quietly back to his kennel with the engine, but the gentleman kept up such an incessant noise for some weeks after the occurrence, that he became a positive nuisance. As no more parliamentary fires have occurred, however, and as he has consequently had no more opportunities of writing to the newspapers to relate how, by way of preserving pictures he cut them out of their frames, and performed other great national services, he has gradually relapsed into his old state of calmness.

That female in black—not the one whom the Lord's-Day-Bill Baronet has just chucked under the chin; the shorter of the two—is 'Jane:' the Hebe of Bellamy's. Jane is as great a character as Nicholas, in her way. Her leading features are a thorough contempt for the great majority of her visitors; her predominant quality, love of admiration, as you cannot fail to observe, if you mark the glee with which she listens to something the young Member near her mutters somewhat unintelligibly in her ear (for his speech is rather thick from some cause or other), and how playfully she digs the handle of a fork into the arm with which he detains her, by way of reply.

Jane is no bad hand at repartees, and showers them about, with a degree of liberality and total absence of reserve or constraint, which occasionally excites no small amazement in the minds of strangers. She cuts jokes with Nicholas, too, but looks up to him with a great deal of respect—the immovable stolidity with which Nicholas receives the aforesaid jokes, and looks on, at certain pastoral friskings and rompings (Jane's only recreations, and they are very innocent too) which occasionally take place in the passage, is not the least amusing part of his character.

The two persons who are seated at the table in the corner, at the farther end of the room, have been constant guests here, for many years past; and one of them has feasted within these walls, many a time, with the most brilliant characters of a brilliant period. He has gone up to the other House since then; the greater part of his boon companions have shared Yorick's fate, and his visits to Bellamy's are comparatively few.

If he really be eating his supper now, at what hour can he possibly have dined! A second solid mass of rump-steak has disappeared, and he eat the first in four minutes and three quarters, by the clock over the window. Was there ever such a personification of Falstaff! Mark the air with which he gloats over that Stilton, as he removes the napkin which has been placed beneath his chin to catch the superfluous gravy of the steak, and with what gusto he imbibes the porter which has been fetched, expressly for him, in the pewter pot. Listen to the hoarse sound of that voice, kept down as it is by layers of solids, and deep draughts of rich wine, and tell us if you ever saw such a perfect picture of a regular *gourmand*; and whether he is not exactly the man whom you would pitch upon as having been the partner of Sheridan's parliamentary carouses, the volunteer driver of the hackney-coach that took him home, and the involuntary upsetter of the whole party?

What an amusing contrast between his voice and appearance, and that of the spare, squeaking old man, who sits at the same table, and who, elevating a little cracked bantam sort of voice to its highest pitch, invokes damnation upon his own eyes or somebody else's at the commencement of every sentence he utters. 'The Captain,' as they call him, is a very old frequenter of Bellamy's; much addicted to stopping 'after the House is up' (an inexpiable crime in Jane's eyes), and a complete walking reservoir of spirits and water.

The old Peer—or rather, the old man—for his peerage is of comparatively recent date—has a huge tumbler of hot punch brought him; and the other damns and drinks, and drinks and damns, and smokes. Members arrive every moment in a great bustle to report that 'The Chancellor of the Exchequer's up,' and to get glasses of brandy-and-water to sustain them during the division; people who have ordered supper, countermand it, and prepare to go down-stairs, when suddenly a bell is heard to ring with tremendous violence, and a cry of 'Di-vi-sion!' is heard in the passage. This is enough; away rush the members pell-mell. The room is cleared in an instant; the noise rapidly dies away; you hear the creaking of the last boot on the last stair, and are left alone with the leviathan of rump-steaks.

CHAPTER XIX—PUBLIC DINNERS

All public dinners in London, from the Lord Mayor’s annual banquet at Guildhall, to the Chimney-sweepers’ anniversary at White Conduit House; from the Goldsmiths’ to the Butchers’, from the Sheriffs’ to the Licensed Victuallers’; are amusing scenes. Of all entertainments of this description, however, we think the annual dinner of some public charity is the most amusing. At a Company’s dinner, the people are nearly all alike—regular old stagers, who make it a matter of business, and a thing not to be laughed at. At a political dinner, everybody is disagreeable, and inclined to speechify—much the same thing, by-the-bye; but at a charity dinner you see people of all sorts, kinds, and descriptions. The wine may not be remarkably special, to be sure, and we have heard some hardhearted monsters grumble at the collection; but we really think the amusement to be derived from the occasion, sufficient to counterbalance even these disadvantages.

Let us suppose you are induced to attend a dinner of this description—‘Indigent Orphans’ Friends’ Benevolent Institution,’ we think it is. The name of the charity is a line or two longer, but never mind the rest. You have a distinct recollection, however, that you purchased a ticket at the solicitationfootnote of some charitable friend: and you deposit yourself in a hackney-coach, the driver of which—no doubt that you may do the thing in style—turns a deaf ear to your earnest entreaties to be set down at the corner of Great Queen-street, and persists in carrying you to the very door of the Freemasons’, round which a crowd of people are assembled to witness the entrance of the indigent orphans’ friends. You hear great speculations as you pay the fare, on the possibility of your being the noble Lord who is announced to fill the chair on the occasion, and are highly gratified to hear it eventually decided that you are only a ‘wocalist.’

The first thing that strikes you, on your entrance, is the astonishing importance of the committee. You observe a door on the first landing, carefully guarded by two waiters, in and out of which stout gentlemen with very red faces keep running, with a degree of speed highly unbecoming the gravity of persons of their years and corpulency. You pause, quite alarmed at the bustle, and thinking, in your innocence, that two or three people must have been carried out of the dining-room in fits, at least. You are immediately undeceived by the waiter—‘Up-stairs, if you please, sir; this is the committee-room.’ Up-stairs you go, accordingly; wondering, as you mount, what the duties of the committee can be, and whether they ever do anything beyond confusing each other, and running over the waiters.

Having deposited your hat and cloak, and received a remarkably small scrap of pasteboard in exchange (which, as a matter of course, you lose, before you require it again), you enter the hall, down which there are three long tables for the less distinguished guests, with a cross table on a raised platform at the upper end for the reception of the very particular friends of the indigent orphans. Being fortunate enough to find a plate without anybody’s card in it, you wisely seat yourself at once, and have a little leisure to look about you. Waiters, with wine-baskets in their hands, are placing decanters of sherry down the tables, at very respectable distances; melancholy-looking salt-cellars, and decayed vinegar-cruets, which might have belonged to the parents of the indigent orphans in their time, are scattered at distant intervals on the cloth; and the knives and forks look as if they had done duty at every public dinner in London since the accession of George the First. The musicians are scraping and grating and screwing tremendously—playing no notes but notes of preparation; and several gentlemen are gliding along the sides of the tables, looking into plate after plate with frantic eagerness, the expression of their countenances growing more and more dismal as they meet with everybody’s card but their own.

You turn round to take a look at the table behind you, and—not being in the habit of attending public dinners—are somewhat struck by the appearance of the party on which your eyes rest. One of its principal members appears to be a little man, with a long and rather inflamed face, and gray hair brushed bolt upright in front; he wears a wisp of black silk round his neck, without any stiffener, as an apology for a neckerchief, and is addressed by his companions by the familiar appellation of ‘Fitz,’ or some such monosyllable. Near him is a stout man in a white neckerchief and buff waistcoat, with shining dark hair, cut very short in front, and a great, round, healthy-looking face, on which he studiously preserves a half sentimental simper. Next him, again, is a large-headed man, with black hair and bushy whiskers; and opposite them are two or three others, one of whom is a little round-faced person, in a dress-stock and blue under-waistcoat. There is something peculiar in their air and manner, though you could hardly describe what it is; you cannot divest yourself of the idea that they have come for some other purpose than mere eating and drinking. You have no time to debate the matter, however, for the waiters (who have been arranged in lines down the room, placing the dishes on table) retire to the lower end; the dark man in the blue coat and bright buttons, who has the direction of the music, looks up to the gallery, and calls out ‘band’ in a very loud voice; out burst the orchestra, up rise the visitors, in march fourteen stewards, each with a long wand in his hand, like the evil genius in a pantomime; then the chairman, then the titled visitors; they all make their way up the room, as fast as they can, bowing, and smiling, and smirking, and looking remarkably amiable. The applause ceases, grace is said, the clatter of plates and dishes begins; and every one appears highly gratified, either with the presence of the distinguished visitors, or the commencement of the anxiously-expected dinner.

As to the dinner itself—the mere dinner—it goes off much the same everywhere. Tureens of soup are emptied with awful rapidity—waiters take plates of turbot away, to get lobster-sauce, and bring back plates of lobster-sauce without turbot; people who can carve poultry, are great fools if they own it, and people who can’t have no wish to learn. The knives and forks form a pleasing accompaniment to Auber’s music, and Auber’s music would form a pleasing accompaniment to the dinner, if you could hear anything besides the cymbals. The substantials disappear—moulds of jelly vanish like lightning—hearty eaters wipe their foreheads, and appear rather overcome by their recent exertions—people who have looked very cross hitherto, become remarkably bland, and ask you to take wine in the most friendly manner possible—old gentlemen direct your attention to the ladies’ gallery, and take great pains to impress you with the fact that the charity is always peculiarly favoured in this respect—every one appears disposed to become talkative—and the hum of conversation is loud and general.

‘Pray, silence, gentlemen, if you please, for *Non nobis*!’ shouts the toast-master with stentorian lungs—a toast-master’s shirt-front, waistcoat, and neckerchief, by-the-bye, always exhibit three distinct shades of cloudy-white.—‘Pray, silence, gentlemen, for *Non nobis*!’ The singers, whom you discover to be no other than the very party that excited your curiosity at first, after ‘pitching’ their voices immediately begin *too-too*ing most dismally, on which the regular old stagers burst into occasional cries of—‘Sh—Sh—waiters!—Silence, waiters—stand still, waiters—keep back, waiters,’ and other exorcisms, delivered in a tone of indignant remonstrance. The grace is soon concluded, and the company resume their seats. The uninitiated portion of the guests applaud *Non nobis* as vehemently as if it were a capital comic song, greatly to the scandal and indignation of the regular diners, who immediately attempt to quell this sacrilegious approbation, by cries of ‘Hush, hush!’ whereupon the others, mistaking these sounds for hisses, applaud more tumultuously than before, and, by way of placing their approval beyond the possibility of doubt, shout ‘*Encore*!’ most vociferously.

The moment the noise ceases, up starts the toast-master:—‘Gentlemen, charge your glasses, if you please!’ Decanters having been handed about, and glasses filled, the toast-master proceeds, in a regular ascending scale:—‘Gentlemen—*air*—you—all charged? Pray—silence—gentlemen—for—the cha-i-r!’ The chairman rises, and, after stating that he feels it quite unnecessary to preface the toast he is about to propose, with any observations whatever, wanders into a maze of sentences, and flounders about in the most extraordinary manner, presenting a lamentable spectacle of mystified humanity, until he arrives at the words, ‘constitutional sovereign of these realms,’ at which elderly gentlemen exclaim ‘Bravo!’ and hammer the table tremendously with their knife-handles. ‘Under any circumstances, it would give him the greatest pride, it would give him the greatest pleasure—he might almost say, it would afford him satisfaction [cheers] to propose that toast. What must be his feelings, then, when he has the gratification of announcing, that he has received her Majesty’s commands to apply to the Treasurer of her Majesty’s Household, for her Majesty’s annual donation of 25*l.* in aid of the funds of this charity!’ This announcement (which has been regularly made by every chairman, since the first foundation of the charity, forty-two years ago) calls forth the most vociferous applause; the toast is drunk with a great deal of cheering and knocking; and ‘God save the Queen’ is sung by the ‘professional gentlemen;’ the unprofessional gentlemen joining in the chorus, and giving the national anthem an effect which the newspapers, with great justice, describe as ‘perfectly electrical.’

The other ‘loyal and patriotic’ toasts having been drunk with all due enthusiasm, a comic song having been well sung by the gentleman with the small neckerchief, and a sentimental one by the second of the party, we come to the most important toast of the evening—‘Prosperity to the charity.’ Here again we are compelled to adopt newspaper phraseology, and to express our regret at being ‘precluded from giving even the substance of the noble lord’s observations.’ Suffice it to say, that the speech, which is somewhat of the longest, is rapturously received; and the toast having been drunk, the stewards (looking more important than ever) leave the room, and presently return, heading a procession of indigent orphans, boys and girls, who walk round the room, curtseying, and bowing, and treading on each other’s heels, and looking very much as if they would like a glass of wine apiece, to the high gratification of the company generally, and especially of the lady patronesses in the gallery. *Exeunt* children, and re-enter stewards, each with a blue plate in his hand. The band plays a lively air; the majority of the company put their hands in their pockets and look rather serious; and the noise of sovereigns, rattling on crockery, is heard from all parts of the room.

After a short interval, occupied in singing and toasting, the secretary puts on his spectacles, and proceeds to read the report and list of subscriptions, the latter being listened to with great attention. ‘Mr. Smith, one guinea—Mr. Tompkins, one guinea—Mr. Wilson, one guinea—Mr. Hickson, one guinea—Mr. Nixon, one guinea—Mr. Charles Nixon, one guinea—[hear, hear!]—Mr. James Nixon, one guinea—Mr. Thomas Nixon, one pound one [tremendous applause]. Lord Fitz Binkle, the chairman of the day, in addition to an annual donation of fifteen pounds—thirty guineas [prolonged knocking: several gentlemen knock the stems off their wine-glasses, in the vehemence of their approbation]. Lady, Fitz Binkle, in addition to an annual donation of ten pound—twenty pound’ [protracted knocking and shouts of ‘Bravo!’] The list being at length concluded, the chairman rises, and proposes the health of the secretary, than whom he knows no more zealous or estimable individual. The secretary, in returning thanks, observes that *he* knows no more excellent individual than the chairman—except the senior officer of the charity, whose health *he* begs to propose. The senior officer, in returning thanks, observes that *he* knows no more worthy man than the secretary—except Mr. Walker, the auditor, whose health *he* begs to propose. Mr. Walker, in returning thanks, discovers some other estimable individual, to whom alone the senior officer is inferior—and so they go on toasting and lauding and thanking: the only other toast of importance being ‘The Lady Patronesses now present!’ on which all the gentlemen turn their faces towards the ladies’ gallery, shouting tremendously; and little priggish men, who have imbibed more wine than usual, kiss their hands and exhibit distressing contortions of visage.

We have protracted our dinner to so great a length, that we have hardly time to add one word by way of grace. We can only entreat our readers not to imagine, because we have attempted to extract some amusement from a charity dinner, that we are at all disposed to underrate, either the excellence of the benevolent institutions with which London abounds, or the estimable motives of those who support them.

CHAPTER XX—THE FIRST OF MAY

> ‘Now ladies, up in the sky-parlour: only once a year, if you please!’
>
> Young Lady with Brass Ladle.
>
> ‘Sweep—sweep—sw-e-ep!’
>
> Illegal Watchword.

The first of May! There is a merry freshness in the sound, calling to our minds a thousand thoughts of all that is pleasant in nature and beautiful in her most delightful form. What man is there, over whose mind a bright spring morning does not exercise a magic influence—carrying him back to the days of his childish sports, and conjuring up before him the old green field with its gently-waving trees, where the birds sang as he has never heard them since—where the butterfly fluttered far more gaily than he ever sees him now, in all his ramblings—where the sky seemed bluer, and the sun shone more brightly—where the air blew more freshly over greener grass, and sweeter-smelling flowers—where everything wore a richer and more brilliant hue than it is ever dressed in now! Such are the deep feelings of childhood, and such are the impressions which every lovely object stamps upon its heart! The hardy traveller wanders through the maze of thick and pathless woods, where the sun’s rays never shone, and heaven’s pure air never played; he stands on the brink of the roaring waterfall, and, giddy and bewildered, watches the foaming mass as it leaps from stone to stone, and from crag to crag; he lingers in the fertile plains of a land of perpetual sunshine, and revels in the luxury of their balmy breath. But what are the deep forests, or the thundering waters, or the richest landscapes that bounteous nature ever spread, to charm the eyes, and captivate the senses of man, compared with the recollection of the old scenes of his early youth? Magic scenes indeed; for the fancies of childhood dressed them in colours brighter than the rainbow, and almost as fleeting!

In former times, spring brought with it not only such associations as these, connected with the past, but sports and games for the present—merry dances round rustic pillars, adorned with emblems of the season, and reared in honour of its coming. Where are they now! Pillars we have, but they are no longer rustic ones; and as to dancers, they are used to rooms, and lights, and would not show well in the open air. Think of the immorality, too! What would your sabbath enthusiasts say, to an aristocratic ring encircling the Duke of York's column in Carlton-terrace—a grand *poussette* of the middle classes, round Alderman Waithman's monument in Fleet-street,—or a general hands-four-round of ten-pound householders, at the foot of the Obelisk in St. George's-fields? Alas! romance can make no head against the riot act; and pastoral simplicity is not understood by the police.

Well; many years ago we began to be a steady and matter-of-fact sort of people, and dancing in spring being beneath our dignity, we gave it up, and in course of time it descended to the sweeps—a fall certainly, because, though sweeps are very good fellows in their way, and moreover very useful in a civilised community, they are not exactly the sort of people to give the tone to the little elegances of society. The sweeps, however, got the dancing to themselves, and they kept it up, and handed it down. This was a severe blow to the romance of spring-time, but, it did not entirely destroy it, either; for a portion of it descended to the sweeps with the dancing, and rendered them objects of great interest. A mystery hung over the sweeps in those days. Legends were in existence of wealthy gentlemen who had lost children, and who, after many years of sorrow and suffering, had found them in the character of sweeps. Stories were related of a young boy who, having been stolen from his parents in his infancy, and devoted to the occupation of chimney-sweeping, was sent, in the course of his professional career, to sweep the chimney of his mother's bedroom; and how, being hot and tired when he came out of the chimney, he got into the bed he had so often slept in as an infant, and was discovered and recognised therein by his mother, who once every year of her life, thereafter, requested the pleasure of the company of every London sweep, at half-past one o'clock, to roast beef, plum-pudding, porter, and sixpence.

Such stories as these, and there were many such, threw an air of mystery round the sweeps, and produced for them some of those good effects which animals derive from the doctrine of the transmigration of souls. No one (except the masters) thought of ill-treating a sweep, because no one knew who he might be, or what nobleman's or gentleman's son he might turn out. Chimney-sweeping was, by many believers in the marvellous, considered as a sort of probationary term, at an earlier or later period of which, divers young noblemen were to come into possession of their rank and titles: and the profession was held by them in great respect accordingly.

We remember, in our young days, a little sweep about our own age, with curly hair and white teeth, whom we devoutly and sincerely believed to be the lost son and heir of some illustrious personage—an impression which was resolved into an unchangeable conviction on our infant mind, by the subject of our speculations informing us, one day, in reply to our question, propounded a few moments before his ascent to the summit of the kitchen chimney, 'that he believed he'd been born in the vurkis, but he'd never know'd his father.' We felt certain, from that time forth, that he would one day be owned by a lord: and we never heard the church-bells ring, or saw a flag hoisted in the neighbourhood, without thinking that the happy event had at last occurred, and that his long-lost parent had arrived in a coach and six, to take him home to Grosvenor-square. He never came, however; and, at the present moment, the young gentleman in question is settled down as a master sweep in the neighbourhood of Battle-bridge, his distinguishing characteristics being a decided antipathy to washing himself, and the possession of a pair of legs very inadequate to the support of his unwieldy and corpulent body.

The romance of spring having gone out before our time, we were fain to console ourselves as we best could with the uncertainty that enveloped the birth and parentage of its attendant dancers, the sweeps; and we *did* console ourselves with it, for many years. But, even this wicked source of comfort received a shock from which it has never recovered—a shock which has been in reality its death-blow. We could not disguise from ourselves the fact that whole families of sweeps were regularly born of sweeps, in the rural districts of Somers Town and Camden Town—that the eldest son succeeded to the father's business, that the other branches assisted him therein, and commenced on their own account; that their children again, were educated to the profession; and that about their identity there could be no mistake whatever. We could not be blind, we say, to this melancholy truth, but we could not bring ourselves to admit it, nevertheless, and we lived on for some years in a state of voluntary ignorance. We were roused from our pleasant slumber by certain dark insinuations thrown out by a friend of ours, to the effect that children in the lower ranks of life were beginning to *choose* chimney-sweeping as their particular walk; that applications had been made by various boys to the constituted authorities, to allow them to pursue the object of their ambition with the full concurrence and sanction of the law; that the affair, in short, was becoming one of mere legal contract. We turned a deaf ear to these rumours at first, but slowly and surely they stole upon us. Month after month, week after week, nay, day after day, at last, did we meet with accounts of similar applications. The veil was removed, all mystery was at an end, and chimney-sweeping had become a favourite and chosen pursuit. There is no longer any occasion to steal boys; for boys flock in crowds to bind themselves. The romance of the trade has fled, and the chimney-sweeper of the present day, is no more like unto him of thirty years ago, than is a Fleet-street pickpocket to a Spanish brigand, or Paul Pry to Caleb Williams.

This gradual decay and disuse of the practice of leading noble youths into captivity, and compelling them to ascend chimneys, was a severe blow, if we may so speak, to the romance of chimney-sweeping, and to the romance of spring at the same time. But even this was not all, for some few years ago the dancing on May-day began to decline; small sweeps were observed to congregate in twos or threes, unsupported by a ‘green,’ with no ‘My Lord’ to act as master of the ceremonies, and no ‘My Lady’ to preside over the exchequer. Even in companies where there was a ‘green’ it was an absolute nothing—a mere sprout—and the instrumental accompaniments rarely extended beyond the shovels and a set of Panpipes, better known to the many, as a ‘mouth-organ.’

These were signs of the times, portentous omens of a coming change; and what was the result which they shadowed forth? Why, the master sweeps, influenced by a restless spirit of innovation, actually interposed their authority, in opposition to the dancing, and substituted a dinner—an anniversary dinner at White Conduit House—where clean faces appeared in lieu of black ones smeared with rose pink; and knee cords and tops superseded nankeen drawers and rosetted shoes.

Gentlemen who were in the habit of riding shy horses; and steady-going people who have no vagrancy in their souls, lauded this alteration to the skies, and the conduct of the master sweeps was described beyond the reach of praise. But how stands the real fact? Let any man deny, if he can, that when the cloth had been removed, fresh pots and pipes laid upon the table, and the customary loyal and patriotic toasts proposed, the celebrated Mr. Sluffen, of Adam-and-Eve-court, whose authority not the most malignant of our opponents can call in question, expressed himself in a manner following: 'That now he'd cotcht the cheerman's hi, he vished he might be jolly vell blessed, if he worn't a goin' to have his innings, vich he vould say these here obserwashuns—that how some mischeevus coves as know'd nuffin about the consarn, had tried to sit people agin the mas'r swips, and take the shine out o' their bis'nes, and the bread out o' the traps o' their preshus kids, by a makin' o' this here remark, as chimblies could be as vell svept by 'sheenery as by boys; and that the makin' use o' boys for that there purpuss vos barbareous; vereas, he 'ad been a chummy—he begged the cheerman's parding for usin' such a wulgar hexpression—more nor thirty year—he might say he'd been born in a chimbley—and he know'd uncommon vell as 'sheenery vos vus nor o' no use: and as to kerhewelty to the boys, everybody in the chimbley line know'd as vell as he did, that they liked the climbin' better nor nuffin as vos.' From this day, we date the total fall of the last lingering remnant of May-day dancing, among the *élite* of the profession: and from this period we commence a new era in that portion of our spring associations which relates to the first of May.

We are aware that the unthinking part of the population will meet us here, with the assertion, that dancing on May-day still continues—that 'greens' are annually seen to roll along the streets—that youths in the garb of clowns, precede them, giving vent to the ebullitions of their sportive fancies; and that lords and ladies follow in their wake.

Granted. We are ready to acknowledge that in outward show, these processions have greatly improved: we do not deny the introduction of solos on the drum; we will even go so far as to admit an occasional fantasia on the triangle, but here our admissions end. We positively deny that the sweeps have art or part in these proceedings. We distinctly charge the dustmen with throwing what they ought to clear away, into the eyes of the public. We accuse scavengers, brickmakers, and gentlemen who devote their energies to the costermongering line, with obtaining money once a-year, under false pretences. We cling with peculiar fondness to the custom of days gone by, and have shut out conviction as long as we could, but it has forced itself upon us; and we now proclaim to a deluded public, that the May-day dancers are *not* sweeps. The size of them, alone, is sufficient to repudiate the idea. It is a notorious fact that the widely-spread taste for register-stoves has materially increased the demand for small boys; whereas the men, who, under a fictitious character, dance about the streets on the first of May nowadays, would be a tight fit in a kitchen flue, to say nothing of the parlour. This is strong presumptive evidence, but we have positive proof—the evidence of our own senses. And here is our testimony.

Upon the morning of the second of the merry month of May, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirty-six, we went out for a stroll, with a kind of forlorn hope of seeing something or other which might induce us to believe that it was really spring, and not Christmas. After wandering as far as Copenhagen House, without meeting anything calculated to dispel our impression that there was a mistake in the almanacks, we turned back down Maidenlane, with the intention of passing through the extensive colony lying between it and Battle-bridge, which is inhabited by proprietors of donkey-carts, boilers of horse-flesh, makers of tiles, and sifters of cinders; through which colony we should have passed, without stoppage or interruption, if a little crowd gathered round a shed had not attracted our attention, and induced us to pause.

When we say a ‘shed,’ we do not mean the conservatory sort of building, which, according to the old song, Love tenanted when he was a young man, but a wooden house with windows stuffed with rags and paper, and a small yard at the side, with one dust-cart, two baskets, a few shovels, and little heaps of cinders, and fragments of china and tiles, scattered about it. Before this inviting spot we paused; and the longer we looked, the more we wondered what exciting circumstance it could be, that induced the foremost members of the crowd to flatten their noses against the parlour window, in the vain hope of catching a glimpse of what was going on inside. After staring vacantly about us for some minutes, we appealed, touching the cause of this assemblage, to a gentleman in a suit of tarpaulin, who was smoking his pipe on our right hand; but as the only answer we obtained was a playful inquiry whether our mother had disposed of her mangle, we determined to await the issue in silence.

Judge of our virtuous indignation, when the street-door of the shed opened, and a party emerged therefrom, clad in the costume and emulating the appearance, of May-day sweeps!

The first person who appeared was ‘my lord,’ habited in a blue coat and bright buttons, with gilt paper tacked over the seams, yellow knee-breeches, pink cotton stockings, and shoes; a cocked hat, ornamented with shreds of various-coloured paper, on his head, a *bouquet* the size of a prize cauliflower in his button-hole, a long Belcher handkerchief in his right hand, and a thin cane in his left. A murmur of applause ran through the crowd (which was chiefly composed of his lordship’s personal friends), when this graceful figure made his appearance, which swelled into a burst of applause as his fair partner in the dance bounded forth to join him. Her ladyship was attired in pink crape over bed-furniture, with a low body and short sleeves. The symmetry of her ankles was partially concealed by a very perceptible pair of frilled trousers; and the inconvenience which might have resulted from the circumstance of her white satin shoes being a few sizes too large, was obviated by their being firmly attached to her legs with strong tape sandals.

Her head was ornamented with a profusion of artificial flowers; and in her hand she bore a large brass ladle, wherein to receive what she figuratively denominated ‘the tin.’ The other characters were a young gentleman in girl’s clothes and a widow’s cap; two clowns who walked upon their hands in the mud, to the immeasurable delight of all the spectators; a man with a drum; another man with a flageolet; a dirty woman in a large shawl, with a box under her arm for the money,—and last, though not least, the ‘green,’ animated by no less a personage than our identical friend in the tarpaulin suit.

The man hammered away at the drum, the flageolet squeaked, the shovels rattled, the ‘green’ rolled about, pitching first on one side and then on the other; my lady threw her right foot over her left ankle, and her left foot over her right ankle, alternately; my lord ran a few paces forward, and butted at the ‘green,’ and then a few paces backward upon the toes of the crowd, and then went to the right, and then to the left, and then dodged my lady round the ‘green;’ and finally drew her arm through his, and called upon the boys to shout, which they did lustily—for this was the dancing.

We passed the same group, accidentally, in the evening. We never saw a ‘green’ so drunk, a lord so quarrelsome (no: not even in the house of peers after dinner), a pair of clowns so melancholy, a lady so muddy, or a party so miserable.

How has May-day decayed!

CHAPTER XXI—BROKERS' AND MARINE-STORE SHOPS

When we affirm that brokers' shops are strange places, and that if an authentic history of their contents could be procured, it would furnish many a page of amusement, and many a melancholy tale, it is necessary to explain the class of shops to which we allude. Perhaps when we make use of the term 'Brokers' Shop,' the minds of our readers will at once picture large, handsome warehouses, exhibiting a long perspective of French-polished dining-tables, rosewood chiffoniers, and mahogany wash-hand-stands, with an occasional vista of a four-post bedstead and hangings, and an appropriate foreground of dining-room chairs. Perhaps they will imagine that we mean an humble class of second-hand furniture repositories. Their imagination will then naturally lead them to that street at the back of Long-acre, which is composed almost entirely of brokers' shops; where you walk through groves of deceitful, showy-looking furniture, and where the prospect is occasionally enlivened by a bright red, blue, and yellow hearth-rug, embellished with the pleasing device of a mail-coach at full speed, or a strange animal, supposed to have been originally intended for a dog, with a mass of worsted-work in his mouth, which conjecture has likened to a basket of flowers.

This, by-the-bye, is a tempting article to young wives in the humbler ranks of life, who have a first-floor front to furnish—they are lost in admiration, and hardly know which to admire most. The dog is very beautiful, but they have a dog already on the best tea-tray, and two more on the mantel-piece. Then, there is something so genteel about that mail-coach; and the passengers outside (who are all hat) give it such an air of reality!

The goods here are adapted to the taste, or rather to the means, of cheap purchasers. There are some of the most beautiful *looking* Pembroke tables that were ever beheld: the wood as green as the trees in the Park, and the leaves almost as certain to fall off in the course of a year. There is also a most extensive assortment of tent and turn-up bedsteads, made of stained wood, and innumerable specimens of that base imposition on society—a sofa bedstead.

A turn-up bedstead is a blunt, honest piece of furniture; it may be slightly disguised with a sham drawer; and sometimes a mad attempt is even made to pass it off for a book-case; ornament it as you will, however, the turn-up bedstead seems to defy disguise, and to insist on having it distinctly understood that he is a turn-up bedstead, and nothing else—that he is indispensably necessary, and that being so useful, he disdains to be ornamental.

How different is the demeanour of a sofa bedstead! Ashamed of its real use, it strives to appear an article of luxury and gentility—an attempt in which it miserably fails. It has neither the respectability of a sofa, nor the virtues of a bed; every man who keeps a sofa bedstead in his house, becomes a party to a wilful and designing fraud—we question whether you could insult him more, than by insinuating that you entertain the least suspicion of its real use.

To return from this digression, we beg to say, that neither of these classes of brokers' shops, forms the subject of this sketch. The shops to which we advert, are immeasurably inferior to those on whose outward appearance we have slightly touched. Our readers must often have observed in some by-street, in a poor neighbourhood, a small dirty shop, exposing for sale the most extraordinary and confused jumble of old, worn-out, wretched articles, that can well be imagined. Our wonder at their ever having been bought, is only to be equalled by our astonishment at the idea of their ever being sold again. On a board, at the side of the door, are placed about twenty books—all odd volumes; and as many wine-glasses—all different patterns; several locks, an old earthenware pan, full of rusty keys; two or three gaudy chimney-ornaments—cracked, of course; the remains of a lustre, without any drops; a round frame like a capital O, which has once held a mirror; a flute, complete with the exception of the middle joint; a pair of curling-irons; and a tinder-box. In front of the shop-window, are ranged some half-dozen high-backed chairs, with spinal complaints and wasted legs; a corner cupboard; two or three very dark mahogany tables with flaps like mathematical problems; some pickle-jars, some surgeons' ditto, with gilt labels and without stoppers; an unframed portrait of some lady who flourished about the beginning of the thirteenth century, by an artist who never flourished at all; an incalculable host of miscellanies of every description, including bottles and cabinets, rags and bones, fenders and street-door knockers, fire-irons, wearing apparel and bedding, a hall-lamp, and a room-door. Imagine, in addition to this incongruous mass, a black doll in a white frock, with two faces—one looking up the street, and the other looking down, swinging over the door; a board with the squeezed-up inscription ‘Dealer in marine stores,’ in lanky white letters, whose height is strangely out of proportion to their width; and you have before you precisely the kind of shop to which we wish to direct your attention.

Although the same heterogeneous mixture of things will be found at all these places, it is curious to observe how truly and accurately some of the minor articles which are exposed for sale—articles of wearing apparel, for instance—mark the character of the neighbourhood. Take Drury-Lane and Covent-garden for example.

This is essentially a theatrical neighbourhood. There is not a potboy in the vicinity who is not, to a greater or less extent, a dramatic character. The errand-boys and chandler’s-shop-keepers’ sons, are all stage-struck: they ‘gets up’ plays in back kitchens hired for the purpose, and will stand before a shop-window for hours, contemplating a great staring portrait of Mr. Somebody or other, of the Royal Coburg Theatre, ‘as he appeared in the character of Tongo the Denounced.’ The consequence is, that there is not a marine-store shop in the neighbourhood, which does not exhibit for sale some faded articles of dramatic finery, such as three or four pairs of soiled buff boots with turn-over red tops, heretofore worn by a ‘fourth robber,’ or ‘fifth mob;’ a pair of rusty broadswords, a few gauntlets, and certain resplendent ornaments, which, if they were yellow instead of white, might be taken for insurance plates of the Sun Fire-office. There are several of these shops in the narrow streets and dirty courts, of which there are so many near the national theatres, and they all have tempting goods of this description, with the addition, perhaps, of a lady’s pink dress covered with spangles; white wreaths, stage shoes, and a tiara like a tin lamp reflector. They have been purchased of some wretched supernumeraries, or sixth-rate actors, and are now offered for the benefit of the rising generation, who, on condition of making certain weekly payments, amounting in the whole to about ten times their value, may avail themselves of such desirable bargains.

Let us take a very different quarter, and apply it to the same test. Look at a marine-store dealer's, in that reservoir of dirt, drunkenness, and drabs: thieves, oysters, baked potatoes, and pickled salmon—Ratcliff-highway. Here, the wearing apparel is all nautical. Rough blue jackets, with mother-of-pearl buttons, oil-skin hats, coarse checked shirts, and large canvas trousers that look as if they were made for a pair of bodies instead of a pair of legs, are the staple commodities. Then, there are large bunches of cotton pocket-handkerchiefs, in colour and pattern unlike any one ever saw before, with the exception of those on the backs of the three young ladies without bonnets who passed just now. The furniture is much the same as elsewhere, with the addition of one or two models of ships, and some old prints of naval engagements in still older frames. In the window, are a few compasses, a small tray containing silver watches in clumsy thick cases; and tobacco-boxes, the lid of each ornamented with a ship, or an anchor, or some such trophy. A sailor generally pawns or sells all he has before he has been long ashore, and if he does not, some favoured companion kindly saves him the trouble. In either case, it is an even chance that he afterwards unconsciously repurchases the same things at a higher price than he gave for them at first.

Again: pay a visit with a similar object, to a part of London, as unlike both of these as they are to each other. Cross over to the Surrey side, and look at such shops of this description as are to be found near the King's Bench prison, and in 'the Rules.' How different, and how strikingly illustrative of the decay of some of the unfortunate residents in this part of the metropolis! Imprisonment and neglect have done their work. There is contamination in the profligate denizens of a debtor's prison; old friends have fallen off; the recollection of former prosperity has passed away; and with it all thoughts for the past, all care for the future. First, watches and rings, then cloaks, coats, and all the more expensive articles of dress, have found their way to the pawnbroker's. That miserable resource has failed at last, and the sale of some trifling article at one of these shops, has been the only mode left of raising a shilling or two, to meet the urgent demands of the moment. Dressing-cases and writing-desks, too old to pawn but too good to keep; guns, fishing-rods, musical instruments, all in the same condition; have first been sold, and the sacrifice has been but slightly felt. But hunger must be allayed, and what has already become a habit, is easily resorted to, when an emergency arises. Light articles of clothing, first of the ruined man, then of his wife, at last of their children, even of the youngest, have been parted with, piecemeal. There they are, thrown carelessly together until a purchaser presents himself, old, and patched and repaired, it is true; but the make and materials tell of better days; and the older they are, the greater the misery and destitution of those whom they once adorned.

CHAPTER XXII—GIN-SHOPS

It is a remarkable circumstance, that different trades appear to partake of the disease to which elephants and dogs are especially liable, and to run stark, staring, raving mad, periodically. The great distinction between the animals and the trades, is, that the former run mad with a certain degree of propriety—they are very regular in their irregularities. We know the period at which the emergency will arise, and provide against it accordingly. If an elephant run mad, we are all ready for him—kill or cure—pills or bullets, calomel in conserve of roses, or lead in a musket-barrel. If a dog happen to look unpleasantly warm in the summer months, and to trot about the shady side of the streets with a quarter of a yard of tongue hanging out of his mouth, a thick leather muzzle, which has been previously prepared in compliance with the thoughtful injunctions of the Legislature, is instantly clapped over his head, by way of making him cooler, and he either looks remarkably unhappy for the next six weeks, or becomes legally insane, and goes mad, as it were, by Act of Parliament. But these trades are as eccentric as comets; nay, worse, for no one can calculate on the recurrence of the strange appearances which betoken the disease. Moreover, the contagion is general, and the quickness with which it diffuses itself, almost incredible.

We will cite two or three cases in illustration of our meaning. Six or eight years ago, the epidemic began to display itself among the linen-drapers and haberdashers. The primary symptoms were an inordinate love of plate-glass, and a passion for gas-lights and gilding. The disease gradually progressed, and at last attained a fearful height. Quiet, dusty old shops in different parts of town, were pulled down; spacious premises with stuccoed fronts and gold letters, were erected instead; floors were covered with Turkey carpets; roofs supported by massive pillars; doors knocked into windows; a dozen squares of glass into one; one shopman into a dozen; and there is no knowing what would have been done, if it had not been fortunately discovered, just in time, that the Commissioners of Bankruptcy were as competent to decide such cases as the Commissioners of Lunacy, and that a little confinement and gentle examination did wonders. The disease abated. It died away. A year or two of comparative tranquillity ensued. Suddenly it burst out again amongst the chemists; the symptoms were the same, with the addition of a strong desire to stick the royal arms over the shop-door, and a great rage for mahogany, varnish, and expensive floor-cloth. Then, the hosiers were infected, and began to pull down their shop-fronts with frantic recklessness. The mania again died away, and the public began to congratulate themselves on its entire disappearance, when it burst forth with tenfold violence among the publicans, and keepers of 'wine vaults.' From that moment it has spread among them with unprecedented rapidity, exhibiting a concatenation of all the previous symptoms; onward it has rushed to every part of town, knocking down all the old public-houses, and depositing splendid mansions, stone balustrades, rosewood fittings, immense lamps, and illuminated clocks, at the corner of every street.

The extensive scale on which these places are established, and the ostentatious manner in which the business of even the smallest among them is divided into branches, is amusing. A handsome plate of ground glass in one door directs you 'To the Counting-house;' another to the 'Bottle Department; a third to the 'Wholesale Department;' a fourth to 'The Wine Promenade;' and so forth, until we are in daily expectation of meeting with a 'Brandy Bell,' or a 'Whiskey Entrance.' Then, ingenuity is exhausted in devising attractive titles for the different descriptions of gin; and the dram-drinking portion of the community as they gaze upon the gigantic black and white announcements, which are only to be equalled in size by the figures beneath them, are left in a state of pleasing hesitation between 'The Cream of the Valley,' 'The Out and Out,' 'The No Mistake,' 'The Good for Mixing,' 'The real Knock-me-down,' 'The celebrated Butter Gin,' 'The regular Flare-up,' and a dozen other, equally inviting and wholesome *liqueurs*. Although places of this description are to be met with in every second street, they are invariably numerous and splendid in precise proportion to the dirt and poverty of the surrounding neighbourhood. The gin-shops in and near Drury-Lane, Holborn, St. Giles's, Covent-garden, and Clare-market, are the handsomest in London. There is more of filth and squalid misery near those great thorough-fares than in any part of this mighty city.

We will endeavour to sketch the bar of a large gin-shop, and its ordinary customers, for the edification of such of our readers as may not have had opportunities of observing such scenes; and on the chance of finding one well suited to our purpose, we will make for Drury-Lane, through the narrow streets and dirty courts which divide it from Oxford-street, and that classical spot adjoining the brewery at the bottom of Tottenham-court-road, best known to the initiated as the 'Rookery.'

The filthy and miserable appearance of this part of London can hardly be imagined by those (and there are many such) who have not witnessed it. Wretched houses with broken windows patched with rags and paper: every room let out to a different family, and in many instances to two or even three—fruit and 'sweet-stuff' manufacturers in the cellars, barbers and red-herring vendors in the front parlours, cobblers in the back; a bird-fancier in the first floor, three families on the second, starvation in the attics, Irishmen in the passage, a 'musician' in the front kitchen, and a charwoman and five hungry children in the back one—filth everywhere—a gutter before the houses and a drain behind—clothes drying and slops emptying, from the windows; girls of fourteen or fifteen, with matted hair, walking about barefoot, and in white great-coats, almost their only covering; boys of all ages, in coats of all sizes and no coats at all; men and women, in every variety of scanty and dirty apparel, lounging, scolding, drinking, smoking, squabbling, fighting, and swearing.

You turn the corner. What a change! All is light and brilliancy. The hum of many voices issues from that splendid gin-shop which forms the commencement of the two streets opposite; and the gay building with the fantastically ornamented parapet, the illuminated clock, the plate-glass windows surrounded by stucco rosettes, and its profusion of gas-lights in richly-gilt burners, is perfectly dazzling when contrasted with the darkness and dirt we have just left. The interior is even gayer than the exterior. A bar of French-polished mahogany, elegantly carved, extends the whole width of the place; and there are two side-aisles of great casks, painted green and gold, enclosed within a light brass rail, and bearing such inscriptions, as 'Old Tom, 549;' 'Young Tom, 360;' 'Samson, 1421'—the figures agreeing, we presume, with 'gallons,' understood. Beyond the bar is a lofty and spacious saloon, full of the same enticing vessels, with a gallery running round it, equally well furnished. On the counter, in addition to the usual spirit apparatus, are two or three little baskets of cakes and biscuits, which are carefully secured at top with wicker-work, to prevent their contents being unlawfully abstracted. Behind it, are two showily-dressed damsels with large necklaces, dispensing the spirits and ‘compounds.’ They are assisted by the ostensible proprietor of the concern, a stout, coarse fellow in a fur cap, put on very much on one side to give him a knowing air, and to display his sandy whiskers to the best advantage.

The two old washerwomen, who are seated on the little bench to the left of the bar, are rather overcome by the head-dresses and haughty demeanour of the young ladies who officiate. They receive their half-quartern of gin and peppermint, with considerable deference, prefacing a request for ‘one of them soft biscuits,’ with a ‘Jist be good enough, ma’am.’ They are quite astonished at the impudent air of the young fellow in a brown coat and bright buttons, who, ushering in his two companions, and walking up to the bar in as careless a manner as if he had been used to green and gold ornaments all his life, winks at one of the young ladies with singular coolness, and calls for a ‘kervorten and a three-out-glass,’ just as if the place were his own. ‘Gin for you, sir?’ says the young lady when she has drawn it: carefully looking every way but the right one, to show that the wink had no effect upon her. ‘For me, Mary, my dear,’ replies the gentleman in brown. ‘My name an’t Mary as it happens,’ says the young girl, rather relaxing as she delivers the change. ‘Well, if it an’t, it ought to be,’ responds the irresistible one; ‘all the Marys as ever *I* see, was handsome gals.’ Here the young lady, not precisely remembering how blushes are managed in such cases, abruptly ends the flirtation by addressing the female in the faded feathers who has just entered, and who, after stating explicitly, to prevent any subsequent misunderstanding, that ‘this gentleman pays,’ calls for ‘a glass of port wine and a bit of sugar.’

Those two old men who came in ‘just to have a drain,’ finished their third quartern a few seconds ago; they have made themselves crying drunk; and the fat comfortable-looking elderly women, who had ‘a glass of rum-srub’ each, having chimed in with their complaints on the hardness of the times, one of the women has agreed to stand a glass round, jocularly observing that ‘grief never mended no broken bones, and as good people’s wery scarce, what I says is, make the most on ’em, and that’s all about it!’ a sentiment which appears to afford unlimited satisfaction to those who have nothing to pay.

It is growing late, and the throng of men, women, and children, who have been constantly going in and out, dwindles down to two or three occasional stragglers—cold, wretched-looking creatures, in the last stage of emaciation and disease. The knot of Irish labourers at the lower end of the place, who have been alternately shaking hands with, and threatening the life of each other, for the last hour, become furious in their disputes, and finding it impossible to silence one man, who is particularly anxious to adjust the difference, they resort to the expedient of knocking him down and jumping on him afterwards. The man in the fur cap, and the potboy rush out; a scene of riot and confusion ensues; half the Irishmen get shut out, and the other half get shut in; the potboy is knocked among the tubs in no time; the landlord hits everybody, and everybody hits the landlord; the barmaids scream; the police come in; the rest is a confused mixture of arms, legs, staves, torn coats, shouting, and struggling. Some of the party are borne off to the station-house, and the remainder slink home to beat their wives for complaining, and kick the children for daring to be hungry.

We have sketched this subject very slightly, not only because our limits compel us to do so, but because, if it were pursued farther, it would be painful and repulsive. Well-disposed gentlemen, and charitable ladies, would alike turn with coldness and disgust from a description of the drunken besotted men, and wretched broken-down miserable women, who form no inconsiderable portion of the frequenters of these haunts; forgetting, in the pleasant consciousness of their own rectitude, the poverty of the one, and the temptation of the other. Gin-drinking is a great vice in England, but wretchedness and dirt are a greater; and until you improve the homes of the poor, or persuade a half-famished wretch not to seek relief in the temporary oblivion of his own misery, with the pittance which, divided among his family, would furnish a morsel of bread for each, gin-shops will increase in number and splendour. If Temperance Societies would suggest an antidote against hunger, filth, and foul air, or could establish dispensaries for the gratuitous distribution of bottles of Lethe-water, gin-palaces would be numbered among the things that were.

CHAPTER XXIII—THE PAWNBROKER'S SHOP

Of the numerous receptacles for misery and distress with which the streets of London unhappily abound, there are, perhaps, none which present such striking scenes as the pawnbrokers' shops. The very nature and description of these places occasions their being but little known, except to the unfortunate beings whose profligacy or misfortune drives them to seek the temporary relief they offer. The subject may appear, at first sight, to be anything but an inviting one, but we venture on it nevertheless, in the hope that, as far as the limits of our present paper are concerned, it will present nothing to disgust even the most fastidious reader.

There are some pawnbrokers' shops of a very superior description. There are grades in pawning as in everything else, and distinctions must be observed even in poverty. The aristocratic Spanish cloak and the plebeian calico shirt, the silver fork and the flat iron, the muslin cravat and the Belcher neckerchief, would but ill assort together; so, the better sort of pawnbroker calls himself a silver-smith, and decorates his shop with handsome trinkets and expensive jewellery, while the more humble money-lender boldly advertises his calling, and invites observation. It is with pawnbrokers' shops of the latter class, that we have to do. We have selected one for our purpose, and will endeavour to describe it.

The pawnbroker's shop is situated near Drury-Lane, at the corner of a court, which affords a side entrance for the accommodation of such customers as may be desirous of avoiding the observation of the passers-by, or the chance of recognition in the public street. It is a low, dirty-looking, dusty shop, the door of which stands always doubtfully, a little way open: half inviting, half repelling the hesitating visitor, who, if he be as yet uninitiated, examines one of the old garnet brooches in the window for a minute or two with affected eagerness, as if he contemplated making a purchase; and then looking cautiously round to ascertain that no one watches him, hastily slinks in: the door closing of itself after him, to just its former width. The shop front and the window-frames bear evident marks of having been once painted; but, what the colour was originally, or at what date it was probably laid on, are at this remote period questions which may be asked, but cannot be answered. Tradition states that the transparency in the front door, which displays at night three red balls on a blue ground, once bore also, inscribed in graceful waves, the words ‘Money advanced on plate, jewels, wearing apparel, and every description of property,’ but a few illegible hieroglyphics are all that now remain to attest the fact. The plate and jewels would seem to have disappeared, together with the announcement, for the articles of stock, which are displayed in some profusion in the window, do not include any very valuable luxuries of either kind. A few old china cups; some modern vases, adorned with paltry paintings of three Spanish cavaliers playing three Spanish guitars; or a party of boors carousing: each boor with one leg painfully elevated in the air, by way of expressing his perfect freedom and gaiety; several sets of chessmen, two or three flutes, a few fiddles, a round-eyed portrait staring in astonishment from a very dark ground; some gaudily-bound prayer-books and testaments, two rows of silver watches quite as clumsy and almost as large as Ferguson’s first; numerous old-fashioned table and tea spoons, displayed, fan-like, in half-dozens; strings of coral with great broad gilt snaps; cards of rings and brooches, fastened and labelled separately, like the insects in the British Museum; cheap silver penholders and snuff-boxes, with a masonic star, complete the jewellery department; while five or six beds in smeary clouded ticks, strings of blankets and sheets, silk and cotton handkerchiefs, and wearing apparel of every description, form the more useful, though even less ornamental, part, of the articles exposed for sale. An extensive collection of planes, chisels, saws, and other carpenters’ tools, which have been pledged, and never redeemed, form the foreground of the picture; while the large frames full of ticketed bundles, which are dimly seen through the dirty casement up-stairs—the squalid neighbourhood—the adjoining houses, straggling, shrunken, and rotten, with one or two filthy, unwholesome-looking heads thrust out of every window, and old red pans and stunted plants exposed on the tottering parapets, to the manifest hazard of the heads of the passers-by—the noisy men loitering under the archway at the corner of the court, or about the gin-shop next door—and their wives patiently standing on the curb-stone, with large baskets of cheap vegetables slung round them for sale, are its immediate auxiliaries.

If the outside of the pawnbroker’s shop be calculated to attract the attention, or excite the interest, of the speculative pedestrian, its interior cannot fail to produce the same effect in an increased degree. The front door, which we have before noticed, opens into the common shop, which is the resort of all those customers whose habitual acquaintance with such scenes renders them indifferent to the observation of their companions in poverty. The side door opens into a small passage from which some half-dozen doors (which may be secured on the inside by bolts) open into a corresponding number of little dens, or closets, which face the counter. Here, the more timid or respectable portion of the crowd shroud themselves from the notice of the remainder, and patiently wait until the gentleman behind the counter, with the curly black hair, diamond ring, and double silver watch-guard, shall feel disposed to favour them with his notice—a consummation which depends considerably on the temper of the aforesaid gentleman for the time being.

At the present moment, this elegantly-attired individual is in the act of entering the duplicate he has just made out, in a thick book: a process from which he is diverted occasionally, by a conversation he is carrying on with another young man similarly employed at a little distance from him, whose allusions to 'that last bottle of soda-water last night,' and 'how regularly round my hat he felt himself when the young 'ooman gave 'em in charge,' would appear to refer to the consequences of some stolen joviality of the preceding evening. The customers generally, however, seem unable to participate in the amusement derivable from this source, for an old sallow-looking woman, who has been leaning with both arms on the counter with a small bundle before her, for half an hour previously, suddenly interrupts the conversation by addressing the jewelled shopman—'Now, Mr. Henry, do make haste, there's a good soul, for my two grandchildren's locked up at home, and I'm afeer'd of the fire.' The shopman slightly raises his head, with an air of deep abstraction, and resumes his entry with as much deliberation as if he were engraving. 'You're in a hurry, Mrs. Tatham, this ev'nin', an't you?' is the only notice he deigns to take, after the lapse of five minutes or so. 'Yes, I am indeed, Mr. Henry; now, do serve me next, there's a good creetur. I wouldn't worry you, only it's all along o' them botherin' children.' 'What have you got here?' inquires the shopman, unpinning the bundle—'old concern, I suppose—pair o' stays and a petticut. You must look up somethin' else, old 'ooman; I can't lend you anything more upon them; they're completely worn out by this time, if it's only by putting in, and taking out again, three times a week.' 'Oh! you're a rum un, you are,' replies the old woman, laughing extremely, as in duty bound; 'I wish I'd got the gift of the gab like you; see if I'd be up the spout so often then! No, no; it an't the petticut; it's a child's frock and a beautiful silk ankecher, as belongs to my husband. He gave four shillin' for it, the werry same blessed day as he broke his arm.'—'What do you want upon these?' inquires Mr. Henry, slightly glancing at the articles, which in all probability are old acquaintances. 'What do you want upon these?'—'Eighteenpence.'—'Lend you ninepence.'—'Oh, make it a shillin'; there's a dear—do now?'—'Not another farden.'—'Well, I suppose I must take it.' The duplicate is made out, one ticket pinned on the parcel, the other given to the old woman; the parcel is flung carelessly down into a corner, and some other customer prefers his claim to be served without further delay.

The choice falls on an unshaven, dirty, sottish-looking fellow, whose tarnished paper-cap, stuck negligently over one eye, communicates an additionally repulsive expression to his very uninviting countenance. He was enjoying a little relaxation from his sedentary pursuits a quarter of an hour ago, in kicking his wife up the court. He has come to redeem some tools:—probably to complete a job with, on account of which he has already received some money, if his inflamed countenance and drunken staggers may be taken as evidence of the fact. Having waited some little time, he makes his presence known by venting his ill-humour on a ragged urchin, who, being unable to bring his face on a level with the counter by any other process, has employed himself in climbing up, and then hooking himself on with his elbows—an uneasy perch, from which he has fallen at intervals, generally alighting on the toes of the person in his immediate vicinity. In the present case, the unfortunate little wretch has received a cuff which sends him reeling to this door; and the donor of the blow is immediately the object of general indignation.

'What do you strike the boy for, you brute?' exclaims a slipshod woman, with two flat irons in a little basket. 'Do you think he's your wife, you willin?' 'Go and hang yourself!' replies the gentleman addressed, with a drunken look of savage stupidity, aiming at the same time a blow at the woman which fortunately misses its object. 'Go and hang yourself; and wait till I come and cut you down.'—'Cut you down,' rejoins the woman, 'I wish I had the cutting of you up, you wagabond! (loud.) Oh! you precious wagabond! (rather louder.) Where's your wife, you willin? (louder still; women of this class are always sympathetic, and work themselves into a tremendous passion on the shortest notice.) Your poor dear wife as you uses worser nor a dog—strike a woman—you a man! (very shrill;) I wish I had you—I'd murder you, I would, if I died for it!'—'Now be civil,' retorts the man fiercely. 'Be civil, you wiper!' ejaculates the woman contemptuously. 'An't it shocking?' she continues, turning round, and appealing to an old woman who is peeping out of one of the little closets we have before described, and who has not the slightest objection to join in the attack, possessing, as she does, the comfortable conviction that she is bolted in. 'Ain't it shocking, ma'am? (Dreadful! says the old woman in a parenthesis, not exactly knowing what the question refers to.) He's got a wife, ma'am, as takes in mangling, and is as 'dustrious and hard-working a young 'ooman as can be, (very fast) as lives in the back parlour of our 'ous, which my husband and me lives in the front one (with great rapidity)—and we hears him a beaten' on her sometimes when he comes home drunk, the whole night through, and not only a beaten' her, but beaten' his own child too, to make her more miserable—ugh, you beast! and she, poor creater, won't swear the peace agin him, nor do nothin', because she likes the wretch arter all—worse luck!' Here, as the woman has completely run herself out of breath, the pawnbroker himself, who has just appeared behind the counter in a gray dressing-gown, embraces the favourable opportunity of putting in a word:—'Now I won't have none of this sort of thing on my premises!' he interposes with an air of authority. 'Mrs. Mackin, keep yourself to yourself, or you don't get fourpence for a flat iron here; and Jinkins, you leave your ticket here till you're sober, and send your wife for them two planes, for I won't have you in my shop at no price; so make yourself scarce, before I make you scarcer.'

This eloquent address produces anything but the effect desired; the women rail in concert; the man hits about him in all directions, and is in the act of establishing an indisputable claim to gratuitous lodgings for the night, when the entrance of his wife, a wretched, worn-out woman, apparently in the last stage of consumption, whose face bears evident marks of recent ill-usage, and whose strength seems hardly equal to the burden—light enough, God knows!—of the thin, sickly child she carries in her arms, turns his cowardly rage in a safer direction. 'Come home, dear,' cries the miserable creature, in an imploring tone; '*do* come home, there's a good fellow, and go to bed.'—'Go home yourself,' rejoins the furious ruffian. 'Do come home quietly,' repeats the wife, bursting into tears. 'Go home yourself,' retorts the husband again, enforcing his argument by a blow which sends the poor creature flying out of the shop. Her ‘natural protector’ follows her up the court, alternately venting his rage in accelerating her progress, and in knocking the little scanty blue bonnet of the unfortunate child over its still more scanty and faded-looking face.

In the last box, which is situated in the darkest and most obscure corner of the shop, considerably removed from either of the gas-lights, are a young delicate girl of about twenty, and an elderly female, evidently her mother from the resemblance between them, who stand at some distance back, as if to avoid the observation even of the shopman. It is not their first visit to a pawnbroker’s shop, for they answer without a moment’s hesitation the usual questions, put in a rather respectful manner, and in a much lower tone than usual, of ‘What name shall I say?—Your own property, of course?—Where do you live?—Housekeeper or lodger?’ They bargain, too, for a higher loan than the shopman is at first inclined to offer, which a perfect stranger would be little disposed to do; and the elder female urges her daughter on, in scarcely audible whispers, to exert her utmost powers of persuasion to obtain an advance of the sum, and expatiate on the value of the articles they have brought to raise a present supply upon. They are a small gold chain and a ‘Forget me not’ ring: the girl’s property, for they are both too small for the mother; given her in better times; prized, perhaps, once, for the giver’s sake, but parted with now without a struggle; for want has hardened the mother, and her example has hardened the girl, and the prospect of receiving money, coupled with a recollection of the misery they have both endured from the want of it—the coldness of old friends—the stern refusal of some, and the still more galling compassion of others—appears to have obliterated the consciousness of self-humiliation, which the idea of their present situation would once have aroused.

In the next box, is a young female, whose attire, miserably poor, but extremely gaudy, wretchedly cold, but extravagantly fine, too plainly bespeaks her station. The rich satin gown with its faded trimmings, the worn-out thin shoes, and pink silk stockings, the summer bonnet in winter, and the sunken face, where a daub of rouge only serves as an index to the ravages of squandered health never to be regained, and lost happiness never to be restored, and where the practised smile is a wretched mockery of the misery of the heart, cannot be mistaken. There is something in the glimpse she has just caught of her young neighbour, and in the sight of the little trinkets she has offered in pawn, that seems to have awakened in this woman's mind some slumbering recollection, and to have changed, for an instant, her whole demeanour. Her first hasty impulse was to bend forward as if to scan more minutely the appearance of her half-concealed companions; her next, on seeing them involuntarily shrink from her, to retreat to the back of the box, cover her face with her hands, and burst into tears.

There are strange chords in the human heart, which will lie dormant through years of depravity and wickedness, but which will vibrate at last to some slight circumstance apparently trivial in itself, but connected by some undefined and indistinct association, with past days that can never be recalled, and with bitter recollections from which the most degraded creature in existence cannot escape.

There has been another spectator, in the person of a woman in the common shop; the lowest of the low; dirty, unbonneted, flaunting, and slovenly. Her curiosity was at first attracted by the little she could see of the group; then her attention. The half-intoxicated leer changed to an expression of something like interest, and a feeling similar to that we have described, appeared for a moment, and only a moment, to extend itself even to her bosom.

Who shall say how soon these women may change places? The last has but two more stages—the hospital and the grave. How many females situated as her two companions are, and as she may have been once, have terminated the same wretched course, in the same wretched manner! One is already tracing her footsteps with frightful rapidity. How soon may the other follow her example! How many have done the same!

CHAPTER XXIV—CRIMINAL COURTS

We shall never forget the mingled feelings of awe and respect with which we used to gaze on the exterior of Newgate in our schoolboy days. How dreadful its rough heavy walls, and low massive doors, appeared to us—the latter looking as if they were made for the express purpose of letting people in, and never letting them out again. Then the fetters over the debtors' door, which we used to think were a *bonâ fide* set of irons, just hung up there, for convenience' sake, ready to be taken down at a moment's notice, and riveted on the limbs of some refractory felon! We were never tired of wondering how the hackney-coachmen on the opposite stand could cut jokes in the presence of such horrors, and drink pots of half-and-half so near the last drop.

Often have we strayed here, in sessions time, to catch a glimpse of the whipping-place, and that dark building on one side of the yard, in which is kept the gibbet with all its dreadful apparatus, and on the door of which we half expected to see a brass plate, with the inscription ‘Mr. Ketch;’ for we never imagined that the distinguished functionary could by possibility live anywhere else! The days of these childish dreams have passed away, and with them many other boyish ideas of a gayer nature. But we still retain so much of our original feeling, that to this hour we never pass the building without something like a shudder.

What London pedestrian is there who has not, at some time or other, cast a hurried glance through the wicket at which prisoners are admitted into this gloomy mansion, and surveyed the few objects he could discern, with an indescribable feeling of curiosity? The thick door, plated with iron and mounted with spikes, just low enough to enable you to see, leaning over them, an ill-looking fellow, in a broad-brimmed hat, Belcher handkerchief and top-boots: with a brown coat, something between a great-coat and a ‘sporting’ jacket, on his back, and an immense key in his left hand. Perhaps you are lucky enough to pass, just as the gate is being opened; then, you see on the other side of the lodge, another gate, the image of its predecessor, and two or three more turnkeys, who look like multiplications of the first one, seated round a fire which just lights up the whitewashed apartment sufficiently to enable you to catch a hasty glimpse of these different objects. We have a great respect for Mrs. Fry, but she certainly ought to have written more romances than Mrs. Radcliffe.

We were walking leisurely down the Old Bailey, some time ago, when, as we passed this identical gate, it was opened by the officiating turnkey. We turned quickly round, as a matter of course, and saw two persons descending the steps. We could not help stopping and observing them.

They were an elderly woman, of decent appearance, though evidently poor, and a boy of about fourteen or fifteen. The woman was crying bitterly; she carried a small bundle in her hand, and the boy followed at a short distance behind her. Their little history was obvious. The boy was her son, to whose early comfort she had perhaps sacrificed her own—for whose sake she had borne misery without repining, and poverty without a murmur—looking steadily forward to the time, when he who had so long witnessed her struggles for himself, might be enabled to make some exertions for their joint support. He had formed dissolute connexions; idleness had led to crime; and he had been committed to take his trial for some petty theft. He had been long in prison, and, after receiving some trifling additional punishment, had been ordered to be discharged that morning. It was his first offence, and his poor old mother, still hoping to reclaim him, had been waiting at the gate to implore him to return home.

We cannot forget the boy; he descended the steps with a dogged look, shaking his head with an air of bravado and obstinate determination. They walked a few paces, and paused. The woman put her hand upon his shoulder in an agony of entreaty, and the boy sullenly raised his head as if in refusal. It was a brilliant morning, and every object looked fresh and happy in the broad, gay sunlight; he gazed round him for a few moments, bewildered with the brightness of the scene, for it was long since he had beheld anything save the gloomy walls of a prison. Perhaps the wretchedness of his mother made some impression on the boy's heart; perhaps some undefined recollection of the time when he was a happy child, and she his only friend, and best companion, crowded on him—he burst into tears; and covering his face with one hand, and hurriedly placing the other in his mother's, walked away with her.

Curiosity has occasionally led us into both Courts at the Old Bailey. Nothing is so likely to strike the person who enters them for the first time, as the calm indifference with which the proceedings are conducted; every trial seems a mere matter of business. There is a great deal of form, but no compassion; considerable interest, but no sympathy. Take the Old Court for example. There sit the judges, with whose great dignity everybody is acquainted, and of whom therefore we need say no more. Then, there is the Lord Mayor in the centre, looking as cool as a Lord Mayor *can* look, with an immense *bouquet* before him, and habited in all the splendour of his office. Then, there are the Sheriffs, who are almost as dignified as the Lord Mayor himself; and the Barristers, who are quite dignified enough in their own opinion; and the spectators, who having paid for their admission, look upon the whole scene as if it were got up especially for their amusement. Look upon the whole group in the body of the Court—some wholly engrossed in the morning papers, others carelessly conversing in low whispers, and others, again, quietly dozing away an hour—and you can scarcely believe that the result of the trial is a matter of life or death to one wretched being present. But turn your eyes to the dock; watch the prisoner attentively for a few moments; and the fact is before you, in all its painful reality. Mark how restlessly he has been engaged for the last ten minutes, in forming all sorts of fantastic figures with the herbs which are strewed upon the ledge before him; observe the ashy paleness of his face when a particular witness appears, and how he changes his position and wipes his clammy forehead, and feverish hands, when the case for the prosecution is closed, as if it were a relief to him to feel that the jury knew the worst.

The defence is concluded; the judge proceeds to sum up the evidence; and the prisoner watches the countenances of the jury, as a dying man, clinging to life to the very last, vainly looks in the face of his physician for a slight ray of hope. They turn round to consult; you can almost hear the man’s heart beat, as he bites the stalk of rosemary, with a desperate effort to appear composed. They resume their places—a dead silence prevails as the foreman delivers in the verdict—‘Guilty!’ A shriek bursts from a female in the gallery; the prisoner casts one look at the quarter from whence the noise proceeded; and is immediately hurried from the dock by the gaoler. The clerk directs one of the officers of the Court to ‘take the woman out,’ and fresh business is proceeded with, as if nothing had occurred.

No imaginary contrast to a case like this, could be as complete as that which is constantly presented in the New Court, the gravity of which is frequently disturbed in no small degree, by the cunning and pertinacity of juvenile offenders. A boy of thirteen is tried, say for picking the pocket of some subject of her Majesty, and the offence is about as clearly proved as an offence can be. He is called upon for his defence, and contents himself with a little declamation about the jurymen and his country—asserts that all the witnesses have committed perjury, and hints that the police force generally have entered into a conspiracy ‘again’ him. However probable this statement may be, it fails to convince the Court, and some such scene as the following then takes place:

Court: Have you any witnesses to speak to your character, boy?

Boy: Yes, my Lord; fifteen gen’lm’n is a vaten outside, and vos a vaten all day yesterday, vich they told me the night afore my trial vos a comin’ on.

Court. Inquire for these witnesses.

Here, a stout beadle runs out, and vociferates for the witnesses at the very top of his voice; for you hear his cry grow fainter and fainter as he descends the steps into the court-yard below. After an absence of five minutes, he returns, very warm and hoarse, and informs the Court of what it knew perfectly well before—namely, that there are no such witnesses in attendance. Hereupon, the boy sets up a most awful howling; screws the lower part of the palms of his hands into the corners of his eyes; and endeavours to look the picture of injured innocence. The jury at once find him 'guilty,' and his endeavours to squeeze out a tear or two are redoubled. The governor of the gaol then states, in reply to an inquiry from the bench, that the prisoner has been under his care twice before. This the urchin resolutely denies in some such terms as—'S'elp me, gen'lm'n, I never vos in trouble afore—indeed, my Lord, I never vos. It's all a howen to my having a twin brother, vich has wrongfully got into trouble, and vich is so exactly like me, that no vun ever knows the difference atween us.'

This representation, like the defence, fails in producing the desired effect, and the boy is sentenced, perhaps, to seven years' transportation. Finding it impossible to excite compassion, he gives vent to his feelings in an imprecation bearing reference to the eyes of 'old big vig!' and as he declines to take the trouble of walking from the dock, is forthwith carried out, congratulating himself on having succeeded in giving everybody as much trouble as possible.

CHAPTER XXV—A VISIT TO NEWGATE

'The force of habit' is a trite phrase in everybody's mouth; and it is not a little remarkable that those who use it most as applied to others, unconsciously afford in their own persons singular examples of the power which habit and custom exercise over the minds of men, and of the little reflection they are apt to bestow on subjects with which every day's experience has rendered them familiar. If Bedlam could be suddenly removed like another Aladdin's palace, and set down on the space now occupied by Newgate, scarcely one man out of a hundred, whose road to business every morning lies through Newgate-street, or the Old Bailey, would pass the building without bestowing a hasty glance on its small, grated windows, and a transient thought upon the condition of the unhappy beings immured in its dismal cells; and yet these same men, day by day, and hour by hour, pass and repass this gloomy depository of the guilt and misery of London, in one perpetual stream of life and bustle, utterly unmindful of the throng of wretched creatures pent up within it—nay, not even knowing, or if they do, not heeding, the fact, that as they pass one particular angle of the massive wall with a light laugh or a merry whistle, they stand within one yard of a fellow-creature, bound and helpless, whose hours are numbered, from whom the last feeble ray of hope has fled for ever, and whose miserable career will shortly terminate in a violent and shameful death. Contact with death even in its least terrible shape, is solemn and appalling. How much more awful is it to reflect on this near vicinity to the dying—to men in full health and vigour, in the flower of youth or the prime of life, with all their faculties and perceptions as acute and perfect as your own; but dying, nevertheless—dying as surely—with the hand of death imprinted upon them as indelibly—as if mortal disease had wasted their frames to shadows, and corruption had already begun!

It was with some such thoughts as these that we determined, not many weeks since, to visit the interior of Newgate—in an amateur capacity, of course; and, having carried our intention into effect, we proceed to lay its results before our readers, in the hope—founded more upon the nature of the subject, than on any presumptuous confidence in our own descriptive powers—that this paper may not be found wholly devoid of interest. We have only to premise, that we do not intend to fatigue the reader with any statistical accounts of the prison; they will be found at length in numerous reports of numerous committees, and a variety of authorities of equal weight. We took no notes, made no memoranda, measured none of the yards, ascertained the exact number of inches in no particular room: are unable even to report of how many apartments the gaol is composed.

We saw the prison, and saw the prisoners; and what we did see, and what we thought, we will tell at once in our own way.

Having delivered our credentials to the servant who answered our knock at the door of the governor’s house, we were ushered into the ‘office;’ a little room, on the right-hand side as you enter, with two windows looking into the Old Bailey: fitted up like an ordinary attorney’s office, or merchant’s counting-house, with the usual fixtures—a wainscoted partition, a shelf or two, a desk, a couple of stools, a pair of clerks, an almanack, a clock, and a few maps. After a little delay, occasioned by sending into the interior of the prison for the officer whose duty it was to conduct us, that functionary arrived; a respectable-looking man of about two or three and fifty, in a broad-brimmed hat, and full suit of black, who, but for his keys, would have looked quite as much like a clergyman as a turnkey. We were disappointed; he had not even top-boots on. Following our conductor by a door opposite to that at which we had entered, we arrived at a small room, without any other furniture than a little desk, with a book for visitors' autographs, and a shelf, on which were a few boxes for papers, and casts of the heads and faces of the two notorious murderers, Bishop and Williams; the former, in particular, exhibiting a style of head and set of features, which might have afforded sufficient moral grounds for his instant execution at any time, even had there been no other evidence against him. Leaving this room also, by an opposite door, we found ourself in the lodge which opens on the Old Bailey; one side of which is plentifully garnished with a choice collection of heavy sets of irons, including those worn by the redoubtable Jack Sheppard—genuine; and those *said* to have been graced by the sturdy limbs of the no less celebrated Dick Turpin—doubtful. From this lodge, a heavy oaken gate, bound with iron, studded with nails of the same material, and guarded by another turnkey, opens on a few steps, if we remember right, which terminate in a narrow and dismal stone passage, running parallel with the Old Bailey, and leading to the different yards, through a number of tortuous and intricate windings, guarded in their turn by huge gates and gratings, whose appearance is sufficient to dispel at once the slightest hope of escape that any new-comer may have entertained; and the very recollection of which, on eventually traversing the place again, involves one in a maze of confusion.

It is necessary to explain here, that the buildings in the prison, or in other words the different wards—form a square, of which the four sides abut respectively on the Old Bailey, the old College of Physicians (now forming a part of Newgate-market), the Sessions-house, and Newgate-street. The intermediate space is divided into several paved yards, in which the prisoners take such air and exercise as can be had in such a place. These yards, with the exception of that in which prisoners under sentence of death are confined (of which we shall presently give a more detailed description), run parallel with Newgate-street, and consequently from the Old Bailey, as it were, to Newgate-market. The women's side is in the right wing of the prison nearest the Sessions-house. As we were introduced into this part of the building first, we will adopt the same order, and introduce our readers to it also.

Turning to the right, then, down the passage to which we just now adverted, omitting any mention of intervening gates—for if we noticed every gate that was unlocked for us to pass through, and locked again as soon as we had passed, we should require a gate at every comma—we came to a door composed of thick bars of wood, through which were discernible, passing to and fro in a narrow yard, some twenty women: the majority of whom, however, as soon as they were aware of the presence of strangers, retreated to their wards. One side of this yard is railed off at a considerable distance, and formed into a kind of iron cage, about five feet ten inches in height, roofed at the top, and defended in front by iron bars, from which the friends of the female prisoners communicate with them. In one corner of this singular-looking den, was a yellow, haggard, decrepit old woman, in a tattered gown that had once been black, and the remains of an old straw bonnet, with faded ribbon of the same hue, in earnest conversation with a young girl—a prisoner, of course—of about two-and-twenty. It is impossible to imagine a more poverty-stricken object, or a creature so borne down in soul and body, by excess of misery and destitution, as the old woman. The girl was a good-looking, robust female, with a profusion of hair streaming about in the wind—for she had no bonnet on—and a man's silk pocket-handkerchief loosely thrown over a most ample pair of shoulders. The old woman was talking in that low, stifled tone of voice which tells so forcibly of mental anguish; and every now and then burst into an irrepressible sharp, abrupt cry of grief, the most distressing sound that ears can hear. The girl was perfectly unmoved. Hardened beyond all hope of redemption, she listened doggedly to her mother's entreaties, whatever they were: and, beyond inquiring after 'Jem,' and eagerly catching at the few halfpence her miserable parent had brought her, took no more apparent interest in the conversation than the most unconcerned spectators. Heaven knows there were enough of them, in the persons of the other prisoners in the yard, who were no more concerned by what was passing before their eyes, and within their hearing, than if they were blind and deaf. Why should they be? Inside the prison, and out, such scenes were too familiar to them, to excite even a passing thought, unless of ridicule or contempt for feelings which they had long since forgotten.

A little farther on, a squalid-looking woman in a slovenly, thick-bordered cap, with her arms muffled in a large red shawl, the fringed ends of which straggled nearly to the bottom of a dirty white apron, was communicating some instructions to *her* visitor—her daughter evidently. The girl was thinly clad, and shaking with the cold. Some ordinary word of recognition passed between her and her mother when she appeared at the grating, but neither hope, condolence, regret, nor affection was expressed on either side. The mother whispered her instructions, and the girl received them with her pinched-up, half-starved features twisted into an expression of careful cunning. It was some scheme for the woman's defence that she was disclosing, perhaps; and a sullen smile came over the girl's face for an instant, as if she were pleased: not so much at the probability of her mother's liberation, as at the chance of her 'getting off' in spite of her prosecutors. The dialogue was soon concluded; and with the same careless indifference with which they had approached each other, the mother turned towards the inner end of the yard, and the girl to the gate at which she had entered.

The girl belonged to a class—unhappily but too extensive—the very existence of which, should make men's hearts bleed. Barely past her childhood, it required but a glance to discover that she was one of those children, born and bred in neglect and vice, who have never known what childhood is: who have never been taught to love and court a parent's smile, or to dread a parent's frown. The thousand nameless endearments of childhood, its gaiety and its innocence, are alike unknown to them. They have entered at once upon the stern realities and miseries of life, and to their better nature it is almost hopeless to appeal in after-times, by any of the references which will awaken, if it be only for a moment, some good feeling in ordinary bosoms, however corrupt they may have become. Talk to *them* of parental solicitude, the happy days of childhood, and the merry games of infancy! Tell them of hunger and the streets, beggary and stripes, the gin-shop, the station-house, and the pawnbroker's, and they will understand you.

Two or three women were standing at different parts of the grating, conversing with their friends, but a very large proportion of the prisoners appeared to have no friends at all, beyond such of their old companions as might happen to be within the walls. So, passing hastily down the yard, and pausing only for an instant to notice the little incidents we have just recorded, we were conducted up a clean and well-lighted flight of stone stairs to one of the wards. There are several in this part of the building, but a description of one is a description of the whole.

It was a spacious, bare, whitewashed apartment, lighted, of course, by windows looking into the interior of the prison, but far more light and airy than one could reasonably expect to find in such a situation. There was a large fire with a deal table before it, round which ten or a dozen women were seated on wooden forms at dinner. Along both sides of the room ran a shelf; below it, at regular intervals, a row of large hooks were fixed in the wall, on each of which was hung the sleeping mat of a prisoner: her rug and blanket being folded up, and placed on the shelf above. At night, these mats are placed on the floor, each beneath the hook on which it hangs during the day; and the ward is thus made to answer the purposes both of a day-room and sleeping apartment. Over the fireplace, was a large sheet of pasteboard, on which were displayed a variety of texts from Scripture, which were also scattered about the room in scraps about the size and shape of the copy-slips which are used in schools. On the table was a sufficient provision of a kind of stewed beef and brown bread, in pewter dishes, which are kept perfectly bright, and displayed on shelves in great order and regularity when they are not in use.

The women rose hastily, on our entrance, and retired in a hurried manner to either side of the fireplace. They were all cleanly—many of them decently—attired, and there was nothing peculiar, either in their appearance or demeanour. One or two resumed the needlework which they had probably laid aside at the commencement of their meal; others gazed at the visitors with listless curiosity; and a few retired behind their companions to the very end of the room, as if desirous to avoid even the casual observation of the strangers. Some old Irish women, both in this and other wards, to whom the thing was no novelty, appeared perfectly indifferent to our presence, and remained standing close to the seats from which they had just risen; but the general feeling among the females seemed to be one of uneasiness during the period of our stay among them: which was very brief. Not a word was uttered during the time of our remaining, unless, indeed, by the wardswoman in reply to some question which we put to the turnkey who accompanied us. In every ward on the female side, a wardswoman is appointed to preserve order, and a similar regulation is adopted among the males. The wardsmen and wardswomen are all prisoners, selected for good conduct. They alone are allowed the privilege of sleeping on bedsteads; a small stump bedstead being placed in every ward for that purpose. On both sides of the gaol, is a small receiving-room, to which prisoners are conducted on their first reception, and whence they cannot be removed until they have been examined by the surgeon of the prison. [161]

Retracing our steps to the dismal passage in which we found ourselves at first (and which, by-the-bye, contains three or four dark cells for the accommodation of refractory prisoners), we were led through a narrow yard to the ‘school’—a portion of the prison set apart for boys under fourteen years of age. In a tolerable-sized room, in which were writing-materials and some copy-books, was the schoolmaster, with a couple of his pupils; the remainder having been fetched from an adjoining apartment, the whole were drawn up in line for our inspection. There were fourteen of them in all, some with shoes, some without; some in pinafores without jackets, others in jackets without pinafores, and one in scarce anything at all. The whole number, without an exception we believe, had been committed for trial on charges of pocket-picking; and fourteen such terrible little faces we never beheld.—There was not one redeeming feature among them—not a glance of honesty—not a wink expressive of anything but the gallows and the hulks, in the whole collection. As to anything like shame or contrition, that was entirely out of the question. They were evidently quite gratified at being thought worth the trouble of looking at; their idea appeared to be, that we had come to see Newgate as a grand affair, and that they were an indispensable part of the show; and every boy as he ‘fell in’ to the line, actually seemed as pleased and important as if he had done something excessively meritorious in getting there at all. We never looked upon a more disagreeable sight, because we never saw fourteen such hopeless creatures of neglect, before.

On either side of the school-yard is a yard for men, in one of which—that towards Newgate-street—prisoners of the more respectable class are confined. Of the other, we have little description to offer, as the different wards necessarily partake of the same character. They are provided, like the wards on the women’s side, with mats and rugs, which are disposed of in the same manner during the day; the only very striking difference between their appearance and that of the wards inhabited by the females, is the utter absence of any employment. Huddled together on two opposite forms, by the fireside, sit twenty men perhaps; here, a boy in livery; there, a man in a rough great-coat and top-boots; farther on, a desperate-looking fellow in his shirt-sleeves, with an old Scotch cap upon his shaggy head; near him again, a tall ruffian, in a smock-frock; next to him, a miserable being of distressed appearance, with his head resting on his hand;—all alike in one respect, all idle and listless. When they do leave the fire, sauntering moodily about, lounging in the window, or leaning against the wall, vacantly swinging their bodies to and fro. With the exception of a man reading an old newspaper, in two or three instances, this was the case in every ward we entered.

The only communication these men have with their friends, is through two close iron gratings, with an intermediate space of about a yard in width between the two, so that nothing can be handed across, nor can the prisoner have any communication by touch with the person who visits him. The married men have a separate grating, at which to see their wives, but its construction is the same.

The prison chapel is situated at the back of the governor's house: the latter having no windows looking into the interior of the prison. Whether the associations connected with the place—the knowledge that here a portion of the burial service is, on some dreadful occasions, performed over the quick and not upon the dead—cast over it a still more gloomy and sombre air than art has imparted to it, we know not, but its appearance is very striking. There is something in a silent and deserted place of worship, solemn and impressive at any time; and the very dissimilarity of this one from any we have been accustomed to, only enhances the impression. The meanness of its appointments—the bare and scanty pulpit, with the paltry painted pillars on either side—the women's gallery with its great heavy curtain—the men's with its unpainted benches and dingy front—the tottering little table at the altar, with the commandments on the wall above it, scarcely legible through lack of paint, and dust and damp—so unlike the velvet and gilding, the marble and wood, of a modern church—are strange and striking. There is one object, too, which rivets the attention and fascinates the gaze, and from which we may turn horror-stricken in vain, for the recollection of it will haunt us, waking and sleeping, for a long time afterwards. Immediately below the reading-desk, on the floor of the chapel, and forming the most conspicuous object in its little area, is *the condemned pew*; a huge black pen, in which the wretched people, who are singled out for death, are placed on the Sunday preceding their execution, in sight of all their fellow-prisoners, from many of whom they may have been separated but a week before, to hear prayers for their own souls, to join in the responses of their own burial service, and to listen to an address, warning their recent companions to take example by their fate, and urging themselves, while there is yet time—nearly four-and-twenty hours—to 'turn, and flee from the wrath to come!' Imagine what have been the feelings of the men whom that fearful pew has enclosed, and of whom, between the gallows and the knife, no mortal remnant may now remain! Think of the hopeless clinging to life to the last, and the wild despair, far exceeding in anguish the felon's death itself, by which they have heard the certainty of their speedy transmission to another world, with all their crimes upon their heads, rung into their ears by the officiating clergyman!

At one time—and at no distant period either—the coffins of the men about to be executed, were placed in that pew, upon the seat by their side, during the whole service. It may seem incredible, but it is true. Let us hope that the increased spirit of civilisation and humanity which abolished this frightful and degrading custom, may extend itself to other usages equally barbarous; usages which have not even the plea of utility in their defence, as every year's experience has shown them to be more and more inefficacious.

Leaving the chapel, descending to the passage so frequently alluded to, and crossing the yard before noticed as being allotted to prisoners of a more respectable description than the generality of men confined here, the visitor arrives at a thick iron gate of great size and strength. Having been admitted through it by the turnkey on duty, he turns sharp round to the left, and pauses before another gate; and, having passed this last barrier, he stands in the most terrible part of this gloomy building—the condemned ward.

The press-yard, well known by name to newspaper readers, from its frequent mention in accounts of executions, is at the corner of the building, and next to the ordinary's house, in Newgate-street: running from Newgate-street, towards the centre of the prison, parallel with Newgate-market. It is a long, narrow court, of which a portion of the wall in Newgate-street forms one end, and the gate the other. At the upper end, on the left hand—that is, adjoining the wall in Newgate-street—is a cistern of water, and at the bottom a double grating (of which the gate itself forms a part) similar to that before described. Through these grates the prisoners are allowed to see their friends; a turnkey always remaining in the vacant space between, during the whole interview. Immediately on the right as you enter, is a building containing the press-room, day-room, and cells; the yard is on every side surrounded by lofty walls guarded by *chevaux de frise*; and the whole is under the constant inspection of vigilant and experienced turnkeys.

In the first apartment into which we were conducted—which was at the top of a staircase, and immediately over the press-room—were five-and-twenty or thirty prisoners, all under sentence of death, awaiting the result of the recorder’s report—men of all ages and appearances, from a hardened old offender with swarthy face and grizzly beard of three days’ growth, to a handsome boy, not fourteen years old, and of singularly youthful appearance even for that age, who had been condemned for burglary. There was nothing remarkable in the appearance of these prisoners. One or two decently-dressed men were brooding with a dejected air over the fire; several little groups of two or three had been engaged in conversation at the upper end of the room, or in the windows; and the remainder were crowded round a young man seated at a table, who appeared to be engaged in teaching the younger ones to write. The room was large, airy, and clean. There was very little anxiety or mental suffering depicted in the countenance of any of the men;—they had all been sentenced to death, it is true, and the recorder’s report had not yet been made; but, we question whether there was a man among them, notwithstanding, who did not *know* that although he had undergone the ceremony, it never was intended that his life should be sacrificed. On the table lay a Testament, but there were no tokens of its having been in recent use.

In the press-room below, were three men, the nature of whose offence rendered it necessary to separate them, even from their companions in guilt. It is a long, sombre room, with two windows sunk into the stone wall, and here the wretched men are pinioned on the morning of their execution, before moving towards the scaffold. The fate of one of these prisoners was uncertain; some mitigatory circumstances having come to light since his trial, which had been humanely represented in the proper quarter. The other two had nothing to expect from the mercy of the crown; their doom was sealed; no plea could be urged in extenuation of their crime, and they well knew that for them there was no hope in this world. ‘The two short ones,’ the turnkey whispered, ‘were dead men.’

The man to whom we have alluded as entertaining some hopes of escape, was lounging, at the greatest distance he could place between himself and his companions, in the window nearest to the door. He was probably aware of our approach, and had assumed an air of courageous indifference; his face was purposely averted towards the window, and he stirred not an inch while we were present. The other two men were at the upper end of the room. One of them, who was imperfectly seen in the dim light, had his back towards us, and was stooping over the fire, with his right arm on the mantel-piece, and his head sunk upon it. The other was leaning on the sill of the farthest window. The light fell full upon him, and communicated to his pale, haggard face, and disordered hair, an appearance which, at that distance, was ghastly. His cheek rested upon his hand; and, with his face a little raised, and his eyes wildly staring before him, he seemed to be unconsciously intent on counting the chinks in the opposite wall. We passed this room again afterwards. The first man was pacing up and down the court with a firm military step—he had been a soldier in the foot-guards—and a cloth cap jauntily thrown on one side of his head. He bowed respectfully to our conductor, and the salute was returned. The other two still remained in the positions we have described, and were as motionless as statues. [165]

A few paces up the yard, and forming a continuation of the building, in which are the two rooms we have just quitted, lie the condemned cells. The entrance is by a narrow and obscure stair-case leading to a dark passage, in which a charcoal stove casts a lurid tint over the objects in its immediate vicinity, and diffuses something like warmth around. From the left-hand side of this passage, the massive door of every cell on the story opens; and from it alone can they be approached. There are three of these passages, and three of these ranges of cells, one above the other; but in size, furniture and appearance, they are all precisely alike. Prior to the recorder’s report being made, all the prisoners under sentence of death are removed from the day-room at five o’clock in the afternoon, and locked up in these cells, where they are allowed a candle until ten o’clock; and here they remain until seven next morning. When the warrant for a prisoner’s execution arrives, he is removed to the cells and confined in one of them until he leaves it for the scaffold. He is at liberty to walk in the yard; but, both in his walks and in his cell, he is constantly attended by a turnkey who never leaves him on any pretence.

We entered the first cell. It was a stone dungeon, eight feet long by six wide, with a bench at the upper end, under which were a common rug, a bible, and prayer-book. An iron candlestick was fixed into the wall at the side; and a small high window in the back admitted as much air and light as could struggle in between a double row of heavy, crossed iron bars. It contained no other furniture of any description.

Conceive the situation of a man, spending his last night on earth in this cell. Buoyed up with some vague and undefined hope of reprieve, he knew not why—indulging in some wild and visionary idea of escaping, he knew not how—hour after hour of the three preceding days allowed him for preparation, has fled with a speed which no man living would deem possible, for none but this dying man can know. He has wearied his friends with entreaties, exhausted the attendants with importunities, neglected in his feverish restlessness the timely warnings of his spiritual consoler; and, now that the illusion is at last dispelled, now that eternity is before him and guilt behind, now that his fears of death amount almost to madness, and an overwhelming sense of his helpless, hopeless state rushes upon him, he is lost and stupefied, and has neither thoughts to turn to, nor power to call upon, the Almighty Being, from whom alone he can seek mercy and forgiveness, and before whom his repentance can alone avail.

Hours have glided by, and still he sits upon the same stone bench with folded arms, heedless alike of the fast decreasing time before him, and the urgent entreaties of the good man at his side. The feeble light is wasting gradually, and the deathlike stillness of the street without, broken only by the rumbling of some passing vehicle which echoes mournfully through the empty yards, warns him that the night is waning fast away. The deep bell of St. Paul’s strikes—one! He heard it; it has roused him. Seven hours left! He paces the narrow limits of his cell with rapid strides, cold drops of terror starting on his forehead, and every muscle of his frame quivering with agony. Seven hours! He suffers himself to be led to his seat, mechanically takes the bible which is placed in his hand, and tries to read and listen. No: his thoughts will wander. The book is torn and soiled by use—and like the book he read his lessons in, at school, just forty years ago! He has never bestowed a thought upon it, perhaps, since he left it as a child: and yet the place, the time, the room—nay, the very boys he played with, crowd as vividly before him as if they were scenes of yesterday; and some forgotten phrase, some childish word, rings in his ears like the echo of one uttered but a minute since. The voice of the clergyman recalls him to himself. He is reading from the sacred book its solemn promises of pardon for repentance, and its awful denunciation of obdurate men. He falls upon his knees and clasps his hands to pray. Hush! what sound was that? He starts upon his feet. It cannot be two yet. Hark! Two quarters have struck;—the third—the fourth. It is! Six hours left. Tell him not of repentance! Six hours' repentance for eight times six years of guilt and sin! He buries his face in his hands, and throws himself on the bench.

Worn with watching and excitement, he sleeps, and the same unsettled state of mind pursues him in his dreams. An insupportable load is taken from his breast; he is walking with his wife in a pleasant field, with the bright sky above them, and a fresh and boundless prospect on every side—how different from the stone walls of Newgate! She is looking—not as she did when he saw her for the last time in that dreadful place, but as she used when he loved her—long, long ago, before misery and ill-treatment had altered her looks, and vice had changed his nature, and she is leaning upon his arm, and looking up into his face with tenderness and affection—and he does *not* strike her now, nor rudely shake her from him. And oh! how glad he is to tell her all he had forgotten in that last hurried interview, and to fall on his knees before her and fervently beseech her pardon for all the unkindness and cruelty that wasted her form and broke her heart! The scene suddenly changes. He is on his trial again: there are the judge and jury, and prosecutors, and witnesses, just as they were before. How full the court is—what a sea of heads—with a gallows, too, and a scaffold—and how all those people stare at *him*! Verdict, 'Guilty.' No matter; he will escape.

The night is dark and cold, the gates have been left open, and in an instant he is in the street, flying from the scene of his imprisonment like the wind. The streets are cleared, the open fields are gained and the broad, wide country lies before him. Onward he dashes in the midst of darkness, over hedge and ditch, through mud and pool, bounding from spot to spot with a speed and lightness, astonishing even to himself. At length he pauses; he must be safe from pursuit now; he will stretch himself on that bank and sleep till sunrise.

A period of unconsciousness succeeds. He wakes, cold and wretched. The dull, gray light of morning is stealing into the cell, and falls upon the form of the attendant turnkey. Confused by his dreams, he starts from his uneasy bed in momentary uncertainty. It is but momentary. Every object in the narrow cell is too frightfully real to admit of doubt or mistake. He is the condemned felon again, guilty and despairing; and in two hours more will be dead.

CHARACTERS

CHAPTER I—THOUGHTS ABOUT PEOPLE

It is strange with how little notice, good, bad, or indifferent, a man may live and die in London. He awakens no sympathy in the breast of any single person; his existence is a matter of interest to no one save himself; he cannot be said to be forgotten when he dies, for no one remembered him when he was alive. There is a numerous class of people in this great metropolis who seem not to possess a single friend, and whom nobody appears to care for. Urged by imperative necessity in the first instance, they have resorted to London in search of employment, and the means of subsistence. It is hard, we know, to break the ties which bind us to our homes and friends, and harder still to efface the thousand recollections of happy days and old times, which have been slumbering in our bosoms for years, and only rush upon the mind, to bring before it associations connected with the friends we have left, the scenes we have beheld too probably for the last time, and the hopes we once cherished, but may entertain no more. These men, however, happily for themselves, have long forgotten such thoughts. Old country friends have died or emigrated; former correspondents have become lost, like themselves, in the crowd and turmoil of some busy city; and they have gradually settled down into mere passive creatures of habit and endurance.

We were seated in the enclosure of St. James's Park the other day, when our attention was attracted by a man whom we immediately put down in our own mind as one of this class. He was a tall, thin, pale person, in a black coat, scanty gray trousers, little pinched-up gaiters, and brown beaver gloves. He had an umbrella in his hand—not for use, for the day was fine—but, evidently, because he always carried one to the office in the morning. He walked up and down before the little patch of grass on which the chairs are placed for hire, not as if he were doing it for pleasure or recreation, but as if it were a matter of compulsion, just as he would walk to the office every morning from the back settlements of Islington. It was Monday; he had escaped for four-and-twenty hours from the thraldom of the desk; and was walking here for exercise and amusement—perhaps for the first time in his life. We were inclined to think he had never had a holiday before, and that he did not know what to do with himself. Children were playing on the grass; groups of people were loitering about, chatting and laughing; but the man walked steadily up and down, unheeding and unheeded his spare, pale face looking as if it were incapable of bearing the expression of curiosity or interest.

There was something in the man's manner and appearance which told us, we fancied, his whole life, or rather his whole day, for a man of this sort has no variety of days. We thought we almost saw the dingy little back office into which he walks every morning, hanging his hat on the same peg, and placing his legs beneath the same desk: first, taking off that black coat which lasts the year through, and putting on the one which did duty last year, and which he keeps in his desk to save the other. There he sits till five o'clock, working on, all day, as regularly as the dial over the mantel-piece, whose loud ticking is as monotonous as his whole existence: only raising his head when some one enters the counting-house, or when, in the midst of some difficult calculation, he looks up to the ceiling as if there were inspiration in the dusty skylight with a green knot in the centre of every pane of glass. About five, or half-past, he slowly dismounts from his accustomed stool, and again changing his coat, proceeds to his usual dining-place, somewhere near Bucklersbury. The waiter recites the bill of fare in a rather confidential manner—for he is a regular customer—and after inquiring 'What's in the best cut?' and 'What was up last?' he orders a small plate of roast beef, with greens, and half-a-pint of porter. He has a small plate to-day, because greens are a penny more than potatoes, and he had 'two breads' yesterday, with the additional enormity of 'a cheese' the day before. This important point settled, he hangs up his hat—he took it off the moment he sat down—and bespeaks the paper after the next gentleman. If he can get it while he is at dinner, he eats with much greater zest; balancing it against the water-bottle, and eating a bit of beef, and reading a line or two, alternately. Exactly at five minutes before the hour is up, he produces a shilling, pays the reckoning, carefully deposits the change in his waistcoat-pocket (first deducting a penny for the waiter), and returns to the office, from which, if it is not foreign post night, he again sallies forth, in about half an hour. He then walks home, at his usual pace, to his little back room at Islington, where he has his tea; perhaps solacing himself during the meal with the conversation of his landlady’s little boy, whom he occasionally rewards with a penny, for solving problems in simple addition. Sometimes, there is a letter or two to take up to his employer’s, in Russell-square; and then, the wealthy man of business, hearing his voice, calls out from the dining-parlour,—‘Come in, Mr. Smith:’ and Mr. Smith, putting his hat at the feet of one of the hall chairs, walks timidly in, and being condescendingly desired to sit down, carefully tucks his legs under his chair, and sits at a considerable distance from the table while he drinks the glass of sherry which is poured out for him by the eldest boy, and after drinking which, he backs and slides out of the room, in a state of nervous agitation from which he does not perfectly recover, until he finds himself once more in the Islington-road. Poor, harmless creatures such men are; contented but not happy; broken-spirited and humbled, they may feel no pain, but they never know pleasure.

Compare these men with another class of beings who, like them, have neither friend nor companion, but whose position in society is the result of their own choice. These are generally old fellows with white heads and red faces, addicted to port wine and Hessian boots, who from some cause, real or imaginary—generally the former, the excellent reason being that they are rich, and their relations poor—grow suspicious of everybody, and do the misanthropical in chambers, taking great delight in thinking themselves unhappy, and making everybody they come near, miserable. You may see such men as these, anywhere; you will know them at coffee-houses by their discontented exclamations and the luxury of their dinners; at theatres, by their always sitting in the same place and looking with a jaundiced eye on all the young people near them; at church, by the pomposity with which they enter, and the loud tone in which they repeat the responses; at parties, by their getting cross at whist and hating music. An old fellow of this kind will have his chambers splendidly furnished, and collect books, plate, and pictures about him in profusion; not so much for his own gratification, as to be superior to those who have the desire, but not the means, to compete with him. He belongs to two or three clubs, and is envied, and flattered, and hated by the members of them all. Sometimes he will be appealed to by a poor relation—a married nephew perhaps—for some little assistance: and then he will declaim with honest indignation on the improvidence of young married people, the worthlessness of a wife, the insolence of having a family, the atrocity of getting into debt with a hundred and twenty-five pounds a year, and other unpardonable crimes; winding up his exhortations with a complacent review of his own conduct, and a delicate allusion to parochial relief. He dies, some day after dinner, of apoplexy, having bequeathed his property to a Public Society, and the Institution erects a tablet to his memory, expressive of their admiration of his Christian conduct in this world, and their comfortable conviction of his happiness in the next.

But, next to our very particular friends, hackney-coachmen, cabmen and cads, whom we admire in proportion to the extent of their cool impudence and perfect self-possession, there is no class of people who amuse us more than London apprentices. They are no longer an organised body, bound down by solemn compact to terrify his Majesty's subjects whenever it pleases them to take offence in their heads and staves in their hands. They are only bound, now, by indentures, and, as to their valour, it is easily restrained by the wholesome dread of the New Police, and a perspective view of a damp station-house, terminating in a police-office and a reprimand. They are still, however, a peculiar class, and not the less pleasant for being inoffensive. Can any one fail to have noticed them in the streets on Sunday? And were there ever such harmless efforts at the grand and magnificent as the young fellows display! We walked down the Strand, a Sunday or two ago, behind a little group; and they furnished food for our amusement the whole way. They had come out of some part of the city; it was between three and four o'clock in the afternoon; and they were on their way to the Park. There were four of them, all arm-in-arm, with white kid gloves like so many bridegrooms, light trousers of unprecedented patterns, and coats for which the English language has yet no name—a kind of cross between a great-coat and a surtout, with the collar of the one, the skirts of the other, and pockets peculiar to themselves.

Each of the gentlemen carried a thick stick, with a large tassel at the top, which he occasionally twirled gracefully round; and the whole four, by way of looking easy and unconcerned, were walking with a paralytic swagger irresistibly ludicrous. One of the party had a watch about the size and shape of a reasonable Ribstone pippin, jammed into his waistcoat-pocket, which he carefully compared with the clocks at St. Clement's and the New Church, the illuminated clock at Exeter 'Change, the clock of St. Martin's Church, and the clock of the Horse Guards. When they at last arrived in St. James's Park, the member of the party who had the best-made boots on, hired a second chair expressly for his feet, and flung himself on this twopennyworth of sylvan luxury with an air which levelled all distinctions between Brookes's and Snooks's, Crockford's and Bagnigge Wells.

We may smile at such people, but they can never excite our anger. They are usually on the best terms with themselves, and it follows almost as a matter of course, in good humour with every one about them. Besides, they are always the faint reflection of higher lights; and, if they do display a little occasional foolery in their own proper persons, it is surely more tolerable than precocious puppyism in the Quadrant, whiskered dandyism in Regent-street and Pall-mall, or gallantry in its dotage anywhere.

CHAPTER II—A CHRISTMAS DINNER

Christmas time! That man must be a misanthrope indeed, in whose breast something like a jovial feeling is not roused—in whose mind some pleasant associations are not awakened—by the recurrence of Christmas. There are people who will tell you that Christmas is not to them what it used to be; that each succeeding Christmas has found some cherished hope, or happy prospect, of the year before, dimmed or passed away; that the present only serves to remind them of reduced circumstances and straitened incomes—of the feasts they once bestowed on hollow friends, and of the cold looks that meet them now, in adversity and misfortune. Never heed such dismal reminiscences. There are few men who have lived long enough in the world, who cannot call up such thoughts any day in the year. Then do not select the merriest of the three hundred and sixty-five for your doleful recollections, but draw your chair nearer the blazing fire—fill the glass and send round the song—and if your room be smaller than it was a dozen years ago, or if your glass be filled with reeking punch, instead of sparkling wine, put a good face on the matter, and empty it off-hand, and fill another, and troll off the old ditty you used to sing, and thank God it's no worse. Look on the merry faces of your children (if you have any) as they sit round the fire. One little seat may be empty; one slight form that gladdened the father's heart, and roused the mother's pride to look upon, may not be there. Dwell not upon the past; think not that one short year ago, the fair child now resolving into dust, sat before you, with the bloom of health upon its cheek, and the gaiety of infancy in its joyous eye. Reflect upon your present blessings—of which every man has many—not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some. Fill your glass again, with a merry face and contented heart. Our life on it, but your Christmas shall be merry, and your new year a happy one!

Who can be insensible to the outpourings of good feeling, and the honest interchange of affectionate attachment, which abound at this season of the year? A Christmas family-party! We know nothing in nature more delightful! There seems a magic in the very name of Christmas. Petty jealousies and discords are forgotten; social feelings are awakened, in bosoms to which they have long been strangers; father and son, or brother and sister, who have met and passed with averted gaze, or a look of cold recognition, for months before, proffer and return the cordial embrace, and bury their past animosities in their present happiness. Kindly hearts that have yearned towards each other, but have been withheld by false notions of pride and self-dignity, are again reunited, and all is kindness and benevolence! Would that Christmas lasted the whole year through (as it ought), and that the prejudices and passions which deform our better nature, were never called into action among those to whom they should ever be strangers!

The Christmas family-party that we mean, is not a mere assemblage of relations, got up at a week or two's notice, originating this year, having no family precedent in the last, and not likely to be repeated in the next. No. It is an annual gathering of all the accessible members of the family, young or old, rich or poor; and all the children look forward to it, for two months beforehand, in a fever of anticipation. Formerly, it was held at grandpapa's; but grandpapa getting old, and grandmamma getting old too, and rather infirm, they have given up house-keeping, and domesticated themselves with uncle George; so, the party always takes place at uncle George's house, but grandmamma sends in most of the good things, and grandpapa always *will* toddle down, all the way to Newgate-market, to buy the turkey, which he engages a porter to bring home behind him in triumph, always insisting on the man's being rewarded with a glass of spirits, over and above his hire, to drink 'a merry Christmas and a happy new year' to aunt George. As to grandmamma, she is very secret and mysterious for two or three days beforehand, but not sufficiently so, to prevent rumours getting afloat that she has purchased a beautiful new cap with pink ribbons for each of the servants, together with sundry books, and pen-knives, and pencil-cases, for the younger branches; to say nothing of divers secret additions to the order originally given by aunt George at the pastry-cook’s, such as another dozen of mince-pies for the dinner, and a large plum-cake for the children.

On Christmas-eve, grandmamma is always in excellent spirits, and after employing all the children, during the day, in stoning the plums, and all that, insists, regularly every year, on uncle George coming down into the kitchen, taking off his coat, and stirring the pudding for half an hour or so, which uncle George good-humouredly does, to the vociferous delight of the children and servants. The evening concludes with a glorious game of blind-man’s-buff, in an early stage of which grandpapa takes great care to be caught, in order that he may have an opportunity of displaying his dexterity.

On the following morning, the old couple, with as many of the children as the pew will hold, go to church in great state: leaving aunt George at home dusting decanters and filling casters, and uncle George carrying bottles into the dining-parlour, and calling for corkscrews, and getting into everybody’s way.

When the church-party return to lunch, grandpapa produces a small sprig of mistletoe from his pocket, and tempts the boys to kiss their little cousins under it—a proceeding which affords both the boys and the old gentleman unlimited satisfaction, but which rather outrages grandmamma’s ideas of decorum, until grandpapa says, that when he was just thirteen years and three months old, *he* kissed grandmamma under a mistletoe too, on which the children clap their hands, and laugh very heartily, as do aunt George and uncle George; and grandmamma looks pleased, and says, with a benevolent smile, that grandpapa was an impudent young dog, on which the children laugh very heartily again, and grandpapa more heartily than any of them.

But all these diversions are nothing to the subsequent excitement when grandmamma in a high cap, and slate-coloured silk gown; and grandpapa with a beautifully plaited shirt-frill, and white neckerchief; seat themselves on one side of the drawing-room fire, with uncle George’s children and little cousins innumerable, seated in the front, waiting the arrival of the expected visitors. Suddenly a hackney-coach is heard to stop, and uncle George, who has been looking out of the window, exclaims ‘Here’s Jane!’ on which the children rush to the door, and helter-skelter down-stairs; and uncle Robert and aunt Jane, and the dear little baby, and the nurse, and the whole party, are ushered up-stairs amidst tumultuous shouts of ‘Oh, my!’ from the children, and frequently repeated warnings not to hurt baby from the nurse. And grandpapa takes the child, and grandmamma kisses her daughter, and the confusion of this first entry has scarcely subsided, when some other aunts and uncles with more cousins arrive, and the grown-up cousins flirt with each other, and so do the little cousins too, for that matter, and nothing is to be heard but a confused din of talking, laughing, and merriment.

A hesitating double knock at the street-door, heard during a momentary pause in the conversation, excites a general inquiry of ‘Who’s that?’ and two or three children, who have been standing at the window, announce in a low voice, that it’s ‘poor aunt Margaret.’ Upon which, aunt George leaves the room to welcome the new-comer; and grandmamma draws herself up, rather stiff and stately; for Margaret married a poor man without her consent, and poverty not being a sufficiently weighty punishment for her offence, has been discarded by her friends, and debarred the society of her dearest relatives. But Christmas has come round, and the unkind feelings that have struggled against better dispositions during the year, have melted away before its genial influence, like half-formed ice beneath the morning sun. It is not difficult in a moment of angry feeling for a parent to denounce a disobedient child; but, to banish her at a period of general good-will and hilarity, from the hearth, round which she has sat on so many anniversaries of the same day, expanding by slow degrees from infancy to girlhood, and then bursting, almost imperceptibly, into a woman, is widely different. The air of conscious rectitude, and cold forgiveness, which the old lady has assumed, sits ill upon her; and when the poor girl is led in by her sister, pale in looks and broken in hope—not from poverty, for that she could bear, but from the consciousness of undeserved neglect, and unmerited unkindness—it is easy to see how much of it is assumed. A momentary pause succeeds; the girl breaks suddenly from her sister and throws herself, sobbing, on her mother’s neck. The father steps hastily forward, and takes her husband’s hand. Friends crowd round to offer their hearty congratulations, and happiness and harmony again prevail.

As to the dinner, it’s perfectly delightful—nothing goes wrong, and everybody is in the very best of spirits, and disposed to please and be pleased. Grandpapa relates a circumstantial account of the purchase of the turkey, with a slight digression relative to the purchase of previous turkeys, on former Christmas-days, which grandmamma corroborates in the minutest particular. Uncle George tells stories, and carves poultry, and takes wine, and jokes with the children at the side-table, and winks at the cousins that are making love, or being made love to, and exhilarates everybody with his good humour and hospitality; and when, at last, a stout servant staggers in with a gigantic pudding, with a sprig of holly in the top, there is such a laughing, and shouting, and clapping of little chubby hands, and kicking up of fat dumpy legs, as can only be equalled by the applause with which the astonishing feat of pouring lighted brandy into mince-pies, is received by the younger visitors. Then the dessert!—and the wine!—and the fun! Such beautiful speeches, and *such* songs, from aunt Margaret's husband, who turns out to be such a nice man, and *so* attentive to grandmamma! Even grandpapa not only sings his annual song with unprecedented vigour, but on being honoured with an unanimous *encore*, according to annual custom, actually comes out with a new one which nobody but grandmamma ever heard before; and a young scapegrace of a cousin, who has been in some disgrace with the old people, for certain heinous sins of omission and commission—neglecting to call, and persisting in drinking Burton Ale—astonishes everybody into convulsions of laughter by volunteering the most extraordinary comic songs that ever were heard. And thus the evening passes, in a strain of rational good-will and cheerfulness, doing more to awaken the sympathies of every member of the party in behalf of his neighbour, and to perpetuate their good feeling during the ensuing year, than half the homilies that have ever been written, by half the Divines that have ever lived.

CHAPTER III—THE NEW YEAR

Next to Christmas-day, the most pleasant annual epoch in existence is the advent of the New Year. There are a lachrymose set of people who usher in the New Year with watching and fasting, as if they were bound to attend as chief mourners at the obsequies of the old one. Now, we cannot but think it a great deal more complimentary, both to the old year that has rolled away, and to the New Year that is just beginning to dawn upon us, to see the old fellow out, and the new one in, with gaiety and glee.

There must have been some few occurrences in the past year to which we can look back, with a smile of cheerful recollection, if not with a feeling of heartfelt thankfulness. And we are bound by every rule of justice and equity to give the New Year credit for being a good one, until he proves himself unworthy the confidence we repose in him.

This is our view of the matter; and entertaining it, notwithstanding our respect for the old year, one of the few remaining moments of whose existence passes away with every word we write, here we are, seated by our fireside on this last night of the old year, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-six, penning this article with as jovial a face as if nothing extraordinary had happened, or was about to happen, to disturb our good humour.

Hackney-coaches and carriages keep rattling up the street and down the street in rapid succession, conveying, doubtless, smartly-dressed coachfuls to crowded parties; loud and repeated double knocks at the house with green blinds, opposite, announce to the whole neighbourhood that there's one large party in the street at all events; and we saw through the window, and through the fog too, till it grew so thick that we rung for candles, and drew our curtains, pastry-cooks' men with green boxes on their heads, and rout-furniture-warehouse-carts, with cane seats and French lamps, hurrying to the numerous houses where an annual festival is held in honour of the occasion.

We can fancy one of these parties, we think, as well as if we were duly dress-coated and pumped, and had just been announced at the drawing-room door.

Take the house with the green blinds for instance. We know it is a quadrille party, because we saw some men taking up the front drawing-room carpet while we sat at breakfast this morning, and if further evidence be required, and we must tell the truth, we just now saw one of the young ladies 'doing' another of the young ladies' hair, near one of the bedroom windows, in an unusual style of splendour, which nothing else but a quadrille party could possibly justify.

The master of the house with the green blinds is in a public office; we know the fact by the cut of his coat, the tie of his neckcloth, and the self-satisfaction of his gait—the very green blinds themselves have a Somerset House air about them.

Hark!—a cab! That's a junior clerk in the same office; a tidy sort of young man, with a tendency to cold and corns, who comes in a pair of boots with black cloth fronts, and brings his shoes in his coat-pocket, which shoes he is at this very moment putting on in the hall. Now he is announced by the man in the passage to another man in a blue coat, who is a disguised messenger from the office.

The man on the first landing precedes him to the drawing-room door. 'Mr. Tupple!' shouts the messenger. 'How *are* you, Tupple?' says the master of the house, advancing from the fire, before which he has been talking politics and airing himself. 'My dear, this is Mr. Tupple (a courteous salute from the lady of the house); Tupple, my eldest daughter; Julia, my dear, Mr. Tupple; Tupple, my other daughters; my son, sir;' Tupple rubs his hands very hard, and smiles as if it were all capital fun, and keeps constantly bowing and turning himself round, till the whole family have been introduced, when he glides into a chair at the corner of the sofa, and opens a miscellaneous conversation with the young ladies upon the weather, and the theatres, and the old year, and the last new murder, and the balloon, and the ladies' sleeves, and the festivities of the season, and a great many other topics of small talk.

More double knocks! what an extensive party! what an incessant hum of conversation and general sipping of coffee! We see Tupple now, in our mind's eye, in the height of his glory. He has just handed that stout old lady's cup to the servant; and now, he dives among the crowd of young men by the door, to intercept the other servant, and secure the muffin-plate for the old lady's daughter, before he leaves the room; and now, as he passes the sofa on his way back, he bestows a glance of recognition and patronage upon the young ladies as condescending and familiar as if he had known them from infancy.

Charming person Mr. Tupple—perfect ladies' man—such a delightful companion, too! Laugh!—nobody ever understood papa's jokes half so well as Mr. Tupple, who laughs himself into convulsions at every fresh burst of facetiousness. Most delightful partner! talks through the whole set! and although he does seem at first rather gay and frivolous, so romantic and with so *much* feeling! Quite a love. No great favourite with the young men, certainly, who sneer at, and affect to despise him; but everybody knows that's only envy, and they needn't give themselves the trouble to depreciate his merits at any rate, for Ma says he shall be asked to every future dinner-party, if it’s only to talk to people between the courses, and distract their attention when there’s any unexpected delay in the kitchen.

At supper, Mr. Tupple shows to still greater advantage than he has done throughout the evening, and when Pa requests every one to fill their glasses for the purpose of drinking happiness throughout the year, Mr. Tupple is *so* droll: insisting on all the young ladies having their glasses filled, notwithstanding their repeated assurances that they never can, by any possibility, think of emptying them and subsequently begging permission to say a few words on the sentiment which has just been uttered by Pa—when he makes one of the most brilliant and poetical speeches that can possibly be imagined, about the old year and the new one. After the toast has been drunk, and when the ladies have retired, Mr. Tupple requests that every gentleman will do him the favour of filling his glass, for he has a toast to propose: on which all the gentlemen cry ‘Hear! hear!’ and pass the decanters accordingly: and Mr. Tupple being informed by the master of the house that they are all charged, and waiting for his toast, rises, and begs to remind the gentlemen present, how much they have been delighted by the dazzling array of elegance and beauty which the drawing-room has exhibited that night, and how their senses have been charmed, and their hearts captivated, by the bewitching concentration of female loveliness which that very room has so recently displayed. (Loud cries of ‘Hear!’) Much as he (Tupple) would be disposed to deplore the absence of the ladies, on other grounds, he cannot but derive some consolation from the reflection that the very circumstance of their not being present, enables him to propose a toast, which he would have otherwise been prevented from giving—that toast he begs to say is—‘The Ladies!’ (Great applause.) The Ladies! among whom the fascinating daughters of their excellent host, are alike conspicuous for their beauty, their accomplishments, and their elegance. He begs them to drain a bumper to ‘The Ladies, and a happy new year to them!’ (Prolonged approbation; above which the noise of the ladies dancing the Spanish dance among themselves, overhead, is distinctly audible.)

The applause consequent on this toast, has scarcely subsided, when a young gentleman in a pink under-waistcoat, sitting towards the bottom of the table, is observed to grow very restless and fidgety, and to evince strong indications of some latent desire to give vent to his feelings in a speech, which the wary Tupple at once perceiving, determines to forestall by speaking himself. He, therefore, rises again, with an air of solemn importance, and trusts he may be permitted to propose another toast (unqualified approbation, and Mr. Tupple proceeds). He is sure they must all be deeply impressed with the hospitality—he may say the splendour—with which they have been that night received by their worthy host and hostess. (Unbounded applause.) Although this is the first occasion on which he has had the pleasure and delight of sitting at that board, he has known his friend Dobble long and intimately; he has been connected with him in business—he wishes everybody present knew Dobble as well as he does. (A cough from the host.) He (Tupple) can lay his hand upon his (Tupple's) heart, and declare his confident belief that a better man, a better husband, a better father, a better brother, a better son, a better relation in any relation of life, than Dobble, never existed. (Loud cries of 'Hear!') They have seen him to-night in the peaceful bosom of his family; they should see him in the morning, in the trying duties of his office. Calm in the perusal of the morning papers, uncompromising in the signature of his name, dignified in his replies to the inquiries of stranger applicants, deferential in his behaviour to his superiors, majestic in his deportment to the messengers. (Cheers.) When he bears this merited testimony to the excellent qualities of his friend Dobble, what can he say in approaching such a subject as Mrs. Dobble? Is it requisite for him to expatiate on the qualities of that amiable woman? No; he will spare his friend Dobble's feelings; he will spare the feelings of his friend—if he will allow him to have the honour of calling him so—Mr. Dobble, junior. (Here Mr. Dobble, junior, who has been previously distending his mouth to a considerable width, by thrusting a particularly fine orange into that feature, suspends operations, and assumes a proper appearance of intense melancholy). He will simply say—and he is quite certain it is a sentiment in which all who hear him will readily concur—that his friend Dobble is as superior to any man he ever knew, as Mrs. Dobble is far beyond any woman he ever saw (except her daughters); and he will conclude by proposing their worthy 'Host and Hostess, and may they live to enjoy many more new years!'

The toast is drunk with acclamation; Dobble returns thanks, and the whole party rejoin the ladies in the drawing-room. Young men who were too bashful to dance before supper, find tongues and partners; the musicians exhibit unequivocal symptoms of having drunk the new year in, while the company were out; and dancing is kept up, until far in the first morning of the new year.

We have scarcely written the last word of the previous sentence, when the first stroke of twelve, peals from the neighbouring churches. There certainly—we must confess it now—is something awful in the sound. Strictly speaking, it may not be more impressive now, than at any other time; for the hours steal as swiftly on, at other periods, and their flight is little heeded. But, we measure man's life by years, and it is a solemn knell that warns us we have passed another of the landmarks which stands between us and the grave. Disguise it as we may, the reflection will force itself on our minds, that when the next bell announces the arrival of a new year, we may be insensible alike of the timely warning we have so often neglected, and of all the warm feelings that glow within us now.

CHAPTER IV—MISS EVANS AND THE EAGLE

Mr. Samuel Wilkins was a carpenter, a journeyman carpenter of small dimensions, decidedly below the middle size—bordering, perhaps, upon the dwarfish. His face was round and shining, and his hair carefully twisted into the outer corner of each eye, till it formed a variety of that description of semi-curls, usually known as 'aggerawators.' His earnings were all-sufficient for his wants, varying from eighteen shillings to one pound five, weekly—his manner undeniable—his sabbath waistcoats dazzling. No wonder that, with these qualifications, Samuel Wilkins found favour in the eyes of the other sex: many women have been captivated by far less substantial qualifications. But, Samuel was proof against their blandishments, until at length his eyes rested on those of a Being for whom, from that time forth, he felt fate had destined him. He came, and conquered—proposed, and was accepted—loved, and was beloved. Mr. Wilkins 'kept company' with Jemima Evans.

Miss Evans (or Ivins, to adopt the pronunciation most in vogue with her circle of acquaintance) had adopted in early life the useful pursuit of shoe-binding, to which she had afterwards superadded the occupation of a straw-bonnet maker. Herself, her maternal parent, and two sisters, formed an harmonious quartett in the most secluded portion of Camden-town; and here it was that Mr. Wilkins presented himself, one Monday afternoon, in his best attire, with his face more shining and his waistcoat more bright than either had ever appeared before. The family were just going to tea, and were *so* glad to see him. It was quite a little feast; two ounces of seven-and-sixpenny green, and a quarter of a pound of the best fresh; and Mr. Wilkins had brought a pint of shrimps, neatly folded up in a clean belcher, to give a zest to the meal, and propitiate Mrs. Ivins. Jemima was 'cleaning herself' up-stairs; so Mr. Samuel Wilkins sat down and talked domestic economy with Mrs. Ivins, whilst the two youngest Miss Ivinses poked bits of lighted brown paper between the bars under the kettle, to make the water boil for tea.

'I wos a thinking,' said Mr. Samuel Wilkins, during a pause in the conversation—'I wos a thinking of taking J'mima to the Eagle to-night.'—'O my!' exclaimed Mrs. Ivins. 'Lor! how nice!' said the youngest Miss Ivins. 'Well, I declare!' added the youngest Miss Ivins but one. 'Tell J'mima to put on her white muslin, Tilly,' screamed Mrs. Ivins, with motherly anxiety; and down came J'mima herself soon afterwards in a white muslin gown carefully hooked and eyed, a little red shawl, plentifully pinned, a white straw bonnet trimmed with red ribbons, a small necklace, a large pair of bracelets, Denmark satin shoes, and open-worked stockings; white cotton gloves on her fingers, and a cambric pocket-handkerchief, carefully folded up, in her hand—all quite genteel and ladylike. And away went Miss J'mima Ivins and Mr. Samuel Wilkins, and a dress-cane, with a gilt knob at the top, to the admiration and envy of the street in general, and to the high gratification of Mrs. Ivins, and the two youngest Miss Ivinses in particular. They had no sooner turned into the Pancras-road, than who should Miss J'mima Ivins stumble upon, by the most fortunate accident in the world, but a young lady as she knew, with *her* young man!—And it is so strange how things do turn out sometimes—they were actually going to the Eagle too. So Mr. Samuel Wilkins was introduced to Miss J'mima Ivins's friend's young man, and they all walked on together, talking, and laughing, and joking away like anything; and when they got as far as Pentonville, Miss Ivins's friend's young man *would* have the ladies go into the Crown, to taste some shrub, which, after a great blushing and giggling, and hiding of faces in elaborate pocket-handkerchiefs, they consented to do. Having tasted it once, they were easily prevailed upon to taste it again; and they sat out in the garden tasting shrub, and looking at the Busses alternately, till it was just the proper time to go to the Eagle; and then they resumed their journey, and walked very fast, for fear they should lose the beginning of the concert in the Rotunda.

‘How ev’nly!’ said Miss J’mima Ivins, and Miss J’mima Ivins’s friend, both at once, when they had passed the gate and were fairly inside the gardens. There were the walks, beautifully gravelled and planted—and the refreshment-boxes, painted and ornamented like so many snuff-boxes—and the variegated lamps shedding their rich light upon the company’s heads—and the place for dancing ready chalked for the company’s feet—and a Moorish band playing at one end of the gardens—and an opposition military band playing away at the other. Then, the waiters were rushing to and fro with glasses of negus, and glasses of brandy-and-water, and bottles of ale, and bottles of stout; and ginger-beer was going off in one place, and practical jokes were going on in another; and people were crowding to the door of the Rotunda; and in short the whole scene was, as Miss J’mima Ivins, inspired by the novelty, or the shrub, or both, observed—‘one of dazzling excitement.’ As to the concert-room, never was anything half so splendid. There was an orchestra for the singers, all paint, gilding, and plate-glass; and such an organ! Miss J’mima Ivins’s friend’s young man whispered it had cost ‘four hundred pound,’ which Mr. Samuel Wilkins said was ‘not dear neither;’ an opinion in which the ladies perfectly coincided. The audience were seated on elevated benches round the room, and crowded into every part of it; and everybody was eating and drinking as comfortably as possible. Just before the concert commenced, Mr. Samuel Wilkins ordered two glasses of rum-and-water ‘warm with—’ and two slices of lemon, for himself and the other young man, together with ‘a pint o’ sherry wine for the ladies, and some sweet carraway-seed biscuits;’ and they would have been quite comfortable and happy, only a strange gentleman with large whiskers *would* stare at Miss J’mima Ivins, and another gentleman in a plaid waistcoat *would* wink at Miss J’mima Ivins’s friend; on which Miss Jemima Ivins’s friend’s young man exhibited symptoms of boiling over, and began to mutter about ‘people’s imperence,’ and ‘swells out o’ luck;’ and to intimate, in oblique terms, a vague intention of knocking somebody’s head off; which he was only prevented from announcing more emphatically, by both Miss J’mima Ivins and her friend threatening to faint away on the spot if he said another word.

The concert commenced—overture on the organ. ‘How solemn!’ exclaimed Miss J’mima Ivins, glancing, perhaps unconsciously, at the gentleman with the whiskers. Mr. Samuel Wilkins, who had been muttering apart for some time past, as if he were holding a confidential conversation with the gilt knob of the dress-cane, breathed hard-breathing vengeance, perhaps,—but said nothing. ‘The soldier tired,’ Miss Somebody in white satin. ‘Ancore!’ cried Miss J’mima Ivins’s friend. ‘Ancore!’ shouted the gentleman in the plaid waistcoat immediately, hammering the table with a stout-bottle. Miss J’mima Ivins’s friend’s young man eyed the man behind the waistcoat from head to foot, and cast a look of interrogative contempt towards Mr. Samuel Wilkins. Comic song, accompanied on the organ. Miss J’mima Ivins was convulsed with laughter—so was the man with the whiskers. Everything the ladies did, the plaid waistcoat and whiskers did, by way of expressing unity of sentiment and congeniality of soul; and Miss J’mima Ivins, and Miss J’mima Ivins’s friend, grew lively and talkative, as Mr. Samuel Wilkins, and Miss J’mima Ivins’s friend’s young man, grew morose and surly in inverse proportion.

Now, if the matter had ended here, the little party might soon have recovered their former equanimity; but Mr. Samuel Wilkins and his friend began to throw looks of defiance upon the waistcoat and whiskers. And the waistcoat and whiskers, by way of intimating the slight degree in which they were affected by the looks aforesaid, bestowed glances of increased admiration upon Miss J’mima Ivins and friend. The concert and vaudeville concluded, they promenaded the gardens. The waistcoat and whiskers did the same; and made divers remarks complimentary to the ankles of Miss J’mima Ivins and friend, in an audible tone. At length, not satisfied with these numerous atrocities, they actually came up and asked Miss J’mima Ivins, and Miss J’mima Ivins’s friend, to dance, without taking no more notice of Mr. Samuel Wilkins, and Miss J’mima Ivins’s friend’s young man, than if they was nobody!

‘What do you mean by that, scoundrel!’ exclaimed Mr. Samuel Wilkins, grasping the gilt-knobbed dress-cane firmly in his right hand. ‘What’s the matter with *you*, you little humbug?’ replied the whiskers. ‘How dare you insult me and my friend?’ inquired the friend’s young man. ‘You and your friend be hanged!’ responded the waistcoat. ‘Take that,’ exclaimed Mr. Samuel Wilkins. The ferrule of the gilt-knobbed dress-cane was visible for an instant, and then the light of the variegated lamps shone brightly upon it as it whirled into the air, cane and all. 'Give it him,' said the waistcoat. 'Horficer!' screamed the ladies. Miss J'mima Ivins's beau, and the friend's young man, lay gasping on the gravel, and the waistcoat and whiskers were seen no more.

Miss J'mima Ivins and friend being conscious that the affray was in no slight degree attributable to themselves, of course went into hysterics forthwith; declared themselves the most injured of women; exclaimed, in incoherent ravings, that they had been suspected—wrongfully suspected—oh! that they should ever have lived to see the day—and so forth; suffered a relapse every time they opened their eyes and saw their unfortunate little admirers; and were carried to their respective abodes in a hackney-coach, and a state of insensibility, compounded of shrub, sherry, and excitement.

CHAPTER V—THE PARLOUR ORATOR

We had been lounging one evening, down Oxford-street, Holborn, Cheapside, Coleman-street, Finsbury-square, and so on, with the intention of returning westward, by Pentonville and the New-road, when we began to feel rather thirsty, and disposed to rest for five or ten minutes. So, we turned back towards an old, quiet, decent public-house, which we remembered to have passed but a moment before (it was not far from the City-road), for the purpose of solacing ourself with a glass of ale. The house was none of your stuccoed, French-polished, illuminated palaces, but a modest public-house of the old school, with a little old bar, and a little old landlord, who, with a wife and daughter of the same pattern, was comfortably seated in the bar aforesaid—a snug little room with a cheerful fire, protected by a large screen: from behind which the young lady emerged on our representing our inclination for a glass of ale.

'Won't you walk into the parlour, sir?' said the young lady, in seductive tones.

'You had better walk into the parlour, sir,' said the little old landlord, throwing his chair back, and looking round one side of the screen, to survey our appearance.

'You had much better step into the parlour, sir,' said the little old lady, popping out her head, on the other side of the screen.

We cast a slight glance around, as if to express our ignorance of the locality so much recommended. The little old landlord observed it; bustled out of the small door of the small bar; and forthwith ushered us into the parlour itself.

It was an ancient, dark-looking room, with oaken wainscoting, a sanded floor, and a high mantel-piece. The walls were ornamented with three or four old coloured prints in black frames, each print representing a naval engagement, with a couple of men-of-war banging away at each other most vigorously, while another vessel or two were blowing up in the distance, and the foreground presented a miscellaneous collection of broken masts and blue legs sticking up out of the water. Depending from the ceiling in the centre of the room, were a gas-light and bell-pull; on each side were three or four long narrow tables, behind which was a thickly-planted row of those slippery, shiny-looking wooden chairs, peculiar to hostelries of this description. The monotonous appearance of the sanded boards was relieved by an occasional spittoon; and a triangular pile of those useful articles adorned the two upper corners of the apartment.

At the furthest table, nearest the fire, with his face towards the door at the bottom of the room, sat a stoutish man of about forty, whose short, stiff, black hair curled closely round a broad high forehead, and a face to which something besides water and exercise had communicated a rather inflamed appearance. He was smoking a cigar, with his eyes fixed on the ceiling, and had that confident oracular air which marked him as the leading politician, general authority, and universal anecdote-relater, of the place. He had evidently just delivered himself of something very weighty; for the remainder of the company were puffing at their respective pipes and cigars in a kind of solemn abstraction, as if quite overwhelmed with the magnitude of the subject recently under discussion.

On his right hand sat an elderly gentleman with a white head, and broad-brimmed brown hat; on his left, a sharp-nosed, light-haired man in a brown surtout reaching nearly to his heels, who took a whiff at his pipe, and an admiring glance at the red-faced man, alternately.

‘Very extraordinary!’ said the light-haired man after a pause of five minutes. A murmur of assent ran through the company.

‘Not at all extraordinary—not at all,’ said the red-faced man, awakening suddenly from his reverie, and turning upon the light-haired man, the moment he had spoken.

‘Why should it be extraordinary?—why is it extraordinary?—prove it to be extraordinary!’

‘Oh, if you come to that—’ said the light-haired man, meekly.

‘Come to that!’ ejaculated the man with the red face; ‘but we *must* come to that. We stand, in these times, upon a calm elevation of intellectual attainment, and not in the dark recess of mental deprivation. Proof, is what I require—proof, and not assertions, in these stirring times. Every gen’lem’n that knows me, knows what was the nature and effect of my observations, when it was in the contemplation of the Old-street Suburban Representative Discovery Society, to recommend a candidate for that place in Cornwall there—I forget the name of it. “Mr. Snobee,” said Mr. Wilson, “is a fit and proper person to represent the borough in Parliament.” “Prove it,” says I. “He is a friend to Reform,” says Mr. Wilson. “Prove it,” says I. “The abolitionist of the national debt, the unflinching opponent of pensions, the uncompromising advocate of the negro, the reducer of sinecures and the duration of Parliaments; the extender of nothing but the suffrages of the people,” says Mr. Wilson. “Prove it,” says I. “His acts prove it,” says he. “Prove *them*,” says I.

‘And he could not prove them,’ said the red-faced man, looking round triumphantly; ‘and the borough didn’t have him; and if you carried this principle to the full extent, you’d have no debt, no pensions, no sinecures, no negroes, no nothing. And then, standing upon an elevation of intellectual attainment, and having reached the summit of popular prosperity, you might bid defiance to the nations of the earth, and erect yourselves in the proud confidence of wisdom and superiority. This is my argument—this always has been my argument—and if I was a Member of the House of Commons to-morrow, I’d make ’em shake in their shoes with it. And the red-faced man, having struck the table very hard with his clenched fist, to add weight to the declaration, smoked away like a brewery.

‘Well!’ said the sharp-nosed man, in a very slow and soft voice, addressing the company in general, ‘I always do say, that of all the gentlemen I have the pleasure of meeting in this room, there is not one whose conversation I like to hear so much as Mr. Rogers’s, or who is such improving company.’

‘Improving company!’ said Mr. Rogers, for that, it seemed, was the name of the red-faced man. ‘You may say I am improving company, for I’ve improved you all to some purpose; though as to my conversation being as my friend Mr. Ellis here describes it, that is not for me to say anything about. You, gentlemen, are the best judges on that point; but this I will say, when I came into this parish, and first used this room, ten years ago, I don't believe there was one man in it, who knew he was a slave—and now you all know it, and writhe under it. Inscribe that upon my tomb, and I am satisfied.'

'Why, as to inscribing it on your tomb,' said a little greengrocer with a chubby face, 'of course you can have anything chalked up, as you likes to pay for, so far as it relates to yourself and your affairs; but, when you come to talk about slaves, and that there abuse, you'd better keep it in the family, 'cos I for one don't like to be called them names, night after night.'

'You *are* a slave,' said the red-faced man, 'and the most pitiable of all slaves.'

'Werry hard if I am,' interrupted the greengrocer, 'for I got no good out of the twenty million that was paid for 'mancipation, anyhow.'

'A willing slave,' ejaculated the red-faced man, getting more red with eloquence, and contradiction—'resigning the dearest birthright of your children—neglecting the sacred call of Liberty—who, standing imploringly before you, appeals to the warmest feelings of your heart, and points to your helpless infants, but in vain.'

'Prove it,' said the greengrocer.

'Prove it!' sneered the man with the red face. 'What! bending beneath the yoke of an insolent and factious oligarchy; bowed down by the domination of cruel laws; groaning beneath tyranny and oppression on every hand, at every side, and in every corner. Prove it!—' The red-faced man abruptly broke off, sneered melo-dramatically, and buried his countenance and his indignation together, in a quart pot.

'Ah, to be sure, Mr. Rogers,' said a stout broker in a large waistcoat, who had kept his eyes fixed on this luminary all the time he was speaking. 'Ah, to be sure,' said the broker with a sigh, 'that's the point.'

'Of course, of course,' said divers members of the company, who understood almost as much about the matter as the broker himself.

'You had better let him alone, Tommy,' said the broker, by way of advice to the little greengrocer; 'he can tell what's o'clock by an eight-day, without looking at the minute hand, he can. Try it on, on some other suit; it won't do with him, Tommy.'

‘What is a man?’ continued the red-faced specimen of the species, jerking his hat indignantly from its peg on the wall. ‘What is an Englishman? Is he to be trampled upon by every oppressor? Is he to be knocked down at everybody’s bidding? What’s freedom? Not a standing army. What’s a standing army? Not freedom. What’s general happiness? Not universal misery. Liberty ain’t the window-tax, is it? The Lords ain’t the Commons, are they?’ And the red-faced man, gradually bursting into a radiating sentence, in which such adjectives as ‘dastardly,’ ‘oppressive,’ ‘violent,’ and ‘sanguinary,’ formed the most conspicuous words, knocked his hat indignantly over his eyes, left the room, and slammed the door after him.

‘Wonderful man!’ said he of the sharp nose.

‘Splendid speaker!’ added the broker.

‘Great power!’ said everybody but the greengrocer. And as they said it, the whole party shook their heads mysteriously, and one by one retired, leaving us alone in the old parlour.

If we had followed the established precedent in all such instances, we should have fallen into a fit of musing, without delay. The ancient appearance of the room—the old panelling of the wall—the chimney blackened with smoke and age—would have carried us back a hundred years at least, and we should have gone dreaming on, until the pewter-pot on the table, or the little beer-chiller on the fire, had started into life, and addressed to us a long story of days gone by. But, by some means or other, we were not in a romantic humour; and although we tried very hard to invest the furniture with vitality, it remained perfectly unmoved, obstinate, and sullen. Being thus reduced to the unpleasant necessity of musing about ordinary matters, our thoughts reverted to the red-faced man, and his oratorical display.

A numerous race are these red-faced men; there is not a parlour, or club-room, or benefit society, or humble party of any kind, without its red-faced man. Weak-pated dolts they are, and a great deal of mischief they do to their cause, however good. So, just to hold a pattern one up, to know the others by, we took his likeness at once, and put him in here. And that is the reason why we have written this paper.

CHAPTER VI—THE HOSPITAL PATIENT

In our rambles through the streets of London after evening has set in, we often pause beneath the windows of some public hospital, and picture to ourself the gloomy and mournful scenes that are passing within. The sudden moving of a taper as its feeble ray shoots from window to window, until its light gradually disappears, as if it were carried farther back into the room to the bedside of some suffering patient, is enough to awaken a whole crowd of reflections; the mere glimmering of the low-burning lamps, which, when all other habitations are wrapped in darkness and slumber, denote the chamber where so many forms are writhing with pain, or wasting with disease, is sufficient to check the most boisterous merriment.

Who can tell the anguish of those weary hours, when the only sound the sick man hears, is the disjointed wanderings of some feverish slumberer near him, the low moan of pain, or perhaps the muttered, long-forgotten prayer of a dying man? Who, but they who have felt it, can imagine the sense of loneliness and desolation which must be the portion of those who in the hour of dangerous illness are left to be tended by strangers; for what hands, be they ever so gentle, can wipe the clammy brow, or smooth the restless bed, like those of mother, wife, or child?

Impressed with these thoughts, we have turned away, through the nearly-deserted streets; and the sight of the few miserable creatures still hovering about them, has not tended to lessen the pain which such meditations awaken. The hospital is a refuge and resting-place for hundreds, who but for such institutions must die in the streets and doorways; but what can be the feelings of some outcasts when they are stretched on the bed of sickness with scarcely a hope of recovery? The wretched woman who lingers about the pavement, hours after midnight, and the miserable shadow of a man—the ghastly remnant that want and drunkenness have left—which crouches beneath a window-ledge, to sleep where there is some shelter from the rain, have little to bind them to life, but what have they to look back upon, in death? What are the unwonted comforts of a roof and a bed, to them, when the recollections of a whole life of debasement stalk before them; when repentance seems a mockery, and sorrow comes too late?

About a twelvemonth ago, as we were strolling through Covent-garden (we had been thinking about these things over-night), we were attracted by the very prepossessing appearance of a pickpocket, who having declined to take the trouble of walking to the Police-office, on the ground that he hadn’t the slightest wish to go there at all, was being conveyed thither in a wheelbarrow, to the huge delight of a crowd.

Somehow, we never can resist joining a crowd, so we turned back with the mob, and entered the office, in company with our friend the pickpocket, a couple of policemen, and as many dirty-faced spectators as could squeeze their way in.

There was a powerful, ill-looking young fellow at the bar, who was undergoing an examination, on the very common charge of having, on the previous night, ill-treated a woman, with whom he lived in some court hard by. Several witnesses bore testimony to acts of the grossest brutality; and a certificate was read from the house-surgeon of a neighbouring hospital, describing the nature of the injuries the woman had received, and intimating that her recovery was extremely doubtful.

Some question appeared to have been raised about the identity of the prisoner; for when it was agreed that the two magistrates should visit the hospital at eight o'clock that evening, to take her deposition, it was settled that the man should be taken there also. He turned pale at this, and we saw him clench the bar very hard when the order was given. He was removed directly afterwards, and he spoke not a word.

We felt an irrepressible curiosity to witness this interview, although it is hard to tell why, at this instant, for we knew it must be a painful one. It was no very difficult matter for us to gain permission, and we obtained it.

The prisoner, and the officer who had him in custody, were already at the hospital when we reached it, and waiting the arrival of the magistrates in a small room below stairs. The man was handcuffed, and his hat was pulled forward over his eyes. It was easy to see, though, by the whiteness of his countenance, and the constant twitching of the muscles of his face, that he dreaded what was to come. After a short interval, the magistrates and clerk were bowed in by the house-surgeon and a couple of young men who smelt very strong of tobacco-smoke—they were introduced as 'dressers'—and after one magistrate had complained bitterly of the cold, and the other of the absence of any news in the evening paper, it was announced that the patient was prepared; and we were conducted to the 'casualty ward' in which she was lying.

The dim light which burnt in the spacious room, increased rather than diminished the ghastly appearance of the hapless creatures in the beds, which were ranged in two long rows on either side. In one bed, lay a child enveloped in bandages, with its body half-consumed by fire; in another, a female, rendered hideous by some dreadful accident, was wildly beating her clenched fists on the coverlet, in pain; on a third, there lay stretched a young girl, apparently in the heavy stupor often the immediate precursor of death: her face was stained with blood, and her breast and arms were bound up in folds of linen. Two or three of the beds were empty, and their recent occupants were sitting beside them, but with faces so wan, and eyes so bright and glassy, that it was fearful to meet their gaze. On every face was stamped the expression of anguish and suffering.

The object of the visit was lying at the upper end of the room. She was a fine young woman of about two or three and twenty. Her long black hair, which had been hastily cut from near the wounds on her head, streamed over the pillow in jagged and matted locks. Her face bore deep marks of the ill-usage she had received: her hand was pressed upon her side, as if her chief pain were there; her breathing was short and heavy; and it was plain to see that she was dying fast. She murmured a few words in reply to the magistrate's inquiry whether she was in great pain; and, having been raised on the pillow by the nurse, looked vacantly upon the strange countenances that surrounded her bed. The magistrate nodded to the officer, to bring the man forward. He did so, and stationed him at the bedside. The girl looked on with a wild and troubled expression of face; but her sight was dim, and she did not know him.

'Take off his hat,' said the magistrate. The officer did as he was desired, and the man's features were disclosed.

The girl started up, with an energy quite preternatural; the fire gleamed in her heavy eyes, and the blood rushed to her pale and sunken cheeks. It was a convulsive effort. She fell back upon her pillow, and covering her scarred and bruised face with her hands, burst into tears. The man cast an anxious look towards her, but otherwise appeared wholly unmoved. After a brief pause the nature of the errand was explained, and the oath tendered.

'Oh, no, gentlemen,' said the girl, raising herself once more, and folding her hands together; 'no, gentlemen, for God's sake! I did it myself—it was nobody's fault—it was an accident. He didn't hurt me; he wouldn't for all the world. Jack, dear Jack, you know you wouldn't!'

Her sight was fast failing her, and her hand groped over the bedclothes in search of his. Brute as the man was, he was not prepared for this. He turned his face from the bed, and sobbed. The girl's colour changed, and her breathing grew more difficult. She was evidently dying.

'We respect the feelings which prompt you to this,' said the gentleman who had spoken first, 'but let me warn you, not to persist in what you know to be untrue, until it is too late. It cannot save him.'

'Jack,' murmured the girl, laying her hand upon his arm, 'they shall not persuade me to swear your life away. He didn't do it, gentlemen. He never hurt me.' She grasped his arm tightly, and added, in a broken whisper, 'I hope God Almighty will forgive me all the wrong I have done, and the life I have led. God bless you, Jack. Some kind gentleman take my love to my poor old father. Five years ago, he said he wished I had died a child. Oh, I wish I had! I wish I had!'

The nurse bent over the girl for a few seconds, and then drew the sheet over her face. It covered a corpse.

CHAPTER VII—THE MISPLACED ATTACHMENT OF MR. JOHN DOUNCE

If we had to make a classification of society, there is a particular kind of men whom we should immediately set down under the head of 'Old Boys;' and a column of most extensive dimensions the old boys would require. To what precise causes the rapid advance of old-boy population is to be traced, we are unable to determine. It would be an interesting and curious speculation, but, as we have not sufficient space to devote to it here, we simply state the fact that the numbers of the old boys have been gradually augmenting within the last few years, and that they are at this moment alarmingly on the increase.

Upon a general review of the subject, and without considering it minutely in detail, we should be disposed to subdivide the old boys into two distinct classes—the gay old boys, and the steady old boys. The gay old boys, are paunchy old men in the disguise of young ones, who frequent the Quadrant and Regent-street in the day-time: the theatres (especially theatres under lady management) at night; and who assume all the foppishness and levity of boys, without the excuse of youth or inexperience. The steady old boys are certain stout old gentlemen of clean appearance, who are always to be seen in the same taverns, at the same hours every evening, smoking and drinking in the same company.

There was once a fine collection of old boys to be seen round the circular table at Offley's every night, between the hours of half-past eight and half-past eleven. We have lost sight of them for some time. There were, and may be still, for aught we know, two splendid specimens in full blossom at the Rainbow Tavern in Fleet-street, who always used to sit in the box nearest the fireplace, and smoked long cherry-stick pipes which went under the table, with the bowls resting on the floor. Grand old boys they were—fat, red-faced, white-headed old fellows—always there—one on one side the table, and the other opposite—puffing and drinking away in great state. Everybody knew them, and it was supposed by some people that they were both immortal.

Mr. John Dounce was an old boy of the latter class (we don't mean immortal, but steady), a retired glove and braces maker, a widower, resident with three daughters—all grown up, and all unmarried—in Cursitor-street, Chancery-lane. He was a short, round, large-faced, tubbish sort of man, with a broad-brimmed hat, and a square coat; and had that grave, but confident, kind of roll, peculiar to old boys in general. Regular as clockwork—breakfast at nine—dress and tittivate a little—down to the Sir Somebody's Head—a glass of ale and the paper—come back again, and take daughters out for a walk—dinner at three—glass of grog and pipe—nap—tea—little walk—Sir Somebody's Head again—capital house—delightful evenings. There were Mr. Harris, the law-stationer, and Mr. Jennings, the robe-maker (two jolly young fellows like himself), and Jones, the barrister's clerk—rum fellow that Jones—capital company—full of anecdote!—and there they sat every night till just ten minutes before twelve, drinking their brandy-and-water, and smoking their pipes, and telling stories, and enjoying themselves with a kind of solemn joviality particularly edifying.

Sometimes Jones would propose a half-price visit to Drury Lane or Covent Garden, to see two acts of a five-act play, and a new farce, perhaps, or a ballet, on which occasions the whole four of them went together: none of your hurrying and nonsense, but having their brandy-and-water first, comfortably, and ordering a steak and some oysters for their supper against they came back, and then walking coolly into the pit, when the 'rush' had gone in, as all sensible people do, and did when Mr. Dounce was a young man, except when the celebrated Master Betty was at the height of his popularity, and then, sir,—then—Mr. Dounce perfectly well remembered getting a holiday from business; and going to the pit doors at eleven o’clock in the forenoon, and waiting there, till six in the afternoon, with some sandwiches in a pocket-handkerchief and some wine in a phial; and fainting after all, with the heat and fatigue, before the play began; in which situation he was lifted out of the pit, into one of the dress boxes, sir, by five of the finest women of that day, sir, who compassionated his situation and administered restoratives, and sent a black servant, six foot high, in blue and silver livery, next morning with their compliments, and to know how he found himself, sir—by G-! Between the acts Mr. Dounce and Mr. Harris, and Mr. Jennings, used to stand up, and look round the house, and Jones—knowing fellow that Jones—knew everybody—pointed out the fashionable and celebrated Lady So-and-So in the boxes, at the mention of whose name Mr. Dounce, after brushing up his hair, and adjusting his neckerchief, would inspect the aforesaid Lady So-and-So through an immense glass, and remark, either, that she was a ‘fine woman—very fine woman, indeed,’ or that ‘there might be a little more of her, eh, Jones?’ Just as the case might happen to be. When the dancing began, John Dounce and the other old boys were particularly anxious to see what was going forward on the stage, and Jones—wicked dog that Jones—whispered little critical remarks into the ears of John Dounce, which John Dounce retailed to Mr. Harris and Mr. Harris to Mr. Jennings; and then they all four laughed, until the tears ran down out of their eyes.

When the curtain fell, they walked back together, two and two, to the steaks and oysters; and when they came to the second glass of brandy-and-water, Jones—hoaxing scamp, that Jones—used to recount how he had observed a lady in white feathers, in one of the pit boxes, gazing intently on Mr. Dounce all the evening, and how he had caught Mr. Dounce, whenever he thought no one was looking at him, bestowing ardent looks of intense devotion on the lady in return; on which Mr. Harris and Mr. Jennings used to laugh very heartily, and John Dounce more heartily than either of them, acknowledging, however, that the time *had* been when he *might* have done such things; upon which Mr. Jones used to poke him in the ribs, and tell him he had been a sad dog in his time, which John Dounce with chuckles confessed. And after Mr. Harris and Mr. Jennings had preferred their claims to the character of having been sad dogs too, they separated harmoniously, and trotted home.

The decrees of Fate, and the means by which they are brought about, are mysterious and inscrutable. John Dounce had led this life for twenty years and upwards, without wish for change, or care for variety, when his whole social system was suddenly upset and turned completely topsy-turvy—not by an earthquake, or some other dreadful convulsion of nature, as the reader would be inclined to suppose, but by the simple agency of an oyster; and thus it happened.

Mr. John Dounce was returning one night from the Sir Somebody's Head, to his residence in Cursitor-street—not tipsy, but rather excited, for it was Mr. Jennings's birthday, and they had had a brace of partridges for supper, and a brace of extra glasses afterwards, and Jones had been more than ordinarily amusing—when his eyes rested on a newly-opened oyster-shop, on a magnificent scale, with natives laid, one deep, in circular marble basins in the windows, together with little round barrels of oysters directed to Lords and Baronets, and Colonels and Captains, in every part of the habitable globe.

Behind the natives were the barrels, and behind the barrels was a young lady of about five-and-twenty, all in blue, and all alone—splendid creature, charming face and lovely figure! It is difficult to say whether Mr. John Dounce's red countenance, illuminated as it was by the flickering gas-light in the window before which he paused, excited the lady's risibility, or whether a natural exuberance of animal spirits proved too much for that staidness of demeanour which the forms of society rather dictatorially prescribe. But certain it is, that the lady smiled; then put her finger upon her lip, with a striking recollection of what was due to herself; and finally retired, in oyster-like bashfulness, to the very back of the counter. The sad-dog sort of feeling came strongly upon John Dounce: he lingered—the lady in blue made no sign. He coughed—still she came not. He entered the shop.

'Can you open me an oyster, my dear?' said Mr. John Dounce.

'Dare say I can, sir,' replied the lady in blue, with playfulness. And Mr. John Dounce eat one oyster, and then looked at the young lady, and then eat another, and then squeezed the young lady's hand as she was opening the third, and so forth, until he had devoured a dozen of those at eightpence in less than no time.

‘Can you open me half-a-dozen more, my dear?’ inquired Mr. John Dounce.

‘I’ll see what I can do for you, sir,’ replied the young lady in blue, even more bewitchingly than before; and Mr. John Dounce eat half-a-dozen more of those at eightpence.

‘You couldn’t manage to get me a glass of brandy-and-water, my dear, I suppose?’ said Mr. John Dounce, when he had finished the oysters: in a tone which clearly implied his supposition that she could.

‘I’ll see, sir,’ said the young lady: and away she ran out of the shop, and down the street, her long auburn ringlets shaking in the wind in the most enchanting manner; and back she came again, tripping over the coal-cellar lids like a whipping-top, with a tumbler of brandy-and-water, which Mr. John Dounce insisted on her taking a share of, as it was regular ladies’ grog—hot, strong, sweet, and plenty of it.

So, the young lady sat down with Mr. John Dounce, in a little red box with a green curtain, and took a small sip of the brandy-and-water, and a small look at Mr. John Dounce, and then turned her head away, and went through various other serio-pantomimic fascinations, which forcibly reminded Mr. John Dounce of the first time he courted his first wife, and which made him feel more affectionate than ever; in pursuance of which affection, and actuated by which feeling, Mr. John Dounce sounded the young lady on her matrimonial engagements, when the young lady denied having formed any such engagements at all—she couldn’t abear the men, they were such deceivers; thereupon Mr. John Dounce inquired whether this sweeping condemnation was meant to include other than very young men; on which the young lady blushed deeply—at least she turned away her head, and said Mr. John Dounce had made her blush, so of course she *did* blush—and Mr. John Dounce was a long time drinking the brandy-and-water; and, at last, John Dounce went home to bed, and dreamed of his first wife, and his second wife, and the young lady, and partridges, and oysters, and brandy-and-water, and disinterested attachments.

The next morning, John Dounce was rather feverish with the extra brandy-and-water of the previous night; and, partly in the hope of cooling himself with an oyster, and partly with the view of ascertaining whether he owed the young lady anything, or not, went back to the oyster-shop. If the young lady had appeared beautiful by night, she was perfectly irresistible by day; and, from this time forward, a change came over the spirit of John

Dounce’s dream. He bought shirt-pins; wore a ring on his third finger; read poetry; bribed a cheap miniature-painter to perpetrate a faint resemblance to a youthful face, with a curtain over his head, six large books in the background, and an open country in the distance (this he called his portrait); ‘went on’ altogether in such an uproarious manner, that the three Miss Dounces went off on small pensions, he having made the tenement in Cursitor-street too warm to contain them; and in short, comported and demeaned himself in every respect like an unmitigated old Saracen, as he was.

As to his ancient friends, the other old boys, at the Sir Somebody’s Head, he dropped off from them by gradual degrees; for, even when he did go there, Jones—vulgar fellow that Jones—persisted in asking ‘when it was to be?’ and ‘whether he was to have any gloves?’ together with other inquiries of an equally offensive nature: at which not only Harris laughed, but Jennings also; so, he cut the two, altogether, and attached himself solely to the blue young lady at the smart oyster-shop.

Now comes the moral of the story—for it has a moral after all. The last-mentioned young lady, having derived sufficient profit and emolument from John Dounce’s attachment, not only refused, when matters came to a crisis, to take him for better for worse, but expressly declared, to use her own forcible words, that she ‘wouldn’t have him at no price;’ and John Dounce, having lost his old friends, alienated his relations, and rendered himself ridiculous to everybody, made offers successively to a schoolmistress, a landlady, a feminine tobacconist, and a housekeeper; and, being directly rejected by each and every of them, was accepted by his cook, with whom he now lives, a henpecked husband, a melancholy monument of antiquated misery, and a living warning to all uxorious old boys.

CHAPTER VIII—THE MISTAKEN MILLINER. A TALE OF AMBITION

Miss Amelia Martin was pale, tallish, thin, and two-and-thirty—what ill-natured people would call plain, and police reports interesting. She was a milliner and dressmaker, living on her business and not above it. If you had been a young lady in service, and had wanted Miss Martin, as a great many young ladies in service did, you would just have stepped up, in the evening, to number forty-seven, Drummond-street, George-street, Euston-square, and after casting your eye on a brass door-plate, one foot ten by one and a half, ornamented with a great brass knob at each of the four corners, and bearing the inscription ‘Miss Martin; millinery and dressmaking, in all its branches;’ you’d just have knocked two loud knocks at the street-door; and down would have come Miss Martin herself, in a merino gown of the newest fashion, black velvet bracelets on the genteelest principle, and other little elegancies of the most approved description.

If Miss Martin knew the young lady who called, or if the young lady who called had been recommended by any other young lady whom Miss Martin knew, Miss Martin would forthwith show her up-stairs into the two-pair front, and chat she would—*so* kind, and *so* comfortable—it really wasn’t like a matter of business, she was so friendly; and, then Miss Martin, after contemplating the figure and general appearance of the young lady in service with great apparent admiration, would say how well she would look, to be sure, in a low dress with short sleeves; made very full in the skirts, with four tucks in the bottom; to which the young lady in service would reply in terms expressive of her entire concurrence in the notion, and of the virtuous indignation with which she reflected on the tyranny of ‘Missis,’ who wouldn’t allow a young girl to wear a short sleeve of an arternoon—no, nor nothing smart, not even a pair of ear-rings; let alone hiding people’s heads of hair under them frightful caps. At the termination of this complaint, Miss Amelia Martin would distantly suggest certain dark suspicions that some people were jealous on account of their own daughters, and were obliged to keep their servants’ charms under, for fear they should get married first, which was no uncommon circumstance—leastways she had known two or three young ladies in service, who had married a great deal better than their missises, and *they* were not very good-looking either; and then the young lady would inform Miss Martin, in confidence, that how one of their young ladies was engaged to a young man and was a-going to be married, and Missis was so proud about it there was no bearing of her; but how she needn’t hold her head quite so high neither, for, after all, he was only a clerk. And, after expressing due contempt for clerks in general, and the engaged clerk in particular, and the highest opinion possible of themselves and each other, Miss Martin and the young lady in service would bid each other good night, in a friendly but perfectly genteel manner: and the one went back to her ‘place,’ and the other, to her room on the second-floor front.

There is no saying how long Miss Amelia Martin might have continued this course of life; how extensive a connection she might have established among young ladies in service; or what amount her demands upon their quarterly receipts might have ultimately attained, had not an unforeseen train of circumstances directed her thoughts to a sphere of action very different from dressmaking or millinery.

A friend of Miss Martin’s who had long been keeping company with an ornamental painter and decorator’s journeyman, at last consented (on being at last asked to do so) to name the day which would make the aforesaid journeyman a happy husband. It was a Monday that was appointed for the celebration of the nuptials, and Miss Amelia Martin was invited, among others, to honour the wedding-dinner with her presence. It was a charming party; Somers-town the locality, and a front parlour the apartment. The ornamental painter and decorator’s journeyman had taken a house—no lodgings nor vulgarity of that kind, but a house—four beautiful rooms, and a delightful little washhouse at the end of the passage—which was the most convenient thing in the world, for the bridesmaids could sit in the front parlour and receive the company, and then run into the little washhouse and see how the pudding and boiled pork were getting on in the copper, and then pop back into the parlour again, as snug and comfortable as possible. And such a parlour as it was! Beautiful Kidderminster carpet—six bran-new cane-bottomed stained chairs—three wine-glasses and a tumbler on each sideboard—farmer’s girl and farmer’s boy on the mantelpiece: girl tumbling over a stile, and boy spitting himself, on the handle of a pitchfork—long white dimity curtains in the window—and, in short, everything on the most genteel scale imaginable.

Then, the dinner. There was baked leg of mutton at the top, boiled leg of mutton at the bottom, pair of fowls and leg of pork in the middle; porter-pots at the corners; pepper, mustard, and vinegar in the centre; vegetables on the floor; and plum-pudding and apple-pie and tartlets without number: to say nothing of cheese, and celery, and water-cresses, and all that sort of thing. As to the Company! Miss Amelia Martin herself declared, on a subsequent occasion, that, much as she had heard of the ornamental painter’s journeyman’s connexion, she never could have supposed it was half so genteel. There was his father, such a funny old gentleman—and his mother, such a dear old lady—and his sister, such a charming girl—and his brother, such a manly-looking young man—with such a eye! But even all these were as nothing when compared with his musical friends, Mr. and Mrs. Jennings Rodolph, from White Conduit, with whom the ornamental painter's journeyman had been fortunate enough to contract an intimacy while engaged in decorating the concert-room of that noble institution. To hear them sing separately, was divine, but when they went through the tragic duet of 'Red Ruffian, retire!' it was, as Miss Martin afterwards remarked, 'thrilling.' And why (as Mr. Jennings Rodolph observed) why were they not engaged at one of the patent theatres? If he was to be told that their voices were not powerful enough to fill the House, his only reply was, that he would back himself for any amount to fill Russell-square—a statement in which the company, after hearing the duet, expressed their full belief; so they all said it was shameful treatment; and both Mr. and Mrs. Jennings Rodolph said it was shameful too; and Mr. Jennings Rodolph looked very serious, and said he knew who his malignant opponents were, but they had better take care how far they went, for if they irritated him too much he had not quite made up his mind whether he wouldn't bring the subject before Parliament; and they all agreed that it ''ud serve 'em quite right, and it was very proper that such people should be made an example of.' So Mr. Jennings Rodolph said he'd think of it.

When the conversation resumed its former tone, Mr. Jennings Rodolph claimed his right to call upon a lady, and the right being conceded, trusted Miss Martin would favour the company—a proposal which met with unanimous approbation, whereupon Miss Martin, after sundry hesitatings and coughings, with a preparatory choke or two, and an introductory declaration that she was frightened to death to attempt it before such great judges of the art, commenced a species of treble chirruping containing frequent allusions to some young gentleman of the name of Hen-e-ry, with an occasional reference to madness and broken hearts. Mr. Jennings Rodolph frequently interrupted the progress of the song, by ejaculating 'Beautiful!'—'Charming!'—'Brilliant!'—'Oh! splendid,' &c.; and at its close the admiration of himself, and his lady, knew no bounds.

'Did you ever hear so sweet a voice, my dear?' inquired Mr. Jennings Rodolph of Mrs. Jennings Rodolph.

'Never; indeed I never did, love,' replied Mrs. Jennings Rodolph.

‘Don’t you think Miss Martin, with a little cultivation, would be very like Signora Marra Boni, my dear?’ asked Mr. Jennings Rodolph.

‘Just exactly the very thing that struck me, my love,’ answered Mrs. Jennings Rodolph.

And thus the time passed away; Mr. Jennings Rodolph played tunes on a walking-stick, and then went behind the parlour-door and gave his celebrated imitations of actors, edge-tools, and animals; Miss Martin sang several other songs with increased admiration every time; and even the funny old gentleman began singing. His song had properly seven verses, but as he couldn’t recollect more than the first one, he sang that over seven times, apparently very much to his own personal gratification. And then all the company sang the national anthem with national independence—each for himself, without reference to the other—and finally separated: all declaring that they never had spent so pleasant an evening: and Miss Martin inwardly resolving to adopt the advice of Mr. Jennings Rodolph, and to ‘come out’ without delay.

Now, ‘coming out,’ either in acting, or singing, or society, or facetiousness, or anything else, is all very well, and remarkably pleasant to the individual principally concerned, if he or she can but manage to come out with a burst, and being out, to keep out, and not go in again; but, it does unfortunately happen that both consummations are extremely difficult to accomplish, and that the difficulties, of getting out at all in the first instance, and if you surmount them, of keeping out in the second, are pretty much on a par, and no slight ones either—and so Miss Amelia Martin shortly discovered. It is a singular fact (there being ladies in the case) that Miss Amelia Martin’s principal foible was vanity, and the leading characteristic of Mrs. Jennings Rodolph an attachment to dress. Dismal wailings were heard to issue from the second-floor front of number forty-seven, Drummond-street, George-street, Euston-square; it was Miss Martin practising. Half-suppressed murmurs disturbed the calm dignity of the White Conduit orchestra at the commencement of the season. It was the appearance of Mrs. Jennings Rodolph in full dress, that occasioned them. Miss Martin studied incessantly—the practising was the consequence. Mrs. Jennings Rodolph taught gratuitously now and then—the dresses were the result.

Weeks passed away; the White Conduit season had begun, and progressed, and was more than half over. The dressmaking business had fallen off, from neglect; and its profits had dwindled away almost imperceptibly. A benefit-night approached; Mr. Jennings Rodolph yielded to the earnest solicitationfootnotes of Miss Amelia Martin, and introduced her personally to the 'comic gentleman' whose benefit it was. The comic gentleman was all smiles and blandness—he had composed a duet, expressly for the occasion, and Miss Martin should sing it with him. The night arrived; there was an immense room—ninety-seven sixpenn'orths of gin-and-water, thirty-two small glasses of brandy-and-water, five-and-twenty bottled ales, and forty-one neguses; and the ornamental painter's journeyman, with his wife and a select circle of acquaintance, were seated at one of the side-tables near the orchestra. The concert began. Song—sentimental—by a light-haired young gentleman in a blue coat, and bright basket buttons—[applause]. Another song, doubtful, by another gentleman in another blue coat and more bright basket buttons—[increased applause]. Duet, Mr. Jennings Rodolph, and Mrs. Jennings Rodolph, 'Red Ruffian, retire!'—[great applause]. Solo, Miss Julia Montague (positively on this occasion only)—'I am a Friar'—[enthusiasm]. Original duet, comic—Mr. H. Taplin (the comic gentleman) and Miss Martin—'The Time of Day.' 'Brayvo!—Brayvo!' cried the ornamental painter's journeyman's party, as Miss Martin was gracefully led in by the comic gentleman. 'Go to work, Harry,' cried the comic gentleman's personal friends. 'Tap-tap-tap,' went the leader's bow on the music-desk. The symphony began, and was soon afterwards followed by a faint kind of ventriloquial chirping, proceeding apparently from the deepest recesses of the interior of Miss Amelia Martin. 'Sing out'—shouted one gentleman in a white great-coat. 'Don't be afraid to put the steam on, old gal,' exclaimed another, 'S-s-s-s-s-s-s'-went the five-and-twenty bottled ales. 'Shame, shame!' remonstrated the ornamental painter's journeyman's party—'S-s-s-s' went the bottled ales again, accompanied by all the gins, and a majority of the brandies.

'Turn them geese out,' cried the ornamental painter's journeyman's party, with great indignation.

'Sing out,' whispered Mr. Jennings Rodolph.

'So I do,' responded Miss Amelia Martin.

'Sing louder,' said Mrs. Jennings Rodolph.

'I can't,' replied Miss Amelia Martin.

'Off, off, off,' cried the rest of the audience.

'Bray-vo!' shouted the painter's party. It wouldn't do—Miss Amelia Martin left the orchestra, with much less ceremony than she had entered it; and, as she couldn't sing out, never came out. The general good humour was not restored until Mr. Jennings Rodolph had become purple in the face, by imitating divers quadrupeds for half an hour, without being able to render himself audible; and, to this day, neither has Miss Amelia Martin's good humour been restored, nor the dresses made for and presented to Mrs. Jennings Rodolph, nor the local abilities which Mr. Jennings Rodolph once staked his professional reputation that Miss Martin possessed.

CHAPTER IX—THE DANCING ACADEMY

Of all the dancing academies that ever were established, there never was one more popular in its immediate vicinity than Signor Billsmethi's, of the 'King's Theatre.' It was not in Spring-gardens, or Newman-street, or Berners-street, or Gower-street, or Charlotte-street, or Percy-street, or any other of the numerous streets which have been devoted time out of mind to professional people, dispensaries, and boarding-houses; it was not in the West-end at all—it rather approximated to the eastern portion of London, being situated in the populous and improving neighbourhood of Gray's-inn-lane. It was not a dear dancing academy—four-and-sixpence a quarter is decidedly cheap upon the whole. It was *very* select, the number of pupils being strictly limited to seventy-five, and a quarter's payment in advance being rigidly exacted. There was public tuition and private tuition—an assembly-room and a parlour. Signor Billsmethi's family were always thrown in with the parlour, and included in parlour price; that is to say, a private pupil had Signor Billsmethi's parlour to dance *in*, and Signor Billsmethi's family to dance *with*; and when he had been sufficiently broken in in the parlour, he began to run in couples in the assembly-room.

Such was the dancing academy of Signor Billsmethi, when Mr. Augustus Cooper, of Fetter-lane, first saw an unstamped advertisement walking leisurely down Holborn-hill, announcing to the world that Signor Billsmethi, of the King's Theatre, intended opening for the season with a Grand Ball.

Now, Mr. Augustus Cooper was in the oil and colour line—just of age, with a little money, a little business, and a little mother, who, having managed her husband and *his* business in his lifetime, took to managing her son and *his* business after his decease; and so, somehow or other, he had been cooped up in the little back parlour behind the shop on week-days, and in a little deal box without a lid (called by courtesy a pew) at Bethel Chapel, on Sundays, and had seen no more of the world than if he had been an infant all his days; whereas Young White, at the gas-fitter's over the way, three years younger than him, had been flaring away like winkin'—going to the theatre—supping at harmonic meetings—eating oysters by the barrel—drinking stout by the gallon—even out all night, and coming home as cool in the morning as if nothing had happened. So Mr. Augustus Cooper made up his mind that he would not stand it any longer, and had that very morning expressed to his mother a firm determination to be 'blowed,' in the event of his not being instantly provided with a street-door key. And he was walking down Holborn-hill, thinking about all these things, and wondering how he could manage to get introduced into genteel society for the first time, when his eyes rested on Signor Billsmethi's announcement, which it immediately struck him was just the very thing he wanted; for he should not only be able to select a genteel circle of acquaintance at once, out of the five-and-seventy pupils at four-and-sixpence a quarter, but should qualify himself at the same time to go through a hornpipe in private society, with perfect ease to himself and great delight to his friends. So, he stopped the unstamped advertisement—an animated sandwich, composed of a boy between two boards—and having procured a very small card with the Signor's address indented thereon, walked straight at once to the Signor's house—and very fast he walked too, for fear the list should be filled up, and the five-and-seventy completed, before he got there. The Signor was at home, and, what was still more gratifying, he was an Englishman! Such a nice man—and so polite! The list was not full, but it was a most extraordinary circumstance that there was only just one vacancy, and even that one would have been filled up, that very morning, only Signor Billsmethi was dissatisfied with the reference, and, being very much afraid that the lady wasn't select, wouldn't take her.

'And very much delighted I am, Mr. Cooper,' said Signor Billsmethi, 'that I did *not* take her. I assure you, Mr. Cooper—I don't say it to flatter you, for I know you're above it—that I consider myself extremely fortunate in having a gentleman of your manners and appearance, sir.'

'I am very glad of it too, sir,' said Augustus Cooper.

‘And I hope we shall be better acquainted, sir,’ said Signor Billsmethi.

‘And I’m sure I hope we shall too, sir,’ responded Augustus Cooper. Just then, the door opened, and in came a young lady, with her hair curled in a crop all over her head, and her shoes tied in sandals all over her ankles.

‘Don’t run away, my dear,’ said Signor Billsmethi; for the young lady didn’t know Mr. Cooper was there when she ran in, and was going to run out again in her modesty, all in confusion-like. ‘Don’t run away, my dear,’ said Signor Billsmethi, ‘this is Mr. Cooper—Mr. Cooper, of Fetter-lane. Mr. Cooper, my daughter, sir—Miss Billsmethi, sir, who I hope will have the pleasure of dancing many a quadrille, minuet, gavotte, country-dance, fandango, double-hornpipe, and farinagholkajingo with you, sir. She dances them all, sir; and so shall you, sir, before you’re a quarter older, sir.’

And Signor Bellsmethi slapped Mr. Augustus Cooper on the back, as if he had known him a dozen years,—so friendly;—and Mr. Cooper bowed to the young lady, and the young lady curtseyed to him, and Signor Billsmethi said they were as handsome a pair as ever he’d wish to see; upon which the young lady exclaimed, ‘Lor, pa!’ and blushed as red as Mr. Cooper himself—you might have thought they were both standing under a red lamp at a chemist’s shop; and before Mr. Cooper went away it was settled that he should join the family circle that very night—taking them just as they were—no ceremony nor nonsense of that kind—and learn his positions in order that he might lose no time, and be able to come out at the forthcoming ball.

Well; Mr. Augustus Cooper went away to one of the cheap shoemakers’ shops in Holborn, where gentlemen’s dress-pumps are seven-and-sixpence, and men’s strong walking just nothing at all, and bought a pair of the regular seven-and-sixpenny, long-quartered, town-mades, in which he astonished himself quite as much as his mother, and sallied forth to Signor Billsmethi’s. There were four other private pupils in the parlour: two ladies and two gentlemen. Such nice people! Not a bit of pride about them. One of the ladies in particular, who was in training for a Columbine, was remarkably affable; and she and Miss Billsmethi took such an interest in Mr. Augustus Cooper, and joked, and smiled, and looked so bewitching, that he got quite at home, and learnt his steps in no time. After the practising was over, Signor Billsmethi, and Miss Billsmethi, and Master Billsmethi, and a young lady, and the two ladies, and the two gentlemen, danced a quadrille—none of your slipping and sliding about, but regular warm work, flying into corners, and diving among chairs, and shooting out at the door,—something like dancing! Signor Billsmethi in particular, notwithstanding his having a little fiddle to play all the time, was out on the landing every figure, and Master Billsmethi, when everybody else was breathless, danced a hornpipe, with a cane in his hand, and a cheese-plate on his head, to the unqualified admiration of the whole company. Then, Signor Billsmethi insisted, as they were so happy, that they should all stay to supper, and proposed sending Master Billsmethi for the beer and spirits, whereupon the two gentlemen swore, 'strike 'em wulgar if they'd stand that;' and were just going to quarrel who should pay for it, when Mr. Augustus Cooper said he would, if they'd have the kindness to allow him—and they *had* the kindness to allow him; and Master Billsmethi brought the beer in a can, and the rum in a quart pot. They had a regular night of it; and Miss Billsmethi squeezed Mr. Augustus Cooper's hand under the table; and Mr. Augustus Cooper returned the squeeze, and returned home too, at something to six o'clock in the morning, when he was put to bed by main force by the apprentice, after repeatedly expressing an uncontrollable desire to pitch his revered parent out of the second-floor window, and to throttle the apprentice with his own neck-handkerchief.

Weeks had worn on, and the seven-and-sixpenny town-mades had nearly worn out, when the night arrived for the grand dress-ball at which the whole of the five-and-seventy pupils were to meet together, for the first time that season, and to take out some portion of their respective four-and-sixpences in lamp-oil and fiddlers. Mr. Augustus Cooper had ordered a new coat for the occasion—a two-pound-tenner from Turnstile. It was his first appearance in public; and, after a grand Sicilian shawl-dance by fourteen young ladies in character, he was to open the quadrille department with Miss Billsmethi herself, with whom he had become quite intimate since his first introduction. It *was* a night! Everything was admirably arranged. The sandwich-boy took the hats and bonnets at the street-door; there was a turn-up bedstead in the back parlour, on which Miss Billsmethi made tea and coffee for such of the gentlemen as chose to pay for it, and such of the ladies as the gentlemen treated; red port-wine negus and lemonade were handed round at eighteen-pence a head; and in pursuance of a previous engagement with the public-house at the corner of the street, an extra potboy was laid on for the occasion. In short, nothing could exceed the arrangements, except the company. Such ladies! Such pink silk stockings! Such artificial flowers! Such a number of cabs! No sooner had one cab set down a couple of ladies, than another cab drove up and set down another couple of ladies, and they all knew: not only one another, but the majority of the gentlemen into the bargain, which made it all as pleasant and lively as could be. Signor Billsmethi, in black tights, with a large blue bow in his buttonhole, introduced the ladies to such of the gentlemen as were strangers: and the ladies talked away—and laughed they did—it was delightful to see them.

As to the shawl-dance, it was the most exciting thing that ever was beheld; there was such a whisking, and rustling, and fanning, and getting ladies into a tangle with artificial flowers, and then disentangling them again! And as to Mr. Augustus Cooper's share in the quadrille, he got through it admirably. He was missing from his partner, now and then, certainly, and discovered on such occasions to be either dancing with laudable perseverance in another set, or sliding about in perspective, without any definite object; but, generally speaking, they managed to shove him through the figure, until he turned up in the right place. Be this as it may, when he had finished, a great many ladies and gentlemen came up and complimented him very much, and said they had never seen a beginner do anything like it before; and Mr. Augustus Cooper was perfectly satisfied with himself, and everybody else into the bargain; and 'stood' considerable quantities of spirits-and-water, negus, and compounds, for the use and behoof of two or three dozen very particular friends, selected from the select circle of five-and-seventy pupils.

Now, whether it was the strength of the compounds, or the beauty of the ladies, or what not, it did so happen that Mr. Augustus Cooper encouraged, rather than repelled, the very flattering attentions of a young lady in brown gauze over white calico who had appeared particularly struck with him from the first; and when the encouragements had been prolonged for some time, Miss Billsmethi betrayed her spite and jealousy thereat by calling the young lady in brown gauze a 'creeter,' which induced the young lady in brown gauze to retort, in certain sentences containing a taunt founded on the payment of four-and-sixpence a quarter, which reference Mr. Augustus Cooper, being then and there in a state of considerable bewilderment, expressed his entire concurrence in. Miss Billsmethi, thus renounced, forthwith began screaming in the loudest key of her voice, at the rate of fourteen screams a minute; and being unsuccessful, in an onslaught on the eyes and face, first of the lady in gauze and then of Mr. Augustus Cooper, called distractedly on the other three-and-seventy pupils to furnish her with oxalic acid for her own private drinking; and, the call not being honoured, made another rush at Mr. Cooper, and then had her stay-lace cut, and was carried off to bed. Mr. Augustus Cooper, not being remarkable for quickness of apprehension, was at a loss to understand what all this meant, until Signor Billsmethi explained it in a most satisfactory manner, by stating to the pupils, that Mr. Augustus Cooper had made and confirmed divers promises of marriage to his daughter on divers occasions, and had now basely deserted her; on which, the indignation of the pupils became universal; and as several chivalrous gentlemen inquired rather pressingly of Mr. Augustus Cooper, whether he required anything for his own use, or, in other words, whether he 'wanted anything for himself,' he deemed it prudent to make a precipitate retreat. And the upshot of the matter was, that a lawyer's letter came next day, and an action was commenced next week; and that Mr. Augustus Cooper, after walking twice to the Serpentine for the purpose of drowning himself, and coming twice back without doing it, made a confidante of his mother, who compromised the matter with twenty pounds from the till: which made twenty pounds four shillings and sixpence paid to Signor Billsmethi, exclusive of treats and pumps. And Mr. Augustus Cooper went back and lived with his mother, and there he lives to this day; and as he has lost his ambition for society, and never goes into the world, he will never see this account of himself, and will never be any the wiser.

CHAPTER X—SHABBY-GENTEEL PEOPLE

There are certain descriptions of people who, oddly enough, appear to appertain exclusively to the metropolis. You meet them, every day, in the streets of London, but no one ever encounters them elsewhere; they seem indigenous to the soil, and to belong as exclusively to London as its own smoke, or the dingy bricks and mortar. We could illustrate the remark by a variety of examples, but, in our present sketch, we will only advert to one class as a specimen—that class which is so aptly and expressively designated as 'shabby-genteel.'

Now, shabby people, God knows, may be found anywhere, and genteel people are not articles of greater scarcity out of London than in it; but this compound of the two—this shabby-gentility—is as purely local as the statue at Charing-cross, or the pump at Aldgate. It is worthy of remark, too, that only men are shabby-genteel; a woman is always either dirty and slovenly in the extreme, or neat and respectable, however poverty-stricken in appearance. A very poor man, ‘who has seen better days,’ as the phrase goes, is a strange compound of dirty-slovenliness and wretched attempts at faded smartness.

We will endeavour to explain our conception of the term which forms the title of this paper. If you meet a man, lounging up Drury-Lane, or leaning with his back against a post in Long-acre, with his hands in the pockets of a pair of drab trousers plentifully besprinkled with grease-spots: the trousers made very full over the boots, and ornamented with two cords down the outside of each leg—wearing, also, what has been a brown coat with bright buttons, and a hat very much pinched up at the side, cocked over his right eye—don’t pity him. He is not shabby-genteel. The ‘harmonic meetings’ at some fourth-rate public-house, or the purlieus of a private theatre, are his chosen haunts; he entertains a rooted antipathy to any kind of work, and is on familiar terms with several pantomime men at the large houses. But, if you see hurrying along a by-street, keeping as close as he can to the area-railings, a man of about forty or fifty, clad in an old rusty suit of threadbare black cloth which shines with constant wear as if it had been bees-waxed—the trousers tightly strapped down, partly for the look of the thing and partly to keep his old shoes from slipping off at the heels,—if you observe, too, that his yellowish-white neckerchief is carefully pinned up, to conceal the tattered garment underneath, and that his hands are encased in the remains of an old pair of beaver gloves, you may set him down as a shabby-genteel man. A glance at that depressed face, and timorous air of conscious poverty, will make your heart ache—always supposing that you are neither a philosopher nor a political economist.

We were once haunted by a shabby-genteel man; he was bodily present to our senses all day, and he was in our mind’s eye all night. The man of whom Sir Walter Scott speaks in his Demonology, did not suffer half the persecution from his imaginary gentleman-usher in black velvet, that we sustained from our friend in quondam black cloth. He first attracted our notice, by sitting opposite to us in the reading-room at the British Museum; and what made the man more remarkable was, that he always had before him a couple of shabby-genteel books—two old dog’s-eared folios, in mouldy worm-eaten covers, which had once been smart. He was in his chair, every morning, just as the clock struck ten; he was always the last to leave the room in the afternoon; and when he did, he quitted it with the air of a man who knew not where else to go, for warmth and quiet. There he used to sit all day, as close to the table as possible, in order to conceal the lack of buttons on his coat: with his old hat carefully deposited at his feet, where he evidently flattered himself it escaped observation.

About two o’clock, you would see him munching a French roll or a penny loaf; not taking it boldly out of his pocket at once, like a man who knew he was only making a lunch; but breaking off little bits in his pocket, and eating them by stealth. He knew too well it was his dinner.

When we first saw this poor object, we thought it quite impossible that his attire could ever become worse. We even went so far, as to speculate on the possibility of his shortly appearing in a decent second-hand suit. We knew nothing about the matter; he grew more and more shabby-genteel every day. The buttons dropped off his waistcoat, one by one; then, he buttoned his coat; and when one side of the coat was reduced to the same condition as the waistcoat, he buttoned it over—on the other side. He looked somewhat better at the beginning of the week than at the conclusion, because the neckerchief, though yellow, was not quite so dingy; and, in the midst of all this wretchedness, he never appeared without gloves and straps. He remained in this state for a week or two. At length, one of the buttons on the back of the coat fell off, and then the man himself disappeared, and we thought he was dead.

We were sitting at the same table about a week after his disappearance, and as our eyes rested on his vacant chair, we insensibly fell into a train of meditation on the subject of his retirement from public life. We were wondering whether he had hung himself, or thrown himself off a bridge—whether he really was dead or had only been arrested—when our conjectures were suddenly set at rest by the entry of the man himself. He had undergone some strange metamorphosis, and walked up the centre of the room with an air which showed he was fully conscious of the improvement in his appearance. It was very odd. His clothes were a fine, deep, glossy black; and yet they looked like the same suit; nay, there were the very darns with which old acquaintance had made us familiar. The hat, too—nobody could mistake the shape of that hat, with its high crown gradually increasing in circumference towards the top. Long service had imparted to it a reddish-brown tint; but, now, it was as black as the coat. The truth flashed suddenly upon us—they had been ‘revived.’ It is a deceitful liquid that black and blue reviver; we have watched its effects on many a shabby-genteel man. It betrays its victims into a temporary assumption of importance: possibly into the purchase of a new pair of gloves, or a cheap stock, or some other trifling article of dress. It elevates their spirits for a week, only to depress them, if possible, below their original level. It was so in this case; the transient dignity of the unhappy man decreased, in exact proportion as the ‘reviver’ wore off. The knees of the unmentionables, and the elbows of the coat, and the seams generally, soon began to get alarmingly white. The hat was once more deposited under the table, and its owner crept into his seat as quietly as ever.

There was a week of incessant small rain and mist. At its expiration the ‘reviver’ had entirely vanished, and the shabby-genteel man never afterwards attempted to effect any improvement in his outward appearance.

It would be difficult to name any particular part of town as the principal resort of shabby-genteel men. We have met a great many persons of this description in the neighbourhood of the inns of court. They may be met with, in Holborn, between eight and ten any morning; and whoever has the curiosity to enter the Insolvent Debtors’ Court will observe, both among spectators and practitioners, a great variety of them. We never went on ‘Change, by any chance, without seeing some shabby-genteel men, and we have often wondered what earthly business they can have there. They will sit there, for hours, leaning on great, dropsical, mildewed umbrellas, or eating Abernethy biscuits. Nobody speaks to them, nor they to any one. On consideration, we remember to have occasionally seen two shabby-genteel men conversing together on ‘Change, but our experience assures us that this is an uncommon circumstance, occasioned by the offer of a pinch of snuff, or some such civility.

It would be a task of equal difficulty, either to assign any particular spot for the residence of these beings, or to endeavour to enumerate their general occupations. We were never engaged in business with more than one shabby-genteel man; and he was a drunken engraver, and lived in a damp back-parlour in a new row of houses at Camden-town, half street, half brick-field, somewhere near the canal. A shabby-genteel man may have no occupation, or he may be a corn agent, or a coal agent, or a wine merchant, or a collector of debts, or a broker’s assistant, or a broken-down attorney.

He may be a clerk of the lowest description, or a contributor to the press of the same grade. Whether our readers have noticed these men, in their walks, as often as we have, we know not; this we know—that the miserably poor man (no matter whether he owes his distresses to his own conduct, or that of others) who feels his poverty and vainly strives to conceal it, is one of the most pitiable objects in human nature. Such objects, with few exceptions, are shabby-genteel people.

CHAPTER XI—MAKING A NIGHT OF IT

Damon and Pythias were undoubtedly very good fellows in their way: the former for his extreme readiness to put in special bail for a friend: and the latter for a certain trump-like punctuality in turning up just in the very nick of time, scarcely less remarkable. Many points in their character have, however, grown obsolete. Damons are rather hard to find, in these days of imprisonment for debt (except the sham ones, and they cost half-a-crown); and, as to the Pythiases, the few that have existed in these degenerate times, have had an unfortunate knack of making themselves scarce, at the very moment when their appearance would have been strictly classical. If the actions of these heroes, however, can find no parallel in modern times, their friendship can. We have Damon and Pythias on the one hand. We have Potter and Smithers on the other; and, lest the two last-mentioned names should never have reached the ears of our unenlightened readers, we can do no better than make them acquainted with the owners thereof.

Mr. Thomas Potter, then, was a clerk in the city, and Mr. Robert Smithers was a ditto in the same; their incomes were limited, but their friendship was unbounded. They lived in the same street, walked into town every morning at the same hour, dined at the same slap-bang every day, and revelled in each other’s company very night. They were knit together by the closest ties of intimacy and friendship, or, as Mr. Thomas Potter touchingly observed, they were ‘thick-and-thin pals, and nothing but it.’ There was a spice of romance in Mr. Smithers’s disposition, a ray of poetry, a gleam of misery, a sort of consciousness of he didn’t exactly know what, coming across him he didn’t precisely know why—which stood out in fine relief against the off-hand, dashing, amateur-pickpocket-sort-of-manner, which distinguished Mr. Potter in an eminent degree.

The peculiarity of their respective dispositions, extended itself to their individual costume. Mr. Smithers generally appeared in public in a surtout and shoes, with a narrow black neckerchief and a brown hat, very much turned up at the sides—peculiarities which Mr. Potter wholly eschewed, for it was his ambition to do something in the celebrated 'kiddy' or stage-coach way, and he had even gone so far as to invest capital in the purchase of a rough blue coat with wooden buttons, made upon the fireman's principle, in which, with the addition of a low-crowned, flower-pot-saucer-shaped hat, he had created no inconsiderable sensation at the Albion in Little Russell-street, and divers other places of public and fashionable resort.

Mr. Potter and Mr. Smithers had mutually agreed that, on the receipt of their quarter's salary, they would jointly and in company 'spend the evening'—an evident misnomer—the spending applying, as everybody knows, not to the evening itself but to all the money the individual may chance to be possessed of, on the occasion to which reference is made; and they had likewise agreed that, on the evening aforesaid, they would 'make a night of it'—an expressive term, implying the borrowing of several hours from to-morrow morning, adding them to the night before, and manufacturing a compound night of the whole.

The quarter-day arrived at last—we say at last, because quarter-days are as eccentric as comets: moving wonderfully quick when you have a good deal to pay, and marvellously slow when you have a little to receive. Mr. Thomas Potter and Mr. Robert Smithers met by appointment to begin the evening with a dinner; and a nice, snug, comfortable dinner they had, consisting of a little procession of four chops and four kidneys, following each other, supported on either side by a pot of the real draught stout, and attended by divers cushions of bread, and wedges of cheese.

When the cloth was removed, Mr. Thomas Potter ordered the waiter to bring in, two goes of his best Scotch whiskey, with warm water and sugar, and a couple of his 'very mildest' Havannahs, which the waiter did. Mr. Thomas Potter mixed his grog, and lighted his cigar; Mr. Robert Smithers did the same; and then, Mr. Thomas Potter jocularly proposed as the first toast, 'the abolition of all offices whatever' (not sinecures, but counting-houses), which was immediately drunk by Mr. Robert Smithers, with enthusiastic applause. So they went on, talking politics, puffing cigars, and sipping whiskey-and-water, until the 'goes'—most appropriately so called—were both gone, which Mr. Robert Smithers perceiving, immediately ordered in two more goes of the best Scotch whiskey, and two more of the very mildest Havannahs; and the goes kept coming in, and the mild Havannahs kept going out, until, what with the drinking, and lighting, and puffing, and the stale ashes on the table, and the tallow-grease on the cigars, Mr. Robert Smithers began to doubt the mildness of the Havannahs, and to feel very much as if he had been sitting in a hackney-coach with his back to the horses.

As to Mr. Thomas Potter, he *would* keep laughing out loud, and volunteering inarticulate declarations that he was ‘all right;’ in proof of which, he feebly bespoke the evening paper after the next gentleman, but finding it a matter of some difficulty to discover any news in its columns, or to ascertain distinctly whether it had any columns at all, walked slowly out to look for the moon, and, after coming back quite pale with looking up at the sky so long, and attempting to express mirth at Mr. Robert Smithers having fallen asleep, by various galvanic chuckles, laid his head on his arm, and went to sleep also. When he awoke again, Mr. Robert Smithers awoke too, and they both very gravely agreed that it was extremely unwise to eat so many pickled walnuts with the chops, as it was a notorious fact that they always made people queer and sleepy; indeed, if it had not been for the whiskey and cigars, there was no knowing what harm they mightn’t have done ’em. So they took some coffee, and after paying the bill,—twelve and twopence the dinner, and the odd tenpence for the waiter—thirteen shillings in all—started out on their expedition to manufacture a night.

It was just half-past eight, so they thought they couldn’t do better than go at half-price to the slips at the City Theatre, which they did accordingly. Mr. Robert Smithers, who had become extremely poetical after the settlement of the bill, enlivening the walk by informing Mr. Thomas Potter in confidence that he felt an inward presentiment of approaching dissolution, and subsequently embellishing the theatre, by falling asleep with his head and both arms gracefully drooping over the front of the boxes.

Such was the quiet demeanour of the unassuming Smithers, and such were the happy effects of Scotch whiskey and Havannahs on that interesting person! But Mr. Thomas Potter, whose great aim it was to be considered as a ‘knowing card,’ a ‘fast-goer,’ and so forth, conducted himself in a very different manner, and commenced going very fast indeed—rather too fast at last, for the patience of the audience to keep pace with him. On his first entry, he contented himself by earnestly calling upon the gentlemen in the gallery to ‘flare up,’ accompanying the demand with another request, expressive of his wish that they would instantaneously ‘form a union,’ both which requisitions were responded to, in the manner most in vogue on such occasions.

‘Give that dog a bone!’ cried one gentleman in his shirt-sleeves.

‘Where have you been a having half a pint of intermediate beer?’ cried a second. ‘Tailor!’ screamed a third. ‘Barber’s clerk!’ shouted a fourth. ‘Throw him o—ver!’ roared a fifth; while numerous voices concurred in desiring Mr. Thomas Potter to ‘go home to his mother!’ All these taunts Mr. Thomas Potter received with supreme contempt, cocking the low-crowned hat a little more on one side, whenever any reference was made to his personal appearance, and, standing up with his arms a-kimbo, expressing defiance melodramatically.

The overture—to which these various sounds had been an *ad libitum* accompaniment—concluded, the second piece began, and Mr. Thomas Potter, emboldened by impunity, proceeded to behave in a most unprecedented and outrageous manner. First of all, he imitated the shake of the principal female singer; then, groaned at the blue fire; then, affected to be frightened into convulsions of terror at the appearance of the ghost; and, lastly, not only made a running commentary, in an audible voice, upon the dialogue on the stage, but actually awoke Mr. Robert Smithers, who, hearing his companion making a noise, and having a very indistinct notion where he was, or what was required of him, immediately, by way of imitating a good example, set up the most unearthly, unremitting, and appalling howling that ever audience heard. It was too much. ‘Turn them out!’ was the general cry. A noise, as of shuffling of feet, and men being knocked up with violence against wainscoting, was heard: a hurried dialogue of ‘Come out?’—‘I won’t!’—‘You shall!’—‘I shan’t!’—‘Give me your card, Sir?’—‘You’re a scoundrel, Sir!’ and so forth, succeeded. A round of applause betokened the approbation of the audience, and Mr. Robert Smithers and Mr. Thomas Potter found themselves shot with astonishing swiftness into the road, without having had the trouble of once putting foot to ground during the whole progress of their rapid descent.

Mr. Robert Smithers, being constitutionally one of the slow-goers, and having had quite enough of fast-going, in the course of his recent expulsion, to last until the quarter-day then next ensuing at the very least, had no sooner emerged with his companion from the precincts of Milton-street, than he proceeded to indulge in circuitous references to the beauties of sleep, mingled with distant allusions to the propriety of returning to Islington, and testing the influence of their patent Bramahs over the street-door locks to which they respectively belonged. Mr. Thomas Potter, however, was valorous and peremptory. They had come out to make a night of it: and a night must be made. So Mr. Robert Smithers, who was three parts dull, and the other dismal, despairingly assented; and they went into a wine-vaults, to get materials for assisting them in making a night; where they found a good many young ladies, and various old gentlemen, and a plentiful sprinkling of hackney-coachmen and cab-drivers, all drinking and talking together; and Mr. Thomas Potter and Mr. Robert Smithers drank small glasses of brandy, and large glasses of soda, until they began to have a very confused idea, either of things in general, or of anything in particular; and, when they had done treating themselves they began to treat everybody else; and the rest of the entertainment was a confused mixture of heads and heels, black eyes and blue uniforms, mud and gas-lights, thick doors, and stone paving.

Then, as standard novelists expressively inform us—'all was a blank!' and in the morning the blank was filled up with the words 'Station-house,' and the station-house was filled up with Mr. Thomas Potter, Mr. Robert Smithers, and the major part of their wine-vault companions of the preceding night, with a comparatively small portion of clothing of any kind. And it was disclosed at the Police-office, to the indignation of the Bench, and the astonishment of the spectators, how one Robert Smithers, aided and abetted by one Thomas Potter, had knocked down and beaten, in divers streets, at different times, five men, four boys, and three women; how the said Thomas Potter had feloniously obtained possession of five door-knockers, two bell-handles, and a bonnet; how Robert Smithers, his friend, had sworn, at least forty pounds' worth of oaths, at the rate of five shillings apiece; terrified whole streets full of Her Majesty's subjects with awful shrieks and alarms of fire; destroyed the uniforms of five policemen; and committed various other atrocities, too numerous to recapitulate. And the magistrate, after an appropriate reprimand, fined Mr. Thomas Potter and Mr. Thomas Smithers five shillings each, for being, what the law vulgarly terms, drunk; and thirty-four pounds for seventeen assaults at forty shillings a-head, with liberty to speak to the prosecutors.

The prosecutors *were* spoken to, and Messrs. Potter and Smithers lived on credit, for a quarter, as best they might; and, although the prosecutors expressed their readiness to be assaulted twice a week, on the same terms, they have never since been detected in 'making a night of it.'

CHAPTER XII—THE PRISONERS' VAN

We were passing the corner of Bow-street, on our return from a lounging excursion the other afternoon, when a crowd, assembled round the door of the Police-office, attracted our attention. We turned up the street accordingly. There were thirty or forty people, standing on the pavement and half across the road; and a few stragglers were patiently stationed on the opposite side of the way—all evidently waiting in expectation of some arrival. We waited too, a few minutes, but nothing occurred; so, we turned round to an unshorn, sallow-looking cobbler, who was standing next us with his hands under the bib of his apron, and put the usual question of 'What's the matter?' The cobbler eyed us from head to foot, with superlative contempt, and laconically replied 'Nuffin.'

Now, we were perfectly aware that if two men stop in the street to look at any given object, or even to gaze in the air, two hundred men will be assembled in no time; but, as we knew very well that no crowd of people could by possibility remain in a street for five minutes without getting up a little amusement among themselves, unless they had some absorbing object in view, the natural inquiry next in order was, 'What are all these people waiting here for?'—'Her Majesty's carriage,' replied the cobbler. This was still more extraordinary. We could not imagine what earthly business Her Majesty's carriage could have at the Public Office, Bow-street. We were beginning to ruminate on the possible causes of such an uncommon appearance, when a general exclamation from all the boys in the crowd of 'Here's the wan!' caused us to raise our heads, and look up the street.

The covered vehicle, in which prisoners are conveyed from the police-offices to the different prisons, was coming along at full speed. It then occurred to us, for the first time, that Her Majesty's carriage was merely another name for the prisoners' van, conferred upon it, not only by reason of the superior gentility of the term, but because the aforesaid van is maintained at Her Majesty's expense: having been originally started for the exclusive accommodation of ladies and gentlemen under the necessity of visiting the various houses of call known by the general denomination of ‘Her Majesty’s Gaols.’

The van drew up at the office-door, and the people thronged round the steps, just leaving a little alley for the prisoners to pass through. Our friend the cobbler, and the other stragglers, crossed over, and we followed their example. The driver, and another man who had been seated by his side in front of the vehicle, dismounted, and were admitted into the office. The office-door was closed after them, and the crowd were on the tiptoe of expectation.

After a few minutes’ delay, the door again opened, and the two first prisoners appeared. They were a couple of girls, of whom the elder—could not be more than sixteen, and the younger of whom had certainly not attained her fourteenth year. That they were sisters, was evident, from the resemblance which still subsisted between them, though two additional years of depravity had fixed their brand upon the elder girl’s features, as legibly as if a red-hot iron had seared them. They were both gaudily dressed, the younger one especially; and, although there was a strong similarity between them in both respects, which was rendered the more obvious by their being handcuffed together, it is impossible to conceive a greater contrast than the demeanour of the two presented. The younger girl was weeping bitterly—not for display, or in the hope of producing effect, but for very shame: her face was buried in her handkerchief: and her whole manner was but too expressive of bitter and unavailing sorrow.

‘How long are you for, Emily?’ screamed a red-faced woman in the crowd. ‘Six weeks and labour,’ replied the elder girl with a flaunting laugh; ‘and that’s better than the stone jug anyhow; the mill’s a deal better than the Sessions, and here’s Bella a-going too for the first time. Hold up your head, you chicken,’ she continued, boisterously tearing the other girl’s handkerchief away; ‘Hold up your head, and show ’em your face. I an’t jealous, but I’m blessed if I an’t game!’—‘That’s right, old gal,’ exclaimed a man in a paper cap, who, in common with the greater part of the crowd, had been inexpressibly delighted with this little incident.—‘Right!’ replied the girl; ‘ah, to be sure; what’s the odds, eh?’—‘Come! In with you,’ interrupted the driver. ‘Don’t you be in a hurry, coachman,’ replied the girl, ‘and recollect I want to be set down in Cold Bath Fields—large house with a high garden-wall in front; you can’t mistake it. Hallo. Bella, where are you going to—you'll pull my precious arm off?' This was addressed to the younger girl, who, in her anxiety to hide herself in the caravan, had ascended the steps first, and forgotten the strain upon the handcuff. 'Come down, and let's show you the way.' And after jerking the miserable girl down with a force which made her stagger on the pavement, she got into the vehicle, and was followed by her wretched companion.

These two girls had been thrown upon London streets, their vices and debauchery, by a sordid and rapacious mother. What the younger girl was then, the elder had been once; and what the elder then was, the younger must soon become. A melancholy prospect, but how surely to be realised; a tragic drama, but how often acted! Turn to the prisons and police offices of London—nay, look into the very streets themselves. These things pass before our eyes, day after day, and hour after hour—they have become such matters of course, that they are utterly disregarded. The progress of these girls in crime will be as rapid as the flight of a pestilence, resembling it too in its baneful influence and wide-spreading infection. Step by step, how many wretched females, within the sphere of every man's observation, have become involved in a career of vice, frightful to contemplate; hopeless at its commencement, loathsome and repulsive in its course; friendless, forlorn, and unpitied, at its miserable conclusion!

There were other prisoners—boys of ten, as hardened in vice as men of fifty—a houseless vagrant, going joyfully to prison as a place of food and shelter, handcuffed to a man whose prospects were ruined, character lost, and family rendered destitute, by his first offence. Our curiosity, however, was satisfied. The first group had left an impression on our mind we would gladly have avoided, and would willingly have effaced.

The crowd dispersed; the vehicle rolled away with its load of guilt and misfortune; and we saw no more of the Prisoners' Van.

TALES

CHAPTER I—THE BOARDING-HOUSE

CHAPTER I.

Mrs. Tibbs was, beyond all dispute, the most tidy, fidgety, thrifty little personage that ever inhaled the smoke of London; and the house of Mrs. Tibbs was, decidedly, the neatest in all Great Coram-street. The area and the area-steps, and the street-door and the street-door steps, and the brass handle, and the door-plate, and the knocker, and the fan-light, were all as clean and bright, as indefatigable white-washing, and hearth-stoning, and scrubbing and rubbing, could make them. The wonder was, that the brass door-plate, with the interesting inscription 'Mrs. Tibbs,' had never caught fire from constant friction, so perseveringly was it polished. There were meat-safe-looking blinds in the parlour-windows, blue and gold curtains in the drawing-room, and spring-roller blinds, as Mrs. Tibbs was wont in the pride of her heart to boast, 'all the way up.' The bell-lamp in the passage looked as clear as a soap-bubble; you could see yourself in all the tables, and French-polish yourself on any one of the chairs. The banisters were bees-waxed; and the very stair-wires made your eyes wink, they were so glittering.

Mrs. Tibbs was somewhat short of stature, and Mr. Tibbs was by no means a large man. He had, moreover, very short legs, but, by way of indemnification, his face was peculiarly long. He was to his wife what the 0 is in 90—he was of some importance *with* her—he was nothing without her. Mrs. Tibbs was always talking. Mr. Tibbs rarely spoke; but, if it were at any time possible to put in a word, when he should have said nothing at all, he had that talent. Mrs. Tibbs detested long stories, and Mr. Tibbs had one, the conclusion of which had never been heard by his most intimate friends. It always began, 'I recollect when I was in the volunteer corps, in eighteen hundred and six,'—but, as he spoke very slowly and softly, and his better half very quickly and loudly, he rarely got beyond the introductory sentence. He was a melancholy specimen of the story-teller. He was the wandering Jew of Joe Millerism.

Mr. Tibbs enjoyed a small independence from the pension-list—about 43*l.* 15*s.* 10*d.* a year. His father, mother, and five interesting scions from the same stock, drew a like sum from the revenue of a grateful country, though for what particular service was never known. But, as this said independence was not quite sufficient to furnish two people with *all* the luxuries of this life, it had occurred to the busy little spouse of Tibbs, that the best thing she could do with a legacy of 700*l.*, would be to take and furnish a tolerable house—somewhere in that partially-explored tract of country which lies between the British Museum, and a remote village called Somers-town—for the reception of boarders. Great Coram-street was the spot pitched upon. The house had been furnished accordingly; two female servants and a boy engaged; and an advertisement inserted in the morning papers, informing the public that 'Six individuals would meet with all the comforts of a cheerful musical home in a select private family, residing within ten minutes' walk of'—everywhere. Answers out of number were received, with all sorts of initials; all the letters of the alphabet seemed to be seized with a sudden wish to go out boarding and lodging; voluminous was the correspondence between Mrs. Tibbs and the applicants; and most profound was the secrecy observed. 'E.' didn't like this; 'I.' couldn't think of putting up with that; 'I. O. U.' didn't think the terms would suit him; and 'G. R.' had never slept in a French bed. The result, however, was, that three gentlemen became inmates of Mrs. Tibbs's house, on terms which were 'agreeable to all parties.' In went the advertisement again, and a lady with her two daughters, proposed to increase—not their families, but Mrs. Tibbs's.

'Charming woman, that Mrs. Maplesone!' said Mrs. Tibbs, as she and her spouse were sitting by the fire after breakfast; the gentlemen having gone out on their several avocations. 'Charming woman, indeed!' repeated little Mrs. Tibbs, more by way of soliloquy than anything else, for she never thought of consulting her husband. 'And the two daughters are delightful. We must have some fish to-day; they'll join us at dinner for the first time.'

Mr. Tibbs placed the poker at right angles with the fire shovel, and essayed to speak, but recollected he had nothing to say.

'The young ladies,' continued Mrs. T., 'have kindly volunteered to bring their own piano.'

Tibbs thought of the volunteer story, but did not venture it.

A bright thought struck him—

‘It’s very likely—’ said he.

‘Pray don’t lean your head against the paper,’ interrupted Mrs. Tibbs; ‘and don’t put your feet on the steel fender; that’s worse.’

Tibbs took his head from the paper, and his feet from the fender, and proceeded. ‘It’s very likely one of the young ladies may set her cap at young Mr. Simpson, and you know a marriage—’

‘A what!’ shrieked Mrs. Tibbs. Tibbs modestly repeated his former suggestion.

‘I beg you won’t mention such a thing,’ said Mrs. T. ‘A marriage, indeed to rob me of my boarders—no, not for the world.’

Tibbs thought in his own mind that the event was by no means unlikely, but, as he never argued with his wife, he put a stop to the dialogue, by observing it was ‘time to go to business.’ He always went out at ten o’clock in the morning, and returned at five in the afternoon, with an exceedingly dirty face, and smelling mouldy. Nobody knew what he was, or where he went; but Mrs. Tibbs used to say with an air of great importance, that he was engaged in the City.

The Miss Maplesones and their accomplished parent arrived in the course of the afternoon in a hackney-coach, and accompanied by a most astonishing number of packages. Trunks, bonnet-boxes, muff-boxes and parasols, guitar-cases, and parcels of all imaginable shapes, done up in brown paper, and fastened with pins, filled the passage. Then, there was such a running up and down with the luggage, such scampering for warm water for the ladies to wash in, and such a bustle, and confusion, and heating of servants, and curling-irons, as had never been known in Great Coram-street before. Little Mrs. Tibbs was quite in her element, bustling about, talking incessantly, and distributing towels and soap, like a head nurse in a hospital. The house was not restored to its usual state of quiet repose, until the ladies were safely shut up in their respective bedrooms, engaged in the important occupation of dressing for dinner.

‘Are these gals ’andsome?’ inquired Mr. Simpson of Mr. Septimus Hicks, another of the boarders, as they were amusing themselves in the drawing-room, before dinner, by lolling on sofas, and contemplating their pumps.

‘Don’t know,’ replied Mr. Septimus Hicks, who was a tallish, white-faced young man, with spectacles, and a black ribbon round his neck instead of a neckerchief—a most interesting person; a poetical walker of the hospitals, and a ‘very talented young man.’ He was fond of ‘lugging’ into conversation all sorts of quotations from Don Juan, without fettering himself by the propriety of their application; in which particular he was remarkably independent. The other, Mr. Simpson, was one of those young men, who are in society what walking gentlemen are on the stage, only infinitely worse skilled in his vocation than the most indifferent artist. He was as empty-headed as the great bell of St. Paul’s; always dressed according to the caricatures published in the monthly fashion; and spelt Character with a K.

‘I saw a devilish number of parcels in the passage when I came home,’ simpered Mr. Simpson.

‘Materials for the toilet, no doubt,’ rejoined the Don Juan reader.

—‘Much linen, lace, and several pair
Of stockings, slippers, brushes, combs, complete;
With other articles of ladies fair,
To keep them beautiful, or leave them neat.’

‘Is that from Milton?’ inquired Mr. Simpson.

‘No—from Byron,’ returned Mr. Hicks, with a look of contempt. He was quite sure of his author, because he had never read any other. ‘Hush! Here come the gals,’ and they both commenced talking in a very loud key.

‘Mrs. Maplesone and the Miss Maplesones, Mr. Hicks. Mr. Hicks—Mrs. Maplesone and the Miss Maplesones,’ said Mrs. Tibbs, with a very red face, for she had been superintending the cooking operations below stairs, and looked like a wax doll on a sunny day. ‘Mr. Simpson, I beg your pardon—Mr. Simpson—Mrs. Maplesone and the Miss Maplesones’—and *vice versâ*. The gentlemen immediately began to slide about with much politeness, and to look as if they wished their arms had been legs, so little did they know what to do with them. The ladies smiled, curtseyed, and glided into chairs, and dived for dropped pocket-handkerchiefs: the gentlemen leant against two of the curtain-pegs; Mrs. Tibbs went through an admirable bit of serious pantomime with a servant who had come up to ask some question about the fish-sauce; and then the two young ladies looked at each other; and everybody else appeared to discover something very attractive in the pattern of the fender.

‘Julia, my love,’ said Mrs. Maplesone to her youngest daughter, in a tone loud enough for the remainder of the company to hear—‘Julia.’

‘Yes, Ma.’

‘Don’t stoop.’—This was said for the purpose of directing general attention to Miss Julia’s figure, which was undeniable. Everybody looked at her, accordingly, and there was another pause.

‘We had the most uncivil hackney-coachman to-day, you can imagine,’ said Mrs. Maplesone to Mrs. Tibbs, in a confidential tone.

‘Dear me!’ replied the hostess, with an air of great commiseration. She couldn’t say more, for the servant again appeared at the door, and commenced telegraphing most earnestly to her ‘Missis.’

‘I think hackney-coachmen generally *are* uncivil,’ said Mr. Hicks in his most insinuating tone.

‘Positively I think they are,’ replied Mrs. Maplesone, as if the idea had never struck her before.

‘And cabmen, too,’ said Mr. Simpson. This remark was a failure, for no one intimated, by word or sign, the slightest knowledge of the manners and customs of cabmen.

‘Robinson, what *do* you want?’ said Mrs. Tibbs to the servant, who, by way of making her presence known to her mistress, had been giving sundry hems and sniffs outside the door during the preceding five minutes.

‘Please, ma’am, master wants his clean things,’ replied the servant, taken off her guard. The two young men turned their faces to the window, and ‘went off’ like a couple of bottles of ginger-beer; the ladies put their handkerchiefs to their mouths; and little Mrs. Tibbs bustled out of the room to give Tibbs his clean linen,—and the servant warning.

Mr. Calton, the remaining boarder, shortly afterwards made his appearance, and proved a surprising promoter of the conversation. Mr. Calton was a superannuated beau—an old boy. He used to say of himself that although his features were not regularly handsome, they were striking. They certainly were. It was impossible to look at his face without being reminded of a chubby street-door knocker, half-lion half-monkey; and the comparison might be extended to his whole character and conversation. He had stood still, while everything else had been moving. He never originated a conversation, or started an idea; but if any commonplace topic were broached, or, to pursue the comparison, if anybody *lifted him up*, he would hammer away with surprising rapidity. He had the tic-douloureux occasionally, and then he might be said to be muffled, because he did not make quite as much noise as at other times, when he would go on prosing, rat-tat-tat the same thing over and over again. He had never been married; but he was still on the look-out for a wife with money. He had a life interest worth about 300*l.* a year—he was exceedingly vain, and inordinately selfish. He had acquired the reputation of being the very pink of politeness, and he walked round the park, and up Regent-street, every day.

This respectable personage had made up his mind to render himself exceedingly agreeable to Mrs. Maplesone—indeed, the desire of being as amiable as possible extended itself to the whole party; Mrs. Tibbs having considered it an admirable little bit of management to represent to the gentlemen that she had *some* reason to believe the ladies were fortunes, and to hint to the ladies, that all the gentlemen were 'eligible.' A little flirtation, she thought, might keep her house full, without leading to any other result.

Mrs. Maplesone was an enterprising widow of about fifty: shrewd, scheming, and good-looking. She was amiably anxious on behalf of her daughters; in proof whereof she used to remark, that she would have no objection to marry again, if it would benefit her dear girls—she could have no other motive. The 'dear girls' themselves were not at all insensible to the merits of 'a good establishment.' One of them was twenty-five; the other, three years younger. They had been at different watering-places, for four seasons; they had gambled at libraries, read books in balconies, sold at fancy fairs, danced at assemblies, talked sentiment—in short, they had done all that industrious girls could do—but, as yet, to no purpose.

'What a magnificent dresser Mr. Simpson is!' whispered Matilda Maplesone to her sister Julia.

'Splendid!' returned the youngest. The magnificent individual alluded to wore a maroon-coloured dress-coat, with a velvet collar and cuffs of the same tint—very like that which usually invests the form of the distinguished unknown who condescends to play the 'swell' in the pantomime at 'Richardson's Show.'

'What whiskers!' said Miss Julia.

'Charming!' responded her sister; 'and what hair!' His hair was like a wig, and distinguished by that insinuating wave which graces the shining locks of those *chef-d'oeuvres* of art surmounting the waxen images in Bartellot's window in Regent-street; his whiskers meeting beneath his chin, seemed strings wherewith to tie it on, ere science had rendered them unnecessary by her patent invisible springs.

'Dinner's on the table, ma'am, if you please,' said the boy, who now appeared for the first time, in a revived black coat of his master's.

'Oh! Mr. Calton, will you lead Mrs. Maplesone?—Thank you.' Mr. Simpson offered his arm to Miss Julia; Mr. Septimus Hicks escorted the lovely Matilda; and the procession proceeded to the dining-room. Mr. Tibbs was introduced, and Mr. Tibbs bobbed up and down to the three ladies like a figure in a Dutch clock, with a powerful spring in the middle of his body, and then dived rapidly into his seat at the bottom of the table, delighted to screen himself behind a soup-tureen, which he could just see over, and that was all. The boarders were seated, a lady and gentleman alternately, like the layers of bread and meat in a plate of sandwiches; and then Mrs. Tibbs directed James to take off the covers. Salmon, lobster-sauce, giblet-soup, and the usual accompaniments were discovered: potatoes like petrifactions, and bits of toasted bread, the shape and size of blank dice.

'Soup for Mrs. Maplesone, my dear,' said the bustling Mrs. Tibbs. She always called her husband 'my dear' before company. Tibbs, who had been eating his bread, and calculating how long it would be before he should get any fish, helped the soup in a hurry, made a small island on the table-cloth, and put his glass upon it, to hide it from his wife.

'Miss Julia, shall I assist you to some fish?'

'If you please—very little—oh! plenty, thank you' (a bit about the size of a walnut put upon the plate).

'Julia is a *very* little eater,' said Mrs. Maplesone to Mr. Calton.

The knocker gave a single rap. He was busy eating the fish with his eyes: so he only ejaculated, 'Ah!'

'My dear,' said Mrs. Tibbs to her spouse after every one else had been helped, 'what do *you* take?' The inquiry was accompanied with a look intimating that he mustn't say fish, because there was not much left. Tibbs thought the frown referred to the island on the table-cloth; he therefore coolly replied, 'Why—I'll take a little—fish, I think.'

'Did you say fish, my dear?' (another frown).

'Yes, dear,' replied the villain, with an expression of acute hunger depicted in his countenance. The tears almost started to Mrs. Tibbs's eyes, as she helped her ‘wretch of a husband,’ as she inwardly called him, to the last eatable bit of salmon on the dish.

‘James, take this to your master, and take away your master’s knife.’ This was deliberate revenge, as Tibbs never could eat fish without one. He was, however, constrained to chase small particles of salmon round and round his plate with a piece of bread and a fork, the number of successful attempts being about one in seventeen.

‘Take away, James,’ said Mrs. Tibbs, as Tibbs swallowed the fourth mouthful—and away went the plates like lightning.

‘I’ll take a bit of bread, James,’ said the poor ‘master of the house,’ more hungry than ever.

‘Never mind your master now, James,’ said Mrs. Tibbs, ‘see about the meat.’ This was conveyed in the tone in which ladies usually give admonitions to servants in company, that is to say, a low one; but which, like a stage whisper, from its peculiar emphasis, is most distinctly heard by everybody present.

A pause ensued, before the table was replenished—a sort of parenthesis in which Mr. Simpson, Mr. Calton, and Mr. Hicks, produced respectively a bottle of sauterne, bucellas, and sherry, and took wine with everybody—except Tibbs. No one ever thought of him.

Between the fish and an intimated sirloin, there was a prolonged interval.

Here was an opportunity for Mr. Hicks. He could not resist the singularly appropriate quotation—

‘But beef is rare within these oxless isles;
Goats’ flesh there is, no doubt, and kid, and mutton,
And when a holiday upon them smiles,
A joint upon their barbarous spits they put on.’

‘Very ungentlemanly behaviour,’ thought little Mrs. Tibbs, ‘to talk in that way.’

‘Ah,’ said Mr. Calton, filling his glass. ‘Tom Moore is my poet.’

‘And mine,’ said Mrs. Maplesone.

‘And mine,’ said Miss Julia.

‘And mine,’ added Mr. Simpson.

‘Look at his compositions,’ resumed the knocker.

‘To be sure,’ said Simpson, with confidence.

‘Look at Don Juan,’ replied Mr. Septimus Hicks.

‘Julia’s letter,’ suggested Miss Matilda.

‘Can anything be grander than the Fire Worshippers?’ inquired Miss Julia.

‘To be sure,’ said Simpson.

‘Or Paradise and the Peri,’ said the old beau.

‘Yes; or Paradise and the Peer,’ repeated Simpson, who thought he was getting through it capitally.

‘It’s all very well,’ replied Mr. Septimus Hicks, who, as we have before hinted, never had read anything but Don Juan. ‘Where will you find anything finer than the description of the siege, at the commencement of the seventh canto?’

‘Talking of a siege,’ said Tibbs, with a mouthful of bread—‘when I was in the volunteer corps, in eighteen hundred and six, our commanding officer was Sir Charles Rampart; and one day, when we were exercising on the ground on which the London University now stands, he says, says he, Tibbs (calling me from the ranks), Tibbs—’

‘Tell your master, James,’ interrupted Mrs. Tibbs, in an awfully distinct tone, ‘tell your master if he *won’t* carve those fowls, to send them to me.’ The discomfited volunteer instantly set to work, and carved the fowls almost as expeditiously as his wife operated on the haunch of mutton. Whether he ever finished the story is not known but, if he did, nobody heard it.

As the ice was now broken, and the new inmates more at home, every member of the company felt more at ease. Tibbs himself most certainly did, because he went to sleep immediately after dinner. Mr. Hicks and the ladies discoursed most eloquently about poetry, and the theatres, and Lord Chesterfield’s Letters; and Mr. Calton followed up what everybody said, with continuous double knocks. Mrs. Tibbs highly approved of every observation that fell from Mrs. Maplesone; and as Mr. Simpson sat with a smile upon his face and said ‘Yes,’ or ‘Certainly,’ at intervals of about four minutes each, he received full credit for understanding what was going forward. The gentlemen rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room very shortly after they had left the dining-parlour. Mrs. Maplesone and Mr. Calton played cribbage, and the ‘young people’ amused themselves with music and conversation. The Miss Maplesones sang the most fascinating duets, and accompanied themselves on guitars, ornamented with bits of ethereal blue ribbon. Mr. Simpson put on a pink waistcoat, and said he was in raptures; and Mr. Hicks felt in the seventh heaven of poetry or the seventh canto of Don Juan—it was the same thing to him. Mrs. Tibbs was quite charmed with the newcomers; and Mr. Tibbs spent the evening in his usual way—he went to sleep, and woke up, and went to sleep again, and woke at supper-time.

* * * * *

We are not about to adopt the licence of novel-writers, and to let 'years roll on;' but we will take the liberty of requesting the reader to suppose that six months have elapsed, since the dinner we have described, and that Mrs. Tibbs's boarders have, during that period, sang, and danced, and gone to theatres and exhibitions, together, as ladies and gentlemen, wherever they board, often do. And we will beg them, the period we have mentioned having elapsed, to imagine farther, that Mr. Septimus Hicks received, in his own bedroom (a front attic), at an early hour one morning, a note from Mr. Calton, requesting the favour of seeing him, as soon as convenient to himself, in his (Calton's) dressing-room on the second-floor back.

'Tell Mr. Calton I'll come down directly,' said Mr. Septimus to the boy. 'Stop—is Mr. Calton unwell?' inquired this excited walker of hospitals, as he put on a bed-furniture-looking dressing-gown.

'Not as I knows on, sir,' replied the boy. ' Please, sir, he looked rather rum, as it might be.'

'Ah, that's no proof of his being ill,' returned Hicks, unconsciously. 'Very well: I'll be down directly.' Downstairs ran the boy with the message, and down went the excited Hicks himself, almost as soon as the message was delivered. 'Tap, tap.' 'Come in.'—Door opens, and discovers Mr. Calton sitting in an easy chair. Mutual shakes of the hand exchanged, and Mr. Septimus Hicks motioned to a seat. A short pause. Mr. Hicks coughed, and Mr. Calton took a pinch of snuff. It was one of those interviews where neither party knows what to say. Mr. Septimus Hicks broke silence.

'I received a note—' he said, very tremulously, in a voice like a Punch with a cold.

'Yes,' returned the other, 'you did.'

'Exactly.'

'Yes.'

Now, although this dialogue must have been satisfactory, both gentlemen felt there was something more important to be said; therefore they did as most men in such a situation would have done—they looked at the table with a determined aspect. The conversation had been opened, however, and Mr. Calton had made up his mind to continue it with a regular double knock. He always spoke very pompously.

‘Hicks,’ said he, ‘I have sent for you, in consequence of certain arrangements which are pending in this house, connected with a marriage.’

‘With a marriage!’ gasped Hicks, compared with whose expression of countenance, Hamlet’s, when he sees his father’s ghost, is pleasing and composed.

‘With a marriage,’ returned the knocker. ‘I have sent for you to prove the great confidence I can repose in you.’

‘And will you betray me?’ eagerly inquired Hicks, who in his alarm had even forgotten to quote.

‘*I* betray *you*! Won’t *you* betray *me*?’

‘Never: no one shall know, to my dying day, that you had a hand in the business,’ responded the agitated Hicks, with an inflamed countenance, and his hair standing on end as if he were on the stool of an electrifying machine in full operation.

‘People must know that, some time or other—within a year, I imagine,’ said Mr. Calton, with an air of great self-complacency. ‘We *may* have a family.’

‘*We*!—That won’t affect you, surely?’

‘The devil it won’t!’

‘No! how can it?’ said the bewildered Hicks. Calton was too much inwrapped in the contemplation of his happiness to see the equivoque between Hicks and himself; and threw himself back in his chair. ‘Oh, Matilda!’ sighed the antique beau, in a lack-a-daisical voice, and applying his right hand a little to the left of the fourth button of his waistcoat, counting from the bottom. ‘Oh, Matilda!’

‘What Matilda?’ inquired Hicks, starting up.

‘Matilda Maplesone,’ responded the other, doing the same.

‘I marry her to-morrow morning,’ said Hicks.

‘It’s false,’ rejoined his companion: ‘I marry her!’

‘You marry her?’

‘I marry her!’

‘You marry Matilda Maplesone?’

‘Matilda Maplesone.’

‘*Miss* Maplesone marry *you*?’

‘Miss Maplesone! No; Mrs. Maplesone.’

‘Good Heaven!’ said Hicks, falling into his chair: ‘You marry the mother, and I the daughter!’

‘Most extraordinary circumstance!’ replied Mr. Calton, ‘and rather inconvenient too; for the fact is, that owing to Matilda’s wishing to keep her intention secret from her daughters until the ceremony had taken place, she doesn’t like applying to any of her friends to give her away. I entertain an objection to making the affair known to my acquaintance just now; and the consequence is, that I sent to you to know whether you’d oblige me by acting as father.’

‘I should have been most happy, I assure you,’ said Hicks, in a tone of condolence; ‘but, you see, I shall be acting as bridegroom. One character is frequently a consequence of the other; but it is not usual to act in both at the same time. There’s Simpson—I have no doubt he’ll do it for you.’

‘I don’t like to ask him,’ replied Calton, ‘he’s such a donkey.’

Mr. Septimus Hicks looked up at the ceiling, and down at the floor; at last an idea struck him. ‘Let the man of the house, Tibbs, be the father,’ he suggested; and then he quoted, as peculiarly applicable to Tibbs and the pair—

‘Oh Powers of Heaven! what dark eyes meets she there?
’Tis—’tis her father’s—fixed upon the pair.’

‘The idea has struck me already,’ said Mr. Calton: ‘but, you see, Matilda, for what reason I know not, is very anxious that Mrs. Tibbs should know nothing about it, till it’s all over. It’s a natural delicacy, after all, you know.’

‘He’s the best-natured little man in existence, if you manage him properly,’ said Mr. Septimus Hicks. ‘Tell him not to mention it to his wife, and assure him she won’t mind it, and he’ll do it directly. My marriage is to be a secret one, on account of the mother and *my* father; therefore he must be enjoined to secrecy.’

A small double knock, like a presumptuous single one, was that instant heard at the street-door. It was Tibbs; it could be no one else; for no one else occupied five minutes in rubbing his shoes. He had been out to pay the baker’s bill.

‘Mr. Tibbs,’ called Mr. Calton in a very bland tone, looking over the banisters.

‘Sir!’ replied he of the dirty face.

‘Will you have the kindness to step up-stairs for a moment?’

‘Certainly, sir,’ said Tibbs, delighted to be taken notice of. The bedroom-door was carefully closed, and Tibbs, having put his hat on the floor (as most timid men do), and been accommodated with a seat, looked as astounded as if he were suddenly summoned before the familiars of the Inquisition.

‘A rather unpleasant occurrence, Mr. Tibbs,’ said Calton, in a very portentous manner, ‘obliges me to consult you, and to beg you will not communicate what I am about to say, to your wife.’

Tibbs acquiesced, wondering in his own mind what the deuce the other could have done, and imagining that at least he must have broken the best decanters.

Mr. Calton resumed; ‘I am placed, Mr. Tibbs, in rather an unpleasant situation.’

Tibbs looked at Mr. Septimus Hicks, as if he thought Mr. H.’s being in the immediate vicinity of his fellow-boarder might constitute the unpleasantness of his situation; but as he did not exactly know what to say, he merely ejaculated the monosyllable ‘Lor!’

‘Now,’ continued the knocker, ‘let me beg you will exhibit no manifestations of surprise, which may be overheard by the domestics, when I tell you—command your feelings of astonishment—that two inmates of this house intend to be married to-morrow morning.’ And he drew back his chair, several feet, to perceive the effect of the unlooked-for announcement.

If Tibbs had rushed from the room, staggered down-stairs, and fainted in the passage—if he had instantaneously jumped out of the window into the mews behind the house, in an agony of surprise—his behaviour would have been much less inexplicable to Mr. Calton than it was, when he put his hands into his inexpressible-pockets, and said with a half-chuckle, ‘Just so.’

‘You are not surprised, Mr. Tibbs?’ inquired Mr. Calton.

‘Bless you, no, sir,’ returned Tibbs; ‘after all, its very natural. When two young people get together, you know—’

‘Certainly, certainly,’ said Calton, with an indescribable air of self-satisfaction.

‘You don’t think it’s at all an out-of-the-way affair then?’ asked Mr. Septimus Hicks, who had watched the countenance of Tibbs in mute astonishment.

‘No, sir,’ replied Tibbs; ‘I was just the same at his age.’ He actually smiled when he said this.

‘How devilish well I must carry my years!’ thought the delighted old beau, knowing he was at least ten years older than Tibbs at that moment.

‘Well, then, to come to the point at once,’ he continued, ‘I have to ask you whether you will object to act as father on the occasion?’

‘Certainly not,’ replied Tibbs; still without evincing an atom of surprise.

‘You will not?’

‘Decidedly not,’ reiterated Tibbs, still as calm as a pot of porter with the head off.

Mr. Calton seized the hand of the petticoat-governed little man, and vowed eternal friendship from that hour. Hicks, who was all admiration and surprise, did the same.

‘Now, confess,’ asked Mr. Calton of Tibbs, as he picked up his hat, ‘were you not a little surprised?’

‘I b’lieve you!’ replied that illustrious person, holding up one hand; ‘I b’lieve you! When I first heard of it.’

‘So sudden,’ said Septimus Hicks.

‘So strange to ask *me*, you know,’ said Tibbs.

‘So odd altogether!’ said the superannuated love-maker; and then all three laughed.

‘I say,’ said Tibbs, shutting the door which he had previously opened, and giving full vent to a hitherto corked-up giggle, ‘what bothers me is, what *will* his father say?’

Mr. Septimus Hicks looked at Mr. Calton.

‘Yes; but the best of it is,’ said the latter, giggling in his turn, ‘I haven’t got a father—he! he! he!’

‘You haven’t got a father. No; but *he* has,’ said Tibbs.

‘*Who* has?’ inquired Septimus Hicks.

‘Why, *him*.’

‘Him, who? Do you know my secret? Do you mean me?’

‘You! No; you know who I mean,’ returned Tibbs with a knowing wink.

‘For Heaven’s sake, whom do you mean?’ inquired Mr. Calton, who, like Septimus Hicks, was all but out of his senses at the strange confusion.

‘Why Mr. Simpson, of course,’ replied Tibbs; ‘who else could I mean?’

‘I see it all,’ said the Byron-quoter; ‘Simpson marries Julia Maplesone to-morrow morning!’

‘Undoubtedly,’ replied Tibbs, thoroughly satisfied, ‘of course he does.’

It would require the pencil of Hogarth to illustrate—our feeble pen is inadequate to describe—the expression which the countenances of Mr. Calton and Mr. Septimus Hicks respectively assumed, at this unexpected announcement. Equally impossible is it to describe, although perhaps it is easier for our lady readers to imagine, what arts the three ladies could have used, so completely to entangle their separate partners. Whatever they were, however, they were successful. The mother was perfectly aware of the intended marriage of both daughters; and the young ladies were equally acquainted with the intention of their estimable parent. They agreed, however, that it would have a much better appearance if each feigned ignorance of the other’s engagement; and it was equally desirable that all the marriages should take place on the same day, to prevent the discovery of one clandestine alliance, operating prejudicially on the others. Hence, the mystification of Mr. Calton and Mr. Septimus Hicks, and the pre-engagement of the unwary Tibbs.

On the following morning, Mr. Septimus Hicks was united to Miss Matilda Maplesone. Mr. Simpson also entered into a ‘holy alliance’ with Miss Julia; Tibbs acting as father, ‘his first appearance in that character.’ Mr. Calton, not being quite so eager as the two young men, was rather struck by the double discovery; and as he had found some difficulty in getting any one to give the lady away, it occurred to him that the best mode of obviating the inconvenience would be not to take her at all. The lady, however, ‘appealed,’ as her counsel said on the trial of the cause, *Maplesone* v. *Calton*, for a breach of promise, ‘with a broken heart, to the outraged laws of her country.’ She recovered damages to the amount of 1,000*l.* which the unfortunate knocker was compelled to pay. Mr. Septimus Hicks having walked the hospitals, took it into his head to walk off altogether. His injured wife is at present residing with her mother at Boulogne. Mr. Simpson, having the misfortune to lose his wife six weeks after marriage (by her eloping with an officer during his temporary sojourn in the Fleet Prison, in consequence of his inability to discharge her little mantua-maker’s bill), and being disinherited by his father, who died soon afterwards, was fortunate enough to obtain a permanent engagement at a fashionable haircutter’s; hairdressing being a science to which he had frequently directed his attention. In this situation he had necessarily many opportunities of making himself acquainted with the habits, and style of thinking, of the exclusive portion of the nobility of this kingdom. To this fortunate circumstance are we indebted for the production of those brilliant efforts of genius, his fashionable novels, which so long as good taste, unsullied by exaggeration, cant, and quackery, continues to exist, cannot fail to instruct and amuse the thinking portion of the community.

It only remains to add, that this complication of disorders completely deprived poor Mrs. Tibbs of all her inmates, except the one whom she could have best spared—her husband. That wretched little man returned home, on the day of the wedding, in a state of partial intoxication; and, under the influence of wine, excitement, and despair, actually dared to brave the anger of his wife. Since that ill-fated hour he has constantly taken his meals in the kitchen, to which apartment, it is understood, his witticisms will be in future confined: a turn-up bedstead having been conveyed there by Mrs. Tibbs's order for his exclusive accommodation. It is possible that he will be enabled to finish, in that seclusion, his story of the volunteers.

The advertisement has again appeared in the morning papers. Results must be reserved for another chapter.

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

'Well!' said little Mrs. Tibbs to herself, as she sat in the front parlour of the Coram-street mansion one morning, mending a piece of stair-carpet off the first Landings;—'Things have not turned out so badly, either, and if I only get a favourable answer to the advertisement, we shall be full again.'

Mrs. Tibbs resumed her occupation of making worsted lattice-work in the carpet, anxiously listening to the twopenny postman, who was hammering his way down the street, at the rate of a penny a knock. The house was as quiet as possible. There was only one low sound to be heard—it was the unhappy Tibbs cleaning the gentlemen's boots in the back kitchen, and accompanying himself with a buzzing noise, in wretched mockery of humming a tune.

The postman drew near the house. He paused—so did Mrs. Tibbs. A knock—a bustle—a letter—post-paid.

> 'T. I. presents compt. to I. T. and T. I. begs To say that i see the advertisement And she will Do Herself the pleasure of calling On you

at 12 o’clock to-morrow morning.

‘T. I. as To apologise to I. T. for the shortness Of the notice But i hope it will not unconvenience you.

‘I remain yours Truly
‘Wednesday evening.’

Little Mrs. Tibbs perused the document, over and over again; and the more she read it, the more was she confused by the mixture of the first and third person; the substitution of the ‘i’ for the ‘T. I.;’ and the transition from the ‘I. T.’ to the ‘You.’ The writing looked like a skein of thread in a tangle, and the note was ingeniously folded into a perfect square, with the direction squeezed up into the right-hand corner, as if it were ashamed of itself. The back of the epistle was pleasingly ornamented with a large red wafer, which, with the addition of divers ink-stains, bore a marvellous resemblance to a black beetle trodden upon. One thing, however, was perfectly clear to the perplexed Mrs. Tibbs. Somebody was to call at twelve. The drawing-room was forthwith dusted for the third time that morning; three or four chairs were pulled out of their places, and a corresponding number of books carefully upset, in order that there might be a due absence of formality. Down went the piece of stair-carpet before noticed, and up ran Mrs. Tibbs ‘to make herself tidy.’

The clock of New Saint Pancras Church struck twelve, and the Foundling, with laudable politeness, did the same ten minutes afterwards, Saint something else struck the quarter, and then there arrived a single lady with a double knock, in a pelisse the colour of the interior of a damson pie; a bonnet of the same, with a regular conservatory of artificial flowers; a white veil, and a green parasol, with a cobweb border.

The visitor (who was very fat and red-faced) was shown into the drawing-room; Mrs. Tibbs presented herself, and the negotiation commenced.

‘I called in consequence of an advertisement,’ said the stranger, in a voice as if she had been playing a set of Pan’s pipes for a fortnight without leaving off.

‘Yes!’ said Mrs. Tibbs, rubbing her hands very slowly, and looking the applicant full in the face—two things she always did on such occasions.

‘Money isn’t no object whatever to me,’ said the lady, ‘so much as living in a state of retirement and obtrusion.’

Mrs. Tibbs, as a matter of course, acquiesced in such an exceedingly natural desire.

‘I am constantly attended by a medical man,’ resumed the pelisse wearer; ‘I have been a shocking unitarian for some time—I, indeed, have had very little peace since the death of Mr. Bloss.’

Mrs. Tibbs looked at the relict of the departed Bloss, and thought he must have had very little peace in his time. Of course she could not say so; so she looked very sympathising.

‘I shall be a good deal of trouble to you,’ said Mrs. Bloss; ‘but, for that trouble I am willing to pay. I am going through a course of treatment which renders attention necessary. I have one mutton-chop in bed at half-past eight, and another at ten, every morning.’

Mrs. Tibbs, as in duty bound, expressed the pity she felt for anybody placed in such a distressing situation; and the carnivorous Mrs. Bloss proceeded to arrange the various preliminaries with wonderful despatch. ‘Now mind,’ said that lady, after terms were arranged; ‘I am to have the second-floor front, for my bed-room?’

‘Yes, ma’am.’

‘And you’ll find room for my little servant Agnes?’

‘Oh! certainly.’

‘And I can have one of the cellars in the area for my bottled porter.’

‘With the greatest pleasure;—James shall get it ready for you by Saturday.’

‘And I’ll join the company at the breakfast-table on Sunday morning,’ said Mrs. Bloss. ‘I shall get up on purpose.’

‘Very well,’ returned Mrs. Tibbs, in her most amiable tone; for satisfactory references had ‘been given and required,’ and it was quite certain that the new-comer had plenty of money. ‘It’s rather singular,’ continued Mrs. Tibbs, with what was meant for a most bewitching smile, ‘that we have a gentleman now with us, who is in a very delicate state of health—a Mr. Gobler.—His apartment is the back drawing-room.’

‘The next room?’ inquired Mrs. Bloss.

‘The next room,’ repeated the hostess.

‘How very promiscuous!’ ejaculated the widow.

‘He hardly ever gets up,’ said Mrs. Tibbs in a whisper.

‘Lor!’ cried Mrs. Bloss, in an equally low tone.

‘And when he is up,’ said Mrs. Tibbs, ‘we never can persuade him to go to bed again.’

‘Dear me!’ said the astonished Mrs. Bloss, drawing her chair nearer Mrs. Tibbs. ‘What is his complaint?’

‘Why, the fact is,’ replied Mrs. Tibbs, with a most communicative air, ‘he has no stomach whatever.’

‘No what?’ inquired Mrs. Bloss, with a look of the most indescribable alarm.

‘No stomach,’ repeated Mrs. Tibbs, with a shake of the head.

‘Lord bless us! what an extraordinary case!’ gasped Mrs. Bloss, as if she understood the communication in its literal sense, and was astonished at a gentleman without a stomach finding it necessary to board anywhere.

‘When I say he has no stomach,’ explained the chatty little Mrs. Tibbs, ‘I mean that his digestion is so much impaired, and his interior so deranged, that his stomach is not of the least use to him;—in fact, it’s an inconvenience.’

‘Never heard such a case in my life!’ exclaimed Mrs. Bloss. ‘Why, he’s worse than I am.’

‘Oh, yes!’ replied Mrs. Tibbs;—‘certainly.’ She said this with great confidence, for the damson pelisse suggested that Mrs. Bloss, at all events, was not suffering under Mr. Gobler’s complaint.

‘You have quite incited my curiosity,’ said Mrs. Bloss, as she rose to depart. ‘How I long to see him!’

‘He generally comes down, once a week,’ replied Mrs. Tibbs; ‘I dare say you’ll see him on Sunday.’ With this consolatory promise Mrs. Bloss was obliged to be contented. She accordingly walked slowly down the stairs, detailing her complaints all the way; and Mrs. Tibbs followed her, uttering an exclamation of compassion at every step. James (who looked very gritty, for he was cleaning the knives) fell up the kitchen-stairs, and opened the street-door; and, after mutual farewells, Mrs. Bloss slowly departed, down the shady side of the street.

It is almost superfluous to say, that the lady whom we have just shown out at the street-door (and whom the two female servants are now inspecting from the second-floor windows) was exceedingly vulgar, ignorant, and selfish. Her deceased better-half had been an eminent cork-cutter, in which capacity he had amassed a decent fortune. He had no relative but his nephew, and no friend but his cook. The former had the insolence one morning to ask for the loan of fifteen pounds; and, by way of retaliation, he married the latter next day; he made a will immediately afterwards, containing a burst of honest indignation against his nephew (who supported himself and two sisters on 100*l.* a year), and a bequest of his whole property to his wife. He felt ill after breakfast, and died after dinner. There is a mantelpiece-looking tablet in a civic parish church, setting forth his virtues, and deploring his loss. He never dishonoured a bill, or gave away a halfpenny.

The relict and sole executrix of this noble-minded man was an odd mixture of shrewdness and simplicity, liberality and meanness. Bred up as she had been, she knew no mode of living so agreeable as a boarding-house: and having nothing to do, and nothing to wish for, she naturally imagined she must be ill—an impression which was most assiduously promoted by her medical attendant, Dr. Wosky, and her handmaid Agnes: both of whom, doubtless for good reasons, encouraged all her extravagant notions.

Since the catastrophe recorded in the last chapter, Mrs. Tibbs had been very shy of young-lady boarders. Her present inmates were all lords of the creation, and she availed herself of the opportunity of their assemblage at the dinner-table, to announce the expected arrival of Mrs. Bloss. The gentlemen received the communication with stoical indifference, and Mrs. Tibbs devoted all her energies to prepare for the reception of the valetudinarian. The second-floor front was scrubbed, and washed, and flannelled, till the wet went through to the drawing-room ceiling. Clean white counterpanes, and curtains, and napkins, water-bottles as clear as crystal, blue jugs, and mahogany furniture, added to the splendour, and increased the comfort, of the apartment. The warming-pan was in constant requisition, and a fire lighted in the room every day. The chattels of Mrs. Bloss were forwarded by instalments. First, there came a large hamper of Guinness’s stout, and an umbrella; then, a train of trunks; then, a pair of clogs and a bandbox; then, an easy chair with an air-cushion; then, a variety of suspicious-looking packages; and—‘though last not least’—Mrs. Bloss and Agnes: the latter in a cherry-coloured merino dress, open-work stockings, and shoes with sandals: like a disguised Columbine.

The installation of the Duke of Wellington, as Chancellor of the University of Oxford, was nothing, in point of bustle and turmoil, to the installation of Mrs. Bloss in her new quarters. True, there was no bright doctor of civil law to deliver a classical address on the occasion; but there were several other old women present, who spoke quite as much to the purpose, and understood themselves equally well. The chop-eater was so fatigued with the process of removal that she declined leaving her room until the following morning; so a mutton-chop, pickle, a pill, a pint bottle of stout, and other medicines, were carried up-stairs for her consumption.

‘Why, what *do* you think, ma’am?’ inquired the inquisitive Agnes of her mistress, after they had been in the house some three hours; ‘what *do* you think, ma’am? the lady of the house is married.’

‘Married!’ said Mrs. Bloss, taking the pill and a draught of Guinness—‘married! Unpossible!’

‘She is indeed, ma’am,’ returned the Columbine; ‘and her husband, ma’am, lives—he—he—he—lives in the kitchen, ma’am.’

‘In the kitchen!’

‘Yes, ma’am: and he—he—he—the housemaid says, he never goes into the parlour except on Sundays; and that Ms. Tibbs makes him clean the gentlemen’s boots; and that he cleans the windows, too, sometimes; and that one morning early, when he was in the front balcony cleaning the drawing-room windows, he called out to a gentleman on the opposite side of the way, who used to live here—“Ah! Mr. Calton, sir, how are you?”’ Here the attendant laughed till Mrs. Bloss was in serious apprehension of her chuckling herself into a fit.

‘Well, I never!’ said Mrs. Bloss.

‘Yes. And please, ma’am, the servants gives him gin-and-water sometimes; and then he cries, and says he hates his wife and the boarders, and wants to tickle them.’

‘Tickle the boarders!’ exclaimed Mrs. Bloss, seriously alarmed.

‘No, ma’am, not the boarders, the servants.’

‘Oh, is that all!’ said Mrs. Bloss, quite satisfied.

‘He wanted to kiss me as I came up the kitchen-stairs, just now,’ said Agnes, indignantly; ‘but I gave it him—a little wretch!’

This intelligence was but too true. A long course of snubbing and neglect; his days spent in the kitchen, and his nights in the turn-up bedstead, had completely broken the little spirit that the unfortunate volunteer had ever possessed. He had no one to whom he could detail his injuries but the servants, and they were almost of necessity his chosen confidants. It is no less strange than true, however, that the little weaknesses which he had incurred, most probably during his military career, seemed to increase as his comforts diminished. He was actually a sort of journeyman Giovanni of the basement story.

The next morning, being Sunday, breakfast was laid in the front parlour at ten o’clock. Nine was the usual time, but the family always breakfasted an hour later on sabbath. Tibbs enrobed himself in his Sunday costume—a black coat, and exceedingly short, thin trousers; with a very large white waistcoat, white stockings and cravat, and Blucher boots—and mounted to the parlour aforesaid. Nobody had come down, and he amused himself by drinking the contents of the milkpot with a teaspoon.

A pair of slippers were heard descending the stairs. Tibbs flew to a chair; and a stern-looking man, of about fifty, with very little hair on his head, and a Sunday paper in his hand, entered the room.

‘Good morning, Mr. Evenson,’ said Tibbs, very humbly, with something between a nod and a bow.

‘How do you do, Mr. Tibbs?’ replied he of the slippers, as he sat himself down, and began to read his paper without saying another word.

‘Is Mr. Wisbottle in town to-day, do you know, sir?’ inquired Tibbs, just for the sake of saying something.

‘I should think he was,’ replied the stern gentleman. ‘He was whistling “The Light Guitar,” in the next room to mine, at five o’clock this morning.’

‘He’s very fond of whistling,’ said Tibbs, with a slight smirk.

‘Yes—I ain’t,’ was the laconic reply.

Mr. John Evenson was in the receipt of an independent income, arising chiefly from various houses he owned in the different suburbs. He was very morose and discontented. He was a thorough radical, and used to attend a great variety of public meetings, for the express purpose of finding fault with everything that was proposed. Mr. Wisbottle, on the other hand, was a high Tory. He was a clerk in the Woods and Forests Office, which he considered rather an aristocratic employment; he knew the peerage by heart, and, could tell you, off-hand, where any illustrious personage lived. He had a good set of teeth, and a capital tailor. Mr. Evenson looked on all these qualifications with profound contempt; and the consequence was that the two were always disputing, much to the edification of the rest of the house. It should be added, that, in addition to his partiality for whistling, Mr. Wisbottle had a great idea of his singing powers. There were two other boarders, besides the gentleman in the back drawing-room—Mr. Alfred

Tomkins and Mr. Frederick O’Bleary. Mr. Tomkins was a clerk in a wine-house; he was a connoisseur in paintings, and had a wonderful eye for the picturesque. Mr. O’Bleary was an Irishman, recently imported; he was in a perfectly wild state; and had come over to England to be an apothecary, a clerk in a government office, an actor, a reporter, or anything else that turned up—he was not particular. He was on familiar terms with two small Irish members, and got franks for everybody in the house. He felt convinced that his intrinsic merits must procure him a high destiny. He wore shepherd’s-plaid inexpressibles, and used to look under all the ladies’ bonnets as he walked along the streets. His manners and appearance reminded one of Orson.

‘Here comes Mr. Wisbottle,’ said Tibbs; and Mr. Wisbottle forthwith appeared in blue slippers, and a shawl dressing-gown, whistling ‘*Di piacer*.’

‘Good morning, sir,’ said Tibbs again. It was almost the only thing he ever said to anybody.

‘How are you, Tibbs?’ condescendingly replied the amateur; and he walked to the window, and whistled louder than ever.

‘Pretty air, that!’ said Evenson, with a snarl, and without taking his eyes off the paper.

‘Glad you like it,’ replied Wisbottle, highly gratified.

‘Don’t you think it would sound better, if you whistled it a little louder?’ inquired the mastiff.

‘No; I don’t think it would,’ rejoined the unconscious Wisbottle.

‘I’ll tell you what, Wisbottle,’ said Evenson, who had been bottling up his anger for some hours—‘the next time you feel disposed to whistle “The Light Guitar” at five o’clock in the morning, I’ll trouble you to whistle it with your head out o’ window. If you don’t, I’ll learn the triangle—I will, by—’

The entrance of Mrs. Tibbs (with the keys in a little basket) interrupted the threat, and prevented its conclusion.

Mrs. Tibbs apologised for being down rather late; the bell was rung; James brought up the urn, and received an unlimited order for dry toast and bacon. Tibbs sat down at the bottom of the table, and began eating water-cresses like a Nebuchadnezzar. Mr. O’Bleary appeared, and Mr. Alfred Tomkins. The compliments of the morning were exchanged, and the tea was made.

‘God bless me!’ exclaimed Tomkins, who had been looking out at the window. ‘Here—Wisbottle—pray come here—make haste.’

Mr. Wisbottle started from the table, and every one looked up.

‘Do you see,’ said the connoisseur, placing Wisbottle in the right position—‘a little more this way: there—do you see how splendidly the light falls upon the left side of that broken chimney-pot at No. 48?’

‘Dear me! I see,’ replied Wisbottle, in a tone of admiration.

‘I never saw an object stand out so beautifully against the clear sky in my life,’ ejaculated Alfred. Everybody (except John Evenson) echoed the sentiment; for Mr. Tomkins had a great character for finding out beauties which no one else could discover—he certainly deserved it.

‘I have frequently observed a chimney-pot in College-green, Dublin, which has a much better effect,’ said the patriotic O’Bleary, who never allowed Ireland to be outdone on any point.

The assertion was received with obvious incredulity, for Mr. Tomkins declared that no other chimney-pot in the United Kingdom, broken or unbroken, could be so beautiful as the one at No. 48.

The room-door was suddenly thrown open, and Agnes appeared, leading in Mrs. Bloss, who was dressed in a geranium-coloured muslin gown, and displayed a gold watch of huge dimensions; a chain to match; and a splendid assortment of rings, with enormous stones. A general rush was made for a chair, and a regular introduction took place. Mr. John Evenson made a slight inclination of the head; Mr. Frederick O’Bleary, Mr. Alfred Tomkins, and Mr. Wisbottle, bowed like the mandarins in a grocer’s shop; Tibbs rubbed hands, and went round in circles. He was observed to close one eye, and to assume a clock-work sort of expression with the other; this has been considered as a wink, and it has been reported that Agnes was its object. We repel the calumny, and challenge contradiction.

Mrs. Tibbs inquired after Mrs. Bloss’s health in a low tone. Mrs. Bloss, with a supreme contempt for the memory of Lindley Murray, answered the various questions in a most satisfactory manner; and a pause ensued, during which the eatables disappeared with awful rapidity.

‘You must have been very much pleased with the appearance of the ladies going to the Drawing-room the other day, Mr. O’Bleary?’ said Mrs. Tibbs, hoping to start a topic.

‘Yes,’ replied Orson, with a mouthful of toast.

‘Never saw anything like it before, I suppose?’ suggested Wisbottle.

‘No—except the Lord Lieutenant’s levees,’ replied O’Bleary.

‘Are they at all equal to our drawing-rooms?’

‘Oh, infinitely superior!’

‘Gad! I don’t know,’ said the aristocratic Wisbottle, ‘the Dowager Marchioness of Publiccash was most magnificently dressed, and so was the Baron Slappenbachenhausen.’

‘What was he presented on?’ inquired Evenson.

‘On his arrival in England.’

‘I thought so,’ growled the radical; ‘you never hear of these fellows being presented on their going away again. They know better than that.’

‘Unless somebody pervades them with an apintment,’ said Mrs. Bloss, joining in the conversation in a faint voice.

‘Well,’ said Wisbottle, evading the point, ‘it’s a splendid sight.’

‘And did it never occur to you,’ inquired the radical, who never would be quiet; ‘did it never occur to you, that you pay for these precious ornaments of society?’

‘It certainly *has* occurred to me,’ said Wisbottle, who thought this answer was a poser; ‘it *has* occurred to me, and I am willing to pay for them.’

‘Well, and it has occurred to me too,’ replied John Evenson, ‘and I ain’t willing to pay for ’em. Then why should I?—I say, why should I?’ continued the politician, laying down the paper, and knocking his knuckles on the table. ‘There are two great principles—demand—’

‘A cup of tea if you please, dear,’ interrupted Tibbs.

‘And supply—’

‘May I trouble you to hand this tea to Mr. Tibbs?’ said Mrs. Tibbs, interrupting the argument, and unconsciously illustrating it.

The thread of the orator’s discourse was broken. He drank his tea and resumed the paper.

‘If it’s very fine,’ said Mr. Alfred Tomkins, addressing the company in general, ‘I shall ride down to Richmond to-day, and come back by the steamer. There are some splendid effects of light and shade on the Thames; the contrast between the blueness of the sky and the yellow water is frequently exceedingly beautiful.’ Mr. Wisbottle hummed, ‘Flow on, thou shining river.’

‘We have some splendid steam-vessels in Ireland,’ said O’Bleary.

‘Certainly,’ said Mrs. Bloss, delighted to find a subject broached in which she could take part.

‘The accommodations are extraordinary,’ said O’Bleary.

‘Extraordinary indeed,’ returned Mrs. Bloss. ‘When Mr. Bloss was alive, he was promiscuously obligated to go to Ireland on business. I went with him, and raly the manner in which the ladies and gentlemen were accommodated with berths, is not creditable.’

Tibbs, who had been listening to the dialogue, looked aghast, and evinced a strong inclination to ask a question, but was checked by a look from his wife. Mr. Wisbottle laughed, and said Tomkins had made a pun; and Tomkins laughed too, and said he had not.

The remainder of the meal passed off as breakfasts usually do. Conversation flagged, and people played with their teaspoons. The gentlemen looked out at the window; walked about the room; and, when they got near the door, dropped off one by one. Tibbs retired to the back parlour by his wife’s orders, to check the green-grocer’s weekly account; and ultimately Mrs. Tibbs and Mrs. Bloss were left alone together.

‘Oh dear!’ said the latter, ‘I feel alarmingly faint; it’s very singular.’ (It certainly was, for she had eaten four pounds of solids that morning.) ‘By-the-bye,’ said Mrs. Bloss, ‘I have not seen Mr. What’s-his-name yet.’

‘Mr. Gobler?’ suggested Mrs. Tibbs.

‘Yes.’

‘Oh!’ said Mrs. Tibbs, ‘he is a most mysterious person. He has his meals regularly sent up-stairs, and sometimes don’t leave his room for weeks together.’

‘I haven’t seen or heard nothing of him,’ repeated Mrs. Bloss.

‘I dare say you’ll hear him to-night,’ replied Mrs. Tibbs; ‘he generally groans a good deal on Sunday evenings.’

‘I never felt such an interest in any one in my life,’ ejaculated Mrs. Bloss. A little double-knock interrupted the conversation; Dr. Wosky was announced, and duly shown in. He was a little man with a red face—dressed of course in black, with a stiff white neckerchief. He had a very good practice, and plenty of money, which he had amassed by invariably humouring the worst fancies of all the females of all the families he had ever been introduced into. Mrs. Tibbs offered to retire, but was entreated to stay.

‘Well, my dear ma’am, and how are we?’ inquired Wosky, in a soothing tone.

‘Very ill, doctor—very ill,’ said Mrs. Bloss, in a whisper

‘Ah! we must take care of ourselves;—we must, indeed,’ said the obsequious Wosky, as he felt the pulse of his interesting patient.

‘How is our appetite?’

Mrs. Bloss shook her head.

‘Our friend requires great care,’ said Wosky, appealing to Mrs. Tibbs, who of course assented. ‘I hope, however, with the blessing of Providence, that we shall be enabled to make her quite stout again.’ Mrs. Tibbs wondered in her own mind what the patient would be when she was made quite stout.

‘We must take stimulants,’ said the cunning Wosky—‘plenty of nourishment, and, above all, we must keep our nerves quiet; we positively must not give way to our sensibilities. We must take all we can get,’ concluded the doctor, as he pocketed his fee, ‘and we must keep quiet.’

‘Dear man!’ exclaimed Mrs. Bloss, as the doctor stepped into the carriage.

‘Charming creature indeed—quite a lady’s man!’ said Mrs. Tibbs, and Dr. Wosky rattled away to make fresh gulls of delicate females, and pocket fresh fees.

As we had occasion, in a former paper, to describe a dinner at Mrs. Tibbs’s; and as one meal went off very like another on all ordinary occasions; we will not fatigue our readers by entering into any other detailed account of the domestic economy of the establishment. We will therefore proceed to events, merely premising that the mysterious tenant of the back drawing-room was a lazy, selfish hypochondriac; always complaining and never ill. As his character in many respects closely assimilated to that of Mrs. Bloss, a very warm friendship soon sprung up between them. He was tall, thin, and pale; he always fancied he had a severe pain somewhere or other, and his face invariably wore a pinched, screwed-up expression; he looked, indeed, like a man who had got his feet in a tub of exceedingly hot water, against his will.

For two or three months after Mrs. Bloss’s first appearance in Coram-street, John Evenson was observed to become, every day, more sarcastic and more ill-natured; and there was a degree of additional importance in his manner, which clearly showed that he fancied he had discovered something, which he only wanted a proper opportunity of divulging. He found it at last.

One evening, the different inmates of the house were assembled in the drawing-room engaged in their ordinary occupations. Mr. Gobler and Mrs. Bloss were sitting at a small card-table near the centre window, playing cribbage; Mr. Wisbottle was describing semicircles on the music-stool, turning over the leaves of a book on the piano, and humming most melodiously; Alfred Tomkins was sitting at the round table, with his elbows duly squared, making a pencil sketch of a head considerably larger than his own; O'Bleary was reading Horace, and trying to look as if he understood it; and John Evenson had drawn his chair close to Mrs. Tibbs's work-table, and was talking to her very earnestly in a low tone.

'I can assure you, Mrs. Tibbs,' said the radical, laying his forefinger on the muslin she was at work on; 'I can assure you, Mrs. Tibbs, that nothing but the interest I take in your welfare would induce me to make this communication. I repeat, I fear Wisbottle is endeavouring to gain the affections of that young woman, Agnes, and that he is in the habit of meeting her in the store-room on the first floor, over the leads. From my bedroom I distinctly heard voices there, last night. I opened my door immediately, and crept very softly on to the landing; there I saw Mr. Tibbs, who, it seems, had been disturbed also.—Bless me, Mrs. Tibbs, you change colour!'

'No, no—it's nothing,' returned Mrs. T. in a hurried manner; 'it's only the heat of the room.'

'A flush!' ejaculated Mrs. Bloss from the card-table; 'that's good for four.'

'If I thought it was Mr. Wisbottle,' said Mrs. Tibbs, after a pause, 'he should leave this house instantly.'

'Go!' said Mrs. Bloss again.

'And if I thought,' continued the hostess with a most threatening air, 'if I thought he was assisted by Mr. Tibbs—'

'One for his nob!' said Gobler.

'Oh,' said Evenson, in a most soothing tone—he liked to make mischief—'I should hope Mr. Tibbs was not in any way implicated. He always appeared to me very harmless.'

'I have generally found him so,' sobbed poor little Mrs. Tibbs; crying like a watering-pot.

‘Hush! hush! pray—Mrs. Tibbs—consider—we shall be observed—pray, don’t!’ said John Evenson, fearing his whole plan would be interrupted. ‘We will set the matter at rest with the utmost care, and I shall be most happy to assist you in doing so.’ Mrs. Tibbs murmured her thanks.

‘When you think every one has retired to rest to-night,’ said Evenson very pompously, ‘if you’ll meet me without a light, just outside my bedroom door, by the staircase window, I think we can ascertain who the parties really are, and you will afterwards be enabled to proceed as you think proper.’

Mrs. Tibbs was easily persuaded; her curiosity was excited, her jealousy was roused, and the arrangement was forthwith made. She resumed her work, and John Evenson walked up and down the room with his hands in his pockets, looking as if nothing had happened. The game of cribbage was over, and conversation began again.

‘Well, Mr. O’Bleary,’ said the humming-top, turning round on his pivot, and facing the company, ‘what did you think of Vauxhall the other night?’

‘Oh, it’s very fair,’ replied Orson, who had been enthusiastically delighted with the whole exhibition.

‘Never saw anything like that Captain Ross’s set-out—eh?’

‘No,’ returned the patriot, with his usual reservation—‘except in Dublin.’

‘I saw the Count de Canky and Captain Fitzthompson in the Gardens,’ said Wisbottle; ‘they appeared much delighted.’

‘Then it *must* be beautiful,’ snarled Evenson.

‘I think the white bears is partickerlerly well done,’ suggested Mrs. Bloss. ‘In their shaggy white coats, they look just like Polar bears—don’t you think they do, Mr. Evenson?’

‘I think they look a great deal more like omnibus cads on all fours,’ replied the discontented one.

‘Upon the whole, I should have liked our evening very well,’ gasped Gobler; ‘only I caught a desperate cold which increased my pain dreadfully! I was obliged to have several shower-baths, before I could leave my room.’

‘Capital things those shower-baths!’ ejaculated Wisbottle.

‘Excellent!’ said Tomkins.

‘Delightful!’ chimed in O’Bleary. (He had once seen one, outside a tinman’s.)

‘Disgusting machines!’ rejoined Evenson, who extended his dislike to almost every created object, masculine, feminine, or neuter.

‘Disgusting, Mr. Evenson!’ said Gobler, in a tone of strong indignation.—‘Disgusting! Look at their utility—consider how many lives they have saved by promoting perspiration.’

‘Promoting perspiration, indeed,’ growled John Evenson, stopping short in his walk across the large squares in the pattern of the carpet—‘I was ass enough to be persuaded some time ago to have one in my bedroom. ‘Gad, I was in it once, and it effectually cured *me*, for the mere sight of it threw me into a profuse perspiration for six months afterwards.’

A titter followed this announcement, and before it had subsided James brought up ‘the tray,’ containing the remains of a leg of lamb which had made its *début* at dinner; bread; cheese; an atom of butter in a forest of parsley; one pickled walnut and the third of another; and so forth. The boy disappeared, and returned again with another tray, containing glasses and jugs of hot and cold water. The gentlemen brought in their spirit-bottles; the housemaid placed divers plated bedroom candlesticks under the card-table; and the servants retired for the night.

Chairs were drawn round the table, and the conversation proceeded in the customary manner. John Evenson, who never ate supper, lolled on the sofa, and amused himself by contradicting everybody. O’Bleary ate as much as he could conveniently carry, and Mrs. Tibbs felt a due degree of indignation thereat; Mr. Gobler and Mrs. Bloss conversed most affectionately on the subject of pill-taking, and other innocent amusements; and Tomkins and Wisbottle ‘got into an argument;’ that is to say, they both talked very loudly and vehemently, each flattering himself that he had got some advantage about something, and neither of them having more than a very indistinct idea of what they were talking about. An hour or two passed away; and the boarders and the plated candlesticks retired in pairs to their respective bedrooms. John Evenson pulled off his boots, locked his door, and determined to sit up until Mr. Gobler had retired. He always sat in the drawing-room an hour after everybody else had left it, taking medicine, and groaning.

Great Coram-street was hushed into a state of profound repose: it was nearly two o’clock. A hackney-coach now and then rumbled slowly by; and occasionally some stray lawyer’s clerk, on his way home to Somers-town, struck his iron heel on the top of the coal-cellar with a noise resembling the click of a smoke-Jack. A low, monotonous, gushing sound was heard, which added considerably to the romantic dreariness of the scene. It was the water 'coming in' at number eleven.

'He must be asleep by this time,' said John Evenson to himself, after waiting with exemplary patience for nearly an hour after Mr. Gobler had left the drawing-room. He listened for a few moments; the house was perfectly quiet; he extinguished his rushlight, and opened his bedroom door. The staircase was so dark that it was impossible to see anything.

'S-s-s!' whispered the mischief-maker, making a noise like the first indication a catherine-wheel gives of the probability of its going off.

'Hush!' whispered somebody else.

'Is that you, Mrs. Tibbs?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Where?'

'Here;' and the misty outline of Mrs. Tibbs appeared at the staircase window, like the ghost of Queen Anne in the tent scene in Richard.

'This way, Mrs. Tibbs,' whispered the delighted busybody: 'give me your hand—there! Whoever these people are, they are in the store-room now, for I have been looking down from my window, and I could see that they accidentally upset their candlestick, and are now in darkness. You have no shoes on, have you?'

'No,' said little Mrs. Tibbs, who could hardly speak for trembling.

'Well; I have taken my boots off, so we can go down, close to the store-room door, and listen over the banisters;' and down-stairs they both crept accordingly, every board creaking like a patent mangle on a Saturday afternoon.

'It's Wisbottle and somebody, I'll swear,' exclaimed the radical in an energetic whisper, when they had listened for a few moments.

'Hush—pray let's hear what they say!' exclaimed Mrs. Tibbs, the gratification of whose curiosity was now paramount to every other consideration.

'Ah! if I could but believe you,' said a female voice coquettishly, 'I'd be bound to settle my missis for life.'

'What does she say?' inquired Mr. Evenson, who was not quite so well situated as his companion.

'She says she'll settle her missis's life,' replied Mrs. Tibbs. 'The wretch! they're plotting murder.'

‘I know you want money,’ continued the voice, which belonged to Agnes; ‘and if you’d secure me the five hundred pound, I warrant she should take fire soon enough.’

‘What’s that?’ inquired Evenson again. He could just hear enough to want to hear more.

‘I think she says she’ll set the house on fire,’ replied the affrighted Mrs. Tibbs. ‘But thank God I’m insured in the Phoenix!’

‘The moment I have secured your mistress, my dear,’ said a man’s voice in a strong Irish brogue, ‘you may depend on having the money.’

‘Bless my soul, it’s Mr. O’Bleary!’ exclaimed Mrs. Tibbs, in a parenthesis.

‘The villain!’ said the indignant Mr. Evenson.

‘The first thing to be done,’ continued the Hibernian, ‘is to poison Mr. Gobler’s mind.’

‘Oh, certainly,’ returned Agnes.

‘What’s that?’ inquired Evenson again, in an agony of curiosity and a whisper.

‘He says she’s to mind and poison Mr. Gobler,’ replied Mrs. Tibbs, aghast at this sacrifice of human life.

‘And in regard of Mrs. Tibbs,’ continued O’Bleary.—Mrs. Tibbs shuddered.

‘Hush!’ exclaimed Agnes, in a tone of the greatest alarm, just as Mrs. Tibbs was on the extreme verge of a fainting fit. ‘Hush!’

‘Hush!’ exclaimed Evenson, at the same moment to Mrs. Tibbs.

‘There’s somebody coming *up*-stairs,’ said Agnes to O’Bleary.

‘There’s somebody coming *down*-stairs,’ whispered Evenson to Mrs. Tibbs.

‘Go into the parlour, sir,’ said Agnes to her companion. ‘You will get there, before whoever it is, gets to the top of the kitchen stairs.’

‘The drawing-room, Mrs. Tibbs!’ whispered the astonished Evenson to his equally astonished companion; and for the drawing-room they both made, plainly hearing the rustling of two persons, one coming down-stairs, and one coming up.

‘What can it be?’ exclaimed Mrs. Tibbs. ‘It’s like a dream. I wouldn’t be found in this situation for the world!’

‘Nor I,’ returned Evenson, who could never bear a joke at his own expense. ‘Hush! here they are at the door.’

‘What fun!’ whispered one of the new-comers.—It was Wisbottle.

‘Glorious!’ replied his companion, in an equally low tone.—This was Alfred Tomkins. ‘Who would have thought it?’

‘I told you so,’ said Wisbottle, in a most knowing whisper. ‘Lord bless you, he has paid her most extraordinary attention for the last two months. I saw ’em when I was sitting at the piano to-night.’

‘Well, do you know I didn’t notice it?’ interrupted Tomkins.

‘Not notice it!’ continued Wisbottle. ‘Bless you; I saw him whispering to her, and she crying; and then I’ll swear I heard him say something about to-night when we were all in bed.’

‘They’re talking of *us*!’ exclaimed the agonised Mrs. Tibbs, as the painful suspicion, and a sense of their situation, flashed upon her mind.

‘I know it—I know it,’ replied Evenson, with a melancholy consciousness that there was no mode of escape.

‘What’s to be done? we cannot both stop here!’ ejaculated Mrs. Tibbs, in a state of partial derangement.

‘I’ll get up the chimney,’ replied Evenson, who really meant what he said.

‘You can’t,’ said Mrs. Tibbs, in despair. ‘You can’t—it’s a register stove.’

‘Hush!’ repeated John Evenson.

‘Hush—hush!’ cried somebody down-stairs.

‘What a d-d hushing!’ said Alfred Tomkins, who began to get rather bewildered.

‘There they are!’ exclaimed the sapient Wisbottle, as a rustling noise was heard in the store-room.

‘Hark!’ whispered both the young men.

‘Hark!’ repeated Mrs. Tibbs and Evenson.

‘Let me alone, sir,’ said a female voice in the store-room.

‘Oh, Hagnes!’ cried another voice, which clearly belonged to Tibbs, for nobody else ever owned one like it, ‘Oh, Hagnes—lovely creature!’

‘Be quiet, sir!’ (A bounce.)

‘Hag—’

‘Be quiet, sir—I am ashamed of you. Think of your wife, Mr. Tibbs. Be quiet, sir!’

‘My wife!’ exclaimed the valorous Tibbs, who was clearly under the influence of gin-and-water, and a misplaced attachment; ‘I ate her! Oh, Hagnes! when I was in the volunteer corps, in eighteen hundred and—'

'I declare I'll scream. Be quiet, sir, will you?' (Another bounce and a scuffle.)

'What's that?' exclaimed Tibbs, with a start.

'What's what?' said Agnes, stopping short.

'Why that!'

'Ah! you have done it nicely now, sir,' sobbed the frightened Agnes, as a tapping was heard at Mrs. Tibbs's bedroom door, which would have beaten any dozen woodpeckers hollow.

'Mrs. Tibbs! Mrs. Tibbs!' called out Mrs. Bloss. 'Mrs. Tibbs, pray get up.' (Here the imitation of a woodpecker was resumed with tenfold violence.)

'Oh, dear—dear!' exclaimed the wretched partner of the depraved Tibbs. 'She's knocking at my door. We must be discovered! What will they think?'

'Mrs. Tibbs! Mrs. Tibbs!' screamed the woodpecker again.

'What's the matter!' shouted Gobler, bursting out of the back drawing-room, like the dragon at Astley's.

'Oh, Mr. Gobler!' cried Mrs. Bloss, with a proper approximation to hysterics; 'I think the house is on fire, or else there's thieves in it. I have heard the most dreadful noises!'

'The devil you have!' shouted Gobler again, bouncing back into his den, in happy imitation of the aforesaid dragon, and returning immediately with a lighted candle. 'Why, what's this? Wisbottle! Tomkins! O'Bleary! Agnes! What the deuce! all up and dressed?'

'Astonishing!' said Mrs. Bloss, who had run down-stairs, and taken Mr. Gobler's arm.

'Call Mrs. Tibbs directly, somebody,' said Gobler, turning into the front drawing-room.—'What! Mrs. Tibbs and Mr. Evenson!!'

'Mrs. Tibbs and Mr. Evenson!' repeated everybody, as that unhappy pair were discovered: Mrs. Tibbs seated in an arm-chair by the fireplace, and Mr. Evenson standing by her side.

We must leave the scene that ensued to the reader's imagination. We could tell, how Mrs. Tibbs forthwith fainted away, and how it required the united strength of Mr. Wisbottle and Mr. Alfred Tomkins to hold her in her chair; how Mr. Evenson explained, and how his explanation was evidently disbelieved; how Agnes repelled the accusations of Mrs. Tibbs by proving that she was negotiating with Mr. O'Bleary to influence her mistress's affections in his behalf; and how Mr. Gobler threw a damp counterpane on the hopes of Mr. O'Bleary by avowing that he (Gobler) had already proposed to, and been accepted by, Mrs. Bloss; how Agnes was discharged from that lady's service; how Mr. O'Bleary discharged himself from Mrs. Tibbs's house, without going through the form of previously discharging his bill; and how that disappointed young gentleman rails against England and the English, and vows there is no virtue or fine feeling extant, 'except in Ireland.' We repeat that we *could* tell all this, but we love to exercise our self-denial, and we therefore prefer leaving it to be imagined.

The lady whom we have hitherto described as Mrs. Bloss, is no more. Mrs. Gobler exists: Mrs. Bloss has left us for ever. In a secluded retreat in Newington Butts, far, far removed from the noisy strife of that great boarding-house, the world, the enviable Gobler and his pleasing wife revel in retirement: happy in their complaints, their table, and their medicine, wafted through life by the grateful prayers of all the purveyors of animal food within three miles round.

We would willingly stop here, but we have a painful duty imposed upon us, which we must discharge. Mr. and Mrs. Tibbs have separated by mutual consent, Mrs. Tibbs receiving one moiety of 43*l.* 15*s.* 10*d.*, which we before stated to be the amount of her husband's annual income, and Mr. Tibbs the other. He is spending the evening of his days in retirement; and he is spending also, annually, that small but honourable independence. He resides among the original settlers at Walworth; and it has been stated, on unquestionable authority, that the conclusion of the volunteer story has been heard in a small tavern in that respectable neighbourhood.

The unfortunate Mrs. Tibbs has determined to dispose of the whole of her furniture by public auction, and to retire from a residence in which she has suffered so much. Mr. Robins has been applied to, to conduct the sale, and the transcendent abilities of the literary gentlemen connected with his establishment are now devoted to the task of drawing up the preliminary advertisement. It is to contain, among a variety of brilliant matter, seventy-eight words in large capitals, and six original quotations in inverted commas.

CHAPTER II—MR. MINNS AND HIS COUSIN

Mr. Augustus Minns was a bachelor, of about forty as he said—of about eight-and-forty as his friends said. He was always exceedingly clean, precise, and tidy; perhaps somewhat priggish, and the most retiring man in the world. He usually wore a brown frock-coat without a wrinkle, light inexplicables without a spot, a neat neckerchief with a remarkably neat tie, and boots without a fault; moreover, he always carried a brown silk umbrella with an ivory handle. He was a clerk in Somerset-house, or, as he said himself, he held 'a responsible situation under Government.' He had a good and increasing salary, in addition to some 10,000*l.* of his own (invested in the funds), and he occupied a first floor in Tavistock-street, Covent-garden, where he had resided for twenty years, having been in the habit of quarrelling with his landlord the whole time: regularly giving notice of his intention to quit on the first day of every quarter, and as regularly countermanding it on the second. There were two classes of created objects which he held in the deepest and most unmingled horror; these were dogs, and children. He was not unamiable, but he could, at any time, have viewed the execution of a dog, or the assassination of an infant, with the liveliest satisfaction. Their habits were at variance with his love of order; and his love of order was as powerful as his love of life. Mr. Augustus Minns had no relations, in or near London, with the exception of his cousin, Mr. Octavius Budden, to whose son, whom he had never seen (for he disliked the father), he had consented to become godfather by proxy. Mr. Budden having realised a moderate fortune by exercising the trade or calling of a corn-chandler, and having a great predilection for the country, had purchased a cottage in the vicinity of Stamford-hill, whither he retired with the wife of his bosom, and his only son, Master Alexander Augustus Budden. One evening, as Mr. and Mrs. B. were admiring their son, discussing his various merits, talking over his education, and disputing whether the classics should be made an essential part thereof, the lady pressed so strongly upon her husband the propriety of cultivating the friendship of Mr. Minns in behalf of their son, that Mr. Budden at last made up his mind, that it should not be his fault if he and his cousin were not in future more intimate.

'I'll break the ice, my love,' said Mr. Budden, stirring up the sugar at the bottom of his glass of brandy-and-water, and casting a sidelong look at his spouse to see the effect of the announcement of his determination, 'by asking Minns down to dine with us, on Sunday.'

‘Then pray, Budden, write to your cousin at once,’ replied Mrs. Budden. ‘Who knows, if we could only get him down here, but he might take a fancy to our Alexander, and leave him his property?—Alick, my dear, take your legs off the rail of the chair!’

‘Very true,’ said Mr. Budden, musing, ‘very true indeed, my love!’ On the following morning, as Mr. Minns was sitting at his breakfast-table, alternately biting his dry toast and casting a look upon the columns of his morning paper, which he always read from the title to the printer’s name, he heard a loud knock at the street-door; which was shortly afterwards followed by the entrance of his servant, who put into his hands a particularly small card, on which was engraven in immense letters, ‘Mr. Octavius Budden, Amelia Cottage (Mrs. B.’s name was Amelia), Poplar-walk, Stamford-hill.’

‘Budden!’ ejaculated Minns, ‘what can bring that vulgar man here!—say I’m asleep—say I’m out, and shall never be home again—anything to keep him down-stairs.’

‘But please, sir, the gentleman’s coming up,’ replied the servant, and the fact was made evident, by an appalling creaking of boots on the staircase accompanied by a pattering noise; the cause of which, Minns could not, for the life of him, divine.

‘Hem—show the gentleman in,’ said the unfortunate bachelor. Exit servant, and enter Octavius preceded by a large white dog, dressed in a suit of fleecy hosiery, with pink eyes, large ears, and no perceptible tail.

The cause of the pattering on the stairs was but too plain. Mr. Augustus Minns staggered beneath the shock of the dog’s appearance.

‘My dear fellow, how are you?’ said Budden, as he entered.

He always spoke at the top of his voice, and always said the same thing half-a-dozen times.

‘How are you, my hearty?’

‘How do you do, Mr. Budden?—pray take a chair!’ politely stammered the discomfited Minns.

‘Thank you—thank you—well—how are you, eh?’

‘Uncommonly well, thank you,’ said Minns, casting a diabolical look at the dog, who, with his hind legs on the floor, and his fore paws resting on the table, was dragging a bit of bread and butter out of a plate, preparatory to devouring it, with the buttered side next the carpet.

‘Ah, you rogue!’ said Budden to his dog; ‘you see, Minns, he’s like me, always at home, eh, my boy!—Egad, I’m precious hot and hungry! I’ve walked all the way from Stamford-hill this morning.’

‘Have you breakfasted?’ inquired Minns.

‘Oh, no!—came to breakfast with you; so ring the bell, my dear fellow, will you? and let’s have another cup and saucer, and the cold ham.—Make myself at home, you see!’ continued Budden, dusting his boots with a table-napkin. ‘Ha!—ha!—ha!—’pon my life, I’m hungry.’

Minns rang the bell, and tried to smile.

‘I decidedly never was so hot in my life,’ continued Octavius, wiping his forehead; ‘well, but how are you, Minns? ‘Pon my soul, you wear capitally!’

‘D’ye think so?’ said Minns; and he tried another smile.

‘’Pon my life, I do!’

‘Mrs. B. and—what’s his name—quite well?’

‘Alick—my son, you mean; never better—never better. But at such a place as we’ve got at Poplar-walk, you know, he couldn’t be ill if he tried. When I first saw it, by Jove! it looked so knowing, with the front garden, and the green railings and the brass knocker, and all that—I really thought it was a cut above me.’

‘Don’t you think you’d like the ham better,’ interrupted Minns, ‘if you cut it the other way?’ He saw, with feelings which it is impossible to describe, that his visitor was cutting or rather maiming the ham, in utter violation of all established rules.

‘No, thank ye,’ returned Budden, with the most barbarous indifference to crime, ‘I prefer it this way, it eats short. But I say, Minns, when will you come down and see us? You will be delighted with the place; I know you will. Amelia and I were talking about you the other night, and Amelia said—another lump of sugar, please; thank ye—she said, don’t you think you could contrive, my dear, to say to Mr. Minns, in a friendly way—come down, sir—damn the dog! he’s spoiling your curtains, Minns—ha!—ha!—ha!’ Minns leaped from his seat as though he had received the discharge from a galvanic battery.

‘Come out, sir!—go out, hoo!’ cried poor Augustus, keeping, nevertheless, at a very respectful distance from the dog; having read of a case of hydrophobia in the paper of that morning. By dint of great exertion, much shouting, and a marvellous deal of poking under the tables with a stick and umbrella, the dog was at last dislodged, and placed on the landing outside the door, where he immediately commenced a most appalling howling; at the same time vehemently scratching the paint off the two nicely-varnished bottom panels, until they resembled the interior of a backgammon-board.

‘A good dog for the country that!’ coolly observed Budden to the distracted Minns, ‘but he’s not much used to confinement. But now, Minns, when will you come down? I’ll take no denial, positively. Let’s see, to-day’s Thursday.—Will you come on Sunday? We dine at five, don’t say no —do.’

After a great deal of pressing, Mr. Augustus Minns, driven to despair, accepted the invitation, and promised to be at Poplar-walk on the ensuing Sunday, at a quarter before five to the minute.

‘Now mind the direction,’ said Budden: ‘the coach goes from the Flower-pot, in Bishopsgate-street, every half hour. When the coach stops at the Swan, you’ll see, immediately opposite you, a white house.’

‘Which is your house—I understand,’ said Minns, wishing to cut short the visit, and the story, at the same time.

‘No, no, that’s not mine; that’s Grogus’s, the great ironmonger’s. I was going to say—you turn down by the side of the white house till you can’t go another step further—mind that!—and then you turn to your right, by some stables—well; close to you, you’ll see a wall with “Beware of the Dog” written on it in large letters—(Minns shuddered)—go along by the side of that wall for about a quarter of a mile—and anybody will show you which is my place.’

‘Very well—thank ye—good-bye.’

‘Be punctual.’

‘Certainly: good morning.’

‘I say, Minns, you’ve got a card.’

‘Yes, I have; thank ye.’ And Mr. Octavius Budden departed, leaving his cousin looking forward to his visit on the following Sunday, with the feelings of a penniless poet to the weekly visit of his Scotch landlady.

Sunday arrived; the sky was bright and clear; crowds of people were hurrying along the streets, intent on their different schemes of pleasure for the day; everything and everybody looked cheerful and happy except Mr. Augustus Minns.

The day was fine, but the heat was considerable; when Mr. Minns had fagged up the shady side of Fleet-street, Cheapside, and Threadneedle-street, he had become pretty warm, tolerably dusty, and it was getting late into the bargain. By the most extraordinary good fortune, however, a coach was waiting at the Flower-pot, into which Mr. Augustus Minns got, on the solemn assurance of the cad that the vehicle would start in three minutes—that being the very utmost extremity of time it was allowed to wait by Act of Parliament. A quarter of an hour elapsed, and there were no signs of moving. Minns looked at his watch for the sixth time.

‘Coachman, are you going or not?’ bawled Mr. Minns, with his head and half his body out of the coach window.

‘Di-rectly, sir,’ said the coachman, with his hands in his pockets, looking as much unlike a man in a hurry as possible.

‘Bill, take them cloths off.’ Five minutes more elapsed: at the end of which time the coachman mounted the box, from whence he looked down the street, and up the street, and hailed all the pedestrians for another five minutes.

‘Coachman! if you don’t go this moment, I shall get out,’ said Mr. Minns, rendered desperate by the lateness of the hour, and the impossibility of being in Poplar-walk at the appointed time.

‘Going this minute, sir,’ was the reply;—and, accordingly, the machine trundled on for a couple of hundred yards, and then stopped again. Minns doubled himself up in a corner of the coach, and abandoned himself to his fate, as a child, a mother, a bandbox and a parasol, became his fellow-passengers.

The child was an affectionate and an amiable infant; the little dear mistook Minns for his other parent, and screamed to embrace him.

‘Be quiet, dear,’ said the mamma, restraining the impetuosity of the darling, whose little fat legs were kicking, and stamping, and twining themselves into the most complicated forms, in an ecstasy of impatience. ‘Be quiet, dear, that’s not your papa.’

‘Thank Heaven I am not!’ thought Minns, as the first gleam of pleasure he had experienced that morning shone like a meteor through his wretchedness.

Playfulness was agreeably mingled with affection in the disposition of the boy. When satisfied that Mr. Minns was not his parent, he endeavoured to attract his notice by scraping his drab trousers with his dirty shoes, poking his chest with his mamma’s parasol, and other nameless endearments peculiar to infancy, with which he beguiled the tediousness of the ride, apparently very much to his own satisfaction.

When the unfortunate gentleman arrived at the Swan, he found to his great dismay, that it was a quarter past five. The white house, the stables, the ‘Beware of the Dog,’—every landmark was passed, with a rapidity not unusual to a gentleman of a certain age when too late for dinner. After the lapse of a few minutes, Mr. Minns found himself opposite a yellow brick house with a green door, brass knocker, and door-plate, green window-frames and ditto railings, with ‘a garden’ in front, that is to say, a small loose bit of gravelled ground, with one round and two scalene triangular beds, containing a fir-tree, twenty or thirty bulbs, and an unlimited number of marigolds. The taste of Mr. and Mrs. Budden was further displayed by the appearance of a Cupid on each side of the door, perched upon a heap of large chalk flints, variegated with pink conch-shells. His knock at the door was answered by a stumpy boy, in drab livery, cotton stockings and high-lows, who, after hanging his hat on one of the dozen brass pegs which ornamented the passage, denominated by courtesy ‘The Hall,’ ushered him into a front drawing-room commanding a very extensive view of the backs of the neighbouring houses. The usual ceremony of introduction, and so forth, over, Mr. Minns took his seat: not a little agitated at finding that he was the last comer, and, somehow or other, the Lion of about a dozen people, sitting together in a small drawing-room, getting rid of that most tedious of all time, the time preceding dinner.

‘Well, Brogson,’ said Budden, addressing an elderly gentleman in a black coat, drab knee-breeches, and long gaiters, who, under pretence of inspecting the prints in an Annual, had been engaged in satisfying himself on the subject of Mr. Minns’s general appearance, by looking at him over the tops of the leaves—‘Well, Brogson, what do ministers mean to do? Will they go out, or what?’

‘Oh—why—really, you know, I’m the last person in the world to ask for news. Your cousin, from his situation, is the most likely person to answer the question.’

Mr. Minns assured the last speaker, that although he was in Somerset-house, he possessed no official communication relative to the projects of his Majesty’s Ministers. But his remark was evidently received incredulously; and no further conjectures being hazarded on the subject, a long pause ensued, during which the company occupied themselves in coughing and blowing their noses, until the entrance of Mrs. Budden caused a general rise.

The ceremony of introduction being over, dinner was announced, and down-stairs the party proceeded accordingly—Mr. Minns escorting Mrs. Budden as far as the drawing-room door, but being prevented, by the narrowness of the staircase, from extending his gallantry any farther. The dinner passed off as such dinners usually do. Ever and anon, amidst the clatter of knives and forks, and the hum of conversation, Mr. B.'s voice might be heard, asking a friend to take wine, and assuring him he was glad to see him; and a great deal of by-play took place between Mrs. B. and the servants, respecting the removal of the dishes, during which her countenance assumed all the variations of a weather-glass, from 'stormy' to 'set fair.'

Upon the dessert and wine being placed on the table, the servant, in compliance with a significant look from Mrs. B., brought down 'Master Alexander,' habited in a sky-blue suit with silver buttons; and possessing hair of nearly the same colour as the metal. After sundry praises from his mother, and various admonitions as to his behaviour from his father, he was introduced to his godfather.

'Well, my little fellow—you are a fine boy, ain't you?' said Mr. Minns, as happy as a tomtit on birdlime.

'Yes.'

'How old are you?'

'Eight, next We'nsday. How old are *you*?'

'Alexander,' interrupted his mother, 'how dare you ask Mr. Minns how old he is!'

'He asked me how old *I* was,' said the precocious child, to whom Minns had from that moment internally resolved that he never would bequeath one shilling. As soon as the titter occasioned by the observation had subsided, a little smirking man with red whiskers, sitting at the bottom of the table, who during the whole of dinner had been endeavouring to obtain a listener to some stories about Sheridan, called, out, with a very patronising air, 'Alick, what part of speech is *be*.'

'A verb.'

'That's a good boy,' said Mrs. Budden, with all a mother's pride.

'Now, you know what a verb is?'

‘A verb is a word which signifies to be, to do, or to suffer; as, I am—I rule—I am ruled. Give me an apple, Ma.’

‘I’ll give you an apple,’ replied the man with the red whiskers, who was an established friend of the family, or in other words was always invited by Mrs. Budden, whether Mr. Budden liked it or not, ‘if you’ll tell me what is the meaning of *be*.’

‘Be?’ said the prodigy, after a little hesitation—‘an insect that gathers honey.’

‘No, dear,’ frowned Mrs. Budden; ‘B double E is the substantive.’

‘I don’t think he knows much yet about *common* substantives,’ said the smirking gentleman, who thought this an admirable opportunity for letting off a joke. ‘It’s clear he’s not very well acquainted with *proper names*. He! he! he!’

‘Gentlemen,’ called out Mr. Budden, from the end of the table, in a stentorian voice, and with a very important air, ‘will you have the goodness to charge your glasses? I have a toast to propose.’

‘Hear! hear!’ cried the gentlemen, passing the decanters. After they had made the round of the table, Mr. Budden proceeded—‘Gentlemen; there is an individual present—’

‘Hear! hear!’ said the little man with red whiskers.

‘*Pray* be quiet, Jones,’ remonstrated Budden.

‘I say, gentlemen, there is an individual present,’ resumed the host, ‘in whose society, I am sure we must take great delight—and—and—the conversation of that individual must have afforded to every one present, the utmost pleasure.’ [‘Thank Heaven, he does not mean me!’ thought Minns, conscious that his diffidence and exclusiveness had prevented his saying above a dozen words since he entered the house.] ‘Gentlemen, I am but a humble individual myself, and I perhaps ought to apologise for allowing any individual feeling of friendship and affection for the person I allude to, to induce me to venture to rise, to propose the health of that person—a person that, I am sure—that is to say, a person whose virtues must endear him to those who know him—and those who have not the pleasure of knowing him, cannot dislike him.’

‘Hear! hear!’ said the company, in a tone of encouragement and approval.

‘Gentlemen,’ continued Budden, ‘my cousin is a man who—who is a relation of my own.’ (Hear! hear!) Minns groaned audibly. ‘Who I am most happy to see here, and who, if he were not here, would certainly have deprived us of the great pleasure we all feel in seeing him. (Loud cries of hear!) Gentlemen, I feel that I have already trespassed on your attention for too long a time. With every feeling—of—with every sentiment of—of—'

'Gratification'—suggested the friend of the family.

'—Of gratification, I beg to propose the health of Mr. Minns.'

'Standing, gentlemen!' shouted the indefatigable little man with the whiskers—'and with the honours. Take your time from me, if you please. Hip! hip! hip!—Za!—Hip! hip! hip!—Za!—Hip hip!—Za-a-a!'

All eyes were now fixed on the subject of the toast, who by gulping down port wine at the imminent hazard of suffocation, endeavoured to conceal his confusion. After as long a pause as decency would admit, he rose, but, as the newspapers sometimes say in their reports, 'we regret that we are quite unable to give even the substance of the honourable gentleman's observations.' The words 'present company—honour—present occasion,' and 'great happiness'—heard occasionally, and repeated at intervals, with a countenance expressive of the utmost confusion and misery, convinced the company that he was making an excellent speech; and, accordingly, on his resuming his seat, they cried 'Bravo!' and manifested tumultuous applause. Jones, who had been long watching his opportunity, then darted up.

'Budden,' said he, 'will you allow *me* to propose a toast?'

'Certainly,' replied Budden, adding in an under-tone to Minns right across the table, 'Devilish sharp fellow that: you'll be very much pleased with his speech. He talks equally well on any subject.' Minns bowed, and Mr. Jones proceeded:

'It has on several occasions, in various instances, under many circumstances, and in different companies, fallen to my lot to propose a toast to those by whom, at the time, I have had the honour to be surrounded, I have sometimes, I will cheerfully own—for why should I deny it?—felt the overwhelming nature of the task I have undertaken, and my own utter incapability to do justice to the subject. If such have been my feelings, however, on former occasions, what must they be now—now—under the extraordinary circumstances in which I am placed. (Hear! hear!) To describe my feelings accurately, would be impossible; but I cannot give you a better idea of them, gentlemen, than by referring to a circumstance which happens, oddly enough, to occur to my mind at the moment. On one occasion, when that truly great and illustrious man, Sheridan, was—'

Now, there is no knowing what new villainy in the form of a joke would have been heaped on the grave of that very ill-used man, Mr. Sheridan, if the boy in drab had not at that moment entered the room in a breathless state, to report that, as it was a very wet night, the nine o'clock stage had come round, to know whether there was anybody going to town, as, in that case, he (the nine o'clock) had room for one inside.

Mr. Minns started up; and, despite countless exclamations of surprise, and entreaties to stay, persisted in his determination to accept the vacant place. But, the brown silk umbrella was nowhere to be found; and as the coachman couldn't wait, he drove back to the Swan, leaving word for Mr. Minns to 'run round' and catch him. However, as it did not occur to Mr. Minns for some ten minutes or so, that he had left the brown silk umbrella with the ivory handle in the other coach, coming down; and, moreover, as he was by no means remarkable for speed, it is no matter of surprise that when he accomplished the feat of 'running round' to the Swan, the coach—the last coach—had gone without him.

It was somewhere about three o'clock in the morning, when Mr. Augustus Minns knocked feebly at the street-door of his lodgings in Tavistock-street, cold, wet, cross, and miserable. He made his will next morning, and his professional man informs us, in that strict confidence in which we inform the public, that neither the name of Mr. Octavius Budden, nor of Mrs. Amelia Budden, nor of Master Alexander Augustus Budden, appears therein.

CHAPTER III—SENTIMENT

The Miss Crumptons, or to quote the authority of the inscription on the garden-gate of Minerva House, Hammersmith, 'The Misses Crumpton,' were two unusually tall, particularly thin, and exceedingly skinny personages: very upright, and very yellow. Miss Amelia Crumpton owned to thirty-eight, and Miss Maria Crumpton admitted she was forty; an admission which was rendered perfectly unnecessary by the self-evident fact of her being at least fifty. They dressed in the most interesting manner—like twins! and looked as happy and comfortable as a couple of marigolds run to seed. They were very precise, had the strictest possible ideas of propriety, wore false hair, and always smelt very strongly of lavender.

Minerva House, conducted under the auspices of the two sisters, was a ‘finishing establishment for young ladies,’ where some twenty girls of the ages of from thirteen to nineteen inclusive, acquired a smattering of everything, and a knowledge of nothing; instruction in French and Italian, dancing lessons twice a-week; and other necessaries of life. The house was a white one, a little removed from the roadside, with close palings in front. The bedroom windows were always left partly open, to afford a bird’s-eye view of numerous little bedsteads with very white dimity furniture, and thereby impress the passer-by with a due sense of the luxuries of the establishment; and there was a front parlour hung round with highly varnished maps which nobody ever looked at, and filled with books which no one ever read, appropriated exclusively to the reception of parents, who, whenever they called, could not fail to be struck with the very deep appearance of the place.

‘Amelia, my dear,’ said Miss Maria Crumpton, entering the school-room one morning, with her false hair in papers: as she occasionally did, in order to impress the young ladies with a conviction of its reality. ‘Amelia, my dear, here is a most gratifying note I have just received. You needn’t mind reading it aloud.’

Miss Amelia, thus advised, proceeded to read the following note with an air of great triumph:

> ‘Cornelius Brook Dingwall, Esq., M.P., presents his compliments to Miss Crumpton, and will feel much obliged by Miss Crumpton’s calling on him, if she conveniently can, to-morrow morning at one o’clock, as Cornelius Brook Dingwall, Esq., M.P., is anxious to see Miss Crumpton on the subject of placing Miss Brook Dingwall under her charge.
>
> ‘Adelphi.
> ‘Monday morning.’

‘A Member of Parliament’s daughter!’ ejaculated Amelia, in an ecstatic tone.

‘A Member of Parliament’s daughter!’ repeated Miss Maria, with a smile of delight, which, of course, elicited a concurrent titter of pleasure from all the young ladies.

‘It’s exceedingly delightful!’ said Miss Amelia; whereupon all the young ladies murmured their admiration again. Courtiers are but school-boys, and court-ladies school-girl’s.

So important an announcement at once superseded the business of the day. A holiday was declared, in commemoration of the great event; the Miss Crumptons retired to their private apartment to talk it over; the smaller girls discussed the probable manners and customs of the daughter of a Member of Parliament; and the young ladies verging on eighteen wondered whether she was engaged, whether she was pretty, whether she wore much bustle, and many other *whethers* of equal importance.

The two Miss Crumptons proceeded to the Adelphi at the appointed time next day, dressed, of course, in their best style, and looking as amiable as they possibly could—which, by-the-bye, is not saying much for them. Having sent in their cards, through the medium of a red-hot looking footman in bright livery, they were ushered into the august presence of the profound Dingwall.

Cornelius Brook Dingwall, Esq., M.P., was very haughty, solemn, and portentous. He had, naturally, a somewhat spasmodic expression of countenance, which was not rendered the less remarkable by his wearing an extremely stiff cravat. He was wonderfully proud of the M.P. attached to his name, and never lost an opportunity of reminding people of his dignity. He had a great idea of his own abilities, which must have been a great comfort to him, as no one else had; and in diplomacy, on a small scale, in his own family arrangements, he considered himself unrivalled. He was a county magistrate, and discharged the duties of his station with all due justice and impartiality; frequently committing poachers, and occasionally committing himself. Miss Brook Dingwall was one of that numerous class of young ladies, who, like adverbs, may be known by their answering to a commonplace question, and doing nothing else.

On the present occasion, this talented individual was seated in a small library at a table covered with papers, doing nothing, but trying to look busy, playing at shop. Acts of Parliament, and letters directed to ‘Cornelius Brook Dingwall, Esq., M.P.,’ were ostentatiously scattered over the table; at a little distance from which, Mrs. Brook Dingwall was seated at work. One of those public nuisances, a spoiled child, was playing about the room, dressed after the most approved fashion—in a blue tunic with a black belt—

a quarter of a yard wide, fastened with an immense buckle—looking like a robber in a melodrama, seen through a diminishing glass.

After a little pleasantry from the sweet child, who amused himself by running away with Miss Maria Crumpton’s chair as fast as it was placed for her, the visitors were seated, and Cornelius Brook Dingwall, Esq., opened the conversation.

He had sent for Miss Crumpton, he said, in consequence of the high character he had received of her establishment from his friend, Sir Alfred Muggs.

Miss Crumpton murmured her acknowledgments to him (Muggs), and Cornelius proceeded.

‘One of my principal reasons, Miss Crumpton, for parting with my daughter, is, that she has lately acquired some sentimental ideas, which it is most desirable to eradicate from her young mind.’ (Here the little innocent before noticed, fell out of an arm-chair with an awful crash.)

‘Naughty boy!’ said his mamma, who appeared more surprised at his taking the liberty of falling down, than at anything else; ‘I’ll ring the bell for James to take him away.’

‘Pray don’t check him, my love,’ said the diplomatist, as soon as he could make himself heard amidst the unearthly howling consequent upon the threat and the tumble. ‘It all arises from his great flow of spirits.’ This last explanation was addressed to Miss Crumpton.

‘Certainly, sir,’ replied the antique Maria: not exactly seeing, however, the connexion between a flow of animal spirits, and a fall from an arm-chair.

Silence was restored, and the M.P. resumed: ‘Now, I know nothing so likely to effect this object, Miss Crumpton, as her mixing constantly in the society of girls of her own age; and, as I know that in your establishment she will meet such as are not likely to contaminate her young mind, I propose to send her to you.’

The youngest Miss Crumpton expressed the acknowledgments of the establishment generally. Maria was rendered speechless by bodily pain. The dear little fellow, having recovered his animal spirits, was standing upon her most tender foot, by way of getting his face (which looked like a capital O in a red-lettered play-bill) on a level with the writing-table.

‘Of course, Lavinia will be a parlour boarder,’ continued the enviable father; ‘and on one point I wish my directions to be strictly observed. The fact is, that some ridiculous love affair, with a person much her inferior in life, has been the cause of her present state of mind. Knowing that of course, under your care, she can have no opportunity of meeting this person, I do not object to—indeed, I should rather prefer—her mixing with such society as you see yourself.'

This important statement was again interrupted by the high-spirited little creature, in the excess of his joyousness breaking a pane of glass, and nearly precipitating himself into an adjacent area. James was rung for; considerable confusion and screaming succeeded; two little blue legs were seen to kick violently in the air as the man left the room, and the child was gone.

'Mr. Brook Dingwall would like Miss Brook Dingwall to learn everything,' said Mrs. Brook Dingwall, who hardly ever said anything at all.

'Certainly,' said both the Miss Crumptons together.

'And as I trust the plan I have devised will be effectual in weaning my daughter from this absurd idea, Miss Crumpton,' continued the legislator, 'I hope you will have the goodness to comply, in all respects, with any request I may forward to you.'

The promise was of course made; and after a lengthened discussion, conducted on behalf of the Dingwalls with the most becoming diplomatic gravity, and on that of the Crumptons with profound respect, it was finally arranged that Miss Lavinia should be forwarded to Hammersmith on the next day but one, on which occasion the half-yearly ball given at the establishment was to take place. It might divert the dear girl's mind. This, by the way, was another bit of diplomacy.

Miss Lavinia was introduced to her future governess, and both the Miss Crumptons pronounced her 'a most charming girl;' an opinion which, by a singular coincidence, they always entertained of any new pupil.

Courtesies were exchanged, acknowledgments expressed, condescension exhibited, and the interview terminated.

Preparations, to make use of theatrical phraseology, 'on a scale of magnitude never before attempted,' were incessantly made at Minerva House to give every effect to the forthcoming ball. The largest room in the house was pleasingly ornamented with blue calico roses, plaid tulips, and other equally natural-looking artificial flowers, the work of the young ladies themselves. The carpet was taken up, the folding-doors were taken down, the furniture was taken out, and rout-seats were taken in. The linen-drapers of Hammersmith were astounded at the sudden demand for blue sarsenet ribbon, and long white gloves. Dozens of geraniums were purchased for bouquets, and a harp and two violins were bespoke from town, in addition to the grand piano already on the premises. The young ladies who were selected to show off on the occasion, and do credit to the establishment, practised incessantly, much to their own satisfaction, and greatly to the annoyance of the lame old gentleman over the way; and a constant correspondence was kept up, between the Misses Crumpton and the Hammersmith pastrycook.

The evening came; and then there was such a lacing of stays, and tying of sandals, and dressing of hair, as never can take place with a proper degree of bustle out of a boarding-school. The smaller girls managed to be in everybody's way, and were pushed about accordingly; and the elder ones dressed, and tied, and flattered, and envied, one another, as earnestly and sincerely as if they had actually *come out*.

'How do I look, dear?' inquired Miss Emily Smithers, the belle of the house, of Miss Caroline Wilson, who was her bosom friend, because she was the ugliest girl in Hammersmith, or out of it.

'Oh! charming, dear. How do I?'

'Delightful! you never looked so handsome,' returned the belle, adjusting her own dress, and not bestowing a glance on her poor companion.

'I hope young Hilton will come early,' said another young lady to Miss somebody else, in a fever of expectation.

'I'm sure he'd be highly flattered if he knew it,' returned the other, who was practising *l'été*.

'Oh! he's so handsome,' said the first.

'Such a charming person!' added a second.

'Such a *distingué* air!' said a third.

'Oh, what *do* you think?' said another girl, running into the room; 'Miss Crumpton says her cousin's coming.'

'What! Theodosius Butler?' said everybody in raptures.

'Is *he* handsome?' inquired a novice.

'No, not particularly handsome,' was the general reply; 'but, oh, so clever!'

Mr. Theodosius Butler was one of those immortal geniuses who are to be met with in almost every circle. They have, usually, very deep, monotonous voices. They always persuade themselves that they are wonderful persons, and that they ought to be very miserable, though they don’t precisely know why. They are very conceited, and usually possess half an idea; but, with enthusiastic young ladies, and silly young gentlemen, they are very wonderful persons. The individual in question, Mr. Theodosius, had written a pamphlet containing some very weighty considerations on the expediency of doing something or other; and as every sentence contained a good many words of four syllables, his admirers took it for granted that he meant a good deal.

‘Perhaps that’s he,’ exclaimed several young ladies, as the first pull of the evening threatened destruction to the bell of the gate.

An awful pause ensued. Some boxes arrived and a young lady—Miss Brook Dingwall, in full ball costume, with an immense gold chain round her neck, and her dress looped up with a single rose; an ivory fan in her hand, and a most interesting expression of despair in her face.

The Miss Crumptons inquired after the family, with the most excruciating anxiety, and Miss Brook Dingwall was formally introduced to her future companions. The Miss Crumptons conversed with the young ladies in the most mellifluous tones, in order that Miss Brook Dingwall might be properly impressed with their amiable treatment.

Another pull at the bell. Mr. Dadson the writing-master, and his wife. The wife in green silk, with shoes and cap-trimmings to correspond: the writing-master in a white waistcoat, black knee-shorts, and ditto silk stockings, displaying a leg large enough for two writing-masters. The young ladies whispered one another, and the writing-master and his wife flattered the Miss Crumptons, who were dressed in amber, with long sashes, like dolls.

Repeated pulls at the bell, and arrivals too numerous to particularise: papas and mammas, and aunts and uncles, the owners and guardians of the different pupils; the singing-master, Signor Lobskini, in a black wig; the piano-forte player and the violins; the harp, in a state of intoxication; and some twenty young men, who stood near the door, and talked to one another, occasionally bursting into a giggle. A general hum of conversation. Coffee handed round, and plentifully partaken of by fat mammas, who looked like the stout people who come on in pantomimes for the sole purpose of being knocked down.

The popular Mr. Hilton was the next arrival; and he having, at the request of the Miss Crumptons, undertaken the office of Master of the Ceremonies, the quadrilles commenced with considerable spirit. The young men by the door gradually advanced into the middle of the room, and in time became sufficiently at ease to consent to be introduced to partners. The writing-master danced every set, springing about with the most fearful agility, and his wife played a rubber in the back-parlour—a little room with five book-shelves, dignified by the name of the study. Setting her down to whist was a half-yearly piece of generalship on the part of the Miss Crumptons; it was necessary to hide her somewhere, on account of her being a fright.

The interesting Lavinia Brook Dingwall was the only girl present, who appeared to take no interest in the proceedings of the evening. In vain was she solicited to dance; in vain was the universal homage paid to her as the daughter of a member of parliament. She was equally unmoved by the splendid tenor of the inimitable Lobskini, and the brilliant execution of Miss Laetitia Parsons, whose performance of 'The Recollections of Ireland' was universally declared to be almost equal to that of Moscheles himself. Not even the announcement of the arrival of Mr. Theodosius Butler could induce her to leave the corner of the back drawing-room in which she was seated.

'Now, Theodosius,' said Miss Maria Crumpton, after that enlightened pamphleteer had nearly run the gauntlet of the whole company, 'I must introduce you to our new pupil.'

Theodosius looked as if he cared for nothing earthly.

'She's the daughter of a member of parliament,' said Maria.—Theodosius started.

'And her name is—?' he inquired.

'Miss Brook Dingwall.'

'Great Heaven!' poetically exclaimed Theodosius, in a low tone.

Miss Crumpton commenced the introduction in due form. Miss Brook Dingwall languidly raised her head.

'Edward!' she exclaimed, with a half-shriek, on seeing the well-known nankeen legs.

Fortunately, as Miss Maria Crumpton possessed no remarkable share of penetration, and as it was one of the diplomatic arrangements that no attention was to be paid to Miss Lavinia's incoherent exclamations, she was perfectly unconscious of the mutual agitation of the parties; and therefore, seeing that the offer of his hand for the next quadrille was accepted, she left him by the side of Miss Brook Dingwall.

'Oh, Edward!' exclaimed that most romantic of all romantic young ladies, as the light of science seated himself beside her, 'Oh, Edward, is it you?'

Mr. Theodosius assured the dear creature, in the most impassioned manner, that he was not conscious of being anybody but himself.

'Then why—why—this disguise? Oh! Edward M'Neville Walter, what have I not suffered on your account?'

'Lavinia, hear me,' replied the hero, in his most poetic strain. 'Do not condemn me unheard. If anything that emanates from the soul of such a wretch as I, can occupy a place in your recollection—if any being, so vile, deserve your notice—you may remember that I once published a pamphlet (and paid for its publication) entitled "Considerations on the Policy of Removing the Duty on Bees'-wax."'

'I do—I do!' sobbed Lavinia.

'That,' continued the lover, 'was a subject to which your father was devoted heart and soul.'

'He was—he was!' reiterated the sentimentalist.

'I knew it,' continued Theodosius, tragically; 'I knew it—I forwarded him a copy. He wished to know me. Could I disclose my real name? Never! No, I assumed that name which you have so often pronounced in tones of endearment. As M'Neville Walter, I devoted myself to the stirring cause; as M'Neville Walter I gained your heart; in the same character I was ejected from your house by your father's domestics; and in no character at all have I since been enabled to see you. We now meet again, and I proudly own that I am—Theodosius Butler.'

The young lady appeared perfectly satisfied with this argumentative address, and bestowed a look of the most ardent affection on the immortal advocate of bees'-wax.

'May I hope,' said he, 'that the promise your father's violent behaviour interrupted, may be renewed?'

'Let us join this set,' replied Lavinia, coquettishly—for girls of nineteen *can* coquette.

'No,' ejaculated he of the nankeens. 'I stir not from this spot, writhing under this torture of suspense. May I—may I—hope?'

'You may.'

'The promise is renewed?'

'It is.'

'I have your permission?'

'You have.'

'To the fullest extent?'

'You know it,' returned the blushing Lavinia. The contortions of the interesting Butler's visage expressed his raptures.

We could dilate upon the occurrences that ensued. How Mr. Theodosius and Miss Lavinia danced, and talked, and sighed for the remainder of the evening—how the Miss Crumptons were delighted thereat. How the writing-master continued to frisk about with one-horse power, and how his wife, from some unaccountable freak, left the whist-table in the little back-parlour, and persisted in displaying her green head-dress in the most conspicuous part of the drawing-room. How the supper consisted of small triangular sandwiches in trays, and a tart here and there by way of variety; and how the visitors consumed warm water disguised with lemon, and dotted with nutmeg, under the denomination of negus. These, and other matters of as much interest, however, we pass over, for the purpose of describing a scene of even more importance.

A fortnight after the date of the ball, Cornelius Brook Dingwall, Esq., M.P., was seated at the same library-table, and in the same room, as we have before described. He was alone, and his face bore an expression of deep thought and solemn gravity—he was drawing up 'A Bill for the better observance of Easter Monday.'

The footman tapped at the door—the legislator started from his reverie, and 'Miss Crumpton' was announced. Permission was given for Miss Crumpton to enter the *sanctum*; Maria came sliding in, and having taken her seat with a due portion of affectation, the footman retired, and the governess was left alone with the M.P. Oh! how she longed for the presence of a third party! Even the facetious young gentleman would have been a relief.

Miss Crumpton began the duet. She hoped Mrs. Brook Dingwall and the handsome little boy were in good health.

They were. Mrs. Brook Dingwall and little Frederick were at Brighton.

'Much obliged to you, Miss Crumpton,' said Cornelius, in his most dignified manner, 'for your attention in calling this morning. I should have driven down to Hammersmith, to see Lavinia, but your account was so very satisfactory, and my duties in the House occupy me so much, that I determined to postpone it for a week. How has she gone on?'

'Very well indeed, sir,' returned Maria, dreading to inform the father that she had gone off.

'Ah, I thought the plan on which I proceeded would be a match for her.'

Here was a favourable opportunity to say that somebody else had been a match for her. But the unfortunate governess was unequal to the task.

'You have persevered strictly in the line of conduct I prescribed, Miss Crumpton?'

'Strictly, sir.'

'You tell me in your note that her spirits gradually improved.'

'Very much indeed, sir.'

'To be sure. I was convinced they would.'

'But I fear, sir,' said Miss Crumpton, with visible emotion, 'I fear the plan has not succeeded, quite so well as we could have wished.'

No!' exclaimed the prophet. 'Bless me! Miss Crumpton, you look alarmed. What has happened?'

'Miss Brook Dingwall, sir—'

'Yes, ma'am?'

'Has gone, sir'—said Maria, exhibiting a strong inclination to faint.

'Gone!'

'Eloped, sir.'

'Eloped!—Who with—when—where—how?' almost shrieked the agitated diplomatist.

The natural yellow of the unfortunate Maria's face changed to all the hues of the rainbow, as she laid a small packet on the member's table.

He hurriedly opened it. A letter from his daughter, and another from Theodosius. He glanced over their contents—'Ere this reaches you, far distant—appeal to feelings—love to distraction—bees'-wax—slavery,' &c., &c. He dashed his hand to his forehead, and paced the room with fearfully long strides, to the great alarm of the precise Maria.

'Now mind; from this time forward,' said Mr. Brook Dingwall, suddenly stopping at the table, and beating time upon it with his hand;

‘from this time forward, I never will, under any circumstances whatever, permit a man who writes pamphlets to enter any other room of this house but the kitchen.—I’ll allow my daughter and her husband one hundred and fifty pounds a-year, and never see their faces again: and, damme! ma’am, I’ll bring in a bill for the abolition of finishing-schools.’

Some time has elapsed since this passionate declaration. Mr. and Mrs. Butler are at present rusticating in a small cottage at Ball’s-pond, pleasantly situated in the immediate vicinity of a brick-field. They have no family. Mr. Theodosius looks very important, and writes incessantly; but, in consequence of a gross combination on the part of publishers, none of his productions appear in print. His young wife begins to think that ideal misery is preferable to real unhappiness; and that a marriage, contracted in haste, and repented at leisure, is the cause of more substantial wretchedness than she ever anticipated.

On cool reflection, Cornelius Brook Dingwall, Esq., M.P., was reluctantly compelled to admit that the untoward result of his admirable arrangements was attributable, not to the Miss Crumptons, but his own diplomacy. He, however, consoles himself, like some other small diplomatists, by satisfactorily proving that if his plans did not succeed, they ought to have done so. Minerva House is *in status quo*, and ‘The Misses Crumpton’ remain in the peaceable and undisturbed enjoyment of all the advantages resulting from their Finishing-School.

CHAPTER IV—THE TUGGSES AT RAMSGATE

Once upon a time there dwelt, in a narrow street on the Surrey side of the water, within three minutes’ walk of old London Bridge, Mr. Joseph Tuggs—a little dark-faced man, with shiny hair, twinkling eyes, short legs, and a body of very considerable thickness, measuring from the centre button of his waistcoat in front, to the ornamental buttons of his coat behind. The figure of the amiable Mrs. Tuggs, if not perfectly symmetrical, was decidedly comfortable; and the form of her only daughter, the accomplished Miss Charlotte Tuggs, was fast ripening into that state of luxuriant plumpness which had enchanted the eyes, and captivated the heart, of Mr. Joseph Tuggs in his earlier days. Mr. Simon Tuggs, his only son, and Miss Charlotte Tuggs's only brother, was as differently formed in body, as he was differently constituted in mind, from the remainder of his family. There was that elongation in his thoughtful face, and that tendency to weakness in his interesting legs, which tell so forcibly of a great mind and romantic disposition. The slightest traits of character in such a being, possess no mean interest to speculative minds. He usually appeared in public, in capacious shoes with black cotton stockings; and was observed to be particularly attached to a black glazed stock, without tie or ornament of any description.

There is perhaps no profession, however useful; no pursuit, however meritorious; which can escape the petty attacks of vulgar minds. Mr. Joseph Tuggs was a grocer. It might be supposed that a grocer was beyond the breath of calumny; but no—the neighbours stigmatised him as a chandler; and the poisonous voice of envy distinctly asserted that he dispensed tea and coffee by the quartern, retailed sugar by the ounce, cheese by the slice, tobacco by the screw, and butter by the pat. These taunts, however, were lost upon the Tuggses. Mr. Tuggs attended to the grocery department; Mrs. Tuggs to the cheesemongery; and Miss Tuggs to her education. Mr. Simon Tuggs kept his father's books, and his own counsel.

One fine spring afternoon, the latter gentleman was seated on a tub of weekly Dorset, behind the little red desk with a wooden rail, which ornamented a corner of the counter; when a stranger dismounted from a cab, and hastily entered the shop. He was habited in black cloth, and bore with him, a green umbrella, and a blue bag.

'Mr. Tuggs?' said the stranger, inquiringly.

'*My* name is Tuggs,' replied Mr. Simon.

'It's the other Mr. Tuggs,' said the stranger, looking towards the glass door which led into the parlour behind the shop, and on the inside of which, the round face of Mr. Tuggs, senior, was distinctly visible, peeping over the curtain.

Mr. Simon gracefully waved his pen, as if in intimation of his wish that his father would advance. Mr. Joseph Tuggs, with considerable celerity, removed his face from the curtain and placed it before the stranger.

'I come from the Temple,' said the man with the bag.

'From the Temple!' said Mrs. Tuggs, flinging open the door of the little parlour and disclosing Miss Tuggs in perspective.

‘From the Temple!’ said Miss Tuggs and Mr. Simon Tuggs at the same moment.

‘From the Temple!’ said Mr. Joseph Tuggs, turning as pale as a Dutch cheese.

‘From the Temple,’ repeated the man with the bag; ‘from Mr. Cower’s, the solicitor’s. Mr. Tuggs, I congratulate you, sir. Ladies, I wish you joy of your prosperity! We have been successful.’ And the man with the bag leisurely divested himself of his umbrella and glove, as a preliminary to shaking hands with Mr. Joseph Tuggs.

Now the words ‘we have been successful,’ had no sooner issued from the mouth of the man with the bag, than Mr. Simon Tuggs rose from the tub of weekly Dorset, opened his eyes very wide, gasped for breath, made figures of eight in the air with his pen, and finally fell into the arms of his anxious mother, and fainted away without the slightest ostensible cause or pretence.

‘Water!’ screamed Mrs. Tuggs.

‘Look up, my son,’ exclaimed Mr. Tuggs.

‘Simon! dear Simon!’ shrieked Miss Tuggs.

‘I’m better now,’ said Mr. Simon Tuggs. ‘What! successful!’ And then, as corroborative evidence of his being better, he fainted away again, and was borne into the little parlour by the united efforts of the remainder of the family, and the man with the bag.

To a casual spectator, or to any one unacquainted with the position of the family, this fainting would have been unaccountable. To those who understood the mission of the man with the bag, and were moreover acquainted with the excitability of the nerves of Mr. Simon Tuggs, it was quite comprehensible. A long-pending lawsuit respecting the validity of a will, had been unexpectedly decided; and Mr. Joseph Tuggs was the possessor of twenty thousand pounds.

A prolonged consultation took place, that night, in the little parlour—a consultation that was to settle the future destinies of the Tuggses. The shop was shut up, at an unusually early hour; and many were the unavailing kicks bestowed upon the closed door by applicants for quarterns of sugar, or half-quarterns of bread, or penn’orths of pepper, which were to have been ‘left till Saturday,’ but which fortune had decreed were to be left alone altogether.

‘We must certainly give up business,’ said Miss Tuggs.

‘Oh, decidedly,’ said Mrs. Tuggs.

‘Simon shall go to the bar,’ said Mr. Joseph Tuggs.

‘And I shall always sign myself “Cymon” in future,’ said his son.

‘And I shall call myself Charlotta,’ said Miss Tuggs.

‘And you must always call *me* “Ma,” and father “Pa,”’ said Mrs. Tuggs.

‘Yes, and Pa must leave off all his vulgar habits,’ interposed Miss Tuggs.

‘I’ll take care of all that,’ responded Mr. Joseph Tuggs, complacently. He was, at that very moment, eating pickled salmon with a pocket-knife.

‘We must leave town immediately,’ said Mr. Cymon Tuggs.

Everybody concurred that this was an indispensable preliminary to being genteel. The question then arose, Where should they go?

‘Gravesend?’ mildly suggested Mr. Joseph Tuggs. The idea was unanimously scouted. Gravesend was *low*.

‘Margate?’ insinuated Mrs. Tuggs. Worse and worse—nobody there, but tradespeople.

‘Brighton?’ Mr. Cymon Tuggs opposed an insurmountable objection. All the coaches had been upset, in turn, within the last three weeks; each coach had averaged two passengers killed, and six wounded; and, in every case, the newspapers had distinctly understood that ‘no blame whatever was attributable to the coachman.’

‘Ramsgate?’ ejaculated Mr. Cymon, thoughtfully. To be sure; how stupid they must have been, not to have thought of that before! Ramsgate was just the place of all others.

Two months after this conversation, the City of London Ramsgate steamer was running gaily down the river. Her flag was flying, her band was playing, her passengers were conversing; everything about her seemed gay and lively.—No wonder—the Tuggses were on board.

‘Charming, ain’t it?’ said Mr. Joseph Tuggs, in a bottle-green great-coat, with a velvet collar of the same, and a blue travelling-cap with a gold band.

‘Soul-inspiring,’ replied Mr. Cymon Tuggs—he was entered at the bar. ‘Soul-inspiring!’

‘Delightful morning, sir!’ said a stoutish, military-looking gentleman in a blue surtout buttoned up to his chin, and white trousers chained down to the soles of his boots.

Mr. Cymon Tuggs took upon himself the responsibility of answering the observation. ‘Heavenly!’ he replied.

‘You are an enthusiastic admirer of the beauties of Nature, sir?’ said the military gentleman.

‘I am, sir,’ replied Mr. Cymon Tuggs.

‘Travelled much, sir?’ inquired the military gentleman.

‘Not much,’ replied Mr. Cymon Tuggs.

‘You’ve been on the continent, of course?’ inquired the military gentleman.

‘Not exactly,’ replied Mr. Cymon Tuggs—in a qualified tone, as if he wished it to be implied that he had gone half-way and come back again.

‘You of course intend your son to make the grand tour, sir?’ said the military gentleman, addressing Mr. Joseph Tuggs.

As Mr. Joseph Tuggs did not precisely understand what the grand tour was, or how such an article was manufactured, he replied, ‘Of course.’ Just as he said the word, there came tripping up, from her seat at the stern of the vessel, a young lady in a puce-coloured silk cloak, and boots of the same; with long black ringlets, large black eyes, brief petticoats, and unexceptionable ankles.

‘Walter, my dear,’ said the young lady to the military gentleman.

‘Yes, Belinda, my love,’ responded the military gentleman to the black-eyed young lady.

‘What have you left me alone so long for?’ said the young lady. ‘I have been stared out of countenance by those rude young men.’

‘What! stared at?’ exclaimed the military gentleman, with an emphasis which made Mr. Cymon Tuggs withdraw his eyes from the young lady’s face with inconceivable rapidity. ‘Which young men—where?’ and the military gentleman clenched his fist, and glared fearfully on the cigar-smokers around.

‘Be calm, Walter, I entreat,’ said the young lady.

‘I won’t,’ said the military gentleman.

‘Do, sir,’ interposed Mr. Cymon Tuggs. ‘They ain’t worth your notice.’

‘No—no—they are not, indeed,’ urged the young lady.

‘I *will* be calm,’ said the military gentleman. ‘You speak truly, sir. I thank you for a timely remonstrance, which may have spared me the guilt of manslaughter.’ Calming his wrath, the military gentleman wrung Mr. Cymon Tuggs by the hand.

‘My sister, sir!’ said Mr. Cymon Tuggs; seeing that the military gentleman was casting an admiring look towards Miss Charlotta.

‘My wife, ma’am—Mrs. Captain Waters,’ said the military gentleman, presenting the black-eyed young lady.

‘My mother, ma’am—Mrs. Tuggs,’ said Mr. Cymon. The military gentleman and his wife murmured enchanting courtesies; and the Tuggses looked as unembarrassed as they could.

‘Walter, my dear,’ said the black-eyed young lady, after they had sat chatting with the Tuggses some half-hour.

‘Yes, my love,’ said the military gentleman.

‘Don’t you think this gentleman (with an inclination of the head towards Mr. Cymon Tuggs) is very much like the Marquis Carriwini?’

‘Lord bless me, very!’ said the military gentleman.

‘It struck me, the moment I saw him,’ said the young lady, gazing intently, and with a melancholy air, on the scarlet countenance of Mr. Cymon Tuggs. Mr. Cymon Tuggs looked at everybody; and finding that everybody was looking at him, appeared to feel some temporary difficulty in disposing of his eyesight.

‘So exactly the air of the marquis,’ said the military gentleman.

‘Quite extraordinary!’ sighed the military gentleman’s lady.

‘You don’t know the marquis, sir?’ inquired the military gentleman.

Mr. Cymon Tuggs stammered a negative.

‘If you did,’ continued Captain Walter Waters, ‘you would feel how much reason you have to be proud of the resemblance—a most elegant man, with a most prepossessing appearance.’

‘He is—he is indeed!’ exclaimed Belinda Waters energetically. As her eye caught that of Mr. Cymon Tuggs, she withdrew it from his features in bashful confusion.

All this was highly gratifying to the feelings of the Tuggses; and when, in the course of farther conversation, it was discovered that Miss Charlotta Tuggs was the *fac simile* of a titled relative of Mrs. Belinda Waters, and that Mrs. Tuggs herself was the very picture of the Dowager Duchess of Dobbleton, their delight in the acquisition of so genteel and friendly an acquaintance, knew no bounds. Even the dignity of Captain Walter Waters relaxed, to that degree, that he suffered himself to be prevailed upon by Mr. Joseph Tuggs, to partake of cold pigeon-pie and sherry, on deck; and a most delightful conversation, aided by these agreeable stimulants, was prolonged, until they ran alongside Ramsgate Pier.

‘Good-bye, dear!’ said Mrs. Captain Waters to Miss Charlotta Tuggs, just before the bustle of landing commenced; ‘we shall see you on the sands in the morning; and, as we are sure to have found lodgings before then, I hope we shall be inseparables for many weeks to come.’

‘Oh! I hope so,’ said Miss Charlotta Tuggs, emphatically.

‘Tickets, ladies and gen’lm’n,’ said the man on the paddle-box.

‘Want a porter, sir?’ inquired a dozen men in smock-frocks.

‘Now, my dear!’ said Captain Waters.

‘Good-bye!’ said Mrs. Captain Waters—‘good-bye, Mr. Cymon!’ and with a pressure of the hand which threw the amiable young man’s nerves into a state of considerable derangement, Mrs. Captain Waters disappeared among the crowd. A pair of puce-coloured boots were seen ascending the steps, a white handkerchief fluttered, a black eye gleamed. The Waterses were gone, and Mr. Cymon Tuggs was alone in a heartless world.

Silently and abstractedly, did that too sensitive youth follow his revered parents, and a train of smock-frocks and wheelbarrows, along the pier, until the bustle of the scene around, recalled him to himself. The sun was shining brightly; the sea, dancing to its own music, rolled merrily in; crowds of people promenaded to and fro; young ladies tittered; old ladies talked; nursemaids displayed their charms to the greatest possible advantage; and their little charges ran up and down, and to and fro, and in and out, under the feet, and between the legs, of the assembled concourse, in the most playful and exhilarating manner. There were old gentlemen, trying to make out objects through long telescopes; and young ones, making objects of themselves in open shirt-collars; ladies, carrying about portable chairs, and portable chairs carrying about invalids; parties, waiting on the pier for parties who had come by the steam-boat; and nothing was to be heard but talking, laughing, welcoming, and merriment.

‘Fly, sir?’ exclaimed a chorus of fourteen men and six boys, the moment Mr. Joseph Tuggs, at the head of his little party, set foot in the street.

‘Here’s the gen’lm’n at last!’ said one, touching his hat with mock politeness. ‘Werry glad to see you, sir,—been a-waitin’ for you these six weeks. Jump in, if you please, sir!’

‘Nice light fly and a fast trotter, sir,’ said another: ‘fourteen mile a hour, and surroundin’ objects rendered inwisible by ex-treme welocity!’

‘Large fly for your luggage, sir,’ cried a third. ‘Werry large fly here, sir—reg’lar bluebottle!’

‘Here’s *your* fly, sir!’ shouted another aspiring charioteer, mounting the box, and inducing an old grey horse to indulge in some imperfect reminiscences of a canter. ‘Look at him, sir!—temper of a lamb and haction of a steam-ingein!’

Resisting even the temptation of securing the services of so valuable a quadruped as the last named, Mr. Joseph Tuggs beckoned to the proprietor of a dingy conveyance of a greenish hue, lined with faded striped calico; and, the luggage and the family having been deposited therein, the animal in the shafts, after describing circles in the road for a quarter of an hour, at last consented to depart in quest of lodgings.

‘How many beds have you got?’ screamed Mrs. Tuggs out of the fly, to the woman who opened the door of the first house which displayed a bill intimating that apartments were to be let within.

‘How many did you want, ma’am?’ was, of course, the reply.

‘Three.’

‘Will you step in, ma’am?’ Down got Mrs. Tuggs. The family were delighted. Splendid view of the sea from the front windows—charming! A short pause. Back came Mrs. Tuggs again.—One parlour and a mattress.

‘Why the devil didn’t they say so at first?’ inquired Mr. Joseph Tuggs, rather pettishly.

‘Don’t know,’ said Mrs. Tuggs.

‘Wretches!’ exclaimed the nervous Cymon. Another bill—another stoppage. Same question—same answer—similar result.

‘What do they mean by this?’ inquired Mr. Joseph Tuggs, thoroughly out of temper.

‘Don’t know,’ said the placid Mrs. Tuggs.

‘Orvis the vay here, sir,’ said the driver, by way of accounting for the circumstance in a satisfactory manner; and off they went again, to make fresh inquiries, and encounter fresh disappointments.

It had grown dusk when the ‘fly’—the rate of whose progress greatly belied its name—after climbing up four or five perpendicular hills, stopped before the door of a dusty house, with a bay window, from which you could obtain a beautiful glimpse of the sea—if you thrust half of your body out of it, at the imminent peril of falling into the area. Mrs. Tuggs alighted. One ground-floor sitting-room, and three cells with beds in them up-stairs. A double-house. Family on the opposite side. Five children milk-and-watering in the parlour, and one little boy, expelled for bad behaviour, screaming on his back in the passage.

‘What’s the terms?’ said Mrs. Tuggs. The mistress of the house was considering the expediency of putting on an extra guinea; so, she coughed slightly, and affected not to hear the question.

‘What’s the terms?’ said Mrs. Tuggs, in a louder key.

‘Five guineas a week, ma’am, *with* attendance,’ replied the lodging-house keeper. (Attendance means the privilege of ringing the bell as often as you like, for your own amusement.)

‘Rather dear,’ said Mrs. Tuggs. ‘Oh dear, no, ma’am!’ replied the mistress of the house, with a benign smile of pity at the ignorance of manners and customs, which the observation betrayed. ‘Very cheap!’

Such an authority was indisputable. Mrs. Tuggs paid a week’s rent in advance, and took the lodgings for a month. In an hour’s time, the family were seated at tea in their new abode.

‘Capital srimps!’ said Mr. Joseph Tuggs.

Mr. Cymon eyed his father with a rebellious scowl, as he emphatically said ‘*Shrimps*.’

‘Well, then, shrimps,’ said Mr. Joseph Tuggs. ‘Srimps or shrimps, don’t much matter.’

There was pity, blended with malignity, in Mr. Cymon’s eye, as he replied, ‘Don’t matter, father! What would Captain Waters say, if he heard such vulgarity?’

‘Or what would dear Mrs. Captain Waters say,’ added Charlotta, ‘if she saw mother—ma, I mean—eating them whole, heads and all!’

‘It won’t bear thinking of!’ ejaculated Mr. Cymon, with a shudder. ‘How different,’ he thought, ‘from the Dowager Duchess of Dobbleton!’

‘Very pretty woman, Mrs. Captain Waters, is she not, Cymon?’ inquired Miss Charlotta.

A glow of nervous excitement passed over the countenance of Mr. Cymon Tuggs, as he replied, ‘An angel of beauty!’

‘Hallo!’ said Mr. Joseph Tuggs. ‘Hallo, Cymon, my boy, take care. Married lady, you know;’ and he winked one of his twinkling eyes knowingly.

‘Why,’ exclaimed Cymon, starting up with an ebullition of fury, as unexpected as alarming, ‘why am I to be reminded of that blight of my happiness, and ruin of my hopes? Why am I to be taunted with the miseries which are heaped upon my head? Is it not enough to—to—to—' and the orator paused; but whether for want of words, or lack of breath, was never distinctly ascertained.

There was an impressive solemnity in the tone of this address, and in the air with which the romantic Cymon, at its conclusion, rang the bell, and demanded a flat candlestick, which effectually forbade a reply. He stalked dramatically to bed, and the Tuggses went to bed too, half an hour afterwards, in a state of considerable mystification and perplexity.

If the pier had presented a scene of life and bustle to the Tuggses on their first landing at Ramsgate, it was far surpassed by the appearance of the sands on the morning after their arrival. It was a fine, bright, clear day, with a light breeze from the sea. There were the same ladies and gentlemen, the same children, the same nursemaids, the same telescopes, the same portable chairs. The ladies were employed in needlework, or watch-guard making, or knitting, or reading novels; the gentlemen were reading newspapers and magazines; the children were digging holes in the sand with wooden spades, and collecting water therein; the nursemaids, with their youngest charges in their arms, were running in after the waves, and then running back with the waves after them; and, now and then, a little sailing-boat either departed with a gay and talkative cargo of passengers, or returned with a very silent and particularly uncomfortable-looking one.

'Well, I never!' exclaimed Mrs. Tuggs, as she and Mr. Joseph Tuggs, and Miss Charlotta Tuggs, and Mr. Cymon Tuggs, with their eight feet in a corresponding number of yellow shoes, seated themselves on four rush-bottomed chairs, which, being placed in a soft part of the sand, forthwith sunk down some two feet and a half—'Well, I never!'

Mr. Cymon, by an exertion of great personal strength, uprooted the chairs, and removed them further back.

'Why, I'm blessed if there ain't some ladies a-going in!' exclaimed Mr. Joseph Tuggs, with intense astonishment.

'Lor, pa!' exclaimed Miss Charlotta.

'There *is*, my dear,' said Mr. Joseph Tuggs. And, sure enough, four young ladies, each furnished with a towel, tripped up the steps of a bathing-machine. In went the horse, floundering about in the water; round turned the machine; down sat the driver; and presently out burst the young ladies aforesaid, with four distinct splashes.

‘Well, that’s sing’ler, too!’ ejaculated Mr. Joseph Tuggs, after an awkward pause. Mr. Cymon coughed slightly.

‘Why, here’s some gentlemen a-going in on this side!’ exclaimed Mrs. Tuggs, in a tone of horror.

Three machines—three horses—three flounderings—three turnings round—three splashes—three gentlemen, disporting themselves in the water like so many dolphins.

‘Well, *that’s* sing’ler!’ said Mr. Joseph Tuggs again. Miss Charlotta coughed this time, and another pause ensued. It was agreeably broken.

‘How d’ye do, dear? We have been looking for you, all the morning,’ said a voice to Miss Charlotta Tuggs. Mrs. Captain Waters was the owner of it.

‘How d’ye do?’ said Captain Walter Waters, all suavity; and a most cordial interchange of greetings ensued.

‘Belinda, my love,’ said Captain Walter Waters, applying his glass to his eye, and looking in the direction of the sea.

‘Yes, my dear,’ replied Mrs. Captain Waters.

‘There’s Harry Thompson!’

‘Where?’ said Belinda, applying her glass to her eye.

‘Bathing.’

‘Lor, so it is! He don’t see us, does he?’

‘No, I don’t think he does’ replied the captain. ‘Bless my soul, how very singular!’

‘What?’ inquired Belinda.

‘There’s Mary Golding, too.’

‘Lor!—where?’ (Up went the glass again.)

‘There!’ said the captain, pointing to one of the young ladies before noticed, who, in her bathing costume, looked as if she was enveloped in a patent Mackintosh, of scanty dimensions.

‘So it is, I declare!’ exclaimed Mrs. Captain Waters. ‘How very curious we should see them both!’

‘Very,’ said the captain, with perfect coolness.

‘It’s the reg’lar thing here, you see,’ whispered Mr. Cymon Tuggs to his father.

‘I see it is,’ whispered Mr. Joseph Tuggs in reply. ‘Queer, though—ain’t it?’ Mr. Cymon Tuggs nodded assent.

‘What do you think of doing with yourself this morning?’ inquired the captain. ‘Shall we lunch at Pegwell?’

‘I should like that very much indeed,’ interposed Mrs. Tuggs. She had never heard of Pegwell; but the word ‘lunch’ had reached her ears, and it sounded very agreeably.

‘How shall we go?’ inquired the captain; ‘it’s too warm to walk.’

‘A shay?’ suggested Mr. Joseph Tuggs.

‘Chaise,’ whispered Mr. Cymon.

‘I should think one would be enough,’ said Mr. Joseph Tuggs aloud, quite unconscious of the meaning of the correction. ‘However, two shays if you like.’

‘I should like a donkey *so* much,’ said Belinda.

‘Oh, so should I!’ echoed Charlotta Tuggs.

‘Well, we can have a fly,’ suggested the captain, ‘and you can have a couple of donkeys.’

A fresh difficulty arose. Mrs. Captain Waters declared it would be decidedly improper for two ladies to ride alone. The remedy was obvious. Perhaps young Mr. Tuggs would be gallant enough to accompany them.

Mr. Cymon Tuggs blushed, smiled, looked vacant, and faintly protested that he was no horseman. The objection was at once overruled. A fly was speedily found; and three donkeys—which the proprietor declared on his solemn asseveration to be ‘three parts blood, and the other corn’—were engaged in the service.

‘Kim up!’ shouted one of the two boys who followed behind, to propel the donkeys, when Belinda Waters and Charlotta Tuggs had been hoisted, and pushed, and pulled, into their respective saddles.

‘Hi—hi—hi!’ groaned the other boy behind Mr. Cymon Tuggs. Away went the donkey, with the stirrups jingling against the heels of Cymon’s boots, and Cymon’s boots nearly scraping the ground.

‘Way—way! Wo—o—o—!’ cried Mr. Cymon Tuggs as well as he could, in the midst of the jolting.

‘Don’t make it gallop!’ screamed Mrs. Captain Waters, behind.

‘My donkey *will* go into the public-house!’ shrieked Miss Tuggs in the rear.

‘Hi—hi—hi!’ groaned both the boys together; and on went the donkeys as if nothing would ever stop them.

Everything has an end, however; even the galloping of donkeys will cease in time. The animal which Mr. Cymon Tuggs bestrode, feeling sundry uncomfortable tugs at the bit, the intent of which he could by no means divine, abruptly sidled against a brick wall, and expressed his uneasiness by grinding Mr. Cymon Tuggs's leg on the rough surface. Mrs. Captain Waters's donkey, apparently under the influence of some playfulness of spirit, rushed suddenly, head first, into a hedge, and declined to come out again: and the quadruped on which Miss Tuggs was mounted, expressed his delight at this humorous proceeding by firmly planting his fore-feet against the ground, and kicking up his hind-legs in a very agile, but somewhat alarming manner.

This abrupt termination to the rapidity of the ride, naturally occasioned some confusion. Both the ladies indulged in vehement screaming for several minutes; and Mr. Cymon Tuggs, besides sustaining intense bodily pain, had the additional mental anguish of witnessing their distressing situation, without having the power to rescue them, by reason of his leg being firmly screwed in between the animal and the wall. The efforts of the boys, however, assisted by the ingenious expedient of twisting the tail of the most rebellious donkey, restored order in a much shorter time than could have reasonably been expected, and the little party jogged slowly on together.

'Now let 'em walk,' said Mr. Cymon Tuggs. 'It's cruel to overdrive 'em.'

'Werry well, sir,' replied the boy, with a grin at his companion, as if he understood Mr. Cymon to mean that the cruelty applied less to the animals than to their riders.

'What a lovely day, dear!' said Charlotta.

'Charming; enchanting, dear!' responded Mrs. Captain Waters.

'What a beautiful prospect, Mr. Tuggs!'

Cymon looked full in Belinda's face, as he responded—'Beautiful, indeed!' The lady cast down her eyes, and suffered the animal she was riding to fall a little back. Cymon Tuggs instinctively did the same.

There was a brief silence, broken only by a sigh from Mr. Cymon Tuggs.

'Mr. Cymon,' said the lady suddenly, in a low tone, 'Mr. Cymon—I am another's.'

Mr. Cymon expressed his perfect concurrence in a statement which it was impossible to controvert.

‘If I had not been—’ resumed Belinda; and there she stopped.

‘What—what?’ said Mr. Cymon earnestly. ‘Do not torture me. What would you say?’

‘If I had not been’—continued Mrs. Captain Waters—‘if, in earlier life, it had been my fate to have known, and been beloved by, a noble youth—a kindred soul—a congenial spirit—one capable of feeling and appreciating the sentiments which—’

‘Heavens! what do I hear?’ exclaimed Mr. Cymon Tuggs. ‘Is it possible! can I believe my—Come up!’ (This last unsentimental parenthesis was addressed to the donkey, who, with his head between his fore-legs, appeared to be examining the state of his shoes with great anxiety.)

‘Hi—hi—hi,’ said the boys behind. ‘Come up,’ expostulated Cymon Tuggs again. ‘Hi—hi—hi,’ repeated the boys. And whether it was that the animal felt indignant at the tone of Mr. Tuggs’s command, or felt alarmed by the noise of the deputy proprietor’s boots running behind him; or whether he burned with a noble emulation to outstrip the other donkeys; certain it is that he no sooner heard the second series of ‘hi—hi’s,’ than he started away, with a celerity of pace which jerked Mr. Cymon’s hat off, instantaneously, and carried him to the Pegwell Bay hotel in no time, where he deposited his rider without giving him the trouble of dismounting, by sagaciously pitching him over his head, into the very doorway of the tavern.

Great was the confusion of Mr. Cymon Tuggs, when he was put right end uppermost, by two waiters; considerable was the alarm of Mrs. Tuggs in behalf of her son; agonizing were the apprehensions of Mrs. Captain Waters on his account. It was speedily discovered, however, that he had not sustained much more injury than the donkey—he was grazed, and the animal was grazing—and then it *was* a delightful party to be sure! Mr. and Mrs. Tuggs, and the captain, had ordered lunch in the little garden behind:—small saucers of large shrimps, dabs of butter, crusty loaves, and bottled ale. The sky was without a cloud; there were flower-pots and turf before them; the sea, from the foot of the cliff, stretching away as far as the eye could discern anything at all; vessels in the distance with sails as white, and as small, as nicely-got-up cambric handkerchiefs. The shrimps were delightful, the ale better, and the captain even more pleasant than either.

Mrs. Captain Waters was in *such* spirits after lunch!—chasing, first the captain across the turf, and among the flower-pots; and then Mr. Cymon Tuggs; and then Miss Tuggs; and laughing, too, quite boisterously. But as the captain said, it didn't matter; who knew what they were, there? For all the people of the house knew, they might be common people. To which Mr. Joseph Tuggs responded, 'To be sure.' And then they went down the steep wooden steps a little further on, which led to the bottom of the cliff; and looked at the crabs, and the seaweed, and the eels, till it was more than fully time to go back to Ramsgate again. Finally, Mr. Cymon Tuggs ascended the steps last, and Mrs. Captain Waters last but one; and Mr. Cymon Tuggs discovered that the foot and ankle of Mrs. Captain Waters, were even more unexceptionable than he had at first supposed.

Taking a donkey towards his ordinary place of residence, is a very different thing, and a feat much more easily to be accomplished, than taking him from it. It requires a great deal of foresight and presence of mind in the one case, to anticipate the numerous flights of his discursive imagination; whereas, in the other, all you have to do, is, to hold on, and place a blind confidence in the animal. Mr. Cymon Tuggs adopted the latter expedient on his return; and his nerves were so little discomposed by the journey, that he distinctly understood they were all to meet again at the library in the evening.

The library was crowded. There were the same ladies, and the same gentlemen, who had been on the sands in the morning, and on the pier the day before. There were young ladies, in maroon-coloured gowns and black velvet bracelets, dispensing fancy articles in the shop, and presiding over games of chance in the concert-room. There were marriageable daughters, and marriage-making mammas, gaming and promenading, and turning over music, and flirting. There were some male beaux doing the sentimental in whispers, and others doing the ferocious in moustache. There were Mrs. Tuggs in amber, Miss Tuggs in sky-blue, Mrs. Captain Waters in pink. There was Captain Waters in a braided surtout; there was Mr. Cymon Tuggs in pumps and a gilt waistcoat; there was Mr. Joseph Tuggs in a blue coat and a shirt-frill.

'Numbers three, eight, and eleven!' cried one of the young ladies in the maroon-coloured gowns.

'Numbers three, eight, and eleven!' echoed another young lady in the same uniform.

‘Number three’s gone,’ said the first young lady. ‘Numbers eight and eleven!’

‘Numbers eight and eleven!’ echoed the second young lady.

‘Number eight’s gone, Mary Ann,’ said the first young lady.

‘Number eleven!’ screamed the second.

‘The numbers are all taken now, ladies, if you please,’ said the first. The representatives of numbers three, eight, and eleven, and the rest of the numbers, crowded round the table.

‘Will you throw, ma’am?’ said the presiding goddess, handing the dice-box to the eldest daughter of a stout lady, with four girls.

There was a profound silence among the lookers-on.

‘Throw, Jane, my dear,’ said the stout lady. An interesting display of bashfulness—a little blushing in a cambric handkerchief—a whispering to a younger sister.

‘Amelia, my dear, throw for your sister,’ said the stout lady; and then she turned to a walking advertisement of Rowlands’ Macassar Oil, who stood next her, and said, ‘Jane is so *very* modest and retiring; but I can’t be angry with her for it. An artless and unsophisticated girl is *so* truly amiable, that I often wish Amelia was more like her sister!’

The gentleman with the whiskers whispered his admiring approval.

‘Now, my dear!’ said the stout lady. Miss Amelia threw—eight for her sister, ten for herself.

‘Nice figure, Amelia,’ whispered the stout lady to a thin youth beside her.

‘Beautiful!’

‘And *such* a spirit! I am like you in that respect. I can *not* help admiring that life and vivacity. Ah! (a sigh) I wish I could make poor Jane a little more like my dear Amelia!’

The young gentleman cordially acquiesced in the sentiment; both he, and the individual first addressed, were perfectly contented.

‘Who’s this?’ inquired Mr. Cymon Tuggs of Mrs. Captain Waters, as a short female, in a blue velvet hat and feathers, was led into the orchestra, by a fat man in black tights and cloudy Berlins.

‘Mrs. Tippin, of the London theatres,’ replied Belinda, referring to the programme of the concert.

The talented Tippin having condescendingly acknowledged the clapping of hands, and shouts of ‘bravo!’ which greeted her appearance, proceeded to sing the popular cavatina of ‘Bid me discourse,’ accompanied on the piano by Mr. Tippin; after which, Mr. Tippin sang a comic song, accompanied on the piano by Mrs. Tippin: the applause consequent upon which, was only to be exceeded by the enthusiastic approbation bestowed upon an air with variations on the guitar, by Miss Tippin, accompanied on the chin by Master Tippin.

Thus passed the evening; thus passed the days and evenings of the Tuggses, and the Waterses, for six weeks. Sands in the morning—donkeys at noon—pier in the afternoon—library at night—and the same people everywhere.

On that very night six weeks, the moon was shining brightly over the calm sea, which dashed against the feet of the tall gaunt cliffs, with just enough noise to lull the old fish to sleep, without disturbing the young ones, when two figures were discernible—or would have been, if anybody had looked for them—seated on one of the wooden benches which are stationed near the verge of the western cliff. The moon had climbed higher into the heavens, by two hours’ journeying, since those figures first sat down—and yet they had moved not. The crowd of loungers had thinned and dispersed; the noise of itinerant musicians had died away; light after light had appeared in the windows of the different houses in the distance; blockade-man after blockade-man had passed the spot, wending his way towards his solitary post; and yet those figures had remained stationary. Some portions of the two forms were in deep shadow, but the light of the moon fell strongly on a puce-coloured boot and a glazed stock. Mr. Cymon Tuggs and Mrs. Captain Waters were seated on that bench. They spoke not, but were silently gazing on the sea.

‘Walter will return to-morrow,’ said Mrs. Captain Waters, mournfully breaking silence.

Mr. Cymon Tuggs sighed like a gust of wind through a forest of gooseberry bushes, as he replied, ‘Alas! he will.’

‘Oh, Cymon!’ resumed Belinda, ‘the chaste delight, the calm happiness, of this one week of Platonic love, is too much for me!’ Cymon was about to suggest that it was too little for him, but he stopped himself, and murmured unintelligibly.

‘And to think that even this gleam of happiness, innocent as it is,’ exclaimed Belinda, ‘is now to be lost for ever!’

‘Oh, do not say for ever, Belinda,’ exclaimed the excitable Cymon, as two strongly-defined tears chased each other down his pale face—it was so long that there was plenty of room for a chase. ‘Do not say for ever!’

‘I must,’ replied Belinda.

‘Why?’ urged Cymon, ‘oh why? Such Platonic acquaintance as ours is so harmless, that even your husband can never object to it.’

‘My husband!’ exclaimed Belinda. ‘You little know him. Jealous and revengeful; ferocious in his revenge—a maniac in his jealousy! Would you be assassinated before my eyes?’ Mr. Cymon Tuggs, in a voice broken by emotion, expressed his disinclination to undergo the process of assassination before the eyes of anybody.

‘Then leave me,’ said Mrs. Captain Waters. ‘Leave me, this night, for ever. It is late: let us return.’

Mr. Cymon Tuggs sadly offered the lady his arm, and escorted her to her lodgings. He paused at the door—he felt a Platonic pressure of his hand. ‘Good night,’ he said, hesitating.

‘Good night,’ sobbed the lady. Mr. Cymon Tuggs paused again.

‘Won’t you walk in, sir?’ said the servant. Mr. Tuggs hesitated. Oh, that hesitation! He *did* walk in.

‘Good night!’ said Mr. Cymon Tuggs again, when he reached the drawing-room.

‘Good night!’ replied Belinda; ‘and, if at any period of my life, I—Hush!’ The lady paused and stared with a steady gaze of horror, on the ashy countenance of Mr. Cymon Tuggs. There was a double knock at the street-door.

‘It is my husband!’ said Belinda, as the captain’s voice was heard below.

‘And my family!’ added Cymon Tuggs, as the voices of his relatives floated up the staircase.

‘The curtain! The curtain!’ gasped Mrs. Captain Waters, pointing to the window, before which some chintz hangings were closely drawn.

‘But I have done nothing wrong,’ said the hesitating Cymon.

‘The curtain!’ reiterated the frantic lady: ‘you will be murdered.’ This last appeal to his feelings was irresistible. The dismayed Cymon concealed himself behind the curtain with pantomimic suddenness.

Enter the captain, Joseph Tuggs, Mrs. Tuggs, and Charlotta.

‘My dear,’ said the captain, ‘Lieutenant, Slaughter.’ Two iron-shod boots and one gruff voice were heard by Mr. Cymon to advance, and acknowledge the honour of the introduction. The sabre of the lieutenant rattled heavily upon the floor, as he seated himself at the table. Mr. Cymon’s fears almost overcame his reason.

‘The brandy, my dear!’ said the captain. Here was a situation! They were going to make a night of it! And Mr. Cymon Tuggs was pent up behind the curtain and afraid to breathe!

‘Slaughter,’ said the captain, ‘a cigar?’

Now, Mr. Cymon Tuggs never could smoke without feeling it indispensably necessary to retire, immediately, and never could smell smoke without a strong disposition to cough. The cigars were introduced; the captain was a professed smoker; so was the lieutenant; so was Joseph Tuggs. The apartment was small, the door was closed, the smoke powerful: it hung in heavy wreaths over the room, and at length found its way behind the curtain. Cymon Tuggs held his nose, his mouth, his breath. It was all of no use—out came the cough.

‘Bless my soul!’ said the captain, ‘I beg your pardon, Miss Tuggs. You dislike smoking?’

‘Oh, no; I don’t indeed,’ said Charlotta.

‘It makes you cough.’

‘Oh dear no.’

‘You coughed just now.’

‘Me, Captain Waters! Lor! how can you say so?’

‘Somebody coughed,’ said the captain.

‘I certainly thought so,’ said Slaughter. No; everybody denied it.

‘Fancy,’ said the captain.

‘Must be,’ echoed Slaughter.

Cigars resumed—more smoke—another cough—smothered, but violent.

‘Damned odd!’ said the captain, staring about him.

‘Sing’ler!’ ejaculated the unconscious Mr. Joseph Tuggs.

Lieutenant Slaughter looked first at one person mysteriously, then at another: then, laid down his cigar, then approached the window on tiptoe, and pointed with his right thumb over his shoulder, in the direction of the curtain.

‘Slaughter!’ ejaculated the captain, rising from table, ‘what do you mean?’

The lieutenant, in reply, drew back the curtain and discovered Mr. Cymon Tuggs behind it: pallid with apprehension, and blue with wanting to cough.

‘Aha!’ exclaimed the captain, furiously. ‘What do I see? Slaughter, your sabre!’

‘Cymon!’ screamed the Tuggses.

‘Mercy!’ said Belinda.

‘Platonic!’ gasped Cymon.

‘Your sabre!’ roared the captain: ‘Slaughter—unhand me—the villain’s life!’

‘Murder!’ screamed the Tuggses.

‘Hold him fast, sir!’ faintly articulated Cymon.

‘Water!’ exclaimed Joseph Tuggs—and Mr. Cymon Tuggs and all the ladies forthwith fainted away, and formed a tableau.

Most willingly would we conceal the disastrous termination of the six weeks’ acquaintance. A troublesome form, and an arbitrary custom, however, prescribe that a story should have a conclusion, in addition to a commencement; we have therefore no alternative. Lieutenant Slaughter brought a message—the captain brought an action. Mr. Joseph Tuggs interposed—the lieutenant negotiated. When Mr. Cymon Tuggs recovered from the nervous disorder into which misplaced affection, and exciting circumstances, had plunged him, he found that his family had lost their pleasant acquaintance; that his father was minus fifteen hundred pounds; and the captain plus the precise sum. The money was paid to hush the matter up, but it got abroad notwithstanding; and there are not wanting some who affirm that three designing impostors never found more easy dupes, than did Captain Waters, Mrs. Waters, and Lieutenant Slaughter, in the Tuggses at Ramsgate.

CHAPTER V—HORATIO SPARKINS

‘Indeed, my love, he paid Teresa very great attention on the last assembly night,’ said Mrs. Malderton, addressing her spouse, who, after the fatigues of the day in the City, was sitting with a silk handkerchief over his head, and his feet on the fender, drinking his port;—'very great attention; and I say again, every possible encouragement ought to be given him. He positively must be asked down here to dine.'

'Who must?' inquired Mr. Malderton.

'Why, you know whom I mean, my dear—the young man with the black whiskers and the white cravat, who has just come out at our assembly, and whom all the girls are talking about. Young—dear me! what's his name?—Marianne, what *is* his name?' continued Mrs. Malderton, addressing her youngest daughter, who was engaged in netting a purse, and looking sentimental.

'Mr. Horatio Sparkins, ma,' replied Miss Marianne, with a sigh.

'Oh! yes, to be sure—Horatio Sparkins,' said Mrs. Malderton. 'Decidedly the most gentleman-like young man I ever saw. I am sure in the beautifully-made coat he wore the other night, he looked like—like—'

'Like Prince Leopold, ma—so noble, so full of sentiment!' suggested Marianne, in a tone of enthusiastic admiration.

'You should recollect, my dear,' resumed Mrs. Malderton, 'that Teresa is now eight-and-twenty; and that it really is very important that something should be done.'

Miss Teresa Malderton was a very little girl, rather fat, with vermilion cheeks, but good-humoured, and still disengaged, although, to do her justice, the misfortune arose from no lack of perseverance on her part. In vain had she flirted for ten years; in vain had Mr. and Mrs. Malderton assiduously kept up an extensive acquaintance among the young eligible bachelors of Camberwell, and even of Wandsworth and Brixton; to say nothing of those who 'dropped in' from town. Miss Malderton was as well known as the lion on the top of Northumberland House, and had an equal chance of 'going off.'

'I am quite sure you'd like him,' continued Mrs. Malderton, 'he is so gentlemanly!'

'So clever!' said Miss Marianne.

'And has such a flow of language!' added Miss Teresa.

'He has a great respect for you, my dear,' said Mrs. Malderton to her husband. Mr. Malderton coughed, and looked at the fire.

'Yes I'm sure he's very much attached to pa's society,' said Miss Marianne.

'No doubt of it,' echoed Miss Teresa.

‘Indeed, he said as much to me in confidence,’ observed Mrs. Malderton.

‘Well, well,’ returned Mr. Malderton, somewhat flattered; ‘if I see him at the assembly to-morrow, perhaps I’ll ask him down. I hope he knows we live at Oak Lodge, Camberwell, my dear?’

‘Of course—and that you keep a one-horse carriage.’

‘I’ll see about it,’ said Mr. Malderton, composing himself for a nap; ‘I’ll see about it.’

Mr. Malderton was a man whose whole scope of ideas was limited to Lloyd’s, the Exchange, the India House, and the Bank. A few successful speculations had raised him from a situation of obscurity and comparative poverty, to a state of affluence. As frequently happens in such cases, the ideas of himself and his family became elevated to an extraordinary pitch as their means increased; they affected fashion, taste, and many other fooleries, in imitation of their betters, and had a very decided and becoming horror of anything which could, by possibility, be considered low. He was hospitable from ostentation, illiberal from ignorance, and prejudiced from conceit. Egotism and the love of display induced him to keep an excellent table: convenience, and a love of good things of this life, ensured him plenty of guests. He liked to have clever men, or what he considered such, at his table, because it was a great thing to talk about; but he never could endure what he called ‘sharp fellows.’ Probably, he cherished this feeling out of compliment to his two sons, who gave their respected parent no uneasiness in that particular. The family were ambitious of forming acquaintances and connexions in some sphere of society superior to that in which they themselves moved; and one of the necessary consequences of this desire, added to their utter ignorance of the world beyond their own small circle, was, that any one who could lay claim to an acquaintance with people of rank and title, had a sure passport to the table at Oak Lodge, Camberwell.

The appearance of Mr. Horatio Sparkins at the assembly, had excited no small degree of surprise and curiosity among its regular frequenters. Who could he be? He was evidently reserved, and apparently melancholy. Was he a clergyman?—He danced too well. A barrister?—He said he was not called. He used very fine words, and talked a great deal. Could he be a distinguished foreigner, come to England for the purpose of describing the country, its manners and customs; and frequenting public balls and public dinners, with the view of becoming acquainted with high life, polished etiquette, and English refinement?—No, he had not a foreign accent. Was he a surgeon, a contributor to the magazines, a writer of fashionable novels, or an artist?—No; to each and all of these surmises, there existed some valid objection.—'Then,' said everybody, 'he must be *somebody*.'—'I should think he must be,' reasoned Mr. Malderton, within himself, 'because he perceives our superiority, and pays us so much attention.'

The night succeeding the conversation we have just recorded, was 'assembly night.' The double-fly was ordered to be at the door of Oak Lodge at nine o'clock precisely. The Miss Maldertons were dressed in sky-blue satin trimmed with artificial flowers; and Mrs. M. (who was a little fat woman), in ditto ditto, looked like her eldest daughter multiplied by two. Mr. Frederick Malderton, the eldest son, in full-dress costume, was the very *beau idéal* of a smart waiter; and Mr. Thomas Malderton, the youngest, with his white dress-stock, blue coat, bright buttons, and red watch-ribbon, strongly resembled the portrait of that interesting, but rash young gentleman, George Barnwell. Every member of the party had made up his or her mind to cultivate the acquaintance of Mr. Horatio Sparkins. Miss Teresa, of course, was to be as amiable and interesting as ladies of eight-and-twenty on the look-out for a husband, usually are. Mrs. Malderton would be all smiles and graces. Miss Marianne would request the favour of some verses for her album. Mr. Malderton would patronise the great unknown by asking him to dinner. Tom intended to ascertain the extent of his information on the interesting topics of snuff and cigars. Even Mr. Frederick Malderton himself, the family authority on all points of taste, dress, and fashionable arrangement; who had lodgings of his own in town; who had a free admission to Covent-garden theatre; who always dressed according to the fashions of the months; who went up the water twice a-week in the season; and who actually had an intimate friend who once knew a gentleman who formerly lived in the Albany,—even he had determined that Mr. Horatio Sparkins must be a devilish good fellow, and that he would do him the honour of challenging him to a game at billiards.

The first object that met the anxious eyes of the expectant family on their entrance into the ball-room, was the interesting Horatio, with his hair brushed off his forehead, and his eyes fixed on the ceiling, reclining in a contemplative attitude on one of the seats.

'There he is, my dear,' whispered Mrs. Malderton to Mr. Malderton.

‘How like Lord Byron!’ murmured Miss Teresa.

‘Or Montgomery!’ whispered Miss Marianne.

‘Or the portraits of Captain Cook!’ suggested Tom.

‘Tom—don’t be an ass!’ said his father, who checked him on all occasions, probably with a view to prevent his becoming ‘sharp’—which was very unnecessary.

The elegant Sparkins attitudinised with admirable effect, until the family had crossed the room. He then started up, with the most natural appearance of surprise and delight; accosted Mrs. Malderton with the utmost cordiality; saluted the young ladies in the most enchanting manner; bowed to, and shook hands with Mr. Malderton, with a degree of respect amounting almost to veneration; and returned the greetings of the two young men in a half-gratified, half-patronising manner, which fully convinced them that he must be an important, and, at the same time, condescending personage.

‘Miss Malderton,’ said Horatio, after the ordinary salutations, and bowing very low, ‘may I be permitted to presume to hope that you will allow me to have the pleasure—’

‘I don’t *think* I am engaged,’ said Miss Teresa, with a dreadful affectation of indifference—‘but, really—so many—’

Horatio looked handsomely miserable.

‘I shall be most happy,’ simpered the interesting Teresa, at last. Horatio’s countenance brightened up, like an old hat in a shower of rain.

‘A very genteel young man, certainly!’ said the gratified Mr. Malderton, as the obsequious Sparkins and his partner joined the quadrille which was just forming.

‘He has a remarkably good address,’ said Mr. Frederick.

‘Yes, he is a prime fellow,’ interposed Tom, who always managed to put his foot in it—‘he talks just like an auctioneer.’

‘Tom!’ said his father solemnly, ‘I think I desired you, before, not to be a fool.’ Tom looked as happy as a cock on a drizzly morning.

‘How delightful!’ said the interesting Horatio to his partner, as they promenaded the room at the conclusion of the set—‘how delightful, how refreshing it is, to retire from the cloudy storms, the vicissitudes, and the troubles, of life, even if it be but for a few short fleeting moments: and to spend those moments, fading and evanescent though they be, in the delightful, the blessed society of one individual—whose frowns would be death, whose coldness would be madness, whose falsehood would be ruin, whose constancy would be bliss; the possession of whose affection would be the brightest and best reward that Heaven could bestow on man?'

'What feeling! what sentiment!' thought Miss Teresa, as she leaned more heavily on her companion's arm.

'But enough—enough!' resumed the elegant Sparkins, with a theatrical air. 'What have I said? what have I—I—to do with sentiments like these! Miss Malderton'—here he stopped short—'may I hope to be permitted to offer the humble tribute of—'

'Really, Mr. Sparkins,' returned the enraptured Teresa, blushing in the sweetest confusion, 'I must refer you to papa. I never can, without his consent, venture to—'

'Surely he cannot object—'

'Oh, yes. Indeed, indeed, you know him not!' interrupted Miss Teresa, well knowing there was nothing to fear, but wishing to make the interview resemble a scene in some romantic novel.

'He cannot object to my offering you a glass of negus,' returned the adorable Sparkins, with some surprise.

'Is that all?' thought the disappointed Teresa. 'What a fuss about nothing!'

'It will give me the greatest pleasure, sir, to see you to dinner at Oak Lodge, Camberwell, on Sunday next at five o'clock, if you have no better engagement,' said Mr. Malderton, at the conclusion of the evening, as he and his sons were standing in conversation with Mr. Horatio Sparkins.

Horatio bowed his acknowledgments, and accepted the flattering invitation.

'I must confess,' continued the father, offering his snuff-box to his new acquaintance, 'that I don't enjoy these assemblies half so much as the comfort—I had almost said the luxury—of Oak Lodge. They have no great charms for an elderly man.'

'And after all, sir, what is man?' said the metaphysical Sparkins. 'I say, what is man?'

'Ah! very true,' said Mr. Malderton; 'very true.'

'We know that we live and breathe,' continued Horatio; 'that we have wants and wishes, desires and appetites—'

'Certainly,' said Mr. Frederick Malderton, looking profound.

‘I say, we know that we exist,’ repeated Horatio, raising his voice, ‘but there we stop; there, is an end to our knowledge; there, is the summit of our attainments; there, is the termination of our ends. What more do we know?’

‘Nothing,’ replied Mr. Frederick—than whom no one was more capable of answering for himself in that particular. Tom was about to hazard something, but, fortunately for his reputation, he caught his father’s angry eye, and slunk off like a puppy convicted of petty larceny.

‘Upon my word,’ said Mr. Malderton the elder, as they were returning home in the fly, ‘that Mr. Sparkins is a wonderful young man. Such surprising knowledge! such extraordinary information! and such a splendid mode of expressing himself!’

‘I think he must be somebody in disguise,’ said Miss Marianne. ‘How charmingly romantic!’

‘He talks very loud and nicely,’ timidly observed Tom, ‘but I don’t exactly understand what he means.’

‘I almost begin to despair of your understanding anything, Tom,’ said his father, who, of course, had been much enlightened by Mr. Horatio Sparkins’s conversation.

‘It strikes me, Tom,’ said Miss Teresa, ‘that you have made yourself very ridiculous this evening.’

‘No doubt of it,’ cried everybody—and the unfortunate Tom reduced himself into the least possible space. That night, Mr. and Mrs. Malderton had a long conversation respecting their daughter’s prospects and future arrangements. Miss Teresa went to bed, considering whether, in the event of her marrying a title, she could conscientiously encourage the visits of her present associates; and dreamed, all night, of disguised noblemen, large routs, ostrich plumes, bridal favours, and Horatio Sparkins.

Various surmises were hazarded on the Sunday morning, as to the mode of conveyance which the anxiously-expected Horatio would adopt. Did he keep a gig?—was it possible he could come on horseback?—or would he patronize the stage? These, and other various conjectures of equal importance, engrossed the attention of Mrs. Malderton and her daughters during the whole morning after church.

‘Upon my word, my dear, it’s a most annoying thing that that vulgar brother of yours should have invited himself to dine here to-day,’ said Mr. Malderton to his wife. ‘On account of Mr. Sparkins’s coming down, I purposely abstained from asking any one but Flamwell. And then to think of your brother—a tradesman—it's insufferable! I declare I wouldn't have him mention his shop, before our new guest—no, not for a thousand pounds! I wouldn't care if he had the good sense to conceal the disgrace he is to the family; but he's so fond of his horrible business, that he *will* let people know what he is.'

Mr. Jacob Barton, the individual alluded to, was a large grocer; so vulgar, and so lost to all sense of feeling, that he actually never scrupled to avow that he wasn't above his business: 'he'd made his money by it, and he didn't care who know'd it.'

'Ah! Flamwell, my dear fellow, how d'ye do?' said Mr. Malderton, as a little spoffish man, with green spectacles, entered the room. 'You got my note?'

'Yes, I did; and here I am in consequence.'

'You don't happen to know this Mr. Sparkins by name? You know everybody?'

Mr. Flamwell was one of those gentlemen of remarkably extensive information whom one occasionally meets in society, who pretend to know everybody, but in reality know nobody. At Malderton's, where any stories about great people were received with a greedy ear, he was an especial favourite; and, knowing the kind of people he had to deal with, he carried his passion of claiming acquaintance with everybody, to the most immoderate length. He had rather a singular way of telling his greatest lies in a parenthesis, and with an air of self-denial, as if he feared being thought egotistical.

'Why, no, I don't know him by that name,' returned Flamwell, in a low tone, and with an air of immense importance. 'I have no doubt I know him, though. Is he tall?'

'Middle-sized,' said Miss Teresa.

'With black hair?' inquired Flamwell, hazarding a bold guess.

'Yes,' returned Miss Teresa, eagerly.

'Rather a snub nose?'

'No,' said the disappointed Teresa, 'he has a Roman nose.'

'I said a Roman nose, didn't I?' inquired Flamwell. 'He's an elegant young man?'

'Oh, certainly.'

'With remarkably prepossessing manners?'

'Oh, yes!' said all the family together. 'You must know him.'

‘Yes, I thought you knew him, if he was anybody,’ triumphantly exclaimed Mr. Malderton. ‘Who d’ye think he is?’

‘Why, from your description,’ said Flamwell, ruminating, and sinking his voice, almost to a whisper, ‘he bears a strong resemblance to the Honourable Augustus Fitz-Edward Fitz-John Fitz-Osborne. He’s a very talented young man, and rather eccentric. It’s extremely probable he may have changed his name for some temporary purpose.’

Teresa’s heart beat high. Could he be the Honourable Augustus Fitz-Edward Fitz-John Fitz-Osborne! What a name to be elegantly engraved upon two glazed cards, tied together with a piece of white satin ribbon! ‘The Honourable Mrs. Augustus Fitz-Edward Fitz-John Fitz-Osborne!’ The thought was transport.

‘It’s five minutes to five,’ said Mr. Malderton, looking at his watch: ‘I hope he’s not going to disappoint us.’

‘There he is!’ exclaimed Miss Teresa, as a loud double-knock was heard at the door. Everybody endeavoured to look—as people when they particularly expect a visitor always do—as if they were perfectly unsuspicious of the approach of anybody.

The room-door opened—‘Mr. Barton!’ said the servant.

‘Confound the man!’ murmured Malderton. ‘Ah! my dear sir, how d’ye do! Any news?’

‘Why no,’ returned the grocer, in his usual bluff manner. ‘No, none partickler. None that I am much aware of. How d’ye do, gals and boys? Mr. Flamwell, sir—glad to see you.’

‘Here’s Mr. Sparkins!’ said Tom, who had been looking out at the window, ‘on *such* a black horse!’ There was Horatio, sure enough, on a large black horse, curvetting and prancing along, like an Astley’s supernumerary. After a great deal of reining in, and pulling up, with the accompaniments of snorting, rearing, and kicking, the animal consented to stop at about a hundred yards from the gate, where Mr. Sparkins dismounted, and confided him to the care of Mr. Malderton’s groom. The ceremony of introduction was gone through, in all due form. Mr. Flamwell looked from behind his green spectacles at Horatio with an air of mysterious importance; and the gallant Horatio looked unutterable things at Teresa.

‘Is he the Honourable Mr. Augustus What’s-his-name?’ whispered Mrs. Malderton to Flamwell, as he was escorting her to the dining-room.

‘Why, no—at least not exactly,’ returned that great authority—‘not exactly.’

‘Who *is* he then?’

‘Hush!’ said Flamwell, nodding his head with a grave air, importing that he knew very well; but was prevented, by some grave reasons of state, from disclosing the important secret. It might be one of the ministers making himself acquainted with the views of the people.

‘Mr. Sparkins,’ said the delighted Mrs. Malderton, ‘pray divide the ladies. John, put a chair for the gentleman between Miss Teresa and Miss Marianne.’ This was addressed to a man who, on ordinary occasions, acted as half-groom, half-gardener; but who, as it was important to make an impression on Mr. Sparkins, had been forced into a white neckerchief and shoes, and touched up, and brushed, to look like a second footman.

The dinner was excellent; Horatio was most attentive to Miss Teresa, and every one felt in high spirits, except Mr. Malderton, who, knowing the propensity of his brother-in-law, Mr. Barton, endured that sort of agony which the newspapers inform us is experienced by the surrounding neighbourhood when a pot-boy hangs himself in a hay-loft, and which is ‘much easier to be imagined than described.’

‘Have you seen your friend, Sir Thomas Noland, lately, Flamwell?’ inquired Mr. Malderton, casting a sidelong look at Horatio, to see what effect the mention of so great a man had upon him.

‘Why, no—not very lately. I saw Lord Gubbleton the day before yesterday.’

‘All! I hope his lordship is very well?’ said Malderton, in a tone of the greatest interest. It is scarcely necessary to say that, until that moment, he had been quite innocent of the existence of such a person.

‘Why, yes; he was very well—very well indeed. He’s a devilish good fellow. I met him in the City, and had a long chat with him. Indeed, I’m rather intimate with him. I couldn’t stop to talk to him as long as I could wish, though, because I was on my way to a banker’s, a very rich man, and a member of Parliament, with whom I am also rather, indeed I may say very, intimate.’

‘I know whom you mean,’ returned the host, consequentially—in reality knowing as much about the matter as Flamwell himself.—‘He has a capital business.’

This was touching on a dangerous topic.

‘Talking of business,’ interposed Mr. Barton, from the centre of the table. ‘A gentleman whom you knew very well, Malderton, before you made that first lucky spec of yours, called at our shop the other day, and—’

‘Barton, may I trouble you for a potato?’ interrupted the wretched master of the house, hoping to nip the story in the bud.

‘Certainly,’ returned the grocer, quite insensible of his brother-in-law’s object—‘and he said in a very plain manner—’

‘*Floury*, if you please,’ interrupted Malderton again; dreading the termination of the anecdote, and fearing a repetition of the word ‘shop.’

‘He said, says he,’ continued the culprit, after despatching the potato; ‘says he, how goes on your business? So I said, jokingly—you know my way—says I, I’m never above my business, and I hope my business will never be above me. Ha, ha!’

‘Mr. Sparkins,’ said the host, vainly endeavouring to conceal his dismay, ‘a glass of wine?’

‘With the utmost pleasure, sir.’

‘Happy to see you.’

‘Thank you.’

‘We were talking the other evening,’ resumed the host, addressing Horatio, partly with the view of displaying the conversational powers of his new acquaintance, and partly in the hope of drowning the grocer’s stories—‘we were talking the other night about the nature of man. Your argument struck me very forcibly.’

‘And me,’ said Mr. Frederick. Horatio made a graceful inclination of the head.

‘Pray, what is your opinion of woman, Mr. Sparkins?’ inquired Mrs. Malderton. The young ladies simpered.

‘Man,’ replied Horatio, ‘man, whether he ranged the bright, gay, flowery plains of a second Eden, or the more sterile, barren, and I may say, commonplace regions, to which we are compelled to accustom ourselves, in times such as these; man, under any circumstances, or in any place—whether he were bending beneath the withering blasts of the frigid zone, or scorching under the rays of a vertical sun—man, without woman, would be—alone.’

‘I am very happy to find you entertain such honourable opinions, Mr. Sparkins,’ said Mrs. Malderton.

‘And I,’ added Miss Teresa. Horatio looked his delight, and the young lady blushed.

‘Now, it’s my opinion—’ said Mr. Barton.

‘I know what you’re going to say,’ interposed Malderton, determined not to give his relation another opportunity, ‘and I don’t agree with you.’

‘What!’ inquired the astonished grocer.

‘I am sorry to differ from you, Barton,’ said the host, in as positive a manner as if he really were contradicting a position which the other had laid down, ‘but I cannot give my assent to what I consider a very monstrous proposition.’

‘But I meant to say—’

‘You never can convince me,’ said Malderton, with an air of obstinate determination. ‘Never.’

‘And I,’ said Mr. Frederick, following up his father’s attack, ‘cannot entirely agree in Mr. Sparkins’s argument.’

‘What!’ said Horatio, who became more metaphysical, and more argumentative, as he saw the female part of the family listening in wondering delight—‘what! Is effect the consequence of cause? Is cause the precursor of effect?’

‘That’s the point,’ said Flamwell.

‘To be sure,’ said Mr. Malderton.

‘Because, if effect is the consequence of cause, and if cause does precede effect, I apprehend you are wrong,’ added Horatio.

‘Decidedly,’ said the toad-eating Flamwell.

‘At least, I apprehend that to be the just and logical deduction?’ said Sparkins, in a tone of interrogation.

‘No doubt of it,’ chimed in Flamwell again. ‘It settles the point.’

‘Well, perhaps it does,’ said Mr. Frederick; ‘I didn’t see it before.’

‘I don’t exactly see it now,’ thought the grocer; ‘but I suppose it’s all right.’

‘How wonderfully clever he is!’ whispered Mrs. Malderton to her daughters, as they retired to the drawing-room.

‘Oh, he’s quite a love!’ said both the young ladies together; ‘he talks like an oracle. He must have seen a great deal of life.’

The gentlemen being left to themselves, a pause ensued, during which everybody looked very grave, as if they were quite overcome by the profound nature of the previous discussion. Flamwell, who had made up his mind to find out who and what Mr. Horatio Sparkins really was, first broke silence.

‘Excuse me, sir,’ said that distinguished personage, ‘I presume you have studied for the bar? I thought of entering once, myself—indeed, I’m rather intimate with some of the highest ornaments of that distinguished profession.’

‘N-no!’ said Horatio, with a little hesitation; ‘not exactly.’

‘But you have been much among the silk gowns, or I mistake?’ inquired Flamwell, deferentially.

‘Nearly all my life,’ returned Sparkins.

The question was thus pretty well settled in the mind of Mr. Flamwell. He was a young gentleman ‘about to be called.’

‘I shouldn’t like to be a barrister,’ said Tom, speaking for the first time, and looking round the table to find somebody who would notice the remark.

No one made any reply.

‘I shouldn’t like to wear a wig,’ said Tom, hazarding another observation.

‘Tom, I beg you will not make yourself ridiculous,’ said his father. ‘Pray listen, and improve yourself by the conversation you hear, and don’t be constantly making these absurd remarks.’

‘Very well, father,’ replied the unfortunate Tom, who had not spoken a word since he had asked for another slice of beef at a quarter-past five o’clock, p.m., and it was then eight.

‘Well, Tom,’ observed his good-natured uncle, ‘never mind! *I* think with you. I shouldn’t like to wear a wig. I’d rather wear an apron.’

Mr. Malderton coughed violently. Mr. Barton resumed—‘For if a man’s above his business—’

The cough returned with tenfold violence, and did not cease until the unfortunate cause of it, in his alarm, had quite forgotten what he intended to say.

‘Mr. Sparkins,’ said Flamwell, returning to the charge, ‘do you happen to know Mr. Delafontaine, of Bedford-square?’

‘I have exchanged cards with him; since which, indeed, I have had an opportunity of serving him considerably,’ replied Horatio, slightly colouring; no doubt, at having been betrayed into making the acknowledgment.

‘You are very lucky, if you have had an opportunity of obliging that great man,’ observed Flamwell, with an air of profound respect.

‘I don’t know who he is,’ he whispered to Mr. Malderton, confidentially, as they followed Horatio up to the drawing-room. ‘It’s quite clear, however, that he belongs to the law, and that he is somebody of great importance, and very highly connected.’

‘No doubt, no doubt,’ returned his companion.

The remainder of the evening passed away most delightfully. Mr. Malderton, relieved from his apprehensions by the circumstance of Mr. Barton’s falling into a profound sleep, was as affable and gracious as possible. Miss Teresa played the ‘Fall of Paris,’ as Mr. Sparkins declared, in a most masterly manner, and both of them, assisted by Mr. Frederick, tried over glees and trios without number; they having made the pleasing discovery that their voices harmonised beautifully. To be sure, they all sang the first part; and Horatio, in addition to the slight drawback of having no ear, was perfectly innocent of knowing a note of music; still, they passed the time very agreeably, and it was past twelve o’clock before Mr. Sparkins ordered the mourning-coach-looking steed to be brought out—an order which was only complied with, on the distinct understanding that he was to repeat his visit on the following Sunday.

‘But, perhaps, Mr. Sparkins will form one of our party to-morrow evening?’ suggested Mrs. M. ‘Mr. Malderton intends taking the girls to see the pantomime.’ Mr. Sparkins bowed, and promised to join the party in box 48, in the course of the evening.

‘We will not tax you for the morning,’ said Miss Teresa, bewitchingly; ‘for ma is going to take us to all sorts of places, shopping. I know that gentlemen have a great horror of that employment.’ Mr. Sparkins bowed again, and declared that he should be delighted, but business of importance occupied him in the morning. Flamwell looked at Malderton significantly.—‘It’s term time!’ he whispered.

At twelve o’clock on the following morning, the ‘fly’ was at the door of Oak Lodge, to convey Mrs. Malderton and her daughters on their expedition for the day. They were to dine and dress for the play at a friend’s house. First, driving thither with their band-boxes, they departed on their first errand to make some purchases at Messrs. Jones, Spruggins, and Smith’s, of Tottenham-court-road; after which, they were to go to Redmayne’s in Bond-street; thence, to innumerable places that no one ever heard of. The young ladies beguiled the tediousness of the ride by eulogising Mr. Horatio Sparkins, scolding their mamma for taking them so far to save a shilling, and wondering whether they should ever reach their destination. At length, the vehicle stopped before a dirty-looking ticketed linen-draper's shop, with goods of all kinds, and labels of all sorts and sizes, in the window. There were dropsical figures of seven with a little three-farthings in the corner; 'perfectly invisible to the naked eye;' three hundred and fifty thousand ladies' boas, *from* one shilling and a penny halfpenny; real French kid shoes, at two and ninepence per pair; green parasols, at an equally cheap rate; and 'every description of goods,' as the proprietors said—and they must know best—'fifty per cent. under cost price.'

'Lor! ma, what a place you have brought us to!' said Miss Teresa; 'what *would* Mr. Sparkins say if he could see us!'

'Ah! what, indeed!' said Miss Marianne, horrified at the idea.

'Pray be seated, ladies. What is the first article?' inquired the obsequious master of the ceremonies of the establishment, who, in his large white neckcloth and formal tie, looked like a bad 'portrait of a gentleman' in the Somerset-house exhibition.

'I want to see some silks,' answered Mrs. Malderton.

'Directly, ma'am.—Mr. Smith! Where *is* Mr. Smith?'

'Here, sir,' cried a voice at the back of the shop.

'Pray make haste, Mr. Smith,' said the M.C. 'You never are to be found when you're wanted, sir.'

Mr. Smith, thus enjoined to use all possible despatch, leaped over the counter with great agility, and placed himself before the newly-arrived customers. Mrs. Malderton uttered a faint scream; Miss Teresa, who had been stooping down to talk to her sister, raised her head, and beheld—Horatio Sparkins!

'We will draw a veil,' as novel-writers say, over the scene that ensued. The mysterious, philosophical, romantic, metaphysical Sparkins—he who, to the interesting Teresa, seemed like the embodied idea of the young dukes and poetical exquisites in blue silk dressing-gowns, and ditto ditto slippers, of whom she had read and dreamed, but had never expected to behold, was suddenly converted into Mr. Samuel Smith, the assistant at a 'cheap shop;' the junior partner in a slippery firm of some three weeks' existence. The dignified evanishment of the hero of Oak Lodge, on this unexpected recognition, could only be equalled by that of a furtive dog with a considerable kettle at his tail. All the hopes of the Maldertons were destined at once to melt away, like the lemon ices at a Company's dinner; Almack's was still to them as distant as the North Pole; and Miss Teresa had as much chance of a husband as Captain Ross had of the north-west passage.

Years have elapsed since the occurrence of this dreadful morning. The daisies have thrice bloomed on Camberwell-green; the sparrows have thrice repeated their vernal chirps in Camberwell-grove; but the Miss Maldertons are still unmated. Miss Teresa's case is more desperate than ever; but Flamwell is yet in the zenith of his reputation; and the family have the same predilection for aristocratic personages, with an increased aversion to anything *low*.

CHAPTER VI—THE BLACK VEIL

One winter's evening, towards the close of the year 1800, or within a year or two of that time, a young medical practitioner, recently established in business, was seated by a cheerful fire in his little parlour, listening to the wind which was beating the rain in pattering drops against the window, or rumbling dismally in the chimney. The night was wet and cold; he had been walking through mud and water the whole day, and was now comfortably reposing in his dressing-gown and slippers, more than half asleep and less than half awake, revolving a thousand matters in his wandering imagination. First, he thought how hard the wind was blowing, and how the cold, sharp rain would be at that moment beating in his face, if he were not comfortably housed at home. Then, his mind reverted to his annual Christmas visit to his native place and dearest friends; he thought how glad they would all be to see him, and how happy it would make Rose if he could only tell her that he had found a patient at last, and hoped to have more, and to come down again, in a few months' time, and marry her, and take her home to gladden his lonely fireside, and stimulate him to fresh exertions. Then, he began to wonder when his first patient would appear, or whether he was destined, by a special dispensation of Providence, never to have any patients at all; and then, he thought about Rose again, and dropped to sleep and dreamed about her, till the tones of her sweet merry voice sounded in his ears, and her soft tiny hand rested on his shoulder.

There *was* a hand upon his shoulder, but it was neither soft nor tiny; its owner being a corpulent round-headed boy, who, in consideration of the sum of one shilling per week and his food, was let out by the parish to carry medicine and messages. As there was no demand for the medicine, however, and no necessity for the messages, he usually occupied his unemployed hours—averaging fourteen a day—in abstracting peppermint drops, taking animal nourishment, and going to sleep.

'A lady, sir—a lady!' whispered the boy, rousing his master with a shake.

'What lady?' cried our friend, starting up, not quite certain that his dream was an illusion, and half expecting that it might be Rose herself. —'What lady? Where?'

‘*There,* sir!’ replied the boy, pointing to the glass door leading into the surgery, with an expression of alarm which the very unusual apparition of a customer might have tended to excite.

The surgeon looked towards the door, and started himself, for an instant, on beholding the appearance of his unlooked-for visitor.

It was a singularly tall woman, dressed in deep mourning, and standing so close to the door that her face almost touched the glass. The upper part of her figure was carefully muffled in a black shawl, as if for the purpose of concealment; and her face was shrouded by a thick black veil. She stood perfectly erect, her figure was drawn up to its full height, and though the surgeon felt that the eyes beneath the veil were fixed on him, she stood perfectly motionless, and evinced, by no gesture whatever, the slightest consciousness of his having turned towards her.

‘Do you wish to consult me?’ he inquired, with some hesitation, holding open the door. It opened inwards, and therefore the action did not alter the position of the figure, which still remained motionless on the same spot.

She slightly inclined her head, in token of acquiescence.

‘Pray walk in,’ said the surgeon.

The figure moved a step forward; and then, turning its head in the direction of the boy—to his infinite horror—appeared to hesitate.

‘Leave the room, Tom,’ said the young man, addressing the boy, whose large round eyes had been extended to their utmost width during this brief interview. ‘Draw the curtain, and shut the door.’

The boy drew a green curtain across the glass part of the door, retired into the surgery, closed the door after him, and immediately applied one of his large eyes to the keyhole on the other side.

The surgeon drew a chair to the fire, and motioned the visitor to a seat. The mysterious figure slowly moved towards it. As the blaze shone upon the black dress, the surgeon observed that the bottom of it was saturated with mud and rain.

‘You are very wet,’ be said.

‘I am,’ said the stranger, in a low deep voice.

‘And you are ill?’ added the surgeon, compassionately, for the tone was that of a person in pain.

‘I am,’ was the reply—‘very ill; not bodily, but mentally. It is not for myself, or on my own behalf,’ continued the stranger, ‘that I come to you. If I laboured under bodily disease, I should not be out, alone, at such an hour, or on such a night as this; and if I were afflicted with it, twenty-four hours hence, God knows how gladly I would lie down and pray to die. It is for another that I beseech your aid, sir. I may be mad to ask it for him—I think I am; but, night after night, through the long dreary hours of watching and weeping, the thought has been ever present to my mind; and though even *I* see the hopelessness of human assistance availing him, the bare thought of laying him in his grave without it makes my blood run cold!' And a shudder, such as the surgeon well knew art could not produce, trembled through the speaker's frame.

There was a desperate earnestness in this woman's manner, that went to the young man's heart. He was young in his profession, and had not yet witnessed enough of the miseries which are daily presented before the eyes of its members, to have grown comparatively callous to human suffering.

'If,' he said, rising hastily, 'the person of whom you speak, be in so hopeless a condition as you describe, not a moment is to be lost. I will go with you instantly. Why did you not obtain medical advice before?'

'Because it would have been useless before—because it is useless even now,' replied the woman, clasping her hands passionately.

The surgeon gazed, for a moment, on the black veil, as if to ascertain the expression of the features beneath it: its thickness, however, rendered such a result impossible.

'You *are* ill,' he said, gently, 'although you do not know it. The fever which has enabled you to bear, without feeling it, the fatigue you have evidently undergone, is burning within you now. Put that to your lips,' he continued, pouring out a glass of water—'compose yourself for a few moments, and then tell me, as calmly as you can, what the disease of the patient is, and how long he has been ill. When I know what it is necessary I should know, to render my visit serviceable to him, I am ready to accompany you.'

The stranger lifted the glass of water to her mouth, without raising the veil; put it down again untasted; and burst into tears.

'I know,' she said, sobbing aloud, 'that what I say to you now, seems like the ravings of fever. I have been told so before, less kindly than by you. I am not a young woman; and they do say, that as life steals on towards its final close, the last short remnant, worthless as it may seem to all beside, is dearer to its possessor than all the years that have gone before, connected though they be with the recollection of old friends long since dead, and young ones—children perhaps—who have fallen off from, and forgotten one as completely as if they had died too. My natural term of life cannot be many years longer, and should be dear on that account; but I would lay it down without a sigh—with cheerfulness—with joy—if what I tell you now, were only false, or imaginary. To-morrow morning he of whom I speak will be, I *know*, though I would fain think otherwise, beyond the reach of human aid; and yet, to-night, though he is in deadly peril, you must not see, and could not serve, him.'

'I am unwilling to increase your distress,' said the surgeon, after a short pause, 'by making any comment on what you have just said, or appearing desirous to investigate a subject you are so anxious to conceal; but there is an inconsistency in your statement which I cannot reconcile with probability. This person is dying to-night, and I cannot see him when my assistance might possibly avail; you apprehend it will be useless to-morrow, and yet you would have me see him then! If he be, indeed, as dear to you, as your words and manner would imply, why not try to save his life before delay and the progress of his disease render it impracticable?'

'God help me!' exclaimed the woman, weeping bitterly, 'how can I hope strangers will believe what appears incredible, even to myself? You will *not* see him then, sir?' she added, rising suddenly.

'I did not say that I declined to see him,' replied the surgeon; 'but I warn you, that if you persist in this extraordinary procrastination, and the individual dies, a fearful responsibility rests with you.'

'The responsibility will rest heavily somewhere,' replied the stranger bitterly. 'Whatever responsibility rests with me, I am content to bear, and ready to answer.'

'As I incur none,' continued the surgeon, 'by acceding to your request, I will see him in the morning, if you leave me the address. At what hour can he be seen?'

'*Nine*,' replied the stranger.

'You must excuse my pressing these inquiries,' said the surgeon. 'But is he in your charge now?'

'He is not,' was the rejoinder.

'Then, if I gave you instructions for his treatment through the night, you could not assist him?'

The woman wept bitterly, as she replied, 'I could not.'

Finding that there was but little prospect of obtaining more information by prolonging the interview; and anxious to spare the woman's feelings, which, subdued at first by a violent effort, were now irrepressible and most painful to witness; the surgeon repeated his promise of calling in the morning at the appointed hour. His visitor, after giving him a direction to an obscure part of Walworth, left the house in the same mysterious manner in which she had entered it.

It will be readily believed that so extraordinary a visit produced a considerable impression on the mind of the young surgeon; and that he speculated a great deal and to very little purpose on the possible circumstances of the case. In common with the generality of people, he had often heard and read of singular instances, in which a presentiment of death, at a particular day, or even minute, had been entertained and realised. At one moment he was inclined to think that the present might be such a case; but, then, it occurred to him that all the anecdotes of the kind he had ever heard, were of persons who had been troubled with a foreboding of their own death. This woman, however, spoke of another person—a man; and it was impossible to suppose that a mere dream or delusion of fancy would induce her to speak of his approaching dissolution with such terrible certainty as she had spoken. It could not be that the man was to be murdered in the morning, and that the woman, originally a consenting party, and bound to secrecy by an oath, had relented, and, though unable to prevent the commission of some outrage on the victim, had determined to prevent his death if possible, by the timely interposition of medical aid? The idea of such things happening within two miles of the metropolis appeared too wild and preposterous to be entertained beyond the instant. Then, his original impression that the woman's intellects were disordered, recurred; and, as it was the only mode of solving the difficulty with any degree of satisfaction, he obstinately made up his mind to believe that she was mad. Certain misgivings upon this point, however, stole upon his thoughts at the time, and presented themselves again and again through the long dull course of a sleepless night; during which, in spite of all his efforts to the contrary, he was unable to banish the black veil from his disturbed imagination.

The back part of Walworth, at its greatest distance from town, is a straggling miserable place enough, even in these days; but, five-and-thirty years ago, the greater portion of it was little better than a dreary waste, inhabited by a few scattered people of questionable character, whose poverty prevented their living in any better neighbourhood, or whose pursuits and mode of life rendered its solitude desirable. Very many of the houses which have since sprung up on all sides, were not built until some years afterwards; and the great majority even of those which were sprinkled about, at irregular intervals, were of the rudest and most miserable description.

The appearance of the place through which he walked in the morning, was not calculated to raise the spirits of the young surgeon, or to dispel any feeling of anxiety or depression which the singular kind of visit he was about to make, had awakened. Striking off from the high road, his way lay across a marshy common, through irregular lanes, with here and there a ruinous and dismantled cottage fast falling to pieces with decay and neglect. A stunted tree, or pool of stagnant water, roused into a sluggish action by the heavy rain of the preceding night, skirted the path occasionally; and, now and then, a miserable patch of garden-ground, with a few old boards knocked together for a summer-house, and old palings imperfectly mended with stakes pilfered from the neighbouring hedges, bore testimony, at once to the poverty of the inhabitants, and the little scruple they entertained in appropriating the property of other people to their own use. Occasionally, a filthy-looking woman would make her appearance from the door of a dirty house, to empty the contents of some cooking utensil into the gutter in front, or to scream after a little slip-shod girl, who had contrived to stagger a few yards from the door under the weight of a sallow infant almost as big as herself; but, scarcely anything was stirring around: and so much of the prospect as could be faintly traced through the cold damp mist which hung heavily over it, presented a lonely and dreary appearance perfectly in keeping with the objects we have described.

After plodding wearily through the mud and mire; making many inquiries for the place to which he had been directed; and receiving as many contradictory and unsatisfactory replies in return; the young man at length arrived before the house which had been pointed out to him as the object of his destination. It was a small low building, one story above the ground, with even a more desolate and unpromising exterior than any he had yet passed. An old yellow curtain was closely drawn across the window up-stairs, and the parlour shutters were closed, but not fastened. The house was detached from any other, and, as it stood at an angle of a narrow lane, there was no other habitation in sight.

When we say that the surgeon hesitated, and walked a few paces beyond the house, before he could prevail upon himself to lift the knocker, we say nothing that need raise a smile upon the face of the boldest reader. The police of London were a very different body in that day; the isolated position of the suburbs, when the rage for building and the progress of improvement had not yet begun to connect them with the main body of the city and its environs, rendered many of them (and this in particular) a place of resort for the worst and most depraved characters. Even the streets in the gayest parts of London were imperfectly lighted, at that time; and such places as these, were left entirely to the mercy of the moon and stars. The chances of detecting desperate characters, or of tracing them to their haunts, were thus rendered very few, and their offences naturally increased in boldness, as the consciousness of comparative security became the more impressed upon them by daily experience. Added to these considerations, it must be remembered that the young man had spent some time in the public hospitals of the metropolis; and, although neither Burke nor Bishop had then gained a horrible notoriety, his own observation might have suggested to him how easily the atrocities to which the former has since given his name, might be committed. Be this as it may, whatever reflection made him hesitate, he *did* hesitate: but, being a young man of strong mind and great personal courage, it was only for an instant;—he stepped briskly back and knocked gently at the door.

A low whispering was audible, immediately afterwards, as if some person at the end of the passage were conversing stealthily with another on the landing above. It was succeeded by the noise of a pair of heavy boots upon the bare floor. The door-chain was softly unfastened; the door opened; and a tall, ill-favoured man, with black hair, and a face, as the surgeon often declared afterwards, as pale and haggard, as the countenance of any dead man he ever saw, presented himself.

‘Walk in, sir,’ he said in a low tone.

The surgeon did so, and the man having secured the door again, by the chain, led the way to a small back parlour at the extremity of the passage.

‘Am I in time?’

‘Too soon!’ replied the man. The surgeon turned hastily round, with a gesture of astonishment not unmixed with alarm, which he found it impossible to repress.

‘If you’ll step in here, sir,’ said the man, who had evidently noticed the action—‘if you’ll step in here, sir, you won’t be detained five minutes, I assure you.’

The surgeon at once walked into the room. The man closed the door, and left him alone.

It was a little cold room, with no other furniture than two deal chairs, and a table of the same material. A handful of fire, unguarded by any fender, was burning in the grate, which brought out the damp if it served no more comfortable purpose, for the unwholesome moisture was stealing down the walls, in long slug-like tracks. The window, which was broken and patched in many places, looked into a small enclosed piece of ground, almost covered with water. Not a sound was to be heard, either within the house, or without. The young surgeon sat down by the fireplace, to await the result of his first professional visit.

He had not remained in this position many minutes, when the noise of some approaching vehicle struck his ear. It stopped; the street-door was opened; a low talking succeeded, accompanied with a shuffling noise of footsteps, along the passage and on the stairs, as if two or three men were engaged in carrying some heavy body to the room above. The creaking of the stairs, a few seconds afterwards, announced that the new-comers having completed their task, whatever it was, were leaving the house. The door was again closed, and the former silence was restored.

Another five minutes had elapsed, and the surgeon had resolved to explore the house, in search of some one to whom he might make his errand known, when the room-door opened, and his last night’s visitor, dressed in exactly the same manner, with the veil lowered as before, motioned him to advance. The singular height of her form, coupled with the circumstance of her not speaking, caused the idea to pass across his brain for an instant, that it might be a man disguised in woman’s attire. The hysteric sobs which issued from beneath the veil, and the convulsive attitude of grief of the whole figure, however, at once exposed the absurdity of the suspicion; and he hastily followed.

The woman led the way up-stairs to the front room, and paused at the door, to let him enter first. It was scantily furnished with an old deal box, a few chairs, and a tent bedstead, without hangings or cross-rails, which was covered with a patchwork counterpane. The dim light admitted through the curtain which he had noticed from the outside, rendered the objects in the room so indistinct, and communicated to all of them so uniform a hue, that he did not, at first, perceive the object on which his eye at once rested when the woman rushed frantically past him, and flung herself on her knees by the bedside.

Stretched upon the bed, closely enveloped in a linen wrapper, and covered with blankets, lay a human form, stiff and motionless. The head and face, which were those of a man, were uncovered, save by a bandage which passed over the head and under the chin. The eyes were closed. The left arm lay heavily across the bed, and the woman held the passive hand.

The surgeon gently pushed the woman aside, and took the hand in his.

'My God!' he exclaimed, letting it fall involuntarily—'the man is dead!'

The woman started to her feet and beat her hands together.

'Oh! don't say so, sir,' she exclaimed, with a burst of passion, amounting almost to frenzy. 'Oh! don't say so, sir! I can't bear it! Men have been brought to life, before, when unskilful people have given them up for lost; and men have died, who might have been restored, if proper means had been resorted to. Don't let him lie here, sir, without one effort to save him! This very moment life may be passing away. Do try, sir,—do, for Heaven's sake!'—And while speaking, she hurriedly chafed, first the forehead, and then the breast, of the senseless form before her; and then, wildly beat the cold hands, which, when she ceased to hold them, fell listlessly and heavily back on the coverlet.

'It is of no use, my good woman,' said the surgeon, soothingly, as he withdrew his hand from the man's breast. 'Stay—undraw that curtain!'

'Why?' said the woman, starting up.

'Undraw that curtain!' repeated the surgeon in an agitated tone.

'I darkened the room on purpose,' said the woman, throwing herself before him as he rose to undraw it.—'Oh! sir, have pity on me! If it can be of no use, and he is really dead, do not expose that form to other eyes than mine!'

'This man died no natural or easy death,' said the surgeon. 'I *must* see the body!' With a motion so sudden, that the woman hardly knew that he had slipped from beside her, he tore open the curtain, admitted the full light of day, and returned to the bedside.

'There has been violence here,' he said, pointing towards the body, and gazing intently on the face, from which the black veil was now, for the first time, removed. In the excitement of a minute before, the female had thrown off the bonnet and veil, and now stood with her eyes fixed upon him. Her features were those of a woman about fifty, who had once been handsome. Sorrow and weeping had left traces upon them which not time itself would ever have produced without their aid; her face was deadly pale; and there was a nervous contortion of the lip, and an unnatural fire in her eye, which showed too plainly that her bodily and mental powers had nearly sunk, beneath an accumulation of misery.

'There has been violence here,' said the surgeon, preserving his searching glance.

'There has!' replied the woman.

'This man has been murdered.'

'That I call God to witness he has,' said the woman, passionately; 'pitilessly, inhumanly murdered!'

'By whom?' said the surgeon, seizing the woman by the arm.

'Look at the butchers' marks, and then ask me!' she replied.

The surgeon turned his face towards the bed, and bent over the body which now lay full in the light of the window. The throat was swollen, and a livid mark encircled it. The truth flashed suddenly upon him.

'This is one of the men who were hanged this morning!' he exclaimed, turning away with a shudder.

'It is,' replied the woman, with a cold, unmeaning stare.

'Who was he?' inquired the surgeon.

'*My son,*' rejoined the woman; and fell senseless at his feet.

It was true. A companion, equally guilty with himself, had been acquitted for want of evidence; and this man had been left for death, and executed. To recount the circumstances of the case, at this distant period, must be unnecessary, and might give pain to some persons still alive. The history was an every-day one. The mother was a widow without friends or money, and had denied herself necessaries to bestow them on her orphan boy. That boy, unmindful of her prayers, and forgetful of the sufferings she had endured for him—incessant anxiety of mind, and voluntary starvation of body—had plunged into a career of dissipation and crime. And this was the result; his own death by the hangman's hands, and his mother's shame, and incurable insanity.

For many years after this occurrence, and when profitable and arduous avocations would have led many men to forget that such a miserable being existed, the young surgeon was a daily visitor at the side of the harmless mad woman; not only soothing her by his presence and kindness, but alleviating the rigour of her condition by pecuniary donations for her comfort and support, bestowed with no sparing hand. In the transient gleam of recollection and consciousness which preceded her death, a prayer for his welfare and protection, as fervent as mortal ever breathed, rose from the lips of this poor friendless creature. That prayer flew to Heaven, and was heard. The blessings he was instrumental in conferring, have been repaid to him a thousand-fold; but, amid all the honours of rank and station which have since been heaped upon him, and which he has so well earned, he can have no reminiscence more gratifying to his heart than that connected with The Black Veil.

CHAPTER VII—THE STEAM EXCURSION

Mr. Percy Noakes was a law student, inhabiting a set of chambers on the fourth floor, in one of those houses in Gray's-inn-square which command an extensive view of the gardens, and their usual adjuncts—flaunting nursery-maids, and town-made children, with parenthetical legs. Mr. Percy Noakes was what is generally termed—'a devilish good fellow.' He had a large circle of acquaintance, and seldom dined at his own expense. He used to talk politics to papas, flatter the vanity of mammas, do the amiable to their daughters, make pleasure engagements with their sons, and romp with the younger branches. Like those paragons of perfection, advertising footmen out of place, he was always 'willing to make himself generally useful.' If any old lady, whose son was in India, gave a ball, Mr. Percy Noakes was master of the ceremonies; if any young lady made a stolen match, Mr. Percy Noakes gave her away; if a juvenile wife presented her husband with a blooming cherub, Mr. Percy Noakes was either godfather, or deputy-godfather; and if any member of a friend's family died, Mr. Percy Noakes was invariably to be seen in the second mourning coach, with a white handkerchief to his eyes, sobbing—to use his own appropriate and expressive description—'like winkin'!'

It may readily be imagined that these numerous avocations were rather calculated to interfere with Mr. Percy Noakes's professional studies. Mr. Percy Noakes was perfectly aware of the fact, and had, therefore, after mature reflection, made up his mind not to study at all—a laudable determination, to which he adhered in the most praiseworthy manner. His sitting-room presented a strange chaos of dress-gloves, boxing-gloves, caricatures, albums, invitation-cards, foils, cricket-bats, cardboard drawings, paste, gum, and fifty other miscellaneous articles, heaped together in the strangest confusion. He was always making something for somebody, or planning some party of pleasure, which was his great *forte*. He invariably spoke with astonishing rapidity; was smart, spoffish, and eight-and-twenty.

'Splendid idea, 'pon my life!' soliloquised Mr. Percy Noakes, over his morning coffee, as his mind reverted to a suggestion which had been thrown out on the previous night, by a lady at whose house he had spent the evening. 'Glorious idea!—Mrs. Stubbs.'

'Yes, sir,' replied a dirty old woman with an inflamed countenance, emerging from the bedroom, with a barrel of dirt and cinders.—This was the laundress. 'Did you call, sir?'

'Oh! Mrs. Stubbs, I'm going out. If that tailor should call again, you'd better say—you'd better say I'm out of town, and shan't be back for a fortnight; and if that bootmaker should come, tell him I've lost his address, or I'd have sent him that little amount. Mind he writes it down; and if Mr. Hardy should call—you know Mr. Hardy?'

'The funny gentleman, sir?'

'Ah! the funny gentleman. If Mr. Hardy should call, say I've gone to Mrs. Taunton's about that water-party.'

'Yes, sir.'

'And if any fellow calls, and says he's come about a steamer, tell him to be here at five o'clock this afternoon, Mrs. Stubbs.'

'Very well, sir.'

Mr. Percy Noakes brushed his hat, whisked the crumbs off his inexpressibles with a silk handkerchief, gave the ends of his hair a persuasive roll round his forefinger, and sallied forth for Mrs. Taunton's domicile in Great Marlborough-street, where she and her daughters occupied the upper part of a house. She was a good-looking widow of fifty, with the form of a giantess and the mind of a child. The pursuit of pleasure, and some means of killing time, were the sole end of her existence. She doted on her daughters, who were as frivolous as herself.

A general exclamation of satisfaction hailed the arrival of Mr. Percy Noakes, who went through the ordinary salutations, and threw himself into an easy chair near the ladies' work-table, with the ease of a regularly established friend of the family. Mrs. Taunton was busily engaged in planting immense bright bows on every part of a smart cap on which it was possible to stick one; Miss Emily Taunton was making a watch-guard; Miss Sophia was at the piano, practising a new song—poetry by the young officer, or the police-officer, or the custom-house officer, or some other interesting amateur.

'You good creature!' said Mrs. Taunton, addressing the gallant Percy. 'You really are a good soul! You've come about the water-party, I know.'

'I should rather suspect I had,' replied Mr. Noakes, triumphantly. 'Now, come here, girls, and I'll tell you all about it.' Miss Emily and Miss Sophia advanced to the table.

'Now,' continued Mr. Percy Noakes, 'it seems to me that the best way will be, to have a committee of ten, to make all the arrangements, and manage the whole set-out. Then, I propose that the expenses shall be paid by these ten fellows jointly.'

'Excellent, indeed!' said Mrs. Taunton, who highly approved of this part of the arrangements.

'Then, my plan is, that each of these ten fellows shall have the power of asking five people. There must be a meeting of the committee, at my chambers, to make all the arrangements, and these people shall be then named; every member of the committee shall have the power of black-balling any one who is proposed; and one black ball shall exclude that person. This will ensure our having a pleasant party, you know.'

'What a manager you are!' interrupted Mrs. Taunton again.

'Charming!' said the lovely Emily.

'I never did!' ejaculated Sophia.

'Yes, I think it'll do,' replied Mr. Percy Noakes, who was now quite in his element. 'I think it'll do. Then you know we shall go down to the Nore, and back, and have a regular capital cold dinner laid out in the cabin before we start, so that everything may be ready without any confusion; and we shall have the lunch laid out, on deck, in those little tea-garden-looking concerns by the paddle-boxes—I don't know what you call 'em. Then, we shall hire a steamer expressly for our party, and a band, and have the deck chalked, and we shall be able to dance quadrilles all day; and then, whoever we know that’s musical, you know, why they’ll make themselves useful and agreeable; and—and—upon the whole, I really hope we shall have a glorious day, you know!’

The announcement of these arrangements was received with the utmost enthusiasm. Mrs. Taunton, Emily, and Sophia, were loud in their praises.

‘Well, but tell me, Percy,’ said Mrs. Taunton, ‘who are the ten gentlemen to be?’

‘Oh! I know plenty of fellows who’ll be delighted with the scheme,’ replied Mr. Percy Noakes; ‘of course we shall have—’

‘Mr. Hardy!’ interrupted the servant, announcing a visitor. Miss Sophia and Miss Emily hastily assumed the most interesting attitudes that could be adopted on so short a notice.

‘How are you?’ said a stout gentleman of about forty, pausing at the door in the attitude of an awkward harlequin. This was Mr. Hardy, whom we have before described, on the authority of Mrs. Stubbs, as ‘the funny gentleman.’ He was an Astley-Cooperish Joe Miller—a practical joker, immensely popular with married ladies, and a general favourite with young men. He was always engaged in some pleasure excursion or other, and delighted in getting somebody into a scrape on such occasions. He could sing comic songs, imitate hackney-coachmen and fowls, play airs on his chin, and execute concertos on the Jews’-harp. He always eat and drank most immoderately, and was the bosom friend of Mr. Percy Noakes. He had a red face, a somewhat husky voice, and a tremendous laugh.

‘How *are* you?’ said this worthy, laughing, as if it were the finest joke in the world to make a morning call, and shaking hands with the ladies with as much vehemence as if their arms had been so many pump-handles.

‘You’re just the very man I wanted,’ said Mr. Percy Noakes, who proceeded to explain the cause of his being in requisition.

‘Ha! ha! ha!’ shouted Hardy, after hearing the statement, and receiving a detailed account of the proposed excursion. ‘Oh, capital! glorious! What a day it will be! what fun!—But, I say, when are you going to begin making the arrangements?’

‘No time like the present—at once, if you please.’

‘Oh, charming!’ cried the ladies. ‘Pray, do!’

Writing materials were laid before Mr. Percy Noakes, and the names of the different members of the committee were agreed on, after as much discussion between him and Mr. Hardy as if the fate of nations had depended on their appointment. It was then agreed that a meeting should take place at Mr. Percy Noakes's chambers on the ensuing Wednesday evening at eight o'clock, and the visitors departed.

Wednesday evening arrived; eight o'clock came, and eight members of the committee were punctual in their attendance. Mr. Loggins, the solicitor, of Boswell-court, sent an excuse, and Mr. Samuel Briggs, the ditto of Furnival's Inn, sent his brother: much to his (the brother's) satisfaction, and greatly to the discomfiture of Mr. Percy Noakes. Between the Briggses and the Tauntons there existed a degree of implacable hatred, quite unprecedented. The animosity between the Montagues and Capulets, was nothing to that which prevailed between these two illustrious houses. Mrs. Briggs was a widow, with three daughters and two sons; Mr. Samuel, the eldest, was an attorney, and Mr. Alexander, the youngest, was under articles to his brother. They resided in Portland-street, Oxford-street, and moved in the same orbit as the Tauntons—hence their mutual dislike. If the Miss Briggses appeared in smart bonnets, the Miss Tauntons eclipsed them with smarter. If Mrs. Taunton appeared in a cap of all the hues of the rainbow, Mrs. Briggs forthwith mounted a toque, with all the patterns of the kaleidoscope. If Miss Sophia Taunton learnt a new song, two of the Miss Briggses came out with a new duet. The Tauntons had once gained a temporary triumph with the assistance of a harp, but the Briggses brought three guitars into the field, and effectually routed the enemy. There was no end to the rivalry between them.

Now, as Mr. Samuel Briggs was a mere machine, a sort of self-acting legal walking-stick; and as the party was known to have originated, however remotely, with Mrs. Taunton, the female branches of the Briggs family had arranged that Mr. Alexander should attend, instead of his brother; and as the said Mr. Alexander was deservedly celebrated for possessing all the pertinacity of a bankruptcy-court attorney, combined with the obstinacy of that useful animal which browses on the thistle, he required but little tuition. He was especially enjoined to make himself as disagreeable as possible; and, above all, to black-ball the Tauntons at every hazard.

The proceedings of the evening were opened by Mr. Percy Noakes. After successfully urging on the gentlemen present the propriety of their mixing some brandy-and-water, he briefly stated the object of the meeting, and concluded by observing that the first step must be the selection of a chairman, necessarily possessing some arbitrary—he trusted not unconstitutional—powers, to whom the personal direction of the whole of the arrangements (subject to the approval of the committee) should be confided. A pale young gentleman, in a green stock and spectacles of the same, a member of the honourable society of the Inner Temple, immediately rose for the purpose of proposing Mr. Percy Noakes. He had known him long, and this he would say, that a more honourable, a more excellent, or a better-hearted fellow, never existed.—(Hear, hear!) The young gentleman, who was a member of a debating society, took this opportunity of entering into an examination of the state of the English law, from the days of William the Conqueror down to the present period; he briefly adverted to the code established by the ancient Druids; slightly glanced at the principles laid down by the Athenian law-givers; and concluded with a most glowing eulogium on pic-nics and constitutional rights.

Mr. Alexander Briggs opposed the motion. He had the highest esteem for Mr. Percy Noakes as an individual, but he did consider that he ought not to be intrusted with these immense powers—(oh, oh!)—He believed that in the proposed capacity Mr. Percy Noakes would not act fairly, impartially, or honourably; but he begged it to be distinctly understood, that he said this, without the slightest personal disrespect. Mr. Hardy defended his honourable friend, in a voice rendered partially unintelligible by emotion and brandy-and-water. The proposition was put to the vote, and there appearing to be only one dissentient voice, Mr. Percy Noakes was declared duly elected, and took the chair accordingly.

The business of the meeting now proceeded with rapidity. The chairman delivered in his estimate of the probable expense of the excursion, and every one present subscribed his portion thereof. The question was put that ‘The Endeavour’ be hired for the occasion; Mr. Alexander Briggs moved as an amendment, that the word ‘Fly’ be substituted for the word ‘Endeavour’; but after some debate consented to withdraw his opposition. The important ceremony of balloting then commenced. A tea-caddy was placed on a table in a dark corner of the apartment, and every one was provided with two backgammon men, one black and one white.

The chairman with great solemnity then read the following list of the guests whom he proposed to introduce:—Mrs. Taunton and two daughters, Mr. Wizzle, Mr. Simson. The names were respectively balloted for, and

Mrs. Taunton and her daughters were declared to be black-balled. Mr. Percy Noakes and Mr. Hardy exchanged glances.

‘Is your list prepared, Mr. Briggs?’ inquired the chairman.

‘It is,’ replied Alexander, delivering in the following:—‘Mrs. Briggs and three daughters, Mr. Samuel Briggs.’ The previous ceremony was repeated, and Mrs. Briggs and three daughters were declared to be black-balled. Mr. Alexander Briggs looked rather foolish, and the remainder of the company appeared somewhat overawed by the mysterious nature of the proceedings.

The balloting proceeded; but, one little circumstance which Mr. Percy Noakes had not originally foreseen, prevented the system from working quite as well as he had anticipated. Everybody was black-balled. Mr. Alexander Briggs, by way of retaliation, exercised his power of exclusion in every instance, and the result was, that after three hours had been consumed in hard balloting, the names of only three gentlemen were found to have been agreed to. In this dilemma what was to be done? either the whole plan must fall to the ground, or a compromise must be effected. The latter alternative was preferable; and Mr. Percy Noakes therefore proposed that the form of balloting should be dispensed with, and that every gentleman should merely be required to state whom he intended to bring. The proposal was acceded to; the Tauntons and the Briggses were reinstated; and the party was formed.

The next Wednesday was fixed for the eventful day, and it was unanimously resolved that every member of the committee should wear a piece of blue sarsenet ribbon round his left arm. It appeared from the statement of Mr. Percy Noakes, that the boat belonged to the General Steam Navigation Company, and was then lying off the Custom-house; and, as he proposed that the dinner and wines should be provided by an eminent city purveyor, it was arranged that Mr. Percy Noakes should be on board by seven o’clock to superintend the arrangements, and that the remaining members of the committee, together with the company generally, should be expected to join her by nine o’clock. More brandy-and-water was despatched; several speeches were made by the different law students present; thanks were voted to the chairman; and the meeting separated.

The weather had been beautiful up to this period, and beautiful it continued to be. Sunday passed over, and Mr. Percy Noakes became unusually fidgety—rushing, constantly, to and from the Steam Packet

Wharf, to the astonishment of the clerks, and the great emolument of the Holborn cabmen. Tuesday arrived, and the anxiety of Mr. Percy Noakes knew no bounds. He was every instant running to the window, to look out for clouds; and Mr. Hardy astonished the whole square by practising a new comic song for the occasion, in the chairman's chambers.

Uneasy were the slumbers of Mr. Percy Noakes that night; he tossed and tumbled about, and had confused dreams of steamers starting off, and gigantic clocks with the hands pointing to a quarter-past nine, and the ugly face of Mr. Alexander Briggs looking over the boat's side, and grinning, as if in derision of his fruitless attempts to move. He made a violent effort to get on board, and awoke. The bright sun was shining cheerfully into the bedroom, and Mr. Percy Noakes started up for his watch, in the dreadful expectation of finding his worst dreams realised.

It was just five o'clock. He calculated the time—he should be a good half-hour dressing himself; and as it was a lovely morning, and the tide would be then running down, he would walk leisurely to Strand-lane, and have a boat to the Custom-house.

He dressed himself, took a hasty apology for a breakfast, and sallied forth. The streets looked as lonely and deserted as if they had been crowded, overnight, for the last time. Here and there, an early apprentice, with quenched-looking sleepy eyes, was taking down the shutters of a shop; and a policeman or milkwoman might occasionally be seen pacing slowly along; but the servants had not yet begun to clean the doors, or light the kitchen fires, and London looked the picture of desolation. At the corner of a by-street, near Temple-bar, was stationed a 'street-breakfast.' The coffee was boiling over a charcoal fire, and large slices of bread and butter were piled one upon the other, like deals in a timber-yard. The company were seated on a form, which, with a view both to security and comfort, was placed against a neighbouring wall. Two young men, whose uproarious mirth and disordered dress bespoke the conviviality of the preceding evening, were treating three 'ladies' and an Irish labourer. A little sweep was standing at a short distance, casting a longing eye at the tempting delicacies; and a policeman was watching the group from the opposite side of the street. The wan looks and gaudy finery of the thinly-clad women contrasted as strangely with the gay sunlight, as did their forced merriment with the boisterous hilarity of the two young men, who, now and then, varied their amusements by ‘bonneting’ the proprietor of this itinerant coffee-house.

Mr. Percy Noakes walked briskly by, and when he turned down Strand-lane, and caught a glimpse of the glistening water, he thought he had never felt so important or so happy in his life.

‘Boat, sir?’ cried one of the three watermen who were mopping out their boats, and all whistling. ‘Boat, sir?’

‘No,’ replied Mr. Percy Noakes, rather sharply; for the inquiry was not made in a manner at all suitable to his dignity.

‘Would you prefer a wessel, sir?’ inquired another, to the infinite delight of the ‘Jack-in-the-water.’

Mr. Percy Noakes replied with a look of supreme contempt.

‘Did you want to be put on board a steamer, sir?’ inquired an old fireman-waterman, very confidentially. He was dressed in a faded red suit, just the colour of the cover of a very old Court-guide.

‘Yes, make haste—the Endeavour—off the Custom-house.’

‘Endeavour!’ cried the man who had convulsed the ‘Jack’ before. ‘Vy, I see the Endeavour go up half an hour ago.’

‘So did I,’ said another; ‘and I should think she’d gone down by this time, for she’s a precious sight too full of ladies and gen’lemen.’

Mr. Percy Noakes affected to disregard these representations, and stepped into the boat, which the old man, by dint of scrambling, and shoving, and grating, had brought up to the causeway. ‘Shove her off!’ cried Mr. Percy Noakes, and away the boat glided down the river; Mr. Percy Noakes seated on the recently mopped seat, and the watermen at the stairs offering to bet him any reasonable sum that he’d never reach the ‘Custum-us.’

‘Here she is, by Jove!’ said the delighted Percy, as they ran alongside the Endeavour.

‘Hold hard!’ cried the steward over the side, and Mr. Percy Noakes jumped on board.

‘Hope you will find everything as you wished, sir. She looks uncommon well this morning.’

‘She does, indeed,’ replied the manager, in a state of ecstasy which it is impossible to describe. The deck was scrubbed, and the seats were scrubbed, and there was a bench for the band, and a place for dancing, and a pile of camp-stools, and an awning; and then Mr. Percy Noakes bustled down below, and there were the pastrycook's men, and the steward's wife, laying out the dinner on two tables the whole length of the cabin; and then Mr. Percy Noakes took off his coat and rushed backwards and forwards, doing nothing, but quite convinced he was assisting everybody; and the steward's wife laughed till she cried, and Mr. Percy Noakes panted with the violence of his exertions. And then the bell at London-bridge wharf rang; and a Margate boat was just starting; and a Gravesend boat was just starting, and people shouted, and porters ran down the steps with luggage that would crush any men but porters; and sloping boards, with bits of wood nailed on them, were placed between the outside boat and the inside boat; and the passengers ran along them, and looked like so many fowls coming out of an area; and then, the bell ceased, and the boards were taken away, and the boats started, and the whole scene was one of the most delightful bustle and confusion.

The time wore on; half-past eight o'clock arrived; the pastry-cook's men went ashore; the dinner was completely laid out; and Mr. Percy Noakes locked the principal cabin, and put the key in his pocket, in order that it might be suddenly disclosed, in all its magnificence, to the eyes of the astonished company. The band came on board, and so did the wine.

Ten minutes to nine, and the committee embarked in a body. There was Mr. Hardy, in a blue jacket and waistcoat, white trousers, silk stockings, and pumps—in full aquatic costume, with a straw hat on his head, and an immense telescope under his arm; and there was the young gentleman with the green spectacles, in nankeen inexplicables, with a ditto waistcoat and bright buttons, like the pictures of Paul—not the saint, but he of Virginia notoriety. The remainder of the committee, dressed in white hats, light jackets, waistcoats, and trousers, looked something between waiters and West India planters.

Nine o'clock struck, and the company arrived in shoals. Mr. Samuel Briggs, Mrs. Briggs, and the Misses Briggs, made their appearance in a smart private wherry. The three guitars, in their respective dark green cases, were carefully stowed away in the bottom of the boat, accompanied by two immense portfolios of music, which it would take at least a week's incessant playing to get through. The Tauntons arrived at the same moment with more music, and a lion—a gentleman with a bass voice and an incipient red moustache. The colours of the Taunton party were pink; those of the Briggses a light blue. The Tauntons had artificial flowers in their bonnets; here the Briggses gained a decided advantage—they wore feathers.

‘How d’ye do, dear?’ said the Misses Briggs to the Misses Taunton. (The word ‘dear’ among girls is frequently synonymous with ‘wretch.’)

‘Quite well, thank you, dear,’ replied the Misses Taunton to the Misses Briggs; and then, there was such a kissing, and congratulating, and shaking of hands, as might have induced one to suppose that the two families were the best friends in the world, instead of each wishing the other overboard, as they most sincerely did.

Mr. Percy Noakes received the visitors, and bowed to the strange gentleman, as if he should like to know who he was. This was just what Mrs. Taunton wanted. Here was an opportunity to astonish the Briggses.

‘Oh! I beg your pardon,’ said the general of the Taunton party, with a careless air.—‘Captain Helves—Mr. Percy Noakes—Mrs. Briggs—Captain Helves.’

Mr. Percy Noakes bowed very low; the gallant captain did the same with all due ferocity, and the Briggses were clearly overcome.

‘Our friend, Mr. Wizzle, being unfortunately prevented from coming,’ resumed Mrs. Taunton, ‘I did myself the pleasure of bringing the captain, whose musical talents I knew would be a great acquisition.’

‘In the name of the committee I have to thank you for doing so, and to offer you welcome, sir,’ replied Percy. (Here the scraping was renewed.) ‘But pray be seated—won’t you walk aft? Captain, will you conduct Miss Taunton?—Miss Briggs, will you allow me?’

‘Where could they have picked up that military man?’ inquired Mrs. Briggs of Miss Kate Briggs, as they followed the little party.

‘I can’t imagine,’ replied Miss Kate, bursting with vexation; for the very fierce air with which the gallant captain regarded the company, had impressed her with a high sense of his importance.

Boat after boat came alongside, and guest after guest arrived. The invites had been excellently arranged: Mr. Percy Noakes having considered it as important that the number of young men should exactly tally with that of the young ladies, as that the quantity of knives on board should be in precise proportion to the forks.

‘Now, is every one on board?’ inquired Mr. Percy Noakes. The committee (who, with their bits of blue ribbon, looked as if they were all going to be bled) bustled about to ascertain the fact, and reported that they might safely start.

‘Go on!’ cried the master of the boat from the top of one of the paddle-boxes.

‘Go on!’ echoed the boy, who was stationed over the hatchway to pass the directions down to the engineer; and away went the vessel with that agreeable noise which is peculiar to steamers, and which is composed of a mixture of creaking, gushing, clanging, and snorting.

‘Hoi-oi-oi-oi-oi-oi-o-i-i-i!’ shouted half-a-dozen voices from a boat, a quarter of a mile astern.

‘Ease her!’ cried the captain: ‘do these people belong to us, sir?’

‘Noakes,’ exclaimed Hardy, who had been looking at every object far and near, through the large telescope, ‘it’s the Fleetwoods and the Wakefields—and two children with them, by Jove!’

‘What a shame to bring children!’ said everybody; ‘how very inconsiderate!’

‘I say, it would be a good joke to pretend not to see ’em, wouldn’t it?’ suggested Hardy, to the immense delight of the company generally. A council of war was hastily held, and it was resolved that the newcomers should be taken on board, on Mr. Hardy solemnly pledging himself to tease the children during the whole of the day.

‘Stop her!’ cried the captain.

‘Stop her!’ repeated the boy; whizz went the steam, and all the young ladies, as in duty bound, screamed in concert. They were only appeased by the assurance of the martial Helves, that the escape of steam consequent on stopping a vessel was seldom attended with any great loss of human life.

Two men ran to the side; and after some shouting, and swearing, and angling for the wherry with a boat-hook, Mr. Fleetwood, and Mrs. Fleetwood, and Master Fleetwood, and Mr. Wakefield, and Mrs. Wakefield, and Miss Wakefield, were safely deposited on the deck. The girl was about six years old, the boy about four; the former was dressed in a white frock with a pink sash and dog’s-eared-looking little spencer: a straw bonnet and green veil, six inches by three and a half; the latter, was attired for the occasion in a nankeen frock, between the bottom of which, and the top of his plaid socks, a considerable portion of two small mottled legs was discernible. He had a light blue cap with a gold band and tassel on his head, and a damp piece of gingerbread in his hand, with which he had slightly embossed his countenance.

The boat once more started off; the band played ‘Off she goes:’ the major part of the company conversed cheerfully in groups; and the old gentlemen walked up and down the deck in pairs, as perseveringly and gravely as if they were doing a match against time for an immense stake. They ran briskly down the Pool; the gentlemen pointed out the Docks, the Thames Police-office, and other elegant public edifices; and the young ladies exhibited a proper display of horror at the appearance of the coal-whippers and ballast-heavers. Mr. Hardy told stories to the married ladies, at which they laughed very much in their pocket-handkerchiefs, and hit him on the knuckles with their fans, declaring him to be ‘a naughty man—a shocking creature’—and so forth; and Captain Helves gave slight descriptions of battles and duels, with a most bloodthirsty air, which made him the admiration of the women, and the envy of the men. Quadrilling commenced; Captain Helves danced one set with Miss Emily Taunton, and another set with Miss Sophia Taunton. Mrs. Taunton was in ecstasies. The victory appeared to be complete; but alas! the inconstancy of man! Having performed this necessary duty, he attached himself solely to Miss Julia Briggs, with whom he danced no less than three sets consecutively, and from whose side he evinced no intention of stirring for the remainder of the day.

Mr. Hardy, having played one or two very brilliant fantasias on the Jews’-harp, and having frequently repeated the exquisitely amusing joke of slily chalking a large cross on the back of some member of the committee, Mr. Percy Noakes expressed his hope that some of their musical friends would oblige the company by a display of their abilities.

‘Perhaps,’ he said in a very insinuating manner, ‘Captain Helves will oblige us?’ Mrs. Taunton’s countenance lighted up, for the captain only sang duets, and couldn’t sing them with anybody but one of her daughters.

‘Really,’ said that warlike individual, ‘I should be very happy, ‘but—’

‘Oh! pray do,’ cried all the young ladies.

‘Miss Emily, have you any objection to join in a duet?’

‘Oh! not the slightest,’ returned the young lady, in a tone which clearly showed she had the greatest possible objection.

‘Shall I accompany you, dear?’ inquired one of the Miss Briggses, with the bland intention of spoiling the effect.

‘Very much obliged to you, Miss Briggs,’ sharply retorted Mrs. Taunton, who saw through the manoeuvre; ‘my daughters always sing without accompaniments.’

‘And without voices,’ tittered Mrs. Briggs, in a low tone.

‘Perhaps,’ said Mrs. Taunton, reddening, for she guessed the tenor of the observation, though she had not heard it clearly—‘Perhaps it would be as well for some people, if their voices were not quite so audible as they are to other people.’

‘And, perhaps, if gentlemen who are kidnapped to pay attention to some persons’ daughters, had not sufficient discernment to pay attention to other persons’ daughters,’ returned Mrs. Briggs, ‘some persons would not be so ready to display that ill-temper which, thank God, distinguishes them from other persons.’

‘Persons!’ ejaculated Mrs. Taunton.

‘Persons,’ replied Mrs. Briggs.

‘Insolence!’

‘Creature!’

‘Hush! hush!’ interrupted Mr. Percy Noakes, who was one of the very few by whom this dialogue had been overheard. ‘Hush!—pray, silence for the duet.’

After a great deal of preparatory crowing and humming, the captain began the following duet from the opera of ‘Paul and Virginia,’ in that grunting tone in which a man gets down, Heaven knows where, without the remotest chance of ever getting up again. This, in private circles, is frequently designated ‘a bass voice.’

‘See (sung the captain) from o—ce—an ri—sing
Bright flames the or—b of d—ay.
From yon gro—ove, the varied so—ongs—’

Here, the singer was interrupted by varied cries of the most dreadful description, proceeding from some grove in the immediate vicinity of the starboard paddle-box.

‘My child!’ screamed Mrs. Fleetwood. ‘My child! it is his voice—I know it.’

Mr. Fleetwood, accompanied by several gentlemen, here rushed to the quarter from whence the noise proceeded, and an exclamation of horror burst from the company; the general impression being, that the little innocent had either got his head in the water, or his legs in the machinery.

‘What is the matter?’ shouted the agonised father, as he returned with the child in his arms.

‘Oh! oh! oh!’ screamed the small sufferer again.

‘What is the matter, dear?’ inquired the father once more—hastily stripping off the nankeen frock, for the purpose of ascertaining whether the child had one bone which was not smashed to pieces.

‘Oh! oh!—I’m so frightened!’

‘What at, dear?—what at?’ said the mother, soothing the sweet infant.

‘Oh! he’s been making such dreadful faces at me,’ cried the boy, relapsing into convulsions at the bare recollection.

‘He!—who?’ cried everybody, crowding round him.

‘Oh!—him!’ replied the child, pointing at Hardy, who affected to be the most concerned of the whole group.

The real state of the case at once flashed upon the minds of all present, with the exception of the Fleetwoods and the Wakefields. The facetious Hardy, in fulfilment of his promise, had watched the child to a remote part of the vessel, and, suddenly appearing before him with the most awful contortions of visage, had produced his paroxysm of terror. Of course, he now observed that it was hardly necessary for him to deny the accusation; and the unfortunate little victim was accordingly led below, after receiving sundry thumps on the head from both his parents, for having the wickedness to tell a story.

This little interruption having been adjusted, the captain resumed, and Miss Emily chimed in, in due course. The duet was loudly applauded, and, certainly, the perfect independence of the parties deserved great commendation. Miss Emily sung her part, without the slightest reference to the captain; and the captain sang so loud, that he had not the slightest idea what was being done by his partner. After having gone through the last few eighteen or nineteen bars by himself, therefore, he acknowledged the plaudits of the circle with that air of self-denial which men usually assume when they think they have done something to astonish the company.

‘Now,’ said Mr. Percy Noakes, who had just ascended from the fore-cabin, where he had been busily engaged in decanting the wine, ‘if the Misses Briggs will oblige us with something before dinner, I am sure we shall be very much delighted.’

One of those hums of admiration followed the suggestion, which one frequently hears in society, when nobody has the most distant notion what he is expressing his approval of. The three Misses Briggs looked modestly at their mamma, and the mamma looked approvingly at her daughters, and Mrs. Taunton looked scornfully at all of them. The Misses Briggs asked for their guitars, and several gentlemen seriously damaged the cases in their anxiety to present them. Then, there was a very interesting production of three little keys for the aforesaid cases, and a melodramatic expression of horror at finding a string broken; and a vast deal of screwing and tightening, and winding, and tuning, during which Mrs. Briggs expatiated to those near her on the immense difficulty of playing a guitar, and hinted at the wondrous proficiency of her daughters in that mystic art. Mrs. Taunton whispered to a neighbour that it was 'quite sickening!' and the Misses Taunton looked as if they knew how to play, but disdained to do it.

At length, the Misses Briggs began in real earnest. It was a new Spanish composition, for three voices and three guitars. The effect was electrical. All eyes were turned upon the captain, who was reported to have once passed through Spain with his regiment, and who must be well acquainted with the national music. He was in raptures. This was sufficient; the trio was encored; the applause was universal; and never had the Tauntons suffered such a complete defeat.

'Bravo! bravo!' ejaculated the captain;—'bravo!'

'Pretty! isn't it, sir?' inquired Mr. Samuel Briggs, with the air of a self-satisfied showman. By-the-bye, these were the first words he had been heard to utter since he left Boswell-court the evening before.

'De-lightful!' returned the captain, with a flourish, and a military cough;—'de-lightful!'

'Sweet instrument!' said an old gentleman with a bald head, who had been trying all the morning to look through a telescope, inside the glass of which Mr. Hardy had fixed a large black wafer.

'Did you ever hear a Portuguese tambourine?' inquired that jocular individual.

'Did *you* ever hear a tom-tom, sir?' sternly inquired the captain, who lost no opportunity of showing off his travels, real or pretended.

'A what?' asked Hardy, rather taken aback.

'A tom-tom.'

'Never!'

'Nor a gum-gum?'

'Never!'

‘What *is* a gum-gum?’ eagerly inquired several young ladies.

‘When I was in the East Indies,’ replied the captain—(here was a discovery—he had been in the East Indies!)—‘when I was in the East Indies, I was once stopping a few thousand miles up the country, on a visit at the house of a very particular friend of mine, Ram Chowdar Doss Azuph Al Bowlar—a devilish pleasant fellow. As we were enjoying our hookahs, one evening, in the cool verandah in front of his villa, we were rather surprised by the sudden appearance of thirty-four of his Kit-ma-gars (for he had rather a large establishment there), accompanied by an equal number of Con-su-mars, approaching the house with a threatening aspect, and beating a tom-tom. The Ram started up—’

‘Who?’ inquired the bald gentleman, intensely interested.

‘The Ram—Ram Chowdar—’

‘Oh!’ said the old gentleman, ‘beg your pardon; pray go on.’

‘—Started up and drew a pistol. “Helves,” said he, “my boy,”—he always called me, my boy—“Helves,” said he, “do you hear that tom-tom?” “I do,” said I. His countenance, which before was pale, assumed a most frightful appearance; his whole visage was distorted, and his frame shaken by violent emotions. “Do you see that gum-gum?” said he. “No,” said I, staring about me. “You don’t?” said he. “No, I’ll be damned if I do,” said I; “and what’s more, I don’t know what a gum-gum is,” said I. I really thought the Ram would have dropped. He drew me aside, and with an expression of agony I shall never forget, said in a low whisper—’

‘Dinner’s on the table, ladies,’ interrupted the steward’s wife.

‘Will you allow me?’ said the captain, immediately suiting the action to the word, and escorting Miss Julia Briggs to the cabin, with as much ease as if he had finished the story.

‘What an extraordinary circumstance!’ ejaculated the same old gentleman, preserving his listening attitude.

‘What a traveller!’ said the young ladies.

‘What a singular name!’ exclaimed the gentlemen, rather confused by the coolness of the whole affair.

‘I wish he had finished the story,’ said an old lady. ‘I wonder what a gum-gum really is?’

‘By Jove!’ exclaimed Hardy, who until now had been lost in utter amazement, ‘I don’t know what it may be in India, but in England I think a gum-gum has very much the same meaning as a hum-bug.’

‘How illiberal! how envious!’ cried everybody, as they made for the cabin, fully impressed with a belief in the captain’s amazing adventures. Helves was the sole lion for the remainder of the day—impudence and the marvellous are pretty sure passports to any society.

The party had by this time reached their destination, and put about on their return home. The wind, which had been with them the whole day, was now directly in their teeth; the weather had become gradually more and more overcast; and the sky, water, and shore, were all of that dull, heavy, uniform lead-colour, which house-painters daub in the first instance over a street-door which is gradually approaching a state of convalescence. It had been ‘spitting’ with rain for the last half-hour, and now began to pour in good earnest. The wind was freshening very fast, and the waterman at the wheel had unequivocally expressed his opinion that there would shortly be a squall. A slight emotion on the part of the vessel, now and then, seemed to suggest the possibility of its pitching to a very uncomfortable extent in the event of its blowing harder; and every timber began to creak, as if the boat were an overladen clothes-basket. Sea-sickness, however, is like a belief in ghosts—every one entertains some misgivings on the subject, but few will acknowledge any. The majority of the company, therefore, endeavoured to look peculiarly happy, feeling all the while especially miserable.

‘Don’t it rain?’ inquired the old gentleman before noticed, when, by dint of squeezing and jamming, they were all seated at table.

‘I think it does—a little,’ replied Mr. Percy Noakes, who could hardly hear himself speak, in consequence of the pattering on the deck.

‘Don’t it blow?’ inquired some one else.

‘No, I don’t think it does,’ responded Hardy, sincerely wishing that he could persuade himself that it did not; for he sat near the door, and was almost blown off his seat.

‘It’ll soon clear up,’ said Mr. Percy Noakes, in a cheerful tone.

‘Oh, certainly!’ ejaculated the committee generally.

‘No doubt of it!’ said the remainder of the company, whose attention was now pretty well engrossed by the serious business of eating, carving, taking wine, and so forth.

The throbbing motion of the engine was but too perceptible. There was a large, substantial, cold boiled leg of mutton, at the bottom of the table, shaking like blancmange; a previously hearty sirloin of beef looked as if it had been suddenly seized with the palsy; and some tongues, which were placed on dishes rather too large for them, went through the most surprising evolutions; darting from side to side, and from end to end, like a fly in an inverted wine-glass. Then, the sweets shook and trembled, till it was quite impossible to help them, and people gave up the attempt in despair; and the pigeon-pies looked as if the birds, whose legs were stuck outside, were trying to get them in. The table vibrated and started like a feverish pulse, and the very legs were convulsed—everything was shaking and jarring. The beams in the roof of the cabin seemed as if they were put there for the sole purpose of giving people head-aches, and several elderly gentlemen became ill-tempered in consequence. As fast as the steward put the fire-irons up, they *would* fall down again; and the more the ladies and gentlemen tried to sit comfortably on their seats, the more the seats seemed to slide away from the ladies and gentlemen. Several ominous demands were made for small glasses of brandy; the countenances of the company gradually underwent most extraordinary changes; one gentleman was observed suddenly to rush from table without the slightest ostensible reason, and dart up the steps with incredible swiftness: thereby greatly damaging both himself and the steward, who happened to be coming down at the same moment.

The cloth was removed; the dessert was laid on the table; and the glasses were filled. The motion of the boat increased; several members of the party began to feel rather vague and misty, and looked as if they had only just got up. The young gentleman with the spectacles, who had been in a fluctuating state for some time—at one moment bright, and at another dismal, like a revolving light on the sea-coast—rashly announced his wish to propose a toast. After several ineffectual attempts to preserve his perpendicular, the young gentleman, having managed to hook himself to the centre leg of the table with his left hand, proceeded as follows:

‘Ladies and gentlemen. A gentleman is among us—I may say a stranger—(here some painful thought seemed to strike the orator; he paused, and looked extremely odd)—whose talents, whose travels, whose cheerfulness—’

‘I beg your pardon, Edkins,’ hastily interrupted Mr. Percy Noakes,—‘Hardy, what’s the matter?’

‘Nothing,’ replied the ‘funny gentleman,’ who had just life enough left to utter two consecutive syllables.

‘Will you have some brandy?’

‘No!’ replied Hardy in a tone of great indignation, and looking as comfortable as Temple-bar in a Scotch mist; ‘what should I want brandy for?’

‘Will you go on deck?’

‘No, I will *not*.’ This was said with a most determined air, and in a voice which might have been taken for an imitation of anything; it was quite as much like a guinea-pig as a bassoon.

‘I beg your pardon, Edkins,’ said the courteous Percy; ‘I thought our friend was ill. Pray go on.’

A pause.

‘Pray go on.’

‘Mr. Edkins *is* gone,’ cried somebody.

‘I beg your pardon, sir,’ said the steward, running up to Mr. Percy Noakes, ‘I beg your pardon, sir, but the gentleman as just went on deck—him with the green spectacles—is uncommon bad, to be sure; and the young man as played the wiolin says, that unless he has some brandy he can’t answer for the consequences. He says he has a wife and two children, whose werry subsistence depends on his breaking a wessel, and he expects to do so every moment. The flageolet’s been werry ill, but he’s better, only he’s in a dreadful prusperation.’

All disguise was now useless; the company staggered on deck; the gentlemen tried to see nothing but the clouds; and the ladies, muffled up in such shawls and cloaks as they had brought with them, lay about on the seats, and under the seats, in the most wretched condition. Never was such a blowing, and raining, and pitching, and tossing, endured by any pleasure party before. Several remonstrances were sent down below, on the subject of Master Fleetwood, but they were totally unheeded in consequence of the indisposition of his natural protectors. That interesting child screamed at the top of his voice, until he had no voice left to scream with; and then, Miss Wakefield began, and screamed for the remainder of the passage.

Mr. Hardy was observed, some hours afterwards, in an attitude which induced his friends to suppose that he was busily engaged in contemplating the beauties of the deep; they only regretted that his taste for the picturesque should lead him to remain so long in a position, very injurious at all times, but especially so, to an individual labouring under a tendency of blood to the head.

The party arrived off the Custom-house at about two o'clock on the Thursday morning dispirited and worn out. The Tauntons were too ill to quarrel with the Briggses, and the Briggses were too wretched to annoy the Tauntons. One of the guitar-cases was lost on its passage to a hackney-coach, and Mrs. Briggs has not scrupled to state that the Tauntons bribed a porter to throw it down an area. Mr. Alexander Briggs opposes vote by ballot—he says from personal experience of its inefficacy; and Mr. Samuel Briggs, whenever he is asked to express his sentiments on the point, says he has no opinion on that or any other subject.

Mr. Edkins—the young gentleman in the green spectacles—makes a speech on every occasion on which a speech can possibly be made: the eloquence of which can only be equalled by its length. In the event of his not being previously appointed to a judgeship, it is probable that he will practise as a barrister in the New Central Criminal Court.

Captain Helves continued his attention to Miss Julia Briggs, whom he might possibly have espoused, if it had not unfortunately happened that Mr. Samuel arrested him, in the way of business, pursuant to instructions received from Messrs. Scroggins and Payne, whose town-debts the gallant captain had condescended to collect, but whose accounts, with the indiscretion sometimes peculiar to military minds, he had omitted to keep with that dull accuracy which custom has rendered necessary. Mrs. Taunton complains that she has been much deceived in him. He introduced himself to the family on board a Gravesend steam-packet, and certainly, therefore, ought to have proved respectable.

Mr. Percy Noakes is as light-hearted and careless as ever.

CHAPTER VIII—THE GREAT WINGLEBURY DUEL

The little town of Great Winglebury is exactly forty-two miles and three-quarters from Hyde Park corner. It has a long, straggling, quiet High-street, with a great black and white clock at a small red Town-hall, half-way up—a market-place—a cage—an assembly-room—a church—a bridge—a chapel—a theatre—a library—an inn—a pump—and a Post-office. Tradition tells of a 'Little Winglebury,' down some cross-road about two miles off; and, as a square mass of dirty paper, supposed to have been originally intended for a letter, with certain tremulous characters inscribed thereon, in which a lively imagination might trace a remote resemblance to the word ‘Little,’ was once stuck up to be owned in the sunny window of the Great Winglebury Post-office, from which it only disappeared when it fell to pieces with dust and extreme old age, there would appear to be some foundation for the legend. Common belief is inclined to bestow the name upon a little hole at the end of a muddy lane about a couple of miles long, colonised by one wheelwright, four paupers, and a beer-shop; but, even this authority, slight as it is, must be regarded with extreme suspicion, inasmuch as the inhabitants of the hole aforesaid, concur in opining that it never had any name at all, from the earliest ages down to the present day.

The Winglebury Arms, in the centre of the High-street, opposite the small building with the big clock, is the principal inn of Great Winglebury—the commercial-inn, posting-house, and excise-office; the ‘Blue’ house at every election, and the judges’ house at every assizes. It is the head-quarters of the Gentlemen’s Whist Club of Winglebury Blues (so called in opposition to the Gentlemen’s Whist Club of Winglebury Buffs, held at the other house, a little further down): and whenever a juggler, or wax-work man, or concert-giver, takes Great Winglebury in his circuit, it is immediately placarded all over the town that Mr. So-and-so, ‘trusting to that liberal support which the inhabitants of Great Winglebury have long been so liberal in bestowing, has at a great expense engaged the elegant and commodious assembly-rooms, attached to the Winglebury Arms.’ The house is a large one, with a red brick and stone front; a pretty spacious hall, ornamented with evergreen plants, terminates in a perspective view of the bar, and a glass case, in which are displayed a choice variety of delicacies ready for dressing, to catch the eye of a new-comer the moment he enters, and excite his appetite to the highest possible pitch. Opposite doors lead to the ‘coffee’ and ‘commercial’ rooms; and a great wide, rambling staircase,—three stairs and a landing—four stairs and another landing—one step and another landing—half-a-dozen stairs and another landing—and so on—conducts to galleries of bedrooms, and labyrinths of sitting-rooms, denominated ‘private,’ where you may enjoy yourself, as privately as you can in any place where some bewildered being walks into your room every five minutes, by mistake, and then walks out again, to open all the doors along the gallery until he finds his own.

Such is the Winglebury Arms, at this day, and such was the Winglebury Arms some time since—no matter when—two or three minutes before the arrival of the London stage. Four horses with cloths on—change for a coach—were standing quietly at the corner of the yard surrounded by a listless group of post-boys in shiny hats and smock-frocks, engaged in discussing the merits of the cattle; half a dozen ragged boys were standing a little apart, listening with evident interest to the conversation of these worthies; and a few loungers were collected round the horse-trough, awaiting the arrival of the coach.

The day was hot and sunny, the town in the zenith of its dulness, and with the exception of these few idlers, not a living creature was to be seen. Suddenly, the loud notes of a key-bugle broke the monotonous stillness of the street; in came the coach, rattling over the uneven paving with a noise startling enough to stop even the large-faced clock itself. Down got the outsides, up went the windows in all directions, out came the waiters, up started the ostlers, and the loungers, and the post-boys, and the ragged boys, as if they were electrified—unstrapping, and unchaining, and unbuckling, and dragging willing horses out, and forcing reluctant horses in, and making a most exhilarating bustle. ‘Lady inside, here!’ said the guard. ‘Please to alight, ma’am,’ said the waiter. ‘Private sitting-room?’ interrogated the lady. ‘Certainly, ma’am,’ responded the chamber-maid. ‘Nothing but these ’ere trunks, ma’am?’ inquired the guard. ‘Nothing more,’ replied the lady. Up got the outsides again, and the guard, and the coachman; off came the cloths, with a jerk; ‘All right,’ was the cry; and away they went. The loungers lingered a minute or two in the road, watching the coach until it turned the corner, and then loitered away one by one. The street was clear again, and the town, by contrast, quieter than ever.

‘Lady in number twenty-five,’ screamed the landlady.—‘Thomas!’

‘Yes, ma’am.’

‘Letter just been left for the gentleman in number nineteen. Boots at the Lion left it. No answer.’

‘Letter for you, sir,’ said Thomas, depositing the letter on number nineteen’s table.

‘For me?’ said number nineteen, turning from the window, out of which he had been surveying the scene just described.

‘Yes, sir,’—(waiters always speak in hints, and never utter complete sentences,)—‘yes, sir,—Boots at the Lion, sir,—Bar, sir,—Missis said number nineteen, sir—Alexander Trott, Esq., sir?—Your card at the bar, sir, I think, sir?'

'My name *is* Trott,' replied number nineteen, breaking the seal. 'You may go, waiter.' The waiter pulled down the window-blind, and then pulled it up again—for a regular waiter must do something before he leaves the room—adjusted the glasses on the side-board, brushed a place that was *not* dusty, rubbed his hands very hard, walked stealthily to the door, and evaporated.

There was, evidently, something in the contents of the letter, of a nature, if not wholly unexpected, certainly extremely disagreeable. Mr. Alexander Trott laid it down, and took it up again, and walked about the room on particular squares of the carpet, and even attempted, though unsuccessfully, to whistle an air. It wouldn't do. He threw himself into a chair, and read the following epistle aloud:—

'Blue Lion and Stomach-warmer,
'Great Winglebury.
'*Wednesday Morning*.

> 'Sir. Immediately on discovering your intentions, I left our counting-house, and followed you. I know the purport of your journey;—that journey shall never be completed.
>
> 'I have no friend here, just now, on whose secrecy I can rely. This shall be no obstacle to my revenge. Neither shall Emily Brown be exposed to the mercenary solicitationfootnotes of a scoundrel, odious in her eyes, and contemptible in everybody else's: nor will I tamely submit to the clandestine attacks of a base umbrella-maker.
>
> 'Sir. From Great Winglebury church, a footpath leads through four meadows to a retired spot known to the townspeople as Stiffun's Acre.' [Mr. Trott shuddered.] 'I shall be waiting there alone, at twenty minutes before six o'clock to-morrow morning. Should I be disappointed in seeing you there, I will do myself the pleasure of calling with a horsewhip.
>
> 'Horace Hunter.
>
> 'PS. There is a gunsmiths in the High-street; and they won't sell gunpowder after dark—you understand me.
>
> 'PPS. You had better not order your breakfast in the morning until you have met me. It may be an unnecessary expense.'

‘Desperate-minded villain! I knew how it would be!’ ejaculated the terrified Trott. ‘I always told father, that once start me on this expedition, and Hunter would pursue me like the Wandering Jew. It’s bad enough as it is, to marry with the old people’s commands, and without the girl’s consent; but what will Emily think of me, if I go down there breathless with running away from this infernal salamander? What *shall* I do? What *can* I do? If I go back to the city, I’m disgraced for ever—lose the girl—and, what’s more, lose the money too. Even if I did go on to the Browns’ by the coach, Hunter would be after me in a post-chaise; and if I go to this place, this Stiffun’s Acre (another shudder), I’m as good as dead. I’ve seen him hit the man at the Pall-mall shooting-gallery, in the second button-hole of the waistcoat, five times out of every six, and when he didn’t hit him there, he hit him in the head.’ With this consolatory reminiscence Mr. Alexander Trott again ejaculated, ‘What shall I do?’

Long and weary were his reflections, as, burying his face in his hand, he sat, ruminating on the best course to be pursued. His mental direction-post pointed to London. He thought of the ‘governor’s’ anger, and the loss of the fortune which the paternal Brown had promised the paternal Trott his daughter should contribute to the coffers of his son. Then the words ‘To Brown’s’ were legibly inscribed on the said direction-post, but Horace Hunter’s denunciation rung in his ears;—last of all it bore, in red letters, the words, ‘To Stiffun’s Acre;’ and then Mr. Alexander Trott decided on adopting a plan which he presently matured.

First and foremost, he despatched the under-boots to the Blue Lion and Stomach-warmer, with a gentlemanly note to Mr. Horace Hunter, intimating that he thirsted for his destruction and would do himself the pleasure of slaughtering him next morning, without fail. He then wrote another letter, and requested the attendance of the other boots—for they kept a pair. A modest knock at the room door was heard. ‘Come in,’ said Mr. Trott. A man thrust in a red head with one eye in it, and being again desired to ‘come in,’ brought in the body and the legs to which the head belonged, and a fur cap which belonged to the head.

‘You are the upper-boots, I think?’ inquired Mr. Trott.

‘Yes, I am the upper-boots,’ replied a voice from inside a velveteen case, with mother-of-pearl buttons—‘that is, I’m the boots as b’longs to the house; the other man’s my man, as goes errands and does odd jobs. Top-boots and half-boots, I calls us.’

‘You’re from London?’ inquired Mr. Trott.

‘Driv a cab once,’ was the laconic reply.

‘Why don’t you drive it now?’ asked Mr. Trott.

‘Over-driv the cab, and driv over a ’ooman,’ replied the top-boots, with brevity.

‘Do you know the mayor’s house?’ inquired Mr. Trott.

‘Rather,’ replied the boots, significantly, as if he had some good reason to remember it.

‘Do you think you could manage to leave a letter there?’ interrogated Trott.

‘Shouldn’t wonder,’ responded boots.

‘But this letter,’ said Trott, holding a deformed note with a paralytic direction in one hand, and five shillings in the other—‘this letter is anonymous.’

‘A—what?’ interrupted the boots.

‘Anonymous—he’s not to know who it comes from.’

‘Oh! I see,’ responded the reg’lar, with a knowing wink, but without evincing the slightest disinclination to undertake the charge—‘I see—bit o’ Sving, eh?’ and his one eye wandered round the room, as if in quest of a dark lantern and phosphorus-box. ‘But, I say!’ he continued, recalling the eye from its search, and bringing it to bear on Mr. Trott. ‘I say, he’s a lawyer, our mayor, and insured in the County. If you’ve a spite agen him, you’d better not burn his house down—blessed if I don’t think it would be the greatest favour you could do him.’ And he chuckled inwardly.

If Mr. Alexander Trott had been in any other situation, his first act would have been to kick the man down-stairs by deputy; or, in other words, to ring the bell, and desire the landlord to take his boots off. He contented himself, however, with doubling the fee and explaining that the letter merely related to a breach of the peace. The top-boots retired, solemnly pledged to secrecy; and Mr. Alexander Trott sat down to a fried sole, maintenon cutlet, Madeira, and sundries, with greater composure than he had experienced since the receipt of Horace Hunter’s letter of defiance.

The lady who alighted from the London coach had no sooner been installed in number twenty-five, and made some alteration in her travelling-dress, than she indited a note to Joseph Overton, esquire, solicitor, and mayor of Great Winglebury, requesting his immediate attendance on private business of paramount importance—a summons which that worthy functionary lost no time in obeying; for after sundry openings of his eyes, divers ejaculations of 'Bless me!' and other manifestations of surprise, he took his broad-brimmed hat from its accustomed peg in his little front office, and walked briskly down the High-street to the Winglebury Arms; through the hall and up the staircase of which establishment he was ushered by the landlady, and a crowd of officious waiters, to the door of number twenty-five.

'Show the gentleman in,' said the stranger lady, in reply to the foremost waiter's announcement. The gentleman was shown in accordingly.

The lady rose from the sofa; the mayor advanced a step from the door; and there they both paused, for a minute or two, looking at one another as if by mutual consent. The mayor saw before him a buxom, richly-dressed female of about forty; the lady looked upon a sleek man, about ten years older, in drab shorts and continuations, black coat, neckcloth, and gloves.

'Miss Julia Manners!' exclaimed the mayor at length, 'you astonish me.'

'That's very unfair of you, Overton,' replied Miss Julia, 'for I have known you, long enough, not to be surprised at anything you do, and you might extend equal courtesy to me.'

'But to run away—actually run away—with a young man!' remonstrated the mayor.

'You wouldn't have me actually run away with an old one, I presume?' was the cool rejoinder.

'And then to ask me—me—of all people in the world—a man of my age and appearance—mayor of the town—to promote such a scheme!' pettishly ejaculated Joseph Overton; throwing himself into an arm-chair, and producing Miss Julia's letter from his pocket, as if to corroborate the assertion that he *had* been asked.

'Now, Overton,' replied the lady, 'I want your assistance in this matter, and I must have it. In the lifetime of that poor old dear, Mr. Cornberry, who—who—'

'Who was to have married you, and didn't, because he died first; and who left you his property unencumbered with the addition of himself,' suggested the mayor.

'Well,' replied Miss Julia, reddening slightly, 'in the lifetime of the poor old dear, the property had the incumbrance of your management; and all I will say of that, is, that I only wonder it didn't die of consumption instead of its master. You helped yourself then:—help me now.'

Mr. Joseph Overton was a man of the world, and an attorney; and as certain indistinct recollections of an odd thousand pounds or two, appropriated by mistake, passed across his mind he hemmed deprecatingly, smiled blandly, remained silent for a few seconds; and finally inquired, 'What do you wish me to do?'

'I'll tell you,' replied Miss Julia—'I'll tell you in three words. Dear Lord Peter—'

'That's the young man, I suppose—' interrupted the mayor.

'That's the young Nobleman,' replied the lady, with a great stress on the last word. 'Dear Lord Peter is considerably afraid of the resentment of his family; and we have therefore thought it better to make the match a stolen one. He left town, to avoid suspicion, on a visit to his friend, the Honourable Augustus Flair, whose seat, as you know, is about thirty miles from this, accompanied only by his favourite tiger. We arranged that I should come here alone in the London coach; and that he, leaving his tiger and cab behind him, should come on, and arrive here as soon as possible this afternoon.'

'Very well,' observed Joseph Overton, 'and then he can order the chaise, and you can go on to Gretna Green together, without requiring the presence or interference of a third party, can't you?'

'No,' replied Miss Julia. 'We have every reason to believe—dear Lord Peter not being considered very prudent or sagacious by his friends, and they having discovered his attachment to me—that, immediately on his absence being observed, pursuit will be made in this direction:—to elude which, and to prevent our being traced, I wish it to be understood in this house, that dear Lord Peter is slightly deranged, though perfectly harmless; and that I am, unknown to him, awaiting his arrival to convey him in a post-chaise to a private asylum—at Berwick, say. If I don't show myself much, I dare say I can manage to pass for his mother.'

The thought occurred to the mayor's mind that the lady might show herself a good deal without fear of detection; seeing that she was about double the age of her intended husband. He said nothing, however, and the lady proceeded.

'With the whole of this arrangement dear Lord Peter is acquainted; and all I want you to do, is, to make the delusion more complete by giving it the sanction of your influence in this place, and assigning this as a reason to the people of the house for my taking the young gentleman away. As it would not be consistent with the story that I should see him until after he has entered the chaise, I also wish you to communicate with him, and inform him that it is all going on well.'

'Has he arrived?' inquired Overton.

'I don't know,' replied the lady.

'Then how am I to know!' inquired the mayor. 'Of course he will not give his own name at the bar.'

'I begged him, immediately on his arrival, to write you a note,' replied Miss Manners; 'and to prevent the possibility of our project being discovered through its means, I desired him to write anonymously, and in mysterious terms, to acquaint you with the number of his room.'

'Bless me!' exclaimed the mayor, rising from his seat, and searching his pockets—'most extraordinary circumstance—he has arrived—mysterious note left at my house in a most mysterious manner, just before yours—didn't know what to make of it before, and certainly shouldn't have attended to it.—Oh! here it is.' And Joseph Overton pulled out of an inner coat-pocket the identical letter penned by Alexander Trott. 'Is this his lordship's hand?'

'Oh yes,' replied Julia; 'good, punctual creature! I have not seen it more than once or twice, but I know he writes very badly and very large. These dear, wild young noblemen, you know, Overton—'

'Ay, ay, I see,' replied the mayor.—'Horses and dogs, play and wine—grooms, actresses, and cigars—the stable, the green-room, the saloon, and the tavern; and the legislative assembly at last.'

'Here's what he says,' pursued the mayor; '"Sir,—A young gentleman in number nineteen at the Winglebury Arms, is bent on committing a rash act to-morrow morning at an early hour." (That's good—he means marrying.) "If you have any regard for the peace of this town, or the preservation of one—it may be two—human lives"—What the deuce does he mean by that?'

'That he's so anxious for the ceremony, he will expire if it's put off, and that I may possibly do the same,' replied the lady with great complacency.

'Oh! I see—not much fear of that;—well—"two human lives, you will cause him to be removed to-night." (He wants to start at once.) "Fear not to do this on your responsibility: for to-morrow the absolute necessity of the proceeding will be but too apparent. Remember: number nineteen. The name is Trott. No delay; for life and death depend upon your promptitude.” Passionate language, certainly. Shall I see him?’

‘Do,’ replied Miss Julia; ‘and entreat him to act his part well. I am half afraid of him. Tell him to be cautious.’

‘I will,’ said the mayor.

‘Settle all the arrangements.’

‘I will,’ said the mayor again.

‘And say I think the chaise had better be ordered for one o’clock.’

‘Very well,’ said the mayor once more; and, ruminating on the absurdity of the situation in which fate and old acquaintance had placed him, he desired a waiter to herald his approach to the temporary representative of number nineteen.

The announcement, ‘Gentleman to speak with you, sir,’ induced Mr. Trott to pause half-way in the glass of port, the contents of which he was in the act of imbibing at the moment; to rise from his chair; and retreat a few paces towards the window, as if to secure a retreat, in the event of the visitor assuming the form and appearance of Horace Hunter. One glance at Joseph Overton, however, quieted his apprehensions. He courteously motioned the stranger to a seat. The waiter, after a little jingling with the decanter and glasses, consented to leave the room; and Joseph Overton, placing the broad-brimmed hat on the chair next him, and bending his body gently forward, opened the business by saying in a very low and cautious tone,

‘My lord—’

‘Eh?’ said Mr. Alexander Trott, in a loud key, with the vacant and mystified stare of a chilly somnambulist.

‘Hush—hush!’ said the cautious attorney: ‘to be sure—quite right—no titles here—my name is Overton, sir.’

‘Overton?’

‘Yes: the mayor of this place—you sent me a letter with anonymous information, this afternoon.’

‘I, sir?’ exclaimed Trott with ill-dissembled surprise; for, coward as he was, he would willingly have repudiated the authorship of the letter in question. ‘I, sir?’

‘Yes, you, sir; did you not?’ responded Overton, annoyed with what he supposed to be an extreme degree of unnecessary suspicion. ‘Either this letter is yours, or it is not. If it be, we can converse securely upon the subject at once. If it be not, of course I have no more to say.'

'Stay, stay,' said Trott, 'it *is* mine; I *did* write it. What could I do, sir? I had no friend here.'

'To be sure, to be sure,' said the mayor, encouragingly, 'you could not have managed it better. Well, sir; it will be necessary for you to leave here to-night in a post-chaise and four. And the harder the boys drive, the better. You are not safe from pursuit.'

'Bless me!' exclaimed Trott, in an agony of apprehension, 'can such things happen in a country like this? Such unrelenting and cold-blooded hostility!' He wiped off the concentrated essence of cowardice that was oozing fast down his forehead, and looked aghast at Joseph Overton.

'It certainly is a very hard case,' replied the mayor with a smile, 'that, in a free country, people can't marry whom they like, without being hunted down as if they were criminals. However, in the present instance the lady is willing, you know, and that's the main point, after all.'

'Lady willing,' repeated Trott, mechanically. 'How do you know the lady's willing?'

'Come, that's a good one,' said the mayor, benevolently tapping Mr. Trott on the arm with his broad-brimmed hat; 'I have known her, well, for a long time; and if anybody could entertain the remotest doubt on the subject, I assure you I have none, nor need you have.'

'Dear me!' said Mr. Trott, ruminating. 'This is *very* extraordinary!'

'Well, Lord Peter,' said the mayor, rising.

'Lord Peter?' repeated Mr. Trott.

'Oh—ah, I forgot. Mr. Trott, then—Trott—very good, ha! ha!—Well, sir, the chaise shall be ready at half-past twelve.'

'And what is to become of me until then?' inquired Mr. Trott, anxiously. 'Wouldn't it save appearances, if I were placed under some restraint?'

'Ah!' replied Overton, 'very good thought—capital idea indeed. I'll send somebody up directly. And if you make a little resistance when we put you in the chaise it wouldn't be amiss—look as if you didn't want to be taken away, you know.'

'To be sure,' said Trott—'to be sure.'

'Well, my lord,' said Overton, in a low tone, 'until then, I wish your lordship a good evening.'

‘Lord—lordship?’ ejaculated Trott again, falling back a step or two, and gazing, in unutterable wonder, on the countenance of the mayor.

‘Ha-ha! I see, my lord—practising the madman?—very good indeed—very vacant look—capital, my lord, capital—good evening, Mr.—Trott—ha! ha! ha!’

‘That mayor’s decidedly drunk,’ soliloquised Mr. Trott, throwing himself back in his chair, in an attitude of reflection.

‘He is a much cleverer fellow than I thought him, that young nobleman—he carries it off uncommonly well,’ thought Overton, as he went his way to the bar, there to complete his arrangements. This was soon done. Every word of the story was implicitly believed, and the one-eyed boots was immediately instructed to repair to number nineteen, to act as custodian of the person of the supposed lunatic until half-past twelve o’clock. In pursuance of this direction, that somewhat eccentric gentleman armed himself with a walking-stick of gigantic dimensions, and repaired, with his usual equanimity of manner, to Mr. Trott’s apartment, which he entered without any ceremony, and mounted guard in, by quietly depositing himself on a chair near the door, where he proceeded to beguile the time by whistling a popular air with great apparent satisfaction.

‘What do you want here, you scoundrel?’ exclaimed Mr. Alexander Trott, with a proper appearance of indignation at his detention.

The boots beat time with his head, as he looked gently round at Mr. Trott with a smile of pity, and whistled an *adagio* movement.

‘Do you attend in this room by Mr. Overton’s desire?’ inquired Trott, rather astonished at the man’s demeanour.

‘Keep yourself to yourself, young feller,’ calmly responded the boots, ‘and don’t say nothing to nobody.’ And he whistled again.

‘Now mind!’ ejaculated Mr. Trott, anxious to keep up the farce of wishing with great earnestness to fight a duel if they’d let him. ‘I protest against being kept here. I deny that I have any intention of fighting with anybody. But as it’s useless contending with superior numbers, I shall sit quietly down.’

‘You’d better,’ observed the placid boots, shaking the large stick expressively.

‘Under protest, however,’ added Alexander Trott, seating himself with indignation in his face, but great content in his heart. ‘Under protest.’

‘Oh, certainly!’ responded the boots; ‘anything you please. If you’re happy, I’m transported; only don’t talk too much—it’ll make you worse.’

‘Make me worse?’ exclaimed Trott, in unfeigned astonishment: ‘the man’s drunk!’

‘You’d better be quiet, young feller,’ remarked the boots, going through a threatening piece of pantomime with the stick.

‘Or mad!’ said Mr. Trott, rather alarmed. ‘Leave the room, sir, and tell them to send somebody else.’

‘Won’t do!’ replied the boots.

‘Leave the room!’ shouted Trott, ringing the bell violently: for he began to be alarmed on a new score.

‘Leave that ’ere bell alone, you wretched loo-nattic!’ said the boots, suddenly forcing the unfortunate Trott back into his chair, and brandishing the stick aloft. ‘Be quiet, you miserable object, and don’t let everybody know there’s a madman in the house.’

‘He *is* a madman! He *is* a madman!’ exclaimed the terrified Mr. Trott, gazing on the one eye of the red-headed boots with a look of abject horror.

‘Madman!’ replied the boots, ‘dam’me, I think he *is* a madman with a vengeance! Listen to me, you unfortunate. Ah! would you?’ [a slight tap on the head with the large stick, as Mr. Trott made another move towards the bell-handle] ‘I caught you there! did I?’

‘Spare my life!’ exclaimed Trott, raising his hands imploringly.

‘I don’t want your life,’ replied the boots, disdainfully, ‘though I think it ’ud be a charity if somebody took it.’

‘No, no, it wouldn’t,’ interrupted poor Mr. Trott, hurriedly, ‘no, no, it wouldn’t! I—I-’d rather keep it!’

‘O werry well,’ said the boots: ‘that’s a mere matter of taste—ev’ry one to his liking. Hows’ever, all I’ve got to say is this here: You sit quietly down in that chair, and I’ll sit hoppersite you here, and if you keep quiet and don’t stir, I won’t damage you; but, if you move hand or foot till half-past twelve o’clock, I shall alter the expression of your countenance so completely, that the next time you look in the glass you’ll ask vether you’re gone out of town, and ven you’re likely to come back again. So sit down.’

‘I will—I will,’ responded the victim of mistakes; and down sat Mr. Trott and down sat the boots too, exactly opposite him, with the stick ready for immediate action in case of emergency.

Long and dreary were the hours that followed. The bell of Great Winglebury church had just struck ten, and two hours and a half would probably elapse before succour arrived.

For half an hour, the noise occasioned by shutting up the shops in the street beneath, betokened something like life in the town, and rendered Mr. Trott's situation a little less insupportable; but, when even these ceased, and nothing was heard beyond the occasional rattling of a post-chaise as it drove up the yard to change horses, and then drove away again, or the clattering of horses' hoofs in the stables behind, it became almost unbearable. The boots occasionally moved an inch or two, to knock superfluous bits of wax off the candles, which were burning low, but instantaneously resumed his former position; and as he remembered to have heard, somewhere or other, that the human eye had an unfailing effect in controlling mad people, he kept his solitary organ of vision constantly fixed on Mr. Alexander Trott. That unfortunate individual stared at his companion in his turn, until his features grew more and more indistinct—his hair gradually less red—and the room more misty and obscure. Mr. Alexander Trott fell into a sound sleep, from which he was awakened by a rumbling in the street, and a cry of 'Chaise-and-four for number twenty-five!' A bustle on the stairs succeeded; the room door was hastily thrown open; and Mr. Joseph Overton entered, followed by four stout waiters, and Mrs. Williamson, the stout landlady of the Winglebury Arms.

'Mr. Overton!' exclaimed Mr. Alexander Trott, jumping up in a frenzy. 'Look at this man, sir; consider the situation in which I have been placed for three hours past—the person you sent to guard me, sir, was a madman—a madman—a raging, ravaging, furious madman.'

'Bravo!' whispered Mr. Overton.

'Poor dear!' said the compassionate Mrs. Williamson, 'mad people always thinks other people's mad.'

'Poor dear!' ejaculated Mr. Alexander Trott. 'What the devil do you mean by poor dear! Are you the landlady of this house?'

'Yes, yes,' replied the stout old lady, 'don't exert yourself, there's a dear! Consider your health, now; do.'

'Exert myself!' shouted Mr. Alexander Trott; 'it's a mercy, ma'am, that I have any breath to exert myself with! I might have been assassinated three hours ago by that one-eyed monster with the oakum head. How dare you have a madman, ma'am—how dare you have a madman, to assault and terrify the visitors to your house?'

'I'll never have another,' said Mrs. Williamson, casting a look of reproach at the mayor.

'Capital, capital,' whispered Overton again, as he enveloped Mr. Alexander Trott in a thick travelling-cloak.

'Capital, sir!' exclaimed Trott, aloud; 'it's horrible. The very recollection makes me shudder. I'd rather fight four duels in three hours, if I survived the first three, than I'd sit for that time face to face with a madman.'

'Keep it up, my lord, as you go down-stairs,' whispered Overton, 'your bill is paid, and your portmanteau in the chaise.' And then he added aloud, 'Now, waiters, the gentleman's ready.'

At this signal, the waiters crowded round Mr. Alexander Trott. One took one arm; another, the other; a third, walked before with a candle; the fourth, behind with another candle; the boots and Mrs. Williamson brought up the rear; and down-stairs they went: Mr. Alexander Trott expressing alternately at the very top of his voice either his feigned reluctance to go, or his unfeigned indignation at being shut up with a madman.

Mr. Overton was waiting at the chaise-door, the boys were ready mounted, and a few ostlers and stable nondescripts were standing round to witness the departure of 'the mad gentleman.' Mr. Alexander Trott's foot was on the step, when he observed (which the dim light had prevented his doing before) a figure seated in the chaise, closely muffled up in a cloak like his own.

'Who's that?' he inquired of Overton, in a whisper.

'Hush, hush,' replied the mayor: 'the other party of course.'

'The other party!' exclaimed Trott, with an effort to retreat.

'Yes, yes; you'll soon find that out, before you go far, I should think—but make a noise, you'll excite suspicion if you whisper to me so much.'

'I won't go in this chaise!' shouted Mr. Alexander Trott, all his original fears recurring with tenfold violence. 'I shall be assassinated—I shall be—'

'Bravo, bravo,' whispered Overton. 'I'll push you in.'

'But I won't go,' exclaimed Mr. Trott. 'Help here, help! They're carrying me away against my will. This is a plot to murder me.'

'Poor dear!' said Mrs. Williamson again.

‘Now, boys, put ’em along,’ cried the mayor, pushing Trott in and slamming the door. ‘Off with you, as quick as you can, and stop for nothing till you come to the next stage—all right!’

‘Horses are paid, Tom,’ screamed Mrs. Williamson; and away went the chaise, at the rate of fourteen miles an hour, with Mr. Alexander Trott and Miss Julia Manners carefully shut up in the inside.

Mr. Alexander Trott remained coiled up in one corner of the chaise, and his mysterious companion in the other, for the first two or three miles; Mr. Trott edging more and more into his corner, as he felt his companion gradually edging more and more from hers; and vainly endeavouring in the darkness to catch a glimpse of the furious face of the supposed Horace Hunter.

‘We may speak now,’ said his fellow-traveller, at length; ‘the post-boys can neither see nor hear us.’

‘That’s not Hunter’s voice!’—thought Alexander, astonished.

‘Dear Lord Peter!’ said Miss Julia, most winningly: putting her arm on Mr. Trott’s shoulder. ‘Dear Lord Peter. Not a word?’

‘Why, it’s a woman!’ exclaimed Mr. Trott, in a low tone of excessive wonder.

‘Ah! Whose voice is that?’ said Julia; ‘’tis not Lord Peter’s.’

‘No,—it’s mine,’ replied Mr. Trott.

‘Yours!’ ejaculated Miss Julia Manners; ‘a strange man! Gracious heaven! How came you here!’

‘Whoever you are, you might have known that I came against my will, ma’am,’ replied Alexander, ‘for I made noise enough when I got in.’

‘Do you come from Lord Peter?’ inquired Miss Manners.

‘Confound Lord Peter,’ replied Trott pettishly. ‘I don’t know any Lord Peter. I never heard of him before to-night, when I’ve been Lord Peter’d by one and Lord Peter’d by another, till I verily believe I’m mad, or dreaming—’

‘Whither are we going?’ inquired the lady tragically.

‘How should *I* know, ma’am?’ replied Trott with singular coolness; for the events of the evening had completely hardened him.

‘Stop stop!’ cried the lady, letting down the front glasses of the chaise.

‘Stay, my dear ma’am!’ said Mr. Trott, pulling the glasses up again with one hand, and gently squeezing Miss Julia’s waist with the other. ‘There is some mistake here; give me till the end of this stage to explain my share of it. We must go so far; you cannot be set down here alone, at this hour of the night.'

The lady consented; the mistake was mutually explained. Mr. Trott was a young man, had highly promising whiskers, an undeniable tailor, and an insinuating address—he wanted nothing but valour, and who wants that with three thousand a-year? The lady had this, and more; she wanted a young husband, and the only course open to Mr. Trott to retrieve his disgrace was a rich wife. So, they came to the conclusion that it would be a pity to have all this trouble and expense for nothing; and that as they were so far on the road already, they had better go to Gretna Green, and marry each other; and they did so. And the very next preceding entry in the Blacksmith's book, was an entry of the marriage of Emily Brown with Horace Hunter. Mr. Hunter took his wife home, and begged pardon, and *was* pardoned; and Mr. Trott took *his* wife home, begged pardon too, and was pardoned also. And Lord Peter, who had been detained beyond his time by drinking champagne and riding a steeple-chase, went back to the Honourable Augustus Flair's, and drank more champagne, and rode another steeple-chase, and was thrown and killed. And Horace Hunter took great credit to himself for practising on the cowardice of Alexander Trott; and all these circumstances were discovered in time, and carefully noted down; and if you ever stop a week at the Winglebury Arms, they will give you just this account of The Great Winglebury Duel.

CHAPTER IX—MRS. JOSEPH PORTER

Most extensive were the preparations at Rose Villa, Clapham Rise, in the occupation of Mr. Gattleton (a stock-broker in especially comfortable circumstances), and great was the anxiety of Mr. Gattleton's interesting family, as the day fixed for the representation of the Private Play which had been 'many months in preparation,' approached. The whole family was infected with the mania for Private Theatricals; the house, usually so clean and tidy, was, to use Mr. Gattleton's expressive description, 'regularly turned out o' windows;' the large dining-room, dismantled of its furniture, and ornaments, presented a strange jumble of flats, flies, wings, lamps, bridges, clouds, thunder and lightning, festoons and flowers, daggers and foil, and various other messes in theatrical slang included under the comprehensive name of ‘properties.’ The bedrooms were crowded with scenery, the kitchen was occupied by carpenters. Rehearsals took place every other night in the drawing-room, and every sofa in the house was more or less damaged by the perseverance and spirit with which Mr. Sempronius Gattleton, and Miss Lucina, rehearsed the smothering scene in ‘Othello’—it having been determined that that tragedy should form the first portion of the evening’s entertainments.

‘When we’re a *leetle* more perfect, I think it will go admirably,’ said Mr. Sempronius, addressing his *corps dramatique*, at the conclusion of the hundred and fiftieth rehearsal. In consideration of his sustaining the trifling inconvenience of bearing all the expenses of the play, Mr. Sempronius had been, in the most handsome manner, unanimously elected stage-manager. ‘Evans,’ continued Mr. Gattleton, the younger, addressing a tall, thin, pale young gentleman, with extensive whiskers—‘Evans, you play *Roderigo* beautifully.’

‘Beautifully,’ echoed the three Miss Gattletons; for Mr. Evans was pronounced by all his lady friends to be ‘quite a dear.’ He looked so interesting, and had such lovely whiskers: to say nothing of his talent for writing verses in albums and playing the flute! *Roderigo* simpered and bowed.

‘But I think,’ added the manager, ‘you are hardly perfect in the—fall—in the fencing-scene, where you are—you understand?’

‘It’s very difficult,’ said Mr. Evans, thoughtfully; ‘I’ve fallen about, a good deal, in our counting-house lately, for practice, only I find it hurts one so. Being obliged to fall backward you see, it bruises one’s head a good deal.’

‘But you must take care you don’t knock a wing down,’ said Mr. Gattleton, the elder, who had been appointed prompter, and who took as much interest in the play as the youngest of the company. ‘The stage is very narrow, you know.’

‘Oh! don’t be afraid,’ said Mr. Evans, with a very self-satisfied air; ‘I shall fall with my head “off,” and then I can’t do any harm.’

‘But, egad,’ said the manager, rubbing his hands, ‘we shall make a decided hit in “Masaniello.” Harleigh sings that music admirably.’

Everybody echoed the sentiment. Mr. Harleigh smiled, and looked foolish—not an unusual thing with him—hummed’ Behold how brightly breaks the morning,' and blushed as red as the fisherman's nightcap he was trying on.

'Let's see,' resumed the manager, telling the number on his fingers, 'we shall have three dancing female peasants, besides *Fenella*, and four fishermen. Then, there's our man Tom; he can have a pair of ducks of mine, and a check shirt of Bob's, and a red nightcap, and he'll do for another—that's five. In the choruses, of course, we can sing at the sides; and in the market-scene we can walk about in cloaks and things. When the revolt takes place, Tom must keep rushing in on one side and out on the other, with a pickaxe, as fast as he can. The effect will be electrical; it will look exactly as if there were an immense number of 'em. And in the eruption-scene we must burn the red fire, and upset the tea-trays, and make all sorts of noises—and it's sure to do.'

'Sure! sure!' cried all the performers *unâ voce*—and away hurried Mr. Sempronius Gattleton to wash the burnt cork off his face, and superintend the 'setting up' of some of the amateur-painted, but never-sufficiently-to-be-admired, scenery.

Mrs. Gattleton was a kind, good-tempered, vulgar soul, exceedingly fond of her husband and children, and entertaining only three dislikes. In the first place, she had a natural antipathy to anybody else's unmarried daughters; in the second, she was in bodily fear of anything in the shape of ridicule; lastly—almost a necessary consequence of this feeling—she regarded, with feelings of the utmost horror, one Mrs. Joseph Porter over the way. However, the good folks of Clapham and its vicinity stood very much in awe of scandal and sarcasm; and thus Mrs. Joseph Porter was courted, and flattered, and caressed, and invited, for much the same reason that induces a poor author, without a farthing in his pocket, to behave with extraordinary civility to a twopenny postman.

'Never mind, ma,' said Miss Emma Porter, in colloquy with her respected relative, and trying to look unconcerned; 'if they had invited me, you know that neither you nor pa would have allowed me to take part in such an exhibition.'

'Just what I should have thought from your high sense of propriety,' returned the mother. 'I am glad to see, Emma, you know how to designate the proceeding.' Miss P., by-the-bye, had only the week before made 'an exhibition' of herself for four days, behind a counter at a fancy fair, to all and every of her Majesty's liege subjects who were disposed to pay a shilling each for the privilege of seeing some four dozen girls flirting with strangers, and playing at shop.

‘There!’ said Mrs. Porter, looking out of window; ‘there are two rounds of beef and a ham going in—clearly for sandwiches; and Thomas, the pastry-cook, says, there have been twelve dozen tarts ordered, besides blancmange and jellies. Upon my word! think of the Miss Gattletons in fancy dresses, too!’

‘Oh, it’s too ridiculous!’ said Miss Porter, hysterically.

‘I’ll manage to put them a little out of conceit with the business, however,’ said Mrs. Porter; and out she went on her charitable errand.

‘Well, my dear Mrs. Gattleton,’ said Mrs. Joseph Porter, after they had been closeted for some time, and when, by dint of indefatigable pumping, she had managed to extract all the news about the play, ‘well, my dear, people may say what they please; indeed we know they will, for some folks are *so* ill-natured. Ah, my dear Miss Lucina, how d’ye do? I was just telling your mamma that I have heard it said, that—’

‘What?’

‘Mrs. Porter is alluding to the play, my dear,’ said Mrs. Gattleton; ‘she was, I am sorry to say, just informing me that—’

‘Oh, now pray don’t mention it,’ interrupted Mrs. Porter; ‘it’s most absurd—quite as absurd as young What’s-his-name saying he wondered how Miss Caroline, with such a foot and ankle, could have the vanity to play *Fenella*.’

‘Highly impertinent, whoever said it,’ said Mrs. Gattleton, bridling up.

‘Certainly, my dear,’ chimed in the delighted Mrs. Porter; ‘most undoubtedly! Because, as I said, if Miss Caroline *does* play *Fenella*, it doesn’t follow, as a matter of course, that she should think she has a pretty foot;—and then—such puppies as these young men are—he had the impudence to say, that—’

How far the amiable Mrs. Porter might have succeeded in her pleasant purpose, it is impossible to say, had not the entrance of Mr. Thomas Balderstone, Mrs. Gattleton’s brother, familiarly called in the family ‘Uncle Tom,’ changed the course of conversation, and suggested to her mind an excellent plan of operation on the evening of the play.

Uncle Tom was very rich, and exceedingly fond of his nephews and nieces: as a matter of course, therefore, he was an object of great importance in his own family. He was one of the best-hearted men in existence: always in a good temper, and always talking. It was his boast that he wore top-boots on all occasions, and had never worn a black silk neckerchief; and it was his pride that he remembered all the principal plays of Shakspeare from beginning to end—and so he did. The result of this parrot-like accomplishment was, that he was not only perpetually quoting himself, but that he could never sit by, and hear a misquotation from the 'Swan of Avon' without setting the unfortunate delinquent right. He was also something of a wag; never missed an opportunity of saying what he considered a good thing, and invariably laughed until he cried at anything that appeared to him mirth-moving or ridiculous.

'Well, girls!' said Uncle Tom, after the preparatory ceremony of kissing and how-d'ye-do-ing had been gone through—'how d'ye get on? Know your parts, eh?—Lucina, my dear, act II., scene I—place, left-cue —"Unknown fate,"—What's next, eh?—Go on—"The Heavens—"'

'Oh, yes,' said Miss Lucina, 'I recollect—

"The heavens forbid
But that our loves and comforts should increase
Even as our days do grow!"'

'Make a pause here and there,' said the old gentleman, who was a great critic. '"But that our loves and comforts should increase"—emphasis on the last syllable, "crease,"—loud "even,"—one, two, three, four; then loud again, "as our days do grow;" emphasis on *days*. That's the way, my dear; trust to your uncle for emphasis. Ah! Sem, my boy, how are you?'

'Very well, thankee, uncle,' returned Mr. Sempronius, who had just appeared, looking something like a ringdove, with a small circle round each eye: the result of his constant corking. 'Of course we see you on Thursday.'

'Of course, of course, my dear boy.'

'What a pity it is your nephew didn't think of making you prompter, Mr. Balderstone!' whispered Mrs. Joseph Porter; 'you would have been invaluable.'

'Well, I flatter myself, I *should* have been tolerably up to the thing,' responded Uncle Tom.

'I must bespeak sitting next you on the night,' resumed Mrs. Porter; 'and then, if our dear young friends here, should be at all wrong, you will be able to enlighten me. I shall be so interested.'

'I am sure I shall be most happy to give you any assistance in my power'

‘Mind, it’s a bargain.’

‘Certainly.’

‘I don’t know how it is,’ said Mrs. Gattleton to her daughters, as they were sitting round the fire in the evening, looking over their parts, ‘but I really very much wish Mrs. Joseph Porter wasn’t coming on Thursday. I am sure she’s scheming something.’

‘She can’t make us ridiculous, however,’ observed Mr. Sempronius Gattleton, haughtily.

The long-looked-for Thursday arrived in due course, and brought with it, as Mr. Gattleton, senior, philosophically observed, ‘no disappointments, to speak of.’ True, it was yet a matter of doubt whether *Cassio* would be enabled to get into the dress which had been sent for him from the masquerade warehouse. It was equally uncertain whether the principal female singer would be sufficiently recovered from the influenza to make her appearance; Mr. Harleigh, the *Masaniello* of the night, was hoarse, and rather unwell, in consequence of the great quantity of lemon and sugar-candy he had eaten to improve his voice; and two flutes and a violoncello had pleaded severe colds. What of that? the audience were all coming. Everybody knew his part: the dresses were covered with tinsel and spangles; the white plumes looked beautiful; Mr. Evans had practised falling until he was bruised from head to foot and quite perfect; *Iago* was sure that, in the stabbing-scene, he should make ‘a decided hit.’ A self-taught deaf gentleman, who had kindly offered to bring his flute, would be a most valuable addition to the orchestra; Miss Jenkins’s talent for the piano was too well known to be doubted for an instant; Mr. Cape had practised the violin accompaniment with her frequently; and Mr. Brown, who had kindly undertaken, at a few hours’ notice, to bring his violoncello, would, no doubt, manage extremely well.

Seven o’clock came, and so did the audience; all the rank and fashion of Clapham and its vicinity was fast filling the theatre. There were the Smiths, the Gubbinses, the Nixons, the Dixons, the Hicksons, people with all sorts of names, two aldermen, a sheriff in perspective, Sir Thomas Glumper (who had been knighted in the last reign for carrying up an address on somebody’s escaping from nothing); and last, not least, there were Mrs. Joseph Porter and Uncle Tom, seated in the centre of the third row from the stage; Mrs. P. amusing Uncle Tom with all sorts of stories, and Uncle Tom amusing every one else by laughing most immoderately.

Ting, ting, ting! went the prompter's bell at eight o'clock precisely, and dash went the orchestra into the overture to 'The Men of Prometheus.' The pianoforte player hammered away with laudable perseverance; and the violoncello, which struck in at intervals, 'sounded very well, considering.' The unfortunate individual, however, who had undertaken to play the flute accompaniment 'at sight,' found, from fatal experience, the perfect truth of the old adage, 'ought of sight, out of mind;' for being very near-sighted, and being placed at a considerable distance from his music-book, all he had an opportunity of doing was to play a bar now and then in the wrong place, and put the other performers out. It is, however, but justice to Mr. Brown to say that he did this to admiration. The overture, in fact, was not unlike a race between the different instruments; the piano came in first by several bars, and the violoncello next, quite distancing the poor flute; for the deaf gentleman *too-too'd* away, quite unconscious that he was at all wrong, until apprised, by the applause of the audience, that the overture was concluded. A considerable bustle and shuffling of feet was then heard upon the stage, accompanied by whispers of 'Here's a pretty go!—what's to be done?' &c. The audience applauded again, by way of raising the spirits of the performers; and then Mr. Sempronius desired the prompter, in a very audible voice, to 'clear the stage, and ring up.'

Ting, ting, ting! went the bell again. Everybody sat down; the curtain shook; rose sufficiently high to display several pair of yellow boots paddling about; and there remained.

Ting, ting, ting! went the bell again. The curtain was violently convulsed, but rose no higher; the audience tittered; Mrs. Porter looked at Uncle Tom; Uncle Tom looked at everybody, rubbing his hands, and laughing with perfect rapture. After as much ringing with the little bell as a muffin-boy would make in going down a tolerably long street, and a vast deal of whispering, hammering, and calling for nails and cord, the curtain at length rose, and discovered Mr. Sempronius Gattleton *solus*, and decked for *Othello*. After three distinct rounds of applause, during which Mr. Sempronius applied his right hand to his left breast, and bowed in the most approved manner, the manager advanced and said:

'Ladies and Gentlemen—I assure you it is with sincere regret, that I regret to be compelled to inform you, that *Iago* who was to have played Mr. Wilson—I beg your pardon, Ladies and Gentlemen, but I am naturally somewhat agitated (applause)—I mean, Mr. Wilson, who was to have played *Iago*, is—that is, has been—or, in other words, Ladies and Gentlemen, the fact is, that I have just received a note, in which I am informed that *Iago* is unavoidably detained at the Post-office this evening. Under these circumstances, I trust—a—a—amateur performance—a—another gentleman undertaken to read the part—request indulgence for a short time—courtesy and kindness of a British audience.' Overwhelming applause. Exit Mr. Sempronius Gattleton, and curtain falls.

The audience were, of course, exceedingly good-humoured; the whole business was a joke; and accordingly they waited for an hour with the utmost patience, being enlivened by an interlude of rout-cakes and lemonade. It appeared by Mr. Sempronius's subsequent explanation, that the delay would not have been so great, had it not so happened that when the substitute *Iago* had finished dressing, and just as the play was on the point of commencing, the original *Iago* unexpectedly arrived. The former was therefore compelled to undress, and the latter to dress for his part; which, as he found some difficulty in getting into his clothes, occupied no inconsiderable time. At last, the tragedy began in real earnest. It went off well enough, until the third scene of the first act, in which *Othello* addresses the Senate: the only remarkable circumstance being, that as *Iago* could not get on any of the stage boots, in consequence of his feet being violently swelled with the heat and excitement, he was under the necessity of playing the part in a pair of Wellingtons, which contrasted rather oddly with his richly embroidered pantaloons. When *Othello* started with his address to the Senate (whose dignity was represented by, the *Duke*, *a* carpenter, two men engaged on the recommendation of the gardener, and a boy), Mrs. Porter found the opportunity she so anxiously sought.

Mr. Sempronius proceeded:

'"Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors,
My very noble and approv'd good masters,
That I have ta'en away this old man's daughter,
It is most true;—rude am I in my speech—"'

'Is that right?' whispered Mrs. Porter to Uncle Tom.

'No.'

'Tell him so, then.'

'I will. Sem!' called out Uncle Tom, 'that's wrong, my boy.'

'What's wrong, uncle?' demanded *Othello*, quite forgetting the dignity of his situation.

‘You’ve left out something. “True I have married—”’

‘Oh, ah!’ said Mr. Sempronius, endeavouring to hide his confusion as much and as ineffectually as the audience attempted to conceal their half-suppressed tittering, by coughing with extraordinary violence—

—‘“true I have married her;—
The very head and front of my offending
Hath this extent; no more.”

(*Aside*) Why don’t you prompt, father?’

‘Because I’ve mislaid my spectacles,’ said poor Mr. Gattleton, almost dead with the heat and bustle.

‘There, now it’s “rude am I,”’ said Uncle Tom.

‘Yes, I know it is,’ returned the unfortunate manager, proceeding with his part.

It would be useless and tiresome to quote the number of instances in which Uncle Tom, now completely in his element, and instigated by the mischievous Mrs. Porter, corrected the mistakes of the performers; suffice it to say, that having mounted his hobby, nothing could induce him to dismount; so, during the whole remainder of the play, he performed a kind of running accompaniment, by muttering everybody’s part as it was being delivered, in an under-tone. The audience were highly amused, Mrs. Porter delighted, the performers embarrassed; Uncle Tom never was better pleased in all his life; and Uncle Tom’s nephews and nieces had never, although the declared heirs to his large property, so heartily wished him gathered to his fathers as on that memorable occasion.

Several other minor causes, too, united to damp the ardour of the *dramatis personae*. None of the performers could walk in their tights, or move their arms in their jackets; the pantaloons were too small, the boots too large, and the swords of all shapes and sizes. Mr. Evans, naturally too tall for the scenery, wore a black velvet hat with immense white plumes, the glory of which was lost in ‘the flies;’ and the only other inconvenience of which was, that when it was off his head he could not put it on, and when it was on he could not take it off. Notwithstanding all his practice, too, he fell with his head and shoulders as neatly through one of the side scenes, as a harlequin would jump through a panel in a Christmas pantomime. The pianoforte player, overpowered by the extreme heat of the room, fainted away at the commencement of the entertainments, leaving the music of ‘Masaniello’ to the flute and violoncello. The orchestra complained that

Mr. Harleigh put them out, and Mr. Harleigh declared that the orchestra prevented his singing a note. The fishermen, who were hired for the occasion, revolted to the very life, positively refusing to play without an increased allowance of spirits; and, their demand being complied with, getting drunk in the eruption-scene as naturally as possible. The red fire, which was burnt at the conclusion of the second act, not only nearly suffocated the audience, but nearly set the house on fire into the bargain; and, as it was, the remainder of the piece was acted in a thick fog.

In short, the whole affair was, as Mrs. Joseph Porter triumphantly told everybody, ‘a complete failure.’ The audience went home at four o’clock in the morning, exhausted with laughter, suffering from severe headaches, and smelling terribly of brimstone and gunpowder. The Messrs. Gattleton, senior and junior, retired to rest, with the vague idea of emigrating to Swan River early in the ensuing week.

Rose Villa has once again resumed its wonted appearance; the dining-room furniture has been replaced; the tables are as nicely polished as formerly; the horsehair chairs are ranged against the wall, as regularly as ever; Venetian blinds have been fitted to every window in the house to intercept the prying gaze of Mrs. Joseph Porter. The subject of theatricals is never mentioned in the Gattleton family, unless, indeed, by Uncle Tom, who cannot refrain from sometimes expressing his surprise and regret at finding that his nephews and nieces appear to have lost the relish they once possessed for the beauties of Shakspeare, and quotations from the works of that immortal bard.

CHAPTER X—A PASSAGE IN THE LIFE OF MR. WATKINS TOTTLE

CHAPTER THE FIRST

Matrimony is proverbially a serious undertaking. Like an over-weening predilection for brandy-and-water, it is a misfortune into which a man easily falls, and from which he finds it remarkably difficult to extricate himself. It is of no use telling a man who is timorous on these points, that it is but one plunge, and all is over. They say the same thing at the Old Bailey, and the unfortunate victims derive as much comfort from the assurance in the one case as in the other.

Mr. Watkins Tottle was a rather uncommon compound of strong uxorious inclinations, and an unparalleled degree of anti-connubial timidity. He was about fifty years of age; stood four feet six inches and three-quarters in his socks—for he never stood in stockings at all—plump, clean, and rosy. He looked something like a vignette to one of Richardson's novels, and had a clean-cravatish formality of manner, and kitchen-pokerness of carriage, which Sir Charles Grandison himself might have envied. He lived on an annuity, which was well adapted to the individual who received it, in one respect—it was rather small. He received it in periodical payments on every alternate Monday; but he ran himself out, about a day after the expiration of the first week, as regularly as an eight-day clock; and then, to make the comparison complete, his landlady wound him up, and he went on with a regular tick.

Mr. Watkins Tottle had long lived in a state of single blessedness, as bachelors say, or single cursedness, as spinsters think; but the idea of matrimony had never ceased to haunt him. Wrapt in profound reveries on this never-failing theme, fancy transformed his small parlour in Cecil-street, Strand, into a neat house in the suburbs; the half-hundredweight of coals under the kitchen-stairs suddenly sprang up into three tons of the best Walls-end; his small French bedstead was converted into a regular matrimonial four-poster; and in the empty chair on the opposite side of the fireplace, imagination seated a beautiful young lady, with a very little independence or will of her own, and a very large independence under a will of her father's.

'Who's there?' inquired Mr. Watkins Tottle, as a gentle tap at his room-door disturbed these meditations one evening.

‘Tottle, my dear fellow, how *do* you do?’ said a short elderly gentleman with a gruffish voice, bursting into the room, and replying to the question by asking another.

‘Told you I should drop in some evening,’ said the short gentleman, as he delivered his hat into Tottle’s hand, after a little struggling and dodging.

‘Delighted to see you, I’m sure,’ said Mr. Watkins Tottle, wishing internally that his visitor had ‘dropped in’ to the Thames at the bottom of the street, instead of dropping into his parlour. The fortnight was nearly up, and Watkins was hard up.

‘How is Mrs. Gabriel Parsons?’ inquired Tottle.

‘Quite well, thank you,’ replied Mr. Gabriel Parsons, for that was the name the short gentleman revelled in. Here there was a pause; the short gentleman looked at the left hob of the fireplace; Mr. Watkins Tottle stared vacancy out of countenance.

‘Quite well,’ repeated the short gentleman, when five minutes had expired. ‘I may say remarkably well.’ And he rubbed the palms of his hands as hard as if he were going to strike a light by friction.

‘What will you take?’ inquired Tottle, with the desperate suddenness of a man who knew that unless the visitor took his leave, he stood very little chance of taking anything else.

‘Oh, I don’t know—have you any whiskey?’

‘Why,’ replied Tottle, very slowly, for all this was gaining time, ‘I *had* some capital, and remarkably strong whiskey last week; but it’s all gone—and therefore its strength—’

‘Is much beyond proof; or, in other words, impossible to be proved,’ said the short gentleman; and he laughed very heartily, and seemed quite glad the whiskey had been drunk. Mr. Tottle smiled—but it was the smile of despair. When Mr. Gabriel Parsons had done laughing, he delicately insinuated that, in the absence of whiskey, he would not be averse to brandy. And Mr. Watkins Tottle, lighting a flat candle very ostentatiously; and displaying an immense key, which belonged to the street-door, but which, for the sake of appearances, occasionally did duty in an imaginary wine-cellar; left the room to entreat his landlady to charge their glasses, and charge them in the bill. The application was successful; the spirits were speedily called—not from the vasty deep, but the adjacent wine-vaults. The two short gentlemen mixed their grog; and then sat cosily down before the fire—a pair of shorts, airing themselves.

‘Tottle,’ said Mr. Gabriel Parsons, ‘you know my way—off-hand, open, say what I mean, mean what I say, hate reserve, and can’t bear affectation. One, is a bad domino which only hides what good people have about ’em, without making the bad look better; and the other is much about the same thing as pinking a white cotton stocking to make it look like a silk one. Now listen to what I’m going to say.’

Here, the little gentleman paused, and took a long pull at his brandy-and-water. Mr. Watkins Tottle took a sip of his, stirred the fire, and assumed an air of profound attention.

‘It’s of no use humming and ha’ing about the matter,’ resumed the short gentleman.—‘You want to get married.’

‘Why,’ replied Mr. Watkins Tottle evasively; for he trembled violently, and felt a sudden tingling throughout his whole frame; ‘why—I should certainly—at least, I *think* I should like—’

‘Won’t do,’ said the short gentleman.—‘Plain and free—or there’s an end of the matter. Do you want money?’

‘You know I do.’

‘You admire the sex?’

‘I do.’

‘And you’d like to be married?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Then you shall be. There’s an end of that.’ Thus saying, Mr. Gabriel Parsons took a pinch of snuff, and mixed another glass.

‘Let me entreat you to be more explanatory,’ said Tottle. ‘Really, as the party principally interested, I cannot consent to be disposed of, in this way.’

‘I’ll tell you,’ replied Mr. Gabriel Parsons, warming with the subject, and the brandy-and-water—‘I know a lady—she’s stopping with my wife now—who is just the thing for you. Well educated; talks French; plays the piano; knows a good deal about flowers, and shells, and all that sort of thing; and has five hundred a year, with an uncontrolled power of disposing of it, by her last will and testament.’

‘I’ll pay my addresses to her,’ said Mr. Watkins Tottle. ‘She isn’t *very* young—is she?’

‘Not very; just the thing for you. I’ve said that already.’

‘What coloured hair has the lady?’ inquired Mr. Watkins Tottle.

‘Egad, I hardly recollect,’ replied Gabriel, with coolness. ‘Perhaps I ought to have observed, at first, she wears a front.’

‘A what?’ ejaculated Tottle.

‘One of those things with curls, along here,’ said Parsons, drawing a straight line across his forehead, just over his eyes, in illustration of his meaning. ‘I know the front’s black; I can’t speak quite positively about her own hair; because, unless one walks behind her, and catches a glimpse of it under her bonnet, one seldom sees it; but I should say that it was *rather* lighter than the front—a shade of a greyish tinge, perhaps.’

Mr. Watkins Tottle looked as if he had certain misgivings of mind. Mr. Gabriel Parsons perceived it, and thought it would be safe to begin the next attack without delay.

‘Now, were you ever in love, Tottle?’ he inquired.

Mr. Watkins Tottle blushed up to the eyes, and down to the chin, and exhibited a most extensive combination of colours as he confessed the soft impeachment.

‘I suppose you popped the question, more than once, when you were a young—I beg your pardon—a younger—man,’ said Parsons.

‘Never in my life!’ replied his friend, apparently indignant at being suspected of such an act. ‘Never! The fact is, that I entertain, as you know, peculiar opinions on these subjects. I am not afraid of ladies, young or old—far from it; but, I think, that in compliance with the custom of the present day, they allow too much freedom of speech and manner to marriageable men. Now, the fact is, that anything like this easy freedom I never could acquire; and as I am always afraid of going too far, I am generally, I dare say, considered formal and cold.’

‘I shouldn’t wonder if you were,’ replied Parsons, gravely; ‘I shouldn’t wonder. However, you’ll be all right in this case; for the strictness and delicacy of this lady’s ideas greatly exceed your own. Lord bless you, why, when she came to our house, there was an old portrait of some man or other, with two large, black, staring eyes, hanging up in her bedroom; she positively refused to go to bed there, till it was taken down, considering it decidedly wrong.’

‘I think so, too,’ said Mr. Watkins Tottle; ‘certainly.’

‘And then, the other night—I never laughed so much in my life’—resumed Mr. Gabriel Parsons; ‘I had driven home in an easterly wind, and caught a devil of a face-ache. Well; as Fanny—that’s Mrs. Parsons, you know—and this friend of hers, and I, and Frank Ross, were playing a rubber, I said, jokingly, that when I went to bed I should wrap my head in

Fanny's flannel petticoat. She instantly threw up her cards, and left the room.'

'Quite right!' said Mr. Watkins Tottle; 'she could not possibly have behaved in a more dignified manner. What did you do?'

'Do?—Frank took dummy; and I won sixpence.'

'But, didn't you apologise for hurting her feelings?'

'Devil a bit. Next morning at breakfast, we talked it over. She contended that any reference to a flannel petticoat was improper;—men ought not to be supposed to know that such things were. I pleaded my coverture; being a married man.'

'And what did the lady say to that?' inquired Tottle, deeply interested.

'Changed her ground, and said that Frank being a single man, its impropriety was obvious.'

'Noble-minded creature!' exclaimed the enraptured Tottle.

'Oh! both Fanny and I said, at once, that she was regularly cut out for you.'

A gleam of placid satisfaction shone on the circular face of Mr. Watkins Tottle, as he heard the prophecy.

'There's one thing I can't understand,' said Mr. Gabriel Parsons, as he rose to depart; 'I cannot, for the life and soul of me, imagine how the deuce you'll ever contrive to come together. The lady would certainly go into convulsions if the subject were mentioned.' Mr. Gabriel Parsons sat down again, and laughed until he was weak. Tottle owed him money, so he had a perfect right to laugh at Tottle's expense.

Mr. Watkins Tottle feared, in his own mind, that this was another characteristic which he had in common with this modern Lucretia. He, however, accepted the invitation to dine with the Parsonses on the next day but one, with great firmness: and looked forward to the introduction, when again left alone, with tolerable composure.

The sun that rose on the next day but one, had never beheld a sprucer personage on the outside of the Norwood stage, than Mr. Watkins Tottle; and when the coach drew up before a cardboard-looking house with disguised chimneys, and a lawn like a large sheet of green letter-paper, he certainly had never lighted to his place of destination a gentleman who felt more uncomfortable.

The coach stopped, and Mr. Watkins Tottle jumped—we beg his pardon—alighted, with great dignity. 'All right!' said he, and away went the coach up the hill with that beautiful equanimity of pace for which ‘short’ stages are generally remarkable.

Mr. Watkins Tottle gave a faltering jerk to the handle of the garden-gate bell. He essayed a more energetic tug, and his previous nervousness was not at all diminished by hearing the bell ringing like a fire alarum.

‘Is Mr. Parsons at home?’ inquired Tottle of the man who opened the gate. He could hardly hear himself speak, for the bell had not yet done tolling.

‘Here I am,’ shouted a voice on the lawn,—and there was Mr. Gabriel Parsons in a flannel jacket, running backwards and forwards, from a wicket to two hats piled on each other, and from the two hats to the wicket, in the most violent manner, while another gentleman with his coat off was getting down the area of the house, after a ball. When the gentleman without the coat had found it—which he did in less than ten minutes—he ran back to the hats, and Gabriel Parsons pulled up. Then, the gentleman without the coat called out ‘play,’ very loudly, and bowled. Then Mr. Gabriel Parsons knocked the ball several yards, and took another run. Then, the other gentleman aimed at the wicket, and didn’t hit it; and Mr. Gabriel Parsons, having finished running on his own account, laid down the bat and ran after the ball, which went into a neighbouring field. They called this cricket.

‘Tottle, will you “go in?”’ inquired Mr. Gabriel Parsons, as he approached him, wiping the perspiration off his face.

Mr. Watkins Tottle declined the offer, the bare idea of accepting which made him even warmer than his friend.

‘Then we’ll go into the house, as it’s past four, and I shall have to wash my hands before dinner,’ said Mr. Gabriel Parsons. ‘Here, I hate ceremony, you know! Timson, that’s Tottle—Tottle, that’s Timson; bred for the church, which I fear will never be bread for him;’ and he chuckled at the old joke. Mr. Timson bowed carelessly. Mr. Watkins Tottle bowed stiffly. Mr. Gabriel Parsons led the way to the house. He was a rich sugar-baker, who mistook rudeness for honesty, and abrupt bluntness for an open and candid manner; many besides Gabriel mistake bluntness for sincerity.

Mrs. Gabriel Parsons received the visitors most graciously on the steps, and preceded them to the drawing-room. On the sofa, was seated a lady of very prim appearance, and remarkably inanimate. She was one of those persons at whose age it is impossible to make any reasonable guess; her features might have been remarkably pretty when she was younger, and they might always have presented the same appearance. Her complexion—with a slight trace of powder here and there—was as clear as that of a well-made wax doll, and her face as expressive. She was handsomely dressed, and was winding up a gold watch.

‘Miss Lillerton, my dear, this is our friend Mr. Watkins Tottle; a very old acquaintance I assure you,’ said Mrs. Parsons, presenting the Strephon of Cecil-street, Strand. The lady rose, and made a deep courtesy; Mr. Watkins Tottle made a bow.

‘Splendid, majestic creature!’ thought Tottle.

Mr. Timson advanced, and Mr. Watkins Tottle began to hate him. Men generally discover a rival, instinctively, and Mr. Watkins Tottle felt that his hate was deserved.

‘May I beg,’ said the reverend gentleman,—‘May I beg to call upon you, Miss Lillerton, for some trifling donation to my soup, coals, and blanket distribution society?’

‘Put my name down, for two sovereigns, if you please,’ responded Miss Lillerton.

‘You are truly charitable, madam,’ said the Reverend Mr. Timson, ‘and we know that charity will cover a multitude of sins. Let me beg you to understand that I do not say this from the supposition that you have many sins which require palliation; believe me when I say that I never yet met any one who had fewer to atone for, than Miss Lillerton.’

Something like a bad imitation of animation lighted up the lady’s face, as she acknowledged the compliment. Watkins Tottle incurred the sin of wishing that the ashes of the Reverend Charles Timson were quietly deposited in the churchyard of his curacy, wherever it might be.

‘I’ll tell you what,’ interrupted Parsons, who had just appeared with clean hands, and a black coat, ‘it’s my private opinion, Timson, that your “distribution society” is rather a humbug.’

‘You are so severe,’ replied Timson, with a Christian smile: he disliked Parsons, but liked his dinners.

‘So positively unjust!’ said Miss Lillerton.

‘Certainly,’ observed Tottle. The lady looked up; her eyes met those of Mr. Watkins Tottle. She withdrew them in a sweet confusion, and Watkins Tottle did the same—the confusion was mutual.

‘Why,’ urged Mr. Parsons, pursuing his objections, ‘what on earth is the use of giving a man coals who has nothing to cook, or giving him blankets when he hasn’t a bed, or giving him soup when he requires substantial food?—“like sending them ruffles when wanting a shirt.” Why not give ’em a trifle of money, as I do, when I think they deserve it, and let them purchase what they think best? Why?—because your subscribers wouldn’t see their names flourishing in print on the church-door—that’s the reason.’

‘Really, Mr. Parsons, I hope you don’t mean to insinuate that I wish to see *my* name in print, on the church-door,’ interrupted Miss Lillerton.

‘I hope not,’ said Mr. Watkins Tottle, putting in another word, and getting another glance.

‘Certainly not,’ replied Parsons. ‘I dare say you wouldn’t mind seeing it in writing, though, in the church register—eh?’

‘Register! What register?’ inquired the lady gravely.

‘Why, the register of marriages, to be sure,’ replied Parsons, chuckling at the sally, and glancing at Tottle. Mr. Watkins Tottle thought he should have fainted for shame, and it is quite impossible to imagine what effect the joke would have had upon the lady, if dinner had not been, at that moment, announced. Mr. Watkins Tottle, with an unprecedented effort of gallantry, offered the tip of his little finger; Miss Lillerton accepted it gracefully, with maiden modesty; and they proceeded in due state to the dinner-table, where they were soon deposited side by side. The room was very snug, the dinner very good, and the little party in spirits. The conversation became pretty general, and when Mr. Watkins Tottle had extracted one or two cold observations from his neighbour, and had taken wine with her, he began to acquire confidence rapidly. The cloth was removed; Mrs. Gabriel Parsons drank four glasses of port on the plea of being a nurse just then; and Miss Lillerton took about the same number of sips, on the plea of not wanting any at all. At length, the ladies retired, to the great gratification of Mr. Gabriel Parsons, who had been coughing and frowning at his wife, for half-an-hour previously—signals which Mrs. Parsons never happened to observe, until she had been pressed to take her ordinary quantum, which, to avoid giving trouble, she generally did at once.

‘What do you think of her?’ inquired Mr. Gabriel Parsons of Mr. Watkins Tottle, in an under-tone.

‘I dote on her with enthusiasm already!’ replied Mr. Watkins Tottle.

‘Gentlemen, pray let us drink “the ladies,”’ said the Reverend Mr. Timson.

‘The ladies!’ said Mr. Watkins Tottle, emptying his glass. In the fulness of his confidence, he felt as if he could make love to a dozen ladies, off-hand.

‘Ah!’ said Mr. Gabriel Parsons, ‘I remember when I was a young man—fill your glass, Timson.’

‘I have this moment emptied it.’

‘Then fill again.’

‘I will,’ said Timson, suiting the action to the word.

‘I remember,’ resumed Mr. Gabriel Parsons, ‘when I was a younger man, with what a strange compound of feelings I used to drink that toast, and how I used to think every woman was an angel.’

‘Was that before you were married?’ mildly inquired Mr. Watkins Tottle.

‘Oh! certainly,’ replied Mr. Gabriel Parsons. ‘I have never thought so since; and a precious milksop I must have been, ever to have thought so at all. But, you know, I married Fanny under the oddest, and most ridiculous circumstances possible.’

‘What were they, if one may inquire?’ asked Timson, who had heard the story, on an average, twice a week for the last six months. Mr. Watkins Tottle listened attentively, in the hope of picking up some suggestion that might be useful to him in his new undertaking.

‘I spent my wedding-night in a back-kitchen chimney,’ said Parsons, by way of a beginning.

‘In a back-kitchen chimney!’ ejaculated Watkins Tottle. ‘How dreadful!’

‘Yes, it wasn’t very pleasant,’ replied the small host. ‘The fact is, Fanny’s father and mother liked me well enough as an individual, but had a decided objection to my becoming a husband. You see, I hadn’t any money in those days, and they had; and so they wanted Fanny to pick up somebody else. However, we managed to discover the state of each other’s affections somehow. I used to meet her, at some mutual friends’ parties; at first we danced together, and talked, and flirted, and all that sort of thing; then, I used to like nothing so well as sitting by her side—we didn’t talk so much then, but I remember I used to have a great notion of looking at her out of the extreme corner of my left eye—and then I got very miserable and sentimental, and began to write verses, and use Macassar oil. At last I couldn’t bear it any longer, and after I had walked up and down the sunny side of Oxford-street in tight boots for a week—and a devilish hot summer it was too—in the hope of meeting her, I sat down and wrote a letter, and begged her to manage to see me clandestinely, for I wanted to hear her decision from her own mouth. I said I had discovered, to my perfect satisfaction, that I couldn't live without her, and that if she didn't have me, I had made up my mind to take prussic acid, or take to drinking, or emigrate, so as to take myself off in some way or other. Well, I borrowed a pound, and bribed the housemaid to give her the note, which she did.'

'And what was the reply?' inquired Timson, who had found, before, that to encourage the repetition of old stories is to get a general invitation.

'Oh, the usual one! Fanny expressed herself very miserable; hinted at the possibility of an early grave; said that nothing should induce her to swerve from the duty she owed her parents; implored me to forget her, and find out somebody more deserving, and all that sort of thing. She said she could, on no account, think of meeting me unknown to her pa and ma; and entreated me, as she should be in a particular part of Kensington Gardens at eleven o'clock next morning, not to attempt to meet her there.'

'You didn't go, of course?' said Watkins Tottle.

'Didn't I?—Of course I did. There she was, with the identical housemaid in perspective, in order that there might be no interruption. We walked about, for a couple of hours; made ourselves delightfully miserable; and were regularly engaged. Then, we began to "correspond"—that is to say, we used to exchange about four letters a day; what we used to say in 'em I can't imagine. And I used to have an interview, in the kitchen, or the cellar, or some such place, every evening. Well, things went on in this way for some time; and we got fonder of each other every day. At last, as our love was raised to such a pitch, and as my salary had been raised too, shortly before, we determined on a secret marriage. Fanny arranged to sleep at a friend's, on the previous night; we were to be married early in the morning; and then we were to return to her home and be pathetic. She was to fall at the old gentleman's feet, and bathe his boots with her tears; and I was to hug the old lady and call her "mother," and use my pocket-handkerchief as much as possible. Married we were, the next morning; two girls-friends of Fanny's—acting as bridesmaids; and a man, who was hired for five shillings and a pint of porter, officiating as father. Now, the old lady unfortunately put off her return from Ramsgate, where she had been paying a visit, until the next morning; and as we placed great reliance on her, we agreed to postpone our confession for four-and-twenty hours. My newly-made wife returned home, and I spent my wedding-day in strolling about Hampstead-heath, and execrating my father-in-law. Of course, I went to comfort my dear little wife at night, as much as I could, with the assurance that our troubles would soon be over. I opened the garden-gate, of which I had a key, and was shown by the servant to our old place of meeting—a back kitchen, with a stone-floor and a dresser: upon which, in the absence of chairs, we used to sit and make love.'

'Make love upon a kitchen-dresser!' interrupted Mr. Watkins Tottle, whose ideas of decorum were greatly outraged.

'Ah! On a kitchen-dresser!' replied Parsons. 'And let me tell you, old fellow, that, if you were really over head-and-ears in love, and had no other place to make love in, you'd be devilish glad to avail yourself of such an opportunity. However, let me see;—where was I?'

'On the dresser,' suggested Timson.

'Oh—ah! Well, here I found poor Fanny, quite disconsolate and uncomfortable. The old boy had been very cross all day, which made her feel still more lonely; and she was quite out of spirits. So, I put a good face on the matter, and laughed it off, and said we should enjoy the pleasures of a matrimonial life more by contrast; and, at length, poor Fanny brightened up a little. I stopped there, till about eleven o'clock, and, just as I was taking my leave for the fourteenth time, the girl came running down the stairs, without her shoes, in a great fright, to tell us that the old villain—Heaven forgive me for calling him so, for he is dead and gone now!—prompted I suppose by the prince of darkness, was coming down, to draw his own beer for supper—a thing he had not done before, for six months, to my certain knowledge; for the cask stood in that very back kitchen. If he discovered me there, explanation would have been out of the question; for he was so outrageously violent, when at all excited, that he never would have listened to me. There was only one thing to be done. The chimney was a very wide one; it had been originally built for an oven; went up perpendicularly for a few feet, and then shot backward and formed a sort of small cavern. My hopes and fortune—the means of our joint existence almost—were at stake. I scrambled in like a squirrel; coiled myself up in this recess; and, as Fanny and the girl replaced the deal chimney-board, I could see the light of the candle which my unconscious father-in-law carried in his hand. I heard him draw the beer; and I never heard beer run so slowly. He was just leaving the kitchen, and I was preparing to descend, when down came the infernal chimney-board with a tremendous crash. He stopped and put down the candle and the jug of beer on the dresser; he was a nervous old fellow, and any unexpected noise annoyed him. He coolly observed that the fire-place was never used, and sending the frightened servant into the next kitchen for a hammer and nails, actually nailed up the board, and locked the door on the outside. So, there was I, on my wedding-night, in the light kerseymere trousers, fancy waistcoat, and blue coat, that I had been married in in the morning, in a back-kitchen chimney, the bottom of which was nailed up, and the top of which had been formerly raised some fifteen feet, to prevent the smoke from annoying the neighbours. And there,' added Mr. Gabriel Parsons, as he passed the bottle, 'there I remained till half-past seven the next morning, when the housemaid's sweetheart, who was a carpenter, unshelled me. The old dog had nailed me up so securely, that, to this very hour, I firmly believe that no one but a carpenter could ever have got me out.'

'And what did Mrs. Parsons's father say, when he found you were married?' inquired Watkins Tottle, who, although he never saw a joke, was not satisfied until he heard a story to the very end.

'Why, the affair of the chimney so tickled his fancy, that he pardoned us off-hand, and allowed us something to live on till he went the way of all flesh. I spent the next night in his second-floor front, much more comfortably than I had spent the preceding one; for, as you will probably guess—'

'Please, sir, missis has made tea,' said a middle-aged female servant, bobbing into the room.

'That's the very housemaid that figures in my story,' said Mr. Gabriel Parsons. 'She went into Fanny's service when we were first married, and has been with us ever since; but I don't think she has felt one atom of respect for me since the morning she saw me released, when she went into violent hysterics, to which she has been subject ever since. Now, shall we join the ladies?'

'If you please,' said Mr. Watkins Tottle.

'By all means,' added the obsequious Mr. Timson; and the trio made for the drawing-room accordingly.

Tea being concluded, and the toast and cups having been duly handed, and occasionally upset, by Mr. Watkins Tottle, a rubber was proposed.

They cut for partners—Mr. and Mrs. Parsons; and Mr. Watkins Tottle and Miss Lillerton. Mr. Timson having conscientious scruples on the subject of card-playing, drank brandy-and-water, and kept up a running spar with Mr. Watkins Tottle. The evening went off well; Mr. Watkins Tottle was in high spirits, having some reason to be gratified with his reception by Miss Lillerton; and before he left, a small party was made up to visit the Beulah Spa on the following Saturday.

'It's all right, I think,' said Mr. Gabriel Parsons to Mr. Watkins Tottle as he opened the garden gate for him.

'I hope so,' he replied, squeezing his friend's hand.

'You'll be down by the first coach on Saturday,' said Mr. Gabriel Parsons.

'Certainly,' replied Mr. Watkins Tottle. 'Undoubtedly.'

But fortune had decreed that Mr. Watkins Tottle should not be down by the first coach on Saturday. His adventures on that day, however, and the success of his wooing, are subjects for another chapter.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

'The first coach has not come in yet, has it, Tom?' inquired Mr. Gabriel Parsons, as he very complacently paced up and down the fourteen feet of gravel which bordered the 'lawn,' on the Saturday morning which had been fixed upon for the Beulah Spa jaunt.

'No, sir; I haven't seen it,' replied a gardener in a blue apron, who let himself out to do the ornamental for half-a-crown a day and his 'keep.'

'Time Tottle was down,' said Mr. Gabriel Parsons, ruminating—'Oh, here he is, no doubt,' added Gabriel, as a cab drove rapidly up the hill; and he buttoned his dressing-gown, and opened the gate to receive the expected visitor. The cab stopped, and out jumped a man in a coarse Petersham great-coat, whity-brown neckerchief, faded black suit, gamboge-coloured top-boots, and one of those large-crowned hats, formerly seldom met with, but now very generally patronised by gentlemen and costermongers.

'Mr. Parsons?' said the man, looking at the superscription of a note he held in his hand, and addressing Gabriel with an inquiring air.

'*My* name is Parsons,' responded the sugar-baker.

'I've brought this here note,' replied the individual in the painted tops, in a hoarse whisper: 'I've brought this here note from a gen'lm'n as come to our house this mornin'.'

'I expected the gentleman at my house,' said Parsons, as he broke the seal, which bore the impression of her Majesty's profile as it is seen on a sixpence.

'I've no doubt the gen'lm'n would ha' been here, replied the stranger, 'if he hadn't happened to call at our house first; but we never trusts no gen'lm'n furder nor we can see him—no mistake about that there'—added the unknown, with a facetious grin; 'beg your pardon, sir, no offence meant, only—once in, and I wish you may—catch the idea, sir?'

Mr. Gabriel Parsons was not remarkable for catching anything suddenly, but a cold. He therefore only bestowed a glance of profound astonishment on his mysterious companion, and proceeded to unfold the note of which he had been the bearer. Once opened and the idea was caught with very little difficulty. Mr. Watkins Tottle had been suddenly arrested for 33*l.* 10*s.* 4*d.*, and dated his communication from a lock-up house in the vicinity of Chancery-lane.

'Unfortunate affair this!' said Parsons, refolding the note.

'Oh! nothin' ven you're used to it,' coolly observed the man in the Petersham.

'Tom!' exclaimed Parsons, after a few minutes' consideration, 'just put the horse in, will you?—Tell the gentleman that I shall be there almost as soon as you are,' he continued, addressing the sheriff-officer's Mercury.

'Werry well,' replied that important functionary; adding, in a confidential manner, 'I'd adwise the gen'lm'n's friends to settle. You see it's a mere trifle; and, unless the gen'lm'n means to go up afore the court, it's hardly worth while waiting for detainers, you know. Our governor's wide awake, he is. I'll never say nothin' agin him, nor no man; but he knows what's o'clock, he does, uncommon.' Having delivered this eloquent, and, to Parsons, particularly intelligible harangue, the meaning of which was eked out by divers nods and winks, the gentleman in the boots reseated himself in the cab, which went rapidly off, and was soon out of sight. Mr. Gabriel Parsons continued to pace up and down the pathway for some minutes, apparently absorbed in deep meditation. The result of his cogitations seemed to be perfectly satisfactory to himself, for he ran briskly into the house; said that business had suddenly summoned him to town; that he had desired the messenger to inform Mr. Watkins Tottle of the fact; and that they would return together to dinner. He then hastily equipped himself for a drive, and mounting his gig, was soon on his way to the establishment of Mr. Solomon Jacobs, situate (as Mr. Watkins Tottle had informed him) in Cursitor-street, Chancery-lane.

When a man is in a violent hurry to get on, and has a specific object in view, the attainment of which depends on the completion of his journey, the difficulties which interpose themselves in his way appear not only to be innumerable, but to have been called into existence especially for the occasion. The remark is by no means a new one, and Mr. Gabriel Parsons had practical and painful experience of its justice in the course of his drive. There are three classes of animated objects which prevent your driving with any degree of comfort or celerity through streets which are but little frequented—they are pigs, children, and old women. On the occasion we are describing, the pigs were luxuriating on cabbage-stalks, and the shuttlecocks fluttered from the little deal battledores, and the children played in the road; and women, with a basket in one hand, and the street-door key in the other, *would* cross just before the horse's head, until Mr. Gabriel Parsons was perfectly savage with vexation, and quite hoarse with hoi-ing and imprecating. Then, when he got into Fleet-street, there was 'a stoppage,' in which people in vehicles have the satisfaction of remaining stationary for half an hour, and envying the slowest pedestrians; and where policemen rush about, and seize hold of horses' bridles, and back them into shop-windows, by way of clearing the road and preventing confusion. At length Mr. Gabriel Parsons turned into Chancery-lane, and having inquired for, and been directed to Cursitor-street (for it was a locality of which he was quite ignorant), he soon found himself opposite the house of Mr. Solomon Jacobs. Confiding his horse and gig to the care of one of the fourteen boys who had followed him from the other side of Blackfriars-bridge on the chance of his requiring their services, Mr. Gabriel Parsons crossed the road and knocked at an inner door, the upper part of which was of glass, grated like the windows of this inviting mansion with iron bars—painted white to look comfortable.

The knock was answered by a sallow-faced, red-haired, sulky boy, who, after surveying Mr. Gabriel Parsons through the glass, applied a large key to an immense wooden excrescence, which was in reality a lock, but which, taken in conjunction with the iron nails with which the panels were studded, gave the door the appearance of being subject to warts.

'I want to see Mr. Watkins Tottle,' said Parsons.

‘It’s the gentleman that come in this morning, Jem,’ screamed a voice from the top of the kitchen-stairs, which belonged to a dirty woman who had just brought her chin to a level with the passage-floor. ‘The gentleman’s in the coffee-room.’

‘Up-stairs, sir,’ said the boy, just opening the door wide enough to let Parsons in without squeezing him, and double-locking it the moment he had made his way through the aperture—‘First floor—door on the left.’

Mr. Gabriel Parsons thus instructed, ascended the uncarpeted and ill-lighted staircase, and after giving several subdued taps at the before-mentioned ‘door on the left,’ which were rendered inaudible by the hum of voices within the room, and the hissing noise attendant on some frying operations which were carrying on below stairs, turned the handle, and entered the apartment. Being informed that the unfortunate object of his visit had just gone up-stairs to write a letter, he had leisure to sit down and observe the scene before him.

The room—which was a small, confined den—was partitioned off into boxes, like the common-room of some inferior eating-house. The dirty floor had evidently been as long a stranger to the scrubbing-brush as to carpet or floor-cloth: and the ceiling was completely blackened by the flare of the oil-lamp by which the room was lighted at night. The gray ashes on the edges of the tables, and the cigar ends which were plentifully scattered about the dusty grate, fully accounted for the intolerable smell of tobacco which pervaded the place; and the empty glasses and half-saturated slices of lemon on the tables, together with the porter pots beneath them, bore testimony to the frequent libations in which the individuals who honoured Mr. Solomon Jacobs by a temporary residence in his house indulged. Over the mantel-shelf was a paltry looking-glass, extending about half the width of the chimney-piece; but by way of counterpoise, the ashes were confined by a rusty fender about twice as long as the hearth.

From this cheerful room itself, the attention of Mr. Gabriel Parsons was naturally directed to its inmates. In one of the boxes two men were playing at cribbage with a very dirty pack of cards, some with blue, some with green, and some with red backs—selections from decayed packs. The cribbage board had been long ago formed on the table by some ingenious visitor with the assistance of a pocket-knife and a two-pronged fork, with which the necessary number of holes had been made in the table at proper distances for the reception of the wooden pegs. In another box a stout, hearty-looking man, of about forty, was eating some dinner which his wife—an equally comfortable-looking personage—had brought him in a basket: and in a third, a genteel-looking young man was talking earnestly, and in a low tone, to a young female, whose face was concealed by a thick veil, but whom Mr. Gabriel Parsons immediately set down in his own mind as the debtor's wife. A young fellow of vulgar manners, dressed in the very extreme of the prevailing fashion, was pacing up and down the room, with a lighted cigar in his mouth and his hands in his pockets, ever and anon puffing forth volumes of smoke, and occasionally applying, with much apparent relish, to a pint pot, the contents of which were 'chilling' on the hob.

'Fourpence more, by gum!' exclaimed one of the cribbage-players, lighting a pipe, and addressing his adversary at the close of the game; 'one 'ud think you'd got luck in a pepper-cruet, and shook it out when you wanted it.'

'Well, that a'n't a bad un,' replied the other, who was a horse-dealer from Islington.

'No; I'm blessed if it is,' interposed the jolly-looking fellow, who, having finished his dinner, was drinking out of the same glass as his wife, in truly conjugal harmony, some hot gin-and-water. The faithful partner of his cares had brought a plentiful supply of the anti-temperance fluid in a large flat stone bottle, which looked like a half-gallon jar that had been successfully tapped for the dropsy. 'You're a rum chap, you are, Mr. Walker—will you dip your beak into this, sir?'

'Thank'ee, sir,' replied Mr. Walker, leaving his box, and advancing to the other to accept the proffered glass. 'Here's your health, sir, and your good 'ooman's here. Gentlemen all—yours, and better luck still. Well, Mr. Willis,' continued the facetious prisoner, addressing the young man with the cigar, 'you seem rather down to-day—floored, as one may say. What's the matter, sir? Never say die, you know.'

'Oh! I'm all right,' replied the smoker. 'I shall be bailed out to-morrow.'

'Shall you, though?' inquired the other. 'Damme, I wish I could say the same. I am as regularly over head and ears as the Royal George, and stand about as much chance of being *bailed out*. Ha! ha! ha!'

'Why,' said the young man, stopping short, and speaking in a very loud key, 'look at me. What d'ye think I've stopped here two days for?'

‘’Cause you couldn’t get out, I suppose,’ interrupted Mr. Walker, winking to the company. ‘Not that you’re exactly obliged to stop here, only you can’t help it. No compulsion, you know, only you must—eh?’

‘A’n’t he a rum un?’ inquired the delighted individual, who had offered the gin-and-water, of his wife.

‘Oh, he just is!’ replied the lady, who was quite overcome by these flashes of imagination.

‘Why, my case,’ frowned the victim, throwing the end of his cigar into the fire, and illustrating his argument by knocking the bottom of the pot on the table, at intervals,—‘my case is a very singular one. My father’s a man of large property, and I am his son.’

‘That’s a very strange circumstance!’ interrupted the jocose Mr. Walker, *en passant*.

‘—I am his son, and have received a liberal education. I don’t owe no man nothing—not the value of a farthing, but I was induced, you see, to put my name to some bills for a friend—bills to a large amount, I may say a very large amount, for which I didn’t receive no consideration. What’s the consequence?’

‘Why, I suppose the bills went out, and you came in. The acceptances weren’t taken up, and you were, eh?’ inquired Walker.

‘To be sure,’ replied the liberally educated young gentleman. ‘To be sure; and so here I am, locked up for a matter of twelve hundred pound.’

‘Why don’t you ask your old governor to stump up?’ inquired Walker, with a somewhat sceptical air.

‘Oh! bless you, he’d never do it,’ replied the other, in a tone of expostulation—‘Never!’

‘Well, it is very odd to—be—sure,’ interposed the owner of the flat bottle, mixing another glass, ‘but I’ve been in difficulties, as one may say, now for thirty year. I went to pieces when I was in a milk-walk, thirty year ago; arterwards, when I was a fruiterer, and kept a spring wan; and arter that again in the coal and ’tatur line—but all that time I never see a youngish chap come into a place of this kind, who wasn’t going out again directly, and who hadn’t been arrested on bills which he’d given a friend and for which he’d received nothing whatsomever—not a fraction.’

‘Oh! it’s always the cry,’ said Walker. ‘I can’t see the use on it; that’s what makes me so wild. Why, I should have a much better opinion of an individual, if he’d say at once in an honourable and gentlemanly manner as he’d done everybody he possibly could.’

‘Ay, to be sure,’ interposed the horse-dealer, with whose notions of bargain and sale the axiom perfectly coincided, ‘so should I.’ The young gentleman, who had given rise to these observations, was on the point of offering a rather angry reply to these sneers, but the rising of the young man before noticed, and of the female who had been sitting by him, to leave the room, interrupted the conversation. She had been weeping bitterly, and the noxious atmosphere of the room acting upon her excited feelings and delicate frame, rendered the support of her companion necessary as they quitted it together.

There was an air of superiority about them both, and something in their appearance so unusual in such a place, that a respectful silence was observed until the *whirr—r—bang* of the spring door announced that they were out of hearing. It was broken by the wife of the ex-fruiterer.

‘Poor creetur!’ said she, quenching a sigh in a rivulet of gin-and-water. ‘She’s very young.’

‘She’s a nice-looking ’ooman too,’ added the horse-dealer.

‘What’s he in for, Ikey?’ inquired Walker, of an individual who was spreading a cloth with numerous blotches of mustard upon it, on one of the tables, and whom Mr. Gabriel Parsons had no difficulty in recognising as the man who had called upon him in the morning.

‘Vy,’ responded the factotum, ‘it’s one of the rummiest rigs you ever heard on. He come in here last Vensday, which by-the-bye he’s a-going over the water to-night—hows’ever that’s neither here nor there. You see I’ve been a going back’ards and for’ards about his business, and ha’ managed to pick up some of his story from the servants and them; and so far as I can make it out, it seems to be summat to this here effect—’

‘Cut it short, old fellow,’ interrupted Walker, who knew from former experience that he of the top-boots was neither very concise nor intelligible in his narratives.

‘Let me alone,’ replied Ikey, ‘and I’ll ha’ wound up, and made my lucky in five seconds. This here young gen’lm’n’s father—so I’m told, mind ye—and the father o’ the young voman, have always been on very bad, out-and-out, rig’lar knock-me-down sort o’ terms; but somehow or another, when he was a wisitin’ at some gentlefolk’s house, as he knowed at college, he came into contract with the young lady. He seed her several times, and then he up and said he'd keep company with her, if so be as she vos agreeable. Vell, she vos as sweet upon him as he vos upon her, and so I s'pose they made it all right; for they got married 'bout six months arterwards, unbeknown, mind ye, to the two fathers—leastways so I'm told. When they heard on it—my eyes, there was such a combustion! Starvation vos the very least that vos to be done to 'em. The young gen'lm'n's father cut him off vith a bob, 'cos he'd cut himself off vith a wife; and the young lady's father he behaved even worser and more unnat'ral, for he not only blow'd her up dreadful, and swore he'd never see her again, but he employed a chap as I knows—and as you knows, Mr. Valker, a precious sight too well—to go about and buy up the bills and them things on which the young husband, thinking his governor 'ud come round agin, had raised the vind just to blow himself on vith for a time; besides vich, he made all the interest he could to set other people agin him. Consequence vos, that he paid as long as he could; but things he never expected to have to meet till he'd had time to turn himself round, come fast upon him, and he vos nabbed. He vos brought here, as I said afore, last Vensday, and I think there's about—ah, half-a-dozen detainers agin him down-stairs now. I have been,' added Ikey, 'in the purfession these fifteen year, and I never met vith such windictiveness afore!'

'Poor creeturs!' exclaimed the coal-dealer's wife once more: again resorting to the same excellent prescription for nipping a sigh in the bud. 'Ah! when they've seen as much trouble as I and my old man here have, they'll be as comfortable under it as we are.'

'The young lady's a pretty creature,' said Walker, 'only she's a little too delicate for my taste—there ain't enough of her. As to the young cove, he may be very respectable and what not, but he's too down in the mouth for me—he ain't game.'

'Game!' exclaimed Ikey, who had been altering the position of a green-handled knife and fork at least a dozen times, in order that he might remain in the room under the pretext of having something to do. 'He's game enough ven there's anything to be fierce about; but who could be game as you call it, Mr. Walker, with a pale young creetur like that, hanging about him?—It's enough to drive any man's heart into his boots to see 'em together—and no mistake at all about it. I never shall forget her first comin' here; he wrote to her on the Thursday to come—I know he did, 'cos I took the letter. Uncommon fidgety he was all day to be sure, and in the evening he goes down into the office, and he says to Jacobs, says he, “Sir, can I have the loan of a private room for a few minutes this evening, without incurring any additional expense—just to see my wife in?” says he. Jacobs looked as much as to say—“Strike me bountiful if you ain’t one of the modest sort!” but as the gen’lm’n who had been in the back parlour had just gone out, and had paid for it for that day, he says—werry grave—“Sir,” says he, “it’s agin our rules to let private rooms to our lodgers on gratis terms, but,” says he, “for a gentleman, I don’t mind breaking through them for once.” So then he turns round to me, and says, “Ikey, put two mould candles in the back parlour, and charge ’em to this gen’lm’n’s account,” vich I did. Vell, by-and-by a hackney-coach comes up to the door, and there, sure enough, was the young lady, wrapped up in a hopera-cloak, as it might be, and all alone. I opened the gate that night, so I went up when the coach come, and he vos a waitin’ at the parlour door—and wasn’t he a trembling, neither? The poor creetur see him, and could hardly walk to meet him. “Oh, Harry!” she says, “that it should have come to this; and all for my sake,” says she, putting her hand upon his shoulder. So he puts his arm round her pretty little waist, and leading her gently a little way into the room, so that he might be able to shut the door, he says, so kind and soft-like—“Why, Kate,” says he—’

‘Here’s the gentleman you want,’ said Ikey, abruptly breaking off in his story, and introducing Mr. Gabriel Parsons to the crest-fallen Watkins Tottle, who at that moment entered the room. Watkins advanced with a wooden expression of passive endurance, and accepted the hand which Mr. Gabriel Parsons held out.

‘I want to speak to you,’ said Gabriel, with a look strongly expressive of his dislike of the company.

‘This way,’ replied the imprisoned one, leading the way to the front drawing-room, where rich debtors did the luxurious at the rate of a couple of guineas a day.

‘Well, here I am,’ said Mr. Watkins, as he sat down on the sofa; and placing the palms of his hands on his knees, anxiously glanced at his friend’s countenance.

‘Yes; and here you’re likely to be,’ said Gabriel, coolly, as he rattled the money in his unmentionable pockets, and looked out of the window.

‘What’s the amount with the costs?’ inquired Parsons, after an awkward pause.

‘Have you any money?’

‘Nine and sixpence halfpenny.’

Mr. Gabriel Parsons walked up and down the room for a few seconds, before he could make up his mind to disclose the plan he had formed; he was accustomed to drive hard bargains, but was always most anxious to conceal his avarice. At length he stopped short, and said, ‘Tottle, you owe me fifty pounds.’

‘I do.’

‘And from all I see, I infer that you are likely to owe it to me.’

‘I fear I am.’

‘Though you have every disposition to pay me if you could?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Then,’ said Mr. Gabriel Parsons, ‘listen: here’s my proposition. You know my way of old. Accept it—yes or no—I will or I won’t. I’ll pay the debt and costs, and I’ll lend you 10*l.* more (which, added to your annuity, will enable you to carry on the war well) if you’ll give me your note of hand to pay me one hundred and fifty pounds within six months after you are married to Miss Lillerton.’

‘My dear—’

‘Stop a minute—on one condition; and that is, that you propose to Miss Lillerton at once.’

‘At once! My dear Parsons, consider.’

‘It’s for you to consider, not me. She knows you well from reputation, though she did not know you personally until lately. Notwithstanding all her maiden modesty, I think she’d be devilish glad to get married out of hand with as little delay as possible. My wife has sounded her on the subject, and she has confessed.’

‘What—what?’ eagerly interrupted the enamoured Watkins.

‘Why,’ replied Parsons, ‘to say exactly what she has confessed, would be rather difficult, because they only spoke in hints, and so forth; but my wife, who is no bad judge in these cases, declared to me that what she had confessed was as good as to say that she was not insensible of your merits—in fact, that no other man should have her.’

Mr. Watkins Tottle rose hastily from his seat, and rang the bell.

‘What’s that for?’ inquired Parsons.

‘I want to send the man for the bill stamp,’ replied Mr. Watkins Tottle.

‘Then you’ve made up your mind?’

'I have,'—and they shook hands most cordially. The note of hand was given—the debt and costs were paid—Ikey was satisfied for his trouble, and the two friends soon found themselves on that side of Mr. Solomon Jacobs's establishment, on which most of his visitors were very happy when they found themselves once again—to wit, the *out*side.

'Now,' said Mr. Gabriel Parsons, as they drove to Norwood together—'you shall have an opportunity to make the disclosure to-night, and mind you speak out, Tottle.'

'I will—I will!' replied Watkins, valorously.

'How I should like to see you together,' ejaculated Mr. Gabriel Parsons.—'What fun!' and he laughed so long and so loudly, that he disconcerted Mr. Watkins Tottle, and frightened the horse.

'There's Fanny and your intended walking about on the lawn,' said Gabriel, as they approached the house. 'Mind your eye, Tottle.'

'Never fear,' replied Watkins, resolutely, as he made his way to the spot where the ladies were walking.

'Here's Mr. Tottle, my dear,' said Mrs. Parsons, addressing Miss Lillerton. The lady turned quickly round, and acknowledged his courteous salute with the same sort of confusion that Watkins had noticed on their first interview, but with something like a slight expression of disappointment or carelessness.

'Did you see how glad she was to see you?' whispered Parsons to his friend.

'Why, I really thought she looked as if she would rather have seen somebody else,' replied Tottle.

'Pooh, nonsense!' whispered Parsons again—'it's always the way with the women, young or old. They never show how delighted they are to see those whose presence makes their hearts beat. It's the way with the whole sex, and no man should have lived to your time of life without knowing it. Fanny confessed it to me, when we were first married, over and over again—see what it is to have a wife.'

'Certainly,' whispered Tottle, whose courage was vanishing fast.

'Well, now, you'd better begin to pave the way,' said Parsons, who, having invested some money in the speculation, assumed the office of director.

'Yes, yes, I will—presently,' replied Tottle, greatly flurried.

‘Say something to her, man,’ urged Parsons again. ‘Confound it! pay her a compliment, can’t you?’

‘No! not till after dinner,’ replied the bashful Tottle, anxious to postpone the evil moment.

‘Well, gentlemen,’ said Mrs. Parsons, ‘you are really very polite; you stay away the whole morning, after promising to take us out, and when you do come home, you stand whispering together and take no notice of us.’

‘We were talking of the *business*, my dear, which detained us this morning,’ replied Parsons, looking significantly at Tottle.

‘Dear me! how very quickly the morning has gone,’ said Miss Lillerton, referring to the gold watch, which was wound up on state occasions, whether it required it or not.

‘I think it has passed very slowly,’ mildly suggested Tottle.

(‘That’s right—bravo!’) whispered Parsons.

‘Indeed!’ said Miss Lillerton, with an air of majestic surprise.

‘I can only impute it to my unavoidable absence from your society, madam,’ said Watkins, ‘and that of Mrs. Parsons.’

During this short dialogue, the ladies had been leading the way to the house.

‘What the deuce did you stick Fanny into that last compliment for?’ inquired Parsons, as they followed together; ‘it quite spoilt the effect.’

‘Oh! it really would have been too broad without,’ replied Watkins Tottle, ‘much too broad!’

‘He’s mad!’ Parsons whispered his wife, as they entered the drawing-room, ‘mad from modesty.’

‘Dear me!’ ejaculated the lady, ‘I never heard of such a thing.’

‘You’ll find we have quite a family dinner, Mr. Tottle,’ said Mrs. Parsons, when they sat down to table: ‘Miss Lillerton is one of us, and, of course, we make no stranger of you.’

Mr. Watkins Tottle expressed a hope that the Parsons family never would make a stranger of him; and wished internally that his bashfulness would allow him to feel a little less like a stranger himself.

‘Take off the covers, Martha,’ said Mrs. Parsons, directing the shifting of the scenery with great anxiety. The order was obeyed, and a pair of boiled fowls, with tongue and et ceteras, were displayed at the top, and a fillet of veal at the bottom. On one side of the table two green sauce-tureens, with ladles of the same, were setting to each other in a green dish; and on the other was a curried rabbit, in a brown suit, turned up with lemon.

‘Miss Lillerton, my dear,’ said Mrs. Parsons, ‘shall I assist you?’

‘Thank you, no; I think I’ll trouble Mr. Tottle.’

Watkins started—trembled—helped the rabbit—and broke a tumbler. The countenance of the lady of the house, which had been all smiles previously, underwent an awful change.

‘Extremely sorry,’ stammered Watkins, assisting himself to currie and parsley and butter, in the extremity of his confusion.

‘Not the least consequence,’ replied Mrs. Parsons, in a tone which implied that it was of the greatest consequence possible,—directing aside the researches of the boy, who was groping under the table for the bits of broken glass.

‘I presume,’ said Miss Lillerton, ‘that Mr. Tottle is aware of the interest which bachelors usually pay in such cases; a dozen glasses for one is the lowest penalty.’

Mr. Gabriel Parsons gave his friend an admonitory tread on the toe. Here was a clear hint that the sooner he ceased to be a bachelor and emancipated himself from such penalties, the better. Mr. Watkins Tottle viewed the observation in the same light, and challenged Mrs. Parsons to take wine, with a degree of presence of mind, which, under all the circumstances, was really extraordinary.

‘Miss Lillerton,’ said Gabriel, ‘may I have the pleasure?’

‘I shall be most happy.’

‘Tottle, will you assist Miss Lillerton, and pass the decanter. Thank you.’ (The usual pantomimic ceremony of nodding and sipping gone through)—

‘Tottle, were you ever in Suffolk?’ inquired the master of the house, who was burning to tell one of his seven stock stories.

‘No,’ responded Watkins, adding, by way of a saving clause, ‘but I’ve been in Devonshire.’

‘Ah!’ replied Gabriel, ‘it was in Suffolk that a rather singular circumstance happened to me many years ago. Did you ever happen to hear me mention it?’

Mr. Watkins Tottle *had* happened to hear his friend mention it some four hundred times. Of course he expressed great curiosity, and evinced the utmost impatience to hear the story again. Mr. Gabriel Parsons forthwith attempted to proceed, in spite of the interruptions to which, as our readers must frequently have observed, the master of the house is often exposed in such cases. We will attempt to give them an idea of our meaning.

‘When I was in Suffolk—’ said Mr. Gabriel Parsons.

‘Take off the fowls first, Martha,’ said Mrs. Parsons. ‘I beg your pardon, my dear.’

‘When I was in Suffolk,’ resumed Mr. Parsons, with an impatient glance at his wife, who pretended not to observe it, ‘which is now years ago, business led me to the town of Bury St. Edmund’s. I had to stop at the principal places in my way, and therefore, for the sake of convenience, I travelled in a gig. I left Sudbury one dark night—it was winter time—about nine o’clock; the rain poured in torrents, the wind howled among the trees that skirted the roadside, and I was obliged to proceed at a foot-pace, for I could hardly see my hand before me, it was so dark—’

‘John,’ interrupted Mrs. Parsons, in a low, hollow voice, ‘don’t spill that gravy.’

‘Fanny,’ said Parsons impatiently, ‘I wish you’d defer these domestic reproofs to some more suitable time. Really, my dear, these constant interruptions are very annoying.’

‘My dear, I didn’t interrupt you,’ said Mrs. Parsons.

‘But, my dear, you *did* interrupt me,’ remonstrated Mr. Parsons.

‘How very absurd you are, my love! I must give directions to the servants; I am quite sure that if I sat here and allowed John to spill the gravy over the new carpet, you’d be the first to find fault when you saw the stain to-morrow morning.’

‘Well,’ continued Gabriel with a resigned air, as if he knew there was no getting over the point about the carpet, ‘I was just saying, it was so dark that I could hardly see my hand before me. The road was very lonely, and I assure you, Tottle (this was a device to arrest the wandering attention of that individual, which was distracted by a confidential communication between Mrs. Parsons and Martha, accompanied by the delivery of a large bunch of keys), I assure you, Tottle, I became somehow impressed with a sense of the loneliness of my situation—’

‘Pie to your master,’ interrupted Mrs. Parsons, again directing the servant.

‘Now, pray, my dear,’ remonstrated Parsons once more, very pettishly. Mrs. P. turned up her hands and eyebrows, and appealed in dumb show to

Miss Lillerton. 'As I turned a corner of the road,' resumed Gabriel, 'the horse stopped short, and reared tremendously. I pulled up, jumped out, ran to his head, and found a man lying on his back in the middle of the road, with his eyes fixed on the sky. I thought he was dead; but no, he was alive, and there appeared to be nothing the matter with him. He jumped up, and putting his hand to his chest, and fixing upon me the most earnest gaze you can imagine, exclaimed—'

'Pudding here,' said Mrs. Parsons.

'Oh! it's no use,' exclaimed the host, now rendered desperate. 'Here, Tottle; a glass of wine. It's useless to attempt relating anything when Mrs. Parsons is present.'

This attack was received in the usual way. Mrs. Parsons talked *to* Miss Lillerton and *at* her better half; expatiated on the impatience of men generally; hinted that her husband was peculiarly vicious in this respect, and wound up by insinuating that she must be one of the best tempers that ever existed, or she never could put up with it. Really what she had to endure sometimes, was more than any one who saw her in every-day life could by possibility suppose.—The story was now a painful subject, and therefore Mr. Parsons declined to enter into any details, and contented himself by stating that the man was a maniac, who had escaped from a neighbouring mad-house.

The cloth was removed; the ladies soon afterwards retired, and Miss Lillerton played the piano in the drawing-room overhead, very loudly, for the edification of the visitor. Mr. Watkins Tottle and Mr. Gabriel Parsons sat chatting comfortably enough, until the conclusion of the second bottle, when the latter, in proposing an adjournment to the drawing-room, informed Watkins that he had concerted a plan with his wife, for leaving him and Miss Lillerton alone, soon after tea.

'I say,' said Tottle, as they went up-stairs, 'don't you think it would be better if we put it off till-till-to-morrow?'

'Don't *you* think it would have been much better if I had left you in that wretched hole I found you in this morning?' retorted Parsons bluntly.

'Well—well—I only made a suggestion,' said poor Watkins Tottle, with a deep sigh.

Tea was soon concluded, and Miss Lillerton, drawing a small work-table on one side of the fire, and placing a little wooden frame upon it, something like a miniature clay-mill without the horse, was soon busily engaged in making a watch-guard with brown silk.

'God bless me!' exclaimed Parsons, starting up with well-feigned surprise, 'I've forgotten those confounded letters. Tottle, I know you'll excuse me.'

If Tottle had been a free agent, he would have allowed no one to leave the room on any pretence, except himself. As it was, however, he was obliged to look cheerful when Parsons quitted the apartment.

He had scarcely left, when Martha put her head into the room, with—'Please, ma'am, you're wanted.'

Mrs. Parsons left the room, shut the door carefully after her, and Mr. Watkins Tottle was left alone with Miss Lillerton.

For the first five minutes there was a dead silence.—Mr. Watkins Tottle was thinking how he should begin, and Miss Lillerton appeared to be thinking of nothing. The fire was burning low; Mr. Watkins Tottle stirred it, and put some coals on.

'Hem!' coughed Miss Lillerton; Mr. Watkins Tottle thought the fair creature had spoken. 'I beg your pardon,' said he.

'Eh?'

'I thought you spoke.'

'No.'

'Oh!'

'There are some books on the sofa, Mr. Tottle, if you would like to look at them,' said Miss Lillerton, after the lapse of another five minutes.

'No, thank you,' returned Watkins; and then he added, with a courage which was perfectly astonishing, even to himself, 'Madam, that is Miss Lillerton, I wish to speak to you.'

'To me!' said Miss Lillerton, letting the silk drop from her hands, and sliding her chair back a few paces.—'Speak—to me!'

'To you, madam—and on the subject of the state of your affections.' The lady hastily rose and would have left the room; but Mr. Watkins Tottle gently detained her by the hand, and holding it as far from him as the joint length of their arms would permit, he thus proceeded: 'Pray do not misunderstand me, or suppose that I am led to address you, after so short an acquaintance, by any feeling of my own merits—for merits I have none which could give me a claim to your hand. I hope you will acquit me of any presumption when I explain that I have been acquainted through Mrs.

Parsons, with the state—that is, that Mrs. Parsons has told me—at least, not Mrs. Parsons, but—' here Watkins began to wander, but Miss Lillerton relieved him.

'Am I to understand, Mr. Tottle, that Mrs. Parsons has acquainted you with my feeling—my affection—I mean my respect, for an individual of the opposite sex?'

'She has.'

'Then, what?' inquired Miss Lillerton, averting her face, with a girlish air, 'what could induce *you* to seek such an interview as this? What can your object be? How can I promote your happiness, Mr. Tottle?'

Here was the time for a flourish—'By allowing me,' replied Watkins, falling bump on his knees, and breaking two brace-buttons and a waistcoat-string, in the act—'By allowing me to be your slave, your servant—in short, by unreservedly making me the confidant of your heart's feelings—may I say for the promotion of your own happiness—may I say, in order that you may become the wife of a kind and affectionate husband?'

'Disinterested creature!' exclaimed Miss Lillerton, hiding her face in a white pocket-handkerchief with an eyelet-hole border.

Mr. Watkins Tottle thought that if the lady knew all, she might possibly alter her opinion on this last point. He raised the tip of her middle finger ceremoniously to his lips, and got off his knees, as gracefully as he could. 'My information was correct?' he tremulously inquired, when he was once more on his feet.

'It was.' Watkins elevated his hands, and looked up to the ornament in the centre of the ceiling, which had been made for a lamp, by way of expressing his rapture.

'Our situation, Mr. Tottle,' resumed the lady, glancing at him through one of the eyelet-holes, 'is a most peculiar and delicate one.'

'It is,' said Mr. Tottle.

'Our acquaintance has been of *so* short duration,' said Miss Lillerton.

'Only a week,' assented Watkins Tottle.

'Oh! more than that,' exclaimed the lady, in a tone of surprise.

'Indeed!' said Tottle.

'More than a month—more than two months!' said Miss Lillerton.

'Rather odd, this,' thought Watkins.

'Oh!' he said, recollecting Parsons's assurance that she had known him from report, 'I understand. But, my dear madam, pray, consider. The longer this acquaintance has existed, the less reason is there for delay now. Why not at once fix a period for gratifying the hopes of your devoted admirer?'

'It has been represented to me again and again that this is the course I ought to pursue,' replied Miss Lillerton, 'but pardon my feelings of delicacy, Mr. Tottle—pray excuse this embarrassment—I have peculiar ideas on such subjects, and I am quite sure that I never could summon up fortitude enough to name the day to my future husband.'

'Then allow *me* to name it,' said Tottle eagerly.

'I should like to fix it myself,' replied Miss Lillerton, bashfully, 'but I cannot do so without at once resorting to a third party.'

'A third party!' thought Watkins Tottle; 'who the deuce is that to be, I wonder!'

'Mr. Tottle,' continued Miss Lillerton, 'you have made me a most disinterested and kind offer—that offer I accept. Will you at once be the bearer of a note from me to—to Mr. Timson?'

'Mr. Timson!' said Watkins.

'After what has passed between us,' responded Miss Lillerton, still averting her head, 'you must understand whom I mean; Mr. Timson, the—the—clergyman.'

'Mr. Timson, the clergyman!' ejaculated Watkins Tottle, in a state of inexpressible beatitude, and positive wonder at his own success. 'Angel! Certainly—this moment!'

'I'll prepare it immediately,' said Miss Lillerton, making for the door; 'the events of this day have flurried me so much, Mr. Tottle, that I shall not leave my room again this evening; I will send you the note by the servant.'

'Stay,—stay,' cried Watkins Tottle, still keeping a most respectful distance from the lady; 'when shall we meet again?'

'Oh! Mr. Tottle,' replied Miss Lillerton, coquettishly, 'when *we* are married, I can never see you too often, nor thank you too much;' and she left the room.

Mr. Watkins Tottle flung himself into an arm-chair, and indulged in the most delicious reveries of future bliss, in which the idea of 'Five hundred pounds per annum, with an uncontrolled power of disposing of it by her last will and testament,' was somehow or other the foremost. He had gone through the interview so well, and it had terminated so admirably, that he almost began to wish he had expressly stipulated for the settlement of the annual five hundred on himself.

‘May I come in?’ said Mr. Gabriel Parsons, peeping in at the door.

‘You may,’ replied Watkins.

‘Well, have you done it?’ anxiously inquired Gabriel.

‘Have I done it!’ said Watkins Tottle. ‘Hush—I’m going to the clergyman.’

‘No!’ said Parsons. ‘How well you have managed it!’

‘Where does Timson live?’ inquired Watkins.

‘At his uncle’s,’ replied Gabriel, ‘just round the lane. He’s waiting for a living, and has been assisting his uncle here for the last two or three months. But how well you have done it—I didn’t think you could have carried it off so!’

Mr. Watkins Tottle was proceeding to demonstrate that the Richardsonian principle was the best on which love could possibly be made, when he was interrupted by the entrance of Martha, with a little pink note folded like a fancy cocked-hat.

‘Miss Lillerton’s compliments,’ said Martha, as she delivered it into Tottle’s hands, and vanished.

‘Do you observe the delicacy?’ said Tottle, appealing to Mr. Gabriel Parsons. ‘*Compliments*, not *love*, by the servant, eh?’

Mr. Gabriel Parsons didn’t exactly know what reply to make, so he poked the forefinger of his right hand between the third and fourth ribs of Mr. Watkins Tottle.

‘Come,’ said Watkins, when the explosion of mirth, consequent on this practical jest, had subsided, ‘we’ll be off at once—let’s lose no time.’

‘Capital!’ echoed Gabriel Parsons; and in five minutes they were at the garden-gate of the villa tenanted by the uncle of Mr. Timson.

‘Is Mr. Charles Timson at home?’ inquired Mr. Watkins Tottle of Mr. Charles Timson’s uncle’s man.

‘Mr. Charles *is* at home,’ replied the man, stammering; ‘but he desired me to say he couldn’t be interrupted, sir, by any of the parishioners.’

‘*I* am not a parishioner,’ replied Watkins.

‘Is Mr. Charles writing a sermon, Tom?’ inquired Parsons, thrusting himself forward.

‘No, Mr. Parsons, sir; he’s not exactly writing a sermon, but he is practising the violoncello in his own bedroom, and gave strict orders not to be disturbed.'

'Say I'm here,' replied Gabriel, leading the way across the garden; 'Mr. Parsons and Mr. Tottle, on private and particular business.'

They were shown into the parlour, and the servant departed to deliver his message. The distant groaning of the violoncello ceased; footsteps were heard on the stairs; and Mr. Timson presented himself, and shook hands with Parsons with the utmost cordiality.

'Game!' exclaimed Ikey, who had been altering the position of a green-handled knife and fork at least a dozen times, in order that he might remain in the room under the pretext of having something to do. 'He's game enough ven there's anything to be fierce about; but who could be game as you call it, Mr. Walker, with a pale young creetur like that, hanging about him?—It's enough to drive any man's heart into his boots to see 'em together—and no mistake at all about it. I never shall forget her first comin' here; he wrote to her on the Thursday to come—I know he did, 'cos I took the letter. Uncommon fidgety he was all day to be sure, and in the evening he goes down into the office, and he says to Jacobs, says he, "Sir, can I have the loan of a private room for a few minutes this evening, without incurring any additional expense—just to see my wife in?" says he. Jacobs looked as much as to say—"Strike me bountiful if you ain't one of the modest sort!" but as the gen'lm'n who had been in the back parlour had just gone out, and had paid for it for that day, he says—werry grave—"Sir," says he, "it's agin our rules to let private rooms to our lodgers on gratis terms, but," says he, "for a gentleman, I don't mind breaking through them for once." So then he turns found to me, and says, "Ikey, put two mould candles in the back parlour, and charge 'em to this gen'lm'n's account," vich I did. Vell, by-and-by a hackney-coach comes up to the door, and there, sure enough, was the young lady, wrapped up in a hopera-cloak, as it might be, and all alone. I opened the gate that night, so I went up when the coach come, and he vos a waitin' at the parlour door—and wasn't he a trembling, neither? The poor creetur see him, and could hardly walk to meet him. "Oh, Harry!" she says, "that it should have come to this; and all for my sake," says she, putting her hand upon his shoulder. So he puts his arm round her pretty little waist, and leading her gently a little way into the room, so that he might be able to shut the door, he says, so kind and soft-like—"Why, Kate," says he—'

‘Here’s the gentleman you want,’ said Ikey, abruptly breaking off in his story, and introducing Mr. Gabriel Parsons to the crest-fallen Watkins Tottle, who at that moment entered the room. Watkins advanced with a wooden expression of passive endurance, and accepted the hand which Mr. Gabriel Parsons held out.

‘I want to speak to you,’ said Gabriel, with a look strongly expressive of his dislike of the company.

‘This way,’ replied the imprisoned one, leading the way to the front drawing-room, where rich debtors did the luxurious at the rate of a couple of guineas a day.

‘Well, here I am,’ said Mr. Watkins, as he sat down on the sofa; and placing the palms of his hands on his knees, anxiously glanced at his friend’s countenance.

‘Yes; and here you’re likely to be,’ said Gabriel, coolly, as he rattled the money in his unmentionable pockets, and looked out of the window.

‘What’s the amount with the costs?’ inquired Parsons, after an awkward pause.

‘Have you any money?’

‘Nine and sixpence halfpenny.’

Mr. Gabriel Parsons walked up and down the room for a few seconds, before he could make up his mind to disclose the plan he had formed; he was accustomed to drive hard bargains, but was always most anxious to conceal his avarice. At length he stopped short, and said, ‘Tottle, you owe me fifty pounds.’

‘I do.’

‘And from all I see, I infer that you are likely to owe it to me.’

‘I fear I am.’

‘Though you have every disposition to pay me if you could?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Then,’ said Mr. Gabriel Parsons, ‘listen: here’s my proposition. You know my way of old. Accept it—yes or no—I will or I won’t. I’ll pay the debt and costs, and I’ll lend you 10*l.* more (which, added to your annuity, will enable you to carry on the war well) if you’ll give me your note of hand to pay me one hundred and fifty pounds within six months after you are married to Miss Lillerton.’

‘My dear—’

‘Stop a minute—on one condition; and that is, that you propose to Miss Lillerton at once.’

‘At once! My dear Parsons, consider.’

‘It’s for you to consider, not me. She knows you well from reputation, though she did not know you personally until lately. Notwithstanding all her maiden modesty, I think she’d be devilish glad to get married out of hand with as little delay as possible. My wife has sounded her on the subject, and she has confessed.’

‘What—what?’ eagerly interrupted the enamoured Watkins.

‘Why,’ replied Parsons, ‘to say exactly what she has confessed, would be rather difficult, because they only spoke in hints, and so forth; but my wife, who is no bad judge in these cases, declared to me that what she had confessed was as good as to say that she was not insensible of your merits—in fact, that no other man should have her.’

Mr. Watkins Tottle rose hastily from his seat, and rang the bell.

‘What’s that for?’ inquired Parsons.

‘I want to send the man for the bill stamp,’ replied Mr. Watkins Tottle.

‘Then you’ve made up your mind?’

‘I have,’—and they shook hands most cordially. The note of hand was given—the debt and costs were paid—Ikey was satisfied for his trouble, and the two friends soon found themselves on that side of Mr. Solomon Jacobs’s establishment, on which most of his visitors were very happy when they found themselves once again—to wit, the outside.

‘Now,’ said Mr. Gabriel Parsons, as they drove to Norwood together—‘you shall have an opportunity to make the disclosure to-night, and mind you speak out, Tottle.’

‘I will—I will!’ replied Watkins, valorously.

‘How I should like to see you together,’ ejaculated Mr. Gabriel Parsons.—‘What fun!’ and he laughed so long and so loudly, that he disconcerted Mr. Watkins Tottle, and frightened the horse.

‘There’s Fanny and your intended walking about on the lawn,’ said Gabriel, as they approached the house. ‘Mind your eye, Tottle.’

‘Never fear,’ replied Watkins, resolutely, as he made his way to the spot where the ladies were walking.

‘Here’s Mr. Tottle, my dear,’ said Mrs. Parsons, addressing Miss Lillerton. The lady turned quickly round, and acknowledged his courteous salute with the same sort of confusion that Watkins had noticed on their first interview, but with something like a slight expression of disappointment or carelessness.

‘Did you see how glad she was to see you?’ whispered Parsons to his friend.

‘Why, I really thought she looked as if she would rather have seen somebody else,’ replied Tottle.

‘Pooh, nonsense!’ whispered Parsons again—‘it’s always the way with the women, young or old. They never show how delighted they are to see those whose presence makes their hearts beat. It’s the way with the whole sex, and no man should have lived to your time of life without knowing it. Fanny confessed it to me, when we were first married, over and over again—see what it is to have a wife.’

‘Certainly,’ whispered Tottle, whose courage was vanishing fast.

‘Well, now, you’d better begin to pave the way,’ said Parsons, who, having invested some money in the speculation, assumed the office of director.

‘Yes, yes, I will—presently,’ replied Tottle, greatly flurried.

‘Say something to her, man,’ urged Parsons again. ‘Confound it! pay her a compliment, can’t you?’

‘No! not till after dinner,’ replied the bashful Tottle, anxious to postpone the evil moment.

‘Well, gentlemen,’ said Mrs. Parsons, ‘you are really very polite; you stay away the whole morning, after promising to take us out, and when you do come home, you stand whispering together and take no notice of us.’

‘We were talking of the *business*, my dear, which detained us this morning,’ replied Parsons, looking significantly at Tottle.

‘Dear me! how very quickly the morning has gone,’ said Miss Lillerton, referring to the gold watch, which was wound up on state occasions, whether it required it or not.

‘I think it has passed very slowly,’ mildly suggested Tottle.

(‘That’s right—bravo!’) whispered Parsons.

‘Indeed!’ said Miss Lillerton, with an air of majestic surprise.

‘I can only impute it to my unavoidable absence from your society, madam,’ said Watkins, ‘and that of Mrs. Parsons.’

During this short dialogue, the ladies had been leading the way to the house.

‘What the deuce did you stick Fanny into that last compliment for?’ inquired Parsons, as they followed together; ‘it quite spoilt the effect.’

‘Oh! it really would have been too broad without,’ replied Watkins Tottle, ‘much too broad!’

‘He’s mad!’ Parsons whispered his wife, as they entered the drawing-room, ‘mad from modesty.’

‘Dear me!’ ejaculated the lady, ‘I never heard of such a thing.’

‘You’ll find we have quite a family dinner, Mr. Tottle,’ said Mrs. Parsons, when they sat down to table: ‘Miss Lillerton is one of us, and, of course, we make no stranger of you.’

Mr. Watkins Tottle expressed a hope that the Parsons family never would make a stranger of him; and wished internally that his bashfulness would allow him to feel a little less like a stranger himself.

‘Take off the covers, Martha,’ said Mrs. Parsons, directing the shifting of the scenery with great anxiety. The order was obeyed, and a pair of boiled fowls, with tongue and et ceteras, were displayed at the top, and a fillet of veal at the bottom. On one side of the table two green sauce-tureens, with ladles of the same, were setting to each other in a green dish; and on the other was a curried rabbit, in a brown suit, turned up with lemon.

‘Miss Lillerton, my dear,’ said Mrs. Parsons, ‘shall I assist you?’

‘Thank you, no; I think I’ll trouble Mr. Tottle.’

Watkins started—trembled—helped the rabbit—and broke a tumbler. The countenance of the lady of the house, which had been all smiles previously, underwent an awful change.

‘Extremely sorry,’ stammered Watkins, assisting himself to currie and parsley and butter, in the extremity of his confusion.

‘Not the least consequence,’ replied Mrs. Parsons, in a tone which implied that it was of the greatest consequence possible,—directing aside the researches of the boy, who was groping under the table for the bits of broken glass.

‘I presume,’ said Miss Lillerton, ‘that Mr. Tottle is aware of the interest which bachelors usually pay in such cases; a dozen glasses for one is the lowest penalty.’

Mr. Gabriel Parsons gave his friend an admonitory tread on the toe. Here was a clear hint that the sooner he ceased to be a bachelor and emancipated himself from such penalties, the better. Mr. Watkins Tottle viewed the observation in the same light, and challenged Mrs. Parsons to take wine, with a degree of presence of mind, which, under all the circumstances, was really extraordinary.

‘Miss Lillerton,’ said Gabriel, ‘may I have the pleasure?’

‘I shall be most happy.’

‘Tottle, will you assist Miss Lillerton, and pass the decanter. Thank you.’ (The usual pantomimic ceremony of nodding and sipping gone through)—

‘Tottle, were you ever in Suffolk?’ inquired the master of the house, who was burning to tell one of his seven stock stories.

‘No,’ responded Watkins, adding, by way of a saving clause, ‘but I’ve been in Devonshire.’

‘Ah!’ replied Gabriel, ‘it was in Suffolk that a rather singular circumstance happened to me many years ago. Did you ever happen to hear me mention it?’

Mr. Watkins Tottle *had* happened to hear his friend mention it some four hundred times. Of course he expressed great curiosity, and evinced the utmost impatience to hear the story again. Mr. Gabriel Parsons forthwith attempted to proceed, in spite of the interruptions to which, as our readers must frequently have observed, the master of the house is often exposed in such cases. We will attempt to give them an idea of our meaning.

‘When I was in Suffolk—’ said Mr. Gabriel Parsons.

‘Take off the fowls first, Martha,’ said Mrs. Parsons. ‘I beg your pardon, my dear.’

‘When I was in Suffolk,’ resumed Mr. Parsons, with an impatient glance at his wife, who pretended not to observe it, ‘which is now years ago, business led me to the town of Bury St. Edmund’s. I had to stop at the principal places in my way, and therefore, for the sake of convenience, I travelled in a gig. I left Sudbury one dark night—it was winter time—about nine o’clock; the rain poured in torrents, the wind howled among the trees that skirted the roadside, and I was obliged to proceed at a foot-pace, for I could hardly see my hand before me, it was so dark—’

‘John,’ interrupted Mrs. Parsons, in a low, hollow voice, ‘don’t spill that gravy.’

‘Fanny,’ said Parsons impatiently, ‘I wish you’d defer these domestic reproofs to some more suitable time. Really, my dear, these constant interruptions are very annoying.’

‘My dear, I didn’t interrupt you,’ said Mrs. Parsons.

‘But, my dear, you did interrupt me,’ remonstrated Mr. Parsons.

‘How very absurd you are, my love! I must give directions to the servants; I am quite sure that if I sat here and allowed John to spill the gravy over the new carpet, you’d be the first to find fault when you saw the stain to-morrow morning.’

‘Well,’ continued Gabriel with a resigned air, as if he knew there was no getting over the point about the carpet, ‘I was just saying, it was so dark that I could hardly see my hand before me. The road was very lonely, and I assure you, Tottle (this was a device to arrest the wandering attention of that individual, which was distracted by a confidential communication between Mrs. Parsons and Martha, accompanied by the delivery of a large bunch of keys), I assure you, Tottle, I became somehow impressed with a sense of the loneliness of my situation—’

‘Pie to your master,’ interrupted Mrs. Parsons, again directing the servant.

‘Now, pray, my dear,’ remonstrated Parsons once more, very pettishly. Mrs. P. turned up her hands and eyebrows, and appealed in dumb show to Miss Lillerton. ‘As I turned a corner of the road,’ resumed Gabriel, ‘the horse stopped short, and reared tremendously. I pulled up, jumped out, ran to his head, and found a man lying on his back in the middle of the road, with his eyes fixed on the sky. I thought he was dead; but no, he was alive, and there appeared to be nothing the matter with him. He jumped up, and potting his hand to his chest, and fixing upon me the most earnest gaze you can imagine, exclaimed—‘Pudding here,’ said Mrs. Parsons.

‘Oh! it’s no use,’ exclaimed the host, now rendered desperate. ‘Here, Tottle; a glass of wine. It’s useless to attempt relating anything when Mrs. Parsons is present.’

This attack was received in the usual way. Mrs. Parsons talked *to* Miss Lillerton and *at* her better half; expatiated on the impatience of men generally; hinted that her husband was peculiarly vicious in this respect, and wound up by insinuating that she must be one of the best tempers that ever existed, or she never could put up with it. Really what she had to endure sometimes, was more than any one who saw her in every-day life could by possibility suppose.—The story was now a painful subject, and therefore Mr. Parsons declined to enter into any details, and contented himself by stating that the man was a maniac, who had escaped from a neighbouring mad-house.

The cloth was removed; the ladies soon afterwards retired, and Miss Lillerton played the piano in the drawing-room overhead, very loudly, for the edification of the visitor. Mr. Watkins Tottle and Mr. Gabriel Parsons sat chatting comfortably enough, until the conclusion of the second bottle, when the latter, in proposing an adjournment to the drawing-room, informed Watkins that he had concerted a plan with his wife, for leaving him and Miss Lillerton alone, soon after tea.

'I say,' said Tottle, as they went up-stairs, 'don't you think it would be better if we put it off till-till-to-morrow?'

'Don't *you* think it would have been much better if I had left you in that wretched hole I found you in this morning?' retorted Parsons bluntly.

'Well—well—I only made a suggestion,' said poor Watkins Tottle, with a deep sigh.

Tea was soon concluded, and Miss Lillerton, drawing a small work-table on one side of the fire, and placing a little wooden frame upon it, something like a miniature clay-mill without the horse, was soon busily engaged in making a watch-guard with brown silk.

'God bless me!' exclaimed Parsons, starting up with well-feigned surprise, 'I've forgotten those confounded letters. Tottle, I know you'll excuse me.'

If Tottle had been a free agent, he would have allowed no one to leave the room on any pretence, except himself. As it was, however, he was obliged to look cheerful when Parsons quitted the apartment.

He had scarcely left, when Martha put her head into the room, with—'Please, ma'am, you're wanted.'

Mrs. Parsons left the room, shut the door carefully after her, and Mr. Watkins Tottle was left alone with Miss Lillerton.

For the first five minutes there was a dead silence.—Mr. Watkins Tottle was thinking how he should begin, and Miss Lillerton appeared to be thinking of nothing. The fire was burning low; Mr. Watkins Tottle stirred it, and put some coals on.

'Hem!' coughed Miss Lillerton; Mr. Watkins Tottle thought the fair creature had spoken. 'I beg your pardon,' said he.

'Eh?'

'I thought you spoke.'

'No.'

'Oh!'

‘There are some books on the sofa, Mr. Tottle, if you would like to look at them,’ said Miss Lillerton, after the lapse of another five minutes.

‘No, thank you,’ returned Watkins; and then he added, with a courage which was perfectly astonishing, even to himself, ‘Madam, that is Miss Lillerton, I wish to speak to you.’

‘To me!’ said Miss Lillerton, letting the silk drop from her hands, and sliding her chair back a few paces.—‘Speak—to me!’

‘To you, madam—and on the subject of the state of your affections.’ The lady hastily rose and would have left the room; but Mr. Watkins Tottle gently detained her by the hand, and holding it as far from him as the joint length of their arms would permit, he thus proceeded: ‘Pray do not misunderstand me, or suppose that I am led to address you, after so short an acquaintance, by any feeling of my own merits—for merits I have none which could give me a claim to your hand. I hope you will acquit me of any presumption when I explain that I have been acquainted through Mrs. Parsons, with the state—that is, that Mrs. Parsons has told me—at least, not Mrs. Parsons, but—’ here Watkins began to wander, but Miss Lillerton relieved him.

‘Am I to understand, Mr. Tottle, that Mrs. Parsons has acquainted you with my feeling—my affection—I mean my respect, for an individual of the opposite sex?’

‘She has.’

‘Then, what?’ inquired Miss Lillerton, averting her face, with a girlish air, ‘what could induce *you* to seek such an interview as this? What can your object be? How can I promote your happiness, Mr. Tottle?’

Here was the time for a flourish—‘By allowing me,’ replied Watkins, falling bump on his knees, and breaking two brace-buttons and a waistcoat-string, in the act—‘By allowing me to be your slave, your servant—in short, by unreservedly making me the confidant of your heart’s feelings—may I say for the promotion of your own happiness—may I say, in order that you may become the wife of a kind and affectionate husband?’

‘Disinterested creature!’ exclaimed Miss Lillerton, hiding her face in a white pocket-handkerchief with an eyelet-hole border.

Mr. Watkins Tottle thought that if the lady knew all, she might possibly alter her opinion on this last point. He raised the tip of her middle finger ceremoniously to his lips, and got off his knees, as gracefully as he could.

'My information was correct?' he tremulously inquired, when he was once more on his feet.

'It was.' Watkins elevated his hands, and looked up to the ornament in the centre of the ceiling, which had been made for a lamp, by way of expressing his rapture.

'Our situation, Mr. Tottle,' resumed the lady, glancing at him through one of the eyelet-holes, 'is a most peculiar. and delicate one.'

'It is,' said Mr. Tottle.

'Our acquaintance has been of *so* short duration,' said Miss Lillerton.

'Only a week,' assented Watkins Tottle.

'Oh! more than that,' exclaimed the lady, in a tone of surprise.

'Indeed!' said Tottle.

'More than a month—more than two months!' said Miss Lillerton.

'Rather odd, this,' thought Watkins.

'Oh!' he said, recollecting Parsons's assurance that she had known him from report, 'I understand. But, my dear madam, pray, consider. The longer this acquaintance has existed, the less reason is I there for delay now. Why not at once fix a period for gratifying the hopes of your devoted admirer?'

'It has been represented to me again and again that this is the course I ought to pursue,' replied Miss Lillerton, 'but pardon my feelings of delicacy, Mr. Tottle—pray excuse this embarrassment—I have peculiar ideas on such subjects, and I am quite sure that I never could summon up fortitude enough to name the day to my future husband.'

'Then allow *me* to name it,' said Tottle eagerly.

'I should like to fix it myself,' replied Miss Lillerton, bashfully, but I cannot do so without at once resorting to a third party.'

'A third party!' thought Watkins Tottle; 'who the deuce is that to be, I wonder!'

'Mr. Tottle,' continued Miss Lillerton, 'you have made me a most disinterested and kind offer—that offer I accept. Will you at once be the bearer of a note from me to—to Mr. Timson?'

'Mr. Timson!' said Watkins.

'After what has passed between us,' responded Miss Lillerton, still averting her head, 'you must understand whom I mean; Mr. Timson, the—the—clergyman.'

‘Mr. Timson, the clergyman!’ ejaculated Watkins Tottle, in a state of inexpressible beatitude, and positive wonder at his own success. ‘Angel! Certainly—this moment!’

‘I’ll prepare it immediately,’ said Miss Lillerton, making for the door; ‘the events of this day have flurried me so much, Mr. Tottle, that I shall not leave my room again this evening; I will send you the note by the servant.’

‘Stay,—stay,’ cried Watkins Tottle, still keeping a most respectful distance from the lady; ‘when shall we meet again?’

‘Oh! Mr. Tottle,’ replied Miss Lillerton, coquettishly, ‘when we are married, I can never see you too often, nor thank you too much;’ and she left the room.

Mr. Watkins Tottle flung himself into an arm-chair, and indulged in the most delicious reveries of future bliss, in which the idea of ‘Five hundred pounds per annum, with an uncontrolled power of disposing of it by her last will and testament,’ was somehow or other the foremost. He had gone through the interview so well, and it had terminated so admirably, that he almost began to wish he had expressly stipulated for the settlement of the annual five hundred on himself.

‘May I come in?’ said Mr. Gabriel Parsons, peeping in at the door.

‘You may,’ replied Watkins.

‘Well, have you done it?’ anxiously inquired Gabriel.

‘Have I done it!’ said Watkins Tottle. ‘Hush—I’m going to the clergyman.’

‘No!’ said Parsons. ‘How well you have managed it!’

‘Where does Timson live?’ inquired Watkins.

‘At his uncle’s,’ replied Gabriel, ‘just round the lane. He’s waiting for a living, and has been assisting his uncle here for the last two or three months. But how well you have done it—I didn’t think you could have carried it off so!’

Mr. Watkins Tottle was proceeding to demonstrate that the Richardsonian principle was the best on which love could possibly be made, when he was interrupted by the entrance of Martha, with a little pink note folded like a fancy cocked-hat.

‘Miss Lillerton’s compliments,’ said Martha, as she delivered it into Tottle’s hands, and vanished.

‘Do you observe the delicacy?’ said Tottle, appealing to Mr. Gabriel Parsons. ‘*Compliments*, not *love*, by the servant, eh?’

Mr. Gabriel Parsons didn’t exactly know what reply to make, so he poked the forefinger of his right hand between the third and fourth ribs of Mr. Watkins Tottle.

‘Come,’ said Watkins, when the explosion of mirth, consequent on this practical jest, had subsided, ‘we’ll be off at once—let’s lose no time.’

‘Capital!’ echoed Gabriel Parsons; and in five minutes they were at the garden-gate of the villa tenanted by the uncle of Mr. Timson.

‘Is Mr. Charles Timson at home?’ inquired Mr. Watkins Tottle of Mr. Charles Timson’s uncle’s man.

‘Mr. Charles *is* at home,’ replied the man, stammering; ‘but he desired me to say he couldn’t be interrupted, sir, by any of the parishioners.’

‘*I* am not a parishioner,’ replied Watkins.

‘Is Mr. Charles writing a sermon, Tom?’ inquired Parsons, thrusting himself forward.

‘No, Mr. Parsons, sir; he’s not exactly writing a sermon, but he is practising the violoncello in his own bedroom, and gave strict orders not to be disturbed.’

‘Say I’m here,’ replied Gabriel, leading the way across the garden; ‘Mr. Parsons and Mr. Tottle, on private and particular business.’

They were shown into the parlour, and the servant departed to deliver his message. The distant groaning of the violoncello ceased; footsteps were heard on the stairs; and Mr. Timson presented himself, and shook hands with Parsons with the utmost cordiality.

‘How do you do, sir?’ said Watkins Tottle, with great solemnity.

‘How do *you* do, sir?’ replied Timson, with as much coldness as if it were a matter of perfect indifference to him how he did, as it very likely was.

‘I beg to deliver this note to you,’ said Watkins Tottle, producing the cocked-hat.

‘From Miss Lillerton!’ said Timson, suddenly changing colour. ‘Pray sit down.’

Mr. Watkins Tottle sat down; and while Timson perused the note, fixed his eyes on an oyster-sauce-coloured portrait of the Archbishop of Canterbury, which hung over the fireplace.

Mr. Timson rose from his seat when he had concluded the note, and looked dubiously at Parsons. ‘May I ask,’ he inquired, appealing to

Watkins Tottle, 'whether our friend here is acquainted with the object of your visit?'

'Our friend is in *my* confidence,' replied Watkins, with considerable importance.

'Then, sir,' said Timson, seizing both Tottle's hands, 'allow me in his presence to thank you most unfeignedly and cordially, for the noble part you have acted in this affair.'

'He thinks I recommended him,' thought Tottle. 'Confound these fellows! they never think of anything but their fees.'

'I deeply regret having misunderstood your intentions, my dear sir,' continued Timson. 'Disinterested and manly, indeed! There are very few men who would have acted as you have done.'

Mr. Watkins Tottle could not help thinking that this last remark was anything but complimentary. He therefore inquired, rather hastily, 'When is it to be?'

'On Thursday,' replied Timson,—'on Thursday morning at half-past eight.'

'Uncommonly early,' observed Watkins Tottle, with an air of triumphant self-denial. 'I shall hardly be able to get down here by that hour.' (This was intended for a joke.)

'Never mind, my dear fellow,' replied Timson, all suavity, shaking hands with Tottle again most heartily, 'so long as we see you to breakfast, you know—'

'Eh!' said Parsons, with one of the most extraordinary expressions of countenance that ever appeared in a human face.

'What!' ejaculated Watkins Tottle, at the same moment.

'I say that so long as we see you to breakfast,' replied Timson, 'we will excuse your being absent from the ceremony, though of course your presence at it would give us the utmost pleasure.'

Mr. Watkins Tottle staggered against the wall, and fixed his eyes on Timson with appalling perseverance.

'Timson,' said Parsons, hurriedly brushing his hat with his left arm, 'when you say "us," whom do you mean?'

Mr. Timson looked foolish in his turn, when he replied, 'Why—Mrs. Timson that will be this day week: Miss Lillerton that is—'

'Now don't stare at that idiot in the corner,' angrily exclaimed Parsons, as the extraordinary convulsions of Watkins Tottle's countenance excited the wondering gaze of Timson,—'but have the goodness to tell me in three words the contents of that note?'

'This note,' replied Timson, 'is from Miss Lillerton, to whom I have been for the last five weeks regularly engaged. Her singular scruples and strange feeling on some points have hitherto prevented my bringing the engagement to that termination which I so anxiously desire. She informs me here, that she sounded Mrs. Parsons with the view of making her her confidante and go-between, that Mrs. Parsons informed this elderly gentleman, Mr. Tottle, of the circumstance, and that he, in the most kind and delicate terms, offered to assist us in any way, and even undertook to convey this note, which contains the promise I have long sought in vain—an act of kindness for which I can never be sufficiently grateful.'

'Good night, Timson,' said Parsons, hurrying off, and carrying the bewildered Tottle with him.

'Won't you stay—and have something?' said Timson.

'No, thank ye,' replied Parsons; 'I've had quite enough;' and away he went, followed by Watkins Tottle in a state of stupefaction.

Mr. Gabriel Parsons whistled until they had walked some quarter of a mile past his own gate, when he suddenly stopped, and said—

'You are a clever fellow, Tottle, ain't you?'

'I don't know,' said the unfortunate Watkins.

'I suppose you'll say this is Fanny's fault, won't you?' inquired Gabriel.

'I don't know anything about it,' replied the bewildered Tottle.

'Well,' said Parsons, turning on his heel to go home, 'the next time you make an offer, you had better speak plainly, and don't throw a chance away. And the next time you're locked up in a spunging-house, just wait there till I come and take you out, there's a good fellow.'

How, or at what hour, Mr. Watkins Tottle returned to Cecil-street is unknown. His boots were seen outside his bedroom-door next morning; but we have the authority of his landlady for stating that he neither emerged therefrom nor accepted sustenance for four-and-twenty hours. At the expiration of that period, and when a council of war was being held in the kitchen on the propriety of summoning the parochial beadle to break his door open, he rang his bell, and demanded a cup of milk-and-water. The next morning he went through the formalities of eating and drinking as usual, but a week afterwards he was seized with a relapse, while perusing the list of marriages in a morning paper, from which he never perfectly recovered.

A few weeks after the last-named occurrence, the body of a gentleman unknown, was found in the Regent's canal. In the trousers-pockets were four shillings and threepence halfpenny; a matrimonial advertisement from a lady, which appeared to have been cut out of a Sunday paper: a tooth-pick, and a card-case, which it is confidently believed would have led to the identification of the unfortunate gentleman, but for the circumstance of there being none but blank cards in it. Mr. Watkins Tottle absented himself from his lodgings shortly before. A bill, which has not been taken up, was presented next morning; and a bill, which has not been taken down, was soon afterwards affixed in his parlour-window.

CHAPTER XI—THE BLOOMSBURY CHRISTENING

Mr. Nicodemus Dumps, or, as his acquaintance called him, 'long Dumps,' was a bachelor, six feet high, and fifty years old: cross, cadaverous, odd, and ill-natured. He was never happy but when he was miserable; and always miserable when he had the best reason to be happy. The only real comfort of his existence was to make everybody about him wretched—then he might be truly said to enjoy life. He was afflicted with a situation in the Bank worth five hundred a-year, and he rented a 'first-floor furnished,' at Pentonville, which he originally took because it commanded a dismal prospect of an adjacent churchyard. He was familiar with the face of every tombstone, and the burial service seemed to excite his strongest sympathy. His friends said he was surly—he insisted he was nervous; they thought him a lucky dog, but he protested that he was 'the most unfortunate man in the world.' Cold as he was, and wretched as he declared himself to be, he was not wholly unsusceptible of attachments. He revered the memory of Hoyle, as he was himself an admirable and imperturbable whist-player, and he chuckled with delight at a fretful and impatient adversary. He adored King Herod for his massacre of the innocents; and if he hated one thing more than another, it was a child. However, he could hardly be said to hate anything in particular, because he disliked everything in general; but perhaps his greatest antipathies were cabs, old women, doors that would not shut, musical amateurs, and omnibus cads. He subscribed to the ‘Society for the Suppression of Vice’ for the pleasure of putting a stop to any harmless amusements; and he contributed largely towards the support of two itinerant methodist parsons, in the amiable hope that if circumstances rendered any people happy in this world, they might perchance be rendered miserable by fears for the next.

Mr. Dumps had a nephew who had been married about a year, and who was somewhat of a favourite with his uncle, because he was an admirable subject to exercise his misery-creating powers upon. Mr. Charles Kitterbell was a small, sharp, spare man, with a very large head, and a broad, good-humoured countenance. He looked like a faded giant, with the head and face partially restored; and he had a cast in his eye which rendered it quite impossible for any one with whom he conversed to know where he was looking. His eyes appeared fixed on the wall, and he was staring you out of countenance; in short, there was no catching his eye, and perhaps it is a merciful dispensation of Providence that such eyes are not catching. In addition to these characteristics, it may be added that Mr. Charles Kitterbell was one of the most credulous and matter-of-fact little personages that ever took *to* himself a wife, and *for* himself a house in Great Russell-street, Bedford-square. (Uncle Dumps always dropped the ‘Bedford-square,’ and inserted in lieu thereof the dreadful words ‘Tottenham-court-road.’)

‘No, but, uncle, ’pon my life you must—you must promise to be godfather,’ said Mr. Kitterbell, as he sat in conversation with his respected relative one morning.

‘I cannot, indeed I cannot,’ returned Dumps.

‘Well, but why not? Jemima will think it very unkind. It’s very little trouble.’

‘As to the trouble,’ rejoined the most unhappy man in existence, ‘I don’t mind that; but my nerves are in that state—I cannot go through the ceremony. You know I don’t like going out.—For God’s sake, Charles, don’t fidget with that stool so; you’ll drive me mad.’ Mr. Kitterbell, quite regardless of his uncle’s nerves, had occupied himself for some ten minutes in describing a circle on the floor with one leg of the office-stool on which he was seated, keeping the other three up in the air, and holding fast on by the desk.

‘I beg your pardon, uncle,’ said Kitterbell, quite abashed, suddenly releasing his hold of the desk, and bringing the three wandering legs back to the floor, with a force sufficient to drive them through it.

‘But come, don’t refuse. If it’s a boy, you know, we must have two godfathers.’

‘*If* it’s a boy!’ said Dumps; ‘why can’t you say at once whether it *is* a boy or not?’

‘I should be very happy to tell you, but it’s impossible I can undertake to say whether it’s a girl or a boy, if the child isn’t born yet.’

‘Not born yet!’ echoed Dumps, with a gleam of hope lighting up his lugubrious visage. ‘Oh, well, it *may* be a girl, and then you won’t want me; or if it is a boy, it *may* die before it is christened.’

‘I hope not,’ said the father that expected to be, looking very grave.

‘I hope not,’ acquiesced Dumps, evidently pleased with the subject. He was beginning to get happy. ‘I hope not, but distressing cases frequently occur during the first two or three days of a child’s life; fits, I am told, are exceedingly common, and alarming convulsions are almost matters of course.’

‘Lord, uncle!’ ejaculated little Kitterbell, gasping for breath.

‘Yes; my landlady was confined—let me see—last Tuesday: an uncommonly fine boy. On the Thursday night the nurse was sitting with him upon her knee before the fire, and he was as well as possible. Suddenly he became black in the face, and alarmingly spasmodic. The medical man was instantly sent for, and every remedy was tried, but—’

‘How frightful!’ interrupted the horror-stricken Kitterbell.

‘The child died, of course. However, your child *may* not die; and if it should be a boy, and should *live* to be christened, why I suppose I must be one of the sponsors.’ Dumps was evidently good-natured on the faith of his anticipations.

‘Thank you, uncle,’ said his agitated nephew, grasping his hand as warmly as if he had done him some essential service. ‘Perhaps I had better not tell Mrs. K. what you have mentioned.’

‘Why, if she’s low-spirited, perhaps you had better not mention the melancholy case to her,’ returned Dumps, who of course had invented the whole story; ‘though perhaps it would be but doing your duty as a husband to prepare her for the *worst*.’

A day or two afterwards, as Dumps was perusing a morning paper at the chop-house which he regularly frequented, the following-paragraph met his eyes:—

> ‘*Births*.—On Saturday, the 18th inst., in Great Russell-street, the lady of Charles Kitterbell, Esq., of a son.’

‘It *is* a boy!’ he exclaimed, dashing down the paper, to the astonishment of the waiters. ‘It *is* a boy!’ But he speedily regained his composure as his eye rested on a paragraph quoting the number of infant deaths from the bills of mortality.

Six weeks passed away, and as no communication had been received from the Kitterbells, Dumps was beginning to flatter himself that the child was dead, when the following note painfully resolved his doubts:—

‘*Great Russell-street,*
Monday morning.

> ‘Dear Uncle,—You will be delighted to hear that my dear Jemima has left her room, and that your future godson is getting on capitally. He was very thin at first, but he is getting much larger, and nurse says he is filling out every day. He cries a good deal, and is a very singular colour, which made Jemima and me rather uncomfortable; but as nurse says it’s natural, and as of course we know nothing about these things yet, we are quite satisfied with what nurse says. We think he will be a sharp child; and nurse says she’s sure he will, because he never goes to sleep. You will readily believe that we are all very happy, only we’re a little worn out for want of rest, as he keeps us awake all night; but this we must expect, nurse says, for the first six or eight months. He has been vaccinated, but in consequence of the operation being rather awkwardly performed, some small particles of glass were introduced into the arm with the matter. Perhaps this may in some degree account for his being rather fractious; at least, so nurse says. We propose to have him christened at twelve o’clock on Friday, at Saint George’s church, in Hart-street, by the name of Frederick Charles William. Pray don’t be later than a quarter before twelve. We shall have a very few friends in the evening, when of course we shall see you. I am sorry to say that the dear boy appears rather restless and uneasy to-day: the cause, I fear, is fever.

‘Believe me, dear Uncle,
‘Yours affectionately,
‘Charles Kitterbell.

> ‘P.S.—I open this note to say that we have just discovered the cause of little Frederick’s restlessness. It is not fever, as I

> apprehended, but a small pin, which nurse accidentally stuck in his leg yesterday evening. We have taken it out, and he appears more composed, though he still sobs a good deal.'

It is almost unnecessary to say that the perusal of the above interesting statement was no great relief to the mind of the hypochondriacal Dumps. It was impossible to recede, however, and so he put the best face—that is to say, an uncommonly miserable one—upon the matter; and purchased a handsome silver mug for the infant Kitterbell, upon which he ordered the initials 'F. C. W. K.,' with the customary untrained grape-vine-looking flourishes, and a large full stop, to be engraved forthwith.

Monday was a fine day, Tuesday was delightful, Wednesday was equal to either, and Thursday was finer than ever; four successive fine days in London! Hackney-coachmen became revolutionary, and crossing-sweepers began to doubt the existence of a First Cause. The *Morning Herald* informed its readers that an old woman in Camden Town had been heard to say that the fineness of the season was 'unprecedented in the memory of the oldest inhabitant;' and Islington clerks, with large families and small salaries, left off their black gaiters, disdained to carry their once green cotton umbrellas, and walked to town in the conscious pride of white stockings and cleanly brushed Bluchers. Dumps beheld all this with an eye of supreme contempt—his triumph was at hand. He knew that if it had been fine for four weeks instead of four days, it would rain when he went out; he was lugubriously happy in the conviction that Friday would be a wretched day—and so it was. 'I knew how it would be,' said Dumps, as he turned round opposite the Mansion-house at half-past eleven o'clock on the Friday morning. 'I knew how it would be. *I* am concerned, and that's enough;'—and certainly the appearance of the day was sufficient to depress the spirits of a much more buoyant-hearted individual than himself. It had rained, without a moment's cessation, since eight o'clock; everybody that passed up Cheapside, and down Cheapside, looked wet, cold, and dirty. All sorts of forgotten and long-concealed umbrellas had been put into requisition. Cabs whisked about, with the 'fare' as carefully boxed up behind two glazed calico curtains as any mysterious picture in any one of Mrs. Radcliffe's castles; omnibus horses smoked like steam-engines; nobody thought of 'standing up' under doorways or arches; they were painfully convinced it was a hopeless case; and so everybody went hastily along, jumbling and jostling, and swearing and perspiring, and slipping about, like amateur skaters behind wooden chairs on the Serpentine on a frosty Sunday.

Dumps paused; he could not think of walking, being rather smart for the christening. If he took a cab he was sure to be spilt, and a hackney-coach was too expensive for his economical ideas. An omnibus was waiting at the opposite corner—it was a desperate case—he had never heard of an omnibus upsetting or running away, and if the cad did knock him down, he could ‘pull him up’ in return.

‘Now, sir!’ cried the young gentleman who officiated as ‘cad’ to the ‘Lads of the Village,’ which was the name of the machine just noticed. Dumps crossed.

‘This vay, sir!’ shouted the driver of the ‘Hark-away,’ pulling up his vehicle immediately across the door of the opposition—‘This vay, sir—he’s full.’ Dumps hesitated, whereupon the ‘Lads of the Village’ commenced pouring out a torrent of abuse against the ‘Hark-away;’ but the conductor of the ‘Admiral Napier’ settled the contest in a most satisfactory manner, for all parties, by seizing Dumps round the waist, and thrusting him into the middle of his vehicle which had just come up and only wanted the sixteenth inside.

‘All right,’ said the ‘Admiral,’ and off the thing thundered, like a fire-engine at full gallop, with the kidnapped customer inside, standing in the position of a half doubled-up bootjack, and falling about with every jerk of the machine, first on the one side, and then on the other, like a ‘Jack-in-the-green,’ on May-day, setting to the lady with a brass ladle.

‘For Heaven’s sake, where am I to sit?’ inquired the miserable man of an old gentleman, into whose stomach he had just fallen for the fourth time.

‘Anywhere but on my *chest*, sir,’ replied the old gentleman in a surly tone.

‘Perhaps the *box* would suit the gentleman better,’ suggested a very damp lawyer’s clerk, in a pink shirt, and a smirking countenance.

After a great deal of struggling and falling about, Dumps at last managed to squeeze himself into a seat, which, in addition to the slight disadvantage of being between a window that would not shut, and a door that must be open, placed him in close contact with a passenger, who had been walking about all the morning without an umbrella, and who looked as if he had spent the day in a full water-butt—only wetter.

‘Don’t bang the door so,’ said Dumps to the conductor, as he shut it after letting out four of the passengers; I am very nervous—it destroys me.’

‘Did any gen’lm’n say anythink?’ replied the cad, thrusting in his head, and trying to look as if he didn’t understand the request.

‘I told you not to bang the door so!’ repeated Dumps, with an expression of countenance like the knave of clubs, in convulsions.

‘Oh! vy, it’s rather a sing’ler circumstance about this here door, sir, that it von’t shut without banging,’ replied the conductor; and he opened the door very wide, and shut it again with a terrific bang, in proof of the assertion.

‘I beg your pardon, sir,’ said a little prim, wheezing old gentleman, sitting opposite Dumps, ‘I beg your pardon; but have you ever observed, when you have been in an omnibus on a wet day, that four people out of five always come in with large cotton umbrellas, without a handle at the top, or the brass spike at the bottom?’

‘Why, sir,’ returned Dumps, as he heard the clock strike twelve, ‘it never struck me before; but now you mention it, I—Hollo! hollo!’ shouted the persecuted individual, as the omnibus dashed past Drury-lane, where he had directed to be set down.—‘Where is the cad?’

‘I think he’s on the box, sir,’ said the young gentleman before noticed in the pink shirt, which looked like a white one ruled with red ink.

‘I want to be set down!’ said Dumps in a faint voice, overcome by his previous efforts.

‘I think these cads want to be *set down*,’ returned the attorney’s clerk, chuckling at his sally.

‘Hollo!’ cried Dumps again.

‘Hollo!’ echoed the passengers. The omnibus passed St. Giles’s church.

‘Hold hard!’ said the conductor; ‘I’m blowed if we ha’n’t forgot the gen’lm’n as vas to be set down at Doory-lane.—Now, sir, make haste, if you please,’ he added, opening the door, and assisting Dumps out with as much coolness as if it was ‘all right.’ Dumps’s indignation was for once getting the better of his cynical equanimity. ‘Drury-lane!’ he gasped, with the voice of a boy in a cold bath for the first time.

‘Doory-lane, sir?—yes, sir,—third turning on the right-hand side, sir.’

Dumps’s passion was paramount: he clutched his umbrella, and was striding off with the firm determination of not paying the fare. The cad, by a remarkable coincidence, happened to entertain a directly contrary opinion, and Heaven knows how far the altercation would have proceeded, if it had not been most ably and satisfactorily brought to a close by the driver.

‘Hollo!’ said that respectable person, standing up on the box, and leaning with one hand on the roof of the omnibus. ‘Hollo, Tom! tell the gentleman if so be as he feels aggrieved, we will take him up to the Edge-er (Edgeware) Road for nothing, and set him down at Doory-lane when we comes back. He can’t reject that, anyhow.’

The argument was irresistible: Dumps paid the disputed sixpence, and in a quarter of an hour was on the staircase of No. 14, Great Russell-street.

Everything indicated that preparations were making for the reception of ‘a few friends’ in the evening. Two dozen extra tumblers, and four ditto wine-glasses—looking anything but transparent, with little bits of straw in them on the slab in the passage, just arrived. There was a great smell of nutmeg, port wine, and almonds, on the staircase; the covers were taken off the stair-carpet, and the figure of Venus on the first landing looked as if she were ashamed of the composition-candle in her right hand, which contrasted beautifully with the lamp-blacked drapery of the goddess of love. The female servant (who looked very warm and bustling) ushered Dumps into a front drawing-room, very prettily furnished, with a plentiful sprinkling of little baskets, paper table-mats, china watchmen, pink and gold albums, and rainbow-bound little books on the different tables.

‘Ah, uncle!’ said Mr. Kitterbell, ‘how d’ye do? Allow me—Jemima, my dear—my uncle. I think you’ve seen Jemima before, sir?’

‘Have had the *pleasure,*’ returned big Dumps, his tone and look making it doubtful whether in his life he had ever experienced the sensation.

‘I’m sure,’ said Mrs. Kitterbell, with a languid smile, and a slight cough. ‘I’m sure—hem—any friend—of Charles’s—hem—much less a relation, is—’

‘I knew you’d say so, my love,’ said little Kitterbell, who, while he appeared to be gazing on the opposite houses, was looking at his wife with a most affectionate air: ‘Bless you!’ The last two words were accompanied with a simper, and a squeeze of the hand, which stirred up all Uncle Dumps’s bile.

‘Jane, tell nurse to bring down baby,’ said Mrs. Kitterbell, addressing the servant. Mrs. Kitterbell was a tall, thin young lady, with very light hair, and a particularly white face—one of those young women who almost invariably, though one hardly knows why, recall to one’s mind the idea of a cold fillet of veal. Out went the servant, and in came the nurse, with a remarkably small parcel in her arms, packed up in a blue mantle trimmed with white fur.—This was the baby.

‘Now, uncle,’ said Mr. Kitterbell, lifting up that part of the mantle which covered the infant’s face, with an air of great triumph, ‘*Who* do you think he’s like?’

‘He! he! Yes, who?’ said Mrs. K., putting her arm through her husband’s, and looking up into Dumps’s face with an expression of as much interest as she was capable of displaying.

‘Good God, how small he is!’ cried the amiable uncle, starting back with well-feigned surprise; ‘*remarkably* small indeed.’

‘Do you think so?’ inquired poor little Kitterbell, rather alarmed. ‘He’s a monster to what he was—ain’t he, nurse?’

‘He’s a dear,’ said the nurse, squeezing the child, and evading the question—not because she scrupled to disguise the fact, but because she couldn’t afford to throw away the chance of Dumps’s half-crown.

‘Well, but who is he like?’ inquired little Kitterbell.

Dumps looked at the little pink heap before him, and only thought at the moment of the best mode of mortifying the youthful parents.

‘I really don’t know *who* he’s like,’ he answered, very well knowing the reply expected of him.

‘Don’t you think he’s like *me*?’ inquired his nephew with a knowing air.

‘Oh, *decidedly* not!’ returned Dumps, with an emphasis not to be misunderstood. ‘Decidedly not like you.—Oh, certainly not.’

‘Like Jemima?’ asked Kitterbell, faintly.

‘Oh, dear no; not in the least. I’m no judge, of course, in such cases; but I really think he’s more like one of those little carved representations that one sometimes sees blowing a trumpet on a tombstone!’ The nurse stooped down over the child, and with great difficulty prevented an explosion of mirth. Pa and ma looked almost as miserable as their amiable uncle.

‘Well!’ said the disappointed little father, ‘you’ll be better able to tell what he’s like by-and-by. You shall see him this evening with his mantle off.’

‘Thank you,’ said Dumps, feeling particularly grateful.

‘Now, my love,’ said Kitterbell to his wife, ‘it’s time we were off. We’re to meet the other godfather and the godmother at the church, uncle,

—Mr. and Mrs. Wilson from over the way—uncommonly nice people. My love, are you well wrapped up?'

'Yes, dear.'

'Are you sure you won't have another shawl?' inquired the anxious husband.

'No, sweet,' returned the charming mother, accepting Dumps's proffered arm; and the little party entered the hackney-coach that was to take them to the church; Dumps amusing Mrs. Kitterbell by expatiating largely on the danger of measles, thrush, teeth-cutting, and other interesting diseases to which children are subject.

The ceremony (which occupied about five minutes) passed off without anything particular occurring. The clergyman had to dine some distance from town, and had two churchings, three christenings, and a funeral to perform in something less than an hour. The godfathers and godmother, therefore, promised to renounce the devil and all his works—'and all that sort of thing'—as little Kitterbell said—'in less than no time;' and with the exception of Dumps nearly letting the child fall into the font when he handed it to the clergyman, the whole affair went off in the usual business-like and matter-of-course manner, and Dumps re-entered the Bank-gates at two o'clock with a heavy heart, and the painful conviction that he was regularly booked for an evening party.

Evening came—and so did Dumps's pumps, black silk stockings, and white cravat which he had ordered to be forwarded, per boy, from Pentonville. The depressed godfather dressed himself at a friend's counting-house, from whence, with his spirits fifty degrees below proof, he sallied forth—as the weather had cleared up, and the evening was tolerably fine—to walk to Great Russell-street. Slowly he paced up Cheapside, Newgate-street, down Snow-hill, and up Holborn ditto, looking as grim as the figure-head of a man-of-war, and finding out fresh causes of misery at every step. As he was crossing the corner of Hatton-garden, a man apparently intoxicated, rushed against him, and would have knocked him down, had he not been providentially caught by a very genteel young man, who happened to be close to him at the time. The shock so disarranged Dumps's nerves, as well as his dress, that he could hardly stand. The gentleman took his arm, and in the kindest manner walked with him as far as Furnival's Inn. Dumps, for about the first time in his life, felt grateful and polite; and he and the gentlemanly-looking young man parted with mutual expressions of good will.

‘There are at least some well-disposed men in the world,’ ruminated the misanthropical Dumps, as he proceeded towards his destination.

Rat—tat—ta-ra-ra-ra-ra-rat—knocked a hackney-coachman at Kitterbell’s door, in imitation of a gentleman’s servant, just as Dumps reached it; and out came an old lady in a large toque, and an old gentleman in a blue coat, and three female copies of the old lady in pink dresses, and shoes to match.

‘It’s a large party,’ sighed the unhappy godfather, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, and leaning against the area-railings. It was some time before the miserable man could muster up courage to knock at the door, and when he did, the smart appearance of a neighbouring greengrocer (who had been hired to wait for seven and sixpence, and whose calves alone were worth double the money), the lamp in the passage, and the Venus on the landing, added to the hum of many voices, and the sound of a harp and two violins, painfully convinced him that his surmises were but too well founded.

‘How are you?’ said little Kitterbell, in a greater bustle than ever, bolting out of the little back parlour with a cork-screw in his hand, and various particles of sawdust, looking like so many inverted commas, on his inexpressibles.

‘Good God!’ said Dumps, turning into the aforesaid parlour to put his shoes on, which he had brought in his coat-pocket, and still more appalled by the sight of seven fresh-drawn corks, and a corresponding number of decanters. ‘How many people are there up-stairs?’

‘Oh, not above thirty-five. We’ve had the carpet taken up in the back drawing-room, and the piano and the card-tables are in the front. Jemima thought we’d better have a regular sit-down supper in the front parlour, because of the speechifying, and all that. But, Lord! uncle, what’s the matter?’ continued the excited little man, as Dumps stood with one shoe on, rummaging his pockets with the most frightful distortion of visage. ‘What have you lost? Your pocket-book?’

‘No,’ returned Dumps, diving first into one pocket and then into the other, and speaking in a voice like Desdemona with the pillow over her mouth.

‘Your card-case? snuff-box? the key of your lodgings?’ continued Kitterbell, pouring question on question with the rapidity of lightning.

‘No! no!’ ejaculated Dumps, still diving eagerly into his empty pockets.

‘Not—not—the *mug* you spoke of this morning?’

‘Yes, the *mug*!’ replied Dumps, sinking into a chair.

‘How *could* you have done it?’ inquired Kitterbell. ‘Are you sure you brought it out?’

‘Yes! yes! I see it all!’ said Dumps, starting up as the idea flashed across his mind; ‘miserable dog that I am—I was born to suffer. I see it all: it was the gentlemanly-looking young man!’

‘Mr. Dumps!’ shouted the greengrocer in a stentorian voice, as he ushered the somewhat recovered godfather into the drawing-room half an hour after the above declaration. ‘Mr. Dumps!’—everybody looked at the door, and in came Dumps, feeling about as much out of place as a salmon might be supposed to be on a gravel-walk.

‘Happy to see you again,’ said Mrs. Kitterbell, quite unconscious of the unfortunate man’s confusion and misery; ‘you must allow me to introduce you to a few of our friends:—my mamma, Mr. Dumps—my papa and sisters.’ Dumps seized the hand of the mother as warmly as if she was his own parent, bowed *to* the young ladies, and *against* a gentleman behind him, and took no notice whatever of the father, who had been bowing incessantly for three minutes and a quarter.

‘Uncle,’ said little Kitterbell, after Dumps had been introduced to a select dozen or two, ‘you must let me lead you to the other end of the room, to introduce you to my friend Danton. Such a splendid fellow!—I’m sure you’ll like him—this way,’—Dumps followed as tractably as a tame bear.

Mr. Danton was a young man of about five-and-twenty, with a considerable stock of impudence, and a very small share of ideas: he was a great favourite, especially with young ladies of from sixteen to twenty-six years of age, both inclusive. He could imitate the French-horn to admiration, sang comic songs most inimitably, and had the most insinuating way of saying impertinent nothings to his doting female admirers. He had acquired, somehow or other, the reputation of being a great wit, and, accordingly, whenever he opened his mouth, everybody who knew him laughed very heartily.

The introduction took place in due form. Mr. Danton bowed, and twirled a lady’s handkerchief, which he held in his hand, in a most comic way. Everybody smiled.

'Very warm,' said Dumps, feeling it necessary to say something.

'Yes. It was warmer yesterday,' returned the brilliant Mr. Danton.—A general laugh.

'I have great pleasure in congratulating you on your first appearance in the character of a father, sir,' he continued, addressing Dumps—'godfather, I mean.'—The young ladies were convulsed, and the gentlemen in ecstasies.

A general hum of admiration interrupted the conversation, and announced the entrance of nurse with the baby. An universal rush of the young ladies immediately took place. (Girls are always *so* fond of babies in company.)

'Oh, you dear!' said one.

'How sweet!' cried another, in a low tone of the most enthusiastic admiration.

'Heavenly!' added a third.

'Oh! what dear little arms!' said a fourth, holding up an arm and fist about the size and shape of the leg of a fowl cleanly picked.

'Did you ever!'—said a little coquette with a large bustle, who looked like a French lithograph, appealing to a gentleman in three waistcoats—'Did you ever!'

'Never, in my life,' returned her admirer, pulling up his collar.

'Oh! *do* let me take it, nurse,' cried another young lady. 'The love!'

'Can it open its eyes, nurse?' inquired another, affecting the utmost innocence.—Suffice it to say, that the single ladies unanimously voted him an angel, and that the married ones, *nem. con.*, agreed that he was decidedly the finest baby they had ever beheld—except their own.

The quadrilles were resumed with great spirit. Mr. Danton was universally admitted to be beyond himself; several young ladies enchanted the company and gained admirers by singing 'We met'—'I saw her at the Fancy Fair'—and other equally sentimental and interesting ballads. 'The young men,' as Mrs. Kitterbell said, 'made themselves very agreeable;' the girls did not lose their opportunity; and the evening promised to go off excellently. Dumps didn't mind it: he had devised a plan for himself—a little bit of fun in his own way—and he was almost happy! He played a rubber and lost every point Mr. Danton said he could not have lost every point, because he made a point of losing: everybody laughed tremendously.

Dumps retorted with a better joke, and nobody smiled, with the exception of the host, who seemed to consider it his duty to laugh till he was black in the face, at everything. There was only one drawback—the musicians did not play with quite as much spirit as could have been wished. The cause, however, was satisfactorily explained; for it appeared, on the testimony of a gentleman who had come up from Gravesend in the afternoon, that they had been engaged on board a steamer all day, and had played almost without cessation all the way to Gravesend, and all the way back again.

The 'sit-down supper' was excellent; there were four barley-sugar temples on the table, which would have looked beautiful if they had not melted away when the supper began; and a water-mill, whose only fault was that instead of going round, it ran over the table-cloth. Then there were fowls, and tongue, and trifle, and sweets, and lobster salad, and potted beef—and everything. And little Kitterbell kept calling out for clean plates, and the clean plates did not come: and then the gentlemen who wanted the plates said they didn't mind, they'd take a lady's; and then Mrs. Kitterbell applauded their gallantry, and the greengrocer ran about till he thought his seven and sixpence was very hardly earned; and the young ladies didn't eat much for fear it shouldn't look romantic, and the married ladies eat as much as possible, for fear they shouldn't have enough; and a great deal of wine was drunk, and everybody talked and laughed considerably.

'Hush! hush!' said Mr. Kitterbell, rising and looking very important. 'My love (this was addressed to his wife at the other end of the table), take care of Mrs. Maxwell, and your mamma, and the rest of the married ladies; the gentlemen will persuade the young ladies to fill their glasses, I am sure.'

'Ladies and gentlemen,' said long Dumps, in a very sepulchral voice and rueful accent, rising from his chair like the ghost in Don Juan, 'will you have the kindness to charge your glasses? I am desirous of proposing a toast.'

A dead silence ensued, and the glasses were filled—everybody looked serious.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' slowly continued the ominous Dumps, 'I'—(here Mr. Danton imitated two notes from the French-horn, in a very loud key, which electrified the nervous toast-proposer, and convulsed his audience).

'Order! order!' said little Kitterbell, endeavouring to suppress his laughter.

‘Order!’ said the gentlemen.

‘Danton, be quiet,’ said a particular friend on the opposite side of the table.

‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ resumed Dumps, somewhat recovered, and not much disconcerted, for he was always a pretty good hand at a speech—‘In accordance with what is, I believe, the established usage on these occasions, I, as one of the godfathers of Master Frederick Charles William Kitterbell—(here the speaker’s voice faltered, for he remembered the mug)—venture to rise to propose a toast. I need hardly say that it is the health and prosperity of that young gentleman, the particular event of whose early life we are here met to celebrate—(applause). Ladies and gentlemen, it is impossible to suppose that our friends here, whose sincere well-wishers we all are, can pass through life without some trials, considerable suffering, severe affliction, and heavy losses!’—Here the arch-traitor paused, and slowly drew forth a long, white pocket-handkerchief—his example was followed by several ladies. ‘That these trials may be long spared them is my most earnest prayer, my most fervent wish (a distinct sob from the grandmother). I hope and trust, ladies and gentlemen, that the infant whose christening we have this evening met to celebrate, may not be removed from the arms of his parents by premature decay (several cambrics were in requisition): that his young and now *apparently* healthy form, may not be wasted by lingering disease. (Here Dumps cast a sardonic glance around, for a great sensation was manifest among the married ladies.) You, I am sure, will concur with me in wishing that he may live to be a comfort and a blessing to his parents. (“Hear, hear!” and an audible sob from Mr. Kitterbell.) But should he not be what we could wish—should he forget in after times the duty which he owes to them—should they unhappily experience that distracting truth, “how sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is to have a thankless child”’—Here Mrs. Kitterbell, with her handkerchief to her eyes, and accompanied by several ladies, rushed from the room, and went into violent hysterics in the passage, leaving her better half in almost as bad a condition, and a general impression in Dumps’s favour; for people like sentiment, after all.

It need hardly be added, that this occurrence quite put a stop to the harmony of the evening. Vinegar, hartshorn, and cold water, were now as much in request as negus, rout-cakes, and *bon-bons* had been a short time before. Mrs. Kitterbell was immediately conveyed to her apartment, the musicians were silenced, flirting ceased, and the company slowly departed. Dumps left the house at the commencement of the bustle, and walked home with a light step, and (for him) a cheerful heart. His landlady, who slept in the next room, has offered to make oath that she heard him laugh, in his peculiar manner, after he had locked his door. The assertion, however, is so improbable, and bears on the face of it such strong evidence of untruth, that it has never obtained credence to this hour.

The family of Mr. Kitterbell has considerably increased since the period to which we have referred; he has now two sons and a daughter; and as he expects, at no distant period, to have another addition to his blooming progeny, he is anxious to secure an eligible godfather for the occasion. He is determined, however, to impose upon him two conditions. He must bind himself, by a solemn obligation, not to make any speech after supper; and it is indispensable that he should be in no way connected with 'the most miserable man in the world.'

CHAPTER XII—THE DRUNKARD'S DEATH

We will be bold to say, that there is scarcely a man in the constant habit of walking, day after day, through any of the crowded thoroughfares of London, who cannot recollect among the people whom he 'knows by sight,' to use a familiar phrase, some being of abject and wretched appearance whom he remembers to have seen in a very different condition, whom he has observed sinking lower and lower, by almost imperceptible degrees, and the shabbiness and utter destitution of whose appearance, at last, strike forcibly and painfully upon him, as he passes by. Is there any man who has mixed much with society, or whose avocations have caused him to mingle, at one time or other, with a great number of people, who cannot call to mind the time when some shabby, miserable wretch, in rags and filth, who shuffles past him now in all the squalor of disease and poverty, with a respectable tradesman, or clerk, or a man following some thriving pursuit, with good prospects, and decent means?—or cannot any of our readers call to mind from among the list of their *quondam* acquaintance, some fallen and degraded man, who lingers about the pavement in hungry misery—from whom every one turns coldly away, and who preserves himself from sheer starvation, nobody knows how? Alas! such cases are of too frequent occurrence to be rare items in any man's experience; and but too often arise from one cause—drunkenness—that fierce rage for the slow, sure poison, that oversteps every other consideration; that casts aside wife, children, friends, happiness, and station; and hurries its victims madly on to degradation and death.

Some of these men have been impelled, by misfortune and misery, to the vice that has degraded them. The ruin of worldly expectations, the death of those they loved, the sorrow that slowly consumes, but will not break the heart, has driven them wild; and they present the hideous spectacle of madmen, slowly dying by their own hands. But by far the greater part have wilfully, and with open eyes, plunged into the gulf from which the man who once enters it never rises more, but into which he sinks deeper and deeper down, until recovery is hopeless.

Such a man as this once stood by the bedside of his dying wife, while his children knelt around, and mingled loud bursts of grief with their innocent prayers. The room was scantily and meanly furnished; and it needed but a glance at the pale form from which the light of life was fast passing away, to know that grief, and want, and anxious care, had been busy at the heart for many a weary year. An elderly woman, with her face bathed in tears, was supporting the head of the dying woman—her daughter—on her arm. But it was not towards her that the was face turned; it was not her hand that the cold and trembling fingers clasped; they pressed the husband's arm; the eyes so soon to be closed in death rested on his face, and the man shook beneath their gaze. His dress was slovenly and disordered, his face inflamed, his eyes bloodshot and heavy. He had been summoned from some wild debauch to the bed of sorrow and death.

A shaded lamp by the bed-side cast a dim light on the figures around, and left the remainder of the room in thick, deep shadow. The silence of night prevailed without the house, and the stillness of death was in the chamber. A watch hung over the mantel-shelf; its low ticking was the only sound that broke the profound quiet, but it was a solemn one, for well they knew, who heard it, that before it had recorded the passing of another hour, it would beat the knell of a departed spirit.

It is a dreadful thing to wait and watch for the approach of death; to know that hope is gone, and recovery impossible; and to sit and count the dreary hours through long, long nights—such nights as only watchers by the bed of sickness know. It chills the blood to hear the dearest secrets of the heart—the pent-up, hidden secrets of many years—poured forth by the unconscious, helpless being before you; and to think how little the reserve and cunning of a whole life will avail, when fever and delirium tear off the mask at last. Strange tales have been told in the wanderings of dying men; tales so full of guilt and crime, that those who stood by the sick person's couch have fled in horror and affright, lest they should be scared to madness by what they heard and saw; and many a wretch has died alone, raving of deeds the very name of which has driven the boldest man away.

But no such ravings were to be heard at the bed-side by which the children knelt. Their half-stifled sobs and moaning alone broke the silence of the lonely chamber. And when at last the mother's grasp relaxed, and, turning one look from the children to the father, she vainly strove to speak, and fell backward on the pillow, all was so calm and tranquil that she seemed to sink to sleep. They leant over her; they called upon her name, softly at first, and then in the loud and piercing tones of desperation. But there was no reply. They listened for her breath, but no sound came. They felt for the palpitation of the heart, but no faint throb responded to the touch. That heart was broken, and she was dead!

The husband sunk into a chair by the bed-side, and clasped his hands upon his burning forehead. He gazed from child to child, but when a weeping eye met his, he quailed beneath its look. No word of comfort was whispered in his ear, no look of kindness lighted on his face. All shrunk from and avoided him; and when at last he staggered from the room, no one sought to follow or console the widower.

The time had been when many a friend would have crowded round him in his affliction, and many a heartfelt condolence would have met him in his grief. Where were they now? One by one, friends, relations, the commonest acquaintance even, had fallen off from and deserted the drunkard. His wife alone had clung to him in good and evil, in sickness and poverty, and how had he rewarded her? He had reeled from the tavern to her bed-side in time to see her die.

He rushed from the house, and walked swiftly through the streets. Remorse, fear, shame, all crowded on his mind. Stupefied with drink, and bewildered with the scene he had just witnessed, he re-entered the tavern he had quitted shortly before. Glass succeeded glass. His blood mounted, and his brain whirled round. Death! Every one must die, and why not *she*? She was too good for him; her relations had often told him so. Curses on them! Had they not deserted her, and left her to whine away the time at home? Well—she was dead, and happy perhaps. It was better as it was. Another glass—one more! Hurrah! It was a merry life while it lasted; and he would make the most of it.

Time went on; the three children who were left to him, grew up, and were children no longer. The father remained the same—poorer, shabbier, and more dissolute-looking, but the same confirmed and irreclaimable drunkard. The boys had, long ago, run wild in the streets, and left him; the girl alone remained, but she worked hard, and words or blows could always procure him something for the tavern. So he went on in the old course, and a merry life he led.

One night, as early as ten o’clock—for the girl had been sick for many days, and there was, consequently, little to spend at the public-house—he bent his steps homeward, bethinking himself that if he would have her able to earn money, it would be as well to apply to the parish surgeon, or, at all events, to take the trouble of inquiring what ailed her, which he had not yet thought it worth while to do. It was a wet December night; the wind blew piercing cold, and the rain poured heavily down. He begged a few halfpence from a passer-by, and having bought a small loaf (for it was his interest to keep the girl alive, if he could), he shuffled onwards as fast as the wind and rain would let him.

At the back of Fleet-street, and lying between it and the water-side, are several mean and narrow courts, which form a portion of Whitefriars: it was to one of these that he directed his steps.

The alley into which he turned, might, for filth and misery, have competed with the darkest corner of this ancient sanctuary in its dirtiest and most lawless time. The houses, varying from two stories in height to four, were stained with every indescribable hue that long exposure to the weather, damp, and rottenness can impart to tenements composed originally of the roughest and coarsest materials. The windows were patched with paper, and stuffed with the foulest rags; the doors were falling from their hinges; poles with lines on which to dry clothes, projected from every casement, and sounds of quarrelling or drunkenness issued from every room.

The solitary oil lamp in the centre of the court had been blown out, either by the violence of the wind or the act of some inhabitant who had excellent reasons for objecting to his residence being rendered too conspicuous; and the only light which fell upon the broken and uneven pavement, was derived from the miserable candles that here and there twinkled in the rooms of such of the more fortunate residents as could afford to indulge in so expensive a luxury. A gutter ran down the centre of the alley—all the sluggish odours of which had been called forth by the rain; and as the wind whistled through the old houses, the doors and shutters creaked upon their hinges, and the windows shook in their frames, with a violence which every moment seemed to threaten the destruction of the whole place.

The man whom we have followed into this den, walked on in the darkness, sometimes stumbling into the main gutter, and at others into some branch repositories of garbage which had been formed by the rain, until he reached the last house in the court. The door, or rather what was left of it, stood ajar, for the convenience of the numerous lodgers; and he proceeded to grope his way up the old and broken stair, to the attic story.

He was within a step or two of his room door, when it opened, and a girl, whose miserable and emaciated appearance was only to be equalled by that of the candle which she shaded with her hand, peeped anxiously out.

‘Is that you, father?’ said the girl.

‘Who else should it be?’ replied the man gruffly. ‘What are you trembling at? It’s little enough that I’ve had to drink to-day, for there’s no drink without money, and no money without work. What the devil’s the matter with the girl?’

‘I am not well, father—not at all well,’ said the girl, bursting into tears.

‘Ah!’ replied the man, in the tone of a person who is compelled to admit a very unpleasant fact, to which he would rather remain blind, if he could. ‘You must get better somehow, for we must have money. You must go to the parish doctor, and make him give you some medicine. They’re paid for it, damn ’em. What are you standing before the door for? Let me come in, can’t you?’

‘Father,’ whispered the girl, shutting the door behind her, and placing herself before it, ‘William has come back.’

‘Who!’ said the man with a start.

‘Hush,’ replied the girl, ‘William; brother William.’

‘And what does he want?’ said the man, with an effort at composure—‘money? meat? drink? He’s come to the wrong shop for that, if he does.

Give me the candle—give me the candle, fool—I ain't going to hurt him.' He snatched the candle from her hand, and walked into the room.

Sitting on an old box, with his head resting on his hand, and his eyes fixed on a wretched cinder fire that was smouldering on the hearth, was a young man of about two-and-twenty, miserably clad in an old coarse jacket and trousers. He started up when his father entered.

'Fasten the door, Mary,' said the young man hastily—'Fasten the door. You look as if you didn't know me, father. It's long enough, since you drove me from home; you may well forget me.'

'And what do you want here, now?' said the father, seating himself on a stool, on the other side of the fireplace. 'What do you want here, now?'

'Shelter,' replied the son. 'I'm in trouble: that's enough. If I'm caught I shall swing; that's certain. Caught I shall be, unless I stop here; that's *as* certain. And there's an end of it.'

'You mean to say, you've been robbing, or murdering, then?' said the father.

'Yes, I do,' replied the son. 'Does it surprise you, father?' He looked steadily in the man's face, but he withdrew his eyes, and bent them on the ground.

'Where's your brothers?' he said, after a long pause.

'Where they'll never trouble you,' replied his son: 'John's gone to America, and Henry's dead.'

'Dead!' said the father, with a shudder, which even he could not express.

'Dead,' replied the young man. 'He died in my arms—shot like a dog, by a gamekeeper. He staggered back, I caught him, and his blood trickled down my hands. It poured out from his side like water. He was weak, and it blinded him, but he threw himself down on his knees, on the grass, and prayed to God, that if his mother was in heaven, He would hear her prayers for pardon for her youngest son. "I was her favourite boy, Will," he said, "and I am glad to think, now, that when she was dying, though I was a very young child then, and my little heart was almost bursting, I knelt down at the foot of the bed, and thanked God for having made me so fond of her as to have never once done anything to bring the tears into her eyes. O Will, why was she taken away, and father left?" There's his dying words, father,' said the young man; 'make the best you can of 'em. You struck him across the face, in a drunken fit, the morning we ran away; and here’s the end of it.’

The girl wept aloud; and the father, sinking his head upon his knees, rocked himself to and fro.

‘If I am taken,’ said the young man, ‘I shall be carried back into the country, and hung for that man’s murder. They cannot trace me here, without your assistance, father. For aught I know, you may give me up to justice; but unless you do, here I stop, until I can venture to escape abroad.’

For two whole days, all three remained in the wretched room, without stirring out. On the third evening, however, the girl was worse than she had been yet, and the few scraps of food they had were gone. It was indispensably necessary that somebody should go out; and as the girl was too weak and ill, the father went, just at nightfall.

He got some medicine for the girl, and a trifle in the way of pecuniary assistance. On his way back, he earned sixpence by holding a horse; and he turned homewards with enough money to supply their most pressing wants for two or three days to come. He had to pass the public-house. He lingered for an instant, walked past it, turned back again, lingered once more, and finally slunk in. Two men whom he had not observed, were on the watch. They were on the point of giving up their search in despair, when his loitering attracted their attention; and when he entered the public-house, they followed him.

‘You’ll drink with me, master,’ said one of them, proffering him a glass of liquor.

‘And me too,’ said the other, replenishing the glass as soon as it was drained of its contents.

The man thought of his hungry children, and his son’s danger. But they were nothing to the drunkard. He *did* drink; and his reason left him.

‘A wet night, Warden,’ whispered one of the men in his ear, as he at length turned to go away, after spending in liquor one-half of the money on which, perhaps, his daughter’s life depended.

‘The right sort of night for our friends in hiding, Master Warden,’ whispered the other.

‘Sit down here,’ said the one who had spoken first, drawing him into a corner. ‘We have been looking arter the young un. We came to tell him, it’s all right now, but we couldn’t find him ’cause we hadn’t got the precise direction. But that ain't strange, for I don't think he know'd it himself, when he come to London, did he?'

'No, he didn't,' replied the father.

The two men exchanged glances.

'There's a vessel down at the docks, to sail at midnight, when it's high water,' resumed the first speaker, 'and we'll put him on board. His passage is taken in another name, and what's better than that, it's paid for. It's lucky we met you.'

'Very,' said the second.

'Capital luck,' said the first, with a wink to his companion.

'Great,' replied the second, with a slight nod of intelligence.

'Another glass here; quick'—said the first speaker. And in five minutes more, the father had unconsciously yielded up his own son into the hangman's hands.

Slowly and heavily the time dragged along, as the brother and sister, in their miserable hiding-place, listened in anxious suspense to the slightest sound. At length, a heavy footstep was heard upon the stair; it approached nearer; it reached the landing; and the father staggered into the room.

The girl saw that he was intoxicated, and advanced with the candle in her hand to meet him; she stopped short, gave a loud scream, and fell senseless on the ground. She had caught sight of the shadow of a man reflected on the floor. They both rushed in, and in another instant the young man was a prisoner, and handcuffed.

'Very quietly done,' said one of the men to his companion, 'thanks to the old man. Lift up the girl, Tom—come, come, it's no use crying, young woman. It's all over now, and can't be helped.'

The young man stooped for an instant over the girl, and then turned fiercely round upon his father, who had reeled against the wall, and was gazing on the group with drunken stupidity.

'Listen to me, father,' he said, in a tone that made the drunkard's flesh creep. 'My brother's blood, and mine, is on your head: I never had kind look, or word, or care, from you, and alive or dead, I never will forgive you. Die when you will, or how, I will be with you. I speak as a dead man now, and I warn you, father, that as surely as you must one day stand before your Maker, so surely shall your children be there, hand in hand, to cry for judgment against you.' He raised his manacled hands in a threatening attitude, fixed his eyes on his shrinking parent, and slowly left the room; and neither father nor sister ever beheld him more, on this side of the grave.

When the dim and misty light of a winter’s morning penetrated into the narrow court, and struggled through the begrimed window of the wretched room, Warden awoke from his heavy sleep, and found himself alone. He rose, and looked round him; the old flock mattress on the floor was undisturbed; everything was just as he remembered to have seen it last: and there were no signs of any one, save himself, having occupied the room during the night. He inquired of the other lodgers, and of the neighbours; but his daughter had not been seen or heard of. He rambled through the streets, and scrutinised each wretched face among the crowds that thronged them, with anxious eyes. But his search was fruitless, and he returned to his garret when night came on, desolate and weary.

For many days he occupied himself in the same manner, but no trace of his daughter did he meet with, and no word of her reached his ears. At length he gave up the pursuit as hopeless. He had long thought of the probability of her leaving him, and endeavouring to gain her bread in quiet, elsewhere. She had left him at last to starve alone. He ground his teeth, and cursed her!

He begged his bread from door to door. Every halfpenny he could wring from the pity or credulity of those to whom he addressed himself, was spent in the old way. A year passed over his head; the roof of a jail was the only one that had sheltered him for many months. He slept under archways, and in brickfields—anywhere, where there was some warmth or shelter from the cold and rain. But in the last stage of poverty, disease, and houseless want, he was a drunkard still.

At last, one bitter night, he sunk down on a door-step faint and ill. The premature decay of vice and profligacy had worn him to the bone. His cheeks were hollow and livid; his eyes were sunken, and their sight was dim. His legs trembled beneath his weight, and a cold shiver ran through every limb.

And now the long-forgotten scenes of a misspent life crowded thick and fast upon him. He thought of the time when he had a home—a happy, cheerful home—and of those who peopled it, and flocked about him then, until the forms of his elder children seemed to rise from the grave, and stand about him—so plain, so clear, and so distinct they were that he could touch and feel them. Looks that he had long forgotten were fixed upon him once more; voices long since hushed in death sounded in his ears like the music of village bells. But it was only for an instant. The rain beat heavily upon him; and cold and hunger were gnawing at his heart again.

He rose, and dragged his feeble limbs a few paces further. The street was silent and empty; the few passengers who passed by, at that late hour, hurried quickly on, and his tremulous voice was lost in the violence of the storm. Again that heavy chill struck through his frame, and his blood seemed to stagnate beneath it. He coiled himself up in a projecting doorway, and tried to sleep.

But sleep had fled from his dull and glazed eyes. His mind wandered strangely, but he was awake, and conscious. The well-known shout of drunken mirth sounded in his ear, the glass was at his lips, the board was covered with choice rich food—they were before him: he could see them all, he had but to reach out his hand, and take them—and, though the illusion was reality itself, he knew that he was sitting alone in the deserted street, watching the rain-drops as they pattered on the stones; that death was coming upon him by inches—and that there were none to care for or help him.

Suddenly he started up, in the extremity of terror. He had heard his own voice shouting in the night air, he knew not what, or why. Hark! A groan!—another! His senses were leaving him: half-formed and incoherent words burst from his lips; and his hands sought to tear and lacerate his flesh. He was going mad, and he shrieked for help till his voice failed him.

He raised his head, and looked up the long dismal street. He recollected that outcasts like himself, condemned to wander day and night in those dreadful streets, had sometimes gone distracted with their own loneliness. He remembered to have heard many years before that a homeless wretch had once been found in a solitary corner, sharpening a rusty knife to plunge into his own heart, preferring death to that endless, weary, wandering to and fro. In an instant his resolve was taken, his limbs received new life; he ran quickly from the spot, and paused not for breath until he reached the river-side.

He crept softly down the steep stone stairs that lead from the commencement of Waterloo Bridge, down to the water's level. He crouched into a corner, and held his breath, as the patrol passed. Never did prisoner's heart throb with the hope of liberty and life half so eagerly as did that of the wretched man at the prospect of death. The watch passed close to him, but he remained unobserved; and after waiting till the sound of footsteps had died away in the distance, he cautiously descended, and stood beneath the gloomy arch that forms the landing-place from the river.

The tide was in, and the water flowed at his feet. The rain had ceased, the wind was lulled, and all was, for the moment, still and quiet—so quiet, that the slightest sound on the opposite bank, even the rippling of the water against the barges that were moored there, was distinctly audible to his ear. The stream stole languidly and sluggishly on. Strange and fantastic forms rose to the surface, and beckoned him to approach; dark gleaming eyes peered from the water, and seemed to mock his hesitation, while hollow murmurs from behind, urged him onwards. He retreated a few paces, took a short run, desperate leap, and plunged into the river.

Not five seconds had passed when he rose to the water's surface—but what a change had taken place in that short time, in all his thoughts and feelings! Life—life in any form, poverty, misery, starvation—anything but death. He fought and struggled with the water that closed over his head, and screamed in agonies of terror. The curse of his own son rang in his ears. The shore—but one foot of dry ground—he could almost touch the step. One hand's breadth nearer, and he was saved—but the tide bore him onward, under the dark arches of the bridge, and he sank to the bottom.

Again he rose, and struggled for life. For one instant—for one brief instant—the buildings on the river's banks, the lights on the bridge through which the current had borne him, the black water, and the fast-flying clouds, were distinctly visible—once more he sunk, and once again he rose. Bright flames of fire shot up from earth to heaven, and reeled before his eyes, while the water thundered in his ears, and stunned him with its furious roar.

A week afterwards the body was washed ashore, some miles down the river, a swollen and disfigured mass. Unrecognised and unpitied, it was borne to the grave; and there it has long since mouldered away!

SKETCHES OF YOUNG GENTLEMEN

TO THE YOUNG LADIES
of the
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland;
also
THE YOUNG LADIES
of
the principality of wales,
and likewise
THE YOUNG LADIES
resident in the isles of
guernsey, jersey, alderney, and sark,
the humble dedication of their devoted admirer,

Sheweth,—

That your Dedicator has perused, with feelings of virtuous indignation, a work purporting to be ‘Sketches of Young Ladies;’ written by Quiz, illustrated by Phiz, and published in one volume, square twelvemo.

That after an attentive and vigilant perusal of the said work, your Dedicator is humbly of opinion that so many libels, upon your Honourable sex, were never contained in any previously published work, in twelvemo or any other mo.

That in the title page and preface to the said work, your Honourable sex are described and classified as animals; and although your Dedicator is not at present prepared to deny that you *are* animals, still he humbly submits that it is not polite to call you so.

That in the aforesaid preface, your Honourable sex are also described as Troglodites, which, being a hard word, may, for aught your Honourable sex or your Dedicator can say to the contrary, be an injurious and disrespectful appellation.

That the author of the said work applied himself to his task in malice prepense and with wickedness aforethought; a fact which, your Dedicator contends, is sufficiently demonstrated, by his assuming the name of Quiz, which, your Dedicator submits, denotes a foregone conclusion, and implies an intention of quizzing.

That in the execution of his evil design, the said Quiz, or author of the said work, must have betrayed some trust or confidence reposed in him by some members of your Honourable sex, otherwise he never could have acquired so much information relative to the manners and customs of your Honourable sex in general.

That actuated by these considerations, and further moved by various slanders and insinuations respecting your Honourable sex contained in the said work, square twelvemo, entitled ‘Sketches of Young Ladies,’ your Dedicator ventures to produce another work, square twelvemo, entitled ‘Sketches of Young Gentlemen,’ of which he now solicits your acceptance and approval.

That as the Young Ladies are the best companions of the Young Gentlemen, so the Young Gentlemen should be the best companions of the Young Ladies; and extending the comparison from animals (to quote the disrespectful language of the said Quiz) to inanimate objects, your Dedicator humbly suggests, that such of your Honourable sex as purchased the bane should possess themselves of the antidote, and that those of your Honourable sex who were not rash enough to take the first, should lose no time in swallowing the last,—prevention being in all cases better than cure, as we are informed upon the authority, not only of general acknowledgment, but also of traditionary wisdom.

That with reference to the said bane and antidote, your Dedicator has no further remarks to make, than are comprised in the printed directions issued with Doctor Morison’s pills; namely, that whenever your Honourable sex take twenty-five of Number, 1, you will be pleased to take fifty of Number 2, without delay.

And your Dedicator shall ever pray, &c.

THE BASHFUL YOUNG GENTLEMAN

We found ourself seated at a small dinner party the other day, opposite a stranger of such singular appearance and manner, that he irresistibly attracted our attention.

This was a fresh-coloured young gentleman, with as good a promise of light whisker as one might wish to see, and possessed of a very velvet-like, soft-looking countenance. We do not use the latter term invidiously, but merely to denote a pair of smooth, plump, highly-coloured cheeks of capacious dimensions, and a mouth rather remarkable for the fresh hue of the lips than for any marked or striking expression it presented. His whole face was suffused with a crimson blush, and bore that downcast, timid, retiring look, which betokens a man ill at ease with himself.

There was nothing in these symptoms to attract more than a passing remark, but our attention had been originally drawn to the bashful young gentleman, on his first appearance in the drawing-room above-stairs, into which he was no sooner introduced, than making his way towards us who were standing in a window, and wholly neglecting several persons who warmly accosted him, he seized our hand with visible emotion, and pressed it with a convulsive grasp for a good couple of minutes, after which he dived in a nervous manner across the room, oversetting in his way a fine little girl of six years and a quarter old—and shrouding himself behind some hangings, was seen no more, until the eagle eye of the hostess detecting him in his concealment, on the announcement of dinner, he was requested to pair off with a lively single lady, of two or three and thirty.

This most flattering salutation from a perfect stranger, would have gratified us not a little as a token of his having held us in high respect, and for that reason been desirous of our acquaintance, if we had not suspected from the first, that the young gentleman, in making a desperate effort to get through the ceremony of introduction, had, in the bewilderment of his ideas, shaken hands with us at random. This impression was fully confirmed by the subsequent behaviour of the bashful young gentleman in question, which we noted particularly, with the view of ascertaining whether we were right in our conjecture.

The young gentleman seated himself at table with evident misgivings, and turning sharp round to pay attention to some observation of his loquacious neighbour, overset his bread. There was nothing very bad in this, and if he had had the presence of mind to let it go, and say nothing about it, nobody but the man who had laid the cloth would have been a bit the wiser; but the young gentleman in various semi-successful attempts to prevent its fall, played with it a little, as gentlemen in the streets may be seen to do with their hats on a windy day, and then giving the roll a smart rap in his anxiety to catch it, knocked it with great adroitness into a tureen of white soup at some distance, to the unspeakable terror and disturbance of a very amiable bald gentleman, who was dispensing the contents. We thought the bashful young gentleman would have gone off in an apoplectic fit, consequent upon the violent rush of blood to his face at the occurrence of this catastrophe.

From this moment we perceived, in the phraseology of the fancy, that it was ‘all up’ with the bashful young gentleman, and so indeed it was. Several benevolent persons endeavoured to relieve his embarrassment by taking wine with him, but finding that it only augmented his sufferings, and that after mingling sherry, champagne, hock, and moselle together, he applied the greater part of the mixture externally, instead of internally, they gradually dropped off, and left him to the exclusive care of the talkative lady, who, not noting the wildness of his eye, firmly believed she had secured a listener. He broke a glass or two in the course of the meal, and disappeared shortly afterwards; it is inferred that he went away in some confusion, inasmuch as he left the house in another gentleman’s coat, and the footman’s hat.

This little incident led us to reflect upon the most prominent characteristics of bashful young gentlemen in the abstract; and as this portable volume will be the great text-book of young ladies in all future generations, we record them here for their guidance and behoof.

If the bashful young gentleman, in turning a street corner, chance to stumble suddenly upon two or three young ladies of his acquaintance, nothing can exceed his confusion and agitation. His first impulse is to make a great variety of bows, and dart past them, which he does until, observing that they wish to stop, but are uncertain whether to do so or not, he makes several feints of returning, which causes them to do the same; and at length, after a great quantity of unnecessary dodging and falling up against the other passengers, he returns and shakes hands most affectionately with all of them, in doing which he knocks out of their grasp sundry little parcels, which he hastily picks up, and returns very muddy and disordered. The chances are that the bashful young gentleman then observes it is very fine weather, and being reminded that it has only just left off raining for the first time these three days, he blushes very much, and smiles as if he had said a very good thing. The young lady who was most anxious to speak, here inquires, with an air of great commiseration, how his dear sister Harriet is to-day; to which the young gentleman, without the slightest consideration, replies with many thanks, that she is remarkably well. ‘Well, Mr. Hopkins!’ cries the young lady, ‘why, we heard she was bled yesterday evening, and have been perfectly miserable about her.' 'Oh, ah,' says the young gentleman, 'so she was. Oh, she's very ill, very ill indeed.' The young gentleman then shakes his head, and looks very desponding (he has been smiling perpetually up to this time), and after a short pause, gives his glove a great wrench at the wrist, and says, with a strong emphasis on the adjective, '*Good* morning, *good* morning.' And making a great number of bows in acknowledgment of several little messages to his sister, walks backward a few paces, and comes with great violence against a lamp-post, knocking his hat off in the contact, which in his mental confusion and bodily pain he is going to walk away without, until a great roar from a carter attracts his attention, when he picks it up, and tries to smile cheerfully to the young ladies, who are looking back, and who, he has the satisfaction of seeing, are all laughing heartily.

At a quadrille party, the bashful young gentleman always remains as near the entrance of the room as possible, from which position he smiles at the people he knows as they come in, and sometimes steps forward to shake hands with more intimate friends: a process which on each repetition seems to turn him a deeper scarlet than before. He declines dancing the first set or two, observing, in a faint voice, that he would rather wait a little; but at length is absolutely compelled to allow himself to be introduced to a partner, when he is led, in a great heat and blushing furiously, across the room to a spot where half-a-dozen unknown ladies are congregated together.

'Miss Lambert, let me introduce Mr. Hopkins for the next quadrille.' Miss Lambert inclines her head graciously. Mr. Hopkins bows, and his fair conductress disappears, leaving Mr. Hopkins, as he too well knows, to make himself agreeable. The young lady more than half expects that the bashful young gentleman will say something, and the bashful young gentleman feeling this, seriously thinks whether he has got anything to say, which, upon mature reflection, he is rather disposed to conclude he has not, since nothing occurs to him. Meanwhile, the young lady, after several inspections of her *bouquet*, all made in the expectation that the bashful young gentleman is going to talk, whispers her mamma, who is sitting next her, which whisper the bashful young gentleman immediately suspects (and possibly with very good reason) must be about *him*. In this comfortable condition he remains until it is time to 'stand up,' when murmuring a 'Will you allow me?' he gives the young lady his arm, and after inquiring where she will stand, and receiving a reply that she has no choice, conducts her to the remotest corner of the quadrille, and making one attempt at conversation, which turns out a desperate failure, preserves a profound silence until it is all over, when he walks her twice round the room, deposits her in her old seat, and retires in confusion.

A married bashful gentleman—for these bashful gentlemen do get married sometimes; how it is ever brought about, is a mystery to us—a married bashful gentleman either causes his wife to appear bold by contrast, or merges her proper importance in his own insignificance. Bashful young gentlemen should be cured, or avoided. They are never hopeless, and never will be, while female beauty and attractions retain their influence, as any young lady will find, who may think it worth while on this confident assurance to take a patient in hand.

THE OUT-AND-OUT YOUNG GENTLEMAN

Out-and-out young gentlemen may be divided into two classes—those who have something to do, and those who have nothing. I shall commence with the former, because that species come more frequently under the notice of young ladies, whom it is our province to warn and to instruct.

The out-and-out young gentleman is usually no great dresser, his instructions to his tailor being all comprehended in the one general direction to ‘make that what’s-a-name a regular bang-up sort of thing.’ For some years past, the favourite costume of the out-and-out young gentleman has been a rough pilot coat, with two gilt hooks and eyes to the velvet collar; buttons somewhat larger than crown-pieces; a black or fancy neckerchief, loosely tied; a wide-brimmed hat, with a low crown; tightish inexpressibles, and iron-shod boots. Out of doors he sometimes carries a large ash stick, but only on special occasions, for he prefers keeping his hands in his coat pockets. He smokes at all hours, of course, and swears considerably.

The out-and-out young gentleman is employed in a city counting-house or solicitor’s office, in which he does as little as he possibly can: his chief places of resort are, the streets, the taverns, and the theatres. In the streets at evening time, out-and-out young gentlemen have a pleasant custom of walking six or eight abreast, thus driving females and other inoffensive persons into the road, which never fails to afford them the highest satisfaction, especially if there be any immediate danger of their being run over, which enhances the fun of the thing materially. In all places of public resort, the out-and-outers are careful to select each a seat to himself, upon which he lies at full length, and (if the weather be very dirty, but not in any other case) he lies with his knees up, and the soles of his boots planted firmly on the cushion, so that if any low fellow should ask him to make room for a lady, he takes ample revenge upon her dress, without going at all out of his way to do it. He always sits with his hat on, and flourishes his stick in the air while the play is proceeding, with a dignified contempt of the performance; if it be possible for one or two out-and-out young gentlemen to get up a little crowding in the passages, they are quite in their element, squeezing, pushing, whooping, and shouting in the most humorous manner possible. If they can only succeed in irritating the gentleman who has a family of daughters under his charge, they are like to die with laughing, and boast of it among their companions for a week afterwards, adding, that one or two of them were 'devilish fine girls,' and that they really thought the youngest would have fainted, which was the only thing wanted to render the joke complete.

If the out-and-out young gentleman have a mother and sisters, of course he treats them with becoming contempt, inasmuch as they (poor things!) having no notion of life or gaiety, are far too weak-spirited and moping for him. Sometimes, however, on a birth-day or at Christmas-time, he cannot very well help accompanying them to a party at some old friend's, with which view he comes home when they have been dressed an hour or two, smelling very strongly of tobacco and spirits, and after exchanging his rough coat for some more suitable attire (in which however he loses nothing of the out-and-outer), gets into the coach and grumbles all the way at his own good nature: his bitter reflections aggravated by the recollection, that Tom Smith has taken the chair at a little impromptu dinner at a fighting man's, and that a set-to was to take place on a dining-table, between the fighting man and his brother-in-law, which is probably 'coming off' at that very instant.

As the out-and-out young gentleman is by no means at his ease in ladies' society, he shrinks into a corner of the drawing-room when they reach the friend's, and unless one of his sisters is kind enough to talk to him, remains there without being much troubled by the attentions of other people, until he espies, lingering outside the door, another gentleman, whom he at once knows, by his air and manner (for there is a kind of free-masonry in the craft), to be a brother out-and-outer, and towards whom he accordingly makes his way. Conversation being soon opened by some casual remark, the second out-and-outer confidentially informs the first, that he is one of the rough sort and hates that kind of thing, only he couldn't very well be off coming; to which the other replies, that that's just his case—'and I'll tell you what,' continues the out-and-outer in a whisper, 'I should like a glass of warm brandy and water just now,'—'Or a pint of stout and a pipe,' suggests the other out-and-outer.

The discovery is at once made that they are sympathetic souls; each of them says at the same moment, that he sees the other understands what's what: and they become fast friends at once, more especially when it appears, that the second out-and-outer is no other than a gentleman, long favourably known to his familiars as 'Mr. Warmint Blake,' who upon divers occasions has distinguished himself in a manner that would not have disgraced the fighting man, and who—having been a pretty long time about town—had the honour of once shaking hands with the celebrated Mr. Thurtell himself.

At supper, these gentlemen greatly distinguish themselves, brightening up very much when the ladies leave the table, and proclaiming aloud their intention of beginning to spend the evening—a process which is generally understood to be satisfactorily performed, when a great deal of wine is drunk and a great deal of noise made, both of which feats the out-and-out young gentlemen execute to perfection. Having protracted their sitting until long after the host and the other guests have adjourned to the drawing-room, and finding that they have drained the decanters empty, they follow them thither with complexions rather heightened, and faces rather bloated with wine; and the agitated lady of the house whispers her friends as they waltz together, to the great terror of the whole room, that 'both Mr. Blake and Mr. Dummins are very nice sort of young men in their way, only they are eccentric persons, and unfortunately *rather too wild*!'

The remaining class of out-and-out young gentlemen is composed of persons, who, having no money of their own and a soul above earning any, enjoy similar pleasures, nobody knows how. These respectable gentlemen, without aiming quite so much at the out-and-out in external appearance, are distinguished by all the same amiable and attractive characteristics, in an equal or perhaps greater degree, and now and then find their way into society, through the medium of the other class of out-and-out young gentlemen, who will sometimes carry them home, and who usually pay their tavern bills. As they are equally gentlemanly, clever, witty, intelligent, wise, and well-bred, we need scarcely have recommended them to the peculiar consideration of the young ladies, if it were not that some of the gentle creatures whom we hold in such high respect, are perhaps a little too apt to confound a great many heavier terms with the light word eccentricity, which we beg them henceforth to take in a strictly Johnsonian sense, without any liberality or latitude of construction.

THE VERY FRIENDLY YOUNG GENTLEMAN

We know—and all people know—so many specimens of this class, that in selecting the few heads our limits enable us to take from a great number, we have been induced to give the very friendly young gentleman the preference over many others, to whose claims upon a more cursory view of the question we had felt disposed to assign the priority.

The very friendly young gentleman is very friendly to everybody, but he attaches himself particularly to two, or at most to three families: regulating his choice by their dinners, their circle of acquaintance, or some other criterion in which he has an immediate interest. He is of any age between twenty and forty, unmarried of course, must be fond of children, and is expected to make himself generally useful if possible. Let us illustrate our meaning by an example, which is the shortest mode and the clearest.

We encountered one day, by chance, an old friend of whom we had lost sight for some years, and who—expressing a strong anxiety to renew our former intimacy—urged us to dine with him on an early day, that we might talk over old times. We readily assented, adding, that we hoped we should be alone. ‘Oh, certainly, certainly,’ said our friend, ‘not a soul with us but Mincin.’ ‘And who is Mincin?’ was our natural inquiry. ‘O don’t mind him,’ replied our friend, ‘he’s a most particular friend of mine, and a very friendly fellow you will find him;’ and so he left us.

‘We thought no more about Mincin until we duly presented ourselves at the house next day, when, after a hearty welcome, our friend motioned towards a gentleman who had been previously showing his teeth by the fireplace, and gave us to understand that it was Mr. Mincin, of whom he had spoken. It required no great penetration on our part to discover at once that Mr. Mincin was in every respect a very friendly young gentleman.

‘I am delighted,’ said Mincin, hastily advancing, and pressing our hand warmly between both of his, ‘I am delighted, I am sure, to make your acquaintance—(here he smiled)—very much delighted indeed—(here he exhibited a little emotion)—I assure you that I have looked forward to it anxiously for a very long time:’ here he released our hands, and rubbing his own, observed, that the day was severe, but that he was delighted to perceive from our appearance that it agreed with us wonderfully; and then went on to observe, that, notwithstanding the coldness of the weather, he had that morning seen in the paper an exceedingly curious paragraph, to the effect, that there was now in the garden of Mr. Wilkins of Chichester, a pumpkin, measuring four feet in height, and eleven feet seven inches in circumference, which he looked upon as a very extraordinary piece of intelligence. We ventured to remark, that we had a dim recollection of having once or twice before observed a similar paragraph in the public prints, upon which Mr. Mincin took us confidentially by the button, and said, Exactly, exactly, to be sure, we were very right, and he wondered what the editors meant by putting in such things. Who the deuce, he should like to know, did they suppose cared about them? that struck him as being the best of it.

The lady of the house appeared shortly afterwards, and Mr. Mincin’s friendliness, as will readily be supposed, suffered no diminution in consequence; he exerted much strength and skill in wheeling a large easy-chair up to the fire, and the lady being seated in it, carefully closed the door, stirred the fire, and looked to the windows to see that they admitted no air; having satisfied himself upon all these points, he expressed himself quite easy in his mind, and begged to know how she found herself to-day. Upon the lady’s replying very well, Mr. Mincin (who it appeared was a medical gentleman) offered some general remarks upon the nature and treatment of colds in the head, which occupied us agreeably until dinner-time. During the meal, he devoted himself to complimenting everybody, not forgetting himself, so that we were an uncommonly agreeable quartette.

‘I’ll tell you what, Capper,’ said Mr. Mincin to our host, as he closed the room door after the lady had retired, ‘you have very great reason to be fond of your wife. Sweet woman, Mrs. Capper, sir!’ ‘Nay, Mincin—I beg,’ interposed the host, as we were about to reply that Mrs. Capper unquestionably was particularly sweet. 'Pray, Mincin, don't.' 'Why not?' exclaimed Mr. Mincin, 'why not? Why should you feel any delicacy before your old friend—*our* old friend, if I may be allowed to call you so, sir; why should you, I ask?' We of course wished to know why he should also, upon which our friend admitted that Mrs. Capper *was* a very sweet woman, at which admission Mr. Mincin cried 'Bravo!' and begged to propose Mrs. Capper with heartfelt enthusiasm, whereupon our host said, 'Thank you, Mincin,' with deep feeling; and gave us, in a low voice, to understand, that Mincin had saved Mrs. Capper's cousin's life no less than fourteen times in a year and a half, which he considered no common circumstance—an opinion to which we most cordially subscribed.

Now that we three were left to entertain ourselves with conversation, Mr. Mincin's extreme friendliness became every moment more apparent; he was so amazingly friendly, indeed, that it was impossible to talk about anything in which he had not the chief concern. We happened to allude to some affairs in which our friend and we had been mutually engaged nearly fourteen years before, when Mr. Mincin was all at once reminded of a joke which our friend had made on that day four years, which he positively must insist upon telling—and which he did tell accordingly, with many pleasant recollections of what he said, and what Mrs. Capper said, and how he well remembered that they had been to the play with orders on the very night previous, and had seen Romeo and Juliet, and the pantomime, and how Mrs. Capper being faint had been led into the lobby, where she smiled, said it was nothing after all, and went back again, with many other interesting and absorbing particulars: after which the friendly young gentleman went on to assure us, that our friend had experienced a marvellously prophetic opinion of that same pantomime, which was of such an admirable kind, that two morning papers took the same view next day: to this our friend replied, with a little triumph, that in that instance he had some reason to think he had been correct, which gave the friendly young gentleman occasion to believe that our friend was always correct; and so we went on, until our friend, filling a bumper, said he must drink one glass to his dear friend Mincin, than whom he would say no man saved the lives of his acquaintances more, or had a more friendly heart. Finally, our friend having emptied his glass, said, 'God bless you, Mincin,'—and Mr. Mincin and he shook hands across the table with much affection and earnestness.

But great as the friendly young gentleman is, in a limited scene like this, he plays the same part on a larger scale with increased *éclat*. Mr. Mincin is invited to an evening party with his dear friends the Martins, where he meets his dear friends the Cappers, and his dear friends the Watsons, and a hundred other dear friends too numerous to mention. He is as much at home with the Martins as with the Cappers; but how exquisitely he balances his attentions, and divides them among his dear friends! If he flirts with one of the Miss Watsons, he has one little Martin on the sofa pulling his hair, and the other little Martin on the carpet riding on his foot. He carries Mrs. Watson down to supper on one arm, and Miss Martin on the other, and takes wine so judiciously, and in such exact order, that it is impossible for the most punctilious old lady to consider herself neglected. If any young lady, being prevailed upon to sing, become nervous afterwards, Mr. Mincin leads her tenderly into the next room, and restores her with port wine, which she must take medicinally. If any gentleman be standing by the piano during the progress of the ballad, Mr. Mincin seizes him by the arm at one point of the melody, and softly beating time the while with his head, expresses in dumb show his intense perception of the delicacy of the passage. If anybody's self-love is to be flattered, Mr. Mincin is at hand. If anybody's overweening vanity is to be pampered, Mr. Mincin will surfeit it. What wonder that people of all stations and ages recognise Mr. Mincin's friendliness; that he is universally allowed to be handsome as amiable; that mothers think him an oracle, daughters a dear, brothers a beau, and fathers a wonder! And who would not have the reputation of the very friendly young gentleman?

THE MILITARY YOUNG GENTLEMAN

We are rather at a loss to imagine how it has come to pass that military young gentlemen have obtained so much favour in the eyes of the young ladies of this kingdom. We cannot think so lightly of them as to suppose that the mere circumstance of a man's wearing a red coat ensures him a ready passport to their regard; and even if this were the case, it would be no satisfactory explanation of the circumstance, because, although the analogy may in some degree hold good in the case of mail coachmen and guards, still general postmen wear red coats, and *they* are not to our knowledge better received than other men; nor are firemen either, who wear (or used to wear) not only red coats, but very resplendent and massive badges besides—much larger than epaulettes. Neither do the twopenny post-office boys, if the result of our inquiries be correct, find any peculiar favour in woman's eyes, although they wear very bright red jackets, and have the additional advantage of constantly appearing in public on horseback, which last circumstance may be naturally supposed to be greatly in their favour.

We have sometimes thought that this phenomenon may take its rise in the conventional behaviour of captains and colonels and other gentlemen in red coats on the stage, where they are invariably represented as fine swaggering fellows, talking of nothing but charming girls, their king and country, their honour, and their debts, and crowing over the inferior classes of the community, whom they occasionally treat with a little gentlemanly swindling, no less to the improvement and pleasure of the audience, than to the satisfaction and approval of the choice spirits who consort with them. But we will not devote these pages to our speculations upon the subject, inasmuch as our business at the present moment is not so much with the young ladies who are bewitched by her Majesty's livery as with the young gentlemen whose heads are turned by it. For 'heads' we had written 'brains;' but upon consideration, we think the former the more appropriate word of the two.

These young gentlemen may be divided into two classes—young gentlemen who are actually in the army, and young gentlemen who, having an intense and enthusiastic admiration for all things appertaining to a military life, are compelled by adverse fortune or adverse relations to wear out their existence in some ignoble counting-house. We will take this latter description of military young gentlemen first.

The whole heart and soul of the military young gentleman are concentrated in his favourite topic. There is nothing that he is so learned upon as uniforms; he will tell you, without faltering for an instant, what the habiliments of any one regiment are turned up with, what regiment wear stripes down the outside and inside of the leg, and how many buttons the Tenth had on their coats; he knows to a fraction how many yards and odd inches of gold lace it takes to make an ensign in the Guards; is deeply read in the comparative merits of different bands, and the apparelling of trumpeters; and is very luminous indeed in descanting upon 'crack regiments,’ and the ‘crack’ gentlemen who compose them, of whose mightiness and grandeur he is never tired of telling.

We were suggesting to a military young gentleman only the other day, after he had related to us several dazzling instances of the profusion of half-a-dozen honourable ensign somebodies or nobodies in the articles of kid gloves and polished boots, that possibly ‘cracked’ regiments would be an improvement upon ‘crack,’ as being a more expressive and appropriate designation, when he suddenly interrupted us by pulling out his watch, and observing that he must hurry off to the Park in a cab, or he would be too late to hear the band play. Not wishing to interfere with so important an engagement, and being in fact already slightly overwhelmed by the anecdotes of the honourable ensigns afore-mentioned, we made no attempt to detain the military young gentleman, but parted company with ready good-will.

Some three or four hours afterwards, we chanced to be walking down Whitehall, on the Admiralty side of the way, when, as we drew near to one of the little stone places in which a couple of horse soldiers mount guard in the daytime, we were attracted by the motionless appearance and eager gaze of a young gentleman, who was devouring both man and horse with his eyes, so eagerly, that he seemed deaf and blind to all that was passing around him. We were not much surprised at the discovery that it was our friend, the military young gentleman, but we *were* a little astonished when we returned from a walk to South Lambeth to find him still there, looking on with the same intensity as before. As it was a very windy day, we felt bound to awaken the young gentleman from his reverie, when he inquired of us with great enthusiasm, whether ‘that was not a glorious spectacle,’ and proceeded to give us a detailed account of the weight of every article of the spectacle’s trappings, from the man’s gloves to the horse’s shoes.

We have made it a practice since, to take the Horse Guards in our daily walk, and we find it is the custom of military young gentlemen to plant themselves opposite the sentries, and contemplate them at leisure, in periods varying from fifteen minutes to fifty, and averaging twenty-five. We were much struck a day or two since, by the behaviour of a very promising young butcher who (evincing an interest in the service, which cannot be too strongly commanded or encouraged), after a prolonged inspection of the sentry, proceeded to handle his boots with great curiosity, and as much composure and indifference as if the man were wax-work.

But the really military young gentleman is waiting all this time, and at the very moment that an apology rises to our lips, he emerges from the barrack gate (he is quartered in a garrison town), and takes the way towards the high street. He wears his undress uniform, which somewhat mars the glory of his outward man; but still how great, how grand, he is! What a happy mixture of ease and ferocity in his gait and carriage, and how lightly he carries that dreadful sword under his arm, making no more ado about it than if it were a silk umbrella! The lion is sleeping: only think if an enemy were in sight, how soon he'd whip it out of the scabbard, and what a terrible fellow he would be!

But he walks on, thinking of nothing less than blood and slaughter; and now he comes in sight of three other military young gentlemen, arm-in-arm, who are bearing down towards him, clanking their iron heels on the pavement, and clashing their swords with a noise, which should cause all peaceful men to quail at heart. They stop to talk. See how the flaxen-haired young gentleman with the weak legs—he who has his pocket-handkerchief thrust into the breast of his coat-glares upon the fainthearted civilians who linger to look upon his glory; how the next young gentleman elevates his head in the air, and majestically places his arms a-kimbo, while the third stands with his legs very wide apart, and clasps his hands behind him. Well may we inquire—not in familiar jest, but in respectful earnest—if you call that nothing. Oh! if some encroaching foreign power—the Emperor of Russia, for instance, or any of those deep fellows, could only see those military young gentlemen as they move on together towards the billiard-room over the way, wouldn't he tremble a little!

And then, at the Theatre at night, when the performances are by command of Colonel Fitz-Sordust and the officers of the garrison—what a splendid sight it is! How sternly the defenders of their country look round the house as if in mute assurance to the audience, that they may make themselves comfortable regarding any foreign invasion, for they (the military young gentlemen) are keeping a sharp look-out, and are ready for anything. And what a contrast between them, and that stage-box full of grey-headed officers with tokens of many battles about them, who have nothing at all in common with the military young gentlemen, and who—but for an old-fashioned kind of manly dignity in their looks and bearing—might be common hard-working soldiers for anything they take the pains to announce to the contrary!

Ah! here is a family just come in who recognise the flaxen-headed young gentleman; and the flaxen-headed young gentleman recognises them too, only he doesn't care to show it just now. Very well done indeed! He talks louder to the little group of military young gentlemen who are standing by him, and coughs to induce some ladies in the next box but one to look round, in order that their faces may undergo the same ordeal of criticism to which they have subjected, in not a wholly inaudible tone, the majority of the female portion of the audience. Oh! a gentleman in the same box looks round as if he were disposed to resent this as an impertinence; and the flaxen-headed young gentleman sees his friends at once, and hurries away to them with the most charming cordiality.

Three young ladies, one young man, and the mamma of the party, receive the military young gentleman with great warmth and politeness, and in five minutes afterwards the military young gentleman, stimulated by the mamma, introduces the two other military young gentlemen with whom he was walking in the morning, who take their seats behind the young ladies and commence conversation; whereat the mamma bestows a triumphant bow upon a rival mamma, who has not succeeded in decoying any military young gentlemen, and prepares to consider her visitors from that moment three of the most elegant and superior young gentlemen in the whole world.

THE POLITICAL YOUNG GENTLEMAN

Once upon a time—*not* in the days when pigs drank wine, but in a more recent period of our history—it was customary to banish politics when ladies were present. If this usage still prevailed, we should have had no chapter for political young gentlemen, for ladies would have neither known nor cared what kind of monster a political young gentleman was. But as this good custom in common with many others has 'gone out,' and left no word when it is likely to be home again; as political young ladies are by no means rare, and political young gentlemen the very reverse of scarce, we are bound in the strict discharge of our most responsible duty not to neglect this natural division of our subject.

If the political young gentleman be resident in a country town (and there *are* political young gentlemen in country towns sometimes), he is wholly absorbed in his politics; as a pair of purple spectacles communicate the same uniform tint to all objects near and remote, so the political glasses, with which the young gentleman assists his mental vision, give to everything the hue and tinge of party feeling. The political young gentleman would as soon think of being struck with the beauty of a young lady in the opposite interest, as he would dream of marrying his sister to the opposite member.

If the political young gentleman be a Conservative, he has usually some vague ideas about Ireland and the Pope which he cannot very clearly explain, but which he knows are the right sort of thing, and not to be very easily got over by the other side. He has also some choice sentences regarding church and state, culled from the banners in use at the last election, with which he intersperses his conversation at intervals with surprising effect. But his great topic is the constitution, upon which he will declaim, by the hour together, with much heat and fury; not that he has any particular information on the subject, but because he knows that the constitution is somehow church and state, and church and state somehow the constitution, and that the fellows on the other side say it isn't, which is quite a sufficient reason for him to say it is, and to stick to it.

Perhaps his greatest topic of all, though, is the people. If a fight takes place in a populous town, in which many noses are broken, and a few windows, the young gentleman throws down the newspaper with a triumphant air, and exclaims, 'Here's your precious people!' If half-a-dozen boys run across the course at race time, when it ought to be kept clear, the young gentleman looks indignantly round, and begs you to observe the conduct of the people; if the gallery demand a hornpipe between the play and the afterpiece, the same young gentleman cries 'No' and 'Shame' till he is hoarse, and then inquires with a sneer what you think of popular moderation *now*; in short, the people form a never-failing theme for him; and when the attorney, on the side of his candidate, dwells upon it with great power of eloquence at election time, as he never fails to do, the young gentleman and his friends, and the body they head, cheer with great violence against *the other people*, with whom, of course, they have no possible connexion. In much the same manner the audience at a theatre never fail to be highly amused with any jokes at the expense of the public—always laughing heartily at some other public, and never at themselves.

If the political young gentleman be a Radical, he is usually a very profound person indeed, having great store of theoretical questions to put to you, with an infinite variety of possible cases and logical deductions therefrom. If he be of the utilitarian school, too, which is more than probable, he is particularly pleasant company, having many ingenious remarks to offer upon the voluntary principle and various cheerful disquisitions connected with the population of the country, the position of Great Britain in the scale of nations, and the balance of power. Then he is exceedingly well versed in all doctrines of political economy as laid down in the newspapers, and knows a great many parliamentary speeches by heart; nay, he has a small stock of aphorisms, none of them exceeding a couple of lines in length, which will settle the toughest question and leave you nothing to say. He gives all the young ladies to understand, that Miss Martineau is the greatest woman that ever lived; and when they praise the good looks of Mr. Hawkins the new member, says he’s very well for a representative, all things considered, but he wants a little calling to account, and he is more than half afraid it will be necessary to bring him down on his knees for that vote on the miscellaneous estimates. At this, the young ladies express much wonderment, and say surely a Member of Parliament is not to be brought upon his knees so easily; in reply to which the political young gentleman smiles sternly, and throws out dark hints regarding the speedy arrival of that day, when Members of Parliament will be paid salaries, and required to render weekly accounts of their proceedings, at which the young ladies utter many expressions of astonishment and incredulity, while their lady-mothers regard the prophecy as little else than blasphemous.

It is extremely improving and interesting to hear two political young gentlemen, of diverse opinions, discuss some great question across a dinner-table; such as, whether, if the public were admitted to Westminster Abbey for nothing, they would or would not convey small chisels and hammers in their pockets, and immediately set about chipping all the noses off the statues; or whether, if they once got into the Tower for a shilling, they would not insist upon trying the crown on their own heads, and loading and firing off all the small arms in the armoury, to the great discomposure of Whitechapel and the Minories. Upon these, and many other momentous questions which agitate the public mind in these desperate days, they will discourse with great vehemence and irritation for a considerable time together, both leaving off precisely where they began, and each thoroughly persuaded that he has got the better of the other.

In society, at assemblies, balls, and playhouses, these political young gentlemen are perpetually on the watch for a political allusion, or anything which can be tortured or construed into being one; when, thrusting themselves into the very smallest openings for their favourite discourse, they fall upon the unhappy company tooth and nail. They have recently had many favourable opportunities of opening in churches, but as there the clergyman has it all his own way, and must not be contradicted, whatever politics he preaches, they are fain to hold their tongues until they reach the outer door, though at the imminent risk of bursting in the effort.

As such discussions can please nobody but the talkative parties concerned, we hope they will henceforth take the hint and discontinue them, otherwise we now give them warning, that the ladies have our advice to discountenance such talkers altogether.

THE DOMESTIC YOUNG GENTLEMAN

Let us make a slight sketch of our amiable friend, Mr. Felix Nixon. We are strongly disposed to think, that if we put him in this place, he will answer our purpose without another word of comment.

Felix, then, is a young gentleman who lives at home with his mother, just within the twopenny-post office circle of three miles from St. Martin-le-Grand. He wears Indiarubber goloshes when the weather is at all damp, and always has a silk handkerchief neatly folded up in the right-hand pocket of his great-coat, to tie over his mouth when he goes home at night; moreover, being rather near-sighted, he carries spectacles for particular occasions, and has a weakish tremulous voice, of which he makes great use, for he talks as much as any old lady breathing.

The two chief subjects of Felix's discourse, are himself and his mother, both of whom would appear to be very wonderful and interesting persons. As Felix and his mother are seldom apart in body, so Felix and his mother are scarcely ever separate in spirit. If you ask Felix how he finds himself to-day, he prefaces his reply with a long and minute bulletin of his mother's state of health; and the good lady in her turn, edifies her acquaintance with a circumstantial and alarming account, how he sneezed four times and coughed once after being out in the rain the other night, but having his feet promptly put into hot water, and his head into a flannel-something, which we will not describe more particularly than by this delicate allusion, was happily brought round by the next morning, and enabled to go to business as usual.

Our friend is not a very adventurous or hot-headed person, but he has passed through many dangers, as his mother can testify: there is one great story in particular, concerning a hackney coachman who wanted to overcharge him one night for bringing them home from the play, upon which Felix gave the aforesaid coachman a look which his mother thought would have crushed him to the earth, but which did not crush him quite, for he continued to demand another sixpence, notwithstanding that Felix took out his pocket-book, and, with the aid of a flat candle, pointed out the fare in print, which the coachman obstinately disregarding, he shut the street-door with a slam which his mother shudders to think of; and then, roused to the most appalling pitch of passion by the coachman knocking a double knock to show that he was by no means convinced, he broke with uncontrollable force from his parent and the servant girl, and running into the street without his hat, actually shook his fist at the coachman, and came back again with a face as white, Mrs. Nixon says, looking about her for a simile, as white as that ceiling. She never will forget his fury that night, Never!

To this account Felix listens with a solemn face, occasionally looking at you to see how it affects you, and when his mother has made an end of it, adds that he looked at every coachman he met for three weeks afterwards, in hopes that he might see the scoundrel; whereupon Mrs. Nixon, with an exclamation of terror, requests to know what he would have done to him if he *had* seen him, at which Felix smiling darkly and clenching his right fist, she exclaims, ‘Goodness gracious!’ with a distracted air, and insists upon extorting a promise that he never will on any account do anything so rash, which her dutiful son—it being something more than three years since the offence was committed—reluctantly concedes, and his mother, shaking her head prophetically, fears with a sigh that his spirit will lead him into something violent yet. The discourse then, by an easy transition, turns upon the spirit which glows within the bosom of Felix, upon which point Felix himself becomes eloquent, and relates a thrilling anecdote of the time when he used to sit up till two o’clock in the morning reading French, and how his mother used to say, ‘Felix, you will make yourself ill, I know you will;’ and how *he* used to say, ‘Mother, I don’t care—I will do it;’ and how at last his mother privately procured a doctor to come and see him, who declared, the moment he felt his pulse, that if he had gone on reading one night more—only one night more—he must have put a blister on each temple, and another between his shoulders; and who, as it was, sat down upon the instant, and writing a prescription for a blue pill, said it must be taken immediately, or he wouldn't answer for the consequences. The recital of these and many other moving perils of the like nature, constantly harrows up the feelings of Mr. Nixon's friends.

Mrs. Nixon has a tolerably extensive circle of female acquaintance, being a good-humoured, talkative, bustling little body, and to the unmarried girls among them she is constantly vaunting the virtues of her son, hinting that she will be a very happy person who wins him, but that they must mind their P's and Q's, for he is very particular, and terribly severe upon young ladies. At this last caution the young ladies resident in the same row, who happen to be spending the evening there, put their pocket-handkerchiefs before their mouths, and are troubled with a short cough; just then Felix knocks at the door, and his mother drawing the tea-table nearer the fire, calls out to him as he takes off his boots in the back parlour that he needn't mind coming in in his slippers, for there are only the two Miss Greys and Miss Thompson, and she is quite sure they will excuse *him*, and nodding to the two Miss Greys, she adds, in a whisper, that Julia Thompson is a great favourite with Felix, at which intelligence the short cough comes again, and Miss Thompson in particular is greatly troubled with it, till Felix coming in, very faint for want of his tea, changes the subject of discourse, and enables her to laugh out boldly and tell Amelia Grey not to be so foolish. Here they all three laugh, and Mrs. Nixon says they are giddy girls; in which stage of the proceedings, Felix, who has by this time refreshened himself with the grateful herb that 'cheers but not inebriates,' removes his cup from his countenance and says with a knowing smile, that all girls are; whereat his admiring mamma pats him on the back and tells him not to be sly, which calls forth a general laugh from the young ladies, and another smile from Felix, who, thinking he looks very sly indeed, is perfectly satisfied.

Tea being over, the young ladies resume their work, and Felix insists upon holding a skein of silk while Miss Thompson winds it on a card. This process having been performed to the satisfaction of all parties, he brings down his flute in compliance with a request from the youngest Miss Grey, and plays divers tunes out of a very small music-book till supper-time, when he is very facetious and talkative indeed. Finally, after half a tumblerful of warm sherry and water, he gallantly puts on his goloshes over his slippers, and telling Miss Thompson's servant to run on first and get the door open, escorts that young lady to her house, five doors off: the Miss Greys who live in the next house but one stopping to peep with merry faces from their own door till he comes back again, when they call out 'Very well, Mr. Felix,' and trip into the passage with a laugh more musical than any flute that was ever played.

Felix is rather prim in his appearance, and perhaps a little priggish about his books and flute, and so forth, which have all their peculiar corners of peculiar shelves in his bedroom; indeed all his female acquaintance (and they are good judges) have long ago set him down as a thorough old bachelor. He is a favourite with them however, in a certain way, as an honest, inoffensive, kind-hearted creature; and as his peculiarities harm nobody, not even himself, we are induced to hope that many who are not personally acquainted with him will take our good word in his behalf, and be content to leave him to a long continuance of his harmless existence.

THE CENSORIOUS YOUNG GENTLEMAN

There is an amiable kind of young gentleman going about in society, upon whom, after much experience of him, and considerable turning over of the subject in our mind, we feel it our duty to affix the above appellation. Young ladies mildly call him a 'sarcastic' young gentleman, or a 'severe' young gentleman. We, who know better, beg to acquaint them with the fact, that he is merely a censorious young gentleman, and nothing else.

The censorious young gentleman has the reputation among his familiars of a remarkably clever person, which he maintains by receiving all intelligence and expressing all opinions with a dubious sneer, accompanied with a half smile, expressive of anything you please but good-humour. This sets people about thinking what on earth the censorious young gentleman means, and they speedily arrive at the conclusion that he means something very deep indeed; for they reason in this way—'This young gentleman looks so very knowing that he must mean something, and as I am by no means a dull individual, what a very deep meaning he must have if I can't find it out!' It is extraordinary how soon a censorious young gentleman may make a reputation in his own small circle if he bear this in his mind, and regulate his proceedings accordingly.

As young ladies are generally—not curious, but laudably desirous to acquire information, the censorious young gentleman is much talked about among them, and many surmises are hazarded regarding him. ‘I wonder,’ exclaims the eldest Miss Greenwood, laying down her work to turn up the lamp, ‘I wonder whether Mr. Fairfax will ever be married.’ ‘Bless me, dear,’ cries Miss Marshall, ‘what ever made you think of him?’ ‘Really I hardly know,’ replies Miss Greenwood; ‘he is such a very mysterious person, that I often wonder about him.’ ‘Well, to tell you the truth,’ replies Miss Marshall, ‘and so do I.’ Here two other young ladies profess that they are constantly doing the like, and all present appear in the same condition except one young lady, who, not scrupling to state that she considers Mr. Fairfax ‘a horror,’ draws down all the opposition of the others, which having been expressed in a great many ejaculatory passages, such as ‘Well, did I ever!’—and ‘Lor, Emily, dear!’ ma takes up the subject, and gravely states, that she must say she does not think Mr. Fairfax by any means a horror, but rather takes him to be a young man of very great ability; ‘and I am quite sure,’ adds the worthy lady, ‘he always means a great deal more than he says.’

The door opens at this point of the disclosure, and who of all people alive walks into the room, but the very Mr. Fairfax, who has been the subject of conversation! ‘Well, it really is curious,’ cries ma, ‘we were at that very moment talking about you.’ ‘You did me great honour,’ replies Mr. Fairfax; ‘may I venture to ask what you were saying?’ ‘Why, if you must know,’ returns the eldest girl, ‘we were remarking what a very mysterious man you are.’ ‘Ay, ay!’ observes Mr. Fairfax, ‘Indeed!’ Now Mr. Fairfax says this ay, ay, and indeed, which are slight words enough in themselves, with so very unfathomable an air, and accompanies them with such a very equivocal smile, that ma and the young ladies are more than ever convinced that he means an immensity, and so tell him he is a very dangerous man, and seems to be always thinking ill of somebody, which is precisely the sort of character the censorious young gentleman is most desirous to establish; wherefore he says, ‘Oh, dear, no,’ in a tone, obviously intended to mean, ‘You have me there,’ and which gives them to understand that they have hit the right nail on the very centre of its head.

When the conversation ranges from the mystery overhanging the censorious young gentleman’s behaviour, to the general topics of the day, he sustains his character to admiration. He considers the new tragedy well enough for a new tragedy, but Lord bless us—well, no matter; he could say a great deal on that point, but he would rather not, lest he should be thought ill-natured, as he knows he would be. ‘But is not Mr. So-and-so’s performance truly charming?’ inquires a young lady. ‘Charming!’ replies the censorious young gentleman. ‘Oh, dear, yes, certainly; very charming—oh, very charming indeed.’ After this, he stirs the fire, smiling contemptuously all the while: and a modest young gentleman, who has been a silent listener, thinks what a great thing it must be, to have such a critical judgment. Of music, pictures, books, and poetry, the censorious young gentleman has an equally fine conception. As to men and women, he can tell all about them at a glance. ‘Now let us hear your opinion of young Mrs. Barker,’ says some great believer in the powers of Mr. Fairfax, ‘but don’t be too severe.’ ‘I never am severe,’ replies the censorious young gentleman. ‘Well, never mind that now. She is very lady-like, is she not?’ ‘Lady-like!’ repeats the censorious young gentleman (for he always repeats when he is at a loss for anything to say). ‘Did you observe her manner? Bless my heart and soul, Mrs. Thompson, did you observe her manner?—that’s all I ask.’ ‘I thought I had done so,’ rejoins the poor lady, much perplexed; ‘I did not observe it very closely perhaps.’ ‘Oh, not very closely,’ rejoins the censorious young gentleman, triumphantly. ‘Very good; then *I* did. Let us talk no more about her.’ The censorious young gentleman purses up his lips, and nods his head sagely, as he says this; and it is forthwith whispered about, that Mr. Fairfax (who, though he is a little prejudiced, must be admitted to be a very excellent judge) has observed something exceedingly odd in Mrs. Barker’s manner.

THE FUNNY YOUNG GENTLEMAN

As one funny young gentleman will serve as a sample of all funny young Gentlemen we purpose merely to note down the conduct and behaviour of an individual specimen of this class, whom we happened to meet at an annual family Christmas party in the course of this very last Christmas that ever came.

We were all seated round a blazing fire which crackled pleasantly as the guests talked merrily and the urn steamed cheerily—for, being an old-fashioned party, there *was* an urn, and a teapot besides—when there came a postman’s knock at the door, so violent and sudden, that it startled the whole circle, and actually caused two or three very interesting and most unaffected young ladies to scream aloud and to exhibit many afflicting symptoms of terror and distress, until they had been several times assured by their respective adorers, that they were in no danger. We were about to remark that it was surely beyond post-time, and must have been a runaway knock, when our host, who had hitherto been paralysed with wonder, sank into a chair in a perfect ecstasy of laughter, and offered to lay twenty pounds that it was that droll dog Griggins. He had no sooner said this, than the majority of the company and all the children of the house burst into a roar of laughter too, as if some inimitable joke flashed upon them simultaneously, and gave vent to various exclamations of—To be sure it must be Griggins, and How like him that was, and What spirits he was always in! with many other commendatory remarks of the like nature.

Not having the happiness to know Griggins, we became extremely desirous to see so pleasant a fellow, the more especially as a stout gentleman with a powdered head, who was sitting with his breeches buckles almost touching the hob, whispered us he was a wit of the first water, when the door opened, and Mr. Griggins being announced, presented himself, amidst another shout of laughter and a loud clapping of hands from the younger branches. This welcome he acknowledged by sundry contortions of countenance, imitative of the clown in one of the new pantomimes, which were so extremely successful, that one stout gentleman rolled upon an ottoman in a paroxysm of delight, protesting, with many gasps, that if somebody didn’t make that fellow Griggins leave off, he would be the death of him, he knew. At this the company only laughed more boisterously than before, and as we always like to accommodate our tone and spirit if possible to the humour of any society in which we find ourself, we laughed with the rest, and exclaimed, ‘Oh! capital, capital!’ as loud as any of them.

When he had quite exhausted all beholders, Mr. Griggins received the welcomes and congratulations of the circle, and went through the needful introductions with much ease and many puns. This ceremony over, he avowed his intention of sitting in somebody’s lap unless the young ladies made room for him on the sofa, which being done, after a great deal of tittering and pleasantry, he squeezed himself among them, and likened his condition to that of love among the roses. At this novel jest we all roared once more. ‘You should consider yourself highly honoured, sir,’ said we. ‘Sir,’ replied Mr. Griggins, ‘you do me proud.’ Here everybody laughed again; and the stout gentleman by the fire whispered in our ear that Griggins was making a dead set at us.

The tea-things having been removed, we all sat down to a round game, and here Mr. Griggins shone forth with peculiar brilliancy, abstracting other people’s fish, and looking over their hands in the most comical manner. He made one most excellent joke in snuffing a candle, which was neither more nor less than setting fire to the hair of a pale young gentleman who sat next him, and afterwards begging his pardon with considerable humour. As the young gentleman could not see the joke however, possibly in consequence of its being on the top of his own head, it did not go off quite as well as it might have done; indeed, the young gentleman was heard to murmur some general references to ‘impertinence,’ and a ‘rascal,’ and to state the number of his lodgings in an angry tone—a turn of the conversation which might have been productive of slaughterous consequences, if a young lady, betrothed to the young gentleman, had not used her immediate influence to bring about a reconciliation: emphatically declaring in an agitated whisper, intended for his peculiar edification but audible to the whole table, that if he went on in that way, she never would think of him otherwise than as a friend, though as that she must always regard him. At this terrible threat the young gentleman became calm, and the young lady, overcome by the revulsion of feeling, instantaneously fainted.

Mr. Griggins’s spirits were slightly depressed for a short period by this unlooked-for result of such a harmless pleasantry, but being promptly elevated by the attentions of the host and several glasses of wine, he soon recovered, and became even more vivacious than before, insomuch that the stout gentleman previously referred to, assured us that although he had known him since he was *that* high (something smaller than a nutmeg-grater), he had never beheld him in such excellent cue.

When the round game and several games at blind man’s buff which followed it were all over, and we were going down to supper, the inexhaustible Mr. Griggins produced a small sprig of mistletoe from his waistcoat pocket, and commenced a general kissing of the assembled females, which occasioned great commotion and much excitement. We observed that several young gentlemen—including the young gentleman with the pale countenance—were greatly scandalised at this indecorous proceeding, and talked very big among themselves in corners; and we observed too, that several young ladies when remonstrated with by the aforesaid young gentlemen, called each other to witness how they had struggled, and protested vehemently that it was very rude, and that they were surprised at Mrs. Brown's allowing it, and that they couldn't bear it, and had no patience with such impertinence. But such is the gentle and forgiving nature of woman, that although we looked very narrowly for it, we could not detect the slightest harshness in the subsequent treatment of Mr. Griggins. Indeed, upon the whole, it struck us that among the ladies he seemed rather more popular than before!

To recount all the drollery of Mr. Griggins at supper, would fill such a tiny volume as this, [429] to the very bottom of the outside cover. How he drank out of other people's glasses, and ate of other people's bread, how he frightened into screaming convulsions a little boy who was sitting up to supper in a high chair, by sinking below the table and suddenly reappearing with a mask on; how the hostess was really surprised that anybody could find a pleasure in tormenting children, and how the host frowned at the hostess, and felt convinced that Mr. Griggins had done it with the very best intentions; how Mr. Griggins explained, and how everybody's good-humour was restored but the child's;—to tell these and a hundred other things ever so briefly, would occupy more of our room and our readers' patience, than either they or we can conveniently spare. Therefore we change the subject, merely observing that we have offered no description of the funny young gentleman's personal appearance, believing that almost every society has a Griggins of its own, and leaving all readers to supply the deficiency, according to the particular circumstances of their particular case.

THE THEATRICAL YOUNG GENTLEMAN

All gentlemen who love the drama—and there are few gentlemen who are not attached to the most intellectual and rational of all our amusements—do not come within this definition. As we have no mean relish for theatrical entertainments ourself, we are disinterestedly anxious that this should be perfectly understood.

The theatrical young gentleman has early and important information on all theatrical topics. ‘Well,’ says he, abruptly, when you meet him in the street, ‘here’s a pretty to-do. Flimkins has thrown up his part in the melodrama at the Surrey.’—‘And what’s to be done?’ you inquire with as much gravity as you can counterfeit. ‘Ah, that’s the point,’ replies the theatrical young gentleman, looking very serious; ‘Boozle declines it; positively declines it. From all I am told, I should say it was decidedly in Boozle’s line, and that he would be very likely to make a great hit in it; but he objects on the ground of Flimkins having been put up in the part first, and says no earthly power shall induce him to take the character. It’s a fine part, too—excellent business, I’m told. He has to kill six people in the course of the piece, and to fight over a bridge in red fire, which is as safe a card, you know, as can be. Don’t mention it; but I hear that the last scene, when he is first poisoned, and then stabbed, by Mrs. Flimkins as Vengedora, will be the greatest thing that has been done these many years.’ With this piece of news, and laying his finger on his lips as a caution for you not to excite the town with it, the theatrical young gentleman hurries away.

The theatrical young gentleman, from often frequenting the different theatrical establishments, has pet and familiar names for them all. Thus Covent-Garden is the garden, Drury-Lane the lane, the Victoria the vic, and the Olympic the pic. Actresses, too, are always designated by their surnames only, as Taylor, Nisbett, Faucit, Honey; that talented and lady-like girl Sheriff, that clever little creature Horton, and so on. In the same manner he prefixes Christian names when he mentions actors, as Charley Young, Jemmy Buckstone, Fred. Yates, Paul Bedford. When he is at a loss for a Christian name, the word ‘old’ applied indiscriminately answers quite as well: as old Charley Matthews at Vestris’s, old Harley, and old Braham. He has a great knowledge of the private proceedings of actresses, especially of their getting married, and can tell you in a breath half-a-dozen who have changed their names without avowing it. Whenever an alteration of this kind is made in the playbills, he will remind you that he let you into the secret six months ago.

The theatrical young gentleman has a great reverence for all that is connected with the stage department of the different theatres. He would, at any time, prefer going a street or two out of his way, to omitting to pass a stage-entrance, into which he always looks with a curious and searching eye. If he can only identify a popular actor in the street, he is in a perfect transport of delight; and no sooner meets him, than he hurries back, and walks a few paces in front of him, so that he can turn round from time to time, and have a good stare at his features. He looks upon a theatrical-fund dinner as one of the most enchanting festivities ever known; and thinks that to be a member of the Garrick Club, and see so many actors in their plain clothes, must be one of the highest gratifications the world can bestow.

The theatrical young gentleman is a constant half-price visitor at one or other of the theatres, and has an infinite relish for all pieces which display the fullest resources of the establishment. He likes to place implicit reliance upon the play-bills when he goes to see a show-piece, and works himself up to such a pitch of enthusiasm, as not only to believe (if the bills say so) that there are three hundred and seventy-five people on the stage at one time in the last scene, but is highly indignant with you, unless you believe it also. He considers that if the stage be opened from the foot-lights to the back wall, in any new play, the piece is a triumph of dramatic writing, and applauds accordingly. He has a great notion of trap-doors too; and thinks any character going down or coming up a trap (no matter whether he be an angel or a demon—they both do it occasionally) one of the most interesting feats in the whole range of scenic illusion.

Besides these acquirements, he has several veracious accounts to communicate of the private manners and customs of different actors, which, during the pauses of a quadrille, he usually communicates to his partner, or imparts to his neighbour at a supper table. Thus he is advised, that Mr. Liston always had a footman in gorgeous livery waiting at the side-scene with a brandy bottle and tumbler, to administer half a pint or so of spirit to him every time he came off, without which assistance he must infallibly have fainted. He knows for a fact, that, after an arduous part, Mr. George Bennett is put between two feather beds, to absorb the perspiration; and is credibly informed, that Mr. Baker has, for many years, submitted to a course of lukewarm toast-and-water, to qualify him to sustain his favourite characters. He looks upon Mr. Fitz Ball as the principal dramatic genius and poet of the day; but holds that there are great writers extant besides him,—in proof whereof he refers you to various dramas and melodramas recently produced, of which he takes in all the sixpenny and three-penny editions as fast as they appear.

The theatrical young gentleman is a great advocate for violence of emotion and redundancy of action. If a father has to curse a child upon the stage, he likes to see it done in the thorough-going style, with no mistake about it: to which end it is essential that the child should follow the father on her knees, and be knocked violently over on her face by the old gentleman as he goes into a small cottage, and shuts the door behind him. He likes to see a blessing invoked upon the young lady, when the old gentleman repents, with equal earnestness, and accompanied by the usual conventional forms, which consist of the old gentleman looking anxiously up into the clouds, as if to see whether it rains, and then spreading an imaginary tablecloth in the air over the young lady's head—soft music playing all the while. Upon these, and other points of a similar kind, the theatrical young gentleman is a great critic indeed. He is likewise very acute in judging of natural expressions of the passions, and knows precisely the frown, wink, nod, or leer, which stands for any one of them, or the means by which it may be converted into any other: as jealousy, with a good stamp of the right foot, becomes anger; or wildness, with the hands clasped before the throat, instead of tearing the wig, is passionate love. If you venture to express a doubt of the accuracy of any of these portraitures, the theatrical young gentleman assures you, with a haughty smile, that it always has been done in that way, and he supposes they are not going to change it at this time of day to please you; to which, of course, you meekly reply that you suppose not.

There are innumerable disquisitions of this nature, in which the theatrical young gentleman is very profound, especially to ladies whom he is most in the habit of entertaining with them; but as we have no space to recapitulate them at greater length, we must rest content with calling the attention of the young ladies in general to the theatrical young gentlemen of their own acquaintance.

THE POETICAL YOUNG GENTLEMAN

Time was, and not very long ago either, when a singular epidemic raged among the young gentlemen, vast numbers of whom, under the influence of the malady, tore off their neckerchiefs, turned down their shirt collars, and exhibited themselves in the open streets with bare throats and dejected countenances, before the eyes of an astonished public. These were poetical young gentlemen. The custom was gradually found to be inconvenient, as involving the necessity of too much clean linen and too large washing bills, and these outward symptoms have consequently passed away; but we are disposed to think, notwithstanding, that the number of poetical young gentlemen is considerably on the increase.

We know a poetical young gentleman—a very poetical young gentleman. We do not mean to say that he is troubled with the gift of poesy in any remarkable degree, but his countenance is of a plaintive and melancholy cast, his manner is abstracted and bespeaks affliction of soul: he seldom has his hair cut, and often talks about being an outcast and wanting a kindred spirit; from which, as well as from many general observations in which he is wont to indulge, concerning mysterious impulses, and yearnings of the heart, and the supremacy of intellect gilding all earthly things with the glowing magic of immortal verse, it is clear to all his friends that he has been stricken poetical.

The favourite attitude of the poetical young gentleman is lounging on a sofa with his eyes fixed upon the ceiling, or sitting bolt upright in a high-backed chair, staring with very round eyes at the opposite wall. When he is in one of these positions, his mother, who is a worthy, affectionate old soul, will give you a nudge to bespeak your attention without disturbing the abstracted one, and whisper with a shake of the head, that John's imagination is at some extraordinary work or other, you may take her word for it. Hereupon John looks more fiercely intent upon vacancy than before, and suddenly snatching a pencil from his pocket, puts down three words, and a cross on the back of a card, sighs deeply, paces once or twice across the room, inflicts a most unmerciful slap upon his head, and walks moodily up to his dormitory.

The poetical young gentleman is apt to acquire peculiar notions of things too, which plain ordinary people, unblessed with a poetical obliquity of vision, would suppose to be rather distorted. For instance, when the sickening murder and mangling of a wretched woman was affording delicious food wherewithal to gorge the insatiable curiosity of the public, our friend the poetical young gentleman was in ecstasies—not of disgust, but admiration. 'Heavens!' cried the poetical young gentleman, 'how grand; how great!' We ventured deferentially to inquire upon whom these epithets were bestowed: our humble thoughts oscillating between the police officer who found the criminal, and the lock-keeper who found the head. 'Upon whom!' exclaimed the poetical young gentleman in a frenzy of poetry, ‘Upon whom should they be bestowed but upon the murderer!’—and thereupon it came out, in a fine torrent of eloquence, that the murderer was a great spirit, a bold creature full of daring and nerve, a man of dauntless heart and determined courage, and withal a great casuist and able reasoner, as was fully demonstrated in his philosophical colloquies with the great and noble of the land. We held our peace, and meekly signified our indisposition to controvert these opinions—firstly, because we were no match at quotation for the poetical young gentleman; and secondly, because we felt it would be of little use our entering into any disputation, if we were: being perfectly convinced that the respectable and immoral hero in question is not the first and will not be the last hanged gentleman upon whom false sympathy or diseased curiosity will be plentifully expended.

This was a stern mystic flight of the poetical young gentleman. In his milder and softer moments he occasionally lays down his neckcloth, and pens stanzas, which sometimes find their way into a Lady’s Magazine, or the ‘Poets’ Corner’ of some country newspaper; or which, in default of either vent for his genius, adorn the rainbow leaves of a lady’s album. These are generally written upon some such occasions as contemplating the Bank of England by midnight, or beholding Saint Paul’s in a snow-storm; and when these gloomy objects fail to afford him inspiration, he pours forth his soul in a touching address to a violet, or a plaintive lament that he is no longer a child, but has gradually grown up.

The poetical young gentleman is fond of quoting passages from his favourite authors, who are all of the gloomy and desponding school. He has a great deal to say too about the world, and is much given to opining, especially if he has taken anything strong to drink, that there is nothing in it worth living for. He gives you to understand, however, that for the sake of society, he means to bear his part in the tiresome play, manfully resisting the gratification of his own strong desire to make a premature exit; and consoles himself with the reflection, that immortality has some chosen nook for himself and the other great spirits whom earth has chafed and wearied.

When the poetical young gentleman makes use of adjectives, they are all superlatives. Everything is of the grandest, greatest, noblest, mightiest, loftiest; or the lowest, meanest, obscurest, vilest, and most pitiful. He knows no medium: for enthusiasm is the soul of poetry; and who so enthusiastic as a poetical young gentleman? ‘Mr. Milkwash,’ says a young lady as she unlocks her album to receive the young gentleman’s original impromptu contribution, 'how very silent you are! I think you must be in love.' 'Love!' cries the poetical young gentleman, starting from his seat by the fire and terrifying the cat who scampers off at full speed, 'Love! that burning, consuming passion; that ardour of the soul, that fierce glowing of the heart. Love! The withering, blighting influence of hope misplaced and affection slighted. Love did you say! Ha! ha! ha!'

With this, the poetical young gentleman laughs a laugh belonging only to poets and Mr. O. Smith of the Adelphi Theatre, and sits down, pen in hand, to throw off a page or two of verse in the biting, semi-atheistical demoniac style, which, like the poetical young gentleman himself, is full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

THE 'THROWING-OFF' YOUNG GENTLEMAN

There is a certain kind of impostor—a bragging, vaunting, puffing young gentleman—against whom we are desirous to warn that fairer part of the creation, to whom we more peculiarly devote these our labours. And we are particularly induced to lay especial stress upon this division of our subject, by a little dialogue we held some short time ago, with an esteemed young lady of our acquaintance, touching a most gross specimen of this class of men. We had been urging all the absurdities of his conduct and conversation, and dwelling upon the impossibilities he constantly recounted—to which indeed we had not scrupled to prefix a certain hard little word of one syllable and three letters—when our fair friend, unable to maintain the contest any longer, reluctantly cried, 'Well; he certainly has a habit of throwing-off, but then—' What then? Throw him off yourself, said we. And so she did, but not at our instance, for other reasons appeared, and it might have been better if she had done so at first.

The throwing-off young gentleman has so often a father possessed of vast property in some remote district of Ireland, that we look with some suspicion upon all young gentlemen who volunteer this description of themselves. The deceased grandfather of the throwing-off young gentleman was a man of immense possessions, and untold wealth; the throwing-off young gentleman remembers, as well as if it were only yesterday, the deceased baronet's library, with its long rows of scarce and valuable books in superbly embossed bindings, arranged in cases, reaching from the lofty ceiling to the oaken floor; and the fine antique chairs and tables, and the noble old castle of Ballykillbabaloo, with its splendid prospect of hill and dale, and wood, and rich wild scenery, and the fine hunting stables and the spacious court-yards, ‘and—and—everything upon the same magnificent scale,’ says the throwing-off young gentleman, ‘princely; quite princely. Ah!’ And he sighs as if mourning over the fallen fortunes of his noble house.

The throwing-off young gentleman is a universal genius; at walking, running, rowing, swimming, and skating, he is unrivalled; at all games of chance or skill, at hunting, shooting, fishing, riding, driving, or amateur theatricals, no one can touch him—that is *could* not, because he gives you carefully to understand, lest there should be any opportunity of testing his skill, that he is quite out of practice just now, and has been for some years. If you mention any beautiful girl of your common acquaintance in his hearing, the throwing-off young gentleman starts, smiles, and begs you not to mind him, for it was quite involuntary: people do say indeed that they were once engaged, but no—although she is a very fine girl, he was so situated at that time that he couldn’t possibly encourage the—‘but it’s of no use talking about it!’ he adds, interrupting himself. ‘She has got over it now, and I firmly hope and trust is happy.’ With this benevolent aspiration he nods his head in a mysterious manner, and whistling the first part of some popular air, thinks perhaps it will be better to change the subject.

There is another great characteristic of the throwing-off young gentleman, which is, that he ‘happens to be acquainted’ with a most extraordinary variety of people in all parts of the world. Thus in all disputed questions, when the throwing-off young gentleman has no argument to bring forward, he invariably happens to be acquainted with some distant person, intimately connected with the subject, whose testimony decides the point against you, to the great—may we say it—to the great admiration of three young ladies out of every four, who consider the throwing-off young gentleman a very highly-connected young man, and a most charming person.

Sometimes the throwing-off young gentleman happens to look in upon a little family circle of young ladies who are quietly spending the evening together, and then indeed is he at the very height and summit of his glory; for it is to be observed that he by no means shines to equal advantage in the presence of men as in the society of over-credulous young ladies, which is his proper element. It is delightful to hear the number of pretty things the throwing-off young gentleman gives utterance to, during tea, and still more so to observe the ease with which, from long practice and study, he delicately blends one compliment to a lady with two for himself. ‘Did you ever see a more lovely blue than this flower, Mr. Caveton?’ asks a young lady who, truth to tell, is rather smitten with the throwing-off young gentleman. ‘Never,’ he replies, bending over the object of admiration, ‘never but in your eyes.’ ‘Oh, Mr. Caveton,’ cries the young lady, blushing of course. ‘Indeed I speak the truth,’ replies the throwing-off young gentleman, ‘I never saw any approach to them. I used to think my cousin’s blue eyes lovely, but they grow dim and colourless beside yours.’ ‘Oh! a beautiful cousin, Mr. Caveton!’ replies the young lady, with that perfect artlessness which is the distinguishing characteristic of all young ladies; ‘an affair, of course.’ ‘No; indeed, indeed you wrong me,’ rejoins the throwing-off young gentleman with great energy. ‘I fervently hope that her attachment towards me may be nothing but the natural result of our close intimacy in childhood, and that in change of scene and among new faces she may soon overcome it. *I* love her! Think not so meanly of me, Miss Lowfield, I beseech, as to suppose that title, lands, riches, and beauty, can influence *my* choice. The heart, the heart, Miss Lowfield.’ Here the throwing-off young gentleman sinks his voice to a still lower whisper; and the young lady duly proclaims to all the other young ladies when they go up-stairs, to put their bonnets on, that Mr. Caveton’s relations are all immensely rich, and that he is hopelessly beloved by title, lands, riches, and beauty.

We have seen a throwing-off young gentleman who, to our certain knowledge, was innocent of a note of music, and scarcely able to recognise a tune by ear, volunteer a Spanish air upon the guitar when he had previously satisfied himself that there was not such an instrument within a mile of the house.

We have heard another throwing-off young gentleman, after striking a note or two upon the piano, and accompanying it correctly (by dint of laborious practice) with his voice, assure a circle of wondering listeners that so acute was his ear that he was wholly unable to sing out of tune, let him try as he would. We have lived to witness the unmasking of another throwing-off young gentleman, who went out a visiting in a military cap with a gold band and tassel, and who, after passing successfully for a captain and being lauded to the skies for his red whiskers, his bravery, his soldierly bearing and his pride, turned out to be the dishonest son of an honest linen-draper in a small country town, and whom, if it were not for this fortunate exposure, we should not yet despair of encountering as the fortunate husband of some rich heiress. Ladies, ladies, the throwing-off young gentlemen are often swindlers, and always fools. So pray you avoid them.

THE YOUNG LADIES' YOUNG GENTLEMAN

This young gentleman has several titles. Some young ladies consider him 'a nice young man,' others 'a fine young man,' others 'quite a lady's man,' others 'a handsome man,' others 'a remarkably good-looking young man.' With some young ladies he is 'a perfect angel,' and with others 'quite a love.' He is likewise a charming creature, a duck, and a dear.

The young ladies' young gentleman has usually a fresh colour and very white teeth, which latter articles, of course, he displays on every possible opportunity. He has brown or black hair, and whiskers of the same, if possible; but a slight tinge of red, or the hue which is vulgarly known as *sandy*, is not considered an objection. If his head and face be large, his nose prominent, and his figure square, he is an uncommonly fine young man, and worshipped accordingly. Should his whiskers meet beneath his chin, so much the better, though this is not absolutely insisted on; but he must wear an under-waistcoat, and smile constantly.

There was a great party got up by some party-loving friends of ours last summer, to go and dine in Epping Forest. As we hold that such wild expeditions should never be indulged in, save by people of the smallest means, who have no dinner at home, we should indubitably have excused ourself from attending, if we had not recollected that the projectors of the excursion were always accompanied on such occasions by a choice sample of the young ladies' young gentleman, whom we were very anxious to have an opportunity of meeting. This determined us, and we went.

We were to make for Chigwell in four glass coaches, each with a trifling company of six or eight inside, and a little boy belonging to the projectors on the box—and to start from the residence of the projectors, Woburn-place, Russell-square, at half-past ten precisely. We arrived at the place of rendezvous at the appointed time, and found the glass coaches and the little boys quite ready, and divers young ladies and young gentlemen looking anxiously over the breakfast-parlour blinds, who appeared by no means so much gratified by our approach as we might have expected, but evidently wished we had been somebody else. Observing that our arrival in lieu of the unknown occasioned some disappointment, we ventured to inquire who was yet to come, when we found from the hasty reply of a dozen voices, that it was no other than the young ladies' young gentleman.

'I cannot imagine,' said the mamma, 'what has become of Mr. Balim—always so punctual, always so pleasant and agreeable. I am sure I can-*not* think.' As these last words were uttered in that measured, emphatic manner which painfully announces that the speaker has not quite made up his or her mind what to say, but is determined to talk on nevertheless, the eldest daughter took up the subject, and hoped no accident had happened to Mr. Balim, upon which there was a general chorus of 'Dear Mr. Balim!' and one young lady, more adventurous than the rest, proposed that an express should be straightway sent to dear Mr. Balim's lodgings. This, however, the papa resolutely opposed, observing, in what a short young lady behind us termed 'quite a bearish way,' that if Mr. Balim didn't choose to come, he might stop at home. At this all the daughters raised a murmur of 'Oh pa!' except one sprightly little girl of eight or ten years old, who, taking advantage of a pause in the discourse, remarked, that perhaps Mr. Balim might have been married that morning—for which impertinent suggestion she was summarily ejected from the room by her eldest sister.

We were all in a state of great mortification and uneasiness, when one of the little boys, running into the room as airily as little boys usually run who have an unlimited allowance of animal food in the holidays, and keep their hands constantly forced down to the bottoms of very deep trouser-pockets when they take exercise, joyfully announced that Mr. Balim was at that moment coming up the street in a hackney-cab; and the intelligence was confirmed beyond all doubt a minute afterwards by the entry of Mr. Balim himself, who was received with repeated cries of 'Where have you been, you naughty creature?' whereunto the naughty creature replied, that he had been in bed, in consequence of a late party the night before, and had only just risen. The acknowledgment awakened a variety of agonizing fears that he had taken no breakfast; which appearing after a slight cross-examination to be the real state of the case, breakfast for one was immediately ordered, notwithstanding Mr. Balim’s repeated protestations that he couldn’t think of it. He did think of it though, and thought better of it too, for he made a remarkably good meal when it came, and was assiduously served by a select knot of young ladies. It was quite delightful to see how he ate and drank, while one pair of fair hands poured out his coffee, and another put in the sugar, and another the milk; the rest of the company ever and anon casting angry glances at their watches, and the glass coaches,—and the little boys looking on in an agony of apprehension lest it should begin to rain before we set out; it might have rained all day, after we were once too far to turn back again, and welcome, for aught they cared.

However, the cavalcade moved at length, every coachman being accommodated with a hamper between his legs something larger than a wheelbarrow; and the company being packed as closely as they possibly could in the carriages, ‘according,’ as one married lady observed, ‘to the immemorial custom, which was half the diversion of gipsy parties.’ Thinking it very likely it might be (we have never been able to discover the other half), we submitted to be stowed away with a cheerful aspect, and were fortunate enough to occupy one corner of a coach in which were one old lady, four young ladies, and the renowned Mr. Balim the young ladies’ young gentleman.

We were no sooner fairly off, than the young ladies’ young gentleman hummed a fragment of an air, which induced a young lady to inquire whether he had danced to that the night before. ‘By Heaven, then, I did,’ replied the young gentleman, ‘and with a lovely heiress; a superb creature, with twenty thousand pounds.’ ‘You seem rather struck,’ observed another young lady. ‘’Gad she was a sweet creature,’ returned the young gentleman, arranging his hair. ‘Of course *she* was struck too?’ inquired the first young lady. ‘How can you ask, love?’ interposed the second; ‘could she fail to be?’ ‘Well, honestly I think she was,’ observed the young gentleman. At this point of the dialogue, the young lady who had spoken first, and who sat on the young gentleman’s right, struck him a severe blow on the arm with a rosebud, and said he was a vain man—whereupon the young gentleman insisted on having the rosebud, and the young lady appealing for help to the other young ladies, a charming struggle ensued, terminating in the victory of the young gentleman, and the capture of the rosebud. This little skirmish over, the married lady, who was the mother of the rosebud, smiled sweetly upon the young gentleman, and accused him of being a flirt; the young gentleman pleading not guilty, a most interesting discussion took place upon the important point whether the young gentleman was a flirt or not, which being an agreeable conversation of a light kind, lasted a considerable time. At length, a short silence occurring, the young ladies on either side of the young gentleman fell suddenly fast asleep; and the young gentleman, winking upon us to preserve silence, won a pair of gloves from each, thereby causing them to wake with equal suddenness and to scream very loud. The lively conversation to which this pleasantry gave rise, lasted for the remainder of the ride, and would have eked out a much longer one.

We dined rather more comfortably than people usually do under such circumstances, nothing having been left behind but the cork-screw and the bread. The married gentlemen were unusually thirsty, which they attributed to the heat of the weather; the little boys ate to inconvenience; mammas were very jovial, and their daughters very fascinating; and the attendants being well-behaved men, got exceedingly drunk at a respectful distance.

We had our eye on Mr. Balim at dinner-time, and perceived that he flourished wonderfully, being still surrounded by a little group of young ladies, who listened to him as an oracle, while he ate from their plates and drank from their glasses in a manner truly captivating from its excessive playfulness. His conversation, too, was exceedingly brilliant. In fact, one elderly lady assured us, that in the course of a little lively *badinage* on the subject of ladies' dresses, he had evinced as much knowledge as if he had been born and bred a milliner.

As such of the fat people who did not happen to fall asleep after dinner entered upon a most vigorous game at ball, we slipped away alone into a thicker part of the wood, hoping to fall in with Mr. Balim, the greater part of the young people having dropped off in twos and threes and the young ladies' young gentleman among them. Nor were we disappointed, for we had not walked far, when, peeping through the trees, we discovered him before us, and truly it was a pleasant thing to contemplate his greatness.

The young ladies' young gentleman was seated upon the ground, at the feet of a few young ladies who were reclining on a bank; he was so profusely decked with scarfs, ribands, flowers, and other pretty spoils, that he looked like a lamb—or perhaps a calf would be a better simile—adorned for the sacrifice. One young lady supported a parasol over his interesting head, another held his hat, and a third his neck-cloth, which in romantic fashion he had thrown off; the young gentleman himself, with his hand upon his breast, and his face moulded into an expression of the most honeyed sweetness, was warbling forth some choice specimens of vocal music in praise of female loveliness, in a style so exquisitely perfect, that we burst into an involuntary shout of laughter, and made a hasty retreat.

What charming fellows these young ladies' young gentlemen are! Ducks, dears, loves, angels, are all terms inadequate to express their merit. They are such amazingly, uncommonly, wonderfully, nice men.

CONCLUSION

As we have placed before the young ladies so many specimens of young gentlemen, and have also in the dedication of this volume given them to understand how much we reverence and admire their numerous virtues and perfections; as we have given them such strong reasons to treat us with confidence, and to banish, in our case, all that reserve and distrust of the male sex which, as a point of general behaviour, they cannot do better than preserve and maintain—we say, as we have done all this, we feel that now, when we have arrived at the close of our task, they may naturally press upon us the inquiry, what particular description of young gentlemen we can conscientiously recommend.

Here we are at a loss. We look over our list, and can neither recommend the bashful young gentleman, nor the out-and-out young gentleman, nor the very friendly young gentleman, nor the military young gentleman, nor the political young gentleman, nor the domestic young gentleman, nor the censorious young gentleman, nor the funny young gentleman, nor the theatrical young gentleman, nor the poetical young gentleman, nor the throwing-off young gentleman, nor the young ladies' young gentleman.

As there are some good points about many of them, which still are not sufficiently numerous to render any one among them eligible, as a whole, our respectful advice to the young ladies is, to seek for a young gentleman who unites in himself the best qualities of all, and the worst weaknesses of none, and to lead him forthwith to the hymeneal altar, whether he will or no. And to the young lady who secures him, we beg to tender one short fragment of matrimonial advice, selected from many sound passages of a similar tendency, to be found in a letter written by Dean Swift to a young lady on her marriage.

‘The grand affair of your life will be, to gain and preserve the esteem of your husband. Neither good-nature nor virtue will suffer him to *esteem* you against his judgment; and although he is not capable of using you ill, yet you will in time grow a thing indifferent and perhaps contemptible; unless you can supply the loss of youth and beauty with more durable qualities. You have but a very few years to be young and handsome in the eyes of the world; and as few months to be so in the eyes of a husband who is not a fool; for I hope you do not still dream of charms and raptures, which marriage ever did, and ever will, put a sudden end to.’

From the anxiety we express for the proper behaviour of the fortunate lady after marriage, it may possibly be inferred that the young gentleman to whom we have so delicately alluded, is no other than ourself. Without in any way committing ourself upon this point, we have merely to observe, that we are ready to receive sealed offers containing a full specification of age, temper, appearance, and condition; but we beg it to be distinctly understood that we do not pledge ourself to accept the highest bidder.

These offers may be forwarded to the Publishers, Messrs. Chapman and Hall, London; to whom all pieces of plate and other testimonials of approbation from the young ladies generally, are respectfully requested to be addressed.

SKETCHES OF YOUNG COUPLES

AN URGENT REMONSTRANCE, &c.

TO THE GENTLEMEN OF ENGLAND,
(being bachelors or widowers,)
THE REMONSTRANCE OF THEIR FAITHFUL FELLOW-SUBJECT,

Sheweth,—

That Her Most Gracious Majesty, Victoria, by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland Queen, Defender of the Faith, did, on the 23rd day of November last past, declare and pronounce to Her Most Honourable Privy Council, Her Majesty's Most Gracious intention of entering into the bonds of wedlock.

That Her Most Gracious Majesty, in so making known Her Most Gracious intention to Her Most Honourable Privy Council as aforesaid, did use and employ the words—'It is my intention to ally myself in marriage with Prince Albert of Saxe Coburg and Gotha.'

That the present is Bissextile, or Leap Year, in which it is held and considered lawful for any lady to offer and submit proposals of marriage to any gentleman, and to enforce and insist upon acceptance of the same, under pain of a certain fine or penalty; to wit, one silk or satin dress of the first quality, to be chosen by the lady and paid (or owed) for, by the gentleman.

That these and other the horrors and dangers with which the said Bissextile, or Leap Year, threatens the gentlemen of England on every occasion of its periodical return, have been greatly aggravated and augmented by the terms of Her Majesty's said Most Gracious communication, which have filled the heads of divers young ladies in this Realm with certain new ideas destructive to the peace of mankind, that never entered their imagination before.

That a case has occurred in Camberwell, in which a young lady informed her Papa that 'she intended to ally herself in marriage' with Mr. Smith of Stepney; and that another, and a very distressing case, has occurred at Tottenham, in which a young lady not only stated her intention of allying herself in marriage with her cousin John, but, taking violent possession of her said cousin, actually married him.

That similar outrages are of constant occurrence, not only in the capital and its neighbourhood, but throughout the kingdom, and that unless the excited female populace be speedily checked and restrained in their lawless proceedings, most deplorable results must ensue therefrom; among which may be anticipated a most alarming increase in the population of the country, with which no efforts of the agricultural or manufacturing interest can possibly keep pace.

That there is strong reason to suspect the existence of a most extensive plot, conspiracy, or design, secretly contrived by vast numbers of single ladies in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and now extending its ramifications in every quarter of the land; the object and intent of which plainly appears to be the holding and solemnising of an enormous and unprecedented number of marriages, on the day on which the nuptials of Her said Most Gracious Majesty are performed.

That such plot, conspiracy, or design, strongly savours of Popery, as tending to the discomfiture of the Clergy of the Established Church, by entailing upon them great mental and physical exhaustion; and that such Popish plots are fomented and encouraged by Her Majesty's Ministers, which clearly appears—not only from Her Majesty's principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs traitorously getting married while holding office under the Crown; but from Mr. O'Connell having been heard to declare and avow that, if he had a daughter to marry, she should be married on the same day as Her said Most Gracious Majesty.

That such arch plots, conspiracies, and designs, besides being fraught with danger to the Established Church, and (consequently) to the State, cannot fail to bring ruin and bankruptcy upon a large class of Her Majesty's subjects; as a great and sudden increase in the number of married men occasioning the comparative desertion (for a time) of Taverns, Hotels, Billiard-rooms, and Gaming-Houses, will deprive the Proprietors of their accustomed profits and returns. And in further proof of the depth and baseness of such designs, it may be here observed, that all proprietors of Taverns, Hotels, Billiard-rooms, and Gaming-Houses, are (especially the last) solemnly devoted to the Protestant religion.

For all these reasons, and many others of no less gravity and import, an urgent appeal is made to the gentlemen of England (being bachelors or widowers) to take immediate steps for convening a Public meeting; To consider of the best and surest means of averting the dangers with which they are threatened by the recurrence of Bissextile, or Leap Year, and the additional sensation created among single ladies by the terms of Her Majesty’s Most Gracious Declaration; To take measures, without delay, for resisting the said single Ladies, and counteracting their evil designs; And to pray Her Majesty to dismiss her present Ministers, and to summon to her Councils those distinguished Gentlemen in various Honourable Professions who, by insulting on all occasions the only Lady in England who can be insulted with safety, have given a sufficient guarantee to Her Majesty’s Loving Subjects that they, at least, are qualified to make war with women, and are already expert in the use of those weapons which are common to the lowest and most abandoned of the sex.

THE YOUNG COUPLE

There is to be a wedding this morning at the corner house in the terrace. The pastry-cook’s people have been there half-a-dozen times already; all day yesterday there was a great stir and bustle, and they were up this morning as soon as it was light. Miss Emma Fielding is going to be married to young Mr. Harvey.

Heaven alone can tell in what bright colours this marriage is painted upon the mind of the little housemaid at number six, who has hardly slept a wink all night with thinking of it, and now stands on the unswept door-steps leaning upon her broom, and looking wistfully towards the enchanted house. Nothing short of omniscience can divine what visions of the baker, or the green-grocer, or the smart and most insinuating butterman, are flitting across her mind—what thoughts of how she would dress on such an occasion, if she were a lady—of how she would dress, if she were only a bride—of how cook would dress, being bridesmaid, conjointly with her sister ‘in place’ at Fulham, and how the clergyman, deeming them so many ladies, would be quite humbled and respectful. What day-dreams of hope and happiness—of life being one perpetual holiday, with no master and no mistress to grant or withhold it—of every Sunday being a Sunday out—of pure freedom as to curls and ringlets, and no obligation to hide fine heads of hair in caps—what pictures of happiness, vast and immense to her, but utterly ridiculous to us, bewilder the brain of the little housemaid at number six, all called into existence by the wedding at the corner!

We smile at such things, and so we should, though perhaps for a better reason than commonly presents itself. It should be pleasant to us to know that there are notions of happiness so moderate and limited, since upon those who entertain them, happiness and lightness of heart are very easily bestowed.

But the little housemaid is awakened from her reverie, for forth from the door of the magical corner house there runs towards her, all fluttering in smart new dress and streaming ribands, her friend Jane Adams, who comes all out of breath to redeem a solemn promise of taking her in, under cover of the confusion, to see the breakfast table spread forth in state, and—sight of sights!—her young mistress ready dressed for church.

And there, in good truth, when they have stolen up-stairs on tip-toe and edged themselves in at the chamber-door—there is Miss Emma 'looking like the sweetest picter,' in a white chip bonnet and orange flowers, and all other elegancies becoming a bride, (with the make, shape, and quality of every article of which the girl is perfectly familiar in one moment, and never forgets to her dying day)—and there is Miss Emma's mamma in tears, and Miss Emma's papa comforting her, and saying how that of course she has been long looking forward to this, and how happy she ought to be—and there too is Miss Emma's sister with her arms round her neck, and the other bridesmaid all smiles and tears, quieting the children, who would cry more but that they are so finely dressed, and yet sob for fear sister Emma should be taken away—and it is all so affecting, that the two servant-girls cry more than anybody; and Jane Adams, sitting down upon the stairs, when they have crept away, declares that her legs tremble so that she don't know what to do, and that she will say for Miss Emma, that she never had a hasty word from her, and that she does hope and pray she may be happy.

But Jane soon comes round again, and then surely there never was anything like the breakfast table, glittering with plate and china, and set out with flowers and sweets, and long-necked bottles, in the most sumptuous and dazzling manner. In the centre, too, is the mighty charm, the cake, glistening with frosted sugar, and garnished beautifully. They agree that there ought to be a little Cupid under one of the barley-sugar temples, or at least two hearts and an arrow; but, with this exception, there is nothing to wish for, and a table could not be handsomer. As they arrive at this conclusion, who should come in but Mr. John! to whom Jane says that its only Anne from number six; and John says *he* knows, for he’s often winked his eye down the area, which causes Anne to blush and look confused. She is going away, indeed; when Mr. John will have it that she must drink a glass of wine, and he says never mind it’s being early in the morning, it won’t hurt her: so they shut the door and pour out the wine; and Anne drinking lane’s health, and adding, ‘and here’s wishing you yours, Mr. John,’ drinks it in a great many sips,—Mr. John all the time making jokes appropriate to the occasion. At last Mr. John, who has waxed bolder by degrees, pleads the usage at weddings, and claims the privilege of a kiss, which he obtains after a great scuffle; and footsteps being now heard on the stairs, they disperse suddenly.

By this time a carriage has driven up to convey the bride to church, and Anne of number six prolonging the process of ‘cleaning her door,’ has the satisfaction of beholding the bride and bridesmaids, and the papa and mamma, hurry into the same and drive rapidly off. Nor is this all, for soon other carriages begin to arrive with a posse of company all beautifully dressed, at whom she could stand and gaze for ever; but having something else to do, is compelled to take one last long look and shut the street-door.

And now the company have gone down to breakfast, and tears have given place to smiles, for all the corks are out of the long-necked bottles, and their contents are disappearing rapidly. Miss Emma’s papa is at the top of the table; Miss Emma’s mamma at the bottom; and beside the latter are Miss Emma herself and her husband,—admitted on all hands to be the handsomest and most interesting young couple ever known. All down both sides of the table, too, are various young ladies, beautiful to see, and various young gentlemen who seem to think so; and there, in a post of honour, is an unmarried aunt of Miss Emma’s, reported to possess unheard-of riches, and to have expressed vast testamentary intentions respecting her favourite niece and new nephew. This lady has been very liberal and generous already, as the jewels worn by the bride abundantly testify, but that is nothing to what she means to do, or even to what she has done, for she put herself in close communication with the dressmaker three months ago, and prepared a wardrobe (with some articles worked by her own hands) fit for a Princess. People may call her an old maid, and so she may be, but she is neither cross nor ugly for all that; on the contrary, she is very cheerful and pleasant-looking, and very kind and tender-hearted: which is no matter of surprise except to those who yield to popular prejudices without thinking why, and will never grow wiser and never know better.

Of all the company though, none are more pleasant to behold or better pleased with themselves than two young children, who, in honour of the day, have seats among the guests. Of these, one is a little fellow of six or eight years old, brother to the bride,—and the other a girl of the same age, or something younger, whom he calls ‘his wife.’ The real bride and bridegroom are not more devoted than they: he all love and attention, and she all blushes and fondness, toying with a little bouquet which he gave her this morning, and placing the scattered rose-leaves in her bosom with nature’s own coquettishness. They have dreamt of each other in their quiet dreams, these children, and their little hearts have been nearly broken when the absent one has been dispraised in jest. When will there come in after-life a passion so earnest, generous, and true as theirs; what, even in its gentlest realities, can have the grace and charm that hover round such fairy lovers!

By this time the merriment and happiness of the feast have gained their height; certain ominous looks begin to be exchanged between the bridesmaids, and somehow it gets whispered about that the carriage which is to take the young couple into the country has arrived. Such members of the party as are most disposed to prolong its enjoyments, affect to consider this a false alarm, but it turns out too true, being speedily confirmed, first by the retirement of the bride and a select file of intimates who are to prepare her for the journey, and secondly by the withdrawal of the ladies generally. To this there ensues a particularly awkward pause, in which everybody essays to be facetious, and nobody succeeds; at length the bridegroom makes a mysterious disappearance in obedience to some equally mysterious signal; and the table is deserted.

Now, for at least six weeks last past it has been solemnly devised and settled that the young couple should go away in secret; but they no sooner appear without the door than the drawing-room windows are blocked up with ladies waving their handkerchiefs and kissing their hands, and the dining-room panes with gentlemen’s faces beaming farewell in every queer variety of its expression. The hall and steps are crowded with servants in white favours, mixed up with particular friends and relations who have darted out to say good-bye; and foremost in the group are the tiny lovers arm in arm, thinking, with fluttering hearts, what happiness it would be to dash away together in that gallant coach, and never part again.

The bride has barely time for one hurried glance at her old home, when the steps rattle, the door slams, the horses clatter on the pavement, and they have left it far away.

A knot of women servants still remain clustered in the hall, whispering among themselves, and there of course is Anne from number six, who has made another escape on some plea or other, and been an admiring witness of the departure. There are two points on which Anne expatiates over and over again, without the smallest appearance of fatigue or intending to leave off; one is, that she 'never see in all her life such a—oh such a angel of a gentleman as Mr. Harvey'—and the other, that she 'can't tell how it is, but it don't seem a bit like a work-a-day, or a Sunday neither—it's all so unsettled and unregular.'

THE FORMAL COUPLE

The formal couple are the most prim, cold, immovable, and unsatisfactory people on the face of the earth. Their faces, voices, dress, house, furniture, walk, and manner, are all the essence of formality, unrelieved by one redeeming touch of frankness, heartiness, or nature.

Everything with the formal couple resolves itself into a matter of form. They don't call upon you on your account, but their own; not to see how you are, but to show how they are: it is not a ceremony to do honour to you, but to themselves,—not due to your position, but to theirs. If one of a friend's children die, the formal couple are as sure and punctual in sending to the house as the undertaker; if a friend's family be increased, the monthly nurse is not more attentive than they. The formal couple, in fact, joyfully seize all occasions of testifying their good-breeding and precise observance of the little usages of society; and for you, who are the means to this end, they care as much as a man does for the tailor who has enabled him to cut a figure, or a woman for the milliner who has assisted her to a conquest.

Having an extensive connexion among that kind of people who make acquaintances and eschew friends, the formal gentleman attends from time to time a great many funerals, to which he is formally invited, and to which he formally goes, as returning a call for the last time. Here his deportment is of the most faultless description; he knows the exact pitch of voice it is proper to assume, the sombre look he ought to wear, the melancholy tread which should be his gait for the day. He is perfectly acquainted with all the dreary courtesies to be observed in a mourning-coach; knows when to sigh, and when to hide his nose in the white handkerchief; and looks into the grave and shakes his head when the ceremony is concluded, with the sad formality of a mute.

'What kind of funeral was it?' says the formal lady, when he returns home. 'Oh!' replies the formal gentleman, 'there never was such a gross and disgusting impropriety; there were no feathers.' 'No feathers!' cries the lady, as if on wings of black feathers dead people fly to Heaven, and, lacking them, they must of necessity go elsewhere. Her husband shakes his head; and further adds, that they had seed-cake instead of plum-cake, and that it was all white wine. 'All white wine!' exclaims his wife. 'Nothing but sherry and madeira,' says the husband. 'What! no port?' 'Not a drop.' No port, no plums, and no feathers! 'You will recollect, my dear,' says the formal lady, in a voice of stately reproof, 'that when we first met this poor man who is now dead and gone, and he took that very strange course of addressing me at dinner without being previously introduced, I ventured to express my opinion that the family were quite ignorant of etiquette, and very imperfectly acquainted with the decencies of life. You have now had a good opportunity of judging for yourself, and all I have to say is, that I trust you will never go to a funeral *there* again.' 'My dear,' replies the formal gentleman, 'I never will.' So the informal deceased is cut in his grave; and the formal couple, when they tell the story of the funeral, shake their heads, and wonder what some people's feelings *are* made of, and what their notions of propriety *can* be!

If the formal couple have a family (which they sometimes have), they are not children, but little, pale, sour, sharp-nosed men and women; and so exquisitely brought up, that they might be very old dwarfs for anything that appeareth to the contrary. Indeed, they are so acquainted with forms and conventionalities, and conduct themselves with such strict decorum, that to see the little girl break a looking-glass in some wild outbreak, or the little boy kick his parents, would be to any visitor an unspeakable relief and consolation.

The formal couple are always sticklers for what is rigidly proper, and have a great readiness in detecting hidden impropriety of speech or thought, which by less scrupulous people would be wholly unsuspected. Thus, if they pay a visit to the theatre, they sit all night in a perfect agony lest anything improper or immoral should proceed from the stage; and if anything should happen to be said which admits of a double construction, they never fail to take it up directly, and to express by their looks the great outrage which their feelings have sustained. Perhaps this is their chief reason for absenting themselves almost entirely from places of public amusement. They go sometimes to the Exhibition of the Royal Academy;—but that is often more shocking than the stage itself, and the formal lady thinks that it really is high time Mr. Etty was prosecuted and made a public example of.

We made one at a christening party not long since, where there were amongst the guests a formal couple, who suffered the acutest torture from certain jokes, incidental to such an occasion, cut—and very likely dried also—by one of the godfathers; a red-faced elderly gentleman, who, being highly popular with the rest of the company, had it all his own way, and was in great spirits. It was at supper-time that this gentleman came out in full force. We—being of a grave and quiet demeanour—had been chosen to escort the formal lady down-stairs, and, sitting beside her, had a favourable opportunity of observing her emotions.

We have a shrewd suspicion that, in the very beginning, and in the first blush—literally the first blush—of the matter, the formal lady had not felt quite certain whether the being present at such a ceremony, and encouraging, as it were, the public exhibition of a baby, was not an act involving some degree of indelicacy and impropriety; but certain we are that when that baby's health was drunk, and allusions were made, by a grey-headed gentleman proposing it, to the time when he had dandled in his arms the young Christian's mother,—certain we are that then the formal lady took the alarm, and recoiled from the old gentleman as from a hoary profligate. Still she bore it; she fanned herself with an indignant air, but still she bore it. A comic song was sung, involving a confession from some imaginary gentleman that he had kissed a female, and yet the formal lady bore it. But when at last, the health of the godfather before-mentioned being drunk, the godfather rose to return thanks, and in the course of his observations darkly hinted at babies yet unborn, and even contemplated the possibility of the subject of that festival having brothers and sisters, the formal lady could endure no more, but, bowing slightly round, and sweeping haughtily past the offender, left the room in tears, under the protection of the formal gentleman.

THE LOVING COUPLE

There cannot be a better practical illustration of the wise saw and ancient instance, that there may be too much of a good thing, than is presented by a loving couple. Undoubtedly it is meet and proper that two persons joined together in holy matrimony should be loving, and unquestionably it is pleasant to know and see that they are so; but there is a time for all things, and the couple who happen to be always in a loving state before company, are well-nigh intolerable.

And in taking up this position we would have it distinctly understood that we do not seek alone the sympathy of bachelors, in whose objection to loving couples we recognise interested motives and personal considerations. We grant that to that unfortunate class of society there may be something very irritating, tantalising, and provoking, in being compelled to witness those gentle endearments and chaste interchanges which to loving couples are quite the ordinary business of life. But while we recognise the natural character of the prejudice to which these unhappy men are subject, we can neither receive their biassed evidence, nor address ourself to their inflamed and angered minds. Dispassionate experience is our only guide; and in these moral essays we seek no less to reform hymeneal offenders than to hold out a timely warning to all rising couples, and even to those who have not yet set forth upon their pilgrimage towards the matrimonial market.

Let all couples, present or to come, therefore profit by the example of Mr. and Mrs. Leaver, themselves a loving couple in the first degree.

Mr. and Mrs. Leaver are pronounced by Mrs. Starling, a widow lady who lost her husband when she was young, and lost herself about the same-time—for by her own count she has never since grown five years older—to be a perfect model of wedded felicity. ‘You would suppose,’ says the romantic lady, ‘that they were lovers only just now engaged. Never was such happiness! They are so tender, so affectionate, so attached to each other, so enamoured, that positively nothing can be more charming!’

‘Augusta, my soul,’ says Mr. Leaver. ‘Augustus, my life,’ replies Mrs. Leaver. ‘Sing some little ballad, darling,’ quoth Mr. Leaver. ‘I couldn’t, indeed, dearest,’ returns Mrs. Leaver. ‘Do, my dove,’ says Mr. Leaver. ‘I couldn’t possibly, my love,’ replies Mrs. Leaver; ‘and it’s very naughty of you to ask me.’ ‘Naughty, darling!’ cries Mr. Leaver. ‘Yes, very naughty, and very cruel,’ returns Mrs. Leaver, ‘for you know I have a sore throat, and that to sing would give me great pain. You’re a monster, and I hate you. Go away!’ Mrs. Leaver has said ‘go away,’ because Mr. Leaver has tapped her under the chin: Mr. Leaver not doing as he is bid, but on the contrary, sitting down beside her, Mrs. Leaver slaps Mr. Leaver; and Mr. Leaver in return slaps Mrs. Leaver, and it being now time for all persons present to look the other way, they look the other way, and hear a still small sound as of kissing, at which Mrs. Starling is thoroughly enraptured, and whispers her neighbour that if all married couples were like that, what a heaven this earth would be!

The loving couple are at home when this occurs, and maybe only three or four friends are present, but, unaccustomed to reserve upon this interesting point, they are pretty much the same abroad. Indeed upon some occasions, such as a pic-nic or a water-party, their lovingness is even more developed, as we had an opportunity last summer of observing in person.

There was a great water-party made up to go to Twickenham and dine, and afterwards dance in an empty villa by the river-side, hired expressly for the purpose. Mr. and Mrs. Leaver were of the company; and it was our fortune to have a seat in the same boat, which was an eight-oared galley, manned by amateurs, with a blue striped awning of the same pattern as their Guernsey shirts, and a dingy red flag of the same shade as the whiskers of the stroke oar. A coxswain being appointed, and all other matters adjusted, the eight gentlemen threw themselves into strong paroxysms, and pulled up with the tide, stimulated by the compassionate remarks of the ladies, who one and all exclaimed, that it seemed an immense exertion—as indeed it did. At first we raced the other boat, which came alongside in gallant style; but this being found an unpleasant amusement, as giving rise to a great quantity of splashing, and rendering the cold pies and other viands very moist, it was unanimously voted down, and we were suffered to shoot a-head, while the second boat followed ingloriously in our wake.

It was at this time that we first recognised Mr. Leaver. There were two firemen-watermen in the boat, lying by until somebody was exhausted; and one of them, who had taken upon himself the direction of affairs, was heard to cry in a gruff voice, ‘Pull away, number two—give it her, number two—take a longer reach, number two—now, number two, sir, think you’re winning a boat.’ The greater part of the company had no doubt begun to wonder which of the striped Guernseys it might be that stood in need of such encouragement, when a stifled shriek from Mrs. Leaver confirmed the doubtful and informed the ignorant; and Mr. Leaver, still further disguised in a straw hat and no neckcloth, was observed to be in a fearful perspiration, and failing visibly. Nor was the general consternation diminished at this instant by the same gentleman (in the performance of an accidental aquatic feat, termed ‘catching a crab’) plunging suddenly backward, and displaying nothing of himself to the company, but two violently struggling legs. Mrs. Leaver shrieked again several times, and cried piteously—‘Is he dead? Tell me the worst. Is he dead?’

Now, a moment’s reflection might have convinced the loving wife, that unless her husband were endowed with some most surprising powers of muscular action, he never could be dead while he kicked so hard; but still Mrs. Leaver cried, ‘Is he dead? is he dead?’ and still everybody else cried—‘No, no, no,’ until such time as Mr. Leaver was replaced in a sitting posture, and his oar (which had been going through all kinds of wrong-headed performances on its own account) was once more put in his hand, by the exertions of the two firemen-watermen. Mr. Leaver then exclaimed, ‘Augustus, my child, come to me;’ and Mr. Leaver said, ‘Augusta, my love, compose yourself, I am not injured.’ But Mrs. Leaver cried again more piteously than before, ‘Augustus, my child, come to me;’ and now the company generally, who seemed to be apprehensive that if Mr. Leaver remained where he was, he might contribute more than his proper share towards the drowning of the party, disinterestedly took part with Mrs. Leaver, and said he really ought to go, and that he was not strong enough for such violent exercise, and ought never to have undertaken it. Reluctantly, Mr. Leaver went, and laid himself down at Mrs. Leaver’s feet, and Mrs. Leaver stooping over him, said, ‘Oh Augustus, how could you terrify me so?’ and Mr. Leaver said, ‘Augusta, my sweet, I never meant to terrify you;’ and Mrs. Leaver said, ‘You are faint, my dear;’ and Mr. Leaver said, ‘I am rather so, my love;’ and they were very loving indeed under Mrs. Leaver’s veil, until at length Mr. Leaver came forth again, and pleasantly asked if he had not heard something said about bottled stout and sandwiches.

Mrs. Starling, who was one of the party, was perfectly delighted with this scene, and frequently murmured half-aside, ‘What a loving couple you are!’ or ‘How delightful it is to see man and wife so happy together!’ To us she was quite poetical, (for we are a kind of cousins,) observing that hearts beating in unison like that made life a paradise of sweets; and that when kindred creatures were drawn together by sympathies so fine and delicate, what more than mortal happiness did not our souls partake! To all this we answered ‘Certainly,’ or ‘Very true,’ or merely sighed, as the case might be. At every new act of the loving couple, the widow’s admiration broke out afresh; and when Mrs. Leaver would not permit Mr. Leaver to keep his hat off, lest the sun should strike to his head, and give him a brain fever, Mrs. Starling actually shed tears, and said it reminded her of Adam and Eve.

The loving couple were thus loving all the way to Twickenham, but when we arrived there (by which time the amateur crew looked very thirsty and vicious) they were more playful than ever, for Mrs. Leaver threw stones at Mr. Leaver, and Mr. Leaver ran after Mrs. Leaver on the grass, in a most innocent and enchanting manner. At dinner, too, Mr. Leaver *would* steal Mrs. Leaver’s tongue, and Mrs. Leaver *would* retaliate upon Mr. Leaver’s fowl; and when Mrs. Leaver was going to take some lobster salad, Mr. Leaver wouldn’t let her have any, saying that it made her ill, and she was always sorry for it afterwards, which afforded Mrs. Leaver an opportunity of pretending to be cross, and showing many other prettinesses. But this was merely the smiling surface of their loves, not the mighty depths of the stream, down to which the company, to say the truth, dived rather unexpectedly, from the following accident. It chanced that Mr. Leaver took upon himself to propose the bachelors who had first originated the notion of that entertainment, in doing which, he affected to regret that he was no longer of their body himself, and pretended grievously to lament his fallen state. This Mrs. Leaver’s feelings could not brook, even in jest, and consequently, exclaiming aloud, ‘He loves me not, he loves me not!’ she fell in a very pitiable state into the arms of Mrs. Starling, and, directly becoming insensible, was conveyed by that lady and her husband into another room. Presently Mr. Leaver came running back to know if there was a medical gentleman in company, and as there was, (in what company is there not?) both Mr. Leaver and the medical gentleman hurried away together.

The medical gentleman was the first who returned, and among his intimate friends he was observed to laugh and wink, and look as unmedical as might be; but when Mr. Leaver came back he was very solemn, and in answer to all inquiries, shook his head, and remarked that Augusta was far too sensitive to be trifled with—an opinion which the widow subsequently confirmed. Finding that she was in no imminent peril, however, the rest of the party betook themselves to dancing on the green, and very merry and happy they were, and a vast quantity of flirtation there was; the last circumstance being no doubt attributable, partly to the fineness of the weather, and partly to the locality, which is well known to be favourable to all harmless recreations.

In the bustle of the scene, Mr. and Mrs. Leaver stole down to the boat, and disposed themselves under the awning, Mrs. Leaver reclining her head upon Mr. Leaver's shoulder, and Mr. Leaver grasping her hand with great fervour, and looking in her face from time to time with a melancholy and sympathetic aspect. The widow sat apart, feigning to be occupied with a book, but stealthily observing them from behind her fan; and the two firemen-watermen, smoking their pipes on the bank hard by, nudged each other, and grinned in enjoyment of the joke. Very few of the party missed the loving couple; and the few who did, heartily congratulated each other on their disappearance.

THE CONTRADICTORY COUPLE

One would suppose that two people who are to pass their whole lives together, and must necessarily be very often alone with each other, could find little pleasure in mutual contradiction; and yet what is more common than a contradictory couple?

The contradictory couple agree in nothing but contradiction. They return home from Mrs. Bluebottle's dinner-party, each in an opposite corner of the coach, and do not exchange a syllable until they have been seated for at least twenty minutes by the fireside at home, when the gentleman, raising his eyes from the stove, all at once breaks silence:

‘What a very extraordinary thing it is,’ says he, ‘that you *will* contradict, Charlotte!’ ‘*I* contradict!’ cries the lady, ‘but that’s just like you.’ ‘What’s like me?’ says the gentleman sharply. ‘Saying that I contradict you,’ replies the lady. ‘Do you mean to say that you do *not* contradict me?’ retorts the gentleman; ‘do you mean to say that you have not been contradicting me the whole of this day?’ ‘Do you mean to tell me now, that you have not? I mean to tell you nothing of the kind,’ replies the lady quietly; ‘when you are wrong, of course I shall contradict you.’

During this dialogue the gentleman has been taking his brandy-and-water on one side of the fire, and the lady, with her dressing-case on the table, has been curling her hair on the other. She now lets down her back hair, and proceeds to brush it; preserving at the same time an air of conscious rectitude and suffering virtue, which is intended to exasperate the gentleman—and does so.

‘I do believe,’ he says, taking the spoon out of his glass, and tossing it on the table, ‘that of all the obstinate, positive, wrong-headed creatures that were ever born, you are the most so, Charlotte.’ ‘Certainly, certainly, have it your own way, pray. You see how much *I* contradict you,’ rejoins the lady. ‘Of course, you didn’t contradict me at dinner-time—oh no, not you!’ says the gentleman. ‘Yes, I did,’ says the lady. ‘Oh, you did,’ cries the gentleman ‘you admit that?’ ‘If you call that contradiction, I do,’ the lady answers; ‘and I say again, Edward, that when I know you are wrong, I will contradict you. I am not your slave.’ ‘Not my slave!’ repeats the gentleman bitterly; ‘and you still mean to say that in the Blackburns’ new house there are not more than fourteen doors, including the door of the wine-cellar!’ ‘I mean to say,’ retorts the lady, beating time with her hair-brush on the palm of her hand, ‘that in that house there are fourteen doors and no more.’ ‘Well then—’ cries the gentleman, rising in despair, and pacing the room with rapid strides. ‘By G-, this is enough to destroy a man’s intellect, and drive him mad!’

By and by the gentleman comes-to a little, and passing his hand gloomily across his forehead, reseats himself in his former chair. There is a long silence, and this time the lady begins. ‘I appealed to Mr. Jenkins, who sat next to me on the sofa in the drawing-room during tea—’ ‘Morgan, you mean,’ interrupts the gentleman. ‘I do not mean anything of the kind,’ answers the lady. ‘Now, by all that is aggravating and impossible to bear,’ cries the gentleman, clenching his hands and looking upwards in agony, ‘she is going to insist upon it that Morgan is Jenkins!’ ‘Do you take me for a perfect fool?’ exclaims the lady; ‘do you suppose I don’t know the one from the other? Do you suppose I don’t know that the man in the blue coat was Mr. Jenkins?’ ‘Jenkins in a blue coat!’ cries the gentleman with a groan; ‘Jenkins in a blue coat! a man who would suffer death rather than wear anything but brown!’ ‘Do you dare to charge me with telling an untruth?’ demands the lady, bursting into tears. ‘I charge you, ma’am,’ retorts the gentleman, starting up, ‘with being a monster of contradiction, a monster of aggravation, a—a—a—Jenkins in a blue coat!—what have I done that I should be doomed to hear such statements!’

Expressing himself with great scorn and anguish, the gentleman takes up his candle and stalks off to bed, where feigning to be fast asleep when the lady comes up-stairs drowned in tears, murmuring lamentations over her hard fate and indistinct intentions of consulting her brothers, he undergoes the secret torture of hearing her exclaim between whiles, ‘I know there are only fourteen doors in the house, I know it was Mr. Jenkins, I know he had a blue coat on, and I would say it as positively as I do now, if they were the last words I had to speak!’

If the contradictory couple are blessed with children, they are not the less contradictory on that account. Master James and Miss Charlotte present themselves after dinner, and being in perfect good humour, and finding their parents in the same amiable state, augur from these appearances half a glass of wine a-piece and other extraordinary indulgences. But unfortunately Master James, growing talkative upon such prospects, asks his mamma how tall Mrs. Parsons is, and whether she is not six feet high; to which his mamma replies, ‘Yes, she should think she was, for Mrs. Parsons is a very tall lady indeed; quite a giantess.’ ‘For Heaven’s sake, Charlotte,’ cries her husband, ‘do not tell the child such preposterous nonsense. Six feet high!’ ‘Well,’ replies the lady, ‘surely I may be permitted to have an opinion; my opinion is, that she is six feet high—at least six feet.’ ‘Now you know, Charlotte,’ retorts the gentleman sternly, ‘that that is *not* your opinion—that you have no such idea—and that you only say this for the sake of contradiction.’ ‘You are exceedingly polite,’ his wife replies; ‘to be wrong about such a paltry question as anybody’s height, would be no great crime; but I say again, that I believe Mrs. Parsons to be six feet—more than six feet; nay, I believe you know her to be full six feet, and only say she is not, because I say she is.’ This taunt disposes the gentleman to become violent, but he cheeks himself, and is content to mutter, in a haughty tone, ‘Six feet—ha! ha! Mrs. Parsons six feet!’ and the lady answers, ‘Yes, six feet. I am sure I am glad you are amused, and I’ll say it again—six feet.’ Thus the subject gradually drops off, and the contradiction begins to be forgotten, when Master James, with some undefined notion of making himself agreeable, and putting things to rights again, unfortunately asks his mamma what the moon’s made of; which gives her occasion to say that he had better not ask her, for she is always wrong and never can be right; that he only exposes her to contradiction by asking any question of her; and that he had better ask his papa, who is infallible, and never can be wrong. Papa, smarting under this attack, gives a terrible pull at the bell, and says, that if the conversation is to proceed in this way, the children had better be removed. Removed they are, after a few tears and many struggles; and Pa having looked at Ma sideways for a minute or two, with a baleful eye, draws his pocket-handkerchief over his face, and composes himself for his after-dinner nap.

The friends of the contradictory couple often deplore their frequent disputes, though they rather make light of them at the same time: observing, that there is no doubt they are very much attached to each other, and that they never quarrel except about trifles. But neither the friends of the contradictory couple, nor the contradictory couple themselves, reflect, that as the most stupendous objects in nature are but vast collections of minute particles, so the slightest and least considered trifles make up the sum of human happiness or misery.

THE COUPLE WHO DOTE UPON THEIR CHILDREN

The couple who dote upon their children have usually a great many of them: six or eight at least. The children are either the healthiest in all the world, or the most unfortunate in existence. In either case, they are equally the theme of their doting parents, and equally a source of mental anguish and irritation to their doting parents’ friends.

The couple who dote upon their children recognise no dates but those connected with their births, accidents, illnesses, or remarkable deeds. They keep a mental almanack with a vast number of Innocents’-days, all in red letters. They recollect the last coronation, because on that day little Tom fell down the kitchen stairs; the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot, because it was on the fifth of November that Ned asked whether wooden legs were made in heaven and cocked hats grew in gardens. Mrs. Whiffler will never cease to recollect the last day of the old year as long as she lives, for it was on that day that the baby had the four red spots on its nose which they took for measles: nor Christmas-day, for twenty-one days after Christmas-day the twins were born; nor Good Friday, for it was on a Good Friday that she was frightened by the donkey-cart when she was in the family way with Georgiana. The movable feasts have no motion for Mr. and Mrs. Whiffler, but remain pinned down tight and fast to the shoulders of some small child, from whom they can never be separated any more. Time was made, according to their creed, not for slaves but for girls and boys; the restless sands in his glass are but little children at play.

As we have already intimated, the children of this couple can know no medium. They are either prodigies of good health or prodigies of bad health; whatever they are, they must be prodigies. Mr. Whiffler must have to describe at his office such excruciating agonies constantly undergone by his eldest boy, as nobody else's eldest boy ever underwent; or he must be able to declare that there never was a child endowed with such amazing health, such an indomitable constitution, and such a cast-iron frame, as his child. His children must be, in some respect or other, above and beyond the children of all other people. To such an extent is this feeling pushed, that we were once slightly acquainted with a lady and gentleman who carried their heads so high and became so proud after their youngest child fell out of a two-pair-of-stairs window without hurting himself much, that the greater part of their friends were obliged to forego their acquaintance. But perhaps this may be an extreme case, and one not justly entitled to be considered as a precedent of general application.

If a friend happen to dine in a friendly way with one of these couples who dote upon their children, it is nearly impossible for him to divert the conversation from their favourite topic. Everything reminds Mr. Whiffler of Ned, or Mrs. Whiffler of Mary Anne, or of the time before Ned was born, or the time before Mary Anne was thought of. The slightest remark, however harmless in itself, will awaken slumbering recollections of the twins. It is impossible to steer clear of them. They will come uppermost, let the poor man do what he may. Ned has been known to be lost sight of for half an hour, Dick has been forgotten, the name of Mary Anne has not been mentioned, but the twins will out. Nothing can keep down the twins.

'It's a very extraordinary thing, Saunders,' says Mr. Whiffler to the visitor, 'but—you have seen our little babies, the—the—twins?' The friend's heart sinks within him as he answers, 'Oh, yes—often.' 'Your talking of the Pyramids,' says Mr. Whiffler, quite as a matter of course, 'reminds me of the twins. It's a very extraordinary thing about those babies—what colour should you say their eyes were?' 'Upon my word,' the friend stammers, 'I hardly know how to answer'—the fact being, that except as the friend does not remember to have heard of any departure from the ordinary course of nature in the instance of these twins, they might have no eyes at all for aught he has observed to the contrary. 'You wouldn't say they were red, I suppose?' says Mr. Whiffler. The friend hesitates, and rather thinks they are; but inferring from the expression of Mr. Whiffler's face that red is not the colour, smiles with some confidence, and says, 'No, no! very different from that.' 'What should you say to blue?' says Mr. Whiffler. The friend glances at him, and observing a different expression in his face, ventures to say, 'I should say they *were* blue—a decided blue.' 'To be sure!' cries Mr. Whiffler, triumphantly, 'I knew you would! But what should you say if I was to tell you that the boy's eyes are blue and the girl's hazel, eh?' 'Impossible!' exclaims the friend, not at all knowing why it should be impossible. 'A fact, notwithstanding,' cries Mr. Whiffler; 'and let me tell you, Saunders, *that's* not a common thing in twins, or a circumstance that'll happen every day.'

In this dialogue Mrs. Whiffler, as being deeply responsible for the twins, their charms and singularities, has taken no share; but she now relates, in broken English, a witticism of little Dick's bearing upon the subject just discussed, which delights Mr. Whiffler beyond measure, and causes him to declare that he would have sworn that was Dick's if he had heard it anywhere. Then he requests that Mrs. Whiffler will tell Saunders what Tom said about mad bulls; and Mrs. Whiffler relating the anecdote, a discussion ensues upon the different character of Tom's wit and Dick's wit, from which it appears that Dick's humour is of a lively turn, while Tom's style is the dry and caustic. This discussion being enlivened by various illustrations, lasts a long time, and is only stopped by Mrs. Whiffler instructing the footman to ring the nursery bell, as the children were promised that they should come down and taste the pudding.

The friend turns pale when this order is given, and paler still when it is followed up by a great pattering on the staircase, (not unlike the sound of rain upon a skylight,) a violent bursting open of the dining-room door, and the tumultuous appearance of six small children, closely succeeded by a strong nursery-maid with a twin in each arm. As the whole eight are screaming, shouting, or kicking—some influenced by a ravenous appetite, some by a horror of the stranger, and some by a conflict of the two feelings—a pretty long space elapses before all their heads can be ranged round the table and anything like order restored; in bringing about which happy state of things both the nurse and footman are severely scratched. At length Mrs. Whiffler is heard to say, ‘Mr. Saunders, shall I give you some pudding?’ A breathless silence ensues, and sixteen small eyes are fixed upon the guest in expectation of his reply. A wild shout of joy proclaims that he has said ‘No, thank you.’ Spoons are waved in the air, legs appear above the table-cloth in uncontrollable ecstasy, and eighty short fingers dabble in damson syrup.

While the pudding is being disposed of, Mr. and Mrs. Whiffler look on with beaming countenances, and Mr. Whiffler nudging his friend Saunders, begs him to take notice of Tom’s eyes, or Dick’s chin, or Ned’s nose, or Mary Anne’s hair, or Emily’s figure, or little Bob’s calves, or Fanny’s mouth, or Carry’s head, as the case may be. Whatever the attention of Mr. Saunders is called to, Mr. Saunders admires of course; though he is rather confused about the sex of the youngest branches and looks at the wrong children, turning to a girl when Mr. Whiffler directs his attention to a boy, and falling into raptures with a boy when he ought to be enchanted with a girl. Then the dessert comes, and there is a vast deal of scrambling after fruit, and sudden spirting forth of juice out of tight oranges into infant eyes, and much screeching and wailing in consequence. At length it becomes time for Mrs. Whiffler to retire, and all the children are by force of arms compelled to kiss and love Mr. Saunders before going up-stairs, except Tom, who, lying on his back in the hall, proclaims that Mr. Saunders ‘is a naughty beast;’ and Dick, who having drunk his father’s wine when he was looking another way, is found to be intoxicated and is carried out, very limp and helpless.

Mr. Whiffler and his friend are left alone together, but Mr. Whiffler’s thoughts are still with his family, if his family are not with him. ‘Saunders,’ says he, after a short silence, ‘if you please, we’ll drink Mrs. Whiffler and the children.’ Mr. Saunders feels this to be a reproach against himself for not proposing the same sentiment, and drinks it in some confusion. ‘Ah!’ Mr. Whiffler sighs, ‘these children, Saunders, make one quite an old man.’ Mr. Saunders thinks that if they were his, they would make him a very old man; but he says nothing. ‘And yet,’ pursues Mr. Whiffler, ‘what can equal domestic happiness? what can equal the engaging ways of children! Saunders, why don’t you get married?’ Now, this is an embarrassing question, because Mr. Saunders has been thinking that if he had at any time entertained matrimonial designs, the revelation of that day would surely have routed them for ever. ‘I am glad, however,’ says Mr. Whiffler, ‘that you *are* a bachelor,—glad on one account, Saunders; a selfish one, I admit. Will you do Mrs. Whiffler and myself a favour?’ Mr. Saunders is surprised—evidently surprised; but he replies, ‘with the greatest pleasure.’ ‘Then, will you, Saunders,’ says Mr. Whiffler, in an impressive manner, ‘will you cement and consolidate our friendship by coming into the family (so to speak) as a godfather?’ ‘I shall be proud and delighted,’ replies Mr. Saunders: ‘which of the children is it? really, I thought they were all christened; or—’ ‘Saunders,’ Mr. Whiffler interposes, ‘they *are* all christened; you are right. The fact is, that Mrs. Whiffler is—in short, we expect another.’ ‘Not a ninth!’ cries the friend, all aghast at the idea. ‘Yes, Saunders,’ rejoins Mr. Whiffler, solemnly, ‘a ninth. Did we drink Mrs. Whiffler’s health? Let us drink it again, Saunders, and wish her well over it!’

Doctor Johnson used to tell a story of a man who had but one idea, which was a wrong one. The couple who dote upon their children are in the same predicament: at home or abroad, at all times, and in all places, their thoughts are bound up in this one subject, and have no sphere beyond. They relate the clever things their offspring say or do, and weary every company with their prolixity and absurdity. Mr. Whiffler takes a friend by the button at a street corner on a windy day to tell him a *bon mot* of his youngest boy’s; and Mrs. Whiffler, calling to see a sick acquaintance, entertains her with a cheerful account of all her own past sufferings and present expectations. In such cases the sins of the fathers indeed descend upon the children; for people soon come to regard them as predestined little bores. The couple who dote upon their children cannot be said to be actuated by a general love for these engaging little people (which would be a great excuse); for they are apt to underrate and entertain a jealousy of any children but their own. If they examined their own hearts, they would, perhaps, find at the bottom of all this, more self-love and egotism than they think of. Self-love and egotism are bad qualities, of which the unrestrained exhibition, though it may be sometimes amusing, never fails to be wearisome and unpleasant. Couples who dote upon their children, therefore, are best avoided.

THE COOL COUPLE

There is an old-fashioned weather-glass representing a house with two doorways, in one of which is the figure of a gentleman, in the other the figure of a lady. When the weather is to be fine the lady comes out and the gentleman goes in; when wet, the gentleman comes out and the lady goes in. They never seek each other's society, are never elevated and depressed by the same cause, and have nothing in common. They are the model of a cool couple, except that there is something of politeness and consideration about the behaviour of the gentleman in the weather-glass, in which, neither of the cool couple can be said to participate.

The cool couple are seldom alone together, and when they are, nothing can exceed their apathy and dulness: the gentleman being for the most part drowsy, and the lady silent. If they enter into conversation, it is usually of an ironical or recriminatory nature. Thus, when the gentleman has indulged in a very long yawn and settled himself more snugly in his easy-chair, the lady will perhaps remark, 'Well, I am sure, Charles! I hope you're comfortable.' To which the gentleman replies, 'Oh yes, he's quite comfortable quite.' 'There are not many married men, I hope,' returns the lady, 'who seek comfort in such selfish gratifications as you do.' 'Nor many wives who seek comfort in such selfish gratifications as *you* do, I hope,' retorts the gentleman. 'Whose fault is that?' demands the lady. The gentleman becoming more sleepy, returns no answer. 'Whose fault is that?' the lady repeats. The gentleman still returning no answer, she goes on to say that she believes there never was in all this world anybody so attached to her home, so thoroughly domestic, so unwilling to seek a moment's gratification or pleasure beyond her own fireside as she. God knows that before she was married she never thought or dreamt of such a thing; and she remembers that her poor papa used to say again and again, almost every day of his life, 'Oh, my dear Louisa, if you only marry a man who understands you, and takes the trouble to consider your happiness and accommodate himself a very little to your disposition, what a treasure he will find in you!' She supposes her papa knew what her disposition was—he had known her long enough—he ought to have been acquainted with it, but what can she do? If her home is always dull and lonely, and her husband is always absent and finds no pleasure in her society, she is naturally sometimes driven (seldom enough, she is sure) to seek a little recreation elsewhere; she is not expected to pine and mope to death, she hopes. 'Then come, Louisa,' says the gentleman, waking up as suddenly as he fell asleep, 'stop at home this evening, and so will I.' 'I should be sorry to suppose, Charles, that you took a pleasure in aggravating me,' replies the lady; 'but you know as well as I do that I am particularly engaged to Mrs. Mortimer, and that it would be an act of the grossest rudeness and ill-breeding, after accepting a seat in her box and preventing her from inviting anybody else, not to go.' 'Ah! there it is!' says the gentleman, shrugging his shoulders, 'I knew that perfectly well. I knew you couldn't devote an evening to your own home. Now all I have to say, Louisa, is this—recollect that *I* was quite willing to stay at home, and that it's no fault of *mine* we are not oftener together.'

With that the gentleman goes away to keep an old appointment at his club, and the lady hurries off to dress for Mrs. Mortimer's; and neither thinks of the other until by some odd chance they find themselves alone again.

But it must not be supposed that the cool couple are habitually a quarrelsome one. Quite the contrary. These differences are only occasions for a little self-excuse,—nothing more. In general they are as easy and careless, and dispute as seldom, as any common acquaintances may; for it is neither worth their while to put each other out of the way, nor to ruffle themselves.

When they meet in society, the cool couple are the best-bred people in existence. The lady is seated in a corner among a little knot of lady friends, one of whom exclaims, 'Why, I vow and declare there is your husband, my dear!' 'Whose?—mine?' she says, carelessly. 'Ay, yours, and coming this way too.' 'How very odd!' says the lady, in a languid tone, 'I thought he had been at Dover.' The gentleman coming up, and speaking to all the other ladies and nodding slightly to his wife, it turns out that he has been at Dover, and has just now returned. 'What a strange creature you are!' cries his wife; ‘and what on earth brought you here, I wonder?’ ‘I came to look after you, *of course*,’ rejoins her husband. This is so pleasant a jest that the lady is mightily amused, as are all the other ladies similarly situated who are within hearing; and while they are enjoying it to the full, the gentleman nods again, turns upon his heel, and saunters away.

There are times, however, when his company is not so agreeable, though equally unexpected; such as when the lady has invited one or two particular friends to tea and scandal, and he happens to come home in the very midst of their diversion. It is a hundred chances to one that he remains in the house half an hour, but the lady is rather disturbed by the intrusion, notwithstanding, and reasons within herself,—‘I am sure I never interfere with him, and why should he interfere with me? It can scarcely be accidental; it never happens that I have a particular reason for not wishing him to come home, but he always comes. It’s very provoking and tiresome; and I am sure when he leaves me so much alone for his own pleasure, the least he could do would be to do as much for mine.’ Observing what passes in her mind, the gentleman, who has come home for his own accommodation, makes a merit of it with himself; arrives at the conclusion that it is the very last place in which he can hope to be comfortable; and determines, as he takes up his hat and cane, never to be so virtuous again.

Thus a great many cool couples go on until they are cold couples, and the grave has closed over their folly and indifference. Loss of name, station, character, life itself, has ensued from causes as slight as these, before now; and when gossips tell such tales, and aggravate their deformities, they elevate their hands and eyebrows, and call each other to witness what a cool couple Mr. and Mrs. So-and-so always were, even in the best of times.

THE PLAUSIBLE COUPLE

The plausible couple have many titles. They are ‘a delightful couple,’ an ‘affectionate couple,’ ‘a most agreeable couple, ‘a good-hearted couple,’ and ‘the best-natured couple in existence.’ The truth is, that the plausible couple are people of the world; and either the way of pleasing the world has grown much easier than it was in the days of the old man and his ass, or the old man was but a bad hand at it, and knew very little of the trade.

‘But is it really possible to please the world!’ says some doubting reader. It is indeed. Nay, it is not only very possible, but very easy. The ways are crooked, and sometimes foul and low. What then? A man need but crawl upon his hands and knees, know when to close his eyes and when his ears, when to stoop and when to stand upright; and if by the world is meant that atom of it in which he moves himself, he shall please it, never fear.

Now, it will be readily seen, that if a plausible man or woman have an easy means of pleasing the world by an adaptation of self to all its twistings and twinings, a plausible man *and* woman, or, in other words, a plausible couple, playing into each other’s hands, and acting in concert, have a manifest advantage. Hence it is that plausible couples scarcely ever fail of success on a pretty large scale; and hence it is that if the reader, laying down this unwieldy volume at the next full stop, will have the goodness to review his or her circle of acquaintance, and to search particularly for some man and wife with a large connexion and a good name, not easily referable to their abilities or their wealth, he or she (that is, the male or female reader) will certainly find that gentleman or lady, on a very short reflection, to be a plausible couple.

The plausible couple are the most ecstatic people living: the most sensitive people—to merit—on the face of the earth. Nothing clever or virtuous escapes them. They have microscopic eyes for such endowments, and can find them anywhere. The plausible couple never fawn—oh no! They don’t even scruple to tell their friends of their faults. One is too generous, another too candid; a third has a tendency to think all people like himself, and to regard mankind as a company of angels; a fourth is kind-hearted to a fault. ‘We never flatter, my dear Mrs. Jackson,’ say the plausible couple; ‘we speak our minds. Neither you nor Mr. Jackson have faults enough. It may sound strangely, but it is true. You have not faults enough. You know our way,—we must speak out, and always do. Quarrel with us for saying so, if you will; but we repeat it,—you have not faults enough!’

The plausible couple are no less plausible to each other than to third parties. They are always loving and harmonious. The plausible gentleman calls his wife ‘darling,’ and the plausible lady addresses him as ‘dearest.’ If it be Mr. and Mrs. Bobtail Widger, Mrs. Widger is ‘Lavinia, darling,’ and Mr. Widger is ‘Bobtail, dearest.’ Speaking of each other, they observe the same tender form. Mrs. Widger relates what ‘Bobtail’ said, and Mr. Widger recounts what ‘darling’ thought and did.

If you sit next to the plausible lady at a dinner-table, she takes the earliest opportunity of expressing her belief that you are acquainted with the Clickits; she is sure she has heard the Clickits speak of you—she must not tell you in what terms, or you will take her for a flatterer. You admit a knowledge of the Clickits; the plausible lady immediately launches out in their praise. She quite loves the Clickits. Were there ever such true-hearted, hospitable, excellent people—such a gentle, interesting little woman as Mrs. Clickit, or such a frank, unaffected creature as Mr. Clickit? were there ever two people, in short, so little spoiled by the world as they are? ‘As who, darling?’ cries Mr. Widger, from the opposite side of the table. ‘The Clickits, dearest,’ replies Mrs. Widger. ‘Indeed you are right, darling,’ Mr. Widger rejoins; ‘the Clickits are a very high-minded, worthy, estimable couple.’ Mrs. Widger remarking that Bobtail always grows quite eloquent upon this subject, Mr. Widger admits that he feels very strongly whenever such people as the Clickits and some other friends of his (here he glances at the host and hostess) are mentioned; for they are an honour to human nature, and do one good to think of. ‘*You* know the Clickits, Mrs. Jackson?’ he says, addressing the lady of the house. ‘No, indeed; we have not that pleasure,’ she replies. ‘You astonish me!’ exclaims Mr. Widger: ‘not know the Clickits! why, you are the very people of all others who ought to be their bosom friends. You are kindred beings; you are one and the same thing:—not know the Clickits! Now *will* you know the Clickits? Will you make a point of knowing them? Will you meet them in a friendly way at our house one evening, and be acquainted with them?’ Mrs. Jackson will be quite delighted; nothing would give her more pleasure. ‘Then, Lavinia, my darling,’ says Mr. Widger, ‘mind you don’t lose sight of that; now, pray take care that Mr. and Mrs. Jackson know the Clickits without loss of time. Such people ought not to be strangers to each other.’ Mrs. Widger books both families as the centre of attraction for her next party; and Mr. Widger, going on to expatiate upon the virtues of the Clickits, adds to their other moral qualities, that they keep one of the neatest phaetons in town, and have two thousand a year.

As the plausible couple never laud the merits of any absent person, without dexterously contriving that their praises shall reflect upon somebody who is present, so they never depreciate anything or anybody, without turning their depreciation to the same account. Their friend, Mr. Slummery, say they, is unquestionably a clever painter, and would no doubt be very popular, and sell his pictures at a very high price, if that cruel Mr. Fithers had not forestalled him in his department of art, and made it thoroughly and completely his own;—Fithers, it is to be observed, being present and within hearing, and Slummery elsewhere. Is Mrs. Tabblewick really as beautiful as people say? Why, there indeed you ask them a very puzzling question, because there is no doubt that she is a very charming woman, and they have long known her intimately. She is no doubt beautiful, very beautiful; they once thought her the most beautiful woman ever seen; still if you press them for an honest answer, they are bound to say that this was before they had ever seen our lovely friend on the sofa, (the sofa is hard by, and our lovely friend can't help hearing the whispers in which this is said;) since that time, perhaps, they have been hardly fair judges; Mrs. Tabblewick is no doubt extremely handsome,—very like our friend, in fact, in the form of the features,—but in point of expression, and soul, and figure, and air altogether—oh dear!

But while the plausible couple depreciate, they are still careful to preserve their character for amiability and kind feeling; indeed the depreciation itself is often made to grow out of their excessive sympathy and good will. The plausible lady calls on a lady who dotes upon her children, and is sitting with a little girl upon her knee, enraptured by her artless replies, and protesting that there is nothing she delights in so much as conversing with these fairies; when the other lady inquires if she has seen young Mrs. Finching lately, and whether the baby has turned out a finer one than it promised to be. 'Oh dear!' cries the plausible lady, 'you cannot think how often Bobtail and I have talked about poor Mrs. Finching—she is such a dear soul, and was so anxious that the baby should be a fine child—and very naturally, because she was very much here at one time, and there is, you know, a natural emulation among mothers—that it is impossible to tell you how much we have felt for her.' 'Is it weak or plain, or what?' inquires the other. 'Weak or plain, my love,' returns the plausible lady, 'it's a fright—a perfect little fright; you never saw such a miserable creature in all your days. Positively you must not let her see one of these beautiful dears again, or you'll break her heart, you will indeed.—Heaven bless this child, see how she is looking in my face! can you conceive anything prettier than that? If poor Mrs. Finching could only hope—but that's impossible—

and the gifts of Providence, you know—What *did* I do with my pocket-handkerchief!'

What prompts the mother, who dotes upon her children, to comment to her lord that evening on the plausible lady's engaging qualities and feeling heart, and what is it that procures Mr. and Mrs. Bobtail Widger an immediate invitation to dinner?

THE NICE LITTLE COUPLE

A custom once prevailed in old-fashioned circles, that when a lady or gentleman was unable to sing a song, he or she should enliven the company with a story. As we find ourself in the predicament of not being able to describe (to our own satisfaction) nice little couples in the abstract, we purpose telling in this place a little story about a nice little couple of our acquaintance.

Mr. and Mrs. Chirrup are the nice little couple in question. Mr. Chirrup has the smartness, and something of the brisk, quick manner of a small bird. Mrs. Chirrup is the prettiest of all little women, and has the prettiest little figure conceivable. She has the neatest little foot, and the softest little voice, and the pleasantest little smile, and the tidiest little curls, and the brightest little eyes, and the quietest little manner, and is, in short, altogether one of the most engaging of all little women, dead or alive. She is a condensation of all the domestic virtues,—a pocket edition of the young man's best companion,—a little woman at a very high pressure, with an amazing quantity of goodness and usefulness in an exceedingly small space. Little as she is, Mrs. Chirrup might furnish forth matter for the moral equipment of a score of housewives, six feet high in their stockings—if, in the presence of ladies, we may be allowed the expression—and of corresponding robustness.

Nobody knows all this better than Mr. Chirrup, though he rather takes on that he don't. Accordingly he is very proud of his better-half, and evidently considers himself, as all other people consider him, rather fortunate in having her to wife. We say evidently, because Mr. Chirrup is a warm-hearted little fellow; and if you catch his eye when he has been slyly glancing at Mrs. Chirrup in company, there is a certain complacent twinkle in it, accompanied, perhaps, by a half-expressed toss of the head, which as clearly indicates what has been passing in his mind as if he had put it into words, and shouted it out through a speaking-trumpet. Moreover, Mr. Chirrup has a particularly mild and bird-like manner of calling Mrs. Chirrup 'my dear;' and—for he is of a jocose turn—of cutting little witticisms upon her, and making her the subject of various harmless pleasantries, which nobody enjoys more thoroughly than Mrs. Chirrup herself. Mr. Chirrup, too, now and then affects to deplore his bachelor-days, and to bemoan (with a marvellously contented and smirking face) the loss of his freedom, and the sorrow of his heart at having been taken captive by Mrs. Chirrup—all of which circumstances combine to show the secret triumph and satisfaction of Mr. Chirrup's soul.

We have already had occasion to observe that Mrs. Chirrup is an incomparable housewife. In all the arts of domestic arrangement and management, in all the mysteries of confectionery-making, pickling, and preserving, never was such a thorough adept as that nice little body. She is, besides, a cunning worker in muslin and fine linen, and a special hand at marketing to the very best advantage. But if there be one branch of housekeeping in which she excels to an utterly unparalleled and unprecedented extent, it is in the important one of carving. A roast goose is universally allowed to be the great stumbling-block in the way of young aspirants to perfection in this department of science; many promising carvers, beginning with legs of mutton, and preserving a good reputation through fillets of veal, sirloins of beef, quarters of lamb, fowls, and even ducks, have sunk before a roast goose, and lost caste and character for ever. To Mrs. Chirrup the resolving a goose into its smallest component parts is a pleasant pastime—a practical joke—a thing to be done in a minute or so, without the smallest interruption to the conversation of the time. No handing the dish over to an unfortunate man upon her right or left, no wild sharpening of the knife, no hacking and sawing at an unruly joint, no noise, no splash, no heat, no leaving off in despair; all is confidence and cheerfulness. The dish is set upon the table, the cover is removed; for an instant, and only an instant, you observe that Mrs. Chirrup's attention is distracted; she smiles, but heareth not. You proceed with your story; meanwhile the glittering knife is slowly upraised, both Mrs. Chirrup's wrists are slightly but not ungracefully agitated, she compresses her lips for an instant, then breaks into a smile, and all is over. The legs of the bird slide gently down into a pool of gravy, the wings seem to melt from the body, the breast separates into a row of juicy slices, the smaller and more complicated parts of his anatomy are perfectly developed, a cavern of stuffing is revealed, and the goose is gone!

To dine with Mr. and Mrs. Chirrup is one of the pleasantest things in the world. Mr. Chirrup has a bachelor friend, who lived with him in his own days of single blessedness, and to whom he is mightily attached. Contrary to the usual custom, this bachelor friend is no less a friend of Mrs. Chirrup's, and, consequently, whenever you dine with Mr. and Mrs. Chirrup, you meet the bachelor friend. It would put any reasonably-conditioned mortal into good-humour to observe the entire unanimity which subsists between these three; but there is a quiet welcome dimpling in Mrs. Chirrup's face, a bustling hospitality oozing as it were out of the waistcoat-pockets of Mr. Chirrup, and a patronising enjoyment of their cordiality and satisfaction on the part of the bachelor friend, which is quite delightful. On these occasions Mr. Chirrup usually takes an opportunity of rallying the friend on being single, and the friend retorts on Mr. Chirrup for being married, at which moments some single young ladies present are like to die of laughter; and we have more than once observed them bestow looks upon the friend, which convinces us that his position is by no means a safe one, as, indeed, we hold no bachelor's to be who visits married friends and cracks jokes on wedlock, for certain it is that such men walk among traps and nets and pitfalls innumerable, and often find themselves down upon their knees at the altar rails, taking M. or N. for their wedded wives, before they know anything about the matter.

However, this is no business of Mr. Chirrup's, who talks, and laughs, and drinks his wine, and laughs again, and talks more, until it is time to repair to the drawing-room, where, coffee served and over, Mrs. Chirrup prepares for a round game, by sorting the nicest possible little fish into the nicest possible little pools, and calling Mr. Chirrup to assist her, which Mr. Chirrup does. As they stand side by side, you find that Mr. Chirrup is the least possible shadow of a shade taller than Mrs. Chirrup, and that they are the neatest and best-matched little couple that can be, which the chances are ten to one against your observing with such effect at any other time, unless you see them in the street arm-in-arm, or meet them some rainy day trotting along under a very small umbrella. The round game (at which Mr. Chirrup is the merriest of the party) being done and over, in course of time a nice little tray appears, on which is a nice little supper; and when that is finished likewise, and you have said 'Good night,' you find yourself repeating a dozen times, as you ride home, that there never was such a nice little couple as Mr. and Mrs. Chirrup.

Whether it is that pleasant qualities, being packed more closely in small bodies than in large, come more readily to hand than when they are diffused over a wider space, and have to be gathered together for use, we don't know, but as a general rule,—strengthened like all other rules by its exceptions,—we hold that little people are sprightly and good-natured. The more sprightly and good-natured people we have, the better; therefore, let us wish well to all nice little couples, and hope that they may increase and multiply.

THE EGOTISTICAL COUPLE

Egotism in couples is of two kinds.—It is our purpose to show this by two examples.

The egotistical couple may be young, old, middle-aged, well to do, or ill to do; they may have a small family, a large family, or no family at all. There is no outward sign by which an egotistical couple may be known and avoided. They come upon you unawares; there is no guarding against them. No man can of himself be forewarned or forearmed against an egotistical couple.

The egotistical couple have undergone every calamity, and experienced every pleasurable and painful sensation of which our nature is susceptible. You cannot by possibility tell the egotistical couple anything they don't know, or describe to them anything they have not felt. They have been everything but dead. Sometimes we are tempted to wish they had been even that, but only in our uncharitable moments, which are few and far between.

We happened the other day, in the course of a morning call, to encounter an egotistical couple, nor were we suffered to remain long in ignorance of the fact, for our very first inquiry of the lady of the house brought them into active and vigorous operation. The inquiry was of course touching the lady's health, and the answer happened to be, that she had not been very well. 'Oh, my dear!' said the egotistical lady, 'don't talk of not being well. We have been in *such* a state since we saw you last!'—The lady of the house happening to remark that her lord had not been well either, the egotistical gentleman struck in: ‘Never let Briggs complain of not being well—never let Briggs complain, my dear Mrs. Briggs, after what I have undergone within these six weeks. He doesn’t know what it is to be ill, he hasn’t the least idea of it; not the faintest conception.’—‘My dear,’ interposed his wife smiling, ‘you talk as if it were almost a crime in Mr. Briggs not to have been as ill as we have been, instead of feeling thankful to Providence that both he and our dear Mrs. Briggs are in such blissful ignorance of real suffering.’—‘My love,’ returned the egotistical gentleman, in a low and pious voice, ‘you mistake me;—I feel grateful—very grateful. I trust our friends may never purchase their experience as dearly as we have bought ours; I hope they never may!’

Having put down Mrs. Briggs upon this theme, and settled the question thus, the egotistical gentleman turned to us, and, after a few preliminary remarks, all tending towards and leading up to the point he had in his mind, inquired if we happened to be acquainted with the Dowager Lady Snorflerer. On our replying in the negative, he presumed we had often met Lord Slang, or beyond all doubt, that we were on intimate terms with Sir Chipkins Glogwog. Finding that we were equally unable to lay claim to either of these distinctions, he expressed great astonishment, and turning to his wife with a retrospective smile, inquired who it was that had told that capital story about the mashed potatoes. ‘Who, my dear?’ returned the egotistical lady, ‘why Sir Chipkins, of course; how can you ask! Don’t you remember his applying it to our cook, and saying that you and I were so like the Prince and Princess, that he could almost have sworn we were they?’ ‘To be sure, I remember that,’ said the egotistical gentleman, ‘but are you quite certain that didn’t apply to the other anecdote about the Emperor of Austria and the pump?’ ‘Upon my word then, I think it did,’ replied his wife. ‘To be sure it did,’ said the egotistical gentleman, ‘it was Slang’s story, I remember now, perfectly.’ However, it turned out, a few seconds afterwards, that the egotistical gentleman’s memory was rather treacherous, as he began to have a misgiving that the story had been told by the Dowager Lady Snorflerer the very last time they dined there; but there appearing, on further consideration, strong circumstantial evidence tending to show that this couldn’t be, inasmuch as the Dowager Lady Snorflerer had been, on the occasion in question, wholly engrossed by the egotistical lady, the egotistical gentleman recanted this opinion; and after laying the story at the doors of a great many great people, happily left it at last with the Duke of Scuttlewig:—observing that it was not extraordinary he had forgotten his Grace hitherto, as it often happened that the names of those with whom we were upon the most familiar footing were the very last to present themselves to our thoughts.

It not only appeared that the egotistical couple knew everybody, but that scarcely any event of importance or notoriety had occurred for many years with which they had not been in some way or other connected. Thus we learned that when the well-known attempt upon the life of George the Third was made by Hatfield in Drury Lane theatre, the egotistical gentleman's grandfather sat upon his right hand and was the first man who collared him; and that the egotistical lady's aunt, sitting within a few boxes of the royal party, was the only person in the audience who heard his Majesty exclaim, 'Charlotte, Charlotte, don't be frightened, don't be frightened; they're letting off squibs, they're letting off squibs.' When the fire broke out, which ended in the destruction of the two Houses of Parliament, the egotistical couple, being at the time at a drawing-room window on Blackheath, then and there simultaneously exclaimed, to the astonishment of a whole party—'It's the House of Lords!' Nor was this a solitary instance of their peculiar discernment, for chancing to be (as by a comparison of dates and circumstances they afterwards found) in the same omnibus with Mr. Greenacre, when he carried his victim's head about town in a blue bag, they both remarked a singular twitching in the muscles of his countenance; and walking down Fish Street Hill, a few weeks since, the egotistical gentleman said to his lady—slightly casting up his eyes to the top of the Monument—'There's a boy up there, my dear, reading a Bible. It's very strange. I don't like it.—In five seconds afterwards, Sir,' says the egotistical gentleman, bringing his hands together with one violent clap—'the lad was over!'

Diversifying these topics by the introduction of many others of the same kind, and entertaining us between whiles with a minute account of what weather and diet agreed with them, and what weather and diet disagreed with them, and at what time they usually got up, and at what time went to bed, with many other particulars of their domestic economy too numerous to mention; the egotistical couple at length took their leave, and afforded us an opportunity of doing the same.

Mr. and Mrs. Sliverstone are an egotistical couple of another class, for all the lady's egotism is about her husband, and all the gentleman's about his wife. For example:—Mr. Sliverstone is a clerical gentleman, and occasionally writes sermons, as clerical gentlemen do. If you happen to obtain admission at the street-door while he is so engaged, Mrs. Sliverstone appears on tip-toe, and speaking in a solemn whisper, as if there were at least three or four particular friends up-stairs, all upon the point of death, implores you to be very silent, for Mr. Sliverstone is composing, and she need not say how very important it is that he should not be disturbed. Unwilling to interrupt anything so serious, you hasten to withdraw, with many apologies; but this Mrs. Sliverstone will by no means allow, observing, that she knows you would like to see him, as it is very natural you should, and that she is determined to make a trial for you, as you are a great favourite. So you are led up-stairs—still on tip-toe—to the door of a little back room, in which, as the lady informs you in a whisper, Mr. Sliverstone always writes. No answer being returned to a couple of soft taps, the lady opens the door, and there, sure enough, is Mr. Sliverstone, with dishevelled hair, powdering away with pen, ink, and paper, at a rate which, if he has any power of sustaining it, would settle the longest sermon in no time. At first he is too much absorbed to be roused by this intrusion; but presently looking up, says faintly, 'Ah!' and pointing to his desk with a weary and languid smile, extends his hand, and hopes you'll forgive him. Then Mrs. Sliverstone sits down beside him, and taking his hand in hers, tells you how that Mr. Sliverstone has been shut up there ever since nine o'clock in the morning, (it is by this time twelve at noon,) and how she knows it cannot be good for his health, and is very uneasy about it. Unto this Mr. Sliverstone replies firmly, that 'It must be done;' which agonizes Mrs. Sliverstone still more, and she goes on to tell you that such were Mr. Sliverstone's labours last week—what with the buryings, marryings, churchings, christenings, and all together,—that when he was going up the pulpit stairs on Sunday evening, he was obliged to hold on by the rails, or he would certainly have fallen over into his own pew. Mr. Sliverstone, who has been listening and smiling meekly, says, 'Not quite so bad as that, not quite so bad!' he admits though, on cross-examination, that he *was* very near falling upon the verger who was following him up to bolt the door; but adds, that it was his duty as a Christian to fall upon him, if need were, and that he, Mr. Sliverstone, and (possibly the verger too) ought to glory in it.

This sentiment communicates new impulse to Mrs. Sliverstone, who launches into new praises of Mr. Sliverstone's worth and excellence, to which he listens in the same meek silence, save when he puts in a word of self-denial relative to some question of fact, as—'Not seventy-two christenings that week, my dear. Only seventy-one, only seventy-one.' At length his lady has quite concluded, and then he says, Why should he repine, why should he give way, why should he suffer his heart to sink within him? Is it he alone who toils and suffers? What has she gone through, he should like to know? What does she go through every day for him and for society?

With such an exordium Mr. Sliverstone launches out into glowing praises of the conduct of Mrs. Sliverstone in the production of eight young children, and the subsequent rearing and fostering of the same; and thus the husband magnifies the wife, and the wife the husband.

This would be well enough if Mr. and Mrs. Sliverstone kept it to themselves, or even to themselves and a friend or two; but they do not. The more hearers they have, the more egotistical the couple become, and the more anxious they are to make believers in their merits. Perhaps this is the worst kind of egotism. It has not even the poor excuse of being spontaneous, but is the result of a deliberate system and malice aforethought. Mere empty-headed conceit excites our pity, but ostentatious hypocrisy awakens our disgust.

THE COUPLE WHO CODDLE THEMSELVES

Mrs. Merrywinkle's maiden name was Chopper. She was the only child of Mr. and Mrs. Chopper. Her father died when she was, as the play-books express it, 'yet an infant;' and so old Mrs. Chopper, when her daughter married, made the house of her son-in-law her home from that time henceforth, and set up her staff of rest with Mr. and Mrs. Merrywinkle.

Mr. and Mrs. Merrywinkle are a couple who coddle themselves; and the venerable Mrs. Chopper is an aider and abettor in the same.

Mr. Merrywinkle is a rather lean and long-necked gentleman, middle-aged and middle-sized, and usually troubled with a cold in the head. Mrs. Merrywinkle is a delicate-looking lady, with very light hair, and is exceedingly subject to the same unpleasant disorder. The venerable Mrs.

Chopper—who is strictly entitled to the appellation, her daughter not being very young, otherwise than by courtesy, at the time of her marriage, which was some years ago—is a mysterious old lady who lurks behind a pair of spectacles, and is afflicted with a chronic disease, respecting which she has taken a vast deal of medical advice, and referred to a vast number of medical books, without meeting any definition of symptoms that at all suits her, or enables her to say, 'That's my complaint.' Indeed, the absence of authentic information upon the subject of this complaint would seem to be Mrs. Chopper's greatest ill, as in all other respects she is an uncommonly hale and hearty gentlewoman.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Chopper wear an extraordinary quantity of flannel, and have a habit of putting their feet in hot water to an unnatural extent. They likewise indulge in chamomile tea and such-like compounds, and rub themselves on the slightest provocation with camphorated spirits and other lotions applicable to mumps, sore-throat, rheumatism, or lumbago.

Mr. Merrywinkle's leaving home to go to business on a damp or wet morning is a very elaborate affair. He puts on wash-leather socks over his stockings, and India-rubber shoes above his boots, and wears under his waistcoat a cuirass of hare-skin. Besides these precautions, he winds a thick shawl round his throat, and blocks up his mouth with a large silk handkerchief. Thus accoutred, and furnished besides with a great-coat and umbrella, he braves the dangers of the streets; travelling in severe weather at a gentle trot, the better to preserve the circulation, and bringing his mouth to the surface to take breath, but very seldom, and with the utmost caution. His office-door opened, he shoots past his clerk at the same pace, and diving into his own private room, closes the door, examines the window-fastenings, and gradually unrobes himself: hanging his pocket-handkerchief on the fender to air, and determining to write to the newspapers about the fog, which, he says, 'has really got to that pitch that it is quite unbearable.'

In this last opinion Mrs. Merrywinkle and her respected mother fully concur; for though not present, their thoughts and tongues are occupied with the same subject, which is their constant theme all day. If anybody happens to call, Mrs. Merrywinkle opines that they must assuredly be mad, and her first salutation is, 'Why, what in the name of goodness can bring you out in such weather? You know you *must* catch your death.' This assurance is corroborated by Mrs. Chopper, who adds, in further confirmation, a dismal legend concerning an individual of her acquaintance who, making a call under precisely parallel circumstances, and being then in the best health and spirits, expired in forty-eight hours afterwards, of a complication of inflammatory disorders. The visitor, rendered not altogether comfortable perhaps by this and other precedents, inquires very affectionately after Mr. Merrywinkle, but by so doing brings about no change of the subject; for Mr. Merrywinkle's name is inseparably connected with his complaints, and his complaints are inseparably connected with Mrs. Merrywinkle's; and when these are done with, Mrs. Chopper, who has been biding her time, cuts in with the chronic disorder—a subject upon which the amiable old lady never leaves off speaking until she is left alone, and very often not then.

But Mr. Merrywinkle comes home to dinner. He is received by Mrs. Merrywinkle and Mrs. Chopper, who, on his remarking that he thinks his feet are damp, turn pale as ashes and drag him up-stairs, imploring him to have them rubbed directly with a dry coarse towel. Rubbed they are, one by Mrs. Merrywinkle and one by Mrs. Chopper, until the friction causes Mr. Merrywinkle to make horrible faces, and look as if he had been smelling very powerful onions; when they desist, and the patient, provided for his better security with thick worsted stockings and list slippers, is borne down-stairs to dinner. Now, the dinner is always a good one, the appetites of the diners being delicate, and requiring a little of what Mrs. Merrywinkle calls 'tittivation;' the secret of which is understood to lie in good cookery and tasteful spices, and which process is so successfully performed in the present instance, that both Mr. and Mrs. Merrywinkle eat a remarkably good dinner, and even the afflicted Mrs. Chopper wields her knife and fork with much of the spirit and elasticity of youth. But Mr. Merrywinkle, in his desire to gratify his appetite, is not unmindful of his health, for he has a bottle of carbonate of soda with which to qualify his porter, and a little pair of scales in which to weigh it out. Neither in his anxiety to take care of his body is he unmindful of the welfare of his immortal part, as he always prays that for what he is going to receive he may be made truly thankful; and in order that he may be as thankful as possible, eats and drinks to the utmost.

Either from eating and drinking so much, or from being the victim of this constitutional infirmity, among others, Mr. Merrywinkle, after two or three glasses of wine, falls fast asleep; and he has scarcely closed his eyes, when Mrs. Merrywinkle and Mrs. Chopper fall asleep likewise. It is on awakening at tea-time that their most alarming symptoms prevail; for then

Mr. Merrywinkle feels as if his temples were tightly bound round with the chain of the street-door, and Mrs. Merrywinkle as if she had made a hearty dinner of half-hundredweights, and Mrs. Chopper as if cold water were running down her back, and oyster-knives with sharp points were plunging of their own accord into her ribs. Symptoms like these are enough to make people peevish, and no wonder that they remain so until supper-time, doing little more than doze and complain, unless Mr. Merrywinkle calls out very loudly to a servant ‘to keep that draught out,’ or rushes into the passage to flourish his fist in the countenance of the twopenny-postman, for daring to give such a knock as he had just performed at the door of a private gentleman with nerves.

Supper, coming after dinner, should consist of some gentle provocative; and therefore the tittivating art is again in requisition, and again—done honour to by Mr. and Mrs. Merrywinkle, still comforted and abetted by Mrs. Chopper. After supper, it is ten to one but the last-named old lady becomes worse, and is led off to bed with the chronic complaint in full vigour. Mr. and Mrs. Merrywinkle, having administered to her a warm cordial, which is something of the strongest, then repair to their own room, where Mr. Merrywinkle, with his legs and feet in hot water, superintends the mulling of some wine which he is to drink at the very moment he plunges into bed, while Mrs. Merrywinkle, in garments whose nature is unknown to and unimagined by all but married men, takes four small pills with a spasmodic look between each, and finally comes to something hot and fragrant out of another little saucepan, which serves as her composing-draught for the night.

There is another kind of couple who coddle themselves, and who do so at a cheaper rate and on more spare diet, because they are niggardly and parsimonious; for which reason they are kind enough to coddle their visitors too. It is unnecessary to describe them, for our readers may rest assured of the accuracy of these general principles:—that all couples who coddle themselves are selfish and slothful,—that they charge upon every wind that blows, every rain that falls, and every vapour that hangs in the air, the evils which arise from their own imprudence or the gloom which is engendered in their own tempers,—and that all men and women, in couples or otherwise, who fall into exclusive habits of self-indulgence, and forget their natural sympathy and close connexion with everybody and everything in the world around them, not only neglect the first duty of life, but, by a happy retributive justice, deprive themselves of its truest and best enjoyment.

THE OLD COUPLE

They are grandfather and grandmother to a dozen grown people and have great-grandchildren besides; their bodies are bent, their hair is grey, their step tottering and infirm. Is this the lightsome pair whose wedding was so merry, and have the young couple indeed grown old so soon!

It seems but yesterday—and yet what a host of cares and griefs are crowded into the intervening time which, reckoned by them, lengthens out into a century! How many new associations have wreathed themselves about their hearts since then! The old time is gone, and a new time has come for others—not for them. They are but the rusting link that feebly joins the two, and is silently loosening its hold and dropping asunder.

It seems but yesterday—and yet three of their children have sunk into the grave, and the tree that shades it has grown quite old. One was an infant—they wept for him; the next a girl, a slight young thing too delicate for earth—her loss was hard indeed to bear. The third, a man. That was the worst of all, but even that grief is softened now.

It seems but yesterday—and yet how the gay and laughing faces of that bright morning have changed and vanished from above ground! Faint likenesses of some remain about them yet, but they are very faint and scarcely to be traced. The rest are only seen in dreams, and even they are unlike what they were, in eyes so old and dim.

One or two dresses from the bridal wardrobe are yet preserved. They are of a quaint and antique fashion, and seldom seen except in pictures. White has turned yellow, and brighter hues have faded. Do you wonder, child? The wrinkled face was once as smooth as yours, the eyes as bright, the shrivelled skin as fair and delicate. It is the work of hands that have been dust these many years.

Where are the fairy lovers of that happy day whose annual return comes upon the old man and his wife, like the echo of some village bell which has long been silent? Let yonder peevish bachelor, racked by rheumatic pains, and quarrelling with the world, let him answer to the question. He recollects something of a favourite playmate; her name was Lucy—so they tell him. He is not sure whether she was married, or went abroad, or died. It is a long while ago, and he don't remember.

Is nothing as it used to be; does no one feel, or think, or act, as in days of yore? Yes. There is an aged woman who once lived servant with the old lady's father, and is sheltered in an alms-house not far off. She is still attached to the family, and loves them all; she nursed the children in her lap, and tended in their sickness those who are no more. Her old mistress has still something of youth in her eyes; the young ladies are like what she was but not quite so handsome, nor are the gentlemen as stately as Mr. Harvey used to be. She has seen a great deal of trouble; her husband and her son died long ago; but she has got over that, and is happy now—quite happy.

If ever her attachment to her old protectors were disturbed by fresher cares and hopes, it has long since resumed its former current. It has filled the void in the poor creature's heart, and replaced the love of kindred. Death has not left her alone, and this, with a roof above her head, and a warm hearth to sit by, makes her cheerful and contented. Does she remember the marriage of great-grandmamma? Ay, that she does, as well—as if it was only yesterday. You wouldn't think it to look at her now, and perhaps she ought not to say so of herself, but she was as smart a young girl then as you'd wish to see. She recollects she took a friend of hers up-stairs to see Miss Emma dressed for church; her name was—ah! she forgets the name, but she remembers that she was a very pretty girl, and that she married not long afterwards, and lived—it has quite passed out of her mind where she lived, but she knows she had a bad husband who used her ill, and that she died in Lambeth work-house. Dear, dear, in Lambeth workhouse!

And the old couple—have they no comfort or enjoyment of existence? See them among their grandchildren and great-grandchildren; how garrulous they are, how they compare one with another, and insist on likenesses which no one else can see; how gently the old lady lectures the girls on points of breeding and decorum, and points the moral by anecdotes of herself in her young days—how the old gentleman chuckles over boyish feats and roguish tricks, and tells long stories of a 'barring-out' achieved at the school he went to: which was very wrong, he tells the boys, and never to be imitated of course, but which he cannot help letting them know was very pleasant too—especially when he kissed the master's niece. This last, however, is a point on which the old lady is very tender, for she considers it a shocking and indelicate thing to talk about, and always says so whenever it is mentioned, never failing to observe that he ought to be very penitent for having been so sinful. So the old gentleman gets no further, and what the schoolmaster's niece said afterwards (which he is always going to tell) is lost to posterity.

The old gentleman is eighty years old, to-day—'Eighty years old, Crofts, and never had a headache,' he tells the barber who shaves him (the barber being a young fellow, and very subject to that complaint). 'That's a great age, Crofts,' says the old gentleman. 'I don't think it's sich a wery great age, Sir,' replied the barber. 'Crofts,' rejoins the old gentleman, 'you're talking nonsense to me. Eighty not a great age?' 'It's a wery great age, Sir, for a gentleman to be as healthy and active as you are,' returns the barber; 'but my grandfather, Sir, he was ninety-four.' 'You don't mean that, Crofts?' says the old gentleman. 'I do indeed, Sir,' retorts the barber, 'and as wiggerous as Julius Caesar, my grandfather was.' The old gentleman muses a little time, and then says, 'What did he die of, Crofts?' 'He died accidentally, Sir,' returns the barber; 'he didn't mean to do it. He always would go a running about the streets—walking never satisfied *his* spirit—and he run against a post and died of a hurt in his chest.' The old gentleman says no more until the shaving is concluded, and then he gives Crofts half-a-crown to drink his health. He is a little doubtful of the barber's veracity afterwards, and telling the anecdote to the old lady, affects to make very light of it—though to be sure (he adds) there was old Parr, and in some parts of England, ninety-five or so is a common age, quite a common age.

This morning the old couple are cheerful but serious, recalling old times as well as they can remember them, and dwelling upon many passages in their past lives which the day brings to mind. The old lady reads aloud, in a tremulous voice, out of a great Bible, and the old gentleman with his hand to his ear, listens with profound respect. When the book is closed, they sit silent for a short space, and afterwards resume their conversation, with a reference perhaps to their dead children, as a subject not unsuited to that they have just left. By degrees they are led to consider which of those who survive are the most like those dearly-remembered objects, and so they fall into a less solemn strain, and become cheerful again.

How many people in all, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and one or two intimate friends of the family, dine together to-day at the eldest son's to congratulate the old couple, and wish them many happy returns, is a calculation beyond our powers; but this we know, that the old couple no sooner present themselves, very sprucely and carefully attired, than there is a violent shouting and rushing forward of the younger branches with all manner of presents, such as pocket-books, pencil-cases, pen-wipers, watch-papers, pin-cushions, sleeve-buckles, worked-slippers, watch-guards, and even a nutmeg-grater: the latter article being presented by a very chubby and very little boy, who exhibits it in great triumph as an extraordinary variety. The old couple's emotion at these tokens of remembrance occasions quite a pathetic scene, of which the chief ingredients are a vast quantity of kissing and hugging, and repeated wipings of small eyes and noses with small square pocket-handkerchiefs, which don't come at all easily out of small pockets. Even the peevish bachelor is moved, and he says, as he presents the old gentleman with a queer sort of antique ring from his own finger, that he'll be de'ed if he doesn't think he looks younger than he did ten years ago.

But the great time is after dinner, when the dessert and wine are on the table, which is pushed back to make plenty of room, and they are all gathered in a large circle round the fire, for it is then—the glasses being filled, and everybody ready to drink the toast—that two great-grandchildren rush out at a given signal, and presently return, dragging in old Jane Adams leaning upon her crutched stick, and trembling with age and pleasure. Who so popular as poor old Jane, nurse and story-teller in ordinary to two generations; and who so happy as she, striving to bend her stiff limbs into a curtsey, while tears of pleasure steal down her withered cheeks!

The old couple sit side by side, and the old time seems like yesterday indeed. Looking back upon the path they have travelled, its dust and ashes disappear; the flowers that withered long ago, show brightly again upon its borders, and they grow young once more in the youth of those about them.

CONCLUSION

We have taken for the subjects of the foregoing moral essays, twelve samples of married couples, carefully selected from a large stock on hand, open to the inspection of all comers. These samples are intended for the benefit of the rising generation of both sexes, and, for their more easy and pleasant information, have been separately ticketed and labelled in the manner they have seen.

We have purposely excluded from consideration the couple in which the lady reigns paramount and supreme, holding such cases to be of a very unnatural kind, and like hideous births and other monstrous deformities, only to be discreetly and sparingly exhibited.

And here our self-imposed task would have ended, but that to those young ladies and gentlemen who are yet revolving singly round the church, awaiting the advent of that time when the mysterious laws of attraction shall draw them towards it in couples, we are desirous of addressing a few last words.

Before marriage and afterwards, let them learn to centre all their hopes of real and lasting happiness in their own fireside; let them cherish the faith that in home, and all the English virtues which the love of home engenders, lies the only true source of domestic felicity; let them believe that round the household gods, contentment and tranquillity cluster in their gentlest and most graceful forms; and that many weary hunters of happiness through the noisy world, have learnt this truth too late, and found a cheerful spirit and a quiet mind only at home at last.

How much may depend on the education of daughters and the conduct of mothers; how much of the brightest part of our old national character may be perpetuated by their wisdom or frittered away by their folly—how much of it may have been lost already, and how much more in danger of vanishing every day—are questions too weighty for discussion here, but well deserving a little serious consideration from all young couples nevertheless.

To that one young couple on whose bright destiny the thoughts of nations are fixed, may the youth of England look, and not in vain, for an example. From that one young couple, blessed and favoured as they are, may they learn that even the glare and glitter of a court, the splendour of a palace, and the pomp and glory of a throne, yield in their power of conferring happiness, to domestic worth and virtue. From that one young couple may they learn that the crown of a great empire, costly and jewelled though it be, gives place in the estimation of a Queen to the plain gold ring that links her woman’s nature to that of tens of thousands of her humble subjects, and guards in her woman’s heart one secret store of tenderness, whose proudest boast shall be that it knows no Royalty save Nature’s own, and no pride of birth but being the child of heaven!

So shall the highest young couple in the land for once hear the truth, when men throw up their caps, and cry with loving shouts—

God bless them.

THE MUDFOG AND OTHER SKETCHES

PUBLIC LIFE OF MR. TULRUMBLE—ONCE MAYOR OF MUDFOG

Mudfog is a pleasant town—a remarkably pleasant town—situated in a charming hollow by the side of a river, from which river, Mudfog derives an agreeable scent of pitch, tar, coals, and rope-yarn, a roving population in oilskin hats, a pretty steady influx of drunken bargemen, and a great many other maritime advantages. There is a good deal of water about Mudfog, and yet it is not exactly the sort of town for a watering-place, either. Water is a perverse sort of element at the best of times, and in Mudfog it is particularly so. In winter, it comes oozing down the streets and tumbling over the fields,—nay, rushes into the very cellars and kitchens of the houses, with a lavish prodigality that might well be dispensed with; but in the hot summer weather it *will* dry up, and turn green: and, although green is a very good colour in its way, especially in grass, still it certainly is not becoming to water; and it cannot be denied that the beauty of Mudfog is rather impaired, even by this trifling circumstance. Mudfog is a healthy place—very healthy;—damp, perhaps, but none the worse for that. It's quite a mistake to suppose that damp is unwholesome: plants thrive best in damp situations, and why shouldn't men? The inhabitants of Mudfog are unanimous in asserting that there exists not a finer race of people on the face of the earth; here we have an indisputable and veracious contradiction of the vulgar error at once. So, admitting Mudfog to be damp, we distinctly state that it is salubrious.

The town of Mudfog is extremely picturesque. Limehouse and Ratcliff Highway are both something like it, but they give you a very faint idea of Mudfog. There are a great many more public-houses in Mudfog—more than in Ratcliff Highway and Limehouse put together. The public buildings, too, are very imposing. We consider the town-hall one of the finest specimens of shed architecture, extant: it is a combination of the pig-sty and tea-garden-box orders; and the simplicity of its design is of surpassing beauty. The idea of placing a large window on one side of the door, and a small one on the other, is particularly happy. There is a fine old Doric beauty, too, about the padlock and scraper, which is strictly in keeping with the general effect.

In this room do the mayor and corporation of Mudfog assemble together in solemn council for the public weal. Seated on the massive wooden benches, which, with the table in the centre, form the only furniture of the whitewashed apartment, the sage men of Mudfog spend hour after hour in grave deliberation. Here they settle at what hour of the night the public-houses shall be closed, at what hour of the morning they shall be permitted to open, how soon it shall be lawful for people to eat their dinner on church-days, and other great political questions; and sometimes, long after silence has fallen on the town, and the distant lights from the shops and houses have ceased to twinkle, like far-off stars, to the sight of the boatmen on the river, the illumination in the two unequal-sized windows of the town-hall, warns the inhabitants of Mudfog that its little body of legislators, like a larger and better-known body of the same genus, a great deal more noisy, and not a whit more profound, are patriotically dozing away in company, far into the night, for their country’s good.

Among this knot of sage and learned men, no one was so eminently distinguished, during many years, for the quiet modesty of his appearance and demeanour, as Nicholas Tulrumble, the well-known coal-dealer. However exciting the subject of discussion, however animated the tone of the debate, or however warm the personalities exchanged, (and even in Mudfog we get personal sometimes,) Nicholas Tulrumble was always the same. To say truth, Nicholas, being an industrious man, and always up betimes, was apt to fall asleep when a debate began, and to remain asleep till it was over, when he would wake up very much refreshed, and give his vote with the greatest complacency. The fact was, that Nicholas Tulrumble, knowing that everybody there had made up his mind beforehand, considered the talking as just a long botheration about nothing at all; and to the present hour it remains a question, whether, on this point at all events, Nicholas Tulrumble was not pretty near right.

Time, which strews a man’s head with silver, sometimes fills his pockets with gold. As he gradually performed one good office for Nicholas Tulrumble, he was obliging enough, not to omit the other. Nicholas began life in a wooden tenement of four feet square, with a capital of two and ninepence, and a stock in trade of three bushels and a-half of coals, exclusive of the large lump which hung, by way of sign-board, outside. Then he enlarged the shed, and kept a truck; then he left the shed, and the truck too, and started a donkey and a Mrs. Tulrumble; then he moved again and set up a cart; the cart was soon afterwards exchanged for a waggon; and so he went on like his great predecessor Whittington—only without a cat for a partner—increasing in wealth and fame, until at last he gave up business altogether, and retired with Mrs. Tulrumble and family to Mudfog Hall, which he had himself erected, on something which he attempted to delude himself into the belief was a hill, about a quarter of a mile distant from the town of Mudfog.

About this time, it began to be murmured in Mudfog that Nicholas Tulrumble was growing vain and haughty; that prosperity and success had corrupted the simplicity of his manners, and tainted the natural goodness of his heart; in short, that he was setting up for a public character, and a great gentleman, and affected to look down upon his old companions with compassion and contempt. Whether these reports were at the time well-founded, or not, certain it is that Mrs. Tulrumble very shortly afterwards started a four-wheel chaise, driven by a tall postilion in a yellow cap,—that Mr. Tulrumble junior took to smoking cigars, and calling the footman a ‘feller,’—and that Mr. Tulrumble from that time forth, was no more seen in his old seat in the chimney-corner of the Lighterman’s Arms at night. This looked bad; but, more than this, it began to be observed that Mr. Nicholas Tulrumble attended the corporation meetings more frequently than heretofore; and he no longer went to sleep as he had done for so many years, but propped his eyelids open with his two forefingers; that he read the newspapers by himself at home; and that he was in the habit of indulging abroad in distant and mysterious allusions to ‘masses of people,’ and ‘the property of the country,’ and ‘productive power,’ and ‘the monied interest:’ all of which denoted and proved that Nicholas Tulrumble was either mad, or worse; and it puzzled the good people of Mudfog amazingly.

At length, about the middle of the month of October, Mr. Tulrumble and family went up to London; the middle of October being, as Mrs. Tulrumble informed her acquaintance in Mudfog, the very height of the fashionable season.

Somehow or other, just about this time, despite the health-preserving air of Mudfog, the Mayor died. It was a most extraordinary circumstance; he had lived in Mudfog for eighty-five years. The corporation didn’t understand it at all; indeed it was with great difficulty that one old gentleman, who was a great stickler for forms, was dissuaded from proposing a vote of censure on such unaccountable conduct. Strange as it was, however, die he did, without taking the slightest notice of the corporation; and the corporation were imperatively called upon to elect his successor. So, they met for the purpose; and being very full of Nicholas Tulrumble just then, and Nicholas Tulrumble being a very important man, they elected him, and wrote off to London by the very next post to acquaint Nicholas Tulrumble with his new elevation.

Now, it being November time, and Mr. Nicholas Tulrumble being in the capital, it fell out that he was present at the Lord Mayor’s show and dinner, at sight of the glory and splendour whereof, he, Mr. Tulrumble, was greatly mortified, inasmuch as the reflection would force itself on his mind, that, had he been born in London instead of in Mudfog, he might have been a Lord Mayor too, and have patronized the judges, and been affable to the Lord Chancellor, and friendly with the Premier, and coldly condescending to the Secretary to the Treasury, and have dined with a flag behind his back, and done a great many other acts and deeds which unto Lord Mayors of London peculiarly appertain. The more he thought of the Lord Mayor, the more enviable a personage he seemed. To be a King was all very well; but what was the King to the Lord Mayor! When the King made a speech, everybody knew it was somebody else’s writing; whereas here was the Lord Mayor, talking away for half an hour-all out of his own head—amidst the enthusiastic applause of the whole company, while it was notorious that the King might talk to his parliament till he was black in the face without getting so much as a single cheer. As all these reflections passed through the mind of Mr. Nicholas Tulrumble, the Lord Mayor of London appeared to him the greatest sovereign on the face of the earth, beating the Emperor of Russia all to nothing, and leaving the Great Mogul immeasurably behind.

Mr. Nicholas Tulrumble was pondering over these things, and inwardly cursing the fate which had pitched his coal-shed in Mudfog, when the letter of the corporation was put into his hand. A crimson flush mantled over his face as he read it, for visions of brightness were already dancing before his imagination.

‘My dear,’ said Mr. Tulrumble to his wife, ‘they have elected me, Mayor of Mudfog.’

‘Lor-a-mussy!’ said Mrs. Tulrumble: ‘why what’s become of old Sniggs?’

‘The late Mr. Sniggs, Mrs. Tulrumble,’ said Mr. Tulrumble sharply, for he by no means approved of the notion of unceremoniously designating a gentleman who filled the high office of Mayor, as ‘Old Sniggs,’—‘The late Mr. Sniggs, Mrs. Tulrumble, is dead.’

The communication was very unexpected; but Mrs. Tulrumble only ejaculated ‘Lor-a-mussy!’ once again, as if a Mayor were a mere ordinary Christian, at which Mr. Tulrumble frowned gloomily.

‘What a pity ’tan’t in London, ain’t it?’ said Mrs. Tulrumble, after a short pause; ‘what a pity ’tan’t in London, where you might have had a show.’

‘I *might* have a show in Mudfog, if I thought proper, I apprehend,’ said Mr. Tulrumble mysteriously.

‘Lor! so you might, I declare,’ replied Mrs. Tulrumble.

‘And a good one too,’ said Mr. Tulrumble.

‘Delightful!’ exclaimed Mrs. Tulrumble.

‘One which would rather astonish the ignorant people down there,’ said Mr. Tulrumble.

‘It would kill them with envy,’ said Mrs. Tulrumble.

So it was agreed that his Majesty’s lieges in Mudfog should be astonished with splendour, and slaughtered with envy, and that such a show should take place as had never been seen in that town, or in any other town before,—no, not even in London itself.

On the very next day after the receipt of the letter, down came the tall postilion in a post-chaise,—not upon one of the horses, but inside—actually inside the chaise,—and, driving up to the very door of the town-hall, where the corporation were assembled, delivered a letter, written by the Lord knows who, and signed by Nicholas Tulrumble, in which Nicholas said, all through four sides of closely-written, gilt-edged, hot-pressed, Bath post letter paper, that he responded to the call of his fellow-townsmen with feelings of heartfelt delight; that he accepted the arduous office which their confidence had imposed upon him; that they would never find him shrinking from the discharge of his duty; that he would endeavour to execute his functions with all that dignity which their magnitude and importance demanded; and a great deal more to the same effect. But even this was not all. The tall postilion produced from his right-hand top-boot, a damp copy of that afternoon’s number of the county paper; and there, in large type, running the whole length of the very first column, was a long address from Nicholas Tulrumble to the inhabitants of Mudfog, in which he said that he cheerfully complied with their requisition, and, in short, as if to prevent any mistake about the matter, told them over again what a grand fellow he meant to be, in very much the same terms as those in which he had already told them all about the matter in his letter.

The corporation stared at one another very hard at all this, and then looked as if for explanation to the tall postilion, but as the tall postilion was intently contemplating the gold tassel on the top of his yellow cap, and could have afforded no explanation whatever, even if his thoughts had been entirely disengaged, they contented themselves with coughing very dubiously, and looking very grave. The tall postilion then delivered another letter, in which Nicholas Tulrumble informed the corporation, that he intended repairing to the town-hall, in grand state and gorgeous procession, on the Monday afternoon next ensuing. At this the corporation looked still more solemn; but, as the epistle wound up with a formal invitation to the whole body to dine with the Mayor on that day, at Mudfog Hall, Mudfog Hill, Mudfog, they began to see the fun of the thing directly, and sent back their compliments, and they’d be sure to come.

Now there happened to be in Mudfog, as somehow or other there does happen to be, in almost every town in the British dominions, and perhaps in foreign dominions too—we think it very likely, but, being no great traveller, cannot distinctly say—there happened to be, in Mudfog, a merry-tempered, pleasant-faced, good-for-nothing sort of vagabond, with an invincible dislike to manual labour, and an unconquerable attachment to strong beer and spirits, whom everybody knew, and nobody, except his wife, took the trouble to quarrel with, who inherited from his ancestors the appellation of Edward Twigger, and rejoiced in the *sobriquet* of Bottle-nosed Ned. He was drunk upon the average once a day, and penitent upon an equally fair calculation once a month; and when he was penitent, he was invariably in the very last stage of maudlin intoxication. He was a ragged, roving, roaring kind of fellow, with a burly form, a sharp wit, and a ready head, and could turn his hand to anything when he chose to do it. He was by no means opposed to hard labour on principle, for he would work away at a cricket-match by the day together,—running, and catching, and batting, and bowling, and revelling in toil which would exhaust a galley-slave. He would have been invaluable to a fire-office; never was a man with such a natural taste for pumping engines, running up ladders, and throwing furniture out of two-pair-of-stairs' windows: nor was this the only element in which he was at home; he was a humane society in himself, a portable drag, an animated life-preserver, and had saved more people, in his time, from drowning, than the Plymouth life-boat, or Captain Manby's apparatus. With all these qualifications, notwithstanding his dissipation, Bottle-nosed Ned was a general favourite; and the authorities of Mudfog, remembering his numerous services to the population, allowed him in return to get drunk in his own way, without the fear of stocks, fine, or imprisonment. He had a general licence, and he showed his sense of the compliment by making the most of it.

We have been thus particular in describing the character and avocations of Bottle-nosed Ned, because it enables us to introduce a fact politely, without hauling it into the reader's presence with indecent haste by the head and shoulders, and brings us very naturally to relate, that on the very same evening on which Mr. Nicholas Tulrumble and family returned to Mudfog, Mr. Tulrumble's new secretary, just imported from London, with a pale face and light whiskers, thrust his head down to the very bottom of his neckcloth-tie, in at the tap-room door of the Lighterman's Arms, and inquiring whether one Ned Twigger was luxuriating within, announced himself as the bearer of a message from Nicholas Tulrumble, Esquire, requiring Mr. Twigger's immediate attendance at the hall, on private and particular business. It being by no means Mr. Twigger's interest to affront the Mayor, he rose from the fireplace with a slight sigh, and followed the light-whiskered secretary through the dirt and wet of Mudfog streets, up to Mudfog Hall, without further ado.

Mr. Nicholas Tulrumble was seated in a small cavern with a skylight, which he called his library, sketching out a plan of the procession on a large sheet of paper; and into the cavern the secretary ushered Ned Twigger.

'Well, Twigger!' said Nicholas Tulrumble, condescendingly.

There was a time when Twigger would have replied, 'Well, Nick!' but that was in the days of the truck, and a couple of years before the donkey; so, he only bowed.

'I want you to go into training, Twigger,' said Mr. Tulrumble.

‘What for, sir?’ inquired Ned, with a stare.

‘Hush, hush, Twigger!’ said the Mayor. ‘Shut the door, Mr. Jennings. Look here, Twigger.’

As the Mayor said this, he unlocked a high closet, and disclosed a complete suit of brass armour, of gigantic dimensions.

‘I want you to wear this next Monday, Twigger,’ said the Mayor.

‘Bless your heart and soul, sir!’ replied Ned, ‘you might as well ask me to wear a seventy-four pounder, or a cast-iron boiler.’

‘Nonsense, Twigger, nonsense!’ said the Mayor.

‘I couldn’t stand under it, sir,’ said Twigger; ‘it would make mashed potatoes of me, if I attempted it.’

‘Pooh, pooh, Twigger!’ returned the Mayor. ‘I tell you I have seen it done with my own eyes, in London, and the man wasn’t half such a man as you are, either.’

‘I should as soon have thought of a man’s wearing the case of an eight-day clock to save his linen,’ said Twigger, casting a look of apprehension at the brass suit.

‘It’s the easiest thing in the world,’ rejoined the Mayor.

‘It’s nothing,’ said Mr. Jennings.

‘When you’re used to it,’ added Ned.

‘You do it by degrees,’ said the Mayor. ‘You would begin with one piece to-morrow, and two the next day, and so on, till you had got it all on. Mr. Jennings, give Twigger a glass of rum. Just try the breast-plate, Twigger. Stay; take another glass of rum first. Help me to lift it, Mr. Jennings. Stand firm, Twigger! There!—it isn’t half as heavy as it looks, is it?’

Twigger was a good strong, stout fellow; so, after a great deal of staggering, he managed to keep himself up, under the breastplate, and even contrived, with the aid of another glass of rum, to walk about in it, and the gauntlets into the bargain. He made a trial of the helmet, but was not equally successful, inasmuch as he tipped over instantly,—an accident which Mr. Tulrumble clearly demonstrated to be occasioned by his not having a counteracting weight of brass on his legs.

‘Now, wear that with grace and propriety on Monday next,’ said Tulrumble, ‘and I’ll make your fortune.’

‘I’ll try what I can do, sir,’ said Twigger.

‘It must be kept a profound secret,’ said Tulrumble.

‘Of course, sir,’ replied Twigger.

‘And you must be sober,’ said Tulrumble; ‘perfectly sober.’ Mr. Twigger at once solemnly pledged himself to be as sober as a judge, and Nicholas Tulrumble was satisfied, although, had we been Nicholas, we should certainly have exacted some promise of a more specific nature; inasmuch as, having attended the Mudfog assizes in the evening more than once, we can solemnly testify to having seen judges with very strong symptoms of dinner under their wigs. However, that’s neither here nor there.

The next day, and the day following, and the day after that, Ned Twigger was securely locked up in the small cavern with the sky-light, hard at work at the armour. With every additional piece he could manage to stand upright in, he had an additional glass of rum; and at last, after many partial suffocations, he contrived to get on the whole suit, and to stagger up and down the room in it, like an intoxicated effigy from Westminster Abbey.

Never was man so delighted as Nicholas Tulrumble; never was woman so charmed as Nicholas Tulrumble’s wife. Here was a sight for the common people of Mudfog! A live man in brass armour! Why, they would go wild with wonder!

The day—*the* Monday—arrived.

If the morning had been made to order, it couldn’t have been better adapted to the purpose. They never showed a better fog in London on Lord Mayor’s day, than enwrapped the town of Mudfog on that eventful occasion. It had risen slowly and surely from the green and stagnant water with the first light of morning, until it reached a little above the lamp-post tops; and there it had stopped, with a sleepy, sluggish obstinacy, which bade defiance to the sun, who had got up very blood-shot about the eyes, as if he had been at a drinking-party over-night, and was doing his day’s work with the worst possible grace. The thick damp mist hung over the town like a huge gauze curtain. All was dim and dismal. The church steeples had bidden a temporary adieu to the world below; and every object of lesser importance—houses, barns, hedges, trees, and barges—had all taken the veil.

The church-clock struck one. A cracked trumpet from the front garden of Mudfog Hall produced a feeble flourish, as if some asthmatic person had coughed into it accidentally; the gate flew open, and out came a gentleman, on a moist-sugar coloured charger, intended to represent a herald, but bearing a much stronger resemblance to a court-card on horseback. This was one of the Circus people, who always came down to Mudfog at that time of the year, and who had been engaged by Nicholas Tulrumble expressly for the occasion. There was the horse, whisking his tail about, balancing himself on his hind-legs, and flourishing away with his fore-feet, in a manner which would have gone to the hearts and souls of any reasonable crowd. But a Mudfog crowd never was a reasonable one, and in all probability never will be. Instead of scattering the very fog with their shouts, as they ought most indubitably to have done, and were fully intended to do, by Nicholas Tulrumble, they no sooner recognized the herald, than they began to growl forth the most unqualified disapprobation at the bare notion of his riding like any other man. If he had come out on his head indeed, or jumping through a hoop, or flying through a red-hot drum, or even standing on one leg with his other foot in his mouth, they might have had something to say to him; but for a professional gentleman to sit astride in the saddle, with his feet in the stirrups, was rather too good a joke. So, the herald was a decided failure, and the crowd hooted with great energy, as he pranced ingloriously away.

On the procession came. We are afraid to say how many supernumeraries there were, in striped shirts and black velvet caps, to imitate the London watermen, or how many base imitations of running-footmen, or how many banners, which, owing to the heaviness of the atmosphere, could by no means be prevailed on to display their inscriptions: still less do we feel disposed to relate how the men who played the wind instruments, looking up into the sky (we mean the fog) with musical fervour, walked through pools of water and hillocks of mud, till they covered the powdered heads of the running-footmen aforesaid with splashes, that looked curious, but not ornamental; or how the barrel-organ performer put on the wrong stop, and played one tune while the band played another; or how the horses, being used to the arena, and not to the streets, would stand still and dance, instead of going on and prancing;—all of which are matters which might be dilated upon to great advantage, but which we have not the least intention of dilating upon, notwithstanding.

Oh! it was a grand and beautiful sight to behold a corporation in glass coaches, provided at the sole cost and charge of Nicholas Tulrumble, coming rolling along, like a funeral out of mourning, and to watch the attempts the corporation made to look great and solemn, when Nicholas Tulrumble himself, in the four-wheel chaise, with the tall postilion, rolled out after them, with Mr. Jennings on one side to look like a chaplain, and a supernumerary on the other, with an old life-guardsman's sabre, to imitate the sword-bearer; and to see the tears rolling down the faces of the mob as they screamed with merriment. This was beautiful! and so was the appearance of Mrs. Tulrumble and son, as they bowed with grave dignity out of their coach-window to all the dirty faces that were laughing around them: but it is not even with this that we have to do, but with the sudden stopping of the procession at another blast of the trumpet, whereat, and whereupon, a profound silence ensued, and all eyes were turned towards Mudfog Hall, in the confident anticipation of some new wonder.

'They won't laugh now, Mr. Jennings,' said Nicholas Tulrumble.

'I think not, sir,' said Mr. Jennings.

'See how eager they look,' said Nicholas Tulrumble. 'Aha! the laugh will be on our side now; eh, Mr. Jennings?'

'No doubt of that, sir,' replied Mr. Jennings; and Nicholas Tulrumble, in a state of pleasurable excitement, stood up in the four-wheel chaise, and telegraphed gratification to the Mayoress behind.

While all this was going forward, Ned Twigger had descended into the kitchen of Mudfog Hall for the purpose of indulging the servants with a private view of the curiosity that was to burst upon the town; and, somehow or other, the footman was so companionable, and the housemaid so kind, and the cook so friendly, that he could not resist the offer of the first-mentioned to sit down and take something—just to drink success to master in.

So, down Ned Twigger sat himself in his brass livery on the top of the kitchen-table; and in a mug of something strong, paid for by the unconscious Nicholas Tulrumble, and provided by the companionable footman, drank success to the Mayor and his procession; and, as Ned laid by his helmet to imbibe the something strong, the companionable footman put it on his own head, to the immeasurable and unrecordable delight of the cook and housemaid. The companionable footman was very facetious to Ned, and Ned was very gallant to the cook and housemaid by turns. They were all very cosy and comfortable; and the something strong went briskly round.

At last Ned Twigger was loudly called for, by the procession people: and, having had his helmet fixed on, in a very complicated manner, by the companionable footman, and the kind housemaid, and the friendly cook, he walked gravely forth, and appeared before the multitude.

The crowd roared—it was not with wonder, it was not with surprise; it was most decidedly and unquestionably with laughter.

‘What!’ said Mr. Tulrumble, starting up in the four-wheel chaise. ‘Laughing? If they laugh at a man in real brass armour, they’d laugh when their own fathers were dying. Why doesn’t he go into his place, Mr. Jennings? What’s he rolling down towards us for? he has no business here!’

‘I am afraid, sir—’ faltered Mr. Jennings.

‘Afraid of what, sir?’ said Nicholas Tulrumble, looking up into the secretary’s face.

‘I am afraid he’s drunk, sir,’ replied Mr. Jennings.

Nicholas Tulrumble took one look at the extraordinary figure that was bearing down upon them; and then, clasping his secretary by the arm, uttered an audible groan in anguish of spirit.

It is a melancholy fact that Mr. Twigger having full licence to demand a single glass of rum on the putting on of every piece of the armour, got, by some means or other, rather out of his calculation in the hurry and confusion of preparation, and drank about four glasses to a piece instead of one, not to mention the something strong which went on the top of it. Whether the brass armour checked the natural flow of perspiration, and thus prevented the spirit from evaporating, we are not scientific enough to know; but, whatever the cause was, Mr. Twigger no sooner found himself outside the gate of Mudfog Hall, than he also found himself in a very considerable state of intoxication; and hence his extraordinary style of progressing. This was bad enough, but, as if fate and fortune had conspired against Nicholas Tulrumble, Mr. Twigger, not having been penitent for a good calendar month, took it into his head to be most especially and particularly sentimental, just when his repentance could have been most conveniently dispensed with. Immense tears were rolling down his cheeks, and he was vainly endeavouring to conceal his grief by applying to his eyes a blue cotton pocket-handkerchief with white spots,—an article not strictly in keeping with a suit of armour some three hundred years old, or thereabouts.

‘Twigger, you villain!’ said Nicholas Tulrumble, quite forgetting his dignity, ‘go back.’

‘Never,’ said Ned. ‘I’m a miserable wretch. I’ll never leave you.’

The by-standers of course received this declaration with acclamations of ‘That’s right, Ned; don’t!’

‘I don’t intend it,’ said Ned, with all the obstinacy of a very tipsy man. ‘I’m very unhappy. I’m the wretched father of an unfortunate family; but I am very faithful, sir. I’ll never leave you.’ Having reiterated this obliging promise, Ned proceeded in broken words to harangue the crowd upon the number of years he had lived in Mudfog, the excessive respectability of his character, and other topics of the like nature.

‘Here! will anybody lead him away?’ said Nicholas: ‘if they’ll call on me afterwards, I’ll reward them well.’

Two or three men stepped forward, with the view of bearing Ned off, when the secretary interposed.

‘Take care! take care!’ said Mr. Jennings. ‘I beg your pardon, sir; but they’d better not go too near him, because, if he falls over, he’ll certainly crush somebody.’

At this hint the crowd retired on all sides to a very respectful distance, and left Ned, like the Duke of Devonshire, in a little circle of his own.

‘But, Mr. Jennings,’ said Nicholas Tulrumble, ‘he’ll be suffocated.’

‘I’m very sorry for it, sir,’ replied Mr. Jennings; ‘but nobody can get that armour off, without his own assistance. I’m quite certain of it from the way he put it on.’

Here Ned wept dolefully, and shook his helmeted head, in a manner that might have touched a heart of stone; but the crowd had not hearts of stone, and they laughed heartily.

‘Dear me, Mr. Jennings,’ said Nicholas, turning pale at the possibility of Ned’s being smothered in his antique costume—‘Dear me, Mr. Jennings, can nothing be done with him?’

‘Nothing at all,’ replied Ned, ‘nothing at all. Gentlemen, I’m an unhappy wretch. I’m a body, gentlemen, in a brass coffin.’ At this poetical idea of his own conjuring up, Ned cried so much that the people began to get sympathetic, and to ask what Nicholas Tulrumble meant by putting a man into such a machine as that; and one individual in a hairy waistcoat like the top of a trunk, who had previously expressed his opinion that if Ned hadn’t been a poor man, Nicholas wouldn’t have dared do it, hinted at the propriety of breaking the four-wheel chaise, or Nicholas's head, or both, which last compound proposition the crowd seemed to consider a very good notion.

It was not acted upon, however, for it had hardly been broached, when Ned Twigger's wife made her appearance abruptly in the little circle before noticed, and Ned no sooner caught a glimpse of her face and form, than from the mere force of habit he set off towards his home just as fast as his legs could carry him; and that was not very quick in the present instance either, for, however ready they might have been to carry *him*, they couldn't get on very well under the brass armour. So, Mrs. Twigger had plenty of time to denounce Nicholas Tulrumble to his face: to express her opinion that he was a decided monster; and to intimate that, if her ill-used husband sustained any personal damage from the brass armour, she would have the law of Nicholas Tulrumble for manslaughter. When she had said all this with due vehemence, she posted after Ned, who was dragging himself along as best he could, and deploring his unhappiness in most dismal tones.

What a wailing and screaming Ned's children raised when he got home at last! Mrs. Twigger tried to undo the armour, first in one place, and then in another, but she couldn't manage it; so she tumbled Ned into bed, helmet, armour, gauntlets, and all. Such a creaking as the bedstead made, under Ned's weight in his new suit! It didn't break down though; and there Ned lay, like the anonymous vessel in the Bay of Biscay, till next day, drinking barley-water, and looking miserable: and every time he groaned, his good lady said it served him right, which was all the consolation Ned Twigger got.

Nicholas Tulrumble and the gorgeous procession went on together to the town-hall, amid the hisses and groans of all the spectators, who had suddenly taken it into their heads to consider poor Ned a martyr. Nicholas was formally installed in his new office, in acknowledgment of which ceremony he delivered himself of a speech, composed by the secretary, which was very long, and no doubt very good, only the noise of the people outside prevented anybody from hearing it, but Nicholas Tulrumble himself. After which, the procession got back to Mudfog Hall any how it could; and Nicholas and the corporation sat down to dinner.

But the dinner was flat, and Nicholas was disappointed. They were such dull sleepy old fellows, that corporation. Nicholas made quite as long speeches as the Lord Mayor of London had done, nay, he said the very same things that the Lord Mayor of London had said, and the deuce a cheer the corporation gave him. There was only one man in the party who was thoroughly awake; and he was insolent, and called him Nick. Nick! What would be the consequence, thought Nicholas, of anybody presuming to call the Lord Mayor of London 'Nick!' He should like to know what the sword-bearer would say to that; or the recorder, or the toast-master, or any other of the great officers of the city. They'd nick him.

But these were not the worst of Nicholas Tulrumble's doings. If they had been, he might have remained a Mayor to this day, and have talked till he lost his voice. He contracted a relish for statistics, and got philosophical; and the statistics and the philosophy together, led him into an act which increased his unpopularity and hastened his downfall.

At the very end of the Mudfog High-street, and abutting on the river-side, stands the Jolly Boatmen, an old-fashioned low-roofed, bay-windowed house, with a bar, kitchen, and tap-room all in one, and a large fireplace with a kettle to correspond, round which the working men have congregated time out of mind on a winter's night, refreshed by draughts of good strong beer, and cheered by the sounds of a fiddle and tambourine: the Jolly Boatmen having been duly licensed by the Mayor and corporation, to scrape the fiddle and thumb the tambourine from time, whereof the memory of the oldest inhabitants goeth not to the contrary. Now Nicholas Tulrumble had been reading pamphlets on crime, and parliamentary reports,—or had made the secretary read them to him, which is the same thing in effect,—and he at once perceived that this fiddle and tambourine must have done more to demoralize Mudfog, than any other operating causes that ingenuity could imagine. So he read up for the subject, and determined to come out on the corporation with a burst, the very next time the licence was applied for.

The licensing day came, and the red-faced landlord of the Jolly Boatmen walked into the town-hall, looking as jolly as need be, having actually put on an extra fiddle for that night, to commemorate the anniversary of the Jolly Boatmen's music licence. It was applied for in due form, and was just about to be granted as a matter of course, when up rose Nicholas Tulrumble, and drowned the astonished corporation in a torrent of eloquence. He descanted in glowing terms upon the increasing depravity of his native town of Mudfog, and the excesses committed by its population. Then, he related how shocked he had been, to see barrels of beer sliding down into the cellar of the Jolly Boatmen week after week; and how he had sat at a window opposite the Jolly Boatmen for two days together, to count the people who went in for beer between the hours of twelve and one o'clock alone—which, by-the-bye, was the time at which the great majority of the Mudfog people dined. Then, he went on to state, how the number of people who came out with beer-jugs, averaged twenty-one in five minutes, which, being multiplied by twelve, gave two hundred and fifty-two people with beer-jugs in an hour, and multiplied again by fifteen (the number of hours during which the house was open daily) yielded three thousand seven hundred and eighty people with beer-jugs per day, or twenty-six thousand four hundred and sixty people with beer-jugs, per week. Then he proceeded to show that a tambourine and moral degradation were synonymous terms, and a fiddle and vicious propensities wholly inseparable. All these arguments he strengthened and demonstrated by frequent references to a large book with a blue cover, and sundry quotations from the Middlesex magistrates; and in the end, the corporation, who were posed with the figures, and sleepy with the speech, and sadly in want of dinner into the bargain, yielded the palm to Nicholas Tulrumble, and refused the music licence to the Jolly Boatmen.

But although Nicholas triumphed, his triumph was short. He carried on the war against beer-jugs and fiddles, forgetting the time when he was glad to drink out of the one, and to dance to the other, till the people hated, and his old friends shunned him. He grew tired of the lonely magnificence of Mudfog Hall, and his heart yearned towards the Lighterman's Arms. He wished he had never set up as a public man, and sighed for the good old times of the coal-shop, and the chimney corner.

At length old Nicholas, being thoroughly miserable, took heart of grace, paid the secretary a quarter's wages in advance, and packed him off to London by the next coach. Having taken this step, he put his hat on his head, and his pride in his pocket, and walked down to the old room at the Lighterman's Arms. There were only two of the old fellows there, and they looked coldly on Nicholas as he proffered his hand.

'Are you going to put down pipes, Mr. Tulrumble?' said one.

'Or trace the progress of crime to 'bacca?' growled another.

'Neither,' replied Nicholas Tulrumble, shaking hands with them both, whether they would or not. 'I've come down to say that I'm very sorry for having made a fool of myself, and that I hope you'll give me up the old chair, again.'

The old fellows opened their eyes, and three or four more old fellows opened the door, to whom Nicholas, with tears in his eyes, thrust out his hand too, and told the same story. They raised a shout of joy, that made the bells in the ancient church-tower vibrate again, and wheeling the old chair into the warm corner, thrust old Nicholas down into it, and ordered in the very largest-sized bowl of hot punch, with an unlimited number of pipes, directly.

The next day, the Jolly Boatmen got the licence, and the next night, old Nicholas and Ned Twigger's wife led off a dance to the music of the fiddle and tambourine, the tone of which seemed mightily improved by a little rest, for they never had played so merrily before. Ned Twigger was in the very height of his glory, and he danced hornpipes, and balanced chairs on his chin, and straws on his nose, till the whole company, including the corporation, were in raptures of admiration at the brilliancy of his acquirements.

Mr. Tulrumble, junior, couldn't make up his mind to be anything but magnificent, so he went up to London and drew bills on his father; and when he had overdrawn, and got into debt, he grew penitent, and came home again.

As to old Nicholas, he kept his word, and having had six weeks of public life, never tried it any more. He went to sleep in the town-hall at the very next meeting; and, in full proof of his sincerity, has requested us to write this faithful narrative. We wish it could have the effect of reminding the Tulrumbles of another sphere, that puffed-up conceit is not dignity, and that snarling at the little pleasures they were once glad to enjoy, because they would rather forget the times when they were of lower station, renders them objects of contempt and ridicule.

This is the first time we have published any of our gleanings from this particular source. Perhaps, at some future period, we may venture to open the chronicles of Mudfog.

FULL REPORT OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE MUDFOG ASSOCIATION

for the advancement of everything

We have made the most unparalleled and extraordinary exertions to place before our readers a complete and accurate account of the proceedings at the late grand meeting of the Mudfog Association, holden in the town of Mudfog; it affords us great happiness to lay the result before them, in the shape of various communications received from our able, talented, and graphic correspondent, expressly sent down for the purpose, who has immortalized us, himself, Mudfog, and the association, all at one and the same time. We have been, indeed, for some days unable to determine who will transmit the greatest name to posterity; ourselves, who sent our correspondent down; our correspondent, who wrote an account of the matter; or the association, who gave our correspondent something to write about. We rather incline to the opinion that we are the greatest man of the party, inasmuch as the notion of an exclusive and authentic report originated with us; this may be prejudice: it may arise from a prepossession on our part in our own favour. Be it so. We have no doubt that every gentleman concerned in this mighty assemblage is troubled with the same complaint in a greater or less degree; and it is a consolation to us to know that we have at least this feeling in common with the great scientific stars, the brilliant and extraordinary luminaries, whose speculations we record.

We give our correspondent's letters in the order in which they reached us. Any attempt at amalgamating them into one beautiful whole, would only destroy that glowing tone, that dash of wildness, and rich vein of picturesque interest, which pervade them throughout.

'*Mudfog, Monday night, seven o'clock*.

'We are in a state of great excitement here. Nothing is spoken of, but the approaching meeting of the association. The inn-doors are thronged with waiters anxiously looking for the expected arrivals; and the numerous bills which are wafered up in the windows of private houses, intimating that there are beds to let within, give the streets a very animated and cheerful appearance, the wafers being of a great variety of colours, and the monotony of printed inscriptions being relieved by every possible size and style of hand-writing. It is confidently rumoured that Professors Snore, Doze, and Wheezy have engaged three beds and a sitting-room at the Pig and Tinder-box. I give you the rumour as it has reached me; but I cannot, as yet, vouch for its accuracy. The moment I have been enabled to obtain any certain information upon this interesting point, you may depend upon receiving it.'

‘*Half-past seven*.

I have just returned from a personal interview with the landlord of the Pig and Tinder-box. He speaks confidently of the probability of Professors Snore, Doze, and Wheezy taking up their residence at his house during the sitting of the association, but denies that the beds have been yet engaged; in which representation he is confirmed by the chambermaid—a girl of artless manners, and interesting appearance. The boots denies that it is at all likely that Professors Snore, Doze, and Wheezy will put up here; but I have reason to believe that this man has been suborned by the proprietor of the Original Pig, which is the opposition hotel. Amidst such conflicting testimony it is difficult to arrive at the real truth; but you may depend upon receiving authentic information upon this point the moment the fact is ascertained. The excitement still continues. A boy fell through the window of the pastrycook’s shop at the corner of the High-street about half an hour ago, which has occasioned much confusion. The general impression is, that it was an accident. Pray heaven it may prove so!’

‘*Tuesday*, *noon*.

‘At an early hour this morning the bells of all the churches struck seven o’clock; the effect of which, in the present lively state of the town, was extremely singular. While I was at breakfast, a yellow gig, drawn by a dark grey horse, with a patch of white over his right eyelid, proceeded at a rapid pace in the direction of the Original Pig stables; it is currently reported that this gentleman has arrived here for the purpose of attending the association, and, from what I have heard, I consider it extremely probable, although nothing decisive is yet known regarding him. You may conceive the anxiety with which we are all looking forward to the arrival of the four o’clock coach this afternoon.

‘Notwithstanding the excited state of the populace, no outrage has yet been committed, owing to the admirable discipline and discretion of the police, who are nowhere to be seen. A barrel-organ is playing opposite my window, and groups of people, offering fish and vegetables for sale, parade the streets. With these exceptions everything is quiet, and I trust will continue so.’

‘*Five o’clock*.

‘It is now ascertained, beyond all doubt, that Professors Snore, Doze, and Wheezy will *not* repair to the Pig and Tinder-box, but have actually engaged apartments at the Original Pig. This intelligence is *exclusive*; and I leave you and your readers to draw their own inferences from it. Why Professor Wheezy, of all people in the world, should repair to the Original Pig in preference to the Pig and Tinder-box, it is not easy to conceive. The professor is a man who should be above all such petty feelings. Some people here openly impute treachery, and a distinct breach of faith to Professors Snore and Doze; while others, again, are disposed to acquit them of any culpability in the transaction, and to insinuate that the blame rests solely with Professor Wheezy. I own that I incline to the latter opinion; and although it gives me great pain to speak in terms of censure or disapprobation of a man of such transcendent genius and acquirements, still I am bound to say that, if my suspicions be well founded, and if all the reports which have reached my ears be true, I really do not well know what to make of the matter.

'Mr. Slug, so celebrated for his statistical researches, arrived this afternoon by the four o'clock stage. His complexion is a dark purple, and he has a habit of sighing constantly. He looked extremely well, and appeared in high health and spirits. Mr. Woodensconce also came down in the same conveyance. The distinguished gentleman was fast asleep on his arrival, and I am informed by the guard that he had been so the whole way. He was, no doubt, preparing for his approaching fatigues; but what gigantic visions must those be that flit through the brain of such a man when his body is in a state of torpidity!

'The influx of visitors increases every moment. I am told (I know not how truly) that two post-chaises have arrived at the Original Pig within the last half-hour, and I myself observed a wheelbarrow, containing three carpet bags and a bundle, entering the yard of the Pig and Tinder-box no longer ago than five minutes since. The people are still quietly pursuing their ordinary occupations; but there is a wildness in their eyes, and an unwonted rigidity in the muscles of their countenances, which shows to the observant spectator that their expectations are strained to the very utmost pitch. I fear, unless some very extraordinary arrivals take place to-night, that consequences may arise from this popular ferment, which every man of sense and feeling would deplore.'

'*Twenty minutes past six*.

'I have just heard that the boy who fell through the pastrycook's window last night has died of the fright. He was suddenly called upon to pay three and sixpence for the damage done, and his constitution, it seems, was not strong enough to bear up against the shock. The inquest, it is said, will be held to-morrow.’

‘*Three-quarters part seven*.

‘Professors Muff and Nogo have just driven up to the hotel door; they at once ordered dinner with great condescension. We are all very much delighted with the urbanity of their manners, and the ease with which they adapt themselves to the forms and ceremonies of ordinary life. Immediately on their arrival they sent for the head waiter, and privately requested him to purchase a live dog,—as cheap a one as he could meet with,—and to send him up after dinner, with a pie-board, a knife and fork, and a clean plate. It is conjectured that some experiments will be tried upon the dog to-night; if any particulars should transpire, I will forward them by express.’

‘*Half-past eight*.

‘The animal has been procured. He is a pug-dog, of rather intelligent appearance, in good condition, and with very short legs. He has been tied to a curtain-peg in a dark room, and is howling dreadfully.’

‘*Ten minutes to nine*.

‘The dog has just been rung for. With an instinct which would appear almost the result of reason, the sagacious animal seized the waiter by the calf of the leg when he approached to take him, and made a desperate, though ineffectual resistance. I have not been able to procure admission to the apartment occupied by the scientific gentlemen; but, judging from the sounds which reached my ears when I stood upon the landing-place outside the door, just now, I should be disposed to say that the dog had retreated growling beneath some article of furniture, and was keeping the professors at bay. This conjecture is confirmed by the testimony of the ostler, who, after peeping through the keyhole, assures me that he distinctly saw Professor Nogo on his knees, holding forth a small bottle of prussic acid, to which the animal, who was crouched beneath an arm-chair, obstinately declined to smell. You cannot imagine the feverish state of irritation we are in, lest the interests of science should be sacrificed to the prejudices of a brute creature, who is not endowed with sufficient sense to foresee the incalculable benefits which the whole human race may derive from so very slight a concession on his part.’

‘*Nine o’clock*.

‘The dog’s tail and ears have been sent down-stairs to be washed; from which circumstance we infer that the animal is no more. His forelegs have been delivered to the boots to be brushed, which strengthens the supposition.’

‘*Half after ten*.

‘My feelings are so overpowered by what has taken place in the course of the last hour and a half, that I have scarcely strength to detail the rapid succession of events which have quite bewildered all those who are cognizant of their occurrence. It appears that the pug-dog mentioned in my last was surreptitiously obtained,—stolen, in fact,—by some person attached to the stable department, from an unmarried lady resident in this town. Frantic on discovering the loss of her favourite, the lady rushed distractedly into the street, calling in the most heart-rending and pathetic manner upon the passengers to restore her, her Augustus,—for so the deceased was named, in affectionate remembrance of a former lover of his mistress, to whom he bore a striking personal resemblance, which renders the circumstances additionally affecting. I am not yet in a condition to inform you what circumstance induced the bereaved lady to direct her steps to the hotel which had witnessed the last struggles of her *protégé*. I can only state that she arrived there, at the very instant when his detached members were passing through the passage on a small tray. Her shrieks still reverberate in my ears! I grieve to say that the expressive features of Professor Muff were much scratched and lacerated by the injured lady; and that Professor Nogo, besides sustaining several severe bites, has lost some handfuls of hair from the same cause. It must be some consolation to these gentlemen to know that their ardent attachment to scientific pursuits has alone occasioned these unpleasant consequences; for which the sympathy of a grateful country will sufficiently reward them. The unfortunate lady remains at the Pig and Tinder-box, and up to this time is reported in a very precarious state.

‘I need scarcely tell you that this unlooked-for catastrophe has cast a damp and gloom upon us in the midst of our exhilaration; natural in any case, but greatly enhanced in this, by the amiable qualities of the deceased animal, who appears to have been much and deservedly respected by the whole of his acquaintance.’

‘*Twelve o’clock*.

‘I take the last opportunity before sealing my parcel to inform you that the boy who fell through the pastrycook’s window is not dead, as was universally believed, but alive and well. The report appears to have had its origin in his mysterious disappearance. He was found half an hour since on the premises of a sweet-stuff maker, where a raffle had been announced for a second-hand seal-skin cap and a tambourine; and where—a sufficient number of members not having been obtained at first—he had patiently waited until the list was completed. This fortunate discovery has in some degree restored our gaiety and cheerfulness. It is proposed to get up a subscription for him without delay.

‘Everybody is nervously anxious to see what to-morrow will bring forth. If any one should arrive in the course of the night, I have left strict directions to be called immediately. I should have sat up, indeed, but the agitating events of this day have been too much for me.

‘No news yet of either of the Professors Snore, Doze, or Wheezy. It is very strange!’

‘*Wednesday afternoon*.

‘All is now over; and, upon one point at least, I am at length enabled to set the minds of your readers at rest. The three professors arrived at ten minutes after two o’clock, and, instead of taking up their quarters at the Original Pig, as it was universally understood in the course of yesterday that they would assuredly have done, drove straight to the Pig and Tinder-box, where they threw off the mask at once, and openly announced their intention of remaining. Professor Wheezy may reconcile this very extraordinary conduct with *his* notions of fair and equitable dealing, but I would recommend Professor Wheezy to be cautious how he presumes too far upon his well-earned reputation. How such a man as Professor Snore, or, which is still more extraordinary, such an individual as Professor Doze, can quietly allow himself to be mixed up with such proceedings as these, you will naturally inquire. Upon this head, rumour is silent; I have my speculations, but forbear to give utterance to them just now.’

‘*Four o’clock*.

‘The town is filling fast; eighteenpence has been offered for a bed and refused. Several gentlemen were under the necessity last night of sleeping in the brick fields, and on the steps of doors, for which they were taken before the magistrates in a body this morning, and committed to prison as vagrants for various terms. One of these persons I understand to be a highly-respectable tinker, of great practical skill, who had forwarded a paper to the President of Section D. Mechanical Science, on the construction of pipkins with copper bottoms and safety-values, of which report speaks highly. The incarceration of this gentleman is greatly to be regretted, as his absence will preclude any discussion on the subject.

‘The bills are being taken down in all directions, and lodgings are being secured on almost any terms. I have heard of fifteen shillings a week for two rooms, exclusive of coals and attendance, but I can scarcely believe it. The excitement is dreadful. I was informed this morning that the civil authorities, apprehensive of some outbreak of popular feeling, had commanded a recruiting sergeant and two corporals to be under arms; and that, with the view of not irritating the people unnecessarily by their presence, they had been requested to take up their position before daybreak in a turnpike, distant about a quarter of a mile from the town. The vigour and promptness of these measures cannot be too highly extolled.

‘Intelligence has just been brought me, that an elderly female, in a state of inebriety, has declared in the open street her intention to “do” for Mr. Slug. Some statistical returns compiled by that gentleman, relative to the consumption of raw spirituous liquors in this place, are supposed to be the cause of the wretch’s animosity. It is added that this declaration was loudly cheered by a crowd of persons who had assembled on the spot; and that one man had the boldness to designate Mr. Slug aloud by the opprobrious epithet of “Stick-in-the-mud!” It is earnestly to be hoped that now, when the moment has arrived for their interference, the magistrates will not shrink from the exercise of that power which is vested in them by the constitution of our common country.’

‘*Half-past ten*.

‘The disturbance, I am happy to inform you, has been completely quelled, and the ringleader taken into custody. She had a pail of cold water thrown over her, previous to being locked up, and expresses great contrition and uneasiness. We are all in a fever of anticipation about to-morrow; but, now that we are within a few hours of the meeting of the association, and at last enjoy the proud consciousness of having its illustrious members amongst us, I trust and hope everything may go off peaceably. I shall send you a full report of to-morrow’s proceedings by the night coach.’

‘*Eleven o’clock*.

‘I open my letter to say that nothing whatever has occurred since I folded it up.’

‘*Thursday*.

‘The sun rose this morning at the usual hour. I did not observe anything particular in the aspect of the glorious planet, except that he appeared to me (it might have been a delusion of my heightened fancy) to shine with more than common brilliancy, and to shed a refulgent lustre upon the town, such as I had never observed before. This is the more extraordinary, as the sky was perfectly cloudless, and the atmosphere peculiarly fine. At half-past nine o’clock the general committee assembled, with the last year’s president in the chair. The report of the council was read; and one passage, which stated that the council had corresponded with no less than three thousand five hundred and seventy-one persons, (all of whom paid their own postage,) on no fewer than seven thousand two hundred and forty-three topics, was received with a degree of enthusiasm which no efforts could suppress. The various committees and sections having been appointed, and the more formal business transacted, the great proceedings of the meeting commenced at eleven o’clock precisely. I had the happiness of occupying a most eligible position at that time, in

‘SECTION A.—ZOOLOGY AND BOTANY.
GREAT ROOM, PIG AND TINDER-BOX.

President—Professor Snore. *Vice-Presidents*—Professors Doze and Wheezy.

‘The scene at this moment was particularly striking. The sun streamed through the windows of the apartments, and tinted the whole scene with its brilliant rays, bringing out in strong relief the noble visages of the professors and scientific gentlemen, who, some with bald heads, some with red heads, some with brown heads, some with grey heads, some with black heads, some with block heads, presented a *coup d’oeil* which no eye-witness will readily forget. In front of these gentlemen were papers and inkstands; and round the room, on elevated benches extending as far as the forms could reach, were assembled a brilliant concourse of those lovely and elegant women for which Mudfog is justly acknowledged to be without a rival in the whole world. The contrast between their fair faces and the dark coats and trousers of the scientific gentlemen I shall never cease to remember while Memory holds her seat.

‘Time having been allowed for a slight confusion, occasioned by the falling down of the greater part of the platforms, to subside, the president called on one of the secretaries to read a communication entitled, “Some remarks on the industrious fleas, with considerations on the importance of establishing infant-schools among that numerous class of society; of directing their industry to useful and practical ends; and of applying the surplus fruits thereof, towards providing for them a comfortable and respectable maintenance in their old age.”

‘The author stated, that, having long turned his attention to the moral and social condition of these interesting animals, he had been induced to visit an exhibition in Regent-street, London, commonly known by the designation of “The Industrious Fleas.” He had there seen many fleas, occupied certainly in various pursuits and avocations, but occupied, he was bound to add, in a manner which no man of well-regulated mind could fail to regard with sorrow and regret. One flea, reduced to the level of a beast of burden, was drawing about a miniature gig, containing a particularly small effigy of His Grace the Duke of Wellington; while another was staggering beneath the weight of a golden model of his great adversary Napoleon Bonaparte. Some, brought up as mountebanks and ballet-dancers, were performing a figure-dance (he regretted to observe, that, of the fleas so employed, several were females); others were in training, in a small card-board box, for pedestrians,—mere sporting characters—and two were actually engaged in the cold-blooded and barbarous occupation of duelling; a pursuit from which humanity recoiled with horror and disgust. He suggested that measures should be immediately taken to employ the labour of these fleas as part and parcel of the productive power of the country, which might easily be done by the establishment among them of infant schools and houses of industry, in which a system of virtuous education, based upon sound principles, should be observed, and moral precepts strictly inculcated. He proposed that every flea who presumed to exhibit, for hire, music, or dancing, or any species of theatrical entertainment, without a licence, should be considered a vagabond, and treated accordingly; in which respect he only placed him upon a level with the rest of mankind. He would further suggest that their labour should be placed under the control and regulation of the state, who should set apart from the profits, a fund for the support of superannuated or disabled fleas, their widows and orphans. With this view, he proposed that liberal premiums should be offered for the three best designs for a general almshouse; from which—as insect architecture was well known to be in a very advanced and perfect state—we might possibly derive many valuable hints for the improvement of our metropolitan universities, national galleries, and other public edifices.

‘The President wished to be informed how the ingenious gentleman proposed to open a communication with fleas generally, in the first instance, so that they might be thoroughly imbued with a sense of the advantages they must necessarily derive from changing their mode of life, and applying themselves to honest labour. This appeared to him, the only difficulty.

‘The Author submitted that this difficulty was easily overcome, or rather that there was no difficulty at all in the case. Obviously the course to be pursued, if Her Majesty’s government could be prevailed upon to take up the plan, would be, to secure at a remunerative salary the individual to whom he had alluded as presiding over the exhibition in Regent-street at the period of his visit. That gentleman would at once be able to put himself in communication with the mass of the fleas, and to instruct them in pursuance of some general plan of education, to be sanctioned by Parliament, until such time as the more intelligent among them were advanced enough to officiate as teachers to the rest.

‘The President and several members of the section highly complimented the author of the paper last read, on his most ingenious and important treatise. It was determined that the subject should be recommended to the immediate consideration of the council.

‘Mr. Wigsby produced a cauliflower somewhat larger than a chaise-umbrella, which had been raised by no other artificial means than the simple application of highly carbonated soda-water as manure. He explained that by scooping out the head, which would afford a new and delicious species of nourishment for the poor, a parachute, in principle something similar to that constructed by M. Garnerin, was at once obtained; the stalk of course being kept downwards. He added that he was perfectly willing to make a descent from a height of not less than three miles and a quarter; and had in fact already proposed the same to the proprietors of Vauxhall Gardens, who in the handsomest manner at once consented to his wishes, and appointed an early day next summer for the undertaking;

merely stipulating that the rim of the cauliflower should be previously broken in three or four places to ensure the safety of the descent.

‘The President congratulated the public on the *grand gala* in store for them, and warmly eulogised the proprietors of the establishment alluded to, for their love of science, and regard for the safety of human life, both of which did them the highest honour.

‘A Member wished to know how many thousand additional lamps the royal property would be illuminated with, on the night after the descent.

‘Mr. Wigsby replied that the point was not yet finally decided; but he believed it was proposed, over and above the ordinary illuminations, to exhibit in various devices eight millions and a-half of additional lamps.

‘The Member expressed himself much gratified with this announcement.

‘Mr. Blunderum delighted the section with a most interesting and valuable paper “on the last moments of the learned pig,” which produced a very strong impression on the assembly, the account being compiled from the personal recollections of his favourite attendant. The account stated in the most emphatic terms that the animal’s name was not Toby, but Solomon; and distinctly proved that he could have no near relatives in the profession, as many designing persons had falsely stated, inasmuch as his father, mother, brothers and sisters, had all fallen victims to the butcher at different times. An uncle of his indeed, had with very great labour been traced to a sty in Somers Town; but as he was in a very infirm state at the time, being afflicted with measles, and shortly afterwards disappeared, there appeared too much reason to conjecture that he had been converted into sausages. The disorder of the learned pig was originally a severe cold, which, being aggravated by excessive trough indulgence, finally settled upon the lungs, and terminated in a general decay of the constitution. A melancholy instance of a presentiment entertained by the animal of his approaching dissolution, was recorded. After gratifying a numerous and fashionable company with his performances, in which no falling off whatever was visible, he fixed his eyes on the biographer, and, turning to the watch which lay on the floor, and on which he was accustomed to point out the hour, deliberately passed his snout twice round the dial. In precisely four-and-twenty hours from that time he had ceased to exist!

‘Professor Wheezy inquired whether, previous to his demise, the animal had expressed, by signs or otherwise, any wishes regarding the disposal of his little property.

‘Mr. Blunderum replied, that, when the biographer took up the pack of cards at the conclusion of the performance, the animal grunted several times in a significant manner, and nodding his head as he was accustomed to do, when gratified. From these gestures it was understood that he wished the attendant to keep the cards, which he had ever since done. He had not expressed any wish relative to his watch, which had accordingly been pawned by the same individual.

‘The President wished to know whether any Member of the section had ever seen or conversed with the pig-faced lady, who was reported to have worn a black velvet mask, and to have taken her meals from a golden trough.

‘After some hesitation a Member replied that the pig-faced lady was his mother-in-law, and that he trusted the President would not violate the sanctity of private life.

‘The President begged pardon. He had considered the pig-faced lady a public character. Would the honourable member object to state, with a view to the advancement of science, whether she was in any way connected with the learned pig?

‘The Member replied in the same low tone, that, as the question appeared to involve a suspicion that the learned pig might be his half-brother, he must decline answering it.

‘SECTION B.—ANATOMY AND MEDICINE.
COACH-HOUSE, PIG AND TINDER-BOX.

President—Dr. Toorell. *Vice-Presidents*—Professors Muff and Nogo.

Dr. Kutankumagen (of Moscow) read to the section a report of a case which had occurred within his own practice, strikingly illustrative of the power of medicine, as exemplified in his successful treatment of a virulent disorder. He had been called in to visit the patient on the 1st of April, 1837. He was then labouring under symptoms peculiarly alarming to any medical man. His frame was stout and muscular, his step firm and elastic, his cheeks plump and red, his voice loud, his appetite good, his pulse full and round. He was in the constant habit of eating three meals *per diem*, and of drinking at least one bottle of wine, and one glass of spirituous liquors diluted with water, in the course of the four-and-twenty hours. He laughed constantly, and in so hearty a manner that it was terrible to hear him. By dint of powerful medicine, low diet, and bleeding, the symptoms in the course of three days perceptibly decreased. A rigid perseverance in the same course of treatment for only one week, accompanied with small doses of water-gruel, weak broth, and barley-water, led to their entire disappearance. In the course of a month he was sufficiently recovered to be carried down-stairs by two nurses, and to enjoy an airing in a close carriage, supported by soft pillows. At the present moment he was restored so far as to walk about, with the slight assistance of a crutch and a boy. It would perhaps be gratifying to the section to learn that he ate little, drank little, slept little, and was never heard to laugh by any accident whatever.

'Dr. W. R. Fee, in complimenting the honourable member upon the triumphant cure he had effected, begged to ask whether the patient still bled freely?

'Dr. Kutankumagen replied in the affirmative.

'Dr. W. R. Fee.—And you found that he bled freely during the whole course of the disorder?

'Dr. Kutankumagen.—Oh dear, yes; most freely.

'Dr. Neeshawts supposed, that if the patient had not submitted to be bled with great readiness and perseverance, so extraordinary a cure could never, in fact, have been accomplished. Dr. Kutankumagen rejoined, certainly not.

'Mr. Knight Bell (M.R.C.S.) exhibited a wax preparation of the interior of a gentleman who in early life had inadvertently swallowed a door-key. It was a curious fact that a medical student of dissipated habits, being present at the *post mortem* examination, found means to escape unobserved from the room, with that portion of the coats of the stomach upon which an exact model of the instrument was distinctly impressed, with which he hastened to a locksmith of doubtful character, who made a new key from the pattern so shown to him. With this key the medical student entered the house of the deceased gentleman, and committed a burglary to a large amount, for which he was subsequently tried and executed.

'The President wished to know what became of the original key after the lapse of years. Mr. Knight Bell replied that the gentleman was always much accustomed to punch, and it was supposed the acid had gradually devoured it.

‘Dr. Neeshawts and several of the members were of opinion that the key must have lain very cold and heavy upon the gentleman’s stomach.

‘Mr. Knight Bell believed it did at first. It was worthy of remark, perhaps, that for some years the gentleman was troubled with a night-mare, under the influence of which he always imagined himself a wine-cellar door.

‘Professor Muff related a very extraordinary and convincing proof of the wonderful efficacy of the system of infinitesimal doses, which the section were doubtless aware was based upon the theory that the very minutest amount of any given drug, properly dispersed through the human frame, would be productive of precisely the same result as a very large dose administered in the usual manner. Thus, the fortieth part of a grain of calomel was supposed to be equal to a five-grain calomel pill, and so on in proportion throughout the whole range of medicine. He had tried the experiment in a curious manner upon a publican who had been brought into the hospital with a broken head, and was cured upon the infinitesimal system in the incredibly short space of three months. This man was a hard drinker. He (Professor Muff) had dispersed three drops of rum through a bucket of water, and requested the man to drink the whole. What was the result? Before he had drunk a quart, he was in a state of beastly intoxication; and five other men were made dead drunk with the remainder.

‘The President wished to know whether an infinitesimal dose of soda-water would have recovered them? Professor Muff replied that the twenty-fifth part of a teaspoonful, properly administered to each patient, would have sobered him immediately. The President remarked that this was a most important discovery, and he hoped the Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen would patronize it immediately.

‘A Member begged to be informed whether it would be possible to administer—say, the twentieth part of a grain of bread and cheese to all grown-up paupers, and the fortieth part to children, with the same satisfying effect as their present allowance.

‘Professor Muff was willing to stake his professional reputation on the perfect adequacy of such a quantity of food to the support of human life—in workhouses; the addition of the fifteenth part of a grain of pudding twice a week would render it a high diet.

‘Professor Nogo called the attention of the section to a very extraordinary case of animal magnetism. A private watchman, being merely looked at by the operator from the opposite side of a wide street, was at once observed to be in a very drowsy and languid state. He was followed to his box, and being once slightly rubbed on the palms of the hands, fell into a sound sleep, in which he continued without intermission for ten hours.

‘SECTION C.—STATISTICS.
HAY-LOFT, ORIGINAL PIG.

President—Mr. Woodensconce. *Vice-Presidents*—Mr. Ledbrain and Mr. Timbered.

‘Mr. Slug stated to the section the result of some calculations he had made with great difficulty and labour, regarding the state of infant education among the middle classes of London. He found that, within a circle of three miles from the Elephant and Castle, the following were the names and numbers of children’s books principally in circulation:—

‘Jack the Giant-killer	*7,943*
Ditto and Bean-stalk	*8,621*
Ditto and Eleven Brothers	*2,845*
Ditto and Jill	*1,998*
Total	*21,407*

‘He found that the proportion of Robinson Crusoes to Philip Quarlls was as four and a half to one; and that the preponderance of Valentine and Orsons over Goody Two Shoeses was as three and an eighth of the former to half a one of the latter; a comparison of Seven Champions with Simple Simons gave the same result. The ignorance that prevailed, was lamentable. One child, on being asked whether he would rather be Saint George of England or a respectable tallow-chandler, instantly replied, “Taint George of Ingling.” Another, a little boy of eight years old, was found to be firmly impressed with a belief in the existence of dragons, and openly stated that it was his intention when he grew up, to rush forth sword in hand for the deliverance of captive princesses, and the promiscuous slaughter of giants. Not one child among the number interrogated had ever heard of Mungo Park,—some inquiring whether he was at all connected with the black man that swept the crossing; and others whether he was in any way related to the Regent's Park. They had not the slightest conception of the commonest principles of mathematics, and considered Sindbad the Sailor the most enterprising voyager that the world had ever produced.

'A Member strongly deprecating the use of all the other books mentioned, suggested that Jack and Jill might perhaps be exempted from the general censure, inasmuch as the hero and heroine, in the very outset of the tale, were depicted as going *up* a hill to fetch a pail of water, which was a laborious and useful occupation,—supposing the family linen was being washed, for instance.

'Mr. Slug feared that the moral effect of this passage was more than counterbalanced by another in a subsequent part of the poem, in which very gross allusion was made to the mode in which the heroine was personally chastised by her mother

"'For laughing at Jack's disaster;"

besides, the whole work had this one great fault, *it was not true*.

'The President complimented the honourable member on the excellent distinction he had drawn. Several other Members, too, dwelt upon the immense and urgent necessity of storing the minds of children with nothing but facts and figures; which process the President very forcibly remarked, had made them (the section) the men they were.

'Mr. Slug then stated some curious calculations respecting the dogs'-meat barrows of London. He found that the total number of small carts and barrows engaged in dispensing provision to the cats and dogs of the metropolis was, one thousand seven hundred and forty-three. The average number of skewers delivered daily with the provender, by each dogs'-meat cart or barrow, was thirty-six. Now, multiplying the number of skewers so delivered by the number of barrows, a total of sixty-two thousand seven hundred and forty-eight skewers daily would be obtained. Allowing that, of these sixty-two thousand seven hundred and forty-eight skewers, the odd two thousand seven hundred and forty-eight were accidentally devoured with the meat, by the most voracious of the animals supplied, it followed that sixty thousand skewers per day, or the enormous number of twenty-one millions nine hundred thousand skewers annually, were wasted in the kennels and dustholes of London; which, if collected and warehoused, would in ten years' time afford a mass of timber more than sufficient for the construction of a first-rate vessel of war for the use of her Majesty's navy, to be called "The Royal Skewer," and to become under that name the terror of all the enemies of this island.

'Mr. X. Ledbrain read a very ingenious communication, from which it appeared that the total number of legs belonging to the manufacturing population of one great town in Yorkshire was, in round numbers, forty thousand, while the total number of chair and stool legs in their houses was only thirty thousand, which, upon the very favourable average of three legs to a seat, yielded only ten thousand seats in all. From this calculation it would appear,—not taking wooden or cork legs into the account, but allowing two legs to every person,—that ten thousand individuals (one-half of the whole population) were either destitute of any rest for their legs at all, or passed the whole of their leisure time in sitting upon boxes.

'SECTION D.—MECHANICAL SCIENCE.
COACH-HOUSE, ORIGINAL PIG.

President—Mr. Carter. *Vice-Presidents*—Mr. Truck and Mr. Waghorn.

'Professor Queerspeck exhibited an elegant model of a portable railway, neatly mounted in a green case, for the waistcoat pocket. By attaching this beautiful instrument to his boots, any Bank or public-office clerk could transport himself from his place of residence to his place of business, at the easy rate of sixty-five miles an hour, which, to gentlemen of sedentary pursuits, would be an incalculable advantage.

'The President was desirous of knowing whether it was necessary to have a level surface on which the gentleman was to run.

'Professor Queerspeck explained that City gentlemen would run in trains, being handcuffed together to prevent confusion or unpleasantness. For instance, trains would start every morning at eight, nine, and ten o'clock, from Camden Town, Islington, Camberwell, Hackney, and various other places in which City gentlemen are accustomed to reside. It would be necessary to have a level, but he had provided for this difficulty by proposing that the best line that the circumstances would admit of, should be taken through the sewers which undermine the streets of the metropolis, and which, well lighted by jets from the gas pipes which run immediately above them, would form a pleasant and commodious arcade, especially in winter-time, when the inconvenient custom of carrying umbrellas, now so general, could be wholly dispensed with. In reply to another question, Professor Queerspeck stated that no substitute for the purposes to which these arcades were at present devoted had yet occurred to him, but that he hoped no fanciful objection on this head would be allowed to interfere with so great an undertaking.

‘Mr. Jobba produced a forcing-machine on a novel plan, for bringing joint-stock railway shares prematurely to a premium. The instrument was in the form of an elegant gilt weather-glass, of most dazzling appearance, and was worked behind, by strings, after the manner of a pantomime trick, the strings being always pulled by the directors of the company to which the machine belonged. The quicksilver was so ingeniously placed, that when the acting directors held shares in their pockets, figures denoting very small expenses and very large returns appeared upon the glass; but the moment the directors parted with these pieces of paper, the estimate of needful expenditure suddenly increased itself to an immense extent, while the statements of certain profits became reduced in the same proportion. Mr. Jobba stated that the machine had been in constant requisition for some months past, and he had never once known it to fail.

‘A Member expressed his opinion that it was extremely neat and pretty. He wished to know whether it was not liable to accidental derangement? Mr. Jobba said that the whole machine was undoubtedly liable to be blown up, but that was the only objection to it.

‘Professor Nogo arrived from the anatomical section to exhibit a model of a safety fire-escape, which could be fixed at any time, in less than half an hour, and by means of which, the youngest or most infirm persons (successfully resisting the progress of the flames until it was quite ready) could be preserved if they merely balanced themselves for a few minutes on the sill of their bedroom window, and got into the escape without falling into the street. The Professor stated that the number of boys who had been rescued in the daytime by this machine from houses which were not on fire, was almost incredible. Not a conflagration had occurred in the whole of London for many months past to which the escape had not been carried on the very next day, and put in action before a concourse of persons.

‘The President inquired whether there was not some difficulty in ascertaining which was the top of the machine, and which the bottom, in cases of pressing emergency.

‘Professor Nogo explained that of course it could not be expected to act quite as well when there was a fire, as when there was not a fire; but in the former case he thought it would be of equal service whether the top were up or down.’

With the last section our correspondent concludes his most able and faithful Report, which will never cease to reflect credit upon him for his scientific attainments, and upon us for our enterprising spirit. It is needless to take a review of the subjects which have been discussed; of the mode in which they have been examined; of the great truths which they have elicited. They are now before the world, and we leave them to read, to consider, and to profit.

The place of meeting for next year has undergone discussion, and has at length been decided, regard being had to, and evidence being taken upon, the goodness of its wines, the supply of its markets, the hospitality of its inhabitants, and the quality of its hotels. We hope at this next meeting our correspondent may again be present, and that we may be once more the means of placing his communications before the world. Until that period we have been prevailed upon to allow this number of our Miscellany to be retailed to the public, or wholesaled to the trade, without any advance upon our usual price.

We have only to add, that the committees are now broken up, and that Mudfog is once again restored to its accustomed tranquillity,—that Professors and Members have had balls, and *soirées*, and suppers, and great mutual complimentations, and have at length dispersed to their several homes,—whither all good wishes and joys attend them, until next year!

Signed Boz.

FULL REPORT OF THE SECOND MEETING OF THE MUDFOG ASSOCIATION
for the advancement of everything

In October last, we did ourselves the immortal credit of recording, at an enormous expense, and by dint of exertions unnpralleled in the history of periodical publication, the proceedings of the Mudfog Association for the Advancement of Everything, which in that month held its first great half-yearly meeting, to the wonder and delight of the whole empire. We announced at the conclusion of that extraordinary and most remarkable Report, that when the Second Meeting of the Society should take place, we should be found again at our post, renewing our gigantic and spirited endeavours, and once more making the world ring with the accuracy, authenticity, immeasurable superiority, and intense remarkability of our account of its proceedings. In redemption of this pledge, we caused to be despatched per steam to Oldcastle (at which place this second meeting of the Society was held on the 20th instant), the same superhumanly-endowed gentleman who furnished the former report, and who,—gifted by nature with transcendent abilities, and furnished by us with a body of assistants scarcely inferior to himself,—has forwarded a series of letters, which, for faithfulness of description, power of language, fervour of thought, happiness of expression, and importance of subject-matter, have no equal in the epistolary literature of any age or country. We give this gentleman's correspondence entire, and in the order in which it reached our office.

'*Saloon of Steamer*, *Thursday night*, *half-past eight*.

'When I left New Burlington Street this evening in the hackney cabriolet, number four thousand two hundred and eighty-five, I experienced sensations as novel as they were oppressive. A sense of the importance of the task I had undertaken, a consciousness that I was leaving London, and, stranger still, going somewhere else, a feeling of loneliness and a sensation of jolting, quite bewildered my thoughts, and for a time rendered me even insensible to the presence of my carpet-bag and hat-box. I shall ever feel grateful to the driver of a Blackwall omnibus who, by thrusting the pole of his vehicle through the small door of the cabriolet, awakened me from a tumult of imaginings that are wholly indescribable. But of such materials is our imperfect nature composed!

'I am happy to say that I am the first passenger on board, and shall thus be enabled to give you an account of all that happens in the order of its occurrence. The chimney is smoking a good deal, and so are the crew; and the captain, I am informed, is very drunk in a little house upon deck, something like a black turnpike. I should infer from all I hear that he has got the steam up.

'You will readily guess with what feelings I have just made the discovery that my berth is in the same closet with those engaged by Professor Woodensconce, Mr. Slug, and Professor Grime. Professor

Woodensconce has taken the shelf above me, and Mr. Slug and Professor Grime the two shelves opposite. Their luggage has already arrived. On Mr. Slug's bed is a long tin tube of about three inches in diameter, carefully closed at both ends. What can this contain? Some powerful instrument of a new construction, doubtless.'

'*Ten minutes past nine*.

'Nobody has yet arrived, nor has anything fresh come in my way except several joints of beef and mutton, from which I conclude that a good plain dinner has been provided for to-morrow. There is a singular smell below, which gave me some uneasiness at first; but as the steward says it is always there, and never goes away, I am quite comfortable again. I learn from this man that the different sections will be distributed at the Black Boy and Stomach-ache, and the Boot-jack and Countenance. If this intelligence be true (and I have no reason to doubt it), your readers will draw such conclusions as their different opinions may suggest.

'I write down these remarks as they occur to me, or as the facts come to my knowledge, in order that my first impressions may lose nothing of their original vividness. I shall despatch them in small packets as opportunities arise.'

'*Half past nine*.

'Some dark object has just appeared upon the wharf. I think it is a travelling carriage.'

'*A quarter to ten*.

'No, it isn't.'

'*Half-past ten*.

The passengers are pouring in every instant. Four omnibuses full have just arrived upon the wharf, and all is bustle and activity. The noise and confusion are very great. Cloths are laid in the cabins, and the steward is placing blue plates—full of knobs of cheese at equal distances down the centre of the tables. He drops a great many knobs; but, being used to it, picks them up again with great dexterity, and, after wiping them on his sleeve, throws them back into the plates. He is a young man of exceedingly prepossessing appearance—either dirty or a mulatto, but I think the former.

'An interesting old gentleman, who came to the wharf in an omnibus, has just quarrelled violently with the porters, and is staggering towards the vessel with a large trunk in his arms. I trust and hope that he may reach it in safety; but the board he has to cross is narrow and slippery. Was that a splash? Gracious powers!

‘I have just returned from the deck. The trunk is standing upon the extreme brink of the wharf, but the old gentleman is nowhere to be seen. The watchman is not sure whether he went down or not, but promises to drag for him the first thing to-morrow morning. May his humane efforts prove successful!

‘Professor Nogo has this moment arrived with his nightcap on under his hat. He has ordered a glass of cold brandy and water, with a hard biscuit and a basin, and has gone straight to bed. What can this mean?

‘The three other scientific gentlemen to whom I have already alluded have come on board, and have all tried their beds, with the exception of Professor Woodensconce, who sleeps in one of the top ones, and can’t get into it. Mr. Slug, who sleeps in the other top one, is unable to get out of his, and is to have his supper handed up by a boy. I have had the honour to introduce myself to these gentlemen, and we have amicably arranged the order in which we shall retire to rest; which it is necessary to agree upon, because, although the cabin is very comfortable, there is not room for more than one gentleman to be out of bed at a time, and even he must take his boots off in the passage.

‘As I anticipated, the knobs of cheese were provided for the passengers’ supper, and are now in course of consumption. Your readers will be surprised to hear that Professor Woodensconce has abstained from cheese for eight years, although he takes butter in considerable quantities. Professor Grime having lost several teeth, is unable, I observe, to eat his crusts without previously soaking them in his bottled porter. How interesting are these peculiarities!’

‘*Half-past eleven*.

‘Professors Woodensconce and Grime, with a degree of good humour that delights us all, have just arranged to toss for a bottle of mulled port. There has been some discussion whether the payment should be decided by the first toss or the best out of three. Eventually the latter course has been determined on. Deeply do I wish that both gentlemen could win; but that being impossible, I own that my personal aspirations (I speak as an individual, and do not compromise either you or your readers by this expression of feeling) are with Professor Woodensconce. I have backed that gentleman to the amount of eighteenpence.’

‘*Twenty minutes to twelve*.

‘Professor Grime has inadvertently tossed his half-crown out of one of the cabin-windows, and it has been arranged that the steward shall toss for him. Bets are offered on any side to any amount, but there are no takers.

‘Professor Woodensconce has just called “woman;” but the coin having lodged in a beam, is a long time coming down again. The interest and suspense of this one moment are beyond anything that can be imagined.’

‘*Twelve o’clock*.

‘The mulled port is smoking on the table before me, and Professor Grime has won. Tossing is a game of chance; but on every ground, whether of public or private character, intellectual endowments, or scientific attainments, I cannot help expressing my opinion that Professor Woodensconce *ought* to have come off victorious. There is an exultation about Professor Grime incompatible, I fear, with true greatness.’

‘*A quarter past twelve*.

‘Professor Grime continues to exult, and to boast of his victory in no very measured terms, observing that he always does win, and that he knew it would be a “head” beforehand, with many other remarks of a similar nature. Surely this gentleman is not so lost to every feeling of decency and propriety as not to feel and know the superiority of Professor Woodensconce? Is Professor Grime insane? or does he wish to be reminded in plain language of his true position in society, and the precise level of his acquirements and abilities? Professor Grime will do well to look to this.’

‘*One o’clock*.

‘I am writing in bed. The small cabin is illuminated by the feeble light of a flickering lamp suspended from the ceiling; Professor Grime is lying on the opposite shelf on the broad of his back, with his mouth wide open. The scene is indescribably solemn. The rippling of the tide, the noise of the sailors’ feet overhead, the gruff voices on the river, the dogs on the shore, the snoring of the passengers, and a constant creaking of every plank in the vessel, are the only sounds that meet the ear. With these exceptions, all is profound silence.

‘My curiosity has been within the last moment very much excited. Mr. Slug, who lies above Professor Grime, has cautiously withdrawn the curtains of his berth, and, after looking anxiously out, as if to satisfy himself that his companions are asleep, has taken up the tin tube of which I have before spoken, and is regarding it with great interest. What rare mechanical combination can be contained in that mysterious case? It is evidently a profound secret to all.'

'*A quarter past one*.

'The behaviour of Mr. Slug grows more and more mysterious. He has unscrewed the top of the tube, and now renews his observations upon his companions, evidently to make sure that he is wholly unobserved. He is clearly on the eve of some great experiment. Pray heaven that it be not a dangerous one; but the interests of science must be promoted, and I am prepared for the worst.'

'*Five minutes later*.

'He has produced a large pair of scissors, and drawn a roll of some substance, not unlike parchment in appearance, from the tin case. The experiment is about to begin. I must strain my eyes to the utmost, in the attempt to follow its minutest operation.'

'*Twenty minutes before two*.

'I have at length been enabled to ascertain that the tin tube contains a few yards of some celebrated plaster, recommended—as I discover on regarding the label attentively through my eye-glass—as a preservative against sea-sickness. Mr. Slug has cut it up into small portions, and is now sticking it over himself in every direction.'

'*Three o'clock*.

'Precisely a quarter of an hour ago we weighed anchor, and the machinery was suddenly put in motion with a noise so appalling, that Professor Woodensconce (who had ascended to his berth by means of a platform of carpet-bags arranged by himself on geometrical principals) darted from his shelf head foremost, and, gaining his feet with all the rapidity of extreme terror, ran wildly into the ladies' cabin, under the impression that we were sinking, and uttering loud cries for aid. I am assured that the scene which ensued baffles all description. There were one hundred and forty-seven ladies in their respective berths at the time.

'Mr. Slug has remarked, as an additional instance of the extreme ingenuity of the steam-engine as applied to purposes of navigation, that in whatever part of the vessel a passenger's berth may be situated, the machinery always appears to be exactly under his pillow. He intends stating this very beautiful, though simple discovery, to the association.'

'*Half-past ten*.

‘We are still in smooth water; that is to say, in as smooth water as a steam-vessel ever can be, for, as Professor Woodensconce (who has just woke up) learnedly remarks, another great point of ingenuity about a steamer is, that it always carries a little storm with it. You can scarcely conceive how exciting the jerking pulsation of the ship becomes. It is a matter of positive difficulty to get to sleep.’

‘*Friday afternoon, six o’clock*.

‘I regret to inform you that Mr. Slug’s plaster has proved of no avail. He is in great agony, but has applied several large, additional pieces notwithstanding. How affecting is this extreme devotion to science and pursuit of knowledge under the most trying circumstances!

‘We were extremely happy this morning, and the breakfast was one of the most animated description. Nothing unpleasant occurred until noon, with the exception of Doctor Foxey’s brown silk umbrella and white hat becoming entangled in the machinery while he was explaining to a knot of ladies the construction of the steam-engine. I fear the gravy soup for lunch was injudicious. We lost a great many passengers almost immediately afterwards.’

‘*Half-past six*.

‘I am again in bed. Anything so heart-rending as Mr. Slug’s sufferings it has never yet been my lot to witness.’

‘*Seven o’clock*.

‘A messenger has just come down for a clean pocket-handkerchief from Professor Woodensconce’s bag, that unfortunate gentleman being quite unable to leave the deck, and imploring constantly to be thrown overboard. From this man I understand that Professor Nogo, though in a state of utter exhaustion, clings feebly to the hard biscuit and cold brandy and water, under the impression that they will yet restore him. Such is the triumph of mind over matter.

‘Professor Grime is in bed, to all appearance quite well; but he *will* eat, and it is disagreeable to see him. Has this gentleman no sympathy with the sufferings of his fellow-creatures? If he has, on what principle can he call for mutton-chops—and smile?’

‘*Black Boy and Stomach-ache,*
Oldcastle, Saturday noon.

‘You will be happy to learn that I have at length arrived here in safety. The town is excessively crowded, and all the private lodgings and hotels are filled with *savans* of both sexes. The tremendous assemblage of intellect that one encounters in every street is in the last degree overwhelming.

‘Notwithstanding the throng of people here, I have been fortunate enough to meet with very comfortable accommodation on very reasonable terms, having secured a sofa in the first-floor passage at one guinea per night, which includes permission to take my meals in the bar, on condition that I walk about the streets at all other times, to make room for other gentlemen similarly situated. I have been over the outhouses intended to be devoted to the reception of the various sections, both here and at the Boot-jack and Countenance, and am much delighted with the arrangements. Nothing can exceed the fresh appearance of the saw-dust with which the floors are sprinkled. The forms are of unplaned deal, and the general effect, as you can well imagine, is extremely beautiful.’

‘*Half-past nine*.

‘The number and rapidity of the arrivals are quite bewildering. Within the last ten minutes a stage-coach has driven up to the door, filled inside and out with distinguished characters, comprising Mr. Muddlebranes, Mr. Drawley, Professor Muff, Mr. X. Misty, Mr. X. X. Misty, Mr. Purblind, Professor Rummun, The Honourable and Reverend Mr. Long Eers, Professor John Ketch, Sir William Joltered, Doctor Buffer, Mr. Smith (of London), Mr. Brown (of Edinburgh), Sir Hookham Snivey, and Professor Pumpkinskull. The ten last-named gentlemen were wet through, and looked extremely intelligent.’

‘*Sunday, two o’clock, p.m.*

‘The Honourable and Reverend Mr. Long Eers, accompanied by Sir William Joltered, walked and drove this morning. They accomplished the former feat in boots, and the latter in a hired fly. This has naturally given rise to much discussion.

‘I have just learnt that an interview has taken place at the Boot-jack and Countenance between Sowster, the active and intelligent beadle of this place, and Professor Pumpkinskull, who, as your readers are doubtless aware, is an influential member of the council. I forbear to communicate any of the rumours to which this very extraordinary proceeding has given rise until I have seen Sowster, and endeavoured to ascertain the truth from him.’

‘*Half-past six*.

‘I engaged a donkey-chaise shortly after writing the above, and proceeded at a brisk trot in the direction of Sowster’s residence, passing through a beautiful expanse of country, with red brick buildings on either side, and stopping in the marketplace to observe the spot where Mr. Kwakley’s hat was blown off yesterday. It is an uneven piece of paving, but has certainly no appearance which would lead one to suppose that any such event had recently occurred there. From this point I proceeded—passing the gas-works and tallow-melter’s—to a lane which had been pointed out to me as the beadle’s place of residence; and before I had driven a dozen yards further, I had the good fortune to meet Sowster himself advancing towards me.

‘Sowster is a fat man, with a more enlarged development of that peculiar conformation of countenance which is vulgarly termed a double chin than I remember to have ever seen before. He has also a very red nose, which he attributes to a habit of early rising—so red, indeed, that but for this explanation I should have supposed it to proceed from occasional inebriety. He informed me that he did not feel himself at liberty to relate what had passed between himself and Professor Pumpkinskull, but had no objection to state that it was connected with a matter of police regulation, and added with peculiar significance “Never wos sitch times!”

‘You will easily believe that this intelligence gave me considerable surprise, not wholly unmixed with anxiety, and that I lost no time in waiting on Professor Pumpkinskull, and stating the object of my visit. After a few moments’ reflection, the Professor, who, I am bound to say, behaved with the utmost politeness, openly avowed (I mark the passage in italics) *that he had requested Sowster to attend on the Monday morning at the Boot-jack and Countenance, to keep off the boys*; *and that he had further desired that the under-beadle might be stationed, with the same object, at the Black Boy and Stomach-ache*!

‘Now I leave this unconstitutional proceeding to your comments and the consideration of your readers. I have yet to learn that a beadle, without the precincts of a church, churchyard, or work-house, and acting otherwise than under the express orders of churchwardens and overseers in council assembled, to enforce the law against people who come upon the parish, and other offenders, has any lawful authority whatever over the rising youth of this country. I have yet to learn that a beadle can be called out by any civilian to exercise a domination and despotism over the boys of Britain. I have yet to learn that a beadle will be permitted by the commissioners of poor law regulation to wear out the soles and heels of his boots in illegal interference with the liberties of people not proved poor or otherwise criminal. I have yet to learn that a beadle has power to stop up the Queen's highway at his will and pleasure, or that the whole width of the street is not free and open to any man, boy, or woman in existence, up to the very walls of the houses—ay, be they Black Boys and Stomach-aches, or Boot-jacks and Countenances, I care not.'

'*Nine o'clock*.

'I have procured a local artist to make a faithful sketch of the tyrant Sowster, which, as he has acquired this infamous celebrity, you will no doubt wish to have engraved for the purpose of presenting a copy with every copy of your next number. I enclose it.

[Picture which cannot be reproduced]

The under-beadle has consented to write his life, but it is to be strictly anonymous.

'The accompanying likeness is of course from the life, and complete in every respect. Even if I had been totally ignorant of the man's real character, and it had been placed before me without remark, I should have shuddered involuntarily. There is an intense malignity of expression in the features, and a baleful ferocity of purpose in the ruffian's eye, which appals and sickens. His whole air is rampant with cruelty, nor is the stomach less characteristic of his demoniac propensities.'

'*Monday*.

'The great day has at length arrived. I have neither eyes, nor ears, nor pens, nor ink, nor paper, for anything but the wonderful proceedings that have astounded my senses. Let me collect my energies and proceed to the account.

'SECTION A.—ZOOLOGY AND BOTANY.
FRONT PARLOUR, BLACK BOY AND STOMACH-ACHE.

President—Sir William Joltered. *Vice-Presidents*—Mr. Muddlebranes and Mr. Drawley.

'Mr. X. X. Misty communicated some remarks on the disappearance of dancing-bears from the streets of London, with observations on the exhibition of monkeys as connected with barrel-organs. The writer had observed, with feelings of the utmost pain and regret, that some years ago a sudden and unaccountable change in the public taste took place with reference to itinerant bears, who, being discountenanced by the populace, gradually fell off one by one from the streets of the metropolis, until not one remained to create a taste for natural history in the breasts of the poor and uninstructed. One bear, indeed,—a brown and ragged animal,—had lingered about the haunts of his former triumphs, with a worn and dejected visage and feeble limbs, and had essayed to wield his quarter-staff for the amusement of the multitude; but hunger, and an utter want of any due recompense for his abilities, had at length driven him from the field, and it was only too probable that he had fallen a sacrifice to the rising taste for grease. He regretted to add that a similar, and no less lamentable, change had taken place with reference to monkeys. These delightful animals had formerly been almost as plentiful as the organs on the tops of which they were accustomed to sit; the proportion in the year 1829 (it appeared by the parliamentary return) being as one monkey to three organs. Owing, however, to an altered taste in musical instruments, and the substitution, in a great measure, of narrow boxes of music for organs, which left the monkeys nothing to sit upon, this source of public amusement was wholly dried up. Considering it a matter of the deepest importance, in connection with national education, that the people should not lose such opportunities of making themselves acquainted with the manners and customs of two most interesting species of animals, the author submitted that some measures should be immediately taken for the restoration of these pleasing and truly intellectual amusements.

‘The President inquired by what means the honourable member proposed to attain this most desirable end?

‘The Author submitted that it could be most fully and satisfactorily accomplished, if Her Majesty’s Government would cause to be brought over to England, and maintained at the public expense, and for the public amusement, such a number of bears as would enable every quarter of the town to be visited—say at least by three bears a week. No difficulty whatever need be experienced in providing a fitting place for the reception of these animals, as a commodious bear-garden could be erected in the immediate neighbourhood of both Houses of Parliament; obviously the most proper and eligible spot for such an establishment.

‘Professor Mull doubted very much whether any correct ideas of natural history were propagated by the means to which the honourable member had so ably adverted. On the contrary, he believed that they had been the means of diffusing very incorrect and imperfect notions on the subject. He spoke from personal observation and personal experience, when he said that many children of great abilities had been induced to believe, from what they had observed in the streets, at and before the period to which the honourable gentleman had referred, that all monkeys were born in red coats and spangles, and that their hats and feathers also came by nature. He wished to know distinctly whether the honourable gentleman attributed the want of encouragement the bears had met with to the decline of public taste in that respect, or to a want of ability on the part of the bears themselves?

‘Mr. X. X. Misty replied, that he could not bring himself to believe but that there must be a great deal of floating talent among the bears and monkeys generally; which, in the absence of any proper encouragement, was dispersed in other directions.

‘Professor Pumpkinskull wished to take that opportunity of calling the attention of the section to a most important and serious point. The author of the treatise just read had alluded to the prevalent taste for bears’-grease as a means of promoting the growth of hair, which undoubtedly was diffused to a very great and (as it appeared to him) very alarming extent. No gentleman attending that section could fail to be aware of the fact that the youth of the present age evinced, by their behaviour in the streets, and at all places of public resort, a considerable lack of that gallantry and gentlemanly feeling which, in more ignorant times, had been thought becoming. He wished to know whether it were possible that a constant outward application of bears’-grease by the young gentlemen about town had imperceptibly infused into those unhappy persons something of the nature and quality of the bear. He shuddered as he threw out the remark; but if this theory, on inquiry, should prove to be well founded, it would at once explain a great deal of unpleasant eccentricity of behaviour, which, without some such discovery, was wholly unaccountable.

‘The President highly complimented the learned gentleman on his most valuable suggestion, which produced the greatest effect upon the assembly; and remarked that only a week previous he had seen some young gentlemen at a theatre eyeing a box of ladies with a fierce intensity, which nothing but the influence of some brutish appetite could possibly explain. It was dreadful to reflect that our youth were so rapidly verging into a generation of bears.

'After a scene of scientific enthusiasm it was resolved that this important question should be immediately submitted to the consideration of the council.

'The President wished to know whether any gentleman could inform the section what had become of the dancing-dogs?

'A Member replied, after some hesitation, that on the day after three glee-singers had been committed to prison as criminals by a late most zealous police-magistrate of the metropolis, the dogs had abandoned their professional duties, and dispersed themselves in different quarters of the town to gain a livelihood by less dangerous means. He was given to understand that since that period they had supported themselves by lying in wait for and robbing blind men's poodles.

'Mr. Flummery exhibited a twig, claiming to be a veritable branch of that noble tree known to naturalists as the Shakspeare, which has taken root in every land and climate, and gathered under the shade of its broad green boughs the great family of mankind. The learned gentleman remarked that the twig had been undoubtedly called by other names in its time; but that it had been pointed out to him by an old lady in Warwickshire, where the great tree had grown, as a shoot of the genuine Shakspeare, by which name he begged to introduce it to his countrymen.

'The President wished to know what botanical definition the honourable gentleman could afford of the curiosity.

'Mr. Flummery expressed his opinion that it was a decided plant.

'SECTION B.—DISPLAY OF MODELS AND MECHANICAL SCIENCE.

LARGE ROOM, BOOT-JACK AND COUNTENANCE.

President—Mr. Mallett. *Vice-Presidents*—Messrs. Leaver and Scroo.

'Mr. Crinkles exhibited a most beautiful and delicate machine, of little larger size than an ordinary snuff-box, manufactured entirely by himself, and composed exclusively of steel, by the aid of which more pockets could be picked in one hour than by the present slow and tedious process in four-and-twenty. The inventor remarked that it had been put into active operation in Fleet Street, the Strand, and other thoroughfares, and had never been once known to fail.

‘After some slight delay, occasioned by the various members of the section buttoning their pockets,

‘The President narrowly inspected the invention, and declared that he had never seen a machine of more beautiful or exquisite construction. Would the inventor be good enough to inform the section whether he had taken any and what means for bringing it into general operation?

‘Mr. Crinkles stated that, after encountering some preliminary difficulties, he had succeeded in putting himself in communication with Mr. Fogle Hunter, and other gentlemen connected with the swell mob, who had awarded the invention the very highest and most unqualified approbation. He regretted to say, however, that these distinguished practitioners, in common with a gentleman of the name of Gimlet-eyed Tommy, and other members of a secondary grade of the profession whom he was understood to represent, entertained an insuperable objection to its being brought into general use, on the ground that it would have the inevitable effect of almost entirely superseding manual labour, and throwing a great number of highly-deserving persons out of employment.

‘The President hoped that no such fanciful objections would be allowed to stand in the way of such a great public improvement.

‘Mr. Crinkles hoped so too; but he feared that if the gentlemen of the swell mob persevered in their objection, nothing could be done.

‘Professor Grime suggested, that surely, in that case, Her Majesty’s Government might be prevailed upon to take it up.

‘Mr. Crinkles said, that if the objection were found to be insuperable he should apply to Parliament, which he thought could not fail to recognise the utility of the invention.

‘The President observed that, up to this time Parliament had certainly got on very well without it; but, as they did their business on a very large scale, he had no doubt they would gladly adopt the improvement. His only fear was that the machine might be worn out by constant working.

‘Mr. Coppernose called the attention of the section to a proposition of great magnitude and interest, illustrated by a vast number of models, and stated with much clearness and perspicuity in a treatise entitled “Practical Suggestions on the necessity of providing some harmless and wholesome relaxation for the young noblemen of England.” His proposition was, that a space of ground of not less than ten miles in length and four in breadth should be purchased by a new company, to be incorporated by Act of Parliament, and inclosed by a brick wall of not less than twelve feet in height. He proposed that it should be laid out with highway roads, turnpikes, bridges, miniature villages, and every object that could conduce to the comfort and glory of Four-in-hand Clubs, so that they might be fairly presumed to require no drive beyond it. This delightful retreat would be fitted up with most commodious and extensive stables, for the convenience of such of the nobility and gentry as had a taste for ostlering, and with houses of entertainment furnished in the most expensive and handsome style. It would be further provided with whole streets of door-knockers and bell-handles of extra size, so constructed that they could be easily wrenched off at night, and regularly screwed on again, by attendants provided for the purpose, every day. There would also be gas lamps of real glass, which could be broken at a comparatively small expense per dozen, and a broad and handsome foot pavement for gentlemen to drive their cabriolets upon when they were humorously disposed—for the full enjoyment of which feat live pedestrians would be procured from the workhouse at a very small charge per head. The place being inclosed, and carefully screened from the intrusion of the public, there would be no objection to gentlemen laying aside any article of their costume that was considered to interfere with a pleasant frolic, or, indeed, to their walking about without any costume at all, if they liked that better. In short, every facility of enjoyment would be afforded that the most gentlemanly person could possibly desire. But as even these advantages would be incomplete unless there were some means provided of enabling the nobility and gentry to display their prowess when they sallied forth after dinner, and as some inconvenience might be experienced in the event of their being reduced to the necessity of pummelling each other, the inventor had turned his attention to the construction of an entirely new police force, composed exclusively of automaton figures, which, with the assistance of the ingenious Signor Gagliardi, of Windmill-street, in the Haymarket, he had succeeded in making with such nicety, that a policeman, cab-driver, or old woman, made upon the principle of the models exhibited, would walk about until knocked down like any real man; nay, more, if set upon and beaten by six or eight noblemen or gentlemen, after it was down, the figure would utter divers groans, mingled with entreaties for mercy, thus rendering the illusion complete, and the enjoyment perfect. But the invention did not stop even here; for station-houses would be built, containing good beds for noblemen and gentlemen during the night, and in the morning they would repair to a commodious police office, where a pantomimic investigation would take place before the automaton magistrates,—quite equal to life,—who would fine them in so many counters, with which they would be previously provided for the purpose. This office would be furnished with an inclined plane, for the convenience of any nobleman or gentleman who might wish to bring in his horse as a witness; and the prisoners would be at perfect liberty, as they were now, to interrupt the complainants as much as they pleased, and to make any remarks that they thought proper. The charge for these amusements would amount to very little more than they already cost, and the inventor submitted that the public would be much benefited and comforted by the proposed arrangement.

‘Professor Nogo wished to be informed what amount of automaton police force it was proposed to raise in the first instance.

‘Mr. Coppernose replied, that it was proposed to begin with seven divisions of police of a score each, lettered from A to G inclusive. It was proposed that not more than half this number should be placed on active duty, and that the remainder should be kept on shelves in the police office ready to be called out at a moment’s notice.

‘The President, awarding the utmost merit to the ingenious gentleman who had originated the idea, doubted whether the automaton police would quite answer the purpose. He feared that noblemen and gentlemen would perhaps require the excitement of thrashing living subjects.

‘Mr. Coppernose submitted, that as the usual odds in such cases were ten noblemen or gentlemen to one policeman or cab-driver, it could make very little difference in point of excitement whether the policeman or cab-driver were a man or a block. The great advantage would be, that a policeman’s limbs might be all knocked off, and yet he would be in a condition to do duty next day. He might even give his evidence next morning with his head in his hand, and give it equally well.

‘Professor Muff.—Will you allow me to ask you, sir, of what materials it is intended that the magistrates’ heads shall be composed?

‘Mr. Coppernose.—The magistrates will have wooden heads of course, and they will be made of the toughest and thickest materials that can possibly be obtained.

‘Professor Muff.—I am quite satisfied. This is a great invention.

‘Professor Nogo.—I see but one objection to it. It appears to me that the magistrates ought to talk.

‘Mr. Coppernose no sooner heard this suggestion than he touched a small spring in each of the two models of magistrates which were placed upon the table; one of the figures immediately began to exclaim with great volubility that he was sorry to see gentlemen in such a situation, and the other to express a fear that the policeman was intoxicated.

‘The section, as with one accord, declared with a shout of applause that the invention was complete; and the President, much excited, retired with Mr. Coppernose to lay it before the council. On his return,

‘Mr. Tickle displayed his newly-invented spectacles, which enabled the wearer to discern, in very bright colours, objects at a great distance, and rendered him wholly blind to those immediately before him. It was, he said, a most valuable and useful invention, based strictly upon the principle of the human eye.

‘The President required some information upon this point. He had yet to learn that the human eye was remarkable for the peculiarities of which the honourable gentleman had spoken.

‘Mr. Tickle was rather astonished to hear this, when the President could not fail to be aware that a large number of most excellent persons and great statesmen could see, with the naked eye, most marvellous horrors on West India plantations, while they could discern nothing whatever in the interior of Manchester cotton mills. He must know, too, with what quickness of perception most people could discover their neighbour’s faults, and how very blind they were to their own. If the President differed from the great majority of men in this respect, his eye was a defective one, and it was to assist his vision that these glasses were made.

‘Mr. Blank exhibited a model of a fashionable annual, composed of copper-plates, gold leaf, and silk boards, and worked entirely by milk and water.

‘Mr. Prosee, after examining the machine, declared it to be so ingeniously composed, that he was wholly unable to discover how it went on at all.

‘Mr. Blank.—Nobody can, and that is the beauty of it.

‘SECTION C.—ANATOMY AND MEDICINE.
BAR ROOM, BLACK BOY AND STOMACH-ACHE.

President—Dr. Soemup. *Vice-Presidents*—Messrs. Pessell and Mortair.

‘Dr. Grummidge stated to the section a most interesting case of monomania, and described the course of treatment he had pursued with perfect success. The patient was a married lady in the middle rank of life, who, having seen another lady at an evening party in a full suit of pearls, was suddenly seized with a desire to possess a similar equipment, although her husband’s finances were by no means equal to the necessary outlay. Finding her wish ungratified, she fell sick, and the symptoms soon became so alarming, that he (Dr. Grummidge) was called in. At this period the prominent tokens of the disorder were sullenness, a total indisposition to perform domestic duties, great peevishness, and extreme languor, except when pearls were mentioned, at which times the pulse quickened, the eyes grew brighter, the pupils dilated, and the patient, after various incoherent exclamations, burst into a passion of tears, and exclaimed that nobody cared for her, and that she wished herself dead. Finding that the patient’s appetite was affected in the presence of company, he began by ordering a total abstinence from all stimulants, and forbidding any sustenance but weak gruel; he then took twenty ounces of blood, applied a blister under each ear, one upon the chest, and another on the back; having done which, and administered five grains of calomel, he left the patient to her repose. The next day she was somewhat low, but decidedly better, and all appearances of irritation were removed. The next day she improved still further, and on the next again. On the fourth there was some appearance of a return of the old symptoms, which no sooner developed themselves, than he administered another dose of calomel, and left strict orders that, unless a decidedly favourable change occurred within two hours, the patient’s head should be immediately shaved to the very last curl. From that moment she began to mend, and, in less than four-and-twenty hours was perfectly restored. She did not now betray the least emotion at the sight or mention of pearls or any other ornaments. She was cheerful and good-humoured, and a most beneficial change had been effected in her whole temperament and condition.

‘Mr. Pipkin (M.R.C.S.) read a short but most interesting communication in which he sought to prove the complete belief of Sir William Courtenay, otherwise Thorn, recently shot at Canterbury, in the Homoeopathic system. The section would bear in mind that one of the Homoeopathic doctrines was, that infinitesimal doses of any medicine which would occasion the disease under which the patient laboured, supposing him to be in a healthy state, would cure it. Now, it was a remarkable circumstance—proved in the evidence—that the deceased Thorn employed a woman to follow him about all day with a pail of water, assuring her that one drop (a purely homoeopathic remedy, the section would observe), placed upon his tongue, after death, would restore him. What was the obvious inference? That Thorn, who was marching and countermarching in osier beds, and other swampy places, was impressed with a presentiment that he should be drowned; in which case, had his instructions been complied with, he could not fail to have been brought to life again instantly by his own prescription. As it was, if this woman, or any other person, had administered an infinitesimal dose of lead and gunpowder immediately after he fell, he would have recovered forthwith. But unhappily the woman concerned did not possess the power of reasoning by analogy, or carrying out a principle, and thus the unfortunate gentleman had been sacrificed to the ignorance of the peasantry.

‘SECTION D.—STATISTICS.
OUT-HOUSE, BLACK BOY AND STOMACH-ACHE.

President—Mr. Slug. *Vice-Presidents*—Messrs. Noakes and Styles.

‘Mr. Kwakley stated the result of some most ingenious statistical inquiries relative to the difference between the value of the qualification of several members of Parliament as published to the world, and its real nature and amount. After reminding the section that every member of Parliament for a town or borough was supposed to possess a clear freehold estate of three hundred pounds per annum, the honourable gentleman excited great amusement and laughter by stating the exact amount of freehold property possessed by a column of legislators, in which he had included himself. It appeared from this table, that the amount of such income possessed by each was 0 pounds, 0 shillings, and 0 pence, yielding an average of the same. (Great laughter.) It was pretty well known that there were accommodating gentlemen in the habit of furnishing new members with temporary qualifications, to the ownership of which they swore solemnly—of course as a mere matter of form. He argued from these *data* that it was wholly unnecessary for members of Parliament to possess any property at all, especially as when they had none the public could get them so much cheaper.

‘SUPPLEMENTARY SECTION, E.—UMBUGOLOGY AND DITCHWATERISICS.

President—Mr. Grub. *Vice Presidents*—Messrs. Dull and Dummy.

‘A paper was read by the secretary descriptive of a bay pony with one eye, which had been seen by the author standing in a butcher’s cart at the corner of Newgate Market. The communication described the author of the paper as having, in the prosecution of a mercantile pursuit, betaken himself one Saturday morning last summer from Somers Town to Cheapside; in the course of which expedition he had beheld the extraordinary appearance above described. The pony had one distinct eye, and it had been pointed out to him by his friend Captain Blunderbore, of the Horse Marines, who assisted the author in his search, that whenever he winked this eye he whisked his tail (possibly to drive the flies off), but that he always winked and whisked at the same time. The animal was lean, spavined, and tottering; and the author proposed to constitute it of the family of *Fitfordogsmeataurious*. It certainly did occur to him that there was no case on record of a pony with one clearly-defined and distinct organ of vision, winking and whisking at the same moment.

‘Mr. Q. J. Snuffletoffle had heard of a pony winking his eye, and likewise of a pony whisking his tail, but whether they were two ponies or the same pony he could not undertake positively to say. At all events, he was acquainted with no authenticated instance of a simultaneous winking and whisking, and he really could not but doubt the existence of such a marvellous pony in opposition to all those natural laws by which ponies were governed. Referring, however, to the mere question of his one organ of vision, might he suggest the possibility of this pony having been literally half asleep at the time he was seen, and having closed only one eye.

‘The President observed that, whether the pony was half asleep or fast asleep, there could be no doubt that the association was wide awake, and therefore that they had better get the business over, and go to dinner. He had certainly never seen anything analogous to this pony, but he was not prepared to doubt its existence; for he had seen many queerer ponies in his time, though he did not pretend to have seen any more remarkable donkeys than the other gentlemen around him.

‘Professor John Ketch was then called upon to exhibit the skull of the late Mr. Greenacre, which he produced from a blue bag, remarking, on being invited to make any observations that occurred to him, “that he’d pound it as that ’ere ’spectable section had never seed a more gamerer cove nor he vos.”

‘A most animated discussion upon this interesting relic ensued; and, some difference of opinion arising respecting the real character of the deceased gentleman, Mr. Blubb delivered a lecture upon the cranium before him, clearly showing that Mr. Greenacre possessed the organ of destructiveness to a most unusual extent, with a most remarkable development of the organ of carveativeness. Sir Hookham Snivey was proceeding to combat this opinion, when Professor Ketch suddenly interrupted the proceedings by exclaiming, with great excitement of manner, “Walker!”

‘The President begged to call the learned gentleman to order.

‘Professor Ketch.—“Order be blowed! you’ve got the wrong un, I tell you. It ain’t no ’ed at all; it’s a coker-nut as my brother-in-law has been a-carvin’, to hornament his new baked tatur-stall wots a-comin’ down ’ere vile the ’sociation’s in the town. Hand over, vill you?”

‘With these words, Professor Ketch hastily repossessed himself of the cocoa-nut, and drew forth the skull, in mistake for which he had exhibited it. A most interesting conversation ensued; but as there appeared some doubt ultimately whether the skull was Mr. Greenacre’s, or a hospital patient’s, or a pauper’s, or a man’s, or a woman’s, or a monkey’s, no particular result was obtained.’

‘I cannot,’ says our talented correspondent in conclusion, ‘I cannot close my account of these gigantic researches and sublime and noble triumphs without repeating a *bon mot* of Professor Woodensconce’s, which shows how the greatest minds may occasionally unbend when truth can be presented to listening ears, clothed in an attractive and playful form. I was standing by, when, after a week of feasting and feeding, that learned gentleman, accompanied by the whole body of wonderful men, entered the hall yesterday, where a sumptuous dinner was prepared; where the richest wines sparkled on the board, and fat bucks—propitiatory sacrifices to learning—sent forth their savoury odours. "Ah!" said Professor Woodensconce, rubbing his hands, "this is what we meet for; this is what inspires us; this is what keeps us together, and beckons us onward; this is the *spread* of science, and a glorious spread it is."'

THE PANTOMIME OF LIFE

Before we plunge headlong into this paper, let us at once confess to a fondness for pantomimes—to a gentle sympathy with clowns and pantaloons—to an unqualified admiration of harlequins and columbines—to a chaste delight in every action of their brief existence, varied and many-coloured as those actions are, and inconsistent though they occasionally be with those rigid and formal rules of propriety which regulate the proceedings of meaner and less comprehensive minds. We revel in pantomimes—not because they dazzle one's eyes with tinsel and gold leaf; not because they present to us, once again, the well-beloved chalked faces, and goggle eyes of our childhood; not even because, like Christmas-day, and Twelfth-night, and Shrove-Tuesday, and one's own birthday, they come to us but once a year;—our attachment is founded on a graver and a very different reason. A pantomime is to us, a mirror of life; nay, more, we maintain that it is so to audiences generally, although they are not aware of it, and that this very circumstance is the secret cause of their amusement and delight.

Let us take a slight example. The scene is a street: an elderly gentleman, with a large face and strongly marked features, appears. His countenance beams with a sunny smile, and a perpetual dimple is on his broad, red cheek. He is evidently an opulent elderly gentleman, comfortable in circumstances, and well-to-do in the world. He is not unmindful of the adornment of his person, for he is richly, not to say gaudily, dressed; and that he indulges to a reasonable extent in the pleasures of the table may be inferred from the joyous and oily manner in which he rubs his stomach, by way of informing the audience that he is going home to dinner. In the fulness of his heart, in the fancied security of wealth, in the possession and enjoyment of all the good things of life, the elderly gentleman suddenly loses his footing, and stumbles. How the audience roar! He is set upon by a noisy and officious crowd, who buffet and cuff him unmercifully. They scream with delight! Every time the elderly gentleman struggles to get up, his relentless persecutors knock him down again. The spectators are convulsed with merriment! And when at last the elderly gentleman does get up, and staggers away, despoiled of hat, wig, and clothing, himself battered to pieces, and his watch and money gone, they are exhausted with laughter, and express their merriment and admiration in rounds of applause.

Is this like life? Change the scene to any real street;—to the Stock Exchange, or the City banker's; the merchant's counting-house, or even the tradesman's shop. See any one of these men fall,—the more suddenly, and the nearer the zenith of his pride and riches, the better. What a wild hallo is raised over his prostrate carcase by the shouting mob; how they whoop and yell as he lies humbled beneath them! Mark how eagerly they set upon him when he is down; and how they mock and deride him as he slinks away. Why, it is the pantomime to the very letter.

Of all the pantomimic *dramatis personae,* we consider the pantaloon the most worthless and debauched. Independent of the dislike one naturally feels at seeing a gentleman of his years engaged in pursuits highly unbecoming his gravity and time of life, we cannot conceal from ourselves the fact that he is a treacherous, worldly-minded old villain, constantly enticing his younger companion, the clown, into acts of fraud or petty larceny, and generally standing aside to watch the result of the enterprise. If it be successful, he never forgets to return for his share of the spoil; but if it turn out a failure, he generally retires with remarkable caution and expedition, and keeps carefully aloof until the affair has blown over. His amorous propensities, too, are eminently disagreeable; and his mode of addressing ladies in the open street at noon-day is down-right improper, being usually neither more nor less than a perceptible tickling of the aforesaid ladies in the waist, after committing which, he starts back, manifestly ashamed (as well he may be) of his own indecorum and temerity; continuing, nevertheless, to ogle and beckon to them from a distance in a very unpleasant and immoral manner.

Is there any man who cannot count a dozen pantaloons in his own social circle? Is there any man who has not seen them swarming at the west end of the town on a sunshiny day or a summer's evening, going through the last-named pantomimic feats with as much liquorish energy, and as total an absence of reserve, as if they were on the very stage itself? We can tell upon our fingers a dozen pantaloons of our acquaintance at this moment—capital pantaloons, who have been performing all kinds of strange freaks, to the great amusement of their friends and acquaintance, for years past; and who to this day are making such comical and ineffectual attempts to be young and dissolute, that all beholders are like to die with laughter.

Take that old gentleman who has just emerged from the *Café de l'Europe* in the Haymarket, where he has been dining at the expense of the young man upon town with whom he shakes hands as they part at the door of the tavern. The affected warmth of that shake of the hand, the courteous nod, the obvious recollection of the dinner, the savoury flavour of which still hangs upon his lips, are all characteristics of his great prototype. He hobbles away humming an opera tune, and twirling his cane to and fro, with affected carelessness. Suddenly he stops—'tis at the milliner's window. He peeps through one of the large panes of glass; and, his view of the ladies within being obstructed by the India shawls, directs his attentions to the young girl with the band-box in her hand, who is gazing in at the window also. See! he draws beside her. He coughs; she turns away from him. He draws near her again; she disregards him. He gleefully chucks her under the chin, and, retreating a few steps, nods and beckons with fantastic grimaces, while the girl bestows a contemptuous and supercilious look upon his wrinkled visage. She turns away with a flounce, and the old gentleman trots after her with a toothless chuckle. The pantaloon to the life!

But the close resemblance which the clowns of the stage bear to those of every-day life is perfectly extraordinary. Some people talk with a sigh of the decline of pantomime, and murmur in low and dismal tones the name of Grimaldi. We mean no disparagement to the worthy and excellent old man when we say that this is downright nonsense. Clowns that beat Grimaldi all to nothing turn up every day, and nobody patronizes them—more's the pity!

'I know who you mean,' says some dirty-faced patron of Mr. Osbaldistone's, laying down the Miscellany when he has got thus far, and bestowing upon vacancy a most knowing glance; 'you mean C. J. Smith as did Guy Fawkes, and George Barnwell at the Garden.' The dirty-faced gentleman has hardly uttered the words, when he is interrupted by a young gentleman in no shirt-collar and a Petersham coat. 'No, no,' says the young gentleman; 'he means Brown, King, and Gibson, at the 'Delphi.' Now, with great deference both to the first-named gentleman with the dirty face, and the last-named gentleman in the non-existing shirt-collar, we do *not* mean either the performer who so grotesquely burlesqued the Popish conspirator, or the three unchangeables who have been dancing the same dance under different imposing titles, and doing the same thing under various high-sounding names for some five or six years last past. We have no sooner made this avowal, than the public, who have hitherto been silent witnesses of the dispute, inquire what on earth it is we *do* mean; and, with becoming respect, we proceed to tell them.

It is very well known to all playgoers and pantomime-seers, that the scenes in which a theatrical clown is at the very height of his glory are those which are described in the play-bills as ‘Cheesemonger’s shop and Crockery warehouse,’ or ‘Tailor’s shop, and Mrs. Queertable’s boarding-house,’ or places bearing some such title, where the great fun of the thing consists in the hero’s taking lodgings which he has not the slightest intention of paying for, or obtaining goods under false pretences, or abstracting the stock-in-trade of the respectable shopkeeper next door, or robbing warehouse porters as they pass under his window, or, to shorten the catalogue, in his swindling everybody he possibly can, it only remaining to be observed that, the more extensive the swindling is, and the more barefaced the impudence of the swindler, the greater the rapture and ecstasy of the audience. Now it is a most remarkable fact that precisely this sort of thing occurs in real life day after day, and nobody sees the humour of it. Let us illustrate our position by detailing the plot of this portion of the pantomime—not of the theatre, but of life.

The Honourable Captain Fitz-Whisker Fiercy, attended by his livery servant Do’em—a most respectable servant to look at, who has grown grey in the service of the captain’s family—views, treats for, and ultimately obtains possession of, the unfurnished house, such a number, such a street. All the tradesmen in the neighbourhood are in agonies of competition for the captain’s custom; the captain is a good-natured, kind-hearted, easy man, and, to avoid being the cause of disappointment to any, he most handsomely gives orders to all. Hampers of wine, baskets of provisions, cart-loads of furniture, boxes of jewellery, supplies of luxuries of the costliest description, flock to the house of the Honourable Captain Fitz-Whisker Fiercy, where they are received with the utmost readiness by the highly respectable Do’em; while the captain himself struts and swaggers about with that compound air of conscious superiority and general blood-thirstiness which a military captain should always, and does most times, wear, to the admiration and terror of plebeian men. But the tradesmen’s backs are no sooner turned, than the captain, with all the eccentricity of a mighty mind, and assisted by the faithful Do’em, whose devoted fidelity is not the least touching part of his character, disposes of everything to great advantage; for, although the articles fetch small sums, still they are sold considerably above cost price, the cost to the captain having been nothing at all. After various manoeuvres, the imposture is discovered, Fitz-Fiercy and Do’em are recognized as confederates, and the police office to which they are both taken is thronged with their dupes.

Who can fail to recognize in this, the exact counterpart of the best portion of a theatrical pantomime—Fitz-Whisker Fiercy by the clown; Do’em by the pantaloon; and supernumeraries by the tradesmen? The best of the joke, too, is, that the very coal-merchant who is loudest in his complaints against the person who defrauded him, is the identical man who sat in the centre of the very front row of the pit last night and laughed the most boisterously at this very same thing,—and not so well done either. Talk of Grimaldi, we say again! Did Grimaldi, in his best days, ever do anything in this way equal to Da Costa?

The mention of this latter justly celebrated clown reminds us of his last piece of humour, the fraudulently obtaining certain stamped acceptances from a young gentleman in the army. We had scarcely laid down our pen to contemplate for a few moments this admirable actor’s performance of that exquisite practical joke, than a new branch of our subject flashed suddenly upon us. So we take it up again at once.

All people who have been behind the scenes, and most people who have been before them, know, that in the representation of a pantomime, a good many men are sent upon the stage for the express purpose of being cheated, or knocked down, or both. Now, down to a moment ago, we had never been able to understand for what possible purpose a great number of odd, lazy, large-headed men, whom one is in the habit of meeting here, and there, and everywhere, could ever have been created. We see it all, now. They are the supernumeraries in the pantomime of life; the men who have been thrust into it, with no other view than to be constantly tumbling over each other, and running their heads against all sorts of strange things. We sat opposite to one of these men at a supper-table, only last week. Now we think of it, he was exactly like the gentlemen with the pasteboard heads and faces, who do the corresponding business in the theatrical pantomimes;

there was the same broad stolid simper—the same dull leaden eye—the same unmeaning, vacant stare; and whatever was said, or whatever was done, he always came in at precisely the wrong place, or jostled against something that he had not the slightest business with. We looked at the man across the table again and again; and could not satisfy ourselves what race of beings to class him with. How very odd that this never occurred to us before!

We will frankly own that we have been much troubled with the harlequin. We see harlequins of so many kinds in the real living pantomime, that we hardly know which to select as the proper fellow of him of the theatres. At one time we were disposed to think that the harlequin was neither more nor less than a young man of family and independent property, who had run away with an opera-dancer, and was fooling his life and his means away in light and trivial amusements. On reflection, however, we remembered that harlequins are occasionally guilty of witty, and even clever acts, and we are rather disposed to acquit our young men of family and independent property, generally speaking, of any such misdemeanours. On a more mature consideration of the subject, we have arrived at the conclusion that the harlequins of life are just ordinary men, to be found in no particular walk or degree, on whom a certain station, or particular conjunction of circumstances, confers the magic wand. And this brings us to a few words on the pantomime of public and political life, which we shall say at once, and then conclude—merely premising in this place that we decline any reference whatever to the columbine, being in no wise satisfied of the nature of her connection with her parti-coloured lover, and not feeling by any means clear that we should be justified in introducing her to the virtuous and respectable ladies who peruse our lucubrations.

We take it that the commencement of a Session of Parliament is neither more nor less than the drawing up of the curtain for a grand comic pantomime, and that his Majesty’s most gracious speech on the opening thereof may be not inaptly compared to the clown’s opening speech of ‘Here we are!’ ‘My lords and gentlemen, here we are!’ appears, to our mind at least, to be a very good abstract of the point and meaning of the propitiatory address of the ministry. When we remember how frequently this speech is made, immediately after *the change* too, the parallel is quite perfect, and still more singular.

Perhaps the cast of our political pantomime never was richer than at this day. We are particularly strong in clowns. At no former time, we should say, have we had such astonishing tumblers, or performers so ready to go through the whole of their feats for the amusement of an admiring throng. Their extreme readiness to exhibit, indeed, has given rise to some ill-natured reflections; it having been objected that by exhibiting gratuitously through the country when the theatre is closed, they reduce themselves to the level of mountebanks, and thereby tend to degrade the respectability of the profession. Certainly Grimaldi never did this sort of thing; and though Brown, King, and Gibson have gone to the Surrey in vacation time, and Mr. C. J. Smith has ruralised at Sadler's Wells, we find no theatrical precedent for a general tumbling through the country, except in the gentleman, name unknown, who threw summersets on behalf of the late Mr. Richardson, and who is no authority either, because he had never been on the regular boards.

But, laying aside this question, which after all is a mere matter of taste, we may reflect with pride and gratification of heart on the proficiency of our clowns as exhibited in the season. Night after night will they twist and tumble about, till two, three, and four o'clock in the morning; playing the strangest antics, and giving each other the funniest slaps on the face that can possibly be imagined, without evincing the smallest tokens of fatigue. The strange noises, the confusion, the shouting and roaring, amid which all this is done, too, would put to shame the most turbulent sixpenny gallery that ever yelled through a boxing-night.

It is especially curious to behold one of these clowns compelled to go through the most surprising contortions by the irresistible influence of the wand of office, which his leader or harlequin holds above his head. Acted upon by this wonderful charm he will become perfectly motionless, moving neither hand, foot, nor finger, and will even lose the faculty of speech at an instant's notice; or on the other hand, he will become all life and animation if required, pouring forth a torrent of words without sense or meaning, throwing himself into the wildest and most fantastic contortions, and even grovelling on the earth and licking up the dust. These exhibitions are more curious than pleasing; indeed, they are rather disgusting than otherwise, except to the admirers of such things, with whom we confess we have no fellow-feeling.

Strange tricks—very strange tricks—are also performed by the harlequin who holds for the time being the magic wand which we have just mentioned. The mere waving it before a man's eyes will dispossess his brains of all the notions previously stored there, and fill it with an entirely new set of ideas; one gentle tap on the back will alter the colour of a man's coat completely; and there are some expert performers, who, having this wand held first on one side and then on the other, will change from side to side, turning their coats at every evolution, with so much rapidity and dexterity, that the quickest eye can scarcely detect their motions. Occasionally, the genius who confers the wand, wrests it from the hand of the temporary possessor, and consigns it to some new performer; on which occasions all the characters change sides, and then the race and the hard knocks begin anew.

We might have extended this chapter to a much greater length—we might have carried the comparison into the liberal professions—we might have shown, as was in fact our original purpose, that each is in itself a little pantomime with scenes and characters of its own, complete; but, as we fear we have been quite lengthy enough already, we shall leave this chapter just where it is. A gentleman, not altogether unknown as a dramatic poet, wrote thus a year or two ago—

‘All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:’

and we, tracking out his footsteps at the scarcely-worth-mentioning little distance of a few millions of leagues behind, venture to add, by way of new reading, that he meant a Pantomime, and that we are all actors in The Pantomime of Life.

SOME PARTICULARS CONCERNING A LION

We have a great respect for lions in the abstract. In common with most other people, we have heard and read of many instances of their bravery and generosity. We have duly admired that heroic self-denial and charming philanthropy which prompts them never to eat people except when they are hungry, and we have been deeply impressed with a becoming sense of the politeness they are said to display towards unmarried ladies of a certain state. All natural histories teem with anecdotes illustrative of their excellent qualities; and one old spelling-book in particular recounts a touching instance of an old lion, of high moral dignity and stern principle, who felt it his imperative duty to devour a young man who had contracted a habit of swearing, as a striking example to the rising generation.

All this is extremely pleasant to reflect upon, and, indeed, says a very great deal in favour of lions as a mass. We are bound to state, however, that such individual lions as we have happened to fall in with have not put forth any very striking characteristics, and have not acted up to the chivalrous character assigned them by their chroniclers. We never saw a lion in what is called his natural state, certainly; that is to say, we have never met a lion out walking in a forest, or crouching in his lair under a tropical sun, waiting till his dinner should happen to come by, hot from the baker's. But we have seen some under the influence of captivity, and the pressure of misfortune; and we must say that they appeared to us very apathetic, heavy-headed fellows.

The lion at the Zoological Gardens, for instance. He is all very well; he has an undeniable mane, and looks very fierce; but, Lord bless us! what of that? The lions of the fashionable world look just as ferocious, and are the most harmless creatures breathing. A box-lobby lion or a Regent-street animal will put on a most terrible aspect, and roar, fearfully, if you affront him; but he will never bite, and, if you offer to attack him manfully, will fairly turn tail and sneak off. Doubtless these creatures roam about sometimes in herds, and, if they meet any especially meek-looking and peaceably-disposed fellow, will endeavour to frighten him; but the faintest show of a vigorous resistance is sufficient to scare them even then. These are pleasant characteristics, whereas we make it matter of distinct charge against the Zoological lion and his brethren at the fairs, that they are sleepy, dreamy, sluggish quadrupeds.

We do not remember to have ever seen one of them perfectly awake, except at feeding-time. In every respect we uphold the biped lions against their four-footed namesakes, and we boldly challenge controversy upon the subject.

With these opinions it may be easily imagined that our curiosity and interest were very much excited the other day, when a lady of our acquaintance called on us and resolutely declined to accept our refusal of her invitation to an evening party; 'for,' said she, 'I have got a lion coming.' We at once retracted our plea of a prior engagement, and became as anxious to go, as we had previously been to stay away.

We went early, and posted ourselves in an eligible part of the drawing-room, from whence we could hope to obtain a full view of the interesting animal. Two or three hours passed, the quadrilles began, the room filled; but no lion appeared. The lady of the house became inconsolable,—for it is one of the peculiar privileges of these lions to make solemn appointments and never keep them,—when all of a sudden there came a tremendous double rap at the street-door, and the master of the house, after gliding out (unobserved as he flattered himself) to peep over the banisters, came into the room, rubbing his hands together with great glee, and cried out in a very important voice, ‘My dear, Mr.—(naming the lion) has this moment arrived.’

Upon this, all eyes were turned towards the door, and we observed several young ladies, who had been laughing and conversing previously with great gaiety and good humour, grow extremely quiet and sentimental; while some young gentlemen, who had been cutting great figures in the facetious and small-talk way, suddenly sank very obviously in the estimation of the company, and were looked upon with great coldness and indifference. Even the young man who had been ordered from the music shop to play the pianoforte was visibly affected, and struck several false notes in the excess of his excitement.

All this time there was a great talking outside, more than once accompanied by a loud laugh, and a cry of ‘Oh! capital! excellent!’ from which we inferred that the lion was jocose, and that these exclamations were occasioned by the transports of his keeper and our host. Nor were we deceived; for when the lion at last appeared, we overheard his keeper, who was a little prim man, whisper to several gentlemen of his acquaintance, with uplifted hands, and every expression of half-suppressed admiration, that—(naming the lion again) was in *such* cue to-night!

The lion was a literary one. Of course, there were a vast number of people present who had admired his roarings, and were anxious to be introduced to him; and very pleasant it was to see them brought up for the purpose, and to observe the patient dignity with which he received all their patting and caressing. This brought forcibly to our mind what we had so often witnessed at country fairs, where the other lions are compelled to go through as many forms of courtesy as they chance to be acquainted with, just as often as admiring parties happen to drop in upon them.

While the lion was exhibiting in this way, his keeper was not idle, for he mingled among the crowd, and spread his praises most industriously. To one gentleman he whispered some very choice thing that the noble animal had said in the very act of coming up-stairs, which, of course, rendered the mental effort still more astonishing; to another he murmured a hasty account of a grand dinner that had taken place the day before, where twenty-seven gentlemen had got up all at once to demand an extra cheer for the lion; and to the ladies he made sundry promises of interceding to procure the majestic brute's sign-manual for their albums. Then, there were little private consultations in different corners, relative to the personal appearance and stature of the lion; whether he was shorter than they had expected to see him, or taller, or thinner, or fatter, or younger, or older; whether he was like his portrait, or unlike it; and whether the particular shade of his eyes was black, or blue, or hazel, or green, or yellow, or mixture. At all these consultations the keeper assisted; and, in short, the lion was the sole and single subject of discussion till they sat him down to whist, and then the people relapsed into their old topics of conversation—themselves and each other.

We must confess that we looked forward with no slight impatience to the announcement of supper; for if you wish to see a tame lion under particularly favourable circumstances, feeding-time is the period of all others to pitch upon. We were therefore very much delighted to observe a sensation among the guests, which we well knew how to interpret, and immediately afterwards to behold the lion escorting the lady of the house down-stairs. We offered our arm to an elderly female of our acquaintance, who—dear old soul!—is the very best person that ever lived, to lead down to any meal; for, be the room ever so small, or the party ever so large, she is sure, by some intuitive perception of the eligible, to push and pull herself and conductor close to the best dishes on the table;—we say we offered our arm to this elderly female, and, descending the stairs shortly after the lion, were fortunate enough to obtain a seat nearly opposite him.

Of course the keeper was there already. He had planted himself at precisely that distance from his charge which afforded him a decent pretext for raising his voice, when he addressed him, to so loud a key, as could not fail to attract the attention of the whole company, and immediately began to apply himself seriously to the task of bringing the lion out, and putting him through the whole of his manoeuvres. Such flashes of wit as he elicited from the lion! First of all, they began to make puns upon a salt-cellar, and then upon the breast of a fowl, and then upon the trifle; but the best jokes of all were decidedly on the lobster salad, upon which latter subject the lion came out most vigorously, and, in the opinion of the most competent authorities, quite outshone himself. This is a very excellent mode of shining in society, and is founded, we humbly conceive, upon the classic model of the dialogues between Mr. Punch and his friend the proprietor, wherein the latter takes all the up-hill work, and is content to pioneer to the jokes and repartees of Mr. P. himself, who never fails to gain great credit and excite much laughter thereby. Whatever it be founded on, however, we recommend it to all lions, present and to come; for in this instance it succeeded to admiration, and perfectly dazzled the whole body of hearers.

When the salt-cellar, and the fowl's breast, and the trifle, and the lobster salad were all exhausted, and could not afford standing-room for another solitary witticism, the keeper performed that very dangerous feat which is still done with some of the caravan lions, although in one instance it terminated fatally, of putting his head in the animal's mouth, and placing himself entirely at its mercy. Boswell frequently presents a melancholy instance of the lamentable results of this achievement, and other keepers and jackals have been terribly lacerated for their daring. It is due to our lion to state, that he condescended to be trifled with, in the most gentle manner, and finally went home with the showman in a hack cab: perfectly peaceable, but slightly fuddled.

Being in a contemplative mood, we were led to make some reflections upon the character and conduct of this genus of lions as we walked homewards, and we were not long in arriving at the conclusion that our former impression in their favour was very much strengthened and confirmed by what we had recently seen. While the other lions receive company and compliments in a sullen, moody, not to say snarling manner, these appear flattered by the attentions that are paid them; while those conceal themselves to the utmost of their power from the vulgar gaze, these court the popular eye, and, unlike their brethren, whom nothing short of compulsion will move to exertion, are ever ready to display their acquirements to the wondering throng. We have known bears of undoubted ability who, when the expectations of a large audience have been wound up to the utmost pitch, have peremptorily refused to dance; well-taught monkeys, who have unaccountably objected to exhibit on the slack wire;

and elephants of unquestioned genius, who have suddenly declined to turn the barrel-organ; but we never once knew or heard of a biped lion, literary or otherwise,—and we state it as a fact which is highly creditable to the whole species,—who, occasion offering, did not seize with avidity on any opportunity which was afforded him, of performing to his heart's content on the first violin.

MR. ROBERT BOLTON: THE 'GENTLEMAN CONNECTED WITH THE PRESS'

In the parlour of the Green Dragon, a public-house in the immediate neighbourhood of Westminster Bridge, everybody talks politics, every evening, the great political authority being Mr. Robert Bolton, an individual who defines himself as 'a gentleman connected with the press,' which is a definition of peculiar indefiniteness. Mr. Robert Bolton's regular circle of admirers and listeners are an undertaker, a greengrocer, a hairdresser, a baker, a large stomach surmounted by a man's head, and placed on the top of two particularly short legs, and a thin man in black, name, profession, and pursuit unknown, who always sits in the same position, always displays the same long, vacant face, and never opens his lips, surrounded as he is by most enthusiastic conversation, except to puff forth a volume of tobacco smoke, or give vent to a very snappy, loud, and shrill *hem*! The conversation sometimes turns upon literature, Mr. Bolton being a literary character, and always upon such news of the day as is exclusively possessed by that talented individual. I found myself (of course, accidentally) in the Green Dragon the other evening, and, being somewhat amused by the following conversation, preserved it.

'Can you lend me a ten-pound note till Christmas?' inquired the hairdresser of the stomach.

'Where's your security, Mr. Clip?'

'My stock in trade,—there's enough of it, I'm thinking, Mr. Thicknesse. Some fifty wigs, two poles, half-a-dozen head blocks, and a dead Bruin.'

'No, I won't, then,' growled out Thicknesse. 'I lends nothing on the security of the whigs or the Poles either. As for whigs, they're cheats; as for the Poles, they've got no cash. I never have nothing to do with blockheads, unless I can't awoid it (ironically), and a dead bear's about as much use to me as I could be to a dead bear.'

'Well, then,' urged the other, 'there's a book as belonged to Pope, Byron's Poems, valued at forty pounds, because it's got Pope's identical scratch on the back; what do you think of that for security?'

'Well, to be sure!' cried the baker. 'But how d'ye mean, Mr. Clip?'

'Mean! why, that it's got the *hottergruff* of Pope.

"Steal not this book, for fear of hangman's rope;
For it belongs to Alexander Pope."

All that's written on the inside of the binding of the book; so, as my son says, we're *bound* to believe it.'

'Well, sir,' observed the undertaker, deferentially, and in a half-whisper, leaning over the table, and knocking over the hairdresser's grog as he spoke, 'that argument's very easy upset.'

'Perhaps, sir,' said Clip, a little flurried, 'you'll pay for the first upset afore you thinks of another.'

'Now,' said the undertaker, bowing amicably to the hairdresser, 'I *think*, I says I *think*—you'll excuse me, Mr. Clip, I *think*, you see, that won't go down with the present company—unfortunately, my master had the honour of making the coffin of that ere Lord's housemaid, not no more nor twenty year ago. Don't think I'm proud on it, gentlemen; others might be; but I hate rank of any sort. I've no more respect for a Lord's footman than I have for any respectable tradesman in this room. I may say no more nor I have for Mr. Clip! (bowing). Therefore, that ere Lord must have been born long after Pope died. And it's a logical interference to defer, that they neither of them lived at the same time. So what I mean is this here, that Pope never had no book, never seed, felt, never smelt no book (triumphantly) as belonged to that ere Lord. And, gentlemen, when I consider how patiently you have 'eared the ideas what I have expressed, I feel bound, as the best way to reward you for the kindness you have exhibited, to sit down without saying anything more—partickler as I perceive a worthier visitor nor myself is just entered. I am not in the habit of paying compliments, gentlemen; when I do, therefore, I hope I strikes with double force.'

'Ah, Mr. Murgatroyd! what's all this about striking with double force?' said the object of the above remark, as he entered. 'I never excuse a man's getting into a rage during winter, even when he's seated so close to the fire as you are. It is very injudicious to put yourself into such a perspiration. What is the cause of this extreme physical and mental excitement, sir?'

Such was the very philosophical address of Mr. Robert Bolton, a shorthand-writer, as he termed himself—a bit of equivoque passing current among his fraternity, which must give the uninitiated a vast idea of the establishment of the ministerial organ, while to the initiated it signifies that no one paper can lay claim to the enjoyment of their services. Mr. Bolton was a young man, with a somewhat sickly and very dissipated expression of countenance. His habiliments were composed of an exquisite union of gentility, slovenliness, assumption, simplicity, *newness*, and old age. Half of him was dressed for the winter, the other half for the summer. His hat was of the newest cut, the D'Orsay; his trousers had been white, but the inroads of mud and ink, etc., had given them a pie-bald appearance; round his throat he wore a very high black cravat, of the most tyrannical stiffness; while his *tout ensemble* was hidden beneath the enormous folds of an old brown poodle-collared great-coat, which was closely buttoned up to the aforesaid cravat. His fingers peeped through the ends of his black kid gloves, and two of the toes of each foot took a similar view of society through the extremities of his high-lows. Sacred to the bare walls of his garret be the mysteries of his interior dress! He was a short, spare man, of a somewhat inferior deportment. Everybody seemed influenced by his entry into the room, and his salutation of each member partook of the patronizing. The hairdresser made way for him between himself and the stomach. A minute afterwards he had taken possession of his pint and pipe. A pause in the conversation took place. Everybody was waiting, anxious for his first observation.

'Horrid murder in Westminster this morning,' observed Mr. Bolton.

Everybody changed their positions. All eyes were fixed upon the man of paragraphs.

'A baker murdered his son by boiling him in a copper,' said Mr. Bolton.

'Good heavens!' exclaimed everybody, in simultaneous horror.

'Boiled him, gentlemen!' added Mr. Bolton, with the most effective emphasis; '*boiled* him!'

'And the particulars, Mr. B.,' inquired the hairdresser, 'the particulars?'

Mr. Bolton took a very long draught of porter, and some two or three dozen whiffs of tobacco, doubtless to instil into the commercial capacities of the company the superiority of a gentlemen connected with the press, and then said—

‘The man was a baker, gentlemen.’ (Every one looked at the baker present, who stared at Bolton.) ‘His victim, being his son, also was necessarily the son of a baker. The wretched murderer had a wife, whom he was frequently in the habit, while in an intoxicated state, of kicking, pummelling, flinging mugs at, knocking down, and half-killing while in bed, by inserting in her mouth a considerable portion of a sheet or blanket.’

The speaker took another draught, everybody looked at everybody else, and exclaimed, ‘Horrid!’

‘It appears in evidence, gentlemen,’ continued Mr. Bolton, ‘that, on the evening of yesterday, Sawyer the baker came home in a reprehensible state of beer. Mrs. S., connubially considerate, carried him in that condition up-stairs into his chamber, and consigned him to their mutual couch. In a minute or two she lay sleeping beside the man whom the morrow’s dawn beheld a murderer!’ (Entire silence informed the reporter that his picture had attained the awful effect he desired.) ‘The son came home about an hour afterwards, opened the door, and went up to bed. Scarcely (gentlemen, conceive his feelings of alarm), scarcely had he taken off his indescribables, when shrieks (to his experienced ear *maternal* shrieks) scared the silence of surrounding night. He put his indescribables on again, and ran down-stairs. He opened the door of the parental bed-chamber. His father was dancing upon his mother. What must have been his feelings! In the agony of the minute he rushed at his male parent as he was about to plunge a knife into the side of his female. The mother shrieked. The father caught the son (who had wrested the knife from the paternal grasp) up in his arms, carried him down-stairs, shoved him into a copper of boiling water among some linen, closed the lid, and jumped upon the top of it, in which position he was found with a ferocious countenance by the mother, who arrived in the melancholy wash-house just as he had so settled himself.

‘“Where’s my boy?” shrieked the mother.

‘“In that copper, boiling,” coolly replied the benign father.

‘Struck by the awful intelligence, the mother rushed from the house, and alarmed the neighbourhood. The police entered a minute afterwards. The father, having bolted the wash-house door, had bolted himself. They dragged the lifeless body of the boiled baker from the cauldron, and, with a promptitude commendable in men of their station, they immediately carried it to the station-house. Subsequently, the baker was apprehended while seated on the top of a lamp-post in Parliament Street, lighting his pipe.'

The whole horrible ideality of the Mysteries of Udolpho, condensed into the pithy effect of a ten-line paragraph, could not possibly have so affected the narrator's auditory. Silence, the purest and most noble of all kinds of applause, bore ample testimony to the barbarity of the baker, as well as to Bolton's knack of narration; and it was only broken after some minutes had elapsed by interjectional expressions of the intense indignation of every man present. The baker wondered how a British baker could so disgrace himself and the highly honourable calling to which he belonged; and the others indulged in a variety of wonderments connected with the subject; among which not the least wonderment was that which was awakened by the genius and information of Mr. Robert Bolton, who, after a glowing eulogium on himself, and his unspeakable influence with the daily press, was proceeding, with a most solemn countenance, to hear the pros and cons of the Pope autograph question, when I took up my hat, and left.

FAMILIAR EPISTLE FROM A PARENT TO A CHILD

aged two years and two months

My Child,

To recount with what trouble I have brought you up—with what an anxious eye I have regarded your progress,—how late and how often I have sat up at night working for you,—and how many thousand letters I have received from, and written to your various relations and friends, many of whom have been of a querulous and irritable turn,—to dwell on the anxiety and tenderness with which I have (as far as I possessed the power) inspected and chosen your food; rejecting the indigestible and heavy matter which some injudicious but well-meaning old ladies would have had you swallow, and retaining only those light and pleasant articles which I deemed calculated to keep you free from all gross humours, and to render you an agreeable child, and one who might be popular with society in general,—to dilate on the steadiness with which I have prevented your annoying any company by talking politics—always assuring you that you would thank me for it yourself some day when you grew older,—to expatiate, in short, upon my own assiduity as a parent, is beside my present purpose, though I cannot but contemplate your fair appearance—your robust health, and unimpeded circulation (which I take to be the great secret of your good looks) without the liveliest satisfaction and delight.

It is a trite observation, and one which, young as you are, I have no doubt you have often heard repeated, that we have fallen upon strange times, and live in days of constant shiftings and changes. I had a melancholy instance of this only a week or two since. I was returning from Manchester to London by the Mail Train, when I suddenly fell into another train—a mixed train—of reflection, occasioned by the dejected and disconsolate demeanour of the Post-Office Guard. We were stopping at some station where they take in water, when he dismounted slowly from the little box in which he sits in ghastly mockery of his old condition with pistol and blunderbuss beside him, ready to shoot the first highwayman (or railwayman) who shall attempt to stop the horses, which now travel (when they travel at all) *inside* and in a portable stable invented for the purpose,—he dismounted, I say, slowly and sadly, from his post, and looking mournfully about him as if in dismal recollection of the old roadside public-house the blazing fire—the glass of foaming ale—the buxom handmaid and admiring hangers-on of tap-room and stable, all honoured by his notice; and, retiring a little apart, stood leaning against a signal-post, surveying the engine with a look of combined affliction and disgust which no words can describe. His scarlet coat and golden lace were tarnished with ignoble smoke; flakes of soot had fallen on his bright green shawl—his pride in days of yore—the steam condensed in the tunnel from which we had just emerged, shone upon his hat like rain. His eye betokened that he was thinking of the coachman; and as it wandered to his own seat and his own fast-fading garb, it was plain to see that he felt his office and himself had alike no business there, and were nothing but an elaborate practical joke.

As we whirled away, I was led insensibly into an anticipation of those days to come, when mail-coach guards shall no longer be judges of horse-flesh—when a mail-coach guard shall never even have seen a horse—when stations shall have superseded stables, and corn shall have given place to coke. ‘In those dawning times,’ thought I, ‘exhibition-rooms shall teem with portraits of Her Majesty’s favourite engine, with boilers after Nature by future Landseers. Some Amburgh, yet unborn, shall break wild horses by his magic power; and in the dress of a mail-coach guard exhibit his trained animals in a mock mail-coach. Then, shall wondering crowds observe how that, with the exception of his whip, it is all his eye; and crowned heads shall see them fed on oats, and stand alone unmoved and undismayed, while counters flee affrighted when the coursers neigh!'

Such, my child, were the reflections from which I was only awakened then, as I am now, by the necessity of attending to matters of present though minor importance. I offer no apology to you for the digression, for it brings me very naturally to the subject of change, which is the very subject of which I desire to treat.

In fact, my child, you have changed hands. Henceforth I resign you to the guardianship and protection of one of my most intimate and valued friends, Mr. Ainsworth, with whom, and with you, my best wishes and warmest feelings will ever remain. I reap no gain or profit by parting from you, nor will any conveyance of your property be required, for, in this respect, you have always been literally 'Bentley's' Miscellany, and never mine.

Unlike the driver of the old Manchester mail, I regard this altered state of things with feelings of unmingled pleasure and satisfaction.

Unlike the guard of the new Manchester mail, *your* guard is at home in his new place, and has roystering highwaymen and gallant desperadoes ever within call. And if I might compare you, my child, to an engine; (not a Tory engine, nor a Whig engine, but a brisk and rapid locomotive;) your friends and patrons to passengers; and he who now stands towards you *in loco parentis* as the skilful engineer and supervisor of the whole, I would humbly crave leave to postpone the departure of the train on its new and auspicious course for one brief instant, while, with hat in hand, I approach side by side with the friend who travelled with me on the old road, and presume to solicit favour and kindness in behalf of him and his new charge, both for their sakes and that of the old coachman,

Boz.

Footnotes:

[122] This paper was written before the practice of exhibiting Members of Parliament, like other curiosities, for the small charge of half-a-crown, was abolished.

[161] The regulations of the prison relative to the confinement of prisoners during the day, their sleeping at night, their taking their meals, and other matters of gaol economy, have been all altered-greatly for the better—since this sketch was first published. Even the construction of the prison itself has been changed.

[165] These two men were executed shortly afterwards. The other was respited during his Majesty's pleasure.

[429] [In its original form.]

THE END OF
Sketches by Boz

SKETCHES OF YOUNG COUPLES

AN URGENT REMONSTRANCE, &c

TO THE GENTLEMEN OF ENGLAND,

(BEING BACHELORS OR WIDOWERS,)

THE REMONSTRANCE OF THEIR FAITHFUL FELLOW-SUBJECT,

SHEWETH,-

THAT Her Most Gracious Majesty, Victoria, by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland Queen, Defender of the Faith, did, on the 23rd day of November last past, declare and pronounce to Her Most Honourable Privy Council, Her Majesty's Most Gracious intention of entering into the bonds of wedlock.

THAT Her Most Gracious Majesty, in so making known Her Most Gracious intention to Her Most Honourable Privy Council as aforesaid, did use and employ the words—'It is my intention to ally myself in marriage with Prince Albert of Saxe Coburg and Gotha.'

THAT the present is Bissextile, or Leap Year, in which it is held and considered lawful for any lady to offer and submit proposals of marriage to any gentleman, and to enforce and insist upon acceptance of the same, under pain of a certain fine or penalty; to wit, one silk or satin dress of the first quality, to be chosen by the lady and paid (or owed) for, by the gentleman.

THAT these and other the horrors and dangers with which the said Bissextile, or Leap Year, threatens the gentlemen of England on every occasion of its periodical return, have been greatly aggravated and augmented by the terms of Her Majesty's said Most Gracious communication, which have filled the heads of divers young ladies in this Realm with certain new ideas destructive to the peace of mankind, that never entered their imagination before.

THAT a case has occurred in Camberwell, in which a young lady informed her Papa that 'she intended to ally herself in marriage' with Mr. Smith of Stepney; and that another, and a very distressing case, has occurred at Tottenham, in which a young lady not only stated her intention of allying herself in marriage with her cousin John, but, taking violent possession of her said cousin, actually married him.

THAT similar outrages are of constant occurrence, not only in the capital and its neighbourhood, but throughout the kingdom, and that unless the excited female populace be speedily checked and restrained in their lawless proceedings, most deplorable results must ensue therefrom; among which may be anticipated a most alarming increase in the population of the country, with which no efforts of the agricultural or manufacturing interest can possibly keep pace.

THAT there is strong reason to suspect the existence of a most extensive plot, conspiracy, or design, secretly contrived by vast numbers of single ladies in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and now extending its ramifications in every quarter of the land; the object and intent of which plainly appears to be the holding and solemnising of an enormous and unprecedented number of marriages, on the day on which the nuptials of Her said Most Gracious Majesty are performed.

THAT such plot, conspiracy, or design, strongly savours of Popery, as tending to the discomfiture of the Clergy of the Established Church, by entailing upon them great mental and physical exhaustion; and that such Popish plots are fomented and encouraged by Her Majesty's Ministers, which clearly appears—not only from Her Majesty's principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs traitorously getting married while holding office under the Crown; but from Mr. O'Connell having been heard to declare and avow that, if he had a daughter to marry, she should be married on the same day as Her said Most Gracious Majesty.

THAT such arch plots, conspiracies, and designs, besides being fraught with danger to the Established Church, and (consequently) to the State, cannot fail to bring ruin and bankruptcy upon a large class of Her Majesty's subjects; as a great and sudden increase in the number of married men occasioning the comparative desertion (for a time) of Taverns, Hotels, Billiard-rooms, and Gaming-Houses, will deprive the Proprietors of their accustomed profits and returns. And in further proof of the depth and baseness of such designs, it may be here observed, that all proprietors of Taverns, Hotels, Billiard-rooms, and Gaming-Houses, are (especially the last) solemnly devoted to the Protestant religion.

FOR all these reasons, and many others of no less gravity and import, an urgent appeal is made to the gentlemen of England (being bachelors or widowers) to take immediate steps for convening a Public meeting; To consider of the best and surest means of averting the dangers with which they are threatened by the recurrence of Bissextile, or Leap Year, and the additional sensation created among single ladies by the terms of Her Majesty’s Most Gracious Declaration; To take measures, without delay, for resisting the said single Ladies, and counteracting their evil designs; And to pray Her Majesty to dismiss her present Ministers, and to summon to her Councils those distinguished Gentlemen in various Honourable Professions who, by insulting on all occasions the only Lady in England who can be insulted with safety, have given a sufficient guarantee to Her Majesty’s Loving Subjects that they, at least, are qualified to make war with women, and are already expert in the use of those weapons which are common to the lowest and most abandoned of the sex.

THE YOUNG COUPLE

There is to be a wedding this morning at the corner house in the terrace. The pastry-cook's people have been there half-a-dozen times already; all day yesterday there was a great stir and bustle, and they were up this morning as soon as it was light. Miss Emma Fielding is going to be married to young Mr. Harvey.

Heaven alone can tell in what bright colours this marriage is painted upon the mind of the little housemaid at number six, who has hardly slept a wink all night with thinking of it, and now stands on the unswept door-steps leaning upon her broom, and looking wistfully towards the enchanted house. Nothing short of omniscience can divine what visions of the baker, or the green-grocer, or the smart and most insinuating butterman, are flitting across her mind—what thoughts of how she would dress on such an occasion, if she were a lady—of how she would dress, if she were only a bride—of how cook would dress, being bridesmaid, conjointly with her sister 'in place' at Fulham, and how the clergyman, deeming them so many ladies, would be quite humbled and respectful. What day-dreams of hope and happiness—of life being one perpetual holiday, with no master and no mistress to grant or withhold it—of every Sunday being a Sunday out—of pure freedom as to curls and ringlets, and no obligation to hide fine heads of hair in caps—what pictures of happiness, vast and immense to her, but utterly ridiculous to us, bewilder the brain of the little housemaid at number six, all called into existence by the wedding at the corner!

We smile at such things, and so we should, though perhaps for a better reason than commonly presents itself. It should be pleasant to us to know that there are notions of happiness so moderate and limited, since upon those who entertain them, happiness and lightness of heart are very easily bestowed.

But the little housemaid is awakened from her reverie, for forth from the door of the magical corner house there runs towards her, all fluttering in smart new dress and streaming ribands, her friend Jane Adams, who comes all out of breath to redeem a solemn promise of taking her in, under cover of the confusion, to see the breakfast table spread forth in state, and—sight of sights!—her young mistress ready dressed for church.

And there, in good truth, when they have stolen up-stairs on tip-toe and edged themselves in at the chamber-door—there is Miss Emma ‘looking like the sweetest picter,’ in a white chip bonnet and orange flowers, and all other elegancies becoming a bride, (with the make, shape, and quality of every article of which the girl is perfectly familiar in one moment, and never forgets to her dying day)—and there is Miss Emma’s mamma in tears, and Miss Emma’s papa comforting her, and saying how that of course she has been long looking forward to this, and how happy she ought to be—and there too is Miss Emma’s sister with her arms round her neck, and the other bridesmaid all smiles and tears, quieting the children, who would cry more but that they are so finely dressed, and yet sob for fear sister Emma should be taken away—and it is all so affecting, that the two servant-girls cry more than anybody; and Jane Adams, sitting down upon the stairs, when they have crept away, declares that her legs tremble so that she don’t know what to do, and that she will say for Miss Emma, that she never had a hasty word from her, and that she does hope and pray she may be happy.

But Jane soon comes round again, and then surely there never was anything like the breakfast table, glittering with plate and china, and set out with flowers and sweets, and long-necked bottles, in the most sumptuous and dazzling manner. In the centre, too, is the mighty charm, the cake, glistening with frosted sugar, and garnished beautifully. They agree that there ought to be a little Cupid under one of the barley-sugar temples, or at least two hearts and an arrow; but, with this exception, there is nothing to wish for, and a table could not be handsomer. As they arrive at this conclusion, who should come in but Mr. John! to whom Jane says that its only Anne from number six; and John says *he* knows, for he’s often winked his eye down the area, which causes Anne to blush and look confused. She is going away, indeed; when Mr. John will have it that she must drink a glass of wine, and he says never mind it’s being early in the morning, it won’t hurt her: so they shut the door and pour out the wine; and Anne drinking lane’s health, and adding, ‘and here’s wishing you yours, Mr. John,’ drinks it in a great many sips,—Mr. John all the time making jokes appropriate to the occasion. At last Mr. John, who has waxed bolder by degrees, pleads the usage at weddings, and claims the privilege of a kiss, which he obtains after a great scuffle; and footsteps being now heard on the stairs, they disperse suddenly.

By this time a carriage has driven up to convey the bride to church, and Anne of number six prolonging the process of ‘cleaning her door,’ has the satisfaction of beholding the bride and bridesmaids, and the papa and mamma, hurry into the same and drive rapidly off. Nor is this all, for soon other carriages begin to arrive with a posse of company all beautifully dressed, at whom she could stand and gaze for ever; but having something else to do, is compelled to take one last long look and shut the street-door.

And now the company have gone down to breakfast, and tears have given place to smiles, for all the corks are out of the long-necked bottles, and their contents are disappearing rapidly. Miss Emma’s papa is at the top of the table; Miss Emma’s mamma at the bottom; and beside the latter are Miss Emma herself and her husband,—admitted on all hands to be the handsomest and most interesting young couple ever known. All down both sides of the table, too, are various young ladies, beautiful to see, and various young gentlemen who seem to think so; and there, in a post of honour, is an unmarried aunt of Miss Emma’s, reported to possess unheard-of riches, and to have expressed vast testamentary intentions respecting her favourite niece and new nephew. This lady has been very liberal and generous already, as the jewels worn by the bride abundantly testify, but that is nothing to what she means to do, or even to what she has done, for she put herself in close communication with the dressmaker three months ago, and prepared a wardrobe (with some articles worked by her own hands) fit for a Princess. People may call her an old maid, and so she may be, but she is neither cross nor ugly for all that; on the contrary, she is very cheerful and pleasant-looking, and very kind and tender-hearted: which is no matter of surprise except to those who yield to popular prejudices without thinking why, and will never grow wiser and never know better.

Of all the company though, none are more pleasant to behold or better pleased with themselves than two young children, who, in honour of the day, have seats among the guests. Of these, one is a little fellow of six or eight years old, brother to the bride,—and the other a girl of the same age, or something younger, whom he calls ‘his wife.’ The real bride and bridegroom are not more devoted than they: he all love and attention, and she all blushes and fondness, toying with a little bouquet which he gave her this morning, and placing the scattered rose-leaves in her bosom with nature’s own coquettishness. They have dreamt of each other in their quiet dreams, these children, and their little hearts have been nearly broken when the absent one has been dispraised in jest. When will there come in after-life a passion so earnest, generous, and true as theirs; what, even in its gentlest realities, can have the grace and charm that hover round such fairy lovers!

By this time the merriment and happiness of the feast have gained their height; certain ominous looks begin to be exchanged between the bridesmaids, and somehow it gets whispered about that the carriage which is to take the young couple into the country has arrived. Such members of the party as are most disposed to prolong its enjoyments, affect to consider this a false alarm, but it turns out too true, being speedily confirmed, first by the retirement of the bride and a select file of intimates who are to prepare her for the journey, and secondly by the withdrawal of the ladies generally. To this there ensues a particularly awkward pause, in which everybody essays to be facetious, and nobody succeeds; at length the bridegroom makes a mysterious disappearance in obedience to some equally mysterious signal; and the table is deserted.

Now, for at least six weeks last past it has been solemnly devised and settled that the young couple should go away in secret; but they no sooner appear without the door than the drawing-room windows are blocked up with ladies waving their handkerchiefs and kissing their hands, and the dining-room panes with gentlemen's faces beaming farewell in every queer variety of its expression. The hall and steps are crowded with servants in white favours, mixed up with particular friends and relations who have darted out to say good-bye; and foremost in the group are the tiny lovers arm in arm, thinking, with fluttering hearts, what happiness it would be to dash away together in that gallant coach, and never part again.

The bride has barely time for one hurried glance at her old home, when the steps rattle, the door slams, the horses clatter on the pavement, and they have left it far away.

A knot of women servants still remain clustered in the hall, whispering among themselves, and there of course is Anne from number six, who has made another escape on some plea or other, and been an admiring witness of the departure. There are two points on which Anne expatiates over and over again, without the smallest appearance of fatigue or intending to leave off; one is, that she 'never see in all her life such a—oh such a angel of a gentleman as Mr. Harvey'—and the other, that she 'can't tell how it is, but it don’t seem a bit like a work-a-day, or a Sunday neither—it’s all so unsettled and unregular.’

THE FORMAL COUPLE

The formal couple are the most prim, cold, immovable, and unsatisfactory people on the face of the earth. Their faces, voices, dress, house, furniture, walk, and manner, are all the essence of formality, unrelieved by one redeeming touch of frankness, heartiness, or nature.

Everything with the formal couple resolves itself into a matter of form. They don’t call upon you on your account, but their own; not to see how you are, but to show how they are: it is not a ceremony to do honour to you, but to themselves,—not due to your position, but to theirs. If one of a friend’s children die, the formal couple are as sure and punctual in sending to the house as the undertaker; if a friend’s family be increased, the monthly nurse is not more attentive than they. The formal couple, in fact, joyfully seize all occasions of testifying their good-breeding and precise observance of the little usages of society; and for you, who are the means to this end, they care as much as a man does for the tailor who has enabled him to cut a figure, or a woman for the milliner who has assisted her to a conquest.

Having an extensive connexion among that kind of people who make acquaintances and eschew friends, the formal gentleman attends from time to time a great many funerals, to which he is formally invited, and to which he formally goes, as returning a call for the last time. Here his deportment is of the most faultless description; he knows the exact pitch of voice it is proper to assume, the sombre look he ought to wear, the melancholy tread which should be his gait for the day. He is perfectly acquainted with all the dreary courtesies to be observed in a mourning-coach; knows when to sigh, and when to hide his nose in the white handkerchief; and looks into the grave and shakes his head when the ceremony is concluded, with the sad formality of a mute.

‘What kind of funeral was it?’ says the formal lady, when he returns home. ‘Oh!’ replies the formal gentleman, ‘there never was such a gross and disgusting impropriety; there were no feathers.’ ‘No feathers!’ cries the lady, as if on wings of black feathers dead people fly to Heaven, and, lacking them, they must of necessity go elsewhere. Her husband shakes his head; and further adds, that they had seed-cake instead of plum-cake, and that it was all white wine. ‘All white wine!’ exclaims his wife. ‘Nothing but sherry and madeira,' says the husband. 'What! no port?' 'Not a drop.' No port, no plums, and no feathers! 'You will recollect, my dear,' says the formal lady, in a voice of stately reproof, 'that when we first met this poor man who is now dead and gone, and he took that very strange course of addressing me at dinner without being previously introduced, I ventured to express my opinion that the family were quite ignorant of etiquette, and very imperfectly acquainted with the decencies of life. You have now had a good opportunity of judging for yourself, and all I have to say is, that I trust you will never go to a funeral *there* again.' 'My dear,' replies the formal gentleman, 'I never will.' So the informal deceased is cut in his grave; and the formal couple, when they tell the story of the funeral, shake their heads, and wonder what some people's feelings *are* made of, and what their notions of propriety *can* be!

If the formal couple have a family (which they sometimes have), they are not children, but little, pale, sour, sharp-nosed men and women; and so exquisitely brought up, that they might be very old dwarfs for anything that appeareth to the contrary. Indeed, they are so acquainted with forms and conventionalities, and conduct themselves with such strict decorum, that to see the little girl break a looking-glass in some wild outbreak, or the little boy kick his parents, would be to any visitor an unspeakable relief and consolation.

The formal couple are always sticklers for what is rigidly proper, and have a great readiness in detecting hidden impropriety of speech or thought, which by less scrupulous people would be wholly unsuspected. Thus, if they pay a visit to the theatre, they sit all night in a perfect agony lest anything improper or immoral should proceed from the stage; and if anything should happen to be said which admits of a double construction, they never fail to take it up directly, and to express by their looks the great outrage which their feelings have sustained. Perhaps this is their chief reason for absenting themselves almost entirely from places of public amusement. They go sometimes to the Exhibition of the Royal Academy;—but that is often more shocking than the stage itself, and the formal lady thinks that it really is high time Mr. Etty was prosecuted and made a public example of.

We made one at a christening party not long since, where there were amongst the guests a formal couple, who suffered the acutest torture from certain jokes, incidental to such an occasion, cut—and very likely dried also

—by one of the godfathers; a red-faced elderly gentleman, who, being highly popular with the rest of the company, had it all his own way, and was in great spirits. It was at supper-time that this gentleman came out in full force. We—being of a grave and quiet demeanour—had been chosen to escort the formal lady down-stairs, and, sitting beside her, had a favourable opportunity of observing her emotions.

We have a shrewd suspicion that, in the very beginning, and in the first blush—literally the first blush—of the matter, the formal lady had not felt quite certain whether the being present at such a ceremony, and encouraging, as it were, the public exhibition of a baby, was not an act involving some degree of indelicacy and impropriety; but certain we are that when that baby's health was drunk, and allusions were made, by a grey-headed gentleman proposing it, to the time when he had dandled in his arms the young Christian's mother,—certain we are that then the formal lady took the alarm, and recoiled from the old gentleman as from a hoary profligate. Still she bore it; she fanned herself with an indignant air, but still she bore it. A comic song was sung, involving a confession from some imaginary gentleman that he had kissed a female, and yet the formal lady bore it. But when at last, the health of the godfather before-mentioned being drunk, the godfather rose to return thanks, and in the course of his observations darkly hinted at babies yet unborn, and even contemplated the possibility of the subject of that festival having brothers and sisters, the formal lady could endure no more, but, bowing slightly round, and sweeping haughtily past the offender, left the room in tears, under the protection of the formal gentleman.

THE LOVING COUPLE

There cannot be a better practical illustration of the wise saw and ancient instance, that there may be too much of a good thing, than is presented by a loving couple. Undoubtedly it is meet and proper that two persons joined together in holy matrimony should be loving, and unquestionably it is pleasant to know and see that they are so; but there is a time for all things, and the couple who happen to be always in a loving state before company, are well-nigh intolerable.

And in taking up this position we would have it distinctly understood that we do not seek alone the sympathy of bachelors, in whose objection to loving couples we recognise interested motives and personal considerations. We grant that to that unfortunate class of society there may be something very irritating, tantalising, and provoking, in being compelled to witness those gentle endearments and chaste interchanges which to loving couples are quite the ordinary business of life. But while we recognise the natural character of the prejudice to which these unhappy men are subject, we can neither receive their biassed evidence, nor address ourself to their inflamed and angered minds. Dispassionate experience is our only guide; and in these moral essays we seek no less to reform hymeneal offenders than to hold out a timely warning to all rising couples, and even to those who have not yet set forth upon their pilgrimage towards the matrimonial market.

Let all couples, present or to come, therefore profit by the example of Mr. and Mrs. Leaver, themselves a loving couple in the first degree.

Mr. and Mrs. Leaver are pronounced by Mrs. Starling, a widow lady who lost her husband when she was young, and lost herself about the same-time—for by her own count she has never since grown five years older—to be a perfect model of wedded felicity. ‘You would suppose,’ says the romantic lady, ‘that they were lovers only just now engaged. Never was such happiness! They are so tender, so affectionate, so attached to each other, so enamoured, that positively nothing can be more charming!’

‘Augusta, my soul,’ says Mr. Leaver. ‘Augustus, my life,’ replies Mrs. Leaver. ‘Sing some little ballad, darling,’ quoth Mr. Leaver. ‘I couldn’t, indeed, dearest,’ returns Mrs. Leaver. ‘Do, my dove,’ says Mr. Leaver. ‘I couldn’t possibly, my love,’ replies Mrs. Leaver; ‘and it’s very naughty of you to ask me.’ ‘Naughty, darling!’ cries Mr. Leaver. ‘Yes, very naughty, and very cruel,’ returns Mrs. Leaver, ‘for you know I have a sore throat, and that to sing would give me great pain. You’re a monster, and I hate you. Go away!’ Mrs. Leaver has said ‘go away,’ because Mr. Leaver has tapped her under the chin: Mr. Leaver not doing as he is bid, but on the contrary, sitting down beside her, Mrs. Leaver slaps Mr. Leaver; and Mr. Leaver in return slaps Mrs. Leaver, and it being now time for all persons present to look the other way, they look the other way, and hear a still small sound as of kissing, at which Mrs. Starling is thoroughly enraptured, and whispers her neighbour that if all married couples were like that, what a heaven this earth would be!

The loving couple are at home when this occurs, and maybe only three or four friends are present, but, unaccustomed to reserve upon this interesting point, they are pretty much the same abroad. Indeed upon some occasions, such as a pic-nic or a water-party, their lovingness is even more developed, as we had an opportunity last summer of observing in person.

There was a great water-party made up to go to Twickenham and dine, and afterwards dance in an empty villa by the river-side, hired expressly for the purpose. Mr. and Mrs. Leaver were of the company; and it was our fortune to have a seat in the same boat, which was an eight-oared galley, manned by amateurs, with a blue striped awning of the same pattern as their Guernsey shirts, and a dingy red flag of the same shade as the whiskers of the stroke oar. A coxswain being appointed, and all other matters adjusted, the eight gentlemen threw themselves into strong paroxysms, and pulled up with the tide, stimulated by the compassionate remarks of the ladies, who one and all exclaimed, that it seemed an immense exertion—as indeed it did. At first we raced the other boat, which came alongside in gallant style; but this being found an unpleasant amusement, as giving rise to a great quantity of splashing, and rendering the cold pies and other viands very moist, it was unanimously voted down, and we were suffered to shoot a-head, while the second boat followed ingloriously in our wake.

It was at this time that we first recognised Mr. Leaver. There were two firemen-watermen in the boat, lying by until somebody was exhausted; and one of them, who had taken upon himself the direction of affairs, was heard to cry in a gruff voice, ‘Pull away, number two—give it her, number two—take a longer reach, number two—now, number two, sir, think you’re winning a boat.' The greater part of the company had no doubt begun to wonder which of the striped Guernseys it might be that stood in need of such encouragement, when a stifled shriek from Mrs. Leaver confirmed the doubtful and informed the ignorant; and Mr. Leaver, still further disguised in a straw hat and no neckcloth, was observed to be in a fearful perspiration, and failing visibly. Nor was the general consternation diminished at this instant by the same gentleman (in the performance of an accidental aquatic feat, termed 'catching a crab') plunging suddenly backward, and displaying nothing of himself to the company, but two violently struggling legs. Mrs. Leaver shrieked again several times, and cried piteously—'Is he dead? Tell me the worst. Is he dead?'

Now, a moment's reflection might have convinced the loving wife, that unless her husband were endowed with some most surprising powers of muscular action, he never could be dead while he kicked so hard; but still Mrs. Leaver cried, 'Is he dead? is he dead?' and still everybody else cried—'No, no, no,' until such time as Mr. Leaver was replaced in a sitting posture, and his oar (which had been going through all kinds of wrong-headed performances on its own account) was once more put in his hand, by the exertions of the two firemen-watermen. Mr. Leaver then exclaimed, 'Augustus, my child, come to me;' and Mr. Leaver said, 'Augusta, my love, compose yourself, I am not injured.' But Mrs. Leaver cried again more piteously than before, 'Augustus, my child, come to me;' and now the company generally, who seemed to be apprehensive that if Mr. Leaver remained where he was, he might contribute more than his proper share towards the drowning of the party, disinterestedly took part with Mrs. Leaver, and said he really ought to go, and that he was not strong enough for such violent exercise, and ought never to have undertaken it. Reluctantly, Mr. Leaver went, and laid himself down at Mrs. Leaver's feet, and Mrs. Leaver stooping over him, said, 'Oh Augustus, how could you terrify me so?' and Mr. Leaver said, 'Augusta, my sweet, I never meant to terrify you;' and Mrs. Leaver said, 'You are faint, my dear;' and Mr. Leaver said, 'I am rather so, my love;' and they were very loving indeed under Mrs. Leaver's veil, until at length Mr. Leaver came forth again, and pleasantly asked if he had not heard something said about bottled stout and sandwiches.

Mrs. Starling, who was one of the party, was perfectly delighted with this scene, and frequently murmured half-aside, 'What a loving couple you are!' or 'How delightful it is to see man and wife so happy together!' To us she was quite poetical, (for we are a kind of cousins,) observing that hearts beating in unison like that made life a paradise of sweets; and that when kindred creatures were drawn together by sympathies so fine and delicate, what more than mortal happiness did not our souls partake! To all this we answered 'Certainly,' or 'Very true,' or merely sighed, as the case might be. At every new act of the loving couple, the widow's admiration broke out afresh; and when Mrs. Leaver would not permit Mr. Leaver to keep his hat off, lest the sun should strike to his head, and give him a brain fever, Mrs. Starling actually shed tears, and said it reminded her of Adam and Eve.

The loving couple were thus loving all the way to Twickenham, but when we arrived there (by which time the amateur crew looked very thirsty and vicious) they were more playful than ever, for Mrs. Leaver threw stones at Mr. Leaver, and Mr. Leaver ran after Mrs. Leaver on the grass, in a most innocent and enchanting manner. At dinner, too, Mr. Leaver *would* steal Mrs. Leaver's tongue, and Mrs. Leaver *would* retaliate upon Mr. Leaver's fowl; and when Mrs. Leaver was going to take some lobster salad, Mr. Leaver wouldn't let her have any, saying that it made her ill, and she was always sorry for it afterwards, which afforded Mrs. Leaver an opportunity of pretending to be cross, and showing many other prettinesses. But this was merely the smiling surface of their loves, not the mighty depths of the stream, down to which the company, to say the truth, dived rather unexpectedly, from the following accident. It chanced that Mr. Leaver took upon himself to propose the bachelors who had first originated the notion of that entertainment, in doing which, he affected to regret that he was no longer of their body himself, and pretended grievously to lament his fallen state. This Mrs. Leaver's feelings could not brook, even in jest, and consequently, exclaiming aloud, 'He loves me not, he loves me not!' she fell in a very pitiable state into the arms of Mrs. Starling, and, directly becoming insensible, was conveyed by that lady and her husband into another room. Presently Mr. Leaver came running back to know if there was a medical gentleman in company, and as there was, (in what company is there not?) both Mr. Leaver and the medical gentleman hurried away together.

The medical gentleman was the first who returned, and among his intimate friends he was observed to laugh and wink, and look as unmedical as might be; but when Mr. Leaver came back he was very solemn, and in answer to all inquiries, shook his head, and remarked that Augusta was far too sensitive to be trifled with—an opinion which the widow subsequently confirmed. Finding that she was in no imminent peril, however, the rest of the party betook themselves to dancing on the green, and very merry and happy they were, and a vast quantity of flirtation there was; the last circumstance being no doubt attributable, partly to the fineness of the weather, and partly to the locality, which is well known to be favourable to all harmless recreations.

In the bustle of the scene, Mr. and Mrs. Leaver stole down to the boat, and disposed themselves under the awning, Mrs. Leaver reclining her head upon Mr. Leaver's shoulder, and Mr. Leaver grasping her hand with great fervour, and looking in her face from time to time with a melancholy and sympathetic aspect. The widow sat apart, feigning to be occupied with a book, but stealthily observing them from behind her fan; and the two firemen-watermen, smoking their pipes on the bank hard by, nudged each other, and grinned in enjoyment of the joke. Very few of the party missed the loving couple; and the few who did, heartily congratulated each other on their disappearance.

THE CONTRADICTORY COUPLE

One would suppose that two people who are to pass their whole lives together, and must necessarily be very often alone with each other, could find little pleasure in mutual contradiction; and yet what is more common than a contradictory couple?

The contradictory couple agree in nothing but contradiction. They return home from Mrs. Bluebottle’s dinner-party, each in an opposite corner of the coach, and do not exchange a syllable until they have been seated for at least twenty minutes by the fireside at home, when the gentleman, raising his eyes from the stove, all at once breaks silence:

‘What a very extraordinary thing it is,’ says he, ‘that you *will* contradict, Charlotte!’ ‘*I* contradict!’ cries the lady, ‘but that’s just like you.’ ‘What’s like me?’ says the gentleman sharply. ‘Saying that I contradict you,’ replies the lady. ‘Do you mean to say that you do *not* contradict me?’ retorts the gentleman; ‘do you mean to say that you have not been contradicting me the whole of this day?’ ‘Do you mean to tell me now, that you have not? I mean to tell you nothing of the kind,’ replies the lady quietly; ‘when you are wrong, of course I shall contradict you.’

During this dialogue the gentleman has been taking his brandy-and-water on one side of the fire, and the lady, with her dressing-case on the table, has been curling her hair on the other. She now lets down her back hair, and proceeds to brush it; preserving at the same time an air of conscious rectitude and suffering virtue, which is intended to exasperate the gentleman—and does so.

‘I do believe,’ he says, taking the spoon out of his glass, and tossing it on the table, ‘that of all the obstinate, positive, wrong-headed creatures that were ever born, you are the most so, Charlotte.’ ‘Certainly, certainly, have it your own way, pray. You see how much *I* contradict you,’ rejoins the lady. ‘Of course, you didn’t contradict me at dinner-time—oh no, not you!’ says the gentleman. ‘Yes, I did,’ says the lady. ‘Oh, you did,’ cries the gentleman ‘you admit that?’ ‘If you call that contradiction, I do,’ the lady answers; ‘and I say again, Edward, that when I know you are wrong, I will contradict you. I am not your slave.’ ‘Not my slave!’ repeats the gentleman bitterly; ‘and you still mean to say that in the Blackburns’ new house there are not more than fourteen doors, including the door of the wine-cellar!' 'I mean to say,' retorts the lady, beating time with her hair-brush on the palm of her hand, 'that in that house there are fourteen doors and no more.' 'Well then—' cries the gentleman, rising in despair, and pacing the room with rapid strides. 'By G-, this is enough to destroy a man's intellect, and drive him mad!'

By and by the gentleman comes-to a little, and passing his hand gloomily across his forehead, reseats himself in his former chair. There is a long silence, and this time the lady begins. 'I appealed to Mr. Jenkins, who sat next to me on the sofa in the drawing-room during tea—' 'Morgan, you mean,' interrupts the gentleman. 'I do not mean anything of the kind,' answers the lady. 'Now, by all that is aggravating and impossible to bear,' cries the gentleman, clenching his hands and looking upwards in agony, 'she is going to insist upon it that Morgan is Jenkins!' 'Do you take me for a perfect fool?' exclaims the lady; 'do you suppose I don't know the one from the other? Do you suppose I don't know that the man in the blue coat was Mr. Jenkins?' 'Jenkins in a blue coat!' cries the gentleman with a groan; 'Jenkins in a blue coat! a man who would suffer death rather than wear anything but brown!' 'Do you dare to charge me with telling an untruth?' demands the lady, bursting into tears. 'I charge you, ma'am,' retorts the gentleman, starting up, 'with being a monster of contradiction, a monster of aggravation, a—a—a—Jenkins in a blue coat!—what have I done that I should be doomed to hear such statements!'

Expressing himself with great scorn and anguish, the gentleman takes up his candle and stalks off to bed, where feigning to be fast asleep when the lady comes up-stairs drowned in tears, murmuring lamentations over her hard fate and indistinct intentions of consulting her brothers, he undergoes the secret torture of hearing her exclaim between whiles, 'I know there are only fourteen doors in the house, I know it was Mr. Jenkins, I know he had a blue coat on, and I would say it as positively as I do now, if they were the last words I had to speak!'

If the contradictory couple are blessed with children, they are not the less contradictory on that account. Master James and Miss Charlotte present themselves after dinner, and being in perfect good humour, and finding their parents in the same amiable state, augur from these appearances half a glass of wine a-piece and other extraordinary indulgences. But unfortunately Master James, growing talkative upon such prospects, asks his mamma how tall Mrs. Parsons is, and whether she is not six feet high; to which his mamma replies, ‘Yes, she should think she was, for Mrs. Parsons is a very tall lady indeed; quite a giantess.’ ‘For Heaven’s sake, Charlotte,’ cries her husband, ‘do not tell the child such preposterous nonsense. Six feet high!’ ‘Well,’ replies the lady, ‘surely I may be permitted to have an opinion; my opinion is, that she is six feet high—at least six feet.’ ‘Now you know, Charlotte,’ retorts the gentleman sternly, ‘that that is *not* your opinion—that you have no such idea—and that you only say this for the sake of contradiction.’ ‘You are exceedingly polite,’ his wife replies; ‘to be wrong about such a paltry question as anybody’s height, would be no great crime; but I say again, that I believe Mrs. Parsons to be six feet—more than six feet; nay, I believe you know her to be full six feet, and only say she is not, because I say she is.’ This taunt disposes the gentleman to become violent, but he cheeks himself, and is content to mutter, in a haughty tone, ‘Six feet—ha! ha! Mrs. Parsons six feet!’ and the lady answers, ‘Yes, six feet. I am sure I am glad you are amused, and I’ll say it again—six feet.’ Thus the subject gradually drops off, and the contradiction begins to be forgotten, when Master James, with some undefined notion of making himself agreeable, and putting things to rights again, unfortunately asks his mamma what the moon’s made of; which gives her occasion to say that he had better not ask her, for she is always wrong and never can be right; that he only exposes her to contradiction by asking any question of her; and that he had better ask his papa, who is infallible, and never can be wrong. Papa, smarting under this attack, gives a terrible pull at the bell, and says, that if the conversation is to proceed in this way, the children had better be removed. Removed they are, after a few tears and many struggles; and Pa having looked at Ma sideways for a minute or two, with a baleful eye, draws his pocket-handkerchief over his face, and composes himself for his after-dinner nap.

The friends of the contradictory couple often deplore their frequent disputes, though they rather make light of them at the same time: observing, that there is no doubt they are very much attached to each other, and that they never quarrel except about trifles. But neither the friends of the contradictory couple, nor the contradictory couple themselves, reflect, that as the most stupendous objects in nature are but vast collections of minute particles, so the slightest and least considered trifles make up the sum of human happiness or misery.

THE COUPLE WHO DOTE UPON THEIR CHILDREN

The couple who dote upon their children have usually a great many of them: six or eight at least. The children are either the healthiest in all the world, or the most unfortunate in existence. In either case, they are equally the theme of their doting parents, and equally a source of mental anguish and irritation to their doting parents' friends.

The couple who dote upon their children recognise no dates but those connected with their births, accidents, illnesses, or remarkable deeds. They keep a mental almanack with a vast number of Innocents'-days, all in red letters. They recollect the last coronation, because on that day little Tom fell down the kitchen stairs; the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot, because it was on the fifth of November that Ned asked whether wooden legs were made in heaven and cocked hats grew in gardens. Mrs. Whiffler will never cease to recollect the last day of the old year as long as she lives, for it was on that day that the baby had the four red spots on its nose which they took for measles: nor Christmas-day, for twenty-one days after Christmas-day the twins were born; nor Good Friday, for it was on a Good Friday that she was frightened by the donkey-cart when she was in the family way with Georgiana. The movable feasts have no motion for Mr. and Mrs. Whiffler, but remain pinned down tight and fast to the shoulders of some small child, from whom they can never be separated any more. Time was made, according to their creed, not for slaves but for girls and boys; the restless sands in his glass are but little children at play.

As we have already intimated, the children of this couple can know no medium. They are either prodigies of good health or prodigies of bad health; whatever they are, they must be prodigies. Mr. Whiffler must have to describe at his office such excruciating agonies constantly undergone by his eldest boy, as nobody else's eldest boy ever underwent; or he must be able to declare that there never was a child endowed with such amazing health, such an indomitable constitution, and such a cast-iron frame, as his child. His children must be, in some respect or other, above and beyond the children of all other people. To such an extent is this feeling pushed, that we were once slightly acquainted with a lady and gentleman who carried their heads so high and became so proud after their youngest child fell out of a two-pair-of-stairs window without hurting himself much, that the greater part of their friends were obliged to forego their acquaintance. But perhaps this may be an extreme case, and one not justly entitled to be considered as a precedent of general application.

If a friend happen to dine in a friendly way with one of these couples who dote upon their children, it is nearly impossible for him to divert the conversation from their favourite topic. Everything reminds Mr. Whiffler of Ned, or Mrs. Whiffler of Mary Anne, or of the time before Ned was born, or the time before Mary Anne was thought of. The slightest remark, however harmless in itself, will awaken slumbering recollections of the twins. It is impossible to steer clear of them. They will come uppermost, let the poor man do what he may. Ned has been known to be lost sight of for half an hour, Dick has been forgotten, the name of Mary Anne has not been mentioned, but the twins will out. Nothing can keep down the twins.

'It's a very extraordinary thing, Saunders,' says Mr. Whiffler to the visitor, 'but—you have seen our little babies, the—the—twins?' The friend's heart sinks within him as he answers, 'Oh, yes—often.' 'Your talking of the Pyramids,' says Mr. Whiffler, quite as a matter of course, 'reminds me of the twins. It's a very extraordinary thing about those babies—what colour should you say their eyes were?' 'Upon my word,' the friend stammers, 'I hardly know how to answer'—the fact being, that except as the friend does not remember to have heard of any departure from the ordinary course of nature in the instance of these twins, they might have no eyes at all for aught he has observed to the contrary. 'You wouldn't say they were red, I suppose?' says Mr. Whiffler. The friend hesitates, and rather thinks they are; but inferring from the expression of Mr. Whiffler's face that red is not the colour, smiles with some confidence, and says, 'No, no! very different from that.' 'What should you say to blue?' says Mr. Whiffler. The friend glances at him, and observing a different expression in his face, ventures to say, 'I should say they *were* blue—a decided blue.' 'To be sure!' cries Mr. Whiffler, triumphantly, 'I knew you would! But what should you say if I was to tell you that the boy's eyes are blue and the girl's hazel, eh?' 'Impossible!' exclaims the friend, not at all knowing why it should be impossible. 'A fact, notwithstanding,' cries Mr. Whiffler; 'and let me tell you, Saunders, *that's* not a common thing in twins, or a circumstance that'll happen every day.'

In this dialogue Mrs. Whiffler, as being deeply responsible for the twins, their charms and singularities, has taken no share; but she now relates, in broken English, a witticism of little Dick's bearing upon the subject just discussed, which delights Mr. Whiffler beyond measure, and causes him to declare that he would have sworn that was Dick's if he had heard it anywhere. Then he requests that Mrs. Whiffler will tell Saunders what Tom said about mad bulls; and Mrs. Whiffler relating the anecdote, a discussion ensues upon the different character of Tom's wit and Dick's wit, from which it appears that Dick's humour is of a lively turn, while Tom's style is the dry and caustic. This discussion being enlivened by various illustrations, lasts a long time, and is only stopped by Mrs. Whiffler instructing the footman to ring the nursery bell, as the children were promised that they should come down and taste the pudding.

The friend turns pale when this order is given, and paler still when it is followed up by a great pattering on the staircase, (not unlike the sound of rain upon a skylight,) a violent bursting open of the dining-room door, and the tumultuous appearance of six small children, closely succeeded by a strong nursery-maid with a twin in each arm. As the whole eight are screaming, shouting, or kicking—some influenced by a ravenous appetite, some by a horror of the stranger, and some by a conflict of the two feelings—a pretty long space elapses before all their heads can be ranged round the table and anything like order restored; in bringing about which happy state of things both the nurse and footman are severely scratched. At length Mrs. Whiffler is heard to say, 'Mr. Saunders, shall I give you some pudding?' A breathless silence ensues, and sixteen small eyes are fixed upon the guest in expectation of his reply. A wild shout of joy proclaims that he has said 'No, thank you.' Spoons are waved in the air, legs appear above the table-cloth in uncontrollable ecstasy, and eighty short fingers dabble in damson syrup.

While the pudding is being disposed of, Mr. and Mrs. Whiffler look on with beaming countenances, and Mr. Whiffler nudging his friend Saunders, begs him to take notice of Tom's eyes, or Dick's chin, or Ned's nose, or Mary Anne's hair, or Emily's figure, or little Bob's calves, or Fanny's mouth, or Carry's head, as the case may be. Whatever the attention of Mr. Saunders is called to, Mr. Saunders admires of course; though he is rather confused about the sex of the youngest branches and looks at the wrong children, turning to a girl when Mr. Whiffler directs his attention to a boy, and falling into raptures with a boy when he ought to be enchanted with a girl. Then the dessert comes, and there is a vast deal of scrambling after fruit, and sudden spirting forth of juice out of tight oranges into infant eyes, and much screeching and wailing in consequence. At length it becomes time for Mrs. Whiffler to retire, and all the children are by force of arms compelled to kiss and love Mr. Saunders before going up-stairs, except Tom, who, lying on his back in the hall, proclaims that Mr. Saunders 'is a naughty beast;' and Dick, who having drunk his father's wine when he was looking another way, is found to be intoxicated and is carried out, very limp and helpless.

Mr. Whiffler and his friend are left alone together, but Mr. Whiffler's thoughts are still with his family, if his family are not with him. 'Saunders,' says he, after a short silence, 'if you please, we'll drink Mrs. Whiffler and the children.' Mr. Saunders feels this to be a reproach against himself for not proposing the same sentiment, and drinks it in some confusion. 'Ah!' Mr. Whiffler sighs, 'these children, Saunders, make one quite an old man.' Mr. Saunders thinks that if they were his, they would make him a very old man; but he says nothing. 'And yet,' pursues Mr. Whiffler, 'what can equal domestic happiness? what can equal the engaging ways of children! Saunders, why don't you get married?' Now, this is an embarrassing question, because Mr. Saunders has been thinking that if he had at any time entertained matrimonial designs, the revelation of that day would surely have routed them for ever. 'I am glad, however,' says Mr. Whiffler, 'that you *are* a bachelor,—glad on one account, Saunders; a selfish one, I admit. Will you do Mrs. Whiffler and myself a favour?' Mr. Saunders is surprised—evidently surprised; but he replies, 'with the greatest pleasure.' 'Then, will you, Saunders,' says Mr. Whiffler, in an impressive manner, 'will you cement and consolidate our friendship by coming into the family (so to speak) as a godfather?' 'I shall be proud and delighted,' replies Mr. Saunders: 'which of the children is it? really, I thought they were all christened; or—' 'Saunders,' Mr. Whiffler interposes, 'they *are* all christened; you are right. The fact is, that Mrs. Whiffler is—in short, we expect another.' 'Not a ninth!' cries the friend, all aghast at the idea. 'Yes, Saunders,' rejoins Mr. Whiffler, solemnly, 'a ninth. Did we drink Mrs. Whiffler's health? Let us drink it again, Saunders, and wish her well over it!'

Doctor Johnson used to tell a story of a man who had but one idea, which was a wrong one. The couple who dote upon their children are in the same predicament: at home or abroad, at all times, and in all places, their thoughts are bound up in this one subject, and have no sphere beyond. They relate the clever things their offspring say or do, and weary every company with their prolixity and absurdity. Mr. Whiffler takes a friend by the button at a street corner on a windy day to tell him a *bon mot* of his youngest boy's; and Mrs. Whiffler, calling to see a sick acquaintance, entertains her with a cheerful account of all her own past sufferings and present expectations. In such cases the sins of the fathers indeed descend upon the children; for people soon come to regard them as predestined little bores. The couple who dote upon their children cannot be said to be actuated by a general love for these engaging little people (which would be a great excuse); for they are apt to underrate and entertain a jealousy of any children but their own. If they examined their own hearts, they would, perhaps, find at the bottom of all this, more self-love and egotism than they think of. Self-love and egotism are bad qualities, of which the unrestrained exhibition, though it may be sometimes amusing, never fails to be wearisome and unpleasant. Couples who dote upon their children, therefore, are best avoided.

THE COOL COUPLE

There is an old-fashioned weather-glass representing a house with two doorways, in one of which is the figure of a gentleman, in the other the figure of a lady. When the weather is to be fine the lady comes out and the gentleman goes in; when wet, the gentleman comes out and the lady goes in. They never seek each other's society, are never elevated and depressed by the same cause, and have nothing in common. They are the model of a cool couple, except that there is something of politeness and consideration about the behaviour of the gentleman in the weather-glass, in which, neither of the cool couple can be said to participate.

The cool couple are seldom alone together, and when they are, nothing can exceed their apathy and dulness: the gentleman being for the most part drowsy, and the lady silent. If they enter into conversation, it is usually of an ironical or recriminatory nature. Thus, when the gentleman has indulged in a very long yawn and settled himself more snugly in his easy-chair, the lady will perhaps remark, 'Well, I am sure, Charles! I hope you're comfortable.' To which the gentleman replies, 'Oh yes, he's quite comfortable quite.' 'There are not many married men, I hope,' returns the lady, 'who seek comfort in such selfish gratifications as you do.' 'Nor many wives who seek comfort in such selfish gratifications as *you* do, I hope,' retorts the gentleman. 'Whose fault is that?' demands the lady. The gentleman becoming more sleepy, returns no answer. 'Whose fault is that?' the lady repeats. The gentleman still returning no answer, she goes on to say that she believes there never was in all this world anybody so attached to her home, so thoroughly domestic, so unwilling to seek a moment's gratification or pleasure beyond her own fireside as she. God knows that before she was married she never thought or dreamt of such a thing; and she remembers that her poor papa used to say again and again, almost every day of his life, 'Oh, my dear Louisa, if you only marry a man who understands you, and takes the trouble to consider your happiness and accommodate himself a very little to your disposition, what a treasure he will find in you!' She supposes her papa knew what her disposition was—he had known her long enough—he ought to have been acquainted with it, but what can she do? If her home is always dull and lonely, and her husband is always absent and finds no pleasure in her society, she is naturally sometimes driven (seldom enough, she is sure) to seek a little recreation elsewhere; she is not expected to pine and mope to death, she hopes. 'Then come, Louisa,' says the gentleman, waking up as suddenly as he fell asleep, 'stop at home this evening, and so will I.' 'I should be sorry to suppose, Charles, that you took a pleasure in aggravating me,' replies the lady; 'but you know as well as I do that I am particularly engaged to Mrs. Mortimer, and that it would be an act of the grossest rudeness and ill-breeding, after accepting a seat in her box and preventing her from inviting anybody else, not to go.' 'Ah! there it is!' says the gentleman, shrugging his shoulders, 'I knew that perfectly well. I knew you couldn't devote an evening to your own home. Now all I have to say, Louisa, is this—recollect that *I* was quite willing to stay at home, and that it's no fault of *mine* we are not oftener together.'

With that the gentleman goes away to keep an old appointment at his club, and the lady hurries off to dress for Mrs. Mortimer's; and neither thinks of the other until by some odd chance they find themselves alone again.

But it must not be supposed that the cool couple are habitually a quarrelsome one. Quite the contrary. These differences are only occasions for a little self-excuse,—nothing more. In general they are as easy and careless, and dispute as seldom, as any common acquaintances may; for it is neither worth their while to put each other out of the way, nor to ruffle themselves.

When they meet in society, the cool couple are the best-bred people in existence. The lady is seated in a corner among a little knot of lady friends, one of whom exclaims, 'Why, I vow and declare there is your husband, my dear!' 'Whose?—mine?' she says, carelessly. 'Ay, yours, and coming this way too.' 'How very odd!' says the lady, in a languid tone, 'I thought he had been at Dover.' The gentleman coming up, and speaking to all the other ladies and nodding slightly to his wife, it turns out that he has been at Dover, and has just now returned. 'What a strange creature you are!' cries his wife; 'and what on earth brought you here, I wonder?' 'I came to look after you, *of course*,' rejoins her husband. This is so pleasant a jest that the lady is mightily amused, as are all the other ladies similarly situated who are within hearing; and while they are enjoying it to the full, the gentleman nods again, turns upon his heel, and saunters away.

There are times, however, when his company is not so agreeable, though equally unexpected; such as when the lady has invited one or two particular friends to tea and scandal, and he happens to come home in the very midst of their diversion. It is a hundred chances to one that he remains in the house half an hour, but the lady is rather disturbed by the intrusion, notwithstanding, and reasons within herself,—'I am sure I never interfere with him, and why should he interfere with me? It can scarcely be accidental; it never happens that I have a particular reason for not wishing him to come home, but he always comes. It's very provoking and tiresome; and I am sure when he leaves me so much alone for his own pleasure, the least he could do would be to do as much for mine.' Observing what passes in her mind, the gentleman, who has come home for his own accommodation, makes a merit of it with himself; arrives at the conclusion that it is the very last place in which he can hope to be comfortable; and determines, as he takes up his hat and cane, never to be so virtuous again.

Thus a great many cool couples go on until they are cold couples, and the grave has closed over their folly and indifference. Loss of name, station, character, life itself, has ensued from causes as slight as these, before now; and when gossips tell such tales, and aggravate their deformities, they elevate their hands and eyebrows, and call each other to witness what a cool couple Mr. and Mrs. So-and-so always were, even in the best of times.

THE PLAUSIBLE COUPLE

The plausible couple have many titles. They are 'a delightful couple,' an 'affectionate couple,' 'a most agreeable couple, 'a good-hearted couple,' and 'the best-natured couple in existence.' The truth is, that the plausible couple are people of the world; and either the way of pleasing the world has grown much easier than it was in the days of the old man and his ass, or the old man was but a bad hand at it, and knew very little of the trade.

'But is it really possible to please the world!' says some doubting reader. It is indeed. Nay, it is not only very possible, but very easy. The ways are crooked, and sometimes foul and low. What then? A man need but crawl upon his hands and knees, know when to close his eyes and when his ears, when to stoop and when to stand upright; and if by the world is meant that atom of it in which he moves himself, he shall please it, never fear.

Now, it will be readily seen, that if a plausible man or woman have an easy means of pleasing the world by an adaptation of self to all its twistings and twinings, a plausible man *and* woman, or, in other words, a plausible couple, playing into each other's hands, and acting in concert, have a manifest advantage. Hence it is that plausible couples scarcely ever fail of success on a pretty large scale; and hence it is that if the reader, laying down this unwieldy volume at the next full stop, will have the goodness to review his or her circle of acquaintance, and to search particularly for some man and wife with a large connexion and a good name, not easily referable to their abilities or their wealth, he or she (that is, the male or female reader) will certainly find that gentleman or lady, on a very short reflection, to be a plausible couple.

The plausible couple are the most ecstatic people living: the most sensitive people—to merit—on the face of the earth. Nothing clever or virtuous escapes them. They have microscopic eyes for such endowments, and can find them anywhere. The plausible couple never fawn—oh no! They don't even scruple to tell their friends of their faults. One is too generous, another too candid; a third has a tendency to think all people like himself, and to regard mankind as a company of angels; a fourth is kind-hearted to a fault. 'We never flatter, my dear Mrs. Jackson,' say the plausible couple; 'we speak our minds. Neither you nor Mr. Jackson have faults enough. It may sound strangely, but it is true. You have not faults enough. You know our way,—we must speak out, and always do. Quarrel with us for saying so, if you will; but we repeat it,—you have not faults enough!'

The plausible couple are no less plausible to each other than to third parties. They are always loving and harmonious. The plausible gentleman calls his wife 'darling,' and the plausible lady addresses him as 'dearest.' If it be Mr. and Mrs. Bobtail Widger, Mrs. Widger is 'Lavinia, darling,' and Mr. Widger is 'Bobtail, dearest.' Speaking of each other, they observe the same tender form. Mrs. Widger relates what 'Bobtail' said, and Mr. Widger recounts what 'darling' thought and did.

If you sit next to the plausible lady at a dinner-table, she takes the earliest opportunity of expressing her belief that you are acquainted with the Clickits; she is sure she has heard the Clickits speak of you—she must not tell you in what terms, or you will take her for a flatterer. You admit a knowledge of the Clickits; the plausible lady immediately launches out in their praise. She quite loves the Clickits. Were there ever such true-hearted, hospitable, excellent people—such a gentle, interesting little woman as Mrs. Clickit, or such a frank, unaffected creature as Mr. Clickit? were there ever two people, in short, so little spoiled by the world as they are? 'As who, darling?' cries Mr. Widger, from the opposite side of the table. 'The Clickits, dearest,' replies Mrs. Widger. 'Indeed you are right, darling,' Mr. Widger rejoins; 'the Clickits are a very high-minded, worthy, estimable couple.' Mrs. Widger remarking that Bobtail always grows quite eloquent upon this subject, Mr. Widger admits that he feels very strongly whenever such people as the Clickits and some other friends of his (here he glances at the host and hostess) are mentioned; for they are an honour to human nature, and do one good to think of. '*You* know the Clickits, Mrs. Jackson?' he says, addressing the lady of the house. 'No, indeed; we have not that pleasure,' she replies. 'You astonish me!' exclaims Mr. Widger: 'not know the Clickits! why, you are the very people of all others who ought to be their bosom friends. You are kindred beings; you are one and the same thing:- not know the Clickits! Now *will* you know the Clickits? Will you make a point of knowing them? Will you meet them in a friendly way at our house one evening, and be acquainted with them?' Mrs. Jackson will be quite delighted; nothing would give her more pleasure. 'Then, Lavinia, my darling,' says Mr. Widger, 'mind you don't lose sight of that; now, pray take care that Mr. and Mrs. Jackson know the Clickits without loss of time. Such people ought not to be strangers to each other.' Mrs. Widger books both families as the centre of attraction for her next party; and Mr. Widger, going on to expatiate upon the virtues of the Clickits, adds to their other moral qualities, that they keep one of the neatest phaetons in town, and have two thousand a year.

As the plausible couple never laud the merits of any absent person, without dexterously contriving that their praises shall reflect upon somebody who is present, so they never depreciate anything or anybody, without turning their depreciation to the same account. Their friend, Mr. Slummery, say they, is unquestionably a clever painter, and would no doubt be very popular, and sell his pictures at a very high price, if that cruel Mr. Fithers had not forestalled him in his department of art, and made it thoroughly and completely his own;—Fithers, it is to be observed, being present and within hearing, and Slummery elsewhere. Is Mrs. Tabblewick really as beautiful as people say? Why, there indeed you ask them a very puzzling question, because there is no doubt that she is a very charming woman, and they have long known her intimately. She is no doubt beautiful, very beautiful; they once thought her the most beautiful woman ever seen; still if you press them for an honest answer, they are bound to say that this was before they had ever seen our lovely friend on the sofa, (the sofa is hard by, and our lovely friend can't help hearing the whispers in which this is said;) since that time, perhaps, they have been hardly fair judges; Mrs. Tabblewick is no doubt extremely handsome,—very like our friend, in fact, in the form of the features,—but in point of expression, and soul, and figure, and air altogether—oh dear!

But while the plausible couple depreciate, they are still careful to preserve their character for amiability and kind feeling; indeed the depreciation itself is often made to grow out of their excessive sympathy and good will. The plausible lady calls on a lady who dotes upon her children, and is sitting with a little girl upon her knee, enraptured by her artless replies, and protesting that there is nothing she delights in so much as conversing with these fairies; when the other lady inquires if she has seen young Mrs. Finching lately, and whether the baby has turned out a finer one than it promised to be. 'Oh dear!' cries the plausible lady, 'you cannot think how often Bobtail and I have talked about poor Mrs. Finching—she is such a dear soul, and was so anxious that the baby should be a fine child—and very naturally, because she was very much here at one time, and there is, you know, a natural emulation among mothers—that it is impossible to tell you how much we have felt for her.’ ‘Is it weak or plain, or what?’ inquires the other. ‘Weak or plain, my love,’ returns the plausible lady, ‘it’s a fright—a perfect little fright; you never saw such a miserable creature in all your days. Positively you must not let her see one of these beautiful dears again, or you’ll break her heart, you will indeed.—Heaven bless this child, see how she is looking in my face! can you conceive anything prettier than that? If poor Mrs. Finching could only hope—but that’s impossible—and the gifts of Providence, you know—What *did* I do with my pocket-handkerchief!’

What prompts the mother, who dotes upon her children, to comment to her lord that evening on the plausible lady’s engaging qualities and feeling heart, and what is it that procures Mr. and Mrs. Bobtail Widger an immediate invitation to dinner?

THE NICE LITTLE COUPLE

A custom once prevailed in old-fashioned circles, that when a lady or gentleman was unable to sing a song, he or she should enliven the company with a story. As we find ourself in the predicament of not being able to describe (to our own satisfaction) nice little couples in the abstract, we purpose telling in this place a little story about a nice little couple of our acquaintance.

Mr. and Mrs. Chirrup are the nice little couple in question. Mr. Chirrup has the smartness, and something of the brisk, quick manner of a small bird. Mrs. Chirrup is the prettiest of all little women, and has the prettiest little figure conceivable. She has the neatest little foot, and the softest little voice, and the pleasantest little smile, and the tidiest little curls, and the brightest little eyes, and the quietest little manner, and is, in short, altogether one of the most engaging of all little women, dead or alive. She is a condensation of all the domestic virtues,—a pocket edition of the young man's best companion,—a little woman at a very high pressure, with an amazing quantity of goodness and usefulness in an exceedingly small space. Little as she is, Mrs. Chirrup might furnish forth matter for the moral equipment of a score of housewives, six feet high in their stockings—if, in the presence of ladies, we may be allowed the expression—and of corresponding robustness.

Nobody knows all this better than Mr. Chirrup, though he rather takes on that he don't. Accordingly he is very proud of his better-half, and evidently considers himself, as all other people consider him, rather fortunate in having her to wife. We say evidently, because Mr. Chirrup is a warm-hearted little fellow; and if you catch his eye when he has been slyly glancing at Mrs. Chirrup in company, there is a certain complacent twinkle in it, accompanied, perhaps, by a half-expressed toss of the head, which as clearly indicates what has been passing in his mind as if he had put it into words, and shouted it out through a speaking-trumpet. Moreover, Mr. Chirrup has a particularly mild and bird-like manner of calling Mrs. Chirrup 'my dear;' and—for he is of a jocose turn—of cutting little witticisms upon her, and making her the subject of various harmless pleasantries, which nobody enjoys more thoroughly than Mrs. Chirrup herself. Mr. Chirrup, too, now and then affects to deplore his bachelor-days, and to bemoan (with a marvellously contented and smirking face) the loss of his freedom, and the sorrow of his heart at having been taken captive by Mrs. Chirrup—all of which circumstances combine to show the secret triumph and satisfaction of Mr. Chirrup's soul.

We have already had occasion to observe that Mrs. Chirrup is an incomparable housewife. In all the arts of domestic arrangement and management, in all the mysteries of confectionery-making, pickling, and preserving, never was such a thorough adept as that nice little body. She is, besides, a cunning worker in muslin and fine linen, and a special hand at marketing to the very best advantage. But if there be one branch of housekeeping in which she excels to an utterly unparalleled and unprecedented extent, it is in the important one of carving. A roast goose is universally allowed to be the great stumbling-block in the way of young aspirants to perfection in this department of science; many promising carvers, beginning with legs of mutton, and preserving a good reputation through fillets of veal, sirloins of beef, quarters of lamb, fowls, and even ducks, have sunk before a roast goose, and lost caste and character for ever. To Mrs. Chirrup the resolving a goose into its smallest component parts is a pleasant pastime—a practical joke—a thing to be done in a minute or so, without the smallest interruption to the conversation of the time. No handing the dish over to an unfortunate man upon her right or left, no wild sharpening of the knife, no hacking and sawing at an unruly joint, no noise, no splash, no heat, no leaving off in despair; all is confidence and cheerfulness. The dish is set upon the table, the cover is removed; for an instant, and only an instant, you observe that Mrs. Chirrup's attention is distracted; she smiles, but heareth not. You proceed with your story; meanwhile the glittering knife is slowly upraised, both Mrs. Chirrup's wrists are slightly but not ungracefully agitated, she compresses her lips for an instant, then breaks into a smile, and all is over. The legs of the bird slide gently down into a pool of gravy, the wings seem to melt from the body, the breast separates into a row of juicy slices, the smaller and more complicated parts of his anatomy are perfectly developed, a cavern of stuffing is revealed, and the goose is gone!

To dine with Mr. and Mrs. Chirrup is one of the pleasantest things in the world. Mr. Chirrup has a bachelor friend, who lived with him in his own days of single blessedness, and to whom he is mightily attached. Contrary to the usual custom, this bachelor friend is no less a friend of Mrs. Chirrup's, and, consequently, whenever you dine with Mr. and Mrs. Chirrup, you meet the bachelor friend. It would put any reasonably-conditioned mortal into good-humour to observe the entire unanimity which subsists between these three; but there is a quiet welcome dimpling in Mrs. Chirrup's face, a bustling hospitality oozing as it were out of the waistcoat-pockets of Mr. Chirrup, and a patronising enjoyment of their cordiality and satisfaction on the part of the bachelor friend, which is quite delightful. On these occasions Mr. Chirrup usually takes an opportunity of rallying the friend on being single, and the friend retorts on Mr. Chirrup for being married, at which moments some single young ladies present are like to die of laughter; and we have more than once observed them bestow looks upon the friend, which convinces us that his position is by no means a safe one, as, indeed, we hold no bachelor's to be who visits married friends and cracks jokes on wedlock, for certain it is that such men walk among traps and nets and pitfalls innumerable, and often find themselves down upon their knees at the altar rails, taking M. or N. for their wedded wives, before they know anything about the matter.

However, this is no business of Mr. Chirrup's, who talks, and laughs, and drinks his wine, and laughs again, and talks more, until it is time to repair to the drawing-room, where, coffee served and over, Mrs. Chirrup prepares for a round game, by sorting the nicest possible little fish into the nicest possible little pools, and calling Mr. Chirrup to assist her, which Mr. Chirrup does. As they stand side by side, you find that Mr. Chirrup is the least possible shadow of a shade taller than Mrs. Chirrup, and that they are the neatest and best-matched little couple that can be, which the chances are ten to one against your observing with such effect at any other time, unless you see them in the street arm-in-arm, or meet them some rainy day trotting along under a very small umbrella. The round game (at which Mr. Chirrup is the merriest of the party) being done and over, in course of time a nice little tray appears, on which is a nice little supper; and when that is finished likewise, and you have said 'Good night,' you find yourself repeating a dozen times, as you ride home, that there never was such a nice little couple as Mr. and Mrs. Chirrup.

Whether it is that pleasant qualities, being packed more closely in small bodies than in large, come more readily to hand than when they are diffused over a wider space, and have to be gathered together for use, we don't know, but as a general rule,—strengthened like all other rules by its exceptions,—we hold that little people are sprightly and good-natured. The more sprightly and good-natured people we have, the better; therefore, let us wish well to all nice little couples, and hope that they may increase and multiply.

THE EGOTISTICAL COUPLE

Egotism in couples is of two kinds.—It is our purpose to show this by two examples.

The egotistical couple may be young, old, middle-aged, well to do, or ill to do; they may have a small family, a large family, or no family at all. There is no outward sign by which an egotistical couple may be known and avoided. They come upon you unawares; there is no guarding against them. No man can of himself be forewarned or forearmed against an egotistical couple.

The egotistical couple have undergone every calamity, and experienced every pleasurable and painful sensation of which our nature is susceptible. You cannot by possibility tell the egotistical couple anything they don't know, or describe to them anything they have not felt. They have been everything but dead. Sometimes we are tempted to wish they had been even that, but only in our uncharitable moments, which are few and far between.

We happened the other day, in the course of a morning call, to encounter an egotistical couple, nor were we suffered to remain long in ignorance of the fact, for our very first inquiry of the lady of the house brought them into active and vigorous operation. The inquiry was of course touching the lady's health, and the answer happened to be, that she had not been very well. 'Oh, my dear!' said the egotistical lady, 'don't talk of not being well. We have been in *such* a state since we saw you last!'—The lady of the house happening to remark that her lord had not been well either, the egotistical gentleman struck in: 'Never let Briggs complain of not being well—never let Briggs complain, my dear Mrs. Briggs, after what I have undergone within these six weeks. He doesn't know what it is to be ill, he hasn't the least idea of it; not the faintest conception.'—'My dear,' interposed his wife smiling, 'you talk as if it were almost a crime in Mr. Briggs not to have been as ill as we have been, instead of feeling thankful to Providence that both he and our dear Mrs. Briggs are in such blissful ignorance of real suffering.'—'My love,' returned the egotistical gentleman, in a low and pious voice, 'you mistake me;—I feel grateful—

very grateful. I trust our friends may never purchase their experience as dearly as we have bought ours; I hope they never may!'

Having put down Mrs. Briggs upon this theme, and settled the question thus, the egotistical gentleman turned to us, and, after a few preliminary remarks, all tending towards and leading up to the point he had in his mind, inquired if we happened to be acquainted with the Dowager Lady Snorflerer. On our replying in the negative, he presumed we had often met Lord Slang, or beyond all doubt, that we were on intimate terms with Sir Chipkins Glogwog. Finding that we were equally unable to lay claim to either of these distinctions, he expressed great astonishment, and turning to his wife with a retrospective smile, inquired who it was that had told that capital story about the mashed potatoes. 'Who, my dear?' returned the egotistical lady, 'why Sir Chipkins, of course; how can you ask! Don't you remember his applying it to our cook, and saying that you and I were so like the Prince and Princess, that he could almost have sworn we were they?' 'To be sure, I remember that,' said the egotistical gentleman, 'but are you quite certain that didn't apply to the other anecdote about the Emperor of Austria and the pump?' 'Upon my word then, I think it did,' replied his wife. 'To be sure it did,' said the egotistical gentleman, 'it was Slang's story, I remember now, perfectly.' However, it turned out, a few seconds afterwards, that the egotistical gentleman's memory was rather treacherous, as he began to have a misgiving that the story had been told by the Dowager Lady Snorflerer the very last time they dined there; but there appearing, on further consideration, strong circumstantial evidence tending to show that this couldn't be, inasmuch as the Dowager Lady Snorflerer had been, on the occasion in question, wholly engrossed by the egotistical lady, the egotistical gentleman recanted this opinion; and after laying the story at the doors of a great many great people, happily left it at last with the Duke of Scuttlewig:- observing that it was not extraordinary he had forgotten his Grace hitherto, as it often happened that the names of those with whom we were upon the most familiar footing were the very last to present themselves to our thoughts.

It not only appeared that the egotistical couple knew everybody, but that scarcely any event of importance or notoriety had occurred for many years with which they had not been in some way or other connected. Thus we learned that when the well-known attempt upon the life of George the Third was made by Hatfield in Drury Lane theatre, the egotistical gentleman's grandfather sat upon his right hand and was the first man who collared him; and that the egotistical lady's aunt, sitting within a few boxes of the royal party, was the only person in the audience who heard his Majesty exclaim, 'Charlotte, Charlotte, don't be frightened, don't be frightened; they're letting off squibs, they're letting off squibs.' When the fire broke out, which ended in the destruction of the two Houses of Parliament, the egotistical couple, being at the time at a drawing-room window on Blackheath, then and there simultaneously exclaimed, to the astonishment of a whole party—'It's the House of Lords!' Nor was this a solitary instance of their peculiar discernment, for chancing to be (as by a comparison of dates and circumstances they afterwards found) in the same omnibus with Mr. Greenacre, when he carried his victim's head about town in a blue bag, they both remarked a singular twitching in the muscles of his countenance; and walking down Fish Street Hill, a few weeks since, the egotistical gentleman said to his lady—slightly casting up his eyes to the top of the Monument—'There's a boy up there, my dear, reading a Bible. It's very strange. I don't like it.—In five seconds afterwards, Sir,' says the egotistical gentleman, bringing his hands together with one violent clap—'the lad was over!'

Diversifying these topics by the introduction of many others of the same kind, and entertaining us between whiles with a minute account of what weather and diet agreed with them, and what weather and diet disagreed with them, and at what time they usually got up, and at what time went to bed, with many other particulars of their domestic economy too numerous to mention; the egotistical couple at length took their leave, and afforded us an opportunity of doing the same.

Mr. and Mrs. Sliverstone are an egotistical couple of another class, for all the lady's egotism is about her husband, and all the gentleman's about his wife. For example:- Mr. Sliverstone is a clerical gentleman, and occasionally writes sermons, as clerical gentlemen do. If you happen to obtain admission at the street-door while he is so engaged, Mrs. Sliverstone appears on tip-toe, and speaking in a solemn whisper, as if there were at least three or four particular friends up-stairs, all upon the point of death, implores you to be very silent, for Mr. Sliverstone is composing, and she need not say how very important it is that he should not be disturbed. Unwilling to interrupt anything so serious, you hasten to withdraw, with many apologies; but this Mrs. Sliverstone will by no means allow, observing, that she knows you would like to see him, as it is very natural you should, and that she is determined to make a trial for you, as you are a great favourite. So you are led up-stairs—still on tip-toe—to the door of a little back room, in which, as the lady informs you in a whisper, Mr. Sliverstone always writes. No answer being returned to a couple of soft taps, the lady opens the door, and there, sure enough, is Mr. Sliverstone, with dishevelled hair, powdering away with pen, ink, and paper, at a rate which, if he has any power of sustaining it, would settle the longest sermon in no time. At first he is too much absorbed to be roused by this intrusion; but presently looking up, says faintly, ‘Ah!’ and pointing to his desk with a weary and languid smile, extends his hand, and hopes you’ll forgive him. Then Mrs. Sliverstone sits down beside him, and taking his hand in hers, tells you how that Mr. Sliverstone has been shut up there ever since nine o’clock in the morning, (it is by this time twelve at noon,) and how she knows it cannot be good for his health, and is very uneasy about it. Unto this Mr. Sliverstone replies firmly, that ‘It must be done;’ which agonizes Mrs. Sliverstone still more, and she goes on to tell you that such were Mr. Sliverstone’s labours last week—what with the buryings, marryings, churchings, christenings, and all together,—that when he was going up the pulpit stairs on Sunday evening, he was obliged to hold on by the rails, or he would certainly have fallen over into his own pew. Mr. Sliverstone, who has been listening and smiling meekly, says, ‘Not quite so bad as that, not quite so bad!’ he admits though, on cross-examination, that he *was* very near falling upon the verger who was following him up to bolt the door; but adds, that it was his duty as a Christian to fall upon him, if need were, and that he, Mr. Sliverstone, and (possibly the verger too) ought to glory in it.

This sentiment communicates new impulse to Mrs. Sliverstone, who launches into new praises of Mr. Sliverstone’s worth and excellence, to which he listens in the same meek silence, save when he puts in a word of self-denial relative to some question of fact, as—‘Not seventy-two christenings that week, my dear. Only seventy-one, only seventy-one.’ At length his lady has quite concluded, and then he says, Why should he repine, why should he give way, why should he suffer his heart to sink within him? Is it he alone who toils and suffers? What has she gone through, he should like to know? What does she go through every day for him and for society?

With such an exordium Mr. Sliverstone launches out into glowing praises of the conduct of Mrs. Sliverstone in the production of eight young children, and the subsequent rearing and fostering of the same; and thus the husband magnifies the wife, and the wife the husband.

This would be well enough if Mr. and Mrs. Sliverstone kept it to themselves, or even to themselves and a friend or two; but they do not. The more hearers they have, the more egotistical the couple become, and the more anxious they are to make believers in their merits. Perhaps this is the worst kind of egotism. It has not even the poor excuse of being spontaneous, but is the result of a deliberate system and malice aforethought. Mere empty-headed conceit excites our pity, but ostentatious hypocrisy awakens our disgust.

THE COUPLE WHO CODDLE THEMSELVES

Mrs. Merrywinkle's maiden name was Chopper. She was the only child of Mr. and Mrs. Chopper. Her father died when she was, as the play-books express it, 'yet an infant;' and so old Mrs. Chopper, when her daughter married, made the house of her son-in-law her home from that time henceforth, and set up her staff of rest with Mr. and Mrs. Merrywinkle.

Mr. and Mrs. Merrywinkle are a couple who coddle themselves; and the venerable Mrs. Chopper is an aider and abettor in the same.

Mr. Merrywinkle is a rather lean and long-necked gentleman, middle-aged and middle-sized, and usually troubled with a cold in the head. Mrs. Merrywinkle is a delicate-looking lady, with very light hair, and is exceedingly subject to the same unpleasant disorder. The venerable Mrs. Chopper—who is strictly entitled to the appellation, her daughter not being very young, otherwise than by courtesy, at the time of her marriage, which was some years ago—is a mysterious old lady who lurks behind a pair of spectacles, and is afflicted with a chronic disease, respecting which she has taken a vast deal of medical advice, and referred to a vast number of medical books, without meeting any definition of symptoms that at all suits her, or enables her to say, 'That's my complaint.' Indeed, the absence of authentic information upon the subject of this complaint would seem to be Mrs. Chopper's greatest ill, as in all other respects she is an uncommonly hale and hearty gentlewoman.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Chopper wear an extraordinary quantity of flannel, and have a habit of putting their feet in hot water to an unnatural extent. They likewise indulge in chamomile tea and such-like compounds, and rub themselves on the slightest provocation with camphorated spirits and other lotions applicable to mumps, sore-throat, rheumatism, or lumbago.

Mr. Merrywinkle's leaving home to go to business on a damp or wet morning is a very elaborate affair. He puts on wash-leather socks over his stockings, and India-rubber shoes above his boots, and wears under his waistcoat a cuirass of hare-skin. Besides these precautions, he winds a thick shawl round his throat, and blocks up his mouth with a large silk handkerchief. Thus accoutred, and furnished besides with a great-coat and umbrella, he braves the dangers of the streets; travelling in severe weather at a gentle trot, the better to preserve the circulation, and bringing his mouth to the surface to take breath, but very seldom, and with the utmost caution. His office-door opened, he shoots past his clerk at the same pace, and diving into his own private room, closes the door, examines the window-fastenings, and gradually unrobes himself: hanging his pocket-handkerchief on the fender to air, and determining to write to the newspapers about the fog, which, he says, 'has really got to that pitch that it is quite unbearable.'

In this last opinion Mrs. Merrywinkle and her respected mother fully concur; for though not present, their thoughts and tongues are occupied with the same subject, which is their constant theme all day. If anybody happens to call, Mrs. Merrywinkle opines that they must assuredly be mad, and her first salutation is, 'Why, what in the name of goodness can bring you out in such weather? You know you *must* catch your death.' This assurance is corroborated by Mrs. Chopper, who adds, in further confirmation, a dismal legend concerning an individual of her acquaintance who, making a call under precisely parallel circumstances, and being then in the best health and spirits, expired in forty-eight hours afterwards, of a complication of inflammatory disorders. The visitor, rendered not altogether comfortable perhaps by this and other precedents, inquires very affectionately after Mr. Merrywinkle, but by so doing brings about no change of the subject; for Mr. Merrywinkle's name is inseparably connected with his complaints, and his complaints are inseparably connected with Mrs. Merrywinkle's; and when these are done with, Mrs. Chopper, who has been biding her time, cuts in with the chronic disorder—a subject upon which the amiable old lady never leaves off speaking until she is left alone, and very often not then.

But Mr. Merrywinkle comes home to dinner. He is received by Mrs. Merrywinkle and Mrs. Chopper, who, on his remarking that he thinks his feet are damp, turn pale as ashes and drag him up-stairs, imploring him to have them rubbed directly with a dry coarse towel. Rubbed they are, one by Mrs. Merrywinkle and one by Mrs. Chopper, until the friction causes Mr. Merrywinkle to make horrible faces, and look as if he had been smelling very powerful onions; when they desist, and the patient, provided for his better security with thick worsted stockings and list slippers, is borne down-stairs to dinner. Now, the dinner is always a good one, the appetites of the diners being delicate, and requiring a little of what Mrs. Merrywinkle calls ‘tittivation;’ the secret of which is understood to lie in good cookery and tasteful spices, and which process is so successfully performed in the present instance, that both Mr. and Mrs. Merrywinkle eat a remarkably good dinner, and even the afflicted Mrs. Chopper wields her knife and fork with much of the spirit and elasticity of youth. But Mr. Merrywinkle, in his desire to gratify his appetite, is not unmindful of his health, for he has a bottle of carbonate of soda with which to qualify his porter, and a little pair of scales in which to weigh it out. Neither in his anxiety to take care of his body is he unmindful of the welfare of his immortal part, as he always prays that for what he is going to receive he may be made truly thankful; and in order that he may be as thankful as possible, eats and drinks to the utmost.

Either from eating and drinking so much, or from being the victim of this constitutional infirmity, among others, Mr. Merrywinkle, after two or three glasses of wine, falls fast asleep; and he has scarcely closed his eyes, when Mrs. Merrywinkle and Mrs. Chopper fall asleep likewise. It is on awakening at tea-time that their most alarming symptoms prevail; for then Mr. Merrywinkle feels as if his temples were tightly bound round with the chain of the street-door, and Mrs. Merrywinkle as if she had made a hearty dinner of half-hundredweights, and Mrs. Chopper as if cold water were running down her back, and oyster-knives with sharp points were plunging of their own accord into her ribs. Symptoms like these are enough to make people peevish, and no wonder that they remain so until supper-time, doing little more than doze and complain, unless Mr. Merrywinkle calls out very loudly to a servant ‘to keep that draught out,’ or rushes into the passage to flourish his fist in the countenance of the twopenny-postman, for daring to give such a knock as he had just performed at the door of a private gentleman with nerves.

Supper, coming after dinner, should consist of some gentle provocative; and therefore the tittivating art is again in requisition, and again—done honour to by Mr. and Mrs. Merrywinkle, still comforted and abetted by Mrs. Chopper. After supper, it is ten to one but the last-named old lady becomes worse, and is led off to bed with the chronic complaint in full vigour. Mr. and Mrs. Merrywinkle, having administered to her a warm cordial, which is something of the strongest, then repair to their own room, where Mr. Merrywinkle, with his legs and feet in hot water, superintends the mulling of some wine which he is to drink at the very moment he plunges into bed, while Mrs. Merrywinkle, in garments whose nature is unknown to and unimagined by all but married men, takes four small pills with a spasmodic look between each, and finally comes to something hot and fragrant out of another little saucepan, which serves as her composing-draught for the night.

There is another kind of couple who coddle themselves, and who do so at a cheaper rate and on more spare diet, because they are niggardly and parsimonious; for which reason they are kind enough to coddle their visitors too. It is unnecessary to describe them, for our readers may rest assured of the accuracy of these general principles:- that all couples who coddle themselves are selfish and slothful,—that they charge upon every wind that blows, every rain that falls, and every vapour that hangs in the air, the evils which arise from their own imprudence or the gloom which is engendered in their own tempers,—and that all men and women, in couples or otherwise, who fall into exclusive habits of self-indulgence, and forget their natural sympathy and close connexion with everybody and everything in the world around them, not only neglect the first duty of life, but, by a happy retributive justice, deprive themselves of its truest and best enjoyment.

THE OLD COUPLE

They are grandfather and grandmother to a dozen grown people and have great-grandchildren besides; their bodies are bent, their hair is grey, their step tottering and infirm. Is this the lightsome pair whose wedding was so merry, and have the young couple indeed grown old so soon!

It seems but yesterday—and yet what a host of cares and griefs are crowded into the intervening time which, reckoned by them, lengthens out into a century! How many new associations have wreathed themselves about their hearts since then! The old time is gone, and a new time has come for others—not for them. They are but the rusting link that feebly joins the two, and is silently loosening its hold and dropping asunder.

It seems but yesterday—and yet three of their children have sunk into the grave, and the tree that shades it has grown quite old. One was an infant—they wept for him; the next a girl, a slight young thing too delicate for earth—her loss was hard indeed to bear. The third, a man. That was the worst of all, but even that grief is softened now.

It seems but yesterday—and yet how the gay and laughing faces of that bright morning have changed and vanished from above ground! Faint likenesses of some remain about them yet, but they are very faint and scarcely to be traced. The rest are only seen in dreams, and even they are unlike what they were, in eyes so old and dim.

One or two dresses from the bridal wardrobe are yet preserved. They are of a quaint and antique fashion, and seldom seen except in pictures. White has turned yellow, and brighter hues have faded. Do you wonder, child? The wrinkled face was once as smooth as yours, the eyes as bright, the shrivelled skin as fair and delicate. It is the work of hands that have been dust these many years.

Where are the fairy lovers of that happy day whose annual return comes upon the old man and his wife, like the echo of some village bell which has long been silent? Let yonder peevish bachelor, racked by rheumatic pains, and quarrelling with the world, let him answer to the question. He recollects something of a favourite playmate; her name was Lucy—so they tell him. He is not sure whether she was married, or went abroad, or died. It is a long while ago, and he don’t remember.

Is nothing as it used to be; does no one feel, or think, or act, as in days of yore? Yes. There is an aged woman who once lived servant with the old lady's father, and is sheltered in an alms-house not far off. She is still attached to the family, and loves them all; she nursed the children in her lap, and tended in their sickness those who are no more. Her old mistress has still something of youth in her eyes; the young ladies are like what she was but not quite so handsome, nor are the gentlemen as stately as Mr. Harvey used to be. She has seen a great deal of trouble; her husband and her son died long ago; but she has got over that, and is happy now—quite happy.

If ever her attachment to her old protectors were disturbed by fresher cares and hopes, it has long since resumed its former current. It has filled the void in the poor creature's heart, and replaced the love of kindred. Death has not left her alone, and this, with a roof above her head, and a warm hearth to sit by, makes her cheerful and contented. Does she remember the marriage of great-grandmamma? Ay, that she does, as well—as if it was only yesterday. You wouldn't think it to look at her now, and perhaps she ought not to say so of herself, but she was as smart a young girl then as you'd wish to see. She recollects she took a friend of hers up-stairs to see Miss Emma dressed for church; her name was—ah! she forgets the name, but she remembers that she was a very pretty girl, and that she married not long afterwards, and lived—it has quite passed out of her mind where she lived, but she knows she had a bad husband who used her ill, and that she died in Lambeth work-house. Dear, dear, in Lambeth workhouse!

And the old couple—have they no comfort or enjoyment of existence? See them among their grandchildren and great-grandchildren; how garrulous they are, how they compare one with another, and insist on likenesses which no one else can see; how gently the old lady lectures the girls on points of breeding and decorum, and points the moral by anecdotes of herself in her young days—how the old gentleman chuckles over boyish feats and roguish tricks, and tells long stories of a 'barring-out' achieved at the school he went to: which was very wrong, he tells the boys, and never to be imitated of course, but which he cannot help letting them know was very pleasant too—especially when he kissed the master's niece. This last, however, is a point on which the old lady is very tender, for she considers it a shocking and indelicate thing to talk about, and always says so whenever it is mentioned, never failing to observe that he ought to be very penitent for having been so sinful. So the old gentleman gets no further, and what the schoolmaster’s niece said afterwards (which he is always going to tell) is lost to posterity.

The old gentleman is eighty years old, to-day—‘Eighty years old, Crofts, and never had a headache,’ he tells the barber who shaves him (the barber being a young fellow, and very subject to that complaint). ‘That’s a great age, Crofts,’ says the old gentleman. ‘I don’t think it’s sich a wery great age, Sir,’ replied the barber. ‘Crofts,’ rejoins the old gentleman, ‘you’re talking nonsense to me. Eighty not a great age?’ ‘It’s a wery great age, Sir, for a gentleman to be as healthy and active as you are,’ returns the barber; ‘but my grandfather, Sir, he was ninety-four.’ ‘You don’t mean that, Crofts?’ says the old gentleman. ‘I do indeed, Sir,’ retorts the barber, ‘and as wiggerous as Julius Caesar, my grandfather was.’ The old gentleman muses a little time, and then says, ‘What did he die of, Crofts?’ ‘He died accidentally, Sir,’ returns the barber; ‘he didn’t mean to do it. He always would go a running about the streets—walking never satisfied *his* spirit—and he run against a post and died of a hurt in his chest.’ The old gentleman says no more until the shaving is concluded, and then he gives Crofts half-a-crown to drink his health. He is a little doubtful of the barber’s veracity afterwards, and telling the anecdote to the old lady, affects to make very light of it—though to be sure (he adds) there was old Parr, and in some parts of England, ninety-five or so is a common age, quite a common age.

This morning the old couple are cheerful but serious, recalling old times as well as they can remember them, and dwelling upon many passages in their past lives which the day brings to mind. The old lady reads aloud, in a tremulous voice, out of a great Bible, and the old gentleman with his hand to his ear, listens with profound respect. When the book is closed, they sit silent for a short space, and afterwards resume their conversation, with a reference perhaps to their dead children, as a subject not unsuited to that they have just left. By degrees they are led to consider which of those who survive are the most like those dearly-remembered objects, and so they fall into a less solemn strain, and become cheerful again.

How many people in all, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and one or two intimate friends of the family, dine together to-day at the eldest son’s to congratulate the old couple, and wish them many happy returns, is a calculation beyond our powers; but this we know, that the old couple no sooner present themselves, very sprucely and carefully attired, than there is a violent shouting and rushing forward of the younger branches with all manner of presents, such as pocket-books, pencil-cases, pen-wipers, watch-papers, pin-cushions, sleeve-buckles, worked-slippers, watch-guards, and even a nutmeg-grater: the latter article being presented by a very chubby and very little boy, who exhibits it in great triumph as an extraordinary variety. The old couple's emotion at these tokens of remembrance occasions quite a pathetic scene, of which the chief ingredients are a vast quantity of kissing and hugging, and repeated wipings of small eyes and noses with small square pocket-handkerchiefs, which don't come at all easily out of small pockets. Even the peevish bachelor is moved, and he says, as he presents the old gentleman with a queer sort of antique ring from his own finger, that he'll be de'ed if he doesn't think he looks younger than he did ten years ago.

But the great time is after dinner, when the dessert and wine are on the table, which is pushed back to make plenty of room, and they are all gathered in a large circle round the fire, for it is then—the glasses being filled, and everybody ready to drink the toast—that two great-grandchildren rush out at a given signal, and presently return, dragging in old Jane Adams leaning upon her crutched stick, and trembling with age and pleasure. Who so popular as poor old Jane, nurse and story-teller in ordinary to two generations; and who so happy as she, striving to bend her stiff limbs into a curtsey, while tears of pleasure steal down her withered cheeks!

The old couple sit side by side, and the old time seems like yesterday indeed. Looking back upon the path they have travelled, its dust and ashes disappear; the flowers that withered long ago, show brightly again upon its borders, and they grow young once more in the youth of those about them.

CONCLUSION

We have taken for the subjects of the foregoing moral essays, twelve samples of married couples, carefully selected from a large stock on hand, open to the inspection of all comers. These samples are intended for the benefit of the rising generation of both sexes, and, for their more easy and pleasant information, have been separately ticketed and labelled in the manner they have seen.

We have purposely excluded from consideration the couple in which the lady reigns paramount and supreme, holding such cases to be of a very unnatural kind, and like hideous births and other monstrous deformities, only to be discreetly and sparingly exhibited.

And here our self-imposed task would have ended, but that to those young ladies and gentlemen who are yet revolving singly round the church, awaiting the advent of that time when the mysterious laws of attraction shall draw them towards it in couples, we are desirous of addressing a few last words.

Before marriage and afterwards, let them learn to centre all their hopes of real and lasting happiness in their own fireside; let them cherish the faith that in home, and all the English virtues which the love of home engenders, lies the only true source of domestic felicity; let them believe that round the household gods, contentment and tranquillity cluster in their gentlest and most graceful forms; and that many weary hunters of happiness through the noisy world, have learnt this truth too late, and found a cheerful spirit and a quiet mind only at home at last.

How much may depend on the education of daughters and the conduct of mothers; how much of the brightest part of our old national character may be perpetuated by their wisdom or frittered away by their folly—how much of it may have been lost already, and how much more in danger of vanishing every day—are questions too weighty for discussion here, but well deserving a little serious consideration from all young couples nevertheless.

To that one young couple on whose bright destiny the thoughts of nations are fixed, may the youth of England look, and not in vain, for an example. From that one young couple, blessed and favoured as they are, may they learn that even the glare and glitter of a court, the splendour of a palace, and the pomp and glory of a throne, yield in their power of conferring happiness, to domestic worth and virtue. From that one young couple may they learn that the crown of a great empire, costly and jewelled though it be, gives place in the estimation of a Queen to the plain gold ring that links her woman's nature to that of tens of thousands of her humble subjects, and guards in her woman's heart one secret store of tenderness, whose proudest boast shall be that it knows no Royalty save Nature's own, and no pride of birth but being the child of heaven!

So shall the highest young couple in the land for once hear the truth, when men throw up their caps, and cry with loving shouts -

GOD BLESS THEM.

THE END OF
Sketches of Young Couples

SKETCHES OF YOUNG GENTLEMEN

TO THE YOUNG LADIES
OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND;
ALSO
THE YOUNG LADIES
OF
THE PRINCIPALITY OF WALES,
AND LIKEWISE
THE YOUNG LADIES
RESIDENT IN THE ISLES OF
GUERNSEY, JERSEY, ALDERNEY, AND SARK,
THE HUMBLE DEDICATION OF THEIR DEVOTED ADMIRER,

SHEWETH, -

THAT your Dedicator has perused, with feelings of virtuous indignation, a work purporting to be ‘Sketches of Young Ladies;’ written by Quiz, illustrated by Phiz, and published in one volume, square twelvemo.

THAT after an attentive and vigilant perusal of the said work, your Dedicator is humbly of opinion that so many libels, upon your Honourable sex, were never contained in any previously published work, in twelvemo or any other mo.

THAT in the title page and preface to the said work, your Honourable sex are described and classified as animals; and although your Dedicator is not at present prepared to deny that you *are* animals, still he humbly submits that it is not polite to call you so.

THAT in the aforesaid preface, your Honourable sex are also described as Troglodites, which, being a hard word, may, for aught your Honourable sex or your Dedicator can say to the contrary, be an injurious and disrespectful appellation.

THAT the author of the said work applied himself to his task in malice prepense and with wickedness aforethought; a fact which, your Dedicator contends, is sufficiently demonstrated, by his assuming the name of Quiz, which, your Dedicator submits, denotes a foregone conclusion, and implies an intention of quizzing.

THAT in the execution of his evil design, the said Quiz, or author of the said work, must have betrayed some trust or confidence reposed in him by some members of your Honourable sex, otherwise he never could have acquired so much information relative to the manners and customs of your Honourable sex in general.

THAT actuated by these considerations, and further moved by various slanders and insinuations respecting your Honourable sex contained in the said work, square twelvemo, entitled ‘Sketches of Young Ladies,’ your Dedicator ventures to produce another work, square twelvemo, entitled ‘Sketches of Young Gentlemen,’ of which he now solicits your acceptance and approval.

THAT as the Young Ladies are the best companions of the Young Gentlemen, so the Young Gentlemen should be the best companions of the Young Ladies; and extending the comparison from animals (to quote the disrespectful language of the said Quiz) to inanimate objects, your Dedicator humbly suggests, that such of your Honourable sex as purchased the bane should possess themselves of the antidote, and that those of your Honourable sex who were not rash enough to take the first, should lose no time in swallowing the last,—prevention being in all cases better than cure, as we are informed upon the authority, not only of general acknowledgment, but also of traditionary wisdom.

THAT with reference to the said bane and antidote, your Dedicator has no further remarks to make, than are comprised in the printed directions issued with Doctor Morison’s pills; namely, that whenever your Honourable sex take twenty-five of Number, 1, you will be pleased to take fifty of Number 2, without delay.

And your Dedicator shall ever pray, &c.

THE BASHFUL YOUNG GENTLEMAN

We found ourself seated at a small dinner party the other day, opposite a stranger of such singular appearance and manner, that he irresistibly attracted our attention.

This was a fresh-coloured young gentleman, with as good a promise of light whisker as one might wish to see, and possessed of a very velvet-like, soft-looking countenance. We do not use the latter term invidiously, but merely to denote a pair of smooth, plump, highly-coloured cheeks of capacious dimensions, and a mouth rather remarkable for the fresh hue of the lips than for any marked or striking expression it presented. His whole face was suffused with a crimson blush, and bore that downcast, timid, retiring look, which betokens a man ill at ease with himself.

There was nothing in these symptoms to attract more than a passing remark, but our attention had been originally drawn to the bashful young gentleman, on his first appearance in the drawing-room above-stairs, into which he was no sooner introduced, than making his way towards us who were standing in a window, and wholly neglecting several persons who warmly accosted him, he seized our hand with visible emotion, and pressed it with a convulsive grasp for a good couple of minutes, after which he dived in a nervous manner across the room, oversetting in his way a fine little girl of six years and a quarter old—and shrouding himself behind some hangings, was seen no more, until the eagle eye of the hostess detecting him in his concealment, on the announcement of dinner, he was requested to pair off with a lively single lady, of two or three and thirty.

This most flattering salutation from a perfect stranger, would have gratified us not a little as a token of his having held us in high respect, and for that reason been desirous of our acquaintance, if we had not suspected from the first, that the young gentleman, in making a desperate effort to get through the ceremony of introduction, had, in the bewilderment of his ideas, shaken hands with us at random. This impression was fully confirmed by the subsequent behaviour of the bashful young gentleman in question, which we noted particularly, with the view of ascertaining whether we were right in our conjecture.

The young gentleman seated himself at table with evident misgivings, and turning sharp round to pay attention to some observation of his loquacious neighbour, overset his bread. There was nothing very bad in this, and if he had had the presence of mind to let it go, and say nothing about it, nobody but the man who had laid the cloth would have been a bit the wiser; but the young gentleman in various semi-successful attempts to prevent its fall, played with it a little, as gentlemen in the streets may be seen to do with their hats on a windy day, and then giving the roll a smart rap in his anxiety to catch it, knocked it with great adroitness into a tureen of white soup at some distance, to the unspeakable terror and disturbance of a very amiable bald gentleman, who was dispensing the contents. We thought the bashful young gentleman would have gone off in an apoplectic fit, consequent upon the violent rush of blood to his face at the occurrence of this catastrophe.

From this moment we perceived, in the phraseology of the fancy, that it was ‘all up’ with the bashful young gentleman, and so indeed it was. Several benevolent persons endeavoured to relieve his embarrassment by taking wine with him, but finding that it only augmented his sufferings, and that after mingling sherry, champagne, hock, and moselle together, he applied the greater part of the mixture externally, instead of internally, they gradually dropped off, and left him to the exclusive care of the talkative lady, who, not noting the wildness of his eye, firmly believed she had secured a listener. He broke a glass or two in the course of the meal, and disappeared shortly afterwards; it is inferred that he went away in some confusion, inasmuch as he left the house in another gentleman’s coat, and the footman’s hat.

This little incident led us to reflect upon the most prominent characteristics of bashful young gentlemen in the abstract; and as this portable volume will be the great text-book of young ladies in all future generations, we record them here for their guidance and behoof.

If the bashful young gentleman, in turning a street corner, chance to stumble suddenly upon two or three young ladies of his acquaintance, nothing can exceed his confusion and agitation. His first impulse is to make a great variety of bows, and dart past them, which he does until, observing that they wish to stop, but are uncertain whether to do so or not, he makes several feints of returning, which causes them to do the same; and at length, after a great quantity of unnecessary dodging and falling up against the other passengers, he returns and shakes hands most affectionately with all of them, in doing which he knocks out of their grasp sundry little parcels, which he hastily picks up, and returns very muddy and disordered. The chances are that the bashful young gentleman then observes it is very fine weather, and being reminded that it has only just left off raining for the first time these three days, he blushes very much, and smiles as if he had said a very good thing. The young lady who was most anxious to speak, here inquires, with an air of great commiseration, how his dear sister Harriet is to-day; to which the young gentleman, without the slightest consideration, replies with many thanks, that she is remarkably well. ‘Well, Mr. Hopkins!’ cries the young lady, ‘why, we heard she was bled yesterday evening, and have been perfectly miserable about her.’ ‘Oh, ah,’ says the young gentleman, ‘so she was. Oh, she’s very ill, very ill indeed.’ The young gentleman then shakes his head, and looks very desponding (he has been smiling perpetually up to this time), and after a short pause, gives his glove a great wrench at the wrist, and says, with a strong emphasis on the adjective, ‘*Good* morning, *good* morning.’ And making a great number of bows in acknowledgment of several little messages to his sister, walks backward a few paces, and comes with great violence against a lamp-post, knocking his hat off in the contact, which in his mental confusion and bodily pain he is going to walk away without, until a great roar from a carter attracts his attention, when he picks it up, and tries to smile cheerfully to the young ladies, who are looking back, and who, he has the satisfaction of seeing, are all laughing heartily.

At a quadrille party, the bashful young gentleman always remains as near the entrance of the room as possible, from which position he smiles at the people he knows as they come in, and sometimes steps forward to shake hands with more intimate friends: a process which on each repetition seems to turn him a deeper scarlet than before. He declines dancing the first set or two, observing, in a faint voice, that he would rather wait a little; but at length is absolutely compelled to allow himself to be introduced to a partner, when he is led, in a great heat and blushing furiously, across the room to a spot where half-a-dozen unknown ladies are congregated together.

‘Miss Lambert, let me introduce Mr. Hopkins for the next quadrille.’ Miss Lambert inclines her head graciously. Mr. Hopkins bows, and his fair conductress disappears, leaving Mr. Hopkins, as he too well knows, to make himself agreeable. The young lady more than half expects that the bashful young gentleman will say something, and the bashful young gentleman feeling this, seriously thinks whether he has got anything to say, which, upon mature reflection, he is rather disposed to conclude he has not, since nothing occurs to him. Meanwhile, the young lady, after several inspections of her *bouquet*, all made in the expectation that the bashful young gentleman is going to talk, whispers her mamma, who is sitting next her, which whisper the bashful young gentleman immediately suspects (and possibly with very good reason) must be about *him*. In this comfortable condition he remains until it is time to 'stand up,' when murmuring a 'Will you allow me?' he gives the young lady his arm, and after inquiring where she will stand, and receiving a reply that she has no choice, conducts her to the remotest corner of the quadrille, and making one attempt at conversation, which turns out a desperate failure, preserves a profound silence until it is all over, when he walks her twice round the room, deposits her in her old seat, and retires in confusion.

A married bashful gentleman—for these bashful gentlemen do get married sometimes; how it is ever brought about, is a mystery to us—a married bashful gentleman either causes his wife to appear bold by contrast, or merges her proper importance in his own insignificance. Bashful young gentlemen should be cured, or avoided. They are never hopeless, and never will be, while female beauty and attractions retain their influence, as any young lady will find, who may think it worth while on this confident assurance to take a patient in hand.

THE OUT-AND-OUT YOUNG GENTLEMAN

Out-and-out young gentlemen may be divided into two classes—those who have something to do, and those who have nothing. I shall commence with the former, because that species come more frequently under the notice of young ladies, whom it is our province to warn and to instruct.

The out-and-out young gentleman is usually no great dresser, his instructions to his tailor being all comprehended in the one general direction to 'make that what's-a-name a regular bang-up sort of thing.' For some years past, the favourite costume of the out-and-out young gentleman has been a rough pilot coat, with two gilt hooks and eyes to the velvet collar; buttons somewhat larger than crown-pieces; a black or fancy neckerchief, loosely tied; a wide-brimmed hat, with a low crown; tightish inexpressibles, and iron-shod boots. Out of doors he sometimes carries a large ash stick, but only on special occasions, for he prefers keeping his hands in his coat pockets. He smokes at all hours, of course, and swears considerably.

The out-and-out young gentleman is employed in a city counting-house or solicitor's office, in which he does as little as he possibly can: his chief places of resort are, the streets, the taverns, and the theatres. In the streets at evening time, out-and-out young gentlemen have a pleasant custom of walking six or eight abreast, thus driving females and other inoffensive persons into the road, which never fails to afford them the highest satisfaction, especially if there be any immediate danger of their being run over, which enhances the fun of the thing materially. In all places of public resort, the out-and-outers are careful to select each a seat to himself, upon which he lies at full length, and (if the weather be very dirty, but not in any other case) he lies with his knees up, and the soles of his boots planted firmly on the cushion, so that if any low fellow should ask him to make room for a lady, he takes ample revenge upon her dress, without going at all out of his way to do it. He always sits with his hat on, and flourishes his stick in the air while the play is proceeding, with a dignified contempt of the performance; if it be possible for one or two out-and-out young gentlemen to get up a little crowding in the passages, they are quite in their element, squeezing, pushing, whooping, and shouting in the most humorous manner possible. If they can only succeed in irritating the gentleman who has a family of daughters under his charge, they are like to die with laughing, and boast of it among their companions for a week afterwards, adding, that one or two of them were ‘devilish fine girls,’ and that they really thought the youngest would have fainted, which was the only thing wanted to render the joke complete.

If the out-and-out young gentleman have a mother and sisters, of course he treats them with becoming contempt, inasmuch as they (poor things!) having no notion of life or gaiety, are far too weak-spirited and moping for him. Sometimes, however, on a birth-day or at Christmas-time, he cannot very well help accompanying them to a party at some old friend’s, with which view he comes home when they have been dressed an hour or two, smelling very strongly of tobacco and spirits, and after exchanging his rough coat for some more suitable attire (in which however he loses nothing of the out-and-outer), gets into the coach and grumbles all the way at his own good nature: his bitter reflections aggravated by the recollection, that Tom Smith has taken the chair at a little impromptu dinner at a fighting man’s, and that a set-to was to take place on a dining-table, between the fighting man and his brother-in-law, which is probably ‘coming off’ at that very instant.

As the out-and-out young gentleman is by no means at his ease in ladies’ society, he shrinks into a corner of the drawing-room when they reach the friend’s, and unless one of his sisters is kind enough to talk to him, remains there without being much troubled by the attentions of other people, until he espies, lingering outside the door, another gentleman, whom he at once knows, by his air and manner (for there is a kind of free-masonry in the craft), to be a brother out-and-outer, and towards whom he accordingly makes his way. Conversation being soon opened by some casual remark, the second out-and-outer confidentially informs the first, that he is one of the rough sort and hates that kind of thing, only he couldn’t very well be off coming; to which the other replies, that that’s just his case—‘and I’ll tell you what,’ continues the out-and-outer in a whisper, ‘I should like a glass of warm brandy and water just now,’—‘Or a pint of stout and a pipe,’ suggests the other out-and-outer.

The discovery is at once made that they are sympathetic souls; each of them says at the same moment, that he sees the other understands what’s what: and they become fast friends at once, more especially when it appears, that the second out-and-outer is no other than a gentleman, long favourably known to his familiars as ‘Mr. Warmint Blake,’ who upon divers occasions has distinguished himself in a manner that would not have disgraced the fighting man, and who—having been a pretty long time about town—had the honour of once shaking hands with the celebrated Mr. Thurtell himself.

At supper, these gentlemen greatly distinguish themselves, brightening up very much when the ladies leave the table, and proclaiming aloud their intention of beginning to spend the evening—a process which is generally understood to be satisfactorily performed, when a great deal of wine is drunk and a great deal of noise made, both of which feats the out-and-out young gentlemen execute to perfection. Having protracted their sitting until long after the host and the other guests have adjourned to the drawing-room, and finding that they have drained the decanters empty, they follow them thither with complexions rather heightened, and faces rather bloated with wine; and the agitated lady of the house whispers her friends as they waltz together, to the great terror of the whole room, that ‘both Mr. Blake and Mr. Dummins are very nice sort of young men in their way, only they are eccentric persons, and unfortunately *rather too wild*!’

The remaining class of out-and-out young gentlemen is composed of persons, who, having no money of their own and a soul above earning any, enjoy similar pleasures, nobody knows how. These respectable gentlemen, without aiming quite so much at the out-and-out in external appearance, are distinguished by all the same amiable and attractive characteristics, in an equal or perhaps greater degree, and now and then find their way into society, through the medium of the other class of out-and-out young gentlemen, who will sometimes carry them home, and who usually pay their tavern bills. As they are equally gentlemanly, clever, witty, intelligent, wise, and well-bred, we need scarcely have recommended them to the peculiar consideration of the young ladies, if it were not that some of the gentle creatures whom we hold in such high respect, are perhaps a little too apt to confound a great many heavier terms with the light word eccentricity, which we beg them henceforth to take in a strictly Johnsonian sense, without any liberality or latitude of construction.

THE VERY FRIENDLY YOUNG GENTLEMAN

We know—and all people know—so many specimens of this class, that in selecting the few heads our limits enable us to take from a great number, we have been induced to give the very friendly young gentleman the preference over many others, to whose claims upon a more cursory view of the question we had felt disposed to assign the priority.

The very friendly young gentleman is very friendly to everybody, but he attaches himself particularly to two, or at most to three families: regulating his choice by their dinners, their circle of acquaintance, or some other criterion in which he has an immediate interest. He is of any age between twenty and forty, unmarried of course, must be fond of children, and is expected to make himself generally useful if possible. Let us illustrate our meaning by an example, which is the shortest mode and the clearest.

We encountered one day, by chance, an old friend of whom we had lost sight for some years, and who—expressing a strong anxiety to renew our former intimacy—urged us to dine with him on an early day, that we might talk over old times. We readily assented, adding, that we hoped we should be alone. ‘Oh, certainly, certainly,’ said our friend, ‘not a soul with us but Mincin.’ ‘And who is Mincin?’ was our natural inquiry. ‘O don’t mind him,’ replied our friend, ‘he’s a most particular friend of mine, and a very friendly fellow you will find him;’ and so he left us.

‘We thought no more about Mincin until we duly presented ourselves at the house next day, when, after a hearty welcome, our friend motioned towards a gentleman who had been previously showing his teeth by the fireplace, and gave us to understand that it was Mr. Mincin, of whom he had spoken. It required no great penetration on our part to discover at once that Mr. Mincin was in every respect a very friendly young gentleman.

‘I am delighted,’ said Mincin, hastily advancing, and pressing our hand warmly between both of his, ‘I am delighted, I am sure, to make your acquaintance—(here he smiled)—very much delighted indeed—(here he exhibited a little emotion)—I assure you that I have looked forward to it anxiously for a very long time:’ here he released our hands, and rubbing his own, observed, that the day was severe, but that he was delighted to perceive from our appearance that it agreed with us wonderfully; and then went on to observe, that, notwithstanding the coldness of the weather, he had that morning seen in the paper an exceedingly curious paragraph, to the effect, that there was now in the garden of Mr. Wilkins of Chichester, a pumpkin, measuring four feet in height, and eleven feet seven inches in circumference, which he looked upon as a very extraordinary piece of intelligence. We ventured to remark, that we had a dim recollection of having once or twice before observed a similar paragraph in the public prints, upon which Mr. Mincin took us confidentially by the button, and said, Exactly, exactly, to be sure, we were very right, and he wondered what the editors meant by putting in such things. Who the deuce, he should like to know, did they suppose cared about them? that struck him as being the best of it.

The lady of the house appeared shortly afterwards, and Mr. Mincin's friendliness, as will readily be supposed, suffered no diminution in consequence; he exerted much strength and skill in wheeling a large easy-chair up to the fire, and the lady being seated in it, carefully closed the door, stirred the fire, and looked to the windows to see that they admitted no air; having satisfied himself upon all these points, he expressed himself quite easy in his mind, and begged to know how she found herself to-day. Upon the lady's replying very well, Mr. Mincin (who it appeared was a medical gentleman) offered some general remarks upon the nature and treatment of colds in the head, which occupied us agreeably until dinner-time. During the meal, he devoted himself to complimenting everybody, not forgetting himself, so that we were an uncommonly agreeable quartette.

'I'll tell you what, Capper,' said Mr. Mincin to our host, as he closed the room door after the lady had retired, 'you have very great reason to be fond of your wife. Sweet woman, Mrs. Capper, sir!' 'Nay, Mincin—I beg,' interposed the host, as we were about to reply that Mrs. Capper unquestionably was particularly sweet. 'Pray, Mincin, don't.' 'Why not?' exclaimed Mr. Mincin, 'why not? Why should you feel any delicacy before your old friend—*our* old friend, if I may be allowed to call you so, sir; why should you, I ask?' We of course wished to know why he should also, upon which our friend admitted that Mrs. Capper *was* a very sweet woman, at which admission Mr. Mincin cried 'Bravo!' and begged to propose Mrs. Capper with heartfelt enthusiasm, whereupon our host said, 'Thank you, Mincin,' with deep feeling; and gave us, in a low voice, to understand, that Mincin had saved Mrs. Capper's cousin's life no less than fourteen times in a year and a half, which he considered no common circumstance—an opinion to which we most cordially subscribed.

Now that we three were left to entertain ourselves with conversation, Mr. Mincin's extreme friendliness became every moment more apparent; he was so amazingly friendly, indeed, that it was impossible to talk about anything in which he had not the chief concern. We happened to allude to some affairs in which our friend and we had been mutually engaged nearly fourteen years before, when Mr. Mincin was all at once reminded of a joke which our friend had made on that day four years, which he positively must insist upon telling—and which he did tell accordingly, with many pleasant recollections of what he said, and what Mrs. Capper said, and how he well remembered that they had been to the play with orders on the very night previous, and had seen Romeo and Juliet, and the pantomime, and how Mrs. Capper being faint had been led into the lobby, where she smiled, said it was nothing after all, and went back again, with many other interesting and absorbing particulars: after which the friendly young gentleman went on to assure us, that our friend had experienced a marvellously prophetic opinion of that same pantomime, which was of such an admirable kind, that two morning papers took the same view next day: to this our friend replied, with a little triumph, that in that instance he had some reason to think he had been correct, which gave the friendly young gentleman occasion to believe that our friend was always correct; and so we went on, until our friend, filling a bumper, said he must drink one glass to his dear friend Mincin, than whom he would say no man saved the lives of his acquaintances more, or had a more friendly heart. Finally, our friend having emptied his glass, said, 'God bless you, Mincin,'—and Mr. Mincin and he shook hands across the table with much affection and earnestness.

But great as the friendly young gentleman is, in a limited scene like this, he plays the same part on a larger scale with increased *éclat*. Mr. Mincin is invited to an evening party with his dear friends the Martins, where he meets his dear friends the Cappers, and his dear friends the Watsons, and a hundred other dear friends too numerous to mention. He is as much at home with the Martins as with the Cappers; but how exquisitely he balances his attentions, and divides them among his dear friends! If he flirts with one of the Miss Watsons, he has one little Martin on the sofa pulling his hair, and the other little Martin on the carpet riding on his foot. He carries Mrs. Watson down to supper on one arm, and Miss Martin on the other, and takes wine so judiciously, and in such exact order, that it is impossible for the most punctilious old lady to consider herself neglected. If any young lady, being prevailed upon to sing, become nervous afterwards, Mr. Mincin leads her tenderly into the next room, and restores her with port wine, which she must take medicinally. If any gentleman be standing by the piano during the progress of the ballad, Mr. Mincin seizes him by the arm at one point of the melody, and softly beating time the while with his head, expresses in dumb show his intense perception of the delicacy of the passage. If anybody's self-love is to be flattered, Mr. Mincin is at hand. If anybody's overweening vanity is to be pampered, Mr. Mincin will surfeit it. What wonder that people of all stations and ages recognise Mr. Mincin's friendliness; that he is universally allowed to be handsome as amiable; that mothers think him an oracle, daughters a dear, brothers a beau, and fathers a wonder! And who would not have the reputation of the very friendly young gentleman?

THE MILITARY YOUNG GENTLEMAN

We are rather at a loss to imagine how it has come to pass that military young gentlemen have obtained so much favour in the eyes of the young ladies of this kingdom. We cannot think so lightly of them as to suppose that the mere circumstance of a man's wearing a red coat ensures him a ready passport to their regard; and even if this were the case, it would be no satisfactory explanation of the circumstance, because, although the analogy may in some degree hold good in the case of mail coachmen and guards, still general postmen wear red coats, and *they* are not to our knowledge better received than other men; nor are firemen either, who wear (or used to wear) not only red coats, but very resplendent and massive badges besides—much larger than epaulettes. Neither do the twopenny post-office boys, if the result of our inquiries be correct, find any peculiar favour in woman's eyes, although they wear very bright red jackets, and have the additional advantage of constantly appearing in public on horseback, which last circumstance may be naturally supposed to be greatly in their favour.

We have sometimes thought that this phenomenon may take its rise in the conventional behaviour of captains and colonels and other gentlemen in red coats on the stage, where they are invariably represented as fine swaggering fellows, talking of nothing but charming girls, their king and country, their honour, and their debts, and crowing over the inferior classes of the community, whom they occasionally treat with a little gentlemanly swindling, no less to the improvement and pleasure of the audience, than to the satisfaction and approval of the choice spirits who consort with them. But we will not devote these pages to our speculations upon the subject, inasmuch as our business at the present moment is not so much with the young ladies who are bewitched by her Majesty's livery as with the young gentlemen whose heads are turned by it. For 'heads' we had written 'brains;' but upon consideration, we think the former the more appropriate word of the two.

These young gentlemen may be divided into two classes—young gentlemen who are actually in the army, and young gentlemen who, having an intense and enthusiastic admiration for all things appertaining to a military life, are compelled by adverse fortune or adverse relations to wear out their existence in some ignoble counting-house. We will take this latter description of military young gentlemen first.

The whole heart and soul of the military young gentleman are concentrated in his favourite topic. There is nothing that he is so learned upon as uniforms; he will tell you, without faltering for an instant, what the habiliments of any one regiment are turned up with, what regiment wear stripes down the outside and inside of the leg, and how many buttons the Tenth had on their coats; he knows to a fraction how many yards and odd inches of gold lace it takes to make an ensign in the Guards; is deeply read in the comparative merits of different bands, and the apparelling of trumpeters; and is very luminous indeed in descanting upon 'crack regiments,' and the 'crack' gentlemen who compose them, of whose mightiness and grandeur he is never tired of telling.

We were suggesting to a military young gentleman only the other day, after he had related to us several dazzling instances of the profusion of half-a-dozen honourable ensign somebodies or nobodies in the articles of kid gloves and polished boots, that possibly 'cracked' regiments would be an improvement upon 'crack,' as being a more expressive and appropriate designation, when he suddenly interrupted us by pulling out his watch, and observing that he must hurry off to the Park in a cab, or he would be too late to hear the band play. Not wishing to interfere with so important an engagement, and being in fact already slightly overwhelmed by the anecdotes of the honourable ensigns afore-mentioned, we made no attempt to detain the military young gentleman, but parted company with ready good-will.

Some three or four hours afterwards, we chanced to be walking down Whitehall, on the Admiralty side of the way, when, as we drew near to one of the little stone places in which a couple of horse soldiers mount guard in the daytime, we were attracted by the motionless appearance and eager gaze of a young gentleman, who was devouring both man and horse with his eyes, so eagerly, that he seemed deaf and blind to all that was passing around him. We were not much surprised at the discovery that it was our friend, the military young gentleman, but we *were* a little astonished when we returned from a walk to South Lambeth to find him still there, looking on with the same intensity as before. As it was a very windy day, we felt bound to awaken the young gentleman from his reverie, when he inquired of us with great enthusiasm, whether 'that was not a glorious spectacle,' and proceeded to give us a detailed account of the weight of every article of the spectacle's trappings, from the man's gloves to the horse's shoes.

We have made it a practice since, to take the Horse Guards in our daily walk, and we find it is the custom of military young gentlemen to plant themselves opposite the sentries, and contemplate them at leisure, in periods varying from fifteen minutes to fifty, and averaging twenty-five. We were much struck a day or two since, by the behaviour of a very promising young butcher who (evincing an interest in the service, which cannot be too strongly commanded or encouraged), after a prolonged inspection of the sentry, proceeded to handle his boots with great curiosity, and as much composure and indifference as if the man were wax-work.

But the really military young gentleman is waiting all this time, and at the very moment that an apology rises to our lips, he emerges from the barrack gate (he is quartered in a garrison town), and takes the way towards the high street. He wears his undress uniform, which somewhat mars the glory of his outward man; but still how great, how grand, he is! What a happy mixture of ease and ferocity in his gait and carriage, and how lightly he carries that dreadful sword under his arm, making no more ado about it than if it were a silk umbrella! The lion is sleeping: only think if an enemy were in sight, how soon he'd whip it out of the scabbard, and what a terrible fellow he would be!

But he walks on, thinking of nothing less than blood and slaughter; and now he comes in sight of three other military young gentlemen, arm-in-arm, who are bearing down towards him, clanking their iron heels on the pavement, and clashing their swords with a noise, which should cause all peaceful men to quail at heart. They stop to talk. See how the flaxen-haired young gentleman with the weak legs—he who has his pocket-handkerchief thrust into the breast of his coat-glares upon the fainthearted civilians who linger to look upon his glory; how the next young gentleman elevates his head in the air, and majestically places his arms a-kimbo, while the third stands with his legs very wide apart, and clasps his hands behind him. Well may we inquire—not in familiar jest, but in respectful earnest—if you call that nothing. Oh! if some encroaching foreign power—the Emperor of Russia, for instance, or any of those deep fellows, could only see those military young gentlemen as they move on together towards the billiard-room over the way, wouldn't he tremble a little!

And then, at the Theatre at night, when the performances are by command of Colonel Fitz-Sordust and the officers of the garrison—what a splendid sight it is! How sternly the defenders of their country look round the house as if in mute assurance to the audience, that they may make themselves comfortable regarding any foreign invasion, for they (the military young gentlemen) are keeping a sharp look-out, and are ready for anything. And what a contrast between them, and that stage-box full of grey-headed officers with tokens of many battles about them, who have nothing at all in common with the military young gentlemen, and who—but for an old-fashioned kind of manly dignity in their looks and bearing—might be common hard-working soldiers for anything they take the pains to announce to the contrary!

Ah! here is a family just come in who recognise the flaxen-headed young gentleman; and the flaxen-headed young gentleman recognises them too, only he doesn't care to show it just now. Very well done indeed! He talks louder to the little group of military young gentlemen who are standing by him, and coughs to induce some ladies in the next box but one to look round, in order that their faces may undergo the same ordeal of criticism to which they have subjected, in not a wholly inaudible tone, the majority of the female portion of the audience. Oh! a gentleman in the same box looks round as if he were disposed to resent this as an impertinence; and the flaxen-headed young gentleman sees his friends at once, and hurries away to them with the most charming cordiality.

Three young ladies, one young man, and the mamma of the party, receive the military young gentleman with great warmth and politeness, and in five minutes afterwards the military young gentleman, stimulated by the mamma, introduces the two other military young gentlemen with whom he was walking in the morning, who take their seats behind the young ladies and commence conversation; whereat the mamma bestows a triumphant bow upon a rival mamma, who has not succeeded in decoying any military young gentlemen, and prepares to consider her visitors from that moment three of the most elegant and superior young gentlemen in the whole world.

THE POLITICAL YOUNG GENTLEMAN

Once upon a time—*not* in the days when pigs drank wine, but in a more recent period of our history—it was customary to banish politics when ladies were present. If this usage still prevailed, we should have had no chapter for political young gentlemen, for ladies would have neither known nor cared what kind of monster a political young gentleman was. But as this good custom in common with many others has 'gone out,' and left no word when it is likely to be home again; as political young ladies are by no means rare, and political young gentlemen the very reverse of scarce, we are bound in the strict discharge of our most responsible duty not to neglect this natural division of our subject.

If the political young gentleman be resident in a country town (and there *are* political young gentlemen in country towns sometimes), he is wholly absorbed in his politics; as a pair of purple spectacles communicate the same uniform tint to all objects near and remote, so the political glasses, with which the young gentleman assists his mental vision, give to everything the hue and tinge of party feeling. The political young gentleman would as soon think of being struck with the beauty of a young lady in the opposite interest, as he would dream of marrying his sister to the opposite member.

If the political young gentleman be a Conservative, he has usually some vague ideas about Ireland and the Pope which he cannot very clearly explain, but which he knows are the right sort of thing, and not to be very easily got over by the other side. He has also some choice sentences regarding church and state, culled from the banners in use at the last election, with which he intersperses his conversation at intervals with surprising effect. But his great topic is the constitution, upon which he will declaim, by the hour together, with much heat and fury; not that he has any particular information on the subject, but because he knows that the constitution is somehow church and state, and church and state somehow the constitution, and that the fellows on the other side say it isn't, which is quite a sufficient reason for him to say it is, and to stick to it.

Perhaps his greatest topic of all, though, is the people. If a fight takes place in a populous town, in which many noses are broken, and a few windows, the young gentleman throws down the newspaper with a triumphant air, and exclaims, ‘Here’s your precious people!’ If half-a-dozen boys run across the course at race time, when it ought to be kept clear, the young gentleman looks indignantly round, and begs you to observe the conduct of the people; if the gallery demand a hornpipe between the play and the afterpiece, the same young gentleman cries ‘No’ and ‘Shame’ till he is hoarse, and then inquires with a sneer what you think of popular moderation *now*; in short, the people form a never-failing theme for him; and when the attorney, on the side of his candidate, dwells upon it with great power of eloquence at election time, as he never fails to do, the young gentleman and his friends, and the body they head, cheer with great violence against *the other people*, with whom, of course, they have no possible connexion. In much the same manner the audience at a theatre never fail to be highly amused with any jokes at the expense of the public—always laughing heartily at some other public, and never at themselves.

If the political young gentleman be a Radical, he is usually a very profound person indeed, having great store of theoretical questions to put to you, with an infinite variety of possible cases and logical deductions therefrom. If he be of the utilitarian school, too, which is more than probable, he is particularly pleasant company, having many ingenious remarks to offer upon the voluntary principle and various cheerful disquisitions connected with the population of the country, the position of Great Britain in the scale of nations, and the balance of power. Then he is exceedingly well versed in all doctrines of political economy as laid down in the newspapers, and knows a great many parliamentary speeches by heart; nay, he has a small stock of aphorisms, none of them exceeding a couple of lines in length, which will settle the toughest question and leave you nothing to say. He gives all the young ladies to understand, that Miss Martineau is the greatest woman that ever lived; and when they praise the good looks of Mr. Hawkins the new member, says he’s very well for a representative, all things considered, but he wants a little calling to account, and he is more than half afraid it will be necessary to bring him down on his knees for that vote on the miscellaneous estimates. At this, the young ladies express much wonderment, and say surely a Member of Parliament is not to be brought upon his knees so easily; in reply to which the political young gentleman smiles sternly, and throws out dark hints regarding the speedy arrival of that day, when Members of Parliament will be paid salaries, and required to render weekly accounts of their proceedings, at which the young ladies utter many expressions of astonishment and incredulity, while their lady-mothers regard the prophecy as little else than blasphemous.

It is extremely improving and interesting to hear two political young gentlemen, of diverse opinions, discuss some great question across a dinner-table; such as, whether, if the public were admitted to Westminster Abbey for nothing, they would or would not convey small chisels and hammers in their pockets, and immediately set about chipping all the noses off the statues; or whether, if they once got into the Tower for a shilling, they would not insist upon trying the crown on their own heads, and loading and firing off all the small arms in the armoury, to the great discomposure of Whitechapel and the Minories. Upon these, and many other momentous questions which agitate the public mind in these desperate days, they will discourse with great vehemence and irritation for a considerable time together, both leaving off precisely where they began, and each thoroughly persuaded that he has got the better of the other.

In society, at assemblies, balls, and playhouses, these political young gentlemen are perpetually on the watch for a political allusion, or anything which can be tortured or construed into being one; when, thrusting themselves into the very smallest openings for their favourite discourse, they fall upon the unhappy company tooth and nail. They have recently had many favourable opportunities of opening in churches, but as there the clergyman has it all his own way, and must not be contradicted, whatever politics he preaches, they are fain to hold their tongues until they reach the outer door, though at the imminent risk of bursting in the effort.

As such discussions can please nobody but the talkative parties concerned, we hope they will henceforth take the hint and discontinue them, otherwise we now give them warning, that the ladies have our advice to discountenance such talkers altogether.

THE DOMESTIC YOUNG GENTLEMAN

Let us make a slight sketch of our amiable friend, Mr. Felix Nixon. We are strongly disposed to think, that if we put him in this place, he will answer our purpose without another word of comment.

Felix, then, is a young gentleman who lives at home with his mother, just within the twopenny-post office circle of three miles from St. Martin-le-Grand. He wears Indiarubber goloshes when the weather is at all damp, and always has a silk handkerchief neatly folded up in the right-hand pocket of his great-coat, to tie over his mouth when he goes home at night; moreover, being rather near-sighted, he carries spectacles for particular occasions, and has a weakish tremulous voice, of which he makes great use, for he talks as much as any old lady breathing.

The two chief subjects of Felix's discourse, are himself and his mother, both of whom would appear to be very wonderful and interesting persons. As Felix and his mother are seldom apart in body, so Felix and his mother are scarcely ever separate in spirit. If you ask Felix how he finds himself to-day, he prefaces his reply with a long and minute bulletin of his mother's state of health; and the good lady in her turn, edifies her acquaintance with a circumstantial and alarming account, how he sneezed four times and coughed once after being out in the rain the other night, but having his feet promptly put into hot water, and his head into a flannel-something, which we will not describe more particularly than by this delicate allusion, was happily brought round by the next morning, and enabled to go to business as usual.

Our friend is not a very adventurous or hot-headed person, but he has passed through many dangers, as his mother can testify: there is one great story in particular, concerning a hackney coachman who wanted to overcharge him one night for bringing them home from the play, upon which Felix gave the aforesaid coachman a look which his mother thought would have crushed him to the earth, but which did not crush him quite, for he continued to demand another sixpence, notwithstanding that Felix took out his pocket-book, and, with the aid of a flat candle, pointed out the fare in print, which the coachman obstinately disregarding, he shut the street-door with a slam which his mother shudders to think of; and then, roused to the most appalling pitch of passion by the coachman knocking a double knock to show that he was by no means convinced, he broke with uncontrollable force from his parent and the servant girl, and running into the street without his hat, actually shook his fist at the coachman, and came back again with a face as white, Mrs. Nixon says, looking about her for a simile, as white as that ceiling. She never will forget his fury that night, Never!

To this account Felix listens with a solemn face, occasionally looking at you to see how it affects you, and when his mother has made an end of it, adds that he looked at every coachman he met for three weeks afterwards, in hopes that he might see the scoundrel; whereupon Mrs. Nixon, with an exclamation of terror, requests to know what he would have done to him if he *had* seen him, at which Felix smiling darkly and clenching his right fist, she exclaims, ‘Goodness gracious!’ with a distracted air, and insists upon extorting a promise that he never will on any account do anything so rash, which her dutiful son—it being something more than three years since the offence was committed—reluctantly concedes, and his mother, shaking her head prophetically, fears with a sigh that his spirit will lead him into something violent yet. The discourse then, by an easy transition, turns upon the spirit which glows within the bosom of Felix, upon which point Felix himself becomes eloquent, and relates a thrilling anecdote of the time when he used to sit up till two o’clock in the morning reading French, and how his mother used to say, ‘Felix, you will make yourself ill, I know you will;’ and how *he* used to say, ‘Mother, I don’t care—I will do it;’ and how at last his mother privately procured a doctor to come and see him, who declared, the moment he felt his pulse, that if he had gone on reading one night more—only one night more—he must have put a blister on each temple, and another between his shoulders; and who, as it was, sat down upon the instant, and writing a prescription for a blue pill, said it must be taken immediately, or he wouldn’t answer for the consequences. The recital of these and many other moving perils of the like nature, constantly harrows up the feelings of Mr. Nixon’s friends.

Mrs. Nixon has a tolerably extensive circle of female acquaintance, being a good-humoured, talkative, bustling little body, and to the unmarried girls among them she is constantly vaunting the virtues of her son, hinting that she will be a very happy person who wins him, but that they must mind their P's and Q's, for he is very particular, and terribly severe upon young ladies. At this last caution the young ladies resident in the same row, who happen to be spending the evening there, put their pocket-handkerchiefs before their mouths, and are troubled with a short cough; just then Felix knocks at the door, and his mother drawing the tea-table nearer the fire, calls out to him as he takes off his boots in the back parlour that he needn't mind coming in in his slippers, for there are only the two Miss Greys and Miss Thompson, and she is quite sure they will excuse *him*, and nodding to the two Miss Greys, she adds, in a whisper, that Julia Thompson is a great favourite with Felix, at which intelligence the short cough comes again, and Miss Thompson in particular is greatly troubled with it, till Felix coming in, very faint for want of his tea, changes the subject of discourse, and enables her to laugh out boldly and tell Amelia Grey not to be so foolish. Here they all three laugh, and Mrs. Nixon says they are giddy girls; in which stage of the proceedings, Felix, who has by this time refreshened himself with the grateful herb that 'cheers but not inebriates,' removes his cup from his countenance and says with a knowing smile, that all girls are; whereat his admiring mamma pats him on the back and tells him not to be sly, which calls forth a general laugh from the young ladies, and another smile from Felix, who, thinking he looks very sly indeed, is perfectly satisfied.

Tea being over, the young ladies resume their work, and Felix insists upon holding a skein of silk while Miss Thompson winds it on a card. This process having been performed to the satisfaction of all parties, he brings down his flute in compliance with a request from the youngest Miss Grey, and plays divers tunes out of a very small music-book till supper-time, when he is very facetious and talkative indeed. Finally, after half a tumblerful of warm sherry and water, he gallantly puts on his goloshes over his slippers, and telling Miss Thompson's servant to run on first and get the door open, escorts that young lady to her house, five doors off: the Miss Greys who live in the next house but one stopping to peep with merry faces from their own door till he comes back again, when they call out 'Very well, Mr. Felix,' and trip into the passage with a laugh more musical than any flute that was ever played.

Felix is rather prim in his appearance, and perhaps a little priggish about his books and flute, and so forth, which have all their peculiar corners of peculiar shelves in his bedroom; indeed all his female acquaintance (and they are good judges) have long ago set him down as a thorough old bachelor. He is a favourite with them however, in a certain way, as an honest, inoffensive, kind-hearted creature; and as his peculiarities harm nobody, not even himself, we are induced to hope that many who are not personally acquainted with him will take our good word in his behalf, and be content to leave him to a long continuance of his harmless existence.

THE CENSORIOUS YOUNG GENTLEMAN

There is an amiable kind of young gentleman going about in society, upon whom, after much experience of him, and considerable turning over of the subject in our mind, we feel it our duty to affix the above appellation. Young ladies mildly call him a ‘sarcastic’ young gentleman, or a ‘severe’ young gentleman. We, who know better, beg to acquaint them with the fact, that he is merely a censorious young gentleman, and nothing else.

The censorious young gentleman has the reputation among his familiars of a remarkably clever person, which he maintains by receiving all intelligence and expressing all opinions with a dubious sneer, accompanied with a half smile, expressive of anything you please but good-humour. This sets people about thinking what on earth the censorious young gentleman means, and they speedily arrive at the conclusion that he means something very deep indeed; for they reason in this way—‘This young gentleman looks so very knowing that he must mean something, and as I am by no means a dull individual, what a very deep meaning he must have if I can’t find it out!’ It is extraordinary how soon a censorious young gentleman may make a reputation in his own small circle if he bear this in his mind, and regulate his proceedings accordingly.

As young ladies are generally—not curious, but laudably desirous to acquire information, the censorious young gentleman is much talked about among them, and many surmises are hazarded regarding him. ‘I wonder,’ exclaims the eldest Miss Greenwood, laying down her work to turn up the lamp, ‘I wonder whether Mr. Fairfax will ever be married.’ ‘Bless me, dear,’ cries Miss Marshall, ‘what ever made you think of him?’ ‘Really I hardly know,’ replies Miss Greenwood; ‘he is such a very mysterious person, that I often wonder about him.’ ‘Well, to tell you the truth,’ replies Miss Marshall, ‘and so do I.’ Here two other young ladies profess that they are constantly doing the like, and all present appear in the same condition except one young lady, who, not scrupling to state that she considers Mr. Fairfax ‘a horror,’ draws down all the opposition of the others, which having been expressed in a great many ejaculatory passages, such as ‘Well, did I ever!'—and 'Lor, Emily, dear!' ma takes up the subject, and gravely states, that she must say she does not think Mr. Fairfax by any means a horror, but rather takes him to be a young man of very great ability; 'and I am quite sure,' adds the worthy lady, 'he always means a great deal more than he says.'

The door opens at this point of the disclosure, and who of all people alive walks into the room, but the very Mr. Fairfax, who has been the subject of conversation! 'Well, it really is curious,' cries ma, 'we were at that very moment talking about you.' 'You did me great honour,' replies Mr. Fairfax; 'may I venture to ask what you were saying?' 'Why, if you must know,' returns the eldest girl, 'we were remarking what a very mysterious man you are.' 'Ay, ay!' observes Mr. Fairfax, 'Indeed!' Now Mr. Fairfax says this ay, ay, and indeed, which are slight words enough in themselves, with so very unfathomable an air, and accompanies them with such a very equivocal smile, that ma and the young ladies are more than ever convinced that he means an immensity, and so tell him he is a very dangerous man, and seems to be always thinking ill of somebody, which is precisely the sort of character the censorious young gentleman is most desirous to establish; wherefore he says, 'Oh, dear, no,' in a tone, obviously intended to mean, 'You have me there,' and which gives them to understand that they have hit the right nail on the very centre of its head.

When the conversation ranges from the mystery overhanging the censorious young gentleman's behaviour, to the general topics of the day, he sustains his character to admiration. He considers the new tragedy well enough for a new tragedy, but Lord bless us—well, no matter; he could say a great deal on that point, but he would rather not, lest he should be thought ill-natured, as he knows he would be. 'But is not Mr. So-and-so's performance truly charming?' inquires a young lady. 'Charming!' replies the censorious young gentleman. 'Oh, dear, yes, certainly; very charming—oh, very charming indeed.' After this, he stirs the fire, smiling contemptuously all the while: and a modest young gentleman, who has been a silent listener, thinks what a great thing it must be, to have such a critical judgment. Of music, pictures, books, and poetry, the censorious young gentleman has an equally fine conception. As to men and women, he can tell all about them at a glance. 'Now let us hear your opinion of young Mrs. Barker,' says some great believer in the powers of Mr. Fairfax, 'but don't be too severe.' 'I never am severe,' replies the censorious young gentleman.

‘Well, never mind that now. She is very lady-like, is she not?’ ‘Lady-like!’ repeats the censorious young gentleman (for he always repeats when he is at a loss for anything to say). ‘Did you observe her manner? Bless my heart and soul, Mrs. Thompson, did you observe her manner?—that’s all I ask.’ ‘I thought I had done so,’ rejoins the poor lady, much perplexed; ‘I did not observe it very closely perhaps.’ ‘Oh, not very closely,’ rejoins the censorious young gentleman, triumphantly. ‘Very good; then *I* did. Let us talk no more about her.’ The censorious young gentleman purses up his lips, and nods his head sagely, as he says this; and it is forthwith whispered about, that Mr. Fairfax (who, though he is a little prejudiced, must be admitted to be a very excellent judge) has observed something exceedingly odd in Mrs. Barker’s manner.

THE FUNNY YOUNG GENTLEMAN

As one funny young gentleman will serve as a sample of all funny young Gentlemen we purpose merely to note down the conduct and behaviour of an individual specimen of this class, whom we happened to meet at an annual family Christmas party in the course of this very last Christmas that ever came.

We were all seated round a blazing fire which crackled pleasantly as the guests talked merrily and the urn steamed cheerily—for, being an old-fashioned party, there *was* an urn, and a teapot besides—when there came a postman's knock at the door, so violent and sudden, that it startled the whole circle, and actually caused two or three very interesting and most unaffected young ladies to scream aloud and to exhibit many afflicting symptoms of terror and distress, until they had been several times assured by their respective adorers, that they were in no danger. We were about to remark that it was surely beyond post-time, and must have been a runaway knock, when our host, who had hitherto been paralysed with wonder, sank into a chair in a perfect ecstasy of laughter, and offered to lay twenty pounds that it was that droll dog Griggins. He had no sooner said this, than the majority of the company and all the children of the house burst into a roar of laughter too, as if some inimitable joke flashed upon them simultaneously, and gave vent to various exclamations of—To be sure it must be Griggins, and How like him that was, and What spirits he was always in! with many other commendatory remarks of the like nature.

Not having the happiness to know Griggins, we became extremely desirous to see so pleasant a fellow, the more especially as a stout gentleman with a powdered head, who was sitting with his breeches buckles almost touching the hob, whispered us he was a wit of the first water, when the door opened, and Mr. Griggins being announced, presented himself, amidst another shout of laughter and a loud clapping of hands from the younger branches. This welcome he acknowledged by sundry contortions of countenance, imitative of the clown in one of the new pantomimes, which were so extremely successful, that one stout gentleman rolled upon an ottoman in a paroxysm of delight, protesting, with many gasps, that if somebody didn't make that fellow Griggins leave off, he would be the death of him, he knew. At this the company only laughed more boisterously than before, and as we always like to accommodate our tone and spirit if possible to the humour of any society in which we find ourself, we laughed with the rest, and exclaimed, ‘Oh! capital, capital!’ as loud as any of them.

When he had quite exhausted all beholders, Mr. Griggins received the welcomes and congratulations of the circle, and went through the needful introductions with much ease and many puns. This ceremony over, he avowed his intention of sitting in somebody’s lap unless the young ladies made room for him on the sofa, which being done, after a great deal of tittering and pleasantry, he squeezed himself among them, and likened his condition to that of love among the roses. At this novel jest we all roared once more. ‘You should consider yourself highly honoured, sir,’ said we. ‘Sir,’ replied Mr. Griggins, ‘you do me proud.’ Here everybody laughed again; and the stout gentleman by the fire whispered in our ear that Griggins was making a dead set at us.

The tea-things having been removed, we all sat down to a round game, and here Mr. Griggins shone forth with peculiar brilliancy, abstracting other people’s fish, and looking over their hands in the most comical manner. He made one most excellent joke in snuffing a candle, which was neither more nor less than setting fire to the hair of a pale young gentleman who sat next him, and afterwards begging his pardon with considerable humour. As the young gentleman could not see the joke however, possibly in consequence of its being on the top of his own head, it did not go off quite as well as it might have done; indeed, the young gentleman was heard to murmur some general references to ‘impertinence,’ and a ‘rascal,’ and to state the number of his lodgings in an angry tone—a turn of the conversation which might have been productive of slaughterous consequences, if a young lady, betrothed to the young gentleman, had not used her immediate influence to bring about a reconciliation: emphatically declaring in an agitated whisper, intended for his peculiar edification but audible to the whole table, that if he went on in that way, she never would think of him otherwise than as a friend, though as that she must always regard him. At this terrible threat the young gentleman became calm, and the young lady, overcome by the revulsion of feeling, instantaneously fainted.

Mr. Griggins’s spirits were slightly depressed for a short period by this unlooked-for result of such a harmless pleasantry, but being promptly elevated by the attentions of the host and several glasses of wine, he soon recovered, and became even more vivacious than before, insomuch that the stout gentleman previously referred to, assured us that although he had known him since he was *that* high (something smaller than a nutmeg-grater), he had never beheld him in such excellent cue.

When the round game and several games at blind man's buff which followed it were all over, and we were going down to supper, the inexhaustible Mr. Griggins produced a small sprig of mistletoe from his waistcoat pocket, and commenced a general kissing of the assembled females, which occasioned great commotion and much excitement. We observed that several young gentlemen—including the young gentleman with the pale countenance—were greatly scandalised at this indecorous proceeding, and talked very big among themselves in corners; and we observed too, that several young ladies when remonstrated with by the aforesaid young gentlemen, called each other to witness how they had struggled, and protested vehemently that it was very rude, and that they were surprised at Mrs. Brown's allowing it, and that they couldn't bear it, and had no patience with such impertinence. But such is the gentle and forgiving nature of woman, that although we looked very narrowly for it, we could not detect the slightest harshness in the subsequent treatment of Mr. Griggins. Indeed, upon the whole, it struck us that among the ladies he seemed rather more popular than before!

To recount all the drollery of Mr. Griggins at supper, would fill such a tiny volume as this, to the very bottom of the outside cover. How he drank out of other people's glasses, and ate of other people's bread, how he frightened into screaming convulsions a little boy who was sitting up to supper in a high chair, by sinking below the table and suddenly reappearing with a mask on; how the hostess was really surprised that anybody could find a pleasure in tormenting children, and how the host frowned at the hostess, and felt convinced that Mr. Griggins had done it with the very best intentions; how Mr. Griggins explained, and how everybody's good-humour was restored but the child's;—to tell these and a hundred other things ever so briefly, would occupy more of our room and our readers' patience, than either they or we can conveniently spare. Therefore we change the subject, merely observing that we have offered no description of the funny young gentleman's personal appearance, believing that almost every society has a Griggins of its own, and leaving all readers to supply the deficiency, according to the particular circumstances of their particular case.

THE THEATRICAL YOUNG GENTLEMAN

All gentlemen who love the drama—and there are few gentlemen who are not attached to the most intellectual and rational of all our amusements—do not come within this definition. As we have no mean relish for theatrical entertainments ourself, we are disinterestedly anxious that this should be perfectly understood.

The theatrical young gentleman has early and important information on all theatrical topics. 'Well,' says he, abruptly, when you meet him in the street, 'here's a pretty to-do. Flimkins has thrown up his part in the melodrama at the Surrey.'—'And what's to be done?' you inquire with as much gravity as you can counterfeit. 'Ah, that's the point,' replies the theatrical young gentleman, looking very serious; 'Boozle declines it; positively declines it. From all I am told, I should say it was decidedly in Boozle's line, and that he would be very likely to make a great hit in it; but he objects on the ground of Flimkins having been put up in the part first, and says no earthly power shall induce him to take the character. It's a fine part, too—excellent business, I'm told. He has to kill six people in the course of the piece, and to fight over a bridge in red fire, which is as safe a card, you know, as can be. Don't mention it; but I hear that the last scene, when he is first poisoned, and then stabbed, by Mrs. Flimkins as Vengedora, will be the greatest thing that has been done these many years.' With this piece of news, and laying his finger on his lips as a caution for you not to excite the town with it, the theatrical young gentleman hurries away.

The theatrical young gentleman, from often frequenting the different theatrical establishments, has pet and familiar names for them all. Thus Covent-Garden is the garden, Drury-Lane the lane, the Victoria the vic, and the Olympic the pic. Actresses, too, are always designated by their surnames only, as Taylor, Nisbett, Faucit, Honey; that talented and lady-like girl Sheriff, that clever little creature Horton, and so on. In the same manner he prefixes Christian names when he mentions actors, as Charley Young, Jemmy Buckstone, Fred. Yates, Paul Bedford. When he is at a loss for a Christian name, the word 'old' applied indiscriminately answers quite as well: as old Charley Matthews at Vestris's, old Harley, and old Braham. He has a great knowledge of the private proceedings of actresses, especially of their getting married, and can tell you in a breath half-a-dozen who have changed their names without avowing it. Whenever an alteration of this kind is made in the playbills, he will remind you that he let you into the secret six months ago.

The theatrical young gentleman has a great reverence for all that is connected with the stage department of the different theatres. He would, at any time, prefer going a street or two out of his way, to omitting to pass a stage-entrance, into which he always looks with a curious and searching eye. If he can only identify a popular actor in the street, he is in a perfect transport of delight; and no sooner meets him, than he hurries back, and walks a few paces in front of him, so that he can turn round from time to time, and have a good stare at his features. He looks upon a theatrical-fund dinner as one of the most enchanting festivities ever known; and thinks that to be a member of the Garrick Club, and see so many actors in their plain clothes, must be one of the highest gratifications the world can bestow.

The theatrical young gentleman is a constant half-price visitor at one or other of the theatres, and has an infinite relish for all pieces which display the fullest resources of the establishment. He likes to place implicit reliance upon the play-bills when he goes to see a show-piece, and works himself up to such a pitch of enthusiasm, as not only to believe (if the bills say so) that there are three hundred and seventy-five people on the stage at one time in the last scene, but is highly indignant with you, unless you believe it also. He considers that if the stage be opened from the foot-lights to the back wall, in any new play, the piece is a triumph of dramatic writing, and applauds accordingly. He has a great notion of trap-doors too; and thinks any character going down or coming up a trap (no matter whether he be an angel or a demon—they both do it occasionally) one of the most interesting feats in the whole range of scenic illusion.

Besides these acquirements, he has several veracious accounts to communicate of the private manners and customs of different actors, which, during the pauses of a quadrille, he usually communicates to his partner, or imparts to his neighbour at a supper table. Thus he is advised, that Mr. Liston always had a footman in gorgeous livery waiting at the side-scene with a brandy bottle and tumbler, to administer half a pint or so of spirit to him every time he came off, without which assistance he must infallibly have fainted. He knows for a fact, that, after an arduous part, Mr. George Bennett is put between two feather beds, to absorb the perspiration; and is credibly informed, that Mr. Baker has, for many years, submitted to a course of lukewarm toast-and-water, to qualify him to sustain his favourite characters. He looks upon Mr. Fitz Ball as the principal dramatic genius and poet of the day; but holds that there are great writers extant besides him,—in proof whereof he refers you to various dramas and melodramas recently produced, of which he takes in all the sixpenny and three-penny editions as fast as they appear.

The theatrical young gentleman is a great advocate for violence of emotion and redundancy of action. If a father has to curse a child upon the stage, he likes to see it done in the thorough-going style, with no mistake about it: to which end it is essential that the child should follow the father on her knees, and be knocked violently over on her face by the old gentleman as he goes into a small cottage, and shuts the door behind him. He likes to see a blessing invoked upon the young lady, when the old gentleman repents, with equal earnestness, and accompanied by the usual conventional forms, which consist of the old gentleman looking anxiously up into the clouds, as if to see whether it rains, and then spreading an imaginary tablecloth in the air over the young lady's head—soft music playing all the while. Upon these, and other points of a similar kind, the theatrical young gentleman is a great critic indeed. He is likewise very acute in judging of natural expressions of the passions, and knows precisely the frown, wink, nod, or leer, which stands for any one of them, or the means by which it may be converted into any other: as jealousy, with a good stamp of the right foot, becomes anger; or wildness, with the hands clasped before the throat, instead of tearing the wig, is passionate love. If you venture to express a doubt of the accuracy of any of these portraitures, the theatrical young gentleman assures you, with a haughty smile, that it always has been done in that way, and he supposes they are not going to change it at this time of day to please you; to which, of course, you meekly reply that you suppose not.

There are innumerable disquisitions of this nature, in which the theatrical young gentleman is very profound, especially to ladies whom he is most in the habit of entertaining with them; but as we have no space to recapitulate them at greater length, we must rest content with calling the attention of the young ladies in general to the theatrical young gentlemen of their own acquaintance.

THE POETICAL YOUNG GENTLEMAN

Time was, and not very long ago either, when a singular epidemic raged among the young gentlemen, vast numbers of whom, under the influence of the malady, tore off their neckerchiefs, turned down their shirt collars, and exhibited themselves in the open streets with bare throats and dejected countenances, before the eyes of an astonished public. These were poetical young gentlemen. The custom was gradually found to be inconvenient, as involving the necessity of too much clean linen and too large washing bills, and these outward symptoms have consequently passed away; but we are disposed to think, notwithstanding, that the number of poetical young gentlemen is considerably on the increase.

We know a poetical young gentleman—a very poetical young gentleman. We do not mean to say that he is troubled with the gift of poesy in any remarkable degree, but his countenance is of a plaintive and melancholy cast, his manner is abstracted and bespeaks affliction of soul: he seldom has his hair cut, and often talks about being an outcast and wanting a kindred spirit; from which, as well as from many general observations in which he is wont to indulge, concerning mysterious impulses, and yearnings of the heart, and the supremacy of intellect gilding all earthly things with the glowing magic of immortal verse, it is clear to all his friends that he has been stricken poetical.

The favourite attitude of the poetical young gentleman is lounging on a sofa with his eyes fixed upon the ceiling, or sitting bolt upright in a high-backed chair, staring with very round eyes at the opposite wall. When he is in one of these positions, his mother, who is a worthy, affectionate old soul, will give you a nudge to bespeak your attention without disturbing the abstracted one, and whisper with a shake of the head, that John's imagination is at some extraordinary work or other, you may take her word for it. Hereupon John looks more fiercely intent upon vacancy than before, and suddenly snatching a pencil from his pocket, puts down three words, and a cross on the back of a card, sighs deeply, paces once or twice across the room, inflicts a most unmerciful slap upon his head, and walks moodily up to his dormitory.

The poetical young gentleman is apt to acquire peculiar notions of things too, which plain ordinary people, unblessed with a poetical obliquity of vision, would suppose to be rather distorted. For instance, when the sickening murder and mangling of a wretched woman was affording delicious food wherewithal to gorge the insatiable curiosity of the public, our friend the poetical young gentleman was in ecstasies—not of disgust, but admiration. 'Heavens!' cried the poetical young gentleman, 'how grand; how great!' We ventured deferentially to inquire upon whom these epithets were bestowed: our humble thoughts oscillating between the police officer who found the criminal, and the lock-keeper who found the head. 'Upon whom!' exclaimed the poetical young gentleman in a frenzy of poetry, 'Upon whom should they be bestowed but upon the murderer!'—and thereupon it came out, in a fine torrent of eloquence, that the murderer was a great spirit, a bold creature full of daring and nerve, a man of dauntless heart and determined courage, and withal a great casuist and able reasoner, as was fully demonstrated in his philosophical colloquies with the great and noble of the land. We held our peace, and meekly signified our indisposition to controvert these opinions—firstly, because we were no match at quotation for the poetical young gentleman; and secondly, because we felt it would be of little use our entering into any disputation, if we were: being perfectly convinced that the respectable and immoral hero in question is not the first and will not be the last hanged gentleman upon whom false sympathy or diseased curiosity will be plentifully expended.

This was a stern mystic flight of the poetical young gentleman. In his milder and softer moments he occasionally lays down his neckcloth, and pens stanzas, which sometimes find their way into a Lady's Magazine, or the 'Poets' Corner' of some country newspaper; or which, in default of either vent for his genius, adorn the rainbow leaves of a lady's album. These are generally written upon some such occasions as contemplating the Bank of England by midnight, or beholding Saint Paul's in a snow-storm; and when these gloomy objects fail to afford him inspiration, he pours forth his soul in a touching address to a violet, or a plaintive lament that he is no longer a child, but has gradually grown up.

The poetical young gentleman is fond of quoting passages from his favourite authors, who are all of the gloomy and desponding school. He has a great deal to say too about the world, and is much given to opining, especially if he has taken anything strong to drink, that there is nothing in it worth living for. He gives you to understand, however, that for the sake of society, he means to bear his part in the tiresome play, manfully resisting the gratification of his own strong desire to make a premature exit; and consoles himself with the reflection, that immortality has some chosen nook for himself and the other great spirits whom earth has chafed and wearied.

When the poetical young gentleman makes use of adjectives, they are all superlatives. Everything is of the grandest, greatest, noblest, mightiest, loftiest; or the lowest, meanest, obscurest, vilest, and most pitiful. He knows no medium: for enthusiasm is the soul of poetry; and who so enthusiastic as a poetical young gentleman? ‘Mr. Milkwash,’ says a young lady as she unlocks her album to receive the young gentleman’s original impromptu contribution, ‘how very silent you are! I think you must be in love.’ ‘Love!’ cries the poetical young gentleman, starting from his seat by the fire and terrifying the cat who scampers off at full speed, ‘Love! that burning, consuming passion; that ardour of the soul, that fierce glowing of the heart. Love! The withering, blighting influence of hope misplaced and affection slighted. Love did you say! Ha! ha! ha!’

With this, the poetical young gentleman laughs a laugh belonging only to poets and Mr. O. Smith of the Adelphi Theatre, and sits down, pen in hand, to throw off a page or two of verse in the biting, semi-atheistical demoniac style, which, like the poetical young gentleman himself, is full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

THE 'THROWING-OFF' YOUNG GENTLEMAN

There is a certain kind of impostor—a bragging, vaunting, puffing young gentleman—against whom we are desirous to warn that fairer part of the creation, to whom we more peculiarly devote these our labours. And we are particularly induced to lay especial stress upon this division of our subject, by a little dialogue we held some short time ago, with an esteemed young lady of our acquaintance, touching a most gross specimen of this class of men. We had been urging all the absurdities of his conduct and conversation, and dwelling upon the impossibilities he constantly recounted—to which indeed we had not scrupled to prefix a certain hard little word of one syllable and three letters—when our fair friend, unable to maintain the contest any longer, reluctantly cried, 'Well; he certainly has a habit of throwing-off, but then—' What then? Throw him off yourself, said we. And so she did, but not at our instance, for other reasons appeared, and it might have been better if she had done so at first.

The throwing-off young gentleman has so often a father possessed of vast property in some remote district of Ireland, that we look with some suspicion upon all young gentlemen who volunteer this description of themselves. The deceased grandfather of the throwing-off young gentleman was a man of immense possessions, and untold wealth; the throwing-off young gentleman remembers, as well as if it were only yesterday, the deceased baronet's library, with its long rows of scarce and valuable books in superbly embossed bindings, arranged in cases, reaching from the lofty ceiling to the oaken floor; and the fine antique chairs and tables, and the noble old castle of Ballykillbabaloo, with its splendid prospect of hill and dale, and wood, and rich wild scenery, and the fine hunting stables and the spacious court-yards, 'and—and—everything upon the same magnificent scale,' says the throwing-off young gentleman, 'princely; quite princely. Ah!' And he sighs as if mourning over the fallen fortunes of his noble house.

The throwing-off young gentleman is a universal genius; at walking, running, rowing, swimming, and skating, he is unrivalled; at all games of chance or skill, at hunting, shooting, fishing, riding, driving, or amateur theatricals, no one can touch him—that is *could* not, because he gives you carefully to understand, lest there should be any opportunity of testing his skill, that he is quite out of practice just now, and has been for some years. If you mention any beautiful girl of your common acquaintance in his hearing, the throwing-off young gentleman starts, smiles, and begs you not to mind him, for it was quite involuntary: people do say indeed that they were once engaged, but no—although she is a very fine girl, he was so situated at that time that he couldn't possibly encourage the—'but it's of no use talking about it!' he adds, interrupting himself. 'She has got over it now, and I firmly hope and trust is happy.' With this benevolent aspiration he nods his head in a mysterious manner, and whistling the first part of some popular air, thinks perhaps it will be better to change the subject.

There is another great characteristic of the throwing-off young gentleman, which is, that he 'happens to be acquainted' with a most extraordinary variety of people in all parts of the world. Thus in all disputed questions, when the throwing-off young gentleman has no argument to bring forward, he invariably happens to be acquainted with some distant person, intimately connected with the subject, whose testimony decides the point against you, to the great—may we say it—to the great admiration of three young ladies out of every four, who consider the throwing-off young gentleman a very highly-connected young man, and a most charming person.

Sometimes the throwing-off young gentleman happens to look in upon a little family circle of young ladies who are quietly spending the evening together, and then indeed is he at the very height and summit of his glory; for it is to be observed that he by no means shines to equal advantage in the presence of men as in the society of over-credulous young ladies, which is his proper element. It is delightful to hear the number of pretty things the throwing-off young gentleman gives utterance to, during tea, and still more so to observe the ease with which, from long practice and study, he delicately blends one compliment to a lady with two for himself. 'Did you ever see a more lovely blue than this flower, Mr. Caveton?' asks a young lady who, truth to tell, is rather smitten with the throwing-off young gentleman. 'Never,' he replies, bending over the object of admiration, 'never but in your eyes.' 'Oh, Mr. Caveton,' cries the young lady, blushing of course. 'Indeed I speak the truth,' replies the throwing-off young gentleman, ‘I never saw any approach to them. I used to think my cousin’s blue eyes lovely, but they grow dim and colourless beside yours.’ ‘Oh! a beautiful cousin, Mr. Caveton!’ replies the young lady, with that perfect artlessness which is the distinguishing characteristic of all young ladies; ‘an affair, of course.’ ‘No; indeed, indeed you wrong me,’ rejoins the throwing-off young gentleman with great energy. ‘I fervently hope that her attachment towards me may be nothing but the natural result of our close intimacy in childhood, and that in change of scene and among new faces she may soon overcome it. *I* love her! Think not so meanly of me, Miss Lowfield, I beseech, as to suppose that title, lands, riches, and beauty, can influence *my* choice. The heart, the heart, Miss Lowfield.’ Here the throwing-off young gentleman sinks his voice to a still lower whisper; and the young lady duly proclaims to all the other young ladies when they go up-stairs, to put their bonnets on, that Mr. Caveton’s relations are all immensely rich, and that he is hopelessly beloved by title, lands, riches, and beauty.

We have seen a throwing-off young gentleman who, to our certain knowledge, was innocent of a note of music, and scarcely able to recognise a tune by ear, volunteer a Spanish air upon the guitar when he had previously satisfied himself that there was not such an instrument within a mile of the house.

We have heard another throwing-off young gentleman, after striking a note or two upon the piano, and accompanying it correctly (by dint of laborious practice) with his voice, assure a circle of wondering listeners that so acute was his ear that he was wholly unable to sing out of tune, let him try as he would. We have lived to witness the unmasking of another throwing-off young gentleman, who went out a visiting in a military cap with a gold band and tassel, and who, after passing successfully for a captain and being lauded to the skies for his red whiskers, his bravery, his soldierly bearing and his pride, turned out to be the dishonest son of an honest linen-draper in a small country town, and whom, if it were not for this fortunate exposure, we should not yet despair of encountering as the fortunate husband of some rich heiress. Ladies, ladies, the throwing-off young gentlemen are often swindlers, and always fools. So pray you avoid them.

THE YOUNG LADIES’ YOUNG GENTLEMAN

This young gentleman has several titles. Some young ladies consider him ‘a nice young man,’ others ‘a fine young man,’ others ‘quite a lady’s man,’ others ‘a handsome man,’ others ‘a remarkably good-looking young man.’ With some young ladies he is ‘a perfect angel,’ and with others ‘quite a love.’ He is likewise a charming creature, a duck, and a dear.

The young ladies’ young gentleman has usually a fresh colour and very white teeth, which latter articles, of course, he displays on every possible opportunity. He has brown or black hair, and whiskers of the same, if possible; but a slight tinge of red, or the hue which is vulgarly known as *sandy*, is not considered an objection. If his head and face be large, his nose prominent, and his figure square, he is an uncommonly fine young man, and worshipped accordingly. Should his whiskers meet beneath his chin, so much the better, though this is not absolutely insisted on; but he must wear an under-waistcoat, and smile constantly.

There was a great party got up by some party-loving friends of ours last summer, to go and dine in Epping Forest. As we hold that such wild expeditions should never be indulged in, save by people of the smallest means, who have no dinner at home, we should indubitably have excused ourself from attending, if we had not recollected that the projectors of the excursion were always accompanied on such occasions by a choice sample of the young ladies’ young gentleman, whom we were very anxious to have an opportunity of meeting. This determined us, and we went.

We were to make for Chigwell in four glass coaches, each with a trifling company of six or eight inside, and a little boy belonging to the projectors on the box—and to start from the residence of the projectors, Woburn-place, Russell-square, at half-past ten precisely. We arrived at the place of rendezvous at the appointed time, and found the glass coaches and the little boys quite ready, and divers young ladies and young gentlemen looking anxiously over the breakfast-parlour blinds, who appeared by no means so much gratified by our approach as we might have expected, but evidently wished we had been somebody else. Observing that our arrival in lieu of the unknown occasioned some disappointment, we ventured to inquire who was yet to come, when we found from the hasty reply of a dozen voices, that it was no other than the young ladies' young gentleman.

'I cannot imagine,' said the mamma, 'what has become of Mr. Balim—always so punctual, always so pleasant and agreeable. I am sure I can-*not* think.' As these last words were uttered in that measured, emphatic manner which painfully announces that the speaker has not quite made up his or her mind what to say, but is determined to talk on nevertheless, the eldest daughter took up the subject, and hoped no accident had happened to Mr. Balim, upon which there was a general chorus of 'Dear Mr. Balim!' and one young lady, more adventurous than the rest, proposed that an express should be straightway sent to dear Mr. Balim's lodgings. This, however, the papa resolutely opposed, observing, in what a short young lady behind us termed 'quite a bearish way,' that if Mr. Balim didn't choose to come, he might stop at home. At this all the daughters raised a murmur of 'Oh pa!' except one sprightly little girl of eight or ten years old, who, taking advantage of a pause in the discourse, remarked, that perhaps Mr. Balim might have been married that morning—for which impertinent suggestion she was summarily ejected from the room by her eldest sister.

We were all in a state of great mortification and uneasiness, when one of the little boys, running into the room as airily as little boys usually run who have an unlimited allowance of animal food in the holidays, and keep their hands constantly forced down to the bottoms of very deep trouser-pockets when they take exercise, joyfully announced that Mr. Balim was at that moment coming up the street in a hackney-cab; and the intelligence was confirmed beyond all doubt a minute afterwards by the entry of Mr. Balim himself, who was received with repeated cries of 'Where have you been, you naughty creature?' whereunto the naughty creature replied, that he had been in bed, in consequence of a late party the night before, and had only just risen. The acknowledgment awakened a variety of agonizing fears that he had taken no breakfast; which appearing after a slight cross-examination to be the real state of the case, breakfast for one was immediately ordered, notwithstanding Mr. Balim's repeated protestations that he couldn't think of it. He did think of it though, and thought better of it too, for he made a remarkably good meal when it came, and was assiduously served by a select knot of young ladies. It was quite delightful to see how he ate and drank, while one pair of fair hands poured out his coffee, and another put in the sugar, and another the milk; the rest of the company ever and anon casting angry glances at their watches, and the glass coaches,—and the little boys looking on in an agony of apprehension lest it should begin to rain before we set out; it might have rained all day, after we were once too far to turn back again, and welcome, for aught they cared.

However, the cavalcade moved at length, every coachman being accommodated with a hamper between his legs something larger than a wheelbarrow; and the company being packed as closely as they possibly could in the carriages, 'according,' as one married lady observed, 'to the immemorial custom, which was half the diversion of gipsy parties.' Thinking it very likely it might be (we have never been able to discover the other half), we submitted to be stowed away with a cheerful aspect, and were fortunate enough to occupy one corner of a coach in which were one old lady, four young ladies, and the renowned Mr. Balim the young ladies' young gentleman.

We were no sooner fairly off, than the young ladies' young gentleman hummed a fragment of an air, which induced a young lady to inquire whether he had danced to that the night before. 'By Heaven, then, I did,' replied the young gentleman, 'and with a lovely heiress; a superb creature, with twenty thousand pounds.' 'You seem rather struck,' observed another young lady. ''Gad she was a sweet creature,' returned the young gentleman, arranging his hair. 'Of course *she* was struck too?' inquired the first young lady. 'How can you ask, love?' interposed the second; 'could she fail to be?' 'Well, honestly I think she was,' observed the young gentleman. At this point of the dialogue, the young lady who had spoken first, and who sat on the young gentleman's right, struck him a severe blow on the arm with a rosebud, and said he was a vain man—whereupon the young gentleman insisted on having the rosebud, and the young lady appealing for help to the other young ladies, a charming struggle ensued, terminating in the victory of the young gentleman, and the capture of the rosebud. This little skirmish over, the married lady, who was the mother of the rosebud, smiled sweetly upon the young gentleman, and accused him of being a flirt; the young gentleman pleading not guilty, a most interesting discussion took place upon the important point whether the young gentleman was a flirt or not, which being an agreeable conversation of a light kind, lasted a considerable time. At length, a short silence occurring, the young ladies on either side of the young gentleman fell suddenly fast asleep; and the young gentleman, winking upon us to preserve silence, won a pair of gloves from each, thereby causing them to wake with equal suddenness and to scream very loud. The lively conversation to which this pleasantry gave rise, lasted for the remainder of the ride, and would have eked out a much longer one.

We dined rather more comfortably than people usually do under such circumstances, nothing having been left behind but the cork-screw and the bread. The married gentlemen were unusually thirsty, which they attributed to the heat of the weather; the little boys ate to inconvenience; mammas were very jovial, and their daughters very fascinating; and the attendants being well-behaved men, got exceedingly drunk at a respectful distance.

We had our eye on Mr. Balim at dinner-time, and perceived that he flourished wonderfully, being still surrounded by a little group of young ladies, who listened to him as an oracle, while he ate from their plates and drank from their glasses in a manner truly captivating from its excessive playfulness. His conversation, too, was exceedingly brilliant. In fact, one elderly lady assured us, that in the course of a little lively *badinage* on the subject of ladies' dresses, he had evinced as much knowledge as if he had been born and bred a milliner.

As such of the fat people who did not happen to fall asleep after dinner entered upon a most vigorous game at ball, we slipped away alone into a thicker part of the wood, hoping to fall in with Mr. Balim, the greater part of the young people having dropped off in twos and threes and the young ladies' young gentleman among them. Nor were we disappointed, for we had not walked far, when, peeping through the trees, we discovered him before us, and truly it was a pleasant thing to contemplate his greatness.

The young ladies' young gentleman was seated upon the ground, at the feet of a few young ladies who were reclining on a bank; he was so profusely decked with scarfs, ribands, flowers, and other pretty spoils, that he looked like a lamb—or perhaps a calf would be a better simile—adorned for the sacrifice. One young lady supported a parasol over his interesting head, another held his hat, and a third his neck-cloth, which in romantic fashion he had thrown off; the young gentleman himself, with his hand upon his breast, and his face moulded into an expression of the most honeyed sweetness, was warbling forth some choice specimens of vocal music in praise of female loveliness, in a style so exquisitely perfect, that we burst into an involuntary shout of laughter, and made a hasty retreat.

What charming fellows these young ladies’ young gentlemen are! Ducks, dears, loves, angels, are all terms inadequate to express their merit. They are such amazingly, uncommonly, wonderfully, nice men.

CONCLUSION

As we have placed before the young ladies so many specimens of young gentlemen, and have also in the dedication of this volume given them to understand how much we reverence and admire their numerous virtues and perfections; as we have given them such strong reasons to treat us with confidence, and to banish, in our case, all that reserve and distrust of the male sex which, as a point of general behaviour, they cannot do better than preserve and maintain—we say, as we have done all this, we feel that now, when we have arrived at the close of our task, they may naturally press upon us the inquiry, what particular description of young gentlemen we can conscientiously recommend.

Here we are at a loss. We look over our list, and can neither recommend the bashful young gentleman, nor the out-and-out young gentleman, nor the very friendly young gentleman, nor the military young gentleman, nor the political young gentleman, nor the domestic young gentleman, nor the censorious young gentleman, nor the funny young gentleman, nor the theatrical young gentleman, nor the poetical young gentleman, nor the throwing-off young gentleman, nor the young ladies' young gentleman.

As there are some good points about many of them, which still are not sufficiently numerous to render any one among them eligible, as a whole, our respectful advice to the young ladies is, to seek for a young gentleman who unites in himself the best qualities of all, and the worst weaknesses of none, and to lead him forthwith to the hymeneal altar, whether he will or no. And to the young lady who secures him, we beg to tender one short fragment of matrimonial advice, selected from many sound passages of a similar tendency, to be found in a letter written by Dean Swift to a young lady on her marriage.

'The grand affair of your life will be, to gain and preserve the esteem of your husband. Neither good-nature nor virtue will suffer him to *esteem* you against his judgment; and although he is not capable of using you ill, yet you will in time grow a thing indifferent and perhaps contemptible; unless you can supply the loss of youth and beauty with more durable qualities. You have but a very few years to be young and handsome in the eyes of the world; and as few months to be so in the eyes of a husband who is not a fool; for I hope you do not still dream of charms and raptures, which marriage ever did, and ever will, put a sudden end to.'

From the anxiety we express for the proper behaviour of the fortunate lady after marriage, it may possibly be inferred that the young gentleman to whom we have so delicately alluded, is no other than ourself. Without in any way committing ourself upon this point, we have merely to observe, that we are ready to receive sealed offers containing a full specification of age, temper, appearance, and condition; but we beg it to be distinctly understood that we do not pledge ourself to accept the highest bidder.

These offers may be forwarded to the Publishers, Messrs. Chapman and Hall, London; to whom all pieces of plate and other testimonials of approbation from the young ladies generally, are respectfully requested to be addressed.

THE END OF
Sketches of Young Gentlemen

SOMEBODY’S LUGGAGE

CHAPTER I—HIS LEAVING IT TILL CALLED FOR

The writer of these humble lines being a Waiter, and having come of a family of Waiters, and owning at the present time five brothers who are all Waiters, and likewise an only sister who is a Waitress, would wish to offer a few words respecting his calling; first having the pleasure of hereby in a friendly manner offering the Dedication of the same unto *Joseph*, much respected Head Waiter at the Slamjam Coffee-house, London, E.C., than which a individual more eminently deserving of the name of man, or a more amenable honour to his own head and heart, whether considered in the light of a Waiter or regarded as a human being, do not exist.

In case confusion should arise in the public mind (which it is open to confusion on many subjects) respecting what is meant or implied by the term Waiter, the present humble lines would wish to offer an explanation. It may not be generally known that the person as goes out to wait is *not* a Waiter. It may not be generally known that the hand as is called in extra, at the Freemasons' Tavern, or the London, or the Albion, or otherwise, is *not* a Waiter. Such hands may be took on for Public Dinners by the bushel (and you may know them by their breathing with difficulty when in attendance, and taking away the bottle ere yet it is half out); but such are *not* Waiters. For you cannot lay down the tailoring, or the shoemaking, or the brokering, or the green-grocering, or the pictorial-periodicalling, or the second-hand wardrobe, or the small fancy businesses,—you cannot lay down those lines of life at your will and pleasure by the half-day or evening, and take up Waitering. You may suppose you can, but you cannot; or you may go so far as to say you do, but you do not. Nor yet can you lay down the gentleman's-service when stimulated by prolonged incompatibility on the part of Cooks (and here it may be remarked that Cooking and Incompatibility will be mostly found united), and take up Waitering. It has been ascertained that what a gentleman will sit meek under, at home, he will not bear out of doors, at the Slamjam or any similar establishment. Then, what is the inference to be drawn respecting true Waitering? You must be bred to it. You must be born to it.

Would you know how born to it, Fair Reader,—if of the adorable female sex? Then learn from the biographical experience of one that is a Waiter in the sixty-first year of his age.

You were conveyed,—ere yet your dawning powers were otherwise developed than to harbour vacancy in your inside,—you were conveyed, by surreptitious means, into a pantry adjoining the Admiral Nelson, Civic and General Dining-Rooms, there to receive by stealth that healthful sustenance which is the pride and boast of the British female constitution. Your mother was married to your father (himself a distant Waiter) in the profoundest secrecy; for a Waitress known to be married would ruin the best of businesses,—it is the same as on the stage. Hence your being smuggled into the pantry, and that—to add to the infliction—by an unwilling grandmother. Under the combined influence of the smells of roast and boiled, and soup, and gas, and malt liquors, you partook of your earliest nourishment; your unwilling grandmother sitting prepared to catch you when your mother was called and dropped you; your grandmother's shawl ever ready to stifle your natural complainings; your innocent mind surrounded by uncongenial cruets, dirty plates, dish-covers, and cold gravy; your mother calling down the pipe for veals and porks, instead of soothing you with nursery rhymes. Under these untoward circumstances you were early weaned. Your unwilling grandmother, ever growing more unwilling as your food assimilated less, then contracted habits of shaking you till your system curdled, and your food would not assimilate at all. At length she was no longer spared, and could have been thankfully spared much sooner. When your brothers began to appear in succession, your mother retired, left off her smart dressing (she had previously been a smart dresser), and her dark ringlets (which had previously been flowing), and haunted your father late of nights, lying in wait for him, through all weathers, up the shabby court which led to the back door of the Royal Old Dust-Bin (said to have been so named by George the Fourth), where your father was Head. But the Dust-Bin was going down then, and your father took but little,—excepting from a liquid point of view. Your mother's object in those visits was of a house-keeping character, and you was set on to whistle your father out. Sometimes he came out, but generally not. Come or not come, however, all that part of his existence which was unconnected with open Waitering was kept a close secret, and was acknowledged by your mother to be a close secret, and you and your mother flitted about the court, close secrets both of you, and would scarcely have confessed under torture that you know your father, or that your father had any name than Dick (which wasn't his name, though he was never known by any other), or that he had kith or kin or chick or child. Perhaps the attraction of this mystery, combined with your father's having a damp compartment, to himself, behind a leaky cistern, at the Dust-Bin,—a sort of a cellar compartment, with a sink in it, and a smell, and a plate-rack, and a bottle-rack, and three windows that didn't match each other or anything else, and no daylight,—caused your young mind to feel convinced that you must grow up to be a Waiter too; but you did feel convinced of it, and so did all your brothers, down to your sister. Every one of you felt convinced that you was born to the Waitering. At this stage of your career, what was your feelings one day when your father came home to your mother in open broad daylight,—of itself an act of Madness on the part of a Waiter,—and took to his bed (leastwise, your mother and family's bed), with the statement that his eyes were devilled kidneys. Physicians being in vain, your father expired, after repeating at intervals for a day and a night, when gleams of reason and old business fitfully illuminated his being, "Two and two is five. And three is sixpence." Interred in the parochial department of the neighbouring churchyard, and accompanied to the grave by as many Waiters of long standing as could spare the morning time from their soiled glasses (namely, one), your bereaved form was attired in a white neckankecher, and you was took on from motives of benevolence at The George and Gridiron, theatrical and supper. Here, supporting nature on what you found in the plates (which was as it happened, and but too often thoughtlessly, immersed in mustard), and on what you found in the glasses (which rarely went beyond driblets and lemon), by night you dropped asleep standing, till you was cuffed awake, and by day was set to polishing every individual article in the coffee-room. Your couch being sawdust; your counterpane being ashes of cigars. Here, frequently hiding a heavy heart under the smart tie of your white neckankecher (or correctly speaking lower down and more to the left), you picked up the rudiments of knowledge from an extra, by the name of Bishops, and by calling plate-washer, and gradually elevating your mind with chalk on the back of the corner-box partition, until such time as you used the inkstand when it was out of hand, attained to manhood, and to be the Waiter that you find yourself.

I could wish here to offer a few respectful words on behalf of the calling so long the calling of myself and family, and the public interest in which is but too often very limited. We are not generally understood. No, we are not. Allowance enough is not made for us. For, say that we ever show a little drooping listlessness of spirits, or what might be termed indifference or apathy. Put it to yourself what would your own state of mind be, if you was one of an enormous family every member of which except you was always greedy, and in a hurry. Put it to yourself that you was regularly replete with animal food at the slack hours of one in the day and again at nine p.m., and that the repleter you was, the more voracious all your fellow-creatures came in. Put it to yourself that it was your business, when your digestion was well on, to take a personal interest and sympathy in a hundred gentlemen fresh and fresh (say, for the sake of argument, only a hundred), whose imaginations was given up to grease and fat and gravy and melted butter, and abandoned to questioning you about cuts of this, and dishes of that,—each of ’em going on as if him and you and the bill of fare was alone in the world. Then look what you are expected to know. You are never out, but they seem to think you regularly attend everywhere. “What’s this, Christopher, that I hear about the smashed Excursion Train? How are they doing at the Italian Opera, Christopher?” “Christopher, what are the real particulars of this business at the Yorkshire Bank?” Similarly a ministry gives me more trouble than it gives the Queen. As to Lord Palmerston, the constant and wearing connection into which I have been brought with his lordship during the last few years is deserving of a pension. Then look at the Hypocrites we are made, and the lies (white, I hope) that are forced upon us! Why must a sedentary-pursuited Waiter be considered to be a judge of horseflesh, and to have a most tremendous interest in horse-training and racing? Yet it would be half our little incomes out of our pockets if we didn’t take on to have those sporting tastes. It is the same (inconceivable why!) with Farming. Shooting, equally so. I am sure that so regular as the months of August, September, and October come round, I am ashamed of myself in my own private bosom for the way in which I make believe to care whether or not the grouse is strong on the wing (much their wings, or drumsticks either, signifies to me, uncooked!), and whether the partridges is plentiful among the turnips, and whether the pheasants is shy or bold, or anything else you please to mention. Yet you may see me, or any other Waiter of my standing, holding on by the back of the box, and leaning over a gentleman with his purse out and his bill before him, discussing these points in a confidential tone of voice, as if my happiness in life entirely depended on ’em.

I have mentioned our little incomes. Look at the most unreasonable point of all, and the point on which the greatest injustice is done us! Whether it is owing to our always carrying so much change in our right-hand trousers-pocket, and so many halfpence in our coat-tails, or whether it is human nature (which I were loth to believe), what is meant by the everlasting fable that Head Waiters is rich? How did that fable get into circulation? Who first put it about, and what are the facts to establish the unblushing statement? Come forth, thou slanderer, and refer the public to the Waiter’s will in Doctors’ Commons supporting thy malignant hiss! Yet this is so commonly dwelt upon—especially by the screws who give Waiters the least—that denial is vain; and we are obliged, for our credit’s sake, to carry our heads as if we were going into a business, when of the two we are much more likely to go into a union. There was formerly a screw as frequented the Slamjam ere yet the present writer had quitted that establishment on a question of tea-ing his assistant staff out of his own pocket, which screw carried the taunt to its bitterest height. Never soaring above threepence, and as often as not grovelling on the earth a penny lower, he yet represented the present writer as a large holder of Consols, a lender of money on mortgage, a Capitalist. He has been overheard to dilate to other customers on the allegation that the present writer put out thousands of pounds at interest in Distilleries and Breweries. “Well, Christopher,” he would say (having grovelled his lowest on the earth, half a moment before), “looking out for a House to open, eh? Can’t find a business to be disposed of on a scale as is up to your resources, humph?” To such a dizzy precipice of falsehood has this misrepresentation taken wing, that the well-known and highly-respected OLD CHARLES, long eminent at the West Country Hotel, and by some considered the Father of the Waitering, found himself under the obligation to fall into it through so many years that his own wife (for he had an unbeknown old lady in that capacity towards himself) believed it! And what was the consequence? When he was borne to his grave on the shoulders of six picked Waiters, with six more for change, six more acting as pall-bearers, all keeping step in a pouring shower without a dry eye visible, and a concourse only inferior to Royalty, his pantry and lodgings was equally ransacked high and low for property, and none was found!

How could it be found, when, beyond his last monthly collection of walking-sticks, umbrellas, and pocket-handkerchiefs (which happened to have been not yet disposed of, though he had ever been through life punctual in clearing off his collections by the month), there was no property existing? Such, however, is the force of this universal libel, that the widow of Old Charles, at the present hour an inmate of the Almshouses of the Cork-Cutters' Company, in Blue Anchor Road (identified sitting at the door of one of 'em, in a clean cap and a Windsor arm-chair, only last Monday), expects John's hoarded wealth to be found hourly! Nay, ere yet he had succumbed to the grisly dart, and when his portrait was painted in oils life-size, by subscription of the frequenters of the West Country, to hang over the coffee-room chimney-piece, there were not wanting those who contended that what is termed the accessories of such a portrait ought to be the Bank of England out of window, and a strong-box on the table. And but for better-regulated minds contending for a bottle and screw and the attitude of drawing,—and carrying their point,—it would have been so handed down to posterity.

I am now brought to the title of the present remarks. Having, I hope without offence to any quarter, offered such observations as I felt it my duty to offer, in a free country which has ever dominated the seas, on the general subject, I will now proceed to wait on the particular question.

At a momentous period of my life, when I was off, so far as concerned notice given, with a House that shall be nameless,—for the question on which I took my departing stand was a fixed charge for waiters, and no House as commits itself to that eminently Un-English act of more than foolishness and baseness shall be advertised by me,—I repeat, at a momentous crisis, when I was off with a House too mean for mention, and not yet on with that to which I have ever since had the honour of being attached in the capacity of Head, {1} I was casting about what to do next. Then it were that proposals were made to me on behalf of my present establishment. Stipulations were necessary on my part, emendations were necessary on my part: in the end, ratifications ensued on both sides, and I entered on a new career.

We are a bed business, and a coffee-room business. We are not a general dining business, nor do we wish it. In consequence, when diners drop in, we know what to give 'em as will keep 'em away another time. We are a Private Room or Family business also; but Coffee-room principal. Me and the Directory and the Writing Materials and cetrer occupy a place to ourselves—a place fended of up a step or two at the end of the Coffee-room, in what I call the good old-fashioned style. The good old-fashioned style is, that whatever you want, down to a wafer, you must be olely and solely dependent on the Head Waiter for. You must put yourself a new-born Child into his hands. There is no other way in which a business untinged with Continental Vice can be conducted. (It were bootless to add, that if languages is required to be jabbered and English is not good enough, both families and gentlemen had better go somewhere else.)

When I began to settle down in this right-principled and well-conducted House, I noticed, under the bed in No. 24 B (which it is up a angle off the staircase, and usually put off upon the lowly-minded), a heap of things in a corner. I asked our Head Chambermaid in the course of the day,

"What are them things in 24 B?"

To which she answered with a careless air, "Somebody's Luggage."

Regarding her with a eye not free from severity, I says, "Whose Luggage?"

Evading my eye, she replied,

"Lor! How should *I* know!"

—Being, it may be right to mention, a female of some pertness, though acquainted with her business.

A Head Waiter must be either Head or Tail. He must be at one extremity or the other of the social scale. He cannot be at the waist of it, or anywhere else but the extremities. It is for him to decide which of the extremities.

On the eventful occasion under consideration, I give Mrs. Pratchett so distinctly to understand my decision, that I broke her spirit as towards myself, then and there, and for good. Let not inconsistency be suspected on account of my mentioning Mrs. Pratchett as "Mrs.," and having formerly remarked that a waitress must not be married. Readers are respectfully requested to notice that Mrs. Pratchett was not a waitress, but a chambermaid. Now a chambermaid *may* be married; if Head, generally is married,—or says so. It comes to the same thing as expressing what is customary. (N.B. Mr. Pratchett is in Australia, and his address there is "the Bush.")

Having took Mrs. Pratchett down as many pegs as was essential to the future happiness of all parties, I requested her to explain herself.

"For instance," I says, to give her a little encouragement, "who is Somebody?"

"I give you my sacred honour, Mr. Christopher," answers Pratchett, "that I haven't the faintest notion."

But for the manner in which she settled her cap-strings, I should have doubted this; but in respect of positiveness it was hardly to be discriminated from an affidavit.

"Then you never saw him?" I followed her up with.

"Nor yet," said Mrs. Pratchett, shutting her eyes and making as if she had just took a pill of unusual circumference,—which gave a remarkable force to her denial,—"nor yet any servant in this house. All have been changed, Mr. Christopher, within five year, and Somebody left his Luggage here before then."

Inquiry of Miss Martin yielded (in the language of the Bard of A.1.) "confirmation strong." So it had really and truly happened. Miss Martin is the young lady at the bar as makes out our bills; and though higher than I could wish considering her station, is perfectly well-behaved.

Farther investigations led to the disclosure that there was a bill against this Luggage to the amount of two sixteen six. The Luggage had been lying under the bedstead of 24 B over six year. The bedstead is a four-poster, with a deal of old hanging and valance, and is, as I once said, probably connected with more than 24 Bs,—which I remember my hearers was pleased to laugh at, at the time.

I don't know why,—when DO we know why?—but this Luggage laid heavy on my mind. I fell a wondering about Somebody, and what he had got and been up to. I couldn't satisfy my thoughts why he should leave so much Luggage against so small a bill. For I had the Luggage out within a day or two and turned it over, and the following were the items:—A black portmanteau, a black bag, a desk, a dressing-case, a brown-paper parcel, a hat-box, and an umbrella strapped to a walking-stick. It was all very dusty and fluey. I had our porter up to get under the bed and fetch it out; and though he habitually wallows in dust,—swims in it from morning to night, and wears a close-fitting waistcoat with black calimanco sleeves for the purpose,—it made him sneeze again, and his throat was that hot with it that it was obliged to be cooled with a drink of Allsopp's draft.

The Luggage so got the better of me, that instead of having it put back when it was well dusted and washed with a wet cloth,—previous to which it was so covered with feathers that you might have thought it was turning into poultry, and would by-and-by begin to Lay,—I say, instead of having it put back, I had it carried into one of my places down-stairs. There from time to time I stared at it and stared at it, till it seemed to grow big and grow little, and come forward at me and retreat again, and go through all manner of performances resembling intoxication. When this had lasted weeks,—I may say months, and not be far out,—I one day thought of asking Miss Martin for the particulars of the Two sixteen six total. She was so obliging as to extract it from the books,—it dating before her time,—and here follows a true copy:

Coffee-Room.

1856.	No. 4.	£	s.	d.
Feb. 2d,	Pen and Paper	0	0	6
	Port Negus	0	2	0
	Ditto	0	2	0
	Pen and paper	0	0	6
	Tumbler broken	0	2	6
	Brandy	0	2	0
	Pen and paper	0	0	6
	Anchovy toast	0	2	6
	Pen and paper	0	0	6
	Bed	0	3	0
Feb. 3d,	Pen and paper	0	0	6
	Breakfast	0	2	6
	Broiled ham	0	2	0
	Eggs	0	1	0
	Watercresses	0	1	0
	Shrimps	0	1	0
	Pen and paper	0	0	6
	Blotting-paper	0	0	6
	Messenger to Paternoster Row and back	0	1	6
	Again, when No Answer	0	1	6
	Brandy 2s., Devilled Pork chop 2s.	0	4	0
	Pens and paper	0	1	0
	Messenger to Albemarle Street and back	0	1	0
	Again (detained), when No Answer	0	1	6
	Salt-cellar broken	0	3	6
	Large Liquour-glass Orange Brandy	0	1	6
	Dinner, Soup, Fish,			

Joint, and bird	0	7	6
Bottle old East India Brown	0	8	0
Pen and paper	0	0	6
	£2	16	6

Mem.: January 1st, 1857. He went out after dinner, directing luggage to be ready when he called for it. Never called.

* * * * *

So far from throwing a light upon the subject, this bill appeared to me, if I may so express my doubts, to involve it in a yet more lurid halo. Speculating it over with the Mistress, she informed me that the luggage had been advertised in the Master’s time as being to be sold after such and such a day to pay expenses, but no farther steps had been taken. (I may here remark, that the Mistress is a widow in her fourth year. The Master was possessed of one of those unfortunate constitutions in which Spirits turns to Water, and rises in the ill-starred Victim.)

My speculating it over, not then only, but repeatedly, sometimes with the Mistress, sometimes with one, sometimes with another, led up to the Mistress’s saying to me,—whether at first in joke or in earnest, or half joke and half earnest, it matters not:

“Christopher, I am going to make you a handsome offer.”

(If this should meet her eye,—a lovely blue,—may she not take it ill my mentioning that if I had been eight or ten year younger, I would have done as much by her! That is, I would have made her a offer. It is for others than me to denominate it a handsome one.)

“Christopher, I am going to make you a handsome offer.”

“Put a name to it, ma’am.”

“Look here, Christopher. Run over the articles of Somebody’s Luggage. You’ve got it all by heart, I know.”

“A black portmanteau, ma’am, a black bag, a desk, a dressing-case, a brown-paper parcel, a hat-box, and an umbrella strapped to a walking-stick.”

“All just as they were left. Nothing opened, nothing tampered with.”

“You are right, ma’am. All locked but the brown-paper parcel, and that sealed.”

The Mistress was leaning on Miss Martin’s desk at the bar-window, and she taps the open book that lays upon the desk,—she has a pretty-made hand to be sure,—and bobs her head over it and laughs.

“Come,” says she, “Christopher. Pay me Somebody’s bill, and you shall have Somebody’s Luggage.”

I rather took to the idea from the first moment; but,

“It mayn’t be worth the money,” I objected, seeming to hold back.

“That’s a Lottery,” says the Mistress, folding her arms upon the book,—it ain’t her hands alone that’s pretty made, the observation extends right up her arms. “Won’t you venture two pound sixteen shillings and sixpence in the Lottery? Why, there’s no blanks!” says the Mistress; laughing and bobbing her head again, “you *must* win. If you lose, you must win! All prizes in this Lottery! Draw a blank, and remember, Gentlemen-Sportsmen, you’ll still be entitled to a black portmanteau, a black bag, a desk, a dressing-case, a sheet of brown paper, a hat-box, and an umbrella strapped to a walking-stick!”

To make short of it, Miss Martin come round me, and Mrs. Pratchett come round me, and the Mistress she was completely round me already, and all the women in the house come round me, and if it had been Sixteen two instead of Two sixteen, I should have thought myself well out of it. For what can you do when they do come round you?

So I paid the money—down—and such a laughing as there was among ’em! But I turned the tables on ’em regularly, when I said:

“My family-name is Blue-Beard. I’m going to open Somebody’s Luggage all alone in the Secret Chamber, and not a female eye catches sight of the contents!”

Whether I thought proper to have the firmness to keep to this, don’t signify, or whether any female eye, and if any, how many, was really present when the opening of the Luggage came off. Somebody’s Luggage is the question at present: Nobody’s eyes, nor yet noses.

What I still look at most, in connection with that Luggage, is the extraordinary quantity of writing-paper, and all written on! And not our paper neither,—not the paper charged in the bill, for we know our paper,—so he must have been always at it. And he had crumpled up this writing of his, everywhere, in every part and parcel of his luggage. There was writing in his dressing-case, writing in his boots, writing among his shaving-tackle, writing in his hat-box, writing folded away down among the very whalebones of his umbrella.

His clothes wasn’t bad, what there was of ’em. His dressing-case was poor,—not a particle of silver stopper,—bottle apertures with nothing in

’em, like empty little dog-kennels,—and a most searching description of tooth-powder diffusing itself around, as under a deluded mistake that all the chinks in the fittings was divisions in teeth. His clothes I parted with, well enough, to a second-hand dealer not far from St. Clement’s Danes, in the Strand,—him as the officers in the Army mostly dispose of their uniforms to, when hard pressed with debts of honour, if I may judge from their coats and epaulets diversifying the window with their backs towards the public. The same party bought in one lot the portmanteau, the bag, the desk, the dressing-case, the hat-box, the umbrella, strap, and walking-stick. On my remarking that I should have thought those articles not quite in his line, he said: “No more ith a man’th grandmother, Mithter Chrithtopher; but if any man will bring hith grandmother here, and offer her at a fair trifle below what the’ll feth with good luck when the’th thcoured and turned—I’ll buy her!”

These transactions brought me home, and, indeed, more than home, for they left a goodish profit on the original investment. And now there remained the writings; and the writings I particular wish to bring under the candid attention of the reader.

I wish to do so without postponement, for this reason. That is to say, namely, viz. i.e., as follows, thus:—Before I proceed to recount the mental sufferings of which I became the prey in consequence of the writings, and before following up that harrowing tale with a statement of the wonderful and impressive catastrophe, as thrilling in its nature as unlooked for in any other capacity, which crowned the ole and filled the cup of unexpectedness to overflowing, the writings themselves ought to stand forth to view. Therefore it is that they now come next. One word to introduce them, and I lay down my pen (I hope, my unassuming pen) until I take it up to trace the gloomy sequel of a mind with something on it.

He was a smeary writer, and wrote a dreadful bad hand. Utterly regardless of ink, he lavished it on every undeserving object—on his clothes, his desk, his hat, the handle of his tooth-brush, his umbrella. Ink was found freely on the coffee-room carpet by No. 4 table, and two blots was on his restless couch. A reference to the document I have given entire will show that on the morning of the third of February, eighteen fifty-six, he procured his no less than fifth pen and paper. To whatever deplorable act of ungovernable composition he immolated those materials obtained from the bar, there is no doubt that the fatal deed was committed in bed, and that it left its evidences but too plainly, long afterwards, upon the pillow-case.

He had put no Heading to any of his writings. Alas! Was he likely to have a Heading without a Head, and where was *his* Head when he took such things into it? In some cases, such as his Boots, he would appear to have hid the writings; thereby involving his style in greater obscurity. But his Boots was at least pairs,—and no two of his writings can put in any claim to be so regarded. Here follows (not to give more specimens) what was found in

CHAPTER II—HIS BOOTS

"Eh! well then, Monsieur Mutuel! What do I know, what can I say? I assure you that he calls himself Monsieur The Englishman."

"Pardon. But I think it is impossible," said Monsieur Mutuel,—a spectacled, snuffy, stooping old gentleman in carpet shoes and a cloth cap with a peaked shade, a loose blue frock-coat reaching to his heels, a large limp white shirt-frill, and cravat to correspond,—that is to say, white was the natural colour of his linen on Sundays, but it toned down with the week.

"It is," repeated Monsieur Mutuel, his amiable old walnut-shell countenance very walnut-shelly indeed as he smiled and blinked in the bright morning sunlight,—"it is, my cherished Madame Bouclet, I think, impossible!"

"Hey!" (with a little vexed cry and a great many tosses of her head.) "But it is not impossible that you are a Pig!" retorted Madame Bouclet, a compact little woman of thirty-five or so. "See then,—look there,—read! 'On the second floor Monsieur L'Anglais.' Is it not so?"

"It is so," said Monsieur Mutuel.

"Good. Continue your morning walk. Get out!" Madame Bouclet dismissed him with a lively snap of her fingers.

The morning walk of Monsieur Mutuel was in the brightest patch that the sun made in the Grande Place of a dull old fortified French town. The manner of his morning walk was with his hands crossed behind him; an umbrella, in figure the express image of himself, always in one hand; a snuffbox in the other. Thus, with the shuffling gait of the Elephant (who really does deal with the very worst trousers-maker employed by the Zoological world, and who appeared to have recommended him to Monsieur Mutuel), the old gentleman sunned himself daily when sun was to be had—of course, at the same time sunning a red ribbon at his button-hole; for was he not an ancient Frenchman?

Being told by one of the angelic sex to continue his morning walk and get out, Monsieur Mutuel laughed a walnut-shell laugh, pulled off his cap at arm's length with the hand that contained his snuffbox, kept it off for a considerable period after he had parted from Madame Bouclet, and continued his morning walk and got out, like a man of gallantry as he was.

The documentary evidence to which Madame Bouclet had referred Monsieur Mutuel was the list of her lodgers, sweetly written forth by her own Nephew and Bookkeeper, who held the pen of an Angel, and posted up at the side of her gateway, for the information of the Police: “Au second, M. L’Anglais, Propriétaire.” On the second floor, Mr. The Englishman, man of property. So it stood; nothing could be plainer.

Madame Bouclet now traced the line with her forefinger, as it were to confirm and settle herself in her parting snap at Monsieur Mutuel, and so placing her right hand on her hip with a defiant air, as if nothing should ever tempt her to unsnap that snap, strolled out into the Place to glance up at the windows of Mr. The Englishman. That worthy happening to be looking out of window at the moment, Madame Bouclet gave him a graceful salutation with her head, looked to the right and looked to the left to account to him for her being there, considered for a moment, like one who accounted to herself for somebody she had expected not being there, and reëntered her own gateway. Madame Bouclet let all her house giving on the Place in furnished flats or floors, and lived up the yard behind in company with Monsieur Bouclet her husband (great at billiards), an inherited brewing business, several fowls, two carts, a nephew, a little dog in a big kennel, a grape-vine, a counting-house, four horses, a married sister (with a share in the brewing business), the husband and two children of the married sister, a parrot, a drum (performed on by the little boy of the married sister), two billeted soldiers, a quantity of pigeons, a fife (played by the nephew in a ravishing manner), several domestics and supernumeraries, a perpetual flavour of coffee and soup, a terrific range of artificial rocks and wooden precipices at least four feet high, a small fountain, and half-a-dozen large sunflowers.

Now the Englishman, in taking his Appartement,—or, as one might say on our side of the Channel, his set of chambers,—had given his name, correct to the letter, LANGLEY. But as he had a British way of not opening his mouth very wide on foreign soil, except at meals, the Brewery had been able to make nothing of it but L’Anglais. So Mr. The Englishman he had become and he remained.

“Never saw such a people!” muttered Mr. The Englishman, as he now looked out of window. “Never did, in my life!”

This was true enough, for he had never before been out of his own country,—a right little island, a tight little island, a bright little island, a show-fight little island, and full of merit of all sorts; but not the whole round world.

"These chaps," said Mr. The Englishman to himself, as his eye rolled over the Place, sprinkled with military here and there, "are no more like soldiers—" Nothing being sufficiently strong for the end of his sentence, he left it unended.

This again (from the point of view of his experience) was strictly correct; for though there was a great agglomeration of soldiers in the town and neighbouring country, you might have held a grand Review and Field-day of them every one, and looked in vain among them all for a soldier choking behind his foolish stock, or a soldier lamed by his ill-fitting shoes, or a soldier deprived of the use of his limbs by straps and buttons, or a soldier elaborately forced to be self-helpless in all the small affairs of life. A swarm of brisk, bright, active, bustling, handy, odd, skirmishing fellows, able to turn cleverly at anything, from a siege to soup, from great guns to needles and thread, from the broadsword exercise to slicing an onion, from making war to making omelets, was all you would have found.

What a swarm! From the Great Place under the eye of Mr. The Englishman, where a few awkward squads from the last conscription were doing the goose-step—some members of those squads still as to their bodies, in the chrysalis peasant-state of Blouse, and only military butterflies as to their regimentally-clothed legs—from the Great Place, away outside the fortifications, and away for miles along the dusty roads, soldiers swarmed. All day long, upon the grass-grown ramparts of the town, practising soldiers trumpeted and bugled; all day long, down in angles of dry trenches, practising soldiers drummed and drummed. Every forenoon, soldiers burst out of the great barracks into the sandy gymnasium-ground hard by, and flew over the wooden horse, and hung on to flying ropes, and dangled upside-down between parallel bars, and shot themselves off wooden platforms,—splashes, sparks, coruscations, showers of soldiers. At every corner of the town-wall, every guard-house, every gateway, every sentry-box, every drawbridge, every reedy ditch, and rushy dike, soldiers, soldiers, soldiers. And the town being pretty well all wall, guard-house, gateway, sentry-box, drawbridge, reedy ditch, and rushy dike, the town was pretty well all soldiers.

What would the sleepy old town have been without the soldiers, seeing that even with them it had so overslept itself as to have slept its echoes hoarse, its defensive bars and locks and bolts and chains all rusty, and its ditches stagnant! From the days when VAUBAN engineered it to that perplexing extent that to look at it was like being knocked on the head with it, the stranger becoming stunned and stertorous under the shock of its incomprehensibility,—from the days when VAUBAN made it the express incorporation of every substantive and adjective in the art of military engineering, and not only twisted you into it and twisted you out of it, to the right, to the left, opposite, under here, over there, in the dark, in the dirt, by the gateway, archway, covered way, dry way, wet way, fosse, portcullis, drawbridge, sluice, squat tower, pierced wall, and heavy battery, but likewise took a fortifying dive under the neighbouring country, and came to the surface three or four miles off, blowing out incomprehensible mounds and batteries among the quiet crops of chicory and beet-root,—from those days to these the town had been asleep, and dust and rust and must had settled on its drowsy Arsenals and Magazines, and grass had grown up in its silent streets.

On market-days alone, its Great Place suddenly leaped out of bed. On market-days, some friendly enchanter struck his staff upon the stones of the Great Place, and instantly arose the liveliest booths and stalls, and sittings and standings, and a pleasant hum of chaffering and huckstering from many hundreds of tongues, and a pleasant, though peculiar, blending of colours,—white caps, blue blouses, and green vegetables,—and at last the Knight destined for the adventure seemed to have come in earnest, and all the Vaubanois sprang up awake. And now, by long, low-lying avenues of trees, jolting in white-hooded donkey-cart, and on donkey-back, and in tumbril and wagon, and cart and cabriolet, and afoot with barrow and burden,—and along the dikes and ditches and canals, in little peak-prowed country boats,—came peasant-men and women in flocks and crowds, bringing articles for sale. And here you had boots and shoes, and sweetmeats and stuffs to wear, and here (in the cool shade of the Town-hall) you had milk and cream and butter and cheese, and here you had fruits and onions and carrots, and all things needful for your soup, and here you had poultry and flowers and protesting pigs, and here new shovels, axes, spades, and bill-hooks for your farming work, and here huge mounds of bread, and here your unground grain in sacks, and here your children’s dolls, and here the cake-seller, announcing his wares by beat and roll of drum. And hark! fanfaronade of trumpets, and here into the Great Place, resplendent in an open carriage, with four gorgeously-attired servitors up behind, playing horns, drums, and cymbals, rolled "the Daughter of a Physician" in massive golden chains and ear-rings, and blue-feathered hat, shaded from the admiring sun by two immense umbrellas of artificial roses, to dispense (from motives of philanthropy) that small and pleasant dose which had cured so many thousands! Toothache, earache, headache, heartache, stomach-ache, debility, nervousness, fits, fainting, fever, ague, all equally cured by the small and pleasant dose of the great Physician's great daughter! The process was this,—she, the Daughter of a Physician, proprietress of the superb equipage you now admired with its confirmatory blasts of trumpet, drum, and cymbal, told you so: On the first day after taking the small and pleasant dose, you would feel no particular influence beyond a most harmonious sensation of indescribable and irresistible joy; on the second day you would be so astonishingly better that you would think yourself changed into somebody else; on the third day you would be entirely free from disorder, whatever its nature and however long you had had it, and would seek out the Physician's Daughter to throw yourself at her feet, kiss the hem of her garment, and buy as many more of the small and pleasant doses as by the sale of all your few effects you could obtain; but she would be inaccessible,—gone for herbs to the Pyramids of Egypt,—and you would be (though cured) reduced to despair! Thus would the Physician's Daughter drive her trade (and briskly too), and thus would the buying and selling and mingling of tongues and colours continue, until the changing sunlight, leaving the Physician's Daughter in the shadow of high roofs, admonished her to jolt out westward, with a departing effect of gleam and glitter on the splendid equipage and brazen blast. And now the enchanter struck his staff upon the stones of the Great Place once more, and down went the booths, the sittings and standings, and vanished the merchandise, and with it the barrows, donkeys, donkey-carts, and tumbrils, and all other things on wheels and feet, except the slow scavengers with unwieldy carts and meagre horses clearing up the rubbish, assisted by the sleek town pigeons, better plumped out than on non-market days. While there was yet an hour or two to wane before the autumn sunset, the loiterer outside town-gate and drawbridge, and postern and double-ditch, would see the last white-hooded cart lessening in the avenue of lengthening shadows of trees, or the last country boat, paddled by the last market-woman on her way home, showing black upon the reddening, long, low, narrow dike between him and the mill;

and as the paddle-parted scum and weed closed over the boat's track, he might be comfortably sure that its sluggish rest would be troubled no more until next market-day.

As it was not one of the Great Place's days for getting out of bed, when Mr. The Englishman looked down at the young soldiers practising the goose-step there, his mind was left at liberty to take a military turn.

"These fellows are billeted everywhere about," said he; "and to see them lighting the people's fires, boiling the people's pots, minding the people's babies, rocking the people's cradles, washing the people's greens, and making themselves generally useful, in every sort of unmilitary way, is most ridiculous! Never saw such a set of fellows,—never did in my life!"

All perfectly true again. Was there not Private Valentine in that very house, acting as sole housemaid, valet, cook, steward, and nurse, in the family of his captain, Monsieur le Capitaine de la Cour,—cleaning the floors, making the beds, doing the marketing, dressing the captain, dressing the dinners, dressing the salads, and dressing the baby, all with equal readiness? Or, to put him aside, he being in loyal attendance on his Chief, was there not Private Hyppolite, billeted at the Perfumer's two hundred yards off, who, when not on duty, volunteered to keep shop while the fair Perfumeress stepped out to speak to a neighbour or so, and laughingly sold soap with his war-sword girded on him? Was there not Emile, billeted at the Clock-maker's, perpetually turning to of an evening, with his coat off, winding up the stock? Was there not Eugène, billeted at the Tinman's, cultivating, pipe in mouth, a garden four feet square, for the Tinman, in the little court, behind the shop, and extorting the fruits of the earth from the same, on his knees, with the sweat of his brow? Not to multiply examples, was there not Baptiste, billeted on the poor Water-carrier, at that very instant sitting on the pavement in the sunlight, with his martial legs asunder, and one of the Water-carrier's spare pails between them, which (to the delight and glory of the heart of the Water-carrier coming across the Place from the fountain, yoked and burdened) he was painting bright-green outside and bright-red within? Or, to go no farther than the Barber's at the very next door, was there not Corporal Théophile—

"No," said Mr. The Englishman, glancing down at the Barber's, "he is not there at present. There's the child, though."

A mere mite of a girl stood on the steps of the Barber's shop, looking across the Place. A mere baby, one might call her, dressed in the close white linen cap which small French country children wear (like the children in Dutch pictures), and in a frock of homespun blue, that had no shape except where it was tied round her little fat throat. So that, being naturally short and round all over, she looked, behind, as if she had been cut off at her natural waist, and had had her head neatly fitted on it.

"There's the child, though."

To judge from the way in which the dimpled hand was rubbing the eyes, the eyes had been closed in a nap, and were newly opened. But they seemed to be looking so intently across the Place, that the Englishman looked in the same direction.

"O!" said he presently. "I thought as much. The Corporal's there."

The Corporal, a smart figure of a man of thirty, perhaps a thought under the middle size, but very neatly made,—a sunburnt Corporal with a brown peaked beard,—faced about at the moment, addressing voluble words of instruction to the squad in hand. Nothing was amiss or awry about the Corporal. A lithe and nimble Corporal, quite complete, from the sparkling dark eyes under his knowing uniform cap to his sparkling white gaiters. The very image and presentment of a Corporal of his country's army, in the line of his shoulders, the line of his waist, the broadest line of his Bloomer trousers, and their narrowest line at the calf of his leg.

Mr. The Englishman looked on, and the child looked on, and the Corporal looked on (but the last-named at his men), until the drill ended a few minutes afterwards, and the military sprinkling dried up directly, and was gone. Then said Mr. The Englishman to himself, "Look here! By George!" And the Corporal, dancing towards the Barber's with his arms wide open, caught up the child, held her over his head in a flying attitude, caught her down again, kissed her, and made off with her into the Barber's house.

Now Mr. The Englishman had had a quarrel with his erring and disobedient and disowned daughter, and there was a child in that case too. Had not his daughter been a child, and had she not taken angel-flights above his head as this child had flown above the Corporal's?

"He's a "—National Participled—"fool!" said the Englishman, and shut his window.

But the windows of the house of Memory, and the windows of the house of Mercy, are not so easily closed as windows of glass and wood. They fly open unexpectedly; they rattle in the night; they must be nailed up. Mr. The Englishman had tried nailing them, but had not driven the nails quite home. So he passed but a disturbed evening and a worse night.

By nature a good-tempered man? No; very little gentleness, confounding the quality with weakness. Fierce and wrathful when crossed? Very, and stupendously unreasonable. Moody? Exceedingly so. Vindictive? Well; he had had scowling thoughts that he would formally curse his daughter, as he had seen it done on the stage. But remembering that the real Heaven is some paces removed from the mock one in the great chandelier of the Theatre, he had given that up.

And he had come abroad to be rid of his repudiated daughter for the rest of his life. And here he was.

At bottom, it was for this reason, more than for any other, that Mr. The Englishman took it extremely ill that Corporal Théophile should be so devoted to little Bebelle, the child at the Barber's shop. In an unlucky moment he had chanced to say to himself, "Why, confound the fellow, he is not her father!" There was a sharp sting in the speech which ran into him suddenly, and put him in a worse mood. So he had National Participled the unconscious Corporal with most hearty emphasis, and had made up his mind to think no more about such a mountebank.

But it came to pass that the Corporal was not to be dismissed. If he had known the most delicate fibres of the Englishman's mind, instead of knowing nothing on earth about him, and if he had been the most obstinate Corporal in the Grand Army of France, instead of being the most obliging, he could not have planted himself with more determined immovability plump in the midst of all the Englishman's thoughts. Not only so, but he seemed to be always in his view. Mr. The Englishman had but to look out of window, to look upon the Corporal with little Bebelle. He had but to go for a walk, and there was the Corporal walking with Bebelle. He had but to come home again, disgusted, and the Corporal and Bebelle were at home before him. If he looked out at his back windows early in the morning, the Corporal was in the Barber's back yard, washing and dressing and brushing Bebelle. If he took refuge at his front windows, the Corporal brought his breakfast out into the Place, and shared it there with Bebelle. Always Corporal and always Bebelle. Never Corporal without Bebelle. Never Bebelle without Corporal.

Mr. The Englishman was not particularly strong in the French language as a means of oral communication, though he read it very well. It is with languages as with people,—when you only know them by sight, you are apt to mistake them; you must be on speaking terms before you can be said to have established an acquaintance.

For this reason, Mr. The Englishman had to gird up his loins considerably before he could bring himself to the point of exchanging ideas with Madame Bouclet on the subject of this Corporal and this Bebelle. But Madame Bouclet looking in apologetically one morning to remark, that, O Heaven! she was in a state of desolation because the lamp-maker had not sent home that lamp confided to him to repair, but that truly he was a lamp-maker against whom the whole world shrieked out, Mr. The Englishman seized the occasion.

"Madame, that baby—"

"Pardon, monsieur. That lamp."

"No, no, that little girl."

"But, pardon!" said Madame Bonclet, angling for a clew, "one cannot light a little girl, or send her to be repaired?"

"The little girl—at the house of the barber."

"Ah-h-h!" cried Madame Bouclet, suddenly catching the idea with her delicate little line and rod. "Little Bebelle? Yes, yes, yes! And her friend the Corporal? Yes, yes, yes, yes! So genteel of him,—is it not?"

"He is not—?"

"Not at all; not at all! He is not one of her relations. Not at all!"

"Why, then, he—"

"Perfectly!" cried Madame Bouclet, "you are right, monsieur. It is so genteel of him. The less relation, the more genteel. As you say."

"Is she—?"

"The child of the barber?" Madame Bouclet whisked up her skilful little line and rod again. "Not at all, not at all! She is the child of—in a word, of no one."

"The wife of the barber, then—?"

"Indubitably. As you say. The wife of the barber receives a small stipend to take care of her. So much by the month. Eh, then! It is without doubt very little, for we are all poor here."

"You are not poor, madame."

"As to my lodgers," replied Madame Bouclet, with a smiling and a gracious bend of her head, "no. As to all things else, so-so."

"You flatter me, madame."

“Monsieur, it is you who flatter me in living here.”

Certain fishy gasps on Mr. The Englishman’s part, denoting that he was about to resume his subject under difficulties, Madame Bouclet observed him closely, and whisked up her delicate line and rod again with triumphant success.

“O no, monsieur, certainly not. The wife of the barber is not cruel to the poor child, but she is careless. Her health is delicate, and she sits all day, looking out at window. Consequently, when the Corporal first came, the poor little Bebelle was much neglected.”

“It is a curious—” began Mr. The Englishman.

“Name? That Bebelle? Again you are right, monsieur. But it is a playful name for Gabrielle.”

“And so the child is a mere fancy of the Corporal’s?” said Mr. The Englishman, in a gruffly disparaging tone of voice.

“Eh, well!” returned Madame Bouclet, with a pleading shrug: “one must love something. Human nature is weak.”

(“Devilish weak,” muttered the Englishman, in his own language.)

“And the Corporal,” pursued Madame Bouclet, “being billeted at the barber’s,—where he will probably remain a long time, for he is attached to the General,—and finding the poor unowned child in need of being loved, and finding himself in need of loving,—why, there you have it all, you see!”

Mr. The Englishman accepted this interpretation of the matter with an indifferent grace, and observed to himself, in an injured manner, when he was again alone: “I shouldn’t mind it so much, if these people were not such a”—National Participled—“sentimental people!”

There was a Cemetery outside the town, and it happened ill for the reputation of the Vaubanois, in this sentimental connection, that he took a walk there that same afternoon. To be sure there were some wonderful things in it (from the Englishman’s point of view), and of a certainty in all Britain you would have found nothing like it. Not to mention the fanciful flourishes of hearts and crosses in wood and iron, that were planted all over the place, making it look very like a Firework-ground, where a most splendid pyrotechnic display might be expected after dark, there were so many wreaths upon the graves, embroidered, as it might be, “To my mother,” “To my daughter,” “To my father,” “To my brother,” “To my sister,” “To my friend,” and those many wreaths were in so many stages of elaboration and decay, from the wreath of yesterday, all fresh colour and bright beads, to the wreath of last year, a poor mouldering wisp of straw! There were so many little gardens and grottos made upon graves, in so many tastes, with plants and shells and plaster figures and porcelain pitchers, and so many odds and ends! There were so many tributes of remembrance hanging up, not to be discriminated by the closest inspection from little round waiters, whereon were depicted in glowing lines either a lady or a gentleman with a white pocket-handkerchief out of all proportion, leaning, in a state of the most faultless mourning and most profound affliction, on the most architectural and gorgeous urn! There were so many surviving wives who had put their names on the tombs of their deceased husbands, with a blank for the date of their own departure from this weary world; and there were so many surviving husbands who had rendered the same homage to their deceased wives; and out of the number there must have been so many who had long ago married again! In fine, there was so much in the place that would have seemed more frippery to a stranger, save for the consideration that the lightest paper flower that lay upon the poorest heap of earth was never touched by a rude hand, but perished there, a sacred thing!

“Nothing of the solemnity of Death here,” Mr. The Englishman had been going to say, when this last consideration touched him with a mild appeal, and on the whole he walked out without saying it. “But these people are,” he insisted, by way of compensation, when he was well outside the gate, “they are so”—Participled—“sentimental!”

His way back lay by the military gymnasium-ground. And there he passed the Corporal glibly instructing young soldiers how to swing themselves over rapid and deep watercourses on their way to Glory, by means of a rope, and himself deftly plunging off a platform, and flying a hundred feet or two, as an encouragement to them to begin. And there he also passed, perched on a crowning eminence (probably the Corporal’s careful hands), the small Bebelle, with her round eyes wide open, surveying the proceeding like a wondering sort of blue and white bird.

“If that child was to die,” this was his reflection as he turned his back and went his way,—“and it would almost serve the fellow right for making such a fool of himself,—I suppose we should have him sticking up a wreath and a waiter in that fantastic burying-ground.”

Nevertheless, after another early morning or two of looking out of window, he strolled down into the Place, when the Corporal and Bebelle were walking there, and touching his hat to the Corporal (an immense achievement), wished him Good-day.

“Good-day, monsieur.”

“This is a rather pretty child you have here,” said Mr. The Englishman, taking her chin in his hand, and looking down into her astonished blue eyes.

“Monsieur, she is a very pretty child,” returned the Corporal, with a stress on his polite correction of the phrase.

“And good?” said the Englishman.

“And very good. Poor little thing!”

“Hah!” The Englishman stooped down and patted her cheek, not without awkwardness, as if he were going too far in his conciliation. “And what is this medal round your neck, my little one?”

Bebelle having no other reply on her lips than her chubby right fist, the Corporal offered his services as interpreter.

“Monsieur demands, what is this, Bebelle?”

“It is the Holy Virgin,” said Bebelle.

“And who gave it you?” asked the Englishman.

“Théophile.”

“And who is Théophile?”

Bebelle broke into a laugh, laughed merrily and heartily, clapped her chubby hands, and beat her little feet on the stone pavement of the Place.

“He doesn’t know Théophile! Why, he doesn’t know any one! He doesn’t know anything!” Then, sensible of a small solecism in her manners, Bebelle twisted her right hand in a leg of the Corporal’s Bloomer trousers, and, laying her cheek against the place, kissed it.

“Monsieur Théophile, I believe?” said the Englishman to the Corporal.

“It is I, monsieur.”

“Permit me.” Mr. The Englishman shook him heartily by the hand and turned away. But he took it mighty ill that old Monsieur Mutuel in his patch of sunlight, upon whom he came as he turned, should pull off his cap to him with a look of pleased approval. And he muttered, in his own tongue, as he returned the salutation, “Well, walnut-shell! And what business is it of *yours*?”

Mr. The Englishman went on for many weeks passing but disturbed evenings and worse nights, and constantly experiencing that those aforesaid windows in the houses of Memory and Mercy rattled after dark, and that he had very imperfectly nailed them up. Likewise, he went on for many weeks daily improving the acquaintance of the Corporal and Bebelle. That is to say, he took Bebelle by the chin, and the Corporal by the hand, and offered Bebelle sous and the Corporal cigars, and even got the length of changing pipes with the Corporal and kissing Bebelle. But he did it all in a shamefaced way, and always took it extremely ill that Monsieur Mutuel in his patch of sunlight should note what he did. Whenever that seemed to be the case, he always growled in his own tongue, “There you are again, walnut-shell! What business is it of yours?”

In a word, it had become the occupation of Mr. The Englishman’s life to look after the Corporal and little Bebelle, and to resent old Monsieur Mutuel’s looking after *him*. An occupation only varied by a fire in the town one windy night, and much passing of water-buckets from hand to hand (in which the Englishman rendered good service), and much beating of drums,—when all of a sudden the Corporal disappeared.

Next, all of a sudden, Bebelle disappeared.

She had been visible a few days later than the Corporal,—sadly deteriorated as to washing and brushing,—but she had not spoken when addressed by Mr. The Englishman, and had looked scared and had run away. And now it would seem that she had run away for good. And there lay the Great Place under the windows, bare and barren.

In his shamefaced and constrained way, Mr. The Englishman asked no question of any one, but watched from his front windows and watched from his back windows, and lingered about the Place, and peeped in at the Barber’s shop, and did all this and much more with a whistling and tune-humming pretence of not missing anything, until one afternoon when Monsieur Mutuel’s patch of sunlight was in shadow, and when, according to all rule and precedent, he had no right whatever to bring his red ribbon out of doors, behold here he was, advancing with his cap already in his hand twelve paces off!

Mr. The Englishman had got as far into his usual objurgation as, “What bu-si—” when he checked himself.

“Ah, it is sad, it is sad! Hélas, it is unhappy, it is sad!” Thus old Monsieur Mutuel, shaking his gray head.

“What busin—at least, I would say, what do you mean, Monsieur Mutuel?”

"Our Corporal. Hélas, our dear Corporal!"

"What has happened to him?"

"You have not heard?"

"No."

"At the fire. But he was so brave, so ready. Ah, too brave, too ready!"

"May the Devil carry you away!" the Englishman broke in impatiently; "I beg your pardon,—I mean me,—I am not accustomed to speak French,—go on, will you?"

"And a falling beam—"

"Good God!" exclaimed the Englishman. "It was a private soldier who was killed?"

"No. A Corporal, the same Corporal, our dear Corporal. Beloved by all his comrades. The funeral ceremony was touching,—penetrating. Monsieur The Englishman, your eyes fill with tears."

"What bu-si—"

"Monsieur The Englishman, I honour those emotions. I salute you with profound respect. I will not obtrude myself upon your noble heart."

Monsieur Mutuel,—a gentleman in every thread of his cloudy linen, under whose wrinkled hand every grain in the quarter of an ounce of poor snuff in his poor little tin box became a gentleman's property,—Monsieur Mutuel passed on, with his cap in his hand.

"I little thought," said the Englishman, after walking for several minutes, and more than once blowing his nose, "when I was looking round that cemetery—I'll go there!"

Straight he went there, and when he came within the gate he paused, considering whether he should ask at the lodge for some direction to the grave. But he was less than ever in a mood for asking questions, and he thought, "I shall see something on it to know it by."

In search of the Corporal's grave he went softly on, up this walk and down that, peering in, among the crosses and hearts and columns and obelisks and tombstones, for a recently disturbed spot. It troubled him now to think how many dead there were in the cemetery,—he had not thought them a tenth part so numerous before,—and after he had walked and sought for some time, he said to himself, as he struck down a new vista of tombs, "I might suppose that every one was dead but I."

Not every one. A live child was lying on the ground asleep. Truly he had found something on the Corporal's grave to know it by, and the something was Bebelle.

With such a loving will had the dead soldier’s comrades worked at his resting-place, that it was already a neat garden. On the green turf of the garden Bebelle lay sleeping, with her cheek touching it. A plain, unpainted little wooden Cross was planted in the turf, and her short arm embraced this little Cross, as it had many a time embraced the Corporal’s neck. They had put a tiny flag (the flag of France) at his head, and a laurel garland.

Mr. The Englishman took off his hat, and stood for a while silent. Then, covering his head again, he bent down on one knee, and softly roused the child.

“Bebelle! My little one!”

Opening her eyes, on which the tears were still wet, Bebelle was at first frightened; but seeing who it was, she suffered him to take her in his arms, looking steadfastly at him.

“You must not lie here, my little one. You must come with me.”

“No, no. I can’t leave Théophile. I want the good dear Théophile.”

“We will go and seek him, Bebelle. We will go and look for him in England. We will go and look for him at my daughter’s, Bebelle.”

“Shall we find him there?”

“We shall find the best part of him there. Come with me, poor forlorn little one. Heaven is my witness,” said the Englishman, in a low voice, as, before he rose, he touched the turf above the gentle Corporal’s breast, “that I thankfully accept this trust!”

It was a long way for the child to have come unaided. She was soon asleep again, with her embrace transferred to the Englishman’s neck. He looked at her worn shoes, and her galled feet, and her tired face, and believed that she had come there every day.

He was leaving the grave with the slumbering Bebelle in his arms, when he stopped, looked wistfully down at it, and looked wistfully at the other graves around. “It is the innocent custom of the people,” said Mr. The Englishman, with hesitation. “I think I should like to do it. No one sees.”

Careful not to wake Bebelle as he went, he repaired to the lodge where such little tokens of remembrance were sold, and bought two wreaths. One, blue and white and glistening silver, “To my friend;” one of a soberer red and black and yellow, “To my friend.” With these he went back to the grave, and so down on one knee again. Touching the child’s lips with the brighter wreath, he guided her hand to hang it on the Cross; then hung his own wreath there. After all, the wreaths were not far out of keeping with the little garden. To my friend. To my friend.

Mr. The Englishman took it very ill when he looked round a street corner into the Great Place, carrying Bebelle in his arms, that old Mutuel should be there airing his red ribbon. He took a world of pains to dodge the worthy Mutuel, and devoted a surprising amount of time and trouble to skulking into his own lodging like a man pursued by Justice. Safely arrived there at last, he made Bebelle's toilet with as accurate a remembrance as he could bring to bear upon that work of the way in which he had often seen the poor Corporal make it, and having given her to eat and drink, laid her down on his own bed. Then he slipped out into the barber's shop, and after a brief interview with the barber's wife, and a brief recourse to his purse and card-case, came back again with the whole of Bebelle's personal property in such a very little bundle that it was quite lost under his arm.

As it was irreconcilable with his whole course and character that he should carry Bebelle off in state, or receive any compliments or congratulations on that feat, he devoted the next day to getting his two portmanteaus out of the house by artfulness and stealth, and to comporting himself in every particular as if he were going to run away,—except, indeed, that he paid his few debts in the town, and prepared a letter to leave for Madame Bouclet, enclosing a sufficient sum of money in lieu of notice. A railway train would come through at midnight, and by that train he would take away Bebelle to look for Théophile in England and at his forgiven daughter's.

At midnight, on a moonlight night, Mr. The Englishman came creeping forth like a harmless assassin, with Bebelle on his breast instead of a dagger. Quiet the Great Place, and quiet the never-stirring streets; closed the cafés; huddled together motionless their billiard-balls; drowsy the guard or sentinel on duty here and there; lulled for the time, by sleep, even the insatiate appetite of the Office of Town-dues.

Mr. The Englishman left the Place behind, and left the streets behind, and left the civilian-inhabited town behind, and descended down among the military works of Vauban, hemming all in. As the shadow of the first heavy arch and postern fell upon him and was left behind, as the shadow of the second heavy arch and postern fell upon him and was left behind, as his hollow tramp over the first drawbridge was succeeded by a gentler sound, as his hollow tramp over the second drawbridge was succeeded by a gentler sound, as he overcame the stagnant ditches one by one, and passed out where the flowing waters were and where the moonlight, so the dark shades and the hollow sounds and the unwholesomely locked currents of his soul were vanquished and set free. See to it, Vaubans of your own hearts, who gird them in with triple walls and ditches, and with bolt and chain and bar and lifted bridge,—raze those fortifications, and lay them level with the all-absorbing dust, before the night cometh when no hand can work!

All went prosperously, and he got into an empty carriage in the train, where he could lay Bebelle on the seat over against him, as on a couch, and cover her from head to foot with his mantle. He had just drawn himself up from perfecting this arrangement, and had just leaned back in his own seat contemplating it with great satisfaction, when he became aware of a curious appearance at the open carriage window,—a ghostly little tin box floating up in the moonlight, and hovering there.

He leaned forward, and put out his head. Down among the rails and wheels and ashes, Monsieur Mutuel, red ribbon and all!

“Excuse me, Monsieur The Englishman,” said Monsieur Mutuel, holding up his box at arm’s length, the carriage being so high and he so low; “but I shall reverence the little box for ever, if your so generous hand will take a pinch from it at parting.”

Mr. The Englishman reached out of the window before complying, and—without asking the old fellow what business it was of his—shook hands and said, “Adieu! God bless you!”

“And, Mr. The Englishman, God bless *you*!” cried Madame Bouclet, who was also there among the rails and wheels and ashes. “And God will bless you in the happiness of the protected child now with you. And God will bless you in your own child at home. And God will bless you in your own remembrances. And this from me!”

He had barely time to catch a bouquet from her hand, when the train was flying through the night. Round the paper that enfolded it was bravely written (doubtless by the nephew who held the pen of an Angel), “Homage to the friend of the friendless.”

“Not bad people, Bebelle!” said Mr. The Englishman, softly drawing the mantle a little from her sleeping face, that he might kiss it, “though they are so—”

Too “sentimental” himself at the moment to be able to get out that word, he added nothing but a sob, and travelled for some miles, through the moonlight, with his hand before his eyes.

CHAPTER III—HIS BROWN-PAPER PARCEL

My works are well known. I am a young man in the Art line. You have seen my works many a time, though it's fifty thousand to one if you have seen me. You say you don't want to see me? You say your interest is in my works, and not in me? Don't be too sure about that. Stop a bit.

Let us have it down in black and white at the first go off, so that there may be no unpleasantness or wrangling afterwards. And this is looked over by a friend of mine, a ticket writer, that is up to literature. I am a young man in the Art line—in the Fine-Art line. You have seen my works over and over again, and you have been curious about me, and you think you have seen me. Now, as a safe rule, you never have seen me, and you never do see me, and you never will see me. I think that's plainly put—and it's what knocks me over.

If there's a blighted public character going, I am the party.

It has been remarked by a certain (or an uncertain,) philosopher, that the world knows nothing of its greatest men. He might have put it plainer if he had thrown his eye in my direction. He might have put it, that while the world knows something of them that apparently go in and win, it knows nothing of them that really go in and don't win. There it is again in another form—and that's what knocks me over.

Not that it's only myself that suffers from injustice, but that I am more alive to my own injuries than to any other man's. Being, as I have mentioned, in the Fine-Art line, and not the Philanthropic line, I openly admit it. As to company in injury, I have company enough. Who are you passing every day at your Competitive Excruciations? The fortunate candidates whose heads and livers you have turned upside down for life? Not you. You are really passing the Crammers and Coaches. If your principle is right, why don't you turn out to-morrow morning with the keys of your cities on velvet cushions, your musicians playing, and your flags flying, and read addresses to the Crammers and Coaches on your bended knees, beseeching them to come out and govern you? Then, again, as to your public business of all sorts, your Financial statements and your

Budgets; the Public knows much, truly, about the real doers of all that! Your Nobles and Right Honourables are first-rate men? Yes, and so is a goose a first-rate bird. But I'll tell you this about the goose;—you'll find his natural flavour disappointing, without stuffing.

Perhaps I am soured by not being popular? But suppose I AM popular. Suppose my works never fail to attract. Suppose that, whether they are exhibited by natural light or by artificial, they invariably draw the public. Then no doubt they are preserved in some Collection? No, they are not; they are not preserved in any Collection. Copyright? No, nor yet copyright. Anyhow they must be somewhere? Wrong again, for they are often nowhere.

Says you, "At all events, you are in a moody state of mind, my friend." My answer is, I have described myself as a public character with a blight upon him—which fully accounts for the curdling of the milk in *that* cocoa-nut.

Those that are acquainted with London are aware of a locality on the Surrey side of the river Thames, called the Obelisk, or, more generally, the Obstacle. Those that are not acquainted with London will also be aware of it, now that I have named it. My lodging is not far from that locality. I am a young man of that easy disposition, that I lie abed till it's absolutely necessary to get up and earn something, and then I lie abed again till I have spent it.

It was on an occasion when I had had to turn to with a view to victuals, that I found myself walking along the Waterloo Road, one evening after dark, accompanied by an acquaintance and fellow-lodger in the gas-fitting way of life. He is very good company, having worked at the theatres, and, indeed, he has a theatrical turn himself, and wishes to be brought out in the character of Othello; but whether on account of his regular work always blacking his face and hands more or less, I cannot say.

"Tom," he says, "what a mystery hangs over you!"

"Yes, Mr. Click"—the rest of the house generally give him his name, as being first, front, carpeted all over, his own furniture, and if not mahogany, an out-and-out imitation—"yes, Mr. Click, a mystery does hang over me."

"Makes you low, you see, don't it?" says he, eyeing me sideways.

"Why, yes, Mr. Click, there are circumstances connected with it that have," I yielded to a sigh, "a lowering effect."

“Gives you a touch of the misanthrope too, don’t it?” says he. “Well, I’ll tell you what. If I was you, I’d shake it of.”

“If I was you, I would, Mr. Click; but, if you was me, you wouldn’t.”

“Ah!” says he, “there’s something in that.”

When we had walked a little further, he took it up again by touching me on the chest.

“You see, Tom, it seems to me as if, in the words of the poet who wrote the domestic drama of The Stranger, you had a silent sorrow there.”

“I have, Mr. Click.”

“I hope, Tom,” lowering his voice in a friendly way, “it isn’t coining, or smashing?”

“No, Mr. Click. Don’t be uneasy.”

“Nor yet forg—” Mr. Click checked himself, and added, “counterfeiting anything, for instance?”

“No, Mr. Click. I am lawfully in the Art line—Fine-Art line—but I can say no more.”

“Ah! Under a species of star? A kind of malignant spell? A sort of a gloomy destiny? A cankerworm pegging away at your vitals in secret, as well as I make it out?” said Mr. Click, eyeing me with some admiration.

I told Mr. Click that was about it, if we came to particulars; and I thought he appeared rather proud of me.

Our conversation had brought us to a crowd of people, the greater part struggling for a front place from which to see something on the pavement, which proved to be various designs executed in coloured chalks on the pavement stones, lighted by two candles stuck in mud sconces. The subjects consisted of a fine fresh salmon’s head and shoulders, supposed to have been recently sent home from the fishmonger’s; a moonlight night at sea (in a circle); dead game; scroll-work; the head of a hoary hermit engaged in devout contemplation; the head of a pointer smoking a pipe; and a cherubim, his flesh creased as in infancy, going on a horizontal errand against the wind. All these subjects appeared to me to be exquisitely done.

On his knees on one side of this gallery, a shabby person of modest appearance who shivered dreadfully (though it wasn’t at all cold), was engaged in blowing the chalk-dust off the moon, toning the outline of the back of the hermit’s head with a bit of leather, and fattening the down-stroke of a letter or two in the writing. I have forgotten to mention that writing formed a part of the composition, and that it also—as it appeared to me—was exquisitely done. It ran as follows, in fine round characters: “An honest man is the noblest work of God. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0. £ s. d. Employment in an office is humbly requested. Honour the Queen. Hunger is a 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 sharp thorn. Chip chop, cherry chop, fol de rol de ri do. Astronomy and mathematics. I do this to support my family.”

Murmurs of admiration at the exceeding beauty of this performance went about among the crowd. The artist, having finished his touching (and having spoilt those places), took his seat on the pavement, with his knees crouched up very nigh his chin; and halfpence began to rattle in.

“A pity to see a man of that talent brought so low; ain’t it?” said one of the crowd to me.

“What he might have done in the coach-painting, or house-decorating!” said another man, who took up the first speaker because I did not.

“Why, he writes—alone—like the Lord Chancellor!” said another man.

“Better,” said another. “I know his writing. He couldn’t support his family this way.”

Then, a woman noticed the natural fluffiness of the hermit’s hair, and another woman, her friend, mentioned of the salmon’s gills that you could almost see him gasp. Then, an elderly country gentleman stepped forward and asked the modest man how he executed his work? And the modest man took some scraps of brown paper with colours in ’em out of his pockets, and showed them. Then a fair-complexioned donkey, with sandy hair and spectacles, asked if the hermit was a portrait? To which the modest man, casting a sorrowful glance upon it, replied that it was, to a certain extent, a recollection of his father. This caused a boy to yelp out, “Is the Pinter a smoking the pipe your mother?” who was immediately shoved out of view by a sympathetic carpenter with his basket of tools at his back.

At every fresh question or remark the crowd leaned forward more eagerly, and dropped the halfpence more freely, and the modest man gathered them up more meekly. At last, another elderly gentleman came to the front, and gave the artist his card, to come to his office to-morrow, and get some copying to do. The card was accompanied by sixpence, and the artist was profoundly grateful, and, before he put the card in his hat, read it several times by the light of his candles to fix the address well in his mind, in case he should lose it. The crowd was deeply interested by this last incident, and a man in the second row with a gruff voice growled to the artist, “You’ve got a chance in life now, ain’t you?” The artist answered (sniffing in a very low-spirited way, however), “I’m thankful to hope so.” Upon which there was a general chorus of “You are all right,” and the halfpence slackened very decidedly.

I felt myself pulled away by the arm, and Mr. Click and I stood alone at the corner of the next crossing.

“Why, Tom,” said Mr. Click, “what a horrid expression of face you’ve got!”

“Have I?” says I.

“Have you?” says Mr. Click. “Why, you looked as if you would have his blood.”

“Whose blood?”

“The artist’s.”

“The artist’s?” I repeated. And I laughed, frantically, wildly, gloomily, incoherently, disagreeably. I am sensible that I did. I know I did.

Mr. Click stared at me in a scared sort of a way, but said nothing until we had walked a street’s length. He then stopped short, and said, with excitement on the part of his forefinger:

“Thomas, I find it necessary to be plain with you. I don’t like the envious man. I have identified the cankerworm that’s pegging away at *your* vitals, and it’s envy, Thomas.”

“Is it?” says I.

“Yes, it is,” says be. “Thomas, beware of envy. It is the green-eyed monster which never did and never will improve each shining hour, but quite the reverse. I dread the envious man, Thomas. I confess that I am afraid of the envious man, when he is so envious as you are. Whilst you contemplated the works of a gifted rival, and whilst you heard that rival’s praises, and especially whilst you met his humble glance as he put that card away, your countenance was so malevolent as to be terrific. Thomas, I have heard of the envy of them that follows the Fine-Art line, but I never believed it could be what yours is. I wish you well, but I take my leave of you. And if you should ever got into trouble through knifeing—or say, garotting—a brother artist, as I believe you will, don’t call me to character, Thomas, or I shall be forced to injure your case.”

Mr. Click parted from me with those words, and we broke off our acquaintance.

I became enamoured. Her name was Henrietta. Contending with my easy disposition, I frequently got up to go after her. She also dwelt in the neighbourhood of the Obstacle, and I did fondly hope that no other would interpose in the way of our union.

To say that Henrietta was volatile is but to say that she was woman. To say that she was in the bonnet-trimming is feebly to express the taste which reigned predominant in her own.

She consented to walk with me. Let me do her the justice to say that she did so upon trial. "I am not," said Henrietta, "as yet prepared to regard you, Thomas, in any other light than as a friend; but as a friend I am willing to walk with you, on the understanding that softer sentiments may flow."

We walked.

Under the influence of Henrietta's beguilements, I now got out of bed daily. I pursued my calling with an industry before unknown, and it cannot fail to have been observed at that period, by those most familiar with the streets of London, that there was a larger supply. But hold! The time is not yet come!

One evening in October I was walking with Henrietta, enjoying the cool breezes wafted over Vauxhall Bridge. After several slow turns, Henrietta gaped frequently (so inseparable from woman is the love of excitement), and said, "Let's go home by Grosvenor Place, Piccadilly, and Waterloo"—localities, I may state for the information of the stranger and the foreigner, well known in London, and the last a Bridge.

"No. Not by Piccadilly, Henrietta," said I.

"And why not Piccadilly, for goodness' sake?" said Henrietta.

Could I tell her? Could I confess to the gloomy presentiment that overshadowed me? Could I make myself intelligible to her? No.

"I don't like Piccadilly, Henrietta."

"But I do," said she. "It's dark now, and the long rows of lamps in Piccadilly after dark are beautiful. I *will* go to Piccadilly!"

Of course we went. It was a pleasant night, and there were numbers of people in the streets. It was a brisk night, but not too cold, and not damp. Let me darkly observe, it was the best of all nights—FOR THE PURPOSE.

As we passed the garden wall of the Royal Palace, going up Grosvenor Place, Henrietta murmured:

"I wish I was a Queen!"

"Why so, Henrietta?"

"I would make *you* Something," said she, and crossed her two hands on my arm, and turned away her head.

Judging from this that the softer sentiments alluded to above had begun to flow, I adapted my conduct to that belief. Thus happily we passed on into the detested thoroughfare of Piccadilly. On the right of that thoroughfare is a row of trees, the railing of the Green Park, and a fine broad eligible piece of pavement.

“Oh my!” cried Henrietta presently. “There’s been an accident!”

I looked to the left, and said, “Where, Henrietta?”

“Not there, stupid!” said she. “Over by the Park railings. Where the crowd is. Oh no, it’s not an accident, it’s something else to look at! What’s them lights?”

She referred to two lights twinkling low amongst the legs of the assemblage: two candles on the pavement.

“Oh, do come along!” cried Henrietta, skipping across the road with me. I hung back, but in vain. “Do let’s look!”

Again, designs upon the pavement. Centre compartment, Mount Vesuvius going it (in a circle), supported by four oval compartments, severally representing a ship in heavy weather, a shoulder of mutton attended by two cucumbers, a golden harvest with distant cottage of proprietor, and a knife and fork after nature; above the centre compartment a bunch of grapes, and over the whole a rainbow. The whole, as it appeared to me, exquisitely done.

The person in attendance on these works of art was in all respects, shabbiness excepted, unlike the former personage. His whole appearance and manner denoted briskness. Though threadbare, he expressed to the crowd that poverty had not subdued his spirit, or tinged with any sense of shame this honest effort to turn his talents to some account. The writing which formed a part of his composition was conceived in a similarly cheerful tone. It breathed the following sentiments: “The writer is poor, but not despondent. To a British 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 Public he £ s. d. appeals. Honour to our brave Army! And also 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 to our gallant Navy. BRITONS STRIKE the A B C D E F G writer in common chalks would be grateful for any suitable employment HOME! HURRAH!” The whole of this writing appeared to me to be exquisitely done.

But this man, in one respect like the last, though seemingly hard at it with a great show of brown paper and rubbers, was only really fattening the down-stroke of a letter here and there, or blowing the loose chalk off the rainbow, or toning the outside edge of the shoulder of mutton. Though he did this with the greatest confidence, he did it (as it struck me) in so ignorant a manner, and so spoilt everything he touched, that when he began upon the purple smoke from the chimney of the distant cottage of the proprietor of the golden harvest (which smoke was beautifully soft), I found myself saying aloud, without considering of it:

"Let that alone, will you?"

"Halloa!" said the man next me in the crowd, jerking me roughly from him with his elbow, "why didn't you send a telegram? If we had known you was coming, we'd have provided something better for you. You understand the man's work better than he does himself, don't you? Have you made your will? You're too clever to live long."

"Don't be hard upon the gentleman, sir," said the person in attendance on the works of art, with a twinkle in his eye as he looked at me; "he may chance to be an artist himself. If so, sir, he will have a fellow-feeling with me, sir, when I"—he adapted his action to his words as he went on, and gave a smart slap of his hands between each touch, working himself all the time about and about the composition—"when I lighten the bloom of my grapes—shade off the orange in my rainbow—dot the i of my Britons—throw a yellow light into my cow-cum-*ber*—insinuate another morsel of fat into my shoulder of mutton—dart another zigzag flash of lightning at my ship in distress!"

He seemed to do this so neatly, and was so nimble about it, that the halfpence came flying in.

"Thanks, generous public, thanks!" said the professor. "You will stimulate me to further exertions. My name will be found in the list of British Painters yet. I shall do better than this, with encouragement. I shall indeed."

"You never can do better than that bunch of grapes," said Henrietta. "Oh, Thomas, them grapes!"

"Not better than *that*, lady? I hope for the time when I shall paint anything but your own bright eyes and lips equal to life."

"(Thomas, did you ever?) But it must take a long time, sir," said Henrietta, blushing, "to paint equal to that."

"I was prenticed to it, miss," said the young man, smartly touching up the composition—"prenticed to it in the caves of Spain and Portingale, ever so long and two year over."

There was a laugh from the crowd; and a new man who had worked himself in next me, said, “He’s a smart chap, too; ain’t he?”

“And what a eye!” exclaimed Henrietta softly.

“Ah! He need have a eye,” said the man.

“Ah! He just need,” was murmured among the crowd.

“He couldn’t come that ’ere burning mountain without a eye,” said the man. He had got himself accepted as an authority, somehow, and everybody looked at his finger as it pointed out Vesuvius. “To come that effect in a general illumination would require a eye; but to come it with two dips—why, it’s enough to blind him!”

That impostor, pretending not to have heard what was said, now winked to any extent with both eyes at once, as if the strain upon his sight was too much, and threw back his long hair—it was very long—as if to cool his fevered brow. I was watching him doing it, when Henrietta suddenly whispered, “Oh, Thomas, how horrid you look!” and pulled me out by the arm.

Remembering Mr. Click’s words, I was confused when I retorted, “What do you mean by horrid?”

“Oh gracious! Why, you looked,” said Henrietta, “as if you would have his blood.”

I was going to answer, “So I would, for twopence—from his nose,” when I checked myself and remained silent.

We returned home in silence. Every step of the way, the softer sentiments that had flowed, ebbed twenty mile an hour. Adapting my conduct to the ebbing, as I had done to the flowing, I let my arm drop limp, so as she could scarcely keep hold of it, and I wished her such a cold good-night at parting, that I keep within the bounds of truth when I characterise it as a Rasper.

In the course of the next day I received the following document:

> “Henrietta informs Thomas that my eyes are open to you. I must ever wish you well, but walking and us is separated by an unfarmable abyss. One so malignant to superiority—Oh that look at him!—can never never conduct
>
> HENRIETTA
>
> P.S.—To the altar.”

Yielding to the easiness of my disposition, I went to bed for a week, after receiving this letter. During the whole of such time, London was bereft of the usual fruits of my labour. When I resumed it, I found that Henrietta was married to the artist of Piccadilly.

Did I say to the artist? What fell words were those, expressive of what a galling hollowness, of what a bitter mockery! I—I—I—am the artist. I was the real artist of Piccadilly, I was the real artist of the Waterloo Road, I am the only artist of all those pavement-subjects which daily and nightly arouse your admiration. I do ’em, and I let ’em out. The man you behold with the papers of chalks and the rubbers, touching up the down-strokes of the writing and shading off the salmon, the man you give the credit to, the man you give the money to, hires—yes! and I live to tell it!—hires those works of art of me, and brings nothing to ’em but the candles.

Such is genius in a commercial country. I am not up to the shivering, I am not up to the liveliness, I am not up to the wanting-employment-in-an-office move; I am only up to originating and executing the work. In consequence of which you never see me; you think you see me when you see somebody else, and that somebody else is a mere Commercial character. The one seen by self and Mr. Click in the Waterloo Road can only write a single word, and that I taught him, and it’s MULTIPLICATION—which you may see him execute upside down, because he can’t do it the natural way. The one seen by self and Henrietta by the Green Park railings can just smear into existence the two ends of a rainbow, with his cuff and a rubber—if very hard put upon making a show—but he could no more come the arch of the rainbow, to save his life, than he could come the moonlight, fish, volcano, shipwreck, mutton, hermit, or any of my most celebrated effects.

To conclude as I began: if there’s a blighted public character going, I am the party. And often as you have seen, do see, and will see, my Works, it’s fifty thousand to one if you’ll ever see me, unless, when the candles are burnt down and the Commercial character is gone, you should happen to notice a neglected young man perseveringly rubbing out the last traces of the pictures, so that nobody can renew the same. That’s me.

CHAPTER IV—HIS WONDERFUL END

It will have been, ere now, perceived that I sold the foregoing writings. From the fact of their being printed in these pages, the inference will, ere now, have been drawn by the reader (may I add, the gentle reader?) that I sold them to One who never yet—{2}.

Having parted with the writings on most satisfactory terms,—for, in opening negotiations with the present Journal, was I not placing myself in the hands of One of whom it may be said, in the words of Another, {2,}—resumed my usual functions. But I too soon discovered that peace of mind had fled from a brow which, up to that time, Time had merely took the hair off, leaving an unruffled expanse within.

It were superfluous to veil it,—the brow to which I allude is my own.

Yes, over that brow uneasiness gathered like the sable wing of the fabled bird, as—as no doubt will be easily identified by all right-minded individuals. If not, I am unable, on the spur of the moment, to enter into particulars of him. The reflection that the writings must now inevitably get into print, and that He might yet live and meet with them, sat like the Hag of Night upon my jaded form. The elasticity of my spirits departed. Fruitless was the Bottle, whether Wine or Medicine. I had recourse to both, and the effect of both upon my system was witheringly lowering.

In this state of depression, into which I subsided when I first began to revolve what could I ever say if He—the unknown—was to appear in the Coffee-room and demand reparation, I one forenoon in this last November received a turn that appeared to be given me by the finger of Fate and Conscience, hand in hand. I was alone in the Coffee-room, and had just poked the fire into a blaze, and was standing with my back to it, trying whether heat would penetrate with soothing influence to the Voice within, when a young man in a cap, of an intelligent countenance, though requiring his hair cut, stood before me.

"Mr. Christopher, the Head Waiter?"

"The same."

The young man shook his hair out of his vision,—which it impeded,—to a packet from his breast, and handing it over to me, said, with his eye (or did I dream?) fixed with a lambent meaning on me, "THE PROOFS."

Although I smelt my coat-tails singeing at the fire, I had not the power to withdraw them. The young man put the packet in my faltering grasp, and repeated,—let me do him the justice to add, with civility:

“THE PROOFS. A. Y. R.”

With those words he departed.

A. Y. R.? And You Remember. Was that his meaning? At Your Risk. Were the letters short for *that* reminder? Anticipate Your Retribution. Did they stand for *that* warning? Out-dacious Youth Repent? But no; for that, a O was happily wanting, and the vowel here was a A.

I opened the packet, and found that its contents were the foregoing writings printed just as the reader (may I add the discerning reader?) peruses them. In vain was the reassuring whisper,—A.Y.R., All the Year Round,—it could not cancel the Proofs. Too appropriate name. The Proofs of my having sold the Writings.

My wretchedness daily increased. I had not thought of the risk I ran, and the defying publicity I put my head into, until all was done, and all was in print. Give up the money to be off the bargain and prevent the publication, I could not. My family was down in the world, Christmas was coming on, a brother in the hospital and a sister in the rheumatics could not be entirely neglected. And it was not only ins in the family that had told on the resources of one unaided Waitering; outs were not wanting. A brother out of a situation, and another brother out of money to meet an acceptance, and another brother out of his mind, and another brother out at New York (not the same, though it might appear so), had really and truly brought me to a stand till I could turn myself round. I got worse and worse in my meditations, constantly reflecting “The Proofs,” and reflecting that when Christmas drew nearer, and the Proofs were published, there could be no safety from hour to hour but that He might confront me in the Coffee-room, and in the face of day and his country demand his rights.

The impressive and unlooked-for catastrophe towards which I dimly pointed the reader (shall I add, the highly intellectual reader?) in my first remarks now rapidly approaches.

It was November still, but the last echoes of the Guy Foxes had long ceased to reverberate. We was slack,—several joints under our average mark, and wine, of course, proportionate. So slack had we become at last, that Beds Nos. 26, 27, 28, and 31, having took their six o’clock dinners, and dozed over their respective pints, had drove away in their respective Hansoms for their respective Night Mail-trains and left us empty.

I had took the evening paper to No. 6 table,—which is warm and most to be preferred,—and, lost in the all-absorbing topics of the day, had dropped into a slumber. I was recalled to consciousness by the well-known intimation, “Waiter!” and replying, “Sir!” found a gentleman standing at No. 4 table. The reader (shall I add, the observant reader?) will please to notice the locality of the gentleman,—*at No. 4 table*.

He had one of the newfangled uncollapsable bags in his hand (which I am against, for I don’t see why you shouldn’t collapse, while you are about it, as your fathers collapsed before you), and he said:

“I want to dine, waiter. I shall sleep here to-night.”

“Very good, sir. What will you take for dinner, sir?”

“Soup, bit of codfish, oyster sauce, and the joint.”

“Thank you, sir.”

I rang the chambermaid’s bell; and Mrs. Pratchett marched in, according to custom, demurely carrying a lighted flat candle before her, as if she was one of a long public procession, all the other members of which was invisible.

In the meanwhile the gentleman had gone up to the mantelpiece, right in front of the fire, and had laid his forehead against the mantelpiece (which it is a low one, and brought him into the attitude of leap-frog), and had heaved a tremenjous sigh. His hair was long and lightish; and when he laid his forehead against the mantelpiece, his hair all fell in a dusty fluff together over his eyes; and when he now turned round and lifted up his head again, it all fell in a dusty fluff together over his ears. This give him a wild appearance, similar to a blasted heath.

“O! The chambermaid. Ah!” He was turning something in his mind. “To be sure. Yes. I won’t go up-stairs now, if you will take my bag. It will be enough for the present to know my number.—Can you give me 24 B?”

(O Conscience, what a Adder art thou!)

Mrs. Pratchett allotted him the room, and took his bag to it. He then went back before the fire, and fell a biting his nails.

“Waiter!” biting between the words, “give me,” bite, “pen and paper; and in five minutes,” bite, “let me have, if you please,” bite, “a”, bite, “Messenger.”

Unmindful of his waning soup, he wrote and sent off six notes before he touched his dinner. Three were City; three West-End. The City letters were to Cornhill, Ludgate-hill, and Farringdon Street. The West-End letters were to Great Marlborough Street, New Burlington Street, and Piccadilly. Everybody was systematically denied at every one of the six places, and there was not a vestige of any answer. Our light porter whispered to me, when he came back with that report, “All Booksellers.”

But before then he had cleared off his dinner, and his bottle of wine. He now—mark the concurrence with the document formerly given in full!—knocked a plate of biscuits off the table with his agitated elber (but without breakage), and demanded boiling brandy-and-water.

Now fully convinced that it was Himself, I perspired with the utmost freedom. When he became flushed with the heated stimulant referred to, he again demanded pen and paper, and passed the succeeding two hours in producing a manuscript which he put in the fire when completed. He then went up to bed, attended by Mrs. Pratchett. Mrs. Pratchett (who was aware of my emotions) told me, on coming down, that she had noticed his eye rolling into every corner of the passages and staircase, as if in search of his Luggage, and that, looking back as she shut the door of 24 B, she perceived him with his coat already thrown off immersing himself bodily under the bedstead, like a chimley-sweep before the application of machinery.

The next day—I forbear the horrors of that night—was a very foggy day in our part of London, insomuch that it was necessary to light the Coffee-room gas. We was still alone, and no feverish words of mine can do justice to the fitfulness of his appearance as he sat at No. 4 table, increased by there being something wrong with the meter.

Having again ordered his dinner, he went out, and was out for the best part of two hours. Inquiring on his return whether any of the answers had arrived, and receiving an unqualified negative, his instant call was for mulligatawny, the cayenne pepper, and orange brandy.

Feeling that the mortal struggle was now at hand, I also felt that I must be equal to him, and with that view resolved that whatever he took I would take. Behind my partition, but keeping my eye on him over the curtain, I therefore operated on Mulligatawny, Cayenne Pepper, and Orange Brandy. And at a later period of the day, when he again said, “Orange Brandy,” I said so too, in a lower tone, to George, my Second Lieutenant (my First was absent on leave), who acts between me and the bar.

Throughout that awful day he walked about the Coffee-room continually. Often he came close up to my partition, and then his eye rolled within, too evidently in search of any signs of his Luggage. Half-past six came, and I laid his cloth. He ordered a bottle of old Brown. I likewise ordered a bottle of old Brown. He drank his. I drank mine (as nearly as my duties would permit) glass for glass against his. He topped with coffee and a small glass. I topped with coffee and a small glass. He dozed. I dozed. At last, “Waiter!”—and he ordered his bill. The moment was now at hand when we two must be locked in the deadly grapple.

Swift as the arrow from the bow, I had formed my resolution; in other words, I had hammered it out between nine and nine. It was, that I would be the first to open up the subject with a full acknowledgment, and would offer any gradual settlement within my power. He paid his bill (doing what was right by attendance) with his eye rolling about him to the last for any tokens of his Luggage. One only time our gaze then met, with the lustrous fixedness (I believe I am correct in imputing that character to it?) of the well-known Basilisk. The decisive moment had arrived.

With a tolerable steady hand, though with humility, I laid The Proofs before him.

“Gracious Heavens!” he cries out, leaping up, and catching hold of his hair. “What’s this? Print!”

“Sir,” I replied, in a calming voice, and bending forward, “I humbly acknowledge to being the unfortunate cause of it. But I hope, sir, that when you have heard the circumstances explained, and the innocence of my intentions—”

To my amazement, I was stopped short by his catching me in both his arms, and pressing me to his breast-bone; where I must confess to my face (and particular, nose) having undergone some temporary vexation from his wearing his coat buttoned high up, and his buttons being uncommon hard.

“Ha, ha, ha!” he cries, releasing me with a wild laugh, and grasping my hand. “What is your name, my Benefactor?”

“My name, sir” (I was crumpled, and puzzled to make him out), “is Christopher; and I hope, sir, that, as such, when you’ve heard my ex—”

“In print!” he exclaims again, dashing the proofs over and over as if he was bathing in them.—“In print!! O Christopher! Philanthropist! Nothing can recompense you,—but what sum of money would be acceptable to you?”

I had drawn a step back from him, or I should have suffered from his buttons again.

"Sir, I assure you, I have been already well paid, and—"

"No, no, Christopher! Don't talk like that! What sum of money would be acceptable to you, Christopher? Would you find twenty pounds acceptable, Christopher?"

However great my surprise, I naturally found words to say, "Sir, I am not aware that the man was ever yet born without more than the average amount of water on the brain as would not find twenty pounds acceptable. But—extremely obliged to you, sir, I'm sure;" for he had tumbled it out of his purse and crammed it in my hand in two bank-notes; "but I could wish to know, sir, if not intruding, how I have merited this liberality?"

"Know then, my Christopher," he says, "that from boyhood's hour I have unremittingly and unavailingly endeavoured to get into print. Know, Christopher, that all the Booksellers alive—and several dead—have refused to put me into print. Know, Christopher, that I have written unprinted Reams. But they shall be read to you, my friend and brother. You sometimes have a holiday?"

Seeing the great danger I was in, I had the presence of mind to answer, "Never!" To make it more final, I added, "Never! Not from the cradle to the grave."

"Well," says he, thinking no more about that, and chuckling at his proofs again. "But I am in print! The first flight of ambition emanating from my father's lowly cot is realised at length! The golden bow"—he was getting on,—"struck by the magic hand, has emitted a complete and perfect sound! When did this happen, my Christopher?"

"Which happen, sir?"

"This," he held it out at arms length to admire it,—"this Per-rint."

When I had given him my detailed account of it, he grasped me by the hand again, and said:

"Dear Christopher, it should be gratifying to you to know that you are an instrument in the hands of Destiny. Because you *are*."

A passing Something of a melancholy cast put it into my head to shake it, and to say, "Perhaps we all are."

"I don't mean that," he answered; "I don't take that wide range; I confine myself to the special case. Observe me well, my Christopher! Hopeless of getting rid, through any effort of my own, of any of the manuscripts among my Luggage,—all of which, send them where I would, were always coming back to me,—it is now some seven years since I left that Luggage here, on the desperate chance, either that the too, too faithful manuscripts would come back to me no more, or that some one less accursed than I might give them to the world. You follow me, my Christopher?"

"Pretty well, sir." I followed him so far as to judge that he had a weak head, and that the Orange, the Boiling, and Old Brown combined was beginning to tell. (The Old Brown, being heady, is best adapted to seasoned cases.)

"Years elapsed, and those compositions slumbered in dust. At length, Destiny, choosing her agent from all mankind, sent You here, Christopher, and lo! the Casket was burst asunder, and the Giant was free!"

He made hay of his hair after he said this, and he stood a-tiptoe.

"But," he reminded himself in a state of excitement, "we must sit up all night, my Christopher. I must correct these Proofs for the press. Fill all the inkstands, and bring me several new pens."

He smeared himself and he smeared the Proofs, the night through, to that degree that when Sol gave him warning to depart (in a four-wheeler), few could have said which was them, and which was him, and which was blots. His last instructions was, that I should instantly run and take his corrections to the office of the present Journal. I did so. They most likely will not appear in print, for I noticed a message being brought round from Beauford Printing House, while I was a throwing this concluding statement on paper, that the ole resources of that establishment was unable to make out what they meant. Upon which a certain gentleman in company, as I will not more particularly name,—but of whom it will be sufficient to remark, standing on the broad basis of a wave-girt isle, that whether we regard him in the light of,—{3} laughed, and put the corrections in the fire.

Footnotes

[1] Its name and address at length, with other full particulars, all editorially struck out.

[2] The remainder of this complimentary sentence editorially struck out.

[3] The remainder of this complimentary parenthesis editorially struck out.

THE END OF
Somebody's Luggage

Some Short Christmas Stories

by Charles Dickens

Contents:

A Christmas Tree
What Christmas is as we Grow Older
The Poor Relation's Story
The Child's Story
The Schoolboy's Story
Nobody's Story

A CHRISTMAS TREE

I have been looking on, this evening, at a merry company of children assembled round that pretty German toy, a Christmas Tree. The tree was planted in the middle of a great round table, and towered high above their heads. It was brilliantly lighted by a multitude of little tapers; and everywhere sparkled and glittered with bright objects. There were rosy-cheeked dolls, hiding behind the green leaves; and there were real watches (with movable hands, at least, and an endless capacity of being wound up) dangling from innumerable twigs; there were French-polished tables, chairs, bedsteads, wardrobes, eight-day clocks, and various other articles of domestic furniture (wonderfully made, in tin, at Wolverhampton), perched among the boughs, as if in preparation for some fairy housekeeping; there were jolly, broad-faced little men, much more agreeable in appearance than many real men and no wonder, for their heads took off, and showed them to be full of sugar-plums; there were fiddles and drums; there were tambourines, books, work-boxes, paint-boxes, sweetmeat-boxes, peep-show boxes, and all kinds of boxes; there were trinkets for the elder girls, far brighter than any grown-up gold and jewels; there were baskets and pincushions in all devices; there were guns, swords, and banners; there were witches standing in enchanted rings of pasteboard, to tell fortunes; there were teetotums, humming-tops, needle-cases, pen-wipers, smelling-bottles, conversation-cards, bouquet-holders; real fruit, made artificially dazzling with gold leaf; imitation apples, pears, and walnuts, crammed with surprises; in short, as a pretty child, before me, delightedly whispered to another pretty child, her bosom friend, "There was everything, and more." This motley collection of odd objects, clustering on the tree like magic fruit, and flashing back the bright looks directed towards it from every side some of the diamond-eyes admiring it were hardly on a level with the table, and a few were languishing in timid wonder on the bosoms of pretty mothers, aunts, and nurses made a lively realisation of the fancies of childhood; and set me thinking how all the trees that grow and all the things that come into existence on the earth, have their wild adornments at that well-remembered time.

Being now at home again, and alone, the only person in the house awake, my thoughts are drawn back, by a fascination which I do not care to resist, to my own childhood. I begin to consider, what do we all remember best upon the branches of the Christmas Tree of our own young Christmas days, by which we climbed to real life.

Straight, in the middle of the room, cramped in the freedom of its growth by no encircling walls or soon-reached ceiling, a shadowy tree arises; and, looking up into the dreamy brightness of its top for I observe in this tree the singular property that it appears to grow downward towards the earth I look into my youngest Christmas recollections!

All toys at first, I find. Up yonder, among the green holly and red berries, is the Tumbler with his hands in his pockets, who wouldn't lie down, but whenever he was put upon the floor, persisted in rolling his fat body about, until he rolled himself still, and brought those lobster eyes of his to bear upon me when I affected to laugh very much, but in my heart of hearts was extremely doubtful of him. Close beside him is that infernal snuff-box, out of which there sprang a demoniacal Counsellor in a black gown, with an obnoxious head of hair, and a red cloth mouth, wide open, who was not to be endured on any terms, but could not be put away either; for he used suddenly, in a highly magnified state, to fly out of Mammoth Snuff-boxes in dreams, when least expected. Nor is the frog with cobbler's wax on his tail, far off; for there was no knowing where he wouldn't jump; and when he flew over the candle, and came upon one's hand with that spotted back red on a green ground he was horrible. The cardboard lady in a blue-silk skirt, who was stood up against the candlestick to dance, and whom I see on the same branch, was milder, and was beautiful; but I can't say as much for the larger cardboard man, who used to be hung against the wall and pulled by a string; there was a sinister expression in that nose of his; and when he got his legs round his neck (which he very often did), he was ghastly, and not a creature to be alone with.

When did that dreadful Mask first look at me? Who put it on, and why was I so frightened that the sight of it is an era in my life? It is not a hideous visage in itself; it is even meant to be droll, why then were its stolid features so intolerable? Surely not because it hid the wearer's face. An apron would have done as much; and though I should have preferred even the apron away, it would not have been absolutely insupportable, like the mask. Was it the immovability of the mask? The doll's face was immovable, but I was not afraid of HER. Perhaps that fixed and set change coming over a real face, infused into my quickened heart some remote suggestion and dread of the universal change that is to come on every face, and make it still? Nothing reconciled me to it. No drummers, from whom proceeded a melancholy chirping on the turning of a handle; no regiment of soldiers, with a mute band, taken out of a box, and fitted, one by one, upon a stiff and lazy little set of lazy-tongs; no old woman, made of wires and a brown-paper composition, cutting up a pie for two small children; could give me a permanent comfort, for a long time. Nor was it any satisfaction to be shown the Mask, and see that it was made of paper, or to have it locked up and be assured that no one wore it. The mere recollection of that fixed face, the mere knowledge of its existence anywhere, was sufficient to awake me in the night all perspiration and horror, with, "O I know it's coming! O the mask!"

I never wondered what the dear old donkey with the panniers there he is! was made of, then! His hide was real to the touch, I recollect. And the great black horse with the round red spots all over him the horse that I could even get upon I never wondered what had brought him to that strange condition, or thought that such a horse was not commonly seen at Newmarket. The four horses of no colour, next to him, that went into the waggon of cheeses, and could be taken out and stabled under the piano, appear to have bits of fur-tippet for their tails, and other bits for their manes, and to stand on pegs instead of legs, but it was not so when they were brought home for a Christmas present. They were all right, then; neither was their harness unceremoniously nailed into their chests, as appears to be the case now. The tinkling works of the music- cart, I DID find out, to be made of quill tooth-picks and wire; and I always thought that little tumbler in his shirt sleeves, perpetually swarming up one side of a wooden frame, and coming down, head foremost, on the other, rather a weak-minded person though good-natured; but the Jacob's Ladder, next him, made of little squares of red wood, that went flapping and clattering over one another, each developing a different picture, and the whole enlivened by small bells, was a mighty marvel and a great delight.

Ah! The Doll's house! of which I was not proprietor, but where I visited. I don't admire the Houses of Parliament half so much as that stone-fronted mansion with real glass windows, and door-steps, and a real balcony greener than I ever see now, except at watering places; and even they afford but a poor imitation. And though it DID open all at once, the entire house-front (which was a blow, I admit, as cancelling the fiction of a staircase), it was but to shut it up again, and I could believe. Even open, there were three distinct rooms in it: a sitting-room and bed-room, elegantly furnished, and best of all, a kitchen, with uncommonly soft fire- irons, a plentiful assortment of diminutive utensils oh, the warming-pan! and a tin man-cook in profile, who was always going to fry two fish. What Barmecide justice have I done to the noble feasts wherein the set of wooden platters figured, each with its own peculiar delicacy, as a ham or turkey, glued tight on to it, and garnished with something green, which I recollect as moss! Could all the Temperance Societies of these later days, united, give me such a tea-drinking as I have had through the means of yonder little set of blue crockery, which really would hold liquid (it ran out of the small wooden cask, I recollect, and tasted of matches), and which made tea, nectar. And if the two legs of the ineffectual little sugar-tongs did tumble over one another, and want purpose, like Punch's hands, what does it matter? And if I did once shriek out, as a poisoned child, and strike the fashionable company with consternation, by reason of having drunk a little teaspoon, inadvertently dissolved in too hot tea, I was never the worse for it, except by a powder!

Upon the next branches of the tree, lower down, hard by the green roller and miniature gardening-tools, how thick the books begin to hang. Thin books, in themselves, at first, but many of them, and with deliciously smooth covers of bright red or green. What fat black letters to begin with! "A was an archer, and shot at a frog." Of course he was. He was an apple-pie also, and there he is! He was a good many things in his time, was A, and so were most of his friends, except X, who had so little versatility, that I never knew him to get beyond Xerxes or Xantippe like Y, who was always confined to a Yacht or a Yew Tree; and Z condemned for ever to be a Zebra or a Zany. But, now, the very tree itself changes, and becomes a bean-stalk the marvellous bean-stalk up which Jack climbed to the Giant's house! And now, those dreadfully interesting, double-headed giants, with their clubs over their shoulders, begin to stride along the boughs in a perfect throng, dragging knights and ladies home for dinner by the hair of their heads. And Jack how noble, with his sword of sharpness, and his shoes of swiftness! Again those old meditations come upon me as I gaze up at him; and I debate within myself whether there was more than one Jack (which I am loth to believe possible), or only one genuine original admirable Jack, who achieved all the recorded exploits.

Good for Christmas-time is the ruddy colour of the cloak, in which the tree making a forest of itself for her to trip through, with her basket Little Red Riding-Hood comes to me one Christmas Eve to give me information of the cruelty and treachery of that dissembling Wolf who ate her grandmother, without making any impression on his appetite, and then ate her, after making that ferocious joke about his teeth. She was my first love. I felt that if I could have married Little Red Riding-Hood, I should have known perfect bliss. But, it was not to be; and there was nothing for it but to look out the Wolf in the Noah's Ark there, and put him late in the procession on the table, as a monster who was to be degraded. O the wonderful Noah's Ark! It was not found seaworthy when put in a washing-tub, and the animals were crammed in at the roof, and needed to have their legs well shaken down before they could be got in, even there and then, ten to one but they began to tumble out at the door, which was but imperfectly fastened with a wire latch but what was THAT against it! Consider the noble fly, a size or two smaller than the elephant: the lady-bird, the butterfly all triumphs of art! Consider the goose, whose feet were so small, and whose balance was so indifferent, that he usually tumbled forward, and knocked down all the animal creation. Consider Noah and his family, like idiotic tobacco-stoppers; and how the leopard stuck to warm little fingers; and how the tails of the larger animals used gradually to resolve themselves into frayed bits of string!

Hush! Again a forest, and somebody up in a tree not Robin Hood, not Valentine, not the Yellow Dwarf (I have passed him and all Mother Bunch's wonders, without mention), but an Eastern King with a glittering scimitar and turban. By Allah! two Eastern Kings, for I see another, looking over his shoulder! Down upon the grass, at the tree's foot, lies the full length of a coal-black Giant, stretched asleep, with his head in a lady's lap; and near them is a glass box, fastened with four locks of shining steel, in which he keeps the lady prisoner when he is awake. I see the four keys at his girdle now. The lady makes signs to the two kings in the tree, who softly descend. It is the setting-in of the bright Arabian Nights.

Oh, now all common things become uncommon and enchanted to me. All lamps are wonderful; all rings are talismans. Common flower-pots are full of treasure, with a little earth scattered on the top; trees are for Ali Baba to hide in; beef-steaks are to throw down into the Valley of Diamonds, that the precious stones may stick to them, and be carried by the eagles to their nests, whence the traders, with loud cries, will scare them. Tarts are made, according to the recipe of the Vizier's son of Bussorah, who turned pastrycook after he was set down in his drawers at the gate of Damascus; cobblers are all Mustaphas, and in the habit of sewing up people cut into four pieces, to whom they are taken blind-fold.

Any iron ring let into stone is the entrance to a cave which only waits for the magician, and the little fire, and the necromancy, that will make the earth shake. All the dates imported come from the same tree as that unlucky date, with whose shell the merchant knocked out the eye of the genie's invisible son. All olives are of the stock of that fresh fruit, concerning which the Commander of the Faithful overheard the boy conduct the fictitious trial of the fraudulent olive merchant; all apples are akin to the apple purchased (with two others) from the Sultan's gardener for three sequins, and which the tall black slave stole from the child. All dogs are associated with the dog, really a transformed man, who jumped upon the baker's counter, and put his paw on the piece of bad money. All rice recalls the rice which the awful lady, who was a ghoule, could only peck by grains, because of her nightly feasts in the burial-place. My very rocking-horse, there he is, with his nostrils turned completely inside-out, indicative of Blood! should have a peg in his neck, by virtue thereof to fly away with me, as the wooden horse did with the Prince of Persia, in the sight of all his father's Court.

Yes, on every object that I recognise among those upper branches of my Christmas Tree, I see this fairy light! When I wake in bed, at daybreak, on the cold, dark, winter mornings, the white snow dimly beheld, outside, through the frost on the window-pane, I hear Dinarzade. "Sister, sister, if you are yet awake, I pray you finish the history of the Young King of the Black Islands." Scheherazade replies, "If my lord the Sultan will suffer me to live another day, sister, I will not only finish that, but tell you a more wonderful story yet." Then, the gracious Sultan goes out, giving no orders for the execution, and we all three breathe again.

At this height of my tree I begin to see, cowering among the leaves it may be born of turkey, or of pudding, or mince pie, or of these many fancies, jumbled with Robinson Crusoe on his desert island, Philip Quarll among the monkeys, Sandford and Merton with Mr. Barlow, Mother Bunch, and the Mask or it may be the result of indigestion, assisted by imagination and over-doctoring a prodigious nightmare. It is so exceedingly indistinct, that I don't know why it's frightful but I know it is. I can only make out that it is an immense array of shapeless things, which appear to be planted on a vast exaggeration of the lazy-tongs that used to bear the toy soldiers, and to be slowly coming close to my eyes, and receding to an immeasurable distance. When it comes closest, it is worse. In connection with it I descry remembrances of winter nights incredibly long; of being sent early to bed, as a punishment for some small offence, and waking in two hours, with a sensation of having been asleep two nights; of the laden hopelessness of morning ever dawning; and the oppression of a weight of remorse.

And now, I see a wonderful row of little lights rise smoothly out of the ground, before a vast green curtain. Now, a bell rings a magic bell, which still sounds in my ears unlike all other bells and music plays, amidst a buzz of voices, and a fragrant smell of orange-peel and oil. Anon, the magic bell commands the music to cease, and the great green curtain rolls itself up majestically, and The Play begins! The devoted dog of Montargis avenges the death of his master, foully murdered in the Forest of Bondy; and a humorous Peasant with a red nose and a very little hat, whom I take from this hour forth to my bosom as a friend (I think he was a Waiter or an

Hostler at a village Inn, but many years have passed since he and I have met), remarks that the sassigassity of that dog is indeed surprising; and evermore this jocular conceit will live in my remembrance fresh and unfading, overtopping all possible jokes, unto the end of time. Or now, I learn with bitter tears how poor Jane Shore, dressed all in white, and with her brown hair hanging down, went starving through the streets; or how George Barnwell killed the worthiest uncle that ever man had, and was afterwards so sorry for it that he ought to have been let off. Comes swift to comfort me, the Pantomime stupendous Phenomenon! when clowns are shot from loaded mortars into the great chandelier, bright constellation that it is; when Harlequins, covered all over with scales of pure gold, twist and sparkle, like amazing fish; when Pantaloon (whom I deem it no irreverence to compare in my own mind to my grandfather) puts red-hot pokers in his pocket, and cries "Here's somebody coming!" or taxes the Clown with petty larceny, by saying, "Now, I sawed you do it!" when Everything is capable, with the greatest ease, of being changed into Anything; and "Nothing is, but thinking makes it so." Now, too, I perceive my first experience of the dreary sensation often to return in after-life of being unable, next day, to get back to the dull, settled world; of wanting to live for ever in the bright atmosphere I have quitted; of doting on the little Fairy, with the wand like a celestial Barber's Pole, and pining for a Fairy immortality along with her. Ah, she comes back, in many shapes, as my eye wanders down the branches of my Christmas Tree, and goes as often, and has never yet stayed by me!

Out of this delight springs the toy-theatre, there it is, with its familiar proscenium, and ladies in feathers, in the boxes! and all its attendant occupation with paste and glue, and gum, and water colours, in the getting-up of The Miller and his Men, and Elizabeth, or the Exile of Siberia. In spite of a few besetting accidents and failures (particularly an unreasonable disposition in the respectable Kelmar, and some others, to become faint in the legs, and double up, at exciting points of the drama), a teeming world of fancies so suggestive and all-embracing, that, far below it on my Christmas Tree, I see dark, dirty, real Theatres in the day-time, adorned with these associations as with the freshest garlands of the rarest flowers, and charming me yet.

But hark! The Waits are playing, and they break my childish sleep! What images do I associate with the Christmas music as I see them set forth on the Christmas Tree? Known before all the others, keeping far apart from all the others, they gather round my little bed. An angel, speaking to a group of shepherds in a field; some travellers, with eyes uplifted, following a star; a baby in a manger; a child in a spacious temple, talking with grave men; a solemn figure, with a mild and beautiful face, raising a dead girl by the hand; again, near a city gate, calling back the son of a widow, on his bier, to life; a crowd of people looking through the opened roof of a chamber where he sits, and letting down a sick person on a bed, with ropes; the same, in a tempest, walking on the water to a ship; again, on a sea-shore, teaching a great multitude; again, with a child upon his knee, and other children round; again, restoring sight to the blind, speech to the dumb, hearing to the deaf, health to the sick, strength to the lame, knowledge to the ignorant; again, dying upon a Cross, watched by armed soldiers, a thick darkness coming on, the earth beginning to shake, and only one voice heard, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Still, on the lower and maturer branches of the Tree, Christmas associations cluster thick. School-books shut up; Ovid and Virgil silenced; the Rule of Three, with its cool impertinent inquiries, long disposed of; Terence and Plautus acted no more, in an arena of huddled desks and forms, all chipped, and notched, and inked; cricket-bats, stumps, and balls, left higher up, with the smell of trodden grass and the softened noise of shouts in the evening air; the tree is still fresh, still gay. If I no more come home at Christmas-time, there will be boys and girls (thank Heaven!) while the World lasts; and they do! Yonder they dance and play upon the branches of my Tree, God bless them, merrily, and my heart dances and plays too!

And I do come home at Christmas. We all do, or we all should. We all come home, or ought to come home, for a short holiday the longer, the better from the great boarding-school, where we are for ever working at our arithmetical slates, to take, and give a rest. As to going a visiting, where can we not go, if we will; where have we not been, when we would; starting our fancy from our Christmas Tree!

Away into the winter prospect. There are many such upon the tree! On, by low-lying, misty grounds, through fens and fogs, up long hills, winding dark as caverns between thick plantations, almost shutting out the sparkling stars; so, out on broad heights, until we stop at last, with sudden silence, at an avenue. The gate-bell has a deep, half-awful sound in the frosty air; the gate swings open on its hinges; and, as we drive up to a great house, the glancing lights grow larger in the windows, and the opposing rows of trees seem to fall solemnly back on either side, to give us place. At intervals, all day, a frightened hare has shot across this whitened turf; or the distant clatter of a herd of deer trampling the hard frost, has, for the minute, crushed the silence too. Their watchful eyes beneath the fern may be shining now, if we could see them, like the icy dewdrops on the leaves; but they are still, and all is still. And so, the lights growing larger, and the trees falling back before us, and closing up again behind us, as if to forbid retreat, we come to the house.

There is probably a smell of roasted chestnuts and other good comfortable things all the time, for we are telling Winter Stories Ghost Stories, or more shame for us round the Christmas fire; and we have never stirred, except to draw a little nearer to it. But, no matter for that. We came to the house, and it is an old house, full of great chimneys where wood is burnt on ancient dogs upon the hearth, and grim portraits (some of them with grim legends, too) lower distrustfully from the oaken panels of the walls. We are a middle-aged nobleman, and we make a generous supper with our host and hostess and their guests it being Christmas-time, and the old house full of company and then we go to bed. Our room is a very old room. It is hung with tapestry. We don't like the portrait of a cavalier in green, over the fireplace. There are great black beams in the ceiling, and there is a great black bedstead, supported at the foot by two great black figures, who seem to have come off a couple of tombs in the old baronial church in the park, for our particular accommodation. But, we are not a superstitious nobleman, and we don't mind. Well! we dismiss our servant, lock the door, and sit before the fire in our dressing-gown, musing about a great many things. At length we go to bed. Well! we can't sleep. We toss and tumble, and can't sleep. The embers on the hearth burn fitfully and make the room look ghostly. We can't help peeping out over the counterpane, at the two black figures and the cavalier that wicked- looking cavalier in green. In the flickering light they seem to advance and retire: which, though we are not by any means a superstitious nobleman, is not agreeable. Well! we get nervous more and more nervous. We say "This is very foolish, but we can't stand this; we'll pretend to be ill, and knock up somebody." Well! we are just going to do it, when the locked door opens, and there comes in a young woman, deadly pale, and with long fair hair, who glides to the fire, and sits down in the chair we have left there, wringing her hands. Then, we notice that her clothes are wet. Our tongue cleaves to the roof of our mouth, and we can't speak; but, we observe her accurately. Her clothes are wet; her long hair is dabbled with moist mud; she is dressed in the fashion of two hundred years ago; and she has at her girdle a bunch of rusty keys. Well! there she sits, and we can't even faint, we are in such a state about it. Presently she gets up, and tries all the locks in the room with the rusty keys, which won't fit one of them; then, she fixes her eyes on the portrait of the cavalier in green, and says, in a low, terrible voice, "The stags know it!" After that, she wrings her hands again, passes the bedside, and goes out at the door. We hurry on our dressing-gown, seize our pistols (we always travel with pistols), and are following, when we find the door locked. We turn the key, look out into the dark gallery; no one there. We wander away, and try to find our servant. Can't be done. We pace the gallery till daybreak; then return to our deserted room, fall asleep, and are awakened by our servant (nothing ever haunts him) and the shining sun. Well! we make a wretched breakfast, and all the company say we look queer. After breakfast, we go over the house with our host, and then we take him to the portrait of the cavalier in green, and then it all comes out. He was false to a young housekeeper once attached to that family, and famous for her beauty, who drowned herself in a pond, and whose body was discovered, after a long time, because the stags refused to drink of the water. Since which, it has been whispered that she traverses the house at midnight (but goes especially to that room where the cavalier in green was wont to sleep), trying the old locks with the rusty keys. Well! we tell our host of what we have seen, and a shade comes over his features, and he begs it may be hushed up; and so it is. But, it's all true; and we said so, before we died (we are dead now) to many responsible people.

There is no end to the old houses, with resounding galleries, and dismal state-bedchambers, and haunted wings shut up for many years, through which we may ramble, with an agreeable creeping up our back, and encounter any number of ghosts, but (it is worthy of remark perhaps) reducible to a very few general types and classes; for, ghosts have little originality, and "walk" in a beaten track. Thus, it comes to pass, that a certain room in a certain old hall, where a certain bad lord, baronet, knight, or gentleman, shot himself, has certain planks in the floor from which the blood WILL NOT be taken out. You may scrape and scrape, as the present owner has done, or plane and plane, as his father did, or scrub and scrub, as his grandfather did, or burn and burn with strong acids, as his great-grandfather did, but, there the blood will still be no redder and no paler no more and no less always just the same. Thus, in such another house there is a haunted door, that never will keep open; or another door that never will keep shut, or a haunted sound of a spinning-wheel, or a hammer, or a footstep, or a cry, or a sigh, or a horse's tramp, or the rattling of a chain. Or else, there is a turret-clock, which, at the midnight hour, strikes thirteen when the head of the family is going to die; or a shadowy, immovable black carriage which at such a time is always seen by somebody, waiting near the great gates in the stable-yard. Or thus, it came to pass how Lady Mary went to pay a visit at a large wild house in the Scottish Highlands, and, being fatigued with her long journey, retired to bed early, and innocently said, next morning, at the breakfast-table, "How odd, to have so late a party last night, in this remote place, and not to tell me of it, before I went to bed!" Then, every one asked Lady Mary what she meant? Then, Lady Mary replied, "Why, all night long, the carriages were driving round and round the terrace, underneath my window!" Then, the owner of the house turned pale, and so did his Lady, and Charles Macdoodle of Macdoodle signed to Lady Mary to say no more, and every one was silent. After breakfast, Charles Macdoodle told Lady Mary that it was a tradition in the family that those rumbling carriages on the terrace betokened death. And so it proved, for, two months afterwards, the Lady of the mansion died. And Lady Mary, who was a Maid of Honour at Court, often told this story to the old Queen Charlotte; by this token that the old King always said, "Eh, eh? What, what? Ghosts, ghosts? No such thing, no such thing!" And never left off saying so, until he went to bed.

Or, a friend of somebody's whom most of us know, when he was a young man at college, had a particular friend, with whom he made the compact that, if it were possible for the Spirit to return to this earth after its separation from the body, he of the twain who first died, should reappear to the other. In course of time, this compact was forgotten by our friend; the two young men having progressed in life, and taken diverging paths that were wide asunder. But, one night, many years afterwards, our friend being in the North of England, and staying for the night in an inn, on the Yorkshire Moors, happened to look out of bed; and there, in the moonlight, leaning on a bureau near the window, steadfastly regarding him, saw his old college friend! The appearance being solemnly addressed, replied, in a kind of whisper, but very audibly, "Do not come near me. I am dead. I am here to redeem my promise. I come from another world, but may not disclose its secrets!" Then, the whole form becoming paler, melted, as it were, into the moonlight, and faded away.

Or, there was the daughter of the first occupier of the picturesque Elizabethan house, so famous in our neighbourhood. You have heard about her? No! Why, SHE went out one summer evening at twilight, when she was a beautiful girl, just seventeen years of age, to gather flowers in the garden; and presently came running, terrified, into the hall to her father, saying, "Oh, dear father, I have met myself!" He took her in his arms, and told her it was fancy, but she said, "Oh no! I met myself in the broad walk, and I was pale and gathering withered flowers, and I turned my head, and held them up!" And, that night, she died; and a picture of her story was begun, though never finished, and they say it is somewhere in the house to this day, with its face to the wall.

Or, the uncle of my brother's wife was riding home on horseback, one mellow evening at sunset, when, in a green lane close to his own house, he saw a man standing before him, in the very centre of a narrow way. "Why does that man in the cloak stand there!" he thought. "Does he want me to ride over him?" But the figure never moved. He felt a strange sensation at seeing it so still, but slackened his trot and rode forward. When he was so close to it, as almost to touch it with his stirrup, his horse shied, and the figure glided up the bank, in a curious, unearthly manner backward, and without seeming to use its feet and was gone. The uncle of my brother's wife, exclaiming, "Good Heaven! It's my cousin Harry, from Bombay!" put spurs to his horse, which was suddenly in a profuse sweat, and, wondering at such strange behaviour, dashed round to the front of his house. There, he saw the same figure, just passing in at the long French window of the drawing-room, opening on the ground. He threw his bridle to a servant, and hastened in after it. His sister was sitting there, alone. "Alice, where's my cousin Harry?" "Your cousin Harry, John?" "Yes. From Bombay. I met him in the lane just now, and saw him enter here, this instant." Not a creature had been seen by any one; and in that hour and minute, as it afterwards appeared, this cousin died in India.

Or, it was a certain sensible old maiden lady, who died at ninety- nine, and retained her faculties to the last, who really did see the Orphan Boy; a story which has often been incorrectly told, but, of which the real truth is this because it is, in fact, a story belonging to our family and she was a connexion of our family. When she was about forty years of age, and still an uncommonly fine woman (her lover died young, which was the reason why she never married, though she had many offers), she went to stay at a place in Kent, which her brother, an Indian-Merchant, had newly bought. There was a story that this place had once been held in trust by the guardian of a young boy; who was himself the next heir, and who killed the young boy by harsh and cruel treatment. She knew nothing of that. It has been said that there was a Cage in her bedroom in which the guardian used to put the boy. There was no such thing. There was only a closet. She went to bed, made no alarm whatever in the night, and in the morning said composedly to her maid when she came in, "Who is the pretty forlorn-looking child who has been peeping out of that closet all night?" The maid replied by giving a loud scream, and instantly decamping. She was surprised; but she was a woman of remarkable strength of mind, and she dressed herself and went downstairs, and closeted herself with her brother. "Now, Walter," she said, "I have been disturbed all night by a pretty, forlorn-looking boy, who has been constantly peeping out of that closet in my room, which I can't open. This is some trick." "I am afraid not, Charlotte," said he, "for it is the legend of the house. It is the Orphan Boy. What did he do?" "He opened the door softly," said she, "and peeped out. Sometimes, he came a step or two into the room. Then, I called to him, to encourage him, and he shrunk, and shuddered, and crept in again, and shut the door." "The closet has no communication, Charlotte," said her brother, "with any other part of the house, and it's nailed up." This was undeniably true, and it took two carpenters a whole forenoon to get it open, for examination. Then, she was satisfied that she had seen the Orphan Boy. But, the wild and terrible part of the story is, that he was also seen by three of her brother's sons, in succession, who all died young. On the occasion of each child being taken ill, he came home in a heat, twelve hours before, and said, Oh, Mamma, he had been playing under a particular oak-tree, in a certain meadow, with a strange boy a pretty, forlorn-looking boy, who was very timid, and made signs! From fatal experience, the parents came to know that this was the Orphan Boy, and that the course of that child whom he chose for his little playmate was surely run.

Legion is the name of the German castles, where we sit up alone to wait for the Spectre where we are shown into a room, made comparatively cheerful for our reception where we glance round at the shadows, thrown on the blank walls by the crackling fire where we feel very lonely when the village innkeeper and his pretty daughter have retired, after laying down a fresh store of wood upon the hearth, and setting forth on the small table such supper-cheer as a cold roast capon, bread, grapes, and a flask of old Rhine wine where the reverberating doors close on their retreat, one after another, like so many peals of sullen thunder and where, about the small hours of the night, we come into the knowledge of divers supernatural mysteries. Legion is the name of the haunted German students, in whose society we draw yet nearer to the fire, while the schoolboy in the corner opens his eyes wide and round, and flies off the footstool he has chosen for his seat, when the door accidentally blows open. Vast is the crop of such fruit, shining on our Christmas Tree; in blossom, almost at the very top; ripening all down the boughs!

Among the later toys and fancies hanging there as idle often and less pure be the images once associated with the sweet old Waits, the softened music in the night, ever unalterable! Encircled by the social thoughts of Christmas-time, still let the benignant figure of my childhood stand unchanged! In every cheerful image and suggestion that the season brings, may the bright star that rested above the poor roof, be the star of all the Christian World! A moment's pause, O vanishing tree, of which the lower boughs are dark to me as yet, and let me look once more! I know there are blank spaces on thy branches, where eyes that I have loved have shone and smiled; from which they are departed. But, far above, I see the raiser of the dead girl, and the Widow's Son; and God is good! If Age be hiding for me in the unseen portion of thy downward growth, O may I, with a grey head, turn a child's heart to that figure yet, and a child's trustfulness and confidence!

Now, the tree is decorated with bright merriment, and song, and dance, and cheerfulness. And they are welcome. Innocent and welcome be they ever held, beneath the branches of the Christmas Tree, which cast no gloomy shadow! But, as it sinks into the ground, I hear a whisper going through the leaves. "This, in commemoration of the law of love and kindness, mercy and compassion. This, in remembrance of Me!"

WHAT CHRISTMAS IS AS WE GROW OLDER

Time was, with most of us, when Christmas Day encircling all our limited world like a magic ring, left nothing out for us to miss or seek; bound together all our home enjoyments, affections, and hopes; grouped everything and every one around the Christmas fire; and made the little picture shining in our bright young eyes, complete.

Time came, perhaps, all so soon, when our thoughts over-leaped that narrow boundary; when there was some one (very dear, we thought then, very beautiful, and absolutely perfect) wanting to the fulness of our happiness; when we were wanting too (or we thought so, which did just as well) at the Christmas hearth by which that some one sat; and when we intertwined with every wreath and garland of our life that some one's name.

That was the time for the bright visionary Christmases which have long arisen from us to show faintly, after summer rain, in the palest edges of the rainbow! That was the time for the beatified enjoyment of the things that were to be, and never were, and yet the things that were so real in our resolute hope that it would be hard to say, now, what realities achieved since, have been stronger!

What! Did that Christmas never really come when we and the priceless pearl who was our young choice were received, after the happiest of totally impossible marriages, by the two united families previously at daggers drawn on our account? When brothers and sisters-in-law who had always been rather cool to us before our relationship was effected, perfectly doted on us, and when fathers and mothers overwhelmed us with unlimited incomes? Was that Christmas dinner never really eaten, after which we arose, and generously and eloquently rendered honour to our late rival, present in the company, then and there exchanging friendship and forgiveness, and founding an attachment, not to be surpassed in Greek or Roman story, which subsisted until death? Has that same rival long ceased to care for that same priceless pearl, and married for money, and become usurious? Above all, do we really know, now, that we should probably have been miserable if we had won and worn the pearl, and that we are better without her?

That Christmas when we had recently achieved so much fame; when we had been carried in triumph somewhere, for doing something great and good; when we had won an honoured and ennobled name, and arrived and were received at home in a shower of tears of joy; is it possible that THAT Christmas has not come yet?

And is our life here, at the best, so constituted that, pausing as we advance at such a noticeable mile-stone in the track as this great birthday, we look back on the things that never were, as naturally and full as gravely as on the things that have been and are gone, or have been and still are? If it be so, and so it seems to be, must we come to the conclusion that life is little better than a dream, and little worth the loves and strivings that we crowd into it?

No! Far be such miscalled philosophy from us, dear Reader, on Christmas Day! Nearer and closer to our hearts be the Christmas spirit, which is the spirit of active usefulness, perseverance, cheerful discharge of duty, kindness and forbearance! It is in the last virtues especially, that we are, or should be, strengthened by the unaccomplished visions of our youth; for, who shall say that they are not our teachers to deal gently even with the impalpable nothings of the earth!

Therefore, as we grow older, let us be more thankful that the circle of our Christmas associations and of the lessons that they bring, expands! Let us welcome every one of them, and summon them to take their places by the Christmas hearth.

Welcome, old aspirations, glittering creatures of an ardent fancy, to your shelter underneath the holly! We know you, and have not outlived you yet. Welcome, old projects and old loves, however fleeting, to your nooks among the steadier lights that burn around us. Welcome, all that was ever real to our hearts; and for the earnestness that made you real, thanks to Heaven! Do we build no Christmas castles in the clouds now? Let our thoughts, fluttering like butterflies among these flowers of children, bear witness! Before this boy, there stretches out a Future, brighter than we ever looked on in our old romantic time, but bright with honour and with truth. Around this little head on which the sunny curls lie heaped, the graces sport, as prettily, as airily, as when there was no scythe within the reach of Time to shear away the curls of our first-love. Upon another girl's face near it placider but smiling bright a quiet and contented little face, we see Home fairly written. Shining from the word, as rays shine from a star, we see how, when our graves are old, other hopes than ours are young, other hearts than ours are moved; how other ways are smoothed; how other happiness blooms, ripens, and decays no, not decays, for other homes and other bands of children, not yet in being nor for ages yet to be, arise, and bloom and ripen to the end of all!

Welcome, everything! Welcome, alike what has been, and what never was, and what we hope may be, to your shelter underneath the holly, to your places round the Christmas fire, where what is sits open- hearted! In yonder shadow, do we see obtruding furtively upon the blaze, an enemy's face? By Christmas Day we do forgive him! If the injury he has done us may admit of such companionship, let him come here and take his place. If otherwise, unhappily, let him go hence, assured that we will never injure nor accuse him.

On this day we shut out Nothing!

"Pause," says a low voice. "Nothing? Think!"

"On Christmas Day, we will shut out from our fireside, Nothing."

"Not the shadow of a vast City where the withered leaves are lying deep?" the voice replies. "Not the shadow that darkens the whole globe? Not the shadow of the City of the Dead?"

Not even that. Of all days in the year, we will turn our faces towards that City upon Christmas Day, and from its silent hosts bring those we loved, among us. City of the Dead, in the blessed name wherein we are gathered together at this time, and in the Presence that is here among us according to the promise, we will receive, and not dismiss, thy people who are dear to us!

Yes. We can look upon these children angels that alight, so solemnly, so beautifully among the living children by the fire, and can bear to think how they departed from us. Entertaining angels unawares, as the Patriarchs did, the playful children are unconscious of their guests; but we can see them can see a radiant arm around one favourite neck, as if there were a tempting of that child away. Among the celestial figures there is one, a poor misshapen boy on earth, of a glorious beauty now, of whom his dying mother said it grieved her much to leave him here, alone, for so many years as it was likely would elapse before he came to her being such a little child. But he went quickly, and was laid upon her breast, and in her hand she leads him.

There was a gallant boy, who fell, far away, upon a burning sand beneath a burning sun, and said, "Tell them at home, with my last love, how much I could have wished to kiss them once, but that I died contented and had done my duty!" Or there was another, over whom they read the words, "Therefore we commit his body to the deep," and so consigned him to the lonely ocean and sailed on. Or there was another, who lay down to his rest in the dark shadow of great forests, and, on earth, awoke no more. O shall they not, from sand and sea and forest, be brought home at such a time!

There was a dear girl almost a woman never to be one who made a mourning Christmas in a house of joy, and went her trackless way to the silent City. Do we recollect her, worn out, faintly whispering what could not be heard, and falling into that last sleep for weariness? O look upon her now! O look upon her beauty, her serenity, her changeless youth, her happiness! The daughter of Jairus was recalled to life, to die; but she, more blest, has heard the same voice, saying unto her, "Arise for ever!"

We had a friend who was our friend from early days, with whom we often pictured the changes that were to come upon our lives, and merrily imagined how we would speak, and walk, and think, and talk, when we came to be old. His destined habitation in the City of the Dead received him in his prime. Shall he be shut out from our Christmas remembrance? Would his love have so excluded us? Lost friend, lost child, lost parent, sister, brother, husband, wife, we will not so discard you! You shall hold your cherished places in our Christmas hearts, and by our Christmas fires; and in the season of immortal hope, and on the birthday of immortal mercy, we will shut out Nothing!

The winter sun goes down over town and village; on the sea it makes a rosy path, as if the Sacred tread were fresh upon the water. A few more moments, and it sinks, and night comes on, and lights begin to sparkle in the prospect. On the hill-side beyond the shapelessly-diffused town, and in the quiet keeping of the trees that gird the village-steeple, remembrances are cut in stone, planted in common flowers, growing in grass, entwined with lowly brambles around many a mound of earth. In town and village, there are doors and windows closed against the weather, there are flaming logs heaped high, there are joyful faces, there is healthy music of voices. Be all ungentleness and harm excluded from the temples of the Household Gods, but be those remembrances admitted with tender encouragement! They are of the time and all its comforting and peaceful reassurances; and of the history that re-united even upon earth the living and the dead; and of the broad beneficence and goodness that too many men have tried to tear to narrow shreds.

THE POOR RELATION'S STORY

He was very reluctant to take precedence of so many respected members of the family, by beginning the round of stories they were to relate as they sat in a goodly circle by the Christmas fire; and he modestly suggested that it would be more correct if "John our esteemed host" (whose health he begged to drink) would have the kindness to begin. For as to himself, he said, he was so little used to lead the way that really But as they all cried out here, that he must begin, and agreed with one voice that he might, could, would, and should begin, he left off rubbing his hands, and took his legs out from under his armchair, and did begin.

I have no doubt (said the poor relation) that I shall surprise the assembled members of our family, and particularly John our esteemed host to whom we are so much indebted for the great hospitality with which he has this day entertained us, by the confession I am going to make. But, if you do me the honour to be surprised at anything that falls from a person so unimportant in the family as I am, I can only say that I shall be scrupulously accurate in all I relate.

I am not what I am supposed to be. I am quite another thing. Perhaps before I go further, I had better glance at what I AM supposed to be.

It is supposed, unless I mistake the assembled members of our family will correct me if I do, which is very likely (here the poor relation looked mildly about him for contradiction); that I am nobody's enemy but my own. That I never met with any particular success in anything. That I failed in business because I was unbusiness-like and credulous in not being prepared for the interested designs of my partner. That I failed in love, because I was ridiculously trustful in thinking it impossible that Christiana could deceive me. That I failed in my expectations from my uncle Chill, on account of not being as sharp as he could have wished in worldly matters. That, through life, I have been rather put upon and disappointed in a general way. That I am at present a bachelor of between fifty-nine and sixty years of age, living on a limited income in the form of a quarterly allowance, to which I see that John our esteemed host wishes me to make no further allusion.

The supposition as to my present pursuits and habits is to the following effect.

I live in a lodging in the Clapham Road a very clean back room, in a very respectable house where I am expected not to be at home in the day-time, unless poorly; and which I usually leave in the morning at nine o'clock, on pretence of going to business. I take my breakfast my roll and butter, and my half-pint of coffee at the old-established coffee-shop near Westminster Bridge; and then I go into the City I don't know why and sit in Garraway's Coffee House, and on 'Change, and walk about, and look into a few offices and counting-houses where some of my relations or acquaintance are so good as to tolerate me, and where I stand by the fire if the weather happens to be cold. I get through the day in this way until five o'clock, and then I dine: at a cost, on the average, of one and threepence. Having still a little money to spend on my evening's entertainment, I look into the old-established coffee-shop as I go home, and take my cup of tea, and perhaps my bit of toast. So, as the large hand of the clock makes its way round to the morning hour again, I make my way round to the Clapham Road again, and go to bed when I get to my lodging fire being expensive, and being objected to by the family on account of its giving trouble and making a dirt.

Sometimes, one of my relations or acquaintances is so obliging as to ask me to dinner. Those are holiday occasions, and then I generally walk in the Park. I am a solitary man, and seldom walk with anybody. Not that I am avoided because I am shabby; for I am not at all shabby, having always a very good suit of black on (or rather Oxford mixture, which has the appearance of black and wears much better); but I have got into a habit of speaking low, and being rather silent, and my spirits are not high, and I am sensible that I am not an attractive companion.

The only exception to this general rule is the child of my first cousin, Little Frank. I have a particular affection for that child, and he takes very kindly to me. He is a diffident boy by nature; and in a crowd he is soon run over, as I may say, and forgotten. He and I, however, get on exceedingly well. I have a fancy that the poor child will in time succeed to my peculiar position in the family. We talk but little; still, we understand each other. We walk about, hand in hand; and without much speaking he knows what I mean, and I know what he means. When he was very little indeed, I used to take him to the windows of the toy-shops, and show him the toys inside. It is surprising how soon he found out that I would have made him a great many presents if I had been in circumstances to do it.

Little Frank and I go and look at the outside of the Monument he is very fond of the Monument and at the Bridges, and at all the sights that are free. On two of my birthdays, we have dined on e-la-mode beef, and gone at half-price to the play, and been deeply interested. I was once walking with him in Lombard Street, which we often visit on account of my having mentioned to him that there are great riches there he is very fond of Lombard Street when a gentleman said to me as he passed by, "Sir, your little son has dropped his glove." I assure you, if you will excuse my remarking on so trivial a circumstance, this accidental mention of the child as mine, quite touched my heart and brought the foolish tears into my eyes.

When Little Frank is sent to school in the country, I shall be very much at a loss what to do with myself, but I have the intention of walking down there once a month and seeing him on a half holiday. I am told he will then be at play upon the Heath; and if my visits should be objected to, as unsettling the child, I can see him from a distance without his seeing me, and walk back again. His mother comes of a highly genteel family, and rather disapproves, I am aware, of our being too much together. I know that I am not calculated to improve his retiring disposition; but I think he would miss me beyond the feeling of the moment if we were wholly separated.

When I die in the Clapham Road, I shall not leave much more in this world than I shall take out of it; but, I happen to have a miniature of a bright-faced boy, with a curling head, and an open shirt-frill waving down his bosom (my mother had it taken for me, but I can't believe that it was ever like), which will be worth nothing to sell, and which I shall beg may he given to Frank. I have written my dear boy a little letter with it, in which I have told him that I felt very sorry to part from him, though bound to confess that I knew no reason why I should remain here. I have given him some short advice, the best in my power, to take warning of the consequences of being nobody's enemy but his own; and I have endeavoured to comfort him for what I fear he will consider a bereavement, by pointing out to him, that I was only a superfluous something to every one but him; and that having by some means failed to find a place in this great assembly, I am better out of it.

Such (said the poor relation, clearing his throat and beginning to speak a little louder) is the general impression about me. Now, it is a remarkable circumstance which forms the aim and purpose of my story, that this is all wrong. This is not my life, and these are not my habits. I do not even live in the Clapham Road. Comparatively speaking, I am very seldom there. I reside, mostly, in a I am almost ashamed to say the word, it sounds so full of pretension in a Castle. I do not mean that it is an old baronial habitation, but still it is a building always known to every one by the name of a Castle. In it, I preserve the particulars of my history; they run thus:

It was when I first took John Spatter (who had been my clerk) into partnership, and when I was still a young man of not more than five- and-twenty, residing in the house of my uncle Chill, from whom I had considerable expectations, that I ventured to propose to Christiana. I had loved Christiana a long time. She was very beautiful, and very winning in all respects. I rather mistrusted her widowed mother, who I feared was of a plotting and mercenary turn of mind; but, I thought as well of her as I could, for Christiana's sake. I never had loved any one but Christiana, and she had been all the world, and O far more than all the world, to me, from our childhood!

Christiana accepted me with her mother's consent, and I was rendered very happy indeed. My life at my uncle Chill's was of a spare dull kind, and my garret chamber was as dull, and bare, and cold, as an upper prison room in some stern northern fortress. But, having Christiana's love, I wanted nothing upon earth. I would not have changed my lot with any human being.

Avarice was, unhappily, my uncle Chill's master-vice. Though he was rich, he pinched, and scraped, and clutched, and lived miserably. As Christiana had no fortune, I was for some time a little fearful of confessing our engagement to him; but, at length I wrote him a letter, saying how it all truly was. I put it into his hand one night, on going to bed.

As I came down-stairs next morning, shivering in the cold December air; colder in my uncle's unwarmed house than in the street, where the winter sun did sometimes shine, and which was at all events enlivened by cheerful faces and voices passing along; I carried a heavy heart towards the long, low breakfast-room in which my uncle sat. It was a large room with a small fire, and there was a great bay window in it which the rain had marked in the night as if with the tears of houseless people. It stared upon a raw yard, with a cracked stone pavement, and some rusted iron railings half uprooted, whence an ugly out-building that had once been a dissecting-room (in the time of the great surgeon who had mortgaged the house to my uncle), stared at it.

We rose so early always, that at that time of the year we breakfasted by candle-light. When I went into the room, my uncle was so contracted by the cold, and so huddled together in his chair behind the one dim candle, that I did not see him until I was close to the table.

As I held out my hand to him, he caught up his stick (being infirm, he always walked about the house with a stick), and made a blow at me, and said, "You fool!"

"Uncle," I returned, "I didn't expect you to be so angry as this."

Nor had I expected it, though he was a hard and angry old man.

"You didn't expect!" said he; "when did you ever expect? When did you ever calculate, or look forward, you contemptible dog?"

"These are hard words, uncle!"

"Hard words? Feathers, to pelt such an idiot as you with," said he.

"Here! Betsy Snap! Look at him!"

Betsy Snap was a withered, hard-favoured, yellow old woman our only domestic always employed, at this time of the morning, in rubbing my uncle's legs. As my uncle adjured her to look at me, he put his lean grip on the crown of her head, she kneeling beside him, and turned her face towards me. An involuntary thought connecting them both with the Dissecting Room, as it must often have been in the surgeon's time, passed across my mind in the midst of my anxiety.

"Look at the snivelling milksop!" said my uncle. "Look at the baby! This is the gentleman who, people say, is nobody's enemy but his own. This is the gentleman who can't say no. This is the gentleman who was making such large profits in his business that he must needs take a partner, t'other day. This is the gentleman who is going to marry a wife without a penny, and who falls into the hands of Jezabels who are speculating on my death!"

I knew, now, how great my uncle's rage was; for nothing short of his being almost beside himself would have induced him to utter that concluding word, which he held in such repugnance that it was never spoken or hinted at before him on any account.

"On my death," he repeated, as if he were defying me by defying his own abhorrence of the word. "On my death death Death! But I'll spoil the speculation. Eat your last under this roof, you feeble wretch, and may it choke you!"

You may suppose that I had not much appetite for the breakfast to which I was bidden in these terms; but, I took my accustomed seat. I saw that I was repudiated henceforth by my uncle; still I could bear that very well, possessing Christiana's heart.

He emptied his basin of bread and milk as usual, only that he took it on his knees with his chair turned away from the table where I sat. When he had done, he carefully snuffed out the candle; and the cold, slate-coloured, miserable day looked in upon us.

"Now, Mr. Michael," said he, "before we part, I should like to have a word with these ladies in your presence."

"As you will, sir," I returned; "but you deceive yourself, and wrong us, cruelly, if you suppose that there is any feeling at stake in this contract but pure, disinterested, faithful love."

To this, he only replied, "You lie!" and not one other word.

We went, through half-thawed snow and half-frozen rain, to the house where Christiana and her mother lived. My uncle knew them very well. They were sitting at their breakfast, and were surprised to see us at that hour.

"Your servant, ma'am," said my uncle to the mother. "You divine the purpose of my visit, I dare say, ma'am. I understand there is a world of pure, disinterested, faithful love cooped up here. I am happy to bring it all it wants, to make it complete. I bring you your son-in-law, ma'am and you, your husband, miss. The gentleman is a perfect stranger to me, but I wish him joy of his wise bargain."

He snarled at me as he went out, and I never saw him again.

It is altogether a mistake (continued the poor relation) to suppose that my dear Christiana, over-persuaded and influenced by her mother, married a rich man, the dirt from whose carriage wheels is often, in these changed times, thrown upon me as she rides by. No, no. She married me.

The way we came to be married rather sooner than we intended, was this. I took a frugal lodging and was saving and planning for her sake, when, one day, she spoke to me with great earnestness, and said:

"My dear Michael, I have given you my heart. I have said that I loved you, and I have pledged myself to be your wife. I am as much yours through all changes of good and evil as if we had been married on the day when such words passed between us. I know you well, and know that if we should be separated and our union broken off, your whole life would be shadowed, and all that might, even now, be stronger in your character for the conflict with the world would then be weakened to the shadow of what it is!"

"God help me, Christiana!" said I. "You speak the truth."

"Michael!" said she, putting her hand in mine, in all maidenly devotion, "let us keep apart no longer. It is but for me to say that I can live contented upon such means as you have, and I well know you are happy. I say so from my heart. Strive no more alone; let us strive together. My dear Michael, it is not right that I should keep secret from you what you do not suspect, but what distresses my whole life. My mother: without considering that what you have lost, you have lost for me, and on the assurance of my faith: sets her heart on riches, and urges another suit upon me, to my misery. I cannot bear this, for to bear it is to be untrue to you. I would rather share your struggles than look on. I want no better home than you can give me. I know that you will aspire and labour with a higher courage if I am wholly yours, and let it be so when you will!"

I was blest indeed, that day, and a new world opened to me. We were married in a very little while, and I took my wife to our happy home. That was the beginning of the residence I have spoken of; the Castle we have ever since inhabited together, dates from that time. All our children have been born in it. Our first child now married was a little girl, whom we called Christiana. Her son is so like Little Frank, that I hardly know which is which.

The current impression as to my partner's dealings with me is also quite erroneous. He did not begin to treat me coldly, as a poor simpleton, when my uncle and I so fatally quarrelled; nor did he afterwards gradually possess himself of our business and edge me out. On the contrary, he behaved to me with the utmost good faith and honour.

Matters between us took this turn:- On the day of my separation from my uncle, and even before the arrival at our counting-house of my trunks (which he sent after me, NOT carriage paid), I went down to our room of business, on our little wharf, overlooking the river; and there I told John Spatter what had happened. John did not say, in reply, that rich old relatives were palpable facts, and that love and sentiment were moonshine and fiction. He addressed me thus:

"Michael," said John, "we were at school together, and I generally had the knack of getting on better than you, and making a higher reputation."

"You had, John," I returned.

"Although" said John, "I borrowed your books and lost them; borrowed your pocket-money, and never repaid it; got you to buy my damaged knives at a higher price than I had given for them new; and to own to the windows that I had broken."

"All not worth mentioning, John Spatter," said I, "but certainly true."

"When you were first established in this infant business, which promises to thrive so well," pursued John, "I came to you, in my search for almost any employment, and you made me your clerk."

"Still not worth mentioning, my dear John Spatter," said I; "still, equally true."

"And finding that I had a good head for business, and that I was really useful TO the business, you did not like to retain me in that capacity, and thought it an act of justice soon to make me your partner."

"Still less worth mentioning than any of those other little circumstances you have recalled, John Spatter," said I; "for I was, and am, sensible of your merits and my deficiencies."

"Now, my good friend," said John, drawing my arm through his, as he had had a habit of doing at school; while two vessels outside the windows of our counting-house which were shaped like the stern windows of a ship went lightly down the river with the tide, as John and I might then be sailing away in company, and in trust and confidence, on our voyage of life; "let there, under these friendly circumstances, be a right understanding between us. You are too easy, Michael. You are nobody's enemy but your own. If I were to give you that damaging character among our connexion, with a shrug, and a shake of the head, and a sigh; and if I were further to abuse the trust you place in me "

"But you never will abuse it at all, John," I observed.

"Never!" said he; "but I am putting a case I say, and if I were further to abuse that trust by keeping this piece of our common affairs in the dark, and this other piece in the light, and again this other piece in the twilight, and so on, I should strengthen my strength, and weaken your weakness, day by day, until at last I found myself on the high road to fortune, and you left behind on some bare common, a hopeless number of miles out of the way."

"Exactly so," said I.

"To prevent this, Michael," said John Spatter, "or the remotest chance of this, there must be perfect openness between us. Nothing must be concealed, and we must have but one interest."

"My dear John Spatter," I assured him, "that is precisely what I mean."

"And when you are too easy," pursued John, his face glowing with friendship, "you must allow me to prevent that imperfection in your nature from being taken advantage of, by any one; you must not expect me to humour it "

"My dear John Spatter," I interrupted, "I DON'T expect you to humour it. I want to correct it."

"And I, too," said John.

"Exactly so!" cried I. "We both have the same end in view; and, honourably seeking it, and fully trusting one another, and having but one interest, ours will be a prosperous and happy partnership."

"I am sure of it!" returned John Spatter. And we shook hands most affectionately.

I took John home to my Castle, and we had a very happy day. Our partnership throve well. My friend and partner supplied what I wanted, as I had foreseen that he would, and by improving both the business and myself, amply acknowledged any little rise in life to which I had helped him.

I am not (said the poor relation, looking at the fire as he slowly rubbed his hands) very rich, for I never cared to be that; but I have enough, and am above all moderate wants and anxieties. My Castle is not a splendid place, but it is very comfortable, and it has a warm and cheerful air, and is quite a picture of Home.

Our eldest girl, who is very like her mother, married John Spatter's eldest son. Our two families are closely united in other ties of attachment. It is very pleasant of an evening, when we are all assembled together which frequently happens and when John and I talk over old times, and the one interest there has always been between us.

I really do not know, in my Castle, what loneliness is. Some of our children or grandchildren are always about it, and the young voices of my descendants are delightful O, how delightful! to me to hear. My dearest and most devoted wife, ever faithful, ever loving, ever helpful and sustaining and consoling, is the priceless blessing of my house; from whom all its other blessings spring. We are rather a musical family, and when Christiana sees me, at any time, a little weary or depressed, she steals to the piano and sings a gentle air she used to sing when we were first betrothed. So weak a man am I, that I cannot bear to hear it from any other source. They played it once, at the Theatre, when I was there with Little Frank; and the child said wondering, "Cousin Michael, whose hot tears are these that have fallen on my hand!"

Such is my Castle, and such are the real particulars of my life therein preserved. I often take Little Frank home there. He is very welcome to my grandchildren, and they play together. At this time of the year the Christmas and New Year time I am seldom out of my Castle. For, the associations of the season seem to hold me there, and the precepts of the season seem to teach me that it is well to be there.

"And the Castle is " observed a grave, kind voice among the company.

"Yes. My Castle," said the poor relation, shaking his head as he still looked at the fire, "is in the Air. John our esteemed host suggests its situation accurately. My Castle is in the Air! I have done. Will you be so good as to pass the story?"

THE CHILD'S STORY

Once upon a time, a good many years ago, there was a traveller, and he set out upon a journey. It was a magic journey, and was to seem very long when he began it, and very short when he got half way through.

He travelled along a rather dark path for some little time, without meeting anything, until at last he came to a beautiful child. So he said to the child, "What do you do here?" And the child said, "I am always at play. Come and play with me!"

So, he played with that child, the whole day long, and they were very merry. The sky was so blue, the sun was so bright, the water was so sparkling, the leaves were so green, the flowers were so lovely, and they heard such singing-birds and saw so many butteries, that everything was beautiful. This was in fine weather. When it rained, they loved to watch the falling drops, and to smell the fresh scents. When it blew, it was delightful to listen to the wind, and fancy what it said, as it came rushing from its home where was that, they wondered! whistling and howling, driving the clouds before it, bending the trees, rumbling in the chimneys, shaking the house, and making the sea roar in fury. But, when it snowed, that was best of all; for, they liked nothing so well as to look up at the white flakes falling fast and thick, like down from the breasts of millions of white birds; and to see how smooth and deep the drift was; and to listen to the hush upon the paths and roads.

They had plenty of the finest toys in the world, and the most astonishing picture-books: all about scimitars and slippers and turbans, and dwarfs and giants and genii and fairies, and blue- beards and bean-stalks and riches and caverns and forests and Valentines and Orsons: and all new and all true.

But, one day, of a sudden, the traveller lost the child. He called to him over and over again, but got no answer. So, he went upon his road, and went on for a little while without meeting anything, until at last he came to a handsome boy. So, he said to the boy, "What do you do here?" And the boy said, "I am always learning. Come and learn with me."

So he learned with that boy about Jupiter and Juno, and the Greeks and the Romans, and I don't know what, and learned more than I could tell or he either, for he soon forgot a great deal of it. But, they were not always learning; they had the merriest games that ever were played. They rowed upon the river in summer, and skated on the ice in winter; they were active afoot, and active on horseback; at cricket, and all games at ball; at prisoner's base, hare and hounds, follow my leader, and more sports than I can think of; nobody could beat them. They had holidays too, and Twelfth cakes, and parties where they danced till midnight, and real Theatres where they saw palaces of real gold and silver rise out of the real earth, and saw all the wonders of the world at once. As to friends, they had such dear friends and so many of them, that I want the time to reckon them up. They were all young, like the handsome boy, and were never to be strange to one another all their lives through.

Still, one day, in the midst of all these pleasures, the traveller lost the boy as he had lost the child, and, after calling to him in vain, went on upon his journey. So he went on for a little while without seeing anything, until at last he came to a young man. So, he said to the young man, "What do you do here?" And the young man said, "I am always in love. Come and love with me."

So, he went away with that young man, and presently they came to one of the prettiest girls that ever was seen just like Fanny in the corner there and she had eyes like Fanny, and hair like Fanny, and dimples like Fanny's, and she laughed and coloured just as Fanny does while I am talking about her. So, the young man fell in love directly just as Somebody I won't mention, the first time he came here, did with Fanny. Well! he was teased sometimes just as Somebody used to be by Fanny; and they quarrelled sometimes just as Somebody and Fanny used to quarrel; and they made it up, and sat in the dark, and wrote letters every day, and never were happy asunder, and were always looking out for one another and pretending not to, and were engaged at Christmas-time, and sat close to one another by the fire, and were going to be married very soon all exactly like Somebody I won't mention, and Fanny!

But, the traveller lost them one day, as he had lost the rest of his friends, and, after calling to them to come back, which they never did, went on upon his journey. So, he went on for a little while without seeing anything, until at last he came to a middle-aged gentleman. So, he said to the gentleman, "What are you doing here?" And his answer was, "I am always busy. Come and be busy with me!"

So, he began to be very busy with that gentleman, and they went on through the wood together. The whole journey was through a wood, only it had been open and green at first, like a wood in spring; and now began to be thick and dark, like a wood in summer; some of the little trees that had come out earliest, were even turning brown. The gentleman was not alone, but had a lady of about the same age with him, who was his Wife; and they had children, who were with them too. So, they all went on together through the wood, cutting down the trees, and making a path through the branches and the fallen leaves, and carrying burdens, and working hard.

Sometimes, they came to a long green avenue that opened into deeper woods. Then they would hear a very little, distant voice crying, "Father, father, I am another child! Stop for me!" And presently they would see a very little figure, growing larger as it came along, running to join them. When it came up, they all crowded round it, and kissed and welcomed it; and then they all went on together.

Sometimes, they came to several avenues at once, and then they all stood still, and one of the children said, "Father, I am going to sea," and another said, "Father, I am going to India," and another, "Father, I am going to seek my fortune where I can," and another, "Father, I am going to Heaven!" So, with many tears at parting, they went, solitary, down those avenues, each child upon its way; and the child who went to Heaven, rose into the golden air and vanished.

Whenever these partings happened, the traveller looked at the gentleman, and saw him glance up at the sky above the trees, where the day was beginning to decline, and the sunset to come on. He saw, too, that his hair was turning grey. But, they never could rest long, for they had their journey to perform, and it was necessary for them to be always busy.

At last, there had been so many partings that there were no children left, and only the traveller, the gentleman, and the lady, went upon their way in company. And now the wood was yellow; and now brown; and the leaves, even of the forest trees, began to fall.

So, they came to an avenue that was darker than the rest, and were pressing forward on their journey without looking down it when the lady stopped.

"My husband," said the lady. "I am called."

They listened, and they heard a voice a long way down the avenue, say, "Mother, mother!"

It was the voice of the first child who had said, "I am going to Heaven!" and the father said, "I pray not yet. The sunset is very near. I pray not yet!"

But, the voice cried, "Mother, mother!" without minding him, though his hair was now quite white, and tears were on his face.

Then, the mother, who was already drawn into the shade of the dark avenue and moving away with her arms still round his neck, kissed him, and said, "My dearest, I am summoned, and I go!" And she was gone. And the traveller and he were left alone together.

And they went on and on together, until they came to very near the end of the wood: so near, that they could see the sunset shining red before them through the trees.

Yet, once more, while he broke his way among the branches, the traveller lost his friend. He called and called, but there was no reply, and when he passed out of the wood, and saw the peaceful sun going down upon a wide purple prospect, he came to an old man sitting on a fallen tree. So, he said to the old man, "What do you do here?" And the old man said with a calm smile, "I am always remembering. Come and remember with me!"

So the traveller sat down by the side of that old man, face to face with the serene sunset; and all his friends came softly back and stood around him. The beautiful child, the handsome boy, the young man in love, the father, mother, and children: every one of them was there, and he had lost nothing. So, he loved them all, and was kind and forbearing with them all, and was always pleased to watch them all, and they all honoured and loved him. And I think the traveller must be yourself, dear Grandfather, because this what you do to us, and what we do to you.

THE SCHOOLBOY'S STORY

Being rather young at present I am getting on in years, but still I am rather young I have no particular adventures of my own to fall back upon. It wouldn't much interest anybody here, I suppose, to know what a screw the Reverend is, or what a griffin SHE is, or how they do stick it into parents particularly hair-cutting, and medical attendance. One of our fellows was charged in his half's account twelve and sixpence for two pills tolerably profitable at six and threepence a-piece, I should think and he never took them either, but put them up the sleeve of his jacket.

As to the beef, it's shameful. It's NOT beef. Regular beef isn't veins. You can chew regular beef. Besides which, there's gravy to regular beef, and you never see a drop to ours. Another of our fellows went home ill, and heard the family doctor tell his father that he couldn't account for his complaint unless it was the beer. Of course it was the beer, and well it might be!

However, beef and Old Cheeseman are two different things. So is beer. It was Old Cheeseman I meant to tell about; not the manner in which our fellows get their constitutions destroyed for the sake of profit.

Why, look at the pie-crust alone. There's no flakiness in it. It's solid like damp lead. Then our fellows get nightmares, and are bolstered for calling out and waking other fellows. Who can wonder!

Old Cheeseman one night walked in his sleep, put his hat on over his night-cap, got hold of a fishing-rod and a cricket-bat, and went down into the parlour, where they naturally thought from his appearance he was a Ghost. Why, he never would have done that if his meals had been wholesome. When we all begin to walk in our sleeps, I suppose they'll be sorry for it.

Old Cheeseman wasn't second Latin Master then; he was a fellow himself. He was first brought there, very small, in a post-chaise, by a woman who was always taking snuff and shaking him and that was the most he remembered about it. He never went home for the holidays. His accounts (he never learnt any extras) were sent to a Bank, and the Bank paid them; and he had a brown suit twice a-year, and went into boots at twelve. They were always too big for him, too.

In the Midsummer holidays, some of our fellows who lived within walking distance, used to come back and climb the trees outside the playground wall, on purpose to look at Old Cheeseman reading there by himself. He was always as mild as the tea and THAT'S pretty mild, I should hope! so when they whistled to him, he looked up and nodded; and when they said, "Halloa, Old Cheeseman, what have you had for dinner?" he said, "Boiled mutton;" and when they said, "An't it solitary, Old Cheeseman?" he said, "It is a little dull sometimes:" and then they said, "Well good-bye, Old Cheeseman!" and climbed down again. Of course it was imposing on Old Cheeseman to give him nothing but boiled mutton through a whole

Vacation, but that was just like the system. When they didn't give him boiled mutton, they gave him rice pudding, pretending it was a treat. And saved the butcher.

So Old Cheeseman went on. The holidays brought him into other trouble besides the loneliness; because when the fellows began to come back, not wanting to, he was always glad to see them; which was aggravating when they were not at all glad to see him, and so he got his head knocked against walls, and that was the way his nose bled. But he was a favourite in general. Once a subscription was raised for him; and, to keep up his spirits, he was presented before the holidays with two white mice, a rabbit, a pigeon, and a beautiful puppy. Old Cheeseman cried about it especially soon afterwards, when they all ate one another.

Of course Old Cheeseman used to be called by the names of all sorts of cheeses Double Glo'sterman, Family Cheshireman, Dutchman, North Wiltshireman, and all that. But he never minded it. And I don't mean to say he was old in point of years because he wasn't only he was called from the first, Old Cheeseman.

At last, Old Cheeseman was made second Latin Master. He was brought in one morning at the beginning of a new half, and presented to the school in that capacity as "Mr. Cheeseman." Then our fellows all agreed that Old Cheeseman was a spy, and a deserter, who had gone over to the enemy's camp, and sold himself for gold. It was no excuse for him that he had sold himself for very little gold two pound ten a quarter and his washing, as was reported. It was decided by a Parliament which sat about it, that Old Cheeseman's mercenary motives could alone be taken into account, and that he had "coined our blood for drachmas." The Parliament took the expression out of the quarrel scene between Brutus and Cassius.

When it was settled in this strong way that Old Cheeseman was a tremendous traitor, who had wormed himself into our fellows' secrets on purpose to get himself into favour by giving up everything he knew, all courageous fellows were invited to come forward and enrol themselves in a Society for making a set against him. The President of the Society was First boy, named Bob Tarter. His father was in the West Indies, and he owned, himself, that his father was worth Millions. He had great power among our fellows, and he wrote a parody, beginning -

Â Â "Who made believe to be so meek
Â Â That we could hardly hear him speak,
Â Â Yet turned out an Informing Sneak?
Â Â Old Cheeseman."

- and on in that way through more than a dozen verses, which he used to go and sing, every morning, close by the new master's desk. He trained one of the low boys, too, a rosy-cheeked little Brass who didn't care what he did, to go up to him with his Latin Grammar one morning, and say it so: NOMINATIVUS PRONOMINUM Old Cheeseman, RARO EXPRIMITUR was never suspected, NISI DISTINCTIONIS of being an informer, AUT EMPHASIS GRATIA until he proved one. UT for instance, VOS DAMNASTIS when he sold the boys. QUASI as though, DICAT he should say, PRETAEREA NEMO I'm a Judas! All this produced a great effect on Old Cheeseman. He had never had much hair; but what he had, began to get thinner and thinner every day. He grew paler and more worn; and sometimes of an evening he was seen sitting at his desk with a precious long snuff to his candle, and his hands before his face, crying. But no member of the Society could pity him, even if he felt inclined, because the President said it was Old Cheeseman's conscience.

So Old Cheeseman went on, and didn't he lead a miserable life! Of course the Reverend turned up his nose at him, and of course SHE did because both of them always do that at all the masters but he suffered from the fellows most, and he suffered from them constantly. He never told about it, that the Society could find out; but he got no credit for that, because the President said it was Old Cheeseman's cowardice.

He had only one friend in the world, and that one was almost as powerless as he was, for it was only Jane. Jane was a sort of wardrobe woman to our fellows, and took care of the boxes. She had come at first, I believe, as a kind of apprentice some of our fellows say from a Charity, but I don't know and after her time was out, had stopped at so much a year. So little a year, perhaps I ought to say, for it is far more likely. However, she had put some pounds in the Savings' Bank, and she was a very nice young woman. She was not quite pretty; but she had a very frank, honest, bright face, and all our fellows were fond of her. She was uncommonly neat and cheerful, and uncommonly comfortable and kind. And if anything was the matter with a fellow's mother, he always went and showed the letter to Jane.

Jane was Old Cheeseman's friend. The more the Society went against him, the more Jane stood by him. She used to give him a good- humoured look out of her still-room window, sometimes, that seemed to set him up for the day. She used to pass out of the orchard and the kitchen garden (always kept locked, I believe you!) through the playground, when she might have gone the other way, only to give a turn of her head, as much as to say "Keep up your spirits!" to Old Cheeseman. His slip of a room was so fresh and orderly that it was well known who looked after it while he was at his desk; and when our fellows saw a smoking hot dumpling on his plate at dinner, they knew with indignation who had sent it up.

Under these circumstances, the Society resolved, after a quantity of meeting and debating, that Jane should be requested to cut Old Cheeseman dead; and that if she refused, she must be sent to Coventry herself. So a deputation, headed by the President, was appointed to wait on Jane, and inform her of the vote the Society had been under the painful necessity of passing. She was very much respected for all her good qualities, and there was a story about her having once waylaid the Reverend in his own study, and got a fellow off from severe punishment, of her own kind comfortable heart. So the deputation didn't much like the job. However, they went up, and the President told Jane all about it. Upon which Jane turned very red, burst into tears, informed the President and the deputation, in a way not at all like her usual way, that they were a parcel of malicious young savages, and turned the whole respected body out of the room. Consequently it was entered in the Society's book (kept in astronomical cypher for fear of detection), that all communication with Jane was interdicted: and the President addressed the members on this convincing instance of Old Cheeseman's undermining.

But Jane was as true to Old Cheeseman as Old Cheeseman was false to our fellows in their opinion, at all events and steadily continued to be his only friend. It was a great exasperation to the Society, because Jane was as much a loss to them as she was a gain to him; and being more inveterate against him than ever, they treated him worse than ever. At last, one morning, his desk stood empty, his room was peeped into, and found to be vacant, and a whisper went about among the pale faces of our fellows that

Old Cheeseman, unable to bear it any longer, had got up early and drowned himself.

The mysterious looks of the other masters after breakfast, and the evident fact that old Cheeseman was not expected, confirmed the Society in this opinion. Some began to discuss whether the President was liable to hanging or only transportation for life, and the President's face showed a great anxiety to know which. However, he said that a jury of his country should find him game; and that in his address he should put it to them to lay their hands upon their hearts and say whether they as Britons approved of informers, and how they thought they would like it themselves. Some of the Society considered that he had better run away until he found a forest where he might change clothes with a wood-cutter, and stain his face with blackberries; but the majority believed that if he stood his ground, his father belonging as he did to the West Indies, and being worth millions could buy him off.

All our fellows' hearts beat fast when the Reverend came in, and made a sort of a Roman, or a Field Marshal, of himself with the ruler; as he always did before delivering an address. But their fears were nothing to their astonishment when he came out with the story that Old Cheeseman, "so long our respected friend and fellow- pilgrim in the pleasant plains of knowledge," he called him O yes! I dare say! Much of that! was the orphan child of a disinherited young lady who had married against her father's wish, and whose young husband had died, and who had died of sorrow herself, and whose unfortunate baby (Old Cheeseman) had been brought up at the cost of a grandfather who would never consent to see it, baby, boy, or man: which grandfather was now dead, and serve him right that's my putting in and which grandfather's large property, there being no will, was now, and all of a sudden and for ever, Old Cheeseman's! Our so long respected friend and fellow-pilgrim in the pleasant plains of knowledge, the Reverend wound up a lot of bothering quotations by saying, would "come among us once more" that day fortnight, when he desired to take leave of us himself, in a more particular manner. With these words, he stared severely round at our fellows, and went solemnly out.

There was precious consternation among the members of the Society, now. Lots of them wanted to resign, and lots more began to try to make out that they had never belonged to it. However, the President stuck up, and said that they must stand or fall together, and that if a breach was made it should be over his body which was meant to encourage the Society: but it didn't. The President further said, he would consider the position in which they stood, and would give them his best opinion and advice in a few days. This was eagerly looked for, as he knew a good deal of the world on account of his father's being in the West Indies.

After days and days of hard thinking, and drawing armies all over his slate, the President called our fellows together, and made the matter clear. He said it was plain that when Old Cheeseman came on the appointed day, his first revenge would be to impeach the Society, and have it flogged all round. After witnessing with joy the torture of his enemies, and gloating over the cries which agony would extort from them, the probability was that he would invite the Reverend, on pretence of conversation, into a private room say the parlour into which Parents were shown, where the two great globes were which were never used and would there reproach him with the various frauds and oppressions he had endured at his hands. At the close of his observations he would make a signal to a Prizefighter concealed in the passage, who would then appear and pitch into the Reverend, till he was left insensible. Old Cheeseman would then make Jane a present of from five to ten pounds, and would leave the establishment in fiendish triumph.

The President explained that against the parlour part, or the Jane part, of these arrangements he had nothing to say; but, on the part of the Society, he counselled deadly resistance. With this view he recommended that all available desks should be filled with stones, and that the first word of the complaint should be the signal to every fellow to let fly at Old Cheeseman. The bold advice put the Society in better spirits, and was unanimously taken. A post about Old Cheeseman's size was put up in the playground, and all our fellows practised at it till it was dinted all over.

When the day came, and Places were called, every fellow sat down in a tremble. There had been much discussing and disputing as to how Old Cheeseman would come; but it was the general opinion that he would appear in a sort of triumphal car drawn by four horses, with two livery servants in front, and the Prizefighter in disguise up behind. So, all our fellows sat listening for the sound of wheels. But no wheels were heard, for Old Cheeseman walked after all, and came into the school without any preparation. Pretty much as he used to be, only dressed in black.

"Gentlemen," said the Reverend, presenting him, "our so long respected friend and fellow-pilgrim in the pleasant plains of knowledge, is desirous to offer a word or two. Attention, gentlemen, one and all!"

Every fellow stole his hand into his desk and looked at the President. The President was all ready, and taking aim at old Cheeseman with his eyes.

What did Old Cheeseman then, but walk up to his old desk, look round him with a queer smile as if there was a tear in his eye, and begin in a quavering, mild voice, "My dear companions and old friends!"

Every fellow's hand came out of his desk, and the President suddenly began to cry.

"My dear companions and old friends," said Old Cheeseman, "you have heard of my good fortune. I have passed so many years under this roof my entire life so far, I may say that I hope you have been glad to hear of it for my sake. I could never enjoy it without exchanging congratulations with you. If we have ever misunderstood one another at all, pray, my dear boys, let us forgive and forget. I have a great tenderness for you, and I am sure you return it. I want in the fulness of a grateful heart to shake hands with you every one. I have come back to do it, if you please, my dear boys."

Since the President had begun to cry, several other fellows had broken out here and there: but now, when Old Cheeseman began with him as first boy, laid his left hand affectionately on his shoulder and gave him his right; and when the President said "Indeed, I don't deserve it, sir; upon my honour I don't;" there was sobbing and crying all over the school. Every other fellow said he didn't deserve it, much in the same way; but Old Cheeseman, not minding that a bit, went cheerfully round to every boy, and wound up with every master finishing off the Reverend last.

Then a snivelling little chap in a corner, who was always under some punishment or other, set up a shrill cry of "Success to Old Cheeseman! Hooray!" The Reverend glared upon him, and said, "MR. Cheeseman, sir." But, Old Cheeseman protesting that he liked his old name a great deal better than his new one, all our fellows took up the cry; and, for I don't know how many minutes, there was such a thundering of feet and hands, and such a roaring of Old Cheeseman, as never was heard.

After that, there was a spread in the dining-room of the most magnificent kind. Fowls, tongues, preserves, fruits, confectionaries, jellies, neguses, barley-sugar temples, trifles, crackers eat all you can and pocket what you like all at Old Cheeseman's expense. After that, speeches, whole holiday, double and treble sets of all manners of things for all manners of games, donkeys, pony-chaises and drive yourself, dinner for all the masters at the Seven Bells (twenty pounds a-head our fellows estimated it at), an annual holiday and feast fixed for that day every year, and another on Old Cheeseman's birthday Reverend bound down before the fellows to allow it, so that he could never back out all at Old Cheeseman's expense.

And didn't our fellows go down in a body and cheer outside the Seven Bells? O no!

But there's something else besides. Don't look at the next story- teller, for there's more yet. Next day, it was resolved that the Society should make it up with Jane, and then be dissolved. What do you think of Jane being gone, though! "What? Gone for ever?" said our fellows, with long faces. "Yes, to be sure," was all the answer they could get. None of the people about the house would say anything more. At length, the first boy took upon himself to ask the Reverend whether our old friend Jane was really gone? The Reverend (he has got a daughter at home turn-up nose, and red) replied severely, "Yes, sir, Miss Pitt is gone." The idea of calling Jane, Miss Pitt! Some said she had been sent away in disgrace for taking money from Old Cheeseman; others said she had gone into Old Cheeseman's service at a rise of ten pounds a year. All that our fellows knew, was, she was gone.

It was two or three months afterwards, when, one afternoon, an open carriage stopped at the cricket field, just outside bounds, with a lady and gentleman in it, who looked at the game a long time and stood up to see it played. Nobody thought much about them, until the same little snivelling chap came in, against all rules, from the post where he was Scout, and said, "It's Jane!" Both Elevens forgot the game directly, and ran crowding round the carriage. It WAS Jane! In such a bonnet! And if you'll believe me, Jane was married to Old Cheeseman.

It soon became quite a regular thing when our fellows were hard at it in the playground, to see a carriage at the low part of the wall where it joins the high part, and a lady and gentleman standing up in it, looking over. The gentleman was always Old Cheeseman, and the lady was always Jane.

The first time I ever saw them, I saw them in that way. There had been a good many changes among our fellows then, and it had turned out that Bob Tarter's father wasn't worth Millions! He wasn't worth anything. Bob had gone for a soldier, and Old Cheeseman had purchased his discharge. But that's not the carriage. The carriage stopped, and all our fellows stopped as soon as it was seen.

"So you have never sent me to Coventry after all!" said the lady, laughing, as our fellows swarmed up the wall to shake hands with her. "Are you never going to do it?"

"Never! never! never!" on all sides.

I didn't understand what she meant then, but of course I do now. I was very much pleased with her face though, and with her good way, and I couldn't help looking at her and at him too with all our fellows clustering so joyfully about them.

They soon took notice of me as a new boy, so I thought I might as well swarm up the wall myself, and shake hands with them as the rest did. I was quite as glad to see them as the rest were, and was quite as familiar with them in a moment.

"Only a fortnight now," said Old Cheeseman, "to the holidays. Who stops? Anybody?"

A good many fingers pointed at me, and a good many voices cried "He does!" For it was the year when you were all away; and rather low I was about it, I can tell you.

"Oh!" said Old Cheeseman. "But it's solitary here in the holiday time. He had better come to us."

So I went to their delightful house, and was as happy as I could possibly be. They understand how to conduct themselves towards boys, THEY do. When they take a boy to the play, for instance, they DO take him. They don't go in after it's begun, or come out before it's over. They know how to bring a boy up, too. Look at their own! Though he is very little as yet, what a capital boy he is! Why, my next favourite to Mrs. Cheeseman and Old Cheeseman, is young Cheeseman.

So, now I have told you all I know about Old Cheeseman. And it's not much after all, I am afraid. Is it?

NOBODY'S STORY

He lived on the bank of a mighty river, broad and deep, which was always silently rolling on to a vast undiscovered ocean. It had rolled on, ever since the world began. It had changed its course sometimes, and turned into new channels, leaving its old ways dry and barren; but it had ever been upon the flow, and ever was to flow until Time should be no more. Against its strong, unfathomable stream, nothing made head. No living creature, no flower, no leaf, no particle of animate or inanimate existence, ever strayed back from the undiscovered ocean. The tide of the river set resistlessly towards it; and the tide never stopped, any more than the earth stops in its circling round the sun.

He lived in a busy place, and he worked very hard to live. He had no hope of ever being rich enough to live a month without hard work, but he was quite content, GOD knows, to labour with a cheerful will. He was one of an immense family, all of whose sons and daughters gained their daily bread by daily work, prolonged from their rising up betimes until their lying down at night. Beyond this destiny he had no prospect, and he sought none.

There was over-much drumming, trumpeting, and speech-making, in the neighbourhood where he dwelt; but he had nothing to do with that. Such clash and uproar came from the Bigwig family, at the unaccountable proceedings of which race, he marvelled much. They set up the strangest statues, in iron, marble, bronze, and brass, before his door; and darkened his house with the legs and tails of uncouth images of horses. He wondered what it all meant, smiled in a rough good-humoured way he had, and kept at his hard work.

The Bigwig family (composed of all the stateliest people thereabouts, and all the noisiest) had undertaken to save him the trouble of thinking for himself, and to manage him and his affairs. "Why truly," said he, "I have little time upon my hands; and if you will be so good as to take care of me, in return for the money I pay over" for the Bigwig family were not above his money "I shall be relieved and much obliged, considering that you know best." Hence the drumming, trumpeting, and speech-making, and the ugly images of horses which he was expected to fall down and worship.

"I don't understand all this," said he, rubbing his furrowed brow confusedly. "But it HAS a meaning, maybe, if I could find it out."

"It means," returned the Bigwig family, suspecting something of what he said, "honour and glory in the highest, to the highest merit."

"Oh!" said he. And he was glad to hear that.

But, when he looked among the images in iron, marble, bronze, and brass, he failed to find a rather meritorious countryman of his, once the son of a Warwickshire wool-dealer, or any single countryman whomsoever of that kind. He could find none of the men whose knowledge had rescued him and his children from terrific and disfiguring disease, whose boldness had raised his forefathers from the condition of serfs, whose wise fancy had opened a new and high existence to the humblest, whose skill had filled the working man's world with accumulated wonders. Whereas, he did find others whom he knew no good of, and even others whom he knew much ill of.

"Humph!" said he. "I don't quite understand it."

So, he went home, and sat down by his fireside to get it out of his mind.

Now, his fireside was a bare one, all hemmed in by blackened streets; but it was a precious place to him. The hands of his wife were hardened with toil, and she was old before her time; but she was dear to him. His children, stunted in their growth, bore traces of unwholesome nurture; but they had beauty in his sight. Above all other things, it was an earnest desire of this man's soul that his children should be taught. "If I am sometimes misled," said he, "for want of knowledge, at least let them know better, and avoid my mistakes. If it is hard to me to reap the harvest of pleasure and instruction that is stored in books, let it be easier to them."

But, the Bigwig family broke out into violent family quarrels concerning what it was lawful to teach to this man's children. Some of the family insisted on such a thing being primary and indispensable above all other things; and others of the family insisted on such another thing being primary and indispensable above all other things; and the Bigwig family, rent into factions, wrote pamphlets, held convocations, delivered charges, orations, and all varieties of discourses; impounded one another in courts Lay and courts Ecclesiastical; threw dirt, exchanged pummelings, and fell together by the ears in unintelligible animosity. Meanwhile, this man, in his short evening snatches at his fireside, saw the demon Ignorance arise there, and take his children to itself. He saw his daughter perverted into a heavy, slatternly drudge; he saw his son go moping down the ways of low sensuality, to brutality and crime; he saw the dawning light of intelligence in the eyes of his babies so changing into cunning and suspicion, that he could have rather wished them idiots.

"I don't understand this any the better," said he; "but I think it cannot be right. Nay, by the clouded Heaven above me, I protest against this as my wrong!"

Becoming peaceable again (for his passion was usually short-lived, and his nature kind), he looked about him on his Sundays and holidays, and he saw how much monotony and weariness there was, and thence how drunkenness arose with all its train of ruin. Then he appealed to the Bigwig family, and said, "We are a labouring people, and I have a glimmering suspicion in me that labouring people of whatever condition were made by a higher intelligence than yours, as I poorly understand it to be in need of mental refreshment and recreation. See what we fall into, when we rest without it. Come! Amuse me harmlessly, show me something, give me an escape!"

But, here the Bigwig family fell into a state of uproar absolutely deafening. When some few voices were faintly heard, proposing to show him the wonders of the world, the greatness of creation, the mighty changes of time, the workings of nature and the beauties of art to show him these things, that is to say, at any period of his life when he could look upon them there arose among the Bigwigs such roaring and raving, such pulpiting and petitioning, such maundering and memorialising, such name-calling and dirt-throwing, such a shrill wind of parliamentary questioning and feeble replying- -where "I dare not" waited on "I would" that the poor fellow stood aghast, staring wildly around.

"Have I provoked all this," said he, with his hands to his affrighted ears, "by what was meant to be an innocent request, plainly arising out of my familiar experience, and the common knowledge of all men who choose to open their eyes? I don't understand, and I am not understood. What is to come of such a state of things!"

He was bending over his work, often asking himself the question, when the news began to spread that a pestilence had appeared among the labourers, and was slaying them by thousands. Going forth to look about him, he soon found this to be true. The dying and the dead were mingled in the close and tainted houses among which his life was passed. New poison was distilled into the always murky, always sickening air. The robust and the weak, old age and infancy, the father and the mother, all were stricken down alike.

What means of flight had he? He remained there, where he was, and saw those who were dearest to him die. A kind preacher came to him, and would have said some prayers to soften his heart in his gloom, but he replied:

"O what avails it, missionary, to come to me, a man condemned to residence in this foetid place, where every sense bestowed upon me for my delight becomes a torment, and where every minute of my numbered days is new mire added to the heap under which I lie oppressed! But, give me my first glimpse of Heaven, through a little of its light and air; give me pure water; help me to be clean; lighten this heavy atmosphere and heavy life, in which our spirits sink, and we become the indifferent and callous creatures you too often see us; gently and kindly take the bodies of those who die among us, out of the small room where we grow to be so familiar with the awful change that even its sanctity is lost to us; and, Teacher, then I will hear none know better than you, how willingly- -of Him whose thoughts were so much with the poor, and who had compassion for all human sorrow!"

He was at work again, solitary and sad, when his Master came and stood near to him dressed in black. He, also, had suffered heavily. His young wife, his beautiful and good young wife, was dead; so, too, his only child.

"Master, 'tis hard to bear I know it but be comforted. I would give you comfort, if I could."

The Master thanked him from his heart, but, said he, "O you labouring men! The calamity began among you. If you had but lived more healthily and decently, I should not be the widowed and bereft mourner that I am this day."

"Master," returned the other, shaking his head, "I have begun to understand a little that most calamities will come from us, as this one did, and that none will stop at our poor doors, until we are united with that great squabbling family yonder, to do the things that are right. We cannot live healthily and decently, unless they who undertook to manage us provide the means. We cannot be instructed unless they will teach us; we cannot be rationally amused, unless they will amuse us; we cannot but have some false gods of our own, while they set up so many of theirs in all the public places. The evil consequences of imperfect instruction, the evil consequences of pernicious neglect, the evil consequences of unnatural restraint and the denial of humanising enjoyments, will all come from us, and none of them will stop with us. They will spread far and wide. They always do; they always have done just like the pestilence. I understand so much, I think, at last."

But the Master said again, "O you labouring men! How seldom do we ever hear of you, except in connection with some trouble!"

"Master," he replied, "I am Nobody, and little likely to be heard of (nor yet much wanted to be heard of, perhaps), except when there is some trouble. But it never begins with me, and it never can end with me. As sure as Death, it comes down to me, and it goes up from me."

There was so much reason in what he said, that the Bigwig family, getting wind of it, and being horribly frightened by the late desolation, resolved to unite with him to do the things that were right at all events, so far as the said things were associated with the direct prevention, humanly speaking, of another pestilence. But, as their fear wore off, which it soon began to do, they resumed their falling out among themselves, and did nothing. Consequently the scourge appeared again low down as before and spread avengingly upward as before, and carried off vast numbers of the brawlers. But not a man among them ever admitted, if in the least degree he ever perceived, that he had anything to do with it.

So Nobody lived and died in the old, old, old way; and this, in the main, is the whole of Nobody's story.

Had he no name, you ask? Perhaps it was Legion. It matters little what his name was. Let us call him Legion.

If you were ever in the Belgian villages near the field of Waterloo, you will have seen, in some quiet little church, a monument erected by faithful companions in arms to the memory of Colonel A, Major B, Captains C, D and E, Lieutenants F and G, Ensigns H, I and J, seven non-commissioned officers, and one hundred and thirty rank and file, who fell in the discharge of their duty on the memorable day. The story of Nobody is the story of the rank and file of the earth. They bear their share of the battle; they have their part in the victory; they fall; they leave no name but in the mass. The march of the proudest of us, leads to the dusty way by which they go. O! Let us think of them this year at the Christmas fire, and not forget them when it is burnt out.

THE END OF
Some Short Christmas Stories

SPEECHES: LITERARY AND SOCIAL BY CHARLES DICKENS

SPEECH: EDINBURGH, JUNE 25, 1841.

[At a public dinner, given in honour of Mr. Dickens, and presided over by the late Professor Wilson, the Chairman having proposed his health in a long and eloquent speech, Mr. Dickens returned thanks as follows:-]

If I felt your warm and generous welcome less, I should be better able to thank you. If I could have listened as you have listened to the glowing language of your distinguished Chairman, and if I could have heard as you heard the “thoughts that breathe and words that burn,” which he has uttered, it would have gone hard but I should have caught some portion of his enthusiasm, and kindled at his example. But every word which fell from his lips, and every demonstration of sympathy and approbation with which you received his eloquent expressions, renders me unable to respond to his kindness, and leaves me at last all heart and no lips, yearning to respond as I would do to your cordial greeting - possessing, heaven knows, the will, and desiring only to find the way.

The way to your good opinion, favour, and support, has been to me very pleasing - a path strewn with flowers and cheered with sunshine. I feel as if I stood amongst old friends, whom I had intimately known and highly valued. I feel as if the deaths of the fictitious creatures, in which you have been kind enough to express an interest, had endeared us to each other as real afflictions deepen friendships in actual life; I feel as if they had been real persons, whose fortunes we had pursued together in inseparable connexion, and that I had never known them apart from you.

It is a difficult thing for a man to speak of himself or of his works. But perhaps on this occasion I may, without impropriety, venture to say a word on the spirit in which mine were conceived. I felt an earnest and humble desire, and shall do till I die, to increase the stock of harmless cheerfulness. I felt that the world was not utterly to be despised; that it was worthy of living in for many reasons. I was anxious to find, as the Professor has said, if I could, in evil things, that soul of goodness which the Creator has put in them. I was anxious to show that virtue may be found in the bye-ways of the world, that it is not incompatible with poverty and even with rags, and to keep steadily through life the motto, expressed in the burning words of your Northern poet -

“The rank is but the guinea stamp,
The man’s the gowd for a’ that.”

And in following this track, where could I have better assurance that I was right, or where could I have stronger assurance to cheer me on than in your kindness on this to me memorable night?

I am anxious and glad to have an opportunity of saying a word in reference to one incident in which I am happy to know you were interested, and still more happy to know, though it may sound paradoxical, that you were disappointed - I mean the death of the little heroine. When I first conceived the idea of conducting that simple story to its termination, I determined rigidly to adhere to it, and never to forsake the end I had in view. Not untried in the school of affliction, in the death of those we love, I thought what a good thing it would be if in my little work of pleasant amusement I could substitute a garland of fresh flowers for the sculptured horrors which disgrace the tomb. If I have put into my book anything which can fill the young mind with better thoughts of death, or soften the grief of older hearts; if I have written one word which can afford pleasure or consolation to old or young in time of trial, I shall consider it as something achieved - something which I shall be glad to look back upon in after life. Therefore I kept to my purpose, notwithstanding that towards the conclusion of the story, I daily received letters of remonstrance, especially from the ladies. God bless them for their tender mercies! The Professor was quite right when he said that I had not reached to an adequate delineation of their virtues; and I fear that I must go on blotting their characters in endeavouring to reach the ideal in my mind. These letters were, however, combined with others from the sterner sex, and some of them were not altogether free from personal invective. But, notwithstanding, I kept to my purpose, and I am happy to know that many of those who at first condemned me are now foremost in their approbation.

If I have made a mistake in detaining you with this little incident, I do not regret having done so; for your kindness has given me such a confidence in you, that the fault is yours and not mine. I come once more to thank you, and here I am in a difficulty again. The distinction you have conferred upon me is one which I never hoped for, and of which I never dared to dream. That it is one which I shall never forget, and that while I live I shall be proud of its remembrance, you must well know. I believe I shall never hear the name of this capital of Scotland without a thrill of gratitude and pleasure. I shall love while I have life her people, her hills, and her houses, and even the very stones of her streets. And if in the future works which may lie before me you should discern - God grant you may! - a brighter spirit and a clearer wit, I pray you to refer it back to this night, and point to that as a Scottish passage for evermore. I thank you again and again, with the energy of a thousand thanks in each one, and I drink to you with a heart as full as my glass, and far easier emptied, I do assure you.

[Later in the evening, in proposing the health of Professor Wilson, Mr. Dickens said:-]

I have the honour to be entrusted with a toast, the very mention of which will recommend itself to you, I know, as one possessing no ordinary claims to your sympathy and approbation, and the proposing of which is as congenial to my wishes and feelings as its acceptance must be to yours. It is the health of our Chairman, and coupled with his name I have to propose the literature of Scotland - a literature which he has done much to render famous through the world, and of which he has been for many years - as I hope and believe he will be for many more - a most brilliant and distinguished ornament. Who can revert to the literature of the land of Scott and of Burns without having directly in his mind, as inseparable from the subject and foremost in the picture, that old man of might, with his lion heart and sceptred crutch - Christopher North. I am glad to remember the time when I believed him to be a real, actual, veritable old gentleman, that might be seen any day hobbling along the High Street with the most brilliant eye - but that is no fiction - and the greyest hair in all the world - who wrote not because he cared to write, not because he cared for the wonder and admiration of his fellow-men, but who wrote because he could not help it, because there was always springing up in his mind a clear and sparkling stream of poetry which must have vent, and like the glittering fountain in the fairy tale, draw what you might, was ever at the full, and never languished even by a single drop or bubble. I had so figured him in my mind, and when I saw the Professor two days ago, striding along the Parliament House, I was disposed to take it as a personal offence - I was vexed to see him look so hearty. I drooped to see twenty Christophers in one. I began to think that Scottish life was all light and no shadows, and I began to doubt that beautiful book to which I have turned again and again, always to find new beauties and fresh sources of interest.

[In proposing the memory of the late Sir David Wilkie, Mr. Dickens said:-]

Less fortunate than the two gentlemen who have preceded me, it is confided to me to mention a name which cannot be pronounced without sorrow, a name in which Scotland had a great triumph, and which England delighted to honour. One of the gifted of the earth has passed away, as it were, yesterday; one who was devoted to his art, and his art was nature - I mean David Wilkie. {1} He was one who made the cottage hearth a graceful thing - of whom it might truly be said that he found "books in the running brooks," and who has left in all he did some breathing of the air which stirs the heather. But however desirous to enlarge on his genius as an artist, I would rather speak of him now as a friend who has gone from amongst us. There is his deserted studio - the empty easel lying idly by - the unfinished picture with its face turned to the wall, and there is that bereaved sister, who loved him with an affection which death cannot quench. He has left a name in fame clear as the bright sky; he has filled our minds with memories pure as the blue waves which roll over him. Let us hope that she who more than all others mourns his loss, may learn to reflect that he died in the fulness of his time, before age or sickness had dimmed his powers - and that she may yet associate with feelings as calm and pleasant as we do now the memory of Wilkie.

SPEECH: JANUARY, 1842.

[In presenting Captain Hewett, of the *Britannia*, {2} with a service of plate on behalf of the passengers, Mr. Dickens addressed him as follows:]

Captain Hewett, - I am very proud and happy to have been selected as the instrument of conveying to you the heartfelt thanks of my fellow-passengers on board the ship entrusted to your charge, and of entreating your acceptance of this trifling present. The ingenious artists who work in silver do not always, I find, keep their promises, even in Boston. I regret that, instead of two goblets, which there should be here, there is, at present, only one. The deficiency, however, will soon be supplied; and, when it is, our little testimonial will be, so far, complete.

You are a sailor, Captain Hewett, in the truest sense of the word; and the devoted admiration of the ladies, God bless them, is a sailor's first boast. I need not enlarge upon the honour they have done you, I am sure, by their presence here. Judging of you by myself, I am certain that the recollection of their beautiful faces will cheer your lonely vigils upon the ocean for a long time to come.

In all time to come, and in all your voyages upon the sea, I hope you will have a thought for those who wish to live in your memory by the help of these trifles. As they will often connect you with the pleasure of those homes and fire sides from which they once wandered, and which, but for you, they might never have regained, so they trust that you will sometimes associate them with your hours of festive enjoyment; and, that, when you drink from these cups, you will feel that the draught is commended to your lips by friends whose best wishes you have; and who earnestly and truly hope for your success, happiness, and prosperity, in all the undertakings of your life.

SPEECH: FEBRUARY 1842.

[At dinner given to Mr. Dickens by the young men of Boston. The company consisted of about two hundred, among whom were George Bancroft, Washington Allston, and Oliver Wendell Holmes. The toast of “Health, happiness, and a hearty welcome to Charles Dickens,” having been proposed by the chairman, Mr. Quincy, and received with great applause, Mr. Dickens responded with the following address:]

Gentlemen, - If you had given this splendid entertainment to anyone else in the whole wide world - if I were to-night to exult in the triumph of my dearest friend - if I stood here upon my defence, to repel any unjust attack - to appeal as a stranger to your generosity and kindness as the freest people on the earth - I could, putting some restraint upon myself, stand among you as self-possessed and unmoved as I should be alone in my own room in England. But when I have the echoes of your cordial greeting ringing in my ears; when I see your kind faces beaming a welcome so warm and earnest as never man had - I feel, it is my nature, so vanquished and subdued, that I have hardly fortitude enough to thank you. If your President, instead of pouring forth that delightful mixture of humour and pathos which you have just heard, had been but a caustic, ill-natured man - if he had only been a dull one - if I could only have doubted or distrusted him or you, I should have had my wits at my fingers’ ends, and, using them, could have held you at arm’s-length. But you have given me no such opportunity; you take advantage of me in the tenderest point; you give me no chance of playing at company, or holding you at a distance, but flock about me like a host of brothers, and make this place like home. Indeed, gentlemen, indeed, if it be natural and allowable for each of us, on his own hearth, to express his thoughts in the most homely fashion, and to appear in his plainest garb, I have a fair claim upon you to let me do so to-night, for you have made my home an Aladdin’s Palace. You fold so tenderly within your breasts that common household lamp in which my feeble fire is all enshrined, and at which my flickering torch is lighted up, that straight my household gods take wing, and are transported there. And whereas it is written of that fairy structure that it never moved without two shocks - one when it rose, and one when it settled down - I can say of mine that, however sharp a tug it took to pluck it from its native ground, it struck at once an easy, and a deep and lasting root into this soil; and loved it as its own. I can say more of it, and say with truth, that long before it moved, or had a chance of moving, its master - perhaps from some secret sympathy between its timbers, and a certain stately tree that has its being hereabout, and spreads its broad branches far and wide - dreamed by day and night, for years, of setting foot upon this shore, and breathing this pure air. And, trust me, gentlemen, that, if I had wandered here, unknowing and unknown, I would - if I know my own heart - have come with all my sympathies clustering as richly about this land and people - with all my sense of justice as keenly alive to their high claims on every man who loves God’s image - with all my energies as fully bent on judging for myself, and speaking out, and telling in my sphere the truth, as I do now, when you rain down your welcomes on my head.

Our President has alluded to those writings which have been my occupation for some years past; and you have received his allusions in a manner which assures me - if I needed any such assurance - that we are old friends in the spirit, and have been in close communion for a long time.

It is not easy for a man to speak of his own books. I daresay that few persons have been more interested in mine than I, and if it be a general principle in nature that a lover’s love is blind, and that a mother’s love is blind, I believe it may be said of an author’s attachment to the creatures of his own imagination, that it is a perfect model of constancy and devotion, and is the blindest of all. But the objects and purposes I have had in view are very plain and simple, and may be easily told. I have always had, and always shall have, an earnest and true desire to contribute, as far as in me lies, to the common stock of healthful cheerfulness and enjoyment. I have always had, and always shall have, an invincible repugnance to that mole-eyed philosophy which loves the darkness, and winks and scowls in the light. I believe that Virtue shows quite as well in rags and patches, as she does in purple and fine linen. I believe that she and every beautiful object in external nature, claims some sympathy in the breast of the poorest man who breaks his scanty loaf of daily bread. I believe that she goes barefoot as well as shod. I believe that she dwells rather oftener in alleys and by-ways than she does in courts and palaces, and that it is good, and pleasant, and profitable to track her out, and follow her. I believe that to lay one’s hand upon some of those rejected ones whom the world has too long forgotten, and too often misused, and to say to the proudest and most thoughtless - "These creatures have the same elements and capacities of goodness as yourselves, they are moulded in the same form, and made of the same clay; and though ten times worse than you, may, in having retained anything of their original nature amidst the trials and distresses of their condition, be really ten times better;" I believe that to do this is to pursue a worthy and not useless vocation. Gentlemen, that you think so too, your fervent greeting sufficiently assures me. That this feeling is alive in the Old World as well as in the New, no man should know better than I - I, who have found such wide and ready sympathy in my own dear land. That in expressing it, we are but treading in the steps of those great master-spirits who have gone before, we know by reference to all the bright examples in our literature, from Shakespeare downward.

There is one other point connected with the labours (if I may call them so) that you hold in such generous esteem, to which I cannot help adverting. I cannot help expressing the delight, the more than happiness it was to me to find so strong an interest awakened on this side of the water, in favour of that little heroine of mine, to whom your president has made allusion, who died in her youth. I had letters about that child, in England, from the dwellers in log-houses among the morasses, and swamps, and densest forests, and deep solitudes of the far west. Many a sturdy hand, hard with the axe and spade, and browned by the summer's sun, has taken up the pen, and written to me a little history of domestic joy or sorrow, always coupled, I am proud to say, with something of interest in that little tale, or some comfort or happiness derived from it, and my correspondent has always addressed me, not as a writer of books for sale, resident some four or five thousand miles away, but as a friend to whom he might freely impart the joys and sorrows of his own fireside. Many a mother - I could reckon them now by dozens, not by units - has done the like, and has told me how she lost such a child at such a time, and where she lay buried, and how good she was, and how, in this or that respect, she resembles Nell. I do assure you that no circumstance of my life has given me one hundredth part of the gratification I have derived from this source. I was wavering at the time whether or not to wind up my Clock, {3} and come and see this country, and this decided me. I felt as if it were a positive duty, as if I were bound to pack up my clothes, and come and see my friends; and even now I have such an odd sensation in connexion with these things, that you have no chance of spoiling me. I feel as though we were agreeing - as indeed we are, if we substitute for fictitious characters the classes from which they are drawn - about third parties, in whom we had a common interest. At every new act of kindness on your part, I say to myself “That’s for Oliver; I should not wonder if that was meant for Smike; I have no doubt that is intended for Nell;” and so I become a much happier, certainly, but a more sober and retiring man than ever I was before.

Gentlemen, talking of my friends in America, brings me back, naturally and of course, to you. Coming back to you, and being thereby reminded of the pleasure we have in store in hearing the gentlemen who sit about me, I arrive by the easiest, though not by the shortest course in the world, at the end of what I have to say. But before I sit down, there is one topic on which I am desirous to lay particular stress. It has, or should have, a strong interest for us all, since to its literature every country must look for one great means of refining and improving its people, and one great source of national pride and honour. You have in America great writers - great writers - who will live in all time, and are as familiar to our lips as household words. Deriving (as they all do in a greater or less degree, in their several walks) their inspiration from the stupendous country that gave them birth, they diffuse a better knowledge of it, and a higher love for it, all over the civilized world. I take leave to say, in the presence of some of those gentleman, that I hope the time is not far distant when they, in America, will receive of right some substantial profit and return in England from their labours; and when we, in England, shall receive some substantial profit and return in America for ours. Pray do not misunderstand me. Securing to myself from day to day the means of an honourable subsistence, I would rather have the affectionate regard of my fellow men, than I would have heaps and mines of gold. But the two things do not seem to me incompatible. They cannot be, for nothing good is incompatible with justice; there must be an international arrangement in this respect: England has done her part, and I am confident that the time is not far distant when America will do hers. It becomes the character of a great country; *firstly*, because it is justice; *secondly*, because without it you never can have, and keep, a literature of your own.

Gentlemen, I thank you with feelings of gratitude, such as are not often awakened, and can never be expressed. As I understand it to be the pleasant custom here to finish with a toast, I would beg to give you:

AMERICA AND ENGLAND, and may they never have any division but the Atlantic between them.

SPEECH: FEBRUARY 7, 1842.

Gentlemen, - To say that I thank you for the earnest manner in which you have drunk the toast just now so eloquently proposed to you - to say that I give you back your kind wishes and good feelings with more than compound interest; and that I feel how dumb and powerless the best acknowledgments would be beside such genial hospitality as yours, is nothing. To say that in this winter season, flowers have sprung up in every footstep's length of the path which has brought me here; that no country ever smiled more pleasantly than yours has smiled on me, and that I have rarely looked upon a brighter summer prospect than that which lies before me now, {4} is nothing.

But it is something to be no stranger in a strange place - to feel, sitting at a board for the first time, the ease and affection of an old guest, and to be at once on such intimate terms with the family as to have a homely, genuine interest in its every member - it is, I say, something to be in this novel and happy frame of mind. And, as it is of your creation, and owes its being to you, I have no reluctance in urging it as a reason why, in addressing you, I should not so much consult the form and fashion of my speech, as I should employ that universal language of the heart, which you, and such as you, best teach, and best can understand. Gentlemen, in that universal language - common to you in America, and to us in England, as that younger mother-tongue, which, by the means of, and through the happy union of our two great countries, shall be spoken ages hence, by land and sea, over the wide surface of the globe - I thank you.

I had occasion to say the other night in Boston, as I have more than once had occasion to remark before, that it is not easy for an author to speak of his own books. If the task be a difficult one at any time, its difficulty, certainly, is not diminished when a frequent recurrence to the same theme has left one nothing new to say. Still, I feel that, in a company like this, and especially after what has been said by the President, that I ought not to pass lightly over those labours of love, which, if they had no other merit, have been the happy means of bringing us together.

It has been often observed, that you cannot judge of an author's personal character from his writings. It may be that you cannot. I think it very likely, for many reasons, that you cannot. But, at least, a reader will rise from the perusal of a book with some defined and tangible idea of the writer's moral creed and broad purposes, if he has any at all; and it is probable enough that he may like to have this idea confirmed from the author's lips, or dissipated by his explanation. Gentlemen, my moral creed - which is a very wide and comprehensive one, and includes all sects and parties - is very easily summed up. I have faith, and I wish to diffuse faith in the existence - yes, of beautiful things, even in those conditions of society, which are so degenerate, degraded, and forlorn, that, at first sight, it would seem as though they could not be described but by a strange and terrible reversal of the words of Scripture, "God said, Let there be light, and there was none." I take it that we are born, and that we hold our sympathies, hopes, and energies, in trust for the many, and not for the few. That we cannot hold in too strong a light of disgust and contempt, before the view of others, all meanness, falsehood, cruelty, and oppression, of every grade and kind. Above all, that nothing is high, because it is in a high place; and that nothing is low, because it is in a low one. This is the lesson taught us in the great book of nature. This is the lesson which may be read, alike in the bright track of the stars, and in the dusty course of the poorest thing that drags its tiny length upon the ground. This is the lesson ever uppermost in the thoughts of that inspired man, who tells us that there are

"Tongues in the trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything."

Gentlemen, keeping these objects steadily before me, I am at no loss to refer your favour and your generous hospitality back to the right source. While I know, on the one hand, that if, instead of being what it is, this were a land of tyranny and wrong, I should care very little for your smiles or frowns, so I am sure upon the other, that if, instead of being what I am, I were the greatest genius that ever trod the earth, and had diverted myself for the oppression and degradation of mankind, you would despise and reject me. I hope you will, whenever, through such means, I give you the opportunity. Trust me, that, whenever you give me the like occasion, I will return the compliment with interest.

Gentlemen, as I have no secrets from you, in the spirit of confidence you have engendered between us, and as I have made a kind of compact with myself that I never will, while I remain in America, omit an opportunity of referring to a topic in which I and all others of my class on both sides of the water are equally interested - equally interested, there is no difference between us, I would beg leave to whisper in your ear two words: *International Copyright*. I use them in no sordid sense, believe me, and those who know me best, best know that. For myself, I would rather that my children, coming after me, trudged in the mud, and knew by the general feeling of society that their father was beloved, and had been of some use, than I would have them ride in their carriages, and know by their banker's books that he was rich. But I do not see, I confess, why one should be obliged to make the choice, or why fame, besides playing that delightful *reveil* for which she is so justly celebrated, should not blow out of her trumpet a few notes of a different kind from those with which she has hitherto contented herself.

It was well observed the other night by a beautiful speaker, whose words went to the heart of every man who heard him, that, if there had existed any law in this respect, Scott might not have sunk beneath the mighty pressure on his brain, but might have lived to add new creatures of his fancy to the crowd which swarm about you in your summer walks, and gather round your winter evening hearths.

As I listened to his words, there came back, fresh upon me, that touching scene in the great man's life, when he lay upon his couch, surrounded by his family, and listened, for the last time, to the rippling of the river he had so well loved, over its stony bed. I pictured him to myself, faint, wan, dying, crushed both in mind and body by his honourable struggle, and hovering round him the phantoms of his own imagination - Waverley, Ravenswood, Jeanie Deans, Rob Roy, Caleb Balderstone, Dominie Sampson - all the familiar throng - with cavaliers, and Puritans, and Highland chiefs innumerable overflowing the chamber, and fading away in the dim distance beyond. I pictured them, fresh from traversing the world, and hanging down their heads in shame and sorrow, that, from all those lands into which they had carried gladness, instruction, and delight for millions, they brought him not one friendly hand to help to raise him from that sad, sad bed. No, nor brought him from that land in which his own language was spoken, and in every house and hut of which his own books were read in his own tongue, one grateful dollar-piece to buy a garland for his grave. Oh! if every man who goes from here, as many do, to look upon that tomb in Dryburgh Abbey, would but remember this, and bring the recollection home!

Gentlemen, I thank you again, and once again, and many times to that. You have given me a new reason for remembering this day, which is already one of mark in my calendar, it being my birthday; and you have given those who are nearest and dearest to me a new reason for recollecting it with pride and interest. Heaven knows that, although I should grow ever so gray, I shall need nothing to remind me of this epoch in my life. But I am glad to think that from this time you are inseparably connected with every recurrence of this day; and, that on its periodical return, I shall always, in imagination, have the unfading pleasure of entertaining you as my guests, in return for the gratification you have afforded me to-night.

SPEECH: NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 18, 1842.

[At a dinner presided over by Washington Irving, when nearly eight hundred of the most distinguished citizens of New York were present, “Charles Dickens, the Literary Guest of the Nation,” having been “proferred as a sentiment” by the Chairman, Mr. Dickens rose, and spoke as follows:]

Gentlemen, - I don’t know how to thank you - I really don’t know how. You would naturally suppose that my former experience would have given me this power, and that the difficulties in my way would have been diminished; but I assure you the fact is exactly the reverse, and I have completely baulked the ancient proverb that “a rolling stone gathers no moss;” and in my progress to this city I have collected such a weight of obligations and acknowledgment - I have picked up such an enormous mass of fresh moss at every point, and was so struck by the brilliant scenes of Monday night, that I thought I could never by any possibility grow any bigger. I have made, continually, new accumulations to such an extent that I am compelled to stand still, and can roll no more!

Gentlemen, we learn from the authorities, that, when fairy stories, or balls, or rolls of thread, stopped of their own accord - as I do not - it presaged some great catastrophe near at hand. The precedent holds good in this case. When I have remembered the short time I have before me to spend in this land of mighty interests, and the poor opportunity I can at best have of acquiring a knowledge of, and forming an acquaintance with it, I have felt it almost a duty to decline the honours you so generously heap upon me, and pass more quietly among you. For Argus himself, though he had but one mouth for his hundred eyes, would have found the reception of a public entertainment once a-week too much for his greatest activity; and, as I would lose no scrap of the rich instruction and the delightful knowledge which meet me on every hand, (and already I have gleaned a great deal from your hospitals and common jails), - I have resolved to take up my staff, and go my way rejoicing, and for the future to shake hands with America, not at parties but at home; and, therefore, gentlemen, I say to-night, with a full heart, and an honest purpose, and grateful feelings, that I bear, and shall ever bear, a deep sense of your kind, your affectionate and your noble greeting, which it is utterly impossible to convey in words. No European sky without, and no cheerful home or well-warmed room within shall ever shut out this land from my vision. I shall often hear your words of welcome in my quiet room, and oftenest when most quiet; and shall see your faces in the blazing fire. If I should live to grow old, the scenes of this and other evenings will shine as brightly to my dull eyes fifty years hence as now; and the honours you bestow upon me shall be well remembered and paid back in my undying love, and honest endeavours for the good of my race.

Gentlemen, one other word with reference to this first person singular, and then I shall close. I came here in an open, honest, and confiding spirit, if ever man did, and because I felt a deep sympathy in your land; had I felt otherwise, I should have kept away. As I came here, and am here, without the least admixture of one-hundredth part of one grain of base alloy, without one feeling of unworthy reference to self in any respect, I claim, in regard to the past, for the last time, my right in reason, in truth, and in justice, to approach, as I have done on two former occasions, a question of literary interest. I claim that justice be done; and I prefer this claim as one who has a right to speak and be heard. I have only to add that I shall be as true to you as you have been to me. I recognize in your enthusiastic approval of the creatures of my fancy, your enlightened care for the happiness of the many, your tender regard for the afflicted, your sympathy for the downcast, your plans for correcting and improving the bad, and for encouraging the good; and to advance these great objects shall be, to the end of my life, my earnest endeavour, to the extent of my humble ability. Having said thus much with reference to myself, I shall have the pleasure of saying a few words with reference to somebody else.

There is in this city a gentleman who, at the reception of one of my books - I well remember it was the Old Curiosity Shop - wrote to me in England a letter so generous, so affectionate, and so manly, that if I had written the book under every circumstance of disappointment, of discouragement, and difficulty, instead of the reverse, I should have found in the receipt of that letter my best and most happy reward. I answered him, {5} and he answered me, and so we kept shaking hands autographically, as if no ocean rolled between us. I came here to this city eager to see him, and [*laying his hand it upon Irving's shoulder*] here he sits! I need not tell you how happy and delighted I am to see him here to-night in this capacity.

Washington Irving! Why, gentlemen, I don't go upstairs to bed two nights out of the seven - as a very creditable witness near at hand can testify - I say I do not go to bed two nights out of the seven without taking Washington Irving under my arm; and, when I don't take him, I take his own brother, Oliver Goldsmith. Washington Irving! Why, of whom but him was I thinking the other day when I came up by the Hog's Back, the Frying Pan, Hell Gate, and all these places? Why, when, not long ago, I visited Shakespeare's birthplace, and went beneath the roof where he first saw light, whose name but *his* was pointed out to me upon the wall? Washington Irving - Diedrich Knickerbocker - Geoffrey Crayon - why, where can you go that they have not been there before? Is there an English farm - is there an English stream, an English city, or an English country-seat, where they have not been? Is there no Bracebridge Hall in existence? Has it no ancient shades or quiet streets?

In bygone times, when Irving left that Hall, he left sitting in an old oak chair, in a small parlour of the Boar's Head, a little man with a red nose, and an oilskin hat. When I came away he was sitting there still! - not a man *like* him, but the same man - with the nose of immortal redness and the hat of an undying glaze! Crayon, while there, was on terms of intimacy with a certain radical fellow, who used to go about, with a hatful of newspapers, wofully out at elbows, and with a coat of great antiquity. Why, gentlemen, I know that man - Tibbles the elder, and he has not changed a hair; and, when I came away, he charged me to give his best respects to Washington Irving!

Leaving the town and the rustic life of England - forgetting this man, if we can - putting out of mind the country church-yard and the broken heart - let us cross the water again, and ask who has associated himself most closely with the Italian peasantry and the bandits of the Pyrenees? When the traveller enters his little chamber beyond the Alps - listening to the dim echoes of the long passages and spacious corridors - damp, and gloomy, and cold - as he hears the tempest beating with fury against his window, and gazes at the curtains, dark, and heavy, and covered with mould - and when all the ghost-stories that ever were told come up before him - amid all his thick-coming fancies, whom does he think of? Washington Irving.

Go farther still: go to the Moorish Mountains, sparkling full in the moonlight - go among the water-carriers and the village gossips, living still as in days of old - and who has travelled among them before you, and peopled the Alhambra and made eloquent its shadows? Who awakes there a voice from every hill and in every cavern, and bids legends, which for centuries have slept a dreamless sleep, or watched unwinkingly, start up and pass before you in all their life and glory?

But leaving this again, who embarked with Columbus upon his gallant ship, traversed with him the dark and mighty ocean, leaped upon the land and planted there the flag of Spain, but this same man, now sitting by my side? And being here at home again, who is a more fit companion for money-diggers? and what pen but his has made Rip Van Winkle, playing at nine-pins on that thundering afternoon, as much part and parcel of the Catskill Mountains as any tree or crag that they can boast?

But these are topics familiar from my boyhood, and which I am apt to pursue; and lest I should be tempted now to talk too long about them, I will, in conclusion, give you a sentiment, most appropriate, I am sure, in the presence of such writers as Bryant, Halleck, and - but I suppose I must not mention the ladies here -

THE LITERATURE OF AMERICA:

She well knows how to do honour to her own literature and to that of other lands, when she chooses Washington Irving for her representative in the country of Cervantes.

SPEECH: MANCHESTER, OCTOBER 5, 1843.

[This address was delivered at a soirée of the members of the Manchester, Athenaeum, at which Mr. Dickens presided. Among the other speakers on the occasion were Mr. Cobden and Mr. Disraeli.]

Ladies and gentlemen, - I am sure I need scarcely tell you that I am very proud and happy; and that I take it as a great distinction to be asked to come amongst you on an occasion such as this, when, even with the brilliant and beautiful spectacle which I see before me, I can hail it as the most brilliant and beautiful circumstance of all, that we assemble together here, even here, upon neutral ground, where we have no more knowledge of party difficulties, or public animosities between side and side, or between man and man, than if we were a public meeting in the commonwealth of Utopia.

Ladies and gentlemen, upon this, and upon a hundred other grounds, this assembly is not less interesting to me, believe me - although, personally, almost a stranger here - than it is interesting to you; and I take it, that it is not of greater importance to all of us than it is to every man who has learned to know that he has an interest in the moral and social elevation, the harmless relaxation, the peace, happiness, and improvement, of the community at large. Not even those who saw the first foundation of your Athenaeum laid, and watched its progress, as I know they did, almost as tenderly as if it were the progress of a living creature, until it reared its beautiful front, an honour to the town - not even they, nor even you who, within its walls, have tasted its usefulness, and put it to the proof, have greater reason, I am persuaded, to exult in its establishment, or to hope that it may thrive and prosper, than scores of thousands at a distance, who - whether consciously or unconsciously, matters not - have, in the principle of its success and bright example, a deep and personal concern.

It well becomes, particularly well becomes, this enterprising town, this little world of labour, that she should stand out foremost in the foremost rank in such a cause. It well becomes her, that, among her numerous and noble public institutions, she should have a splendid temple sacred to the education and improvement of a large class of those who, in their various useful stations, assist in the production of our wealth, and in rendering her name famous through the world. I think it is grand to know, that, while her factories re-echo with the clanking of stupendous engines, and the whirl and rattle of machinery, the immortal mechanism of God's own hand, the mind, is not forgotten in the din and uproar, but is lodged and tended in a palace of its own. That it is a structure deeply fixed and rooted in the public spirit of this place, and built to last, I have no more doubt, judging from the spectacle I see before me, and from what I know of its brief history, than I have of the reality of these walls that hem us in, and the pillars that spring up about us.

You are perfectly well aware, I have no doubt, that the Athenaeum was projected at a time when commerce was in a vigorous and flourishing condition, and when those classes of society to which it particularly addresses itself were fully employed, and in the receipt of regular incomes. A season of depression almost without a parallel ensued, and large numbers of young men employed in warehouses and offices suddenly found their occupation gone, and themselves reduced to very straitened and penurious circumstances. This altered state of things led, as I am told, to the compulsory withdrawal of many of the members, to a proportionate decrease in the expected funds, and to the incurrence of a debt of £3,000. By the very great zeal and energy of all concerned, and by the liberality of those to whom they applied for help, that debt is now in rapid course of being discharged. A little more of the same indefatigable exertion on the one hand, and a little more of the same community of feeling upon the other, and there will be no such thing; the figures will be blotted out for good and all, and, from that time, the Athenaeum may be said to belong to you, and to your heirs for ever.

But, ladies and gentlemen, at all times, now in its most thriving, and in its least flourishing condition - here, with its cheerful rooms, its pleasant and instructive lectures, its improving library of 6,000 volumes, its classes for the study of the foreign languages, elocution, music; its opportunities of discussion and debate, of healthful bodily exercise, and, though last not least - for by this I set great store, as a very novel and excellent provision - its opportunities of blameless, rational enjoyment, here it is, open to every youth and man in this great town, accessible to every bee in this vast hive, who, for all these benefits, and the inestimable ends to which they lead, can set aside one sixpence weekly. I do look upon the reduction of the subscription, and upon the fact that the number of members has considerably more than doubled within the last twelve months, as strides in the path of the very best civilization, and chapters of rich promise in the history of mankind.

I do not know whether, at this time of day, and with such a prospect before us, we need trouble ourselves very much to rake up the ashes of the dead-and-gone objections that were wont to be urged by men of all parties against institutions such as this, whose interests we are met to promote; but their philosophy was always to be summed up in the unmeaning application of one short sentence. How often have we heard from a large class of men wise in their generation, who would really seem to be born and bred for no other purpose than to pass into currency counterfeit and mischievous scraps of wisdom, as it is the sole pursuit of some other criminals to utter base coin - how often have we heard from them, as an all-convincing argument, that "a little learning is a dangerous thing?" Why, a little hanging was considered a very dangerous thing, according to the same authorities, with this difference, that, because a little hanging was dangerous, we had a great deal of it; and, because a little learning was dangerous, we were to have none at all. Why, when I hear such cruel absurdities gravely reiterated, I do sometimes begin to doubt whether the parrots of society are not more pernicious to its interests than its birds of prey. I should be glad to hear such people's estimate of the comparative danger of "a little learning" and a vast amount of ignorance; I should be glad to know which they consider the most prolific parent of misery and crime. Descending a little lower in the social scale, I should be glad to assist them in their calculations, by carrying them into certain gaols and nightly refuges I know of, where my own heart dies within me, when I see thousands of immortal creatures condemned, without alternative or choice, to tread, not what our great poet calls the "primrose path" to the everlasting bonfire, but one of jaded flints and stones, laid down by brutal ignorance, and held together, like the solid rocks, by years of this most wicked axiom.

Would we know from any honourable body of merchants, upright in deed and thought, whether they would rather have ignorant or enlightened persons in their own employment? Why, we have had their answer in this building; we have it in this company; we have it emphatically given in the munificent generosity of your own merchants of Manchester, of all sects and kinds, when this establishment was first proposed. But are the advantages derivable by the people from institutions such as this, only of a negative character? If a little learning be an innocent thing, has it no distinct, wholesome, and immediate influence upon the mind? The old doggerel rhyme, so often written in the beginning of books, says that

“When house and lands are gone and spent,
Then learning is most excellent;”

but I should be strongly disposed to reform the adage, and say that

“Though house and lands be never got,
Learning can give what they can*not*.”

And this I know, that the first unpurchasable blessing earned by every man who makes an effort to improve himself in such a place as the Athenaeum, is self-respect - an inward dignity of character, which, once acquired and righteously maintained, nothing - no, not the hardest drudgery, nor the direst poverty - can vanquish. Though he should find it hard for a season even to keep the wolf - hunger - from his door, let him but once have chased the dragon - ignorance - from his hearth, and self-respect and hope are left him. You could no more deprive him of those sustaining qualities by loss or destruction of his worldly goods, than you could, by plucking out his eyes, take from him an internal consciousness of the bright glory of the sun.

The man who lives from day to day by the daily exercise in his sphere of hands or head, and seeks to improve himself in such a place as the Athenaeum, acquires for himself that property of soul which has in all times upheld struggling men of every degree, but self-made men especially and always. He secures to himself that faithful companion which, while it has ever lent the light of its countenance to men of rank and eminence who have deserved it, has ever shed its brightest consolations on men of low estate and almost hopeless means. It took its patient seat beside Sir Walter Raleigh in his dungeon-study in the Tower; it laid its head upon the block with More; but it did not disdain to watch the stars with Ferguson, the shepherd’s boy; it walked the streets in mean attire with Crabbe; it was a poor barber here in Lancashire with Arkwright; it was a tallow-chandler’s son with Franklin; it worked at shoemaking with Bloomfield in his garret; it followed the plough with Burns; and, high above the noise of loom and hammer, it whispers courage even at this day in ears I could name in Sheffield and in Manchester.

The more the man who improves his leisure in such a place learns, the better, gentler, kinder man he must become. When he knows how much great minds have suffered for the truth in every age and time, and to what dismal persecutions opinion has been exposed, he will become more tolerant of other men's belief in all matters, and will incline more leniently to their sentiments when they chance to differ from his own. Understanding that the relations between himself and his employers involve a mutual duty and responsibility, he will discharge his part of the implied contract cheerfully, satisfactorily, and honourably; for the history of every useful life warns him to shape his course in that direction.

The benefits he acquires in such a place are not of a selfish kind, but extend themselves to his home, and to those whom it contains. Something of what he hears or reads within such walls can scarcely fail to become at times a topic of discourse by his own fireside, nor can it ever fail to lead to larger sympathies with man, and to a higher veneration for the great Creator of all the wonders of this universe. It appears to his home and his homely feeling in other ways; for at certain times he carries there his wife and daughter, or his sister, or, possibly, some bright-eyed acquaintance of a more tender description. Judging from what I see before me, I think it is very likely; I am sure I would if I could. He takes her there to enjoy a pleasant evening, to be gay and happy. Sometimes it may possibly happen that he dates his tenderness from the Athenaeum. I think that is a very excellent thing, too, and not the least among the advantages of the institution. In any case, I am sure the number of bright eyes and beaming faces which grace this meeting to-night by their presence, will never be among the least of its excellences in my recollection.

Ladies and gentlemen, I shall not easily forget this scene, the pleasing task your favour has devolved upon me, or the strong and inspiring confirmation I have to-night, of all the hopes and reliances I have ever placed upon institutions of this nature. In the latter point of view - in their bearing upon this latter point - I regard them as of great importance, deeming that the more intelligent and reflective society in the mass becomes, and the more readers there are, the more distinctly writers of all kinds will be able to throw themselves upon the truthful feeling of the people and the more honoured and the more useful literature must be. At the same time, I must confess that, if there had been an Athenaeum, and if the people had been readers, years ago, some leaves of dedication in your library, of praise of patrons which was very cheaply bought, very dearly sold, and very marketably haggled for by the groat, would be blank leaves, and posterity might probably have lacked the information that certain monsters of virtue ever had existence. But it is upon a much better and wider scale, let me say it once again - it is in the effect of such institutions upon the great social system, and the peace and happiness of mankind, that I delight to contemplate them; and, in my heart, I am quite certain that long after your institution, and others of the same nature, have crumbled into dust, the noble harvest of the seed sown in them will shine out brightly in the wisdom, the mercy, and the forbearance of another race.

SPEECH: LIVERPOOL, FEBRUARY 26, 1844.

[The following address was delivered at a soirée of the Liverpool Mechanics' Institution, at which Mr. Dickens presided.]

Ladies and gentlemen, - It was rather hard of you to take away my breath before I spoke a word; but I would not thank you, even if I could, for the favour which has set me in this place, or for the generous kindness which has greeted me so warmly, - because my first strong impulse still would be, although I had that power, to lose sight of all personal considerations in the high intent and meaning of this numerous assemblage, in the contemplation of the noble objects to which this building is devoted, of its brilliant and inspiring history, of that rough, upward track, so bravely trodden, which it leaves behind, and that bright path of steadily-increasing usefulness which lies stretched out before it. My first strong impulse still would be to exchange congratulations with you, as the members of one united family, on the thriving vigour of this strongest child of a strong race. My first strong impulse still would be, though everybody here had twice as many hundreds of hands as there are hundreds of persons present, to shake them in the spirit, everyone, always, allow me to say, excepting those hands (and there are a few such here), which, with the constitutional infirmity of human nature, I would rather salute in some more tender fashion.

When I first had the honour of communicating with your Committee with reference to this celebration, I had some selfish hopes that the visit proposed to me might turn out to be one of congratulation, or, at least, of solicitous inquiry; for they who receive a visitor in any season of distress are easily touched and moved by what he says, and I entertained some confident expectation of making a mighty strong impression on you. But, when I came to look over the printed documents which were forwarded to me at the same time, and with which you are all tolerably familiar, these anticipations very speedily vanished, and left me bereft of all consolation, but the triumphant feeling to which I have referred. For what do I find, on looking over those brief chronicles of this swift conquest over ignorance and prejudice, in which no blood has been poured out, and no treaty signed but that one sacred compact which recognises the just right of every man, whatever his belief, or however humble his degree, to aspire, and to have some means of aspiring, to be a better and a wiser man? I find that, in 1825, certain misguided and turbulent persons proposed to erect in Liverpool an unpopular, dangerous, irreligious, and revolutionary establishment, called a Mechanics' Institution; that, in 1835, Liverpool having, somehow or other, got on pretty comfortably in the meantime, in spite of it, the first stone of a new and spacious edifice was laid; that, in 1837, it was opened; that, it was afterwards, at different periods, considerably enlarged; that, in 1844, conspicuous amongst the public beauties of a beautiful town, here it stands triumphant, its enemies lived down, its former students attesting, in their various useful callings and pursuits, the sound, practical information it afforded them; its members numbering considerably more than 3,000, and setting in rapidly for 6,000 at least; its library comprehending 11,000 volumes, and daily sending forth its hundreds of books into private homes; its staff of masters and officers, amounting to half-a-hundred in themselves; its schools, conveying every sort of instruction, high and low, adapted to the labour, means, exigencies, and convenience of nearly every class and grade of persons. I was here this morning, and in its spacious halls I found stores of the wonders worked by nature in the air, in the forest, in the cavern, and in the sea - stores of the surpassing engines devised by science for the better knowledge of other worlds, and the greater happiness of this - stores of those gentler works of art, which, though achieved in perishable stone, by yet more perishable hands of dust, are in their influence immortal. With such means at their command, so well-directed, so cheaply shared, and so extensively diffused, well may your Committee say, as they have done in one of their Reports, that the success of this establishment has far exceeded their most sanguine expectations.

But, ladies and gentlemen, as that same philosopher whose words they quote, as Bacon tells us, instancing the wonderful effects of little things and small beginnings, that the influence of the loadstone was first discovered in particles of iron, and not in iron bars, so they may lay it to their hearts, that when they combined together to form the institution which has risen to this majestic height, they issued on a field of enterprise, the glorious end of which they cannot even now discern. Every man who has felt the advantages of, or has received improvement in this place, carries its benefits into the society in which he moves, and puts them out at compound interest; and what the blessed sum may be at last, no man can tell. Ladies and gentlemen, with that Christian prelate whose name appears on your list of honorary Members; that good and liberal man who once addressed you within these walls, in a spirit worthy of his calling, and of his High Master - I look forward from this place, as from a tower, to the time when high and low, and rich and poor, shall mutually assist, improve, and educate each other.

I feel, ladies and gentlemen, that this is not a place, with its 3,200 members, and at least 3,200 arguments in every one, to enter on any advocacy of the principle of Mechanics' Institutions, or to discuss the subject with those who do or ever did object to them. I should as soon think of arguing the point with those untutored savages whose mode of life you last year had the opportunity of witnessing; indeed, I am strongly inclined to believe them by far the more rational class of the two. Moreover, if the institution itself be not a sufficient answer to all such objections, then there is no such thing in fact or reason, human or divine. Neither will I venture to enter into those details of the management of this place which struck me most on the perusal of its papers; but I cannot help saying how much impressed and gratified I was, as everybody must be who comes to their perusal for the first time, by the extraordinary munificence with which this institution has been endowed by certain gentlemen.

Amongst the peculiar features of management which made the greatest impression on me, I may observe that that regulation which empowers fathers, being annual subscribers of one guinea, to introduce their sons who are minors; and masters, on payment of the astoundingly small sum of five shillings annually, in like manner their apprentices, is not the least valuable of its privileges; and, certainly not the one least valuable to society. And, ladies and gentlemen, I cannot say to you what pleasure I derived from the perusal of an apparently excellent report in your local papers of a meeting held here some short time since, in aid of the formation of a girls' school in connexion with this institution. This is a new and striking chapter in the history of these institutions; it does equal credit to the gallantry and policy of this, and disposes one to say of it with a slight parody on the words of Burns, that

"Its 'prentice han' it tried on man,
And then it *taught* the lasses, O."

That those who are our best teachers, and whose lessons are oftenest heeded in after life, should be well taught themselves, is a proposition few reasonable men will gainsay; and, certainly, to breed up good husbands on the one hand, and good wives on the other, does appear as reasonable and straightforward a plan as could well be devised for the improvement of the next generation.

This, and what I see before me, naturally brings me to our fairer members, in respect of whom I have no doubt you will agree with me, that they ought to be admitted to the widest possible extent, and on the lowest possible terms; and, ladies, let me venture to say to you, that you never did a wiser thing in all your lives than when you turned your favourable regard on such an establishment as this - for wherever the light of knowledge is diffused, wherever the humanizing influence of the arts and sciences extends itself, wherever there is the clearest perception of what is beautiful, and good, and most redeeming, amid all the faults and vices of mankind, there your character, your virtues, your graces, your better nature, will be the best appreciated, and there the truest homage will be proudly paid to you. You show best, trust me, in the clearest light; and every ray that falls upon you at your own firesides, from any book or thought communicated within these walls, will raise you nearer to the angels in the eyes you care for most.

I will not longer interpose myself, ladies and gentlemen, between you and the pleasure we all anticipate in hearing other gentlemen, and in enjoying those social pleasures with which it is a main part of the wisdom of this society to adorn and relieve its graver pursuits. We all feel, I am sure, being here, that we are truly interested in the cause of human improvement and rational education, and that we pledge ourselves, everyone as far as in him lies, to extend the knowledge of the benefits afforded in this place, and to bear honest witness in its favour. To those who yet remain without its walls, but have the means of purchasing its advantages, we make appeal, and in a friendly and forbearing spirit say, “Come in, and be convinced -

‘Who enters here, leaves *doubt* behind.’”

If you, happily, have been well taught yourself, and are superior to its advantages, so much the more should you make one in sympathy with those who are below you. Beneath this roof we breed the men who, in the time to come, must be found working for good or evil, in every quarter of society.

If mutual respect and forbearance among various classes be not found here, where so many men are trained up in so many grades, to enter on so many roads of life, dating their entry from one common starting-point, as they are all approaching, by various paths, one common end, where else can that great lesson be imbibed? Differences of wealth, of rank, of intellect, we know there must be, and we respect them; but we would give to all the means of taking out one patent of nobility, and we define it, in the words of a great living poet, who is one of us, and who uses his great gifts, as he holds them in trust, for the general welfare -

“Howe’er it be, it seems to me
’Tis only noble to be good:
True hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood.” {6}

SPEECH: BIRMINGHAM, FEBRUARY 28, 1844.

[The following speech was delivered at a Conversazione, in aid of the funds of the Birmingham Polytechnic Institution, at which Mr Dickens presided.]

You will think it very unwise, or very self-denying in me, in such an assembly, in such a splendid scene, and after such a welcome, to congratulate myself on having nothing new to say to you: but I do so, notwithstanding. To say nothing of places nearer home, I had the honour of attending at Manchester, shortly before Christmas, and at Liverpool, only the night before last, for a purpose similar to that which brings you together this evening; and looking down a short perspective of similar engagements, I feel gratification at the thought that I shall very soon have nothing at all to say; in which case, I shall be content to stake my reputation, like the Spectator of Addison, and that other great periodical speaker, the Speaker of the House of Commons, on my powers of listening.

This feeling, and the earnest reception I have met with, are not the only reasons why I feel a genuine, cordial, and peculiar interest in this night's proceedings. The Polytechnic Institution of Birmingham is in its infancy - struggling into life under all those adverse and disadvantageous circumstances which, to a greater or less extent, naturally beset all infancy; but I would much rather connect myself with it now, however humble, in its days of difficulty and of danger, than look back on its origin when it may have become strong, and rich, and powerful. I should prefer an intimate association with it now, in its early days and apparent struggles, to becoming its advocate and acquaintance, its fair-weather friend, in its high and palmy days. I would rather be able to say I knew it in its swaddling-clothes, than in maturer age. Its two elder brothers have grown old and died: their chests were weak - about their cradles nurses shook their heads, and gossips groaned; but the present institution shot up, amidst the ruin of those which have fallen, with an indomitable constitution, with vigorous and with steady pulse; temperate, wise, and of good repute; and by perseverance it has become a very giant. Birmingham is, in my mind and in the minds of most men, associated with many giants; and I no more believe that this young institution will turn out sickly, dwarfish, or of stunted growth, than I do that when the glass-slipper of my chairmanship shall fall off, and the clock strike twelve to-night, this hall will be turned into a pumpkin. I found that strong belief upon the splendid array of grace and beauty by which I am surrounded, and which, if it only had one-hundredth part of the effect upon others it has upon me, could do anything it pleased with anything and anybody. I found my strong conviction, in the second place, upon the public spirit of the town of Birmingham - upon the name and fame of its capitalists and working men; upon the greatness and importance of its merchants and manufacturers; upon its inventions, which are constantly in progress; upon the skill and intelligence of its artisans, which are daily developed; and the increasing knowledge of all portions of the community. All these reasons lead me to the conclusion that your institution will advance - that it will and must progress, and that you will not be content with lingering leagues behind.

I have another peculiar ground of satisfaction in connexion with the object of this assembly; and it is, that the resolutions about to be proposed do not contain in themselves anything of a sectarian or class nature; that they do not confine themselves to any one single institution, but assert the great and omnipotent principles of comprehensive education everywhere and under every circumstance. I beg leave to say that I concur, heart and hand, in those principles, and will do all in my power for their advancement; for I hold, in accordance with the imperfect knowledge which I possess, that it is impossible for any fabric of society to go on day after day, and year after year, from father to son, and from grandfather to grandson, punishing men for not engaging in the pursuit of virtue and for the practice of crime, without showing them what virtue is, and where it best can be found - in justice, religion, and truth. The only reason that can possibly be adduced against it is one founded on fiction - namely, the case where an obdurate old geni, in the “Arabian Nights,” was bound upon taking the life of a merchant, because he had struck out the eye of his invisible son. I recollect, likewise, a tale in the same book of charming fancies, which I consider not inappropriate: it is a case where a powerful spirit has been imprisoned at the bottom of the sea, in a casket with a leaden cover, and the seal of Solomon upon it; there he had lain neglected for many centuries, and during that period had made many different vows: at first, that he would reward magnificently those who should release him; and at last, that he would destroy them. Now, there is a spirit of great power - the Spirit of Ignorance - which is shut up in a vessel of leaden composition, and sealed with the seal of many, many Solomons, and which is effectually in the same position: release it in time, and it will bless, restore, and reanimate society; but let it lie under the rolling waves of years, and its blind revenge is sure to lead to certain destruction. That there are classes which, if rightly treated, constitute strength, and if wrongly, weakness, I hold it impossible to deny - by these classes I mean industrious, intelligent, and honourably independent men, in whom the higher classes of Birmingham are especially interested, and bound to afford them the means of instruction and improvement, and to ameliorate their mental and moral condition. Far be it from me (and I wish to be most particularly understood) to attempt to depreciate the excellent Church Instruction Societies, or the worthy, sincere, and temperate zeal of those reverend gentlemen by whom they are usually conducted; on the contrary, I believe that they have done, and are doing, much good, and are deserving of high praise; but I hope that, without offence, in a community such as Birmingham, there are other objects not unworthy in the sight of heaven, and objects of recognised utility which are worthy of support - principles which are practised in word and deed in Polytechnic Institutions - principles for the diffusion of which honest men of all degrees and of every creed might associate together, on an independent footing and on neutral ground, and at a small expense, for the better understanding and the greater consideration of each other, and for the better cultivation of the happiness of all: for it surely cannot be allowed that those who labour day by day, surrounded by machinery, shall be permitted to degenerate into machines themselves, but, on the contrary, they should assert their common origin from their Creator, at the hands of those who are responsible and thinking men. There is, indeed, no difference in the main with respect to the dangers of ignorance and the advantages of knowledge between those who hold different opinions - for it is to be observed, that those who are most distrustful of the advantages of education, are always the first to exclaim against the results of ignorance. This fact was pleasantly illustrated on the railway, as I came here. In the same carriage with me there sat an ancient gentleman (I feel no delicacy in alluding to him, for I know that he is not in the room, having got out far short of Birmingham), who expressed himself most mournfully as to the ruinous effects and rapid spread of railways, and was most pathetic upon the virtues of the slow-going old stage coaches. Now I, entertaining some little lingering kindness for the road, made shift to express my concurrence with the old gentleman’s opinion, without any great compromise of principle. Well, we got on tolerably comfortably together, and when the engine, with a frightful screech, dived into some dark abyss, like some strange aquatic monster, the old gentleman said it would never do, and I agreed with him. When it parted from each successive station, with a shock and a shriek as if it had had a double-tooth drawn, the old gentleman shook his head, and I shook mine. When he burst forth against such new-fangled notions, and said no good could come of them, I did not contest the point. But I found that when the speed of the engine was abated, or there was a prolonged stay at any station, up the old gentleman was at arms, and his watch was instantly out of his pocket, denouncing the slowness of our progress. Now I could not help comparing this old gentleman to that ingenious class of persons who are in the constant habit of declaiming against the vices and crimes of society, and at the same time are the first and foremost to assert that vice and crime have not their common origin in ignorance and discontent.

The good work, however, in spite of all political and party differences, has been well begun; we are all interested in it; it is advancing, and cannot be stopped by any opposition, although it may be retarded in this place or in that, by the indifference of the middle classes, with whom its successful progress chiefly rests. Of this success I cannot entertain a doubt; for whenever the working classes have enjoyed an opportunity of effectually rebutting accusations which falsehood or thoughtlessness have brought against them, they always avail themselves of it, and show themselves in their true characters; and it was this which made the damage done to a single picture in the National Gallery of London, by some poor lunatic or cripple, a mere matter of newspaper notoriety and wonder for some few days. This, then, establishes a fact evident to the meanest comprehension - that any given number of thousands of individuals, in the humblest walks of life in this country, can pass through the national galleries or museums in seasons of holiday-making, without damaging, in the slightest degree, those choice and valuable collections. I do not myself believe that the working classes ever were the wanton or mischievous persons they were so often and so long represented to be; but I rather incline to the opinion that some men take it into their heads to lay it down as a matter of fact, without being particular about the premises; and that the idle and the prejudiced, not wishing to have the trouble of forming opinions for themselves, take it for granted - until the people have an opportunity of disproving the stigma and vindicating themselves before the world.

Now this assertion is well illustrated by what occurred respecting an equestrian statue in the metropolis, with respect to which a legend existed that the sculptor hanged himself, because he had neglected to put a girth to the horse. This story was currently believed for many years, until it was inspected for altogether a different purpose, and it was found to have had a girth all the time.

But surely if, as is stated, the people are ill-disposed and mischievous, that is the best reason that can be offered for teaching them better; and if they are not, surely that is a reason for giving them every opportunity of vindicating their injured reputation; and no better opportunity could possibly be afforded than that of associating together voluntarily for such high purposes as it is proposed to carry out by the establishment of the Birmingham Polytechnic Institution. In any case - nay, in every case - if we would reward honesty, if we would hold out encouragement to good, if we would eradicate that which is evil or correct that which is bad, education - comprehensive, liberal education - is the one thing needful, and the only effective end. If I might apply to my purpose, and turn into plain prose some words of Hamlet - not with reference to any government or party (for party being, for the most part, an irrational sort of thing, has no connexion with the object we have in view) - if I might apply those words to education as Hamlet applied them to the skull of Yorick, I would say - “Now hie thee to the council-chamber, and tell them, though they lay it on in sounding thoughts and learned words an inch thick, to this complexion they must come at last.”

In answer to a vote of thanks, {7} Mr. Dickens said, at the close of the meeting -

“Ladies and gentlemen, we are now quite even - for every effect which I may have made upon you, the compliment has been amply returned to me; but at the same time I am as little disposed to say to you, ‘go and sin no more,’ as I am to promise for myself that ‘I will never do so again.’ So long as I can make you laugh and cry, I will; and you will readily believe me, when I tell you, you cannot do too much on your parts to show that we are still cordial and loving friends. To you, ladies of the Institution, I am deeply and especially indebted. I sometimes [*pointing to the word ‘Boz’ in front of the great gallery*] think there is some small quantity of magic in that very short name, and that it must consist in its containing as many letters as the three graces, and they, every one of them, being of your fair sisterhood.

A story is told of an eastern potentate of modern times, who, for an eastern potentate, was a tolerably good man, sometimes bowstringing his dependants indiscriminately in his moments of anger, but burying them in great splendour in his moments of penitence, that whenever intelligence was brought him of a new plot or turbulent conspiracy, his first inquiry was, ‘Who is she?’ meaning that a woman was at the bottom. Now, in my small way, I differ from that potentate; for when there is any good to be attained, the services of any ministering angel required, my first inquiry is, ‘Where is she?’ and the answer invariably is, ‘Here.’ Proud and happy am I indeed to thank you for your generosity -

‘A thousand times, good night;
A thousand times the worse to want your light.’

SPEECH: GARDENERS AND GARDENING. LONDON, JUNE 14, 1852.

[The Ninth Anniversary Dinner of the Gardeners' Benevolent Institution was held on the above date at the London Tavern. The company numbered more than 150. The dessert was worthy of the occasion, and an admirable effect was produced by a profuse display of natural flowers upon the tables and in the decoration of the room. The chair was taken by Mr. Charles Dickens, who, in proposing the toast of the evening, spoke as follows:-]

For three times three years the Gardeners' Benevolent Institution has been stimulated and encouraged by meetings such as this, and by three times three cheers we will urge it onward in its prosperous career. [*The cheers were warmly given*.]

Occupying the post I now do, I feel something like a counsel for the plaintiff with nobody on the other side; but even if I had been placed in that position ninety times nine, it would still be my duty to state a few facts from the very short brief with which I have been provided.

This Institution was founded in the year 1838. During the first five years of its existence, it was not particularly robust, and seemed to have been placed in rather a shaded position, receiving somewhat more than its needful allowance of cold water. In 1843 it was removed into a more favourable position, and grafted on a nobler stock, and it has now borne fruit, and become such a vigorous tree that at present thirty-five old people daily sit within the shelter of its branches, and all the pensioners upon the list have been veritable gardeners, or the wives of gardeners. It is managed by gardeners, and it has upon its books the excellent rule that any gardener who has subscribed to it for fifteen years, and conformed to the rules, may, if he will, be placed upon the pensioners' list without election, without canvass, without solispeechescitation, and as his independent right. I lay very great stress upon that honourable characteristic of the charity, because the main principle of any such institution should be to help those who help themselves. That the Society's pensioners do not become such so long as they are able to support themselves, is evinced by the significant fact that the average age of those now upon the list is seventy-seven; that they are not wasteful is proved by the fact that the whole sum expended on their relief is but £500 a-year; that the Institution does not restrict itself to any narrow confines, is shown by the circumstance, that the pensioners come from all parts of England, whilst all the expenses are paid from the annual income and interest on stock, and therefore are not disproportionate to its means.

Such is the Institution which appeals to you through me, as a most unworthy advocate, for sympathy and support, an Institution which has for its President a nobleman {8} whose whole possessions are remarkable for taste and beauty, and whose gardener's laurels are famous throughout the world. In the list of its vice-presidents there are the names of many noblemen and gentlemen of great influence and station, and I have been struck in glancing through the list of its supporters, with the sums written against the names of the numerous nurserymen and seedsmen therein comprised. I hope the day will come when every gardener in England will be a member of the charity.

The gardener particularly needs such a provision as this Institution affords. His gains are not great; he knows gold and silver more as being of the colour of fruits and flowers than by its presence in his pockets; he is subjected to that kind of labour which renders him peculiarly liable to infirmity; and when old age comes upon him, the gardener is of all men perhaps best able to appreciate the merits of such an institution.

To all indeed, present and absent, who are descended from the first

"gardener Adam and his wife,"

the benefits of such a society are obvious. In the culture of flowers there cannot, by their very nature, be anything, solitary or exclusive. The wind that blows over the cottager's porch, sweeps also over the grounds of the nobleman; and as the rain descends on the just and on the unjust, so it communicates to all gardeners, both rich and poor, an interchange of pleasure and enjoyment; and the gardener of the rich man, in developing and enhancing a fruitful flavour or a delightful scent, is, in some sort, the gardener of everybody else.

The love of gardening is associated with all conditions of men, and all periods of time. The scholar and the statesman, men of peace and men of war, have agreed in all ages to delight in gardens. The most ancient people of the earth had gardens where there is now nothing but solitary heaps of earth. The poor man in crowded cities gardens still in jugs and basins and bottles: in factories and workshops people garden; and even the prisoner is found gardening in his lonely cell, after years and years of solitary confinement. Surely, then, the gardener who produces shapes and objects so lovely and so comforting, should have some hold upon the world's remembrance when he himself becomes in need of comfort.

I will call upon you to drink "Prosperity to the Gardeners' Benevolent Institution," and I beg to couple with that toast the name of its noble President, the Duke of Devonshire, whose worth is written in all his deeds, and who has communicated to his title and his riches a lustre which no title and no riches could confer.

[Later in the evening, Mr. Dickens said:-]

My office has compelled me to burst into bloom so often that I could wish there were a closer parallel between myself and the American aloe. It is particularly agreeable and appropriate to know that the parents of this Institution are to be found in the seed and nursery trade; and the seed having yielded such good fruit, and the nursery having produced such a healthy child, I have the greatest pleasure in proposing the health of the parents of the Institution.

[In proposing the health of the Treasurers, Mr. Dickens said:-]

My observation of the signboards of this country has taught me that its conventional gardeners are always jolly, and always three in number. Whether that conventionality has reference to the Three Graces, or to those very significant letters, L., S., D., I do not know. Those mystic letters are, however, most important, and no society can have officers of more importance than its Treasurers, nor can it possibly give them too much to do.

SPEECH: BIRMINGHAM, JANUARY 6, 1853.

[On Thursday, January 6, 1853, at the rooms of the Society of Artists, in Temple Row, Birmingham, a large company assembled to witness the presentation of a testimonial to Mr. Charles Dickens, consisting of a silver-gilt salver and a diamond ring. Mr. Dickens acknowledged the tribute, and the address which accompanied it, in the following words:-]

Gentlemen, I feel it very difficult, I assure you, to tender my acknowledgments to you, and through you, to those many friends of mine whom you represent, for this honour and distinction which you have conferred upon me. I can most honestly assure you, that it is in the power of no great representative of numbers of people to awaken such happiness in me as is inspired by this token of goodwill and remembrance, coming to me direct and fresh from the numbers themselves. I am truly sensible, gentlemen, that my friends who have united in this address are partial in their kindness, and regard what I have done with too great favour. But I may say, with reference to one class - some members of which, I presume, are included there - that I should in my own eyes be very unworthy both of the generous gift and the generous feeling which has been evinced, and this occasion, instead of pleasure, would give me nothing but pain, if I was unable to assure them, and those who are in front of this assembly, that what the working people have found me towards them in my books, I am throughout my life. Gentlemen, whenever I have tried to hold up to admiration their fortitude, patience, gentleness, the reasonableness of their nature, so accessible to persuasion, and their extraordinary goodness one towards another, I have done so because I have first genuinely felt that admiration myself, and have been thoroughly imbued with the sentiment which I sought to communicate to others.

Gentlemen, I accept this salver and this ring as far above all price to me, as very valuable in themselves, and as beautiful specimens of the workmanship of this town, with great emotion, I assure you, and with the liveliest gratitude. You remember something, I daresay, of the old romantic stories of those charmed rings which would lose their brilliance when their wearer was in danger, or would press his finger reproachfully when he was going to do wrong. In the very improbable event of my being in the least danger of deserting the principles which have won me these tokens, I am sure the diamond in that ring would assume a clouded aspect to my faithless eye, and would, I know, squeeze a throb of pain out of my treacherous heart. But I have not the least misgiving on that point; and, in this confident expectation, I shall remove my own old diamond ring from my left hand, and in future wear the Birmingham ring on my right, where its grasp will keep me in mind of the good friends I have here, and in vivid remembrance of this happy hour.

Gentlemen, in conclusion, allow me to thank you and the Society to whom these rooms belong, that the presentation has taken place in an atmosphere so congenial to me, and in an apartment decorated with so many beautiful works of art, among which I recognize before me the productions of friends of mine, whose labours and triumphs will never be subjects of indifference to me. I thank those gentlemen for giving me the opportunity of meeting them here on an occasion which has some connexion with their own proceedings; and, though last not least, I tender my acknowledgments to that charming presence, without which nothing beautiful can be complete, and which is endearingly associated with rings of a plainer description, and which, I must confess, awakens in my mind at the present moment a feeling of regret that I am not in a condition to make an offer of these testimonials. I beg you, gentlemen, to commend me very earnestly and gratefully to our absent friends, and to assure them of my affectionate and heartfelt respect.

The company then adjourned to Dee’s Hotel, where a banquet took place, at which about 220 persons were present, among whom were some of the most distinguished of the Royal Academicians. To the toast of “The Literature of England,” Mr. Dickens responded as follows:-

Mr. Mayor and Gentlemen, I am happy, on behalf of many labourers in that great field of literature to which you have pledged the toast, to thank you for the tribute you have paid to it. Such an honour, rendered by acclamation in such a place as this, seems to me, if I may follow on the same side as the venerable Archdeacon (Sandford) who lately addressed you, and who has inspired me with a gratification I can never forget - such an honour, gentlemen, rendered here, seems to me a two-sided illustration of the position that literature holds in these latter and, of course, "degenerate" days. To the great compact phalanx of the people, by whose industry, perseverance, and intelligence, and their result in money-wealth, such places as Birmingham, and many others like it, have arisen - to that great centre of support, that comprehensive experience, and that beating heart, literature has turned happily from individual patrons - sometimes munificent, often sordid, always few - and has there found at once its highest purpose, its natural range of action, and its best reward. Therefore it is right also, as it seems to me, not only that literature should receive honour here, but that it should render honour, too, remembering that if it has undoubtedly done good to Birmingham, Birmingham has undoubtedly done good to it. From the shame of the purchased dedication, from the scurrilous and dirty work of Grub Street, from the dependent seat on sufferance at my Lord Duke's table to-day, and from the sponging-house or Marshalsea to-morrow - from that venality which, by a fine moral retribution, has degraded statesmen even to a greater extent than authors, because the statesman entertained a low belief in the universality of corruption, while the author yielded only to the dire necessity of his calling - from all such evils the people have set literature free. And my creed in the exercise of that profession is, that literature cannot be too faithful to the people in return - cannot too ardently advocate the cause of their advancement, happiness, and prosperity. I have heard it sometimes said - and what is worse, as expressing something more cold-blooded, I have sometimes seen it written - that literature has suffered by this change, that it has degenerated by being made cheaper. I have not found that to be the case: nor do I believe that you have made the discovery either. But let a good book in these "bad" times be made accessible, - even upon an abstruse and difficult subject, so that it be one of legitimate interest to mankind, - and my life on it, it shall be extensively bought, read, and well considered.

Why do I say this? Because I believe there are in Birmingham at this moment many working men infinitely better versed in Shakespeare and in Milton than the average of fine gentlemen in the days of bought-and-sold dedications and dear books. I ask anyone to consider for himself who, at this time, gives the greatest relative encouragement to the dissemination of such useful publications as "Macaulay's History," "Layard's Researches," "Tennyson's Poems," "The Duke of Wellington's published Despatches," or the minutest truths (if any truth can be called minute) discovered by the genius of a Herschel or a Faraday? It is with all these things as with the great music of Mendelssohn, or a lecture upon art - if we had the good fortune to listen to one to-morrow - by my distinguished friend the President of the Royal Academy. However small the audience, however contracted the circle in the water, in the first instance, the people are nearer the wider range outside, and the Sister Arts, while they instruct them, derive a wholesome advantage and improvement from their ready sympathy and cordial response. I may instance the case of my friend Mr. Ward's magnificent picture; {9} and the reception of that picture here is an example that it is not now the province of art in painting to hold itself in monastic seclusion, that it cannot hope to rest on a single foundation for its great temple, - on the mere classic pose of a figure, or the folds of a drapery - but that it must be imbued with human passions and action, informed with human right and wrong, and, being so informed, it may fearlessly put itself upon its trial, like the criminal of old, to be judged by God and its country.

Gentlemen, to return and conclude, as I shall have occasion to trouble you again. For this time I have only once again to repeat what I have already said. As I begun with literature, I shall end with it. I would simply say that I believe no true man, with anything to tell, need have the least misgiving, either for himself or his message, before a large number of hearers - always supposing that he be not afflicted with the coxcombical idea of writing down to the popular intelligence, instead of writing the popular intelligence up to himself, if, perchance, he be above it; - and, provided always that he deliver himself plainly of what is in him, which seems to be no unreasonable stipulation, it being supposed that he has some dim design of making himself understood. On behalf of that literature to which you have done so much honour, I beg to thank you most cordially, and on my own behalf, for the most flattering reception you have given to one whose claim is, that he has the distinction of making it his profession.

[Later in the evening, Mr. Dickens gave as a toast, "The Educational Institutions of Birmingham," in the following speech:]

I am requested to propose - or, according to the hypothesis of my friend, Mr. Owen, I am in the temporary character of a walking advertisement to advertise to you - the Educational Institutions of Birmingham; an advertisement to which I have the greatest pleasure in calling your attention, Gentlemen, it is right that I should, in so many words, mention the more prominent of these institutions, not because your local memories require any prompting, but because the enumeration implies what has been done here, what you are doing, and what you will yet do. I believe the first is the King Edward's Grammar School, with its various branches, and prominent among them is that most admirable means of training the wives of working men to be good wives and working wives, the prime ornament of their homes, and the cause of happiness to others - I mean those excellent girls' schools in various parts of the town, which, under the excellent superintendence of the principal, I should most sincerely desire to see in every town in England. Next, I believe, is the Spring Hill College, a learned institution belonging to the body of Independents, foremost among whose professors literature is proud to hail Mr. Henry Rogers as one of the soundest and ablest contributors to the Edinburgh Review. The next is the Queen's College, which, I may say, is only a newly-born child; but, in the hands of such an admirable Doctor, we may hope to see it arrive at a vigorous maturity. The next is the School of Design, which, as has been well observed by my friend Sir Charles Eastlake, is invaluable in such a place as this; and, lastly, there is the Polytechnic Institution, with regard to which I had long ago occasion to express my profound conviction that it was of unspeakable importance to such a community as this, when I had the honour to be present, under the auspices of your excellent representative, Mr. Scholefield. This is the last of what has been done in an educational way. They are all admirable in their kind; but I am glad to find that more is yet doing. A few days ago I received a Birmingham newspaper, containing a most interesting account of a preliminary meeting for the formation of a Reformatory School for juvenile delinquents. You are not exempt here from the honour of saving these poor, neglected, and wretched outcasts. I read of one infant, six years old, who has been twice as many times in the hands of the police as years have passed over his devoted head. These are the eggs from which gaol-birds are hatched; if you wish to check that dreadful brood, you must take the young and innocent, and have them reared by Christian hands.

Lastly, I am rejoiced to find that there is on foot a scheme for a new Literary and Scientific Institution, which would be worthy even of this place, if there was nothing of the kind in it - an institution, as I understand it, where the words "exclusion" and "exclusiveness" shall be quite unknown - where all classes may assemble in common trust, respect, and confidence - where there shall be a great gallery of painting and statuary open to the inspection and admiration of all comers - where there shall be a museum of models in which industry may observe its various sources of manufacture, and the mechanic may work out new combinations, and arrive at new results - where the very mines under the earth and under the sea shall not be forgotten, but presented in little to the inquiring eye - an institution, in short, where many and many of the obstacles which now inevitably stand in the rugged way of the poor inventor shall be smoothed away, and where, if he have anything in him, he will find encouragement and hope.

I observe with unusual interest and gratification, that a body of gentlemen are going for a time to lay aside their individual prepossessions on other subjects, and, as good citizens, are to be engaged in a design as patriotic as well can be. They have the intention of meeting in a few days to advance this great object, and I call upon you, in drinking this toast, to drink success to their endeavour, and to make it the pledge by all good means to promote it.

If I strictly followed out the list of educational institutions in Birmingham, I should not have done here, but I intend to stop, merely observing that I have seen within a short walk of this place one of the most interesting and practical Institutions for the Deaf and Dumb that has ever come under my observation. I have seen in the factories and workshops of Birmingham such beautiful order and regularity, and such great consideration for the workpeople provided, that they might justly be entitled to be considered educational too. I have seen in your splendid Town Hall, when the cheap concerts are going on there, also an admirable educational institution. I have seen their results in the demeanour of your working people, excellently balanced by a nice instinct, as free from servility on the one hand, as from self-conceit on the other. It is a perfect delight to have need to ask a question, if only from the manner of the reply - a manner I never knew to pass unnoticed by an observant stranger. Gather up those threads, and a great marry more I have not touched upon, and weaving all into one good fabric, remember how much is included under the general head of the Educational Institutions of your town.

SPEECH: LONDON, APRIL 30, 1853.

[At the annual Dinner of the Royal Academy, the President, Sir Charles Eastlake, proposed as a toast, “The Interests of Literature,” and selected for the representatives of the world of letters, the Dean of St. Paul’s and Mr. Charles Dickens. Dean Milman having returned thanks.]

Mr Dickens then addressed the President, who, it should be mentioned, occupied a large and handsome chair, the back covered with crimson velvet, placed just before Stanfield’s picture of *The Victory.*

Mr. Dickens, after tendering his acknowledgments of the toast, and the honour done him in associating his name with it, said that those acknowledgments were not the less heartfelt because he was unable to recognize in this toast the President’s usual disinterestedness; since English literature could scarcely be remembered in any place, and, certainly, not in a school of art, without a very distinct remembrance of his own tasteful writings, to say nothing of that other and better part of himself, which, unfortunately, was not visible upon these occasions.

If, like the noble Lord, the Commander-in-Chief (Viscount Hardinge), he (Mr. Dickens) might venture to illustrate his brief thanks with one word of reference to the noble picture painted by a very dear friend of his, which was a little eclipsed that evening by the radiant and rubicund chair which the President now so happily toned down, he would beg leave to say that, as literature could nowhere be more appropriately honoured than in that place, so he thought she could nowhere feel a higher gratification in the ties that bound her to the sister arts. He ever felt in that place that literature found, through their instrumentality, always a new expression, and in a universal language.

SPEECH: LONDON, MAY 1, 1853

[At a dinner given by the Lord Mayor at the Mansion House, on the above date, Mr. Justice Talfourd proposed as a toast "Anglo-Saxon Literature," and alluded to Mr. Dickens as having employed fiction as a means of awakening attention to the condition of the oppressed and suffering classes:-]

"Mr. Dickens replied to this toast in a graceful and playful strain. In the former part of the evening, in reply to a toast on the chancery department, Vice-Chancellor Wood, who spoke in the absence of the Lord Chancellor, made a sort of defence of the Court of Chancery, not distinctly alluding to Bleak House, but evidently not without reference to it. The amount of what he said was, that the Court had received a great many more hard opinions than it merited; that they had been parsimoniously obliged to perform a great amount of business by a very inadequate number of judges; but that more recently the number of judges had been increased to seven, and there was reason to hope that all business brought before it would now be performed without unnecessary delay.

"Mr. Dickens alluded playfully to this item of intelligence; said he was exceedingly happy to hear it, as he trusted now that a suit, in which he was greatly interested, would speedily come to an end. I heard a little by-conversation between Mr. Dickens and a gentleman of the bar, who sat opposite me, in which the latter seemed to be reiterating the same assertions, and I understood him to say, that a case not extraordinarily complicated might be got through with in three months. Mr. Dickens said he was very happy to hear it; but I fancied there was a little shade of incredulity in his manner; however, the incident showed one thing, that is, that the chancery were not insensible to the representations of Dickens; but the whole tone of the thing was quite good-natured and agreeable." {10}

SPEECH: BIRMINGHAM, DECEMBER 30, 1853.

[The first of the Readings generously given by Mr. Charles Dickens on behalf of the Birmingham and Midland Institute, took place on Tuesday evening, December 27, 1853, at the Birmingham Town Hall, where, notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather, nearly two thousand persons had assembled. The work selected was the *Christmas Carol*. The high mimetic powers possessed by Mr. Dickens enabled him to personate with remarkable force the various characters of the story, and with admirable skill to pass rapidly from the hard, unbelieving Scrooge, to trusting and thankful Bob Cratchit, and from the genial fulness of Scrooge's nephew, to the hideous mirth of the party assembled in Old Joe the Ragshop-keeper's parlour. The reading occupied more than three hours, but so interested were the audience, that only one or two left the Hall previously to its termination, and the loud and frequent bursts of applause attested the successful discharge of the reader's arduous task. On Thursday evening Mr. Dickens read *The Cricket on the Hearth*. The Hall was again well ruled, and the tale, though deficient in the dramatic interest of the *Carol*, was listened to with attention, and rewarded with repeated applause. On Friday evening, the *Christmas Carol* was read a second time to a large assemblage of work-people, for whom, at Mr. Dickens's special request, the major part of the vast edifice was reserved. Before commencing the tale, Mr. Dickens delivered the following brief address, almost every sentence of which was received with loudly expressed applause.]

My Good Friends, - When I first imparted to the committee of the projected Institute my particular wish that on one of the evenings of my readings here the main body of my audience should be composed of working men and their families, I was animated by two desires; first, by the wish to have the great pleasure of meeting you face to face at this Christmas time, and accompany you myself through one of my little Christmas books; and second, by the wish to have an opportunity of stating publicly in your presence, and in the presence of the committee, my earnest hope that the Institute will, from the beginning, recognise one great principle - strong in reason and justice - which I believe to be essential to the very life of such an Institution. It is, that the working man shall, from the first unto the last, have a share in the management of an Institution which is designed for his benefit, and which calls itself by his name.

I have no fear here of being misunderstood - of being supposed to mean too much in this. If there ever was a time when any one class could of itself do much for its own good, and for the welfare of society - which I greatly doubt - that time is unquestionably past. It is in the fusion of different classes, without confusion; in the bringing together of employers and employed; in the creating of a better common understanding among those whose interests are identical, who depend upon each other, who are vitally essential to each other, and who never can be in unnatural antagonism without deplorable results, that one of the chief principles of a Mechanics' Institution should consist. In this world a great deal of the bitterness among us arises from an imperfect understanding of one another. Erect in Birmingham a great Educational Institution, properly educational; educational of the feelings as well as of the reason; to which all orders of Birmingham men contribute; in which all orders of Birmingham men meet; wherein all orders of Birmingham men are faithfully represented - and you will erect a Temple of Concord here which will be a model edifice to the whole of England.

Contemplating as I do the existence of the Artisans' Committee, which not long ago considered the establishment of the Institute so sensibly, and supported it so heartily, I earnestly entreat the gentlemen - earnest I know in the good work, and who are now among us, - by all means to avoid the great shortcoming of similar institutions; and in asking the working man for his confidence, to set him the great example and give him theirs in return. You will judge for yourselves if I promise too much for the working man, when I say that he will stand by such an enterprise with the utmost of his patience, his perseverance, sense, and support; that I am sure he will need no charitable aid or condescending patronage; but will readily and cheerfully pay for the advantages which it confers; that he will prepare himself in individual cases where he feels that the adverse circumstances around him have rendered it necessary; in a word, that he will feel his responsibility like an honest man, and will most honestly and manfully discharge it. I now proceed to the pleasant task to which I assure you I have looked forward for a long time.

[At the close of the reading Mr. Dickens received a vote of thanks, and "three cheers, with three times three." As soon as the enthusiasm of the audience would allow him to speak, Mr. Dickens said:-]

You have heard so much of my voice since we met to-night, that I will only say, in acknowledgment of this affecting mark of your regard, that I am truly and sincerely interested in you; that any little service I have rendered to you I have freely rendered from my heart; that I hope to become an honorary member of your great Institution, and will meet you often there when it becomes practically useful; that I thank you most affectionately for this new mark of your sympathy and approval; and that I wish you many happy returns of this great birthday-time, and many prosperous years.

SPEECH: COMMERCIAL TRAVELLERS. LONDON, DECEMBER 30, 1854.

[The following speech was made by Mr. Dickens at the Anniversary Dinner in commemoration of the foundation of the Commercial Travellers' Schools, held at the London Tavern on the above date. Mr. Dickens presided on this occasion, and proposed the toasts.]

I think it may be assumed that most of us here present know something about travelling. I do not mean in distant regions or foreign countries, although I dare say some of us have had experience in that way, but at home, and within the limits of the United Kingdom. I dare say most of us have had experience of the extinct "fast coaches," the "Wonders," "Taglionis," and "Tallyhos," of other days. I daresay most of us remember certain modest postchaises, dragging us down interminable roads, through slush and mud, to little country towns with no visible population, except half-a-dozen men in smock-frocks, half-a-dozen women with umbrellas and pattens, and a washed-out dog or so shivering under the gables, to complete the desolate picture. We can all discourse, I dare say, if so minded, about our recollections of the "Talbot," the "Queen's Head," or the "Lion" of those days. We have all been to that room on the ground floor on one side of the old inn yard, not quite free from a certain fragrant smell of tobacco, where the cruets on the sideboard were usually absorbed by the skirts of the box-coats that hung from the wall; where awkward servants waylaid us at every turn, like so many human man-traps; where county members, framed and glazed, were eternally presenting that petition which, somehow or other, had made their glory in the county, although nothing else had ever come of it. Where the books in the windows always wanted the first, last, and middle leaves, and where the one man was always arriving at some unusual hour in the night, and requiring his breakfast at a similarly singular period of the day. I have no doubt we could all be very eloquent on the comforts of our favourite hotel, wherever it was - its beds, its stables, its vast amount of posting, its excellent cheese, its head waiter, its capital dishes, its pigeon-pies, or its 1820 port. Or possibly we could recal our chaste and innocent admiration of its landlady, or our fraternal regard for its handsome chambermaid. A celebrated domestic critic once writing of a famous actress, renowned for her virtue and beauty, gave her the character of being an "eminently gatherable-to-one's-arms sort of person." Perhaps some one amongst us has borne a somewhat similar tribute to the mental charms of the fair deities who presided at our hotels.

With the travelling characteristics of later times, we are all, no doubt, equally familiar. We know all about that station to which we must take our ticket, although we never get there; and the other one at which we arrive after dark, certain to find it half a mile from the town, where the old road is sure to have been abolished, and the new road is going to be made - where the old neighbourhood has been tumbled down, and the new one is not half built up. We know all about that party on the platform who, with the best intentions, can do nothing for our luggage except pitch it into all sorts of unattainable places. We know all about that short omnibus, in which one is to be doubled up, to the imminent danger of the crown of one's hat; and about that fly, whose leading peculiarity is never to be there when it is wanted. We know, too, how instantaneously the lights of the station disappear when the train starts, and about that grope to the new Railway Hotel, which will be an excellent house when the customers come, but which at present has nothing to offer but a liberal allowance of damp mortar and new lime.

I record these little incidents of home travel mainly with the object of increasing your interest in the purpose of this night's assemblage. Every traveller has a home of his own, and he learns to appreciate it the more from his wandering. If he has no home, he learns the same lesson unselfishly by turning to the homes of other men. He may have his experiences of cheerful and exciting pleasures abroad; but home is the best, after all, and its pleasures are the most heartily and enduringly prized. Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, every one must be prepared to learn that commercial travellers, as a body, know how to prize those domestic relations from which their pursuits so frequently sever them; for no one could possibly invent a more delightful or more convincing testimony to the fact than they themselves have offered in founding and maintaining a school for the children of deceased or unfortunate members of their own body; those children who now appeal to you in mute but eloquent terms from the gallery.

It is to support that school, founded with such high and friendly objects, so very honourable to your calling, and so useful in its solid and practical results, that we are here to-night. It is to roof that building which is to shelter the children of your deceased friends with one crowning ornament, the best that any building can have, namely, a receipt stamp for the full amount of the cost. It is for this that your active sympathy is appealed to, for the completion of your own good work. You know how to put your hands to the plough in earnest as well as any men in existence, for this little book informs me that you raised last year no less a sum than £8000, and while fully half of that sum consisted of new donations to the building fund, I find that the regular revenue of the charity has only suffered to the extent of £30. After this, I most earnestly and sincerely say that were we all authors together, I might boast, if in my profession were exhibited the same unity and steadfastness I find in yours.

I will not urge on you the casualties of a life of travel, or the vicissitudes of business, or the claims fostered by that bond of brotherhood which ought always to exist amongst men who are united in a common pursuit. You have already recognized those claims so nobly, that I will not presume to lay them before you in any further detail. Suffice it to say that I do not think it is in your nature to do things by halves. I do not think you could do so if you tried, and I have a moral certainty that you never will try. To those gentlemen present who are not members of the travellers' body, I will say in the words of the French proverb, "Heaven helps those who help themselves." The Commercial Travellers having helped themselves so gallantly, it is clear that the visitors who come as a sort of celestial representatives ought to bring that aid in their pockets which the precept teaches us to expect from them. With these few remarks, I beg to give you as a toast, "Success to the Commercial Travellers' School."

[In proposing the health of the Army in the Crimea, Mr. Dickens said:-]

IT does not require any extraordinary sagacity in a commercial assembly to appreciate the dire evils of war. The great interests of trade enfeebled by it, the enterprise of better times paralysed by it, all the peaceful arts bent down before it, too palpably indicate its character and results, so that far less practical intelligence than that by which I am surrounded would be sufficient to appreciate the horrors of war. But there are seasons when the evils of peace, though not so acutely felt, are immeasurably greater, and when a powerful nation, by admitting the right of any autocrat to do wrong, sows by such complicity the seeds of its own ruin, and overshadows itself in time to come with that fatal influence which great and ambitious powers are sure to exercise over their weaker neighbours.

Therefore it is, ladies and gentlemen, that the tree has not its root in English ground from which the yard wand can be made that will measure - the mine has not its place in English soil that will supply the material of a pair of scales to weigh the influence that may be at stake in the war in which we are now straining all our energies. That war is, at any time and in any shape, a most dreadful and deplorable calamity, we need no proverb to tell us; but it is just because it is such a calamity, and because that calamity must not for ever be impending over us at the fancy of one man against all mankind, that we must not allow that man to darken from our view the figures of peace and justice between whom and us he now interposes.

Ladies and gentlemen, if ever there were a time when the true spirits of two countries were really fighting in the cause of human advancement and freedom - no matter what diplomatic notes or other nameless botherations, from number one to one hundred thousand and one, may have preceded their taking the field - if ever there were a time when noble hearts were deserving well of mankind by exposing themselves to the obedient bayonets of a rash and barbarian tyrant, it is now, when the faithful children of England and France are fighting so bravely in the Crimea. Those faithful children are the admiration and wonder of the world, so gallantly are they discharging their duty; and therefore I propose to an assembly, emphatically representing the interests and arts of peace, to drink the health of the Allied Armies of England and France, with all possible honours.

[In proposing the health of the Treasurer, Mr. Dickens said:-]

If the President of this Institution had been here, I should possibly have made one of the best speeches you ever heard; but as he is not here, I shall turn to the next toast on my list:- “The health of your worthy Treasurer, Mr. George Moore,” a name which is a synonym for integrity, enterprise, public spirit, and benevolence. He is one of the most zealous officers I ever saw in my life; he appears to me to have been doing nothing during the last week but rushing into and out of railway-carriages, and making eloquent speeches at all sorts of public dinners in favour of this charity. Last evening he was at Manchester, and this evening he comes here, sacrificing his time and convenience, and exhausting in the meantime the contents of two vast leaden inkstands and no end of pens, with the energy of fifty bankers' clerks rolled into one. But I clearly foresee that the Treasurer will have so much to do to-night, such gratifying sums to acknowledge and such large lines of figures to write in his books, that I feel the greatest consideration I can show him is to propose his health without further observation, leaving him to address you in his own behalf. I propose to you, therefore, the health of Mr. George Moore, the Treasurer of this charity, and I need hardly add that it is one which is to be drunk with all the honours.

[Later in the evening, Mr. Dickens rose and said:-]

So many travellers have been going up Mont Blanc lately, both in fact and in fiction, that I have heard recently of a proposal for the establishment of a Company to employ Sir Joseph Paxton to take it down. Only one of those travellers, however, has been enabled to bring Mont Blanc to Piccadilly, and, by his own ability and good humour, so to thaw its eternal ice and snow, as that the most timid lady may ascend it twice a-day, "during the holidays," without the smallest danger or fatigue. Mr. Albert Smith, who is present amongst us to-night, is undoubtedly "a traveller." I do not know whether he takes many orders, but this I can testify, on behalf of the children of his friends, that he gives them in the most liberal manner.

We have also amongst us my friend Mr. Peter Cunningham, who is also a traveller, not only in right of his able edition of Goldsmith's "Traveller," but in right of his admirable Handbook, which proves him to be a traveller in the right spirit through all the labyrinths of London. We have also amongst us my friend Horace Mayhew, very well known also for his books, but especially for his genuine admiration of the company at that end of the room [*Mr. Dickens here pointed to the ladies gallery*], and who, whenever the fair sex is mentioned, will be found to have the liveliest personal interest in the conversation.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am about to propose to you the health of these three distinguished visitors. They are all admirable speakers, but Mr. Albert Smith has confessed to me, that on fairly balancing his own merits as a speaker and a singer, he rather thinks he excels in the latter art. I have, therefore, yielded to his estimate of himself, and I have now the pleasure of informing you that he will lead off the speeches of the other two gentlemen with a song. Mr. Albert Smith has just said to me in an earnest tone of voice, "What song would you recommend?" and I replied, "Galignani's Messenger." Ladies and gentlemen, I therefore beg to propose the health of

Messrs. Albert Smith, Peter Cunningham, and Horace Mayhew, and call on the first-named gentleman for a song.

SPEECH: ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM. THEATRE ROYAL, DRURY LANE, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 27, 1855.

I cannot, I am sure, better express my sense of the kind reception accorded to me by this great assembly, than by promising to compress what I shall address to it within the closest possible limits. It is more than eighteen hundred years ago, since there was a set of men who "thought they should be heard for their much speaking." As they have propagated exceedingly since that time, and as I observe that they flourish just now to a surprising extent about Westminster, I will do my best to avoid adding to the numbers of that prolific race. The noble lord at the head of the Government, when he wondered in Parliament about a week ago, that my friend, Mr. Layard, did not blush for having stated in this place what the whole country knows perfectly well to be true, and what no man in it can by possibility better know to be true than those disinterested supporters of that noble lord, who had the advantage of hearing him and cheering him night after night, when he first became premier - I mean that he did officially and habitually joke, at a time when this country was plunged in deep disgrace and distress - I say, that noble lord, when he wondered so much that the man of this age, who has, by his earnest and adventurous spirit, done the most to distinguish himself and it, did not blush for the tremendous audacity of having so come between the wind and his nobility, turned an airy period with reference to the private theatricals at Drury Lane Theatre. Now, I have some slight acquaintance with theatricals, private and public, and I will accept that figure of the noble lord. I will not say that if I wanted to form a company of Her Majesty's servants, I think I should know where to put my hand on "the comic old gentleman;" nor, that if I wanted to get up a pantomime, I fancy I should know what establishment to go to for the tricks and changes; also, for a very considerable host of supernumeraries, to trip one another up in that contention with which many of us are familiar, both on these and on other boards, in which the principal objects thrown about are loaves and fishes. But I will try to give the noble lord the reason for these private theatricals, and the reason why, however ardently he may desire to ring the curtain down upon them, there is not the faintest present hope of their coming to a conclusion. It is this:- The public theatricals which the noble lord is so condescending as to manage are so intolerably bad, the machinery is so cumbrous, the parts so ill-distributed, the company so full of “walking gentlemen,” the managers have such large families, and are so bent upon putting those families into what is theatrically called “first business” - not because of their aptitude for it, but because they *are* their families, that we find ourselves obliged to organize an opposition. We have seen the *Comedy of Errors* played so dismally like a tragedy that we really cannot bear it. We are, therefore, making bold to get up the *School of Reform*, and we hope, before the play is out, to improve that noble lord by our performance very considerably. If he object that we have no right to improve him without his license, we venture to claim that right in virtue of his orchestra, consisting of a very powerful piper, whom we always pay.

Sir, as this is the first political meeting I have ever attended, and as my trade and calling is not associated with politics, perhaps it may be useful for me to show how I came to be here, because reasons similar to those which have influenced me may still be trembling in the balance in the minds of others. I want at all times, in full sincerity, to do my duty by my countrymen. If *I* feel an attachment towards them, there is nothing disinterested or meritorious in that, for I can never too affectionately remember the confidence and friendship that they have long reposed in me. My sphere of action - which I shall never change - I shall never overstep, further than this, or for a longer period than I do to-night. By literature I have lived, and through literature I have been content to serve my country; and I am perfectly well aware that I cannot serve two masters. In my sphere of action I have tried to understand the heavier social grievances, and to help to set them right. When the *Times* newspaper proved its then almost incredible case, in reference to the ghastly absurdity of that vast labyrinth of misplaced men and misdirected things, which had made England unable to find on the face of the earth, an enemy one-twentieth part so potent to effect the misery and ruin of her noble defenders as she has been herself, I believe that the gloomy silence into which the country fell was by far the darkest aspect in which a great people had been exhibited for many years. With shame and indignation lowering among all classes of society, and this new element of discord piled on the heaving basis of ignorance, poverty and crime, which is always below us - with little adequate expression of the general mind, or apparent understanding of the general mind, in Parliament - with the machinery of Government and the legislature going round and round, and the people fallen from it and standing aloof, as if they left it to its last remaining function of destroying itself, when it had achieved the destruction of so much that was dear to them - I did and do believe that the only wholesome turn affairs so menacing could possibly take, was, the awaking of the people, the outspeaking of the people, the uniting of the people in all patriotism and loyalty to effect a great peaceful constitutional change in the administration of their own affairs. At such a crisis this association arose; at such a crisis I joined it: considering its further case to be - if further case could possibly be needed - that what is everybody's business is nobody's business, that men must be gregarious in good citizenship as well as in other things, and that it is a law in nature that there must be a centre of attraction for particles to fly to, before any serviceable body with recognised functions can come into existence. This association has arisen, and we belong to it. What are the objections to it? I have heard in the main but three, which I will now briefly notice. It is said that it is proposed by this association to exercise an influence, through the constituencies, on the House of Commons. I have not the least hesitation in saying that I have the smallest amount of faith in the House of Commons at present existing and that I consider the exercise of such influence highly necessary to the welfare and honour of this country. I was reading no later than yesterday the book of Mr. Pepys, which is rather a favourite of mine, in which he, two hundred years ago, writing of the House of Commons, says:

"My cousin Roger Pepys tells me that it is matter of the greatest grief to him in the world that he should be put upon this trust of being a Parliament man; because he says nothing is done, that he can see, out of any truth and sincerity, but mere envy and design."

Now, how it comes to pass that after two hundred years, and many years after a Reform Bill, the house of Commons is so little changed, I will not stop to inquire. I will not ask how it happens that bills which cramp and worry the people, and restrict their scant enjoyments, are so easily passed, and how it happens that measures for their real interests are so very difficult to be got through Parliament. I will not analyse the confined air of the lobby, or reduce to their primitive gases its deadening influences on the memory of that Honourable Member who was once a candidate for the honour of your - and my - independent vote and interest. I will not ask what is that Secretarian figure, full of blandishments, standing on the threshold, with its finger on its lips. I will not ask how it comes that those personal altercations, involving all the removes and definitions of Shakespeare's Touchstone - the retort courteous - the quip modest - the reply churlish - the reproof valiant - the countercheck quarrelsome - the lie circumstantial and the lie direct - are of immeasurably greater interest in the House of Commons than the health, the taxation, and the education, of a whole people. I will not penetrate into the mysteries of that secret chamber in which the Bluebeard of Party keeps his strangled public questions, and with regard to which, when he gives the key to his wife, the new comer, he strictly charges her on no account to open the door. I will merely put it to the experience of everybody here, whether the House of Commons is not occasionally a little hard of hearing, a little dim of sight, a little slow of understanding, and whether, in short, it is not in a sufficiency invalided state to require close watching, and the occasional application of sharp stimulants; and whether it is not capable of considerable improvement? I believe that, in order to preserve it in a state of real usefulness and independence, the people must be very watchful and very jealous of it; and it must have its memory jogged; and be kept awake when it happens to have taken too much Ministerial narcotic; it must be trotted about, and must be bustled and pinched in a friendly way, as is the usage in such cases. I hold that no power can deprive us of the right to administer our functions as a body comprising electors from all parts of the country, associated together because their country is dearer to them than drowsy twaddle, unmeaning routine, or worn-out conventionalities.

This brings me to objection number two. It is stated that this Association sets class against class. Is this so? (*Cries of* "No.") No, it finds class set against class, and seeks to reconcile them. I wish to avoid placing in opposition those two words - Aristocracy and People. I am one who can believe in the virtues and uses of both, and would not on any account deprive either of a single just right belonging to it. I will use, instead of these words, the terms, the governors and the governed. These two bodies the Association finds with a gulf between them, in which are lying, newly-buried, thousands on thousands of the bravest and most devoted men that even England ever bred. It is to prevent the recurrence of innumerable smaller evils, of which, unchecked, that great calamity was the crowning height and the necessary consummation, and to bring together those two fronts looking now so strangely at each other, that this Association seeks to help to bridge over that abyss, with a structure founded on common justice and supported by common sense. Setting class against class! That is the very parrot prattle that we have so long heard. Try its justice by the following example:- A respectable gentleman had a large establishment, and a great number of servants, who were good for nothing, who, when he asked them to give his children bread, gave them stones; who, when they were told to give those children fish, gave them serpents. When they were ordered to send to the East, they sent to the West; when they ought to have been serving dinner in the North, they were consulting exploded cookery books in the South; who wasted, destroyed, tumbled over one another when required to do anything, and were bringing everything to ruin. At last the respectable gentleman calls his house steward, and says, even then more in sorrow than in anger, “This is a terrible business; no fortune can stand it - no mortal equanimity can bear it! I must change my system; I must obtain servants who will do their duty.” The house steward throws up his eyes in pious horror, ejaculates “Good God, master, you are setting class against class!” and then rushes off into the servants’ hall, and delivers a long and melting oration on that wicked feeling.

I now come to the third objection, which is common among young gentlemen who are not particularly fit for anything but spending money which they have not got. It is usually comprised in the observation, “How very extraordinary it is that these Administrative Reform fellows can’t mind their own business.” I think it will occur to all that a very sufficient mode of disposing of this objection is to say, that it is our own business we mind when we come forward in this way, and it is to prevent it from being mismanaged by them. I observe from the Parliamentary debates - which have of late, by-the-bye, frequently suggested to me that there is this difference between the bull of Spain the bull of Nineveh, that, whereas, in the Spanish case, the bull rushes at the scarlet, in the Ninevite case, the scarlet rushes at the bull - I have observed from the Parliamentary debates that, by a curious fatality, there has been a great deal of the reproof valiant and the counter-check quarrelsome, in reference to every case, showing the necessity of Administrative Reform, by whomsoever produced, whensoever, and wheresoever. I daresay I should have no difficulty in adding two or three cases to the list, which I know to be true, and which I have no doubt would be contradicted, but I consider it a work of supererogation; for, if the people at large be not already convinced that a sufficient general case has been made out for Administrative Reform, I think they never can be, and they never will be. There is, however, an old indisputable, very well known story, which has so pointed a moral at the end of it that I will substitute it for a new case: by doing of which I may avoid, I hope, the sacred wrath of St. Stephen's. Ages ago a savage mode of keeping accounts on notched sticks was introduced into the Court of Exchequer, and the accounts were kept, much as Robinson Crusoe kept his calendar on the desert island. In the course of considerable revolutions of time, the celebrated Cocker was born, and died; Walkinghame, of the Tutor's Assistant, and well versed in figures, was also born, and died; a multitude of accountants, book-keepers, and actuaries, were born, and died. Still official routine inclined to these notched sticks, as if they were pillars of the constitution, and still the Exchequer accounts continued to be kept on certain splints of elm wood called "tallies." In the reign of George III. an inquiry was made by some revolutionary spirit, whether pens, ink, and paper, slates and pencils, being in existence, this obstinate adherence to an obsolete custom ought to be continued, and whether a change ought not to be effected.

All the red tape in the country grew redder at the bare mention of this bold and original conception, and it took till 1826 to get these sticks abolished. In 1834 it was found that there was a considerable accumulation of them; and the question then arose, what was to be done with such worn-out, worm-eaten, rotten old bits of wood? I dare say there was a vast amount of minuting, memoranduming, and despatch-boxing, on this mighty subject. The sticks were housed at Westminster, and it would naturally occur to any intelligent person that nothing could be easier than to allow them to be carried away for fire-wood by the miserable people who live in that neighbourhood. However, they never had been useful, and official routine required that they never should be, and so the order went forth that they were to be privately and confidentially burnt. It came to pass that they were burnt in a stove in the House of Lords. The stove, overgorged with these preposterous sticks, set fire to the panelling; the panelling set fire to the House of Lords; the House of Lords set fire to the House of Commons; the two houses were reduced to ashes; architects were called in to build others; we are now in the second million of the cost thereof; the national pig is not nearly over the stile yet; and the little old woman, Britannia, hasn't got home to-night.

Now, I think we may reasonably remark, in conclusion, that all obstinate adherence to rubbish which the time has long outlived, is certain to have in the soul of it more or less that is pernicious and destructive; and that will some day set fire to something or other; which, if given boldly to the winds would have been harmless; but which, obstinately retained, is ruinous. I believe myself that when Administrative Reform goes up it will be idle to hope to put it down, on this or that particular instance. The great, broad, and true cause that our public progress is far behind our private progress, and that we are not more remarkable for our private wisdom and success in matters of business than we are for our public folly and failure, I take to be as clearly established as the sun, moon, and stars. To set this right, and to clear the way in the country for merit everywhere: accepting it equally whether it be aristocratic or democratic, only asking whether it be honest or true, is, I take it, the true object of this Association. This object it seeks to promote by uniting together large numbers of the people, I hope, of all conditions, to the end that they may better comprehend, bear in mind, understand themselves, and impress upon others, the common public duty. Also, of which there is great need, that by keeping a vigilant eye on the skirmishers thrown out from time to time by the Party of Generals, they may see that their feints and manoeuvres do not oppress the small defaulters and release the great, and that they do not gull the public with a mere field-day Review of Reform, instead of an earnest, hard-fought Battle. I have had no consultation with any one upon the subject, but I particularly wish that the directors may devise some means of enabling intelligent working men to join this body, on easier terms than subscribers who have larger resources. I could wish to see great numbers of them belong to us, because I sincerely believe that it would be good for the common weal.

Said the noble Lord at the head of the Government, when Mr. Layard asked him for a day for his motion, "Let the hon. gentleman find a day for himself."

"Now, in the names of all the gods at once,
Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed
That he is grown so great?"

If our Caesar will excuse me, I would take the liberty of reversing that cool and lofty sentiment, and I would say, "First Lord, your duty it is to see that no man is left to find a day for himself. See you, who take the responsibility of government, who aspire to it, live for it, intrigue for it, scramble for it, who hold to it tooth-and-nail when you can get it, see you that no man is left to find a day for himself. In this old country, with its seething hard-worked millions, its heavy taxes, its swarms of ignorant, its crowds of poor, and its crowds of wicked, woe the day when the dangerous man shall find a day for himself, because the head of the Government failed in his duty in not anticipating it by a brighter and a better one! Name you the day, First Lord; make a day; work for a day beyond your little time, Lord Palmerston, and History in return may then - not otherwise - find a day for you; a day equally associated with the contentment of the loyal, patient, willing-hearted English people, and with the happiness of your Royal Mistress and her fair line of children."

SPEECH: SHEFFIELD, DECEMBER 22, 1855.

[On Saturday Evening Mr. Charles Dickens read his Christmas Carol in the Mechanics' Hall in behalf of the funds of the Institute.

After the reading the Mayor said, he had been charged by a few gentlemen in Sheffield to present to Mr. Dickens for his acceptance a very handsome service of table cutlery, a pair of razors, and a pair of fish carvers, as some substantial manifestation of their gratitude to Mr. Dickens for his kindness in coming to Sheffield. Henceforth the Christmas of 1855 would be associated in his mind with the name of that gentleman.]

Mr. Charles Dickens, in receiving the presentation, said, he accepted with heartfelt delight and cordial gratitude such beautiful specimens of Sheffield-workmanship; and he begged to assure them that the kind observations which had been made by the Mayor, and the way in which they had been responded to by that assembly, would never be obliterated from his remembrance. The present testified not only to the work of Sheffield hands, but to the warmth and generosity of Sheffield hearts. It was his earnest desire to do right by his readers, and to leave imaginative and popular literature associated with the private homes and public rights of the people of England. The case of cutlery with which he had been so kindly presented, should be retained as an heirloom in his family; and he assured them that he should ever be faithful to his death to the principles which had earned for him their approval. In taking his reluctant leave of them, he wished them many merry Christmases, and many happy new years.

SPEECH: LONDON, FEBRUARY 9, 1858.

[At the Anniversary Festival of the Hospital for Sick Children, on Tuesday, February the 9th, 1858, about one hundred and fifty gentlemen sat down to dinner, in the Freemasons' Hall. Later in the evening all the seats in the gallery were filled with ladies interested in the success of the Hospital. After the usual loyal and other toasts, the Chairman, Mr. Dickens, proposed "Prosperity to the Hospital for Sick Children," and said:-]

Ladies and gentlemen, - It is one of my rules in life not to believe a man who may happen to tell me that he feels no interest in children. I hold myself bound to this principle by all kind consideration, because I know, as we all must, that any heart which could really toughen its affections and sympathies against those dear little people must be wanting in so many humanising experiences of innocence and tenderness, as to be quite an unsafe monstrosity among men. Therefore I set the assertion down, whenever I happen to meet with it - which is sometimes, though not often - as an idle word, originating possibly in the genteel languor of the hour, and meaning about as much as that knowing social lassitude, which has used up the cardinal virtues and quite found out things in general, usually does mean. I suppose it may be taken for granted that we, who come together in the name of children and for the sake of children, acknowledge that we have an interest in them; indeed, I have observed since I sit down here that we are quite in a childlike state altogether, representing an infant institution, and not even yet a grown-up company. A few years are necessary to the increase of our strength and the expansion of our figure; and then these tables, which now have a few tucks in them, will be let out, and then this hall, which now sits so easily upon us, will be too tight and small for us. Nevertheless, it is likely that even we are not without our experience now and then of spoilt children. I do not mean of our own spoilt children, because nobody's own children ever were spoilt, but I mean the disagreeable children of our particular friends. We know by experience what it is to have them down after dinner, and, across the rich perspective of a miscellaneous dessert to see, as in a black dose darkly, the family doctor looming in the distance. We know, I have no doubt we all know, what it is to assist at those little maternal anecdotes and table entertainments illustrated with imitations and descriptive dialogue which might not be inaptly called, after the manner of my friend Mr. Albert Smith, the toilsome ascent of Miss Mary and the eruption (cutaneous) of Master Alexander. We know what it is when those children won't go to bed; we know how they prop their eyelids open with their forefingers when they will sit up; how, when they become fractious, they say aloud that they don't like us, and our nose is too long, and why don't we go? And we are perfectly acquainted with those kicking bundles which are carried off at last protesting. An eminent eye-witness told me that he was one of a company of learned pundits who assembled at the house of a very distinguished philosopher of the last generation to hear him expound his stringent views concerning infant education and early mental development, and he told me that while the philosopher did this in very beautiful and lucid language, the philosopher's little boy, for his part, edified the assembled sages by dabbling up to the elbows in an apple pie which had been provided for their entertainment, having previously anointed his hair with the syrup, combed it with his fork, and brushed it with his spoon. It is probable that we also have our similar experiences sometimes, of principles that are not quite practice, and that we know people claiming to be very wise and profound about nations of men who show themselves to be rather weak and shallow about units of babies.

But, ladies and gentlemen, the spoilt children whom I have to present to you after this dinner of to-day are not of this class. I have glanced at these for the easier and lighter introduction of another, a very different, a far more numerous, and a far more serious class. The spoilt children whom I must show you are the spoilt children of the poor in this great city, the children who are, every year, for ever and ever irrevocably spoilt out of this breathing life of ours by tens of thousands, but who may in vast numbers be preserved if you, assisting and not contravening the ways of Providence, will help to save them. The two grim nurses, Poverty and Sickness, who bring these children before you, preside over their births, rock their wretched cradles, nail down their little coffins, pile up the earth above their graves. Of the annual deaths in this great town, their unnatural deaths form more than one-third. I shall not ask you, according to the custom as to the other class - I shall not ask you on behalf of these children to observe how good they are, how pretty they are, how clever they are, how promising they are, whose beauty they most resemble - I shall only ask you to observe how weak they are, and how like death they are! And I shall ask you, by the remembrance of everything that lies between your own infancy and that so miscalled second childhood when the child's graces are gone and nothing but its helplessness remains; I shall ask you to turn your thoughts to *these* spoilt children in the sacred names of Pity and Compassion.

Some years ago, being in Scotland, I went with one of the most humane members of the humane medical profession, on a morning tour among some of the worst lodged inhabitants of the old town of Edinburgh. In the closes and wynds of that picturesque place - I am sorry to remind you what fast friends picturesqueness and typhus often are - we saw more poverty and sickness in an hour than many people would believe in a life. Our way lay from one to another of the most wretched dwellings, reeking with horrible odours; shut out from the sky, shut out from the air, mere pits and dens. In a room in one of these places, where there was an empty porridge-pot on the cold hearth, with a ragged woman and some ragged children crouching on the bare ground near it - where, I remember as I speak, that the very light, refracted from a high damp-stained and time-stained house-wall, came trembling in, as if the fever which had shaken everything else there had shaken even it - there lay, in an old egg-box which the mother had begged from a shop, a little feeble, wasted, wan, sick child. With his little wasted face, and his little hot, worn hands folded over his breast, and his little bright, attentive eyes, I can see him now, as I have seen him for several years, look in steadily at us. There he lay in his little frail box, which was not at all a bad emblem of the little body from which he was slowly parting - there he lay, quite quiet, quite patient, saying never a word. He seldom cried, the mother said; he seldom complained; "he lay there, seemin' to woonder what it was a' aboot." God knows, I thought, as I stood looking at him, he had his reasons for wondering - reasons for wondering how it could possibly come to be that he lay there, left alone, feeble and full of pain, when he ought to have been as bright and as brisk as the birds that never got near him - reasons for wondering how he came to be left there, a little decrepid old man pining to death, quite a thing of course, as if there were no crowds of healthy and happy children playing on the grass under the summer's sun within a stone's throw of him, as if there were no bright, moving sea on the other side of the great hill overhanging the city; as if there were no great clouds rushing over it; as if there were no life, and movement, and vigour anywhere in the world - nothing but stoppage and decay. There he lay looking at us, saying, in his silence, more pathetically than I have ever heard anything said by any orator in my life, “Will you please to tell me what this means, strange man? and if you can give me any good reason why I should be so soon, so far advanced on my way to Him who said that children were to come into His presence and were not to be forbidden, but who scarcely meant, I think, that they should come by this hard road by which I am travelling; pray give that reason to me, for I seek it very earnestly and wonder about it very much;” and to my mind he has been wondering about it ever since. Many a poor child, sick and neglected, I have seen since that time in this London; many a poor sick child I have seen most affectionately and kindly tended by poor people, in an unwholesome house and under untoward circumstances, wherein its recovery was quite impossible; but at all such times I have seen my poor little drooping friend in his egg-box, and he has always addressed his dumb speech to me, and I have always found him wondering what it meant, and why, in the name of a gracious God, such things should be!

Now, ladies and gentlemen, such things need not be, and will not be, if this company, which is a drop of the life-blood of the great compassionate public heart, will only accept the means of rescue and prevention which it is mine to offer. Within a quarter of a mile of this place where I speak, stands a courtly old house, where once, no doubt, blooming children were born, and grew up to be men and women, and married, and brought their own blooming children back to patter up the old oak staircase which stood but the other day, and to wonder at the old oak carvings on the chimney-pieces. In the airy wards into which the old state drawing-rooms and family bedchambers of that house are now converted are such little patients that the attendant nurses look like reclaimed giantesses, and the kind medical practitioner like an amiable Christian ogre. Grouped about the little low tables in the centre of the rooms are such tiny convalescents that they seem to be playing at having been ill. On the doll’s beds are such diminutive creatures that each poor sufferer is supplied with its tray of toys; and, looking round, you may see how the little tired, flushed cheek has toppled over half the brute creation on its way into the ark; or how one little dimpled arm has mowed down (as I saw myself) the whole tin soldiery of Europe. On the walls of these rooms are graceful, pleasant, bright, childish pictures. At the bed's heads, are pictures of the figure which is the universal embodiment of all mercy and compassion, the figure of Him who was once a child himself, and a poor one. Besides these little creatures on the beds, you may learn in that place that the number of small Out-patients brought to that house for relief is no fewer than ten thousand in the compass of one single year. In the room in which these are received, you may see against the wall a box, on which it is written, that it has been calculated, that if every grateful mother who brings a child there will drop a penny into it, the Hospital funds may possibly be increased in a year by so large a sum as forty pounds. And you may read in the Hospital Report, with a glow of pleasure, that these poor women are so respondent as to have made, even in a toiling year of difficulty and high prices, this estimated forty, fifty pounds. In the printed papers of this same Hospital, you may read with what a generous earnestness the highest and wisest members of the medical profession testify to the great need of it; to the immense difficulty of treating children in the same hospitals with grown-up people, by reason of their different ailments and requirements, to the vast amount of pain that will be assuaged, and of life that will be saved, through this Hospital; not only among the poor, observe, but among the prosperous too, by reason of the increased knowledge of children's illnesses, which cannot fail to arise from a more systematic mode of studying them. Lastly, gentlemen, and I am sorry to say, worst of all - (for I must present no rose-coloured picture of this place to you - I must not deceive you;) lastly, the visitor to this Children's Hospital, reckoning up the number of its beds, will find himself perforce obliged to stop at very little over thirty; and will learn, with sorrow and surprise, that even that small number, so forlornly, so miserably diminutive, compared with this vast London, cannot possibly be maintained, unless the Hospital be made better known; I limit myself to saying better known, because I will not believe that in a Christian community of fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters, it can fail, being better known, to be well and richly endowed.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, this, without a word of adornment - which I resolved when I got up not to allow myself - this is the simple case. This is the pathetic case which I have to put to you; not only on behalf of the thousands of children who annually die in this great city, but also on behalf of the thousands of children who live half developed, racked with preventible pain, shorn of their natural capacity for health and enjoyment.

If these innocent creatures cannot move you for themselves, how can I possibly hope to move you in their name? The most delightful paper, the most charming essay, which the tender imagination of Charles Lamb conceived, represents him as sitting by his fireside on a winter night telling stories to his own dear children, and delighting in their society, until he suddenly comes to his old, solitary, bachelor self, and finds that they were but dream-children who might have been, but never were. “We are nothing,” they say to him; “less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been, and we must wait upon the tedious shore of Lethe, millions of ages, before we have existence and a name.” “And immediately awaking,” he says, “I found myself in my arm chair.” The dream-children whom I would now raise, if I could, before every one of you, according to your various circumstances, should be the dear child you love, the dearer child you have lost, the child you might have had, the child you certainly have been. Each of these dream-children should hold in its powerful hand one of the little children now lying in the Child’s Hospital, or now shut out of it to perish. Each of these dream-children should say to you, “O, help this little suppliant in my name; O, help it for my sake!” Well! - And immediately awaking, you should find yourselves in the Freemasons’ Hall, happily arrived at the end of a rather long speech, drinking “Prosperity to the Hospital for Sick Children,” and thoroughly resolved that it shall flourish.

SPEECH: EDINBURGH, MARCH, 26, 1858.

[On the above date Mr. Dickens gave a reading of his Christmas Carol in the Music Hall, before the members and subscribers of the Philosophical Institution. At the conclusion of the reading the Lord Provost of Edinburgh presented him with a massive silver wassail cup. Mr. Dickens acknowledged the tribute as follows:]

My Lord Provost, ladies, and gentlemen, I beg to assure you I am deeply sensible of your kind welcome, and of this beautiful and great surprise; and that I thank you cordially with all my heart. I never have forgotten, and I never can forget, that I have the honour to be a burgess and guild-brother of the Corporation of Edinburgh. As long as sixteen or seventeen years ago, the first great public recognition and encouragement I ever received was bestowed on me in this generous and magnificent city - in this city so distinguished in literature and so distinguished in the arts. You will readily believe that I have carried into the various countries I have since traversed, and through all my subsequent career, the proud and affectionate remembrance of that eventful epoch in my life; and that coming back to Edinburgh is to me like coming home.

Ladies and gentlemen, you have heard so much of my voice to-night, that I will not inflict on you the additional task of hearing any more. I am better reconciled to limiting myself to these very few words, because I know and feel full well that no amount of speech to which I could give utterance could possibly express my sense of the honour and distinction you have conferred on me, or the heartfelt gratification I derive from this reception.

SPEECH: LONDON, MARCH 29, 1858.

[At the thirteenth anniversary festival of the General Theatrical Fund, held at the Freemasons' Tavern, at which Thackeray presided, Mr. Dickens made the following speech:]

In our theatrical experience as playgoers we are all equally accustomed to predict by certain little signs and portents on the stage what is going to happen there. When the young lady, an admiral's daughter, is left alone to indulge in a short soliloquy, and certain smart spirit-rappings are heard to proceed immediately from beneath her feet, we foretell that a song is impending. When two gentlemen enter, for whom, by a happy coincidence, two chairs, and no more, are in waiting, we augur a conversation, and that it will assume a retrospective biographical character. When any of the performers who belong to the sea-faring or marauding professions are observed to arm themselves with very small swords to which are attached very large hilts, we predict that the affair will end in a combat. Carrying out the association of ideas, it may have occurred to some that when I asked my old friend in the chair to allow me to propose a toast I had him in my eye; and I have him now on my lips.

The duties of a trustee of the Theatrical Fund, an office which I hold, are not so frequent or so great as its privileges. He is in fact a mere walking gentleman, with the melancholy difference that he has no one to love. If this advantage could be added to his character it would be one of a more agreeable nature than it is, and his forlorn position would be greatly improved. His duty is to call every half year at the bankers', when he signs his name in a large greasy inconvenient book, to certain documents of which he knows nothing, and then he delivers it to the property man and exits anywhere.

He, however, has many privileges. It is one of his privileges to watch the steady growth of an institution in which he takes great interest; it is one of his privileges to bear his testimony to the prudence, the goodness, the self-denial, and the excellence of a class of persons who have been too long depreciated, and whose virtues are too much denied, out of the depths of an ignorant and stupid superstition. And lastly, it is one of his privileges sometimes to be called on to propose the health of the chairman at the annual dinners of the institution, when that chairman is one for whose genius he entertains the warmest admiration, and whom he respects as a friend, and as one who does honour to literature, and in whom literature is honoured. I say when that is the case, he feels that this last privilege is a great and high one. From the earliest days of this institution I have ventured to impress on its managers, that they would consult its credit and success by choosing its chairmen as often as possible within the circle of literature and the arts; and I will venture to say that no similar institution has been presided over by so many remarkable and distinguished men. I am sure, however, that it never has had, and that it never will have, simply because it cannot have, a greater lustre cast upon it than by the presence of the noble English writer who fills the chair to-night.

It is not for me at this time, and in this place, to take on myself to flutter before you the well-thumbed pages of Mr. Thackeray's books, and to tell you to observe how full they are of wit and wisdom, how out-speaking, and how devoid of fear or favour; but I will take leave to remark, in paying my due homage and respect to them, that it is fitting that such a writer and such an institution should be brought together. Every writer of fiction, although he may not adopt the dramatic form, writes in effect for the stage. He may never write plays; but the truth and passion which are in him must be more or less reflected in the great mirror which he holds up to nature. Actors, managers, and authors are all represented in this company, and it maybe supposed that they all have studied the deep wants of the human heart in many theatres; but none of them could have studied its mysterious workings in any theatre to greater advantage than in the bright and airy pages of *Vanity Fair*. To this skilful showman, who has so often delighted us, and who has charmed us again to-night, we have now to wish God speed, and that he may continue for many years {11} to exercise his potent art. To him fill a bumper toast, and fervently utter, God bless him!

SPEECH: LONDON, APRIL 29, 1858.

[The reader will already have observed that in the Christmas week of 1853, and on several subsequent occasions, Mr. Dickens had read the *Christmas Carol* and the *Chimes* before public audiences, but always in aid of the funds of some institution, or for other benevolent purposes. The first reading he ever gave for his own benefit took place on the above date, in St. Martin's Hall, (now converted into the Queen's Theatre). This reading Mr. Dickens prefaced with the following speech:-]

Ladies and gentlemen, - It may perhaps be in known to you that, for a few years past, I have been accustomed occasionally to read some of my shorter books, to various audiences, in aid of a variety of good objects, and at some charge to myself, both in time and money. It having at length become impossible in any reason to comply with these always accumulating demands, I have had definitively to choose between now and then reading on my own account, as one of my recognised occupations, or not reading at all. I have had little or no difficulty in deciding on the former course. The reasons that have led me to it - besides the consideration that it necessitates no departure whatever from the chosen pursuits of my life - are threefold: firstly, I have satisfied myself that it can involve no possible compromise of the credit and independence of literature; secondly, I have long held the opinion, and have long acted on the opinion, that in these times whatever brings a public man and his public face to face, on terms of mutual confidence and respect, is a good thing; thirdly, I have had a pretty large experience of the interest my hearers are so generous as to take in these occasions, and of the delight they give to me, as a tried means of strengthening those relations - I may almost say of personal friendship - which it is my great privilege and pride, as it is my great responsibility, to hold with a multitude of persons who will never hear my voice nor see my face. Thus it is that I come, quite naturally, to be here among you at this time; and thus it is that I proceed to read this little book, quite as composedly as I might proceed to write it, or to publish it in any other way.

SPEECH: LONDON, MAY 1, 1858.

[The following short speech was made at the Banquet of the Royal Academy, after the health of Mr. Dickens and Mr. Thackeray had been proposed by the President, Sir Charles Eastlake:-]

Following the order of your toast, I have to take the first part in the duet to be performed in acknowledgment of the compliment you have paid to literature. In this home of art I feel it to be too much an interchange of compliments, as it were, between near relations, to enter into any lengthened expression of our thanks for the honour you have done us. I feel that it would be changing this splendid assembly into a sort of family party. I may, however, take leave to say that your sister, whom I represent, is strong and healthy; that she has a very great affection for, and an undying interest in you, and that it is always a very great gratification to her to see herself so well remembered within these walls, and to know that she is an honoured guest at your hospitable board.

SPEECH: LONDON, JULY 21, 1858.

[On the above date, a public meeting was held at the Princess's Theatre, for the purpose of establishing the now famous Royal Dramatic College. Mr. Charles Kean was the chairman, and Mr. Dickens delivered the following speech:]

Ladies and gentlemen, - I think I may venture to congratulate you beforehand on the pleasant circumstance that the movers and seconders of the resolutions which will be submitted to you will, probably, have very little to say. Through the Report which you have heard read, and through the comprehensive address of the chairman, the cause which brings us together has been so very clearly stated to you, that it can stand in need of very little, if of any further exposition. But, as I have the honour to move the first resolution which this handsome gift, and the vigorous action that must be taken upon it, necessitate, I think I shall only give expression to what is uppermost in the general mind here, if I venture to remark that, many as the parts are in which Mr. Kean has distinguished himself on these boards, he has never appeared in one in which the large spirit of an artist, the feeling of a man, and the grace of a gentleman, have been more admirably blended than in this day's faithful adherence to the calling of which he is a prosperous ornament, and in this day's manly advocacy of its cause.

Ladies and gentlemen, the resolution entrusted to me is:

"That the Report of the provisional committee be adopted, and that this meeting joyfully accepts, and gratefully acknowledges, the gift of five acres of land referred to in the said Report." {12}

It is manifest, I take it, that we are all agreed upon this acceptance and acknowledgment, and that we all know very well that this generous gift can inspire but one sentiment in the breast of every lover of the dramatic art. As it is far too often forgotten by those who are indebted to it for many a restorative flight out of this working-day world, that the silks, and velvets, and elegant costumes of its professors must be every night exchanged for the hideous coats and waistcoats of the present day, in which we have now the honour and the misfortune of appearing before you, so when we do meet with a nature so considerably generous as this donor's, and do find an interest in the real life and struggles of the people who have delighted it, so very spontaneous and so very liberal, we have nothing to do but to accept and to admire, we have no duty left but to “take the goods the gods provide us,” and to make the best and the most of them. Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to remark, that in this mode of turning a good gift to the highest account, lies the truest gratitude.

In reference to this, I could not but reflect, whilst Mr. Kean was speaking, that in an hour or two from this time, the spot upon which we are now assembled will be transformed into the scene of a crafty and a cruel bond. I know that, a few hours hence, the Grand Canal of Venice will flow, with picturesque fidelity, on the very spot where I now stand dryshod, and that “the quality of mercy” will be beautifully stated to the Venetian Council by a learned young doctor from Padua, on these very boards on which we now enlarge upon the quality of charity and sympathy. Knowing this, it came into my mind to consider how different the real bond of to-day from the ideal bond of to-night. Now, all generosity, all forbearance, all forgetfulness of little jealousies and unworthy divisions, all united action for the general good. Then, all selfishness, all malignity, all cruelty, all revenge, and all evil, - now all good. Then, a bond to be broken within the compass of a few - three or four - swiftly passing hours, - now, a bond to be valid and of good effect generations hence.

Ladies and gentlemen, of the execution and delivery of this bond, between this generous gentleman on the one hand, and the united members of a too often and too long disunited art upon the other, be you the witnesses. Do you attest of everything that is liberal and free in spirit, that is “so nominated in the bond;” and of everything that is grudging, self-seeking, unjust, or unfair, that it is by no sophistry ever to be found there. I beg to move the resolution which I have already had the pleasure of reading.

SPEECH: MANCHESTER, DECEMBER 3, 1858.

[The following speech was delivered at the annual meeting of the Institutional Association of Lancashire and Cheshire, held in the Free-trade Hall on the evening of the above day, at which Mr. Dickens presided.]

It has of late years become noticeable in England that the autumn season produces an immense amount of public speaking. I notice that no sooner do the leaves begin to fall from the trees, than pearls of great price begin to fall from the lips of the wise men of the east, and north, and west, and south; and anybody may have them by the bushel, for the picking up. Now, whether the comet has this year had a quickening influence on this crop, as it is by some supposed to have had upon the corn-harvest and the vintage, I do not know; but I do know that I have never observed the columns of the newspapers to groan so heavily under a pressure of orations, each vying with the other in the two qualities of having little or nothing to do with the matter in hand, and of being always addressed to any audience in the wide world rather than the audience to which it was delivered.

The autumn having gone, and the winter come, I am so sanguine as to hope that we in our proceedings may break through this enchanted circle and deviate from this precedent; the rather as we have something real to do, and are come together, I am sure, in all plain fellowship and straightforwardness, to do it. We have no little straws of our own to throw up to show us which way any wind blows, and we have no oblique biddings of our own to make for anything outside this hall.

At the top of the public announcement of this meeting are the words, “Institutional Association of Lancashire and Cheshire.” Will you allow me, in reference to the meaning of those words, to present myself before you as the embodied spirit of ignorance recently enlightened, and to put myself through a short, voluntary examination as to the results of my studies. To begin with: the title did not suggest to me anything in the least like the truth. I have been for some years pretty familiar with the terms, “Mechanics’ Institutions,” and “Literary Societies,” but they have, unfortunately, become too often associated in my mind with a body of great pretensions, lame as to some important member or other, which generally inhabits a new house much too large for it, which is seldom paid for, and which takes the name of the mechanics most grievously in vain, for I have usually seen a mechanic and a dodo in that place together.

I, therefore, began my education, in respect of the meaning of this title, very coldly indeed, saying to myself, “Here’s the old story.” But the perusal of a very few lines of my book soon gave me to understand that it was not by any means the old story; in short, that this association is expressly designed to correct the old story, and to prevent its defects from becoming perpetuated. I learnt that this Institutional Association is the union, in one central head, of one hundred and fourteen local Mechanics’ Institutions and Mutual Improvement Societies, at an expense of no more than five shillings to each society; suggesting to all how they can best communicate with and profit by the fountain-head and one another; keeping their best aims steadily before them; advising them how those aims can be best attained; giving a direct end and object to what might otherwise easily become waste forces; and sending among them not only oral teachers, but, better still, boxes of excellent books, called “Free Itinerating Libraries.” I learned that these books are constantly making the circuit of hundreds upon hundreds of miles, and are constantly being read with inexpressible relish by thousands upon thousands of toiling people, but that they are never damaged or defaced by one rude hand. These and other like facts lead me to consider the immense importance of the fact, that no little cluster of working men’s cottages can arise in any Lancashire or Cheshire valley, at the foot of any running stream which enterprise hunts out for water-power, but it has its educational friend and companion ready for it, willing for it, acquainted with its thoughts and ways and turns of speech even before it has come into existence.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, this is the main consideration that has brought me here. No central association at a distance could possibly do for those working men what this local association does. No central association at a distance could possibly understand them as this local association does. No central association at a distance could possibly put them in that familiar and easy communication one with another, as that I, man or boy, eager for knowledge, in that valley seven miles off, should know of you, man or boy, eager for knowledge, in that valley twelve miles off, and should occasionally trudge to meet you, that you may impart your learning in one branch of acquisition to me, whilst I impart mine in another to you. Yet this is distinctly a feature, and a most important feature, of this society.

On the other hand, it is not to be supposed that these honest men, however zealous, could, as a rule, succeed in establishing and maintaining their own institutions of themselves. It is obvious that combination must materially diminish their cost, which is in time a vital consideration; and it is equally obvious that experience, essential to the success of all combination, is especially so when its object is to diffuse the results of experience and of reflection.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, the student of the present profitable history of this society does not stop here in his learning; when he has got so far, he finds with interest and pleasure that the parent society at certain stated periods invites the more eager and enterprising members of the local society to submit themselves to voluntary examination in various branches of useful knowledge, of which examination it takes the charge and arranges the details, and invites the successful candidates to come to Manchester to receive the prizes and certificates of merit which it impartially awards. The most successful of the competitors in the list of these examinations are now among us, and these little marks of recognition and encouragement I shall have the honour presently of giving them, as they come before you, one by one, for that purpose.

I have looked over a few of those examination papers, which have comprised history, geography, grammar, arithmetic, book-keeping, decimal coinage, mensuration, mathematics, social economy, the French language - in fact, they comprise all the keys that open all the locks of knowledge. I felt most devoutly gratified, as to many of them, that they had not been submitted to me to answer, for I am perfectly sure that if they had been, I should have had mighty little to bestow upon myself to-night. And yet it is always to be observed and seriously remembered that these examinations are undergone by people whose lives have been passed in a continual fight for bread, and whose whole existence, has been a constant wrestle with

“Those twin gaolers of the daring heart -
Low birth and iron fortune.” {13}

I could not but consider, with extraordinary admiration, that these questions have been replied to, not by men like myself, the business of whose life is with writing and with books, but by men, the business of whose life is with tools and with machinery.

Let me endeavour to recall, as well as my memory will serve me, from among the most interesting cases of prize-holders and certificate-gainers who will appear before you, some two or three of the most conspicuous examples. There are two poor brothers from near Chorley, who work from morning to night in a coal-pit, and who, in all weathers, have walked eight miles a-night, three nights a-week, to attend the classes in which they have gained distinction. There are two poor boys from Bollington, who begin life as piecers at one shilling or eighteen-pence a-week, and the father of one of whom was cut to pieces by the machinery at which he worked, but not before he had himself founded the institution in which this son has since come to be taught. These two poor boys will appear before you to-night, to take the second-class prize in chemistry. There is a plasterer from Bury, sixteen years of age, who took a third-class certificate last year at the hands of Lord Brougham; he is this year again successful in a competition three times as severe. There is a wagon-maker from the same place, who knew little or absolutely nothing until he was a grown man, and who has learned all he knows, which is a great deal, in the local institution. There is a chain-maker, in very humble circumstances, and working hard all day, who walks six miles a-night, three nights a-week, to attend the classes in which he has won so famous a place. There is a moulder in an iron foundry, who, whilst he was working twelve hours a day before the furnace, got up at four o'clock in the morning to learn drawing. "The thought of my lads," he writes in his modest account of himself, "in their peaceful slumbers above me, gave me fresh courage, and I used to think that if I should never receive any personal benefit, I might instruct them when they came to be of an age to understand the mighty machines and engines which have made our country, England, pre-eminent in the world's history." There is a piecer at mule-frames, who could not read at eighteen, who is now a man of little more than thirty, who is the sole support of an aged mother, who is arithmetical teacher in the institution in which he himself was taught, who writes of himself that he made the resolution never to take up a subject without keeping to it, and who has kept to it with such an astonishing will, that he is now well versed in Euclid and Algebra, and is the best French scholar in Stockport. The drawing-classes in that same Stockport are taught by a working blacksmith; and the pupils of that working blacksmith will receive the highest honours of to-night. Well may it be said of that good blacksmith, as it was written of another of his trade, by the American poet:

“Toiling, rejoicing, sorrowing,
Onward through life he goes;
Each morning sees some task begun,
Each evening sees its clause.
Something attempted, something done,
Has earn’d a night’s repose.”

To pass from the successful candidates to the delegates from local societies now before me, and to content myself with one instance from amongst them. There is among their number a most remarkable man, whose history I have read with feelings that I could not adequately express under any circumstances, and least of all when I know he hears me, who worked when he was a mere baby at hand-loom weaving until he dropped from fatigue: who began to teach himself as soon as he could earn five shillings a-week: who is now a botanist, acquainted with every production of the Lancashire valley: who is a naturalist, and has made and preserved a collection of the eggs of British birds, and stuffed the birds: who is now a conchologist, with a very curious, and in some respects an original collection of fresh-water shells, and has also preserved and collected the mosses of fresh water and of the sea: who is worthily the president of his own local Literary Institution, and who was at his work this time last night as foreman in a mill.

So stimulating has been the influence of these bright examples, and many more, that I notice among the applications from Blackburn for preliminary test examination papers, one from an applicant who gravely fills up the printed form by describing himself as ten years of age, and who, with equal gravity, describes his occupation as “nursing a little child.” Nor are these things confined to the men. The women employed in factories, milliners’ work, and domestic service, have begun to show, as it is fitting they should, a most decided determination not to be outdone by the men; and the women of Preston in particular, have so honourably distinguished themselves, and shown in their examination papers such an admirable knowledge of the science of household management and household economy, that if I were a working bachelor of Lancashire or Cheshire, and if I had not cast my eye or set my heart upon any lass in particular, I should positively get up at four o’clock in the morning with the determination of the iron-moulder himself, and should go to Preston in search of a wife.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, these instances, and many more, daily occurring, always accumulating, are surely better testimony to the working of this Association, than any number of speakers could possibly present to you. Surely the presence among us of these indefatigable people is the Association's best and most effective triumph in the present and the past, and is its noblest stimulus to effort in the future. As its temporary mouthpiece, I would beg to say to that portion of the company who attend to receive the prizes, that the institution can never hold itself apart from them; - can never set itself above them; that their distinction and success must be its distinction and success; and that there can be but one heart beating between them and it. In particular, I would most especially entreat them to observe that nothing will ever be further from this Association's mind than the impertinence of patronage. The prizes that it gives, and the certificates that it gives, are mere admiring assurances of sympathy with so many striving brothers and sisters, and are only valuable for the spirit in which they are given, and in which they are received. The prizes are money prizes, simply because the Institution does not presume to doubt that persons who have so well governed themselves, know best how to make a little money serviceable - because it would be a shame to treat them like grown-up babies by laying it out for them, and because it knows it is given, and knows it is taken, in perfect clearness of purpose, perfect trustfulness, and, above all, perfect independence.

Ladies and Gentlemen, reverting once more to the whole collective audience before me, I will, in another two minutes, release the hold which your favour has given me on your attention. Of the advantages of knowledge I have said, and I shall say, nothing. Of the certainty with which the man who grasps it under difficulties rises in his own respect and in usefulness to the community, I have said, and I shall say, nothing. In the city of Manchester, in the county of Lancaster, both of them remarkable for self-taught men, that were superfluous indeed. For the same reason I rigidly abstain from putting together any of the shattered fragments of that poor clay image of a parrot, which was once always saying, without knowing why, or what it meant, that knowledge was a dangerous thing. I should as soon think of piecing together the mutilated remains of any wretched Hindoo who has been blown from an English gun. Both, creatures of the past, have been - as my friend Mr. Carlyle vigorously has it - "blasted into space;" and there, as to this world, is an end of them.

So I desire, in conclusion, only to sound two strings. In the first place, let me congratulate you upon the progress which real mutual improvement societies are making at this time in your neighbourhood, through the noble agency of individual employers and their families, whom you can never too much delight to honour. Elsewhere, through the agency of the great railway companies, some of which are bestirring themselves in this matter with a gallantry and generosity deserving of all praise. Secondly and lastly, let me say one word out of my own personal heart, which is always very near to it in this connexion. Do not let us, in the midst of the visible objects of nature, whose workings we can tell of in figures, surrounded by machines that can be made to the thousandth part of an inch, acquiring every day knowledge which can be proved upon a slate or demonstrated by a microscope - do not let us, in the laudable pursuit of the facts that surround us, neglect the fancy and the imagination which equally surround us as a part of the great scheme. Let the child have its fables; let the man or woman into which it changes, always remember those fables tenderly. Let numerous graces and ornaments that cannot be weighed and measured, and that seem at first sight idle enough, continue to have their places about us, be we never so wise. The hardest head may co-exist with the softest heart. The union and just balance of those two is always a blessing to the possessor, and always a blessing to mankind. The Divine Teacher was as gentle and considerate as He was powerful and wise. You all know how He could still the raging of the sea, and could hush a little child. As the utmost results of the wisdom of men can only be at last to help to raise this earth to that condition to which His doctrine, untainted by the blindnesses and passions of men, would have exalted it long ago; so let us always remember that He set us the example of blending the understanding and the imagination, and that, following it ourselves, we tread in His steps, and help our race on to its better and best days. Knowledge, as all followers of it must know, has a very limited power indeed, when it informs the head alone; but when it informs the head and the heart too, it has a power over life and death, the body and the soul, and dominates the universe.

SPEECH: COVENTRY, DECEMBER 4, 1858.

[On the above evening, a public dinner was held at the Castle Hotel, on the occasion of the presentation to Mr. Charles Dickens of a gold watch, as a mark of gratitude for the reading of his Christmas Carol, given in December of the previous year, in aid of the funds of the Coventry Institute. The chair was taken by C. W. Hoskyns, Esq. Mr. Dickens ackowledged the testimonial in the following words:]

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice-chairman, and Gentlemen, - I hope your minds will be greatly relieved by my assuring you that it is one of the rules of my life never to make a speech about myself. If I knowingly did so, under any circumstances, it would be least of all under such circumstances as these, when its effect on my acknowledgment of your kind regard, and this pleasant proof of it, would be to give me a certain constrained air, which I fear would contrast badly with your greeting, so cordial, so unaffected, so earnest, and so true. Furthermore, your Chairman has decorated the occasion with a little garland of good sense, good feeling, and good taste; so that I am sure that any attempt at additional ornament would be almost an impertinence.

Therefore I will at once say how earnestly, how fervently, and how deeply I feel your kindness. This watch, with which you have presented me, shall be my companion in my hours of sedentary working at home, and in my wanderings abroad. It shall never be absent from my side, and it shall reckon off the labours of my future days; and I can assure you that after this night the object of those labours will not less than before be to uphold the right and to do good. And when I have done with time and its measurement, this watch shall belong to my children; and as I have seven boys, and as they have all begun to serve their country in various ways, or to elect into what distant regions they shall roam, it is not only possible, but probable, that this little voice will be heard scores of years hence, who knows? in some yet unfounded city in the wilds of Australia, or communicating Greenwich time to Coventry Street, Japan.

Once again, and finally, I thank you; and from my heart of hearts, I can assure you that the memory of to-night, and of your picturesque and interesting city, will never be absent from my mind, and I can never more hear the lightest mention of the name of Coventry without having inspired in my breast sentiments of unusual emotion and unusual attachment.

[Later in the evening, in proposing the health of the Chairman, Mr. Dickens said:]

There may be a great variety of conflicting opinions with regard to farming, and especially with reference to the management of a clay farm; but, however various opinions as to the merits of a clay farm may be, there can be but one opinion as to the merits of a clay farmer, - and it is the health of that distinguished agriculturist which I have to propose.

In my ignorance of the subject, I am bound to say that it may be, for anything I know, indeed I am ready to admit that it *is*, exceedingly important that a clay farm should go for a number of years to waste; but I claim some knowledge as to the management of a clay farmer, and I positively object to his ever lying fallow. In the hope that this very rich and teeming individual may speedily be ploughed up, and that, we shall gather into our barns and store-houses the admirable crop of wisdom, which must spring up when ever he is sown, I take leave to propose his health, begging to assure him that the kind manner in which he offered to me your very valuable present, I can never forget.

SPEECH: LONDON, MARCH 29, 1862.

[At a Dinner of the Artists' General Benevolent Institution, the following Address was delivered by Mr. Charles Dickens from the chair.-]

Seven or eight years ago, without the smallest expectation of ever being called upon to fill the chair at an anniversary festival of the Artists' General Benevolent Institution, and without the remotest reference to such an occasion, I selected the administration of that Charity as the model on which I desired that another should be reformed, both as regarded the mode in which the relief was afforded, and the singular economy with which its funds were administered. As a proof of the latter quality during the past year, the cost of distributing £1,126 among the recipients of the bounty of the Charity amounted to little more than £100, inclusive of all office charges and expenses. The experience and knowledge of those entrusted with the management of the funds are a guarantee that the last available farthing of the funds will be distributed among proper and deserving recipients. Claiming, on my part, to be related in some degree to the profession of an artist, I disdain to stoop to ask for charity, in the ordinary acceptation of the term, on behalf of the Artists. In its broader and higher signification of generous confidence, lasting trustfulness, love and confiding belief, I very readily associate that cardinal virtue with art. I decline to present the artist to the notice of the public as a grown-up child, or as a strange, unaccountable, moon-stricken person, waiting helplessly in the street of life to be helped over the road by the crossing-sweeper; on the contrary, I present the artist as a reasonable creature, a sensible gentleman, and as one well acquainted with the value of his time, and that of other people, as if he were in the habit of going on high 'Change every day. The Artist whom I wish to present to the notice of the Meeting is one to whom the perfect enjoyment of the five senses is essential to every achievement of his life. He can gain no wealth nor fame by buying something which he never touched, and selling it to another who would also never touch or see it, but was compelled to strike out for himself every spark of fire which lighted, burned, and perhaps consumed him. He must win the battle of life with his own hand, and with his own eyes, and was obliged to act as general, captain, ensign, non-commissioned officer, private, drummer, great arms, small arms, infantry, cavalry, all in his own unaided self. When, therefore, I ask help for the artist, I do not make my appeal for one who was a cripple from his birth, but I ask it as part payment of a great debt which all sensible and civilised creatures owe to art, as a mark of respect to art, as a decoration - not as a badge - as a remembrance of what this land, or any land, would be without art, and as the token of an appreciation of the works of the most successful artists of this country. With respect to the society of which I am the advocate, I am gratified that it is so liberally supported by the most distinguished artists, and that it has the confidence of men who occupy the highest rank as artists, above the reach of reverses, and the most distinguished in success and fame, and whose support is above all price. Artists who have obtained wide-world reputation know well that many deserving and persevering men, or their widows and orphans, have received help from this fund, and some of the artists who have received this help are now enrolled among the subscribers to the Institution.

SPEECH: LONDON, MAY 20, 1862.

[The following speech was made by Mr. Dickens, in his capacity as chairman, at the annual Festival of the Newsvendors' and Provident Institution, held at the Freemasons' Tavern on the above date.]

When I had the honour of being asked to preside last year, I was prevented by indisposition, and I besought my friend, Mr. Wilkie Collins, to reign in my stead. He very kindly complied, and made an excellent speech. Now I tell you the truth, that I read that speech with considerable uneasiness, for it inspired me with a strong misgiving that I had better have presided last year with neuralgia in my face and my subject in my head, rather than preside this year with my neuralgia all gone and my subject anticipated. Therefore, I wish to preface the toast this evening by making the managers of this Institution one very solemn and repentant promise, and it is, if ever I find myself obliged to provide a substitute again, they may rely upon my sending the most speechless man of my acquaintance.

The Chairman last year presented you with an amiable view of the universality of the newsman's calling. Nothing, I think, is left for me but to imagine the newsman's burden itself, to unfold one of those wonderful sheets which he every day disseminates, and to take a bird's-eye view of its general character and contents. So, if you please, choosing my own time - though the newsman cannot choose his time, for he must be equally active in winter or summer, in sunshine or sleet, in light or darkness, early or late - but, choosing my own time, I shall for two or three moments start off with the newsman on a fine May morning, and take a view of the wonderful broadsheets which every day he scatters broadcast over the country. Well, the first thing that occurs to me following the newsman is, that every day we are born, that every day we are married - some of us - and that every day we are dead; consequently, the first thing the newsvendor's column informs me is, that Atkins has been born, that Catkins has been married, and that Datkins is dead. But the most remarkable thing I immediately discover in the next column, is that Atkins has grown to be seventeen years old, and that he has run away; for, at last, my eye lights on the fact that William A., who is seventeen years old, is adjured immediately to return to his disconsolate parents, and everything will be arranged to the satisfaction of everyone. I am afraid he will never return, simply because, if he had meant to come back, he would never have gone away. Immediately below, I find a mysterious character in such a mysterious difficulty that it is only to be expressed by several disjointed letters, by several figures, and several stars; and then I find the explanation in the intimation that the writer has given his property over to his uncle, and that the elephant is on the wing. Then, still glancing over the shoulder of my industrious friend, the newsman, I find there are great fleets of ships bound to all parts of the earth, that they all want a little more stowage, a little more cargo, that they have a few more berths to let, that they have all the most spacious decks, that they are all built of teak, and copper-bottomed, that they all carry surgeons of experience, and that they are all A1 at Lloyds', and anywhere else. Still glancing over the shoulder of my friend the newsman, I find I am offered all kinds of house-lodging, clerks, servants, and situations, which I can possibly or impossibly want. I learn, to my intense gratification, that I need never grow old, that I may always preserve the juvenile bloom of my complexion; that if ever I turn ill it is entirely my own fault; that if I have any complaint, and want brown cod-liver oil or Turkish baths, I am told where to get them, and that, if I want an income of seven pounds a-week, I may have it by sending half-a-crown in postage-stamps. Then I look to the police intelligence, and I can discover that I may bite off a human living nose cheaply, but if I take off the dead nose of a pig or a calf from a shop-window, it will cost me exceedingly dear. I also find that if I allow myself to be betrayed into the folly of killing an inoffensive tradesman on his own door-step, that little incident will not affect the testimonials to my character, but that I shall be described as a most amiable young man, and as, above all things, remarkable for the singular inoffensiveness of my character and disposition. Then I turn my eye to the Fine Arts, and, under that head, I see that a certain "J. O." has most triumphantly exposed a certain "J. O. B.," which "J. O. B." was remarkable for this particular ugly feature, that I was requested to deprive myself of the best of my pictures for six months; that for that time it was to be hung on a wet wall, and that I was to be requited for my courtesy in having my picture most impertinently covered with a wet blanket. To sum up the results of a glance over my newsman's shoulder, it gives a comprehensive knowledge of what is going on over the continent of Europe, and also of what is going on over the continent of

America, to say nothing of such little geographical regions as India and China.

Now, my friends, this is the glance over the newsman's shoulders from the whimsical point of view, which is the point, I believe, that most promotes digestion. The newsman is to be met with on steamboats, railway stations, and at every turn. His profits are small, he has a great amount of anxiety and care, and no little amount of personal wear and tear. He is indispensable to civilization and freedom, and he is looked for with pleasurable excitement every day, except when he lends the paper for an hour, and when he is punctual in calling for it, which is sometimes very painful. I think the lesson we can learn from our newsman is some new illustration of the uncertainty of life, some illustration of its vicissitudes and fluctuations. Mindful of this permanent lesson, some members of the trade originated this society, which affords them assistance in time of sickness and indigence. The subscription is infinitesimal. It amounts annually to five shillings. Looking at the returns before me, the progress of the society would seem to be slow, but it has only been slow for the best of all reasons, that it has been sure. The pensions granted are all obtained from the interest on the funded capital, and, therefore, the Institution is literally as safe as the Bank. It is stated that there are several newsvendors who are not members of this society; but that is true in all institutions which have come under my experience. The persons who are most likely to stand in need of the benefits which an institution confers, are usually the persons to keep away until bitter experience comes to them too late.

SPEECH: LONDON, MAY 11, 1864.

[On the above date Mr. Dickens presided at the Adelphi Theatre, at a public meeting, for the purpose of founding the Shakespeare Schools, in connexion with the Royal Dramatic College, and delivered the following address:]

Ladies and gentlemen - Fortunately for me, and fortunately for you, it is the duty of the Chairman on an occasion of this nature, to be very careful that he does not anticipate those speakers who come after him. Like Falstaff, with a considerable difference, he has to be the cause of speaking in others. It is rather his duty to sit and hear speeches with exemplary attention than to stand up to make them; so I shall confine myself, in opening these proceedings as your business official, to as plain and as short an exposition as I can possibly give you of the reasons why we come together.

First of all I will take leave to remark that we do not come together in commemoration of Shakespeare. We have nothing to do with any commemoration, except that we are of course humble worshippers of that mighty genius, and that we propose by-and-by to take his name, but by no means to take it in vain. If, however, the Tercentenary celebration were a hundred years hence, or a hundred years past, we should still be pursuing precisely the same object, though we should not pursue it under precisely the same circumstances. The facts are these: There is, as you know, in existence an admirable institution called the Royal Dramatic College, which is a place of honourable rest and repose for veterans in the dramatic art. The charter of this college, which dates some five or six years back, expressly provides for the establishment of schools in connexion with it; and I may venture to add that this feature of the scheme, when it was explained to him, was specially interesting to his Royal Highness the late Prince Consort, who hailed it as evidence of the desire of the promoters to look forward as well as to look back; to found educational institutions for the rising generation, as well as to establish a harbour of refuge for the generation going out, or at least having their faces turned towards the setting sun. The leading members of the dramatic art, applying themselves first to the more pressing necessity of the two, set themselves to work on the construction of their harbour of refuge, and this they did with the zeal, energy, good-will, and good faith that always honourably distinguish them in their efforts to help one another. Those efforts were very powerfully aided by the respected gentleman {14} under whose roof we are assembled, and who, I hope, may be only half as glad of seeing me on these boards as I always am to see him here. With such energy and determination did Mr. Webster and his brothers and sisters in art proceed with their work, that at this present time all the dwelling-houses of the Royal Dramatic College are built, completely furnished, fitted with every appliance, and many of them inhabited. The central hall of the College is built, the grounds are beautifully planned and laid out, and the estate has become the nucleus of a prosperous neighbourhood. This much achieved, Mr. Webster was revolving in his mind how he should next proceed towards the establishment of the schools, when, this Tercentenary celebration being in hand, it occurred to him to represent to the National Shakespeare Committee their just and reasonable claim to participate in the results of any subscription for a monument to Shakespeare. He represented to the committee that the social recognition and elevation of the followers of Shakespeare's own art, through the education of their children, was surely a monument worthy even of that great name. He urged upon the committee that it was certainly a sensible, tangible project, which the public good sense would immediately appreciate and approve. This claim the committee at once acknowledged; but I wish you distinctly to understand that if the committee had never been in existence, if the Tercentenary celebration had never been attempted, those schools, as a design anterior to both, would still have solicited public support.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, what it is proposed to do is, in fact, to find a new self-supporting public school; with this additional feature, that it is to be available for both sexes. This, of course, presupposes two separate distinct schools. As these schools are to be built on land belonging to the Dramatic College, there will be from the first no charge, no debt, no incumbrance of any kind under that important head. It is, in short, proposed simply to establish a new self-supporting public school, in a rapidly increasing neighbourhood, where there is a large and fast accumulating middle-class population, and where property in land is fast rising in value. But, inasmuch as the project is a project of the Royal Dramatic College, and inasmuch as the schools are to be built on their estate, it is proposed evermore to give their schools the great name of Shakespeare, and evermore to give the followers of Shakespeare's art a prominent place in them. With this view, it is confidently believed that the public will endow a foundation, say, for forty foundation scholars - say, twenty girls and twenty boys - who shall always receive their education gratuitously, and who shall always be the children of actors, actresses, or dramatic writers. This school, you will understand, is to be equal to the best existing public school. It is to be made to impart a sound, liberal, comprehensive education, and it is to address the whole great middle class at least as freely, as widely, and as cheaply as any existing public school.

Broadly, ladies and gentlemen, this is the whole design. There are foundation scholars at Eton, foundation scholars at nearly all our old schools, and if the public, in remembrance of a noble part of our standard national literature, and in remembrance of a great humanising art, will do this thing for these children, it will at the same time be doing a wise and good thing for itself, and will unquestionably find its account in it. Taking this view of the case - and I cannot be satisfied to take any lower one - I cannot make a sorry face about "the poor player." I think it is a term very much misused and very little understood - being, I venture to say, appropriated in a wrong sense by players themselves. Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, I can only present the player to you exceptionally in this wise - that he follows a peculiar and precarious vocation, a vocation very rarely affording the means of accumulating money - that that vocation must, from the nature of things, have in it many undistinguished men and women to one distinguished one - that it is not a vocation the exerciser of which can profit by the labours of others, but in which he must earn every loaf of his bread in his own person, with the aid of his own face, his own limbs, his own voice, his own memory, and his own life and spirits; and these failing, he fails. Surely this is reason enough to render him some little help in opening for his children their paths through life. I say their paths advisedly, because it is not often found, except under the pressure of necessity, or where there is strong hereditary talent - which is always an exceptional case - that the children of actors and actresses take to the stage. Persons therefore need not in the least fear that by helping to endow these schools they would help to overstock the dramatic market. They would do directly the reverse, for they would divert into channels of public distinction and usefulness those good qualities which would otherwise languish in that market's over-rich superabundance.

This project has received the support of the head of the most popular of our English public schools. On the committee stands the name of that eminent scholar and gentleman, the Provost of Eton. You justly admire this liberal spirit, and your admiration - which I cordially share - brings me naturally to what I wish to say, that I believe there is not in England any institution so socially liberal as a public school. It has been called a little cosmos of life outside, and I think it is so, with the exception of one of life's worst foibles - for, as far as I know, nowhere in this country is there so complete an absence of servility to mere rank, to mere position, to mere riches as in a public school. A boy there is always what his abilities or his personal qualities make him. We may differ about the curriculum and other matters, but of the frank, free, manly, independent spirit preserved in our public schools, I apprehend there can be no kind of question. It has happened in these later times that objection has been made to children of dramatic artists in certain little snivelling private schools - but in public schools never. Therefore, I hold that the actors are wise, and gratefully wise, in recognizing the capacious liberality of a public school, in seeking not a little hole-and-corner place of education for their children exclusively, but in addressing the whole of the great middle class, and proposing to them to come and join them, the actors, on their own property, in a public school, in a part of the country where no such advantage is now to be found.

I have now done. The attempt has been a very timid one. I have endeavoured to confine myself within my means, or, rather, like the possessor of an extended estate, to hand it down in an unembarrassed condition. I have laid a trifle of timber here and there, and grubbed up a little brushwood, but merely to open the view, and I think I can descry in the eye of the gentleman who is to move the first resolution that he distinctly sees his way. Thanking you for the courtesy with which you have heard me, and not at all doubting that we shall lay a strong foundation of these schools to-day, I will call, as the mover of the first resolution, on Mr. Robert Bell.

SPEECH: LONDON, MAY 9, 1865.

[On the above date Mr. Dickens presided at the Annual Festival of the Newsvendors' Benevolent and Provident Association, and, in proposing the toast of the evening, delivered the following speech.]

Ladies and gentlemen, - Dr. Johnson's experience of that club, the members of which have travelled over one another's minds in every direction, is not to be compared with the experience of the perpetual president of a society like this. Having on previous occasions said everything about it that he could possibly find to say, he is again produced, with the same awful formalities, to say everything about it that he cannot possibly find to say. It struck me, when Dr. F. Jones was referring just now to Easter Monday, that the case of such an ill-starred president is very like that of the stag at Epping Forest on Easter Monday. That unfortunate animal when he is uncarted at the spot where the meet takes place, generally makes a point, I am told, of making away at a cool trot, venturesomely followed by the whole field, to the yard where he lives, and there subsides into a quiet and inoffensive existence, until he is again brought out to be again followed by exactly the same field, under exactly the same circumstances, next Easter Monday.

The difficulties of the situation - and here I mean the president and not the stag - are greatly increased in such an instance as this by the peculiar nature of the institution. In its unpretending solidity, reality, and usefulness, believe me - for I have carefully considered the point - it presents no opening whatever of an oratorical nature. If it were one of those costly charities, so called, whose yield of wool bears no sort of proportion to their cry for cash, I very likely might have a word or two to say on the subject. If its funds were lavished in patronage and show, instead of being honestly expended in providing small annuities for hard-working people who have themselves contributed to its funds - if its management were intrusted to people who could by no possibility know anything about it, instead of being invested in plain, business, practical hands - if it hoarded when it ought to spend - if it got by cringing and fawning what it never deserved, I might possibly impress you very much by my indignation. If its managers could tell me that it was insolvent, that it was in a hopeless condition, that its accounts had been kept by Mr. Edmunds - or by "Tom," - if its treasurer had run away with the money-box, then I might have made a pathetic appeal to your feelings. But I have no such chance. Just as a nation is happy whose records are barren, so is a society fortunate that has no history - and its president unfortunate. I can only assure you that this society continues its plain, unobtrusive, useful career. I can only assure you that it does a great deal of good at a very small cost, and that the objects of its care and the bulk of its members are faithful working servants of the public - sole ministers of their wants at untimely hours, in all seasons, and in all weathers; at their own doors, at the street-corners, at every railway train, at every steam-boat; through the agency of every establishment and the tiniest little shops; and that, whether regarded as master or as man, their profits are very modest and their risks numerous, while their trouble and responsibility are very great.

The newsvendors and newsmen are a very subordinate part of that wonderful engine - the newspaper press. Still I think we all know very well that they are to the fountain-head what a good service of water pipes is to a good water supply. Just as a goodly store of water at Watford would be a tantalization to thirsty London if it were not brought into town for its use, so any amount of news accumulated at Printing-house Square, or Fleet Street, or the Strand, would be if there were no skill and enterprise engaged in its dissemination.

We are all of us in the habit of saying in our every-day life, that "We never know the value of anything until we lose it." Let us try the newsvendors by the test. A few years ago we discovered one morning that there was a strike among the cab-drivers. Now, let us imagine a strike of newsmen. Imagine the trains waiting in vain for the newspapers. Imagine all sorts and conditions of men dying to know the shipping news, the commercial news, the foreign news, the legal news, the criminal news, the dramatic news. Imagine the paralysis on all the provincial exchanges; the silence and desertion of all the newsmen's exchanges in London. Imagine the circulation of the blood of the nation and of the country standing still, - the clock of the world. Why, even Mr. Reuter, the great Reuter - whom I am always glad to imagine slumbering at night by the side of Mrs. Reuter, with a galvanic battery under his bolster, bell and wires to the head of his bed, and bells at each ear - think how even he would click and flash those wondrous dispatches of his, and how they would become mere nothing without the activity and honesty which catch up the threads and stitches of the electric needle, and scatter them over the land.

It is curious to consider - and the thought occurred to me this day, when I was out for a stroll pondering over the duties of this evening, which even then were looming in the distance, but not quite so far off as I could wish - I found it very curious to consider that though the newsman must be allowed to be a very unpicturesque rendering of Mercury, or Fame, or what-not conventional messenger from the clouds, and although we must allow that he is of this earth, and has a good deal of it on his boots, still that he has two very remarkable characteristics, to which none of his celestial predecessors can lay the slightest claim. One is that he is always the messenger of civilization; the other that he is at least equally so - not only in what he brings, but in what he ceases to bring. Thus the time was, and not so many years ago either, when the newsman constantly brought home to our doors - though I am afraid not to our hearts, which were custom-hardened - the most terrific accounts of murders, of our fellow-creatures being publicly put to death for what we now call trivial offences, in the very heart of London, regularly every Monday morning. At the same time the newsman regularly brought to us the infliction of other punishments, which were demoralising to the innocent part of the community, while they did not operate as punishments in deterring offenders from the perpetration of crimes. In those same days, also, the newsman brought to us daily accounts of a regularly accepted and received system of loading the unfortunate insane with chains, littering them down on straw, starving them on bread and water, damaging their clothes, and making periodical exhibitions of them at a small charge; and that on a Sunday one of our public resorts was a kind of demoniacal zoological gardens. They brought us accounts at the same time of some damage done to the machinery which was destined to supply the operative classes with employment. In the same time they brought us accounts of riots for bread, which were constantly occurring, and undermining society and the state; of the most terrible explosions of class against class, and of the habitual employment of spies for the discovery - if not for the origination - of plots, in which both sides found in those days some relief. In the same time the same newsmen were apprising us of a state of society all around us in which the grossest sensuality and intemperance were the rule; and not as now, when the ignorant, the wicked, and the wretched are the inexcusably vicious exceptions - a state of society in which the professional bully was rampant, and when deadly duels were daily fought for the most absurd and disgraceful causes. All this the newsman has ceased to tell us of. This state of society has discontinued in England for ever; and when we remember the undoubted truth, that the change could never have been effected without the aid of the load which the newsman carries, surely it is not very romantic to express the hope on his behalf that the public will show to him some little token of the sympathetic remembrance which we are all of us glad to bestow on the bearers of happy tidings - the harbingers of good news.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, you will be glad to hear that I am coming to a conclusion; for that conclusion I have a precedent. You all of you know how pleased you are on your return from a morning's walk to learn that the collector has called. Well, I am the collector for this district, and I hope you will bear in mind that I have respectfully called. Regarding the institution on whose behalf I have presented myself, I need only say technically two things. First, that its annuities are granted out of its funded capital, and therefore it is safe as the Bank; and, secondly, that they are attainable by such a slight exercise of prudence and fore-thought, that a payment of 25*s*. extending over a period of five years, entitles a subscriber - if a male - to an annuity of £16 a-year, and a female to £12 a-year. Now, bear in mind that this is an institution on behalf of which the collector has called, leaving behind his assurance that what you can give to one of the most faithful of your servants shall be well bestowed and faithfully applied to the purposes to which you intend them, and to those purposes alone.

SPEECH: NEWSPAPER PRESS FUND. - LONDON, MAY 20, 1865.

[At the second annual dinner of the Institution, held at the Freemasons' Tavern, on Saturday, the 20th May, 1865, the following speech was delivered by the chairman, Mr. Charles Dickens, in proposing the toast of the evening:]

Ladies and gentlemen, - When a young child is produced after dinner to be shown to a circle of admiring relations and friends, it may generally be observed that their conversation - I suppose in an instinctive remembrance of the uncertainty of infant life - takes a retrospective turn. As how much the child has grown since the last dinner; what a remarkably fine child it is, to have been born only two or three years ago, how much stronger it looks now than before it had the measles, and so forth. When a young institution is produced after dinner, there is not the same uncertainty or delicacy as in the case of the child, and it may be confidently predicted of it that if it deserve to live it will surely live, and that if it deserve to die it will surely die. The proof of desert in such a case as this must be mainly sought, I suppose, firstly, in what the society means to do with its money; secondly, in the extent to which it is supported by the class with whom it originated, and for whose benefit it is designed; and, lastly, in the power of its hold upon the public. I add this lastly, because no such institution that ever I heard of ever yet dreamed of existing apart from the public, or ever yet considered it a degradation to accept the public support.

Now, what the Newspaper Press Fund proposes to do with its money is to grant relief to members in want or distress, and to the widows, families, parents, or other near relatives of deceased members in right of a moderate provident annual subscription - commutable, I observe, for a moderate provident life subscription - and its members comprise the whole paid class of literary contributors to the press of the United Kingdom, and every class of reporters. The number of its members at this time last year was something below 100. At the present time it is somewhat above 170, not including 30 members of the press who are regular subscribers, but have not as yet qualified as regular members. This number is steadily on the increase, not only as regards the metropolitan press, but also as regards the provincial throughout the country. I have observed within these few days that many members of the press at Manchester have lately at a meeting expressed a strong brotherly interest in this Institution, and a great desire to extend its operations, and to strengthen its hands, provided that something in the independent nature of life assurance and the purchase of deferred annuities could be introduced into its details, and always assuming that in it the metropolis and the provinces stand on perfectly equal ground. This appears to me to be a demand so very moderate, that I can hardly have a doubt of a response on the part of the managers, or of the beneficial and harmonious results. It only remains to add, on this head of desert, the agreeable circumstance that out of all the money collected in aid of the society during the last year more than one-third came exclusively from the press.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, in regard to the last claim - the last point of desert - the hold upon the public - I think I may say that probably not one single individual in this great company has failed to-day to see a newspaper, or has failed to-day to hear something derived from a newspaper which was quite unknown to him or to her yesterday. Of all those restless crowds that have this day thronged the streets of this enormous city, the same may be said as the general gigantic rule. It may be said almost equally, of the brightest and the dullest, the largest and the least provincial town in the empire; and this, observe, not only as to the active, the industrious, and the healthy among the population, but also to the bedridden, the idle, the blind, and the deaf and dumb. Now, if the men who provide this all-pervading presence, this wonderful, ubiquitous newspaper, with every description of intelligence on every subject of human interest, collected with immense pains and immense patience, often by the exercise of a laboriously-acquired faculty united to a natural aptitude, much of the work done in the night, at the sacrifice of rest and sleep, and (quite apart from the mental strain) by the constant overtasking of the two most delicate of the senses, sight and hearing - I say, if the men who, through the newspapers, from day to day, or from night to night, or from week to week, furnish the public with so much to remember, have not a righteous claim to be remembered by the public in return, then I declare before God I know no working class of the community who have.

It would be absurd, it would be impertinent, in such an assembly as this, if I were to attempt to expatiate upon the extraordinary combination of remarkable qualities involved in the production of any newspaper. But assuming the majority of this associated body to be composed of reporters, because reporters, of one kind or other, compose the majority of the literary staff of almost every newspaper that is not a compilation, I would venture to remind you, if I delicately may, in the august presence of members of Parliament, how much we, the public, owe to the reporters if it were only for their skill in the two great sciences of condensation and rejection. Conceive what our sufferings, under an Imperial Parliament, however popularly constituted, under however glorious a constitution, would be if the reporters could not skip. Dr. Johnson, in one of his violent assertions, declared that "the man who was afraid of anything must be a scoundrel, sir." By no means binding myself to this opinion - though admitting that the man who is afraid of a newspaper will generally be found to be rather something like it, I must still freely own that I should approach my Parliamentary debate with infinite fear and trembling if it were so unskilfully served up for my breakfast. Ever since the time when the old man and his son took their donkey home, which were the old Greek days, I believe, and probably ever since the time when the donkey went into the ark - perhaps he did not like his accommodation there - but certainly from that time downwards, he has objected to go in any direction required of him - from the remotest periods it has been found impossible to please everybody.

I do not for a moment seek to conceal that I know this Institution has been objected to. As an open fact challenging the freëst discussion and inquiry, and seeking no sort of shelter or favour but what it can win, it has nothing, I apprehend, but itself, to urge against objection. No institution conceived in perfect honesty and good faith has a right to object to being questioned to any extent, and any institution so based must be in the end the better for it. Moreover, that this society has been questioned in quarters deserving of the most respectful attention I take to be an indisputable fact. Now, I for one have given that respectful attention, and I have come out of the discussion to where you see me. The whole circle of the arts is pervaded by institutions between which and this I can descry no difference. The painters' art has four or five such institutions. The musicians' art, so generously and charmingly represented here, has likewise several such institutions. In my own art there is one, concerning the details of which my noble friend the president of the society and myself have torn each other's hair to a considerable extent, and which I would, if I could, assimilate more nearly to this. In the dramatic art there are four, and I never yet heard of any objection to their principle, except, indeed, in the cases of some famous actors of large gains, who having through the whole period of their successes positively refused to establish a right in them, became, in their old age and decline, repentant suppliants for their bounty. Is it urged against this particular Institution that it is objectionable because a parliamentary reporter, for instance, might report a subscribing M.P. in large, and a non-subscribing M.P. in little? Apart from the sweeping nature of this charge, which, it is to be observed, lays the unfortunate member and the unfortunate reporter under pretty much the same suspicion - apart from this consideration, I reply that it is notorious in all newspaper offices that every such man is reported according to the position he can gain in the public eye, and according to the force and weight of what he has to say. And if there were ever to be among the members of this society one so very foolish to his brethren, and so very dishonourable to himself, as venally to abuse his trust, I confidently ask those here, the best acquainted with journalism, whether they believe it possible that any newspaper so ill-conducted as to fail instantly to detect him could possibly exist as a thriving enterprise for one single twelvemonth? No, ladies and gentlemen, the blundering stupidity of such an offence would have no chance against the acute sagacity of newspaper editors. But I will go further, and submit to you that its commission, if it be to be dreaded at all, is far more likely on the part of some recreant camp-follower of a scattered, disunited, and half-recognized profession, than when there is a public opinion established in it, by the union of all classes of its members for the common good: the tendency of which union must in the nature of things be to raise the lower members of the press towards the higher, and never to bring the higher members to the lower level.

I hope I may be allowed in the very few closing words that I feel a desire to say in remembrance of some circumstances, rather special, attending my present occupation of this chair, to give those words something of a personal tone. I am not here advocating the case of a mere ordinary client of whom I have little or no knowledge. I hold a brief to-night for my brothers. I went into the gallery of the House of Commons as a parliamentary reporter when I was a boy not eighteen, and I left it - I can hardly believe the inexorable truth - nigh thirty years ago. I have pursued the calling of a reporter under circumstances of which many of my brethren at home in England here, many of my modern successors, can form no adequate conception. I have often transcribed for the printer, from my shorthand notes, important public speeches in which the strictest accuracy was required, and a mistake in which would have been to a young man severely compromising, writing on the palm of my hand, by the light of a dark lantern, in a post-chaise and four, galloping through a wild country, and through the dead of the night, at the then surprising rate of fifteen miles an hour. The very last time I was at Exeter, I strolled into the castle yard there to identify, for the amusement of a friend, the spot on which I once "took," as we used to call it, an election speech of my noble friend Lord Russell, in the midst of a lively fight maintained by all the vagabonds in that division of the county, and under such a pelting rain, that I remember two goodnatured colleagues, who chanced to be at leisure, held a pocket-handkerchief over my notebook, after the manner of a state canopy in an ecclesiastical procession. I have worn my knees by writing on them on the old back row of the old gallery of the old House of Commons; and I have worn my feet by standing to write in a preposterous pen in the old House of Lords, where we used to be huddled together like so many sheep - kept in waiting, say, until the woolsack might want re-stuffing. Returning home from excited political meetings in the country to the waiting press in London, I do verily believe I have been upset in almost every description of vehicle known in this country. I have been, in my time, belated on miry by-roads, towards the small hours, forty or fifty miles from London, in a wheelless carriage, with exhausted horses and drunken postboys, and have got back in time for publication, to be received with never-forgotten compliments by the late Mr. Black, coming in the broadest of Scotch from the broadest of hearts I ever knew.

Ladies and gentlemen, I mention these trivial things as an assurance to you that I never have forgotten the fascination of that old pursuit. The pleasure that I used to feel in the rapidity and dexterity of its exercise has never faded out of my breast. Whatever little cunning of hand or head I took to it, or acquired in it, I have so retained as that I fully believe I could resume it to-morrow, very little the worse from long disuse. To this present year of my life, when I sit in this hall, or where not, hearing a dull speech, the phenomenon does occur - I sometimes beguile the tedium of the moment by mentally following the speaker in the old, old way; and sometimes, if you can believe me, I even find my hand going on the table-cloth, taking an imaginary note of it all. Accept these little truths as a confirmation of what I know; as a confirmation of my undying interest in this old calling. Accept them as a proof that my feeling for the location of my youth is not a sentiment taken up to-night to be thrown away to-morrow - but is a faithful sympathy which is a part of myself. I verily believe - I am sure - that if I had never quitted my old calling I should have been foremost and zealous in the interests of this Institution, believing it to be a sound, a wholesome, and a good one. Ladies and gentlemen, I am to propose to you to drink "Prosperity to the Newspaper Press Fund," with which toast I will connect, as to its acknowledgment, a name that has shed new brilliancy on even the foremost newspaper in the world - the illustrious name of Mr. Russell.

SPEECH: KNEBWORTH, JULY 29, 1865.

[On the above date the members of the "Guild of Literature and Art" proceeded to the neighbourhood of Stevenage, near the magnificent seat of the President, Lord Lytton, to inspect three houses built in the Gothic style, on the ground given by him for the purpose. After their survey, the party drove to Knebworth to partake of the hospitality of Lord Lytton. Mr. Dickens, who was one of the guests, proposed the health of the host in the following words:]

Ladies and gentlemen, - It was said by a very sagacious person, whose authority I am sure my friend of many years will not impugn, seeing that he was named Augustus Tomlinson, the kind friend and philosopher of Paul Clifford - it was said by that remarkable man, "Life is short, and why should speeches be long?" An aphorism so sensible under all circumstances, and particularly in the circumstances in which we are placed, with this delicious weather and such charming gardens near us, I shall practically adopt on the present occasion; and the rather so because the speech of my friend was exhaustive of the subject, as his speeches always are, though not in the least exhaustive of his audience. In thanking him for the toast which he has done us the honour to propose, allow me to correct an error into which he has fallen. Allow me to state that these houses never could have been built but for his zealous and valuable co-operation, and also that the pleasant labour out of which they have arisen would have lost one of its greatest charms and strongest impulses, if it had lost his ever ready sympathy with that class in which he has risen to the foremost rank, and of which he is the brightest ornament.

Having said this much as simply due to my friend, I can only say, on behalf of my associates, that the ladies and gentlemen whom we shall invite to occupy the houses we have built will never be placed under any social disadvantage. They will be invited to occupy them as artists, receiving them as a mark of the high respect in which they are held by their fellow-workers. As artists I hope they will often exercise their calling within those walls for the general advantage; and they will always claim, on equal terms, the hospitality of their generous neighbour.

Now I am sure I shall be giving utterance to the feelings of my brothers and sisters in literature in proposing “Health, long life, and prosperity to our distinguished host.” Ladies and gentlemen, you know very well that when the health, life, and beauty now overflowing these halls shall have fled, crowds of people will come to see the place where he lived and wrote. Setting aside the orator and statesman - for happily we know no party here but this agreeable party - setting aside all, this you know very well, that this is the home of a very great man whose connexion with Hertfordshire every other county in England will envy for many long years to come. You know that when this hall is dullest and emptiest you can make it when you please brightest and fullest by peopling it with the creations of his brilliant fancy. Let us all wish together that they may be many more - for the more they are the better it will be, and, as he always excels himself, the better they will be. I ask you to listen to their praises and not to mine, and to let them, not me, propose his health.

SPEECH: LONDON, FEBRUARY 14, 1866.

[On this occasion Mr. Dickens officiated as Chairman at the annual dinner of the Dramatic, Equestrian, and Musical Fund, at Willis's Rooms, where he made the following speech:]

Ladies, before I couple you with the gentlemen, which will be at least proper to the inscription over my head (St. Valentine's day) - before I do so, allow me, on behalf of my grateful sex here represented, to thank you for the great pleasure and interest with which your gracious presence at these festivals never fails to inspire us. There is no English custom which is so manifestly a relic of savage life as that custom which usually excludes you from participation in similar gatherings. And although the crime carries its own heavy punishment along with it, in respect that it divests a public dinner of its most beautiful ornament and of its most fascinating charm, still the offence is none the less to be severely reprehended on every possible occasion, as outraging equally nature and art. I believe that as little is known of the saint whose name is written here as can well be known of any saint or sinner. We, your loyal servants, are deeply thankful to him for having somehow gained possession of one day in the year - for having, as no doubt he has, arranged the almanac for 1866 - expressly to delight us with the enchanting fiction that we have some tender proprietorship in you which we should scarcely dare to claim on a less auspicious occasion. Ladies, the utmost devotion sanctioned by the saint we beg to lay at your feet, and any little innocent privileges to which we may be entitled by the same authority we beg respectfully but firmly to claim at your hands.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, you need no ghost to inform you that I am going to propose "Prosperity to the Dramatic, Musical, and Equestrian Sick Fund Association," and, further, that I should be going to ask you actively to promote that prosperity by liberally contributing to its funds, if that task were not reserved for a much more persuasive speaker. But I rest the strong claim of the society for its useful existence and its truly charitable functions on a very few words, though, as well as I can recollect, upon something like six grounds. First, it relieves the sick; secondly, it buries the dead; thirdly, it enables the poor members of the profession to journey to accept new engagements whenever they find themselves stranded in some remote, inhospitable place, or when, from other circumstances, they find themselves perfectly crippled as to locomotion for want of money; fourthly, it often finds such engagements for them by acting as their honest, disinterested agent; fifthly, it is its principle to act humanely upon the instant, and never, as is too often the case within my experience, to beat about the bush till the bush is withered and dead; lastly, the society is not in the least degree exclusive, but takes under its comprehensive care the whole range of the theatre and the concert-room, from the manager in his room of state, or in his caravan, or at the drum-head - down to the theatrical housekeeper, who is usually to be found amongst the cobwebs and the flies, or down to the hall porter, who passes his life in a thorough draught - and, to the best of my observation, in perpetually interrupted endeavours to eat something with a knife and fork out of a basin, by a dusty fire, in that extraordinary little gritty room, upon which the sun never shines, and on the portals of which are inscribed the magic words, “stage-door.”

Now, ladies and gentlemen, this society administers its benefits sometimes by way of loan; sometimes by way of gift; sometimes by way of assurance at very low premiums; sometimes to members, oftener to non-members; always expressly, remember, through the hands of a secretary or committee well acquainted with the wants of the applicants, and thoroughly versed, if not by hard experience at least by sympathy, in the calamities and uncertainties incidental to the general calling. One must know something of the general calling to know what those afflictions are. A lady who had been upon the stage from her earliest childhood till she was a blooming woman, and who came from a long line of provincial actors and actresses, once said to me when she was happily married; when she was rich, beloved, courted; when she was mistress of a fine house - once said to me at the head of her own table, surrounded by distinguished guests of every degree, “Oh, but I have never forgotten the hard time when I was on the stage, and when my baby brother died, and when my poor mother and I brought the little baby from Ireland to England, and acted three nights in England, as we had acted three nights in Ireland, with the pretty creature lying upon the only bed in our lodging before we got the money to pay for its funeral.”

Ladies and gentlemen, such things are, every day, to this hour; but, happily, at this day and in this hour this association has arisen to be the timely friend of such great distress.

It is not often the fault of the sufferers that they fall into these straits. Struggling artists must necessarily change from place to place, and thus it frequently happens that they become, as it were, strangers in every place, and very slight circumstances - a passing illness, the sickness of the husband, wife, or child, a serious town, an anathematising expounder of the gospel of gentleness and forbearance - any one of these causes may often in a few hours wreck them upon a rock in the barren ocean; and then, happily, this society, with the swift alacrity of the life-boat, dashes to the rescue, and takes them off. Looking just now over the last report issued by this society, and confining my scrutiny to the head of illness alone, I find that in one year, I think, 672 days of sickness had been assuaged by its means. In nine years, which then formed the term of its existence, as many as 5,500 and odd. Well, I thought when I saw 5,500 and odd days of sickness, this is a very serious sum, but add the nights! Add the nights - those long, dreary hours in the twenty-four when the shadow of death is darkest, when despondency is strongest, and when hope is weakest, before you gauge the good that is done by this institution, and before you gauge the good that really will be done by every shilling that you bestow here to-night. Add, more than all, that the improvidence, the recklessness of the general multitude of poor members of this profession, I should say is a cruel, conventional fable. Add that there is no class of society the members of which so well help themselves, or so well help each other. Not in the whole grand chapters of Westminster Abbey and York Minster, not in the whole quadrangle of the Royal Exchange, not in the whole list of members of the Stock Exchange, not in the Inns of Court, not in the College of Physicians, not in the College of Surgeons, can there possibly be found more remarkable instances of uncomplaining poverty, of cheerful, constant self-denial, of the generous remembrance of the claims of kindred and professional brotherhood, than will certainly be found in the dingiest and dirtiest concert room, in the least lucid theatre - even in the raggedest tent circus that was ever stained by weather.

I have been twitted in print before now with rather flattering actors when I address them as one of their trustees at their General Fund dinner. Believe me, I flatter nobody, unless it be sometimes myself; but, in such a company as the present, I always feel it my manful duty to bear my testimony to this fact - first, because it is opposed to a stupid, unfeeling libel; secondly, because my doing so may afford some slight encouragement to the persons who are unjustly depreciated; and lastly, and most of all, because I know it is the truth.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, it is time we should what we professionally call "ring down" on these remarks. If you, such members of the general public as are here, will only think the great theatrical curtain has really fallen and been taken up again for the night on that dull, dark vault which many of us know so well; if you will only think of the theatre or other place of entertainment as empty; if you will only think of the "float," or other gas-fittings, as extinguished; if you will only think of the people who have beguiled you of an evening's care, whose little vanities and almost childish foibles are engendered in their competing face to face with you for your favour - surely it may be said their feelings are partly of your making, while their virtues are all their own. If you will only do this, and follow them out of that sham place into the real world, where it rains real rain, snows real snow, and blows real wind; where people sustain themselves by real money, which is much harder to get, much harder to make, and very much harder to give away than the pieces of tobacco-pipe in property bags - if you will only do this, and do it in a really kind, considerate spirit, this society, then certain of the result of the night's proceedings, can ask no more. I beg to propose to you to drink "Prosperity to the Dramatic, Equestrian, and Musical Sick Fund Association."

[Mr. Dickens, in proposing the next toast, said:-]

Gentlemen: as I addressed myself to the ladies last time, so I address you this time, and I give you the delightful assurance that it is positively my last appearance but one on the present occasion. A certain Mr. Pepys, who was Secretary for the Admiralty in the days of Charles II., who kept a diary well in shorthand, which he supposed no one could read, and which consequently remains to this day the most honest diary known to print - Mr. Pepys had two special and very strong likings, the ladies and the theatres. But Mr. Pepys, whenever he committed any slight act of remissness, or any little peccadillo which was utterly and wholly untheatrical, used to comfort his conscience by recording a vow that he would abstain from the theatres for a certain time. In the first part of Mr. Pepys' character I have no doubt we fully agree with him; in the second I have no doubt we do not.

I learn this experience of Mr. Pepys from remembrance of a passage in his diary that I was reading the other night, from which it appears that he was not only curious in plays, but curious in sermons; and that one night when he happened to be walking past St. Dunstan’s Church, he turned, went in, and heard what he calls “a very edifying discourse;” during the delivery of which discourse, he notes in his diary - “I stood by a pretty young maid, whom I did attempt to take by the hand.” But he adds - “She would not; and I did perceive that she had pins in her pocket with which to prick me if I should touch her again - and was glad that I spied her design.” Afterwards, about the close of the same edifying discourse, Mr. Pepys found himself near another pretty, fair young maid, who would seem upon the whole to have had no pins, and to have been more impressible.

Now, the moral of this story which I wish to suggest to you is, that we have been this evening in St. James’s much more timid than Mr. Pepys was in St. Dunstan’s, and that we have conducted ourselves very much better. As a slight recompense to us for our highly meritorious conduct, and as a little relief to our over-charged hearts, I beg to propose that we devote this bumper to invoking a blessing on the ladies. It is the privilege of this society annually to hear a lady speak for her own sex. Who so competent to do this as Mrs. Stirling? Surely one who has so gracefully and captivatingly, with such an exquisite mixture of art, and fancy, and fidelity, represented her own sex in innumerable charities, under an infinite variety of phases, cannot fail to represent them well in her own character, especially when it is, amidst her many triumphs, the most agreeable of all. I beg to propose to you “The Ladies,” and I will couple with that toast the name of Mrs. Stirling.

SPEECH: LONDON, MARCH 28, 1866.

[The following speech was made by Mr. Dickens at the Annual Festival of the Royal General Theatrical Fund, held at the Freemasons' Tavern, in proposing the health of the Lord Mayor (Sir Benjamin Phillips), who occupied the chair.]

Gentlemen, in my childish days I remember to have had a vague but profound admiration for a certain legendary person called the Lord Mayor's fool. I had the highest opinion of the intellectual capacity of that suppositious retainer of the Mansion House, and I really regarded him with feelings approaching to absolute veneration, because my nurse informed me on every gastronomic occasion that the Lord Mayor's fool liked everything that was good. You will agree with me, I have no doubt, that if this discriminating jester had existed at the present time he could not fail to have liked his master very much, seeing that so good a Lord Mayor is very rarely to be found, and that a better Lord Mayor could not possibly be.

You have already divined, gentlemen, that I am about to propose to you to drink the health of the right honourable gentleman in the chair. As one of the Trustees of the General Theatrical Fund, I beg officially to tender him my best thanks for lending the very powerful aid of his presence, his influence, and his personal character to this very deserving Institution. As his private friends we ventured to urge upon him to do us this gracious act, and I beg to assure you that the perfect simplicity, modesty, cordiality, and frankness with which he assented, enhanced the gift one thousand fold. I think it must also be very agreeable to a company like this to know that the President of the night is not ceremoniously pretending, "positively for this night only," to have an interest in the drama, but that he has an unusual and thorough acquaintance with it, and that he has a living and discerning knowledge of the merits of the great old actors. It is very pleasant to me to remember that the Lord Mayor and I once beguiled the tedium of a journey by exchanging our experiences upon this subject. I rather prided myself on being something of an old stager, but I found the Lord Mayor so thoroughly up in all the stock pieces, and so knowing and yet so fresh about the merits of those who are most and best identified with them, that I readily recognised in him what would be called in fistic language, a very ugly customer - one, I assure you, by no means to be settled by any novice not in thorough good theatrical training.

Gentlemen, we have all known from our earliest infancy that when the giants in Guildhall hear the clock strike one, they come down to dinner. Similarly, when the City of London shall hear but one single word in just disparagement of its present Lord Mayor, whether as its enlightened chief magistrate, or as one of its merchants, or as one of its true gentlemen, he will then descend from the high personal place which he holds in the general honour and esteem. Until then he will remain upon his pedestal, and my private opinion, between ourselves, is that the giants will come down long before him.

Gentlemen, in conclusion, I would remark that when the Lord Mayor made his truly remarkable, and truly manly, and unaffected speech, I could not but be struck by the odd reversal of the usual circumstances at the Mansion House, which he presented to our view, for whereas it is a very common thing for persons to be brought tremblingly before the Lord Mayor, the Lord Mayor presented himself as being brought tremblingly before us. I hope that the result may hold still further, for whereas it is a common thing for the Lord Mayor to say to a repentant criminal who does not seem to have much harm in him, “let me never see you here again,” so I would propose that we all with one accord say to the Lord Mayor, “Let us by all means see you here again on the first opportunity.” Gentlemen, I beg to propose to you to drink, with all the honours, “The health of the right hon. the Lord Mayor.”

SPEECH: LONDON, MAY 7, 1866.

[The Members of the Metropolitan Rowing Clubs dining together at the London Tavern, on the above date, Mr. Dickens, as President of the Nautilus Rowing Club, occupied the chair. The Speech that follows was made in proposing "Prosperity to the Rowing Clubs of London." Mr. Dickens said that:-]

He could not avoid the remembrance of what very poor things the amateur rowing clubs on the Thames were in the early days of his noviciate; not to mention the difference in the build of the boats. He could not get on in the beginning without being a pupil under an anomalous creature called a "fireman waterman," who wore an eminently tall hat, and a perfectly unaccountable uniform, of which it might be said that if it was less adapted for one thing than another, that thing was fire. He recollected that this gentleman had on some former day won a King's prize wherry, and they used to go about in this accursed wherry, he and a partner, doing all the hard work, while the fireman drank all the beer. The river was very much clearer, freër, and cleaner in those days than these; but he was persuaded that this philosophical old boatman could no more have dreamt of seeing the spectacle which had taken place on Saturday (the procession of the boats of the Metropolitan Amateur Rowing Clubs), or of seeing these clubs matched for skill and speed, than he (the Chairman) should dare to announce through the usual authentic channels that he was to be heard of at the bar below, and that he was perfectly prepared to accommodate Mr. James Mace if he meant business. Nevertheless, he could recollect that he had turned out for a spurt a few years ago on the River Thames with an occasional Secretary, who should be nameless, and some other Eton boys, and that he could hold his own against them. More recently still, the last time that he rowed down from Oxford he was supposed to cover himself with honour, though he must admit that he found the "locks" so picturesque as to require much examination for the discovery of their beauty. But what he wanted to say was this, that though his "fireman waterman" was one of the greatest humbugs that ever existed, he yet taught him what an honest, healthy, manly sport this was. Their waterman would bid them pull away, and assure them that they were certain of winning in some race. And here he would remark that aquatic sports never entailed a moment’s cruelty, or a moment’s pain, upon any living creature. Rowing men pursued recreation under circumstances which braced their muscles, and cleared the cobwebs from their minds. He assured them that he regarded such clubs as these as a “national blessing.” They owed, it was true, a vast deal to steam power - as was sometimes proved at matches on the Thames - but, at the same time, they were greatly indebted to all that tended to keep up a healthy, manly tone. He understood that there had been a committee selected for the purpose of arranging a great amateur regatta, which was to take place off Putney in the course of the season that was just begun. He could not abstain from availing himself of this occasion to express a hope that the committee would successfully carry on its labours to a triumphant result, and that they should see upon the Thames, in the course of this summer, such a brilliant sight as had never been seen there before. To secure this there must be some hard work, skilful combinations, and rather large subscriptions. But although the aggregate result must be great, it by no means followed that it need be at all large in its individual details.

[In conclusion, Mr. Dickens made a laughable comparison between the paying off or purification of the national debt and the purification of the River Thames.]

SPEECH: LONDON, JUNE 5, 1867.

[On the above date Mr. Dickens presided at the Ninth Anniversary Festival of the Railway Benevolent Society, at Willis's Rooms, and in proposing the toast of the evening, made the following speech.]

Although we have not yet left behind us by the distance of nearly fifty years the time when one of the first literary authorities of this country insisted upon the speed of the fastest railway train that the Legisture might disastrously sanction being limited by Act of Parliament to ten miles an hour, yet it does somehow happen that this evening, and every evening, there are railway trains running pretty smoothly to Ireland and to Scotland at the rate of fifty miles an hour; much as it was objected in its time to vaccination, that it must have a tendency to impart to human children something of the nature of the cow, whereas I believe to this very time vaccinated children are found to be as easily defined from calves as they ever were, and certainly they have no cheapening influence on the price of veal; much as it was objected that chloroform was a contravention of the will of Providence, because it lessened providentially-inflicted pain, which would be a reason for your not rubbing your face if you had the tooth-ache, or not rubbing your nose if it itched; so it was evidently predicted that the railway system, even if anything so absurd could be productive of any result, would infallibly throw half the nation out of employment; whereas, you observe that the very cause and occasion of our coming here together to-night is, apart from the various tributary channels of occupation which it has opened out, that it has called into existence a specially and directly employed population of upwards of 200,000 persons.

Now, gentlemen, it is pretty clear and obvious that upwards of 200,000 persons engaged upon the various railways of the United Kingdom cannot be rich; and although their duties require great care and great exactness, and although our lives are every day, humanly speaking, in the hands of many of them, still, for the most of these places there will be always great competition, because they are not posts which require skilled workmen to hold. Wages, as you know very well, cannot be high where competition is great, and you also know very well that railway directors, in the bargains they make, and the salaries which they pay, have to deal with the money of the shareholders, to whom they are accountable. Thus it necessarily happens that railway officers and servants are not remunerated on the whole by any means splendidly, and that they cannot hope in the ordinary course of things to do more than meet the ordinary wants and hazards of life. But it is to be observed that the general hazards are in their case, by reason of the dangerous nature of their avocations, exceptionally great, so very great, I find, as to be stateable, on the authority of a parliamentary paper, by the very startling round of figures, that whereas one railway traveller in 8,000,000 of passengers is killed, one railway servant in every 2,000 is killed.

Hence, from general, special, as well, no doubt, for the usual prudential and benevolent considerations, there came to be established among railway officers and servants, nine years ago, the Railway Benevolent Association. I may suppose, therefore, as it was established nine years ago, that this is the ninth occasion of publishing from this chair the banns between this institution and the public. Nevertheless, I feel bound individually to do my duty the same as if it had never been done before, and to ask whether there is any just cause or impediment why these two parties - the institution and the public - should not be joined together in holy charity. As I understand the society, its objects are five-fold - first, to guarantee annuities which, it is always to be observed, is paid out of the interest of invested capital, so that those annuities may be secure and safe - annual pensions, varying from £10 to £25, to distressed railway officers and servants incapacitated by age, sickness, or accident; secondly, to guarantee small pensions to distressed widows; thirdly, to educate and maintain orphan children; fourthly, to provide temporary relief for all those classes till lasting relief can be guaranteed out of funds sufficiently large for the purpose; lastly, to induce railway officers and servants to assure their lives in some well-established office by sub-dividing the payment of the premiums into small periodical sums, and also by granting a reversionary bonus of £10 per cent. on the amount assured from the funds of the institution.

This is the society we are met to assist - simple, sympathetic, practical, easy, sensible, unpretending. The number of its members is large, and rapidly on the increase: they number 12,000; the amount of invested capital is very nearly £15,000; it has done a world of good and a world of work in these first nine years of its life; and yet I am proud to say that the annual cost of the maintenance of the institution is no more than £250. And now if you do not know all about it in a small compass, either I do not know all about it myself, or the fault must be in my "packing."

One naturally passes from what the institution is and has done, to what it wants. Well, it wants to do more good, and it cannot possibly do more good until it has more money. It cannot safely, and therefore it cannot honourably, grant more pensions to deserving applicants until it grows richer, and it cannot grow rich enough for its laudable purpose by its own unaided self. The thing is absolutely impossible. The means of these railway officers and servants are far too limited. Even if they were helped to the utmost by the great railway companies, their means would still be too limited; even if they were helped - and I hope they shortly will be - by some of the great corporations of this country, whom railways have done so much to enrich. These railway officers and servants, on their road to a very humble and modest superannuation, can no more do without the help of the great public, than the great public, on their road from Torquay to Aberdeen, can do without them. Therefore, I desire to ask the public whether the servants of the great railways - who, in fact, are their servants, their ready, zealous, faithful, hard-working servants - whether they have not established, whether they do not every day establish, a reasonable claim to liberal remembrance.

Now, gentlemen, on this point of the case there is a story once told me by a friend of mine, which seems to my mind to have a certain application. My friend was an American sea-captain, and, therefore, it is quite unnecessary to say his story was quite true. He was captain and part owner of a large American merchant liner. On a certain voyage out, in exquisite summer weather, he had for cabin passengers one beautiful young lady, and ten more or less beautiful young gentlemen. Light winds or dead calms prevailing, the voyage was slow. They had made half their distance when the ten young gentlemen were all madly in love with the beautiful young lady. They had all proposed to her, and bloodshed among the rivals seemed imminent pending the young lady's decision. On this extremity the beautiful young lady confided in my friend the captain, who gave her discreet advice. He said: "If your affections are disengaged, take that one of the young gentlemen whom you like the best and settle the question." To this the beautiful young lady made reply, "I cannot do that because I like them all equally well." My friend, who was a man of resource, hit upon this ingenious expedient, said he, "To-morrow morning at mid-day, when lunch is announced, do you plunge bodily overboard, head foremost. I will be alongside in a boat to rescue you, and take the one of the ten who rushes to your rescue, and then you can afterwards have him." The beautiful young lady highly approved, and did accordingly. But after she plunged in, nine out of the ten more or less beautiful young gentlemen plunged in after her; and the tenth remained and shed tears, looking over the side of the vessel. They were all picked up, and restored dripping to the deck. The beautiful young lady upon seeing them said, "What am I to do? See what a plight they are in. How can I possibly choose, because every one of them is equally wet?" Then said my friend the captain, acting upon a sudden inspiration, "Take the dry one." I am sorry to say that she did so, and they lived happy ever afterwards.

Now, gentleman, in my application of this story, I exactly reverse my friend the captain's anecdote, and I entreat the public in looking about to consider who are fit subjects for their bounty, to give each his hand with something in it, and not award a dry hand to the industrious railway servant who is always at his back. And I would ask any one with a doubt upon this subject to consider what his experience of the railway servant is from the time of his departure to his arrival at his destination. I know what mine is. Here he is, in velveteen or in a policeman's dress, scaling cabs, storming carriages, finding lost articles by a sort of instinct, binding up lost umbrellas and walking sticks, wheeling trucks, counselling old ladies, with a wonderful interest in their affairs - mostly very complicated - and sticking labels upon all sorts of articles. I look around - there he is, in a station-master's uniform, directing and overseeing, with the head of a general, and with the courteous manners of a gentleman; and then there is the handsome figure of the guard, who inspires confidence in timid passengers. I glide out of the station, and there he is again with his flags in his hand at his post in the open country, at the level crossing, at the cutting, at the tunnel mouth, and at every station on the road until our destination is reached. In regard, therefore, to the railway servants with whom we do come into contact, we may surely have some natural sympathy, and it is on their behalf that I this night appeal to you. I beg now to propose "Success to the Railway Benevolent Society."

SPEECH: LONDON, SEPTEMBER 17, 1867.

[On presiding at a public Meeting of the Printers' Readers, held at the Salisbury Hotel, on the above date, Mr. Dickens said:-]

That as the meeting was convened, not to hear him, but to hear a statement of facts and figures very nearly affecting the personal interests of the great majority of those present, his preface to the proceedings need be very brief. Of the details of the question he knew, of his own knowledge, absolutely nothing; but he had consented to occupy the chair on that occasion at the request of the London Association of Correctors of the Press for two reasons - first, because he thought that openness and publicity in such cases were a very wholesome example very much needed at this time, and were highly becoming to a body of men associated with that great public safeguard - the Press; secondly, because he knew from some slight practical experience, what the duties of correctors of the press were, and how their duties were usually discharged; and he could testify, and did testify, that they were not mechanical, that they were not mere matters of manipulation and routine; but that they required from those who performed them much natural intelligence, much super-added cultivation, readiness of reference, quickness of resource, an excellent memory, and a clear understanding. He most gratefully acknowledged that he had never gone through the sheets of any book that he had written, without having presented to him by the correctors of the press something that he had overlooked, some slight inconsistency into which he had fallen, some little lapse he had made - in short, without having set down in black and white some unquestionable indication that he had been closely followed through the work by a patient and trained mind, and not merely by a skilful eye. And in this declaration he had not the slightest doubt that the great body of his brother and sister writers would, as a plain act of justice, readily concur. For these plain reasons he was there; and being there he begged to assure them that every one present - that every speaker - would have a patient hearing, whatever his opinions might be.

[The proceedings concluded with a very cordial and hearty vote of thanks to Mr. Dickens for taking the chair on the occasion.]

Mr. Dickens briefly returned thanks, and expressed the belief that their very calm and temperate proceedings would finally result in the establishment of relations of perfect amity between the employers and the employed, and consequently conduce to the general welfare of both.

SPEECH: LONDON, NOVEMBER 2, 1867.

[On Saturday evening, November 2, 1867, a grand complimentary farewell dinner was given to Mr. Dickens at the Freemasons' Tavern on the occasion of his revisiting the United States of America. Lord Lytton officiated as chairman, and proposed as a toast - "A Prosperous Voyage, Health, and Long Life to our Illustrious Guest and Countryman, Charles Dickens". The toast was drunk with all the honours, and one cheer more. Mr. Dickens then rose, and spoke as follows:]

No thanks that I can offer you can express my sense of my reception by this great assemblage, or can in the least suggest to you how deep the glowing words of my friend the chairman, and your acceptance of them, have sunk into my heart. But both combined have so greatly shaken the composure which I am used to command before an audience, that I hope you may observe in me some traces of an eloquence more expressive than the richest words. To say that I am fervently grateful to you is to say nothing; to say that I can never forget this beautiful sight, is to say nothing; to say that it brings upon me a rush of emotion not only in the present, but in the thought of its remembrance in the future by those who are dearest to me, is to say nothing; but to feel all this for the moment, even almost to pain, is very much indeed. Mercutio says of the wound in his breast, dealt him by the hand of a foe, that - "'Tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door; but 'tis enough, 'twill serve." {15} I may say of the wound in my breast, newly dealt to me by the hands of my friends, that it is deeper than the soundless sea, and wider than the whole Catholic Church. I may safely add that it has for the moment almost stricken me dumb. I should be more than human, and I assure you I am very human indeed, if I could look around upon this brilliant representative company and not feel greatly thrilled and stirred by the presence of so many brother artists, not only in literature, but also in the sister arts, especially painting, among whose professors living and unhappily dead, are many of my oldest and best friends. I hope that I may, without presumption, regard this thronging of my brothers around me as a testimony on their part that they believe that the cause of art generally has been safe in my keeping, and that it has never been falsely dealt with by me. Your resounding cheers just now would have been but so many cruel reproaches to me if I could not here declare that, from the earliest days of my career down to this proud night, I have always tried to be true to my calling. Never unduly to assert it, on the one hand, and never, on any pretence or consideration, to permit it to be patronized in my person, has been the steady endeavour of my life; and I have occasionally been vain enough to hope that I may leave its social position in England better than I found it. Similarly, and equally I hope without presumption, I trust that I may take this general representation of the public here, through so many orders, pursuits, and degrees, as a token that the public believe that, with a host of imperfections and shortcomings on my head, I have as a writer, in my soul and conscience, tried to be as true to them as they have ever been true to me. And here, in reference to the inner circle of the arts and the outer circle of the public, I feel it a duty to-night to offer two remarks. I have in my duty at odd times heard a great deal about literary sets and cliques, and coteries and barriers; about keeping this man up, and keeping that man down; about sworn disciples and sworn unbelievers, and mutual admiration societies, and I know not what other dragons in the upward path. I began to tread it when I was very young, without influence, without money, without companion, introducer, or adviser, and I am bound to put in evidence in this place that I never lighted on these dragons yet. So have I heard in my day, at divers other odd times, much generally to the effect that the English people have little or no love of art for its own sake, and that they do not greatly care to acknowledge or do honour to the artist. My own experience has uniformly been exactly the reverse. I can say that of my countrymen, though I cannot say that of my country.

And now passing to the immediate occasion of your doing me this great honour, the story of my going again to America is very easily and briefly told. Since I was there before a vast and entirely new generation has arisen in the United States. Since I was there before most of the best known of my books have been written and published; the new generation and the books have come together and have kept together, until at length numbers of those who have so widely and constantly read me; naturally desiring a little variety in the relationship between us, have expressed a strong wish that I should read myself. This wish, at first conveyed to me through public channels and business channels, has gradually become enforced by an immense accumulation of letters from individuals and associations of individuals, all expressing in the same hearty, homely, cordial unaffected way, a kind of personal interest in me - I had almost said a kind of personal affection for me, which I am sure you would agree with me it would be dull insensibility on my part not to prize. Little by little this pressure has become so great that, although, as Charles Lamb says, my household gods strike a terribly deep root, I have torn them from their places, and this day week, at this hour, shall be upon the sea. You will readily conceive that I am inspired besides by a natural desire to see for myself the astonishing change and progress of a quarter of a century over there, to grasp the hands of many faithful friends whom I left there, to see the faces of the multitude of new friends upon whom I have never looked, and last, not least, to use my best endeavour to lay down a third cable of intercommunication and alliance between the old world and the new. Twelve years ago, when Heaven knows I little thought I should ever be bound upon the voyage which now lies before me, I wrote in that form of my writings which obtains by far the most extensive circulation, these words of the American nation:- "I know full well, whatever little motes my beamy eyes may have descried in theirs, that they are a kind, large-hearted, generous, and great people." In that faith I am going to see them again; in that faith I shall, please God, return from them in the spring; in that same faith to live and to die. I told you in the beginning that I could not thank you enough, and Heaven knows I have most thoroughly kept my word. If I may quote one other short sentence from myself, let it imply all that I have left unsaid, and yet most deeply feel. Let it, putting a girdle round the earth, comprehend both sides of the Atlantic at once in this moment, and say, as Tiny Tim observes, "God bless us every one."

SPEECH: BOSTON, APRIL 8, 1868.

[Mr. Dickens gave his last Reading at Boston, on the above date. On his entrance a surprise awaited him. His reading-stand had been decorated with flowers and palm-leaves by some of the ladies of the city. He acknowledged this graceful tribute in the following words:- "Before allowing Dr. Marigold to tell his story in his own peculiar way, I kiss the kind, fair hands unknown, which have so beautifully decorated my table this evening." After the Reading, Mr. Dickens attempted in vain to retire. Persistent hands demanded "one word more." Returning to his desk, pale, with a tear in his eye, that found its way to his voice, he spoke as follows:-]

Ladies and gentlemen, - My gracious and generous welcome in America, which can never be obliterated from my remembrance, began here. My departure begins here, too; for I assure you that I have never until this moment really felt that I am going away. In this brief life of ours, it is sad to do almost anything for the last time, and I cannot conceal from you, although my face will so soon be turned towards my native land, and to all that makes it dear, that it is a sad consideration with me that in a very few moments from this time, this brilliant hall and all that it contains, will fade from my view - for ever more. But it is my consolation that the spirit of the bright faces, the quick perception, the ready response, the generous and the cheering sounds that have made this place delightful to me, will remain; and you may rely upon it that that spirit will abide with me as long as I have sense and sentiment left.

I do not say this with any limited reference to private friendships that have for years upon years made Boston a memorable and beloved spot to me, for such private references have no business in this public place. I say it purely in remembrance of, and in homage to, the great public heart before me.

Ladies and gentlemen, I beg most earnestly, most gratefully, and most affectionately, to bid you, each and all, farewell

SPEECH: NEW YORK, APRIL 18, 1863.

[On the above date Mr. Dickens was entertained at a farewell dinner at Delmonico's Hotel, previous to his return to England. Two hundred gentlemen sat down to it; Mr. Horace Greeley presiding. In acknowledgment of the toast of his health, proposed by the chairman, Mr. Dickens rose and said:-]

Gentlemen, - I cannot do better than take my cue to from your distinguished president, and refer in my first remarks to his remarks in connexion with the old, natural, association between you and me. When I received an invitation from a private association of working members of the press of New York to dine with them to-day, I accepted that compliment in grateful remembrance of a calling that was once my own, and in loyal sympathy towards a brotherhood which, in the spirit, I have never quieted. To the wholesome training of severe newspaper work, when I was a very young man, I constantly refer my first successes; and my sons will hereafter testify of their father that he was always steadily proud of that ladder by which he rose. If it were otherwise, I should have but a very poor opinion of their father, which, perhaps, upon the whole, I have not. Hence, gentlemen, under any circumstances, this company would have been exceptionally interesting and gratifying to me. But whereas I supposed that, like the fairies' pavilion in the "Arabian Nights," it would be but a mere handful, and I find it turn out, like the same elastic pavilion, capable of comprehending a multitude, so much the more proud am I of the honour of being your guest; for you will readily believe that the more widely representative of the press in America my entertainers are, the more I must feel the good-will and the kindly sentiments towards me of that vast institution.

Gentlemen, so much of my voice has lately been heard in the land, and I have for upwards of four hard winter months so contended against what I have been sometimes quite admiringly assured was "a true American catarrh " - a possession which I have throughout highly appreciated, though I might have preferred to be naturalised by any other outward and visible signs - I say, gentlemen, so much of my voice has lately been heard, that I might have been contented with troubling you no further from my present standing-point, were it not a duty with which I henceforth charge myself, not only here but on every suitable occasion whatsoever and wheresoever, to express my high and grateful sense of my second reception in America, and to bear my honest testimony to the national generosity and magnanimity. Also, to declare how astounded I have been by the amazing changes that I have seen around me on every side - changes moral, changes physical, changes in the amount of land subdued and peopled, changes in the rise of vast new cities, changes in the growth of older cities almost out of recognition, changes in the graces and amenities of life, changes in the press, without whose advancement no advancement can be made anywhere. Nor am I, believe me, so arrogant as to suppose that in five-and-twenty years there have been no changes in me, and that I had nothing to learn and no extreme impressions to correct when I was here first.

And, gentlemen, this brings me to a point on which I have, ever since I landed here last November, observed a strict silence, though tempted sometimes to break it, but in reference to which I will, with your good leave, take you into my confidence now. Even the press, being human, may be sometimes mistaken or misinformed, and I rather think that I have in one or two rare instances known its information to be not perfectly accurate with reference to myself. Indeed, I have now and again been more surprised by printed news that I have read of myself than by any printed news that I have ever read in my present state of existence. Thus, the vigour and perseverance with which I have for some months past been collecting materials for and hammering away at a new book on America have much astonished me, seeing that all that time it has been perfectly well known to my publishers on both sides of the Atlantic that I positively declared that no consideration on earth should induce me to write one. But what I have intended, what I have resolved upon (and this is the confidence I seek to place in you) is, on my return to England, in my own person, to bear, for the behoof of my countrymen, such testimony to the gigantic changes in this country as I have hinted at to-night. Also, to record that wherever I have been, in the smallest places equally with the largest, I have been received with unsurpassable politeness, delicacy, sweet temper, hospitality, consideration, and with unsurpassable respect for the privacy daily enforced upon me by the nature of my avocation here, and the state of my health. This testimony, so long as I live, and so long as my descendants have any legal right in my books, I shall cause to be re-published, as an appendix to every copy of those two books of mine in which I have referred to America. And this I will do and cause to be done, not in mere love and thankfulness, but because I regard it as an act of plain justice and honour.

Gentlemen, the transition from my own feelings towards and interest in America to those of the mass of my countrymen seems to be a natural one; but, whether or no, I make it with an express object. I was asked in this very city, about last Christmas time, whether an American was not at some disadvantage in England as a foreigner. The notion of an American being regarded in England as a foreigner at all, of his ever being thought of or spoken of in that character, was so uncommonly incongruous and absurd to me, that my gravity was, for the moment, quite overpowered. As soon as it was restored, I said that for years and years past I hoped I had had as many American friends and had received as many American visitors as almost any Englishman living, and that my unvarying experience, fortified by theirs, was that it was enough in England to be an American to be received with the readiest respect and recognition anywhere. Hereupon, out of half-a-dozen people, suddenly spoke out two, one an American gentleman, with a cultivated taste for art, who, finding himself on a certain Sunday outside the walls of a certain historical English castle, famous for its pictures, was refused admission there, according to the strict rules of the establishment on that day, but who, on merely representing that he was an American gentleman, on his travels, had, not to say the picture gallery, but the whole castle, placed at his immediate disposal. The other was a lady, who, being in London, and having a great desire to see the famous reading-room of the British Museum, was assured by the English family with whom she stayed that it was unfortunately impossible, because the place was closed for a week, and she had only three days there. Upon that lady's going to the Museum, as she assured me, alone to the gate, self-introduced as an American lady, the gate flew open, as it were magically. I am unwillingly bound to add that she certainly was young and exceedingly pretty. Still, the porter of that institution is of an obese habit, and, according to the best of my observation of him, not very impressible.

Now, gentlemen, I refer to these trifles as a collateral assurance to you that the Englishman who shall humbly strive, as I hope to do, to be in England as faithful to America as to England herself, has no previous conceptions to contend against. Points of difference there have been, points of difference there are, points of difference there probably always will be between the two great peoples. But broadcast in England is sown the sentiment that those two peoples are essentially one, and that it rests with them jointly to uphold the great Anglo-Saxon race, to which our president has referred, and all its great achievements before the world. And if I know anything of my countrymen - and they give me credit for knowing something - if I know anything of my countrymen, gentlemen, the English heart is stirred by the fluttering of those Stars and Stripes, as it is stirred by no other flag that flies except its own. If I know my countrymen, in any and every relation towards America, they begin, not as Sir Anthony Absolute recommended that lovers should begin, with "a little aversion," but with a great liking and a profound respect; and whatever the little sensitiveness of the moment, or the little official passion, or the little official policy now, or then, or here, or there, may be, take my word for it, that the first enduring, great, popular consideration in England is a generous construction of justice.

Finally, gentlemen, and I say this subject to your correction, I do believe that from the great majority of honest minds on both sides, there cannot be absent the conviction that it would be better for this globe to be riven by an earthquake, fired by a comet, overrun by an iceberg, and abandoned to the Arctic fox and bear, than that it should present the spectacle of these two great nations, each of which has, in its own way and hour, striven so hard and so successfully for freedom, ever again being arrayed the one against the other. Gentlemen, I cannot thank your president enough or you enough for your kind reception of my health, and of my poor remarks, but, believe me, I do thank you with the utmost fervour of which my soul is capable.

SPEECH: NEW YORK, APRIL 20, 1868.

[Mr. Dickens's last Reading in the United States was given at the Steinway Hall on the above date. The task finished he was about to retire, but a tremendous burst of applause stopped him. He came forward and spoke thus:-]

Ladies and gentlemen, - The shadow of one word has impended over me this evening, and the time has come at length when the shadow must fall. It is but a very short one, but the weight of such things is not measured by their length, and two much shorter words express the round of our human existence. When I was reading "David Copperfield" a few evenings since, I felt there was more than usual significance in the words of Peggotty, "My future life lies over the sea." And when I closed this book just now, I felt most keenly that I was shortly to establish such an *alibi* as would have satisfied even the elder Mr. Weller. The relations which have been set up between us, while they have involved for me something more than mere devotion to a task, have been by you sustained with the readiest sympathy and the kindest acknowledgment.

Those relations must now be broken for ever. Be assured, however, that you will not pass from my mind. I shall often realise you as I see you now, equally by my winter fire and in the green English summer weather. I shall never recall you as a mere public audience, but rather as a host of personal friends, and ever with the greatest gratitude, tenderness, and consideration. Ladies and gentlemen, I beg to bid you farewell. God bless you, and God bless the land in which I leave you.

SPEECH: LIVERPOOL, APRIL 10, 1869.

[The following speech was delivered by Mr. Dickens at a Banquet held in his honour at St. George’s Hall, Liverpool, after his health had been proposed by Lord Dufferin.]

Mr. Mayor, ladies and gentlemen, although I have been so well accustomed of late to the sound of my own voice in this neighbourhood as to hear it with perfect composure, the occasion is, believe me, very, very different in respect of those overwhelming voices of yours. As Professor Wilson once confided to me in Edinburgh that I had not the least idea, from hearing him in public, what a magnificent speaker he found himself to be when he was quite alone - so you can form no conception, from the specimen before you, of the eloquence with which I shall thank you again and again in some of the innermost moments of my future life. Often and often, then, God willing, my memory will recall this brilliant scene, and will re-illuminate this banquet-hall. I, faithful to this place in its present aspect, will observe it exactly as it stands - not one man’s seat empty, not one woman’s fair face absent, while life and memory abide by me.

Mr. Mayor, Lord Dufferin in his speech so affecting to me, so eloquently uttered, and so rapturously received, made a graceful and gracious allusion to the immediate occasion of my present visit to your noble city. It is no homage to Liverpool, based upon a moment’s untrustworthy enthusiasm, but it is the solid fact built upon the rock of experience that when I first made up my mind, after considerable deliberation, systematically to meet my readers in large numbers, face to face, and to try to express myself to them through the breath of life, Liverpool stood foremost among the great places out of London to which I looked with eager confidence and pleasure. And why was this? Not merely because of the reputation of its citizens for generous estimation of the arts; not merely because I had unworthily filled the chair of its great self-educational institution long ago; not merely because the place had been a home to me since the well-remembered day when its blessed roofs and steeples dipped into the Mersey behind me on the occasion of my first sailing away to see my generous friends across the Atlantic twenty-seven years ago. Not for one of those considerations, but because it had been my happiness to have a public opportunity of testing the spirit of its people. I had asked Liverpool for help towards the worthy preservation of Shakespeare's house. On another occasion I had ventured to address Liverpool in the names of Leigh Hunt and Sheridan Knowles. On still another occasion I had addressed it in the cause of the brotherhood and sisterhood of letters and the kindred arts, and on each and all the response had been unsurpassably spontaneous, open-handed, and munificent.

Mr. Mayor, and ladies and gentlemen, if I may venture to take a small illustration of my present position from my own peculiar craft, I would say that there is this objection in writing fiction to giving a story an autobiographical form, that through whatever dangers the narrator may pass, it is clear unfortunately to the reader beforehand that he must have come through them somehow else he could not have lived to tell the tale. Now, in speaking fact, when the fact is associated with such honours as those with which you have enriched me, there is this singular difficulty in the way of returning thanks, that the speaker must infallibly come back to himself through whatever oratorical disasters he may languish on the road. Let me, then, take the plainer and simpler middle course of dividing my subject equally between myself and you. Let me assure you that whatever you have accepted with pleasure, either by word of pen or by word of mouth, from me, you have greatly improved in the acceptance. As the gold is said to be doubly and trebly refined which has seven times passed the furnace, so a fancy may be said to become more and more refined each time it passes through the human heart. You have, and you know you have, brought to the consideration of me that quality in yourselves without which I should but have beaten the air. Your earnestness has stimulated mine, your laughter has made me laugh, and your tears have overflowed my eyes. All that I can claim for myself in establishing the relations which exist between us is constant fidelity to hard work. My literary fellows about me, of whom I am so proud to see so many, know very well how true it is in all art that what seems the easiest done is oftentimes the most difficult to do, and that the smallest truth may come of the greatest pains - much, as it occurred to me at Manchester the other day, as the sensitive touch of Mr. Whitworth's measuring machine, comes at last, of Heaven and Manchester and its mayor only know how much hammering - my companions-in-arms know thoroughly well, and I think it only right the public should know too, that in our careful toil and trouble, and in our steady striving for excellence

- not in any little gifts, misused by fits and starts - lies our highest duty at once to our calling, to one another, to ourselves, and to you.

Ladies and gentlemen, before sitting down I find that I have to clear myself of two very unexpected accusations. The first is a most singular charge preferred against me by my old friend Lord Houghton, that I have been somewhat unconscious of the merits of the House of Lords. Now, ladies and gentlemen, seeing that I have had some few not altogether obscure or unknown personal friends in that assembly, seeing that I had some little association with, and knowledge of, a certain obscure peer lately known in England by the name of Lord Brougham; seeing that I regard with some admiration and affection another obscure peer wholly unknown in literary circles, called Lord Lytton; seeing also that I have had for some years some slight admiration of the extraordinary judicial properties and amazingly acute mind of a certain Lord Chief Justice popularly known by the name of Cockburn; and also seeing that there is no man in England whom I respect more in his public capacity, whom I love more in his private capacity, or from whom I have received more remarkable proofs of his honour and love of literature than another obscure nobleman called Lord Russell; taking these circumstances into consideration, I was rather amazed by my noble friend's accusation. When I asked him, on his sitting down, what amazing devil possessed him to make this charge, he replied that he had never forgotten the days of Lord Verisopht. Then, ladies and gentlemen, I understood it all. Because it is a remarkable fact that in the days when that depreciative and profoundly unnatural character was invented there was no Lord Houghton in the House of Lords. And there was in the House of Commons a rather indifferent member called Richard Monckton Milnes.

Ladies and gentlemen, to conclude, for the present, I close with the other charge of my noble friend, and here I am more serious, and I may be allowed perhaps to express my seriousness in half a dozen plain words. When I first took literature as my profession in England, I calmly resolved within myself that, whether I succeeded or whether I failed, literature should be my sole profession. It appeared to me at that time that it was not so well understood in England as it was in other countries that literature was a dignified profession, by which any man might stand or fall. I made a compact with myself that in my person literature should stand, and by itself, of itself, and for itself; and there is no consideration on earth which would induce me to break that bargain.

Ladies and gentlemen, finally allow me to thank you for your great kindness, and for the touching earnestness with which you have drunk my health. I should have thanked you with all my heart if it had not so unfortunately happened that, for many sufficient reasons, I lost my heart at between half-past six and half-past seven to-night.

SPEECH: THE OXFORD AND HARVARD BOAT RACE. SYDENHAM, AUGUST 30, 1869.

[The International University Boat Race having taken place on August 27, the London Rowing Club invited the Crews to a Dinner at the Crystal Palace on the following Monday. The dinner was followed by a grand display of pyrotechnics. Mr. Dickens, in proposing the health of the Crews, made the following speech:]

Gentlemen, flushed with fireworks, I can warrant myself to you as about to imitate those gorgeous illusions by making a brief spirt and then dying out. And, first of all, as an invited visitor of the London Rowing Club on this most interesting occasion, I will beg, in the name of the other invited visitors present - always excepting the distinguished guests who are the cause of our meeting - to thank the president for the modesty and the courtesy with which he has deputed to one of us the most agreeable part of his evening's duty. It is the more graceful in him to do this because he can hardly fail to see that he might very easily do it himself, as this is a case of all others in which it is according to good taste and the very principles of things that the great social vice, speech-making, should hide it diminished head before the great social virtue action. However, there is an ancient story of a lady who threw her glove into an arena full of wild beasts to tempt her attendant lover to climb down and reclaim it. The lover, rightly inferring from the action the worth of the lady, risked his life for the glove, and then threw it rightly in her face as a token of his eternal adieu. {16} I take up the President's glove, on the contrary, as a proof of his much higher worth, and of my real interest in the cause in which it was thrown down, and I now profess my readiness to do even injustice to the duty which he has assigned me.

Gentlemen, a very remarkable and affecting volume was published in the United States within a short time before my last visit to that hospitable land, containing ninety-five biographies of young men, for the most part well-born and well nurtured, and trained in various peaceful pursuits of life, who, when the flag of their country waved them from those quiet paths in which they were seeking distinction of various kinds, took arms in the dread civil war which elicited so much bravery on both sides, and died in the defence of their country. These great spirits displayed extraordinary aptitude in the acquisition, even in the invention, of military tactics, in the combining and commanding of great masses of men, in surprising readiness of self-resource for the general good, in humanely treating the sick and the wounded, and in winning to themselves a very rare amount of personal confidence and trust. They had all risen to be distinguished soldiers; they had all done deeds of great heroism; they had all combined with their valour and self-devotion a serene cheerfulness, a quiet modesty, and a truly Christian spirit; and they had all been educated in one school - Harvard University.

Gentlemen, nothing was more remarkable in these fine descendants of our forefathers than the invincible determination with which they fought against odds, and the undauntable spirit with which they resisted defeat. I ask you, who will say after last Friday that Harvard University is less true to herself in peace than she was in war? I ask you, who will not recognise in her boat's crew the leaven of her soldiers, and who does not feel that she has now a greater right than ever to be proud of her sons, and take these sons to her breast when they return with resounding acclamations? It is related of the Duke of Wellington that he once told a lady who foolishly protested that she would like to see a great victory that there was only one thing worse than a great victory, and that was a great defeat.

But, gentlemen, there is another sense in which to use the term a great defeat. Such is the defeat of a handful of daring fellows who make a preliminary dash of three or four thousand stormy miles to meet great conquerors on their own domain - who do not want the stimulus of friends and home, but who sufficiently hear and feel their own dear land in the shouts and cheers of another - and who strive to the last with a desperate tenacity that makes the beating of them a new feather in the proudest cap. Gentlemen, you agree with me that such a defeat is a great, noble part of a manly, wholesome action; and I say that it is in the essence and life-blood of such a defeat to become at last sure victory.

Now, gentlemen, you know perfectly well the toast I am going to propose, and you know equally well that in thus glancing first towards our friends of the white stripes, I merely anticipate and respond to the instinctive courtesy of Oxford towards our brothers from a distance - a courtesy extending, I hope, and I do not doubt, to any imaginable limits except allowing them to take the first place in last Friday's match, if they could by any human and honourable means be kept in the second. I will not avail myself of the opportunity provided for me by the absence of the greater part of the Oxford crew - indeed, of all but one, and that, its most modest and devoted member - I will not avail myself of the golden opportunity considerately provided for me to say a great deal in honour of the Oxford crew. I know that the gentleman who attends here attends under unusual anxieties and difficulties, and that if he were less in earnest his filial affection could not possibly allow him to be here.

It is therefore enough for me, gentlemen, and enough for you, that I should say here, and now, that we all unite with one accord in regarding the Oxford crew as the pride and flower of England - and that we should consider it very weak indeed to set anything short of England's very best in opposition to or competition with America; though it certainly must be confessed - I am bound in common justice and honour to admit it - it must be confessed in disparagement of the Oxford men, as I heard a discontented gentleman remark - last Friday night, about ten o'clock, when he was baiting a very small horse in the Strand - he was one of eleven with pipes in a chaise cart - I say it must be admitted in disparagement of the Oxford men on the authority of this gentleman, that they have won so often that they could afford to lose a little now, and that "they ought to do it, but they won't."

Gentlemen, in drinking to both crews, and in offering the poor testimony of our thanks in acknowledgment of the gallant spectacle which they presented to countless thousands last Friday, I am sure I express not only your feeling, and my feeling, and the feeling of the Blue, but also the feeling of the whole people of England, when I cordially give them welcome to our English waters and English ground, and also bid them "God speed" in their voyage home. As the greater includes the less, and the sea holds the river, so I think it is no very bold augury to predict that in the friendly contests yet to come and to take place, I hope, on both sides of the Atlantic - there are great river triumphs for Harvard University yet in store. Gentlemen, I warn the English portion of this audience that these are very dangerous men. Remember that it was an undergraduate of Harvard University who served as a common seaman two years before the mast, {17} and who wrote about the best sea book in the English tongue.

Remember that it was one of those young American gentlemen who sailed his mite of a yacht across the Atlantic in mid-winter, and who sailed in her to sink or swim with the men who believed in him.

And now, gentlemen, in conclusion, animated by your cordial acquiescence, I will take upon myself to assure our brothers from a distance that the utmost enthusiasm with which they can be received on their return home will find a ready echo in every corner of England - and further, that none of their immediate countrymen - I use the qualifying term immediate, for we are, as our president said, fellow countrymen, thank God - that none of their compatriots who saw, or who will read of, what they did in this great race, can be more thoroughly imbued with a sense of their indomitable courage and their high deserts than are their rivals and their hosts to-night.

Gentlemen, I beg to propose to you to drink the crews of Harvard and Oxford University, and I beg to couple with that toast the names of Mr. Simmons and Mr. Willan.

SPEECH: BIRMINGHAM, SEPTEMBER 27, 1869.

[Inaugural Address on the opening of the Winter Session of the Birmingham and Midland Institute.

One who was present during the delivery of the following speech, informs the editor that "no note of any kind was referred to by Mr. Dickens - except the Quotation from Sydney Smith. The address, evidently carefully prepared, was delivered without a single pause, in Mr. Dickens's best manner, and was a very great success."]

Ladies and gentlemen, - We often hear of our common country that it is an over-populated one, that it is an over-pauperized one, that it is an over-colonizing one, and that it is an over-taxed one. Now, I entertain, especially of late times, the heretical belief that it is an over-talked one, and that there is a deal of public speech-making going about in various directions which might be advantageously dispensed with. If I were free to act upon this conviction, as president for the time being of the great institution so numerously represented here, I should immediately and at once subside into a golden silence, which would be of a highly edifying, because of a very exemplary character. But I happen to be the institution's willing servant, not its imperious master, and it exacts tribute of mere silver or copper speech - not to say brazen - from whomsoever it exalts to my high office. Some African tribes - not to draw the comparison disrespectfully - some savage African tribes, when they make a king require him perhaps to achieve an exhausting foot-race under the stimulus of considerable popular prodding and goading, or perhaps to be severely and experimentally knocked about the head by his Privy Council, or perhaps to be dipped in a river full of crocodiles, or perhaps to drink immense quantities of something nasty out of a calabash - at all events, to undergo some purifying ordeal in presence of his admiring subjects.

I must confess that I became rather alarmed when I was duly warned by your constituted authorities that whatever I might happen to say here to-night would be termed an inaugural address on the entrance upon a new term of study by the members of your various classes; for, besides that, the phrase is something high-sounding for my taste, I avow that I do look forward to that blessed time when every man shall inaugurate his own work for himself, and do it. I believe that we shall then have inaugurated a new era indeed, and one in which the Lord's Prayer will become a fulfilled prophecy upon this earth. Remembering, however, that you may call anything by any name without in the least changing its nature - bethinking myself that you may, if you be so minded, call a butterfly a buffalo, without advancing a hair's breadth towards making it one - I became composed in my mind, and resolved to stick to the very homely intention I had previously formed. This was merely to tell you, the members, students, and friends of the Birmingham and Midland Institute - firstly, what you cannot possibly want to know, (this is a very popular oratorical theme); secondly, what your institution has done; and, thirdly, what, in the poor opinion of its President for the time being, remains for it to do and not to do.

Now, first, as to what you cannot possibly want to know. You cannot need from me any oratorical declamation concerning the abstract advantages of knowledge or the beauties of self-improvement. If you had any such requirement you would not be here. I conceive that you are here because you have become thoroughly penetrated with such principles, either in your own persons or in the persons of some striving fellow-creatures, on whom you have looked with interest and sympathy. I conceive that you are here because you feel the welfare of the great chiefly adult educational establishment, whose doors stand really open to all sorts and conditions of people, to be inseparable from the best welfare of your great town and its neighbourhood. Nay, if I take a much wider range than that, and say that we all - every one of us here - perfectly well know that the benefits of such an establishment must extend far beyond the limits of this midland county - its fires and smoke, - and must comprehend, in some sort, the whole community, I do not strain the truth. It was suggested by Mr. Babbage, in his ninth "Bridgewater Treatise," that a mere spoken word - a single articulated syllable thrown into the air - may go on reverberating through illimitable space for ever and for ever, seeing that there is no rim against which it can strike - no boundary at which it can possibly arrive. Similarly it may be said - not as an ingenious speculation, but as a stedfast and absolute fact - that human calculation cannot limit the influence of one atom of wholesome knowledge patiently acquired, modestly possessed, and faithfully used.

As the astronomers tell us that it is probable that there are in the universe innumerable solar systems besides ours, to each of which myriads of utterly unknown and unseen stars belong, so it is certain that every man, however obscure, however far removed from the general recognition, is one of a group of men impressible for good, and impressible for evil, and that it is in the eternal nature of things that he cannot really improve himself without in some degree improving other men. And observe, this is especially the case when he has improved himself in the teeth of adverse circumstances, as in a maturity succeeding to a neglected or an ill-taught youth, in the few daily hours remaining to him after ten or twelve hours' labour, in the few pauses and intervals of a life of toil; for then his fellows and companions have assurance that he can have known no favouring conditions, and that they can do what he has done, in wresting some enlightenment and self-respect from what Lord Lytton finely calls -

"Those twin gaolers of the daring heart,
Low birth and iron fortune."

As you have proved these truths in your own experience or in your own observation, and as it may be safely assumed that there can be very few persons in Birmingham, of all places under heaven, who would contest the position that the more cultivated the employed the better for the employer, and the more cultivated the employer the better for the employed; therefore, my references to what you do not want to know shall here cease and determine.

Next, with reference to what your institution has done on my summary, which shall be as concise and as correct as my information and my remembrance of it may render possible, I desire to lay emphatic stress. Your institution, sixteen years old, and in which masters and workmen study together, has outgrown the ample edifice in which it receives its 2,500 or 2,600 members and students. It is a most cheering sign of its vigorous vitality that of its industrial-students almost half are artisans in the receipt of weekly wages. I think I am correct in saying that 400 others are clerks, apprentices, tradesmen, or tradesmen's sons. I note with particular pleasure the adherence of a goodly number of the gentler sex, without whom no institution whatever can truly claim to be either a civilising or a civilised one. The increased attendance at your educational classes is always greatest on the part of the artisans - the class within my experience the least reached in any similar institutions elsewhere, and whose name is the oftenest and the most constantly taken in vain. But it is specially reached here, not improbably because it is, as it should be, specially addressed in the foundation of the industrial department, in the allotment of the direction of the society's affairs, and in the establishment of what are called its penny classes - a bold, and, I am happy to say, a triumphantly successful experiment, which enables the artisan to obtain sound evening instruction in subjects directly bearing upon his daily usefulness or on his daily happiness, as arithmetic (elementary and advanced), chemistry, physical geography, and singing, on payment of the astoundingly low fee of a single penny every time he attends the class. I beg emphatically to say that I look upon this as one of the most remarkable schemes ever devised for the educational behoof of the artisan, and if your institution had done nothing else in all its life, I would take my stand by it on its having done this.

Apart, however, from its industrial department, it has its general department, offering all the advantages of a first-class literary institution. It has its reading-rooms, its library, its chemical laboratory, its museum, its art department, its lecture hall, and its long list of lectures on subjects of various and comprehensive interest, delivered by lecturers of the highest qualifications. Very well. But it may be asked, what are the practical results of all these appliances? Now, let us suppose a few. Suppose that your institution should have educated those who are now its teachers. That would be a very remarkable fact. Supposing, besides, it should, so to speak, have educated education all around it, by sending forth numerous and efficient teachers into many and divers schools. Suppose the young student, reared exclusively in its laboratory, should be presently snapped up for the laboratory of the great and famous hospitals. Suppose that in nine years its industrial students should have carried off a round dozen of the much competed for prizes awarded by the Society of Arts and the Government department, besides two local prizes originating in the generosity of a Birmingham man. Suppose that the Town Council, having it in trust to find an artisan well fit to receive the Whitworth prizes, should find him here. Suppose that one of the industrial students should turn his chemical studies to the practical account of extracting gold from waste colour water, and of taking it into custody, in the very act of running away with hundreds of pounds down the town drains. Suppose another should perceive in his books, in his studious evenings, what was amiss with his master's until then inscrutably defective furnace, and should go straight - to the great annual saving of that master - and put it right. Supposing another should puzzle out the means, until then quite unknown in England, of making a certain description of coloured glass. Supposing another should qualify himself to vanquish one by one, as they daily arise, all the little difficulties incidental to his calling as an electro-plater, and should be applied to by his companions in the shop in all emergencies under the name of the "Encyclopaedia." Suppose a long procession of such cases, and then consider that these are not suppositions at all, but are plain, unvarnished facts, culminating in the one special and significant fact that, with a single solitary exception, every one of the institution's industrial students who have taken its prizes within ten years, have since climbed to higher situations in their way of life.

As to the extent to which the institution encourages the artisan to think, and so, for instance, to rise superior to the little shackling prejudices and observances perchance existing in his trade when they will not bear the test of inquiry, that is only to be equalled by the extent to which it encourages him to feel. There is a certain tone of modest manliness pervading all the little facts which I have looked through which I found remarkably impressive. The decided objection on the part of industrial students to attend classes in their working clothes, breathes this tone, as being a graceful and at the same time perfectly independent recognition of the place and of one another. And this tone is admirably illustrated in a different way, in the case of a poor bricklayer, who, being in temporary reverses through the illness of his family, and having consequently been obliged to part with his best clothes, and being therefore missed from his classes, in which he had been noticed as a very hard worker, was persuaded to attend them in his working clothes. He replied, "No, it was not possible. It must not be thought of. It must not come into question for a moment. It would be supposed, or it might be thought, that he did it to attract attention." And the same man being offered by one of the officers a loan of money to enable him to rehabilitate his appearance, positively declined it, on the ground that he came to the institution to learn and to know better how to help himself, not otherwise to ask help, or to receive help from any man. Now, I am justified in calling this the tone of the institution, because it is no isolated instance, but is a fair and honourable sample of the spirit of the place, and as such I put it at the conclusion - though last certainly not least - of my references to what your institution has indubitably done.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I come at length to what, in the humble opinion of the evanescent officer before you, remains for the institution to do, and not to do. As Mr. Carlyle has it towards the closing pages of his grand history of the French Revolution, "This we are now with due brevity to glance at; and then courage, oh listener, I see land!" {18} I earnestly hope - and I firmly believe - that your institution will do henceforth as it has done hitherto; it can hardly do better. I hope and believe that it will know among its members no distinction of persons, creed, or party, but that it will conserve its place of assemblage as a high, pure ground, on which all such considerations shall merge into the one universal, heaven-sent aspiration of the human soul to be wiser and better. I hope and believe that it will always be expansive and elastic; for ever seeking to devise new means of enlarging the circle of its members, of attracting to itself the confidence of still greater and greater numbers, and never evincing any more disposition to stand still than time does, or life does, or the seasons do. And above all things, I hope, and I feel confident from its antecedents, that it will never allow any consideration on the face of the earth to induce it to patronise or to be patronised, for I verily believe that the bestowal and receipt of patronage in such wise has been a curse in England, and that it has done more to prevent really good objects, and to lower really high character, than the utmost efforts of the narrowest antagonism could have effected in twice the time.

I have no fear that the walls of the Birmingham and Midland Institute will ever tremble responsive to the croakings of the timid opponents of intellectual progress; but in this connexion generally I cannot forbear from offering a remark which is much upon my mind. It is commonly assumed - much too commonly - that this age is a material age, and that a material age is an irreligious age. I have been pained lately to see this assumption repeated in certain influential quarters for which I have a high respect, and desire to have a higher. I am afraid that by dint of constantly being reiterated, and reiterated without protest, this assumption - which I take leave altogether to deny - may be accepted by the more unthinking part of the public as unquestionably true; just as caricaturists and painters, professedly making a portrait of some public man, which was not in the least like him to begin with, have gone on repeating and repeating it until the public came to believe that it must be exactly like him, simply because it was like itself, and really have at last, in the fulness of time, grown almost disposed to resent upon him their tardy discovery - really to resent upon him their late discovery - that he was not like it. I confess, standing here in this responsible situation, that I do not understand this much-used and much-abused phrase - the “material age.” I cannot comprehend - if anybody can I very much doubt - its logical signification. For instance, has electricity become more material in the mind of any sane or moderately insane man, woman, or child, because of the discovery that in the good providence of God it could be made available for the service and use of man to an immeasurably greater extent than for his destruction? Do I make a more material journey to the bed-side of my dying parent or my dying child when I travel there at the rate of sixty miles an hour, than when I travel thither at the rate of six? Rather, in the swiftest case, does not my agonised heart become over-fraught with gratitude to that Supreme Beneficence from whom alone could have proceeded the wonderful means of shortening my suspense? What is the materiality of the cable or the wire compared with the materiality of the spark? What is the materiality of certain chemical substances that we can weigh or measure, imprison or release, compared with the materiality of their appointed affinities and repulsions presented to them from the instant of their creation to the day of judgment? When did this so-called material age begin? With the use of clothing; with the discovery of the compass; with the invention of the art of printing? Surely, it has been a long time about; and which is the more material object, the farthing tallow candle that will not give me light, or that flame of gas which will?

No, ladies and gentlemen, do not let us be discouraged or deceived by any fine, vapid, empty words. The true material age is the stupid Chinese age, in which no new or grand revelations of nature are granted, because they are ignorantly and insolently repelled, instead of being diligently and humbly sought. The difference between the ancient fiction of the mad braggart defying the lightning and the modern historical picture of Franklin drawing it towards his kite, in order that he might the more profoundly study that which was set before him to be studied (or it would not have been there), happily expresses to my mind the distinction between the much-maligned material sages - material in one sense, I suppose, but in another very immaterial sages - of the Celestial Empire school. Consider whether it is likely or unlikely, natural or unnatural, reasonable or unreasonable, that I, a being capable of thought, and finding myself surrounded by such discovered wonders on every hand, should sometimes ask myself the question - should put to myself the solemn consideration - can these things be among those things which might have been disclosed by divine lips nigh upon two thousand years ago, but that the people of that time could not bear them? And whether this be so or no, if I am so surrounded on every hand, is not my moral responsibility tremendously increased thereby, and with it my intelligence and submission as a child of Adam and of the dust, before that Shining Source which equally of all that is granted and all that is withheld holds in His mighty hands the unapproachable mysteries of life and death.

To the students of your industrial classes generally I have had it in my mind, first, to commend the short motto, in two words, "Courage - Persevere." This is the motto of a friend and worker. Not because the eyes of Europe are upon them, for I don't in the least believe it; nor because the eyes of even England are upon them, for I don't in the least believe it; not because their doings will be proclaimed with blast of trumpet at street corners, for no such musical performances will take place; not because self-improvement is at all certain to lead to worldly success, but simply because it is good and right of itself, and because, being so, it does assuredly bring with it its own resources and its own rewards. I would further commend to them a very wise and witty piece of advice on the conduct of the understanding which was given more than half a century ago by the Rev. Sydney Smith - wisest and wittiest of the friends I have lost. He says - and he is speaking, you will please understand, as I speak, to a school of volunteer students - he says: "There is a piece of foppery which is to be cautiously guarded against, the foppery of universality, of knowing all sciences and excelling in all arts - chymistry, mathematics, algebra, dancing, history, reasoning, riding, fencing, Low Dutch, High Dutch, and natural philosophy. In short, the modern precept of education very often is, 'Take the Admirable Crichton for your model, I would have you ignorant of nothing.' Now," says he, "my advice, on the contrary, is to have the courage to be ignorant of a great number of things, in order that you may avoid the calamity of being ignorant of everything."

To this I would superadd a little truth, which holds equally good of my own life and the life of every eminent man I have ever known. The one serviceable, safe, certain, remunerative, attainable quality in every study and in every pursuit is the quality of attention. My own invention or imagination, such as it is, I can most truthfully assure you, would never have served me as it has, but for the habit of commonplace, humble, patient, daily, toiling, drudging attention. Genius, vivacity, quickness of penetration, brilliancy in association of ideas - such mental qualities, like the qualities of the apparition of the externally armed head in *Macbeth*, will not be commanded; but attention, after due term of submissive service, always will. Like certain plants which the poorest peasant may grow in the poorest soil, it can be cultivated by any one, and it is certain in its own good season to bring forth flowers and fruit. I can most truthfully assure you by-the-by, that this eulogium on attention is so far quite disinterested on my part as that it has not the least reference whatever to the attention with which you have honoured me.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I have done. I cannot but reflect how often you have probably heard within these walls one of the foremost men, and certainly one of the very best speakers, if not the very best, in England. I could not say to myself, when I began just now, in Shakespeare's line -

"I will be BRIGHT and shining gold,"

but I could say to myself, and I did say to myself, "I will be as natural and easy as I possibly can," because my heart has all been in my subject, and I bear an old love towards Birmingham and Birmingham men. I have said that I bear an old love towards Birmingham and Birmingham men; let me amend a small omission, and add "and Birmingham women." This ring I wear on my finger now is an old Birmingham gift, and if by rubbing it I could raise the spirit that was obedient to Aladdin's ring, I heartily assure you that my first instruction to that genius on the spot should be to place himself at Birmingham's disposal in the best of causes.

[In acknowledging the vote of thanks, Mr. Dickens said:-]

Ladies and gentlemen, as I hope it is more than possible that I shall have the pleasure of meeting you again before Christmas is out, and shall have the great interest of seeing the faces and touching the bands of the successful competitors in your lists, I will not cast upon that anticipated meeting the terrible foreshadowing of dread which must inevitably result from a second speech. I thank you most heartily, and I most sincerely and fervently say to you, "Good night, and God bless you." In reference to the appropriate and excellent remarks of Mr. Dixon, I will now discharge my conscience of my political creed, which is contained in two articles, and has no reference to any party or persons. My faith in the people governing is, on the whole, infinitesimal; my faith in the People governed is, on the whole, illimitable.

SPEECH: BIRMINGHAM, JANUARY 6, 1870.

[On the evening of the above date, Mr. Dickens, as President of the Birmingham and Midland Institute, distributed the prizes and certificates awarded to the most successful students in the first year. The proceedings took place in the Town Hall: Mr. Dickens entered at eight o'clock, accompanied by the officers of the Institute, and was received with loud applause. After the lapse of a minute or two, he rose and said:-]

Ladies and gentlemen, - When I last had the honour to preside over a meeting of the Institution which again brings us together, I took occasion to remark upon a certain superabundance of public speaking which seems to me to distinguish the present time. It will require very little self-denial on my part to practise now what I preached then; firstly, because I said my little say that night; and secondly, because we have definite and highly interesting action before us to-night. We have now to bestow the rewards which have been brilliantly won by the most successful competitors in the society's lists. I say the most successful, because to-night we should particularly observe, I think, that there is success in all honest endeavour, and that there is some victory gained in every gallant struggle that is made. To strive at all involves a victory achieved over sloth, inertness, and indifference; and competition for these prizes involves, besides, in the vast majority of cases, competition with and mastery asserted over circumstances adverse to the effort made. Therefore, every losing competitor among my hearers may be certain that he has still won much - very much - and that he can well afford to swell the triumph of his rivals who have passed him in the race.

I have applied the word "rewards" to these prizes, and I do so, not because they represent any great intrinsic worth in silver or gold, but precisely because they do not. They represent what is above all price - what can be stated in no arithmetical figures, and what is one of the great needs of the human soul - encouraging sympathy. They are an assurance to every student present or to come in your institution, that he does not work either neglected or unfriended, and that he is watched, felt for, stimulated, and appreciated. Such an assurance, conveyed in the presence of this large assembly, and striking to the breasts of the recipients that thrill which is inseparable from any great united utterance of feeling, is a reward, to my thinking, as purely worthy of the labour as the labour itself is worthy of the reward; and by a sensitive spirit can never be forgotten.

[One of the prize-takers was a Miss Winkle, a name suggestive of "Pickwick," which was received with laughter. Mr. Dickens made some remarks to the lady in an undertone; and then observed to the audience, "I have recommended Miss Winkle to change her name." The prizes having been distributed, Mr. Dickens made a second brief speech. He said:-]

The prizes are now all distributed, and I have discharged myself of the delightful task you have entrusted to me; and if the recipients of these prizes and certificates who have come upon this platform have had the genuine pleasure in receiving their acknowledgments from my hands that I have had in placing them in theirs, they are in a true Christian temper to-night. I have the painful sense upon me, that it is reserved for some one else to enjoy this great satisfaction of mind next time. It would be useless for the few short moments longer to disguise the fact that I happen to have drawn King this Twelfth Night, but that another Sovereign will very soon sit upon my inconstant throne. To-night I abdicate, or, what is much the same thing in the modern annals of Royalty - I am politely dethroned. This melancholy reflection, ladies and gentlemen, brings me to a very small point, personal to myself, upon which I will beg your permission to say a closing word.

When I was here last autumn I made, in reference to some remarks of your respected member, Mr. Dixon, a short confession of my political faith - or perhaps I should better say want of faith. It imported that I have very little confidence in the people who govern us - please to observe "people" there will be with a small "p," - but that I have great confidence in the People whom they govern; please to observe "people" there with a large "P." This was shortly and elliptically stated, and was with no evil intention, I am absolutely sure, in some quarters inversely explained. Perhaps as the inventor of a certain extravagant fiction, but one which I do see rather frequently quoted as if there were grains of truth at the bottom of it - a fiction called the "Circumlocution Office," - and perhaps also as the writer of an idle book or two, whose public opinions are not obscurely stated - perhaps in these respects I do not sufficiently bear in mind Hamlet's caution to speak by the card lest equivocation should undo me.

Now I complain of nobody; but simply in order that there may be no mistake as to what I did mean, and as to what I do mean, I will re-state my meaning, and I will do so in the words of a great thinker, a great writer, and a great scholar, {19} whose death, unfortunately for mankind, cut short his "History of Civilization in England:" - "They may talk as they will about reforms which Government has introduced and improvements to be expected from legislation, but whoever will take a wider and more commanding view of human affairs, will soon discover that such hopes are chimerical. They will learn that lawgivers are nearly always the obstructors of society instead of its helpers, and that in the extremely few cases where their measures have turned out well their success has been owing to the fact that, contrary to their usual custom, they have implicitly obeyed the spirit of their time, and have been - as they always should be - the mere servants of the people, to whose wishes they are bound to give a public and legal sanction."

SPEECH: LONDON, APRIL 6, 1846. {20}

[The first anniversary festival of the General Theatrical Fund Association was held on the evening of the above date at the London Tavern. The chair was taken by Mr. Dickens, who thus proposed the principal toast:]

Gentlemen, - In offering to you a toast which has not as yet been publicly drunk in any company, it becomes incumbent on me to offer a few words in explanation: in the first place, premising that the toast will be "The General Theatrical Fund."

The Association, whose anniversary we celebrate to-night, was founded seven years ago, for the purpose of granting permanent pensions to such of the *corps dramatique* as had retired from the stage, either from a decline in their years or a decay of their powers. Collected within the scope of its benevolence are all actors and actresses, singers, or dancers, of five years' standing in the profession. To relieve their necessities and to protect them from want is the great end of the Society, and it is good to know that for seven years the members of it have steadily, patiently, quietly, and perseveringly pursued this end, advancing by regular contribution, moneys which many of them could ill afford, and cheered by no external help or assistance of any kind whatsoever. It has thus served a regular apprenticeship, but I trust that we shall establish to-night that its time is out, and that henceforth the Fund will enter upon a flourishing and brilliant career.

I have no doubt that you are all aware that there are, and were when this institution was founded, two other institutions existing of a similar nature - Covent Garden and Drury Lane - both of long standing, both richly endowed. It cannot, however, be too distinctly understood, that the present Institution is not in any way adverse to those. How can it be when it is only a wide and broad extension of all that is most excellent in the principles on which they are founded? That such an extension was absolutely necessary was sufficiently proved by the fact that the great body of the dramatic corps were excluded from the benefits conferred by a membership of either of these institutions; for it was essential, in order to become a member of the Drury Lane Society, that the applicant, either he or she, should have been engaged for three consecutive seasons as a performer. This was afterwards reduced, in the case of Covent Garden, to a period of two years, but it really is as exclusive one way as the other, for I need not tell you that Covent Garden is now but a vision of the past. You might play the bottle conjuror with its dramatic company and put them all into a pint bottle. The human voice is rarely heard within its walls save in connexion with corn, or the ambidextrous prestidigitation of the Wizard of the North. In like manner, Drury Lane is conducted now with almost a sole view to the opera and ballet, insomuch that the statue of Shakespeare over the door serves as emphatically to point out his grave as his bust did in the church of Stratford-upon-Avon. How can the profession generally hope to qualify for the Drury Lane or Covent Garden institution, when the oldest and most distinguished members have been driven from the boards on which they have earned their reputations, to delight the town in theatres to which the General Theatrical Fund alone extended?

I will again repeat that I attach no reproach to those other Funds, with which I have had the honour of being connected at different periods of my life. At the time those Associations were established, an engagement at one of those theatres was almost a matter of course, and a successful engagement would last a whole life; but an engagement of two months' duration at Covent Garden would be a perfect Old Parr of an engagement just now. It should never be forgotten that when those two funds were established, the two great theatres were protected by patent, and that at that time the minor theatres were condemned by law to the representation of the most preposterous nonsense, and some gentlemen whom I see around me could no more belong to the minor theatres of that day than they could now belong to St. Bartholomew fair.

As I honour the two old funds for the great good which they have done, so I honour this for the much greater good it is resolved to do. It is not because I love them less, but because I love this more - because it includes more in its operation.

Let us ever remember that there is no class of actors who stand so much in need of a retiring fund as those who do not win the great prizes, but who are nevertheless an essential part of the theatrical system, and by consequence bear a part in contributing to our pleasures. We owe them a debt which we ought to pay. The beds of such men are not of roses, but of very artificial flowers indeed. Their lives are lives of care and privation, and hard struggles with very stern realities. It is from among the poor actors who drink wine from goblets, in colour marvellously like toast and water, and who preside at Barmecide beasts with wonderful appetites for steaks, - it is from their ranks that the most triumphant favourites have sprung. And surely, besides this, the greater the instruction and delight we derive from the rich English drama, the more we are bound to succour and protect the humblest of those votaries of the art who add to our instruction and amusement.

Hazlitt has well said that "There is no class of society whom so many persons regard with affection as actors. We greet them on the stage, we like to meet them in the streets; they almost always recal to us pleasant associations." {21} When they have strutted and fretted their hour upon the stage, let them not be heard no more - but let them be heard sometimes to say that they are happy in their old age. When they have passed for the last time from behind that glittering row of lights with which we are all familiar, let them not pass away into gloom and darkness, - but let them pass into cheerfulness and light - into a contented and happy home.

This is the object for which we have met; and I am too familiar with the English character not to know that it will be effected. When we come suddenly in a crowded street upon the careworn features of a familiar face - crossing us like the ghost of pleasant hours long forgotten - let us not recal those features with pain, in sad remembrance of what they once were, but let us in joy recognise it, and go back a pace or two to meet it once again, as that of a friend who has beguiled us of a moment of care, who has taught us to sympathize with virtuous grief, cheating us to tears for sorrows not our own - and we all know how pleasant are such tears. Let such a face be ever remembered as that of our benefactor and our friend.

I tried to recollect, in coming here, whether I had ever been in any theatre in my life from which I had not brought away some pleasant association, however poor the theatre, and I protest, out of my varied experience, I could not remember even one from which I had not brought some favourable impression, and that, commencing with the period when I believed the clown was a being born into the world with infinite pockets, and ending with that in which I saw the other night, outside one of the "Royal Saloons," a playbill which showed me ships completely rigged, carrying men, and careering over boundless and tempestuous oceans. And now, bespeaking your kindest remembrance of our theatres and actors, I beg to propose that you drink as heartily and freely as ever a toast was drunk in this toast-drinking city "Prosperity to the General Theatrical Fund."

SPEECH: LEEDS, DECEMBER 1, 1847.

[On the above evening a Soirée of the Leeds Mechanics' Institution took place, at which about 1200 persons were present. The chair was taken by Mr. Dickens, who thus addressed the meeting:]

Ladies and gentlemen, - Believe me, speaking to you with a most disastrous cold, which makes my own voice sound very strangely in my ears - that if I were not gratified and honoured beyond expression by your cordial welcome, I should have considered the invitation to occupy my present position in this brilliant assemblage in itself a distinction not easy to be surpassed. The cause in which we are assembled and the objects we are met to promote, I take, and always have taken to be, *the* cause and *the* objects involving almost all others that are essential to the welfare and happiness of mankind. And in a celebration like the present, commemorating the birth and progress of a great educational establishment, I recognise a something, not limited to the spectacle of the moment, beautiful and radiant though it be - not limited even to the success of the particular establishment in which we are more immediately interested - but extending from this place and through swarms of toiling men elsewhere, cheering and stimulating them in the onward, upward path that lies before us all. Wherever hammers beat, or wherever factory chimneys smoke, wherever hands are busy, or the clanking of machinery resounds - wherever, in a word, there are masses of industrious human beings whom their wise Creator did not see fit to constitute all body, but into each and every one of whom He breathed a mind - there, I would fain believe, some touch of sympathy and encouragement is felt from our collective pulse now beating in this Hall.

Ladies and gentlemen, glancing with such feelings at the report of your Institution for the present year sent to me by your respected President - whom I cannot help feeling it, by-the-bye, a kind of crime to depose, even thus peacefully, and for so short a time - I say, glancing over this report, I found one statement of fact in the very opening which gave me an uncommon satisfaction. It is, that a great number of the members and subscribers are among that class of persons for whose advantage Mechanics' Institutions were originated, namely, persons receiving weekly wages. This circumstance gives me the greatest delight. I am sure that no better testimony could be borne to the merits and usefulness of this Institution, and that no better guarantee could be given for its continued prosperity and advancement.

To such Associations as this, in their darker hours, there may yet reappear now and then the spectral shadow of a certain dead and buried opposition; but before the light of a steady trust in them on the part of the general people, bearing testimony to the virtuous influences of such Institutions by their own intelligence and conduct, the ghost will melt away like early vapour from the ground. Fear of such Institutions as these! We have heard people sometimes speak with jealousy of them, - with distrust of them! Imagine here, on either hand, two great towns like Leeds, full of busy men, all of them feeling necessarily, and some of them heavily, the burdens and inequalities inseparable from civilized society. In this town there is ignorance, dense and dark; in that town, education - the best of education; that which the grown man from day to day and year to year furnishes for himself and maintains for himself, and in right of which his education goes on all his life, instead of leaving off, complacently, just when he begins to live in the social system. Now, which of these two towns has a good man, or a good cause, reason to distrust and dread? "The educated one," does some timid politician, with a marvellously weak sight, say (as I have heard such politicians say), "because knowledge is power, and because it won't do to have too much power abroad." Why, ladies and gentlemen, reflect whether ignorance be not power, and a very dreadful power. Look where we will, do we not find it powerful for every kind of wrong and evil? Powerful to take its enemies to its heart, and strike its best friends down - powerful to fill the prisons, the hospitals, and the graves - powerful for blind violence, prejudice, and error, in all their gloomy and destructive shapes. Whereas the power of knowledge, if I understand it, is, to bear and forbear; to learn the path of duty and to tread it; to engender that self-respect which does not stop at self, but cherishes the best respect for the best objects - to turn an always enlarging acquaintance with the joys and sorrows, capabilities and imperfections of our race to daily account in mildness of life and gentleness of construction and humble efforts for the improvement, stone by stone, of the whole social fabric.

I never heard but one tangible position taken against educational establishments for the people, and that was, that in this or that instance, or in these or those instances, education for the people has failed. And I have never traced even this to its source but I have found that the term education, so employed, meant anything but education - implied the mere imperfect application of old, ignorant, preposterous spelling-book lessons to the meanest purposes - as if you should teach a child that there is no higher end in electricity, for example, than expressly to strike a mutton-pie out of the hand of a greedy boy - and on which it is as unreasonable to found an objection to education in a comprehensive sense, as it would be to object altogether to the combing of youthful hair, because in a certain charity school they had a practice of combing it into the pupils' eyes.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I turn to the report of this Institution, on whose behalf we are met; and I start with the education given there, and I find that it really is an education that is deserving of the name. I find that there are papers read and lectures delivered, on a variety of subjects of interest and importance. I find that there are evening classes formed for the acquisition of sound, useful English information, and for the study of those two important languages, daily becoming more important in the business of life, - the French and German. I find that there is a class for drawing, a chemical class, subdivided into the elementary branch and the manufacturing branch, most important here. I find that there is a day-school at twelve shillings a quarter, which small cost, besides including instruction in all that is useful to the merchant and the man of business, admits to all the advantages of the parent institution. I find that there is a School of Design established in connexion with the Government School; and that there was in January this year, a library of between six and seven thousand books. Ladies and gentlemen, if any man would tell me that anything but good could come of such knowledge as this, all I can say is, that I should consider him a new and most lamentable proof of the necessity of such institutions, and should regard him in his own person as a melancholy instance of what a man may come to by never having belonged to one or sympathized with one.

There is one other paragraph in this report which struck my eye in looking over it, and on which I cannot help offering a word of joyful notice. It is the steady increase that appears to have taken place in the number of lady members - among whom I hope I may presume are included some of the bright fair faces that are clustered around me. Gentlemen, I hold that it is not good for man to be alone - even in Mechanics'

Institutions; and I rank it as very far from among the last or least of the merits of such places, that he need not be alone there, and that he is not. I believe that the sympathy and society of those who are our best and dearest friends in infancy, in childhood, in manhood, and in old age, the most devoted and least selfish natures that we know on earth, who turn to us always constant and unchanged, when others turn away, should greet us here, if anywhere, and go on with us side by side.

I know, gentlemen, by the evidence of my own proper senses at this moment, that there are charms and graces in such greetings, such as no other greeting can possess. I know that in every beautiful work of the Almighty hand, which is illustrated in your lectures, and in every real or ideal portraiture of fortitude and goodness that you find in your books, there is something that must bring you home again to them for its brightest and best example. And therefore, gentlemen, I hope that you will never be without them, or without an increasing number of them in your studies and your commemorations; and that an immense number of new marriages, and other domestic festivals naturally consequent upon those marriages, may be traced back from time to time to the Leeds Mechanics' Institution.

There are many gentlemen around me, distinguished by their public position and service, or endeared to you by frequent intercourse, or by their zealous efforts on behalf of the cause which brings us together; and to them I shall beg leave to refer you for further observations on this happy and interesting occasion; begging to congratulate you finally upon the occasion itself; upon the prosperity and thriving prospects of your institution; and upon our common and general good fortune in living in these times, when the means of mental culture and improvement are presented cheaply, socially, and cheerfully, and not in dismal cells or lonely garrets. And lastly, I congratulate myself, I assure you most heartily, upon the part with which I am honoured on an occasion so congenial to my warmest feelings and sympathies, and I beg to thank you for such evidences of your good-will, as I never can coldly remember and never forget.

[In acknowledging the vote of thanks, Mr, Dickens said:-]

Ladies and Gentlemen, - It is a great satisfaction to me that this question has been put by the Mayor, inasmuch as I hope I may receive it as a token that he has forgiven me those extremely large letters, which I must say, from the glimpse I caught of them when I arrived in the town, looked like a leaf from the first primer of a very promising young giant.

I will only observe, in reference to the proceeding of this evening, that after what I have seen, and the excellent speeches I have heard from gentlemen of so many different callings and persuasions, meeting here as on neutral ground, I do more strongly and sincerely believe than I ever have in my life, - and that is saying a great deal, - that institutions such as this will be the means of refining and improving that social edifice which has been so often mentioned to-night, until, - unlike that Babel tower that would have taken heaven by storm, - it shall end in sweet accord and harmony amongst all classes of its builders.

Ladies and gentlemen, most respectfully and heartily I bid you good night and good-bye, and I trust the next time we meet it will be in even greater numbers, and in a larger room, and that we often shall meet again, to recal this evening, then of the past, and remember it as one of a series of increasing triumphs of your excellent institution.

SPEECH: GLASGOW, DECEMBER 28, 1847.

[The first Soirée, commemorative of the opening of the Glasgow Athenaeum took place on the above evening in the City Hall. Mr. Charles Dickens presided, and made the following speech:]

Ladies and gentlemen - Let me begin by endeavouring to convey to you the assurance that not even the warmth of your reception can possibly exceed, in simple earnestness, the cordiality of the feeling with which I come amongst you. This beautiful scene and your generous greeting would naturally awaken, under any circumstances, no common feeling within me; but when I connect them with the high purpose of this brilliant assembly - when I regard it as an educational example and encouragement to the rest of Scotland - when I regard it no less as a recognition on the part of everybody here of the right, indisputable and inalienable, of all those who are actively engaged in the work and business of life to elevate and improve themselves so far as in them lies, by all good means - I feel as if I stand here to swear brotherhood to all the young men in Glasgow; - and I may say to all the young women in Glasgow; being unfortunately in no position to take any tenderer vows upon myself - and as if we were pledged from this time henceforth to make common cause together in one of the most laudable and worthy of human objects.

Ladies and gentlemen, a common cause must be made in such a design as that which brings us together this night; for without it, nothing can be done, but with it, everything. It is a common cause of right, God knows; for it is idle to suppose that the advantages of such an institution as the Glasgow Athenaeum will stop within its own walls or be confined to its own members. Through all the society of this great and important city, upwards to the highest and downwards to the lowest, it must, I know, be felt for good. Downward in a clearer perception of, and sympathy with, those social miseries which can be alleviated, and those wide-open doors to vice and crime that can be shut and barred; and upward in a greater intelligence, increased efficiency, and higher knowledge, of all who partake of its benefits themselves, or who communicate, as all must do, in a greater or less degree, some portion to the circle of relatives or friends in which they move.

Nor, ladies and gentlemen, would I say for any man, however high his social position, or however great his attainments, that he might not find something to be learnt even from immediate contact with such institutions. If he only saw the goddess Knowledge coming out of her secluded palaces and high places to mingle with the throng, and to give them shining glimpses of the delights which were long kept hoarded up, he might learn something. If he only saw the energy and the courage with which those who earn their daily bread by the labour of their hands or heads, come night after night, as to a recreation, to that which was, perhaps, the whole absorbing business of his youth, there might still be something very wholesome for him to learn. But when he could see in such places their genial and reviving influences, their substituting of the contemplation of the beauties of nature and art, and of the wisdom of great men, for mere sensual enjoyment or stupid idleness - at any rate he would learn this - that it is at once the duty and the interest of all good members of society to encourage and protect them.

I took occasion to say at an Athenaeum in Yorkshire a few weeks since, and I think it a point most important to be borne in mind on such commemorations as these, that when such societies are objected to, or are decried on the ground that in the views of the objectors, education among the people has not succeeded, the term education is used with not the least reference to its real meaning, and is wholly misunderstood. Mere reading and writing is not education; it would be quite as reasonable to call bricks and mortar architecture - oils and colours art - reeds and cat-gut music - or the child's spelling-books the works of Shakespeare, Milton, or Bacon - as to call the lowest rudiments of education, education, and to visit on that most abused and slandered word their failure in any instance; and precisely because they were not education; because, generally speaking, the word has been understood in that sense a great deal too long; because education for the business of life, and for the due cultivation of domestic virtues, is at least as important from day to day to the grown person as to the child; because real education, in the strife and contention for a livelihood, and the consequent necessity incumbent on a great number of young persons to go into the world when they are very young, is extremely difficult. It is because of these things that I look upon mechanics' institutions and athenaeums as vitally important to the well-being of society. It is because the rudiments of education may there be turned to good account in the acquisition of sound principles, and of the great virtues, hope, faith, and charity, to which all our knowledge tends; it is because of that, I take it, that you have met in education's name to-night.

It is a great satisfaction to me to occupy the place I do in behalf of an infant institution; a remarkably fine child enough, of a vigorous constitution, but an infant still. I esteem myself singularly fortunate in knowing it before its prime, in the hope that I may have the pleasure of remembering in its prime, and when it has attained to its lusty maturity, that I was a friend of its youth. It has already passed through some of the disorders to which children are liable; it succeeded to an elder brother of a very meritorious character, but of rather a weak constitution, and which expired when about twelve months old, from, it is said, a destructive habit of getting up early in the morning: it succeeded this elder brother, and has fought manfully through a sea of troubles. Its friends have often been much concerned for it; its pulse has been exceedingly low, being only 1250, when it was expected to have been 10,000; several relations and friends have even gone so far as to walk off once or twice in the melancholy belief that it was dead. Through all that, assisted by the indomitable energy of one or two nurses, to whom it can never be sufficiently grateful, it came triumphantly, and now, of all the youthful members of its family I ever saw, it has the strongest attitude, the healthiest look, the brightest and most cheerful air. I find the institution nobly lodged; I find it with a reading-room, a coffee-room, and a news-room; I find it with lectures given and in progress, in sound, useful and well-selected subjects; I find it with morning and evening classes for mathematics, logic, grammar, music, French, German, Spanish, and Italian, attended by upwards of five hundred persons; but, best and first of all and what is to me more satisfactory than anything else in the history of the institution, I find that all, this has been mainly achieved by the young men of Glasgow themselves, with very little assistance. And, ladies and gentlemen, as the axiom, "Heaven helps those who help themselves," is truer in no case than it is in this, I look to the young men of Glasgow, from such a past and such a present, to a noble future. Everything that has been done in any other athenaeum, I confidently expect to see done here; and when that shall be the case, and when there shall be great cheap schools in connexion with the institution, and when it has bound together for ever all its friends, and brought over to itself all those who look upon it as an objectionable institution, - then, and not till then, I hope the young men of Glasgow will rest from their labours, and think their study done.

If the young men of Glasgow want any stimulus or encouragement in this wise, they have one beside them in the presence of their fair townswomen, which is irresistible. It is a most delightful circumstance to me, and one fraught with inestimable benefits to institutions of this kind, that at a meeting of this nature those who in all things are our best examples, encouragers, and friends, are not excluded. The abstract idea of the Graces was in ancient times associated with those arts which refine the human understanding; and it is pleasant to see now, in the rolling of the world, the Graces popularising the practice of those arts by their example, and adorning it with their presence.

I am happy to know that in the Glasgow Athenaeum there is a peculiar bond of union between the institution and the fairest part of creation. I understand that the necessary addition to the small library of books being difficult and expensive to make, the ladies have generally resolved to hold a fancy bazaar, and to devote the proceeds to this admirable purpose; and I learn with no less pleasure that her Majesty the Queen, in a graceful and womanly sense of the excellence of this design, has consented that the bazaar shall be held under her royal patronage. I can only say, that if you do not find something very noble in your books after this, you are much duller students than I take you to be. The ladies - the single ladies, at least - however disinterested I know they are by sex and nature, will, I hope, resolve to have some of the advantages of these books, by never marrying any but members of the Athenaeum. It seems to me it ought to be the pleasantest library in the world.

Hazlitt says, in speaking of some of the graceful fancies of some familiar writer of fiction, “How long since I first became acquainted with these characters; what old-fashioned friends they seem; and yet I am not tired of them like so many other friends, nor they of me.” In this case the books will not only possess all the attractions of their own friendships and charms, but also the manifold - I may say womanfold - associations connected with their donors. I can imagine how, in fact, from these fanciful associations, some fair Glasgow widow may be taken for the remoter one whom Sir Roger de Coverley could not forget; I can imagine how Sophia’s muff may be seen and loved, but not by Tom Jones, going down the High

Street on any winter day; or I can imagine the student finding in every fair form the exact counterpart of the Glasgow Athenaeum, and taking into consideration the history of Europe without the consent of Sheriff Alison. I can imagine, in short, how through all the facts and fictions of this library, these ladies will be always active, and that

“Age will not wither them, nor custom stale
Their infinite variety.”

It seems to me to be a moral, delightful, and happy chance, that this meeting has been held at this genial season of the year, when a new time is, as it were, opening before us, and when we celebrate the birth of that divine and blessed Teacher, who took the highest knowledge into the humblest places, and whose great system comprehended all mankind. I hail it as a most auspicious omen, at this time of the year, when many scattered friends and families are re-assembled, for the members of this institution to be calling men together from all quarters, with a brotherly view to the general good, and a view to the general improvement; as I consider that such designs are practically worthy of the faith we hold, and a practical remembrance of the words, “On earth peace, and good will toward men.” I hope that every year which dawns on your Institution, will find it richer in its means of usefulness, and grayer-headed in the honour and respect it has gained. It can hardly speak for itself more appropriately than in the words of an English writer, when contemplating the English emblem of this period of the year, the holly-tree:-

[Mr. Dickens concluded by quoting the last three stanzas of Southey’s poem, *The Holly Tree*.

In acknowledging a vote of thanks proposed by Sir Archibald (then Mr.) Alison, Mr. Dickens said:]

Ladies and Gentlemen, - I am no stranger - and I say it with the deepest gratitude - to the warmth of Scottish hearts; but the warmth of your present welcome almost deprives me of any hope of acknowledging it. I will not detain you any longer at this late hour; let it suffice to assure you, that for taking the part with which I have been honoured in this festival, I have been repaid a thousand-fold by your abundant kindness, and by the unspeakable gratification it has afforded me. I hope that, before many years are past, we may have another meeting in public, when we shall rejoice at the immense progress your institution will have made in the meantime, and look back upon this night with new pleasure and satisfaction. I shall now, in conclusion, repeat most heartily and fervently the quotation of Dr. Ewing, the late Provost of Glasgow, which Bailie Nicol Jarvie, himself “a Glasgow body,” observed was “elegantly putten round the town’s arms.”

SPEECH: LONDON, APRIL 14, 1851.

[The Sixth Annual Dinner of the General Theatrical Fund was held at the London Tavern on the above date. Mr. Charles Dickens occupied the chair, and in giving the toast of the evening said:-]

I have so often had the satisfaction of bearing my testimony, in this place, to the usefulness of the excellent Institution in whose behalf we are assembled, that I should be really sensible of the disadvantage of having now nothing to say in proposing the toast you all anticipate, if I were not well assured that there is really nothing which needs be said. I have to appeal to you on the old grounds, and no ingenuity of mine could render those grounds of greater weight than they have hitherto successfully proved to you.

Although the General Theatrical Fund Association, unlike many other public societies and endowments, is represented by no building, whether of stone, or brick, or glass, like that astonishing evidence of the skill and energy of my friend Mr. Paxton, which all the world is now called upon to admire, and the great merit of which, as you learn from the best authorities, is, that it ought to have fallen down long before it was built, and yet that it would by no means consent to doing so - although, I say, this Association possesses no architectural home, it is nevertheless as plain a fact, rests on as solid a foundation, and carries as erect a front, as any building, in the world. And the best and the utmost that its exponent and its advocate can do, standing here, is to point it out to those who gather round it, and to say, "judge for yourselves."

It may not, however, be improper for me to suggest to that portion of the company whose previous acquaintance with it may have been limited, what it is not. It is not a theatrical association whose benefits are confined to a small and exclusive body of actors. It is a society whose claims are always preferred in the name of the whole histrionic art. It is not a theatrical association adapted to a state of theatrical things entirely past and gone, and no more suited to present theatrical requirements than a string of pack-horses would be suited to the conveyance of traffic between London and Birmingham. It is not a rich old gentleman, with the gout in his vitals, brushed and got-up once a year to look as vigorous as possible, and brought out for a public airing by the few survivors of a large family of nephews and nieces, who afterwards double-lock the street-door upon the poor relations. It is not a theatrical association which insists that no actor can share its bounty who has not walked so many years on those boards where the English tongue is never heard - between the little bars of music in an aviary of singing birds, to which the unwieldy Swan of Avon is never admitted - that bounty which was gathered in the name and for the elevation of an all-embracing art.

No, if there be such things, this thing is not of that kind. This is a theatrical association, expressly adapted to the wants and to the means of the whole theatrical profession all over England. It is a society in which the word exclusiveness is wholly unknown. It is a society which includes every actor, whether he be Benedict or Hamlet, or the Ghost, or the Bandit, or the court-physician, or, in the one person, the whole King's army. He may do the "light business," or the "heavy," or the comic, or the eccentric. He may be the captain who courts the young lady, whose uncle still unaccountably persists in dressing himself in a costume one hundred years older than his time. Or he may be the young lady's brother in the white gloves and inexpressibles, whose duty in the family appears to be to listen to the female members of it whenever they sing, and to shake hands with everybody between all the verses. Or he may be the baron who gives the fête, and who sits uneasily on the sofa under a canopy with the baroness while the fete is going on. Or he may be the peasant at the fête who comes on the stage to swell the drinking chorus, and who, it may be observed, always turns his glass upside down before he begins to drink out of it. Or he may be the clown who takes away the doorstep of the house where the evening party is going on. Or he may be the gentleman who issues out of the house on the false alarm, and is precipitated into the area. Or, to come to the actresses, she may be the fairy who resides for ever in a revolving star with an occasional visit to a bower or a palace. Or the actor may be the armed head of the witch's cauldron; or even that extraordinary witch, concerning whom I have observed in country places, that he is much less like the notion formed from the description of Hopkins than the Malcolm or Donalbain of the previous scenes. This society, in short, says, "Be you what you may, be you actor or actress, be your path in your profession never so high, or never so low, never so haughty, or never so humble, we offer you the means of doing good to yourselves, and of doing good to your brethren.”

This society is essentially a provident institution, appealing to a class of men to take care of their own interests, and giving a continuous security only in return for a continuous sacrifice and effort. The actor by the means of this society obtains his own right, to no man’s wrong; and when, in old age, or in disastrous times, he makes his claim on the institution, he is enabled to say, “I am neither a beggar, nor a suppliant. I am but reaping what I sowed long ago.” And therefore it is that I cannot hold out to you that in assisting this fund you are doing an act of charity in the common acceptation of that phrase. Of all the abuses of that much abused term, none have more raised my indignation than what I have heard in this room in past times, in reference to this institution. I say, if you help this institution you will be helping the wagoner who has resolutely put his own shoulder to the wheel, and who has *not* stuck idle in the mud. In giving this aid you will be doing an act of justice, and you will be performing an act of gratitude; and this is what I solicit from you; but I will not so far wrong those who are struggling manfully for their own independence as to pretend to entreat from you an act of charity.

I have used the word gratitude; and let any man ask his own heart, and confess if he have not some grateful acknowledgments for the actor’s art? Not peculiarly because it is a profession often pursued, and as it were marked, by poverty and misfortune - for other callings, God knows, have their distresses - nor because the actor has sometimes to come from scenes of sickness, of suffering, ay, even of death itself, to play his part before us - for all of us, in our spheres, have as often to do violence to our feelings and to hide our hearts in fighting this great battle of life, and in discharging our duties and responsibilities. But the art of the actor excites reflections, sombre or grotesque, awful or humorous, which we are all familiar with. If any man were to tell me that he denied his acknowledgments to the stage, I would simply put to him one question - whether he remembered his first play?

If you, gentlemen, will but carry back your recollection to that great night, and call to mind the bright and harmless world which then opened to your view, we shall, I think, hear favourably of the effect upon your liberality on this occasion from our Secretary.

This is the sixth year of meetings of this kind - the sixth time we have had this fine child down after dinner. His nurse, a very worthy person of the name of Buckstone, who has an excellent character from several places, will presently report to you that his chest is perfectly sound, and that his general health is in the most thriving condition. Long may it be so; long may it thrive and grow; long may we meet (it is my sincere wish) to exchange our congratulations on its prosperity; and longer than the line of Banquo may be that line of figures which, as its patriotic share in the national debt, a century hence shall be stated by the Governor and Company of the Bank of England.

SPEECH: THE ROYAL LITERARY FUND. LONDON, MARCH 12, 1856.

[The Corporation of the Royal Literary Fund was established in 1790, its object being to administer assistance to authors of genius and learning, who may be reduced to distress by unavoidable calamities, or deprived, by enfeebled faculties or declining life, of the power of literary exertion. At the annual general meeting held at the house of the society on the above date, the following speech was made by Mr. Charles Dickens:]

Sir, - I shall not attempt to follow my friend Mr. Bell, who, in the profession of literature, represents upon this committee a separate and distinct branch of the profession, that, like

“The last rose of summer
Stands blooming alone,
While all its companions
Are faded and gone,”

into the very prickly bramble-bush with which he has ingeniously contrived to beset this question. In the remarks I have to make I shall confine myself to four points: - 1. That the committee find themselves in the painful condition of not spending enough money, and will presently apply themselves to the great reform of spending more. 2. That with regard to the house, it is a positive matter of history, that the house for which Mr. Williams was so anxious was to be applied to uses to which it never has been applied, and which the administrators of the fund decline to recognise. 3. That, in Mr. Bell’s endeavours to remove the Artists’ Fund from the ground of analogy it unquestionably occupies with reference to this fund, by reason of their continuing periodical relief to the same persons, I beg to tell Mr. Bell what every gentleman at that table knows - that it is the business of this fund to relieve over and over again the same people.

MR. BELL: But fresh inquiry is always made first.

MR. C. DICKENS: I can only oppose to that statement my own experience when I sat on that committee, and when I have known persons relieved on many consecutive occasions without further inquiry being made. As to the suggestion that we should select the items of expenditure that we complain of, I think it is according to all experience that we should first affirm the principle that the expenditure is too large. If that be done by the meeting, then I will proceed to the selection of the separate items. Now, in rising to support this resolution, I may state at once that I have scarcely any expectation of its being carried, and I am happy to think it will not. Indeed, I consider it the strongest point of the resolution's case that it should not be carried, because it will show the determination of the fund's managers. Nothing can possibly be stronger in favour of the resolution than that the statement should go forth to the world that twice within twelve months the attention of the committee has been called to this great expenditure, and twice the committee have considered that it was not unreasonable. I cannot conceive a stronger case for the resolution than this statement of fact as to the expenditure going forth to the public accompanied by the committee's assertion that it is reasonable. Now, to separate this question from details, let us remember what the committee and their supporters asserted last year, and, I hope, will re-assert this year. It seems to be rather the model kind of thing than otherwise now that if you get £100 you are to spend £40 in management; and if you get £1000, of course you may spend £400 in giving the rest away. Now, in case there should be any ill-conditioned people here who may ask what occasion there can be for all this expenditure, I will give you my experience. I went last year to a highly respectable place of resort, Willis's Rooms, in St. James's, to a meeting of this fund. My original intention was to hear all I could, and say as little as possible. Allowing for the absence of the younger and fairer portion of the creation, the general appearance of the place was something like Almack's in the morning. A number of stately old dowagers sat in a row on one side, and old gentlemen on the other. The ball was opened with due solemnity by a real marquis, who walked a minuet with the secretary, at which the audience were much affected. Then another party advanced, who, I am sorry to say, was only a member of the House of Commons, and he took possession of the floor. To him, however, succeeded a lord, then a bishop, then the son of a distinguished lord, then one or two celebrities from the City and Stock Exchange, and at last a gentleman, who made a fortune by the success of "Candide," sustained the part of Pangloss, and spoke much of what he evidently believed to be the very best management of this best of all possible funds. Now it is in this fondness for being stupendously genteel, and keeping up fine appearances - this vulgar and common social vice of hanging on to great connexions at any price, that the money goes. The last time you got a distinguished writer at a public meeting, and he was called on to address you somewhere amongst the small hours, he told you he felt like the man in plush who was permitted to sweep the stage down after all the other people had gone. If the founder of this society were here, I should think he would feel like a sort of Rip van Winkle reversed, who had gone to sleep backwards for a hundred years and woke up to find his fund still lying under the feet of people who did nothing for it instead of being emancipated and standing alone long ago. This Bloomsbury house is another part of the same desire for show, and the officer who inhabits it. (I mean, of course, in his official capacity, for, as an individual, I much respect him.) When one enters the house it appears to be haunted by a series of mysterious-looking ghosts, who glide about engaged in some extraordinary occupation, and, after the approved fashion of ghosts, but seldom condescend to disclose their business. What are all these meetings and inquiries wanted for? As for the authors, I say, as a writer by profession, that the long inquiry said to be necessary to ascertain whether an applicant deserves relief, is a preposterous pretence, and that working literary men would have a far better knowledge of the cases coming before the board than can ever be attained by that committee. Further, I say openly and plainly, that this fund is pompously and unnaturally administered at great expense, instead of being quietly administered at small expense; and that the secrecy to which it lays claim as its greatest attribute, is not kept; for through those “two respectable householders,” to whom reference must be made, the names of the most deserving applicants are to numbers of people perfectly well known. The members have now got before them a plain statement of fact as to these charges; and it is for them to say whether they are justifiable, becoming, or decent. I beg most earnestly and respectfully to put it to those gentlemen who belong to this institution, that must now decide, and cannot help deciding, what the Literary Fund is for, and what it is not for. The question raised by the resolution is whether this is a public corporation for the relief of men of genius and learning, or whether it is a snug, traditional, and conventional party, bent upon maintaining its own usages with a vast amount of pride; upon its own annual puffery at costly dinner-tables, and upon a course of expensive toadying to a number of distinguished individuals. This is the question which you cannot this day escape.

SPEECH: LONDON, NOVEMBER 5, 1857.

[At the fourth anniversary dinner of the Warehousemen and Clerks Schools, which took place on Thursday evening, Nov. 5th, 1857, at the London Tavern, and was very numerously attended, Mr. Charles Dickens occupied the chair. On the subject which had brought the company together Mr. Dickens spoke as follows:-]

I must now solicit your attention for a few minutes to the cause of your assembling together - the main and real object of this evening's gathering; for I suppose we are all agreed that the motto of these tables is not "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die;" but, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we live." It is because a great and good work is to live to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to live a greater and better life with every succeeding to-morrow, that we eat and drink here at all. Conspicuous on the card of admission to this dinner is the word "Schools." This set me thinking this morning what are the sorts of schools that I don't like. I found them on consideration, to be rather numerous. I don't like to begin with, and to begin as charity does at home - I don't like the sort of school to which I once went myself - the respected proprietor of which was by far the most ignorant man I have ever had the pleasure to know; one of the worst-tempered men perhaps that ever lived, whose business it was to make as much out of us and put as little into us as possible, and who sold us at a figure which I remember we used to delight to estimate, as amounting to exactly £2 4s. 6d. per head. I don't like that sort of school, because I don't see what business the master had to be at the top of it instead of the bottom, and because I never could understand the wholesomeness of the moral preached by the abject appearance and degraded condition of the teachers who plainly said to us by their looks every day of their lives, "Boys, never be learned; whatever you are, above all things be warned from that in time by our sunken cheeks, by our poor pimply noses, by our meagre diet, by our acid-beer, and by our extraordinary suits of clothes, of which no human being can say whether they are snuff-coloured turned black, or black turned snuff-coloured, a point upon which we ourselves are perfectly unable to offer any ray of enlightenment, it is so very long since they were undarned and new." I do not like that sort of school, because I have never yet lost my ancient suspicion touching that curious coincidence that the boy with four brothers to come always got the prizes. In fact, and short, I do not like that sort of school, which is a pernicious and abominable humbug, altogether. Again, ladies and gentlemen, I don't like that sort of school - a ladies' school - with which the other school used to dance on Wednesdays, where the young ladies, as I look back upon them now, seem to me always to have been in new stays and disgrace - the latter concerning a place of which I know nothing at this day, that bounds Timbuctoo on the north-east - and where memory always depicts the youthful enthraller of my first affection as for ever standing against a wall, in a curious machine of wood, which confined her innocent feet in the first dancing position, while those arms, which should have encircled my jacket, those precious arms, I say, were pinioned behind her by an instrument of torture called a backboard, fixed in the manner of a double direction post. Again, I don't like that sort of school, of which we have a notable example in Kent, which was established ages ago by worthy scholars and good men long deceased, whose munificent endowments have been monstrously perverted from their original purpose, and which, in their distorted condition, are struggled for and fought over with the most indecent pertinacity. Again, I don't like that sort of school - and I have seen a great many such in these latter times - where the bright childish imagination is utterly discouraged, and where those bright childish faces, which it is so very good for the wisest among us to remember in after life - when the world is too much with us, early and late {22} - are gloomily and grimly scared out of countenance; where I have never seen among the pupils, whether boys or girls, anything but little parrots and small calculating machines. Again, I don't by any means like schools in leather breeches, and with mortified straw baskets for bonnets, which file along the streets in long melancholy rows under the escort of that surprising British monster - a beadle, whose system of instruction, I am afraid, too often presents that happy union of sound with sense, of which a very remarkable instance is given in a grave report of a trustworthy school inspector, to the effect that a boy in great repute at school for his learning, presented on his slate, as one of the ten commandments, the perplexing prohibition, "Thou shalt not commit doldrum." Ladies and gentlemen, I confess, also, that I don't like those schools, even though the instruction given in them be gratuitous, where those sweet little voices which ought to be heard speaking in very different accents, anathematise by rote any human being who does not hold what is taught there. Lastly, I do not like, and I did not like some years ago, cheap distant schools, where neglected children pine from year to year under an amount of neglect, want, and youthful misery far too sad even to be glanced at in this cheerful assembly.

And now, ladies and gentlemen, perhaps you will permit me to sketch in a few words the sort of school that I do like. It is a school established by the members of an industrious and useful order, which supplies the comforts and graces of life at every familiar turning in the road of our existence; it is a school established by them for the Orphan and Necessitous Children of their own brethren and sisterhood; it is a place giving an education worthy of them - an education by them invented, by them conducted, by them watched over; it is a place of education where, while the beautiful history of the Christian religion is daily taught, and while the life of that Divine Teacher who Himself took little children on His knees is daily studied, no sectarian ill-will nor narrow human dogma is permitted to darken the face of the clear heaven which they disclose. It is a children's school, which is at the same time no less a children's home, a home not to be confided to the care of cold or ignorant strangers, nor, by the nature of its foundation, in the course of ages to pass into hands that have as much natural right to deal with it as with the peaks of the highest mountains or with the depths of the sea, but to be from generation to generation administered by men living in precisely such homes as those poor children have lost; by men always bent upon making that replacement, such a home as their own dear children might find a happy refuge in if they themselves were taken early away. And I fearlessly ask you, is this a design which has any claim to your sympathy? Is this a sort of school which is deserving of your support?

This is the design, this is the school, whose strong and simple claim I have to lay before you to-night. I must particularly entreat you not to suppose that my fancy and unfortunate habit of fiction has anything to do with the picture I have just presented to you. It is sober matter of fact. The Warehousemen and Clerks' Schools, established for the maintaining, clothing, and educating of the Orphan and Necessitous Children of those employed in the wholesale trades and manufactures of the United Kingdom, are, in fact, what I have just described. These schools for both sexes were originated only four years ago. In the first six weeks of the undertaking the young men of themselves and quite unaided, subscribed the large sum of £3,000. The schools have been opened only three years, they have now on their foundation thirty-nine children, and in a few days they will have six more, making a total of forty-five. They have been most munificently assisted by the heads of great mercantile houses, numerously represented, I am happy to say, around me, and they have a funded capital of almost £14,000. This is wonderful progress, but the aim must still be upwards, the motto always "Excelsior." You do not need to be told that five-and-forty children can form but a very small proportion of the Orphan and Necessitous Children of those who have been entrusted with the wholesale trades and manufactures of the United Kingdom: you do not require to be informed that the house at New-cross, rented for a small term of years, in which the schools are at present established, can afford but most imperfect accommodation for such a breadth of design. To carry this good work through the two remaining degrees of better and best there must be more work, more co-operation, more friends, more money. Then be the friends and give the money. Before I conclude, there is one other feature in these schools which I would commend to your special attention and approval. Their benefits are reserved for the children of subscribers; that is to say, it is an essential principle of the institution that it must help those whose parents have helped them, and that the unfortunate children whose father has been so lax, or so criminal, as to withhold a subscription so exceedingly small that when divided by weeks it amounts to only threepence weekly, cannot, in justice, be allowed to jostle out and shoulder away the happier children, whose father has had that little forethought, or done that little kindness which was requisite to secure for them the benefits of the institution. I really cannot believe that there will long be any such defaulting parents. I cannot believe that any of the intelligent young men who are engaged in the wholesale houses will long neglect this obvious, this easy duty. If they suppose that the objects of their love, born or unborn, will never want the benefits of the charity, that may be a fatal and blind mistake - it can never be an excuse, for, supposing them to be right in their anticipation, they should do what is asked for the sake of their friends and comrades around them, assured that they will be the happier and the better for the deed.

Ladies and gentlemen, this little "labour of love" of mine is now done. I most heartily wish that I could charm you now not to see me, not to think of me, not to hear me - I most heartily wish that I could make you see in my stead the multitude of innocent and bereaved children who are looking towards these schools, and entreating with uplifted hands to be let in. A very famous advocate once said, in speaking of his fears of failure when he had first to speak in court, being very poor, that he felt his little children tugging at his skirts, and that recovered him. Will you think of the number of little children who are tugging at my skirts, when I ask you, in their names, on their behalf, and in their little persons, and in no strength of my own, to encourage and assist this work?

At a later period of the evening Mr. Dickens proposed the health of the President of the Institution, Lord John Russell. He said he should do nothing so superfluous and so unnecessary as to descant upon his lordship's many faithful, long, and great public services, upon the honour and integrity with which he had pursued his straightforward public course through every difficulty, or upon the manly, gallant, and courageous character, which rendered him certain, in the eyes alike of friends and opponents, to rise with every rising occasion, and which, like the seal of Solomon, in the old Arabian story, enclosed in a not very large casket the soul of a giant. In answer to loud cheers, he said he had felt perfectly certain, that that would be the response for in no English assembly that he had ever seen was it necessary to do more than mention the name of Lord John Russell to ensure a manifestation of personal respect and grateful remembrance.

SPEECH: LONDON, MAY 8, 1858.

[The forty-eighth Anniversary of the establishment of the Artists' Benevolent Fund took place on the above date at the Freemasons' Tavern. The chair was taken by Mr. Charles Dickens, who, after having disposed of the preliminary toasts with his usual felicity, proceeded to advocate the claims of the Institution in whose interest the company had assembled, in the following terms:-]

Ladies and gentlemen, - There is an absurd theatrical story which was once told to me by a dear and valued friend, who has now passed from this sublunary stage, and which is not without its moral as applied to myself, in my present presidential position. In a certain theatrical company was included a man, who on occasions of emergency was capable of taking part in the whole round of the British drama, provided he was allowed to use his own language in getting through the dialogue. It happened one night that Reginald, in the *Castle Spectre*, was taken ill, and this veteran of a hundred characters was, of course, called up for the vacant part. He responded with his usual promptitude, although knowing nothing whatever of the character, but while they were getting him into the dress, he expressed a not unreasonable wish to know in some vague way what the part was about. He was not particular as to details, but in order that he might properly pourtray his sufferings, he thought he should have some slight inkling as to what really had happened to him. As, for example, what murders he had committed, whose father he was, of what misfortunes he was the victim, - in short, in a general way to know why he was in that place at all. They said to him, "Here you are, chained in a dungeon, an unhappy father; you have been here for seventeen years, during which time you have never seen your daughter; you have lived upon bread and water, and, in consequence, are extremely weak, and suffer from occasional lowness of spirits." - "All right," said the actor of universal capabilities, "ring up." When he was discovered to the audience, he presented an extremely miserable appearance, was very favourably received, and gave every sign of going on well, until, through some mental confusion as to his instructions, he opened the business of the act by stating in pathetic terms, that he had been confined in that dungeon seventeen years, during which time he had not tasted a morsel of food, to which circumstance he was inclined to attribute the fact of his being at that moment very much out of condition. The audience, thinking this statement exceedingly improbable, declined to receive it, and the weight of that speech hung round him until the end of his performance.

Now I, too, have received instructions for the part I have the honour of performing before you, and it behoves both you and me to profit by the terrible warning I have detailed, while I endeavour to make the part I have undertaken as plain and intelligible as I possibly can.

As I am going to propose to you that we should now begin to connect the business with the pleasure of the evening, by drinking prosperity to the Artists' Benevolent Fund, it becomes important that we should know what that fund is. It is an Association supported by the voluntary gifts of those who entertain a critical and admiring estimation of art, and has for its object the granting of annuities to the widows and children of deceased artists - of artists who have been unable in their lives to make any provision for those dear objects of their love surviving themselves. Now it is extremely important to observe that this institution of an Artists' Benevolent Fund, which I now call on you to pledge, has connected with it, and has arisen out of another artists' association, which does not ask you for a health, which never did, and never will ask you for a health, which is self-supporting, and which is entirely maintained by the prudence and providence of its three hundred artist members. That fund, which is called the Artists' Annuity Fund, is, so to speak, a joint and mutual Assurance Company against infirmity, sickness, and age. To the benefits it affords every one of its members has an absolute right, a right, be it remembered, produced by timely thrift and self-denial, and not assisted by appeals to the charity or compassion of any human being. On that fund there are, if I remember a right, some seventeen annuitants who are in the receipt of eleven hundred a-year, the proceeds of their own self-supporting Institution. In recommending to you this benevolent fund, which is not self-supporting, they address you, in effect, in these words:- "We ask you to help these widows and orphans, because we show you we have first helped ourselves. These widows and orphans may be ours or they may not be ours; but in any case we will prove to you to a certainty that we are not so many wagoners calling upon Jupiter to do our work, because we do our own work; each has his shoulder to the wheel; each, from year to year, has had his shoulder set to the wheel, and the prayer we make to Jupiter and all the gods is simply this - that this fact may be remembered when the wagon has stopped for ever, and the spent and worn-out wagoner lies lifeless by the roadside.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, I most particularly wish to impress on you the strength of this appeal. I am a painter, a sculptor, or an engraver, of average success. I study and work here for no immense return, while life and health, while hand and eye are mine. I prudently belong to the Annuity Fund, which in sickness, old age, and infirmity, preserves me from want. I do my duty to those who are depending on me while life remains; but when the grass grows above my grave there is no provision for them any longer.”

This is the case with the Artists’ Benevolent Fund, and in stating this I am only the mouthpiece of three hundred of the trade, who in truth stands as independent before you as if they were three hundred Cockers all regulated by the Gospel according to themselves. There are in existence three artists’ funds, which ought never to be mentioned without respect. I am an officer of one of them, and can speak from knowledge; but on this occasion I address myself to a case for which there is no provision. I address you on behalf of those professors of the fine arts who have made provision during life, and in submitting to you their claims I am only advocating principles which I myself have always maintained.

When I add that this Benevolent Fund makes no pretensions to gentility, squanders no treasure in keeping up appearances, that it considers that the money given for the widow and the orphan, should really be held for the widow and the orphan, I think I have exhausted the case, which I desire most strenuously to commend to you.

Perhaps you will allow me to say one last word. I will not consent to present to you the professors of Art as a set of helpless babies, who are to be held up by the chin; I present them as an energetic and persevering class of men, whose incomes depend on their own faculties and personal exertions; and I also make so bold as to present them as men who in their vocation render good service to the community. I am strongly disposed to believe there are very few debates in Parliament so important to the public welfare as a really good picture. I have also a notion that any number of bundles of the driest legal chaff that ever was chopped would be cheaply expended for one really meritorious engraving. At a highly interesting annual festival at which I have the honour to assist, and which takes place behind two fountains, I sometimes observe that great ministers of state and other such exalted characters have a strange delight in rather ostentatiously declaring that they have no knowledge whatever of art, and particularly of impressing on the company that they have passed their lives in severe studies. It strikes me when I hear these things as if these great men looked upon the arts as a sort of dancing dogs, or Punch’s show, to be turned to for amusement when one has nothing else to do. Now I always take the opportunity on these occasions of entertaining my humble opinion that all this is complete “bosh;” and of asserting to myself my strong belief that the neighbourhoods of Trafalgar Square, or Suffolk Street, rightly understood, are quite as important to the welfare of the empire as those of Downing Street, or Westminster Hall. Ladies and Gentlemen, on these grounds, and backed by the recommendation of three hundred artists in favour of the Benevolent Fund, I beg to propose its prosperity as a toast for your adoption.

SPEECH: THE FAREWELL READING.
ST. JAMES'S HALL, MARCH 15, 1870.

[With the "Christmas Carol" and "The Trial from Pickwick," Mr. Charles Dickens brought to a brilliant close the memorable series of public readings which have for sixteen years proved to audiences unexampled in numbers, the source of the highest intellectual enjoyment. Every portion of available space in the building was, of course, last night occupied some time before the appointed hour; but could the St. James's Hall have been specially enlarged for the occasion to the dimensions of Salisbury Plain, it is doubtful whether sufficient room would even then have been provided for all anxious to seize the last chance of hearing the distinguished novelist give his own interpretation of the characters called into existence by his own creative pen. As if determined to convince his auditors that, whatever reason had influenced his determination, physical exhaustion was not amongst them, Mr. Dickens never read with greater spirit and energy. His voice to the last retained its distinctive clearness, and the transitions of tone, as each personage in the story, conjured up by a word, rose vividly before the eye, seemed to be more marvellous than ever. The vast assemblage, hushed into breathless attention, suffered not a syllable to escape the ear, and the rich humour and deep pathos of one of the most delightful books ever written found once again the fullest appreciation. The usual burst of merriment responsive to the blithe description of Bob Cratchit's Christmas day, and the wonted sympathy with the crippled child "Tiny Tim," found prompt expression, and the general delight at hearing of Ebenezer Scrooge's reformation was only checked by the saddening remembrance that with it the last strain of the "carol" was dying away. After the "Trial from Pickwick," in which the speeches of the opposing counsel, and the owlish gravity of the judge, seemed to be delivered and depicted with greater dramatic power than ever, the applause of the audience rang for several minutes through the hall, and when it had subsided, Mr. Dickens, with evidently strong emotion, but in his usual distinct and expressive manner, spoke as follows:-]

Ladies and gentlemen, - It would be worse than idle - for it would be hypocritical and unfeeling - if I were to disguise that I close this episode in my life with feelings of very considerable pain. For some fifteen years, in this hall and in many kindred places, I have had the honour of presenting my own cherished ideas before you for your recognition, and, in closely observing your reception of them, have enjoyed an amount of artistic delight and instruction which, perhaps, is given to few men to know. In this task, and in every other I have ever undertaken, as a faithful servant of the public, always imbued with a sense of duty to them, and always striving to do his best, I have been uniformly cheered by the readiest response, the most generous sympathy, and the most stimulating support. Nevertheless, I have thought it well, at the full flood-tide of your favour, to retire upon those older associations between us, which date from much further back than these, and henceforth to devote myself exclusively to the art that first brought us together. Ladies and gentlemen, in but two short weeks from this time I hope that you may enter, in your own homes, on a new series of readings, at which my assistance will be indispensable; {23} but from these garish lights I vanish now for evermore, with a heartfelt, grateful, respectful, and affectionate farewell.

[Amidst repeated acclamations of the most enthusiastic description, whilst hats and handkerchiefs were waving in every part of the hall, Mr. Charles Dickens retired, withdrawing with him one of the greatest intellectual treats the public ever enjoyed.]

SPEECH: THE NEWSVENDORS' INSTITUTION, LONDON, APRIL 5, 1870.

[The annual dinner in aid of the funds of the Newsvendors' Benevolent and Provident Institution was held on the above evening, at the Freemason's Tavern. Mr. Charles Dickens presided, and was supported by the Sheriffs of the City of London and Middlesex.

After the usual toasts had been given and responded to,

The Chairman said that if the approved order of their proceedings had been observed, the Corporation of the City of London would no doubt have considered themselves snubbed if they were not toasted by themselves. He was sure that a distinguished member of the Corporation who was present would tell the company what the Corporation were going to do; and he had not the slightest doubt they were going to do something highly creditable to themselves, and something highly serviceable to the whole metropolis; and if the secret were not at present locked up in the blue chamber, they would be all deeply obliged to the gentleman who would immediately follow him, if he let them into it in the same confidence as he had observed with respect to the Corporation of the City of London being snubbed. He begged to give the toast of "The Corporation of the City of London."

Mr. Alderman Cotton, in replying to the toast, said for once, and once only, had their chairman said an unkind word about the Corporation of London. He had always reckoned Mr. Dickens to be one of the warmest friends of the Corporation; and remembering that he (Mr. Dickens) did really go through a Lord Mayor's Show in a Lord Mayor's carriage, if he had not felt himself quite a Lord Mayor, he must have at least considered himself next to one.

In proposing the toast of the evening Mr, Dickens said:-]

Ladies and gentlemen, - You receive me with so much cordiality that I fear you believe that I really did once sit in a Lord Mayor's state coach. Permit me to assure you, in spite of the information received from Mr. Alderman Cotton, that I never had that honour. Furthermore, I beg to assure you that I never witnessed a Lord Mayor's show except from the point of view obtained by the other vagabonds upon the pavement. Now, ladies and gentlemen, in spite of this great cordiality of yours, I doubt if you fully know yet what a blessing it is to you that I occupy this chair to-night, because, having filled it on several previous occasions for the society on whose behalf we are assembled, and having said everything that I could think of to say about it, and being, moreover, the president of the institution itself, I am placed to-night in the modest position of a host who is not so much to display himself as to call out his guests - perhaps even to try to induce some among them to occupy his place on another occasion. And, therefore, you may be safely sure that, like Falstaff, but with a modification almost as large as himself, I shall try rather to be the cause of speaking in others than to speak myself to-night. Much in this manner they exhibit at the door of a snuff shop the effigy of a Highlander with an empty mull in his hand, who, having apparently taken all the snuff he can carry, and discharged all the sneezes of which he is capable, politely invites his friends and patrons to step in and try what they can do in the same line.

It is an appropriate instance of the universality of the newsman's calling that no toast we have drunk to-night - and no toast we shall drink to-night - and no toast we might, could, should, or would drink to-night, is separable for a moment from that great inclusion of all possible subjects of human interest which he delivers at our doors every day. Further, it may be worthy the consideration of everybody here who has talked cheerfully to his or her neighbour since we have sat down at the table, what in the name of Heaven should we have talked about, and how on earth could we have possibly got on, if our newsman had only for one single day forgotten us. Now, ladies and gentlemen, as our newsman is not by any means in the habit of forgetting us, let us try to form a little habit of not forgetting our newsman. Let us remember that his work is very arduous; that it occupies him early and late; that the profits he derives from us are at the best very small; that the services he renders to us are very great; that if he be a master, his little capital is exposed to all sorts of mischances, anxieties, and hazards; and if he be a journeyman, he himself is exposed to all manner of weathers, of tempers, and of difficult and unreasonable requirements.

Let me illustrate this. I was once present at a social discussion, which originated by chance. The subject was, What was the most absorbing and longest-lived passion in the human breast? What was the passion so powerful that it would almost induce the generous to be mean, the careless to be cautious, the guileless to be deeply designing, and the dove to emulate the serpent? A daily editor of vast experience and great acuteness, who was one of the company, considerably surprised us by saying with the greatest confidence that the passion in question was the passion of getting orders for the play.

There had recently been a terrible shipwreck, and very few of the surviving sailors had escaped in an open boat. One of these on making land came straight to London, and straight to the newspaper office, with his story of how he had seen the ship go down before his eyes. That young man had witnessed the most terrible contention between the powers of fire and water for the destruction of that ship and of every one on board. He had rowed away among the floating, dying, and the sinking dead. He had floated by day, and he had frozen by night, with no shelter and no food, and, as he told his dismal tale, he rolled his haggard eyes about the room. When he had finished, and the tale had been noted down from his lips, he was cheered and refreshed, and soothed, and asked if anything could be done for him. Even within him that master passion was so strong that he immediately replied he should like an order for the play. My friend the editor certainly thought that was rather a strong case; but he said that during his many years of experience he had witnessed an incurable amount of self-prostration and abasement having no outer object, and that almost invariably on the part of people who could well afford to pay.

This made a great impression on my mind, and I really lived in this faith until some years ago it happened upon a stormy night I was kindly escorted from a bleak railway station to the little out-of-the-way town it represented by a sprightly and vivacious newsman, to whom I propounded, as we went along under my umbrella - he being most excellent company - this old question, what was the one all-absorbing passion of the human soul? He replied, without the slightest hesitation, that it certainly was the passion for getting your newspaper in advance of your fellow-creatures; also, if you only hired it, to get it delivered at your own door at exactly the same time as another man who hired the same copy four miles off; and, finally, the invincible determination on the part of both men not to believe the time was up when the boy called.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have not had an opportunity of verifying this experience with my friends of the managing committee, but I have no doubt from its reception to-night that my friend the newsman was perfectly right.

Well, as a sort of beacon in a sufficiently dark life, and as an assurance that among a little body of working men there is a feeling of brotherhood and sympathy - which is worth much to all men, or they would herd with wolves - the newsvendors once upon a time established the Benevolent and Provident Institution, and here it is. Under the Provident head, certain small annuities are granted to old and hard-working subscribers. Under the Benevolent head, relief is afforded to temporary and proved distress. Under both heads, I am bound to say the help rendered is very humble and very sparing, but if you like it to be handsomer you have it in your power to make it so. Such as it is, it is most gratefully received, and does a deal of good. Such as it is, it is most discreetly and feelingly administered; and it is encumbered with no wasteful charges for management or patronage.

You know upon an old authority, that you may believe anything except facts and figures, but you really may believe that during the last year we have granted £100 in pensions, and some £70 in temporary relief, and we have invested in Government securities some £400. But, touching this matter of investments, it was suggested at the anniversary dinner, on the high and kind authority of Sir Benjamin Phillips that we might grant more pensions and invest less money. We urged, on the other hand, that we wished our pensions to be certain and unchangeable - which of course they must be if they are always paid out of our Government interest and never out of our capital. However, so amiable is our nature, that we profess our desire to grant more pensions and to invest more money too. The more you give us to-night again, so amiable is our nature, the more we promise to do in both departments. That the newsman's work has greatly increased, and that it is far more wearing and tearing than it used to be, you may infer from one fact, not to mention that we live in railway times. It is stated in Mitchell's "Newspaper Press Directory," that during the last quarter of a century the number of newspapers which appeared in London had more than doubled, while the increase in the number of people among whom they were disseminated was probably beyond calculation.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have stated the newsman's simple case. I leave it in your hands. Within the last year the institution has had the good fortune to attract the sympathy and gain the support of the eminent man of letters I am proud to call my friend, {24} who now represents the great Republic of America at the British Court. Also it has the honour of enrolling upon its list of donors and vice-presidents the great name of

Longfellow. I beg to propose to you to drink "Prosperity to the Newsvendors' Benevolent and Provident Institution."

SPEECH: MACREADY. LONDON, MARCH 1, 1851.

[On the evening of the above day the friends and admirers of Mr. Macready entertained him at a public dinner. Upwards of six hundred gentlemen assembled to do honour to the great actor on his retirement from the stage. Sir E. B. Lytton took the chair. Among the other speakers were Baron Bunsen, Sir Charles Eastlake, Mr. Thackeray, Mr. John Forster, Mr. W. J. Fox, and Mr. Charles Dickens, who proposed "The Health of the Chairman" in the following words:-]

Gentlemen, - After all you have already heard, and so rapturously received, I assure you that not even the warmth of your kind welcome would embolden me to hope to interest you if I had not full confidence in the subject I have to offer to your notice. But my reliance on the strength of this appeal to you is so strong that I am rather encouraged than daunted by the brightness of the track on which I have to throw my little shadow.

Gentlemen, as it seems to me, there are three great requisites essential to the perfect realisation of a scene so unusual and so splendid as that in which we are now assembled. The first, and I must say very difficult requisite, is a man possessing the stronghold in the general remembrance, the indisputable claim on the general regard and esteem, which is possessed by my dear and much valued friend our guest. The second requisite is the presence of a body of entertainers, - a great multitude of hosts so cheerful and good-humoured (under, I am sorry to say, some personal inconvenience), - so warm-hearted and so nobly in earnest, as those whom I have the privilege of addressing. The third, and certainly not the least of these requisites, is a president who, less by his social position, which he may claim by inheritance, or by fortune, which may have been adventitiously won, and may be again accidentally lost, than by his comprehensive genius, shall fitly represent the best part of him to whom honour is done, and the best part of those who unite in the doing of it. Such a president I think we have found in our chairman of to-night, and I need scarcely add that our chairman's health is the toast I have to propose to you.

Many of those who now hear me were present, I daresay, at that memorable scene on Wednesday night last, {25} when the great vision which had been a delight and a lesson, - very often, I daresay, a support and a comfort to you, which had for many years improved and charmed us, and to which we had looked for an elevated relief from the labours of our lives, faded from our sight for ever. I will not stop to inquire whether our guest may or may not have looked backward, through rather too long a period for us, to some remote and distant time when he might possibly bear some far-off likeness to a certain Spanish archbishop whom Gil Blas once served. Nor will I stop to inquire whether it was a reasonable disposition in the audience of Wednesday to seize upon the words -

“And I have brought,
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon - ” {26}

but I will venture to intimate to those whom I am addressing how in my mind I mainly connect that occasion with the present. When I looked round on the vast assemblage, and observed the huge pit hushed into stillness on the rising of the curtain, and that mighty surging gallery, where men in their shirt-sleeves had been striking out their arms like strong swimmers - when I saw that. boisterous human flood become still water in a moment, and remain so from the opening to the end of the play, it suggested to me something besides the trustworthiness of an English crowd, and the delusion under which those labour who are apt to disparage and malign it: it suggested to me that in meeting here to-night we undertook to represent something of the all-pervading feeling of that crowd, through all its intermediate degrees, from the full-dressed lady, with her diamonds sparkling upon her breast in the proscenium-box, to the half-undressed gentleman; who bides his time to take some refreshment in the back row of the gallery. And I consider, gentlemen, that no one who could possibly be placed in this chair could so well head that comprehensive representation, and could so well give the crowning grace to our festivities, as one whose comprehensive genius has in his various works embraced them all, and who has, in his dramatic genius, enchanted and enthralled them all at once.

Gentlemen, it is not for me here to recall, after what you have heard this night, what I have seen and known in the bygone times of Mr. Macready’s management, of the strong friendship of Sir Bulwer Lytton for him, of the association of his pen with his earliest successes, or of Mr. Macready's zealous and untiring services; but it may be permitted me to say what, in any public mention of him I can never repress, that in the path we both tread I have uniformly found him from the first the most generous of men; quick to encourage, slow to disparage, ever anxious to assert the order of which he is so great an ornament; never condescending to shuffle it off, and leave it outside state rooms, as a Mussulman might leave his slippers outside a mosque.

There is a popular prejudice, a kind of superstition to the effect that authors are not a particularly united body, that they are not invariably and inseparably attached to each other. I am afraid I must concede half-a-grain or so of truth I to that superstition; but this I know, that there can hardly be - that there hardly can have been - among the followers of literature, a man of more high standing farther above these little grudging jealousies, which do sometimes disparage its brightness, than Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton.

And I have the strongest reason just at present to bear my testimony to his great consideration for those evils which are sometimes unfortunately attendant upon it, though not on him. For, in conjunction with some other gentlemen now present, I have just embarked in a design with Sir Bulwer Lytton, to smoothe the rugged way of young labourers, both in literature and the fine arts, and to soften, but by no eleemosynary means, the declining years of meritorious age. And if that project prosper as I hope it will, and as I know it ought, it will one day be an honour to England where there is now a reproach; originating in his sympathies, being brought into operation by his activity, and endowed from its very cradle by his generosity. There are many among you who will have each his own favourite reason for drinking our chairman's health, resting his claim probably upon some of his diversified successes. According to the nature of your reading, some of you will connect him with prose, others will connect him with poetry. One will connect him with comedy, and another with the romantic passions of the stage, and his assertion of worthy ambition and earnest struggle against those

"twin gaolers of the human heart,
Low birth and iron fortune."

Again, another's taste will lead him to the contemplation of Rienzi and the streets of Rome; another's to the rebuilt and repeopled streets of Pompeii; another's to the touching history of the fireside where the Caxton family learned how to discipline their natures and tame their wild hopes down. But, however various their feelings and reasons may be, I am sure that with one accord each will help the other, and all will swell the greeting, with which I shall now propose to you “The Health of our Chairman, Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton.”

SPEECH: SANITARY REFORM. LONDON, MAY 10, 1851.

[The members and friends of the Metropolitan Sanitary Association dined together on the above evening at Gore House, Kensington. The Earl of Carlisle occupied the chair. Mr. Charles Dickens was present, and in proposing "The Board of Health," made the following speech:-]

There are very few words for me to say upon the needfulness of sanitary reform, or the consequent usefulness of the Board of Health. That no man can estimate the amount of mischief grown in dirt, - that no man can say the evil stops here or stops there, either in its moral or physical effects, or can deny that it begins in the cradle and is not at rest in the miserable grave, is as certain as it is that the air from Gin Lane will be carried by an easterly wind into Mayfair, or that the furious pestilence raging in St. Giles's no mortal list of lady patronesses can keep out of Almack's. Fifteen years ago some of the valuable reports of Mr. Chadwick and Dr. Southwood Smith, strengthening and much enlarging my knowledge, made me earnest in this cause in my own sphere; and I can honestly declare that the use I have since that time made of my eyes and nose have only strengthened the conviction that certain sanitary reforms must precede all other social remedies, and that neither education nor religion can do anything useful until the way has been paved for their ministrations by cleanliness and decency.

I do not want authority for this opinion: you have heard the speech of the right reverend prelate {27} this evening - a speech which no sanitary reformer can have heard without emotion. Of what avail is it to send missionaries to the miserable man condemned to work in a foetid court, with every sense bestowed upon him for his health and happiness turned into a torment, with every month of his life adding to the heap of evils under which he is condemned to exist? What human sympathy within him is that instructor to address? what natural old chord within him is he to touch? Is it the remembrance of his children? - a memory of destitution, of sickness, of fever, and of scrofula? Is it his hopes, his latent hopes of immortality? He is so surrounded by and embedded in material filth, that his soul cannot rise to the contemplation of the great truths of religion. Or if the case is that of a miserable child bred and nurtured in some noisome, loathsome place, and tempted, in these better days, into the ragged school, what can a few hours' teaching effect against the ever-renewed lesson of a whole existence? But give them a glimpse of heaven through a little of its light and air; give them water; help them to be clean; lighten that heavy atmosphere in which their spirits flag and in which they become the callous things they are; take the body of the dead relative from the close room in which the living live with it, and where death, being familiar, loses its awe; and then they will be brought willingly to hear of Him whose thoughts were so much with the poor, and who had compassion for all human suffering.

The toast which I have to propose, The Board of Health, is entitled to all the honour which can be conferred upon it. We have very near us, in Kensington, a transparent illustration that no very great thing can ever be accomplished without an immense amount of abuse being heaped upon it. In connexion with the Board of Health we are always hearing a very large word which is always pronounced with a very great relish - the word centralization. Now I submit that in the time of the cholera we had a pretty good opportunity of judging between this so called centralization and what I may, I think, call "vestrylisation." I dare say the company present have read the reports of the Cholera Board of Health, and I daresay they have also read reports of certain vestries. I have the honour of belonging to a constituency which elected that amazing body, the Marylebone vestry, and I think that if the company present will look to what was done by the Board of Health at Glasgow, and then contrast those proceedings with the wonderful cleverness with which affairs were managed at the same period by my vestry, there will be very little difficulty in judging between them. My vestry even took upon itself to deny the existence of cholera as a weak invention of the enemy, and that denial had little or no effect in staying the progress of the disease. We can now contrast what centralization is as represented by a few noisy and interested gentlemen, and what centralization is when worked out by a body combining business habits, sound medical and social knowledge, and an earnest sympathy with the sufferings of the working classes.

Another objection to the Board of Health is conveyed in a word not so large as the other, - "Delay." I would suggest, in respect to this, that it would be very unreasonable to complain that a first-rate chronometer didn't go when its master had not wound it up. The Board of Health may be excellently adapted for going and very willing and anxious to go, and yet may not be permitted to go by reason of its lawful master having fallen into a gentle slumber and forgotten to set it a going. One of the speakers this evening has referred to Lord Castlereagh’s caution “not to halloo until they were out of the wood.” As regards the Board of Trade I would suggest that they ought not to halloo until they are out of the Woods and Forests. In that leafy region the Board of Health suffers all sorts of delays, and this should always be borne in mind. With the toast of the Board of Health I will couple the name of a noble lord (Ashley), of whose earnestness in works of benevolence, no man can doubt, and who has the courage on all occasions to face the cant which is the worst and commonest of all - the cant about the cant of philanthropy.

SPEECH: GARDENING. LONDON, JUNE 9, 1851.

[At the anniversary dinner of the Gardeners' Benevolent Institution, held under the presidency of Mr., afterwards Sir Joseph Paxton, Mr. Charles Dickens made the following speech:-]

I feel an unbounded and delightful interest in all the purposes and associations of gardening. Probably there is no feeling in the human mind stronger than the love of gardening. The prisoner will make a garden in his prison, and cultivate his solitary flower in the chink of a wall. The poor mechanic will string his scarlet bean from one side of his window to the other, and watch it and tend it with unceasing interest. It is a holy duty in foreign countries to decorate the graves of the dead with flowers, and here, too, the resting-places of those who have passed away from us will soon be gardens. From that old time when the Lord walked in the garden in the cool of the evening, down to the day when a Poet-Laureate sang -

"Trust me, Clara Vere de Vere,
From yon blue heaven above us bent
The gardener Adam and his wife
Smile at the claims of long descent,"

at all times and in all ages gardens have been amongst the objects of the greatest interest to mankind. There may be a few, but I believe they are but a few, who take no interest in the products of gardening, except perhaps in "London Pride," or a certain degenerate kind of "Stock," which is apt to grow hereabouts, cultivated by a species of frozen-out gardeners whom no thaw can ever penetrate: except these, the gardeners' art has contributed to the delight of all men in their time. That there ought to be a Benevolent Provident Institution for gardeners is in the fitness of things, and that such an institution ought to flourish and does flourish is still more so.

I have risen to propose to you the health of a gentleman who is a great gardener, and not only a great gardener but a great man - the growth of a fine Saxon root cultivated up with a power of intellect to a plant that is at this time the talk of the civilized world - I allude, of course, to my friend the chairman of the day. I took occasion to say at a public assembly hard-by, a month or two ago, in speaking of that wonderful building Mr. Paxton has designed for the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park, that it ought to have fallen down, but that it refused to do so. We were told that the glass ought to have been all broken, the gutters all choked up, and the building flooded, and that the roof and sides ought to have been blown away; in short that everything ought to have done what everything obstinately persisted in not doing. Earth, air, fire, and water all appear to have conspired together in Mr. Paxton's favour - all have conspired together to one result, which, when the present generation is dust, will be an enduring temple to his honour, and to the energy, the talent, and the resources of Englishmen.

"But," said a gentleman to me the other day, "no doubt Mr. Paxton is a great man, but there is one objection to him that you can never get over, that is, he is a gardener." Now that is our case to-night, that he is a gardener, and we are extremely proud of it. This is a great age, with all its faults, when a man by the power of his own genius and good sense can scale such a daring height as Mr. Paxton has reached, and composedly place his form on the top. This is a great age, when a man impressed with a useful idea can carry out his project without being imprisoned, or thumb-screwed, or persecuted in any form. I can well understand that you, to whom the genius, the intelligence, the industry, and the achievements of our friend are well known, should be anxious to do him honour by placing him in the position he occupies to-night; and I assure you, you have conferred great gratification on one of his friends, in permitting him to have the opportunity of proposing his health, which that friend now does most cordially and with all the honours.

SPEECH: THE ROYAL ACADEMY DINNER. LONDON, MAY 2, 1870.

[On the occasion of the Second Exhibition of the Royal Academy in their new galleries in Piccadilly, the President, Sir F. Grant, and the council gave their usual inaugurative banquet, and a very distinguished company was present. The dinner took place in the large central room, and covers were laid for 200 guests. The Prince of Wales acknowledged the toast of his health and that of the Princess, the Duke of Cambridge responded to the toast of the army, Mr. Childers to the navy, Lord Elcho to the volunteers, Mr. Motley to "The Prosperity of the United States," Mr. Gladstone to "Her Majesty's Ministers," the Archbishop of York to, "The Guests," and Mr. Dickens to "Literature." The last toast having been proposed in a highly eulogistic speech, Mr. Dickens responded.]

Mr. President, your Royal Highnesses, my Lords and Gentlemen, - I beg to acknowledge the toast with which you have done me the great honour of associating my name. I beg to acknowledge it on behalf of the brotherhood of literature, present and absent, not forgetting an illustrious wanderer from the fold, whose tardy return to it we all hail with delight, and who now sits - or lately did sit - within a few chairs of or on your left hand. I hope I may also claim to acknowledge the toast on behalf of the sisterhood of literature also, although that "better half of human nature," to which Mr. Gladstone rendered his graceful tribute, is unworthily represented here, in the present state of its rights and wrongs, by the devouring monster, man.

All the arts, and many of the sciences, bear witness that women, even in their present oppressed condition, can attain to quite as great distinction, and can attain to quite as lofty names as men. Their emancipation (as I am given to understand) drawing very near, there is no saying how soon they may "push us from our stools" at these tables, or how soon our better half of human nature, standing in this place of mine, may eloquently depreciate mankind, addressing another better half of human nature sitting in the president's chair.

The literary visitors of the Royal Academy to-night desire me to congratulate their hosts on a very interesting exhibition, in which risen excellence supremely asserts itself, and from which promise of a brilliant succession in time to come is not wanting. They naturally see with especial interest the writings and persons of great men - historians, philosophers, poets, and novelists, vividly illustrated around them here. And they hope that they may modestly claim to have rendered some little assistance towards the production of many of the pictures in this magnificent gallery. For without the patient labours of some among them unhistoric history might have long survived in this place, and but for the researches and wandering of others among them, the most preposterous countries, the most impossible peoples, and the absurdest superstitions, manners, and customs, might have usurped the place of truth upon these walls. Nay, there is no knowing, Sir Francis Grant, what unlike portraits you yourself might have painted if you had been left, with your sitters, to idle pens, unchecked reckless rumours, and undenounced lying malevolence.

I cannot forbear, before I resume my seat, adverting to a sad theme (the recent death of Daniel Maclise) to which his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales made allusion, and to which the president referred with the eloquence of genuine feeling. Since I first entered the public lists, a very young man indeed, it has been my constant fortune to number amongst my nearest and dearest friends members of the Royal Academy who have been its grace and pride. They have so dropped from my side one by one that I already, begin to feel like the Spanish monk of whom Wilkie tells, who had grown to believe that the only realities around him were the pictures which he loved, and that all the moving life he saw, or ever had seen, was a shadow and a dream.

For many years I was one of the two most intimate friends and most constant companions of the late Mr. Maclise. Of his genius in his chosen art I will venture to say nothing here, but of his prodigious fertility of mind and wonderful wealth of intellect, I may confidently assert that they would have made him, if he had been so minded, at least as great a writer as he was a painter. The gentlest and most modest of men, the freshest as to his generous appreciation of young aspirants, and the frankest and largest-hearted as to his peers, incapable of a sordid or ignoble thought, gallantly sustaining the true dignity of his vocation, without one grain of self-ambition, wholesomely natural at the last as at the first, “in wit a man, simplicity a child,” no artist, of whatsoever denomination, I make bold to say, ever went to his rest leaving a golden memory more pure from dross, or having devoted himself with a truer chivalry to the art goddess whom he worshipped.

[These were the last public words of Charles Dickens.]

speechesfootnotes:

{1} Sir David Wilkie died at sea, on board the *Oriental*, off Gibraltar, on the 1st of June, 1841, whilst on his way back to England. During the evening of the same day his body was committed to the deep. - ED.

{2} The *Britannia* was the vessel that conveyed Mr. Dickens across the Atlantic, on his first visit to America - ED.

{3} *Master Humphrey's Clock*, under which title the two novels of Barnaby Rudge and The Old Curiosity Shop originally appeared. - ED.

{4} "I shall always entertain a very pleasant and grateful recollection of Hartford. It is a lovely place, and I had many friends there, whom I can never remember with indifference. We left it with no little regret." *American Notes* (Lond. 1842). Vol. I, p. 182.

{5} See the *Life and Letters of Washington Irving* (Lond. 1863), p. 644, where Irving speaks of a letter he has received "from that glorious fellow Dickens, in reply to the one I wrote, expressing my heartfelt delight with his writings, and my yearnings toward himself." See also the letter itself, in the second division of this volume. - ED.

{6} *TENNYSON*, *Lady Clara Vere de Vere*, then newly published in collection of 1842. - ED

{7} "That this meeting, while conveying its cordial thanks to Charles Dickens, Esq., for his presence this evening, and for his able and courteous conduct as President, cannot separate without tendering the warmest expression of its gratitude and admiration to one whose writings have so loyally inculcated the lessons of benevolence and virtue, and so richly contributed to the stores of public pleasure and instructions."

{8} The Duke of Devonshire.

{9} *Charlotte Corday going to Execution.*

{10} The above is extracted from Mrs. Stowe's "Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands,", a book in which her eaves-dropping propensities were already developed in a sufficiently ugly form. - ED.

{11} Alas! the "many years" were to be barely six, when the speaker was himself destined to write some memorial pages commemorative of his illustrious friend (Cornhill Magazine, February, 1864.) - ED.

{12} Mr. Henry Dodd had proposed to give five acres of land in Berkshire, but, in consequence of his desiring to attach certain restrictions, after a long and unsatisfactory correspondence, the Committee, on 13th January following, rejected the offer. (*Communicated*.)

{13} Claude Melnotte in *The Lady of Lyons*, Act iii. sc. 2.

{14} Mr. B. Webster.

{15} *Romeo and Juliet*, Act III. Sc. 1.

{16} Robert Browning: *Bells and Pomegranates.*

{17} R. H.

{18} *Carlyle's French Revolution*. Book X., Chapter I.

{19} Henry Thomas Buckle.

{20} This and the Speeches which follow were accidentally omitted in their right places.

{21} Hazlitt's Round Table (Edinburgh, 1817, vol ii., p. 242), *On Actors and Acting.*

{22} An allusion to a well-known Sonnet of Wordsworth, beginning - "The world is too much with us - late and soon," &c. - ED.

{23} Alluding to the forthcoming serial story of *Edwin Drood.*

{24} The Honourable John Lothrop Motley.

{25} February 26th, 1851. Mr. Macready's Farewell Benefit at Drury Lane Theatre, on which occasion he played the part of Macbeth. - ED.

{26} MACBETH, Act I., sc. 7.

{27} The Bishop of Ripon (Dr. Longley).

THE END OF
Speeches: Literary and Social

SUNDAY UNDER THREE HEADS

DEDICATION

To The Right Reverend
THE BISHOP OF LONDON

MY LORD,

You were among the first, some years ago, to expatiate on the vicious addiction of the lower classes of society to Sunday excursions; and were thus instrumental in calling forth occasional demonstrations of those extreme opinions on the subject, which are very generally received with derision, if not with contempt.

Your elevated station, my Lord, affords you countless opportunities of increasing the comforts and pleasures of the humbler classes of society—not by the expenditure of the smallest portion of your princely income, but by merely sanctioning with the influence of your example, their harmless pastimes, and innocent recreations.

That your Lordship would ever have contemplated Sunday recreations with so much horror, if you had been at all acquainted with the wants and necessities of the people who indulged in them, I cannot imagine possible. That a Prelate of your elevated rank has the faintest conception of the extent of those wants, and the nature of those necessities, I do not believe.

For these reasons, I venture to address this little Pamphlet to your Lordship's consideration. I am quite conscious that the outlines I have drawn, afford but a very imperfect description of the feelings they are intended to illustrate; but I claim for them one merit—their truth and freedom from exaggeration. I may have fallen short of the mark, but I have never overshot it: and while I have pointed out what appears to me, to be injustice on the part of others, I hope I have carefully abstained from committing it myself.

I am,
My Lord,
Your Lordship's most obedient,
Humble Servant,
TIMOTHY SPARKS.
June, 1836.

CHAPTER I—AS IT IS

There are few things from which I derive greater pleasure, than walking through some of the principal streets of London on a fine Sunday, in summer, and watching the cheerful faces of the lively groups with which they are thronged. There is something, to my eyes at least, exceedingly pleasing in the general desire evinced by the humbler classes of society, to appear neat and clean on this their only holiday. There are many grave old persons, I know, who shake their heads with an air of profound wisdom, and tell you that poor people dress too well now-a-days; that when they were children, folks knew their stations in life better; that you may depend upon it, no good will come of this sort of thing in the end,—and so forth: but I fancy I can discern in the fine bonnet of the working-man’s wife, or the feather-bedizened hat of his child, no inconsiderable evidence of good feeling on the part of the man himself, and an affectionate desire to expend the few shillings he can spare from his week’s wages, in improving the appearance and adding to the happiness of those who are nearest and dearest to him. This may be a very heinous and unbecoming degree of vanity, perhaps, and the money might possibly be applied to better uses; it must not be forgotten, however, that it might very easily be devoted to worse: and if two or three faces can be rendered happy and contented, by a trifling improvement of outward appearance, I cannot help thinking that the object is very cheaply purchased, even at the expense of a smart gown, or a gaudy riband. There is a great deal of very unnecessary cant about the over-dressing of the common people. There is not a manufacturer or tradesman in existence, who would not employ a man who takes a reasonable degree of pride in the appearance of himself and those about him, in preference to a sullen, slovenly fellow, who works doggedly on, regardless of his own clothing and that of his wife and children, and seeming to take pleasure or pride in nothing.

The pampered aristocrat, whose life is one continued round of licentious pleasures and sensual gratifications; or the gloomy enthusiast, who detests the cheerful amusements he can never enjoy, and envies the healthy feelings he can never know, and who would put down the one and suppress the other, until he made the minds of his fellow-beings as besotted and distorted as his own;—neither of these men can by possibility form an adequate notion of what Sunday really is to those whose lives are spent in sedentary or laborious occupations, and who are accustomed to look forward to it through their whole existence, as their only day of rest from toil, and innocent enjoyment.

The sun that rises over the quiet streets of London on a bright Sunday morning, shines till his setting, on gay and happy faces. Here and there, so early as six o'clock, a young man and woman in their best attire, may be seen hurrying along on their way to the house of some acquaintance, who is included in their scheme of pleasure for the day; from whence, after stopping to take "a bit of breakfast," they sally forth, accompanied by several old people, and a whole crowd of young ones, bearing large hand-baskets full of provisions, and Belcher handkerchiefs done up in bundles, with the neck of a bottle sticking out at the top, and closely-packed apples bulging out at the sides,—and away they hurry along the streets leading to the steam-packet wharfs, which are already plentifully sprinkled with parties bound for the same destination. Their good humour and delight know no bounds—for it is a delightful morning, all blue over head, and nothing like a cloud in the whole sky; and even the air of the river at London Bridge is something to them, shut up as they have been, all the week, in close streets and heated rooms. There are dozens of steamers to all sorts of places—Gravesend, Greenwich, and Richmond; and such numbers of people, that when you have once sat down on the deck, it is all but a moral impossibility to get up again—to say nothing of walking about, which is entirely out of the question. Away they go, joking and laughing, and eating and drinking, and admiring everything they see, and pleased with everything they hear, to climb Windmill Hill, and catch a glimpse of the rich corn-fields and beautiful orchards of Kent; or to stroll among the fine old trees of Greenwich Park, and survey the wonders of Shooter's Hill and Lady James's Folly; or to glide past the beautiful meadows of Twickenham and Richmond, and to gaze with a delight which only people like them can know, on every lovely object in the fair prospect around. Boat follows boat, and coach succeeds coach, for the next three hours; but all are filled, and all with the same kind of people—neat and clean, cheerful and contented.

They reach their places of destination, and the taverns are crowded; but there is no drunkenness or brawling, for the class of men who commit the enormity of making Sunday excursions, take their families with them: and this in itself would be a check upon them, even if they were inclined to dissipation, which they really are not. Boisterous their mirth may be, for they have all the excitement of feeling that fresh air and green fields can impart to the dwellers in crowded cities, but it is innocent and harmless. The glass is circulated, and the joke goes round; but the one is free from excess, and the other from offence; and nothing but good humour and hilarity prevail.

In streets like Holborn and Tottenham Court Road, which form the central market of a large neighbourhood, inhabited by a vast number of mechanics and poor people, a few shops are open at an early hour of the morning; and a very poor man, with a thin and sickly woman by his side, may be seen with their little basket in hand, purchasing the scanty quantity of necessaries they can afford, which the time at which the man receives his wages, or his having a good deal of work to do, or the woman's having been out charing till a late hour, prevented their procuring over-night. The coffee-shops too, at which clerks and young men employed in counting-houses can procure their breakfasts, are also open. This class comprises, in a place like London, an enormous number of people, whose limited means prevent their engaging for their lodgings any other apartment than a bedroom, and who have consequently no alternative but to take their breakfasts at a coffee-shop, or go without it altogether. All these places, however, are quickly closed; and by the time the church bells begin to ring, all appearance of traffic has ceased. And then, what are the signs of immorality that meet the eye? Churches are well filled, and Dissenters' chapels are crowded to suffocation. There is no preaching to empty benches, while the drunken and dissolute populace run riot in the streets.

Here is a fashionable church, where the service commences at a late hour, for the accommodation of such members of the congregation—and they are not a few—as may happen to have lingered at the Opera far into the morning of the Sabbath; an excellent contrivance for poising the balance between God and Mammon, and illustrating the ease with which a man's duties to both, may be accommodated and adjusted. How the carriages rattle up, and deposit their richly-dressed burdens beneath the lofty portico! The powdered footmen glide along the aisle, place the richly-bound prayer-books on the pew desks, slam the doors, and hurry away, leaving the fashionable members of the congregation to inspect each other through their glasses, and to dazzle and glitter in the eyes of the few shabby people in the free seats. The organ peals forth, the hired singers commence a short hymn, and the congregation condescendingly rise, stare about them, and converse in whispers. The clergyman enters the reading-desk,—a young man of noble family and elegant demeanour, notorious at Cambridge for his knowledge of horse-flesh and dancers, and celebrated at Eton for his hopeless stupidity. The service commences. Mark the soft voice in which he reads, and the impressive manner in which he applies his white hand, studded with brilliants, to his perfumed hair. Observe the graceful emphasis with which he offers up the prayers for the King, the Royal Family, and all the Nobility; and the nonchalance with which he hurries over the more uncomfortable portions of the service, the seventh commandment for instance, with a studied regard for the taste and feeling of his auditors, only to be equalled by that displayed by the sleek divine who succeeds him, who murmurs, in a voice kept down by rich feeding, most comfortable doctrines for exactly twelve minutes, and then arrives at the anxiously expected 'Now to God,' which is the signal for the dismissal of the congregation. The organ is again heard; those who have been asleep wake up, and those who have kept awake, smile and seem greatly relieved; bows and congratulations are exchanged, the livery servants are all bustle and commotion, bang go the steps, up jump the footmen, and off rattle the carriages: the inmates discoursing on the dresses of the congregation, and congratulating themselves on having set so excellent an example to the community in general, and Sunday-pleasurers in particular.

Enter a less orthodox place of religious worship, and observe the contrast. A small close chapel with a white-washed wall, and plain deal pews and pulpit, contains a closely-packed congregation, as different in dress, as they are opposed in manner, to that we have just quitted. The hymn is sung—not by paid singers, but by the whole assembly at the loudest pitch of their voices, unaccompanied by any musical instrument, the words being given out, two lines at a time, by the clerk. There is something in the sonorous quavering of the harsh voices, in the lank and hollow faces of the men, and the sour solemnity of the women, which bespeaks this a strong-hold of intolerant zeal and ignorant enthusiasm. The preacher enters the pulpit. He is a coarse, hard-faced man of forbidding aspect, clad in rusty black, and bearing in his hand a small plain Bible from which he selects some passage for his text, while the hymn is concluding. The congregation fall upon their knees, and are hushed into profound stillness as he delivers an extempore prayer, in which he calls upon the Sacred Founder of the Christian faith to bless his ministry, in terms of disgusting and impious familiarity not to be described. He begins his oration in a drawling tone, and his hearers listen with silent attention. He grows warmer as he proceeds with his subject, and his gesticulation becomes proportionately violent. He clenches his fists, beats the book upon the desk before him, and swings his arms wildly about his head. The congregation murmur their acquiescence in his doctrines: and a short groan, occasionally bears testimony to the moving nature of his eloquence. Encouraged by these symptoms of approval, and working himself up to a pitch of enthusiasm amounting almost to frenzy, he denounces sabbath-breakers with the direst vengeance of offended Heaven. He stretches his body half out of the pulpit, thrusts forth his arms with frantic gestures, and blasphemously calls upon The Deity to visit with eternal torments, those who turn aside from the word, as interpreted and preached by—himself. A low moaning is heard, the women rock their bodies to and fro, and wring their hands; the preacher's fervour increases, the perspiration starts upon his brow, his face is flushed, and he clenches his hands convulsively, as he draws a hideous and appalling picture of the horrors preparing for the wicked in a future state. A great excitement is visible among his hearers, a scream is heard, and some young girl falls senseless on the floor. There is a momentary rustle, but it is only for a moment—all eyes are turned towards the preacher. He pauses, passes his handkerchief across his face, and looks complacently round. His voice resumes its natural tone, as with mock humility he offers up a thanksgiving for having been successful in his efforts, and having been permitted to rescue one sinner from the path of evil. He sinks back into his seat, exhausted with the violence of his ravings; the girl is removed, a hymn is sung, a petition for some measure for securing the better observance of the Sabbath, which has been prepared by the good man, is read; and his worshipping admirers struggle who shall be the first to sign it.

But the morning service has concluded, and the streets are again crowded with people. Long rows of cleanly-dressed charity children, preceded by a portly beadle and a withered schoolmaster, are returning to their welcome dinner; and it is evident, from the number of men with beer-trays who are running from house to house, that no inconsiderable portion of the population are about to take theirs at this early hour. The bakers' shops in the humbler suburbs especially, are filled with men, women, and children, each anxiously waiting for the Sunday dinner. Look at the group of children who surround that working man who has just emerged from the baker's shop at the corner of the street, with the reeking dish, in which a diminutive joint of mutton simmers above a vast heap of half-browned potatoes. How the young rogues clap their hands, and dance round their father, for very joy at the prospect of the feast: and how anxiously the youngest and chubbiest of the lot, lingers on tiptoe by his side, trying to get a peep into the interior of the dish. They turn up the street, and the chubby-faced boy trots on as fast as his little legs will carry him, to herald the approach of the dinner to 'Mother' who is standing with a baby in her arms on the doorstep, and who seems almost as pleased with the whole scene as the children themselves; whereupon 'baby' not precisely understanding the importance of the business in hand, but clearly perceiving that it is something unusually lively, kicks and crows most lustily, to the unspeakable delight of all the children and both the parents: and the dinner is borne into the house amidst a shouting of small voices, and jumping of fat legs, which would fill Sir Andrew Agnew with astonishment; as well it might, seeing that Baronets, generally speaking, eat pretty comfortable dinners all the week through, and cannot be expected to understand what people feel, who only have a meat dinner on one day out of every seven.

The bakings being all duly consigned to their respective owners, and the beer-man having gone his rounds, the church bells ring for afternoon service, the shops are again closed, and the streets are more than ever thronged with people; some who have not been to church in the morning, going to it now; others who have been to church, going out for a walk; and others—let us admit the full measure of their guilt—going for a walk, who have not been to church at all. I am afraid the smart servant of all work, who has been loitering at the corner of the square for the last ten minutes, is one of the latter class. She is evidently waiting for somebody, and though she may have made up her mind to go to church with him one of these mornings, I don't think they have any such intention on this particular afternoon. Here he is, at last. The white trousers, blue coat, and yellow waistcoat—and more especially that cock of the hat—indicate, as surely as inanimate objects can, that Chalk Farm and not the parish church, is their destination. The girl colours up, and puts out her hand with a very awkward affectation of indifference. He gives it a gallant squeeze, and away they walk, arm in arm, the girl just looking back towards her ‘place’ with an air of conscious self-importance, and nodding to her fellow-servant who has gone up to the two-pair-of-stairs window, to take a full view of ‘Mary’s young man,’ which being communicated to William, he takes off his hat to the fellow-servant: a proceeding which affords unmitigated satisfaction to all parties, and impels the fellow-servant to inform Miss Emily confidentially, in the course of the evening, ‘that the young man as Mary keeps company with, is one of the most genteelest young men as ever she see.’

The two young people who have just crossed the road, and are following this happy couple down the street, are a fair specimen of another class of Sunday—pleasurers. There is a dapper smartness, struggling through very limited means, about the young man, which induces one to set him down at once as a junior clerk to a tradesman or attorney. The girl no one could possibly mistake. You may tell a young woman in the employment of a large dress-maker, at any time, by a certain neatness of cheap finery and humble following of fashion, which pervade her whole attire; but unfortunately there are other tokens not to be misunderstood—the pale face with its hectic bloom, the slight distortion of form which no artifice of dress can wholly conceal, the unhealthy stoop, and the short cough—the effects of hard work and close application to a sedentary employment, upon a tender frame. They turn towards the fields. The girl’s countenance brightens, and an unwonted glow rises in her face. They are going to Hampstead or Highgate, to spend their holiday afternoon in some place where they can see the sky, the fields, and trees, and breathe for an hour or two the pure air, which so seldom plays upon that poor girl’s form, or exhilarates her spirits.

I would to God, that the iron-hearted man who would deprive such people as these of their only pleasures, could feel the sinking of heart and soul, the wasting exhaustion of mind and body, the utter prostration of present strength and future hope, attendant upon that incessant toil which lasts from day to day, and from month to month; that toil which is too often protracted until the silence of midnight, and resumed with the first stir of morning. How marvellously would his ardent zeal for other men’s souls, diminish after a short probation, and how enlightened and comprehensive would his views of the real object and meaning of the institution of the Sabbath become!

The afternoon is far advanced—the parks and public drives are crowded. Carriages, gigs, phaetons, stanhopes, and vehicles of every description, glide smoothly on. The promenades are filled with loungers on foot, and the road is thronged with loungers on horseback. Persons of every class are crowded together, here, in one dense mass. The plebeian, who takes his pleasure on no day but Sunday, jostles the patrician, who takes his, from year's end to year's end. You look in vain for any outward signs of profligacy or debauchery. You see nothing before you but a vast number of people, the denizens of a large and crowded city, in the needful and rational enjoyment of air and exercise.

It grows dusk. The roads leading from the different places of suburban resort, are crowded with people on their return home, and the sound of merry voices rings through the gradually darkening fields. The evening is hot and sultry. The rich man throws open the sashes of his spacious dining-room, and quaffs his iced wine in splendid luxury. The poor man, who has no room to take his meals in, but the close apartment to which he and his family have been confined throughout the week, sits in the tea-garden of some famous tavern, and drinks his beer in content and comfort. The fields and roads are gradually deserted, the crowd once more pour into the streets, and disperse to their several homes; and by midnight all is silent and quiet, save where a few stragglers linger beneath the window of some great man's house, to listen to the strains of music from within: or stop to gaze upon the splendid carriages which are waiting to convey the guests from the dinner-party of an Earl.

There is a darker side to this picture, on which, so far from its being any part of my purpose to conceal it, I wish to lay particular stress. In some parts of London, and in many of the manufacturing towns of England, drunkenness and profligacy in their most disgusting forms, exhibit in the open streets on Sunday, a sad and a degrading spectacle. We need go no farther than St. Giles's, or Drury Lane, for sights and scenes of a most repulsive nature. Women with scarcely the articles of apparel which common decency requires, with forms bloated by disease, and faces rendered hideous by habitual drunkenness—men reeling and staggering along—children in rags and filth—whole streets of squalid and miserable appearance, whose inhabitants are lounging in the public road, fighting, screaming, and swearing—these are the common objects which present themselves in, these are the well-known characteristics of, that portion of London to which I have just referred.

And why is it, that all well-disposed persons are shocked, and public decency scandalised, by such exhibitions?

These people are poor—that is notorious. It may be said that they spend in liquor, money with which they might purchase necessaries, and there is no denying the fact; but let it be remembered that even if they applied every farthing of their earnings in the best possible way, they would still be very—very poor. Their dwellings are necessarily uncomfortable, and to a certain degree unhealthy. Cleanliness might do much, but they are too crowded together, the streets are too narrow, and the rooms too small, to admit of their ever being rendered desirable habitations. They work very hard all the week. We know that the effect of prolonged and arduous labour, is to produce, when a period of rest does arrive, a sensation of lassitude which it requires the application of some stimulus to overcome. What stimulus have they? Sunday comes, and with it a cessation of labour. How are they to employ the day, or what inducement have they to employ it, in recruiting their stock of health? They see little parties, on pleasure excursions, passing through the streets; but they cannot imitate their example, for they have not the means. They may walk, to be sure, but it is exactly the inducement to walk that they require. If every one of these men knew, that by taking the trouble to walk two or three miles he would be enabled to share in a good game of cricket, or some athletic sport, I very much question whether any of them would remain at home.

But you hold out no inducement, you offer no relief from listlessness, you provide nothing to amuse his mind, you afford him no means of exercising his body. Unwashed and unshaven, he saunters moodily about, weary and dejected. In lieu of the wholesome stimulus he might derive from nature, you drive him to the pernicious excitement to be gained from art. He flies to the gin-shop as his only resource; and when, reduced to a worse level than the lowest brute in the scale of creation, he lies wallowing in the kennel, your saintly lawgivers lift up their hands to heaven, and exclaim for a law which shall convert the day intended for rest and cheerfulness, into one of universal gloom, bigotry, and persecution.

CHAPTER II—AS SABBATH BILLS WOULD MAKE IT

The provisions of the bill introduced into the House of Commons by Sir Andrew Agnew, and thrown out by that House on the motion for the second reading, on the 18th of May in the present year, by a majority of 32, may very fairly be taken as a test of the length to which the fanatics, of which the honourable Baronet is the distinguished leader, are prepared to go. No test can be fairer; because while on the one hand this measure may be supposed to exhibit all that improvement which mature reflection and long deliberation may have suggested, so on the other it may very reasonably be inferred, that if it be quite as severe in its provisions, and to the full as partial in its operation, as those which have preceded it and experienced a similar fate, the disease under which the honourable Baronet and his friends labour, is perfectly hopeless, and beyond the reach of cure.

The proposed enactments of the bill are briefly these:- All work is prohibited on the Lord's day, under heavy penalties, increasing with every repetition of the offence. There are penalties for keeping shops open—penalties for drunkenness—penalties for keeping open houses of entertainment—penalties for being present at any public meeting or assembly—penalties for letting carriages, and penalties for hiring them—penalties for travelling in steam-boats, and penalties for taking passengers—penalties on vessels commencing their voyage on Sunday—penalties on the owners of cattle who suffer them to be driven on the Lord's day—penalties on constables who refuse to act, and penalties for resisting them when they do. In addition to these trifles, the constables are invested with arbitrary, vexatious, and most extensive powers; and all this in a bill which sets out with a hypocritical and canting declaration that 'nothing is more acceptable to God than the *true and sincere* worship of Him according to His holy will, and that it is the bounden duty of Parliament to promote the observance of the Lord's day, by protecting every class of society against being required to sacrifice their comfort, health, religious privileges, and conscience, for the convenience, enjoyment, or supposed advantage of any other class on the Lord's day'! The idea of making a man truly moral through the ministry of constables, and sincerely religious under the influence of penalties, is worthy of the mind which could form such a mass of monstrous absurdity as this bill is composed of.

The House of Commons threw the measure out certainly, and by so doing retrieved the disgrace—so far as it could be retrieved—of placing among the printed papers of Parliament, such an egregious specimen of legislative folly; but there was a degree of delicacy and forbearance about the debate that took place, which I cannot help thinking as unnecessary and uncalled for, as it is unusual in Parliamentary discussions. If it had been the first time of Sir Andrew Agnew's attempting to palm such a measure upon the country, we might well understand, and duly appreciate, the delicate and compassionate feeling due to the supposed weakness and imbecility of the man, which prevented his proposition being exposed in its true colours, and induced this Hon. Member to bear testimony to his excellent motives, and that Noble Lord to regret that he could not—although he had tried to do so—adopt any portion of the bill. But when these attempts have been repeated, again and again; when Sir Andrew Agnew has renewed them session after session, and when it has become palpably evident to the whole House that

His impudence of proof in every trial,
Kens no polite, and heeds no plain denial -

it really becomes high time to speak of him and his legislation, as they appear to deserve, without that gloss of politeness, which is all very well in an ordinary case, but rather out of place when the liberties and comforts of a whole people are at stake.

In the first place, it is by no means the worst characteristic of this bill, that it is a bill of blunders: it is, from beginning to end, a piece of deliberate cruelty, and crafty injustice. If the rich composed the whole population of this country, not a single comfort of one single man would be affected by it. It is directed exclusively, and without the exception of a solitary instance, against the amusements and recreations of the poor. This was the bait held out by the Hon. Baronet to a body of men, who cannot be supposed to have any very strong sympathies in common with the poor, because they cannot understand their sufferings or their struggles. This is the bait, which will in time prevail, unless public attention is awakened, and public feeling exerted, to prevent it.

Take the very first clause, the provision that no man shall be allowed to work on Sunday—'That no person, upon the Lord's day, shall do, or hire, or employ any person to do any manner of labour, or any work of his or her ordinary calling.' What class of persons does this affect? The rich man? No. Menial servants, both male and female, are specially exempted from the operation of the bill. 'Menial servants' are among the poor people. The bill has no regard for them. The Baronet's dinner must be cooked on Sunday, the Bishop's horses must be groomed, and the Peer's carriage must be driven. So the menial servants are put utterly beyond the pale of grace;—unless indeed, they are to go to heaven through the sanctity of their masters, and possibly they might think even that, rather an uncertain passport.

There is a penalty for keeping open, houses of entertainment. Now, suppose the bill had passed, and that half-a-dozen adventurous licensed victuallers, relying upon the excitement of public feeling on the subject, and the consequent difficulty of conviction (this is by no means an improbable supposition), had determined to keep their houses and gardens open, through the whole Sunday afternoon, in defiance of the law. Every act of hiring or working, every act of buying or selling, or delivering, or causing anything to be bought or sold, is specifically made a separate offence—mark the effect. A party, a man and his wife and children, enter a tea-garden, and the informer stations himself in the next box, from whence he can see and hear everything that passes. 'Waiter!' says the father. 'Yes. Sir.' 'Pint of the best ale!' 'Yes, Sir.' Away runs the waiter to the bar, and gets the ale from the landlord. Out comes the informer's note-book—penalty on the father for hiring, on the waiter for delivering, and on the landlord for selling, on the Lord's day. But it does not stop here. The waiter delivers the ale, and darts off, little suspecting the penalties in store for him. 'Hollo,' cries the father, 'waiter!' 'Yes, Sir.' 'Just get this little boy a biscuit, will you?' 'Yes, Sir.' Off runs the waiter again, and down goes another case of hiring, another case of delivering, and another case of selling; and so it would go on *ad infinitum*, the sum and substance of the matter being, that every time a man or woman cried 'Waiter!' on Sunday, he or she would be fined not less than forty shillings, nor more than a hundred; and every time a waiter replied, 'Yes, Sir,' he and his master would be fined in the same amount: with the addition of a new sort of window duty on the landlord, to wit, a tax of twenty shillings an hour for every hour beyond the first one, during which he should have his shutters down on the Sabbath.

With one exception, there are perhaps no clauses in the whole bill, so strongly illustrative of its partial operation, and the intention of its framer, as those which relate to travelling on Sunday. Penalties of ten, twenty, and thirty pounds, are mercilessly imposed upon coach proprietors who shall run their coaches on the Sabbath; one, two, and ten pounds upon those who hire, or let to hire, horses and carriages upon the Lord’s day, but not one syllable about those who have no necessity to hire, because they have carriages and horses of their own; not one word of a penalty on liveried coachmen and footmen. The whole of the saintly venom is directed against the hired cabriolet, the humble fly, or the rumbling hackney-coach, which enables a man of the poorer class to escape for a few hours from the smoke and dirt, in the midst of which he has been confined throughout the week: while the escutcheoned carriage and the dashing cab, may whirl their wealthy owners to Sunday feasts and private oratorios, setting constables, informers, and penalties, at defiance. Again, in the description of the places of public resort which it is rendered criminal to attend on Sunday, there are no words comprising a very fashionable promenade. Public discussions, public debates, public lectures and speeches, are cautiously guarded against; for it is by their means that the people become enlightened enough to deride the last efforts of bigotry and superstition. There is a stringent provision for punishing the poor man who spends an hour in a news-room, but there is nothing to prevent the rich one from lounging away the day in the Zoological Gardens.

There is, in four words, a mock proviso, which affects to forbid travelling ‘with any animal’ on the Lord’s day. This, however, is revoked, as relates to the rich man, by a subsequent provision. We have then a penalty of not less than fifty, nor more than one hundred pounds, upon any person participating in the control, or having the command of any vessel which shall commence her voyage on the Lord’s day, should the wind prove favourable. The next time this bill is brought forward (which will no doubt be at an early period of the next session of Parliament) perhaps it will be better to amend this clause by declaring, that from and after the passing of the act, it shall be deemed unlawful for the wind to blow at all upon the

Sabbath. It would remove a great deal of temptation from the owners and captains of vessels.

The reader is now in possession of the principal enacting clauses of Sir Andrew Agnew's bill, with the exception of one, for preventing the killing or taking of '*fish, or other wild animals,*' and the ordinary provisions which are inserted for form's sake in all acts of Parliament. I now beg his attention to the clauses of exemption.

They are two in number. The first exempts menial servants from any rest, and all poor men from any recreation: outlaws a milkman after nine o'clock in the morning, and makes eating-houses lawful for only two hours in the afternoon; permits a medical man to use his carriage on Sunday, and declares that a clergyman may either use his own, or hire one.

The second is artful, cunning, and designing; shielding the rich man from the possibility of being entrapped, and affecting at the same time, to have a tender and scrupulous regard, for the interests of the whole community. It declares, 'that nothing in this act contained, shall extend to works of piety, charity, or necessity.'

What is meant by the word 'necessity' in this clause? Simply this—that the rich man shall be at liberty to make use of all the splendid luxuries he has collected around him, on any day in the week, because habit and custom have rendered them 'necessary' to his easy existence; but that the poor man who saves his money to provide some little pleasure for himself and family at lengthened intervals, shall not be permitted to enjoy it. It is not 'necessary' to him:- Heaven knows, he very often goes long enough without it. This is the plain English of the clause. The carriage and pair of horses, the coachman, the footman, the helper, and the groom, are 'necessary' on Sundays, as on other days, to the bishop and the nobleman; but the hackney-coach, the hired gig, or the taxed cart, cannot possibly be 'necessary' to the working-man on Sunday, for he has it not at other times. The sumptuous dinner and the rich wines, are 'necessaries' to a great man in his own mansion: but the pint of beer and the plate of meat, degrade the national character in an eating-house.

Such is the bill for promoting the true and sincere worship of God according to his Holy Will, and for protecting every class of society against being required to sacrifice their health and comfort on the Sabbath. Instances in which its operation would be as unjust as it would be absurd, might be multiplied to an endless amount; but it is sufficient to place its leading provisions before the reader. In doing so, I have purposely abstained from drawing upon the imagination for possible cases; the provisions to which I have referred, stand in so many words upon the bill as printed by order of the House of Commons; and they can neither be disowned, nor explained away.

Let us suppose such a bill as this, to have actually passed both branches of the legislature; to have received the royal assent; and to have come into operation. Imagine its effect in a great city like London.

Sunday comes, and brings with it a day of general gloom and austerity. The man who has been toiling hard all the week, has been looking towards the Sabbath, not as to a day of rest from labour, and healthy recreation, but as one of grievous tyranny and grinding oppression. The day which his Maker intended as a blessing, man has converted into a curse. Instead of being hailed by him as his period of relaxation, he finds it remarkable only as depriving him of every comfort and enjoyment. He has many children about him, all sent into the world at an early age, to struggle for a livelihood; one is kept in a warehouse all day, with an interval of rest too short to enable him to reach home, another walks four or five miles to his employment at the docks, a third earns a few shillings weekly, as an errand boy, or office messenger; and the employment of the man himself, detains him at some distance from his home from morning till night. Sunday is the only day on which they could all meet together, and enjoy a homely meal in social comfort; and now they sit down to a cold and cheerless dinner: the pious guardians of the man's salvation having, in their regard for the welfare of his precious soul, shut up the bakers' shops. The fire blazes high in the kitchen chimney of these well-fed hypocrites, and the rich steams of the savoury dinner scent the air. What care they to be told that this class of men have neither a place to cook in—nor means to bear the expense, if they had?

Look into your churches—diminished congregations, and scanty attendance. People have grown sullen and obstinate, and are becoming disgusted with the faith which condemns them to such a day as this, once in every seven. And as you cannot make people religious by Act of Parliament, or force them to church by constables, they display their feeling by staying away.

Turn into the streets, and mark the rigid gloom that reigns over everything around. The roads are empty, the fields are deserted, the houses of entertainment are closed. Groups of filthy and discontented-looking men, are idling about at the street corners, or sleeping in the sun; but there are no decently-dressed people of the poorer class, passing to and fro. Where should they walk to? It would take them an hour, at least, to get into the fields, and when they reached them, they could procure neither bite nor sup, without the informer and the penalty. Now and then, a carriage rolls smoothly on, or a well-mounted horseman, followed by a liveried attendant, canters by; but with these exceptions, all is as melancholy and quiet as if a pestilence had fallen on the city.

Bend your steps through the narrow and thickly-inhabited streets, and observe the sallow faces of the men and women who are lounging at the doors, or lolling from the windows. Regard well the closeness of these crowded rooms, and the noisome exhalations that rise from the drains and kennels; and then laud the triumph of religion and morality, which condemns people to drag their lives out in such stews as these, and makes it criminal for them to eat or drink in the fresh air, or under the clear sky. Here and there, from some half-opened window, the loud shout of drunken revelry strikes upon the ear, and the noise of oaths and quarrelling—the effect of the close and heated atmosphere—is heard on all sides. See how the men all rush to join the crowd that are making their way down the street, and how loud the execrations of the mob become as they draw nearer. They have assembled round a little knot of constables, who have seized the stock-in-trade, heinously exposed on Sunday, of some miserable walking-stick seller, who follows clamouring for his property. The dispute grows warmer and fiercer, until at last some of the more furious among the crowd, rush forward to restore the goods to their owner. A general conflict takes place; the sticks of the constables are exercised in all directions; fresh assistance is procured; and half a dozen of the assailants are conveyed to the station-house, struggling, bleeding, and cursing. The case is taken to the police-office on the following morning; and after a frightful amount of perjury on both sides, the men are sent to prison for resisting the officers, their families to the workhouse to keep them from starving: and there they both remain for a month afterwards, glorious trophies of the sanctified enforcement of the Christian Sabbath. Add to such scenes as these, the profligacy, idleness, drunkenness, and vice, that will be committed to an extent which no man can foresee, on Monday, as an atonement for the restraint of the preceding day; and you have a very faint and imperfect picture of the religious effects of this Sunday legislation, supposing it could ever be forced upon the people.

But let those who advocate the cause of fanaticism, reflect well upon the probable issue of their endeavours. They may by perseverance, succeed with Parliament. Let them ponder on the probability of succeeding with the people. You may deny the concession of a political question for a time, and a nation will bear it patiently. Strike home to the comforts of every man's fireside—tamper with every man's freedom and liberty—and one month, one week, may rouse a feeling abroad, which a king would gladly yield his crown to quell, and a peer would resign his coronet to allay.

It is the custom to affect a deference for the motives of those who advocate these measures, and a respect for the feelings by which they are actuated. They do not deserve it. If they legislate in ignorance, they are criminal and dishonest; if they do so with their eyes open, they commit wilful injustice; in either case, they bring religion into contempt. But they do NOT legislate in ignorance. Public prints, and public men, have pointed out to them again and again, the consequences of their proceedings. If they persist in thrusting themselves forward, let those consequences rest upon their own heads, and let them be content to stand upon their own merits.

It may be asked, what motives can actuate a man who has so little regard for the comfort of his fellow-beings, so little respect for their wants and necessities, and so distorted a notion of the beneficence of his Creator. I reply, an envious, heartless, ill-conditioned dislike to seeing those whom fortune has placed below him, cheerful and happy—an intolerant confidence in his own high worthiness before God, and a lofty impression of the demerits of others—pride, selfish pride, as inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity itself, as opposed to the example of its Founder upon earth.

To these may be added another class of men—the stern and gloomy enthusiasts, who would make earth a hell, and religion a torment: men who, having wasted the earlier part of their lives in dissipation and depravity, find themselves when scarcely past its meridian, steeped to the neck in vice, and shunned like a loathsome disease. Abandoned by the world, having nothing to fall back upon, nothing to remember but time mis-spent, and energies misdirected, they turn their eyes and not their thoughts to Heaven, and delude themselves into the impious belief, that in denouncing the lightness of heart of which they cannot partake, and the rational pleasures from which they never derived enjoyment, they are more than remedying the sins of their old career, and—like the founders of monasteries and builders of churches, in ruder days—establishing a good set claim upon their Maker.

CHAPTER III—AS IT MIGHT BE MADE

The supporters of Sabbath Bills, and more especially the extreme class of Dissenters, lay great stress upon the declarations occasionally made by criminals from the condemned cell or the scaffold, that to Sabbath-breaking they attribute their first deviation from the path of rectitude; and they point to these statements, as an incontestable proof of the evil consequences which await a departure from that strict and rigid observance of the Sabbath, which they uphold. I cannot help thinking that in this, as in almost every other respect connected with the subject, there is a considerable degree of cant, and a very great deal of wilful blindness. If a man be viciously disposed—and with very few exceptions, not a man dies by the executioner's hands, who has not been in one way or other a most abandoned and profligate character for many years—if a man be viciously disposed, there is no doubt that he will turn his Sunday to bad account, that he will take advantage of it, to dissipate with other bad characters as vile as himself; and that in this way, he may trace his first yielding to temptation, possibly his first commission of crime, to an infringement of the Sabbath. But this would be an argument against any holiday at all. If his holiday had been Wednesday instead of Sunday, and he had devoted it to the same improper uses, it would have been productive of the same results. It is too much to judge of the character of a whole people, by the confessions of the very worst members of society. It is not fair, to cry down things which are harmless in themselves, because evil-disposed men may turn them to bad account. Who ever thought of deprecating the teaching poor people to write, because some porter in a warehouse had committed forgery? Or into what man's head did it ever enter, to prevent the crowding of churches, because it afforded a temptation for the picking of pockets?

When the Book of Sports, for allowing the peasantry of England to divert themselves with certain games in the open air, on Sundays, after evening service, was published by Charles the First, it is needless to say the English people were comparatively rude and uncivilised. And yet it is extraordinary to how few excesses it gave rise, even in that day, when men’s minds were not enlightened, or their passions moderated, by the influence of education and refinement. That some excesses were committed through its means, in the remoter parts of the country, and that it was discontinued in those places, in consequence, cannot be denied: but generally speaking, there is no proof whatever on record, of its having had any tendency to increase crime, or to lower the character of the people.

The Puritans of that time, were as much opposed to harmless recreations and healthful amusements as those of the present day, and it is amusing to observe that each in their generation, advance precisely the same description of arguments. In the British Museum, there is a curious pamphlet got up by the Agnews of Charles’s time, entitled ‘A Divine Tragedie lately acted, or a Collection of sundry memorable examples of God’s Judgements upon Sabbath Breakers, and other like Libertines in their unlawful Sports, happening within the realme of England, in the compass only of two yeares last past, since the Booke (of Sports) was published, worthy to be knowne and considered of all men, especially such who are guilty of the sinne, or archpatrons thereof.’ This amusing document, contains some fifty or sixty veritable accounts of balls of fire that fell into churchyards and upset the sporters, and sporters that quarrelled, and upset one another, and so forth: and among them is one anecdote containing an example of a rather different kind, which I cannot resist the temptation of quoting, as strongly illustrative of the fact, that this blinking of the question has not even the recommendation of novelty.

‘A woman about Northampton, the same day that she heard the booke for sports read, went immediately, and having 3. pence in her purse, hired a fellow to goe to the next towne to fetch a Minstrell, who coming, she with others fell a dauncing, which continued within night; at which time shee was got with child, which at the birth shee murthering, was detected and apprehended, and being converted before the justice, shee confessed it, and withal told the occasion of it, saying it was her falling to sport on the Sabbath, upon the reading of the Booke, so as for this treble sinfull act, her presumptuous profaning of the Sabbath, wh. brought her adultory and that murther. Shee was according to the Law both of God and man, put to death. Much sinne and misery followeth upon Sabbath-breaking.’

It is needless to say, that if the young lady near Northampton had ‘fallen to sport’ of such a dangerous description, on any other day but Sunday, the first result would probably have been the same: it never having been distinctly shown that Sunday is more favourable to the propagation of the human race than any other day in the week. The second result—the murder of the child—does not speak very highly for the amiability of her natural disposition; and the whole story, supposing it to have had any foundation at all, is about as much chargeable upon the Book of Sports, as upon the Book of Kings. Such ‘sports’ have taken place in Dissenting Chapels before now; but religion has never been blamed in consequence; nor has it been proposed to shut up the chapels on that account.

The question, then, very fairly arises, whether we have any reason to suppose that allowing games in the open air on Sundays, or even providing the means of amusement for the humbler classes of society on that day, would be hurtful and injurious to the character and morals of the people.

I was travelling in the west of England a summer or two back, and was induced by the beauty of the scenery, and the seclusion of the spot, to remain for the night in a small village, distant about seventy miles from London. The next morning was Sunday; and I walked out, towards the church. Groups of people—the whole population of the little hamlet apparently—were hastening in the same direction. Cheerful and good-humoured congratulations were heard on all sides, as neighbours overtook each other, and walked on in company. Occasionally I passed an aged couple, whose married daughter and her husband were loitering by the side of the old people, accommodating their rate of walking to their feeble pace, while a little knot of children hurried on before; stout young labourers in clean round frocks; and buxom girls with healthy, laughing faces, were plentifully sprinkled about in couples, and the whole scene was one of quiet and tranquil contentment, irresistibly captivating. The morning was bright and pleasant, the hedges were green and blooming, and a thousand delicious scents were wafted on the air, from the wild flowers which blossomed on either side of the footpath. The little church was one of those venerable simple buildings which abound in the English counties; half overgrown with moss and ivy, and standing in the centre of a little plot of ground, which, but for the green mounds with which it was studded, might have passed for a lovely meadow. I fancied that the old clanking bell which was now summoning the congregation together, would seem less terrible when it rung out the knell of a departed soul, than I had ever deemed possible before—that the sound would tell only of a welcome to calmness and rest, amidst the most peaceful and tranquil scene in nature.

I followed into the church—a low-roofed building with small arched windows, through which the sun’s rays streamed upon a plain tablet on the opposite wall, which had once recorded names, now as undistinguishable on its worn surface, as were the bones beneath, from the dust into which they had resolved. The impressive service of the Church of England was spoken—not merely *read*—by a grey-headed minister, and the responses delivered by his auditors, with an air of sincere devotion as far removed from affectation or display, as from coldness or indifference. The psalms were accompanied by a few instrumental performers, who were stationed in a small gallery extending across the church at the lower end, over the door: and the voices were led by the clerk, who, it was evident, derived no slight pride and gratification from this portion of the service. The discourse was plain, unpretending, and well adapted to the comprehension of the hearers. At the conclusion of the service, the villagers waited in the churchyard, to salute the clergyman as he passed; and two or three, I observed, stepped aside, as if communicating some little difficulty, and asking his advice. This, to guess from the homely bows, and other rustic expressions of gratitude, the old gentleman readily conceded. He seemed intimately acquainted with the circumstances of all his parishioners; for I heard him inquire after one man’s youngest child, another man’s wife, and so forth; and that he was fond of his joke, I discovered from overhearing him ask a stout, fresh-coloured young fellow, with a very pretty bashful-looking girl on his arm, ‘when those banns were to be put up?’—an inquiry which made the young fellow more fresh-coloured, and the girl more bashful, and which, strange to say, caused a great many other girls who were standing round, to colour up also, and look anywhere but in the faces of their male companions.

As I approached this spot in the evening about half an hour before sunset, I was surprised to hear the hum of voices, and occasionally a shout of merriment from the meadow beyond the churchyard; which I found, when I reached the stile, to be occasioned by a very animated game of cricket, in which the boys and young men of the place were engaged, while the females and old people were scattered about: some seated on the grass watching the progress of the game, and others sauntering about in groups of two or three, gathering little nosegays of wild roses and hedge flowers. I could not but take notice of one old man in particular, with a bright-eyed grand-daughter by his side, who was giving a sunburnt young fellow some instructions in the game, which he received with an air of profound deference, but with an occasional glance at the girl, which induced me to think that his attention was rather distracted from the old gentleman's narration of the fruits of his experience. When it was his turn at the wicket, too, there was a glance towards the pair every now and then, which the old grandfather very complacently considered as an appeal to his judgment of a particular hit, but which a certain blush in the girl's face, and a downcast look of the bright eye, led me to believe was intended for somebody else than the old man,—and understood by somebody else, too, or I am much mistaken.

I was in the very height of the pleasure which the contemplation of this scene afforded me, when I saw the old clergyman making his way towards us. I trembled for an angry interruption to the sport, and was almost on the point of crying out, to warn the cricketers of his approach; he was so close upon me, however, that I could do nothing but remain still, and anticipate the reproof that was preparing. What was my agreeable surprise to see the old gentleman standing at the stile, with his hands in his pockets, surveying the whole scene with evident satisfaction! And how dull I must have been, not to have known till my friend the grandfather (who, by-the-bye, said he had been a wonderful cricketer in his time) told me, that it was the clergyman himself who had established the whole thing: that it was his field they played in; and that it was he who had purchased stumps, bats, ball, and all!

It is such scenes as this, I would see near London, on a Sunday evening. It is such men as this, who would do more in one year to make people properly religious, cheerful, and contented, than all the legislation of a century could ever accomplish.

It will be said—it has been very often—that it would be matter of perfect impossibility to make amusements and exercises succeed in large towns, which may be very well adapted to a country population. Here, again, we are called upon to yield to bare assertions on matters of belief and opinion, as if they were established and undoubted facts. That there is a wide difference between the two cases, no one will be prepared to dispute; that the difference is such as to prevent the application of the same principle to both, no reasonable man, I think, will be disposed to maintain. The great majority of the people who make holiday on Sunday now, are industrious, orderly, and well-behaved persons. It is not unreasonable to suppose that they would be no more inclined to an abuse of pleasures provided for them, than they are to an abuse of the pleasures they provide for themselves; and if any people, for want of something better to do, resort to criminal practices on the Sabbath as at present observed, no better remedy for the evil can be imagined, than giving them the opportunity of doing something which will amuse them, and hurt nobody else.

The propriety of opening the British Museum to respectable people on Sunday, has lately been the subject of some discussion. I think it would puzzle the most austere of the Sunday legislators to assign any valid reason for opposing so sensible a proposition. The Museum contains rich specimens from all the vast museums and repositories of Nature, and rare and curious fragments of the mighty works of art, in bygone ages: all calculated to awaken contemplation and inquiry, and to tend to the enlightenment and improvement of the people. But attendants would be necessary, and a few men would be employed upon the Sabbath. They certainly would; but how many? Why, if the British Museum, and the National Gallery, and the Gallery of Practical Science, and every other exhibition in London, from which knowledge is to be derived and information gained, were to be thrown open on a Sunday afternoon, not fifty people would be required to preside over the whole: and it would take treble the number to enforce a Sabbath bill in any three populous parishes.

I should like to see some large field, or open piece of ground, in every outskirt of London, exhibiting each Sunday evening on a larger scale, the scene of the little country meadow. I should like to see the time arrive, when a man's attendance to his religious duties might be left to that religious feeling which most men possess in a greater or less degree, but which was never forced into the breast of any man by menace or restraint. I should like to see the time when Sunday might be looked forward to, as a recognised day of relaxation and enjoyment, and when every man might feel, what few men do now, that religion is not incompatible with rational pleasure and needful recreation.

How different a picture would the streets and public places then present! The museums, and repositories of scientific and useful inventions, would be crowded with ingenious mechanics and industrious artisans, all anxious for information, and all unable to procure it at any other time. The spacious saloons would be swarming with practical men: humble in appearance, but destined, perhaps, to become the greatest inventors and philosophers of their age. The labourers who now lounge away the day in idleness and intoxication, would be seen hurrying along, with cheerful faces and clean attire, not to the close and smoky atmosphere of the public-house but to the fresh and airy fields. Fancy the pleasant scene. Throngs of people, pouring out from the lanes and alleys of the metropolis, to various places of common resort at some short distance from the town, to join in the refreshing sports and exercises of the day—the children gambolling in crowds upon the grass, the mothers looking on, and enjoying themselves the little game they seem only to direct; other parties strolling along some pleasant walks, or reposing in the shade of the stately trees; others again intent upon their different amusements. Nothing should be heard on all sides, but the sharp stroke of the bat as it sent the ball skimming along the ground, the clear ring of the quoit, as it struck upon the iron peg: the noisy murmur of many voices, and the loud shout of mirth and delight, which would awaken the echoes far and wide, till the fields rung with it. The day would pass away, in a series of enjoyments which would awaken no painful reflections when night arrived; for they would be calculated to bring with them, only health and contentment. The young would lose that dread of religion, which the sour austerity of its professors too often inculcates in youthful bosoms; and the old would find less difficulty in persuading them to respect its observances. The drunken and dissipated, deprived of any excuse for their misconduct, would no longer excite pity but disgust. Above all, the more ignorant and humble class of men, who now partake of many of the bitters of life, and taste but few of its sweets, would naturally feel attachment and respect for that code of morality, which, regarding the many hardships of their station, strove to alleviate its rigours, and endeavoured to soften its asperity.

This is what Sunday might be made, and what it might be made without impiety or profanation. The wise and beneficent Creator who places men upon earth, requires that they shall perform the duties of that station of life to which they are called, and He can never intend that the more a man strives to discharge those duties, the more he shall be debarred from happiness and enjoyment. Let those who have six days in the week for all the world’s pleasures, appropriate the seventh to fasting and gloom, either for their own sins or those of other people, if they like to bewail them; but let those who employ their six days in a worthier manner, devote their seventh to a different purpose. Let divines set the example of true morality:

preach it to their flocks in the morning, and dismiss them to enjoy true rest in the afternoon; and let them select for their text, and let Sunday legislators take for their motto, the words which fell from the lips of that Master, whose precepts they misconstrue, and whose lessons they pervert—'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man to serve the Sabbath.'

THE END OF
Sunday Under Three Heads

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

A STORY OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

By Charles Dickens

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Book the First—Recalled to Life

I. The Period

It was the best of times,
it was the worst of times,
it was the age of wisdom,
it was the age of foolishness,
it was the epoch of belief,
it was the epoch of incredulity,
it was the season of Light,
it was the season of Darkness,
it was the spring of hope,
it was the winter of despair,

we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way— in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

There were a king with a large jaw and a queen with a plain face, on the throne of England; there were a king with a large jaw and a queen with a fair face, on the throne of France. In both countries it was clearer than crystal to the lords of the State preserves of loaves and fishes, that things in general were settled for ever.

It was the year of Our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five. Spiritual revelations were conceded to England at that favoured period, as at this. Mrs. Southcott had recently attained her five-and-twentieth blessed birthday, of whom a prophetic private in the Life Guards had heralded the sublime appearance by announcing that arrangements were made for the swallowing up of London and Westminster. Even the Cock-lane ghost had been laid only a round dozen of years, after rapping out its messages, as the spirits of this very year last past (supernaturally deficient in originality) rapped out theirs. Mere messages in the earthly order of events had lately come to the English Crown and People, from a congress of British subjects in America: which, strange to relate, have proved more important to the human race than any communications yet received through any of the chickens of the Cock-lane brood.

France, less favoured on the whole as to matters spiritual than her sister of the shield and trident, rolled with exceeding smoothness down hill, making paper money and spending it. Under the guidance of her Christian pastors, she entertained herself, besides, with such humane achievements as sentencing a youth to have his hands cut off, his tongue torn out with pincers, and his body burned alive, because he had not kneeled down in the rain to do honour to a dirty procession of monks which passed within his view, at a distance of some fifty or sixty yards. It is likely enough that, rooted in the woods of France and Norway, there were growing trees, when that sufferer was put to death, already marked by the Woodman, Fate, to come down and be sawn into boards, to make a certain movable framework with a sack and a knife in it, terrible in history. It is likely enough that in the rough outhouses of some tillers of the heavy lands adjacent to Paris, there were sheltered from the weather that very day, rude carts, bespattered with rustic mire, snuffed about by pigs, and roosted in by poultry, which the Farmer, Death, had already set apart to be his tumbrils of the Revolution. But that Woodman and that Farmer, though they work unceasingly, work silently, and no one heard them as they went about with muffled tread: the rather, forasmuch as to entertain any suspicion that they were awake, was to be atheistical and traitorous.

In England, there was scarcely an amount of order and protection to justify much national boasting. Daring burglaries by armed men, and highway robberies, took place in the capital itself every night; families were publicly cautioned not to go out of town without removing their furniture to upholsterers' warehouses for security; the highwayman in the dark was a City tradesman in the light, and, being recognised and challenged by his fellow-tradesman whom he stopped in his character of "the Captain," gallantly shot him through the head and rode away; the mail was waylaid by seven robbers, and the guard shot three dead, and then got shot dead himself by the other four, "in consequence of the failure of his ammunition:" after which the mail was robbed in peace; that magnificent potentate, the Lord Mayor of London, was made to stand and deliver on Turnham Green, by one highwayman, who despoiled the illustrious creature in sight of all his retinue; prisoners in London gaols fought battles with their turnkeys, and the majesty of the law fired blunderbusses in among them, loaded with rounds of shot and ball; thieves snipped off diamond crosses from the necks of noble lords at Court drawing-rooms; musketeers went into St. Giles's, to search for contraband goods, and the mob fired on the musketeers, and the musketeers fired on the mob, and nobody thought any of these occurrences much out of the common way. In the midst of them, the hangman, ever busy and ever worse than useless, was in constant requisition; now, stringing up long rows of miscellaneous criminals; now, hanging a housebreaker on Saturday who had been taken on Tuesday; now, burning people in the hand at Newgate by the dozen, and now burning pamphlets at the door of Westminster Hall; to-day, taking the life of an atrocious murderer, and to-morrow of a wretched pilferer who had robbed a farmer's boy of sixpence.

All these things, and a thousand like them, came to pass in and close upon the dear old year one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five. Environed by them, while the Woodman and the Farmer worked unheeded, those two of the large jaws, and those other two of the plain and the fair faces, trod with stir enough, and carried their divine rights with a high hand. Thus did the year one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five conduct their Greatnesses, and myriads of small creatures—the creatures of this chronicle among the rest—along the roads that lay before them.

II. The Mail

It was the Dover road that lay, on a Friday night late in November, before the first of the persons with whom this history has business. The Dover road lay, as to him, beyond the Dover mail, as it lumbered up Shooter's Hill. He walked up hill in the mire by the side of the mail, as the rest of the passengers did; not because they had the least relish for walking exercise, under the circumstances, but because the hill, and the harness, and the mud, and the mail, were all so heavy, that the horses had three times already come to a stop, besides once drawing the coach across the road, with the mutinous intent of taking it back to Blackheath. Reins and whip and coachman and guard, however, in combination, had read that article of war which forbade a purpose otherwise strongly in favour of the argument, that some brute animals are endued with Reason; and the team had capitulated and returned to their duty.

With drooping heads and tremulous tails, they mashed their way through the thick mud, floundering and stumbling between whiles, as if they were falling to pieces at the larger joints. As often as the driver rested them and brought them to a stand, with a wary "Wo-ho! so-ho-then!" the near leader violently shook his head and everything upon it—like an unusually emphatic horse, denying that the coach could be got up the hill. Whenever the leader made this rattle, the passenger started, as a nervous passenger might, and was disturbed in mind.

There was a steaming mist in all the hollows, and it had roamed in its forlornness up the hill, like an evil spirit, seeking rest and finding none. A clammy and intensely cold mist, it made its slow way through the air in ripples that visibly followed and overspread one another, as the waves of an unwholesome sea might do. It was dense enough to shut out everything from the light of the coach-lamps but these its own workings, and a few yards of road; and the reek of the labouring horses steamed into it, as if they had made it all.

Two other passengers, besides the one, were plodding up the hill by the side of the mail. All three were wrapped to the cheekbones and over the ears, and wore jack-boots. Not one of the three could have said, from anything he saw, what either of the other two was like; and each was hidden under almost as many wrappers from the eyes of the mind, as from the eyes of the body, of his two companions. In those days, travellers were very shy of being confidential on a short notice, for anybody on the road might be a robber or in league with robbers. As to the latter, when every posting-house and ale-house could produce somebody in "the Captain's" pay, ranging from the landlord to the lowest stable non-descript, it was the likeliest thing upon the cards. So the guard of the Dover mail thought to himself, that Friday night in November, one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five, lumbering up Shooter's Hill, as he stood on his own particular perch behind the mail, beating his feet, and keeping an eye and a hand on the arm-chest before him, where a loaded blunderbuss lay at the top of six or eight loaded horse-pistols, deposited on a substratum of cutlass.

The Dover mail was in its usual genial position that the guard suspected the passengers, the passengers suspected one another and the guard, they all suspected everybody else, and the coachman was sure of nothing but the horses; as to which cattle he could with a clear conscience have taken his oath on the two Testaments that they were not fit for the journey.

"Wo-ho!" said the coachman. "So, then! One more pull and you're at the top and be damned to you, for I have had trouble enough to get you to it!—Joe!"

"Halloa!" the guard replied.

"What o'clock do you make it, Joe?"

"Ten minutes, good, past eleven."

"My blood!" ejaculated the vexed coachman, "and not atop of Shooter's yet! Tst! Yah! Get on with you!"

The emphatic horse, cut short by the whip in a most decided negative, made a decided scramble for it, and the three other horses followed suit. Once more, the Dover mail struggled on, with the jack-boots of its passengers squashing along by its side. They had stopped when the coach stopped, and they kept close company with it. If any one of the three had had the hardihood to propose to another to walk on a little ahead into the mist and darkness, he would have put himself in a fair way of getting shot instantly as a highwayman.

The last burst carried the mail to the summit of the hill. The horses stopped to breathe again, and the guard got down to skid the wheel for the descent, and open the coach-door to let the passengers in.

"Tst! Joe!" cried the coachman in a warning voice, looking down from his box.

"What do you say, Tom?"

They both listened.

"I say a horse at a canter coming up, Joe."

"*I* say a horse at a gallop, Tom," returned the guard, leaving his hold of the door, and mounting nimbly to his place. "Gentlemen! In the king's name, all of you!"

With this hurried adjuration, he cocked his blunderbuss, and stood on the offensive.

The passenger booked by this history, was on the coach-step, getting in; the two other passengers were close behind him, and about to follow. He remained on the step, half in the coach and half out of; they remained in the road below him. They all looked from the coachman to the guard, and from the guard to the coachman, and listened. The coachman looked back and the guard looked back, and even the emphatic leader pricked up his ears and looked back, without contradicting.

The stillness consequent on the cessation of the rumbling and labouring of the coach, added to the stillness of the night, made it very quiet indeed. The panting of the horses communicated a tremulous motion to the coach, as if it were in a state of agitation. The hearts of the passengers beat loud enough perhaps to be heard; but at any rate, the quiet pause was audibly expressive of people out of breath, and holding the breath, and having the pulses quickened by expectation.

The sound of a horse at a gallop came fast and furiously up the hill.

"So-ho!" the guard sang out, as loud as he could roar. "Yo there! Stand! I shall fire!"

The pace was suddenly checked, and, with much splashing and floundering, a man's voice called from the mist, "Is that the Dover mail?"

"Never you mind what it is!" the guard retorted. "What are you?"

"*Is* that the Dover mail?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"I want a passenger, if it is."

"What passenger?"

"Mr. Jarvis Lorry."

Our booked passenger showed in a moment that it was his name. The guard, the coachman, and the two other passengers eyed him distrustfully.

"Keep where you are," the guard called to the voice in the mist, "because, if I should make a mistake, it could never be set right in your lifetime. Gentleman of the name of Lorry answer straight."

"What is the matter?" asked the passenger, then, with mildly quavering speech. "Who wants me? Is it Jerry?"

("I don't like Jerry's voice, if it is Jerry," growled the guard to himself. "He's hoarser than suits me, is Jerry.")

"Yes, Mr. Lorry."

"What is the matter?"

"A despatch sent after you from over yonder. T. and Co."

"I know this messenger, guard," said Mr. Lorry, getting down into the road—assisted from behind more swiftly than politely by the other two passengers, who immediately scrambled into the coach, shut the door, and pulled up the window. "He may come close; there's nothing wrong."

"I hope there ain't, but I can't make so 'Nation sure of that," said the guard, in gruff soliloquy. "Hallo you!"

"Well! And hallo you!" said Jerry, more hoarsely than before.

"Come on at a footpace! d'ye mind me? And if you've got holsters to that saddle o' yourn, don't let me see your hand go nigh 'em. For I'm a devil at a quick mistake, and when I make one it takes the form of Lead. So now let's look at you."

The figures of a horse and rider came slowly through the eddying mist, and came to the side of the mail, where the passenger stood. The rider stooped, and, casting up his eyes at the guard, handed the passenger a small folded paper. The rider's horse was blown, and both horse and rider were covered with mud, from the hoofs of the horse to the hat of the man.

"Guard!" said the passenger, in a tone of quiet business confidence.

The watchful guard, with his right hand at the stock of his raised blunderbuss, his left at the barrel, and his eye on the horseman, answered curtly, "Sir."

"There is nothing to apprehend. I belong to Tellson's Bank. You must know Tellson's Bank in London. I am going to Paris on business. A crown to drink. I may read this?"

"If so be as you're quick, sir."

He opened it in the light of the coach-lamp on that side, and read—first to himself and then aloud: "'Wait at Dover for Mam'selle.' It's not long, you see, guard. Jerry, say that my answer was, RECALLED TO LIFE."

Jerry started in his saddle. "That's a Blazing strange answer, too," said he, at his hoarsest.

"Take that message back, and they will know that I received this, as well as if I wrote. Make the best of your way. Good night."

With those words the passenger opened the coach-door and got in; not at all assisted by his fellow-passengers, who had expeditiously secreted their watches and purses in their boots, and were now making a general pretence of being asleep. With no more definite purpose than to escape the hazard of originating any other kind of action.

The coach lumbered on again, with heavier wreaths of mist closing round it as it began the descent. The guard soon replaced his blunderbuss in his arm-chest, and, having looked to the rest of its contents, and having looked to the supplementary pistols that he wore in his belt, looked to a smaller chest beneath his seat, in which there were a few smith's tools, a couple of torches, and a tinder-box. For he was furnished with that completeness that if the coach-lamps had been blown and stormed out, which did occasionally happen, he had only to shut himself up inside, keep the flint and steel sparks well off the straw, and get a light with tolerable safety and ease (if he were lucky) in five minutes.

"Tom!" softly over the coach roof.

"Hallo, Joe."

"Did you hear the message?"

"I did, Joe."

"What did you make of it, Tom?"

"Nothing at all, Joe."

"That's a coincidence, too," the guard mused, "for I made the same of it myself."

Jerry, left alone in the mist and darkness, dismounted meanwhile, not only to ease his spent horse, but to wipe the mud from his face, and shake the wet out of his hat-brim, which might be capable of holding about half a gallon. After standing with the bridle over his heavily-splashed arm, until the wheels of the mail were no longer within hearing and the night was quite still again, he turned to walk down the hill.

"After that there gallop from Temple Bar, old lady, I won't trust your fore-legs till I get you on the level," said this hoarse messenger, glancing at his mare. "'Recalled to life.' That's a Blazing strange message. Much of that wouldn't do for you, Jerry! I say, Jerry! You'd be in a Blazing bad way, if recalling to life was to come into fashion, Jerry!"

III. The Night Shadows

A wonderful fact to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other. A solemn consideration, when I enter a great city by night, that every one of those darkly clustered houses encloses its own secret; that every room in every one of them encloses its own secret; that every beating heart in the hundreds of thousands of breasts there, is, in some of its imaginings, a secret to the heart nearest it! Something of the awfulness, even of Death itself, is referable to this. No more can I turn the leaves of this dear book that I loved, and vainly hope in time to read it all. No more can I look into the depths of this unfathomable water, wherein, as momentary lights glanced into it, I have had glimpses of buried treasure and other things submerged. It was appointed that the book should shut with a spring, for ever and for ever, when I had read but a page. It was appointed that the water should be locked in an eternal frost, when the light was playing on its surface, and I stood in ignorance on the shore. My friend is dead, my neighbour is dead, my love, the darling of my soul, is dead; it is the inexorable consolidation and perpetuation of the secret that was always in that individuality, and which I shall carry in mine to my life's end. In any of the burial-places of this city through which I pass, is there a sleeper more inscrutable than its busy inhabitants are, in their innermost personality, to me, or than I am to them?

As to this, his natural and not to be alienated inheritance, the messenger on horseback had exactly the same possessions as the King, the first Minister of State, or the richest merchant in London. So with the three passengers shut up in the narrow compass of one lumbering old mail coach; they were mysteries to one another, as complete as if each had been in his own coach and six, or his own coach and sixty, with the breadth of a county between him and the next.

The messenger rode back at an easy trot, stopping pretty often at ale-houses by the way to drink, but evincing a tendency to keep his own counsel, and to keep his hat cocked over his eyes. He had eyes that assorted very well with that decoration, being of a surface black, with no depth in the colour or form, and much too near together—as if they were afraid of being found out in something, singly, if they kept too far apart. They had a sinister expression, under an old cocked-hat like a three-cornered spittoon, and over a great muffler for the chin and throat, which descended nearly to the wearer's knees. When he stopped for drink, he moved this muffler with his left hand, only while he poured his liquor in with his right; as soon as that was done, he muffled again.

"No, Jerry, no!" said the messenger, harping on one theme as he rode. "It wouldn't do for you, Jerry. Jerry, you honest tradesman, it wouldn't suit *your* line of business! Recalled—! Bust me if I don't think he'd been a drinking!"

His message perplexed his mind to that degree that he was fain, several times, to take off his hat to scratch his head. Except on the crown, which was raggedly bald, he had stiff, black hair, standing jaggedly all over it, and growing down hill almost to his broad, blunt nose. It was so like Smith's work, so much more like the top of a strongly spiked wall than a head of hair, that the best of players at leap-frog might have declined him, as the most dangerous man in the world to go over.

While he trotted back with the message he was to deliver to the night watchman in his box at the door of Tellson's Bank, by Temple Bar, who was to deliver it to greater authorities within, the shadows of the night took such shapes to him as arose out of the message, and took such shapes to the mare as arose out of *her* private topics of uneasiness. They seemed to be numerous, for she shied at every shadow on the road.

What time, the mail-coach lumbered, jolted, rattled, and bumped upon its tedious way, with its three fellow-inscrutables inside. To whom, likewise, the shadows of the night revealed themselves, in the forms their dozing eyes and wandering thoughts suggested.

Tellson's Bank had a run upon it in the mail. As the bank passenger—with an arm drawn through the leathern strap, which did what lay in it to keep him from pounding against the next passenger, and driving him into his corner, whenever the coach got a special jolt—nodded in his place, with half-shut eyes, the little coach-windows, and the coach-lamp dimly gleaming through them, and the bulky bundle of opposite passenger, became the bank, and did a great stroke of business. The rattle of the harness was the chink of money, and more drafts were honoured in five minutes than even Tellson's, with all its foreign and home connection, ever paid in thrice the time. Then the strong-rooms underground, at Tellson's, with such of their valuable stores and secrets as were known to the passenger (and it was not a little that he knew about them), opened before him, and he went in among them with the great keys and the feebly-burning candle, and found them safe, and strong, and sound, and still, just as he had last seen them.

But, though the bank was almost always with him, and though the coach (in a confused way, like the presence of pain under an opiate) was always with him, there was another current of impression that never ceased to run, all through the night. He was on his way to dig some one out of a grave.

Now, which of the multitude of faces that showed themselves before him was the true face of the buried person, the shadows of the night did not indicate; but they were all the faces of a man of five-and-forty by years, and they differed principally in the passions they expressed, and in the ghastliness of their worn and wasted state. Pride, contempt, defiance, stubbornness, submission, lamentation, succeeded one another; so did varieties of sunken cheek, cadaverous colour, emaciated hands and figures. But the face was in the main one face, and every head was prematurely white. A hundred times the dozing passenger inquired of this spectre:

"Buried how long?"

The answer was always the same: "Almost eighteen years."

"You had abandoned all hope of being dug out?"

"Long ago."

"You know that you are recalled to life?"

"They tell me so."

"I hope you care to live?"

"I can't say."

"Shall I show her to you? Will you come and see her?"

The answers to this question were various and contradictory. Sometimes the broken reply was, "Wait! It would kill me if I saw her too soon." Sometimes, it was given in a tender rain of tears, and then it was, "Take me to her." Sometimes it was staring and bewildered, and then it was, "I don't know her. I don't understand."

After such imaginary discourse, the passenger in his fancy would dig, and dig, dig—now with a spade, now with a great key, now with his hands—to dig this wretched creature out. Got out at last, with earth hanging about his face and hair, he would suddenly fan away to dust. The passenger would then start to himself, and lower the window, to get the reality of mist and rain on his cheek.

Yet even when his eyes were opened on the mist and rain, on the moving patch of light from the lamps, and the hedge at the roadside retreating by jerks, the night shadows outside the coach would fall into the train of the night shadows within. The real Banking-house by Temple Bar, the real business of the past day, the real strong rooms, the real express sent after him, and the real message returned, would all be there. Out of the midst of them, the ghostly face would rise, and he would accost it again.

"Buried how long?"

"Almost eighteen years."

"I hope you care to live?"

"I can't say."

Dig—dig—dig—until an impatient movement from one of the two passengers would admonish him to pull up the window, draw his arm securely through the leathern strap, and speculate upon the two slumbering forms, until his mind lost its hold of them, and they again slid away into the bank and the grave.

"Buried how long?"

"Almost eighteen years."

"You had abandoned all hope of being dug out?"

"Long ago."

The words were still in his hearing as just spoken—distinctly in his hearing as ever spoken words had been in his life—when the weary passenger started to the consciousness of daylight, and found that the shadows of the night were gone.

He lowered the window, and looked out at the rising sun. There was a ridge of ploughed land, with a plough upon it where it had been left last night when the horses were unyoked; beyond, a quiet coppice-wood, in which many leaves of burning red and golden yellow still remained upon the trees. Though the earth was cold and wet, the sky was clear, and the sun rose bright, placid, and beautiful.

"Eighteen years!" said the passenger, looking at the sun. "Gracious Creator of day! To be buried alive for eighteen years!"

IV. The Preparation

When the mail got successfully to Dover, in the course of the forenoon, the head drawer at the Royal George Hotel opened the coach-door as his custom was. He did it with some flourish of ceremony, for a mail journey from London in winter was an achievement to congratulate an adventurous traveller upon.

By that time, there was only one adventurous traveller left be congratulated: for the two others had been set down at their respective roadside destinations. The mildewy inside of the coach, with its damp and dirty straw, its disagreeable smell, and its obscurity, was rather like a larger dog-kennel. Mr. Lorry, the passenger, shaking himself out of it in chains of straw, a tangle of shaggy wrapper, flapping hat, and muddy legs, was rather like a larger sort of dog.

"There will be a packet to Calais, tomorrow, drawer?"

"Yes, sir, if the weather holds and the wind sets tolerable fair. The tide will serve pretty nicely at about two in the afternoon, sir. Bed, sir?"

"I shall not go to bed till night; but I want a bedroom, and a barber."

"And then breakfast, sir? Yes, sir. That way, sir, if you please. Show Concord! Gentleman's valise and hot water to Concord. Pull off gentleman's boots in Concord. (You will find a fine sea-coal fire, sir.) Fetch barber to Concord. Stir about there, now, for Concord!"

The Concord bed-chamber being always assigned to a passenger by the mail, and passengers by the mail being always heavily wrapped up from head to foot, the room had the odd interest for the establishment of the Royal George, that although but one kind of man was seen to go into it, all kinds and varieties of men came out of it. Consequently, another drawer, and two porters, and several maids and the landlady, were all loitering by accident at various points of the road between the Concord and the coffee-room, when a gentleman of sixty, formally dressed in a brown suit of clothes, pretty well worn, but very well kept, with large square cuffs and large flaps to the pockets, passed along on his way to his breakfast.

The coffee-room had no other occupant, that forenoon, than the gentleman in brown. His breakfast-table was drawn before the fire, and as he sat, with its light shining on him, waiting for the meal, he sat so still, that he might have been sitting for his portrait.

Very orderly and methodical he looked, with a hand on each knee, and a loud watch ticking a sonorous sermon under his flapped waist-coat, as though it pitted its gravity and longevity against the levity and evanescence of the brisk fire. He had a good leg, and was a little vain of it, for his brown stockings fitted sleek and close, and were of a fine texture; his shoes and buckles, too, though plain, were trim. He wore an odd little sleek crisp flaxen wig, setting very close to his head: which wig, it is to be presumed, was made of hair, but which looked far more as though it were spun from filaments of silk or glass. His linen, though not of a fineness in accordance with his stockings, was as white as the tops of the waves that broke upon the neighbouring beach, or the specks of sail that glinted in the sunlight far at sea. A face habitually suppressed and quieted, was still lighted up under the quaint wig by a pair of moist bright eyes that it must have cost their owner, in years gone by, some pains to drill to the composed and reserved expression of Tellson's Bank. He had a healthy colour in his cheeks, and his face, though lined, bore few traces of anxiety. But, perhaps the confidential bachelor clerks in Tellson's Bank were principally occupied with the cares of other people; and perhaps second-hand cares, like second-hand clothes, come easily off and on.

Completing his resemblance to a man who was sitting for his portrait, Mr. Lorry dropped off to sleep. The arrival of his breakfast roused him, and he said to the drawer, as he moved his chair to it:

"I wish accommodation prepared for a young lady who may come here at any time to-day. She may ask for Mr. Jarvis Lorry, or she may only ask for a gentleman from Tellson's Bank. Please to let me know."

"Yes, sir. Tellson's Bank in London, sir?"

"Yes."

"Yes, sir. We have oftentimes the honour to entertain your gentlemen in their travelling backwards and forwards betwixt London and Paris, sir. A vast deal of travelling, sir, in Tellson and Company's House."

"Yes. We are quite a French House, as well as an English one."

"Yes, sir. Not much in the habit of such travelling yourself, I think, sir?"

"Not of late years. It is fifteen years since we—since I—came last from France."

"Indeed, sir? That was before my time here, sir. Before our people's time here, sir. The George was in other hands at that time, sir."

"I believe so."

"But I would hold a pretty wager, sir, that a House like Tellson and Company was flourishing, a matter of fifty, not to speak of fifteen years ago?"

"You might treble that, and say a hundred and fifty, yet not be far from the truth."

"Indeed, sir!"

Rounding his mouth and both his eyes, as he stepped backward from the table, the waiter shifted his napkin from his right arm to his left, dropped into a comfortable attitude, and stood surveying the guest while he ate and drank, as from an observatory or watchtower. According to the immemorial usage of waiters in all ages.

When Mr. Lorry had finished his breakfast, he went out for a stroll on the beach. The little narrow, crooked town of Dover hid itself away from the beach, and ran its head into the chalk cliffs, like a marine ostrich. The beach was a desert of heaps of sea and stones tumbling wildly about, and the sea did what it liked, and what it liked was destruction. It thundered at the town, and thundered at the cliffs, and brought the coast down, madly. The air among the houses was of so strong a piscatory flavour that one might have supposed sick fish went up to be dipped in it, as sick people went down to be dipped in the sea. A little fishing was done in the port, and a quantity of strolling about by night, and looking seaward: particularly at those times when the tide made, and was near flood. Small tradesmen, who did no business whatever, sometimes unaccountably realised large fortunes, and it was remarkable that nobody in the neighbourhood could endure a lamplighter.

As the day declined into the afternoon, and the air, which had been at intervals clear enough to allow the French coast to be seen, became again charged with mist and vapour, Mr. Lorry's thoughts seemed to cloud too. When it was dark, and he sat before the coffee-room fire, awaiting his dinner as he had awaited his breakfast, his mind was busily digging, digging, digging, in the live red coals.

A bottle of good claret after dinner does a digger in the red coals no harm, otherwise than as it has a tendency to throw him out of work. Mr. Lorry had been idle a long time, and had just poured out his last glassful of wine with as complete an appearance of satisfaction as is ever to be found in an elderly gentleman of a fresh complexion who has got to the end of a bottle, when a rattling of wheels came up the narrow street, and rumbled into the inn-yard.

He set down his glass untouched. "This is Mam'selle!" said he.

In a very few minutes the waiter came in to announce that Miss Manette had arrived from London, and would be happy to see the gentleman from Tellson's.

"So soon?"

Miss Manette had taken some refreshment on the road, and required none then, and was extremely anxious to see the gentleman from Tellson's immediately, if it suited his pleasure and convenience.

The gentleman from Tellson's had nothing left for it but to empty his glass with an air of stolid desperation, settle his odd little flaxen wig at the ears, and follow the waiter to Miss Manette's apartment. It was a large, dark room, furnished in a funereal manner with black horsehair, and loaded with heavy dark tables. These had been oiled and oiled, until the two tall candles on the table in the middle of the room were gloomily reflected on every leaf; as if *they* were buried, in deep graves of black mahogany, and no light to speak of could be expected from them until they were dug out.

The obscurity was so difficult to penetrate that Mr. Lorry, picking his way over the well-worn Turkey carpet, supposed Miss Manette to be, for the moment, in some adjacent room, until, having got past the two tall candles, he saw standing to receive him by the table between them and the fire, a young lady of not more than seventeen, in a riding-cloak, and still holding her straw travelling-hat by its ribbon in her hand. As his eyes rested on a short, slight, pretty figure, a quantity of golden hair, a pair of blue eyes that met his own with an inquiring look, and a forehead with a singular capacity (remembering how young and smooth it was), of rifting and knitting itself into an expression that was not quite one of perplexity, or wonder, or alarm, or merely of a bright fixed attention, though it included all the four expressions—as his eyes rested on these things, a sudden vivid likeness passed before him, of a child whom he had held in his arms on the passage across that very Channel, one cold time, when the hail drifted heavily and the sea ran high. The likeness passed away, like a breath along the surface of the gaunt pier-glass behind her, on the frame of which, a hospital procession of negro cupids, several headless and all cripples, were offering black baskets of Dead Sea fruit to black divinities of the feminine gender—and he made his formal bow to Miss Manette.

"Pray take a seat, sir." In a very clear and pleasant young voice; a little foreign in its accent, but a very little indeed.

"I kiss your hand, miss," said Mr. Lorry, with the manners of an earlier date, as he made his formal bow again, and took his seat.

"I received a letter from the Bank, sir, yesterday, informing me that some intelligence—or discovery—"

"The word is not material, miss; either word will do."

"—respecting the small property of my poor father, whom I never saw—so long dead—"

Mr. Lorry moved in his chair, and cast a troubled look towards the hospital procession of negro cupids. As if *they* had any help for anybody in their absurd baskets!

"—rendered it necessary that I should go to Paris, there to communicate with a gentleman of the Bank, so good as to be despatched to Paris for the purpose."

"Myself."

"As I was prepared to hear, sir."

She curtseyed to him (young ladies made curtseys in those days), with a pretty desire to convey to him that she felt how much older and wiser he was than she. He made her another bow.

"I replied to the Bank, sir, that as it was considered necessary, by those who know, and who are so kind as to advise me, that I should go to France, and that as I am an orphan and have no friend who could go with me, I should esteem it highly if I might be permitted to place myself, during the journey, under that worthy gentleman's protection. The gentleman had left London, but I think a messenger was sent after him to beg the favour of his waiting for me here."

"I was happy," said Mr. Lorry, "to be entrusted with the charge. I shall be more happy to execute it."

"Sir, I thank you indeed. I thank you very gratefully. It was told me by the Bank that the gentleman would explain to me the details of the business, and that I must prepare myself to find them of a surprising nature. I have done my best to prepare myself, and I naturally have a strong and eager interest to know what they are."

"Naturally," said Mr. Lorry. "Yes—I—"

After a pause, he added, again settling the crisp flaxen wig at the ears, "It is very difficult to begin."

He did not begin, but, in his indecision, met her glance. The young forehead lifted itself into that singular expression—but it was pretty and characteristic, besides being singular—and she raised her hand, as if with an involuntary action she caught at, or stayed some passing shadow.

"Are you quite a stranger to me, sir?"

"Am I not?" Mr. Lorry opened his hands, and extended them outwards with an argumentative smile.

Between the eyebrows and just over the little feminine nose, the line of which was as delicate and fine as it was possible to be, the expression deepened itself as she took her seat thoughtfully in the chair by which she had hitherto remained standing. He watched her as she mused, and the moment she raised her eyes again, went on:

"In your adopted country, I presume, I cannot do better than address you as a young English lady, Miss Manette?"

"If you please, sir."

"Miss Manette, I am a man of business. I have a business charge to acquit myself of. In your reception of it, don't heed me any more than if I was a speaking machine—truly, I am not much else. I will, with your leave, relate to you, miss, the story of one of our customers."

"Story!"

He seemed wilfully to mistake the word she had repeated, when he added, in a hurry, "Yes, customers; in the banking business we usually call our connection our customers. He was a French gentleman; a scientific gentleman; a man of great acquirements—a Doctor."

"Not of Beauvais?"

"Why, yes, of Beauvais. Like Monsieur Manette, your father, the gentleman was of Beauvais. Like Monsieur Manette, your father, the gentleman was of repute in Paris. I had the honour of knowing him there. Our relations were business relations, but confidential. I was at that time in our French House, and had been—oh! twenty years."

"At that time—I may ask, at what time, sir?"

"I speak, miss, of twenty years ago. He married—an English lady—and I was one of the trustees. His affairs, like the affairs of many other French gentlemen and French families, were entirely in Tellson's hands. In a similar way I am, or I have been, trustee of one kind or other for scores of our customers. These are mere business relations, miss; there is no friendship in them, no particular interest, nothing like sentiment. I have passed from one to another, in the course of my business life, just as I pass from one of our customers to another in the course of my business day; in short, I have no feelings; I am a mere machine. To go on—"

"But this is my father's story, sir; and I begin to think"—the curiously roughened forehead was very intent upon him—"that when I was left an orphan through my mother's surviving my father only two years, it was you who brought me to England. I am almost sure it was you."

Mr. Lorry took the hesitating little hand that confidingly advanced to take his, and he put it with some ceremony to his lips. He then conducted the young lady straightway to her chair again, and, holding the chair-back with his left hand, and using his right by turns to rub his chin, pull his wig at the ears, or point what he said, stood looking down into her face while she sat looking up into his.

"Miss Manette, it *was* I. And you will see how truly I spoke of myself just now, in saying I had no feelings, and that all the relations I hold with my fellow-creatures are mere business relations, when you reflect that I have never seen you since. No; you have been the ward of Tellson's House since, and I have been busy with the other business of Tellson's House since. Feelings! I have no time for them, no chance of them. I pass my whole life, miss, in turning an immense pecuniary Mangle."

After this odd description of his daily routine of employment, Mr. Lorry flattened his flaxen wig upon his head with both hands (which was most unnecessary, for nothing could be flatter than its shining surface was before), and resumed his former attitude.

"So far, miss (as you have remarked), this is the story of your regretted father. Now comes the difference. If your father had not died when he did—Don't be frightened! How you start!"

She did, indeed, start. And she caught his wrist with both her hands.

"Pray," said Mr. Lorry, in a soothing tone, bringing his left hand from the back of the chair to lay it on the supplicatory fingers that clasped him in so violent a tremble: "pray control your agitation—a matter of business. As I was saying—"

Her look so discomposed him that he stopped, wandered, and began anew:

"As I was saying; if Monsieur Manette had not died; if he had suddenly and silently disappeared; if he had been spirited away; if it had not been difficult to guess to what dreadful place, though no art could trace him; if he had an enemy in some compatriot who could exercise a privilege that I in my own time have known the boldest people afraid to speak of in a whisper, across the water there; for instance, the privilege of filling up blank forms for the consignment of any one to the oblivion of a prison for any length of time; if his wife had implored the king, the queen, the court, the clergy, for any tidings of him, and all quite in vain;—then the history of your father would have been the history of this unfortunate gentleman, the Doctor of Beauvais."

"I entreat you to tell me more, sir."

"I will. I am going to. You can bear it?"

"I can bear anything but the uncertainty you leave me in at this moment."

"You speak collectedly, and you—*are* collected. That's good!" (Though his manner was less satisfied than his words.) "A matter of business. Regard it as a matter of business—business that must be done. Now if this doctor's wife, though a lady of great courage and spirit, had suffered so intensely from this cause before her little child was born—"

"The little child was a daughter, sir."

"A daughter. A-a-matter of business—don't be distressed. Miss, if the poor lady had suffered so intensely before her little child was born, that she came to the determination of sparing the poor child the inheritance of any part of the agony she had known the pains of, by rearing her in the belief that her father was dead—No, don't kneel! In Heaven's name why should you kneel to me!"

"For the truth. O dear, good, compassionate sir, for the truth!"

"A—a matter of business. You confuse me, and how can I transact business if I am confused? Let us be clear-headed. If you could kindly mention now, for instance, what nine times ninepence are, or how many shillings in twenty guineas, it would be so encouraging. I should be so much more at my ease about your state of mind."

Without directly answering to this appeal, she sat so still when he had very gently raised her, and the hands that had not ceased to clasp his wrists were so much more steady than they had been, that she communicated some reassurance to Mr. Jarvis Lorry.

"That's right, that's right. Courage! Business! You have business before you; useful business. Miss Manette, your mother took this course with you. And when she died—I believe broken-hearted—having never slackened her unavailing search for your father, she left you, at two years old, to grow to be blooming, beautiful, and happy, without the dark cloud upon you of living in uncertainty whether your father soon wore his heart out in prison, or wasted there through many lingering years."

As he said the words he looked down, with an admiring pity, on the flowing golden hair; as if he pictured to himself that it might have been already tinged with grey.

"You know that your parents had no great possession, and that what they had was secured to your mother and to you. There has been no new discovery, of money, or of any other property; but—"

He felt his wrist held closer, and he stopped. The expression in the forehead, which had so particularly attracted his notice, and which was now immovable, had deepened into one of pain and horror.

"But he has been—been found. He is alive. Greatly changed, it is too probable; almost a wreck, it is possible; though we will hope the best. Still, alive. Your father has been taken to the house of an old servant in Paris, and we are going there: I, to identify him if I can: you, to restore him to life, love, duty, rest, comfort."

A shiver ran through her frame, and from it through his. She said, in a low, distinct, awe-stricken voice, as if she were saying it in a dream,

"I am going to see his Ghost! It will be his Ghost—not him!"

Mr. Lorry quietly chafed the hands that held his arm. "There, there, there! See now, see now! The best and the worst are known to you, now. You are well on your way to the poor wronged gentleman, and, with a fair sea voyage, and a fair land journey, you will be soon at his dear side."

She repeated in the same tone, sunk to a whisper, "I have been free, I have been happy, yet his Ghost has never haunted me!"

"Only one thing more," said Mr. Lorry, laying stress upon it as a wholesome means of enforcing her attention: "he has been found under another name; his own, long forgotten or long concealed. It would be worse than useless now to inquire which; worse than useless to seek to know whether he has been for years overlooked, or always designedly held prisoner. It would be worse than useless now to make any inquiries, because it would be dangerous. Better not to mention the subject, anywhere or in any way, and to remove him—for a while at all events—out of France. Even I, safe as an Englishman, and even Tellson's, important as they are to French credit, avoid all naming of the matter. I carry about me, not a scrap of writing openly referring to it. This is a secret service altogether. My credentials, entries, and memoranda, are all comprehended in the one line, 'Recalled to Life;' which may mean anything. But what is the matter! She doesn't notice a word! Miss Manette!"

Perfectly still and silent, and not even fallen back in her chair, she sat under his hand, utterly insensible; with her eyes open and fixed upon him, and with that last expression looking as if it were carved or branded into her forehead. So close was her hold upon his arm, that he feared to detach himself lest he should hurt her; therefore he called out loudly for assistance without moving.

A wild-looking woman, whom even in his agitation, Mr. Lorry observed to be all of a red colour, and to have red hair, and to be dressed in some extraordinary tight-fitting fashion, and to have on her head a most wonderful bonnet like a Grenadier wooden measure, and good measure too, or a great Stilton cheese, came running into the room in advance of the inn servants, and soon settled the question of his detachment from the poor young lady, by laying a brawny hand upon his chest, and sending him flying back against the nearest wall.

("I really think this must be a man!" was Mr. Lorry's breathless reflection, simultaneously with his coming against the wall.)

"Why, look at you all!" bawled this figure, addressing the inn servants. "Why don't you go and fetch things, instead of standing there staring at me? I am not so much to look at, am I? Why don't you go and fetch things? I'll let you know, if you don't bring smelling-salts, cold water, and vinegar, quick, I will."

There was an immediate dispersal for these restoratives, and she softly laid the patient on a sofa, and tended her with great skill and gentleness: calling her "my precious!" and "my bird!" and spreading her golden hair aside over her shoulders with great pride and care.

"And you in brown!" she said, indignantly turning to Mr. Lorry; "couldn't you tell her what you had to tell her, without frightening her to death? Look at her, with her pretty pale face and her cold hands. Do you call *that* being a Banker?"

Mr. Lorry was so exceedingly disconcerted by a question so hard to answer, that he could only look on, at a distance, with much feebler sympathy and humility, while the strong woman, having banished the inn servants under the mysterious penalty of "letting them know" something not mentioned if they stayed there, staring, recovered her charge by a regular series of gradations, and coaxed her to lay her drooping head upon her shoulder.

"I hope she will do well now," said Mr. Lorry.

"No thanks to you in brown, if she does. My darling pretty!"

"I hope," said Mr. Lorry, after another pause of feeble sympathy and humility, "that you accompany Miss Manette to France?"

"A likely thing, too!" replied the strong woman. "If it was ever intended that I should go across salt water, do you suppose Providence would have cast my lot in an island?"

This being another question hard to answer, Mr. Jarvis Lorry withdrew to consider it.

V. The Wine-shop

A large cask of wine had been dropped and broken, in the street. The accident had happened in getting it out of a cart; the cask had tumbled out with a run, the hoops had burst, and it lay on the stones just outside the door of the wine-shop, shattered like a walnut-shell.

All the people within reach had suspended their business, or their idleness, to run to the spot and drink the wine. The rough, irregular stones of the street, pointing every way, and designed, one might have thought, expressly to lame all living creatures that approached them, had dammed it into little pools; these were surrounded, each by its own jostling group or crowd, according to its size. Some men kneeled down, made scoops of their two hands joined, and sipped, or tried to help women, who bent over their shoulders, to sip, before the wine had all run out between their fingers. Others, men and women, dipped in the puddles with little mugs of mutilated earthenware, or even with handkerchiefs from women's heads, which were squeezed dry into infants' mouths; others made small mud-embankments, to stem the wine as it ran; others, directed by lookers-on up at high windows, darted here and there, to cut off little streams of wine that started away in new directions; others devoted themselves to the sodden and lee-dyed pieces of the cask, licking, and even champing the moister wine-rotted fragments with eager relish. There was no drainage to carry off the wine, and not only did it all get taken up, but so much mud got taken up along with it, that there might have been a scavenger in the street, if anybody acquainted with it could have believed in such a miraculous presence.

A shrill sound of laughter and of amused voices—voices of men, women, and children—resounded in the street while this wine game lasted. There was little roughness in the sport, and much playfulness. There was a special companionship in it, an observable inclination on the part of every one to join some other one, which led, especially among the luckier or lighter-hearted, to frolicsome embraces, drinking of healths, shaking of hands, and even joining of hands and dancing, a dozen together. When the wine was gone, and the places where it had been most abundant were raked into a gridiron-pattern by fingers, these demonstrations ceased, as suddenly as they had broken out. The man who had left his saw sticking in the firewood he was cutting, set it in motion again; the women who had left on a door-step the little pot of hot ashes, at which she had been trying to soften the pain in her own starved fingers and toes, or in those of her child, returned to it; men with bare arms, matted locks, and cadaverous faces, who had emerged into the winter light from cellars, moved away, to descend again; and a gloom gathered on the scene that appeared more natural to it than sunshine.

The wine was red wine, and had stained the ground of the narrow street in the suburb of Saint Antoine, in Paris, where it was spilled. It had stained many hands, too, and many faces, and many naked feet, and many wooden shoes. The hands of the man who sawed the wood, left red marks on the billets; and the forehead of the woman who nursed her baby, was stained with the stain of the old rag she wound about her head again. Those who had been greedy with the staves of the cask, had acquired a tigerish smear about the mouth; and one tall joker so besmirched, his head more out of a long squalid bag of a nightcap than in it, scrawled upon a wall with his finger dipped in muddy wine-lees—BLOOD.

The time was to come, when that wine too would be spilled on the street-stones, and when the stain of it would be red upon many there.

And now that the cloud settled on Saint Antoine, which a momentary gleam had driven from his sacred countenance, the darkness of it was heavy—cold, dirt, sickness, ignorance, and want, were the lords in waiting on the saintly presence—nobles of great power all of them; but, most especially the last. Samples of a people that had undergone a terrible grinding and regrinding in the mill, and certainly not in the fabulous mill which ground old people young, shivered at every corner, passed in and out at every doorway, looked from every window, fluttered in every vestige of a garment that the wind shook. The mill which had worked them down, was the mill that grinds young people old; the children had ancient faces and grave voices; and upon them, and upon the grown faces, and ploughed into every furrow of age and coming up afresh, was the sigh, Hunger. It was prevalent everywhere. Hunger was pushed out of the tall houses, in the wretched clothing that hung upon poles and lines; Hunger was patched into them with straw and rag and wood and paper; Hunger was repeated in every fragment of the small modicum of firewood that the man sawed off; Hunger stared down from the smokeless chimneys, and started up from the filthy street that had no offal, among its refuse, of anything to eat. Hunger was the inscription on the baker's shelves, written in every small loaf of his scanty stock of bad bread; at the sausage-shop, in every dead-dog preparation that was offered for sale. Hunger rattled its dry bones among the roasting chestnuts in the turned cylinder; Hunger was shred into atomics in every farthing porringer of husky chips of potato, fried with some reluctant drops of oil.

Its abiding place was in all things fitted to it. A narrow winding street, full of offence and stench, with other narrow winding streets diverging, all peopled by rags and nightcaps, and all smelling of rags and nightcaps, and all visible things with a brooding look upon them that looked ill. In the hunted air of the people there was yet some wild-beast thought of the possibility of turning at bay. Depressed and slinking though they were, eyes of fire were not wanting among them; nor compressed lips, white with what they suppressed; nor foreheads knitted into the likeness of the gallows-rope they mused about enduring, or inflicting. The trade signs (and they were almost as many as the shops) were, all, grim illustrations of Want. The butcher and the porkman painted up, only the leanest scrags of meat; the baker, the coarsest of meagre loaves. The people rudely pictured as drinking in the wine-shops, croaked over their scanty measures of thin wine and beer, and were gloweringly confidential together. Nothing was represented in a flourishing condition, save tools and weapons; but, the cutler's knives and axes were sharp and bright, the smith's hammers were heavy, and the gunmaker's stock was murderous. The crippling stones of the pavement, with their many little reservoirs of mud and water, had no footways, but broke off abruptly at the doors. The kennel, to make amends, ran down the middle of the street—when it ran at all: which was only after heavy rains, and then it ran, by many eccentric fits, into the houses. Across the streets, at wide intervals, one clumsy lamp was slung by a rope and pulley; at night, when the lamplighter had let these down, and lighted, and hoisted them again, a feeble grove of dim wicks swung in a sickly manner overhead, as if they were at sea. Indeed they were at sea, and the ship and crew were in peril of tempest.

For, the time was to come, when the gaunt scarecrows of that region should have watched the lamplighter, in their idleness and hunger, so long, as to conceive the idea of improving on his method, and hauling up men by those ropes and pulleys, to flare upon the darkness of their condition. But, the time was not come yet; and every wind that blew over France shook the rags of the scarecrows in vain, for the birds, fine of song and feather, took no warning.

The wine-shop was a corner shop, better than most others in its appearance and degree, and the master of the wine-shop had stood outside it, in a yellow waistcoat and green breeches, looking on at the struggle for the lost wine. "It's not my affair," said he, with a final shrug of the shoulders. "The people from the market did it. Let them bring another."

There, his eyes happening to catch the tall joker writing up his joke, he called to him across the way:

"Say, then, my Gaspard, what do you do there?"

The fellow pointed to his joke with immense significance, as is often the way with his tribe. It missed its mark, and completely failed, as is often the way with his tribe too.

"What now? Are you a subject for the mad hospital?" said the wine-shop keeper, crossing the road, and obliterating the jest with a handful of mud, picked up for the purpose, and smeared over it. "Why do you write in the public streets? Is there—tell me thou—is there no other place to write such words in?"

In his expostulation he dropped his cleaner hand (perhaps accidentally, perhaps not) upon the joker's heart. The joker rapped it with his own, took a nimble spring upward, and came down in a fantastic dancing attitude, with one of his stained shoes jerked off his foot into his hand, and held out. A joker of an extremely, not to say wolfishly practical character, he looked, under those circumstances.

"Put it on, put it on," said the other. "Call wine, wine; and finish there." With that advice, he wiped his soiled hand upon the joker's dress, such as it was—quite deliberately, as having dirtied the hand on his account; and then recrossed the road and entered the wine-shop.

This wine-shop keeper was a bull-necked, martial-looking man of thirty, and he should have been of a hot temperament, for, although it was a bitter day, he wore no coat, but carried one slung over his shoulder. His shirt-sleeves were rolled up, too, and his brown arms were bare to the elbows. Neither did he wear anything more on his head than his own crisply-curling short dark hair. He was a dark man altogether, with good eyes and a good bold breadth between them. Good-humoured looking on the whole, but implacable-looking, too; evidently a man of a strong resolution and a set purpose; a man not desirable to be met, rushing down a narrow pass with a gulf on either side, for nothing would turn the man.

Madame Defarge, his wife, sat in the shop behind the counter as he came in. Madame Defarge was a stout woman of about his own age, with a watchful eye that seldom seemed to look at anything, a large hand heavily ringed, a steady face, strong features, and great composure of manner. There was a character about Madame Defarge, from which one might have predicated that she did not often make mistakes against herself in any of the reckonings over which she presided. Madame Defarge being sensitive to cold, was wrapped in fur, and had a quantity of bright shawl twined about her head, though not to the concealment of her large earrings. Her knitting was before her, but she had laid it down to pick her teeth with a toothpick. Thus engaged, with her right elbow supported by her left hand, Madame Defarge said nothing when her lord came in, but coughed just one grain of cough. This, in combination with the lifting of her darkly defined eyebrows over her toothpick by the breadth of a line, suggested to her husband that he would do well to look round the shop among the customers, for any new customer who had dropped in while he stepped over the way.

The wine-shop keeper accordingly rolled his eyes about, until they rested upon an elderly gentleman and a young lady, who were seated in a corner. Other company were there: two playing cards, two playing dominoes, three standing by the counter lengthening out a short supply of wine. As he passed behind the counter, he took notice that the elderly gentleman said in a look to the young lady, "This is our man."

"What the devil do *you* do in that galley there?" said Monsieur Defarge to himself; "I don't know you."

But, he feigned not to notice the two strangers, and fell into discourse with the triumvirate of customers who were drinking at the counter.

"How goes it, Jacques?" said one of these three to Monsieur Defarge. "Is all the spilt wine swallowed?"

"Every drop, Jacques," answered Monsieur Defarge.

When this interchange of Christian name was effected, Madame Defarge, picking her teeth with her toothpick, coughed another grain of cough, and raised her eyebrows by the breadth of another line.

"It is not often," said the second of the three, addressing Monsieur Defarge, "that many of these miserable beasts know the taste of wine, or of anything but black bread and death. Is it not so, Jacques?"

"It is so, Jacques," Monsieur Defarge returned.

At this second interchange of the Christian name, Madame Defarge, still using her toothpick with profound composure, coughed another grain of cough, and raised her eyebrows by the breadth of another line.

The last of the three now said his say, as he put down his empty drinking vessel and smacked his lips.

"Ah! So much the worse! A bitter taste it is that such poor cattle always have in their mouths, and hard lives they live, Jacques. Am I right, Jacques?"

"You are right, Jacques," was the response of Monsieur Defarge.

This third interchange of the Christian name was completed at the moment when Madame Defarge put her toothpick by, kept her eyebrows up, and slightly rustled in her seat.

"Hold then! True!" muttered her husband. "Gentlemen—my wife!"

The three customers pulled off their hats to Madame Defarge, with three flourishes. She acknowledged their homage by bending her head, and giving them a quick look. Then she glanced in a casual manner round the wine-shop, took up her knitting with great apparent calmness and repose of spirit, and became absorbed in it.

"Gentlemen," said her husband, who had kept his bright eye observantly upon her, "good day. The chamber, furnished bachelor-fashion, that you wished to see, and were inquiring for when I stepped out, is on the fifth floor. The doorway of the staircase gives on the little courtyard close to the left here," pointing with his hand, "near to the window of my establishment. But, now that I remember, one of you has already been there, and can show the way. Gentlemen, adieu!"

They paid for their wine, and left the place. The eyes of Monsieur Defarge were studying his wife at her knitting when the elderly gentleman advanced from his corner, and begged the favour of a word.

"Willingly, sir," said Monsieur Defarge, and quietly stepped with him to the door.

Their conference was very short, but very decided. Almost at the first word, Monsieur Defarge started and became deeply attentive. It had not lasted a minute, when he nodded and went out. The gentleman then beckoned to the young lady, and they, too, went out. Madame Defarge knitted with nimble fingers and steady eyebrows, and saw nothing.

Mr. Jarvis Lorry and Miss Manette, emerging from the wine-shop thus, joined Monsieur Defarge in the doorway to which he had directed his own company just before. It opened from a stinking little black courtyard, and was the general public entrance to a great pile of houses, inhabited by a great number of people. In the gloomy tile-paved entry to the gloomy tile-paved staircase, Monsieur Defarge bent down on one knee to the child of his old master, and put her hand to his lips. It was a gentle action, but not at all gently done; a very remarkable transformation had come over him in a few seconds. He had no good-humour in his face, nor any openness of aspect left, but had become a secret, angry, dangerous man.

"It is very high; it is a little difficult. Better to begin slowly." Thus, Monsieur Defarge, in a stern voice, to Mr. Lorry, as they began ascending the stairs.

"Is he alone?" the latter whispered.

"Alone! God help him, who should be with him!" said the other, in the same low voice.

"Is he always alone, then?"

"Yes."

"Of his own desire?"

"Of his own necessity. As he was, when I first saw him after they found me and demanded to know if I would take him, and, at my peril be discreet—as he was then, so he is now."

"He is greatly changed?"

"Changed!"

The keeper of the wine-shop stopped to strike the wall with his hand, and mutter a tremendous curse. No direct answer could have been half so forcible. Mr. Lorry's spirits grew heavier and heavier, as he and his two companions ascended higher and higher.

Such a staircase, with its accessories, in the older and more crowded parts of Paris, would be bad enough now; but, at that time, it was vile indeed to unaccustomed and unhardened senses. Every little habitation within the great foul nest of one high building—that is to say, the room or rooms within every door that opened on the general staircase—left its own heap of refuse on its own landing, besides flinging other refuse from its own windows. The uncontrollable and hopeless mass of decomposition so engendered, would have polluted the air, even if poverty and deprivation had not loaded it with their intangible impurities; the two bad sources combined made it almost insupportable. Through such an atmosphere, by a steep dark shaft of dirt and poison, the way lay. Yielding to his own disturbance of mind, and to his young companion's agitation, which became greater every instant, Mr. Jarvis Lorry twice stopped to rest. Each of these stoppages was made at a doleful grating, by which any languishing good airs that were left uncorrupted, seemed to escape, and all spoilt and sickly vapours seemed to crawl in. Through the rusted bars, tastes, rather than glimpses, were caught of the jumbled neighbourhood; and nothing within range, nearer or lower than the summits of the two great towers of Notre-Dame, had any promise on it of healthy life or wholesome aspirations.

At last, the top of the staircase was gained, and they stopped for the third time. There was yet an upper staircase, of a steeper inclination and of contracted dimensions, to be ascended, before the garret story was reached. The keeper of the wine-shop, always going a little in advance, and always going on the side which Mr. Lorry took, as though he dreaded to be asked any question by the young lady, turned himself about here, and, carefully feeling in the pockets of the coat he carried over his shoulder, took out a key.

"The door is locked then, my friend?" said Mr. Lorry, surprised.

"Ay. Yes," was the grim reply of Monsieur Defarge.

"You think it necessary to keep the unfortunate gentleman so retired?"

"I think it necessary to turn the key." Monsieur Defarge whispered it closer in his ear, and frowned heavily.

"Why?"

"Why! Because he has lived so long, locked up, that he would be frightened—rave—tear himself to pieces—die—come to I know not what harm—if his door was left open."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Mr. Lorry.

"Is it possible!" repeated Defarge, bitterly. "Yes. And a beautiful world we live in, when it *is* possible, and when many other such things are possible, and not only possible, but done—done, see you!—under that sky there, every day. Long live the Devil. Let us go on."

This dialogue had been held in so very low a whisper, that not a word of it had reached the young lady's ears. But, by this time she trembled under such strong emotion, and her face expressed such deep anxiety, and, above all, such dread and terror, that Mr. Lorry felt it incumbent on him to speak a word or two of reassurance.

"Courage, dear miss! Courage! Business! The worst will be over in a moment; it is but passing the room-door, and the worst is over. Then, all the good you bring to him, all the relief, all the happiness you bring to him, begin. Let our good friend here, assist you on that side. That's well, friend Defarge. Come, now. Business, business!"

They went up slowly and softly. The staircase was short, and they were soon at the top. There, as it had an abrupt turn in it, they came all at once in sight of three men, whose heads were bent down close together at the side of a door, and who were intently looking into the room to which the door belonged, through some chinks or holes in the wall. On hearing footsteps close at hand, these three turned, and rose, and showed themselves to be the three of one name who had been drinking in the wine-shop.

"I forgot them in the surprise of your visit," explained Monsieur Defarge. "Leave us, good boys; we have business here."

The three glided by, and went silently down.

There appearing to be no other door on that floor, and the keeper of the wine-shop going straight to this one when they were left alone, Mr. Lorry asked him in a whisper, with a little anger:

"Do you make a show of Monsieur Manette?"

"I show him, in the way you have seen, to a chosen few."

"Is that well?"

"*I* think it is well."

"Who are the few? How do you choose them?"

"I choose them as real men, of my name—Jacques is my name—to whom the sight is likely to do good. Enough; you are English; that is another thing. Stay there, if you please, a little moment."

With an admonitory gesture to keep them back, he stooped, and looked in through the crevice in the wall. Soon raising his head again, he struck twice or thrice upon the door—evidently with no other object than to make a noise there. With the same intention, he drew the key across it, three or four times, before he put it clumsily into the lock, and turned it as heavily as he could.

The door slowly opened inward under his hand, and he looked into the room and said something. A faint voice answered something. Little more than a single syllable could have been spoken on either side.

He looked back over his shoulder, and beckoned them to enter. Mr. Lorry got his arm securely round the daughter's waist, and held her; for he felt that she was sinking.

"A-a-a-business, business!" he urged, with a moisture that was not of business shining on his cheek. "Come in, come in!"

"I am afraid of it," she answered, shuddering.

"Of it? What?"

"I mean of him. Of my father."

Rendered in a manner desperate, by her state and by the beckoning of their conductor, he drew over his neck the arm that shook upon his shoulder, lifted her a little, and hurried her into the room. He sat her down just within the door, and held her, clinging to him.

Defarge drew out the key, closed the door, locked it on the inside, took out the key again, and held it in his hand. All this he did, methodically, and with as loud and harsh an accompaniment of noise as he could make. Finally, he walked across the room with a measured tread to where the window was. He stopped there, and faced round.

The garret, built to be a depository for firewood and the like, was dim and dark: for, the window of dormer shape, was in truth a door in the roof, with a little crane over it for the hoisting up of stores from the street: unglazed, and closing up the middle in two pieces, like any other door of French construction. To exclude the cold, one half of this door was fast closed, and the other was opened but a very little way. Such a scanty portion of light was admitted through these means, that it was difficult, on first coming in, to see anything; and long habit alone could have slowly formed in any one, the ability to do any work requiring nicety in such obscurity. Yet, work of that kind was being done in the garret; for, with his back towards the door, and his face towards the window where the keeper of the wine-shop stood looking at him, a white-haired man sat on a low bench, stooping forward and very busy, making shoes.

VI. The Shoemaker

"Good day!" said Monsieur Defarge, looking down at the white head that bent low over the shoemaking.

It was raised for a moment, and a very faint voice responded to the salutation, as if it were at a distance:

"Good day!"

"You are still hard at work, I see?"

After a long silence, the head was lifted for another moment, and the voice replied, "Yes—I am working." This time, a pair of haggard eyes had looked at the questioner, before the face had dropped again.

The faintness of the voice was pitiable and dreadful. It was not the faintness of physical weakness, though confinement and hard fare no doubt had their part in it. Its deplorable peculiarity was, that it was the faintness of solitude and disuse. It was like the last feeble echo of a sound made long and long ago. So entirely had it lost the life and resonance of the human voice, that it affected the senses like a once beautiful colour faded away into a poor weak stain. So sunken and suppressed it was, that it was like a voice underground. So expressive it was, of a hopeless and lost creature, that a famished traveller, wearied out by lonely wandering in a wilderness, would have remembered home and friends in such a tone before lying down to die.

Some minutes of silent work had passed: and the haggard eyes had looked up again: not with any interest or curiosity, but with a dull mechanical perception, beforehand, that the spot where the only visitor they were aware of had stood, was not yet empty.

"I want," said Defarge, who had not removed his gaze from the shoemaker, "to let in a little more light here. You can bear a little more?"

The shoemaker stopped his work; looked with a vacant air of listening, at the floor on one side of him; then similarly, at the floor on the other side of him; then, upward at the speaker.

"What did you say?"

"You can bear a little more light?"

"I must bear it, if you let it in." (Laying the palest shadow of a stress upon the second word.)

The opened half-door was opened a little further, and secured at that angle for the time. A broad ray of light fell into the garret, and showed the workman with an unfinished shoe upon his lap, pausing in his labour. His few common tools and various scraps of leather were at his feet and on his bench. He had a white beard, raggedly cut, but not very long, a hollow face, and exceedingly bright eyes. The hollowness and thinness of his face would have caused them to look large, under his yet dark eyebrows and his confused white hair, though they had been really otherwise; but, they were naturally large, and looked unnaturally so. His yellow rags of shirt lay open at the throat, and showed his body to be withered and worn. He, and his old canvas frock, and his loose stockings, and all his poor tatters of clothes, had, in a long seclusion from direct light and air, faded down to such a dull uniformity of parchment-yellow, that it would have been hard to say which was which.

He had put up a hand between his eyes and the light, and the very bones of it seemed transparent. So he sat, with a steadfastly vacant gaze, pausing in his work. He never looked at the figure before him, without first looking down on this side of himself, then on that, as if he had lost the habit of associating place with sound; he never spoke, without first wandering in this manner, and forgetting to speak.

"Are you going to finish that pair of shoes to-day?" asked Defarge, motioning to Mr. Lorry to come forward.

"What did you say?"

"Do you mean to finish that pair of shoes to-day?"

"I can't say that I mean to. I suppose so. I don't know."

But, the question reminded him of his work, and he bent over it again.

Mr. Lorry came silently forward, leaving the daughter by the door. When he had stood, for a minute or two, by the side of Defarge, the shoemaker looked up. He showed no surprise at seeing another figure, but the unsteady fingers of one of his hands strayed to his lips as he looked at it (his lips and his nails were of the same pale lead-colour), and then the hand dropped to his work, and he once more bent over the shoe. The look and the action had occupied but an instant.

"You have a visitor, you see," said Monsieur Defarge.

"What did you say?"

"Here is a visitor."

The shoemaker looked up as before, but without removing a hand from his work.

"Come!" said Defarge. "Here is monsieur, who knows a well-made shoe when he sees one. Show him that shoe you are working at. Take it, monsieur."

Mr. Lorry took it in his hand.

"Tell monsieur what kind of shoe it is, and the maker's name."

There was a longer pause than usual, before the shoemaker replied:

"I forget what it was you asked me. What did you say?"

"I said, couldn't you describe the kind of shoe, for monsieur's information?"

"It is a lady's shoe. It is a young lady's walking-shoe. It is in the present mode. I never saw the mode. I have had a pattern in my hand." He glanced at the shoe with some little passing touch of pride.

"And the maker's name?" said Defarge.

Now that he had no work to hold, he laid the knuckles of the right hand in the hollow of the left, and then the knuckles of the left hand in the hollow of the right, and then passed a hand across his bearded chin, and so on in regular changes, without a moment's intermission. The task of recalling him from the vagrancy into which he always sank when he had spoken, was like recalling some very weak person from a swoon, or endeavouring, in the hope of some disclosure, to stay the spirit of a fast-dying man.

"Did you ask me for my name?"

"Assuredly I did."

"One Hundred and Five, North Tower."

"Is that all?"

"One Hundred and Five, North Tower."

With a weary sound that was not a sigh, nor a groan, he bent to work again, until the silence was again broken.

"You are not a shoemaker by trade?" said Mr. Lorry, looking steadfastly at him.

His haggard eyes turned to Defarge as if he would have transferred the question to him: but as no help came from that quarter, they turned back on the questioner when they had sought the ground.

"I am not a shoemaker by trade? No, I was not a shoemaker by trade. I-I learnt it here. I taught myself. I asked leave to—"

He lapsed away, even for minutes, ringing those measured changes on his hands the whole time. His eyes came slowly back, at last, to the face from which they had wandered; when they rested on it, he started, and resumed, in the manner of a sleeper that moment awake, reverting to a subject of last night.

"I asked leave to teach myself, and I got it with much difficulty after a long while, and I have made shoes ever since."

As he held out his hand for the shoe that had been taken from him, Mr. Lorry said, still looking steadfastly in his face:

"Monsieur Manette, do you remember nothing of me?"

The shoe dropped to the ground, and he sat looking fixedly at the questioner.

"Monsieur Manette"; Mr. Lorry laid his hand upon Defarge's arm; "do you remember nothing of this man? Look at him. Look at me. Is there no old banker, no old business, no old servant, no old time, rising in your mind, Monsieur Manette?"

As the captive of many years sat looking fixedly, by turns, at Mr. Lorry and at Defarge, some long obliterated marks of an actively intent intelligence in the middle of the forehead, gradually forced themselves through the black mist that had fallen on him. They were overclouded again, they were fainter, they were gone; but they had been there. And so exactly was the expression repeated on the fair young face of her who had crept along the wall to a point where she could see him, and where she now stood looking at him, with hands which at first had been only raised in frightened compassion, if not even to keep him off and shut out the sight of him, but which were now extending towards him, trembling with eagerness to lay the spectral face upon her warm young breast, and love it back to life and hope—so exactly was the expression repeated (though in stronger characters) on her fair young face, that it looked as though it had passed like a moving light, from him to her.

Darkness had fallen on him in its place. He looked at the two, less and less attentively, and his eyes in gloomy abstraction sought the ground and looked about him in the old way. Finally, with a deep long sigh, he took the shoe up, and resumed his work.

"Have you recognised him, monsieur?" asked Defarge in a whisper.

"Yes; for a moment. At first I thought it quite hopeless, but I have unquestionably seen, for a single moment, the face that I once knew so well. Hush! Let us draw further back. Hush!"

She had moved from the wall of the garret, very near to the bench on which he sat. There was something awful in his unconsciousness of the figure that could have put out its hand and touched him as he stooped over his labour.

Not a word was spoken, not a sound was made. She stood, like a spirit, beside him, and he bent over his work.

It happened, at length, that he had occasion to change the instrument in his hand, for his shoemaker's knife. It lay on that side of him which was not the side on which she stood. He had taken it up, and was stooping to work again, when his eyes caught the skirt of her dress. He raised them, and saw her face. The two spectators started forward, but she stayed them with a motion of her hand. She had no fear of his striking at her with the knife, though they had.

He stared at her with a fearful look, and after a while his lips began to form some words, though no sound proceeded from them. By degrees, in the pauses of his quick and laboured breathing, he was heard to say:

"What is this?"

With the tears streaming down her face, she put her two hands to her lips, and kissed them to him; then clasped them on her breast, as if she laid his ruined head there.

"You are not the gaoler's daughter?"

She sighed "No."

"Who are you?"

Not yet trusting the tones of her voice, she sat down on the bench beside him. He recoiled, but she laid her hand upon his arm. A strange thrill struck him when she did so, and visibly passed over his frame; he laid the knife down softly, as he sat staring at her.

Her golden hair, which she wore in long curls, had been hurriedly pushed aside, and fell down over her neck. Advancing his hand by little and little, he took it up and looked at it. In the midst of the action he went astray, and, with another deep sigh, fell to work at his shoemaking.

But not for long. Releasing his arm, she laid her hand upon his shoulder. After looking doubtfully at it, two or three times, as if to be sure that it was really there, he laid down his work, put his hand to his neck, and took off a blackened string with a scrap of folded rag attached to it. He opened this, carefully, on his knee, and it contained a very little quantity of hair: not more than one or two long golden hairs, which he had, in some old day, wound off upon his finger.

He took her hair into his hand again, and looked closely at it. "It is the same. How can it be! When was it! How was it!"

As the concentrated expression returned to his forehead, he seemed to become conscious that it was in hers too. He turned her full to the light, and looked at her.

"She had laid her head upon my shoulder, that night when I was summoned out—she had a fear of my going, though I had none—and when I was brought to the North Tower they found these upon my sleeve. 'You will leave me them? They can never help me to escape in the body, though they may in the spirit.' Those were the words I said. I remember them very well."

He formed this speech with his lips many times before he could utter it. But when he did find spoken words for it, they came to him coherently, though slowly.

"How was this?—*Was it you*?"

Once more, the two spectators started, as he turned upon her with a frightful suddenness. But she sat perfectly still in his grasp, and only said, in a low voice, "I entreat you, good gentlemen, do not come near us, do not speak, do not move!"

"Hark!" he exclaimed. "Whose voice was that?"

His hands released her as he uttered this cry, and went up to his white hair, which they tore in a frenzy. It died out, as everything but his shoemaking did die out of him, and he refolded his little packet and tried to secure it in his breast; but he still looked at her, and gloomily shook his head.

"No, no, no; you are too young, too blooming. It can't be. See what the prisoner is. These are not the hands she knew, this is not the face she knew, this is not a voice she ever heard. No, no. She was—and He was—before the slow years of the North Tower—ages ago. What is your name, my gentle angel?"

Hailing his softened tone and manner, his daughter fell upon her knees before him, with her appealing hands upon his breast.

"O, sir, at another time you shall know my name, and who my mother was, and who my father, and how I never knew their hard, hard history. But I cannot tell you at this time, and I cannot tell you here. All that I may tell you, here and now, is, that I pray to you to touch me and to bless me. Kiss me, kiss me! O my dear, my dear!"

His cold white head mingled with her radiant hair, which warmed and lighted it as though it were the light of Freedom shining on him.

"If you hear in my voice—I don't know that it is so, but I hope it is—if you hear in my voice any resemblance to a voice that once was sweet music in your ears, weep for it, weep for it! If you touch, in touching my hair, anything that recalls a beloved head that lay on your breast when you were young and free, weep for it, weep for it! If, when I hint to you of a Home that is before us, where I will be true to you with all my duty and with all my faithful service, I bring back the remembrance of a Home long desolate, while your poor heart pined away, weep for it, weep for it!"

She held him closer round the neck, and rocked him on her breast like a child.

"If, when I tell you, dearest dear, that your agony is over, and that I have come here to take you from it, and that we go to England to be at peace and at rest, I cause you to think of your useful life laid waste, and of our native France so wicked to you, weep for it, weep for it! And if, when I shall tell you of my name, and of my father who is living, and of my mother who is dead, you learn that I have to kneel to my honoured father, and implore his pardon for having never for his sake striven all day and lain awake and wept all night, because the love of my poor mother hid his torture from me, weep for it, weep for it! Weep for her, then, and for me! Good gentlemen, thank God! I feel his sacred tears upon my face, and his sobs strike against my heart. O, see! Thank God for us, thank God!"

He had sunk in her arms, and his face dropped on her breast: a sight so touching, yet so terrible in the tremendous wrong and suffering which had gone before it, that the two beholders covered their faces.

When the quiet of the garret had been long undisturbed, and his heaving breast and shaken form had long yielded to the calm that must follow all storms—emblem to humanity, of the rest and silence into which the storm called Life must hush at last—they came forward to raise the father and daughter from the ground. He had gradually dropped to the floor, and lay there in a lethargy, worn out. She had nestled down with him, that his head might lie upon her arm; and her hair drooping over him curtained him from the light.

"If, without disturbing him," she said, raising her hand to Mr. Lorry as he stooped over them, after repeated blowings of his nose, "all could be arranged for our leaving Paris at once, so that, from the very door, he could be taken away—"

"But, consider. Is he fit for the journey?" asked Mr. Lorry.

"More fit for that, I think, than to remain in this city, so dreadful to him."

"It is true," said Defarge, who was kneeling to look on and hear. "More than that; Monsieur Manette is, for all reasons, best out of France. Say, shall I hire a carriage and post-horses?"

"That's business," said Mr. Lorry, resuming on the shortest notice his methodical manners; "and if business is to be done, I had better do it."

"Then be so kind," urged Miss Manette, "as to leave us here. You see how composed he has become, and you cannot be afraid to leave him with me now. Why should you be? If you will lock the door to secure us from interruption, I do not doubt that you will find him, when you come back, as quiet as you leave him. In any case, I will take care of him until you return, and then we will remove him straight."

Both Mr. Lorry and Defarge were rather disinclined to this course, and in favour of one of them remaining. But, as there were not only carriage and horses to be seen to, but travelling papers; and as time pressed, for the day was drawing to an end, it came at last to their hastily dividing the business that was necessary to be done, and hurrying away to do it.

Then, as the darkness closed in, the daughter laid her head down on the hard ground close at the father's side, and watched him. The darkness deepened and deepened, and they both lay quiet, until a light gleamed through the chinks in the wall.

Mr. Lorry and Monsieur Defarge had made all ready for the journey, and had brought with them, besides travelling cloaks and wrappers, bread and meat, wine, and hot coffee. Monsieur Defarge put this provender, and the lamp he carried, on the shoemaker's bench (there was nothing else in the garret but a pallet bed), and he and Mr. Lorry roused the captive, and assisted him to his feet.

No human intelligence could have read the mysteries of his mind, in the scared blank wonder of his face. Whether he knew what had happened, whether he recollected what they had said to him, whether he knew that he was free, were questions which no sagacity could have solved. They tried speaking to him; but, he was so confused, and so very slow to answer, that they took fright at his bewilderment, and agreed for the time to tamper with him no more. He had a wild, lost manner of occasionally clasping his head in his hands, that had not been seen in him before; yet, he had some pleasure in the mere sound of his daughter's voice, and invariably turned to it when she spoke.

In the submissive way of one long accustomed to obey under coercion, he ate and drank what they gave him to eat and drink, and put on the cloak and other wrappings, that they gave him to wear. He readily responded to his daughter's drawing her arm through his, and took—and kept—her hand in both his own.

They began to descend; Monsieur Defarge going first with the lamp, Mr. Lorry closing the little procession. They had not traversed many steps of the long main staircase when he stopped, and stared at the roof and round at the walls.

"You remember the place, my father? You remember coming up here?"

"What did you say?"

But, before she could repeat the question, he murmured an answer as if she had repeated it.

"Remember? No, I don't remember. It was so very long ago."

That he had no recollection whatever of his having been brought from his prison to that house, was apparent to them. They heard him mutter, "One Hundred and Five, North Tower;" and when he looked about him, it evidently was for the strong fortress-walls which had long encompassed him. On their reaching the courtyard he instinctively altered his tread, as being in expectation of a drawbridge; and when there was no drawbridge, and he saw the carriage waiting in the open street, he dropped his daughter's hand and clasped his head again.

No crowd was about the door; no people were discernible at any of the many windows; not even a chance passerby was in the street. An unnatural silence and desertion reigned there. Only one soul was to be seen, and that was Madame Defarge—who leaned against the door-post, knitting, and saw nothing.

The prisoner had got into a coach, and his daughter had followed him, when Mr. Lorry's feet were arrested on the step by his asking, miserably, for his shoemaking tools and the unfinished shoes. Madame Defarge immediately called to her husband that she would get them, and went, knitting, out of the lamplight, through the courtyard. She quickly brought them down and handed them in;—and immediately afterwards leaned against the door-post, knitting, and saw nothing.

Defarge got upon the box, and gave the word "To the Barrier!" The postilion cracked his whip, and they clattered away under the feeble over-swinging lamps.

Under the over-swinging lamps—swinging ever brighter in the better streets, and ever dimmer in the worse—and by lighted shops, gay crowds, illuminated coffee-houses, and theatre-doors, to one of the city gates. Soldiers with lanterns, at the guard-house there. "Your papers, travellers!" "See here then, Monsieur the Officer," said Defarge, getting down, and taking him gravely apart, "these are the papers of monsieur inside, with the white head. They were consigned to me, with him, at the—" He dropped his voice, there was a flutter among the military lanterns, and one of them being handed into the coach by an arm in uniform, the eyes connected with the arm looked, not an every day or an every night look, at monsieur with the white head. "It is well. Forward!" from the uniform. "Adieu!" from Defarge. And so, under a short grove of feebler and feebler over-swinging lamps, out under the great grove of stars.

Beneath that arch of unmoved and eternal lights; some, so remote from this little earth that the learned tell us it is doubtful whether their rays have even yet discovered it, as a point in space where anything is suffered or done: the shadows of the night were broad and black. All through the cold and restless interval, until dawn, they once more whispered in the ears of Mr. Jarvis Lorry—sitting opposite the buried man who had been dug out, and wondering what subtle powers were for ever lost to him, and what were capable of restoration—the old inquiry:

"I hope you care to be recalled to life?"

And the old answer:

"I can't say."

The end of the first book.

Book the Second—the Golden Thread

I. Five Years Later

Tellson's Bank by Temple Bar was an old-fashioned place, even in the year one thousand seven hundred and eighty. It was very small, very dark, very ugly, very incommodious. It was an old-fashioned place, moreover, in the moral attribute that the partners in the House were proud of its smallness, proud of its darkness, proud of its ugliness, proud of its incommodiousness. They were even boastful of its eminence in those particulars, and were fired by an express conviction that, if it were less objectionable, it would be less respectable. This was no passive belief, but an active weapon which they flashed at more convenient places of business. Tellson's (they said) wanted no elbow-room, Tellson's wanted no light, Tellson's wanted no embellishment. Noakes and Co.'s might, or Snooks Brothers' might; but Tellson's, thank Heaven—!

Any one of these partners would have disinherited his son on the question of rebuilding Tellson's. In this respect the House was much on a par with the Country; which did very often disinherit its sons for suggesting improvements in laws and customs that had long been highly objectionable, but were only the more respectable.

Thus it had come to pass, that Tellson's was the triumphant perfection of inconvenience. After bursting open a door of idiotic obstinacy with a weak rattle in its throat, you fell into Tellson's down two steps, and came to your senses in a miserable little shop, with two little counters, where the oldest of men made your cheque shake as if the wind rustled it, while they examined the signature by the dingiest of windows, which were always under a shower-bath of mud from Fleet-street, and which were made the dingier by their own iron bars proper, and the heavy shadow of Temple Bar. If your business necessitated your seeing "the House," you were put into a species of Condemned Hold at the back, where you meditated on a misspent life, until the House came with its hands in its pockets, and you could hardly blink at it in the dismal twilight. Your money came out of, or went into, wormy old wooden drawers, particles of which flew up your nose and down your throat when they were opened and shut. Your bank-notes had a musty odour, as if they were fast decomposing into rags again. Your plate was stowed away among the neighbouring cesspools, and evil communications corrupted its good polish in a day or two. Your deeds got into extemporised strong-rooms made of kitchens and sculleries, and fretted all the fat out of their parchments into the banking-house air. Your lighter boxes of family papers went up-stairs into a Barmecide room, that always had a great dining-table in it and never had a dinner, and where, even in the year one thousand seven hundred and eighty, the first letters written to you by your old love, or by your little children, were but newly released from the horror of being ogled through the windows, by the heads exposed on Temple Bar with an insensate brutality and ferocity worthy of Abyssinia or Ashantee.

But indeed, at that time, putting to death was a recipe much in vogue with all trades and professions, and not least of all with Tellson's. Death is Nature's remedy for all things, and why not Legislation's? Accordingly, the forger was put to Death; the utterer of a bad note was put to Death; the unlawful opener of a letter was put to Death; the purloiner of forty shillings and sixpence was put to Death; the holder of a horse at Tellson's door, who made off with it, was put to Death; the coiner of a bad shilling was put to Death; the sounders of three-fourths of the notes in the whole gamut of Crime, were put to Death. Not that it did the least good in the way of prevention—it might almost have been worth remarking that the fact was exactly the reverse—but, it cleared off (as to this world) the trouble of each particular case, and left nothing else connected with it to be looked after. Thus, Tellson's, in its day, like greater places of business, its contemporaries, had taken so many lives, that, if the heads laid low before it had been ranged on Temple Bar instead of being privately disposed of, they would probably have excluded what little light the ground floor had, in a rather significant manner.

Cramped in all kinds of dim cupboards and hutches at Tellson's, the oldest of men carried on the business gravely. When they took a young man into Tellson's London house, they hid him somewhere till he was old. They kept him in a dark place, like a cheese, until he had the full Tellson flavour and blue-mould upon him. Then only was he permitted to be seen, spectacularly poring over large books, and casting his breeches and gaiters into the general weight of the establishment.

Outside Tellson's—never by any means in it, unless called in—was an odd-job-man, an occasional porter and messenger, who served as the live sign of the house. He was never absent during business hours, unless upon an errand, and then he was represented by his son: a grisly urchin of twelve, who was his express image. People understood that Tellson's, in a stately way, tolerated the odd-job-man. The house had always tolerated some person in that capacity, and time and tide had drifted this person to the post. His surname was Cruncher, and on the youthful occasion of his renouncing by proxy the works of darkness, in the easterly parish church of Hounsditch, he had received the added appellation of Jerry.

The scene was Mr. Cruncher's private lodging in Hanging-sword-alley, Whitefriars: the time, half-past seven of the clock on a windy March morning, Anno Domini seventeen hundred and eighty. (Mr. Cruncher himself always spoke of the year of our Lord as Anna Dominoes: apparently under the impression that the Christian era dated from the invention of a popular game, by a lady who had bestowed her name upon it.)

Mr. Cruncher's apartments were not in a savoury neighbourhood, and were but two in number, even if a closet with a single pane of glass in it might be counted as one. But they were very decently kept. Early as it was, on the windy March morning, the room in which he lay abed was already scrubbed throughout; and between the cups and saucers arranged for breakfast, and the lumbering deal table, a very clean white cloth was spread.

Mr. Cruncher reposed under a patchwork counterpane, like a Harlequin at home. At first, he slept heavily, but, by degrees, began to roll and surge in bed, until he rose above the surface, with his spiky hair looking as if it must tear the sheets to ribbons. At which juncture, he exclaimed, in a voice of dire exasperation:

"Bust me, if she ain't at it agin!"

A woman of orderly and industrious appearance rose from her knees in a corner, with sufficient haste and trepidation to show that she was the person referred to.

"What!" said Mr. Cruncher, looking out of bed for a boot. "You're at it agin, are you?"

After hailing the morn with this second salutation, he threw a boot at the woman as a third. It was a very muddy boot, and may introduce the odd circumstance connected with Mr. Cruncher's domestic economy, that, whereas he often came home after banking hours with clean boots, he often got up next morning to find the same boots covered with clay.

"What," said Mr. Cruncher, varying his apostrophe after missing his mark—"what are you up to, Aggerawayter?"

"I was only saying my prayers."

"Saying your prayers! You're a nice woman! What do you mean by flopping yourself down and praying agin me?"

"I was not praying against you; I was praying for you."

"You weren't. And if you were, I won't be took the liberty with. Here! your mother's a nice woman, young Jerry, going a praying agin your father's prosperity. You've got a dutiful mother, you have, my son. You've got a religious mother, you have, my boy: going and flopping herself down, and praying that the bread-and-butter may be snatched out of the mouth of her only child."

Master Cruncher (who was in his shirt) took this very ill, and, turning to his mother, strongly deprecated any praying away of his personal board.

"And what do you suppose, you conceited female," said Mr. Cruncher, with unconscious inconsistency, "that the worth of *your* prayers may be? Name the price that you put *your* prayers at!"

"They only come from the heart, Jerry. They are worth no more than that."

"Worth no more than that," repeated Mr. Cruncher. "They ain't worth much, then. Whether or no, I won't be prayed agin, I tell you. I can't afford it. I'm not a going to be made unlucky by *your* sneaking. If you must go flopping yourself down, flop in favour of your husband and child, and not in opposition to 'em. If I had had any but a unnat'ral wife, and this poor boy had had any but a unnat'ral mother, I might have made some money last week instead of being counter-prayed and countermined and religiously circumwented into the worst of luck. B-u-u-ust me!" said Mr. Cruncher, who all this time had been putting on his clothes, "if I ain't, what with piety and one blowed thing and another, been choused this last week into as bad luck as ever a poor devil of a honest tradesman met with! Young Jerry, dress yourself, my boy, and while I clean my boots keep a eye upon your mother now and then, and if you see any signs of more flopping, give me a call. For, I tell you," here he addressed his wife once more, "I won't be gone agin, in this manner. I am as rickety as a hackney-coach, I'm as sleepy as laudanum, my lines is strained to that degree that I shouldn't know, if it wasn't for the pain in 'em, which was me and which somebody else, yet I'm none the better for it in pocket; and it's my suspicion that you've been at it from morning to night to prevent me from being the better for it in pocket, and I won't put up with it, Aggerawayter, and what do you say now!"

Growling, in addition, such phrases as "Ah! yes! You're religious, too. You wouldn't put yourself in opposition to the interests of your husband and child, would you? Not you!" and throwing off other sarcastic sparks from the whirling grindstone of his indignation, Mr. Cruncher betook himself to his boot-cleaning and his general preparation for business. In the meantime, his son, whose head was garnished with tenderer spikes, and whose young eyes stood close by one another, as his father's did, kept the required watch upon his mother. He greatly disturbed that poor woman at intervals, by darting out of his sleeping closet, where he made his toilet, with a suppressed cry of "You are going to flop, mother. —Halloa, father!" and, after raising this fictitious alarm, darting in again with an undutiful grin.

Mr. Cruncher's temper was not at all improved when he came to his breakfast. He resented Mrs. Cruncher's saying grace with particular animosity.

"Now, Aggerawayter! What are you up to? At it again?"

His wife explained that she had merely "asked a blessing."

"Don't do it!" said Mr. Crunches looking about, as if he rather expected to see the loaf disappear under the efficacy of his wife's petitions. "I ain't a going to be blest out of house and home. I won't have my wittles blest off my table. Keep still!"

Exceedingly red-eyed and grim, as if he had been up all night at a party which had taken anything but a convivial turn, Jerry Cruncher worried his breakfast rather than ate it, growling over it like any four-footed inmate of a menagerie. Towards nine o'clock he smoothed his ruffled aspect, and, presenting as respectable and business-like an exterior as he could overlay his natural self with, issued forth to the occupation of the day.

It could scarcely be called a trade, in spite of his favourite description of himself as "a honest tradesman." His stock consisted of a wooden stool, made out of a broken-backed chair cut down, which stool, young Jerry, walking at his father's side, carried every morning to beneath the banking-house window that was nearest Temple Bar: where, with the addition of the first handful of straw that could be gleaned from any passing vehicle to keep the cold and wet from the odd-job-man's feet, it formed the encampment for the day. On this post of his, Mr. Cruncher was as well known to Fleet-street and the Temple, as the Bar itself,—and was almost as in-looking.

Encamped at a quarter before nine, in good time to touch his three-cornered hat to the oldest of men as they passed in to Tellson's, Jerry took up his station on this windy March morning, with young Jerry standing by him, when not engaged in making forays through the Bar, to inflict bodily and mental injuries of an acute description on passing boys who were small enough for his amiable purpose. Father and son, extremely like each other, looking silently on at the morning traffic in Fleet-street, with their two heads as near to one another as the two eyes of each were, bore a considerable resemblance to a pair of monkeys. The resemblance was not lessened by the accidental circumstance, that the mature Jerry bit and spat out straw, while the twinkling eyes of the youthful Jerry were as restlessly watchful of him as of everything else in Fleet-street.

The head of one of the regular indoor messengers attached to Tellson's establishment was put through the door, and the word was given:

"Porter wanted!"

"Hooray, father! Here's an early job to begin with!"

Having thus given his parent God speed, young Jerry seated himself on the stool, entered on his reversionary interest in the straw his father had been chewing, and cogitated.

"Al-ways rusty! His fingers is al-ways rusty!" muttered young Jerry. "Where does my father get all that iron rust from? He don't get no iron rust here!"

II. A Sight

"You know the Old Bailey well, no doubt?" said one of the oldest of clerks to Jerry the messenger.

"Ye-es, sir," returned Jerry, in something of a dogged manner. "I *do* know the Bailey."

"Just so. And you know Mr. Lorry."

"I know Mr. Lorry, sir, much better than I know the Bailey. Much better," said Jerry, not unlike a reluctant witness at the establishment in question, "than I, as a honest tradesman, wish to know the Bailey."

"Very well. Find the door where the witnesses go in, and show the door-keeper this note for Mr. Lorry. He will then let you in."

"Into the court, sir?"

"Into the court."

Mr. Cruncher's eyes seemed to get a little closer to one another, and to interchange the inquiry, "What do you think of this?"

"Am I to wait in the court, sir?" he asked, as the result of that conference.

"I am going to tell you. The door-keeper will pass the note to Mr. Lorry, and do you make any gesture that will attract Mr. Lorry's attention, and show him where you stand. Then what you have to do, is, to remain there until he wants you."

"Is that all, sir?"

"That's all. He wishes to have a messenger at hand. This is to tell him you are there."

As the ancient clerk deliberately folded and superscribed the note, Mr. Cruncher, after surveying him in silence until he came to the blotting-paper stage, remarked:

"I suppose they'll be trying Forgeries this morning?"

"Treason!"

"That's quartering," said Jerry. "Barbarous!"

"It is the law," remarked the ancient clerk, turning his surprised spectacles upon him. "It is the law."

"It's hard in the law to spile a man, I think. It's hard enough to kill him, but it's wery hard to spile him, sir."

"Not at all," retained the ancient clerk. "Speak well of the law. Take care of your chest and voice, my good friend, and leave the law to take care of itself. I give you that advice."

"It's the damp, sir, what settles on my chest and voice," said Jerry. "I leave you to judge what a damp way of earning a living mine is."

"Well, well," said the old clerk; "we all have our various ways of gaining a livelihood. Some of us have damp ways, and some of us have dry ways. Here is the letter. Go along."

Jerry took the letter, and, remarking to himself with less internal deference than he made an outward show of, "You are a lean old one, too," made his bow, informed his son, in passing, of his destination, and went his way.

They hanged at Tyburn, in those days, so the street outside Newgate had not obtained one infamous notoriety that has since attached to it. But, the gaol was a vile place, in which most kinds of debauchery and villainy were practised, and where dire diseases were bred, that came into court with the prisoners, and sometimes rushed straight from the dock at my Lord Chief Justice himself, and pulled him off the bench. It had more than once happened, that the Judge in the black cap pronounced his own doom as certainly as the prisoner's, and even died before him. For the rest, the Old Bailey was famous as a kind of deadly inn-yard, from which pale travellers set out continually, in carts and coaches, on a violent passage into the other world: traversing some two miles and a half of public street and road, and shaming few good citizens, if any. So powerful is use, and so desirable to be good use in the beginning. It was famous, too, for the pillory, a wise old institution, that inflicted a punishment of which no one could foresee the extent; also, for the whipping-post, another dear old institution, very humanising and softening to behold in action; also, for extensive transactions in blood-money, another fragment of ancestral wisdom, systematically leading to the most frightful mercenary crimes that could be committed under Heaven. Altogether, the Old Bailey, at that date, was a choice illustration of the precept, that "Whatever is is right;" an aphorism that would be as final as it is lazy, did it not include the troublesome consequence, that nothing that ever was, was wrong.

Making his way through the tainted crowd, dispersed up and down this hideous scene of action, with the skill of a man accustomed to make his way quietly, the messenger found out the door he sought, and handed in his letter through a trap in it. For, people then paid to see the play at the Old Bailey, just as they paid to see the play in Bedlam—only the former entertainment was much the dearer. Therefore, all the Old Bailey doors were well guarded—except, indeed, the social doors by which the criminals got there, and those were always left wide open.

After some delay and demur, the door grudgingly turned on its hinges a very little way, and allowed Mr. Jerry Cruncher to squeeze himself into court.

"What's on?" he asked, in a whisper, of the man he found himself next to.

"Nothing yet."

"What's coming on?"

"The Treason case."

"The quartering one, eh?"

"Ah!" returned the man, with a relish; "he'll be drawn on a hurdle to be half hanged, and then he'll be taken down and sliced before his own face, and then his inside will be taken out and burnt while he looks on, and then his head will be chopped off, and he'll be cut into quarters. That's the sentence."

"If he's found Guilty, you mean to say?" Jerry added, by way of proviso.

"Oh! they'll find him guilty," said the other. "Don't you be afraid of that."

Mr. Cruncher's attention was here diverted to the door-keeper, whom he saw making his way to Mr. Lorry, with the note in his hand. Mr. Lorry sat at a table, among the gentlemen in wigs: not far from a wigged gentleman, the prisoner's counsel, who had a great bundle of papers before him: and nearly opposite another wigged gentleman with his hands in his pockets, whose whole attention, when Mr. Cruncher looked at him then or afterwards, seemed to be concentrated on the ceiling of the court. After some gruff coughing and rubbing of his chin and signing with his hand, Jerry attracted the notice of Mr. Lorry, who had stood up to look for him, and who quietly nodded and sat down again.

"What's *he* got to do with the case?" asked the man he had spoken with.

"Blest if I know," said Jerry.

"What have *you* got to do with it, then, if a person may inquire?"

"Blest if I know that either," said Jerry.

The entrance of the Judge, and a consequent great stir and settling down in the court, stopped the dialogue. Presently, the dock became the central point of interest. Two gaolers, who had been standing there, went out, and the prisoner was brought in, and put to the bar.

Everybody present, except the one wigged gentleman who looked at the ceiling, stared at him. All the human breath in the place, rolled at him, like a sea, or a wind, or a fire. Eager faces strained round pillars and corners, to get a sight of him; spectators in back rows stood up, not to miss a hair of him; people on the floor of the court, laid their hands on the shoulders of the people before them, to help themselves, at anybody's cost, to a view of him—stood a-tiptoe, got upon ledges, stood upon next to nothing, to see every inch of him. Conspicuous among these latter, like an animated bit of the spiked wall of Newgate, Jerry stood: aiming at the prisoner the beery breath of a whet he had taken as he came along, and discharging it to mingle with the waves of other beer, and gin, and tea, and coffee, and what not, that flowed at him, and already broke upon the great windows behind him in an impure mist and rain.

The object of all this staring and blaring, was a young man of about five-and-twenty, well-grown and well-looking, with a sunburnt cheek and a dark eye. His condition was that of a young gentleman. He was plainly dressed in black, or very dark grey, and his hair, which was long and dark, was gathered in a ribbon at the back of his neck; more to be out of his way than for ornament. As an emotion of the mind will express itself through any covering of the body, so the paleness which his situation engendered came through the brown upon his cheek, showing the soul to be stronger than the sun. He was otherwise quite self-possessed, bowed to the Judge, and stood quiet.

The sort of interest with which this man was stared and breathed at, was not a sort that elevated humanity. Had he stood in peril of a less horrible sentence—had there been a chance of any one of its savage details being spared—by just so much would he have lost in his fascination. The form that was to be doomed to be so shamefully mangled, was the sight; the immortal creature that was to be so butchered and torn asunder, yielded the sensation. Whatever gloss the various spectators put upon the interest, according to their several arts and powers of self-deceit, the interest was, at the root of it, Ogreish.

Silence in the court! Charles Darnay had yesterday pleaded Not Guilty to an indictment denouncing him (with infinite jingle and jangle) for that he was a false traitor to our serene, illustrious, excellent, and so forth, prince, our Lord the King, by reason of his having, on divers occasions, and by divers means and ways, assisted Lewis, the French King, in his wars against our said serene, illustrious, excellent, and so forth; that was to say, by coming and going, between the dominions of our said serene, illustrious, excellent, and so forth, and those of the said French Lewis, and wickedly, falsely, traitorously, and otherwise evil-adverbiously, revealing to the said French Lewis what forces our said serene, illustrious, excellent, and so forth, had in preparation to send to Canada and North America. This much, Jerry, with his head becoming more and more spiky as the law terms bristled it, made out with huge satisfaction, and so arrived circuitously at the understanding that the aforesaid, and over and over again aforesaid, Charles Darnay, stood there before him upon his trial; that the jury were swearing in; and that Mr. Attorney-General was making ready to speak.

The accused, who was (and who knew he was) being mentally hanged, beheaded, and quartered, by everybody there, neither flinched from the situation, nor assumed any theatrical air in it. He was quiet and attentive; watched the opening proceedings with a grave interest; and stood with his hands resting on the slab of wood before him, so composedly, that they had not displaced a leaf of the herbs with which it was strewn. The court was all bestrewn with herbs and sprinkled with vinegar, as a precaution against gaol air and gaol fever.

Over the prisoner's head there was a mirror, to throw the light down upon him. Crowds of the wicked and the wretched had been reflected in it, and had passed from its surface and this earth's together. Haunted in a most ghastly manner that abominable place would have been, if the glass could ever have rendered back its reflections, as the ocean is one day to give up its dead. Some passing thought of the infamy and disgrace for which it had been reserved, may have struck the prisoner's mind. Be that as it may, a change in his position making him conscious of a bar of light across his face, he looked up; and when he saw the glass his face flushed, and his right hand pushed the herbs away.

It happened, that the action turned his face to that side of the court which was on his left. About on a level with his eyes, there sat, in that corner of the Judge's bench, two persons upon whom his look immediately rested; so immediately, and so much to the changing of his aspect, that all the eyes that were turned upon him, turned to them.

The spectators saw in the two figures, a young lady of little more than twenty, and a gentleman who was evidently her father; a man of a very remarkable appearance in respect of the absolute whiteness of his hair, and a certain indescribable intensity of face: not of an active kind, but pondering and self-communing. When this expression was upon him, he looked as if he were old; but when it was stirred and broken up—as it was now, in a moment, on his speaking to his daughter—he became a handsome man, not past the prime of life.

His daughter had one of her hands drawn through his arm, as she sat by him, and the other pressed upon it. She had drawn close to him, in her dread of the scene, and in her pity for the prisoner. Her forehead had been strikingly expressive of an engrossing terror and compassion that saw nothing but the peril of the accused. This had been so very noticeable, so very powerfully and naturally shown, that starers who had had no pity for him were touched by her; and the whisper went about, "Who are they?"

Jerry, the messenger, who had made his own observations, in his own manner, and who had been sucking the rust off his fingers in his absorption, stretched his neck to hear who they were. The crowd about him had pressed and passed the inquiry on to the nearest attendant, and from him it had been more slowly pressed and passed back; at last it got to Jerry:

"Witnesses."

"For which side?"

"Against."

"Against what side?"

"The prisoner's."

The Judge, whose eyes had gone in the general direction, recalled them, leaned back in his seat, and looked steadily at the man whose life was in his hand, as Mr. Attorney-General rose to spin the rope, grind the axe, and hammer the nails into the scaffold.

III. A Disappointment

Mr. Attorney-General had to inform the jury, that the prisoner before them, though young in years, was old in the treasonable practices which claimed the forfeit of his life. That this correspondence with the public enemy was not a correspondence of to-day, or of yesterday, or even of last year, or of the year before. That, it was certain the prisoner had, for longer than that, been in the habit of passing and repassing between France and England, on secret business of which he could give no honest account. That, if it were in the nature of traitorous ways to thrive (which happily it never was), the real wickedness and guilt of his business might have remained undiscovered. That Providence, however, had put it into the heart of a person who was beyond fear and beyond reproach, to ferret out the nature of the prisoner's schemes, and, struck with horror, to disclose them to his Majesty's Chief Secretary of State and most honourable Privy Council. That, this patriot would be produced before them. That, his position and attitude were, on the whole, sublime. That, he had been the prisoner's friend, but, at once in an auspicious and an evil hour detecting his infamy, had resolved to immolate the traitor he could no longer cherish in his bosom, on the sacred altar of his country. That, if statues were decreed in Britain, as in ancient Greece and Rome, to public benefactors, this shining citizen would assuredly have had one. That, as they were not so decreed, he probably would not have one. That, Virtue, as had been observed by the poets (in many passages which he well knew the jury would have, word for word, at the tips of their tongues; whereat the jury's countenances displayed a guilty consciousness that they knew nothing about the passages), was in a manner contagious; more especially the bright virtue known as patriotism, or love of country. That, the lofty example of this immaculate and unimpeachable witness for the Crown, to refer to whom however unworthily was an honour, had communicated itself to the prisoner's servant, and had engendered in him a holy determination to examine his master's table-drawers and pockets, and secrete his papers. That, he (Mr. Attorney-General) was prepared to hear some disparagement attempted of this admirable servant; but that, in a general way, he preferred him to his (Mr. Attorney-General's) brothers and sisters, and honoured him more than his (Mr. Attorney-General's) father and mother. That, he called with confidence on the jury to come and do likewise. That, the evidence of these two witnesses, coupled with the documents of their discovering that would be produced, would show the prisoner to have been furnished with lists of his Majesty's forces, and of their disposition and preparation, both by sea and land, and would leave no doubt that he had habitually conveyed such information to a hostile power. That, these lists could not be proved to be in the prisoner's handwriting; but that it was all the same; that, indeed, it was rather the better for the prosecution, as showing the prisoner to be artful in his precautions. That, the proof would go back five years, and would show the prisoner already engaged in these pernicious missions, within a few weeks before the date of the very first action fought between the British troops and the Americans. That, for these reasons, the jury, being a loyal jury (as he knew they were), and being a responsible jury (as *they* knew they were), must positively find the prisoner Guilty, and make an end of him, whether they liked it or not. That, they never could lay their heads upon their pillows; that, they never could tolerate the idea of their wives laying their heads upon their pillows; that, they never could endure the notion of their children laying their heads upon their pillows; in short, that there never more could be, for them or theirs, any laying of heads upon pillows at all, unless the prisoner's head was taken off. That head Mr. Attorney-General concluded by demanding of them, in the name of everything he could think of with a round turn in it, and on the faith of his solemn asseveration that he already considered the prisoner as good as dead and gone.

When the Attorney-General ceased, a buzz arose in the court as if a cloud of great blue-flies were swarming about the prisoner, in anticipation of what he was soon to become. When toned down again, the unimpeachable patriot appeared in the witness-box.

Mr. Solicitor-General then, following his leader's lead, examined the patriot: John Barsad, gentleman, by name. The story of his pure soul was exactly what Mr. Attorney-General had described it to be—perhaps, if it had a fault, a little too exactly. Having released his noble bosom of its burden, he would have modestly withdrawn himself, but that the wigged gentleman with the papers before him, sitting not far from Mr. Lorry, begged to ask him a few questions. The wigged gentleman sitting opposite, still looking at the ceiling of the court.

Had he ever been a spy himself? No, he scorned the base insinuation. What did he live upon? His property. Where was his property? He didn't precisely remember where it was. What was it? No business of anybody's. Had he inherited it? Yes, he had. From whom? Distant relation. Very distant? Rather. Ever been in prison? Certainly not. Never in a debtors' prison? Didn't see what that had to do with it. Never in a debtors' prison?—Come, once again. Never? Yes. How many times? Two or three times. Not five or six? Perhaps. Of what profession? Gentleman. Ever been kicked? Might have been. Frequently? No. Ever kicked downstairs? Decidedly not; once received a kick on the top of a staircase, and fell downstairs of his own accord. Kicked on that occasion for cheating at dice? Something to that effect was said by the intoxicated liar who committed the assault, but it was not true. Swear it was not true? Positively. Ever live by cheating at play? Never. Ever live by play? Not more than other gentlemen do. Ever borrow money of the prisoner? Yes. Ever pay him? No. Was not this intimacy with the prisoner, in reality a very slight one, forced upon the prisoner in coaches, inns, and packets? No. Sure he saw the prisoner with these lists? Certain. Knew no more about the lists? No. Had not procured them himself, for instance? No. Expect to get anything by this evidence? No. Not in regular government pay and employment, to lay traps? Oh dear no. Or to do anything? Oh dear no. Swear that? Over and over again. No motives but motives of sheer patriotism? None whatever.

The virtuous servant, Roger Cly, swore his way through the case at a great rate. He had taken service with the prisoner, in good faith and simplicity, four years ago. He had asked the prisoner, aboard the Calais packet, if he wanted a handy fellow, and the prisoner had engaged him. He had not asked the prisoner to take the handy fellow as an act of charity—never thought of such a thing. He began to have suspicions of the prisoner, and to keep an eye upon him, soon afterwards. In arranging his clothes, while travelling, he had seen similar lists to these in the prisoner's pockets, over and over again. He had taken these lists from the drawer of the prisoner's desk. He had not put them there first. He had seen the prisoner show these identical lists to French gentlemen at Calais, and similar lists to French gentlemen, both at Calais and Boulogne. He loved his country, and couldn't bear it, and had given information. He had never been suspected of stealing a silver tea-pot; he had been maligned respecting a mustard-pot, but it turned out to be only a plated one. He had known the last witness seven or eight years; that was merely a coincidence. He didn't call it a particularly curious coincidence; most coincidences were curious. Neither did he call it a curious coincidence that true patriotism was *his* only motive too. He was a true Briton, and hoped there were many like him.

The blue-flies buzzed again, and Mr. Attorney-General called Mr. Jarvis Lorry.

"Mr. Jarvis Lorry, are you a clerk in Tellson's bank?"

"I am."

"On a certain Friday night in November one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five, did business occasion you to travel between London and Dover by the mail?"

"It did."

"Were there any other passengers in the mail?"

"Two."

"Did they alight on the road in the course of the night?"

"They did."

"Mr. Lorry, look upon the prisoner. Was he one of those two passengers?"

"I cannot undertake to say that he was."

"Does he resemble either of these two passengers?"

"Both were so wrapped up, and the night was so dark, and we were all so reserved, that I cannot undertake to say even that."

"Mr. Lorry, look again upon the prisoner. Supposing him wrapped up as those two passengers were, is there anything in his bulk and stature to render it unlikely that he was one of them?"

"No."

"You will not swear, Mr. Lorry, that he was not one of them?"

"No."

"So at least you say he may have been one of them?"

"Yes. Except that I remember them both to have been—like myself—timorous of highwaymen, and the prisoner has not a timorous air."

"Did you ever see a counterfeit of timidity, Mr. Lorry?"

"I certainly have seen that."

"Mr. Lorry, look once more upon the prisoner. Have you seen him, to your certain knowledge, before?"

"I have."

"When?"

"I was returning from France a few days afterwards, and, at Calais, the prisoner came on board the packet-ship in which I returned, and made the voyage with me."

"At what hour did he come on board?"

"At a little after midnight."

"In the dead of the night. Was he the only passenger who came on board at that untimely hour?"

"He happened to be the only one."

"Never mind about 'happening,' Mr. Lorry. He was the only passenger who came on board in the dead of the night?"

"He was."

"Were you travelling alone, Mr. Lorry, or with any companion?"

"With two companions. A gentleman and lady. They are here."

"They are here. Had you any conversation with the prisoner?"

"Hardly any. The weather was stormy, and the passage long and rough, and I lay on a sofa, almost from shore to shore."

"Miss Manette!"

The young lady, to whom all eyes had been turned before, and were now turned again, stood up where she had sat. Her father rose with her, and kept her hand drawn through his arm.

"Miss Manette, look upon the prisoner."

To be confronted with such pity, and such earnest youth and beauty, was far more trying to the accused than to be confronted with all the crowd. Standing, as it were, apart with her on the edge of his grave, not all the staring curiosity that looked on, could, for the moment, nerve him to remain quite still. His hurried right hand parcelled out the herbs before him into imaginary beds of flowers in a garden; and his efforts to control and steady his breathing shook the lips from which the colour rushed to his heart. The buzz of the great flies was loud again.

"Miss Manette, have you seen the prisoner before?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"On board of the packet-ship just now referred to, sir, and on the same occasion."

"You are the young lady just now referred to?"

"O! most unhappily, I am!"

The plaintive tone of her compassion merged into the less musical voice of the Judge, as he said something fiercely: "Answer the questions put to you, and make no remark upon them."

"Miss Manette, had you any conversation with the prisoner on that passage across the Channel?"

"Yes, sir."

"Recall it."

In the midst of a profound stillness, she faintly began: "When the gentleman came on board—"

"Do you mean the prisoner?" inquired the Judge, knitting his brows.

"Yes, my Lord."

"Then say the prisoner."

"When the prisoner came on board, he noticed that my father," turning her eyes lovingly to him as he stood beside her, "was much fatigued and in a very weak state of health. My father was so reduced that I was afraid to take him out of the air, and I had made a bed for him on the deck near the cabin steps, and I sat on the deck at his side to take care of him. There were no other passengers that night, but we four. The prisoner was so good as to beg permission to advise me how I could shelter my father from the wind and weather, better than I had done. I had not known how to do it well, not understanding how the wind would set when we were out of the harbour. He did it for me. He expressed great gentleness and kindness for my father's state, and I am sure he felt it. That was the manner of our beginning to speak together."

"Let me interrupt you for a moment. Had he come on board alone?"

"No."

"How many were with him?"

"Two French gentlemen."

"Had they conferred together?"

"They had conferred together until the last moment, when it was necessary for the French gentlemen to be landed in their boat."

"Had any papers been handed about among them, similar to these lists?"

"Some papers had been handed about among them, but I don't know what papers."

"Like these in shape and size?"

"Possibly, but indeed I don't know, although they stood whispering very near to me: because they stood at the top of the cabin steps to have the light of the lamp that was hanging there; it was a dull lamp, and they spoke very low, and I did not hear what they said, and saw only that they looked at papers."

"Now, to the prisoner's conversation, Miss Manette."

"The prisoner was as open in his confidence with me—which arose out of my helpless situation—as he was kind, and good, and useful to my father. I hope," bursting into tears, "I may not repay him by doing him harm to-day."

Buzzing from the blue-flies.

"Miss Manette, if the prisoner does not perfectly understand that you give the evidence which it is your duty to give—which you must give—and which you cannot escape from giving—with great unwillingness, he is the only person present in that condition. Please to go on."

"He told me that he was travelling on business of a delicate and difficult nature, which might get people into trouble, and that he was therefore travelling under an assumed name. He said that this business had, within a few days, taken him to France, and might, at intervals, take him backwards and forwards between France and England for a long time to come."

"Did he say anything about America, Miss Manette? Be particular."

"He tried to explain to me how that quarrel had arisen, and he said that, so far as he could judge, it was a wrong and foolish one on England's part. He added, in a jesting way, that perhaps George Washington might gain almost as great a name in history as George the Third. But there was no harm in his way of saying this: it was said laughingly, and to beguile the time."

Any strongly marked expression of face on the part of a chief actor in a scene of great interest to whom many eyes are directed, will be unconsciously imitated by the spectators. Her forehead was painfully anxious and intent as she gave this evidence, and, in the pauses when she stopped for the Judge to write it down, watched its effect upon the counsel for and against. Among the lookers-on there was the same expression in all quarters of the court; insomuch, that a great majority of the foreheads there, might have been mirrors reflecting the witness, when the Judge looked up from his notes to glare at that tremendous heresy about George Washington.

Mr. Attorney-General now signified to my Lord, that he deemed it necessary, as a matter of precaution and form, to call the young lady's father, Doctor Manette. Who was called accordingly.

"Doctor Manette, look upon the prisoner. Have you ever seen him before?"

"Once. When he called at my lodgings in London. Some three years, or three years and a half ago."

"Can you identify him as your fellow-passenger on board the packet, or speak to his conversation with your daughter?"

"Sir, I can do neither."

"Is there any particular and special reason for your being unable to do either?"

He answered, in a low voice, "There is."

"Has it been your misfortune to undergo a long imprisonment, without trial, or even accusation, in your native country, Doctor Manette?"

He answered, in a tone that went to every heart, "A long imprisonment."

"Were you newly released on the occasion in question?"

"They tell me so."

"Have you no remembrance of the occasion?"

"None. My mind is a blank, from some time—I cannot even say what time—when I employed myself, in my captivity, in making shoes, to the time when I found myself living in London with my dear daughter here. She had become familiar to me, when a gracious God restored my faculties; but, I am quite unable even to say how she had become familiar. I have no remembrance of the process."

Mr. Attorney-General sat down, and the father and daughter sat down together.

A singular circumstance then arose in the case. The object in hand being to show that the prisoner went down, with some fellow-plotter untracked, in the Dover mail on that Friday night in November five years ago, and got out of the mail in the night, as a blind, at a place where he did not remain, but from which he travelled back some dozen miles or more, to a garrison and dockyard, and there collected information; a witness was called to identify him as having been at the precise time required, in the coffee-room of an hotel in that garrison-and-dockyard town, waiting for another person. The prisoner's counsel was cross-examining this witness with no result, except that he had never seen the prisoner on any other occasion, when the wigged gentleman who had all this time been looking at the ceiling of the court, wrote a word or two on a little piece of paper, screwed it up, and tossed it to him. Opening this piece of paper in the next pause, the counsel looked with great attention and curiosity at the prisoner.

"You say again you are quite sure that it was the prisoner?"

The witness was quite sure.

"Did you ever see anybody very like the prisoner?"

Not so like (the witness said) as that he could be mistaken.

"Look well upon that gentleman, my learned friend there," pointing to him who had tossed the paper over, "and then look well upon the prisoner. How say you? Are they very like each other?"

Allowing for my learned friend's appearance being careless and slovenly if not debauched, they were sufficiently like each other to surprise, not only the witness, but everybody present, when they were thus brought into comparison. My Lord being prayed to bid my learned friend lay aside his wig, and giving no very gracious consent, the likeness became much more remarkable. My Lord inquired of Mr. Stryver (the prisoner's counsel), whether they were next to try Mr. Carton (name of my learned friend) for treason? But, Mr. Stryver replied to my Lord, no; but he would ask the witness to tell him whether what happened once, might happen twice; whether he would have been so confident if he had seen this illustration of his rashness sooner, whether he would be so confident, having seen it; and more. The upshot of which, was, to smash this witness like a crockery vessel, and shiver his part of the case to useless lumber.

Mr. Cruncher had by this time taken quite a lunch of rust off his fingers in his following of the evidence. He had now to attend while Mr. Stryver fitted the prisoner's case on the jury, like a compact suit of clothes; showing them how the patriot, Barsad, was a hired spy and traitor, an unblushing trafficker in blood, and one of the greatest scoundrels upon earth since accursed Judas—which he certainly did look rather like. How the virtuous servant, Cly, was his friend and partner, and was worthy to be; how the watchful eyes of those forgers and false swearers had rested on the prisoner as a victim, because some family affairs in France, he being of French extraction, did require his making those passages across the Channel—though what those affairs were, a consideration for others who were near and dear to him, forbade him, even for his life, to disclose. How the evidence that had been warped and wrested from the young lady, whose anguish in giving it they had witnessed, came to nothing, involving the mere little innocent gallantries and politenesses likely to pass between any young gentleman and young lady so thrown together;—with the exception of that reference to George Washington, which was altogether too extravagant and impossible to be regarded in any other light than as a monstrous joke. How it would be a weakness in the government to break down in this attempt to practise for popularity on the lowest national antipathies and fears, and therefore Mr. Attorney-General had made the most of it; how, nevertheless, it rested upon nothing, save that vile and infamous character of evidence too often disfiguring such cases, and of which the State Trials of this country were full. But, there my Lord interposed (with as grave a face as if it had not been true), saying that he could not sit upon that Bench and suffer those allusions.

Mr. Stryver then called his few witnesses, and Mr. Cruncher had next to attend while Mr. Attorney-General turned the whole suit of clothes Mr. Stryver had fitted on the jury, inside out; showing how Barsad and Cly were even a hundred times better than he had thought them, and the prisoner a hundred times worse. Lastly, came my Lord himself, turning the suit of clothes, now inside out, now outside in, but on the whole decidedly trimming and shaping them into grave-clothes for the prisoner.

And now, the jury turned to consider, and the great flies swarmed again.

Mr. Carton, who had so long sat looking at the ceiling of the court, changed neither his place nor his attitude, even in this excitement. While his learned friend, Mr. Stryver, massing his papers before him, whispered with those who sat near, and from time to time glanced anxiously at the jury; while all the spectators moved more or less, and grouped themselves anew; while even my Lord himself arose from his seat, and slowly paced up and down his platform, not unattended by a suspicion in the minds of the audience that his state was feverish; this one man sat leaning back, with his torn gown half off him, his untidy wig put on just as it had happened to light on his head after its removal, his hands in his pockets, and his eyes on the ceiling as they had been all day. Something especially reckless in his demeanour, not only gave him a disreputable look, but so diminished the strong resemblance he undoubtedly bore to the prisoner (which his momentary earnestness, when they were compared together, had strengthened), that many of the lookers-on, taking note of him now, said to one another they would hardly have thought the two were so alike. Mr. Cruncher made the observation to his next neighbour, and added, "I'd hold half a guinea that *he* don't get no law-work to do. Don't look like the sort of one to get any, do he?"

Yet, this Mr. Carton took in more of the details of the scene than he appeared to take in; for now, when Miss Manette's head dropped upon her father's breast, he was the first to see it, and to say audibly: "Officer! look to that young lady. Help the gentleman to take her out. Don't you see she will fall!"

There was much commiseration for her as she was removed, and much sympathy with her father. It had evidently been a great distress to him, to have the days of his imprisonment recalled. He had shown strong internal agitation when he was questioned, and that pondering or brooding look which made him old, had been upon him, like a heavy cloud, ever since. As he passed out, the jury, who had turned back and paused a moment, spoke, through their foreman.

They were not agreed, and wished to retire. My Lord (perhaps with George Washington on his mind) showed some surprise that they were not agreed, but signified his pleasure that they should retire under watch and ward, and retired himself. The trial had lasted all day, and the lamps in the court were now being lighted. It began to be rumoured that the jury would be out a long while. The spectators dropped off to get refreshment, and the prisoner withdrew to the back of the dock, and sat down.

Mr. Lorry, who had gone out when the young lady and her father went out, now reappeared, and beckoned to Jerry: who, in the slackened interest, could easily get near him.

"Jerry, if you wish to take something to eat, you can. But, keep in the way. You will be sure to hear when the jury come in. Don't be a moment behind them, for I want you to take the verdict back to the bank. You are the quickest messenger I know, and will get to Temple Bar long before I can."

Jerry had just enough forehead to knuckle, and he knuckled it in acknowledgment of this communication and a shilling. Mr. Carton came up at the moment, and touched Mr. Lorry on the arm.

"How is the young lady?"

"She is greatly distressed; but her father is comforting her, and she feels the better for being out of court."

"I'll tell the prisoner so. It won't do for a respectable bank gentleman like you, to be seen speaking to him publicly, you know."

Mr. Lorry reddened as if he were conscious of having debated the point in his mind, and Mr. Carton made his way to the outside of the bar. The way out of court lay in that direction, and Jerry followed him, all eyes, ears, and spikes.

"Mr. Darnay!"

The prisoner came forward directly.

"You will naturally be anxious to hear of the witness, Miss Manette. She will do very well. You have seen the worst of her agitation."

"I am deeply sorry to have been the cause of it. Could you tell her so for me, with my fervent acknowledgments?"

"Yes, I could. I will, if you ask it."

Mr. Carton's manner was so careless as to be almost insolent. He stood, half turned from the prisoner, lounging with his elbow against the bar.

"I do ask it. Accept my cordial thanks."

"What," said Carton, still only half turned towards him, "do you expect, Mr. Darnay?"

"The worst."

"It's the wisest thing to expect, and the likeliest. But I think their withdrawing is in your favour."

Loitering on the way out of court not being allowed, Jerry heard no more: but left them—so like each other in feature, so unlike each other in manner—standing side by side, both reflected in the glass above them.

An hour and a half limped heavily away in the thief-and-rascal crowded passages below, even though assisted off with mutton pies and ale. The hoarse messenger, uncomfortably seated on a form after taking that refection, had dropped into a doze, when a loud murmur and a rapid tide of people setting up the stairs that led to the court, carried him along with them.

"Jerry! Jerry!" Mr. Lorry was already calling at the door when he got there.

"Here, sir! It's a fight to get back again. Here I am, sir!"

Mr. Lorry handed him a paper through the throng. "Quick! Have you got it?"

"Yes, sir."

Hastily written on the paper was the word "ACQUITTED."

"If you had sent the message, 'Recalled to Life,' again," muttered Jerry, as he turned, "I should have known what you meant, this time."

He had no opportunity of saying, or so much as thinking, anything else, until he was clear of the Old Bailey; for, the crowd came pouring out with a vehemence that nearly took him off his legs, and a loud buzz swept into the street as if the baffled blue-flies were dispersing in search of other carrion.

IV. Congratulatory

From the dimly-lighted passages of the court, the last sediment of the human stew that had been boiling there all day, was straining off, when Doctor Manette, Lucie Manette, his daughter, Mr. Lorry, the solicitor for the defence, and its counsel, Mr. Stryver, stood gathered round Mr. Charles Darnay—just released—congratulating him on his escape from death.

It would have been difficult by a far brighter light, to recognise in Doctor Manette, intellectual of face and upright of bearing, the shoemaker of the garret in Paris. Yet, no one could have looked at him twice, without looking again: even though the opportunity of observation had not extended to the mournful cadence of his low grave voice, and to the abstraction that overclouded him fitfully, without any apparent reason. While one external cause, and that a reference to his long lingering agony, would always—as on the trial—evoke this condition from the depths of his soul, it was also in its nature to arise of itself, and to draw a gloom over him, as incomprehensible to those unacquainted with his story as if they had seen the shadow of the actual Bastille thrown upon him by a summer sun, when the substance was three hundred miles away.

Only his daughter had the power of charming this black brooding from his mind. She was the golden thread that united him to a Past beyond his misery, and to a Present beyond his misery: and the sound of her voice, the light of her face, the touch of her hand, had a strong beneficial influence with him almost always. Not absolutely always, for she could recall some occasions on which her power had failed; but they were few and slight, and she believed them over.

Mr. Darnay had kissed her hand fervently and gratefully, and had turned to Mr. Stryver, whom he warmly thanked. Mr. Stryver, a man of little more than thirty, but looking twenty years older than he was, stout, loud, red, bluff, and free from any drawback of delicacy, had a pushing way of shouldering himself (morally and physically) into companies and conversations, that argued well for his shouldering his way up in life.

He still had his wig and gown on, and he said, squaring himself at his late client to that degree that he squeezed the innocent Mr. Lorry clean out of the group: "I am glad to have brought you off with honour, Mr. Darnay. It was an infamous prosecution, grossly infamous; but not the less likely to succeed on that account."

"You have laid me under an obligation to you for life—in two senses," said his late client, taking his hand.

"I have done my best for you, Mr. Darnay; and my best is as good as another man's, I believe."

It clearly being incumbent on some one to say, "Much better," Mr. Lorry said it; perhaps not quite disinterestedly, but with the interested object of squeezing himself back again.

"You think so?" said Mr. Stryver. "Well! you have been present all day, and you ought to know. You are a man of business, too."

"And as such," quoth Mr. Lorry, whom the counsel learned in the law had now shouldered back into the group, just as he had previously shouldered him out of it—"as such I will appeal to Doctor Manette, to break up this conference and order us all to our homes. Miss Lucie looks ill, Mr. Darnay has had a terrible day, we are worn out."

"Speak for yourself, Mr. Lorry," said Stryver; "I have a night's work to do yet. Speak for yourself."

"I speak for myself," answered Mr. Lorry, "and for Mr. Darnay, and for Miss Lucie, and—Miss Lucie, do you not think I may speak for us all?" He asked her the question pointedly, and with a glance at her father.

His face had become frozen, as it were, in a very curious look at Darnay: an intent look, deepening into a frown of dislike and distrust, not even unmixed with fear. With this strange expression on him his thoughts had wandered away.

"My father," said Lucie, softly laying her hand on his.

He slowly shook the shadow off, and turned to her.

"Shall we go home, my father?"

With a long breath, he answered "Yes."

The friends of the acquitted prisoner had dispersed, under the impression—which he himself had originated—that he would not be released that night. The lights were nearly all extinguished in the passages, the iron gates were being closed with a jar and a rattle, and the dismal place was deserted until to-morrow morning's interest of gallows, pillory, whipping-post, and branding-iron, should repeople it. Walking between her father and Mr. Darnay, Lucie Manette passed into the open air. A hackney-coach was called, and the father and daughter departed in it.

Mr. Stryver had left them in the passages, to shoulder his way back to the robing-room. Another person, who had not joined the group, or interchanged a word with any one of them, but who had been leaning against the wall where its shadow was darkest, had silently strolled out after the rest, and had looked on until the coach drove away. He now stepped up to where Mr. Lorry and Mr. Darnay stood upon the pavement.

"So, Mr. Lorry! Men of business may speak to Mr. Darnay now?"

Nobody had made any acknowledgment of Mr. Carton's part in the day's proceedings; nobody had known of it. He was unrobed, and was none the better for it in appearance.

"If you knew what a conflict goes on in the business mind, when the business mind is divided between good-natured impulse and business appearances, you would be amused, Mr. Darnay."

Mr. Lorry reddened, and said, warmly, "You have mentioned that before, sir. We men of business, who serve a House, are not our own masters. We have to think of the House more than ourselves."

"*I* know, *I* know," rejoined Mr. Carton, carelessly. "Don't be nettled, Mr. Lorry. You are as good as another, I have no doubt: better, I dare say."

"And indeed, sir," pursued Mr. Lorry, not minding him, "I really don't know what you have to do with the matter. If you'll excuse me, as very much your elder, for saying so, I really don't know that it is your business."

"Business! Bless you, *I* have no business," said Mr. Carton.

"It is a pity you have not, sir."

"I think so, too."

"If you had," pursued Mr. Lorry, "perhaps you would attend to it."

"Lord love you, no!—I shouldn't," said Mr. Carton.

"Well, sir!" cried Mr. Lorry, thoroughly heated by his indifference, "business is a very good thing, and a very respectable thing. And, sir, if business imposes its restraints and its silences and impediments, Mr. Darnay as a young gentleman of generosity knows how to make allowance for that circumstance. Mr. Darnay, good night, God bless you, sir! I hope you have been this day preserved for a prosperous and happy life.—Chair there!"

Perhaps a little angry with himself, as well as with the barrister, Mr. Lorry bustled into the chair, and was carried off to Tellson's. Carton, who smelt of port wine, and did not appear to be quite sober, laughed then, and turned to Darnay:

"This is a strange chance that throws you and me together. This must be a strange night to you, standing alone here with your counterpart on these street stones?"

"I hardly seem yet," returned Charles Darnay, "to belong to this world again."

"I don't wonder at it; it's not so long since you were pretty far advanced on your way to another. You speak faintly."

"I begin to think I *am* faint."

"Then why the devil don't you dine? I dined, myself, while those numskulls were deliberating which world you should belong to—this, or some other. Let me show you the nearest tavern to dine well at."

Drawing his arm through his own, he took him down Ludgate-hill to Fleet-street, and so, up a covered way, into a tavern. Here, they were shown into a little room, where Charles Darnay was soon recruiting his strength with a good plain dinner and good wine: while Carton sat opposite to him at the same table, with his separate bottle of port before him, and his fully half-insolent manner upon him.

"Do you feel, yet, that you belong to this terrestrial scheme again, Mr. Darnay?"

"I am frightfully confused regarding time and place; but I am so far mended as to feel that."

"It must be an immense satisfaction!"

He said it bitterly, and filled up his glass again: which was a large one.

"As to me, the greatest desire I have, is to forget that I belong to it. It has no good in it for me—except wine like this—nor I for it. So we are not much alike in that particular. Indeed, I begin to think we are not much alike in any particular, you and I."

Confused by the emotion of the day, and feeling his being there with this Double of coarse deportment, to be like a dream, Charles Darnay was at a loss how to answer; finally, answered not at all.

"Now your dinner is done," Carton presently said, "why don't you call a health, Mr. Darnay; why don't you give your toast?"

"What health? What toast?"

"Why, it's on the tip of your tongue. It ought to be, it must be, I'll swear it's there."

"Miss Manette, then!"

"Miss Manette, then!"

Looking his companion full in the face while he drank the toast, Carton flung his glass over his shoulder against the wall, where it shivered to pieces; then, rang the bell, and ordered in another.

"That's a fair young lady to hand to a coach in the dark, Mr. Darnay!" he said, filling his new goblet.

A slight frown and a laconic "Yes," were the answer.

"That's a fair young lady to be pitied by and wept for by! How does it feel? Is it worth being tried for one's life, to be the object of such sympathy and compassion, Mr. Darnay?"

Again Darnay answered not a word.

"She was mightily pleased to have your message, when I gave it her. Not that she showed she was pleased, but I suppose she was."

The allusion served as a timely reminder to Darnay that this disagreeable companion had, of his own free will, assisted him in the strait of the day. He turned the dialogue to that point, and thanked him for it.

"I neither want any thanks, nor merit any," was the careless rejoinder. "It was nothing to do, in the first place; and I don't know why I did it, in the second. Mr. Darnay, let me ask you a question."

"Willingly, and a small return for your good offices."

"Do you think I particularly like you?"

"Really, Mr. Carton," returned the other, oddly disconcerted, "I have not asked myself the question."

"But ask yourself the question now."

"You have acted as if you do; but I don't think you do."

"*I* don't think I do," said Carton. "I begin to have a very good opinion of your understanding."

"Nevertheless," pursued Darnay, rising to ring the bell, "there is nothing in that, I hope, to prevent my calling the reckoning, and our parting without ill-blood on either side."

Carton rejoining, "Nothing in life!" Darnay rang. "Do you call the whole reckoning?" said Carton. On his answering in the affirmative, "Then bring me another pint of this same wine, drawer, and come and wake me at ten."

The bill being paid, Charles Darnay rose and wished him good night. Without returning the wish, Carton rose too, with something of a threat of defiance in his manner, and said, "A last word, Mr. Darnay: you think I am drunk?"

"I think you have been drinking, Mr. Carton."

"Think? You know I have been drinking."

"Since I must say so, I know it."

"Then you shall likewise know why. I am a disappointed drudge, sir. I care for no man on earth, and no man on earth cares for me."

"Much to be regretted. You might have used your talents better."

"May be so, Mr. Darnay; may be not. Don't let your sober face elate you, however; you don't know what it may come to. Good night!"

When he was left alone, this strange being took up a candle, went to a glass that hung against the wall, and surveyed himself minutely in it.

"Do you particularly like the man?" he muttered, at his own image; "why should you particularly like a man who resembles you? There is nothing in you to like; you know that. Ah, confound you! What a change you have made in yourself! A good reason for taking to a man, that he shows you what you have fallen away from, and what you might have been! Change places with him, and would you have been looked at by those blue eyes as he was, and commiserated by that agitated face as he was? Come on, and have it out in plain words! You hate the fellow."

He resorted to his pint of wine for consolation, drank it all in a few minutes, and fell asleep on his arms, with his hair straggling over the table, and a long winding-sheet in the candle dripping down upon him.

V. The Jackal

Those were drinking days, and most men drank hard. So very great is the improvement Time has brought about in such habits, that a moderate statement of the quantity of wine and punch which one man would swallow in the course of a night, without any detriment to his reputation as a perfect gentleman, would seem, in these days, a ridiculous exaggeration. The learned profession of the law was certainly not behind any other learned profession in its Bacchanalian propensities; neither was Mr. Stryver, already fast shouldering his way to a large and lucrative practice, behind his compeers in this particular, any more than in the drier parts of the legal race.

A favourite at the Old Bailey, and eke at the Sessions, Mr. Stryver had begun cautiously to hew away the lower staves of the ladder on which he mounted. Sessions and Old Bailey had now to summon their favourite, specially, to their longing arms; and shouldering itself towards the visage of the Lord Chief Justice in the Court of King's Bench, the florid countenance of Mr. Stryver might be daily seen, bursting out of the bed of wigs, like a great sunflower pushing its way at the sun from among a rank garden-full of flaring companions.

It had once been noted at the Bar, that while Mr. Stryver was a glib man, and an unscrupulous, and a ready, and a bold, he had not that faculty of extracting the essence from a heap of statements, which is among the most striking and necessary of the advocate's accomplishments. But, a remarkable improvement came upon him as to this. The more business he got, the greater his power seemed to grow of getting at its pith and marrow; and however late at night he sat carousing with Sydney Carton, he always had his points at his fingers' ends in the morning.

Sydney Carton, idlest and most unpromising of men, was Stryver's great ally. What the two drank together, between Hilary Term and Michaelmas, might have floated a king's ship. Stryver never had a case in hand, anywhere, but Carton was there, with his hands in his pockets, staring at the ceiling of the court; they went the same Circuit, and even there they prolonged their usual orgies late into the night, and Carton was rumoured to be seen at broad day, going home stealthily and unsteadily to his lodgings, like a dissipated cat. At last, it began to get about, among such as were interested in the matter, that although Sydney Carton would never be a lion, he was an amazingly good jackal, and that he rendered suit and service to Stryver in that humble capacity.

"Ten o'clock, sir," said the man at the tavern, whom he had charged to wake him—"ten o'clock, sir."

"*What's* the matter?"

"Ten o'clock, sir."

"What do you mean? Ten o'clock at night?"

"Yes, sir. Your honour told me to call you."

"Oh! I remember. Very well, very well."

After a few dull efforts to get to sleep again, which the man dexterously combated by stirring the fire continuously for five minutes, he got up, tossed his hat on, and walked out. He turned into the Temple, and, having revived himself by twice pacing the pavements of King's Bench-walk and Paper-buildings, turned into the Stryver chambers.

The Stryver clerk, who never assisted at these conferences, had gone home, and the Stryver principal opened the door. He had his slippers on, and a loose bed-gown, and his throat was bare for his greater ease. He had that rather wild, strained, seared marking about the eyes, which may be observed in all free livers of his class, from the portrait of Jeffries downward, and which can be traced, under various disguises of Art, through the portraits of every Drinking Age.

"You are a little late, Memory," said Stryver.

"About the usual time; it may be a quarter of an hour later."

They went into a dingy room lined with books and littered with papers, where there was a blazing fire. A kettle steamed upon the hob, and in the midst of the wreck of papers a table shone, with plenty of wine upon it, and brandy, and rum, and sugar, and lemons.

"You have had your bottle, I perceive, Sydney."

"Two to-night, I think. I have been dining with the day's client; or seeing him dine—it's all one!"

"That was a rare point, Sydney, that you brought to bear upon the identification. How did you come by it? When did it strike you?"

"I thought he was rather a handsome fellow, and I thought I should have been much the same sort of fellow, if I had had any luck."

Mr. Stryver laughed till he shook his precocious paunch.

"You and your luck, Sydney! Get to work, get to work."

Sullenly enough, the jackal loosened his dress, went into an adjoining room, and came back with a large jug of cold water, a basin, and a towel or two. Steeping the towels in the water, and partially wringing them out, he folded them on his head in a manner hideous to behold, sat down at the table, and said, "Now I am ready!"

"Not much boiling down to be done to-night, Memory," said Mr. Stryver, gaily, as he looked among his papers.

"How much?"

"Only two sets of them."

"Give me the worst first."

"There they are, Sydney. Fire away!"

The lion then composed himself on his back on a sofa on one side of the drinking-table, while the jackal sat at his own paper-bestrewn table proper, on the other side of it, with the bottles and glasses ready to his hand. Both resorted to the drinking-table without stint, but each in a different way; the lion for the most part reclining with his hands in his waistband, looking at the fire, or occasionally flirting with some lighter document; the jackal, with knitted brows and intent face, so deep in his task, that his eyes did not even follow the hand he stretched out for his glass—which often groped about, for a minute or more, before it found the glass for his lips. Two or three times, the matter in hand became so knotty, that the jackal found it imperative on him to get up, and steep his towels anew. From these pilgrimages to the jug and basin, he returned with such eccentricities of damp headgear as no words can describe; which were made the more ludicrous by his anxious gravity.

At length the jackal had got together a compact repast for the lion, and proceeded to offer it to him. The lion took it with care and caution, made his selections from it, and his remarks upon it, and the jackal assisted both. When the repast was fully discussed, the lion put his hands in his waistband again, and lay down to meditate. The jackal then invigorated himself with a bumper for his throttle, and a fresh application to his head, and applied himself to the collection of a second meal; this was administered to the lion in the same manner, and was not disposed of until the clocks struck three in the morning.

"And now we have done, Sydney, fill a bumper of punch," said Mr. Stryver.

The jackal removed the towels from his head, which had been steaming again, shook himself, yawned, shivered, and complied.

"You were very sound, Sydney, in the matter of those crown witnesses to-day. Every question told."

"I always am sound; am I not?"

"I don't gainsay it. What has roughened your temper? Put some punch to it and smooth it again."

With a deprecatory grunt, the jackal again complied.

"The old Sydney Carton of old Shrewsbury School," said Stryver, nodding his head over him as he reviewed him in the present and the past, "the old seesaw Sydney. Up one minute and down the next; now in spirits and now in despondency!"

"Ah!" returned the other, sighing: "yes! The same Sydney, with the same luck. Even then, I did exercises for other boys, and seldom did my own."

"And why not?"

"God knows. It was my way, I suppose."

He sat, with his hands in his pockets and his legs stretched out before him, looking at the fire.

"Carton," said his friend, squaring himself at him with a bullying air, as if the fire-grate had been the furnace in which sustained endeavour was forged, and the one delicate thing to be done for the old Sydney Carton of old Shrewsbury School was to shoulder him into it, "your way is, and always was, a lame way. You summon no energy and purpose. Look at me."

"Oh, botheration!" returned Sydney, with a lighter and more good-humoured laugh, "don't *you* be moral!"

"How have I done what I have done?" said Stryver; "how do I do what I do?"

"Partly through paying me to help you, I suppose. But it's not worth your while to apostrophise me, or the air, about it; what you want to do, you do. You were always in the front rank, and I was always behind."

"I had to get into the front rank; I was not born there, was I?"

"I was not present at the ceremony; but my opinion is you were," said Carton. At this, he laughed again, and they both laughed.

"Before Shrewsbury, and at Shrewsbury, and ever since Shrewsbury," pursued Carton, "you have fallen into your rank, and I have fallen into mine. Even when we were fellow-students in the Student-Quarter of Paris, picking up French, and French law, and other French crumbs that we didn't get much good of, you were always somewhere, and I was always nowhere."

"And whose fault was that?"

"Upon my soul, I am not sure that it was not yours. You were always driving and riving and shouldering and passing, to that restless degree that I had no chance for my life but in rust and repose. It's a gloomy thing, however, to talk about one's own past, with the day breaking. Turn me in some other direction before I go."

"Well then! Pledge me to the pretty witness," said Stryver, holding up his glass. "Are you turned in a pleasant direction?"

Apparently not, for he became gloomy again.

"Pretty witness," he muttered, looking down into his glass. "I have had enough of witnesses to-day and to-night; who's your pretty witness?"

"The picturesque doctor's daughter, Miss Manette."

"*She* pretty?"

"Is she not?"

"No."

"Why, man alive, she was the admiration of the whole Court!"

"Rot the admiration of the whole Court! Who made the Old Bailey a judge of beauty? She was a golden-haired doll!"

"Do you know, Sydney," said Mr. Stryver, looking at him with sharp eyes, and slowly drawing a hand across his florid face: "do you know, I rather thought, at the time, that you sympathised with the golden-haired doll, and were quick to see what happened to the golden-haired doll?"

"Quick to see what happened! If a girl, doll or no doll, swoons within a yard or two of a man's nose, he can see it without a perspective-glass. I pledge you, but I deny the beauty. And now I'll have no more drink; I'll get to bed."

When his host followed him out on the staircase with a candle, to light him down the stairs, the day was coldly looking in through its grimy windows. When he got out of the house, the air was cold and sad, the dull sky overcast, the river dark and dim, the whole scene like a lifeless desert. And wreaths of dust were spinning round and round before the morning blast, as if the desert-sand had risen far away, and the first spray of it in its advance had begun to overwhelm the city.

Waste forces within him, and a desert all around, this man stood still on his way across a silent terrace, and saw for a moment, lying in the wilderness before him, a mirage of honourable ambition, self-denial, and perseverance. In the fair city of this vision, there were airy galleries from which the loves and graces looked upon him, gardens in which the fruits of life hung ripening, waters of Hope that sparkled in his sight. A moment, and it was gone. Climbing to a high chamber in a well of houses, he threw himself down in his clothes on a neglected bed, and its pillow was wet with wasted tears.

Sadly, sadly, the sun rose; it rose upon no sadder sight than the man of good abilities and good emotions, incapable of their directed exercise, incapable of his own help and his own happiness, sensible of the blight on him, and resigning himself to let it eat him away.

VI. Hundreds of People

The quiet lodgings of Doctor Manette were in a quiet street-corner not far from Soho-square. On the afternoon of a certain fine Sunday when the waves of four months had rolled over the trial for treason, and carried it, as to the public interest and memory, far out to sea, Mr. Jarvis Lorry walked along the sunny streets from Clerkenwell where he lived, on his way to dine with the Doctor. After several relapses into business-absorption, Mr. Lorry had become the Doctor's friend, and the quiet street-corner was the sunny part of his life.

On this certain fine Sunday, Mr. Lorry walked towards Soho, early in the afternoon, for three reasons of habit. Firstly, because, on fine Sundays, he often walked out, before dinner, with the Doctor and Lucie; secondly, because, on unfavourable Sundays, he was accustomed to be with them as the family friend, talking, reading, looking out of window, and generally getting through the day; thirdly, because he happened to have his own little shrewd doubts to solve, and knew how the ways of the Doctor's household pointed to that time as a likely time for solving them.

A quainter corner than the corner where the Doctor lived, was not to be found in London. There was no way through it, and the front windows of the Doctor's lodgings commanded a pleasant little vista of street that had a congenial air of retirement on it. There were few buildings then, north of the Oxford-road, and forest-trees flourished, and wild flowers grew, and the hawthorn blossomed, in the now vanished fields. As a consequence, country airs circulated in Soho with vigorous freedom, instead of languishing into the parish like stray paupers without a settlement; and there was many a good south wall, not far off, on which the peaches ripened in their season.

The summer light struck into the corner brilliantly in the earlier part of the day; but, when the streets grew hot, the corner was in shadow, though not in shadow so remote but that you could see beyond it into a glare of brightness. It was a cool spot, staid but cheerful, a wonderful place for echoes, and a very harbour from the raging streets.

There ought to have been a tranquil bark in such an anchorage, and there was. The Doctor occupied two floors of a large stiff house, where several callings purported to be pursued by day, but whereof little was audible any day, and which was shunned by all of them at night. In a building at the back, attainable by a courtyard where a plane-tree rustled its green leaves, church-organs claimed to be made, and silver to be chased, and likewise gold to be beaten by some mysterious giant who had a golden arm starting out of the wall of the front hall—as if he had beaten himself precious, and menaced a similar conversion of all visitors. Very little of these trades, or of a lonely lodger rumoured to live up-stairs, or of a dim coach-trimming maker asserted to have a counting-house below, was ever heard or seen. Occasionally, a stray workman putting his coat on, traversed the hall, or a stranger peered about there, or a distant clink was heard across the courtyard, or a thump from the golden giant. These, however, were only the exceptions required to prove the rule that the sparrows in the plane-tree behind the house, and the echoes in the corner before it, had their own way from Sunday morning unto Saturday night.

Doctor Manette received such patients here as his old reputation, and its revival in the floating whispers of his story, brought him. His scientific knowledge, and his vigilance and skill in conducting ingenious experiments, brought him otherwise into moderate request, and he earned as much as he wanted.

These things were within Mr. Jarvis Lorry's knowledge, thoughts, and notice, when he rang the door-bell of the tranquil house in the corner, on the fine Sunday afternoon.

"Doctor Manette at home?"

Expected home.

"Miss Lucie at home?"

Expected home.

"Miss Pross at home?"

Possibly at home, but of a certainty impossible for handmaid to anticipate intentions of Miss Pross, as to admission or denial of the fact.

"As I am at home myself," said Mr. Lorry, "I'll go upstairs."

Although the Doctor's daughter had known nothing of the country of her birth, she appeared to have innately derived from it that ability to make much of little means, which is one of its most useful and most agreeable characteristics. Simple as the furniture was, it was set off by so many little adornments, of no value but for their taste and fancy, that its effect was delightful. The disposition of everything in the rooms, from the largest object to the least; the arrangement of colours, the elegant variety and contrast obtained by thrift in trifles, by delicate hands, clear eyes, and good sense; were at once so pleasant in themselves, and so expressive of their originator, that, as Mr. Lorry stood looking about him, the very chairs and tables seemed to ask him, with something of that peculiar expression which he knew so well by this time, whether he approved?

There were three rooms on a floor, and, the doors by which they communicated being put open that the air might pass freely through them all, Mr. Lorry, smilingly observant of that fanciful resemblance which he detected all around him, walked from one to another. The first was the best room, and in it were Lucie's birds, and flowers, and books, and desk, and work-table, and box of water-colours; the second was the Doctor's consulting-room, used also as the dining-room; the third, changingly speckled by the rustle of the plane-tree in the yard, was the Doctor's bedroom, and there, in a corner, stood the disused shoemaker's bench and tray of tools, much as it had stood on the fifth floor of the dismal house by the wine-shop, in the suburb of Saint Antoine in Paris.

"I wonder," said Mr. Lorry, pausing in his looking about, "that he keeps that reminder of his sufferings about him!"

"And why wonder at that?" was the abrupt inquiry that made him start.

It proceeded from Miss Pross, the wild red woman, strong of hand, whose acquaintance he had first made at the Royal George Hotel at Dover, and had since improved.

"I should have thought—" Mr. Lorry began.

"Pooh! You'd have thought!" said Miss Pross; and Mr. Lorry left off.

"How do you do?" inquired that lady then—sharply, and yet as if to express that she bore him no malice.

"I am pretty well, I thank you," answered Mr. Lorry, with meekness; "how are you?"

"Nothing to boast of," said Miss Pross.

"Indeed?"

"Ah! indeed!" said Miss Pross. "I am very much put out about my Ladybird."

"Indeed?"

"For gracious sake say something else besides 'indeed,' or you'll fidget me to death," said Miss Pross: whose character (dissociated from stature) was shortness.

"Really, then?" said Mr. Lorry, as an amendment.

"Really, is bad enough," returned Miss Pross, "but better. Yes, I am very much put out."

"May I ask the cause?"

"I don't want dozens of people who are not at all worthy of Ladybird, to come here looking after her," said Miss Pross.

"*Do* dozens come for that purpose?"

"Hundreds," said Miss Pross.

It was characteristic of this lady (as of some other people before her time and since) that whenever her original proposition was questioned, she exaggerated it.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lorry, as the safest remark he could think of.

"I have lived with the darling—or the darling has lived with me, and paid me for it; which she certainly should never have done, you may take your affidavit, if I could have afforded to keep either myself or her for nothing—since she was ten years old. And it's really very hard," said Miss Pross.

Not seeing with precision what was very hard, Mr. Lorry shook his head; using that important part of himself as a sort of fairy cloak that would fit anything.

"All sorts of people who are not in the least degree worthy of the pet, are always turning up," said Miss Pross. "When you began it—"

"*I* began it, Miss Pross?"

"Didn't you? Who brought her father to life?"

"Oh! If *that* was beginning it—" said Mr. Lorry.

"It wasn't ending it, I suppose? I say, when you began it, it was hard enough; not that I have any fault to find with Doctor Manette, except that he is not worthy of such a daughter, which is no imputation on him, for it was not to be expected that anybody should be, under any circumstances. But it really is doubly and trebly hard to have crowds and multitudes of people turning up after him (I could have forgiven him), to take Ladybird's affections away from me."

Mr. Lorry knew Miss Pross to be very jealous, but he also knew her by this time to be, beneath the service of her eccentricity, one of those unselfish creatures—found only among women—who will, for pure love and admiration, bind themselves willing slaves, to youth when they have lost it, to beauty that they never had, to accomplishments that they were never fortunate enough to gain, to bright hopes that never shone upon their own sombre lives. He knew enough of the world to know that there is nothing in it better than the faithful service of the heart; so rendered and so free from any mercenary taint, he had such an exalted respect for it, that in the retributive arrangements made by his own mind—we all make such arrangements, more or less—he stationed Miss Pross much nearer to the lower Angels than many ladies immeasurably better got up both by Nature and Art, who had balances at Tellson's.

"There never was, nor will be, but one man worthy of Ladybird," said Miss Pross; "and that was my brother Solomon, if he hadn't made a mistake in life."

Here again: Mr. Lorry's inquiries into Miss Pross's personal history had established the fact that her brother Solomon was a heartless scoundrel who had stripped her of everything she possessed, as a stake to speculate with, and had abandoned her in her poverty for evermore, with no touch of compunction. Miss Pross's fidelity of belief in Solomon (deducting a mere trifle for this slight mistake) was quite a serious matter with Mr. Lorry, and had its weight in his good opinion of her.

"As we happen to be alone for the moment, and are both people of business," he said, when they had got back to the drawing-room and had sat down there in friendly relations, "let me ask you—does the Doctor, in talking with Lucie, never refer to the shoemaking time, yet?"

"Never."

"And yet keeps that bench and those tools beside him?"

"Ah!" returned Miss Pross, shaking her head. "But I don't say he don't refer to it within himself."

"Do you believe that he thinks of it much?"

"I do," said Miss Pross.

"Do you imagine—" Mr. Lorry had begun, when Miss Pross took him up short with:

"Never imagine anything. Have no imagination at all."

"I stand corrected; do you suppose—you go so far as to suppose, sometimes?"

"Now and then," said Miss Pross.

"Do you suppose," Mr. Lorry went on, with a laughing twinkle in his bright eye, as it looked kindly at her, "that Doctor Manette has any theory of his own, preserved through all those years, relative to the cause of his being so oppressed; perhaps, even to the name of his oppressor?"

"I don't suppose anything about it but what Ladybird tells me."

"And that is—?"

"That she thinks he has."

"Now don't be angry at my asking all these questions; because I am a mere dull man of business, and you are a woman of business."

"Dull?" Miss Pross inquired, with placidity.

Rather wishing his modest adjective away, Mr. Lorry replied, "No, no, no. Surely not. To return to business:—Is it not remarkable that Doctor Manette, unquestionably innocent of any crime as we are all well assured he is, should never touch upon that question? I will not say with me, though he had business relations with me many years ago, and we are now intimate; I will say with the fair daughter to whom he is so devotedly attached, and who is so devotedly attached to him? Believe me, Miss Pross, I don't approach the topic with you, out of curiosity, but out of zealous interest."

"Well! To the best of my understanding, and bad's the best, you'll tell me," said Miss Pross, softened by the tone of the apology, "he is afraid of the whole subject."

"Afraid?"

"It's plain enough, I should think, why he may be. It's a dreadful remembrance. Besides that, his loss of himself grew out of it. Not knowing how he lost himself, or how he recovered himself, he may never feel certain of not losing himself again. That alone wouldn't make the subject pleasant, I should think."

It was a profounder remark than Mr. Lorry had looked for. "True," said he, "and fearful to reflect upon. Yet, a doubt lurks in my mind, Miss Pross, whether it is good for Doctor Manette to have that suppression always shut up within him. Indeed, it is this doubt and the uneasiness it sometimes causes me that has led me to our present confidence."

"Can't be helped," said Miss Pross, shaking her head. "Touch that string, and he instantly changes for the worse. Better leave it alone. In short, must leave it alone, like or no like. Sometimes, he gets up in the dead of the night, and will be heard, by us overhead there, walking up and down, walking up and down, in his room. Ladybird has learnt to know then that his mind is walking up and down, walking up and down, in his old prison. She hurries to him, and they go on together, walking up and down, walking up and down, until he is composed. But he never says a word of the true reason of his restlessness, to her, and she finds it best not to hint at it to him.

In silence they go walking up and down together, walking up and down together, till her love and company have brought him to himself."

Notwithstanding Miss Pross's denial of her own imagination, there was a perception of the pain of being monotonously haunted by one sad idea, in her repetition of the phrase, walking up and down, which testified to her possessing such a thing.

The corner has been mentioned as a wonderful corner for echoes; it had begun to echo so resoundingly to the tread of coming feet, that it seemed as though the very mention of that weary pacing to and fro had set it going.

"Here they are!" said Miss Pross, rising to break up the conference; "and now we shall have hundreds of people pretty soon!"

It was such a curious corner in its acoustical properties, such a peculiar Ear of a place, that as Mr. Lorry stood at the open window, looking for the father and daughter whose steps he heard, he fancied they would never approach. Not only would the echoes die away, as though the steps had gone; but, echoes of other steps that never came would be heard in their stead, and would die away for good when they seemed close at hand. However, father and daughter did at last appear, and Miss Pross was ready at the street door to receive them.

Miss Pross was a pleasant sight, albeit wild, and red, and grim, taking off her darling's bonnet when she came up-stairs, and touching it up with the ends of her handkerchief, and blowing the dust off it, and folding her mantle ready for laying by, and smoothing her rich hair with as much pride as she could possibly have taken in her own hair if she had been the vainest and handsomest of women. Her darling was a pleasant sight too, embracing her and thanking her, and protesting against her taking so much trouble for her—which last she only dared to do playfully, or Miss Pross, sorely hurt, would have retired to her own chamber and cried. The Doctor was a pleasant sight too, looking on at them, and telling Miss Pross how she spoilt Lucie, in accents and with eyes that had as much spoiling in them as Miss Pross had, and would have had more if it were possible. Mr. Lorry was a pleasant sight too, beaming at all this in his little wig, and thanking his bachelor stars for having lighted him in his declining years to a Home. But, no Hundreds of people came to see the sights, and Mr. Lorry looked in vain for the fulfilment of Miss Pross's prediction.

Dinner-time, and still no Hundreds of people. In the arrangements of the little household, Miss Pross took charge of the lower regions, and always acquitted herself marvellously. Her dinners, of a very modest quality, were so well cooked and so well served, and so neat in their contrivances, half English and half French, that nothing could be better. Miss Pross's friendship being of the thoroughly practical kind, she had ravaged Soho and the adjacent provinces, in search of impoverished French, who, tempted by shillings and half-crowns, would impart culinary mysteries to her. From these decayed sons and daughters of Gaul, she had acquired such wonderful arts, that the woman and girl who formed the staff of domestics regarded her as quite a Sorceress, or Cinderella's Godmother: who would send out for a fowl, a rabbit, a vegetable or two from the garden, and change them into anything she pleased.

On Sundays, Miss Pross dined at the Doctor's table, but on other days persisted in taking her meals at unknown periods, either in the lower regions, or in her own room on the second floor—a blue chamber, to which no one but her Ladybird ever gained admittance. On this occasion, Miss Pross, responding to Ladybird's pleasant face and pleasant efforts to please her, unbent exceedingly; so the dinner was very pleasant, too.

It was an oppressive day, and, after dinner, Lucie proposed that the wine should be carried out under the plane-tree, and they should sit there in the air. As everything turned upon her, and revolved about her, they went out under the plane-tree, and she carried the wine down for the special benefit of Mr. Lorry. She had installed herself, some time before, as Mr. Lorry's cup-bearer; and while they sat under the plane-tree, talking, she kept his glass replenished. Mysterious backs and ends of houses peeped at them as they talked, and the plane-tree whispered to them in its own way above their heads.

Still, the Hundreds of people did not present themselves. Mr. Darnay presented himself while they were sitting under the plane-tree, but he was only One.

Doctor Manette received him kindly, and so did Lucie. But, Miss Pross suddenly became afflicted with a twitching in the head and body, and retired into the house. She was not unfrequently the victim of this disorder, and she called it, in familiar conversation, "a fit of the jerks."

The Doctor was in his best condition, and looked specially young. The resemblance between him and Lucie was very strong at such times, and as they sat side by side, she leaning on his shoulder, and he resting his arm on the back of her chair, it was very agreeable to trace the likeness.

He had been talking all day, on many subjects, and with unusual vivacity. "Pray, Doctor Manette," said Mr. Darnay, as they sat under the plane-tree—and he said it in the natural pursuit of the topic in hand, which happened to be the old buildings of London—"have you seen much of the Tower?"

"Lucie and I have been there; but only casually. We have seen enough of it, to know that it teems with interest; little more."

"*I* have been there, as you remember," said Darnay, with a smile, though reddening a little angrily, "in another character, and not in a character that gives facilities for seeing much of it. They told me a curious thing when I was there."

"What was that?" Lucie asked.

"In making some alterations, the workmen came upon an old dungeon, which had been, for many years, built up and forgotten. Every stone of its inner wall was covered by inscriptions which had been carved by prisoners—dates, names, complaints, and prayers. Upon a corner stone in an angle of the wall, one prisoner, who seemed to have gone to execution, had cut as his last work, three letters. They were done with some very poor instrument, and hurriedly, with an unsteady hand. At first, they were read as D. I. C.; but, on being more carefully examined, the last letter was found to be G. There was no record or legend of any prisoner with those initials, and many fruitless guesses were made what the name could have been. At length, it was suggested that the letters were not initials, but the complete word, DIG. The floor was examined very carefully under the inscription, and, in the earth beneath a stone, or tile, or some fragment of paving, were found the ashes of a paper, mingled with the ashes of a small leathern case or bag. What the unknown prisoner had written will never be read, but he had written something, and hidden it away to keep it from the gaoler."

"My father," exclaimed Lucie, "you are ill!"

He had suddenly started up, with his hand to his head. His manner and his look quite terrified them all.

"No, my dear, not ill. There are large drops of rain falling, and they made me start. We had better go in."

He recovered himself almost instantly. Rain was really falling in large drops, and he showed the back of his hand with rain-drops on it. But, he said not a single word in reference to the discovery that had been told of, and, as they went into the house, the business eye of Mr. Lorry either detected, or fancied it detected, on his face, as it turned towards Charles Darnay, the same singular look that had been upon it when it turned towards him in the passages of the Court House.

He recovered himself so quickly, however, that Mr. Lorry had doubts of his business eye. The arm of the golden giant in the hall was not more steady than he was, when he stopped under it to remark to them that he was not yet proof against slight surprises (if he ever would be), and that the rain had startled him.

Tea-time, and Miss Pross making tea, with another fit of the jerks upon her, and yet no Hundreds of people. Mr. Carton had lounged in, but he made only Two.

The night was so very sultry, that although they sat with doors and windows open, they were overpowered by heat. When the tea-table was done with, they all moved to one of the windows, and looked out into the heavy twilight. Lucie sat by her father; Darnay sat beside her; Carton leaned against a window. The curtains were long and white, and some of the thunder-gusts that whirled into the corner, caught them up to the ceiling, and waved them like spectral wings.

"The rain-drops are still falling, large, heavy, and few," said Doctor Manette. "It comes slowly."

"It comes surely," said Carton.

They spoke low, as people watching and waiting mostly do; as people in a dark room, watching and waiting for Lightning, always do.

There was a great hurry in the streets of people speeding away to get shelter before the storm broke; the wonderful corner for echoes resounded with the echoes of footsteps coming and going, yet not a footstep was there.

"A multitude of people, and yet a solitude!" said Darnay, when they had listened for a while.

"Is it not impressive, Mr. Darnay?" asked Lucie. "Sometimes, I have sat here of an evening, until I have fancied—but even the shade of a foolish fancy makes me shudder to-night, when all is so black and solemn—"

"Let us shudder too. We may know what it is."

"It will seem nothing to you. Such whims are only impressive as we originate them, I think; they are not to be communicated. I have sometimes sat alone here of an evening, listening, until I have made the echoes out to be the echoes of all the footsteps that are coming by-and-bye into our lives."

"There is a great crowd coming one day into our lives, if that be so," Sydney Carton struck in, in his moody way.

The footsteps were incessant, and the hurry of them became more and more rapid. The corner echoed and re-echoed with the tread of feet; some, as it seemed, under the windows; some, as it seemed, in the room; some coming, some going, some breaking off, some stopping altogether; all in the distant streets, and not one within sight.

"Are all these footsteps destined to come to all of us, Miss Manette, or are we to divide them among us?"

"I don't know, Mr. Darnay; I told you it was a foolish fancy, but you asked for it. When I have yielded myself to it, I have been alone, and then I have imagined them the footsteps of the people who are to come into my life, and my father's."

"I take them into mine!" said Carton. "*I* ask no questions and make no stipulations. There is a great crowd bearing down upon us, Miss Manette, and I see them—by the Lightning." He added the last words, after there had been a vivid flash which had shown him lounging in the window.

"And I hear them!" he added again, after a peal of thunder. "Here they come, fast, fierce, and furious!"

It was the rush and roar of rain that he typified, and it stopped him, for no voice could be heard in it. A memorable storm of thunder and lightning broke with that sweep of water, and there was not a moment's interval in crash, and fire, and rain, until after the moon rose at midnight.

The great bell of Saint Paul's was striking one in the cleared air, when Mr. Lorry, escorted by Jerry, high-booted and bearing a lantern, set forth on his return-passage to Clerkenwell. There were solitary patches of road on the way between Soho and Clerkenwell, and Mr. Lorry, mindful of foot-pads, always retained Jerry for this service: though it was usually performed a good two hours earlier.

"What a night it has been! Almost a night, Jerry," said Mr. Lorry, "to bring the dead out of their graves."

"I never see the night myself, master—nor yet I don't expect to—what would do that," answered Jerry.

"Good night, Mr. Carton," said the man of business. "Good night, Mr. Darnay. Shall we ever see such a night again, together!"

Perhaps. Perhaps, see the great crowd of people with its rush and roar, bearing down upon them, too.

VII. Monseigneur in Town

Monseigneur, one of the great lords in power at the Court, held his fortnightly reception in his grand hotel in Paris. Monseigneur was in his inner room, his sanctuary of sanctuaries, the Holiest of Holiests to the crowd of worshippers in the suite of rooms without. Monseigneur was about to take his chocolate. Monseigneur could swallow a great many things with ease, and was by some few sullen minds supposed to be rather rapidly swallowing France; but, his morning's chocolate could not so much as get into the throat of Monseigneur, without the aid of four strong men besides the Cook.

Yes. It took four men, all four ablaze with gorgeous decoration, and the Chief of them unable to exist with fewer than two gold watches in his pocket, emulative of the noble and chaste fashion set by Monseigneur, to conduct the happy chocolate to Monseigneur's lips. One lacquey carried the chocolate-pot into the sacred presence; a second, milled and frothed the chocolate with the little instrument he bore for that function; a third, presented the favoured napkin; a fourth (he of the two gold watches), poured the chocolate out. It was impossible for Monseigneur to dispense with one of these attendants on the chocolate and hold his high place under the admiring Heavens. Deep would have been the blot upon his escutcheon if his chocolate had been ignobly waited on by only three men; he must have died of two.

Monseigneur had been out at a little supper last night, where the Comedy and the Grand Opera were charmingly represented. Monseigneur was out at a little supper most nights, with fascinating company. So polite and so impressible was Monseigneur, that the Comedy and the Grand Opera had far more influence with him in the tiresome articles of state affairs and state secrets, than the needs of all France. A happy circumstance for France, as the like always is for all countries similarly favoured!—always was for England (by way of example), in the regretted days of the merry Stuart who sold it.

Monseigneur had one truly noble idea of general public business, which was, to let everything go on in its own way; of particular public business, Monseigneur had the other truly noble idea that it must all go his way—

tend to his own power and pocket. Of his pleasures, general and particular, Monseigneur had the other truly noble idea, that the world was made for them. The text of his order (altered from the original by only a pronoun, which is not much) ran: "The earth and the fulness thereof are mine, saith Monseigneur."

Yet, Monseigneur had slowly found that vulgar embarrassments crept into his affairs, both private and public; and he had, as to both classes of affairs, allied himself perforce with a Farmer-General. As to finances public, because Monseigneur could not make anything at all of them, and must consequently let them out to somebody who could; as to finances private, because Farmer-Generals were rich, and Monseigneur, after generations of great luxury and expense, was growing poor. Hence Monseigneur had taken his sister from a convent, while there was yet time to ward off the impending veil, the cheapest garment she could wear, and had bestowed her as a prize upon a very rich Farmer-General, poor in family. Which Farmer-General, carrying an appropriate cane with a golden apple on the top of it, was now among the company in the outer rooms, much prostrated before by mankind—always excepting superior mankind of the blood of Monseigneur, who, his own wife included, looked down upon him with the loftiest contempt.

A sumptuous man was the Farmer-General. Thirty horses stood in his stables, twenty-four male domestics sat in his halls, six body-women waited on his wife. As one who pretended to do nothing but plunder and forage where he could, the Farmer-General—howsoever his matrimonial relations conduced to social morality—was at least the greatest reality among the personages who attended at the hotel of Monseigneur that day.

For, the rooms, though a beautiful scene to look at, and adorned with every device of decoration that the taste and skill of the time could achieve, were, in truth, not a sound business; considered with any reference to the scarecrows in the rags and nightcaps elsewhere (and not so far off, either, but that the watching towers of Notre Dame, almost equidistant from the two extremes, could see them both), they would have been an exceedingly uncomfortable business—if that could have been anybody's business, at the house of Monseigneur. Military officers destitute of military knowledge; naval officers with no idea of a ship; civil officers without a notion of affairs; brazen ecclesiastics, of the worst world worldly, with sensual eyes, loose tongues, and looser lives; all totally unfit for their several callings, all lying horribly in pretending to belong to them, but all nearly or remotely of the order of Monseigneur, and therefore foisted on all public employments from which anything was to be got; these were to be told off by the score and the score. People not immediately connected with Monseigneur or the State, yet equally unconnected with anything that was real, or with lives passed in travelling by any straight road to any true earthly end, were no less abundant. Doctors who made great fortunes out of dainty remedies for imaginary disorders that never existed, smiled upon their courtly patients in the ante-chambers of Monseigneur. Projectors who had discovered every kind of remedy for the little evils with which the State was touched, except the remedy of setting to work in earnest to root out a single sin, poured their distracting babble into any ears they could lay hold of, at the reception of Monseigneur. Unbelieving Philosophers who were remodelling the world with words, and making card-towers of Babel to scale the skies with, talked with Unbelieving Chemists who had an eye on the transmutation of metals, at this wonderful gathering accumulated by Monseigneur. Exquisite gentlemen of the finest breeding, which was at that remarkable time—and has been since—to be known by its fruits of indifference to every natural subject of human interest, were in the most exemplary state of exhaustion, at the hotel of Monseigneur. Such homes had these various notabilities left behind them in the fine world of Paris, that the spies among the assembled devotees of Monseigneur—forming a goodly half of the polite company—would have found it hard to discover among the angels of that sphere one solitary wife, who, in her manners and appearance, owned to being a Mother. Indeed, except for the mere act of bringing a troublesome creature into this world—which does not go far towards the realisation of the name of mother—there was no such thing known to the fashion. Peasant women kept the unfashionable babies close, and brought them up, and charming grandmammas of sixty dressed and supped as at twenty.

The leprosy of unreality disfigured every human creature in attendance upon Monseigneur. In the outermost room were half a dozen exceptional people who had had, for a few years, some vague misgiving in them that things in general were going rather wrong. As a promising way of setting them right, half of the half-dozen had become members of a fantastic sect of Convulsionists, and were even then considering within themselves whether they should foam, rage, roar, and turn cataleptic on the spot—thereby setting up a highly intelligible finger-post to the Future, for

Monseigneur's guidance. Besides these Dervishes, were other three who had rushed into another sect, which mended matters with a jargon about "the Centre of Truth:" holding that Man had got out of the Centre of Truth—which did not need much demonstration—but had not got out of the Circumference, and that he was to be kept from flying out of the Circumference, and was even to be shoved back into the Centre, by fasting and seeing of spirits. Among these, accordingly, much discoursing with spirits went on—and it did a world of good which never became manifest.

But, the comfort was, that all the company at the grand hotel of Monseigneur were perfectly dressed. If the Day of Judgment had only been ascertained to be a dress day, everybody there would have been eternally correct. Such frizzling and powdering and sticking up of hair, such delicate complexions artificially preserved and mended, such gallant swords to look at, and such delicate honour to the sense of smell, would surely keep anything going, for ever and ever. The exquisite gentlemen of the finest breeding wore little pendent trinkets that chinked as they languidly moved; these golden fetters rang like precious little bells; and what with that ringing, and with the rustle of silk and brocade and fine linen, there was a flutter in the air that fanned Saint Antoine and his devouring hunger far away.

Dress was the one unfailing talisman and charm used for keeping all things in their places. Everybody was dressed for a Fancy Ball that was never to leave off. From the Palace of the Tuileries, through Monseigneur and the whole Court, through the Chambers, the Tribunals of Justice, and all society (except the scarecrows), the Fancy Ball descended to the Common Executioner: who, in pursuance of the charm, was required to officiate "frizzled, powdered, in a gold-laced coat, pumps, and white silk stockings." At the gallows and the wheel—the axe was a rarity—Monsieur Paris, as it was the episcopal mode among his brother Professors of the provinces, Monsieur Orleans, and the rest, to call him, presided in this dainty dress. And who among the company at Monseigneur's reception in that seventeen hundred and eightieth year of our Lord, could possibly doubt, that a system rooted in a frizzled hangman, powdered, gold-laced, pumped, and white-silk stockinged, would see the very stars out!

Monseigneur having eased his four men of their burdens and taken his chocolate, caused the doors of the Holiest of Holiests to be thrown open, and issued forth. Then, what submission, what cringing and fawning, what servility, what abject humiliation! As to bowing down in body and spirit, nothing in that way was left for Heaven—which may have been one among other reasons why the worshippers of Monseigneur never troubled it.

Bestowing a word of promise here and a smile there, a whisper on one happy slave and a wave of the hand on another, Monseigneur affably passed through his rooms to the remote region of the Circumference of Truth. There, Monseigneur turned, and came back again, and so in due course of time got himself shut up in his sanctuary by the chocolate sprites, and was seen no more.

The show being over, the flutter in the air became quite a little storm, and the precious little bells went ringing downstairs. There was soon but one person left of all the crowd, and he, with his hat under his arm and his snuff-box in his hand, slowly passed among the mirrors on his way out.

"I devote you," said this person, stopping at the last door on his way, and turning in the direction of the sanctuary, "to the Devil!"

With that, he shook the snuff from his fingers as if he had shaken the dust from his feet, and quietly walked downstairs.

He was a man of about sixty, handsomely dressed, haughty in manner, and with a face like a fine mask. A face of a transparent paleness; every feature in it clearly defined; one set expression on it. The nose, beautifully formed otherwise, was very slightly pinched at the top of each nostril. In those two compressions, or dints, the only little change that the face ever showed, resided. They persisted in changing colour sometimes, and they would be occasionally dilated and contracted by something like a faint pulsation; then, they gave a look of treachery, and cruelty, to the whole countenance. Examined with attention, its capacity of helping such a look was to be found in the line of the mouth, and the lines of the orbits of the eyes, being much too horizontal and thin; still, in the effect of the face made, it was a handsome face, and a remarkable one.

Its owner went downstairs into the courtyard, got into his carriage, and drove away. Not many people had talked with him at the reception; he had stood in a little space apart, and Monseigneur might have been warmer in his manner. It appeared, under the circumstances, rather agreeable to him to see the common people dispersed before his horses, and often barely escaping from being run down. His man drove as if he were charging an enemy, and the furious recklessness of the man brought no check into the face, or to the lips, of the master. The complaint had sometimes made itself audible, even in that deaf city and dumb age, that, in the narrow streets without footways, the fierce patrician custom of hard driving endangered and maimed the mere vulgar in a barbarous manner. But, few cared enough for that to think of it a second time, and, in this matter, as in all others, the common wretches were left to get out of their difficulties as they could.

With a wild rattle and clatter, and an inhuman abandonment of consideration not easy to be understood in these days, the carriage dashed through streets and swept round corners, with women screaming before it, and men clutching each other and clutching children out of its way. At last, swooping at a street corner by a fountain, one of its wheels came to a sickening little jolt, and there was a loud cry from a number of voices, and the horses reared and plunged.

But for the latter inconvenience, the carriage probably would not have stopped; carriages were often known to drive on, and leave their wounded behind, and why not? But the frightened valet had got down in a hurry, and there were twenty hands at the horses' bridles.

"What has gone wrong?" said Monsieur, calmly looking out.

A tall man in a nightcap had caught up a bundle from among the feet of the horses, and had laid it on the basement of the fountain, and was down in the mud and wet, howling over it like a wild animal.

"Pardon, Monsieur the Marquis!" said a ragged and submissive man, "it is a child."

"Why does he make that abominable noise? Is it his child?"

"Excuse me, Monsieur the Marquis—it is a pity—yes."

The fountain was a little removed; for the street opened, where it was, into a space some ten or twelve yards square. As the tall man suddenly got up from the ground, and came running at the carriage, Monsieur the Marquis clapped his hand for an instant on his sword-hilt.

"Killed!" shrieked the man, in wild desperation, extending both arms at their length above his head, and staring at him. "Dead!"

The people closed round, and looked at Monsieur the Marquis. There was nothing revealed by the many eyes that looked at him but watchfulness and eagerness; there was no visible menacing or anger. Neither did the people say anything; after the first cry, they had been silent, and they remained so. The voice of the submissive man who had spoken, was flat and tame in its extreme submission. Monsieur the Marquis ran his eyes over them all, as if they had been mere rats come out of their holes.

He took out his purse.

"It is extraordinary to me," said he, "that you people cannot take care of yourselves and your children. One or the other of you is for ever in the way. How do I know what injury you have done my horses. See! Give him that."

He threw out a gold coin for the valet to pick up, and all the heads craned forward that all the eyes might look down at it as it fell. The tall man called out again with a most unearthly cry, "Dead!"

He was arrested by the quick arrival of another man, for whom the rest made way. On seeing him, the miserable creature fell upon his shoulder, sobbing and crying, and pointing to the fountain, where some women were stooping over the motionless bundle, and moving gently about it. They were as silent, however, as the men.

"I know all, I know all," said the last comer. "Be a brave man, my Gaspard! It is better for the poor little plaything to die so, than to live. It has died in a moment without pain. Could it have lived an hour as happily?"

"You are a philosopher, you there," said the Marquis, smiling. "How do they call you?"

"They call me Defarge."

"Of what trade?"

"Monsieur the Marquis, vendor of wine."

"Pick up that, philosopher and vendor of wine," said the Marquis, throwing him another gold coin, "and spend it as you will. The horses there; are they right?"

Without deigning to look at the assemblage a second time, Monsieur the Marquis leaned back in his seat, and was just being driven away with the air of a gentleman who had accidentally broke some common thing, and had paid for it, and could afford to pay for it; when his ease was suddenly disturbed by a coin flying into his carriage, and ringing on its floor.

"Hold!" said Monsieur the Marquis. "Hold the horses! Who threw that?"

He looked to the spot where Defarge the vendor of wine had stood, a moment before; but the wretched father was grovelling on his face on the pavement in that spot, and the figure that stood beside him was the figure of a dark stout woman, knitting.

"You dogs!" said the Marquis, but smoothly, and with an unchanged front, except as to the spots on his nose: "I would ride over any of you very willingly, and exterminate you from the earth. If I knew which rascal threw at the carriage, and if that brigand were sufficiently near it, he should be crushed under the wheels."

So cowed was their condition, and so long and hard their experience of what such a man could do to them, within the law and beyond it, that not a voice, or a hand, or even an eye was raised. Among the men, not one. But the woman who stood knitting looked up steadily, and looked the Marquis in the face. It was not for his dignity to notice it; his contemptuous eyes passed over her, and over all the other rats; and he leaned back in his seat again, and gave the word "Go on!"

He was driven on, and other carriages came whirling by in quick succession; the Minister, the State-Projector, the Farmer-General, the Doctor, the Lawyer, the Ecclesiastic, the Grand Opera, the Comedy, the whole Fancy Ball in a bright continuous flow, came whirling by. The rats had crept out of their holes to look on, and they remained looking on for hours; soldiers and police often passing between them and the spectacle, and making a barrier behind which they slunk, and through which they peeped. The father had long ago taken up his bundle and bidden himself away with it, when the women who had tended the bundle while it lay on the base of the fountain, sat there watching the running of the water and the rolling of the Fancy Ball—when the one woman who had stood conspicuous, knitting, still knitted on with the steadfastness of Fate. The water of the fountain ran, the swift river ran, the day ran into evening, so much life in the city ran into death according to rule, time and tide waited for no man, the rats were sleeping close together in their dark holes again, the Fancy Ball was lighted up at supper, all things ran their course.

VIII. Monseigneur in the Country

A beautiful landscape, with the corn bright in it, but not abundant. Patches of poor rye where corn should have been, patches of poor peas and beans, patches of most coarse vegetable substitutes for wheat. On inanimate nature, as on the men and women who cultivated it, a prevalent tendency towards an appearance of vegetating unwillingly—a dejected disposition to give up, and wither away.

Monsieur the Marquis in his travelling carriage (which might have been lighter), conducted by four post-horses and two postilions, fagged up a steep hill. A blush on the countenance of Monsieur the Marquis was no impeachment of his high breeding; it was not from within; it was occasioned by an external circumstance beyond his control—the setting sun.

The sunset struck so brilliantly into the travelling carriage when it gained the hill-top, that its occupant was steeped in crimson. "It will die out," said Monsieur the Marquis, glancing at his hands, "directly."

In effect, the sun was so low that it dipped at the moment. When the heavy drag had been adjusted to the wheel, and the carriage slid down hill, with a cinderous smell, in a cloud of dust, the red glow departed quickly; the sun and the Marquis going down together, there was no glow left when the drag was taken off.

But, there remained a broken country, bold and open, a little village at the bottom of the hill, a broad sweep and rise beyond it, a church-tower, a windmill, a forest for the chase, and a crag with a fortress on it used as a prison. Round upon all these darkening objects as the night drew on, the Marquis looked, with the air of one who was coming near home.

The village had its one poor street, with its poor brewery, poor tannery, poor tavern, poor stable-yard for relays of post-horses, poor fountain, all usual poor appointments. It had its poor people too. All its people were poor, and many of them were sitting at their doors, shredding spare onions and the like for supper, while many were at the fountain, washing leaves, and grasses, and any such small yieldings of the earth that could be eaten. Expressive signs of what made them poor, were not wanting; the tax for the state, the tax for the church, the tax for the lord, tax local and tax general, were to be paid here and to be paid there, according to solemn inscription in the little village, until the wonder was, that there was any village left unswallowed.

Few children were to be seen, and no dogs. As to the men and women, their choice on earth was stated in the prospect—Life on the lowest terms that could sustain it, down in the little village under the mill; or captivity and Death in the dominant prison on the crag.

Heralded by a courier in advance, and by the cracking of his postilions' whips, which twined snake-like about their heads in the evening air, as if he came attended by the Furies, Monsieur the Marquis drew up in his travelling carriage at the posting-house gate. It was hard by the fountain, and the peasants suspended their operations to look at him. He looked at them, and saw in them, without knowing it, the slow sure filing down of misery-worn face and figure, that was to make the meagreness of Frenchmen an English superstition which should survive the truth through the best part of a hundred years.

Monsieur the Marquis cast his eyes over the submissive faces that drooped before him, as the like of himself had drooped before Monseigneur of the Court—only the difference was, that these faces drooped merely to suffer and not to propitiate—when a grizzled mender of the roads joined the group.

"Bring me hither that fellow!" said the Marquis to the courier.

The fellow was brought, cap in hand, and the other fellows closed round to look and listen, in the manner of the people at the Paris fountain.

"I passed you on the road?"

"Monseigneur, it is true. I had the honour of being passed on the road."

"Coming up the hill, and at the top of the hill, both?"

"Monseigneur, it is true."

"What did you look at, so fixedly?"

"Monseigneur, I looked at the man."

He stooped a little, and with his tattered blue cap pointed under the carriage. All his fellows stooped to look under the carriage.

"What man, pig? And why look there?"

"Pardon, Monseigneur; he swung by the chain of the shoe—the drag."

"Who?" demanded the traveller.

"Monseigneur, the man."

"May the Devil carry away these idiots! How do you call the man? You know all the men of this part of the country. Who was he?"

"Your clemency, Monseigneur! He was not of this part of the country. Of all the days of my life, I never saw him."

"Swinging by the chain? To be suffocated?"

"With your gracious permission, that was the wonder of it, Monseigneur. His head hanging over—like this!"

He turned himself sideways to the carriage, and leaned back, with his face thrown up to the sky, and his head hanging down; then recovered himself, fumbled with his cap, and made a bow.

"What was he like?"

"Monseigneur, he was whiter than the miller. All covered with dust, white as a spectre, tall as a spectre!"

The picture produced an immense sensation in the little crowd; but all eyes, without comparing notes with other eyes, looked at Monsieur the Marquis. Perhaps, to observe whether he had any spectre on his conscience.

"Truly, you did well," said the Marquis, felicitously sensible that such vermin were not to ruffle him, "to see a thief accompanying my carriage, and not open that great mouth of yours. Bah! Put him aside, Monsieur Gabelle!"

Monsieur Gabelle was the Postmaster, and some other taxing functionary united; he had come out with great obsequiousness to assist at this examination, and had held the examined by the drapery of his arm in an official manner.

"Bah! Go aside!" said Monsieur Gabelle.

"Lay hands on this stranger if he seeks to lodge in your village to-night, and be sure that his business is honest, Gabelle."

"Monseigneur, I am flattered to devote myself to your orders."

"Did he run away, fellow?—where is that Accursed?"

The accursed was already under the carriage with some half-dozen particular friends, pointing out the chain with his blue cap. Some half-dozen other particular friends promptly hauled him out, and presented him breathless to Monsieur the Marquis.

"Did the man run away, Dolt, when we stopped for the drag?"

"Monseigneur, he precipitated himself over the hill-side, head first, as a person plunges into the river."

"See to it, Gabelle. Go on!"

The half-dozen who were peering at the chain were still among the wheels, like sheep; the wheels turned so suddenly that they were lucky to save their skins and bones; they had very little else to save, or they might not have been so fortunate.

The burst with which the carriage started out of the village and up the rise beyond, was soon checked by the steepness of the hill. Gradually, it subsided to a foot pace, swinging and lumbering upward among the many sweet scents of a summer night. The postilions, with a thousand gossamer gnats circling about them in lieu of the Furies, quietly mended the points to the lashes of their whips; the valet walked by the horses; the courier was audible, trotting on ahead into the dull distance.

At the steepest point of the hill there was a little burial-ground, with a Cross and a new large figure of Our Saviour on it; it was a poor figure in wood, done by some inexperienced rustic carver, but he had studied the figure from the life—his own life, maybe—for it was dreadfully spare and thin.

To this distressful emblem of a great distress that had long been growing worse, and was not at its worst, a woman was kneeling. She turned her head as the carriage came up to her, rose quickly, and presented herself at the carriage-door.

"It is you, Monseigneur! Monseigneur, a petition."

With an exclamation of impatience, but with his unchangeable face, Monseigneur looked out.

"How, then! What is it? Always petitions!"

"Monseigneur. For the love of the great God! My husband, the forester."

"What of your husband, the forester? Always the same with you people. He cannot pay something?"

"He has paid all, Monseigneur. He is dead."

"Well! He is quiet. Can I restore him to you?"

"Alas, no, Monseigneur! But he lies yonder, under a little heap of poor grass."

"Well?"

"Monseigneur, there are so many little heaps of poor grass?"

"Again, well?"

She looked an old woman, but was young. Her manner was one of passionate grief; by turns she clasped her veinous and knotted hands together with wild energy, and laid one of them on the carriage-door—

tenderly, caressingly, as if it had been a human breast, and could be expected to feel the appealing touch.

"Monseigneur, hear me! Monseigneur, hear my petition! My husband died of want; so many die of want; so many more will die of want."

"Again, well? Can I feed them?"

"Monseigneur, the good God knows; but I don't ask it. My petition is, that a morsel of stone or wood, with my husband's name, may be placed over him to show where he lies. Otherwise, the place will be quickly forgotten, it will never be found when I am dead of the same malady, I shall be laid under some other heap of poor grass. Monseigneur, they are so many, they increase so fast, there is so much want. Monseigneur! Monseigneur!"

The valet had put her away from the door, the carriage had broken into a brisk trot, the postilions had quickened the pace, she was left far behind, and Monseigneur, again escorted by the Furies, was rapidly diminishing the league or two of distance that remained between him and his chateau.

The sweet scents of the summer night rose all around him, and rose, as the rain falls, impartially, on the dusty, ragged, and toil-worn group at the fountain not far away; to whom the mender of roads, with the aid of the blue cap without which he was nothing, still enlarged upon his man like a spectre, as long as they could bear it. By degrees, as they could bear no more, they dropped off one by one, and lights twinkled in little casements; which lights, as the casements darkened, and more stars came out, seemed to have shot up into the sky instead of having been extinguished.

The shadow of a large high-roofed house, and of many over-hanging trees, was upon Monsieur the Marquis by that time; and the shadow was exchanged for the light of a flambeau, as his carriage stopped, and the great door of his chateau was opened to him.

"Monsieur Charles, whom I expect; is he arrived from England?"

"Monseigneur, not yet."

IX. The Gorgon's Head

It was a heavy mass of building, that chateau of Monsieur the Marquis, with a large stone courtyard before it, and two stone sweeps of staircase meeting in a stone terrace before the principal door. A stony business altogether, with heavy stone balustrades, and stone urns, and stone flowers, and stone faces of men, and stone heads of lions, in all directions. As if the Gorgon's head had surveyed it, when it was finished, two centuries ago.

Up the broad flight of shallow steps, Monsieur the Marquis, flambeau preceded, went from his carriage, sufficiently disturbing the darkness to elicit loud remonstrance from an owl in the roof of the great pile of stable building away among the trees. All else was so quiet, that the flambeau carried up the steps, and the other flambeau held at the great door, burnt as if they were in a close room of state, instead of being in the open night-air. Other sound than the owl's voice there was none, save the falling of a fountain into its stone basin; for, it was one of those dark nights that hold their breath by the hour together, and then heave a long low sigh, and hold their breath again.

The great door clanged behind him, and Monsieur the Marquis crossed a hall grim with certain old boar-spears, swords, and knives of the chase; grimmer with certain heavy riding-rods and riding-whips, of which many a peasant, gone to his benefactor Death, had felt the weight when his lord was angry.

Avoiding the larger rooms, which were dark and made fast for the night, Monsieur the Marquis, with his flambeau-bearer going on before, went up the staircase to a door in a corridor. This thrown open, admitted him to his own private apartment of three rooms: his bed-chamber and two others. High vaulted rooms with cool uncarpeted floors, great dogs upon the hearths for the burning of wood in winter time, and all luxuries befitting the state of a marquis in a luxurious age and country. The fashion of the last Louis but one, of the line that was never to break—the fourteenth Louis—was conspicuous in their rich furniture; but, it was diversified by many objects that were illustrations of old pages in the history of France.

A supper-table was laid for two, in the third of the rooms; a round room, in one of the chateau's four extinguisher-topped towers. A small lofty room, with its window wide open, and the wooden jalousie-blinds closed, so that the dark night only showed in slight horizontal lines of black, alternating with their broad lines of stone colour.

"My nephew," said the Marquis, glancing at the supper preparation; "they said he was not arrived."

Nor was he; but, he had been expected with Monseigneur.

"Ah! It is not probable he will arrive to-night; nevertheless, leave the table as it is. I shall be ready in a quarter of an hour."

In a quarter of an hour Monseigneur was ready, and sat down alone to his sumptuous and choice supper. His chair was opposite to the window, and he had taken his soup, and was raising his glass of Bordeaux to his lips, when he put it down.

"What is that?" he calmly asked, looking with attention at the horizontal lines of black and stone colour.

"Monseigneur? That?"

"Outside the blinds. Open the blinds."

It was done.

"Well?"

"Monseigneur, it is nothing. The trees and the night are all that are here."

The servant who spoke, had thrown the blinds wide, had looked out into the vacant darkness, and stood with that blank behind him, looking round for instructions.

"Good," said the imperturbable master. "Close them again."

That was done too, and the Marquis went on with his supper. He was half way through it, when he again stopped with his glass in his hand, hearing the sound of wheels. It came on briskly, and came up to the front of the chateau.

"Ask who is arrived."

It was the nephew of Monseigneur. He had been some few leagues behind Monseigneur, early in the afternoon. He had diminished the distance rapidly, but not so rapidly as to come up with Monseigneur on the road. He had heard of Monseigneur, at the posting-houses, as being before him.

He was to be told (said Monseigneur) that supper awaited him then and there, and that he was prayed to come to it. In a little while he came. He had been known in England as Charles Darnay.

Monseigneur received him in a courtly manner, but they did not shake hands.

"You left Paris yesterday, sir?" he said to Monseigneur, as he took his seat at table.

"Yesterday. And you?"

"I come direct."

"From London?"

"Yes."

"You have been a long time coming," said the Marquis, with a smile.

"On the contrary; I come direct."

"Pardon me! I mean, not a long time on the journey; a long time intending the journey."

"I have been detained by"—the nephew stopped a moment in his answer—"various business."

"Without doubt," said the polished uncle.

So long as a servant was present, no other words passed between them. When coffee had been served and they were alone together, the nephew, looking at the uncle and meeting the eyes of the face that was like a fine mask, opened a conversation.

"I have come back, sir, as you anticipate, pursuing the object that took me away. It carried me into great and unexpected peril; but it is a sacred object, and if it had carried me to death I hope it would have sustained me."

"Not to death," said the uncle; "it is not necessary to say, to death."

"I doubt, sir," returned the nephew, "whether, if it had carried me to the utmost brink of death, you would have cared to stop me there."

The deepened marks in the nose, and the lengthening of the fine straight lines in the cruel face, looked ominous as to that; the uncle made a graceful gesture of protest, which was so clearly a slight form of good breeding that it was not reassuring.

"Indeed, sir," pursued the nephew, "for anything I know, you may have expressly worked to give a more suspicious appearance to the suspicious circumstances that surrounded me."

"No, no, no," said the uncle, pleasantly.

"But, however that may be," resumed the nephew, glancing at him with deep distrust, "I know that your diplomacy would stop me by any means, and would know no scruple as to means."

"My friend, I told you so," said the uncle, with a fine pulsation in the two marks. "Do me the favour to recall that I told you so, long ago."

"I recall it."

"Thank you," said the Marquis—very sweetly indeed.

His tone lingered in the air, almost like the tone of a musical instrument.

"In effect, sir," pursued the nephew, "I believe it to be at once your bad fortune, and my good fortune, that has kept me out of a prison in France here."

"I do not quite understand," returned the uncle, sipping his coffee. "Dare I ask you to explain?"

"I believe that if you were not in disgrace with the Court, and had not been overshadowed by that cloud for years past, a letter de cachet would have sent me to some fortress indefinitely."

"It is possible," said the uncle, with great calmness. "For the honour of the family, I could even resolve to incommode you to that extent. Pray excuse me!"

"I perceive that, happily for me, the Reception of the day before yesterday was, as usual, a cold one," observed the nephew.

"I would not say happily, my friend," returned the uncle, with refined politeness; "I would not be sure of that. A good opportunity for consideration, surrounded by the advantages of solitude, might influence your destiny to far greater advantage than you influence it for yourself. But it is useless to discuss the question. I am, as you say, at a disadvantage. These little instruments of correction, these gentle aids to the power and honour of families, these slight favours that might so incommode you, are only to be obtained now by interest and importunity. They are sought by so many, and they are granted (comparatively) to so few! It used not to be so, but France in all such things is changed for the worse. Our not remote ancestors held the right of life and death over the surrounding vulgar. From this room, many such dogs have been taken out to be hanged; in the next room (my bedroom), one fellow, to our knowledge, was poniarded on the spot for professing some insolent delicacy respecting his daughter—*his* daughter? We have lost many privileges; a new philosophy has become the mode; and the assertion of our station, in these days, might (I do not go so far as to say would, but might) cause us real inconvenience. All very bad, very bad!"

The Marquis took a gentle little pinch of snuff, and shook his head; as elegantly despondent as he could becomingly be of a country still containing himself, that great means of regeneration.

"We have so asserted our station, both in the old time and in the modern time also," said the nephew, gloomily, "that I believe our name to be more detested than any name in France."

"Let us hope so," said the uncle. "Detestation of the high is the involuntary homage of the low."

"There is not," pursued the nephew, in his former tone, "a face I can look at, in all this country round about us, which looks at me with any deference on it but the dark deference of fear and slavery."

"A compliment," said the Marquis, "to the grandeur of the family, merited by the manner in which the family has sustained its grandeur. Hah!" And he took another gentle little pinch of snuff, and lightly crossed his legs.

But, when his nephew, leaning an elbow on the table, covered his eyes thoughtfully and dejectedly with his hand, the fine mask looked at him sideways with a stronger concentration of keenness, closeness, and dislike, than was comportable with its wearer's assumption of indifference.

"Repression is the only lasting philosophy. The dark deference of fear and slavery, my friend," observed the Marquis, "will keep the dogs obedient to the whip, as long as this roof," looking up to it, "shuts out the sky."

That might not be so long as the Marquis supposed. If a picture of the chateau as it was to be a very few years hence, and of fifty like it as they too were to be a very few years hence, could have been shown to him that night, he might have been at a loss to claim his own from the ghastly, fire-charred, plunder-wrecked rains. As for the roof he vaunted, he might have found *that* shutting out the sky in a new way—to wit, for ever, from the eyes of the bodies into which its lead was fired, out of the barrels of a hundred thousand muskets.

"Meanwhile," said the Marquis, "I will preserve the honour and repose of the family, if you will not. But you must be fatigued. Shall we terminate our conference for the night?"

"A moment more."

"An hour, if you please."

"Sir," said the nephew, "we have done wrong, and are reaping the fruits of wrong."

"*We* have done wrong?" repeated the Marquis, with an inquiring smile, and delicately pointing, first to his nephew, then to himself.

"Our family; our honourable family, whose honour is of so much account to both of us, in such different ways. Even in my father's time, we did a world of wrong, injuring every human creature who came between us and our pleasure, whatever it was. Why need I speak of my father's time, when it is equally yours? Can I separate my father's twin-brother, joint inheritor, and next successor, from himself?"

"Death has done that!" said the Marquis.

"And has left me," answered the nephew, "bound to a system that is frightful to me, responsible for it, but powerless in it; seeking to execute the last request of my dear mother's lips, and obey the last look of my dear mother's eyes, which implored me to have mercy and to redress; and tortured by seeking assistance and power in vain."

"Seeking them from me, my nephew," said the Marquis, touching him on the breast with his forefinger—they were now standing by the hearth—"you will for ever seek them in vain, be assured."

Every fine straight line in the clear whiteness of his face, was cruelly, craftily, and closely compressed, while he stood looking quietly at his nephew, with his snuff-box in his hand. Once again he touched him on the breast, as though his finger were the fine point of a small sword, with which, in delicate finesse, he ran him through the body, and said,

"My friend, I will die, perpetuating the system under which I have lived."

When he had said it, he took a culminating pinch of snuff, and put his box in his pocket.

"Better to be a rational creature," he added then, after ringing a small bell on the table, "and accept your natural destiny. But you are lost, Monsieur Charles, I see."

"This property and France are lost to me," said the nephew, sadly; "I renounce them."

"Are they both yours to renounce? France may be, but is the property? It is scarcely worth mentioning; but, is it yet?"

"I had no intention, in the words I used, to claim it yet. If it passed to me from you, to-morrow—"

"Which I have the vanity to hope is not probable."

"—or twenty years hence—"

"You do me too much honour," said the Marquis; "still, I prefer that supposition."

"—I would abandon it, and live otherwise and elsewhere. It is little to relinquish. What is it but a wilderness of misery and ruin!"

"Hah!" said the Marquis, glancing round the luxurious room.

"To the eye it is fair enough, here; but seen in its integrity, under the sky, and by the daylight, it is a crumbling tower of waste, mismanagement, extortion, debt, mortgage, oppression, hunger, nakedness, and suffering."

"Hah!" said the Marquis again, in a well-satisfied manner.

"If it ever becomes mine, it shall be put into some hands better qualified to free it slowly (if such a thing is possible) from the weight that drags it down, so that the miserable people who cannot leave it and who have been long wrung to the last point of endurance, may, in another generation, suffer less; but it is not for me. There is a curse on it, and on all this land."

"And you?" said the uncle. "Forgive my curiosity; do you, under your new philosophy, graciously intend to live?"

"I must do, to live, what others of my countrymen, even with nobility at their backs, may have to do some day—work."

"In England, for example?"

"Yes. The family honour, sir, is safe from me in this country. The family name can suffer from me in no other, for I bear it in no other."

The ringing of the bell had caused the adjoining bed-chamber to be lighted. It now shone brightly, through the door of communication. The Marquis looked that way, and listened for the retreating step of his valet.

"England is very attractive to you, seeing how indifferently you have prospered there," he observed then, turning his calm face to his nephew with a smile.

"I have already said, that for my prospering there, I am sensible I may be indebted to you, sir. For the rest, it is my Refuge."

"They say, those boastful English, that it is the Refuge of many. You know a compatriot who has found a Refuge there? A Doctor?"

"Yes."

"With a daughter?"

"Yes."

"Yes," said the Marquis. "You are fatigued. Good night!"

As he bent his head in his most courtly manner, there was a secrecy in his smiling face, and he conveyed an air of mystery to those words, which struck the eyes and ears of his nephew forcibly. At the same time, the thin straight lines of the setting of the eyes, and the thin straight lips, and the markings in the nose, curved with a sarcasm that looked handsomely diabolic.

"Yes," repeated the Marquis. "A Doctor with a daughter. Yes. So commences the new philosophy! You are fatigued. Good night!"

It would have been of as much avail to interrogate any stone face outside the chateau as to interrogate that face of his. The nephew looked at him, in vain, in passing on to the door.

"Good night!" said the uncle. "I look to the pleasure of seeing you again in the morning. Good repose! Light Monsieur my nephew to his chamber there!—And burn Monsieur my nephew in his bed, if you will," he added to himself, before he rang his little bell again, and summoned his valet to his own bedroom.

The valet come and gone, Monsieur the Marquis walked to and fro in his loose chamber-robe, to prepare himself gently for sleep, that hot still night. Rustling about the room, his softly-slippered feet making no noise on the floor, he moved like a refined tiger:—looked like some enchanted marquis of the impenitently wicked sort, in story, whose periodical change into tiger form was either just going off, or just coming on.

He moved from end to end of his voluptuous bedroom, looking again at the scraps of the day's journey that came unbidden into his mind; the slow toil up the hill at sunset, the setting sun, the descent, the mill, the prison on the crag, the little village in the hollow, the peasants at the fountain, and the mender of roads with his blue cap pointing out the chain under the carriage. That fountain suggested the Paris fountain, the little bundle lying on the step, the women bending over it, and the tall man with his arms up, crying, "Dead!"

"I am cool now," said Monsieur the Marquis, "and may go to bed."

So, leaving only one light burning on the large hearth, he let his thin gauze curtains fall around him, and heard the night break its silence with a long sigh as he composed himself to sleep.

The stone faces on the outer walls stared blindly at the black night for three heavy hours; for three heavy hours, the horses in the stables rattled at their racks, the dogs barked, and the owl made a noise with very little resemblance in it to the noise conventionally assigned to the owl by men-poets. But it is the obstinate custom of such creatures hardly ever to say what is set down for them.

For three heavy hours, the stone faces of the chateau, lion and human, stared blindly at the night. Dead darkness lay on all the landscape, dead darkness added its own hush to the hushing dust on all the roads. The burial-place had got to the pass that its little heaps of poor grass were undistinguishable from one another; the figure on the Cross might have come down, for anything that could be seen of it. In the village, taxers and taxed were fast asleep. Dreaming, perhaps, of banquets, as the starved usually do, and of ease and rest, as the driven slave and the yoked ox may, its lean inhabitants slept soundly, and were fed and freed.

The fountain in the village flowed unseen and unheard, and the fountain at the chateau dropped unseen and unheard—both melting away, like the minutes that were falling from the spring of Time—through three dark hours. Then, the grey water of both began to be ghostly in the light, and the eyes of the stone faces of the chateau were opened.

Lighter and lighter, until at last the sun touched the tops of the still trees, and poured its radiance over the hill. In the glow, the water of the chateau fountain seemed to turn to blood, and the stone faces crimsoned. The carol of the birds was loud and high, and, on the weather-beaten sill of the great window of the bed-chamber of Monsieur the Marquis, one little bird sang its sweetest song with all its might. At this, the nearest stone face seemed to stare amazed, and, with open mouth and dropped under-jaw, looked awe-stricken.

Now, the sun was full up, and movement began in the village. Casement windows opened, crazy doors were unbarred, and people came forth shivering—chilled, as yet, by the new sweet air. Then began the rarely lightened toil of the day among the village population. Some, to the fountain; some, to the fields; men and women here, to dig and delve; men and women there, to see to the poor live stock, and lead the bony cows out, to such pasture as could be found by the roadside. In the church and at the Cross, a kneeling figure or two; attendant on the latter prayers, the led cow, trying for a breakfast among the weeds at its foot.

The chateau awoke later, as became its quality, but awoke gradually and surely. First, the lonely boar-spears and knives of the chase had been reddened as of old; then, had gleamed trenchant in the morning sunshine; now, doors and windows were thrown open, horses in their stables looked round over their shoulders at the light and freshness pouring in at doorways, leaves sparkled and rustled at iron-grated windows, dogs pulled hard at their chains, and reared impatient to be loosed.

All these trivial incidents belonged to the routine of life, and the return of morning. Surely, not so the ringing of the great bell of the chateau, nor the running up and down the stairs; nor the hurried figures on the terrace; nor the booting and tramping here and there and everywhere, nor the quick saddling of horses and riding away?

What winds conveyed this hurry to the grizzled mender of roads, already at work on the hill-top beyond the village, with his day's dinner (not much to carry) lying in a bundle that it was worth no crow's while to peck at, on a heap of stones? Had the birds, carrying some grains of it to a distance, dropped one over him as they sow chance seeds? Whether or no, the mender of roads ran, on the sultry morning, as if for his life, down the hill, knee-high in dust, and never stopped till he got to the fountain.

All the people of the village were at the fountain, standing about in their depressed manner, and whispering low, but showing no other emotions than grim curiosity and surprise. The led cows, hastily brought in and tethered to anything that would hold them, were looking stupidly on, or lying down chewing the cud of nothing particularly repaying their trouble, which they had picked up in their interrupted saunter. Some of the people of the chateau, and some of those of the posting-house, and all the taxing authorities, were armed more or less, and were crowded on the other side of the little street in a purposeless way, that was highly fraught with nothing. Already, the mender of roads had penetrated into the midst of a group of fifty particular friends, and was smiting himself in the breast with his blue cap. What did all this portend, and what portended the swift hoisting-up of Monsieur Gabelle behind a servant on horseback, and the conveying away of the said Gabelle (double-laden though the horse was), at a gallop, like a new version of the German ballad of Leonora?

It portended that there was one stone face too many, up at the chateau.

The Gorgon had surveyed the building again in the night, and had added the one stone face wanting; the stone face for which it had waited through about two hundred years.

It lay back on the pillow of Monsieur the Marquis. It was like a fine mask, suddenly startled, made angry, and petrified. Driven home into the heart of the stone figure attached to it, was a knife. Round its hilt was a frill of paper, on which was scrawled:

"Drive him fast to his tomb. This, from Jacques."

X. Two Promises

More months, to the number of twelve, had come and gone, and Mr. Charles Darnay was established in England as a higher teacher of the French language who was conversant with French literature. In this age, he would have been a Professor; in that age, he was a Tutor. He read with young men who could find any leisure and interest for the study of a living tongue spoken all over the world, and he cultivated a taste for its stores of knowledge and fancy. He could write of them, besides, in sound English, and render them into sound English. Such masters were not at that time easily found; Princes that had been, and Kings that were to be, were not yet of the Teacher class, and no ruined nobility had dropped out of Tellson's ledgers, to turn cooks and carpenters. As a tutor, whose attainments made the student's way unusually pleasant and profitable, and as an elegant translator who brought something to his work besides mere dictionary knowledge, young Mr. Darnay soon became known and encouraged. He was well acquainted, more-over, with the circumstances of his country, and those were of ever-growing interest. So, with great perseverance and untiring industry, he prospered.

In London, he had expected neither to walk on pavements of gold, nor to lie on beds of roses; if he had had any such exalted expectation, he would not have prospered. He had expected labour, and he found it, and did it and made the best of it. In this, his prosperity consisted.

A certain portion of his time was passed at Cambridge, where he read with undergraduates as a sort of tolerated smuggler who drove a contraband trade in European languages, instead of conveying Greek and Latin through the Custom-house. The rest of his time he passed in London.

Now, from the days when it was always summer in Eden, to these days when it is mostly winter in fallen latitudes, the world of a man has invariably gone one way—Charles Darnay's way—the way of the love of a woman.

He had loved Lucie Manette from the hour of his danger. He had never heard a sound so sweet and dear as the sound of her compassionate voice; he had never seen a face so tenderly beautiful, as hers when it was confronted with his own on the edge of the grave that had been dug for him.

But, he had not yet spoken to her on the subject; the assassination at the deserted chateau far away beyond the heaving water and the long, long, dusty roads—the solid stone chateau which had itself become the mere mist of a dream—had been done a year, and he had never yet, by so much as a single spoken word, disclosed to her the state of his heart.

That he had his reasons for this, he knew full well. It was again a summer day when, lately arrived in London from his college occupation, he turned into the quiet corner in Soho, bent on seeking an opportunity of opening his mind to Doctor Manette. It was the close of the summer day, and he knew Lucie to be out with Miss Pross.

He found the Doctor reading in his arm-chair at a window. The energy which had at once supported him under his old sufferings and aggravated their sharpness, had been gradually restored to him. He was now a very energetic man indeed, with great firmness of purpose, strength of resolution, and vigour of action. In his recovered energy he was sometimes a little fitful and sudden, as he had at first been in the exercise of his other recovered faculties; but, this had never been frequently observable, and had grown more and more rare.

He studied much, slept little, sustained a great deal of fatigue with ease, and was equably cheerful. To him, now entered Charles Darnay, at sight of whom he laid aside his book and held out his hand.

"Charles Darnay! I rejoice to see you. We have been counting on your return these three or four days past. Mr. Stryver and Sydney Carton were both here yesterday, and both made you out to be more than due."

"I am obliged to them for their interest in the matter," he answered, a little coldly as to them, though very warmly as to the Doctor. "Miss Manette —"

"Is well," said the Doctor, as he stopped short, "and your return will delight us all. She has gone out on some household matters, but will soon be home."

"Doctor Manette, I knew she was from home. I took the opportunity of her being from home, to beg to speak to you."

There was a blank silence.

"Yes?" said the Doctor, with evident constraint. "Bring your chair here, and speak on."

He complied as to the chair, but appeared to find the speaking on less easy.

"I have had the happiness, Doctor Manette, of being so intimate here," so he at length began, "for some year and a half, that I hope the topic on which I am about to touch may not—"

He was stayed by the Doctor's putting out his hand to stop him. When he had kept it so a little while, he said, drawing it back:

"Is Lucie the topic?"

"She is."

"It is hard for me to speak of her at any time. It is very hard for me to hear her spoken of in that tone of yours, Charles Darnay."

"It is a tone of fervent admiration, true homage, and deep love, Doctor Manette!" he said deferentially.

There was another blank silence before her father rejoined:

"I believe it. I do you justice; I believe it."

His constraint was so manifest, and it was so manifest, too, that it originated in an unwillingness to approach the subject, that Charles Darnay hesitated.

"Shall I go on, sir?"

Another blank.

"Yes, go on."

"You anticipate what I would say, though you cannot know how earnestly I say it, how earnestly I feel it, without knowing my secret heart, and the hopes and fears and anxieties with which it has long been laden. Dear Doctor Manette, I love your daughter fondly, dearly, disinterestedly, devotedly. If ever there were love in the world, I love her. You have loved yourself; let your old love speak for me!"

The Doctor sat with his face turned away, and his eyes bent on the ground. At the last words, he stretched out his hand again, hurriedly, and cried:

"Not that, sir! Let that be! I adjure you, do not recall that!"

His cry was so like a cry of actual pain, that it rang in Charles Darnay's ears long after he had ceased. He motioned with the hand he had extended, and it seemed to be an appeal to Darnay to pause. The latter so received it, and remained silent.

"I ask your pardon," said the Doctor, in a subdued tone, after some moments. "I do not doubt your loving Lucie; you may be satisfied of it."

He turned towards him in his chair, but did not look at him, or raise his eyes. His chin dropped upon his hand, and his white hair overshadowed his face:

"Have you spoken to Lucie?"

"No."

"Nor written?"

"Never."

"It would be ungenerous to affect not to know that your self-denial is to be referred to your consideration for her father. Her father thanks you."

He offered his hand; but his eyes did not go with it.

"I know," said Darnay, respectfully, "how can I fail to know, Doctor Manette, I who have seen you together from day to day, that between you and Miss Manette there is an affection so unusual, so touching, so belonging to the circumstances in which it has been nurtured, that it can have few parallels, even in the tenderness between a father and child. I know, Doctor Manette—how can I fail to know—that, mingled with the affection and duty of a daughter who has become a woman, there is, in her heart, towards you, all the love and reliance of infancy itself. I know that, as in her childhood she had no parent, so she is now devoted to you with all the constancy and fervour of her present years and character, united to the trustfulness and attachment of the early days in which you were lost to her. I know perfectly well that if you had been restored to her from the world beyond this life, you could hardly be invested, in her sight, with a more sacred character than that in which you are always with her. I know that when she is clinging to you, the hands of baby, girl, and woman, all in one, are round your neck. I know that in loving you she sees and loves her mother at her own age, sees and loves you at my age, loves her mother broken-hearted, loves you through your dreadful trial and in your blessed restoration. I have known this, night and day, since I have known you in your home."

Her father sat silent, with his face bent down. His breathing was a little quickened; but he repressed all other signs of agitation.

"Dear Doctor Manette, always knowing this, always seeing her and you with this hallowed light about you, I have forborne, and forborne, as long as it was in the nature of man to do it. I have felt, and do even now feel, that to bring my love—even mine—between you, is to touch your history with something not quite so good as itself. But I love her. Heaven is my witness that I love her!"

"I believe it," answered her father, mournfully. "I have thought so before now. I believe it."

"But, do not believe," said Darnay, upon whose ear the mournful voice struck with a reproachful sound, "that if my fortune were so cast as that, being one day so happy as to make her my wife, I must at any time put any separation between her and you, I could or would breathe a word of what I now say. Besides that I should know it to be hopeless, I should know it to be a baseness. If I had any such possibility, even at a remote distance of years, harboured in my thoughts, and hidden in my heart—if it ever had been there—if it ever could be there—I could not now touch this honoured hand."

He laid his own upon it as he spoke.

"No, dear Doctor Manette. Like you, a voluntary exile from France; like you, driven from it by its distractions, oppressions, and miseries; like you, striving to live away from it by my own exertions, and trusting in a happier future; I look only to sharing your fortunes, sharing your life and home, and being faithful to you to the death. Not to divide with Lucie her privilege as your child, companion, and friend; but to come in aid of it, and bind her closer to you, if such a thing can be."

His touch still lingered on her father's hand. Answering the touch for a moment, but not coldly, her father rested his hands upon the arms of his chair, and looked up for the first time since the beginning of the conference. A struggle was evidently in his face; a struggle with that occasional look which had a tendency in it to dark doubt and dread.

"You speak so feelingly and so manfully, Charles Darnay, that I thank you with all my heart, and will open all my heart—or nearly so. Have you any reason to believe that Lucie loves you?"

"None. As yet, none."

"Is it the immediate object of this confidence, that you may at once ascertain that, with my knowledge?"

"Not even so. I might not have the hopefulness to do it for weeks; I might (mistaken or not mistaken) have that hopefulness to-morrow."

"Do you seek any guidance from me?"

"I ask none, sir. But I have thought it possible that you might have it in your power, if you should deem it right, to give me some."

"Do you seek any promise from me?"

"I do seek that."

"What is it?"

"I well understand that, without you, I could have no hope. I well understand that, even if Miss Manette held me at this moment in her innocent heart—do not think I have the presumption to assume so much—I could retain no place in it against her love for her father."

"If that be so, do you see what, on the other hand, is involved in it?"

"I understand equally well, that a word from her father in any suitor's favour, would outweigh herself and all the world. For which reason, Doctor Manette," said Darnay, modestly but firmly, "I would not ask that word, to save my life."

"I am sure of it. Charles Darnay, mysteries arise out of close love, as well as out of wide division; in the former case, they are subtle and delicate, and difficult to penetrate. My daughter Lucie is, in this one respect, such a mystery to me; I can make no guess at the state of her heart."

"May I ask, sir, if you think she is—" As he hesitated, her father supplied the rest.

"Is sought by any other suitor?"

"It is what I meant to say."

Her father considered a little before he answered:

"You have seen Mr. Carton here, yourself. Mr. Stryver is here too, occasionally. If it be at all, it can only be by one of these."

"Or both," said Darnay.

"I had not thought of both; I should not think either, likely. You want a promise from me. Tell me what it is."

"It is, that if Miss Manette should bring to you at any time, on her own part, such a confidence as I have ventured to lay before you, you will bear testimony to what I have said, and to your belief in it. I hope you may be able to think so well of me, as to urge no influence against me. I say nothing more of my stake in this; this is what I ask. The condition on which I ask it, and which you have an undoubted right to require, I will observe immediately."

"I give the promise," said the Doctor, "without any condition. I believe your object to be, purely and truthfully, as you have stated it. I believe your intention is to perpetuate, and not to weaken, the ties between me and my other and far dearer self. If she should ever tell me that you are essential to her perfect happiness, I will give her to you. If there were—Charles Darnay, if there were—"

The young man had taken his hand gratefully; their hands were joined as the Doctor spoke:

"—any fancies, any reasons, any apprehensions, anything whatsoever, new or old, against the man she really loved—the direct responsibility thereof not lying on his head—they should all be obliterated for her sake. She is everything to me; more to me than suffering, more to me than wrong, more to me—Well! This is idle talk."

So strange was the way in which he faded into silence, and so strange his fixed look when he had ceased to speak, that Darnay felt his own hand turn cold in the hand that slowly released and dropped it.

"You said something to me," said Doctor Manette, breaking into a smile. "What was it you said to me?"

He was at a loss how to answer, until he remembered having spoken of a condition. Relieved as his mind reverted to that, he answered:

"Your confidence in me ought to be returned with full confidence on my part. My present name, though but slightly changed from my mother's, is not, as you will remember, my own. I wish to tell you what that is, and why I am in England."

"Stop!" said the Doctor of Beauvais.

"I wish it, that I may the better deserve your confidence, and have no secret from you."

"Stop!"

For an instant, the Doctor even had his two hands at his ears; for another instant, even had his two hands laid on Darnay's lips.

"Tell me when I ask you, not now. If your suit should prosper, if Lucie should love you, you shall tell me on your marriage morning. Do you promise?"

"Willingly.

"Give me your hand. She will be home directly, and it is better she should not see us together to-night. Go! God bless you!"

It was dark when Charles Darnay left him, and it was an hour later and darker when Lucie came home; she hurried into the room alone—for Miss Pross had gone straight up-stairs—and was surprised to find his reading-chair empty.

"My father!" she called to him. "Father dear!"

Nothing was said in answer, but she heard a low hammering sound in his bedroom. Passing lightly across the intermediate room, she looked in at his door and came running back frightened, crying to herself, with her blood all chilled, "What shall I do! What shall I do!"

Her uncertainty lasted but a moment; she hurried back, and tapped at his door, and softly called to him. The noise ceased at the sound of her voice, and he presently came out to her, and they walked up and down together for a long time.

She came down from her bed, to look at him in his sleep that night. He slept heavily, and his tray of shoemaking tools, and his old unfinished work, were all as usual.

XI. A Companion Picture

"Sydney," said Mr. Stryver, on that self-same night, or morning, to his jackal; "mix another bowl of punch; I have something to say to you."

Sydney had been working double tides that night, and the night before, and the night before that, and a good many nights in succession, making a grand clearance among Mr. Stryver's papers before the setting in of the long vacation. The clearance was effected at last; the Stryver arrears were handsomely fetched up; everything was got rid of until November should come with its fogs atmospheric, and fogs legal, and bring grist to the mill again.

Sydney was none the livelier and none the soberer for so much application. It had taken a deal of extra wet-towelling to pull him through the night; a correspondingly extra quantity of wine had preceded the towelling; and he was in a very damaged condition, as he now pulled his turban off and threw it into the basin in which he had steeped it at intervals for the last six hours.

"Are you mixing that other bowl of punch?" said Stryver the portly, with his hands in his waistband, glancing round from the sofa where he lay on his back.

"I am."

"Now, look here! I am going to tell you something that will rather surprise you, and that perhaps will make you think me not quite as shrewd as you usually do think me. I intend to marry."

"*Do* you?"

"Yes. And not for money. What do you say now?"

"I don't feel disposed to say much. Who is she?"

"Guess."

"Do I know her?"

"Guess."

"I am not going to guess, at five o'clock in the morning, with my brains frying and sputtering in my head. If you want me to guess, you must ask me to dinner."

"Well then, I'll tell you," said Stryver, coming slowly into a sitting posture. "Sydney, I rather despair of making myself intelligible to you, because you are such an insensible dog."

"And you," returned Sydney, busy concocting the punch, "are such a sensitive and poetical spirit—"

"Come!" rejoined Stryver, laughing boastfully, "though I don't prefer any claim to being the soul of Romance (for I hope I know better), still I am a tenderer sort of fellow than *you*."

"You are a luckier, if you mean that."

"I don't mean that. I mean I am a man of more—more—"

"Say gallantry, while you are about it," suggested Carton.

"Well! I'll say gallantry. My meaning is that I am a man," said Stryver, inflating himself at his friend as he made the punch, "who cares more to be agreeable, who takes more pains to be agreeable, who knows better how to be agreeable, in a woman's society, than you do."

"Go on," said Sydney Carton.

"No; but before I go on," said Stryver, shaking his head in his bullying way, "I'll have this out with you. You've been at Doctor Manette's house as much as I have, or more than I have. Why, I have been ashamed of your moroseness there! Your manners have been of that silent and sullen and hangdog kind, that, upon my life and soul, I have been ashamed of you, Sydney!"

"It should be very beneficial to a man in your practice at the bar, to be ashamed of anything," returned Sydney; "you ought to be much obliged to me."

"You shall not get off in that way," rejoined Stryver, shouldering the rejoinder at him; "no, Sydney, it's my duty to tell you—and I tell you to your face to do you good—that you are a devilish ill-conditioned fellow in that sort of society. You are a disagreeable fellow."

Sydney drank a bumper of the punch he had made, and laughed.

"Look at me!" said Stryver, squaring himself; "I have less need to make myself agreeable than you have, being more independent in circumstances. Why do I do it?"

"I never saw you do it yet," muttered Carton.

"I do it because it's politic; I do it on principle. And look at me! I get on."

"You don't get on with your account of your matrimonial intentions," answered Carton, with a careless air; "I wish you would keep to that. As to me—will you never understand that I am incorrigible?"

He asked the question with some appearance of scorn.

"You have no business to be incorrigible," was his friend's answer, delivered in no very soothing tone.

"I have no business to be, at all, that I know of," said Sydney Carton. "Who is the lady?"

"Now, don't let my announcement of the name make you uncomfortable, Sydney," said Mr. Stryver, preparing him with ostentatious friendliness for the disclosure he was about to make, "because I know you don't mean half you say; and if you meant it all, it would be of no importance. I make this little preface, because you once mentioned the young lady to me in slighting terms."

"I did?"

"Certainly; and in these chambers."

Sydney Carton looked at his punch and looked at his complacent friend; drank his punch and looked at his complacent friend.

"You made mention of the young lady as a golden-haired doll. The young lady is Miss Manette. If you had been a fellow of any sensitiveness or delicacy of feeling in that kind of way, Sydney, I might have been a little resentful of your employing such a designation; but you are not. You want that sense altogether; therefore I am no more annoyed when I think of the expression, than I should be annoyed by a man's opinion of a picture of mine, who had no eye for pictures: or of a piece of music of mine, who had no ear for music."

Sydney Carton drank the punch at a great rate; drank it by bumpers, looking at his friend.

"Now you know all about it, Syd," said Mr. Stryver. "I don't care about fortune: she is a charming creature, and I have made up my mind to please myself: on the whole, I think I can afford to please myself. She will have in me a man already pretty well off, and a rapidly rising man, and a man of some distinction: it is a piece of good fortune for her, but she is worthy of good fortune. Are you astonished?"

Carton, still drinking the punch, rejoined, "Why should I be astonished?"

"You approve?"

Carton, still drinking the punch, rejoined, "Why should I not approve?"

"Well!" said his friend Stryver, "you take it more easily than I fancied you would, and are less mercenary on my behalf than I thought you would be; though, to be sure, you know well enough by this time that your ancient chum is a man of a pretty strong will. Yes, Sydney, I have had enough of this style of life, with no other as a change from it; I feel that it is a pleasant thing for a man to have a home when he feels inclined to go to it (when he doesn't, he can stay away), and I feel that Miss Manette will tell well in any station, and will always do me credit. So I have made up my mind. And now, Sydney, old boy, I want to say a word to *you* about *your* prospects. You are in a bad way, you know; you really are in a bad way. You don't know the value of money, you live hard, you'll knock up one of these days, and be ill and poor; you really ought to think about a nurse."

The prosperous patronage with which he said it, made him look twice as big as he was, and four times as offensive.

"Now, let me recommend you," pursued Stryver, "to look it in the face. I have looked it in the face, in my different way; look it in the face, you, in your different way. Marry. Provide somebody to take care of you. Never mind your having no enjoyment of women's society, nor understanding of it, nor tact for it. Find out somebody. Find out some respectable woman with a little property—somebody in the landlady way, or lodging-letting way—and marry her, against a rainy day. That's the kind of thing for *you*. Now think of it, Sydney."

"I'll think of it," said Sydney.

XII. The Fellow of Delicacy

Mr. Stryver having made up his mind to that magnanimous bestowal of good fortune on the Doctor's daughter, resolved to make her happiness known to her before he left town for the Long Vacation. After some mental debating of the point, he came to the conclusion that it would be as well to get all the preliminaries done with, and they could then arrange at their leisure whether he should give her his hand a week or two before Michaelmas Term, or in the little Christmas vacation between it and Hilary.

As to the strength of his case, he had not a doubt about it, but clearly saw his way to the verdict. Argued with the jury on substantial worldly grounds—the only grounds ever worth taking into account—it was a plain case, and had not a weak spot in it. He called himself for the plaintiff, there was no getting over his evidence, the counsel for the defendant threw up his brief, and the jury did not even turn to consider. After trying it, Stryver, C. J., was satisfied that no plainer case could be.

Accordingly, Mr. Stryver inaugurated the Long Vacation with a formal proposal to take Miss Manette to Vauxhall Gardens; that failing, to Ranelagh; that unaccountably failing too, it behoved him to present himself in Soho, and there declare his noble mind.

Towards Soho, therefore, Mr. Stryver shouldered his way from the Temple, while the bloom of the Long Vacation's infancy was still upon it. Anybody who had seen him projecting himself into Soho while he was yet on Saint Dunstan's side of Temple Bar, bursting in his full-blown way along the pavement, to the jostlement of all weaker people, might have seen how safe and strong he was.

His way taking him past Tellson's, and he both banking at Tellson's and knowing Mr. Lorry as the intimate friend of the Manettes, it entered Mr. Stryver's mind to enter the bank, and reveal to Mr. Lorry the brightness of the Soho horizon. So, he pushed open the door with the weak rattle in its throat, stumbled down the two steps, got past the two ancient cashiers, and shouldered himself into the musty back closet where Mr. Lorry sat at great books ruled for figures, with perpendicular iron bars to his window as if that were ruled for figures too, and everything under the clouds were a sum.

"Halloa!" said Mr. Stryver. "How do you do? I hope you are well!"

It was Stryver's grand peculiarity that he always seemed too big for any place, or space. He was so much too big for Tellson's, that old clerks in distant corners looked up with looks of remonstrance, as though he squeezed them against the wall. The House itself, magnificently reading the paper quite in the far-off perspective, lowered displeased, as if the Stryver head had been butted into its responsible waistcoat.

The discreet Mr. Lorry said, in a sample tone of the voice he would recommend under the circumstances, "How do you do, Mr. Stryver? How do you do, sir?" and shook hands. There was a peculiarity in his manner of shaking hands, always to be seen in any clerk at Tellson's who shook hands with a customer when the House pervaded the air. He shook in a self-abnegating way, as one who shook for Tellson and Co.

"Can I do anything for you, Mr. Stryver?" asked Mr. Lorry, in his business character.

"Why, no, thank you; this is a private visit to yourself, Mr. Lorry; I have come for a private word."

"Oh indeed!" said Mr. Lorry, bending down his ear, while his eye strayed to the House afar off.

"I am going," said Mr. Stryver, leaning his arms confidentially on the desk: whereupon, although it was a large double one, there appeared to be not half desk enough for him: "I am going to make an offer of myself in marriage to your agreeable little friend, Miss Manette, Mr. Lorry."

"Oh dear me!" cried Mr. Lorry, rubbing his chin, and looking at his visitor dubiously.

"Oh dear me, sir?" repeated Stryver, drawing back. "Oh dear you, sir? What may your meaning be, Mr. Lorry?"

"My meaning," answered the man of business, "is, of course, friendly and appreciative, and that it does you the greatest credit, and—in short, my meaning is everything you could desire. But—really, you know, Mr. Stryver—" Mr. Lorry paused, and shook his head at him in the oddest manner, as if he were compelled against his will to add, internally, "you know there really is so much too much of you!"

"Well!" said Stryver, slapping the desk with his contentious hand, opening his eyes wider, and taking a long breath, "if I understand you, Mr. Lorry, I'll be hanged!"

Mr. Lorry adjusted his little wig at both ears as a means towards that end, and bit the feather of a pen.

"D—n it all, sir!" said Stryver, staring at him, "am I not eligible?"

"Oh dear yes! Yes. Oh yes, you're eligible!" said Mr. Lorry. "If you say eligible, you are eligible."

"Am I not prosperous?" asked Stryver.

"Oh! if you come to prosperous, you are prosperous," said Mr. Lorry.

"And advancing?"

"If you come to advancing you know," said Mr. Lorry, delighted to be able to make another admission, "nobody can doubt that."

"Then what on earth is your meaning, Mr. Lorry?" demanded Stryver, perceptibly crestfallen.

"Well! I—Were you going there now?" asked Mr. Lorry.

"Straight!" said Stryver, with a plump of his fist on the desk.

"Then I think I wouldn't, if I was you."

"Why?" said Stryver. "Now, I'll put you in a corner," forensically shaking a forefinger at him. "You are a man of business and bound to have a reason. State your reason. Why wouldn't you go?"

"Because," said Mr. Lorry, "I wouldn't go on such an object without having some cause to believe that I should succeed."

"D—n *me*!" cried Stryver, "but this beats everything."

Mr. Lorry glanced at the distant House, and glanced at the angry Stryver.

"Here's a man of business—a man of years—a man of experience—*in* a Bank," said Stryver; "and having summed up three leading reasons for complete success, he says there's no reason at all! Says it with his head on!" Mr. Stryver remarked upon the peculiarity as if it would have been infinitely less remarkable if he had said it with his head off.

"When I speak of success, I speak of success with the young lady; and when I speak of causes and reasons to make success probable, I speak of causes and reasons that will tell as such with the young lady. The young lady, my good sir," said Mr. Lorry, mildly tapping the Stryver arm, "the young lady. The young lady goes before all."

"Then you mean to tell me, Mr. Lorry," said Stryver, squaring his elbows, "that it is your deliberate opinion that the young lady at present in question is a mincing Fool?"

"Not exactly so. I mean to tell you, Mr. Stryver," said Mr. Lorry, reddening, "that I will hear no disrespectful word of that young lady from any lips; and that if I knew any man—which I hope I do not—whose taste was so coarse, and whose temper was so overbearing, that he could not restrain himself from speaking disrespectfully of that young lady at this desk, not even Tellson's should prevent my giving him a piece of my mind."

The necessity of being angry in a suppressed tone had put Mr. Stryver's blood-vessels into a dangerous state when it was his turn to be angry; Mr. Lorry's veins, methodical as their courses could usually be, were in no better state now it was his turn.

"That is what I mean to tell you, sir," said Mr. Lorry. "Pray let there be no mistake about it."

Mr. Stryver sucked the end of a ruler for a little while, and then stood hitting a tune out of his teeth with it, which probably gave him the toothache. He broke the awkward silence by saying:

"This is something new to me, Mr. Lorry. You deliberately advise me not to go up to Soho and offer myself—*my*self, Stryver of the King's Bench bar?"

"Do you ask me for my advice, Mr. Stryver?"

"Yes, I do."

"Very good. Then I give it, and you have repeated it correctly."

"And all I can say of it is," laughed Stryver with a vexed laugh, "that this—ha, ha!—beats everything past, present, and to come."

"Now understand me," pursued Mr. Lorry. "As a man of business, I am not justified in saying anything about this matter, for, as a man of business, I know nothing of it. But, as an old fellow, who has carried Miss Manette in his arms, who is the trusted friend of Miss Manette and of her father too, and who has a great affection for them both, I have spoken. The confidence is not of my seeking, recollect. Now, you think I may not be right?"

"Not I!" said Stryver, whistling. "I can't undertake to find third parties in common sense; I can only find it for myself. I suppose sense in certain quarters; you suppose mincing bread-and-butter nonsense. It's new to me, but you are right, I dare say."

"What I suppose, Mr. Stryver, I claim to characterise for myself—And understand me, sir," said Mr. Lorry, quickly flushing again, "I will not—not even at Tellson's—have it characterised for me by any gentleman breathing."

"There! I beg your pardon!" said Stryver.

"Granted. Thank you. Well, Mr. Stryver, I was about to say:—it might be painful to you to find yourself mistaken, it might be painful to Doctor

Manette to have the task of being explicit with you, it might be very painful to Miss Manette to have the task of being explicit with you. You know the terms upon which I have the honour and happiness to stand with the family. If you please, committing you in no way, representing you in no way, I will undertake to correct my advice by the exercise of a little new observation and judgment expressly brought to bear upon it. If you should then be dissatisfied with it, you can but test its soundness for yourself; if, on the other hand, you should be satisfied with it, and it should be what it now is, it may spare all sides what is best spared. What do you say?"

"How long would you keep me in town?"

"Oh! It is only a question of a few hours. I could go to Soho in the evening, and come to your chambers afterwards."

"Then I say yes," said Stryver: "I won't go up there now, I am not so hot upon it as that comes to; I say yes, and I shall expect you to look in to-night. Good morning."

Then Mr. Stryver turned and burst out of the Bank, causing such a concussion of air on his passage through, that to stand up against it bowing behind the two counters, required the utmost remaining strength of the two ancient clerks. Those venerable and feeble persons were always seen by the public in the act of bowing, and were popularly believed, when they had bowed a customer out, still to keep on bowing in the empty office until they bowed another customer in.

The barrister was keen enough to divine that the banker would not have gone so far in his expression of opinion on any less solid ground than moral certainty. Unprepared as he was for the large pill he had to swallow, he got it down. "And now," said Mr. Stryver, shaking his forensic forefinger at the Temple in general, when it was down, "my way out of this, is, to put you all in the wrong."

It was a bit of the art of an Old Bailey tactician, in which he found great relief. "You shall not put me in the wrong, young lady," said Mr. Stryver; "I'll do that for you."

Accordingly, when Mr. Lorry called that night as late as ten o'clock, Mr. Stryver, among a quantity of books and papers littered out for the purpose, seemed to have nothing less on his mind than the subject of the morning. He even showed surprise when he saw Mr. Lorry, and was altogether in an absent and preoccupied state.

"Well!" said that good-natured emissary, after a full half-hour of bootless attempts to bring him round to the question. "I have been to Soho."

"To Soho?" repeated Mr. Stryver, coldly. "Oh, to be sure! What am I thinking of!"

"And I have no doubt," said Mr. Lorry, "that I was right in the conversation we had. My opinion is confirmed, and I reiterate my advice."

"I assure you," returned Mr. Stryver, in the friendliest way, "that I am sorry for it on your account, and sorry for it on the poor father's account. I know this must always be a sore subject with the family; let us say no more about it."

"I don't understand you," said Mr. Lorry.

"I dare say not," rejoined Stryver, nodding his head in a smoothing and final way; "no matter, no matter."

"But it does matter," Mr. Lorry urged.

"No it doesn't; I assure you it doesn't. Having supposed that there was sense where there is no sense, and a laudable ambition where there is not a laudable ambition, I am well out of my mistake, and no harm is done. Young women have committed similar follies often before, and have repented them in poverty and obscurity often before. In an unselfish aspect, I am sorry that the thing is dropped, because it would have been a bad thing for me in a worldly point of view; in a selfish aspect, I am glad that the thing has dropped, because it would have been a bad thing for me in a worldly point of view—it is hardly necessary to say I could have gained nothing by it. There is no harm at all done. I have not proposed to the young lady, and, between ourselves, I am by no means certain, on reflection, that I ever should have committed myself to that extent. Mr. Lorry, you cannot control the mincing vanities and giddinesses of empty-headed girls; you must not expect to do it, or you will always be disappointed. Now, pray say no more about it. I tell you, I regret it on account of others, but I am satisfied on my own account. And I am really very much obliged to you for allowing me to sound you, and for giving me your advice; you know the young lady better than I do; you were right, it never would have done."

Mr. Lorry was so taken aback, that he looked quite stupidly at Mr. Stryver shouldering him towards the door, with an appearance of showering generosity, forbearance, and goodwill, on his erring head. "Make the best of it, my dear sir," said Stryver; "say no more about it; thank you again for allowing me to sound you; good night!"

Mr. Lorry was out in the night, before he knew where he was. Mr. Stryver was lying back on his sofa, winking at his ceiling.

XIII. The Fellow of No Delicacy

If Sydney Carton ever shone anywhere, he certainly never shone in the house of Doctor Manette. He had been there often, during a whole year, and had always been the same moody and morose lounger there. When he cared to talk, he talked well; but, the cloud of caring for nothing, which overshadowed him with such a fatal darkness, was very rarely pierced by the light within him.

And yet he did care something for the streets that environed that house, and for the senseless stones that made their pavements. Many a night he vaguely and unhappily wandered there, when wine had brought no transitory gladness to him; many a dreary daybreak revealed his solitary figure lingering there, and still lingering there when the first beams of the sun brought into strong relief, removed beauties of architecture in spires of churches and lofty buildings, as perhaps the quiet time brought some sense of better things, else forgotten and unattainable, into his mind. Of late, the neglected bed in the Temple Court had known him more scantily than ever; and often when he had thrown himself upon it no longer than a few minutes, he had got up again, and haunted that neighbourhood.

On a day in August, when Mr. Stryver (after notifying to his jackal that "he had thought better of that marrying matter") had carried his delicacy into Devonshire, and when the sight and scent of flowers in the City streets had some waifs of goodness in them for the worst, of health for the sickliest, and of youth for the oldest, Sydney's feet still trod those stones. From being irresolute and purposeless, his feet became animated by an intention, and, in the working out of that intention, they took him to the Doctor's door.

He was shown up-stairs, and found Lucie at her work, alone. She had never been quite at her ease with him, and received him with some little embarrassment as he seated himself near her table. But, looking up at his face in the interchange of the first few common-places, she observed a change in it.

"I fear you are not well, Mr. Carton!"

"No. But the life I lead, Miss Manette, is not conducive to health. What is to be expected of, or by, such profligates?"

"Is it not—forgive me; I have begun the question on my lips—a pity to live no better life?"

"God knows it is a shame!"

"Then why not change it?"

Looking gently at him again, she was surprised and saddened to see that there were tears in his eyes. There were tears in his voice too, as he answered:

"It is too late for that. I shall never be better than I am. I shall sink lower, and be worse."

He leaned an elbow on her table, and covered his eyes with his hand. The table trembled in the silence that followed.

She had never seen him softened, and was much distressed. He knew her to be so, without looking at her, and said:

"Pray forgive me, Miss Manette. I break down before the knowledge of what I want to say to you. Will you hear me?"

"If it will do you any good, Mr. Carton, if it would make you happier, it would make me very glad!"

"God bless you for your sweet compassion!"

He unshaded his face after a little while, and spoke steadily.

"Don't be afraid to hear me. Don't shrink from anything I say. I am like one who died young. All my life might have been."

"No, Mr. Carton. I am sure that the best part of it might still be; I am sure that you might be much, much worthier of yourself."

"Say of you, Miss Manette, and although I know better—although in the mystery of my own wretched heart I know better—I shall never forget it!"

She was pale and trembling. He came to her relief with a fixed despair of himself which made the interview unlike any other that could have been holden.

"If it had been possible, Miss Manette, that you could have returned the love of the man you see before yourself—flung away, wasted, drunken, poor creature of misuse as you know him to be—he would have been conscious this day and hour, in spite of his happiness, that he would bring you to misery, bring you to sorrow and repentance, blight you, disgrace you, pull you down with him. I know very well that you can have no tenderness for me; I ask for none; I am even thankful that it cannot be."

"Without it, can I not save you, Mr. Carton? Can I not recall you—forgive me again!—to a better course? Can I in no way repay your confidence? I know this is a confidence," she modestly said, after a little hesitation, and in earnest tears, "I know you would say this to no one else. Can I turn it to no good account for yourself, Mr. Carton?"

He shook his head.

"To none. No, Miss Manette, to none. If you will hear me through a very little more, all you can ever do for me is done. I wish you to know that you have been the last dream of my soul. In my degradation I have not been so degraded but that the sight of you with your father, and of this home made such a home by you, has stirred old shadows that I thought had died out of me. Since I knew you, I have been troubled by a remorse that I thought would never reproach me again, and have heard whispers from old voices impelling me upward, that I thought were silent for ever. I have had unformed ideas of striving afresh, beginning anew, shaking off sloth and sensuality, and fighting out the abandoned fight. A dream, all a dream, that ends in nothing, and leaves the sleeper where he lay down, but I wish you to know that you inspired it."

"Will nothing of it remain? O Mr. Carton, think again! Try again!"

"No, Miss Manette; all through it, I have known myself to be quite undeserving. And yet I have had the weakness, and have still the weakness, to wish you to know with what a sudden mastery you kindled me, heap of ashes that I am, into fire—a fire, however, inseparable in its nature from myself, quickening nothing, lighting nothing, doing no service, idly burning away."

"Since it is my misfortune, Mr. Carton, to have made you more unhappy than you were before you knew me—"

"Don't say that, Miss Manette, for you would have reclaimed me, if anything could. You will not be the cause of my becoming worse."

"Since the state of your mind that you describe, is, at all events, attributable to some influence of mine—this is what I mean, if I can make it plain—can I use no influence to serve you? Have I no power for good, with you, at all?"

"The utmost good that I am capable of now, Miss Manette, I have come here to realise. Let me carry through the rest of my misdirected life, the remembrance that I opened my heart to you, last of all the world; and that there was something left in me at this time which you could deplore and pity."

"Which I entreated you to believe, again and again, most fervently, with all my heart, was capable of better things, Mr. Carton!"

"Entreat me to believe it no more, Miss Manette. I have proved myself, and I know better. I distress you; I draw fast to an end. Will you let me believe, when I recall this day, that the last confidence of my life was reposed in your pure and innocent breast, and that it lies there alone, and will be shared by no one?"

"If that will be a consolation to you, yes."

"Not even by the dearest one ever to be known to you?"

"Mr. Carton," she answered, after an agitated pause, "the secret is yours, not mine; and I promise to respect it."

"Thank you. And again, God bless you."

He put her hand to his lips, and moved towards the door.

"Be under no apprehension, Miss Manette, of my ever resuming this conversation by so much as a passing word. I will never refer to it again. If I were dead, that could not be surer than it is henceforth. In the hour of my death, I shall hold sacred the one good remembrance—and shall thank and bless you for it—that my last avowal of myself was made to you, and that my name, and faults, and miseries were gently carried in your heart. May it otherwise be light and happy!"

He was so unlike what he had ever shown himself to be, and it was so sad to think how much he had thrown away, and how much he every day kept down and perverted, that Lucie Manette wept mournfully for him as he stood looking back at her.

"Be comforted!" he said, "I am not worth such feeling, Miss Manette. An hour or two hence, and the low companions and low habits that I scorn but yield to, will render me less worth such tears as those, than any wretch who creeps along the streets. Be comforted! But, within myself, I shall always be, towards you, what I am now, though outwardly I shall be what you have heretofore seen me. The last supplication but one I make to you, is, that you will believe this of me."

"I will, Mr. Carton."

"My last supplication of all, is this; and with it, I will relieve you of a visitor with whom I well know you have nothing in unison, and between whom and you there is an impassable space. It is useless to say it, I know, but it rises out of my soul. For you, and for any dear to you, I would do anything. If my career were of that better kind that there was any opportunity or capacity of sacrifice in it, I would embrace any sacrifice for you and for those dear to you. Try to hold me in your mind, at some quiet times, as ardent and sincere in this one thing. The time will come, the time will not be long in coming, when new ties will be formed about you—ties that will bind you yet more tenderly and strongly to the home you so adorn—the dearest ties that will ever grace and gladden you. O Miss Manette, when the little picture of a happy father's face looks up in yours, when you see your own bright beauty springing up anew at your feet, think now and then that there is a man who would give his life, to keep a life you love beside you!"

He said, "Farewell!" said a last "God bless you!" and left her.

XIV. The Honest Tradesman

To the eyes of Mr. Jeremiah Cruncher, sitting on his stool in Fleet-street with his grisly urchin beside him, a vast number and variety of objects in movement were every day presented. Who could sit upon anything in Fleet-street during the busy hours of the day, and not be dazed and deafened by two immense processions, one ever tending westward with the sun, the other ever tending eastward from the sun, both ever tending to the plains beyond the range of red and purple where the sun goes down!

With his straw in his mouth, Mr. Cruncher sat watching the two streams, like the heathen rustic who has for several centuries been on duty watching one stream—saving that Jerry had no expectation of their ever running dry. Nor would it have been an expectation of a hopeful kind, since a small part of his income was derived from the pilotage of timid women (mostly of a full habit and past the middle term of life) from Tellson's side of the tides to the opposite shore. Brief as such companionship was in every separate instance, Mr. Cruncher never failed to become so interested in the lady as to express a strong desire to have the honour of drinking her very good health. And it was from the gifts bestowed upon him towards the execution of this benevolent purpose, that he recruited his finances, as just now observed.

Time was, when a poet sat upon a stool in a public place, and mused in the sight of men. Mr. Cruncher, sitting on a stool in a public place, but not being a poet, mused as little as possible, and looked about him.

It fell out that he was thus engaged in a season when crowds were few, and belated women few, and when his affairs in general were so unprosperous as to awaken a strong suspicion in his breast that Mrs. Cruncher must have been "flopping" in some pointed manner, when an unusual concourse pouring down Fleet-street westward, attracted his attention. Looking that way, Mr. Cruncher made out that some kind of funeral was coming along, and that there was popular objection to this funeral, which engendered uproar.

"Young Jerry," said Mr. Cruncher, turning to his offspring, "it's a buryin'."

"Hooroar, father!" cried Young Jerry.

The young gentleman uttered this exultant sound with mysterious significance. The elder gentleman took the cry so ill, that he watched his opportunity, and smote the young gentleman on the ear.

"What d'ye mean? What are you hooroaring at? What do you want to conwey to your own father, you young Rip? This boy is a getting too many for *me*!" said Mr. Cruncher, surveying him. "Him and his hooroars! Don't let me hear no more of you, or you shall feel some more of me. D'ye hear?"

"I warn't doing no harm," Young Jerry protested, rubbing his cheek.

"Drop it then," said Mr. Cruncher; "I won't have none of *your* no harms. Get a top of that there seat, and look at the crowd."

His son obeyed, and the crowd approached; they were bawling and hissing round a dingy hearse and dingy mourning coach, in which mourning coach there was only one mourner, dressed in the dingy trappings that were considered essential to the dignity of the position. The position appeared by no means to please him, however, with an increasing rabble surrounding the coach, deriding him, making grimaces at him, and incessantly groaning and calling out: "Yah! Spies! Tst! Yaha! Spies!" with many compliments too numerous and forcible to repeat.

Funerals had at all times a remarkable attraction for Mr. Cruncher; he always pricked up his senses, and became excited, when a funeral passed Tellson's. Naturally, therefore, a funeral with this uncommon attendance excited him greatly, and he asked of the first man who ran against him:

"What is it, brother? What's it about?"

"*I* don't know," said the man. "Spies! Yaha! Tst! Spies!"

He asked another man. "Who is it?"

"*I* don't know," returned the man, clapping his hands to his mouth nevertheless, and vociferating in a surprising heat and with the greatest ardour, "Spies! Yaha! Tst, tst! Spi—ies!"

At length, a person better informed on the merits of the case, tumbled against him, and from this person he learned that the funeral was the funeral of one Roger Cly.

"Was He a spy?" asked Mr. Cruncher.

"Old Bailey spy," returned his informant. "Yaha! Tst! Yah! Old Bailey Spi—i—ies!"

"Why, to be sure!" exclaimed Jerry, recalling the Trial at which he had assisted. "I've seen him. Dead, is he?"

"Dead as mutton," returned the other, "and can't be too dead. Have 'em out, there! Spies! Pull 'em out, there! Spies!"

The idea was so acceptable in the prevalent absence of any idea, that the crowd caught it up with eagerness, and loudly repeating the suggestion to have 'em out, and to pull 'em out, mobbed the two vehicles so closely that they came to a stop. On the crowd's opening the coach doors, the one mourner scuffled out of himself and was in their hands for a moment; but he was so alert, and made such good use of his time, that in another moment he was scouring away up a bye-street, after shedding his cloak, hat, long hatband, white pocket-handkerchief, and other symbolical tears.

These, the people tore to pieces and scattered far and wide with great enjoyment, while the tradesmen hurriedly shut up their shops; for a crowd in those times stopped at nothing, and was a monster much dreaded. They had already got the length of opening the hearse to take the coffin out, when some brighter genius proposed instead, its being escorted to its destination amidst general rejoicing. Practical suggestions being much needed, this suggestion, too, was received with acclamation, and the coach was immediately filled with eight inside and a dozen out, while as many people got on the roof of the hearse as could by any exercise of ingenuity stick upon it. Among the first of these volunteers was Jerry Cruncher himself, who modestly concealed his spiky head from the observation of Tellson's, in the further corner of the mourning coach.

The officiating undertakers made some protest against these changes in the ceremonies; but, the river being alarmingly near, and several voices remarking on the efficacy of cold immersion in bringing refractory members of the profession to reason, the protest was faint and brief. The remodelled procession started, with a chimney-sweep driving the hearse—advised by the regular driver, who was perched beside him, under close inspection, for the purpose—and with a pieman, also attended by his cabinet minister, driving the mourning coach. A bear-leader, a popular street character of the time, was impressed as an additional ornament, before the cavalcade had gone far down the Strand; and his bear, who was black and very mangy, gave quite an Undertaking air to that part of the procession in which he walked.

Thus, with beer-drinking, pipe-smoking, song-roaring, and infinite caricaturing of woe, the disorderly procession went its way, recruiting at every step, and all the shops shutting up before it. Its destination was the old church of Saint Pancras, far off in the fields. It got there in course of time; insisted on pouring into the burial-ground; finally, accomplished the interment of the deceased Roger Cly in its own way, and highly to its own satisfaction.

The dead man disposed of, and the crowd being under the necessity of providing some other entertainment for itself, another brighter genius (or perhaps the same) conceived the humour of impeaching casual passers-by, as Old Bailey spies, and wreaking vengeance on them. Chase was given to some scores of inoffensive persons who had never been near the Old Bailey in their lives, in the realisation of this fancy, and they were roughly hustled and maltreated. The transition to the sport of window-breaking, and thence to the plundering of public-houses, was easy and natural. At last, after several hours, when sundry summer-houses had been pulled down, and some area-railings had been torn up, to arm the more belligerent spirits, a rumour got about that the Guards were coming. Before this rumour, the crowd gradually melted away, and perhaps the Guards came, and perhaps they never came, and this was the usual progress of a mob.

Mr. Cruncher did not assist at the closing sports, but had remained behind in the churchyard, to confer and condole with the undertakers. The place had a soothing influence on him. He procured a pipe from a neighbouring public-house, and smoked it, looking in at the railings and maturely considering the spot.

"Jerry," said Mr. Cruncher, apostrophising himself in his usual way, "you see that there Cly that day, and you see with your own eyes that he was a young 'un and a straight made 'un."

Having smoked his pipe out, and ruminated a little longer, he turned himself about, that he might appear, before the hour of closing, on his station at Tellson's. Whether his meditations on mortality had touched his liver, or whether his general health had been previously at all amiss, or whether he desired to show a little attention to an eminent man, is not so much to the purpose, as that he made a short call upon his medical adviser—a distinguished surgeon—on his way back.

Young Jerry relieved his father with dutiful interest, and reported No job in his absence. The bank closed, the ancient clerks came out, the usual watch was set, and Mr. Cruncher and his son went home to tea.

"Now, I tell you where it is!" said Mr. Cruncher to his wife, on entering. "If, as a honest tradesman, my wenturs goes wrong to-night, I shall make sure that you've been praying again me, and I shall work you for it just the same as if I seen you do it."

The dejected Mrs. Cruncher shook her head.

"Why, you're at it afore my face!" said Mr. Cruncher, with signs of angry apprehension.

"I am saying nothing."

"Well, then; don't meditate nothing. You might as well flop as meditate. You may as well go again me one way as another. Drop it altogether."

"Yes, Jerry."

"Yes, Jerry," repeated Mr. Cruncher sitting down to tea. "Ah! It *is* yes, Jerry. That's about it. You may say yes, Jerry."

Mr. Cruncher had no particular meaning in these sulky corroborations, but made use of them, as people not unfrequently do, to express general ironical dissatisfaction.

"You and your yes, Jerry," said Mr. Cruncher, taking a bite out of his bread-and-butter, and seeming to help it down with a large invisible oyster out of his saucer. "Ah! I think so. I believe you."

"You are going out to-night?" asked his decent wife, when he took another bite.

"Yes, I am."

"May I go with you, father?" asked his son, briskly.

"No, you mayn't. I'm a going—as your mother knows—a fishing. That's where I'm going to. Going a fishing."

"Your fishing-rod gets rayther rusty; don't it, father?"

"Never you mind."

"Shall you bring any fish home, father?"

"If I don't, you'll have short commons, to-morrow," returned that gentleman, shaking his head; "that's questions enough for you; I ain't a going out, till you've been long abed."

He devoted himself during the remainder of the evening to keeping a most vigilant watch on Mrs. Cruncher, and sullenly holding her in conversation that she might be prevented from meditating any petitions to his disadvantage. With this view, he urged his son to hold her in conversation also, and led the unfortunate woman a hard life by dwelling on any causes of complaint he could bring against her, rather than he would leave her for a moment to her own reflections. The devoutest person could have rendered no greater homage to the efficacy of an honest prayer than he did in this distrust of his wife. It was as if a professed unbeliever in ghosts should be frightened by a ghost story.

"And mind you!" said Mr. Cruncher. "No games to-morrow! If I, as a honest tradesman, succeed in providing a jinte of meat or two, none of your not touching of it, and sticking to bread. If I, as a honest tradesman, am able to provide a little beer, none of your declaring on water. When you go to Rome, do as Rome does. Rome will be a ugly customer to you, if you don't. *I*'m your Rome, you know."

Then he began grumbling again:

"With your flying into the face of your own wittles and drink! I don't know how scarce you mayn't make the wittles and drink here, by your flopping tricks and your unfeeling conduct. Look at your boy: he *is* your'n, ain't he? He's as thin as a lath. Do you call yourself a mother, and not know that a mother's first duty is to blow her boy out?"

This touched Young Jerry on a tender place; who adjured his mother to perform her first duty, and, whatever else she did or neglected, above all things to lay especial stress on the discharge of that maternal function so affectingly and delicately indicated by his other parent.

Thus the evening wore away with the Cruncher family, until Young Jerry was ordered to bed, and his mother, laid under similar injunctions, obeyed them. Mr. Cruncher beguiled the earlier watches of the night with solitary pipes, and did not start upon his excursion until nearly one o'clock. Towards that small and ghostly hour, he rose up from his chair, took a key out of his pocket, opened a locked cupboard, and brought forth a sack, a crowbar of convenient size, a rope and chain, and other fishing tackle of that nature. Disposing these articles about him in skilful manner, he bestowed a parting defiance on Mrs. Cruncher, extinguished the light, and went out.

Young Jerry, who had only made a feint of undressing when he went to bed, was not long after his father. Under cover of the darkness he followed out of the room, followed down the stairs, followed down the court, followed out into the streets. He was in no uneasiness concerning his getting into the house again, for it was full of lodgers, and the door stood ajar all night.

Impelled by a laudable ambition to study the art and mystery of his father's honest calling, Young Jerry, keeping as close to house fronts, walls, and doorways, as his eyes were close to one another, held his honoured parent in view. The honoured parent steering Northward, had not gone far, when he was joined by another disciple of Izaak Walton, and the two trudged on together.

Within half an hour from the first starting, they were beyond the winking lamps, and the more than winking watchmen, and were out upon a lonely road. Another fisherman was picked up here—and that so silently, that if Young Jerry had been superstitious, he might have supposed the second follower of the gentle craft to have, all of a sudden, split himself into two.

The three went on, and Young Jerry went on, until the three stopped under a bank overhanging the road. Upon the top of the bank was a low brick wall, surmounted by an iron railing. In the shadow of bank and wall the three turned out of the road, and up a blind lane, of which the wall—there, risen to some eight or ten feet high—formed one side. Crouching down in a corner, peeping up the lane, the next object that Young Jerry saw, was the form of his honoured parent, pretty well defined against a watery and clouded moon, nimbly scaling an iron gate. He was soon over, and then the second fisherman got over, and then the third. They all dropped softly on the ground within the gate, and lay there a little—listening perhaps. Then, they moved away on their hands and knees.

It was now Young Jerry's turn to approach the gate: which he did, holding his breath. Crouching down again in a corner there, and looking in, he made out the three fishermen creeping through some rank grass! and all the gravestones in the churchyard—it was a large churchyard that they were in—looking on like ghosts in white, while the church tower itself looked on like the ghost of a monstrous giant. They did not creep far, before they stopped and stood upright. And then they began to fish.

They fished with a spade, at first. Presently the honoured parent appeared to be adjusting some instrument like a great corkscrew. Whatever tools they worked with, they worked hard, until the awful striking of the church clock so terrified Young Jerry, that he made off, with his hair as stiff as his father's.

But, his long-cherished desire to know more about these matters, not only stopped him in his running away, but lured him back again. They were still fishing perseveringly, when he peeped in at the gate for the second time; but, now they seemed to have got a bite. There was a screwing and complaining sound down below, and their bent figures were strained, as if by a weight. By slow degrees the weight broke away the earth upon it, and came to the surface. Young Jerry very well knew what it would be; but, when he saw it, and saw his honoured parent about to wrench it open, he was so frightened, being new to the sight, that he made off again, and never stopped until he had run a mile or more.

He would not have stopped then, for anything less necessary than breath, it being a spectral sort of race that he ran, and one highly desirable to get to the end of. He had a strong idea that the coffin he had seen was running after him; and, pictured as hopping on behind him, bolt upright, upon its narrow end, always on the point of overtaking him and hopping on at his side—perhaps taking his arm—it was a pursuer to shun. It was an inconsistent and ubiquitous fiend too, for, while it was making the whole night behind him dreadful, he darted out into the roadway to avoid dark alleys, fearful of its coming hopping out of them like a dropsical boy's Kite without tail and wings. It hid in doorways too, rubbing its horrible shoulders against doors, and drawing them up to its ears, as if it were laughing. It got into shadows on the road, and lay cunningly on its back to trip him up. All this time it was incessantly hopping on behind and gaining on him, so that when the boy got to his own door he had reason for being half dead. And even then it would not leave him, but followed him upstairs with a bump on every stair, scrambled into bed with him, and bumped down, dead and heavy, on his breast when he fell asleep.

From his oppressed slumber, Young Jerry in his closet was awakened after daybreak and before sunrise, by the presence of his father in the family room. Something had gone wrong with him; at least, so Young Jerry inferred, from the circumstance of his holding Mrs. Cruncher by the ears, and knocking the back of her head against the head-board of the bed.

"I told you I would," said Mr. Cruncher, "and I did."

"Jerry, Jerry, Jerry!" his wife implored.

"You oppose yourself to the profit of the business," said Jerry, "and me and my partners suffer. You was to honour and obey; why the devil don't you?"

"I try to be a good wife, Jerry," the poor woman protested, with tears.

"Is it being a good wife to oppose your husband's business? Is it honouring your husband to dishonour his business? Is it obeying your husband to disobey him on the wital subject of his business?"

"You hadn't taken to the dreadful business then, Jerry."

"It's enough for you," retorted Mr. Cruncher, "to be the wife of a honest tradesman, and not to occupy your female mind with calculations when he took to his trade or when he didn't. A honouring and obeying wife would let his trade alone altogether. Call yourself a religious woman? If you're a religious woman, give me a irreligious one! You have no more nat'ral sense of duty than the bed of this here Thames river has of a pile, and similarly it must be knocked into you."

The altercation was conducted in a low tone of voice, and terminated in the honest tradesman's kicking off his clay-soiled boots, and lying down at his length on the floor. After taking a timid peep at him lying on his back, with his rusty hands under his head for a pillow, his son lay down too, and fell asleep again.

There was no fish for breakfast, and not much of anything else. Mr. Cruncher was out of spirits, and out of temper, and kept an iron pot-lid by him as a projectile for the correction of Mrs. Cruncher, in case he should observe any symptoms of her saying Grace. He was brushed and washed at the usual hour, and set off with his son to pursue his ostensible calling.

Young Jerry, walking with the stool under his arm at his father's side along sunny and crowded Fleet-street, was a very different Young Jerry from him of the previous night, running home through darkness and solitude from his grim pursuer. His cunning was fresh with the day, and his qualms were gone with the night—in which particulars it is not improbable that he had compeers in Fleet-street and the City of London, that fine morning.

"Father," said Young Jerry, as they walked along: taking care to keep at arm's length and to have the stool well between them: "what's a Resurrection-Man?"

Mr. Cruncher came to a stop on the pavement before he answered, "How should I know?"

"I thought you knowed everything, father," said the artless boy.

"Hem! Well," returned Mr. Cruncher, going on again, and lifting off his hat to give his spikes free play, "he's a tradesman."

"What's his goods, father?" asked the brisk Young Jerry.

"His goods," said Mr. Cruncher, after turning it over in his mind, "is a branch of Scientific goods."

"Persons' bodies, ain't it, father?" asked the lively boy.

"I believe it is something of that sort," said Mr. Cruncher.

"Oh, father, I should so like to be a Resurrection-Man when I'm quite growed up!"

Mr. Cruncher was soothed, but shook his head in a dubious and moral way. "It depends upon how you dewelop your talents. Be careful to dewelop your talents, and never to say no more than you can help to nobody, and there's no telling at the present time what you may not come to be fit for." As Young Jerry, thus encouraged, went on a few yards in advance, to plant the stool in the shadow of the Bar, Mr. Cruncher added to himself: "Jerry, you honest tradesman, there's hopes wot that boy will yet be a blessing to you, and a recompense to you for his mother!"

XV. Knitting

There had been earlier drinking than usual in the wine-shop of Monsieur Defarge. As early as six o'clock in the morning, sallow faces peeping through its barred windows had descried other faces within, bending over measures of wine. Monsieur Defarge sold a very thin wine at the best of times, but it would seem to have been an unusually thin wine that he sold at this time. A sour wine, moreover, or a souring, for its influence on the mood of those who drank it was to make them gloomy. No vivacious Bacchanalian flame leaped out of the pressed grape of Monsieur Defarge: but, a smouldering fire that burnt in the dark, lay hidden in the dregs of it.

This had been the third morning in succession, on which there had been early drinking at the wine-shop of Monsieur Defarge. It had begun on Monday, and here was Wednesday come. There had been more of early brooding than drinking; for, many men had listened and whispered and slunk about there from the time of the opening of the door, who could not have laid a piece of money on the counter to save their souls. These were to the full as interested in the place, however, as if they could have commanded whole barrels of wine; and they glided from seat to seat, and from corner to corner, swallowing talk in lieu of drink, with greedy looks.

Notwithstanding an unusual flow of company, the master of the wine-shop was not visible. He was not missed; for, nobody who crossed the threshold looked for him, nobody asked for him, nobody wondered to see only Madame Defarge in her seat, presiding over the distribution of wine, with a bowl of battered small coins before her, as much defaced and beaten out of their original impress as the small coinage of humanity from whose ragged pockets they had come.

A suspended interest and a prevalent absence of mind, were perhaps observed by the spies who looked in at the wine-shop, as they looked in at every place, high and low, from the king's palace to the criminal's gaol. Games at cards languished, players at dominoes musingly built towers with them, drinkers drew figures on the tables with spilt drops of wine, Madame Defarge herself picked out the pattern on her sleeve with her toothpick, and saw and heard something inaudible and invisible a long way off.

Thus, Saint Antoine in this vinous feature of his, until midday. It was high noontide, when two dusty men passed through his streets and under his swinging lamps: of whom, one was Monsieur Defarge: the other a mender of roads in a blue cap. All adust and athirst, the two entered the wine-shop. Their arrival had lighted a kind of fire in the breast of Saint Antoine, fast spreading as they came along, which stirred and flickered in flames of faces at most doors and windows. Yet, no one had followed them, and no man spoke when they entered the wine-shop, though the eyes of every man there were turned upon them.

"Good day, gentlemen!" said Monsieur Defarge.

It may have been a signal for loosening the general tongue. It elicited an answering chorus of "Good day!"

"It is bad weather, gentlemen," said Defarge, shaking his head.

Upon which, every man looked at his neighbour, and then all cast down their eyes and sat silent. Except one man, who got up and went out.

"My wife," said Defarge aloud, addressing Madame Defarge: "I have travelled certain leagues with this good mender of roads, called Jacques. I met him—by accident—a day and half's journey out of Paris. He is a good child, this mender of roads, called Jacques. Give him to drink, my wife!"

A second man got up and went out. Madame Defarge set wine before the mender of roads called Jacques, who doffed his blue cap to the company, and drank. In the breast of his blouse he carried some coarse dark bread; he ate of this between whiles, and sat munching and drinking near Madame Defarge's counter. A third man got up and went out.

Defarge refreshed himself with a draught of wine—but, he took less than was given to the stranger, as being himself a man to whom it was no rarity—and stood waiting until the countryman had made his breakfast. He looked at no one present, and no one now looked at him; not even Madame Defarge, who had taken up her knitting, and was at work.

"Have you finished your repast, friend?" he asked, in due season.

"Yes, thank you."

"Come, then! You shall see the apartment that I told you you could occupy. It will suit you to a marvel."

Out of the wine-shop into the street, out of the street into a courtyard, out of the courtyard up a steep staircase, out of the staircase into a garret—formerly the garret where a white-haired man sat on a low bench, stooping forward and very busy, making shoes.

No white-haired man was there now; but, the three men were there who had gone out of the wine-shop singly. And between them and the white-haired man afar off, was the one small link, that they had once looked in at him through the chinks in the wall.

Defarge closed the door carefully, and spoke in a subdued voice:

"Jacques One, Jacques Two, Jacques Three! This is the witness encountered by appointment, by me, Jacques Four. He will tell you all. Speak, Jacques Five!"

The mender of roads, blue cap in hand, wiped his swarthy forehead with it, and said, "Where shall I commence, monsieur?"

"Commence," was Monsieur Defarge's not unreasonable reply, "at the commencement."

"I saw him then, messieurs," began the mender of roads, "a year ago this running summer, underneath the carriage of the Marquis, hanging by the chain. Behold the manner of it. I leaving my work on the road, the sun going to bed, the carriage of the Marquis slowly ascending the hill, he hanging by the chain—like this."

Again the mender of roads went through the whole performance; in which he ought to have been perfect by that time, seeing that it had been the infallible resource and indispensable entertainment of his village during a whole year.

Jacques One struck in, and asked if he had ever seen the man before?

"Never," answered the mender of roads, recovering his perpendicular.

Jacques Three demanded how he afterwards recognised him then?

"By his tall figure," said the mender of roads, softly, and with his finger at his nose. "When Monsieur the Marquis demands that evening, 'Say, what is he like?' I make response, 'Tall as a spectre.'"

"You should have said, short as a dwarf," returned Jacques Two.

"But what did I know? The deed was not then accomplished, neither did he confide in me. Observe! Under those circumstances even, I do not offer my testimony. Monsieur the Marquis indicates me with his finger, standing near our little fountain, and says, 'To me! Bring that rascal!' My faith, messieurs, I offer nothing."

"He is right there, Jacques," murmured Defarge, to him who had interrupted. "Go on!"

"Good!" said the mender of roads, with an air of mystery. "The tall man is lost, and he is sought—how many months? Nine, ten, eleven?"

"No matter, the number," said Defarge. "He is well hidden, but at last he is unluckily found. Go on!"

"I am again at work upon the hill-side, and the sun is again about to go to bed. I am collecting my tools to descend to my cottage down in the village below, where it is already dark, when I raise my eyes, and see coming over the hill six soldiers. In the midst of them is a tall man with his arms bound—tied to his sides—like this!"

With the aid of his indispensable cap, he represented a man with his elbows bound fast at his hips, with cords that were knotted behind him.

"I stand aside, messieurs, by my heap of stones, to see the soldiers and their prisoner pass (for it is a solitary road, that, where any spectacle is well worth looking at), and at first, as they approach, I see no more than that they are six soldiers with a tall man bound, and that they are almost black to my sight—except on the side of the sun going to bed, where they have a red edge, messieurs. Also, I see that their long shadows are on the hollow ridge on the opposite side of the road, and are on the hill above it, and are like the shadows of giants. Also, I see that they are covered with dust, and that the dust moves with them as they come, tramp, tramp! But when they advance quite near to me, I recognise the tall man, and he recognises me. Ah, but he would be well content to precipitate himself over the hill-side once again, as on the evening when he and I first encountered, close to the same spot!"

He described it as if he were there, and it was evident that he saw it vividly; perhaps he had not seen much in his life.

"I do not show the soldiers that I recognise the tall man; he does not show the soldiers that he recognises me; we do it, and we know it, with our eyes. 'Come on!' says the chief of that company, pointing to the village, 'bring him fast to his tomb!' and they bring him faster. I follow. His arms are swelled because of being bound so tight, his wooden shoes are large and clumsy, and he is lame. Because he is lame, and consequently slow, they drive him with their guns—like this!"

He imitated the action of a man's being impelled forward by the butt-ends of muskets.

"As they descend the hill like madmen running a race, he falls. They laugh and pick him up again. His face is bleeding and covered with dust, but he cannot touch it; thereupon they laugh again. They bring him into the village; all the village runs to look; they take him past the mill, and up to the prison; all the village sees the prison gate open in the darkness of the night, and swallow him—like this!"

He opened his mouth as wide as he could, and shut it with a sounding snap of his teeth. Observant of his unwillingness to mar the effect by opening it again, Defarge said, "Go on, Jacques."

"All the village," pursued the mender of roads, on tiptoe and in a low voice, "withdraws; all the village whispers by the fountain; all the village sleeps; all the village dreams of that unhappy one, within the locks and bars of the prison on the crag, and never to come out of it, except to perish. In the morning, with my tools upon my shoulder, eating my morsel of black bread as I go, I make a circuit by the prison, on my way to my work. There I see him, high up, behind the bars of a lofty iron cage, bloody and dusty as last night, looking through. He has no hand free, to wave to me; I dare not call to him; he regards me like a dead man."

Defarge and the three glanced darkly at one another. The looks of all of them were dark, repressed, and revengeful, as they listened to the countryman's story; the manner of all of them, while it was secret, was authoritative too. They had the air of a rough tribunal; Jacques One and Two sitting on the old pallet-bed, each with his chin resting on his hand, and his eyes intent on the road-mender; Jacques Three, equally intent, on one knee behind them, with his agitated hand always gliding over the network of fine nerves about his mouth and nose; Defarge standing between them and the narrator, whom he had stationed in the light of the window, by turns looking from him to them, and from them to him.

"Go on, Jacques," said Defarge.

"He remains up there in his iron cage some days. The village looks at him by stealth, for it is afraid. But it always looks up, from a distance, at the prison on the crag; and in the evening, when the work of the day is achieved and it assembles to gossip at the fountain, all faces are turned towards the prison. Formerly, they were turned towards the posting-house; now, they are turned towards the prison. They whisper at the fountain, that although condemned to death he will not be executed; they say that petitions have been presented in Paris, showing that he was enraged and made mad by the death of his child; they say that a petition has been presented to the King himself. What do I know? It is possible. Perhaps yes, perhaps no."

"Listen then, Jacques," Number One of that name sternly interposed. "Know that a petition was presented to the King and Queen. All here, yourself excepted, saw the King take it, in his carriage in the street, sitting beside the Queen. It is Defarge whom you see here, who, at the hazard of his life, darted out before the horses, with the petition in his hand."

"And once again listen, Jacques!" said the kneeling Number Three: his fingers ever wandering over and over those fine nerves, with a strikingly greedy air, as if he hungered for something—that was neither food nor drink; "the guard, horse and foot, surrounded the petitioner, and struck him blows. You hear?"

"I hear, messieurs."

"Go on then," said Defarge.

"Again; on the other hand, they whisper at the fountain," resumed the countryman, "that he is brought down into our country to be executed on the spot, and that he will very certainly be executed. They even whisper that because he has slain Monseigneur, and because Monseigneur was the father of his tenants—serfs—what you will—he will be executed as a parricide. One old man says at the fountain, that his right hand, armed with the knife, will be burnt off before his face; that, into wounds which will be made in his arms, his breast, and his legs, there will be poured boiling oil, melted lead, hot resin, wax, and sulphur; finally, that he will be torn limb from limb by four strong horses. That old man says, all this was actually done to a prisoner who made an attempt on the life of the late King, Louis Fifteen. But how do I know if he lies? I am not a scholar."

"Listen once again then, Jacques!" said the man with the restless hand and the craving air. "The name of that prisoner was Damiens, and it was all done in open day, in the open streets of this city of Paris; and nothing was more noticed in the vast concourse that saw it done, than the crowd of ladies of quality and fashion, who were full of eager attention to the last—to the last, Jacques, prolonged until nightfall, when he had lost two legs and an arm, and still breathed! And it was done—why, how old are you?"

"Thirty-five," said the mender of roads, who looked sixty.

"It was done when you were more than ten years old; you might have seen it."

"Enough!" said Defarge, with grim impatience. "Long live the Devil! Go on."

"Well! Some whisper this, some whisper that; they speak of nothing else; even the fountain appears to fall to that tune. At length, on Sunday night when all the village is asleep, come soldiers, winding down from the prison, and their guns ring on the stones of the little street. Workmen dig, workmen hammer, soldiers laugh and sing; in the morning, by the fountain, there is raised a gallows forty feet high, poisoning the water."

The mender of roads looked *through* rather than *at* the low ceiling, and pointed as if he saw the gallows somewhere in the sky.

"All work is stopped, all assemble there, nobody leads the cows out, the cows are there with the rest. At midday, the roll of drums. Soldiers have marched into the prison in the night, and he is in the midst of many soldiers. He is bound as before, and in his mouth there is a gag—tied so, with a tight string, making him look almost as if he laughed." He suggested it, by creasing his face with his two thumbs, from the corners of his mouth to his ears. "On the top of the gallows is fixed the knife, blade upwards, with its point in the air. He is hanged there forty feet high—and is left hanging, poisoning the water."

They looked at one another, as he used his blue cap to wipe his face, on which the perspiration had started afresh while he recalled the spectacle.

"It is frightful, messieurs. How can the women and the children draw water! Who can gossip of an evening, under that shadow! Under it, have I said? When I left the village, Monday evening as the sun was going to bed, and looked back from the hill, the shadow struck across the church, across the mill, across the prison—seemed to strike across the earth, messieurs, to where the sky rests upon it!"

The hungry man gnawed one of his fingers as he looked at the other three, and his finger quivered with the craving that was on him.

"That's all, messieurs. I left at sunset (as I had been warned to do), and I walked on, that night and half next day, until I met (as I was warned I should) this comrade. With him, I came on, now riding and now walking, through the rest of yesterday and through last night. And here you see me!"

After a gloomy silence, the first Jacques said, "Good! You have acted and recounted faithfully. Will you wait for us a little, outside the door?"

"Very willingly," said the mender of roads. Whom Defarge escorted to the top of the stairs, and, leaving seated there, returned.

The three had risen, and their heads were together when he came back to the garret.

"How say you, Jacques?" demanded Number One. "To be registered?"

"To be registered, as doomed to destruction," returned Defarge.

"Magnificent!" croaked the man with the craving.

"The chateau, and all the race?" inquired the first.

"The chateau and all the race," returned Defarge. "Extermination."

The hungry man repeated, in a rapturous croak, "Magnificent!" and began gnawing another finger.

"Are you sure," asked Jacques Two, of Defarge, "that no embarrassment can arise from our manner of keeping the register? Without doubt it is safe, for no one beyond ourselves can decipher it; but shall we always be able to decipher it—or, I ought to say, will she?"

"Jacques," returned Defarge, drawing himself up, "if madame my wife undertook to keep the register in her memory alone, she would not lose a word of it—not a syllable of it. Knitted, in her own stitches and her own symbols, it will always be as plain to her as the sun. Confide in Madame Defarge. It would be easier for the weakest poltroon that lives, to erase himself from existence, than to erase one letter of his name or crimes from the knitted register of Madame Defarge."

There was a murmur of confidence and approval, and then the man who hungered, asked: "Is this rustic to be sent back soon? I hope so. He is very simple; is he not a little dangerous?"

"He knows nothing," said Defarge; "at least nothing more than would easily elevate himself to a gallows of the same height. I charge myself with him; let him remain with me; I will take care of him, and set him on his road. He wishes to see the fine world—the King, the Queen, and Court; let him see them on Sunday."

"What?" exclaimed the hungry man, staring. "Is it a good sign, that he wishes to see Royalty and Nobility?"

"Jacques," said Defarge; "judiciously show a cat milk, if you wish her to thirst for it. Judiciously show a dog his natural prey, if you wish him to bring it down one day."

Nothing more was said, and the mender of roads, being found already dozing on the topmost stair, was advised to lay himself down on the pallet-bed and take some rest. He needed no persuasion, and was soon asleep.

Worse quarters than Defarge's wine-shop, could easily have been found in Paris for a provincial slave of that degree. Saving for a mysterious dread of madame by which he was constantly haunted, his life was very new and agreeable. But, madame sat all day at her counter, so expressly unconscious of him, and so particularly determined not to perceive that his being there had any connection with anything below the surface, that he shook in his wooden shoes whenever his eye lighted on her. For, he contended with himself that it was impossible to foresee what that lady might pretend next; and he felt assured that if she should take it into her brightly ornamented head to pretend that she had seen him do a murder and afterwards flay the victim, she would infallibly go through with it until the play was played out.

Therefore, when Sunday came, the mender of roads was not enchanted (though he said he was) to find that madame was to accompany monsieur and himself to Versailles. It was additionally disconcerting to have madame knitting all the way there, in a public conveyance; it was additionally disconcerting yet, to have madame in the crowd in the afternoon, still with her knitting in her hands as the crowd waited to see the carriage of the King and Queen.

"You work hard, madame," said a man near her.

"Yes," answered Madame Defarge; "I have a good deal to do."

"What do you make, madame?"

"Many things."

"For instance—"

"For instance," returned Madame Defarge, composedly, "shrouds."

The man moved a little further away, as soon as he could, and the mender of roads fanned himself with his blue cap: feeling it mightily close and oppressive. If he needed a King and Queen to restore him, he was fortunate in having his remedy at hand; for, soon the large-faced King and the fair-faced Queen came in their golden coach, attended by the shining Bull's Eye of their Court, a glittering multitude of laughing ladies and fine lords; and in jewels and silks and powder and splendour and elegantly spurning figures and handsomely disdainful faces of both sexes, the mender of roads bathed himself, so much to his temporary intoxication, that he cried Long live the King, Long live the Queen, Long live everybody and everything! as if he had never heard of ubiquitous Jacques in his time. Then, there were gardens, courtyards, terraces, fountains, green banks, more King and Queen, more Bull's Eye, more lords and ladies, more Long live they all! until he absolutely wept with sentiment. During the whole of this scene, which lasted some three hours, he had plenty of shouting and weeping and sentimental company, and throughout Defarge held him by the collar, as if to restrain him from flying at the objects of his brief devotion and tearing them to pieces.

"Bravo!" said Defarge, clapping him on the back when it was over, like a patron; "you are a good boy!"

The mender of roads was now coming to himself, and was mistrustful of having made a mistake in his late demonstrations; but no.

"You are the fellow we want," said Defarge, in his ear; "you make these fools believe that it will last for ever. Then, they are the more insolent, and it is the nearer ended."

"Hey!" cried the mender of roads, reflectively; "that's true."

"These fools know nothing. While they despise your breath, and would stop it for ever and ever, in you or in a hundred like you rather than in one of their own horses or dogs, they only know what your breath tells them. Let it deceive them, then, a little longer; it cannot deceive them too much."

Madame Defarge looked superciliously at the client, and nodded in confirmation.

"As to you," said she, "you would shout and shed tears for anything, if it made a show and a noise. Say! Would you not?"

"Truly, madame, I think so. For the moment."

"If you were shown a great heap of dolls, and were set upon them to pluck them to pieces and despoil them for your own advantage, you would pick out the richest and gayest. Say! Would you not?"

"Truly yes, madame."

"Yes. And if you were shown a flock of birds, unable to fly, and were set upon them to strip them of their feathers for your own advantage, you would set upon the birds of the finest feathers; would you not?"

"It is true, madame."

"You have seen both dolls and birds to-day," said Madame Defarge, with a wave of her hand towards the place where they had last been apparent; "now, go home!"

XVI. Still Knitting

Madame Defarge and monsieur her husband returned amicably to the bosom of Saint Antoine, while a speck in a blue cap toiled through the darkness, and through the dust, and down the weary miles of avenue by the wayside, slowly tending towards that point of the compass where the chateau of Monsieur the Marquis, now in his grave, listened to the whispering trees. Such ample leisure had the stone faces, now, for listening to the trees and to the fountain, that the few village scarecrows who, in their quest for herbs to eat and fragments of dead stick to burn, strayed within sight of the great stone courtyard and terrace staircase, had it borne in upon their starved fancy that the expression of the faces was altered. A rumour just lived in the village—had a faint and bare existence there, as its people had—that when the knife struck home, the faces changed, from faces of pride to faces of anger and pain; also, that when that dangling figure was hauled up forty feet above the fountain, they changed again, and bore a cruel look of being avenged, which they would henceforth bear for ever. In the stone face over the great window of the bed-chamber where the murder was done, two fine dints were pointed out in the sculptured nose, which everybody recognised, and which nobody had seen of old; and on the scarce occasions when two or three ragged peasants emerged from the crowd to take a hurried peep at Monsieur the Marquis petrified, a skinny finger would not have pointed to it for a minute, before they all started away among the moss and leaves, like the more fortunate hares who could find a living there.

Chateau and hut, stone face and dangling figure, the red stain on the stone floor, and the pure water in the village well—thousands of acres of land—a whole province of France—all France itself—lay under the night sky, concentrated into a faint hair-breadth line. So does a whole world, with all its greatnesses and littlenesses, lie in a twinkling star. And as mere human knowledge can split a ray of light and analyse the manner of its composition, so, sublimer intelligences may read in the feeble shining of this earth of ours, every thought and act, every vice and virtue, of every responsible creature on it.

The Defarges, husband and wife, came lumbering under the starlight, in their public vehicle, to that gate of Paris whereunto their journey naturally tended. There was the usual stoppage at the barrier guardhouse, and the usual lanterns came glancing forth for the usual examination and inquiry. Monsieur Defarge alighted; knowing one or two of the soldiery there, and one of the police. The latter he was intimate with, and affectionately embraced.

When Saint Antoine had again enfolded the Defarges in his dusky wings, and they, having finally alighted near the Saint's boundaries, were picking their way on foot through the black mud and offal of his streets, Madame Defarge spoke to her husband:

"Say then, my friend; what did Jacques of the police tell thee?"

"Very little to-night, but all he knows. There is another spy commissioned for our quarter. There may be many more, for all that he can say, but he knows of one."

"Eh well!" said Madame Defarge, raising her eyebrows with a cool business air. "It is necessary to register him. How do they call that man?"

"He is English."

"So much the better. His name?"

"Barsad," said Defarge, making it French by pronunciation. But, he had been so careful to get it accurately, that he then spelt it with perfect correctness.

"Barsad," repeated madame. "Good. Christian name?"

"John."

"John Barsad," repeated madame, after murmuring it once to herself. "Good. His appearance; is it known?"

"Age, about forty years; height, about five feet nine; black hair; complexion dark; generally, rather handsome visage; eyes dark, face thin, long, and sallow; nose aquiline, but not straight, having a peculiar inclination towards the left cheek; expression, therefore, sinister."

"Eh my faith. It is a portrait!" said madame, laughing. "He shall be registered to-morrow."

They turned into the wine-shop, which was closed (for it was midnight), and where Madame Defarge immediately took her post at her desk, counted the small moneys that had been taken during her absence, examined the stock, went through the entries in the book, made other entries of her own, checked the serving man in every possible way, and finally dismissed him to bed. Then she turned out the contents of the bowl of money for the second time, and began knotting them up in her handkerchief, in a chain of separate knots, for safe keeping through the night. All this while, Defarge, with his pipe in his mouth, walked up and down, complacently admiring, but never interfering; in which condition, indeed, as to the business and his domestic affairs, he walked up and down through life.

The night was hot, and the shop, close shut and surrounded by so foul a neighbourhood, was ill-smelling. Monsieur Defarge's olfactory sense was by no means delicate, but the stock of wine smelt much stronger than it ever tasted, and so did the stock of rum and brandy and aniseed. He whiffed the compound of scents away, as he put down his smoked-out pipe.

"You are fatigued," said madame, raising her glance as she knotted the money. "There are only the usual odours."

"I am a little tired," her husband acknowledged.

"You are a little depressed, too," said madame, whose quick eyes had never been so intent on the accounts, but they had had a ray or two for him. "Oh, the men, the men!"

"But my dear!" began Defarge.

"But my dear!" repeated madame, nodding firmly; "but my dear! You are faint of heart to-night, my dear!"

"Well, then," said Defarge, as if a thought were wrung out of his breast, "it *is* a long time."

"It is a long time," repeated his wife; "and when is it not a long time? Vengeance and retribution require a long time; it is the rule."

"It does not take a long time to strike a man with Lightning," said Defarge.

"How long," demanded madame, composedly, "does it take to make and store the lightning? Tell me."

Defarge raised his head thoughtfully, as if there were something in that too.

"It does not take a long time," said madame, "for an earthquake to swallow a town. Eh well! Tell me how long it takes to prepare the earthquake?"

"A long time, I suppose," said Defarge.

"But when it is ready, it takes place, and grinds to pieces everything before it. In the meantime, it is always preparing, though it is not seen or heard. That is your consolation. Keep it."

She tied a knot with flashing eyes, as if it throttled a foe.

"I tell thee," said madame, extending her right hand, for emphasis, "that although it is a long time on the road, it is on the road and coming. I tell thee it never retreats, and never stops. I tell thee it is always advancing. Look around and consider the lives of all the world that we know, consider the faces of all the world that we know, consider the rage and discontent to which the Jacquerie addresses itself with more and more of certainty every hour. Can such things last? Bah! I mock you."

"My brave wife," returned Defarge, standing before her with his head a little bent, and his hands clasped at his back, like a docile and attentive pupil before his catechist, "I do not question all this. But it has lasted a long time, and it is possible—you know well, my wife, it is possible—that it may not come, during our lives."

"Eh well! How then?" demanded madame, tying another knot, as if there were another enemy strangled.

"Well!" said Defarge, with a half complaining and half apologetic shrug. "We shall not see the triumph."

"We shall have helped it," returned madame, with her extended hand in strong action. "Nothing that we do, is done in vain. I believe, with all my soul, that we shall see the triumph. But even if not, even if I knew certainly not, show me the neck of an aristocrat and tyrant, and still I would—"

Then madame, with her teeth set, tied a very terrible knot indeed.

"Hold!" cried Defarge, reddening a little as if he felt charged with cowardice; "I too, my dear, will stop at nothing."

"Yes! But it is your weakness that you sometimes need to see your victim and your opportunity, to sustain you. Sustain yourself without that. When the time comes, let loose a tiger and a devil; but wait for the time with the tiger and the devil chained—not shown—yet always ready."

Madame enforced the conclusion of this piece of advice by striking her little counter with her chain of money as if she knocked its brains out, and then gathering the heavy handkerchief under her arm in a serene manner, and observing that it was time to go to bed.

Next noontide saw the admirable woman in her usual place in the wine-shop, knitting away assiduously. A rose lay beside her, and if she now and then glanced at the flower, it was with no infraction of her usual preoccupied air. There were a few customers, drinking or not drinking, standing or seated, sprinkled about. The day was very hot, and heaps of flies, who were extending their inquisitive and adventurous perquisitions into all the glutinous little glasses near madame, fell dead at the bottom. Their decease made no impression on the other flies out promenading, who looked at them in the coolest manner (as if they themselves were elephants, or something as far removed), until they met the same fate. Curious to consider how heedless flies are!—perhaps they thought as much at Court that sunny summer day.

A figure entering at the door threw a shadow on Madame Defarge which she felt to be a new one. She laid down her knitting, and began to pin her rose in her head-dress, before she looked at the figure.

It was curious. The moment Madame Defarge took up the rose, the customers ceased talking, and began gradually to drop out of the wine-shop.

"Good day, madame," said the new-comer.

"Good day, monsieur."

She said it aloud, but added to herself, as she resumed her knitting: "Hah! Good day, age about forty, height about five feet nine, black hair, generally rather handsome visage, complexion dark, eyes dark, thin, long and sallow face, aquiline nose but not straight, having a peculiar inclination towards the left cheek which imparts a sinister expression! Good day, one and all!"

"Have the goodness to give me a little glass of old cognac, and a mouthful of cool fresh water, madame."

Madame complied with a polite air.

"Marvellous cognac this, madame!"

It was the first time it had ever been so complimented, and Madame Defarge knew enough of its antecedents to know better. She said, however, that the cognac was flattered, and took up her knitting. The visitor watched her fingers for a few moments, and took the opportunity of observing the place in general.

"You knit with great skill, madame."

"I am accustomed to it."

"A pretty pattern too!"

"*You* think so?" said madame, looking at him with a smile.

"Decidedly. May one ask what it is for?"

"Pastime," said madame, still looking at him with a smile while her fingers moved nimbly.

"Not for use?"

"That depends. I may find a use for it one day. If I do—Well," said madame, drawing a breath and nodding her head with a stern kind of coquetry, "I'll use it!"

It was remarkable; but, the taste of Saint Antoine seemed to be decidedly opposed to a rose on the head-dress of Madame Defarge. Two men had entered separately, and had been about to order drink, when, catching sight of that novelty, they faltered, made a pretence of looking about as if for some friend who was not there, and went away. Nor, of those who had been there when this visitor entered, was there one left. They had all dropped off. The spy had kept his eyes open, but had been able to detect no sign. They had lounged away in a poverty-stricken, purposeless, accidental manner, quite natural and unimpeachable.

"*John,*" thought madame, checking off her work as her fingers knitted, and her eyes looked at the stranger. "Stay long enough, and I shall knit 'BARSAD' before you go."

"You have a husband, madame?"

"I have."

"Children?"

"No children."

"Business seems bad?"

"Business is very bad; the people are so poor."

"Ah, the unfortunate, miserable people! So oppressed, too—as you say."

"As *you* say," madame retorted, correcting him, and deftly knitting an extra something into his name that boded him no good.

"Pardon me; certainly it was I who said so, but you naturally think so. Of course."

"*I* think?" returned madame, in a high voice. "I and my husband have enough to do to keep this wine-shop open, without thinking. All we think, here, is how to live. That is the subject *we* think of, and it gives us, from morning to night, enough to think about, without embarrassing our heads concerning others. *I* think for others? No, no."

The spy, who was there to pick up any crumbs he could find or make, did not allow his baffled state to express itself in his sinister face; but, stood with an air of gossiping gallantry, leaning his elbow on Madame Defarge's little counter, and occasionally sipping his cognac.

"A bad business this, madame, of Gaspard's execution. Ah! the poor Gaspard!" With a sigh of great compassion.

"My faith!" returned madame, coolly and lightly, "if people use knives for such purposes, they have to pay for it. He knew beforehand what the price of his luxury was; he has paid the price."

"I believe," said the spy, dropping his soft voice to a tone that invited confidence, and expressing an injured revolutionary susceptibility in every muscle of his wicked face: "I believe there is much compassion and anger in this neighbourhood, touching the poor fellow? Between ourselves."

"Is there?" asked madame, vacantly.

"Is there not?"

"—Here is my husband!" said Madame Defarge.

As the keeper of the wine-shop entered at the door, the spy saluted him by touching his hat, and saying, with an engaging smile, "Good day, Jacques!" Defarge stopped short, and stared at him.

"Good day, Jacques!" the spy repeated; with not quite so much confidence, or quite so easy a smile under the stare.

"You deceive yourself, monsieur," returned the keeper of the wine-shop. "You mistake me for another. That is not my name. I am Ernest Defarge."

"It is all the same," said the spy, airily, but discomfited too: "good day!"

"Good day!" answered Defarge, drily.

"I was saying to madame, with whom I had the pleasure of chatting when you entered, that they tell me there is—and no wonder!—much sympathy and anger in Saint Antoine, touching the unhappy fate of poor Gaspard."

"No one has told me so," said Defarge, shaking his head. "I know nothing of it."

Having said it, he passed behind the little counter, and stood with his hand on the back of his wife's chair, looking over that barrier at the person to whom they were both opposed, and whom either of them would have shot with the greatest satisfaction.

The spy, well used to his business, did not change his unconscious attitude, but drained his little glass of cognac, took a sip of fresh water, and asked for another glass of cognac. Madame Defarge poured it out for him, took to her knitting again, and hummed a little song over it.

"You seem to know this quarter well; that is to say, better than I do?" observed Defarge.

"Not at all, but I hope to know it better. I am so profoundly interested in its miserable inhabitants."

"Hah!" muttered Defarge.

"The pleasure of conversing with you, Monsieur Defarge, recalls to me," pursued the spy, "that I have the honour of cherishing some interesting associations with your name."

"Indeed!" said Defarge, with much indifference.

"Yes, indeed. When Doctor Manette was released, you, his old domestic, had the charge of him, I know. He was delivered to you. You see I am informed of the circumstances?"

"Such is the fact, certainly," said Defarge. He had had it conveyed to him, in an accidental touch of his wife's elbow as she knitted and warbled, that he would do best to answer, but always with brevity.

"It was to you," said the spy, "that his daughter came; and it was from your care that his daughter took him, accompanied by a neat brown monsieur; how is he called?—in a little wig—Lorry—of the bank of Tellson and Company—over to England."

"Such is the fact," repeated Defarge.

"Very interesting remembrances!" said the spy. "I have known Doctor Manette and his daughter, in England."

"Yes?" said Defarge.

"You don't hear much about them now?" said the spy.

"No," said Defarge.

"In effect," madame struck in, looking up from her work and her little song, "we never hear about them. We received the news of their safe arrival, and perhaps another letter, or perhaps two; but, since then, they have gradually taken their road in life—we, ours—and we have held no correspondence."

"Perfectly so, madame," replied the spy. "She is going to be married."

"Going?" echoed madame. "She was pretty enough to have been married long ago. You English are cold, it seems to me."

"Oh! You know I am English."

"I perceive your tongue is," returned madame; "and what the tongue is, I suppose the man is."

He did not take the identification as a compliment; but he made the best of it, and turned it off with a laugh. After sipping his cognac to the end, he added:

"Yes, Miss Manette is going to be married. But not to an Englishman; to one who, like herself, is French by birth. And speaking of Gaspard (ah, poor

Gaspard! It was cruel, cruel!), it is a curious thing that she is going to marry the nephew of Monsieur the Marquis, for whom Gaspard was exalted to that height of so many feet; in other words, the present Marquis. But he lives unknown in England, he is no Marquis there; he is Mr. Charles Darnay. D'Aulnais is the name of his mother's family."

Madame Defarge knitted steadily, but the intelligence had a palpable effect upon her husband. Do what he would, behind the little counter, as to the striking of a light and the lighting of his pipe, he was troubled, and his hand was not trustworthy. The spy would have been no spy if he had failed to see it, or to record it in his mind.

Having made, at least, this one hit, whatever it might prove to be worth, and no customers coming in to help him to any other, Mr. Barsad paid for what he had drunk, and took his leave: taking occasion to say, in a genteel manner, before he departed, that he looked forward to the pleasure of seeing Monsieur and Madame Defarge again. For some minutes after he had emerged into the outer presence of Saint Antoine, the husband and wife remained exactly as he had left them, lest he should come back.

"Can it be true," said Defarge, in a low voice, looking down at his wife as he stood smoking with his hand on the back of her chair: "what he has said of Ma'amselle Manette?"

"As he has said it," returned madame, lifting her eyebrows a little, "it is probably false. But it may be true."

"If it is—" Defarge began, and stopped.

"If it is?" repeated his wife.

"—And if it does come, while we live to see it triumph—I hope, for her sake, Destiny will keep her husband out of France."

"Her husband's destiny," said Madame Defarge, with her usual composure, "will take him where he is to go, and will lead him to the end that is to end him. That is all I know."

"But it is very strange—now, at least, is it not very strange"—said Defarge, rather pleading with his wife to induce her to admit it, "that, after all our sympathy for Monsieur her father, and herself, her husband's name should be proscribed under your hand at this moment, by the side of that infernal dog's who has just left us?"

"Stranger things than that will happen when it does come," answered madame. "I have them both here, of a certainty; and they are both here for their merits; that is enough."

She rolled up her knitting when she had said those words, and presently took the rose out of the handkerchief that was wound about her head. Either Saint Antoine had an instinctive sense that the objectionable decoration was gone, or Saint Antoine was on the watch for its disappearance; howbeit, the Saint took courage to lounge in, very shortly afterwards, and the wine-shop recovered its habitual aspect.

In the evening, at which season of all others Saint Antoine turned himself inside out, and sat on door-steps and window-ledges, and came to the corners of vile streets and courts, for a breath of air, Madame Defarge with her work in her hand was accustomed to pass from place to place and from group to group: a Missionary—there were many like her—such as the world will do well never to breed again. All the women knitted. They knitted worthless things; but, the mechanical work was a mechanical substitute for eating and drinking; the hands moved for the jaws and the digestive apparatus: if the bony fingers had been still, the stomachs would have been more famine-pinched.

But, as the fingers went, the eyes went, and the thoughts. And as Madame Defarge moved on from group to group, all three went quicker and fiercer among every little knot of women that she had spoken with, and left behind.

Her husband smoked at his door, looking after her with admiration. "A great woman," said he, "a strong woman, a grand woman, a frightfully grand woman!"

Darkness closed around, and then came the ringing of church bells and the distant beating of the military drums in the Palace Courtyard, as the women sat knitting, knitting. Darkness encompassed them. Another darkness was closing in as surely, when the church bells, then ringing pleasantly in many an airy steeple over France, should be melted into thundering cannon; when the military drums should be beating to drown a wretched voice, that night all potent as the voice of Power and Plenty, Freedom and Life. So much was closing in about the women who sat knitting, knitting, that they their very selves were closing in around a structure yet unbuilt, where they were to sit knitting, knitting, counting dropping heads.

XVII. One Night

Never did the sun go down with a brighter glory on the quiet corner in Soho, than one memorable evening when the Doctor and his daughter sat under the plane-tree together. Never did the moon rise with a milder radiance over great London, than on that night when it found them still seated under the tree, and shone upon their faces through its leaves.

Lucie was to be married to-morrow. She had reserved this last evening for her father, and they sat alone under the plane-tree.

"You are happy, my dear father?"

"Quite, my child."

They had said little, though they had been there a long time. When it was yet light enough to work and read, she had neither engaged herself in her usual work, nor had she read to him. She had employed herself in both ways, at his side under the tree, many and many a time; but, this time was not quite like any other, and nothing could make it so.

"And I am very happy to-night, dear father. I am deeply happy in the love that Heaven has so blessed—my love for Charles, and Charles's love for me. But, if my life were not to be still consecrated to you, or if my marriage were so arranged as that it would part us, even by the length of a few of these streets, I should be more unhappy and self-reproachful now than I can tell you. Even as it is—"

Even as it was, she could not command her voice.

In the sad moonlight, she clasped him by the neck, and laid her face upon his breast. In the moonlight which is always sad, as the light of the sun itself is—as the light called human life is—at its coming and its going.

"Dearest dear! Can you tell me, this last time, that you feel quite, quite sure, no new affections of mine, and no new duties of mine, will ever interpose between us? *I* know it well, but do you know it? In your own heart, do you feel quite certain?"

Her father answered, with a cheerful firmness of conviction he could scarcely have assumed, "Quite sure, my darling! More than that," he added, as he tenderly kissed her: "my future is far brighter, Lucie, seen through your marriage, than it could have been—nay, than it ever was—without it."

"If I could hope *that*, my father!—"

"Believe it, love! Indeed it is so. Consider how natural and how plain it is, my dear, that it should be so. You, devoted and young, cannot fully appreciate the anxiety I have felt that your life should not be wasted—"

She moved her hand towards his lips, but he took it in his, and repeated the word.

"—wasted, my child—should not be wasted, struck aside from the natural order of things—for my sake. Your unselfishness cannot entirely comprehend how much my mind has gone on this; but, only ask yourself, how could my happiness be perfect, while yours was incomplete?"

"If I had never seen Charles, my father, I should have been quite happy with you."

He smiled at her unconscious admission that she would have been unhappy without Charles, having seen him; and replied:

"My child, you did see him, and it is Charles. If it had not been Charles, it would have been another. Or, if it had been no other, I should have been the cause, and then the dark part of my life would have cast its shadow beyond myself, and would have fallen on you."

It was the first time, except at the trial, of her ever hearing him refer to the period of his suffering. It gave her a strange and new sensation while his words were in her ears; and she remembered it long afterwards.

"See!" said the Doctor of Beauvais, raising his hand towards the moon. "I have looked at her from my prison-window, when I could not bear her light. I have looked at her when it has been such torture to me to think of her shining upon what I had lost, that I have beaten my head against my prison-walls. I have looked at her, in a state so dull and lethargic, that I have thought of nothing but the number of horizontal lines I could draw across her at the full, and the number of perpendicular lines with which I could intersect them." He added in his inward and pondering manner, as he looked at the moon, "It was twenty either way, I remember, and the twentieth was difficult to squeeze in."

The strange thrill with which she heard him go back to that time, deepened as he dwelt upon it; but, there was nothing to shock her in the manner of his reference. He only seemed to contrast his present cheerfulness and felicity with the dire endurance that was over.

"I have looked at her, speculating thousands of times upon the unborn child from whom I had been rent. Whether it was alive. Whether it had been born alive, or the poor mother's shock had killed it. Whether it was a son who would some day avenge his father. (There was a time in my imprisonment, when my desire for vengeance was unbearable.) Whether it was a son who would never know his father's story; who might even live to weigh the possibility of his father's having disappeared of his own will and act. Whether it was a daughter who would grow to be a woman."

She drew closer to him, and kissed his cheek and his hand.

"I have pictured my daughter, to myself, as perfectly forgetful of me—rather, altogether ignorant of me, and unconscious of me. I have cast up the years of her age, year after year. I have seen her married to a man who knew nothing of my fate. I have altogether perished from the remembrance of the living, and in the next generation my place was a blank."

"My father! Even to hear that you had such thoughts of a daughter who never existed, strikes to my heart as if I had been that child."

"You, Lucie? It is out of the Consolation and restoration you have brought to me, that these remembrances arise, and pass between us and the moon on this last night.—What did I say just now?"

"She knew nothing of you. She cared nothing for you."

"So! But on other moonlight nights, when the sadness and the silence have touched me in a different way—have affected me with something as like a sorrowful sense of peace, as any emotion that had pain for its foundations could—I have imagined her as coming to me in my cell, and leading me out into the freedom beyond the fortress. I have seen her image in the moonlight often, as I now see you; except that I never held her in my arms; it stood between the little grated window and the door. But, you understand that that was not the child I am speaking of?"

"The figure was not; the—the—image; the fancy?"

"No. That was another thing. It stood before my disturbed sense of sight, but it never moved. The phantom that my mind pursued, was another and more real child. Of her outward appearance I know no more than that she was like her mother. The other had that likeness too—as you have—but was not the same. Can you follow me, Lucie? Hardly, I think? I doubt you must have been a solitary prisoner to understand these perplexed distinctions."

His collected and calm manner could not prevent her blood from running cold, as he thus tried to anatomise his old condition.

"In that more peaceful state, I have imagined her, in the moonlight, coming to me and taking me out to show me that the home of her married life was full of her loving remembrance of her lost father. My picture was in her room, and I was in her prayers. Her life was active, cheerful, useful; but my poor history pervaded it all."

"I was that child, my father, I was not half so good, but in my love that was I."

"And she showed me her children," said the Doctor of Beauvais, "and they had heard of me, and had been taught to pity me. When they passed a prison of the State, they kept far from its frowning walls, and looked up at its bars, and spoke in whispers. She could never deliver me; I imagined that she always brought me back after showing me such things. But then, blessed with the relief of tears, I fell upon my knees, and blessed her."

"I am that child, I hope, my father. O my dear, my dear, will you bless me as fervently to-morrow?"

"Lucie, I recall these old troubles in the reason that I have to-night for loving you better than words can tell, and thanking God for my great happiness. My thoughts, when they were wildest, never rose near the happiness that I have known with you, and that we have before us."

He embraced her, solemnly commended her to Heaven, and humbly thanked Heaven for having bestowed her on him. By-and-bye, they went into the house.

There was no one bidden to the marriage but Mr. Lorry; there was even to be no bridesmaid but the gaunt Miss Pross. The marriage was to make no change in their place of residence; they had been able to extend it, by taking to themselves the upper rooms formerly belonging to the apocryphal invisible lodger, and they desired nothing more.

Doctor Manette was very cheerful at the little supper. They were only three at table, and Miss Pross made the third. He regretted that Charles was not there; was more than half disposed to object to the loving little plot that kept him away; and drank to him affectionately.

So, the time came for him to bid Lucie good night, and they separated. But, in the stillness of the third hour of the morning, Lucie came downstairs again, and stole into his room; not free from unshaped fears, beforehand.

All things, however, were in their places; all was quiet; and he lay asleep, his white hair picturesque on the untroubled pillow, and his hands lying quiet on the coverlet. She put her needless candle in the shadow at a distance, crept up to his bed, and put her lips to his; then, leaned over him, and looked at him.

Into his handsome face, the bitter waters of captivity had worn; but, he covered up their tracks with a determination so strong, that he held the mastery of them even in his sleep. A more remarkable face in its quiet, resolute, and guarded struggle with an unseen assailant, was not to be beheld in all the wide dominions of sleep, that night.

She timidly laid her hand on his dear breast, and put up a prayer that she might ever be as true to him as her love aspired to be, and as his sorrows deserved. Then, she withdrew her hand, and kissed his lips once more, and went away. So, the sunrise came, and the shadows of the leaves of the plane-tree moved upon his face, as softly as her lips had moved in praying for him.

XVIII. Nine Days

The marriage-day was shining brightly, and they were ready outside the closed door of the Doctor's room, where he was speaking with Charles Darnay. They were ready to go to church; the beautiful bride, Mr. Lorry, and Miss Pross—to whom the event, through a gradual process of reconcilement to the inevitable, would have been one of absolute bliss, but for the yet lingering consideration that her brother Solomon should have been the bridegroom.

"And so," said Mr. Lorry, who could not sufficiently admire the bride, and who had been moving round her to take in every point of her quiet, pretty dress; "and so it was for this, my sweet Lucie, that I brought you across the Channel, such a baby! Lord bless me! How little I thought what I was doing! How lightly I valued the obligation I was conferring on my friend Mr. Charles!"

"You didn't mean it," remarked the matter-of-fact Miss Pross, "and therefore how could you know it? Nonsense!"

"Really? Well; but don't cry," said the gentle Mr. Lorry.

"I am not crying," said Miss Pross; "*you* are."

"I, my Pross?" (By this time, Mr. Lorry dared to be pleasant with her, on occasion.)

"You were, just now; I saw you do it, and I don't wonder at it. Such a present of plate as you have made 'em, is enough to bring tears into anybody's eyes. There's not a fork or a spoon in the collection," said Miss Pross, "that I didn't cry over, last night after the box came, till I couldn't see it."

"I am highly gratified," said Mr. Lorry, "though, upon my honour, I had no intention of rendering those trifling articles of remembrance invisible to any one. Dear me! This is an occasion that makes a man speculate on all he has lost. Dear, dear, dear! To think that there might have been a Mrs. Lorry, any time these fifty years almost!"

"Not at all!" From Miss Pross.

"You think there never might have been a Mrs. Lorry?" asked the gentleman of that name.

"Pooh!" rejoined Miss Pross; "you were a bachelor in your cradle."

"Well!" observed Mr. Lorry, beamingly adjusting his little wig, "that seems probable, too."

"And you were cut out for a bachelor," pursued Miss Pross, "before you were put in your cradle."

"Then, I think," said Mr. Lorry, "that I was very unhandsomely dealt with, and that I ought to have had a voice in the selection of my pattern. Enough! Now, my dear Lucie," drawing his arm soothingly round her waist, "I hear them moving in the next room, and Miss Pross and I, as two formal folks of business, are anxious not to lose the final opportunity of saying something to you that you wish to hear. You leave your good father, my dear, in hands as earnest and as loving as your own; he shall be taken every conceivable care of; during the next fortnight, while you are in Warwickshire and thereabouts, even Tellson's shall go to the wall (comparatively speaking) before him. And when, at the fortnight's end, he comes to join you and your beloved husband, on your other fortnight's trip in Wales, you shall say that we have sent him to you in the best health and in the happiest frame. Now, I hear Somebody's step coming to the door. Let me kiss my dear girl with an old-fashioned bachelor blessing, before Somebody comes to claim his own."

For a moment, he held the fair face from him to look at the well-remembered expression on the forehead, and then laid the bright golden hair against his little brown wig, with a genuine tenderness and delicacy which, if such things be old-fashioned, were as old as Adam.

The door of the Doctor's room opened, and he came out with Charles Darnay. He was so deadly pale—which had not been the case when they went in together—that no vestige of colour was to be seen in his face. But, in the composure of his manner he was unaltered, except that to the shrewd glance of Mr. Lorry it disclosed some shadowy indication that the old air of avoidance and dread had lately passed over him, like a cold wind.

He gave his arm to his daughter, and took her down-stairs to the chariot which Mr. Lorry had hired in honour of the day. The rest followed in another carriage, and soon, in a neighbouring church, where no strange eyes looked on, Charles Darnay and Lucie Manette were happily married.

Besides the glancing tears that shone among the smiles of the little group when it was done, some diamonds, very bright and sparkling, glanced on the bride's hand, which were newly released from the dark obscurity of one of Mr. Lorry's pockets. They returned home to breakfast, and all went well, and in due course the golden hair that had mingled with the poor shoemaker's white locks in the Paris garret, were mingled with them again in the morning sunlight, on the threshold of the door at parting.

It was a hard parting, though it was not for long. But her father cheered her, and said at last, gently disengaging himself from her enfolding arms, "Take her, Charles! She is yours!"

And her agitated hand waved to them from a chaise window, and she was gone.

The corner being out of the way of the idle and curious, and the preparations having been very simple and few, the Doctor, Mr. Lorry, and Miss Pross, were left quite alone. It was when they turned into the welcome shade of the cool old hall, that Mr. Lorry observed a great change to have come over the Doctor; as if the golden arm uplifted there, had struck him a poisoned blow.

He had naturally repressed much, and some revulsion might have been expected in him when the occasion for repression was gone. But, it was the old scared lost look that troubled Mr. Lorry; and through his absent manner of clasping his head and drearily wandering away into his own room when they got up-stairs, Mr. Lorry was reminded of Defarge the wine-shop keeper, and the starlight ride.

"I think," he whispered to Miss Pross, after anxious consideration, "I think we had best not speak to him just now, or at all disturb him. I must look in at Tellson's; so I will go there at once and come back presently. Then, we will take him a ride into the country, and dine there, and all will be well."

It was easier for Mr. Lorry to look in at Tellson's, than to look out of Tellson's. He was detained two hours. When he came back, he ascended the old staircase alone, having asked no question of the servant; going thus into the Doctor's rooms, he was stopped by a low sound of knocking.

"Good God!" he said, with a start. "What's that?"

Miss Pross, with a terrified face, was at his ear. "O me, O me! All is lost!" cried she, wringing her hands. "What is to be told to Ladybird? He doesn't know me, and is making shoes!"

Mr. Lorry said what he could to calm her, and went himself into the Doctor's room. The bench was turned towards the light, as it had been when he had seen the shoemaker at his work before, and his head was bent down, and he was very busy.

"Doctor Manette. My dear friend, Doctor Manette!"

The Doctor looked at him for a moment—half inquiringly, half as if he were angry at being spoken to—and bent over his work again.

He had laid aside his coat and waistcoat; his shirt was open at the throat, as it used to be when he did that work; and even the old haggard, faded surface of face had come back to him. He worked hard—impatiently—as if in some sense of having been interrupted.

Mr. Lorry glanced at the work in his hand, and observed that it was a shoe of the old size and shape. He took up another that was lying by him, and asked what it was.

"A young lady's walking shoe," he muttered, without looking up. "It ought to have been finished long ago. Let it be."

"But, Doctor Manette. Look at me!"

He obeyed, in the old mechanically submissive manner, without pausing in his work.

"You know me, my dear friend? Think again. This is not your proper occupation. Think, dear friend!"

Nothing would induce him to speak more. He looked up, for an instant at a time, when he was requested to do so; but, no persuasion would extract a word from him. He worked, and worked, and worked, in silence, and words fell on him as they would have fallen on an echoless wall, or on the air. The only ray of hope that Mr. Lorry could discover, was, that he sometimes furtively looked up without being asked. In that, there seemed a faint expression of curiosity or perplexity—as though he were trying to reconcile some doubts in his mind.

Two things at once impressed themselves on Mr. Lorry, as important above all others; the first, that this must be kept secret from Lucie; the second, that it must be kept secret from all who knew him. In conjunction with Miss Pross, he took immediate steps towards the latter precaution, by giving out that the Doctor was not well, and required a few days of complete rest. In aid of the kind deception to be practised on his daughter, Miss Pross was to write, describing his having been called away professionally, and referring to an imaginary letter of two or three hurried lines in his own hand, represented to have been addressed to her by the same post.

These measures, advisable to be taken in any case, Mr. Lorry took in the hope of his coming to himself. If that should happen soon, he kept another course in reserve; which was, to have a certain opinion that he thought the best, on the Doctor's case.

In the hope of his recovery, and of resort to this third course being thereby rendered practicable, Mr. Lorry resolved to watch him attentively, with as little appearance as possible of doing so. He therefore made arrangements to absent himself from Tellson's for the first time in his life, and took his post by the window in the same room.

He was not long in discovering that it was worse than useless to speak to him, since, on being pressed, he became worried. He abandoned that attempt on the first day, and resolved merely to keep himself always before him, as a silent protest against the delusion into which he had fallen, or was falling. He remained, therefore, in his seat near the window, reading and writing, and expressing in as many pleasant and natural ways as he could think of, that it was a free place.

Doctor Manette took what was given him to eat and drink, and worked on, that first day, until it was too dark to see—worked on, half an hour after Mr. Lorry could not have seen, for his life, to read or write. When he put his tools aside as useless, until morning, Mr. Lorry rose and said to him:

"Will you go out?"

He looked down at the floor on either side of him in the old manner, looked up in the old manner, and repeated in the old low voice:

"Out?"

"Yes; for a walk with me. Why not?"

He made no effort to say why not, and said not a word more. But, Mr. Lorry thought he saw, as he leaned forward on his bench in the dusk, with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands, that he was in some misty way asking himself, "Why not?" The sagacity of the man of business perceived an advantage here, and determined to hold it.

Miss Pross and he divided the night into two watches, and observed him at intervals from the adjoining room. He paced up and down for a long time before he lay down; but, when he did finally lay himself down, he fell asleep. In the morning, he was up betimes, and went straight to his bench and to work.

On this second day, Mr. Lorry saluted him cheerfully by his name, and spoke to him on topics that had been of late familiar to them. He returned no reply, but it was evident that he heard what was said, and that he thought about it, however confusedly. This encouraged Mr. Lorry to have Miss

Pross in with her work, several times during the day; at those times, they quietly spoke of Lucie, and of her father then present, precisely in the usual manner, and as if there were nothing amiss. This was done without any demonstrative accompaniment, not long enough, or often enough to harass him; and it lightened Mr. Lorry's friendly heart to believe that he looked up oftener, and that he appeared to be stirred by some perception of inconsistencies surrounding him.

When it fell dark again, Mr. Lorry asked him as before:

"Dear Doctor, will you go out?"

As before, he repeated, "Out?"

"Yes; for a walk with me. Why not?"

This time, Mr. Lorry feigned to go out when he could extract no answer from him, and, after remaining absent for an hour, returned. In the meanwhile, the Doctor had removed to the seat in the window, and had sat there looking down at the plane-tree; but, on Mr. Lorry's return, he slipped away to his bench.

The time went very slowly on, and Mr. Lorry's hope darkened, and his heart grew heavier again, and grew yet heavier and heavier every day. The third day came and went, the fourth, the fifth. Five days, six days, seven days, eight days, nine days.

With a hope ever darkening, and with a heart always growing heavier and heavier, Mr. Lorry passed through this anxious time. The secret was well kept, and Lucie was unconscious and happy; but he could not fail to observe that the shoemaker, whose hand had been a little out at first, was growing dreadfully skilful, and that he had never been so intent on his work, and that his hands had never been so nimble and expert, as in the dusk of the ninth evening.

XIX. An Opinion

Worn out by anxious watching, Mr. Lorry fell asleep at his post. On the tenth morning of his suspense, he was startled by the shining of the sun into the room where a heavy slumber had overtaken him when it was dark night.

He rubbed his eyes and roused himself; but he doubted, when he had done so, whether he was not still asleep. For, going to the door of the Doctor's room and looking in, he perceived that the shoemaker's bench and tools were put aside again, and that the Doctor himself sat reading at the window. He was in his usual morning dress, and his face (which Mr. Lorry could distinctly see), though still very pale, was calmly studious and attentive.

Even when he had satisfied himself that he was awake, Mr. Lorry felt giddily uncertain for some few moments whether the late shoemaking might not be a disturbed dream of his own; for, did not his eyes show him his friend before him in his accustomed clothing and aspect, and employed as usual; and was there any sign within their range, that the change of which he had so strong an impression had actually happened?

It was but the inquiry of his first confusion and astonishment, the answer being obvious. If the impression were not produced by a real corresponding and sufficient cause, how came he, Jarvis Lorry, there? How came he to have fallen asleep, in his clothes, on the sofa in Doctor Manette's consulting-room, and to be debating these points outside the Doctor's bedroom door in the early morning?

Within a few minutes, Miss Pross stood whispering at his side. If he had had any particle of doubt left, her talk would of necessity have resolved it; but he was by that time clear-headed, and had none. He advised that they should let the time go by until the regular breakfast-hour, and should then meet the Doctor as if nothing unusual had occurred. If he appeared to be in his customary state of mind, Mr. Lorry would then cautiously proceed to seek direction and guidance from the opinion he had been, in his anxiety, so anxious to obtain.

Miss Pross, submitting herself to his judgment, the scheme was worked out with care. Having abundance of time for his usual methodical toilette, Mr. Lorry presented himself at the breakfast-hour in his usual white linen, and with his usual neat leg. The Doctor was summoned in the usual way, and came to breakfast.

So far as it was possible to comprehend him without overstepping those delicate and gradual approaches which Mr. Lorry felt to be the only safe advance, he at first supposed that his daughter's marriage had taken place yesterday. An incidental allusion, purposely thrown out, to the day of the week, and the day of the month, set him thinking and counting, and evidently made him uneasy. In all other respects, however, he was so composedly himself, that Mr. Lorry determined to have the aid he sought. And that aid was his own.

Therefore, when the breakfast was done and cleared away, and he and the Doctor were left together, Mr. Lorry said, feelingly:

"My dear Manette, I am anxious to have your opinion, in confidence, on a very curious case in which I am deeply interested; that is to say, it is very curious to me; perhaps, to your better information it may be less so."

Glancing at his hands, which were discoloured by his late work, the Doctor looked troubled, and listened attentively. He had already glanced at his hands more than once.

"Doctor Manette," said Mr. Lorry, touching him affectionately on the arm, "the case is the case of a particularly dear friend of mine. Pray give your mind to it, and advise me well for his sake—and above all, for his daughter's—his daughter's, my dear Manette."

"If I understand," said the Doctor, in a subdued tone, "some mental shock—?"

"Yes!"

"Be explicit," said the Doctor. "Spare no detail."

Mr. Lorry saw that they understood one another, and proceeded.

"My dear Manette, it is the case of an old and a prolonged shock, of great acuteness and severity to the affections, the feelings, the—the—as you express it—the mind. The mind. It is the case of a shock under which the sufferer was borne down, one cannot say for how long, because I believe he cannot calculate the time himself, and there are no other means of getting at it. It is the case of a shock from which the sufferer recovered, by a process that he cannot trace himself—as I once heard him publicly relate in a striking manner. It is the case of a shock from which he has recovered, so completely, as to be a highly intelligent man, capable of close application of mind, and great exertion of body, and of constantly making fresh additions to his stock of knowledge, which was already very large. But, unfortunately, there has been," he paused and took a deep breath—"a slight relapse."

The Doctor, in a low voice, asked, "Of how long duration?"

"Nine days and nights."

"How did it show itself? I infer," glancing at his hands again, "in the resumption of some old pursuit connected with the shock?"

"That is the fact."

"Now, did you ever see him," asked the Doctor, distinctly and collectedly, though in the same low voice, "engaged in that pursuit originally?"

"Once."

"And when the relapse fell on him, was he in most respects—or in all respects—as he was then?"

"I think in all respects."

"You spoke of his daughter. Does his daughter know of the relapse?"

"No. It has been kept from her, and I hope will always be kept from her. It is known only to myself, and to one other who may be trusted."

The Doctor grasped his hand, and murmured, "That was very kind. That was very thoughtful!" Mr. Lorry grasped his hand in return, and neither of the two spoke for a little while.

"Now, my dear Manette," said Mr. Lorry, at length, in his most considerate and most affectionate way, "I am a mere man of business, and unfit to cope with such intricate and difficult matters. I do not possess the kind of information necessary; I do not possess the kind of intelligence; I want guiding. There is no man in this world on whom I could so rely for right guidance, as on you. Tell me, how does this relapse come about? Is there danger of another? Could a repetition of it be prevented? How should a repetition of it be treated? How does it come about at all? What can I do for my friend? No man ever can have been more desirous in his heart to serve a friend, than I am to serve mine, if I knew how.

"But I don't know how to originate, in such a case. If your sagacity, knowledge, and experience, could put me on the right track, I might be able to do so much; unenlightened and undirected, I can do so little. Pray discuss it with me; pray enable me to see it a little more clearly, and teach me how to be a little more useful."

Doctor Manette sat meditating after these earnest words were spoken, and Mr. Lorry did not press him.

"I think it probable," said the Doctor, breaking silence with an effort, "that the relapse you have described, my dear friend, was not quite unforeseen by its subject."

"Was it dreaded by him?" Mr. Lorry ventured to ask.

"Very much." He said it with an involuntary shudder.

"You have no idea how such an apprehension weighs on the sufferer's mind, and how difficult—how almost impossible—it is, for him to force himself to utter a word upon the topic that oppresses him."

"Would he," asked Mr. Lorry, "be sensibly relieved if he could prevail upon himself to impart that secret brooding to any one, when it is on him?"

"I think so. But it is, as I have told you, next to impossible. I even believe it—in some cases—to be quite impossible."

"Now," said Mr. Lorry, gently laying his hand on the Doctor's arm again, after a short silence on both sides, "to what would you refer this attack?"

"I believe," returned Doctor Manette, "that there had been a strong and extraordinary revival of the train of thought and remembrance that was the first cause of the malady. Some intense associations of a most distressing nature were vividly recalled, I think. It is probable that there had long been a dread lurking in his mind, that those associations would be recalled—say, under certain circumstances—say, on a particular occasion. He tried to prepare himself in vain; perhaps the effort to prepare himself made him less able to bear it."

"Would he remember what took place in the relapse?" asked Mr. Lorry, with natural hesitation.

The Doctor looked desolately round the room, shook his head, and answered, in a low voice, "Not at all."

"Now, as to the future," hinted Mr. Lorry.

"As to the future," said the Doctor, recovering firmness, "I should have great hope. As it pleased Heaven in its mercy to restore him so soon, I should have great hope. He, yielding under the pressure of a complicated something, long dreaded and long vaguely foreseen and contended against, and recovering after the cloud had burst and passed, I should hope that the worst was over."

"Well, well! That's good comfort. I am thankful!" said Mr. Lorry.

"I am thankful!" repeated the Doctor, bending his head with reverence.

"There are two other points," said Mr. Lorry, "on which I am anxious to be instructed. I may go on?"

"You cannot do your friend a better service." The Doctor gave him his hand.

"To the first, then. He is of a studious habit, and unusually energetic; he applies himself with great ardour to the acquisition of professional knowledge, to the conducting of experiments, to many things. Now, does he do too much?"

"I think not. It may be the character of his mind, to be always in singular need of occupation. That may be, in part, natural to it; in part, the result of affliction. The less it was occupied with healthy things, the more it would be in danger of turning in the unhealthy direction. He may have observed himself, and made the discovery."

"You are sure that he is not under too great a strain?"

"I think I am quite sure of it."

"My dear Manette, if he were overworked now—"

"My dear Lorry, I doubt if that could easily be. There has been a violent stress in one direction, and it needs a counterweight."

"Excuse me, as a persistent man of business. Assuming for a moment, that he *was* overworked; it would show itself in some renewal of this disorder?"

"I do not think so. I do not think," said Doctor Manette with the firmness of self-conviction, "that anything but the one train of association would renew it. I think that, henceforth, nothing but some extraordinary jarring of that chord could renew it. After what has happened, and after his recovery, I find it difficult to imagine any such violent sounding of that string again. I trust, and I almost believe, that the circumstances likely to renew it are exhausted."

He spoke with the diffidence of a man who knew how slight a thing would overset the delicate organisation of the mind, and yet with the confidence of a man who had slowly won his assurance out of personal endurance and distress. It was not for his friend to abate that confidence. He professed himself more relieved and encouraged than he really was, and approached his second and last point. He felt it to be the most difficult of all; but, remembering his old Sunday morning conversation with Miss Pross, and remembering what he had seen in the last nine days, he knew that he must face it.

"The occupation resumed under the influence of this passing affliction so happily recovered from," said Mr. Lorry, clearing his throat, "we will call—Blacksmith's work, Blacksmith's work. We will say, to put a case and for the sake of illustration, that he had been used, in his bad time, to work at a little forge. We will say that he was unexpectedly found at his forge again. Is it not a pity that he should keep it by him?"

The Doctor shaded his forehead with his hand, and beat his foot nervously on the ground.

"He has always kept it by him," said Mr. Lorry, with an anxious look at his friend. "Now, would it not be better that he should let it go?"

Still, the Doctor, with shaded forehead, beat his foot nervously on the ground.

"You do not find it easy to advise me?" said Mr. Lorry. "I quite understand it to be a nice question. And yet I think—" And there he shook his head, and stopped.

"You see," said Doctor Manette, turning to him after an uneasy pause, "it is very hard to explain, consistently, the innermost workings of this poor man's mind. He once yearned so frightfully for that occupation, and it was so welcome when it came; no doubt it relieved his pain so much, by substituting the perplexity of the fingers for the perplexity of the brain, and by substituting, as he became more practised, the ingenuity of the hands, for the ingenuity of the mental torture; that he has never been able to bear the thought of putting it quite out of his reach. Even now, when I believe he is more hopeful of himself than he has ever been, and even speaks of himself with a kind of confidence, the idea that he might need that old employment, and not find it, gives him a sudden sense of terror, like that which one may fancy strikes to the heart of a lost child."

He looked like his illustration, as he raised his eyes to Mr. Lorry's face.

"But may not—mind! I ask for information, as a plodding man of business who only deals with such material objects as guineas, shillings, and bank-notes—may not the retention of the thing involve the retention of the idea? If the thing were gone, my dear Manette, might not the fear go with it? In short, is it not a concession to the misgiving, to keep the forge?"

There was another silence.

"You see, too," said the Doctor, tremulously, "it is such an old companion."

"I would not keep it," said Mr. Lorry, shaking his head; for he gained in firmness as he saw the Doctor disquieted. "I would recommend him to sacrifice it. I only want your authority. I am sure it does no good. Come! Give me your authority, like a dear good man. For his daughter's sake, my dear Manette!"

Very strange to see what a struggle there was within him!

"In her name, then, let it be done; I sanction it. But, I would not take it away while he was present. Let it be removed when he is not there; let him miss his old companion after an absence."

Mr. Lorry readily engaged for that, and the conference was ended. They passed the day in the country, and the Doctor was quite restored. On the three following days he remained perfectly well, and on the fourteenth day he went away to join Lucie and her husband. The precaution that had been taken to account for his silence, Mr. Lorry had previously explained to him, and he had written to Lucie in accordance with it, and she had no suspicions.

On the night of the day on which he left the house, Mr. Lorry went into his room with a chopper, saw, chisel, and hammer, attended by Miss Pross carrying a light. There, with closed doors, and in a mysterious and guilty manner, Mr. Lorry hacked the shoemaker's bench to pieces, while Miss Pross held the candle as if she were assisting at a murder—for which, indeed, in her grimness, she was no unsuitable figure. The burning of the body (previously reduced to pieces convenient for the purpose) was commenced without delay in the kitchen fire; and the tools, shoes, and leather, were buried in the garden. So wicked do destruction and secrecy appear to honest minds, that Mr. Lorry and Miss Pross, while engaged in the commission of their deed and in the removal of its traces, almost felt, and almost looked, like accomplices in a horrible crime.

XX. A Plea

When the newly-married pair came home, the first person who appeared, to offer his congratulations, was Sydney Carton. They had not been at home many hours, when he presented himself. He was not improved in habits, or in looks, or in manner; but there was a certain rugged air of fidelity about him, which was new to the observation of Charles Darnay.

He watched his opportunity of taking Darnay aside into a window, and of speaking to him when no one overheard.

"Mr. Darnay," said Carton, "I wish we might be friends."

"We are already friends, I hope."

"You are good enough to say so, as a fashion of speech; but, I don't mean any fashion of speech. Indeed, when I say I wish we might be friends, I scarcely mean quite that, either."

Charles Darnay—as was natural—asked him, in all good-humour and good-fellowship, what he did mean?

"Upon my life," said Carton, smiling, "I find that easier to comprehend in my own mind, than to convey to yours. However, let me try. You remember a certain famous occasion when I was more drunk than—than usual?"

"I remember a certain famous occasion when you forced me to confess that you had been drinking."

"I remember it too. The curse of those occasions is heavy upon me, for I always remember them. I hope it may be taken into account one day, when all days are at an end for me! Don't be alarmed; I am not going to preach."

"I am not at all alarmed. Earnestness in you, is anything but alarming to me."

"Ah!" said Carton, with a careless wave of his hand, as if he waved that away. "On the drunken occasion in question (one of a large number, as you know), I was insufferable about liking you, and not liking you. I wish you would forget it."

"I forgot it long ago."

"Fashion of speech again! But, Mr. Darnay, oblivion is not so easy to me, as you represent it to be to you. I have by no means forgotten it, and a light answer does not help me to forget it."

"If it was a light answer," returned Darnay, "I beg your forgiveness for it. I had no other object than to turn a slight thing, which, to my surprise, seems to trouble you too much, aside. I declare to you, on the faith of a gentleman, that I have long dismissed it from my mind. Good Heaven, what was there to dismiss! Have I had nothing more important to remember, in the great service you rendered me that day?"

"As to the great service," said Carton, "I am bound to avow to you, when you speak of it in that way, that it was mere professional claptrap, I don't know that I cared what became of you, when I rendered it.—Mind! I say when I rendered it; I am speaking of the past."

"You make light of the obligation," returned Darnay, "but I will not quarrel with *your* light answer."

"Genuine truth, Mr. Darnay, trust me! I have gone aside from my purpose; I was speaking about our being friends. Now, you know me; you know I am incapable of all the higher and better flights of men. If you doubt it, ask Stryver, and he'll tell you so."

"I prefer to form my own opinion, without the aid of his."

"Well! At any rate you know me as a dissolute dog, who has never done any good, and never will."

"I don't know that you 'never will.'"

"But I do, and you must take my word for it. Well! If you could endure to have such a worthless fellow, and a fellow of such indifferent reputation, coming and going at odd times, I should ask that I might be permitted to come and go as a privileged person here; that I might be regarded as an useless (and I would add, if it were not for the resemblance I detected between you and me, an unornamental) piece of furniture, tolerated for its old service, and taken no notice of. I doubt if I should abuse the permission. It is a hundred to one if I should avail myself of it four times in a year. It would satisfy me, I dare say, to know that I had it."

"Will you try?"

"That is another way of saying that I am placed on the footing I have indicated. I thank you, Darnay. I may use that freedom with your name?"

"I think so, Carton, by this time."

They shook hands upon it, and Sydney turned away. Within a minute afterwards, he was, to all outward appearance, as unsubstantial as ever.

When he was gone, and in the course of an evening passed with Miss Pross, the Doctor, and Mr. Lorry, Charles Darnay made some mention of this conversation in general terms, and spoke of Sydney Carton as a problem of carelessness and recklessness. He spoke of him, in short, not bitterly or meaning to bear hard upon him, but as anybody might who saw him as he showed himself.

He had no idea that this could dwell in the thoughts of his fair young wife; but, when he afterwards joined her in their own rooms, he found her waiting for him with the old pretty lifting of the forehead strongly marked.

"We are thoughtful to-night!" said Darnay, drawing his arm about her.

"Yes, dearest Charles," with her hands on his breast, and the inquiring and attentive expression fixed upon him; "we are rather thoughtful to-night, for we have something on our mind to-night."

"What is it, my Lucie?"

"Will you promise not to press one question on me, if I beg you not to ask it?"

"Will I promise? What will I not promise to my Love?"

What, indeed, with his hand putting aside the golden hair from the cheek, and his other hand against the heart that beat for him!

"I think, Charles, poor Mr. Carton deserves more consideration and respect than you expressed for him to-night."

"Indeed, my own? Why so?"

"That is what you are not to ask me. But I think—I know—he does."

"If you know it, it is enough. What would you have me do, my Life?"

"I would ask you, dearest, to be very generous with him always, and very lenient on his faults when he is not by. I would ask you to believe that he has a heart he very, very seldom reveals, and that there are deep wounds in it. My dear, I have seen it bleeding."

"It is a painful reflection to me," said Charles Darnay, quite astounded, "that I should have done him any wrong. I never thought this of him."

"My husband, it is so. I fear he is not to be reclaimed; there is scarcely a hope that anything in his character or fortunes is reparable now. But, I am sure that he is capable of good things, gentle things, even magnanimous things."

She looked so beautiful in the purity of her faith in this lost man, that her husband could have looked at her as she was for hours.

"And, O my dearest Love!" she urged, clinging nearer to him, laying her head upon his breast, and raising her eyes to his, "remember how strong we are in our happiness, and how weak he is in his misery!"

The supplication touched him home. "I will always remember it, dear Heart! I will remember it as long as I live."

He bent over the golden head, and put the rosy lips to his, and folded her in his arms. If one forlorn wanderer then pacing the dark streets, could have heard her innocent disclosure, and could have seen the drops of pity kissed away by her husband from the soft blue eyes so loving of that husband, he might have cried to the night—and the words would not have parted from his lips for the first time—

"God bless her for her sweet compassion!"

XXI. Echoing Footsteps

A wonderful corner for echoes, it has been remarked, that corner where the Doctor lived. Ever busily winding the golden thread which bound her husband, and her father, and herself, and her old directress and companion, in a life of quiet bliss, Lucie sat in the still house in the tranquilly resounding corner, listening to the echoing footsteps of years.

At first, there were times, though she was a perfectly happy young wife, when her work would slowly fall from her hands, and her eyes would be dimmed. For, there was something coming in the echoes, something light, afar off, and scarcely audible yet, that stirred her heart too much. Fluttering hopes and doubts—hopes, of a love as yet unknown to her: doubts, of her remaining upon earth, to enjoy that new delight—divided her breast. Among the echoes then, there would arise the sound of footsteps at her own early grave; and thoughts of the husband who would be left so desolate, and who would mourn for her so much, swelled to her eyes, and broke like waves.

That time passed, and her little Lucie lay on her bosom. Then, among the advancing echoes, there was the tread of her tiny feet and the sound of her prattling words. Let greater echoes resound as they would, the young mother at the cradle side could always hear those coming. They came, and the shady house was sunny with a child's laugh, and the Divine friend of children, to whom in her trouble she had confided hers, seemed to take her child in his arms, as He took the child of old, and made it a sacred joy to her.

Ever busily winding the golden thread that bound them all together, weaving the service of her happy influence through the tissue of all their lives, and making it predominate nowhere, Lucie heard in the echoes of years none but friendly and soothing sounds. Her husband's step was strong and prosperous among them; her father's firm and equal. Lo, Miss Pross, in harness of string, awakening the echoes, as an unruly charger, whip-corrected, snorting and pawing the earth under the plane-tree in the garden!

Even when there were sounds of sorrow among the rest, they were not harsh nor cruel. Even when golden hair, like her own, lay in a halo on a pillow round the worn face of a little boy, and he said, with a radiant smile, "Dear papa and mamma, I am very sorry to leave you both, and to leave my pretty sister; but I am called, and I must go!" those were not tears all of agony that wetted his young mother's cheek, as the spirit departed from her embrace that had been entrusted to it. Suffer them and forbid them not. They see my Father's face. O Father, blessed words!

Thus, the rustling of an Angel's wings got blended with the other echoes, and they were not wholly of earth, but had in them that breath of Heaven. Sighs of the winds that blew over a little garden-tomb were mingled with them also, and both were audible to Lucie, in a hushed murmur—like the breathing of a summer sea asleep upon a sandy shore—as the little Lucie, comically studious at the task of the morning, or dressing a doll at her mother's footstool, chattered in the tongues of the Two Cities that were blended in her life.

The Echoes rarely answered to the actual tread of Sydney Carton. Some half-dozen times a year, at most, he claimed his privilege of coming in uninvited, and would sit among them through the evening, as he had once done often. He never came there heated with wine. And one other thing regarding him was whispered in the echoes, which has been whispered by all true echoes for ages and ages.

No man ever really loved a woman, lost her, and knew her with a blameless though an unchanged mind, when she was a wife and a mother, but her children had a strange sympathy with him—an instinctive delicacy of pity for him. What fine hidden sensibilities are touched in such a case, no echoes tell; but it is so, and it was so here. Carton was the first stranger to whom little Lucie held out her chubby arms, and he kept his place with her as she grew. The little boy had spoken of him, almost at the last. "Poor Carton! Kiss him for me!"

Mr. Stryver shouldered his way through the law, like some great engine forcing itself through turbid water, and dragged his useful friend in his wake, like a boat towed astern. As the boat so favoured is usually in a rough plight, and mostly under water, so, Sydney had a swamped life of it. But, easy and strong custom, unhappily so much easier and stronger in him than any stimulating sense of desert or disgrace, made it the life he was to lead; and he no more thought of emerging from his state of lion's jackal, than any real jackal may be supposed to think of rising to be a lion. Stryver was rich; had married a florid widow with property and three boys, who had nothing particularly shining about them but the straight hair of their dumpling heads.

These three young gentlemen, Mr. Stryver, exuding patronage of the most offensive quality from every pore, had walked before him like three sheep to the quiet corner in Soho, and had offered as pupils to Lucie's husband: delicately saying "Halloa! here are three lumps of bread-and-cheese towards your matrimonial picnic, Darnay!" The polite rejection of the three lumps of bread-and-cheese had quite bloated Mr. Stryver with indignation, which he afterwards turned to account in the training of the young gentlemen, by directing them to beware of the pride of Beggars, like that tutor-fellow. He was also in the habit of declaiming to Mrs. Stryver, over his full-bodied wine, on the arts Mrs. Darnay had once put in practice to "catch" him, and on the diamond-cut-diamond arts in himself, madam, which had rendered him "not to be caught." Some of his King's Bench familiars, who were occasionally parties to the full-bodied wine and the lie, excused him for the latter by saying that he had told it so often, that he believed it himself—which is surely such an incorrigible aggravation of an originally bad offence, as to justify any such offender's being carried off to some suitably retired spot, and there hanged out of the way.

These were among the echoes to which Lucie, sometimes pensive, sometimes amused and laughing, listened in the echoing corner, until her little daughter was six years old. How near to her heart the echoes of her child's tread came, and those of her own dear father's, always active and self-possessed, and those of her dear husband's, need not be told. Nor, how the lightest echo of their united home, directed by herself with such a wise and elegant thrift that it was more abundant than any waste, was music to her. Nor, how there were echoes all about her, sweet in her ears, of the many times her father had told her that he found her more devoted to him married (if that could be) than single, and of the many times her husband had said to her that no cares and duties seemed to divide her love for him or her help to him, and asked her "What is the magic secret, my darling, of your being everything to all of us, as if there were only one of us, yet never seeming to be hurried, or to have too much to do?"

But, there were other echoes, from a distance, that rumbled menacingly in the corner all through this space of time. And it was now, about little Lucie's sixth birthday, that they began to have an awful sound, as of a great storm in France with a dreadful sea rising.

On a night in mid-July, one thousand seven hundred and eighty-nine, Mr. Lorry came in late, from Tellson's, and sat himself down by Lucie and her husband in the dark window. It was a hot, wild night, and they were all three reminded of the old Sunday night when they had looked at the lightning from the same place.

"I began to think," said Mr. Lorry, pushing his brown wig back, "that I should have to pass the night at Tellson's. We have been so full of business all day, that we have not known what to do first, or which way to turn. There is such an uneasiness in Paris, that we have actually a run of confidence upon us! Our customers over there, seem not to be able to confide their property to us fast enough. There is positively a mania among some of them for sending it to England."

"That has a bad look," said Darnay—

"A bad look, you say, my dear Darnay? Yes, but we don't know what reason there is in it. People are so unreasonable! Some of us at Tellson's are getting old, and we really can't be troubled out of the ordinary course without due occasion."

"Still," said Darnay, "you know how gloomy and threatening the sky is."

"I know that, to be sure," assented Mr. Lorry, trying to persuade himself that his sweet temper was soured, and that he grumbled, "but I am determined to be peevish after my long day's botheration. Where is Manette?"

"Here he is," said the Doctor, entering the dark room at the moment.

"I am quite glad you are at home; for these hurries and forebodings by which I have been surrounded all day long, have made me nervous without reason. You are not going out, I hope?"

"No; I am going to play backgammon with you, if you like," said the Doctor.

"I don't think I do like, if I may speak my mind. I am not fit to be pitted against you to-night. Is the teaboard still there, Lucie? I can't see."

"Of course, it has been kept for you."

"Thank ye, my dear. The precious child is safe in bed?"

"And sleeping soundly."

"That's right; all safe and well! I don't know why anything should be otherwise than safe and well here, thank God; but I have been so put out all day, and I am not as young as I was! My tea, my dear! Thank ye. Now, come and take your place in the circle, and let us sit quiet, and hear the echoes about which you have your theory."

"Not a theory; it was a fancy."

"A fancy, then, my wise pet," said Mr. Lorry, patting her hand. "They are very numerous and very loud, though, are they not? Only hear them!"

Headlong, mad, and dangerous footsteps to force their way into anybody's life, footsteps not easily made clean again if once stained red, the footsteps raging in Saint Antoine afar off, as the little circle sat in the dark London window.

Saint Antoine had been, that morning, a vast dusky mass of scarecrows heaving to and fro, with frequent gleams of light above the billowy heads, where steel blades and bayonets shone in the sun. A tremendous roar arose from the throat of Saint Antoine, and a forest of naked arms struggled in the air like shrivelled branches of trees in a winter wind: all the fingers convulsively clutching at every weapon or semblance of a weapon that was thrown up from the depths below, no matter how far off.

Who gave them out, whence they last came, where they began, through what agency they crookedly quivered and jerked, scores at a time, over the heads of the crowd, like a kind of lightning, no eye in the throng could have told; but, muskets were being distributed—so were cartridges, powder, and ball, bars of iron and wood, knives, axes, pikes, every weapon that distracted ingenuity could discover or devise. People who could lay hold of nothing else, set themselves with bleeding hands to force stones and bricks out of their places in walls. Every pulse and heart in Saint Antoine was on high-fever strain and at high-fever heat. Every living creature there held life as of no account, and was demented with a passionate readiness to sacrifice it.

As a whirlpool of boiling waters has a centre point, so, all this raging circled round Defarge's wine-shop, and every human drop in the caldron had a tendency to be sucked towards the vortex where Defarge himself, already begrimed with gunpowder and sweat, issued orders, issued arms, thrust this man back, dragged this man forward, disarmed one to arm another, laboured and strove in the thickest of the uproar.

"Keep near to me, Jacques Three," cried Defarge; "and do you, Jacques One and Two, separate and put yourselves at the head of as many of these patriots as you can. Where is my wife?"

"Eh, well! Here you see me!" said madame, composed as ever, but not knitting to-day. Madame's resolute right hand was occupied with an axe, in place of the usual softer implements, and in her girdle were a pistol and a cruel knife.

"Where do you go, my wife?"

"I go," said madame, "with you at present. You shall see me at the head of women, by-and-bye."

"Come, then!" cried Defarge, in a resounding voice. "Patriots and friends, we are ready! The Bastille!"

With a roar that sounded as if all the breath in France had been shaped into the detested word, the living sea rose, wave on wave, depth on depth, and overflowed the city to that point. Alarm-bells ringing, drums beating, the sea raging and thundering on its new beach, the attack began.

Deep ditches, double drawbridge, massive stone walls, eight great towers, cannon, muskets, fire and smoke. Through the fire and through the smoke—in the fire and in the smoke, for the sea cast him up against a cannon, and on the instant he became a cannonier—Defarge of the wine-shop worked like a manful soldier, Two fierce hours.

Deep ditch, single drawbridge, massive stone walls, eight great towers, cannon, muskets, fire and smoke. One drawbridge down! "Work, comrades all, work! Work, Jacques One, Jacques Two, Jacques One Thousand, Jacques Two Thousand, Jacques Five-and-Twenty Thousand; in the name of all the Angels or the Devils—which you prefer—work!" Thus Defarge of the wine-shop, still at his gun, which had long grown hot.

"To me, women!" cried madame his wife. "What! We can kill as well as the men when the place is taken!" And to her, with a shrill thirsty cry, trooping women variously armed, but all armed alike in hunger and revenge.

Cannon, muskets, fire and smoke; but, still the deep ditch, the single drawbridge, the massive stone walls, and the eight great towers. Slight displacements of the raging sea, made by the falling wounded. Flashing weapons, blazing torches, smoking waggonloads of wet straw, hard work at neighbouring barricades in all directions, shrieks, volleys, execrations, bravery without stint, boom smash and rattle, and the furious sounding of the living sea; but, still the deep ditch, and the single drawbridge, and the massive stone walls, and the eight great towers, and still Defarge of the wine-shop at his gun, grown doubly hot by the service of Four fierce hours.

A white flag from within the fortress, and a parley—this dimly perceptible through the raging storm, nothing audible in it—suddenly the sea rose immeasurably wider and higher, and swept Defarge of the wine-shop over the lowered drawbridge, past the massive stone outer walls, in among the eight great towers surrendered!

So resistless was the force of the ocean bearing him on, that even to draw his breath or turn his head was as impracticable as if he had been struggling in the surf at the South Sea, until he was landed in the outer courtyard of the Bastille. There, against an angle of a wall, he made a struggle to look about him. Jacques Three was nearly at his side; Madame Defarge, still heading some of her women, was visible in the inner distance, and her knife was in her hand. Everywhere was tumult, exultation, deafening and maniacal bewilderment, astounding noise, yet furious dumb-show.

"The Prisoners!"

"The Records!"

"The secret cells!"

"The instruments of torture!"

"The Prisoners!"

Of all these cries, and ten thousand incoherences, "The Prisoners!" was the cry most taken up by the sea that rushed in, as if there were an eternity of people, as well as of time and space. When the foremost billows rolled past, bearing the prison officers with them, and threatening them all with instant death if any secret nook remained undisclosed, Defarge laid his strong hand on the breast of one of these men—a man with a grey head, who had a lighted torch in his hand—separated him from the rest, and got him between himself and the wall.

"Show me the North Tower!" said Defarge. "Quick!"

"I will faithfully," replied the man, "if you will come with me. But there is no one there."

"What is the meaning of One Hundred and Five, North Tower?" asked Defarge. "Quick!"

"The meaning, monsieur?"

"Does it mean a captive, or a place of captivity? Or do you mean that I shall strike you dead?"

"Kill him!" croaked Jacques Three, who had come close up.

"Monsieur, it is a cell."

"Show it me!"

"Pass this way, then."

Jacques Three, with his usual craving on him, and evidently disappointed by the dialogue taking a turn that did not seem to promise bloodshed, held by Defarge's arm as he held by the turnkey's. Their three heads had been close together during this brief discourse, and it had been as much as they could do to hear one another, even then: so tremendous was the noise of the living ocean, in its irruption into the Fortress, and its inundation of the courts and passages and staircases. All around outside, too, it beat the walls with a deep, hoarse roar, from which, occasionally, some partial shouts of tumult broke and leaped into the air like spray.

Through gloomy vaults where the light of day had never shone, past hideous doors of dark dens and cages, down cavernous flights of steps, and again up steep rugged ascents of stone and brick, more like dry waterfalls than staircases, Defarge, the turnkey, and Jacques Three, linked hand and arm, went with all the speed they could make. Here and there, especially at first, the inundation started on them and swept by; but when they had done descending, and were winding and climbing up a tower, they were alone. Hemmed in here by the massive thickness of walls and arches, the storm within the fortress and without was only audible to them in a dull, subdued way, as if the noise out of which they had come had almost destroyed their sense of hearing.

The turnkey stopped at a low door, put a key in a clashing lock, swung the door slowly open, and said, as they all bent their heads and passed in:

"One hundred and five, North Tower!"

There was a small, heavily-grated, unglazed window high in the wall, with a stone screen before it, so that the sky could be only seen by stooping low and looking up. There was a small chimney, heavily barred across, a few feet within. There was a heap of old feathery wood-ashes on the hearth. There was a stool, and table, and a straw bed. There were the four blackened walls, and a rusted iron ring in one of them.

"Pass that torch slowly along these walls, that I may see them," said Defarge to the turnkey.

The man obeyed, and Defarge followed the light closely with his eyes.

"Stop!—Look here, Jacques!"

"A. M.!" croaked Jacques Three, as he read greedily.

"Alexandre Manette," said Defarge in his ear, following the letters with his swart forefinger, deeply engrained with gunpowder. "And here he wrote 'a poor physician.' And it was he, without doubt, who scratched a calendar on this stone. What is that in your hand? A crowbar? Give it me!"

He had still the linstock of his gun in his own hand. He made a sudden exchange of the two instruments, and turning on the worm-eaten stool and table, beat them to pieces in a few blows.

"Hold the light higher!" he said, wrathfully, to the turnkey. "Look among those fragments with care, Jacques. And see! Here is my knife," throwing it to him; "rip open that bed, and search the straw. Hold the light higher, you!"

With a menacing look at the turnkey he crawled upon the hearth, and, peering up the chimney, struck and prised at its sides with the crowbar, and worked at the iron grating across it. In a few minutes, some mortar and dust came dropping down, which he averted his face to avoid; and in it, and in the old wood-ashes, and in a crevice in the chimney into which his weapon had slipped or wrought itself, he groped with a cautious touch.

"Nothing in the wood, and nothing in the straw, Jacques?"

"Nothing."

"Let us collect them together, in the middle of the cell. So! Light them, you!"

The turnkey fired the little pile, which blazed high and hot. Stooping again to come out at the low-arched door, they left it burning, and retraced their way to the courtyard; seeming to recover their sense of hearing as they came down, until they were in the raging flood once more.

They found it surging and tossing, in quest of Defarge himself. Saint Antoine was clamorous to have its wine-shop keeper foremost in the guard upon the governor who had defended the Bastille and shot the people. Otherwise, the governor would not be marched to the Hotel de Ville for judgment. Otherwise, the governor would escape, and the people's blood (suddenly of some value, after many years of worthlessness) be unavenged.

In the howling universe of passion and contention that seemed to encompass this grim old officer conspicuous in his grey coat and red decoration, there was but one quite steady figure, and that was a woman's. "See, there is my husband!" she cried, pointing him out. "See Defarge!" She stood immovable close to the grim old officer, and remained immovable close to him; remained immovable close to him through the streets, as

Defarge and the rest bore him along; remained immovable close to him when he was got near his destination, and began to be struck at from behind; remained immovable close to him when the long-gathering rain of stabs and blows fell heavy; was so close to him when he dropped dead under it, that, suddenly animated, she put her foot upon his neck, and with her cruel knife—long ready—hewed off his head.

The hour was come, when Saint Antoine was to execute his horrible idea of hoisting up men for lamps to show what he could be and do. Saint Antoine's blood was up, and the blood of tyranny and domination by the iron hand was down—down on the steps of the Hotel de Ville where the governor's body lay—down on the sole of the shoe of Madame Defarge where she had trodden on the body to steady it for mutilation. "Lower the lamp yonder!" cried Saint Antoine, after glaring round for a new means of death; "here is one of his soldiers to be left on guard!" The swinging sentinel was posted, and the sea rushed on.

The sea of black and threatening waters, and of destructive upheaving of wave against wave, whose depths were yet unfathomed and whose forces were yet unknown. The remorseless sea of turbulently swaying shapes, voices of vengeance, and faces hardened in the furnaces of suffering until the touch of pity could make no mark on them.

But, in the ocean of faces where every fierce and furious expression was in vivid life, there were two groups of faces—each seven in number—so fixedly contrasting with the rest, that never did sea roll which bore more memorable wrecks with it. Seven faces of prisoners, suddenly released by the storm that had burst their tomb, were carried high overhead: all scared, all lost, all wondering and amazed, as if the Last Day were come, and those who rejoiced around them were lost spirits. Other seven faces there were, carried higher, seven dead faces, whose drooping eyelids and half-seen eyes awaited the Last Day. Impassive faces, yet with a suspended—not an abolished—expression on them; faces, rather, in a fearful pause, as having yet to raise the dropped lids of the eyes, and bear witness with the bloodless lips, "THOU DIDST IT!"

Seven prisoners released, seven gory heads on pikes, the keys of the accursed fortress of the eight strong towers, some discovered letters and other memorials of prisoners of old time, long dead of broken hearts,—such, and such—like, the loudly echoing footsteps of Saint Antoine escort through the Paris streets in mid-July, one thousand seven hundred and eighty-nine. Now, Heaven defeat the fancy of Lucie Darnay, and keep these feet far out of her life! For, they are headlong, mad, and dangerous; and in the years so long after the breaking of the cask at Defarge's wine-shop door, they are not easily purified when once stained red.

XXII. The Sea Still Rises

Haggard Saint Antoine had had only one exultant week, in which to soften his modicum of hard and bitter bread to such extent as he could, with the relish of fraternal embraces and congratulations, when Madame Defarge sat at her counter, as usual, presiding over the customers. Madame Defarge wore no rose in her head, for the great brotherhood of Spies had become, even in one short week, extremely chary of trusting themselves to the saint's mercies. The lamps across his streets had a portentously elastic swing with them.

Madame Defarge, with her arms folded, sat in the morning light and heat, contemplating the wine-shop and the street. In both, there were several knots of loungers, squalid and miserable, but now with a manifest sense of power enthroned on their distress. The raggedest nightcap, awry on the wretchedest head, had this crooked significance in it: "I know how hard it has grown for me, the wearer of this, to support life in myself; but do you know how easy it has grown for me, the wearer of this, to destroy life in you?" Every lean bare arm, that had been without work before, had this work always ready for it now, that it could strike. The fingers of the knitting women were vicious, with the experience that they could tear. There was a change in the appearance of Saint Antoine; the image had been hammering into this for hundreds of years, and the last finishing blows had told mightily on the expression.

Madame Defarge sat observing it, with such suppressed approval as was to be desired in the leader of the Saint Antoine women. One of her sisterhood knitted beside her. The short, rather plump wife of a starved grocer, and the mother of two children withal, this lieutenant had already earned the complimentary name of The Vengeance.

"Hark!" said The Vengeance. "Listen, then! Who comes?"

As if a train of powder laid from the outermost bound of Saint Antoine Quarter to the wine-shop door, had been suddenly fired, a fast-spreading murmur came rushing along.

"It is Defarge," said madame. "Silence, patriots!"

Defarge came in breathless, pulled off a red cap he wore, and looked around him! "Listen, everywhere!" said madame again. "Listen to him!"

Defarge stood, panting, against a background of eager eyes and open mouths, formed outside the door; all those within the wine-shop had sprung to their feet.

"Say then, my husband. What is it?"

"News from the other world!"

"How, then?" cried madame, contemptuously. "The other world?"

"Does everybody here recall old Foulon, who told the famished people that they might eat grass, and who died, and went to Hell?"

"Everybody!" from all throats.

"The news is of him. He is among us!"

"Among us!" from the universal throat again. "And dead?"

"Not dead! He feared us so much—and with reason—that he caused himself to be represented as dead, and had a grand mock-funeral. But they have found him alive, hiding in the country, and have brought him in. I have seen him but now, on his way to the Hotel de Ville, a prisoner. I have said that he had reason to fear us. Say all! *Had* he reason?"

Wretched old sinner of more than threescore years and ten, if he had never known it yet, he would have known it in his heart of hearts if he could have heard the answering cry.

A moment of profound silence followed. Defarge and his wife looked steadfastly at one another. The Vengeance stooped, and the jar of a drum was heard as she moved it at her feet behind the counter.

"Patriots!" said Defarge, in a determined voice, "are we ready?"

Instantly Madame Defarge's knife was in her girdle; the drum was beating in the streets, as if it and a drummer had flown together by magic; and The Vengeance, uttering terrific shrieks, and flinging her arms about her head like all the forty Furies at once, was tearing from house to house, rousing the women.

The men were terrible, in the bloody-minded anger with which they looked from windows, caught up what arms they had, and came pouring down into the streets; but, the women were a sight to chill the boldest. From such household occupations as their bare poverty yielded, from their children, from their aged and their sick crouching on the bare ground famished and naked, they ran out with streaming hair, urging one another, and themselves, to madness with the wildest cries and actions. Villain Foulon taken, my sister! Old Foulon taken, my mother! Miscreant Foulon taken, my daughter! Then, a score of others ran into the midst of these, beating their breasts, tearing their hair, and screaming, Foulon alive! Foulon who told the starving people they might eat grass! Foulon who told my old father that he might eat grass, when I had no bread to give him! Foulon who told my baby it might suck grass, when these breasts were dry with want! O mother of God, this Foulon! O Heaven our suffering! Hear me, my dead baby and my withered father: I swear on my knees, on these stones, to avenge you on Foulon! Husbands, and brothers, and young men, Give us the blood of Foulon, Give us the head of Foulon, Give us the heart of Foulon, Give us the body and soul of Foulon, Rend Foulon to pieces, and dig him into the ground, that grass may grow from him! With these cries, numbers of the women, lashed into blind frenzy, whirled about, striking and tearing at their own friends until they dropped into a passionate swoon, and were only saved by the men belonging to them from being trampled under foot.

Nevertheless, not a moment was lost; not a moment! This Foulon was at the Hotel de Ville, and might be loosed. Never, if Saint Antoine knew his own sufferings, insults, and wrongs! Armed men and women flocked out of the Quarter so fast, and drew even these last dregs after them with such a force of suction, that within a quarter of an hour there was not a human creature in Saint Antoine's bosom but a few old crones and the wailing children.

No. They were all by that time choking the Hall of Examination where this old man, ugly and wicked, was, and overflowing into the adjacent open space and streets. The Defarges, husband and wife, The Vengeance, and Jacques Three, were in the first press, and at no great distance from him in the Hall.

"See!" cried madame, pointing with her knife. "See the old villain bound with ropes. That was well done to tie a bunch of grass upon his back. Ha, ha! That was well done. Let him eat it now!" Madame put her knife under her arm, and clapped her hands as at a play.

The people immediately behind Madame Defarge, explaining the cause of her satisfaction to those behind them, and those again explaining to others, and those to others, the neighbouring streets resounded with the clapping of hands. Similarly, during two or three hours of drawl, and the winnowing of many bushels of words, Madame Defarge's frequent expressions of impatience were taken up, with marvellous quickness, at a distance: the more readily, because certain men who had by some wonderful exercise of agility climbed up the external architecture to look in from the windows, knew Madame Defarge well, and acted as a telegraph between her and the crowd outside the building.

At length the sun rose so high that it struck a kindly ray as of hope or protection, directly down upon the old prisoner's head. The favour was too much to bear; in an instant the barrier of dust and chaff that had stood surprisingly long, went to the winds, and Saint Antoine had got him!

It was known directly, to the furthest confines of the crowd. Defarge had but sprung over a railing and a table, and folded the miserable wretch in a deadly embrace—Madame Defarge had but followed and turned her hand in one of the ropes with which he was tied—The Vengeance and Jacques Three were not yet up with them, and the men at the windows had not yet swooped into the Hall, like birds of prey from their high perches—when the cry seemed to go up, all over the city, "Bring him out! Bring him to the lamp!"

Down, and up, and head foremost on the steps of the building; now, on his knees; now, on his feet; now, on his back; dragged, and struck at, and stifled by the bunches of grass and straw that were thrust into his face by hundreds of hands; torn, bruised, panting, bleeding, yet always entreating and beseeching for mercy; now full of vehement agony of action, with a small clear space about him as the people drew one another back that they might see; now, a log of dead wood drawn through a forest of legs; he was hauled to the nearest street corner where one of the fatal lamps swung, and there Madame Defarge let him go—as a cat might have done to a mouse—and silently and composedly looked at him while they made ready, and while he besought her: the women passionately screeching at him all the time, and the men sternly calling out to have him killed with grass in his mouth. Once, he went aloft, and the rope broke, and they caught him shrieking; twice, he went aloft, and the rope broke, and they caught him shrieking; then, the rope was merciful, and held him, and his head was soon upon a pike, with grass enough in the mouth for all Saint Antoine to dance at the sight of.

Nor was this the end of the day's bad work, for Saint Antoine so shouted and danced his angry blood up, that it boiled again, on hearing when the day closed in that the son-in-law of the despatched, another of the people's enemies and insulters, was coming into Paris under a guard five hundred strong, in cavalry alone. Saint Antoine wrote his crimes on flaring sheets of paper, seized him—would have torn him out of the breast of an army to bear Foulon company—set his head and heart on pikes, and carried the three spoils of the day, in Wolf-procession through the streets.

Not before dark night did the men and women come back to the children, wailing and breadless. Then, the miserable bakers' shops were beset by long files of them, patiently waiting to buy bad bread; and while they waited with stomachs faint and empty, they beguiled the time by embracing one another on the triumphs of the day, and achieving them again in gossip. Gradually, these strings of ragged people shortened and frayed away; and then poor lights began to shine in high windows, and slender fires were made in the streets, at which neighbours cooked in common, afterwards supping at their doors.

Scanty and insufficient suppers those, and innocent of meat, as of most other sauce to wretched bread. Yet, human fellowship infused some nourishment into the flinty viands, and struck some sparks of cheerfulness out of them. Fathers and mothers who had had their full share in the worst of the day, played gently with their meagre children; and lovers, with such a world around them and before them, loved and hoped.

It was almost morning, when Defarge's wine-shop parted with its last knot of customers, and Monsieur Defarge said to madame his wife, in husky tones, while fastening the door:

"At last it is come, my dear!"

"Eh well!" returned madame. "Almost."

Saint Antoine slept, the Defarges slept: even The Vengeance slept with her starved grocer, and the drum was at rest. The drum's was the only voice in Saint Antoine that blood and hurry had not changed. The Vengeance, as custodian of the drum, could have wakened him up and had the same speech out of him as before the Bastille fell, or old Foulon was seized; not so with the hoarse tones of the men and women in Saint Antoine's bosom.

XXIII. Fire Rises

There was a change on the village where the fountain fell, and where the mender of roads went forth daily to hammer out of the stones on the highway such morsels of bread as might serve for patches to hold his poor ignorant soul and his poor reduced body together. The prison on the crag was not so dominant as of yore; there were soldiers to guard it, but not many; there were officers to guard the soldiers, but not one of them knew what his men would do—beyond this: that it would probably not be what he was ordered.

Far and wide lay a ruined country, yielding nothing but desolation. Every green leaf, every blade of grass and blade of grain, was as shrivelled and poor as the miserable people. Everything was bowed down, dejected, oppressed, and broken. Habitations, fences, domesticated animals, men, women, children, and the soil that bore them—all worn out.

Monseigneur (often a most worthy individual gentleman) was a national blessing, gave a chivalrous tone to things, was a polite example of luxurious and shining life, and a great deal more to equal purpose; nevertheless, Monseigneur as a class had, somehow or other, brought things to this. Strange that Creation, designed expressly for Monseigneur, should be so soon wrung dry and squeezed out! There must be something short-sighted in the eternal arrangements, surely! Thus it was, however; and the last drop of blood having been extracted from the flints, and the last screw of the rack having been turned so often that its purchase crumbled, and it now turned and turned with nothing to bite, Monseigneur began to run away from a phenomenon so low and unaccountable.

But, this was not the change on the village, and on many a village like it. For scores of years gone by, Monseigneur had squeezed it and wrung it, and had seldom graced it with his presence except for the pleasures of the chase—now, found in hunting the people; now, found in hunting the beasts, for whose preservation Monseigneur made edifying spaces of barbarous and barren wilderness. No. The change consisted in the appearance of strange faces of low caste, rather than in the disappearance of the high caste, chiselled, and otherwise beautified and beautifying features of Monseigneur.

For, in these times, as the mender of roads worked, solitary, in the dust, not often troubling himself to reflect that dust he was and to dust he must return, being for the most part too much occupied in thinking how little he had for supper and how much more he would eat if he had it—in these times, as he raised his eyes from his lonely labour, and viewed the prospect, he would see some rough figure approaching on foot, the like of which was once a rarity in those parts, but was now a frequent presence. As it advanced, the mender of roads would discern without surprise, that it was a shaggy-haired man, of almost barbarian aspect, tall, in wooden shoes that were clumsy even to the eyes of a mender of roads, grim, rough, swart, steeped in the mud and dust of many highways, dank with the marshy moisture of many low grounds, sprinkled with the thorns and leaves and moss of many byways through woods.

Such a man came upon him, like a ghost, at noon in the July weather, as he sat on his heap of stones under a bank, taking such shelter as he could get from a shower of hail.

The man looked at him, looked at the village in the hollow, at the mill, and at the prison on the crag. When he had identified these objects in what benighted mind he had, he said, in a dialect that was just intelligible:

"How goes it, Jacques?"

"All well, Jacques."

"Touch then!"

They joined hands, and the man sat down on the heap of stones.

"No dinner?"

"Nothing but supper now," said the mender of roads, with a hungry face.

"It is the fashion," growled the man. "I meet no dinner anywhere."

He took out a blackened pipe, filled it, lighted it with flint and steel, pulled at it until it was in a bright glow: then, suddenly held it from him and dropped something into it from between his finger and thumb, that blazed and went out in a puff of smoke.

"Touch then." It was the turn of the mender of roads to say it this time, after observing these operations. They again joined hands.

"To-night?" said the mender of roads.

"To-night," said the man, putting the pipe in his mouth.

"Where?"

"Here."

He and the mender of roads sat on the heap of stones looking silently at one another, with the hail driving in between them like a pigmy charge of bayonets, until the sky began to clear over the village.

"Show me!" said the traveller then, moving to the brow of the hill.

"See!" returned the mender of roads, with extended finger. "You go down here, and straight through the street, and past the fountain—"

"To the Devil with all that!" interrupted the other, rolling his eye over the landscape. "*I* go through no streets and past no fountains. Well?"

"Well! About two leagues beyond the summit of that hill above the village."

"Good. When do you cease to work?"

"At sunset."

"Will you wake me, before departing? I have walked two nights without resting. Let me finish my pipe, and I shall sleep like a child. Will you wake me?"

"Surely."

The wayfarer smoked his pipe out, put it in his breast, slipped off his great wooden shoes, and lay down on his back on the heap of stones. He was fast asleep directly.

As the road-mender plied his dusty labour, and the hail-clouds, rolling away, revealed bright bars and streaks of sky which were responded to by silver gleams upon the landscape, the little man (who wore a red cap now, in place of his blue one) seemed fascinated by the figure on the heap of stones. His eyes were so often turned towards it, that he used his tools mechanically, and, one would have said, to very poor account. The bronze face, the shaggy black hair and beard, the coarse woollen red cap, the rough medley dress of home-spun stuff and hairy skins of beasts, the powerful frame attenuated by spare living, and the sullen and desperate compression of the lips in sleep, inspired the mender of roads with awe. The traveller had travelled far, and his feet were footsore, and his ankles chafed and bleeding; his great shoes, stuffed with leaves and grass, had been heavy to drag over the many long leagues, and his clothes were chafed into holes, as he himself was into sores. Stooping down beside him, the road-mender tried to get a peep at secret weapons in his breast or where not; but, in vain, for he slept with his arms crossed upon him, and set as resolutely as his lips. Fortified towns with their stockades, guard-houses, gates, trenches, and drawbridges, seemed to the mender of roads, to be so much air as against this figure. And when he lifted his eyes from it to the horizon and looked around, he saw in his small fancy similar figures, stopped by no obstacle, tending to centres all over France.

The man slept on, indifferent to showers of hail and intervals of brightness, to sunshine on his face and shadow, to the paltering lumps of dull ice on his body and the diamonds into which the sun changed them, until the sun was low in the west, and the sky was glowing. Then, the mender of roads having got his tools together and all things ready to go down into the village, roused him.

"Good!" said the sleeper, rising on his elbow. "Two leagues beyond the summit of the hill?"

"About."

"About. Good!"

The mender of roads went home, with the dust going on before him according to the set of the wind, and was soon at the fountain, squeezing himself in among the lean kine brought there to drink, and appearing even to whisper to them in his whispering to all the village. When the village had taken its poor supper, it did not creep to bed, as it usually did, but came out of doors again, and remained there. A curious contagion of whispering was upon it, and also, when it gathered together at the fountain in the dark, another curious contagion of looking expectantly at the sky in one direction only. Monsieur Gabelle, chief functionary of the place, became uneasy; went out on his house-top alone, and looked in that direction too; glanced down from behind his chimneys at the darkening faces by the fountain below, and sent word to the sacristan who kept the keys of the church, that there might be need to ring the tocsin by-and-bye.

The night deepened. The trees environing the old chateau, keeping its solitary state apart, moved in a rising wind, as though they threatened the pile of building massive and dark in the gloom. Up the two terrace flights of steps the rain ran wildly, and beat at the great door, like a swift messenger rousing those within; uneasy rushes of wind went through the hall, among the old spears and knives, and passed lamenting up the stairs, and shook the curtains of the bed where the last Marquis had slept. East, West, North, and South, through the woods, four heavy-treading, unkempt figures crushed the high grass and cracked the branches, striding on cautiously to come together in the courtyard. Four lights broke out there, and moved away in different directions, and all was black again.

But, not for long. Presently, the chateau began to make itself strangely visible by some light of its own, as though it were growing luminous. Then, a flickering streak played behind the architecture of the front, picking out transparent places, and showing where balustrades, arches, and windows were. Then it soared higher, and grew broader and brighter. Soon, from a score of the great windows, flames burst forth, and the stone faces awakened, stared out of fire.

A faint murmur arose about the house from the few people who were left there, and there was a saddling of a horse and riding away. There was spurring and splashing through the darkness, and bridle was drawn in the space by the village fountain, and the horse in a foam stood at Monsieur Gabelle's door. "Help, Gabelle! Help, every one!" The tocsin rang impatiently, but other help (if that were any) there was none. The mender of roads, and two hundred and fifty particular friends, stood with folded arms at the fountain, looking at the pillar of fire in the sky. "It must be forty feet high," said they, grimly; and never moved.

The rider from the chateau, and the horse in a foam, clattered away through the village, and galloped up the stony steep, to the prison on the crag. At the gate, a group of officers were looking at the fire; removed from them, a group of soldiers. "Help, gentlemen—officers! The chateau is on fire; valuable objects may be saved from the flames by timely aid! Help, help!" The officers looked towards the soldiers who looked at the fire; gave no orders; and answered, with shrugs and biting of lips, "It must burn."

As the rider rattled down the hill again and through the street, the village was illuminating. The mender of roads, and the two hundred and fifty particular friends, inspired as one man and woman by the idea of lighting up, had darted into their houses, and were putting candles in every dull little pane of glass. The general scarcity of everything, occasioned candles to be borrowed in a rather peremptory manner of Monsieur Gabelle; and in a moment of reluctance and hesitation on that functionary's part, the mender of roads, once so submissive to authority, had remarked that carriages were good to make bonfires with, and that post-horses would roast.

The chateau was left to itself to flame and burn. In the roaring and raging of the conflagration, a red-hot wind, driving straight from the infernal regions, seemed to be blowing the edifice away. With the rising and falling of the blaze, the stone faces showed as if they were in torment.

When great masses of stone and timber fell, the face with the two dints in the nose became obscured: anon struggled out of the smoke again, as if it were the face of the cruel Marquis, burning at the stake and contending with the fire.

The chateau burned; the nearest trees, laid hold of by the fire, scorched and shrivelled; trees at a distance, fired by the four fierce figures, begirt the blazing edifice with a new forest of smoke. Molten lead and iron boiled in the marble basin of the fountain; the water ran dry; the extinguisher tops of the towers vanished like ice before the heat, and trickled down into four rugged wells of flame. Great rents and splits branched out in the solid walls, like crystallisation; stupefied birds wheeled about and dropped into the furnace; four fierce figures trudged away, East, West, North, and South, along the night-enshrouded roads, guided by the beacon they had lighted, towards their next destination. The illuminated village had seized hold of the tocsin, and, abolishing the lawful ringer, rang for joy.

Not only that; but the village, light-headed with famine, fire, and bell-ringing, and bethinking itself that Monsieur Gabelle had to do with the collection of rent and taxes—though it was but a small instalment of taxes, and no rent at all, that Gabelle had got in those latter days—became impatient for an interview with him, and, surrounding his house, summoned him to come forth for personal conference. Whereupon, Monsieur Gabelle did heavily bar his door, and retire to hold counsel with himself. The result of that conference was, that Gabelle again withdrew himself to his housetop behind his stack of chimneys; this time resolved, if his door were broken in (he was a small Southern man of retaliative temperament), to pitch himself head foremost over the parapet, and crush a man or two below.

Probably, Monsieur Gabelle passed a long night up there, with the distant chateau for fire and candle, and the beating at his door, combined with the joy-ringing, for music; not to mention his having an ill-omened lamp slung across the road before his posting-house gate, which the village showed a lively inclination to displace in his favour. A trying suspense, to be passing a whole summer night on the brink of the black ocean, ready to take that plunge into it upon which Monsieur Gabelle had resolved! But, the friendly dawn appearing at last, and the rush-candles of the village guttering out, the people happily dispersed, and Monsieur Gabelle came down bringing his life with him for that while.

Within a hundred miles, and in the light of other fires, there were other functionaries less fortunate, that night and other nights, whom the rising sun found hanging across once-peaceful streets, where they had been born and bred; also, there were other villagers and townspeople less fortunate than the mender of roads and his fellows, upon whom the functionaries and soldiery turned with success, and whom they strung up in their turn. But, the fierce figures were steadily wending East, West, North, and South, be that as it would; and whosoever hung, fire burned. The altitude of the gallows that would turn to water and quench it, no functionary, by any stretch of mathematics, was able to calculate successfully.

XXIV. Drawn to the Loadstone Rock

In such risings of fire and risings of sea—the firm earth shaken by the rushes of an angry ocean which had now no ebb, but was always on the flow, higher and higher, to the terror and wonder of the beholders on the shore—three years of tempest were consumed. Three more birthdays of little Lucie had been woven by the golden thread into the peaceful tissue of the life of her home.

Many a night and many a day had its inmates listened to the echoes in the corner, with hearts that failed them when they heard the thronging feet. For, the footsteps had become to their minds as the footsteps of a people, tumultuous under a red flag and with their country declared in danger, changed into wild beasts, by terrible enchantment long persisted in.

Monseigneur, as a class, had dissociated himself from the phenomenon of his not being appreciated: of his being so little wanted in France, as to incur considerable danger of receiving his dismissal from it, and this life together. Like the fabled rustic who raised the Devil with infinite pains, and was so terrified at the sight of him that he could ask the Enemy no question, but immediately fled; so, Monseigneur, after boldly reading the Lord's Prayer backwards for a great number of years, and performing many other potent spells for compelling the Evil One, no sooner beheld him in his terrors than he took to his noble heels.

The shining Bull's Eye of the Court was gone, or it would have been the mark for a hurricane of national bullets. It had never been a good eye to see with—had long had the mote in it of Lucifer's pride, Sardanapalus's luxury, and a mole's blindness—but it had dropped out and was gone. The Court, from that exclusive inner circle to its outermost rotten ring of intrigue, corruption, and dissimulation, was all gone together. Royalty was gone; had been besieged in its Palace and "suspended," when the last tidings came over.

The August of the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety-two was come, and Monseigneur was by this time scattered far and wide.

As was natural, the head-quarters and great gathering-place of Monseigneur, in London, was Tellson's Bank. Spirits are supposed to haunt the places where their bodies most resorted, and Monseigneur without a guinea haunted the spot where his guineas used to be. Moreover, it was the spot to which such French intelligence as was most to be relied upon, came quickest. Again: Tellson's was a munificent house, and extended great liberality to old customers who had fallen from their high estate. Again: those nobles who had seen the coming storm in time, and anticipating plunder or confiscation, had made provident remittances to Tellson's, were always to be heard of there by their needy brethren. To which it must be added that every new-comer from France reported himself and his tidings at Tellson's, almost as a matter of course. For such variety of reasons, Tellson's was at that time, as to French intelligence, a kind of High Exchange; and this was so well known to the public, and the inquiries made there were in consequence so numerous, that Tellson's sometimes wrote the latest news out in a line or so and posted it in the Bank windows, for all who ran through Temple Bar to read.

On a steaming, misty afternoon, Mr. Lorry sat at his desk, and Charles Darnay stood leaning on it, talking with him in a low voice. The penitential den once set apart for interviews with the House, was now the news-Exchange, and was filled to overflowing. It was within half an hour or so of the time of closing.

"But, although you are the youngest man that ever lived," said Charles Darnay, rather hesitating, "I must still suggest to you—"

"I understand. That I am too old?" said Mr. Lorry.

"Unsettled weather, a long journey, uncertain means of travelling, a disorganised country, a city that may not be even safe for you."

"My dear Charles," said Mr. Lorry, with cheerful confidence, "you touch some of the reasons for my going: not for my staying away. It is safe enough for me; nobody will care to interfere with an old fellow of hard upon fourscore when there are so many people there much better worth interfering with. As to its being a disorganised city, if it were not a disorganised city there would be no occasion to send somebody from our House here to our House there, who knows the city and the business, of old, and is in Tellson's confidence. As to the uncertain travelling, the long journey, and the winter weather, if I were not prepared to submit myself to a few inconveniences for the sake of Tellson's, after all these years, who ought to be?"

"I wish I were going myself," said Charles Darnay, somewhat restlessly, and like one thinking aloud.

"Indeed! You are a pretty fellow to object and advise!" exclaimed Mr. Lorry. "You wish you were going yourself? And you a Frenchman born? You are a wise counsellor."

"My dear Mr. Lorry, it is because I am a Frenchman born, that the thought (which I did not mean to utter here, however) has passed through my mind often. One cannot help thinking, having had some sympathy for the miserable people, and having abandoned something to them," he spoke here in his former thoughtful manner, "that one might be listened to, and might have the power to persuade to some restraint. Only last night, after you had left us, when I was talking to Lucie—"

"When you were talking to Lucie," Mr. Lorry repeated. "Yes. I wonder you are not ashamed to mention the name of Lucie! Wishing you were going to France at this time of day!"

"However, I am not going," said Charles Darnay, with a smile. "It is more to the purpose that you say you are."

"And I am, in plain reality. The truth is, my dear Charles," Mr. Lorry glanced at the distant House, and lowered his voice, "you can have no conception of the difficulty with which our business is transacted, and of the peril in which our books and papers over yonder are involved. The Lord above knows what the compromising consequences would be to numbers of people, if some of our documents were seized or destroyed; and they might be, at any time, you know, for who can say that Paris is not set afire to-day, or sacked to-morrow! Now, a judicious selection from these with the least possible delay, and the burying of them, or otherwise getting of them out of harm's way, is within the power (without loss of precious time) of scarcely any one but myself, if any one. And shall I hang back, when Tellson's knows this and says this—Tellson's, whose bread I have eaten these sixty years—because I am a little stiff about the joints? Why, I am a boy, sir, to half a dozen old codgers here!"

"How I admire the gallantry of your youthful spirit, Mr. Lorry."

"Tut! Nonsense, sir!—And, my dear Charles," said Mr. Lorry, glancing at the House again, "you are to remember, that getting things out of Paris at this present time, no matter what things, is next to an impossibility. Papers and precious matters were this very day brought to us here (I speak in strict confidence; it is not business-like to whisper it, even to you), by the strangest bearers you can imagine, every one of whom had his head hanging on by a single hair as he passed the Barriers. At another time, our parcels would come and go, as easily as in business-like Old England; but now, everything is stopped."

"And do you really go to-night?"

"I really go to-night, for the case has become too pressing to admit of delay."

"And do you take no one with you?"

"All sorts of people have been proposed to me, but I will have nothing to say to any of them. I intend to take Jerry. Jerry has been my bodyguard on Sunday nights for a long time past and I am used to him. Nobody will suspect Jerry of being anything but an English bull-dog, or of having any design in his head but to fly at anybody who touches his master."

"I must say again that I heartily admire your gallantry and youthfulness."

"I must say again, nonsense, nonsense! When I have executed this little commission, I shall, perhaps, accept Tellson's proposal to retire and live at my ease. Time enough, then, to think about growing old."

This dialogue had taken place at Mr. Lorry's usual desk, with Monseigneur swarming within a yard or two of it, boastful of what he would do to avenge himself on the rascal-people before long. It was too much the way of Monseigneur under his reverses as a refugee, and it was much too much the way of native British orthodoxy, to talk of this terrible Revolution as if it were the only harvest ever known under the skies that had not been sown—as if nothing had ever been done, or omitted to be done, that had led to it—as if observers of the wretched millions in France, and of the misused and perverted resources that should have made them prosperous, had not seen it inevitably coming, years before, and had not in plain words recorded what they saw. Such vapouring, combined with the extravagant plots of Monseigneur for the restoration of a state of things that had utterly exhausted itself, and worn out Heaven and earth as well as itself, was hard to be endured without some remonstrance by any sane man who knew the truth. And it was such vapouring all about his ears, like a troublesome confusion of blood in his own head, added to a latent uneasiness in his mind, which had already made Charles Darnay restless, and which still kept him so.

Among the talkers, was Stryver, of the King's Bench Bar, far on his way to state promotion, and, therefore, loud on the theme: broaching to Monseigneur, his devices for blowing the people up and exterminating them from the face of the earth, and doing without them: and for accomplishing many similar objects akin in their nature to the abolition of eagles by sprinkling salt on the tails of the race. Him, Darnay heard with a particular feeling of objection; and Darnay stood divided between going away that he might hear no more, and remaining to interpose his word, when the thing that was to be, went on to shape itself out.

The House approached Mr. Lorry, and laying a soiled and unopened letter before him, asked if he had yet discovered any traces of the person to whom it was addressed? The House laid the letter down so close to Darnay that he saw the direction—the more quickly because it was his own right name. The address, turned into English, ran:

"Very pressing. To Monsieur heretofore the Marquis St. Evremonde, of France. Confided to the cares of Messrs. Tellson and Co., Bankers, London, England."

On the marriage morning, Doctor Manette had made it his one urgent and express request to Charles Darnay, that the secret of this name should be—unless he, the Doctor, dissolved the obligation—kept inviolate between them. Nobody else knew it to be his name; his own wife had no suspicion of the fact; Mr. Lorry could have none.

"No," said Mr. Lorry, in reply to the House; "I have referred it, I think, to everybody now here, and no one can tell me where this gentleman is to be found."

The hands of the clock verging upon the hour of closing the Bank, there was a general set of the current of talkers past Mr. Lorry's desk. He held the letter out inquiringly; and Monseigneur looked at it, in the person of this plotting and indignant refugee; and Monseigneur looked at it in the person of that plotting and indignant refugee; and This, That, and The Other, all had something disparaging to say, in French or in English, concerning the Marquis who was not to be found.

"Nephew, I believe—but in any case degenerate successor—of the polished Marquis who was murdered," said one. "Happy to say, I never knew him."

"A craven who abandoned his post," said another—this Monseigneur had been got out of Paris, legs uppermost and half suffocated, in a load of hay—"some years ago."

"Infected with the new doctrines," said a third, eyeing the direction through his glass in passing; "set himself in opposition to the last Marquis, abandoned the estates when he inherited them, and left them to the ruffian herd. They will recompense him now, I hope, as he deserves."

"Hey?" cried the blatant Stryver. "Did he though? Is that the sort of fellow? Let us look at his infamous name. D—n the fellow!"

Darnay, unable to restrain himself any longer, touched Mr. Stryver on the shoulder, and said:

"I know the fellow."

"Do you, by Jupiter?" said Stryver. "I am sorry for it."

"Why?"

"Why, Mr. Darnay? D'ye hear what he did? Don't ask, why, in these times."

"But I do ask why?"

"Then I tell you again, Mr. Darnay, I am sorry for it. I am sorry to hear you putting any such extraordinary questions. Here is a fellow, who, infected by the most pestilent and blasphemous code of devilry that ever was known, abandoned his property to the vilest scum of the earth that ever did murder by wholesale, and you ask me why I am sorry that a man who instructs youth knows him? Well, but I'll answer you. I am sorry because I believe there is contamination in such a scoundrel. That's why."

Mindful of the secret, Darnay with great difficulty checked himself, and said: "You may not understand the gentleman."

"I understand how to put *you* in a corner, Mr. Darnay," said Bully Stryver, "and I'll do it. If this fellow is a gentleman, I *don't* understand him. You may tell him so, with my compliments. You may also tell him, from me, that after abandoning his worldly goods and position to this butcherly mob, I wonder he is not at the head of them. But, no, gentlemen," said Stryver, looking all round, and snapping his fingers, "I know something of human nature, and I tell you that you'll never find a fellow like this fellow, trusting himself to the mercies of such precious *protégés*. No, gentlemen; he'll always show 'em a clean pair of heels very early in the scuffle, and sneak away."

With those words, and a final snap of his fingers, Mr. Stryver shouldered himself into Fleet-street, amidst the general approbation of his hearers. Mr. Lorry and Charles Darnay were left alone at the desk, in the general departure from the Bank.

"Will you take charge of the letter?" said Mr. Lorry. "You know where to deliver it?"

"I do."

"Will you undertake to explain, that we suppose it to have been addressed here, on the chance of our knowing where to forward it, and that it has been here some time?"

"I will do so. Do you start for Paris from here?"

"From here, at eight."

"I will come back, to see you off."

Very ill at ease with himself, and with Stryver and most other men, Darnay made the best of his way into the quiet of the Temple, opened the letter, and read it. These were its contents:

"Prison of the Abbaye, Paris.

"June 21, 1792. "MONSIEUR HERETOFORE THE MARQUIS.

"After having long been in danger of my life at the hands of the village, I have been seized, with great violence and indignity, and brought a long journey on foot to Paris. On the road I have suffered a great deal. Nor is that all; my house has been destroyed—razed to the ground.

"The crime for which I am imprisoned, Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, and for which I shall be summoned before the tribunal, and shall lose my life (without your so generous help), is, they tell me, treason against the majesty of the people, in that I have acted against them for an emigrant. It is in vain I represent that I have acted for them, and not against, according to your commands. It is in vain I represent that, before the sequestration of emigrant property, I had remitted the imposts they had ceased to pay; that I had collected no rent; that I had had recourse to no process. The only response is, that I have acted for an emigrant, and where is that emigrant?

"Ah! most gracious Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, where is that emigrant? I cry in my sleep where is he? I demand of Heaven, will he not come to deliver me? No answer. Ah Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, I send my desolate cry across the sea, hoping it may perhaps reach your ears through the great bank of Tilson known at Paris!

"For the love of Heaven, of justice, of generosity, of the honour of your noble name, I supplicate you, Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, to succour and release me. My fault is, that I have been true to you. Oh Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, I pray you be you true to me!

"From this prison here of horror, whence I every hour tend nearer and nearer to destruction, I send you, Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, the assurance of my dolorous and unhappy service.

"Your afflicted,

"Gabelle."

The latent uneasiness in Darnay's mind was roused to vigourous life by this letter. The peril of an old servant and a good one, whose only crime was fidelity to himself and his family, stared him so reproachfully in the face, that, as he walked to and fro in the Temple considering what to do, he almost hid his face from the passersby.

He knew very well, that in his horror of the deed which had culminated the bad deeds and bad reputation of the old family house, in his resentful suspicions of his uncle, and in the aversion with which his conscience regarded the crumbling fabric that he was supposed to uphold, he had acted imperfectly. He knew very well, that in his love for Lucie, his renunciation of his social place, though by no means new to his own mind, had been hurried and incomplete. He knew that he ought to have systematically worked it out and supervised it, and that he had meant to do it, and that it had never been done.

The happiness of his own chosen English home, the necessity of being always actively employed, the swift changes and troubles of the time which had followed on one another so fast, that the events of this week annihilated the immature plans of last week, and the events of the week following made all new again; he knew very well, that to the force of these circumstances he had yielded:—not without disquiet, but still without continuous and accumulating resistance. That he had watched the times for a time of action, and that they had shifted and struggled until the time had gone by, and the nobility were trooping from France by every highway and byway, and their property was in course of confiscation and destruction, and their very names were blotting out, was as well known to himself as it could be to any new authority in France that might impeach him for it.

But, he had oppressed no man, he had imprisoned no man; he was so far from having harshly exacted payment of his dues, that he had relinquished them of his own will, thrown himself on a world with no favour in it, won his own private place there, and earned his own bread. Monsieur Gabelle had held the impoverished and involved estate on written instructions, to spare the people, to give them what little there was to give—such fuel as the heavy creditors would let them have in the winter, and such produce as could be saved from the same grip in the summer—and no doubt he had put the fact in plea and proof, for his own safety, so that it could not but appear now.

This favoured the desperate resolution Charles Darnay had begun to make, that he would go to Paris.

Yes. Like the mariner in the old story, the winds and streams had driven him within the influence of the Loadstone Rock, and it was drawing him to itself, and he must go. Everything that arose before his mind drifted him on, faster and faster, more and more steadily, to the terrible attraction. His latent uneasiness had been, that bad aims were being worked out in his own unhappy land by bad instruments, and that he who could not fail to know that he was better than they, was not there, trying to do something to stay bloodshed, and assert the claims of mercy and humanity. With this uneasiness half stifled, and half reproaching him, he had been brought to the pointed comparison of himself with the brave old gentleman in whom duty was so strong; upon that comparison (injurious to himself) had instantly followed the sneers of Monseigneur, which had stung him bitterly, and those of Stryver, which above all were coarse and galling, for old reasons. Upon those, had followed Gabelle's letter: the appeal of an innocent prisoner, in danger of death, to his justice, honour, and good name.

His resolution was made. He must go to Paris.

Yes. The Loadstone Rock was drawing him, and he must sail on, until he struck. He knew of no rock; he saw hardly any danger. The intention with which he had done what he had done, even although he had left it incomplete, presented it before him in an aspect that would be gratefully acknowledged in France on his presenting himself to assert it. Then, that glorious vision of doing good, which is so often the sanguine mirage of so many good minds, arose before him, and he even saw himself in the illusion with some influence to guide this raging Revolution that was running so fearfully wild.

As he walked to and fro with his resolution made, he considered that neither Lucie nor her father must know of it until he was gone. Lucie should be spared the pain of separation; and her father, always reluctant to turn his thoughts towards the dangerous ground of old, should come to the knowledge of the step, as a step taken, and not in the balance of suspense and doubt. How much of the incompleteness of his situation was referable to her father, through the painful anxiety to avoid reviving old associations of France in his mind, he did not discuss with himself. But, that circumstance too, had had its influence in his course.

He walked to and fro, with thoughts very busy, until it was time to return to Tellson's and take leave of Mr. Lorry. As soon as he arrived in Paris he would present himself to this old friend, but he must say nothing of his intention now.

A carriage with post-horses was ready at the Bank door, and Jerry was booted and equipped.

"I have delivered that letter," said Charles Darnay to Mr. Lorry. "I would not consent to your being charged with any written answer, but perhaps you will take a verbal one?"

"That I will, and readily," said Mr. Lorry, "if it is not dangerous."

"Not at all. Though it is to a prisoner in the Abbaye."

"What is his name?" said Mr. Lorry, with his open pocket-book in his hand.

"Gabelle."

"Gabelle. And what is the message to the unfortunate Gabelle in prison?"

"Simply, 'that he has received the letter, and will come.'"

"Any time mentioned?"

"He will start upon his journey to-morrow night."

"Any person mentioned?"

"No."

He helped Mr. Lorry to wrap himself in a number of coats and cloaks, and went out with him from the warm atmosphere of the old Bank, into the misty air of Fleet-street. "My love to Lucie, and to little Lucie," said Mr. Lorry at parting, "and take precious care of them till I come back." Charles Darnay shook his head and doubtfully smiled, as the carriage rolled away.

That night—it was the fourteenth of August—he sat up late, and wrote two fervent letters; one was to Lucie, explaining the strong obligation he was under to go to Paris, and showing her, at length, the reasons that he had, for feeling confident that he could become involved in no personal danger there; the other was to the Doctor, confiding Lucie and their dear child to his care, and dwelling on the same topics with the strongest assurances. To both, he wrote that he would despatch letters in proof of his safety, immediately after his arrival.

It was a hard day, that day of being among them, with the first reservation of their joint lives on his mind. It was a hard matter to preserve the innocent deceit of which they were profoundly unsuspicious. But, an affectionate glance at his wife, so happy and busy, made him resolute not to tell her what impended (he had been half moved to do it, so strange it was to him to act in anything without her quiet aid), and the day passed quickly. Early in the evening he embraced her, and her scarcely less dear namesake, pretending that he would return by-and-bye (an imaginary engagement took him out, and he had secreted a valise of clothes ready), and so he emerged into the heavy mist of the heavy streets, with a heavier heart.

The unseen force was drawing him fast to itself, now, and all the tides and winds were setting straight and strong towards it. He left his two letters with a trusty porter, to be delivered half an hour before midnight, and no sooner; took horse for Dover; and began his journey. "For the love of Heaven, of justice, of generosity, of the honour of your noble name!" was the poor prisoner's cry with which he strengthened his sinking heart, as he left all that was dear on earth behind him, and floated away for the Loadstone Rock.

The end of the second book.

Book the Third—the Track of a Storm

I. In Secret

The traveller fared slowly on his way, who fared towards Paris from England in the autumn of the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety-two. More than enough of bad roads, bad equipages, and bad horses, he would have encountered to delay him, though the fallen and unfortunate King of France had been upon his throne in all his glory; but, the changed times were fraught with other obstacles than these. Every town-gate and village taxing-house had its band of citizen-patriots, with their national muskets in a most explosive state of readiness, who stopped all comers and goers, cross-questioned them, inspected their papers, looked for their names in lists of their own, turned them back, or sent them on, or stopped them and laid them in hold, as their capricious judgment or fancy deemed best for the dawning Republic One and Indivisible, of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, or Death.

A very few French leagues of his journey were accomplished, when Charles Darnay began to perceive that for him along these country roads there was no hope of return until he should have been declared a good citizen at Paris. Whatever might befall now, he must on to his journey's end. Not a mean village closed upon him, not a common barrier dropped across the road behind him, but he knew it to be another iron door in the series that was barred between him and England. The universal watchfulness so encompassed him, that if he had been taken in a net, or were being forwarded to his destination in a cage, he could not have felt his freedom more completely gone.

This universal watchfulness not only stopped him on the highway twenty times in a stage, but retarded his progress twenty times in a day, by riding after him and taking him back, riding before him and stopping him by anticipation, riding with him and keeping him in charge. He had been days upon his journey in France alone, when he went to bed tired out, in a little town on the high road, still a long way from Paris.

Nothing but the production of the afflicted Gabelle's letter from his prison of the Abbaye would have got him on so far. His difficulty at the guard-house in this small place had been such, that he felt his journey to have come to a crisis. And he was, therefore, as little surprised as a man could be, to find himself awakened at the small inn to which he had been remitted until morning, in the middle of the night.

Awakened by a timid local functionary and three armed patriots in rough red caps and with pipes in their mouths, who sat down on the bed.

"Emigrant," said the functionary, "I am going to send you on to Paris, under an escort."

"Citizen, I desire nothing more than to get to Paris, though I could dispense with the escort."

"Silence!" growled a red-cap, striking at the coverlet with the butt-end of his musket. "Peace, aristocrat!"

"It is as the good patriot says," observed the timid functionary. "You are an aristocrat, and must have an escort—and must pay for it."

"I have no choice," said Charles Darnay.

"Choice! Listen to him!" cried the same scowling red-cap. "As if it was not a favour to be protected from the lamp-iron!"

"It is always as the good patriot says," observed the functionary. "Rise and dress yourself, emigrant."

Darnay complied, and was taken back to the guard-house, where other patriots in rough red caps were smoking, drinking, and sleeping, by a watch-fire. Here he paid a heavy price for his escort, and hence he started with it on the wet, wet roads at three o'clock in the morning.

The escort were two mounted patriots in red caps and tri-coloured cockades, armed with national muskets and sabres, who rode one on either side of him.

The escorted governed his own horse, but a loose line was attached to his bridle, the end of which one of the patriots kept girded round his wrist. In this state they set forth with the sharp rain driving in their faces: clattering at a heavy dragoon trot over the uneven town pavement, and out upon the mire-deep roads. In this state they traversed without change, except of horses and pace, all the mire-deep leagues that lay between them and the capital.

They travelled in the night, halting an hour or two after daybreak, and lying by until the twilight fell. The escort were so wretchedly clothed, that they twisted straw round their bare legs, and thatched their ragged shoulders to keep the wet off. Apart from the personal discomfort of being so attended, and apart from such considerations of present danger as arose from one of the patriots being chronically drunk, and carrying his musket very recklessly, Charles Darnay did not allow the restraint that was laid upon him to awaken any serious fears in his breast; for, he reasoned with himself that it could have no reference to the merits of an individual case that was not yet stated, and of representations, confirmable by the prisoner in the Abbaye, that were not yet made.

But when they came to the town of Beauvais—which they did at eventide, when the streets were filled with people—he could not conceal from himself that the aspect of affairs was very alarming. An ominous crowd gathered to see him dismount of the posting-yard, and many voices called out loudly, "Down with the emigrant!"

He stopped in the act of swinging himself out of his saddle, and, resuming it as his safest place, said:

"Emigrant, my friends! Do you not see me here, in France, of my own will?"

"You are a cursed emigrant," cried a farrier, making at him in a furious manner through the press, hammer in hand; "and you are a cursed aristocrat!"

The postmaster interposed himself between this man and the rider's bridle (at which he was evidently making), and soothingly said, "Let him be; let him be! He will be judged at Paris."

"Judged!" repeated the farrier, swinging his hammer. "Ay! and condemned as a traitor." At this the crowd roared approval.

Checking the postmaster, who was for turning his horse's head to the yard (the drunken patriot sat composedly in his saddle looking on, with the line round his wrist), Darnay said, as soon as he could make his voice heard:

"Friends, you deceive yourselves, or you are deceived. I am not a traitor."

"He lies!" cried the smith. "He is a traitor since the decree. His life is forfeit to the people. His cursed life is not his own!"

At the instant when Darnay saw a rush in the eyes of the crowd, which another instant would have brought upon him, the postmaster turned his horse into the yard, the escort rode in close upon his horse's flanks, and the postmaster shut and barred the crazy double gates. The farrier struck a blow upon them with his hammer, and the crowd groaned; but, no more was done.

"What is this decree that the smith spoke of?" Darnay asked the postmaster, when he had thanked him, and stood beside him in the yard.

"Truly, a decree for selling the property of emigrants."

"When passed?"

"On the fourteenth."

"The day I left England!"

"Everybody says it is but one of several, and that there will be others—if there are not already—banishing all emigrants, and condemning all to death who return. That is what he meant when he said your life was not your own."

"But there are no such decrees yet?"

"What do I know!" said the postmaster, shrugging his shoulders; "there may be, or there will be. It is all the same. What would you have?"

They rested on some straw in a loft until the middle of the night, and then rode forward again when all the town was asleep. Among the many wild changes observable on familiar things which made this wild ride unreal, not the least was the seeming rarity of sleep. After long and lonely spurring over dreary roads, they would come to a cluster of poor cottages, not steeped in darkness, but all glittering with lights, and would find the people, in a ghostly manner in the dead of the night, circling hand in hand round a shrivelled tree of Liberty, or all drawn up together singing a Liberty song. Happily, however, there was sleep in Beauvais that night to help them out of it and they passed on once more into solitude and loneliness: jingling through the untimely cold and wet, among impoverished fields that had yielded no fruits of the earth that year, diversified by the blackened remains of burnt houses, and by the sudden emergence from ambuscade, and sharp reining up across their way, of patriot patrols on the watch on all the roads.

Daylight at last found them before the wall of Paris. The barrier was closed and strongly guarded when they rode up to it.

"Where are the papers of this prisoner?" demanded a resolute-looking man in authority, who was summoned out by the guard.

Naturally struck by the disagreeable word, Charles Darnay requested the speaker to take notice that he was a free traveller and French citizen, in charge of an escort which the disturbed state of the country had imposed upon him, and which he had paid for.

"Where," repeated the same personage, without taking any heed of him whatever, "are the papers of this prisoner?"

The drunken patriot had them in his cap, and produced them. Casting his eyes over Gabelle's letter, the same personage in authority showed some disorder and surprise, and looked at Darnay with a close attention.

He left escort and escorted without saying a word, however, and went into the guard-room; meanwhile, they sat upon their horses outside the gate. Looking about him while in this state of suspense, Charles Darnay observed that the gate was held by a mixed guard of soldiers and patriots, the latter far outnumbering the former; and that while ingress into the city for peasants' carts bringing in supplies, and for similar traffic and traffickers, was easy enough, egress, even for the homeliest people, was very difficult. A numerous medley of men and women, not to mention beasts and vehicles of various sorts, was waiting to issue forth; but, the previous identification was so strict, that they filtered through the barrier very slowly. Some of these people knew their turn for examination to be so far off, that they lay down on the ground to sleep or smoke, while others talked together, or loitered about. The red cap and tri-colour cockade were universal, both among men and women.

When he had sat in his saddle some half-hour, taking note of these things, Darnay found himself confronted by the same man in authority, who directed the guard to open the barrier. Then he delivered to the escort, drunk and sober, a receipt for the escorted, and requested him to dismount. He did so, and the two patriots, leading his tired horse, turned and rode away without entering the city.

He accompanied his conductor into a guard-room, smelling of common wine and tobacco, where certain soldiers and patriots, asleep and awake, drunk and sober, and in various neutral states between sleeping and waking, drunkenness and sobriety, were standing and lying about. The light in the guard-house, half derived from the waning oil-lamps of the night, and half from the overcast day, was in a correspondingly uncertain condition. Some registers were lying open on a desk, and an officer of a coarse, dark aspect, presided over these.

"Citizen Defarge," said he to Darnay's conductor, as he took a slip of paper to write on. "Is this the emigrant Evremonde?"

"This is the man."

"Your age, Evremonde?"

"Thirty-seven."

"Married, Evremonde?"

"Yes."

"Where married?"

"In England."

"Without doubt. Where is your wife, Evremonde?"

"In England."

"Without doubt. You are consigned, Evremonde, to the prison of La Force."

"Just Heaven!" exclaimed Darnay. "Under what law, and for what offence?"

The officer looked up from his slip of paper for a moment.

"We have new laws, Evremonde, and new offences, since you were here." He said it with a hard smile, and went on writing.

"I entreat you to observe that I have come here voluntarily, in response to that written appeal of a fellow-countryman which lies before you. I demand no more than the opportunity to do so without delay. Is not that my right?"

"Emigrants have no rights, Evremonde," was the stolid reply. The officer wrote until he had finished, read over to himself what he had written, sanded it, and handed it to Defarge, with the words "In secret."

Defarge motioned with the paper to the prisoner that he must accompany him. The prisoner obeyed, and a guard of two armed patriots attended them.

"Is it you," said Defarge, in a low voice, as they went down the guardhouse steps and turned into Paris, "who married the daughter of Doctor Manette, once a prisoner in the Bastille that is no more?"

"Yes," replied Darnay, looking at him with surprise.

"My name is Defarge, and I keep a wine-shop in the Quarter Saint Antoine. Possibly you have heard of me."

"My wife came to your house to reclaim her father? Yes!"

The word "wife" seemed to serve as a gloomy reminder to Defarge, to say with sudden impatience, "In the name of that sharp female newly-born, and called La Guillotine, why did you come to France?"

"You heard me say why, a minute ago. Do you not believe it is the truth?"

"A bad truth for you," said Defarge, speaking with knitted brows, and looking straight before him.

"Indeed I am lost here. All here is so unprecedented, so changed, so sudden and unfair, that I am absolutely lost. Will you render me a little help?"

"None." Defarge spoke, always looking straight before him.

"Will you answer me a single question?"

"Perhaps. According to its nature. You can say what it is."

"In this prison that I am going to so unjustly, shall I have some free communication with the world outside?"

"You will see."

"I am not to be buried there, prejudged, and without any means of presenting my case?"

"You will see. But, what then? Other people have been similarly buried in worse prisons, before now."

"But never by me, Citizen Defarge."

Defarge glanced darkly at him for answer, and walked on in a steady and set silence. The deeper he sank into this silence, the fainter hope there was—or so Darnay thought—of his softening in any slight degree. He, therefore, made haste to say:

"It is of the utmost importance to me (you know, Citizen, even better than I, of how much importance), that I should be able to communicate to Mr. Lorry of Tellson's Bank, an English gentleman who is now in Paris, the simple fact, without comment, that I have been thrown into the prison of La Force. Will you cause that to be done for me?"

"I will do," Defarge doggedly rejoined, "nothing for you. My duty is to my country and the People. I am the sworn servant of both, against you. I will do nothing for you."

Charles Darnay felt it hopeless to entreat him further, and his pride was touched besides. As they walked on in silence, he could not but see how used the people were to the spectacle of prisoners passing along the streets. The very children scarcely noticed him. A few passers turned their heads, and a few shook their fingers at him as an aristocrat; otherwise, that a man in good clothes should be going to prison, was no more remarkable than that a labourer in working clothes should be going to work. In one narrow, dark, and dirty street through which they passed, an excited orator, mounted on a stool, was addressing an excited audience on the crimes against the people, of the king and the royal family. The few words that he caught from this man's lips, first made it known to Charles Darnay that the king was in prison, and that the foreign ambassadors had one and all left Paris. On the road (except at Beauvais) he had heard absolutely nothing. The escort and the universal watchfulness had completely isolated him.

That he had fallen among far greater dangers than those which had developed themselves when he left England, he of course knew now. That perils had thickened about him fast, and might thicken faster and faster yet, he of course knew now. He could not but admit to himself that he might not have made this journey, if he could have foreseen the events of a few days. And yet his misgivings were not so dark as, imagined by the light of this later time, they would appear. Troubled as the future was, it was the unknown future, and in its obscurity there was ignorant hope. The horrible massacre, days and nights long, which, within a few rounds of the clock, was to set a great mark of blood upon the blessed garnering time of harvest, was as far out of his knowledge as if it had been a hundred thousand years away. The "sharp female newly-born, and called La Guillotine," was hardly known to him, or to the generality of people, by name. The frightful deeds that were to be soon done, were probably unimagined at that time in the brains of the doers. How could they have a place in the shadowy conceptions of a gentle mind?

Of unjust treatment in detention and hardship, and in cruel separation from his wife and child, he foreshadowed the likelihood, or the certainty; but, beyond this, he dreaded nothing distinctly. With this on his mind, which was enough to carry into a dreary prison courtyard, he arrived at the prison of La Force.

A man with a bloated face opened the strong wicket, to whom Defarge presented "The Emigrant Evremonde."

"What the Devil! How many more of them!" exclaimed the man with the bloated face.

Defarge took his receipt without noticing the exclamation, and withdrew, with his two fellow-patriots.

"What the Devil, I say again!" exclaimed the gaoler, left with his wife. "How many more!"

The gaoler's wife, being provided with no answer to the question, merely replied, "One must have patience, my dear!" Three turnkeys who entered responsive to a bell she rang, echoed the sentiment, and one added, "For the love of Liberty;" which sounded in that place like an inappropriate conclusion.

The prison of La Force was a gloomy prison, dark and filthy, and with a horrible smell of foul sleep in it. Extraordinary how soon the noisome flavour of imprisoned sleep, becomes manifest in all such places that are ill cared for!

"In secret, too," grumbled the gaoler, looking at the written paper. "As if I was not already full to bursting!"

He stuck the paper on a file, in an ill-humour, and Charles Darnay awaited his further pleasure for half an hour: sometimes, pacing to and fro in the strong arched room: sometimes, resting on a stone seat: in either case detained to be imprinted on the memory of the chief and his subordinates.

"Come!" said the chief, at length taking up his keys, "come with me, emigrant."

Through the dismal prison twilight, his new charge accompanied him by corridor and staircase, many doors clanging and locking behind them, until they came into a large, low, vaulted chamber, crowded with prisoners of both sexes. The women were seated at a long table, reading and writing, knitting, sewing, and embroidering; the men were for the most part standing behind their chairs, or lingering up and down the room.

In the instinctive association of prisoners with shameful crime and disgrace, the new-comer recoiled from this company. But the crowning unreality of his long unreal ride, was, their all at once rising to receive him, with every refinement of manner known to the time, and with all the engaging graces and courtesies of life.

So strangely clouded were these refinements by the prison manners and gloom, so spectral did they become in the inappropriate squalor and misery through which they were seen, that Charles Darnay seemed to stand in a company of the dead. Ghosts all! The ghost of beauty, the ghost of stateliness, the ghost of elegance, the ghost of pride, the ghost of frivolity, the ghost of wit, the ghost of youth, the ghost of age, all waiting their dismissal from the desolate shore, all turning on him eyes that were changed by the death they had died in coming there.

It struck him motionless. The gaoler standing at his side, and the other gaolers moving about, who would have been well enough as to appearance in the ordinary exercise of their functions, looked so extravagantly coarse contrasted with sorrowing mothers and blooming daughters who were there—with the apparitions of the coquette, the young beauty, and the mature woman delicately bred—that the inversion of all experience and likelihood which the scene of shadows presented, was heightened to its utmost. Surely, ghosts all. Surely, the long unreal ride some progress of disease that had brought him to these gloomy shades!

"In the name of the assembled companions in misfortune," said a gentleman of courtly appearance and address, coming forward, "I have the honour of giving you welcome to La Force, and of condoling with you on the calamity that has brought you among us. May it soon terminate happily! It would be an impertinence elsewhere, but it is not so here, to ask your name and condition?"

Charles Darnay roused himself, and gave the required information, in words as suitable as he could find.

"But I hope," said the gentleman, following the chief gaoler with his eyes, who moved across the room, "that you are not in secret?"

"I do not understand the meaning of the term, but I have heard them say so."

"Ah, what a pity! We so much regret it! But take courage; several members of our society have been in secret, at first, and it has lasted but a short time." Then he added, raising his voice, "I grieve to inform the society—in secret."

There was a murmur of commiseration as Charles Darnay crossed the room to a grated door where the gaoler awaited him, and many voices—among which, the soft and compassionate voices of women were conspicuous—gave him good wishes and encouragement. He turned at the grated door, to render the thanks of his heart; it closed under the gaoler's hand; and the apparitions vanished from his sight forever.

The wicket opened on a stone staircase, leading upward. When they had ascended forty steps (the prisoner of half an hour already counted them), the gaoler opened a low black door, and they passed into a solitary cell. It struck cold and damp, but was not dark.

"Yours," said the gaoler.

"Why am I confined alone?"

"How do I know!"

"I can buy pen, ink, and paper?"

"Such are not my orders. You will be visited, and can ask then. At present, you may buy your food, and nothing more."

There were in the cell, a chair, a table, and a straw mattress. As the gaoler made a general inspection of these objects, and of the four walls, before going out, a wandering fancy wandered through the mind of the prisoner leaning against the wall opposite to him, that this gaoler was so unwholesomely bloated, both in face and person, as to look like a man who had been drowned and filled with water. When the gaoler was gone, he thought in the same wandering way, "Now am I left, as if I were dead." Stopping then, to look down at the mattress, he turned from it with a sick feeling, and thought, "And here in these crawling creatures is the first condition of the body after death."

"Five paces by four and a half, five paces by four and a half, five paces by four and a half." The prisoner walked to and fro in his cell, counting its measurement, and the roar of the city arose like muffled drums with a wild swell of voices added to them. "He made shoes, he made shoes, he made shoes." The prisoner counted the measurement again, and paced faster, to draw his mind with him from that latter repetition. "The ghosts that vanished when the wicket closed. There was one among them, the appearance of a lady dressed in black, who was leaning in the embrasure of a window, and she had a light shining upon her golden hair, and she looked like * * * * Let us ride on again, for God's sake, through the illuminated villages with the people all awake! * * * * He made shoes, he made shoes, he made shoes. * * * * Five paces by four and a half." With such scraps tossing and rolling upward from the depths of his mind, the prisoner walked faster and faster, obstinately counting and counting; and the roar of the city changed to this extent—that it still rolled in like muffled drums, but with the wail of voices that he knew, in the swell that rose above them.

II. The Grindstone

Tellson's Bank, established in the Saint Germain Quarter of Paris, was in a wing of a large house, approached by a courtyard and shut off from the street by a high wall and a strong gate. The house belonged to a great nobleman who had lived in it until he made a flight from the troubles, in his own cook's dress, and got across the borders. A mere beast of the chase flying from hunters, he was still in his metempsychosis no other than the same Monseigneur, the preparation of whose chocolate for whose lips had once occupied three strong men besides the cook in question.

Monseigneur gone, and the three strong men absolving themselves from the sin of having drawn his high wages, by being more than ready and willing to cut his throat on the altar of the dawning Republic one and indivisible of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, or Death, Monseigneur's house had been first sequestrated, and then confiscated. For, all things moved so fast, and decree followed decree with that fierce precipitation, that now upon the third night of the autumn month of September, patriot emissaries of the law were in possession of Monseigneur's house, and had marked it with the tri-colour, and were drinking brandy in its state apartments.

A place of business in London like Tellson's place of business in Paris, would soon have driven the House out of its mind and into the Gazette. For, what would staid British responsibility and respectability have said to orange-trees in boxes in a Bank courtyard, and even to a Cupid over the counter? Yet such things were. Tellson's had whitewashed the Cupid, but he was still to be seen on the ceiling, in the coolest linen, aiming (as he very often does) at money from morning to night. Bankruptcy must inevitably have come of this young Pagan, in Lombard-street, London, and also of a curtained alcove in the rear of the immortal boy, and also of a looking-glass let into the wall, and also of clerks not at all old, who danced in public on the slightest provocation. Yet, a French Tellson's could get on with these things exceedingly well, and, as long as the times held together, no man had taken fright at them, and drawn out his money.

What money would be drawn out of Tellson's henceforth, and what would lie there, lost and forgotten; what plate and jewels would tarnish in Tellson's hiding-places, while the depositors rusted in prisons, and when they should have violently perished; how many accounts with Tellson's never to be balanced in this world, must be carried over into the next; no man could have said, that night, any more than Mr. Jarvis Lorry could, though he thought heavily of these questions. He sat by a newly-lighted wood fire (the blighted and unfruitful year was prematurely cold), and on his honest and courageous face there was a deeper shade than the pendent lamp could throw, or any object in the room distortedly reflect—a shade of horror.

He occupied rooms in the Bank, in his fidelity to the House of which he had grown to be a part, like strong root-ivy. It chanced that they derived a kind of security from the patriotic occupation of the main building, but the true-hearted old gentleman never calculated about that. All such circumstances were indifferent to him, so that he did his duty. On the opposite side of the courtyard, under a colonnade, was extensive standing—for carriages—where, indeed, some carriages of Monseigneur yet stood. Against two of the pillars were fastened two great flaring flambeaux, and in the light of these, standing out in the open air, was a large grindstone: a roughly mounted thing which appeared to have hurriedly been brought there from some neighbouring smithy, or other workshop. Rising and looking out of window at these harmless objects, Mr. Lorry shivered, and retired to his seat by the fire. He had opened, not only the glass window, but the lattice blind outside it, and he had closed both again, and he shivered through his frame.

From the streets beyond the high wall and the strong gate, there came the usual night hum of the city, with now and then an indescribable ring in it, weird and unearthly, as if some unwonted sounds of a terrible nature were going up to Heaven.

"Thank God," said Mr. Lorry, clasping his hands, "that no one near and dear to me is in this dreadful town to-night. May He have mercy on all who are in danger!"

Soon afterwards, the bell at the great gate sounded, and he thought, "They have come back!" and sat listening. But, there was no loud irruption into the courtyard, as he had expected, and he heard the gate clash again, and all was quiet.

The nervousness and dread that were upon him inspired that vague uneasiness respecting the Bank, which a great change would naturally awaken, with such feelings roused. It was well guarded, and he got up to go among the trusty people who were watching it, when his door suddenly opened, and two figures rushed in, at sight of which he fell back in amazement.

Lucie and her father! Lucie with her arms stretched out to him, and with that old look of earnestness so concentrated and intensified, that it seemed as though it had been stamped upon her face expressly to give force and power to it in this one passage of her life.

"What is this?" cried Mr. Lorry, breathless and confused. "What is the matter? Lucie! Manette! What has happened? What has brought you here? What is it?"

With the look fixed upon him, in her paleness and wildness, she panted out in his arms, imploringly, "O my dear friend! My husband!"

"Your husband, Lucie?"

"Charles."

"What of Charles?"

"Here.

"Here, in Paris?"

"Has been here some days—three or four—I don't know how many—I can't collect my thoughts. An errand of generosity brought him here unknown to us; he was stopped at the barrier, and sent to prison."

The old man uttered an irrepressible cry. Almost at the same moment, the beg of the great gate rang again, and a loud noise of feet and voices came pouring into the courtyard.

"What is that noise?" said the Doctor, turning towards the window.

"Don't look!" cried Mr. Lorry. "Don't look out! Manette, for your life, don't touch the blind!"

The Doctor turned, with his hand upon the fastening of the window, and said, with a cool, bold smile:

"My dear friend, I have a charmed life in this city. I have been a Bastille prisoner. There is no patriot in Paris—in Paris? In France—who, knowing me to have been a prisoner in the Bastille, would touch me, except to overwhelm me with embraces, or carry me in triumph. My old pain has given me a power that has brought us through the barrier, and gained us news of Charles there, and brought us here. I knew it would be so; I knew I could help Charles out of all danger; I told Lucie so.—What is that noise?" His hand was again upon the window.

"Don't look!" cried Mr. Lorry, absolutely desperate. "No, Lucie, my dear, nor you!" He got his arm round her, and held her. "Don't be so terrified, my love. I solemnly swear to you that I know of no harm having happened to Charles; that I had no suspicion even of his being in this fatal place. What prison is he in?"

"La Force!"

"La Force! Lucie, my child, if ever you were brave and serviceable in your life—and you were always both—you will compose yourself now, to do exactly as I bid you; for more depends upon it than you can think, or I can say. There is no help for you in any action on your part to-night; you cannot possibly stir out. I say this, because what I must bid you to do for Charles's sake, is the hardest thing to do of all. You must instantly be obedient, still, and quiet. You must let me put you in a room at the back here. You must leave your father and me alone for two minutes, and as there are Life and Death in the world you must not delay."

"I will be submissive to you. I see in your face that you know I can do nothing else than this. I know you are true."

The old man kissed her, and hurried her into his room, and turned the key; then, came hurrying back to the Doctor, and opened the window and partly opened the blind, and put his hand upon the Doctor's arm, and looked out with him into the courtyard.

Looked out upon a throng of men and women: not enough in number, or near enough, to fill the courtyard: not more than forty or fifty in all. The people in possession of the house had let them in at the gate, and they had rushed in to work at the grindstone; it had evidently been set up there for their purpose, as in a convenient and retired spot.

But, such awful workers, and such awful work!

The grindstone had a double handle, and, turning at it madly were two men, whose faces, as their long hair flapped back when the whirlings of the grindstone brought their faces up, were more horrible and cruel than the visages of the wildest savages in their most barbarous disguise. False eyebrows and false moustaches were stuck upon them, and their hideous countenances were all bloody and sweaty, and all awry with howling, and all staring and glaring with beastly excitement and want of sleep. As these ruffians turned and turned, their matted locks now flung forward over their eyes, now flung backward over their necks, some women held wine to their mouths that they might drink; and what with dropping blood, and what with dropping wine, and what with the stream of sparks struck out of the stone, all their wicked atmosphere seemed gore and fire. The eye could not detect one creature in the group free from the smear of blood. Shouldering one another to get next at the sharpening-stone, were men stripped to the waist, with the stain all over their limbs and bodies; men in all sorts of rags, with the stain upon those rags; men devilishly set off with spoils of women's lace and silk and ribbon, with the stain dyeing those trifles through and through. Hatchets, knives, bayonets, swords, all brought to be sharpened, were all red with it. Some of the hacked swords were tied to the wrists of those who carried them, with strips of linen and fragments of dress: ligatures various in kind, but all deep of the one colour. And as the frantic wielders of these weapons snatched them from the stream of sparks and tore away into the streets, the same red hue was red in their frenzied eyes;—eyes which any unbrutalised beholder would have given twenty years of life, to petrify with a well-directed gun.

All this was seen in a moment, as the vision of a drowning man, or of any human creature at any very great pass, could see a world if it were there. They drew back from the window, and the Doctor looked for explanation in his friend's ashy face.

"They are," Mr. Lorry whispered the words, glancing fearfully round at the locked room, "murdering the prisoners. If you are sure of what you say; if you really have the power you think you have—as I believe you have—make yourself known to these devils, and get taken to La Force. It may be too late, I don't know, but let it not be a minute later!"

Doctor Manette pressed his hand, hastened bareheaded out of the room, and was in the courtyard when Mr. Lorry regained the blind.

His streaming white hair, his remarkable face, and the impetuous confidence of his manner, as he put the weapons aside like water, carried him in an instant to the heart of the concourse at the stone. For a few moments there was a pause, and a hurry, and a murmur, and the unintelligible sound of his voice; and then Mr. Lorry saw him, surrounded by all, and in the midst of a line of twenty men long, all linked shoulder to shoulder, and hand to shoulder, hurried out with cries of—"Live the Bastille prisoner! Help for the Bastille prisoner's kindred in La Force! Room for the Bastille prisoner in front there! Save the prisoner Evremonde at La Force!" and a thousand answering shouts.

He closed the lattice again with a fluttering heart, closed the window and the curtain, hastened to Lucie, and told her that her father was assisted by the people, and gone in search of her husband. He found her child and Miss Pross with her; but, it never occurred to him to be surprised by their appearance until a long time afterwards, when he sat watching them in such quiet as the night knew.

Lucie had, by that time, fallen into a stupor on the floor at his feet, clinging to his hand. Miss Pross had laid the child down on his own bed, and her head had gradually fallen on the pillow beside her pretty charge. O the long, long night, with the moans of the poor wife! And O the long, long night, with no return of her father and no tidings!

Twice more in the darkness the bell at the great gate sounded, and the irruption was repeated, and the grindstone whirled and spluttered. "What is it?" cried Lucie, affrighted. "Hush! The soldiers' swords are sharpened there," said Mr. Lorry. "The place is national property now, and used as a kind of armoury, my love."

Twice more in all; but, the last spell of work was feeble and fitful. Soon afterwards the day began to dawn, and he softly detached himself from the clasping hand, and cautiously looked out again. A man, so besmeared that he might have been a sorely wounded soldier creeping back to consciousness on a field of slain, was rising from the pavement by the side of the grindstone, and looking about him with a vacant air. Shortly, this worn-out murderer descried in the imperfect light one of the carriages of Monseigneur, and, staggering to that gorgeous vehicle, climbed in at the door, and shut himself up to take his rest on its dainty cushions.

The great grindstone, Earth, had turned when Mr. Lorry looked out again, and the sun was red on the courtyard. But, the lesser grindstone stood alone there in the calm morning air, with a red upon it that the sun had never given, and would never take away.

III. The Shadow

One of the first considerations which arose in the business mind of Mr. Lorry when business hours came round, was this:—that he had no right to imperil Tellson's by sheltering the wife of an emigrant prisoner under the Bank roof. His own possessions, safety, life, he would have hazarded for Lucie and her child, without a moment's demur; but the great trust he held was not his own, and as to that business charge he was a strict man of business.

At first, his mind reverted to Defarge, and he thought of finding out the wine-shop again and taking counsel with its master in reference to the safest dwelling-place in the distracted state of the city. But, the same consideration that suggested him, repudiated him; he lived in the most violent Quarter, and doubtless was influential there, and deep in its dangerous workings.

Noon coming, and the Doctor not returning, and every minute's delay tending to compromise Tellson's, Mr. Lorry advised with Lucie. She said that her father had spoken of hiring a lodging for a short term, in that Quarter, near the Banking-house. As there was no business objection to this, and as he foresaw that even if it were all well with Charles, and he were to be released, he could not hope to leave the city, Mr. Lorry went out in quest of such a lodging, and found a suitable one, high up in a removed by-street where the closed blinds in all the other windows of a high melancholy square of buildings marked deserted homes.

To this lodging he at once removed Lucie and her child, and Miss Pross: giving them what comfort he could, and much more than he had himself. He left Jerry with them, as a figure to fill a doorway that would bear considerable knocking on the head, and retained to his own occupations. A disturbed and doleful mind he brought to bear upon them, and slowly and heavily the day lagged on with him.

It wore itself out, and wore him out with it, until the Bank closed. He was again alone in his room of the previous night, considering what to do next, when he heard a foot upon the stair. In a few moments, a man stood in his presence, who, with a keenly observant look at him, addressed him by his name.

"Your servant," said Mr. Lorry. "Do you know me?"

He was a strongly made man with dark curling hair, from forty-five to fifty years of age. For answer he repeated, without any change of emphasis, the words:

"Do you know me?"

"I have seen you somewhere."

"Perhaps at my wine-shop?"

Much interested and agitated, Mr. Lorry said: "You come from Doctor Manette?"

"Yes. I come from Doctor Manette."

"And what says he? What does he send me?"

Defarge gave into his anxious hand, an open scrap of paper. It bore the words in the Doctor's writing:

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"Charles is safe, but I cannot safely leave this place yet.
 I have obtained the favour that the bearer has a short note
 from Charles to his wife.  Let the bearer see his wife."
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It was dated from La Force, within an hour.

"Will you accompany me," said Mr. Lorry, joyfully relieved after reading this note aloud, "to where his wife resides?"

"Yes," returned Defarge.

Scarcely noticing as yet, in what a curiously reserved and mechanical way Defarge spoke, Mr. Lorry put on his hat and they went down into the courtyard. There, they found two women; one, knitting.

"Madame Defarge, surely!" said Mr. Lorry, who had left her in exactly the same attitude some seventeen years ago.

"It is she," observed her husband.

"Does Madame go with us?" inquired Mr. Lorry, seeing that she moved as they moved.

"Yes. That she may be able to recognise the faces and know the persons. It is for their safety."

Beginning to be struck by Defarge's manner, Mr. Lorry looked dubiously at him, and led the way. Both the women followed; the second woman being The Vengeance.

They passed through the intervening streets as quickly as they might, ascended the staircase of the new domicile, were admitted by Jerry, and found Lucie weeping, alone. She was thrown into a transport by the tidings

Mr. Lorry gave her of her husband, and clasped the hand that delivered his note—little thinking what it had been doing near him in the night, and might, but for a chance, have done to him.

> "DEAREST,—Take courage. I am well, and your father has
> influence around me. You cannot answer this.
> Kiss our child for me."

That was all the writing. It was so much, however, to her who received it, that she turned from Defarge to his wife, and kissed one of the hands that knitted. It was a passionate, loving, thankful, womanly action, but the hand made no response—dropped cold and heavy, and took to its knitting again.

There was something in its touch that gave Lucie a check. She stopped in the act of putting the note in her bosom, and, with her hands yet at her neck, looked terrified at Madame Defarge. Madame Defarge met the lifted eyebrows and forehead with a cold, impassive stare.

"My dear," said Mr. Lorry, striking in to explain; "there are frequent risings in the streets; and, although it is not likely they will ever trouble you, Madame Defarge wishes to see those whom she has the power to protect at such times, to the end that she may know them—that she may identify them. I believe," said Mr. Lorry, rather halting in his reassuring words, as the stony manner of all the three impressed itself upon him more and more, "I state the case, Citizen Defarge?"

Defarge looked gloomily at his wife, and gave no other answer than a gruff sound of acquiescence.

"You had better, Lucie," said Mr. Lorry, doing all he could to propitiate, by tone and manner, "have the dear child here, and our good Pross. Our good Pross, Defarge, is an English lady, and knows no French."

The lady in question, whose rooted conviction that she was more than a match for any foreigner, was not to be shaken by distress and, danger, appeared with folded arms, and observed in English to The Vengeance, whom her eyes first encountered, "Well, I am sure, Boldface! I hope *you* are pretty well!" She also bestowed a British cough on Madame Defarge; but, neither of the two took much heed of her.

"Is that his child?" said Madame Defarge, stopping in her work for the first time, and pointing her knitting-needle at little Lucie as if it were the finger of Fate.

"Yes, madame," answered Mr. Lorry; "this is our poor prisoner's darling daughter, and only child."

The shadow attendant on Madame Defarge and her party seemed to fall so threatening and dark on the child, that her mother instinctively kneeled on the ground beside her, and held her to her breast. The shadow attendant on Madame Defarge and her party seemed then to fall, threatening and dark, on both the mother and the child.

"It is enough, my husband," said Madame Defarge. "I have seen them. We may go."

But, the suppressed manner had enough of menace in it—not visible and presented, but indistinct and withheld—to alarm Lucie into saying, as she laid her appealing hand on Madame Defarge's dress:

"You will be good to my poor husband. You will do him no harm. You will help me to see him if you can?"

"Your husband is not my business here," returned Madame Defarge, looking down at her with perfect composure. "It is the daughter of your father who is my business here."

"For my sake, then, be merciful to my husband. For my child's sake! She will put her hands together and pray you to be merciful. We are more afraid of you than of these others."

Madame Defarge received it as a compliment, and looked at her husband. Defarge, who had been uneasily biting his thumb-nail and looking at her, collected his face into a sterner expression.

"What is it that your husband says in that little letter?" asked Madame Defarge, with a lowering smile. "Influence; he says something touching influence?"

"That my father," said Lucie, hurriedly taking the paper from her breast, but with her alarmed eyes on her questioner and not on it, "has much influence around him."

"Surely it will release him!" said Madame Defarge. "Let it do so."

"As a wife and mother," cried Lucie, most earnestly, "I implore you to have pity on me and not to exercise any power that you possess, against my innocent husband, but to use it in his behalf. O sister-woman, think of me. As a wife and mother!"

Madame Defarge looked, coldly as ever, at the suppliant, and said, turning to her friend The Vengeance:

"The wives and mothers we have been used to see, since we were as little as this child, and much less, have not been greatly considered? We have known *their* husbands and fathers laid in prison and kept from them, often enough? All our lives, we have seen our sister-women suffer, in themselves and in their children, poverty, nakedness, hunger, thirst, sickness, misery, oppression and neglect of all kinds?"

"We have seen nothing else," returned The Vengeance.

"We have borne this a long time," said Madame Defarge, turning her eyes again upon Lucie. "Judge you! Is it likely that the trouble of one wife and mother would be much to us now?"

She resumed her knitting and went out. The Vengeance followed. Defarge went last, and closed the door.

"Courage, my dear Lucie," said Mr. Lorry, as he raised her. "Courage, courage! So far all goes well with us—much, much better than it has of late gone with many poor souls. Cheer up, and have a thankful heart."

"I am not thankless, I hope, but that dreadful woman seems to throw a shadow on me and on all my hopes."

"Tut, tut!" said Mr. Lorry; "what is this despondency in the brave little breast? A shadow indeed! No substance in it, Lucie."

But the shadow of the manner of these Defarges was dark upon himself, for all that, and in his secret mind it troubled him greatly.

IV. Calm in Storm

Doctor Manette did not return until the morning of the fourth day of his absence. So much of what had happened in that dreadful time as could be kept from the knowledge of Lucie was so well concealed from her, that not until long afterwards, when France and she were far apart, did she know that eleven hundred defenceless prisoners of both sexes and all ages had been killed by the populace; that four days and nights had been darkened by this deed of horror; and that the air around her had been tainted by the slain. She only knew that there had been an attack upon the prisons, that all political prisoners had been in danger, and that some had been dragged out by the crowd and murdered.

To Mr. Lorry, the Doctor communicated under an injunction of secrecy on which he had no need to dwell, that the crowd had taken him through a scene of carnage to the prison of La Force. That, in the prison he had found a self-appointed Tribunal sitting, before which the prisoners were brought singly, and by which they were rapidly ordered to be put forth to be massacred, or to be released, or (in a few cases) to be sent back to their cells. That, presented by his conductors to this Tribunal, he had announced himself by name and profession as having been for eighteen years a secret and unaccused prisoner in the Bastille; that, one of the body so sitting in judgment had risen and identified him, and that this man was Defarge.

That, hereupon he had ascertained, through the registers on the table, that his son-in-law was among the living prisoners, and had pleaded hard to the Tribunal—of whom some members were asleep and some awake, some dirty with murder and some clean, some sober and some not—for his life and liberty. That, in the first frantic greetings lavished on himself as a notable sufferer under the overthrown system, it had been accorded to him to have Charles Darnay brought before the lawless Court, and examined. That, he seemed on the point of being at once released, when the tide in his favour met with some unexplained check (not intelligible to the Doctor), which led to a few words of secret conference. That, the man sitting as President had then informed Doctor Manette that the prisoner must remain in custody, but should, for his sake, be held inviolate in safe custody. That, immediately, on a signal, the prisoner was removed to the interior of the prison again; but, that he, the Doctor, had then so strongly pleaded for permission to remain and assure himself that his son-in-law was, through no malice or mischance, delivered to the concourse whose murderous yells outside the gate had often drowned the proceedings, that he had obtained the permission, and had remained in that Hall of Blood until the danger was over.

The sights he had seen there, with brief snatches of food and sleep by intervals, shall remain untold. The mad joy over the prisoners who were saved, had astounded him scarcely less than the mad ferocity against those who were cut to pieces. One prisoner there was, he said, who had been discharged into the street free, but at whom a mistaken savage had thrust a pike as he passed out. Being besought to go to him and dress the wound, the Doctor had passed out at the same gate, and had found him in the arms of a company of Samaritans, who were seated on the bodies of their victims. With an inconsistency as monstrous as anything in this awful nightmare, they had helped the healer, and tended the wounded man with the gentlest solicitude—had made a litter for him and escorted him carefully from the spot—had then caught up their weapons and plunged anew into a butchery so dreadful, that the Doctor had covered his eyes with his hands, and swooned away in the midst of it.

As Mr. Lorry received these confidences, and as he watched the face of his friend now sixty-two years of age, a misgiving arose within him that such dread experiences would revive the old danger.

But, he had never seen his friend in his present aspect: he had never at all known him in his present character. For the first time the Doctor felt, now, that his suffering was strength and power. For the first time he felt that in that sharp fire, he had slowly forged the iron which could break the prison door of his daughter's husband, and deliver him. "It all tended to a good end, my friend; it was not mere waste and ruin. As my beloved child was helpful in restoring me to myself, I will be helpful now in restoring the dearest part of herself to her; by the aid of Heaven I will do it!" Thus, Doctor Manette. And when Jarvis Lorry saw the kindled eyes, the resolute face, the calm strong look and bearing of the man whose life always seemed to him to have been stopped, like a clock, for so many years, and then set going again with an energy which had lain dormant during the cessation of its usefulness, he believed.

Greater things than the Doctor had at that time to contend with, would have yielded before his persevering purpose. While he kept himself in his place, as a physician, whose business was with all degrees of mankind, bond and free, rich and poor, bad and good, he used his personal influence so wisely, that he was soon the inspecting physician of three prisons, and among them of La Force. He could now assure Lucie that her husband was no longer confined alone, but was mixed with the general body of prisoners; he saw her husband weekly, and brought sweet messages to her, straight from his lips; sometimes her husband himself sent a letter to her (though never by the Doctor's hand), but she was not permitted to write to him: for, among the many wild suspicions of plots in the prisons, the wildest of all pointed at emigrants who were known to have made friends or permanent connections abroad.

This new life of the Doctor's was an anxious life, no doubt; still, the sagacious Mr. Lorry saw that there was a new sustaining pride in it. Nothing unbecoming tinged the pride; it was a natural and worthy one; but he observed it as a curiosity. The Doctor knew, that up to that time, his imprisonment had been associated in the minds of his daughter and his friend, with his personal affliction, deprivation, and weakness. Now that this was changed, and he knew himself to be invested through that old trial with forces to which they both looked for Charles's ultimate safety and deliverance, he became so far exalted by the change, that he took the lead and direction, and required them as the weak, to trust to him as the strong. The preceding relative positions of himself and Lucie were reversed, yet only as the liveliest gratitude and affection could reverse them, for he could have had no pride but in rendering some service to her who had rendered so much to him. "All curious to see," thought Mr. Lorry, in his amiably shrewd way, "but all natural and right; so, take the lead, my dear friend, and keep it; it couldn't be in better hands."

But, though the Doctor tried hard, and never ceased trying, to get Charles Darnay set at liberty, or at least to get him brought to trial, the public current of the time set too strong and fast for him. The new era began; the king was tried, doomed, and beheaded; the Republic of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, or Death, declared for victory or death against the world in arms; the black flag waved night and day from the great towers of Notre Dame; three hundred thousand men, summoned to rise against the tyrants of the earth, rose from all the varying soils of France, as if the dragon's teeth had been sown broadcast, and had yielded fruit equally on hill and plain, on rock, in gravel, and alluvial mud, under the bright sky of the South and under the clouds of the North, in fell and forest, in the vineyards and the olive-grounds and among the cropped grass and the stubble of the corn, along the fruitful banks of the broad rivers, and in the sand of the sea-shore. What private solicitude could rear itself against the deluge of the Year One of Liberty—the deluge rising from below, not falling from above, and with the windows of Heaven shut, not opened!

There was no pause, no pity, no peace, no interval of relenting rest, no measurement of time. Though days and nights circled as regularly as when time was young, and the evening and morning were the first day, other count of time there was none. Hold of it was lost in the raging fever of a nation, as it is in the fever of one patient. Now, breaking the unnatural silence of a whole city, the executioner showed the people the head of the king—and now, it seemed almost in the same breath, the head of his fair wife which had had eight weary months of imprisoned widowhood and misery, to turn it grey.

And yet, observing the strange law of contradiction which obtains in all such cases, the time was long, while it flamed by so fast. A revolutionary tribunal in the capital, and forty or fifty thousand revolutionary committees all over the land; a law of the Suspected, which struck away all security for liberty or life, and delivered over any good and innocent person to any bad and guilty one; prisons gorged with people who had committed no offence, and could obtain no hearing; these things became the established order and nature of appointed things, and seemed to be ancient usage before they were many weeks old. Above all, one hideous figure grew as familiar as if it had been before the general gaze from the foundations of the world—the figure of the sharp female called La Guillotine.

It was the popular theme for jests; it was the best cure for headache, it infallibly prevented the hair from turning grey, it imparted a peculiar delicacy to the complexion, it was the National Razor which shaved close: who kissed La Guillotine, looked through the little window and sneezed into the sack. It was the sign of the regeneration of the human race. It superseded the Cross. Models of it were worn on breasts from which the Cross was discarded, and it was bowed down to and believed in where the Cross was denied.

It sheared off heads so many, that it, and the ground it most polluted, were a rotten red. It was taken to pieces, like a toy-puzzle for a young Devil, and was put together again when the occasion wanted it. It hushed the eloquent, struck down the powerful, abolished the beautiful and good. Twenty-two friends of high public mark, twenty-one living and one dead, it had lopped the heads off, in one morning, in as many minutes. The name of the strong man of Old Scripture had descended to the chief functionary who worked it; but, so armed, he was stronger than his namesake, and blinder, and tore away the gates of God's own Temple every day.

Among these terrors, and the brood belonging to them, the Doctor walked with a steady head: confident in his power, cautiously persistent in his end, never doubting that he would save Lucie's husband at last. Yet the current of the time swept by, so strong and deep, and carried the time away so fiercely, that Charles had lain in prison one year and three months when the Doctor was thus steady and confident. So much more wicked and distracted had the Revolution grown in that December month, that the rivers of the South were encumbered with the bodies of the violently drowned by night, and prisoners were shot in lines and squares under the southern wintry sun. Still, the Doctor walked among the terrors with a steady head. No man better known than he, in Paris at that day; no man in a stranger situation. Silent, humane, indispensable in hospital and prison, using his art equally among assassins and victims, he was a man apart. In the exercise of his skill, the appearance and the story of the Bastille Captive removed him from all other men. He was not suspected or brought in question, any more than if he had indeed been recalled to life some eighteen years before, or were a Spirit moving among mortals.

V. The Wood-Sawyer

One year and three months. During all that time Lucie was never sure, from hour to hour, but that the Guillotine would strike off her husband's head next day. Every day, through the stony streets, the tumbrils now jolted heavily, filled with Condemned. Lovely girls; bright women, brown-haired, black-haired, and grey; youths; stalwart men and old; gentle born and peasant born; all red wine for La Guillotine, all daily brought into light from the dark cellars of the loathsome prisons, and carried to her through the streets to slake her devouring thirst. Liberty, equality, fraternity, or death;—the last, much the easiest to bestow, O Guillotine!

If the suddenness of her calamity, and the whirling wheels of the time, had stunned the Doctor's daughter into awaiting the result in idle despair, it would but have been with her as it was with many. But, from the hour when she had taken the white head to her fresh young bosom in the garret of Saint Antoine, she had been true to her duties. She was truest to them in the season of trial, as all the quietly loyal and good will always be.

As soon as they were established in their new residence, and her father had entered on the routine of his avocations, she arranged the little household as exactly as if her husband had been there. Everything had its appointed place and its appointed time. Little Lucie she taught, as regularly, as if they had all been united in their English home. The slight devices with which she cheated herself into the show of a belief that they would soon be reunited—the little preparations for his speedy return, the setting aside of his chair and his books—these, and the solemn prayer at night for one dear prisoner especially, among the many unhappy souls in prison and the shadow of death—were almost the only outspoken reliefs of her heavy mind.

She did not greatly alter in appearance. The plain dark dresses, akin to mourning dresses, which she and her child wore, were as neat and as well attended to as the brighter clothes of happy days. She lost her colour, and the old and intent expression was a constant, not an occasional, thing; otherwise, she remained very pretty and comely. Sometimes, at night on kissing her father, she would burst into the grief she had repressed all day, and would say that her sole reliance, under Heaven, was on him. He always resolutely answered: "Nothing can happen to him without my knowledge, and I know that I can save him, Lucie."

They had not made the round of their changed life many weeks, when her father said to her, on coming home one evening:

"My dear, there is an upper window in the prison, to which Charles can sometimes gain access at three in the afternoon. When he can get to it—which depends on many uncertainties and incidents—he might see you in the street, he thinks, if you stood in a certain place that I can show you. But you will not be able to see him, my poor child, and even if you could, it would be unsafe for you to make a sign of recognition."

"O show me the place, my father, and I will go there every day."

From that time, in all weathers, she waited there two hours. As the clock struck two, she was there, and at four she turned resignedly away. When it was not too wet or inclement for her child to be with her, they went together; at other times she was alone; but, she never missed a single day.

It was the dark and dirty corner of a small winding street. The hovel of a cutter of wood into lengths for burning, was the only house at that end; all else was wall. On the third day of her being there, he noticed her.

"Good day, citizeness."

"Good day, citizen."

This mode of address was now prescribed by decree. It had been established voluntarily some time ago, among the more thorough patriots; but, was now law for everybody.

"Walking here again, citizeness?"

"You see me, citizen!"

The wood-sawyer, who was a little man with a redundancy of gesture (he had once been a mender of roads), cast a glance at the prison, pointed at the prison, and putting his ten fingers before his face to represent bars, peeped through them jocosely.

"But it's not my business," said he. And went on sawing his wood.

Next day he was looking out for her, and accosted her the moment she appeared.

"What? Walking here again, citizeness?"

"Yes, citizen."

"Ah! A child too! Your mother, is it not, my little citizeness?"

"Do I say yes, mamma?" whispered little Lucie, drawing close to her.

"Yes, dearest."

"Yes, citizen."

"Ah! But it's not my business. My work is my business. See my saw! I call it my Little Guillotine. La, la, la; La, la, la! And off his head comes!"

The billet fell as he spoke, and he threw it into a basket.

"I call myself the Samson of the firewood guillotine. See here again! Loo, loo, loo; Loo, loo, loo! And off *her* head comes! Now, a child. Tickle, tickle; Pickle, pickle! And off *its* head comes. All the family!"

Lucie shuddered as he threw two more billets into his basket, but it was impossible to be there while the wood-sawyer was at work, and not be in his sight. Thenceforth, to secure his good will, she always spoke to him first, and often gave him drink-money, which he readily received.

He was an inquisitive fellow, and sometimes when she had quite forgotten him in gazing at the prison roof and grates, and in lifting her heart up to her husband, she would come to herself to find him looking at her, with his knee on his bench and his saw stopped in its work. "But it's not my business!" he would generally say at those times, and would briskly fall to his sawing again.

In all weathers, in the snow and frost of winter, in the bitter winds of spring, in the hot sunshine of summer, in the rains of autumn, and again in the snow and frost of winter, Lucie passed two hours of every day at this place; and every day on leaving it, she kissed the prison wall. Her husband saw her (so she learned from her father) it might be once in five or six times: it might be twice or thrice running: it might be, not for a week or a fortnight together. It was enough that he could and did see her when the chances served, and on that possibility she would have waited out the day, seven days a week.

These occupations brought her round to the December month, wherein her father walked among the terrors with a steady head. On a lightly-snowing afternoon she arrived at the usual corner. It was a day of some wild rejoicing, and a festival. She had seen the houses, as she came along, decorated with little pikes, and with little red caps stuck upon them; also, with tricoloured ribbons; also, with the standard inscription (tricoloured letters were the favourite), Republic One and Indivisible. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, or Death!

The miserable shop of the wood-sawyer was so small, that its whole surface furnished very indifferent space for this legend. He had got somebody to scrawl it up for him, however, who had squeezed Death in with most inappropriate difficulty. On his house-top, he displayed pike and cap, as a good citizen must, and in a window he had stationed his saw inscribed as his "Little Sainte Guillotine"—for the great sharp female was by that time popularly canonised. His shop was shut and he was not there, which was a relief to Lucie, and left her quite alone.

But, he was not far off, for presently she heard a troubled movement and a shouting coming along, which filled her with fear. A moment afterwards, and a throng of people came pouring round the corner by the prison wall, in the midst of whom was the wood-sawyer hand in hand with The Vengeance. There could not be fewer than five hundred people, and they were dancing like five thousand demons. There was no other music than their own singing. They danced to the popular Revolution song, keeping a ferocious time that was like a gnashing of teeth in unison. Men and women danced together, women danced together, men danced together, as hazard had brought them together. At first, they were a mere storm of coarse red caps and coarse woollen rags; but, as they filled the place, and stopped to dance about Lucie, some ghastly apparition of a dance-figure gone raving mad arose among them. They advanced, retreated, struck at one another's hands, clutched at one another's heads, spun round alone, caught one another and spun round in pairs, until many of them dropped. While those were down, the rest linked hand in hand, and all spun round together: then the ring broke, and in separate rings of two and four they turned and turned until they all stopped at once, began again, struck, clutched, and tore, and then reversed the spin, and all spun round another way. Suddenly they stopped again, paused, struck out the time afresh, formed into lines the width of the public way, and, with their heads low down and their hands high up, swooped screaming off. No fight could have been half so terrible as this dance. It was so emphatically a fallen sport—a something, once innocent, delivered over to all devilry—a healthy pastime changed into a means of angering the blood, bewildering the senses, and steeling the heart. Such grace as was visible in it, made it the uglier, showing how warped and perverted all things good by nature were become. The maidenly bosom bared to this, the pretty almost-child's head thus distracted, the delicate foot mincing in this slough of blood and dirt, were types of the disjointed time.

This was the Carmagnole. As it passed, leaving Lucie frightened and bewildered in the doorway of the wood-sawyer's house, the feathery snow fell as quietly and lay as white and soft, as if it had never been.

"O my father!" for he stood before her when she lifted up the eyes she had momentarily darkened with her hand; "such a cruel, bad sight."

"I know, my dear, I know. I have seen it many times. Don't be frightened! Not one of them would harm you."

"I am not frightened for myself, my father. But when I think of my husband, and the mercies of these people—"

"We will set him above their mercies very soon. I left him climbing to the window, and I came to tell you. There is no one here to see. You may kiss your hand towards that highest shelving roof."

"I do so, father, and I send him my Soul with it!"

"You cannot see him, my poor dear?"

"No, father," said Lucie, yearning and weeping as she kissed her hand, "no."

A footstep in the snow. Madame Defarge. "I salute you, citizeness," from the Doctor. "I salute you, citizen." This in passing. Nothing more. Madame Defarge gone, like a shadow over the white road.

"Give me your arm, my love. Pass from here with an air of cheerfulness and courage, for his sake. That was well done;" they had left the spot; "it shall not be in vain. Charles is summoned for to-morrow."

"For to-morrow!"

"There is no time to lose. I am well prepared, but there are precautions to be taken, that could not be taken until he was actually summoned before the Tribunal. He has not received the notice yet, but I know that he will presently be summoned for to-morrow, and removed to the Conciergerie; I have timely information. You are not afraid?"

She could scarcely answer, "I trust in you."

"Do so, implicitly. Your suspense is nearly ended, my darling; he shall be restored to you within a few hours; I have encompassed him with every protection. I must see Lorry."

He stopped. There was a heavy lumbering of wheels within hearing. They both knew too well what it meant. One. Two. Three. Three tumbrils faring away with their dread loads over the hushing snow.

"I must see Lorry," the Doctor repeated, turning her another way.

The staunch old gentleman was still in his trust; had never left it. He and his books were in frequent requisition as to property confiscated and made national. What he could save for the owners, he saved. No better man living to hold fast by what Tellson's had in keeping, and to hold his peace.

A murky red and yellow sky, and a rising mist from the Seine, denoted the approach of darkness. It was almost dark when they arrived at the Bank. The stately residence of Monseigneur was altogether blighted and deserted. Above a heap of dust and ashes in the court, ran the letters: National Property. Republic One and Indivisible. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, or Death!

Who could that be with Mr. Lorry—the owner of the riding-coat upon the chair—who must not be seen? From whom newly arrived, did he come out, agitated and surprised, to take his favourite in his arms? To whom did he appear to repeat her faltering words, when, raising his voice and turning his head towards the door of the room from which he had issued, he said: "Removed to the Conciergerie, and summoned for to-morrow?"

VI. Triumph

The dread tribunal of five Judges, Public Prosecutor, and determined Jury, sat every day. Their lists went forth every evening, and were read out by the gaolers of the various prisons to their prisoners. The standard gaoler-joke was, "Come out and listen to the Evening Paper, you inside there!"

"Charles Evremonde, called Darnay!"

So at last began the Evening Paper at La Force.

When a name was called, its owner stepped apart into a spot reserved for those who were announced as being thus fatally recorded. Charles Evremonde, called Darnay, had reason to know the usage; he had seen hundreds pass away so.

His bloated gaoler, who wore spectacles to read with, glanced over them to assure himself that he had taken his place, and went through the list, making a similar short pause at each name. There were twenty-three names, but only twenty were responded to; for one of the prisoners so summoned had died in gaol and been forgotten, and two had already been guillotined and forgotten. The list was read, in the vaulted chamber where Darnay had seen the associated prisoners on the night of his arrival. Every one of those had perished in the massacre; every human creature he had since cared for and parted with, had died on the scaffold.

There were hurried words of farewell and kindness, but the parting was soon over. It was the incident of every day, and the society of La Force were engaged in the preparation of some games of forfeits and a little concert, for that evening. They crowded to the grates and shed tears there; but, twenty places in the projected entertainments had to be refilled, and the time was, at best, short to the lock-up hour, when the common rooms and corridors would be delivered over to the great dogs who kept watch there through the night. The prisoners were far from insensible or unfeeling; their ways arose out of the condition of the time. Similarly, though with a subtle difference, a species of fervour or intoxication, known, without doubt, to have led some persons to brave the guillotine unnecessarily, and to die by it, was not mere boastfulness, but a wild infection of the wildly shaken public mind. In seasons of pestilence, some of us will have a secret attraction to the disease

—a terrible passing inclination to die of it. And all of us have like wonders hidden in our breasts, only needing circumstances to evoke them.

The passage to the Conciergerie was short and dark; the night in its vermin-haunted cells was long and cold. Next day, fifteen prisoners were put to the bar before Charles Darnay's name was called. All the fifteen were condemned, and the trials of the whole occupied an hour and a half.

"Charles Evremonde, called Darnay," was at length arraigned.

His judges sat upon the Bench in feathered hats; but the rough red cap and tricoloured cockade was the head-dress otherwise prevailing. Looking at the Jury and the turbulent audience, he might have thought that the usual order of things was reversed, and that the felons were trying the honest men. The lowest, cruelest, and worst populace of a city, never without its quantity of low, cruel, and bad, were the directing spirits of the scene: noisily commenting, applauding, disapproving, anticipating, and precipitating the result, without a check. Of the men, the greater part were armed in various ways; of the women, some wore knives, some daggers, some ate and drank as they looked on, many knitted. Among these last, was one, with a spare piece of knitting under her arm as she worked. She was in a front row, by the side of a man whom he had never seen since his arrival at the Barrier, but whom he directly remembered as Defarge. He noticed that she once or twice whispered in his ear, and that she seemed to be his wife; but, what he most noticed in the two figures was, that although they were posted as close to himself as they could be, they never looked towards him. They seemed to be waiting for something with a dogged determination, and they looked at the Jury, but at nothing else. Under the President sat Doctor Manette, in his usual quiet dress. As well as the prisoner could see, he and Mr. Lorry were the only men there, unconnected with the Tribunal, who wore their usual clothes, and had not assumed the coarse garb of the Carmagnole.

Charles Evremonde, called Darnay, was accused by the public prosecutor as an emigrant, whose life was forfeit to the Republic, under the decree which banished all emigrants on pain of Death. It was nothing that the decree bore date since his return to France. There he was, and there was the decree; he had been taken in France, and his head was demanded.

"Take off his head!" cried the audience. "An enemy to the Republic!"

The President rang his bell to silence those cries, and asked the prisoner whether it was not true that he had lived many years in England?

Undoubtedly it was.

Was he not an emigrant then? What did he call himself?

Not an emigrant, he hoped, within the sense and spirit of the law.

Why not? the President desired to know.

Because he had voluntarily relinquished a title that was distasteful to him, and a station that was distasteful to him, and had left his country—he submitted before the word emigrant in the present acceptation by the Tribunal was in use—to live by his own industry in England, rather than on the industry of the overladen people of France.

What proof had he of this?

He handed in the names of two witnesses; Theophile Gabelle, and Alexandre Manette.

But he had married in England? the President reminded him.

True, but not an English woman.

A citizeness of France?

Yes. By birth.

Her name and family?

"Lucie Manette, only daughter of Doctor Manette, the good physician who sits there."

This answer had a happy effect upon the audience. Cries in exaltation of the well-known good physician rent the hall. So capriciously were the people moved, that tears immediately rolled down several ferocious countenances which had been glaring at the prisoner a moment before, as if with impatience to pluck him out into the streets and kill him.

On these few steps of his dangerous way, Charles Darnay had set his foot according to Doctor Manette's reiterated instructions. The same cautious counsel directed every step that lay before him, and had prepared every inch of his road.

The President asked, why had he returned to France when he did, and not sooner?

He had not returned sooner, he replied, simply because he had no means of living in France, save those he had resigned; whereas, in England, he lived by giving instruction in the French language and literature. He had returned when he did, on the pressing and written entreaty of a French citizen, who represented that his life was endangered by his absence. He had come back, to save a citizen's life, and to bear his testimony, at whatever personal hazard, to the truth. Was that criminal in the eyes of the Republic?

The populace cried enthusiastically, "No!" and the President rang his bell to quiet them. Which it did not, for they continued to cry "No!" until they left off, of their own will.

The President required the name of that citizen. The accused explained that the citizen was his first witness. He also referred with confidence to the citizen's letter, which had been taken from him at the Barrier, but which he did not doubt would be found among the papers then before the President.

The Doctor had taken care that it should be there—had assured him that it would be there—and at this stage of the proceedings it was produced and read. Citizen Gabelle was called to confirm it, and did so. Citizen Gabelle hinted, with infinite delicacy and politeness, that in the pressure of business imposed on the Tribunal by the multitude of enemies of the Republic with which it had to deal, he had been slightly overlooked in his prison of the Abbaye—in fact, had rather passed out of the Tribunal's patriotic remembrance—until three days ago; when he had been summoned before it, and had been set at liberty on the Jury's declaring themselves satisfied that the accusation against him was answered, as to himself, by the surrender of the citizen Evremonde, called Darnay.

Doctor Manette was next questioned. His high personal popularity, and the clearness of his answers, made a great impression; but, as he proceeded, as he showed that the Accused was his first friend on his release from his long imprisonment; that, the accused had remained in England, always faithful and devoted to his daughter and himself in their exile; that, so far from being in favour with the Aristocrat government there, he had actually been tried for his life by it, as the foe of England and friend of the United States—as he brought these circumstances into view, with the greatest discretion and with the straightforward force of truth and earnestness, the Jury and the populace became one. At last, when he appealed by name to Monsieur Lorry, an English gentleman then and there present, who, like himself, had been a witness on that English trial and could corroborate his account of it, the Jury declared that they had heard enough, and that they were ready with their votes if the President were content to receive them.

At every vote (the Jurymen voted aloud and individually), the populace set up a shout of applause. All the voices were in the prisoner's favour, and the President declared him free.

Then, began one of those extraordinary scenes with which the populace sometimes gratified their fickleness, or their better impulses towards generosity and mercy, or which they regarded as some set-off against their swollen account of cruel rage. No man can decide now to which of these motives such extraordinary scenes were referable; it is probable, to a blending of all the three, with the second predominating. No sooner was the acquittal pronounced, than tears were shed as freely as blood at another time, and such fraternal embraces were bestowed upon the prisoner by as many of both sexes as could rush at him, that after his long and unwholesome confinement he was in danger of fainting from exhaustion; none the less because he knew very well, that the very same people, carried by another current, would have rushed at him with the very same intensity, to rend him to pieces and strew him over the streets.

His removal, to make way for other accused persons who were to be tried, rescued him from these caresses for the moment. Five were to be tried together, next, as enemies of the Republic, forasmuch as they had not assisted it by word or deed. So quick was the Tribunal to compensate itself and the nation for a chance lost, that these five came down to him before he left the place, condemned to die within twenty-four hours. The first of them told him so, with the customary prison sign of Death—a raised finger—and they all added in words, "Long live the Republic!"

The five had had, it is true, no audience to lengthen their proceedings, for when he and Doctor Manette emerged from the gate, there was a great crowd about it, in which there seemed to be every face he had seen in Court—except two, for which he looked in vain. On his coming out, the concourse made at him anew, weeping, embracing, and shouting, all by turns and all together, until the very tide of the river on the bank of which the mad scene was acted, seemed to run mad, like the people on the shore.

They put him into a great chair they had among them, and which they had taken either out of the Court itself, or one of its rooms or passages. Over the chair they had thrown a red flag, and to the back of it they had bound a pike with a red cap on its top. In this car of triumph, not even the Doctor's entreaties could prevent his being carried to his home on men's shoulders, with a confused sea of red caps heaving about him, and casting up to sight from the stormy deep such wrecks of faces, that he more than once misdoubted his mind being in confusion, and that he was in the tumbril on his way to the Guillotine.

In wild dreamlike procession, embracing whom they met and pointing him out, they carried him on. Reddening the snowy streets with the prevailing Republican colour, in winding and tramping through them, as they had reddened them below the snow with a deeper dye, they carried him thus into the courtyard of the building where he lived. Her father had gone on before, to prepare her, and when her husband stood upon his feet, she dropped insensible in his arms.

As he held her to his heart and turned her beautiful head between his face and the brawling crowd, so that his tears and her lips might come together unseen, a few of the people fell to dancing. Instantly, all the rest fell to dancing, and the courtyard overflowed with the Carmagnole. Then, they elevated into the vacant chair a young woman from the crowd to be carried as the Goddess of Liberty, and then swelling and overflowing out into the adjacent streets, and along the river's bank, and over the bridge, the Carmagnole absorbed them every one and whirled them away.

After grasping the Doctor's hand, as he stood victorious and proud before him; after grasping the hand of Mr. Lorry, who came panting in breathless from his struggle against the waterspout of the Carmagnole; after kissing little Lucie, who was lifted up to clasp her arms round his neck; and after embracing the ever zealous and faithful Pross who lifted her; he took his wife in his arms, and carried her up to their rooms.

"Lucie! My own! I am safe."

"O dearest Charles, let me thank God for this on my knees as I have prayed to Him."

They all reverently bowed their heads and hearts. When she was again in his arms, he said to her:

"And now speak to your father, dearest. No other man in all this France could have done what he has done for me."

She laid her head upon her father's breast, as she had laid his poor head on her own breast, long, long ago. He was happy in the return he had made her, he was recompensed for his suffering, he was proud of his strength. "You must not be weak, my darling," he remonstrated; "don't tremble so. I have saved him."

VII. A Knock at the Door

"I have saved him." It was not another of the dreams in which he had often come back; he was really here. And yet his wife trembled, and a vague but heavy fear was upon her.

All the air round was so thick and dark, the people were so passionately revengeful and fitful, the innocent were so constantly put to death on vague suspicion and black malice, it was so impossible to forget that many as blameless as her husband and as dear to others as he was to her, every day shared the fate from which he had been clutched, that her heart could not be as lightened of its load as she felt it ought to be. The shadows of the wintry afternoon were beginning to fall, and even now the dreadful carts were rolling through the streets. Her mind pursued them, looking for him among the Condemned; and then she clung closer to his real presence and trembled more.

Her father, cheering her, showed a compassionate superiority to this woman's weakness, which was wonderful to see. No garret, no shoemaking, no One Hundred and Five, North Tower, now! He had accomplished the task he had set himself, his promise was redeemed, he had saved Charles. Let them all lean upon him.

Their housekeeping was of a very frugal kind: not only because that was the safest way of life, involving the least offence to the people, but because they were not rich, and Charles, throughout his imprisonment, had had to pay heavily for his bad food, and for his guard, and towards the living of the poorer prisoners. Partly on this account, and partly to avoid a domestic spy, they kept no servant; the citizen and citizeness who acted as porters at the courtyard gate, rendered them occasional service; and Jerry (almost wholly transferred to them by Mr. Lorry) had become their daily retainer, and had his bed there every night.

It was an ordinance of the Republic One and Indivisible of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, or Death, that on the door or doorpost of every house, the name of every inmate must be legibly inscribed in letters of a certain size, at a certain convenient height from the ground. Mr. Jerry Cruncher's name, therefore, duly embellished the doorpost down below; and, as the afternoon shadows deepened, the owner of that name himself appeared, from overlooking a painter whom Doctor Manette had employed to add to the list the name of Charles Evremonde, called Darnay.

In the universal fear and distrust that darkened the time, all the usual harmless ways of life were changed. In the Doctor's little household, as in very many others, the articles of daily consumption that were wanted were purchased every evening, in small quantities and at various small shops. To avoid attracting notice, and to give as little occasion as possible for talk and envy, was the general desire.

For some months past, Miss Pross and Mr. Cruncher had discharged the office of purveyors; the former carrying the money; the latter, the basket. Every afternoon at about the time when the public lamps were lighted, they fared forth on this duty, and made and brought home such purchases as were needful. Although Miss Pross, through her long association with a French family, might have known as much of their language as of her own, if she had had a mind, she had no mind in that direction; consequently she knew no more of that "nonsense" (as she was pleased to call it) than Mr. Cruncher did. So her manner of marketing was to plump a noun-substantive at the head of a shopkeeper without any introduction in the nature of an article, and, if it happened not to be the name of the thing she wanted, to look round for that thing, lay hold of it, and hold on by it until the bargain was concluded. She always made a bargain for it, by holding up, as a statement of its just price, one finger less than the merchant held up, whatever his number might be.

"Now, Mr. Cruncher," said Miss Pross, whose eyes were red with felicity; "if you are ready, I am."

Jerry hoarsely professed himself at Miss Pross's service. He had worn all his rust off long ago, but nothing would file his spiky head down.

"There's all manner of things wanted," said Miss Pross, "and we shall have a precious time of it. We want wine, among the rest. Nice toasts these Redheads will be drinking, wherever we buy it."

"It will be much the same to your knowledge, miss, I should think," retorted Jerry, "whether they drink your health or the Old Un's."

"Who's he?" said Miss Pross.

Mr. Cruncher, with some diffidence, explained himself as meaning "Old Nick's."

"Ha!" said Miss Pross, "it doesn't need an interpreter to explain the meaning of these creatures. They have but one, and it's Midnight Murder, and Mischief."

"Hush, dear! Pray, pray, be cautious!" cried Lucie.

"Yes, yes, yes, I'll be cautious," said Miss Pross; "but I may say among ourselves, that I do hope there will be no oniony and tobaccoey smotherings in the form of embracings all round, going on in the streets. Now, Ladybird, never you stir from that fire till I come back! Take care of the dear husband you have recovered, and don't move your pretty head from his shoulder as you have it now, till you see me again! May I ask a question, Doctor Manette, before I go?"

"I think you may take that liberty," the Doctor answered, smiling.

"For gracious sake, don't talk about Liberty; we have quite enough of that," said Miss Pross.

"Hush, dear! Again?" Lucie remonstrated.

"Well, my sweet," said Miss Pross, nodding her head emphatically, "the short and the long of it is, that I am a subject of His Most Gracious Majesty King George the Third;" Miss Pross curtseyed at the name; "and as such, my maxim is, Confound their politics, Frustrate their knavish tricks, On him our hopes we fix, God save the King!"

Mr. Cruncher, in an access of loyalty, growlingly repeated the words after Miss Pross, like somebody at church.

"I am glad you have so much of the Englishman in you, though I wish you had never taken that cold in your voice," said Miss Pross, approvingly. "But the question, Doctor Manette. Is there"—it was the good creature's way to affect to make light of anything that was a great anxiety with them all, and to come at it in this chance manner—"is there any prospect yet, of our getting out of this place?"

"I fear not yet. It would be dangerous for Charles yet."

"Heigh-ho-hum!" said Miss Pross, cheerfully repressing a sigh as she glanced at her darling's golden hair in the light of the fire, "then we must have patience and wait: that's all. We must hold up our heads and fight low, as my brother Solomon used to say. Now, Mr. Cruncher!—Don't you move, Ladybird!"

They went out, leaving Lucie, and her husband, her father, and the child, by a bright fire. Mr. Lorry was expected back presently from the Banking House. Miss Pross had lighted the lamp, but had put it aside in a corner, that they might enjoy the fire-light undisturbed. Little Lucie sat by her grandfather with her hands clasped through his arm: and he, in a tone not rising much above a whisper, began to tell her a story of a great and powerful Fairy who had opened a prison-wall and let out a captive who had once done the Fairy a service. All was subdued and quiet, and Lucie was more at ease than she had been.

"What is that?" she cried, all at once.

"My dear!" said her father, stopping in his story, and laying his hand on hers, "command yourself. What a disordered state you are in! The least thing—nothing—startles you! *You*, your father's daughter!"

"I thought, my father," said Lucie, excusing herself, with a pale face and in a faltering voice, "that I heard strange feet upon the stairs."

"My love, the staircase is as still as Death."

As he said the word, a blow was struck upon the door.

"Oh father, father. What can this be! Hide Charles. Save him!"

"My child," said the Doctor, rising, and laying his hand upon her shoulder, "I *have* saved him. What weakness is this, my dear! Let me go to the door."

He took the lamp in his hand, crossed the two intervening outer rooms, and opened it. A rude clattering of feet over the floor, and four rough men in red caps, armed with sabres and pistols, entered the room.

"The Citizen Evremonde, called Darnay," said the first.

"Who seeks him?" answered Darnay.

"I seek him. We seek him. I know you, Evremonde; I saw you before the Tribunal to-day. You are again the prisoner of the Republic."

The four surrounded him, where he stood with his wife and child clinging to him.

"Tell me how and why am I again a prisoner?"

"It is enough that you return straight to the Conciergerie, and will know to-morrow. You are summoned for to-morrow."

Doctor Manette, whom this visitation had so turned into stone, that he stood with the lamp in his hand, as if be woe a statue made to hold it, moved after these words were spoken, put the lamp down, and confronting the speaker, and taking him, not ungently, by the loose front of his red woollen shirt, said:

"You know him, you have said. Do you know me?"

"Yes, I know you, Citizen Doctor."

"We all know you, Citizen Doctor," said the other three.

He looked abstractedly from one to another, and said, in a lower voice, after a pause:

"Will you answer his question to me then? How does this happen?"

"Citizen Doctor," said the first, reluctantly, "he has been denounced to the Section of Saint Antoine. This citizen," pointing out the second who had entered, "is from Saint Antoine."

The citizen here indicated nodded his head, and added:

"He is accused by Saint Antoine."

"Of what?" asked the Doctor.

"Citizen Doctor," said the first, with his former reluctance, "ask no more. If the Republic demands sacrifices from you, without doubt you as a good patriot will be happy to make them. The Republic goes before all. The People is supreme. Evremonde, we are pressed."

"One word," the Doctor entreated. "Will you tell me who denounced him?"

"It is against rule," answered the first; "but you can ask Him of Saint Antoine here."

The Doctor turned his eyes upon that man. Who moved uneasily on his feet, rubbed his beard a little, and at length said:

"Well! Truly it is against rule. But he is denounced—and gravely—by the Citizen and Citizeness Defarge. And by one other."

"What other?"

"Do *you* ask, Citizen Doctor?"

"Yes."

"Then," said he of Saint Antoine, with a strange look, "you will be answered to-morrow. Now, I am dumb!"

VIII. A Hand at Cards

Happily unconscious of the new calamity at home, Miss Pross threaded her way along the narrow streets and crossed the river by the bridge of the Pont-Neuf, reckoning in her mind the number of indispensable purchases she had to make. Mr. Cruncher, with the basket, walked at her side. They both looked to the right and to the left into most of the shops they passed, had a wary eye for all gregarious assemblages of people, and turned out of their road to avoid any very excited group of talkers. It was a raw evening, and the misty river, blurred to the eye with blazing lights and to the ear with harsh noises, showed where the barges were stationed in which the smiths worked, making guns for the Army of the Republic. Woe to the man who played tricks with *that* Army, or got undeserved promotion in it! Better for him that his beard had never grown, for the National Razor shaved him close.

Having purchased a few small articles of grocery, and a measure of oil for the lamp, Miss Pross bethought herself of the wine they wanted. After peeping into several wine-shops, she stopped at the sign of the Good Republican Brutus of Antiquity, not far from the National Palace, once (and twice) the Tuileries, where the aspect of things rather took her fancy. It had a quieter look than any other place of the same description they had passed, and, though red with patriotic caps, was not so red as the rest. Sounding Mr. Cruncher, and finding him of her opinion, Miss Pross resorted to the Good Republican Brutus of Antiquity, attended by her cavalier.

Slightly observant of the smoky lights; of the people, pipe in mouth, playing with limp cards and yellow dominoes; of the one bare-breasted, bare-armed, soot-begrimed workman reading a journal aloud, and of the others listening to him; of the weapons worn, or laid aside to be resumed; of the two or three customers fallen forward asleep, who in the popular high-shouldered shaggy black spencer looked, in that attitude, like slumbering bears or dogs; the two outlandish customers approached the counter, and showed what they wanted.

As their wine was measuring out, a man parted from another man in a corner, and rose to depart. In going, he had to face Miss Pross. No sooner did he face her, than Miss Pross uttered a scream, and clapped her hands.

In a moment, the whole company were on their feet. That somebody was assassinated by somebody vindicating a difference of opinion was the likeliest occurrence. Everybody looked to see somebody fall, but only saw a man and a woman standing staring at each other; the man with all the outward aspect of a Frenchman and a thorough Republican; the woman, evidently English.

What was said in this disappointing anti-climax, by the disciples of the Good Republican Brutus of Antiquity, except that it was something very voluble and loud, would have been as so much Hebrew or Chaldean to Miss Pross and her protector, though they had been all ears. But, they had no ears for anything in their surprise. For, it must be recorded, that not only was Miss Pross lost in amazement and agitation, but, Mr. Cruncher—though it seemed on his own separate and individual account—was in a state of the greatest wonder.

"What is the matter?" said the man who had caused Miss Pross to scream; speaking in a vexed, abrupt voice (though in a low tone), and in English.

"Oh, Solomon, dear Solomon!" cried Miss Pross, clapping her hands again. "After not setting eyes upon you or hearing of you for so long a time, do I find you here!"

"Don't call me Solomon. Do you want to be the death of me?" asked the man, in a furtive, frightened way.

"Brother, brother!" cried Miss Pross, bursting into tears. "Have I ever been so hard with you that you ask me such a cruel question?"

"Then hold your meddlesome tongue," said Solomon, "and come out, if you want to speak to me. Pay for your wine, and come out. Who's this man?"

Miss Pross, shaking her loving and dejected head at her by no means affectionate brother, said through her tears, "Mr. Cruncher."

"Let him come out too," said Solomon. "Does he think me a ghost?"

Apparently, Mr. Cruncher did, to judge from his looks. He said not a word, however, and Miss Pross, exploring the depths of her reticule through her tears with great difficulty paid for her wine. As she did so, Solomon turned to the followers of the Good Republican Brutus of Antiquity, and offered a few words of explanation in the French language, which caused them all to relapse into their former places and pursuits.

"Now," said Solomon, stopping at the dark street corner, "what do you want?"

"How dreadfully unkind in a brother nothing has ever turned my love away from!" cried Miss Pross, "to give me such a greeting, and show me no affection."

"There. Confound it! There," said Solomon, making a dab at Miss Pross's lips with his own. "Now are you content?"

Miss Pross only shook her head and wept in silence.

"If you expect me to be surprised," said her brother Solomon, "I am not surprised; I knew you were here; I know of most people who are here. If you really don't want to endanger my existence—which I half believe you do—go your ways as soon as possible, and let me go mine. I am busy. I am an official."

"My English brother Solomon," mourned Miss Pross, casting up her tear-fraught eyes, "that had the makings in him of one of the best and greatest of men in his native country, an official among foreigners, and such foreigners! I would almost sooner have seen the dear boy lying in his—"

"I said so!" cried her brother, interrupting. "I knew it. You want to be the death of me. I shall be rendered Suspected, by my own sister. Just as I am getting on!"

"The gracious and merciful Heavens forbid!" cried Miss Pross. "Far rather would I never see you again, dear Solomon, though I have ever loved you truly, and ever shall. Say but one affectionate word to me, and tell me there is nothing angry or estranged between us, and I will detain you no longer."

Good Miss Pross! As if the estrangement between them had come of any culpability of hers. As if Mr. Lorry had not known it for a fact, years ago, in the quiet corner in Soho, that this precious brother had spent her money and left her!

He was saying the affectionate word, however, with a far more grudging condescension and patronage than he could have shown if their relative merits and positions had been reversed (which is invariably the case, all the world over), when Mr. Cruncher, touching him on the shoulder, hoarsely and unexpectedly interposed with the following singular question:

"I say! Might I ask the favour? As to whether your name is John Solomon, or Solomon John?"

The official turned towards him with sudden distrust. He had not previously uttered a word.

"Come!" said Mr. Cruncher. "Speak out, you know." (Which, by the way, was more than he could do himself.) "John Solomon, or Solomon John? She calls you Solomon, and she must know, being your sister. And *I* know you're John, you know. Which of the two goes first? And regarding that name of Pross, likewise. That warn't your name over the water."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I don't know all I mean, for I can't call to mind what your name was, over the water."

"No?"

"No. But I'll swear it was a name of two syllables."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. T'other one's was one syllable. I know you. You was a spy—witness at the Bailey. What, in the name of the Father of Lies, own father to yourself, was you called at that time?"

"Barsad," said another voice, striking in.

"That's the name for a thousand pound!" cried Jerry.

The speaker who struck in, was Sydney Carton. He had his hands behind him under the skirts of his riding-coat, and he stood at Mr. Cruncher's elbow as negligently as he might have stood at the Old Bailey itself.

"Don't be alarmed, my dear Miss Pross. I arrived at Mr. Lorry's, to his surprise, yesterday evening; we agreed that I would not present myself elsewhere until all was well, or unless I could be useful; I present myself here, to beg a little talk with your brother. I wish you had a better employed brother than Mr. Barsad. I wish for your sake Mr. Barsad was not a Sheep of the Prisons."

Sheep was a cant word of the time for a spy, under the gaolers. The spy, who was pale, turned paler, and asked him how he dared—

"I'll tell you," said Sydney. "I lighted on you, Mr. Barsad, coming out of the prison of the Conciergerie while I was contemplating the walls, an hour or more ago. You have a face to be remembered, and I remember faces well. Made curious by seeing you in that connection, and having a reason, to which you are no stranger, for associating you with the misfortunes of a friend now very unfortunate, I walked in your direction. I walked into the wine-shop here, close after you, and sat near you. I had no difficulty in deducing from your unreserved conversation, and the rumour openly going about among your admirers, the nature of your calling. And gradually, what I had done at random, seemed to shape itself into a purpose, Mr. Barsad."

"What purpose?" the spy asked.

"It would be troublesome, and might be dangerous, to explain in the street. Could you favour me, in confidence, with some minutes of your company—at the office of Tellson's Bank, for instance?"

"Under a threat?"

"Oh! Did I say that?"

"Then, why should I go there?"

"Really, Mr. Barsad, I can't say, if you can't."

"Do you mean that you won't say, sir?" the spy irresolutely asked.

"You apprehend me very clearly, Mr. Barsad. I won't."

Carton's negligent recklessness of manner came powerfully in aid of his quickness and skill, in such a business as he had in his secret mind, and with such a man as he had to do with. His practised eye saw it, and made the most of it.

"Now, I told you so," said the spy, casting a reproachful look at his sister; "if any trouble comes of this, it's your doing."

"Come, come, Mr. Barsad!" exclaimed Sydney. "Don't be ungrateful. But for my great respect for your sister, I might not have led up so pleasantly to a little proposal that I wish to make for our mutual satisfaction. Do you go with me to the Bank?"

"I'll hear what you have got to say. Yes, I'll go with you."

"I propose that we first conduct your sister safely to the corner of her own street. Let me take your arm, Miss Pross. This is not a good city, at this time, for you to be out in, unprotected; and as your escort knows Mr. Barsad, I will invite him to Mr. Lorry's with us. Are we ready? Come then!"

Miss Pross recalled soon afterwards, and to the end of her life remembered, that as she pressed her hands on Sydney's arm and looked up in his face, imploring him to do no hurt to Solomon, there was a braced purpose in the arm and a kind of inspiration in the eyes, which not only contradicted his light manner, but changed and raised the man. She was too much occupied then with fears for the brother who so little deserved her affection, and with Sydney's friendly reassurances, adequately to heed what she observed.

They left her at the corner of the street, and Carton led the way to Mr. Lorry's, which was within a few minutes' walk. John Barsad, or Solomon Pross, walked at his side.

Mr. Lorry had just finished his dinner, and was sitting before a cheery little log or two of fire—perhaps looking into their blaze for the picture of that younger elderly gentleman from Tellson's, who had looked into the red coals at the Royal George at Dover, now a good many years ago. He turned his head as they entered, and showed the surprise with which he saw a stranger.

"Miss Pross's brother, sir," said Sydney. "Mr. Barsad."

"Barsad?" repeated the old gentleman, "Barsad? I have an association with the name—and with the face."

"I told you you had a remarkable face, Mr. Barsad," observed Carton, coolly. "Pray sit down."

As he took a chair himself, he supplied the link that Mr. Lorry wanted, by saying to him with a frown, "Witness at that trial." Mr. Lorry immediately remembered, and regarded his new visitor with an undisguised look of abhorrence.

"Mr. Barsad has been recognised by Miss Pross as the affectionate brother you have heard of," said Sydney, "and has acknowledged the relationship. I pass to worse news. Darnay has been arrested again."

Struck with consternation, the old gentleman exclaimed, "What do you tell me! I left him safe and free within these two hours, and am about to return to him!"

"Arrested for all that. When was it done, Mr. Barsad?"

"Just now, if at all."

"Mr. Barsad is the best authority possible, sir," said Sydney, "and I have it from Mr. Barsad's communication to a friend and brother Sheep over a bottle of wine, that the arrest has taken place. He left the messengers at the gate, and saw them admitted by the porter. There is no earthly doubt that he is retaken."

Mr. Lorry's business eye read in the speaker's face that it was loss of time to dwell upon the point. Confused, but sensible that something might depend on his presence of mind, he commanded himself, and was silently attentive.

"Now, I trust," said Sydney to him, "that the name and influence of Doctor Manette may stand him in as good stead to-morrow—you said he would be before the Tribunal again to-morrow, Mr. Barsad?—"

"Yes; I believe so."

"—In as good stead to-morrow as to-day. But it may not be so. I own to you, I am shaken, Mr. Lorry, by Doctor Manette's not having had the power to prevent this arrest."

"He may not have known of it beforehand," said Mr. Lorry.

"But that very circumstance would be alarming, when we remember how identified he is with his son-in-law."

"That's true," Mr. Lorry acknowledged, with his troubled hand at his chin, and his troubled eyes on Carton.

"In short," said Sydney, "this is a desperate time, when desperate games are played for desperate stakes. Let the Doctor play the winning game; I will play the losing one. No man's life here is worth purchase. Any one carried home by the people to-day, may be condemned tomorrow. Now, the stake I have resolved to play for, in case of the worst, is a friend in the Conciergerie. And the friend I purpose to myself to win, is Mr. Barsad."

"You need have good cards, sir," said the spy.

"I'll run them over. I'll see what I hold,—Mr. Lorry, you know what a brute I am; I wish you'd give me a little brandy."

It was put before him, and he drank off a glassful—drank off another glassful—pushed the bottle thoughtfully away.

"Mr. Barsad," he went on, in the tone of one who really was looking over a hand at cards: "Sheep of the prisons, emissary of Republican committees, now turnkey, now prisoner, always spy and secret informer, so much the more valuable here for being English that an Englishman is less open to suspicion of subornation in those characters than a Frenchman, represents himself to his employers under a false name. That's a very good card. Mr. Barsad, now in the employ of the republican French government, was formerly in the employ of the aristocratic English government, the enemy of France and freedom. That's an excellent card. Inference clear as day in this region of suspicion, that Mr. Barsad, still in the pay of the aristocratic English government, is the spy of Pitt, the treacherous foe of the Republic crouching in its bosom, the English traitor and agent of all mischief so much spoken of and so difficult to find. That's a card not to be beaten. Have you followed my hand, Mr. Barsad?"

"Not to understand your play," returned the spy, somewhat uneasily.

"I play my Ace, Denunciation of Mr. Barsad to the nearest Section Committee. Look over your hand, Mr. Barsad, and see what you have. Don't hurry."

He drew the bottle near, poured out another glassful of brandy, and drank it off. He saw that the spy was fearful of his drinking himself into a fit state for the immediate denunciation of him. Seeing it, he poured out and drank another glassful.

"Look over your hand carefully, Mr. Barsad. Take time."

It was a poorer hand than he suspected. Mr. Barsad saw losing cards in it that Sydney Carton knew nothing of. Thrown out of his honourable employment in England, through too much unsuccessful hard swearing there—not because he was not wanted there; our English reasons for vaunting our superiority to secrecy and spies are of very modern date—he knew that he had crossed the Channel, and accepted service in France: first, as a tempter and an eavesdropper among his own countrymen there: gradually, as a tempter and an eavesdropper among the natives. He knew that under the overthrown government he had been a spy upon Saint Antoine and Defarge's wine-shop; had received from the watchful police such heads of information concerning Doctor Manette's imprisonment, release, and history, as should serve him for an introduction to familiar conversation with the Defarges; and tried them on Madame Defarge, and had broken down with them signally. He always remembered with fear and trembling, that that terrible woman had knitted when he talked with her, and had looked ominously at him as her fingers moved. He had since seen her, in the Section of Saint Antoine, over and over again produce her knitted registers, and denounce people whose lives the guillotine then surely swallowed up. He knew, as every one employed as he was did, that he was never safe; that flight was impossible; that he was tied fast under the shadow of the axe; and that in spite of his utmost tergiversation and treachery in furtherance of the reigning terror, a word might bring it down upon him. Once denounced, and on such grave grounds as had just now been suggested to his mind, he foresaw that the dreadful woman of whose unrelenting character he had seen many proofs, would produce against him that fatal register, and would quash his last chance of life. Besides that all secret men are men soon terrified, here were surely cards enough of one black suit, to justify the holder in growing rather livid as he turned them over.

"You scarcely seem to like your hand," said Sydney, with the greatest composure. "Do you play?"

"I think, sir," said the spy, in the meanest manner, as he turned to Mr. Lorry, "I may appeal to a gentleman of your years and benevolence, to put it to this other gentleman, so much your junior, whether he can under any circumstances reconcile it to his station to play that Ace of which he has spoken. I admit that *I* am a spy, and that it is considered a discreditable station—though it must be filled by somebody; but this gentleman is no spy, and why should he so demean himself as to make himself one?"

"I play my Ace, Mr. Barsad," said Carton, taking the answer on himself, and looking at his watch, "without any scruple, in a very few minutes."

"I should have hoped, gentlemen both," said the spy, always striving to hook Mr. Lorry into the discussion, "that your respect for my sister—"

"I could not better testify my respect for your sister than by finally relieving her of her brother," said Sydney Carton.

"You think not, sir?"

"I have thoroughly made up my mind about it."

The smooth manner of the spy, curiously in dissonance with his ostentatiously rough dress, and probably with his usual demeanour, received such a check from the inscrutability of Carton,—who was a mystery to wiser and honester men than he,—that it faltered here and failed him. While he was at a loss, Carton said, resuming his former air of contemplating cards:

"And indeed, now I think again, I have a strong impression that I have another good card here, not yet enumerated. That friend and fellow-Sheep, who spoke of himself as pasturing in the country prisons; who was he?"

"French. You don't know him," said the spy, quickly.

"French, eh?" repeated Carton, musing, and not appearing to notice him at all, though he echoed his word. "Well; he may be."

"Is, I assure you," said the spy; "though it's not important."

"Though it's not important," repeated Carton, in the same mechanical way—"though it's not important—No, it's not important. No. Yet I know the face."

"I think not. I am sure not. It can't be," said the spy.

"It-can't-be," muttered Sydney Carton, retrospectively, and idling his glass (which fortunately was a small one) again. "Can't-be. Spoke good French. Yet like a foreigner, I thought?"

"Provincial," said the spy.

"No. Foreign!" cried Carton, striking his open hand on the table, as a light broke clearly on his mind. "Cly! Disguised, but the same man. We had that man before us at the Old Bailey."

"Now, there you are hasty, sir," said Barsad, with a smile that gave his aquiline nose an extra inclination to one side; "there you really give me an advantage over you. Cly (who I will unreservedly admit, at this distance of time, was a partner of mine) has been dead several years. I attended him in his last illness. He was buried in London, at the church of Saint Pancras-in-the-Fields. His unpopularity with the blackguard multitude at the moment prevented my following his remains, but I helped to lay him in his coffin."

Here, Mr. Lorry became aware, from where he sat, of a most remarkable goblin shadow on the wall. Tracing it to its source, he discovered it to be caused by a sudden extraordinary rising and stiffening of all the risen and stiff hair on Mr. Cruncher's head.

"Let us be reasonable," said the spy, "and let us be fair. To show you how mistaken you are, and what an unfounded assumption yours is, I will lay before you a certificate of Cly's burial, which I happened to have carried in my pocket-book," with a hurried hand he produced and opened it, "ever since. There it is. Oh, look at it, look at it! You may take it in your hand; it's no forgery."

Here, Mr. Lorry perceived the reflection on the wall to elongate, and Mr. Cruncher rose and stepped forward. His hair could not have been more violently on end, if it had been that moment dressed by the Cow with the crumpled horn in the house that Jack built.

Unseen by the spy, Mr. Cruncher stood at his side, and touched him on the shoulder like a ghostly bailiff.

"That there Roger Cly, master," said Mr. Cruncher, with a taciturn and iron-bound visage. "So *you* put him in his coffin?"

"I did."

"Who took him out of it?"

Barsad leaned back in his chair, and stammered, "What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Mr. Cruncher, "that he warn't never in it. No! Not he! I'll have my head took off, if he was ever in it."

The spy looked round at the two gentlemen; they both looked in unspeakable astonishment at Jerry.

"I tell you," said Jerry, "that you buried paving-stones and earth in that there coffin. Don't go and tell me that you buried Cly. It was a take in. Me and two more knows it."

"How do you know it?"

"What's that to you? Ecod!" growled Mr. Cruncher, "it's you I have got a old grudge again, is it, with your shameful impositions upon tradesmen! I'd catch hold of your throat and choke you for half a guinea."

Sydney Carton, who, with Mr. Lorry, had been lost in amazement at this turn of the business, here requested Mr. Cruncher to moderate and explain himself.

"At another time, sir," he returned, evasively, "the present time is ill-conwenient for explainin'. What I stand to, is, that he knows well wot that there Cly was never in that there coffin. Let him say he was, in so much as a word of one syllable, and I'll either catch hold of his throat and choke him for half a guinea;" Mr. Cruncher dwelt upon this as quite a liberal offer; "or I'll out and announce him."

"Humph! I see one thing," said Carton. "I hold another card, Mr. Barsad. Impossible, here in raging Paris, with Suspicion filling the air, for you to outlive denunciation, when you are in communication with another aristocratic spy of the same antecedents as yourself, who, moreover, has the mystery about him of having feigned death and come to life again! A plot in the prisons, of the foreigner against the Republic. A strong card—a certain Guillotine card! Do you play?"

"No!" returned the spy. "I throw up. I confess that we were so unpopular with the outrageous mob, that I only got away from England at the risk of being ducked to death, and that Cly was so ferreted up and down, that he never would have got away at all but for that sham. Though how this man knows it was a sham, is a wonder of wonders to me."

"Never you trouble your head about this man," retorted the contentious Mr. Cruncher; "you'll have trouble enough with giving your attention to that gentleman. And look here! Once more!"—Mr. Cruncher could not be restrained from making rather an ostentatious parade of his liberality—"I'd catch hold of your throat and choke you for half a guinea."

The Sheep of the prisons turned from him to Sydney Carton, and said, with more decision, "It has come to a point. I go on duty soon, and can't overstay my time. You told me you had a proposal; what is it? Now, it is of no use asking too much of me. Ask me to do anything in my office, putting my head in great extra danger, and I had better trust my life to the chances of a refusal than the chances of consent. In short, I should make that choice. You talk of desperation. We are all desperate here. Remember! I may denounce you if I think proper, and I can swear my way through stone walls, and so can others. Now, what do you want with me?"

"Not very much. You are a turnkey at the Conciergerie?"

"I tell you once for all, there is no such thing as an escape possible," said the spy, firmly.

"Why need you tell me what I have not asked? You are a turnkey at the Conciergerie?"

"I am sometimes."

"You can be when you choose?"

"I can pass in and out when I choose."

Sydney Carton filled another glass with brandy, poured it slowly out upon the hearth, and watched it as it dropped. It being all spent, he said, rising:

"So far, we have spoken before these two, because it was as well that the merits of the cards should not rest solely between you and me. Come into the dark room here, and let us have one final word alone."

IX. The Game Made

While Sydney Carton and the Sheep of the prisons were in the adjoining dark room, speaking so low that not a sound was heard, Mr. Lorry looked at Jerry in considerable doubt and mistrust. That honest tradesman's manner of receiving the look, did not inspire confidence; he changed the leg on which he rested, as often as if he had fifty of those limbs, and were trying them all; he examined his finger-nails with a very questionable closeness of attention; and whenever Mr. Lorry's eye caught his, he was taken with that peculiar kind of short cough requiring the hollow of a hand before it, which is seldom, if ever, known to be an infirmity attendant on perfect openness of character.

"Jerry," said Mr. Lorry. "Come here."

Mr. Cruncher came forward sideways, with one of his shoulders in advance of him.

"What have you been, besides a messenger?"

After some cogitation, accompanied with an intent look at his patron, Mr. Cruncher conceived the luminous idea of replying, "Agicultooral character."

"My mind misgives me much," said Mr. Lorry, angrily shaking a forefinger at him, "that you have used the respectable and great house of Tellson's as a blind, and that you have had an unlawful occupation of an infamous description. If you have, don't expect me to befriend you when you get back to England. If you have, don't expect me to keep your secret. Tellson's shall not be imposed upon."

"I hope, sir," pleaded the abashed Mr. Cruncher, "that a gentleman like yourself wot I've had the honour of odd jobbing till I'm grey at it, would think twice about harming of me, even if it wos so—I don't say it is, but even if it wos. And which it is to be took into account that if it wos, it wouldn't, even then, be all o' one side. There'd be two sides to it. There might be medical doctors at the present hour, a picking up their guineas where a honest tradesman don't pick up his fardens—fardens! no, nor yet his half fardens—half fardens! no, nor yet his quarter—a banking away like smoke at Tellson's, and a cocking their medical eyes at that tradesman on the sly, a going in and going out to their own carriages—ah! equally like smoke, if not more so. Well, that 'ud be imposing, too, on Tellson's. For you cannot sarse the goose and not the gander. And here's Mrs. Cruncher, or leastways wos in the Old England times, and would be to-morrow, if cause given, a floppin' again the business to that degree as is ruinating—stark ruinating! Whereas them medical doctors' wives don't flop—catch 'em at it! Or, if they flop, their floppings goes in favour of more patients, and how can you rightly have one without t'other? Then, wot with undertakers, and wot with parish clerks, and wot with sextons, and wot with private watchmen (all awaricious and all in it), a man wouldn't get much by it, even if it wos so. And wot little a man did get, would never prosper with him, Mr. Lorry. He'd never have no good of it; he'd want all along to be out of the line, if he, could see his way out, being once in—even if it wos so."

"Ugh!" cried Mr. Lorry, rather relenting, nevertheless, "I am shocked at the sight of you."

"Now, what I would humbly offer to you, sir," pursued Mr. Cruncher, "even if it wos so, which I don't say it is—"

"Don't prevaricate," said Mr. Lorry.

"No, I will *not*, sir," returned Mr. Crunches as if nothing were further from his thoughts or practice—"which I don't say it is—wot I would humbly offer to you, sir, would be this. Upon that there stool, at that there Bar, sets that there boy of mine, brought up and growed up to be a man, wot will errand you, message you, general-light-job you, till your heels is where your head is, if such should be your wishes. If it wos so, which I still don't say it is (for I will not prewaricate to you, sir), let that there boy keep his father's place, and take care of his mother; don't blow upon that boy's father—do not do it, sir—and let that father go into the line of the reg'lar diggin', and make amends for what he would have undug—if it wos so—by diggin' of 'em in with a will, and with conwictions respectin' the futur' keepin' of 'em safe. That, Mr. Lorry," said Mr. Cruncher, wiping his forehead with his arm, as an announcement that he had arrived at the peroration of his discourse, "is wot I would respectfully offer to you, sir. A man don't see all this here a goin' on dreadful round him, in the way of Subjects without heads, dear me, plentiful enough fur to bring the price down to porterage and hardly that, without havin' his serious thoughts of things. And these here would be mine, if it wos so, entreatin' of you fur to bear in mind that wot I said just now, I up and said in the good cause when I might have kep' it back."

"That at least is true," said Mr. Lorry. "Say no more now. It may be that I shall yet stand your friend, if you deserve it, and repent in action—not in words. I want no more words."

Mr. Cruncher knuckled his forehead, as Sydney Carton and the spy returned from the dark room. "Adieu, Mr. Barsad," said the former; "our arrangement thus made, you have nothing to fear from me."

He sat down in a chair on the hearth, over against Mr. Lorry. When they were alone, Mr. Lorry asked him what he had done?

"Not much. If it should go ill with the prisoner, I have ensured access to him, once."

Mr. Lorry's countenance fell.

"It is all I could do," said Carton. "To propose too much, would be to put this man's head under the axe, and, as he himself said, nothing worse could happen to him if he were denounced. It was obviously the weakness of the position. There is no help for it."

"But access to him," said Mr. Lorry, "if it should go ill before the Tribunal, will not save him."

"I never said it would."

Mr. Lorry's eyes gradually sought the fire; his sympathy with his darling, and the heavy disappointment of his second arrest, gradually weakened them; he was an old man now, overborne with anxiety of late, and his tears fell.

"You are a good man and a true friend," said Carton, in an altered voice. "Forgive me if I notice that you are affected. I could not see my father weep, and sit by, careless. And I could not respect your sorrow more, if you were my father. You are free from that misfortune, however."

Though he said the last words, with a slip into his usual manner, there was a true feeling and respect both in his tone and in his touch, that Mr. Lorry, who had never seen the better side of him, was wholly unprepared for. He gave him his hand, and Carton gently pressed it.

"To return to poor Darnay," said Carton. "Don't tell Her of this interview, or this arrangement. It would not enable Her to go to see him. She might think it was contrived, in case of the worse, to convey to him the means of anticipating the sentence."

Mr. Lorry had not thought of that, and he looked quickly at Carton to see if it were in his mind. It seemed to be; he returned the look, and evidently understood it.

"She might think a thousand things," Carton said, "and any of them would only add to her trouble. Don't speak of me to her. As I said to you when I first came, I had better not see her. I can put my hand out, to do any little helpful work for her that my hand can find to do, without that. You are going to her, I hope? She must be very desolate to-night."

"I am going now, directly."

"I am glad of that. She has such a strong attachment to you and reliance on you. How does she look?"

"Anxious and unhappy, but very beautiful."

"Ah!"

It was a long, grieving sound, like a sigh—almost like a sob. It attracted Mr. Lorry's eyes to Carton's face, which was turned to the fire. A light, or a shade (the old gentleman could not have said which), passed from it as swiftly as a change will sweep over a hill-side on a wild bright day, and he lifted his foot to put back one of the little flaming logs, which was tumbling forward. He wore the white riding-coat and top-boots, then in vogue, and the light of the fire touching their light surfaces made him look very pale, with his long brown hair, all untrimmed, hanging loose about him. His indifference to fire was sufficiently remarkable to elicit a word of remonstrance from Mr. Lorry; his boot was still upon the hot embers of the flaming log, when it had broken under the weight of his foot.

"I forgot it," he said.

Mr. Lorry's eyes were again attracted to his face. Taking note of the wasted air which clouded the naturally handsome features, and having the expression of prisoners' faces fresh in his mind, he was strongly reminded of that expression.

"And your duties here have drawn to an end, sir?" said Carton, turning to him.

"Yes. As I was telling you last night when Lucie came in so unexpectedly, I have at length done all that I can do here. I hoped to have left them in perfect safety, and then to have quitted Paris. I have my Leave to Pass. I was ready to go."

They were both silent.

"Yours is a long life to look back upon, sir?" said Carton, wistfully.

"I am in my seventy-eighth year."

"You have been useful all your life; steadily and constantly occupied; trusted, respected, and looked up to?"

"I have been a man of business, ever since I have been a man. Indeed, I may say that I was a man of business when a boy."

"See what a place you fill at seventy-eight. How many people will miss you when you leave it empty!"

"A solitary old bachelor," answered Mr. Lorry, shaking his head. "There is nobody to weep for me."

"How can you say that? Wouldn't She weep for you? Wouldn't her child?"

"Yes, yes, thank God. I didn't quite mean what I said."

"It *is* a thing to thank God for; is it not?"

"Surely, surely."

"If you could say, with truth, to your own solitary heart, to-night, 'I have secured to myself the love and attachment, the gratitude or respect, of no human creature; I have won myself a tender place in no regard; I have done nothing good or serviceable to be remembered by!' your seventy-eight years would be seventy-eight heavy curses; would they not?"

"You say truly, Mr. Carton; I think they would be."

Sydney turned his eyes again upon the fire, and, after a silence of a few moments, said:

"I should like to ask you:—Does your childhood seem far off? Do the days when you sat at your mother's knee, seem days of very long ago?"

Responding to his softened manner, Mr. Lorry answered:

"Twenty years back, yes; at this time of my life, no. For, as I draw closer and closer to the end, I travel in the circle, nearer and nearer to the beginning. It seems to be one of the kind smoothings and preparings of the way. My heart is touched now, by many remembrances that had long fallen asleep, of my pretty young mother (and I so old!), and by many associations of the days when what we call the World was not so real with me, and my faults were not confirmed in me."

"I understand the feeling!" exclaimed Carton, with a bright flush. "And you are the better for it?"

"I hope so."

Carton terminated the conversation here, by rising to help him on with his outer coat; "But you," said Mr. Lorry, reverting to the theme, "you are young."

"Yes," said Carton. "I am not old, but my young way was never the way to age. Enough of me."

"And of me, I am sure," said Mr. Lorry. "Are you going out?"

"I'll walk with you to her gate. You know my vagabond and restless habits. If I should prowl about the streets a long time, don't be uneasy; I shall reappear in the morning. You go to the Court to-morrow?"

"Yes, unhappily."

"I shall be there, but only as one of the crowd. My Spy will find a place for me. Take my arm, sir."

Mr. Lorry did so, and they went down-stairs and out in the streets. A few minutes brought them to Mr. Lorry's destination. Carton left him there; but lingered at a little distance, and turned back to the gate again when it was shut, and touched it. He had heard of her going to the prison every day. "She came out here," he said, looking about him, "turned this way, must have trod on these stones often. Let me follow in her steps."

It was ten o'clock at night when he stood before the prison of La Force, where she had stood hundreds of times. A little wood-sawyer, having closed his shop, was smoking his pipe at his shop-door.

"Good night, citizen," said Sydney Carton, pausing in going by; for, the man eyed him inquisitively.

"Good night, citizen."

"How goes the Republic?"

"You mean the Guillotine. Not ill. Sixty-three to-day. We shall mount to a hundred soon. Samson and his men complain sometimes, of being exhausted. Ha, ha, ha! He is so droll, that Samson. Such a Barber!"

"Do you often go to see him—"

"Shave? Always. Every day. What a barber! You have seen him at work?"

"Never."

"Go and see him when he has a good batch. Figure this to yourself, citizen; he shaved the sixty-three to-day, in less than two pipes! Less than two pipes. Word of honour!"

As the grinning little man held out the pipe he was smoking, to explain how he timed the executioner, Carton was so sensible of a rising desire to strike the life out of him, that he turned away.

"But you are not English," said the wood-sawyer, "though you wear English dress?"

"Yes," said Carton, pausing again, and answering over his shoulder.

"You speak like a Frenchman."

"I am an old student here."

"Aha, a perfect Frenchman! Good night, Englishman."

"Good night, citizen."

"But go and see that droll dog," the little man persisted, calling after him. "And take a pipe with you!"

Sydney had not gone far out of sight, when he stopped in the middle of the street under a glimmering lamp, and wrote with his pencil on a scrap of paper. Then, traversing with the decided step of one who remembered the way well, several dark and dirty streets—much dirtier than usual, for the best public thoroughfares remained uncleansed in those times of terror—he stopped at a chemist's shop, which the owner was closing with his own hands. A small, dim, crooked shop, kept in a tortuous, up-hill thoroughfare, by a small, dim, crooked man.

Giving this citizen, too, good night, as he confronted him at his counter, he laid the scrap of paper before him. "Whew!" the chemist whistled softly, as he read it. "Hi! hi! hi!"

Sydney Carton took no heed, and the chemist said:

"For you, citizen?"

"For me."

"You will be careful to keep them separate, citizen? You know the consequences of mixing them?"

"Perfectly."

Certain small packets were made and given to him. He put them, one by one, in the breast of his inner coat, counted out the money for them, and deliberately left the shop. "There is nothing more to do," said he, glancing upward at the moon, "until to-morrow. I can't sleep."

It was not a reckless manner, the manner in which he said these words aloud under the fast-sailing clouds, nor was it more expressive of negligence than defiance. It was the settled manner of a tired man, who had wandered and struggled and got lost, but who at length struck into his road and saw its end.

Long ago, when he had been famous among his earliest competitors as a youth of great promise, he had followed his father to the grave. His mother had died, years before. These solemn words, which had been read at his father's grave, arose in his mind as he went down the dark streets, among the heavy shadows, with the moon and the clouds sailing on high above him. "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die."

In a city dominated by the axe, alone at night, with natural sorrow rising in him for the sixty-three who had been that day put to death, and for to-morrow's victims then awaiting their doom in the prisons, and still of to-morrow's and to-morrow's, the chain of association that brought the words home, like a rusty old ship's anchor from the deep, might have been easily found. He did not seek it, but repeated them and went on.

With a solemn interest in the lighted windows where the people were going to rest, forgetful through a few calm hours of the horrors surrounding them; in the towers of the churches, where no prayers were said, for the popular revulsion had even travelled that length of self-destruction from years of priestly impostors, plunderers, and profligates; in the distant burial-places, reserved, as they wrote upon the gates, for Eternal Sleep; in the abounding gaols; and in the streets along which the sixties rolled to a death which had become so common and material, that no sorrowful story of a haunting Spirit ever arose among the people out of all the working of the Guillotine; with a solemn interest in the whole life and death of the city settling down to its short nightly pause in fury; Sydney Carton crossed the Seine again for the lighter streets.

Few coaches were abroad, for riders in coaches were liable to be suspected, and gentility hid its head in red nightcaps, and put on heavy shoes, and trudged. But, the theatres were all well filled, and the people poured cheerfully out as he passed, and went chatting home. At one of the theatre doors, there was a little girl with a mother, looking for a way across the street through the mud. He carried the child over, and before the timid arm was loosed from his neck asked her for a kiss.

"I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die."

Now, that the streets were quiet, and the night wore on, the words were in the echoes of his feet, and were in the air. Perfectly calm and steady, he sometimes repeated them to himself as he walked; but, he heard them always.

The night wore out, and, as he stood upon the bridge listening to the water as it splashed the river-walls of the Island of Paris, where the picturesque confusion of houses and cathedral shone bright in the light of the moon, the day came coldly, looking like a dead face out of the sky. Then, the night, with the moon and the stars, turned pale and died, and for a little while it seemed as if Creation were delivered over to Death's dominion.

But, the glorious sun, rising, seemed to strike those words, that burden of the night, straight and warm to his heart in its long bright rays. And looking along them, with reverently shaded eyes, a bridge of light appeared to span the air between him and the sun, while the river sparkled under it.

The strong tide, so swift, so deep, and certain, was like a congenial friend, in the morning stillness. He walked by the stream, far from the houses, and in the light and warmth of the sun fell asleep on the bank. When he awoke and was afoot again, he lingered there yet a little longer, watching an eddy that turned and turned purposeless, until the stream absorbed it, and carried it on to the sea.—"Like me."

A trading-boat, with a sail of the softened colour of a dead leaf, then glided into his view, floated by him, and died away. As its silent track in the water disappeared, the prayer that had broken up out of his heart for a merciful consideration of all his poor blindnesses and errors, ended in the words, "I am the resurrection and the life."

Mr. Lorry was already out when he got back, and it was easy to surmise where the good old man was gone. Sydney Carton drank nothing but a little coffee, ate some bread, and, having washed and changed to refresh himself, went out to the place of trial.

The court was all astir and a-buzz, when the black sheep—whom many fell away from in dread—pressed him into an obscure corner among the crowd. Mr. Lorry was there, and Doctor Manette was there. She was there, sitting beside her father.

When her husband was brought in, she turned a look upon him, so sustaining, so encouraging, so full of admiring love and pitying tenderness, yet so courageous for his sake, that it called the healthy blood into his face, brightened his glance, and animated his heart. If there had been any eyes to notice the influence of her look, on Sydney Carton, it would have been seen to be the same influence exactly.

Before that unjust Tribunal, there was little or no order of procedure, ensuring to any accused person any reasonable hearing. There could have been no such Revolution, if all laws, forms, and ceremonies, had not first been so monstrously abused, that the suicidal vengeance of the Revolution was to scatter them all to the winds.

Every eye was turned to the jury. The same determined patriots and good republicans as yesterday and the day before, and to-morrow and the day after. Eager and prominent among them, one man with a craving face, and his fingers perpetually hovering about his lips, whose appearance gave great satisfaction to the spectators. A life-thirsting, cannibal-looking, bloody-minded juryman, the Jacques Three of St. Antoine. The whole jury, as a jury of dogs empannelled to try the deer.

Every eye then turned to the five judges and the public prosecutor. No favourable leaning in that quarter to-day. A fell, uncompromising, murderous business-meaning there. Every eye then sought some other eye in the crowd, and gleamed at it approvingly; and heads nodded at one another, before bending forward with a strained attention.

Charles Evremonde, called Darnay. Released yesterday. Reaccused and retaken yesterday. Indictment delivered to him last night. Suspected and Denounced enemy of the Republic, Aristocrat, one of a family of tyrants, one of a race proscribed, for that they had used their abolished privileges to the infamous oppression of the people. Charles Evremonde, called Darnay, in right of such proscription, absolutely Dead in Law.

To this effect, in as few or fewer words, the Public Prosecutor.

The President asked, was the Accused openly denounced or secretly?

"Openly, President."

"By whom?"

"Three voices. Ernest Defarge, wine-vendor of St. Antoine."

"Good."

"Therese Defarge, his wife."

"Good."

"Alexandre Manette, physician."

A great uproar took place in the court, and in the midst of it, Doctor Manette was seen, pale and trembling, standing where he had been seated.

"President, I indignantly protest to you that this is a forgery and a fraud. You know the accused to be the husband of my daughter. My daughter, and those dear to her, are far dearer to me than my life. Who and where is the false conspirator who says that I denounce the husband of my child!"

"Citizen Manette, be tranquil. To fail in submission to the authority of the Tribunal would be to put yourself out of Law. As to what is dearer to you than life, nothing can be so dear to a good citizen as the Republic."

Loud acclamations hailed this rebuke. The President rang his bell, and with warmth resumed.

"If the Republic should demand of you the sacrifice of your child herself, you would have no duty but to sacrifice her. Listen to what is to follow. In the meanwhile, be silent!"

Frantic acclamations were again raised. Doctor Manette sat down, with his eyes looking around, and his lips trembling; his daughter drew closer to him. The craving man on the jury rubbed his hands together, and restored the usual hand to his mouth.

Defarge was produced, when the court was quiet enough to admit of his being heard, and rapidly expounded the story of the imprisonment, and of his having been a mere boy in the Doctor's service, and of the release, and of the state of the prisoner when released and delivered to him. This short examination followed, for the court was quick with its work.

"You did good service at the taking of the Bastille, citizen?"

"I believe so."

Here, an excited woman screeched from the crowd: "You were one of the best patriots there. Why not say so? You were a cannonier that day there, and you were among the first to enter the accursed fortress when it fell. Patriots, I speak the truth!"

It was The Vengeance who, amidst the warm commendations of the audience, thus assisted the proceedings. The President rang his bell; but, The Vengeance, warming with encouragement, shrieked, "I defy that bell!" wherein she was likewise much commended.

"Inform the Tribunal of what you did that day within the Bastille, citizen."

"I knew," said Defarge, looking down at his wife, who stood at the bottom of the steps on which he was raised, looking steadily up at him; "I knew that this prisoner, of whom I speak, had been confined in a cell known as One Hundred and Five, North Tower. I knew it from himself. He knew himself by no other name than One Hundred and Five, North Tower, when he made shoes under my care. As I serve my gun that day, I resolve, when the place shall fall, to examine that cell. It falls. I mount to the cell, with a fellow-citizen who is one of the Jury, directed by a gaoler. I examine it, very closely. In a hole in the chimney, where a stone has been worked out and replaced, I find a written paper. This is that written paper. I have made it my business to examine some specimens of the writing of Doctor Manette. This is the writing of Doctor Manette. I confide this paper, in the writing of Doctor Manette, to the hands of the President."

"Let it be read."

In a dead silence and stillness—the prisoner under trial looking lovingly at his wife, his wife only looking from him to look with solicitude at her father, Doctor Manette keeping his eyes fixed on the reader, Madame Defarge never taking hers from the prisoner, Defarge never taking his from his feasting wife, and all the other eyes there intent upon the Doctor, who saw none of them—the paper was read, as follows.

X. The Substance of the Shadow

"I, Alexandre Manette, unfortunate physician, native of Beauvais, and afterwards resident in Paris, write this melancholy paper in my doleful cell in the Bastille, during the last month of the year, 1767. I write it at stolen intervals, under every difficulty. I design to secrete it in the wall of the chimney, where I have slowly and laboriously made a place of concealment for it. Some pitying hand may find it there, when I and my sorrows are dust.

"These words are formed by the rusty iron point with which I write with difficulty in scrapings of soot and charcoal from the chimney, mixed with blood, in the last month of the tenth year of my captivity. Hope has quite departed from my breast. I know from terrible warnings I have noted in myself that my reason will not long remain unimpaired, but I solemnly declare that I am at this time in the possession of my right mind—that my memory is exact and circumstantial—and that I write the truth as I shall answer for these my last recorded words, whether they be ever read by men or not, at the Eternal Judgment-seat.

"One cloudy moonlight night, in the third week of December (I think the twenty-second of the month) in the year 1757, I was walking on a retired part of the quay by the Seine for the refreshment of the frosty air, at an hour's distance from my place of residence in the Street of the School of Medicine, when a carriage came along behind me, driven very fast. As I stood aside to let that carriage pass, apprehensive that it might otherwise run me down, a head was put out at the window, and a voice called to the driver to stop.

"The carriage stopped as soon as the driver could rein in his horses, and the same voice called to me by my name. I answered. The carriage was then so far in advance of me that two gentlemen had time to open the door and alight before I came up with it.

"I observed that they were both wrapped in cloaks, and appeared to conceal themselves. As they stood side by side near the carriage door, I also observed that they both looked of about my own age, or rather younger, and that they were greatly alike, in stature, manner, voice, and (as far as I could see) face too.

"'You are Doctor Manette?' said one.

"I am."

"'Doctor Manette, formerly of Beauvais,' said the other; 'the young physician, originally an expert surgeon, who within the last year or two has made a rising reputation in Paris?'

"'Gentlemen,' I returned, 'I am that Doctor Manette of whom you speak so graciously.'

"'We have been to your residence,' said the first, 'and not being so fortunate as to find you there, and being informed that you were probably walking in this direction, we followed, in the hope of overtaking you. Will you please to enter the carriage?'

"The manner of both was imperious, and they both moved, as these words were spoken, so as to place me between themselves and the carriage door. They were armed. I was not.

"'Gentlemen,' said I, 'pardon me; but I usually inquire who does me the honour to seek my assistance, and what is the nature of the case to which I am summoned.'

"The reply to this was made by him who had spoken second. 'Doctor, your clients are people of condition. As to the nature of the case, our confidence in your skill assures us that you will ascertain it for yourself better than we can describe it. Enough. Will you please to enter the carriage?'

"I could do nothing but comply, and I entered it in silence. They both entered after me—the last springing in, after putting up the steps. The carriage turned about, and drove on at its former speed.

"I repeat this conversation exactly as it occurred. I have no doubt that it is, word for word, the same. I describe everything exactly as it took place, constraining my mind not to wander from the task. Where I make the broken marks that follow here, I leave off for the time, and put my paper in its hiding-place.

"The carriage left the streets behind, passed the North Barrier, and emerged upon the country road. At two-thirds of a league from the Barrier—I did not estimate the distance at that time, but afterwards when I traversed it—it struck out of the main avenue, and presently stopped at a solitary house, We all three alighted, and walked, by a damp soft footpath in a garden where a neglected fountain had overflowed, to the door of the house. It was not opened immediately, in answer to the ringing of the bell, and one of my two conductors struck the man who opened it, with his heavy riding glove, across the face.

"There was nothing in this action to attract my particular attention, for I had seen common people struck more commonly than dogs. But, the other of the two, being angry likewise, struck the man in like manner with his arm; the look and bearing of the brothers were then so exactly alike, that I then first perceived them to be twin brothers.

"From the time of our alighting at the outer gate (which we found locked, and which one of the brothers had opened to admit us, and had relocked), I had heard cries proceeding from an upper chamber. I was conducted to this chamber straight, the cries growing louder as we ascended the stairs, and I found a patient in a high fever of the brain, lying on a bed.

"The patient was a woman of great beauty, and young; assuredly not much past twenty. Her hair was torn and ragged, and her arms were bound to her sides with sashes and handkerchiefs. I noticed that these bonds were all portions of a gentleman's dress. On one of them, which was a fringed scarf for a dress of ceremony, I saw the armorial bearings of a Noble, and the letter E.

"I saw this, within the first minute of my contemplation of the patient; for, in her restless strivings she had turned over on her face on the edge of the bed, had drawn the end of the scarf into her mouth, and was in danger of suffocation. My first act was to put out my hand to relieve her breathing; and in moving the scarf aside, the embroidery in the corner caught my sight.

"I turned her gently over, placed my hands upon her breast to calm her and keep her down, and looked into her face. Her eyes were dilated and wild, and she constantly uttered piercing shrieks, and repeated the words, 'My husband, my father, and my brother!' and then counted up to twelve, and said, 'Hush!' For an instant, and no more, she would pause to listen, and then the piercing shrieks would begin again, and she would repeat the cry, 'My husband, my father, and my brother!' and would count up to twelve, and say, 'Hush!' There was no variation in the order, or the manner. There was no cessation, but the regular moment's pause, in the utterance of these sounds.

"'How long,' I asked, 'has this lasted?'

"To distinguish the brothers, I will call them the elder and the younger; by the elder, I mean him who exercised the most authority. It was the elder who replied, 'Since about this hour last night.'

"'She has a husband, a father, and a brother?'

"'A brother.'

"'I do not address her brother?'

"He answered with great contempt, 'No.'

"'She has some recent association with the number twelve?'

"The younger brother impatiently rejoined, 'With twelve o'clock?'

"'See, gentlemen,' said I, still keeping my hands upon her breast, 'how useless I am, as you have brought me! If I had known what I was coming to see, I could have come provided. As it is, time must be lost. There are no medicines to be obtained in this lonely place.'

"The elder brother looked to the younger, who said haughtily, 'There is a case of medicines here;' and brought it from a closet, and put it on the table.

"I opened some of the bottles, smelt them, and put the stoppers to my lips. If I had wanted to use anything save narcotic medicines that were poisons in themselves, I would not have administered any of those.

"'Do you doubt them?' asked the younger brother.

"'You see, monsieur, I am going to use them,' I replied, and said no more.

"I made the patient swallow, with great difficulty, and after many efforts, the dose that I desired to give. As I intended to repeat it after a while, and as it was necessary to watch its influence, I then sat down by the side of the bed. There was a timid and suppressed woman in attendance (wife of the man down-stairs), who had retreated into a corner. The house was damp and decayed, indifferently furnished—evidently, recently occupied and temporarily used. Some thick old hangings had been nailed up before the windows, to deaden the sound of the shrieks. They continued to be uttered in their regular succession, with the cry, 'My husband, my father, and my brother!' the counting up to twelve, and 'Hush!' The frenzy was so violent, that I had not unfastened the bandages restraining the arms; but, I had looked to them, to see that they were not painful. The only spark of encouragement in the case, was, that my hand upon the sufferer's breast had this much soothing influence, that for minutes at a time it tranquillised the figure. It had no effect upon the cries; no pendulum could be more regular.

"For the reason that my hand had this effect (I assume), I had sat by the side of the bed for half an hour, with the two brothers looking on, before the elder said:

"'There is another patient.'

"I was startled, and asked, 'Is it a pressing case?'

"'You had better see,' he carelessly answered; and took up a light.

"The other patient lay in a back room across a second staircase, which was a species of loft over a stable. There was a low plastered ceiling to a part of it; the rest was open, to the ridge of the tiled roof, and there were beams across. Hay and straw were stored in that portion of the place, fagots for firing, and a heap of apples in sand. I had to pass through that part, to get at the other. My memory is circumstantial and unshaken. I try it with these details, and I see them all, in this my cell in the Bastille, near the close of the tenth year of my captivity, as I saw them all that night.

"On some hay on the ground, with a cushion thrown under his head, lay a handsome peasant boy—a boy of not more than seventeen at the most. He lay on his back, with his teeth set, his right hand clenched on his breast, and his glaring eyes looking straight upward. I could not see where his wound was, as I kneeled on one knee over him; but, I could see that he was dying of a wound from a sharp point.

"'I am a doctor, my poor fellow,' said I. 'Let me examine it.'

"'I do not want it examined,' he answered; 'let it be.'

"It was under his hand, and I soothed him to let me move his hand away. The wound was a sword-thrust, received from twenty to twenty-four hours before, but no skill could have saved him if it had been looked to without delay. He was then dying fast. As I turned my eyes to the elder brother, I saw him looking down at this handsome boy whose life was ebbing out, as if he were a wounded bird, or hare, or rabbit; not at all as if he were a fellow-creature.

"'How has this been done, monsieur?' said I.

"'A crazed young common dog! A serf! Forced my brother to draw upon him, and has fallen by my brother's sword—like a gentleman.'

"There was no touch of pity, sorrow, or kindred humanity, in this answer. The speaker seemed to acknowledge that it was inconvenient to have that different order of creature dying there, and that it would have been better if he had died in the usual obscure routine of his vermin kind. He was quite incapable of any compassionate feeling about the boy, or about his fate.

"The boy's eyes had slowly moved to him as he had spoken, and they now slowly moved to me.

"'Doctor, they are very proud, these Nobles; but we common dogs are proud too, sometimes. They plunder us, outrage us, beat us, kill us; but we have a little pride left, sometimes. She—have you seen her, Doctor?'

"The shrieks and the cries were audible there, though subdued by the distance. He referred to them, as if she were lying in our presence.

"I said, 'I have seen her.'

"'She is my sister, Doctor. They have had their shameful rights, these Nobles, in the modesty and virtue of our sisters, many years, but we have had good girls among us. I know it, and have heard my father say so. She was a good girl. She was betrothed to a good young man, too: a tenant of his. We were all tenants of his—that man's who stands there. The other is his brother, the worst of a bad race.'

"It was with the greatest difficulty that the boy gathered bodily force to speak; but, his spirit spoke with a dreadful emphasis.

"'We were so robbed by that man who stands there, as all we common dogs are by those superior Beings—taxed by him without mercy, obliged to work for him without pay, obliged to grind our corn at his mill, obliged to feed scores of his tame birds on our wretched crops, and forbidden for our lives to keep a single tame bird of our own, pillaged and plundered to that degree that when we chanced to have a bit of meat, we ate it in fear, with the door barred and the shutters closed, that his people should not see it and take it from us—I say, we were so robbed, and hunted, and were made so poor, that our father told us it was a dreadful thing to bring a child into the world, and that what we should most pray for, was, that our women might be barren and our miserable race die out!'

"I had never before seen the sense of being oppressed, bursting forth like a fire. I had supposed that it must be latent in the people somewhere; but, I had never seen it break out, until I saw it in the dying boy.

"'Nevertheless, Doctor, my sister married. He was ailing at that time, poor fellow, and she married her lover, that she might tend and comfort him in our cottage—our dog-hut, as that man would call it. She had not been married many weeks, when that man's brother saw her and admired her, and asked that man to lend her to him—for what are husbands among us! He was willing enough, but my sister was good and virtuous, and hated his brother with a hatred as strong as mine. What did the two then, to persuade her husband to use his influence with her, to make her willing?'

"The boy's eyes, which had been fixed on mine, slowly turned to the looker-on, and I saw in the two faces that all he said was true. The two opposing kinds of pride confronting one another, I can see, even in this Bastille; the gentleman's, all negligent indifference; the peasant's, all trodden-down sentiment, and passionate revenge.

"'You know, Doctor, that it is among the Rights of these Nobles to harness us common dogs to carts, and drive us. They so harnessed him and drove him. You know that it is among their Rights to keep us in their grounds all night, quieting the frogs, in order that their noble sleep may not be disturbed. They kept him out in the unwholesome mists at night, and ordered him back into his harness in the day. But he was not persuaded. No! Taken out of harness one day at noon, to feed—if he could find food—he sobbed twelve times, once for every stroke of the bell, and died on her bosom.'

"Nothing human could have held life in the boy but his determination to tell all his wrong. He forced back the gathering shadows of death, as he forced his clenched right hand to remain clenched, and to cover his wound.

"'Then, with that man's permission and even with his aid, his brother took her away; in spite of what I know she must have told his brother—and what that is, will not be long unknown to you, Doctor, if it is now—his brother took her away—for his pleasure and diversion, for a little while. I saw her pass me on the road. When I took the tidings home, our father's heart burst; he never spoke one of the words that filled it. I took my young sister (for I have another) to a place beyond the reach of this man, and where, at least, she will never be *his* vassal. Then, I tracked the brother here, and last night climbed in—a common dog, but sword in hand.—Where is the loft window? It was somewhere here?'

"The room was darkening to his sight; the world was narrowing around him. I glanced about me, and saw that the hay and straw were trampled over the floor, as if there had been a struggle.

"'She heard me, and ran in. I told her not to come near us till he was dead. He came in and first tossed me some pieces of money; then struck at me with a whip. But I, though a common dog, so struck at him as to make him draw. Let him break into as many pieces as he will, the sword that he stained with my common blood; he drew to defend himself—thrust at me with all his skill for his life.'

"My glance had fallen, but a few moments before, on the fragments of a broken sword, lying among the hay. That weapon was a gentleman's. In another place, lay an old sword that seemed to have been a soldier's.

"'Now, lift me up, Doctor; lift me up. Where is he?'

"'He is not here,' I said, supporting the boy, and thinking that he referred to the brother.

"'He! Proud as these nobles are, he is afraid to see me. Where is the man who was here? Turn my face to him.'

"I did so, raising the boy's head against my knee. But, invested for the moment with extraordinary power, he raised himself completely: obliging me to rise too, or I could not have still supported him.

"'Marquis,' said the boy, turned to him with his eyes opened wide, and his right hand raised, 'in the days when all these things are to be answered for, I summon you and yours, to the last of your bad race, to answer for them. I mark this cross of blood upon you, as a sign that I do it. In the days when all these things are to be answered for, I summon your brother, the worst of the bad race, to answer for them separately. I mark this cross of blood upon him, as a sign that I do it.'

"Twice, he put his hand to the wound in his breast, and with his forefinger drew a cross in the air. He stood for an instant with the finger yet raised, and as it dropped, he dropped with it, and I laid him down dead.

"When I returned to the bedside of the young woman, I found her raving in precisely the same order of continuity. I knew that this might last for many hours, and that it would probably end in the silence of the grave.

"I repeated the medicines I had given her, and I sat at the side of the bed until the night was far advanced. She never abated the piercing quality of her shrieks, never stumbled in the distinctness or the order of her words. They were always 'My husband, my father, and my brother! One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve. Hush!'

"This lasted twenty-six hours from the time when I first saw her. I had come and gone twice, and was again sitting by her, when she began to falter. I did what little could be done to assist that opportunity, and by-and-bye she sank into a lethargy, and lay like the dead.

"It was as if the wind and rain had lulled at last, after a long and fearful storm. I released her arms, and called the woman to assist me to compose her figure and the dress she had torn. It was then that I knew her condition to be that of one in whom the first expectations of being a mother have arisen; and it was then that I lost the little hope I had had of her.

"'Is she dead?' asked the Marquis, whom I will still describe as the elder brother, coming booted into the room from his horse.

"'Not dead,' said I; 'but like to die.'

"'What strength there is in these common bodies!' he said, looking down at her with some curiosity.

"'There is prodigious strength,' I answered him, 'in sorrow and despair.'

"He first laughed at my words, and then frowned at them. He moved a chair with his foot near to mine, ordered the woman away, and said in a subdued voice,

"'Doctor, finding my brother in this difficulty with these hinds, I recommended that your aid should be invited. Your reputation is high, and, as a young man with your fortune to make, you are probably mindful of your interest. The things that you see here, are things to be seen, and not spoken of.'

"I listened to the patient's breathing, and avoided answering.

"'Do you honour me with your attention, Doctor?'

"'Monsieur,' said I, 'in my profession, the communications of patients are always received in confidence.' I was guarded in my answer, for I was troubled in my mind with what I had heard and seen.

"Her breathing was so difficult to trace, that I carefully tried the pulse and the heart. There was life, and no more. Looking round as I resumed my seat, I found both the brothers intent upon me.

"I write with so much difficulty, the cold is so severe, I am so fearful of being detected and consigned to an underground cell and total darkness, that I must abridge this narrative. There is no confusion or failure in my memory; it can recall, and could detail, every word that was ever spoken between me and those brothers.

"She lingered for a week. Towards the last, I could understand some few syllables that she said to me, by placing my ear close to her lips. She asked me where she was, and I told her; who I was, and I told her. It was in vain that I asked her for her family name. She faintly shook her head upon the pillow, and kept her secret, as the boy had done.

"I had no opportunity of asking her any question, until I had told the brothers she was sinking fast, and could not live another day. Until then, though no one was ever presented to her consciousness save the woman and myself, one or other of them had always jealously sat behind the curtain at the head of the bed when I was there. But when it came to that, they seemed careless what communication I might hold with her; as if—the thought passed through my mind—I were dying too.

"I always observed that their pride bitterly resented the younger brother's (as I call him) having crossed swords with a peasant, and that peasant a boy. The only consideration that appeared to affect the mind of either of them was the consideration that this was highly degrading to the family, and was ridiculous. As often as I caught the younger brother's eyes, their expression reminded me that he disliked me deeply, for knowing what I knew from the boy. He was smoother and more polite to me than the elder; but I saw this. I also saw that I was an incumbrance in the mind of the elder, too.

"My patient died, two hours before midnight—at a time, by my watch, answering almost to the minute when I had first seen her. I was alone with her, when her forlorn young head drooped gently on one side, and all her earthly wrongs and sorrows ended.

"The brothers were waiting in a room down-stairs, impatient to ride away. I had heard them, alone at the bedside, striking their boots with their riding-whips, and loitering up and down.

"'At last she is dead?' said the elder, when I went in.

"'She is dead,' said I.

"'I congratulate you, my brother,' were his words as he turned round.

"He had before offered me money, which I had postponed taking. He now gave me a rouleau of gold. I took it from his hand, but laid it on the table. I had considered the question, and had resolved to accept nothing.

"'Pray excuse me,' said I. 'Under the circumstances, no.'

"They exchanged looks, but bent their heads to me as I bent mine to them, and we parted without another word on either side.

* * *

"I am weary, weary, weary—worn down by misery. I cannot read what I have written with this gaunt hand.

"Early in the morning, the rouleau of gold was left at my door in a little box, with my name on the outside. From the first, I had anxiously considered what I ought to do. I decided, that day, to write privately to the Minister, stating the nature of the two cases to which I had been summoned, and the place to which I had gone: in effect, stating all the circumstances. I knew what Court influence was, and what the immunities of the Nobles were, and I expected that the matter would never be heard of; but, I wished to relieve my own mind. I had kept the matter a profound secret, even from my wife; and this, too, I resolved to state in my letter. I had no apprehension whatever of my real danger; but I was conscious that there might be danger for others, if others were compromised by possessing the knowledge that I possessed.

"I was much engaged that day, and could not complete my letter that night. I rose long before my usual time next morning to finish it. It was the last day of the year. The letter was lying before me just completed, when I was told that a lady waited, who wished to see me.

"I am growing more and more unequal to the task I have set myself. It is so cold, so dark, my senses are so benumbed, and the gloom upon me is so dreadful.

"The lady was young, engaging, and handsome, but not marked for long life. She was in great agitation. She presented herself to me as the wife of the Marquis St. Evremonde. I connected the title by which the boy had addressed the elder brother, with the initial letter embroidered on the scarf, and had no difficulty in arriving at the conclusion that I had seen that nobleman very lately.

"My memory is still accurate, but I cannot write the words of our conversation. I suspect that I am watched more closely than I was, and I know not at what times I may be watched. She had in part suspected, and in part discovered, the main facts of the cruel story, of her husband's share in it, and my being resorted to. She did not know that the girl was dead. Her hope had been, she said in great distress, to show her, in secret, a woman's sympathy. Her hope had been to avert the wrath of Heaven from a House that had long been hateful to the suffering many.

"She had reasons for believing that there was a young sister living, and her greatest desire was, to help that sister. I could tell her nothing but that there was such a sister; beyond that, I knew nothing. Her inducement to come to me, relying on my confidence, had been the hope that I could tell her the name and place of abode. Whereas, to this wretched hour I am ignorant of both.

"These scraps of paper fail me. One was taken from me, with a warning, yesterday. I must finish my record to-day.

"She was a good, compassionate lady, and not happy in her marriage. How could she be! The brother distrusted and disliked her, and his influence was all opposed to her; she stood in dread of him, and in dread of her husband too. When I handed her down to the door, there was a child, a pretty boy from two to three years old, in her carriage.

"'For his sake, Doctor,' she said, pointing to him in tears, 'I would do all I can to make what poor amends I can. He will never prosper in his inheritance otherwise. I have a presentiment that if no other innocent atonement is made for this, it will one day be required of him. What I have left to call my own—it is little beyond the worth of a few jewels—I will make it the first charge of his life to bestow, with the compassion and lamenting of his dead mother, on this injured family, if the sister can be discovered.'

"She kissed the boy, and said, caressing him, 'It is for thine own dear sake. Thou wilt be faithful, little Charles?' The child answered her bravely, 'Yes!' I kissed her hand, and she took him in her arms, and went away caressing him. I never saw her more.

"As she had mentioned her husband's name in the faith that I knew it, I added no mention of it to my letter. I sealed my letter, and, not trusting it out of my own hands, delivered it myself that day.

"That night, the last night of the year, towards nine o'clock, a man in a black dress rang at my gate, demanded to see me, and softly followed my servant, Ernest Defarge, a youth, up-stairs. When my servant came into the room where I sat with my wife—O my wife, beloved of my heart! My fair young English wife!—we saw the man, who was supposed to be at the gate, standing silent behind him.

"An urgent case in the Rue St. Honore, he said. It would not detain me, he had a coach in waiting.

"It brought me here, it brought me to my grave. When I was clear of the house, a black muffler was drawn tightly over my mouth from behind, and my arms were pinioned. The two brothers crossed the road from a dark corner, and identified me with a single gesture. The Marquis took from his pocket the letter I had written, showed it me, burnt it in the light of a lantern that was held, and extinguished the ashes with his foot. Not a word was spoken. I was brought here, I was brought to my living grave.

"If it had pleased *God* to put it in the hard heart of either of the brothers, in all these frightful years, to grant me any tidings of my dearest wife—so much as to let me know by a word whether alive or dead—I might have thought that He had not quite abandoned them. But, now I believe that the mark of the red cross is fatal to them, and that they have no part in His mercies. And them and their descendants, to the last of their race, I, Alexandre Manette, unhappy prisoner, do this last night of the year 1767, in my unbearable agony, denounce to the times when all these things shall be answered for. I denounce them to Heaven and to earth."

A terrible sound arose when the reading of this document was done. A sound of craving and eagerness that had nothing articulate in it but blood. The narrative called up the most revengeful passions of the time, and there was not a head in the nation but must have dropped before it.

Little need, in presence of that tribunal and that auditory, to show how the Defarges had not made the paper public, with the other captured Bastille memorials borne in procession, and had kept it, biding their time. Little need to show that this detested family name had long been anathematised by Saint Antoine, and was wrought into the fatal register. The man never trod ground whose virtues and services would have sustained him in that place that day, against such denunciation.

And all the worse for the doomed man, that the denouncer was a well-known citizen, his own attached friend, the father of his wife. One of the frenzied aspirations of the populace was, for imitations of the questionable public virtues of antiquity, and for sacrifices and self-immolations on the people's altar. Therefore when the President said (else had his own head quivered on his shoulders), that the good physician of the Republic would deserve better still of the Republic by rooting out an obnoxious family of Aristocrats, and would doubtless feel a sacred glow and joy in making his daughter a widow and her child an orphan, there was wild excitement, patriotic fervour, not a touch of human sympathy.

"Much influence around him, has that Doctor?" murmured Madame Defarge, smiling to The Vengeance. "Save him now, my Doctor, save him!"

At every juryman's vote, there was a roar. Another and another. Roar and roar.

Unanimously voted. At heart and by descent an Aristocrat, an enemy of the Republic, a notorious oppressor of the People. Back to the Conciergerie, and Death within four-and-twenty hours!

XI. Dusk

The wretched wife of the innocent man thus doomed to die, fell under the sentence, as if she had been mortally stricken. But, she uttered no sound; and so strong was the voice within her, representing that it was she of all the world who must uphold him in his misery and not augment it, that it quickly raised her, even from that shock.

The Judges having to take part in a public demonstration out of doors, the Tribunal adjourned. The quick noise and movement of the court's emptying itself by many passages had not ceased, when Lucie stood stretching out her arms towards her husband, with nothing in her face but love and consolation.

"If I might touch him! If I might embrace him once! O, good citizens, if you would have so much compassion for us!"

There was but a gaoler left, along with two of the four men who had taken him last night, and Barsad. The people had all poured out to the show in the streets. Barsad proposed to the rest, "Let her embrace him then; it is but a moment." It was silently acquiesced in, and they passed her over the seats in the hall to a raised place, where he, by leaning over the dock, could fold her in his arms.

"Farewell, dear darling of my soul. My parting blessing on my love. We shall meet again, where the weary are at rest!"

They were her husband's words, as he held her to his bosom.

"I can bear it, dear Charles. I am supported from above: don't suffer for me. A parting blessing for our child."

"I send it to her by you. I kiss her by you. I say farewell to her by you."

"My husband. No! A moment!" He was tearing himself apart from her. "We shall not be separated long. I feel that this will break my heart by-and-bye; but I will do my duty while I can, and when I leave her, God will raise up friends for her, as He did for me."

Her father had followed her, and would have fallen on his knees to both of them, but that Darnay put out a hand and seized him, crying:

"No, no! What have you done, what have you done, that you should kneel to us! We know now, what a struggle you made of old. We know, now what you underwent when you suspected my descent, and when you knew it. We know now, the natural antipathy you strove against, and conquered, for her dear sake. We thank you with all our hearts, and all our love and duty. Heaven be with you!"

Her father's only answer was to draw his hands through his white hair, and wring them with a shriek of anguish.

"It could not be otherwise," said the prisoner. "All things have worked together as they have fallen out. It was the always-vain endeavour to discharge my poor mother's trust that first brought my fatal presence near you. Good could never come of such evil, a happier end was not in nature to so unhappy a beginning. Be comforted, and forgive me. Heaven bless you!"

As he was drawn away, his wife released him, and stood looking after him with her hands touching one another in the attitude of prayer, and with a radiant look upon her face, in which there was even a comforting smile. As he went out at the prisoners' door, she turned, laid her head lovingly on her father's breast, tried to speak to him, and fell at his feet.

Then, issuing from the obscure corner from which he had never moved, Sydney Carton came and took her up. Only her father and Mr. Lorry were with her. His arm trembled as it raised her, and supported her head. Yet, there was an air about him that was not all of pity—that had a flush of pride in it.

"Shall I take her to a coach? I shall never feel her weight."

He carried her lightly to the door, and laid her tenderly down in a coach. Her father and their old friend got into it, and he took his seat beside the driver.

When they arrived at the gateway where he had paused in the dark not many hours before, to picture to himself on which of the rough stones of the street her feet had trodden, he lifted her again, and carried her up the staircase to their rooms. There, he laid her down on a couch, where her child and Miss Pross wept over her.

"Don't recall her to herself," he said, softly, to the latter, "she is better so. Don't revive her to consciousness, while she only faints."

"Oh, Carton, Carton, dear Carton!" cried little Lucie, springing up and throwing her arms passionately round him, in a burst of grief. "Now that you have come, I think you will do something to help mamma, something to save papa! O, look at her, dear Carton! Can you, of all the people who love her, bear to see her so?"

He bent over the child, and laid her blooming cheek against his face. He put her gently from him, and looked at her unconscious mother.

"Before I go," he said, and paused—"I may kiss her?"

It was remembered afterwards that when he bent down and touched her face with his lips, he murmured some words. The child, who was nearest to him, told them afterwards, and told her grandchildren when she was a handsome old lady, that she heard him say, "A life you love."

When he had gone out into the next room, he turned suddenly on Mr. Lorry and her father, who were following, and said to the latter:

"You had great influence but yesterday, Doctor Manette; let it at least be tried. These judges, and all the men in power, are very friendly to you, and very recognisant of your services; are they not?"

"Nothing connected with Charles was concealed from me. I had the strongest assurances that I should save him; and I did." He returned the answer in great trouble, and very slowly.

"Try them again. The hours between this and to-morrow afternoon are few and short, but try."

"I intend to try. I will not rest a moment."

"That's well. I have known such energy as yours do great things before now—though never," he added, with a smile and a sigh together, "such great things as this. But try! Of little worth as life is when we misuse it, it is worth that effort. It would cost nothing to lay down if it were not."

"I will go," said Doctor Manette, "to the Prosecutor and the President straight, and I will go to others whom it is better not to name. I will write too, and—But stay! There is a Celebration in the streets, and no one will be accessible until dark."

"That's true. Well! It is a forlorn hope at the best, and not much the forlorner for being delayed till dark. I should like to know how you speed; though, mind! I expect nothing! When are you likely to have seen these dread powers, Doctor Manette?"

"Immediately after dark, I should hope. Within an hour or two from this."

"It will be dark soon after four. Let us stretch the hour or two. If I go to Mr. Lorry's at nine, shall I hear what you have done, either from our friend or from yourself?"

"Yes."

"May you prosper!"

Mr. Lorry followed Sydney to the outer door, and, touching him on the shoulder as he was going away, caused him to turn.

"I have no hope," said Mr. Lorry, in a low and sorrowful whisper.

"Nor have I."

"If any one of these men, or all of these men, were disposed to spare him—which is a large supposition; for what is his life, or any man's to them!—I doubt if they durst spare him after the demonstration in the court."

"And so do I. I heard the fall of the axe in that sound."

Mr. Lorry leaned his arm upon the door-post, and bowed his face upon it.

"Don't despond," said Carton, very gently; "don't grieve. I encouraged Doctor Manette in this idea, because I felt that it might one day be consolatory to her. Otherwise, she might think 'his life was wantonly thrown away or wasted,' and that might trouble her."

"Yes, yes, yes," returned Mr. Lorry, drying his eyes, "you are right. But he will perish; there is no real hope."

"Yes. He will perish: there is no real hope," echoed Carton.

And walked with a settled step, down-stairs.

XII. Darkness

Sydney Carton paused in the street, not quite decided where to go. "At Tellson's banking-house at nine," he said, with a musing face. "Shall I do well, in the mean time, to show myself? I think so. It is best that these people should know there is such a man as I here; it is a sound precaution, and may be a necessary preparation. But care, care, care! Let me think it out!"

Checking his steps which had begun to tend towards an object, he took a turn or two in the already darkening street, and traced the thought in his mind to its possible consequences. His first impression was confirmed. "It is best," he said, finally resolved, "that these people should know there is such a man as I here." And he turned his face towards Saint Antoine.

Defarge had described himself, that day, as the keeper of a wine-shop in the Saint Antoine suburb. It was not difficult for one who knew the city well, to find his house without asking any question. Having ascertained its situation, Carton came out of those closer streets again, and dined at a place of refreshment and fell sound asleep after dinner. For the first time in many years, he had no strong drink. Since last night he had taken nothing but a little light thin wine, and last night he had dropped the brandy slowly down on Mr. Lorry's hearth like a man who had done with it.

It was as late as seven o'clock when he awoke refreshed, and went out into the streets again. As he passed along towards Saint Antoine, he stopped at a shop-window where there was a mirror, and slightly altered the disordered arrangement of his loose cravat, and his coat-collar, and his wild hair. This done, he went on direct to Defarge's, and went in.

There happened to be no customer in the shop but Jacques Three, of the restless fingers and the croaking voice. This man, whom he had seen upon the Jury, stood drinking at the little counter, in conversation with the Defarges, man and wife. The Vengeance assisted in the conversation, like a regular member of the establishment.

As Carton walked in, took his seat and asked (in very indifferent French) for a small measure of wine, Madame Defarge cast a careless glance at him, and then a keener, and then a keener, and then advanced to him herself, and asked him what it was he had ordered.

He repeated what he had already said.

"English?" asked Madame Defarge, inquisitively raising her dark eyebrows.

After looking at her, as if the sound of even a single French word were slow to express itself to him, he answered, in his former strong foreign accent. "Yes, madame, yes. I am English!"

Madame Defarge returned to her counter to get the wine, and, as he took up a Jacobin journal and feigned to pore over it puzzling out its meaning, he heard her say, "I swear to you, like Evremonde!"

Defarge brought him the wine, and gave him Good Evening.

"How?"

"Good evening."

"Oh! Good evening, citizen," filling his glass. "Ah! and good wine. I drink to the Republic."

Defarge went back to the counter, and said, "Certainly, a little like." Madame sternly retorted, "I tell you a good deal like." Jacques Three pacifically remarked, "He is so much in your mind, see you, madame." The amiable Vengeance added, with a laugh, "Yes, my faith! And you are looking forward with so much pleasure to seeing him once more to-morrow!"

Carton followed the lines and words of his paper, with a slow forefinger, and with a studious and absorbed face. They were all leaning their arms on the counter close together, speaking low. After a silence of a few moments, during which they all looked towards him without disturbing his outward attention from the Jacobin editor, they resumed their conversation.

"It is true what madame says," observed Jacques Three. "Why stop? There is great force in that. Why stop?"

"Well, well," reasoned Defarge, "but one must stop somewhere. After all, the question is still where?"

"At extermination," said madame.

"Magnificent!" croaked Jacques Three. The Vengeance, also, highly approved.

"Extermination is good doctrine, my wife," said Defarge, rather troubled; "in general, I say nothing against it. But this Doctor has suffered much; you have seen him to-day; you have observed his face when the paper was read."

"I have observed his face!" repeated madame, contemptuously and angrily. "Yes. I have observed his face. I have observed his face to be not the face of a true friend of the Republic. Let him take care of his face!"

"And you have observed, my wife," said Defarge, in a deprecatory manner, "the anguish of his daughter, which must be a dreadful anguish to him!"

"I have observed his daughter," repeated madame; "yes, I have observed his daughter, more times than one. I have observed her to-day, and I have observed her other days. I have observed her in the court, and I have observed her in the street by the prison. Let me but lift my finger—!" She seemed to raise it (the listener's eyes were always on his paper), and to let it fall with a rattle on the ledge before her, as if the axe had dropped.

"The citizeness is superb!" croaked the Juryman.

"She is an Angel!" said The Vengeance, and embraced her.

"As to thee," pursued madame, implacably, addressing her husband, "if it depended on thee—which, happily, it does not—thou wouldst rescue this man even now."

"No!" protested Defarge. "Not if to lift this glass would do it! But I would leave the matter there. I say, stop there."

"See you then, Jacques," said Madame Defarge, wrathfully; "and see you, too, my little Vengeance; see you both! Listen! For other crimes as tyrants and oppressors, I have this race a long time on my register, doomed to destruction and extermination. Ask my husband, is that so."

"It is so," assented Defarge, without being asked.

"In the beginning of the great days, when the Bastille falls, he finds this paper of to-day, and he brings it home, and in the middle of the night when this place is clear and shut, we read it, here on this spot, by the light of this lamp. Ask him, is that so."

"It is so," assented Defarge.

"That night, I tell him, when the paper is read through, and the lamp is burnt out, and the day is gleaming in above those shutters and between those iron bars, that I have now a secret to communicate. Ask him, is that so."

"It is so," assented Defarge again.

"I communicate to him that secret. I smite this bosom with these two hands as I smite it now, and I tell him, 'Defarge, I was brought up among the fishermen of the sea-shore, and that peasant family so injured by the two Evremonde brothers, as that Bastille paper describes, is my family. Defarge, that sister of the mortally wounded boy upon the ground was my sister, that husband was my sister's husband, that unborn child was their child, that brother was my brother, that father was my father, those dead are my dead, and that summons to answer for those things descends to me!' Ask him, is that so."

"It is so," assented Defarge once more.

"Then tell Wind and Fire where to stop," returned madame; "but don't tell me."

Both her hearers derived a horrible enjoyment from the deadly nature of her wrath—the listener could feel how white she was, without seeing her—and both highly commended it. Defarge, a weak minority, interposed a few words for the memory of the compassionate wife of the Marquis; but only elicited from his own wife a repetition of her last reply. "Tell the Wind and the Fire where to stop; not me!"

Customers entered, and the group was broken up. The English customer paid for what he had had, perplexedly counted his change, and asked, as a stranger, to be directed towards the National Palace. Madame Defarge took him to the door, and put her arm on his, in pointing out the road. The English customer was not without his reflections then, that it might be a good deed to seize that arm, lift it, and strike under it sharp and deep.

But, he went his way, and was soon swallowed up in the shadow of the prison wall. At the appointed hour, he emerged from it to present himself in Mr. Lorry's room again, where he found the old gentleman walking to and fro in restless anxiety. He said he had been with Lucie until just now, and had only left her for a few minutes, to come and keep his appointment. Her father had not been seen, since he quitted the banking-house towards four o'clock. She had some faint hopes that his mediation might save Charles, but they were very slight. He had been more than five hours gone: where could he be?

Mr. Lorry waited until ten; but, Doctor Manette not returning, and he being unwilling to leave Lucie any longer, it was arranged that he should go back to her, and come to the banking-house again at midnight. In the meanwhile, Carton would wait alone by the fire for the Doctor.

He waited and waited, and the clock struck twelve; but Doctor Manette did not come back. Mr. Lorry returned, and found no tidings of him, and brought none. Where could he be?

They were discussing this question, and were almost building up some weak structure of hope on his prolonged absence, when they heard him on the stairs. The instant he entered the room, it was plain that all was lost.

Whether he had really been to any one, or whether he had been all that time traversing the streets, was never known. As he stood staring at them, they asked him no question, for his face told them everything.

"I cannot find it," said he, "and I must have it. Where is it?"

His head and throat were bare, and, as he spoke with a helpless look straying all around, he took his coat off, and let it drop on the floor.

"Where is my bench? I have been looking everywhere for my bench, and I can't find it. What have they done with my work? Time presses: I must finish those shoes."

They looked at one another, and their hearts died within them.

"Come, come!" said he, in a whimpering miserable way; "let me get to work. Give me my work."

Receiving no answer, he tore his hair, and beat his feet upon the ground, like a distracted child.

"Don't torture a poor forlorn wretch," he implored them, with a dreadful cry; "but give me my work! What is to become of us, if those shoes are not done to-night?"

Lost, utterly lost!

It was so clearly beyond hope to reason with him, or try to restore him, that—as if by agreement—they each put a hand upon his shoulder, and soothed him to sit down before the fire, with a promise that he should have his work presently. He sank into the chair, and brooded over the embers, and shed tears. As if all that had happened since the garret time were a momentary fancy, or a dream, Mr. Lorry saw him shrink into the exact figure that Defarge had had in keeping.

Affected, and impressed with terror as they both were, by this spectacle of ruin, it was not a time to yield to such emotions. His lonely daughter, bereft of her final hope and reliance, appealed to them both too strongly. Again, as if by agreement, they looked at one another with one meaning in their faces. Carton was the first to speak:

"The last chance is gone: it was not much. Yes; he had better be taken to her. But, before you go, will you, for a moment, steadily attend to me? Don't ask me why I make the stipulations I am going to make, and exact the promise I am going to exact; I have a reason—a good one."

"I do not doubt it," answered Mr. Lorry. "Say on."

The figure in the chair between them, was all the time monotonously rocking itself to and fro, and moaning. They spoke in such a tone as they would have used if they had been watching by a sick-bed in the night.

Carton stooped to pick up the coat, which lay almost entangling his feet. As he did so, a small case in which the Doctor was accustomed to carry the lists of his day's duties, fell lightly on the floor. Carton took it up, and there was a folded paper in it. "We should look at this!" he said. Mr. Lorry nodded his consent. He opened it, and exclaimed, "Thank *God!*"

"What is it?" asked Mr. Lorry, eagerly.

"A moment! Let me speak of it in its place. First," he put his hand in his coat, and took another paper from it, "that is the certificate which enables me to pass out of this city. Look at it. You see—Sydney Carton, an Englishman?"

Mr. Lorry held it open in his hand, gazing in his earnest face.

"Keep it for me until to-morrow. I shall see him to-morrow, you remember, and I had better not take it into the prison."

"Why not?"

"I don't know; I prefer not to do so. Now, take this paper that Doctor Manette has carried about him. It is a similar certificate, enabling him and his daughter and her child, at any time, to pass the barrier and the frontier! You see?"

"Yes!"

"Perhaps he obtained it as his last and utmost precaution against evil, yesterday. When is it dated? But no matter; don't stay to look; put it up carefully with mine and your own. Now, observe! I never doubted until within this hour or two, that he had, or could have such a paper. It is good, until recalled. But it may be soon recalled, and, I have reason to think, will be."

"They are not in danger?"

"They are in great danger. They are in danger of denunciation by Madame Defarge. I know it from her own lips. I have overheard words of that woman's, to-night, which have presented their danger to me in strong colours. I have lost no time, and since then, I have seen the spy. He confirms me. He knows that a wood-sawyer, living by the prison wall, is under the control of the Defarges, and has been rehearsed by Madame Defarge as to his having seen Her"—he never mentioned Lucie's name

—"making signs and signals to prisoners. It is easy to foresee that the pretence will be the common one, a prison plot, and that it will involve her life—and perhaps her child's—and perhaps her father's—for both have been seen with her at that place. Don't look so horrified. You will save them all."

"Heaven grant I may, Carton! But how?"

"I am going to tell you how. It will depend on you, and it could depend on no better man. This new denunciation will certainly not take place until after to-morrow; probably not until two or three days afterwards; more probably a week afterwards. You know it is a capital crime, to mourn for, or sympathise with, a victim of the Guillotine. She and her father would unquestionably be guilty of this crime, and this woman (the inveteracy of whose pursuit cannot be described) would wait to add that strength to her case, and make herself doubly sure. You follow me?"

"So attentively, and with so much confidence in what you say, that for the moment I lose sight," touching the back of the Doctor's chair, "even of this distress."

"You have money, and can buy the means of travelling to the seacoast as quickly as the journey can be made. Your preparations have been completed for some days, to return to England. Early to-morrow have your horses ready, so that they may be in starting trim at two o'clock in the afternoon."

"It shall be done!"

His manner was so fervent and inspiring, that Mr. Lorry caught the flame, and was as quick as youth.

"You are a noble heart. Did I say we could depend upon no better man? Tell her, to-night, what you know of her danger as involving her child and her father. Dwell upon that, for she would lay her own fair head beside her husband's cheerfully." He faltered for an instant; then went on as before. "For the sake of her child and her father, press upon her the necessity of leaving Paris, with them and you, at that hour. Tell her that it was her husband's last arrangement. Tell her that more depends upon it than she dare believe, or hope. You think that her father, even in this sad state, will submit himself to her; do you not?"

"I am sure of it."

"I thought so. Quietly and steadily have all these arrangements made in the courtyard here, even to the taking of your own seat in the carriage. The moment I come to you, take me in, and drive away."

"I understand that I wait for you under all circumstances?"

"You have my certificate in your hand with the rest, you know, and will reserve my place. Wait for nothing but to have my place occupied, and then for England!"

"Why, then," said Mr. Lorry, grasping his eager but so firm and steady hand, "it does not all depend on one old man, but I shall have a young and ardent man at my side."

"By the help of Heaven you shall! Promise me solemnly that nothing will influence you to alter the course on which we now stand pledged to one another."

"Nothing, Carton."

"Remember these words to-morrow: change the course, or delay in it—for any reason—and no life can possibly be saved, and many lives must inevitably be sacrificed."

"I will remember them. I hope to do my part faithfully."

"And I hope to do mine. Now, good bye!"

Though he said it with a grave smile of earnestness, and though he even put the old man's hand to his lips, he did not part from him then. He helped him so far to arouse the rocking figure before the dying embers, as to get a cloak and hat put upon it, and to tempt it forth to find where the bench and work were hidden that it still moaningly besought to have. He walked on the other side of it and protected it to the courtyard of the house where the afflicted heart—so happy in the memorable time when he had revealed his own desolate heart to it—outwatched the awful night. He entered the courtyard and remained there for a few moments alone, looking up at the light in the window of her room. Before he went away, he breathed a blessing towards it, and a Farewell.

XIII. Fifty-two

In the black prison of the Conciergerie, the doomed of the day awaited their fate. They were in number as the weeks of the year. Fifty-two were to roll that afternoon on the life-tide of the city to the boundless everlasting sea. Before their cells were quit of them, new occupants were appointed; before their blood ran into the blood spilled yesterday, the blood that was to mingle with theirs to-morrow was already set apart.

Two score and twelve were told off. From the farmer-general of seventy, whose riches could not buy his life, to the seamstress of twenty, whose poverty and obscurity could not save her. Physical diseases, engendered in the vices and neglects of men, will seize on victims of all degrees; and the frightful moral disorder, born of unspeakable suffering, intolerable oppression, and heartless indifference, smote equally without distinction.

Charles Darnay, alone in a cell, had sustained himself with no flattering delusion since he came to it from the Tribunal. In every line of the narrative he had heard, he had heard his condemnation. He had fully comprehended that no personal influence could possibly save him, that he was virtually sentenced by the millions, and that units could avail him nothing.

Nevertheless, it was not easy, with the face of his beloved wife fresh before him, to compose his mind to what it must bear. His hold on life was strong, and it was very, very hard, to loosen; by gradual efforts and degrees unclosed a little here, it clenched the tighter there; and when he brought his strength to bear on that hand and it yielded, this was closed again. There was a hurry, too, in all his thoughts, a turbulent and heated working of his heart, that contended against resignation. If, for a moment, he did feel resigned, then his wife and child who had to live after him, seemed to protest and to make it a selfish thing.

But, all this was at first. Before long, the consideration that there was no disgrace in the fate he must meet, and that numbers went the same road wrongfully, and trod it firmly every day, sprang up to stimulate him. Next followed the thought that much of the future peace of mind enjoyable by the dear ones, depended on his quiet fortitude. So, by degrees he calmed into the better state, when he could raise his thoughts much higher, and draw comfort down.

Before it had set in dark on the night of his condemnation, he had travelled thus far on his last way. Being allowed to purchase the means of writing, and a light, he sat down to write until such time as the prison lamps should be extinguished.

He wrote a long letter to Lucie, showing her that he had known nothing of her father's imprisonment, until he had heard of it from herself, and that he had been as ignorant as she of his father's and uncle's responsibility for that misery, until the paper had been read. He had already explained to her that his concealment from herself of the name he had relinquished, was the one condition—fully intelligible now—that her father had attached to their betrothal, and was the one promise he had still exacted on the morning of their marriage. He entreated her, for her father's sake, never to seek to know whether her father had become oblivious of the existence of the paper, or had had it recalled to him (for the moment, or for good), by the story of the Tower, on that old Sunday under the dear old plane-tree in the garden. If he had preserved any definite remembrance of it, there could be no doubt that he had supposed it destroyed with the Bastille, when he had found no mention of it among the relics of prisoners which the populace had discovered there, and which had been described to all the world. He besought her—though he added that he knew it was needless—to console her father, by impressing him through every tender means she could think of, with the truth that he had done nothing for which he could justly reproach himself, but had uniformly forgotten himself for their joint sakes. Next to her preservation of his own last grateful love and blessing, and her overcoming of her sorrow, to devote herself to their dear child, he adjured her, as they would meet in Heaven, to comfort her father.

To her father himself, he wrote in the same strain; but, he told her father that he expressly confided his wife and child to his care. And he told him this, very strongly, with the hope of rousing him from any despondency or dangerous retrospect towards which he foresaw he might be tending.

To Mr. Lorry, he commended them all, and explained his worldly affairs. That done, with many added sentences of grateful friendship and warm attachment, all was done. He never thought of Carton. His mind was so full of the others, that he never once thought of him.

He had time to finish these letters before the lights were put out. When he lay down on his straw bed, he thought he had done with this world.

But, it beckoned him back in his sleep, and showed itself in shining forms. Free and happy, back in the old house in Soho (though it had nothing in it like the real house), unaccountably released and light of heart, he was with Lucie again, and she told him it was all a dream, and he had never gone away. A pause of forgetfulness, and then he had even suffered, and had come back to her, dead and at peace, and yet there was no difference in him. Another pause of oblivion, and he awoke in the sombre morning, unconscious where he was or what had happened, until it flashed upon his mind, "this is the day of my death!"

Thus, had he come through the hours, to the day when the fifty-two heads were to fall. And now, while he was composed, and hoped that he could meet the end with quiet heroism, a new action began in his waking thoughts, which was very difficult to master.

He had never seen the instrument that was to terminate his life. How high it was from the ground, how many steps it had, where he would be stood, how he would be touched, whether the touching hands would be dyed red, which way his face would be turned, whether he would be the first, or might be the last: these and many similar questions, in nowise directed by his will, obtruded themselves over and over again, countless times. Neither were they connected with fear: he was conscious of no fear. Rather, they originated in a strange besetting desire to know what to do when the time came; a desire gigantically disproportionate to the few swift moments to which it referred; a wondering that was more like the wondering of some other spirit within his, than his own.

The hours went on as he walked to and fro, and the clocks struck the numbers he would never hear again. Nine gone for ever, ten gone for ever, eleven gone for ever, twelve coming on to pass away. After a hard contest with that eccentric action of thought which had last perplexed him, he had got the better of it. He walked up and down, softly repeating their names to himself. The worst of the strife was over. He could walk up and down, free from distracting fancies, praying for himself and for them.

Twelve gone for ever.

He had been apprised that the final hour was Three, and he knew he would be summoned some time earlier, inasmuch as the tumbrils jolted heavily and slowly through the streets. Therefore, he resolved to keep Two before his mind, as the hour, and so to strengthen himself in the interval that he might be able, after that time, to strengthen others.

Walking regularly to and fro with his arms folded on his breast, a very different man from the prisoner, who had walked to and fro at La Force, he heard One struck away from him, without surprise. The hour had measured like most other hours. Devoutly thankful to Heaven for his recovered self-possession, he thought, "There is but another now," and turned to walk again.

Footsteps in the stone passage outside the door. He stopped.

The key was put in the lock, and turned. Before the door was opened, or as it opened, a man said in a low voice, in English: "He has never seen me here; I have kept out of his way. Go you in alone; I wait near. Lose no time!"

The door was quickly opened and closed, and there stood before him face to face, quiet, intent upon him, with the light of a smile on his features, and a cautionary finger on his lip, Sydney Carton.

There was something so bright and remarkable in his look, that, for the first moment, the prisoner misdoubted him to be an apparition of his own imagining. But, he spoke, and it was his voice; he took the prisoner's hand, and it was his real grasp.

"Of all the people upon earth, you least expected to see me?" he said.

"I could not believe it to be you. I can scarcely believe it now. You are not"—the apprehension came suddenly into his mind—"a prisoner?"

"No. I am accidentally possessed of a power over one of the keepers here, and in virtue of it I stand before you. I come from her—your wife, dear Darnay."

The prisoner wrung his hand.

"I bring you a request from her."

"What is it?"

"A most earnest, pressing, and emphatic entreaty, addressed to you in the most pathetic tones of the voice so dear to you, that you well remember."

The prisoner turned his face partly aside.

"You have no time to ask me why I bring it, or what it means; I have no time to tell you. You must comply with it—take off those boots you wear, and draw on these of mine."

There was a chair against the wall of the cell, behind the prisoner. Carton, pressing forward, had already, with the speed of lightning, got him down into it, and stood over him, barefoot.

"Draw on these boots of mine. Put your hands to them; put your will to them. Quick!"

"Carton, there is no escaping from this place; it never can be done. You will only die with me. It is madness."

"It would be madness if I asked you to escape; but do I? When I ask you to pass out at that door, tell me it is madness and remain here. Change that cravat for this of mine, that coat for this of mine. While you do it, let me take this ribbon from your hair, and shake out your hair like this of mine!"

With wonderful quickness, and with a strength both of will and action, that appeared quite supernatural, he forced all these changes upon him. The prisoner was like a young child in his hands.

"Carton! Dear Carton! It is madness. It cannot be accomplished, it never can be done, it has been attempted, and has always failed. I implore you not to add your death to the bitterness of mine."

"Do I ask you, my dear Darnay, to pass the door? When I ask that, refuse. There are pen and ink and paper on this table. Is your hand steady enough to write?"

"It was when you came in."

"Steady it again, and write what I shall dictate. Quick, friend, quick!"

Pressing his hand to his bewildered head, Darnay sat down at the table. Carton, with his right hand in his breast, stood close beside him.

"Write exactly as I speak."

"To whom do I address it?"

"To no one." Carton still had his hand in his breast.

"Do I date it?"

"No."

The prisoner looked up, at each question. Carton, standing over him with his hand in his breast, looked down.

"'If you remember,'" said Carton, dictating, "'the words that passed between us, long ago, you will readily comprehend this when you see it. You do remember them, I know. It is not in your nature to forget them.'"

He was drawing his hand from his breast; the prisoner chancing to look up in his hurried wonder as he wrote, the hand stopped, closing upon something.

"Have you written 'forget them'?" Carton asked.

"I have. Is that a weapon in your hand?"

"No; I am not armed."

"What is it in your hand?"

"You shall know directly. Write on; there are but a few words more." He dictated again. "'I am thankful that the time has come, when I can prove them. That I do so is no subject for regret or grief.'" As he said these words with his eyes fixed on the writer, his hand slowly and softly moved down close to the writer's face.

The pen dropped from Darnay's fingers on the table, and he looked about him vacantly.

"What vapour is that?" he asked.

"Vapour?"

"Something that crossed me?"

"I am conscious of nothing; there can be nothing here. Take up the pen and finish. Hurry, hurry!"

As if his memory were impaired, or his faculties disordered, the prisoner made an effort to rally his attention. As he looked at Carton with clouded eyes and with an altered manner of breathing, Carton—his hand again in his breast—looked steadily at him.

"Hurry, hurry!"

The prisoner bent over the paper, once more.

"'If it had been otherwise;'" Carton's hand was again watchfully and softly stealing down; "'I never should have used the longer opportunity. If it had been otherwise;'" the hand was at the prisoner's face; "'I should but have had so much the more to answer for. If it had been otherwise—'" Carton looked at the pen and saw it was trailing off into unintelligible signs.

Carton's hand moved back to his breast no more. The prisoner sprang up with a reproachful look, but Carton's hand was close and firm at his nostrils, and Carton's left arm caught him round the waist. For a few seconds he faintly struggled with the man who had come to lay down his life for him; but, within a minute or so, he was stretched insensible on the ground.

Quickly, but with hands as true to the purpose as his heart was, Carton dressed himself in the clothes the prisoner had laid aside, combed back his hair, and tied it with the ribbon the prisoner had worn. Then, he softly called, "Enter there! Come in!" and the Spy presented himself.

"You see?" said Carton, looking up, as he kneeled on one knee beside the insensible figure, putting the paper in the breast: "is your hazard very great?"

"Mr. Carton," the Spy answered, with a timid snap of his fingers, "my hazard is not *that*, in the thick of business here, if you are true to the whole of your bargain."

"Don't fear me. I will be true to the death."

"You must be, Mr. Carton, if the tale of fifty-two is to be right. Being made right by you in that dress, I shall have no fear."

"Have no fear! I shall soon be out of the way of harming you, and the rest will soon be far from here, please God! Now, get assistance and take me to the coach."

"You?" said the Spy nervously.

"Him, man, with whom I have exchanged. You go out at the gate by which you brought me in?"

"Of course."

"I was weak and faint when you brought me in, and I am fainter now you take me out. The parting interview has overpowered me. Such a thing has happened here, often, and too often. Your life is in your own hands. Quick! Call assistance!"

"You swear not to betray me?" said the trembling Spy, as he paused for a last moment.

"Man, man!" returned Carton, stamping his foot; "have I sworn by no solemn vow already, to go through with this, that you waste the precious moments now? Take him yourself to the courtyard you know of, place him yourself in the carriage, show him yourself to Mr. Lorry, tell him yourself to give him no restorative but air, and to remember my words of last night, and his promise of last night, and drive away!"

The Spy withdrew, and Carton seated himself at the table, resting his forehead on his hands. The Spy returned immediately, with two men.

"How, then?" said one of them, contemplating the fallen figure. "So afflicted to find that his friend has drawn a prize in the lottery of Sainte Guillotine?"

"A good patriot," said the other, "could hardly have been more afflicted if the Aristocrat had drawn a blank."

They raised the unconscious figure, placed it on a litter they had brought to the door, and bent to carry it away.

"The time is short, Evremonde," said the Spy, in a warning voice.

"I know it well," answered Carton. "Be careful of my friend, I entreat you, and leave me."

"Come, then, my children," said Barsad. "Lift him, and come away!"

The door closed, and Carton was left alone. Straining his powers of listening to the utmost, he listened for any sound that might denote suspicion or alarm. There was none. Keys turned, doors clashed, footsteps passed along distant passages: no cry was raised, or hurry made, that seemed unusual. Breathing more freely in a little while, he sat down at the table, and listened again until the clock struck Two.

Sounds that he was not afraid of, for he divined their meaning, then began to be audible. Several doors were opened in succession, and finally his own. A gaoler, with a list in his hand, looked in, merely saying, "Follow me, Evremonde!" and he followed into a large dark room, at a distance. It was a dark winter day, and what with the shadows within, and what with the shadows without, he could but dimly discern the others who were brought there to have their arms bound. Some were standing; some seated. Some were lamenting, and in restless motion; but, these were few. The great majority were silent and still, looking fixedly at the ground.

As he stood by the wall in a dim corner, while some of the fifty-two were brought in after him, one man stopped in passing, to embrace him, as having a knowledge of him. It thrilled him with a great dread of discovery; but the man went on. A very few moments after that, a young woman, with a slight girlish form, a sweet spare face in which there was no vestige of colour, and large widely opened patient eyes, rose from the seat where he had observed her sitting, and came to speak to him.

"Citizen Evremonde," she said, touching him with her cold hand. "I am a poor little seamstress, who was with you in La Force."

He murmured for answer: "True. I forget what you were accused of?"

"Plots. Though the just Heaven knows that I am innocent of any. Is it likely? Who would think of plotting with a poor little weak creature like me?"

The forlorn smile with which she said it, so touched him, that tears started from his eyes.

"I am not afraid to die, Citizen Evremonde, but I have done nothing. I am not unwilling to die, if the Republic which is to do so much good to us poor, will profit by my death; but I do not know how that can be, Citizen Evremonde. Such a poor weak little creature!"

As the last thing on earth that his heart was to warm and soften to, it warmed and softened to this pitiable girl.

"I heard you were released, Citizen Evremonde. I hoped it was true?"

"It was. But, I was again taken and condemned."

"If I may ride with you, Citizen Evremonde, will you let me hold your hand? I am not afraid, but I am little and weak, and it will give me more courage."

As the patient eyes were lifted to his face, he saw a sudden doubt in them, and then astonishment. He pressed the work-worn, hunger-worn young fingers, and touched his lips.

"Are you dying for him?" she whispered.

"And his wife and child. Hush! Yes."

"O you will let me hold your brave hand, stranger?"

"Hush! Yes, my poor sister; to the last."

The same shadows that are falling on the prison, are falling, in that same hour of the early afternoon, on the Barrier with the crowd about it, when a coach going out of Paris drives up to be examined.

"Who goes here? Whom have we within? Papers!"

The papers are handed out, and read.

"Alexandre Manette. Physician. French. Which is he?"

This is he; this helpless, inarticulately murmuring, wandering old man pointed out.

"Apparently the Citizen-Doctor is not in his right mind? The Revolution-fever will have been too much for him?"

Greatly too much for him.

"Hah! Many suffer with it. Lucie. His daughter. French. Which is she?"

This is she.

"Apparently it must be. Lucie, the wife of Evremonde; is it not?"

It is.

"Hah! Evremonde has an assignation elsewhere. Lucie, her child. English. This is she?"

She and no other.

"Kiss me, child of Evremonde. Now, thou hast kissed a good Republican; something new in thy family; remember it! Sydney Carton. Advocate. English. Which is he?"

He lies here, in this corner of the carriage. He, too, is pointed out.

"Apparently the English advocate is in a swoon?"

It is hoped he will recover in the fresher air. It is represented that he is not in strong health, and has separated sadly from a friend who is under the displeasure of the Republic.

"Is that all? It is not a great deal, that! Many are under the displeasure of the Republic, and must look out at the little window. Jarvis Lorry. Banker. English. Which is he?"

"I am he. Necessarily, being the last."

It is Jarvis Lorry who has replied to all the previous questions. It is Jarvis Lorry who has alighted and stands with his hand on the coach door, replying to a group of officials. They leisurely walk round the carriage and leisurely mount the box, to look at what little luggage it carries on the roof; the country-people hanging about, press nearer to the coach doors and greedily stare in; a little child, carried by its mother, has its short arm held out for it, that it may touch the wife of an aristocrat who has gone to the Guillotine.

"Behold your papers, Jarvis Lorry, countersigned."

"One can depart, citizen?"

"One can depart. Forward, my postilions! A good journey!"

"I salute you, citizens.—And the first danger passed!"

These are again the words of Jarvis Lorry, as he clasps his hands, and looks upward. There is terror in the carriage, there is weeping, there is the heavy breathing of the insensible traveller.

"Are we not going too slowly? Can they not be induced to go faster?" asks Lucie, clinging to the old man.

"It would seem like flight, my darling. I must not urge them too much; it would rouse suspicion."

"Look back, look back, and see if we are pursued!"

"The road is clear, my dearest. So far, we are not pursued."

Houses in twos and threes pass by us, solitary farms, ruinous buildings, dye-works, tanneries, and the like, open country, avenues of leafless trees. The hard uneven pavement is under us, the soft deep mud is on either side. Sometimes, we strike into the skirting mud, to avoid the stones that clatter us and shake us; sometimes, we stick in ruts and sloughs there. The agony of our impatience is then so great, that in our wild alarm and hurry we are for getting out and running—hiding—doing anything but stopping.

Out of the open country, in again among ruinous buildings, solitary farms, dye-works, tanneries, and the like, cottages in twos and threes, avenues of leafless trees. Have these men deceived us, and taken us back by another road? Is not this the same place twice over? Thank Heaven, no. A village. Look back, look back, and see if we are pursued! Hush! the posting-house.

Leisurely, our four horses are taken out; leisurely, the coach stands in the little street, bereft of horses, and with no likelihood upon it of ever moving again; leisurely, the new horses come into visible existence, one by one; leisurely, the new postilions follow, sucking and plaiting the lashes of their whips; leisurely, the old postilions count their money, make wrong additions, and arrive at dissatisfied results. All the time, our overfraught hearts are beating at a rate that would far outstrip the fastest gallop of the fastest horses ever foaled.

At length the new postilions are in their saddles, and the old are left behind. We are through the village, up the hill, and down the hill, and on the low watery grounds. Suddenly, the postilions exchange speech with animated gesticulation, and the horses are pulled up, almost on their haunches. We are pursued?

"Ho! Within the carriage there. Speak then!"

"What is it?" asks Mr. Lorry, looking out at window.

"How many did they say?"

"I do not understand you."

"—At the last post. How many to the Guillotine to-day?"

"Fifty-two."

"I said so! A brave number! My fellow-citizen here would have it forty-two; ten more heads are worth having. The Guillotine goes handsomely. I love it. Hi forward. Whoop!"

The night comes on dark. He moves more; he is beginning to revive, and to speak intelligibly; he thinks they are still together; he asks him, by his name, what he has in his hand. O pity us, kind Heaven, and help us! Look out, look out, and see if we are pursued.

The wind is rushing after us, and the clouds are flying after us, and the moon is plunging after us, and the whole wild night is in pursuit of us; but, so far, we are pursued by nothing else.

XIV. The Knitting Done

In that same juncture of time when the Fifty-Two awaited their fate Madame Defarge held darkly ominous council with The Vengeance and Jacques Three of the Revolutionary Jury. Not in the wine-shop did Madame Defarge confer with these ministers, but in the shed of the wood-sawyer, erst a mender of roads. The sawyer himself did not participate in the conference, but abided at a little distance, like an outer satellite who was not to speak until required, or to offer an opinion until invited.

"But our Defarge," said Jacques Three, "is undoubtedly a good Republican? Eh?"

"There is no better," the voluble Vengeance protested in her shrill notes, "in France."

"Peace, little Vengeance," said Madame Defarge, laying her hand with a slight frown on her lieutenant's lips, "hear me speak. My husband, fellow-citizen, is a good Republican and a bold man; he has deserved well of the Republic, and possesses its confidence. But my husband has his weaknesses, and he is so weak as to relent towards this Doctor."

"It is a great pity," croaked Jacques Three, dubiously shaking his head, with his cruel fingers at his hungry mouth; "it is not quite like a good citizen; it is a thing to regret."

"See you," said madame, "I care nothing for this Doctor, I. He may wear his head or lose it, for any interest I have in him; it is all one to me. But, the Evremonde people are to be exterminated, and the wife and child must follow the husband and father."

"She has a fine head for it," croaked Jacques Three. "I have seen blue eyes and golden hair there, and they looked charming when Samson held them up." Ogre that he was, he spoke like an epicure.

Madame Defarge cast down her eyes, and reflected a little.

"The child also," observed Jacques Three, with a meditative enjoyment of his words, "has golden hair and blue eyes. And we seldom have a child there. It is a pretty sight!"

"In a word," said Madame Defarge, coming out of her short abstraction, "I cannot trust my husband in this matter. Not only do I feel, since last night, that I dare not confide to him the details of my projects; but also I feel that if I delay, there is danger of his giving warning, and then they might escape."

"That must never be," croaked Jacques Three; "no one must escape. We have not half enough as it is. We ought to have six score a day."

"In a word," Madame Defarge went on, "my husband has not my reason for pursuing this family to annihilation, and I have not his reason for regarding this Doctor with any sensibility. I must act for myself, therefore. Come hither, little citizen."

The wood-sawyer, who held her in the respect, and himself in the submission, of mortal fear, advanced with his hand to his red cap.

"Touching those signals, little citizen," said Madame Defarge, sternly, "that she made to the prisoners; you are ready to bear witness to them this very day?"

"Ay, ay, why not!" cried the sawyer. "Every day, in all weathers, from two to four, always signalling, sometimes with the little one, sometimes without. I know what I know. I have seen with my eyes."

He made all manner of gestures while he spoke, as if in incidental imitation of some few of the great diversity of signals that he had never seen.

"Clearly plots," said Jacques Three. "Transparently!"

"There is no doubt of the Jury?" inquired Madame Defarge, letting her eyes turn to him with a gloomy smile.

"Rely upon the patriotic Jury, dear citizeness. I answer for my fellow-Jurymen."

"Now, let me see," said Madame Defarge, pondering again. "Yet once more! Can I spare this Doctor to my husband? I have no feeling either way. Can I spare him?"

"He would count as one head," observed Jacques Three, in a low voice. "We really have not heads enough; it would be a pity, I think."

"He was signalling with her when I saw her," argued Madame Defarge; "I cannot speak of one without the other; and I must not be silent, and trust the case wholly to him, this little citizen here. For, I am not a bad witness."

The Vengeance and Jacques Three vied with each other in their fervent protestations that she was the most admirable and marvellous of witnesses. The little citizen, not to be outdone, declared her to be a celestial witness.

"He must take his chance," said Madame Defarge. "No, I cannot spare him! You are engaged at three o'clock; you are going to see the batch of to-day executed.—You?"

The question was addressed to the wood-sawyer, who hurriedly replied in the affirmative: seizing the occasion to add that he was the most ardent of Republicans, and that he would be in effect the most desolate of Republicans, if anything prevented him from enjoying the pleasure of smoking his afternoon pipe in the contemplation of the droll national barber. He was so very demonstrative herein, that he might have been suspected (perhaps was, by the dark eyes that looked contemptuously at him out of Madame Defarge's head) of having his small individual fears for his own personal safety, every hour in the day.

"I," said madame, "am equally engaged at the same place. After it is over—say at eight to-night—come you to me, in Saint Antoine, and we will give information against these people at my Section."

The wood-sawyer said he would be proud and flattered to attend the citizeness. The citizeness looking at him, he became embarrassed, evaded her glance as a small dog would have done, retreated among his wood, and hid his confusion over the handle of his saw.

Madame Defarge beckoned the Juryman and The Vengeance a little nearer to the door, and there expounded her further views to them thus:

"She will now be at home, awaiting the moment of his death. She will be mourning and grieving. She will be in a state of mind to impeach the justice of the Republic. She will be full of sympathy with its enemies. I will go to her."

"What an admirable woman; what an adorable woman!" exclaimed Jacques Three, rapturously. "Ah, my cherished!" cried The Vengeance; and embraced her.

"Take you my knitting," said Madame Defarge, placing it in her lieutenant's hands, "and have it ready for me in my usual seat. Keep me my usual chair. Go you there, straight, for there will probably be a greater concourse than usual, to-day."

"I willingly obey the orders of my Chief," said The Vengeance with alacrity, and kissing her cheek. "You will not be late?"

"I shall be there before the commencement."

"And before the tumbrils arrive. Be sure you are there, my soul," said The Vengeance, calling after her, for she had already turned into the street, "before the tumbrils arrive!"

Madame Defarge slightly waved her hand, to imply that she heard, and might be relied upon to arrive in good time, and so went through the mud, and round the corner of the prison wall. The Vengeance and the Juryman, looking after her as she walked away, were highly appreciative of her fine figure, and her superb moral endowments.

There were many women at that time, upon whom the time laid a dreadfully disfiguring hand; but, there was not one among them more to be dreaded than this ruthless woman, now taking her way along the streets. Of a strong and fearless character, of shrewd sense and readiness, of great determination, of that kind of beauty which not only seems to impart to its possessor firmness and animosity, but to strike into others an instinctive recognition of those qualities; the troubled time would have heaved her up, under any circumstances. But, imbued from her childhood with a brooding sense of wrong, and an inveterate hatred of a class, opportunity had developed her into a tigress. She was absolutely without pity. If she had ever had the virtue in her, it had quite gone out of her.

It was nothing to her, that an innocent man was to die for the sins of his forefathers; she saw, not him, but them. It was nothing to her, that his wife was to be made a widow and his daughter an orphan; that was insufficient punishment, because they were her natural enemies and her prey, and as such had no right to live. To appeal to her, was made hopeless by her having no sense of pity, even for herself. If she had been laid low in the streets, in any of the many encounters in which she had been engaged, she would not have pitied herself; nor, if she had been ordered to the axe to-morrow, would she have gone to it with any softer feeling than a fierce desire to change places with the man who sent her there.

Such a heart Madame Defarge carried under her rough robe. Carelessly worn, it was a becoming robe enough, in a certain weird way, and her dark hair looked rich under her coarse red cap. Lying hidden in her bosom, was a loaded pistol. Lying hidden at her waist, was a sharpened dagger. Thus accoutred, and walking with the confident tread of such a character, and with the supple freedom of a woman who had habitually walked in her girlhood, bare-foot and bare-legged, on the brown sea-sand, Madame Defarge took her way along the streets.

Now, when the journey of the travelling coach, at that very moment waiting for the completion of its load, had been planned out last night, the difficulty of taking Miss Pross in it had much engaged Mr. Lorry's attention.

It was not merely desirable to avoid overloading the coach, but it was of the highest importance that the time occupied in examining it and its passengers, should be reduced to the utmost; since their escape might depend on the saving of only a few seconds here and there. Finally, he had proposed, after anxious consideration, that Miss Pross and Jerry, who were at liberty to leave the city, should leave it at three o'clock in the lightest-wheeled conveyance known to that period. Unencumbered with luggage, they would soon overtake the coach, and, passing it and preceding it on the road, would order its horses in advance, and greatly facilitate its progress during the precious hours of the night, when delay was the most to be dreaded.

Seeing in this arrangement the hope of rendering real service in that pressing emergency, Miss Pross hailed it with joy. She and Jerry had beheld the coach start, had known who it was that Solomon brought, had passed some ten minutes in tortures of suspense, and were now concluding their arrangements to follow the coach, even as Madame Defarge, taking her way through the streets, now drew nearer and nearer to the else-deserted lodging in which they held their consultation.

"Now what do you think, Mr. Cruncher," said Miss Pross, whose agitation was so great that she could hardly speak, or stand, or move, or live: "what do you think of our not starting from this courtyard? Another carriage having already gone from here to-day, it might awaken suspicion."

"My opinion, miss," returned Mr. Cruncher, "is as you're right. Likewise wot I'll stand by you, right or wrong."

"I am so distracted with fear and hope for our precious creatures," said Miss Pross, wildly crying, "that I am incapable of forming any plan. Are *you* capable of forming any plan, my dear good Mr. Cruncher?"

"Respectin' a future spear o' life, miss," returned Mr. Cruncher, "I hope so. Respectin' any present use o' this here blessed old head o' mine, I think not. Would you do me the favour, miss, to take notice o' two promises and wows wot it is my wishes fur to record in this here crisis?"

"Oh, for gracious sake!" cried Miss Pross, still wildly crying, "record them at once, and get them out of the way, like an excellent man."

"First," said Mr. Cruncher, who was all in a tremble, and who spoke with an ashy and solemn visage, "them poor things well out o' this, never no more will I do it, never no more!"

"I am quite sure, Mr. Cruncher," returned Miss Pross, "that you never will do it again, whatever it is, and I beg you not to think it necessary to mention more particularly what it is."

"No, miss," returned Jerry, "it shall not be named to you. Second: them poor things well out o' this, and never no more will I interfere with Mrs. Cruncher's flopping, never no more!"

"Whatever housekeeping arrangement that may be," said Miss Pross, striving to dry her eyes and compose herself, "I have no doubt it is best that Mrs. Cruncher should have it entirely under her own superintendence.—O my poor darlings!"

"I go so far as to say, miss, moreover," proceeded Mr. Cruncher, with a most alarming tendency to hold forth as from a pulpit—"and let my words be took down and took to Mrs. Cruncher through yourself—that wot my opinions respectin' flopping has undergone a change, and that wot I only hope with all my heart as Mrs. Cruncher may be a flopping at the present time."

"There, there, there! I hope she is, my dear man," cried the distracted Miss Pross, "and I hope she finds it answering her expectations."

"Forbid it," proceeded Mr. Cruncher, with additional solemnity, additional slowness, and additional tendency to hold forth and hold out, "as anything wot I have ever said or done should be wisited on my earnest wishes for them poor creeturs now! Forbid it as we shouldn't all flop (if it was anyways conwenient) to get 'em out o' this here dismal risk! Forbid it, miss! Wot I say, for-*bid* it!" This was Mr. Cruncher's conclusion after a protracted but vain endeavour to find a better one.

And still Madame Defarge, pursuing her way along the streets, came nearer and nearer.

"If we ever get back to our native land," said Miss Pross, "you may rely upon my telling Mrs. Cruncher as much as I may be able to remember and understand of what you have so impressively said; and at all events you may be sure that I shall bear witness to your being thoroughly in earnest at this dreadful time. Now, pray let us think! My esteemed Mr. Cruncher, let us think!"

Still, Madame Defarge, pursuing her way along the streets, came nearer and nearer.

"If you were to go before," said Miss Pross, "and stop the vehicle and horses from coming here, and were to wait somewhere for me; wouldn't that be best?"

Mr. Cruncher thought it might be best.

"Where could you wait for me?" asked Miss Pross.

Mr. Cruncher was so bewildered that he could think of no locality but Temple Bar. Alas! Temple Bar was hundreds of miles away, and Madame Defarge was drawing very near indeed.

"By the cathedral door," said Miss Pross. "Would it be much out of the way, to take me in, near the great cathedral door between the two towers?"

"No, miss," answered Mr. Cruncher.

"Then, like the best of men," said Miss Pross, "go to the posting-house straight, and make that change."

"I am doubtful," said Mr. Cruncher, hesitating and shaking his head, "about leaving of you, you see. We don't know what may happen."

"Heaven knows we don't," returned Miss Pross, "but have no fear for me. Take me in at the cathedral, at Three o'Clock, or as near it as you can, and I am sure it will be better than our going from here. I feel certain of it. There! Bless you, Mr. Cruncher! Think-not of me, but of the lives that may depend on both of us!"

This exordium, and Miss Pross's two hands in quite agonised entreaty clasping his, decided Mr. Cruncher. With an encouraging nod or two, he immediately went out to alter the arrangements, and left her by herself to follow as she had proposed.

The having originated a precaution which was already in course of execution, was a great relief to Miss Pross. The necessity of composing her appearance so that it should attract no special notice in the streets, was another relief. She looked at her watch, and it was twenty minutes past two. She had no time to lose, but must get ready at once.

Afraid, in her extreme perturbation, of the loneliness of the deserted rooms, and of half-imagined faces peeping from behind every open door in them, Miss Pross got a basin of cold water and began laving her eyes, which were swollen and red. Haunted by her feverish apprehensions, she could not bear to have her sight obscured for a minute at a time by the dripping water, but constantly paused and looked round to see that there was no one watching her. In one of those pauses she recoiled and cried out, for she saw a figure standing in the room.

The basin fell to the ground broken, and the water flowed to the feet of Madame Defarge. By strange stern ways, and through much staining blood, those feet had come to meet that water.

Madame Defarge looked coldly at her, and said, "The wife of Evremonde; where is she?"

It flashed upon Miss Pross's mind that the doors were all standing open, and would suggest the flight. Her first act was to shut them. There were four in the room, and she shut them all. She then placed herself before the door of the chamber which Lucie had occupied.

Madame Defarge's dark eyes followed her through this rapid movement, and rested on her when it was finished. Miss Pross had nothing beautiful about her; years had not tamed the wildness, or softened the grimness, of her appearance; but, she too was a determined woman in her different way, and she measured Madame Defarge with her eyes, every inch.

"You might, from your appearance, be the wife of Lucifer," said Miss Pross, in her breathing. "Nevertheless, you shall not get the better of me. I am an Englishwoman."

Madame Defarge looked at her scornfully, but still with something of Miss Pross's own perception that they two were at bay. She saw a tight, hard, wiry woman before her, as Mr. Lorry had seen in the same figure a woman with a strong hand, in the years gone by. She knew full well that Miss Pross was the family's devoted friend; Miss Pross knew full well that Madame Defarge was the family's malevolent enemy.

"On my way yonder," said Madame Defarge, with a slight movement of her hand towards the fatal spot, "where they reserve my chair and my knitting for me, I am come to make my compliments to her in passing. I wish to see her."

"I know that your intentions are evil," said Miss Pross, "and you may depend upon it, I'll hold my own against them."

Each spoke in her own language; neither understood the other's words; both were very watchful, and intent to deduce from look and manner, what the unintelligible words meant.

"It will do her no good to keep herself concealed from me at this moment," said Madame Defarge. "Good patriots will know what that means. Let me see her. Go tell her that I wish to see her. Do you hear?"

"If those eyes of yours were bed-winches," returned Miss Pross, "and I was an English four-poster, they shouldn't loose a splinter of me. No, you wicked foreign woman; I am your match."

Madame Defarge was not likely to follow these idiomatic remarks in detail; but, she so far understood them as to perceive that she was set at naught.

"Woman imbecile and pig-like!" said Madame Defarge, frowning. "I take no answer from you. I demand to see her. Either tell her that I demand to see her, or stand out of the way of the door and let me go to her!" This, with an angry explanatory wave of her right arm.

"I little thought," said Miss Pross, "that I should ever want to understand your nonsensical language; but I would give all I have, except the clothes I wear, to know whether you suspect the truth, or any part of it."

Neither of them for a single moment released the other's eyes. Madame Defarge had not moved from the spot where she stood when Miss Pross first became aware of her; but, she now advanced one step.

"I am a Briton," said Miss Pross, "I am desperate. I don't care an English Twopence for myself. I know that the longer I keep you here, the greater hope there is for my Ladybird. I'll not leave a handful of that dark hair upon your head, if you lay a finger on me!"

Thus Miss Pross, with a shake of her head and a flash of her eyes between every rapid sentence, and every rapid sentence a whole breath. Thus Miss Pross, who had never struck a blow in her life.

But, her courage was of that emotional nature that it brought the irrepressible tears into her eyes. This was a courage that Madame Defarge so little comprehended as to mistake for weakness. "Ha, ha!" she laughed, "you poor wretch! What are you worth! I address myself to that Doctor." Then she raised her voice and called out, "Citizen Doctor! Wife of Evremonde! Child of Evremonde! Any person but this miserable fool, answer the Citizeness Defarge!"

Perhaps the following silence, perhaps some latent disclosure in the expression of Miss Pross's face, perhaps a sudden misgiving apart from either suggestion, whispered to Madame Defarge that they were gone. Three of the doors she opened swiftly, and looked in.

"Those rooms are all in disorder, there has been hurried packing, there are odds and ends upon the ground. There is no one in that room behind you! Let me look."

"Never!" said Miss Pross, who understood the request as perfectly as Madame Defarge understood the answer.

"If they are not in that room, they are gone, and can be pursued and brought back," said Madame Defarge to herself.

"As long as you don't know whether they are in that room or not, you are uncertain what to do," said Miss Pross to herself; "and you shall not know that, if I can prevent your knowing it; and know that, or not know that, you shall not leave here while I can hold you."

"I have been in the streets from the first, nothing has stopped me, I will tear you to pieces, but I will have you from that door," said Madame Defarge.

"We are alone at the top of a high house in a solitary courtyard, we are not likely to be heard, and I pray for bodily strength to keep you here, while every minute you are here is worth a hundred thousand guineas to my darling," said Miss Pross.

Madame Defarge made at the door. Miss Pross, on the instinct of the moment, seized her round the waist in both her arms, and held her tight. It was in vain for Madame Defarge to struggle and to strike; Miss Pross, with the vigorous tenacity of love, always so much stronger than hate, clasped her tight, and even lifted her from the floor in the struggle that they had. The two hands of Madame Defarge buffeted and tore her face; but, Miss Pross, with her head down, held her round the waist, and clung to her with more than the hold of a drowning woman.

Soon, Madame Defarge's hands ceased to strike, and felt at her encircled waist. "It is under my arm," said Miss Pross, in smothered tones, "you shall not draw it. I am stronger than you, I bless Heaven for it. I hold you till one or other of us faints or dies!"

Madame Defarge's hands were at her bosom. Miss Pross looked up, saw what it was, struck at it, struck out a flash and a crash, and stood alone—blinded with smoke.

All this was in a second. As the smoke cleared, leaving an awful stillness, it passed out on the air, like the soul of the furious woman whose body lay lifeless on the ground.

In the first fright and horror of her situation, Miss Pross passed the body as far from it as she could, and ran down the stairs to call for fruitless help. Happily, she bethought herself of the consequences of what she did, in time to check herself and go back. It was dreadful to go in at the door again; but, she did go in, and even went near it, to get the bonnet and other things that she must wear. These she put on, out on the staircase, first shutting and locking the door and taking away the key. She then sat down on the stairs a few moments to breathe and to cry, and then got up and hurried away.

By good fortune she had a veil on her bonnet, or she could hardly have gone along the streets without being stopped. By good fortune, too, she was naturally so peculiar in appearance as not to show disfigurement like any other woman. She needed both advantages, for the marks of gripping fingers were deep in her face, and her hair was torn, and her dress (hastily composed with unsteady hands) was clutched and dragged a hundred ways.

In crossing the bridge, she dropped the door key in the river. Arriving at the cathedral some few minutes before her escort, and waiting there, she thought, what if the key were already taken in a net, what if it were identified, what if the door were opened and the remains discovered, what if she were stopped at the gate, sent to prison, and charged with murder! In the midst of these fluttering thoughts, the escort appeared, took her in, and took her away.

"Is there any noise in the streets?" she asked him.

"The usual noises," Mr. Cruncher replied; and looked surprised by the question and by her aspect.

"I don't hear you," said Miss Pross. "What do you say?"

It was in vain for Mr. Cruncher to repeat what he said; Miss Pross could not hear him. "So I'll nod my head," thought Mr. Cruncher, amazed, "at all events she'll see that." And she did.

"Is there any noise in the streets now?" asked Miss Pross again, presently.

Again Mr. Cruncher nodded his head.

"I don't hear it."

"Gone deaf in an hour?" said Mr. Cruncher, ruminating, with his mind much disturbed; "wot's come to her?"

"I feel," said Miss Pross, "as if there had been a flash and a crash, and that crash was the last thing I should ever hear in this life."

"Blest if she ain't in a queer condition!" said Mr. Cruncher, more and more disturbed. "Wot can she have been a takin', to keep her courage up? Hark! There's the roll of them dreadful carts! You can hear that, miss?"

"I can hear," said Miss Pross, seeing that he spoke to her, "nothing. O, my good man, there was first a great crash, and then a great stillness, and that stillness seems to be fixed and unchangeable, never to be broken any more as long as my life lasts."

"If she don't hear the roll of those dreadful carts, now very nigh their journey's end," said Mr. Cruncher, glancing over his shoulder, "it's my opinion that indeed she never will hear anything else in this world."

And indeed she never did.

XV. The Footsteps Die Out For Ever

Along the Paris streets, the death-carts rumble, hollow and harsh. Six tumbrils carry the day's wine to La Guillotine. All the devouring and insatiate Monsters imagined since imagination could record itself, are fused in the one realisation, Guillotine. And yet there is not in France, with its rich variety of soil and climate, a blade, a leaf, a root, a sprig, a peppercorn, which will grow to maturity under conditions more certain than those that have produced this horror. Crush humanity out of shape once more, under similar hammers, and it will twist itself into the same tortured forms. Sow the same seed of rapacious license and oppression over again, and it will surely yield the same fruit according to its kind.

Six tumbrils roll along the streets. Change these back again to what they were, thou powerful enchanter, Time, and they shall be seen to be the carriages of absolute monarchs, the equipages of feudal nobles, the toilettes of flaring Jezebels, the churches that are not my father's house but dens of thieves, the huts of millions of starving peasants! No; the great magician who majestically works out the appointed order of the Creator, never reverses his transformations. "If thou be changed into this shape by the will of God," say the seers to the enchanted, in the wise Arabian stories, "then remain so! But, if thou wear this form through mere passing conjuration, then resume thy former aspect!" Changeless and hopeless, the tumbrils roll along.

As the sombre wheels of the six carts go round, they seem to plough up a long crooked furrow among the populace in the streets. Ridges of faces are thrown to this side and to that, and the ploughs go steadily onward. So used are the regular inhabitants of the houses to the spectacle, that in many windows there are no people, and in some the occupation of the hands is not so much as suspended, while the eyes survey the faces in the tumbrils. Here and there, the inmate has visitors to see the sight; then he points his finger, with something of the complacency of a curator or authorised exponent, to this cart and to this, and seems to tell who sat here yesterday, and who there the day before.

Of the riders in the tumbrils, some observe these things, and all things on their last roadside, with an impassive stare; others, with a lingering interest in the ways of life and men. Some, seated with drooping heads, are sunk in silent despair; again, there are some so heedful of their looks that they cast upon the multitude such glances as they have seen in theatres, and in pictures. Several close their eyes, and think, or try to get their straying thoughts together. Only one, and he a miserable creature, of a crazed aspect, is so shattered and made drunk by horror, that he sings, and tries to dance. Not one of the whole number appeals by look or gesture, to the pity of the people.

There is a guard of sundry horsemen riding abreast of the tumbrils, and faces are often turned up to some of them, and they are asked some question. It would seem to be always the same question, for, it is always followed by a press of people towards the third cart. The horsemen abreast of that cart, frequently point out one man in it with their swords. The leading curiosity is, to know which is he; he stands at the back of the tumbril with his head bent down, to converse with a mere girl who sits on the side of the cart, and holds his hand. He has no curiosity or care for the scene about him, and always speaks to the girl. Here and there in the long street of St. Honore, cries are raised against him. If they move him at all, it is only to a quiet smile, as he shakes his hair a little more loosely about his face. He cannot easily touch his face, his arms being bound.

On the steps of a church, awaiting the coming-up of the tumbrils, stands the Spy and prison-sheep. He looks into the first of them: not there. He looks into the second: not there. He already asks himself, "Has he sacrificed me?" when his face clears, as he looks into the third.

"Which is Evremonde?" says a man behind him.

"That. At the back there."

"With his hand in the girl's?"

"Yes."

The man cries, "Down, Evremonde! To the Guillotine all aristocrats! Down, Evremonde!"

"Hush, hush!" the Spy entreats him, timidly.

"And why not, citizen?"

"He is going to pay the forfeit: it will be paid in five minutes more. Let him be at peace."

But the man continuing to exclaim, "Down, Evremonde!" the face of Evremonde is for a moment turned towards him. Evremonde then sees the Spy, and looks attentively at him, and goes his way.

The clocks are on the stroke of three, and the furrow ploughed among the populace is turning round, to come on into the place of execution, and end. The ridges thrown to this side and to that, now crumble in and close behind the last plough as it passes on, for all are following to the Guillotine. In front of it, seated in chairs, as in a garden of public diversion, are a number of women, busily knitting. On one of the fore-most chairs, stands The Vengeance, looking about for her friend.

"Therese!" she cries, in her shrill tones. "Who has seen her? Therese Defarge!"

"She never missed before," says a knitting-woman of the sisterhood.

"No; nor will she miss now," cries The Vengeance, petulantly. "Therese."

"Louder," the woman recommends.

Ay! Louder, Vengeance, much louder, and still she will scarcely hear thee. Louder yet, Vengeance, with a little oath or so added, and yet it will hardly bring her. Send other women up and down to seek her, lingering somewhere; and yet, although the messengers have done dread deeds, it is questionable whether of their own wills they will go far enough to find her!

"Bad Fortune!" cries The Vengeance, stamping her foot in the chair, "and here are the tumbrils! And Evremonde will be despatched in a wink, and she not here! See her knitting in my hand, and her empty chair ready for her. I cry with vexation and disappointment!"

As The Vengeance descends from her elevation to do it, the tumbrils begin to discharge their loads. The ministers of Sainte Guillotine are robed and ready. Crash!—A head is held up, and the knitting-women who scarcely lifted their eyes to look at it a moment ago when it could think and speak, count One.

The second tumbril empties and moves on; the third comes up. Crash!—And the knitting-women, never faltering or pausing in their Work, count Two.

The supposed Evremonde descends, and the seamstress is lifted out next after him. He has not relinquished her patient hand in getting out, but still holds it as he promised. He gently places her with her back to the crashing engine that constantly whirrs up and falls, and she looks into his face and thanks him.

"But for you, dear stranger, I should not be so composed, for I am naturally a poor little thing, faint of heart; nor should I have been able to raise my thoughts to Him who was put to death, that we might have hope and comfort here to-day. I think you were sent to me by Heaven."

"Or you to me," says Sydney Carton. "Keep your eyes upon me, dear child, and mind no other object."

"I mind nothing while I hold your hand. I shall mind nothing when I let it go, if they are rapid."

"They will be rapid. Fear not!"

The two stand in the fast-thinning throng of victims, but they speak as if they were alone. Eye to eye, voice to voice, hand to hand, heart to heart, these two children of the Universal Mother, else so wide apart and differing, have come together on the dark highway, to repair home together, and to rest in her bosom.

"Brave and generous friend, will you let me ask you one last question? I am very ignorant, and it troubles me—just a little."

"Tell me what it is."

"I have a cousin, an only relative and an orphan, like myself, whom I love very dearly. She is five years younger than I, and she lives in a farmer's house in the south country. Poverty parted us, and she knows nothing of my fate—for I cannot write—and if I could, how should I tell her! It is better as it is."

"Yes, yes: better as it is."

"What I have been thinking as we came along, and what I am still thinking now, as I look into your kind strong face which gives me so much support, is this:—If the Republic really does good to the poor, and they come to be less hungry, and in all ways to suffer less, she may live a long time: she may even live to be old."

"What then, my gentle sister?"

"Do you think:" the uncomplaining eyes in which there is so much endurance, fill with tears, and the lips part a little more and tremble: "that it will seem long to me, while I wait for her in the better land where I trust both you and I will be mercifully sheltered?"

"It cannot be, my child; there is no Time there, and no trouble there."

"You comfort me so much! I am so ignorant. Am I to kiss you now? Is the moment come?"

"Yes."

She kisses his lips; he kisses hers; they solemnly bless each other. The spare hand does not tremble as he releases it; nothing worse than a sweet, bright constancy is in the patient face. She goes next before him—is gone; the knitting-women count Twenty-Two.

"I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

The murmuring of many voices, the upturning of many faces, the pressing on of many footsteps in the outskirts of the crowd, so that it swells forward in a mass, like one great heave of water, all flashes away. Twenty-Three.

* * *

They said of him, about the city that night, that it was the peacefullest man's face ever beheld there. Many added that he looked sublime and prophetic.

One of the most remarkable sufferers by the same axe—a woman—had asked at the foot of the same scaffold, not long before, to be allowed to write down the thoughts that were inspiring her. If he had given any utterance to his, and they were prophetic, they would have been these:

"I see Barsad, and Cly, Defarge, The Vengeance, the Juryman, the Judge, long ranks of the new oppressors who have risen on the destruction of the old, perishing by this retributive instrument, before it shall cease out of its present use. I see a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this abyss, and, in their struggles to be truly free, in their triumphs and defeats, through long years to come, I see the evil of this time and of the previous time of which this is the natural birth, gradually making expiation for itself and wearing out.

"I see the lives for which I lay down my life, peaceful, useful, prosperous and happy, in that England which I shall see no more. I see Her with a child upon her bosom, who bears my name. I see her father, aged and bent, but otherwise restored, and faithful to all men in his healing office, and at peace. I see the good old man, so long their friend, in ten years' time enriching them with all he has, and passing tranquilly to his reward.

"I see that I hold a sanctuary in their hearts, and in the hearts of their descendants, generations hence. I see her, an old woman, weeping for me on the anniversary of this day. I see her and her husband, their course done, lying side by side in their last earthly bed, and I know that each was not more honoured and held sacred in the other's soul, than I was in the souls of both.

"I see that child who lay upon her bosom and who bore my name, a man winning his way up in that path of life which once was mine. I see him winning it so well, that my name is made illustrious there by the light of his. I see the blots I threw upon it, faded away. I see him, fore-most of just judges and honoured men, bringing a boy of my name, with a forehead that I know and golden hair, to this place—then fair to look upon, with not a trace of this day's disfigurement—and I hear him tell the child my story, with a tender and a faltering voice.

"It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known."

THE END OF
A Tale of Two Cities

THREE GHOST STORIES

BY

CHARLES DICKENS

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THE SIGNAL-MAN

"HALLOA! Below there!"

When he heard a voice thus calling to him, he was standing at the door of his box, with a flag in his hand, furled round its short pole. One would have thought, considering the nature of the ground, that he could not have doubted from what quarter the voice came; but instead of looking up to where I stood on the top of the steep cutting nearly over his head, he turned himself about, and looked down the Line. There was something remarkable in his manner of doing so, though I could not have said for my life what. But I know it was remarkable enough to attract my notice, even though his figure was foreshortened and shadowed, down in the deep trench, and mine was high above him, so steeped in the glow of an angry sunset, that I had shaded my eyes with my hand before I saw him at all.

"Halloa! Below!"

From looking down the Line, he turned himself about again, and, raising his eyes, saw my figure high above him.

"Is there any path by which I can come down and speak to you?"

He looked up at me without replying, and I looked down at him without pressing him too soon with a repetition of my idle question. Just then there came a vague vibration in the earth and air, quickly changing into a violent pulsation, and an oncoming rush that caused me to start back, as though it had force to draw me down. When such vapour as rose to my height from this rapid train had passed me, and was skimming away over the landscape, I looked down again, and saw him refurling the flag he had shown while the train went by.

I repeated my inquiry. After a pause, during which he seemed to regard me with fixed attention, he motioned with his rolled-up flag towards a point on my level, some two or three hundred yards distant. I called down to him, "All right!" and made for that point. There, by dint of looking closely about me, I found a rough zigzag descending path notched out, which I followed.

The cutting was extremely deep, and unusually precipitate. It was made through a clammy stone, that became oozier and wetter as I went down. For these reasons, I found the way long enough to give me time to recall a singular air of reluctance or compulsion with which he had pointed out the path.

When I came down low enough upon the zigzag descent to see him again, I saw that he was standing between the rails on the way by which the train had lately passed, in an attitude as if he were waiting for me to appear. He had his left hand at his chin, and that left elbow rested on his right hand, crossed over his breast. His attitude was one of such expectation and watchfulness that I stopped a moment, wondering at it.

I resumed my downward way, and stepping out upon the level of the railroad, and drawing nearer to him, saw that he was a dark, sallow man, with a dark beard and rather heavy eyebrows. His post was in as solitary and dismal a place as ever I saw. On either side, a dripping-wet wall of jagged stone, excluding all view but a strip of sky; the perspective one way only a crooked prolongation of this great dungeon; the shorter perspective in the other direction terminating in a gloomy red light, and the gloomier entrance to a black tunnel, in whose massive architecture there was a barbarous, depressing, and forbidding air. So little sunlight ever found its way to this spot, that it had an earthy, deadly smell; and so much cold wind rushed through it, that it struck chill to me, as if I had left the natural world.

Before he stirred, I was near enough to him to have touched him. Not even then removing his eyes from mine, he stepped back one step, and lifted his hand.

This was a lonesome post to occupy (I said), and it had riveted my attention when I looked down from up yonder. A visitor was a rarity, I should suppose; not an unwelcome rarity, I hoped? In me, he merely saw a man who had been shut up within narrow limits all his life, and who, being at last set free, had a newly-awakened interest in these great works. To such purpose I spoke to him; but I am far from sure of the terms I used; for, besides that I am not happy in opening any conversation, there was something in the man that daunted me.

He directed a most curious look towards the red light near the tunnel’s mouth, and looked all about it, as if something were missing from it, and then looked at me.

That light was part of his charge? Was it not?

He answered in a low voice,—"Don’t you know it is?"

The monstrous thought came into my mind, as I perused the fixed eyes and the saturnine face, that this was a spirit, not a man. I have speculated since, whether there may have been infection in his mind.

In my turn, I stepped back. But in making the action, I detected in his eyes some latent fear of me. This put the monstrous thought to flight.

"You look at me," I said, forcing a smile, "as if you had a dread of me."

"I was doubtful," he returned, "whether I had seen you before."

"Where?"

He pointed to the red light he had looked at.

"There?" I said.

Intently watchful of me, he replied (but without sound), "Yes."

"My good fellow, what should I do there? However, be that as it may, I never was there, you may swear."

"I think I may," he rejoined. "Yes; I am sure I may."

His manner cleared, like my own. He replied to my remarks with readiness, and in well-chosen words. Had he much to do there? Yes; that was to say, he had enough responsibility to bear; but exactness and watchfulness were what was required of him, and of actual work—manual labour—he had next to none. To change that signal, to trim those lights, and to turn this iron handle now and then, was all he had to do under that head. Regarding those many long and lonely hours of which I seemed to make so much, he could only say that the routine of his life had shaped itself into that form, and he had grown used to it. He had taught himself a language down here,—if only to know it by sight, and to have formed his own crude ideas of its pronunciation, could be called learning it. He had also worked at fractions and decimals, and tried a little algebra; but he was, and had been as a boy, a poor hand at figures. Was it necessary for him when on duty always to remain in that channel of damp air, and could he never rise into the sunshine from between those high stone walls? Why, that depended upon times and circumstances. Under some conditions there would be less upon the Line than under others, and the same held good as to certain hours of the day and night. In bright weather, he did choose occasions for getting a little above these lower shadows; but, being at all times liable to be called by his electric bell, and at such times listening for it with redoubled anxiety, the relief was less than I would suppose.

He took me into his box, where there was a fire, a desk for an official book in which he had to make certain entries, a telegraphic instrument with its dial, face, and needles, and the little bell of which he had spoken. On my trusting that he would excuse the remark that he had been well educated, and (I hoped I might say without offence) perhaps educated above that station, he observed that instances of slight incongruity in such wise would rarely be found wanting among large bodies of men; that he had heard it was so in workhouses, in the police force, even in that last desperate resource, the army; and that he knew it was so, more or less, in any great railway staff. He had been, when young (if I could believe it, sitting in that hut,—he scarcely could), a student of natural philosophy, and had attended lectures; but he had run wild, misused his opportunities, gone down, and never risen again. He had no complaint to offer about that. He had made his bed, and he lay upon it. It was far too late to make another.

All that I have here condensed he said in a quiet manner, with his grave, dark regards divided between me and the fire. He threw in the word, "Sir," from time to time, and especially when he referred to his youth,—as though to request me to understand that he claimed to be nothing but what I found him. He was several times interrupted by the little bell, and had to read off messages, and send replies. Once he had to stand without the door, and display a flag as a train passed, and make some verbal communication to the driver. In the discharge of his duties, I observed him to be remarkably exact and vigilant, breaking off his discourse at a syllable, and remaining silent until what he had to do was done.

In a word, I should have set this man down as one of the safest of men to be employed in that capacity, but for the circumstance that while he was speaking to me he twice broke off with a fallen colour, turned his face towards the little bell when it did NOT ring, opened the door of the hut (which was kept shut to exclude the unhealthy damp), and looked out towards the red light near the mouth of the tunnel. On both of those occasions, he came back to the fire with the inexplicable air upon him which I had remarked, without being able to define, when we were so far asunder.

Said I, when I rose to leave him, "You almost make me think that I have met with a contented man."

(I am afraid I must acknowledge that I said it to lead him on.)

"I believe I used to be so," he rejoined, in the low voice in which he had first spoken; "but I am troubled, sir, I am troubled."

He would have recalled the words if he could. He had said them, however, and I took them up quickly.

"With what? What is your trouble?"

"It is very difficult to impart, sir. It is very, very difficult to speak of. If ever you make me another visit, I will try to tell you."

"But I expressly intend to make you another visit. Say, when shall it be?"

"I go off early in the morning, and I shall be on again at ten to-morrow night, sir."

"I will come at eleven."

He thanked me, and went out at the door with me. "I’ll show my white light, sir," he said, in his peculiar low voice, "till you have found the way up. When you have found it, don’t call out! And when you are at the top, don’t call out!"

His manner seemed to make the place strike colder to me, but I said no more than, "Very well."

"And when you come down to-morrow night, don’t call out! Let me ask you a parting question. What made you cry, ‘Halloa! Below there!’ to-night?"

"Heaven knows," said I. "I cried something to that effect—"

"Not to that effect, sir. Those were the very words. I know them well."

"Admit those were the very words. I said them, no doubt, because I saw you below."

"For no other reason?"

"What other reason could I possibly have?"

"You had no feeling that they were conveyed to you in any supernatural way?"

"No."

He wished me good-night, and held up his light. I walked by the side of the down Line of rails (with a very disagreeable sensation of a train coming behind me) until I found the path. It was easier to mount than to descend, and I got back to my inn without any adventure.

Punctual to my appointment, I placed my foot on the first notch of the zigzag next night, as the distant clocks were striking eleven. He was waiting for me at the bottom, with his white light on. "I have not called out," I said, when we came close together; "may I speak now?" "By all means, sir." "Good-night, then, and here’s my hand." "Good-night, sir, and here’s mine." With that we walked side by side to his box, entered it, closed the door, and sat down by the fire.

"I have made up my mind, sir," he began, bending forward as soon as we were seated, and speaking in a tone but a little above a whisper, "that you shall not have to ask me twice what troubles me. I took you for some one else yesterday evening. That troubles me."

"That mistake?"

"No. That some one else."

"Who is it?"

"I don’t know."

"Like me?"

"I don’t know. I never saw the face. The left arm is across the face, and the right arm is waved,—violently waved. This way."

I followed his action with my eyes, and it was the action of an arm gesticulating, with the utmost passion and vehemence, "For God’s sake, clear the way!"

"One moonlight night," said the man, "I was sitting here, when I heard a voice cry, ‘Halloa! Below there!’ I started up, looked from that door, and saw this Some one else standing by the red light near the tunnel, waving as I just now showed you. The voice seemed hoarse with shouting, and it cried, ‘Look out! Look out!’ And then again, ‘Halloa! Below there! Look out!’ I caught up my lamp, turned it on red, and ran towards the figure, calling, ‘What’s wrong? What has happened? Where?’ It stood just outside the blackness of the tunnel. I advanced so close upon it that I wondered at its keeping the sleeve across its eyes. I ran right up at it, and had my hand stretched out to pull the sleeve away, when it was gone."

"Into the tunnel?" said I.

"No. I ran on into the tunnel, five hundred yards. I stopped, and held my lamp above my head, and saw the figures of the measured distance, and saw the wet stains stealing down the walls and trickling through the arch. I ran out again faster than I had run in (for I had a mortal abhorrence of the place upon me), and I looked all round the red light with my own red light, and I went up the iron ladder to the gallery atop of it, and I came down again, and ran back here. I telegraphed both ways, ‘An alarm has been given. Is anything wrong?’ The answer came back, both ways, ‘All well.’ "

Resisting the slow touch of a frozen finger tracing out my spine, I showed him how that this figure must be a deception of his sense of sight; and how that figures, originating in disease of the delicate nerves that minister to the functions of the eye, were known to have often troubled patients, some of whom had become conscious of the nature of their affliction, and had even proved it by experiments upon themselves. "As to an imaginary cry," said I, "do but listen for a moment to the wind in this unnatural valley while we speak so low, and to the wild harp it makes of the telegraph wires."

That was all very well, he returned, after we had sat listening for a while, and he ought to know something of the wind and the wires,—he who so often passed long winter nights there, alone and watching. But he would beg to remark that he had not finished.

I asked his pardon, and he slowly added these words, touching my arm,—

"Within six hours after the Appearance, the memorable accident on this Line happened, and within ten hours the dead and wounded were brought along through the tunnel over the spot where the figure had stood."

A disagreeable shudder crept over me, but I did my best against it. It was not to be denied, I rejoined, that this was a remarkable coincidence, calculated deeply to impress his mind. But it was unquestionable that remarkable coincidences did continually occur, and they must be taken into account in dealing with such a subject. Though to be sure I must admit, I added (for I thought I saw that he was going to bring the objection to bear upon me), men of common sense did not allow much for coincidences in making the ordinary calculations of life.

He again begged to remark that he had not finished.

I again begged his pardon for being betrayed into interruptions.

"This," he said, again laying his hand upon my arm, and glancing over his shoulder with hollow eyes, "was just a year ago. Six or seven months passed, and I had recovered from the surprise and shock, when one morning, as the day was breaking, I, standing at the door, looked towards the red light, and saw the spectre again." He stopped, with a fixed look at me.

"Did it cry out?"

"No. It was silent."

"Did it wave its arm?"

"No. It leaned against the shaft of the light, with both hands before the face. Like this."

Once more I followed his action with my eyes. It was an action of mourning. I have seen such an attitude in stone figures on tombs.

"Did you go up to it?"

"I came in and sat down, partly to collect my thoughts, partly because it had turned me faint. When I went to the door again, daylight was above me, and the ghost was gone."

"But nothing followed? Nothing came of this?"

He touched me on the arm with his forefinger twice or thrice giving a ghastly nod each time:—

"That very day, as a train came out of the tunnel, I noticed, at a carriage window on my side, what looked like a confusion of hands and heads, and something waved. I saw it just in time to signal the driver, Stop! He shut off, and put his brake on, but the train drifted past here a hundred and fifty yards or more. I ran after it, and, as I went along, heard terrible screams and cries. A beautiful young lady had died instantaneously in one of the compartments, and was brought in here, and laid down on this floor between us."

Involuntarily I pushed my chair back, as I looked from the boards at which he pointed to himself.

"True, sir. True. Precisely as it happened, so I tell it you."

I could think of nothing to say, to any purpose, and my mouth was very dry. The wind and the wires took up the story with a long lamenting wail.

He resumed. "Now, sir, mark this, and judge how my mind is troubled. The spectre came back a week ago. Ever since, it has been there, now and again, by fits and starts."

"At the light?"

"At the Danger-light."

"What does it seem to do?"

He repeated, if possible with increased passion and vehemence, that former gesticulation of, "For God's sake, clear the way!"

Then he went on. "I have no peace or rest for it. It calls to me, for many minutes together, in an agonised manner, 'Below there! Look out! Look out!' It stands waving to me. It rings my little bell—"

I caught at that. "Did it ring your bell yesterday evening when I was here, and you went to the door?"

"Twice."

"Why, see," said I, "how your imagination misleads you. My eyes were on the bell, and my ears were open to the bell, and if I am a living man, it did NOT ring at those times. No, nor at any other time, except when it was rung in the natural course of physical things by the station communicating with you."

He shook his head. "I have never made a mistake as to that yet, sir. I have never confused the spectre’s ring with the man’s. The ghost’s ring is a strange vibration in the bell that it derives from nothing else, and I have not asserted that the bell stirs to the eye. I don’t wonder that you failed to hear it. But *I* heard it."

"And did the spectre seem to be there, when you looked out?"

"It WAS there."

"Both times?"

He repeated firmly: "Both times."

"Will you come to the door with me, and look for it now?"

He bit his under lip as though he were somewhat unwilling, but arose. I opened the door, and stood on the step, while he stood in the doorway. There was the Danger-light. There was the dismal mouth of the tunnel. There were the high, wet stone walls of the cutting. There were the stars above them.

"Do you see it?" I asked him, taking particular note of his face. His eyes were prominent and strained, but not very much more so, perhaps, than my own had been when I had directed them earnestly towards the same spot.

"No," he answered. "It is not there."

"Agreed," said I.

We went in again, shut the door, and resumed our seats. I was thinking how best to improve this advantage, if it might be called one, when he took up the conversation in such a matter-of-course way, so assuming that there could be no serious question of fact between us, that I felt myself placed in the weakest of positions.

"By this time you will fully understand, sir," he said, "that what troubles me so dreadfully is the question, What does the spectre mean?"

I was not sure, I told him, that I did fully understand.

"What is its warning against?" he said, ruminating, with his eyes on the fire, and only by times turning them on me. "What is the danger? Where is the danger? There is danger overhanging somewhere on the Line. Some dreadful calamity will happen. It is not to be doubted this third time, after what has gone before. But surely this is a cruel haunting of *me*. What can *I* do?"

He pulled out his handkerchief, and wiped the drops from his heated forehead.

"If I telegraph Danger, on either side of me, or on both, I can give no reason for it," he went on, wiping the palms of his hands. "I should get into trouble, and do no good. They would think I was mad. This is the way it would work,—Message: ‘Danger! Take care!’ Answer: ‘What Danger? Where?’ Message: ‘Don’t know. But, for God’s sake, take care!’ They would displace me. What else could they do?"

His pain of mind was most pitiable to see. It was the mental torture of a conscientious man, oppressed beyond endurance by an unintelligible responsibility involving life.

"When it first stood under the Danger-light," he went on, putting his dark hair back from his head, and drawing his hands outward across and across his temples in an extremity of feverish distress, "why not tell me where that accident was to happen,—if it must happen? Why not tell me how it could be averted,—if it could have been averted? When on its second coming it hid its face, why not tell me, instead, ‘She is going to die. Let them keep her at home’? If it came, on those two occasions, only to show me that its warnings were true, and so to prepare me for the third, why not warn me plainly now? And I, Lord help me! A mere poor signal-man on this solitary station! Why not go to somebody with credit to be believed, and power to act?"

When I saw him in this state, I saw that for the poor man’s sake, as well as for the public safety, what I had to do for the time was to compose his mind. Therefore, setting aside all question of reality or unreality between us, I represented to him that whoever thoroughly discharged his duty must do well, and that at least it was his comfort that he understood his duty, though he did not understand these confounding Appearances. In this effort I succeeded far better than in the attempt to reason him out of his conviction. He became calm; the occupations incidental to his post as the night advanced began to make larger demands on his attention: and I left him at two in the morning. I had offered to stay through the night, but he would not hear of it.

That I more than once looked back at the red light as I ascended the pathway, that I did not like the red light, and that I should have slept but poorly if my bed had been under it, I see no reason to conceal. Nor did I like the two sequences of the accident and the dead girl. I see no reason to conceal that either.

But what ran most in my thoughts was the consideration how ought I to act, having become the recipient of this disclosure? I had proved the man to be intelligent, vigilant, painstaking, and exact; but how long might he remain so, in his state of mind? Though in a subordinate position, still he held a most important trust, and would I (for instance) like to stake my own life on the chances of his continuing to execute it with precision?

Unable to overcome a feeling that there would be something treacherous in my communicating what he had told me to his superiors in the Company, without first being plain with himself and proposing a middle course to him, I ultimately resolved to offer to accompany him (otherwise keeping his secret for the present) to the wisest medical practitioner we could hear of in those parts, and to take his opinion. A change in his time of duty would come round next night, he had apprised me, and he would be off an hour or two after sunrise, and on again soon after sunset. I had appointed to return accordingly.

Next evening was a lovely evening, and I walked out early to enjoy it. The sun was not yet quite down when I traversed the field-path near the top of the deep cutting. I would extend my walk for an hour, I said to myself, half an hour on and half an hour back, and it would then be time to go to my signal-man’s box.

Before pursuing my stroll, I stepped to the brink, and mechanically looked down, from the point from which I had first seen him. I cannot describe the thrill that seized upon me, when, close at the mouth of the tunnel, I saw the appearance of a man, with his left sleeve across his eyes, passionately waving his right arm.

The nameless horror that oppressed me passed in a moment, for in a moment I saw that this appearance of a man was a man indeed, and that there was a little group of other men, standing at a short distance, to whom he seemed to be rehearsing the gesture he made. The Danger-light was not yet lighted. Against its shaft, a little low hut, entirely new to me, had been made of some wooden supports and tarpaulin. It looked no bigger than a bed.

With an irresistible sense that something was wrong,—with a flashing self-reproachful fear that fatal mischief had come of my leaving the man there, and causing no one to be sent to overlook or correct what he did,—I descended the notched path with all the speed I could make.

"What is the matter?" I asked the men.

"Signal-man killed this morning, sir."

"Not the man belonging to that box?"

"Yes, sir."

"Not the man I know?"

"You will recognise him, sir, if you knew him," said the man who spoke for the others, solemnly uncovering his own head, and raising an end of the tarpaulin, "for his face is quite composed."

"O, how did this happen, how did this happen?" I asked, turning from one to another as the hut closed in again.

"He was cut down by an engine, sir. No man in England knew his work better. But somehow he was not clear of the outer rail. It was just at broad day. He had struck the light, and had the lamp in his hand. As the engine came out of the tunnel, his back was towards her, and she cut him down. That man drove her, and was showing how it happened. Show the gentleman, Tom."

The man, who wore a rough dark dress, stepped back to his former place at the mouth of the tunnel.

"Coming round the curve in the tunnel, sir," he said, "I saw him at the end, like as if I saw him down a perspective-glass. There was no time to check speed, and I knew him to be very careful. As he didn't seem to take heed of the whistle, I shut it off when we were running down upon him, and called to him as loud as I could call."

"What did you say?"

"I said, 'Below there! Look out! Look out! For God's sake, clear the way!' "

I started.

"Ah! it was a dreadful time, sir. I never left off calling to him. I put this arm before my eyes not to see, and I waved this arm to the last; but it was no use."

Without prolonging the narrative to dwell on any one of its curious circumstances more than on any other, I may, in closing it, point out the coincidence that the warning of the Engine-Driver included, not only the words which the unfortunate Signal-man had repeated to me as haunting him, but also the words which I myself—not he—had attached, and that only in my own mind, to the gesticulation he had imitated.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

CHAPTER I—THE MORTALS IN THE HOUSE

UNDER none of the accredited ghostly circumstances, and environed by none of the conventional ghostly surroundings, did I first make acquaintance with the house which is the subject of this Christmas piece. I saw it in the daylight, with the sun upon it. There was no wind, no rain, no lightning, no thunder, no awful or unwonted circumstance, of any kind, to heighten its effect. More than that: I had come to it direct from a railway station: it was not more than a mile distant from the railway station; and, as I stood outside the house, looking back upon the way I had come, I could see the goods train running smoothly along the embankment in the valley. I will not say that everything was utterly commonplace, because I doubt if anything can be that, except to utterly commonplace people—and there my vanity steps in; but, I will take it on myself to say that anybody might see the house as I saw it, any fine autumn morning.

The manner of my lighting on it was this.

I was travelling towards London out of the North, intending to stop by the way, to look at the house. My health required a temporary residence in the country; and a friend of mine who knew that, and who had happened to drive past the house, had written to me to suggest it as a likely place. I had got into the train at midnight, and had fallen asleep, and had woke up and had sat looking out of window at the brilliant Northern Lights in the sky, and had fallen asleep again, and had woke up again to find the night gone, with the usual discontented conviction on me that I hadn’t been to sleep at all;—upon which question, in the first imbecility of that condition, I am ashamed to believe that I would have done wager by battle with the man who sat opposite me. That opposite man had had, through the night—as that opposite man always has—several legs too many, and all of them too long. In addition to this unreasonable conduct (which was only to be expected of him), he had had a pencil and a pocket-book, and had been perpetually listening and taking notes. It had appeared to me that these aggravating notes related to the jolts and bumps of the carriage, and I should have resigned myself to his taking them, under a general supposition that he was in the civil-engineering way of life, if he had not sat staring straight over my head whenever he listened. He was a goggle-eyed gentleman of a perplexed aspect, and his demeanour became unbearable.

It was a cold, dead morning (the sun not being up yet), and when I had out-watched the paling light of the fires of the iron country, and the curtain of heavy smoke that hung at once between me and the stars and between me and the day, I turned to my fellow-traveller and said:

"I *beg* your pardon, sir, but do you observe anything particular in me?" For, really, he appeared to be taking down, either my travelling-cap or my hair, with a minuteness that was a liberty.

The goggle-eyed gentleman withdrew his eyes from behind me, as if the back of the carriage were a hundred miles off, and said, with a lofty look of compassion for my insignificance:

"In you, sir?—B."

"B, sir?" said I, growing warm.

"I have nothing to do with you, sir," returned the gentleman; "pray let me listen—O."

He enunciated this vowel after a pause, and noted it down.

At first I was alarmed, for an Express lunatic and no communication with the guard, is a serious position. The thought came to my relief that the gentleman might be what is popularly called a Rapper: one of a sect for (some of) whom I have the highest respect, but whom I don’t believe in. I was going to ask him the question, when he took the bread out of my mouth.

"You will excuse me," said the gentleman contemptuously, "if I am too much in advance of common humanity to trouble myself at all about it. I have passed the night—as indeed I pass the whole of my time now—in spiritual intercourse."

"O!" said I, somewhat snappishly.

"The conferences of the night began," continued the gentleman, turning several leaves of his note-book, "with this message: ‘Evil communications corrupt good manners.’ "

"Sound," said I; "but, absolutely new?"

"New from spirits," returned the gentleman.

I could only repeat my rather snappish "O!" and ask if I might be favoured with the last communication.

" ‘A bird in the hand,’ " said the gentleman, reading his last entry with great solemnity, " ‘is worth two in the Bosh.’ "

"Truly I am of the same opinion," said I; "but shouldn’t it be Bush?"

"It came to me, Bosh," returned the gentleman.

The gentleman then informed me that the spirit of Socrates had delivered this special revelation in the course of the night. "My friend, I hope you are pretty well. There are two in this railway carriage. How do you do? There are seventeen thousand four hundred and seventy-nine spirits here, but you cannot see them. Pythagoras is here. He is not at liberty to mention it, but hopes you like travelling." Galileo likewise had dropped in, with this scientific intelligence. "I am glad to see you, *amico. Come sta?* Water will freeze when it is cold enough. *Addio!*" In the course of the night, also, the following phenomena had occurred. Bishop Butler had insisted on spelling his name, "Bubler," for which offence against orthography and good manners he had been dismissed as out of temper. John Milton (suspected of wilful mystification) had repudiated the authorship of Paradise Lost, and had introduced, as joint authors of that poem, two Unknown gentlemen, respectively named Grungers and Scadgingtone. And Prince Arthur, nephew of King John of England, had described himself as tolerably comfortable in the seventh circle, where he was learning to paint on velvet, under the direction of Mrs. Trimmer and Mary Queen of Scots.

If this should meet the eye of the gentleman who favoured me with these disclosures, I trust he will excuse my confessing that the sight of the rising sun, and the contemplation of the magnificent Order of the vast Universe, made me impatient of them. In a word, I was so impatient of them, that I was mightily glad to get out at the next station, and to exchange these clouds and vapours for the free air of Heaven.

By that time it was a beautiful morning. As I walked away among such leaves as had already fallen from the golden, brown, and russet trees; and as I looked around me on the wonders of Creation, and thought of the steady, unchanging, and harmonious laws by which they are sustained; the gentleman’s spiritual intercourse seemed to me as poor a piece of journey-work as ever this world saw. In which heathen state of mind, I came within view of the house, and stopped to examine it attentively.

It was a solitary house, standing in a sadly neglected garden: a pretty even square of some two acres. It was a house of about the time of George the Second; as stiff, as cold, as formal, and in as bad taste, as could possibly be desired by the most loyal admirer of the whole quartet of Georges. It was uninhabited, but had, within a year or two, been cheaply repaired to render it habitable; I say cheaply, because the work had been done in a surface manner, and was already decaying as to the paint and plaster, though the colours were fresh. A lop-sided board drooped over the garden wall, announcing that it was "to let on very reasonable terms, well furnished." It was much too closely and heavily shadowed by trees, and, in particular, there were six tall poplars before the front windows, which were excessively melancholy, and the site of which had been extremely ill chosen.

It was easy to see that it was an avoided house—a house that was shunned by the village, to which my eye was guided by a church spire some half a mile off—a house that nobody would take. And the natural inference was, that it had the reputation of being a haunted house.

No period within the four-and-twenty hours of day and night is so solemn to me, as the early morning. In the summer time, I often rise very early, and repair to my room to do a day’s work before breakfast, and I am always on those occasions deeply impressed by the stillness and solitude around me. Besides that there is something awful in the being surrounded by familiar faces asleep—in the knowledge that those who are dearest to us and to whom we are dearest, are profoundly unconscious of us, in an impassive state, anticipative of that mysterious condition to which we are all tending—the stopped life, the broken threads of yesterday, the deserted seat, the closed book, the unfinished but abandoned occupation, all are images of Death. The tranquillity of the hour is the tranquillity of Death. The colour and the chill have the same association. Even a certain air that familiar household objects take upon them when they first emerge from the shadows of the night into the morning, of being newer, and as they used to be long ago, has its counterpart in the subsidence of the worn face of maturity or age, in death, into the old youthful look. Moreover, I once saw the apparition of my father, at this hour. He was alive and well, and nothing ever came of it, but I saw him in the daylight, sitting with his back towards me, on a seat that stood beside my bed. His head was resting on his hand, and whether he was slumbering or grieving, I could not discern. Amazed to see him there, I sat up, moved my position, leaned out of bed, and watched him. As he did not move, I spoke to him more than once. As he did not move then, I became alarmed and laid my hand upon his shoulder, as I thought—and there was no such thing.

For all these reasons, and for others less easily and briefly statable, I find the early morning to be my most ghostly time. Any house would be more or less haunted, to me, in the early morning; and a haunted house could scarcely address me to greater advantage than then.

I walked on into the village, with the desertion of this house upon my mind, and I found the landlord of the little inn, sanding his door-step. I bespoke breakfast, and broached the subject of the house.

"Is it haunted?" I asked.

The landlord looked at me, shook his head, and answered, "I say nothing."

"Then it *is* haunted?"

"Well!" cried the landlord, in an outburst of frankness that had the appearance of desperation—"I wouldn’t sleep in it."

"Why not?"

"If I wanted to have all the bells in a house ring, with nobody to ring ’em; and all the doors in a house bang, with nobody to bang ’em; and all sorts of feet treading about, with no feet there; why, then," said the landlord, "I’d sleep in that house."

"Is anything seen there?"

The landlord looked at me again, and then, with his former appearance of desperation, called down his stable-yard for "Ikey!"

The call produced a high-shouldered young fellow, with a round red face, a short crop of sandy hair, a very broad humorous mouth, a turned-up nose, and a great sleeved waistcoat of purple bars, with mother-of-pearl buttons, that seemed to be growing upon him, and to be in a fair way—if it were not pruned—of covering his head and overunning his boots.

"This gentleman wants to know," said the landlord, "if anything’s seen at the Poplars."

" ’Ooded woman with a howl," said Ikey, in a state of great freshness.

"Do you mean a cry?"

"I mean a bird, sir."

"A hooded woman with an owl. Dear me! Did you ever see her?"

"I seen the howl."

"Never the woman?"

"Not so plain as the howl, but they always keeps together."

"Has anybody ever seen the woman as plainly as the owl?"

"Lord bless you, sir! Lots."

"Who?"

"Lord bless you, sir! Lots."

"The general-dealer opposite, for instance, who is opening his shop?"

"Perkins? Bless you, Perkins wouldn’t go a-nigh the place. No!" observed the young man, with considerable feeling; "he an’t overwise, an’t Perkins, but he an’t such a fool as *that*."

(Here, the landlord murmured his confidence in Perkins’s knowing better.)

"Who is—or who was—the hooded woman with the owl? Do you know?"

"Well!" said Ikey, holding up his cap with one hand while he scratched his head with the other, "they say, in general, that she was murdered, and the howl he ’ooted the while."

This very concise summary of the facts was all I could learn, except that a young man, as hearty and likely a young man as ever I see, had been took with fits and held down in ’em, after seeing the hooded woman. Also, that a personage, dimly described as "a hold chap, a sort of one-eyed tramp, answering to the name of Joby, unless you challenged him as Greenwood, and then he said, ‘Why not? and even if so, mind your own business,’ " had encountered the hooded woman, a matter of five or six times. But, I was not materially assisted by these witnesses: inasmuch as the first was in California, and the last was, as Ikey said (and he was confirmed by the landlord), Anywheres.

Now, although I regard with a hushed and solemn fear, the mysteries, between which and this state of existence is interposed the barrier of the great trial and change that fall on all the things that live; and although I have not the audacity to pretend that I know anything of them; I can no more reconcile the mere banging of doors, ringing of bells, creaking of boards, and such-like insignificances, with the majestic beauty and pervading analogy of all the Divine rules that I am permitted to understand, than I had been able, a little while before, to yoke the spiritual intercourse of my fellow-traveller to the chariot of the rising sun. Moreover, I had lived in two haunted houses—both abroad. In one of these, an old Italian palace, which bore the reputation of being very badly haunted indeed, and which had recently been twice abandoned on that account, I lived eight months, most tranquilly and pleasantly: notwithstanding that the house had a score of mysterious bedrooms, which were never used, and possessed, in one large room in which I sat reading, times out of number at all hours, and next to which I slept, a haunted chamber of the first pretensions. I gently hinted these considerations to the landlord. And as to this particular house having a bad name, I reasoned with him, Why, how many things had bad names undeservedly, and how easy it was to give bad names, and did he not think that if he and I were persistently to whisper in the village that any weird-looking, old drunken tinker of the neighbourhood had sold himself to the Devil, he would come in time to be suspected of that commercial venture! All this wise talk was perfectly ineffective with the landlord, I am bound to confess, and was as dead a failure as ever I made in my life.

To cut this part of the story short, I was piqued about the haunted house, and was already half resolved to take it. So, after breakfast, I got the keys from Perkins’s brother-in-law (a whip and harness maker, who keeps the Post Office, and is under submission to a most rigorous wife of the Doubly Seceding Little Emmanuel persuasion), and went up to the house, attended by my landlord and by Ikey.

Within, I found it, as I had expected, transcendently dismal. The slowly changing shadows waved on it from the heavy trees, were doleful in the last degree; the house was ill-placed, ill-built, ill-planned, and ill-fitted. It was damp, it was not free from dry rot, there was a flavour of rats in it, and it was the gloomy victim of that indescribable decay which settles on all the work of man’s hands whenever it’s not turned to man’s account. The kitchens and offices were too large, and too remote from each other. Above stairs and below, waste tracts of passage intervened between patches of fertility represented by rooms; and there was a mouldy old well with a green growth upon it, hiding like a murderous trap, near the bottom of the back-stairs, under the double row of bells. One of these bells was labelled, on a black ground in faded white letters, MASTER B. This, they told me, was the bell that rang the most.

"Who was Master B.?" I asked. "Is it known what he did while the owl hooted?"

"Rang the bell," said Ikey.

I was rather struck by the prompt dexterity with which this young man pitched his fur cap at the bell, and rang it himself. It was a loud, unpleasant bell, and made a very disagreeable sound. The other bells were inscribed according to the names of the rooms to which their wires were conducted: as "Picture Room," "Double Room," "Clock Room," and the like. Following Master B.’s bell to its source I found that young gentleman to have had but indifferent third-class accommodation in a triangular cabin under the cock-loft, with a corner fireplace which Master B. must have been exceedingly small if he were ever able to warm himself at, and a corner chimney-piece like a pyramidal staircase to the ceiling for Tom Thumb. The papering of one side of the room had dropped down bodily, with fragments of plaster adhering to it, and almost blocked up the door. It appeared that Master B., in his spiritual condition, always made a point of pulling the paper down. Neither the landlord nor Ikey could suggest why he made such a fool of himself.

Except that the house had an immensely large rambling loft at top, I made no other discoveries. It was moderately well furnished, but sparely. Some of the furniture—say, a third—was as old as the house; the rest was of various periods within the last half century. I was referred to a corn-chandler in the market-place of the county town to treat for the house. I went that day, and I took it for six months.

It was just the middle of October when I moved in with my maiden sister (I venture to call her eight-and-thirty, she is so very handsome, sensible, and engaging). We took with us, a deaf stable-man, my bloodhound Turk, two women servants, and a young person called an Odd Girl. I have reason to record of the attendant last enumerated, who was one of the Saint Lawrence’s Union Female Orphans, that she was a fatal mistake and a disastrous engagement.

The year was dying early, the leaves were falling fast, it was a raw cold day when we took possession, and the gloom of the house was most depressing. The cook (an amiable woman, but of a weak turn of intellect) burst into tears on beholding the kitchen, and requested that her silver watch might be delivered over to her sister (2 Tuppintock’s Gardens, Liggs’s Walk, Clapham Rise), in the event of anything happening to her from the damp. Streaker, the housemaid, feigned cheerfulness, but was the greater martyr. The Odd Girl, who had never been in the country, alone was pleased, and made arrangements for sowing an acorn in the garden outside the scullery window, and rearing an oak.

We went, before dark, through all the natural—as opposed to supernatural—miseries incidental to our state. Dispiriting reports ascended (like the smoke) from the basement in volumes, and descended from the upper rooms. There was no rolling-pin, there was no salamander (which failed to surprise me, for I don’t know what it is), there was nothing in the house, what there was, was broken, the last people must have lived like pigs, what could the meaning of the landlord be? Through these distresses, the Odd Girl was cheerful and exemplary. But within four hours after dark we had got into a supernatural groove, and the Odd Girl had seen "Eyes," and was in hysterics.

My sister and I had agreed to keep the haunting strictly to ourselves, and my impression was, and still is, that I had not left Ikey, when he helped to unload the cart, alone with the women, or any one of them, for one minute. Nevertheless, as I say, the Odd Girl had "seen Eyes" (no other explanation could ever be drawn from her), before nine, and by ten o’clock had had as much vinegar applied to her as would pickle a handsome salmon.

I leave a discerning public to judge of my feelings, when, under these untoward circumstances, at about half-past ten o’clock Master B.’s bell began to ring in a most infuriated manner, and Turk howled until the house resounded with his lamentations!

I hope I may never again be in a state of mind so unchristian as the mental frame in which I lived for some weeks, respecting the memory of Master B. Whether his bell was rung by rats, or mice, or bats, or wind, or what other accidental vibration, or sometimes by one cause, sometimes another, and sometimes by collusion, I don’t know; but, certain it is, that it did ring two nights out of three, until I conceived the happy idea of twisting Master B.’s neck—in other words, breaking his bell short off—and silencing that young gentleman, as to my experience and belief, for ever.

But, by that time, the Odd Girl had developed such improving powers of catalepsy, that she had become a shining example of that very inconvenient disorder. She would stiffen, like a Guy Fawkes endowed with unreason, on the most irrelevant occasions. I would address the servants in a lucid manner, pointing out to them that I had painted Master B.’s room and balked the paper, and taken Master B.’s bell away and balked the ringing, and if they could suppose that that confounded boy had lived and died, to clothe himself with no better behaviour than would most unquestionably have brought him and the sharpest particles of a birch-broom into close acquaintance in the present imperfect state of existence, could they also suppose a mere poor human being, such as I was, capable by those contemptible means of counteracting and limiting the powers of the disembodied spirits of the dead, or of any spirits?—I say I would become emphatic and cogent, not to say rather complacent, in such an address, when it would all go for nothing by reason of the Odd Girl's suddenly stiffening from the toes upward, and glaring among us like a parochial petrifaction.

Streaker, the housemaid, too, had an attribute of a most discomfiting nature. I am unable to say whether she was of an unusually lymphatic temperament, or what else was the matter with her, but this young woman became a mere Distillery for the production of the largest and most transparent tears I ever met with. Combined with these characteristics, was a peculiar tenacity of hold in those specimens, so that they didn't fall, but hung upon her face and nose. In this condition, and mildly and deplorably shaking her head, her silence would throw me more heavily than the Admirable Crichton could have done in a verbal disputation for a purse of money. Cook, likewise, always covered me with confusion as with a garment, by neatly winding up the session with the protest that the Ouse was wearing her out, and by meekly repeating her last wishes regarding her silver watch.

As to our nightly life, the contagion of suspicion and fear was among us, and there is no such contagion under the sky. Hooded woman? According to the accounts, we were in a perfect Convent of hooded women. Noises? With that contagion downstairs, I myself have sat in the dismal parlour, listening, until I have heard so many and such strange noises, that they would have chilled my blood if I had not warmed it by dashing out to make discoveries. Try this in bed, in the dead of the night: try this at your own comfortable fire-side, in the life of the night. You can fill any house with noises, if you will, until you have a noise for every nerve in your nervous system.

I repeat; the contagion of suspicion and fear was among us, and there is no such contagion under the sky. The women (their noses in a chronic state of excoriation from smelling-salts) were always primed and loaded for a swoon, and ready to go off with hair-triggers. The two elder detached the Odd Girl on all expeditions that were considered doubly hazardous, and she always established the reputation of such adventures by coming back cataleptic. If Cook or Streaker went overhead after dark, we knew we should presently hear a bump on the ceiling; and this took place so constantly, that it was as if a fighting man were engaged to go about the house, administering a touch of his art which I believe is called The Auctioneer, to every domestic he met with.

It was in vain to do anything. It was in vain to be frightened, for the moment in one’s own person, by a real owl, and then to show the owl. It was in vain to discover, by striking an accidental discord on the piano, that Turk always howled at particular notes and combinations. It was in vain to be a Rhadamanthus with the bells, and if an unfortunate bell rang without leave, to have it down inexorably and silence it. It was in vain to fire up chimneys, let torches down the well, charge furiously into suspected rooms and recesses. We changed servants, and it was no better. The new set ran away, and a third set came, and it was no better. At last, our comfortable housekeeping got to be so disorganised and wretched, that I one night dejectedly said to my sister: "Patty, I begin to despair of our getting people to go on with us here, and I think we must give this up."

My sister, who is a woman of immense spirit, replied, "No, John, don’t give it up. Don’t be beaten, John. There is another way."

"And what is that?" said I.

"John," returned my sister, "if we are not to be driven out of this house, and that for no reason whatever that is apparent to you or me, we must help ourselves and take the house wholly and solely into our own hands."

"But, the servants," said I.

"Have no servants," said my sister, boldly.

Like most people in my grade of life, I had never thought of the possibility of going on without those faithful obstructions. The notion was so new to me when suggested, that I looked very doubtful.

"We know they come here to be frightened and infect one another, and we know they are frightened and do infect one another," said my sister.

"With the exception of Bottles," I observed, in a meditative tone.

(The deaf stable-man. I kept him in my service, and still keep him, as a phenomenon of moroseness not to be matched in England.)

"To be sure, John," assented my sister; "except Bottles. And what does that go to prove? Bottles talks to nobody, and hears nobody unless he is absolutely roared at, and what alarm has Bottles ever given, or taken! None."

This was perfectly true; the individual in question having retired, every night at ten o’clock, to his bed over the coach-house, with no other company than a pitchfork and a pail of water. That the pail of water would have been over me, and the pitchfork through me, if I had put myself without announcement in Bottles’s way after that minute, I had deposited in my own mind as a fact worth remembering. Neither had Bottles ever taken the least notice of any of our many uproars. An imperturbable and speechless man, he had sat at his supper, with Streaker present in a swoon, and the Odd Girl marble, and had only put another potato in his cheek, or profited by the general misery to help himself to beefsteak pie.

"And so," continued my sister, "I exempt Bottles. And considering, John, that the house is too large, and perhaps too lonely, to be kept well in hand by Bottles, you, and me, I propose that we cast about among our friends for a certain selected number of the most reliable and willing—form a Society here for three months—wait upon ourselves and one another—live cheerfully and socially—and see what happens."

I was so charmed with my sister, that I embraced her on the spot, and went into her plan with the greatest ardour.

We were then in the third week of November; but, we took our measures so vigorously, and were so well seconded by the friends in whom we confided, that there was still a week of the month unexpired, when our party all came down together merrily, and mustered in the haunted house.

I will mention, in this place, two small changes that I made while my sister and I were yet alone. It occurring to me as not improbable that Turk howled in the house at night, partly because he wanted to get out of it, I stationed him in his kennel outside, but unchained; and I seriously warned the village that any man who came in his way must not expect to leave him without a rip in his own throat. I then casually asked Ikey if he were a judge of a gun? On his saying, "Yes, sir, I knows a good gun when I sees her," I begged the favour of his stepping up to the house and looking at mine.

"*She’s* a true one, sir," said Ikey, after inspecting a double-barrelled rifle that I bought in New York a few years ago. "No mistake about *her*, sir."

"Ikey," said I, "don’t mention it; I have seen something in this house."

"No, sir?" he whispered, greedily opening his eyes. " ’Ooded lady, sir?"

"Don’t be frightened," said I. "It was a figure rather like you."

"Lord, sir?"

"Ikey!" said I, shaking hands with him warmly: I may say affectionately; "if there is any truth in these ghost-stories, the greatest service I can do you, is, to fire at that figure. And I promise you, by Heaven and earth, I will do it with this gun if I see it again!"

The young man thanked me, and took his leave with some little precipitation, after declining a glass of liquor. I imparted my secret to him, because I had never quite forgotten his throwing his cap at the bell; because I had, on another occasion, noticed something very like a fur cap, lying not far from the bell, one night when it had burst out ringing; and because I had remarked that we were at our ghostliest whenever he came up in the evening to comfort the servants. Let me do Ikey no injustice. He was afraid of the house, and believed in its being haunted; and yet he would play false on the haunting side, so surely as he got an opportunity. The Odd Girl's case was exactly similar. She went about the house in a state of real terror, and yet lied monstrously and wilfully, and invented many of the alarms she spread, and made many of the sounds we heard. I had had my eye on the two, and I know it. It is not necessary for me, here, to account for this preposterous state of mind; I content myself with remarking that it is familiarly known to every intelligent man who has had fair medical, legal, or other watchful experience; that it is as well established and as common a state of mind as any with which observers are acquainted; and that it is one of the first elements, above all others, rationally to be suspected in, and strictly looked for, and separated from, any question of this kind.

To return to our party. The first thing we did when we were all assembled, was, to draw lots for bedrooms. That done, and every bedroom, and, indeed, the whole house, having been minutely examined by the whole body, we allotted the various household duties, as if we had been on a gipsy party, or a yachting party, or a hunting party, or were shipwrecked. I then recounted the floating rumours concerning the hooded lady, the owl, and Master B.: with others, still more filmy, which had floated about during our occupation, relative to some ridiculous old ghost of the female gender who went up and down, carrying the ghost of a round table; and also to an impalpable Jackass, whom nobody was ever able to catch. Some of these ideas I really believe our people below had communicated to one another in some diseased way, without conveying them in words. We then gravely called one another to witness, that we were not there to be deceived, or to deceive—which we considered pretty much the same thing—and that, with a serious sense of responsibility, we would be strictly true to one another, and would strictly follow out the truth. The understanding was established, that any one who heard unusual noises in the night, and who wished to trace them, should knock at my door; lastly, that on Twelfth Night, the last night of holy Christmas, all our individual experiences since that then present hour of our coming together in the haunted house, should be brought to light for the good of all; and that we would hold our peace on the subject till then, unless on some remarkable provocation to break silence.

We were, in number and in character, as follows:

First—to get my sister and myself out of the way—there were we two. In the drawing of lots, my sister drew her own room, and I drew Master B.'s. Next, there was our first cousin John Herschel, so called after the great astronomer: than whom I suppose a better man at a telescope does not breathe. With him, was his wife: a charming creature to whom he had been married in the previous spring. I thought it (under the circumstances) rather imprudent to bring her, because there is no knowing what even a false alarm may do at such a time; but I suppose he knew his own business best, and I must say that if she had been *my* wife, I never could have left her endearing and bright face behind. They drew the Clock Room. Alfred Starling, an uncommonly agreeable young fellow of eight-and-twenty for whom I have the greatest liking, was in the Double Room; mine, usually, and designated by that name from having a dressing-room within it, with two large and cumbersome windows, which no wedges *I* was ever able to make, would keep from shaking, in any weather, wind or no wind. Alfred is a young fellow who pretends to be "fast" (another word for loose, as I understand the term), but who is much too good and sensible for that nonsense, and who would have distinguished himself before now, if his father had not unfortunately left him a small independence of two hundred a year, on the strength of which his only occupation in life has been to spend six. I am in hopes, however, that his Banker may break, or that he may enter into some speculation guaranteed to pay twenty per cent.; for, I am convinced that if he could only be ruined, his fortune is made. Belinda Bates, bosom friend of my sister, and a most intellectual, amiable, and delightful girl, got the Picture Room. She has a fine genius for poetry, combined with real business earnestness, and "goes in"—to use an expression of Alfred's—for Woman's mission, Woman's rights, Woman's wrongs, and everything that is woman's with a capital W, or is not and ought to be, or is and ought not to be. "Most praiseworthy, my dear, and Heaven prosper you!" I whispered to her on the first night of my taking leave of her at the Picture-Room door, "but don’t overdo it. And in respect of the great necessity there is, my darling, for more employments being within the reach of Woman than our civilisation has as yet assigned to her, don’t fly at the unfortunate men, even those men who are at first sight in your way, as if they were the natural oppressors of your sex; for, trust me, Belinda, they do sometimes spend their wages among wives and daughters, sisters, mothers, aunts, and grandmothers; and the play is, really, not *all* Wolf and Red Riding-Hood, but has other parts in it." However, I digress.

Belinda, as I have mentioned, occupied the Picture Room. We had but three other chambers: the Corner Room, the Cupboard Room, and the Garden Room. My old friend, Jack Governor, "slung his hammock," as he called it, in the Corner Room. I have always regarded Jack as the finest-looking sailor that ever sailed. He is gray now, but as handsome as he was a quarter of a century ago—nay, handsomer. A portly, cheery, well-built figure of a broad-shouldered man, with a frank smile, a brilliant dark eye, and a rich dark eyebrow. I remember those under darker hair, and they look all the better for their silver setting. He has been wherever his Union namesake flies, has Jack, and I have met old shipmates of his, away in the Mediterranean and on the other side of the Atlantic, who have beamed and brightened at the casual mention of his name, and have cried, "You know Jack Governor? Then you know a prince of men!" That he is! And so unmistakably a naval officer, that if you were to meet him coming out of an Esquimaux snow-hut in seal’s skin, you would be vaguely persuaded he was in full naval uniform.

Jack once had that bright clear eye of his on my sister; but, it fell out that he married another lady and took her to South America, where she died. This was a dozen years ago or more. He brought down with him to our haunted house a little cask of salt beef; for, he is always convinced that all salt beef not of his own pickling, is mere carrion, and invariably, when he goes to London, packs a piece in his portmanteau. He had also volunteered to bring with him one "Nat Beaver," an old comrade of his, captain of a merchantman. Mr. Beaver, with a thick-set wooden face and figure, and apparently as hard as a block all over, proved to be an intelligent man, with a world of watery experiences in him, and great practical knowledge. At times, there was a curious nervousness about him, apparently the lingering result of some old illness; but, it seldom lasted many minutes. He got the Cupboard Room, and lay there next to Mr. Undery, my friend and solicitor: who came down, in an amateur capacity, "to go through with it," as he said, and who plays whist better than the whole Law List, from the red cover at the beginning to the red cover at the end.

I never was happier in my life, and I believe it was the universal feeling among us. Jack Governor, always a man of wonderful resources, was Chief Cook, and made some of the best dishes I ever ate, including unapproachable curries. My sister was pastrycook and confectioner. Starling and I were Cook’s Mate, turn and turn about, and on special occasions the chief cook "pressed" Mr. Beaver. We had a great deal of out-door sport and exercise, but nothing was neglected within, and there was no ill-humour or misunderstanding among us, and our evenings were so delightful that we had at least one good reason for being reluctant to go to bed.

We had a few night alarms in the beginning. On the first night, I was knocked up by Jack with a most wonderful ship’s lantern in his hand, like the gills of some monster of the deep, who informed me that he "was going aloft to the main truck," to have the weathercock down. It was a stormy night and I remonstrated; but Jack called my attention to its making a sound like a cry of despair, and said somebody would be "hailing a ghost" presently, if it wasn’t done. So, up to the top of the house, where I could hardly stand for the wind, we went, accompanied by Mr. Beaver; and there Jack, lantern and all, with Mr. Beaver after him, swarmed up to the top of a cupola, some two dozen feet above the chimneys, and stood upon nothing particular, coolly knocking the weathercock off, until they both got into such good spirits with the wind and the height, that I thought they would never come down. Another night, they turned out again, and had a chimney-cowl off. Another night, they cut a sobbing and gulping water-pipe away. Another night, they found out something else. On several occasions, they both, in the coolest manner, simultaneously dropped out of their respective bedroom windows, hand over hand by their counterpanes, to "overhaul" something mysterious in the garden.

The engagement among us was faithfully kept, and nobody revealed anything. All we knew was, if any one’s room were haunted, no one looked the worse for it.

CHAPTER II—THE GHOST IN MASTER B.’S ROOM

WHEN I established myself in the triangular garret which had gained so distinguished a reputation, my thoughts naturally turned to Master B. My speculations about him were uneasy and manifold. Whether his Christian name was Benjamin, Bissextile (from his having been born in Leap Year), Bartholomew, or Bill. Whether the initial letter belonged to his family name, and that was Baxter, Black, Brown, Barker, Buggins, Baker, or Bird. Whether he was a foundling, and had been baptized B. Whether he was a lion-hearted boy, and B. was short for Briton, or for Bull. Whether he could possibly have been kith and kin to an illustrious lady who brightened my own childhood, and had come of the blood of the brilliant Mother Bunch?

With these profitless meditations I tormented myself much. I also carried the mysterious letter into the appearance and pursuits of the deceased; wondering whether he dressed in Blue, wore Boots (he couldn’t have been Bald), was a boy of Brains, liked Books, was good at Bowling, had any skill as a Boxer, even in his Buoyant Boyhood Bathed from a Bathing-machine at Bognor, Bangor, Bournemouth, Brighton, or Broadstairs, like a Bounding Billiard Ball?

So, from the first, I was haunted by the letter B.

It was not long before I remarked that I never by any hazard had a dream of Master B., or of anything belonging to him. But, the instant I awoke from sleep, at whatever hour of the night, my thoughts took him up, and roamed away, trying to attach his initial letter to something that would fit it and keep it quiet.

For six nights, I had been worried thus in Master B.’s room, when I began to perceive that things were going wrong.

The first appearance that presented itself was early in the morning when it was but just daylight and no more. I was standing shaving at my glass, when I suddenly discovered, to my consternation and amazement, that I was shaving—not myself—I am fifty—but a boy. Apparently Master B.!

I trembled and looked over my shoulder; nothing there. I looked again in the glass, and distinctly saw the features and expression of a boy, who was shaving, not to get rid of a beard, but to get one. Extremely troubled in my mind, I took a few turns in the room, and went back to the looking-glass, resolved to steady my hand and complete the operation in which I had been disturbed. Opening my eyes, which I had shut while recovering my firmness, I now met in the glass, looking straight at me, the eyes of a young man of four or five and twenty. Terrified by this new ghost, I closed my eyes, and made a strong effort to recover myself. Opening them again, I saw, shaving his cheek in the glass, my father, who has long been dead. Nay, I even saw my grandfather too, whom I never did see in my life.

Although naturally much affected by these remarkable visitations, I determined to keep my secret, until the time agreed upon for the present general disclosure. Agitated by a multitude of curious thoughts, I retired to my room, that night, prepared to encounter some new experience of a spectral character. Nor was my preparation needless, for, waking from an uneasy sleep at exactly two o’clock in the morning, what were my feelings to find that I was sharing my bed with the skeleton of Master B.!

I sprang up, and the skeleton sprang up also. I then heard a plaintive voice saying, "Where am I? What is become of me?" and, looking hard in that direction, perceived the ghost of Master B.

The young spectre was dressed in an obsolete fashion: or rather, was not so much dressed as put into a case of inferior pepper-and-salt cloth, made horrible by means of shining buttons. I observed that these buttons went, in a double row, over each shoulder of the young ghost, and appeared to descend his back. He wore a frill round his neck. His right hand (which I distinctly noticed to be inky) was laid upon his stomach; connecting this action with some feeble pimples on his countenance, and his general air of nausea, I concluded this ghost to be the ghost of a boy who had habitually taken a great deal too much medicine.

"Where am I?" said the little spectre, in a pathetic voice. "And why was I born in the Calomel days, and why did I have all that Calomel given me?"

I replied, with sincere earnestness, that upon my soul I couldn’t tell him.

"Where is my little sister," said the ghost, "and where my angelic little wife, and where is the boy I went to school with?"

I entreated the phantom to be comforted, and above all things to take heart respecting the loss of the boy he went to school with. I represented to him that probably that boy never did, within human experience, come out well, when discovered. I urged that I myself had, in later life, turned up several boys whom I went to school with, and none of them had at all answered. I expressed my humble belief that that boy never did answer. I represented that he was a mythic character, a delusion, and a snare. I recounted how, the last time I found him, I found him at a dinner party behind a wall of white cravat, with an inconclusive opinion on every possible subject, and a power of silent boredom absolutely Titanic. I related how, on the strength of our having been together at "Old Doylance’s," he had asked himself to breakfast with me (a social offence of the largest magnitude); how, fanning my weak embers of belief in Doylance’s boys, I had let him in; and how, he had proved to be a fearful wanderer about the earth, pursuing the race of Adam with inexplicable notions concerning the currency, and with a proposition that the Bank of England should, on pain of being abolished, instantly strike off and circulate, God knows how many thousand millions of ten-and-sixpenny notes.

The ghost heard me in silence, and with a fixed stare. "Barber!" it apostrophised me when I had finished.

"Barber?" I repeated—for I am not of that profession.

"Condemned," said the ghost, "to shave a constant change of customers—now, me—now, a young man—now, thyself as thou art—now, thy father—now, thy grandfather; condemned, too, to lie down with a skeleton every night, and to rise with it every morning—"

(I shuddered on hearing this dismal announcement.)

"Barber! Pursue me!"

I had felt, even before the words were uttered, that I was under a spell to pursue the phantom. I immediately did so, and was in Master B.’s room no longer.

Most people know what long and fatiguing night journeys had been forced upon the witches who used to confess, and who, no doubt, told the exact truth—particularly as they were always assisted with leading questions, and the Torture was always ready. I asseverate that, during my occupation of Master B.’s room, I was taken by the ghost that haunted it, on expeditions fully as long and wild as any of those. Assuredly, I was presented to no shabby old man with a goat’s horns and tail (something between Pan and an old clothesman), holding conventional receptions, as stupid as those of real life and less decent; but, I came upon other things which appeared to me to have more meaning.

Confident that I speak the truth and shall be believed, I declare without hesitation that I followed the ghost, in the first instance on a broom-stick, and afterwards on a rocking-horse. The very smell of the animal’s paint—

especially when I brought it out, by making him warm—I am ready to swear to. I followed the ghost, afterwards, in a hackney coach; an institution with the peculiar smell of which, the present generation is unacquainted, but to which I am again ready to swear as a combination of stable, dog with the mange, and very old bellows. (In this, I appeal to previous generations to confirm or refute me.) I pursued the phantom, on a headless donkey: at least, upon a donkey who was so interested in the state of his stomach that his head was always down there, investigating it; on ponies, expressly born to kick up behind; on roundabouts and swings, from fairs; in the first cab—another forgotten institution where the fare regularly got into bed, and was tucked up with the driver.

Not to trouble you with a detailed account of all my travels in pursuit of the ghost of Master B., which were longer and more wonderful than those of Sinbad the Sailor, I will confine myself to one experience from which you may judge of many.

I was marvellously changed. I was myself, yet not myself. I was conscious of something within me, which has been the same all through my life, and which I have always recognised under all its phases and varieties as never altering, and yet I was not the I who had gone to bed in Master B.'s room. I had the smoothest of faces and the shortest of legs, and I had taken another creature like myself, also with the smoothest of faces and the shortest of legs, behind a door, and was confiding to him a proposition of the most astounding nature.

This proposition was, that we should have a Seraglio.

The other creature assented warmly. He had no notion of respectability, neither had I. It was the custom of the East, it was the way of the good Caliph Haroun Alraschid (let me have the corrupted name again for once, it is so scented with sweet memories!), the usage was highly laudable, and most worthy of imitation. "O, yes! Let us," said the other creature with a jump, "have a Seraglio."

It was not because we entertained the faintest doubts of the meritorious character of the Oriental establishment we proposed to import, that we perceived it must be kept a secret from Miss Griffin. It was because we knew Miss Griffin to be bereft of human sympathies, and incapable of appreciating the greatness of the great Haroun. Mystery impenetrably shrouded from Miss Griffin then, let us entrust it to Miss Bule.

We were ten in Miss Griffin's establishment by Hampstead Ponds; eight ladies and two gentlemen. Miss Bule, whom I judge to have attained the ripe age of eight or nine, took the lead in society. I opened the subject to her in the course of the day, and proposed that she should become the Favourite.

Miss Bule, after struggling with the diffidence so natural to, and charming in, her adorable sex, expressed herself as flattered by the idea, but wished to know how it was proposed to provide for Miss Pipson? Miss Bule—who was understood to have vowed towards that young lady, a friendship, halves, and no secrets, until death, on the Church Service and Lessons complete in two volumes with case and lock—Miss Bule said she could not, as the friend of Pipson, disguise from herself, or me, that Pipson was not one of the common.

Now, Miss Pipson, having curly hair and blue eyes (which was my idea of anything mortal and feminine that was called Fair), I promptly replied that I regarded Miss Pipson in the light of a Fair Circassian.

"And what then?" Miss Bule pensively asked.

I replied that she must be inveigled by a Merchant, brought to me veiled, and purchased as a slave.

[The other creature had already fallen into the second male place in the State, and was set apart for Grand Vizier. He afterwards resisted this disposal of events, but had his hair pulled until he yielded.]

"Shall I not be jealous?" Miss Bule inquired, casting down her eyes.

"Zobeide, no," I replied; "you will ever be the favourite Sultana; the first place in my heart, and on my throne, will be ever yours."

Miss Bule, upon that assurance, consented to propound the idea to her seven beautiful companions. It occurring to me, in the course of the same day, that we knew we could trust a grinning and good-natured soul called Tabby, who was the serving drudge of the house, and had no more figure than one of the beds, and upon whose face there was always more or less black-lead, I slipped into Miss Bule's hand after supper, a little note to that effect; dwelling on the black-lead as being in a manner deposited by the finger of Providence, pointing Tabby out for Mesrour, the celebrated chief of the Blacks of the Hareem.

There were difficulties in the formation of the desired institution, as there are in all combinations. The other creature showed himself of a low character, and, when defeated in aspiring to the throne, pretended to have conscientious scruples about prostrating himself before the Caliph; wouldn’t call him Commander of the Faithful; spoke of him slightingly and inconsistently as a mere "chap;" said he, the other creature, "wouldn’t play"—Play!—and was otherwise coarse and offensive. This meanness of disposition was, however, put down by the general indignation of an united Seraglio, and I became blessed in the smiles of eight of the fairest of the daughters of men.

The smiles could only be bestowed when Miss Griffin was looking another way, and only then in a very wary manner, for there was a legend among the followers of the Prophet that she saw with a little round ornament in the middle of the pattern on the back of her shawl. But every day after dinner, for an hour, we were all together, and then the Favourite and the rest of the Royal Hareem competed who should most beguile the leisure of the Serene Haroun reposing from the cares of State—which were generally, as in most affairs of State, of an arithmetical character, the Commander of the Faithful being a fearful boggler at a sum.

On these occasions, the devoted Mesrour, chief of the Blacks of the Hareem, was always in attendance (Miss Griffin usually ringing for that officer, at the same time, with great vehemence), but never acquitted himself in a manner worthy of his historical reputation. In the first place, his bringing a broom into the Divan of the Caliph, even when Haroun wore on his shoulders the red robe of anger (Miss Pipson’s pelisse), though it might be got over for the moment, was never to be quite satisfactorily accounted for. In the second place, his breaking out into grinning exclamations of "Lork you pretties!" was neither Eastern nor respectful. In the third place, when specially instructed to say "Bismillah!" he always said "Hallelujah!" This officer, unlike his class, was too good-humoured altogether, kept his mouth open far too wide, expressed approbation to an incongruous extent, and even once—it was on the occasion of the purchase of the Fair Circassian for five hundred thousand purses of gold, and cheap, too—embraced the Slave, the Favourite, and the Caliph, all round. (Parenthetically let me say God bless Mesrour, and may there have been sons and daughters on that tender bosom, softening many a hard day since!)

Miss Griffin was a model of propriety, and I am at a loss to imagine what the feelings of the virtuous woman would have been, if she had known, when she paraded us down the Hampstead Road two and two, that she was walking with a stately step at the head of Polygamy and

Mahomedanism. I believe that a mysterious and terrible joy with which the contemplation of Miss Griffin, in this unconscious state, inspired us, and a grim sense prevalent among us that there was a dreadful power in our knowledge of what Miss Griffin (who knew all things that could be learnt out of book) didn’t know, were the main-spring of the preservation of our secret. It was wonderfully kept, but was once upon the verge of self-betrayal. The danger and escape occurred upon a Sunday. We were all ten ranged in a conspicuous part of the gallery at church, with Miss Griffin at our head—as we were every Sunday—advertising the establishment in an unsecular sort of way—when the description of Solomon in his domestic glory happened to be read. The moment that monarch was thus referred to, conscience whispered me, "Thou, too, Haroun!" The officiating minister had a cast in his eye, and it assisted conscience by giving him the appearance of reading personally at me. A crimson blush, attended by a fearful perspiration, suffused my features. The Grand Vizier became more dead than alive, and the whole Seraglio reddened as if the sunset of Bagdad shone direct upon their lovely faces. At this portentous time the awful Griffin rose, and balefully surveyed the children of Islam. My own impression was, that Church and State had entered into a conspiracy with Miss Griffin to expose us, and that we should all be put into white sheets, and exhibited in the centre aisle. But, so Westerly—if I may be allowed the expression as opposite to Eastern associations—was Miss Griffin’s sense of rectitude, that she merely suspected Apples, and we were saved.

I have called the Seraglio, united. Upon the question, solely, whether the Commander of the Faithful durst exercise a right of kissing in that sanctuary of the palace, were its peerless inmates divided. Zobeide asserted a counter-right in the Favourite to scratch, and the fair Circassian put her face, for refuge, into a green baize bag, originally designed for books. On the other hand, a young antelope of transcendent beauty from the fruitful plains of Camden Town (whence she had been brought, by traders, in the half-yearly caravan that crossed the intermediate desert after the holidays), held more liberal opinions, but stipulated for limiting the benefit of them to that dog, and son of a dog, the Grand Vizier—who had no rights, and was not in question. At length, the difficulty was compromised by the installation of a very youthful slave as Deputy. She, raised upon a stool, officially received upon her cheeks the salutes intended by the gracious

Haroun for other Sultanas, and was privately rewarded from the coffers of the Ladies of the Hareem.

And now it was, at the full height of enjoyment of my bliss, that I became heavily troubled. I began to think of my mother, and what she would say to my taking home at Midsummer eight of the most beautiful of the daughters of men, but all unexpected. I thought of the number of beds we made up at our house, of my father's income, and of the baker, and my despondency redoubled. The Seraglio and malicious Vizier, divining the cause of their Lord's unhappiness, did their utmost to augment it. They professed unbounded fidelity, and declared that they would live and die with him. Reduced to the utmost wretchedness by these protestations of attachment, I lay awake, for hours at a time, ruminating on my frightful lot. In my despair, I think I might have taken an early opportunity of falling on my knees before Miss Griffin, avowing my resemblance to Solomon, and praying to be dealt with according to the outraged laws of my country, if an unthought-of means of escape had not opened before me.

One day, we were out walking, two and two—on which occasion the Vizier had his usual instructions to take note of the boy at the turnpike, and if he profanely gazed (which he always did) at the beauties of the Hareem, to have him bowstrung in the course of the night—and it happened that our hearts were veiled in gloom. An unaccountable action on the part of the antelope had plunged the State into disgrace. That charmer, on the representation that the previous day was her birthday, and that vast treasures had been sent in a hamper for its celebration (both baseless assertions), had secretly but most pressingly invited thirty-five neighbouring princes and princesses to a ball and supper: with a special stipulation that they were "not to be fetched till twelve." This wandering of the antelope's fancy, led to the surprising arrival at Miss Griffin's door, in divers equipages and under various escorts, of a great company in full dress, who were deposited on the top step in a flush of high expectancy, and who were dismissed in tears. At the beginning of the double knocks attendant on these ceremonies, the antelope had retired to a back attic, and bolted herself in; and at every new arrival, Miss Griffin had gone so much more and more distracted, that at last she had been seen to tear her front. Ultimate capitulation on the part of the offender, had been followed by solitude in the linen-closet, bread and water and a lecture to all, of vindictive length, in which Miss Griffin had used expressions: Firstly, "I believe you all of you knew of it;" Secondly, "Every one of you is as wicked as another;" Thirdly, "A pack of little wretches."

Under these circumstances, we were walking drearily along; and I especially, with my Moosulmaun responsibilities heavy on me, was in a very low state of mind; when a strange man accosted Miss Griffin, and, after walking on at her side for a little while and talking with her, looked at me. Supposing him to be a minion of the law, and that my hour was come, I instantly ran away, with the general purpose of making for Egypt.

The whole Seraglio cried out, when they saw me making off as fast as my legs would carry me (I had an impression that the first turning on the left, and round by the public-house, would be the shortest way to the Pyramids), Miss Griffin screamed after me, the faithless Vizier ran after me, and the boy at the turnpike dodged me into a corner, like a sheep, and cut me off. Nobody scolded me when I was taken and brought back; Miss Griffin only said, with a stunning gentleness, This was very curious! Why had I run away when the gentleman looked at me?

If I had had any breath to answer with, I dare say I should have made no answer; having no breath, I certainly made none. Miss Griffin and the strange man took me between them, and walked me back to the palace in a sort of state; but not at all (as I couldn’t help feeling, with astonishment) in culprit state.

When we got there, we went into a room by ourselves, and Miss Griffin called in to her assistance, Mesrour, chief of the dusky guards of the Hareem. Mesrour, on being whispered to, began to shed tears. "Bless you, my precious!" said that officer, turning to me; "your Pa’s took bitter bad!"

I asked, with a fluttered heart, "Is he very ill?"

"Lord temper the wind to you, my lamb!" said the good Mesrour, kneeling down, that I might have a comforting shoulder for my head to rest on, "your Pa’s dead!"

Haroun Alraschid took to flight at the words; the Seraglio vanished; from that moment, I never again saw one of the eight of the fairest of the daughters of men.

I was taken home, and there was Debt at home as well as Death, and we had a sale there. My own little bed was so superciliously looked upon by a Power unknown to me, hazily called "The Trade," that a brass coal-scuttle, a roasting-jack, and a birdcage, were obliged to be put into it to make a Lot of it, and then it went for a song. So I heard mentioned, and I wondered what song, and thought what a dismal song it must have been to sing!

Then, I was sent to a great, cold, bare, school of big boys; where everything to eat and wear was thick and clumpy, without being enough; where everybody, large and small, was cruel; where the boys knew all about the sale, before I got there, and asked me what I had fetched, and who had bought me, and hooted at me, "Going, going, gone!" I never whispered in that wretched place that I had been Haroun, or had had a Seraglio: for, I knew that if I mentioned my reverses, I should be so worried, that I should have to drown myself in the muddy pond near the playground, which looked like the beer.

Ah me, ah me! No other ghost has haunted the boy’s room, my friends, since I have occupied it, than the ghost of my own childhood, the ghost of my own innocence, the ghost of my own airy belief. Many a time have I pursued the phantom: never with this man’s stride of mine to come up with it, never with these man’s hands of mine to touch it, never more to this man’s heart of mine to hold it in its purity. And here you see me working out, as cheerfully and thankfully as I may, my doom of shaving in the glass a constant change of customers, and of lying down and rising up with the skeleton allotted to me for my mortal companion.

THE TRIAL FOR MURDER

I HAVE always noticed a prevalent want of courage, even among persons of superior intelligence and culture, as to imparting their own psychological experiences when those have been of a strange sort. Almost all men are afraid that what they could relate in such wise would find no parallel or response in a listener's internal life, and might be suspected or laughed at. A truthful traveller, who should have seen some extraordinary creature in the likeness of a sea-serpent, would have no fear of mentioning it; but the same traveller, having had some singular presentiment, impulse, vagary of thought, vision (so-called), dream, or other remarkable mental impression, would hesitate considerably before he would own to it. To this reticence I attribute much of the obscurity in which such subjects are involved. We do not habitually communicate our experiences of these subjective things as we do our experiences of objective creation. The consequence is, that the general stock of experience in this regard appears exceptional, and really is so, in respect of being miserably imperfect.

In what I am going to relate, I have no intention of setting up, opposing, or supporting, any theory whatever. I know the history of the Bookseller of Berlin, I have studied the case of the wife of a late Astronomer Royal as related by Sir David Brewster, and I have followed the minutest details of a much more remarkable case of Spectral Illusion occurring within my private circle of friends. It may be necessary to state as to this last, that the sufferer (a lady) was in no degree, however distant, related to me. A mistaken assumption on that head might suggest an explanation of a part of my own case,—but only a part,—which would be wholly without foundation. It cannot be referred to my inheritance of any developed peculiarity, nor had I ever before any at all similar experience, nor have I ever had any at all similar experience since.

It does not signify how many years ago, or how few, a certain murder was committed in England, which attracted great attention. We hear more than enough of murderers as they rise in succession to their atrocious eminence, and I would bury the memory of this particular brute, if I could, as his body was buried, in Newgate Jail. I purposely abstain from giving any direct clue to the criminal's individuality.

When the murder was first discovered, no suspicion fell—or I ought rather to say, for I cannot be too precise in my facts, it was nowhere publicly hinted that any suspicion fell—on the man who was afterwards brought to trial. As no reference was at that time made to him in the newspapers, it is obviously impossible that any description of him can at that time have been given in the newspapers. It is essential that this fact be remembered.

Unfolding at breakfast my morning paper, containing the account of that first discovery, I found it to be deeply interesting, and I read it with close attention. I read it twice, if not three times. The discovery had been made in a bedroom, and, when I laid down the paper, I was aware of a flash—rush—flow—I do not know what to call it,—no word I can find is satisfactorily descriptive,—in which I seemed to see that bedroom passing through my room, like a picture impossibly painted on a running river. Though almost instantaneous in its passing, it was perfectly clear; so clear that I distinctly, and with a sense of relief, observed the absence of the dead body from the bed.

It was in no romantic place that I had this curious sensation, but in chambers in Piccadilly, very near to the corner of St. James's Street. It was entirely new to me. I was in my easy-chair at the moment, and the sensation was accompanied with a peculiar shiver which started the chair from its position. (But it is to be noted that the chair ran easily on castors.) I went to one of the windows (there are two in the room, and the room is on the second floor) to refresh my eyes with the moving objects down in Piccadilly. It was a bright autumn morning, and the street was sparkling and cheerful. The wind was high. As I looked out, it brought down from the Park a quantity of fallen leaves, which a gust took, and whirled into a spiral pillar. As the pillar fell and the leaves dispersed, I saw two men on the opposite side of the way, going from West to East. They were one behind the other. The foremost man often looked back over his shoulder. The second man followed him, at a distance of some thirty paces, with his right hand menacingly raised. First, the singularity and steadiness of this threatening gesture in so public a thoroughfare attracted my attention; and next, the more remarkable circumstance that nobody heeded it. Both men threaded their way among the other passengers with a smoothness hardly consistent even with the action of walking on a pavement; and no single creature, that I could see, gave them place, touched them, or looked after them. In passing before my windows, they both stared up at me. I saw their two faces very distinctly, and I knew that I could recognise them anywhere. Not that I had consciously noticed anything very remarkable in either face, except that the man who went first had an unusually lowering appearance, and that the face of the man who followed him was of the colour of impure wax.

I am a bachelor, and my valet and his wife constitute my whole establishment. My occupation is in a certain Branch Bank, and I wish that my duties as head of a Department were as light as they are popularly supposed to be. They kept me in town that autumn, when I stood in need of change. I was not ill, but I was not well. My reader is to make the most that can be reasonably made of my feeling jaded, having a depressing sense upon me of a monotonous life, and being "slightly dyspeptic." I am assured by my renowned doctor that my real state of health at that time justifies no stronger description, and I quote his own from his written answer to my request for it.

As the circumstances of the murder, gradually unravelling, took stronger and stronger possession of the public mind, I kept them away from mine by knowing as little about them as was possible in the midst of the universal excitement. But I knew that a verdict of Wilful Murder had been found against the suspected murderer, and that he had been committed to Newgate for trial. I also knew that his trial had been postponed over one Sessions of the Central Criminal Court, on the ground of general prejudice and want of time for the preparation of the defence. I may further have known, but I believe I did not, when, or about when, the Sessions to which his trial stood postponed would come on.

My sitting-room, bedroom, and dressing-room, are all on one floor. With the last there is no communication but through the bedroom. True, there is a door in it, once communicating with the staircase; but a part of the fitting of my bath has been—and had then been for some years—fixed across it. At the same period, and as a part of the same arrangement,—the door had been nailed up and canvased over.

I was standing in my bedroom late one night, giving some directions to my servant before he went to bed. My face was towards the only available door of communication with the dressing-room, and it was closed. My servant’s back was towards that door. While I was speaking to him, I saw it open, and a man look in, who very earnestly and mysteriously beckoned to me. That man was the man who had gone second of the two along Piccadilly, and whose face was of the colour of impure wax.

The figure, having beckoned, drew back, and closed the door. With no longer pause than was made by my crossing the bedroom, I opened the dressing-room door, and looked in. I had a lighted candle already in my hand. I felt no inward expectation of seeing the figure in the dressing-room, and I did not see it there.

Conscious that my servant stood amazed, I turned round to him, and said: "Derrick, could you believe that in my cool senses I fancied I saw a —" As I there laid my hand upon his breast, with a sudden start he trembled violently, and said, "O Lord, yes, sir! A dead man beckoning!"

Now I do not believe that this John Derrick, my trusty and attached servant for more than twenty years, had any impression whatever of having seen any such figure, until I touched him. The change in him was so startling, when I touched him, that I fully believe he derived his impression in some occult manner from me at that instant.

I bade John Derrick bring some brandy, and I gave him a dram, and was glad to take one myself. Of what had preceded that night’s phenomenon, I told him not a single word. Reflecting on it, I was absolutely certain that I had never seen that face before, except on the one occasion in Piccadilly. Comparing its expression when beckoning at the door with its expression when it had stared up at me as I stood at my window, I came to the conclusion that on the first occasion it had sought to fasten itself upon my memory, and that on the second occasion it had made sure of being immediately remembered.

I was not very comfortable that night, though I felt a certainty, difficult to explain, that the figure would not return. At daylight I fell into a heavy sleep, from which I was awakened by John Derrick’s coming to my bedside with a paper in his hand.

This paper, it appeared, had been the subject of an altercation at the door between its bearer and my servant. It was a summons to me to serve upon a Jury at the forthcoming Sessions of the Central Criminal Court at the Old Bailey. I had never before been summoned on such a Jury, as John Derrick well knew. He believed—I am not certain at this hour whether with reason or otherwise—that that class of Jurors were customarily chosen on a lower qualification than mine, and he had at first refused to accept the summons. The man who served it had taken the matter very coolly. He had said that my attendance or non-attendance was nothing to him; there the summons was; and I should deal with it at my own peril, and not at his.

For a day or two I was undecided whether to respond to this call, or take no notice of it. I was not conscious of the slightest mysterious bias, influence, or attraction, one way or other. Of that I am as strictly sure as of every other statement that I make here. Ultimately I decided, as a break in the monotony of my life, that I would go.

The appointed morning was a raw morning in the month of November. There was a dense brown fog in Piccadilly, and it became positively black and in the last degree oppressive East of Temple Bar. I found the passages and staircases of the Court-House flaringly lighted with gas, and the Court itself similarly illuminated. I *think* that, until I was conducted by officers into the Old Court and saw its crowded state, I did not know that the Murderer was to be tried that day. I *think* that, until I was so helped into the Old Court with considerable difficulty, I did not know into which of the two Courts sitting my summons would take me. But this must not be received as a positive assertion, for I am not completely satisfied in my mind on either point.

I took my seat in the place appropriated to Jurors in waiting, and I looked about the Court as well as I could through the cloud of fog and breath that was heavy in it. I noticed the black vapour hanging like a murky curtain outside the great windows, and I noticed the stifled sound of wheels on the straw or tan that was littered in the street; also, the hum of the people gathered there, which a shrill whistle, or a louder song or hail than the rest, occasionally pierced. Soon afterwards the Judges, two in number, entered, and took their seats. The buzz in the Court was awfully hushed. The direction was given to put the Murderer to the bar. He appeared there. And in that same instant I recognised in him the first of the two men who had gone down Piccadilly.

If my name had been called then, I doubt if I could have answered to it audibly. But it was called about sixth or eighth in the panel, and I was by that time able to say, "Here!" Now, observe. As I stepped into the box, the prisoner, who had been looking on attentively, but with no sign of concern, became violently agitated, and beckoned to his attorney. The prisoner’s wish to challenge me was so manifest, that it occasioned a pause, during which the attorney, with his hand upon the dock, whispered with his client, and shook his head. I afterwards had it from that gentleman, that the prisoner’s first affrighted words to him were, "*At all hazards, challenge that man!*" But that, as he would give no reason for it, and admitted that he had not even known my name until he heard it called and I appeared, it was not done.

Both on the ground already explained, that I wish to avoid reviving the unwholesome memory of that Murderer, and also because a detailed account of his long trial is by no means indispensable to my narrative, I shall confine myself closely to such incidents in the ten days and nights during which we, the Jury, were kept together, as directly bear on my own curious personal experience. It is in that, and not in the Murderer, that I seek to interest my reader. It is to that, and not to a page of the Newgate Calendar, that I beg attention.

I was chosen Foreman of the Jury. On the second morning of the trial, after evidence had been taken for two hours (I heard the church clocks strike), happening to cast my eyes over my brother jurymen, I found an inexplicable difficulty in counting them. I counted them several times, yet always with the same difficulty. In short, I made them one too many.

I touched the brother jurymen whose place was next me, and I whispered to him, "Oblige me by counting us." He looked surprised by the request, but turned his head and counted. "Why," says he, suddenly, "we are Thirt—; but no, it’s not possible. No. We are twelve."

According to my counting that day, we were always right in detail, but in the gross we were always one too many. There was no appearance—no figure—to account for it; but I had now an inward foreshadowing of the figure that was surely coming.

The Jury were housed at the London Tavern. We all slept in one large room on separate tables, and we were constantly in the charge and under the eye of the officer sworn to hold us in safe-keeping. I see no reason for suppressing the real name of that officer. He was intelligent, highly polite, and obliging, and (I was glad to hear) much respected in the City. He had an agreeable presence, good eyes, enviable black whiskers, and a fine sonorous voice. His name was Mr. Harker.

When we turned into our twelve beds at night, Mr. Harker’s bed was drawn across the door. On the night of the second day, not being disposed to lie down, and seeing Mr. Harker sitting on his bed, I went and sat beside him, and offered him a pinch of snuff. As Mr. Harker’s hand touched mine in taking it from my box, a peculiar shiver crossed him, and he said, "Who is this?"

Following Mr. Harker’s eyes, and looking along the room, I saw again the figure I expected,—the second of the two men who had gone down Piccadilly. I rose, and advanced a few steps; then stopped, and looked round at Mr. Harker. He was quite unconcerned, laughed, and said in a pleasant way, "I thought for a moment we had a thirteenth juryman, without a bed. But I see it is the moonlight."

Making no revelation to Mr. Harker, but inviting him to take a walk with me to the end of the room, I watched what the figure did. It stood for a few moments by the bedside of each of my eleven brother jurymen, close to the pillow. It always went to the right-hand side of the bed, and always passed out crossing the foot of the next bed. It seemed, from the action of the head, merely to look down pensively at each recumbent figure. It took no notice of me, or of my bed, which was that nearest to Mr. Harker’s. It seemed to go out where the moonlight came in, through a high window, as by an aerial flight of stairs.

Next morning at breakfast, it appeared that everybody present had dreamed of the murdered man last night, except myself and Mr. Harker.

I now felt as convinced that the second man who had gone down Piccadilly was the murdered man (so to speak), as if it had been borne into my comprehension by his immediate testimony. But even this took place, and in a manner for which I was not at all prepared.

On the fifth day of the trial, when the case for the prosecution was drawing to a close, a miniature of the murdered man, missing from his bedroom upon the discovery of the deed, and afterwards found in a hiding-place where the Murderer had been seen digging, was put in evidence. Having been identified by the witness under examination, it was handed up to the Bench, and thence handed down to be inspected by the Jury. As an officer in a black gown was making his way with it across to me, the figure of the second man who had gone down Piccadilly impetuously started from the crowd, caught the miniature from the officer, and gave it to me with his own hands, at the same time saying, in a low and hollow tone,—before I saw the miniature, which was in a locket,—"*I was younger then, and my face was not then drained of blood*." It also came between me and the brother juryman to whom I would have given the miniature, and between him and the brother juryman to whom he would have given it, and so passed it on through the whole of our number, and back into my possession. Not one of them, however, detected this.

At table, and generally when we were shut up together in Mr. Harker's custody, we had from the first naturally discussed the day's proceedings a good deal. On that fifth day, the case for the prosecution being closed, and we having that side of the question in a completed shape before us, our discussion was more animated and serious. Among our number was a vestryman,—the densest idiot I have ever seen at large,—who met the plainest evidence with the most preposterous objections, and who was sided with by two flabby parochial parasites; all the three impanelled from a district so delivered over to Fever that they ought to have been upon their own trial for five hundred Murders. When these mischievous blockheads were at their loudest, which was towards midnight, while some of us were already preparing for bed, I again saw the murdered man. He stood grimly behind them, beckoning to me. On my going towards them, and striking into the conversation, he immediately retired. This was the beginning of a separate series of appearances, confined to that long room in which we were confined. Whenever a knot of my brother jurymen laid their heads together, I saw the head of the murdered man among theirs. Whenever their comparison of notes was going against him, he would solemnly and irresistibly beckon to me.

It will be borne in mind that down to the production of the miniature, on the fifth day of the trial, I had never seen the Appearance in Court. Three changes occurred now that we entered on the case for the defence. Two of them I will mention together, first. The figure was now in Court continually, and it never there addressed itself to me, but always to the person who was speaking at the time. For instance: the throat of the murdered man had been cut straight across. In the opening speech for the defence, it was suggested that the deceased might have cut his own throat. At that very moment, the figure, with its throat in the dreadful condition referred to (this it had concealed before), stood at the speaker's elbow, motioning across and across its windpipe, now with the right hand, now with the left, vigorously suggesting to the speaker himself the impossibility of such a wound having been self-inflicted by either hand. For another instance: a witness to character, a woman, deposed to the prisoner's being the most amiable of mankind. The figure at that instant stood on the floor before her, looking her full in the face, and pointing out the prisoner’s evil countenance with an extended arm and an outstretched finger.

The third change now to be added impressed me strongly as the most marked and striking of all. I do not theorise upon it; I accurately state it, and there leave it. Although the Appearance was not itself perceived by those whom it addressed, its coming close to such persons was invariably attended by some trepidation or disturbance on their part. It seemed to me as if it were prevented, by laws to which I was not amenable, from fully revealing itself to others, and yet as if it could invisibly, dumbly, and darkly overshadow their minds. When the leading counsel for the defence suggested that hypothesis of suicide, and the figure stood at the learned gentleman’s elbow, frightfully sawing at its severed throat, it is undeniable that the counsel faltered in his speech, lost for a few seconds the thread of his ingenious discourse, wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, and turned extremely pale. When the witness to character was confronted by the Appearance, her eyes most certainly did follow the direction of its pointed finger, and rest in great hesitation and trouble upon the prisoner’s face. Two additional illustrations will suffice. On the eighth day of the trial, after the pause which was every day made early in the afternoon for a few minutes’ rest and refreshment, I came back into Court with the rest of the Jury some little time before the return of the Judges. Standing up in the box and looking about me, I thought the figure was not there, until, chancing to raise my eyes to the gallery, I saw it bending forward, and leaning over a very decent woman, as if to assure itself whether the Judges had resumed their seats or not. Immediately afterwards that woman screamed, fainted, and was carried out. So with the venerable, sagacious, and patient Judge who conducted the trial. When the case was over, and he settled himself and his papers to sum up, the murdered man, entering by the Judges’ door, advanced to his Lordship’s desk, and looked eagerly over his shoulder at the pages of his notes which he was turning. A change came over his Lordship’s face; his hand stopped; the peculiar shiver, that I knew so well, passed over him; he faltered, "Excuse me, gentlemen, for a few moments. I am somewhat oppressed by the vitiated air;" and did not recover until he had drunk a glass of water.

Through all the monotony of six of those interminable ten days,—the same Judges and others on the bench, the same Murderer in the dock, the same lawyers at the table, the same tones of question and answer rising to the roof of the court, the same scratching of the Judge’s pen, the same ushers going in and out, the same lights kindled at the same hour when there had been any natural light of day, the same foggy curtain outside the great windows when it was foggy, the same rain pattering and dripping when it was rainy, the same footmarks of turnkeys and prisoner day after day on the same sawdust, the same keys locking and unlocking the same heavy doors,—through all the wearisome monotony which made me feel as if I had been Foreman of the Jury for a vast period of time, and Piccadilly had flourished coevally with Babylon, the murdered man never lost one trace of his distinctness in my eyes, nor was he at any moment less distinct than anybody else. I must not omit, as a matter of fact, that I never once saw the Appearance which I call by the name of the murdered man look at the Murderer. Again and again I wondered, "Why does he not?" But he never did.

Nor did he look at me, after the production of the miniature, until the last closing minutes of the trial arrived. We retired to consider, at seven minutes before ten at night. The idiotic vestryman and his two parochial parasites gave us so much trouble that we twice returned into Court to beg to have certain extracts from the Judge’s notes re-read. Nine of us had not the smallest doubt about those passages, neither, I believe, had any one in the Court; the dunder-headed triumvirate, having no idea but obstruction, disputed them for that very reason. At length we prevailed, and finally the Jury returned into Court at ten minutes past twelve.

The murdered man at that time stood directly opposite the Jury-box, on the other side of the Court. As I took my place, his eyes rested on me with great attention; he seemed satisfied, and slowly shook a great gray veil, which he carried on his arm for the first time, over his head and whole form. As I gave in our verdict, "Guilty," the veil collapsed, all was gone, and his place was empty.

The Murderer, being asked by the Judge, according to usage, whether he had anything to say before sentence of Death should be passed upon him, indistinctly muttered something which was described in the leading newspapers of the following day as "a few rambling, incoherent, and half-audible words, in which he was understood to complain that he had not had a fair trial, because the Foreman of the Jury was prepossessed against him." The remarkable declaration that he really made was this: "*My Lord, I knew I was a doomed man, when the Foreman of my Jury came into the box. My*

Lord, I knew he would never let me off, because, before I was taken, he somehow got to my bedside in the night, woke me, and put a rope round my neck."

THE END OF
Three Ghost Stories

TO BE READ AT DUSK

BY

CHARLES DICKENS

ONE, two, three, four, five. There were five of them.

Five couriers, sitting on a bench outside the convent on the summit of the Great St. Bernard in Switzerland, looking at the remote heights, stained by the setting sun as if a mighty quantity of red wine had been broached upon the mountain top, and had not yet had time to sink into the snow.

This is not my simile. It was made for the occasion by the stoutest courier, who was a German. None of the others took any more notice of it than they took of me, sitting on another bench on the other side of the convent door, smoking my cigar, like them, and—also like them—looking at the reddened snow, and at the lonely shed hard by, where the bodies of belated travellers, dug out of it, slowly wither away, knowing no corruption in that cold region.

The wine upon the mountain top soaked in as we looked; the mountain became white; the sky, a very dark blue; the wind rose; and the air turned piercing cold. The five couriers buttoned their rough coats. There being no safer man to imitate in all such proceedings than a courier, I buttoned mine.

The mountain in the sunset had stopped the five couriers in a conversation. It is a sublime sight, likely to stop conversation. The mountain being now out of the sunset, they resumed. Not that I had heard any part of their previous discourse; for indeed, I had not then broken away from the American gentleman, in the travellers' parlour of the convent, who, sitting with his face to the fire, had undertaken to realise to me the whole progress of events which had led to the accumulation by the Honourable Ananias Dodger of one of the largest acquisitions of dollars ever made in our country.

'My God!' said the Swiss courier, speaking in French, which I do not hold (as some authors appear to do) to be such an all-sufficient excuse for a naughty word, that I have only to write it in that language to make it innocent; 'if you talk of ghosts—'

'But I *don't* talk of ghosts,' said the German.

'Of what then?' asked the Swiss.

‘If I knew of what then,’ said the German, ‘I should probably know a great deal more.’

It was a good answer, I thought, and it made me curious. So, I moved my position to that corner of my bench which was nearest to them, and leaning my back against the convent wall, heard perfectly, without appearing to attend.

‘Thunder and lightning!’ said the German, warming, ‘when a certain man is coming to see you, unexpectedly; and, without his own knowledge, sends some invisible messenger, to put the idea of him into your head all day, what do you call that? When you walk along a crowded street—at Frankfort, Milan, London, Paris—and think that a passing stranger is like your friend Heinrich, and then that another passing stranger is like your friend Heinrich, and so begin to have a strange foreknowledge that presently you’ll meet your friend Heinrich—which you do, though you believed him at Trieste—what do you call *that?*’

‘It’s not uncommon, either,’ murmured the Swiss and the other three.

‘Uncommon!’ said the German. ‘It’s as common as cherries in the Black Forest. It’s as common as maccaroni at Naples. And Naples reminds me! When the old Marchesa Senzanima shrieks at a card-party on the Chiaja—as I heard and saw her, for it happened in a Bavarian family of mine, and I was overlooking the service that evening—I say, when the old Marchesa starts up at the card-table, white through her rouge, and cries, "My sister in Spain is dead! I felt her cold touch on my back!"—and when that sister *is* dead at the moment—what do you call that?’

‘Or when the blood of San Gennaro liquefies at the request of the clergy—as all the world knows that it does regularly once a-year, in my native city,’ said the Neapolitan courier after a pause, with a comical look, ‘what do you call that?’

‘*That!’* cried the German. ‘Well, I think I know a name for that.’

‘Miracle?’ said the Neapolitan, with the same sly face.

The German merely smoked and laughed; and they all smoked and laughed.

‘Bah!’ said the German, presently. ‘I speak of things that really do happen. When I want to see the conjurer, I pay to see a professed one, and have my money’s worth. Very strange things do happen without ghosts. Ghosts! Giovanni Baptista, tell your story of the English bride. There’s no ghost in that, but something full as strange. Will any man tell me what?’

As there was a silence among them, I glanced around. He whom I took to be Baptista was lighting a fresh cigar. He presently went on to speak. He was a Genoese, as I judged.

‘The story of the English bride?’ said he. ‘Basta! one ought not to call so slight a thing a story. Well, it’s all one. But it’s true. Observe me well, gentlemen, it’s true. That which glitters is not always gold; but what I am going to tell, is true.’

He repeated this more than once.

Ten years ago, I took my credentials to an English gentleman at Long’s Hotel, in Bond Street, London, who was about to travel—it might be for one year, it might be for two. He approved of them; likewise of me. He was pleased to make inquiry. The testimony that he received was favourable. He engaged me by the six months, and my entertainment was generous.

He was young, handsome, very happy. He was enamoured of a fair young English lady, with a sufficient fortune, and they were going to be married. It was the wedding-trip, in short, that we were going to take. For three months’ rest in the hot weather (it was early summer then) he had hired an old place on the Riviera, at an easy distance from my city, Genoa, on the road to Nice. Did I know that place? Yes; I told him I knew it well. It was an old palace with great gardens. It was a little bare, and it was a little dark and gloomy, being close surrounded by trees; but it was spacious, ancient, grand, and on the seashore. He said it had been so described to him exactly, and he was well pleased that I knew it. For its being a little bare of furniture, all such places were. For its being a little gloomy, he had hired it principally for the gardens, and he and my mistress would pass the summer weather in their shade.

‘So all goes well, Baptista?’ said he.

‘Indubitably, signore; very well.’

We had a travelling chariot for our journey, newly built for us, and in all respects complete. All we had was complete; we wanted for nothing. The marriage took place. They were happy. *I* was happy, seeing all so bright, being so well situated, going to my own city, teaching my language in the rumble to the maid, la bella Carolina, whose heart was gay with laughter: who was young and rosy.

The time flew. But I observed—listen to this, I pray! (and here the courier dropped his voice)—I observed my mistress sometimes brooding in a manner very strange; in a frightened manner; in an unhappy manner; with a cloudy, uncertain alarm upon her. I think that I began to notice this when I was walking up hills by the carriage side, and master had gone on in front. At any rate, I remember that it impressed itself upon my mind one evening in the South of France, when she called to me to call master back; and when he came back, and walked for a long way, talking encouragingly and affectionately to her, with his hand upon the open window, and hers in it. Now and then, he laughed in a merry way, as if he were bantering her out of something. By-and-by, she laughed, and then all went well again.

It was curious. I asked la bella Carolina, the pretty little one, Was mistress unwell?—No.—Out of spirits?—No.—Fearful of bad roads, or brigands?—No. And what made it more mysterious was, the pretty little one would not look at me in giving answer, but *would* look at the view.

But, one day she told me the secret.

‘If you must know,’ said Carolina, ‘I find, from what I have overheard, that mistress is haunted.’

‘How haunted?’

‘By a dream.’

‘What dream?’

‘By a dream of a face. For three nights before her marriage, she saw a face in a dream—always the same face, and only One.’

‘A terrible face?’

‘No. The face of a dark, remarkable-looking man, in black, with black hair and a grey moustache—a handsome man except for a reserved and secret air. Not a face she ever saw, or at all like a face she ever saw. Doing nothing in the dream but looking at her fixedly, out of darkness.’

‘Does the dream come back?’

‘Never. The recollection of it is all her trouble.’

‘And why does it trouble her?’

Carolina shook her head.

‘That’s master’s question,’ said la bella. ‘She don’t know. She wonders why, herself. But I heard her tell him, only last night, that if she was to find a picture of that face in our Italian house (which she is afraid she will) she did not know how she could ever bear it.’

Upon my word I was fearful after this (said the Genoese courier) of our coming to the old palazzo, lest some such ill-starred picture should happen to be there. I knew there were many there; and, as we got nearer and nearer to the place, I wished the whole gallery in the crater of Vesuvius. To mend the matter, it was a stormy dismal evening when we, at last, approached that part of the Riviera. It thundered; and the thunder of my city and its environs, rolling among the high hills, is very loud. The lizards ran in and out of the chinks in the broken stone wall of the garden, as if they were frightened; the frogs bubbled and croaked their loudest; the sea-wind moaned, and the wet trees dripped; and the lightning—body of San Lorenzo, how it lightened!

We all know what an old palace in or near Genoa is—how time and the sea air have blotted it—how the drapery painted on the outer walls has peeled off in great flakes of plaster—how the lower windows are darkened with rusty bars of iron—how the courtyard is overgrown with grass—how the outer buildings are dilapidated—how the whole pile seems devoted to ruin. Our palazzo was one of the true kind. It had been shut up close for months. Months?—years!—it had an earthy smell, like a tomb. The scent of the orange trees on the broad back terrace, and of the lemons ripening on the wall, and of some shrubs that grew around a broken fountain, had got into the house somehow, and had never been able to get out again. There was, in every room, an aged smell, grown faint with confinement. It pined in all the cupboards and drawers. In the little rooms of communication between great rooms, it was stifling. If you turned a picture—to come back to the pictures—there it still was, clinging to the wall behind the frame, like a sort of bat.

The lattice-blinds were close shut, all over the house. There were two ugly, grey old women in the house, to take care of it; one of them with a spindle, who stood winding and mumbling in the doorway, and who would as soon have let in the devil as the air. Master, mistress, la bella Carolina, and I, went all through the palazzo. I went first, though I have named myself last, opening the windows and the lattice-blinds, and shaking down on myself splashes of rain, and scraps of mortar, and now and then a dozing mosquito, or a monstrous, fat, blotchy, Genoese spider.

When I had let the evening light into a room, master, mistress, and la bella Carolina, entered. Then, we looked round at all the pictures, and I went forward again into another room. Mistress secretly had great fear of meeting with the likeness of that face—we all had; but there was no such thing. The Madonna and Bambino, San Francisco, San Sebastiano, Venus, Santa Caterina, Angels, Brigands, Friars, Temples at Sunset, Battles, White

Horses, Forests, Apostles, Doges, all my old acquaintances many times repeated?—yes. Dark, handsome man in black, reserved and secret, with black hair and grey moustache, looking fixedly at mistress out of darkness?—no.

At last we got through all the rooms and all the pictures, and came out into the gardens. They were pretty well kept, being rented by a gardener, and were large and shady. In one place there was a rustic theatre, open to the sky; the stage a green slope; the coulisses, three entrances upon a side, sweet-smelling leafy screens. Mistress moved her bright eyes, even there, as if she looked to see the face come in upon the scene; but all was well.

‘Now, Clara,’ master said, in a low voice, ‘you see that it is nothing? You are happy.’

Mistress was much encouraged. She soon accustomed herself to that grim palazzo, and would sing, and play the harp, and copy the old pictures, and stroll with master under the green trees and vines all day. She was beautiful. He was happy. He would laugh and say to me, mounting his horse for his morning ride before the heat:

‘All goes well, Baptista!’

‘Yes, signore, thank God, very well.’

We kept no company. I took la bella to the Duomo and Annunciata, to the Café, to the Opera, to the village Festa, to the Public Garden, to the Day Theatre, to the Marionetti. The pretty little one was charmed with all she saw. She learnt Italian—heavens! miraculously! Was mistress quite forgetful of that dream? I asked Carolina sometimes. Nearly, said la bella—almost. It was wearing out.

One day master received a letter, and called me.

‘Baptista!’

‘Signore!’

‘A gentleman who is presented to me will dine here to-day. He is called the Signor Dellombra. Let me dine like a prince.’

It was an odd name. I did not know that name. But, there had been many noblemen and gentlemen pursued by Austria on political suspicions, lately, and some names had changed. Perhaps this was one. Altro! Dellombra was as good a name to me as another.

When the Signor Dellombra came to dinner (said the Genoese courier in the low voice, into which he had subsided once before), I showed him into the reception-room, the great sala of the old palazzo. Master received him with cordiality, and presented him to mistress. As she rose, her face changed, she gave a cry, and fell upon the marble floor.

Then, I turned my head to the Signor Dellombra, and saw that he was dressed in black, and had a reserved and secret air, and was a dark, remarkable-looking man, with black hair and a grey moustache.

Master raised mistress in his arms, and carried her to her own room, where I sent la bella Carolina straight. La bella told me afterwards that mistress was nearly terrified to death, and that she wandered in her mind about her dream, all night.

Master was vexed and anxious—almost angry, and yet full of solicitude. The Signor Dellombra was a courtly gentleman, and spoke with great respect and sympathy of mistress's being so ill. The African wind had been blowing for some days (they had told him at his hotel of the Maltese Cross), and he knew that it was often hurtful. He hoped the beautiful lady would recover soon. He begged permission to retire, and to renew his visit when he should have the happiness of hearing that she was better. Master would not allow of this, and they dined alone.

He withdrew early. Next day he called at the gate, on horseback, to inquire for mistress. He did so two or three times in that week.

What I observed myself, and what la bella Carolina told me, united to explain to me that master had now set his mind on curing mistress of her fanciful terror. He was all kindness, but he was sensible and firm. He reasoned with her, that to encourage such fancies was to invite melancholy, if not madness. That it rested with herself to be herself. That if she once resisted her strange weakness, so successfully as to receive the Signor Dellombra as an English lady would receive any other guest, it was for ever conquered. To make an end, the signore came again, and mistress received him without marked distress (though with constraint and apprehension still), and the evening passed serenely. Master was so delighted with this change, and so anxious to confirm it, that the Signor Dellombra became a constant guest. He was accomplished in pictures, books, and music; and his society, in any grim palazzo, would have been welcome.

I used to notice, many times, that mistress was not quite recovered. She would cast down her eyes and droop her head, before the Signor Dellombra, or would look at him with a terrified and fascinated glance, as if his presence had some evil influence or power upon her. Turning from her to him, I used to see him in the shaded gardens, or the large half-lighted sala, looking, as I might say, ‘fixedly upon her out of darkness.’ But, truly, I had not forgotten la bella Carolina’s words describing the face in the dream.

After his second visit I heard master say:

‘Now, see, my dear Clara, it’s over! Dellombra has come and gone, and your apprehension is broken like glass.’

‘Will he—will he ever come again?’ asked mistress.

‘Again? Why, surely, over and over again! Are you cold?’ (she shivered).

‘No, dear—but—he terrifies me: are you sure that he need come again?’

‘The surer for the question, Clara!’ replied master, cheerfully.

But, he was very hopeful of her complete recovery now, and grew more and more so every day. She was beautiful. He was happy.

‘All goes well, Baptista?’ he would say to me again.

‘Yes, signore, thank God; very well.’

We were all (said the Genoese courier, constraining himself to speak a little louder), we were all at Rome for the Carnival. I had been out, all day, with a Sicilian, a friend of mine, and a courier, who was there with an English family. As I returned at night to our hotel, I met the little Carolina, who never stirred from home alone, running distractedly along the Corso.

‘Carolina! What’s the matter?’

‘O Baptista! O, for the Lord’s sake! where is my mistress?’

‘Mistress, Carolina?’

‘Gone since morning—told me, when master went out on his day’s journey, not to call her, for she was tired with not resting in the night (having been in pain), and would lie in bed until the evening; then get up refreshed. She is gone!—she is gone! Master has come back, broken down the door, and she is gone! My beautiful, my good, my innocent mistress!’

The pretty little one so cried, and raved, and tore herself that I could not have held her, but for her swooning on my arm as if she had been shot. Master came up—in manner, face, or voice, no more the master that I knew, than I was he. He took me (I laid the little one upon her bed in the hotel, and left her with the chamber-women), in a carriage, furiously through the darkness, across the desolate Campagna. When it was day, and we stopped at a miserable post-house, all the horses had been hired twelve hours ago, and sent away in different directions. Mark me! by the Signor Dellombra, who had passed there in a carriage, with a frightened English lady crouching in one corner.

I never heard (said the Genoese courier, drawing a long breath) that she was ever traced beyond that spot. All I know is, that she vanished into infamous oblivion, with the dreaded face beside her that she had seen in her dream.

‘What do you call *that?*’ said the German courier, triumphantly. ‘Ghosts! There are no ghosts *there!* What do you call this, that I am going to tell you? Ghosts! There are no ghosts *here!*’

I took an engagement once (pursued the German courier) with an English gentleman, elderly and a bachelor, to travel through my country, my Fatherland. He was a merchant who traded with my country and knew the language, but who had never been there since he was a boy—as I judge, some sixty years before.

His name was James, and he had a twin-brother John, also a bachelor. Between these brothers there was a great affection. They were in business together, at Goodman’s Fields, but they did not live together. Mr. James dwelt in Poland Street, turning out of Oxford Street, London; Mr. John resided by Epping Forest.

Mr. James and I were to start for Germany in about a week. The exact day depended on business. Mr. John came to Poland Street (where I was staying in the house), to pass that week with Mr. James. But, he said to his brother on the second day, ‘I don’t feel very well, James. There’s not much the matter with me; but I think I am a little gouty. I’ll go home and put myself under the care of my old housekeeper, who understands my ways. If I get quite better, I’ll come back and see you before you go. If I don’t feel well enough to resume my visit where I leave it off, why *you* will come and see *me* before you go.’ Mr. James, of course, said he would, and they shook hands—both hands, as they always did—and Mr. John ordered out his old-fashioned chariot and rumbled home.

It was on the second night after that—that is to say, the fourth in the week—when I was awoke out of my sound sleep by Mr. James coming into my bedroom in his flannel-gown, with a lighted candle. He sat upon the side of my bed, and looking at me, said:

‘Wilhelm, I have reason to think I have got some strange illness upon me.’

I then perceived that there was a very unusual expression in his face.

‘Wilhelm,’ said he, ‘I am not afraid or ashamed to tell you what I might be afraid or ashamed to tell another man. You come from a sensible country, where mysterious things are inquired into and are not settled to have been weighed and measured—or to have been unweighable and unmeasurable—or in either case to have been completely disposed of, for all time—ever so many years ago. I have just now seen the phantom of my brother.’

I confess (said the German courier) that it gave me a little tingling of the blood to hear it.

‘I have just now seen,’ Mr. James repeated, looking full at me, that I might see how collected he was, ‘the phantom of my brother John. I was sitting up in bed, unable to sleep, when it came into my room, in a white dress, and regarding me earnestly, passed up to the end of the room, glanced at some papers on my writing-desk, turned, and, still looking earnestly at me as it passed the bed, went out at the door. Now, I am not in the least mad, and am not in the least disposed to invest that phantom with any external existence out of myself. I think it is a warning to me that I am ill; and I think I had better be bled.’

I got out of bed directly (said the German courier) and began to get on my clothes, begging him not to be alarmed, and telling him that I would go myself to the doctor. I was just ready, when we heard a loud knocking and ringing at the street door. My room being an attic at the back, and Mr. James’s being the second-floor room in the front, we went down to his room, and put up the window, to see what was the matter.

‘Is that Mr. James?’ said a man below, falling back to the opposite side of the way to look up.

‘It is,’ said Mr. James, ‘and you are my brother’s man, Robert.’

‘Yes, Sir. I am sorry to say, Sir, that Mr. John is ill. He is very bad, Sir. It is even feared that he may be lying at the point of death. He wants to see you, Sir. I have a chaise here. Pray come to him. Pray lose no time.’

Mr. James and I looked at one another. ‘Wilhelm,’ said he, ‘this is strange. I wish you to come with me!’ I helped him to dress, partly there and partly in the chaise; and no grass grew under the horses’ iron shoes between Poland Street and the Forest.

Now, mind! (said the German courier) I went with Mr. James into his brother’s room, and I saw and heard myself what follows.

His brother lay upon his bed, at the upper end of a long bed-chamber. His old housekeeper was there, and others were there: I think three others were there, if not four, and they had been with him since early in the afternoon. He was in white, like the figure—necessarily so, because he had his night-dress on. He looked like the figure—necessarily so, because he looked earnestly at his brother when he saw him come into the room.

But, when his brother reached the bed-side, he slowly raised himself in bed, and looking full upon him, said these words:

‘JAMES, YOU HAVE SEEN ME BEFORE, TO-NIGHT—AND YOU KNOW IT!’

And so died!

I waited, when the German courier ceased, to hear something said of this strange story. The silence was unbroken. I looked round, and the five couriers were gone: so noiselessly that the ghostly mountain might have absorbed them into its eternal snows. By this time, I was by no means in a mood to sit alone in that awful scene, with the chill air coming solemnly upon me—or, if I may tell the truth, to sit alone anywhere. So I went back into the convent-parlour, and, finding the American gentleman still disposed to relate the biography of the Honourable Ananias Dodger, heard it all out.

THE END OF
To be Read at Dusk

TOM TIDDLER’S GROUND

CHAPTER I—PICKING UP SOOT AND CINDERS

“And why Tom Tiddler’s ground?” said the Traveller.

“Because he scatters halfpence to Tramps and such-like,” returned the Landlord, “and of course they pick ’em up. And this being done on his own land (which it *is* his own land, you observe, and were his family’s before him), why it is but regarding the halfpence as gold and silver, and turning the ownership of the property a bit round your finger, and there you have the name of the children’s game complete. And it’s appropriate too,” said the Landlord, with his favourite action of stooping a little, to look across the table out of window at vacancy, under the window-blind which was half drawn down. “Leastwise it has been so considered by many gentlemen which have partook of chops and tea in the present humble parlour.”

The Traveller was partaking of chops and tea in the present humble parlour, and the Landlord’s shot was fired obliquely at him.

“And you call him a Hermit?” said the Traveller.

“They call him such,” returned the Landlord, evading personal responsibility; “he is in general so considered.”

“What *is* a Hermit?” asked the Traveller.

“What is it?” repeated the Landlord, drawing his hand across his chin.

“Yes, what is it?”

The Landlord stooped again, to get a more comprehensive view of vacancy under the window-blind, and—with an asphyxiated appearance on him as one unaccustomed to definition—made no answer.

“I’ll tell you what I suppose it to be,” said the Traveller. “An abominably dirty thing.”

“Mr. Mopes is dirty, it cannot be denied,” said the Landlord.

“Intolerably conceited.”

“Mr. Mopes is vain of the life he leads, some do say,” replied the Landlord, as another concession.

“A slothful, unsavoury, nasty reversal of the laws of human mature,” said the Traveller; “and for the sake of GOD’S working world and its wholesomeness, both moral and physical, I would put the thing on the treadmill (if I had my way) wherever I found it; whether on a pillar, or in a hole; whether on Tom Tiddler's ground, or the Pope of Rome's ground, or a Hindoo fakeer's ground, or any other ground."

"I don't know about putting Mr. Mopes on the treadmill," said the Landlord, shaking his head very seriously. "There ain't a doubt but what he has got landed property."

"How far may it be to this said Tom Tiddler's ground?" asked the Traveller.

"Put it at five mile," returned the Landlord.

"Well! When I have done my breakfast," said the Traveller, "I'll go there. I came over here this morning, to find it out and see it."

"Many does," observed the Landlord.

The conversation passed, in the Midsummer weather of no remote year of grace, down among the pleasant dales and trout-streams of a green English county. No matter what county. Enough that you may hunt there, shoot there, fish there, traverse long grass-grown Roman roads there, open ancient barrows there, see many a square mile of richly cultivated land there, and hold Arcadian talk with a bold peasantry, their country's pride, who will tell you (if you want to know) how pastoral housekeeping is done on nine shillings a week.

Mr. Traveller sat at his breakfast in the little sanded parlour of the Peal of Bells village alehouse, with the dew and dust of an early walk upon his shoes—an early walk by road and meadow and coppice, that had sprinkled him bountifully with little blades of grass, and scraps of new hay, and with leaves both young and old, and with other such fragrant tokens of the freshness and wealth of summer. The window through which the landlord had concentrated his gaze upon vacancy was shaded, because the morning sun was hot and bright on the village street. The village street was like most other village streets: wide for its height, silent for its size, and drowsy in the dullest degree. The quietest little dwellings with the largest of window-shutters (to shut up Nothing as carefully as if it were the Mint, or the Bank of England) had called in the Doctor's house so suddenly, that his brass door-plate and three stories stood among them as conspicuous and different as the doctor himself in his broadcloth, among the smock-frocks of his patients. The village residences seemed to have gone to law with a similar absence of consideration, for a score of weak little lath-and-plaster cabins clung in confusion about the Attorney's red-brick house, which, with glaring door-steps and a most terrific scraper, seemed to serve all manner of ejectments upon them. They were as various as labourers—high-shouldered, wry-necked, one-eyed, goggle-eyed, squinting, bow-legged, knock-knee'd, rheumatic, crazy. Some of the small tradesmen's houses, such as the crockery-shop and the harness-maker, had a Cyclops window in the middle of the gable, within an inch or two of its apex, suggesting that some forlorn rural Prentice must wriggle himself into that apartment horizontally, when he retired to rest, after the manner of the worm. So bountiful in its abundance was the surrounding country, and so lean and scant the village, that one might have thought the village had sown and planted everything it once possessed, to convert the same into crops. This would account for the bareness of the little shops, the bareness of the few boards and trestles designed for market purposes in a corner of the street, the bareness of the obsolete Inn and Inn Yard, with the ominous inscription "Excise Office" not yet faded out from the gateway, as indicating the very last thing that poverty could get rid of. This would also account for the determined abandonment of the village by one stray dog, fast lessening in the perspective where the white posts and the pond were, and would explain his conduct on the hypothesis that he was going (through the act of suicide) to convert himself into manure, and become a part proprietor in turnips or mangold-wurzel.

Mr. Traveller having finished his breakfast and paid his moderate score, walked out to the threshold of the Peal of Bells, and, thence directed by the pointing finger of his host, betook himself towards the ruined hermitage of Mr. Mopes the hermit.

For, Mr. Mopes, by suffering everything about him to go to ruin, and by dressing himself in a blanket and skewer, and by steeping himself in soot and grease and other nastiness, had acquired great renown in all that country-side—far greater renown than he could ever have won for himself, if his career had been that of any ordinary Christian, or decent Hottentot. He had even blanketed and skewered and sooted and greased himself, into the London papers. And it was curious to find, as Mr. Traveller found by stopping for a new direction at this farm-house or at that cottage as he went along, with how much accuracy the morbid Mopes had counted on the weakness of his neighbours to embellish him. A mist of home-brewed marvel and romance surrounded Mopes, in which (as in all fogs) the real proportions of the real object were extravagantly heightened. He had murdered his beautiful beloved in a fit of jealousy and was doing penance; he had made a vow under the influence of grief; he had made a vow under the influence of a fatal accident; he had made a vow under the influence of religion; he had made a vow under the influence of drink; he had made a vow under the influence of disappointment; he had never made any vow, but "had got led into it" by the possession of a mighty and most awful secret; he was enormously rich, he was stupendously charitable, he was profoundly learned, he saw spectres, he knew and could do all kinds of wonders. Some said he went out every night, and was met by terrified wayfarers stalking along dark roads, others said he never went out, some knew his penance to be nearly expired, others had positive information that his seclusion was not a penance at all, and would never expire but with himself. Even, as to the easy facts of how old he was, or how long he had held verminous occupation of his blanket and skewer, no consistent information was to be got, from those who must know if they would. He was represented as being all the ages between five-and-twenty and sixty, and as having been a hermit seven years, twelve, twenty, thirty,—though twenty, on the whole, appeared the favourite term.

"Well, well!" said Mr. Traveller. "At any rate, let us see what a real live Hermit looks like."

So, Mr. Traveller went on, and on, and on, until he came to Tom Tiddler's Ground.

It was a nook in a rustic by-road, which the genius of Mopes had laid waste as completely, as if he had been born an Emperor and a Conqueror. Its centre object was a dwelling-house, sufficiently substantial, all the window-glass of which had been long ago abolished by the surprising genius of Mopes, and all the windows of which were barred across with rough-split logs of trees nailed over them on the outside. A rickyard, hip-high in vegetable rankness and ruin, contained outbuildings from which the thatch had lightly fluttered away, on all the winds of all the seasons of the year, and from which the planks and beams had heavily dropped and rotted. The frosts and damps of winter, and the heats of summer, had warped what wreck remained, so that not a post or a board retained the position it was meant to hold, but everything was twisted from its purpose, like its owner, and degraded and debased. In this homestead of the sluggard, behind the ruined hedge, and sinking away among the ruined grass and the nettles, were the last perishing fragments of certain ricks: which had gradually mildewed and collapsed, until they looked like mounds of rotten honeycomb, or dirty sponge. Tom Tiddler's ground could even show its ruined water; for, there was a slimy pond into which a tree or two had fallen—one soppy trunk and branches lay across it then—which in its accumulation of stagnant weed, and in its black decomposition, and in all its foulness and filth, was almost comforting, regarded as the only water that could have reflected the shameful place without seeming polluted by that low office.

Mr. Traveller looked all around him on Tom Tiddler's ground, and his glance at last encountered a dusky Tinker lying among the weeds and rank grass, in the shade of the dwelling-house. A rough walking-staff lay on the ground by his side, and his head rested on a small wallet. He met Mr. Traveller's eye without lifting up his head, merely depressing his chin a little (for he was lying on his back) to get a better view of him.

"Good day!" said Mr. Traveller.

"Same to you, if you like it," returned the Tinker.

"Don't *you* like it? It's a very fine day."

"I ain't partickler in weather," returned the Tinker, with a yawn.

Mr. Traveller had walked up to where he lay, and was looking down at him. "This is a curious place," said Mr. Traveller.

"Ay, I suppose so!" returned the Tinker. "Tom Tiddler's ground, they call this."

"Are you well acquainted with it?"

"Never saw it afore to-day," said the Tinker, with another yawn, "and don't care if I never see it again. There was a man here just now, told me what it was called. If you want to see Tom himself, you must go in at that gate." He faintly indicated with his chin a little mean ruin of a wooden gate at the side of the house.

"Have you seen Tom?"

"No, and I ain't partickler to see him. I can see a dirty man anywhere."

"He does not live in the house, then?" said Mr. Traveller, casting his eyes upon the house anew.

"The man said," returned the Tinker, rather irritably,—"him as was here just now, 'this what you're a laying on, mate, is Tom Tiddler's ground. And if you want to see Tom,' he says, 'you must go in at that gate.' The man come out at that gate himself, and he ought to know."

"Certainly," said Mr. Traveller.

"Though, perhaps," exclaimed the Tinker, so struck by the brightness of his own idea, that it had the electric effect upon him of causing him to lift up his head an inch or so, "perhaps he was a liar! He told some rum 'uns—him as was here just now, did about this place of Tom's. He says—him as was here just now—'When Tom shut up the house, mate, to go to rack, the beds was left, all made, like as if somebody was a-going to sleep in every bed. And if you was to walk through the bedrooms now, you'd see the ragged mouldy bedclothes a heaving and a heaving like seas. And a heaving and a heaving with what?' he says. 'Why, with the rats under 'em.'"

"I wish I had seen that man," Mr. Traveller remarked.

"You'd have been welcome to see him instead of me seeing him," growled the Tinker; "for he was a long-winded one."

Not without a sense of injury in the remembrance, the Tinker gloomily closed his eyes. Mr. Traveller, deeming the Tinker a short-winded one, from whom no further breath of information was to be derived, betook himself to the gate.

Swung upon its rusty hinges, it admitted him into a yard in which there was nothing to be seen but an outhouse attached to the ruined building, with a barred window in it. As there were traces of many recent footsteps under this window, and as it was a low window, and unglazed, Mr. Traveller made bold to peep within the bars. And there to be sure he had a real live Hermit before him, and could judge how the real dead Hermits used to look.

He was lying on a bank of soot and cinders, on the floor, in front of a rusty fireplace. There was nothing else in the dark little kitchen, or scullery, or whatever his den had been originally used as, but a table with a litter of old bottles on it. A rat made a clatter among these bottles, jumped down, and ran over the real live Hermit on his way to his hole, or the man in *his* hole would not have been so easily discernible. Tickled in the face by the rat's tail, the owner of Tom Tiddler's ground opened his eyes, saw Mr. Traveller, started up, and sprang to the window.

"Humph!" thought Mr. Traveller, retiring a pace or two from the bars. "A compound of Newgate, Bedlam, a Debtors' Prison in the worst time, a chimney-sweep, a mudlark, and the Noble Savage! A nice old family, the Hermit family. Hah!"

Mr. Traveller thought this, as he silently confronted the sooty object in the blanket and skewer (in sober truth it wore nothing else), with the matted hair and the staring eyes. Further, Mr. Traveller thought, as the eye surveyed him with a very obvious curiosity in ascertaining the effect they produced, “Vanity, vanity, vanity! Verily, all is vanity!”

“What is your name, sir, and where do you come from?” asked Mr. Mopes the Hermit—with an air of authority, but in the ordinary human speech of one who has been to school.

Mr. Traveller answered the inquiries.

“Did you come here, sir, to see *me*?”

“I did. I heard of you, and I came to see you.—I know you like to be seen.” Mr. Traveller coolly threw the last words in, as a matter of course, to forestall an affectation of resentment or objection that he saw rising beneath the grease and grime of the face. They had their effect.

“So,” said the Hermit, after a momentary silence, unclasping the bars by which he had previously held, and seating himself behind them on the ledge of the window, with his bare legs and feet crouched up, “you know I like to be seen?”

Mr. Traveller looked about him for something to sit on, and, observing a billet of wood in a corner, brought it near the window. Deliberately seating himself upon it, he answered, “Just so.”

Each looked at the other, and each appeared to take some pains to get the measure of the other.

“Then you have come to ask me why I lead this life,” said the Hermit, frowning in a stormy manner. “I never tell that to any human being. I will not be asked that.”

“Certainly you will not be asked that by me,” said Mr. Traveller, “for I have not the slightest desire to know.”

“You are an uncouth man,” said Mr. Mopes the Hermit.

“You are another,” said Mr. Traveller.

The Hermit, who was plainly in the habit of overawing his visitors with the novelty of his filth and his blanket and skewer, glared at his present visitor in some discomfiture and surprise: as if he had taken aim at him with a sure gun, and his piece had missed fire.

“Why do you come here at all?” he asked, after a pause.

“Upon my life,” said Mr. Traveller, “I was made to ask myself that very question only a few minutes ago—by a Tinker too.”

As he glanced towards the gate in saying it, the Hermit glanced in that direction likewise.

"Yes. He is lying on his back in the sunlight outside," said Mr, Traveller, as if he had been asked concerning the man, "and he won't come in; for he says—and really very reasonably—'What should I come in for? I can see a dirty man anywhere.'"

"You are an insolent person. Go away from my premises. Go!" said the Hermit, in an imperious and angry tone.

"Come, come!" returned Mr. Traveller, quite undisturbed. "This is a little too much. You are not going to call yourself clean? Look at your legs. And as to these being your premises:—they are in far too disgraceful a condition to claim any privilege of ownership, or anything else."

The Hermit bounced down from his window-ledge, and cast himself on his bed of soot and cinders.

"I am not going," said Mr. Traveller, glancing in after him; "you won't get rid of me in that way. You had better come and talk."

"I won't talk," said the Hermit, flouncing round to get his back towards the window.

"Then I will," said Mr. Traveller. "Why should you take it ill that I have no curiosity to know why you live this highly absurd and highly indecent life? When I contemplate a man in a state of disease, surely there is no moral obligation on me to be anxious to know how he took it."

After a short silence, the Hermit bounced up again, and came back to the barred window.

"What? You are not gone?" he said, affecting to have supposed that he was.

"Nor going," Mr. Traveller replied: "I design to pass this summer day here."

"How dare you come, sir, upon my promises—" the Hermit was returning, when his visitor interrupted him.

"Really, you know, you must *not* talk about your premises. I cannot allow such a place as this to be dignified with the name of premises."

"How dare you," said the Hermit, shaking his bars, "come in at my gate, to taunt me with being in a diseased state?"

"Why, Lord bless my soul," returned the other, very composedly, "you have not the face to say that you are in a wholesome state? Do allow me again to call your attention to your legs. Scrape yourself anywhere—with anything—and then tell me you are in a wholesome state. The fact is, Mr. Mopes, that you are not only a Nuisance—"

“A Nuisance?” repeated the Hermit, fiercely.

“What is a place in this obscene state of dilapidation but a Nuisance? What is a man in your obscene state of dilapidation but a Nuisance? Then, as you very well know, you cannot do without an audience, and your audience is a Nuisance. You attract all the disreputable vagabonds and prowlers within ten miles around, by exhibiting yourself to them in that objectionable blanket, and by throwing copper money among them, and giving them drink out of those very dirty jars and bottles that I see in there (their stomachs need be strong!); and in short,” said Mr. Traveller, summing up in a quietly and comfortably settled manner, “you are a Nuisance, and this kennel is a Nuisance, and the audience that you cannot possibly dispense with is a Nuisance, and the Nuisance is not merely a local Nuisance, because it is a general Nuisance to know that there *can be* such a Nuisance left in civilisation so very long after its time.”

“Will you go away? I have a gun in here,” said the Hermit.

“Pooh!”

“I *have*!”

“Now, I put it to you. Did I say you had not? And as to going away, didn’t I say I am not going away? You have made me forget where I was. I now remember that I was remarking on your conduct being a Nuisance. Moreover, it is in the last and lowest degree inconsequent foolishness and weakness.”

“Weakness?” echoed the Hermit.

“Weakness,” said Mr. Traveller, with his former comfortably settled final air.

“I weak, you fool?” cried the Hermit, “I, who have held to my purpose, and my diet, and my only bed there, all these years?”

“The more the years, the weaker you,” returned Mr. Traveller. “Though the years are not so many as folks say, and as you willingly take credit for. The crust upon your face is thick and dark, Mr. Mopes, but I can see enough of you through it, to see that you are still a young man.”

“Inconsequent foolishness is lunacy, I suppose?” said the Hermit.

“I suppose it is very like it,” answered Mr. Traveller.

“Do I converse like a lunatic?”

“One of us two must have a strong presumption against him of being one, whether or no. Either the clean and decorously clad man, or the dirty and indecorously clad man. I don’t say which.”

“Why, you self-sufficient bear,” said the Hermit, “not a day passes but I am justified in my purpose by the conversations I hold here; not a day passes but I am shown, by everything I hear and see here, how right and strong I am in holding my purpose.”

Mr. Traveller, lounging easily on his billet of wood, took out a pocket pipe and began to fill it. “Now, that a man,” he said, appealing to the summer sky as he did so, “that a man—even behind bars, in a blanket and skewer—should tell me that he can see, from day to day, any orders or conditions of men, women, or children, who can by any possibility teach him that it is anything but the miserablest drivelling for a human creature to quarrel with his social nature—not to go so far as to say, to renounce his common human decency, for that is an extreme case; or who can teach him that he can in any wise separate himself from his kind and the habits of his kind, without becoming a deteriorated spectacle calculated to give the Devil (and perhaps the monkeys) pleasure,—is something wonderful! I repeat,” said Mr. Traveller, beginning to smoke, “the unreasoning hardihood of it is something wonderful—even in a man with the dirt upon him an inch or two thick—behind bars—in a blanket and skewer!”

The Hermit looked at him irresolutely, and retired to his soot and cinders and lay down, and got up again and came to the bars, and again looked at him irresolutely, and finally said with sharpness: “I don’t like tobacco.”

“I don’t like dirt,” rejoined Mr. Traveller; “tobacco is an excellent disinfectant. We shall both be the better for my pipe. It is my intention to sit here through this summer day, until that blessed summer sun sinks low in the west, and to show you what a poor creature you are, through the lips of every chance wayfarer who may come in at your gate.”

“What do you mean?” inquired the Hermit, with a furious air.

“I mean that yonder is your gate, and there are you, and here am I; I mean that I know it to be a moral impossibility that any person can stray in at that gate from any point of the compass, with any sort of experience, gained at first hand, or derived from another, that can confute me and justify you.”

“You are an arrogant and boastful hero,” said the Hermit. “You think yourself profoundly wise.”

“Bah!” returned Mr. Traveller, quietly smoking. “There is little wisdom in knowing that every man must be up and doing, and that all mankind are made dependent on one another.”

“You have companions outside,” said the Hermit. “I am not to be imposed upon by your assumed confidence in the people who may enter.”

“A depraved distrust,” returned the visitor, compassionately raising his eyebrows, “of course belongs to your state, I can’t help that.”

“Do you mean to tell me you have no confederates?”

“I mean to tell you nothing but what I have told you. What I have told you is, that it is a moral impossibility that any son or daughter of Adam can stand on this ground that I put my foot on, or on any ground that mortal treads, and gainsay the healthy tenure on which we hold our existence.”

“Which is,” sneered the Hermit, “according to you—”

“Which is,” returned the other, “according to Eternal Providence, that we must arise and wash our faces and do our gregarious work and act and re-act on one another, leaving only the idiot and the palsied to sit blinking in the corner. Come!” apostrophising the gate. “Open Sesame! Show his eyes and grieve his heart! I don’t care who comes, for I know what must come of it!”

With that, he faced round a little on his billet of wood towards the gate; and Mr. Mopes, the Hermit, after two or three ridiculous bounces of indecision at his bed and back again, submitted to what he could not help himself against, and coiled himself on his window-ledge, holding to his bars and looking out rather anxiously.

CHAPTER VI—PICKING UP MISS KIMMEENS {1}

The day was by this time waning, when the gate again opened, and, with the brilliant golden light that streamed from the declining sun and touched the very bars of the sooty creature’s den, there passed in a little child; a little girl with beautiful bright hair. She wore a plain straw hat, had a door-key in her hand, and tripped towards Mr. Traveller as if she were pleased to see him and were going to repose some childish confidence in him, when she caught sight of the figure behind the bars, and started back in terror.

“Don’t be alarmed, darling!” said Mr. Traveller, taking her by the hand.

“Oh, but I don’t like it!” urged the shrinking child; “it’s dreadful.”

“Well! I don’t like it either,” said Mr. Traveller.

“Who has put it there?” asked the little girl. “Does it bite?”

“No,—only barks. But can’t you make up your mind to see it, my dear?” For she was covering her eyes.

“O no no no!” returned the child. “I cannot bear to look at it!”

Mr. Traveller turned his head towards his friend in there, as much as to ask him how he liked that instance of his success, and then took the child out at the still open gate, and stood talking to her for some half an hour in the mellow sunlight. At length he returned, encouraging her as she held his arm with both her hands; and laying his protecting hand upon her head and smoothing her pretty hair, he addressed his friend behind the bars as follows:

* * * * *

Miss Pupford’s establishment for six young ladies of tender years, is an establishment of a compact nature, an establishment in miniature, quite a pocket establishment. Miss Pupford, Miss Pupford’s assistant with the Parisian accent, Miss Pupford’s cook, and Miss Pupford’s housemaid, complete what Miss Pupford calls the educational and domestic staff of her Lilliputian College.

Miss Pupford is one of the most amiable of her sex; it necessarily follows that she possesses a sweet temper, and would own to the possession of a great deal of sentiment if she considered it quite reconcilable with her duty to parents. Deeming it not in the bond, Miss Pupford keeps it as far out of sight as she can—which (God bless her!) is not very far.

Miss Pupford's assistant with the Parisian accent, may be regarded as in some sort an inspired lady, for she never conversed with a Parisian, and was never out of England—except once in the pleasure-boat Lively, in the foreign waters that ebb and flow two miles off Margate at high water. Even under those geographically favourable circumstances for the acquisition of the French language in its utmost politeness and purity, Miss Pupford's assistant did not fully profit by the opportunity; for the pleasure-boat, Lively, so strongly asserted its title to its name on that occasion, that she was reduced to the condition of lying in the bottom of the boat pickling in brine—as if she were being salted down for the use of the Navy—undergoing at the same time great mental alarm, corporeal distress, and clear-starching derangement.

When Miss Pupford and her assistant first foregathered, is not known to men, or pupils. But, it was long ago. A belief would have established itself among pupils that the two once went to school together, were it not for the difficulty and audacity of imagining Miss Pupford born without mittens, and without a front, and without a bit of gold wire among her front teeth, and without little dabs of powder on her neat little face and nose. Indeed, whenever Miss Pupford gives a little lecture on the mythology of the misguided heathens (always carefully excluding Cupid from recognition), and tells how Minerva sprang, perfectly equipped, from the brain of Jupiter, she is half supposed to hint, "So I myself came into the world, completely up in Pinnock, Mangnall, Tables, and the use of the Globes."

Howbeit, Miss Pupford and Miss Pupford's assistant are old old friends. And it is thought by pupils that, after pupils are gone to bed, they even call one another by their christian names in the quiet little parlour. For, once upon a time on a thunderous afternoon, when Miss Pupford fainted away without notice, Miss Pupford's assistant (never heard, before or since, to address her otherwise than as Miss Pupford) ran to her, crying out, "My dearest Euphemia!" And Euphemia is Miss Pupford's christian name on the sampler (date picked out) hanging up in the College-hall, where the two peacocks, terrified to death by some German text that is waddling down-hill after them out of a cottage, are scuttling away to hide their profiles in two immense bean-stalks growing out of flower-pots.

Also, there is a notion latent among pupils, that Miss Pupford was once in love, and that the beloved object still moves upon this ball. Also, that he is a public character, and a personage of vast consequence. Also, that Miss Pupford's assistant knows all about it. For, sometimes of an afternoon when Miss Pupford has been reading the paper through her little gold eye-glass (it is necessary to read it on the spot, as the boy calls for it, with ill-conditioned punctuality, in an hour), she has become agitated, and has said to her assistant "G!" Then Miss Pupford's assistant has gone to Miss Pupford, and Miss Pupford has pointed out, with her eye-glass, G in the paper, and then Miss Pupford's assistant has read about G, and has shown sympathy. So stimulated has the pupil-mind been in its time to curiosity on the subject of G, that once, under temporary circumstances favourable to the bold sally, one fearless pupil did actually obtain possession of the paper, and range all over it in search of G, who had been discovered therein by Miss Pupford not ten minutes before. But no G could be identified, except one capital offender who had been executed in a state of great hardihood, and it was not to be supposed that Miss Pupford could ever have loved *him*. Besides, he couldn't be always being executed. Besides, he got into the paper again, alive, within a month.

On the whole, it is suspected by the pupil-mind that G is a short chubby old gentleman, with little black sealing-wax boots up to his knees, whom a sharply observant pupil, Miss Linx, when she once went to Tunbridge Wells with Miss Pupford for the holidays, reported on her return (privately and confidentially) to have seen come capering up to Miss Pupford on the Promenade, and to have detected in the act of squeezing Miss Pupford's hand, and to have heard pronounce the words, "Cruel Euphemia, ever thine!"—or something like that. Miss Linx hazarded a guess that he might be House of Commons, or Money Market, or Court Circular, or Fashionable Movements; which would account for his getting into the paper so often. But, it was fatally objected by the pupil-mind, that none of those notabilities could possibly be spelt with a G.

There are other occasions, closely watched and perfectly comprehended by the pupil-mind, when Miss Pupford imparts with mystery to her assistant that there is special excitement in the morning paper. These occasions are, when Miss Pupford finds an old pupil coming out under the head of Births, or Marriages. Affectionate tears are invariably seen in Miss Pupford's meek little eyes when this is the case; and the pupil-mind, perceiving that its order has distinguished itself—though the fact is never mentioned by Miss Pupford—becomes elevated, and feels that it likewise is reserved for greatness.

Miss Pupford's assistant with the Parisian accent has a little more bone than Miss Pupford, but is of the same trim orderly diminutive cast, and, from long contemplation, admiration, and imitation of Miss Pupford, has grown like her. Being entirely devoted to Miss Pupford, and having a pretty talent for pencil-drawing, she once made a portrait of that lady: which was so instantly identified and hailed by the pupils, that it was done on stone at five shillings. Surely the softest and milkiest stone that ever was quarried, received that likeness of Miss Pupford! The lines of her placid little nose are so undecided in it that strangers to the work of art are observed to be exceedingly perplexed as to where the nose goes to, and involuntarily feel their own noses in a disconcerted manner. Miss Pupford being represented in a state of dejection at an open window, ruminating over a bowl of gold fish, the pupil-mind has settled that the bowl was presented by G, and that he wreathed the bowl with flowers of soul, and that Miss Pupford is depicted as waiting for him on a memorable occasion when he was behind his time.

The approach of the last Midsummer holidays had a particular interest for the pupil-mind, by reason of its knowing that Miss Pupford was bidden, on the second day of those holidays, to the nuptials of a former pupil. As it was impossible to conceal the fact—so extensive were the dress-making preparations—Miss Pupford openly announced it. But, she held it due to parents to make the announcement with an air of gentle melancholy, as if marriage were (as indeed it exceptionally has been) rather a calamity. With an air of softened resignation and pity, therefore, Miss Pupford went on with her preparations: and meanwhile no pupil ever went up-stairs, or came down, without peeping in at the door of Miss Pupford's bedroom (when Miss Pupford wasn't there), and bringing back some surprising intelligence concerning the bonnet.

The extensive preparations being completed on the day before the holidays, an unanimous entreaty was preferred to Miss Pupford by the pupil-mind—finding expression through Miss Pupford's assistant—that she would deign to appear in all her splendour. Miss Pupford consenting, presented a lovely spectacle. And although the oldest pupil was barely thirteen, every one of the six became in two minutes perfect in the shape, cut, colour, price, and quality, of every article Miss Pupford wore.

Thus delightfully ushered in, the holidays began. Five of the six pupils kissed little Kitty Kimmeens twenty times over (round total, one hundred times, for she was very popular), and so went home. Miss Kitty Kimmeens remained behind, for her relations and friends were all in India, far away. A self-helpful steady little child is Miss Kitty Kimmeens: a dimpled child too, and a loving.

So, the great marriage-day came, and Miss Pupford, quite as much fluttered as any bride could be (G! thought Miss Kitty Kimmeens), went away, splendid to behold, in the carriage that was sent for her. But not Miss Pupford only went away; for Miss Pupford's assistant went away with her, on a dutiful visit to an aged uncle—though surely the venerable gentleman couldn't live in the gallery of the church where the marriage was to be, thought Miss Kitty Kimmeens—and yet Miss Pupford's assistant had let out that she was going there. Where the cook was going, didn't appear, but she generally conveyed to Miss Kimmeens that she was bound, rather against her will, on a pilgrimage to perform some pious office that rendered new ribbons necessary to her best bonnet, and also sandals to her shoes.

"So you see," said the housemaid, when they were all gone, "there's nobody left in the house but you and me, Miss Kimmeens."

"Nobody else," said Miss Kitty Kimmeens, shaking her curls a little sadly. "Nobody!"

"And you wouldn't like your Bella to go too; would you, Miss Kimmeens?" said the housemaid. (She being Bella.)

"N-no," answered little Miss Kimmeens.

"Your poor Bella is forced to stay with you, whether she likes it or not; ain't she, Miss Kimmeens?"

"*Don't* you like it?" inquired Kitty.

"Why, you're such a darling, Miss, that it would be unkind of your Bella to make objections. Yet my brother-in-law has been took unexpected bad by this morning's post. And your poor Bella is much attached to him, letting alone her favourite sister, Miss Kimmeens."

"Is he very ill?" asked little Kitty.

"Your poor Bella has her fears so, Miss Kimmeens," returned the housemaid, with her apron at her eyes. "It was but his inside, it is true, but it might mount, and the doctor said that if it mounted he wouldn't answer."

Here the housemaid was so overcome that Kitty administered the only comfort she had ready: which was a kiss.

“If it hadn’t been for disappointing Cook, dear Miss Kimmeens,” said the housemaid, “your Bella would have asked her to stay with you. For Cook is sweet company, Miss Kimmeens, much more so than your own poor Bella.”

“But you are very nice, Bella.”

“Your Bella could wish to be so, Miss Kimmeens,” returned the housemaid, “but she knows full well that it do not lay in her power this day.”

With which despondent conviction, the housemaid drew a heavy sigh, and shook her head, and dropped it on one side.

“If it had been anyways right to disappoint Cook,” she pursued, in a contemplative and abstracted manner, “it might have been so easy done! I could have got to my brother-in-law’s, and had the best part of the day there, and got back, long before our ladies come home at night, and neither the one nor the other of them need never have known it. Not that Miss Pupford would at all object, but that it might put her out, being tender-hearted. Hows’ever, your own poor Bella, Miss Kimmeens,” said the housemaid, rousing herself, “is forced to stay with you, and you’re a precious love, if not a liberty.”

“Bella,” said little Kitty, after a short silence.

“Call your own poor Bella, your Bella, dear,” the housemaid besought her.

“My Bella, then.”

“Bless your considerate heart!” said the housemaid.

“If you would not mind leaving me, I should not mind being left. I am not afraid to stay in the house alone. And you need not be uneasy on my account, for I would be very careful to do no harm.”

“O! As to harm, you more than sweetest, if not a liberty,” exclaimed the housemaid, in a rapture, “your Bella could trust you anywhere, being so steady, and so answerable. The oldest head in this house (me and Cook says), but for its bright hair, is Miss Kimmeens. But no, I will not leave you; for you would think your Bella unkind.”

“But if you are my Bella, you *must* go,” returned the child.

“Must I?” said the housemaid, rising, on the whole with alacrity. “What must be, must be, Miss Kimmeens. Your own poor Bella acts according, though unwilling. But go or stay, your own poor Bella loves you, Miss Kimmeens.”

It was certainly go, and not stay, for within five minutes Miss Kimmeens’s own poor Bella—so much improved in point of spirits as to have grown almost sanguine on the subject of her brother-in-law—went her way, in apparel that seemed to have been expressly prepared for some festive occasion. Such are the changes of this fleeting world, and so short-sighted are we poor mortals!

When the house door closed with a bang and a shake, it seemed to Miss Kimmeens to be a very heavy house door, shutting her up in a wilderness of a house. But, Miss Kimmeens being, as before stated, of a self-reliant and methodical character, presently began to parcel out the long summer-day before her.

And first she thought she would go all over the house, to make quite sure that nobody with a great-coat on and a carving-knife in it, had got under one of the beds or into one of the cupboards. Not that she had ever before been troubled by the image of anybody armed with a great-coat and a carving-knife, but that it seemed to have been shaken into existence by the shake and the bang of the great street-door, reverberating through the solitary house. So, little Miss Kimmeens looked under the five empty beds of the five departed pupils, and looked, under her own bed, and looked under Miss Pupford’s bed, and looked under Miss Pupford’s assistants bed. And when she had done this, and was making the tour of the cupboards, the disagreeable thought came into her young head, What a very alarming thing it would be to find somebody with a mask on, like Guy Fawkes, hiding bolt upright in a corner and pretending not to be alive! However, Miss Kimmeens having finished her inspection without making any such uncomfortable discovery, sat down in her tidy little manner to needlework, and began stitching away at a great rate.

The silence all about her soon grew very oppressive, and the more so because of the odd inconsistency that the more silent it was, the more noises there were. The noise of her own needle and thread as she stitched, was infinitely louder in her ears than the stitching of all the six pupils, and of Miss Pupford, and of Miss Pupford’s assistant, all stitching away at once on a highly emulative afternoon. Then, the schoolroom clock conducted itself in a way in which it had never conducted itself before—fell lame, somehow, and yet persisted in running on as hard and as loud as it could:

the consequence of which behaviour was, that it staggered among the minutes in a state of the greatest confusion, and knocked them about in all directions without appearing to get on with its regular work. Perhaps this alarmed the stairs; but be that as it might, they began to creak in a most unusual manner, and then the furniture began to crack, and then poor little Miss Kimmeens, not liking the furtive aspect of things in general, began to sing as she stitched. But, it was not her own voice that she heard—it was somebody else making believe to be Kitty, and singing excessively flat, without any heart—so as that would never mend matters, she left off again.

By-and-by the stitching became so palpable a failure that Miss Kitty Kimmeens folded her work neatly, and put it away in its box, and gave it up. Then the question arose about reading. But no; the book that was so delightful when there was somebody she loved for her eyes to fall on when they rose from the page, had not more heart in it than her own singing now. The book went to its shelf as the needlework had gone to its box, and, since something *must* be done—thought the child, "I'll go put my room to rights."

She shared her room with her dearest little friend among the other five pupils, and why then should she now conceive a lurking dread of the little friend's bedstead? But she did. There was a stealthy air about its innocent white curtains, and there were even dark hints of a dead girl lying under the coverlet. The great want of human company, the great need of a human face, began now to express itself in the facility with which the furniture put on strange exaggerated resemblances to human looks. A chair with a menacing frown was horribly out of temper in a corner; a most vicious chest of drawers snarled at her from between the windows. It was no relief to escape from those monsters to the looking-glass, for the reflection said, "What? Is that you all alone there? How you stare!" And the background was all a great void stare as well.

The day dragged on, dragging Kitty with it very slowly by the hair of her head, until it was time to eat. There were good provisions in the pantry, but their right flavour and relish had evaporated with the five pupils, and Miss Pupford, and Miss Pupford's assistant, and the cook and housemaid. Where was the use of laying the cloth symmetrically for one small guest, who had gone on ever since the morning growing smaller and smaller, while the empty house had gone on swelling larger and larger? The very Grace came out wrong, for who were "we" who were going to receive and be thankful? So, Miss Kimmeens was *not* thankful, and found herself taking her dinner in very slovenly style—gobbling it up, in short, rather after the manner of the lower animals, not to particularise the pigs.

But, this was by no means the worst of the change wrought out in the naturally loving and cheery little creature as the solitary day wore on. She began to brood and be suspicious. She discovered that she was full of wrongs and injuries. All the people she knew, got tainted by her lonely thoughts and turned bad.

It was all very well for Papa, a widower in India, to send her home to be educated, and to pay a handsome round sum every year for her to Miss Pupford, and to write charming letters to his darling little daughter; but what did he care for her being left by herself, when he was (as no doubt he always was) enjoying himself in company from morning till night? Perhaps he only sent her here, after all, to get her out of the way. It looked like it—looked like it to-day, that is, for she had never dreamed of such a thing before.

And this old pupil who was being married. It was unsupportably conceited and selfish in the old pupil to be married. She was very vain, and very glad to show off; but it was highly probable that she wasn't pretty; and even if she were pretty (which Miss Kimmeens now totally denied), she had no business to be married; and, even if marriage were conceded, she had no business to ask Miss Pupford to her wedding. As to Miss Pupford, she was too old to go to any wedding. She ought to know that. She had much better attend to her business. She had thought she looked nice in the morning, but she didn't look nice. She was a stupid old thing. G was another stupid old thing. Miss Pupford's assistant was another. They were all stupid old things together.

More than that: it began to be obvious that this was a plot. They had said to one another, "Never mind Kitty; you get off, and I'll get off; and we'll leave Kitty to look after herself. Who cares for her?" To be sure they were right in that question; for who *did* care for her, a poor little lonely thing against whom they all planned and plotted? Nobody, nobody! Here Kitty sobbed.

At all other times she was the pet of the whole house, and loved her five companions in return with a child's tenderest and most ingenuous attachment; but now, the five companions put on ugly colours, and appeared for the first time under a sullen cloud. There they were, all at their homes that day, being made much of, being taken out, being spoilt and made disagreeable, and caring nothing for her. It was like their artful selfishness always to tell her when they came back, under pretence of confidence and friendship, all those details about where they had been, and what they had done and seen, and how often they had said, "O! If we had only darling little Kitty here!" Here indeed! I dare say! When they came back after the holidays, they were used to being received by Kitty, and to saying that coming to Kitty was like coming to another home. Very well then, why did they go away? If the meant it, why did they go away? Let them answer that. But they didn't mean it, and couldn't answer that, and they didn't tell the truth, and people who didn't tell the truth were hateful. When they came back next time, they should be received in a new manner; they should be avoided and shunned.

And there, the while she sat all alone revolving how ill she was used, and how much better she was than the people who were not alone, the wedding breakfast was going on: no question of it! With a nasty great bride-cake, and with those ridiculous orange-flowers, and with that conceited bride, and that hideous bridegroom, and those heartless bridesmaids, and Miss Pupford stuck up at the table! They thought they were enjoying themselves, but it would come home to them one day to have thought so. They would all be dead in a few years, let them enjoy themselves ever so much. It was a religious comfort to know that.

It was such a comfort to know it, that little Miss Kitty Kimmeens suddenly sprang from the chair in which she had been musing in a corner, and cried out, "O those envious thoughts are not mine, O this wicked creature isn't me! Help me, somebody! I go wrong, alone by my weak self! Help me, anybody!"

* * * * *

"—Miss Kimmeens is not a professed philosopher, sir," said Mr. Traveller, presenting her at the barred window, and smoothing her shining hair, "but I apprehend there was some tincture of philosophy in her words, and in the prompt action with which she followed them. That action was, to emerge from her unnatural solitude, and look abroad for wholesome sympathy, to bestow and to receive. Her footsteps strayed to this gate, bringing her here by chance, as an apposite contrast to you. The child came out, sir. If you have the wisdom to learn from a child (but I doubt it, for that requires more wisdom than one in your condition would seem to possess), you cannot do better than imitate the child, and come out too—from that very demoralising hutch of yours.”

CHAPTER VII—PICKING UP THE TINKER

It was now sunset. The Hermit had betaken himself to his bed of cinders half an hour ago, and lying on it in his blanket and skewer with his back to the window, took not the smallest heed of the appeal addressed to him.

All that had been said for the last two hours, had been said to a tinkling accompaniment performed by the Tinker, who had got to work upon some villager's pot or kettle, and was working briskly outside. This music still continuing, seemed to put it into Mr. Traveller's mind to have another word or two with the Tinker. So, holding Miss Kimmeens (with whom he was now on the most friendly terms) by the hand, he went out at the gate to where the Tinker was seated at his work on the patch of grass on the opposite side of the road, with his wallet of tools open before him, and his little fire smoking.

"I am glad to see you employed," said Mr. Traveller.

"I am glad to *be* employed," returned the Tinker, looking up as he put the finishing touches to his job. "But why are you glad?"

"I thought you were a lazy fellow when I saw you this morning."

"I was only disgusted," said the Tinker.

"Do you mean with the fine weather?"

"With the fine weather?" repeated the Tinker, staring.

"You told me you were not particular as to weather, and I thought—"

"Ha, ha! How should such as me get on, if we *was* particular as to weather? We must take it as it comes, and make the best of it. There's something good in all weathers. If it don't happen to be good for my work to-day, it's good for some other man's to-day, and will come round to me to-morrow. We must all live."

"Pray shake hands," said Mr. Traveller.

"Take care, sir," was the Tinker's caution, as he reached up his hand in surprise; "the black comes off."

"I am glad of it," said Mr. Traveller. "I have been for several hours among other black that does not come off."

"You are speaking of Tom in there?"

"Yes."

"Well now," said the Tinker, blowing the dust off his job: which was finished. "Ain't it enough to disgust a pig, if he could give his mind to it?"

"If he could give his mind to it," returned the other, smiling, "the probability is that he wouldn't be a pig."

"There you clench the nail," returned the Tinker. "Then what's to be said for Tom?"

"Truly, very little."

"Truly nothing you mean, sir," said the Tinker, as he put away his tools.

"A better answer, and (I freely acknowledge) my meaning. I infer that he was the cause of your disgust?"

"Why, look'ee here, sir," said the Tinker, rising to his feet, and wiping his face on the corner of his black apron energetically; "I leave you to judge!—I ask you!—Last night I has a job that needs to be done in the night, and I works all night. Well, there's nothing in that. But this morning I comes along this road here, looking for a sunny and soft spot to sleep in, and I sees this desolation and ruination. I've lived myself in desolation and ruination; I knows many a fellow-creetur that's forced to live life long in desolation and ruination; and I sits me down and takes pity on it, as I casts my eyes about. Then comes up the long-winded one as I told you of, from that gate, and spins himself out like a silkworm concerning the Donkey (if my Donkey at home will excuse me) as has made it all—made it of his own choice! And tells me, if you please, of his likewise choosing to go ragged and naked, and grimy—maskerading, mountebanking, in what is the real hard lot of thousands and thousands! Why, then I say it's a unbearable and nonsensical piece of inconsistency, and I'm disgusted. I'm ashamed and disgusted!"

"I wish you would come and look at him," said Mr. Traveller, clapping the Tinker on the shoulder.

"Not I, sir," he rejoined. "I ain't a going to flatter him up by looking at him!"

"But he is asleep."

"Are you sure he is asleep?" asked the Tinker, with an unwilling air, as he shouldered his wallet.

"Sure."

"Then I'll look at him for a quarter of a minute," said the Tinker, "since you so much wish it; but not a moment longer."

They all three went back across the road; and, through the barred window, by the dying glow of the sunset coming in at the gate—which the child held open for its admission—he could be pretty clearly discerned lying on his bed.

"You see him?" asked Mr. Traveller.

"Yes," returned the Tinker, "and he's worse than I thought him."

Mr. Traveller then whispered in few words what he had done since morning; and asked the Tinker what he thought of that?

"I think," returned the Tinker, as he turned from the window, "that you've wasted a day on him."

"I think so too; though not, I hope, upon myself. Do you happen to be going anywhere near the Peal of Bells?"

"That's my direct way, sir," said the Tinker.

"I invite you to supper there. And as I learn from this young lady that she goes some three-quarters of a mile in the same direction, we will drop her on the road, and we will spare time to keep her company at her garden gate until her own Bella comes home."

So, Mr. Traveller, and the child, and the Tinker, went along very amicably in the sweet-scented evening; and the moral with which the Tinker dismissed the subject was, that he said in his trade that metal that rotted for want of use, had better be left to rot, and couldn't rot too soon, considering how much true metal rotted from over-use and hard service.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Dickens didn’t write chapters 2 to 5 and they are omitted in this edition.

THE END OF
Tom Tiddler's Ground

THE TRIAL OF WILLIAM TINKLING

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF
AT THE AGE OF 8 YEARS

BY

CHARLES DICKENS

LONDON: CONSTABLE AND CO. LTD.

FOREWORD

The story contained herein was written by Charles Dickens in 1867. It is the first of four stories entitled "Holiday Romance" and was published originally in a children's magazine in America. It purports to be written by a child aged eight. It was republished in England in "All the Year Round" in 1868. For this and four other Christmas pieces Dickens received £1,000.

"Holiday Romance" was published in book form by Messrs Chapman & Hall in 1874, with "Edwin Drood" and other stories.

For this reprint the text of the story as it appeared in "All the Year Round" has been followed.

THE TRIAL OF WILLIAM TINKLING

This beginning-part is not made out of anybody's head, you know. It's real. You must believe this beginning-part more than what comes after, else you won't understand how what comes after came to be written. You must believe it all, but you must believe this most, please. I am the Editor of it. Bob Redforth (he's my cousin, and shaking the table on purpose) wanted to be the Editor of it, but I said he shouldn't because he couldn't. *He* has no idea of being an editor.

Nettie Ashford is my Bride. We were married in the right-hand closet in the corner of the dancing-school where first we met, with a ring (a green one) from Wilkingwater's toy-shop. *I* owed for it out of my pocket-money. When the rapturous ceremony was over, we all four went up the lane and let off a cannon (brought loaded in Bob Redforth's waistcoat-pocket) to announce our nuptials. It flew right up when it went off, and turned over. Next day, Lieutenant-Colonel Robin Redforth was united, with similar ceremonies, to Alice Rainbird. This time the cannon bust with a most terrific explosion, and made a puppy bark.

My peerless Bride was, at the period of which we now treat, in captivity at Miss Grimmer's. Drowvey and Grimmer is the partnership, and opinion is divided which is the greatest Beast. The lovely bride of the Colonel was also immured in the Dungeons of the same establishment. A vow was entered into between the Colonel and myself that we would cut them out on the following Wednesday, when walking two and two.

Under the desperate circumstances of the case, the active brain of the Colonel, combining with his lawless pursuit (he is a Pirate), suggested an attack with fireworks. This however, from motives of humanity, was abandoned as too expensive.

Lightly armed with a paper-knife buttoned up under his jacket, and waving the dreaded black flag at the end of a cane, the Colonel took command of me at 2 P.M. on the eventful and appointed day. He had drawn out the plan of attack on a piece of paper which was rolled up round a hoop-stick. He showed it to me. My position and my full-length portrait (but my real ears don't stick out horizontal) was behind a corner-lamp-post, with written orders to remain there till I should see Miss Drowvey fall. The

Drowvey who was to fall was the one in spectacles, not the one with the large lavender bonnet. At that signal I was to rush forth, seize my Bride, and fight my way to the lane. There, a junction would be effected between myself and the Colonel; and putting our Brides behind us, between ourselves and the palings, we were to conquer or die.

The enemy appeared—approached. Waving his black flag, the Colonel attacked. Confusion ensued. Anxiously I awaited my signal, but my signal came not. So far from falling, the hated Drowvey in spectacles appeared to me to have muffled the Colonel's head in his outlawed banner, and to be pitching into him with a parasol. The one in the lavender bonnet also performed prodigies of valour with her fists on his back. Seeing that all was for the moment lost, I fought my desperate way hand to hand to the lane. Through taking the back road, I was so fortunate as to meet nobody, and arrived there uninterrupted.

It seemed an age, ere the Colonel joined me. He had been to the jobbing-tailor's to be sewn up in several places, and attributed our defeat to the refusal of the detested Drowvey to fall. Finding her so obstinate he had said to her in a loud voice, "Die, recreant!" but had found her no more open to reason on that point than the other.

My blooming Bride appeared, accompanied by the Colonel's Bride, at the Dancing-School next day. What? Was her face averted from me? Hah! Even so. With a look of scorn she put into my hand a bit of paper, and took another partner. On the paper was pencilled, "Heavens! Can I write the word! Is my husband a Cow?"

In the first bewilderment of my heated brain I tried to think what slanderer could have traced my family to the ignoble animal mentioned above. Vain were my endeavours. At the end of that dance I whispered the Colonel to come into the cloak-room, and I showed him the note.

"There is a syllable wanting," said he, with a gloomy brow.

"Hah! What syllable?" was my inquiry.

"She asks, Can she write the word? And no; you see she couldn't," said the Colonel, pointing out the passage.

"And the word was?" said I.

"Cow—cow—coward," hissed the Pirate-Colonel in my ear, and gave me back the note.

Feeling that I must for ever tread the earth a branded boy—person I mean—or that I must clear up my honour, I demanded to be tried by a

Court-Martial. The Colonel admitted my right to be tried. Some difficulty was found in composing the court, on account of the Emperor of France's aunt refusing to let him come out. He was to be the President. 'Ere yet we had appointed a substitute, he made his escape over the back wall, and stood among us, a free monarch.

The court was held on the grass by the pond. I recognised in a certain Admiral among my judges my deadliest foe. A cocoa-nut had given rise to language that I could not brook. But confiding in my innocence, and also in the knowledge that the President of the United States (who sat next him) owed me a knife, I braced myself for the ordeal.

It was a solemn spectacle, that court. Two executioners with pinafores reversed, led me in. Under the shade of an umbrella, I perceived my Bride, supported by the Bride of the Pirate-Colonel. The President (having reproved a little female ensign for tittering, on a matter of Life or Death) called upon me to plead, "Coward or no Coward, Guilty or not Guilty?" I pleaded in a firm tone, "No Coward and Not Guilty." (The little female ensign being again reproved by the President for misconduct, mutinied, left the court, and threw stones.)

My implacable enemy, the Admiral, conducted the case against me. The Colonel's Bride was called to prove that I had remained behind the corner-lamp-post during the engagement. I might have been spared the anguish of my own Bride's being also made a witness to the same point, but the Admiral knew where to wound me. Be still my soul, no matter. The Colonel was then brought forward with his evidence.

It was for this point that I had saved myself up, as the turning-point of my case. Shaking myself free of my guards—who had no business to hold me, the stupids! unless I was found guilty—I asked the Colonel what he considered the first duty of a soldier? 'Ere he could reply, the President of the United States rose and informed the court that my foe the Admiral had suggested "Bravery," and that prompting a witness wasn't fair. The President of the Court immediately ordered the Admiral's mouth to be filled with leaves, and tied up with string. I had the satisfaction of seeing the sentence carried into effect, before the proceedings went further.

I then took a paper from my trousers-pocket, and asked: "What do you consider, Colonel Redforth, the first duty of a soldier? Is it obedience?"

"It is," said the Colonel.

"Is that paper—please to look at it—in your hand?"

"It is," said the Colonel.

"Is it a military sketch?"

"It is," said the Colonel.

"Of an engagement?"

"Quite so," said the Colonel.

"Of the late engagement?"

"Of the late engagement."

"Please to describe it, and then hand it to the President of the Court."

From that triumphant moment my sufferings and my dangers were at an end. The court rose up and jumped, on discovering that I had strictly obeyed orders. My foe, the Admiral, who though muzzled was malignant yet, contrived to suggest that I was dishonoured by having quitted the field. But the Colonel himself had done as much, and gave his opinion, upon his word and honour as a Pirate, that when all was lost the field might be quitted without disgrace. I was going to be found "No Coward and Not Guilty," and my blooming Bride was going to be publicly restored to my arms in a procession, when an unlooked-for event disturbed the general rejoicing. This was no other than the Emperor of France's aunt catching hold of his hair. The proceedings abruptly terminated, and the court tumultuously dissolved.

It was when the shades of the next evening but one were beginning to fall, 'ere yet the silver beams of Luna touched the earth, that four forms might have been descried slowly advancing towards the weeping willow on the borders of the pond, the now deserted scene of the day before yesterday's agonies and triumphs. On a nearer approach, and by a practised eye, these might have been identified as the forms of the Pirate-Colonel with his Bride, and of the day before yesterday's gallant prisoner with *his* Bride.

On the beauteous faces of the Nymphs, dejection sat enthroned. All four reclined under the willow for some minutes without speaking, till at length the bride of the Colonel poutingly observed, "It's of no use pretending any more, and we had better give it up."

"Hah!" exclaimed the Pirate. "Pretending?"

"Don't go on like that; you worry me," returned his Bride.

The lovely Bride of Tinkling echoed the incredible declaration. The two warriors exchanged stoney glances.

"If," said the Bride of the Pirate-Colonel, "grown-up people WON'T do what they ought to do, and WILL put us out, what comes of our pretending?"

"We only get into scrapes," said the Bride of Tinkling.

"You know very well," pursued the Colonel's Bride, "that Miss Drowvey wouldn't fall. You complained of it yourself. And you know how disgracefully the court-martial ended. As to our marriage; would my people acknowledge it at home?"

"Or would my people acknowledge ours?" said the Bride of Tinkling.

Again the two warriors exchanged stoney glances.

"If you knocked at the door and claimed me, after you were told to go away," said the Colonel's Bride, "you would only have your hair pulled, or your ears, or your nose."

"If you persisted in ringing at the bell and claiming Me," said the Bride of Tinkling to that gentleman, "you would have things dropped on your head from the window over the handle, or you would be played upon by the garden-engine."

"And at your own homes," resumed the Bride of the Colonel, "it would be just as bad. You would be sent to bed, or something equally undignified. Again: how would you support us?"

The Pirate-Colonel replied, in a courageous voice, "By rapine!" But his Bride retorted, suppose the grown-up people wouldn't be rapined? Then, said the Colonel, they should pay the penalty in Blood. But suppose they should object, retorted his bride, and wouldn't pay the penalty in Blood or anything else?

A mournful silence ensued.

"Then do you no longer love me, Alice?" asked the Colonel.

"Redforth! I am ever thine," returned his Bride.

"Then do you no longer love me, Nettie?" asked the present writer.

"Tinkling! I am ever thine," returned my Bride.

We all four embraced. Let me not be misunderstood by the giddy. The Colonel embraced his own Bride, and I embraced mine. But two times two make four.

"Nettie and I," said Alice, mournfully, "have been considering our position. The grown-up people are too strong for us. They make us ridiculous. Besides, they have changed the times. William Tinkling's baby-brother was christened yesterday. What took place? Was any king present? Answer, William."

I said No, unless disguised as great-uncle Chopper.

"Any queen?"

There had been no queen that I knew of at our house. There might have been one in the kitchen; but I didn't think so, or the servants would have mentioned it.

"Any fairies?"

None that were visible.

"We had an idea among us, I think," said Alice, with a melancholy smile, "we four, that Miss Grimmer would prove to be the wicked fairy, and would come in at the christening with her crutch-stick, and give the child a bad gift? Was there anything of that sort? Answer, William."

I said that Ma had said afterwards (and so she had), that great-uncle Chopper's gift was a shabby one; but she hadn't said a bad one. She had called it shabby, electrotyped, second-hand, and below his income.

"It must be the grown-up people who have changed all this," said Alice. "*We* couldn't have changed it, if we had been so inclined, and we never should have been. Or perhaps Miss Grimmer *is* a wicked fairy, after all, and won't act up to it, because the grown-up people have persuaded her not to. Either way, they would make us ridiculous if we told them what we expected."

"Tyrants!" muttered the Pirate-Colonel.

"Nay, my Redforth," said Alice, "say not so. Call not names, my Redforth, or they will apply to Pa."

"Let 'em," said the Colonel. "I don't care. Who's he?"

Tinkling here undertook the perilous task of remonstrating with his lawless friend, who consented to withdraw the moody expressions above quoted.

"What remains for us to do?" Alice went on in her mild wise way. "We must educate, we must pretend in a new manner, we must wait."

The Colonel clenched his teeth—four out in front, and a piece off another, and he had been twice dragged to the door of a dentist-despot, but had escaped from his guards. "How educate? How pretend in a new manner? How wait?"

"Educate the grown-up people," replied Alice. "We part to-night. Yes, Redforth,"—for the Colonel tucked up his cuffs,—"part to-night! Let us in these next Holidays, now going to begin, throw our thoughts into something educational for the grown-up people, hinting to them how things ought to be. Let us veil our meaning under a mask of romance;[A] you, I, and Nettie. William Tinkling being the plainest and quickest writer, shall copy out. Is it agreed?"

The Colonel answered, sulkily, "I don't mind." He then asked, "How about pretending?"

"We will pretend," said Alice, "that we are children; not that we are those grown-up people who won't help us out as they ought, and who understand us so badly."

The Colonel, still much dissatisfied, growled, "How about waiting?"

"We will wait," answered little Alice, taking Nettie's hand in hers, and looking up to the sky, "we will wait—ever constant and true—till the times have got so changed as that everything helps us out, and nothing makes us ridiculous, and the fairies have come back. We will wait—ever constant and true—till we are eighty, ninety, or one hundred. And then the fairies will send *us* children, and we will help them out, poor pretty little creatures, if they pretend ever so much."

"So we will, dear," said Nettie Ashford, taking her round the waist with both arms and kissing her. "And now if my Husband will go and buy some cherries for us, I have got some money."

In the friendliest manner I invited the Colonel to go with me; but he so far forgot himself as to acknowledge the invitation by kicking out behind, and then lying down on his stomach on the grass, pulling it up and chewing it. When I came back, however, Alice had nearly brought him out of his vexation, and was soothing him by telling him how soon we should all be ninety.

As we sat under the willow-tree and ate the cherries (fair, for Alice shared them out), we played at being ninety. Nettie complained that she had a bone in her old back and it made her hobble, and Alice sang a song in an old woman's way, but it was very pretty, and we were all merry. At least I don't know about merry exactly, but all comfortable.

There was a most tremendous lot of cherries and Alice always had with her some neat little bag or box or case, to hold things. In it, that night, was a tiny wine-glass. So Alice and Nettie said they would make some cherry-wine to drink our love at parting.

Each of us had a glassful, and it was delicious, and each of us drank the toast, "Our love at parting." The Colonel drank his wine last, and it got into my head directly that it got into his directly. Anyhow his eyes rolled immediately after he had turned the glass upside down, and he took me on one side and proposed in a hoarse whisper that we should "Cut 'em out still."

"How did he mean?" I asked my lawless friend.

"Cut our Brides out," said the Colonel, "and then cut our way, without going down a single turning, Bang to the Spanish Main!"

We might have tried it, though I didn't think it would answer; only we looked round and saw that there was nothing but moonlight under the willow-tree, and that our pretty, pretty wives were gone. We burst out crying. The Colonel gave in second, and came to first; but he gave in strong.

We were ashamed of our red eyes, and hung about for half an hour to whiten them. Likewise a piece of chalk round the rims, I doing the Colonel's, and he mine, but afterwards found in the bedroom looking-glass not natural, besides inflammation. Our conversation turned on being ninety. The Colonel told me he had a pair of boots that wanted soleing and heeling but he thought it hardly worth while to mention it to his father, as he himself should so soon be ninety, when he thought shoes would be more convenient. The Colonel also told me with his hand upon his hip that he felt himself already getting on in life, and turning rheumatic. And I told him the same. And when they said at our house at supper (they are always bothering about something) that I stooped, I felt so glad!

This is the end of the beginning-part that you were to believe most.

THE END

[A] The titles of the romances by which Alice Rainbird, Nettie Ashford and the Pirate-Colonel sought to veil their meanings will be found on page 31.

THE END OF
The Trial of William Tinkling

THE UNCOMMERCIAL TRAVELLER

CHAPTER I—HIS GENERAL LINE OF BUSINESS

Allow me to introduce myself—first negatively.

No landlord is my friend and brother, no chambermaid loves me, no waiter worships me, no boots admires and envies me. No round of beef or tongue or ham is expressly cooked for me, no pigeon-pie is especially made for me, no hotel-advertisement is personally addressed to me, no hotel-room tapestried with great-coats and railway wrappers is set apart for me, no house of public entertainment in the United Kingdom greatly cares for my opinion of its brandy or sherry. When I go upon my journeys, I am not usually rated at a low figure in the bill; when I come home from my journeys, I never get any commission. I know nothing about prices, and should have no idea, if I were put to it, how to wheedle a man into ordering something he doesn't want. As a town traveller, I am never to be seen driving a vehicle externally like a young and volatile pianoforte van, and internally like an oven in which a number of flat boxes are baking in layers. As a country traveller, I am rarely to be found in a gig, and am never to be encountered by a pleasure train, waiting on the platform of a branch station, quite a Druid in the midst of a light Stonehenge of samples.

And yet—proceeding now, to introduce myself positively—I am both a town traveller and a country traveller, and am always on the road. Figuratively speaking, I travel for the great house of Human Interest Brothers, and have rather a large connection in the fancy goods way. Literally speaking, I am always wandering here and there from my rooms in Covent-garden, London—now about the city streets: now, about the country by-roads—seeing many little things, and some great things, which, because they interest me, I think may interest others.

These are my chief credentials as the Uncommercial Traveller.

CHAPTER II—THE SHIPWRECK

Never had I seen a year going out, or going on, under quieter circumstances. Eighteen hundred and fifty-nine had but another day to live, and truly its end was Peace on that sea-shore that morning.

So settled and orderly was everything seaward, in the bright light of the sun and under the transparent shadows of the clouds, that it was hard to imagine the bay otherwise, for years past or to come, than it was that very day. The Tug-steamer lying a little off the shore, the Lighter lying still nearer to the shore, the boat alongside the Lighter, the regularly-turning windlass aboard the Lighter, the methodical figures at work, all slowly and regularly heaving up and down with the breathing of the sea, all seemed as much a part of the nature of the place as the tide itself. The tide was on the flow, and had been for some two hours and a half; there was a slight obstruction in the sea within a few yards of my feet: as if the stump of a tree, with earth enough about it to keep it from lying horizontally on the water, had slipped a little from the land—and as I stood upon the beach and observed it dimpling the light swell that was coming in, I cast a stone over it.

So orderly, so quiet, so regular—the rising and falling of the Tug-steamer, the Lighter, and the boat—the turning of the windlass—the coming in of the tide—that I myself seemed, to my own thinking, anything but new to the spot. Yet, I had never seen it in my life, a minute before, and had traversed two hundred miles to get at it. That very morning I had come bowling down, and struggling up, hill-country roads; looking back at snowy summits; meeting courteous peasants well to do, driving fat pigs and cattle to market: noting the neat and thrifty dwellings, with their unusual quantity of clean white linen, drying on the bushes; having windy weather suggested by every cotter’s little rick, with its thatch straw-ridged and extra straw-ridged into overlapping compartments like the back of a rhinoceros. Had I not given a lift of fourteen miles to the Coast-guardsman (kit and all), who was coming to his spell of duty there, and had we not just now parted company? So it was; but the journey seemed to glide down into the placid sea, with other chafe and trouble, and for the moment nothing was so calmly and monotonously real under the sunlight as the gentle rising and falling of the water with its freight, the regular turning of the windlass aboard the Lighter, and the slight obstruction so very near my feet.

O reader, haply turning this page by the fireside at Home, and hearing the night wind rumble in the chimney, that slight obstruction was the uppermost fragment of the Wreck of the Royal Charter, Australian trader and passenger ship, Homeward bound, that struck here on the terrible morning of the twenty-sixth of this October, broke into three parts, went down with her treasure of at least five hundred human lives, and has never stirred since!

From which point, or from which, she drove ashore, stern foremost; on which side, or on which, she passed the little Island in the bay, for ages henceforth to be aground certain yards outside her; these are rendered bootless questions by the darkness of that night and the darkness of death. Here she went down.

Even as I stood on the beach with the words ‘Here she went down!’ in my ears, a diver in his grotesque dress, dipped heavily over the side of the boat alongside the Lighter, and dropped to the bottom. On the shore by the water’s edge, was a rough tent, made of fragments of wreck, where other divers and workmen sheltered themselves, and where they had kept Christmas-day with rum and roast beef, to the destruction of their frail chimney. Cast up among the stones and boulders of the beach, were great spars of the lost vessel, and masses of iron twisted by the fury of the sea into the strangest forms. The timber was already bleached and iron rusted, and even these objects did no violence to the prevailing air the whole scene wore, of having been exactly the same for years and years.

Yet, only two short months had gone, since a man, living on the nearest hill-top overlooking the sea, being blown out of bed at about daybreak by the wind that had begun to strip his roof off, and getting upon a ladder with his nearest neighbour to construct some temporary device for keeping his house over his head, saw from the ladder’s elevation as he looked down by chance towards the shore, some dark troubled object close in with the land. And he and the other, descending to the beach, and finding the sea mercilessly beating over a great broken ship, had clambered up the stony ways, like staircases without stairs, on which the wild village hangs in little clusters, as fruit hangs on boughs, and had given the alarm. And so, over the hill-slopes, and past the waterfall, and down the gullies where the land drains off into the ocean, the scattered quarrymen and fishermen inhabiting that part of Wales had come running to the dismal sight—their clergyman among them. And as they stood in the leaden morning, stricken with pity, leaning hard against the wind, their breath and vision often failing as the sleet and spray rushed at them from the ever forming and dissolving mountains of sea, and as the wool which was a part of the vessel's cargo blew in with the salt foam and remained upon the land when the foam melted, they saw the ship's life-boat put off from one of the heaps of wreck; and first, there were three men in her, and in a moment she capsized, and there were but two; and again, she was struck by a vast mass of water, and there was but one; and again, she was thrown bottom upward, and that one, with his arm struck through the broken planks and waving as if for the help that could never reach him, went down into the deep.

It was the clergyman himself from whom I heard this, while I stood on the shore, looking in his kind wholesome face as it turned to the spot where the boat had been. The divers were down then, and busy. They were 'lifting' to-day the gold found yesterday—some five-and-twenty thousand pounds. Of three hundred and fifty thousand pounds' worth of gold, three hundred thousand pounds' worth, in round numbers, was at that time recovered. The great bulk of the remainder was surely and steadily coming up. Some loss of sovereigns there would be, of course; indeed, at first sovereigns had drifted in with the sand, and been scattered far and wide over the beach, like sea-shells; but most other golden treasure would be found. As it was brought up, it went aboard the Tug-steamer, where good account was taken of it. So tremendous had the force of the sea been when it broke the ship, that it had beaten one great ingot of gold, deep into a strong and heavy piece of her solid iron-work: in which, also, several loose sovereigns that the ingot had swept in before it, had been found, as firmly embedded as though the iron had been liquid when they were forced there. It had been remarked of such bodies come ashore, too, as had been seen by scientific men, that they had been stunned to death, and not suffocated. Observation, both of the internal change that had been wrought in them, and of their external expression, showed death to have been thus merciful and easy. The report was brought, while I was holding such discourse on the beach, that no more bodies had come ashore since last night. It began to be very doubtful whether many more would be thrown up, until the north-east winds of the early spring set in. Moreover, a great number of the passengers, and particularly the second-class women-passengers, were known to have been in the middle of the ship when she parted, and thus the collapsing wreck would have fallen upon them after yawning open, and would keep them down. A diver made known, even then, that he had come upon the body of a man, and had sought to release it from a great superincumbent weight; but that, finding he could not do so without mutilating the remains, he had left it where it was.

It was the kind and wholesome face I have made mention of as being then beside me, that I had purposed to myself to see, when I left home for Wales. I had heard of that clergyman, as having buried many scores of the shipwrecked people; of his having opened his house and heart to their agonised friends; of his having used a most sweet and patient diligence for weeks and weeks, in the performance of the forlornest offices that Man can render to his kind; of his having most tenderly and thoroughly devoted himself to the dead, and to those who were sorrowing for the dead. I had said to myself, ‘In the Christmas season of the year, I should like to see that man!’ And he had swung the gate of his little garden in coming out to meet me, not half an hour ago.

So cheerful of spirit and guiltless of affectation, as true practical Christianity ever is! I read more of the New Testament in the fresh frank face going up the village beside me, in five minutes, than I have read in anathematising discourses (albeit put to press with enormous flourishing of trumpets), in all my life. I heard more of the Sacred Book in the cordial voice that had nothing to say about its owner, than in all the would-be celestial pairs of bellows that have ever blown conceit at me.

We climbed towards the little church, at a cheery pace, among the loose stones, the deep mud, the wet coarse grass, the outlying water, and other obstructions from which frost and snow had lately thawed. It was a mistake (my friend was glad to tell me, on the way) to suppose that the peasantry had shown any superstitious avoidance of the drowned; on the whole, they had done very well, and had assisted readily. Ten shillings had been paid for the bringing of each body up to the church, but the way was steep, and a horse and cart (in which it was wrapped in a sheet) were necessary, and three or four men, and, all things considered, it was not a great price. The people were none the richer for the wreck, for it was the season of the herring-shoal—and who could cast nets for fish, and find dead men and women in the draught?

He had the church keys in his hand, and opened the churchyard gate, and opened the church door; and we went in.

It is a little church of great antiquity; there is reason to believe that some church has occupied the spot, these thousand years or more. The pulpit was gone, and other things usually belonging to the church were gone, owing to its living congregation having deserted it for the neighbouring school-room, and yielded it up to the dead. The very Commandments had been shouldered out of their places, in the bringing in of the dead; the black wooden tables on which they were painted, were askew, and on the stone pavement below them, and on the stone pavement all over the church, were the marks and stains where the drowned had been laid down. The eye, with little or no aid from the imagination, could yet see how the bodies had been turned, and where the head had been and where the feet. Some faded traces of the wreck of the Australian ship may be discernible on the stone pavement of this little church, hundreds of years hence, when the digging for gold in Australia shall have long and long ceased out of the land.

Forty-four shipwrecked men and women lay here at one time, awaiting burial. Here, with weeping and wailing in every room of his house, my companion worked alone for hours, solemnly surrounded by eyes that could not see him, and by lips that could not speak to him, patiently examining the tattered clothing, cutting off buttons, hair, marks from linen, anything that might lead to subsequent identification, studying faces, looking for a scar, a bent finger, a crooked toe, comparing letters sent to him with the ruin about him. 'My dearest brother had bright grey eyes and a pleasant smile,' one sister wrote. O poor sister! well for you to be far from here, and keep that as your last remembrance of him!

The ladies of the clergyman's family, his wife and two sisters-in-law, came in among the bodies often. It grew to be the business of their lives to do so. Any new arrival of a bereaved woman would stimulate their pity to compare the description brought, with the dread realities. Sometimes, they would go back able to say, 'I have found him,' or, 'I think she lies there.' Perhaps, the mourner, unable to bear the sight of all that lay in the church, would be led in blindfold. Conducted to the spot with many compassionate words, and encouraged to look, she would say, with a piercing cry, 'This is my boy!' and drop insensible on the insensible figure.

He soon observed that in some cases of women, the identification of persons, though complete, was quite at variance with the marks upon the linen; this led him to notice that even the marks upon the linen were sometimes inconsistent with one another; and thus he came to understand that they had dressed in great haste and agitation, and that their clothes had become mixed together. The identification of men by their dress, was rendered extremely difficult, in consequence of a large proportion of them being dressed alike—in clothes of one kind, that is to say, supplied by slopsellers and outfitters, and not made by single garments but by hundreds. Many of the men were bringing over parrots, and had receipts upon them for the price of the birds; others had bills of exchange in their pockets, or in belts. Some of these documents, carefully unwrinkled and dried, were little less fresh in appearance that day, than the present page will be under ordinary circumstances, after having been opened three or four times.

In that lonely place, it had not been easy to obtain even such common commodities in towns, as ordinary disinfectants. Pitch had been burnt in the church, as the readiest thing at hand, and the frying-pan in which it had bubbled over a brazier of coals was still there, with its ashes. Hard by the Communion-Table, were some boots that had been taken off the drowned and preserved—a gold-digger's boot, cut down the leg for its removal—a trodden-down man's ankle-boot with a buff cloth top—and others—soaked and sandy, weedy and salt.

From the church, we passed out into the churchyard. Here, there lay, at that time, one hundred and forty-five bodies, that had come ashore from the wreck. He had buried them, when not identified, in graves containing four each. He had numbered each body in a register describing it, and had placed a corresponding number on each coffin, and over each grave. Identified bodies he had buried singly, in private graves, in another part of the church-yard. Several bodies had been exhumed from the graves of four, as relatives had come from a distance and seen his register; and, when recognised, these have been reburied in private graves, so that the mourners might erect separate headstones over the remains. In all such cases he had performed the funeral service a second time, and the ladies of his house had attended. There had been no offence in the poor ashes when they were brought again to the light of day; the beneficent Earth had already absorbed it. The drowned were buried in their clothes. To supply the great sudden demand for coffins, he had got all the neighbouring people handy at tools, to work the livelong day, and Sunday likewise. The coffins were neatly formed;—I had seen two, waiting for occupants, under the lee of the ruined walls of a stone hut on the beach, within call of the tent where the Christmas Feast was held. Similarly, one of the graves for four was lying open and ready, here, in the churchyard. So much of the scanty space was already devoted to the wrecked people, that the villagers had begun to express uneasy doubts whether they themselves could lie in their own ground, with their forefathers and descendants, by-and-by. The churchyard being but a step from the clergyman's dwelling-house, we crossed to the latter; the white surplice was hanging up near the door ready to be put on at any time, for a funeral service.

The cheerful earnestness of this good Christian minister was as consolatory, as the circumstances out of which it shone were sad. I never have seen anything more delightfully genuine than the calm dismissal by himself and his household of all they had undergone, as a simple duty that was quietly done and ended. In speaking of it, they spoke of it with great compassion for the bereaved; but laid no stress upon their own hard share in those weary weeks, except as it had attached many people to them as friends, and elicited many touching expressions of gratitude. This clergyman's brother—himself the clergyman of two adjoining parishes, who had buried thirty-four of the bodies in his own churchyard, and who had done to them all that his brother had done as to the larger number—must be understood as included in the family. He was there, with his neatly arranged papers, and made no more account of his trouble than anybody else did. Down to yesterday's post outward, my clergyman alone had written one thousand and seventy-five letters to relatives and friends of the lost people. In the absence of self-assertion, it was only through my now and then delicately putting a question as the occasion arose, that I became informed of these things. It was only when I had remarked again and again, in the church, on the awful nature of the scene of death he had been required so closely to familiarise himself with for the soothing of the living, that he had casually said, without the least abatement of his cheerfulness, 'indeed, it had rendered him unable for a time to eat or drink more than a little coffee now and then, and a piece of bread.'

In this noble modesty, in this beautiful simplicity, in this serene avoidance of the least attempt to 'improve' an occasion which might be supposed to have sunk of its own weight into my heart, I seemed to have happily come, in a few steps, from the churchyard with its open grave, which was the type of Death, to the Christian dwelling side by side with it, which was the type of Resurrection. I never shall think of the former, without the latter. The two will always rest side by side in my memory. If I had lost any one dear to me in this unfortunate ship, if I had made a voyage from Australia to look at the grave in the churchyard, I should go away, thankful to GOD that that house was so close to it, and that its shadow by day and its domestic lights by night fell upon the earth in which its Master had so tenderly laid my dear one's head.

The references that naturally arose out of our conversation, to the descriptions sent down of shipwrecked persons, and to the gratitude of relations and friends, made me very anxious to see some of those letters. I was presently seated before a shipwreck of papers, all bordered with black, and from them I made the following few extracts.

A mother writes:

REVEREND SIR. Amongst the many who perished on your shore was numbered my beloved son. I was only just recovering from a severe illness, and this fearful affliction has caused a relapse, so that I am unable at present to go to identify the remains of the loved and lost. My darling son would have been sixteen on Christmas-day next. He was a most amiable and obedient child, early taught the way of salvation. We fondly hoped that as a British seaman he might be an ornament to his profession, but, 'it is well;' I feel assured my dear boy is now with the redeemed. Oh, he did not wish to go this last voyage! On the fifteenth of October, I received a letter from him from Melbourne, date August twelfth; he wrote in high spirits, and in conclusion he says: 'Pray for a fair breeze, dear mamma, and I'll not forget to whistle for it! and, God permitting, I shall see you and all my little pets again. Good-bye, dear mother—good-bye, dearest parents. Good-bye, dear brother.' Oh, it was indeed an eternal farewell. I do not apologise for thus writing you, for oh, my heart is so very sorrowful.

A husband writes:

MY DEAR KIND SIR. Will you kindly inform me whether there are any initials upon the ring and guard you have in possession, found, as the Standard says, last Tuesday? Believe me, my dear sir, when I say that I cannot express my deep gratitude in words sufficiently for your kindness to me on that fearful and appalling day. Will you tell me what I can do for you, and will you write me a consoling letter to prevent my mind from going astray?

A widow writes:

Left in such a state as I am, my friends and I thought it best that my dear husband should be buried where he lies, and, much as I should have liked to have had it otherwise, I must submit. I feel, from all I have heard of you, that you will see it done decently and in order. Little does it signify to us, when the soul has departed, where this poor body lies, but we who are left behind would do all we can to show how we loved them. This is denied me, but it is God's hand that afflicts us, and I try to submit. Some day I may be able to visit the spot, and see where he lies, and erect a simple stone to his memory. Oh! it will be long, long before I forget that dreadful night! Is there such a thing in the vicinity, or any shop in Bangor, to which I could send for a small picture of Moelfra or Llanallgo church, a spot now sacred to me?

Another widow writes:

I have received your letter this morning, and do thank you most kindly for the interest you have taken about my dear husband, as well for the sentiments yours contains, evincing the spirit of a Christian who can sympathise with those who, like myself, are broken down with grief.

May God bless and sustain you, and all in connection with you, in this great trial. Time may roll on and bear all its sons away, but your name as a disinterested person will stand in history, and, as successive years pass, many a widow will think of your noble conduct, and the tears of gratitude flow down many a cheek, the tribute of a thankful heart, when other things are forgotten for ever.

A father writes:

I am at a loss to find words to sufficiently express my gratitude to you for your kindness to my son Richard upon the melancholy occasion of his visit to his dear brother's body, and also for your ready attention in pronouncing our beautiful burial service over my poor unfortunate son's remains. God grant that your prayers over him may reach the Mercy Seat, and that his soul may be received (through Christ's intercession) into heaven!

His dear mother begs me to convey to you her heartfelt thanks.

Those who were received at the clergyman's house, write thus, after leaving it:

DEAR AND NEVER-TO-BE-FORGOTTEN FRIENDS. I arrived here yesterday morning without accident, and am about to proceed to my home by railway.

I am overpowered when I think of you and your hospitable home. No words could speak language suited to my heart. I refrain. God reward you with the same measure you have meted with!

I enumerate no names, but embrace you all.

MY BELOVED FRIENDS. This is the first day that I have been able to leave my bedroom since I returned, which will explain the reason of my not writing sooner.

If I could only have had my last melancholy hope realised in recovering the body of my beloved and lamented son, I should have returned home somewhat comforted, and I think I could then have been comparatively resigned.

I fear now there is but little prospect, and I mourn as one without hope.

The only consolation to my distressed mind is in having been so feelingly allowed by you to leave the matter in your hands, by whom I well know that everything will be done that can be, according to arrangements made before I left the scene of the awful catastrophe, both as to the identification of my dear son, and also his interment.

I feel most anxious to hear whether anything fresh has transpired since I left you; will you add another to the many deep obligations I am under to you by writing to me? And should the body of my dear and unfortunate son be identified, let me hear from you immediately, and I will come again.

Words cannot express the gratitude I feel I owe to you all for your benevolent aid, your kindness, and your sympathy.

MY DEARLY BELOVED FRIENDS. I arrived in safety at my house yesterday, and a night’s rest has restored and tranquillised me. I must again repeat, that language has no words by which I can express my sense of obligation to you. You are enshrined in my heart of hearts.

I have seen him! and can now realise my misfortune more than I have hitherto been able to do. Oh, the bitterness of the cup I drink! But I bow submissive. God *must* have done right. I do not want to feel less, but to acquiesce more simply.

There were some Jewish passengers on board the Royal Charter, and the gratitude of the Jewish people is feelingly expressed in the following letter bearing date from ‘the office of the Chief Rabbi:’

REVEREND SIR. I cannot refrain from expressing to you my heartfelt thanks on behalf of those of my flock whose relatives have unfortunately been among those who perished at the late wreck of the Royal Charter. You have, indeed, like Boaz, ‘not left off your kindness to the living and the dead.’

You have not alone acted kindly towards the living by receiving them hospitably at your house, and energetically assisting them in their mournful duty, but also towards the dead, by exerting yourself to have our co-religionists buried in our ground, and according to our rites. May our heavenly Father reward you for your acts of humanity and true philanthropy!

The ‘Old Hebrew congregation of Liverpool’ thus express themselves through their secretary:

REVEREND SIR. The wardens of this congregation have learned with great pleasure that, in addition to those indefatigable exertions, at the scene of the late disaster to the Royal Charter, which have received universal recognition, you have very benevolently employed your valuable efforts to assist such members of our faith as have sought the bodies of lost friends to give them burial in our consecrated grounds, with the observances and rites prescribed by the ordinances of our religion.

The wardens desire me to take the earliest available opportunity to offer to you, on behalf of our community, the expression of their warm acknowledgments and grateful thanks, and their sincere wishes for your continued welfare and prosperity.

A Jewish gentleman writes:

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR. I take the opportunity of thanking you right earnestly for the promptness you displayed in answering my note with full particulars concerning my much lamented brother, and I also herein beg to express my sincere regard for the willingness you displayed and for the facility you afforded for getting the remains of my poor brother exhumed. It has been to us a most sorrowful and painful event, but when we meet with such friends as yourself, it in a measure, somehow or other, abates that mental anguish, and makes the suffering so much easier to be borne. Considering the circumstances connected with my poor brother's fate, it does, indeed, appear a hard one. He had been away in all seven years; he returned four years ago to see his family. He was then engaged to a very amiable young lady. He had been very successful abroad, and was now returning to fulfil his sacred vow; he brought all his property with him in gold uninsured. We heard from him when the ship stopped at Queenstown, when he was in the highest of hope, and in a few short hours afterwards all was washed away.

Mournful in the deepest degree, but too sacred for quotation here, were the numerous references to those miniatures of women worn round the necks of rough men (and found there after death), those locks of hair, those scraps of letters, those many many slight memorials of hidden tenderness. One man cast up by the sea bore about him, printed on a perforated lace card, the following singular (and unavailing) charm:

A BLESSING.

May the blessing of God await thee. May the sun of glory shine around thy bed; and may the gates of plenty, honour, and happiness be ever open to thee. May no sorrow distress thy days; may no grief disturb thy nights. May the pillow of peace kiss thy cheek, and the pleasures of imagination attend thy dreams; and when length of years makes thee tired of earthly joys, and the curtain of death gently closes around thy last sleep of human existence, may the Angel of God attend thy bed, and take care that the expiring lamp of life shall not receive one rude blast to hasten on its extinction.

A sailor had these devices on his right arm. ‘Our Saviour on the Cross, the forehead of the Crucifix and the vesture stained red; on the lower part of the arm, a man and woman; on one side of the Cross, the appearance of a half moon, with a face; on the other side, the sun; on the top of the Cross, the letters I.H.S.; on the left arm, a man and woman dancing, with an effort to delineate the female’s dress; under which, initials.’ Another seaman ‘had, on the lower part of the right arm, the device of a sailor and a female; the man holding the Union Jack with a streamer, the folds of which waved over her head, and the end of it was held in her hand. On the upper part of the arm, a device of Our Lord on the Cross, with stars surrounding the head of the Cross, and one large star on the side in Indian Ink. On the left arm, a flag, a true lover’s knot, a face, and initials.’ This tattooing was found still plain, below the discoloured outer surface of a mutilated arm, when such surface was carefully scraped away with a knife. It is not improbable that the perpetuation of this marking custom among seamen, may be referred back to their desire to be identified, if drowned and flung ashore.

It was some time before I could sever myself from the many interesting papers on the table, and then I broke bread and drank wine with the kind family before I left them. As I brought the Coast-guard down, so I took the Postman back, with his leathern wallet, walking-stick, bugle, and terrier dog. Many a heart-broken letter had he brought to the Rectory House within two months many; a benignantly painstaking answer had he carried back.

As I rode along, I thought of the many people, inhabitants of this mother country, who would make pilgrimages to the little churchyard in the years to come; I thought of the many people in Australia, who would have an interest in such a shipwreck, and would find their way here when they visit the Old World; I thought of the writers of all the wreck of letters I had left upon the table; and I resolved to place this little record where it stands. Convocations, Conferences, Diocesan Epistles, and the like, will do a great deal for Religion, I dare say, and Heaven send they may! but I doubt if they will ever do their Master’s service half so well, in all the time they last, as the Heavens have seen it done in this bleak spot upon the rugged coast of Wales.

Had I lost the friend of my life, in the wreck of the Royal Charter; had I lost my betrothed, the more than friend of my life; had I lost my maiden daughter, had I lost my hopeful boy, had I lost my little child; I would kiss the hands that worked so busily and gently in the church, and say, ‘None better could have touched the form, though it had lain at home.’ I could be sure of it, I could be thankful for it: I could be content to leave the grave near the house the good family pass in and out of every day, undisturbed, in the little churchyard where so many are so strangely brought together.

Without the name of the clergyman to whom—I hope, not without carrying comfort to some heart at some time—I have referred, my reference would be as nothing. He is the Reverend Stephen Roose Hughes, of Llanallgo, near Moelfra, Anglesey. His brother is the Reverend Hugh Robert Hughes, of Penrhos, Alligwy.

CHAPTER III—WAPPING WORKHOUSE

My day’s no-business beckoning me to the East-end of London, I had turned my face to that point of the metropolitan compass on leaving Covent-garden, and had got past the India House, thinking in my idle manner of Tippoo-Sahib and Charles Lamb, and had got past my little wooden midshipman, after affectionately patting him on one leg of his knee-shorts for old acquaintance’ sake, and had got past Aldgate Pump, and had got past the Saracen’s Head (with an ignominious rash of posting bills disfiguring his swarthy countenance), and had strolled up the empty yard of his ancient neighbour the Black or Blue Boar, or Bull, who departed this life I don’t know when, and whose coaches are all gone I don’t know where; and I had come out again into the age of railways, and I had got past Whitechapel Church, and was—rather inappropriately for an Uncommercial Traveller—in the Commercial Road. Pleasantly wallowing in the abundant mud of that thoroughfare, and greatly enjoying the huge piles of building belonging to the sugar refiners, the little masts and vanes in small back gardens in back streets, the neighbouring canals and docks, the India vans lumbering along their stone tramway, and the pawnbrokers’ shops where hard-up Mates had pawned so many sextants and quadrants, that I should have bought a few cheap if I had the least notion how to use them, I at last began to file off to the right, towards Wapping.

Not that I intended to take boat at Wapping Old Stairs, or that I was going to look at the locality, because I believe (for I don’t) in the constancy of the young woman who told her sea-going lover, to such a beautiful old tune, that she had ever continued the same, since she gave him the ‘baccer-box marked with his name; I am afraid he usually got the worst of those transactions, and was frightfully taken in. No, I was going to Wapping, because an Eastern police magistrate had said, through the morning papers, that there was no classification at the Wapping workhouse for women, and that it was a disgrace and a shame, and divers other hard names, and because I wished to see how the fact really stood. For, that Eastern police magistrates are not always the wisest men of the East, may be inferred from their course of procedure respecting the fancy-dressing and pantomime-posturing at St. George's in that quarter: which is usually, to discuss the matter at issue, in a state of mind betokening the weakest perplexity, with all parties concerned and unconcerned, and, for a final expedient, to consult the complainant as to what he thinks ought to be done with the defendant, and take the defendant's opinion as to what he would recommend to be done with himself.

Long before I reached Wapping, I gave myself up as having lost my way, and, abandoning myself to the narrow streets in a Turkish frame of mind, relied on predestination to bring me somehow or other to the place I wanted if I were ever to get there. When I had ceased for an hour or so to take any trouble about the matter, I found myself on a swing-bridge looking down at some dark locks in some dirty water. Over against me, stood a creature remotely in the likeness of a young man, with a puffed sallow face, and a figure all dirty and shiny and slimy, who may have been the youngest son of his filthy old father, Thames, or the drowned man about whom there was a placard on the granite post like a large thimble, that stood between us.

I asked this apparition what it called the place? Unto which, it replied, with a ghastly grin and a sound like gurgling water in its throat:

'Mr. Baker's trap.'

As it is a point of great sensitiveness with me on such occasions to be equal to the intellectual pressure of the conversation, I deeply considered the meaning of this speech, while I eyed the apparition—then engaged in hugging and sucking a horizontal iron bar at the top of the locks. Inspiration suggested to me that Mr. Baker was the acting coroner of that neighbourhood.

'A common place for suicide,' said I, looking down at the locks.

'Sue?' returned the ghost, with a stare. 'Yes! And Poll. Likewise Emily. And Nancy. And Jane;' he sucked the iron between each name; 'and all the bileing. Ketches off their bonnets or shorls, takes a run, and headers down here, they doos. Always a headerin' down here, they is. Like one o'clock.'

'And at about that hour of the morning, I suppose?'

'Ah!' said the apparition. '*They* an't partickler. Two 'ull do for *them*. Three. All times o' night. On'y mind you!' Here the apparition rested his profile on the bar, and gurgled in a sarcastic manner. 'There must be somebody comin'. They don't go a headerin' down here, wen there an't no Bobby nor gen'ral Cove, fur to hear the splash.'

According to my interpretation of these words, I was myself a General Cove, or member of the miscellaneous public. In which modest character I remarked:

'They are often taken out, are they, and restored?'

'I dunno about restored,' said the apparition, who, for some occult reason, very much objected to that word; 'they're carried into the werkiss and put into a 'ot bath, and brought round. But I dunno about restored,' said the apparition; 'blow *that*!'—and vanished.

As it had shown a desire to become offensive, I was not sorry to find myself alone, especially as the 'werkiss' it had indicated with a twist of its matted head, was close at hand. So I left Mr. Baker's terrible trap (baited with a scum that was like the soapy rinsing of sooty chimneys), and made bold to ring at the workhouse gate, where I was wholly unexpected and quite unknown.

A very bright and nimble little matron, with a bunch of keys in her hand, responded to my request to see the House. I began to doubt whether the police magistrate was quite right in his facts, when I noticed her quick, active little figure and her intelligent eyes.

The Traveller (the matron intimated) should see the worst first. He was welcome to see everything. Such as it was, there it all was.

This was the only preparation for our entering 'the Foul wards.' They were in an old building squeezed away in a corner of a paved yard, quite detached from the more modern and spacious main body of the workhouse. They were in a building most monstrously behind the time—a mere series of garrets or lofts, with every inconvenient and objectionable circumstance in their construction, and only accessible by steep and narrow staircases, infamously ill-adapted for the passage up-stairs of the sick or down-stairs of the dead.

A-bed in these miserable rooms, here on bedsteads, there (for a change, as I understood it) on the floor, were women in every stage of distress and disease. None but those who have attentively observed such scenes, can conceive the extraordinary variety of expression still latent under the general monotony and uniformity of colour, attitude, and condition. The form a little coiled up and turned away, as though it had turned its back on this world for ever; the uninterested face at once lead-coloured and yellow, looking passively upward from the pillow; the haggard mouth a little dropped, the hand outside the coverlet, so dull and indifferent, so light, and yet so heavy; these were on every pallet; but when I stopped beside a bed, and said ever so slight a word to the figure lying there, the ghost of the old character came into the face, and made the Foul ward as various as the fair world. No one appeared to care to live, but no one complained; all who could speak, said that as much was done for them as could be done there, that the attendance was kind and patient, that their suffering was very heavy, but they had nothing to ask for. The wretched rooms were as clean and sweet as it is possible for such rooms to be; they would become a pest-house in a single week, if they were ill-kept.

I accompanied the brisk matron up another barbarous staircase, into a better kind of loft devoted to the idiotic and imbecile. There was at least Light in it, whereas the windows in the former wards had been like sides of school-boys' bird-cages. There was a strong grating over the fire here, and, holding a kind of state on either side of the hearth, separated by the breadth of this grating, were two old ladies in a condition of feeble dignity, which was surely the very last and lowest reduction of self-complacency to be found in this wonderful humanity of ours. They were evidently jealous of each other, and passed their whole time (as some people do, whose fires are not grated) in mentally disparaging each other, and contemptuously watching their neighbours. One of these parodies on provincial gentlewomen was extremely talkative, and expressed a strong desire to attend the service on Sundays, from which she represented herself to have derived the greatest interest and consolation when allowed that privilege. She gossiped so well, and looked altogether so cheery and harmless, that I began to think this a case for the Eastern magistrate, until I found that on the last occasion of her attending chapel she had secreted a small stick, and had caused some confusion in the responses by suddenly producing it and belabouring the congregation.

So, these two old ladies, separated by the breadth of the grating—otherwise they would fly at one another's caps—sat all day long, suspecting one another, and contemplating a world of fits. For everybody else in the room had fits, except the wards-woman; an elderly, able-bodied pauperess, with a large upper lip, and an air of repressing and saving her strength, as she stood with her hands folded before her, and her eyes slowly rolling, biding her time for catching or holding somebody. This civil personage (in whom I regretted to identify a reduced member of my honourable friend Mrs. Gamp's family) said, 'They has 'em continiwal, sir. They drops without no more notice than if they was coach-horses dropped from the moon, sir. And when one drops, another drops, and sometimes there'll be as many as four or five on 'em at once, dear me, a rolling and a tearin', bless you!—this young woman, now, has 'em dreadful bad.'

She turned up this young woman's face with her hand as she said it. This young woman was seated on the floor, pondering in the foreground of the afflicted. There was nothing repellent either in her face or head. Many, apparently worse, varieties of epilepsy and hysteria were about her, but she was said to be the worst here. When I had spoken to her a little, she still sat with her face turned up, pondering, and a gleam of the mid-day sun shone in upon her.

- Whether this young woman, and the rest of these so sorely troubled, as they sit or lie pondering in their confused dull way, ever get mental glimpses among the motes in the sunlight, of healthy people and healthy things? Whether this young woman, brooding like this in the summer season, ever thinks that somewhere there are trees and flowers, even mountains and the great sea? Whether, not to go so far, this young woman ever has any dim revelation of that young woman—that young woman who is not here and never will come here; who is courted, and caressed, and loved, and has a husband, and bears children, and lives in a home, and who never knows what it is to have this lashing and tearing coming upon her? And whether this young woman, God help her, gives herself up then and drops like a coach-horse from the moon?

I hardly knew whether the voices of infant children, penetrating into so hopeless a place, made a sound that was pleasant or painful to me. It was something to be reminded that the weary world was not all aweary, and was ever renewing itself; but, this young woman was a child not long ago, and a child not long hence might be such as she. Howbeit, the active step and eye of the vigilant matron conducted me past the two provincial gentlewomen (whose dignity was ruffled by the children), and into the adjacent nursery.

There were many babies here, and more than one handsome young mother. There were ugly young mothers also, and sullen young mothers, and callous young mothers. But, the babies had not appropriated to themselves any bad expression yet, and might have been, for anything that appeared to the contrary in their soft faces, Princes Imperial, and Princesses

Royal. I had the pleasure of giving a poetical commission to the baker’s man to make a cake with all despatch and toss it into the oven for one red-headed young pauper and myself, and felt much the better for it. Without that refreshment, I doubt if I should have been in a condition for ‘the Refractories,’ towards whom my quick little matron—for whose adaptation to her office I had by this time conceived a genuine respect—drew me next, and marshalled me the way that I was going.

The Refractories were picking oakum, in a small room giving on a yard. They sat in line on a form, with their backs to a window; before them, a table, and their work. The oldest Refractory was, say twenty; youngest Refractory, say sixteen. I have never yet ascertained in the course of my uncommercial travels, why a Refractory habit should affect the tonsils and uvula; but, I have always observed that Refractories of both sexes and every grade, between a Ragged School and the Old Bailey, have one voice, in which the tonsils and uvula gain a diseased ascendency.

‘Five pound indeed! I hain’t a going fur to pick five pound,’ said the Chief of the Refractories, keeping time to herself with her head and chin. ‘More than enough to pick what we picks now, in sich a place as this, and on wot we gets here!’

(This was in acknowledgment of a delicate intimation that the amount of work was likely to be increased. It certainly was not heavy then, for one Refractory had already done her day’s task—it was barely two o’clock—and was sitting behind it, with a head exactly matching it.)

‘A pretty Ouse this is, matron, ain’t it?’ said Refractory Two, ‘where a pleeseman’s called in, if a gal says a word!’

‘And wen you’re sent to prison for nothink or less!’ said the Chief, tugging at her oakum as if it were the matron’s hair. ‘But any place is better than this; that’s one thing, and be thankful!’

A laugh of Refractories led by Oakum Head with folded arms—who originated nothing, but who was in command of the skirmishers outside the conversation.

‘If any place is better than this,’ said my brisk guide, in the calmest manner, ‘it is a pity you left a good place when you had one.’

‘Ho, no, I didn’t, matron,’ returned the Chief, with another pull at her oakum, and a very expressive look at the enemy’s forehead. ‘Don’t say that, matron, cos it’s lies!’

Oakum Head brought up the skirmishers again, skirmished, and retired.

‘And *I* warn’t a going,’ exclaimed Refractory Two, ‘though I was in one place for as long as four year—*I* warn’t a going fur to stop in a place that warn’t fit for me—there! And where the family warn’t ’spectable characters—there! And where I fortunately or hunfort’nately, found that the people warn’t what they pretended to make theirselves out to be—there! And where it wasn’t their faults, by chalks, if I warn’t made bad and ruinated—Hah!’

During this speech, Oakum Head had again made a diversion with the skirmishers, and had again withdrawn.

The Uncommercial Traveller ventured to remark that he supposed Chief Refractory and Number One, to be the two young women who had been taken before the magistrate?

‘Yes!’ said the Chief, ‘we har! and the wonder is, that a pleeseman an’t ’ad in now, and we took off agen. You can’t open your lips here, without a pleeseman.’

Number Two laughed (very uvularly), and the skirmishers followed suit.

‘I’m sure I’d be thankful,’ protested the Chief, looking sideways at the Uncommercial, ‘if I could be got into a place, or got abroad. I’m sick and tired of this precious Ouse, I am, with reason.’

So would be, and so was, Number Two. So would be, and so was, Oakum Head. So would be, and so were, Skirmishers.

The Uncommercial took the liberty of hinting that he hardly thought it probable that any lady or gentleman in want of a likely young domestic of retiring manners, would be tempted into the engagement of either of the two leading Refractories, on her own presentation of herself as per sample.

‘It ain’t no good being nothink else here,’ said the Chief.

The Uncommercial thought it might be worth trying.

‘Oh no it ain’t,’ said the Chief.

‘Not a bit of good,’ said Number Two.

‘And I’m sure I’d be very thankful to be got into a place, or got abroad,’ said the Chief.

‘And so should I,’ said Number Two. ‘Truly thankful, I should.’

Oakum Head then rose, and announced as an entirely new idea, the mention of which profound novelty might be naturally expected to startle her unprepared hearers, that she would be very thankful to be got into a place, or got abroad. And, as if she had then said, ‘Chorus, ladies!’ all the Skirmishers struck up to the same purpose. We left them, thereupon, and began a long walk among the women who were simply old and infirm; but whenever, in the course of this same walk, I looked out of any high window that commanded the yard, I saw Oakum Head and all the other Refractories looking out at their low window for me, and never failing to catch me, the moment I showed my head.

In ten minutes I had ceased to believe in such fables of a golden time as youth, the prime of life, or a hale old age. In ten minutes, all the lights of womankind seemed to have been blown out, and nothing in that way to be left this vault to brag of, but the flickering and expiring snuffs.

And what was very curious, was, that these dim old women had one company notion which was the fashion of the place. Every old woman who became aware of a visitor and was not in bed hobbled over a form into her accustomed seat, and became one of a line of dim old women confronting another line of dim old women across a narrow table. There was no obligation whatever upon them to range themselves in this way; it was their manner of 'receiving.' As a rule, they made no attempt to talk to one another, or to look at the visitor, or to look at anything, but sat silently working their mouths, like a sort of poor old Cows. In some of these wards, it was good to see a few green plants; in others, an isolated Refractory acting as nurse, who did well enough in that capacity, when separated from her compeers; every one of these wards, day room, night room, or both combined, was scrupulously clean and fresh. I have seen as many such places as most travellers in my line, and I never saw one such, better kept.

Among the bedridden there was great patience, great reliance on the books under the pillow, great faith in GOD. All cared for sympathy, but none much cared to be encouraged with hope of recovery; on the whole, I should say, it was considered rather a distinction to have a complication of disorders, and to be in a worse way than the rest. From some of the windows, the river could be seen with all its life and movement; the day was bright, but I came upon no one who was looking out.

In one large ward, sitting by the fire in arm-chairs of distinction, like the President and Vice of the good company, were two old women, upwards of ninety years of age. The younger of the two, just turned ninety, was deaf, but not very, and could easily be made to hear. In her early time she had nursed a child, who was now another old woman, more infirm than herself, inhabiting the very same chamber. She perfectly understood this when the matron told it, and, with sundry nods and motions of her forefinger, pointed out the woman in question. The elder of this pair, ninety-three, seated before an illustrated newspaper (but not reading it), was a bright-eyed old soul, really not deaf, wonderfully preserved, and amazingly conversational. She had not long lost her husband, and had been in that place little more than a year. At Boston, in the State of Massachusetts, this poor creature would have been individually addressed, would have been tended in her own room, and would have had her life gently assimilated to a comfortable life out of doors. Would that be much to do in England for a woman who has kept herself out of a workhouse more than ninety rough long years? When Britain first, at Heaven's command, arose, with a great deal of allegorical confusion, from out the azure main, did her guardian angels positively forbid it in the Charter which has been so much besung?

The object of my journey was accomplished when the nimble matron had no more to show me. As I shook hands with her at the gate, I told her that I thought justice had not used her very well, and that the wise men of the East were not infallible.

Now, I reasoned with myself, as I made my journey home again, concerning those Foul wards. They ought not to exist; no person of common decency and humanity can see them and doubt it. But what is this Union to do? The necessary alteration would cost several thousands of pounds; it has already to support three workhouses; its inhabitants work hard for their bare lives, and are already rated for the relief of the Poor to the utmost extent of reasonable endurance. One poor parish in this very Union is rated to the amount of FIVE AND SIXPENCE in the pound, at the very same time when the rich parish of Saint George's, Hanover-square, is rated at about SEVENPENCE in the pound, Paddington at about FOURPENCE, Saint James's, Westminster, at about TENPENCE! It is only through the equalisation of Poor Rates that what is left undone in this wise, can be done. Much more is left undone, or is ill-done, than I have space to suggest in these notes of a single uncommercial journey; but, the wise men of the East, before they can reasonably hold forth about it, must look to the North and South and West; let them also, any morning before taking the seat of Solomon, look into the shops and dwellings all around the Temple, and first ask themselves 'how much more can these poor people—many of whom keep themselves with difficulty enough out of the workhouse—bear?'

I had yet other matter for reflection as I journeyed home, inasmuch as, before I altogether departed from the neighbourhood of Mr. Baker’s trap, I had knocked at the gate of the workhouse of St. George’s-in-the-East, and had found it to be an establishment highly creditable to those parts, and thoroughly well administered by a most intelligent master. I remarked in it, an instance of the collateral harm that obstinate vanity and folly can do. ‘This was the Hall where those old paupers, male and female, whom I had just seen, met for the Church service, was it?’—‘Yes.’—‘Did they sing the Psalms to any instrument?’—‘They would like to, very much; they would have an extraordinary interest in doing so.’—‘And could none be got?’—‘Well, a piano could even have been got for nothing, but these unfortunate dissensions—’ Ah! better, far better, my Christian friend in the beautiful garment, to have let the singing boys alone, and left the multitude to sing for themselves! You should know better than I, but I think I have read that they did so, once upon a time, and that ‘when they had sung an hymn,’ Some one (not in a beautiful garment) went up into the Mount of Olives.

It made my heart ache to think of this miserable trifling, in the streets of a city where every stone seemed to call to me, as I walked along, ‘Turn this way, man, and see what waits to be done!’ So I decoyed myself into another train of thought to ease my heart. But, I don’t know that I did it, for I was so full of paupers, that it was, after all, only a change to a single pauper, who took possession of my remembrance instead of a thousand.

‘I beg your pardon, sir,’ he had said, in a confidential manner, on another occasion, taking me aside; ‘but I have seen better days.’

‘I am very sorry to hear it.’

‘Sir, I have a complaint to make against the master.’

‘I have no power here, I assure you. And if I had—’

‘But, allow me, sir, to mention it, as between yourself and a man who has seen better days, sir. The master and myself are both masons, sir, and I make him the sign continually; but, because I am in this unfortunate position, sir, he won’t give me the counter-sign!’

CHAPTER IV—TWO VIEWS OF A CHEAP THEATRE

As I shut the door of my lodging behind me, and came out into the streets at six on a drizzling Saturday evening in the last past month of January, all that neighbourhood of Covent-garden looked very desolate. It is so essentially a neighbourhood which has seen better days, that bad weather affects it sooner than another place which has not come down in the World. In its present reduced condition it bears a thaw almost worse than any place I know. It gets so dreadfully low-spirited when damp breaks forth. Those wonderful houses about Drury-lane Theatre, which in the palmy days of theatres were prosperous and long-settled places of business, and which now change hands every week, but never change their character of being divided and sub-divided on the ground floor into mouldy dens of shops where an orange and half-a-dozen nuts, or a pomatum-pot, one cake of fancy soap, and a cigar box, are offered for sale and never sold, were most ruefully contemplated that evening, by the statue of Shakespeare, with the rain-drops coursing one another down its innocent nose. Those inscrutable pigeon-hole offices, with nothing in them (not so much as an inkstand) but a model of a theatre before the curtain, where, in the Italian Opera season, tickets at reduced prices are kept on sale by nomadic gentlemen in smeary hats too tall for them, whom one occasionally seems to have seen on race-courses, not wholly unconnected with strips of cloth of various colours and a rolling ball—those Bedouin establishments, deserted by the tribe, and tenantless, except when sheltering in one corner an irregular row of ginger-beer bottles, which would have made one shudder on such a night, but for its being plain that they had nothing in them, shrunk from the shrill cries of the news-boys at their Exchange in the kennel of Catherine-street, like guilty things upon a fearful summons. At the pipe-shop in Great Russell-street, the Death's-head pipes were like theatrical memento mori, admonishing beholders of the decline of the playhouse as an Institution. I walked up Bow-street, disposed to be angry with the shops there, that were letting out theatrical secrets by exhibiting to work-a-day humanity the stuff of which diadems and robes of kings are made. I noticed that some shops which had once been in the dramatic line, and had struggled out of it, were not getting on prosperously—like some actors I have known, who took to business and failed to make it answer. In a word, those streets looked so dull, and, considered as theatrical streets, so broken and bankrupt, that the FOUND DEAD on the black board at the police station might have announced the decease of the Drama, and the pools of water outside the fire-engine maker's at the corner of Long-acre might have been occasioned by his having brought out the whole of his stock to play upon its last smouldering ashes.

And yet, on such a night in so degenerate a time, the object of my journey was theatrical. And yet within half an hour I was in an immense theatre, capable of holding nearly five thousand people.

What Theatre? Her Majesty's? Far better. Royal Italian Opera? Far better. Infinitely superior to the latter for hearing in; infinitely superior to both, for seeing in. To every part of this Theatre, spacious fire-proof ways of ingress and egress. For every part of it, convenient places of refreshment and retiring rooms. Everything to eat and drink carefully supervised as to quality, and sold at an appointed price; respectable female attendants ready for the commonest women in the audience; a general air of consideration, decorum, and supervision, most commendable; an unquestionably humanising influence in all the social arrangements of the place.

Surely a dear Theatre, then? Because there were in London (not very long ago) Theatres with entrance-prices up to half-a-guinea a head, whose arrangements were not half so civilised. Surely, therefore, a dear Theatre? Not very dear. A gallery at three-pence, another gallery at fourpence, a pit at sixpence, boxes and pit-stalls at a shilling, and a few private boxes at half-a-crown.

My uncommercial curiosity induced me to go into every nook of this great place, and among every class of the audience assembled in it—amounting that evening, as I calculated, to about two thousand and odd hundreds. Magnificently lighted by a firmament of sparkling chandeliers, the building was ventilated to perfection. My sense of smell, without being particularly delicate, has been so offended in some of the commoner places of public resort, that I have often been obliged to leave them when I have made an uncommercial journey expressly to look on. The air of this Theatre was fresh, cool, and wholesome. To help towards this end, very sensible precautions had been used, ingeniously combining the experience of hospitals and railway stations. Asphalt pavements substituted for wooden floors, honest bare walls of glazed brick and tile—even at the back of the boxes—for plaster and paper, no benches stuffed, and no carpeting or baize used; a cool material with a light glazed surface, being the covering of the seats.

These various contrivances are as well considered in the place in question as if it were a Fever Hospital; the result is, that it is sweet and healthful. It has been constructed from the ground to the roof, with a careful reference to sight and sound in every corner; the result is, that its form is beautiful, and that the appearance of the audience, as seen from the proscenium—with every face in it commanding the stage, and the whole so admirably raked and turned to that centre, that a hand can scarcely move in the great assemblage without the movement being seen from thence—is highly remarkable in its union of vastness with compactness. The stage itself, and all its appurtenances of machinery, cellarage, height and breadth, are on a scale more like the Scala at Milan, or the San Carlo at Naples, or the Grand Opera at Paris, than any notion a stranger would be likely to form of the Britannia Theatre at Hoxton, a mile north of St. Luke's Hospital in the Old-street-road, London. The Forty Thieves might be played here, and every thief ride his real horse, and the disguised captain bring in his oil jars on a train of real camels, and nobody be put out of the way. This really extraordinary place is the achievement of one man's enterprise, and was erected on the ruins of an inconvenient old building in less than five months, at a round cost of five-and-twenty thousand pounds. To dismiss this part of my subject, and still to render to the proprietor the credit that is strictly his due, I must add that his sense of the responsibility upon him to make the best of his audience, and to do his best for them, is a highly agreeable sign of these times.

As the spectators at this theatre, for a reason I will presently show, were the object of my journey, I entered on the play of the night as one of the two thousand and odd hundreds, by looking about me at my neighbours. We were a motley assemblage of people, and we had a good many boys and young men among us; we had also many girls and young women. To represent, however, that we did not include a very great number, and a very fair proportion of family groups, would be to make a gross mis-statement. Such groups were to be seen in all parts of the house; in the boxes and stalls particularly, they were composed of persons of very decent appearance, who had many children with them. Among our dresses there were most kinds of shabby and greasy wear, and much fustian and corduroy that was neither sound nor fragrant. The caps of our young men were mostly of a limp character, and we who wore them, slouched, high-shouldered, into our places with our hands in our pockets, and occasionally twisted our cravats about our necks like eels, and occasionally tied them down our breasts like links of sausages, and occasionally had a screw in our hair over each cheek-bone with a slight Thief-flavour in it. Besides prowlers and idlers, we were mechanics, dock-labourers, costermongers, petty tradesmen, small clerks, milliners, stay-makers, shoe-binders, slop-workers, poor workers in a hundred highways and byways. Many of us—on the whole, the majority—were not at all clean, and not at all choice in our lives or conversation. But we had all come together in a place where our convenience was well consulted, and where we were well looked after, to enjoy an evening's entertainment in common. We were not going to lose any part of what we had paid for through anybody's caprice, and as a community we had a character to lose. So, we were closely attentive, and kept excellent order; and let the man or boy who did otherwise instantly get out from this place, or we would put him out with the greatest expedition.

We began at half-past six with a pantomime—with a pantomime so long, that before it was over I felt as if I had been travelling for six weeks—going to India, say, by the Overland Mail. The Spirit of Liberty was the principal personage in the Introduction, and the Four Quarters of the World came out of the globe, glittering, and discoursed with the Spirit, who sang charmingly. We were delighted to understand that there was no liberty anywhere but among ourselves, and we highly applauded the agreeable fact. In an allegorical way, which did as well as any other way, we and the Spirit of Liberty got into a kingdom of Needles and Pins, and found them at war with a potentate who called in to his aid their old arch enemy Rust, and who would have got the better of them if the Spirit of Liberty had not in the nick of time transformed the leaders into Clown, Pantaloon, Harlequin, Columbine, Harlequina, and a whole family of Sprites, consisting of a remarkably stout father and three spineless sons. We all knew what was coming when the Spirit of Liberty addressed the king with a big face, and His Majesty backed to the side-scenes and began untying himself behind, with his big face all on one side. Our excitement at that crisis was great, and our delight unbounded. After this era in our existence, we went through all the incidents of a pantomime; it was not by any means a savage pantomime, in the way of burning or boiling people, or throwing them out of window, or cutting them up; was often very droll; was always liberally got up, and cleverly presented. I noticed that the people who kept the shops, and who represented the passengers in the thoroughfares, and so forth, had no conventionality in them, but were unusually like the real thing—from which I infer that you may take that audience in (if you wish to) concerning Knights and Ladies, Fairies, Angels, or such like, but they are not to be done as to anything in the streets. I noticed, also, that when two young men, dressed in exact imitation of the eel-and-sausage-cravated portion of the audience, were chased by policemen, and, finding themselves in danger of being caught, dropped so suddenly as to oblige the policemen to tumble over them, there was great rejoicing among the caps—as though it were a delicate reference to something they had heard of before.

The Pantomime was succeeded by a Melo-Drama. Throughout the evening I was pleased to observe Virtue quite as triumphant as she usually is out of doors, and indeed I thought rather more so. We all agreed (for the time) that honesty was the best policy, and we were as hard as iron upon Vice, and we wouldn't hear of Villainy getting on in the world—no, not on any consideration whatever.

Between the pieces, we almost all of us went out and refreshed. Many of us went the length of drinking beer at the bar of the neighbouring public-house, some of us drank spirits, crowds of us had sandwiches and ginger-beer at the refreshment-bars established for us in the Theatre. The sandwich—as substantial as was consistent with portability, and as cheap as possible—we hailed as one of our greatest institutions. It forced its way among us at all stages of the entertainment, and we were always delighted to see it; its adaptability to the varying moods of our nature was surprising; we could never weep so comfortably as when our tears fell on our sandwich; we could never laugh so heartily as when we choked with sandwich; Virtue never looked so beautiful or Vice so deformed as when we paused, sandwich in hand, to consider what would come of that resolution of Wickedness in boots, to sever Innocence in flowered chintz from Honest Industry in striped stockings. When the curtain fell for the night, we still fell back upon sandwich, to help us through the rain and mire, and home to bed.

This, as I have mentioned, was Saturday night. Being Saturday night, I had accomplished but the half of my uncommercial journey; for, its object was to compare the play on Saturday evening with the preaching in the same Theatre on Sunday evening.

Therefore, at the same hour of half-past six on the similarly damp and muddy Sunday evening, I returned to this Theatre. I drove up to the entrance (fearful of being late, or I should have come on foot), and found myself in a large crowd of people who, I am happy to state, were put into excellent spirits by my arrival. Having nothing to look at but the mud and the closed doors, they looked at me, and highly enjoyed the comic spectacle. My modesty inducing me to draw off, some hundreds of yards, into a dark corner, they at once forgot me, and applied themselves to their former occupation of looking at the mud and looking in at the closed doors: which, being of grated ironwork, allowed the lighted passage within to be seen. They were chiefly people of respectable appearance, odd and impulsive as most crowds are, and making a joke of being there as most crowds do.

In the dark corner I might have sat a long while, but that a very obliging passer-by informed me that the Theatre was already full, and that the people whom I saw in the street were all shut out for want of room. After that, I lost no time in worming myself into the building, and creeping to a place in a Proscenium box that had been kept for me.

There must have been full four thousand people present. Carefully estimating the pit alone, I could bring it out as holding little less than fourteen hundred. Every part of the house was well filled, and I had not found it easy to make my way along the back of the boxes to where I sat. The chandeliers in the ceiling were lighted; there was no light on the stage; the orchestra was empty. The green curtain was down, and, packed pretty closely on chairs on the small space of stage before it, were some thirty gentlemen, and two or three ladies. In the centre of these, in a desk or pulpit covered with red baize, was the presiding minister. The kind of rostrum he occupied will be very well understood, if I liken it to a boarded-up fireplace turned towards the audience, with a gentleman in a black surtout standing in the stove and leaning forward over the mantelpiece.

A portion of Scripture was being read when I went in. It was followed by a discourse, to which the congregation listened with most exemplary attention and uninterrupted silence and decorum. My own attention comprehended both the auditory and the speaker, and shall turn to both in this recalling of the scene, exactly as it did at the time.

‘A very difficult thing,’ I thought, when the discourse began, ‘to speak appropriately to so large an audience, and to speak with tact. Without it, better not to speak at all. Infinitely better, to read the New Testament well, and to let *that* speak. In this congregation there is indubitably one pulse; but I doubt if any power short of genius can touch it as one, and make it answer as one.’

I could not possibly say to myself as the discourse proceeded, that the minister was a good speaker. I could not possibly say to myself that he expressed an understanding of the general mind and character of his audience. There was a supposititious working-man introduced into the homily, to make supposititious objections to our Christian religion and be reasoned down, who was not only a very disagreeable person, but remarkably unlike life—very much more unlike it than anything I had seen in the pantomime. The native independence of character this artisan was supposed to possess, was represented by a suggestion of a dialect that I certainly never heard in my uncommercial travels, and with a coarse swing of voice and manner anything but agreeable to his feelings, I should conceive, considered in the light of a portrait, and as far away from the fact as a Chinese Tartar. There was a model pauper introduced in like manner, who appeared to me to be the most intolerably arrogant pauper ever relieved, and to show himself in absolute want and dire necessity of a course of Stone Yard. For, how did this pauper testify to his having received the gospel of humility? A gentleman met him in the workhouse, and said (which I myself really thought good-natured of him), ‘Ah, John? I am sorry to see you here. I am sorry to see you so poor.’ ‘Poor, sir!’ replied that man, drawing himself up, ‘I am the son of a Prince! *My* father is the King of Kings. *My* father is the Lord of Lords. *My* father is the ruler of all the Princes of the Earth!’ &c. And this was what all the preacher’s fellow-sinners might come to, if they would embrace this blessed book—which I must say it did some violence to my own feelings of reverence, to see held out at arm’s length at frequent intervals and soundingly slapped, like a slow lot at a sale. Now, could I help asking myself the question, whether the mechanic before me, who must detect the preacher as being wrong about the visible manner of himself and the like of himself, and about such a noisy lip-server as that pauper, might not, most unhappily for the usefulness of the occasion, doubt that preacher's being right about things not visible to human senses?

Again. Is it necessary or advisable to address such an audience continually as 'fellow-sinners'? Is it not enough to be fellow-creatures, born yesterday, suffering and striving to-day, dying to-morrow? By our common humanity, my brothers and sisters, by our common capacities for pain and pleasure, by our common laughter and our common tears, by our common aspiration to reach something better than ourselves, by our common tendency to believe in something good, and to invest whatever we love or whatever we lose with some qualities that are superior to our own failings and weaknesses as we know them in our own poor hearts—by these, Hear me!—Surely, it is enough to be fellow-creatures. Surely, it includes the other designation, and some touching meanings over and above.

Again. There was a personage introduced into the discourse (not an absolute novelty, to the best of my remembrance of my reading), who had been personally known to the preacher, and had been quite a Crichton in all the ways of philosophy, but had been an infidel. Many a time had the preacher talked with him on that subject, and many a time had he failed to convince that intelligent man. But he fell ill, and died, and before he died he recorded his conversion—in words which the preacher had taken down, my fellow-sinners, and would read to you from this piece of paper. I must confess that to me, as one of an uninstructed audience, they did not appear particularly edifying. I thought their tone extremely selfish, and I thought they had a spiritual vanity in them which was of the before-mentioned refractory pauper's family.

All slangs and twangs are objectionable everywhere, but the slang and twang of the conventicle—as bad in its way as that of the House of Commons, and nothing worse can be said of it—should be studiously avoided under such circumstances as I describe. The avoidance was not complete on this occasion. Nor was it quite agreeable to see the preacher addressing his pet 'points' to his backers on the stage, as if appealing to those disciples to show him up, and testify to the multitude that each of those points was a clincher.

But, in respect of the large Christianity of his general tone; of his renunciation of all priestly authority; of his earnest and reiterated assurance to the people that the commonest among them could work out their own salvation if they would, by simply, lovingly, and dutifully following Our Saviour, and that they needed the mediation of no erring man; in these particulars, this gentleman deserved all praise. Nothing could be better than the spirit, or the plain emphatic words of his discourse in these respects. And it was a most significant and encouraging circumstance that whenever he struck that chord, or whenever he described anything which Christ himself had done, the array of faces before him was very much more earnest, and very much more expressive of emotion, than at any other time.

And now, I am brought to the fact, that the lowest part of the audience of the previous night, *was not there*. There is no doubt about it. There was no such thing in that building, that Sunday evening. I have been told since, that the lowest part of the audience of the Victoria Theatre has been attracted to its Sunday services. I have been very glad to hear it, but on this occasion of which I write, the lowest part of the usual audience of the Britannia Theatre, decidedly and unquestionably stayed away. When I first took my seat and looked at the house, my surprise at the change in its occupants was as great as my disappointment. To the most respectable class of the previous evening, was added a great number of respectable strangers attracted by curiosity, and drafts from the regular congregations of various chapels. It was impossible to fail in identifying the character of these last, and they were very numerous. I came out in a strong, slow tide of them setting from the boxes. Indeed, while the discourse was in progress, the respectable character of the auditory was so manifest in their appearance, that when the minister addressed a supposititious ‘outcast,’ one really felt a little impatient of it, as a figure of speech not justified by anything the eye could discover.

The time appointed for the conclusion of the proceedings was eight o’clock. The address having lasted until full that time, and it being the custom to conclude with a hymn, the preacher intimated in a few sensible words that the clock had struck the hour, and that those who desired to go before the hymn was sung, could go now, without giving offence. No one stirred. The hymn was then sung, in good time and tune and unison, and its effect was very striking. A comprehensive benevolent prayer dismissed the throng, and in seven or eight minutes there was nothing left in the Theatre but a light cloud of dust.

That these Sunday meetings in Theatres are good things, I do not doubt. Nor do I doubt that they will work lower and lower down in the social scale, if those who preside over them will be very careful on two heads: firstly, not to disparage the places in which they speak, or the intelligence of their hearers; secondly, not to set themselves in antagonism to the natural inborn desire of the mass of mankind to recreate themselves and to be amused.

There is a third head, taking precedence of all others, to which my remarks on the discourse I heard, have tended. In the New Testament there is the most beautiful and affecting history conceivable by man, and there are the terse models for all prayer and for all preaching. As to the models, imitate them, Sunday preachers—else why are they there, consider? As to the history, tell it. Some people cannot read, some people will not read, many people (this especially holds among the young and ignorant) find it hard to pursue the verse-form in which the book is presented to them, and imagine that those breaks imply gaps and want of continuity. Help them over that first stumbling-block, by setting forth the history in narrative, with no fear of exhausting it. You will never preach so well, you will never move them so profoundly, you will never send them away with half so much to think of. Which is the better interest: Christ's choice of twelve poor men to help in those merciful wonders among the poor and rejected; or the pious bullying of a whole Union-full of paupers? What is your changed philosopher to wretched me, peeping in at the door out of the mud of the streets and of my life, when you have the widow's son to tell me about, the ruler's daughter, the other figure at the door when the brother of the two sisters was dead, and one of the two ran to the mourner, crying, 'The Master is come and calleth for thee'?—Let the preacher who will thoroughly forget himself and remember no individuality but one, and no eloquence but one, stand up before four thousand men and women at the Britannia Theatre any Sunday night, recounting that narrative to them as fellow creatures, and he shall see a sight!

CHAPTER V—POOR MERCANTILE JACK

Is the sweet little cherub who sits smiling aloft and keeps watch on life of poor Jack, commissioned to take charge of Mercantile Jack, as well as Jack of the national navy? If not, who is? What is the cherub about, and what are we all about, when poor

Mercantile Jack is having his brains slowly knocked out by pennyweights, aboard the brig Beelzebub, or the barque Bowie-knife—when he looks his last at that infernal craft, with the first officer's iron boot-heel in his remaining eye, or with his dying body towed overboard in the ship's wake, while the cruel wounds in it do 'the multitudinous seas incarnadine'?

Is it unreasonable to entertain a belief that if, aboard the brig Beelzebub or the barque Bowie-knife, the first officer did half the damage to cotton that he does to men, there would presently arise from both sides of the Atlantic so vociferous an invocation of the sweet little cherub who sits calculating aloft, keeping watch on the markets that pay, that such vigilant cherub would, with a winged sword, have that gallant officer's organ of destructiveness out of his head in the space of a flash of lightning?

If it be unreasonable, then am I the most unreasonable of men, for I believe it with all my soul.

This was my thought as I walked the dock-quays at Liverpool, keeping watch on poor Mercantile Jack. Alas for me! I have long outgrown the state of sweet little cherub; but there I was, and there Mercantile Jack was, and very busy he was, and very cold he was: the snow yet lying in the frozen furrows of the land, and the north-east winds snipping off the tops of the little waves in the Mersey, and rolling them into hailstones to pelt him with. Mercantile Jack was hard at it, in the hard weather: as he mostly is in all weathers, poor Jack. He was girded to ships' masts and funnels of steamers, like a forester to a great oak, scraping and painting; he was lying out on yards, furling sails that tried to beat him off; he was dimly discernible up in a world of giant cobwebs, reefing and splicing; he was faintly audible down in holds, stowing and unshipping cargo; he was winding round and round at capstans melodious, monotonous, and drunk;

he was of a diabolical aspect, with coaling for the Antipodes; he was washing decks barefoot, with the breast of his red shirt open to the blast, though it was sharper than the knife in his leathern girdle; he was looking over bulwarks, all eyes and hair; he was standing by at the shoot of the Cunard steamer, off to-morrow, as the stocks in trade of several butchers, poulterers, and fishmongers, poured down into the ice-house; he was coming aboard of other vessels, with his kit in a tarpaulin bag, attended by plunderers to the very last moment of his shore-going existence. As though his senses, when released from the uproar of the elements, were under obligation to be confused by other turmoil, there was a rattling of wheels, a clattering of hoofs, a clashing of iron, a jolting of cotton and hides and casks and timber, an incessant deafening disturbance on the quays, that was the very madness of sound. And as, in the midst of it, he stood swaying about, with his hair blown all manner of wild ways, rather crazedly taking leave of his plunderers, all the rigging in the docks was shrill in the wind, and every little steamer coming and going across the Mersey was sharp in its blowing off, and every buoy in the river bobbed spitefully up and down, as if there were a general taunting chorus of 'Come along, Mercantile Jack! Ill-lodged, ill-fed, ill-used, hocussed, entrapped, anticipated, cleaned out. Come along, Poor Mercantile Jack, and be tempest-tossed till you are drowned!'

The uncommercial transaction which had brought me and Jack together, was this:- I had entered the Liverpool police force, that I might have a look at the various unlawful traps which are every night set for Jack. As my term of service in that distinguished corps was short, and as my personal bias in the capacity of one of its members has ceased, no suspicion will attach to my evidence that it is an admirable force. Besides that it is composed, without favour, of the best men that can be picked, it is directed by an unusual intelligence. Its organisation against Fires, I take to be much better than the metropolitan system, and in all respects it tempers its remarkable vigilance with a still more remarkable discretion.

Jack had knocked off work in the docks some hours, and I had taken, for purposes of identification, a photograph-likeness of a thief, in the portrait-room at our head police office (on the whole, he seemed rather complimented by the proceeding), and I had been on police parade, and the small hand of the clock was moving on to ten, when I took up my lantern to follow Mr. Superintendent to the traps that were set for Jack. In Mr.

Superintendent I saw, as anybody might, a tall, well-looking, well-set-up man of a soldierly bearing, with a cavalry air, a good chest, and a resolute but not by any means ungentle face. He carried in his hand a plain black walking-stick of hard wood; and whenever and wherever, at any after-time of the night, he struck it on the pavement with a ringing sound, it instantly produced a whistle out of the darkness, and a policeman. To this remarkable stick, I refer an air of mystery and magic which pervaded the whole of my perquisition among the traps that were set for Jack.

We began by diving into the obscurest streets and lanes of the port. Suddenly pausing in a flow of cheerful discourse, before a dead wall, apparently some ten miles long, Mr. Superintendent struck upon the ground, and the wall opened and shot out, with military salute of hand to temple, two policemen—not in the least surprised themselves, not in the least surprising Mr. Superintendent.

‘All right, Sharpeye?’

‘All right, sir.’

‘All right, Trampfoot?’

‘All right, sir.’

‘Is Quickear there?’

‘Here am I, sir.’

‘Come with us.’

‘Yes, sir.’

So, Sharpeye went before, and Mr. Superintendent and I went next, and Trampfoot and Quickear marched as rear-guard. Sharp-eye, I soon had occasion to remark, had a skilful and quite professional way of opening doors—touched latches delicately, as if they were keys of musical instruments—opened every door he touched, as if he were perfectly confident that there was stolen property behind it—instantly insinuated himself, to prevent its being shut.

Sharpeye opened several doors of traps that were set for Jack, but Jack did not happen to be in any of them. They were all such miserable places that really, Jack, if I were you, I would give them a wider berth. In every trap, somebody was sitting over a fire, waiting for Jack. Now, it was a crouching old woman, like the picture of the Norwood Gipsy in the old sixpenny dream-books; now, it was a crimp of the male sex, in a checked shirt and without a coat, reading a newspaper; now, it was a man crimp and a woman crimp, who always introduced themselves as united in holy matrimony; now, it was Jack's delight, his (un)lovely Nan; but they were all waiting for Jack, and were all frightfully disappointed to see us.

'Who have you got up-stairs here?' says Sharpeye, generally. (In the Move-on tone.)

'Nobody, surr; sure not a blessed sowl!' (Irish feminine reply.)

'What do you mean by nobody? Didn't I hear a woman's step go up-stairs when my hand was on the latch?'

'Ah! sure thin you're right, surr, I forgot her! 'Tis on'y Betsy White, surr. Ah! you know Betsy, surr. Come down, Betsy darlin', and say the gintlemin.'

Generally, Betsy looks over the banisters (the steep staircase is in the room) with a forcible expression in her protesting face, of an intention to compensate herself for the present trial by grinding Jack finer than usual when he does come. Generally, Sharpeye turns to Mr. Superintendent, and says, as if the subjects of his remarks were wax-work:

'One of the worst, sir, this house is. This woman has been indicted three times. This man's a regular bad one likewise. His real name is Pegg. Gives himself out as Waterhouse.'

'Never had sitch a name as Pegg near me back, thin, since I was in this house, bee the good Lard!' says the woman.

Generally, the man says nothing at all, but becomes exceedingly round-shouldered, and pretends to read his paper with rapt attention. Generally, Sharpeye directs our observation with a look, to the prints and pictures that are invariably numerous on the walls. Always, Trampfoot and Quickear are taking notice on the doorstep. In default of Sharpeye being acquainted with the exact individuality of any gentleman encountered, one of these two is sure to proclaim from the outer air, like a gruff spectre, that Jackson is not Jackson, but knows himself to be Fogle; or that Canlon is Walker's brother, against whom there was not sufficient evidence; or that the man who says he never was at sea since he was a boy, came ashore from a voyage last Thursday, or sails tomorrow morning. 'And that is a bad class of man, you see,' says Mr. Superintendent, when he got out into the dark again, 'and very difficult to deal with, who, when he has made this place too hot to hold him, enters himself for a voyage as steward or cook, and is out of knowledge for months, and then turns up again worse than ever.'

When we had gone into many such houses, and had come out (always leaving everybody relapsing into waiting for Jack), we started off to a singing-house where Jack was expected to muster strong.

The vocalisation was taking place in a long low room up-stairs; at one end, an orchestra of two performers, and a small platform; across the room, a series of open pews for Jack, with an aisle down the middle; at the other end a larger pew than the rest, entitled SNUG, and reserved for mates and similar good company. About the room, some amazing coffee-coloured pictures varnished an inch deep, and some stuffed creatures in cases; dotted among the audience, in Sung and out of Snug, the ‘Professionals;’ among them, the celebrated comic favourite Mr. Banjo Bones, looking very hideous with his blackened face and limp sugar-loaf hat; beside him, sipping rum-and-water, Mrs. Banjo Bones, in her natural colours—a little heightened.

It was a Friday night, and Friday night was considered not a good night for Jack. At any rate, Jack did not show in very great force even here, though the house was one to which he much resorts, and where a good deal of money is taken. There was British Jack, a little maudlin and sleepy, lolling over his empty glass, as if he were trying to read his fortune at the bottom; there was Loafing Jack of the Stars and Stripes, rather an unpromising customer, with his long nose, lank cheek, high cheek-bones, and nothing soft about him but his cabbage-leaf hat; there was Spanish Jack, with curls of black hair, rings in his ears, and a knife not far from his hand, if you got into trouble with him; there were Maltese Jack, and Jack of Sweden, and Jack the Finn, looming through the smoke of their pipes, and turning faces that looked as if they were carved out of dark wood, towards the young lady dancing the hornpipe: who found the platform so exceedingly small for it, that I had a nervous expectation of seeing her, in the backward steps, disappear through the window. Still, if all hands had been got together, they would not have more than half-filled the room. Observe, however, said Mr. Licensed Victualler, the host, that it was Friday night, and, besides, it was getting on for twelve, and Jack had gone aboard. A sharp and watchful man, Mr. Licensed Victualler, the host, with tight lips and a complete edition of Cocker’s arithmetic in each eye. Attended to his business himself, he said. Always on the spot. When he heard of talent, trusted nobody’s account of it, but went off by rail to see it. If true talent, engaged it. Pounds a week for talent—four pound—five pound. Banjo Bones was undoubted talent. Hear this instrument that was going to play—it was real talent! In truth it was very good; a kind of piano-accordion, played by a young girl of a delicate prettiness of face, figure, and dress, that made the audience look coarser. She sang to the instrument, too; first, a song about village bells, and how they chimed; then a song about how I went to sea; winding up with an imitation of the bagpipes, which Mercantile Jack seemed to understand much the best. A good girl, said Mr. Licensed Victualler. Kept herself select. Sat in Snug, not listening to the blandishments of Mates. Lived with mother. Father dead. Once a merchant well to do, but over-speculated himself. On delicate inquiry as to salary paid for item of talent under consideration, Mr. Victualler's pounds dropped suddenly to shillings—still it was a very comfortable thing for a young person like that, you know; she only went on six times a night, and was only required to be there from six at night to twelve. What was more conclusive was, Mr. Victualler's assurance that he 'never allowed any language, and never suffered any disturbance.' Sharpeye confirmed the statement, and the order that prevailed was the best proof of it that could have been cited. So, I came to the conclusion that poor Mercantile Jack might do (as I am afraid he does) much worse than trust himself to Mr. Victualler, and pass his evenings here.

But we had not yet looked, Mr. Superintendent—said Trampfoot, receiving us in the street again with military salute—for Dark Jack. True, Trampfoot. Ring the wonderful stick, rub the wonderful lantern, and cause the spirits of the stick and lantern to convey us to the Darkies.

There was no disappointment in the matter of Dark Jack; *he* was producible. The Genii set us down in the little first floor of a little public-house, and there, in a stiflingly close atmosphere, were Dark Jack, and Dark Jack's delight, his *white* unlovely Nan, sitting against the wall all round the room. More than that: Dark Jack's delight was the least unlovely Nan, both morally and physically, that I saw that night.

As a fiddle and tambourine band were sitting among the company, Quickear suggested why not strike up? 'Ah, la'ads!' said a negro sitting by the door, 'gib the jebblem a darnse. Tak' yah pardlers, jebblem, for 'um QUAD-rill.'

This was the landlord, in a Greek cap, and a dress half Greek and half English. As master of the ceremonies, he called all the figures, and occasionally addressed himself parenthetically—after this manner. When he was very loud, I use capitals.

‘Now den! Hoy! ONE. Right and left. (Put a steam on, gib ’um powder.) LA-dies’ chail. BAL-loon say. Lemonade! TWO. AD-warnse and go back (gib ’ell a breakdown, shake it out o’ yerselbs, keep a movil). SWING-corners, BAL-loon say, and Lemonade! (Hoy!) THREE. GENT come for’ard with a lady and go back, hoppersite come for’ard and do what yer can. (Aeiohoy!) BAL-loon say, and leetle lemonade. (Dat hair nigger by ’um fireplace ’hind a’ time, shake it out o’ yerselbs, gib ’ell a breakdown.) Now den! Hoy! FOUR! Lemonade. BAL-loon say, and swing. FOUR ladies meet in ’um middle, FOUR gents goes round ’um ladies, FOUR gents passes out under ’um ladies’ arms, SWING—and Lemonade till ‘a moosic can’t play no more! (Hoy, Hoy!)’

The male dancers were all blacks, and one was an unusually powerful man of six feet three or four. The sound of their flat feet on the floor was as unlike the sound of white feet as their faces were unlike white faces. They toed and heeled, shuffled, double-shuffled, double-double-shuffled, covered the buckle, and beat the time out, rarely, dancing with a great show of teeth, and with a childish good-humoured enjoyment that was very prepossessing. They generally kept together, these poor fellows, said Mr. Superintendent, because they were at a disadvantage singly, and liable to slights in the neighbouring streets. But, if I were Light Jack, I should be very slow to interfere oppressively with Dark Jack, for, whenever I have had to do with him I have found him a simple and a gentle fellow. Bearing this in mind, I asked his friendly permission to leave him restoration of beer, in wishing him good night, and thus it fell out that the last words I heard him say as I blundered down the worn stairs, were, ‘Jebblem’s elth! Ladies drinks fust!’

The night was now well on into the morning, but, for miles and hours we explored a strange world, where nobody ever goes to bed, but everybody is eternally sitting up, waiting for Jack. This exploration was among a labyrinth of dismal courts and blind alleys, called Entries, kept in wonderful order by the police, and in much better order than by the corporation: the want of gaslight in the most dangerous and infamous of these places being quite unworthy of so spirited a town. I need describe but two or three of the houses in which Jack was waited for as specimens of the rest. Many we attained by noisome passages so profoundly dark that we felt our way with our hands. Not one of the whole number we visited, was without its show of prints and ornamental crockery; the quantity of the latter set forth on little shelves and in little cases, in otherwise wretched rooms, indicating that Mercantile Jack must have an extraordinary fondness for crockery, to necessitate so much of that bait in his traps.

Among such garniture, in one front parlour in the dead of the night, four women were sitting by a fire. One of them had a male child in her arms. On a stool among them was a swarthy youth with a guitar, who had evidently stopped playing when our footsteps were heard.

‘Well I how do *you* do?’ says Mr. Superintendent, looking about him.

‘Pretty well, sir, and hope you gentlemen are going to treat us ladies, now you have come to see us.’

‘Order there!’ says Sharpeye.

‘None of that!’ says Quickear.

Trampfoot, outside, is heard to confide to himself, ‘Meggisson’s lot this is. And a bad ’un!’

‘Well!’ says Mr. Superintendent, laying his hand on the shoulder of the swarthy youth, ‘and who’s this?’

‘Antonio, sir.’

‘And what does *he* do here?’

‘Come to give us a bit of music. No harm in that, I suppose?’

‘A young foreign sailor?’

‘Yes. He’s a Spaniard. You’re a Spaniard, ain’t you, Antonio?’

‘Me Spanish.’

‘And he don’t know a word you say, not he; not if you was to talk to him till doomsday.’ (Triumphantly, as if it redounded to the credit of the house.)

‘Will he play something?’

‘Oh, yes, if you like. Play something, Antonio. *You* ain’t ashamed to play something; are you?’

The cracked guitar raises the feeblest ghost of a tune, and three of the women keep time to it with their heads, and the fourth with the child. If Antonio has brought any money in with him, I am afraid he will never take it out, and it even strikes me that his jacket and guitar may be in a bad way. But, the look of the young man and the tinkling of the instrument so change the place in a moment to a leaf out of Don Quixote, that I wonder where his mule is stabled, until he leaves off.

I am bound to acknowledge (as it tends rather to my uncommercial confusion), that I occasioned a difficulty in this establishment, by having taken the child in my arms. For, on my offering to restore it to a ferocious joker not unstimulated by rum, who claimed to be its mother, that unnatural parent put her hands behind her, and declined to accept it; backing into the fireplace, and very shrilly declaring, regardless of remonstrance from her friends, that she knowed it to be Law, that whoever took a child from its mother of his own will, was bound to stick to it. The uncommercial sense of being in a rather ridiculous position with the poor little child beginning to be frightened, was relieved by my worthy friend and fellow-constable, Trampfoot; who, laying hands on the article as if it were a Bottle, passed it on to the nearest woman, and bade her 'take hold of that.' As we came out the Bottle was passed to the ferocious joker, and they all sat down as before, including Antonio and the guitar. It was clear that there was no such thing as a nightcap to this baby's head, and that even he never went to bed, but was always kept up—and would grow up, kept up—waiting for Jack.

Later still in the night, we came (by the court 'where the man was murdered,' and by the other court across the street, into which his body was dragged) to another parlour in another Entry, where several people were sitting round a fire in just the same way. It was a dirty and offensive place, with some ragged clothes drying in it; but there was a high shelf over the entrance-door (to be out of the reach of marauding hands, possibly) with two large white loaves on it, and a great piece of Cheshire cheese.

'Well!' says Mr. Superintendent, with a comprehensive look all round. 'How do *you* do?'

'Not much to boast of, sir.' From the curtseying woman of the house. 'This is my good man, sir.'

'You are not registered as a common Lodging House?'

'No, sir.'

Sharpeye (in the Move-on tone) puts in the pertinent inquiry, 'Then why ain't you?'

'Ain't got no one here, Mr. Sharpeye,' rejoin the woman and my good man together, 'but our own family.'

'How many are you in family?'

The woman takes time to count, under pretence of coughing, and adds, as one scant of breath, 'Seven, sir.'

But she has missed one, so Sharpeye, who knows all about it, says:

'Here's a young man here makes eight, who ain't of your family?'

'No, Mr. Sharpeye, he's a weekly lodger.'

‘What does he do for a living?’

The young man here, takes the reply upon himself, and shortly answers, ‘Ain’t got nothing to do.’

The young man here, is modestly brooding behind a damp apron pendent from a clothes-line. As I glance at him I become—but I don’t know why—vaguely reminded of Woolwich, Chatham, Portsmouth, and Dover. When we get out, my respected fellow-constable Sharpeye, addressing Mr. Superintendent, says:

‘You noticed that young man, sir, in at Darby’s?’

‘Yes. What is he?’

‘Deserter, sir.’

Mr. Sharpeye further intimates that when we have done with his services, he will step back and take that young man. Which in course of time he does: feeling at perfect ease about finding him, and knowing for a moral certainty that nobody in that region will be gone to bed.

Later still in the night, we came to another parlour up a step or two from the street, which was very cleanly, neatly, even tastefully, kept, and in which, set forth on a draped chest of drawers masking the staircase, was such a profusion of ornamental crockery, that it would have furnished forth a handsome sale-booth at a fair. It backed up a stout old lady—HOGARTH drew her exact likeness more than once—and a boy who was carefully writing a copy in a copy-book.

‘Well, ma’am, how do *you* do?’

Sweetly, she can assure the dear gentlemen, sweetly. Charmingly, charmingly. And overjoyed to see us!

‘Why, this is a strange time for this boy to be writing his copy. In the middle of the night!’

‘So it is, dear gentlemen, Heaven bless your welcome faces and send ye prosperous, but he has been to the Play with a young friend for his diversion, and he combinates his improvement with entertainment, by doing his school-writing afterwards, God be good to ye!’

The copy admonished human nature to subjugate the fire of every fierce desire. One might have thought it recommended stirring the fire, the old lady so approved it. There she sat, rosily beaming at the copy-book and the boy, and invoking showers of blessings on our heads, when we left her in the middle of the night, waiting for Jack.

Later still in the night, we came to a nauseous room with an earth floor, into which the refuse scum of an alley trickled. The stench of this habitation was abominable; the seeming poverty of it, diseased and dire. Yet, here again, was visitor or lodger—a man sitting before the fire, like the rest of them elsewhere, and apparently not distasteful to the mistress's niece, who was also before the fire. The mistress herself had the misfortune of being in jail.

Three weird old women of transcendent ghastliness, were at needlework at a table in this room. Says Trampfoot to First Witch, 'What are you making?' Says she, 'Money-bags.'

'*What* are you making?' retorts Trampfoot, a little off his balance.

'Bags to hold your money,' says the witch, shaking her head, and setting her teeth; 'you as has got it.'

She holds up a common cash-bag, and on the table is a heap of such bags. Witch Two laughs at us. Witch Three scowls at us. Witch sisterhood all, stitch, stitch. First Witch has a circle round each eye. I fancy it like the beginning of the development of a perverted diabolical halo, and that when it spreads all round her head, she will die in the odour of devilry.

Trampfoot wishes to be informed what First Witch has got behind the table, down by the side of her, there? Witches Two and Three croak angrily, 'Show him the child!'

She drags out a skinny little arm from a brown dustheap on the ground. Adjured not to disturb the child, she lets it drop again. Thus we find at last that there is one child in the world of Entries who goes to bed—if this be bed.

Mr. Superintendent asks how long are they going to work at those bags?

How long? First Witch repeats. Going to have supper presently. See the cups and saucers, and the plates.

'Late? Ay! But we has to 'arn our supper afore we eats it!' Both the other witches repeat this after First Witch, and take the Uncommercial measurement with their eyes, as for a charmed winding-sheet. Some grim discourse ensues, referring to the mistress of the cave, who will be released from jail to-morrow. Witches pronounce Trampfoot 'right there,' when he deems it a trying distance for the old lady to walk; she shall be fetched by niece in a spring-cart.

As I took a parting look at First Witch in turning away, the red marks round her eyes seemed to have already grown larger, and she hungrily and thirstily looked out beyond me into the dark doorway, to see if Jack was there. For, Jack came even here, and the mistress had got into jail through deluding Jack.

When I at last ended this night of travel and got to bed, I failed to keep my mind on comfortable thoughts of Seaman's Homes (not overdone with strictness), and improved dock regulations giving Jack greater benefit of fire and candle aboard ship, through my mind's wandering among the vermin I had seen. Afterwards the same vermin ran all over my sleep. Evermore, when on a breezy day I see Poor Mercantile Jack running into port with a fair wind under all sail, I shall think of the unsleeping host of devourers who never go to bed, and are always in their set traps waiting for him.

CHAPTER VI—REFRESHMENTS FOR TRAVELLERS

In the late high winds I was blown to a great many places—and indeed, wind or no wind, I generally have extensive transactions on hand in the article of Air—but I have not been blown to any English place lately, and I very seldom have blown to any English place in my life, where I could get anything good to eat and drink in five minutes, or where, if I sought it, I was received with a welcome.

This is a curious thing to consider. But before (stimulated by my own experiences and the representations of many fellow-travellers of every uncommercial and commercial degree) I consider it further, I must utter a passing word of wonder concerning high winds.

I wonder why metropolitan gales always blow so hard at Walworth. I cannot imagine what Walworth has done, to bring such windy punishment upon itself, as I never fail to find recorded in the newspapers when the wind has blown at all hard. Brixton seems to have something on its conscience; Peckham suffers more than a virtuous Peckham might be supposed to deserve; the howling neighbourhood of Deptford figures largely in the accounts of the ingenious gentlemen who are out in every wind that blows, and to whom it is an ill high wind that blows no good; but, there can hardly be any Walworth left by this time. It must surely be blown away. I have read of more chimney-stacks and house-copings coming down with terrific smashes at Walworth, and of more sacred edifices being nearly (not quite) blown out to sea from the same accursed locality, than I have read of practised thieves with the appearance and manners of gentlemen—a popular phenomenon which never existed on earth out of fiction and a police report. Again: I wonder why people are always blown into the Surrey Canal, and into no other piece of water! Why do people get up early and go out in groups, to be blown into the Surrey Canal? Do they say to one another, ‘Welcome death, so that we get into the newspapers’? Even that would be an insufficient explanation, because even then they might sometimes put themselves in the way of being blown into the Regent’s Canal, instead of always saddling Surrey for the field. Some nameless policeman, too, is constantly, on the slightest provocation, getting himself blown into this same Surrey Canal. Will SIR RICHARD MAYNE see to it, and restrain that weak-minded and feeble-bodied constable?

To resume the consideration of the curious question of Refreshment. I am a Briton, and, as such, I am aware that I never will be a slave—and yet I have latent suspicion that there must be some slavery of wrong custom in this matter.

I travel by railroad. I start from home at seven or eight in the morning, after breakfasting hurriedly. What with skimming over the open landscape, what with mining in the damp bowels of the earth, what with banging, booming and shrieking the scores of miles away, I am hungry when I arrive at the 'Refreshment' station where I am expected. Please to observe, expected. I have said, I am hungry; perhaps I might say, with greater point and force, that I am to some extent exhausted, and that I need—in the expressive French sense of the word—to be restored. What is provided for my restoration? The apartment that is to restore me is a wind-trap, cunningly set to inveigle all the draughts in that country-side, and to communicate a special intensity and velocity to them as they rotate in two hurricanes: one, about my wretched head: one, about my wretched legs. The training of the young ladies behind the counter who are to restore me, has been from their infancy directed to the assumption of a defiant dramatic show that I am *not* expected. It is in vain for me to represent to them by my humble and conciliatory manners, that I wish to be liberal. It is in vain for me to represent to myself, for the encouragement of my sinking soul, that the young ladies have a pecuniary interest in my arrival. Neither my reason nor my feelings can make head against the cold glazed glare of eye with which I am assured that I am not expected, and not wanted. The solitary man among the bottles would sometimes take pity on me, if he dared, but he is powerless against the rights and mights of Woman. (Of the page I make no account, for, he is a boy, and therefore the natural enemy of Creation.) Chilling fast, in the deadly tornadoes to which my upper and lower extremities are exposed, and subdued by the moral disadvantage at which I stand, I turn my disconsolate eyes on the refreshments that are to restore me. I find that I must either scald my throat by insanely ladling into it, against time and for no wager, brown hot water stiffened with flour; or I must make myself flaky and sick with Banbury cake; or, I must stuff into my delicate organisation, a currant pincushion which I know will swell into immeasurable dimensions when it has got there; or, I must extort from an iron-bound quarry, with a fork, as if I were farming an inhospitable soil, some glutinous lumps of gristle and grease, called pork-pie. While thus forlornly occupied, I find that the depressing banquet on the table is, in every phase of its profoundly unsatisfactory character, so like the banquet at the meanest and shabbiest of evening parties, that I begin to think I must have 'brought down' to supper, the old lady unknown, blue with cold, who is setting her teeth on edge with a cool orange at my elbow—that the pastrycook who has compounded for the company on the lowest terms per head, is a fraudulent bankrupt, redeeming his contract with the stale stock from his window—that, for some unexplained reason, the family giving the party have become my mortal foes, and have given it on purpose to affront me. Or, I fancy that I am 'breaking up' again, at the evening conversazione at school, charged two-and-sixpence in the half-year's bill; or breaking down again at that celebrated evening party given at Mrs. Bogles's boarding-house when I was a boarder there, on which occasion Mrs. Bogles was taken in execution by a branch of the legal profession who got in as the harp, and was removed (with the keys and subscribed capital) to a place of durance, half an hour prior to the commencement of the festivities.

Take another case.

Mr. Grazinglands, of the Midland Counties, came to London by railroad one morning last week, accompanied by the amiable and fascinating Mrs. Grazinglands. Mr. G. is a gentleman of a comfortable property, and had a little business to transact at the Bank of England, which required the concurrence and signature of Mrs. G. Their business disposed of, Mr. and Mrs. Grazinglands viewed the Royal Exchange, and the exterior of St. Paul's Cathedral. The spirits of Mrs. Grazinglands then gradually beginning to flag, Mr. Grazinglands (who is the tenderest of husbands) remarked with sympathy, 'Arabella', my dear, 'fear you are faint.' Mrs. Grazing-lands replied, 'Alexander, I am rather faint; but don't mind me, I shall be better presently.' Touched by the feminine meekness of this answer, Mr. Grazinglands looked in at a pastrycook's window, hesitating as to the expediency of lunching at that establishment. He beheld nothing to eat, but butter in various forms, slightly charged with jam, and languidly frizzling over tepid water. Two ancient turtle-shells, on which was inscribed the legend, 'SOUPS,' decorated a glass partition within, enclosing a stuffy alcove, from which a ghastly mockery of a marriage-breakfast spread on a rickety table, warned the terrified traveller. An oblong box of stale and broken pastry at reduced prices, mounted on a stool, ornamented the doorway; and two high chairs that looked as if they were performing on stilts, embellished the counter. Over the whole, a young lady presided, whose gloomy haughtiness as she surveyed the street, announced a deep-seated grievance against society, and an implacable determination to be avenged. From a beetle-haunted kitchen below this institution, fumes arose, suggestive of a class of soup which Mr. Grazinglands knew, from painful experience, enfeebles the mind, distends the stomach, forces itself into the complexion, and tries to ooze out at the eyes. As he decided against entering, and turned away, Mrs. Grazinglands becoming perceptibly weaker, repeated, 'I am rather faint, Alexander, but don't mind me.' Urged to new efforts by these words of resignation, Mr. Grazinglands looked in at a cold and floury baker's shop, where utilitarian buns unrelieved by a currant, consorted with hard biscuits, a stone filter of cold water, a hard pale clock, and a hard little old woman with flaxen hair, of an undeveloped-farinaceous aspect, as if she had been fed upon seeds. He might have entered even here, but for the timely remembrance coming upon him that Jairing's was but round the corner.

Now, Jairing's being an hotel for families and gentlemen, in high repute among the midland counties, Mr. Grazinglands plucked up a great spirit when he told Mrs. Grazinglands she should have a chop there. That lady, likewise felt that she was going to see Life. Arriving on that gay and festive scene, they found the second waiter, in a flabby undress, cleaning the windows of the empty coffee-room; and the first waiter, denuded of his white tie, making up his cruets behind the Post-Office Directory. The latter (who took them in hand) was greatly put out by their patronage, and showed his mind to be troubled by a sense of the pressing necessity of instantly smuggling Mrs. Grazinglands into the obscurest corner of the building. This slighted lady (who is the pride of her division of the county) was immediately conveyed, by several dark passages, and up and down several steps, into a penitential apartment at the back of the house, where five invalided old plate-warmers leaned up against one another under a discarded old melancholy sideboard, and where the wintry leaves of all the dining-tables in the house lay thick. Also, a sofa, of incomprehensible form regarded from any sofane point of view, murmured 'Bed;' while an air of mingled fluffiness and heeltaps, added, 'Second Waiter's.' Secreted in this dismal hold, objects of a mysterious distrust and suspicion, Mr. Grazinglands and his charming partner waited twenty minutes for the smoke (for it never came to a fire), twenty-five minutes for the sherry, half an hour for the tablecloth, forty minutes for the knives and forks, three-quarters of an hour for the chops, and an hour for the potatoes. On settling the little bill—which was not much more than the day's pay of a Lieutenant in the navy—Mr. Grazinglands took heart to remonstrate against the general quality and cost of his reception. To whom the waiter replied, substantially, that Jairing's made it a merit to have accepted him on any terms: 'for,' added the waiter (unmistakably coughing at Mrs. Grazinglands, the pride of her division of the county), 'when indiwiduals is not staying in the 'Ouse, their favours is not as a rule looked upon as making it worth Mr. Jairing's while; nor is it, indeed, a style of business Mr. Jairing wishes.' Finally, Mr. and Mrs. Grazinglands passed out of Jairing's hotel for Families and Gentlemen, in a state of the greatest depression, scorned by the bar; and did not recover their self-respect for several days.

Or take another case. Take your own case.

You are going off by railway, from any Terminus. You have twenty minutes for dinner, before you go. You want your dinner, and like Dr. Johnson, Sir, you like to dine. You present to your mind, a picture of the refreshment-table at that terminus. The conventional shabby evening-party supper—accepted as the model for all termini and all refreshment stations, because it is the last repast known to this state of existence of which any human creature would partake, but in the direst extremity—sickens your contemplation, and your words are these: 'I cannot dine on stale sponge-cakes that turn to sand in the mouth. I cannot dine on shining brown patties, composed of unknown animals within, and offering to my view the device of an indigestible star-fish in leaden pie-crust without. I cannot dine on a sandwich that has long been pining under an exhausted receiver. I cannot dine on barley-sugar. I cannot dine on Toffee.' You repair to the nearest hotel, and arrive, agitated, in the coffee-room.

It is a most astonishing fact that the waiter is very cold to you. Account for it how you may, smooth it over how you will, you cannot deny that he is cold to you. He is not glad to see you, he does not want you, he would much rather you hadn't come. He opposes to your flushed condition, an immovable composure. As if this were not enough, another waiter, born, as it would seem, expressly to look at you in this passage of your life, stands at a little distance, with his napkin under his arm and his hands folded, looking at you with all his might. You impress on your waiter that you have ten minutes for dinner, and he proposes that you shall begin with a bit of fish which will be ready in twenty. That proposal declined, he suggests—as a neat originality—'a weal or mutton cutlet.' You close with either cutlet, any cutlet, anything. He goes, leisurely, behind a door and calls down some unseen shaft. A ventriloquial dialogue ensues, tending finally to the effect that weal only, is available on the spur of the moment. You anxiously call out, 'Veal, then!' Your waiter having settled that point, returns to array your tablecloth, with a table napkin folded cocked-hat-wise (slowly, for something out of window engages his eye), a white wine-glass, a green wine-glass, a blue finger-glass, a tumbler, and a powerful field battery of fourteen casters with nothing in them; or at all events—which is enough for your purpose—with nothing in them that will come out. All this time, the other waiter looks at you—with an air of mental comparison and curiosity, now, as if it had occurred to him that you are rather like his brother. Half your time gone, and nothing come but the jug of ale and the bread, you implore your waiter to 'see after that cutlet, waiter; pray do!' He cannot go at once, for he is carrying in seventeen pounds of American cheese for you to finish with, and a small Landed Estate of celery and water-cresses. The other waiter changes his leg, and takes a new view of you, doubtfully, now, as if he had rejected the resemblance to his brother, and had begun to think you more like his aunt or his grandmother. Again you beseech your waiter with pathetic indignation, to 'see after that cutlet!' He steps out to see after it, and by-and-by, when you are going away without it, comes back with it. Even then, he will not take the sham silver cover off, without a pause for a flourish, and a look at the musty cutlet as if he were surprised to see it—which cannot possibly be the case, he must have seen it so often before. A sort of fur has been produced upon its surface by the cook's art, and in a sham silver vessel staggering on two feet instead of three, is a cutaneous kind of sauce of brown pimples and pickled cucumber. You order the bill, but your waiter cannot bring your bill yet, because he is bringing, instead, three flinty-hearted potatoes and two grim head of broccoli, like the occasional ornaments on area railings, badly boiled. You know that you will never come to this pass, any more than to the cheese and celery, and you imperatively demand your bill; but, it takes time to get, even when gone for, because your waiter has to communicate with a lady who lives behind a sash-window in a corner, and who appears to have to refer to several Ledgers before she can make it out—as if you had been staying there a year. You become distracted to get away, and the other waiter, once more changing his leg, still looks at you—but suspiciously, now, as if you had begun to remind him of the party who took the great-coats last winter. Your bill at last brought and paid, at the rate of sixpence a mouthful, your waiter reproachfully reminds you that 'attendance is not charged for a single meal,' and you have to search in all your pockets for sixpence more. He has a worse opinion of you than ever, when you have given it to him, and lets you out into the street with the air of one saying to himself, as you cannot again doubt he is, 'I hope we shall never see *you* here again!'

Or, take any other of the numerous travelling instances in which, with more time at your disposal, you are, have been, or may be, equally ill served. Take the old-established Bull's Head with its old-established knife-boxes on its old-established sideboards, its old-established flue under its old-established four-post bedsteads in its old-established airless rooms, its old-established frouziness up-stairs and down-stairs, its old-established cookery, and its old-established principles of plunder. Count up your injuries, in its side-dishes of ailing sweetbreads in white poultices, of apothecaries' powders in rice for curry, of pale stewed bits of calf ineffectually relying for an adventitious interest on forcemeat balls. You have had experience of the old-established Bull's Head stringy fowls, with lower extremities like wooden legs, sticking up out of the dish; of its cannibalic boiled mutton, gushing horribly among its capers, when carved; of its little dishes of pastry—roofs of spermaceti ointment, erected over half an apple or four gooseberries. Well for you if you have yet forgotten the old-established Bull's Head fruity port: whose reputation was gained solely by the old-established price the Bull's Head put upon it, and by the old-established air with which the Bull's Head set the glasses and D'Oyleys on, and held that Liquid Gout to the three-and-sixpenny wax-candle, as if its old-established colour hadn't come from the dyer's.

Or lastly, take to finish with, two cases that we all know, every day.

We all know the new hotel near the station, where it is always gusty, going up the lane which is always muddy, where we are sure to arrive at night, and where we make the gas start awfully when we open the front door. We all know the flooring of the passages and staircases that is too new, and the walls that are too new, and the house that is haunted by the ghost of mortar. We all know the doors that have cracked, and the cracked shutters through which we get a glimpse of the disconsolate moon. We all know the new people, who have come to keep the new hotel, and who wish they had never come, and who (inevitable result) wish *we* had never come. We all know how much too scant and smooth and bright the new furniture is, and how it has never settled down, and cannot fit itself into right places, and will get into wrong places. We all know how the gas, being lighted, shows maps of Damp upon the walls. We all know how the ghost of mortar passes into our sandwich, stirs our negus, goes up to bed with us, ascends the pale bedroom chimney, and prevents the smoke from following. We all know how a leg of our chair comes off at breakfast in the morning, and how the dejected waiter attributes the accident to a general greenness pervading the establishment, and informs us, in reply to a local inquiry, that he is thankful to say he is an entire stranger in that part of the country and is going back to his own connexion on Saturday.

We all know, on the other hand, the great station hotel belonging to the company of proprietors, which has suddenly sprung up in the back outskirts of any place we like to name, and where we look out of our palatial windows at little back yards and gardens, old summer-houses, fowl-houses, pigeon-traps, and pigsties. We all know this hotel in which we can get anything we want, after its kind, for money; but where nobody is glad to see us, or sorry to see us, or minds (our bill paid) whether we come or go, or how, or when, or why, or cares about us. We all know this hotel, where we have no individuality, but put ourselves into the general post, as it were, and are sorted and disposed of according to our division. We all know that we can get on very well indeed at such a place, but still not perfectly well; and this may be, because the place is largely wholesale, and there is a lingering personal retail interest within us that asks to be satisfied.

To sum up. My uncommercial travelling has not yet brought me to the conclusion that we are close to perfection in these matters. And just as I do not believe that the end of the world will ever be near at hand, so long as any of the very tiresome and arrogant people who constantly predict that catastrophe are left in it, so, I shall have small faith in the Hotel Millennium, while any of the uncomfortable superstitions I have glanced at remain in existence.

CHAPTER VII—TRAVELLING ABROAD

I got into the travelling chariot—it was of German make, roomy, heavy, and unvarnished—I got into the travelling chariot, pulled up the steps after me, shut myself in with a smart bang of the door, and gave the word, ‘Go on!’

Immediately, all that W. and S.W. division of London began to slide away at a pace so lively, that I was over the river, and past the Old Kent Road, and out on Blackheath, and even ascending Shooter’s Hill, before I had had time to look about me in the carriage, like a collected traveller.

I had two ample Imperials on the roof, other fitted storage for luggage in front, and other up behind; I had a net for books overhead, great pockets to all the windows, a leathern pouch or two hung up for odds and ends, and a reading lamp fixed in the back of the chariot, in case I should be benighted. I was amply provided in all respects, and had no idea where I was going (which was delightful), except that I was going abroad.

So smooth was the old high road, and so fresh were the horses, and so fast went I, that it was midway between Gravesend and Rochester, and the widening river was bearing the ships, white sailed or black-smoked, out to sea, when I noticed by the wayside a very queer small boy.

‘Holloa!’ said I, to the very queer small boy, ‘where do you live?’

‘At Chatham,’ says he.

‘What do you do there?’ says I.

‘I go to school,’ says he.

I took him up in a moment, and we went on. Presently, the very queer small boy says, ‘This is Gads-hill we are coming to, where Falstaff went out to rob those travellers, and ran away.’

‘You know something about Falstaff, eh?’ said I.

‘All about him,’ said the very queer small boy. ‘I am old (I am nine), and I read all sorts of books. But *do* let us stop at the top of the hill, and look at the house there, if you please!’

‘You admire that house?’ said I.

‘Bless you, sir,’ said the very queer small boy, ‘when I was not more than half as old as nine, it used to be a treat for me to be brought to look at it. And now, I am nine, I come by myself to look at it. And ever since I can recollect, my father, seeing me so fond of it, has often said to me, “If you were to be very persevering and were to work hard, you might some day come to live in it.” Though that’s impossible!’ said the very queer small boy, drawing a low breath, and now staring at the house out of window with all his might.

I was rather amazed to be told this by the very queer small boy; for that house happens to be *my* house, and I have reason to believe that what he said was true.

Well! I made no halt there, and I soon dropped the very queer small boy and went on. Over the road where the old Romans used to march, over the road where the old Canterbury pilgrims used to go, over the road where the travelling trains of the old imperious priests and princes used to jingle on horseback between the continent and this Island through the mud and water, over the road where Shakespeare hummed to himself, ‘Blow, blow, thou winter wind,’ as he sat in the saddle at the gate of the inn yard noticing the carriers; all among the cherry orchards, apple orchards, corn-fields, and hop-gardens; so went I, by Canterbury to Dover. There, the sea was tumbling in, with deep sounds, after dark, and the revolving French light on Cape Grinez was seen regularly bursting out and becoming obscured, as if the head of a gigantic light-keeper in an anxious state of mind were interposed every half-minute, to look how it was burning.

Early in the morning I was on the deck of the steam-packet, and we were aiming at the bar in the usual intolerable manner, and the bar was aiming at us in the usual intolerable manner, and the bar got by far the best of it, and we got by far the worst—all in the usual intolerable manner.

But, when I was clear of the Custom House on the other side, and when I began to make the dust fly on the thirsty French roads, and when the twigsome trees by the wayside (which, I suppose, never will grow leafy, for they never did) guarded here and there a dusty soldier, or field labourer, baking on a heap of broken stones, sound asleep in a fiction of shade, I began to recover my travelling spirits. Coming upon the breaker of the broken stones, in a hard, hot, shining hat, on which the sun played at a distance as on a burning-glass, I felt that now, indeed, I was in the dear old France of my affections. I should have known it, without the well-remembered bottle of rough ordinary wine, the cold roast fowl, the loaf, and the pinch of salt, on which I lunched with unspeakable satisfaction, from one of the stuffed pockets of the chariot.

I must have fallen asleep after lunch, for when a bright face looked in at the window, I started, and said:

'Good God, Louis, I dreamed you were dead!'

My cheerful servant laughed, and answered:

'Me? Not at all, sir.'

'How glad I am to wake! What are we doing Louis?'

'We go to take relay of horses. Will you walk up the hill?'

'Certainly.'

Welcome the old French hill, with the old French lunatic (not in the most distant degree related to Sterne's Maria) living in a thatched dog-kennel half-way up, and flying out with his crutch and his big head and extended nightcap, to be beforehand with the old men and women exhibiting crippled children, and with the children exhibiting old men and women, ugly and blind, who always seemed by resurrectionary process to be recalled out of the elements for the sudden peopling of the solitude!

'It is well,' said I, scattering among them what small coin I had; 'here comes Louis, and I am quite roused from my nap.'

We journeyed on again, and I welcomed every new assurance that France stood where I had left it. There were the posting-houses, with their archways, dirty stable-yards, and clean post-masters' wives, bright women of business, looking on at the putting-to of the horses; there were the postilions counting what money they got, into their hats, and never making enough of it; there were the standard population of grey horses of Flanders descent, invariably biting one another when they got a chance; there were the fleecy sheepskins, looped on over their uniforms by the postilions, like bibbed aprons when it blew and rained; there were their Jack-boots, and their cracking whips; there were the cathedrals that I got out to see, as under some cruel bondage, in no wise desiring to see them; there were the little towns that appeared to have no reason for being towns, since most of their houses were to let and nobody could be induced to look at them, except the people who couldn't let them and had nothing else to do but look at them all day. I lay a night upon the road and enjoyed delectable cookery of potatoes, and some other sensible things, adoption of which at home would inevitably be shown to be fraught with ruin, somehow or other, to that rickety national blessing, the British farmer; and at last I was rattled, like a single pill in a box, over leagues of stones, until—madly cracking, plunging, and flourishing two grey tails about—I made my triumphal entry into Paris.

At Paris, I took an upper apartment for a few days in one of the hotels of the Rue de Rivoli; my front windows looking into the garden of the Tuileries (where the principal difference between the nursemaids and the flowers seemed to be that the former were locomotive and the latter not): my back windows looking at all the other back windows in the hotel, and deep down into a paved yard, where my German chariot had retired under a tight-fitting archway, to all appearance for life, and where bells rang all day without anybody's minding them but certain chamberlains with feather brooms and green baize caps, who here and there leaned out of some high window placidly looking down, and where neat waiters with trays on their left shoulders passed and repassed from morning to night.

Whenever I am at Paris, I am dragged by invisible force into the Morgue. I never want to go there, but am always pulled there. One Christmas Day, when I would rather have been anywhere else, I was attracted in, to see an old grey man lying all alone on his cold bed, with a tap of water turned on over his grey hair, and running, drip, drip, drip, down his wretched face until it got to the corner of his mouth, where it took a turn, and made him look sly. One New Year's Morning (by the same token, the sun was shining outside, and there was a mountebank balancing a feather on his nose, within a yard of the gate), I was pulled in again to look at a flaxen-haired boy of eighteen, with a heart hanging on his breast—'from his mother,' was engraven on it—who had come into the net across the river, with a bullet wound in his fair forehead and his hands cut with a knife, but whence or how was a blank mystery. This time, I was forced into the same dread place, to see a large dark man whose disfigurement by water was in a frightful manner comic, and whose expression was that of a prize-fighter who had closed his eyelids under a heavy blow, but was going immediately to open them, shake his head, and 'come up smiling.' Oh what this large dark man cost me in that bright city!

It was very hot weather, and he was none the better for that, and I was much the worse. Indeed, a very neat and pleasant little woman with the key of her lodging on her forefinger, who had been showing him to her little girl while she and the child ate sweetmeats, observed monsieur looking poorly as we came out together, and asked monsieur, with her wondering little eyebrows prettily raised, if there were anything the matter? Faintly replying in the negative, monsieur crossed the road to a wine-shop, got some brandy, and resolved to freshen himself with a dip in the great floating bath on the river.

The bath was crowded in the usual airy manner, by a male population in striped drawers of various gay colours, who walked up and down arm in arm, drank coffee, smoked cigars, sat at little tables, conversed politely with the damsels who dispensed the towels, and every now and then pitched themselves into the river head foremost, and came out again to repeat this social routine. I made haste to participate in the water part of the entertainments, and was in the full enjoyment of a delightful bath, when all in a moment I was seized with an unreasonable idea that the large dark body was floating straight at me.

I was out of the river, and dressing instantly. In the shock I had taken some water into my mouth, and it turned me sick, for I fancied that the contamination of the creature was in it. I had got back to my cool darkened room in the hotel, and was lying on a sofa there, before I began to reason with myself.

Of course, I knew perfectly well that the large dark creature was stone dead, and that I should no more come upon him out of the place where I had seen him dead, than I should come upon the cathedral of Notre-Dame in an entirely new situation. What troubled me was the picture of the creature; and that had so curiously and strongly painted itself upon my brain, that I could not get rid of it until it was worn out.

I noticed the peculiarities of this possession, while it was a real discomfort to me. That very day, at dinner, some morsel on my plate looked like a piece of him, and I was glad to get up and go out. Later in the evening, I was walking along the Rue St. Honoré, when I saw a bill at a public room there, announcing small-sword exercise, broad-sword exercise, wrestling, and other such feats. I went in, and some of the sword-play being very skilful, remained. A specimen of our own national sport, The British Boaxe, was announced to be given at the close of the evening. In an evil hour, I determined to wait for this Boaxe, as became a Briton. It was a clumsy specimen (executed by two English grooms out of place), but one of the combatants, receiving a straight right-hander with the glove between his eyes, did exactly what the large dark creature in the Morgue had seemed going to do—and finished me for that night.

There was rather a sickly smell (not at all an unusual fragrance in Paris) in the little ante-room of my apartment at the hotel. The large dark creature in the Morgue was by no direct experience associated with my sense of smell, because, when I came to the knowledge of him, he lay behind a wall of thick plate-glass as good as a wall of steel or marble for that matter. Yet the whiff of the room never failed to reproduce him. What was more curious, was the capriciousness with which his portrait seemed to light itself up in my mind, elsewhere. I might be walking in the Palais Royal, lazily enjoying the shop windows, and might be regaling myself with one of the ready-made clothes shops that are set out there. My eyes, wandering over impossible-waisted dressing-gowns and luminous waistcoats, would fall upon the master, or the shopman, or even the very dummy at the door, and would suggest to me, 'Something like him!'—and instantly I was sickened again.

This would happen at the theatre, in the same manner. Often it would happen in the street, when I certainly was not looking for the likeness, and when probably there was no likeness there. It was not because the creature was dead that I was so haunted, because I know that I might have been (and I know it because I have been) equally attended by the image of a living aversion. This lasted about a week. The picture did not fade by degrees, in the sense that it became a whit less forcible and distinct, but in the sense that it obtruded itself less and less frequently. The experience may be worth considering by some who have the care of children. It would be difficult to overstate the intensity and accuracy of an intelligent child's observation. At that impressible time of life, it must sometimes produce a fixed impression. If the fixed impression be of an object terrible to the child, it will be (for want of reasoning upon) inseparable from great fear. Force the child at such a time, be Spartan with it, send it into the dark against its will, leave it in a lonely bedroom against its will, and you had better murder it.

On a bright morning I rattled away from Paris, in the German chariot, and left the large dark creature behind me for good. I ought to confess, though, that I had been drawn back to the Morgue, after he was put underground, to look at his clothes, and that I found them frightfully like him—particularly his boots. However, I rattled away for Switzerland, looking forward and not backward, and so we parted company.

Welcome again, the long, long spell of France, with the queer country inns, full of vases of flowers and clocks, in the dull little town, and with the little population not at all dull on the little Boulevard in the evening, under the little trees! Welcome Monsieur the Curé, walking alone in the early morning a short way out of the town, reading that eternal Breviary of yours, which surely might be almost read, without book, by this time! Welcome Monsieur the Curé, later in the day, jolting through the highway dust (as if you had already ascended to the cloudy region), in a very big-headed cabriolet, with the dried mud of a dozen winters on it. Welcome again Monsieur the Curé, as we exchange salutations; you, straightening your back to look at the German chariot, while picking in your little village garden a vegetable or two for the day's soup: I, looking out of the German chariot window in that delicious traveller's trance which knows no cares, no yesterdays, no to-morrows, nothing but the passing objects and the passing scents and sounds! And so I came, in due course of delight, to Strasbourg, where I passed a wet Sunday evening at a window, while an idle trifle of a vaudeville was played for me at the opposite house.

How such a large house came to have only three people living in it, was its own affair. There were at least a score of windows in its high roof alone; how many in its grotesque front, I soon gave up counting. The owner was a shopkeeper, by name Straudenheim; by trade—I couldn't make out what by trade, for he had forborne to write that up, and his shop was shut.

At first, as I looked at Straudenheim's, through the steadily falling rain, I set him up in business in the goose-liver line. But, inspection of Straudenheim, who became visible at a window on the second floor, convinced me that there was something more precious than liver in the case. He wore a black velvet skull-cap, and looked usurious and rich. A large-lipped, pear-nosed old man, with white hair, and keen eyes, though near-sighted. He was writing at a desk, was Straudenheim, and ever and again left off writing, put his pen in his mouth, and went through actions with his right hand, like a man steadying piles of cash. Five-franc pieces, Straudenheim, or golden Napoleons? A jeweller, Straudenheim, a dealer in money, a diamond merchant, or what?

Below Straudenheim, at a window on the first floor, sat his housekeeper—far from young, but of a comely presence, suggestive of a well-matured foot and ankle. She was cheerily dressed, had a fan in her hand, and wore large gold earrings and a large gold cross. She would have been out holiday-making (as I settled it) but for the pestilent rain. Strasbourg had given up holiday-making for that once, as a bad job, because the rain was jerking in gushes out of the old roof-spouts, and running in a brook down the middle of the street. The housekeeper, her arms folded on her bosom and her fan tapping her chin, was bright and smiling at her open window, but otherwise Straudenheim's house front was very dreary. The housekeeper's was the only open window in it; Straudenheim kept himself close, though it was a sultry evening when air is pleasant, and though the rain had brought into the town that vague refreshing smell of grass which rain does bring in the summer-time.

The dim appearance of a man at Straudenheim's shoulder, inspired me with a misgiving that somebody had come to murder that flourishing merchant for the wealth with which I had handsomely endowed him: the rather, as it was an excited man, lean and long of figure, and evidently stealthy of foot. But, he conferred with Straudenheim instead of doing him a mortal injury, and then they both softly opened the other window of that room—which was immediately over the housekeeper's—and tried to see her by looking down. And my opinion of Straudenheim was much lowered when I saw that eminent citizen spit out of window, clearly with the hope of spitting on the housekeeper.

The unconscious housekeeper fanned herself, tossed her head, and laughed. Though unconscious of Straudenheim, she was conscious of somebody else—of me?—there was nobody else.

After leaning so far out of the window, that I confidently expected to see their heels tilt up, Straudenheim and the lean man drew their heads in and shut the window. Presently, the house door secretly opened, and they slowly and spitefully crept forth into the pouring rain. They were coming over to me (I thought) to demand satisfaction for my looking at the housekeeper, when they plunged into a recess in the architecture under my window and dragged out the puniest of little soldiers, begirt with the most innocent of little swords. The tall glazed head-dress of this warrior, Straudenheim instantly knocked off, and out of it fell two sugar-sticks, and three or four large lumps of sugar.

The warrior made no effort to recover his property or to pick up his shako, but looked with an expression of attention at Straudenheim when he kicked him five times, and also at the lean man when *he* kicked him five times, and again at Straudenheim when he tore the breast of his (the warrior's) little coat open, and shook all his ten fingers in his face, as if they were ten thousand. When these outrages had been committed, Straudenheim and his man went into the house again and barred the door. A wonderful circumstance was, that the housekeeper who saw it all (and who could have taken six such warriors to her buxom bosom at once), only fanned herself and laughed as she had laughed before, and seemed to have no opinion about it, one way or other.

But, the chief effect of the drama was the remarkable vengeance taken by the little warrior. Left alone in the rain, he picked up his shako; put it on, all wet and dirty as it was; retired into a court, of which Straudenheim's house formed the corner; wheeled about; and bringing his two forefingers close to the top of his nose, rubbed them over one another, cross-wise, in derision, defiance, and contempt of Straudenheim. Although Straudenheim could not possibly be supposed to be conscious of this strange proceeding, it so inflated and comforted the little warrior's soul, that twice he went away, and twice came back into the court to repeat it, as though it must goad his enemy to madness. Not only that, but he afterwards came back with two other small warriors, and they all three did it together. Not only that—as I live to tell the tale!—but just as it was falling quite dark, the three came back, bringing with them a huge bearded Sapper, whom they moved, by recital of the original wrong, to go through the same performance, with the same complete absence of all possible knowledge of it on the part of Straudenheim. And then they all went away, arm in arm, singing.

I went away too, in the German chariot at sunrise, and rattled on, day after day, like one in a sweet dream; with so many clear little bells on the harness of the horses, that the nursery rhyme about Banbury Cross and the venerable lady who rode in state there, was always in my ears. And now I came to the land of wooden houses, innocent cakes, thin butter soup, and spotless little inn bedrooms with a family likeness to Dairies. And now the Swiss marksmen were for ever rifle-shooting at marks across gorges, so exceedingly near my ear, that I felt like a new Gesler in a Canton of Tells, and went in highly-deserved danger of my tyrannical life. The prizes at these shootings, were watches, smart handkerchiefs, hats, spoons, and (above all) tea-trays; and at these contests I came upon a more than usually accomplished and amiable countryman of my own, who had shot himself deaf in whole years of competition, and had won so many tea-trays that he went about the country with his carriage full of them, like a glorified Cheap-Jack.

In the mountain-country into which I had now travelled, a yoke of oxen were sometimes hooked on before the post-horses, and I went lumbering up, up, up, through mist and rain, with the roar of falling water for change of music. Of a sudden, mist and rain would clear away, and I would come down into picturesque little towns with gleaming spires and odd towers; and would stroll afoot into market-places in steep winding streets, where a hundred women in bodices, sold eggs and honey, butter and fruit, and suckled their children as they sat by their clean baskets, and had such enormous goîtres (or glandular swellings in the throat) that it became a science to know where the nurse ended and the child began. About this time, I deserted my German chariot for the back of a mule (in colour and consistency so very like a dusty old hair trunk I once had at school, that I half expected to see my initials in brass-headed nails on his backbone), and went up a thousand rugged ways, and looked down at a thousand woods of fir and pine, and would on the whole have preferred my mule's keeping a little nearer to the inside, and not usually travelling with a hoof or two over the precipice—though much consoled by explanation that this was to be attributed to his great sagacity, by reason of his carrying broad loads of wood at other times, and not being clear but that I myself belonged to that station of life, and required as much room as they. He brought me safely, in his own wise way, among the passes of the Alps, and here I enjoyed a dozen climates a day; being now (like Don Quixote on the back of the wooden horse) in the region of wind, now in the region of fire, now in the region of unmelting ice and snow. Here, I passed over trembling domes of ice, beneath which the cataract was roaring; and here was received under arches of icicles, of unspeakable beauty; and here the sweet air was so bracing and so light, that at halting-times I rolled in the snow when I saw my mule do it, thinking that he must know best. At this part of the journey we would come, at mid-day, into half an hour's thaw: when the rough mountain inn would be found on an island of deep mud in a sea of snow, while the baiting strings of mules, and the carts full of casks and bales, which had been in an Arctic condition a mile off, would steam again. By such ways and means, I would come to the cluster of châlets where I had to turn out of the track to see the waterfall; and then, uttering a howl like a young giant, on espying a traveller—in other words, something to eat—coming up the steep, the idiot lying on the wood-pile who sunned himself and nursed his goître, would rouse the woman-guide within the hut, who would stream out hastily, throwing her child over one of her shoulders and her goître over the other, as she came along. I slept at religious houses, and bleak refuges of many kinds, on this journey, and by the stove at night heard stories of travellers who had perished within call, in wreaths and drifts of snow. One night the stove within, and the cold outside, awakened childish associations long forgotten, and I dreamed I was in Russia—the identical serf out of a picture-book I had, before I could read it for myself—and that I was going to be knouted by a noble personage in a fur cap, boots, and earrings, who, I think, must have come out of some melodrama.

Commend me to the beautiful waters among these mountains! Though I was not of their mind: they, being inveterately bent on getting down into the level country, and I ardently desiring to linger where I was. What desperate leaps they took, what dark abysses they plunged into, what rocks they wore away, what echoes they invoked! In one part where I went, they were pressed into the service of carrying wood down, to be burnt next winter, as costly fuel, in Italy. But, their fierce savage nature was not to be easily constrained, and they fought with every limb of the wood; whirling it round and round, stripping its bark away, dashing it against pointed corners, driving it out of the course, and roaring and flying at the peasants who steered it back again from the bank with long stout poles. Alas! concurrent streams of time and water carried *me* down fast, and I came, on an exquisitely clear day, to the Lausanne shore of the Lake of Geneva, where I stood looking at the bright blue water, the flushed white mountains opposite, and the boats at my feet with their furled Mediterranean sails, showing like enormous magnifications of this goose-quill pen that is now in my hand.

- The sky became overcast without any notice; a wind very like the March east wind of England, blew across me; and a voice said, ‘How do you like it? Will it do?’

I had merely shut myself, for half a minute, in a German travelling chariot that stood for sale in the Carriage Department of the London Pantechnicon. I had a commission to buy it, for a friend who was going abroad; and the look and manner of the chariot, as I tried the cushions and the springs, brought all these hints of travelling remembrance before me.

‘It will do very well,’ said I, rather sorrowfully, as I got out at the other door, and shut the carriage up.

CHAPTER VIII—THE GREAT TASMANIA'S CARGO

I travel constantly, up and down a certain line of railway that has a terminus in London. It is the railway for a large military depôt, and for other large barracks. To the best of my serious belief, I have never been on that railway by daylight, without seeing some handcuffed deserters in the train.

It is in the nature of things that such an institution as our English army should have many bad and troublesome characters in it. But, this is a reason for, and not against, its being made as acceptable as possible to well-disposed men of decent behaviour. Such men are assuredly not tempted into the ranks, by the beastly inversion of natural laws, and the compulsion to live in worse than swinish foulness. Accordingly, when any such Circumlocutional embellishments of the soldier's condition have of late been brought to notice, we civilians, seated in outer darkness cheerfully meditating on an Income Tax, have considered the matter as being our business, and have shown a tendency to declare that we would rather not have it misregulated, if such declaration may, without violence to the Church Catechism, be hinted to those who are put in authority over us.

Any animated description of a modern battle, any private soldier's letter published in the newspapers, any page of the records of the Victoria Cross, will show that in the ranks of the army, there exists under all disadvantages as fine a sense of duty as is to be found in any station on earth. Who doubts that if we all did our duty as faithfully as the soldier does his, this world would be a better place? There may be greater difficulties in our way than in the soldier's. Not disputed. But, let us at least do our duty towards *him.*

I had got back again to that rich and beautiful port where I had looked after Mercantile Jack, and I was walking up a hill there, on a wild March morning. My conversation with my official friend Pangloss, by whom I was accidentally accompanied, took this direction as we took the up-hill direction, because the object of my uncommercial journey was to see some discharged soldiers who had recently come home from India. There were men of HAVELOCK's among them; there were men who had been in many of the great battles of the great Indian campaign, among them; and I was curious to note what our discharged soldiers looked like, when they were done with.

I was not the less interested (as I mentioned to my official friend Pangloss) because these men had claimed to be discharged, when their right to be discharged was not admitted. They had behaved with unblemished fidelity and bravery; but, a change of circumstances had arisen, which, as they considered, put an end to their compact and entitled them to enter on a new one. Their demand had been blunderingly resisted by the authorities in India: but, it is to be presumed that the men were not far wrong, inasmuch as the bungle had ended in their being sent home discharged, in pursuance of orders from home. (There was an immense waste of money, of course.)

Under these circumstances—thought I, as I walked up the hill, on which I accidentally encountered my official friend—under these circumstances of the men having successfully opposed themselves to the Pagoda Department of that great Circumlocution Office on which the sun never sets and the light of reason never rises, the Pagoda Department will have been particularly careful of the national honour. It will have shown these men, in the scrupulous good faith, not to say the generosity, of its dealing with them, that great national authorities can have no small retaliations and revenges. It will have made every provision for their health on the passage home, and will have landed them, restored from their campaigning fatigues by a sea-voyage, pure air, sound food, and good medicines. And I pleased myself with dwelling beforehand, on the great accounts of their personal treatment which these men would carry into their various towns and villages, and on the increasing popularity of the service that would insensibly follow. I almost began to hope that the hitherto-never-failing deserters on my railroad would by-and-by become a phenomenon.

In this agreeable frame of mind I entered the workhouse of Liverpool.—For, the cultivation of laurels in a sandy soil, had brought the soldiers in question to *that* abode of Glory.

Before going into their wards to visit them, I inquired how they had made their triumphant entry there? They had been brought through the rain in carts it seemed, from the landing-place to the gate, and had then been carried up-stairs on the backs of paupers. Their groans and pains during the performance of this glorious pageant, had been so distressing, as to bring tears into the eyes of spectators but too well accustomed to scenes of suffering. The men were so dreadfully cold, that those who could get near the fires were hard to be restrained from thrusting their feet in among the blazing coals. They were so horribly reduced, that they were awful to look upon. Racked with dysentery and blackened with scurvy, one hundred and forty wretched soldiers had been revived with brandy and laid in bed.

My official friend Pangloss is lineally descended from a learned doctor of that name, who was once tutor to Candide, an ingenious young gentleman of some celebrity. In his personal character, he is as humane and worthy a gentleman as any I know; in his official capacity, he unfortunately preaches the doctrines of his renowned ancestor, by demonstrating on all occasions that we live in the best of all possible official worlds.

‘In the name of Humanity,’ said I, ‘how did the men fall into this deplorable state? Was the ship well found in stores?’

‘I am not here to asseverate that I know the fact, of my own knowledge,’ answered Pangloss, ‘but I have grounds for asserting that the stores were the best of all possible stores.’

A medical officer laid before us, a handful of rotten biscuit, and a handful of split peas. The biscuit was a honeycombed heap of maggots, and the excrement of maggots. The peas were even harder than this filth. A similar handful had been experimentally boiled six hours, and had shown no signs of softening. These were the stores on which the soldiers had been fed.

‘The beef—’ I began, when Pangloss cut me short.

‘Was the best of all possible beef,’ said he.

But, behold, there was laid before us certain evidence given at the Coroner’s Inquest, holden on some of the men (who had obstinately died of their treatment), and from that evidence it appeared that the beef was the worst of possible beef!

‘Then I lay my hand upon my heart, and take my stand,’ said Pangloss, ‘by the pork, which was the best of all possible pork.’

‘But look at this food before our eyes, if one may so misuse the word,’ said I. ‘Would any Inspector who did his duty, pass such abomination?’

‘It ought not to have been passed,’ Pangloss admitted.

‘Then the authorities out there—’ I began, when Pangloss cut me short again.

‘There would certainly seem to have been something wrong somewhere,’ said he; ‘but I am prepared to prove that the authorities out there, are the best of all possible authorities.'

I never heard of any impeached public authority in my life, who was not the best public authority in existence.

'We are told of these unfortunate men being laid low by scurvy,' said I. 'Since lime-juice has been regularly stored and served out in our navy, surely that disease, which used to devastate it, has almost disappeared? Was there lime-juice aboard this transport?'

My official friend was beginning 'the best of all possible—' when an inconvenient medical forefinger pointed out another passage in the evidence, from which it appeared that the lime-juice had been bad too. Not to mention that the vinegar had been bad too, the vegetables bad too, the cooking accommodation insufficient (if there had been anything worth mentioning to cook), the water supply exceedingly inadequate, and the beer sour.

'Then the men,' said Pangloss, a little irritated, 'Were the worst of all possible men.'

'In what respect?' I asked.

'Oh! Habitual drunkards,' said Pangloss.

But, again the same incorrigible medical forefinger pointed out another passage in the evidence, showing that the dead men had been examined after death, and that they, at least, could not possibly have been habitual drunkards, because the organs within them which must have shown traces of that habit, were perfectly sound.

'And besides,' said the three doctors present, 'one and all, habitual drunkards brought as low as these men have been, could not recover under care and food, as the great majority of these men are recovering. They would not have strength of constitution to do it.'

'Reckless and improvident dogs, then,' said Pangloss. 'Always are—nine times out of ten.'

I turned to the master of the workhouse, and asked him whether the men had any money?

'Money?' said he. 'I have in my iron safe, nearly four hundred pounds of theirs; the agents have nearly a hundred pounds more and many of them have left money in Indian banks besides.'

'Hah!' said I to myself, as we went up-stairs, 'this is not the best of all possible stories, I doubt!'

We went into a large ward, containing some twenty or five-and-twenty beds. We went into several such wards, one after another. I find it very difficult to indicate what a shocking sight I saw in them, without frightening the reader from the perusal of these lines, and defeating my object of making it known.

O the sunken eyes that turned to me as I walked between the rows of beds, or—worse still—that glazedly looked at the white ceiling, and saw nothing and cared for nothing! Here, lay the skeleton of a man, so lightly covered with a thin unwholesome skin, that not a bone in the anatomy was clothed, and I could clasp the arm above the elbow, in my finger and thumb. Here, lay a man with the black scurvy eating his legs away, his gums gone, and his teeth all gaunt and bare. This bed was empty, because gangrene had set in, and the patient had died but yesterday. That bed was a hopeless one, because its occupant was sinking fast, and could only be roused to turn the poor pinched mask of face upon the pillow, with a feeble moan. The awful thinness of the fallen cheeks, the awful brightness of the deep set eyes, the lips of lead, the hands of ivory, the recumbent human images lying in the shadow of death with a kind of solemn twilight on them, like the sixty who had died aboard the ship and were lying at the bottom of the sea, O Pangloss, GOD forgive you!

In one bed, lay a man whose life had been saved (as it was hoped) by deep incisions in the feet and legs. While I was speaking to him, a nurse came up to change the poultices which this operation had rendered necessary, and I had an instinctive feeling that it was not well to turn away, merely to spare myself. He was sorely wasted and keenly susceptible, but the efforts he made to subdue any expression of impatience or suffering, were quite heroic. It was easy to see, in the shrinking of the figure, and the drawing of the bed-clothes over the head, how acute the endurance was, and it made me shrink too, as if I were in pain; but, when the new bandages were on, and the poor feet were composed again, he made an apology for himself (though he had not uttered a word), and said plaintively, ‘I am so tender and weak, you see, sir!’ Neither from him nor from any one sufferer of the whole ghastly number, did I hear a complaint. Of thankfulness for present solicitude and care, I heard much; of complaint, not a word.

I think I could have recognised in the dismalest skeleton there, the ghost of a soldier. Something of the old air was still latent in the palest shadow of life I talked to. One emaciated creature, in the strictest literality worn to the bone, lay stretched on his back, looking so like death that I asked one of the doctors if he were not dying, or dead? A few kind words from the doctor, in his ear, and he opened his eyes, and smiled—looked, in a moment, as if he would have made a salute, if he could. ‘We shall pull him through, please God,’ said the Doctor. ‘Plase God, surr, and thankye,’ said the patient. ‘You are much better to-day; are you not?’ said the Doctor. ‘Plase God, surr; ’tis the slape I want, surr; ’tis my breathin’ makes the nights so long.’ ‘He is a careful fellow this, you must know,’ said the Doctor, cheerfully; ‘it was raining hard when they put him in the open cart to bring him here, and he had the presence of mind to ask to have a sovereign taken out of his pocket that he had there, and a cab engaged. Probably it saved his life.’ The patient rattled out the skeleton of a laugh, and said, proud of the story, ‘’Deed, surr, an open cairt was a comical means o’ bringin’ a dyin’ man here, and a clever way to kill him.’ You might have sworn to him for a soldier when he said it.

One thing had perplexed me very much in going from bed to bed. A very significant and cruel thing. I could find no young man but one. He had attracted my notice, by having got up and dressed himself in his soldier’s jacket and trousers, with the intention of sitting by the fire; but he had found himself too weak, and had crept back to his bed and laid himself down on the outside of it. I could have pronounced him, alone, to be a young man aged by famine and sickness. As we were standing by the Irish soldier’s bed, I mentioned my perplexity to the Doctor. He took a board with an inscription on it from the head of the Irishman’s bed, and asked me what age I supposed that man to be? I had observed him with attention while talking to him, and answered, confidently, ‘Fifty.’ The Doctor, with a pitying glance at the patient, who had dropped into a stupor again, put the board back, and said, ‘Twenty-four.’

All the arrangements of the wards were excellent. They could not have been more humane, sympathising, gentle, attentive, or wholesome. The owners of the ship, too, had done all they could, liberally. There were bright fires in every room, and the convalescent men were sitting round them, reading various papers and periodicals. I took the liberty of inviting my official friend Pangloss to look at those convalescent men, and to tell me whether their faces and bearing were or were not, generally, the faces and bearing of steady respectable soldiers? The master of the workhouse, overhearing me, said he had had a pretty large experience of troops, and that better conducted men than these, he had never had to do with. They were always (he added) as we saw them. And of us visitors (I add) they knew nothing whatever, except that we were there.

It was audacious in me, but I took another liberty with Pangloss. Prefacing it with the observation that, of course, I knew beforehand that there was not the faintest desire, anywhere, to hush up any part of this dreadful business, and that the Inquest was the fairest of all possible Inquests, I besought four things of Pangloss. Firstly, to observe that the Inquest *was not held in that place*, but at some distance off. Secondly, to look round upon those helpless spectres in their beds. Thirdly, to remember that the witnesses produced from among them before that Inquest, could not have been selected because they were the men who had the most to tell it, but because they happened to be in a state admitting of their safe removal. Fourthly, to say whether the coroner and jury could have come there, to those pillows, and taken a little evidence? My official friend declined to commit himself to a reply.

There was a sergeant, reading, in one of the fireside groups. As he was a man of very intelligent countenance, and as I have a great respect for non-commissioned officers as a class, I sat down on the nearest bed, to have some talk with him. (It was the bed of one of the grisliest of the poor skeletons, and he died soon afterwards.)

'I was glad to see, in the evidence of an officer at the Inquest, sergeant, that he never saw men behave better on board ship than these men.'

'They did behave very well, sir.'

'I was glad to see, too, that every man had a hammock.' The sergeant gravely shook his head. 'There must be some mistake, sir. The men of my own mess had no hammocks. There were not hammocks enough on board, and the men of the two next messes laid hold of hammocks for themselves as soon as they got on board, and squeezed my men out, as I may say.'

'Had the squeezed-out men none then?'

'None, sir. As men died, their hammocks were used by other men, who wanted hammocks; but many men had none at all.'

'Then you don't agree with the evidence on that point?'

'Certainly not, sir. A man can't, when he knows to the contrary.'

'Did any of the men sell their bedding for drink?'

'There is some mistake on that point too, sir. Men were under the impression—I knew it for a fact at the time—that it was not allowed to take blankets or bedding on board, and so men who had things of that sort came to sell them purposely.'

'Did any of the men sell their clothes for drink?'

'They did, sir.' (I believe there never was a more truthful witness than the sergeant. He had no inclination to make out a case.)

'Many?'

'Some, sir' (considering the question). 'Soldier-like. They had been long marching in the rainy season, by bad roads—no roads at all, in short—and when they got to Calcutta, men turned to and drank, before taking a last look at it. Soldier-like.'

'Do you see any men in this ward, for example, who sold clothes for drink at that time?'

The sergeant's wan eye, happily just beginning to rekindle with health, travelled round the place and came back to me. 'Certainly, sir.'

'The marching to Calcutta in the rainy season must have been severe?'

'It was very severe, sir.'

'Yet what with the rest and the sea air, I should have thought that the men (even the men who got drunk) would have soon begun to recover on board ship?'

'So they might; but the bad food told upon them, and when we got into a cold latitude, it began to tell more, and the men dropped.'

'The sick had a general disinclination for food, I am told, sergeant?'

'Have you seen the food, sir?'

'Some of it.'

'Have you seen the state of their mouths, sir?'

If the sergeant, who was a man of a few orderly words, had spoken the amount of this volume, he could not have settled that question better. I believe the sick could as soon have eaten the ship, as the ship's provisions.

I took the additional liberty with my friend Pangloss, when I had left the sergeant with good wishes, of asking Pangloss whether he had ever heard of biscuit getting drunk and bartering its nutritious qualities for putrefaction and vermin; of peas becoming hardened in liquor; of hammocks drinking themselves off the face of the earth; of lime-juice, vegetables, vinegar, cooking accommodation, water supply, and beer, all taking to drinking together and going to ruin? 'If not (I asked him), what did he say in defence of the officers condemned by the Coroner's jury, who, by signing the General Inspection report relative to the ship Great Tasmania, chartered for these troops, had deliberately asserted all that bad and poisonous dunghill refuse, to be good and wholesome food?' My official friend replied that it was a remarkable fact, that whereas some officers were only positively good, and other officers only comparatively better, those particular officers were superlatively the very best of all possible officers.

My hand and my heart fail me, in writing my record of this journey. The spectacle of the soldiers in the hospital-beds of that Liverpool workhouse (a very good workhouse, indeed, be it understood), was so shocking and so shameful, that as an Englishman I blush to remember it. It would have been simply unbearable at the time, but for the consideration and pity with which they were soothed in their sufferings.

No punishment that our inefficient laws provide, is worthy of the name when set against the guilt of this transaction. But, if the memory of it die out unavenged, and if it do not result in the inexorable dismissal and disgrace of those who are responsible for it, their escape will be infamous to the Government (no matter of what party) that so neglects its duty, and infamous to the nation that tamely suffers such intolerable wrong to be done in its name.

CHAPTER IX—CITY OF LONDON CHURCHES

If the confession that I have often travelled from this Covent Garden lodging of mine on Sundays, should give offence to those who never travel on Sundays, they will be satisfied (I hope) by my adding that the journeys in question were made to churches.

Not that I have any curiosity to hear powerful preachers. Time was, when I was dragged by the hair of my head, as one may say, to hear too many. On summer evenings, when every flower, and tree, and bird, might have better addressed my soft young heart, I have in my day been caught in the palm of a female hand by the crown, have been violently scrubbed from the neck to the roots of the hair as a purification for the Temple, and have then been carried off highly charged with saponaceous electricity, to be steamed like a potato in the unventilated breath of the powerful Boanerges Boiler and his congregation, until what small mind I had, was quite steamed out of me. In which pitiable plight I have been haled out of the place of meeting, at the conclusion of the exercises, and catechised respecting Boanerges Boiler, his fifthly, his sixthly, and his seventhly, until I have regarded that reverend person in the light of a most dismal and oppressive Charade. Time was, when I was carried off to platform assemblages at which no human child, whether of wrath or grace, could possibly keep its eyes open, and when I felt the fatal sleep stealing, stealing over me, and when I gradually heard the orator in possession, spinning and humming like a great top, until he rolled, collapsed, and tumbled over, and I discovered to my burning shame and fear, that as to that last stage it was not he, but I. I have sat under Boanerges when he has specifically addressed himself to us—us, the infants—and at this present writing I hear his lumbering jocularity (which never amused us, though we basely pretended that it did), and I behold his big round face, and I look up the inside of his outstretched coat-sleeve as if it were a telescope with the stopper on, and I hate him with an unwholesome hatred for two hours. Through such means did it come to pass that I knew the powerful preacher from beginning to end, all over and all through, while I was very young, and that I left him behind at an early period of life. Peace be with him! More peace than he brought to me!

Now, I have heard many preachers since that time—not powerful; merely Christian, unaffected, and reverential—and I have had many such preachers on my roll of friends. But, it was not to hear these, any more than the powerful class, that I made my Sunday journeys. They were journeys of curiosity to the numerous churches in the City of London. It came into my head one day, here had I been cultivating a familiarity with all the churches of Rome, and I knew nothing of the insides of the old churches of London! This befell on a Sunday morning. I began my expeditions that very same day, and they lasted me a year.

I never wanted to know the names of the churches to which I went, and to this hour I am profoundly ignorant in that particular of at least nine-tenths of them. Indeed, saying that I know the church of old GOWER’S tomb (he lies in effigy with his head upon his books) to be the church of Saint Saviour’s, Southwark; and the church of MILTON’S tomb to be the church of Cripplegate; and the church on Cornhill with the great golden keys to be the church of Saint Peter; I doubt if I could pass a competitive examination in any of the names. No question did I ever ask of living creature concerning these churches, and no answer to any antiquarian question on the subject that I ever put to books, shall harass the reader’s soul. A full half of my pleasure in them arose out of their mystery; mysterious I found them; mysterious they shall remain for me.

Where shall I begin my round of hidden and forgotten old churches in the City of London?

It is twenty minutes short of eleven on a Sunday morning, when I stroll down one of the many narrow hilly streets in the City that tend due south to the Thames. It is my first experiment, and I have come to the region of Whittington in an omnibus, and we have put down a fierce-eyed, spare old woman, whose slate-coloured gown smells of herbs, and who walked up Aldersgate-street to some chapel where she comforts herself with brimstone doctrine, I warrant. We have also put down a stouter and sweeter old lady, with a pretty large prayer-book in an unfolded pocket-handkerchief, who got out at a corner of a court near Stationers’ Hall, and who I think must go to church there, because she is the widow of some deceased old Company’s Beadle. The rest of our freight were mere chance pleasure-seekers and rural walkers, and went on to the Blackwall railway. So many bells are ringing, when I stand undecided at a street corner, that every sheep in the ecclesiastical fold might be a bell-wether. The discordance is fearful. My state of indecision is referable to, and about equally divisible among, four great churches, which are all within sight and sound, all within the space of a few square yards.

As I stand at the street corner, I don't see as many as four people at once going to church, though I see as many as four churches with their steeples clamouring for people. I choose my church, and go up the flight of steps to the great entrance in the tower. A mouldy tower within, and like a neglected washhouse. A rope comes through the beamed roof, and a man in the corner pulls it and clashes the bell—a whity-brown man, whose clothes were once black—a man with flue on him, and cobweb. He stares at me, wondering how I come there, and I stare at him, wondering how he comes there. Through a screen of wood and glass, I peep into the dim church. About twenty people are discernible, waiting to begin. Christening would seem to have faded out of this church long ago, for the font has the dust of desuetude thick upon it, and its wooden cover (shaped like an old-fashioned tureen-cover) looks as if it wouldn't come off, upon requirement. I perceive the altar to be rickety and the Commandments damp. Entering after this survey, I jostle the clergyman in his canonicals, who is entering too from a dark lane behind a pew of state with curtains, where nobody sits. The pew is ornamented with four blue wands, once carried by four somebodys, I suppose, before somebody else, but which there is nobody now to hold or receive honour from. I open the door of a family pew, and shut myself in; if I could occupy twenty family pews at once I might have them. The clerk, a brisk young man (how does *he* come here?), glances at me knowingly, as who should say, 'You have done it now; you must stop.' Organ plays. Organ-loft is in a small gallery across the church; gallery congregation, two girls. I wonder within myself what will happen when we are required to sing.

There is a pale heap of books in the corner of my pew, and while the organ, which is hoarse and sleepy, plays in such fashion that I can hear more of the rusty working of the stops than of any music, I look at the books, which are mostly bound in faded baize and stuff. They belonged in 1754, to the Dowgate family; and who were they? Jane Comport must have married Young Dowgate, and come into the family that way; Young Dowgate was courting Jane Comport when he gave her her prayer-book, and recorded the presentation in the fly-leaf; if Jane were fond of Young Dowgate, why did she die and leave the book here? Perhaps at the rickety altar, and before the damp Commandments, she, Comport, had taken him, Dowgate, in a flush of youthful hope and joy, and perhaps it had not turned out in the long run as great a success as was expected?

The opening of the service recalls my wandering thoughts. I then find, to my astonishment, that I have been, and still am, taking a strong kind of invisible snuff, up my nose, into my eyes, and down my throat. I wink, sneeze, and cough. The clerk sneezes; the clergyman winks; the unseen organist sneezes and coughs (and probably winks); all our little party wink, sneeze, and cough. The snuff seems to be made of the decay of matting, wood, cloth, stone, iron, earth, and something else. Is the something else, the decay of dead citizens in the vaults below? As sure as Death it is! Not only in the cold, damp February day, do we cough and sneeze dead citizens, all through the service, but dead citizens have got into the very bellows of the organ, and half choked the same. We stamp our feet to warm them, and dead citizens arise in heavy clouds. Dead citizens stick upon the walls, and lie pulverised on the sounding-board over the clergyman's head, and, when a gust of air comes, tumble down upon him.

In this first experience I was so nauseated by too much snuff, made of the Dowgate family, the Comport branch, and other families and branches, that I gave but little heed to our dull manner of ambling through the service; to the brisk clerk's manner of encouraging us to try a note or two at psalm time; to the gallery-congregation's manner of enjoying a shrill duet, without a notion of time or tune; to the whity-brown man's manner of shutting the minister into the pulpit, and being very particular with the lock of the door, as if he were a dangerous animal. But, I tried again next Sunday, and soon accustomed myself to the dead citizens when I found that I could not possibly get on without them among the City churches.

Another Sunday.

After being again rung for by conflicting bells, like a leg of mutton or a laced hat a hundred years ago, I make selection of a church oddly put away in a corner among a number of lanes—a smaller church than the last, and an ugly: of about the date of Queen Anne. As a congregation, we are fourteen strong: not counting an exhausted charity school in a gallery, which has dwindled away to four boys, and two girls. In the porch, is a benefaction of loaves of bread, which there would seem to be nobody left in the exhausted congregation to claim, and which I saw an exhausted beadle, long faded out of uniform, eating with his eyes for self and family when I passed in. There is also an exhausted clerk in a brown wig, and two or three exhausted doors and windows have been bricked up, and the service books are musty, and the pulpit cushions are threadbare, and the whole of the church furniture is in a very advanced stage of exhaustion. We are three old women (habitual), two young lovers (accidental), two tradesmen, one with a wife and one alone, an aunt and nephew, again two girls (these two girls dressed out for church with everything about them limp that should be stiff, and *vice versâ*, are an invariable experience), and three sniggering boys. The clergyman is, perhaps, the chaplain of a civic company; he has the moist and vinous look, and eke the bulbous boots, of one acquainted with 'Twenty port, and comet vintages.

We are so quiet in our dulness that the three sniggering boys, who have got away into a corner by the altar-railing, give us a start, like crackers, whenever they laugh. And this reminds me of my own village church where, during sermon-time on bright Sundays when the birds are very musical indeed, farmers' boys patter out over the stone pavement, and the clerk steps out from his desk after them, and is distinctly heard in the summer repose to pursue and punch them in the churchyard, and is seen to return with a meditative countenance, making believe that nothing of the sort has happened. The aunt and nephew in this City church are much disturbed by the sniggering boys. The nephew is himself a boy, and the sniggerers tempt him to secular thoughts of marbles and string, by secretly offering such commodities to his distant contemplation. This young Saint Anthony for a while resists, but presently becomes a backslider, and in dumb show defies the sniggerers to 'heave' a marble or two in his direction. Here in he is detected by the aunt (a rigorous reduced gentlewoman who has the charge of offices), and I perceive that worthy relative to poke him in the side, with the corrugated hooked handle of an ancient umbrella. The nephew revenges himself for this, by holding his breath and terrifying his kinswoman with the dread belief that he has made up his mind to burst. Regardless of whispers and shakes, he swells and becomes discoloured, and yet again swells and becomes discoloured, until the aunt can bear it no longer, but leads him out, with no visible neck, and with his eyes going before him like a prawn's. This causes the sniggerers to regard flight as an eligible move, and I know which of them will go out first, because of the over-devout attention that he suddenly concentrates on the clergyman. In a little while, this hypocrite, with an elaborate demonstration of hushing his footsteps, and with a face generally expressive of having until now forgotten a religious appointment elsewhere, is gone. Number two gets out in the same way, but rather quicker. Number three getting safely to the door, there turns reckless, and banging it open, flies forth with a Whoop! that vibrates to the top of the tower above us.

The clergyman, who is of a prandial presence and a muffled voice, may be scant of hearing as well as of breath, but he only glances up, as having an idea that somebody has said Amen in a wrong place, and continues his steady jog-trot, like a farmer's wife going to market. He does all he has to do, in the same easy way, and gives us a concise sermon, still like the jog-trot of the farmer's wife on a level road. Its drowsy cadence soon lulls the three old women asleep, and the unmarried tradesman sits looking out at window, and the married tradesman sits looking at his wife's bonnet, and the lovers sit looking at one another, so superlatively happy, that I mind when I, turned of eighteen, went with my Angelica to a City church on account of a shower (by this special coincidence that it was in Huggin-lane), and when I said to my Angelica, 'Let the blessed event, Angelica, occur at no altar but this!' and when my Angelica consented that it should occur at no other—which it certainly never did, for it never occurred anywhere. And O, Angelica, what has become of you, this present Sunday morning when I can't attend to the sermon; and, more difficult question than that, what has become of Me as I was when I sat by your side!

But, we receive the signal to make that unanimous dive which surely is a little conventional—like the strange rustlings and settlings and clearings of throats and noses, which are never dispensed with, at certain points of the Church service, and are never held to be necessary under any other circumstances. In a minute more it is all over, and the organ expresses itself to be as glad of it as it can be of anything in its rheumatic state, and in another minute we are all of us out of the church, and Whity-brown has locked it up. Another minute or little more, and, in the neighbouring churchyard—not the yard of that church, but of another—a churchyard like a great shabby old mignonette box, with two trees in it and one tomb—I meet Whity-brown, in his private capacity, fetching a pint of beer for his dinner from the public-house in the corner, where the keys of the rotting fire-ladders are kept and were never asked for, and where there is a ragged, white-seamed, out-at-elbowed bagatelle board on the first floor.

In one of these City churches, and only in one, I found an individual who might have been claimed as expressly a City personage. I remember the church, by the feature that the clergyman couldn't get to his own desk without going through the clerk's, or couldn't get to the pulpit without going through the reading-desk—I forget which, and it is no matter—and by the presence of this personage among the exceedingly sparse congregation. I doubt if we were a dozen, and we had no exhausted charity school to help us out. The personage was dressed in black of square cut, and was stricken in years, and wore a black velvet cap, and cloth shoes. He was of a staid, wealthy, and dissatisfied aspect. In his hand, he conducted to church a mysterious child: a child of the feminine gender. The child had a beaver hat, with a stiff drab plume that surely never belonged to any bird of the air. The child was further attired in a nankeen frock and spencer, brown boxing-gloves, and a veil. It had a blemish, in the nature of currant jelly, on its chin; and was a thirsty child. Insomuch that the personage carried in his pocket a green bottle, from which, when the first psalm was given out, the child was openly refreshed. At all other times throughout the service it was motionless, and stood on the seat of the large pew, closely fitted into the corner, like a rain-water pipe.

The personage never opened his book, and never looked at the clergyman. He never sat down either, but stood with his arms leaning on the top of the pew, and his forehead sometimes shaded with his right hand, always looking at the church door. It was a long church for a church of its size, and he was at the upper end, but he always looked at the door. That he was an old bookkeeper, or an old trader who had kept his own books, and that he might be seen at the Bank of England about Dividend times, no doubt. That he had lived in the City all his life and was disdainful of other localities, no doubt. Why he looked at the door, I never absolutely proved, but it is my belief that he lived in expectation of the time when the citizens would come back to live in the City, and its ancient glories would be renewed. He appeared to expect that this would occur on a Sunday, and that the wanderers would first appear, in the deserted churches, penitent and humbled. Hence, he looked at the door which they never darkened. Whose child the child was, whether the child of a disinherited daughter, or some parish orphan whom the personage had adopted, there was nothing to lead up to. It never played, or skipped, or smiled. Once, the idea occurred to me that it was an automaton, and that the personage had made it; but following the strange couple out one Sunday, I heard the personage say to it, ‘Thirteen thousand pounds;’ to which it added in a weak human voice, ‘Seventeen and fourpence.’ Four Sundays I followed them out, and this is all I ever heard or saw them say. One Sunday, I followed them home. They lived behind a pump, and the personage opened their abode with an exceeding large key. The one solitary inscription on their house related to a fire-plug. The house was partly undermined by a deserted and closed gateway; its windows were blind with dirt; and it stood with its face disconsolately turned to a wall. Five great churches and two small ones rang their Sunday bells between this house and the church the couple frequented, so they must have had some special reason for going a quarter of a mile to it. The last time I saw them, was on this wise. I had been to explore another church at a distance, and happened to pass the church they frequented, at about two of the afternoon when that edifice was closed. But, a little side-door, which I had never observed before, stood open, and disclosed certain cellarous steps. Methought ‘They are airing the vaults to-day,’ when the personage and the child silently arrived at the steps, and silently descended. Of course, I came to the conclusion that the personage had at last despaired of the looked-for return of the penitent citizens, and that he and the child went down to get themselves buried.

In the course of my pilgrimages I came upon one obscure church which had broken out in the melodramatic style, and was got up with various tawdry decorations, much after the manner of the extinct London may-poles. These attractions had induced several young priests or deacons in black bibs for waistcoats, and several young ladies interested in that holy order (the proportion being, as I estimated, seventeen young ladies to a deacon), to come into the City as a new and odd excitement. It was wonderful to see how these young people played out their little play in the heart of the City, all among themselves, without the deserted City’s knowing anything about it. It was as if you should take an empty counting-house on a Sunday, and act one of the old Mysteries there. They had impressed a small school (from what neighbourhood I don’t know) to assist in the performances, and it was pleasant to notice frantic garlands of inscription on the walls, especially addressing those poor innocents in characters impossible for them to decipher. There was a remarkably agreeable smell of pomatum in this congregation.

But, in other cases, rot and mildew and dead citizens formed the uppermost scent, while, infused into it in a dreamy way not at all displeasing, was the staple character of the neighbourhood. In the churches about Mark-lane, for example, there was a dry whiff of wheat; and I accidentally struck an airy sample of barley out of an aged hassock in one of them. From Rood-lane to Tower-street, and thereabouts, there was often a subtle flavour of wine: sometimes, of tea. One church near Mincing-lane smelt like a druggist's drawer. Behind the Monument the service had a flavour of damaged oranges, which, a little further down towards the river, tempered into herrings, and gradually toned into a cosmopolitan blast of fish. In one church, the exact counterpart of the church in the Rake's Progress where the hero is being married to the horrible old lady, there was no speciality of atmosphere, until the organ shook a perfume of hides all over us from some adjacent warehouse.

Be the scent what it would, however, there was no speciality in the people. There were never enough of them to represent any calling or neighbourhood. They had all gone elsewhere over-night, and the few stragglers in the many churches languished there inexpressively.

Among the Uncommercial travels in which I have engaged, this year of Sunday travel occupies its own place, apart from all the rest. Whether I think of the church where the sails of the oyster-boats in the river almost flapped against the windows, or of the church where the railroad made the bells hum as the train rushed by above the roof, I recall a curious experience. On summer Sundays, in the gentle rain or the bright sunshine—either, deepening the idleness of the idle City—I have sat, in that singular silence which belongs to resting-places usually astir, in scores of buildings at the heart of the world's metropolis, unknown to far greater numbers of people speaking the English tongue, than the ancient edifices of the Eternal City, or the Pyramids of Egypt. The dark vestries and registries into which I have peeped, and the little hemmed-in churchyards that have echoed to my feet, have left impressions on my memory as distinct and quaint as any it has in that way received. In all those dusty registers that the worms are eating, there is not a line but made some hearts leap, or some tears flow, in their day. Still and dry now, still and dry! and the old tree at the window with no room for its branches, has seen them all out. So with the tomb of the old Master of the old Company, on which it drips. His son restored it and died, his daughter restored it and died, and then he had been remembered long enough, and the tree took possession of him, and his name cracked out.

There are few more striking indications of the changes of manners and customs that two or three hundred years have brought about, than these deserted churches. Many of them are handsome and costly structures, several of them were designed by WREN, many of them arose from the ashes of the great fire, others of them outlived the plague and the fire too, to die a slow death in these later days. No one can be sure of the coming time; but it is not too much to say of it that it has no sign in its outsetting tides, of the reflux to these churches of their congregations and uses. They remain like the tombs of the old citizens who lie beneath them and around them, Monuments of another age. They are worth a Sunday-exploration, now and then, for they yet echo, not unharmoniously, to the time when the City of London really was London; when the ’Prentices and Trained Bands were of mark in the state; when even the Lord Mayor himself was a Reality—not a Fiction conventionally be-puffed on one day in the year by illustrious friends, who no less conventionally laugh at him on the remaining three hundred and sixty-four days.

CHAPTER X—SHY NEIGHBOURHOODS

So much of my travelling is done on foot, that if I cherished betting propensities, I should probably be found registered in sporting newspapers under some such title as the Elastic Novice, challenging all eleven stone mankind to competition in walking. My last special feat was turning out of bed at two, after a hard day, pedestrian and otherwise, and walking thirty miles into the country to breakfast. The road was so lonely in the night, that I fell asleep to the monotonous sound of my own feet, doing their regular four miles an hour. Mile after mile I walked, without the slightest sense of exertion, dozing heavily and dreaming constantly. It was only when I made a stumble like a drunken man, or struck out into the road to avoid a horseman close upon me on the path—who had no existence—that I came to myself and looked about. The day broke mistily (it was autumn time), and I could not disembarrass myself of the idea that I had to climb those heights and banks of cloud, and that there was an Alpine Convent somewhere behind the sun, where I was going to breakfast. This sleepy notion was so much stronger than such substantial objects as villages and haystacks, that, after the sun was up and bright, and when I was sufficiently awake to have a sense of pleasure in the prospect, I still occasionally caught myself looking about for wooden arms to point the right track up the mountain, and wondering there was no snow yet. It is a curiosity of broken sleep that I made immense quantities of verses on that pedestrian occasion (of course I never make any when I am in my right senses), and that I spoke a certain language once pretty familiar to me, but which I have nearly forgotten from disuse, with fluency. Of both these phenomena I have such frequent experience in the state between sleeping and waking, that I sometimes argue with myself that I know I cannot be awake, for, if I were, I should not be half so ready. The readiness is not imaginary, because I often recall long strings of the verses, and many turns of the fluent speech, after I am broad awake.

My walking is of two kinds: one, straight on end to a definite goal at a round pace; one, objectless, loitering, and purely vagabond. In the latter state, no gipsy on earth is a greater vagabond than myself; it is so natural to me, and strong with me, that I think I must be the descendant, at no great distance, of some irreclaimable tramp.

One of the pleasantest things I have lately met with, in a vagabond course of shy metropolitan neighbourhoods and small shops, is the fancy of a humble artist, as exemplified in two portraits representing Mr. Thomas Sayers, of Great Britain, and Mr. John Heenan, of the United States of America. These illustrious men are highly coloured in fighting trim, and fighting attitude. To suggest the pastoral and meditative nature of their peaceful calling, Mr. Heenan is represented on emerald sward, with primroses and other modest flowers springing up under the heels of his half-boots; while Mr. Sayers is impelled to the administration of his favourite blow, the Auctioneer, by the silent eloquence of a village church. The humble homes of England, with their domestic virtues and honeysuckle porches, urge both heroes to go in and win; and the lark and other singing birds are observable in the upper air, ecstatically carolling their thanks to Heaven for a fight. On the whole, the associations entwined with the pugilistic art by this artist are much in the manner of Izaak Walton.

But, it is with the lower animals of back streets and by-ways that my present purpose rests. For human notes we may return to such neighbourhoods when leisure and opportunity serve.

Nothing in shy neighbourhoods perplexes my mind more, than the bad company birds keep. Foreign birds often get into good society, but British birds are inseparable from low associates. There is a whole street of them in St. Giles's; and I always find them in poor and immoral neighbourhoods, convenient to the public-house and the pawnbroker's. They seem to lead people into drinking, and even the man who makes their cages usually gets into a chronic state of black eye. Why is this? Also, they will do things for people in short-skirted velveteen coats with bone buttons, or in sleeved waistcoats and fur caps, which they cannot be persuaded by the respectable orders of society to undertake. In a dirty court in Spitalfields, once, I found a goldfinch drawing his own water, and drawing as much of it as if he were in a consuming fever. That goldfinch lived at a bird-shop, and offered, in writing, to barter himself against old clothes, empty bottles, or even kitchen stuff. Surely a low thing and a depraved taste in any finch! I bought that goldfinch for money. He was sent home, and hung upon a nail over against my table. He lived outside a counterfeit dwelling-house, supposed (as I argued) to be a dyer's; otherwise it would have been impossible to account for his perch sticking out of the garret window. From the time of his appearance in my room, either he left off being thirsty—which was not in the bond—or he could not make up his mind to hear his little bucket drop back into his well when he let it go: a shock which in the best of times had made him tremble. He drew no water but by stealth and under the cloak of night. After an interval of futile and at length hopeless expectation, the merchant who had educated him was appealed to. The merchant was a bow-legged character, with a flat and cushiony nose, like the last new strawberry. He wore a fur cap, and shorts, and was of the velveteen race, velveteeny. He sent word that he would 'look round.' He looked round, appeared in the doorway of the room, and slightly cocked up his evil eye at the goldfinch. Instantly a raging thirst beset that bird; when it was appeased, he still drew several unnecessary buckets of water; and finally, leaped about his perch and sharpened his bill, as if he had been to the nearest wine vaults and got drunk.

Donkeys again. I know shy neighbourhoods where the Donkey goes in at the street door, and appears to live up-stairs, for I have examined the back-yard from over the palings, and have been unable to make him out. Gentility, nobility, Royalty, would appeal to that donkey in vain to do what he does for a costermonger. Feed him with oats at the highest price, put an infant prince and princess in a pair of panniers on his back, adjust his delicate trappings to a nicety, take him to the softest slopes at Windsor, and try what pace you can get out of him. Then, starve him, harness him anyhow to a truck with a flat tray on it, and see him bowl from Whitechapel to Bayswater. There appears to be no particular private understanding between birds and donkeys, in a state of nature; but in the shy neighbourhood state, you shall see them always in the same hands and always developing their very best energies for the very worst company. I have known a donkey—by sight; we were not on speaking terms—who lived over on the Surrey side of London-bridge, among the fastnesses of Jacob's Island and Dockhead. It was the habit of that animal, when his services were not in immediate requisition, to go out alone, idling. I have met him a mile from his place of residence, loitering about the streets; and the expression of his countenance at such times was most degraded. He was attached to the establishment of an elderly lady who sold periwinkles, and he used to stand on Saturday nights with a cartful of those delicacies outside a gin-shop, pricking up his ears when a customer came to the cart, and too evidently deriving satisfaction from the knowledge that they got bad measure. His mistress was sometimes overtaken by inebriety. The last time I ever saw him (about five years ago) he was in circumstances of difficulty, caused by this failing. Having been left alone with the cart of periwinkles, and forgotten, he went off idling. He prowled among his usual low haunts for some time, gratifying his depraved tastes, until, not taking the cart into his calculations, he endeavoured to turn up a narrow alley, and became greatly involved. He was taken into custody by the police, and, the Green Yard of the district being near at hand, was backed into that place of durance. At that crisis, I encountered him; the stubborn sense he evinced of being—not to compromise the expression—a blackguard, I never saw exceeded in the human subject. A flaring candle in a paper shade, stuck in among his periwinkles, showed him, with his ragged harness broken and his cart extensively shattered, twitching his mouth and shaking his hanging head, a picture of disgrace and obduracy. I have seen boys being taken to station-houses, who were as like him as his own brother.

The dogs of shy neighbourhoods, I observe to avoid play, and to be conscious of poverty. They avoid work, too, if they can, of course; that is in the nature of all animals. I have the pleasure to know a dog in a back street in the neighbourhood of Walworth, who has greatly distinguished himself in the minor drama, and who takes his portrait with him when he makes an engagement, for the illustration of the play-bill. His portrait (which is not at all like him) represents him in the act of dragging to the earth a recreant Indian, who is supposed to have tomahawked, or essayed to tomahawk, a British officer. The design is pure poetry, for there is no such Indian in the piece, and no such incident. He is a dog of the Newfoundland breed, for whose honesty I would be bail to any amount; but whose intellectual qualities in association with dramatic fiction, I cannot rate high. Indeed, he is too honest for the profession he has entered. Being at a town in Yorkshire last summer, and seeing him posted in the bill of the night, I attended the performance. His first scene was eminently successful; but, as it occupied a second in its representation (and five lines in the bill), it scarcely afforded ground for a cool and deliberate judgment of his powers. He had merely to bark, run on, and jump through an inn window, after a comic fugitive. The next scene of importance to the fable was a little marred in its interest by his over-anxiety; forasmuch as while his master (a belated soldier in a den of robbers on a tempestuous night) was feelingly lamenting the absence of his faithful dog, and laying great stress on the fact that he was thirty leagues away, the faithful dog was barking furiously in the prompter's box, and clearly choking himself against his collar. But it was in his greatest scene of all, that his honesty got the better of him. He had to enter a dense and trackless forest, on the trail of the murderer, and there to fly at the murderer when he found him resting at the foot of a tree, with his victim bound ready for slaughter. It was a hot night, and he came into the forest from an altogether unexpected direction, in the sweetest temper, at a very deliberate trot, not in the least excited; trotted to the foot-lights with his tongue out; and there sat down, panting, and amiably surveying the audience, with his tail beating on the boards, like a Dutch clock. Meanwhile the murderer, impatient to receive his doom, was audibly calling to him 'CO-O-OME here!' while the victim, struggling with his bonds, assailed him with the most injurious expressions. It happened through these means, that when he was in course of time persuaded to trot up and rend the murderer limb from limb, he made it (for dramatic purposes) a little too obvious that he worked out that awful retribution by licking butter off his blood-stained hands.

In a shy street, behind Long-acre, two honest dogs live, who perform in Punch's shows. I may venture to say that I am on terms of intimacy with both, and that I never saw either guilty of the falsehood of failing to look down at the man inside the show, during the whole performance. The difficulty other dogs have in satisfying their minds about these dogs, appears to be never overcome by time. The same dogs must encounter them over and over again, as they trudge along in their off-minutes behind the legs of the show and beside the drum; but all dogs seem to suspect their frills and jackets, and to sniff at them as if they thought those articles of personal adornment, an eruption—a something in the nature of mange, perhaps. From this Covent-garden window of mine I noticed a country dog, only the other day, who had come up to Covent-garden Market under a cart, and had broken his cord, an end of which he still trailed along with him. He loitered about the corners of the four streets commanded by my window; and bad London dogs came up, and told him lies that he didn't believe; and worse London dogs came up, and made proposals to him to go and steal in the market, which his principles rejected; and the ways of the town confused him, and he crept aside and lay down in a doorway. He had scarcely got a wink of sleep, when up comes Punch with Toby. He was darting to Toby for consolation and advice, when he saw the frill, and stopped, in the middle of the street, appalled. The show was pitched, Toby retired behind the drapery, the audience formed, the drum and pipes struck up. My country dog remained immovable, intently staring at these strange appearances, until Toby opened the drama by appearing on his ledge, and to him entered Punch, who put a tobacco-pipe into Toby's mouth. At this spectacle, the country dog threw up his head, gave one terrible howl, and fled due west.

We talk of men keeping dogs, but we might often talk more expressively of dogs keeping men. I know a bull-dog in a shy corner of Hammersmith who keeps a man. He keeps him up a yard, and makes him go to public-houses and lay wagers on him, and obliges him to lean against posts and look at him, and forces him to neglect work for him, and keeps him under rigid coercion. I once knew a fancy terrier who kept a gentleman—a gentleman who had been brought up at Oxford, too. The dog kept the gentleman entirely for his glorification, and the gentleman never talked about anything but the terrier. This, however, was not in a shy neighbourhood, and is a digression consequently.

There are a great many dogs in shy neighbourhoods, who keep boys. I have my eye on a mongrel in Somerstown who keeps three boys. He feigns that he can bring down sparrows, and unburrow rats (he can do neither), and he takes the boys out on sporting pretences into all sorts of suburban fields. He has likewise made them believe that he possesses some mysterious knowledge of the art of fishing, and they consider themselves incompletely equipped for the Hampstead ponds, with a pickle-jar and wide-mouthed bottle, unless he is with them and barking tremendously. There is a dog residing in the Borough of Southwark who keeps a blind man. He may be seen, most days, in Oxford-street, haling the blind man away on expeditions wholly uncontemplated by, and unintelligible to, the man: wholly of the dog's conception and execution. Contrariwise, when the man has projects, the dog will sit down in a crowded thoroughfare and meditate. I saw him yesterday, wearing the money-tray like an easy collar, instead of offering it to the public, taking the man against his will, on the invitation of a disreputable cur, apparently to visit a dog at Harrow—he was so intent on that direction. The north wall of Burlington House Gardens, between the Arcade and the Albany, offers a shy spot for appointments among blind men at about two or three o’clock in the afternoon. They sit (very uncomfortably) on a sloping stone there, and compare notes. Their dogs may always be observed at the same time, openly disparaging the men they keep, to one another, and settling where they shall respectively take their men when they begin to move again. At a small butcher’s, in a shy neighbourhood (there is no reason for suppressing the name; it is by Notting-hill, and gives upon the district called the Potteries), I know a shaggy black and white dog who keeps a drover. He is a dog of an easy disposition, and too frequently allows this drover to get drunk. On these occasions, it is the dog’s custom to sit outside the public-house, keeping his eye on a few sheep, and thinking. I have seen him with six sheep, plainly casting up in his mind how many he began with when he left the market, and at what places he has left the rest. I have seen him perplexed by not being able to account to himself for certain particular sheep. A light has gradually broken on him, he has remembered at what butcher’s he left them, and in a burst of grave satisfaction has caught a fly off his nose, and shown himself much relieved. If I could at any time have doubted the fact that it was he who kept the drover, and not the drover who kept him, it would have been abundantly proved by his way of taking undivided charge of the six sheep, when the drover came out besmeared with red ochre and beer, and gave him wrong directions, which he calmly disregarded. He has taken the sheep entirely into his own hands, has merely remarked with respectful firmness, ‘That instruction would place them under an omnibus; you had better confine your attention to yourself—you will want it all;’ and has driven his charge away, with an intelligence of ears and tail, and a knowledge of business, that has left his lout of a man very, very far behind.

As the dogs of shy neighbourhoods usually betray a slinking consciousness of being in poor circumstances—for the most part manifested in an aspect of anxiety, an awkwardness in their play, and a misgiving that somebody is going to harness them to something, to pick up a living—so the cats of shy neighbourhoods exhibit a strong tendency to relapse into barbarism. Not only are they made selfishly ferocious by ruminating on the surplus population around them, and on the densely crowded state of all the avenues to cat’s meat; not only is there a moral and politico-economical haggardness in them, traceable to these reflections; but they evince a physical deterioration. Their linen is not clean, and is wretchedly got up; their black turns rusty, like old mourning; they wear very indifferent fur;

and take to the shabbiest cotton velvet, instead of silk velvet. I am on terms of recognition with several small streets of cats, about the Obelisk in Saint George's Fields, and also in the vicinity of Clerkenwell-green, and also in the back settlements of Drury-lane. In appearance, they are very like the women among whom they live. They seem to turn out of their unwholesome beds into the street, without any preparation. They leave their young families to stagger about the gutters, unassisted, while they frouzily quarrel and swear and scratch and spit, at street corners. In particular, I remark that when they are about to increase their families (an event of frequent recurrence) the resemblance is strongly expressed in a certain dusty dowdiness, down-at-heel self-neglect, and general giving up of things. I cannot honestly report that I have ever seen a feline matron of this class washing her face when in an interesting condition.

Not to prolong these notes of uncommercial travel among the lower animals of shy neighbourhoods, by dwelling at length upon the exasperated moodiness of the tom-cats, and their resemblance in many respects to a man and a brother, I will come to a close with a word on the fowls of the same localities.

That anything born of an egg and invested with wings, should have got to the pass that it hops contentedly down a ladder into a cellar, and calls *that* going home, is a circumstance so amazing as to leave one nothing more in this connexion to wonder at. Otherwise I might wonder at the completeness with which these fowls have become separated from all the birds of the air—have taken to grovelling in bricks and mortar and mud—have forgotten all about live trees, and make roosting-places of shop-boards, barrows, oyster-tubs, bulk-heads, and door-scrapers. I wonder at nothing concerning them, and take them as they are. I accept as products of Nature and things of course, a reduced Bantam family of my acquaintance in the Hackney-road, who are incessantly at the pawnbroker's. I cannot say that they enjoy themselves, for they are of a melancholy temperament; but what enjoyment they are capable of, they derive from crowding together in the pawnbroker's side-entry. Here, they are always to be found in a feeble flutter, as if they were newly come down in the world, and were afraid of being identified. I know a low fellow, originally of a good family from Dorking, who takes his whole establishment of wives, in single file, in at the door of the jug Department of a disorderly tavern near the Haymarket, manoeuvres them among the company's legs, emerges with them at the Bottle Entrance, and so passes his life: seldom, in the season, going to bed before two in the morning. Over Waterloo-bridge, there is a shabby old speckled couple (they belong to the wooden French-bedstead, washing-stand, and towel-horse-making trade), who are always trying to get in at the door of a chapel. Whether the old lady, under a delusion reminding one of Mrs. Southcott, has an idea of entrusting an egg to that particular denomination, or merely understands that she has no business in the building and is consequently frantic to enter it, I cannot determine; but she is constantly endeavouring to undermine the principal door: while her partner, who is infirm upon his legs, walks up and down, encouraging her and defying the Universe. But, the family I have been best acquainted with, since the removal from this trying sphere of a Chinese circle at Brentford, reside in the densest part of Bethnal-green. Their abstraction from the objects among which they live, or rather their conviction that those objects have all come into existence in express subservience to fowls, has so enchanted me, that I have made them the subject of many journeys at divers hours. After careful observation of the two lords and the ten ladies of whom this family consists, I have come to the conclusion that their opinions are represented by the leading lord and leading lady: the latter, as I judge, an aged personage, afflicted with a paucity of feather and visibility of quill, that gives her the appearance of a bundle of office pens. When a railway goods van that would crush an elephant comes round the corner, tearing over these fowls, they emerge unharmed from under the horses, perfectly satisfied that the whole rush was a passing property in the air, which may have left something to eat behind it. They look upon old shoes, wrecks of kettles and saucepans, and fragments of bonnets, as a kind of meteoric discharge, for fowls to peck at. Peg-tops and hoops they account, I think, as a sort of hail; shuttlecocks, as rain, or dew. Gaslight comes quite as natural to them as any other light; and I have more than a suspicion that, in the minds of the two lords, the early public-house at the corner has superseded the sun. I have established it as a certain fact, that they always begin to crow when the public-house shutters begin to be taken down, and that they salute the potboy, the instant he appears to perform that duty, as if he were Phoebus in person.

CHAPTER XI—TRAMPS

The chance use of the word ‘Tramp’ in my last paper, brought that numerous fraternity so vividly before my mind’s eye, that I had no sooner laid down my pen than a compulsion was upon me to take it up again, and make notes of the Tramps whom I perceived on all the summer roads in all directions.

Whenever a tramp sits down to rest by the wayside, he sits with his legs in a dry ditch; and whenever he goes to sleep (which is very often indeed), he goes to sleep on his back. Yonder, by the high road, glaring white in the bright sunshine, lies, on the dusty bit of turf under the bramble-bush that fences the coppice from the highway, the tramp of the order savage, fast asleep. He lies on the broad of his back, with his face turned up to the sky, and one of his ragged arms loosely thrown across his face. His bundle (what can be the contents of that mysterious bundle, to make it worth his while to carry it about?) is thrown down beside him, and the waking woman with him sits with her legs in the ditch, and her back to the road. She wears her bonnet rakishly perched on the front of her head, to shade her face from the sun in walking, and she ties her skirts round her in conventionally tight tramp-fashion with a sort of apron. You can seldom catch sight of her, resting thus, without seeing her in a despondently defiant manner doing something to her hair or her bonnet, and glancing at you between her fingers. She does not often go to sleep herself in the daytime, but will sit for any length of time beside the man. And his slumberous propensities would not seem to be referable to the fatigue of carrying the bundle, for she carries it much oftener and further than he. When they are afoot, you will mostly find him slouching on ahead, in a gruff temper, while she lags heavily behind with the burden. He is given to personally correcting her, too—which phase of his character develops itself oftenest, on benches outside alehouse doors—and she appears to become strongly attached to him for these reasons; it may usually be noticed that when the poor creature has a bruised face, she is the most affectionate. He has no occupation whatever, this order of tramp, and has no object whatever in going anywhere. He will sometimes call himself a brickmaker, or a sawyer, but only when he takes an imaginary flight. He generally represents himself, in a vague way, as looking out for a job of work; but he never did work, he never does, and he never will. It is a favourite fiction with him, however (as if he were the most industrious character on earth), that *you* never work; and as he goes past your garden and sees you looking at your flowers, you will overhear him growl with a strong sense of contrast, '*You* are a lucky hidle devil, *you* are!'

The slinking tramp is of the same hopeless order, and has the same injured conviction on him that you were born to whatever you possess, and never did anything to get it: but he is of a less audacious disposition. He will stop before your gate, and say to his female companion with an air of constitutional humility and propitiation—to edify any one who may be within hearing behind a blind or a bush—'This is a sweet spot, ain't it? A lovelly spot! And I wonder if they'd give two poor footsore travellers like me and you, a drop of fresh water out of such a pretty gen-teel crib? We'd take it wery koind on 'em, wouldn't us? Wery koind, upon my word, us would?' He has a quick sense of a dog in the vicinity, and will extend his modestly-injured propitiation to the dog chained up in your yard; remarking, as he slinks at the yard gate, 'Ah! You are a foine breed o' dog, too, and *you* ain't kep for nothink! I'd take it wery koind o' your master if he'd elp a traveller and his woife as envies no gentlefolk their good fortun, wi' a bit o' your broken wittles. He'd never know the want of it, nor more would you. Don't bark like that, at poor persons as never done you no arm; the poor is down-trodden and broke enough without that; O DON'T!' He generally heaves a prodigious sigh in moving away, and always looks up the lane and down the lane, and up the road and down the road, before going on.

Both of these orders of tramp are of a very robust habit; let the hard-working labourer at whose cottage-door they prowl and beg, have the ague never so badly, these tramps are sure to be in good health.

There is another kind of tramp, whom you encounter this bright summer day—say, on a road with the sea-breeze making its dust lively, and sails of ships in the blue distance beyond the slope of Down. As you walk enjoyingly on, you descry in the perspective at the bottom of a steep hill up which your way lies, a figure that appears to be sitting airily on a gate, whistling in a cheerful and disengaged manner. As you approach nearer to it, you observe the figure to slide down from the gate, to desist from whistling, to uncock its hat, to become tender of foot, to depress its head and elevate its shoulders, and to present all the characteristics of profound despondency. Arriving at the bottom of the hill and coming close to the figure, you observe it to be the figure of a shabby young man. He is moving painfully forward, in the direction in which you are going, and his mind is so preoccupied with his misfortunes that he is not aware of your approach until you are close upon him at the hill-foot. When he is aware of you, you discover him to be a remarkably well-behaved young man, and a remarkably well-spoken young man. You know him to be well-behaved, by his respectful manner of touching his hat: you know him to be well-spoken, by his smooth manner of expressing himself. He says in a flowing confidential voice, and without punctuation, ‘I ask your pardon sir but if you would excuse the liberty of being so addressed upon the public Iway by one who is almost reduced to rags though it as not always been so and by no fault of his own but through ill elth in his family and many unmerited sufferings it would be a great obligation sir to know the time.’ You give the well-spoken young man the time. The well-spoken young man, keeping well up with you, resumes: ‘I am aware sir that it is a liberty to intrude a further question on a gentleman walking for his entertainment but might I make so bold as ask the favour of the way to Dover sir and about the distance?’ You inform the well-spoken young man that the way to Dover is straight on, and the distance some eighteen miles. The well-spoken young man becomes greatly agitated. ‘In the condition to which I am reduced,’ says he, ‘I could not ope to reach Dover before dark even if my shoes were in a state to take me there or my feet were in a state to old out over the flinty road and were not on the bare ground of which any gentleman has the means to satisfy himself by looking Sir may I take the liberty of speaking to you?’ As the well-spoken young man keeps so well up with you that you can’t prevent his taking the liberty of speaking to you, he goes on, with fluency: ‘Sir it is not begging that is my intention for I was brought up by the best of mothers and begging is not my trade I should not know sir how to follow it as a trade if such were my shameful wishes for the best of mothers long taught otherwise and in the best of omes though now reduced to take the present liberty on the Iway Sir my business was the law-stationering and I was favourably known to the Solicitor-General the Attorney-General the majority of the judges and the ole of the legal profession but through ill elth in my family and the treachery of a friend for whom I became security and he no other than my own wife’s brother the brother of my own wife I was cast forth with my tender partner and three young children not to beg for I will sooner die of deprivation but to make my way to the sea-port town of Dover where I have a relative i in respect not only that will assist me but that would trust me with untold gold Sir in appier times and hare this calamity fell upon me I made for my amusement when I little thought that I should ever need it excepting for my air this'—here the well-spoken young man put his hand into his breast—'this comb! Sir I implore you in the name of charity to purchase a tortoiseshell comb which is a genuine article at any price that your humanity may put upon it and may the blessings of a ouseless family awaiting with beating arts the return of a husband and a father from Dover upon the cold stone seats of London-bridge ever attend you Sir may I take the liberty of speaking to you I implore you to buy this comb!' By this time, being a reasonably good walker, you will have been too much for the well-spoken young man, who will stop short and express his disgust and his want of breath, in a long expectoration, as you leave him behind.

Towards the end of the same walk, on the same bright summer day, at the corner of the next little town or village, you may find another kind of tramp, embodied in the persons of a most exemplary couple whose only improvidence appears to have been, that they spent the last of their little All on soap. They are a man and woman, spotless to behold—John Anderson, with the frost on his short smock-frock instead of his 'pow,' attended by Mrs. Anderson. John is over-ostentatious of the frost upon his raiment, and wears a curious and, you would say, an almost unnecessary demonstration of girdle of white linen wound about his waist—a girdle, snowy as Mrs. Anderson's apron. This cleanliness was the expiring effort of the respectable couple, and nothing then remained to Mr. Anderson but to get chalked upon his spade in snow-white copy-book characters, HUNGRY! and to sit down here. Yes; one thing more remained to Mr. Anderson—his character; Monarchs could not deprive him of his hard-earned character. Accordingly, as you come up with this spectacle of virtue in distress, Mrs. Anderson rises, and with a decent curtsey presents for your consideration a certificate from a Doctor of Divinity, the reverend the Vicar of Upper Dodgington, who informs his Christian friends and all whom it may concern that the bearers, John Anderson and lawful wife, are persons to whom you cannot be too liberal. This benevolent pastor omitted no work of his hands to fit the good couple out, for with half an eye you can recognise his autograph on the spade.

Another class of tramp is a man, the most valuable part of whose stock-in-trade is a highly perplexed demeanour. He is got up like a countryman, and you will often come upon the poor fellow, while he is endeavouring to decipher the inscription on a milestone—quite a fruitless endeavour, for he cannot read. He asks your pardon, he truly does (he is very slow of speech, this tramp, and he looks in a bewildered way all round the prospect while he talks to you), but all of us shold do as we wold be done by, and he'll take it kind, if you'll put a power man in the right road fur to jine his eldest son as has broke his leg bad in the masoning, and is in this heere Orspit'l as is wrote down by Squire Pouncerby's own hand as wold not tell a lie fur no man. He then produces from under his dark frock (being always very slow and perplexed) a neat but worn old leathern purse, from which he takes a scrap of paper. On this scrap of paper is written, by Squire Pouncerby, of The Grove, 'Please to direct the Bearer, a poor but very worthy man, to the Sussex County Hospital, near Brighton'—a matter of some difficulty at the moment, seeing that the request comes suddenly upon you in the depths of Hertfordshire. The more you endeavour to indicate where Brighton is—when you have with the greatest difficulty remembered—the less the devoted father can be made to comprehend, and the more obtusely he stares at the prospect; whereby, being reduced to extremity, you recommend the faithful parent to begin by going to St. Albans, and present him with half-a-crown. It does him good, no doubt, but scarcely helps him forward, since you find him lying drunk that same evening in the wheelwright's sawpit under the shed where the felled trees are, opposite the sign of the Three Jolly Hedgers.

But, the most vicious, by far, of all the idle tramps, is the tramp who pretends to have been a gentleman. 'Educated,' he writes, from the village beer-shop in pale ink of a ferruginous complexion; 'educated at Trin. Coll. Cam.—nursed in the lap of affluence—once in my small way the pattron of the Muses,' &c. &c. &c.—surely a sympathetic mind will not withhold a trifle, to help him on to the market-town where he thinks of giving a Lecture to the *fruges consumere nati*, on things in general? This shameful creature lolling about hedge tap-rooms in his ragged clothes, now so far from being black that they look as if they never can have been black, is more selfish and insolent than even the savage tramp. He would sponge on the poorest boy for a farthing, and spurn him when he had got it; he would interpose (if he could get anything by it) between the baby and the mother's breast. So much lower than the company he keeps, for his maudlin assumption of being higher, this pitiless rascal blights the summer road as he maunders on between the luxuriant hedges; where (to my thinking) even the wild convolvulus and rose and sweet-briar, are the worse for his going by, and need time to recover from the taint of him in the air.

The young fellows who trudge along barefoot, five or six together, their boots slung over their shoulders, their shabby bundles under their arms, their sticks newly cut from some roadside wood, are not eminently prepossessing, but are much less objectionable. There is a tramp-fellowship among them. They pick one another up at resting stations, and go on in companies. They always go at a fast swing—though they generally limp too—and there is invariably one of the company who has much ado to keep up with the rest. They generally talk about horses, and any other means of locomotion than walking: or, one of the company relates some recent experiences of the road—which are always disputes and difficulties. As for example. 'So as I'm a standing at the pump in the market, blest if there don't come up a Beadle, and he ses, "Mustn't stand here," he ses. "Why not?" I ses. "No beggars allowed in this town," he ses. "Who's a beggar?" I ses. "You are," he ses. "Who ever see *me* beg? Did *you*?" I ses. "Then you're a tramp," he ses. "I'd rather be that than a Beadle," I ses.' (The company express great approval.) '"Would you?" he ses to me. "Yes, I would," I ses to him. "Well," he ses, "anyhow, get out of this town." "Why, blow your little town!" I ses, "who wants to be in it? Wot does your dirty little town mean by comin' and stickin' itself in the road to anywhere? Why don't you get a shovel and a barrer, and clear your town out o' people's way?"' (The company expressing the highest approval and laughing aloud, they all go down the hill.)

Then, there are the tramp handicraft men. Are they not all over England, in this Midsummer time? Where does the lark sing, the corn grow, the mill turn, the river run, and they are not among the lights and shadows, tinkering, chair-mending, umbrella-mending, clock-mending, knife-grinding? Surely, a pleasant thing, if we were in that condition of life, to grind our way through Kent, Sussex, and Surrey. For the worst six weeks or so, we should see the sparks we ground off, fiery bright against a background of green wheat and green leaves. A little later, and the ripe harvest would pale our sparks from red to yellow, until we got the dark newly-turned land for a background again, and they were red once more. By that time, we should have ground our way to the sea cliffs, and the whirr of our wheel would be lost in the breaking of the waves. Our next variety in sparks would be derived from contrast with the gorgeous medley of colours in the autumn woods, and, by the time we had ground our way round to the heathy lands between Reigate and Croydon, doing a prosperous stroke of business all along, we should show like a little firework in the light frosty air, and be the next best thing to the blacksmith's forge. Very agreeable, too, to go on a chair-mending tour. What judges we should be of rushes, and how knowingly (with a sheaf and a bottomless chair at our back) we should lounge on bridges, looking over at osier-beds! Among all the innumerable occupations that cannot possibly be transacted without the assistance of lookers-on, chair-mending may take a station in the first rank. When we sat down with our backs against the barn or the public-house, and began to mend, what a sense of popularity would grow upon us! When all the children came to look at us, and the tailor, and the general dealer, and the farmer who had been giving a small order at the little saddler's, and the groom from the great house, and the publican, and even the two skittle-players (and here note that, howsoever busy all the rest of village human-kind may be, there will always be two people with leisure to play at skittles, wherever village skittles are), what encouragement would be on us to plait and weave! No one looks at us while we plait and weave these words. Clock-mending again. Except for the slight inconvenience of carrying a clock under our arm, and the monotony of making the bell go, whenever we came to a human habitation, what a pleasant privilege to give a voice to the dumb cottage-clock, and set it talking to the cottage family again! Likewise we foresee great interest in going round by the park plantations, under the overhanging boughs (hares, rabbits, partridges, and pheasants, scudding like mad across and across the chequered ground before us), and so over the park ladder, and through the wood, until we came to the Keeper's lodge. Then, would, the Keeper be discoverable at his door, in a deep nest of leaves, smoking his pipe. Then, on our accosting him in the way of our trade, would he call to Mrs. Keeper, respecting 't'ould clock' in the kitchen. Then, would Mrs. Keeper ask us into the lodge, and on due examination we should offer to make a good job of it for eighteenpence; which offer, being accepted, would set us tinkling and clinking among the chubby, awe-struck little Keepers for an hour and more. So completely to the family's satisfaction would we achieve our work, that the Keeper would mention how that there was something wrong with the bell of the turret stable-clock up at the Hall, and that if we thought good of going up to the housekeeper on the chance of that job too, why he would take us. Then, should we go, among the branching oaks and the deep fern, by silent ways of mystery known to the Keeper, seeing the herd glancing here and there as we went along, until we came to the old Hall, solemn and grand. Under the Terrace Flower Garden, and round by the stables, would the Keeper take us in, and as we passed we should observe how spacious and stately the stables, and how fine the painting of the horses' names over their stalls, and how solitary all: the family being in London. Then, should we find ourselves presented to the housekeeper, sitting, in hushed state, at needlework, in a bay-window looking out upon a mighty grim red-brick quadrangle, guarded by stone lions disrespectfully throwing somersaults over the escutcheons of the noble family. Then, our services accepted and we insinuated with a candle into the stable-turret, we should find it to be a mere question of pendulum, but one that would hold us until dark. Then, should we fall to work, with a general impression of Ghosts being about, and of pictures indoors that of a certainty came out of their frames and 'walked,' if the family would only own it. Then, should we work and work, until the day gradually turned to dusk, and even until the dusk gradually turned to dark. Our task at length accomplished, we should be taken into an enormous servants' hall, and there regaled with beef and bread, and powerful ale. Then, paid freely, we should be at liberty to go, and should be told by a pointing helper to keep round over yinder by the blasted ash, and so straight through the woods, till we should see the town-lights right afore us. Then, feeling lonesome, should we desire upon the whole, that the ash had not been blasted, or that the helper had had the manners not to mention it. However, we should keep on, all right, till suddenly the stable bell would strike ten in the dolefullest way, quite chilling our blood, though we had so lately taught him how to acquit himself. Then, as we went on, should we recall old stories, and dimly consider what it would be most advisable to do, in the event of a tall figure, all in white, with saucer eyes, coming up and saying, 'I want you to come to a churchyard and mend a church clock. Follow me!' Then, should we make a burst to get clear of the trees, and should soon find ourselves in the open, with the town-lights bright ahead of us. So should we lie that night at the ancient sign of the Crispin and Crispanus, and rise early next morning to be betimes on tramp again.

Bricklayers often tramp, in twos and threes, lying by night at their ‘lodges,’ which are scattered all over the country. Bricklaying is another of the occupations that can by no means be transacted in rural parts, without the assistance of spectators—of as many as can be convened. In thinly-peopled spots, I have known brick-layers on tramp, coming up with bricklayers at work, to be so sensible of the indispensability of lookers-on, that they themselves have sat up in that capacity, and have been unable to subside into the acceptance of a proffered share in the job, for two or three days together. Sometimes, the ‘navvy,’ on tramp, with an extra pair of half-boots over his shoulder, a bag, a bottle, and a can, will take a similar part in a job of excavation, and will look at it without engaging in it, until all his money is gone. The current of my uncommercial pursuits caused me only last summer to want a little body of workmen for a certain spell of work in a pleasant part of the country; and I was at one time honoured with the attendance of as many as seven-and-twenty, who were looking at six.

Who can be familiar with any rustic highway in summer-time, without storing up knowledge of the many tramps who go from one oasis of town or village to another, to sell a stock in trade, apparently not worth a shilling when sold? Shrimps are a favourite commodity for this kind of speculation, and so are cakes of a soft and spongy character, coupled with Spanish nuts and brandy balls. The stock is carried on the head in a basket, and, between the head and the basket, are the trestles on which the stock is displayed at trading times. Fleet of foot, but a careworn class of tramp this, mostly; with a certain stiffness of neck, occasioned by much anxious balancing of baskets; and also with a long, Chinese sort of eye, which an overweighted forehead would seem to have squeezed into that form.

On the hot dusty roads near seaport towns and great rivers, behold the tramping Soldier. And if you should happen never to have asked yourself whether his uniform is suited to his work, perhaps the poor fellow’s appearance as he comes distressfully towards you, with his absurdly tight jacket unbuttoned, his neck-gear in his hand, and his legs well chafed by his trousers of baize, may suggest the personal inquiry, how you think *you* would like it. Much better the tramping Sailor, although his cloth is somewhat too thick for land service. But, why the tramping merchant-mate should put on a black velvet waistcoat, for a chalky country in the dog-days, is one of the great secrets of nature that will never be discovered.

I have my eye upon a piece of Kentish road, bordered on either side by a wood, and having on one hand, between the road-dust and the trees, a skirting patch of grass. Wild flowers grow in abundance on this spot, and it lies high and airy, with a distant river stealing steadily away to the ocean, like a man's life. To gain the milestone here, which the moss, primroses, violets, blue-bells, and wild roses, would soon render illegible but for peering travellers pushing them aside with their sticks, you must come up a steep hill, come which way you may. So, all the tramps with carts or caravans—the Gipsy-tramp, the Show-tramp, the Cheap Jack—find it impossible to resist the temptations of the place, and all turn the horse loose when they come to it, and boil the pot. Bless the place, I love the ashes of the vagabond fires that have scorched its grass! What tramp children do I see here, attired in a handful of rags, making a gymnasium of the shafts of the cart, making a feather-bed of the flints and brambles, making a toy of the hobbled old horse who is not much more like a horse than any cheap toy would be! Here, do I encounter the cart of mats and brooms and baskets—with all thoughts of business given to the evening wind—with the stew made and being served out—with Cheap Jack and Dear Jill striking soft music out of the plates that are rattled like warlike cymbals when put up for auction at fairs and markets—their minds so influenced (no doubt) by the melody of the nightingales as they begin to sing in the woods behind them, that if I were to propose to deal, they would sell me anything at cost price. On this hallowed ground has it been my happy privilege (let me whisper it), to behold the White-haired Lady with the pink eyes, eating meat-pie with the Giant: while, by the hedge-side, on the box of blankets which I knew contained the snakes, were set forth the cups and saucers and the teapot. It was on an evening in August, that I chanced upon this ravishing spectacle, and I noticed that, whereas the Giant reclined half concealed beneath the overhanging boughs and seemed indifferent to Nature, the white hair of the gracious Lady streamed free in the breath of evening, and her pink eyes found pleasure in the landscape. I heard only a single sentence of her uttering, yet it bespoke a talent for modest repartee. The ill-mannered Giant—accursed be his evil race!—had interrupted the Lady in some remark, and, as I passed that enchanted corner of the wood, she gently reproved him, with the words, ‘Now, Cobby;’—Cobby! so short a name!—‘ain’t one fool enough to talk at a time?’

Within appropriate distance of this magic ground, though not so near it as that the song trolled from tap or bench at door, can invade its woodland silence, is a little hostelry which no man possessed of a penny was ever known to pass in warm weather. Before its entrance, are certain pleasant, trimmed limes; likewise, a cool well, with so musical a bucket-handle that its fall upon the bucket rim will make a horse prick up his ears and neigh, upon the droughty road half a mile off. This is a house of great resort for haymaking tramps and harvest tramps, insomuch that as they sit within, drinking their mugs of beer, their relinquished scythes and reaping-hooks glare out of the open windows, as if the whole establishment were a family war-coach of Ancient Britons. Later in the season, the whole country-side, for miles and miles, will swarm with hopping tramps. They come in families, men, women, and children, every family provided with a bundle of bedding, an iron pot, a number of babies, and too often with some poor sick creature quite unfit for the rough life, for whom they suppose the smell of the fresh hop to be a sovereign remedy. Many of these hoppers are Irish, but many come from London. They crowd all the roads, and camp under all the hedges and on all the scraps of common-land, and live among and upon the hops until they are all picked, and the hop-gardens, so beautiful through the summer, look as if they had been laid waste by an invading army. Then, there is a vast exodus of tramps out of the country; and if you ride or drive round any turn of any road, at more than a foot pace, you will be bewildered to find that you have charged into the bosom of fifty families, and that there are splashing up all around you, in the utmost prodigality of confusion, bundles of bedding, babies, iron pots, and a good-humoured multitude of both sexes and all ages, equally divided between perspiration and intoxication.

CHAPTER XII—DULLBOROUGH TOWN

It lately happened that I found myself rambling about the scenes among which my earliest days were passed; scenes from which I departed when I was a child, and which I did not revisit until I was a man. This is no uncommon chance, but one that befalls some of us any day; perhaps it may not be quite uninteresting to compare notes with the reader respecting an experience so familiar and a journey so uncommercial.

I call my boyhood's home (and I feel like a Tenor in an English Opera when I mention it) Dullborough. Most of us come from Dullborough who come from a country town.

As I left Dullborough in the days when there were no railroads in the land, I left it in a stage-coach. Through all the years that have since passed, have I ever lost the smell of the damp straw in which I was packed—like game—and forwarded, carriage paid, to the Cross Keys, Wood-street, Cheapside, London? There was no other inside passenger, and I consumed my sandwiches in solitude and dreariness, and it rained hard all the way, and I thought life sloppier than I had expected to find it.

With this tender remembrance upon me, I was cavalierly shunted back into Dullborough the other day, by train. My ticket had been previously collected, like my taxes, and my shining new portmanteau had had a great plaster stuck upon it, and I had been defied by Act of Parliament to offer an objection to anything that was done to it, or me, under a penalty of not less than forty shillings or more than five pounds, compoundable for a term of imprisonment. When I had sent my disfigured property on to the hotel, I began to look about me; and the first discovery I made, was, that the Station had swallowed up the playing-field.

It was gone. The two beautiful hawthorn-trees, the hedge, the turf, and all those buttercups and daisies, had given place to the stoniest of jolting roads: while, beyond the Station, an ugly dark monster of a tunnel kept its jaws open, as if it had swallowed them and were ravenous for more destruction. The coach that had carried me away, was melodiously called Timpson's Blue-Eyed Maid, and belonged to Timpson, at the coach-office up-street; the locomotive engine that had brought me back, was called severely No. 97, and belonged to S.E.R., and was spitting ashes and hot water over the blighted ground.

When I had been let out at the platform-door, like a prisoner whom his turnkey grudgingly released, I looked in again over the low wall, at the scene of departed glories. Here, in the haymaking time, had I been delivered from the dungeons of Seringapatam, an immense pile (of haycock), by my own countrymen, the victorious British (boy next door and his two cousins), and had been recognised with ecstasy by my affianced one (Miss Green), who had come all the way from England (second house in the terrace) to ransom me, and marry me. Here, had I first heard in confidence, from one whose father was greatly connected, being under Government, of the existence of a terrible banditti, called ‘The Radicals,’ whose principles were, that the Prince Regent wore stays, and that nobody had a right to any salary, and that the army and navy ought to be put down—horrors at which I trembled in my bed, after supplicating that the Radicals might be speedily taken and hanged. Here, too, had we, the small boys of Boles’s, had that cricket match against the small boys of Coles’s, when Boles and Coles had actually met upon the ground, and when, instead of instantly hitting out at one another with the utmost fury, as we had all hoped and expected, those sneaks had said respectively, ‘I hope Mrs. Boles is well,’ and ‘I hope Mrs. Coles and the baby are doing charmingly.’ Could it be that, after all this, and much more, the Playing-field was a Station, and No. 97 expectorated boiling water and redhot cinders on it, and the whole belonged by Act of Parliament to S.E.R.?

As it could be, and was, I left the place with a heavy heart for a walk all over the town. And first of Timpson’s up-street. When I departed from Dullborough in the strawy arms of Timpson’s Blue-Eyed Maid, Timpson’s was a moderate-sized coach-office (in fact, a little coach-office), with an oval transparency in the window, which looked beautiful by night, representing one of Timpson’s coaches in the act of passing a milestone on the London road with great velocity, completely full inside and out, and all the passengers dressed in the first style of fashion, and enjoying themselves tremendously. I found no such place as Timpson’s now—no such bricks and rafters, not to mention the name—no such edifice on the teeming earth. Pickford had come and knocked Timpson’s down. Pickford had not only knocked Timpson’s down, but had knocked two or three houses down on each side of Timpson's, and then had knocked the whole into one great establishment with a pair of big gates, in and out of which, his (Pickford's) waggons are, in these days, always rattling, with their drivers sitting up so high, that they look in at the second-floor windows of the old-fashioned houses in the High-street as they shake the town. I have not the honour of Pickford's acquaintance, but I felt that he had done me an injury, not to say committed an act of boyslaughter, in running over my Childhood in this rough manner; and if ever I meet Pickford driving one of his own monsters, and smoking a pipe the while (which is the custom of his men), he shall know by the expression of my eye, if it catches his, that there is something wrong between us.

Moreover, I felt that Pickford had no right to come rushing into Dullborough and deprive the town of a public picture. He is not Napoleon Bonaparte. When he took down the transparent stage-coach, he ought to have given the town a transparent van. With a gloomy conviction that Pickford is wholly utilitarian and unimaginative, I proceeded on my way.

It is a mercy I have not a red and green lamp and a night-bell at my door, for in my very young days I was taken to so many lyings-in that I wonder I escaped becoming a professional martyr to them in after-life. I suppose I had a very sympathetic nurse, with a large circle of married acquaintance. However that was, as I continued my walk through Dullborough, I found many houses to be solely associated in my mind with this particular interest. At one little greengrocer's shop, down certain steps from the street, I remember to have waited on a lady who had had four children (I am afraid to write five, though I fully believe it was five) at a birth. This meritorious woman held quite a reception in her room on the morning when I was introduced there, and the sight of the house brought vividly to my mind how the four (five) deceased young people lay, side by side, on a clean cloth on a chest of drawers; reminding me by a homely association, which I suspect their complexion to have assisted, of pigs' feet as they are usually displayed at a neat tripe-shop. Hot candle was handed round on the occasion, and I further remembered as I stood contemplating the greengrocer's, that a subscription was entered into among the company, which became extremely alarming to my consciousness of having pocket-money on my person. This fact being known to my conductress, whoever she was, I was earnestly exhorted to contribute, but resolutely declined:

therein disgusting the company, who gave me to understand that I must dismiss all expectations of going to Heaven.

How does it happen that when all else is change wherever one goes, there yet seem, in every place, to be some few people who never alter? As the sight of the greengrocer's house recalled these trivial incidents of long ago, the identical greengrocer appeared on the steps, with his hands in his pockets, and leaning his shoulder against the door-post, as my childish eyes had seen him many a time; indeed, there was his old mark on the door-post yet, as if his shadow had become a fixture there. It was he himself; he might formerly have been an old-looking young man, or he might now be a young-looking old man, but there he was. In walking along the street, I had as yet looked in vain for a familiar face, or even a transmitted face; here was the very greengrocer who had been weighing and handling baskets on the morning of the reception. As he brought with him a dawning remembrance that he had had no proprietary interest in those babies, I crossed the road, and accosted him on the subject. He was not in the least excited or gratified, or in any way roused, by the accuracy of my recollection, but said, Yes, summut out of the common—he didn't remember how many it was (as if half-a-dozen babes either way made no difference)—had happened to a Mrs. What's-her-name, as once lodged there—but he didn't call it to mind, particular. Nettled by this phlegmatic conduct, I informed him that I had left the town when I was a child. He slowly returned, quite unsoftened, and not without a sarcastic kind of complacency, *Had* I? Ah! And did I find it had got on tolerably well without me? Such is the difference (I thought, when I had left him a few hundred yards behind, and was by so much in a better temper) between going away from a place and remaining in it. I had no right, I reflected, to be angry with the greengrocer for his want of interest, I was nothing to him: whereas he was the town, the cathedral, the bridge, the river, my childhood, and a large slice of my life, to me.

Of course the town had shrunk fearfully, since I was a child there. I had entertained the impression that the High-street was at least as wide as Regent-street, London, or the Italian Boulevard at Paris. I found it little better than a lane. There was a public clock in it, which I had supposed to be the finest clock in the world: whereas it now turned out to be as inexpressive, moon-faced, and weak a clock as ever I saw. It belonged to a Town Hall, where I had seen an Indian (who I now suppose wasn't an

Indian) swallow a sword (which I now suppose he didn't). The edifice had appeared to me in those days so glorious a structure, that I had set it up in my mind as the model on which the Genie of the Lamp built the palace for Aladdin. A mean little brick heap, like a demented chapel, with a few yawning persons in leather gaiters, and in the last extremity for something to do, lounging at the door with their hands in their pockets, and calling themselves a Corn Exchange!

The Theatre was in existence, I found, on asking the fishmonger, who had a compact show of stock in his window, consisting of a sole and a quart of shrimps—and I resolved to comfort my mind by going to look at it. Richard the Third, in a very uncomfortable cloak, had first appeared to me there, and had made my heart leap with terror by backing up against the stage-box in which I was posted, while struggling for life against the virtuous Richmond. It was within those walls that I had learnt as from a page of English history, how that wicked King slept in war-time on a sofa much too short for him, and how fearfully his conscience troubled his boots. There, too, had I first seen the funny countryman, but countryman of noble principles, in a flowered waistcoat, crunch up his little hat and throw it on the ground, and pull off his coat, saying, 'Dom thee, squire, coom on with thy fistes then!' At which the lovely young woman who kept company with him (and who went out gleaning, in a narrow white muslin apron with five beautiful bars of five different-coloured ribbons across it) was so frightened for his sake, that she fainted away. Many wondrous secrets of Nature had I come to the knowledge of in that sanctuary: of which not the least terrific were, that the witches in Macbeth bore an awful resemblance to the Thanes and other proper inhabitants of Scotland; and that the good King Duncan couldn't rest in his grave, but was constantly coming out of it and calling himself somebody else. To the Theatre, therefore, I repaired for consolation. But I found very little, for it was in a bad and declining way. A dealer in wine and bottled beer had already squeezed his trade into the box-office, and the theatrical money was taken—when it came—in a kind of meat-safe in the passage. The dealer in wine and bottled beer must have insinuated himself under the stage too; for he announced that he had various descriptions of alcoholic drinks 'in the wood,' and there was no possible stowage for the wood anywhere else. Evidently, he was by degrees eating the establishment away to the core, and would soon have sole possession of it. It was To Let, and hopelessly so, for its old purposes; and there had been no entertainment within its walls for a long time except a Panorama; and even that had been announced as ‘pleasingly instructive,’ and I know too well the fatal meaning and the leaden import of those terrible expressions. No, there was no comfort in the Theatre. It was mysteriously gone, like my own youth. Unlike my own youth, it might be coming back some day; but there was little promise of it.

As the town was placarded with references to the Dullborough Mechanics’ Institution, I thought I would go and look at that establishment next. There had been no such thing in the town, in my young day, and it occurred to me that its extreme prosperity might have brought adversity upon the Drama. I found the Institution with some difficulty, and should scarcely have known that I had found it if I had judged from its external appearance only; but this was attributable to its never having been finished, and having no front: consequently, it led a modest and retired existence up a stable-yard. It was (as I learnt, on inquiry) a most flourishing Institution, and of the highest benefit to the town: two triumphs which I was glad to understand were not at all impaired by the seeming drawbacks that no mechanics belonged to it, and that it was steeped in debt to the chimney-pots. It had a large room, which was approached by an infirm step-ladder: the builder having declined to construct the intended staircase, without a present payment in cash, which Dullborough (though profoundly appreciative of the Institution) seemed unaccountably bashful about subscribing. The large room had cost—or would, when paid for—five hundred pounds; and it had more mortar in it and more echoes, than one might have expected to get for the money. It was fitted up with a platform, and the usual lecturing tools, including a large black board of a menacing appearance. On referring to lists of the courses of lectures that had been given in this thriving Hall, I fancied I detected a shyness in admitting that human nature when at leisure has any desire whatever to be relieved and diverted; and a furtive sliding in of any poor make-weight piece of amusement, shame-facedly and edgewise. Thus, I observed that it was necessary for the members to be knocked on the head with Gas, Air, Water, Food, the Solar System, the Geological periods, Criticism on Milton, the Steam-engine, John Bunyan, and Arrow-Headed Inscriptions, before they might be tickled by those unaccountable choristers, the negro singers in the court costume of the reign of George the Second. Likewise, that they must be stunned by a weighty inquiry whether there was internal evidence in

Shakespeare’s works, to prove that his uncle by the mother’s side lived for some years at Stoke Newington, before they were brought-to by a Miscellaneous Concert. But, indeed, the masking of entertainment, and pretending it was something else—as people mask bedsteads when they are obliged to have them in sitting-rooms, and make believe that they are book-cases, sofas, chests of drawers, anything rather than bedsteads—was manifest even in the pretence of dreariness that the unfortunate entertainers themselves felt obliged in decency to put forth when they came here. One very agreeable professional singer, who travelled with two professional ladies, knew better than to introduce either of those ladies to sing the ballad ‘Comin’ through the Rye’ without prefacing it himself, with some general remarks on wheat and clover; and even then, he dared not for his life call the song, a song, but disguised it in the bill as an ‘Illustration.’ In the library, also—fitted with shelves for three thousand books, and containing upwards of one hundred and seventy (presented copies mostly), seething their edges in damp plaster—there was such a painfully apologetic return of 62 offenders who had read Travels, Popular Biography, and mere Fiction descriptive of the aspirations of the hearts and souls of mere human creatures like themselves; and such an elaborate parade of 2 bright examples who had had down Euclid after the day’s occupation and confinement; and 3 who had had down Metaphysics after ditto; and 1 who had had down Theology after ditto; and 4 who had worried Grammar, Political Economy, Botany, and Logarithms all at once after ditto; that I suspected the boasted class to be one man, who had been hired to do it.

Emerging from the Mechanics’ Institution and continuing my walk about the town, I still noticed everywhere the prevalence, to an extraordinary degree, of this custom of putting the natural demand for amusement out of sight, as some untidy housekeepers put dust, and pretending that it was swept away. And yet it was ministered to, in a dull and abortive manner, by all who made this feint. Looking in at what is called in Dullborough ‘the serious bookseller’s,’ where, in my childhood, I had studied the faces of numbers of gentlemen depicted in rostrums with a gaslight on each side of them, and casting my eyes over the open pages of certain printed discourses there, I found a vast deal of aiming at jocosity and dramatic effect, even in them—yes, verily, even on the part of one very wrathful expounder who bitterly anathematised a poor little Circus. Similarly, in the reading provided for the young people enrolled in the

Lasso of Love, and other excellent unions, I found the writers generally under a distressing sense that they must start (at all events) like story-tellers, and delude the young persons into the belief that they were going to be interesting. As I looked in at this window for twenty minutes by the clock, I am in a position to offer a friendly remonstrance—not bearing on this particular point—to the designers and engravers of the pictures in those publications. Have they considered the awful consequences likely to flow from their representations of Virtue? Have they asked themselves the question, whether the terrific prospect of acquiring that fearful chubbiness of head, unwieldiness of arm, feeble dislocation of leg, crispiness of hair, and enormity of shirt-collar, which they represent as inseparable from Goodness, may not tend to confirm sensitive waverers, in Evil? A most impressive example (if I had believed it) of what a Dustman and a Sailor may come to, when they mend their ways, was presented to me in this same shop-window. When they were leaning (they were intimate friends) against a post, drunk and reckless, with surpassingly bad hats on, and their hair over their foreheads, they were rather picturesque, and looked as if they might be agreeable men, if they would not be beasts. But, when they had got over their bad propensities, and when, as a consequence, their heads had swelled alarmingly, their hair had got so curly that it lifted their blown-out cheeks up, their coat-cuffs were so long that they never could do any work, and their eyes were so wide open that they never could do any sleep, they presented a spectacle calculated to plunge a timid nature into the depths of Infamy.

But, the clock that had so degenerated since I saw it last, admonished me that I had stayed here long enough; and I resumed my walk.

I had not gone fifty paces along the street when I was suddenly brought up by the sight of a man who got out of a little phaeton at the doctor’s door, and went into the doctor’s house. Immediately, the air was filled with the scent of trodden grass, and the perspective of years opened, and at the end of it was a little likeness of this man keeping a wicket, and I said, ‘God bless my soul! Joe Specks!’

Through many changes and much work, I had preserved a tenderness for the memory of Joe, forasmuch as we had made the acquaintance of Roderick Random together, and had believed him to be no ruffian, but an ingenuous and engaging hero. Scorning to ask the boy left in the phaeton whether it was really Joe, and scorning even to read the brass plate on the door—so sure was I—I rang the bell and informed the servant maid that a stranger sought audience of Mr. Specks. Into a room, half surgery, half study, I was shown to await his coming, and I found it, by a series of elaborate accidents, bestrewn with testimonies to Joe. Portrait of Mr. Specks, bust of Mr. Specks, silver cup from grateful patient to Mr. Specks, presentation sermon from local clergyman, dedication poem from local poet, dinner-card from local nobleman, tract on balance of power from local refugee, inscribed *Hommage de l'auteur à Specks.*

When my old schoolfellow came in, and I informed him with a smile that I was not a patient, he seemed rather at a loss to perceive any reason for smiling in connexion with that fact, and inquired to what was he to attribute the honour? I asked him with another smile, could he remember me at all? He had not (he said) that pleasure. I was beginning to have but a poor opinion of Mr. Specks, when he said reflectively, 'And yet there's a something too.' Upon that, I saw a boyish light in his eyes that looked well, and I asked him if he could inform me, as a stranger who desired to know and had not the means of reference at hand, what the name of the young lady was, who married Mr. Random? Upon that, he said 'Narcissa,' and, after staring for a moment, called me by my name, shook me by the hand, and melted into a roar of laughter. 'Why, of course, you'll remember Lucy Green,' he said, after we had talked a little. 'Of course,' said I. 'Whom do you think she married?' said he. 'You?' I hazarded. 'Me,' said Specks, 'and you shall see her.' So I saw her, and she was fat, and if all the hay in the world had been heaped upon her, it could scarcely have altered her face more than Time had altered it from my remembrance of the face that had once looked down upon me into the fragrant dungeons of Seringapatam. But when her youngest child came in after dinner (for I dined with them, and we had no other company than Specks, Junior, Barrister-at-law, who went away as soon as the cloth was removed, to look after the young lady to whom he was going to be married next week), I saw again, in that little daughter, the little face of the hayfield, unchanged, and it quite touched my foolish heart. We talked immensely, Specks and Mrs. Specks, and I, and we spoke of our old selves as though our old selves were dead and gone, and indeed, indeed they were—dead and gone as the playing-field that had become a wilderness of rusty iron, and the property of S.E.R.

Specks, however, illuminated Dullborough with the rays of interest that I wanted and should otherwise have missed in it, and linked its present to its past, with a highly agreeable chain. And in Specks's society I had new occasion to observe what I had before noticed in similar communications among other men. All the schoolfellows and others of old, whom I inquired about, had either done superlatively well or superlatively ill—had either become uncertificated bankrupts, or been felonious and got themselves transported; or had made great hits in life, and done wonders. And this is so commonly the case, that I never can imagine what becomes of all the mediocre people of people's youth—especially considering that we find no lack of the species in our maturity. But, I did not propound this difficulty to Specks, for no pause in the conversation gave me an occasion. Nor, could I discover one single flaw in the good doctor—when he reads this, he will receive in a friendly spirit the pleasantly meant record—except that he had forgotten his Roderick Random, and that he confounded Strap with Lieutenant Hatchway; who never knew Random, howsoever intimate with Pickle.

When I went alone to the Railway to catch my train at night (Specks had meant to go with me, but was inopportunely called out), I was in a more charitable mood with Dullborough than I had been all day; and yet in my heart I had loved it all day too. Ah! who was I that I should quarrel with the town for being changed to me, when I myself had come back, so changed, to it! All my early readings and early imaginations dated from this place, and I took them away so full of innocent construction and guileless belief, and I brought them back so worn and torn, so much the wiser and so much the worse!

CHAPTER XIII—NIGHT WALKS

Some years ago, a temporary inability to sleep, referable to a distressing impression, caused me to walk about the streets all night, for a series of several nights. The disorder might have taken a long time to conquer, if it had been faintly experimented on in bed; but, it was soon defeated by the brisk treatment of getting up directly after lying down, and going out, and coming home tired at sunrise.

In the course of those nights, I finished my education in a fair amateur experience of houselessness. My principal object being to get through the night, the pursuit of it brought me into sympathetic relations with people who have no other object every night in the year.

The month was March, and the weather damp, cloudy, and cold. The sun not rising before half-past five, the night perspective looked sufficiently long at half-past twelve: which was about my time for confronting it.

The restlessness of a great city, and the way in which it tumbles and tosses before it can get to sleep, formed one of the first entertainments offered to the contemplation of us houseless people. It lasted about two hours. We lost a great deal of companionship when the late public-houses turned their lamps out, and when the potmen thrust the last brawling drunkards into the street; but stray vehicles and stray people were left us, after that. If we were very lucky, a policeman's rattle sprang and a fray turned up; but, in general, surprisingly little of this diversion was provided. Except in the Haymarket, which is the worst kept part of London, and about Kent-street in the Borough, and along a portion of the line of the Old Kent-road, the peace was seldom violently broken. But, it was always the case that London, as if in imitation of individual citizens belonging to it, had expiring fits and starts of restlessness. After all seemed quiet, if one cab rattled by, half-a-dozen would surely follow; and Houselessness even observed that intoxicated people appeared to be magnetically attracted towards each other; so that we knew when we saw one drunken object staggering against the shutters of a shop, that another drunken object would stagger up before five minutes were out, to fraternise or fight with it. When we made a divergence from the regular species of drunkard, the thin-armed, puff-faced, leaden-lipped gin-drinker, and encountered a rarer specimen of a more decent appearance, fifty to one but that specimen was dressed in soiled mourning. As the street experience in the night, so the street experience in the day; the common folk who come unexpectedly into a little property, come unexpectedly into a deal of liquor.

At length these flickering sparks would die away, worn out—the last veritable sparks of waking life trailed from some late pieman or hot-potato man—and London would sink to rest. And then the yearning of the houseless mind would be for any sign of company, any lighted place, any movement, anything suggestive of any one being up—nay, even so much as awake, for the houseless eye looked out for lights in windows.

Walking the streets under the pattering rain, Houselessness would walk and walk and walk, seeing nothing but the interminable tangle of streets, save at a corner, here and there, two policemen in conversation, or the sergeant or inspector looking after his men. Now and then in the night—but rarely—Houselessness would become aware of a furtive head peering out of a doorway a few yards before him, and, coming up with the head, would find a man standing bolt upright to keep within the doorway's shadow, and evidently intent upon no particular service to society. Under a kind of fascination, and in a ghostly silence suitable to the time, Houselessness and this gentleman would eye one another from head to foot, and so, without exchange of speech, part, mutually suspicious. Drip, drip, drip, from ledge and coping, splash from pipes and water-spouts, and by-and-by the houseless shadow would fall upon the stones that pave the way to Waterloo-bridge; it being in the houseless mind to have a halfpenny worth of excuse for saying 'Good-night' to the toll-keeper, and catching a glimpse of his fire. A good fire and a good great-coat and a good woollen neck-shawl, were comfortable things to see in conjunction with the toll-keeper; also his brisk wakefulness was excellent company when he rattled the change of halfpence down upon that metal table of his, like a man who defied the night, with all its sorrowful thoughts, and didn't care for the coming of dawn. There was need of encouragement on the threshold of the bridge, for the bridge was dreary. The chopped-up murdered man, had not been lowered with a rope over the parapet when those nights were; he was alive, and slept then quietly enough most likely, and undisturbed by any dream of where he was to come. But the river had an awful look, the buildings on the banks were muffled in black shrouds, and the reflected lights seemed to originate deep in the water, as if the spectres of suicides were holding them to show where they went down. The wild moon and clouds were as restless as an evil conscience in a tumbled bed, and the very shadow of the immensity of London seemed to lie oppressively upon the river.

Between the bridge and the two great theatres, there was but the distance of a few hundred paces, so the theatres came next. Grim and black within, at night, those great dry Wells, and lonesome to imagine, with the rows of faces faded out, the lights extinguished, and the seats all empty. One would think that nothing in them knew itself at such a time but Yorick's skull. In one of my night walks, as the church steeples were shaking the March winds and rain with the strokes of Four, I passed the outer boundary of one of these great deserts, and entered it. With a dim lantern in my hand, I groped my well-known way to the stage and looked over the orchestra—which was like a great grave dug for a time of pestilence—into the void beyond. A dismal cavern of an immense aspect, with the chandelier gone dead like everything else, and nothing visible through mist and fog and space, but tiers of winding-sheets. The ground at my feet where, when last there, I had seen the peasantry of Naples dancing among the vines, reckless of the burning mountain which threatened to overwhelm them, was now in possession of a strong serpent of engine-hose, watchfully lying in wait for the serpent Fire, and ready to fly at it if it showed its forked tongue. A ghost of a watchman, carrying a faint corpse candle, haunted the distant upper gallery and flitted away. Retiring within the proscenium, and holding my light above my head towards the rolled-up curtain—green no more, but black as ebony—my sight lost itself in a gloomy vault, showing faint indications in it of a shipwreck of canvas and cordage. Methought I felt much as a diver might, at the bottom of the sea.

In those small hours when there was no movement in the streets, it afforded matter for reflection to take Newgate in the way, and, touching its rough stone, to think of the prisoners in their sleep, and then to glance in at the lodge over the spiked wicket, and see the fire and light of the watching turnkeys, on the white wall. Not an inappropriate time either, to linger by that wicked little Debtors' Door—shutting tighter than any other door one ever saw—which has been Death's Door to so many. In the days of the uttering of forged one-pound notes by people tempted up from the country, how many hundreds of wretched creatures of both sexes—many quite innocent—swung out of a pitiless and inconsistent world, with the tower of yonder Christian church of Saint Sepulchre monstrously before their eyes!

Is there any haunting of the Bank Parlour, by the remorseful souls of old directors, in the nights of these later days, I wonder, or is it as quiet as this degenerate Aceldama of an Old Bailey?

To walk on to the Bank, lamenting the good old times and bemoaning the present evil period, would be an easy next step, so I would take it, and would make my houseless circuit of the Bank, and give a thought to the treasure within; likewise to the guard of soldiers passing the night there, and nodding over the fire. Next, I went to Billingsgate, in some hope of market-people, but it proving as yet too early, crossed London-bridge and got down by the water-side on the Surrey shore among the buildings of the great brewery. There was plenty going on at the brewery; and the reek, and the smell of grains, and the rattling of the plump dray horses at their mangers, were capital company. Quite refreshed by having mingled with this good society, I made a new start with a new heart, setting the old King's Bench prison before me for my next object, and resolving, when I should come to the wall, to think of poor Horace Kinch, and the Dry Rot in men.

A very curious disease the Dry Rot in men, and difficult to detect the beginning of. It had carried Horace Kinch inside the wall of the old King's Bench prison, and it had carried him out with his feet foremost. He was a likely man to look at, in the prime of life, well to do, as clever as he needed to be, and popular among many friends. He was suitably married, and had healthy and pretty children. But, like some fair-looking houses or fair-looking ships, he took the Dry Rot. The first strong external revelation of the Dry Rot in men, is a tendency to lurk and lounge; to be at street-corners without intelligible reason; to be going anywhere when met; to be about many places rather than at any; to do nothing tangible, but to have an intention of performing a variety of intangible duties to-morrow or the day after. When this manifestation of the disease is observed, the observer will usually connect it with a vague impression once formed or received, that the patient was living a little too hard. He will scarcely have had leisure to turn it over in his mind and form the terrible suspicion 'Dry Rot,' when he will notice a change for the worse in the patient's appearance: a certain slovenliness and deterioration, which is not poverty, nor dirt, nor intoxication, nor ill-health, but simply Dry Rot. To this, succeeds a smell as of strong waters, in the morning; to that, a looseness respecting money; to that, a stronger smell as of strong waters, at all times; to that, a looseness respecting everything; to that, a trembling of the limbs, somnolency, misery, and crumbling to pieces. As it is in wood, so it is in men. Dry Rot advances at a compound usury quite incalculable. A plank is found infected with it, and the whole structure is devoted. Thus it had been with the unhappy Horace Kinch, lately buried by a small subscription. Those who knew him had not nigh done saying, ‘So well off, so comfortably established, with such hope before him—and yet, it is feared, with a slight touch of Dry Rot!’ when lo! the man was all Dry Rot and dust.

From the dead wall associated on those houseless nights with this too common story, I chose next to wander by Bethlehem Hospital; partly, because it lay on my road round to Westminster; partly, because I had a night fancy in my head which could be best pursued within sight of its walls and dome. And the fancy was this: Are not the sane and the insane equal at night as the sane lie a dreaming? Are not all of us outside this hospital, who dream, more or less in the condition of those inside it, every night of our lives? Are we not nightly persuaded, as they daily are, that we associate preposterously with kings and queens, emperors and empresses, and notabilities of all sorts? Do we not nightly jumble events and personages and times and places, as these do daily? Are we not sometimes troubled by our own sleeping inconsistencies, and do we not vexedly try to account for them or excuse them, just as these do sometimes in respect of their waking delusions? Said an afflicted man to me, when I was last in a hospital like this, ‘Sir, I can frequently fly.’ I was half ashamed to reflect that so could I—by night. Said a woman to me on the same occasion, ‘Queen Victoria frequently comes to dine with me, and her Majesty and I dine off peaches and maccaroni in our night-gowns, and his Royal Highness the Prince Consort does us the honour to make a third on horseback in a Field-Marshal’s uniform.’ Could I refrain from reddening with consciousness when I remembered the amazing royal parties I myself had given (at night), the unaccountable viands I had put on table, and my extraordinary manner of conducting myself on those distinguished occasions? I wonder that the great master who knew everything, when he called Sleep the death of each day’s life, did not call Dreams the insanity of each day’s sanity.

By this time I had left the Hospital behind me, and was again setting towards the river; and in a short breathing space I was on Westminster-bridge, regaling my houseless eyes with the external walls of the British Parliament—the perfection of a stupendous institution, I know, and the admiration of all surrounding nations and succeeding ages, I do not doubt, but perhaps a little the better now and then for being pricked up to its work. Turning off into Old Palace-yard, the Courts of Law kept me company for a quarter of an hour; hinting in low whispers what numbers of people they were keeping awake, and how intensely wretched and horrible they were rendering the small hours to unfortunate suitors. Westminster Abbey was fine gloomy society for another quarter of an hour; suggesting a wonderful procession of its dead among the dark arches and pillars, each century more amazed by the century following it than by all the centuries going before. And indeed in those houseless night walks—which even included cemeteries where watchmen went round among the graves at stated times, and moved the tell-tale handle of an index which recorded that they had touched it at such an hour—it was a solemn consideration what enormous hosts of dead belong to one old great city, and how, if they were raised while the living slept, there would not be the space of a pin's point in all the streets and ways for the living to come out into. Not only that, but the vast armies of dead would overflow the hills and valleys beyond the city, and would stretch away all round it, God knows how far.

When a church clock strikes, on houseless ears in the dead of the night, it may be at first mistaken for company and hailed as such. But, as the spreading circles of vibration, which you may perceive at such a time with great clearness, go opening out, for ever and ever afterwards widening perhaps (as the philosopher has suggested) in eternal space, the mistake is rectified and the sense of loneliness is profounder. Once—it was after leaving the Abbey and turning my face north—I came to the great steps of St. Martin's church as the clock was striking Three. Suddenly, a thing that in a moment more I should have trodden upon without seeing, rose up at my feet with a cry of loneliness and houselessness, struck out of it by the bell, the like of which I never heard. We then stood face to face looking at one another, frightened by one another. The creature was like a beetle-browed hair-lipped youth of twenty, and it had a loose bundle of rags on, which it held together with one of its hands. It shivered from head to foot, and its teeth chattered, and as it stared at me—persecutor, devil, ghost, whatever it thought me—it made with its whining mouth as if it were snapping at me, like a worried dog. Intending to give this ugly object money, I put out my hand to stay it—for it recoiled as it whined and snapped—and laid my hand upon its shoulder. Instantly, it twisted out of its garment, like the young man in the New Testament, and left me standing alone with its rags in my hands.

Covent-garden Market, when it was market morning, was wonderful company. The great waggons of cabbages, with growers' men and boys lying asleep under them, and with sharp dogs from market-garden neighbourhoods looking after the whole, were as good as a party. But one of the worst night sights I know in London, is to be found in the children who prowl about this place; who sleep in the baskets, fight for the offal, dart at any object they think they can lay their their thieving hands on, dive under the carts and barrows, dodge the constables, and are perpetually making a blunt pattering on the pavement of the Piazza with the rain of their naked feet. A painful and unnatural result comes of the comparison one is forced to institute between the growth of corruption as displayed in the so much improved and cared for fruits of the earth, and the growth of corruption as displayed in these all uncared for (except inasmuch as ever-hunted) savages.

There was early coffee to be got about Covent-garden Market, and that was more company—warm company, too, which was better. Toast of a very substantial quality, was likewise procurable: though the towzled-headed man who made it, in an inner chamber within the coffee-room, hadn't got his coat on yet, and was so heavy with sleep that in every interval of toast and coffee he went off anew behind the partition into complicated cross-roads of choke and snore, and lost his way directly. Into one of these establishments (among the earliest) near Bow-street, there came one morning as I sat over my houseless cup, pondering where to go next, a man in a high and long snuff-coloured coat, and shoes, and, to the best of my belief, nothing else but a hat, who took out of his hat a large cold meat pudding; a meat pudding so large that it was a very tight fit, and brought the lining of the hat out with it. This mysterious man was known by his pudding, for on his entering, the man of sleep brought him a pint of hot tea, a small loaf, and a large knife and fork and plate. Left to himself in his box, he stood the pudding on the bare table, and, instead of cutting it, stabbed it, overhand, with the knife, like a mortal enemy; then took the knife out, wiped it on his sleeve, tore the pudding asunder with his fingers, and ate it all up. The remembrance of this man with the pudding remains with me as the remembrance of the most spectral person my houselessness encountered. Twice only was I in that establishment, and twice I saw him stalk in (as I should say, just out of bed, and presently going back to bed), take out his pudding, stab his pudding, wipe the dagger, and eat his pudding all up. He was a man whose figure promised cadaverousness, but who had an excessively red face, though shaped like a horse's. On the second occasion of my seeing him, he said huskily to the man of sleep, 'Am I red to-night?' 'You are,' he uncompromisingly answered. 'My mother,' said the spectre, 'was a red-faced woman that liked drink, and I looked at her hard when she laid in her coffin, and I took the complexion.' Somehow, the pudding seemed an unwholesome pudding after that, and I put myself in its way no more.

When there was no market, or when I wanted variety, a railway terminus with the morning mails coming in, was remunerative company. But like most of the company to be had in this world, it lasted only a very short time. The station lamps would burst out ablaze, the porters would emerge from places of concealment, the cabs and trucks would rattle to their places (the post-office carts were already in theirs), and, finally, the bell would strike up, and the train would come banging in. But there were few passengers and little luggage, and everything scuttled away with the greatest expedition. The locomotive post-offices, with their great nets—as if they had been dragging the country for bodies—would fly open as to their doors, and would disgorge a smell of lamp, an exhausted clerk, a guard in a red coat, and their bags of letters; the engine would blow and heave and perspire, like an engine wiping its forehead and saying what a run it had had; and within ten minutes the lamps were out, and I was houseless and alone again.

But now, there were driven cattle on the high road near, wanting (as cattle always do) to turn into the midst of stone walls, and squeeze themselves through six inches' width of iron railing, and getting their heads down (also as cattle always do) for tossing-purchase at quite imaginary dogs, and giving themselves and every devoted creature associated with them a most extraordinary amount of unnecessary trouble. Now, too, the conscious gas began to grow pale with the knowledge that daylight was coming, and straggling workpeople were already in the streets, and, as waking life had become extinguished with the last pieman's sparks, so it began to be rekindled with the fires of the first street-corner breakfast-sellers. And so by faster and faster degrees, until the last degrees were very fast, the day came, and I was tired and could sleep. And it is not, as I used to think, going home at such times, the least wonderful thing in London, that in the real desert region of the night, the houseless wanderer is alone there. I knew well enough where to find Vice and Misfortune of all kinds, if I had chosen; but they were put out of sight, and my houselessness had many miles upon miles of streets in which it could, and did, have its own solitary way.

CHAPTER XIV—CHAMBERS

Having occasion to transact some business with a solicitor who occupies a highly suicidal set of chambers in Gray’s Inn, I afterwards took a turn in the large square of that stronghold of Melancholy, reviewing, with congenial surroundings, my experiences of Chambers.

I began, as was natural, with the Chambers I had just left. They were an upper set on a rotten staircase, with a mysterious bunk or bulkhead on the landing outside them, of a rather nautical and Screw Collier-like appearance than otherwise, and painted an intense black. Many dusty years have passed since the appropriation of this Davy Jones’s locker to any purpose, and during the whole period within the memory of living man, it has been hasped and padlocked. I cannot quite satisfy my mind whether it was originally meant for the reception of coals, or bodies, or as a place of temporary security for the plunder ‘looted’ by laundresses; but I incline to the last opinion. It is about breast high, and usually serves as a bulk for defendants in reduced circumstances to lean against and ponder at, when they come on the hopeful errand of trying to make an arrangement without money—under which auspicious circumstances it mostly happens that the legal gentleman they want to see, is much engaged, and they pervade the staircase for a considerable period. Against this opposing bulk, in the absurdest manner, the tomb-like outer door of the solicitor’s chambers (which is also of an intense black) stands in dark ambush, half open, and half shut, all day. The solicitor’s apartments are three in number; consisting of a slice, a cell, and a wedge. The slice is assigned to the two clerks, the cell is occupied by the principal, and the wedge is devoted to stray papers, old game baskets from the country, a washing-stand, and a model of a patent Ship’s Caboose which was exhibited in Chancery at the commencement of the present century on an application for an injunction to restrain infringement. At about half-past nine on every week-day morning, the younger of the two clerks (who, I have reason to believe, leads the fashion at Pentonville in the articles of pipes and shirts) may be found knocking the dust out of his official door-key on the bunk or locker before mentioned; and so exceedingly subject to dust is his key, and so very retentive of that superfluity, that in exceptional summer weather when a ray of sunlight has fallen on the locker in my presence, I have noticed its inexpressive countenance to be deeply marked by a kind of Bramah erysipelas or small-pox.

This set of chambers (as I have gradually discovered, when I have had restless occasion to make inquiries or leave messages, after office hours) is under the charge of a lady named Sweeney, in figure extremely like an old family-umbrella: whose dwelling confronts a dead wall in a court off Gray's Inn-lane, and who is usually fetched into the passage of that bower, when wanted, from some neighbouring home of industry, which has the curious property of imparting an inflammatory appearance to her visage. Mrs. Sweeney is one of the race of professed laundresses, and is the compiler of a remarkable manuscript volume entitled 'Mrs. Sweeney's Book,' from which much curious statistical information may be gathered respecting the high prices and small uses of soda, soap, sand, firewood, and other such articles. I have created a legend in my mind—and consequently I believe it with the utmost pertinacity—that the late Mr. Sweeney was a ticket-porter under the Honourable Society of Gray's Inn, and that, in consideration of his long and valuable services, Mrs. Sweeney was appointed to her present post. For, though devoid of personal charms, I have observed this lady to exercise a fascination over the elderly ticker-porter mind (particularly under the gateway, and in corners and entries), which I can only refer to her being one of the fraternity, yet not competing with it. All that need be said concerning this set of chambers, is said, when I have added that it is in a large double house in Gray's Inn-square, very much out of repair, and that the outer portal is ornamented in a hideous manner with certain stone remains, which have the appearance of the dismembered bust, torso, and limbs of a petrified bencher.

Indeed, I look upon Gray's Inn generally as one of the most depressing institutions in brick and mortar, known to the children of men. Can anything be more dreary than its arid Square, Sahara Desert of the law, with the ugly old tiled-topped tenements, the dirty windows, the bills To Let, To Let, the door-posts inscribed like gravestones, the crazy gateway giving upon the filthy Lane, the scowling, iron-barred prison-like passage into Verulam-buildings, the mouldy red-nosed ticket-porters with little coffin plates, and why with aprons, the dry, hard, atomy-like appearance of the whole dust-heap? When my uncommercial travels tend to this dismal spot, my comfort is its rickety state. Imagination gloats over the fulness of time when the staircases shall have quite tumbled down—they are daily wearing into an ill-savoured powder, but have not quite tumbled down yet—when the last old prolix bencher all of the olden time, shall have been got out of an upper window by means of a Fire Ladder, and carried off to the Holborn Union; when the last clerk shall have engrossed the last parchment behind the last splash on the last of the mud-stained windows, which, all through the miry year, are pilloried out of recognition in Gray's Inn-lane. Then, shall a squalid little trench, with rank grass and a pump in it, lying between the coffee-house and South-square, be wholly given up to cats and rats, and not, as now, have its empire divided between those animals and a few briefless bipeds—surely called to the Bar by voices of deceiving spirits, seeing that they are wanted there by no mortal—who glance down, with eyes better glazed than their casements, from their dreary and lacklustre rooms. Then shall the way Nor' Westward, now lying under a short grim colonnade where in summer-time pounce flies from law-stationering windows into the eyes of laymen, be choked with rubbish and happily become impassable. Then shall the gardens where turf, trees, and gravel wear a legal livery of black, run rank, and pilgrims go to Gorhambury to see Bacon's effigy as he sat, and not come here (which in truth they seldom do) to see where he walked. Then, in a word, shall the old-established vendor of periodicals sit alone in his little crib of a shop behind the Holborn Gate, like that lumbering Marius among the ruins of Carthage, who has sat heavy on a thousand million of similes.

At one period of my uncommercial career I much frequented another set of chambers in Gray's Inn-square. They were what is familiarly called 'a top set,' and all the eatables and drinkables introduced into them acquired a flavour of Cockloft. I have known an unopened Strasbourg pâté fresh from Fortnum and Mason's, to draw in this cockloft tone through its crockery dish, and become penetrated with cockloft to the core of its inmost truffle in three-quarters of an hour. This, however, was not the most curious feature of those chambers; that, consisted in the profound conviction entertained by my esteemed friend Parkle (their tenant) that they were clean. Whether it was an inborn hallucination, or whether it was imparted to him by Mrs. Miggot the laundress, I never could ascertain. But, I believe he would have gone to the stake upon the question. Now, they were so dirty that I could take off the distinctest impression of my figure on any article of furniture by merely lounging upon it for a few moments; and it used to be a private amusement of mine to print myself off—if I may use the expression—all over the rooms. It was the first large circulation I had. At other times I have accidentally shaken a window curtain while in animated conversation with Parkle, and struggling insects which were certainly red, and were certainly not ladybirds, have dropped on the back of my hand. Yet Parkle lived in that top set years, bound body and soul to the superstition that they were clean. He used to say, when congratulated upon them, 'Well, they are not like chambers in one respect, you know; they are clean.' Concurrently, he had an idea which he could never explain, that Mrs. Miggot was in some way connected with the Church. When he was in particularly good spirits, he used to believe that a deceased uncle of hers had been a Dean; when he was poorly and low, he believed that her brother had been a Curate. I and Mrs. Miggot (she was a genteel woman) were on confidential terms, but I never knew her to commit herself to any distinct assertion on the subject; she merely claimed a proprietorship in the Church, by looking when it was mentioned, as if the reference awakened the slumbering Past, and were personal. It may have been his amiable confidence in Mrs. Miggot's better days that inspired my friend with his delusion respecting the chambers, but he never wavered in his fidelity to it for a moment, though he wallowed in dirt seven years.

Two of the windows of these chambers looked down into the garden; and we have sat up there together many a summer evening, saying how pleasant it was, and talking of many things. To my intimacy with that top set, I am indebted for three of my liveliest personal impressions of the loneliness of life in chambers. They shall follow here, in order; first, second, and third.

First. My Gray's Inn friend, on a time, hurt one of his legs, and it became seriously inflamed. Not knowing of his indisposition, I was on my way to visit him as usual, one summer evening, when I was much surprised by meeting a lively leech in Field-court, Gray's Inn, seemingly on his way to the West End of London. As the leech was alone, and was of course unable to explain his position, even if he had been inclined to do so (which he had not the appearance of being), I passed him and went on. Turning the corner of Gray's Inn-square, I was beyond expression amazed by meeting another leech—also entirely alone, and also proceeding in a westerly direction, though with less decision of purpose. Ruminating on this extraordinary circumstance, and endeavouring to remember whether I had ever read, in the Philosophical Transactions or any work on Natural History, of a migration of Leeches, I ascended to the top set, past the dreary series of closed outer doors of offices and an empty set or two, which intervened between that lofty region and the surface. Entering my friend’s rooms, I found him stretched upon his back, like Prometheus Bound, with a perfectly demented ticket-porter in attendance on him instead of the Vulture: which helpless individual, who was feeble and frightened, and had (my friend explained to me, in great choler) been endeavouring for some hours to apply leeches to his leg, and as yet had only got on two out of twenty. To this Unfortunate’s distraction between a damp cloth on which he had placed the leeches to freshen them, and the wrathful adjurations of my friend to ‘Stick ’em on, sir!’ I referred the phenomenon I had encountered: the rather as two fine specimens were at that moment going out at the door, while a general insurrection of the rest was in progress on the table. After a while our united efforts prevailed, and, when the leeches came off and had recovered their spirits, we carefully tied them up in a decanter. But I never heard more of them than that they were all gone next morning, and that the Out-of-door young man of Bickle, Bush and Bodger, on the ground floor, had been bitten and blooded by some creature not identified. They never ‘took’ on Mrs. Miggot, the laundress; but, I have always preserved fresh, the belief that she unconsciously carried several about her, until they gradually found openings in life.

Second. On the same staircase with my friend Parkle, and on the same floor, there lived a man of law who pursued his business elsewhere, and used those chambers as his place of residence. For three or four years, Parkle rather knew of him than knew him, but after that—for Englishmen—short pause of consideration, they began to speak. Parkle exchanged words with him in his private character only, and knew nothing of his business ways, or means. He was a man a good deal about town, but always alone. We used to remark to one another, that although we often encountered him in theatres, concert-rooms, and similar public places, he was always alone. Yet he was not a gloomy man, and was of a decidedly conversational turn; insomuch that he would sometimes of an evening lounge with a cigar in his mouth, half in and half out of Parkle’s rooms, and discuss the topics of the day by the hour. He used to hint on these occasions that he had four faults to find with life; firstly, that it obliged a man to be always winding up his watch; secondly, that London was too small; thirdly, that it therefore wanted variety; fourthly, that there was too much dust in it. There was so much dust in his own faded chambers, certainly, that they reminded me of a sepulchre, furnished in prophetic anticipation of the present time, which had newly been brought to light, after having remained buried a few thousand years. One dry, hot autumn evening at twilight, this man, being then five years turned of fifty, looked in upon Parkle in his usual lounging way, with his cigar in his mouth as usual, and said, ‘I am going out of town.’ As he never went out of town, Parkle said, ‘Oh indeed! At last?’ ‘Yes,’ says he, ‘at last. For what is a man to do? London is so small! If you go West, you come to Hounslow. If you go East, you come to Bow. If you go South, there’s Brixton or Norwood. If you go North, you can’t get rid of Barnet. Then, the monotony of all the streets, streets, streets—and of all the roads, roads, roads—and the dust, dust, dust!’ When he had said this, he wished Parkle a good evening, but came back again and said, with his watch in his hand, ‘Oh, I really cannot go on winding up this watch over and over again; I wish you would take care of it.’ So, Parkle laughed and consented, and the man went out of town. The man remained out of town so long, that his letter-box became choked, and no more letters could be got into it, and they began to be left at the lodge and to accumulate there. At last the head-porter decided, on conference with the steward, to use his master-key and look into the chambers, and give them the benefit of a whiff of air. Then, it was found that he had hanged himself to his bedstead, and had left this written memorandum: ‘I should prefer to be cut down by my neighbour and friend (if he will allow me to call him so), H. Parkle, Esq.’ This was an end of Parkle’s occupancy of chambers. He went into lodgings immediately.

Third. While Parkle lived in Gray’s Inn, and I myself was uncommercially preparing for the Bar—which is done, as everybody knows, by having a frayed old gown put on in a pantry by an old woman in a chronic state of Saint Anthony’s fire and dropsy, and, so decorated, bolting a bad dinner in a party of four, whereof each individual mistrusts the other three—I say, while these things were, there was a certain elderly gentleman who lived in a court of the Temple, and was a great judge and lover of port wine. Every day he dined at his club and drank his bottle or two of port wine, and every night came home to the Temple and went to bed in his lonely chambers. This had gone on many years without variation, when one night he had a fit on coming home, and fell and cut his head deep, but partly recovered and groped about in the dark to find the door. When he was afterwards discovered, dead, it was clearly established by the marks of his hands about the room that he must have done so. Now, this chanced on the night of Christmas Eve, and over him lived a young fellow who had sisters and young country friends, and who gave them a little party that night, in the course of which they played at Blindman's Buff. They played that game, for their greater sport, by the light of the fire only; and once, when they were all quietly rustling and stealing about, and the blindman was trying to pick out the prettiest sister (for which I am far from blaming him), somebody cried, Hark! The man below must be playing Blindman's Buff by himself to-night! They listened, and they heard sounds of some one falling about and stumbling against furniture, and they all laughed at the conceit, and went on with their play, more light-hearted and merry than ever. Thus, those two so different games of life and death were played out together, blindfolded, in the two sets of chambers.

Such are the occurrences, which, coming to my knowledge, imbued me long ago with a strong sense of the loneliness of chambers. There was a fantastic illustration to much the same purpose implicitly believed by a strange sort of man now dead, whom I knew when I had not quite arrived at legal years of discretion, though I was already in the uncommercial line.

This was a man who, though not more than thirty, had seen the world in divers irreconcilable capacities—had been an officer in a South American regiment among other odd things—but had not achieved much in any way of life, and was in debt, and in hiding. He occupied chambers of the dreariest nature in Lyons Inn; his name, however, was not up on the door, or door-post, but in lieu of it stood the name of a friend who had died in the chambers, and had given him the furniture. The story arose out of the furniture, and was to this effect:- Let the former holder of the chambers, whose name was still upon the door and door-post, be Mr. Testator.

Mr. Testator took a set of chambers in Lyons Inn when he had but very scanty furniture for his bedroom, and none for his sitting-room. He had lived some wintry months in this condition, and had found it very bare and cold. One night, past midnight, when he sat writing and still had writing to do that must be done before he went to bed, he found himself out of coals. He had coals down-stairs, but had never been to his cellar; however the cellar-key was on his mantelshelf, and if he went down and opened the cellar it fitted, he might fairly assume the coals in that cellar to be his. As to his laundress, she lived among the coal-waggons and Thames watermen

—for there were Thames watermen at that time—in some unknown rat-hole by the river, down lanes and alleys on the other side of the Strand. As to any other person to meet him or obstruct him, Lyons Inn was dreaming, drunk, maudlin, moody, betting, brooding over bill-discounting or renewing—asleep or awake, minding its own affairs. Mr. Testator took his coal-scuttle in one hand, his candle and key in the other, and descended to the dismallest underground dens of Lyons Inn, where the late vehicles in the streets became thunderous, and all the water-pipes in the neighbourhood seemed to have Macbeth's Amen sticking in their throats, and to be trying to get it out. After groping here and there among low doors to no purpose, Mr. Testator at length came to a door with a rusty padlock which his key fitted. Getting the door open with much trouble, and looking in, he found, no coals, but a confused pile of furniture. Alarmed by this intrusion on another man's property, he locked the door again, found his own cellar, filled his scuttle, and returned up-stairs.

But the furniture he had seen, ran on castors across and across Mr. Testator's mind incessantly, when, in the chill hour of five in the morning, he got to bed. He particularly wanted a table to write at, and a table expressly made to be written at, had been the piece of furniture in the foreground of the heap. When his laundress emerged from her burrow in the morning to make his kettle boil, he artfully led up to the subject of cellars and furniture; but the two ideas had evidently no connexion in her mind. When she left him, and he sat at his breakfast, thinking about the furniture, he recalled the rusty state of the padlock, and inferred that the furniture must have been stored in the cellars for a long time—was perhaps forgotten—owner dead, perhaps? After thinking it over, a few days, in the course of which he could pump nothing out of Lyons Inn about the furniture, he became desperate, and resolved to borrow that table. He did so, that night. He had not had the table long, when he determined to borrow an easy-chair; he had not had that long, when he made up his mind to borrow a bookcase; then, a couch; then, a carpet and rug. By that time, he felt he was 'in furniture stepped in so far,' as that it could be no worse to borrow it all. Consequently, he borrowed it all, and locked up the cellar for good. He had always locked it, after every visit. He had carried up every separate article in the dead of the night, and, at the best, had felt as wicked as a Resurrection Man. Every article was blue and furry when brought into his rooms, and he had had, in a murderous and guilty sort of way, to polish it up while London slept.

Mr. Testator lived in his furnished chambers two or three years, or more, and gradually lulled himself into the opinion that the furniture was his own. This was his convenient state of mind when, late one night, a step came up the stairs, and a hand passed over his door feeling for his knocker, and then one deep and solemn rap was rapped that might have been a spring in Mr. Testator's easy-chair to shoot him out of it; so promptly was it attended with that effect.

With a candle in his hand, Mr. Testator went to the door, and found there, a very pale and very tall man; a man who stooped; a man with very high shoulders, a very narrow chest, and a very red nose; a shabby-genteel man. He was wrapped in a long thread-bare black coat, fastened up the front with more pins than buttons, and under his arm he squeezed an umbrella without a handle, as if he were playing bagpipes. He said, 'I ask your pardon, but can you tell me—' and stopped; his eyes resting on some object within the chambers.

'Can I tell you what?' asked Mr. Testator, noting his stoppage with quick alarm.

'I ask your pardon,' said the stranger, 'but—this is not the inquiry I was going to make—*do* I see in there, any small article of property belonging to *me*?'

Mr. Testator was beginning to stammer that he was not aware—when the visitor slipped past him, into the chambers. There, in a goblin way which froze Mr. Testator to the marrow, he examined, first, the writing-table, and said, 'Mine;' then, the easy-chair, and said, 'Mine;' then, the bookcase, and said, 'Mine;' then, turned up a corner of the carpet, and said, 'Mine!' in a word, inspected every item of furniture from the cellar, in succession, and said, 'Mine!' Towards the end of this investigation, Mr. Testator perceived that he was sodden with liquor, and that the liquor was gin. He was not unsteady with gin, either in his speech or carriage; but he was stiff with gin in both particulars.

Mr. Testator was in a dreadful state, for (according to his making out of the story) the possible consequences of what he had done in recklessness and hardihood, flashed upon him in their fulness for the first time. When they had stood gazing at one another for a little while, he tremulously began:

‘Sir, I am conscious that the fullest explanation, compensation, and restitution, are your due. They shall be yours. Allow me to entreat that, without temper, without even natural irritation on your part, we may have a little—’

‘Drop of something to drink,’ interposed the stranger. ‘I am agreeable.’

Mr. Testator had intended to say, ‘a little quiet conversation,’ but with great relief of mind adopted the amendment. He produced a decanter of gin, and was bustling about for hot water and sugar, when he found that his visitor had already drunk half of the decanter’s contents. With hot water and sugar the visitor drank the remainder before he had been an hour in the chambers by the chimes of the church of St. Mary in the Strand; and during the process he frequently whispered to himself, ‘Mine!’

The gin gone, and Mr. Testator wondering what was to follow it, the visitor rose and said, with increased stiffness, ‘At what hour of the morning, sir, will it be convenient?’ Mr. Testator hazarded, ‘At ten?’ ‘Sir,’ said the visitor, ‘at ten, to the moment, I shall be here.’ He then contemplated Mr. Testator somewhat at leisure, and said, ‘God bless you! How is your wife?’ Mr. Testator (who never had a wife) replied with much feeling, ‘Deeply anxious, poor soul, but otherwise well.’ The visitor thereupon turned and went away, and fell twice in going down-stairs. From that hour he was never heard of. Whether he was a ghost, or a spectral illusion of conscience, or a drunken man who had no business there, or the drunken rightful owner of the furniture, with a transitory gleam of memory; whether he got safe home, or had no time to get to; whether he died of liquor on the way, or lived in liquor ever afterwards; he never was heard of more. This was the story, received with the furniture and held to be as substantial, by its second possessor in an upper set of chambers in grim Lyons Inn.

It is to be remarked of chambers in general, that they must have been built for chambers, to have the right kind of loneliness. You may make a great dwelling-house very lonely, but isolating suites of rooms and calling them chambers, but you cannot make the true kind of loneliness. In dwelling-houses, there have been family festivals; children have grown in them, girls have bloomed into women in them, courtships and marriages have taken place in them. True chambers never were young, childish, maidenly; never had dolls in them, or rocking-horses, or christenings, or betrothals, or little coffins. Let Gray’s Inn identify the child who first touched hands and hearts with Robinson Crusoe, in any one of its many ‘sets,’ and that child’s little statue, in white marble with a golden inscription, shall be at its service, at my cost and charge, as a drinking fountain for the spirit, to freshen its thirsty square. Let Lincoln’s produce from all its houses, a twentieth of the procession derivable from any dwelling-house one-twentieth of its age, of fair young brides who married for love and hope, not settlements, and all the Vice-Chancellors shall thenceforward be kept in nosegays for nothing, on application to the writer hereof. It is not denied that on the terrace of the Adelphi, or in any of the streets of that subterranean-stable-haunted spot, or about Bedford-row, or James-street of that ilk (a grewsome place), or anywhere among the neighbourhoods that have done flowering and have run to seed, you may find Chambers replete with the accommodations of Solitude, Closeness, and Darkness, where you may be as low-spirited as in the genuine article, and might be as easily murdered, with the placid reputation of having merely gone down to the sea-side. But, the many waters of life did run musical in those dry channels once;—among the Inns, never. The only popular legend known in relation to any one of the dull family of Inns, is a dark Old Bailey whisper concerning Clement’s, and importing how the black creature who holds the sun-dial there, was a negro who slew his master and built the dismal pile out of the contents of his strong box—for which architectural offence alone he ought to have been condemned to live in it. But, what populace would waste fancy upon such a place, or on New Inn, Staple Inn, Barnard’s Inn, or any of the shabby crew?

The genuine laundress, too, is an institution not to be had in its entirety out of and away from the genuine Chambers. Again, it is not denied that you may be robbed elsewhere. Elsewhere you may have—for money—dishonesty, drunkenness, dirt, laziness, and profound incapacity. But the veritable shining-red-faced shameless laundress; the true Mrs. Sweeney—in figure, colour, texture, and smell, like the old damp family umbrella; the tip-top complicated abomination of stockings, spirits, bonnet, limpness, looseness, and larceny; is only to be drawn at the fountain-head. Mrs. Sweeney is beyond the reach of individual art. It requires the united efforts of several men to ensure that great result, and it is only developed in perfection under an Honourable Society and in an Inn of Court.

CHAPTER XV—NURSE'S STORIES

There are not many places that I find it more agreeable to revisit when I am in an idle mood, than some places to which I have never been. For, my acquaintance with those spots is of such long standing, and has ripened into an intimacy of so affectionate a nature, that I take a particular interest in assuring myself that they are unchanged.

I never was in Robinson Crusoe's Island, yet I frequently return there. The colony he established on it soon faded away, and it is uninhabited by any descendants of the grave and courteous Spaniards, or of Will Atkins and the other mutineers, and has relapsed into its original condition. Not a twig of its wicker houses remains, its goats have long run wild again, its screaming parrots would darken the sun with a cloud of many flaming colours if a gun were fired there, no face is ever reflected in the waters of the little creek which Friday swam across when pursued by his two brother cannibals with sharpened stomachs. After comparing notes with other travellers who have similarly revisited the Island and conscientiously inspected it, I have satisfied myself that it contains no vestige of Mr. Atkins's domesticity or theology, though his track on the memorable evening of his landing to set his captain ashore, when he was decoyed about and round about until it was dark, and his boat was stove, and his strength and spirits failed him, is yet plainly to be traced. So is the hill-top on which Robinson was struck dumb with joy when the reinstated captain pointed to the ship, riding within half a mile of the shore, that was to bear him away, in the nine-and-twentieth year of his seclusion in that lonely place. So is the sandy beach on which the memorable footstep was impressed, and where the savages hauled up their canoes when they came ashore for those dreadful public dinners, which led to a dancing worse than speech-making. So is the cave where the flaring eyes of the old goat made such a goblin appearance in the dark. So is the site of the hut where Robinson lived with the dog and the parrot and the cat, and where he endured those first agonies of solitude, which—strange to say—never involved any ghostly fancies; a circumstance so very remarkable, that perhaps he left out something in writing his record? Round hundreds of such objects, hidden in the dense tropical foliage, the tropical sea breaks evermore; and over them the tropical sky, saving in the short rainy season, shines bright and cloudless.

Neither, was I ever belated among wolves, on the borders of France and Spain; nor, did I ever, when night was closing in and the ground was covered with snow, draw up my little company among some felled trees which served as a breastwork, and there fire a train of gunpowder so dexterously that suddenly we had three or four score blazing wolves illuminating the darkness around us. Nevertheless, I occasionally go back to that dismal region and perform the feat again; when indeed to smell the singeing and the frying of the wolves afire, and to see them setting one another alight as they rush and tumble, and to behold them rolling in the snow vainly attempting to put themselves out, and to hear their howlings taken up by all the echoes as well as by all the unseen wolves within the woods, makes me tremble.

I was never in the robbers' cave, where Gil Blas lived, but I often go back there and find the trap-door just as heavy to raise as it used to be, while that wicked old disabled Black lies everlastingly cursing in bed. I was never in Don Quixote's study, where he read his books of chivalry until he rose and hacked at imaginary giants, and then refreshed himself with great draughts of water, yet you couldn't move a book in it without my knowledge, or with my consent. I was never (thank Heaven) in company with the little old woman who hobbled out of the chest and told the merchant Abudah to go in search of the Talisman of Oromanes, yet I make it my business to know that she is well preserved and as intolerable as ever. I was never at the school where the boy Horatio Nelson got out of bed to steal the pears: not because he wanted any, but because every other boy was afraid: yet I have several times been back to this Academy, to see him let down out of window with a sheet. So with Damascus, and Bagdad, and Brobingnag (which has the curious fate of being usually misspelt when written), and Lilliput, and Laputa, and the Nile, and Abyssinia, and the Ganges, and the North Pole, and many hundreds of places—I was never at them, yet it is an affair of my life to keep them intact, and I am always going back to them.

But, when I was in Dullborough one day, revisiting the associations of my childhood as recorded in previous pages of these notes, my experience in this wise was made quite inconsiderable and of no account, by the quantity of places and people—utterly impossible places and people, but none the less alarmingly real—that I found I had been introduced to by my nurse before I was six years old, and used to be forced to go back to at night without at all wanting to go. If we all knew our own minds (in a more enlarged sense than the popular acceptation of that phrase), I suspect we should find our nurses responsible for most of the dark corners we are forced to go back to, against our wills.

The first diabolical character who intruded himself on my peaceful youth (as I called to mind that day at Dullborough), was a certain Captain Murderer. This wretch must have been an off-shoot of the Blue Beard family, but I had no suspicion of the consanguinity in those times. His warning name would seem to have awakened no general prejudice against him, for he was admitted into the best society and possessed immense wealth. Captain Murderer's mission was matrimony, and the gratification of a cannibal appetite with tender brides. On his marriage morning, he always caused both sides of the way to church to be planted with curious flowers; and when his bride said, 'Dear Captain Murderer, I ever saw flowers like these before: what are they called?' he answered, 'They are called Garnish for house-lamb,' and laughed at his ferocious practical joke in a horrid manner, disquieting the minds of the noble bridal company, with a very sharp show of teeth, then displayed for the first time. He made love in a coach and six, and married in a coach and twelve, and all his horses were milk-white horses with one red spot on the back which he caused to be hidden by the harness. For, the spot *would* come there, though every horse was milk-white when Captain Murderer bought him. And the spot was young bride's blood. (To this terrific point I am indebted for my first personal experience of a shudder and cold beads on the forehead.) When Captain Murderer had made an end of feasting and revelry, and had dismissed the noble guests, and was alone with his wife on the day month after their marriage, it was his whimsical custom to produce a golden rolling-pin and a silver pie-board. Now, there was this special feature in the Captain's courtships, that he always asked if the young lady could make pie-crust; and if she couldn't by nature or education, she was taught. Well. When the bride saw Captain Murderer produce the golden rolling-pin and silver pie-board, she remembered this, and turned up her laced-silk sleeves to make a pie. The Captain brought out a silver pie-dish of immense capacity, and the Captain brought out flour and butter and eggs and all things needful, except the inside of the pie; of materials for the staple of the pie itself, the Captain brought out none. Then said the lovely bride, 'Dear Captain Murderer, what pie is this to be?' He replied, 'A meat pie.' Then said the lovely bride, 'Dear Captain Murderer, I see no meat.' The Captain humorously retorted, 'Look in the glass.' She looked in the glass, but still she saw no meat, and then the Captain roared with laughter, and suddenly frowning and drawing his sword, bade her roll out the crust. So she rolled out the crust, dropping large tears upon it all the time because he was so cross, and when she had lined the dish with crust and had cut the crust all ready to fit the top, the Captain called out, 'I see the meat in the glass!' And the bride looked up at the glass, just in time to see the Captain cutting her head off; and he chopped her in pieces, and peppered her, and salted her, and put her in the pie, and sent it to the baker's, and ate it all, and picked the bones.

Captain Murderer went on in this way, prospering exceedingly, until he came to choose a bride from two twin sisters, and at first didn't know which to choose. For, though one was fair and the other dark, they were both equally beautiful. But the fair twin loved him, and the dark twin hated him, so he chose the fair one. The dark twin would have prevented the marriage if she could, but she couldn't; however, on the night before it, much suspecting Captain Murderer, she stole out and climbed his garden wall, and looked in at his window through a chink in the shutter, and saw him having his teeth filed sharp. Next day she listened all day, and heard him make his joke about the house-lamb. And that day month, he had the paste rolled out, and cut the fair twin's head off, and chopped her in pieces, and peppered her, and salted her, and put her in the pie, and sent it to the baker's, and ate it all, and picked the bones.

Now, the dark twin had had her suspicions much increased by the filing of the Captain's teeth, and again by the house-lamb joke. Putting all things together when he gave out that her sister was dead, she divined the truth, and determined to be revenged. So, she went up to Captain Murderer's house, and knocked at the knocker and pulled at the bell, and when the Captain came to the door, said: 'Dear Captain Murderer, marry me next, for I always loved you and was jealous of my sister.' The Captain took it as a compliment, and made a polite answer, and the marriage was quickly arranged. On the night before it, the bride again climbed to his window, and again saw him having his teeth filed sharp. At this sight she laughed such a terrible laugh at the chink in the shutter, that the Captain's blood curdled, and he said: ‘I hope nothing has disagreed with me!’ At that, she laughed again, a still more terrible laugh, and the shutter was opened and search made, but she was nimbly gone, and there was no one. Next day they went to church in a coach and twelve, and were married. And that day month, she rolled the pie-crust out, and Captain Murderer cut her head off, and chopped her in pieces, and peppered her, and salted her, and put her in the pie, and sent it to the baker’s, and ate it all, and picked the bones.

But before she began to roll out the paste she had taken a deadly poison of a most awful character, distilled from toads’ eyes and spiders’ knees; and Captain Murderer had hardly picked her last bone, when he began to swell, and to turn blue, and to be all over spots, and to scream. And he went on swelling and turning bluer, and being more all over spots and screaming, until he reached from floor to ceiling and from wall to wall; and then, at one o’clock in the morning, he blew up with a loud explosion. At the sound of it, all the milk-white horses in the stables broke their halters and went mad, and then they galloped over everybody in Captain Murderer’s house (beginning with the family blacksmith who had filed his teeth) until the whole were dead, and then they galloped away.

Hundreds of times did I hear this legend of Captain Murderer, in my early youth, and added hundreds of times was there a mental compulsion upon me in bed, to peep in at his window as the dark twin peeped, and to revisit his horrible house, and look at him in his blue and spotty and screaming stage, as he reached from floor to ceiling and from wall to wall. The young woman who brought me acquainted with Captain Murderer had a fiendish enjoyment of my terrors, and used to begin, I remember—as a sort of introductory overture—by clawing the air with both hands, and uttering a long low hollow groan. So acutely did I suffer from this ceremony in combination with this infernal Captain, that I sometimes used to plead I thought I was hardly strong enough and old enough to hear the story again just yet. But, she never spared me one word of it, and indeed commanded the awful chalice to my lips as the only preservative known to science against ‘The Black Cat’—a weird and glaring-eyed supernatural Tom, who was reputed to prowl about the world by night, sucking the breath of infancy, and who was endowed with a special thirst (as I was given to understand) for mine.

This female bard—may she have been repaid my debt of obligation to her in the matter of nightmares and perspirations!—reappears in my memory as the daughter of a shipwright. Her name was Mercy, though she had none on me. There was something of a shipbuilding flavour in the following story. As it always recurs to me in a vague association with calomel pills, I believe it to have been reserved for dull nights when I was low with medicine.

There was once a shipwright, and he wrought in a Government Yard, and his name was Chips. And his father's name before him was Chips, and *his* father's name before *him* was Chips, and they were all Chipses. And Chips the father had sold himself to the Devil for an iron pot and a bushel of tenpenny nails and half a ton of copper and a rat that could speak; and Chips the grandfather had sold himself to the Devil for an iron pot and a bushel of tenpenny nails and half a ton of copper and a rat that could speak; and Chips the great-grandfather had disposed of himself in the same direction on the same terms; and the bargain had run in the family for a long, long time. So, one day, when young Chips was at work in the Dock Slip all alone, down in the dark hold of an old Seventy-four that was haled up for repairs, the Devil presented himself, and remarked:

'A Lemon has pips,
And a Yard has ships,
And *I*'ll have Chips!'

(I don't know why, but this fact of the Devil's expressing himself in rhyme was peculiarly trying to me.) Chips looked up when he heard the words, and there he saw the Devil with saucer eyes that squinted on a terrible great scale, and that struck out sparks of blue fire continually. And whenever he winked his eyes, showers of blue sparks came out, and his eyelashes made a clattering like flints and steels striking lights. And hanging over one of his arms by the handle was an iron pot, and under that arm was a bushel of tenpenny nails, and under his other arm was half a ton of copper, and sitting on one of his shoulders was a rat that could speak. So, the Devil said again:

'A Lemon has pips,
And a Yard has ships,
And *I*'ll have Chips!'

(The invariable effect of this alarming tautology on the part of the Evil Spirit was to deprive me of my senses for some moments.) So, Chips answered never a word, but went on with his work. ‘What are you doing, Chips?’ said the rat that could speak. ‘I am putting in new planks where you and your gang have eaten old away,’ said Chips. ‘But we’ll eat them too,’ said the rat that could speak; ‘and we’ll let in the water and drown the crew, and we’ll eat them too.’ Chips, being only a shipwright, and not a Man-of-war’s man, said, ‘You are welcome to it.’ But he couldn’t keep his eyes off the half a ton of copper or the bushel of tenpenny nails; for nails and copper are a shipwright’s sweethearts, and shipwrights will run away with them whenever they can. So, the Devil said, ‘I see what you are looking at, Chips. You had better strike the bargain. You know the terms. Your father before you was well acquainted with them, and so were your grandfather and great-grandfather before him.’ Says Chips, ‘I like the copper, and I like the nails, and I don’t mind the pot, but I don’t like the rat.’ Says the Devil, fiercely, ‘You can’t have the metal without him—and *he’s* a curiosity. I’m going.’ Chips, afraid of losing the half a ton of copper and the bushel of nails, then said, ‘Give us hold!’ So, he got the copper and the nails and the pot and the rat that could speak, and the Devil vanished. Chips sold the copper, and he sold the nails, and he would have sold the pot; but whenever he offered it for sale, the rat was in it, and the dealers dropped it, and would have nothing to say to the bargain. So, Chips resolved to kill the rat, and, being at work in the Yard one day with a great kettle of hot pitch on one side of him and the iron pot with the rat in it on the other, he turned the scalding pitch into the pot, and filled it full. Then, he kept his eye upon it till it cooled and hardened, and then he let it stand for twenty days, and then he heated the pitch again and turned it back into the kettle, and then he sank the pot in water for twenty days more, and then he got the smelters to put it in the furnace for twenty days more, and then they gave it him out, red hot, and looking like red-hot glass instead of iron-yet there was the rat in it, just the same as ever! And the moment it caught his eye, it said with a jeer:

‘A Lemon has pips,
And a Yard has ships,
And *I*’ll have Chips!’

(For this Refrain I had waited since its last appearance, with inexpressible horror, which now culminated.) Chips now felt certain in his own mind that the rat would stick to him; the rat, answering his thought, said, ‘I will—like pitch!’

Now, as the rat leaped out of the pot when it had spoken, and made off, Chips began to hope that it wouldn’t keep its word. But, a terrible thing happened next day. For, when dinner-time came, and the Dock-bell rang to strike work, he put his rule into the long pocket at the side of his trousers, and there he found a rat—not that rat, but another rat. And in his hat, he found another; and in his pocket-handkerchief, another; and in the sleeves of his coat, when he pulled it on to go to dinner, two more. And from that time he found himself so frightfully intimate with all the rats in the Yard, that they climbed up his legs when he was at work, and sat on his tools while he used them. And they could all speak to one another, and he understood what they said. And they got into his lodging, and into his bed, and into his teapot, and into his beer, and into his boots. And he was going to be married to a corn-chandler’s daughter; and when he gave her a workbox he had himself made for her, a rat jumped out of it; and when he put his arm round her waist, a rat clung about her; so the marriage was broken off, though the banns were already twice put up—which the parish clerk well remembers, for, as he handed the book to the clergyman for the second time of asking, a large fat rat ran over the leaf. (By this time a special cascade of rats was rolling down my back, and the whole of my small listening person was overrun with them. At intervals ever since, I have been morbidly afraid of my own pocket, lest my exploring hand should find a specimen or two of those vermin in it.)

You may believe that all this was very terrible to Chips; but even all this was not the worst. He knew besides, what the rats were doing, wherever they were. So, sometimes he would cry aloud, when he was at his club at night, ‘Oh! Keep the rats out of the convicts’ burying-ground! Don’t let them do that!’ Or, ‘There’s one of them at the cheese down-stairs!’ Or, ‘There’s two of them smelling at the baby in the garret!’ Or, other things of that sort. At last, he was voted mad, and lost his work in the Yard, and could get no other work. But, King George wanted men, so before very long he got pressed for a sailor. And so he was taken off in a boat one evening to his ship, lying at Spithead, ready to sail. And so the first thing he made out in her as he got near her, was the figure-head of the old

Seventy-four, where he had seen the Devil. She was called the Argonaut, and they rowed right under the bowsprit where the figure-head of the Argonaut, with a sheepskin in his hand and a blue gown on, was looking out to sea; and sitting staring on his forehead was the rat who could speak, and his exact words were these: ‘Chips ahoy! Old boy! We’ve pretty well eat them too, and we’ll drown the crew, and will eat them too!’ (Here I always became exceedingly faint, and would have asked for water, but that I was speechless.)

The ship was bound for the Indies; and if you don’t know where that is, you ought to it, and angels will never love you. (Here I felt myself an outcast from a future state.) The ship set sail that very night, and she sailed, and sailed, and sailed. Chips’s feelings were dreadful. Nothing ever equalled his terrors. No wonder. At last, one day he asked leave to speak to the Admiral. The Admiral giv’ leave. Chips went down on his knees in the Great State Cabin. ‘Your Honour, unless your Honour, without a moment’s loss of time, makes sail for the nearest shore, this is a doomed ship, and her name is the Coffin!’ ‘Young man, your words are a madman’s words.’ ‘Your Honour no; they are nibbling us away.’ ‘They?’ ‘Your Honour, them dreadful rats. Dust and hollowness where solid oak ought to be! Rats nibbling a grave for every man on board! Oh! Does your Honour love your Lady and your pretty children?’ ‘Yes, my man, to be sure.’ ‘Then, for God’s sake, make for the nearest shore, for at this present moment the rats are all stopping in their work, and are all looking straight towards you with bare teeth, and are all saying to one another that you shall never, never, never, never, see your Lady and your children more.’ ‘My poor fellow, you are a case for the doctor. Sentry, take care of this man!’

So, he was bled and he was blistered, and he was this and that, for six whole days and nights. So, then he again asked leave to speak to the Admiral. The Admiral giv’ leave. He went down on his knees in the Great State Cabin. ‘Now, Admiral, you must die! You took no warning; you must die! The rats are never wrong in their calculations, and they make out that they’ll be through, at twelve to-night. So, you must die!—With me and all the rest!’ And so at twelve o’clock there was a great leak reported in the ship, and a torrent of water rushed in and nothing could stop it, and they all went down, every living soul. And what the rats—being water-rats—left of Chips, at last floated to shore, and sitting on him was an immense overgrown rat, laughing, that dived when the corpse touched the beach and never came up. And there was a deal of seaweed on the remains. And if you get thirteen bits of seaweed, and dry them and burn them in the fire, they will go off like in these thirteen words as plain as plain can be:

‘A Lemon has pips,
And a Yard has ships,
And *I*’ve got Chips!’

The same female bard—descended, possibly, from those terrible old Scalds who seem to have existed for the express purpose of addling the brains of mankind when they begin to investigate languages—made a standing pretence which greatly assisted in forcing me back to a number of hideous places that I would by all means have avoided. This pretence was, that all her ghost stories had occurred to her own relations. Politeness towards a meritorious family, therefore, forbade my doubting them, and they acquired an air of authentication that impaired my digestive powers for life. There was a narrative concerning an unearthly animal foreboding death, which appeared in the open street to a parlour-maid who ‘went to fetch the beer’ for supper: first (as I now recall it) assuming the likeness of a black dog, and gradually rising on its hind-legs and swelling into the semblance of some quadruped greatly surpassing a hippopotamus: which apparition—not because I deemed it in the least improbable, but because I felt it to be really too large to bear—I feebly endeavoured to explain away. But, on Mercy’s retorting with wounded dignity that the parlour-maid was her own sister-in-law, I perceived there was no hope, and resigned myself to this zoological phenomenon as one of my many pursuers. There was another narrative describing the apparition of a young woman who came out of a glass-case and haunted another young woman until the other young woman questioned it and elicited that its bones (Lord! To think of its being so particular about its bones!) were buried under the glass-case, whereas she required them to be interred, with every Undertaking solemnity up to twenty-four pound ten, in another particular place. This narrative I considered—I had a personal interest in disproving, because we had glass-cases at home, and how, otherwise, was I to be guaranteed from the intrusion of young women requiring *me to* bury them up to twenty-four pound ten, when I had only twopence a week? But my remorseless nurse cut the ground from under my tender feet, by informing me that She was the other young woman; and I couldn’t say ‘I don’t believe you;’ it was not possible.

Such are a few of the uncommercial journeys that I was forced to make, against my will, when I was very young and unreasoning. And really, as to the latter part of them, it is not so very long ago—now I come to think of it—that I was asked to undertake them once again, with a steady countenance.

CHAPTER XVI—ARCADIAN LONDON

Being in a humour for complete solitude and uninterrupted meditation this autumn, I have taken a lodging for six weeks in the most unfrequented part of England—in a word, in London.

The retreat into which I have withdrawn myself, is Bond-street. From this lonely spot I make pilgrimages into the surrounding wilderness, and traverse extensive tracts of the Great Desert. The first solemn feeling of isolation overcome, the first oppressive consciousness of profound retirement conquered, I enjoy that sense of freedom, and feel reviving within me that latent wildness of the original savage, which has been (upon the whole somewhat frequently) noticed by Travellers.

My lodgings are at a hatter's—my own hatter's. After exhibiting no articles in his window for some weeks, but sea-side wide-awakes, shooting-caps, and a choice of rough waterproof head-gear for the moors and mountains, he has put upon the heads of his family as much of this stock as they could carry, and has taken them off to the Isle of Thanet. His young man alone remains—and remains alone in the shop. The young man has let out the fire at which the irons are heated, and, saving his strong sense of duty, I see no reason why he should take the shutters down.

Happily for himself and for his country the young man is a Volunteer; most happily for himself, or I think he would become the prey of a settled melancholy. For, to live surrounded by human hats, and alienated from human heads to fit them on, is surely a great endurance. But, the young man, sustained by practising his exercise, and by constantly furbishing up his regulation plume (it is unnecessary to observe that, as a hatter, he is in a cock's-feather corps), is resigned, and uncomplaining. On a Saturday, when he closes early and gets his Knickerbockers on, he is even cheerful. I am gratefully particular in this reference to him, because he is my companion through many peaceful hours.

My hatter has a desk up certain steps behind his counter, enclosed like the clerk's desk at Church. I shut myself into this place of seclusion, after breakfast, and meditate. At such times, I observe the young man loading an imaginary rifle with the greatest precision, and maintaining a most galling and destructive fire upon the national enemy. I thank him publicly for his companionship and his patriotism.

The simple character of my life, and the calm nature of the scenes by which I am surrounded, occasion me to rise early. I go forth in my slippers, and promenade the pavement. It is pastoral to feel the freshness of the air in the uninhabited town, and to appreciate the shepherdess character of the few milkwomen who purvey so little milk that it would be worth nobody's while to adulterate it, if anybody were left to undertake the task. On the crowded sea-shore, the great demand for milk, combined with the strong local temptation of chalk, would betray itself in the lowered quality of the article. In Arcadian London I derive it from the cow.

The Arcadian simplicity of the metropolis altogether, and the primitive ways into which it has fallen in this autumnal Golden Age, make it entirely new to me. Within a few hundred yards of my retreat, is the house of a friend who maintains a most sumptuous butler. I never, until yesterday, saw that butler out of superfine black broadcloth. Until yesterday, I never saw him off duty, never saw him (he is the best of butlers) with the appearance of having any mind for anything but the glory of his master and his master's friends. Yesterday morning, walking in my slippers near the house of which he is the prop and ornament—a house now a waste of shutters—I encountered that butler, also in his slippers, and in a shooting suit of one colour, and in a low-crowned straw-hat, smoking an early cigar. He felt that we had formerly met in another state of existence, and that we were translated into a new sphere. Wisely and well, he passed me without recognition. Under his arm he carried the morning paper, and shortly afterwards I saw him sitting on a rail in the pleasant open landscape of Regent-street, perusing it at his ease under the ripening sun.

My landlord having taken his whole establishment to be salted down, I am waited on by an elderly woman labouring under a chronic sniff, who, at the shadowy hour of half-past nine o'clock of every evening, gives admittance at the street door to a meagre and mouldy old man whom I have never yet seen detached from a flat pint of beer in a pewter pot. The meagre and mouldy old man is her husband, and the pair have a dejected consciousness that they are not justified in appearing on the surface of the earth. They come out of some hole when London empties itself, and go in again when it fills. I saw them arrive on the evening when I myself took possession, and they arrived with the flat pint of beer, and their bed in a bundle. The old man is a weak old man, and appeared to me to get the bed down the kitchen stairs by tumbling down with and upon it. They make their bed in the lowest and remotest corner of the basement, and they smell of bed, and have no possession but bed: unless it be (which I rather infer from an under-current of flavour in them) cheese. I know their name, through the chance of having called the wife's attention, at half-past nine on the second evening of our acquaintance, to the circumstance of there being some one at the house door; when she apologetically explained, 'It's only Mr. Klem.' What becomes of Mr. Klem all day, or when he goes out, or why, is a mystery I cannot penetrate; but at half-past nine he never fails to turn up on the door-step with the flat pint of beer. And the pint of beer, flat as it is, is so much more important than himself, that it always seems to my fancy as if it had found him drivelling in the street and had humanely brought him home. In making his way below, Mr. Klem never goes down the middle of the passage, like another Christian, but shuffles against the wall as if entreating me to take notice that he is occupying as little space as possible in the house; and whenever I come upon him face to face, he backs from me in fascinated confusion. The most extraordinary circumstance I have traced in connexion with this aged couple, is, that there is a Miss Klem, their daughter, apparently ten years older than either of them, who has also a bed and smells of it, and carries it about the earth at dusk and hides it in deserted houses. I came into this piece of knowledge through Mrs. Klem's beseeching me to sanction the sheltering of Miss Klem under that roof for a single night, 'between her takin' care of the upper part in Pall Mall which the family of his back, and a 'ouse in Serjameses-street, which the family of leaves towng ter-morrer.' I gave my gracious consent (having nothing that I know of to do with it), and in the shadowy hours Miss Klem became perceptible on the door-step, wrestling with a bed in a bundle. Where she made it up for the night I cannot positively state, but, I think, in a sink. I know that with the instinct of a reptile or an insect, she stowed it and herself away in deep obscurity. In the Klem family, I have noticed another remarkable gift of nature, and that is a power they possess of converting everything into flue. Such broken victuals as they take by stealth, appear (whatever the nature of the viands) invariably to generate flue; and even the nightly pint of beer, instead of assimilating naturally, strikes me as breaking out in that form, equally on the shabby gown of Mrs. Klem, and the threadbare coat of her husband.

Mrs. Klem has no idea of my name—as to Mr. Klem he has no idea of anything—and only knows me as her good gentleman. Thus, if doubtful whether I am in my room or no, Mrs. Klem taps at the door and says, 'Is my good gentleman here?' Or, if a messenger desiring to see me were consistent with my solitude, she would show him in with 'Here is my good gentleman.' I find this to be a generic custom. For, I meant to have observed before now, that in its Arcadian time all my part of London is indistinctly pervaded by the Klem species. They creep about with beds, and go to bed in miles of deserted houses. They hold no companionship except that sometimes, after dark, two of them will emerge from opposite houses, and meet in the middle of the road as on neutral ground, or will peep from adjoining houses over an interposing barrier of area railings, and compare a few reserved mistrustful notes respecting their good ladies or good gentlemen. This I have discovered in the course of various solitary rambles I have taken Northward from my retirement, along the awful perspectives of Wimpole-street, Harley-street, and similar frowning regions. Their effect would be scarcely distinguishable from that of the primeval forests, but for the Klem stragglers; these may be dimly observed, when the heavy shadows fall, flitting to and fro, putting up the door-chain, taking in the pint of beer, lowering like phantoms at the dark parlour windows, or secretly consorting underground with the dust-bin and the water-cistern.

In the Burlington Arcade, I observe, with peculiar pleasure, a primitive state of manners to have superseded the baneful influences of ultra civilisation. Nothing can surpass the innocence of the ladies' shoe-shops, the artificial-flower repositories, and the head-dress depots. They are in strange hands at this time of year—hands of unaccustomed persons, who are imperfectly acquainted with the prices of the goods, and contemplate them with unsophisticated delight and wonder. The children of these virtuous people exchange familiarities in the Arcade, and temper the asperity of the two tall beadles. Their youthful prattle blends in an unwonted manner with the harmonious shade of the scene, and the general effect is, as of the voices of birds in a grove. In this happy restoration of the golden time, it has been my privilege even to see the bigger beadle's wife. She brought him his dinner in a basin, and he ate it in his arm-chair, and afterwards fell asleep like a satiated child. At Mr. Truefitt's, the excellent hairdresser's, they are learning French to beguile the time; and even the few solitaries left on guard at Mr. Atkinson's, the perfumer's round the corner (generally the most inexorable gentleman in London, and the most scornful of three-and-sixpence), condescend a little, as they drowsily bide or recall their turn for chasing the ebbing Neptune on the ribbed sea-sand. From Messrs. Hunt and Roskell's, the jewellers, all things are absent but the precious stones, and the gold and silver, and the soldierly pensioner at the door with his decorated breast. I might stand night and day for a month to come, in Saville-row, with my tongue out, yet not find a doctor to look at it for love or money. The dentists' instruments are rusting in their drawers, and their horrible cool parlours, where people pretend to read the Every-Day Book and not to be afraid, are doing penance for their grimness in white sheets. The light-weight of shrewd appearance, with one eye always shut up, as if he were eating a sharp gooseberry in all seasons, who usually stands at the gateway of the livery-stables on very little legs under a very large waistcoat, has gone to Doncaster. Of such undesigning aspect is his guileless yard now, with its gravel and scarlet beans, and the yellow Break housed under a glass roof in a corner, that I almost believe I could not be taken in there, if I tried. In the places of business of the great tailors, the cheval-glasses are dim and dusty for lack of being looked into. Ranges of brown paper coat and waistcoat bodies look as funereal as if they were the hatchments of the customers with whose names they are inscribed; the measuring tapes hang idle on the wall; the order-taker, left on the hopeless chance of some one looking in, yawns in the last extremity over the book of patterns, as if he were trying to read that entertaining library. The hotels in Brook-street have no one in them, and the staffs of servants stare disconsolately for next season out of all the windows. The very man who goes about like an erect Turtle, between two boards recommendatory of the Sixteen Shilling Trousers, is aware of himself as a hollow mockery, and eats filberts while he leans his hinder shell against a wall.

Among these tranquillising objects, it is my delight to walk and meditate. Soothed by the repose around me, I wander insensibly to considerable distances, and guide myself back by the stars. Thus, I enjoy the contrast of a few still partially inhabited and busy spots where all the lights are not fled, where all the garlands are not dead, whence all but I have not departed. Then, does it appear to me that in this age three things are clamorously required of Man in the miscellaneous thoroughfares of the metropolis. Firstly, that he have his boots cleaned. Secondly, that he eat a penny ice. Thirdly, that he get himself photographed. Then do I speculate, What have those seam-worn artists been who stand at the photograph doors in Greek caps, sample in hand, and mysteriously salute the public—the female public with a pressing tenderness—to come in and be 'took'? What did they do with their greasy blandishments, before the era of cheap photography? Of what class were their previous victims, and how victimised? And how did they get, and how did they pay for, that large collection of likenesses, all purporting to have been taken inside, with the taking of none of which had that establishment any more to do than with the taking of Delhi?

But, these are small oases, and I am soon back again in metropolitan Arcadia. It is my impression that much of its serene and peaceful character is attributable to the absence of customary Talk. How do I know but there may be subtle influences in Talk, to vex the souls of men who don't hear it? How do I know but that Talk, five, ten, twenty miles off, may get into the air and disagree with me? If I rise from my bed, vaguely troubled and wearied and sick of my life, in the session of Parliament, who shall say that my noble friend, my right reverend friend, my right honourable friend, my honourable friend, my honourable and learned friend, or my honourable and gallant friend, may not be responsible for that effect upon my nervous system? Too much Ozone in the air, I am informed and fully believe (though I have no idea what it is), would affect me in a marvellously disagreeable way; why may not too much Talk? I don't see or hear the Ozone; I don't see or hear the Talk. And there is so much Talk; so much too much; such loud cry, and such scant supply of wool; such a deal of fleecing, and so little fleece! Hence, in the Arcadian season, I find it a delicious triumph to walk down to deserted Westminster, and see the Courts shut up; to walk a little further and see the Two Houses shut up; to stand in the Abbey Yard, like the New Zealander of the grand English History (concerning which unfortunate man, a whole rookery of mares' nests is generally being discovered), and gloat upon the ruins of Talk. Returning to my primitive solitude and lying down to sleep, my grateful heart expands with the consciousness that there is no adjourned Debate, no ministerial explanation, nobody to give notice of intention to ask the noble Lord at the head of her Majesty's Government five-and-twenty bootless questions in one, no term time with legal argument, no Nisi Prius with eloquent appeal to British Jury; that the air will to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, remain untroubled by this superabundant generating of Talk. In a minor degree it is a delicious triumph to me to go into the club, and see the carpets up, and the Bores and the other dust dispersed to the four winds. Again, New Zealander-like, I stand on the cold hearth, and say in the solitude, ‘Here I watched Bore A 1, with voice always mysteriously low and head always mysteriously drooped, whispering political secrets into the ears of Adam’s confiding children. Accursed be his memory for ever and a day!’

But, I have all this time been coming to the point, that the happy nature of my retirement is most sweetly expressed in its being the abode of Love. It is, as it were, an inexpensive Agapemone: nobody’s speculation: everybody’s profit. The one great result of the resumption of primitive habits, and (convertible terms) the not having much to do, is, the abounding of Love.

The Klem species are incapable of the softer emotions; probably, in that low nomadic race, the softer emotions have all degenerated into flue. But, with this exception, all the sharers of my retreat make love.

I have mentioned Saville-row. We all know the Doctor’s servant. We all know what a respectable man he is, what a hard dry man, what a firm man, what a confidential man: how he lets us into the waiting-room, like a man who knows minutely what is the matter with us, but from whom the rack should not wring the secret. In the prosaic “season,” he has distinctly the appearance of a man conscious of money in the savings bank, and taking his stand on his respectability with both feet. At that time it is as impossible to associate him with relaxation, or any human weakness, as it is to meet his eye without feeling guilty of indisposition. In the blest Arcadian time, how changed! I have seen him, in a pepper-and-salt jacket—jacket—and drab trousers, with his arm round the waist of a bootmaker’s housemaid, smiling in open day. I have seen him at the pump by the Albany, unsolicitedly pumping for two fair young creatures, whose figures as they bent over their cans, were—if I may be allowed an original expression—a model for the sculptor. I have seen him trying the piano in the Doctor’s drawing-room with his forefinger, and have heard him humming tunes in praise of lovely woman. I have seen him seated on a fire-engine, and going (obviously in search of excitement) to a fire. I saw him, one moonlight evening when the peace and purity of our Arcadian west were at their height, polk with the lovely daughter of a cleaner of gloves, from the door-steps of his own residence, across Saville-row, round by Clifford-street and Old Burlington-street, back to Burlington-gardens. Is this the Golden Age revived, or Iron London?

The Dentist's servant. Is that man no mystery to us, no type of invisible power? The tremendous individual knows (who else does?) what is done with the extracted teeth; he knows what goes on in the little room where something is always being washed or filed; he knows what warm spicy infusion is put into the comfortable tumbler from which we rinse our wounded mouth, with a gap in it that feels a foot wide; he knows whether the thing we spit into is a fixture communicating with the Thames, or could be cleared away for a dance; he sees the horrible parlour where there are no patients in it, and he could reveal, if he would, what becomes of the Every-Day Book then. The conviction of my coward conscience when I see that man in a professional light, is, that he knows all the statistics of my teeth and gums, my double teeth, my single teeth, my stopped teeth, and my sound. In this Arcadian rest, I am fearless of him as of a harmless, powerless creature in a Scotch cap, who adores a young lady in a voluminous crinoline, at a neighbouring billiard-room, and whose passion would be uninfluenced if every one of her teeth were false. They may be. He takes them all on trust.

In secluded corners of the place of my seclusion, there are little shops withdrawn from public curiosity, and never two together, where servants' perquisites are bought. The cook may dispose of grease at these modest and convenient marts; the butler, of bottles; the valet and lady's maid, of clothes; most servants, indeed, of most things they may happen to lay hold of. I have been told that in sterner times loving correspondence, otherwise interdicted, may be maintained by letter through the agency of some of these useful establishments. In the Arcadian autumn, no such device is necessary. Everybody loves, and openly and blamelessly loves. My landlord's young man loves the whole of one side of the way of Old Bond-street, and is beloved several doors up New Bond-street besides. I never look out of window but I see kissing of hands going on all around me. It is the morning custom to glide from shop to shop and exchange tender sentiments; it is the evening custom for couples to stand hand in hand at house doors, or roam, linked in that flowery manner, through the unpeopled streets. There is nothing else to do but love; and what there is to do, is done.

In unison with this pursuit, a chaste simplicity obtains in the domestic habits of Arcadia. Its few scattered people dine early, live moderately, sup socially, and sleep soundly. It is rumoured that the Beadles of the Arcade, from being the mortal enemies of boys, have signed with tears an address to Lord Shaftesbury, and subscribed to a ragged school. No wonder! For, they might turn their heavy maces into crooks and tend sheep in the Arcade, to the purling of the water-carts as they give the thirsty streets much more to drink than they can carry.

A happy Golden Age, and a serene tranquillity. Charming picture, but it will fade. The iron age will return, London will come back to town, if I show my tongue then in Saville-row for half a minute I shall be prescribed for, the Doctor's man and the Dentist's man will then pretend that these days of unprofessional innocence never existed. Where Mr. and Mrs. Klem and their bed will be at that time, passes human knowledge; but my hatter hermitage will then know them no more, nor will it then know me. The desk at which I have written these meditations will retributively assist at the making out of my account, and the wheels of gorgeous carriages and the hoofs of high-stepping horses will crush the silence out of Bond-street—will grind Arcadia away, and give it to the elements in granite powder.

CHAPTER XVII—THE ITALIAN PRISONER

The rising of the Italian people from under their unutterable wrongs, and the tardy burst of day upon them after the long long night of oppression that has darkened their beautiful country, have naturally caused my mind to dwell often of late on my own small wanderings in Italy. Connected with them, is a curious little drama, in which the character I myself sustained was so very subordinate that I may relate its story without any fear of being suspected of self-display. It is strictly a true story.

I am newly arrived one summer evening, in a certain small town on the Mediterranean. I have had my dinner at the inn, and I and the mosquitoes are coming out into the streets together. It is far from Naples; but a bright, brown, plump little woman-servant at the inn, is a Neapolitan, and is so vivaciously expert in panto-mimic action, that in the single moment of answering my request to have a pair of shoes cleaned which I have left up-stairs, she plies imaginary brushes, and goes completely through the motions of polishing the shoes up, and laying them at my feet. I smile at the brisk little woman in perfect satisfaction with her briskness; and the brisk little woman, amiably pleased with me because I am pleased with her, claps her hands and laughs delightfully. We are in the inn yard. As the little woman's bright eyes sparkle on the cigarette I am smoking, I make bold to offer her one; she accepts it none the less merrily, because I touch a most charming little dimple in her fat cheek, with its light paper end. Glancing up at the many green lattices to assure herself that the mistress is not looking on, the little woman then puts her two little dimple arms a-kimbo, and stands on tiptoe to light her cigarette at mine. 'And now, dear little sir,' says she, puffing out smoke in a most innocent and cherubic manner, 'keep quite straight on, take the first to the right and probably you will see him standing at his door.'

I gave a commission to 'him,' and I have been inquiring about him. I have carried the commission about Italy several months. Before I left England, there came to me one night a certain generous and gentle English nobleman (he is dead in these days when I relate the story, and exiles have lost their best British friend), with this request: ‘Whenever you come to such a town, will you seek out one Giovanni Carlavero, who keeps a little wine-shop there, mention my name to him suddenly, and observe how it affects him?’ I accepted the trust, and am on my way to discharge it.

The sirocco has been blowing all day, and it is a hot unwholesome evening with no cool sea-breeze. Mosquitoes and fire-flies are lively enough, but most other creatures are faint. The coquettish airs of pretty young women in the tiniest and wickedest of dolls’ straw hats, who lean out at opened lattice blinds, are almost the only airs stirring. Very ugly and haggard old women with distaffs, and with a grey tow upon them that looks as if they were spinning out their own hair (I suppose they were once pretty, too, but it is very difficult to believe so), sit on the footway leaning against house walls. Everybody who has come for water to the fountain, stays there, and seems incapable of any such energetic idea as going home. Vespers are over, though not so long but that I can smell the heavy resinous incense as I pass the church. No man seems to be at work, save the coppersmith. In an Italian town he is always at work, and always thumping in the deadliest manner.

I keep straight on, and come in due time to the first on the right: a narrow dull street, where I see a well-favoured man of good stature and military bearing, in a great cloak, standing at a door. Drawing nearer to this threshold, I see it is the threshold of a small wine-shop; and I can just make out, in the dim light, the inscription that it is kept by Giovanni Carlavero.

I touch my hat to the figure in the cloak, and pass in, and draw a stool to a little table. The lamp (just such another as they dig out of Pompeii) is lighted, but the place is empty. The figure in the cloak has followed me in, and stands before me.

‘The master?’

‘At your service, sir.’

‘Please to give me a glass of the wine of the country.’

He turns to a little counter, to get it. As his striking face is pale, and his action is evidently that of an enfeebled man, I remark that I fear he has been ill. It is not much, he courteously and gravely answers, though bad while it lasts: the fever.

As he sets the wine on the little table, to his manifest surprise I lay my hand on the back of his, look him in the face, and say in a low voice: ‘I am an Englishman, and you are acquainted with a friend of mine. Do you recollect—?' and I mentioned the name of my generous countryman.

Instantly, he utters a loud cry, bursts into tears, and falls on his knees at my feet, clasping my legs in both his arms and bowing his head to the ground.

Some years ago, this man at my feet, whose over-fraught heart is heaving as if it would burst from his breast, and whose tears are wet upon the dress I wear, was a galley-slave in the North of Italy. He was a political offender, having been concerned in the then last rising, and was sentenced to imprisonment for life. That he would have died in his chains, is certain, but for the circumstance that the Englishman happened to visit his prison.

It was one of the vile old prisons of Italy, and a part of it was below the waters of the harbour. The place of his confinement was an arched underground and under-water gallery, with a grill-gate at the entrance, through which it received such light and air as it got. Its condition was insufferably foul, and a stranger could hardly breathe in it, or see in it with the aid of a torch. At the upper end of this dungeon, and consequently in the worst position, as being the furthest removed from light and air, the Englishman first beheld him, sitting on an iron bedstead to which he was chained by a heavy chain. His countenance impressed the Englishmen as having nothing in common with the faces of the malefactors with whom he was associated, and he talked with him, and learnt how he came to be there.

When the Englishman emerged from the dreadful den into the light of day, he asked his conductor, the governor of the jail, why Giovanni Carlavero was put into the worst place?

'Because he is particularly recommended,' was the stringent answer.

'Recommended, that is to say, for death?'

'Excuse me; particularly recommended,' was again the answer.

'He has a bad tumour in his neck, no doubt occasioned by the hardship of his miserable life. If he continues to be neglected, and he remains where he is, it will kill him.'

'Excuse me, I can do nothing. He is particularly recommended.' The Englishman was staying in that town, and he went to his home there; but the figure of this man chained to the bedstead made it no home, and destroyed his rest and peace. He was an Englishman of an extraordinarily tender heart, and he could not bear the picture. He went back to the prison grate; went back again and again, and talked to the man and cheered him. He used his utmost influence to get the man unchained from the bedstead, were it only for ever so short a time in the day, and permitted to come to the grate. It look a long time, but the Englishman's station, personal character, and steadiness of purpose, wore out opposition so far, and that grace was at last accorded. Through the bars, when he could thus get light upon the tumour, the Englishman lanced it, and it did well, and healed. His strong interest in the prisoner had greatly increased by this time, and he formed the desperate resolution that he would exert his utmost self-devotion and use his utmost efforts, to get Carlavero pardoned.

If the prisoner had been a brigand and a murderer, if he had committed every non-political crime in the Newgate Calendar and out of it, nothing would have been easier than for a man of any court or priestly influence to obtain his release. As it was, nothing could have been more difficult. Italian authorities, and English authorities who had interest with them, alike assured the Englishman that his object was hopeless. He met with nothing but evasion, refusal, and ridicule. His political prisoner became a joke in the place. It was especially observable that English Circumlocution, and English Society on its travels, were as humorous on the subject as Circumlocution and Society may be on any subject without loss of caste. But, the Englishman possessed (and proved it well in his life) a courage very uncommon among us: he had not the least fear of being considered a bore, in a good humane cause. So he went on persistently trying, and trying, and trying, to get Giovanni Carlavero out. That prisoner had been rigorously re-chained, after the tumour operation, and it was not likely that his miserable life could last very long.

One day, when all the town knew about the Englishman and his political prisoner, there came to the Englishman, a certain sprightly Italian Advocate of whom he had some knowledge; and he made this strange proposal. 'Give me a hundred pounds to obtain Carlavero's release. I think I can get him a pardon, with that money. But I cannot tell you what I am going to do with the money, nor must you ever ask me the question if I succeed, nor must you ever ask me for an account of the money if I fail.' The Englishman decided to hazard the hundred pounds. He did so, and heard not another word of the matter. For half a year and more, the Advocate made no sign, and never once 'took on' in any way, to have the subject on his mind. The Englishman was then obliged to change his residence to another and more famous town in the North of Italy. He parted from the poor prisoner with a sorrowful heart, as from a doomed man for whom there was no release but Death.

The Englishman lived in his new place of abode another half-year and more, and had no tidings of the wretched prisoner. At length, one day, he received from the Advocate a cool, concise, mysterious note, to this effect. 'If you still wish to bestow that benefit upon the man in whom you were once interested, send me fifty pounds more, and I think it can be ensured.' Now, the Englishman had long settled in his mind that the Advocate was a heartless sharper, who had preyed upon his credulity and his interest in an unfortunate sufferer. So, he sat down and wrote a dry answer, giving the Advocate to understand that he was wiser now than he had been formerly, and that no more money was extractable from his pocket.

He lived outside the city gates, some mile or two from the post-office, and was accustomed to walk into the city with his letters and post them himself. On a lovely spring day, when the sky was exquisitely blue, and the sea Divinely beautiful, he took his usual walk, carrying this letter to the Advocate in his pocket. As he went along, his gentle heart was much moved by the loveliness of the prospect, and by the thought of the slowly dying prisoner chained to the bedstead, for whom the universe had no delights. As he drew nearer and nearer to the city where he was to post the letter, he became very uneasy in his mind. He debated with himself, was it remotely possible, after all, that this sum of fifty pounds could restore the fellow-creature whom he pitied so much, and for whom he had striven so hard, to liberty? He was not a conventionally rich Englishman—very far from that—but, he had a spare fifty pounds at the banker's. He resolved to risk it. Without doubt, GOD has recompensed him for the resolution.

He went to the banker's, and got a bill for the amount, and enclosed it in a letter to the Advocate that I wish I could have seen. He simply told the Advocate that he was quite a poor man, and that he was sensible it might be a great weakness in him to part with so much money on the faith of so vague a communication; but, that there it was, and that he prayed the Advocate to make a good use of it. If he did otherwise no good could ever come of it, and it would lie heavy on his soul one day.

Within a week, the Englishman was sitting at his breakfast, when he heard some suppressed sounds of agitation on the staircase, and Giovanni Carlavero leaped into the room and fell upon his breast, a free man!

Conscious of having wronged the Advocate in his own thoughts, the Englishman wrote him an earnest and grateful letter, avowing the fact, and entreating him to confide by what means and through what agency he had succeeded so well. The Advocate returned for answer through the post, ‘There are many things, as you know, in this Italy of ours, that are safest and best not even spoken of—far less written of. We may meet some day, and then I may tell you what you want to know; not here, and now.’ But, the two never did meet again. The Advocate was dead when the Englishman gave me my trust; and how the man had been set free, remained as great a mystery to the Englishman, and to the man himself, as it was to me.

But, I knew this:- here was the man, this sultry night, on his knees at my feet, because I was the Englishman’s friend; here were his tears upon my dress; here were his sobs choking his utterance; here were his kisses on my hands, because they had touched the hands that had worked out his release. He had no need to tell me it would be happiness to him to die for his benefactor; I doubt if I ever saw real, sterling, fervent gratitude of soul, before or since.

He was much watched and suspected, he said, and had had enough to do to keep himself out of trouble. This, and his not having prospered in his worldly affairs, had led to his having failed in his usual communications to the Englishman for—as I now remember the period—some two or three years. But, his prospects were brighter, and his wife who had been very ill had recovered, and his fever had left him, and he had bought a little vineyard, and would I carry to his benefactor the first of its wine? Ay, that I would (I told him with enthusiasm), and not a drop of it should be spilled or lost!

He had cautiously closed the door before speaking of himself, and had talked with such excess of emotion, and in a provincial Italian so difficult to understand, that I had more than once been obliged to stop him, and beg him to have compassion on me and be slower and calmer. By degrees he became so, and tranquilly walked back with me to the hotel. There, I sat down before I went to bed and wrote a faithful account of him to the Englishman: which I concluded by saying that I would bring the wine home, against any difficulties, every drop.

Early next morning, when I came out at the hotel door to pursue my journey, I found my friend waiting with one of those immense bottles in which the Italian peasants store their wine—a bottle holding some half-dozen gallons—bound round with basket-work for greater safety on the journey. I see him now, in the bright sunshine, tears of gratitude in his eyes, proudly inviting my attention to this corpulent bottle. (At the street-comer hard by, two high-flavoured, able-bodied monks—pretending to talk together, but keeping their four evil eyes upon us.)

How the bottle had been got there, did not appear; but the difficulty of getting it into the ramshackle vetturino carriage in which I was departing, was so great, and it took up so much room when it was got in, that I elected to sit outside. The last I saw of Giovanni Carlavero was his running through the town by the side of the jingling wheels, clasping my hand as I stretched it down from the box, charging me with a thousand last loving and dutiful messages to his dear patron, and finally looking in at the bottle as it reposed inside, with an admiration of its honourable way of travelling that was beyond measure delightful.

And now, what disquiet of mind this dearly-beloved and highly-treasured Bottle began to cost me, no man knows. It was my precious charge through a long tour, and, for hundreds of miles, I never had it off my mind by day or by night. Over bad roads—and they were many—I clung to it with affectionate desperation. Up mountains, I looked in at it and saw it helplessly tilting over on its back, with terror. At innumerable inn doors when the weather was bad, I was obliged to be put into my vehicle before the Bottle could be got in, and was obliged to have the Bottle lifted out before human aid could come near me. The Imp of the same name, except that his associations were all evil and these associations were all good, would have been a less troublesome travelling companion. I might have served Mr. Cruikshank as a subject for a new illustration of the miseries of the Bottle. The National Temperance Society might have made a powerful Tract of me.

The suspicions that attached to this innocent Bottle, greatly aggravated my difficulties. It was like the apple-pie in the child’s book. Parma pouted at it, Modena mocked it, Tuscany tackled it, Naples nibbled it, Rome refused it, Austria accused it, Soldiers suspected it, Jesuits jobbed it. I composed a neat Oration, developing my inoffensive intentions in connexion with this Bottle, and delivered it in an infinity of guard-houses, at a multitude of town gates, and on every drawbridge, angle, and rampart, of a complete system of fortifications. Fifty times a day, I got down to harangue an infuriated soldiery about the Bottle. Through the filthy degradation of the abject and vile Roman States, I had as much difficulty in working my way with the Bottle, as if it had bottled up a complete system of heretical theology. In the Neapolitan country, where everybody was a spy, a soldier, a priest, or a lazzarone, the shameless beggars of all four denominations incessantly pounced on the Bottle and made it a pretext for extorting money from me. Quires—quires do I say? Reams—of forms illegibly printed on whity-brown paper were filled up about the Bottle, and it was the subject of more stamping and sanding than I had ever seen before. In consequence of which haze of sand, perhaps, it was always irregular, and always latent with dismal penalties of going back or not going forward, which were only to be abated by the silver crossing of a base hand, poked shirtless out of a ragged uniform sleeve. Under all discouragements, however, I stuck to my Bottle, and held firm to my resolution that every drop of its contents should reach the Bottle's destination.

The latter refinement cost me a separate heap of troubles on its own separate account. What corkscrews did I see the military power bring out against that Bottle; what gimlets, spikes, divining rods, gauges, and unknown tests and instruments! At some places, they persisted in declaring that the wine must not be passed, without being opened and tasted; I, pleading to the contrary, used then to argue the question seated on the Bottle lest they should open it in spite of me. In the southern parts of Italy more violent shrieking, face-making, and gesticulating, greater vehemence of speech and countenance and action, went on about that Bottle than would attend fifty murders in a northern latitude. It raised important functionaries out of their beds, in the dead of night. I have known half-a-dozen military lanterns to disperse themselves at all points of a great sleeping Piazza, each lantern summoning some official creature to get up, put on his cocked-hat instantly, and come and stop the Bottle. It was characteristic that while this innocent Bottle had such immense difficulty in getting from little town to town, Signor Mazzini and the fiery cross were traversing Italy from end to end.

Still, I stuck to my Bottle, like any fine old English gentleman all of the olden time. The more the Bottle was interfered with, the stauncher I became (if possible) in my first determination that my countryman should have it delivered to him intact, as the man whom he had so nobly restored to life and liberty had delivered it to me. If ever I had been obstinate in my days—and I may have been, say, once or twice—I was obstinate about the Bottle. But, I made it a rule always to keep a pocket full of small coin at its service, and never to be out of temper in its cause. Thus, I and the Bottle made our way. Once we had a break-down; rather a bad break-down, on a steep high place with the sea below us, on a tempestuous evening when it blew great guns. We were driving four wild horses abreast, Southern fashion, and there was some little difficulty in stopping them. I was outside, and not thrown off; but no words can describe my feelings when I saw the Bottle—travelling inside, as usual—burst the door open, and roll obesely out into the road. A blessed Bottle with a charmed existence, he took no hurt, and we repaired damage, and went on triumphant.

A thousand representations were made to me that the Bottle must be left at this place, or that, and called for again. I never yielded to one of them, and never parted from the Bottle, on any pretence, consideration, threat, or entreaty. I had no faith in any official receipt for the Bottle, and nothing would induce me to accept one. These unmanageable politics at last brought me and the Bottle, still triumphant, to Genoa. There, I took a tender and reluctant leave of him for a few weeks, and consigned him to a trusty English captain, to be conveyed to the Port of London by sea.

While the Bottle was on his voyage to England, I read the Shipping Intelligence as anxiously as if I had been an underwriter. There was some stormy weather after I myself had got to England by way of Switzerland and France, and my mind greatly misgave me that the Bottle might be wrecked. At last to my great joy, I received notice of his safe arrival, and immediately went down to Saint Katharine’s Docks, and found him in a state of honourable captivity in the Custom House.

The wine was mere vinegar when I set it down before the generous Englishman—probably it had been something like vinegar when I took it up from Giovanni Carlavero—but not a drop of it was spilled or gone. And the Englishman told me, with much emotion in his face and voice, that he had never tasted wine that seemed to him so sweet and sound. And long afterwards, the Bottle graced his table. And the last time I saw him in this world that misses him, he took me aside in a crowd, to say, with his amiable smile: ‘We were talking of you only to-day at dinner, and I wished you had been there, for I had some Claret up in Carlavero’s Bottle.’

CHAPTER XVIII—THE CALAIS NIGHT MAIL

It is an unsettled question with me whether I shall leave Calais something handsome in my will, or whether I shall leave it my malediction. I hate it so much, and yet I am always so very glad to see it, that I am in a state of constant indecision on this subject. When I first made acquaintance with Calais, it was as a maundering young wretch in a clammy perspiration and dripping saline particles, who was conscious of no extremities but the one great extremity, sea-sickness—who was a mere bilious torso, with a mislaid headache somewhere in its stomach—who had been put into a horrible swing in Dover Harbour, and had tumbled giddily out of it on the French coast, or the Isle of Man, or anywhere. Times have changed, and now I enter Calais self-reliant and rational. I know where it is beforehand, I keep a look out for it, I recognise its landmarks when I see any of them, I am acquainted with its ways, and I know—and I can bear—its worst behaviour.

Malignant Calais! Low-lying alligator, evading the eyesight and discouraging hope! Dodging flat streak, now on this bow, now on that, now anywhere, now everywhere, now nowhere! In vain Cape Grinez, coming frankly forth into the sea, exhorts the failing to be stout of heart and stomach: sneaking Calais, prone behind its bar, invites emetically to despair. Even when it can no longer quite conceal itself in its muddy dock, it has an evil way of falling off, has Calais, which is more hopeless than its invisibility. The pier is all but on the bowsprit, and you think you are there—roll, roar, wash!—Calais has retired miles inland, and Dover has burst out to look for it. It has a last dip and slide in its character, has Calais, to be especially commanded to the infernal gods. Thrice accursed be that garrison-town, when it dives under the boat's keel, and comes up a league or two to the right, with the packet shivering and spluttering and staring about for it!

Not but what I have my animosities towards Dover. I particularly detest Dover for the self-complacency with which it goes to bed. It always goes to bed (when I am going to Calais) with a more brilliant display of lamp and candle than any other town. Mr. and Mrs. Birmingham, host and hostess of the Lord Warden Hotel, are my much esteemed friends, but they are too conceited about the comforts of that establishment when the Night Mail is starting. I know it is a good house to stay at, and I don't want the fact insisted upon in all its warm bright windows at such an hour. I know the Warden is a stationary edifice that never rolls or pitches, and I object to its big outline seeming to insist upon that circumstance, and, as it were, to come over me with it, when I am reeling on the deck of the boat. Beshrew the Warden likewise, for obstructing that corner, and making the wind so angry as it rushes round. Shall I not know that it blows quite soon enough, without the officious Warden's interference?

As I wait here on board the night packet, for the South-Eastern Train to come down with the Mail, Dover appears to me to be illuminated for some intensely aggravating festivity in my personal dishonour. All its noises smack of taunting praises of the land, and dispraises of the gloomy sea, and of me for going on it. The drums upon the heights have gone to bed, or I know they would rattle taunts against me for having my unsteady footing on this slippery deck. The many gas eyes of the Marine Parade twinkle in an offensive manner, as if with derision. The distant dogs of Dover bark at me in my misshapen wrappers, as if I were Richard the Third.

A screech, a bell, and two red eyes come gliding down the Admiralty Pier with a smoothness of motion rendered more smooth by the heaving of the boat. The sea makes noises against the pier, as if several hippopotami were lapping at it, and were prevented by circumstances over which they had no control from drinking peaceably. We, the boat, become violently agitated—rumble, hum, scream, roar, and establish an immense family washing-day at each paddle-box. Bright patches break out in the train as the doors of the post-office vans are opened, and instantly stooping figures with sacks upon their backs begin to be beheld among the piles, descending as it would seem in ghostly procession to Davy Jones's Locker. The passengers come on board; a few shadowy Frenchmen, with hatboxes shaped like the stoppers of gigantic case-bottles; a few shadowy Germans in immense fur coats and boots; a few shadowy Englishmen prepared for the worst and pretending not to expect it. I cannot disguise from my uncommercial mind the miserable fact that we are a body of outcasts; that the attendants on us are as scant in number as may serve to get rid of us with the least possible delay; that there are no night-loungers interested in us; that the unwilling lamps shiver and shudder at us; that the sole object is to commit us to the deep and abandon us. Lo, the two red eyes glaring in increasing distance, and then the very train itself has gone to bed before we are off!

What is the moral support derived by some sea-going amateurs from an umbrella? Why do certain voyagers across the Channel always put up that article, and hold it up with a grim and fierce tenacity? A fellow-creature near me—whom I only know to *be* a fellow-creature, because of his umbrella: without which he might be a dark bit of cliff, pier, or bulkbead—clutches that instrument with a desperate grasp, that will not relax until he lands at Calais. Is there any analogy, in certain constitutions, between keeping an umbrella up, and keeping the spirits up? A hawser thrown on board with a flop replies 'Stand by!' 'Stand by, below!' 'Half a turn a head!' 'Half a turn a head!' 'Half speed!' 'Half speed!' 'Port!' 'Port!' 'Steady!' 'Steady!' 'Go on!' 'Go on!'

A stout wooden wedge driven in at my right temple and out at my left, a floating deposit of lukewarm oil in my throat, and a compression of the bridge of my nose in a blunt pair of pincers,—these are the personal sensations by which I know we are off, and by which I shall continue to know it until I am on the soil of France. My symptoms have scarcely established themselves comfortably, when two or three skating shadows that have been trying to walk or stand, get flung together, and other two or three shadows in tarpaulin slide with them into corners and cover them up. Then the South Foreland lights begin to hiccup at us in a way that bodes no good.

It is at about this period that my detestation of Calais knows no bounds. Inwardly I resolve afresh that I never will forgive that hated town. I have done so before, many times, but that is past. Let me register a vow. Implacable animosity to Calais everm- that was an awkward sea, and the funnel seems of my opinion, for it gives a complaining roar.

The wind blows stiffly from the Nor-East, the sea runs high, we ship a deal of water, the night is dark and cold, and the shapeless passengers lie about in melancholy bundles, as if they were sorted out for the laundress; but for my own uncommercial part I cannot pretend that I am much inconvenienced by any of these things. A general howling, whistling, flopping, gurgling, and scooping, I am aware of, and a general knocking about of Nature; but the impressions I receive are very vague. In a sweet faint temper, something like the smell of damaged oranges, I think I should feel languidly benevolent if I had time. I have not time, because I am under a curious compulsion to occupy myself with the Irish melodies. ‘Rich and rare were the gems she wore,’ is the particular melody to which I find myself devoted. I sing it to myself in the most charming manner and with the greatest expression. Now and then, I raise my head (I am sitting on the hardest of wet seats, in the most uncomfortable of wet attitudes, but I don’t mind it,) and notice that I am a whirling shuttlecock between a fiery battledore of a lighthouse on the French coast and a fiery battledore of a lighthouse on the English coast; but I don’t notice it particularly, except to feel envenomed in my hatred of Calais. Then I go on again, ‘Rich and rare were the ge-ems she-e-e-e wore, And a bright gold ring on her wa-and she bo-ore, But O her beauty was fa-a-a-a-r beyond’—I am particularly proud of my execution here, when I become aware of another awkward shock from the sea, and another protest from the funnel, and a fellow-creature at the paddle-box more audibly indisposed than I think he need be—‘Her sparkling gems, or snow-white wand, But O her beauty was fa-a-a-a-a-r beyond’—another awkward one here, and the fellow-creature with the umbrella down and picked up—‘Her spa-a-rkling ge-ems, or her Port! port! steady! steady! snow-white fellow-creature at the paddle-box very selfishly audible, bump, roar, wash, white wand.’

As my execution of the Irish melodies partakes of my imperfect perceptions of what is going on around me, so what is going on around me becomes something else than what it is. The stokers open the furnace doors below, to feed the fires, and I am again on the box of the old Exeter Telegraph fast coach, and that is the light of the for ever extinguished coach-lamps, and the gleam on the hatches and paddle-boxes is *their* gleam on cottages and haystacks, and the monotonous noise of the engines is the steady jingle of the splendid team. Anon, the intermittent funnel roar of protest at every violent roll, becomes the regular blast of a high pressure engine, and I recognise the exceedingly explosive steamer in which I ascended the Mississippi when the American civil war was not, and when only its causes were. A fragment of mast on which the light of a lantern falls, an end of rope, and a jerking block or so, become suggestive of Franconi’s Circus at Paris where I shall be this very night mayhap (for it must be morning now), and they dance to the self-same time and tune as the trained steed, Black Raven. What may be the speciality of these waves as they come rushing on, I cannot desert the pressing demands made upon me by the gems she wore, to inquire, but they are charged with something about Robinson Crusoe, and I think it was in Yarmouth Roads that he first went a seafaring and was near foundering (what a terrific sound that word had for me when I was a boy!) in his first gale of wind. Still, through all this, I must ask her (who *was* she I wonder!) for the fiftieth time, and without ever stopping, Does she not fear to stray, So lone and lovely through this bleak way, And are Erin's sons so good or so cold, As not to be tempted by more fellow-creatures at the paddle-box or gold? Sir Knight I feel not the least alarm, No son of Erin will offer me harm, For though they love fellow-creature with umbrella down again and golden store, Sir Knight they what a tremendous one love honour and virtue more: For though they love Stewards with a bull's eye bright, they'll trouble you for your ticket, sir-rough passage to-night!

I freely admit it to be a miserable piece of human weakness and inconsistency, but I no sooner become conscious of those last words from the steward than I begin to soften towards Calais. Whereas I have been vindictively wishing that those Calais burghers who came out of their town by a short cut into the History of England, with those fatal ropes round their necks by which they have since been towed into so many cartoons, had all been hanged on the spot, I now begin to regard them as highly respectable and virtuous tradesmen. Looking about me, I see the light of Cape Grinez well astern of the boat on the davits to leeward, and the light of Calais Harbour undeniably at its old tricks, but still ahead and shining. Sentiments of forgiveness of Calais, not to say of attachment to Calais, begin to expand my bosom. I have weak notions that I will stay there a day or two on my way back. A faded and recumbent stranger pausing in a profound reverie over the rim of a basin, asks me what kind of place Calais is? I tell him (Heaven forgive me!) a very agreeable place indeed—rather hilly than otherwise.

So strangely goes the time, and on the whole so quickly—though still I seem to have been on board a week—that I am bumped, rolled, gurgled, washed and pitched into Calais Harbour before her maiden smile has finally lighted her through the Green Isle, When blest for ever is she who relied, On entering Calais at the top of the tide. For we have not to land to-night down among those slimy timbers—covered with green hair as if it were the mermaids' favourite combing-place—where one crawls to the surface of the jetty, like a stranded shrimp, but we go steaming up the harbour to the Railway Station Quay. And as we go, the sea washes in and out among piles and planks, with dead heavy beats and in quite a furious manner (whereof we are proud), and the lamps shake in the wind, and the bells of Calais striking One seem to send their vibrations struggling against troubled air, as we have come struggling against troubled water. And now, in the sudden relief and wiping of faces, everybody on board seems to have had a prodigious double-tooth out, and to be this very instant free of the Dentist's hands. And now we all know for the first time how wet and cold we are, and how salt we are; and now I love Calais with my heart of hearts!

'Hôtel Dessin!' (but in this one case it is not a vocal cry; it is but a bright lustre in the eyes of the cheery representative of that best of inns). 'Hôtel Meurice!' 'Hôtel de France!' 'Hôtel de Calais!' 'The Royal Hotel, Sir, Angaishe ouse!' 'You going to Parry, Sir?' 'Your baggage, registair froo, Sir?' Bless ye, my Touters, bless ye, my commissionaires, bless ye, my hungry-eyed mysteries in caps of a military form, who are always here, day or night, fair weather or foul, seeking inscrutable jobs which I never see you get! Bless ye, my Custom House officers in green and grey; permit me to grasp the welcome hands that descend into my travelling-bag, one on each side, and meet at the bottom to give my change of linen a peculiar shake up, as if it were a measure of chaff or grain! I have nothing to declare, Monsieur le Douanier, except that when I cease to breathe, Calais will be found written on my heart. No article liable to local duty have I with me, Monsieur l'Officier de l'Octroi, unless the overflowing of a breast devoted to your charming town should be in that wise chargeable. Ah! see at the gangway by the twinkling lantern, my dearest brother and friend, he once of the Passport Office, he who collects the names! May he be for ever changeless in his buttoned black surtout, with his note-book in his hand, and his tall black hat, surmounting his round, smiling, patient face! Let us embrace, my dearest brother. I am yours à tout jamais—for the whole of ever.

Calais up and doing at the railway station, and Calais down and dreaming in its bed; Calais with something of 'an ancient and fish-like smell' about it, and Calais blown and sea-washed pure; Calais represented at the Buffet by savoury roast fowls, hot coffee, cognac, and Bordeaux; and Calais represented everywhere by flitting persons with a monomania for changing money—though I never shall be able to understand in my present state of existence how they live by it, but I suppose I should, if I understood the currency question—Calais *en gros*, and Calais *en détail*, forgive one who has deeply wronged you.—I was not fully aware of it on the other side, but I meant Dover.

Ding, ding! To the carriages, gentlemen the travellers. Ascend then, gentlemen the travellers, for Hazebroucke, Lille, Douai, Bruxelles, Arras, Amiens, and Paris! I, humble representative of the uncommercial interest, ascend with the rest. The train is light to-night, and I share my compartment with but two fellow-travellers; one, a compatriot in an obsolete cravat, who thinks it a quite unaccountable thing that they don't keep 'London time' on a French railway, and who is made angry by my modestly suggesting the possibility of Paris time being more in their way; the other, a young priest, with a very small bird in a very small cage, who feeds the small bird with a quill, and then puts him up in the network above his head, where he advances twittering, to his front wires, and seems to address me in an electioneering manner. The compatriot (who crossed in the boat, and whom I judge to be some person of distinction, as he was shut up, like a stately species of rabbit, in a private hutch on deck) and the young priest (who joined us at Calais) are soon asleep, and then the bird and I have it all to ourselves.

A stormy night still; a night that sweeps the wires of the electric telegraph with a wild and fitful hand; a night so very stormy, with the added storm of the train-progress through it, that when the Guard comes clambering round to mark the tickets while we are at full speed (a really horrible performance in an express train, though he holds on to the open window by his elbows in the most deliberate manner), he stands in such a whirlwind that I grip him fast by the collar, and feel it next to manslaughter to let him go. Still, when he is gone, the small, small bird remains at his front wires feebly twittering to me—twittering and twittering, until, leaning back in my place and looking at him in drowsy fascination, I find that he seems to jog my memory as we rush along.

Uncommercial travels (thus the small, small bird) have lain in their idle thriftless way through all this range of swamp and dyke, as through many other odd places; and about here, as you very well know, are the queer old stone farm-houses, approached by drawbridges, and the windmills that you get at by boats. Here, are the lands where the women hoe and dig, paddling canoe-wise from field to field, and here are the cabarets and other peasant-houses where the stone dove-cotes in the littered yards are as strong as warders' towers in old castles. Here, are the long monotonous miles of canal, with the great Dutch-built barges garishly painted, and the towing girls, sometimes harnessed by the forehead, sometimes by the girdle and the shoulders, not a pleasant sight to see. Scattered through this country are mighty works of VAUBAN, whom you know about, and regiments of such corporals as you heard of once upon a time, and many a blue-eyed Bebelle. Through these flat districts, in the shining summer days, walk those long, grotesque files of young novices in enormous shovel-hats, whom you remember blackening the ground checkered by the avenues of leafy trees. And now that Hazebroucke slumbers certain kilometres ahead, recall the summer evening when your dusty feet strolling up from the station tended hap-hazard to a Fair there, where the oldest inhabitants were circling round and round a barrel-organ on hobby-horses, with the greatest gravity, and where the principal show in the Fair was a Religious Richardson's—literally, on its own announcement in great letters, THEATRE RELIGIEUX. In which improving Temple, the dramatic representation was of 'all the interesting events in the life of our Lord, from the Manger to the Tomb;' the principal female character, without any reservation or exception, being at the moment of your arrival, engaged in trimming the external Moderators (as it was growing dusk), while the next principal female character took the money, and the Young Saint John disported himself upside down on the platform.

Looking up at this point to confirm the small, small bird in every particular he has mentioned, I find he has ceased to twitter, and has put his head under his wing. Therefore, in my different way I follow the good example.

CHAPTER XIX—SOME RECOLLECTIONS OF MORTALITY

I had parted from the small bird at somewhere about four o'clock in the morning, when he had got out at Arras, and had been received by two shovel-hats in waiting at the station, who presented an appropriately ornithological and crow-like appearance. My compatriot and I had gone on to Paris; my compatriot enlightening me occasionally with a long list of the enormous grievances of French railway travelling: every one of which, as I am a sinner, was perfectly new to me, though I have as much experience of French railways as most uncommercials. I had left him at the terminus (through his conviction, against all explanation and remonstrance, that his baggage-ticket was his passenger-ticket), insisting in a very high temper to the functionary on duty, that in his own personal identity he was four packages weighing so many kilogrammes—as if he had been Cassim Baba! I had bathed and breakfasted, and was strolling on the bright quays. The subject of my meditations was the question whether it is positively in the essence and nature of things, as a certain school of Britons would seem to think it, that a Capital must be ensnared and enslaved before it can be made beautiful: when I lifted up my eyes and found that my feet, straying like my mind, had brought me to Notre-Dame.

That is to say, Notre-Dame was before me, but there was a large open space between us. A very little while gone, I had left that space covered with buildings densely crowded; and now it was cleared for some new wonder in the way of public Street, Place, Garden, Fountain, or all four. Only the obscene little Morgue, slinking on the brink of the river and soon to come down, was left there, looking mortally ashamed of itself, and supremely wicked. I had but glanced at this old acquaintance, when I beheld an airy procession coming round in front of Notre-Dame, past the great hospital. It had something of a Masaniello look, with fluttering striped curtains in the midst of it, and it came dancing round the cathedral in the liveliest manner.

I was speculating on a marriage in Blouse-life, or a Christening, or some other domestic festivity which I would see out, when I found, from the talk of a quick rush of Blouses past me, that it was a Body coming to the Morgue. Having never before chanced upon this initiation, I constituted myself a Blouse likewise, and ran into the Morgue with the rest. It was a very muddy day, and we took in a quantity of mire with us, and the procession coming in upon our heels brought a quantity more. The procession was in the highest spirits, and consisted of idlers who had come with the curtained litter from its starting-place, and of all the reinforcements it had picked up by the way. It set the litter down in the midst of the Morgue, and then two Custodians proclaimed aloud that we were all 'invited' to go out. This invitation was rendered the more pressing, if not the more flattering, by our being shoved out, and the folding-gates being barred upon us.

Those who have never seen the Morgue, may see it perfectly, by presenting to themselves on indifferently paved coach-house accessible from the street by a pair of folding-gates; on the left of the coach-house, occupying its width, any large London tailor's or linendraper's plate-glass window reaching to the ground; within the window, on two rows of inclined plane, what the coach-house has to show; hanging above, like irregular stalactites from the roof of a cave, a quantity of clothes—the clothes of the dead and buried shows of the coach-house.

We had been excited in the highest degree by seeing the Custodians pull off their coats and tuck up their shirt-sleeves, as the procession came along. It looked so interestingly like business. Shut out in the muddy street, we now became quite ravenous to know all about it. Was it river, pistol, knife, love, gambling, robbery, hatred, how many stabs, how many bullets, fresh or decomposed, suicide or murder? All wedged together, and all staring at one another with our heads thrust forward, we propounded these inquiries and a hundred more such. Imperceptibly, it came to be known that Monsieur the tall and sallow mason yonder, was acquainted with the facts. Would Monsieur the tall and sallow mason, surged at by a new wave of us, have the goodness to impart? It was but a poor old man, passing along the street under one of the new buildings, on whom a stone had fallen, and who had tumbled dead. His age? Another wave surged up against the tall and sallow mason, and our wave swept on and broke, and he was any age from sixty-five to ninety.

An old man was not much: moreover, we could have wished he had been killed by human agency—his own, or somebody else's: the latter, preferable—but our comfort was, that he had nothing about him to lead to his identification, and that his people must seek him here. Perhaps they were waiting dinner for him even now? We liked that. Such of us as had pocket-handkerchiefs took a slow, intense, protracted wipe at our noses, and then crammed our handkerchiefs into the breast of our blouses. Others of us who had no handkerchiefs administered a similar relief to our overwrought minds, by means of prolonged smears or wipes of our mouths on our sleeves. One man with a gloomy malformation of brow—a homicidal worker in white-lead, to judge from his blue tone of colour, and a certain flavour of paralysis pervading him—got his coat-collar between his teeth, and bit at it with an appetite. Several decent women arrived upon the outskirts of the crowd, and prepared to launch themselves into the dismal coach-house when opportunity should come; among them, a pretty young mother, pretending to bite the forefinger of her baby-boy, kept it between her rosy lips that it might be handy for guiding to point at the show. Meantime, all faces were turned towards the building, and we men waited with a fixed and stern resolution:- for the most part with folded arms. Surely, it was the only public French sight these uncommercial eyes had seen, at which the expectant people did not form *en queue*. But there was no such order of arrangement here; nothing but a general determination to make a rush for it, and a disposition to object to some boys who had mounted on the two stone posts by the hinges of the gates, with the design of swooping in when the hinges should turn.

Now, they turned, and we rushed! Great pressure, and a scream or two from the front. Then a laugh or two, some expressions of disappointment, and a slackening of the pressure and subsidence of the struggle.—Old man not there.

‘But what would you have?’ the Custodian reasonably argues, as he looks out at his little door. ‘Patience, patience! We make his toilette, gentlemen. He will be exposed presently. It is necessary to proceed according to rule. His toilette is not made all at a blow. He will be exposed in good time, gentlemen, in good time.’ And so retires, smoking, with a wave of his sleeveless arm towards the window, importing, ‘Entertain yourselves in the meanwhile with the other curiosities. Fortunately the Museum is not empty to-day.’

Who would have thought of public fickleness even at the Morgue? But there it was, on that occasion. Three lately popular articles that had been attracting greatly when the litter was first descried coming dancing round the corner by the great cathedral, were so completely deposed now, that nobody save two little girls (one showing them to a doll) would look at them. Yet the chief of the three, the article in the front row, had received jagged injury of the left temple; and the other two in the back row, the drowned two lying side by side with their heads very slightly turned towards each other, seemed to be comparing notes about it. Indeed, those two of the back row were so furtive of appearance, and so (in their puffed way) assassinatingly knowing as to the one of the front, that it was hard to think the three had never come together in their lives, and were only chance companions after death. Whether or no this was the general, as it was the uncommercial, fancy, it is not to be disputed that the group had drawn exceedingly within ten minutes. Yet now, the inconstant public turned its back upon them, and even leaned its elbows carelessly against the bar outside the window and shook off the mud from its shoes, and also lent and borrowed fire for pipes.

Custodian re-enters from his door. 'Again once, gentlemen, you are invited—' No further invitation necessary. Ready dash into the street. Toilette finished. Old man coming out.

This time, the interest was grown too hot to admit of toleration of the boys on the stone posts. The homicidal white-lead worker made a pounce upon one boy who was hoisting himself up, and brought him to earth amidst general commendation. Closely stowed as we were, we yet formed into groups—groups of conversation, without separation from the mass—to discuss the old man. Rivals of the tall and sallow mason sprang into being, and here again was popular inconstancy. These rivals attracted audiences, and were greedily listened to; and whereas they had derived their information solely from the tall and sallow one, officious members of the crowd now sought to enlighten *him* on their authority. Changed by this social experience into an iron-visaged and inveterate misanthrope, the mason glared at mankind, and evidently cherished in his breast the wish that the whole of the present company could change places with the deceased old man. And now listeners became inattentive, and people made a start forward at a slight sound, and an unholy fire kindled in the public eye, and those next the gates beat at them impatiently, as if they were of the cannibal species and hungry.

Again the hinges creaked, and we rushed. Disorderly pressure for some time ensued before the uncommercial unit got figured into the front row of the sum. It was strange to see so much heat and uproar seething about one poor spare, white-haired old man, quiet for evermore. He was calm of feature and undisfigured, as he lay on his back—having been struck upon the hinder part of his head, and thrown forward—and something like a tear or two had started from the closed eyes, and lay wet upon the face. The uncommercial interest, sated at a glance, directed itself upon the striving crowd on either side and behind: wondering whether one might have guessed, from the expression of those faces merely, what kind of sight they were looking at. The differences of expression were not many. There was a little pity, but not much, and that mostly with a selfish touch in it—as who would say, 'Shall I, poor I, look like that, when the time comes!' There was more of a secretly brooding contemplation and curiosity, as 'That man I don't like, and have the grudge against; would such be his appearance, if some one—not to mention names—by any chance gave him an knock?' There was a wolfish stare at the object, in which homicidal white-lead worker shone conspicuous. And there was a much more general, purposeless, vacant staring at it—like looking at waxwork, without a catalogue, and not knowing what to make of it. But all these expressions concurred in possessing the one underlying expression of *looking at something that could not return a look*. The uncommercial notice had established this as very remarkable, when a new pressure all at once coming up from the street pinioned him ignominiously, and hurried him into the arms (now sleeved again) of the Custodian smoking at his door, and answering questions, between puffs, with a certain placid meritorious air of not being proud, though high in office. And mentioning pride, it may be observed, by the way, that one could not well help investing the original sole occupant of the front row with an air depreciatory of the legitimate attraction of the poor old man: while the two in the second row seemed to exult at this superseded popularity.

Pacing presently round the garden of the Tower of St. Jacques de la Boucherie, and presently again in front of the Hôtel de Ville, I called to mind a certain desolate open-air Morgue that I happened to light upon in London, one day in the hard winter of 1861, and which seemed as strange to me, at the time of seeing it, as if I had found it in China. Towards that hour of a winter's afternoon when the lamp-lighters are beginning to light the lamps in the streets a little before they are wanted, because the darkness thickens fast and soon, I was walking in from the country on the northern side of the Regent's Park—hard frozen and deserted—when I saw an empty Hansom cab drive up to the lodge at Gloucester-gate, and the driver with great agitation call to the man there: who quickly reached a long pole from a tree, and, deftly collared by the driver, jumped to the step of his little seat, and so the Hansom rattled out at the gate, galloping over the iron-bound road. I followed running, though not so fast but that when I came to the right-hand Canal Bridge, near the cross-path to Chalk Farm, the Hansom was stationary, the horse was smoking hot, the long pole was idle on the ground, and the driver and the park-keeper were looking over the bridge parapet. Looking over too, I saw, lying on the towing-path with her face turned up towards us, a woman, dead a day or two, and under thirty, as I guessed, poorly dressed in black. The feet were lightly crossed at the ankles, and the dark hair, all pushed back from the face, as though that had been the last action of her desperate hands, streamed over the ground. Dabbled all about her, was the water and the broken ice that had dropped from her dress, and had splashed as she was got out. The policeman who had just got her out, and the passing costermonger who had helped him, were standing near the body; the latter with that stare at it which I have likened to being at a waxwork exhibition without a catalogue; the former, looking over his stock, with professional stiffness and coolness, in the direction in which the bearers he had sent for were expected. So dreadfully forlorn, so dreadfully sad, so dreadfully mysterious, this spectacle of our dear sister here departed! A barge came up, breaking the floating ice and the silence, and a woman steered it. The man with the horse that towed it, cared so little for the body, that the stumbling hoofs had been among the hair, and the tow-rope had caught and turned the head, before our cry of horror took him to the bridle. At which sound the steering woman looked up at us on the bridge, with contempt unutterable, and then looking down at the body with a similar expression—as if it were made in another likeness from herself, had been informed with other passions, had been lost by other chances, had had another nature dragged down to perdition—steered a spurning streak of mud at it, and passed on.

A better experience, but also of the Morgue kind, in which chance happily made me useful in a slight degree, arose to my remembrance as I took my way by the Boulevard de Sébastopol to the brighter scenes of Paris.

The thing happened, say five-and-twenty years ago. I was a modest young uncommercial then, and timid and inexperienced. Many suns and winds have browned me in the line, but those were my pale days. Having newly taken the lease of a house in a certain distinguished metropolitan parish—a house which then appeared to me to be a frightfully first-class Family Mansion, involving awful responsibilities—I became the prey of a Beadle. I think the Beadle must have seen me going in or coming out, and must have observed that I tottered under the weight of my grandeur. Or he may have been in hiding under straw when I bought my first horse (in the desirable stable-yard attached to the first-class Family Mansion), and when the vendor remarked to me, in an original manner, on bringing him for approval, taking his cloth off and smacking him, 'There, Sir! *There's* a Orse!' And when I said gallantly, 'How much do you want for him?' and when the vendor said, 'No more than sixty guineas, from you,' and when I said smartly, 'Why not more than sixty from *me*?' And when he said crushingly, 'Because upon my soul and body he'd be considered cheap at seventy, by one who understood the subject—but you don't.'—I say, the Beadle may have been in hiding under straw, when this disgrace befell me, or he may have noted that I was too raw and young an Atlas to carry the first-class Family Mansion in a knowing manner. Be this as it may, the Beadle did what Melancholy did to the youth in Gray's Elegy—he marked me for his own. And the way in which the Beadle did it, was this: he summoned me as a Juryman on his Coroner's Inquests.

In my first feverish alarm I repaired 'for safety and for succour'—like those sagacious Northern shepherds who, having had no previous reason whatever to believe in young Norval, very prudently did not originate the hazardous idea of believing in him—to a deep householder. This profound man informed me that the Beadle counted on my buying him off; on my bribing him not to summon me; and that if I would attend an Inquest with a cheerful countenance, and profess alacrity in that branch of my country's service, the Beadle would be disheartened, and would give up the game.

I roused my energies, and the next time the wily Beadle summoned me, I went. The Beadle was the blankest Beadle I have ever looked on when I answered to my name; and his discomfiture gave me courage to go through with it.

We were impanelled to inquire concerning the death of a very little mite of a child. It was the old miserable story. Whether the mother had committed the minor offence of concealing the birth, or whether she had committed the major offence of killing the child, was the question on which we were wanted. We must commit her on one of the two issues.

The Inquest came off in the parish workhouse, and I have yet a lively impression that I was unanimously received by my brother Jurymen as a brother of the utmost conceivable insignificance. Also, that before we began, a broker who had lately cheated me fearfully in the matter of a pair of card-tables, was for the utmost rigour of the law. I remember that we sat in a sort of board-room, on such very large square horse-hair chairs that I wondered what race of Patagonians they were made for; and further, that an undertaker gave me his card when we were in the full moral freshness of having just been sworn, as 'an inhabitant that was newly come into the parish, and was likely to have a young family.' The case was then stated to us by the Coroner, and then we went down-stairs—led by the plotting Beadle—to view the body. From that day to this, the poor little figure, on which that sounding legal appellation was bestowed, has lain in the same place and with the same surroundings, to my thinking. In a kind of crypt devoted to the warehousing of the parochial coffins, and in the midst of a perfect Panorama of coffins of all sizes, it was stretched on a box; the mother had put it in her box—this box—almost as soon as it was born, and it had been presently found there. It had been opened, and neatly sewn up, and regarded from that point of view, it looked like a stuffed creature. It rested on a clean white cloth, with a surgical instrument or so at hand, and regarded from that point of view, it looked as if the cloth were 'laid,' and the Giant were coming to dinner. There was nothing repellent about the poor piece of innocence, and it demanded a mere form of looking at. So, we looked at an old pauper who was going about among the coffins with a foot rule, as if he were a case of Self-Measurement; and we looked at one another; and we said the place was well whitewashed anyhow; and then our conversational powers as a British Jury flagged, and the foreman said, 'All right, gentlemen? Back again, Mr. Beadle!'

The miserable young creature who had given birth to this child within a very few days, and who had cleaned the cold wet door-steps immediately afterwards, was brought before us when we resumed our horse-hair chairs, and was present during the proceedings. She had a horse-hair chair herself, being very weak and ill; and I remember how she turned to the unsympathetic nurse who attended her, and who might have been the figure-head of a pauper-ship, and how she hid her face and sobs and tears upon that wooden shoulder. I remember, too, how hard her mistress was upon her (she was a servant-of-all-work), and with what a cruel pertinacity that piece of Virtue spun her thread of evidence double, by intertwisting it with the sternest thread of construction. Smitten hard by the terrible low wail from the utterly friendless orphan girl, which never ceased during the whole inquiry, I took heart to ask this witness a question or two, which hopefully admitted of an answer that might give a favourable turn to the case. She made the turn as little favourable as it could be, but it did some good, and the Coroner, who was nobly patient and humane (he was the late Mr. Wakley), cast a look of strong encouragement in my direction. Then, we had the doctor who had made the examination, and the usual tests as to whether the child was born alive; but he was a timid, muddle-headed doctor, and got confused and contradictory, and wouldn't say this, and couldn't answer for that, and the immaculate broker was too much for him, and our side slid back again. However, I tried again, and the Coroner backed me again, for which I ever afterwards felt grateful to him as I do now to his memory; and we got another favourable turn, out of some other witness, some member of the family with a strong prepossession against the sinner; and I think we had the doctor back again; and I know that the Coroner summed up for our side, and that I and my British brothers turned round to discuss our verdict, and get ourselves into great difficulties with our large chairs and the broker. At that stage of the case I tried hard again, being convinced that I had cause for it; and at last we found for the minor offence of only concealing the birth; and the poor desolate creature, who had been taken out during our deliberation, being brought in again to be told of the verdict, then dropped upon her knees before us, with protestations that we were right—protestations among the most affecting that I have ever heard in my life—and was carried away insensible.

(In private conversation after this was all over, the Coroner showed me his reasons as a trained surgeon, for perceiving it to be impossible that the child could, under the most favourable circumstances, have drawn many breaths, in the very doubtful case of its having ever breathed at all; this, owing to the discovery of some foreign matter in the windpipe, quite irreconcilable with many moments of life.)

When the agonised girl had made those final protestations, I had seen her face, and it was in unison with her distracted heartbroken voice, and it was very moving. It certainly did not impress me by any beauty that it had, and if I ever see it again in another world I shall only know it by the help of some new sense or intelligence. But it came to me in my sleep that night, and I selfishly dismissed it in the most efficient way I could think of. I caused some extra care to be taken of her in the prison, and counsel to be retained for her defence when she was tried at the Old Bailey; and her sentence was lenient, and her history and conduct proved that it was right. In doing the little I did for her, I remember to have had the kind help of some gentle-hearted functionary to whom I addressed myself—but what functionary I have long forgotten—who I suppose was officially present at the Inquest.

I regard this as a very notable uncommercial experience, because this good came of a Beadle. And to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief, it is the only good that ever did come of a Beadle since the first Beadle put on his cocked-hat.

CHAPTER XX—BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

It came into my mind that I would recall in these notes a few of the many hostelries I have rested at in the course of my journeys; and, indeed, I had taken up my pen for the purpose, when I was baffled by an accidental circumstance. It was the having to leave off, to wish the owner of a certain bright face that looked in at my door, 'many happy returns of the day.' Thereupon a new thought came into my mind, driving its predecessor out, and I began to recall—instead of Inns—the birthdays that I have put up at, on my way to this present sheet of paper.

I can very well remember being taken out to visit some peach-faced creature in a blue sash, and shoes to correspond, whose life I supposed to consist entirely of birthdays. Upon seed-cake, sweet wine, and shining presents, that glorified young person seemed to me to be exclusively reared. At so early a stage of my travels did I assist at the anniversary of her nativity (and become enamoured of her), that I had not yet acquired the recondite knowledge that a birthday is the common property of all who are born, but supposed it to be a special gift bestowed by the favouring Heavens on that one distinguished infant. There was no other company, and we sat in a shady bower—under a table, as my better (or worse) knowledge leads me to believe—and were regaled with saccharine substances and liquids, until it was time to part. A bitter powder was administered to me next morning, and I was wretched. On the whole, a pretty accurate foreshadowing of my more mature experiences in such wise!

Then came the time when, inseparable from one's own birthday, was a certain sense of merit, a consciousness of well-earned distinction. When I regarded my birthday as a graceful achievement of my own, a monument of my perseverance, independence, and good sense, redounding greatly to my honour. This was at about the period when Olympia Squires became involved in the anniversary. Olympia was most beautiful (of course), and I loved her to that degree, that I used to be obliged to get out of my little bed in the night, expressly to exclaim to Solitude, 'O, Olympia Squires!'

Visions of Olympia, clothed entirely in sage-green, from which I infer a defectively educated taste on the part of her respected parents, who were necessarily unacquainted with the South Kensington Museum, still arise before me. Truth is sacred, and the visions are crowned by a shining white beaver bonnet, impossibly suggestive of a little feminine postboy. My memory presents a birthday when Olympia and I were taken by an unfeeling relative—some cruel uncle, or the like—to a slow torture called an Orrery. The terrible instrument was set up at the local Theatre, and I had expressed a profane wish in the morning that it was a Play: for which a serious aunt had probed my conscience deep, and my pocket deeper, by reclaiming a bestowed half-crown. It was a venerable and a shabby Orrery, at least one thousand stars and twenty-five comets behind the age. Nevertheless, it was awful. When the low-spirited gentleman with a wand said, ‘Ladies and gentlemen’ (meaning particularly Olympia and me), ‘the lights are about to be put out, but there is not the slightest cause for alarm,’ it was very alarming. Then the planets and stars began. Sometimes they wouldn’t come on, sometimes they wouldn’t go off, sometimes they had holes in them, and mostly they didn’t seem to be good likenesses. All this time the gentleman with the wand was going on in the dark (tapping away at the heavenly bodies between whiles, like a wearisome woodpecker), about a sphere revolving on its own axis eight hundred and ninety-seven thousand millions of times—or miles—in two hundred and sixty-three thousand five hundred and twenty-four millions of something elses, until I thought if this was a birthday it were better never to have been born. Olympia, also, became much depressed, and we both slumbered and woke cross, and still the gentleman was going on in the dark—whether up in the stars, or down on the stage, it would have been hard to make out, if it had been worth trying—cyphering away about planes of orbits, to such an infamous extent that Olympia, stung to madness, actually kicked me. A pretty birthday spectacle, when the lights were turned up again, and all the schools in the town (including the National, who had come in for nothing, and serve them right, for they were always throwing stones) were discovered with exhausted countenances, screwing their knuckles into their eyes, or clutching their heads of hair. A pretty birthday speech when Dr. Sleek of the City-Free bobbed up his powdered head in the stage-box, and said that before this assembly dispersed he really must beg to express his entire approval of a lecture as improving, as informing, as devoid of anything that could call a blush into the cheek of youth, as any it had ever been his lot to hear delivered. A pretty birthday altogether, when Astronomy couldn't leave poor Small Olympia Squires and me alone, but must put an end to our loves! For, we never got over it; the threadbare Orrery outwore our mutual tenderness; the man with the wand was too much for the boy with the bow.

When shall I disconnect the combined smells of oranges, brown paper, and straw, from those other birthdays at school, when the coming hamper casts its shadow before, and when a week of social harmony—shall I add of admiring and affectionate popularity—led up to that Institution? What noble sentiments were expressed to me in the days before the hamper, what vows of friendship were sworn to me, what exceedingly old knives were given me, what generous avowals of having been in the wrong emanated from else obstinate spirits once enrolled among my enemies! The birthday of the potted game and guava jelly, is still made special to me by the noble conduct of Bully Globson. Letters from home had mysteriously inquired whether I should be much surprised and disappointed if among the treasures in the coming hamper I discovered potted game, and guava jelly from the Western Indies. I had mentioned those hints in confidence to a few friends, and had promised to give away, as I now see reason to believe, a handsome covey of partridges potted, and about a hundredweight of guava jelly. It was now that Globson, Bully no more, sought me out in the playground. He was a big fat boy, with a big fat head and a big fat fist, and at the beginning of that Half had raised such a bump on my forehead that I couldn't get my hat of state on, to go to church. He said that after an interval of cool reflection (four months) he now felt this blow to have been an error of judgment, and that he wished to apologise for the same. Not only that, but holding down his big head between his two big hands in order that I might reach it conveniently, he requested me, as an act of justice which would appease his awakened conscience, to raise a retributive bump upon it, in the presence of witnesses. This handsome proposal I modestly declined, and he then embraced me, and we walked away conversing. We conversed respecting the West India Islands, and, in the pursuit of knowledge he asked me with much interest whether in the course of my reading I had met with any reliable description of the mode of manufacturing guava jelly; or whether I had ever happened to taste that conserve, which he had been given to understand was of rare excellence.

Seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty; and then with the waning months came an ever augmenting sense of the dignity of twenty-one. Heaven knows I had nothing to 'come into,' save the bare birthday, and yet I esteemed it as a great possession. I now and then paved the way to my state of dignity, by beginning a proposition with the casual words, 'say that a man of twenty-one,' or by the incidental assumption of a fact that could not sanely be disputed, as, 'for when a fellow comes to be a man of twenty-one.' I gave a party on the occasion. She was there. It is unnecessary to name Her, more particularly; She was older than I, and had pervaded every chink and crevice of my mind for three or four years. I had held volumes of Imaginary Conversations with her mother on the subject of our union, and I had written letters more in number than Horace Walpole's, to that discreet woman, soliciting her daughter's hand in marriage. I had never had the remotest intention of sending any of those letters; but to write them, and after a few days tear them up, had been a sublime occupation. Sometimes, I had begun 'Honoured Madam. I think that a lady gifted with those powers of observation which I know you to possess, and endowed with those womanly sympathies with the young and ardent which it were more than heresy to doubt, can scarcely have failed to discover that I love your adorable daughter, deeply, devotedly.' In less buoyant states of mind I had begun, 'Bear with me, Dear Madam, bear with a daring wretch who is about to make a surprising confession to you, wholly unanticipated by yourself, and which he beseeches you to commit to the flames as soon as you have become aware to what a towering height his mad ambition soars.' At other times—periods of profound mental depression, when She had gone out to balls where I was not—the draft took the affecting form of a paper to be left on my table after my departure to the confines of the globe. As thus: 'For Mrs. Onowenever, these lines when the hand that traces them shall be far away. I could not bear the daily torture of hopelessly loving the dear one whom I will not name. Broiling on the coast of Africa, or congealing on the shores of Greenland, I am far far better there than here.' (In this sentiment my cooler judgment perceives that the family of the beloved object would have most completely concurred.) 'If I ever emerge from obscurity, and my name is ever heralded by Fame, it will be for her dear sake. If I ever amass Gold, it will be to pour it at her feet. Should I on the other hand become the prey of Ravens—' I doubt if I ever quite made up my mind what was to be done in that affecting case; I tried 'then it is better so;' but not feeling convinced that it would be better so, I vacillated between leaving all else blank, which looked expressive and bleak, or winding up with 'Farewell!'

This fictitious correspondence of mine is to blame for the foregoing digression. I was about to pursue the statement that on my twenty-first birthday I gave a party, and She was there. It was a beautiful party. There was not a single animate or inanimate object connected with it (except the company and myself) that I had ever seen before. Everything was hired, and the mercenaries in attendance were profound strangers to me. Behind a door, in the crumby part of the night when wine-glasses were to be found in unexpected spots, I spoke to Her—spoke out to Her. What passed, I cannot as a man of honour reveal. She was all angelical gentleness, but a word was mentioned—a short and dreadful word of three letters, beginning with a B-which, as I remarked at the moment, 'scorched my brain.' She went away soon afterwards, and when the hollow throng (though to be sure it was no fault of theirs) dispersed, I issued forth, with a dissipated scorner, and, as I mentioned expressly to him, 'sought oblivion.' It was found, with a dreadful headache in it, but it didn't last; for, in the shaming light of next day's noon, I raised my heavy head in bed, looking back to the birthdays behind me, and tracking the circle by which I had got round, after all, to the bitter powder and the wretchedness again.

This reactionary powder (taken so largely by the human race I am inclined to regard it as the Universal Medicine once sought for in Laboratories) is capable of being made up in another form for birthday use. Anybody's long-lost brother will do ill to turn up on a birthday. If I had a long-lost brother I should know beforehand that he would prove a tremendous fraternal failure if he appointed to rush into my arms on my birthday. The first Magic Lantern I ever saw, was secretly and elaborately planned to be the great effect of a very juvenile birthday; but it wouldn't act, and its images were dim. My experience of adult birthday Magic Lanterns may possibly have been unfortunate, but has certainly been similar. I have an illustrative birthday in my eye: a birthday of my friend Flipfield, whose birthdays had long been remarkable as social successes. There had been nothing set or formal about them; Flipfield having been accustomed merely to say, two or three days before, 'Don't forget to come and dine, old boy, according to custom;'—I don't know what he said to the ladies he invited, but I may safely assume it *not* to have been 'old girl.' Those were delightful gatherings, and were enjoyed by all participators. In an evil hour, a long-lost brother of Flipfield’s came to light in foreign parts. Where he had been hidden, or what he had been doing, I don’t know, for Flipfield vaguely informed me that he had turned up ‘on the banks of the Ganges’—speaking of him as if he had been washed ashore. The Long-lost was coming home, and Flipfield made an unfortunate calculation, based on the well-known regularity of the P. and O. Steamers, that matters might be so contrived as that the Long-lost should appear in the nick of time on his (Flipfield’s) birthday. Delicacy commanded that I should repress the gloomy anticipations with which my soul became fraught when I heard of this plan. The fatal day arrived, and we assembled in force. Mrs. Flipfield senior formed an interesting feature in the group, with a blue-veined miniature of the late Mr. Flipfield round her neck, in an oval, resembling a tart from the pastrycook’s: his hair powdered, and the bright buttons on his coat, evidently very like. She was accompanied by Miss Flipfield, the eldest of her numerous family, who held her pocket-handkerchief to her bosom in a majestic manner, and spoke to all of us (none of us had ever seen her before), in pious and condoning tones, of all the quarrels that had taken place in the family, from her infancy—which must have been a long time ago—down to that hour. The Long-lost did not appear. Dinner, half an hour later than usual, was announced, and still no Long-lost. We sat down to table. The knife and fork of the Long-lost made a vacuum in Nature, and when the champagne came round for the first time, Flipfield gave him up for the day, and had them removed. It was then that the Long-lost gained the height of his popularity with the company; for my own part, I felt convinced that I loved him dearly. Flipfield’s dinners are perfect, and he is the easiest and best of entertainers. Dinner went on brilliantly, and the more the Long-lost didn’t come, the more comfortable we grew, and the more highly we thought of him. Flipfield’s own man (who has a regard for me) was in the act of struggling with an ignorant stipendiary, to wrest from him the wooden leg of a Guinea-fowl which he was pressing on my acceptance, and to substitute a slice of the breast, when a ringing at the door-bell suspended the strife. I looked round me, and perceived the sudden pallor which I knew my own visage revealed, reflected in the faces of the company. Flipfield hurriedly excused himself, went out, was absent for about a minute or two, and then re-entered with the Long-lost.

I beg to say distinctly that if the stranger had brought Mont Blanc with him, or had come attended by a retinue of eternal snows, he could not have chilled the circle to the marrow in a more efficient manner. Embodied Failure sat enthroned upon the Long-lost's brow, and pervaded him to his Long-lost boots. In vain Mrs. Flipfield senior, opening her arms, exclaimed, 'My Tom!' and pressed his nose against the counterfeit presentment of his other parent. In vain Miss Flipfield, in the first transports of this re-union, showed him a dint upon her maidenly cheek, and asked him if he remembered when he did that with the bellows? We, the bystanders, were overcome, but overcome by the palpable, undisguisable, utter, and total break-down of the Long-lost. Nothing he could have done would have set him right with us but his instant return to the Ganges. In the very same moments it became established that the feeling was reciprocal, and that the Long-lost detested us. When a friend of the family (not myself, upon my honour), wishing to set things going again, asked him, while he partook of soup—asked him with an amiability of intention beyond all praise, but with a weakness of execution open to defeat—what kind of river he considered the Ganges, the Long-lost, scowling at the friend of the family over his spoon, as one of an abhorrent race, replied, 'Why, a river of water, I suppose,' and spooned his soup into himself with a malignancy of hand and eye that blighted the amiable questioner. Not an opinion could be elicited from the Long-lost, in unison with the sentiments of any individual present. He contradicted Flipfield dead, before he had eaten his salmon. He had no idea—or affected to have no idea—that it was his brother's birthday, and on the communication of that interesting fact to him, merely wanted to make him out four years older than he was. He was an antipathetical being, with a peculiar power and gift of treading on everybody's tenderest place. They talk in America of a man's 'Platform.' I should describe the Platform of the Long-lost as a Platform composed of other people's corns, on which he had stumped his way, with all his might and main, to his present position. It is needless to add that Flipfield's great birthday went by the board, and that he was a wreck when I pretended at parting to wish him many happy returns of it.

There is another class of birthdays at which I have so frequently assisted, that I may assume such birthdays to be pretty well known to the human race. My friend Mayday's birthday is an example. The guests have no knowledge of one another except on that one day in the year, and are annually terrified for a week by the prospect of meeting one another again. There is a fiction among us that we have uncommon reasons for being particularly lively and spirited on the occasion, whereas deep despondency is no phrase for the expression of our feelings. But the wonderful feature of the case is, that we are in tacit accordance to avoid the subject—to keep it as far off as possible, as long as possible—and to talk about anything else, rather than the joyful event. I may even go so far as to assert that there is a dumb compact among us that we will pretend that it is NOT Mayday’s birthday. A mysterious and gloomy Being, who is said to have gone to school with Mayday, and who is so lank and lean that he seriously impugns the Dietary of the establishment at which they were jointly educated, always leads us, as I may say, to the block, by laying his grisly hand on a decanter and begging us to fill our glasses. The devices and pretences that I have seen put in practice to defer the fatal moment, and to interpose between this man and his purpose, are innumerable. I have known desperate guests, when they saw the grisly hand approaching the decanter, wildly to begin, without any antecedent whatsoever, ‘That reminds me—’ and to plunge into long stories. When at last the hand and the decanter come together, a shudder, a palpable perceptible shudder, goes round the table. We receive the reminder that it is Mayday’s birthday, as if it were the anniversary of some profound disgrace he had undergone, and we sought to comfort him. And when we have drunk Mayday’s health, and wished him many happy returns, we are seized for some moments with a ghastly blitheness, an unnatural levity, as if we were in the first flushed reaction of having undergone a surgical operation.

Birthdays of this species have a public as well as a private phase. My ‘boyhood’s home,’ Dullborough, presents a case in point. An Immortal Somebody was wanted in Dullborough, to dimple for a day the stagnant face of the waters; he was rather wanted by Dullborough generally, and much wanted by the principal hotel-keeper. The County history was looked up for a locally Immortal Somebody, but the registered Dullborough worthies were all Nobodies. In this state of things, it is hardly necessary to record that Dullborough did what every man does when he wants to write a book or deliver a lecture, and is provided with all the materials except a subject. It fell back upon Shakespeare.

No sooner was it resolved to celebrate Shakespeare’s birthday in Dullborough, than the popularity of the immortal bard became surprising. You might have supposed the first edition of his works to have been published last week, and enthusiastic Dullborough to have got half through them. (I doubt, by the way, whether it had ever done half that, but that is a private opinion.) A young gentleman with a sonnet, the retention of which for two years had enfeebled his mind and undermined his knees, got the sonnet into the Dullborough Warden, and gained flesh. Portraits of Shakespeare broke out in the bookshop windows, and our principal artist painted a large original portrait in oils for the decoration of the dining-room. It was not in the least like any of the other Portraits, and was exceedingly admired, the head being much swollen. At the Institution, the Debating Society discussed the new question, Was there sufficient ground for supposing that the Immortal Shakespeare ever stole deer? This was indignantly decided by an overwhelming majority in the negative; indeed, there was but one vote on the Poaching side, and that was the vote of the orator who had undertaken to advocate it, and who became quite an obnoxious character—particularly to the Dullborough 'roughs,' who were about as well informed on the matter as most other people. Distinguished speakers were invited down, and very nearly came (but not quite). Subscriptions were opened, and committees sat, and it would have been far from a popular measure in the height of the excitement, to have told Dullborough that it wasn't Stratford-upon-Avon. Yet, after all these preparations, when the great festivity took place, and the portrait, elevated aloft, surveyed the company as if it were in danger of springing a mine of intellect and blowing itself up, it did undoubtedly happen, according to the inscrutable mysteries of things, that nobody could be induced, not to say to touch upon Shakespeare, but to come within a mile of him, until the crack speaker of Dullborough rose to propose the immortal memory. Which he did with the perplexing and astonishing result that before he had repeated the great name half-a-dozen times, or had been upon his legs as many minutes, he was assailed with a general shout of 'Question.'

CHAPTER XXI—THE SHORT-TIMERS

‘Within so many yards of this Covent-garden lodging of mine, as within so many yards of Westminster Abbey, Saint Paul’s Cathedral, the Houses of Parliament, the Prisons, the Courts of Justice, all the Institutions that govern the land, I can find—*must* find, whether I will or no—in the open streets, shameful instances of neglect of children, intolerable toleration of the engenderment of paupers, idlers, thieves, races of wretched and destructive cripples both in body and mind, a misery to themselves, a misery to the community, a disgrace to civilisation, and an outrage on Christianity.—I know it to be a fact as easy of demonstration as any sum in any of the elementary rules of arithmetic, that if the State would begin its work and duty at the beginning, and would with the strong hand take those children out of the streets, while they are yet children, and wisely train them, it would make them a part of England’s glory, not its shame—of England’s strength, not its weakness—would raise good soldiers and sailors, and good citizens, and many great men, out of the seeds of its criminal population. Yet I go on bearing with the enormity as if it were nothing, and I go on reading the Parliamentary Debates as if they were something, and I concern myself far more about one railway-bridge across a public thoroughfare, than about a dozen generations of scrofula, ignorance, wickedness, prostitution, poverty, and felony. I can slip out at my door, in the small hours after any midnight, and, in one circuit of the purlieus of Covent-garden Market, can behold a state of infancy and youth, as vile as if a Bourbon sat upon the English throne; a great police force looking on with authority to do no more than worry and hunt the dreadful vermin into corners, and there leave them. Within the length of a few streets I can find a workhouse, mismanaged with that dull short-sighted obstinacy that its greatest opportunities as to the children it receives are lost, and yet not a farthing saved to any one. But the wheel goes round, and round, and round; and because it goes round—so I am told by the politest authorities—it goes well.’

Thus I reflected, one day in the Whitsun week last past, as I floated down the Thames among the bridges, looking—not inappropriately—at the drags that were hanging up at certain dirty stairs to hook the drowned out, and at the numerous conveniences provided to facilitate their tumbling in.

My object in that uncommercial journey called up another train of thought, and it ran as follows:

‘When I was at school, one of seventy boys, I wonder by what secret understanding our attention began to wander when we had pored over our books for some hours. I wonder by what ingenuity we brought on that confused state of mind when sense became nonsense, when figures wouldn’t work, when dead languages wouldn’t construe, when live languages wouldn’t be spoken, when memory wouldn’t come, when dulness and vacancy wouldn’t go. I cannot remember that we ever conspired to be sleepy after dinner, or that we ever particularly wanted to be stupid, and to have flushed faces and hot beating heads, or to find blank hopelessness and obscurity this afternoon in what would become perfectly clear and bright in the freshness of to-morrow morning. We suffered for these things, and they made us miserable enough. Neither do I remember that we ever bound ourselves by any secret oath or other solemn obligation, to find the seats getting too hard to be sat upon after a certain time; or to have intolerable twitches in our legs, rendering us aggressive and malicious with those members; or to be troubled with a similar uneasiness in our elbows, attended with fistic consequences to our neighbours; or to carry two pounds of lead in the chest, four pounds in the head, and several active blue-bottles in each ear. Yet, for certain, we suffered under those distresses, and were always charged at for labouring under them, as if we had brought them on, of our own deliberate act and deed. As to the mental portion of them being my own fault in my own case—I should like to ask any well-trained and experienced teacher, not to say psychologist. And as to the physical portion—I should like to ask PROFESSOR OWEN.’

It happened that I had a small bundle of papers with me, on what is called ‘The Half-Time System’ in schools. Referring to one of those papers I found that the indefatigable MR. CHADWICK had been beforehand with me, and had already asked Professor Owen: who had handsomely replied that I was not to blame, but that, being troubled with a skeleton, and having been constituted according to certain natural laws, I and my skeleton were unfortunately bound by those laws even in school—and had comported ourselves accordingly. Much comforted by the good Professor’s being on my side, I read on to discover whether the indefatigable Mr. Chadwick had taken up the mental part of my afflictions. I found that he had, and that he had gained on my behalf, SIR BENJAMIN BRODIE, SIR DAVID

WILKIE, SIR WALTER SCOTT, and the common sense of mankind. For which I beg Mr. Chadwick, if this should meet his eye, to accept my warm acknowledgments.

Up to that time I had retained a misgiving that the seventy unfortunates of whom I was one, must have been, without knowing it, leagued together by the spirit of evil in a sort of perpetual Guy Fawkes Plot, to grope about in vaults with dark lanterns after a certain period of continuous study. But now the misgiving vanished, and I floated on with a quieted mind to see the Half-Time System in action. For that was the purpose of my journey, both by steamboat on the Thames, and by very dirty railway on the shore. To which last institution, I beg to recommend the legal use of coke as engine-fuel, rather than the illegal use of coal; the recommendation is quite disinterested, for I was most liberally supplied with small coal on the journey, for which no charge was made. I had not only my eyes, nose, and ears filled, but my hat, and all my pockets, and my pocket-book, and my watch.

The V.D.S.C.R.C. (or Very Dirty and Small Coal Railway Company) delivered me close to my destination, and I soon found the Half-Time System established in spacious premises, and freely placed at my convenience and disposal.

What would I see first of the Half-Time System? I chose Military Drill. ‘Atten-tion!’ Instantly a hundred boys stood forth in the paved yard as one boy; bright, quick, eager, steady, watchful for the look of command, instant and ready for the word. Not only was there complete precision—complete accord to the eye and to the ear—but an alertness in the doing of the thing which deprived it, curiously, of its monotonous or mechanical character. There was perfect uniformity, and yet an individual spirit and emulation. No spectator could doubt that the boys liked it. With non-commissioned officers varying from a yard to a yard and a half high, the result could not possibly have been attained otherwise. They marched, and counter-marched, and formed in line and square, and company, and single file and double file, and performed a variety of evolutions; all most admirably. In respect of an air of enjoyable understanding of what they were about, which seems to be forbidden to English soldiers, the boys might have been small French troops. When they were dismissed and the broadsword exercise, limited to a much smaller number, succeeded, the boys who had no part in that new drill, either looked on attentively, or disported themselves in a gymnasium hard by. The steadiness of the broadsword boys on their short legs, and the firmness with which they sustained the different positions, was truly remarkable.

The broadsword exercise over, suddenly there was great excitement and a rush. Naval Drill!

In the corner of the ground stood a decked mimic ship, with real masts, yards, and sails—mainmast seventy feet high. At the word of command from the Skipper of this ship—a mahogany-faced Old Salt, with the indispensable quid in his cheek, the true nautical roll, and all wonderfully complete—the rigging was covered with a swarm of boys: one, the first to spring into the shrouds, outstripping all the others, and resting on the truck of the main-topmast in no time.

And now we stood out to sea, in a most amazing manner; the Skipper himself, the whole crew, the Uncommercial, and all hands present, implicitly believing that there was not a moment to lose, that the wind had that instant chopped round and sprung up fair, and that we were away on a voyage round the world. Get all sail upon her! With a will, my lads! Lay out upon the main-yard there! Look alive at the weather earring! Cheery, my boys! Let go the sheet, now! Stand by at the braces, you! With a will, aloft there! Belay, starboard watch! Fifer! Come aft, fifer, and give ’em a tune! Forthwith, springs up fifer, fife in hand—smallest boy ever seen—big lump on temple, having lately fallen down on a paving-stone—gives ’em a tune with all his might and main. Hoo-roar, fifer! With a will, my lads! Tip ’em a livelier one, fifer! Fifer tips ’em a livelier one, and excitement increases. Shake ’em out, my lads! Well done! There you have her! Pretty, pretty! Every rag upon her she can carry, wind right astarn, and ship cutting through the water fifteen knots an hour!

At this favourable moment of her voyage, I gave the alarm ‘A man overboard!’ (on the gravel), but he was immediately recovered, none the worse. Presently, I observed the Skipper overboard, but forbore to mention it, as he seemed in no wise disconcerted by the accident. Indeed, I soon came to regard the Skipper as an amphibious creature, for he was so perpetually plunging overboard to look up at the hands aloft, that he was oftener in the bosom of the ocean than on deck. His pride in his crew on those occasions was delightful, and the conventional unintelligibility of his orders in the ears of uncommercial landlubbers and loblolly boys, though they were always intelligible to the crew, was hardly less pleasant. But we couldn’t expect to go on in this way for ever; dirty weather came on, and then worse weather, and when we least expected it we got into tremendous difficulties. Screw loose in the chart perhaps—something certainly wrong somewhere—but here we were with breakers ahead, my lads, driving head on, slap on a lee shore! The Skipper broached this terrific announcement in such great agitation, that the small fifer, not fifeing now, but standing looking on near the wheel with his fife under his arm, seemed for the moment quite unboyed, though he speedily recovered his presence of mind. In the trying circumstances that ensued, the Skipper and the crew proved worthy of one another. The Skipper got dreadfully hoarse, but otherwise was master of the situation. The man at the wheel did wonders; all hands (except the fifer) were turned up to wear ship; and I observed the fifer, when we were at our greatest extremity, to refer to some document in his waistcoat-pocket, which I conceived to be his will. I think she struck. I was not myself conscious of any collision, but I saw the Skipper so very often washed overboard and back again, that I could only impute it to the beating of the ship. I am not enough of a seaman to describe the manoeuvres by which we were saved, but they made the Skipper very hot (French polishing his mahogany face) and the crew very nimble, and succeeded to a marvel; for, within a few minutes of the first alarm, we had wore ship and got her off, and were all a-tauto—which I felt very grateful for: not that I knew what it was, but that I perceived that we had not been all a-tauto lately. Land now appeared on our weather-bow, and we shaped our course for it, having the wind abeam, and frequently changing the man at the helm, in order that every man might have his spell. We worked into harbour under prosperous circumstances, and furled our sails, and squared our yards, and made all ship-shape and handsome, and so our voyage ended. When I complimented the Skipper at parting on his exertions and those of his gallant crew, he informed me that the latter were provided for the worst, all hands being taught to swim and dive; and he added that the able seaman at the main-topmast truck especially, could dive as deep as he could go high.

The next adventure that befell me in my visit to the Short-Timers, was the sudden apparition of a military band. I had been inspecting the hammocks of the crew of the good ship, when I saw with astonishment that several musical instruments, brazen and of great size, appeared to have suddenly developed two legs each, and to be trotting about a yard. And my astonishment was heightened when I observed a large drum, that had previously been leaning helpless against a wall, taking up a stout position on four legs. Approaching this drum and looking over it, I found two boys behind it (it was too much for one), and then I found that each of the brazen instruments had brought out a boy, and was going to discourse sweet sounds. The boys—not omitting the fifer, now playing a new instrument—were dressed in neat uniform, and stood up in a circle at their music-stands, like any other Military Band. They played a march or two, and then we had Cheer boys, Cheer, and then we had Yankee Doodle, and we finished, as in loyal duty bound, with God save the Queen. The band's proficiency was perfectly wonderful, and it was not at all wonderful that the whole body corporate of Short-Timers listened with faces of the liveliest interest and pleasure.

What happened next among the Short-Timers? As if the band had blown me into a great class-room out of their brazen tubes, *in* a great class-room I found myself now, with the whole choral force of Short-Timers singing the praises of a summer's day to the harmonium, and my small but highly respected friend the fifer blazing away vocally, as if he had been saving up his wind for the last twelvemonth; also the whole crew of the good ship Nameless swarming up and down the scale as if they had never swarmed up and down the rigging. This done, we threw our whole power into God bless the Prince of Wales, and blessed his Royal Highness to such an extent that, for my own Uncommercial part, I gasped again when it was over. The moment this was done, we formed, with surpassing freshness, into hollow squares, and fell to work at oral lessons as if we never did, and had never thought of doing, anything else.

Let a veil be drawn over the self-committals into which the Uncommercial Traveller would have been betrayed but for a discreet reticence, coupled with an air of absolute wisdom on the part of that artful personage. Take the square of five, multiply it by fifteen, divide it by three, deduct eight from it, add four dozen to it, give me the result in pence, and tell me how many eggs I could get for it at three farthings apiece. The problem is hardly stated, when a dozen small boys pour out answers. Some wide, some very nearly right, some worked as far as they go with such accuracy, as at once to show what link of the chain has been dropped in the hurry. For the moment, none are quite right; but behold a labouring spirit beating the buttons on its corporeal waistcoat, in a process of internal calculation, and knitting an accidental bump on its corporeal forehead in a concentration of mental arithmetic! It is my honourable friend (if he will allow me to call him so) the fifer. With right arm eagerly extended in token of being inspired with an answer, and with right leg foremost, the fifer solves the mystery: then recalls both arm and leg, and with bump in ambush awaits the next poser. Take the square of three, multiply it by seven, divide it by four, add fifty to it, take thirteen from it, multiply it by two, double it, give me the result in pence, and say how many halfpence. Wise as the serpent is the four feet of performer on the nearest approach to that instrument, whose right arm instantly appears, and quenches this arithmetical fire. Tell me something about Great Britain, tell me something about its principal productions, tell me something about its ports, tell me something about its seas and rivers, tell me something about coal, iron, cotton, timber, tin, and turpentine. The hollow square bristles with extended right arms; but ever faithful to fact is the fifer, ever wise as the serpent is the performer on that instrument, ever prominently buoyant and brilliant are all members of the band. I observe the player of the cymbals to dash at a sounding answer now and then rather than not cut in at all; but I take that to be in the way of his instrument. All these questions, and many such, are put on the spur of the moment, and by one who has never examined these boys. The Uncommercial, invited to add another, falteringly demands how many birthdays a man born on the twenty-ninth of February will have had on completing his fiftieth year? A general perception of trap and pitfall instantly arises, and the fifer is seen to retire behind the corduroys of his next neighbours, as perceiving special necessity for collecting himself and communing with his mind. Meanwhile, the wisdom of the serpent suggests that the man will have had only one birthday in all that time, for how can any man have more than one, seeing that he is born once and dies once? The blushing Uncommercial stands corrected, and amends the formula. Pondering ensues, two or three wrong answers are offered, and Cymbals strikes up ‘Six!’ but doesn’t know why. Then modestly emerging from his Academic Grove of corduroys appears the fifer, right arm extended, right leg foremost, bump irradiated. ‘Twelve, and two over!’

The feminine Short-Timers passed a similar examination, and very creditably too. Would have done better perhaps, with a little more geniality on the part of their pupil-teacher; for a cold eye, my young friend, and a hard, abrupt manner, are not by any means the powerful engines that your innocence supposes them to be. Both girls and boys wrote excellently, from copy and dictation; both could cook; both could mend their own clothes; both could clean up everything about them in an orderly and skilful way, the girls having womanly household knowledge superadded. Order and method began in the songs of the Infant School which I visited likewise, and they were even in their dwarf degree to be found in the Nursery, where the Uncommercial walking-stick was carried off with acclamations, and where ‘the Doctor’—a medical gentleman of two, who took his degree on the night when he was found at an apothecary’s door—did the honours of the establishment with great urbanity and gaiety.

These have long been excellent schools; long before the days of the Short-Time. I first saw them, twelve or fifteen years ago. But since the introduction of the Short-Time system it has been proved here that eighteen hours a week of book-learning are more profitable than thirty-six, and that the pupils are far quicker and brighter than of yore. The good influences of music on the whole body of children have likewise been surprisingly proved. Obviously another of the immense advantages of the Short-Time system to the cause of good education is the great diminution of its cost, and of the period of time over which it extends. The last is a most important consideration, as poor parents are always impatient to profit by their children’s labour.

It will be objected: Firstly, that this is all very well, but special local advantages and special selection of children must be necessary to such success. Secondly, that this is all very well, but must be very expensive. Thirdly, that this is all very well, but we have no proof of the results, sir, no proof.

On the first head of local advantages and special selection. Would Limehouse Hole be picked out for the site of a Children’s Paradise? Or would the legitimate and illegitimate pauper children of the long-shore population of such a riverside district, be regarded as unusually favourable specimens to work with? Yet these schools are at Limehouse, and are the Pauper Schools of the Stepney Pauper Union.

On the second head of expense. Would sixpence a week be considered a very large cost for the education of each pupil, including all salaries of teachers and rations of teachers? But supposing the cost were not sixpence a week, not fivepence? it is FOURPENCE-HALFPENNY.

On the third head of no proof, sir, no proof. Is there any proof in the facts that Pupil Teachers more in number, and more highly qualified, have been produced here under the Short-Time system than under the Long-Time system? That the Short-Timers, in a writing competition, beat the Long-Timers of a first-class National School? That the sailor-boys are in such demand for merchant ships, that whereas, before they were trained, 10*l.* premium used to be given with each boy—too often to some greedy brute of a drunken skipper, who disappeared before the term of apprenticeship was out, if the ill-used boy didn't—captains of the best character now take these boys more than willingly, with no premium at all? That they are also much esteemed in the Royal Navy, which they prefer, 'because everything is so neat and clean and orderly'? Or, is there any proof in Naval captains writing 'Your little fellows are all that I can desire'? Or, is there any proof in such testimony as this: 'The owner of a vessel called at the school, and said that as his ship was going down Channel on her last voyage, with one of the boys from the school on board, the pilot said, "It would be as well if the royal were lowered; I wish it were down." Without waiting for any orders, and unobserved by the pilot, the lad, whom they had taken on board from the school, instantly mounted the mast and lowered the royal, and at the next glance of the pilot to the masthead, he perceived that the sail had been let down. He exclaimed, "Who's done that job?" The owner, who was on board, said, "That was the little fellow whom I put on board two days ago." The pilot immediately said, "Why, where could he have been brought up?" The boy had never seen the sea or been on a real ship before'? Or, is there any proof in these boys being in greater demand for Regimental Bands than the Union can meet? Or, in ninety-eight of them having gone into Regimental Bands in three years? Or, in twelve of them being in the band of one regiment? Or, in the colonel of that regiment writing, 'We want six more boys; they are excellent lads'? Or, in one of the boys having risen to be band-corporal in the same regiment? Or, in employers of all kinds chorusing, 'Give us drilled boys, for they are prompt, obedient, and punctual'? Other proofs I have myself beheld with these Uncommercial eyes, though I do not regard myself as having a right to relate in what social positions they have seen respected men and women who were once pauper children of the Stepney Union.

Into what admirable soldiers others of these boys have the capabilities for being turned, I need not point out. Many of them are always ambitious of military service; and once upon a time when an old boy came back to see the old place, a cavalry soldier all complete, *with his spurs on*, such a yearning broke out to get into cavalry regiments and wear those sublime appendages, that it was one of the greatest excitements ever known in the school. The girls make excellent domestic servants, and at certain periods come back, a score or two at a time, to see the old building, and to take tea with the old teachers, and to hear the old band, and to see the old ship with her masts towering up above the neighbouring roofs and chimneys. As to the physical health of these schools, it is so exceptionally remarkable (simply because the sanitary regulations are as good as the other educational arrangements), that when Mr. TUFNELL, the Inspector, first stated it in a report, he was supposed, in spite of his high character, to have been betrayed into some extraordinary mistake or exaggeration. In the moral health of these schools—where corporal punishment is unknown—Truthfulness stands high. When the ship was first erected, the boys were forbidden to go aloft, until the nets, which are now always there, were stretched as a precaution against accidents. Certain boys, in their eagerness, disobeyed the injunction, got out of window in the early daylight, and climbed to the masthead. One boy unfortunately fell, and was killed. There was no clue to the others; but all the boys were assembled, and the chairman of the Board addressed them. 'I promise nothing; you see what a dreadful thing has happened; you know what a grave offence it is that has led to such a consequence; I cannot say what will be done with the offenders; but, boys, you have been trained here, above all things, to respect the truth. I want the truth. Who are the delinquents?' Instantly, the whole number of boys concerned, separated from the rest, and stood out.

Now, the head and heart of that gentleman (it is needless to say, a good head and a good heart) have been deeply interested in these schools for many years, and are so still; and the establishment is very fortunate in a most admirable master, and moreover the schools of the Stepney Union cannot have got to be what they are, without the Stepney Board of Guardians having been earnest and humane men strongly imbued with a sense of their responsibility. But what one set of men can do in this wise, another set of men can do; and this is a noble example to all other Bodies and Unions, and a noble example to the State. Followed, and enlarged upon by its enforcement on bad parents, it would clear London streets of the most terrible objects they smite the sight with—myriads of little children who awfully reverse Our Saviour’s words, and are not of the Kingdom of Heaven, but of the Kingdom of Hell.

Clear the public streets of such shame, and the public conscience of such reproach? Ah! Almost prophetic, surely, the child’s jingle:

When will that be,
Say the bells of Step-ney!

CHAPTER XXII—BOUND FOR THE GREAT SALT LAKE

Behold me on my way to an Emigrant Ship, on a hot morning early in June. My road lies through that part of London generally known to the initiated as 'Down by the Docks.' Down by the Docks, is home to a good many people—to too many, if I may judge from the overflow of local population in the streets—but my nose insinuates that the number to whom it is Sweet Home might be easily counted. Down by the Docks, is a region I would choose as my point of embarkation aboard ship if I were an emigrant. It would present my intention to me in such a sensible light; it would show me so many things to be run away from.

Down by the Docks, they eat the largest oysters and scatter the roughest oyster-shells, known to the descendants of Saint George and the Dragon. Down by the Docks, they consume the slimiest of shell-fish, which seem to have been scraped off the copper bottoms of ships. Down by the Docks, the vegetables at green-grocers' doors acquire a saline and a scaly look, as if they had been crossed with fish and seaweed. Down by the Docks, they 'board seamen' at the eating-houses, the public-houses, the slop-shops, the coffee-shops, the tally-shops, all kinds of shops mentionable and unmentionable—board them, as it were, in the piratical sense, making them bleed terribly, and giving no quarter. Down by the Docks, the seamen roam in mid-street and mid-day, their pockets inside out, and their heads no better. Down by the Docks, the daughters of wave-ruling Britannia also rove, clad in silken attire, with uncovered tresses streaming in the breeze, bandanna kerchiefs floating from their shoulders, and crinoline not wanting. Down by the Docks, you may hear the Incomparable Joe Jackson sing the Standard of England, with a hornpipe, any night; or any day may see at the waxwork, for a penny and no waiting, him as killed the policeman at Acton and suffered for it. Down by the Docks, you may buy polonies, saveloys, and sausage preparations various, if you are not particular what they are made of besides seasoning. Down by the Docks, the children of Israel creep into any gloomy cribs and entries they can hire, and hang slops there—pewter watches, sou'-wester hats, waterproof overalls—'firtht rate articleth, Thjack.' Down by the Docks, such dealers exhibiting on a frame a complete nautical suit without the refinement of a waxen visage in the hat, present the imaginary wearer as drooping at the yard-arm, with his seafaring and earthfaring troubles over. Down by the Docks, the placards in the shops apostrophise the customer, knowing him familiarly beforehand, as, 'Look here, Jack!' 'Here's your sort, my lad!' 'Try our sea-going mixed, at two and nine!' 'The right kit for the British tar!' 'Ship ahoy!' 'Splice the main-brace, brother!' 'Come, cheer up, my lads. We've the best liquors here, And you'll find something new In our wonderful Beer!' Down by the Docks, the pawnbroker lends money on Union-Jack pocket-handkerchiefs, on watches with little ships pitching fore and aft on the dial, on telescopes, nautical instruments in cases, and such-like. Down by the Docks, the apothecary sets up in business on the wretchedest scale—chiefly on lint and plaster for the strapping of wounds—and with no bright bottles, and with no little drawers. Down by the Docks, the shabby undertaker's shop will bury you for next to nothing, after the Malay or Chinaman has stabbed you for nothing at all: so you can hardly hope to make a cheaper end. Down by the Docks, anybody drunk will quarrel with anybody drunk or sober, and everybody else will have a hand in it, and on the shortest notice you may revolve in a whirlpool of red shirts, shaggy beards, wild heads of hair, bare tattooed arms, Britannia's daughters, malice, mud, maundering, and madness. Down by the Docks, scraping fiddles go in the public-houses all day long, and, shrill above their din and all the din, rises the screeching of innumerable parrots brought from foreign parts, who appear to be very much astonished by what they find on these native shores of ours. Possibly the parrots don't know, possibly they do, that Down by the Docks is the road to the Pacific Ocean, with its lovely islands, where the savage girls plait flowers, and the savage boys carve cocoa-nut shells, and the grim blind idols muse in their shady groves to exactly the same purpose as the priests and chiefs. And possibly the parrots don't know, possibly they do, that the noble savage is a wearisome impostor wherever he is, and has five hundred thousand volumes of indifferent rhyme, and no reason, to answer for.

Shadwell church! Pleasant whispers of there being a fresher air down the river than down by the Docks, go pursuing one another, playfully, in and out of the openings in its spire. Gigantic in the basin just beyond the church, looms my Emigrant Ship: her name, the Amazon. Her figure-head is not disfigured as those beauteous founders of the race of strong-minded women are fabled to have been, for the convenience of drawing the bow; but I sympathise with the carver:

A flattering carver who made it his care
To carve busts as they ought to be—not as they were.

My Emigrant Ship lies broadside-on to the wharf. Two great gangways made of spars and planks connect her with the wharf; and up and down these gangways, perpetually crowding to and fro and in and out, like ants, are the Emigrants who are going to sail in my Emigrant Ship. Some with cabbages, some with loaves of bread, some with cheese and butter, some with milk and beer, some with boxes, beds, and bundles, some with babies—nearly all with children—nearly all with bran-new tin cans for their daily allowance of water, uncomfortably suggestive of a tin flavour in the drink. To and fro, up and down, aboard and ashore, swarming here and there and everywhere, my Emigrants. And still as the Dock-Gate swings upon its hinges, cabs appear, and carts appear, and vans appear, bringing more of my Emigrants, with more cabbages, more loaves, more cheese and butter, more milk and beer, more boxes, beds, and bundles, more tin cans, and on those shipping investments accumulated compound interest of children.

I go aboard my Emigrant Ship. I go first to the great cabin, and find it in the usual condition of a Cabin at that pass. Perspiring landsmen, with loose papers, and with pens and inkstands, pervade it; and the general appearance of things is as if the late Mr. Amazon’s funeral had just come home from the cemetery, and the disconsolate Mrs. Amazon’s trustees found the affairs in great disorder, and were looking high and low for the will. I go out on the poop-deck, for air, and surveying the emigrants on the deck below (indeed they are crowded all about me, up there too), find more pens and inkstands in action, and more papers, and interminable complication respecting accounts with individuals for tin cans and what not. But nobody is in an ill-temper, nobody is the worse for drink, nobody swears an oath or uses a coarse word, nobody appears depressed, nobody is weeping, and down upon the deck in every corner where it is possible to find a few square feet to kneel, crouch, or lie in, people, in every unsuitable attitude for writing, are writing letters.

Now, I have seen emigrant ships before this day in June. And these people are so strikingly different from all other people in like circumstances whom I have ever seen, that I wonder aloud, ‘What *would* a stranger suppose these emigrants to be!’

The vigilant, bright face of the weather-browned captain of the Amazon is at my shoulder, and he says, ‘What, indeed! The most of these came aboard yesterday evening. They came from various parts of England in small parties that had never seen one another before. Yet they had not been a couple of hours on board, when they established their own police, made their own regulations, and set their own watches at all the hatchways. Before nine o’clock, the ship was as orderly and as quiet as a man-of-war.’

I looked about me again, and saw the letter-writing going on with the most curious composure. Perfectly abstracted in the midst of the crowd; while great casks were swinging aloft, and being lowered into the hold; while hot agents were hurrying up and down, adjusting the interminable accounts; while two hundred strangers were searching everywhere for two hundred other strangers, and were asking questions about them of two hundred more; while the children played up and down all the steps, and in and out among all the people’s legs, and were beheld, to the general dismay, toppling over all the dangerous places; the letter-writers wrote on calmly. On the starboard side of the ship, a grizzled man dictated a long letter to another grizzled man in an immense fur cap: which letter was of so profound a quality, that it became necessary for the amanuensis at intervals to take off his fur cap in both his hands, for the ventilation of his brain, and stare at him who dictated, as a man of many mysteries who was worth looking at. On the lar-board side, a woman had covered a belaying-pin with a white cloth to make a neat desk of it, and was sitting on a little box, writing with the deliberation of a bookkeeper. Down, upon her breast on the planks of the deck at this woman’s feet, with her head diving in under a beam of the bulwarks on that side, as an eligible place of refuge for her sheet of paper, a neat and pretty girl wrote for a good hour (she fainted at last), only rising to the surface occasionally for a dip of ink. Alongside the boat, close to me on the poop-deck, another girl, a fresh, well-grown country girl, was writing another letter on the bare deck. Later in the day, when this self-same boat was filled with a choir who sang glees and catches for a long time, one of the singers, a girl, sang her part mechanically all the while, and wrote a letter in the bottom of the boat while doing so.

‘A stranger would be puzzled to guess the right name for these people, Mr. Uncommercial,’ says the captain.

‘Indeed he would.’

‘If you hadn’t known, could you ever have supposed—?’

‘How could I! I should have said they were in their degree, the pick and flower of England.’

‘So should I,’ says the captain.

‘How many are they?’

‘Eight hundred in round numbers.’

I went between-decks, where the families with children swarmed in the dark, where unavoidable confusion had been caused by the last arrivals, and where the confusion was increased by the little preparations for dinner that were going on in each group. A few women here and there, had got lost, and were laughing at it, and asking their way to their own people, or out on deck again. A few of the poor children were crying; but otherwise the universal cheerfulness was amazing. ‘We shall shake down by to-morrow.’ ‘We shall come all right in a day or so.’ ‘We shall have more light at sea.’ Such phrases I heard everywhere, as I groped my way among chests and barrels and beams and unstowed cargo and ring-bolts and Emigrants, down to the lower-deck, and thence up to the light of day again, and to my former station.

Surely, an extraordinary people in their power of self-abstraction! All the former letter-writers were still writing calmly, and many more letter-writers had broken out in my absence. A boy with a bag of books in his hand and a slate under his arm, emerged from below, concentrated himself in my neighbourhood (espying a convenient skylight for his purpose), and went to work at a sum as if he were stone deaf. A father and mother and several young children, on the main deck below me, had formed a family circle close to the foot of the crowded restless gangway, where the children made a nest for themselves in a coil of rope, and the father and mother, she suckling the youngest, discussed family affairs as peaceably as if they were in perfect retirement. I think the most noticeable characteristic in the eight hundred as a mass, was their exemption from hurry.

Eight hundred what? ‘Geese, villain?’ EIGHT HUNDRED MORMONS. I, Uncommercial Traveller for the firm of Human Interest Brothers, had come aboard this Emigrant Ship to see what Eight hundred

Latter-day Saints were like, and I found them (to the rout and overthrow of all my expectations) like what I now describe with scrupulous exactness.

The Mormon Agent who had been active in getting them together, and in making the contract with my friends the owners of the ship to take them as far as New York on their way to the Great Salt Lake, was pointed out to me. A compactly-made handsome man in black, rather short, with rich brown hair and beard, and clear bright eyes. From his speech, I should set him down as American. Probably, a man who had 'knocked about the world' pretty much. A man with a frank open manner, and unshrinking look; withal a man of great quickness. I believe he was wholly ignorant of my Uncommercial individuality, and consequently of my immense Uncommercial importance.

UNCOMMERCIAL. These are a very fine set of people you have brought together here.

MORMON AGENT. Yes, sir, they are a *very* fine set of people.

UNCOMMERCIAL (looking about). Indeed, I think it would be difficult to find Eight hundred people together anywhere else, and find so much beauty and so much strength and capacity for work among them.

MORMON AGENT (not looking about, but looking steadily at Uncommercial). I think so.—We sent out about a thousand more, yes'day, from Liverpool.

UNCOMMERCIAL. You are not going with these emigrants?

MORMON AGENT. No, sir. I remain.

UNCOMMERCIAL. But you have been in the Mormon Territory?

MORMON AGENT. Yes; I left Utah about three years ago.

UNCOMMERCIAL. It is surprising to me that these people are all so cheery, and make so little of the immense distance before them.

MORMON AGENT. Well, you see; many of 'em have friends out at Utah, and many of 'em look forward to meeting friends on the way.

UNCOMMERCIAL. On the way?

MORMON AGENT. This way 'tis. This ship lands 'em in New York City. Then they go on by rail right away beyond St. Louis, to that part of the Banks of the Missouri where they strike the Plains. There, waggons from the settlement meet 'em to bear 'em company on their journey 'cross-twelve hundred miles about. Industrious people who come out to the settlement soon get waggons of their own, and so the friends of some of these will come down in their own waggons to meet ’em. They look forward to that, greatly.

UNCOMMERCIAL. On their long journey across the Desert, do you arm them?

MORMON AGENT. Mostly you would find they have arms of some kind or another already with them. Such as had not arms we should arm across the Plains, for the general protection and defence.

UNCOMMERCIAL. Will these waggons bring down any produce to the Missouri?

MORMON AGENT. Well, since the war broke out, we’ve taken to growing cotton, and they’ll likely bring down cotton to be exchanged for machinery. We want machinery. Also we have taken to growing indigo, which is a fine commodity for profit. It has been found that the climate on the further side of the Great Salt Lake suits well for raising indigo.

UNCOMMERCIAL. I am told that these people now on board are principally from the South of England?

MORMON AGENT. And from Wales. That’s true.

UNCOMMERCIAL. Do you get many Scotch?

MORMON AGENT. Not many.

UNCOMMERCIAL. Highlanders, for instance?

MORMON AGENT. No, not Highlanders. They ain’t interested enough in universal brotherhood and peace and good will.

UNCOMMERCIAL. The old fighting blood is strong in them?

MORMON AGENT. Well, yes. And besides; they’ve no faith.

UNCOMMERCIAL (who has been burning to get at the Prophet Joe Smith, and seems to discover an opening). Faith in—!

MORMON AGENT (far too many for Uncommercial). Well.—In anything!

Similarly on this same head, the Uncommercial underwent discomfiture from a Wiltshire labourer: a simple, fresh-coloured farm-labourer, of eight-and-thirty, who at one time stood beside him looking on at new arrivals, and with whom he held this dialogue:

UNCOMMERCIAL. Would you mind my asking you what part of the country you come from?

WILTSHIRE. Not a bit. Theer! (exultingly) I’ve worked all my life o’ Salisbury Plain, right under the shadder o’ Stonehenge. You mightn’t think it, but I haive.

UNCOMMERCIAL. And a pleasant country too.

WILTSHIRE. Ah! ’Tis a pleasant country.

UNCOMMERCIAL. Have you any family on board?

WILTSHIRE. Two children, boy and gal. I am a widderer, *I* am, and I’m going out alonger my boy and gal. That’s my gal, and she’s a fine gal o’ sixteen (pointing out the girl who is writing by the boat). I’ll go and fetch my boy. I’d like to show you my boy. (Here Wiltshire disappears, and presently comes back with a big, shy boy of twelve, in a superabundance of boots, who is not at all glad to be presented.) He is a fine boy too, and a boy fur to work! (Boy having undutifully bolted, Wiltshire drops him.)

UNCOMMERCIAL. It must cost you a great deal of money to go so far, three strong.

WILTSHIRE. A power of money. Theer! Eight shillen a week, eight shillen a week, eight shillen a week, put by out of the week’s wages for ever so long.

UNCOMMERCIAL. I wonder how you did it.

WILTSHIRE (recognising in this a kindred spirit). See theer now! I wonder how I done it! But what with a bit o’ subscription heer, and what with a bit o’ help theer, it were done at last, though I don’t hardly know how. Then it were unfort’net for us, you see, as we got kep’ in Bristol so long—nigh a fortnight, it were—on accounts of a mistake wi’ Brother Halliday. Swaller’d up money, it did, when we might have come straight on.

UNCOMMERCIAL (delicately approaching Joe Smith). You are of the Mormon religion, of course?

WILTSHIRE (confidently). O yes, I’m a Mormon. (Then reflectively.) I’m a Mormon. (Then, looking round the ship, feigns to descry a particular friend in an empty spot, and evades the Uncommercial for evermore.)

After a noontide pause for dinner, during which my Emigrants were nearly all between-decks, and the Amazon looked deserted, a general muster took place. The muster was for the ceremony of passing the Government Inspector and the Doctor. Those authorities held their temporary state amidships, by a cask or two; and, knowing that the whole Eight hundred emigrants must come face to face with them, I took my station behind the two. They knew nothing whatever of me, I believe, and my testimony to the unpretending gentleness and good nature with which they discharged their duty, may be of the greater worth. There was not the slightest flavour of the Circumlocution Office about their proceedings.

The emigrants were now all on deck. They were densely crowded aft, and swarmed upon the poop-deck like bees. Two or three Mormon agents stood ready to hand them on to the Inspector, and to hand them forward when they had passed. By what successful means, a special aptitude for organisation had been infused into these people, I am, of course, unable to report. But I know that, even now, there was no disorder, hurry, or difficulty.

All being ready, the first group are handed on. That member of the party who is entrusted with the passenger-ticket for the whole, has been warned by one of the agents to have it ready, and here it is in his hand. In every instance through the whole eight hundred, without an exception, this paper is always ready.

INSPECTOR (reading the ticket). Jessie Jobson, Sophronia Jobson, Jessie Jobson again, Matilda Jobson, William Jobson, Jane Jobson, Matilda Jobson again, Brigham Jobson, Leonardo Jobson, and Orson Jobson. Are you all here? (glancing at the party, over his spectacles).

JESSIE JOBSON NUMBER TWO. All here, sir.

This group is composed of an old grandfather and grandmother, their married son and his wife, and *their* family of children. Orson Jobson is a little child asleep in his mother's arms. The Doctor, with a kind word or so, lifts up the corner of the mother's shawl, looks at the child's face, and touches the little clenched hand. If we were all as well as Orson Jobson, doctoring would be a poor profession.

INSPECTOR. Quite right, Jessie Jobson. Take your ticket, Jessie, and pass on.

And away they go. Mormon agent, skilful and quiet, hands them on. Mormon agent, skilful and quiet, hands next party up.

INSPECTOR (reading ticket again). Susannah Cleverly and William Cleverly. Brother and sister, eh?

SISTER (young woman of business, hustling slow brother). Yes, sir.

INSPECTOR. Very good, Susannah Cleverly. Take your ticket, Susannah, and take care of it.

And away they go.

INSPECTOR (taking ticket again). Sampson Dibble and Dorothy Dibble (surveying a very old couple over his spectacles, with some surprise). Your husband quite blind, Mrs. Dibble?

MRS. DIBBLE. Yes, sir, he be stone-blind.

MR. DIBBLE (addressing the mast). Yes, sir, I be stone-blind.

INSPECTOR. That’s a bad job. Take your ticket, Mrs. Dibble, and don’t lose it, and pass on.

Doctor taps Mr. Dibble on the eyebrow with his forefinger, and away they go.

INSPECTOR (taking ticket again). Anastatia Weedle.

ANASTATIA (a pretty girl, in a bright Garibaldi, this morning elected by universal suffrage the Beauty of the Ship). That is me, sir.

INSPECTOR. Going alone, Anastatia?

ANASTATIA (shaking her curls). I am with Mrs. Jobson, sir, but I’ve got separated for the moment.

INSPECTOR. Oh! You are with the Jobsons? Quite right. That’ll do, Miss Weedle. Don’t lose your ticket.

Away she goes, and joins the Jobsons who are waiting for her, and stoops and kisses Brigham Jobson—who appears to be considered too young for the purpose, by several Mormons rising twenty, who are looking on. Before her extensive skirts have departed from the casks, a decent widow stands there with four children, and so the roll goes.

The faces of some of the Welsh people, among whom there were many old persons, were certainly the least intelligent. Some of these emigrants would have bungled sorely, but for the directing hand that was always ready. The intelligence here was unquestionably of a low order, and the heads were of a poor type. Generally the case was the reverse. There were many worn faces bearing traces of patient poverty and hard work, and there was great steadiness of purpose and much undemonstrative self-respect among this class. A few young men were going singly. Several girls were going, two or three together. These latter I found it very difficult to refer back, in my mind, to their relinquished homes and pursuits. Perhaps they were more like country milliners, and pupil teachers rather tawdrily dressed, than any other classes of young women. I noticed, among many little ornaments worn, more than one photograph-brooch of the Princess of Wales, and also of the late Prince Consort. Some single women of from thirty to forty, whom one might suppose to be embroiderers, or straw-bonnet-makers, were obviously going out in quest of husbands, as finer ladies go to India. That they had any distinct notions of a plurality of husbands or wives, I do not believe. To suppose the family groups of whom the majority of emigrants were composed, polygamically possessed, would be to suppose an absurdity, manifest to any one who saw the fathers and mothers.

I should say (I had no means of ascertaining the fact) that most familiar kinds of handicraft trades were represented here. Farm-labourers, shepherds, and the like, had their full share of representation, but I doubt if they preponderated. It was interesting to see how the leading spirit in the family circle never failed to show itself, even in the simple process of answering to the names as they were called, and checking off the owners of the names. Sometimes it was the father, much oftener the mother, sometimes a quick little girl second or third in order of seniority. It seemed to occur for the first time to some heavy fathers, what large families they had; and their eyes rolled about, during the calling of the list, as if they half misdoubted some other family to have been smuggled into their own. Among all the fine handsome children, I observed but two with marks upon their necks that were probably scrofulous. Out of the whole number of emigrants, but one old woman was temporarily set aside by the doctor, on suspicion of fever; but even she afterwards obtained a clean bill of health.

When all had ‘passed,’ and the afternoon began to wear on, a black box became visible on deck, which box was in charge of certain personages also in black, of whom only one had the conventional air of an itinerant preacher. This box contained a supply of hymn-books, neatly printed and got up, published at Liverpool, and also in London at the ‘Latter-Day Saints’ Book Depôt, 30, Florence-street.’ Some copies were handsomely bound; the plainer were the more in request, and many were bought. The title ran: ‘Sacred Hymns and Spiritual Songs for the Church of Jesus Church of Latter-Day Saints.’ The Preface, dated Manchester, 1840, ran thus:- ‘The Saints in this country have been very desirous for a Hymn Book adapted to their faith and worship, that they might sing the truth with an understanding heart, and express their praise, joy, and gratitude in songs adapted to the New and Everlasting Covenant. In accordance with their wishes, we have selected the following volume, which we hope will prove acceptable until a greater variety can be added. With sentiments of high consideration and esteem, we subscribe ourselves your brethren in the New and Everlasting Covenant, BRIGHAM YOUNG, PARLEY P. PRATT, JOHN TAYLOR.’ From this book—by no means explanatory to myself of the New and Everlasting Covenant, and not at all making my heart an understanding one on the subject of that mystery—a hymn was sung, which did not attract any great amount of attention, and was supported by a rather select circle. But the choir in the boat was very popular and pleasant; and there was to have been a Band, only the Cornet was late in coming on board. In the course of the afternoon, a mother appeared from shore, in search of her daughter, ‘who had run away with the Mormons.’ She received every assistance from the Inspector, but her daughter was not found to be on board. The saints did not seem to me, particularly interested in finding her.

Towards five o’clock, the galley became full of tea-kettles, and an agreeable fragrance of tea pervaded the ship. There was no scrambling or jostling for the hot water, no ill humour, no quarrelling. As the Amazon was to sail with the next tide, and as it would not be high water before two o’clock in the morning, I left her with her tea in full action, and her idle Steam Tug lying by, deputing steam and smoke for the time being to the Tea-kettles.

I afterwards learned that a Despatch was sent home by the captain before he struck out into the wide Atlantic, highly extolling the behaviour of these Emigrants, and the perfect order and propriety of all their social arrangements. What is in store for the poor people on the shores of the Great Salt Lake, what happy delusions they are labouring under now, on what miserable blindness their eyes may be opened then, I do not pretend to say. But I went on board their ship to bear testimony against them if they deserved it, as I fully believed they would; to my great astonishment they did not deserve it; and my predispositions and tendencies must not affect me as an honest witness. I went over the Amazon’s side, feeling it impossible to deny that, so far, some remarkable influence had produced a remarkable result, which better known influences have often missed. *

* After this Uncommercial Journey was printed, I happened to mention the experience it describes to Lord Houghton. That gentleman then showed me an article of his writing, in *The Edinburgh Review* for January, 1862, which is highly remarkable for its philosophical and literary research concerning these Latter-Day Saints. I find in it the following sentences:- ‘The Select Committee of the House of Commons on emigrant ships for 1854 summoned the Mormon agent and passenger-broker before it, and came to the conclusion that no ships under the provisions of the

“Passengers Act” could be depended upon for comfort and security in the same degree as those under his administration. The Mormon ship is a Family under strong and accepted discipline, with every provision for comfort, decorum and internal peace.’

CHAPTER XXIII—THE CITY OF THE ABSENT

When I think I deserve particularly well of myself, and have earned the right to enjoy a little treat, I stroll from Covent-garden into the City of London, after business-hours there, on a Saturday, or—better yet—on a Sunday, and roam about its deserted nooks and corners. It is necessary to the full enjoyment of these journeys that they should be made in summer-time, for then the retired spots that I love to haunt, are at their idlest and dullest. A gentle fall of rain is not objectionable, and a warm mist sets off my favourite retreats to decided advantage.

Among these, City Churchyards hold a high place. Such strange churchyards hide in the City of London; churchyards sometimes so entirely detached from churches, always so pressed upon by houses; so small, so rank, so silent, so forgotten, except by the few people who ever look down into them from their smoky windows. As I stand peeping in through the iron gates and rails, I can peel the rusty metal off, like bark from an old tree. The illegible tombstones are all lop-sided, the grave-mounds lost their shape in the rains of a hundred years ago, the Lombardy Poplar or Plane-Tree that was once a drysalter's daughter and several common-councilmen, has withered like those worthies, and its departed leaves are dust beneath it. Contagion of slow ruin overhangs the place. The discoloured tiled roofs of the environing buildings stand so awry, that they can hardly be proof against any stress of weather. Old crazy stacks of chimneys seem to look down as they overhang, dubiously calculating how far they will have to fall. In an angle of the walls, what was once the tool-house of the grave-digger rots away, encrusted with toadstools. Pipes and spouts for carrying off the rain from the encompassing gables, broken or feloniously cut for old lead long ago, now let the rain drip and splash as it list, upon the weedy earth. Sometimes there is a rusty pump somewhere near, and, as I look in at the rails and meditate, I hear it working under an unknown hand with a creaking protest: as though the departed in the churchyard urged, 'Let us lie here in peace; don't suck us up and drink us!'

One of my best beloved churchyards, I call the churchyard of Saint Ghastly Grim; touching what men in general call it, I have no information. It lies at the heart of the City, and the Blackwall Railway shrieks at it daily. It is a small small churchyard, with a ferocious, strong, spiked iron gate, like a jail. This gate is ornamented with skulls and cross-bones, larger than the life, wrought in stone; but it likewise came into the mind of Saint Ghastly Grim, that to stick iron spikes a-top of the stone skulls, as though they were impaled, would be a pleasant device. Therefore the skulls grin aloft horribly, thrust through and through with iron spears. Hence, there is attraction of repulsion for me in Saint Ghastly Grim, and, having often contemplated it in the daylight and the dark, I once felt drawn towards it in a thunderstorm at midnight. 'Why not?' I said, in self-excuse. 'I have been to see the Colosseum by the light of the moon; is it worse to go to see Saint Ghastly Grim by the light of the lightning?' I repaired to the Saint in a hackney cab, and found the skulls most effective, having the air of a public execution, and seeming, as the lightning flashed, to wink and grin with the pain of the spikes. Having no other person to whom to impart my satisfaction, I communicated it to the driver. So far from being responsive, he surveyed me—he was naturally a bottled-nosed, red-faced man—with a blanched countenance. And as he drove me back, he ever and again glanced in over his shoulder through the little front window of his carriage, as mistrusting that I was a fare originally from a grave in the churchyard of Saint Ghastly Grim, who might have flitted home again without paying.

Sometimes, the queer Hall of some queer Company gives upon a churchyard such as this, and, when the Livery dine, you may hear them (if you are looking in through the iron rails, which you never are when I am) toasting their own Worshipful prosperity. Sometimes, a wholesale house of business, requiring much room for stowage, will occupy one or two or even all three sides of the enclosing space, and the backs of bales of goods will lumber up the windows, as if they were holding some crowded trade-meeting of themselves within. Sometimes, the commanding windows are all blank, and show no more sign of life than the graves below—not so much, for *they* tell of what once upon a time was life undoubtedly. Such was the surrounding of one City churchyard that I saw last summer, on a Volunteering Saturday evening towards eight of the clock, when with astonishment I beheld an old old man and an old old woman in it, making hay. Yes, of all occupations in this world, making hay! It was a very confined patch of churchyard lying between Gracechurch-street and the Tower, capable of yielding, say an apronful of hay. By what means the old old man and woman had got into it, with an almost toothless hay-making rake, I could not fathom. No open window was within view; no window at all was within view, sufficiently near the ground to have enabled their old legs to descend from it; the rusty churchyard-gate was locked, the mouldy church was locked. Gravely among the graves, they made hay, all alone by themselves. They looked like Time and his wife. There was but the one rake between them, and they both had hold of it in a pastorally-loving manner, and there was hay on the old woman's black bonnet, as if the old man had recently been playful. The old man was quite an obsolete old man, in knee-breeches and coarse grey stockings, and the old woman wore mittens like unto his stockings in texture and in colour. They took no heed of me as I looked on, unable to account for them. The old woman was much too bright for a pew-opener, the old man much too meek for a beadle. On an old tombstone in the foreground between me and them, were two cherubim; but for those celestial embellishments being represented as having no possible use for knee-breeches, stockings, or mittens, I should have compared them with the hay-makers, and sought a likeness. I coughed and awoke the echoes, but the hay-makers never looked at me. They used the rake with a measured action, drawing the scanty crop towards them; and so I was fain to leave them under three yards and a half of darkening sky, gravely making hay among the graves, all alone by themselves. Perhaps they were Spectres, and I wanted a Medium.

In another City churchyard of similar cramped dimensions, I saw, that selfsame summer, two comfortable charity children. They were making love—tremendous proof of the vigour of that immortal article, for they were in the graceful uniform under which English Charity delights to hide herself—and they were overgrown, and their legs (his legs at least, for I am modestly incompetent to speak of hers) were as much in the wrong as mere passive weakness of character can render legs. O it was a leaden churchyard, but no doubt a golden ground to those young persons! I first saw them on a Saturday evening, and, perceiving from their occupation that Saturday evening was their trysting-time, I returned that evening se'nnight, and renewed the contemplation of them. They came there to shake the bits of matting which were spread in the church aisles, and they afterwards rolled them up, he rolling his end, she rolling hers, until they met, and over the two once divided now united rolls—sweet emblem!—gave and received a chaste salute. It was so refreshing to find one of my faded churchyards blooming into flower thus, that I returned a second time, and a third, and ultimately this befell:- They had left the church door open, in their dusting and arranging. Walking in to look at the church, I became aware, by the dim light, of him in the pulpit, of her in the reading-desk, of him looking down, of her looking up, exchanging tender discourse. Immediately both dived, and became as it were non-existent on this sphere. With an assumption of innocence I turned to leave the sacred edifice, when an obese form stood in the portal, puffily demanding Joseph, or in default of Joseph, Celia. Taking this monster by the sleeve, and luring him forth on pretence of showing him whom he sought, I gave time for the emergence of Joseph and Celia, who presently came towards us in the churchyard, bending under dusty matting, a picture of thriving and unconscious industry. It would be superfluous to hint that I have ever since deemed this the proudest passage in my life.

But such instances, or any tokens of vitality, are rare indeed in my City churchyards. A few sparrows occasionally try to raise a lively chirrup in their solitary tree—perhaps, as taking a different view of worms from that entertained by humanity—but they are flat and hoarse of voice, like the clerk, the organ, the bell, the clergyman, and all the rest of the Church-works when they are wound up for Sunday. Caged larks, thrushes, or blackbirds, hanging in neighbouring courts, pour forth their strains passionately, as scenting the tree, trying to break out, and see leaves again before they die, but their song is Willow, Willow—of a churchyard cast. So little light lives inside the churches of my churchyards, when the two are co-existent, that it is often only by an accident and after long acquaintance that I discover their having stained glass in some odd window. The westering sun slants into the churchyard by some unwonted entry, a few prismatic tears drop on an old tombstone, and a window that I thought was only dirty, is for the moment all bejewelled. Then the light passes and the colours die. Though even then, if there be room enough for me to fall back so far as that I can gaze up to the top of the Church Tower, I see the rusty vane new burnished, and seeming to look out with a joyful flash over the sea of smoke at the distant shore of country.

Blinking old men who are let out of workhouses by the hour, have a tendency to sit on bits of coping stone in these churchyards, leaning with both hands on their sticks and asthmatically gasping. The more depressed class of beggars too, bring hither broken meats, and munch. I am on nodding terms with a meditative turncock who lingers in one of them, and whom I suspect of a turn for poetry; the rather, as he looks out of temper when he gives the fire-plug a disparaging wrench with that large tuning-fork of his which would wear out the shoulder of his coat, but for a precautionary piece of inlaid leather. Fire-ladders, which I am satisfied nobody knows anything about, and the keys of which were lost in ancient times, moulder away in the larger churchyards, under eaves like wooden eyebrows; and so removed are those corners from the haunts of men and boys, that once on a fifth of November I found a ‘Guy’ trusted to take care of himself there, while his proprietors had gone to dinner. Of the expression of his face I cannot report, because it was turned to the wall; but his shrugged shoulders and his ten extended fingers, appeared to denote that he had moralised in his little straw chair on the mystery of mortality until he gave it up as a bad job.

You do not come upon these churchyards violently; there are shapes of transition in the neighbourhood. An antiquated news shop, or barber’s shop, apparently bereft of customers in the earlier days of George the Third, would warn me to look out for one, if any discoveries in this respect were left for me to make. A very quiet court, in combination with an unaccountable dyer’s and scourer’s, would prepare me for a churchyard. An exceedingly retiring public-house, with a bagatelle-board shadily visible in a sawdusty parlour shaped like an omnibus, and with a shelf of punch-bowls in the bar, would apprise me that I stood near consecrated ground. A ‘Dairy,’ exhibiting in its modest window one very little milk-can and three eggs, would suggest to me the certainty of finding the poultry hard by, pecking at my forefathers. I first inferred the vicinity of Saint Ghastly Grim, from a certain air of extra repose and gloom pervading a vast stack of warehouses.

From the hush of these places, it is congenial to pass into the hushed resorts of business. Down the lanes I like to see the carts and waggons huddled together in repose, the cranes idle, and the warehouses shut. Pausing in the alleys behind the closed Banks of mighty Lombard-street, it gives one as good as a rich feeling to think of the broad counters with a rim along the edge, made for telling money out on, the scales for weighing precious metals, the ponderous ledgers, and, above all, the bright copper shovels for shovelling gold. When I draw money, it never seems so much money as when it is shovelled at me out of a bright copper shovel. I like to say, ‘In gold,’ and to see seven pounds musically pouring out of the shovel, like seventy; the Bank appearing to remark to me—I italicise *appearing*—‘if you want more of this yellow earth, we keep it in barrows at your service.’ To think of the banker’s clerk with his deft finger turning the crisp edges of the Hundred-Pound Notes he has taken in a fat roll out of a drawer, is again to hear the rustling of that delicious south-cash wind. ‘How will you have it?’ I once heard this usual question asked at a Bank Counter of an elderly female, habited in mourning and steeped in simplicity, who answered, open-eyed, crook-fingered, laughing with expectation, ‘Anyhow!’ Calling these things to mind as I stroll among the Banks, I wonder whether the other solitary Sunday man I pass, has designs upon the Banks. For the interest and mystery of the matter, I almost hope he may have, and that his confederate may be at this moment taking impressions of the keys of the iron closets in wax, and that a delightful robbery may be in course of transaction. About College-hill, Mark-lane, and so on towards the Tower, and Dockward, the deserted wine-merchants’ cellars are fine subjects for consideration; but the deserted money-cellars of the Bankers, and their plate-cellars, and their jewel-cellars, what subterranean regions of the Wonderful Lamp are these! And again: possibly some shoeless boy in rags, passed through this street yesterday, for whom it is reserved to be a Banker in the fulness of time, and to be surpassing rich. Such reverses have been, since the days of Whittington; and were, long before. I want to know whether the boy has any foreglittering of that glittering fortune now, when he treads these stones, hungry. Much as I also want to know whether the next man to be hanged at Newgate yonder, had any suspicion upon him that he was moving steadily towards that fate, when he talked so much about the last man who paid the same great debt at the same small Debtors’ Door.

Where are all the people who on busy working-days pervade these scenes? The locomotive banker’s clerk, who carries a black portfolio chained to him by a chain of steel, where is he? Does he go to bed with his chain on—to church with his chain on—or does he lay it by? And if he lays it by, what becomes of his portfolio when he is unchained for a holiday? The wastepaper baskets of these closed counting-houses would let me into many hints of business matters if I had the exploration of them; and what secrets of the heart should I discover on the ‘pads’ of the young clerks—the sheets of cartridge-paper and blotting-paper interposed between their writing and their desks! Pads are taken into confidence on the tenderest occasions, and oftentimes when I have made a business visit, and have sent in my name from the outer office, have I had it forced on my discursive notice that the officiating young gentleman has over and over again inscribed AMELIA, in ink of various dates, on corners of his pad. Indeed, the pad may be regarded as the legitimate modern successor of the old forest-tree: whereon these young knights (having no attainable forest nearer than Epping) engrave the names of their mistresses. After all, it is a more satisfactory process than carving, and can be oftener repeated. So these courts in their Sunday rest are courts of Love Omnipotent (I rejoice to bethink myself), dry as they look. And here is Garraway's, bolted and shuttered hard and fast! It is possible to imagine the man who cuts the sandwiches, on his back in a hayfield; it is possible to imagine his desk, like the desk of a clerk at church, without him; but imagination is unable to pursue the men who wait at Garraway's all the week for the men who never come. When they are forcibly put out of Garraway's on Saturday night—which they must be, for they never would go out of their own accord—where do they vanish until Monday morning? On the first Sunday that I ever strayed here, I expected to find them hovering about these lanes, like restless ghosts, and trying to peep into Garraway's through chinks in the shutters, if not endeavouring to turn the lock of the door with false keys, picks, and screw-drivers. But the wonder is, that they go clean away! And now I think of it, the wonder is, that every working-day pervader of these scenes goes clean away. The man who sells the dogs' collars and the little toy coal-scuttles, feels under as great an obligation to go afar off, as Glyn and Co., or Smith, Payne, and Smith. There is an old monastery-crypt under Garraway's (I have been in it among the port wine), and perhaps Garraway's, taking pity on the mouldy men who wait in its public-room all their lives, gives them cool house-room down there over Sundays; but the catacombs of Paris would not be large enough to hold the rest of the missing. This characteristic of London City greatly helps its being the quaint place it is in the weekly pause of business, and greatly helps my Sunday sensation in it of being the Last Man. In my solitude, the ticket-porters being all gone with the rest, I venture to breathe to the quiet bricks and stones my confidential wonderment why a ticket-porter, who never does any work with his hands, is bound to wear a white apron, and why a great Ecclesiastical Dignitary, who never does any work with his hands either, is equally bound to wear a black one.

CHAPTER XXIV—AN OLD STAGE-COACHING HOUSE

Before the waitress had shut the door, I had forgotten how many stage-coaches she said used to change horses in the town every day. But it was of little moment; any high number would do as well as another. It had been a great stage-coaching town in the great stage-coaching times, and the ruthless railways had killed and buried it.

The sign of the house was the Dolphin's Head. Why only head, I don't know; for the Dolphin's effigy at full length, and upside down—as a Dolphin is always bound to be when artistically treated, though I suppose he is sometimes right side upward in his natural condition—graced the sign-board. The sign-board chafed its rusty hooks outside the bow-window of my room, and was a shabby work. No visitor could have denied that the Dolphin was dying by inches, but he showed no bright colours. He had once served another master; there was a newer streak of paint below him, displaying with inconsistent freshness the legend, By J. MELLOWS.

My door opened again, and J. Mellows's representative came back. I had asked her what I could have for dinner, and she now returned with the counter question, what would I like? As the Dolphin stood possessed of nothing that I do like, I was fain to yield to the suggestion of a duck, which I don't like. J. Mellows's representative was a mournful young woman with eye susceptible of guidance, and one uncontrollable eye; which latter, seeming to wander in quest of stage-coaches, deepened the melancholy in which the Dolphin was steeped.

This young woman had but shut the door on retiring again when I bethought me of adding to my order, the words, 'with nice vegetables.' Looking out at the door to give them emphatic utterance, I found her already in a state of pensive catalepsy in the deserted gallery, picking her teeth with a pin.

At the Railway Station seven miles off, I had been the subject of wonder when I ordered a fly in which to come here. And when I gave the direction 'To the Dolphin's Head,' I had observed an ominous stare on the countenance of the strong young man in velveteen, who was the platform servant of the Company. He had also called to my driver at parting, 'All right! Don't hang yourself when you get there, Geo-o-rge!' in a sarcastic tone, for which I had entertained some transitory thoughts of reporting him to the General Manager.

I had no business in the town—I never have any business in any town—but I had been caught by the fancy that I would come and look at it in its degeneracy. My purpose was fitly inaugurated by the Dolphin's Head, which everywhere expressed past coachfulness and present coachlessness. Coloured prints of coaches, starting, arriving, changing horses, coaches in the sunshine, coaches in the snow, coaches in the wind, coaches in the mist and rain, coaches on the King's birthday, coaches in all circumstances compatible with their triumph and victory, but never in the act of breaking down or overturning, pervaded the house. Of these works of art, some, framed and not glazed, had holes in them; the varnish of others had become so brown and cracked, that they looked like overdone pie-crust; the designs of others were almost obliterated by the flies of many summers. Broken glasses, damaged frames, lop-sided hanging, and consignment of incurable cripples to places of refuge in dark corners, attested the desolation of the rest. The old room on the ground floor where the passengers of the Highflyer used to dine, had nothing in it but a wretched show of twigs and flower-pots in the broad window to hide the nakedness of the land, and in a corner little Mellows's perambulator, with even its parasol-head turned despondently to the wall. The other room, where post-horse company used to wait while relays were getting ready down the yard, still held its ground, but was as airless as I conceive a hearse to be: insomuch that Mr. Pitt, hanging high against the partition (with spots on him like port wine, though it is mysterious how port wine ever got squirted up there), had good reason for perking his nose and sniffing. The stopperless cruets on the spindle-shanked sideboard were in a miserably dejected state: the anchovy sauce having turned blue some years ago, and the cayenne pepper (with a scoop in it like a small model of a wooden leg) having turned solid. The old fraudulent candles which were always being paid for and never used, were burnt out at last; but their tall stilts of candlesticks still lingered, and still outraged the human intellect by pretending to be silver. The mouldy old unreformed Borough Member, with his right hand buttoned up in the breast of his coat, and his back characteristically turned on bales of petitions from his constituents, was there too; and the poker which never had been among the fire-irons, lest post-horse company should overstir the fire, was *not* there, as of old.

Pursuing my researches in the Dolphin's Head, I found it sorely shrunken. When J. Mellows came into possession, he had walled off half the bar, which was now a tobacco-shop with its own entrance in the yard—the once glorious yard where the postboys, whip in hand and always buttoning their waistcoats at the last moment, used to come running forth to mount and away. A 'Scientific Shoeing—Smith and Veterinary Surgeon,' had further encroached upon the yard; and a grimly satirical jobber, who announced himself as having to Let 'A neat one-horse fly, and a one-horse cart,' had established his business, himself, and his family, in a part of the extensive stables. Another part was lopped clean off from the Dolphin's Head, and now comprised a chapel, a wheelwright's, and a Young Men's Mutual Improvement and Discussion Society (in a loft): the whole forming a back lane. No audacious hand had plucked down the vane from the central cupola of the stables, but it had grown rusty and stuck at N-Nil: while the score or two of pigeons that remained true to their ancestral traditions and the place, had collected in a row on the roof-ridge of the only outhouse retained by the Dolphin, where all the inside pigeons tried to push the outside pigeon off. This I accepted as emblematical of the struggle for post and place in railway times.

Sauntering forth into the town, by way of the covered and pillared entrance to the Dolphin's Yard, once redolent of soup and stable-litter, now redolent of musty disuse, I paced the street. It was a hot day, and the little sun-blinds of the shops were all drawn down, and the more enterprising tradesmen had caused their 'Prentices to trickle water on the pavement appertaining to their frontage. It looked as if they had been shedding tears for the stage-coaches, and drying their ineffectual pocket-handkerchiefs. Such weakness would have been excusable; for business was—as one dejected porkman who kept a shop which refused to reciprocate the compliment by keeping him, informed me—'bitter bad.' Most of the harness-makers and corn-dealers were gone the way of the coaches, but it was a pleasant recognition of the eternal procession of Children down that old original steep Incline, the Valley of the Shadow, that those tradesmen were mostly succeeded by vendors of sweetmeats and cheap toys. The opposition house to the Dolphin, once famous as the New White Hart, had long collapsed. In a fit of abject depression, it had cast whitewash on its windows, and boarded up its front door, and reduced itself to a side entrance; but even that had proved a world too wide for the Literary Institution which had been its last phase; for the Institution had collapsed too, and of the ambitious letters of its inscription on the White Hart's front, all had fallen off but these:

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- suggestive of Lamentably Insolvent. As to the neighbouring market-place, it seemed to have wholly relinquished marketing, to the dealer in crockery whose pots and pans straggled half across it, and to the Cheap Jack who sat with folded arms on the shafts of his cart, superciliously gazing around; his velveteen waistcoat, evidently harbouring grave doubts whether it was worth his while to stay a night in such a place.

The church bells began to ring as I left this spot, but they by no means improved the case, for they said, in a petulant way, and speaking with some difficulty in their irritation, WHAT'S-be-come-of-THE-coach-ES!' Nor would they (I found on listening) ever vary their emphasis, save in respect of growing more sharp and vexed, but invariably went on, 'WHAT'S-be-come-of-THE-coach-ES!'—always beginning the inquiry with an unpolite abruptness. Perhaps from their elevation they saw the railway, and it aggravated them.

Coming upon a coachmaker's workshop, I began to look about me with a revived spirit, thinking that perchance I might behold there some remains of the old times of the town's greatness. There was only one man at work—a dry man, grizzled, and far advanced in years, but tall and upright, who, becoming aware of me looking on, straightened his back, pushed up his spectacles against his brown-paper cap, and appeared inclined to defy me. To whom I pacifically said:

'Good day, sir!'

'What?' said he.

'Good day, sir.'

He seemed to consider about that, and not to agree with me.—'Was you a looking for anything?' he then asked, in a pointed manner.

'I was wondering whether there happened to be any fragment of an old stage-coach here.'

'Is that all?'

‘That’s all.’

‘No, there ain’t.’

It was now my turn to say ‘Oh!’ and I said it. Not another word did the dry and grizzled man say, but bent to his work again. In the coach-making days, the coach-painters had tried their brushes on a post beside him; and quite a Calendar of departed glories was to be read upon it, in blue and yellow and red and green, some inches thick. Presently he looked up again.

‘You seem to have a deal of time on your hands,’ was his querulous remark.

I admitted the fact.

‘I think it’s a pity you was not brought up to something,’ said he.

I said I thought so too.

Appearing to be informed with an idea, he laid down his plane (for it was a plane he was at work with), pushed up his spectacles again, and came to the door.

‘Would a po-shay do for you?’ he asked.

‘I am not sure that I understand what you mean.’

‘Would a po-shay,’ said the coachmaker, standing close before me, and folding his arms in the manner of a cross-examining counsel—‘would a po-shay meet the views you have expressed? Yes, or no?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then you keep straight along down there till you see one. *You’ll* see one if you go fur enough.’

With that, he turned me by the shoulder in the direction I was to take, and went in and resumed his work against a background of leaves and grapes. For, although he was a soured man and a discontented, his workshop was that agreeable mixture of town and country, street and garden, which is often to be seen in a small English town.

I went the way he had turned me, and I came to the Beer-shop with the sign of The First and Last, and was out of the town on the old London road. I came to the Turnpike, and I found it, in its silent way, eloquent respecting the change that had fallen on the road. The Turnpike-house was all overgrown with ivy; and the Turnpike-keeper, unable to get a living out of the tolls, plied the trade of a cobbler. Not only that, but his wife sold ginger-beer, and, in the very window of espial through which the Toll-takers of old times used with awe to behold the grand London coaches coming on at a gallop, exhibited for sale little barber's-poles of sweetstuff in a sticky lantern.

The political economy of the master of the turnpike thus expressed itself.

'How goes turnpike business, master?' said I to him, as he sat in his little porch, repairing a shoe.

'It don't go at all, master,' said he to me. 'It's stopped.'

'That's bad,' said I.

'Bad?' he repeated. And he pointed to one of his sunburnt dusty children who was climbing the turnpike-gate, and said, extending his open right hand in remonstrance with Universal Nature. 'Five on 'em!'

'But how to improve Turnpike business?' said I.

'There's a way, master,' said he, with the air of one who had thought deeply on the subject.

'I should like to know it.'

'Lay a toll on everything as comes through; lay a toll on walkers. Lay another toll on everything as don't come through; lay a toll on them as stops at home.'

'Would the last remedy be fair?'

'Fair? Them as stops at home, could come through if they liked; couldn't they?'

'Say they could.'

'Toll 'em. If they don't come through, it's *their* look out. Anyways,—Toll 'em!'

Finding it was as impossible to argue with this financial genius as if he had been Chancellor of the Exchequer, and consequently the right man in the right place, I passed on meekly.

My mind now began to misgive me that the disappointed coach-maker had sent me on a wild-goose errand, and that there was no post-chaise in those parts. But coming within view of certain allotment-gardens by the roadside, I retracted the suspicion, and confessed that I had done him an injustice. For, there I saw, surely, the poorest superannuated post-chaise left on earth.

It was a post-chaise taken off its axletree and wheels, and plumped down on the clayey soil among a ragged growth of vegetables. It was a post-chaise not even set straight upon the ground, but tilted over, as if it had fallen out of a balloon. It was a post-chaise that had been a long time in those decayed circumstances, and against which scarlet beans were trained. It was a post-chaise patched and mended with old tea-trays, or with scraps of iron that looked like them, and boarded up as to the windows, but having A KNOCKER on the off-side door. Whether it was a post-chaise used as tool-house, summer-house, or dwelling-house, I could not discover, for there was nobody at home at the post-chaise when I knocked, but it was certainly used for something, and locked up. In the wonder of this discovery, I walked round and round the post-chaise many times, and sat down by the post-chaise, waiting for further elucidation. None came. At last, I made my way back to the old London road by the further end of the allotment-gardens, and consequently at a point beyond that from which I had diverged. I had to scramble through a hedge and down a steep bank, and I nearly came down a-top of a little spare man who sat breaking stones by the roadside.

He stayed his hammer, and said, regarding me mysteriously through his dark goggles of wire:

‘Are you aware, sir, that you’ve been trespassing?’

‘I turned out of the way,’ said I, in explanation, ‘to look at that odd post-chaise. Do you happen to know anything about it?’

‘I know it was many a year upon the road,’ said he.

‘So I supposed. Do you know to whom it belongs?’

The stone-breaker bent his brows and goggles over his heap of stones, as if he were considering whether he should answer the question or not. Then, raising his barred eyes to my features as before, he said:

‘To me.’

Being quite unprepared for the reply, I received it with a sufficiently awkward ‘Indeed! Dear me!’ Presently I added, ‘Do you—’ I was going to say ‘live there,’ but it seemed so absurd a question, that I substituted ‘live near here?’

The stone-breaker, who had not broken a fragment since we began to converse, then did as follows. He raised himself by poising his finger on his hammer, and took his coat, on which he had been seated, over his arm. He then backed to an easier part of the bank than that by which I had come down, keeping his dark goggles silently upon me all the time, and then shouldered his hammer, suddenly turned, ascended, and was gone. His face was so small, and his goggles were so large, that he left me wholly uninformed as to his countenance; but he left me a profound impression that the curved legs I had seen from behind as he vanished, were the legs of an old postboy. It was not until then that I noticed he had been working by a grass-grown milestone, which looked like a tombstone erected over the grave of the London road.

My dinner-hour being close at hand, I had no leisure to pursue the goggles or the subject then, but made my way back to the Dolphin's Head. In the gateway I found J. Mellows, looking at nothing, and apparently experiencing that it failed to raise his spirits.

'*I* don't care for the town,' said J. Mellows, when I complimented him on the sanitary advantages it may or may not possess; 'I wish I had never seen the town!'

'You don't belong to it, Mr. Mellows?'

'Belong to it!' repeated Mellows. 'If I didn't belong to a better style of town than this, I'd take and drown myself in a pail.' It then occurred to me that Mellows, having so little to do, was habitually thrown back on his internal resources—by which I mean the Dolphin's cellar.

'What we want,' said Mellows, pulling off his hat, and making as if he emptied it of the last load of Disgust that had exuded from his brain, before he put it on again for another load; 'what we want, is a Branch. The Petition for the Branch Bill is in the coffee-room. Would you put your name to it? Every little helps.'

I found the document in question stretched out flat on the coffee-room table by the aid of certain weights from the kitchen, and I gave it the additional weight of my uncommercial signature. To the best of my belief, I bound myself to the modest statement that universal traffic, happiness, prosperity, and civilisation, together with unbounded national triumph in competition with the foreigner, would infallibly flow from the Branch.

Having achieved this constitutional feat, I asked Mr. Mellows if he could grace my dinner with a pint of good wine? Mr. Mellows thus replied.

'If I couldn't give you a pint of good wine, I'd—there!—I'd take and drown myself in a pail. But I was deceived when I bought this business, and the stock was higgledy-piggledy, and I haven't yet tasted my way quite through it with a view to sorting it. Therefore, if you order one kind and get another, change till it comes right. For what,' said Mellows, unloading his hat as before, 'what would you or any gentleman do, if you ordered one kind of wine and was required to drink another? Why, you'd (and naturally and properly, having the feelings of a gentleman), you’d take and drown yourself in a pail!’

CHAPTER XXV—THE BOILED BEEF OF NEW ENGLAND

The shabbiness of our English capital, as compared with Paris, Bordeaux, Frankfort, Milan, Geneva—almost any important town on the continent of Europe—I find very striking after an absence of any duration in foreign parts. London is shabby in contrast with Edinburgh, with Aberdeen, with Exeter, with Liverpool, with a bright little town like Bury St. Edmunds. London is shabby in contrast with New York, with Boston, with Philadelphia. In detail, one would say it can rarely fail to be a disappointing piece of shabbiness, to a stranger from any of those places. There is nothing shabbier than Drury-lane, in Rome itself. The meanness of Regent-street, set against the great line of Boulevards in Paris, is as striking as the abortive ugliness of Trafalgar-square, set against the gallant beauty of the Place de la Concorde. London is shabby by daylight, and shabbier by gaslight. No Englishman knows what gaslight is, until he sees the Rue de Rivoli and the Palais Royal after dark.

The mass of London people are shabby. The absence of distinctive dress has, no doubt, something to do with it. The porters of the Vintners' Company, the draymen, and the butchers, are about the only people who wear distinctive dresses; and even these do not wear them on holidays. We have nothing which for cheapness, cleanliness, convenience, or picturesqueness, can compare with the belted blouse. As to our women;—next Easter or Whitsuntide, look at the bonnets at the British Museum or the National Gallery, and think of the pretty white French cap, the Spanish mantilla, or the Genoese mezzero.

Probably there are not more second-hand clothes sold in London than in Paris, and yet the mass of the London population have a second-hand look which is not to be detected on the mass of the Parisian population. I think this is mainly because a Parisian workman does not in the least trouble himself about what is worn by a Parisian idler, but dresses in the way of his own class, and for his own comfort. In London, on the contrary, the fashions descend; and you never fully know how inconvenient or ridiculous a fashion is, until you see it in its last descent. It was but the other day, on a race-course, that I observed four people in a barouche deriving great entertainment from the contemplation of four people on foot. The four people on foot were two young men and two young women; the four people in the barouche were two young men and two young women. The four young women were dressed in exactly the same style; the four young men were dressed in exactly the same style. Yet the two couples on wheels were as much amused by the two couples on foot, as if they were quite unconscious of having themselves set those fashions, or of being at that very moment engaged in the display of them.

Is it only in the matter of clothes that fashion descends here in London—and consequently in England—and thence shabbiness arises? Let us think a little, and be just. The 'Black Country' round about Birmingham, is a very black country; but is it quite as black as it has been lately painted? An appalling accident happened at the People's Park near Birmingham, this last July, when it was crowded with people from the Black Country—an appalling accident consequent on a shamefully dangerous exhibition. Did the shamefully dangerous exhibition originate in the moral blackness of the Black Country, and in the Black People's peculiar love of the excitement attendant on great personal hazard, which they looked on at, but in which they did not participate? Light is much wanted in the Black Country. O we are all agreed on that. But, we must not quite forget the crowds of gentlefolks who set the shamefully dangerous fashion, either. We must not quite forget the enterprising Directors of an Institution vaunting mighty educational pretences, who made the low sensation as strong as they possibly could make it, by hanging the Blondin rope as high as they possibly could hang it. All this must not be eclipsed in the Blackness of the Black Country. The reserved seats high up by the rope, the cleared space below it, so that no one should be smashed but the performer, the pretence of slipping and falling off, the baskets for the feet and the sack for the head, the photographs everywhere, and the virtuous indignation nowhere—all this must not be wholly swallowed up in the blackness of the jet-black country.

Whatsoever fashion is set in England, is certain to descend. This is a text for a perpetual sermon on care in setting fashions. When you find a fashion low down, look back for the time (it will never be far off) when it was the fashion high up. This is the text for a perpetual sermon on social justice. From imitations of Ethiopian Serenaders, to imitations of Prince's coats and waistcoats, you will find the original model in St. James's Parish.

When the Serenaders become tiresome, trace them beyond the Black Country; when the coats and waistcoats become insupportable, refer them to their source in the Upper Toady Regions.

Gentlemen's clubs were once maintained for purposes of savage party warfare; working men's clubs of the same day assumed the same character. Gentlemen's clubs became places of quiet inoffensive recreation; working men's clubs began to follow suit. If working men have seemed rather slow to appreciate advantages of combination which have saved the pockets of gentlemen, and enhanced their comforts, it is because working men could scarcely, for want of capital, originate such combinations without help; and because help has not been separable from that great impertinence, Patronage. The instinctive revolt of his spirit against patronage, is a quality much to be respected in the English working man. It is the base of the base of his best qualities. Nor is it surprising that he should be unduly suspicious of patronage, and sometimes resentful of it even where it is not, seeing what a flood of washy talk has been let loose on his devoted head, or with what complacent condescension the same devoted head has been smoothed and patted. It is a proof to me of his self-control that he never strikes out pugilistically, right and left, when addressed as one of 'My friends,' or 'My assembled friends;' that he does not become inappeasable, and run amuck like a Malay, whenever he sees a biped in broadcloth getting on a platform to talk to him; that any pretence of improving his mind, does not instantly drive him out of his mind, and cause him to toss his obliging patron like a mad bull.

For, how often have I heard the unfortunate working man lectured, as if he were a little charity-child, humid as to his nasal development, strictly literal as to his Catechism, and called by Providence to walk all his days in a station in life represented on festive occasions by a mug of warm milk-and-water and a bun! What popguns of jokes have these ears tingled to hear let off at him, what asinine sentiments, what impotent conclusions, what spelling-book moralities, what adaptations of the orator's insufferable tediousness to the assumed level of his understanding! If his sledge-hammers, his spades and pick-axes, his saws and chisels, his paint-pots and brushes, his forges, furnaces, and engines, the horses that he drove at his work, and the machines that drove him at his work, were all toys in one little paper box, and he the baby who played with them, he could not have been discoursed to, more impertinently and absurdly than I have heard him discoursed to times innumerable. Consequently, not being a fool or a fawner, he has come to acknowledge his patronage by virtually saying: ‘Let me alone. If you understand me no better than *that*, sir and madam, let me alone. You mean very well, I dare say, but I don’t like it, and I won’t come here again to have any more of it.’

Whatever is done for the comfort and advancement of the working man must be so far done by himself as that it is maintained by himself. And there must be in it no touch of condescension, no shadow of patronage. In the great working districts, this truth is studied and understood. When the American civil war rendered it necessary, first in Glasgow, and afterwards in Manchester, that the working people should be shown how to avail themselves of the advantages derivable from system, and from the combination of numbers, in the purchase and the cooking of their food, this truth was above all things borne in mind. The quick consequence was, that suspicion and reluctance were vanquished, and that the effort resulted in an astonishing and a complete success.

Such thoughts passed through my mind on a July morning of this summer, as I walked towards Commercial Street (not Uncommercial Street), Whitechapel. The Glasgow and Manchester system had been lately set a-going there, by certain gentlemen who felt an interest in its diffusion, and I had been attracted by the following hand-bill printed on rose-coloured paper:

SELF-SUPPORTING
COOKING DEPÔT
FOR THE WORKING CLASSES
Commercial-street, Whitechapel,
Where Accommodation is provided for Dining comfortably
300 Persons at a time.
Open from 7 A.M. till 7 P.M.
PRICES.
All Articles of the BEST QUALITY.

Cup of Tea or Coffee	One Penny
Bread and Butter	One Penny
Bread and Cheese	One Penny
Slice of bread	One half-penny or One Penny

Boiled Egg	One Penny
Ginger Beer	One Penny

The above Articles always ready.

Besides the above may be had, from 12 to 3 o’clock,

Bowl of Scotch Broth	One Penny
Bowl of Soup	One Penny
Plate of Potatoes	One Penny
Plate of Minced Beef	Twopence
Plate of Cold Beef	Twopence
Plate of Cold Ham	Twopence
Plate of Plum Pudding or Rice	One Penny

As the Economy of Cooking depends greatly upon the simplicity of the arrangements with which a great number of persons can be served at one time, the Upper Room of this Establishment will be especially set apart for a

PUBLIC DINNER EVERY DAY

From 12 till 3 o’clock,

Consisting of the following Dishes:

Bowl of Broth, or Soup,
Plate of Cold Beef or Ham,
Plate of Potatoes,
Plum Pudding, or Rice.

FIXED CHARGE 4.5*d.*

THE DAILY PAPERS PROVIDED.

N.B.—This Establishment is conducted on the strictest business principles, with the full intention of making it self-supporting, so that every one may frequent it with a feeling of perfect independence.

The assistance of all frequenting the Depôt is confidently expected in checking anything interfering with the comfort, quiet, and regularity of the establishment.

Please do not destroy this Hand Bill, but hand it to some other person whom it may interest.

The Self-Supporting Cooking Depôt (not a very good name, and one would rather give it an English one) had hired a newly-built warehouse that it found to let; therefore it was not established in premises specially designed for the purpose. But, at a small cost they were exceedingly well adapted to the purpose: being light, well ventilated, clean, and cheerful.

They consisted of three large rooms. That on the basement story was the kitchen; that on the ground floor was the general dining-room; that on the floor above was the Upper Room referred to in the hand-bill, where the Public Dinner at fourpence-halfpenny a head was provided every day. The cooking was done, with much economy of space and fuel, by American cooking-stoves, and by young women not previously, brought up as cooks; the walls and pillars of the two dining-rooms were agreeably brightened with ornamental colours; the tables were capable of accommodating six or eight persons each; the attendants were all young women, becomingly and neatly dressed, and dressed alike. I think the whole staff was female, with the exception of the steward or manager.

My first inquiries were directed to the wages of this staff; because, if any establishment claiming to be self-supporting, live upon the spoliation of anybody or anything, or eke out a feeble existence by poor mouths and beggarly resources (as too many so-called Mechanics' Institutions do), I make bold to express my Uncommercial opinion that it has no business to live, and had better die. It was made clear to me by the account books, that every person employed was properly paid. My next inquiries were directed to the quality of the provisions purchased, and to the terms on which they were bought. It was made equally clear to me that the quality was the very best, and that all bills were paid weekly. My next inquiries were directed to the balance-sheet for the last two weeks—only the third and fourth of the establishment's career. It was made equally clear to me, that after everything bought was paid for, and after each week was charged with its full share of wages, rent and taxes, depreciation of plant in use, and interest on capital at the rate of four per cent. per annum, the last week had yielded a profit of (in round numbers) one pound ten; and the previous week a profit of six pounds ten. By this time I felt that I had a healthy appetite for the dinners.

It had just struck twelve, and a quick succession of faces had already begun to appear at a little window in the wall of the partitioned space where I sat looking over the books. Within this little window, like a pay-box at a theatre, a neat and brisk young woman presided to take money and issue tickets. Every one coming in must take a ticket. Either the fourpence-halfpenny ticket for the upper room (the most popular ticket, I think), or a penny ticket for a bowl of soup, or as many penny tickets as he or she choose to buy. For three penny tickets one had quite a wide range of choice. A plate of cold boiled beef and potatoes; or a plate of cold ham and potatoes; or a plate of hot minced beef and potatoes; or a bowl of soup, bread and cheese, and a plate of plum-pudding. Touching what they should have, some customers on taking their seats fell into a reverie—became mildly distracted—postponed decision, and said in bewilderment, they would think of it. One old man I noticed when I sat among the tables in the lower room, who was startled by the bill of fare, and sat contemplating it as if it were something of a ghostly nature. The decision of the boys was as rapid as their execution, and always included pudding.

There were several women among the diners, and several clerks and shopmen. There were carpenters and painters from the neighbouring buildings under repair, and there were nautical men, and there were, as one diner observed to me, ‘some of most sorts.’ Some were solitary, some came two together, some dined in parties of three or four, or six. The latter talked together, but assuredly no one was louder than at my club in Pall-Mall. One young fellow whistled in rather a shrill manner while he waited for his dinner, but I was gratified to observe that he did so in evident defiance of my Uncommercial individuality. Quite agreeing with him, on consideration, that I had no business to be there, unless I dined like the rest, ‘I went in,’ as the phrase is, for fourpence-halfpenny.

The room of the fourpence-halfpenny banquet had, like the lower room, a counter in it, on which were ranged a great number of cold portions ready for distribution. Behind this counter, the fragrant soup was steaming in deep cans, and the best-cooked of potatoes were fished out of similar receptacles. Nothing to eat was touched with his hand. Every waitress had her own tables to attend to. As soon as she saw a new customer seat himself at one of her tables, she took from the counter all his dinner—his soup, potatoes, meat, and pudding—piled it up dexterously in her two hands, set it before him, and took his ticket. This serving of the whole dinner at once, had been found greatly to simplify the business of attendance, and was also popular with the customers: who were thus enabled to vary the meal by varying the routine of dishes: beginning with soup-to-day, putting soup in the middle to-morrow, putting soup at the end the day after to-morrow, and ringing similar changes on meat and pudding. The rapidity with which every new-comer got served, was remarkable; and the dexterity with which the waitresses (quite new to the art a month before) discharged their duty, was as agreeable to see, as the neat smartness with which they wore their dress and had dressed their hair.

If I seldom saw better waiting, so I certainly never ate better meat, potatoes, or pudding. And the soup was an honest and stout soup, with rice and barley in it, and 'little matters for the teeth to touch,' as had been observed to me by my friend below stairs already quoted. The dinner-service, too, was neither conspicuously hideous for High Art nor for Low Art, but was of a pleasant and pure appearance. Concerning the viands and their cookery, one last remark. I dined at my club in Pall-Mall aforesaid, a few days afterwards, for exactly twelve times the money, and not half as well.

The company thickened after one o'clock struck, and changed pretty quickly. Although experience of the place had been so recently attainable, and although there was still considerable curiosity out in the street and about the entrance, the general tone was as good as could be, and the customers fell easily into the ways of the place. It was clear to me, however, that they were there to have what they paid for, and to be on an independent footing. To the best of my judgment, they might be patronised out of the building in a month. With judicious visiting, and by dint of being questioned, read to, and talked at, they might even be got rid of (for the next quarter of a century) in half the time.

This disinterested and wise movement is fraught with so many wholesome changes in the lives of the working people, and with so much good in the way of overcoming that suspicion which our own unconscious impertinence has engendered, that it is scarcely gracious to criticise details as yet; the rather, because it is indisputable that the managers of the Whitechapel establishment most thoroughly feel that they are upon their honour with the customers, as to the minutest points of administration. But, although the American stoves cannot roast, they can surely boil one kind of meat as well as another, and need not always circumscribe their boiling talents within the limits of ham and beef. The most enthusiastic admirer of those substantials, would probably not object to occasional inconstancy in respect of pork and mutton: or, especially in cold weather, to a little innocent trifling with Irish stews, meat pies, and toads in holes. Another drawback on the Whitechapel establishment, is the absence of beer. Regarded merely as a question of policy, it is very impolitic, as having a tendency to send the working men to the public-house, where gin is reported to be sold. But, there is a much higher ground on which this absence of beer is objectionable. It expresses distrust of the working man. It is a fragment of that old mantle of patronage in which so many estimable Thugs, so darkly wandering up and down the moral world, are sworn to muffle him. Good beer is a good thing for him, he says, and he likes it; the Depôt could give it him good, and he now gets it bad. Why does the Depôt not give it him good? Because he would get drunk. Why does the Depôt not let him have a pint with his dinner, which would not make him drunk? Because he might have had another pint, or another two pints, before he came. Now, this distrust is an affront, is exceedingly inconsistent with the confidence the managers express in their hand-bills, and is a timid stopping-short upon the straight highway. It is unjust and unreasonable, also. It is unjust, because it punishes the sober man for the vice of the drunken man. It is unreasonable, because any one at all experienced in such things knows that the drunken workman does not get drunk where he goes to eat and drink, but where he goes to drink—expressly to drink. To suppose that the working man cannot state this question to himself quite as plainly as I state it here, is to suppose that he is a baby, and is again to tell him in the old wearisome, condescending, patronising way that he must be goody-poody, and do as he is toldy-poldy, and not be a manny-panny or a voter-poter, but fold his handy-pandys, and be a childy-pildy.

I found from the accounts of the Whitechapel Self-Supporting Cooking Depôt, that every article sold in it, even at the prices I have quoted, yields a certain small profit! Individual speculators are of course already in the field, and are of course already appropriating the name. The classes for whose benefit the real depôts are designed, will distinguish between the two kinds of enterprise.

CHAPTER XXVI—CHATHAM DOCKYARD

There are some small out-of-the-way landing places on the Thames and the Medway, where I do much of my summer idling. Running water is favourable to day-dreams, and a strong tidal river is the best of running water for mine. I like to watch the great ships standing out to sea or coming home richly laden, the active little steam-tugs confidently puffing with them to and from the sea-horizon, the fleet of barges that seem to have plucked their brown and russet sails from the ripe trees in the landscape, the heavy old colliers, light in ballast, floundering down before the tide, the light screw barks and schooners imperiously holding a straight course while the others patiently tack and go about, the yachts with their tiny hulls and great white sheets of canvas, the little sailing-boats bobbing to and fro on their errands of pleasure or business, and—as it is the nature of little people to do—making a prodigious fuss about their small affairs. Watching these objects, I still am under no obligation to think about them, or even so much as to see them, unless it perfectly suits my humour. As little am I obliged to hear the plash and flop of the tide, the ripple at my feet, the clinking windlass afar off, or the humming steam-ship paddles further away yet. These, with the creaking little jetty on which I sit, and the gaunt high-water marks and low-water marks in the mud, and the broken causeway, and the broken bank, and the broken stakes and piles leaning forward as if they were vain of their personal appearance and looking for their reflection in the water, will melt into any train of fancy. Equally adaptable to any purpose or to none, are the posturing sheep and kine upon the marshes, the gulls that wheel and dip around me, the crows (well out of gunshot) going home from the rich harvest-fields, the heron that has been out a-fishing and looks as melancholy, up there in the sky, as if it hadn't agreed with him. Everything within the range of the senses will, by the aid of the running water, lend itself to everything beyond that range, and work into a drowsy whole, not unlike a kind of tune, but for which there is no exact definition.

One of these landing-places is near an old fort (I can see the Nore Light from it with my pocket-glass), from which fort mysteriously emerges a boy, to whom I am much indebted for additions to my scanty stock of knowledge. He is a young boy, with an intelligent face burnt to a dust colour by the summer sun, and with crisp hair of the same hue. He is a boy in whom I have perceived nothing incompatible with habits of studious inquiry and meditation, unless an evanescent black eye (I was delicate of inquiring how occasioned) should be so considered. To him am I indebted for ability to identify a Custom-house boat at any distance, and for acquaintance with all the forms and ceremonies observed by a homeward-bound Indiaman coming up the river, when the Custom-house officers go aboard her. But for him, I might never have heard of 'the dumb-ague,' respecting which malady I am now learned. Had I never sat at his feet, I might have finished my mortal career and never known that when I see a white horse on a barge's sail, that barge is a lime barge. For precious secrets in reference to beer, am I likewise beholden to him, involving warning against the beer of a certain establishment, by reason of its having turned sour through failure in point of demand: though my young sage is not of opinion that similar deterioration has befallen the ale. He has also enlightened me touching the mushrooms of the marshes, and has gently reproved my ignorance in having supposed them to be impregnated with salt. His manner of imparting information, is thoughtful, and appropriate to the scene. As he reclines beside me, he pitches into the river, a little stone or piece of grit, and then delivers himself oracularly, as though he spoke out of the centre of the spreading circle that it makes in the water. He never improves my mind without observing this formula.

With the wise boy—whom I know by no other name than the Spirit of the Fort—I recently consorted on a breezy day when the river leaped about us and was full of life. I had seen the sheaved corn carrying in the golden fields as I came down to the river; and the rosy farmer, watching his labouring-men in the saddle on his cob, had told me how he had reaped his two hundred and sixty acres of long-strawed corn last week, and how a better week's work he had never done in all his days. Peace and abundance were on the country-side in beautiful forms and beautiful colours, and the harvest seemed even to be sailing out to grace the never-reaped sea in the yellow-laden barges that mellowed the distance.

It was on this occasion that the Spirit of the Fort, directing his remarks to a certain floating iron battery lately lying in that reach of the river, enriched my mind with his opinions on naval architecture, and informed me that he would like to be an engineer. I found him up to everything that is done in the contracting line by Messrs. Peto and Brassey—cunning in the article of concrete—mellow in the matter of iron—great on the subject of gunnery. When he spoke of pile-driving and sluice-making, he left me not a leg to stand on, and I can never sufficiently acknowledge his forbearance with me in my disabled state. While he thus discoursed, he several times directed his eyes to one distant quarter of the landscape, and spoke with vague mysterious awe of 'the Yard.' Pondering his lessons after we had parted, I bethought me that the Yard was one of our large public Dockyards, and that it lay hidden among the crops down in the dip behind the windmills, as if it modestly kept itself out of view in peaceful times, and sought to trouble no man. Taken with this modesty on the part of the Yard, I resolved to improve the Yard's acquaintance.

My good opinion of the Yard's retiring character was not dashed by nearer approach. It resounded with the noise of hammers beating upon iron; and the great sheds or slips under which the mighty men-of-war are built, loomed business-like when contemplated from the opposite side of the river. For all that, however, the Yard made no display, but kept itself snug under hill-sides of corn-fields, hop-gardens, and orchards; its great chimneys smoking with a quiet—almost a lazy—air, like giants smoking tobacco; and the great Shears moored off it, looking meekly and inoffensively out of proportion, like the Giraffe of the machinery creation. The store of cannon on the neighbouring gun-wharf, had an innocent toy-like appearance, and the one red-coated sentry on duty over them was a mere toy figure, with a clock-work movement. As the hot sunlight sparkled on him he might have passed for the identical little man who had the little gun, and whose bullets they were made of lead, lead, lead.

Crossing the river and landing at the Stairs, where a drift of chips and weed had been trying to land before me and had not succeeded, but had got into a corner instead, I found the very street posts to be cannon, and the architectural ornaments to be shells. And so I came to the Yard, which was shut up tight and strong with great folded gates, like an enormous patent safe. These gates devouring me, I became digested into the Yard; and it had, at first, a clean-swept holiday air, as if it had given over work until next war-time. Though indeed a quantity of hemp for rope was tumbling out of store-houses, even there, which would hardly be lying like so much hay on the white stones if the Yard were as placid as it pretended.

Ding, Clash, Dong, BANG, Boom, Rattle, Clash, BANG, Clink, BANG, Dong, BANG, Clatter, BANG BANG BANG! What on earth is this! This is, or soon will be, the Achilles, iron armour-plated ship. Twelve hundred men are working at her now; twelve hundred men working on stages over her sides, over her bows, over her stern, under her keel, between her decks, down in her hold, within her and without, crawling and creeping into the finest curves of her lines wherever it is possible for men to twist. Twelve hundred hammerers, measurers, caulkers, armourers, forgers, smiths, shipwrights; twelve hundred dingers, clashers, dongers, rattlers, clinkers, bangers bangers bangers! Yet all this stupendous uproar around the rising Achilles is as nothing to the reverberations with which the perfected Achilles shall resound upon the dreadful day when the full work is in hand for which this is but note of preparation—the day when the scuppers that are now fitting like great, dry, thirsty conduit-pipes, shall run red. All these busy figures between decks, dimly seen bending at their work in smoke and fire, are as nothing to the figures that shall do work here of another kind in smoke and fire, that day. These steam-worked engines alongside, helping the ship by travelling to and fro, and wafting tons of iron plates about, as though they were so many leaves of trees, would be rent limb from limb if they stood by her for a minute then. To think that this Achilles, monstrous compound of iron tank and oaken chest, can ever swim or roll! To think that any force of wind and wave could ever break her! To think that wherever I see a glowing red-hot iron point thrust out of her side from within—as I do now, there, and there, and there!—and two watching men on a stage without, with bared arms and sledge-hammers, strike at it fiercely, and repeat their blows until it is black and flat, I see a rivet being driven home, of which there are many in every iron plate, and thousands upon thousands in the ship! To think that the difficulty I experience in appreciating the ship's size when I am on board, arises from her being a series of iron tanks and oaken chests, so that internally she is ever finishing and ever beginning, and half of her might be smashed, and yet the remaining half suffice and be sound. Then, to go over the side again and down among the ooze and wet to the bottom of the dock, in the depths of the subterranean forest of dog-shores and stays that hold her up, and to see the immense mass bulging out against the upper light, and tapering down towards me, is, with great pains and much clambering, to arrive at an impossibility of realising that this is a ship at all, and to become possessed by the fancy that it is an enormous immovable edifice set up in an ancient amphitheatre (say, that at Verona), and almost filling it! Yet what would even these things be, without the tributary workshops and the mechanical powers for piercing the iron plates—four inches and a half thick—for rivets, shaping them under hydraulic pressure to the finest tapering turns of the ship's lines, and paring them away, with knives shaped like the beaks of strong and cruel birds, to the nicest requirements of the design! These machines of tremendous force, so easily directed by one attentive face and presiding hand, seem to me to have in them something of the retiring character of the Yard. 'Obedient monster, please to bite this mass of iron through and through, at equal distances, where these regular chalk-marks are, all round.' Monster looks at its work, and lifting its ponderous head, replies, 'I don't particularly want to do it; but if it must be done—!' The solid metal wriggles out, hot from the monster's crunching tooth, and it *is* done. 'Dutiful monster, observe this other mass of iron. It is required to be pared away, according to this delicately lessening and arbitrary line, which please to look at.' Monster (who has been in a reverie) brings down its blunt head, and, much in the manner of Doctor Johnson, closely looks along the line—very closely, being somewhat near-sighted. 'I don't particularly want to do it; but if it must be done—!' Monster takes another near-sighted look, takes aim, and the tortured piece writhes off, and falls, a hot, tight-twisted snake, among the ashes. The making of the rivets is merely a pretty round game, played by a man and a boy, who put red-hot barley sugar in a Pope Joan board, and immediately rivets fall out of window; but the tone of the great machines is the tone of the great Yard and the great country: 'We don't particularly want to do it; but if it must be done—!'

How such a prodigious mass as the Achilles can ever be held by such comparatively little anchors as those intended for her and lying near her here, is a mystery of seamanship which I will refer to the wise boy. For my own part, I should as soon have thought of tethering an elephant to a tent-peg, or the larger hippopotamus in the Zoological Gardens to my shirt-pin. Yonder in the river, alongside a hulk, lie two of this ship's hollow iron masts. *They* are large enough for the eye, I find, and so are all her other appliances. I wonder why only her anchors look small.

I have no present time to think about it, for I am going to see the workshops where they make all the oars used in the British Navy. A pretty large pile of building, I opine, and a pretty long job! As to the building, I am soon disappointed, because the work is all done in one loft. And as to a long job—what is this? Two rather large mangles with a swarm of butterflies hovering over them? What can there be in the mangles that attracts butterflies?

Drawing nearer, I discern that these are not mangles, but intricate machines, set with knives and saws and planes, which cut smooth and straight here, and slantwise there, and now cut such a depth, and now miss cutting altogether, according to the predestined requirements of the pieces of wood that are pushed on below them: each of which pieces is to be an oar, and is roughly adapted to that purpose before it takes its final leave of far-off forests, and sails for England. Likewise I discern that the butterflies are not true butterflies, but wooden shavings, which, being spirted up from the wood by the violence of the machinery, and kept in rapid and not equal movement by the impulse of its rotation on the air, flutter and play, and rise and fall, and conduct themselves as like butterflies as heart could wish. Suddenly the noise and motion cease, and the butterflies drop dead. An oar has been made since I came in, wanting the shaped handle. As quickly as I can follow it with my eye and thought, the same oar is carried to a turning lathe. A whirl and a Nick! Handle made. Oar finished.

The exquisite beauty and efficiency of this machinery need no illustration, but happen to have a pointed illustration to-day. A pair of oars of unusual size chance to be wanted for a special purpose, and they have to be made by hand. Side by side with the subtle and facile machine, and side by side with the fast-growing pile of oars on the floor, a man shapes out these special oars with an axe. Attended by no butterflies, and chipping and dinting, by comparison as leisurely as if he were a labouring Pagan getting them ready against his decease at threescore and ten, to take with him as a present to Charon for his boat, the man (aged about thirty) plies his task. The machine would make a regulation oar while the man wipes his forehead. The man might be buried in a mound made of the strips of thin, broad, wooden ribbon torn from the wood whirled into oars as the minutes fall from the clock, before he had done a forenoon’s work with his axe.

Passing from this wonderful sight to the Ships again—for my heart, as to the Yard, is where the ships are—I notice certain unfinished wooden walls left seasoning on the stocks, pending the solution of the merits of the wood and iron question, and having an air of biding their time with surly confidence. The names of these worthies are set up beside them, together with their capacity in guns—a custom highly conducive to ease and satisfaction in social intercourse, if it could be adapted to mankind. By a plank more gracefully pendulous than substantial, I make bold to go aboard a transport ship (iron screw) just sent in from the contractor's yard to be inspected and passed. She is a very gratifying experience, in the simplicity and humanity of her arrangements for troops, in her provision for light and air and cleanliness, and in her care for women and children. It occurs to me, as I explore her, that I would require a handsome sum of money to go aboard her, at midnight by the Dockyard bell, and stay aboard alone till morning; for surely she must be haunted by a crowd of ghosts of obstinate old martinets, mournfully flapping their cherubic epaulettes over the changed times. Though still we may learn from the astounding ways and means in our Yards now, more highly than ever to respect the forefathers who got to sea, and fought the sea, and held the sea, without them. This remembrance putting me in the best of tempers with an old hulk, very green as to her copper, and generally dim and patched, I pull off my hat to her. Which salutation a callow and downy-faced young officer of Engineers, going by at the moment, perceiving, appropriates—and to which he is most heartily welcome, I am sure.

Having been torn to pieces (in imagination) by the steam circular saws, perpendicular saws, horizontal saws, and saws of eccentric action, I come to the sauntering part of my expedition, and consequently to the core of my Uncommercial pursuits.

Everywhere, as I saunter up and down the Yard, I meet with tokens of its quiet and retiring character. There is a gravity upon its red brick offices and houses, a staid pretence of having nothing worth mentioning to do, an avoidance of display, which I never saw out of England. The white stones of the pavement present no other trace of Achilles and his twelve hundred banging men (not one of whom strikes an attitude) than a few occasional echoes. But for a whisper in the air suggestive of sawdust and shavings, the oar-making and the saws of many movements might be miles away. Down below here, is the great reservoir of water where timber is steeped in various temperatures, as a part of its seasoning process. Above it, on a tramroad supported by pillars, is a Chinese Enchanter's Car, which fishes the logs up, when sufficiently steeped, and rolls smoothly away with them to stack them. When I was a child (the Yard being then familiar to me) I used to think that I should like to play at Chinese Enchanter, and to have that apparatus placed at my disposal for the purpose by a beneficent country. I still think that I should rather like to try the effect of writing a book in it. Its retirement is complete, and to go gliding to and fro among the stacks of timber would be a convenient kind of travelling in foreign countries—among the forests of North America, the sodden Honduras swamps, the dark pine woods, the Norwegian frosts, and the tropical heats, rainy seasons, and thunderstorms. The costly store of timber is stacked and stowed away in sequestered places, with the pervading avoidance of flourish or effect. It makes as little of itself as possible, and calls to no one 'Come and look at me!' And yet it is picked out from the trees of the world; picked out for length, picked out for breadth, picked out for straightness, picked out for crookedness, chosen with an eye to every need of ship and boat. Strangely twisted pieces lie about, precious in the sight of shipwrights. Sauntering through these groves, I come upon an open glade where workmen are examining some timber recently delivered. Quite a pastoral scene, with a background of river and windmill! and no more like War than the American States are at present like an Union.

Sauntering among the ropemaking, I am spun into a state of blissful indolence, wherein my rope of life seems to be so untwisted by the process as that I can see back to very early days indeed, when my bad dreams—they were frightful, though my more mature understanding has never made out why—were of an interminable sort of ropemaking, with long minute filaments for strands, which, when they were spun home together close to my eyes, occasioned screaming. Next, I walk among the quiet lofts of stores—of sails, spars, rigging, ships' boats—determined to believe that somebody in authority wears a girdle and bends beneath the weight of a massive bunch of keys, and that, when such a thing is wanted, he comes telling his keys like Blue Beard, and opens such a door. Impassive as the long lofts look, let the electric battery send down the word, and the shutters and doors shall fly open, and such a fleet of armed ships, under steam and under sail, shall burst forth as will charge the old Medway—where the merry Stuart let the Dutch come, while his not so merry sailors starved in the streets—with something worth looking at to carry to the sea. Thus I idle round to the Medway again, where it is now flood tide; and I find the river evincing a strong solicitude to force a way into the dry dock where Achilles is waited on by the twelve hundred bangers, with intent to bear the whole away before they are ready.

To the last, the Yard puts a quiet face upon it; for I make my way to the gates through a little quiet grove of trees, shading the quaintest of Dutch landing-places, where the leaf-speckled shadow of a shipwright just passing away at the further end might be the shadow of Russian Peter himself. So, the doors of the great patent safe at last close upon me, and I take boat again: somehow, thinking as the oars dip, of braggart Pistol and his brood, and of the quiet monsters of the Yard, with their ‘We don’t particularly want to do it; but if it must be done—!’ Scrunch.

CHAPTER XXVII—IN THE FRENCH-FLEMISH COUNTRY

‘It is neither a bold nor a diversified country,’ said I to myself, ‘this country which is three-quarters Flemish, and a quarter French; yet it has its attractions too. Though great lines of railway traverse it, the trains leave it behind, and go puffing off to Paris and the South, to Belgium and Germany, to the Northern Sea-Coast of France, and to England, and merely smoke it a little in passing. Then I don’t know it, and that is a good reason for being here; and I can’t pronounce half the long queer names I see inscribed over the shops, and that is another good reason for being here, since I surely ought to learn how.’ In short, I was ‘here,’ and I wanted an excuse for not going away from here, and I made it to my satisfaction, and stayed here.

What part in my decision was borne by Monsieur P. Salcy, is of no moment, though I own to encountering that gentleman’s name on a red bill on the wall, before I made up my mind. Monsieur P. Salcy, ‘par permission de M. le Maire,’ had established his theatre in the whitewashed Hôtel de Ville, on the steps of which illustrious edifice I stood. And Monsieur P. Salcy, privileged director of such theatre, situate in ‘the first theatrical arrondissement of the department of the North,’ invited French-Flemish mankind to come and partake of the intellectual banquet provided by his family of dramatic artists, fifteen subjects in number. ‘La Famille P. SALCY, composée d’artistes dramatiques, au nombre de 15 sujets.’

Neither a bold nor a diversified country, I say again, and withal an untidy country, but pleasant enough to ride in, when the paved roads over the flats and through the hollows, are not too deep in black mud. A country so sparely inhabited, that I wonder where the peasants who till and sow and reap the ground, can possibly dwell, and also by what invisible balloons they are conveyed from their distant homes into the fields at sunrise and back again at sunset. The occasional few poor cottages and farms in this region, surely cannot afford shelter to the numbers necessary to the cultivation, albeit the work is done so very deliberately, that on one long harvest day I have seen, in twelve miles, about twice as many men and women (all told) reaping and binding. Yet have I seen more cattle, more sheep, more pigs, and all in better case, than where there is purer French spoken, and also better ricks—round swelling peg-top ricks, well thatched; not a shapeless brown heap, like the toast of a Giant’s toast-and-water, pinned to the earth with one of the skewers out of his kitchen. A good custom they have about here, likewise, of prolonging the sloping tiled roof of farm or cottage, so that it overhangs three or four feet, carrying off the wet, and making a good drying-place wherein to hang up herbs, or implements, or what not. A better custom than the popular one of keeping the refuse-heap and puddle close before the house door: which, although I paint my dwelling never so brightly blue (and it cannot be too blue for me, hereabouts), will bring fever inside my door. Wonderful poultry of the French-Flemish country, why take the trouble to *be* poultry? Why not stop short at eggs in the rising generation, and die out and have done with it? Parents of chickens have I seen this day, followed by their wretched young families, scratching nothing out of the mud with an air—tottering about on legs so scraggy and weak, that the valiant word drumsticks becomes a mockery when applied to them, and the crow of the lord and master has been a mere dejected case of croup. Carts have I seen, and other agricultural instruments, unwieldy, dislocated, monstrous. Poplar-trees by the thousand fringe the fields and fringe the end of the flat landscape, so that I feel, looking straight on before me, as if, when I pass the extremest fringe on the low horizon, I shall tumble over into space. Little whitewashed black holes of chapels, with barred doors and Flemish inscriptions, abound at roadside corners, and often they are garnished with a sheaf of wooden crosses, like children’s swords; or, in their default, some hollow old tree with a saint roosting in it, is similarly decorated, or a pole with a very diminutive saint enshrined aloft in a sort of sacred pigeon-house. Not that we are deficient in such decoration in the town here, for, over at the church yonder, outside the building, is a scenic representation of the Crucifixion, built up with old bricks and stones, and made out with painted canvas and wooden figures: the whole surmounting the dusty skull of some holy personage (perhaps), shut up behind a little ashy iron grate, as if it were originally put there to be cooked, and the fire had long gone out. A windmilly country this, though the windmills are so damp and rickety, that they nearly knock themselves off their legs at every turn of their sails, and creak in loud complaint. A weaving country, too, for in the wayside cottages the loom goes wearily—rattle and click, rattle and click—and, looking in, I see the poor weaving peasant, man or woman, bending at the work, while the child, working too, turns a little hand-wheel put upon the ground to suit its height. An unconscionable monster, the loom in a small dwelling, asserting himself ungenerously as the bread-winner, straddling over the children's straw beds, cramping the family in space and air, and making himself generally objectionable and tyrannical. He is tributary, too, to ugly mills and factories and bleaching-grounds, rising out of the sluiced fields in an abrupt bare way, disdaining, like himself, to be ornamental or accommodating. Surrounded by these things, here I stood on the steps of the Hôtel de Ville, persuaded to remain by the P. Salcy family, fifteen dramatic subjects strong.

There was a Fair besides. The double persuasion being irresistible, and my sponge being left behind at the last Hotel, I made the tour of the little town to buy another. In the small sunny shops—mercers, opticians, and druggist-grocers, with here and there an emporium of religious images—the gravest of old spectacled Flemish husbands and wives sat contemplating one another across bare counters, while the wasps, who seemed to have taken military possession of the town, and to have placed it under wasp-martial law, executed warlike manoeuvres in the windows. Other shops the wasps had entirely to themselves, and nobody cared and nobody came when I beat with a five-franc piece upon the board of custom. What I sought was no more to be found than if I had sought a nugget of Californian gold: so I went, spongeless, to pass the evening with the Family P. Salcy.

The members of the Family P. Salcy were so fat and so like one another—fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, uncles, and aunts—that I think the local audience were much confused about the plot of the piece under representation, and to the last expected that everybody must turn out to be the long-lost relative of everybody else. The Theatre was established on the top story of the Hôtel de Ville, and was approached by a long bare staircase, whereon, in an airy situation, one of the P. Salcy Family—a stout gentleman imperfectly repressed by a belt—took the money. This occasioned the greatest excitement of the evening; for, no sooner did the curtain rise on the introductory Vaudeville, and reveal in the person of the young lover (singing a very short song with his eyebrows) apparently the very same identical stout gentleman imperfectly repressed by a belt, than everybody rushed out to the paying-place, to ascertain whether he could possibly have put on that dress-coat, that clear complexion, and those arched black vocal eyebrows, in so short a space of time. It then became manifest that this was another stout gentleman imperfectly repressed by a belt: to whom, before the spectators had recovered their presence of mind, entered a third stout gentleman imperfectly repressed by a belt, exactly like him. These two ‘subjects,’ making with the money-taker three of the announced fifteen, fell into conversation touching a charming young widow: who, presently appearing, proved to be a stout lady altogether irrepressible by any means—quite a parallel case to the American Negro—fourth of the fifteen subjects, and sister of the fifth who presided over the check-department. In good time the whole of the fifteen subjects were dramatically presented, and we had the inevitable Ma Mère, Ma Mère! and also the inevitable malédiction d’un père, and likewise the inevitable Marquis, and also the inevitable provincial young man, weak-minded but faithful, who followed Julie to Paris, and cried and laughed and choked all at once. The story was wrought out with the help of a virtuous spinning-wheel in the beginning, a vicious set of diamonds in the middle, and a rheumatic blessing (which arrived by post) from Ma Mère towards the end; the whole resulting in a small sword in the body of one of the stout gentlemen imperfectly repressed by a belt, fifty thousand francs per annum and a decoration to the other stout gentleman imperfectly repressed by a belt, and an assurance from everybody to the provincial young man that if he were not supremely happy—which he seemed to have no reason whatever for being—he ought to be. This afforded him a final opportunity of crying and laughing and choking all at once, and sent the audience home sentimentally delighted. Audience more attentive or better behaved there could not possibly be, though the places of second rank in the Theatre of the Family P. Salcy were sixpence each in English money, and the places of first rank a shilling. How the fifteen subjects ever got so fat upon it, the kind Heavens know.

What gorgeous china figures of knights and ladies, gilded till they gleamed again, I might have bought at the Fair for the garniture of my home, if I had been a French-Flemish peasant, and had had the money! What shining coffee-cups and saucers I might have won at the turntables, if I had had the luck! Ravishing perfumery also, and sweetmeats, I might have speculated in, or I might have fired for prizes at a multitude of little dolls in niches, and might have hit the doll of dolls, and won francs and fame. Or, being a French-Flemish youth, I might have been drawn in a hand-cart by my compeers, to tilt for municipal rewards at the waterquintain; which, unless I sent my lance clean through the ring, emptied a full bucket over me; to fend off which, the competitors wore grotesque old scarecrow hats. Or, being French-Flemish man or woman, boy or girl, I might have circled all night on my hobby-horse in a stately cavalcade of hobby-horses four abreast, interspersed with triumphal cars, going round and round and round and round, we the goodly company singing a ceaseless chorus to the music of the barrel-organ, drum, and cymbals. On the whole, not more monotonous than the Ring in Hyde Park, London, and much merrier; for when do the circling company sing chorus, *there*, to the barrel-organ, when do the ladies embrace their horses round the neck with both arms, when do the gentlemen fan the ladies with the tails of their gallant steeds? On all these revolving delights, and on their own especial lamps and Chinese lanterns revolving with them, the thoughtful weaver-face brightens, and the Hôtel de Ville sheds an illuminated line of gaslight: while above it, the Eagle of France, gas-outlined and apparently afflicted with the prevailing infirmities that have lighted on the poultry, is in a very undecided state of policy, and as a bird moulting. Flags flutter all around. Such is the prevailing gaiety that the keeper of the prison sits on the stone steps outside the prison-door, to have a look at the world that is not locked up; while that agreeable retreat, the wine-shop opposite to the prison in the prison-alley (its sign La Tranquillité, because of its charming situation), resounds with the voices of the shepherds and shepherdesses who resort there this festive night. And it reminds me that only this afternoon, I saw a shepherd in trouble, tending this way, over the jagged stones of a neighbouring street. A magnificent sight it was, to behold him in his blouse, a feeble little jog-trot rustic, swept along by the wind of two immense gendarmes, in cocked-hats for which the street was hardly wide enough, each carrying a bundle of stolen property that would not have held his shoulder-knot, and clanking a sabre that dwarfed the prisoner.

‘Messieurs et Mesdames, I present to you at this Fair, as a mark of my confidence in the people of this so-renowned town, and as an act of homage to their good sense and fine taste, the Ventriloquist, the Ventriloquist! Further, Messieurs et Mesdames, I present to you the Face-Maker, the Physiognomist, the great Changer of Countenances, who transforms the features that Heaven has bestowed upon him into an endless succession of surprising and extraordinary visages, comprehending, Messieurs et Mesdames, all the contortions, energetic and expressive, of which the human face is capable, and all the passions of the human heart, as Love, Jealousy, Revenge, Hatred, Avarice, Despair! Hi hi! Ho ho! Lu lu! Come in!' To this effect, with an occasional smite upon a sonorous kind of tambourine—bestowed with a will, as if it represented the people who won't come in—holds forth a man of lofty and severe demeanour; a man in stately uniform, gloomy with the knowledge he possesses of the inner secrets of the booth. 'Come in, come in! Your opportunity presents itself to-night; to-morrow it will be gone for ever. To-morrow morning by the Express Train the railroad will reclaim the Ventriloquist and the Face-Maker! Algeria will reclaim the Ventriloquist and the Face-Maker! Yes! For the honour of their country they have accepted propositions of a magnitude incredible, to appear in Algeria. See them for the last time before their departure! We go to commence on the instant. Hi hi! Ho ho! Lu lu! Come in! Take the money that now ascends, Madame; but after that, no more, for we commence! Come in!'

Nevertheless, the eyes both of the gloomy Speaker and of Madame receiving sous in a muslin bower, survey the crowd pretty sharply after the ascending money has ascended, to detect any lingering sous at the turning-point. 'Come in, come in! Is there any more money, Madame, on the point of ascending? If so, we wait for it. If not, we commence!' The orator looks back over his shoulder to say it, lashing the spectators with the conviction that he beholds through the folds of the drapery into which he is about to plunge, the Ventriloquist and the Face-Maker. Several sous burst out of pockets, and ascend. 'Come up, then, Messieurs!' exclaims Madame in a shrill voice, and beckoning with a bejewelled finger. 'Come up! This presses. Monsieur has commanded that they commence!' Monsieur dives into his Interior, and the last half-dozen of us follow. His Interior is comparatively severe; his Exterior also. A true Temple of Art needs nothing but seats, drapery, a small table with two moderator lamps hanging over it, and an ornamental looking-glass let into the wall. Monsieur in uniform gets behind the table and surveys us with disdain, his forehead becoming diabolically intellectual under the moderators. 'Messieurs et Mesdames, I present to you the Ventriloquist. He will commence with the celebrated Experience of the bee in the window. The bee, apparently the veritable bee of Nature, will hover in the window, and about the room. He will be with difficulty caught in the hand of Monsieur the Ventriloquist—he will escape—he will again hover—at length he will be recaptured by

Monsieur the Ventriloquist, and will be with difficulty put into a bottle. Achieve then, Monsieur!’ Here the proprietor is replaced behind the table by the Ventriloquist, who is thin and sallow, and of a weakly aspect. While the bee is in progress, Monsieur the Proprietor sits apart on a stool, immersed in dark and remote thought. The moment the bee is bottled, he stalks forward, eyes us gloomily as we applaud, and then announces, sternly waving his hand: ‘The magnificent Experience of the child with the whooping-cough!’ The child disposed of, he starts up as before. ‘The superb and extraordinary Experience of the dialogue between Monsieur Tatambour in his dining-room, and his domestic, Jerome, in the cellar; concluding with the songsters of the grove, and the Concert of domestic Farm-yard animals.’ All this done, and well done, Monsieur the Ventriloquist withdraws, and Monsieur the Face-Maker bursts in, as if his retiring-room were a mile long instead of a yard. A corpulent little man in a large white waistcoat, with a comic countenance, and with a wig in his hand. Irreverent disposition to laugh, instantly checked by the tremendous gravity of the Face-Maker, who intimates in his bow that if we expect that sort of thing we are mistaken. A very little shaving-glass with a leg behind it is handed in, and placed on the table before the Face-Maker. ‘Messieurs et Mesdames, with no other assistance than this mirror and this wig, I shall have the honour of showing you a thousand characters.’ As a preparation, the Face-Maker with both hands gouges himself, and turns his mouth inside out. He then becomes frightfully grave again, and says to the Proprietor, ‘I am ready!’ Proprietor stalks forth from baleful reverie, and announces ‘The Young Conscript!’ Face-Maker claps his wig on, hind side before, looks in the glass, and appears above it as a conscript so very imbecile, and squinting so extremely hard, that I should think the State would never get any good of him. Thunders of applause. Face-Maker dips behind the looking-glass, brings his own hair forward, is himself again, is awfully grave. ‘A distinguished inhabitant of the Faubourg St. Germain.’ Face-Maker dips, rises, is supposed to be aged, blear-eyed, toothless, slightly palsied, supernaturally polite, evidently of noble birth. ‘The oldest member of the Corps of Invalides on the fête-day of his master.’ Face-Maker dips, rises, wears the wig on one side, has become the feeblest military bore in existence, and (it is clear) would lie frightfully about his past achievements, if he were not confined to pantomime. ‘The Miser!’ Face-Maker dips, rises, clutches a bag, and every hair of the wig is on end to express that he lives in continual dread of thieves. ‘The Genius of France!’ Face-Maker dips, rises, wig pushed back and smoothed flat, little cocked-hat (artfully concealed till now) put a-top of it, Face-Maker’s white waistcoat much advanced, Face-Maker’s left hand in bosom of white waistcoat, Face-Maker’s right hand behind his back. Thunders. This is the first of three positions of the Genius of France. In the second position, the Face-Maker takes snuff; in the third, rolls up his fight hand, and surveys illimitable armies through that pocket-glass. The Face-Maker then, by putting out his tongue, and wearing the wig nohow in particular, becomes the Village Idiot. The most remarkable feature in the whole of his ingenious performance, is, that whatever he does to disguise himself, has the effect of rendering him rather more like himself than he was at first.

There were peep-shows in this Fair, and I had the pleasure of recognising several fields of glory with which I became well acquainted a year or two ago as Crimean battles, now doing duty as Mexican victories. The change was neatly effected by some extra smoking of the Russians, and by permitting the camp followers free range in the foreground to despoil the enemy of their uniforms. As no British troops had ever happened to be within sight when the artist took his original sketches, it followed fortunately that none were in the way now.

The Fair wound up with a ball. Respecting the particular night of the week on which the ball took place, I decline to commit myself; merely mentioning that it was held in a stable-yard so very close to the railway, that it was a mercy the locomotive did not set fire to it. (In Scotland, I suppose, it would have done so.) There, in a tent prettily decorated with looking-glasses and a myriad of toy flags, the people danced all night. It was not an expensive recreation, the price of a double ticket for a cavalier and lady being one and threepence in English money, and even of that small sum fivepence was reclaimable for ‘consommation:’ which word I venture to translate into refreshments of no greater strength, at the strongest, than ordinary wine made hot, with sugar and lemon in it. It was a ball of great good humour and of great enjoyment, though very many of the dancers must have been as poor as the fifteen subjects of the P. Salcy Family.

In short, not having taken my own pet national pint pot with me to this Fair, I was very well satisfied with the measure of simple enjoyment that it poured into the dull French-Flemish country life. How dull that is, I had an opportunity of considering—when the Fair was over—when the tricoloured flags were withdrawn from the windows of the houses on the Place where the Fair was held—when the windows were close shut, apparently until next Fair-time—when the Hôtel de Ville had cut off its gas and put away its eagle—when the two paviours, whom I take to form the entire paving population of the town, were ramming down the stones which had been pulled up for the erection of decorative poles—when the jailer had slammed his gate, and sulkily locked himself in with his charges. But then, as I paced the ring which marked the track of the departed hobby-horses on the market-place, pondering in my mind how long some hobby-horses do leave their tracks in public ways, and how difficult they are to erase, my eyes were greeted with a goodly sight. I beheld four male personages thoughtfully pacing the Place together, in the sunlight, evidently not belonging to the town, and having upon them a certain loose cosmopolitan air of not belonging to any town. One was clad in a suit of white canvas, another in a cap and blouse, the third in an old military frock, the fourth in a shapeless dress that looked as if it had been made out of old umbrellas. All wore dust-coloured shoes. My heart beat high; for, in those four male personages, although complexionless and eyebrowless, I beheld four subjects of the Family P. Salcy. Blue-bearded though they were, and bereft of the youthful smoothness of cheek which is imparted by what is termed in Albion a ‘Whitechapel shave’ (and which is, in fact, whitening, judiciously applied to the jaws with the palm of the hand), I recognised them. As I stood admiring, there emerged from the yard of a lowly Cabaret, the excellent Ma Mère, Ma Mère, with the words, ‘The soup is served;’ words which so elated the subject in the canvas suit, that when they all ran in to partake, he went last, dancing with his hands stuck angularly into the pockets of his canvas trousers, after the Pierrot manner. Glancing down the Yard, the last I saw of him was, that he looked in through a window (at the soup, no doubt) on one leg.

Full of this pleasure, I shortly afterwards departed from the town, little dreaming of an addition to my good fortune. But more was in reserve. I went by a train which was heavy with third-class carriages, full of young fellows (well guarded) who had drawn unlucky numbers in the last conscription, and were on their way to a famous French garrison town where much of the raw military material is worked up into soldiery. At the station they had been sitting about, in their threadbare homespun blue garments, with their poor little bundles under their arms, covered with dust and clay, and the various soils of France; sad enough at heart, most of them, but putting a good face upon it, and slapping their breasts and singing choruses on the smallest provocation; the gayest spirits shouldering half loaves of black bread speared upon their walking-sticks. As we went along, they were audible at every station, chorusing wildly out of tune, and feigning the highest hilarity. After a while, however, they began to leave off singing, and to laugh naturally, while at intervals there mingled with their laughter the barking of a dog. Now, I had to alight short of their destination, and, as that stoppage of the train was attended with a quantity of horn blowing, bell ringing, and proclamation of what Messieurs les Voyageurs were to do, and were not to do, in order to reach their respective destinations, I had ample leisure to go forward on the platform to take a parting look at my recruits, whose heads were all out at window, and who were laughing like delighted children. Then I perceived that a large poodle with a pink nose, who had been their travelling companion and the cause of their mirth, stood on his hind-legs presenting arms on the extreme verge of the platform, ready to salute them as the train went off. This poodle wore a military shako (it is unnecessary to add, very much on one side over one eye), a little military coat, and the regulation white gaiters. He was armed with a little musket and a little sword-bayonet, and he stood presenting arms in perfect attitude, with his unobscured eye on his master or superior officer, who stood by him. So admirable was his discipline, that, when the train moved, and he was greeted with the parting cheers of the recruits, and also with a shower of centimes, several of which struck his shako, and had a tendency to discompose him, he remained staunch on his post, until the train was gone. He then resigned his arms to his officer, took off his shako by rubbing his paw over it, dropped on four legs, bringing his uniform coat into the absurdest relations with the overarching skies, and ran about the platform in his white gaiters, waging his tail to an exceeding great extent. It struck me that there was more waggery than this in the poodle, and that he knew that the recruits would neither get through their exercises, nor get rid of their uniforms, as easily as he; revolving which in my thoughts, and seeking in my pockets some small money to bestow upon him, I casually directed my eyes to the face of his superior officer, and in him beheld the Face-Maker! Though it was not the way to Algeria, but quite the reverse, the military poodle’s Colonel was the Face-Maker in a dark blouse, with a small bundle dangling over his shoulder at the end of an umbrella, and taking a pipe from his breast to smoke as he and the poodle went their mysterious way.

CHAPTER XXVIII—MEDICINE MEN OF CIVILISATION

My voyages (in paper boats) among savages often yield me matter for reflection at home. It is curious to trace the savage in the civilised man, and to detect the hold of some savage customs on conditions of society rather boastful of being high above them.

I wonder, is the Medicine Man of the North American Indians never to be got rid of, out of the North American country? He comes into my Wigwam on all manner of occasions, and with the absurdest 'Medicine.' I always find it extremely difficult, and I often find it simply impossible, to keep him out of my Wigwam. For his legal 'Medicine' he sticks upon his head the hair of quadrupeds, and plasters the same with fat, and dirty white powder, and talks a gibberish quite unknown to the men and squaws of his tribe. For his religious 'Medicine' he puts on puffy white sleeves, little black aprons, large black waistcoats of a peculiar cut, collarless coats with Medicine button-holes, Medicine stockings and gaiters and shoes, and tops the whole with a highly grotesque Medicinal hat. In one respect, to be sure, I am quite free from him. On occasions when the Medicine Men in general, together with a large number of the miscellaneous inhabitants of his village, both male and female, are presented to the principal Chief, his native 'Medicine' is a comical mixture of old odds and ends (hired of traders) and new things in antiquated shapes, and pieces of red cloth (of which he is particularly fond), and white and red and blue paint for the face. The irrationality of this particular Medicine culminates in a mock battle-rush, from which many of the squaws are borne out, much dilapidated. I need not observe how unlike this is to a Drawing Room at St. James's Palace.

The African magician I find it very difficult to exclude from my Wigwam too. This creature takes cases of death and mourning under his supervision, and will frequently impoverish a whole family by his preposterous enchantments. He is a great eater and drinker, and always conceals a rejoicing stomach under a grieving exterior. His charms consist of an infinite quantity of worthless scraps, for which he charges very high. He impresses on the poor bereaved natives, that the more of his followers they pay to exhibit such scraps on their persons for an hour or two (though they never saw the deceased in their lives, and are put in high spirits by his decease), the more honourably and piously they grieve for the dead. The poor people submitting themselves to this conjurer, an expensive procession is formed, in which bits of stick, feathers of birds, and a quantity of other unmeaning objects besmeared with black paint, are carried in a certain ghastly order of which no one understands the meaning, if it ever had any, to the brink of the grave, and are then brought back again.

In the Tonga Islands everything is supposed to have a soul, so that when a hatchet is irreparably broken, they say, 'His immortal part has departed; he is gone to the happy hunting-plains.' This belief leads to the logical sequence that when a man is buried, some of his eating and drinking vessels, and some of his warlike implements, must be broken and buried with him. Superstitious and wrong, but surely a more respectable superstition than the hire of antic scraps for a show that has no meaning based on any sincere belief.

Let me halt on my Uncommercial road, to throw a passing glance on some funeral solemnities that I have seen where North American Indians, African Magicians, and Tonga Islanders, are supposed not to be.

Once, I dwelt in an Italian city, where there dwelt with me for a while, an Englishman of an amiable nature, great enthusiasm, and no discretion. This friend discovered a desolate stranger, mourning over the unexpected death of one very dear to him, in a solitary cottage among the vineyards of an outlying village. The circumstances of the bereavement were unusually distressing; and the survivor, new to the peasants and the country, sorely needed help, being alone with the remains. With some difficulty, but with the strong influence of a purpose at once gentle, disinterested, and determined, my friend—Mr. Kindheart—obtained access to the mourner, and undertook to arrange the burial.

There was a small Protestant cemetery near the city walls, and as Mr. Kindheart came back to me, he turned into it and chose the spot. He was always highly flushed when rendering a service unaided, and I knew that to make him happy I must keep aloof from his ministration. But when at dinner he warmed with the good action of the day, and conceived the brilliant idea of comforting the mourner with 'an English funeral,' I ventured to intimate that I thought that institution, which was not absolutely sublime at home, might prove a failure in Italian hands. However, Mr.

Kindheart was so enraptured with his conception, that he presently wrote down into the town requesting the attendance with to-morrow's earliest light of a certain little upholsterer. This upholsterer was famous for speaking the unintelligible local dialect (his own) in a far more unintelligible manner than any other man alive.

When from my bath next morning I overheard Mr. Kindheart and the upholsterer in conference on the top of an echoing staircase; and when I overheard Mr. Kindheart rendering English Undertaking phrases into very choice Italian, and the upholsterer replying in the unknown Tongues; and when I furthermore remembered that the local funerals had no resemblance to English funerals; I became in my secret bosom apprehensive. But Mr. Kindheart informed me at breakfast that measures had been taken to ensure a signal success.

As the funeral was to take place at sunset, and as I knew to which of the city gates it must tend, I went out at that gate as the sun descended, and walked along the dusty, dusty road. I had not walked far, when I encountered this procession:

1. Mr. Kindheart, much abashed, on an immense grey horse.

2. A bright yellow coach and pair, driven by a coachman in bright red velvet knee-breeches and waistcoat. (This was the established local idea of State.) Both coach doors kept open by the coffin, which was on its side within, and sticking out at each.

3. Behind the coach, the mourner, for whom the coach was intended, walking in the dust.

4. Concealed behind a roadside well for the irrigation of a garden, the unintelligible Upholsterer, admiring.

It matters little now. Coaches of all colours are alike to poor Kindheart, and he rests far North of the little cemetery with the cypress-trees, by the city walls where the Mediterranean is so beautiful.

My first funeral, a fair representative funeral after its kind, was that of the husband of a married servant, once my nurse. She married for money. Sally Flanders, after a year or two of matrimony, became the relict of Flanders, a small master builder; and either she or Flanders had done me the honour to express a desire that I should 'follow.' I may have been seven or eight years old;—young enough, certainly, to feel rather alarmed by the expression, as not knowing where the invitation was held to terminate, and how far I was expected to follow the deceased Flanders. Consent being given by the heads of houses, I was jobbed up into what was pronounced at home decent mourning (comprehending somebody else's shirt, unless my memory deceives me), and was admonished that if, when the funeral was in action, I put my hands in my pockets, or took my eyes out of my pocket-handkerchief, I was personally lost, and my family disgraced. On the eventful day, having tried to get myself into a disastrous frame of mind, and having formed a very poor opinion of myself because I couldn't cry, I repaired to Sally's. Sally was an excellent creature, and had been a good wife to old Flanders, but the moment I saw her I knew that she was not in her own real natural state. She formed a sort of Coat of Arms, grouped with a smelling-bottle, a handkerchief, an orange, a bottle of vinegar, Flanders's sister, her own sister, Flanders's brother's wife, and two neighbouring gossips—all in mourning, and all ready to hold her whenever she fainted. At sight of poor little me she became much agitated (agitating me much more), and having exclaimed, 'O here's dear Master Uncommercial!' became hysterical, and swooned as if I had been the death of her. An affecting scene followed, during which I was handed about and poked at her by various people, as if I were the bottle of salts. Reviving a little, she embraced me, said, 'You knew him well, dear Master Uncommercial, and he knew you!' and fainted again: which, as the rest of the Coat of Arms soothingly said, 'done her credit.' Now, I knew that she needn't have fainted unless she liked, and that she wouldn't have fainted unless it had been expected of her, quite as well as I know it at this day. It made me feel uncomfortable and hypocritical besides. I was not sure but that it might be manners in *me* to faint next, and I resolved to keep my eye on Flanders's uncle, and if I saw any signs of his going in that direction, to go too, politely. But Flanders's uncle (who was a weak little old retail grocer) had only one idea, which was that we all wanted tea; and he handed us cups of tea all round, incessantly, whether we refused or not. There was a young nephew of Flanders's present, to whom Flanders, it was rumoured, had left nineteen guineas. He drank all the tea that was offered him, this nephew—amounting, I should say, to several quarts—and ate as much plum-cake as he could possibly come by; but he felt it to be decent mourning that he should now and then stop in the midst of a lump of cake, and appear to forget that his mouth was full, in the contemplation of his uncle's memory. I felt all this to be the fault of the undertaker, who was handing us gloves on a tea-tray as if they were muffins, and tying us into cloaks (mine had to be pinned up all round, it was so long for me), because I knew that he was making game. So, when we got out into the streets, and I constantly disarranged the procession by tumbling on the people before me because my handkerchief blinded my eyes, and tripping up the people behind me because my cloak was so long, I felt that we were all making game. I was truly sorry for Flanders, but I knew that it was no reason why we should be trying (the women with their heads in hoods like coal-scuttles with the black side outward) to keep step with a man in a scarf, carrying a thing like a mourning spy-glass, which he was going to open presently and sweep the horizon with. I knew that we should not all have been speaking in one particular key-note struck by the undertaker, if we had not been making game. Even in our faces we were every one of us as like the undertaker as if we had been his own family, and I perceived that this could not have happened unless we had been making game. When we returned to Sally's, it was all of a piece. The continued impossibility of getting on without plum-cake; the ceremonious apparition of a pair of decanters containing port and sherry and cork; Sally's sister at the tea-table, clinking the best crockery and shaking her head mournfully every time she looked down into the teapot, as if it were the tomb; the Coat of Arms again, and Sally as before; lastly, the words of consolation administered to Sally when it was considered right that she should 'come round nicely:' which were, that the deceased had had 'as com-for-ta-ble a fu-ne-ral as comfortable could be!'

Other funerals have I seen with grown-up eyes, since that day, of which the burden has been the same childish burden. Making game. Real affliction, real grief and solemnity, have been outraged, and the funeral has been 'performed.' The waste for which the funeral customs of many tribes of savages are conspicuous, has attended these civilised obsequies; and once, and twice, have I wished in my soul that if the waste must be, they would let the undertaker bury the money, and let me bury the friend.

In France, upon the whole, these ceremonies are more sensibly regulated, because they are upon the whole less expensively regulated. I cannot say that I have ever been much edified by the custom of tying a bib and apron on the front of the house of mourning, or that I would myself particularly care to be driven to my grave in a nodding and bobbing car, like an infirm four-post bedstead, by an inky fellow-creature in a cocked-hat. But it may be that I am constitutionally insensible to the virtues of a cocked-hat. In provincial France, the solemnities are sufficiently hideous, but are few and cheap. The friends and townsmen of the departed, in their own dresses and not masquerading under the auspices of the African Conjurer, surround the hand-bier, and often carry it. It is not considered indispensable to stifle the bearers, or even to elevate the burden on their shoulders; consequently it is easily taken up, and easily set down, and is carried through the streets without the distressing floundering and shuffling that we see at home. A dirty priest or two, and a dirtier acolyte or two, do not lend any especial grace to the proceedings; and I regard with personal animosity the bassoon, which is blown at intervals by the big-legged priest (it is always a big-legged priest who blows the bassoon), when his fellows combine in a lugubrious stalwart drawl. But there is far less of the Conjurer and the Medicine Man in the business than under like circumstances here. The grim coaches that we reserve expressly for such shows, are non-existent; if the cemetery be far out of the town, the coaches that are hired for other purposes of life are hired for this purpose; and although the honest vehicles make no pretence of being overcome, I have never noticed that the people in them were the worse for it. In Italy, the hooded Members of Confraternities who attend on funerals, are dismal and ugly to look upon; but the services they render are at least voluntarily rendered, and impoverish no one, and cost nothing. Why should high civilisation and low savagery ever come together on the point of making them a wantonly wasteful and contemptible set of forms?

Once I lost a friend by death, who had been troubled in his time by the Medicine Man and the Conjurer, and upon whose limited resources there were abundant claims. The Conjurer assured me that I must positively ‘follow,’ and both he and the Medicine Man entertained no doubt that I must go in a black carriage, and must wear ‘fittings.’ I objected to fittings as having nothing to do with my friendship, and I objected to the black carriage as being in more senses than one a job. So, it came into my mind to try what would happen if I quietly walked, in my own way, from my own house to my friend’s burial-place, and stood beside his open grave in my own dress and person, reverently listening to the best of Services. It satisfied my mind, I found, quite as well as if I had been disguised in a hired hatband and scarf both trailing to my very heels, and as if I had cost the orphan children, in their greatest need, ten guineas.

Can any one who ever beheld the stupendous absurdities attendant on ‘A message from the Lords’ in the House of Commons, turn upon the

Medicine Man of the poor Indians? Has he any ‘Medicine’ in that dried skin pouch of his, so supremely ludicrous as the two Masters in Chancery holding up their black petticoats and butting their ridiculous wigs at Mr. Speaker? Yet there are authorities innumerable to tell me—as there are authorities innumerable among the Indians to tell them—that the nonsense is indispensable, and that its abrogation would involve most awful consequences. What would any rational creature who had never heard of judicial and forensic ‘fittings,’ think of the Court of Common Pleas on the first day of Term? Or with what an awakened sense of humour would LIVINGSTONE’S account of a similar scene be perused, if the fur and red cloth and goats’ hair and horse hair and powdered chalk and black patches on the top of the head, were all at Tala Mungongo instead of Westminster? That model missionary and good brave man found at least one tribe of blacks with a very strong sense of the ridiculous, insomuch that although an amiable and docile people, they never could see the Missionaries dispose of their legs in the attitude of kneeling, or hear them begin a hymn in chorus, without bursting into roars of irrepressible laughter. It is much to be hoped that no member of this facetious tribe may ever find his way to England and get committed for contempt of Court.

In the Tonga Island already mentioned, there are a set of personages called Mataboos—or some such name—who are the masters of all the public ceremonies, and who know the exact place in which every chief must sit down when a solemn public meeting takes place: a meeting which bears a family resemblance to our own Public Dinner, in respect of its being a main part of the proceedings that every gentleman present is required to drink something nasty. These Mataboos are a privileged order, so important is their avocation, and they make the most of their high functions. A long way out of the Tonga Islands, indeed, rather near the British Islands, was there no calling in of the Mataboos the other day to settle an earth-convulsing question of precedence; and was there no weighty opinion delivered on the part of the Mataboos which, being interpreted to that unlucky tribe of blacks with the sense of the ridiculous, would infallibly set the whole population screaming with laughter?

My sense of justice demands the admission, however, that this is not quite a one-sided question. If we submit ourselves meekly to the Medicine Man and the Conjurer, and are not exalted by it, the savages may retort upon us that we act more unwisely than they in other matters wherein we fail to imitate them. It is a widely diffused custom among savage tribes, when they meet to discuss any affair of public importance, to sit up all night making a horrible noise, dancing, blowing shells, and (in cases where they are familiar with fire-arms) flying out into open places and letting off guns. It is questionable whether our legislative assemblies might not take a hint from this. A shell is not a melodious wind-instrument, and it is monotonous; but it is as musical as, and not more monotonous than, my Honourable friend's own trumpet, or the trumpet that he blows so hard for the Minister. The uselessness of arguing with any supporter of a Government or of an Opposition, is well known. Try dancing. It is a better exercise, and has the unspeakable recommendation that it couldn't be reported. The honourable and savage member who has a loaded gun, and has grown impatient of debate, plunges out of doors, fires in the air, and returns calm and silent to the Palaver. Let the honourable and civilised member similarly charged with a speech, dart into the cloisters of Westminster Abbey in the silence of night, let his speech off, and come back harmless. It is not at first sight a very rational custom to paint a broad blue stripe across one's nose and both cheeks, and a broad red stripe from the forehead to the chin, to attach a few pounds of wood to one's under lip, to stick fish-bones in one's ears and a brass curtain-ring in one's nose, and to rub one's body all over with rancid oil, as a preliminary to entering on business. But this is a question of taste and ceremony, and so is the Windsor Uniform. The manner of entering on the business itself is another question. A council of six hundred savage gentlemen entirely independent of tailors, sitting on their hams in a ring, smoking, and occasionally grunting, seem to me, according to the experience I have gathered in my voyages and travels, somehow to do what they come together for; whereas that is not at all the general experience of a council of six hundred civilised gentlemen very dependent on tailors and sitting on mechanical contrivances. It is better that an Assembly should do its utmost to envelop itself in smoke, than that it should direct its endeavours to enveloping the public in smoke; and I would rather it buried half a hundred hatchets than buried one subject demanding attention.

CHAPTER XXIX—TITBULL'S ALMS-HOUSES

By the side of most railways out of London, one may see Alms-Houses and Retreats (generally with a Wing or a Centre wanting, and ambitious of being much bigger than they are), some of which are newly-founded Institutions, and some old establishments transplanted. There is a tendency in these pieces of architecture to shoot upward unexpectedly, like Jack's bean-stalk, and to be ornate in spires of Chapels and lanterns of Halls, which might lead to the embellishment of the air with many castles of questionable beauty but for the restraining consideration of expense. However, the manners, being always of a sanguine temperament, comfort themselves with plans and elevations of Loomings in the future, and are influenced in the present by philanthropy towards the railway passengers. For, the question how prosperous and promising the buildings can be made to look in their eyes, usually supersedes the lesser question how they can be turned to the best account for the inmates.

Why none of the people who reside in these places ever look out of window, or take an airing in the piece of ground which is going to be a garden by-and-by, is one of the wonders I have added to my always-lengthening list of the wonders of the world. I have got it into my mind that they live in a state of chronic injury and resentment, and on that account refuse to decorate the building with a human interest. As I have known legatees deeply injured by a bequest of five hundred pounds because it was not five thousand, and as I was once acquainted with a pensioner on the Public to the extent of two hundred a year, who perpetually anathematised his Country because he was not in the receipt of four, having no claim whatever to sixpence: so perhaps it usually happens, within certain limits, that to get a little help is to get a notion of being defrauded of more. 'How do they pass their lives in this beautiful and peaceful place!' was the subject of my speculation with a visitor who once accompanied me to a charming rustic retreat for old men and women: a quaint ancient foundation in a pleasant English country, behind a picturesque church and among rich old convent gardens. There were but some dozen or so of houses, and we agreed that we would talk with the inhabitants, as they sat in their groined rooms between the light of their fires and the light shining in at their latticed windows, and would find out. They passed their lives in considering themselves mulcted of certain ounces of tea by a deaf old steward who lived among them in the quadrangle. There was no reason to suppose that any such ounces of tea had ever been in existence, or that the old steward so much as knew what was the matter;—he passed *his* life in considering himself periodically defrauded of a birch-broom by the beadle.

But it is neither to old Alms-Houses in the country, nor to new Alms-Houses by the railroad, that these present Uncommercial notes relate. They refer back to journeys made among those common-place, smoky-fronted London Alms-Houses, with a little paved court-yard in front enclosed by iron railings, which have got snowed up, as it were, by bricks and mortar; which were once in a suburb, but are now in the densely populated town; gaps in the busy life around them, parentheses in the close and blotted texts of the streets.

Sometimes, these Alms-Houses belong to a Company or Society. Sometimes, they were established by individuals, and are maintained out of private funds bequeathed in perpetuity long ago. My favourite among them is Titbull's, which establishment is a picture of many. Of Titbull I know no more than that he deceased in 1723, that his Christian name was Sampson, and his social designation Esquire, and that he founded these Alms-Houses as Dwellings for Nine Poor Women and Six Poor Men by his Will and Testament. I should not know even this much, but for its being inscribed on a grim stone very difficult to read, let into the front of the centre house of Titbull's Alms-Houses, and which stone is ornamented a-top with a piece of sculptured drapery resembling the effigy of Titbull's bath-towel.

Titbull's Alms-Houses are in the east of London, in a great highway, in a poor, busy, and thronged neighbourhood. Old iron and fried fish, cough drops and artificial flowers, boiled pigs'-feet and household furniture that looks as if it were polished up with lip-salve, umbrellas full of vocal literature and saucers full of shell-fish in a green juice which I hope is natural to them when their health is good, garnish the paved sideways as you go to Titbull's. I take the ground to have risen in those parts since Titbull's time, and you drop into his domain by three stone steps. So did I first drop into it, very nearly striking my brows against Titbull's pump, which stands with its back to the thoroughfare just inside the gate, and has a conceited air of reviewing Titbull's pensioners.

'And a worse one,' said a virulent old man with a pitcher, 'there isn't nowhere. A harder one to work, nor a grudginer one to yield, there isn't nowhere!' This old man wore a long coat, such as we see Hogarth's Chairmen represented with, and it was of that peculiar green-pea hue without the green, which seems to come of poverty. It had also that peculiar smell of cupboard which seems to come of poverty.

'The pump is rusty, perhaps,' said I.

'Not *it*,' said the old man, regarding it with undiluted virulence in his watery eye. 'It never were fit to be termed a pump. That's what's the matter with *it*.'

'Whose fault is that?' said I.

The old man, who had a working mouth which seemed to be trying to masticate his anger and to find that it was too hard and there was too much of it, replied, 'Them gentlemen.'

'What gentlemen?'

'Maybe you're one of 'em?' said the old man, suspiciously.

'The trustees?'

'I wouldn't trust 'em myself,' said the virulent old man.

'If you mean the gentlemen who administer this place, no, I am not one of them; nor have I ever so much as heard of them.'

'I wish *I* never heard of them,' gasped the old man: 'at my time of life—with the rheumatics—drawing water-from that thing!' Not to be deluded into calling it a Pump, the old man gave it another virulent look, took up his pitcher, and carried it into a corner dwelling-house, shutting the door after him.

Looking around and seeing that each little house was a house of two little rooms; and seeing that the little oblong court-yard in front was like a graveyard for the inhabitants, saving that no word was engraven on its flat dry stones; and seeing that the currents of life and noise ran to and fro outside, having no more to do with the place than if it were a sort of low-water mark on a lively beach; I say, seeing this and nothing else, I was going out at the gate when one of the doors opened.

'Was you looking for anything, sir?' asked a tidy, well-favoured woman.

Really, no; I couldn't say I was.

‘Not wanting any one, sir?’

‘No—at least I—pray what is the name of the elderly gentleman who lives in the corner there?’

The tidy woman stepped out to be sure of the door I indicated, and she and the pump and I stood all three in a row with our backs to the thoroughfare.

‘Oh! *His* name is Mr. Battens,’ said the tidy woman, dropping her voice.

‘I have just been talking with him.’

‘Indeed?’ said the tidy woman. ‘Ho! I wonder Mr. Battens talked!’

‘Is he usually so silent?’

‘Well, Mr. Battens is the oldest here—that is to say, the oldest of the old gentlemen—in point of residence.’

She had a way of passing her hands over and under one another as she spoke, that was not only tidy but propitiatory; so I asked her if I might look at her little sitting-room? She willingly replied Yes, and we went into it together: she leaving the door open, with an eye as I understood to the social proprieties. The door opening at once into the room without any intervening entry, even scandal must have been silenced by the precaution.

It was a gloomy little chamber, but clean, and with a mug of wallflower in the window. On the chimney-piece were two peacock’s feathers, a carved ship, a few shells, and a black profile with one eyelash; whether this portrait purported to be male or female passed my comprehension, until my hostess informed me that it was her only son, and ‘quite a speaking one.’

‘He is alive, I hope?’

‘No, sir,’ said the widow, ‘he were cast away in China.’ This was said with a modest sense of its reflecting a certain geographical distinction on his mother.

‘If the old gentlemen here are not given to talking,’ said I, ‘I hope the old ladies are?—not that you are one.’

She shook her head. ‘You see they get so cross.’

‘How is that?’

‘Well, whether the gentlemen really do deprive us of any little matters which ought to be ours by rights, I cannot say for certain; but the opinion of the old ones is they do. And Mr. Battens he do even go so far as to doubt whether credit is due to the Founder. For Mr. Battens he do say, anyhow he got his name up by it and he done it cheap.’

‘I am afraid the pump has soured Mr. Battens.’

‘It may be so,’ returned the tidy widow, ‘but the handle does go very hard. Still, what I say to myself is, the gentlemen *may* not pocket the difference between a good pump and a bad one, and I would wish to think well of them. And the dwellings,’ said my hostess, glancing round her room; ‘perhaps they were convenient dwellings in the Founder’s time, considered *as* his time, and therefore he should not be blamed. But Mrs. Saggers is very hard upon them.’

‘Mrs. Saggers is the oldest here?’

‘The oldest but one. Mrs. Quinch being the oldest, and have totally lost her head.’

‘And you?’

‘I am the youngest in residence, and consequently am not looked up to. But when Mrs. Quinch makes a happy release, there will be one below me. Nor is it to be expected that Mrs. Saggers will prove herself immortal.’

‘True. Nor Mr. Battens.’

‘Regarding the old gentlemen,’ said my widow slightingly, ‘they count among themselves. They do not count among us. Mr. Battens is that exceptional that he have written to the gentlemen many times and have worked the case against them. Therefore he have took a higher ground. But we do not, as a rule, greatly reckon the old gentlemen.’

Pursuing the subject, I found it to be traditionally settled among the poor ladies that the poor gentlemen, whatever their ages, were all very old indeed, and in a state of dotage. I also discovered that the juniors and newcomers preserved, for a time, a waning disposition to believe in Titbull and his trustees, but that as they gained social standing they lost this faith, and disparaged Titbull and all his works.

Improving my acquaintance subsequently with this respected lady, whose name was Mrs. Mitts, and occasionally dropping in upon her with a little offering of sound Family Hyson in my pocket, I gradually became familiar with the inner politics and ways of Titbull’s Alms-Houses. But I never could find out who the trustees were, or where they were: it being one of the fixed ideas of the place that those authorities must be vaguely and mysteriously mentioned as ‘the gentlemen’ only. The secretary of ‘the gentlemen’ was once pointed out to me, evidently engaged in championing the obnoxious pump against the attacks of the discontented Mr. Battens; but I am not in a condition to report further of him than that he had the sprightly bearing of a lawyer's clerk. I had it from Mrs. Mitts's lips in a very confidential moment, that Mr. Battens was once 'had up before the gentlemen' to stand or fall by his accusations, and that an old shoe was thrown after him on his departure from the building on this dread errand;—not ineffectually, for, the interview resulting in a plumber, was considered to have encircled the temples of Mr. Battens with the wreath of victory,

In Titbull's Alms-Houses, the local society is not regarded as good society. A gentleman or lady receiving visitors from without, or going out to tea, counts, as it were, accordingly; but visitings or tea-drinkings interchanged among Titbullians do not score. Such interchanges, however, are rare, in consequence of internal dissensions occasioned by Mrs. Saggers's pail: which household article has split Titbull's into almost as many parties as there are dwellings in that precinct. The extremely complicated nature of the conflicting articles of belief on the subject prevents my stating them here with my usual perspicuity, but I think they have all branched off from the root-and-trunk question, Has Mrs. Saggers any right to stand her pail outside her dwelling? The question has been much refined upon, but roughly stated may be stated in those terms.

There are two old men in Titbull's Alms-Houses who, I have been given to understand, knew each other in the world beyond its pump and iron railings, when they were both 'in trade.' They make the best of their reverses, and are looked upon with great contempt. They are little, stooping, blear-eyed old men of cheerful countenance, and they hobble up and down the court-yard wagging their chins and talking together quite gaily. This has given offence, and has, moreover, raised the question whether they are justified in passing any other windows than their own. Mr. Battens, however, permitting them to pass *his* windows, on the disdainful ground that their imbecility almost amounts to irresponsibility, they are allowed to take their walk in peace. They live next door to one another, and take it by turns to read the newspaper aloud (that is to say, the newest newspaper they can get), and they play cribbage at night. On warm and sunny days they have been known to go so far as to bring out two chairs and sit by the iron railings, looking forth; but this low conduct, being much remarked upon throughout Titbull's, they were deterred by an outraged public opinion from repeating it. There is a rumour—but it may be malicious—that they hold the memory of Titbull in some weak sort of veneration, and that they once set off together on a pilgrimage to the parish churchyard to find his tomb. To this, perhaps, might be traced a general suspicion that they are spies of 'the gentlemen:' to which they were supposed to have given colour in my own presence on the occasion of the weak attempt at justification of the pump by the gentlemen's clerk; when they emerged bare-headed from the doors of their dwellings, as if their dwellings and themselves constituted an old-fashioned weather-glass of double action with two figures of old ladies inside, and deferentially bowed to him at intervals until he took his departure. They are understood to be perfectly friendless and relationless. Unquestionably the two poor fellows make the very best of their lives in Titbull's Alms-Houses, and unquestionably they are (as before mentioned) the subjects of unmitigated contempt there.

On Saturday nights, when there is a greater stir than usual outside, and when itinerant vendors of miscellaneous wares even take their stations and light up their smoky lamps before the iron railings, Titbull's becomes flurried. Mrs. Saggers has her celebrated palpitations of the heart, for the most part, on Saturday nights. But Titbull's is unfit to strive with the uproar of the streets in any of its phases. It is religiously believed at Titbull's that people push more than they used, and likewise that the foremost object of the population of England and Wales is to get you down and trample on you. Even of railroads they know, at Titbull's, little more than the shriek (which Mrs. Saggers says goes through her, and ought to be taken up by Government); and the penny postage may even yet be unknown there, for I have never seen a letter delivered to any inhabitant. But there is a tall, straight, sallow lady resident in Number Seven, Titbull's, who never speaks to anybody, who is surrounded by a superstitious halo of lost wealth, who does her household work in housemaid's gloves, and who is secretly much deferred to, though openly cavilled at; and it has obscurely leaked out that this old lady has a son, grandson, nephew, or other relative, who is 'a Contractor,' and who would think it nothing of a job to knock down Titbull's, pack it off into Cornwall, and knock it together again. An immense sensation was made by a gipsy-party calling in a spring-van, to take this old lady up to go for a day's pleasure into Epping Forest, and notes were compared as to which of the company was the son, grandson, nephew, or other relative, the Contractor. A thick-set personage with a white hat and a cigar in his mouth, was the favourite: though as Titbull's had no other reason to believe that the Contractor was there at all, than that this man was supposed to eye the chimney stacks as if he would like to knock them down and cart them off, the general mind was much unsettled in arriving at a conclusion. As a way out of this difficulty, it concentrated itself on the acknowledged Beauty of the party, every stitch in whose dress was verbally unripped by the old ladies then and there, and whose 'goings on' with another and a thinner personage in a white hat might have suffused the pump (where they were principally discussed) with blushes, for months afterwards. Herein Titbull's was to Titbull's true, for it has a constitutional dislike of all strangers. As concerning innovations and improvements, it is always of opinion that what it doesn't want itself, nobody ought to want. But I think I have met with this opinion outside Titbull's.

Of the humble treasures of furniture brought into Titbull's by the inmates when they establish themselves in that place of contemplation for the rest of their days, by far the greater and more valuable part belongs to the ladies. I may claim the honour of having either crossed the threshold, or looked in at the door, of every one of the nine ladies, and I have noticed that they are all particular in the article of bedsteads, and maintain favourite and long-established bedsteads and bedding as a regular part of their rest. Generally an antiquated chest of drawers is among their cherished possessions; a tea-tray always is. I know of at least two rooms in which a little tea-kettle of genuine burnished copper, vies with the cat in winking at the fire; and one old lady has a tea-urn set forth in state on the top of her chest of drawers, which urn is used as her library, and contains four duodecimo volumes, and a black-bordered newspaper giving an account of the funeral of Her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte. Among the poor old gentlemen there are no such niceties. Their furniture has the air of being contributed, like some obsolete Literary Miscellany, 'by several hands;' their few chairs never match; old patchwork coverlets linger among them; and they have an untidy habit of keeping their wardrobes in hat-boxes. When I recall one old gentleman who is rather choice in his shoe-brushes and blacking-bottle, I have summed up the domestic elegances of that side of the building.

On the occurrence of a death in Titbull's, it is invariably agreed among the survivors—and it is the only subject on which they do agree—that the departed did something 'to bring it on.' Judging by Titbull's, I should say the human race need never die, if they took care. But they don't take care, and they do die, and when they die in Titbull's they are buried at the cost of the Foundation. Some provision has been made for the purpose, in virtue of which (I record this on the strength of having seen the funeral of Mrs. Quinch) a lively neighbouring undertaker dresses up four of the old men, and four of the old women, hustles them into a procession of four couples, and leads off with a large black bow at the back of his hat, looking over his shoulder at them airily from time to time to see that no member of the party has got lost, or has tumbled down; as if they were a company of dim old dolls.

Resignation of a dwelling is of very rare occurrence in Titbull's. A story does obtain there, how an old lady's son once drew a prize of Thirty Thousand Pounds in the Lottery, and presently drove to the gate in his own carriage, with French Horns playing up behind, and whisked his mother away, and left ten guineas for a Feast. But I have been unable to substantiate it by any evidence, and regard it as an Alms-House Fairy Tale. It is curious that the only proved case of resignation happened within my knowledge.

It happened on this wise. There is a sharp competition among the ladies respecting the gentility of their visitors, and I have so often observed visitors to be dressed as for a holiday occasion, that I suppose the ladies to have besought them to make all possible display when they come. In these circumstances much excitement was one day occasioned by Mrs. Mitts receiving a visit from a Greenwich Pensioner. He was a Pensioner of a bluff and warlike appearance, with an empty coat-sleeve, and he was got up with unusual care; his coat-buttons were extremely bright, he wore his empty coat-sleeve in a graceful festoon, and he had a walking-stick in his hand that must have cost money. When, with the head of his walking-stick, he knocked at Mrs. Mitts's door—there are no knockers in Titbull's—Mrs. Mitts was overheard by a next-door neighbour to utter a cry of surprise expressing much agitation; and the same neighbour did afterwards solemnly affirm that when he was admitted into Mrs. Mitts's room, she heard a smack. Heard a smack which was not a blow.

There was an air about this Greenwich Pensioner when he took his departure, which imbued all Titbull's with the conviction that he was coming again. He was eagerly looked for, and Mrs. Mitts was closely watched. In the meantime, if anything could have placed the unfortunate six old gentlemen at a greater disadvantage than that at which they chronically stood, it would have been the apparition of this Greenwich

Pensioner. They were well shrunken already, but they shrunk to nothing in comparison with the Pensioner. Even the poor old gentlemen themselves seemed conscious of their inferiority, and to know submissively that they could never hope to hold their own against the Pensioner with his warlike and maritime experience in the past, and his tobacco money in the present: his chequered career of blue water, black gunpowder, and red bloodshed for England, home, and beauty.

Before three weeks were out, the Pensioner reappeared. Again he knocked at Mrs. Mitts's door with the handle of his stick, and again was he admitted. But not again did he depart alone; for Mrs. Mitts, in a bonnet identified as having been re-embellished, went out walking with him, and stayed out till the ten o'clock beer, Greenwich time.

There was now a truce, even as to the troubled waters of Mrs. Saggers's pail; nothing was spoken of among the ladies but the conduct of Mrs. Mitts and its blighting influence on the reputation of Titbull's. It was agreed that Mr. Battens 'ought to take it up,' and Mr. Battens was communicated with on the subject. That unsatisfactory individual replied 'that he didn't see his way yet,' and it was unanimously voted by the ladies that aggravation was in his nature.

How it came to pass, with some appearance of inconsistency, that Mrs. Mitts was cut by all the ladies and the Pensioner admired by all the ladies, matters not. Before another week was out, Titbull's was startled by another phenomenon. At ten o'clock in the forenoon appeared a cab, containing not only the Greenwich Pensioner with one arm, but, to boot, a Chelsea Pensioner with one leg. Both dismounting to assist Mrs. Mitts into the cab, the Greenwich Pensioner bore her company inside, and the Chelsea Pensioner mounted the box by the driver: his wooden leg sticking out after the manner of a bowsprit, as if in jocular homage to his friend's sea-going career. Thus the equipage drove away. No Mrs. Mitts returned that night.

What Mr. Battens might have done in the matter of taking it up, goaded by the infuriated state of public feeling next morning, was anticipated by another phenomenon. A Truck, propelled by the Greenwich Pensioner and the Chelsea Pensioner, each placidly smoking a pipe, and pushing his warrior breast against the handle.

The display on the part of the Greenwich Pensioner of his 'marriage-lines,' and his announcement that himself and friend had looked in for the furniture of Mrs. G. Pensioner, late Mitts, by no means reconciled the ladies to the conduct of their sister; on the contrary, it is said that they appeared more than ever exasperated. Nevertheless, my stray visits to Titbull's since the date of this occurrence, have confirmed me in an impression that it was a wholesome fillip. The nine ladies are smarter, both in mind and dress, than they used to be, though it must be admitted that they despise the six gentlemen to the last extent. They have a much greater interest in the external thoroughfare too, than they had when I first knew Titbull's. And whenever I chance to be leaning my back against the pump or the iron railings, and to be talking to one of the junior ladies, and to see that a flush has passed over her face, I immediately know without looking round that a Greenwich Pensioner has gone past.

CHAPTER XXX—THE RUFFIAN

I entertain so strong an objection to the euphonious softening of Ruffian into Rough, which has lately become popular, that I restore the right word to the heading of this paper; the rather, as my object is to dwell upon the fact that the Ruffian is tolerated among us to an extent that goes beyond all unruffianly endurance. I take the liberty to believe that if the Ruffian besets my life, a professional Ruffian at large in the open streets of a great city, notoriously having no other calling than that of Ruffian, and of disquieting and despoiling me as I go peacefully about my lawful business, interfering with no one, then the Government under which I have the great constitutional privilege, supreme honour and happiness, and all the rest of it, to exist, breaks down in the discharge of any Government's most simple elementary duty.

What did I read in the London daily papers, in the early days of this last September? That the Police had 'AT LENGTH SUCCEEDED IN CAPTURING TWO OF THE NOTORIOUS GANG THAT HAVE SO LONG INVESTED THE WATERLOO ROAD.' Is it possible? What a wonderful Police! Here is a straight, broad, public thoroughfare of immense resort; half a mile long; gas-lighted by night; with a great gas-lighted railway station in it, extra the street lamps; full of shops; traversed by two popular cross thoroughfares of considerable traffic; itself the main road to the South of London; and the admirable Police have, after long infestment of this dark and lonely spot by a gang of Ruffians, actually got hold of two of them. Why, can it be doubted that any man of fair London knowledge and common resolution, armed with the powers of the Law, could have captured the whole confederacy in a week?

It is to the saving up of the Ruffian class by the Magistracy and Police—to the conventional preserving of them, as if they were Partridges—that their number and audacity must be in great part referred. Why is a notorious Thief and Ruffian ever left at large? He never turns his liberty to any account but violence and plunder, he never did a day's work out of gaol, he never will do a day's work out of gaol. As a proved notorious Thief he is always consignable to prison for three months. When he comes out, he is surely as notorious a Thief as he was when he went in. Then send him back again. ‘Just Heaven!’ cries the Society for the protection of remonstrant Ruffians. ‘This is equivalent to a sentence of perpetual imprisonment!’ Precisely for that reason it has my advocacy. I demand to have the Ruffian kept out of my way, and out of the way of all decent people. I demand to have the Ruffian employed, perforce, in hewing wood and drawing water somewhere for the general service, instead of hewing at her Majesty’s subjects and drawing their watches out of their pockets. If this be termed an unreasonable demand, then the tax-gatherer’s demand on me must be far more unreasonable, and cannot be otherwise than extortionate and unjust.

It will be seen that I treat of the Thief and Ruffian as one. I do so, because I know the two characters to be one, in the vast majority of cases, just as well as the Police know it. (As to the Magistracy, with a few exceptions, they know nothing about it but what the Police choose to tell them.) There are disorderly classes of men who are not thieves; as railway-navigators, brickmakers, wood-sawyers, costermongers. These classes are often disorderly and troublesome; but it is mostly among themselves, and at any rate they have their industrious avocations, they work early and late, and work hard. The generic Ruffian—honourable member for what is tenderly called the Rough Element—is either a Thief, or the companion of Thieves. When he infamously molests women coming out of chapel on Sunday evenings (for which I would have his back scarified often and deep) it is not only for the gratification of his pleasant instincts, but that there may be a confusion raised by which either he or his friends may profit, in the commission of highway robberies or in picking pockets. When he gets a police-constable down and kicks him helpless for life, it is because that constable once did his duty in bringing him to justice. When he rushes into the bar of a public-house and scoops an eye out of one of the company there, or bites his ear off, it is because the man he maims gave evidence against him. When he and a line of comrades extending across the footway—say of that solitary mountain-spur of the Abruzzi, the Waterloo Road—advance towards me ‘skylarking’ among themselves, my purse or shirt-pin is in predestined peril from his playfulness. Always a Ruffian, always a Thief. Always a Thief, always a Ruffian.

Now, when I, who am not paid to know these things, know them daily on the evidence of my senses and experience; when I know that the Ruffian never jostles a lady in the streets, or knocks a hat off, but in order that the

Thief may profit, is it surprising that I should require from those who *are* paid to know these things, prevention of them?

Look at this group at a street corner. Number one is a shirking fellow of five-and-twenty, in an ill-favoured and ill-savoured suit, his trousers of corduroy, his coat of some indiscernible groundwork for the deposition of grease, his neckerchief like an eel, his complexion like dirty dough, his mangy fur cap pulled low upon his beetle brows to hide the prison cut of his hair. His hands are in his pockets. He puts them there when they are idle, as naturally as in other people's pockets when they are busy, for he knows that they are not roughened by work, and that they tell a tale. Hence, whenever he takes one out to draw a sleeve across his nose—which is often, for he has weak eyes and a constitutional cold in his head—he restores it to its pocket immediately afterwards. Number two is a burly brute of five-and-thirty, in a tall stiff hat; is a composite as to his clothes of betting-man and fighting-man; is whiskered; has a staring pin in his breast, along with his right hand; has insolent and cruel eyes: large shoulders; strong legs booted and tipped for kicking. Number three is forty years of age; is short, thick-set, strong, and bow-legged; wears knee cords and white stockings, a very long-sleeved waistcoat, a very large neckerchief doubled or trebled round his throat, and a crumpled white hat crowns his ghastly parchment face. This fellow looks like an executed postboy of other days, cut down from the gallows too soon, and restored and preserved by express diabolical agency. Numbers five, six, and seven, are hulking, idle, slouching young men, patched and shabby, too short in the sleeves and too tight in the legs, slimily clothed, foul-spoken, repulsive wretches inside and out. In all the party there obtains a certain twitching character of mouth and furtiveness of eye, that hint how the coward is lurking under the bully. The hint is quite correct, for they are a slinking sneaking set, far more prone to lie down on their backs and kick out, when in difficulty, than to make a stand for it. (This may account for the street mud on the backs of Numbers five, six, and seven, being much fresher than the stale splashes on their legs.)

These engaging gentry a Police-constable stands contemplating. His Station, with a Reserve of assistance, is very near at hand. They cannot pretend to any trade, not even to be porters or messengers. It would be idle if they did, for he knows them, and they know that he knows them, to be nothing but professed Thieves and Ruffians. He knows where they resort, knows by what slang names they call one another, knows how often they have been in prison, and how long, and for what. All this is known at his Station, too, and is (or ought to be) known at Scotland Yard, too. But does he know, or does his Station know, or does Scotland Yard know, or does anybody know, why these fellows should be here at liberty, when, as reputed Thieves to whom a whole Division of Police could swear, they might all be under lock and key at hard labour? Not he; truly he would be a wise man if he did! He only knows that these are members of the 'notorious gang,' which, according to the newspaper Police-office reports of this last past September, 'have so long infested' the awful solitudes of the Waterloo Road, and out of which almost impregnable fastnesses the Police have at length dragged Two, to the unspeakable admiration of all good civilians.

The consequences of this contemplative habit on the part of the Executive—a habit to be looked for in a hermit, but not in a Police System—are familiar to us all. The Ruffian becomes one of the established orders of the body politic. Under the playful name of Rough (as if he were merely a practical joker) his movements and successes are recorded on public occasions. Whether he mustered in large numbers, or small; whether he was in good spirits, or depressed; whether he turned his generous exertions to very prosperous account, or Fortune was against him; whether he was in a sanguinary mood, or robbed with amiable horse-play and a gracious consideration for life and limb; all this is chronicled as if he were an Institution. Is there any city in Europe, out of England, in which these terms are held with the pests of Society? Or in which, at this day, such violent robberies from the person are constantly committed as in London?

The Preparatory Schools of Ruffianism are similarly borne with. The young Ruffians of London—not Thieves yet, but training for scholarships and fellowships in the Criminal Court Universities—molest quiet people and their property, to an extent that is hardly credible. The throwing of stones in the streets has become a dangerous and destructive offence, which surely could have got to no greater height though we had had no Police but our own riding-whips and walking-sticks—the Police to which I myself appeal on these occasions. The throwing of stones at the windows of railway carriages in motion—an act of wanton wickedness with the very Arch-Fiend's hand in it—had become a crying evil, when the railway companies forced it on Police notice. Constabular contemplation had until then been the order of the day.

Within these twelve months, there arose among the young gentlemen of London aspiring to Ruffianism, and cultivating that much-encouraged social art, a facetious cry of ‘I’ll have this!’ accompanied with a clutch at some article of a passing lady’s dress. I have known a lady’s veil to be thus humorously torn from her face and carried off in the open streets at noon; and I have had the honour of myself giving chase, on Westminster Bridge, to another young Ruffian, who, in full daylight early on a summer evening, had nearly thrown a modest young woman into a swoon of indignation and confusion, by his shameful manner of attacking her with this cry as she harmlessly passed along before me. MR. CARLYLE, some time since, awakened a little pleasantry by writing of his own experience of the Ruffian of the streets. I have seen the Ruffian act in exact accordance with Mr. Carlyle’s description, innumerable times, and I never saw him checked.

The blaring use of the very worst language possible, in our public thoroughfares—especially in those set apart for recreation—is another disgrace to us, and another result of constabular contemplation, the like of which I have never heard in any other country to which my uncommercial travels have extended. Years ago, when I had a near interest in certain children who were sent with their nurses, for air and exercise, into the Regent’s Park, I found this evil to be so abhorrent and horrible there, that I called public attention to it, and also to its contemplative reception by the Police. Looking afterwards into the newest Police Act, and finding that the offence was punishable under it, I resolved, when striking occasion should arise, to try my hand as prosecutor. The occasion arose soon enough, and I ran the following gauntlet.

The utterer of the base coin in question was a girl of seventeen or eighteen, who, with a suitable attendance of blackguards, youths, and boys, was flaunting along the streets, returning from an Irish funeral, in a Progress interspersed with singing and dancing. She had turned round to me and expressed herself in the most audible manner, to the great delight of that select circle. I attended the party, on the opposite side of the way, for a mile further, and then encountered a Police-constable. The party had made themselves merry at my expense until now, but seeing me speak to the constable, its male members instantly took to their heels, leaving the girl alone. I asked the constable did he know my name? Yes, he did. ‘Take that girl into custody, on my charge, for using bad language in the streets.’ He had never heard of such a charge. I had. Would he take my word that he should get into no trouble? Yes, sir, he would do that. So he took the girl, and I went home for my Police Act.

With this potent instrument in my pocket, I literally as well as figuratively ‘returned to the charge,’ and presented myself at the Police Station of the district. There, I found on duty a very intelligent Inspector (they are all intelligent men), who, likewise, had never heard of such a charge. I showed him my clause, and we went over it together twice or thrice. It was plain, and I engaged to wait upon the suburban Magistrate to-morrow morning at ten o’clock.

In the morning I put my Police Act in my pocket again, and waited on the suburban Magistrate. I was not quite so courteously received by him as I should have been by The Lord Chancellor or The Lord Chief Justice, but that was a question of good breeding on the suburban Magistrate’s part, and I had my clause ready with its leaf turned down. Which was enough for *me*.

Conference took place between the Magistrate and clerk respecting the charge. During conference I was evidently regarded as a much more objectionable person than the prisoner;—one giving trouble by coming there voluntarily, which the prisoner could not be accused of doing. The prisoner had been got up, since I last had the pleasure of seeing her, with a great effect of white apron and straw bonnet. She reminded me of an elder sister of Red Riding Hood, and I seemed to remind the sympathising Chimney Sweep by whom she was attended, of the Wolf.

The Magistrate was doubtful, Mr. Uncommercial Traveller, whether this charge could be entertained. It was not known. Mr. Uncommercial Traveller replied that he wished it were better known, and that, if he could afford the leisure, he would use his endeavours to make it so. There was no question about it, however, he contended. Here was the clause.

The clause was handed in, and more conference resulted. After which I was asked the extraordinary question: ‘Mr. Uncommercial, do you really wish this girl to be sent to prison?’ To which I grimly answered, staring: ‘If I didn’t, why should I take the trouble to come here?’ Finally, I was sworn, and gave my agreeable evidence in detail, and White Riding Hood was fined ten shillings, under the clause, or sent to prison for so many days. ‘Why, Lord bless you, sir,’ said the Police-officer, who showed me out, with a great enjoyment of the jest of her having been got up so effectively, and caused so much hesitation: ‘if she goes to prison, that will be nothing new to *her*. She comes from Charles Street, Drury Lane!’

The Police, all things considered, are an excellent force, and I have borne my small testimony to their merits. Constabular contemplation is the result of a bad system; a system which is administered, not invented, by the man in constable's uniform, employed at twenty shillings a week. He has his orders, and would be marked for discouragement if he overstepped them. That the system is bad, there needs no lengthened argument to prove, because the fact is self-evident. If it were anything else, the results that have attended it could not possibly have come to pass. Who will say that under a good system, our streets could have got into their present state?

The objection to the whole Police system, as concerning the Ruffian, may be stated, and its failure exemplified, as follows. It is well known that on all great occasions, when they come together in numbers, the mass of the English people are their own trustworthy Police. It is well known that wheresoever there is collected together any fair general representation of the people, a respect for law and order, and a determination to discountenance lawlessness and disorder, may be relied upon. As to one another, the people are a very good Police, and yet are quite willing in their good-nature that the stipendiary Police should have the credit of the people's moderation. But we are all of us powerless against the Ruffian, because we submit to the law, and it is his only trade, by superior force and by violence, to defy it. Moreover, we are constantly admonished from high places (like so many Sunday-school children out for a holiday of buns and milk-and-water) that we are not to take the law into our own hands, but are to hand our defence over to it. It is clear that the common enemy to be punished and exterminated first of all is the Ruffian. It is clear that he is, of all others, *the* offender for whose repressal we maintain a costly system of Police. Him, therefore, we expressly present to the Police to deal with, conscious that, on the whole, we can, and do, deal reasonably well with one another. Him the Police deal with so inefficiently and absurdly that he flourishes, and multiplies, and, with all his evil deeds upon his head as notoriously as his hat is, pervades the streets with no more let or hindrance than ourselves.

CHAPTER XXXI—ABOARD SHIP

My journeys as Uncommercial Traveller for the firm of Human-Interest Brothers have not slackened since I last reported of them, but have kept me continually on the move. I remain in the same idle employment. I never solicit an order, I never get any commission, I am the rolling stone that gathers no moss,—unless any should by chance be found among these samples.

Some half a year ago, I found myself in my idlest, dreamiest, and least accountable condition altogether, on board ship, in the harbour of the city of New York, in the United States of America. Of all the good ships afloat, mine was the good steamship 'RUSSIA,' CAPT. COOK, Cunard Line, bound for Liverpool. What more could I wish for?

I had nothing to wish for but a prosperous passage. My salad-days, when I was green of visage and sea-sick, being gone with better things (and no worse), no coming event cast its shadow before.

I might but a few moments previously have imitated Sterne, and said, '"And yet, methinks, Eugenius,"—laying my forefinger wistfully on his coat-sleeve, thus,—"and yet, methinks, Eugenius, 'tis but sorry work to part with thee, for what fresh fields, . . . my dear Eugenius, . . . can be fresher than thou art, and in what pastures new shall I find Eliza, or call her, Eugenius, if thou wilt, Annie?"'—I say I might have done this; but Eugenius was gone, and I hadn't done it.

I was resting on a skylight on the hurricane-deck, watching the working of the ship very slowly about, that she might head for England. It was high noon on a most brilliant day in April, and the beautiful bay was glorious and glowing. Full many a time, on shore there, had I seen the snow come down, down, down (itself like down), until it lay deep in all the ways of men, and particularly, as it seemed, in my way, for I had not gone dry-shod many hours for months. Within two or three days last past had I watched the feathery fall setting in with the ardour of a new idea, instead of dragging at the skirts of a worn-out winter, and permitting glimpses of a fresh young spring. But a bright sun and a clear sky had melted the snow in the great crucible of nature; and it had been poured out again that morning over sea and land, transformed into myriads of gold and silver sparkles.

The ship was fragrant with flowers. Something of the old Mexican passion for flowers may have gradually passed into North America, where flowers are luxuriously grown, and tastefully combined in the richest profusion; but, be that as it may, such gorgeous farewells in flowers had come on board, that the small officer’s cabin on deck, which I tenanted, bloomed over into the adjacent scuppers, and banks of other flowers that it couldn’t hold made a garden of the unoccupied tables in the passengers’ saloon. These delicious scents of the shore, mingling with the fresh airs of the sea, made the atmosphere a dreamy, an enchanting one. And so, with the watch aloft setting all the sails, and with the screw below revolving at a mighty rate, and occasionally giving the ship an angry shake for resisting, I fell into my idlest ways, and lost myself.

As, for instance, whether it was I lying there, or some other entity even more mysterious, was a matter I was far too lazy to look into. What did it signify to me if it were I? or to the more mysterious entity, if it were he? Equally as to the remembrances that drowsily floated by me, or by him, why ask when or where the things happened? Was it not enough that they befell at some time, somewhere?

There was that assisting at the church service on board another steamship, one Sunday, in a stiff breeze. Perhaps on the passage out. No matter. Pleasant to hear the ship’s bells go as like church-bells as they could; pleasant to see the watch off duty mustered and come in: best hats, best Guernseys, washed hands and faces, smoothed heads. But then arose a set of circumstances so rampantly comical, that no check which the gravest intentions could put upon them would hold them in hand. Thus the scene. Some seventy passengers assembled at the saloon tables. Prayer-books on tables. Ship rolling heavily. Pause. No minister. Rumour has related that a modest young clergyman on board has responded to the captain’s request that he will officiate. Pause again, and very heavy rolling.

Closed double doors suddenly burst open, and two strong stewards skate in, supporting minister between them. General appearance as of somebody picked up drunk and incapable, and under conveyance to station-house. Stoppage, pause, and particularly heavy rolling. Stewards watch their opportunity, and balance themselves, but cannot balance minister; who, struggling with a drooping head and a backward tendency, seems determined to return below, while they are as determined that he shall be got to the reading-desk in mid-saloon. Desk portable, sliding away down a long table, and aiming itself at the breasts of various members of the congregation. Here the double doors, which have been carefully closed by other stewards, fly open again, and worldly passenger tumbles in, seemingly with pale-ale designs: who, seeking friend, says ‘Joe!’ Perceiving incongruity, says, ‘Hullo! Beg yer pardon!’ and tumbles out again. All this time the congregation have been breaking up into sects,—as the manner of congregations often is, each sect sliding away by itself, and all pounding the weakest sect which slid first into the corner. Utmost point of dissent soon attained in every corner, and violent rolling. Stewards at length make a dash; conduct minister to the mast in the centre of the saloon, which he embraces with both arms; skate out; and leave him in that condition to arrange affairs with flock.

There was another Sunday, when an officer of the ship read the service. It was quiet and impressive, until we fell upon the dangerous and perfectly unnecessary experiment of striking up a hymn. After it was given out, we all rose, but everybody left it to somebody else to begin. Silence resulting, the officer (no singer himself) rather reproachfully gave us the first line again, upon which a rosy pippin of an old gentleman, remarkable throughout the passage for his cheerful politeness, gave a little stamp with his boot (as if he were leading off a country dance), and blithely warbled us into a show of joining. At the end of the first verse we became, through these tactics, so much refreshed and encouraged, that none of us, howsoever unmelodious, would submit to be left out of the second verse; while as to the third we lifted up our voices in a sacred howl that left it doubtful whether we were the more boastful of the sentiments we united in professing, or of professing them with a most discordant defiance of time and tune.

‘Lord bless us!’ thought I, when the fresh remembrance of these things made me laugh heartily alone in the dead water-gurgling waste of the night, what time I was wedged into my berth by a wooden bar, or I must have rolled out of it, ‘what errand was I then upon, and to what Abyssinian point had public events then marched? No matter as to me. And as to them, if the wonderful popular rage for a plaything (utterly confounding in its inscrutable unreason) I had not then lighted on a poor young savage boy, and a poor old screw of a horse, and hauled the first off by the hair of his princely head to “inspect” the British volunteers, and hauled the second off by the hair of his equine tail to the Crystal Palace, why so much the better for all of us outside Bedlam!'

So, sticking to the ship, I was at the trouble of asking myself would I like to show the grog distribution in 'the fiddle' at noon to the Grand United Amalgamated Total Abstinence Society? Yes, I think I should. I think it would do them good to smell the rum, under the circumstances. Over the grog, mixed in a bucket, presides the boatswain's mate, small tin can in hand. Enter the crew, the guilty consumers, the grown-up brood of Giant Despair, in contradistinction to the band of youthful angel Hope. Some in boots, some in leggings, some in tarpaulin overalls, some in frocks, some in pea-coats, a very few in jackets, most with sou'wester hats, all with something rough and rugged round the throat; all, dripping salt water where they stand; all pelted by weather, besmeared with grease, and blackened by the sooty rigging.

Each man's knife in its sheath in his girdle, loosened for dinner. As the first man, with a knowingly kindled eye, watches the filling of the poisoned chalice (truly but a very small tin mug, to be prosaic), and, tossing back his head, tosses the contents into himself, and passes the empty chalice and passes on, so the second man with an anticipatory wipe of his mouth on sleeve or handkerchief, bides his turn, and drinks and hands and passes on, in whom, and in each as his turn approaches, beams a knowingly kindled eye, a brighter temper, and a suddenly awakened tendency to be jocose with some shipmate. Nor do I even observe that the man in charge of the ship's lamps, who in right of his office has a double allowance of poisoned chalices, seems thereby vastly degraded, even though he empties the chalices into himself, one after the other, much as if he were delivering their contents at some absorbent establishment in which he had no personal interest. But vastly comforted, I note them all to be, on deck presently, even to the circulation of redder blood in their cold blue knuckles; and when I look up at them lying out on the yards, and holding on for life among the beating sails, I cannot for *my* life see the justice of visiting on them—or on me—the drunken crimes of any number of criminals arraigned at the heaviest of assizes.

Abetting myself in my idle humour, I closed my eyes, and recalled life on board of one of those mail-packets, as I lay, part of that day, in the Bay of New York, O! The regular life began—mine always did, for I never got to sleep afterwards—with the rigging of the pump while it was yet dark, and washing down of decks. Any enormous giant at a prodigious hydropathic establishment, conscientiously undergoing the water-cure in all its departments, and extremely particular about cleaning his teeth, would make those noises. Swash, splash, scrub, rub, toothbrush, bubble, swash, splash, bubble, toothbrush, splash, splash, bubble, rub. Then the day would break, and, descending from my berth by a graceful ladder composed of half-opened drawers beneath it, I would reopen my outer dead-light and my inner sliding window (closed by a watchman during the water-cure), and would look out at the long-rolling, lead-coloured, white topped waves over which the dawn, on a cold winter morning, cast a level, lonely glance, and through which the ship fought her melancholy way at a terrific rate. And now, lying down again, awaiting the season for broiled ham and tea, I would be compelled to listen to the voice of conscience,—the screw.

It might be, in some cases, no more than the voice of stomach; but I called it in my fancy by the higher name. Because it seemed to me that we were all of us, all day long, endeavouring to stifle the voice. Because it was under everybody’s pillow, everybody’s plate, everybody’s camp-stool, everybody’s book, everybody’s occupation. Because we pretended not to hear it, especially at meal-times, evening whist, and morning conversation on deck; but it was always among us in an under monotone, not to be drowned in pea-soup, not to be shuffled with cards, not to be diverted by books, not to be knitted into any pattern, not to be walked away from. It was smoked in the weediest cigar, and drunk in the strongest cocktail; it was conveyed on deck at noon with limp ladies, who lay there in their wrappers until the stars shone; it waited at table with the stewards; nobody could put it out with the lights. It was considered (as on shore) ill-bred to acknowledge the voice of conscience. It was not polite to mention it. One squally day an amiable gentleman in love gave much offence to a surrounding circle, including the object of his attachment, by saying of it, after it had goaded him over two easy-chairs and a skylight, ‘Screw!’

Sometimes it would appear subdued. In fleeting moments, when bubbles of champagne pervaded the nose, or when there was ‘hot pot’ in the bill of fare, or when an old dish we had had regularly every day was described in that official document by a new name,—under such excitements, one would almost believe it hushed. The ceremony of washing plates on deck, performed after every meal by a circle as of ringers of crockery triple-bob majors for a prize, would keep it down. Hauling the reel, taking the sun at noon, posting the twenty-four hours' run, altering the ship's time by the meridian, casting the waste food overboard, and attracting the eager gulls that followed in our wake,—these events would suppress it for a while. But the instant any break or pause took place in any such diversion, the voice would be at it again, importuning us to the last extent. A newly married young pair, who walked the deck affectionately some twenty miles per day, would, in the full flush of their exercise, suddenly become stricken by it, and stand trembling, but otherwise immovable, under its reproaches.

When this terrible monitor was most severe with us was when the time approached for our retiring to our dens for the night; when the lighted candles in the saloon grew fewer and fewer; when the deserted glasses with spoons in them grew more and more numerous; when waifs of toasted cheese and strays of sardines fried in batter slid languidly to and fro in the table-racks; when the man who always read had shut up his book, and blown out his candle; when the man who always talked had ceased from troubling; when the man who was always medically reported as going to have delirium tremens had put it off till to-morrow; when the man who every night devoted himself to a midnight smoke on deck two hours in length, and who every night was in bed within ten minutes afterwards, was buttoning himself up in his third coat for his hardy vigil: for then, as we fell off one by one, and, entering our several hutches, came into a peculiar atmosphere of bilge-water and Windsor soap, the voice would shake us to the centre. Woe to us when we sat down on our sofa, watching the swinging candle for ever trying and retrying to stand upon his head! or our coat upon its peg, imitating us as we appeared in our gymnastic days by sustaining itself horizontally from the wall, in emulation of the lighter and more facile towels! Then would the voice especially claim us for its prey, and rend us all to pieces.

Lights out, we in our berths, and the wind rising, the voice grows angrier and deeper. Under the mattress and under the pillow, under the sofa and under the washing-stand, under the ship and under the sea, seeming to rise from the foundations under the earth with every scoop of the great Atlantic (and oh! why scoop so?), always the voice. Vain to deny its existence in the night season; impossible to be hard of hearing; screw, screw, screw! Sometimes it lifts out of the water, and revolves with a whirr, like a ferocious firework,—except that it never expends itself, but is always ready to go off again; sometimes it seems to be in anguish, and shivers; sometimes it seems to be terrified by its last plunge, and has a fit which causes it to struggle, quiver, and for an instant stop. And now the ship sets in rolling, as only ships so fiercely screwed through time and space, day and night, fair weather and foul, *can* roll.

Did she ever take a roll before like that last? Did she ever take a roll before like this worse one that is coming now? Here is the partition at my ear down in the deep on the lee side. Are we ever coming up again together? I think not; the partition and I are so long about it that I really do believe we have overdone it this time. Heavens, what a scoop! What a deep scoop, what a hollow scoop, what a long scoop! Will it ever end, and can we bear the heavy mass of water we have taken on board, and which has let loose all the table furniture in the officers' mess, and has beaten open the door of the little passage between the purser and me, and is swashing about, even there and even here? The purser snores reassuringly, and the ship's bells striking, I hear the cheerful 'All's well!' of the watch musically given back the length of the deck, as the lately diving partition, now high in air, tries (unsoftened by what we have gone through together) to force me out of bed and berth.

'All's well!' Comforting to know, though surely all might be better. Put aside the rolling and the rush of water, and think of darting through such darkness with such velocity. Think of any other similar object coming in the opposite direction!

Whether there may be an attraction in two such moving bodies out at sea, which may help accident to bring them into collision? Thoughts, too, arise (the voice never silent all the while, but marvellously suggestive) of the gulf below; of the strange, unfruitful mountain ranges and deep valleys over which we are passing; of monstrous fish midway; of the ship's suddenly altering her course on her own account, and with a wild plunge settling down, and making *that* voyage with a crew of dead discoverers. Now, too, one recalls an almost universal tendency on the part of passengers to stumble, at some time or other in the day, on the topic of a certain large steamer making this same run, which was lost at sea, and never heard of more. Everybody has seemed under a spell, compelling approach to the threshold of the grim subject, stoppage, discomfiture, and pretence of never having been near it. The boatswain's whistle sounds! A change in the wind, hoarse orders issuing, and the watch very busy. Sails come crashing home overhead, ropes (that seem all knot) ditto; every man engaged appears to have twenty feet, with twenty times the average amount of stamping power in each. Gradually the noise slackens, the hoarse cries die away, the boatswain's whistle softens into the soothing and contented notes, which rather reluctantly admit that the job is done for the time, and the voice sets in again.

Thus come unintelligible dreams of up hill and down, and swinging and swaying, until consciousness revives of atmospherical Windsor soap and bilge-water, and the voice announces that the giant has come for the water-cure again.

Such were my fanciful reminiscences as I lay, part of that day, in the Bay of New York, O! Also as we passed clear of the Narrows, and got out to sea; also in many an idle hour at sea in sunny weather! At length the observations and computations showed that we should make the coast of Ireland to-night. So I stood watch on deck all night to-night, to see how we made the coast of Ireland.

Very dark, and the sea most brilliantly phosphorescent. Great way on the ship, and double look-out kept. Vigilant captain on the bridge, vigilant first officer looking over the port side, vigilant second officer standing by the quarter-master at the compass, vigilant third officer posted at the stern rail with a lantern. No passengers on the quiet decks, but expectation everywhere nevertheless. The two men at the wheel very steady, very serious, and very prompt to answer orders. An order issued sharply now and then, and echoed back; otherwise the night drags slowly, silently, with no change.

All of a sudden, at the blank hour of two in the morning, a vague movement of relief from a long strain expresses itself in all hands; the third officer's lantern tinkles, and he fires a rocket, and another rocket. A sullen solitary light is pointed out to me in the black sky yonder. A change is expected in the light, but none takes place. 'Give them two more rockets, Mr. Vigilant.' Two more, and a blue-light burnt. All eyes watch the light again. At last a little toy sky-rocket is flashed up from it; and, even as that small streak in the darkness dies away, we are telegraphed to Queenstown, Liverpool, and London, and back again under the ocean to America.

Then up come the half-dozen passengers who are going ashore at Queenstown and up comes the mail-agent in charge of the bags, and up come the men who are to carry the bags into the mail-tender that will come off for them out of the harbour. Lamps and lanterns gleam here and there about the decks, and impeding bulks are knocked away with handspikes; and the port-side bulwark, barren but a moment ago, bursts into a crop of heads of seamen, stewards, and engineers.

The light begins to be gained upon, begins to be alongside, begins to be left astern. More rockets, and, between us and the land, steams beautifully the Inman steamship City of Paris, for New York, outward bound. We observe with complacency that the wind is dead against her (it being *with* us), and that she rolls and pitches. (The sickest passenger on board is the most delighted by this circumstance.) Time rushes by as we rush on; and now we see the light in Queenstown Harbour, and now the lights of the mail-tender coming out to us. What vagaries the mail-tender performs on the way, in every point of the compass, especially in those where she has no business, and why she performs them, Heaven only knows! At length she is seen plunging within a cable’s length of our port broadside, and is being roared at through our speaking-trumpets to do this thing, and not to do that, and to stand by the other, as if she were a very demented tender indeed. Then, we slackening amidst a deafening roar of steam, this much-abused tender is made fast to us by hawsers, and the men in readiness carry the bags aboard, and return for more, bending under their burdens, and looking just like the pasteboard figures of the miller and his men in the theatre of our boyhood, and comporting themselves almost as unsteadily. All the while the unfortunate tender plunges high and low, and is roared at. Then the Queenstown passengers are put on board of her, with infinite plunging and roaring, and the tender gets heaved up on the sea to that surprising extent that she looks within an ace of washing aboard of us, high and dry. Roared at with contumely to the last, this wretched tender is at length let go, with a final plunge of great ignominy, and falls spinning into our wake.

The voice of conscience resumed its dominion as the day climbed up the sky, and kept by all of us passengers into port; kept by us as we passed other lighthouses, and dangerous islands off the coast, where some of the officers, with whom I stood my watch, had gone ashore in sailing-ships in fogs (and of which by that token they seemed to have quite an affectionate remembrance), and past the Welsh coast, and past the Cheshire coast, and past everything and everywhere lying between our ship and her own special dock in the Mersey. Off which, at last, at nine of the clock, on a fair evening early in May, we stopped, and the voice ceased. A very curious sensation, not unlike having my own ears stopped, ensued upon that silence; and it was with a no less curious sensation that I went over the side of the good Cunard ship 'Russia' (whom prosperity attend through all her voyages!) and surveyed the outer hull of the gracious monster that the voice had inhabited. So, perhaps, shall we all, in the spirit, one day survey the frame that held the busier voice from which my vagrant fancy derived this similitude.

CHAPTER XXXII—A SMALL STAR IN THE EAST

I had been looking, yesternight, through the famous ‘Dance of Death,’ and to-day the grim old woodcuts arose in my mind with the new significance of a ghastly monotony not to be found in the original. The weird skeleton rattled along the streets before me, and struck fiercely; but it was never at the pains of assuming a disguise. It played on no dulcimer here, was crowned with no flowers, waved no plume, minced in no flowing robe or train, lifted no wine-cup, sat at no feast, cast no dice, counted no gold. It was simply a bare, gaunt, famished skeleton, slaying his way along.

The borders of Ratcliff and Stepney, eastward of London, and giving on the impure river, were the scene of this uncompromising dance of death, upon a drizzling November day. A squalid maze of streets, courts, and alleys of miserable houses let out in single rooms. A wilderness of dirt, rags, and hunger. A mud-desert, chiefly inhabited by a tribe from whom employment has departed, or to whom it comes but fitfully and rarely. They are not skilled mechanics in any wise. They are but labourers,—dock-labourers, water-side labourers, coal-porters, ballast-heavers, such-like hewers of wood and drawers of water. But they have come into existence, and they propagate their wretched race.

One grisly joke alone, methought, the skeleton seemed to play off here. It had stuck election-bills on the walls, which the wind and rain had deteriorated into suitable rags. It had even summed up the state of the poll, in chalk, on the shutters of one ruined house. It adjured the free and independent starvers to vote for Thisman and vote for Thatman; not to plump, as they valued the state of parties and the national prosperity (both of great importance to them, I think); but, by returning Thisman and Thatman, each naught without the other, to compound a glorious and immortal whole. Surely the skeleton is nowhere more cruelly ironical in the original monkish idea!

Pondering in my mind the far-seeing schemes of Thisman and Thatman, and of the public blessing called Party, for staying the degeneracy, physical and moral, of many thousands (who shall say how many?) of the English race; for devising employment useful to the community for those who want but to work and live; for equalising rates, cultivating waste lands, facilitating emigration, and, above all things, saving and utilising the oncoming generations, and thereby changing ever-growing national weakness into strength: pondering in my mind, I say, these hopeful exertions, I turned down a narrow street to look into a house or two.

It was a dark street with a dead wall on one side. Nearly all the outer doors of the houses stood open. I took the first entry, and knocked at a parlour-door. Might I come in? I might, if I plased, sur.

The woman of the room (Irish) had picked up some long strips of wood, about some wharf or barge; and they had just now been thrust into the otherwise empty grate to make two iron pots boil. There was some fish in one, and there were some potatoes in the other. The flare of the burning wood enabled me to see a table, and a broken chair or so, and some old cheap crockery ornaments about the chimney-piece. It was not until I had spoken with the woman a few minutes, that I saw a horrible brown heap on the floor in a corner, which, but for previous experience in this dismal wise, I might not have suspected to be ‘the bed.’ There was something thrown upon it; and I asked what that was.

‘’Tis the poor craythur that stays here, sur; and ’tis very bad she is, and ’tis very bad she’s been this long time, and ’tis better she’ll never be, and ’tis slape she does all day, and ’tis wake she does all night, and ’tis the lead, sur.’

‘The what?’

‘The lead, sur. Sure ’tis the lead-mills, where the women gets took on at eighteen-pence a day, sur, when they makes application early enough, and is lucky and wanted; and ’tis lead-pisoned she is, sur, and some of them gets lead-pisoned soon, and some of them gets lead-pisoned later, and some, but not many, niver; and ’tis all according to the constitooshun, sur, and some constitooshuns is strong, and some is weak; and her constitooshun is lead-pisoned, bad as can be, sur; and her brain is coming out at her ear, and it hurts her dreadful; and that’s what it is, and niver no more, and niver no less, sur.’

The sick young woman moaning here, the speaker bent over her, took a bandage from her head, and threw open a back door to let in the daylight upon it, from the smallest and most miserable backyard I ever saw.

‘That’s what cooms from her, sur, being lead-pisoned; and it cooms from her night and day, the poor, sick craythur; and the pain of it is dreadful; and God he knows that my husband has walked the sthreets these four days, being a labourer, and is walking them now, and is ready to work, and no work for him, and no fire and no food but the bit in the pot, and no more than ten shillings in a fortnight; God be good to us! and it is poor we are, and dark it is and could it is indeed.’

Knowing that I could compensate myself thereafter for my self-denial, if I saw fit, I had resolved that I would give nothing in the course of these visits. I did this to try the people. I may state at once that my closest observation could not detect any indication whatever of an expectation that I would give money: they were grateful to be talked to about their miserable affairs, and sympathy was plainly a comfort to them; but they neither asked for money in any case, nor showed the least trace of surprise or disappointment or resentment at my giving none.

The woman’s married daughter had by this time come down from her room on the floor above, to join in the conversation. She herself had been to the lead-mills very early that morning to be ‘took on,’ but had not succeeded. She had four children; and her husband, also a water-side labourer, and then out seeking work, seemed in no better case as to finding it than her father. She was English, and by nature, of a buxom figure and cheerful. Both in her poor dress and in her mother’s there was an effort to keep up some appearance of neatness. She knew all about the sufferings of the unfortunate invalid, and all about the lead-poisoning, and how the symptoms came on, and how they grew,—having often seen them. The very smell when you stood inside the door of the works was enough to knock you down, she said: yet she was going back again to get ‘took on.’ What could she do? Better be ulcerated and paralysed for eighteen-pence a day, while it lasted, than see the children starve.

A dark and squalid cupboard in this room, touching the back door and all manner of offence, had been for some time the sleeping-place of the sick young woman. But the nights being now wintry, and the blankets and coverlets ‘gone to the leaving shop,’ she lay all night where she lay all day, and was lying then. The woman of the room, her husband, this most miserable patient, and two others, lay on the one brown heap together for warmth.

‘God bless you, sir, and thank you!’ were the parting words from these people,—gratefully spoken too,—with which I left this place.

Some streets away, I tapped at another parlour-door on another ground-floor. Looking in, I found a man, his wife, and four children, sitting at a washing-stool by way of table, at their dinner of bread and infused tea-leaves. There was a very scanty cinderous fire in the grate by which they sat; and there was a tent bedstead in the room with a bed upon it and a coverlet. The man did not rise when I went in, nor during my stay, but civilly inclined his head on my pulling off my hat, and, in answer to my inquiry whether I might ask him a question or two, said, ‘Certainly.’ There being a window at each end of this room, back and front, it might have been ventilated; but it was shut up tight, to keep the cold out, and was very sickening.

The wife, an intelligent, quick woman, rose and stood at her husband’s elbow; and he glanced up at her as if for help. It soon appeared that he was rather deaf. He was a slow, simple fellow of about thirty.

‘What was he by trade?’

‘Gentleman asks what are you by trade, John?’

‘I am a boilermaker;’ looking about him with an exceedingly perplexed air, as if for a boiler that had unaccountably vanished.

‘He ain’t a mechanic, you understand, sir,’ the wife put in: ‘he’s only a labourer.’

‘Are you in work?’

He looked up at his wife again. ‘Gentleman says are you in work, John?’

‘In work!’ cried this forlorn boilermaker, staring aghast at his wife, and then working his vision’s way very slowly round to me: ‘Lord, no!’

‘Ah, he ain’t indeed!’ said the poor woman, shaking her head, as she looked at the four children in succession, and then at him.

‘Work!’ said the boilermaker, still seeking that evaporated boiler, first in my countenance, then in the air, and then in the features of his second son at his knee: ‘I wish I *was* in work! I haven’t had more than a day’s work to do this three weeks.’

‘How have you lived?’

A faint gleam of admiration lighted up the face of the would-be boilermaker, as he stretched out the short sleeve of his thread-bare canvas jacket, and replied, pointing her out, ‘On the work of the wife.’

I forget where boilermaking had gone to, or where he supposed it had gone to; but he added some resigned information on that head, coupled with an expression of his belief that it was never coming back.

The cheery helpfulness of the wife was very remarkable. She did slop-work; made pea-jackets. She produced the pea-jacket then in hand, and spread it out upon the bed,—the only piece of furniture in the room on which to spread it. She showed how much of it she made, and how much was afterwards finished off by the machine. According to her calculation at the moment, deducting what her trimming cost her, she got for making a pea-jacket tenpence half-penny, and she could make one in something less than two days.

But, you see, it come to her through two hands, and of course it didn't come through the second hand for nothing. Why did it come through the second hand at all? Why, this way. The second hand took the risk of the given-out work, you see. If she had money enough to pay the security deposit,—call it two pound,—she could get the work from the first hand, and so the second would not have to be deducted for. But, having no money at all, the second hand come in and took its profit, and so the whole worked down to tenpence half-penny. Having explained all this with great intelligence, even with some little pride, and without a whine or murmur, she folded her work again, sat down by her husband's side at the washing-stool, and resumed her dinner of dry bread. Mean as the meal was, on the bare board, with its old gallipots for cups, and what not other sordid makeshifts; shabby as the woman was in dress, and toning done towards the Bosjesman colour, with want of nutriment and washing,—there was positively a dignity in her, as the family anchor just holding the poor ship-wrecked boilermaker's bark. When I left the room, the boiler-maker's eyes were slowly turned towards her, as if his last hope of ever again seeing that vanished boiler lay in her direction.

These people had never applied for parish relief but once; and that was when the husband met with a disabling accident at his work.

Not many doors from here, I went into a room on the first floor. The woman apologised for its being in 'an untidy mess.' The day was Saturday, and she was boiling the children's clothes in a saucepan on the hearth. There was nothing else into which she could have put them. There was no crockery, or tinware, or tub, or bucket. There was an old gallipot or two, and there was a broken bottle or so, and there were some broken boxes for seats. The last small scraping of coals left was raked together in a corner of the floor. There were some rags in an open cupboard, also on the floor. In a corner of the room was a crazy old French bed-stead, with a man lying on his back upon it in a ragged pilot jacket, and rough oil-skin fantail hat. The room was perfectly black. It was difficult to believe, at first, that it was not purposely coloured black, the walls were so begrimed.

As I stood opposite the woman boiling the children's clothes,—she had not even a piece of soap to wash them with,—and apologising for her occupation, I could take in all these things without appearing to notice them, and could even correct my inventory. I had missed, at the first glance, some half a pound of bread in the otherwise empty safe, an old red ragged crinoline hanging on the handle of the door by which I had entered, and certain fragments of rusty iron scattered on the floor, which looked like broken tools and a piece of stove-pipe. A child stood looking on. On the box nearest to the fire sat two younger children; one a delicate and pretty little creature, whom the other sometimes kissed.

This woman, like the last, was wofully shabby, and was degenerating to the Bosjesman complexion. But her figure, and the ghost of a certain vivacity about her, and the spectre of a dimple in her cheek, carried my memory strangely back to the old days of the Adelphi Theatre, London, when Mrs. Fitzwilliam was the friend of Victorine.

'May I ask you what your husband is?'

'He's a coal-porter, sir,'—with a glance and a sigh towards the bed.

'Is he out of work?'

'Oh, yes, sir! and work's at all times very, very scanty with him; and now he's laid up.'

'It's my legs,' said the man upon the bed. 'I'll unroll 'em.' And immediately began.

'Have you any older children?'

'I have a daughter that does the needle-work, and I have a son that does what he can. She's at her work now, and he's trying for work.'

'Do they live here?'

'They sleep here. They can't afford to pay more rent, and so they come here at night. The rent is very hard upon us. It's rose upon us too, now,—sixpence a week,—on account of these new changes in the law, about the rates. We are a week behind; the landlord's been shaking and rattling at that door frightfully; he says he'll turn us out. I don't know what's to come of it.'

The man upon the bed ruefully interposed, 'Here's my legs. The skin's broke, besides the swelling. I have had a many kicks, working, one way and another.'

He looked at his legs (which were much discoloured and misshapen) for a while, and then appearing to remember that they were not popular with his family, rolled them up again, as if they were something in the nature of maps or plans that were not wanted to be referred to, lay hopelessly down on his back once more with his fantail hat over his face, and stirred not.

'Do your eldest son and daughter sleep in that cupboard?'

'Yes,' replied the woman.

'With the children?'

'Yes. We have to get together for warmth. We have little to cover us.'

'Have you nothing by you to eat but the piece of bread I see there?'

'Nothing. And we had the rest of the loaf for our breakfast, with water. I don't know what's to come of it.'

'Have you no prospect of improvement?'

'If my eldest son earns anything to-day, he'll bring it home. Then we shall have something to eat to-night, and may be able to do something towards the rent. If not, I don't know what's to come of it.'

'This is a sad state of things.'

'Yes, sir; it's a hard, hard life. Take care of the stairs as you go, sir,—they're broken,—and good day, sir!'

These people had a mortal dread of entering the workhouse, and received no out-of-door relief.

In another room, in still another tenement, I found a very decent woman with five children,—the last a baby, and she herself a patient of the parish doctor,—to whom, her husband being in the hospital, the Union allowed for the support of herself and family, four shillings a week and five loaves. I suppose when Thisman, M.P., and Thatman, M.P., and the Public-blessing Party, lay their heads together in course of time, and come to an equalization of rating, she may go down to the dance of death to the tune of sixpence more.

I could enter no other houses for that one while, for I could not bear the contemplation of the children. Such heart as I had summoned to sustain me against the miseries of the adults failed me when I looked at the children. I saw how young they were, how hungry, how serious and still. I thought of them, sick and dying in those lairs. I think of them dead without anguish; but to think of them so suffering and so dying quite unmanned me.

Down by the river's bank in Ratcliff, I was turning upward by a side-street, therefore, to regain the railway, when my eyes rested on the inscription across the road, 'East London Children's Hospital.' I could scarcely have seen an inscription better suited to my frame of mind; and I went across and went straight in.

I found the children's hospital established in an old sail-loft or storehouse, of the roughest nature, and on the simplest means. There were trap-doors in the floors, where goods had been hoisted up and down; heavy feet and heavy weights had started every knot in the well-trodden planking: inconvenient bulks and beams and awkward staircases perplexed my passage through the wards. But I found it airy, sweet, and clean. In its seven and thirty beds I saw but little beauty; for starvation in the second or third generation takes a pinched look: but I saw the sufferings both of infancy and childhood tenderly assuaged; I heard the little patients answering to pet playful names, the light touch of a delicate lady laid bare the wasted sticks of arms for me to pity; and the claw-like little hands, as she did so, twined themselves lovingly around her wedding-ring.

One baby mite there was as pretty as any of Raphael's angels. The tiny head was bandaged for water on the brain; and it was suffering with acute bronchitis too, and made from time to time a plaintive, though not impatient or complaining, little sound. The smooth curve of the cheeks and of the chin was faultless in its condensation of infantine beauty, and the large bright eyes were most lovely. It happened as I stopped at the foot of the bed, that these eyes rested upon mine with that wistful expression of wondering thoughtfulness which we all know sometimes in very little children. They remained fixed on mine, and never turned from me while I stood there. When the utterance of that plaintive sound shook the little form, the gaze still remained unchanged. I felt as though the child implored me to tell the story of the little hospital in which it was sheltered to any gentle heart I could address. Laying my world-worn hand upon the little unmarked clasped hand at the chin, I gave it a silent promise that I would do so.

A gentleman and lady, a young husband and wife, have bought and fitted up this building for its present noble use, and have quietly settled themselves in it as its medical officers and directors. Both have had considerable practical experience of medicine and surgery; he as house-surgeon of a great London hospital; she as a very earnest student, tested by severe examination, and also as a nurse of the sick poor during the prevalence of cholera.

With every qualification to lure them away, with youth and accomplishments and tastes and habits that can have no response in any breast near them, close begirt by every repulsive circumstance inseparable from such a neighbourhood, there they dwell. They live in the hospital itself, and their rooms are on its first floor. Sitting at their dinner-table, they could hear the cry of one of the children in pain. The lady's piano, drawing-materials, books, and other such evidences of refinement are as much a part of the rough place as the iron bedsteads of the little patients. They are put to shifts for room, like passengers on board ship. The dispenser of medicines (attracted to them not by self-interest, but by their own magnetism and that of their cause) sleeps in a recess in the dining-room, and has his washing apparatus in the sideboard.

Their contented manner of making the best of the things around them, I found so pleasantly inseparable from their usefulness! Their pride in this partition that we put up ourselves, or in that partition that we took down, or in that other partition that we moved, or in the stove that was given us for the waiting-room, or in our nightly conversion of the little consulting-room into a smoking-room! Their admiration of the situation, if we could only get rid of its one objectionable incident, the coal-yard at the back! 'Our hospital carriage, presented by a friend, and very useful.' That was my presentation to a perambulator, for which a coach-house had been discovered in a corner down-stairs, just large enough to hold it. Coloured prints, in all stages of preparation for being added to those already decorating the wards, were plentiful; a charming wooden phenomenon of a bird, with an impossible top-knot, who ducked his head when you set a counter weight going, had been inaugurated as a public statue that very morning; and trotting about among the beds, on familiar terms with all the patients, was a comical mongrel dog, called Poodles. This comical dog (quite a tonic in himself) was found characteristically starving at the door of the institution, and was taken in and fed, and has lived here ever since. An admirer of his mental endowments has presented him with a collar bearing the legend, ‘Judge not Poodles by external appearances.’ He was merrily wagging his tail on a boy’s pillow when he made this modest appeal to me.

When this hospital was first opened, in January of the present year, the people could not possibly conceive but that somebody paid for the services rendered there; and were disposed to claim them as a right, and to find fault if out of temper. They soon came to understand the case better, and have much increased in gratitude. The mothers of the patients avail themselves very freely of the visiting rules; the fathers often on Sundays. There is an unreasonable (but still, I think, touching and intelligible) tendency in the parents to take a child away to its wretched home, if on the point of death. One boy who had been thus carried off on a rainy night, when in a violent state of inflammation, and who had been afterwards brought back, had been recovered with exceeding difficulty; but he was a jolly boy, with a specially strong interest in his dinner, when I saw him.

Insufficient food and unwholesome living are the main causes of disease among these small patients. So nourishment, cleanliness, and ventilation are the main remedies. Discharged patients are looked after, and invited to come and dine now and then; so are certain famishing creatures who were never patients. Both the lady and the gentleman are well acquainted, not only with the histories of the patients and their families, but with the characters and circumstances of great numbers of their neighbours—of these they keep a register. It is their common experience, that people, sinking down by inches into deeper and deeper poverty, will conceal it, even from them, if possible, unto the very last extremity.

The nurses of this hospital are all young,—ranging, say, from nineteen to four and twenty. They have even within these narrow limits, what many well-endowed hospitals would not give them, a comfortable room of their own in which to take their meals. It is a beautiful truth, that interest in the children and sympathy with their sorrows bind these young women to their places far more strongly than any other consideration could. The best skilled of the nurses came originally from a kindred neighbourhood, almost as poor; and she knew how much the work was needed. She is a fair dressmaker. The hospital cannot pay her as many pounds in the year as there are months in it; and one day the lady regarded it as a duty to speak to her about her improving her prospects and following her trade. ‘No,’ she said: she could never be so useful or so happy elsewhere any more; she must stay among the children.

And she stays. One of the nurses, as I passed her, was washing a baby-boy. Liking her pleasant face, I stopped to speak to her charge,—a common, bullet-headed, frowning charge enough, laying hold of his own nose with a slippery grasp, and staring very solemnly out of a blanket. The melting of the pleasant face into delighted smiles, as this young gentleman gave an unexpected kick, and laughed at me, was almost worth my previous pain.

An affecting play was acted in Paris years ago, called 'The Children's Doctor.' As I parted from my children's doctor, now in question, I saw in his easy black necktie, in his loose buttoned black frock-coat, in his pensive face, in the flow of his dark hair, in his eyelashes, in the very turn of his moustache, the exact realisation of the Paris artist's ideal as it was presented on the stage. But no romancer that I know of has had the boldness to prefigure the life and home of this young husband and young wife in the Children's Hospital in the east of London.

I came away from Ratcliff by the Stepney railway station to the terminus at Fenchurch Street. Any one who will reverse that route may retrace my steps.

CHAPTER XXXIII—A LITTLE DINNER IN AN HOUR

It fell out on a day in this last autumn, that I had to go down from London to a place of seaside resort, on an hour's business, accompanied by my esteemed friend Bullfinch. Let the place of seaside resort be, for the nonce, called Namelesston.

I had been loitering about Paris in very hot weather, pleasantly breakfasting in the open air in the garden of the Palais Royal or the Tuileries, pleasantly dining in the open air in the Elysian Fields, pleasantly taking my cigar and lemonade in the open air on the Italian Boulevard towards the small hours after midnight. Bullfinch—an excellent man of business—has summoned me back across the Channel, to transact this said hour's business at Namelesston; and thus it fell out that Bullfinch and I were in a railway carriage together on our way to Namelesston, each with his return-ticket in his waistcoat-pocket.

Says Bullfinch, 'I have a proposal to make. Let us dine at the Temeraire.'

I asked Bullfinch, did he recommend the Temeraire? inasmuch as I had not been rated on the books of the Temeraire for many years.

Bullfinch declined to accept the responsibility of recommending the Temeraire, but on the whole was rather sanguine about it. He 'seemed to remember,' Bullfinch said, that he had dined well there. A plain dinner, but good. Certainly not like a Parisian dinner (here Bullfinch obviously became the prey of want of confidence), but of its kind very fair.

I appeal to Bullfinch's intimate knowledge of my wants and ways to decide whether I was usually ready to be pleased with any dinner, or—for the matter of that—with anything that was fair of its kind and really what it claimed to be. Bullfinch doing me the honour to respond in the affirmative, I agreed to ship myself as an able trencherman on board the Temeraire.

'Now, our plan shall be this,' says Bullfinch, with his forefinger at his nose. 'As soon as we get to Namelesston, we'll drive straight to the Temeraire, and order a little dinner in an hour. And as we shall not have more than enough time in which to dispose of it comfortably, what do you say to giving the house the best opportunities of serving it hot and quickly by dining in the coffee-room?'

What I had to say was, Certainly. Bullfinch (who is by nature of a hopeful constitution) then began to babble of green geese. But I checked him in that Falstaffian vein, urging considerations of time and cookery.

In due sequence of events we drove up to the Temeraire, and alighted. A youth in livery received us on the door-step. 'Looks well,' said Bullfinch confidentially. And then aloud, 'Coffee-room!'

The youth in livery (now perceived to be mouldy) conducted us to the desired haven, and was enjoined by Bullfinch to send the waiter at once, as we wished to order a little dinner in an hour. Then Bullfinch and I waited for the waiter, until, the waiter continuing to wait in some unknown and invisible sphere of action, we rang for the waiter; which ring produced the waiter, who announced himself as not the waiter who ought to wait upon us, and who didn't wait a moment longer.

So Bullfinch approached the coffee-room door, and melodiously pitching his voice into a bar where two young ladies were keeping the books of the Temeraire, apologetically explained that we wished to order a little dinner in an hour, and that we were debarred from the execution of our inoffensive purpose by consignment to solitude.

Hereupon one of the young ladies ran a bell, which reproduced—at the bar this time—the waiter who was not the waiter who ought to wait upon us; that extraordinary man, whose life seemed consumed in waiting upon people to say that he wouldn't wait upon them, repeated his former protest with great indignation, and retired.

Bullfinch, with a fallen countenance, was about to say to me, 'This won't do,' when the waiter who ought to wait upon us left off keeping us waiting at last. 'Waiter,' said Bullfinch piteously, 'we have been a long time waiting.' The waiter who ought to wait upon us laid the blame upon the waiter who ought not to wait upon us, and said it was all that waiter's fault.

'We wish,' said Bullfinch, much depressed, 'to order a little dinner in an hour. What can we have?'

'What would you like to have, gentlemen?'

Bullfinch, with extreme mournfulness of speech and action, and with a forlorn old fly-blown bill of fare in his hand which the waiter had given him, and which was a sort of general manuscript index to any cookery-book you please, moved the previous question.

We could have mock-turtle soup, a sole, curry, and roast duck. Agreed. At this table by this window. Punctually in an hour.

I had been feigning to look out of this window; but I had been taking note of the crumbs on all the tables, the dirty table-cloths, the stuffy, soupy, airless atmosphere, the stale leavings everywhere about, the deep gloom of the waiter who ought to wait upon us, and the stomach-ache with which a lonely traveller at a distant table in a corner was too evidently afflicted. I now pointed out to Bullfinch the alarming circumstance that this traveller had *dined*. We hurriedly debated whether, without infringement of good breeding, we could ask him to disclose if he had partaken of mock-turtle, sole, curry, or roast duck? We decided that the thing could not be politely done, and we had set our own stomachs on a cast, and they must stand the hazard of the die.

I hold phrenology, within certain limits, to be true; I am much of the same mind as to the subtler expressions of the hand; I hold physiognomy to be infallible; though all these sciences demand rare qualities in the student. But I also hold that there is no more certain index to personal character than the condition of a set of casters is to the character of any hotel. Knowing, and having often tested this theory of mine, Bullfinch resigned himself to the worst, when, laying aside any remaining veil of disguise, I held up before him in succession the cloudy oil and furry vinegar, the clogged cayenne, the dirty salt, the obscene dregs of soy, and the anchovy sauce in a flannel waistcoat of decomposition.

We went out to transact our business. So inspiriting was the relief of passing into the clean and windy streets of Namelesston from the heavy and vapid closeness of the coffee-room of the Temeraire, that hope began to revive within us. We began to consider that perhaps the lonely traveller had taken physic, or done something injudicious to bring his complaint on. Bullfinch remarked that he thought the waiter who ought to wait upon us had brightened a little when suggesting curry; and although I knew him to have been at that moment the express image of despair, I allowed myself to become elevated in spirits. As we walked by the softly-lapping sea, all the notabilities of Namelesston, who are for ever going up and down with the changelessness of the tides, passed to and fro in procession. Pretty girls on horseback, and with detested riding-masters; pretty girls on foot; mature ladies in hats,—spectacled, strong-minded, and glaring at the opposite or weaker sex. The Stock Exchange was strongly represented, Jerusalem was strongly represented, the bores of the prosier London clubs were strongly represented. Fortune-hunters of all denominations were there, from hirsute insolvency, in a curricle, to closely-buttoned swindlery in doubtful boots, on the sharp look-out for any likely young gentleman disposed to play a game at billiards round the corner. Masters of languages, their lessons finished for the day, were going to their homes out of sight of the sea; mistresses of accomplishments, carrying small portfolios, likewise tripped homeward; pairs of scholastic pupils, two and two, went languidly along the beach, surveying the face of the waters as if waiting for some Ark to come and take them off. Spectres of the George the Fourth days flitted unsteadily among the crowd, bearing the outward semblance of ancient dandies, of every one of whom it might be said, not that he had one leg in the grave, or both legs, but that he was steeped in grave to the summit of his high shirt-collar, and had nothing real about him but his bones. Alone stationary in the midst of all the movements, the Namelesston boatmen leaned against the railings and yawned, and looked out to sea, or looked at the moored fishing-boats and at nothing. Such is the unchanging manner of life with this nursery of our hardy seamen; and very dry nurses they are, and always wanting something to drink. The only two nautical personages detached from the railing were the two fortunate possessors of the celebrated monstrous unknown barking-fish, just caught (frequently just caught off Namelesston), who carried him about in a hamper, and pressed the scientific to look in at the lid.

The sands of the hour had all run out when we got back to the Temeraire. Says Bullfinch, then, to the youth in livery, with boldness, ‘Lavatory!’

When we arrived at the family vault with a skylight, which the youth in livery presented as the institution sought, we had already whisked off our cravats and coats; but finding ourselves in the presence of an evil smell, and no linen but two crumpled towels newly damp from the countenances of two somebody elses, we put on our cravats and coats again, and fled unwashed to the coffee-room.

There the waiter who ought to wait upon us had set forth our knives and forks and glasses, on the cloth whose dirty acquaintance we had already had the pleasure of making, and which we were pleased to recognise by the familiar expression of its stains. And now there occurred the truly surprising phenomenon, that the waiter who ought not to wait upon us swooped down upon us, clutched our loaf of bread, and vanished with the same.

Bullfinch, with distracted eyes, was following this unaccountable figure 'out at the portal,' like the ghost in Hamlet, when the waiter who ought to wait upon us jostled against it, carrying a tureen.

'Waiter!' said a severe diner, lately finished, perusing his bill fiercely through his eye-glass.

The waiter put down our tureen on a remote side-table, and went to see what was amiss in this new direction.

'This is not right, you know, waiter. Look here! here's yesterday's sherry, one and eightpence, and here we are again, two shillings. And what does sixpence mean?'

So far from knowing what sixpence meant, the waiter protested that he didn't know what anything meant. He wiped the perspiration from his clammy brow, and said it was impossible to do it,—not particularising what,—and the kitchen was so far off.

'Take the bill to the bar, and get it altered,' said Mr. Indignation Cocker, so to call him.

The waiter took it, looked intensely at it, didn't seem to like the idea of taking it to the bar, and submitted, as a new light upon the case, that perhaps sixpence meant sixpence.

'I tell you again,' said Mr. Indignation Cocker, 'here's yesterday's sherry—can't you see it?—one and eightpence, and here we are again, two shillings. What do you make of one and eightpence and two shillings?'

Totally unable to make anything of one and eightpence and two shillings, the waiter went out to try if anybody else could; merely casting a helpless backward glance at Bullfinch, in acknowledgement of his pathetic entreaties for our soup-tureen. After a pause, during which Mr. Indignation Cocker read a newspaper and coughed defiant coughs, Bullfinch arose to get the tureen, when the waiter reappeared and brought it,—dropping Mr. Indignation Cocker's altered bill on Mr. Indignation Cocker's table as he came along.

'It's quite impossible to do it, gentlemen,' murmured the waiter; 'and the kitchen is so far off.'

‘Well, you don’t keep the house; it’s not your fault, we suppose. Bring some sherry.’

‘Waiter!’ from Mr. Indignation Cocker, with a new and burning sense of injury upon him.

The waiter, arrested on his way to our sherry, stopped short, and came back to see what was wrong now.

‘Will you look here? This is worse than before. *Do* you understand? Here’s yesterday’s sherry, one and eightpence, and here we are again two shillings. And what the devil does ninepence mean?’

This new portent utterly confounded the waiter. He wrung his napkin, and mutely appealed to the ceiling.

‘Waiter, fetch that sherry,’ says Bullfinch, in open wrath and revolt.

‘I want to know,’ persisted Mr. Indignation Cocker, ‘the meaning of ninepence. I want to know the meaning of sherry one and eightpence yesterday, and of here we are again two shillings. Send somebody.’

The distracted waiter got out of the room on pretext of sending somebody, and by that means got our wine. But the instant he appeared with our decanter, Mr. Indignation Cocker descended on him again.

‘Waiter!’

‘You will now have the goodness to attend to our dinner, waiter,’ said Bullfinch, sternly.

‘I am very sorry, but it’s quite impossible to do it, gentlemen,’ pleaded the waiter; ‘and the kitchen—’

‘Waiter!’ said Mr. Indignation Cocker.

‘—Is,’ resumed the waiter, ‘so far off, that—’

‘Waiter!’ persisted Mr. Indignation Cocker, ‘send somebody.’

We were not without our fears that the waiter rushed out to hang himself; and we were much relieved by his fetching somebody,—in graceful, flowing skirts and with a waist,—who very soon settled Mr. Indignation Cocker’s business.

‘Oh!’ said Mr. Cocker, with his fire surprisingly quenched by this apparition; ‘I wished to ask about this bill of mine, because it appears to me that there’s a little mistake here. Let me show you. Here’s yesterday’s sherry one and eightpence, and here we are again two shillings. And how do you explain ninepence?’

However it was explained, in tones too soft to be overheard. Mr. Cocker was heard to say nothing more than ‘Ah-h-h! Indeed; thank you!

Yes,' and shortly afterwards went out, a milder man.

The lonely traveller with the stomach-ache had all this time suffered severely, drawing up a leg now and then, and sipping hot brandy-and-water with grated ginger in it. When we tasted our (very) mock-turtle soup, and were instantly seized with symptoms of some disorder simulating apoplexy, and occasioned by the surcharge of nose and brain with lukewarm dish-water holding in solution sour flour, poisonous condiments, and (say) seventy-five per cent. of miscellaneous kitchen stuff rolled into balls, we were inclined to trace his disorder to that source. On the other hand, there was a silent anguish upon him too strongly resembling the results established within ourselves by the sherry, to be discarded from alarmed consideration. Again, we observed him, with terror, to be much overcome by our sole's being aired in a temporary retreat close to him, while the waiter went out (as we conceived) to see his friends. And when the curry made its appearance he suddenly retired in great disorder.

In fine, for the uneatable part of this little dinner (as contradistinguished from the undrinkable) we paid only seven shillings and sixpence each. And Bullfinch and I agreed unanimously, that no such ill-served, ill-appointed, ill-cooked, nasty little dinner could be got for the money anywhere else under the sun. With that comfort to our backs, we turned them on the dear old Temeraire, the charging Temeraire, and resolved (in the Scotch dialect) to gang nae mair to the flabby Temeraire.

CHAPTER XXXIV—MR. BARLOW

A great reader of good fiction at an unusually early age, it seems to me as though I had been born under the superintendence of the estimable but terrific gentleman whose name stands at the head of my present reflections. The instructive monomaniac, Mr. Barlow, will be remembered as the tutor of Master Harry Sandford and Master Tommy Merton. He knew everything, and didactically improved all sorts of occasions, from the consumption of a plate of cherries to the contemplation of a starlight night. What youth came to without Mr. Barlow was displayed in the history of Sandford and Merton, by the example of a certain awful Master Mash. This young wretch wore buckles and powder, conducted himself with insupportable levity at the theatre, had no idea of facing a mad bull single-handed (in which I think him less reprehensible, as remotely reflecting my own character), and was a frightful instance of the enervating effects of luxury upon the human race.

Strange destiny on the part of Mr. Barlow, to go down to posterity as childhood's experience of a bore! Immortal Mr. Barlow, boring his way through the verdant freshness of ages!

My personal indictment against Mr. Barlow is one of many counts. I will proceed to set forth a few of the injuries he has done me.

In the first place, he never made or took a joke. This insensibility on Mr. Barlow's part not only cast its own gloom over my boyhood, but blighted even the sixpenny jest-books of the time; for, groaning under a moral spell constraining me to refer all things to Mr. Barlow, I could not choose but ask myself in a whisper when tickled by a printed jest, 'What would *he* think of it? What would *he* see in it?' The point of the jest immediately became a sting, and stung my conscience. For my mind's eye saw him stolid, frigid, perchance taking from its shelf some dreary Greek book, and translating at full length what some dismal sage said (and touched up afterwards, perhaps, for publication), when he banished some unlucky joker from Athens.

The incompatibility of Mr. Barlow with all other portions of my young life but himself, the adamantine inadaptability of the man to my favourite fancies and amusements, is the thing for which I hate him most. What right had he to bore his way into my Arabian Nights? Yet he did. He was always hinting doubts of the veracity of Sindbad the Sailor. If he could have got hold of the Wonderful Lamp, I knew he would have trimmed it and lighted it, and delivered a lecture over it on the qualities of sperm-oil, with a glance at the whale fisheries. He would so soon have found out—on mechanical principles—the peg in the neck of the Enchanted Horse, and would have turned it the right way in so workmanlike a manner, that the horse could never have got any height into the air, and the story couldn't have been. He would have proved, by map and compass, that there was no such kingdom as the delightful kingdom of Casgar, on the frontiers of Tartary. He would have caused that hypocritical young prig Harry to make an experiment,—with the aid of a temporary building in the garden and a dummy,—demonstrating that you couldn't let a choked hunchback down an Eastern chimney with a cord, and leave him upright on the hearth to terrify the sultan's purveyor.

The golden sounds of the overture to the first metropolitan pantomime, I remember, were alloyed by Mr. Barlow. Click click, ting ting, bang bang, weedle weedle weedle, bang! I recall the chilling air that ran across my frame and cooled my hot delight, as the thought occurred to me, 'This would never do for Mr. Barlow!' After the curtain drew up, dreadful doubts of Mr. Barlow's considering the costumes of the Nymphs of the Nebula as being sufficiently opaque, obtruded themselves on my enjoyment. In the clown I perceived two persons; one a fascinating unaccountable creature of a hectic complexion, joyous in spirits though feeble in intellect, with flashes of brilliancy; the other a pupil for Mr. Barlow. I thought how Mr. Barlow would secretly rise early in the morning, and butter the pavement for *him*, and, when he had brought him down, would look severely out of his study window and ask *him* how he enjoyed the fun.

I thought how Mr. Barlow would heat all the pokers in the house, and singe him with the whole collection, to bring him better acquainted with the properties of incandescent iron, on which he (Barlow) would fully expatiate. I pictured Mr. Barlow's instituting a comparison between the clown's conduct at his studies,—drinking up the ink, licking his copy-book, and using his head for blotting-paper,—and that of the already mentioned young prig of prigs, Harry, sitting at the Barlovian feet, sneakingly pretending to be in a rapture of youthful knowledge. I thought how soon Mr. Barlow would smooth the clown's hair down, instead of letting it stand erect in three tall tufts; and how, after a couple of years or so with Mr. Barlow, he would keep his legs close together when he walked, and would take his hands out of his big loose pockets, and wouldn't have a jump left in him.

That I am particularly ignorant what most things in the universe are made of, and how they are made, is another of my charges against Mr. Barlow. With the dread upon me of developing into a Harry, and with a further dread upon me of being Barlowed if I made inquiries, by bringing down upon myself a cold shower-bath of explanations and experiments, I forbore enlightenment in my youth, and became, as they say in melodramas, 'the wreck you now behold.' That I consorted with idlers and dunces is another of the melancholy facts for which I hold Mr. Barlow responsible. That pragmatical prig, Harry, became so detestable in my sight, that, he being reported studious in the South, I would have fled idle to the extremest North. Better to learn misconduct from a Master Mash than science and statistics from a Sandford! So I took the path, which, but for Mr. Barlow, I might never have trodden. Thought I, with a shudder, 'Mr. Barlow is a bore, with an immense constructive power of making bores. His prize specimen is a bore. He seeks to make a bore of me. That knowledge is power I am not prepared to gainsay; but, with Mr. Barlow, knowledge is power to bore.' Therefore I took refuge in the caves of ignorance, wherein I have resided ever since, and which are still my private address.

But the weightiest charge of all my charges against Mr. Barlow is, that he still walks the earth in various disguises, seeking to make a Tommy of me, even in my maturity. Irrepressible, instructive monomaniac, Mr. Barlow fills my life with pitfalls, and lies hiding at the bottom to burst out upon me when I least expect him.

A few of these dismal experiences of mine shall suffice.

Knowing Mr. Barlow to have invested largely in the moving panorama trade, and having on various occasions identified him in the dark with a long wand in his hand, holding forth in his old way (made more appalling in this connection by his sometimes cracking a piece of Mr. Carlyle's own Dead-Sea fruit in mistake for a joke), I systematically shun pictorial entertainment on rollers. Similarly, I should demand responsible bail and guaranty against the appearance of Mr. Barlow, before committing myself to attendance at any assemblage of my fellow-creatures where a bottle of water and a note-book were conspicuous objects; for in either of those associations, I should expressly expect him. But such is the designing nature of the man, that he steals in where no reasoning precaution or provision could expect him. As in the following case:-

Adjoining the Caves of Ignorance is a country town. In this country town the Mississippi Momuses, nine in number, were announced to appear in the town-hall, for the general delectation, this last Christmas week. Knowing Mr. Barlow to be unconnected with the Mississippi, though holding republican opinions, and deeming myself secure, I took a stall. My object was to hear and see the Mississippi Momuses in what the bills described as their 'National ballads, plantation break-downs, nigger part-songs, choice conundrums, sparkling repartees, &c.' I found the nine dressed alike, in the black coat and trousers, white waistcoat, very large shirt-front, very large shirt-collar, and very large white tie and wristbands, which constitute the dress of the mass of the African race, and which has been observed by travellers to prevail over a vast number of degrees of latitude. All the nine rolled their eyes exceedingly, and had very red lips. At the extremities of the curve they formed, seated in their chairs, were the performers on the tambourine and bones. The centre Momus, a black of melancholy aspect (who inspired me with a vague uneasiness for which I could not then account), performed on a Mississippi instrument closely resembling what was once called in this island a hurdy-gurdy. The Momuses on either side of him had each another instrument peculiar to the Father of Waters, which may be likened to a stringed weather-glass held upside down. There were likewise a little flute and a violin. All went well for awhile, and we had had several sparkling repartees exchanged between the performers on the tambourine and bones, when the black of melancholy aspect, turning to the latter, and addressing him in a deep and improving voice as 'Bones, sir,' delivered certain grave remarks to him concerning the juveniles present, and the season of the year; whereon I perceived that I was in the presence of Mr. Barlow—corked!

Another night—and this was in London—I attended the representation of a little comedy. As the characters were lifelike (and consequently not improving), and as they went upon their several ways and designs without personally addressing themselves to me, I felt rather confident of coming through it without being regarded as Tommy, the more so, as we were clearly getting close to the end. But I deceived myself. All of a sudden, Apropos of nothing, everybody concerned came to a check and halt, advanced to the foot-lights in a general rally to take dead aim at me, and brought me down with a moral homily, in which I detected the dread hand of Barlow.

Nay, so intricate and subtle are the toils of this hunter, that on the very next night after that, I was again entrapped, where no vestige of a spring could have been apprehended by the timidest. It was a burlesque that I saw performed; an uncompromising burlesque, where everybody concerned, but especially the ladies, carried on at a very considerable rate indeed. Most prominent and active among the corps of performers was what I took to be (and she really gave me very fair opportunities of coming to a right conclusion) a young lady of a pretty figure. She was dressed as a picturesque young gentleman, whose pantaloons had been cut off in their infancy; and she had very neat knees and very neat satin boots. Immediately after singing a slang song and dancing a slang dance, this engaging figure approached the fatal lamps, and, bending over them, delivered in a thrilling voice a random eulogium on, and exhortation to pursue, the virtues. ‘Great Heaven!’ was my exclamation; ‘Barlow!’

There is still another aspect in which Mr. Barlow perpetually insists on my sustaining the character of Tommy, which is more unendurable yet, on account of its extreme aggressiveness. For the purposes of a review or newspaper, he will get up an abstruse subject with definite pains, will Barlow, utterly regardless of the price of midnight oil, and indeed of everything else, save cramming himself to the eyes.

But mark. When Mr. Barlow blows his information off, he is not contented with having rammed it home, and discharged it upon me, Tommy, his target, but he pretends that he was always in possession of it, and made nothing of it,—that he imbibed it with mother’s milk,—and that I, the wretched Tommy, am most abjectly behindhand in not having done the same. I ask, why is Tommy to be always the foil of Mr. Barlow to this extent? What Mr. Barlow had not the slightest notion of himself, a week ago, it surely cannot be any very heavy backsliding in me not to have at my fingers’ ends to-day! And yet Mr. Barlow systematically carries it over me with a high hand, and will tauntingly ask me, in his articles, whether it is possible that I am not aware that every school-boy knows that the fourteenth turning on the left in the steppes of Russia will conduct to such and such a wandering tribe? with other disparaging questions of like nature. So, when Mr. Barlow addresses a letter to any journal as a volunteer correspondent (which I frequently find him doing), he will previously have gotten somebody to tell him some tremendous technicality, and will write in the coolest manner, 'Now, sir, I may assume that every reader of your columns, possessing average information and intelligence, knows as well as I do that'—say that the draught from the touch-hole of a cannon of such a calibre bears such a proportion in the nicest fractions to the draught from the muzzle; or some equally familiar little fact. But whatever it is, be certain that it always tends to the exaltation of Mr. Barlow, and the depression of his enforced and enslaved pupil.

Mr. Barlow's knowledge of my own pursuits I find to be so profound, that my own knowledge of them becomes as nothing. Mr. Barlow (disguised and bearing a feigned name, but detected by me) has occasionally taught me, in a sonorous voice, from end to end of a long dinner-table, trifles that I took the liberty of teaching him five-and-twenty years ago. My closing article of impeachment against Mr. Barlow is, that he goes out to breakfast, goes out to dinner, goes out everywhere, high and low, and that he WILL preach to me, and that I CAN'T get rid of him. He makes me a Promethean Tommy, bound; and he is the vulture that gorges itself upon the liver of my uninstructed mind.

CHAPTER XXXV—ON AN AMATEUR BEAT

It is one of my fancies, that even my idlest walk must always have its appointed destination. I set myself a task before I leave my lodging in Covent-garden on a street expedition, and should no more think of altering my route by the way, or turning back and leaving a part of it unachieved, than I should think of fraudulently violating an agreement entered into with somebody else. The other day, finding myself under this kind of obligation to proceed to Limehouse, I started punctually at noon, in compliance with the terms of the contract with myself to which my good faith was pledged.

On such an occasion, it is my habit to regard my walk as my beat, and myself as a higher sort of police-constable doing duty on the same. There is many a ruffian in the streets whom I mentally collar and clear out of them, who would see mighty little of London, I can tell him, if I could deal with him physically.

Issuing forth upon this very beat, and following with my eyes three hulking garrotters on their way home,—which home I could confidently swear to be within so many yards of Drury-lane, in such a narrow and restricted direction (though they live in their lodging quite as undisturbed as I in mine),—I went on duty with a consideration which I respectfully offer to the new Chief Commissioner,—in whom I thoroughly confide as a tried and efficient public servant. How often (thought I) have I been forced to swallow, in police-reports, the intolerable stereotyped pill of nonsense, how that the police-constable informed the worthy magistrate how that the associates of the prisoner did, at that present speaking, dwell in a street or court which no man dared go down, and how that the worthy magistrate had heard of the dark reputation of such street or court, and how that our readers would doubtless remember that it was always the same street or court which was thus edifyingly discoursed about, say once a fortnight.

Now, suppose that a Chief Commissioner sent round a circular to every division of police employed in London, requiring instantly the names in all districts of all such much-puffed streets or courts which no man durst go down; and suppose that in such circular he gave plain warning, ‘If those places really exist, they are a proof of police inefficiency which I mean to punish; and if they do not exist, but are a conventional fiction, then they are a proof of lazy tacit police connivance with professional crime, which I also mean to punish'—what then? Fictions or realities, could they survive the touchstone of this atom of common sense? To tell us in open court, until it has become as trite a feature of news as the great gooseberry, that a costly police-system such as was never before heard of, has left in London, in the days of steam and gas and photographs of thieves and electric telegraphs, the sanctuaries and stews of the Stuarts! Why, a parity of practice, in all departments, would bring back the Plague in two summers, and the Druids in a century!

Walking faster under my share of this public injury, I overturned a wretched little creature, who, clutching at the rags of a pair of trousers with one of its claws, and at its ragged hair with the other, pattered with bare feet over the muddy stones. I stopped to raise and succour this poor weeping wretch, and fifty like it, but of both sexes, were about me in a moment, begging, tumbling, fighting, clamouring, yelling, shivering in their nakedness and hunger. The piece of money I had put into the claw of the child I had over-turned was clawed out of it, and was again clawed out of that wolfish gripe, and again out of that, and soon I had no notion in what part of the obscene scuffle in the mud, of rags and legs and arms and dirt, the money might be. In raising the child, I had drawn it aside out of the main thoroughfare, and this took place among some wooden hoardings and barriers and ruins of demolished buildings, hard by Temple Bar.

Unexpectedly, from among them emerged a genuine police-constable, before whom the dreadful brood dispersed in various directions, he making feints and darts in this direction and in that, and catching nothing. When all were frightened away, he took off his hat, pulled out a handkerchief from it, wiped his heated brow, and restored the handkerchief and hat to their places, with the air of a man who had discharged a great moral duty,—as indeed he had, in doing what was set down for him. I looked at him, and I looked about at the disorderly traces in the mud, and I thought of the drops of rain and the footprints of an extinct creature, hoary ages upon ages old, that geologists have identified on the face of a cliff; and this speculation came over me: If this mud could petrify at this moment, and could lie concealed here for ten thousand years, I wonder whether the race of men then to be our successors on the earth could, from these or any marks, by the utmost force of the human intellect, unassisted by tradition, deduce such an astounding inference as the existence of a polished state of society that bore with the public savagery of neglected children in the streets of its capital city, and was proud of its power by sea and land, and never used its power to seize and save them!

After this, when I came to the Old Bailey and glanced up it towards Newgate, I found that the prison had an inconsistent look. There seemed to be some unlucky inconsistency in the atmosphere that day; for though the proportions of St. Paul's Cathedral are very beautiful, it had an air of being somewhat out of drawing, in my eyes. I felt as though the cross were too high up, and perched upon the intervening golden ball too far away.

Facing eastward, I left behind me Smithfield and Old Bailey,—fire and faggot, condemned hold, public hanging, whipping through the city at the cart-tail, pillory, branding-iron, and other beautiful ancestral landmarks, which rude hands have rooted up, without bringing the stars quite down upon us as yet,—and went my way upon my beat, noting how oddly characteristic neighbourhoods are divided from one another, hereabout, as though by an invisible line across the way. Here shall cease the bankers and the money-changers; here shall begin the shipping interest and the nautical-instrument shops; here shall follow a scarcely perceptible flavouring of groceries and drugs; here shall come a strong infusion of butchers; now, small hosiers shall be in the ascendant; henceforth, everything exposed for sale shall have its ticketed price attached. All this as if specially ordered and appointed.

A single stride at Houndsditch Church, no wider than sufficed to cross the kennel at the bottom of the Canon-gate, which the debtors in Holyrood sanctuary were wont to relieve their minds by skipping over, as Scott relates, and standing in delightful daring of catchpoles on the free side,—a single stride, and everything is entirely changed in grain and character. West of the stride, a table, or a chest of drawers on sale, shall be of mahogany and French-polished; east of the stride, it shall be of deal, smeared with a cheap counterfeit resembling lip-salve. West of the stride, a penny loaf or bun shall be compact and self-contained; east of the stride, it shall be of a sprawling and splay-footed character, as seeking to make more of itself for the money. My beat lying round by Whitechapel Church, and the adjacent sugar-refineries,—great buildings, tier upon tier, that have the appearance of being nearly related to the dock-warehouses at Liverpool,—I turned off to my right, and, passing round the awkward corner on my left, came suddenly on an apparition familiar to London streets afar off.

What London peripatetic of these times has not seen the woman who has fallen forward, double, through some affection of the spine, and whose head has of late taken a turn to one side, so that it now droops over the back of one of her arms at about the wrist? Who does not know her staff, and her shawl, and her basket, as she gropes her way along, capable of seeing nothing but the pavement, never begging, never stopping, for ever going somewhere on no business? How does she live, whence does she come, whither does she go, and why? I mind the time when her yellow arms were naught but bone and parchment. Slight changes steal over her; for there is a shadowy suggestion of human skin on them now. The Strand may be taken as the central point about which she revolves in a half-mile orbit. How comes she so far east as this? And coming back too! Having been how much farther? She is a rare spectacle in this neighbourhood. I receive intelligent information to this effect from a dog—a lop-sided mongrel with a foolish tail, plodding along with his tail up, and his ears pricked, and displaying an amiable interest in the ways of his fellow-men,—if I may be allowed the expression. After pausing at a pork-shop, he is jogging eastward like myself, with a benevolent countenance and a watery mouth, as though musing on the many excellences of pork, when he beholds this doubled-up bundle approaching. He is not so much astonished at the bundle (though amazed by that), as the circumstance that it has within itself the means of locomotion. He stops, pricks his ears higher, makes a slight point, stares, utters a short, low growl, and glistens at the nose,—as I conceive with terror. The bundle continuing to approach, he barks, turns tail, and is about to fly, when, arguing with himself that flight is not becoming in a dog, he turns, and once more faces the advancing heap of clothes. After much hesitation, it occurs to him that there may be a face in it somewhere. Desperately resolving to undertake the adventure, and pursue the inquiry, he goes slowly up to the bundle, goes slowly round it, and coming at length upon the human countenance down there where never human countenance should be, gives a yelp of horror, and flies for the East India Docks.

Being now in the Commercial Road district of my beat, and bethinking myself that Stepney Station is near, I quicken my pace that I may turn out of the road at that point, and see how my small eastern star is shining.

The Children’s Hospital, to which I gave that name, is in full force. All its beds are occupied. There is a new face on the bed where my pretty baby lay, and that sweet little child is now at rest for ever. Much kind sympathy has been here since my former visit, and it is good to see the walls profusely garnished with dolls. I wonder what Poodles may think of them, as they stretch out their arms above the beds, and stare, and display their splendid dresses. Poodles has a greater interest in the patients. I find him making the round of the beds, like a house-surgeon, attended by another dog,—a friend,—who appears to trot about with him in the character of his pupil dresser. Poodles is anxious to make me known to a pretty little girl looking wonderfully healthy, who had had a leg taken off for cancer of the knee. A difficult operation, Poodles intimates, wagging his tail on the counterpane, but perfectly successful, as you see, dear sir! The patient, patting Poodles, adds with a smile, ‘The leg was so much trouble to me, that I am glad it’s gone.’ I never saw anything in doggery finer than the deportment of Poodles, when another little girl opens her mouth to show a peculiar enlargement of the tongue. Poodles (at that time on a table, to be on a level with the occasion) looks at the tongue (with his own sympathetically out) so very gravely and knowingly, that I feel inclined to put my hand in my waistcoat-pocket, and give him a guinea, wrapped in paper.

On my beat again, and close to Limehouse Church, its termination, I found myself near to certain ‘Lead-Mills.’ Struck by the name, which was fresh in my memory, and finding, on inquiry, that these same lead-mills were identified with those same lead-mills of which I made mention when I first visited the East London Children’s Hospital and its neighbourhood as Uncommercial Traveller, I resolved to have a look at them.

Received by two very intelligent gentlemen, brothers, and partners with their father in the concern, and who testified every desire to show their works to me freely, I went over the lead-mills. The purport of such works is the conversion of pig-lead into white-lead. This conversion is brought about by the slow and gradual effecting of certain successive chemical changes in the lead itself. The processes are picturesque and interesting,—the most so, being the burying of the lead, at a certain stage of preparation, in pots, each pot containing a certain quantity of acid besides, and all the pots being buried in vast numbers, in layers, under tan, for some ten weeks.

Hopping up ladders, and across planks, and on elevated perches, until I was uncertain whether to liken myself to a bird or a brick-layer, I became conscious of standing on nothing particular, looking down into one of a series of large cocklofts, with the outer day peeping in through the chinks in the tiled roof above. A number of women were ascending to, and descending from, this cockloft, each carrying on the upward journey a pot of prepared lead and acid, for deposition under the smoking tan. When one layer of pots was completely filled, it was carefully covered in with planks, and those were carefully covered with tan again, and then another layer of pots was begun above; sufficient means of ventilation being preserved through wooden tubes. Going down into the cockloft then filling, I found the heat of the tan to be surprisingly great, and also the odour of the lead and acid to be not absolutely exquisite, though I believe not noxious at that stage. In other cocklofts, where the pots were being exhumed, the heat of the steaming tan was much greater, and the smell was penetrating and peculiar. There were cocklofts in all stages; full and empty, half filled and half emptied; strong, active women were clambering about them busily; and the whole thing had rather the air of the upper part of the house of some immensely rich old Turk, whose faithful seraglio were hiding his money because the sultan or the pasha was coming.

As is the case with most pulps or pigments, so in the instance of this white-lead, processes of stirring, separating, washing, grinding, rolling, and pressing succeed. Some of these are unquestionably inimical to health, the danger arising from inhalation of particles of lead, or from contact between the lead and the touch, or both. Against these dangers, I found good respirators provided (simply made of flannel and muslin, so as to be inexpensively renewed, and in some instances washed with scented soap), and gauntlet gloves, and loose gowns. Everywhere, there was as much fresh air as windows, well placed and opened, could possibly admit. And it was explained that the precaution of frequently changing the women employed in the worst parts of the work (a precaution originating in their own experience or apprehension of its ill effects) was found salutary. They had a mysterious and singular appearance, with the mouth and nose covered, and the loose gown on, and yet bore out the simile of the old Turk and the seraglio all the better for the disguise.

At last this vexed white-lead, having been buried and resuscitated, and heated and cooled and stirred, and separated and washed and ground, and rolled and pressed, is subjected to the action of intense fiery heat. A row of women, dressed as above described, stood, let us say, in a large stone bakehouse, passing on the baking-dishes as they were given out by the cooks, from hand to hand, into the ovens. The oven, or stove, cold as yet, looked as high as an ordinary house, and was full of men and women on temporary footholds, briskly passing up and stowing away the dishes. The door of another oven, or stove, about to be cooled and emptied, was opened from above, for the uncommercial countenance to peer down into. The uncommercial countenance withdrew itself, with expedition and a sense of suffocation, from the dull-glowing heat and the overpowering smell. On the whole, perhaps the going into these stoves to work, when they are freshly opened, may be the worst part of the occupation.

But I made it out to be indubitable that the owners of these lead-mills honestly and sedulously try to reduce the dangers of the occupation to the lowest point.

A washing-place is provided for the women (I thought there might have been more towels), and a room in which they hang their clothes, and take their meals, and where they have a good fire-range and fire, and a female attendant to help them, and to watch that they do not neglect the cleansing of their hands before touching their food. An experienced medical attendant is provided for them, and any premonitory symptoms of lead-poisoning are carefully treated. Their teapots and such things were set out on tables ready for their afternoon meal, when I saw their room; and it had a homely look. It is found that they bear the work much better than men: some few of them have been at it for years, and the great majority of those I observed were strong and active. On the other hand, it should be remembered that most of them are very capricious and irregular in their attendance.

American inventiveness would seem to indicate that before very long white-lead may be made entirely by machinery. The sooner, the better. In the meantime, I parted from my two frank conductors over the mills, by telling them that they had nothing there to be concealed, and nothing to be blamed for. As to the rest, the philosophy of the matter of lead-poisoning and workpeople seems to me to have been pretty fairly summed up by the Irishwoman whom I quoted in my former paper: ‘Some of them gets lead-pisoned soon, and some of them gets lead-pisoned later, and some, but not many, niver; and ’tis all according to the constitooshun, sur; and some constitooshuns is strong and some is weak.' Retracing my footsteps over my beat, I went off duty.

CHAPTER XXXVI—A FLY-LEAF IN A LIFE

Once upon a time (no matter when), I was engaged in a pursuit (no matter what), which could be transacted by myself alone; in which I could have no help; which imposed a constant strain on the attention, memory, observation, and physical powers; and which involved an almost fabulous amount of change of place and rapid railway travelling. I had followed this pursuit through an exceptionally trying winter in an always trying climate, and had resumed it in England after but a brief repose. Thus it came to be prolonged until, at length—and, as it seemed, all of a sudden—it so wore me out that I could not rely, with my usual cheerful confidence, upon myself to achieve the constantly recurring task, and began to feel (for the first time in my life) giddy, jarred, shaken, faint, uncertain of voice and sight and tread and touch, and dull of spirit. The medical advice I sought within a few hours, was given in two words: 'instant rest.' Being accustomed to observe myself as curiously as if I were another man, and knowing the advice to meet my only need, I instantly halted in the pursuit of which I speak, and rested.

My intention was, to interpose, as it were, a fly-leaf in the book of my life, in which nothing should be written from without for a brief season of a few weeks. But some very singular experiences recorded themselves on this same fly-leaf, and I am going to relate them literally. I repeat the word: literally.

My first odd experience was of the remarkable coincidence between my case, in the general mind, and one Mr. Merdle's as I find it recorded in a work of fiction called LITTLE DORRIT. To be sure, Mr. Merdle was a swindler, forger, and thief, and my calling had been of a less harmful (and less remunerative) nature; but it was all one for that.

Here is Mr. Merdle's case:

'At first, he was dead of all the diseases that ever were known, and of several bran-new maladies invented with the speed of Light to meet the demand of the occasion. He had concealed a dropsy from infancy, he had inherited a large estate of water on the chest from his grandfather, he had

had an operation performed upon him every morning of his life for eighteen years, he had been subject to the explosion of important veins in his body after the manner of fireworks, he had had something the matter with his lungs, he had had something the matter with his heart, he had had something the matter with his brain. Five hundred people who sat down to breakfast entirely uninformed on the whole subject, believed before they had done breakfast, that they privately and personally knew Physician to have said to Mr. Merdle, "You must expect to go out, some day, like the snuff of a candle;" and that they knew Mr. Merdle to have said to Physician, "A man can die but once." By about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, something the matter with the brain, became the favourite theory against the field; and by twelve the something had been distinctly ascertained to be "Pressure."

'Pressure was so entirely satisfactory to the public mind, and seemed to make every one so comfortable, that it might have lasted all day but for Bar's having taken the real state of the case into Court at half-past nine. Pressure, however, so far from being overthrown by the discovery, became a greater favourite than ever. There was a general moralising upon Pressure, in every street. All the people who had tried to make money and had not been able to do it, said, There you were! You no sooner began to devote yourself to the pursuit of wealth, than you got Pressure. The idle people improved the occasion in a similar manner. See, said they, what you brought yourself to by work, work, work! You persisted in working, you overdid it, Pressure came on, and you were done for! This consideration was very potent in many quarters, but nowhere more so than among the young clerks and partners who had never been in the slightest danger of overdoing it. These, one and all declared, quite piously, that they hoped they would never forget the warning as long as they lived, and that their conduct might be so regulated as to keep off Pressure, and preserve them, a comfort to their friends, for many years.'

Just my case—if I had only known it—when I was quietly basking in the sunshine in my Kentish meadow!

But while I so rested, thankfully recovering every hour, I had experiences more odd than this. I had experiences of spiritual conceit, for which, as giving me a new warning against that curse of mankind, I shall always feel grateful to the supposition that I was too far gone to protest against playing sick lion to any stray donkey with an itching hoof. All sorts of people seemed to become vicariously religious at my expense. I received the most uncompromising warning that I was a Heathen: on the conclusive authority of a field preacher, who, like the most of his ignorant and vain and daring class, could not construct a tolerable sentence in his native tongue or pen a fair letter. This inspired individual called me to order roundly, and knew in the freest and easiest way where I was going to, and what would become of me if I failed to fashion myself on his bright example, and was on terms of blasphemous confidence with the Heavenly Host. He was in the secrets of my heart, and in the lowest soundings of my soul—he!—and could read the depths of my nature better than his A B C, and could turn me inside out, like his own clammy glove. But what is far more extraordinary than this—for such dirty water as this could alone be drawn from such a shallow and muddy source—I found from the information of a beneficed clergyman, of whom I never heard and whom I never saw, that I had not, as I rather supposed I had, lived a life of some reading, contemplation, and inquiry; that I had not studied, as I rather supposed I had, to inculcate some Christian lessons in books; that I had never tried, as I rather supposed I had, to turn a child or two tenderly towards the knowledge and love of our Saviour; that I had never had, as I rather supposed I had had, departed friends, or stood beside open graves; but that I had lived a life of 'uninterrupted prosperity,' and that I needed this 'check, overmuch,' and that the way to turn it to account was to read these sermons and these poems, enclosed, and written and issued by my correspondent! I beg it may be understood that I relate facts of my own uncommercial experience, and no vain imaginings. The documents in proof lie near my hand.

Another odd entry on the fly-leaf, of a more entertaining character, was the wonderful persistency with which kind sympathisers assumed that I had injuriously coupled with the so suddenly relinquished pursuit, those personal habits of mine most obviously incompatible with it, and most plainly impossible of being maintained, along with it. As, all that exercise, all that cold bathing, all that wind and weather, all that uphill training—all that everything else, say, which is usually carried about by express trains in a portmanteau and hat-box, and partaken of under a flaming row of gas-lights in the company of two thousand people. This assuming of a whole case against all fact and likelihood, struck me as particularly droll, and was an oddity of which I certainly had had no adequate experience in life until I turned that curious fly-leaf.

My old acquaintances the begging-letter writers came out on the fly-leaf, very piously indeed. They were glad, at such a serious crisis, to afford me another opportunity of sending that Post-office order. I needn't make it a pound, as previously insisted on; ten shillings might ease my mind. And Heaven forbid that they should refuse, at such an insignificant figure, to take a weight off the memory of an erring fellow-creature! One gentleman, of an artistic turn (and copiously illustrating the books of the Mendicity Society), thought it might soothe my conscience, in the tender respect of gifts misused, if I would immediately cash up in aid of his lowly talent for original design—as a specimen of which he enclosed me a work of art which I recognized as a tracing from a woodcut originally published in the late Mrs. Trollope's book on America, forty or fifty years ago. The number of people who were prepared to live long years after me, untiring benefactors to their species, for fifty pounds apiece down, was astonishing. Also, of those who wanted bank-notes for stiff penitential amounts, to give away:- not to keep, on any account.

Divers wonderful medicines and machines insinuated recommendations of themselves into the fly-leaf that was to have been so blank. It was specially observable that every prescriber, whether in a moral or physical direction, knew me thoroughly—knew me from head to heel, in and out, through and through, upside down. I was a glass piece of general property, and everybody was on the most surprisingly intimate terms with me. A few public institutions had complimentary perceptions of corners in my mind, of which, after considerable self-examination, I have not discovered any indication. Neat little printed forms were addressed to those corners, beginning with the words: 'I give and bequeath.'

Will it seem exaggerative to state my belief that the most honest, the most modest, and the least vain-glorious of all the records upon this strange fly-leaf, was a letter from the self-deceived discoverer of the recondite secret 'how to live four or five hundred years'? Doubtless it will seem so, yet the statement is not exaggerative by any means, but is made in my serious and sincere conviction. With this, and with a laugh at the rest that shall not be cynical, I turn the Fly-leaf, and go on again.

CHAPTER XXXVII—A PLEA FOR TOTAL ABSTINENCE

One day this last Whitsuntide, at precisely eleven o’clock in the forenoon, there suddenly rode into the field of view commanded by the windows of my lodging an equestrian phenomenon. It was a fellow-creature on horseback, dressed in the absurdest manner. The fellow-creature wore high boots; some other (and much larger) fellow-creature’s breeches, of a slack-baked doughy colour and a baggy form; a blue shirt, whereof the skirt, or tail, was puffily tucked into the waist-band of the said breeches; no coat; a red shoulder-belt; and a demi-semi-military scarlet hat, with a feathered ornament in front, which, to the uninstructed human vision, had the appearance of a moulting shuttlecock. I laid down the newspaper with which I had been occupied, and surveyed the fellow-man in question with astonishment. Whether he had been sitting to any painter as a frontispiece for a new edition of ‘Sartor Resartus;’ whether ‘the husk or shell of him,’ as the esteemed Herr Teufelsdroch might put it, were founded on a jockey, on a circus, on General Garibaldi, on cheap porcelain, on a toy shop, on Guy Fawkes, on waxwork, on gold-digging, on Bedlam, or on all,—were doubts that greatly exercised my mind. Meanwhile, my fellow-man stumbled and slided, excessively against his will, on the slippery stones of my Covent-garden street, and elicited shrieks from several sympathetic females, by convulsively restraining himself from pitching over his horse’s head. In the very crisis of these evolutions, and indeed at the trying moment when his charger’s tail was in a tobacconist’s shop, and his head anywhere about town, this cavalier was joined by two similar portents, who, likewise stumbling and sliding, caused him to stumble and slide the more distressingly. At length this Gilpinian triumvirate effected a halt, and, looking northward, waved their three right hands as commanding unseen troops, to ‘Up, guards! and at ’em.’ Hereupon a brazen band burst forth, which caused them to be instantly bolted with to some remote spot of earth in the direction of the Surrey Hills.

Judging from these appearances that a procession was under way, I threw up my window, and, craning out, had the satisfaction of beholding it advancing along the streets. It was a Teetotal procession, as I learnt from its banners, and was long enough to consume twenty minutes in passing. There were a great number of children in it, some of them so very young in their mothers' arms as to be in the act of practically exemplifying their abstinence from fermented liquors, and attachment to an unintoxicating drink, while the procession defiled. The display was, on the whole, pleasant to see, as any good-humoured holiday assemblage of clean, cheerful, and well-conducted people should be. It was bright with ribbons, tinsel, and shoulder-belts, and abounded in flowers, as if those latter trophies had come up in profusion under much watering. The day being breezy, the insubordination of the large banners was very reprehensible. Each of these being borne aloft on two poles and stayed with some half-dozen lines, was carried, as polite books in the last century used to be written, by 'various hands,' and the anxiety expressed in the upturned faces of those officers,—something between the anxiety attendant on the balancing art, and that inseparable from the pastime of kite-flying, with a touch of the angler's quality in landing his scaly prey,—much impressed me. Suddenly, too, a banner would shiver in the wind, and go about in the most inconvenient manner. This always happened oftenest with such gorgeous standards as those representing a gentleman in black, corpulent with tea and water, in the laudable act of summarily reforming a family, feeble and pinched with beer. The gentleman in black distended by wind would then conduct himself with the most unbecoming levity, while the beery family, growing beerier, would frantically try to tear themselves away from his ministration. Some of the inscriptions accompanying the banners were of a highly determined character, as 'We never, never will give up the temperance cause,' with similar sound resolutions rather suggestive to the profane mind of Mrs. Micawber's 'I never will desert Mr. Micawber,' and of Mr. Micawber's retort, 'Really, my dear, I am not aware that you were ever required by any human being to do anything of the sort.'

At intervals, a gloom would fall on the passing members of the procession, for which I was at first unable to account. But this I discovered, after a little observation, to be occasioned by the coming on of the executioners,—the terrible official beings who were to make the speeches by-and-by,—who were distributed in open carriages at various points of the cavalcade. A dark cloud and a sensation of dampness, as from many wet blankets, invariably preceded the rolling on of the dreadful cars containing these headsmen; and I noticed that the wretched people who closely followed them, and who were in a manner forced to contemplate their folded arms, complacent countenances, and threatening lips, were more overshadowed by the cloud and damp than those in front. Indeed, I perceived in some of these so moody an implacability towards the magnates of the scaffold, and so plain a desire to tear them limb from limb, that I would respectfully suggest to the managers the expediency of conveying the executioners to the scene of their dismal labours by unfrequented ways, and in closely-tilted carts, next Whitsuntide.

The procession was composed of a series of smaller processions, which had come together, each from its own metropolitan district. An infusion of allegory became perceptible when patriotic Peckham advanced. So I judged, from the circumstance of Peckham's unfurling a silken banner that fanned heaven and earth with the words, 'The Peckham Lifeboat.' No boat being in attendance, though life, in the likeness of 'a gallant, gallant crew,' in nautical uniform, followed the flag, I was led to meditate on the fact that Peckham is described by geographers as an inland settlement, with no larger or nearer shore-line than the towing-path of the Surrey Canal, on which stormy station I had been given to understand no lifeboat exists. Thus I deduced an allegorical meaning, and came to the conclusion, that if patriotic Peckham picked a peck of pickled poetry, this *was* the peck of pickled poetry which patriotic Peckham picked.

I have observed that the aggregate procession was on the whole pleasant to see. I made use of that qualified expression with a direct meaning, which I will now explain. It involves the title of this paper, and a little fair trying of teetotalism by its own tests. There were many people on foot, and many people in vehicles of various kinds. The former were pleasant to see, and the latter were not pleasant to see; for the reason that I never, on any occasion or under any circumstances, have beheld heavier overloading of horses than in this public show. Unless the imposition of a great van laden with from ten to twenty people on a single horse be a moderate tasking of the poor creature, then the temperate use of horses was immoderate and cruel. From the smallest and lightest horse to the largest and heaviest, there were many instances in which the beast of burden was so shamefully overladen, that the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals have frequently interposed in less gross cases.

Now, I have always held that there may be, and that there unquestionably is, such a thing as use without abuse, and that therefore the total abolitionists are irrational and wrong-headed. But the procession completely converted me. For so large a number of the people using draught-horses in it were so clearly unable to use them without abusing them, that I perceived total abstinence from horseflesh to be the only remedy of which the case admitted. As it is all one to teetotalers whether you take half a pint of beer or half a gallon, so it was all one here whether the beast of burden were a pony or a cart-horse. Indeed, my case had the special strength that the half-pint quadruped underwent as much suffering as the half-gallon quadruped. Moral: total abstinence from horseflesh through the whole length and breadth of the scale. This pledge will be in course of administration to all teetotal processionists, not pedestrians, at the publishing office of 'All the Year Round,' on the 1st day of April, 1870.

Observe a point for consideration. This procession comprised many persons in their gigs, broughams, tax-carts, barouches, chaises, and what not, who were merciful to the dumb beasts that drew them, and did not overcharge their strength. What is to be done with those unoffending persons? I will not run amuck and vilify and defame them, as teetotal tracts and platforms would most assuredly do, if the question were one of drinking instead of driving: I merely ask what is to be done with them! The reply admits of no dispute whatever. Manifestly, in strict accordance with teetotal doctrines, THEY must come in too, and take the total abstinence from horseflesh pledge. It is not pretended that those members of the procession misused certain auxiliaries which in most countries and all ages have been bestowed upon man for his use, but it is undeniable that other members of the procession did. Teetotal mathematics demonstrate that the less includes the greater; that the guilty include the innocent, the blind the seeing, the deaf the hearing, the dumb the speaking, the drunken the sober. If any of the moderate users of draught-cattle in question should deem that there is any gentle violence done to their reason by these elements of logic, they are invited to come out of the procession next Whitsuntide, and look at it from my window.

THE END OF
The Uncommercial Traveller

THE WRECK OF THE GOLDEN MARY

THE WRECK

I was apprenticed to the Sea when I was twelve years old, and I have encountered a great deal of rough weather, both literal and metaphorical. It has always been my opinion since I first possessed such a thing as an opinion, that the man who knows only one subject is next tiresome to the man who knows no subject. Therefore, in the course of my life I have taught myself whatever I could, and although I am not an educated man, I am able, I am thankful to say, to have an intelligent interest in most things.

A person might suppose, from reading the above, that I am in the habit of holding forth about number one. That is not the case. Just as if I was to come into a room among strangers, and must either be introduced or introduce myself, so I have taken the liberty of passing these few remarks, simply and plainly that it may be known who and what I am. I will add no more of the sort than that my name is William George Ravender, that I was born at Penrith half a year after my own father was drowned, and that I am on the second day of this present blessed Christmas week of one thousand eight hundred and fifty-six, fifty-six years of age.

When the rumour first went flying up and down that there was gold in California—which, as most people know, was before it was discovered in the British colony of Australia—I was in the West Indies, trading among the Islands. Being in command and likewise part-owner of a smart schooner, I had my work cut out for me, and I was doing it. Consequently, gold in California was no business of mine.

But, by the time when I came home to England again, the thing was as clear as your hand held up before you at noon-day. There was Californian gold in the museums and in the goldsmiths' shops, and the very first time I went upon 'Change, I met a friend of mine (a seafaring man like myself), with a Californian nugget hanging to his watch-chain. I handled it. It was as like a peeled walnut with bits unevenly broken off here and there, and then electrotyped all over, as ever I saw anything in my life.

I am a single man (she was too good for this world and for me, and she died six weeks before our marriage-day), so when I am ashore, I live in my house at Poplar. My house at Poplar is taken care of and kept ship-shape by an old lady who was my mother's maid before I was born. She is as handsome and as upright as any old lady in the world. She is as fond of me as if she had ever had an only son, and I was he. Well do I know wherever I sail that she never lays down her head at night without having said, “Merciful Lord! bless and preserve William George Ravender, and send him safe home, through Christ our Saviour!” I have thought of it in many a dangerous moment, when it has done me no harm, I am sure.

In my house at Poplar, along with this old lady, I lived quiet for best part of a year: having had a long spell of it among the Islands, and having (which was very uncommon in me) taken the fever rather badly. At last, being strong and hearty, and having read every book I could lay hold of, right out, I was walking down Leadenhall Street in the City of London, thinking of turning-to again, when I met what I call Smithick and Watersby of Liverpool. I chanced to lift up my eyes from looking in at a ship’s chronometer in a window, and I saw him bearing down upon me, head on.

It is, personally, neither Smithick, nor Watersby, that I here mention, nor was I ever acquainted with any man of either of those names, nor do I think that there has been any one of either of those names in that Liverpool House for years back. But, it is in reality the House itself that I refer to; and a wiser merchant or a truer gentleman never stepped.

“My dear Captain Ravender,” says he. “Of all the men on earth, I wanted to see you most. I was on my way to you.”

“Well!” says I. “That looks as if you *were* to see me, don’t it?” With that I put my arm in his, and we walked on towards the Royal Exchange, and when we got there, walked up and down at the back of it where the Clock-Tower is. We walked an hour and more, for he had much to say to me. He had a scheme for chartering a new ship of their own to take out cargo to the diggers and emigrants in California, and to buy and bring back gold. Into the particulars of that scheme I will not enter, and I have no right to enter. All I say of it is, that it was a very original one, a very fine one, a very sound one, and a very lucrative one beyond doubt.

He imparted it to me as freely as if I had been a part of himself. After doing so, he made me the handsomest sharing offer that ever was made to me, boy or man—or I believe to any other captain in the Merchant Navy—and he took this round turn to finish with:

“Ravender, you are well aware that the lawlessness of that coast and country at present, is as special as the circumstances in which it is placed. Crews of vessels outward-bound, desert as soon as they make the land;

crews of vessels homeward-bound, ship at enormous wages, with the express intention of murdering the captain and seizing the gold freight; no man can trust another, and the devil seems let loose. Now," says he, "you know my opinion of you, and you know I am only expressing it, and with no singularity, when I tell you that you are almost the only man on whose integrity, discretion, and energy—" &c., &c. For, I don't want to repeat what he said, though I was and am sensible of it.

Notwithstanding my being, as I have mentioned, quite ready for a voyage, still I had some doubts of this voyage. Of course I knew, without being told, that there were peculiar difficulties and dangers in it, a long way over and above those which attend all voyages. It must not be supposed that I was afraid to face them; but, in my opinion a man has no manly motive or sustainment in his own breast for facing dangers, unless he has well considered what they are, and is able quietly to say to himself, "None of these perils can now take me by surprise; I shall know what to do for the best in any of them; all the rest lies in the higher and greater hands to which I humbly commit myself." On this principle I have so attentively considered (regarding it as my duty) all the hazards I have ever been able to think of, in the ordinary way of storm, shipwreck, and fire at sea, that I hope I should be prepared to do, in any of those cases, whatever could be done, to save the lives intrusted to my charge.

As I was thoughtful, my good friend proposed that he should leave me to walk there as long as I liked, and that I should dine with him by-and-by at his club in Pall Mall. I accepted the invitation and I walked up and down there, quarter-deck fashion, a matter of a couple of hours; now and then looking up at the weathercock as I might have looked up aloft; and now and then taking a look into Cornhill, as I might have taken a look over the side.

All dinner-time, and all after dinner-time, we talked it over again. I gave him my views of his plan, and he very much approved of the same. I told him I had nearly decided, but not quite. "Well, well," says he, "come down to Liverpool to-morrow with me, and see the Golden Mary." I liked the name (her name was Mary, and she was golden, if golden stands for good), so I began to feel that it was almost done when I said I would go to Liverpool. On the next morning but one we were on board the Golden Mary. I might have known, from his asking me to come down and see her, what she was. I declare her to have been the completest and most exquisite Beauty that ever I set my eyes upon.

We had inspected every timber in her, and had come back to the gangway to go ashore from the dock-basin, when I put out my hand to my friend. “Touch upon it,” says I, “and touch heartily. I take command of this ship, and I am hers and yours, if I can get John Steadiman for my chief mate.”

John Steadiman had sailed with me four voyages. The first voyage John was third mate out to China, and came home second. The other three voyages he was my first officer. At this time of chartering the Golden Mary, he was aged thirty-two. A brisk, bright, blue-eyed fellow, a very neat figure and rather under the middle size, never out of the way and never in it, a face that pleased everybody and that all children took to, a habit of going about singing as cheerily as a blackbird, and a perfect sailor.

We were in one of those Liverpool hackney-coaches in less than a minute, and we cruised about in her upwards of three hours, looking for John. John had come home from Van Diemen’s Land barely a month before, and I had heard of him as taking a frisk in Liverpool. We asked after him, among many other places, at the two boarding-houses he was fondest of, and we found he had had a week’s spell at each of them; but, he had gone here and gone there, and had set off “to lay out on the main-to’-gallant-yard of the highest Welsh mountain” (so he had told the people of the house), and where he might be then, or when he might come back, nobody could tell us. But it was surprising, to be sure, to see how every face brightened the moment there was mention made of the name of Mr. Steadiman.

We were taken aback at meeting with no better luck, and we had wore ship and put her head for my friends, when as we were jogging through the streets, I clap my eyes on John himself coming out of a toyshop! He was carrying a little boy, and conducting two uncommon pretty women to their coach, and he told me afterwards that he had never in his life seen one of the three before, but that he was so taken with them on looking in at the toyshop while they were buying the child a cranky Noah’s Ark, very much down by the head, that he had gone in and asked the ladies’ permission to treat him to a tolerably correct Cutter there was in the window, in order that such a handsome boy might not grow up with a lubberly idea of naval architecture.

We stood off and on until the ladies’ coachman began to give way, and then we hailed John. On his coming aboard of us, I told him, very gravely, what I had said to my friend. It struck him, as he said himself, amidships. He was quite shaken by it. “Captain Ravender,” were John Steadiman’s words, “such an opinion from you is true commendation, and I’ll sail round the world with you for twenty years if you hoist the signal, and stand by you for ever!” And now indeed I felt that it was done, and that the Golden Mary was afloat.

Grass never grew yet under the feet of Smithick and Watersby. The riggers were out of that ship in a fortnight’s time, and we had begun taking in cargo. John was always aboard, seeing everything stowed with his own eyes; and whenever I went aboard myself early or late, whether he was below in the hold, or on deck at the hatchway, or overhauling his cabin, nailing up pictures in it of the Blush Roses of England, the Blue Belles of Scotland, and the female Shamrock of Ireland: of a certainty I heard John singing like a blackbird.

We had room for twenty passengers. Our sailing advertisement was no sooner out, than we might have taken these twenty times over. In entering our men, I and John (both together) picked them, and we entered none but good hands—as good as were to be found in that port. And so, in a good ship of the best build, well owned, well arranged, well officered, well manned, well found in all respects, we parted with our pilot at a quarter past four o’clock in the afternoon of the seventh of March, one thousand eight hundred and fifty-one, and stood with a fair wind out to sea.

It may be easily believed that up to that time I had had no leisure to be intimate with my passengers. The most of them were then in their berths sea-sick; however, in going among them, telling them what was good for them, persuading them not to be there, but to come up on deck and feel the breeze, and in rousing them with a joke, or a comfortable word, I made acquaintance with them, perhaps, in a more friendly and confidential way from the first, than I might have done at the cabin table.

Of my passengers, I need only particularise, just at present, a bright-eyed blooming young wife who was going out to join her husband in California, taking with her their only child, a little girl of three years old, whom he had never seen; a sedate young woman in black, some five years older (about thirty as I should say), who was going out to join a brother; and an old gentleman, a good deal like a hawk if his eyes had been better and not so red, who was always talking, morning, noon, and night, about the gold discovery. But, whether he was making the voyage, thinking his old arms could dig for gold, or whether his speculation was to buy it, or to barter for it, or to cheat for it, or to snatch it anyhow from other people, was his secret. He kept his secret.

These three and the child were the soonest well. The child was a most engaging child, to be sure, and very fond of me: though I am bound to admit that John Steadiman and I were borne on her pretty little books in reverse order, and that he was captain there, and I was mate. It was beautiful to watch her with John, and it was beautiful to watch John with her. Few would have thought it possible, to see John playing at bo-peep round the mast, that he was the man who had caught up an iron bar and struck a Malay and a Maltese dead, as they were gliding with their knives down the cabin stair aboard the barque Old England, when the captain lay ill in his cot, off Saugar Point. But he was; and give him his back against a bulwark, he would have done the same by half a dozen of them. The name of the young mother was Mrs. Atherfield, the name of the young lady in black was Miss Coleshaw, and the name of the old gentleman was Mr. Rarx.

As the child had a quantity of shining fair hair, clustering in curls all about her face, and as her name was Lucy, Steadiman gave her the name of the Golden Lucy. So, we had the Golden Lucy and the Golden Mary; and John kept up the idea to that extent as he and the child went playing about the decks, that I believe she used to think the ship was alive somehow—a sister or companion, going to the same place as herself. She liked to be by the wheel, and in fine weather, I have often stood by the man whose trick it was at the wheel, only to hear her, sitting near my feet, talking to the ship. Never had a child such a doll before, I suppose; but she made a doll of the Golden Mary, and used to dress her up by tying ribbons and little bits of finery to the belaying-pins; and nobody ever moved them, unless it was to save them from being blown away.

Of course I took charge of the two young women, and I called them "my dear," and they never minded, knowing that whatever I said was said in a fatherly and protecting spirit. I gave them their places on each side of me at dinner, Mrs. Atherfield on my right and Miss Coleshaw on my left; and I directed the unmarried lady to serve out the breakfast, and the married lady to serve out the tea. Likewise I said to my black steward in their presence, "Tom Snow, these two ladies are equally the mistresses of this house, and do you obey their orders equally;” at which Tom laughed, and they all laughed.

Old Mr. Rarx was not a pleasant man to look at, nor yet to talk to, or to be with, for no one could help seeing that he was a sordid and selfish character, and that he had warped further and further out of the straight with time. Not but what he was on his best behaviour with us, as everybody was; for we had no bickering among us, for’ard or aft. I only mean to say, he was not the man one would have chosen for a messmate. If choice there had been, one might even have gone a few points out of one’s course, to say, “No! Not him!” But, there was one curious inconsistency in Mr. Rarx. That was, that he took an astonishing interest in the child. He looked, and I may add, he was, one of the last of men to care at all for a child, or to care much for any human creature. Still, he went so far as to be habitually uneasy, if the child was long on deck, out of his sight. He was always afraid of her falling overboard, or falling down a hatchway, or of a block or what not coming down upon her from the rigging in the working of the ship, or of her getting some hurt or other. He used to look at her and touch her, as if she was something precious to him. He was always solicitous about her not injuring her health, and constantly entreated her mother to be careful of it. This was so much the more curious, because the child did not like him, but used to shrink away from him, and would not even put out her hand to him without coaxing from others. I believe that every soul on board frequently noticed this, and not one of us understood it. However, it was such a plain fact, that John Steadiman said more than once when old Mr. Rarx was not within earshot, that if the Golden Mary felt a tenderness for the dear old gentleman she carried in her lap, she must be bitterly jealous of the Golden Lucy.

Before I go any further with this narrative, I will state that our ship was a barque of three hundred tons, carrying a crew of eighteen men, a second mate in addition to John, a carpenter, an armourer or smith, and two apprentices (one a Scotch boy, poor little fellow). We had three boats; the Long-boat, capable of carrying twenty-five men; the Cutter, capable of carrying fifteen; and the Surf-boat, capable of carrying ten. I put down the capacity of these boats according to the numbers they were really meant to hold.

We had tastes of bad weather and head-winds, of course; but, on the whole we had as fine a run as any reasonable man could expect, for sixty days. I then began to enter two remarks in the ship's Log and in my Journal; first, that there was an unusual and amazing quantity of ice; second, that the nights were most wonderfully dark, in spite of the ice.

For five days and a half, it seemed quite useless and hopeless to alter the ship's course so as to stand out of the way of this ice. I made what southing I could; but, all that time, we were beset by it. Mrs. Atherfield after standing by me on deck once, looking for some time in an awed manner at the great bergs that surrounded us, said in a whisper, "O! Captain Ravender, it looks as if the whole solid earth had changed into ice, and broken up!" I said to her, laughing, "I don't wonder that it does, to your inexperienced eyes, my dear." But I had never seen a twentieth part of the quantity, and, in reality, I was pretty much of her opinion.

However, at two p.m. on the afternoon of the sixth day, that is to say, when we were sixty-six days out, John Steadiman who had gone aloft, sang out from the top, that the sea was clear ahead. Before four p.m. a strong breeze springing up right astern, we were in open water at sunset. The breeze then freshening into half a gale of wind, and the Golden Mary being a very fast sailer, we went before the wind merrily, all night.

I had thought it impossible that it could be darker than it had been, until the sun, moon, and stars should fall out of the Heavens, and Time should be destroyed; but, it had been next to light, in comparison with what it was now. The darkness was so profound, that looking into it was painful and oppressive—like looking, without a ray of light, into a dense black bandage put as close before the eyes as it could be, without touching them. I doubled the look-out, and John and I stood in the bow side-by-side, never leaving it all night. Yet I should no more have known that he was near me when he was silent, without putting out my arm and touching him, than I should if he had turned in and been fast asleep below. We were not so much looking out, all of us, as listening to the utmost, both with our eyes and ears.

Next day, I found that the mercury in the barometer, which had risen steadily since we cleared the ice, remained steady. I had had very good observations, with now and then the interruption of a day or so, since our departure. I got the sun at noon, and found that we were in Lat. 58 degrees S., Long. 60 degrees W., off New South Shetland; in the neighbourhood of Cape Horn. We were sixty-seven days out, that day. The ship's reckoning was accurately worked and made up. The ship did her duty admirably, all on board were well, and all hands were as smart, efficient, and contented, as it was possible to be.

When the night came on again as dark as before, it was the eighth night I had been on deck. Nor had I taken more than a very little sleep in the day-time, my station being always near the helm, and often at it, while we were among the ice. Few but those who have tried it can imagine the difficulty and pain of only keeping the eyes open—physically open—under such circumstances, in such darkness. They get struck by the darkness, and blinded by the darkness. They make patterns in it, and they flash in it, as if they had gone out of your head to look at you. On the turn of midnight, John Steadiman, who was alert and fresh (for I had always made him turn in by day), said to me, "Captain Ravender, I entreat of you to go below. I am sure you can hardly stand, and your voice is getting weak, sir. Go below, and take a little rest. I'll call you if a block chafes." I said to John in answer, "Well, well, John! Let us wait till the turn of one o'clock, before we talk about that." I had just had one of the ship's lanterns held up, that I might see how the night went by my watch, and it was then twenty minutes after twelve.

At five minutes before one, John sang out to the boy to bring the lantern again, and when I told him once more what the time was, entreated and prayed of me to go below. "Captain Ravender," says he, "all's well; we can't afford to have you laid up for a single hour; and I respectfully and earnestly beg of you to go below." The end of it was, that I agreed to do so, on the understanding that if I failed to come up of my own accord within three hours, I was to be punctually called. Having settled that, I left John in charge. But I called him to me once afterwards, to ask him a question. I had been to look at the barometer, and had seen the mercury still perfectly steady, and had come up the companion again to take a last look about me—if I can use such a word in reference to such darkness—when I thought that the waves, as the Golden Mary parted them and shook them off, had a hollow sound in them; something that I fancied was a rather unusual reverberation. I was standing by the quarter-deck rail on the starboard side, when I called John aft to me, and bade him listen. He did so with the greatest attention. Turning to me he then said, "Rely upon it, Captain Ravender, you have been without rest too long, and the novelty is only in the state of your sense of hearing." I thought so too by that time, and I think so now, though I can never know for absolute certain in this world, whether it was or not.

When I left John Steadiman in charge, the ship was still going at a great rate through the water. The wind still blew right astern. Though she was making great way, she was under shortened sail, and had no more than she could easily carry. All was snug, and nothing complained. There was a pretty sea running, but not a very high sea neither, nor at all a confused one.

I turned in, as we seamen say, all standing. The meaning of that is, I did not pull my clothes off—no, not even so much as my coat: though I did my shoes, for my feet were badly swelled with the deck. There was a little swing-lamp alight in my cabin. I thought, as I looked at it before shutting my eyes, that I was so tired of darkness, and troubled by darkness, that I could have gone to sleep best in the midst of a million of flaming gas-lights. That was the last thought I had before I went off, except the prevailing thought that I should not be able to get to sleep at all.

I dreamed that I was back at Penrith again, and was trying to get round the church, which had altered its shape very much since I last saw it, and was cloven all down the middle of the steeple in a most singular manner. Why I wanted to get round the church I don't know; but I was as anxious to do it as if my life depended on it. Indeed, I believe it did in the dream. For all that, I could not get round the church. I was still trying, when I came against it with a violent shock, and was flung out of my cot against the ship's side. Shrieks and a terrific outcry struck me far harder than the bruising timbers, and amidst sounds of grinding and crashing, and a heavy rushing and breaking of water—sounds I understood too well—I made my way on deck. It was not an easy thing to do, for the ship heeled over frightfully, and was beating in a furious manner.

I could not see the men as I went forward, but I could hear that they were hauling in sail, in disorder. I had my trumpet in my hand, and, after directing and encouraging them in this till it was done, I hailed first John Steadiman, and then my second mate, Mr. William Rames. Both answered clearly and steadily. Now, I had practised them and all my crew, as I have ever made it a custom to practise all who sail with me, to take certain stations and wait my orders, in case of any unexpected crisis. When my voice was heard hailing, and their voices were heard answering, I was aware, through all the noises of the ship and sea, and all the crying of the passengers below, that there was a pause. "Are you ready, Rames?"—"Ay, ay, sir!"—"Then light up, for God's sake!" In a moment he and another were burning blue-lights, and the ship and all on board seemed to be enclosed in a mist of light, under a great black dome.

The light shone up so high that I could see the huge Iceberg upon which we had struck, cloven at the top and down the middle, exactly like Penrith Church in my dream. At the same moment I could see the watch last relieved, crowding up and down on deck; I could see Mrs. Atherfield and Miss Coleshaw thrown about on the top of the companion as they struggled to bring the child up from below; I could see that the masts were going with the shock and the beating of the ship; I could see the frightful breach stove in on the starboard side, half the length of the vessel, and the sheathing and timbers spirting up; I could see that the Cutter was disabled, in a wreck of broken fragments; and I could see every eye turned upon me. It is my belief that if there had been ten thousand eyes there, I should have seen them all, with their different looks. And all this in a moment. But you must consider what a moment.

I saw the men, as they looked at me, fall towards their appointed stations, like good men and true. If she had not righted, they could have done very little there or anywhere but die—not that it is little for a man to die at his post—I mean they could have done nothing to save the passengers and themselves. Happily, however, the violence of the shock with which we had so determinedly borne down direct on that fatal Iceberg, as if it had been our destination instead of our destruction, had so smashed and pounded the ship that she got off in this same instant and righted. I did not want the carpenter to tell me she was filling and going down; I could see and hear that. I gave Rames the word to lower the Long-boat and the Surf-boat, and I myself told off the men for each duty. Not one hung back, or came before the other. I now whispered to John Steadiman, "John, I stand at the gangway here, to see every soul on board safe over the side. You shall have the next post of honour, and shall be the last but one to leave the ship. Bring up the passengers, and range them behind me; and put what provision and water you can got at, in the boats. Cast your eye for'ard, John, and you'll see you have not a moment to lose."

My noble fellows got the boats over the side as orderly as I ever saw boats lowered with any sea running, and, when they were launched, two or three of the nearest men in them as they held on, rising and falling with the swell, called out, looking up at me, "Captain Ravender, if anything goes wrong with us, and you are saved, remember we stood by you!"—"We'll all stand by one another ashore, yet, please God, my lads!" says I. "Hold on bravely, and be tender with the women."

The women were an example to us. They trembled very much, but they were quiet and perfectly collected. "Kiss me, Captain Ravender," says Mrs. Atherfield, "and God in heaven bless you, you good man!" "My dear," says I, "those words are better for me than a life-boat." I held her child in my arms till she was in the boat, and then kissed the child and handed her safe down. I now said to the people in her, "You have got your freight, my lads, all but me, and I am not coming yet awhile. Pull away from the ship, and keep off!"

That was the Long-boat. Old Mr. Rarx was one of her complement, and he was the only passenger who had greatly misbehaved since the ship struck. Others had been a little wild, which was not to be wondered at, and not very blamable; but, he had made a lamentation and uproar which it was dangerous for the people to hear, as there is always contagion in weakness and selfishness. His incessant cry had been that he must not be separated from the child, that he couldn't see the child, and that he and the child must go together. He had even tried to wrest the child out of my arms, that he might keep her in his. "Mr. Rarx," said I to him when it came to that, "I have a loaded pistol in my pocket; and if you don't stand out of the gangway, and keep perfectly quiet, I shall shoot you through the heart, if you have got one." Says he, "You won't do murder, Captain Ravender!" "No, sir," says I, "I won't murder forty-four people to humour you, but I'll shoot you to save them." After that he was quiet, and stood shivering a little way off, until I named him to go over the side.

The Long-boat being cast off, the Surf-boat was soon filled. There only remained aboard the Golden Mary, John Mullion the man who had kept on burning the blue-lights (and who had lighted every new one at every old one before it went out, as quietly as if he had been at an illumination); John Steadiman; and myself. I hurried those two into the Surf-boat, called to them to keep off, and waited with a grateful and relieved heart for the Long-boat to come and take me in, if she could. I looked at my watch, and it showed me, by the blue-light, ten minutes past two. They lost no time. As soon as she was near enough, I swung myself into her, and called to the men, "With a will, lads! She's reeling!" We were not an inch too far out of the inner vortex of her going down, when, by the blue-light which John

Mullion still burnt in the bow of the Surf-boat, we saw her lurch, and plunge to the bottom head-foremost. The child cried, weeping wildly, “O the dear Golden Mary! O look at her! Save her! Save the poor Golden Mary!” And then the light burnt out, and the black dome seemed to come down upon us.

I suppose if we had all stood a-top of a mountain, and seen the whole remainder of the world sink away from under us, we could hardly have felt more shocked and solitary than we did when we knew we were alone on the wide ocean, and that the beautiful ship in which most of us had been securely asleep within half an hour was gone for ever. There was an awful silence in our boat, and such a kind of palsy on the rowers and the man at the rudder, that I felt they were scarcely keeping her before the sea. I spoke out then, and said, “Let every one here thank the Lord for our preservation!” All the voices answered (even the child’s), “We thank the Lord!” I then said the Lord’s Prayer, and all hands said it after me with a solemn murmuring. Then I gave the word “Cheerily, O men, Cheerily!” and I felt that they were handling the boat again as a boat ought to be handled.

The Surf-boat now burnt another blue-light to show us where they were, and we made for her, and laid ourselves as nearly alongside of her as we dared. I had always kept my boats with a coil or two of good stout stuff in each of them, so both boats had a rope at hand. We made a shift, with much labour and trouble, to got near enough to one another to divide the blue-lights (they were no use after that night, for the sea-water soon got at them), and to get a tow-rope out between us. All night long we kept together, sometimes obliged to cast off the rope, and sometimes getting it out again, and all of us wearying for the morning—which appeared so long in coming that old Mr. Rarx screamed out, in spite of his fears of me, “The world is drawing to an end, and the sun will never rise any more!”

When the day broke, I found that we were all huddled together in a miserable manner. We were deep in the water; being, as I found on mustering, thirty-one in number, or at least six too many. In the Surf-boat they were fourteen in number, being at least four too many. The first thing I did, was to get myself passed to the rudder—which I took from that time—and to get Mrs. Atherfield, her child, and Miss Coleshaw, passed on to sit next me. As to old Mr. Rarx, I put him in the bow, as far from us as I could. And I put some of the best men near us in order that if I should drop there might be a skilful hand ready to take the helm.

The sea moderating as the sun came up, though the sky was cloudy and wild, we spoke the other boat, to know what stores they had, and to overhaul what we had. I had a compass in my pocket, a small telescope, a double-barrelled pistol, a knife, and a fire-box and matches. Most of my men had knives, and some had a little tobacco: some, a pipe as well. We had a mug among us, and an iron spoon. As to provisions, there were in my boat two bags of biscuit, one piece of raw beef, one piece of raw pork, a bag of coffee, roasted but not ground (thrown in, I imagine, by mistake, for something else), two small casks of water, and about half-a-gallon of rum in a keg. The Surf-boat, having rather more rum than we, and fewer to drink it, gave us, as I estimated, another quart into our keg. In return, we gave them three double handfuls of coffee, tied up in a piece of a handkerchief; they reported that they had aboard besides, a bag of biscuit, a piece of beef, a small cask of water, a small box of lemons, and a Dutch cheese. It took a long time to make these exchanges, and they were not made without risk to both parties; the sea running quite high enough to make our approaching near to one another very hazardous. In the bundle with the coffee, I conveyed to John Steadiman (who had a ship's compass with him), a paper written in pencil, and torn from my pocket-book, containing the course I meant to steer, in the hope of making land, or being picked up by some vessel—I say in the hope, though I had little hope of either deliverance. I then sang out to him, so as all might hear, that if we two boats could live or die together, we would; but, that if we should be parted by the weather, and join company no more, they should have our prayers and blessings, and we asked for theirs. We then gave them three cheers, which they returned, and I saw the men's heads droop in both boats as they fell to their oars again.

These arrangements had occupied the general attention advantageously for all, though (as I expressed in the last sentence) they ended in a sorrowful feeling. I now said a few words to my fellow-voyagers on the subject of the small stock of food on which our lives depended if they were preserved from the great deep, and on the rigid necessity of our eking it out in the most frugal manner. One and all replied that whatever allowance I thought best to lay down should be strictly kept to. We made a pair of scales out of a thin scrap of iron-plating and some twine, and I got together for weights such of the heaviest buttons among us as I calculated made up some fraction over two ounces. This was the allowance of solid food served out once a-day to each, from that time to the end; with the addition of a coffee-berry, or sometimes half a one, when the weather was very fair, for breakfast. We had nothing else whatever, but half a pint of water each per day, and sometimes, when we were coldest and weakest, a teaspoonful of rum each, served out as a dram. I know how learnedly it can be shown that rum is poison, but I also know that in this case, as in all similar cases I have ever read of—which are numerous—no words can express the comfort and support derived from it. Nor have I the least doubt that it saved the lives of far more than half our number. Having mentioned half a pint of water as our daily allowance, I ought to observe that sometimes we had less, and sometimes we had more; for much rain fell, and we caught it in a canvas stretched for the purpose.

Thus, at that tempestuous time of the year, and in that tempestuous part of the world, we shipwrecked people rose and fell with the waves. It is not my intention to relate (if I can avoid it) such circumstances appertaining to our doleful condition as have been better told in many other narratives of the kind than I can be expected to tell them. I will only note, in so many passing words, that day after day and night after night, we received the sea upon our backs to prevent it from swamping the boat; that one party was always kept baling, and that every hat and cap among us soon got worn out, though patched up fifty times, as the only vessels we had for that service; that another party lay down in the bottom of the boat, while a third rowed; and that we were soon all in boils and blisters and rags.

The other boat was a source of such anxious interest to all of us that I used to wonder whether, if we were saved, the time could ever come when the survivors in this boat of ours could be at all indifferent to the fortunes of the survivors in that. We got out a tow-rope whenever the weather permitted, but that did not often happen, and how we two parties kept within the same horizon, as we did, He, who mercifully permitted it to be so for our consolation, only knows. I never shall forget the looks with which, when the morning light came, we used to gaze about us over the stormy waters, for the other boat. We once parted company for seventy-two hours, and we believed them to have gone down, as they did us. The joy on both sides when we came within view of one another again, had something in a manner Divine in it; each was so forgetful of individual suffering, in tears of delight and sympathy for the people in the other boat.

I have been wanting to get round to the individual or personal part of my subject, as I call it, and the foregoing incident puts me in the right way. The patience and good disposition aboard of us, was wonderful. I was not surprised by it in the women; for all men born of women know what great qualities they will show when men will fail; but, I own I was a little surprised by it in some of the men. Among one-and-thirty people assembled at the best of times, there will usually, I should say, be two or three uncertain tempers. I knew that I had more than one rough temper with me among my own people, for I had chosen those for the Long-boat that I might have them under my eye. But, they softened under their misery, and were as considerate of the ladies, and as compassionate of the child, as the best among us, or among men—they could not have been more so. I heard scarcely any complaining. The party lying down would moan a good deal in their sleep, and I would often notice a man—not always the same man, it is to be understood, but nearly all of them at one time or other—sitting moaning at his oar, or in his place, as he looked mistily over the sea. When it happened to be long before I could catch his eye, he would go on moaning all the time in the dismallest manner; but, when our looks met, he would brighten and leave off. I almost always got the impression that he did not know what sound he had been making, but that he thought he had been humming a tune.

Our sufferings from cold and wet were far greater than our sufferings from hunger. We managed to keep the child warm; but, I doubt if any one else among us ever was warm for five minutes together; and the shivering, and the chattering of teeth, were sad to hear. The child cried a little at first for her lost playfellow, the Golden Mary; but hardly ever whimpered afterwards; and when the state of the weather made it possible, she used now and then to be held up in the arms of some of us, to look over the sea for John Steadiman's boat. I see the golden hair and the innocent face now, between me and the driving clouds, like an angel going to fly away.

It had happened on the second day, towards night, that Mrs. Atherfield, in getting Little Lucy to sleep, sang her a song. She had a soft, melodious voice, and, when she had finished it, our people up and begged for another. She sang them another, and after it had fallen dark ended with the Evening Hymn. From that time, whenever anything could be heard above the sea and wind, and while she had any voice left, nothing would serve the people but that she should sing at sunset. She always did, and always ended with the Evening Hymn. We mostly took up the last line, and shed tears when it was done, but not miserably. We had a prayer night and morning, also, when the weather allowed of it.

Twelve nights and eleven days we had been driving in the boat, when old Mr. Rarx began to be delirious, and to cry out to me to throw the gold overboard or it would sink us, and we should all be lost. For days past the child had been declining, and that was the great cause of his wildness. He had been over and over again shrieking out to me to give her all the remaining meat, to give her all the remaining rum, to save her at any cost, or we should all be ruined. At this time, she lay in her mother's arms at my feet. One of her little hands was almost always creeping about her mother's neck or chin. I had watched the wasting of the little hand, and I knew it was nearly over.

The old man's cries were so discordant with the mother's love and submission, that I called out to him in an angry voice, unless he held his peace on the instant, I would order him to be knocked on the head and thrown overboard. He was mute then, until the child died, very peacefully, an hour afterwards: which was known to all in the boat by the mother's breaking out into lamentations for the first time since the wreck—for, she had great fortitude and constancy, though she was a little gentle woman. Old Mr. Rarx then became quite ungovernable, tearing what rags he had on him, raging in imprecations, and calling to me that if I had thrown the gold overboard (always the gold with him!) I might have saved the child. "And now," says he, in a terrible voice, "we shall founder, and all go to the Devil, for our sins will sink us, when we have no innocent child to bear us up!" We so discovered with amazement, that this old wretch had only cared for the life of the pretty little creature dear to all of us, because of the influence he superstitiously hoped she might have in preserving him! Altogether it was too much for the smith or armourer, who was sitting next the old man, to bear. He took him by the throat and rolled him under the thwarts, where he lay still enough for hours afterwards.

All that thirteenth night, Miss Coleshaw, lying across my knees as I kept the helm, comforted and supported the poor mother. Her child, covered with a pea-jacket of mine, lay in her lap. It troubled me all night to think that there was no Prayer-Book among us, and that I could remember but very few of the exact words of the burial service. When I stood up at broad day, all knew what was going to be done, and I noticed that my poor fellows made the motion of uncovering their heads, though their heads had been stark bare to the sky and sea for many a weary hour. There was a long heavy swell on, but otherwise it was a fair morning, and there were broad fields of sunlight on the waves in the east. I said no more than this: “I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord. He raised the daughter of Jairus the ruler, and said she was not dead but slept. He raised the widow’s son. He arose Himself, and was seen of many. He loved little children, saying, Suffer them to come unto Me and rebuke them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven. In His name, my friends, and committed to His merciful goodness!” With those words I laid my rough face softly on the placid little forehead, and buried the Golden Lucy in the grave of the Golden Mary.

Having had it on my mind to relate the end of this dear little child, I have omitted something from its exact place, which I will supply here. It will come quite as well here as anywhere else.

Foreseeing that if the boat lived through the stormy weather, the time must come, and soon come, when we should have absolutely no morsel to eat, I had one momentous point often in my thoughts. Although I had, years before that, fully satisfied myself that the instances in which human beings in the last distress have fed upon each other, are exceedingly few, and have very seldom indeed (if ever) occurred when the people in distress, however dreadful their extremity, have been accustomed to moderate forbearance and restraint; I say, though I had long before quite satisfied my mind on this topic, I felt doubtful whether there might not have been in former cases some harm and danger from keeping it out of sight and pretending not to think of it. I felt doubtful whether some minds, growing weak with fasting and exposure and having such a terrific idea to dwell upon in secret, might not magnify it until it got to have an awful attraction about it. This was not a new thought of mine, for it had grown out of my reading. However, it came over me stronger than it had ever done before—as it had reason for doing—in the boat, and on the fourth day I decided that I would bring out into the light that unformed fear which must have been more or less darkly in every brain among us. Therefore, as a means of beguiling the time and inspiring hope, I gave them the best summary in my power of Bligh’s voyage of more than three thousand miles, in an open boat, after the Mutiny of the Bounty, and of the wonderful preservation of that boat’s crew. They listened throughout with great interest, and I concluded by telling them, that, in my opinion, the happiest circumstance in the whole narrative was, that Bligh, who was no delicate man either, had solemnly placed it on record therein that he was sure and certain that under no conceivable circumstances whatever would that emaciated party, who had gone through all the pains of famine, have preyed on one another. I cannot describe the visible relief which this spread through the boat, and how the tears stood in every eye. From that time I was as well convinced as Bligh himself that there was no danger, and that this phantom, at any rate, did not haunt us.

Now, it was a part of Bligh's experience that when the people in his boat were most cast down, nothing did them so much good as hearing a story told by one of their number. When I mentioned that, I saw that it struck the general attention as much as it did my own, for I had not thought of it until I came to it in my summary. This was on the day after Mrs. Atherfield first sang to us. I proposed that, whenever the weather would permit, we should have a story two hours after dinner (I always issued the allowance I have mentioned at one o'clock, and called it by that name), as well as our song at sunset. The proposal was received with a cheerful satisfaction that warmed my heart within me; and I do not say too much when I say that those two periods in the four-and-twenty hours were expected with positive pleasure, and were really enjoyed by all hands. Spectres as we soon were in our bodily wasting, our imaginations did not perish like the gross flesh upon our bones. Music and Adventure, two of the great gifts of Providence to mankind, could charm us long after that was lost.

The wind was almost always against us after the second day; and for many days together we could not nearly hold our own. We had all varieties of bad weather. We had rain, hail, snow, wind, mist, thunder and lightning. Still the boats lived through the heavy seas, and still we perishing people rose and fell with the great waves.

Sixteen nights and fifteen days, twenty nights and nineteen days, twenty-four nights and twenty-three days. So the time went on. Disheartening as I knew that our progress, or want of progress, must be, I never deceived them as to my calculations of it. In the first place, I felt that we were all too near eternity for deceit; in the second place, I knew that if I failed, or died, the man who followed me must have a knowledge of the true state of things to begin upon. When I told them at noon, what I reckoned we had made or lost, they generally received what I said in a tranquil and resigned manner, and always gratefully towards me. It was not unusual at any time of the day for some one to burst out weeping loudly without any new cause; and, when the burst was over, to calm down a little better than before. I had seen exactly the same thing in a house of mourning.

During the whole of this time, old Mr. Rarx had had his fits of calling out to me to throw the gold (always the gold!) overboard, and of heaping violent reproaches upon me for not having saved the child; but now, the food being all gone, and I having nothing left to serve out but a bit of coffee-berry now and then, he began to be too weak to do this, and consequently fell silent. Mrs. Atherfield and Miss Coleshaw generally lay, each with an arm across one of my knees, and her head upon it. They never complained at all. Up to the time of her child's death, Mrs. Atherfield had bound up her own beautiful hair every day; and I took particular notice that this was always before she sang her song at night, when everyone looked at her. But she never did it after the loss of her darling; and it would have been now all tangled with dirt and wet, but that Miss Coleshaw was careful of it long after she was herself, and would sometimes smooth it down with her weak thin hands.

We were past mustering a story now; but one day, at about this period, I reverted to the superstition of old Mr. Rarx, concerning the Golden Lucy, and told them that nothing vanished from the eye of God, though much might pass away from the eyes of men. "We were all of us," says I, "children once; and our baby feet have strolled in green woods ashore; and our baby hands have gathered flowers in gardens, where the birds were singing. The children that we were, are not lost to the great knowledge of our Creator. Those innocent creatures will appear with us before Him, and plead for us. What we were in the best time of our generous youth will arise and go with us too. The purest part of our lives will not desert us at the pass to which all of us here present are gliding. What we were then, will be as much in existence before Him, as what we are now." They were no less comforted by this consideration, than I was myself; and Miss Coleshaw, drawing my ear nearer to her lips, said, "Captain Ravender, I was on my way to marry a disgraced and broken man, whom I dearly loved when he was honourable and good. Your words seem to have come out of my own poor heart." She pressed my hand upon it, smiling.

Twenty-seven nights and twenty-six days. We were in no want of rain-water, but we had nothing else. And yet, even now, I never turned my eyes upon a waking face but it tried to brighten before mine. O, what a thing it is, in a time of danger and in the presence of death, the shining of a face upon a face! I have heard it broached that orders should be given in great new ships by electric telegraph. I admire machinery as much is any man, and am as thankful to it as any man can be for what it does for us. But it will never be a substitute for the face of a man, with his soul in it, encouraging another man to be brave and true. Never try it for that. It will break down like a straw.

I now began to remark certain changes in myself which I did not like. They caused me much disquiet. I often saw the Golden Lucy in the air above the boat. I often saw her I have spoken of before, sitting beside me. I saw the Golden Mary go down, as she really had gone down, twenty times in a day. And yet the sea was mostly, to my thinking, not sea neither, but moving country and extraordinary mountainous regions, the like of which have never been beheld. I felt it time to leave my last words regarding John Steadiman, in case any lips should last out to repeat them to any living ears. I said that John had told me (as he had on deck) that he had sung out "Breakers ahead!" the instant they were audible, and had tried to wear ship, but she struck before it could be done. (His cry, I dare say, had made my dream.) I said that the circumstances were altogether without warning, and out of any course that could have been guarded against; that the same loss would have happened if I had been in charge; and that John was not to blame, but from first to last had done his duty nobly, like the man he was. I tried to write it down in my pocket-book, but could make no words, though I knew what the words were that I wanted to make. When it had come to that, her hands—though she was dead so long—laid me down gently in the bottom of the boat, and she and the Golden Lucy swung me to sleep.

* * * * *

All that follows, was written by John Steadiman, Chief Mate:

On the twenty-sixth day after the foundering of the Golden Mary at sea, I, John Steadiman, was sitting in my place in the stern-sheets of the Surf-boat, with just sense enough left in me to steer—that is to say, with my eyes strained, wide-awake, over the bows of the boat, and my brains fast asleep and dreaming—when I was roused upon a sudden by our second mate, Mr. William Rames.

"Let me take a spell in your place," says he. "And look you out for the Long-boat astern. The last time she rose on the crest of a wave, I thought I made out a signal flying aboard her."

We shifted our places, clumsily and slowly enough, for we were both of us weak and dazed with wet, cold, and hunger. I waited some time, watching the heavy rollers astern, before the Long-boat rose a-top of one of them at the same time with us. At last, she was heaved up for a moment well in view, and there, sure enough, was the signal flying aboard of her—a strip of rag of some sort, rigged to an oar, and hoisted in her bows.

"What does it mean?" says Rames to me in a quavering, trembling sort of voice. "Do they signal a sail in sight?"

"Hush, for God's sake!" says I, clapping my hand over his mouth. "Don't let the people hear you. They'll all go mad together if we mislead them about that signal. Wait a bit, till I have another look at it."

I held on by him, for he had set me all of a tremble with his notion of a sail in sight, and watched for the Long-boat again. Up she rose on the top of another roller. I made out the signal clearly, that second time, and saw that it was rigged half-mast high.

"Rames," says I, "it's a signal of distress. Pass the word forward to keep her before the sea, and no more. We must get the Long-boat within hailing distance of us, as soon as possible."

I dropped down into my old place at the tiller without another word—for the thought went through me like a knife that something had happened to Captain Ravender. I should consider myself unworthy to write another line of this statement, if I had not made up my mind to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—and I must, therefore, confess plainly that now, for the first time, my heart sank within me. This weakness on my part was produced in some degree, as I take it, by the exhausting effects of previous anxiety and grief.

Our provisions—if I may give that name to what we had left—were reduced to the rind of one lemon and about a couple of handsfull of coffee-berries. Besides these great distresses, caused by the death, the danger, and the suffering among my crew and passengers, I had had a little distress of my own to shake me still more, in the death of the child whom I had got to be very fond of on the voyage out—so fond that I was secretly a little jealous of her being taken in the Long-boat instead of mine when the ship foundered. It used to be a great comfort to me, and I think to those with me also, after we had seen the last of the Golden Mary, to see the Golden Lucy, held up by the men in the Long-boat, when the weather allowed it, as the best and brightest sight they had to show. She looked, at the distance we saw her from, almost like a little white bird in the air. To miss her for the first time, when the weather lulled a little again, and we all looked out for our white bird and looked in vain, was a sore disappointment. To see the men's heads bowed down and the captain's hand pointing into the sea when we hailed the Long-boat, a few days after, gave me as heavy a shock and as sharp a pang of heartache to bear as ever I remember suffering in all my life. I only mention these things to show that if I did give way a little at first, under the dread that our captain was lost to us, it was not without having been a good deal shaken beforehand by more trials of one sort or another than often fall to one man's share.

I had got over the choking in my throat with the help of a drop of water, and had steadied my mind again so as to be prepared against the worst, when I heard the hail (Lord help the poor fellows, how weak it sounded!)—

"Surf-boat, ahoy!"

I looked up, and there were our companions in misfortune tossing abreast of us; not so near that we could make out the features of any of them, but near enough, with some exertion for people in our condition, to make their voices heard in the intervals when the wind was weakest.

I answered the hail, and waited a bit, and heard nothing, and then sung out the captain's name. The voice that replied did not sound like his; the words that reached us were:

"Chief-mate wanted on board!"

Every man of my crew knew what that meant as well as I did. As second officer in command, there could be but one reason for wanting me on board the Long-boat. A groan went all round us, and my men looked darkly in each other's faces, and whispered under their breaths:

"The captain is dead!"

I commanded them to be silent, and not to make too sure of bad news, at such a pass as things had now come to with us. Then, hailing the Long-boat, I signified that I was ready to go on board when the weather would let me—stopped a bit to draw a good long breath—and then called out as loud as I could the dreadful question:

"Is the captain dead?"

The black figures of three or four men in the after-part of the Long-boat all stooped down together as my voice reached them. They were lost to view for about a minute; then appeared again—one man among them was held up on his feet by the rest, and he hailed back the blessed words (a very faint hope went a very long way with people in our desperate situation): "Not yet!"

The relief felt by me, and by all with me, when we knew that our captain, though unfitted for duty, was not lost to us, it is not in words—at least, not in such words as a man like me can command—to express. I did my best to cheer the men by telling them what a good sign it was that we were not as badly off yet as we had feared; and then communicated what instructions I had to give, to William Rames, who was to be left in command in my place when I took charge of the Long-boat. After that, there was nothing to be done, but to wait for the chance of the wind dropping at sunset, and the sea going down afterwards, so as to enable our weak crews to lay the two boats alongside of each other, without undue risk—or, to put it plainer, without saddling ourselves with the necessity for any extraordinary exertion of strength or skill. Both the one and the other had now been starved out of us for days and days together.

At sunset the wind suddenly dropped, but the sea, which had been running high for so long a time past, took hours after that before it showed any signs of getting to rest. The moon was shining, the sky was wonderfully clear, and it could not have been, according to my calculations, far off midnight, when the long, slow, regular swell of the calming ocean fairly set in, and I took the responsibility of lessening the distance between the Long-boat and ourselves.

It was, I dare say, a delusion of mine; but I thought I had never seen the moon shine so white and ghastly anywhere, either on sea or on land, as she shone that night while we were approaching our companions in misery. When there was not much more than a boat's length between us, and the white light streamed cold and clear over all our faces, both crews rested on their oars with one great shudder, and stared over the gunwale of either boat, panic-stricken at the first sight of each other.

"Any lives lost among you?" I asked, in the midst of that frightful silence.

The men in the Long-bout huddled together like sheep at the sound of my voice.

"None yet, but the child, thanks be to God!" answered one among them.

And at the sound of his voice, all my men shrank together like the men in the Long-boat. I was afraid to let the horror produced by our first meeting at close quarters after the dreadful changes that wet, cold, and famine had produced, last one moment longer than could be helped; so, without giving time for any more questions and answers, I commanded the men to lay the two boats close alongside of each other. When I rose up and committed the tiller to the hands of Rames, all my poor follows raised their white faces imploringly to mine. "Don't leave us, sir," they said, "don't leave us." "I leave you," says I, "under the command and the guidance of Mr. William Rames, as good a sailor as I am, and as trusty and kind a man as ever stepped. Do your duty by him, as you have done it by me; and remember to the last, that while there is life there is hope. God bless and help you all!" With those words I collected what strength I had left, and caught at two arms that were held out to me, and so got from the stern-sheets of one boat into the stern-sheets of the other.

"Mind where you step, sir," whispered one of the men who had helped me into the Long-boat. I looked down as he spoke. Three figures were huddled up below me, with the moonshine falling on them in ragged streaks through the gaps between the men standing or sitting above them. The first face I made out was the face of Miss Coleshaw, her eyes were wide open and fixed on me. She seemed still to keep her senses, and, by the alternate parting and closing of her lips, to be trying to speak, but I could not hear that she uttered a single word. On her shoulder rested the head of Mrs. Atherfield. The mother of our poor little Golden Lucy must, I think, have been dreaming of the child she had lost; for there was a faint smile just ruffling the white stillness of her face, when I first saw it turned upward, with peaceful closed eyes towards the heavens. From her, I looked down a little, and there, with his head on her lap, and with one of her hands resting tenderly on his cheek—there lay the Captain, to whose help and guidance, up to this miserable time, we had never looked in vain,—there, worn out at last in our service, and for our sakes, lay the best and bravest man of all our company. I stole my hand in gently through his clothes and laid it on his heart, and felt a little feeble warmth over it, though my cold dulled touch could not detect even the faintest beating. The two men in the stern-sheets with me, noticing what I was doing—knowing I loved him like a brother—and seeing, I suppose, more distress in my face than I myself was conscious of its showing, lost command over themselves altogether, and burst into a piteous moaning, sobbing lamentation over him. One of the two drew aside a jacket from his feet, and showed me that they were bare, except where a wet, ragged strip of stocking still clung to one of them. When the ship struck the Iceberg, he had run on deck leaving his shoes in his cabin. All through the voyage in the boat his feet had been unprotected; and not a soul had discovered it until he dropped! As long as he could keep his eyes open, the very look of them had cheered the men, and comforted and upheld the women. Not one living creature in the boat, with any sense about him, but had felt the good influence of that brave man in one way or another. Not one but had heard him, over and over again, give the credit to others which was due only to himself; praising this man for patience, and thanking that man for help, when the patience and the help had really and truly, as to the best part of both, come only from him. All this, and much more, I heard pouring confusedly from the men's lips while they crouched down, sobbing and crying over their commander, and wrapping the jacket as warmly and tenderly as they could over is cold feet. It went to my heart to check them; but I knew that if this lamenting spirit spread any further, all chance of keeping alight any last sparks of hope and resolution among the boat's company would be lost for ever. Accordingly I sent them to their places, spoke a few encouraging words to the men forward, promising to serve out, when the morning came, as much as I dared, of any eatable thing left in the lockers; called to Rames, in my old boat, to keep as near us as he safely could; drew the garments and coverings of the two poor suffering women more closely about them; and, with a secret prayer to be directed for the best in bearing the awful responsibility now laid on my shoulders, took my Captain's vacant place at the helm of the Long-boat.

This, as well as I can tell it, is the full and true account of how I came to be placed in charge of the lost passengers and crew of the Golden Mary, on the morning of the twenty-seventh day after the ship struck the Iceberg, and foundered at sea.

THE END OF
The Wreck of the Golden Mary

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